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Hip hoops

South Dakotan performs American Indian dances and songs to teach students about diversity

By Katherine Lewis

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Kevin Locke stands before a standing room-only crowd in the Naples High School auditorium. As the music plays, he picks up a hoop and starts to spin it. Then another, then another.

By the time he is finished, Locke has used 28 hoops to create everything from flowers and wings to orbs and ladders. More importantly, he has the full attention of the teenage audience, who give him a standing ovation when the song ends.

"If you want to do this, you have to put your mind to it," he said. "That's why I use different colored hoops. We are all very diverse, but we all have a place in this world."

Locke, a Lakota Sioux dancer and indigenous flute player, performed at several Naples and Immokalee schools last week as part of National American Indian Heritage Month. His visit was made possible by the United Arts Council of Collier County, the Miracle II Project and Redlands Christian Migrant Association Community School.

Locke said while he is sharing his heritage with the students, his presentation is not about offering a cultural presentation.

"We are encouraging the students to be who they are and to appreciate diversity," he said. "I want them to see how we are interconnected and how we all share universal human values."

Locke of South Dakota has taken his message to 85 countries and 50 states.

Sophomore Brittany Tummarello, 16, said the presentation was interesting and exciting.

"It's good because we are not sitting in class and reading about it in a book," she said. "We get to see it hands on."

Naples High School Media Specialist KT Brill said Locke's presentation will help the students with their reading and writing skills.

"Kevin is a triple threat. He is a storyteller, a musician and a dancer. I think he is really encouraging to the kids," she said. "How many opportunities do you have to get to see someone who is a Lakota? It adds something to the curriculum."

In addition to dancing, Locke played his indigenous flutes for the students. The songs ranged from the solo flute to him playing the flute over a jazz track. He also performed sign language to articulate American Indian themes.

"This was a universal language that was created years ago as a way for the different tribes to communicate with one another," he said. "We are diverse, but we all share a beautiful heritage."

One of the highlights of the presentation was when Locke called 14 students on stage to learn how to hoop dance with him. Locke told the students that the hoops represented peace, harmony, balance and wholeness.

"Unity is created through dancing," he said.

Senior Mallory Hill, 17, was one of the students to dance with the hoops.

"It was a little fun. It was different. It was harder than I expected," she said.

Mallory said she liked learning about Locke's culture.

"I think it is a good idea to present different cultures to the students," she said. "A lot of people don't consider how diverse we are."

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