

Transcript of Interview with Stephanie Herbert by Liza Black

Date: April 22, 2020

Interviewer: Liza Black

Interviewee: Stephanie Herbert

Location: Nova Scotia, Canada

Transcriber: Sally Velez

Abstract: This is an interview about the Social Distance Powwow group that was started during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The interviewee, Stephanie Herbert, gives information about the Native Powwows and how the Native People are coping during the Coronavirus Pandemic. They cannot gather together and dance in Powwows, so Stephanie and her cohorts have tried to find a workaround for that. They started a Facebook group to help foster connection with others from around the world, which immediately gathered thousands of followers.

Liza Black 00:01

All right, we're recording. Okay, so I'm Liza Black and you are...

Stephanie Hebert 00:06

My name is Stephanie Hebert, I'm First Nations Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia, Canada. And I am from Hebrew, Massachusetts and I currently live just outside of Dallas, Texas.

Liza Black 00:17

Oh my goodness. Okay, so you're two hours ahead of me. Okay.

Stephanie Hebert 00:21

Yes.

Liza Black 00:21

So today is Tue- no , Wednesday, April 22. Right? Is it Wednesday?

Stephanie Hebert 00:29

It is Wednesday.

Liza Black 00:32

This is part of the pandemic is not being very sure what day it is.

Stephanie Hebert 00:36

It's true. No, it's true. They all sort of blend into each other.

Liza Black 00:40

Oh, gosh, absolutely. Okay, so I really want to talk to you about the Social Distance Powwow, but I've never met you before. So maybe you could talk about if you're comfortable talking about what you normally do for work?

Stephanie Hebert 00:53

Sure.

Liza Black 00:53

Or what you do, what you did for work prior to the pandemic and whether that work has changed?

Stephanie Hebert 00:59

Sure. So I'm 28 years old. I said, I'm originally from Hebrew, Massachusetts, which is about 20 minutes or so north of the city of Boston. I am a wildlife biologist by education. I have a master's degree from New Mexico State University in wildlife conservation and management. And in my day to day job, I'm a civilian employee with the US Army Corps of Engineers as a natural resources specialist and a park ranger. So I had the dubious honor of being an essential employee. I'm still working 40 hours a week. And then the Social Distance Powwow is something that I'm doing on a volunteer basis when I'm not at my nine to five.

Liza Black 01:39

Oh, wow. And are you doing your work in the way that you did before? Or are you doing it from home?

Stephanie Hebert 01:46

No, because of the nature of my job, I have to be on site.

Liza Black 01:49

Okay.

Stephanie Hebert 01:49

I, I'm also it's I'm not quite law enforcement. But I issue tickets, I have a badge. And so I'm required to do patrols out at the, the lake, which is about six miles from where I am right now.

Liza Black 02:02

Okay, wow. So your work has actually increased in that you're doing a lot of volunteer time with The Powwow?

Stephanie Hebert 02:11

Yes, and I have a small business of my own as well. So I'm a busy woman.

Liza Black 02:17

Tell me about the small business.

Stephanie Hebert 02:19

It's called the Talon Beading Company. I'm a professional bead worker, I make beaded outfits for, in regalia for our dancers, and then I also make day to day wear and statement pieces for all manner of events so.

Liza Black 02:35

Oh my goodness, okay. So is, how is this impac- how has the pandemic impacted your small business, are you getting more orders? are you?

Stephanie Hebert 02:46

Im actually getting more orders. And initially, I was concerned, I will admit, you know, people are a lot of people are out of work a lot of people in Indian Country, because of the fragile nature and structure of native economies and the reservations and things like that. I was very, I was concerned, however, what I'm seeing is that people recognize that I am a small business. And they also recognize the, that I'm still an essential worker. And they're, they're in a position where through either the stimulus payments that have been coming through, or they themselves are essential employees and their expenses have dramatically dropped, that they're able to make payments towards beadwork. And I'm backed up on orders now through July. And the it has really helped us I donate most of my profits at this point back to the community, for masks, for anything that they may need. And then I also have sponsored specials through the Social Distance Powwow with that money to give back to those who maybe don't have a way necessarily to buy things right now.

Liza Black 03:59

Mhm. That's wonderful. Okay, so I guess we should jump into powwow talk. So maybe you could I mean, I have been on Powwow Committees, have been to lots of powwows I love a pawwow, but just for future researchers, maybe you could talk about your personal relationship with Powwow life. And then maybe talk about how, how this came to be this Social Distancing Powwow.

