



Wellbriety!

White Bison's Online Magazine

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Hoop Journey IV—Healing Men and Children

Begins in Cherokee, NC on April 9, 2003!



The Natives -in-Sobriety Drum (N.I.S.) of the Eastern Cherokee Nation Highlights the Theme of Hoop Journey IV

L to R – Sonny Ledford, Noah Ledford, Greg Leading Fox, John Grant Jr. (Lead Singer for Natives In Sobriety Drum) Not Pictured David Edward Wachacha and Kimsey Taylor.



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White Bison Speaks

Hoop Journey IV Begins in Cherokee, North Carolina!



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The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians welcomed the Sacred Hoop and the Wellbriety Movement to their land again today! The White Bison Staff and Walkers who came to this community in June of 2000 on the Wiping of the Tears Walk from Los Angeles to Washington D.C. (Hoop Journey II) were so inspired by the beauty of the people and their ancestral land. We renewed old friendships and met many new friends who are walking The Red Road to Wellbriety during this first event of the Fourth Journey--Healing Native Men and Children. Stories and descriptions of today's Wellbriety Gathering preceded the arrival of the Hoop in flyers and handouts distributed throughout the community by AYeGA--Awakening the Recovery Spirit, the grassroots organization which coordinated today's gathering.

There were 100 people walking The Red Road to Wellbriety at the Cherokee Casino Hotel for this kick-off event of Hoop Journey 2003. They had come from near and far. People had driven from Ohio, West

Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee and Georgia to join in this day of Healing. The day began in a good way--with prayer. The Drum--Natives in Sobriety--sang an Honor Song as the smoke from sage provided by supporters of White Bison was offered to everyone in the circle. The beat of the Drum and the voices of the Singers filled the Conference Center as the Hoop was carried in and placed on its stand.

The Day Begins

The day's presentations began when Don Coyhis, White Bison's Founder and President, shared his own feelings about how the Wellbriety movement had come to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation. *"When we first started doing this work in the late 80's, we felt like maybe it was too late,"* he said. *"Maybe there was nothing we could do. But the Elders told us, 'no, it's not too late'"* he went on. *"They talked to us about Circles and Cycles of life. Elders from many Tribes told us about the signs of this healing time we are in. They explained to us that what we were trying to do before was at the wrong time. That everything has it's season. They told us, 'You can plant corn at any time, but it won't grow unless it is planted in the right season.' The Elders told us that now is the season for the seeds of healing to be planted and to grow."*

Don went on to share many of the Elder's teachings and how they can be applied in the healing work we need to do as individuals, families, communities, and nations. After Don had shared the story of the Sacred Hoop and the tools and resources available, we viewed the video of The 3rd Journey of the Sacred Hoop 2002, Healing Native Women and Children, which took place last summer west of the Mississippi river.

After watching the Hoop Journey III video, participants began to share about their feelings and response to what they had seen and heard to this point. Here are some of their words:

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Participants gather around the new White Bison Wellbriety products table.

not perfect, but I'm not hurting anyone and I'm healing. Thank you for being here and sharing that video where I could hear other people share their secrets and feel free to share mine."

Keith Brown

"I've struggled with AA and been in and out of Recovery for many years now. I'm telling you, this Red Road to Wellbriety is the best thing that has ever happened. I've been sober now for 4 years! I'm from the Catawba Nation in South Carolina, a four hour drive from here, and I was on the White Bison website and saw the Hoop was coming here to Cherokee and I said 'I've gotta go'."

Sonny Ledford

"The video really touched me. Especially about the Children. It brought tears to my eyes. My son, Noah and I are with this N.I.S (Natives in Sobriety) Drum and it's a sober Drum. Life wasn't always that way for Noah. Just like the children in the video. Thank you for being here."

A Youth

*"I'm very grateful for being sober for 60 days now *thunderous applause* I'm grateful for coming here to UNITY and them helping me. Being here today really helps me. Thank you."*

Patty Grant

"That video and this movement is a powerful message about how we can begin to talk to one another. One of the things that touched me in the video was hearing the man talk about his own experience of being an abuser. Often times, many people don't have that courage to share. We have a lot of secrets that we carry around. That keeps us in our addiction and keeps us from healing."

Herbert Wachacha

"Not too long ago I didn't want to talk about this. It's so hard when you've been taught to keep family secrets. I know I hurt my kids. I hurt my family. I hurt my community and today I'm trying to change that. I have an Alanon family now, and I'm



Noah Ledford, singing with the Natives in Sobriety Drum. We honor you, Noah!

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What is Unity?

UNITY is an Inter-Tribal Treatment Center for Youth that is located in Cherokee N.C. White Bison went to the UNITY center the night before the event for a visit with the young people who were beginning their walk on the Red Road to Wellbriety. There were Cherokee, Chippewa, Oneida, Navajo, Sioux and young people from many other Tribes across Turtle Island who were working the programs at UNITY.

