



Dear Friends of Wings,

December 23, 2021

Greetings, and thank you for continuing to be a supportive part of the Wings family.

Despite the new challenges we've all faced for nearly two years, Wings continues to engage and empower Native youth. From the "virtual" realm back to the classroom, we've remained committed to serving as many families as possible, knowing that running might be just the tool they need to navigate tumultuous times.

As we ended 2020, Wings was able to rally unprecedented support to reach our goal of establishing a one million dollar endowment fund. We are forever grateful for the multi-year matching opportunity offered to us by a longtime champion of Wings, Adelaide Hixon. After over 30 years in operation, her gift injected our organization with a new sense of purpose for the "long run".

After maximizing the potential of the endowment fund, Wings received an unexpected gift of \$100,000 from a new donor at the recommendation of consistent supporters. We used the windfall to put a down payment on a building of our own in Albuquerque (pictured below). The 4,700 sq. ft. "lodge" is perched in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains, steps away from a network of trails that have trained world-class athletes for decades. In the coming years, we envision sharing our new home with the best Native runners from across Indian Country to help them chase their competitive goals in earnest and serve as ready mentors to our participants.

With such wonderful generosity stoking our fire, it is hard to believe we are emerging from one of the most difficult periods in Wings history, from a programmatic perspective. Most Tribal communities remained on "lockdown" last winter and the thought of reviving in-person Running & Fitness Camps was questionable. Yet with former camp facilitators eager to work and families desperate for summer enrichment programs, we made the leap, with additional safety measures in place. Coupled with the lessons our staff learned coordinating movement sessions on Zoom throughout the pandemic, these summer programs underlined that our running curriculum is stronger than ever.

In October, Wings was blessed with another gift of \$250,000 from a relatively new donor. Their only restriction was that at least \$50,000 be used to pay down the mortgage on our new headquarters. We were happy to oblige and continue to plan strategically about how to use the remaining funds.

Moving forward, our first priority is rebuilding our full-time staff, knowing demand for our programs and lessons in Native running history have never been greater.

Please lend your support knowing that modest, consistent contributions are what have sustained our organization since 1988. We are working hard and welcome your ongoing participation at whatever level is comfortable to you. We invite you to visit us in our new home and appreciate you being part of the Wings legacy.

With heartfelt thanks,


Will Channing, Founder



Going Virtual...

It goes without saying that COVID-19 presented significant challenges to the Wings mission. Our in-person programs and events evaporated overnight in March 2020, thereby reducing our participant numbers to just hundreds instead of thousands of youth. Fortunately, a few of our previous partners asked for help designing and implementing “virtual” solutions.

With the help of past Wings facilitators, we learned it was indeed possible to mentor and create community around our “go to” lessons over Zoom. Coupled with incentives for consistent mileage, we began to call the program “Social Distancing Distance Club” (S.D.D.C.). Last holiday season was spent busily reviewing attendance and activity logs, then carefully assembling packages of stickers, t-shirts, posters and sweatshirts earned by our mentees.

We are thankful to be able to assemble in groups again, though Wings is still impacting students virtually. Enrollment in S.D.D.C. is markedly down, but those who have shown interest remain committed. So we will remain consistent and appreciative for the practice. In the future, with improved materials and trained facilitators, these strategies may help Wings assist eager mentors who felt too far away in the past.

SOCIAL DISTANCING DISTANCE CLUB

Wings National Team

The last major event our participants attended before the pandemic hit the U.S. was USA Cross Country Championships in February of 2020. But even a year later, there still wasn’t a national competition for runners to compete in. So for the first time in 33 years, there was no “Wings Team”. Instead, 14-19 year olds across Indian Country had to settle with running their own 5K time trials with the goal of hitting standards (17:35 for men, 20:35 for women) that could earn them a new pair of trainers. We also opened this opportunity to past National Team members and were happy to see that many of our former all-stars were keeping their legs sharp.



2022 National Team hopefuls pose after a shakeout in Flagstaff, AZ on their way to Tempe to race at the “Nike Cross” southwest regional. 11/19/21



The 2020 Wings National Team post-race in San Diego. 2/4/20

Nevertheless, we cannot wait to return to San Diego January 6th-9th with sixteen of Indian Country’s best student-athletes. Though the pandemic certainly changed the scene of elite-level racing for high school runners, we still feel this is the best competition for Wings runners to gain exposure to college coaches.

To help seed this year’s team, Wings once again provided race registration, travel and lodging assistance to runners willing to embrace the challenge of running a qualifying time at their region’s “Nike Cross” or “Eastbay” race. It was truly inspiring to watch the group of 12 runners that travelled to Tempe, AZ in the Wings van come together overnight. Although their team scores were disqualified because they attended different schools, the race announcer wasn’t afraid to tout their affiliation with Wings.

If you are in the area, please come say hello and watch the National Team run at Mission Bay Park on January 8, 2022! You’ll find us next to our turquoise banner on a tarp under a tree on “Tecolote Shores”.