Stephanie Hebert 04:23

Yeah. Um, in, in the theme of it all is resiliency. Native People are very resilient, and we find a way, when I was 12 years old, was when I first entered the Powwow circle, that would have been in, oh- I'm gonna make a liar out of myself, right around 2007. Somewhere in there. I was adopted by a Pawnee woman who lives in Southern New Hampshire just outside of Manchester. And she said do you want to go to Powwow? 12 year old me said sure. You know, why not? And I, at that point I went and I was under the impression that I was just going to watch, you know, Elise was on a drum. She was Powwow Committee. She was a secretary of the New Hampshire InterTribal Council at that time, and so I thought I was going to watch Well, that was not what happened. I was dressed out in a northern traditional buckskin set of regalia and put out in circle, having never been to a Powwow before. And a lot of times families start their children young. The Powwow community is a very tight community and these dances in this way of life is handed down through, with the aunties and uncles and parents and grandparents all the way down. And all the way down to the littlest kids who maybe can't even walk yet. And so a Powwow, in the way that we think of it is a celebration, it's a celebration of life. It's a gathering to have a good time. At the end of the day, we're there to laugh, we're there to dance, we're there to raise prayers for those who can't dance with us or can't be there, whether they're ill or something like this. And there are sacred moments in the Powwow, you know, circle- in there, in these events, whether

it's a mourning song from someone who's passed away, whether it's a coming out dance for someone who's coming out of a period of mourning. They're called honor songs, and they are, they are solemn events, or they can be joyous events. We have honor songs for our high school graduates, for our first responders for our veterans, and, and we make a point to honor people in that public setting. But largely, it's a conglomeration of dancers, singers, on large Powwow drums and on hand drums, vendors and merchants selling their wares, whether it's beads, supplies or finished goods, regalia items, soaps, you know, all sorts of things and food, and no, you can't go to a Powwow without a good Indian taco, or, you know, some mutton or, or these sorts of things. And so it, it's a unique thing where you can be as small as 30 dancers, or even less sometimes if it's really raining, or I've danced at Powwows with over 1000 Dancers 1500 Dancers coming in. And it it always has the same feeling to it, no matter how many people are there. It's a, it's a beautiful, beautiful experience. But that said, during COVID, there is no way to social distance at a Powwow. I mean, even the drummers. The drums are two to three feet wide, and they're shoulder to shoulder sometimes turning this way to make it in. There's no way and we look to power for a variety of things, whether it's connecting with tradition, whether it's connecting with family and friends who we may never see outside of one specific Powwow. You know, it's sometimes it's a spiritual thing where you know, I know as a dancer, like we joke about Powwow hangovers, the days after where you're just completely wiped out and exhausted. But, but spiritually it, it really, it fulfills, at least for me, it, it revives me, and it, it just makes me- makes you feel good. On the inside, if that makes sense. And our community misses that we are a culture built on physical connection. We are a culture built on gatherings and sharing. So Dan Simon's who's one of our other co-founders. This was his original idea.

Liza Black 08:36

Mmm.

Stephanie Hebert 08:37

He put a video out on Facebook.

Liza Black 08:39

Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 08:39

And he started this group called the Social Distance Powwow. And this video was about 30 seconds long. And he's in Bozeman, Montana. So it was snowing outside. And he said- basically that I don't know how this is going to work. I don't know what, what it's going to look like moving forward. But we're going to try. And so I message Dan, and I've known Dan. He's a Wampum Bender, I'm actually wearing some of his work right now. And we traded, I've done beadwork with him. He made my wedding jewelry. So we, we go back. And I said, Dan, do you need help? And, he said, Yeah, if you don't mind, you know, I could use somebody to help me with some posts and approving members in this. And you can't have a Powwow without a good emcee. And that's where

Liza Black 09:14

Hm. That's right!

Stephanie Hebert 09:27

Whitney Rencountre came in. Whitney Rencountre the Second. Excuse me, and he is a very well known emcee across the western parts of Powwow country. And he was all about it. And we told him up front. Look, we have no idea how this is going to work. This is going to be a really fluid thing. He's good friends with Dan. And so we, and he was on board. At that point. There was 22 people in the group, including the three of us by that Saturday, so that would have been March 16th.

Liza Black 09:30

Okay. I was wondering about that.

Stephanie Hebert 10:02

By that Saturday, we had 52,000 people. The following Saturday, we had over 100,000 people. Right now it's April 22. And we are about 150 people shy of 165,000 people. So about four weeks, five weeks, five weeks. Yes. And so firstly, we had no idea, what the, when I offered a hand, not that I would do anything differently, that I had no clue that this is what was coming. We have contests we have, well, I shouldn't say contests, we have specials, we don't you know, where, we are gifting away money members of our community are gifting away things. We're not, you know, getting corporate sponsors or anything like that. And we are completely on volunteer, you know, I don't get paid to do this, Dan, Whitney, neither of them. And even all the hosts and the guests that we have, none of them have ever once asked if they would be getting paid or not. It's all for the community and to try to restore some sense of, of togetherness in a time where togetherness can be potentially fatal. And in using technology to bring large, large celebrations together, even when we physically can't be.

Liza Black 11:28

Yeah, yeah. Oh, gosh, I have so many questions. And I'm sure you have so much you could tell me. So, so Dan posts- did Dan post that first- you said there was a fir- a very first post? It sort of started with that 30 second video, right? Was that on his, a personal page? Or did he actually create a Social Distance Power page and put it on that? And then in, or do you remember the

Stephanie Hebert 11:48

The page was created at that point.