Lance Howe works for the UNITY Center and we were grateful to him and to the young people at UNITY who not only volunteered to share their stories of healing, but were anxious to share because they wanted other young people to join them in this time of healing. Many of the youth from the Center attended the Wellbriety Gathering today and shared from their heart. We were all inspired to hear them.

Many people stood to share about secrets and healing throughout the Wellbriety Day events. During the afternoon we were treated to a Drug Free Puppet Show presented by the High School "NDN Puppeteers." Bill Reed was the speaker for the after-



Closing ceremony-lots of hugs, tears and good feelings!

noon and shared his experiences on the Red Road to Wellbriety.

Wellbriety Day moved quickly on this first Hoop Journey visit in the Eastern Cherokee Nation.

Saying Goodbye

During the closing Ceremony all of the Men and male Children formed a Circle around the Sacred Hoop. Don talked to everyone about the interconnectedness of all of the people in the family or community and demonstrated this as he asked each man to toss a ball of yarn back and forth within their circle to create a great spider web of connection.

Each man saw how his thoughts, actions, and spirit impacted others in their family, community, and nations. Then the web was raised high above the Sacred Hoop and the women and young girls were invited to come into this sacred circle surrounded by the men of this community. There we were told about the old ways of our People. The men were the



Co-coordinator Susan Leading Fox is honored with the gift of a miniature Sacred Hoop. Don Coyhis is at the right.

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protectors of the women and children. No one could come into their families or communities and hurt anyone with this circle of men in place, whose responsibility it was to keep the people safe and to provide for them.

This was a powerful ceremony and there were many tears from the women within the circle as they looked around at the men who formed the protection that surrounded them in this circle. One of the participants told us, *“I have heard people say that the Women and Children are Sacred and should always be respected and taken care of. But I have never seen this teaching come to life like it did for me today in this Ceremony. I have never felt so loved, respected, and taken care of in my whole life as I do in this circle.”*

That’s what this Journey is about. Healing Men and Children. Working toward a time in our families and communities where all people can feel that they are loved and respected.

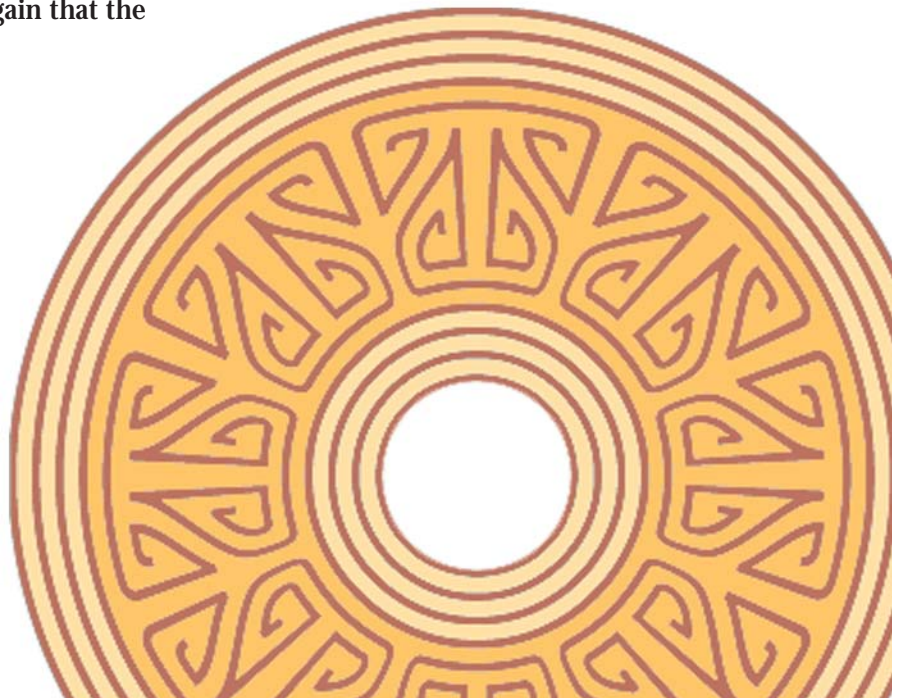
The Elders had told us that *Now is the time for the Healing.* Today we have been shown again that the

Elders spoke the truth to us. It is time. We look forward to the next Gathering on this Journey. And the next circle, and the next, and the next. We are excited about all the possibilities and all the healing that will take place.

Thank You!

