



South Dakota Magazine publisher Bernie Hunhoff photographed Kevin Locke in 2000 at the Micheaux Festival in Gregory.

Lessons From a Hoop Dancer

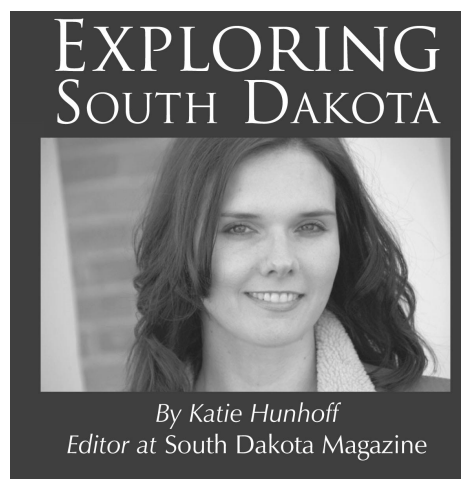
RURAL CHURCHES in our corner of South Dakota just completed a series of meetings on how to survive. One of the worries is how congregations can serve young people.

I think of Kevin Locke whenever someone mentions youth and religion. There would never be an empty pew in any congregation that could offer a smidgen of his magnetism and his message of hope.

Locke is a Lakota Sioux hoop dancer, musician and storyteller who was raised at Wapakala, a small place south of Mobridge on the Standing Rock Reservation. In our travels, we've had several opportunities to watch him perform. I'd watch and listen every Sunday morning if I could.

He travels far from South Dakota to spread his gospel of peace and reconciliation — he has been to 70 countries — but the message is deeply rooted here on the Great Plains. Selections in his newest album, *Earth Gift*, are old songs that he hopes to preserve. "Buffalo Said To Me" is a song from Brave Buffalo, who lived on Standing Rock many years ago. "Muskrat" is from Everett Kapayou, a Meskwaki from Iowa.

Locke plays the songs on a big cedarwood flute. Some think he may be the



By Katie Hunhoff
Editor at South Dakota Magazine

only living musician who is carrying on the traditional music.

He also uses handfuls of hoops — red, black, white and yellow — to perform intricate and athletic dances that leave every audience spellbound with interest and wonderment.

The four colors are significant to the Lakota culture. They represent the four human races, four directions, four seasons and four winds. Years ago, Locke told one of our writers that God wants us to reach out for unity and light. "We are all branches of the great human family,"

he said. "We can soar like the eagles, give off fragrance like the flowers."

But he said we can only realize our beauty and potential if we set aside divisions, distrust, prejudices and fear of one another.

The boy from Wapakala has become a man of peace, a missionary for human harmony. He once thought that he would study law, but a Lakota elder taught him the sacred hoop dance when he was young and he felt a calling. He has now been performing and teaching for 30 years.

One of the things he likes about the hoop dance is that everyone gathers in a circle. There is no back row or back pew, unlike all the churches we attend. "Everybody has a front row," says Locke. We must work to strengthen ourselves, links in a mighty circling chain, to overcome violence, addictions, racism and hate."

Lofty notions, to be sure. But maybe that's what young people are wanting as they sit in the back pews of too many churches today.

Katie Hunhoff is an assistant editor at South Dakota Magazine, published in Yankton. For more history, travel and culture visit www.southdakotamagazine.com.

Fair/ from page 1



Mary Auch, a nutritionist at Sanford Vermillion Medical Center, fields questions during her presentation that offered advice on proper eating. Auch's talk was part of Saturday's Community Health and Wellness Fair. The participants took advantage of the advice they received from her by sampling a few healthy snacks that were available in the conference room. (Photos by David Lias)



example, is usually a silent condition, and usually people don't realize they have high blood pressure symptom-wise until it's progressed and may be fairly advanced," Anderson said. "So by getting your blood pressure checked early at these types of events where it's probably a more relaxed setting than your doctor's office, your more apt to catch some of those earlier signs of a problem before it develops into something more serious.

"I also think this event instills in people the importance of overall health awareness," she said. "You walk out of here and you want to be healthier and you want to make the needed lifestyle changes to reach that goal."

Sanford Vermillion partnered with USD SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) as well as students in Health Professions programs at the University of South Dakota to provide the wide variety of screenings and activities Saturday.

"The Health Sciences students are helping with a lot of the screenings, so it's a good experience for them," Anderson said. "Nursing students

are helping with some of the screenings, as well as the Physician Assistant students, physical therapy, occupational therapy, dental hygiene, and the med-tech students, and quite honestly, we couldn't do this without them. They are excited about it, and we are excited to have their help."

Conditions outdoor Saturday were cold, a bit windy, with snow falling — in other words, a typical day in Vermillion this winter season. The weather may have played a factor in reducing the number of visitors who initially visited the fair shortly after it began Saturday morning.

Organizers were pleased, however, as more and more people began walking through the medical school building's doors later in that morning to participate in the event.

"We so value the partnership we have with USD to be able to do something like this," Merrigan said. "It gives us the ability, with the help of students and faculty, to present this fair. And using the facilities here at USD is fantastic."

The first health fair, held three years ago, was located at the Sanford Vermillion Medi-

cal Center. "It was fun to show off our medical facilities at that event," she said, "but obviously we don't have the space to do an event of this scale at our medical center. We knew after that first year that we wanted to go bigger, and this (the Lee Medical Building) was found to be the perfect spot to do that."

Various booths, displays and other activities of the fair filled not only the ground floor atrium of the medical building, but also the second and third floor hallways of the structures. Many of the classrooms and meetings areas of the medical school were also used for everything from a talk by Sanford Vermillion nutritionist Mary Auch about healthy eating, to a clinic area where Community Health Nurse Jill Munger, with the help of students, could administer flu shots.

"Without the help of the students and this facility, it just wouldn't be the same

event," Merrigan said. "We look at ourselves as the organizers, and the day of the event, it's obvious that the strong presence here comes from the students and the vendors."

Those vendors included several health care providers from the Vermillion community and region, who, like Sanford Vermillion, also provide a variety of health services.

"They include eye physicians, chiropractors, and people who offer home medical services," Merrigan said. "We send invitations to them usually early in the fall, and this year, we must have had some people who may have been watching our Web site, that approached us from outside of the area, and they asked to be a part of this, and we are happy to have them here."

The health fair proved to be a learning experience, thanks to information offered at booths sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the Susan G. Komen Race for the

Cure, and the Dakota Hospital Foundation. Representatives of the South Dakota Lions Eye Bank were also present at Saturday's gathering.

She noted that if people generally feel well, they don't visit a doctor, and they may put off routine tests, such as blood pressure and cholesterol monitoring. The health fair proved to be a perfect opportunity for many people to undergo those screenings in a relaxed, informal setting.

"We always hope and advise that if somebody finds that they have numbers that are a cause of concern, all of the clinical folks will inform them that their next step will be to make an appointment with his or her family doctor to have that concern addressed," Merrigan said. "Once you know your numbers, you need to make sure that you take care of any problems they may reveal."

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