

# Northern Arapaho WIC prepares for Healthy Families Conference Feb. 22-24

By L'DAWN OLSEN

Endorsed by the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone business councils, Wesley Martel opened Part I of the Healthy Families Conference on Jan. 24.

Walking inside a large circle of 115 men seated in the conference room at the Wind River Casino in Riverton, the co-chairman of the Shoshone Business Council motioned behind him and said, "Maybe some of you have seen me around with two tails."

Referring to his twin grandsons, he said, "Raising those little guys since they were born has brought me closer to the Creator and creation. Born premature, they had to fight real hard to live and I saw how strong the human spirit is. How good it is."

"As we get older," Martel continued, "our spirit gets twisted. We've got to get back to the strength and good of our human spirit."

A two-part conference, January's first half focused on healthy men. "As men we need to honor and respect our wives, we need to protect the women — and take responsibility for our children," Martel said.

"As life gives," he continued, "when our women are down, the family and the whole tribe is down."

Free to the public, Part II of the conference will be on Feb. 22-24 and will focus on healthy families as a unit.

The conferences are a collaboration between the CDC Infant Mortality Grant, the Wind River Working Group represented by various agencies, and Dr. Clayton Small's Native PRIDE.

The Wind River Indian Reservation, one of the highest in the nation for infant mortality, was awarded the CDC REACH grant in 2007. In its fourth year of the five-year grant, it was program manager Glenda Washakie's original proposal that captured Washington, D.C.'s attention and ultimately won the highly competitive grant.

Forward in thinking, Washakie cited colonization and historical trauma as the major cause for such an alarming statistic. "From my healing, I realized how healing from historical trauma was crucial to having healthy babies and families," she said.

Through educational programs, Washakie proposed the grant be used in three ways: 1. create awareness of historical trauma; 2. followed with healing; and 3. the replacement of unhealthy practices with traditional family and tribal values and practices.

In addition, the grant is to invigorate tradi-

tional ways of cooperation through collaboration with other resources and agencies.

Its slogan named after the traditional value "Children Are Sacred," the Infant Mortality Prevention program in collaboration with the Wind River Working Group has sponsored a yearly Healthy Families Conference.

In past conferences they introduced to the community American Indian scholar Eduardo Duran, pioneer and expert of historical trauma; as well as three grandmothers from the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers.

This year, Dr. Clayton Small's Native PRIDE and the CDC Infant Mortality Grant combined grants. This collaboration has enabled CDC Infant Mortality Grant and the Wind River Working Group to offer two conferences to the community.

"The great thing about Clayton working with us is his expertise on men's issues," Washakie said, referring to Small's PhD on Native American men's wellness.

Small spoke of the primary reason he chose the Wind River Indian Reservation as one of his grant sites is "Wind River is taking a lead in providing wellness."

Part I of the conference, Small presented his curriculum "Good Road of Life—Responsible Fatherhood." He explained how it "encourages"

adult men and women to make commitment to positive change in own behavior by being more responsible as parents and in relationships."

The curriculum supports participants to have the courage to "Look in the mirror. And ask, 'Maybe I'm the enemy and need to make changes.'"

"If we are going to break unhealthy cycles so our children don't have to experience violence, alcohol, drugs...it has to stop with 'me,'" Small said, referring to individual responsibility.

"Don't be a wuss!" Small challenged, "Being strong also means doing healing work."

On Feb. 22-24, Part II's "Native Families Retreat" will be held at St. Stephen's Keel Gym. CDC Infant Mortality Grant, Wind River Working Group and Native PRIDE invite all adult members of the community to participate.

"For the greatest benefit, we encourage all to try and attend all days," Small said.

Washakie added, "Healing is a process. We have to be brave. And little by little, bit by bit it pays off because we get better and better as individuals, as families, and as a people."

"Like Wes's little grandsons ... we have to try and keep trying to get back the good of our human spirit not only for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren." Washakie encouraged.