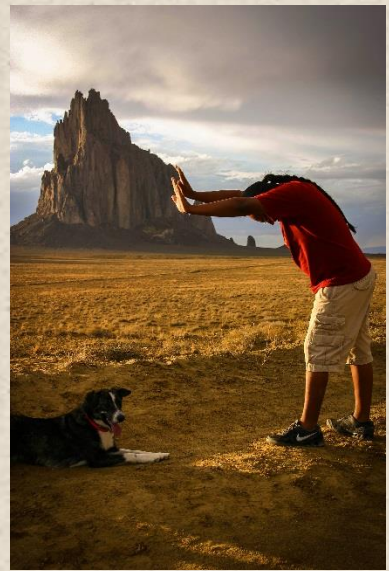
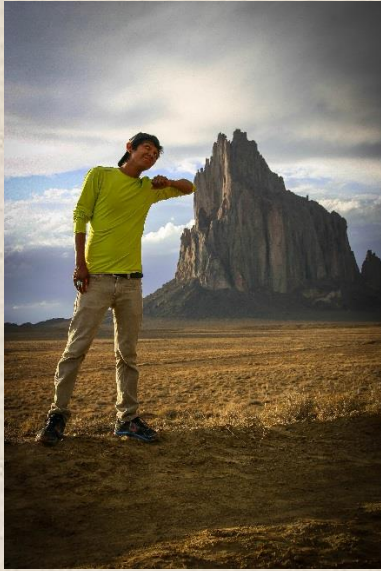


THE MAYORS OF SHIPROCK



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LOGLINE

In the small town of Shiprock, New Mexico a group of young Navajo leaders work to bring hope and change into their once thriving community.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Every Monday in the small community of Shiprock, New Mexico, a group of young Navajo leaders meet to decide how they will help their community. For over seven years, the Northern Dine Youth Committee has worked to give youth opportunities to directly make changes within their community. But while the NDYC works to make changes, many members also consider their own futures, commitments to family and the world outside of the Shiprock. While they love their community, they all must consider their options both on and off the reservation.

LONG SYNOPSIS

On the northern edge of the Navajo reservation, a group of young Navajo leaders -The Northern Dine Youth Committee - meet every Monday night in the town of Shiprock, New Mexico. The group, founded by 19 year-old Graham Beyale, work to find ways to help their community every week and in the process, create and develop ways to help keep the youth of Shiprock away from the negative aspects of reservation life. The group works to develop community engagement and betterment projects, to find ways to learn about their language and culture and continuously work to bring hope and bridge divides within their community.

The Northern Dine Youth Committee has brought consistent change in the community of Shiprock by promoting and organizing community trash clean-ups, graffiti removal, fundraisers, wood hauling for the elderly, volleyball and dodge ball community tournaments to name a few. But by far, their most significant contribution has been to engage the youth of the community and to help them be a part of such a transformational effort – an effort which should prove to inspire every community member.

The group quickly finds that despite their efforts, the economic and political structure of the reservation continuously hinder the progress they wish to make. Even with an education, many Navajos who return home find little opportunity or jobs and are forced to live off the reservation. Many NDYC members consider life off the reservation and the progress that could be achieved through continuing their education. Others find ways to go to school, to work and to stay close to home. They all must weigh the prospects of continuing their educations, leaving home and weather to return home to the reservation to continue their work.

Their tireless leader, Graham is the most devoted member, coming home from college over six years ago and staying to commit himself to the work of the NDYC. But after four years leading the NDYC, Beyale decides to leave for school again. But he wonders if the group can continue without him. After years under his leadership, members prove that they truly are the leaders that can give hope to their community as they continue to organize and inspire.

The Mayors of Shiprock showcases over four years with the Northern Dine Youth Committee and the love that the youth have for their hometown.

THE MAYORS OF SHIPROCK

SYNOPSIS

Without fail, 24-year-old Graham Beyale and a group of young Navajo men and women, gather every Monday night in an old, blue utility building to find ways to help their community of Shiprock, New Mexico. Their small town, one of the largest of the Navajo Reservation, is a constant beacon in the horizon, deep within the canyons of the

surrounding mountains, framed by an iconic and massive rock shaped like a ship, reason for its namesake – a go to monument for films and photographers. Yet the town itself is littered with trash blowing in from nearby communities and blocks of abandoned burned out homes. The community members and its youth, wrestle with poverty – many turning to drugs, alcohol and violence. The leaders can do little to help the situation, bound by a lack of support, money and political infrastructure from the Navajo Nation. It is truly a place on the edge of existence.

