

For Immediate Release

Contact:
Mary Lugo
770-623-8190
lugo@negia.net

NEW TWO-PART SERIES
“INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES”
TO PREMIERE ON PBS IN NOVEMBER 2006
IN CONJUNCTION WITH NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

A Co-Production of Native American Public Telecommunications and Adanvdo Vision

**Series Goes Inside Modern Native American Communities to Reveal a Diverse
People Working to Revitalize Their Culture While Improving the
Social, Physical, and Spiritual Health of their People**

**Told with Wonder, Humor and Insight, INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES is a Must-see
“State of the Union” Report from Modern Native America**

How has new-found casino wealth changed the fortunes of Native Americans? How are tribes coping with the influx of Indian *wannabes*, eager for a piece of the pie? How can Native American parents teach their children their tribal history when they were not taught it themselves? Can Christianity and traditional Native American spiritual beliefs co-exist? Is there any perfect middle ground between assimilation and isolation?

INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES is a two-part series airing on PBS that explores how these issues and many more are being played out in Native American communities in both urban and reservation settings. In each program, a Native American writer reveals their personal struggle with many of these issues and invites the audience to join them as they seek answers. **INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES**, executive produced by Carol Cornsilk and Frank Blythe, will air nationally on PBS in November 2006 (check local listings.)

In Part One, **“A Seat at the Drum,”** journalist Mark Anthony Rolo (Bad River Ojibwe) sets out to learn how Native Americans in Los Angeles preserve a tribal identity, survive economically and cope with the pressures of a federal relocation program and assimilation in a multicultural metropolis. Part Two, **“Spiral of Fire,”** takes author LeAnne Howe (Choctaw) to the North Carolina homeland of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to discover how their fusion of tourism, cultural preservation, and spirituality is working to insure their tribe’s vitality in the 21st century. Native American

culture -- too often invisible both on television and in American society at large -- is at a crossroads and **INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES** provides a personal, provocative, and surprising look at how communities are changing, adapting and enduring.

Part One, “A Seat at the Drum”

In “**A Seat at the Drum**,” journalist Mark Anthony Rolo (Bad River Ojibwe) journeys to Los Angeles, the city that filled his imagination as a child, growing up on the poor side of Milwaukee with his Ojibwe mother, white father and ten siblings. There he meets many of the thousands of American Indian families who were relocated from poor reservations to the cities in the last half of the 20th century, creating the largest Native American community in the nation – over 200,000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Rolo’s journey begins at what has been the gateway to Indian life in Los Angeles – the Sherman Indian School in Riverside, one of the last boarding schools created by the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the end of the 19th century. As Rolo says, “Five generations of Indians from tribal reservations as far away as New Mexico, Montana and North Dakota have passed through Sherman on their journey into white culture. Children came to Sherman as Lakota or Creek but graduated as Americans.” We meet Tara Baugus, a former Sherman student who teaches the Navajo language at her alma mater, which now embraces the teaching of the Native languages it once tried to extinguish. We also meet Randy Edmonds, a participant in the Federal relocation program of the 1950’s who left Clinton, Oklahoma by train with hopes of a new job and a new life; Paula Starr, who runs the Southern California Indian Center, which helps second and third generation urban Indians connect with their tribal roots through classes in drum, dance and language; and Annette Phoenix, a single mom of four who relies on the center to help her teach her children about their heritage. Rolo also joins a men’s prayer breakfast at the Indian Revival Center, where men from fifteen different tribes come together to discuss how they combine their traditional beliefs with their Christian faith.

Rolo finds that although relocated Indians seem to lose their tribal identity, indigenous California tribes such as the Gabrieleno/Tongva and the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians strive to strengthen theirs. Original inhabitants of the Los Angeles Basin, the Gabrieleno/Tongva tribe grasps threads of their original birdsongs, traditional ways and history in an attempt to gain Federal recognition, and with that, the golden road that the Pechanga have achieved. The Pechanga, a dwindling band before the National Indian Gaming Act was passed, are now so prosperous that Governor Schwarzenegger looks to them and other gaming tribes to help bail out California debt.

But how much Indian blood makes one an Indian? Does a Federal I.D. number entitle you to a share of the casino profits? Should Native Americans who have never lived on the reservation still be able to vote in tribal elections? And do the wealthy Indians bear

responsibility for philanthropy toward the poor? Throughout his journey, Rolo finds reasons to rejoice and reasons for concern and, ultimately, his own “seat at the drum.”

Part Two, “Spiral of Fire”

“**Spiral of Fire**” takes author LeAnne Howe (Choctaw) to the North Carolina homeland of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to discover how their mix of tourism, community, and cultural preservation is the key to the tribe’s health in the 21st century. Along the way Howe seeks to reconcile her own complex identity as the illegitimate daughter of a Choctaw woman, fathered by a Cherokee man she never knew, and raised by an adopted Cherokee family in Oklahoma.

