

PROUD-SOURCING
THE ABRAMOFF
WHISTLE-BLOWER
IS FUNDING
SCHOLARSHIPS
ON ETHICS

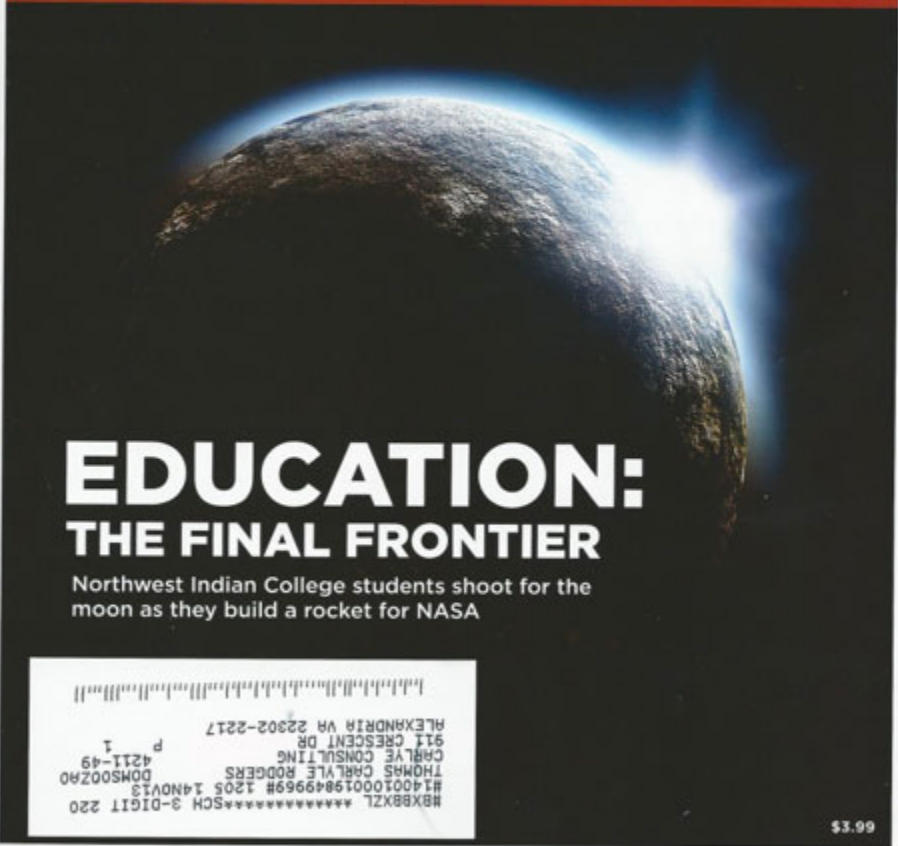


CROWD-SOURCING
BOLIVIAN TRIBES
ARE FIGHTING TO
PRESERVE THEIR
SPECIAL BRAND
OF JUSTICE



THIS WEEK FROM Indian Country TODAY

THE PREMIER NEWSMAGAZINE SERVING THE NATIONS, CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE



EDUCATION: THE FINAL FRONTIER

Northwest Indian College students shoot for the moon as they build a rocket for NASA

#BXBXZL *****SCH 3-DIGIT 220
#1400100019849969# 1205 14NOV13
THOMAS CARLYLE RODGERS
DOMS00Z#0
CARLYLE CONSULTING
911 CRESCENT DR
ALEXANDRIA VA 22302-2217
P 1
4211-49

\$3.99



Rodgers, seen here with his mother, set up an empathy scholarship for high schoolers to honor her.

Redemption Song

An Abramoff whistle-blower has created a law school scholarship for Native students

BY GALE COUREY TOENSING

IndianCountryTodayMediaNetwork.com February 8, 2012

The man who blew the whistle on former Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff has established a full-ride law school scholarship for American Indian students and has called it the Tom C. Rodgers O-tee-paym-soo-wuk Ethics in Government Scholarship.

Tom Rodgers, president and chief executive officer of Carlyle Consulting in Washington, D.C., is a lobbyist who specializes in tribal issues. "O-tee-paym-soo-wuk," he explains, is Cree for "a person who owns himself"—a concept that is at the core of ethical behavior. Rodgers, a citizen of the Blackfeet Nation and an alumnus of the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, established the scholarship to benefit a Native law student at his alma mater. The idea is to encourage and train exceptional students who already have a sense of owning themselves to develop the legal and advocacy skills to participate in the debate surrounding public policy and its creation—with ethics as their guiding value, Rodgers explains. One scholarship a year will be awarded. It will cover all tuition fees, currently at \$36,480 a year, and provide a stipend for living expenses. The scholarship includes stipends for an internship with Rodgers's consulting firm during the first summer and legal work or research of the student's choice during the second summer. The total scholarship value is around \$160,000 over three years.

