



Written by Liz Hill

WASHINGTON – On Friday, Aug. 22 at 7 p.m., MDT, in Oglala, S.D., community members gathered for the honoring of musician and United Nations Ambassador for the Environment Robby Romero. Romero was honored for his role in raising awareness for the school through his music which led to construction funds for Sacred Hoop School (Cangleska Wakan Owayawa) in Oglala, S.D. The school's dedication honoring program began with the arrival of the Wounded Knee Takini Descendants Riders, a group of young Lakota men and children who are descendants of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre victims.



Their spiritual ride from the Sun Dance grounds to Sacred Hoop School is a testament that Native peoples' ways of life are being carried on to future generations.

Participants in the evening's program included: Richard Broken Nose, Oglala Lakota spiritual leader; Leonard Littlefinger, school founder and director; Chief Cloud representing the eight reservations of Lakota, Dakota and Nakota; John Y. Steele, Oglala Sioux tribal president; Killer, National Indian Education Authority board member; and Kathleen Price;

volunteers from Mission of Love, a non-profit organization located in Youngstown, Ohio, who also were honored for their participation in the building of the school.

Also present for the evening's activities was Stacey Thunder, co-host of the PBS television series "Report," which will begin its fourth season in January.

Sacred Hoop School, dedicated to the continuation of the Lakota language, is the first private Lakota language immersion school to open in the northern Plains. The School was established by Leonard Littlefinger, a great-great-grandson of Sitanka (Chief Big Foot). Sitanka, leader of the Miniconjou Band of Lakota, was massacred with his people at the Wounded Knee Creek Massacre of 1890.

Sacred Hoop School is part of Lakota Circle Village, a newly constructed facility in Oglala. It is operated by Lakota Circle Village, a non-profit organization. The School and the facility are located on the land that Little Finger inherited from his grandfather John Little Finger, who was a survivor of Wounded Knee.

In 2006, Romero was approached by Little Finger and German musician Peter Maffay to represent the project and to join them in raising awareness and funds for the school. An album released by Sony Music titled "Encounters II: An Alliance for Children," featuring 14 hit recording artists from their respective countries around the world, a duet with Peter Maffay of Romero's hit single "Heartbeat" and a prayer for the children of the world narrated by Little Finger. Romero was part of a 15-city European tour that featured all of the musicians on the album.

“Heartbeat” became the album’s hit single and was heavily promoted in the print media as well as on radio and television throughout Europe. The “Encounters” project successfully raised more than \$1 million euros that benefited children’s programs around the world, including the Sacred Hoop School.

“I have always supported the people and programs on the Pine Ridge reservation,” said Romero. “It was a special honor for me to represent the Sacred Circle School in Europe and to promote the protection of Native languages globally. I give thanks to Leonard for presenting to me the opportunity.”

“Native languages were attacked, made illegal and furthered the genocidal program of the United States,” said Romero. “We need to protect and revitalize our indigenous languages so this never happens again, and so our children will always know who they are.”

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