

Lack of Local Services Inspire Lakota Family to Start Business

Big Crows utilize business loan from Lakota Funds to expand operations and fill gap in much needed local services for outdoor events on Pine Ridge Reservation.

After several years of using unreliable and expensive suppliers to furnish their outdoor sporting events on the Pine Ridge Reservation with porta-potties, Francis and Jennifer Big Crow decided to purchase their own and rent them out to other local people who needed them for events of their own. "There weren't any vendors nearby that we could rent porta-potties from, and the ones we did find were either really expensive or didn't show up," says Jennifer Big Crow.

The Pine Ridge Reservation is home to many outdoor events, such as sun dances, pow wows, sporting events, and weddings during the Summer months, so their small rental business took off. The Big Crows set their prices at a level they thought was reasonable and affordable for the local residents, which turned out to be around half as much as the other vendors who would service the reservation area. "We know what prices people around here could afford, and we weren't in it to get rich," states Jennifer.

As demand for their business kept up, Jennifer and her husband Francis decided it was time to expand operations. That is when they reached out to Lakota Funds. "The Big Crows came to Lakota Funds with a clear objective in mind and worked to meet all of the loan requirements almost immediately. Their business not only provides the reservation with a much needed service, but also provides an entrepreneurial example for their children to follow," states Tawney Brunsch, Executive Director of Lakota Funds.

The Big Crows began the loan process, which included completing a business planning course, with Lakota Funds in October and received their loan check by November 2, 2012. "Tonia Young at Lakota Funds was on the ball. If we didn't understand something, she would always walk us around the block a couple of times," says Jennifer Big Crow. She also comments the process with Lakota Funds was very smooth and went a lot faster than she expected.

With their \$25,000 loan from Lakota Funds, the Big Crows purchased additional porta-potties, a hand sanitizing station, a truck bed and tires for their company truck, computer equipment, and office supplies. "This lending opportunity has created a window of opportunity for them by increasing their capacity to take on larger events and service contracts," says Tonia Young, Success Coach at Lakota Funds who worked with the Big Crows. Timber Ghost Outdoor Services has grown from a small two porta-potty business to a much larger rental inventory that now includes 28 porta-potties, a public announcement system, speakers, timing lines, and canopies.

In addition, the Big Crows completed the Lakota Funds financial literacy course to help them make the best possible financial decisions. This additional course earned them "All Star" recognition by Lakota Funds. "All Stars" participate in multiple programs designed to build assets for Lakota individuals and families and are recognized for their hard work and dedication to making a better life for themselves and their family.

Probably the most profound effect of the Big Crows' entrepreneurial success will be realized through the experiences and knowledge gained by their four sons. The four Big Crow boys, ranging from elementary school to high school age, help their parents on a regular basis with the family business with things like deliveries and pick-ups of rental equipment. Jennifer says she teases the boys often by telling them, "You had better pay attention now because someday this will be all yours."

All kidding aside, Jennifer and Francis Big Crow have literally broken the cycle of poverty for their family. Their entrepreneurial values, knowledge, and experiences will be passed down to their sons, positioning them for a self-sufficient lifestyle - something that is not very common on the Pine Ridge Reservation yet.



Francis and Jennifer Big Crow, owners of Timber Ghost Outdoor Services, display their loan check from Lakota Funds that they will use to expand their business.