This scholarship is one of the few positive outcomes of the Abramoff scandal, which continues to resonate in politics and the public consciousness. Abramoff, who defrauded American Indian nations of more than \$82 million, pled guilty in 2006 to charges of tax evasion, mail fraud and conspiracy and spent more than three years in prison. In an only-in-America success story, Abramoff, who was released in June 2010, is now making the rounds on TV talk shows, as well as visiting state legislatures and several prestigious institutions of higher learning, such as Harvard Law School, speaking as an "ethics guru" criticizing corruption in Washington.

Rodgers received an ethics award from the University of Denver for his

COURTESY ALCOREY HALL

role in bringing to light Abramoff's criminal actions beginning in 2000, when rumors surfaced that Abramoff was charging client tribes many times more than the average \$10,000-a-month lobbyist fees, and that experience played into his decision to create his scholarship. "When we're confronted with a situation—a learning experience—are you just going to say, 'Wow, that was interesting' and then go out to dinner and a movie? Or are you going to use the experience as a call-to-action to assist others in learning what it meant to you and to them?" Rodgers says. "Out of that experience I learned that before you act you should submit the could-and-should question to yourself. You can do a lot of things, but should you do them? Whether it's legal is not the litmus test; whether it's ethical is."

Another factor prompting him to create the scholarship is the high suicide rate among Native youth. Rodgers says he could not help contrasting his youthful experience to theirs. As a teenager, he used to travel 60 miles with a construction crew from the Blackfeet reservation in Glasgow, Montana, to install septic tanks on the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux reservation in Poplar, Montana. The work was tough and dirty. "Let's just say that OSHA wasn't strictly enforced on those construction sites. I always said later that it was a great experience for politics to stand in a 12-foot-by-four-foot hole and have shit dumped on me all day," Rodgers jokes. "But then I read in the local newspaper that there was a suicide epidemic on the Fort Peck reservation, and it just made me extremely emotional because my memory of Poplar and the reservation is of blue skies and green wheat fields and meadowlarks and beautiful wildflowers and sage and the train that ran along the highway and me and three other Native American guys riding in the pickup at six A.M., and back again at night. And here were these youths killing themselves because of a lack of hope and opportunity. I viewed my experience there as liberating and it just broke my heart that these youth would be choosing a different route."

"I DON'T THINK YOU CAN BE MORAL WITHOUT BEING EMPATHETIC."



Abramoff now lectures others on ethics.

But, Rodgers says, the greatest inspiration in his life is his mother, Barbara Adele Rodgers: "My mother never went to college, but she always loved to read and always had an incredible amount of empathy. Whatever she feels, she feels incredibly deeply. She gave that gift to all of us kids. I don't think you can be moral without being empathetic," Rodgers's parents were married for 60 years, and after his father passed in 2009, his mother expressed two regrets in her life: that she didn't spend more time with

her children and that she never went to college. "I heard that, and I thought I wanted to honor her," he recalls. So, in addition to the Tom C. Rodgers O-tee-paym-soo-wuk Ethics in Government Scholarship, he has set up the Barbara Adele Rodgers Empathy Scholarship at Glasgow High School, in Glasgow, Montana, which he attended.

"It will be needs-based. I just want to avail that person who doesn't have the financial resources to participate and make his or her life larger. It'll preferably be someone like my mother who reads; it'll be directed more toward a literature major. I want it to reflect her life, and I'm going to have her interview the applicants and I will too," Rodgers says. The scholarship is structured to encourage students to continue their undergraduate studies for four years by providing more money each year. This scholarship will also be a full-ride award, but the amount will differ depending on which school the student attends and what the local living costs are.

The high school is thrilled at this expanded opportunity for its students. Bob Rennick, a guidance counselor, wrote to thank Rodgers last fall: "I know what people did for me to allow ~~me~~ ^{me} finish my education, and by passing it forward, I work endlessly trying to further the possibilities of as many students as I can. Your generosity will help that endeavor tremendously."

Rodgers says he is happy to be in the position to be able to provide the scholarship. "I owe it all to my mom," he adds.

The Glasgow High School administration will publicize the Barbara Adele Rodgers Empathy Scholarship internally to its students, who are the only ones eligible to receive the grant. But Native students from all over the country are eligible for the Tom C. Rodgers O-tee-paym-soo-wuk Ethics in Government Scholarship, and Rodgers hopes that many students will apply now during the scholarship application season. ♡

For information on how to apply for the Tom C. Rodgers O-tee-paym-soo-wuk Ethics in Government Scholarship go to Law.du.edu and click on "financial aid." Then click on "scholarship information."