Liza Black 11:48

details? So he created a Social Distance Powwow page?

Stephanie Hebert 11:55

The Social Distance Powwow Group had started. He posted the video in the group

Liza Black 11:57

Okay. Okay.

Stephanie Hebert 12:00

and- Then shared it to his personal page, which is how I saw- Mhm.

Liza Black 12:03

So, but you set it up so that people could invite people? I see, okay, okay. And then. And then you were talking about one of the things you did was to admit people.

Stephanie Hebert 12:15

Yep.

Liza Black 12:15

People were already in it could invite people? And-

Stephanie Hebert 12:18

Yes.

Liza Black 12:18

So approving all of those, so you approved 100 and almost

Stephanie Hebert 12:23

60,000

Liza Black 12:24

admits? Wow.

Stephanie Hebert 12:27

Dan Whitney, and I, it was a lot. But as with any large gathering of people, you know, we worry about unscrupulous and a bit individuals. We worry about people who are known for spamming, virus, you know, just.

Liza Black 12:42

Oh, yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 12:43

So we weren't turning people away, because they were from another country or, you know, anything like that. It was folks that we knew would be an issue.

Liza Black 12:53

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 12:53

I mean, I think in total, we got 160 some odd 1000 people, I think we've only had to turn away like 190 or 200 people. It's, you know, it's not much.

Liza Black 13:05

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 13:05

And we go from every European na- every major European nation, including Russia, half of the continent of Africa, India, China, Japan, Korea, Australia, in almost every nation of South and Central America.

Liza Black 13:19

Wow. So what did you- so you did not anticipate the, the size of this, you did not anticipate that. Is there anything else you didn't anticipate that was unexpected? And maybe a positive?

Stephanie Hebert 13:35

Well, I mean, just the outpouring of support.

Liza Black 13:38

Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 13:38

I mean, if this had happened, or we'd tried to do this at any other time, I think it would have fallen on its face. Why? Because we could go to the Powwow.

Liza Black 13:46

Yeah, me too.

Stephanie Hebert 13:46

It's, it's but it's but it's beautiful.

Liza Black 13:46

Right.

Stephanie Hebert 13:46

We wouldn't deal with technology, we wouldn't have to dress in our living rooms, which is a lot of people are doing it there was its, it would have it wouldn't have worked. And so people, but people are so eager to dress, they are so eager to dance for money or not, the hand drops the drummers that are coming on. And we've got over almost 100,000 posts on that board at this point, unique posts, nevermind the comments that come flooding in after. And it was just unbelievable. I mean, we're getting messages from people saying that this has prevented them from committing suicide. We've got people messaging us that this is the only way that their grandparents will get to see them dance or the last time they saw their family member before they passed away from any number of reasons was dancing for the Social Distance Powwow. I get really emotional thinking about it.

Liza Black 13:48

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 13:49

And it's it's humbling more than anything. It's so humbling that you know, I'm Yes, I would say that a lot. A lot more people know who we are now than a few months ago. But you know what, at the end of the day, that doesn't matter. And I can safely say that about the three of us, the notoriety is not, we don't care, what we care about is that we're able to help. And these dancers are being able to dance. As a side effect to the size of this page, we were able to create the Social Distance Powwow Marketplace for all those vendors and artisans that I was talking about. And that is growing every day hand over fist. And we're getting messages from vendors saying that this has kept their business afloat, this has kept their lights on, this has kept the roof over their head. And, and that is the essence of it is that we're giving people hope. We don't allow politics or virus talk or any of that in there. This is a vacation from all that. It's a place where we don't have to worry. And it's a place where we can be ourselves and smile and laugh and not feel guilty for doing so.

Liza Black 15:56

And if I can just add something that I mean, I couldn't agree more with everything you're talking about. Another thing I've really enjoyed about it is that it's self selecting, and perhaps more accessible, I don't know, I don't know, maybe that's not true. But I really enjoyed seeing folks who are disabled participating.

Stephanie Hebert 16:14

Mhm.

Liza Black 16:15

I saw a man who was deaf, do a drum song, and I just found that so touching. And-

Stephanie Hebert 16:20

Oh!

Liza Black 16:20

I've seen multiple people with all different types of disabilities participating, and that is just so, so special to me, so beautiful.

Stephanie Hebert 16:28

Oh, it is! And, and we also are seeing it's folks that are in the hospital.

Liza Black 16:33

Mhm.

Stephanie Hebert 16:34

It's our bed bound individuals who physically haven't been able to get to a Powwow since who knows when.

Liza Black 16:39

Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 16:40
Because of their condition,

Liza Black 16:41
Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 16:41
And all of a sudden, this opens the door for them again.

Liza Black 16:44
Mhm.

Stephanie Hebert 16:44
this, this allows them that experience. And I think that that's just phenomenal. I really do.

