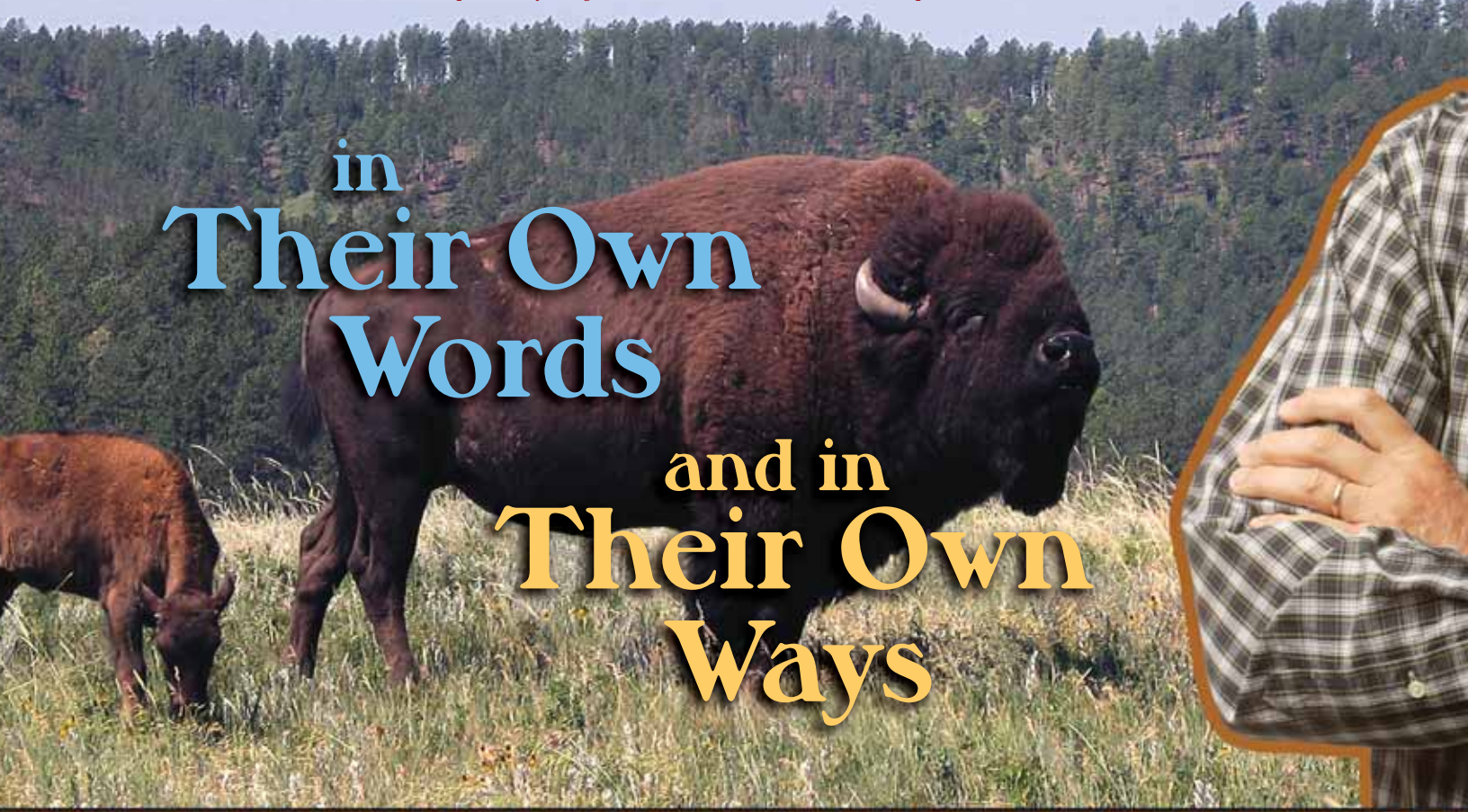





Faculty Focus by Eileen C. Herbert '04 | Portrait by K.C. Kratt

Additional photos by Brigid A. Crumlish '08, Francisco Lopez and Eileen C. Herbert '04



in
**Their Own
Words**
and in
**Their Own
Ways**



Fifteen years ago, when **Keith R. Burich, PhD**, was looking to expand the subject areas of his courses, he did what any good scholar would do - research. A professor of American history at Canisius for nearly 30 years, Burich was in search of a "hook" that would attract students. He found that specialized areas on relevant topics, such as women's studies and black history, were already represented in the curriculum. Then, he discovered an area that not only captured his curiosity but also the

