Bridging Cultures Committee

A partnership between the Crow Tribe and the city of Billings
Initial Discussions and Planning

• Concept was discussed and proposed by many, beginning in 2005
• Vision for this group was shared by many in Crow and Billings
• Driving factor for initial meeting was spurred by:
  – Strong need for workers in Billings
  – Extremely high unemployment rates of Crow people
Beginnings

- Initial partners were Crow Tribe, Big Sky EDA, Billings Chamber, Beartooth RC&D
- Chairman Carl Venne spoke at first meeting encouraging our effort and providing inspiring words and support
- First meetings held in the early spring of 2008
- Consultant Ann Clancy (Billings) facilitated a strategic planning session in April, 2008
Initial Challenges

• Language barriers—not true spoken language, rather the understanding of the following:
  – Interpretation of history
  – Cultural values
  – Business community
  – Family unit definition
  – Government structure
  – View of nature and role of natural systems
Initial “Solutions”

- Billings—
  “you simply need to learn to hold a job, run a business, get organized and structured like us!”

- Crow—”
  “you simply need to give us our land and resources back, understand your place in nature, and get out of our way (it was better before you got here!”
• Adopted the name “Bridging Cultures” with the understanding that we would continue to listen and communicate better amongst one another and with our respective stakeholders so that we could move forward while offending no one
Mission Statement

CULTURE CONSCIOUS – OPPORTUNITY DRIVEN

BUILDING BRIDGES OF RECONCILIATION AND RESPECT BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND CULTURES

• Respect and compassion for one another was paramount

• We had to be completely honest and candid with one another

• Continue to focus our attention and discussions on seeking opportunities and being pro-active
Primary Objectives

1. Develop continuing, effective communication concerning economic development and other projects of mutual benefit
2. Promote mutual understanding of and respect for cultural diversity and contributions
3. Provide opportunities for shared experiences, education and partnership projects
Additional priorities

• Commit to a regular meeting schedule
  – Quarterly meetings
• Follow a specific Action Plan
• Create a circular economy for the Reservation
Accomplishments

• Employment
  – Business and employment opportunity tours hosted by Bruce MacIntyre and Don Stanaway
  – Interview and job skills training at Little Big Horn College
  – 276 individuals trained; approx.$377,000 spent
  – Development of job skills training center on campus of Little Big Horn College
  – Stronger relationship between MSU-Billings and Little Big Horn College
Accomplishments

• Business Development
  – Crow and Hardin Quickbooks class
  – SBA and SBDC business consultation visits
  – Apsaalooke Development Fund providing business lending
Accomplishments

• Community Development
  – Community infrastructure improvements
  – Crow Transit Service
  – Broadband enhancement studies and plans
  – Initial discussions of creating city government in Crow Agency
Accomplishments

- Cultural Awareness
  - Native American Day at Montana Fair
  - Crow documentary video featuring Carl Venne
  - Promotion of Crow Fair
  - Better press coverage of Native events (Men’s Health Ride) and other happenings
Group Discussion

Comments and Discussion from panel participants