Liza Black 16:51
I do too, I really, really do. It's just been absolutely tremendous to be a part of it. And I came in very early on and I'm so grateful to the person that invited me and I'm so grateful to, to you all for for giving your heart and soul to this. So was, is Dan a vendor? Because I was hearing a lot of talk, like we were planning a Powwow at our University, which of course got canceled. And

Stephanie Hebert 17:13
Yeah.

Liza Black 17:13
I was hearing a lot of talk from vendors who are upset about not getting their deposits back.

Stephanie Hebert 17:18
Yes.

Liza Black 17:18
was Dan in that group of people?

Stephanie Hebert 17:20
Yes.

Liza Black 17:21
He was, okay. So I- wondered if there was a connection between, with that issue that that was part of the motivation in doing that.

Stephanie Hebert 17:23
Yep. Yep, There were a few things there. Dan is a man who, oh, he puts his community first, first and foremost. And so it was Whitney.

Liza Black 17:38

Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 17:39

They're both exceptionally giving people. And Dan. I mean, he all of his events were canceled for that he's a wampum. worker. And for those who aren't familiar of the Eastern Tribes he's Mashan-uh, yes, he's Mashantucket Pequot from Connecticut. And we use wampum in traditional adornment, and it's iconic. To the East. Everyone who sees it knows what it is. I'm wearing it, my people wore it. And so he travels the country, he's exceptionally well known for his craftsmanship. And, yeah, everything good just got canceled on him. And there was a lot of backlash, because of the, how sudden everything happened. That big Powwow, such as Gathering of Nations in Albuquerque, Denver, March in Denver, Colorado, they refuse to return vendor fees, and they're no small change, Gathering of Nation's is \$750 for one table. If you have two tables, then you're now at \$1,500, and they flatly refused, Denver March is not as much, and they are still working out exactly what they're going to do. But what it comes down to is that \$750 or \$1,500, that they can't use for food, for a roof over their head, for inventory that may expire in some cases, like all your all natural soaps and things like this. So there was a lot of kickback, a lot, and I, I'm concerned for the future of those large Powwows because of how they treated their vendors and their artisans.

Liza Black 19:19

Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 19:20

It's, I'm, it you know, time will tell. And of course, as a dancer and I've evented as well, I beadwork, music, I, I of course want to see them succeed. But I also know that there's going to be repercussions for what happened. And I think from a business point of view, it was they put all their deposits into their venues. They put in a bunch of non-refundables, and they may not physically have been able to and that's fine. But there is no transparency into why they're refusing. And so Dan, who was slated I believe, for both of those events, definitely Denver March. I'm not sure about Gathering, you know he, he was concerned now because his inventory isn't perishable. But you know, the time and the effort and the energy and doing it, now what? And so he looked at it in that perspective. And, you know, that was the other reason we push that marketplace once we got some momentum to help those vendors. Because that's their living. They go from Powwow to Powwow. And that's it. And so we were wa- we were trying to reach them and try to help them out.

Liza Black 19:23

Mhm. Yeah, thank you so much for speaking to that.

Stephanie Hebert 20:34

Of course.

Liza Black 20:35

Yes. Yeah, I'm not sure that everybody knows that it's, that there's, that there is a financial aspect to it for some folks.

Stephanie Hebert 20:41

Yeah. And even for the dancers too.

Liza Black 20:43

Right.

Stephanie Hebert 20:43

The dancers that come off the reservations or even what we term Urban Indians and I'm in that camp

Liza Black 20:43

Me too.

Stephanie Hebert 20:44

This is your income. They are professional dancers, and there are some Powwows where the, you know, the winner of a category might walk away with three, four or \$5,000. And they just go from Powwow, to Powwow, to Powwow, that's not happening. And so, you know, the specials are our small way to try to mitigate that part of things. And just try to again, financially fill those gaps.

Liza Black 21:19

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 21:19

As a byproduct of what we're trying to do.

Liza Black 21:22

So I saw that Whitney posted two or three days ago, I'm definitely losing my sense of time. So bear with me, I think it was, I think it was this week. It was recently that he said, Hey, this is not ending. There's no, there's no expiration date on the Social Distance Powwow. So what are you picturing for the future of the Social Distance Powwow? Are there new angles that you're hoping to work into this? Or are the committee, the three of you? What are you thinking about where this is going and what you might want to keep in place, what you might want to add, what you might want to take away? Any thoughts about that?

Stephanie Hebert 21:58

Yeah. And until recently, I would have to tell you that we're just acting on a day to day, you know, we're, you know, we are keeping the positivity, we're keeping the momentum, we're going for it.

Liza Black 22:09

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 22:09

I mean, the only money we're, that's like, the money that we get for specials is from selling T shirts. And we've got some more stuff coming soon for that. But the other thing that we've found out in the last day or two is that we are going to be moving towards nonprofit status.

Liza Black 22:27

Oh!

