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Butte Tribe names honorary members

By Belinda Brooks

Did you know that having Native American blood does not qualify you as being a part of a Native American tribe? According to the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), “An Indian tribe was originally a body of people (family) bound together by blood ties who were socially, politically, and religiously organized, who lived together in a defined territory and who spoke a common language or dialect. In the eyes of the US government a body of people as described above must be officially recognized to be considered a tribe.” Therefore, federally recognized tribes are just that, “tribes,” not a person with Native American blood. To be a part of a tribe, one must be born into it or adopted into the family.

With that in mind, there are those with and without indigenous bloodlines who have no claim to an existing tribal family but have spent a lifetime advocating for the rights of Native Americans. Butte Tribe acknowledges and honors two such men, Jim “Standing Bear” Wheatly and Ian Peterkin, as honorary members by adoption.

Jim “Standing Bear” Wheatly, a defender of approximately 90,000 homeless or under-housed indigenous American families across the United States, has spent close to 30 years on the board of Partnership With Native Americans (PWNA). Butte Tribe members John and Kimberly Marine Hall traveled with Standing Bear to the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota in January 2022. The Sisseton, like many poverty-stricken Native reservations within the United States, live on a desolate land with little or no opportunities to provide their families with the basic essentials of healthy, safe living environments. Winters are harsh on the Sisseton. Serving the needs of these people have been Wheatly’s life’s passion. His ancestors carried the Quahadi Comanche and Choctaw bloodlines. Chief Rodger Collum announced the honorary membership of Jim Standing Bear Wheatley in May 2023. Butte Tribe is privileged to have had such a humble and honorable brave join its family. Jim “Standing Bear” Wheatly, a defender of approximately 90,000 homeless or under-housed indigenous American families across the United States, has spent close to 30 years on the board of Partnership With Native Americans (PWNA). Butte Tribe members John and Kimberly Marine Hall traveled with Standing Bear to the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota in January 2022. The Sisseton, like many poverty-stricken Native reservations within the United States, live on a desolate land with little or no opportunities to provide their families with the basic essentials of healthy, safe living environments. Winters are harsh on the Sisseton. Serving the needs of these people have been Wheatly’s life’s passion. His ancestors carried the Quahadi Comanche and Choctaw bloodlines.

He also served Bad River, Standing Rock Sioux, Cheyenne River Sioux tribes for years. Additionally, he has been involved promoting The FOX Project dedicated to rescuing and rehabilitating wild horses, donkeys, and Buffalo. He frequently sponsors rides like the Dakota 38 +2, Big Foot Memorial Ride, and always on look out for donations of horse tack for the riders.

When asked about his passion to serve, Standing Bear said, “I have served the people my whole life. Sitting Bull said, “A warrior is not one that kills as no one has the right to take a life. A warrior is one who protects the young, the old and the old ways. I have seen the poverty, drug addiction and the alcoholism. The children and Elders have lost all hope. It’s my job to restore that hope.” In response to the presentation of hon-



Hoka Hey!! ‘It’s a good day to die.’ Butte Tribe’s beloved Jim “Standing Bear” Wheatly entered into eternal rest after his galent battle with cancer on June 3, 2023. There is no death, only a change of worlds. May his journey to his heavenly Father be a glorious ride.

orary membership to Butte Tribe, he replied, “I am honored and accept humbly. May your tribe always be blessed. You are a kind people as everyone I have met have good hearts.”

Standing side-by-side with Wheatly in Butte Tribe’s Honorary membership category is Ian Peterkin. Ian has worked tirelessly creating the Real Native American Story Group on Facebook with a 75K following. Born a Jamaican in 1958, his family emigrated to the United States when he was 14. His walk with Native Americans began in 1968. As a child, he remembers watching an American western film and vividly sees Natives Americans war dancing around a campfire on their homeland before attacking invading settlers. Until this day, the memory mentally transports him into the middle of the dance and then, the war! His war-cry and heart’s desire were victory for his Native American brothers. This disillusionment of the American culture hit hard upon his arrival to the United States. The gang-braindead mentality of his peers pushed Peterkin toward the study of his Native American passion. Wearing his Billy Jack hat and moccasins, his teachers would defer to him to clarify Native American culture. During that time, the coolest guy that he ever met was the only Native American in school. Peterkin remembers, “He was a great guy. Very quiet, and everyone liked him; talked about how ‘cool’ he was. Just from being quiet.” In December 2017, as a well-known Native American commentator on Facebook, Peterkin was banned from four of the six Facebook indigenous sights he was following. All because of his posting of a pro-native tee-shirt. This blessing in disguise was the catalyst for Peterkin’s creation of a leading FB page “Real Native American Story Group.”

Butte Tribe’s Council Chief Tammy Perot sponsored these two honorary members for a life well-lived serving the Native American people. Perot reported, “It’s time that these two men come home to the people that love and honor their service.” Sadly before the publishing of this article, Butte Tribe received word of Jim “Standing Bear” Wheatly’s passing.