

Crystal C'Bearing:

My vision is just to get our people to know who they are, to learn about the past because there's a great saying that's at Sharpnose's Cemetery that says, "If you don't know your past, then you don't know where you're going."

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Welcome back to the Voices of Greater Yellowstone Podcast, where we share the stories and science of the remarkable greater Yellowstone ecosystem. I'm your host, Kristin Oxford. The Greater Yellowstone ecosystem is home to awe-inspiring landscapes and iconic wildlife. And since time immemorial, it's been stewarded by Indigenous people who view its lands, waters, and wildlife as sacred. The Indigenous way of caring for the land acknowledges its life-giving energy, is centered on reciprocity, and uses traditional ecological knowledge to keep the ecosystem in balance.

Recognizing and reinstituting Indigenous values, beliefs, and practices is a vital step in restoring the cultural and ecological integrity of this region. Over 49 tribes have current and ancestral connections to the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. The Hinono'eino' people, also called Northern Arapaho, are based on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming, just southeast of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.

In this episode, we talk with the incredible crystal C'Bearing, the deputy director of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office of the Northern Arapaho Tribe. Crystal and her team are responsible for the preservation and protection of the Northern Arapaho culture and way of life. It's safe to say she's a pretty busy person. We discuss the many responsibilities and tasks her office takes on, including the innovative ways they're preserving the Northern Arapaho language, repatriating ancestral remains from museum collections, spearheading the renaming of derogatory and offensive location names, and getting kids involved and connected to their cultural heritage. This is an episode you definitely don't want to miss, so let's jump into Northern Arapaho cultural preservation with Crystal C'Bearing.

Crystal C'Bearing:

Tous Neito'eino. My name is Crystal C'Bearing and I am the deputy director for the Northern Arapaho Tribal Historic Preservation Office. It's currently located here in Riverton, Wyoming, and I am a member of the Northern Arapaho and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Wonderful. Well, we're so excited to have you with us, so welcome. For folks who are not familiar, could you just tell us a little bit about what a tribal historic preservation office is?

Crystal C'Bearing:

So the Tribal Historic Preservation Office is designated by the Northern Arapaho Business Council, ours is, so we're designated to perform the protection and preservation and conservation of natural resources, cultural sites, cultural resources, things like that. All the duties that the State Historic Preservation Office holds. And so we're designated by our tribal leaders to take on that role.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

You've been working, they're also called THPOs, correct?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yes.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Awesome. So when we say THPO, we're referring to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices or Officers. You've been working in the office for a little over five years now, is that correct?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yes. So in March it'll be my sixth year working here in this office.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

How did you find yourself on the path to working for the THPO? Have you always been interested in cultural preservation? Tell us a little bit about your journey.

Crystal C'Bearing:

I grew up here on the reservation in Wind River and Ethete, Wyoming. And my family had a big part, they really pushed education, supported us in getting involved in our tribal government, made sure we knew the issues that were going on with the reservation concerning natural resources, water was a big one. And so I grew up with those kind of influences and I always knew I wanted to do something to protect the land, the water to help our people. I didn't really understand what I was going into and when I got into college, I just kind of followed my heart in a way and just took what really interested me. And then once I finished school, I had an opportunity a couple years later to find out what the Tribal Historic Preservation Office was. I read an article about it and I was like, "That's really cool that they do these type of things. I didn't know." And so I contacted the director at the time and I said, "Are you hiring?" And she said, "Sure. Put an application, we'll interview you." And like 30 days later, here I was. I've been here since.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

That is so great. So you actually were like, "I like what they do, I'm going to find out if there's a space for me"?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yes.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

That's beautiful. And so for folks who may not know, what are some of the kinds of policies or programs or projects that THPOs typically work on?

Crystal C'Bearing:

A lot of it, what we're based around is the National Historic Preservation Act, which is the Section 106. And so we deal with a lot of eligibility of putting on register for the national historic places. And so we deal with a lot of federal undertakings within our ancestral migratory territory. Our territory covers 17 states, and this is based off creation stories, migration stories, just stories that we've had, oral histories that we've had. And it's allowed us to claim those areas as our ancestral migratory territory. It's basically from Wisconsin to Montana, down to New Mexico, across to Arkansas, and back up. That is our whole ancestral migratory territory. And so any federal undertakings that are in those areas, they're required

by Section 106 to notify the THPO to let them know that this project is being proposed. And then we have an opportunity if we want to participate in that. And we do that through a formal government-to-government tribal consultation.