Stephanie Hebert 22:28

So that we would like to formally establish ourselves as a nonprofit, whether that's through fiscal partnership and sponsorship, or our own Avenue. And then we also are being contacted by some other Powwows in the future, who have been trying to figure out how they could move their canceled in person Powwows online. So there's a lot of communication, we're doing our best to help other people bring their Powwows online. And if nothing else, you know, we also our platform, a constructive positive platform for things like traditional storytelling, language preservation, and Native people telling history in the Native voice. What is it? What does it look like from our side, as opposed to the conventional mainstream textbook, descriptions about how things are happening and what the status of our cultures are?

Liza Black 23:23

I love it. I love it. Oh, so exciting. It's so exciting. The pandemic is terrible. But this is wonderful.

Stephanie Hebert 23:30

And, and that's why we've been picked up by over 100 news outlets at this point.

Liza Black 23:36

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 23:37

And on Thurs- Like in, in at the national and the local and the international level, we had an interview with Brut media out in France, and they're broadcasting all over their Europe, Asia and America channels. India, the Royal Bank of Canada has approached us to do an Indigenous Persons discussion. And I think really, the like everyone wants, everyone's talking about the pandemic. And I think this is a very rare, you know, beam of light that cuts through all this heavy negativity like since when do you see a power adapter on NBC Sports national news at six o'clock?

Liza Black 24:14

I'm loving it. I mean, I'm loving it. I'm loving it, you know, I'm loving it.

Stephanie Hebert 24:20

It's exceptional

Liza Black 24:21

It is, finally. Finally!

Stephanie Hebert 24:25

And it's opening other avenues and doors to more cultural conversations that just haven't happened. And I think that it's another completely unintended side effect of what we're, but you know what, we're going with it and, you know, we're, it's part of the forward momentum to see where this thing goes.

Liza Black 24:45

Yeah, I couldn't, I couldn't agree more. I could not agree more. There's just, there's so much happening. And it's, it's really, it's really quite remarkable. I mean, you and I probably wouldn't be talking because you're right. The Powwow circuit is national and there are big Powwows. But mostly they're small. Mostly, they're local. And it would be tough to connect to people like you and I.

Stephanie Hebert 25:09

Mhm.

Liza Black 25:09

But in this context, there's, there's an absolute connection.

Stephanie Hebert 25:13

Absolutely. Absolutely

Liza Black 25:14

Yeah. So I'm also seeing another thing I'm really liking about the Social Distance Powwow. And the- and a thing I like about Powwows, in general, is when a Powwow is diverse. So I'm seeing a lot of regional tribal, cultural representation in the-

Stephanie Hebert 25:32

Mhm.

Liza Black 25:32

Social Distance Powwow, like I'm seeing California tribes.

Stephanie Hebert 25:36

Mhm.

Liza Black 25:36

Sometimes, you know, we see a lot of Plains culture in Powwows.

Stephanie Hebert 25:40

Yes.

Liza Black 25:40

And Powwows are always welcoming of any tribal culture. But, but generally, it's it seems to be sort of Plains focused at times. So I'm, I'm really enjoying seeing Indigenous People from all over America and

elsewhere. I mean, are you? Are you feeling that as well? And is this, is this reaching into Canada and Mexico? Do you feel it is?

Stephanie Hebert 26:05

Yes, oh 100%.

Liza Black 26:07

Do you feel like it's increasing?

Stephanie Hebert 26:08

Yes.

Liza Black 26:09

Do you feel like it's becoming less and less US based every day? Is that kind of trending or?

Stephanie Hebert 26:15

So, I'm gonna back up just a quick second.

Liza Black 26:18

Yeah, please do.

Stephanie Hebert 26:18

Just for the future who may not know why Plains culture.

Liza Black 26:21

Yes

Stephanie Hebert 26:22

prevelant.

Liza Black 26:23

Yes.

Stephanie Hebert 26:24

It's because the concept of a Powwow in the way that it's held, at least in this era, and time.

Liza Black 26:30

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 26:31

Based upon Plains style gatherings.

Liza Black 26:34

Right.

Stephanie Hebert 26:35

In the eastern parts of the country where my folks are from, we use small drums and we water drums, maybe this big, you know, and what are called clappers, and there are pieces of black ash, like think like a wooden paint stick, but made out of ash and tied with sinew on one and smacked and it makes like a clapping tone. And we would dance in long houses doing dances that look absolutely nothing like what we're doing. In the Salish coastal cultures, Native Alaskans, the Dons and dancers of Mexico. They don't dance in that big I call it the big drum persona. It's, it's something completely different. They, I adapt to it. I mean, I dance at Powwow all around the with the big drums and that sort of thing. But this has really opened up- like my mom, for example. I get most of my did- my Nativeness through my dad. And you know his parent. He's a first generation American. So you know, my mom has grown around the Northeastern Native Culture. She has logged into Social Distance Powwow, and has seen Native Alaskan dancing for the first time. She's seen the canoe songs and the bird songs and forgive me I don't know what the proper name for that is. But the coastal Pacific Northwest with the the large dance masks the wooden mask. She's seen buffalo dances for the first time from the Pueblo nations. She has seen a variety of danza, danza being the dance of, the dances of Mexico, and even further south of Mexico and Central America. And then then- our First Nations people, they, in the same spirit of American Powwows, they use big drums, they, in the, the Plains style, but what we're seeing is a lot of social songs that are coming out that are different, you know, hand drum songs, or rabbit dances or alligator dances, things that don't ordinarily show up at a Powwow. And we're all about it. We are all about it. You know, we want to see it. We want it.