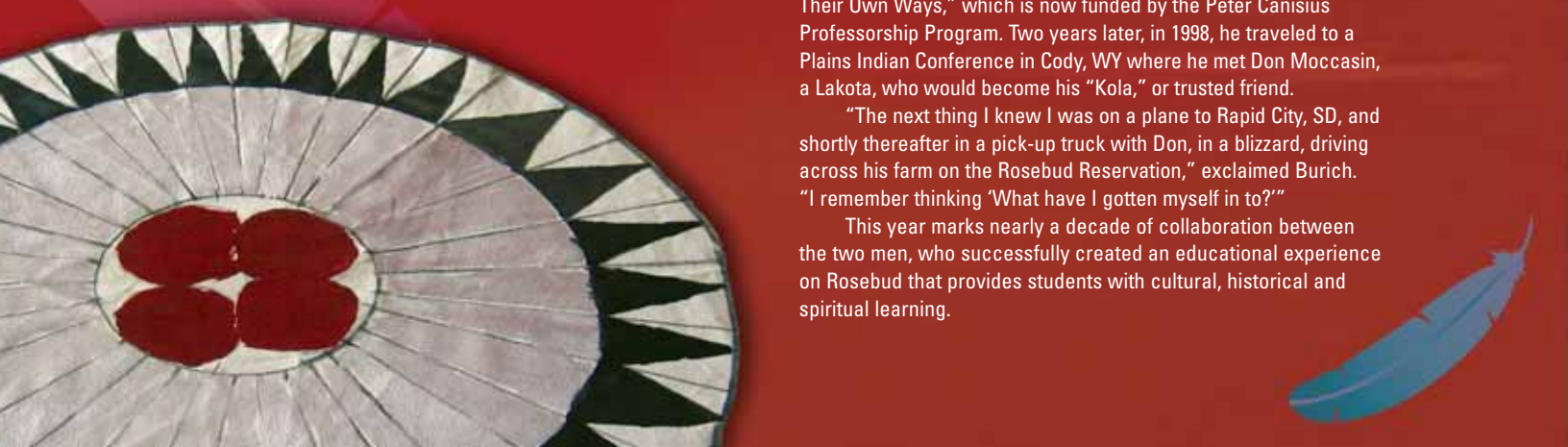
curiosities of his students: Native American history.

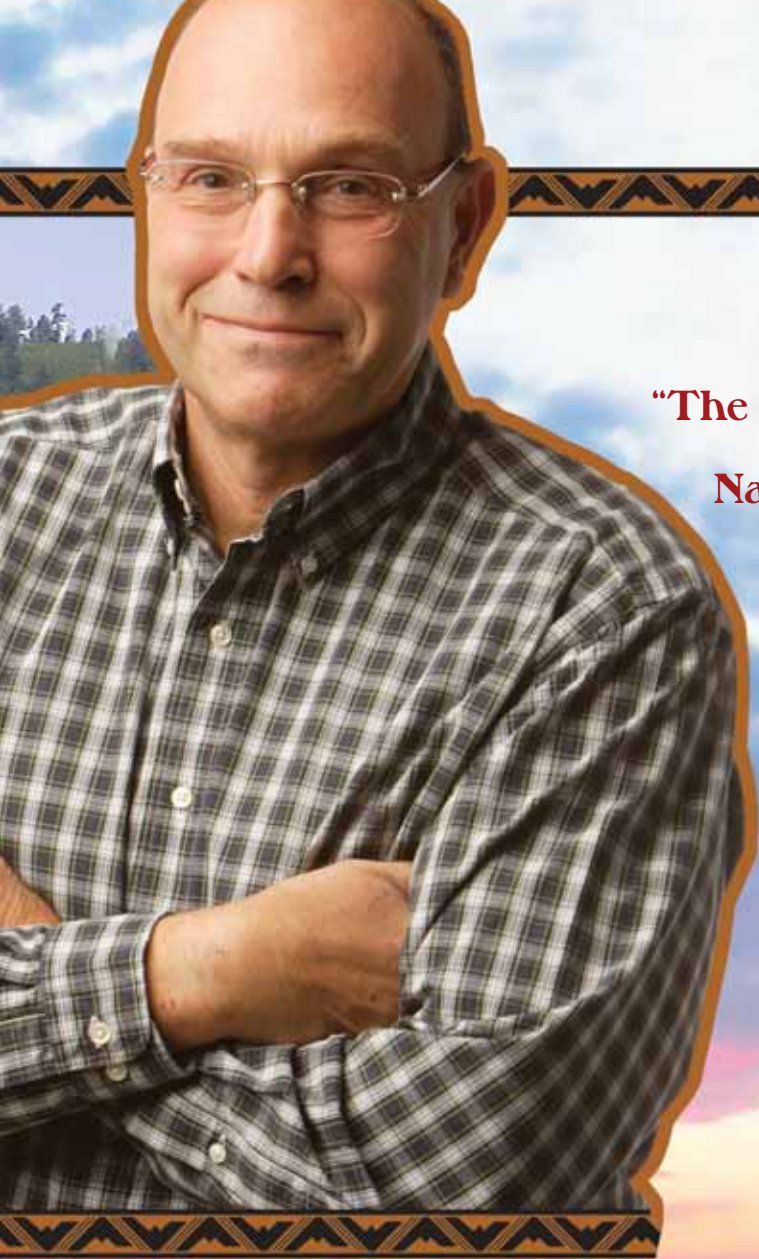
"The only way that you can truly understand Native American culture is to go out and live and experience it with Native Americans," said Burich. "I have learned a tremendous amount about Native Americans and from Native Americans, and it has really changed me a great deal."

