

Champion Native American dancer eager to share his story

Written by Chris Lee

Steve “Young Eagle” Putra, a Native American dancer, recently moved to Phillips County and is looking forward to educating the area on the heritage and art of dancing.

Putra—Chippewa for Young Eagle—grew up in Wyoming and Montana where his family ranched.

Young Eagle was the 2001 world champion traditional Native American dancer. The honor really opened up the possibilities for him.

He has done it all. He led athletes into the arena for the opening ceremonies of the 2002 winter Olympics in Utah, danced for President George H.W. Bush and has completed tours of Iraq and Afghanistan where he entertained troops and visited the wounded in hospitals.

The dancer has also been all around the world dancing as part of a world tour. He danced in Japan, China, England and Australia just to name a few places on the year-long trip.

He has opened for cowboy poet Baxter Black and even toured with Cher. Other credits include the film *Dances with Wolves*.

Another tour he was involved with was the Lewis and Clark Discovery Tour which followed the trail from Virginia to Oregon. It was at the end of this tour he decided to take a break as he was pretty worn out.

The type of dancing he performs is old traditional war dancing. Young Eagle said the dances tell stories of journeys or visions.

During competitions, the dancers aren't made aware of the dance until they hear the beat of the drum. “You have to know that drum,” he said. “I sat at that drum, learned those songs and

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learned that beat to the different old songs.” He said this helped him win the world championship.

His wardrobe is made out of numerous eagle feathers, grizzly bear claws, beads, as well as other items. The gear has all been passed down to him from family members.

Young Eagle and his wife, Patti, moved to Phillips County in September of last year from Fort Morgan after they took jobs with Bamford Feedlot near Haxtun.

Young Eagle would like to get involved with the public and said he enjoys dancing for parties, gatherings and even fund raisers. He has been involved with raising funds for multiple sclerosis (MS).

Educating kids about alcohol and drug abuse is something he holds near to his heart. Having been through sobriety himself, he feels it is important to educate kids about it. The dancer has been to many treatment centers speaking with recovering addicts. He spoke about how he became world champion after recovery and the doors that were opened up for him after becoming sober.

Young Eagle is looking forward to riding/dancing through the Phillips County parade. He would also give thought to participating with area rodeos.

Dancing isn't the only thing Young Eagle is involved with. He is a lifelong cowboy who has been the national Indian Professional Rodeo Association champion. He rode bareback, saddle broncos and bulls.

Young Eagle is looking forward to the Denver March Powwow where he hopes to carry the eagle staff (Native American flag) while leading dancers out onto the floor of the Denver Coliseum. The event is scheduled for March 18-20.

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The dancer said he is a descendant of the Battle of Little Bighorn, Sand Creek Massacre and is a Dog Soldier to the Northern Cheyenne. He is very passionate about his heritage and is looking forward to becoming a part of northeastern Colorado.