And so that's how it gets started. And then we come into different departments that we have with the GIS department for mapping. So we have somebody that looks at the maps, generates maps for us if we are out there doing our own tribal surveys. And then we also have our NAGPRA department in case there are out there on the project that's been approved or permitted. And they do have inadvertent discoveries at times of human remains, then we have our NAGPRA department that comes into play. And we also have our tribal archeologists and our archeological technicians. And so they're the ones that are actually on the ground, they're the eyes and the ears for our office. And so they're out there on the ground and monitoring, making sure they're not digging up things that they shouldn't be or vandalizing or destroying anything of our sites out there that we claim as significant.

And that's kind of the gist of our office. There's a lot more to it because we actually deal with NAGPRA's museums and institutions. And so we deal with a lot of things like that, we're going out to visit and look at inventories. It's just so many different avenues that we go into and cultural resource specialists we have here, getting into the schools and educating our youth and getting them involved in anthropology, archeology, just tribal history treaties and stuff like that. That's in summary, the best that I can explain it, what our office is involved in.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Oh my gosh. So it sounds like you guys are really busy, have a lot going on, but then also this huge territory basically to cover, so 17 states. For some context, do you think you'd be willing to just give us a little overview of the history of the Northern Arapaho people so that we can just have a better understanding of the historic and current context of the tribe?

Crystal C'Bearing:

So the Northern Arapaho people, based on our creation stories, we were originally from the Great Lakes area, and so there's a lot of linguistic similarities to people from the East Coast, our language is Algonquin. And so that kind of tells us that we came from the East and we migrated here based on our oral histories, the breaking of the ice, which our tribes got split because we were agricultural at one time and then we moved West. And then there was a breaking of the ice story. And so a lot of our bands were split up at that time. And so some went North, some went South, some went West. And there's a lot of tribes that refer to the Northern Arapaho or the Arapaho people in general as the mother tribe because a lot of different bands broke off.

And so that's why we have relatives in Canada and we also have relatives in Montana, the Gros Ventre. We all have similar languages, the Southern Arapaho in Oklahoma. And so based on our stories, we've been all over, all throughout the country. And just based on oral histories and the things that we have found within this job that led us to different sites, even other tribal stories from other tribes that have been similar to what we tell, it really is telling that we migrated. There's a cool story about the Black Hills and there's a lot of people, the Lakota people, and other tribes who have identified the Arapaho being there in the beginning. And so just a lot of similarities within those tribes and our allies at that time. So it's really cool to hear those from other THPOs, from other elders, and just to make those connections. We're learning every day and I think that pretty much the entire United States is everybody's territory from a long time ago based on these stories, but that's just what we've identified so far.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, that must feel amazing how through the course of your work you can actually start putting the puzzle pieces back together and discovering connections and relatives all over the place. That's beautiful.

Crystal C'Bearing:

That's wonderful.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah. How did the Northern Arapaho people end up on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming?

Crystal C'Bearing:

So based on the 1868 treaty, well, in the beginning there was the 1851 Horse Creek Treaty that gave us land in Colorado up to the South Platte and to the North Platte. And it was in Colorado, mainly in the Denver area that we, by treaty, that was our territory and we made that agreement, but gold was discovered. And so once gold was discovered, a lot of settlers moved into the Denver area and our tribes kind of got pushed out. From then, thereon the Sand Creek Massacre happened and things like that. They called them the Indian Wars, where people were encroaching on agreed lands that the government gave us to live on, but they were encroaching a lot of times the settlers were. And so there was a lot of conflicts. And then so the 1868 Treaty came into play at Fort Laramie and then they went ahead and gave those lands and kind of designated those areas for tribes. And so the Arapaho were a part of that treaty.

What happened was the southern Arapaho and southern Cheyenne went down to Oklahoma. The Northern Arapaho at the time, we didn't have anybody that really designated or put us on a reservation yet. And so we were waiting to, a General at the time was guaranteeing that we would get a reservation of our own and it was going to be in the northern central area of Wyoming, which is near the Sheridan between Sheridan and Casper. And that was kind of the place where we wanted to be. But unfortunately the General at the time, he passed away and they quit making treaties. They said they would temporarily put the Arapaho with the Shoshones on the Shoshone Reservation. So we did, we temporarily stayed here and then they just said, "You're going to be there." They didn't find another reservation for us. And so we've been here since then.

And that was probably around the 1870s, 1880s, that all of this happened. And it was the Shoshone Reservation at first, but then they changed it to the Wind River Reservation. And the Shoshone Tribe at the time contested us of being here temporarily, we were supposed to be here permanently. And there was a case and the Northern Arapaho Tribe actually paid to be here, so they paid a lot of money. And based on that payment, then we were allowed 50% of the shares on the reservation. And so that's kind of how it became the Wind River Reservation with both tribes on there.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

That's incredible. So what was supposed to be a temporary stop off on the way to a Northern Arapaho Reservation, ended up 150 years later, the two tribes are on the reservation together permanently?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yes.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Well, thank you for sharing that story with us. When learning more about the work that you've been doing at the THPO office, one thing that kept coming up were articles about your efforts to rename places that were holding either names that have degrading meanings or honor someone who committed atrocities against Indigenous peoples. So what does it look like? Walk us through what it takes to actually get an offensive name changed to an Indigenous name.