2019 "Pursuit" Program students and chaperones pose with Wings Board Member, Patti Dillon, and Suzanne Walmsley of the B.A.A.



Tarzan setting the pace during one of his lesser-known performances. ca. 1935

Boston on Indigenous Peoples' Day

When the Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.) re-scheduled the 150th running of the Boston Marathon to October 11, 2021 due to COVID, there was little awareness amongst race officials that it was also Indigenous Peoples' Day (IDP). But then they started to hear complaints from Indigenous organizers and their allies. They felt the Marathon was going to eclipse a holiday officially recognized by multiple municipalities along the route.

Long before the peak of the IDP controversy, Wings decided that we would not select a crew of high school juniors to travel to Boston during Marathon weekend for the "Pursuit" Program. The risks and unknowns associated with COVID, particularly for young people, were still too many. But the B.A.A. offered one "charity bib" to help raise funds for future students. Artist and runner, Yatika Starr Fields (Osage, Cherokee & Muscogee Creek), jumped at the chance. He (and Wings) thought: what better way to honor the legacy of Indigenous People on IDP than to run strong on the world stage?

Eventually, the B.A.A. offered a public apology and donation to Indigenous organizers in Newton, whose IDP celebration had been jeopardized. Prior to that, race organizers began to seek advice from Wings Board Member and Marathon matriarch, Patti Dillon, about how to honor Indigenous Peoples on race day. As a Mi'kmaq woman and three-time Boston runner-up ('79-'81), her insight was invaluable. After conferring with friend and fellow Board Member, Sanjay Rawal, their advice to the B.A.A. was "work with Wings".

Because Yatika was already going to be in "Bean Town" for the race, Wings asked if he might use his talents as a muralist to build on the B.A.A.'s recognition of Native champions that began in 2016. Their first idea: paint a mural honoring 2-time Boston winner, Ellison 'Tarzan' Brown (Narragansett), on a wall along the Marathon course. Ideally, the tribute could be done somewhere in Newton, where Tarzan clinched his first victory in 1936 after putting in a surge that demoralized defending champion, Johnny Kelley, on the now infamous Heartbreak Hill.

With only 6-weeks until race day, finding a wall and willing property owner seemed like a long shot. But the B.A.A. thought up an alternative: a 35'X7' vinyl "canvas" stretched on a truss system in Copley Square. Steps away from the Marathon finish line, nestled between the tents used to check the vaccination or COVID test status of each participant, the "wall" was sure to catch a lot of attention. The B.A.A. also provided Wings with 6 additional race bibs, to be offered to Indigenous runners that could be ready for Boston on short notice.

At the artists' request, the B.A.A. had running cutouts of 5 notable Indigenous runners that made their mark at Boston printed on the "base" canvas: Tarzan Brown, Tom Longboat (Onondaga), Patti Dillon, Andrew Sockalexis (Penobscot) and Jordan Marie Daniel (Kul Wicasa Lakota). Between them, Yatika began to weave a free-form mesh of color and commemorative text, while local artist Robert Peters (Mashpee Wampanoag) worked on a "blown-up" portrait of Tarzan over the life-size cutout printed on the vinyl.



The artists' canvas in Copley Plaza. 10/7/21

The two worked casually, taking time to speak to passersby about the history embedded in their painting and the significance of the Marathon on IDP. The work of art was also used as a meeting place for morning shakeouts amongst Indigenous runners on Friday and Saturday before Marathon Monday. At one of these runs, Wings was presented with a \$10,000 donation from the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation to support future youth programs. More than just a “live painting”, the mural became a place for Indigenous runners to create community, support one another and feel proud of the running tradition their presence sustained.

After two days of work, what was once a blaringly white rectangle had become a colorful ribbon in celebration of movement. Finally, with humble disregard for his gestural spray can work, Yatika helped adhere 10 life size cutouts of Indigenous runners that that would be racing the Marathon on IDP. As he stuck his own silhouette next to Patti’s, the mural became past, present and future in one- strong medicine for all stepping to the start line in a few days.

The night before the race, Patti and Wings were honored by the B.A.A. at a reception attended by Tarzan Brown’s family, Boston Mayor, Kim Janey, and U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo). In her comments, Madam Secretary jokingly promised not to win the race the next day. Instead, she vowed to “run her own race, thankful that Creator has given me good health and the ability to run 26.2 miles with the people of the world.” As Patti fired the official starting gun the next morning, we can only hope that more runners than ever left the line with such humble appreciation for the gift.



Robert (left) poses with Yatika in front of their mural honoring Native runners’ contributions to the Boston Marathon. 2021 will most-likely be the only year the race was run on Indigenous Peoples’ Day. 10/9/21



Inadequate documentation of the finished piece. 10/10/21



Native runners from across the continent pose in front the mural with Boston running legends Patti Dillon, her husband, Danny, and Bill Rodgers. 10/10/21

Wings looks forward to continuing our collaboration with the B.A.A. knowing we have a steadfast partner to help us elevate Native perspectives within the running world. We are thrilled to announce that the mural has been entrusted to the organization and will be on display periodically in our headquarters, when it isn’t on loan to Tribal communities. We will use the remainder of funds donated to Wings by the B.A.A. a few weeks after this year’s race to return in 2022. But with a renewed focus on the students that are part of our “Pursuit” Program, and a new awareness of the Indigenous Peoples that have stewarded the lands we run on since time immemorial. Native runners that are juniors in high school should be on the lookout for the program application on the Wings website soon after the New Year.