His experiences compelled Burich to create the program "The Native American Experience: In Their Own Words and In Their Own Ways," which is now funded by the Peter Canisius Professorship Program. Two years later, in 1998, he traveled to a Plains Indian Conference in Cody, WY where he met Don Moccasin, a Lakota, who would become his "Kola," or trusted friend.

"The next thing I knew I was on a plane to Rapid City, SD, and shortly thereafter in a pick-up truck with Don, in a blizzard, driving across his farm on the Rosebud Reservation," exclaimed Burich. "I remember thinking 'What have I gotten myself in to?'"

This year marks nearly a decade of collaboration between the two men, who successfully created an educational experience on Rosebud that provides students with cultural, historical and spiritual learning.





“The only way that you can truly understand Native American culture is to go out and live and experience it with Native Americans.” – Keith R. Burich, PhD



“Mitakuye Oyasin (*Me-tá-koo-yeh O-wah-see*) is Lakota for ‘all my relatives,’” Moccasin told the group from Canisius as they sat around the campfire on his 160-acre homestead on a crisp summer evening. “My people believe that we are all connected in creation: Mother Earth, Father Sun, Grandmother Moon, the plants and animals, insects and the stone people. Mitakuye Oyasin is our prayer for harmony with all forms of life.”

Storytelling is just one tradition the Canisius group experiences on what has become an annual trip to the Rosebud Reservation. They live as Native Americans. They sleep in tipis, which they put up and take down under Moccasin’s direction. They eat traditional Native American food, such as Buffalo stew and flatbread, prepared by Moccasin’s sister, Martha.


They also camp in Black Hills National Forest, where the group spends one day climbing 1,250 feet up Bear Butte Mountain. It is at this sacred site that Native American tribes are said to receive spiritual messages and gifts. As the group climbs the mountain, they adorn its trees with traditional prayer ties – colored fabric pouches filled with tobacco and tied on a string – as an offering to the spirits. For the Lakota, each color on the prayer tie

represents a different direction, Moccasin explained.

“Red is for the North, where we receive our sacred pipe made out of red stone,” he said. “White is for the South, which represents our spirit world. Black is for the West and the thunder beings. Yellow is for the East and the sun. Blue is for grandfather sky. And green is for grandmother Earth.”

Haley M. Burakowski '08, a management/international relations major, described the sight of thousands of colorful prayer ties on Bear Butte as unbelievably beautiful. “As I hung my prayer tie at the top of the mountain and began to pray, I knew those memories would stay with me for a lifetime and that a special part of me will always be there.”

While students who enroll in the immersion trips experience



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— Haley M. Burakowski '08

life as a Native American and visit historical sites such as Wounded Knee, Badlands National Park and Devil’s Tower National Monument, those who opt for Burich’s course on campus, Native American History, also receive first-hand knowledge of the culture.

“Because the differences between our two cultures are so vast, I felt it best to give a voice to Native Americans and let them tell their story ‘in their own words and in their own ways,’” explained Burich, who notes that the majority of his class lectures are presented by Native Americans.

Since the program’s inception, Native American speakers representing seven nations across the country and Canada have lectured in Burich’s class including healers, medicine men, academics, dream interpreters and tribal chiefs. The weekly classes are typically attended by 100 or more people. This year Burich is giving a voice to the Seneca.

Students enroll in the course for credit but Burich also invites the general public to attend the lectures and participate in various special events and trips offered through his program. That includes bringing Native American customs to the college. Among the highlights, Don Moccasin traveled to Buffalo to build a sweat lodge with students on the Canisius campus. And, each semester culminates with a traditional Indian pow wow, which includes drumming, dancing and Native American food.

“Keith’s program puts you right in the middle of traditions and customs so that you gain a true Native American perspective,” said **Melissa L. Parker '05**, who is now a graduate secondary education major at Canisius.

