

Idaho documentary garners national attention

Community: Director says she made her first film because she was mad

By Eric Muhr - IPT

NAMPA -- An Idaho filmmaker won national attention this year for a documentary on racism that was prompted by her anger with the Idaho Legislature.

Sonya Reyes-Rosario, who flew from meetings at the United Nations to the Hispanic Cultural Center of Idaho Sunday, participated in a showing of her film as part of the Dia de la Raza Celebration.

Reyes-Rosario is also the executive director of the Women of Color Alliance. She said she made her first documentary because she was mad at the Idaho Legislature, when in 2001, tribal governments asked the Legislature to remove the word "squaw" from geographical names across the state. She said the word is a racist reference to women's genitalia.

"It wasn't removed," Reyes-Rosario said.

She then traveled the state to interview native women for the documentary, "The Historical Impact of the 'S' Word: From One Generation to the Next."

The documentary pairs personal interviews with aerial views of Idaho wilderness.

Valerie Fast Horse was the first interviewed.

"This word is given to beautiful places," Fast Horse said. "That is not a beautiful name."

Fast Horse said legislators do not find the word offensive because they do not understand its strength. She suggested the state translate the word to its closest English equivalent.

Another native woman, Janet Campbell Hale, said tribal governments were unsuccessful with the Legislature because they lack political power.

"We don't have the numbers," Hale said, and that the word hurts women.

"The word squaw is not cute," she said. "It isn't harmless. It's offensive."

Reyes-Rosario said each of the state's 105 legislators was invited to a showing of the film. None came. She said some have since seen the film.

The first showing was at Idaho State University. Reyes-Rosario said a group of nuns requested a copy and then showed the film in Grangeville.

Reyes-Rosario said the film has been shown in four reservations and at the Coeur d'Alene tribal casino. She has also taken the film to a number of film festivals.

"This was done for Idaho," Reyes-Rosario said. "It's now being requested around the country."

She said her next documentary will be called Tiny Voices. It will focus on women in rural Idaho.

"I want to tell a story about women who have a powerful voice because of their struggles," she said.

Women of Color produce film

The Women of Color Alliance produced the documentary, "The Historical Impact of the 'S' Word: From One Generation to the Next." For more information on the documentary or this organization, call 344-4914 or send an e-mail to info@wocaonline.org.