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2021 Truth and Reconciliation t-shirt design unveiled

Education and resiliency are the focus of Chataya Holy Singer’s design that adorns t-shirts created to commemorate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Thursday, September 30, 2021, a joint initiative between the University of Lethbridge and the City of Lethbridge.

Holy Singer, a Bachelor of Fine Arts student majoring in the University’s art studio program, is a Blackfoot artist with a personal connection to the residential school system and the themes and issues at the heart of the country’s new national day of reflection.

Her design features First Nation, Métis and Inuit symbolism and can be interpreted in various ways with each symbol conveying its own message. Holy Singer says the overall significance of the design weaves the educational journey for Blackfoot students and resiliency through the past, present and future.

“Education is our new buffalo — our new resource for survival,” says Holy Singer, who has rooted her work in the Niitsitapiisini — the Blackfoot way of life. “We can learn from our past, to understand our present in order to guide the future as we continue to dismantle previous teachings that were put in place to remove our identity.”

“With our education, we can continue to remove these teachings by replacing them with the knowledge inherently passed down from our ancestors and implementing them into our current systems.”

The national day of observance is on the same day as Orange Shirt Day, a symbolic day of commemoration that grew from Phyllis Webstad’s story of having her orange shirt taken from her at the age of six when she arrived at St. Joseph Mission residential school. Her story created an opportunity for discussion on the aspects and experiences of the residential school legacy.

For Holy Singer, the invitation to create the University’s t-shirt design was special and personal. She previously designed shirts for the City of Lethbridge and the Reconciliation Lethbridge Advisory Committee.

“I knew I was going to come up with a design that contributes to the perspective of what it means to be an Indigenous student in post-secondary. I personally know the impacts that residential schools have within my own family,” she says.

Many Indigenous communities spent the summer in mournful reflection, as unmarked graves were discovered at multiple former residential school sites throughout the country.

“For me, the unmarked grave discoveries brought up memories of what my mom had told me about her experiences in residential schools,” says Holy Singer. “These recoveries triggered a lot of sadness and anger that I felt for not only my late mother, but for our people who had suffered from this act of genocide. These children were our relatives. They were our ancestors whose stories were never told and are now being let free where they can finally come home.”

The City of Lethbridge and the Reconciliation Lethbridge Advisory Committee was keen to partner with the University to promote a collective community message of reconciliation and healing, with education the driving force behind these important conversations.

“The City of Lethbridge is really excited to be able to partner with the University of Lethbridge to showcase the work, voice and knowledge of Chataya Holy Singer, and through it, encourage community members to learn more about the legacy of residential schools in Canada,” says City of Lethbridge Indigenous Relations Advisor, Perry Stein. “The process of Truth and Reconciliation requires us to build strong bridges and partnerships. Working with the University on this important initiative, helps us to show up as one, unified community.”

T-shirts are available for purchase at the [U of L Bookstore for \\$15.99](#), with a portion of the proceeds dedicated to Indigenous student initiatives at the University. The City of Lethbridge is also making shirts available through various community partners, including the Lethbridge Public Library.

The U of L is planning several events during the week of Sept. 27 to allow members of the campus community opportunities to reflect on the multigenerational impacts of residential schools.

The City of Lethbridge, Reconciliation Lethbridge and community partners are also planning a series of educational and awareness raising events across the community, over the month of September. Working in partnership with community organizations and groups is one way Lethbridge shines brighter together. For more information on Reconciliation events, tools and resources head to www.lethbridge.ca/indigenousrelations.

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