

## Man hands over Native American skeleton

By Marshall Zelinger  
KCPW News

PUEBLO COUNTY, Colo. — Imagine keeping a human skeleton in your home for 20 years, turning it over to authorities and not getting arrested. Robert Owens called the Pueblo County Sheriff's Office Wednesday morning to let them know he had a skeleton in his closet. Turns out, the skeleton is most likely the remains of a Native American. Owens is interested in geology and collects rocks, fossils, and any artifact.

"Always studied rocks, this place is covered in rocks," says Owens from his Pueblo County home. "I never would have disturbed it. I thought it was a root, the skull cap."

Owens found the remains while looking for artifacts near the Huerfano River.

"Finger bones, all the vertebrae in the back. Skull was broke in two. Two teeth," says Owens.

Those bones are no longer a part of his collection after calling the Sheriff's Office.

"Boy, five minutes they were here, you talk about 'Johnny on the spot,'" says Owens. "They thought it was a murder, but I didn't kill nobody."

"He has quite a collection," says Pueblo County Sheriff Kirk Taylor. "(These are) the only ones that we're interested in at this point."

Deputies took photos of the bones and sent them to Dr. Diane France, a forensic anthropologist in Fort Collins. She confirmed the remains were that of a Native American. According to the Sheriff's Office, Dr. France has been consulted on numerous bone cases in the past.

"The procedure at this time will be to involve the state archaeologist, return to the scene, make an assessment of historical value," says Pueblo County Coroner Jim Kramer.

"Do these reach the level of historic significance to the state of Colorado and the county of Pueblo?"

After 20 years, why exactly did Owens decide to pick up the phone Wednesday morning?

"I was thinking bad karma. Couldn't sleep at night, had to get it off my conscience," says Owens. "Getting old and tired and wanted to get it off my chest."

Kramer says if the remains are identified as a Ute Tribe Indian, they will most likely be turned over to the Ute Tribe.

"One of our primary concerns is respecting the dignity of the deceased individual," says Kramer.

## Indian students dropping out of school

By Elizabeth Ziegler  
KCPW News

Half of Utah's American Indian students drop out of school before earning a diploma, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics. The situation has dire consequences for the quality of life in Indian Country, says Forrest Cuch, director of Utah's Division of Indian Affairs.

"I see how deficiencies in education impact governance and economic development opportunities on and off the reservation on behalf of American Indians," Cuch says.

Thirty percent of the state's American Indians live in poverty. It's the highest poverty rate of any minority group in the state. Cuch says this is a direct result of Indian students' high drop out rate. On average, 78 percent of Utah students graduate.

In groups of 20, each working 30-day shifts, the officers patrol

## Mashantuckets could take a hit on their credit rating

By Heather Allen  
New London Day

NEW LONDON, Conn. — Standard & Poor's is considering downgrading the credit rating of the Mashantucket Pequot tribe on the heels of disappointing slots numbers in June.

The financial services company on Wednesday issued a "CreditWatch" with negative bias, meaning the tribe has a 50-percent chance of having its rating downgraded, according to S&P credit analyst Craig Parmelee. S&P will now conduct a thorough review of the tribe's rating.

On Tuesday, the tribe reported that slot-machine revenue at its Foxwoods Resort Casino was down nearly 9 percent over last year's numbers in June, despite a 13-percent increase in the number of slot machines with the opening of MGM Grand at Foxwoods in mid-May, according to Standard & Poor's.

While a surge in business at a new property tends to dissipate over time, analysts didn't expect the numbers to drop off so quickly.

"We do generally anticipate that when an entity opens new capacity ... that their year-over-year numbers

would be up," Parmelee. "Certainly we were disappointed in the numbers that were released."

A spokeswoman for the tribe declined to comment.

The tribe's credit rating was reduced in November from BBB- to BB+. Analysts at that time were concerned with the tribe's high debt leverage, increased capital spending over the near term, the entity's limited geographic diversity and significant historic and expected distributions to tribal members.

Parmelee said the numbers released Tuesday "are suggesting that the operating

environment may have been worse than we were expecting." But he was quick to add that because of a downward-sloping economy, this is a difficult time for the gaming industry as a whole.

"The operating environment that the gaming industry is experiencing right now is very negative across the country, not just in Connecticut," Parmelee said. "This is no way, shape, or form isolated in Connecticut."

Parmelee said approximately a dozen gaming entities have seen their credit ratings downgraded in recent months.

One of those downgrades was the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority, which is an agency of the Mohegan Tribe that owns and operates Mohegan Sun.

S&P downgraded its outlook rating of MTGA from stable to negative in May. Two weeks later, Moody's Investors Service downgraded several of the gaming authority's ratings.

The review of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe's rating could take anywhere from several days to 90 days, Parmelee said, but he expects the review will be resolved "fairly quickly."

## Pinedale bike rally



Jeff Jones/Independent

Hoop dancer Thurman Becenti, a member of Native Sky Hoop Dancers from Churchrock, holds up a sphere created by combining his hoops Thursday evening while performing with Darryl Becenti during the second annual Timber Ridge MC bike night at the Pinedale Chapter House.

## Standing Rock Sioux tribal surge succeeding

Peter Harriman  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader

McLAUGHLIN, S.D. — The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe reservation was at times down to six Bureau of Indian Affairs officers patrolling an area roughly the size of Connecticut.

One day, a single officer was on duty.