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah, sure. So I've been working with this with a coalition in Colorado and then also the Northern Cheyenne, the Southern Cheyenne, and the Southern Arapaho. There's a coalition that we've been working with and I didn't really know what it entailed until we got into working with this and we did it over COVID. We met on Zoom over COVID and we started organizing. And that was in 2020, and so we just had a lot of different Zooms and we had to learn the process with petitioning, putting in a petition with the Board on Geographic Names. And so we met with a representative from there and she kind of walked us through the process of doing a petition, then we'd have to submit a name. And so that's when we got to that point of, "Well, what do we want to rename Mt. Evans?" And the reason why we wanted to rename Mount Evans is because he was the governor at the time, John Evans, who actually was part of the Sand Creek Massacre.

I mean, he was the governor at the time and there was a lot of atrocities that happened at that time. So a lot of people were mad at him. And just the tragedy that happened there and the dark history of it, that's the reason why we wanted to rename Mt. Evans. He did not deserve to have that mountain named after him. And so that's how we decided. And the name Mt. Blue Sky with the Arapaho people, that's kind of how a lot of tribes identify our people. Before settlers came in, we weren't really called the Arapaho, we were Hinono'ei. And so that just means The People. And that's how a lot of tribes identify themselves as The People, but when other tribes would talk about us, they would refer us to as The Blue Sky people. And so the reason why that is important is because a lot of our men and women, some women had tattoos. And so the way they did the tattoos, they would leave a blue tint on their skin.

And so a lot of people identified us as The Tattooed people or The Blue Sky people. And so that's where the name came from. And presently, a lot of places in our community, we have Sky People education, we have Blue Sky Hall, and we have different markers like that that identify who we are as people, other than Arapaho, the name. And so that's kind of why it was significant, and the Southern Arapaho at the time went ahead and submitted that petition and went for that name. And I agreed with it and I did a small poll over the internet because at the time we were in quarantine and I just sent it out to our community like, "What names would you like?" Because there was another name the Northern Cheyenne brought in, which was Mt. Cheyenne-Arapaho. And so there was two options there and I just wanted to get a feel of what they thought, what name would be better opposed to what I would think, I wanted a collective poll of how the communities felt.

And so I went ahead and I sent out this poll and it was really unanimous, surprisingly, that a lot of our tribal members wanted Mt. Blue Sky. And so I got some support on that and talked to our leaders, talked to our leadership about that name, and they agreed. But there's also some people that are in connection with the Northern Cheyenne tribe too. And so they had their opinions with Cheyenne and Arapaho. The thing with that is there's two names up for renaming and there's a lot of people out there, Colorado citizens who just want it to be the tribes to agree to just one name. And so that's been difficult because I understand from the Northern Cheyennes perspective of why they would want it to be Cheyenne and Arapaho. And so I understand that perspective, but I just like Mt. Blue Sky, it just sounds better to me than Mt. Cheyenne-Arapaho. So that's why. I know Mt. Blue Sky just has a good ring to it.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, that's a beautiful name.

Crystal C'Bearing:

That's why I like it. And I've seen it, I've been seeing articles all over Facebook, off of social media, and just posters that have Mt. Blue Sky on there that are promoting that name in Colorado. I've seen at businesses that there's paintings outside that they're changing and named to Mt. Blue Sky. And so it's really awesome. It makes me feel good, but I know there's the other side of it where there's that other name out there that could possibly get picked. And so right now we're at that stage where the Colorado Board of Geographic Names will be meeting soon and so they'll have to decide what name they'll want to push forward to the national Board of Geographic Names. And so that's the next step that it comes to. And so we're just waiting and seeing what's going to happen and hope for the best.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, absolutely. But either way, it sounds like a new name is on the horizon and we can be happy to see one put to bed and a new name that's far more inclusive and representative used. I really love that you did a poll because I just feel like for anybody who participated in that to then see a name change and feel like they had some stake in it must feel really empowering and just really cool. Awesome. So is there anything, generally speaking, that people can do to support renaming efforts like this? It sounds like there's a pretty specific kind of administrative process it has to go through, but for folks who are just in support of changing names in this way, is there any action that people can take to support you?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah. Specifically for the name change of Mt. Evans, there is a place that they can visit, it's the Mestaa'êhehe Coalition and that's in Colorado, based out of Colorado. And that's the coalition I've been working with. They put out a lot of good information, links, how you can write letters of support and send them to the Colorado Board of Geographic Names to help support the name. You can also, there's a Facebook page that you can go on and where they're doing support of Mt. Blue Sky. You can also just call or get the information for the people of the Colorado Board of Geographic Names. And I think Spirit of the Sun is a nonprofit group that's based out of Denver. And so they've been working a lot with the Coalition and so they have a lot of information out there and they just did a big event a few days ago. I was invited but I couldn't attend unfortunately, but they had a huge just informational event about the name in Colorado.