Summer Running & Fitness Camps:

Soon after last year's winter solstice, Wings started to get calls and emails wondering if summer Running & Fitness Camps might return in 2021. As vaccinations became widely available in Tribal communities, most of our prospective facilitators were quick to get the shot, especially after learning they would be working with kids. With extra masks and a lot of hand sanitizer, we felt we could make outdoor camps safe.



Summer facilitators reunited at the "Treehouse Camp" for Leadership Training June 4-7, 2021

Ultimately, Wings facilitators coordinated 6 two-day Camps for Tribal youth across the Southwest. And even though they had to be hosted off the Rez in most places, we found families were willing to travel. In one case, a mom drove her daughters five hours one-way!

The restrictions also encouraged us to utilize campgrounds that we might never have tried otherwise. This opened new possibilities for partnerships and exposure to complimentary endurance sports like mountain biking, alongside running. We have been invited to apply for funding in 2022 with hope we can continue the trend of familiarizing summer participants with lands and trails they've never visited before.

Aside from impacting "campers", last summer offered new perspective on how beneficial the experience of being a mentor is for Wings facilitators. Starting with Leadership Training in early June, they created a safe space for one another to vent fears and frustrations from the preceding year. And as always, they gained a community of like-minded friends to feel proud to be Native with.

Next summer, we will gradually ramp Running & Fitness Camp opportunities back up. We are excited to work with old friends once again, but understand that Tribal communities have even more reason to be cautious reopening their boundaries. If you know any positive young Native leaders that might be interested in attending our pre-summer training in New Mexico next June, please send them our way!



Flagstaff camp participants headed out for their morning run at the start of two days of movement 7/21/21



Ali cruising on the "Strawberry Trail" with a summer participant during our McGaffey camp. 7/15/21

Running With the Lobos

As a four-time Wings National Team Member and the daughter of former Wings standout, Kelly Bia, we weren't surprised to see Ali Upshaw (Diné) get recruited to run for the powerhouse women's distance team at the University of New Mexico. But we were particularly honored that she decided to embrace the challenge of working as a camp facilitator last summer while remaining focused on her training.

Apparently the extra time spent playing tag paid off. During her sophomore cross-country season, Ali made gradual improvements each race until she found herself vying for a spot on the Lobos' nationally-ranked 'varsity' squad. Ultimately, she punched her ticket to run her first collegiate national meet in Tallahassee, FL on November 20th. She ran 20:44 for 6K and was her team's 7th finisher. The Lady Lobos finished 3rd.

Wings Endowment Fund Update

More than two years before realizing the full potential of the matching grant that helped establish our endowment fund, Wings enlisted an experienced fiduciary to help invest the assets wisely. Based in Waltham, MA, Foster Dykema Cabot & Co. (F.D.C) volunteered to manage the organization's portfolio pro-bono. Though a number of Wings Board Members have vast experience with "the markets", F.D.C. went above and beyond to teach our Executive Director about the unique restrictions and strategies often attached to endowments. More importantly, the firm's leadership took time to meet with Dustin in-person and gain a thorough understanding of Wings' programs, goals and ethics. In turn, they were able to develop an investment strategy that stood true to our values.

Today, we stand tall knowing Wings' money is not only "diversified" with the aim of conservative, long-term growth, but also disassociated from companies that overtly harm our environment and the communities we serve. This includes avoiding exchange trade funds with fossil fuels exposure and weapons research, development and manufacturing. Furthermore, F.D.C. is acutely aware of the business sectors and practices we are averse to and always ready to help us move our assets when red flags arise.

Early next year, the Wings board will discuss the possibility of taking our first "draw" from the endowment to use for programs. Although policy documents stipulate that no more than the value of the previous year's returns may be withdrawn (without drastic action from the Board in the event of a crisis), this is exciting new territory for the organization from a budgetary perspective. Even if our dividends pale in comparison to those of other endowments, Wings has achieved a new level of financial credibility and security that has already opened doors. For example, it is unlikely Wings could have secured a loan to purchase our new building without the endowment on our books.

We are forever grateful to the many donors that helped us rise to this occasion. We are also deeply indebted to the trustees of Adelaide Hixon's estate for formulating a matching grant with a flexible deadline. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about how a gift to the Wings endowment can be arranged, please reach out to our Executive Director at dustin@wingsofamerica.org.

With gratitude,

If you would like to donate to our programs, please visit our website:

wingsofamerica.org/contributions/

Checks can be made out to "Wings of America" and mailed to:

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Dustin Q. Martin



Albuquerque Running & Fitness Camp participants after a long day of playing in the sun. 7/08/21