After seeing the devastating effects of alcohol and drugs in his own family – Graham lost all but one of his grandparents to the disease – he organizes the Northern Diné Youth Committee, where he can offer young people something meaningful to do for themselves and their community instead of being idle and turning to substance abuse and gangs. Coming from a supportive and active family with a history of leadership in the community, Graham first recruits his sisters, Virginia and Nanette and then his brother Herb. They all branch out to invite other friends and youth to join them. Graham's parents were the first supporters of the organization – donating much of their time and money to their son's projects. These early volunteers are the start of a now established organization in Shiprock and surrounding areas with a membership of over 60 youth.

Since then Graham, tall and thin, is always on the move, consistently looking for things to change, fix and better in his town, "At this point in my life, I would just do anything for my community." With his peers, they hold meetings to develop projects which range from trash-pick-up days to graffiti removal, and wood hauling for elders. They commit themselves to learning more about their culture and language, and raise money for trips

and conferences. They all work, with Graham in the lead, to improve their town and their lives tirelessly.

However, some Navajos elders worry that the youth's lack of traditional knowledge and language make them unfit for leadership. In addition, the political and economic hurdles embedded deep into the lives of Navajos all over the reservation, severely deter movements like the ones that the NDYC look to implement and creates an overall atmosphere of resistance to change. Despite these odds, Graham and the NDYC will exert himself and the group to continue their work, move forward with their educations and hopefully inspire a whole new generation of Navajos to do the same.

TREATMENT

The Mayors of Shiprock is a 52-minute documentary which follows the lives of the members of the Northern Dine Youth Committee for over four years, as they work to have their voices heard in their community. Members allow our crew intimate access into their everyday lives, their families' homes and introduce us to the community. They exude pride and responsibility for their hometown. As the film follows their growth from teenagers into adults, the town of Shiprock follows them into such growth.

THE HISTORY OF SHIPROCK AND THE NAVAJO NATION

Shiprock's history takes the same trajectory as the history of the Navajo Nation – developed and created to serve the use and abuse of its land and natural resources. Because of a need to negotiate and extract these resources, the Navajo government was formed and since then it has consistently been strained by mismanagement and corruption. These issues have affected the Navajo people for years in particular the

youth, who seek to make changes. Archival footage illustrates the history of Shiprock as a once vibrant community, filled with businesses and opportunity and its subsequent transition into the town it is today, with unemployment at 25% higher than the national average and few job and school opportunities. Local leaders contribute their outspoken and political stances toward the Navajo Nation government as a major factor in the crumbling infrastructure of their small town.

THE NDYC AND ITS MEMBERS

Despite these odds, the members of the Northern Dine Youth Committee continue to work for their community. Graham drives around his town constantly seeing things that his community needs. He plans meetings, initiates events, and works tirelessly. Yet no matter how hard he works, he knows that the only way he will make real change is by completing his college education.

Graham's friend eighteen year-old Eliseo Curley, dreams of having land and a churro sheep farm of his own one day, but for now works diligently in the community to both learn and teach anyone about traditional Navajo culture so they can proudly own their identity. Lisa Cohoe, a small and quiet girl, joins NDYC and quickly learns to speak up and to take initiative. Christian Lee, lives at home with his mother and sister and works at the local Burger King in order to help out at home with expenses. As he learns to come out of his shell through his work with NDYC, he also ponders a life outside of Shiprock and going away to school, but because of his commitment at home, he stays. Herb, Graham's younger brother thinks ahead to a future as a civil engineer, as he works to paint over the ever-present graffiti on Shiprock's abandoned buildings. "I

want to modernize Shiprock,” he explains. Their numbers grow, as it does their passion and together they start planning and taking action for a better town.