And they were on the news, they got interviewed. And so a lot of things and what we pushed for in our coalition, it was just to get education out there. A lot of people, even in Colorado, didn't know about Sand Creek and the effects of the Sand Creek Massacre and who John Evans was. And so that's the big push that we had, was just to educate community members to the Colorado citizens and to let them know like, "This is the reason why. It's not just to rename a mountain, but there's a reason behind it and it's a pretty big reason." And so just getting that education, we did a lot of webinars over the internet with Spirit of the Sun. And so just getting that knowledge out there and just getting that the other part of the history, the Colorado history out there so people can make a better informed decision about the name.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Right. No, that makes sense. It's not just an arbitrary thing, there is some deep historic context to this and cultural context. And yeah, if you don't know who he was, then maybe you look at the mountain and it doesn't mean anything to you. But the more people know, hopefully they'll be like, "Hold on, why are we naming beautiful mountains after people like this?"

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, for sure. Do you have any other name changes on the horizon, like things that you would like to see changed coming up?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah, there's one locally here, they call it S Woman Creek is how we would put it. And so the local community here in Lander, they're looking at renaming it, which is good, I like it. So I went ahead and submitted. They wanted a suggestion, a recommendation of what we should name that creek. Looking back on the history of the area, she was my great-great-grandmother, her name was Matilda Spoonhunter, and she lived in the area, she befriended some settlers that had homesteaded there near the Sinks Canyon area. And she actually helped save one of their children and then she befriended them. And so she grew up there, she was a very big part in the tribe because she had a lot of children and so that kind of grew big families here. And so she's a big matriarch in the community. And so her place where she was, the area where she grew up and where she lived was near that creek. And so I went ahead and her Arapaho name was Woxhusei, but that means bear woman.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Bear Woman.

Crystal C'Bearing:

And so I recommended Bear Woman Creek.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Love it.

Crystal C'Bearing:

In honor of her.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

That's really beautiful.

Crystal C'Bearing:

So I'm excited about it. We'll see how it goes.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, yeah. All right, I've got my fingers crossed for you big time on that one. It's so exciting. So changing gears a little bit, it's been said quite a few times that the national parks were America's best idea, that's kind of like the tagline that we like to give our national parks, but many Indigenous peoples were as we know, forcibly removed from these beautiful, magnificent areas in order to create these parks and then subsequently prevented from actually using this land that they had been living on shepherding, taking care of for thousands and thousands of years. So how would you like to see the Northern Arapaho people better connected to places like Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Basically, for Yellowstone I think access to our traditional plants and medicines to areas that we've been disconnected from for a long time and just getting our youth back out there to reconnect to those things. And that's a big part of what our office does here and a goal of ours is to get our youth out there to reconnect to all these areas across the nation. And a lot of them are in the National Park Service areas. And so it's really important to try to create those bridges for them. And so not only our youth, but our elders can go out there and it can show the youth what they know, the knowledge that they carry, and to pass that on. That's very important, so we have that connection with the young and the old and we were bringing that together.

Another part of National Park Service they talked about recently when I was on a meeting with them is a co-stewardship with the National Park Service that they have talked about recently in these meetings is that there's a lot of opportunities for us to work together to actually change the way the visitor centers or the National Park Service is bringing in visitors and educating them. And so we bring in that tribal perspective, we bring in information about plants and medicines, the history of the tribes. And that's one thing. Not all tribes are the same, so we handle those areas differently, where they're at different time periods. And that's one thing that based on what we've done in Wyoming with different projects, with transmission lines, pipelines, and stuff where we have gone out and surveyed the land, there's a lot of markers out there that lead towards Yellowstone that we're finding.