Liza Black 28:39

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 28:39

We want all of that to get out there. We've had some Native Siberians that have some sent dances in to us and we've posted. UNESCO, there's a gentleman who, who's a photographer for UNESCO, and he's up in Northern Siberia, and he's actually been facilitating the videos from up there to have those dancers show their way. And the Native peoples of Australia, the Maori in New Zealand, we- and it's a beautiful aggregation of Indigenous Peoples. I wouldn't- say I mean, knowing the inside stats, you know, the membership is 80 to 85%, North America, meaning Canada, US and Mexico, of that it's predominantly the United States very closely followed by Canada. I suspect that that's a connectivity thing. You know, some spots in Mexico do not have the ability to access the internet like others. But there's a we've got communications and access from all over the world. And we, it's, this is a little off topic, but I'm gonna say it anyway. It's encouraging people in other countries to question whose land they're standing on. So the folks in Germany who are asked Yes, I'm here now. But who were the Celts or or the Druids or whomever Druids are Ireland, I apologize. But who are the cultures there before me?

Liza Black 29:20

Ah.

Stephanie Hebert 29:42

And getting into those regional Indigenous histories in that land acknowledgement that we've seen starting in the United States and Canada. But it's those questions are starting to be asked elsewhere. And I think that is phenomenal.

Liza Black 30:23

I'm all for that.

Stephanie Hebert 30:25

Yeah. So yeah, it's um I love seeing it. And, and I can't agree with you more that the regional specializations that come out, and I think the reason we don't see it otherwise is because travel is expensive.

Liza Black 30:43

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 30:44

Hotels and food and gas, and God forbid, you get sick, you break down, whatever. So I think this is a great way to really showcase the diversity that we have, and get it out there.

Liza Black 30:46

Yes. It really is. I mean, it's just flung the door wide open in in. In the best way possible.

Stephanie Hebert 31:01

Oh yeah. Oh, yeah.

Liza Black 31:04

Yeah, yeah. Gosh, um, where do you where do you think it'll be in a year? Just? I don't know.

Stephanie Hebert 31:11

Um, well, if I could personally speculate, and this does not reflect the views of my, my partners, because I, we really haven't talked about it.

Liza Black 31:19

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 31:19

Well, when the virus is over to have an in person, Powwow (inaudible).

Liza Black 31:25

But, would we still call it the Social Distance Powwow, or would it have some other name?

Stephanie Hebert 31:29

It's a conundrum! Because at that- we're not. I mean, we might just as a memory, to remember where this came from. And in the history to that name, even though it's, I mean, it might be one of those things

like, you know, when you show a kid a VHS tape today, they go, what's this? You know, 10 years from now, people might go, why do they call it The Social Distance? Like, what is that? But there's a history there.

Liza Black 31:55

Yeah

Stephanie Hebert 31:55

There's a, there's a big old pin right there. And it's a market history. And so I don't know, like I said, they, we haven't talked about it. And, but I, I personally, I don't think it'll be a year. You know, that's a lot of work. That's a lot of footwork groundwork, financial work. But in the future, I certainly hope so.

Liza Black 32:18

Wow. And do you think do you think it would be some kind of mix of a virtual Powwow and an in person Powwow, so that the folks who can't be there are there with you somehow? I mean, is that-

Stephanie Hebert 32:31

Great que-

Liza Black 32:34

I mean, I, I feel like this is what everybody's thinking about is not just in terms of how I'll just in general, sort of what wasn't working about the way we live before? And, and how does this make us rethink things to make, to make life more accessible?

Stephanie Hebert 32:49

Yeah, um, you know, I think that we're setting a precedent with-

Liza Black 32:53

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 32:53

Social Powwow, having the, they call it the cyber circle, I think I, I coined that term early on. It's, it's, it's pivotal. And, you know, we've got, there have always been groups like powwows.com, that will fly into the major Powwows. And they'll set up cameras and do live TV style feeds, from Denver March from Crow Fair, from these big, big Powwows. And, you know, it's, this is a different way of doing it. And, you know, I don't know what that holds for future Powwows. Because, you know, we're figuring it out on the fly right now, what it means for us, you know, we have a live session with Midnight Express later on today. And we were figuring out yesterday, how we're gonna figure it out today.

Liza Black 33:44

Yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 33:46

But you know, what it's, we're learning and I, I truly hope that this shows the, the populace that we can be more inclusive at our Powwows for those folks who can't, who maybe, you know, housebound, or bedridden, or otherwise unable financially, or for whatever medical or any other reason to get there, and to really share those vibes and that energy and those prayers with them.