But the rampant crime - five-and-a-half times the national rate in 2007 - that arose from that sparse oversight has abated with a surge of officers with Operation Dakota Peacekeeper. Beginning June 2, the BIA began sending its own officers, National Park Service rangers and tribal police who volunteered from tribes across the country to the reservation.

So far, officers have made 684 arrests, including 88 juveniles. Sobriety checkpoints are being set up. Police are spending time with youths who previously roamed the night and vandalized property at will.

"So many people tell us, 'I can finally sleep at night,'" Elmer Four Dance, special agent for the BIA in charge at the Aberdeen District, told Sen. John Thune during a visit to Standing Rock early this month.

Whether the relative peace will continue is not certain, though. A formerly firm BIA commitment has softened amid funding concerns. More immediately, the court system has been flooded with cases, and jurisdictional problems between tribal and non-Indian law enforcement persist.

In groups of 20, each working 30-day shifts, the officers patrol

this 2.3 million acre reservation that straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border.

Operation Draws Attention  
The surge has grabbed the BIA's attention at the highest levels. Four Dance directs the operation. Pat Ragsdale, the BIA's head of the Office of Justice Services, is on hand to oversee it.

Thune and Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, were key players in pressuring the BIA to do something at Standing Rock.

"Nothing, in my view, is more important than law enforcement," Thune told tribal members at a public meeting in Fort Yates. "People need to know there is some basic level of public safety."

Dorgan had similar sentiments.

"I said at a hearing awhile back, 'This is not a Third World country. It's our country. We have an obligation to address this,'" Dorgan said.

Dorgan has been critical of the BIA.

"I appreciate the response on the Standing Rock reservation, but from a practical standpoint, the BIA has very often been slow to respond, with inadequate resources," he said.

Ragsdale said the BIA hopes to apply what it learns from Dakota Peacekeeper to law enforcement challenges throughout Indian Country.

The morale of participating officers is high, he said.

Paul Reed, a member of the Comanche Nation Police Department in Oklahoma, said as a

police officer, "you always think there is more you can do."

At home, day to day, it is not easy to make that kind of difference. At Standing Rock, Reed thinks he is.

Compared to the former law enforcement levels, the current buildup seems like an army has arrived, said Hope Maher, a McLaughlin City Council member.

"Without the BIA, we would be at a loss," she said. "This town is so willing - native and white. All they want is to be safe, their children to be safe."

"I don't think they'll ever know how much we appreciate them," Bonnie Schott said of the officers.

Her husband, Arnie Schott, McLaughlin's mayor, adds, "I want to get this town straightened out, and we've got help now."

Concerns Linger About Future

But Dakota Peacekeeper has been set up as only a 90-day operation.

"People are concerned when this project is finished, the officers will no longer be here," said Verna Dailey, a tribal member.

At the Fort Yates meeting, Ragsdale said, "I know you're concerned about when summer ends. Don't be. We're going to sustain this."

Since then, he's backed down somewhat. Through 90 days, Dakota Peacekeeper will cost about \$1 million, Ragsdale told Thune at Standing Rock. On Friday, Ragsdale said keeping the surge going past this summer "depends on my financial ability to do that. The commitment is to

sustain the operation through the summer and as long as I can thereafter."

Thune said he's been frustrated by seeing \$40 million a year for BIA law enforcement pass the Senate only to be stripped by the House.

Thune and Dorgan are among co-sponsors of an Indian law enforcement bill that could be introduced in the Senate next week. In addition to increasing funding for BIA and tribal police, it would give more money to tribal courts and attempt to address jurisdictional issues and sentencing limits hindering tribal court judges.

But Dorgan said President Bush consistently has threatened to veto BIA appropriations above the administration's recommendations.

"I don't see much change until we have someone else in the White House," he said.

Some of the Dakota Peacekeeper budget is going to the Standing Rock tribal court. Michael Swallow, the tribe's chief prosecutor, told Ragsdale that the surge is having a "tremendous effect," but the court is swamped arraigning defendants and preparing cases.

"The judges, myself, the defender and the clerks are giving up our weekends in the summer to handle this. There has to be money available to the tribal court to provide for additional personnel."

A month into the operation, Four Dance said arraignments are taking place seven days a week.

He and Ragsdale insist money is on the way to hire more attor-

neys and clerks, and Ragsdale promised officers can be recalled to Standing Rock if they are needed to testify in trials later this year.

For all the positive response, one law enforcement official has misgivings.

Corson County Sheriff Keith Gall said there has been no coordination between the BIA and his office.

Four Dance met with him only after the operation was under way, Gall said, and because the tribe won't cross-deputize him and his deputies and allow them to arrest Indians, he has no interest in cross-deputizing BIA and tribal officers.

At their first meeting, Gall said Four Dance asked him if he wanted to take part in a sobriety checkpoint, and Gall said he wanted to be involved.

"A week later, I was driving through McLaughlin, and the street was lit up like a Christmas tree," Gall said. "There was a sobriety checkpoint going on. Neither the local police department nor me knew anything about it."

Ragsdale insists BIA officials did reach out to Gall. But without cross-deputization there is not much useful cooperation that can occur.

McLaughlin's mayor does not share Gall's concerns. Indeed, Schott is committed to keeping a BIA presence in town after Dakota Peacekeeper ends.

"Somehow there is going to be a BIA police station here. I don't care what it takes," he promised. "We've got to keep this going."