And these are old and they're from just tribes. Many tribes that made their marks to get to Yellowstone. And so it's so significant for so many tribes that this area was just a place of healing, a place of prayer, a place to connect. And to get back to that would be really awesome for our tribal people and to work together with the National Park Service to kind of steer it in that direction and keep everybody safe from the buffalo. But yeah, so that's kind of our goal.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, absolutely. That's great. So you're working to hopefully get more Indigenous youth and elders connected back to the landscapes that are currently held within national parks. Another thing that you work on is getting cultural artifacts and sometimes even remains repatriated to tribes themselves, correct?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yes.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

So if we could talk a little bit about that, that would be great. We hear stories about museums, like for example, the British Museum receiving requests from numerous nations asking for the return of remains, and artifacts, relics. What kind of repatriation work are you currently involved in?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Right now, currently there's so many different things that have been coming our way in terms of repatriations. We did take a group of veterans out early this summer because a lot of our society items are held in those museums, so we got to take some veterans who want to learn about their warrior societies. And so we took them to visit these items and it was very powerful, it was a lot of information and a lot of knowledge for them and for me as well, just to be there and to see that. There's a lot of our ceremonial items that are there too, and so just connecting with them and getting that feeling because hardly anybody over these past 100 years has seen them. And so I'm one of the few that have got to be there and see them. I don't touch them, but to just feel that power in the presence of them. And it's very powerful, it's a very emotional time to be there and to see all these items that these museums and these institutions keep.

There's a lot of knowledge in there, there's a lot of just things I think that could help our people heal and that we can connect to. There is so many things that are coming our way now. Before, when I first started working here, we always had to reach out to the museums and be like, "Do you have Arapaho items here? Can we look at your inventory?" And it was always very difficult to have a good relationship with those museums because they always pushed back and they were like, "You need to prove to us that it's yours, that it's Arapaho." And then we'd be like, "How did you get it?" And they'd be like, "Oh, we don't know. It was donated." And that their go-to all the time, I guess, that you would say it was donated all the time. And so we said, "Well, if you don't know how you got it, you need to prove to us how you got it." And then just the whole NAGPRA process.

In the beginning it was frustrating because we have to prove that they belong to us and that they're significant and that they need to come back to us, but we have to provide the evidence. And then they have a committee that decides if the evidence is good enough for them to return it back to us.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Interesting.

Crystal C'Bearing:

And so it's just a really weird system and it's getting revamped right now and they're working on making some amendments much needed, which I think is going to help a lot. But over the past few years, especially with Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland being in there, I think she's really pushed that tribal consultations and the boarding school initiatives. And it's really opened up these museums to their eyes to see, especially with human remains like, "These are people, these are people, these are humans that we have holding care."

One big battle that we've had for three years with the Chicago Field Museum, it was a battle over some remains. And they finally decided a few months ago because we met with them last December because they based on things that they were trying to do with skull measurements and stuff that were so outdated, but that was their excuse. And I said, "Is this a common practice today?" And they said, "No." And I said, "Well, why are you using it? What's the reason?" If you're saying, "Well, we don't really believe in it, but this is what we're saying, it's probably not Arapaho." You know what I mean?

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah.

Crystal C'Bearing:

And so it was just really frustrating too at that time. And then my question to them was just, "Well, okay, so if we don't get our ancestors back, what are your plans for them? What are you going to do with them? Are they just going to continue to sit there in a box on a shelf for who knows how long and you don't have a plan of what you're going to do, you just don't want to give them back to us so we can lay them to rest?" And that was to me, just my question all along was, "What's your plan? How are you treating our ancestors? Wouldn't it be ethical to return them so we can lay them to rest?" And that's all we want to do.

And a big part of what our office does right now with NAGPRA is that we are focused on human remains because we don't have a facility right now to store items properly. And we're working on getting a cultural center and a repository, but our focus, because we don't have that, is repatriation of human remains and reburials.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

That must just be such a surreal experience to be talking to somebody about human remains. And do you ever just want to say like, "Okay, what if it was your relative? What if it was your great-great-grandparent?" It's such a human thing to understand, to respect remains. Does it ever make you feel a little bit crazy?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yes. And I've actually asked that question to them. I'd be like, "What would you think if you came over to our office and we had your grandmother downstairs? And then we're like, 'Well, you need to prove that she's your relative.' And then we get to decide if it's good enough evidence for us to return her to you."

Kristin Oxford, Host:

We'll put it through our committee.

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah, we'll talk about it.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

How do you keep yourself feeling motivated and positive in the face of that kind of thing?

Crystal C'Bearing:

I really thank our team here, the crews that we have on the ground, you have to have passion to work here, you have to be very passionate because it gets hard at times, it gets really trying and emotionally exhausting. Whenever you do repatriations, as we say, it takes a little piece of you because you're transporting an ancestor home. And so it takes a lot, you really have to take care of them and you have to talk to them all the way home. And so you always have to be mindful of that. And it's just the type of people that work here and we push each other and we support each other. And so just to have that support of the elders, that's very important to me is having the support of our elders and the guidance and the direction in our community and also our youth.

This first time, this past summer, we had our interns, college interns come in and help. And they were Arapaho and man, they really made a big difference. And a lot of them, they're changing their majors to come and help.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Oh wow.

