

Photography:

Carl Peterson (right) with Student Success Coach Charlie Luecke from the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation.

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Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation
12151 Avenue of the Chiefs
Crazy Horse, SD 57730

Contact: Jadwiga Ziolkowski
(605) 673-4681
jadwiga@crazyhorse.org

Northern Plains Games Founder Carl Petersen Credits
Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation for Providing Tools for Success

CRAZY HORSE, SD (Oct. 31, 2019) — Last week, a Dakota State University senior from South Dakota's Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation presented a unique computer game at the imagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival in Toronto. Carl Petersen created "Tipi Kaga" earlier this year so players could learn how to build a traditional tipi by following an elder's instructions in the Lakota language.

Although Petersen, who is majoring in computer game design and computer science with a minor in math, won't officially graduate until 2020, he decided to open his own business last March with a Dreamstarter grant from Running Strong for American Indian Youth. Called Northern Plains Games, it's dedicated to providing computer games in Lakota—such as Tipi Kaga, and another game Petersen designed that's set in 1890 and incorporates characters from the Ghost Dance movement.

Petersen's game design is garnering significant attention, and between his school work and business pursuits, this entrepreneurial young man now has his hands full. When asked how a student develops the skills and experience necessary to manage all of this, Petersen attributed his success to a nonprofit organization in the Black Hills that's perhaps best known for its mammoth carving of the celebrated Lakota leader Crazy Horse, which is dedicated to honoring all indigenous peoples of North America.

The Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation operates The Indian University of North America, which has offered distinctive academic programming in partnership with select colleges and universities—as well as student success coaching—to more than 280 students in the last 10 years. These students hail from more than 40 native nations and 20 states; among them is Carl Petersen.

"I graduated from Cheyenne-Eagle Butte High School in spring 2016 and was going to start college at Dakota State University that fall," said Petersen, who grew up in Parade, South Dakota. "I had some contacts with Crazy Horse, and I thought wow, this would be great for college credits and work experience."

The summer program gave Petersen the opportunity to earn 12 credits for college and participate in a paid internship, but he said it provided so much more than that.

"College isn't about how smart you are," he advised. "It's about how well you can manage expectations, your time, and taking care of yourself. You learn those things at Crazy Horse, and they teach you in a way that's tailored to native students."

Petersen completed his first summer program in 2016, and he returned the next year for the upper-level version of the program. During summer 2017 and '18, he returned to work for the nonprofit organization, noting that its internships are valuable for native youth—particularly those who grew up on reservations.

"For native students, this might be the first time you're dealing with non-native tourists, from all over the country and

even around the world,” he said. “Many of them have never met an Indian. You’re putting yourself out there, and it can be intense.

“During the summer program, you have weekly meetings with instructors,” he continued. “They address study skills and provide academic counseling, but they also help you navigate the culture shock, which is really important.”

As he worked his way through his four summers with the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation, Petersen had the opportunity to connect with many young people from tribes across North America.

“When we talked about my idea for games in Lakota, they thought it was so cool,” he remembered. “That was incredibly affirming and helped move me in the direction I went. Crazy Horse also introduced me to famous Lakota leaders in art and history, which isn’t common on the reservation.

“My time at Crazy Horse gave me the most powerful tools in my toolbox,” he reflected. “It broadened my horizons, and made me believe in myself. I loved it.”

Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation funds the tuition, books, and the majority of food and lodging costs for those accepted into The Indian University of North America’s summer program. Native students who start their college careers with the program also are provided an unconventional level of student support from university success coaches, no matter where the students pursue their degrees.

Surveys have shown that 74 percent of respondents have graduated from their universities and colleges or remain enrolled in their degree programs. College graduates who began their higher-education journey at The Indian University of North America currently work as teachers, counselors, nurses, business professionals, an assistant museum curator, a bank examiner, a law enforcement officer and a dental hygienist; more than 50 percent of graduates work at native-led organizations, giving back to their communities.

To learn more about the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation, to plan a visit, and for information about making a contribution, call (605) 673-4681 or visit crazyhorsememorial.org. To stay up to date on the latest news and events, follow the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation on Facebook ([/crazyhorsememorial](https://www.facebook.com/crazyhorsememorial)), Twitter ([@crazyhorsemem](https://twitter.com/crazyhorsemem)) and Instagram ([@crazyhorsememorial](https://www.instagram.com/crazyhorsememorial)).

The Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation is dedicated to protecting and preserving the culture, tradition, and living heritage of the North American Indians by continuing the progress on the world’s largest sculptural undertaking, the memorial of Lakota leader Crazy Horse; providing educational and cultural programming to encourage harmony and reconciliation among all peoples and nations; acting as a repository for Native American artifacts, arts, and crafts through the Indian Museum of North America and the Native American Educational and Cultural Center; and establishing and operating the Indian University of North America and, when practical, a medical training center for American Indians.

