



## Dearest Friends of Wings,

November 29, 2018

In August I had the great honor of celebrating three decades of Wings running programs alongside some of the organization's greatest supporters and inspirational figures. Near the end of the evening, Chief Oren Lyons reminisced to the crowd about approaching the great Jim Thorpe in his youth. A legend in his own right, Oren spoke about his encounter with the prototypical decathlete as if it were a spiritual rite of passage. At that moment I became acutely aware that "The Earth Circle" was nearing another full revolution. With dozens of young men and women that have benefited from the Wings mission listening intently in the crowd, a new generation of messengers was being energized for an endless journey. A journey to safeguard the health and well-being of their communities and, in turn, the Earth.

Recently the Wings family has engaged in the work of raising environmental awareness like I never imagined possible. Whether it's elementary students utilizing their immediate surroundings to run and play games, or prayer runners crisscrossing hundreds of miles on foot to underline their devotion to ancestral lands, our participants continue to use running to foster an understanding of place and meaning that many of us search for our entire lives. With an awakened appreciation and curiosity for their surroundings, our participants will become the leaders of tomorrow and stewards of the land that cradles their passions. Please continue on this path with us as we encourage Native youth to uphold the competitive and spiritual legacy of the runners that came before them. No matter the odds, we look to our ancestors for strength on the long road ahead.

With Love & Gratitude,

Will Channing, Co-Founder

## "Long Run Fundraiser" Lives Up To Its Name



Aside from the joy of bringing together old friends, Wings' 30th anniversary celebration created a healthy stimulus of funding for the organization's future. Grossing just shy of \$75,000 in ticket sales, art purchases and donations, the event surpassed the earnings of any of our previous fundraising campaigns. Still, we're proud to have included our program alumni and current beneficiaries. Of 155 tickets sold, 71 went to our participants and their family members. These are the community members that truly determine the "long run" impact of Wings. A special thanks is owed to our many supporters that purchased tickets for the dinner but relinquished their seat to a local champion. With your help, we not only raised money, but the spirit of the coming generations.



**Left:** Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk (Ute Mountain Ute) speaks about her involvement with the Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition and the vision behind their proposal to create Bears Ears National Monument. The theme of the evening's conversation was "value change for survival". (Photo: Nathaniel Fuentes)

**Above:** Wings runners chat with honored guests at the "Long Run Fundraiser" after presenting them with robes in thanks for their leadership & support. (Photo: Nathaniel Fuentes)

# Sacred Strides Selected to be Part of Banff Mountain Film Festival's World Tour

When the Bears Ears Prayer Run Alliance (BEPRA) united runners from across the southwest last March, a camera crew from *Outside* magazine was there to help cover the miles and document the effort. Coincidentally, the director of photography for the film, Forest Woodward, worked closely with Wings in 2015 while filming *3100:Run & Become*. This set the stage for a relationship of trust, creativity, and earnest communication that produced a magazine editorial and twelve-minute short: *Sacred Strides*. The crew turned to Wings to help steer the content and message of the film through every stage of post production.

As *Outside's* first documentary, expectations for the film were low. But the message BEPRA runners delivered to their ancestors in March had legs that defied the confines of time and region. In October, the production crew learned that *Sacred Strides* was selected by the Banff Mountain Film Festival to be shown during its opening weekend at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Alberta, Canada. 1,000 people packed the theatre for the showing. *Sacred Strides* Director, Marie Sullivan, and Wings Executive Director, Dustin Martin, were in attendance to introduce the film and answer questions for patrons throughout the weekend.

Today it has been confirmed that the film was selected to be included on select stops of the Banff Mountain Film Festival's World Tour. This means that through 2019, *Sacred Strides* will be included in screenings arranged for audiences internationally. Google "2018/2019 World Tour Films" to see the other films that were selected to be part of the tour and learn more about screening dates near you. If you have not seen the film, google "Sacred Strides" to access it for free online.



## Help Wings Build An Endowment Fund For Future Programs

We are excited to announce an opportunity for Wings to kickstart the next era of maturation in our program's history. A generous donor has offered to match contributions made to the organization's endowment fund before the end of the year. For every \$100K we raise, they will match that amount up to half a million dollars. With the help of our "Long Run Fundraiser", we have already reached our first \$100K.

Foster Dykema Cabot & Co., a wealth management firm based in Boston, MA, has agreed to manage our account pro bono. Over time, the firm will help Wings grow the fund while using a portion of yearly earnings to sustain year-round programs like Flight Club. Currently the Board of Directors is working on investment guidelines to ensure the organization's money isn't tied to enterprises that are antithetical to our core values. After 30 years of empowering Native youth and their families, we are primed to seed a new generation of Native role models.