Howe’s search leads the viewer on a journey of discovery to one of the most beautiful places in America where Cherokees, living on lands they’ve inhabited for 10,000 years, manage their own schools, hospitals, cable company, tourist attractions and multi-million dollar casino. Yet, despite these successes, diabetes threatens 40% of the population, racism undermines self-confidence, and greed threatens to divide the community. “**Spiral of Fire**” reveals the forces at work to restore health, prosperity and sovereignty to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

We meet Chief Henry, who poses with tourists in full Hollywood “Indian” garb, much to the disappointment of Howe. Through Joyce Dugan, former teacher, school superintendent and the only woman elected principal chief, we learn about the revolutionary plan to create a K-12 cultural and academic campus on the reservation, where older students can mentor younger ones. We watch as 18-year-old Corey Blankenship speaks before Congress to convince legislators to allow a land exchange with the National Park Service that will provide the site for the new school. All of this new construction is made possible by the influx of casino money into the tribe’s coffers. As Dugan says, “There’s been criticism of Indians and casinos. I think when Congress passed the law to allow this they just never in their wildest dreams envisioned what has happened with Indian gaming. Whether anyone likes gambling, whether they despise it, whether they agree with it or not, because of it we’re finally seeing a sense of independence that we have not seen in over two hundred years.”

But, as Howe says, “Casino profits have swelled the tribal budget to 150 million dollars and made the community more self-sustaining. But it’s also raised some very contentious issues. Who is controlling this new wealth?” To answer this, Howe delves into the complicated arena of tribal politics, where issues of absentee voting, blood quantum, and what it really means to be a Cherokee are being hashed out. Howe discovers that what really binds the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians together is a strong sense of community. Whether expressed at a high school football game, the 90th annual Cherokee Indian fair, or at a meeting to protest tribal council actions, their strong sense of identity

comes from knowing who their neighbors are, who their families are back several generations, and the values that make them Cherokee. Howe sees first-hand many of the advances that tribal money is paying for, including not only new schools but much-needed education about health, diet, alcoholism, domestic violence, and parenting, and mentoring programs to try to break negative behavioral cycles while children are still young. So, despite her initial concerns about tacky tourism and flashy casinos, Howe is inspired by the way the Cherokees are healing their community. And her personal connection with the tribe, through her long gone father, is renewed and revitalized.

For more information about **INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES**, including educational, press and outreach materials, visit www.indiancountrydiaries.org.

About the Filmmakers

Producing Team

Carol Patton Cornsilk (Cherokee) - Executive Producer/Producer

Ms. Cornsilk, an award-winning producer/writer, is President of Adanvdo Vision, Inc. which co-produced **INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES**. Cornsilk was formerly Assistant Director - Programming and Production for NAPT. Cornsilk served as Senior Producer/Director at Nashville Public Television and Producer/Director at KLRU/Austin before joining NAPT in 2000. She has earned an Emmy nomination for scripting the documentary *Impressions of Normandy*; a National Educational Telecommunications Association award for the concert performance series *Recital Hall*; a Cable ACE nomination for TBS' *The Native Americans*; Chicago and New York Film Festival awards and a National Medal of Arts for *Austin City Limits*.

Frank Blythe (Eastern Band of Cherokee/Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota) - Executive Producer

Mr. Blythe is a founder and Executive Director of Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT), a major national producer and distributor of Native American film, video and radio programming. Production credits include *Storytellers of the Pacific*, a documentary co-production with public broadcasters in Canada, Australia, New Zealand the USA; and *Native America Calling*, the nation's first live daily radio call-in show for the AIROS Network (American Indian Radio On Satellite). Mr. Blythe currently serves on the President's Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations for Digital Television Broadcasters.

Phil Lucas (Choctaw) - Senior Producer

Mr. Lucas is founder and President of Phil Lucas Productions, Inc., one of the first native-owned production companies in the United States. In a career that spans four

decades, he has written, produced and directed more than 80 projects, including feature films, television series and documentaries. Credits include the ground-breaking 1980 PBS series *Images of Indians* hosted by actor Will Sampson, *The Native Americans* series for TBS, and *The Honor of All*, a 1987 docudrama which won the prestigious international public television INPUT award. Mr. Lucas was honored for his distinguished career at the 1999 Sundance Festival.

Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa) - Senior Producer

Mr. Geiogamah is a writer, director and producer with thirty years experience working in American Indian performing arts, theater, media and culture. He is Professor of Theater at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and Artistic Director of the American Indian Dance Theater. He served as producer for TNT's Native American project's feature films, which include *Geronimo*, *Lakota Woman*, and *Crazy Horse*. He was principal writer for the six-hour 1994 documentary series, *The Native Americans*, for TBS. Geiogamah wrote, co-produced and co-directed the American Indian Dance Theatre's second *Great Performances'* *Dance in America* special, *Dances For The New Generations*, which was nominated for a 1993 Prime-time Emmy Award.

