

## Northern Arapaho Tribal Committee

*By Jonathan Barela*

The Northern Arapaho Tribal Committee (NATC) is based in the Blue Sky Hall in Ethete, WY. The NATC job is to supervise the maintenance of the Blue Sky and Great Plains community halls on the Wind River Reservation, along with preparing the halls for birthdays, feasts, wedding's, powwows, funeral feasts and give-aways. They also prepare and set up the Arapaho and Ethete area outdoor powwow grounds.

All members of the NATC are elected by the tribe every two years and are a six person group. The current Chairman of the NATC is Bill Armour, the co-chairman is Eugene Ridgley III, Treasurer is Thurlo Jenkins and Tovah Harjo is the secretary. Homer Fighting Bear and Lawrence Bell round out the committee.

The NATC prepares the reservation powwow grounds by cleaning up any debris that have been accumulated, make sure there is electricity available and that there is an adequate amount of portable toilets available. They also do this for the annual Sundance ceremony and provide the security patrol for the weeklong ceremony.

The Northern Arapaho Utilities program recently handed over the grave digging services to the NATC since they now own a back hoe. When there is a funeral on the reservation, families can contact the NATC and request their assistance in the digging the grave if the family isn't planning on doing it themselves. The NATC will also set up the community halls for the funeral services or feasts by making sure the halls are opened, the floors are covered with rollout carpets, tables and

chairs are available and set up and that the heating systems or cooling systems are working properly.

Both community halls in Arapahoe and Ethete are over thirty five years old and are in need of major renovations to accommodate the size of the tribe. The NATC is looking to seek funds to renovate and/or expand the halls or to completely build new and bigger community halls. The tribe has nearly tripled in size since the halls were first built and it's because of this growth that bigger halls are needed since the tribe uses the halls for a great deal of different reasons.

This past fall, the Blue Sky Hall was closed for several weeks following a water break from the upper level hot water storage that flooded the lower gym area in the hall. The water had damaged the gym floor and caused the ceiling to collapse in the Women's shower room. The entire gym floor in the hall had to be replaced and the ceiling repaired in the shower room. What delayed the re-opening of the hall was the resulting mold growth that had spread as a result of the flooding. The mold had grown along the walls, under the floors, in the ceiling and all over in the women's showers room. Before the hall could be reopened, all the mold had to be cleared out since it constituted a health hazard.

The Blue Sky Hall is now open and the Northern Arapaho Diabetes Program re-opened their exercise room and is once again open to the public. Tae-Kwon-Do classes are being held in the gym as well, along with EMT training classes which happen in the evening throughout the week. After the classes, the gym usually opens up for the nightly open gym session. The Wind River Tribal College also uses the hall during the day for its basketball class that it offers.

At the Great Plains Hall in Arapahoe, a new exercise room has been opened for public use. The Council of Elders uses the Great Plains Hall on occasion for their meetings. The Northern Arapaho Tribal Economic Development Commission is also based in this hall.

Both halls are used by tribe for a variety of uses that range from large family dinners to the General Council meetings that are held by the tribe every three months. If someone wants to use the halls for any reason, they need to contact the NATC and fill out a request form and pay a twenty five dollar fee, unless the hall is being used for funeral purposes, then the fee is waived. For all other use, the NATC has a first come, first serve policy to be fair and not show favoritism to anyone.