DISCONNECTION BETWEEN THE YOUTH AND THE ELDERS

It doesn't take long to realize that change will not come easy, as many older Navajo have become accustomed to a colonized view of structure and government. Despite NDYC best efforts, many people in Shiprock resist what they are doing by spreading rumors and putting the group down, while the governmental structures of red tape, administration and colonialism, hinder and strain the youth voice and actions. Even Duane Yazzie, the Shiprock Chapter President, acknowledges that the youth voice is hindered by the status quo of the Navajo Nation government. Those in charge believe young people don't have the knowledge or experience to be leaders. Many of them site the loss of language and tradition in the lives of Navajo youth as the major factor lending to their inexperience. For this reason when many Navajos come back from college full of hopes and ready to work for their people, they turn right around and move back to the nearest main cities, frustrated that their own people don't seem to want to support their desire for improvement. The members of the NDYC see this happening and point out that they are making the effort to learn about their past and rediscover their language and decide to stay put in Shiprock.

Eliseo Curley continues to become a catalyst in this change with his deep knowledge of Navajo culture. He teaches weaving and some language, as well as answers questions about traditional beliefs and events like Navajo shoe games and Night Way dances. He also teaches them about butchering, giving them a hands-on lesson on the traditional practice of butchering sheep. Learning these Navajo practices brings the members one

step closer to understanding the workings of their community and shows elders that they are actively engaged in their culture and community.

Another of their attempts at creating a bridge between generations is their providing of wood to the elders. The members of the NDYC make several trips every winter to find, collect and chop wood for the elders in the community, who depend on it to heat their homes in the winter, delivering it right to their homes. Over time the NDYC persistence and soft approach may win the elders' hearts and minds.

THE NDYC LEARNS TO WORK TOGETHER AND WITH THEIR COMMUNITY

The NDYC continues its work through fundraisers, which creates opportunities to engage with other community members. Through food sales, NDYC generates the money it needs to do the work they do in the community- buying gas and chainsaws, paint and trash bags, etc.

As they plan to attend UNITY, a large Native American national youth gathering in Los Angeles, the NDYC plans and executes the largest fundraising event so far in conjunction with the local government, the "Dinner with the Nataani" event. These summer efforts prove to be a success as the NDYC raises the money to make the trip and to learn and experience life outside of the reservation. Most of all, they become more like a family, making their work all the more important. They return to Shiprock ready to make their efforts even more effective.

Once back in the reservation, NDYC makes the commitment to fix Nizhoni Park - the local park in Shiprock- which up to now consisted of a couple of tables on a dirt lot. They find access to an abandoned playground, make the trip to disassemble and reassemble

it in the new space. They skip the legal and administrative step to it, but install it anyway – choosing to make change on their own and giving the kids in community their first open area to play. Moroni Benally, a former candidate for Navajo Nation President describes their work best, “They don’t ask permission, they just do. They are the ones that are showing the rest of the Navajo Nation how to actively resist oppression and violence. It’s incredibly significant what they are doing.”

PASSING THE TORCH

When Graham started the NDYC years before, he always assumed that he would eventually leave to go back to school, which he does eventually. During this time, NDYC manages to stand on its own, continuing the winter NDYC activities like the Luminary Display events. Graham’s legacy also continues through the story of Adam Begaye, an NDYC member who runs for the local school board and wins, showing the impact of the revolving relationships between the youth and tribal leadership. But when Graham returns for the summer, he is forced to stay due to a local environmental tragedy.

In the summer of 2015, the EPA caused a devastating mine spill which dumped millions of gallons of mine waste into the local San Juan River. All of the fields in Shiprock are affected including the NDYC farm. The NDYC chooses to install drip irrigation and to haul clean water – in turn saving their field. This incident opens dialogue between the NDYC, the community and other community youth groups, one of them, 150 miles away, joining to help save their land. It is then that the NDYC realizes that it is time to reach out and spread their knowledge to other groups, especially Navajo groups, in the

region. In this moment, the first steps to real change and the dreams of Graham and the NDYC is finally realized.

STYLE AND FORMAT

The Mayor of Shiprock is an observational documentary with interviews delving into the lives of the Navajo youth. The vérité style echoes their youth and the change being implemented. The interviews allow the youth to share their experiences, their passions, their lives and their connection to the community, serving as the story's thread. The film also melds together time and place, their connection to their homeland and their ancestors, as their meeting places are all integral to their communities and their activities involve serving the elders.

