

Gallup Film Festival highlights language preservation with film on Zuni

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 15 September 2017 02:42



Featured this Friday at 7:30 pm is “Now, Then, and Forever: Zuni in the Grand Canyon,” one of 50 submissions at the Gallup Film Festival.

The film is a sojourn of the Zuni people and their ancestral connection to the Grand Canyon.

“La Sap Da Ya Kya, La’ Gi, E Sha Maldeh A:shiwi Lak Chimikyanakyadaya:ah” is the title in the Zuni language.

The Grand Canyon is the place of emergence for the Zuni people, and continues to serve as a spiritual sojourn for the A:shiwi (the Zuni people) to leave offerings and gather materials for traditional practices.

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In 1919, the Grand Canyon was established as a National Park says film narrator, Octavius Seowtewa, “and put a stop to the pilgrimage.”

Seowtewa says, “In the 1970s my grandfather chose to ignore this law. He traveled with two other medicine society leaders to Ribbon Falls reopening a connection that grows stronger to this day.”

The film captures Seowtewa traversing the Colorado and Little Colorado Rivers for the nineteenth time with a group of Zuni elders. Traveling to the various sacred sites by boat the group of Zuni elders offer prayers, collect salt, and tell their story in their language. It is translated in English subtitles.

“Now, Then, and Forever: Zuni in the Grand Canyon” takes you through a journey of the rivers and the grand canyon as told by Seowtewa from a spiritual telling as well as a historical one.

It is directed by Daniel Byers, and written by Harry Aspinwall and Octavius Seowtewa, and a production of Skyship Films. Director Byers has made films featuring the rivers of Honduras, nearly extinct snow leopards in Afghanistan, and rafting through the glacial lakes near Mt. Everest, in the Himalayas near Nepal.

Through the story telling of the Zuni elders, they establish their ancestral roots to the Grand Canyon. The ancient signs and markings on the rocks and walls at the base of the rivers are Zuni. Other surrounding tribes do not claim these symbols.

The near 30-minute film, shot in digital 4K, received a high rating by the Gallup Film Festival’s four reviewers.

Advisors for this production include Ronnie Cachini, Eldred Quam, Cornell Tsalate, Harry Chimoni, George Yawakie, Perry Tsadiasi, and Presley Haskie. Zuni cultural consultants who contributed are Shami Kanteena and Pete Peynetsa.

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The Gallup Film Festival starts Thursday, September 14, and ends on Saturday, September 16.

Tickets are on sale at the Gallup Downtown Conference Center at 204 West Coal Ave.