PART ONE – “A Seat at the Drum”

Journalist/Writer: MARK ANTHONY ROLO - (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe)

Mr. Rolo is the former Executive Director of the Native American Journalists Association. He edited the Second Edition of *The American Indian and the Media*, a collection of essays from Native journalists on covering Indian Country. He is the former Washington Bureau Chief for the national weekly *Indian Country Today*, and former Editor of *The Circle* newspaper based in Minneapolis. His features have earned top awards from the Native American Journalists Association and his columns have appeared in major newspapers including *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Seattle Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Kansas City Star*, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Charlotte Observer* and *San Jose Mercury News*. Mr. Rolo, a Sundance Screenwriter's Lab fellow, has also written and directed six plays that have been staged in the Twin Cities. In the summer of 2005, his play *Mama Earth Loves Lace* was produced by Thunder Road Theatre Company in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He has also taught at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and at Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College. Currently, Mr. Rolo is a guest lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Producer/Writer: SAM HURST

Hurst began his broadcast career as a news producer in Los Angeles and rose to National Producer of NBC's *Today Show* over the next seven years. A Nieman Fellow at Harvard

University, Mr. Hurst has produced many documentaries for public television and cable including Turner's *The Native Americans*, *Paul Ehrlich and the Population Bomb* for KQED, *A Falconer's Memoir* and *Hooked* for PBS, and *The Coming Plague* for Turner. He is the recipient of a Cable ACE for Best Documentary Writing. He resides in South Dakota with his family where he also owns and operates the South Swell Buffalo Ranch.

Field Producer: KARIN WILLIAMS

Williams, a Pacific Island native, brings over twenty years experience producing, directing, and writing experience to **INDIAN COUNTRY DIARIES**. Williams began as a reporter for Cook Islands Broadcasting, Radio New Zealand and Radio Pacific before relocating to Seattle to join King Broadcasting as a Writer/Producer where she garnered a Peabody and five local Emmys for her work. Since 1992, her independent production company, Williams Communications, has served clients including NBC, CNN, PBS, Reuters and a consortium of Alaska Native tribes. Her documentary, *The Voyage Home*, which aired on PBS, won Best Global Indigenous Award at the Edmonton Dreamspeakers Festival in 1998. Her recent work includes *Skin Stories*, presented by Pacific Islanders in Communication on PBS.

Director of Photography: Diana Wilmar

Diana Wilmar has worked around the world for every major US television network including ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS. She has also worked as a principal photographer with CNN's Environmental Unit. Diana has won five Emmy awards and a Silver Medal from the New York Film Festival for her work in news, documentaries and features. Special assignments have taken her to the Seoul Olympics, the civil war in El Salvador, the earthquake in San Francisco as well as to Russia, Mexico and Peru. Currently she is producing a documentary about a nuclear artist entitled *The Promise and the Peril*, and continues her work with CNN Productions.

PART TWO – "SPIRAL OF FIRE"

Journalist/Writer – LEANNE HOWE (Choctaw)

Ms. Howe is an author, and playwright, and an enrolled citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Born and educated in Oklahoma, she writes fiction, creative non-fiction, plays, poetry, and screenplays that deal with American Indian experiences. *Shell Shaker*, Ms. Howe's first novel, won an American Book Award for 2002 from the Before Columbus Foundation in May 2002. *Equinoxes Rouge*, the French translation, was the 2004 finalist for Prix Medici Estranger, one of France's top literary awards. Other books by Howe include *Evidence of Red* which won the 2006 Oklahoma Book Award.

She is currently associate professor in the American Indian Studies program and English at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Producer/Director/Editor: CAROL PATTON CORNSILK (see above)

Field Producer – PAMILA BELGARDE (Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe)

Belgarde began her career in public broadcasting as the first Producer/Director of *Native America Calling*, the flagship daily public affairs program on American Indian Radio on Satellite (AIROS). She worked as a producer for Four Directions Health Communications, Prairie Public Television and Red-Horse Productions before starting her own independent production company, Well Native Productions, in 2001. Her credits include production work on Turner's *The Native Americans* under producer Sam Hurst. She is currently completing *Rez-Robics*, a health and fitness video that incorporates Indian humor featuring Elaine Miles and Drew LaCapa.

Field Producer – LARRY POURIER (Lakota Sioux)

A twenty-year veteran of film, television and radio, Larry Pourier's recent credits include second Assistant Director on the hit PBS Mystery *Skinwalkers* for Director Chris Eyre; and Associate Producer of the Crazy Horse Segment for *Colorvision*, also slated for public television. Pourier, from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, also served as Associate Producer/2nd A.D./Locations Manager/ Extras Coordinator/Casting Assistant for Eyre's second feature film *Skins*. A member of the Director's Guild of America, Pourier's credits also include *The Doe Boy*, *Dreamkeepers* (ABC), *Crazy Horse* and *Lakota Woman* (TNT)

Director of Photography – JAMES M. FORTIER (Metis-Ojibwe)

James M. Fortier recently produced, directed and shot *Pulling Together*, a documentary feature focusing on the Muckleshoot tribe's cultural revival during the 2003 Tribal Canoe Journey in the Puget Sound area. He was the Director, Co-Writer and DP for *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*, which screened at Sundance 2001, earned Fortier an Emmy for Directing, and aired nationally on PBS in 2002. In addition he was the Writer, Producer and Director of the Minnesota PBS environmental documentary *Voices For the Land*, and he was the Writer and Associate Producer for the five-time Emmy Award winning 6-hour Ojibway PBS documentary series *Waasa-Inaabidaa: We Look In All Directions*.