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah, a couple of them are. And so that's really good to hear because I was like, "We need you guys, we need you to help finish this work and improve and just get our cultural preservation in order and to help our people and preserve our language is really important too." But yeah, I just really thank our staff here, our community, our leaders, it takes a team effort. Nobody does it alone, it's always a group, it's always a team, it's always supportive.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Well, Crystal, I think it's really cool that you inspired some college kids to change their majors. That must be so validating in a way.

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah, it's really cool because we've worked with our local community college and we're working right now to develop a THPO degree.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Oh, no way.

Crystal C'Bearing:

For tribal members. Yeah. And it's just recently happening, so we're working on the courses. They'll be a cert two, a cert one, and then an actual associates degree. And so they'll have the same qualifications as a cultural resource specialist through the National Park Service. And so that's kind of how we're setting it up. Yeah, I'm really excited.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, that's probably the degree you would've gotten had it been available back when you were in school. So you're like, "I'm going to make it now."

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Oh my gosh, that's so cool. What are some of the other ways that you get kids, either college age or younger kids, involved in learning about their culture?

Crystal C'Bearing:

There's a lot of culture heritage days with the schools that we go in and we kind of talk about what we do, show pictures, kind of show them how we survey land, how we document sites and areas. We have just public meetings where we talk about the different NAGPRA cases that are coming in play and that are coming up. And with the youth we did, even with off-reservation schools, we've been getting a lot of those with the summer camps and stuff. We actually had a summer group from back East that came and

a couple of our staff did a culture day with them. And we just got letters back from them, thank you letters, and one of them was like, "You changed my life." And that was really awesome. Yeah, it was so awesome to see those kids, they're not even from here, they're not Arapaho but to have a big impact on them, to look at their lives differently, to look at a different perspective.

And that's something that we always try to bring to even our own youth is just that perspective, that traditional ecological knowledge, we call it. And incorporating that into today's world. And that's something that I've always pushed with our youth and I've told them like, "If we didn't have the boarding school era happen where we got disconnected from our people and sent away and we didn't know, we got lost at that time, and all those disconnections start happening and those traumas, if we didn't have that and we were able to adapt naturally into the settler way and we were able to naturally adapt in there, I think we would already had our scientists, our lawyers, our doctors." When you look at other countries who have meshed their culture with today's technology, a lot of Asian countries are like that where they've done it successfully and they're really advanced in the world. They're improving and they're advancing and they're progressing.

And I really believe that if we didn't have that trauma of boarding schools that stopped that, we would be right up there. I think we would be just as successful as those other countries.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, instead of having this rupture, there would've been perhaps the opportunity for more just like natural adaptation and traditional ecological knowledge and science, technology not mutually exclusive, in fact, highly complimentary in many ways. And I think it seems like here in North America or at least the United States, we're pretty behind in better integration for that reason. Yeah. You mentioned a little while ago some language preservation work. What does that look like? What kinds of projects or programs are in place to preserve the Northern Arapaho language?

Crystal C'Bearing:

There's so many. We have immersion schools here where the little ones are starting to talk. And we need to get it more into the schools. There's preschools, we have it in high school, in elementary, junior high. And then there's college courses too that you can take. We have an online app that you can download and it has Arapaho words on there and it actually has an elder saying it, a man and a woman, so you can get to hear the Arapaho word. There's different online things that you can access nowadays with technology and bringing the language together. A big part of our office, what we're trying to bring about is getting kind of that age between the youth and the elders who do speak, there's that gap there. And it's kind of like us, the adults that are lacking, the kids are learning, but then when they go home it's hard to speak to their parents and things like that because we're not used to using it.

And I think that's the big push now is just trying to get people involved. There's a great Zoom meeting now for parents, for families, to get on Zoom every week and then they go through and they learn Arapaho together. And I think that's been working really well. And then Zoom's been great for language preservation and so there's just so many different things that we're trying as tribal programs and tribal people that I don't think it'll ever be extinct, but it's close, but I think Arapaho will always be here, our language will always be here and we just got to start speaking it.

And I'm bad at that too and I've been really trying. When I do talk, I try to introduce myself in Arapaho. I'm trying to, when we're out at sites, we're building a plant list of plants in Arapaho, traditional plants and medicines in Arapaho. We're starting to learn words like when we are out in the field that we can talk to each other in Arapaho and say, "Hey, there's something over here," but we say it in Arapaho. And

so that's kind of the direction that we're going in the office. And it's been wonderful, it's good to hear that because me growing up, there was Arapaho in our home because our grandparents spoke it. Nowadays, you hardly ever hear that in a home and we've lost a lot of elders. And so just trying to get back to that point where you always hear Arapaho somewhere is the mission.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah. Well, it sounds like you're doing lots of different creative things to connect folks with the language. I love that, it sounds like a lot of kids are learning it, so that's really helpful. So you mentioned that a couple tribal elders were recording the Arapaho words for the app. What are some other ways that you get tribal elders involved in your work?

