

Fellowship will allow Cash Cash to continue language preservation efforts

BY THE CUJ

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Phillip Cash Cash has received a fellowship to continue his work of preserving native languages from the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A total of 13 fellowships and 25 institutional grants were awarded as part of the agencies' joint Documenting Endangered Languages project – a new, multi-year effort to digitally archive at-risk languages before they become extinct.

Cash Cash, a doctoral candidate at the University of Arizona in Tucson, will use the fellowship (\$40,000) on "A Filmic Language Documentation of Nez Perce and Sahaptin."

Experts estimate that almost half of the world's 6,000 to 7,000 existing languages are endangered. The DEL awards, totaling \$4.4 million, will support the digital documentation of more than 70 of them.

"This is a rescue mission to save endangered languages," said NEH Chairman Bruce Cole. "Language is the DNA of a culture, and it is the vehicle for the traditions, customs, stories, history and beliefs of a people. A lost language is a lost culture. Fortunately, with the aid

of modern technology and these federal funds, linguistic scholars can document and record these languages before they become extinct."

Cash Cash was honored as the recipient of the 2001 Buffett Award for Indigenous Leadership in Conservation for his language preservation work among the Sahaptin speaking peoples of the southern Columbia Plateau. Languages he is most committed to working with are Nez Perce, Sahaptin, Cayuse, Klamath, Chinook Jargon and other Oregon languages. He used the Buffett fellowship to continue his language documentation work, elder outreach and cultural research at Tamastlikt Cultural Institute.

At the University of Arizona, Cash Cash has been assisting Professor Susan Penfield in a project called "Technology-Enhanced Language Revitalization." The project aims to teach tribal members in the use of computer software and other technologies to help preserve their languages.

As part of the project, six fluent speakers of Mohave and Chemehuevi learned how to record, preserve and digitally manipulate samples of their language with the help of special software installed on laptops purchased with a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Participants were already involved with language work either as teachers, librarians or consultants who were available to train on the UA campus.

One of the first sessions was on the use of PowerPoint and Audacity soft-

ware to create language lessons. Pictures from coloring books of Mohave and Chemehuevi were scanned and transformed into electronic images which were later combined with sound files created by the participants with the help of Audacity. These skills and language lessons encouraged the native speakers to learn additional computer skills and to use more complex software.

The DEL grants support a variety of researchers and reflect efforts to document dying languages around the globe. For example, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, N.C., was awarded a grant to translate and digitize 19th century Cherokee language materials from the Smithsonian Institution. Scientists at Cornell and Northern Arizona Universities will gather ultrasound and airflow data to determine just how the "click" sounds of South Africa's N/ u language are produced. Kristine Stenzel from the University of Colorado will document and analyze Purataouyo – an Amazon language that uses an extremely rare word order: object-verb-subject.

Researchers at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks will digitize 1,000 Yup'ik audio recordings for storage at the Arctic Region Supercomputing Center and assess the feasibility of creating a Northern Indigenous Languages Archive for the region's 200 endangered languages. Three DEL fellowship awardees will independently document several endangered Austronesian languages, including ones spoken in Taiwan, the Philippines and on Easter Island.



Phillip Cash Cash