

# Vocational horse camp coming to Lakota reservation

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RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA, USA, July 25, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Rapid City, S. D. – The [Šúnkawkáŋ Oyáte Horse Camp](#) was created in memory of beloved youth worker Dorothy Čánte Wašté Wiŋ (Good Hearted Woman) Kiyukan, and is very good news for the youth of the Kul Wičáša tribe's Lower Brule Reservation of South Dakota.

This August's summer Camp is more than a camp. It is a pilot program specifically designed to provide new career opportunities by introducing professional level feature film and television series stunt horsemanship.

Under the tutelage of professionals, the Šúnkawkáŋ Oyáte Horse Camp will connect film industry job training and jobs to Reservation youth, who can be seen joyfully riding wild horses around Lower Brule. The camp seeks to leverage each rider's natural strengths with film industry needs, connecting them to culturally relevant employment in the industry.

Campers will gain film industry insights and skills that can lead to job connections, while keeping their connections to their home communities. They will learn film set horse etiquette and participate in drills required to perform basic period horse stunt work from camp contributor, third-generation world champion trick rider, horse trainer, and action stunt director, Tad Griffith (John Wick 3, Miracle Workers, Seabiscuit, 300, Lone Ranger, The Mask of Zorro). A traditional approach toward horsemanship will be led by renowned horse trainer Tom Waŋbli Luža (Swift Eagle) Ziegler (Dances With Wolves)

Griffith trains celebrity riders and horses for movies. During his long career in film and television, Griffith's tribal riders have long been strong allies. His goal is to enhance that alliance. In his experience, he says, "Horse people from different backgrounds and principles always find common language and purpose in working together" on a film set. Indeed, the long term goal is to bring this innovative program to reservations across America.

In the Lakota language, "Šúnkawkáŋ Oyáte" means "Horse Nation," referencing the blessings that horses have brought to Native Americans across centuries. The Camp's title reflects the shared goals of a strong and diverse group of founding educators with one vision: "It's time to reconnect people to horses' blessings."

From Ziegler, campers will learn Lakota-style horse training, ceremonial songs and traditions. Ziegler, of the Kul Wičáša tribe, is a 4th generation member of the horse-whispering Wašú Wasté clan. Starting in the 1990s, he delivered cultural education alongside his wife, Kiyukan, of the Dakota Yankton Thunder Clan. Kiyukan is memorialized by this unique program.

For decades, the Ziegler family has taught riding lessons, cultural training and teacher coaching. As a nationally acclaimed educator, career counselor, and indigenous rights advocate, Kiyukan built advancement opportunities and cultural connections for youth through the paddock and beyond the paddock. This Camp, appropriately, takes Ziegler and Kiyukan's life's work to the next level.

Kiyukan passed away from cancer on January 7, 2021. While leading her 14-day memorial ride from Kansas to South Dakota, Ziegler spoke Kiyukan's words, "Life is but a journey," to a prayerful circle of riders. In that circle stood bareback rider Geno St. Cloud. Seeking addiction recovery, the Ponca descendant and father of two had spent six weeks as Ziegler's assistant. Upon St. Cloud's return from the memorial ride, tribal council members noticed a positive change.

Eastern Nebraska Film Commissioner Stacy Heatherly met the riders on their way through Nebraska and was equally impressed. "I saw in Geno's turnaround every reason that bringing horses back is a critical piece of the generational trauma healing process."

Heatherly is founder of a film production camp that links students to film jobs, and she saw potential in Ziegler's horse camps. By amending her model to include horses, she is formalizing career paths while providing trusted workplace development for Hollywood. Heatherly envisions graduates working on cultural films like *I Am A Man - The True Story of Chief Standing Bear*, written and produced by camp contributor, film professional, and Chiricahua Apache member Andrew Troy (*The Fighter*, *The Runaways*, *Salinger*, *Sopranos*, *Growing Up Smith*, *Wild Russia* nature series, *Acid Test: The Global Challenge of Ocean Acidification*).

Heatherly is also negotiating to return government-held wild mustangs to reservations, a move to make horses more accessible. That initiative and the Camp will provide better opportunities for America's First Nations.

But the team still says the best blessings of all will come from personally befriending a horse.

The Šúnkawkáń Oyáte Camp will be held on the Lower Brule Reservation rodeo grounds in South Dakota from Tuesday, August 3rd through Saturday, August 7th, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

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