

## RECRUITING NATIVE STUDENTS TO LAW SCHOOL AND A LEGAL CAREER (S. Klein, Human Services Dept.)

A special event was held Thursday Oct. 1 to share information about getting into law school and serving as a lawyer in Indian Country.

The main theme of this event was how incredibly important Native lawyers are to serving our families, communities, and the Oyate. Lawyers serve in a wide array of capacities: judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, civil law, protecting our rights both individually and as Tribal nations (land, water, jurisdiction, and more), administration and policy-making.

The pivotal speaker was Ms. Linda Benally, President of the National Native American Bar Association. Ms. Benally is Dine (Navajo) and practices law in Arizona. She shared her background and current experiences serving as a lawyer. Ms. Benally stated “having a Native lawyer at the table goes a long way to ensure Tribal issues are included and respected”. She is traveling nationwide to encourage Native people to pursue legal careers and thus serve their communities and Tribes.

Mr. Eric Schulte, President of the South Dakota Bar Association, spoke further on the critical issue of Native attorneys. The SD Bar Association has over 3,000 members; less than 30 are Native. Mr. Schulte emphasized this presents a huge gap for the legal profession and, ultimately, serving the cause of justice for Natives. He shared the SD Bar Association is taking measures to close the gap by recruitment events along with special support for Native students (such as help with costs associated with law school entry and studying for the bar exam). The SD Bar Association President-Elect, Ms. Stephanie Pochop (of Gregory), was also on hand to promote these efforts.

Native lawyers Mr. Seth Pearman, Ms. Dani Daugherty, and Mr. Pat Duffy all addressed the crowd. Collectively they spoke about their personal journeys leading to law school, their experiences in school, especially overcoming challenges such as the lengthy and complex application process, academic rigor, child care, housing, finances, and more. These attorneys have served in a rich variety of positions: practicing tribal law, personal law, corporate attorney, policy-maker, leader/administrator, and more. Ms. Daugherty illustrated the value of lawyers skilled in Native issues with the example of the successful legal fight to prohibit the construction of a bombing range adjacent to the sacred Bear Butte.

Mr. Nick McInerney, Admissions Office for USD School of Law, spoke on the application process for entry into USD’s program. He fielded a number of practical questions and by doing so tried to dispel some of the common myths and anxieties people have about getting into law school. One example is the kind of undergraduate degree needed. Mr. McInerney said most any bachelor’s degree works, as long as it requires one to do substantial reading and writing. How varied the degree can be is illustrated by the fact a current outstanding law school student has an undergraduate degree in Dance! Another big concern is the financing of a legal education; all presenters emphasized the viability of loans, scholarships, Tribal support, and loan forgiveness programs as good ways to make law school affordable.

One of our local Tribal members, Mr. Beau Bearshield, who is a current USD Law School student was also on hand. He shed light on things from a student perspective. Beau is a first year student and enjoys the experience yet admits “it involves a lot of studying!”

Also made known to the attendees is the fact SGU has strong undergraduate programs geared to prepare students for law school. The Human Services Department’s B.A. degree has enabled a number of people to successfully complete law school. The Business Education Department offers a Legal Studies Minor with the intent to train people in legal knowledge and skills, both for law school and also to serve as paralegal professionals in our Tribal judicial system. If SGU students want more information, please contact either Ron Hutchinson (Business Dept.) or Sheryl Klein (Human Services Dept.).

To help anyone interested in a legal career, especially navigating the Law School application process, today’s speakers provided their contact information and are willing to help provide support and guidance.

Name	Title/Position	Email
Linda Benally	President, National Native American Bar Association	Linda.Benally@pinnaclewest.com
Eric Shulte	President, SD State Bar Association	eschulte@dehs.com
Stephanie Pochop	President-Elect, SD State Bar Association	staphanie@rosebudlaw.com
Seth Pearman	Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe Attorney	spearman@fsst.org
Dani Daugherty	BIA Attorney	Danielle.daugherty@bia.gov
Pat Duffy	BIA Superintendent	Patrickduffy@bia.gov
Nick McInerney	USD School of Law Admissions	Nicholas.McInerney@usd.edu

Other individuals who are involved in the recruitment effort but were not able to attend today’s event provided their contact information.

J. R. LaPlante	laplanteindianlaw@gmail.com
Jim Leach	jim@southdakotajustice.com
Tate Means	taewin@gmail.com
Mary Smith	Marysmith828@hotmail.com
Heather Thompson	Hd_thomspon@yahoo.com
Lonnie Wright	Lonnie.wright@bia.com
Robin Zephier	rzephier@azlaw.pro
Tracy Zephier	tzephier@ndnlaw.com

Here are three useful websites:

- The Law School Admissions Council [www.lasc.org](http://www.lasc.org)
- The SD State Bar Association <http://statebarofsouthdakota.com/>
- The University of SD School of Law [www.usd.edu/law](http://www.usd.edu/law)

Lastly, a big *Wopila Tanka* to our two local Native legal professionals who helped facilitate this and other recruitment events: RST Tribal Court Chief Judge Sherman Marshall and RST Court of Appeals Chief Justice Cheryl Three Stars Valandra. We are especially proud of their contribution and are happy to note both individuals have ties to SGU as students.

Below are three pictures of participants. A heartfelt thanks to all!

---



Natives into Law: (l to r) Beau Bearshield, Linda Benally, Pat Duffy, Dani Daugherty, Seth Pearman



The larger group of presenters, including (l to r): Beau Bearshield, Linda Benally, Pat Duffy, Dani Daugherty, Seth Pearman, Stephanie Pochop, Nick McInerney, Eric Shulte



A roomful of prospective Legal Eagles (we hope!) attended the Law School Recruitment Event.