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NEWS RELEASE

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ARCHITECT REVEALS MEANINGS IN UM'S NEW NATIVE AMERICAN CENTER

MISSOULA –

The University of Montana's new Payne Family Native American Center is draped in symbolism.

The \$8.6 million, 30,000 square-foot structure will be completed early next year. It boasts a circular, translucent entrance lobby atrium and gathering space with a canted roof pitched toward the east. The roof contains a long, slotted skylight that will admit the first rays of the rising sun and a central oculus, which brings light down to the center of the circle. At night the atrium's translucent Fiberglas panels will let the building glow like a tepee with an internal campfire.

What does it all mean? This is what the building's lead architect, Daniel Glenn, a Native American from the Crow Tribe of Montana, had to say about the distinctive entranceway:

“The Lodge Rotunda, or atrium, is symbolic of the tepee lodge – with its canted walls, eastern entrance and circular form – and internally the sun dance lodge – with 12 vertical poles,” he said. “The east-facing entrance canopy symbolizes a lifted entrance flap welcoming all who come, and the 12-sided structure forms a circle representing the 12 tribes of Montana and the sacred circle of life.”

Glenn said the trellis structure along the entrance plaza represents the shade arbor, which traditionally is used by Montana's tribes as an outdoor shaded area for cooking and resting in the summer. Adjacent to it to the south is the oval-shaped story-telling space, which is symbolic of the sacred sweat lodge. Seven circular Native herb gardens surround the story-telling area, representing the Salish tepee encampments that once stood on the campus site and the seven reservations of Montana.

“These three elements – tepee, arbor and sweat – form the traditional dwelling place for Plains Indians,” he said.

When completed in January or February 2010, the Native American center will house UM’s Department of Native American Studies, American Indian Student Services and related campus programming under one roof. It will be the first building of its kind on any U.S. university campus. Many features in the building have been designed to represent Montana’s Indian tribes, and the building also is symbolic of the universal Native American reverence for Mother Earth. It is designed as a LEED Gold building with dozens of green features, including its landscaping, which revives the native grasses and plants of the region.

Glenn is the executive director of Environmental Works of Seattle and is the principal for Glenn & Glenn Architects. He has architecture degrees from Montana State University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His work with Montana’s Crow Tribe was featured in a documentary titled “Aboriginal Architecture, Living Architecture,” which explores contemporary Native American building design.

For more information about the Native American center, visit this blog about the new building at <http://blog.umt.edu/nac>.

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