Liza Black 34:11

Yeah. What has it been like with Facebook as the forum has that have? Has Facebook been helpful? Have you, have you thought about another forum? I mean, obviously, you're in I mean, there's so many people now.

Stephanie Hebert 34:24

Oh yeah.

Liza Black 34:25

But what has it been like doing this on Facebook as opposed to maybe another platform? Any, any thoughts about that?

Stephanie Hebert 34:31

Sure, so we are also on Instagram and Twitter.

Liza Black 34:34

Oh!

Stephanie Hebert 34:39

But as you can see-

Liza Black 34:40

I didn't realize that at all!

Stephanie Hebert 34:42

Exactly, and so that's partially on us. We haven't, perhaps push it as well as we could because we're so wrapped up in what's going on.

Liza Black 34:50

Okay.

Stephanie Hebert 34:50

We hit what we call the algorithm wall and about 120 130,000 people, where Facebook has basically said that we are influencing too many peoples news speeds at one time. And so that they are now instead of every time we post it showing up on everybody's newsfeed, it will maybe, every other post will show up or every two posts will show up. And it has dramatically slowed down our membership, like rates have increased, because the Facebook algorithm is restricting our content. And that's not unique for us. That's any huge page out there. That's not It's not like they're coming after us. But we have been trying to find ways to create content and to create interactive experiences-

Liza Black 35:34

Yeah

Stephanie Hebert 35:41

to more or less override that algorithm.

Liza Black 35:44

Okay.

Stephanie Hebert 35:45

One of those things was like last Saturday, we had our one month special we, the 16th of April, Social Distance Powwow one month, 159,000 some odd people, we said, You know what? we need to do a special for that. So we did and we had everybody all age groups, all categories, all classes, submit a video, the top six from likes, loves and reactions went live for Saturday Night Live session.

Liza Black 36:12

Oh, I saw this. I remember this. Yeah, yeah.

Stephanie Hebert 36:15

So what we did then was because we now we've got all their families, we've got their friends, their posting videos to everybody else's page to come back to our page.

Liza Black 36:23

Oh.

Stephanie Hebert 36:24

And it first of all, everyone had a blast, the dancers, the families, everybody, we got inundated with messages about how much they loved it. And then the final six, they got a full introduction, like you would at a spotlight special at a big Powwow and the emcees got your name, they've got their numbers, they've got everything. And we've let the public vote by poll, who won for the night. And there were prizes given and it was an immensely positive reaction. And I think that that was a really ingenious way to work around the limits of the platform of Facebook, to continue to engage our audiences. And so we, we recognize that there are limits to Facebook, we recognize that there are some community guidelines and standards that Facebook has that may be challenging for Native Culture, such as flagging, and removing any posts with the word feather in it.

Liza Black 37:25

What?

Stephanie Hebert 37:26

it could insinuate the buy, sell or trade of restricted items, such as raptor feathers, and Bert. So and I've run into this other places, because when I have e-commerce through Facebook with my business, and I

have to be careful about how I word my posts, because Facebook will flag it as against community standards.

Liza Black 37:47

Wow.

Stephanie Hebert 37:47

So, yeah, so like there's a, there's a lot of levels to how the platform really guides us. And that's part of why we went to Instagram, every photo that we post gets bounced off Instagram, and people can connect with it in a slightly different way. We had to also create a group called the social distance 49. And I'm not sure if you're familiar with the 49s.

Liza Black 38:12

Oh yes I am!

Stephanie Hebert 38:13

So for posterity, the 49s is the evening humor and entertainment after a Powwow that may or may not be particularly friendly for small children. And so it's a lot of the adult jokes and the, the humor that a lot of people just do not understand unless you're involved in the Powwow community. And so in an effort to entertain and also capture that aspect of a Powwow, we created Social Distance 49. So-

Liza Black 38:45

I need to add that to.

Stephanie Hebert 38:46

Yeah, go for it. And so there's a whole, there's, in, in order to prevent our platform from strangling us, you know, because if we put up necessarily all of the 49 posts in the main group, they'd be shutting the group down, because a lot of folks might be offended, they may not understand. And that's no fault of anyone's that's just the nature of it. And so we, we were able to partition that off and prevent issues with community standards and that sort of stuff.

Liza Black 39:18

Wow.

Stephanie Hebert 39:21

Yeah, we're all over the place.

Liza Black 39:23

You are, you are so there's so that's the first spin off. A couple of people have said to me, I feel like there's going to be a spin off our Native Singles, like a Native Snagging,

Stephanie Hebert 39:33

hopefully!

Liza Black 39:34

Circle.

Stephanie Hebert 39:35

But there's a lot of the, the snaggy humor and, and all that.

Liza Black 39:38

Yeah!

Stephanie Hebert 39:39

It's all on 49.

Liza Black 39:41

So the 49 is really the native singles.

Stephanie Hebert 39:43

Yeah, absolutely (inaudible).