Parker, a Seneca, has traveled twice to the Rosebud Reservation with Burich’s class. Her parents accompanied Parker on the first trip. This year, she brought her sister, Julie, and



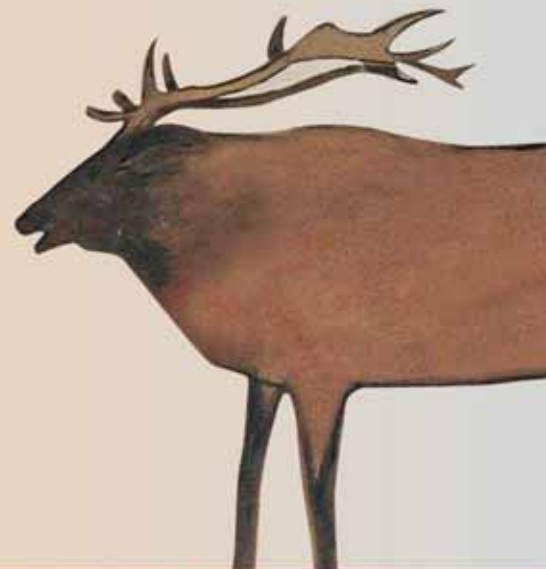
Don Moccasin explains the symbolic meaning of Lakota dance regalia.

nephew, Jacob. Parker said it was important for her family to see places such as the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre, where more than 300 Lakota men, women and children died in the last major battle between the U.S. and Lakota Sioux.

For Parker, the trip evoked a sense of pride. “This history is a part of me, and it was great to see people witness it for the first time and show an interest in my culture,” she said. The trip also affected seven-year-old Jacob who, by the end of the week, proudly reminded everyone in the group that he was a “real Indian.”

“It is the Native American way,” added Burich. “When we go to Rosebud we see that Native Americans include people of all ages in activities and outings. That is why everyone is welcome on my trips and in my classroom.” In fact, throughout the years both infants and 80-year olds have traveled with Burich.

Don Moccasin helps Andrew R. Valint '07 set up a tipi in Black Hills National Forest.





Wooden crosses at Wounded Knee Cemetery mark the graves of the Lakota Sioux who lost their lives in the 1890 massacre.

"This program provides our students, the Canisius community and the wider Buffalo community, including the area's Native Americans, with the opportunity to experience and share the culture, history and spiritual depth of Native Americans in a direct way that would not be possible in a traditional classroom setting," said Paula M. McNutt, PhD, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Canisius, who traveled to Rosebud in 2000 and 2001.

While Burich's Rosebud trip provides a smaller, more intimate experience, his trip to Crow Fair in Montana takes students to the largest Northern Plains Indian celebration in the U.S. Each year, the event attracts more than 45,000 participants and spectators from all over the country.

"It was an incredible sight to see thousands of white tipis along the banks of the Little Bighorn River at Crow Fair," recalled **Max D. Buetow '07**. An English major from Denver, CO, Buetow described Crow Fair as a spectacular celebration that included a daily parade of decorated horses, women and children dressed in authentic costumes and men in elaborate headdresses. "We also enjoyed fantastic food and pow wows with dancing and drumming that lasted into the early morning hours," said Buetow.

Burich's friend, Dewey Bulltail, of the Crow Nation, served as host to the Canisius group. "We



were welcomed into the Bulltail compound and Dewey included us in activities as if we were part of his family," said Buetow.

Perhaps the most significant Native American tradition in which the Canisius group participated was the sweat lodge ceremony. Considered a sacred cleansing, the ceremonial sauna takes place in a domed structure, traditionally covered with Buffalo hides, and includes song, prayer and meditation.

It was an unforgettable experience for Buetow. "I was trying to focus on my prayers but it was extremely hot," he said. "When I opened my eyes and looked up, I actually saw blue lights coming from the drum!"

An invitation to the ceremony "is a rare honor for non-Natives" noted Burich, as tradition holds that exiting the sweat lodge brings about a rebirth.

Like the sweat lodge, Burich's reservation trips instill in students a similar rebirth. They return home with images of visually stunning landscapes, rich Native American spiritual and cultural traditions, contemporary realities of reservation life and new friendships with those they meet out West. "They often send packages, write letters and return with me to visit," said Burich.

A return visit to Montana is already in the works for Max Buetow and his brother, Luke, who also traveled to Crow Fair this past summer. The brothers were invited by Dewey Bulltail and his family to experience another sacred Native American event: Buffalo hunting.

"It is very moving for me to see the many friendships that have formed over the years," said Burich. "These friendships, and what can be learned from them, make me feel that I have

Spectators enjoy the morning parade at Crow Fair.



L to R – Alyce M. Herbert '08, Heidi G. Maines '07 and Brigid A. Crumlish '08 pose with Dewey Bulltail.

done what I set out to do through this program. I have learned to look at things through different eyes and I'm so glad I can share that experience with my students."