Please help Wings take full advantage of this unprecedented opportunity. Pledges for future donations put into writing can be counted toward the match. No donation is too small!

## Wings National Team Poised To Return to Florida Faster Than Ever

In February of next year, Wings will once again sponsor a team of the fastest American Indian youth ages 14-19 to the USA Cross Country Championships. With only one more qualifying race to be run before selections are made, it's apparent that both the men's and women's squads will be some of the strongest the organization has fielded in 31 years. To be a scoring member of either team, boys will need to have run under 16 minutes and girls under 18:30 for a 5K at some point during the fall.

From early December until the first weekend in February, Wings National Team runners will follow a detailed workout regimen delivered to them on a weekly basis. Team members will once again be invited to convene in Albuquerque between Christmas and New Year's to train and get to know one another before making their way to the start line in Tallahassee. With any luck, this bonding and learning experience will produce at least one individual qualifier for the IAAF World Cross Country Championships in Aarhus Denmark the end of March.

The last Wings runner to qualify for international competition as part of a Wings National Team was Courtney Lewis in 2016. Today, Courtney (Fort Mojave/Hopi) is a scoring member of the Arizona State University cross country team alongside another former Wings stand-out from the Navajo Nation, Daan Haven. Stay tuned to see what the coming year brings for graduates of the 31st Wings National Team...



**Left:** On Saturday, November 17, over 50 Native runners ran the Nike Cross Regional in Casa Grande, AZ with hopes of posting a time fast enough to be selected for the Wings National Team. Wings provided transportation and race entry fees for twenty runners that applied for assistance. Though they hailed from many different Tribes and communities across the southwest, these student-athletes came together to represent Native runners and Wings admirably. These young men pushed one another to leave it all on the course and claim big personal bests.

# Order Your Wings 30th Anniversary Memorabilia Today!

Wings Executive Director, Dustin Martin, created a design to mark the historic anniversary of the organization that has given him and his peers so much. Featuring an updated “winged moccasin” floating above a silhouette of Turtle Island, the graphic also serves as a symbol of the resilience of Indigenous Peoples.

Please support Wings and get a little something in return by ordering a 30th anniversary t-shirt or hat. Shirts are 100% cotton and fit true to size. Hats are a cotton/polyester blend with a soft dri-fit band on the inside and an adjustable back. Both also feature Nike branding.



**Shirts: \$30**  
**Hats: \$40**

\*Shipping & Handling included. \$20 of each shirt and \$10 of each hat is tax-deductible.

**Please write the number of shirts/hats you would like to order in the blank to the left of each available size:**



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## Runners Step Up To Raise Awareness For Water Policy

In late September, Wings was approached by Beverly Harry (Diné) about assisting with a fast-approaching prayer relay. As a Native Community Organizer for the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN), Mrs. Harry was attempting to assemble a team of Indigenous allies to run from near Great Basin National Park to Las Vegas. With their feet, they would trace the proposed route of a 300-mile network of wells and pipelines designed to deliver ground water from rural eastern Nevada to the suburban sprawl of Sin City. Though time was short, her plea struck a chord. Within hours of putting out a call for runners to our network of summer camp facilitators and the Bears Ears Prayer Run Alliance, each of the seven seats in the “Wings car” were spoken for. With the executive director at the helm, they set out from Santa Fe on September 29th to rendezvous with others on their way from Nevada and California.



Runners worked together to cover around 100 miles each day for three days. Every morning they rose before sunrise to circle around the fire. They were lead in prayer by Johnnie Bob, a Yomba Shoshone elder who has lived his entire life in central Nevada. For the rest of the day, they split their support vehicles into four teams that were assigned to run ten mile sections concurrently over the next forty miles of road. At the end of each section, the crew would rally to eat, laugh and plan for the distance ahead. The group made it a point to cover the first and last steps of each day as one. When the distance for the day was complete, they pitched their tents and let the stories and laughter flow. They reflected on the beauty the day had to offer.

Today, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) continues to speculate on the water beneath the vast basins of eastern Nevada. Although the State Engineer rejected the utility’s application to move forward on the project in August, SNWA trucks still sped passed prayer runners on their way to and from jobsites hundreds of miles north of the Las Vegas metro area.