White Bison thanks the Community Members in Cherokee, NC and all of the people who traveled so far to attend today’s event. Special thanks go to Susan Leading Fox and Virginia Johnson-Snell, co coordinators of the Hoop Journey visit to the Eastern Cherokee Nation. Many thanks to AYeGA--Awakening the Recovery Spirit, the grassroots organization which coordinated today’s gathering. We are also grateful to the Tribal Government of the Eastern Cherokee Nation for its support of this sobriety and recovery event. ✚

*Vette Middleton
Richard Simonelli*



The Hoop Journey Interview Cherokee, North Carolina



**The Hoop Journey Interview /
Cherokee, North Carolina**

With Susan Leading Fox

Program Manager for Recovery Services,

A-Ye-Ka: Awakening the Recovery Spirit

Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians

Cherokee, North Carolina

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How was the Wellbriety Day visit of the Sacred Hoop for your community in Cherokee, North Carolina?

Susan Leading Fox

I thought it was very encouraging. It gave me a lot of hope to know that changes are happening in our community. The reason I say that is because I saw people and we heard from people that we had not seen or heard from before in terms of being in recovery. That to me is very encouraging.

For a number of years we have had about three core people who were active in recovery and would talk about it. Yesterday during the Hoop visit, those three people were there—but they weren't the focus any more. We had a sober drum, which we never had in this community. Some of those folks shared. We had individuals who got up and shared, people who we have never seen or heard from before, who are just now beginning to come out and talk about being in recovery. We had lots of young people, including teenagers, who came and shared.

I saw a lot of people getting very emotional when folks were talking and sharing. A lot of people who came stayed pretty much all day. It gave me a lot of hope and a lot of encouragement. It just really did my heart good because it gave me the sense that what we are doing is not in vain.

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How did the turnout show you that what you are doing for sobriety and recovery in your community is working?

Susan Leading Fox

I thought to myself, if we had had this event last year, how many people would we have seen? Probably not very many. We are seeing some new faces, some people who aren't afraid to get up and say, "Hey, I'm in recovery. Hey, I quit drinking. This is what I was like back then, this is what I'm doing now, and this is what's working for me." There has always been such a stigma and such a shame-based feeling in our community about being in recovery.

Now we have Virginia Johnson-Snell's CSAT-funded program, called Ayega, building the grassroots support system for those folks who are in recovery. Ayega is a Cherokee word that means someone woke up. I see that there are more and more of the people connected with Ayega who are willing to come up and talk about themselves and share. It's not necessarily even people who are in AA or anything else. They are just people who have things that work for them. They've done their own recovery, whether through the church, or treatment, or AA, or following their traditions—it doesn't matter.

People are becoming more comfortable in talking about what they were doing when they were drinking and drugging, how they hurt their family and how they hurt their friends. The Wellbriety Day visit gave them an outlet to say what they wanted to say. I think it gave them a very safe place to talk. There was a lot of support in the room for those folks. It created a really safe place to feel that they weren't the oddballs any more. It gave them a sense of belonging and made them see that they are not by themselves. We have a lot of patients at our treatment center who deal with that. They feel like they are all alone, like they are the only ones recovering and don't have anyone to turn to.

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The Hoop Journey Interview Cherokee, North Carolina

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What moved you during the visit of the Hoop to Cherokee??

Susan Leading Fox

One thing that moved me was when Don presented me with that miniature Hoop for the program. I just burst into tears. I wasn't expecting anything. I was busy with making sure it all got done. I couldn't speak for quite a while.

The other thing that moved me was the feeling of people joining together and coming together to support one another. When people spoke or shared, others would clap for them and say things to them for support and praise. That really moved me. The whole thing was just wonderful, really powerful.

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What else did you learn during the day?

Susan Leading Fox

I think the overall experience was really good. I think it was something that this community is probably not going to forget for a while. I think for our men it was very encouraging. The name of our drum is NIS-Natives in Sobriety. We had men on that sober drum who got a lot of support and encouragement for what they are doing. Don told them they are taking on a hard task because now they are going to be called on a lot. People will want a sober drum in their activities. Those men haven't just decided to sing together. They are taking on a mission and a responsibility that is huge.

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What do you think your community will take away from the Wellbriety Day visit?

Susan Leading Fox

We would like to start utilizing on a large scale the material that White Bison has put together. Amanda gave me a Daughters of Tradition packet. We do work

with the young people here and have really struggled about how to reach these young people. The children I'm talking about have found their way into the court system because of underage drinking. They are a hard population to work with and we're asking what will work with these kids?

A lot of people purchased the Red Road to Wellbriety book. I've been thinking of changing from the Big Book as our main support tool. But we will have both there so people won't lose that contact. We might start teaching our patients from the White Bison book. It is Native, which we are extremely grateful for. It's been a long time in coming.

We are also excited about the prison program that White Bison has. We have a lot of Natives in prison or in the jails around here. We feel there is a need here for us to do something with our folks who are in prison. They get in there and are forgotten about except for the occasional preacher that might go visit them. We want to have something for them inside, and something they can connect with when they get out.

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Would you coordinate a Hoop Journey event like this again?

Susan Leading Fox

Well sure I would! I would do anything that I thought was going to help this community overcome the stigma of being in recovery. Absolutely I would do it again. ✚

*Vette Middleton
Richard Simonelli*