



MSU professor launches Web site to aid veterans with PTSD

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A Montana State University Native American Studies professor has launched a new Web site that he hopes will help veterans cope with post-traumatic stress disorder through forums that discuss ceremonies.

"Strong evidence exists in scholarly literature that traditional American Indian ceremonies such as sweat lodges and veterans' pow wows have helped American Indian Vietnam veterans cope with post-traumatic stress disorder," said Lawrence Gross, assistant professor of Native American Studies at MSU and an Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) Indian who is a member of the White Earth reservation in Minnesota. His new Veterans Ceremonies Web site is at <http://www.veteranceremonies.org/default.aspx>.

Gross stressed that he doesn't advocate that non-Indians replicate the ceremonies and traditions of American Indians, which could prove dangerous.

"Instead, we encourage individuals and groups to look to the example of American Indians and develop ceremonies based on their own traditions. These would include ceremonies for sending soldiers to war, reintegrating them back into society, honoring their contributions to our freedom, and making use of their experiences by placing them in leadership positions within their groups. We hope that both religious and lay organizations will heed this call."

Gross has also provided a spot for forums for veterans of many backgrounds: http://www.veteranceremonies.org/ceremony_forums.aspx

Gross' work is rooted in a scholarly article about assisting American Indian veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan that won the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers award in 2006-2007 as best academic article. He emphasized that he is paying for the site himself, and while MSU is allowing him work time and computer resources, the site is his own.

"My name in Anishinaabe is 'Anwaatin,' which means calm water," Gross said. He said that he hopes the Web site will help calm the troubled hearts of veterans.

"We want people to use the ideas informing American Indian ceremonies for veterans to create ceremonies true to their own traditions that will have resonance," Gross said. "What we provide are some basic ideas that have helped veterans create peace with their communities and within themselves. We hope it will be an important tool in helping veteran's readjust."

Gross said he is not a veteran himself, but the site is dedicated to the memory of his uncle, Leo Vernon Beaulieu, a Marine who was killed in Vietnam in 1966 and who won a Purple Heart and the Navy Cross posthumously.

"The scholarly literature indicates even though American Indian Vietnam Indians experienced PTSD at levels similar to other groups, now, about 25 years later, American Indians exhibit fewer 12-month symptomology compared to other groups," said Gross, who has a doctorate in religious studies from Stanford and master's degrees from both Harvard and Stanford. "There is empirical evidence that going through ceremonies can help with PTSD. We think we can help."

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