Crystal C'Bearing:

A lot of times, lately what we've been dealing with, like you said, the NAGPRA cases where we are dealing with a lot of sensitive items, sensitive ancestors, different things like that that really need to be handled in a way that follows tribal protocol. And so we always call on our elders at that time to give us guidance on what we do and how we are going to approach things. And so that's very important that we have those connections. And that's one way a lot of tribal elders will just give us guidance, especially our ceremonial elders. But then also when we talk about repatriations, there's also a lot of elders out there who have knowledge of Sand Creek.

When we talk about the British Museum, they have Chief Yellow Calf's headdress. And so we've been interviewing a lot of elders that are descendants of Yellow Calf and getting their stories and how he played a big role in the tribe. And so we've been getting a lot of oral histories and interviews together for evidence and for repatriation. And it's just always good to have elders and to learn the language too, that's another big thing is to have them speak to us, be comfortable for us to support them. And this office is really important and really needs that guidance. We can't do it alone. There's no way that we would be able to get where we are today if we didn't have our elders behind us.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Are there any projects that you've worked on that are either a little more behind the scenes or not as well known or just things that you're particularly excited to have had a part in that you want to share with us?

Crystal C'Bearing:

It hasn't happened yet, but we're making steps because we've all been talking about it since I've been here about a cultural center. And so man, we've been really pushing and trying to move forward. And it's an overwhelming task because I was like at first, "How do I even begin? How do I start even trying to go forward and try to get somewhere where we can start having a repository, cultural center, a museum, a place for community members to come together and learn about who they are?" And I think that's important is this place is meant for our people to learn who they are and to have that strong identity of self and to be proud. And so this project that we are just getting started, we're doing the community roles, we'll be start starting to do the community focus groups and just getting the ideas and everybody's thoughts on how this should look like, how this cultural center should be, what should be in there, if it's going to be geared towards just community-based people or if we're going to actually like, well, make it a place for visitors to come in?

And there's so many questions that go around it, but just getting on this path to this cultural center, it's not going to happen right away, it's going to take some time, but that's one project that I'm really excited to see that we're actually taking some steps forward now and we're going along and we're moving along, so I'm excited.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

That's great, that's a beautiful vision. Yeah, laying the groundwork now. I love it. So in your mind or in your philosophy, what is the relationship between preserving the past and creating the future for the next generations?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah. So when our elders talk about being Arapaho and stuff and the way that we set up things, it's always about the past, the present, and the future. We have to look at all of those things. And so I think that my vision is just to get our people to know who they are, to learn about the past because there's a great saying at Sharpnose's Cemetery that says, "If you don't know your past then you don't know where you're going." And so that's always stuck with me and just having that knowledge of, like we said from a long time ago, our creation stories are all histories all the way to treaties, how we got here on a reservation. There's so much history that makes you understand where you come from. And a lot of us that are on the reservation or any reservation across the country, we didn't just come from one tribe, and so there's a lot of intertribal history that happens.

There's also non-tribal history that's entwined into your history because that's part of who you are. And so just getting that knowledge of the past and who you are, who you are as an individual, I think would help you steer your direction of what you're doing presently. And then also helping you see what's towards your future and how you can help your people, your community, your family. And I think that's the biggest thing is just getting past these traumas and helping each other heal is going to really come from knowing who we are and our history.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, beautifully said. Thank you for sharing that with us. Crystal, is there any other work that you do in the Tribal Historic Preservation Office that you wish folks knew more about or just that you would want to share with us?

Crystal C'Bearing:

I think one thing that I really want people to know about our office is that we're always welcoming to anybody that wants to come in and do research and to learn and to figure out who they are to read books. We're starting a little library here and so it's just an opportunity because it's a very welcoming place, I feel. A lot of times we do our work in a big circle in just one big room, but we work together and we feed off each other and then next thing you know the day's over, but you've learned so much because a visitor will come in, like an elder will come in, and then you're asking them these questions, you might be working on a project. And then they help you, a community member comes in and they help you and they bring in another perspective or something that you didn't even think of and it just happens naturally like that.

But as I always say, everybody has a piece of the puzzle, everybody has something that you can learn from, and we've always wanted this place to be very welcoming to that and to make it feel like tribal members could come here and learn who they are.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah. Oh, that's so great. So it's a really good community space, community resource. I love this idea of everybody sitting around in a circle working on something and then somebody walks in and everyone's like, "Oh, they've got something that we could learn about." Everyone walking around has, like you said, a piece of the puzzle. I think that's great. Very cool. So clearly you're a really busy gal and you work on a really great team, but you have a life outside work as well. So what are some things that you do when you're not working? What do you enjoy? How do you spend your time?

