

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM

Traditional storytelling adapts to modern media

By DEDEE PYA GUTHIKONDA
Edina High School

There's a scene from the classic TV show "Little House on the Prairie" in which Pa Ingalls describes Indigenous people scouring the land "like wild animals." It's no surprise that throughout history Native Americans have been scrutinized and vilified in the media.

This was only exacerbated during the 1970s recession, when more than half of Native American news outlets went under, further removing their voices from the media and making them bystanders to their own stories.

MIGIZI, a Native American-led nonprofit, opened its doors in Minneapolis in July 2019, providing an outlet for Native American voices to be heard in the media. "Migizi" means bald eagle in the Ojibwe language, signifying communication, reporting and ethics. "One of the greatest things as Indigenous people is we've always been storytellers," said Binesikwe Means, lead media instructor at MIGIZI.

While history has sought to erase Native American voices from the narrative, MIGIZI is fighting to bring them back in.

MIGIZI's First Person Productions program trains youth in 21st-century media skills,



Courtesy Jacob Vang

Native American nonprofit MIGIZI continued its summer programming, despite the pandemic and the loss of their building to fires that blazed during unrest in late May.

such as social media marketing, but the training doesn't end in the classroom. Participants partner with small businesses and produce marketing content through social media to help the businesses grow.

"We as an organization are always trying to find ways to partner with our community and come together to create solutions for problems that exist," Means said.

While the organization was founded to give Native American voices a role in media, its programs have since expanded. MIGIZI now helps at-risk youth pursue their interests and share their voices in various fields.

For example, the group runs the Green Jobs Pathway program, which focuses on renewable energy and prepares youth to graduate from

high school to secure a career in the green economy.

Although MIGIZI works with youth from diverse backgrounds, Native American values are at the core of everything they do.

"We call ourselves the stewards of this land. It's a big part of our belief system that you never take from the Earth without giving something back, and these kinds of ideals

really tie into the whole green energy and green movement," Means said.

This summer, students have been picking sage and learning how to make traditional medicines. They have also gone into schools that have a large Native American student population to work with those students on cultural teaching and knowledge. One particular lesson was called "wigwam-a-tree," combining geometry with the ancestral knowledge of the wigwam.

Through all its programs, MIGIZI aims to help youth realize the power of their voice. Students are given credit for attending protests and writing about how that experience affected them. Many of them are also on the forefront of organizing youth-led protests, especially in the wake of recent events in Minneapolis.

"We try to give them all the tools they need as well as we can, allowing them to go out in the community and find out what creating real change looks like," Means said. "One of the biggest things that we never have any issues or problems with is when we ask them to do something social justice related or tell us something that's on your mind. ... People are always joining in the con-

versation."

During the recent Minneapolis protests, MIGIZI served as a safe space for protesters to receive snacks and supplies. Through it all, it focused on the community. However, after flames from nearby buildings spread rapidly, its building was among those that burned down. Afterward, it didn't take long for the strength of MIGIZI's community to rise.

"We had a healing event the day after our building burned; we all just kind of came together as a community. We cried and laughed. We did everything to be able to find a place of healing," Means said.

MIGIZI has since moved to a different space and is now continuing with its summer programming. "MIGIZI is more than a building," Means said.

"A lot of times in the communities that are underrepresented, they are not necessarily always the place people go to when they want to hear a voice," she said. "We really look at empowering our youth and giving them the opportunity to tell their stories from their own perspective."

If you would like to donate to help rebuild MIGIZI's building, please visit migizi.org/support-us.

"Food is a basic need and basic right, and when you don't have your basic needs met, it's really hard to focus on anything else. I think a lot about that."

Emily Eddy White, director of development and marketing at the Food Group



Courtesy Eric Wilson

Volunteers from City Church packed 1,300 pounds of harina de maiz (yellow corn flour) for partners at Community Emergency Service. Harina de maiz is a staple for making many culturally connected foods such as tamales, pupusas, arepas and tortillas.

The Food Group responds to heightened state of need

By BOBBY VERHEY
St. Paul Academy

In the middle of a pandemic and economic downturn, food scarcity is growing in the Twin Cities. More people are hungry, and charitable food distribution is at an all-time high, according to Emily Eddy White, director of development and marketing at the Food Group.

"Food is a human right," said Eddy White. This mantra fuels the activity of the nonprofit organization, which has been fighting hunger throughout 30 counties in Minnesota and Wisconsin since 1976. But the need right now is greater than ever, she said.

Eddy White, who has been with the Food Group since 2006, said she has seen a heightened state of need this year. Since April, the organization has been providing double the usual amount of food. Recent events have led to new partnerships with organizations like Second Harvest Heartland, the city of Minneapolis and Twin Cities Food Justice to distribute food in neighborhoods such as Powderhorn, the site of a once sprawling camp for the homeless, and near the place of George Floyd's

death. The killing of Floyd by Minneapolis police, which occurred on May 25, sparked protests and violence that damaged local grocery stores.