Liza Black 39:51

Wow, I mean, I just who would have ever thought I mean, it was like this thing where the minute I saw it, I thought what!?! But then half a second later, I thought this is genius. This is genius.

Stephanie Hebert 40:07

Yeah.

Liza Black 40:08

But I can't imagine this would have ever happened any other way.

Stephanie Hebert 40:12

No, no, like, Gathering of Nations recently published a day or two ago that they are going to attempt a virtual Powwow. And their virtual Powwow is a complete restream of the 2019 Gathering of Nations footage that powwows.com took. And they're basically going to stream it in high def, utilizing a very similar format to what we're doing. So Gathering of Nations saw what we were doing and the momentum that we gained, and they decided that's what they want to do. They have no affiliation with us, they never approached us never spoke with us or anything like that. But it was like, it's one of those things where we've turned some big heads, as far as Powwow goes, to say, well, maybe this could work. And now other people are trying, we've got other split, like other groups that are not affiliated with us that are doing something special ups, doing something similar, like quarantine specials. They're another group that but they have corporate sponsors, they hire head judges, and they do almost exclusively pay out dances and specials and competitions. There's the round dance, virtual round dancer. So yeah, the virtual round ends. And they do hand drum songs, and they, they specialize in round dances, and that sort of thing. And so we don't, we're not affiliated with them. But we've each sort of found our, our way. And the Social Distance Powwow is sort of the broad encompassing of where quarantine specials has really taken on the competition side of things.

Liza Black 41:53

Hm.

Stephanie Hebert 41:53

And, you know, the round dance group virtual round as they've captured our hand drummers and that sort of thing.

Liza Black 41:59

Mhm.

Stephanie Hebert 41:59

So more more specifically,

Liza Black 42:02

Yeah, yeah. Well, gosh, I don't want to keep you much longer. I, I kept you for about an hour now. Um.

Stephanie Hebert 42:09

Really?

Liza Black 42:10

Yes, yes. Yes, I've taken up an hour of your life. And, and when you explained at the beginning, what you're involved in, it's like, whoa, your hands are full.

Stephanie Hebert 42:21

And that's the- you know what, it's my day off from my nine to five. So I'm, I'm good.

Liza Black 42:26

Oh, that's nice. That's nice, gosh there. Is there anything I haven't asked you about, but that maybe would be, would be good for future researchers to know about being Native living through COVID-19 running a Social Distance Powwow while being a beater?

Stephanie Hebert 42:46

Um, hmm. I would say that for for future researchers who are looking at the impacts of this virus on Indigenous Peoples and communities, reach out to the reservations, monitor the, the printed news from these reservations. That's where a lot of their information is coming from, they do not have the virtual resources to go and have online platforms. So if you're, if you're looking for really what, what went on in a more reservation oriented capacity, that would be the place to go. And I can't stress enough to future researchers that if you really want to get a Native Person, much like we're doing now to explain, go find them, ask them, message them, knock on their door. We are a culture of verbiage. We are a culture that speaks. And, you know, I can, if it's approached in the right way, you know, you don't look like the paparazzi, they're willing to talk to you, and they'll be willing to share. And I can see a lot of a lot of this being a lot like not not the Great Depression, not quite on that scale. But something similar. This is a time that has really marked history for my generation, for the generation before me, the generations

after me, that are older that, you know, they've lived through a whole lot more, you know, and the perspective is very different. But, you know, we will we as in my generation will remember when the virus hit and where were you. Sort of like 9/11 Where were you on 9/11. Everyone remembers where they were. I mean, I was in the fourth grade sitting in art class, and the teacher turned on the television. And so I mean, and that was 20 years ago, you know, so, but yeah, talk to people. Don't be afraid to ask. As long as it's in a good way. People will be more than happy to share.

Liza Black 44:56

Yeah, absolutely. It's just such an honor to talk with you and to be able to personally thank you for what you've done. For all of us. This was just such a tremendous and unexpected gift to be able to connect with each other this way it, it really has saved so many people, and thank you so much for, for giving of yourself in that way and jumping in and, and doing whatever it takes to make this work and make it happen.

Stephanie Hebert 45:29

Well, it's, it's my honor to do so. And I'm humbled to be able to do so. You know, and I'm, I'm glad to have folks like you who are, you know, not only entrenched in the academic world and the science and history side of things, but also just an active member of the Powwow Community so that you can appreciate both sides. And that you, you recognize the need to capture things like this for people in the future. So thank you for what you're doing. And if anyone present, future, or otherwise wants to reach out, I'm here to talk more if you want to record some more, I'm more than happy to make myself available.

Liza Black 46:09

Thank you so much, Stephanie. Thank you so, so much. And I'm just wishing you and the committee and everyone in the Social Distance Power, wonderful, tremendous health and happiness and, and just thank you so much.

Stephanie Hebert 46:22

You're most welcome. You take care of yourself and you'd be safe out there

Liza Black 46:26

you too. You too. Okay. Have a great day. Okay. Bye