

Sobriety revolution gains strength

by Nancy Butterfield
Native American News Service

BOULDER, COLO.—Navajo tribal member Rex Harrison, who says that for years he was a skid road alcoholic, earned his master's degree in public health from the University of California at Berkeley last May at the age of 43.

Harrison said he plans to use his ad-

with one woman, today Alkali Lake village is 95 percent sober, and its members now conduct training for tribes throughout the United States and Canada.

A barometer of the sobriety movement's significance is the recent announcement by leaders of the 4,000-member National Indian Education Association that its annual con-

vention, scheduled for Oct. 6-10 in Anchorage, will be alcohol-free.

This is to be the organization's first officially alcohol-free conference in its 22-year history.

Many tribal alcoholism programs have taken an activist role in promoting community sobriety.

"Dry" reservations have stepped up efforts to eliminate illegal trafficking

of alcohol. Officials in some dry Native villages in Alaska have begun inspecting the cargo on every incoming flight and seizing the alcohol being smuggled in.

Leaders say the sobriety movement is a revolution that already is changing the face of Indian Country, and if successful, stands to liberate future generations of Native Americans.

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vanced education to help design and implement alcoholism and drug abuse treatment programs for American Indians.

A Vietnam veteran, Harrison has dedicated his personal life to helping other Native Americans come to terms with alcoholism and begin the recovery process.

For years, Harrison was part of the grim statistics of Indian alcoholism that have become so familiar. Indian Health Service and tribal alcoholism experts estimate that 75 percent of all Indian families have at least one alcoholic member and that nearly 100 percent have been affected in some way by alcohol.

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But today, like thousands of other Native Americans, Harrison is part of the growing sobriety movement in Indian country. It is a grassroots movement that is springing up on reservations and in Indian communities from Alaska to Florida, with the Shuswap Tribe of Alkali Lake, British Columbia, leading the way.

The Canadian tribe gained international attention three years ago with the release of its award-winning film, *The Honour of All*. Produced by Choctaw filmmaker Phil Lucas, the film chronicled the tribe's struggle and eventual victory over alcoholism which had ravaged an estimated 95 percent of its adult members.

After a 15-year effort that started