**Left:** Relay runners complete their journey by delivering the week’s prayers to the steadily receding shores of Lake Mead. (Photo: Brenda Harry)

**Above:** Wings runners pose with their adopted “team mom”, Brenda Harry. The “Wings car” waits for duty in the background. (Photo: Beverly Harry)

# 3100:Run & Become Examines the Spiritual Realm of Running

In 2015 Wings was approached by Sanjay Rawal about helping produce a film that would offer audiences a look at “Native running”. Though our board members and executive director were cautious to begin with, Sanjay’s uniquely spiritual identity and personal connection with running were apparent. He was attempting to make much more than another sports movie in need of some ethnographic flavor. After learning more about his method and vision for the film, Wings board member, Shaun Martin, agreed to let the cameras tell his family’s story.

As a young boy, Shaun’s father made each of his sons wake up before day break to run to the east. This traditional Navajo practice shows *diyin diné*, the Holy People, that one is ready and appreciative for each new day. In the morning twilight, the senses become acutely aware of their surroundings and the elements that work to animate the world. In many ways, the morning run is a form of prayer to say thanks for the gift of life.

But for Shaun, it was also a reminder that he was fortunate to wake up in his family’s home each morning. When his father was a small boy, he ran to escape boarding school. Though Leupp Boarding School was nearly 100 miles from his family’s hogan near the confluence of the Little Colorado and Colorado Rivers, Shaun’s father repeatedly slipped into the Painted Desert to escape the assimilationist policies of his captors. Again and again, he disappeared into the night until school officials decided they had to send him so far from home that he’d never dream of trying to make it back on foot.

*3100: Run & Become* is the film that resulted from Sanjay’s impulse to tell a story. Apart from following Shaun as he directs the wildly popular Canyon De Chelly Ultra Marathon, the camera watches him retrace the steps his father took from the site of the old Leupp Boarding School to his ancestral home site. Throughout the feature viewers are also introduced to quirky ultramarathoners attempting to complete a 3,100 mile race around a 1/2 mile track in Queens, NY; a Kua Tribesman from the Kalahari Desert who risks his life to teach the next generation the art of the persistence hunt; and a Japanese Bhuddist Monk who continues a 1,000-day walking quest to maintain the most holy spiritual tradition of his order.

The film’s theatrical premiere was held in Santa Fe in August, the night after the Wings 30th anniversary celebration. Dozens of current and former Wings participants were VIP guests. After the showing, an all-star panel of Indigenous athletes attempted to shed further light on the essence of the film through their own experiences. Since then, the film has had short runs in Flagstaff, Sedona, Phoenix, Tucson, Eugene, Seattle, Portland, Boulder, Denver, Chicago, Tahoe, New York and LA.

**3100:Run & Become will be available for purchase via iTunes, GooglePlay and Amazon beginning December 12th.**

If you are a member of a Native community that you would like to arrange a free screening for, please contact us so we can connect you with the film’s distribution team. Wings is currently working with the director to co-host a series of screenings across the Navajo Nation this winter.



**Left:** The film’s poster features vintage-looking likenesses of each of the characters and the Wings logo.



**Above:** Shaun Martin speaks to the audience at the Santa Fe theatrical premiere alongside (right to left) Billy Mills, Oren Lyons, Henry Rono (skip Shaun) and Dustin Martin. Moderated by Rawal, the conversation intertwined Olympic dreams with cultural responsibilities with spiritual epiphanies and connections to the land. (Photo: Alex Meiller)



**Left:** Olympic gold medalist and Wings emeritus board member, Billy Mills, speaks with members of the Santa Fe Indian School cross country team before the premiere. Whether it was from the film’s message or their encounter with a living legend, it’s a day they will not soon forget.

# Native Duo to Train With American Distance Project

Jackson Thomas and Brandon Levi are recent Wings alumni with proven work ethic and big dreams. But like so many talented Native runners before them, their incentive to continue training after college all but evaporated. Fortunately, under the guidance of another former Wings National Team Member and coach, Clay Mayes, both have managed to maintain their base fitness and competitive spirts. But with the 2020 Olympics now peeking over the horizon, there is no more time for half-hearted dream chasing or training environments riddled with distractions.

In 2016, Wings was entrusted with close to \$10,000 upon the dissolution of another organization that aimed to promote elite-level distance runners from Indian Country. The only stipulation was that the funds would be used to the same end. So, after competing at the USA Club Cross Country Championships as members of Sports Warriors Track Club this December, Jackson and Brandon will report to Colorado Springs for at least a six month training stint with the American Distance Project (ADP). Wings will use the orphaned funds to cover their rent in a shared room and provide the pair with a reasonable stipend for food. In return, Jackson and Brandon have agreed to maintain a strict schedule: run, eat, rest, repeat.