Because I'm a member of the Navajo Nation myself, they trusted me and opened their lives to the camera, which stays in close proximity to the participants, almost becoming a witness and one more member of the team. Also while in production we anticipated manipulating time, so we shot time-lapse and quick motion photography to cinematically speed up and slowdown in the editing process to convey the passage of time in their activities.

The sounds and silence of The Mayors of Shiprock, also give us an auditory experience of the vast atmosphere of Shiprock: the absolute silence and stillness of the landscape is contrasted with the hollow sounds of town, the brakes and horns of semi-trucks and the hiss of the roadways, the techno/tribal music hybrids of the youth world and the traditional songs of their people, and the natural sounds of the world around

them. They develop connections to the land, as farmers, as traditional gatherers and as leaders. As they step outside these boundaries, the connections become deeper as they long for home and look forward to their return and to the continued futures of their communities.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The Mayors of Shiprock would be a valuable tool in teaching communities about how to fight poverty and oppression: the legislator or policy maker who needs to be educated about what reservation communities are facing and how their decisions change these outcomes, the teacher who is working to give her students hope in the inner city, the students in high schools and universities, who are looking for a way to create change in their communities. Our story can help facilitate dialog about change, helping to create new generations of activists, students, educators, legislators, who are willing to collaborate and generate real solutions within their own communities.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

We first met Graham Beyale – one of the founders of NDYC - on the set of another film that we were shooting in Shiprock almost six years ago. It didn't take long for us to find out about the work Graham had begun in town, and when we spoke with him about it, it was easy to see how devoted to his community he had become. I asked him if he would ever consider allowing us making a small film about what he was doing and he agreed. Within a year we were shooting.

When we began the film, we had originally called the film *The Mayor of Shiprock*, concentrating on Graham as our main story point. He was never comfortable with that role and halfway through production he came to us and said something that changed everything. "It's not about me, it's about "we." At that point I knew that the direction of the film really needed to change because, that statement was the essence of the film. It was about community and about the connection that we all have to home. That change in direction made the film stronger. And it made me think about my own connections to my hometown just an hour south of Shiprock.

The film was not easy to make. We made at least fifty different trips to Shiprock to film the members of the NDYC, collecting well over seventy hours of footage. We were invited into members' homes and into the collective community of Shiprock every time we came to shoot. It was inspiring to be around so many youth who wanted to make change and to watch their paths reveal themselves in front of our cameras. We have come to know and love all of the members of the Northern Diné Youth Committee as we watched their lives flourish and grow in front of our cameras for the last five years.

As a director, I have always made a conscious effort to make films about my community because I knew that those stories didn't really exist. If I wanted those stories to exist, I knew that I was going to have to make them a reality. Making documentaries like *The Mayors of Shiprock*, allows me to tell the story of what is happening in my community today and how our lives are unfolding in real time. It's the truth and that is what is most important to me.

PRODUCTION STILLS







56 MINUTES – FEATURE DOCUMENTARY

RAMONA EMERSON – Director/Producer/Editor

Ramona Emerson is a Diné writer and filmmaker originally from Tohatchi, New Mexico. She received her degree in Media Arts in 1997 from the University of New Mexico and has worked as a professional videographer, writer and editor for over twenty years. Ramona is a Sundance Native Filmmakers Lab Fellow and a Time/Warner Storyteller Fellow and is a graduate of the 2013 CPB/PBS Producers Academy at WGBH Boston. Ramona just finished the first draft of her novel, *Shutter* and recently received her MFA in Creative Writing (Fiction) from the Institute of American Indian Arts. Her latest documentary, *The Mayors of Shiprock* was funded by Vision Maker Media/PBS/CPB and by the newly awarded Post Production grants from the NM Film Foundation. Emerson also received a Tribeca All Access grant for a new media/app design for *The Shiprock Experience*, a companion and community development project being created alongside the documentary. She currently resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she and her husband/producer, Kelly Byars run their production company Reel Indian Pictures with their son, Max.