Access to nutritious foods and fresh produce is becoming a challenge for many, Eddy White said, because of "grocery stores having to close, restaurants, places that people in those neighborhoods really depended on for food."

The Food Group has also responded to demand created by the pandemic. Normally, the organization relies on groups of up to 50 volunteers to sort and pack food in the warehouse located in New Hope. "We had to figure out how to do it safely with the pandemic," Eddy White said. "Just how do you have people come together to pack and sort food but also keep a safe distance? So, we have had groups of under 10 coming together and packing food every day at our warehouse."

Not only has packing been altered, but distribution of the food has as well, with the organization creating a drive-through pickup in order to socially distance.

"We've had to adapt a lot of our programs," she said.

So far, the Food Group has played a vital role in feeding the community in a time of great uncertainty. However, Eddy White expects the demand to only increase in the fall as unemployment benefits diminish. She said, "I think we had a good initial response (to the pandemic) and I think we still have a consistent response, but we're in need of volunteers right now, so that's definitely one of the things that we're trying to focus on."

What keeps Eddy White up at night?

"How do we most effectively meet the need? What are those gaps in the community that we need to be identifying and making sure that we as an organization are most effectively fulfilling our mission and our purpose?"

"Food is a basic need and basic right, and when you don't have your basic needs met, it's really hard to focus on anything else," she said. "I think a lot about that."

While Eddy White lies awake thinking about how these problems will be solved, someone, somewhere in Minneapolis falls asleep with a belly full of food thanks to the Food Group.

"That's why we exist," she said.

Video game maker is on a mission to uplift

By INDIGO DAVITT-LIU
The FAIR School, Downtown Campus

Using video games as her medium, Minnesota entrepreneur Jules Porter is continuing her mission to transform the video game industry from within.

Porter is currently working on "Ultimate Elder Battle Royale," a quirky game that envisions a world in which superheroes grow old and have to fight bad guys with canes and walkers. In this game most of the characters are Black, Indigenous and people of color.

By creating video games that center on BIPOC, Porter is hoping to empower young Black people, as well as cultivate empathy in those who don't experience racism.

In 2019 Porter founded Seraph 7 Studios and became the first and only Black woman in the world to own a console video game development company.

"The goal is to put out positive images of Black people," Porter said.

Porter, who has played video games for most of her life, understands well the simplistic depictions of Black people in video games, either as drug dealers or criminals.

"Assassins Creed" is a video game that puts players into different historical places in each rendition. It was praised for its diversity in 2013 when "Assassins Creed: Liberation" was released and featured a Black female protagonist. The game takes place in colonial New Orleans sometime after the French and Indian War, and the protagonist is the daughter of an enslaved woman and her captor. At certain points, players have to dress up as people who are enslaved to complete missions.

"I don't want to dress up as a slave in my fantasy," she said.

That's just one example of the simplistic — and negative — tropes that plague representation of Black people in video

games, Porter said: portrayals that fail to acknowledge the full humanity of Black people and perpetuate the view that they are dangerous — a view that has real-world implications, especially in terms of policing.

Porter hopes to undo unconscious biases through telling diverse stories in video games. In her view, "racism is within people's hearts, and to change hearts you need to use media."

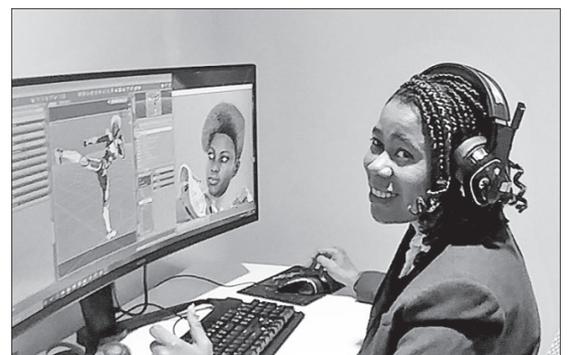
Using positive representations of Black characters, Porter also wants to empower Black video game players, an audience that is unacknowledged. She is also drawn to reshaping the Black experience in Minnesota, characterized by the economic disparities that exist between white and Black residents.

Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income for a white family of four in Minnesota is \$83,000, compared with \$31,000 to \$33,000 for a Black family of four and \$27,000 for a Native American family. Minnesota has one of the worst economic disparities between white and Black people in the country.

To reshape the Black experience, Porter is creating a curriculum to empower and drive students of color, especially those from low-income backgrounds, in video game development. Through this curriculum, youth will have the opportunity to become video game developers.

Porter hopes her program will expose students to the industry and eventually find jobs in it. By marketing this curriculum to low-income and Black students, Porter strives to create upward mobility and cultivate economic power within Minnesota's Black population.

"Ultimate Elder Battle Royale," the first game produced by Seraph 7 Studios, is set to be released in 2021. Follow @Seraph7Studios on Facebook and Twitter for updates.



Courtesy Jules Porter

Seraph 7 Studios founder Jules Porter is the first Black woman to own a console video game development company.