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**CANKDESKA CIKANA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Spirit Lake Tribe

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Tribal College Celebrates New Publication of Dakota Place Names

FORT TOTTEN, N.D. – Cankdeska Cikana Community College (CCCC) is announcing the release of its new publication, *Mniwakan: Place Names and History of the Spirit Lake Dakota*, a tribute to the Spirit Lake Tribe's traditional language and oral history. To celebrate the book release, the tribal college will give away signed copies during the annual Alumni Gathering on July 21, which is open to the public.

Mniwakan—which means Spirit Lake—complements oral tradition with the contemporary version of American history to tell a complete and honest perspective of the Dakota experience. The book comprises 25 chapters in a story collection which includes nearly a hundred significant places and landmarks based on decades of research by the coauthors, Louis Garcia and Mark Dietrich.

"The Dakota language is diminishing very fast," said Garcia. "We have only a few language speakers, most of whom are elders. We need to preserve the language and knowledge of places the tribe considers significant, not only for our future generations but to educate the non-Dakota people about the history of the land."

At age 82, Garcia serves as the college's Dakota Studies instructor and as the Spirit Lake Nation's tribal historian. Since 1978, he has documented the tribe's oral history and traditional knowledge primarily through listening to and interviewing tribal elders.

"For over 30 years, I've been collecting place names in the Dakota language," said Garcia. "I selected all of these sites around Spirit Lake, on and off the reservation, and Mark helped straighten out my writing and researched additional supporting information about each of these places. All I recorded were the Indian names, so they would not be lost, and whatever information I could get from the elders I talked to."

Researching Spirit Lake's Heritage

Dietrich has written several books on Dakota history and chiefs. He authored the CCCC published *Mni Wakan Oyate (Spirit Lake Nation): A History of the Ssituwan, Wahpeton, Pabaksa, and Other Dakota That Settled at Spirit Lake, North Dakota* in 2007 and *Grass Dance of the Spirit Lake Dakota* with Garcia in 2014.

"Louis had spent a lot of time gathering information to the degree that nobody else has, but it was skeletal," explained Dietrich. "I filled in the gaps on what had happened at these places. I found myself wanting to know the history of Fort Totten, how the soldiers used it, how the

reservation developed around it, how the Dakota related to the soldiers being there, and the whole situation."

Although Dietrich is not a member of any Indigenous group, his research has contributed immensely to the historical relevance of the Dakota people. He says the history of Spirit Lake is generally misinterpreted and misrepresented by anti-Indian sentiments of early American newspapers, settlers, and historians.

"I've done quite a bit of research on the Spirit Lake Tribe, especially with newspapers, even though historians say it's unreliable, biased, and kind of racist in tone," said Dietrich. "But I find newspapers provide a lot of nitty-gritty information you can't get elsewhere. One of the chapters in the book is about the body of water the whites called 'Devil's Lake,' but the Dakota always called it 'Spirit Water' or Spirit Lake."

Preserving Dakota History and Culture

Garcia and Dietrich's work on *Mniwakan* and the other two CCCC publications may have never come to fruition without the vision and leadership of the college's president, Dr. Cynthia Lindquist. She is a member of the Spirit Lake Tribe and her Dakota name is *Ta'sunka Wicahpi Winyan* or Star Horse Woman.

"I have a responsibility to our people, especially the children," said Lindquist. "I want to set an example of being a good relative and do what I can to protect and maintain our traditional language and oral history. That includes written textbooks. This work requires everyone to contribute what they can, like Louis Garcia and Mark Dietrich have done."

Since becoming president in 2003, Lindquist has led the institution's growth and development, providing better access to a college education, and improving the quality of life of Tribal members. Few Indigenous leaders have accepted the responsibility of preserving their histories and cultures for the future generations to the extent she has.

"For over a century, colonization, termination, and assimilation efforts have tried to rob the Dakota people of their Indigenous identity," said Lindquist. "But the survival of our people and culture is a testament to the resilience and strength of the Dakota identity. Through higher education the people can learn and thus, strengthen their pride in being Dakota."

Like the other 35 tribal colleges and universities across the country, CCCC is working to maintain and revitalize Indigenous culture and language. For Lindquist, the books on Dakota language, culture and history are small steps in the right direction. She says the college is trying to do more and the training of Dakota instructors is a top priority.

"Without proficient Native instructors we cannot develop relevant academic programming or community education venues," she said. "That's why we look to incorporate Dakota culture and language into all academic areas, like advanced manufacturing, business management, social work, carpentry, and early childhood education. CCCC truly believes and tries to practice its theme, *Think Dakota, Live Dakota.*"

For more information about Cankdeska Cikana Community College and the upcoming book release celebration, visit www.littlehoop.edu/event/alumni-gathering/.

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