KELLY BYARS – Producer/Sound

Kelly Byars is a member of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations of Oklahoma. He moved to New Mexico in 1983 and attended the Institute of American Indian Arts where he graduated in 1985 with a degree in Three-Dimensional Art. He has worked as a stone sculptor for over twenty-five years with exhibitions at local and national venues. Byars then attended the University of New Mexico where he received his B.A. in Media Arts in 2004 and his M.A. in Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies in 2009. He has produced several films as co/owner of Reel Indian Pictures in Albuquerque, New Mexico and has worked as a contributing faculty member at the Santa Fe University of Art and Design and an adjunct professor at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

FERNANDA ROSSI – Co-Writer

Internationally renowned writer and speaker Fernanda Rossi has collaborated in more than 500 fiction scripts, documentaries and fundraising samples, including two documentaries nominated for the Academy Award® and many that received funding from ITVS and National Film Board of Canada. She has given her seminars in more than 15 countries for over 40 film organizations, festivals and markets, such as Hot Docs and Sheffield Doc/Fest. In addition, she's is a trainer for special programs and grant evaluator for foundations. Her book *Trailer Mechanics: How to Make Your Documentary Fundraising Demo*, 2nd Edition, is according to industry professionals the bible on demo production.

BRENT MICHAEL DAVIDS – Composer

Film Composer Brent Michael Davids is the country's top award-winning American Indian composer, and a citizen of the Mohican Nation. In 1996, Davids composed his first feature film score, commissioned by the Santa Fe International Film Festival for "The Silent Enemy" (1929: Paramount) that was performed live-to-picture at the Grand Illusion Theater. Considered the senior fellow of American Indian composers, the world's most renowned ensembles have repeatedly commissioned him, including the Kronos Quartet, Joffrey Ballet, Chanticleer and the National Symphony. The award for Best Original Music Composition" went to Davids in 2015 at the Native American Indian Film Festival of the Southeast for his orchestral score to "Iroquois Creation Story." In 2011, Davids won a Silver Medal for Excellence in Original Scoring from the Park City Film Music Festival in Utah for his 90-minute orchestral score to the animated feature film "Valor's Kids" (2011). That same year, Davids was invited to conduct a month-long tour of Russia, lecturing and performing in Khabarovsk, Birobidjan, Vladivostok and Moscow under an award from the US-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission of the American Seasons in Russia program. In 2006, the National Endowment for the Arts named Davids among the nation's most celebrated choral composers in its project "American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius," along with Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Foster, and 25 others. Many of his original orchestra scores, for films like "The Silent Enemy" (1996), "The Business of Fancy Dancing" (2002), "Dreamkeeper" (2003), "The World of American Indian Dance" (2003), "Last of the Mohicans" (1929/2003), "Bright Circle" (2007), "Raccoon & Crawfish" (2007), and "Opal" (2012) have appeared on ABC, Hallmark, NBC, PBS, NPR, NAPT, AIROS, and the National Geographic Society. He has garnered the Distinguished Alumni Awards from both of the universities he attended, NIU (1996) and ASU (2004), and has been nominated for the prestigious CalArts Alpert Award two times (1995, 2006). With two university degrees, Davids trained at Redford's Sundance Institute with film composer Shirley Walker (A League Of Their Own), and apprenticed in London with film composer Stephen Warbeck (Shakespeare In Love). A Great Film Needs A Great Composer! www.filmcomposer.us

PATRICIA G. ANTELLES – Camera Operator/New Media and Website Development

As an emerging media creator and evangelist Patricia works on cutting edge experiential media projects. As a story-based Content Media Producer, she is a frequent collaborator with filmmakers, artists and groups producing participatory story-based experiences. Her passion for emerging technology research, design and prototyping

experiences is renewed when asked to promote engaging and important immersive works in public space conferences and exhibits.

MELINDA HESS – Camera/New Media Contribution

Melinda Hess is a Jewish artist, film editor and currently Director and producer of documentary films. Her career spans thirty years in film, video and interactive media. She extends her editing skills to interactive as a time-based media creator. Her background as a film editor inspires her interactive video sensibility and narrative approach to non-narrative storytelling. Melinda is filmmaker in Residence at [San Francisco The Jewish Film Institute](#).

OUR SUPPORTERS



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