

Local Organization Mobilizes to Support Native American's hurt by "Geronimo" codename for Osama bin Laden

Almost everyone in the Detroit-area Native American Community has a friend or family member that serves, or served, in the Iraq or Afghanistan wars. Upon hearing that the codename "Geronimo" was used for terrorist Osama bin Laden, the American Indian Health and Family Services Clinic immediately began to mobilize, ready to assist those in their community who may need emotional support knowing one of their cultural heroes has been used to identify the terrorist leader.

Detroit, MI May 4, 2011--Jerilyn Church felt a jolt when she heard that, upon killing Osama bin Laden, the navy seal had radioed back: "*For God and Country: Geronimo, Geronimo, Geronimo.*" As a Native American who lost an extended family member in the war in Iraq and who also has other family serving in Afghanistan, Jerilyn felt the words differently than the general population. Her immediate concern was not for herself, but for the community she serves as director of the American Indian Health and Family Services Clinic of southeast Michigan. She knew that many Native American families would feel hurt by this use of this Native American cultural hero's name as the code designation for the despicable terrorist.

"This is not about political correctness," Jerilyn said on Tuesday. "This is about real families, struggling to explain to themselves and their children why the name of a brave Apache leader and warrior, who defended his homeland, was used to identify the United States' top enemy. These situations can trigger feelings of alienation and renew feelings of trauma in Veterans and Native American families who have been impacted by 9/11 or the war in Iraq. We urge any Native American family members who feel hurt by this insensitive use of Geronimo's name to contact us at AIHFS."

Southeastern Michigan is home to the largest Native American population in the state and the 10th largest Native American population in the country. Nationally, nearly 20,000 people classified as Native American/Alaskan Native are serving in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force, according to the Defense Department's tally from December 2005. There are an estimated 184,000 Native American/Alaskan Native veterans, according to the Veteran's Administration. The National Native American Veterans Association estimates that 22 percent of Native Americans 18 years or older are veterans.

AIHFS is a non-profit urban Indian health center serving the American Indian community of Southeastern Michigan. They offer comprehensive, culturally-integrated health care by providing medical and behavioral health services and health education services, in addition to outpatient substance abuse treatment and prevention programs. These services are open to persons with or without insurance. They also have an active youth program, provide health and wellness programs, and sponsor community events. The organization will be providing emotional and cultural support at their Detroit clinic for anyone who has felt hurt by the culturally insensitive use of Geronimo's name.

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