Crystal C'Bearing:

I really enjoy my family. I know my kids are growing up, but my youngest, she's a senior in high school now and so my other two are in college, actually really old, but just spending time with them. We've always on, they like sports, they like basketball, so we've always got teams together, traveled with them to tournaments and just getting them out there. And my daughter just signed with a team, a college team-

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Wow, congratulations.

Crystal C'Bearing:

... on Monday. Yeah. And so she made her commitment. Yeah, I'm excited for her and she's our last one. I don't know what we're going to do after this, after she graduates and goes to college, we'll still be following them and supporting them. And so family is just a huge thing for me. That's how I get re-energized. Going outdoors, we have wonderful, beautiful mountains here. And fishing, hunting, just going out to the lake, going outdoors is something that I really like and I really, that's how I get my energy back to keep going forward. So family and outdoors is what does it for me.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Family and outdoors. I love that. Those are two wonderful things. So one thing that we like to ask all of our guests on the podcast is if they have a conservation hero. So is there anyone in particular who you look up to either in the context of your cultural preservation work or sort of ecological preservation?

Crystal C'Bearing:

Yeah, I do.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Good.

Crystal C'Bearing:

So it's with my family, he's my great-great-grandfather and his name's Sherman Sage. And he was referred to as Old Man Sage. He lived to be 107. And so he grew up in a time, he grew he says when he was free in 1834. And so he saw the whole transition of living on a prairie in Nebraska and the whole transition to being here on the reservation, he was actually an Indian police and he had a horse named Smokey, who he was retired, he was decorated his horse too. Yeah. And so he was one of our ceremonial and also our tribal leaders at the time, but one of the significant things that he did with a

group with Tom Crispin and Gun Griswold back in 1914 was they helped named the trails in Colorado at Estes Park. And so they did all the Arapaho history, all the trails.

One cool story is there was an anthropologist there and he didn't believe the Arapaho were there or they had that history there. And he said, "Okay." And he was walking and that guy said, "What is that old man doing? What is he doing?" And he was walking, he got to this tree and he's bent down and he started digging. And they said, "What is he doing? What is that crazy old man doing?" And here he dug out pots and pans and he said, "This is where my mom used to bury her pots and pans before we moved." And he said, "And then over there at that tree, that's where another family buried their items."

But yeah, that's where they buried their items. And so it was really significant at that time because it proved that we were in that area forever and he claims that the Arapahos were there, there's a mountain there, it's an old volcano. And he said their Arapahos have been there since the last time that mountain smoked. And so that's been for a long time. And he knew that, and so he's always been my hero, there's a picture of him during the expedition when he did name those trails and he's my screensaver and so I just look up to my great grandpa a lot.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Yeah, so pretty strong family through line there of the type of work that you do.

Crystal C'Bearing:

I always say they were the first THPOs.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

So Crystal, is there anything else you feel like you'd like to share with us?

Crystal C'Bearing:

I'd just like to say thank you for having me on the program. I really enjoyed it. Nice to meet you on the podcast. Hope to see you again.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

For sure.

Crystal C'Bearing:

I think it's important to get the education out there of what THPO, what we do. And we play a big role in a lot of federal projects and it's good to get that knowledge out there because what we're trying to do is preserve, protect, and conserve. And it's not necessarily, I tell companies, I tell agencies, it's not necessarily to stop the project, but it's for protection and how can we work together? We're not against advancement, it's just doing it in a good way and making sure that we're working together and you're listening to us and our voice and that what we're saying is not only important to us, but to everybody and we're trying to look out for everybody and to preserve that history. So yeah, that's kind of what I would like to end. And just thanks again for having me. I really had fun.

Kristin Oxford, Host:

Absolutely. Thank you so much. We really appreciate you spending your time on the podcast and it was so wonderful to learn from you about the Northern Arapaho people and about your work in the Tribal

Historic Preservation Office and keep it up. You are one busy gal, but oh my gosh, you are doing such incredible things, so I feel really honored to be able to have spoken with you today, so thank you.

Hohou, and thank you to Crystal for joining us and sharing your remarkable knowledge and work. If you want to learn more about the efforts to rename Mt. Evans to Mt. Blue Sky, or if you'd like to download the app Crystal mentioned and learn a bit of the Northern Arapaho language, we'll place those links in the show notes. The Voices of Greater Yellowstone Podcast is produced by The Greater Yellowstone Coalition, a nonprofit dedicated to working with all people to protect the lands, waters, and wildlife of this special ecosystem. If you like the podcast, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcast or Spotify or sharing this episode with a friend. We really appreciate your support. Thank you for listening in and we will see you next time.