**Above:** Brandon Levi sprints down the finish chute at the 2013 USA Cross Country Championships in St. Louis, MO as the tie breaker for the Wings National Team.

Scott Simmons, the coach of the ADP, has long been an advocate for Wings athletes and believes strongly in the ability of Native runners to compete on the world stage. More importantly, his team is filled with some of the most decorated distance athletes training in the United States today. Whether it's a 5-time NCAA individual national champion or an Olympic silver medalist in the 5,000-meters, Jackson and Brandon will have no choice but to train alongside some of the best distance runners in the world day in and day out. Wings commends these young men for jumping at this exciting opportunity. Please reach out to us if you are interested in helping Wings extend their six month training block, if need be.



**Above:** Jackson Thomas wins the 15K "Tulsa Run". During his time at Bacone College, Thomas racked up 5 individual national titles at NAA meets (Photo: Brett Rojo).

## Wings Summer Programs Bolster Native Running Traditions

In many ways, our organization has seen that young people benefit from our programs most when they are not only exposed to mentors, but when they are given the opportunity to become mentors themselves. We were proud then to continue an over twenty-year-old initiative this summer by training a class of facilitators to coordinate our Running & Fitness

Camps in Native communities across the southwest. At the beginning of June, twenty-six young men and women with ten different Tribal affiliations came together in Santa Fe to learn the ins and outs of educating Native youth about their health and well-being while getting them active. After six days of informative and inspirational speakers, practical skills training, and team bonding activities, these energetic role models dispersed as three teams: "NavajoNorth", "Navajo South" and "Pueblo". Together, they coordinated twenty-one two-day camps for youth ages 6-18 before the end of July. While traveling around to work camps, Wings facilitators are encouraged to explore the many natural wonders that dot their service areas. They are also often enlisted to help with other local wellness events. Their athleticism, expertise and youthful energy are on display for community members of all ages on a daily basis. Of the 991 campers that attended our free camps this summer, over one-third had taken part in previous years. Additionally, 150 parents noted on their child's registration form that they too had been a part of Wings programs at some point during their path to adulthood.

**Right:** A herd of Running & Fitness Camp participants streams out of the Window Rock High School gym for a morning run. Whether they run miles or walk a few thousand steps, everyone must join in the "continuous movement" portion of each camp day. Facilitators work together to keep an eye on the group.



**Left:** Wings facilitators pose with Navajo Nation President-elect, Jonathan Nez, after helping the Crownpoint Health Promotion Disease Prevention staff coordinate a "Just Move It" event at Whiterock Chapter, NM on July 17. These free community run/walks are hosted in dozens of locations across the Navajo reservation each summer. Like Wings facilitators, Vice President Nez had been a fixture at these events for years.

# Flight Club Opens New Doors For Fledgling Runners

Since 2015, Wings has been empowering volunteer coaches to coordinate extra-curricular running/walking clubs for elementary and middle school youth. After earning the support of a 3-year Nike N7 "Build The Field" grant in 2017, the program is on year 2 of a trajectory toward sustainability and scalability. This year the program rewarded over 200 participants for their devotion to continuous movement and engagement with Running & Fitness games at 8 locations across Indian Country. Along the way, Wings provided resources to help educate these participants about Native running history and encourage them to test their physical capabilities.

As the program develops, the Wings staff is working hard to publish easily-adoptable program guidelines and curriculum. Aside from water bottles, t-shirts and race entries, the organization would like to create age and culturally appropriate picture books, handouts and posters to help Flight Club leaders encourage and reward students and their family members. Perhaps someday Flight Club will ensure all American Indian youth have the opportunity to learn about heroes like Billy Mills, Patti Dillon and Ellison "Tarzan" Brown before being asked to consider the statistical misfortunes of their communities.

In January, volunteer leaders for three new Flight Club sites will join veteran coaches, program partners and the Wings staff for a two-day training before a new semester of movement. Please let us know if you are interested in sponsoring and/or coordinating a Flight Club for Native youth in your area!



**Left:** Program Coordinator, Alicia Littlebear, leads Flight Club members at Cochiti elementary school through their usual routine of dynamic warm-ups before 20 minutes of continuous movement and a round of group games.



**Right:** Cochiti Flight Club members leap for joy and show off the prizes they earned with good attendance. Flight Club is designed to teach youth the value of regular exercise and play regardless of their desire, or lack thereof, to compete as they grow.



## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!!!

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