Passing along the knowledge

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Polequaptewa Dance Group fueled by tradition

Teaching the young strong traditional values from an early start has its benefits and that alone can go a long way.

Especially when it involves a language and a deep rich culture behind it. Such as the case with 27-year-old Alrye Polequaptewa, who was born and raised on the Hopi Reservation.

Polequaptewa has been involved with his culture from an early age. The Hopi Tribe sits atop three mesas in northern Arizona, with each one consisting of different villages.

Polequaptewa is from the Second Mesa and from the village of Shungopovi. Despite facing some life struggles, Polequaptewa has not let him stop doing what he loves, and that is sharing his Hopi life through ceremonial dances across the United States.

Recently his group “Polequaptewa Dance Group” performed at the Summer Nightly Indian Dances in downtown Gallup. His group consists of 19-year-old Shawuana Polequaptewa; 26-year-old Nicole Mariano; 17-year-old Chelsea Kewanyama; and 17-year-old Brennon Silas.

Polequaptewa Dance Group has performed in Albuquerque at the state fair, various casinos and even performed in New York.

Having worked with “Emergence Productions group” and with “Native Roots,” Alrye Polequaptewa gained more recognition and experience prior forming his own group in 2012. The group’s first performance was at the Hopi Heritage Square Art Show. From there, his group took off.

Part of the joy of storytelling through dancing is teaching the younger Hopi generation about the

culture.

“I want to tell people about what it means to be a Hopi, and each of our dances symbolize very important aspects of our life,” he said. “I’ve been doing this since I was in high school. I started out early in another dance group.”

Polequaptewa says that these dances encourage other young Hopi’s to follow in their traditional ways and to keep the Hopi strong.

“I do this to help out the kids at home who are sitting at home doing nothing and help teach them about their culture. I grew up with most of them and they are well-behaved,” he said, laughing.

STYLES OF DANCES

His group performs three dances, which include:

HOPI DEER DANCE: The Hopi deer dance is a blessing ceremony for a successful hunting season. Hopi people believe the deer is a strong healer that provides strength, endurance, and life longevity.

-HOPI EAGLE DANCE: The Hopi eagle dance is a prayer ceremony for purification, healing, and balancing the life of the Hopi people along with the world. Kwaahu (Kwa-huu) is a messenger of the Hopi people in hopes of moisture and balancing the order of humanity and humbleness.

-HOPI WATER MAIDENS DANCE: The Palhikmana (Pahl-heek-mana) dance is a ceremony that allows the young females girls that are unmarried with no children, to perform this special dance. To help teach the young ladies faith, respect, and gracefulness. The dance is performed for the monsoon season to help give moisture to the crops of the Hopi. The headdresses also

signify the different seasons of storms such as the winter, spring, and summer clouds spirits.

Polequaptewa says each of these dances are very sacred to the Hopi people and it's important to know that they honor everything that Mother Earth gives them as well as Father Sky.

"When performing these dances such as the Hopi Water Maiden dance, they hold deep traditional value," he said, "This is primarily a summer time dance, done in August, September for the fresh harvest that they grow on the reservation.

"Our regalia tells also about the weather, too. The headdress symbolizes all that is when a rain storm occurs. The plumes that are on the head represent the cumulous nimbus clouds, the textiles on the outfit represent vegetation on the Hopi Reservation. Mt. Taylor and the San Francisco Peaks are sacred to the Hopi People, and displayed in the dancers regalia to represent a harvest and clouds for a good season."

Dancer Shawuana Polequaptewa says she knew it was a matter of time before she would join the dance ensemble.

"I wanted to partake of and to be a part of it. They asked me a couple of times to do this, then I got into it," she said.

Shawuana Polequaptewa says that she wants to pursue nursing and work her way up to becoming a pediatrician.

About to become seniors at Hopi Jr./High School in Polacca, Ariz., Chelsea Kewanyama and Brennon Silas, say being a part of this group is fun, in addition to sharing their culture.

"Well, I started dancing when I was a little girl and they asked me if I wanted to dance in this group. I said yes and I want to continue doing this," Kewanyama said.

As for Silas, thoroughly knowing his culture is just important just as it is telling others about it.

“It pretty much started at our ceremonials, and I wanted to know more about our culture through the dances, and doing it for our people and showing others about our culture,” he said.

For more information on Polequaptewa Dance Group visit Facebook page Alrye Polequaptewa

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