

# COMMUNITY NEWS

## Tess Potter, YAN member studying movie making in Hollywood

BY DON DECKER,  
YAN News

It takes lots of courage to jump into the frying pan of movie making in Hollywood. This is what Tess Potter did.

About 3 ½ years ago, Tess and her daughter Ashely moved into the heart of Hollywood next door to the Chinese Theater where some of the international TV broadcasts originate from for various entertainment awards. Ashley, who had just graduated from a Sedona high school, also went along with her mother and later returned to Arizona while her mother continued in Hollywood.

The LA Film School in Hollywood is one of the prestigious film schools in the world and the tuition is prohibitive for many people. But Yavapai-Apache Nation education department assisted with the tuition and parts of the living costs for Tess.

### Flashback

Tess had already been to the Zaki Gordon Film Institute in Sedona and had studied filmmaking there and graduated from there.

"They did absolutely nothing for me," she said about the now defunct Sedona school.

"The level of teaching between LA Film School and Zaki Gordon Institute is like being (taught) as (a) toddler to being an adult of knowledge," Tess said about the high quality of the LA Film School.

After the Sedona experience, Tess continued to work in the Verde Valley area working on small movie projects and at one time brought a whole film crew to record a cultural event at the community's cer-



emonial grounds.

Just prior to leaving for Hollywood, Tess and her daughter were barely getting by and selling frybread across the street from the Market Place in Tunlii just to make the rent on their apartment. In November 2016, the move was made to Hollywood.

### Present

For Tess, it has been a long struggle and now the end is near and she anticipates to receive her filmmaking degree this coming April of 2020. "My last class is in March and I hope to graduate either magna cum laude or summa cum laude with the grade point average that I now have a 3.93 GPA," she proudly exclaimed during an interview conducted at the Nation's administration building in late October.

The honor of summa cum laude is for the highest academic achievement.

The struggles

have been plenty for Tess. "It's easy to lose everything out there. Everything is face-paced, the vibrations is so much greater," she said about the busy city life.

The added challenge of cutting back on rent in LA also involves living with up to 4 people in an apartment who have each rented bunk spaces for \$750 a month as Tess has done.

The class time involves 4 ½ to 6 hours of class time daily then homework right behind it she said.

"I find myself getting to school at 8 in the morning and not leaving until 10 o'clock at night because I'm diligent and I want to do my work," she added.

"I gave up everything to go there and I also don't want to waste my time. If you want people to see you, you got to work hard out there and everyone is trying to chase the same dream," said Tess about the challenges of movie making.

"I really do like it. I miss it a lot when I'm away. It's like this energy that you feel and it makes you want to get up and move," said Tess with emphasis.

Tess is totally immersed in all aspects of movie making learning to be a director and producer.

"I write my own content, direct it and produce it. I went back to my Bachelors program and took up producing because I quickly realized as a director we don't understand the logistics of filmmaking and then all of a sudden you have contracts, licensing rights that I didn't understand so I realized quickly I needed to go back into the business of filming."

Finding that special niche is the ultimate goal of filmmaking and Tess has found the right ingredient that will propel her training in the business of film animation.

"Hopefully, I will sell my animation series with 5 networks and looking at Disney Cartoon Network.

'Little Big Heart' is about a young Native

girl who finds a book or a gifted book by the family with a moral story and she has to put the story line back in the book as the pages have become empty," said Tess.

"I do the storytelling, the writing and I am the producer looking for Native American artists who can do it (the illustrations and drawings to be used for animation). It's hard to explain the industry and understand (how)to copyright their images. This is all new to everyone and the indigenous world because they are trying to break down the doors," said Tess about getting her own foot in the door.

The Bachelor's degree and training in filmmaking will definitely help her.

Tess admires a new special Athabaskan TV children's program called 'Molly of Denali' that premiered in July of 2019 which is based on a set of morals that is being broadcast now on PBS. The Alaskan Nations show features indigenous leads.

Tess wants to produce a similar show. "I am

also learning what I've learned in morals and trying to do that with my Yavapai-Apache tribe," she added. Tess is working with a White Mountain Apache family to produce the pilot 'Little Big Heart'.

Things are looking on the bright side now as the end of film school is near.

Tess has made a key contact in West Hollywood not far from her school, the Gotham Group organization which produces children's TV programming that are interested in what Tess has to offer in children's programming.

"I got them to take a look at me. It was like winning the lottery. I got my foot in the door and I'm really happy to have them on board. I'd rather go out trying to uplift my people than sitting on the reservation and (deciding) what I could do with my day," said Tess Potter with a giant smile.



It's been 3 1/2 years since Tess and her daughter, Ashley, sold frybread on hot July days in Tunlii. Now, the well of progress is turning in Tess's favor...movie making.

## First person that people meet when they arrive at tribal headquarters: Suzanna Sanchez

BY DON DECKER,  
YAN News

Meet Suzanna Sanchez, the new administrative assistant for the Nation's front office. She is the nerve center for all communication coming into the Nation via the telephone network. Anyone whose name is on the directory must answer to Ms. Sanchez unless the phone recipient has a direct line.

Mrs. Sanchez has been on board since December 2 but most people have seen her at different offices in the past 2 years where she performed the duties of on-call specialist filling in the empty places for people who no longer work in that department or maybe they were temporarily off. This has included stints at social service, CHR, human resource department and higher education with Lisa Sandoval.

Mrs. Sanchez graduated from Youngker High School in 2013 (Buckeye High School District). Her mother is



Vonda Smith of Middle Verde and father is Dolores Ruiz.

Her grandfather was the late Victor Smith of Middle Verde.

Mrs. Sanchez attended Dental Assistant Academy with a certificate of completion.

She also brings with her a 6-year stint in the Arizona National

Guard with the 1120 Transportation Battalion in Glendale. She attended Basic Training and Advanced Infantry Training in South Carolina at Ft. Jackson Military Training Center. Interestingly, Mrs. Sanchez finished her Basic Training between her junior and senior

year of high school (2012). And after graduating from high school in 2013, she returned to active duty for another 3 months for her Advanced Infantry Training in South Carolina.

In January, 2018, she was discharged from the national guard after completing her 6-year

obligation to the military serving as a Human Resource Specialist with a rank of E-4. The national guard obligation gave her good insights and exposure to work ethics she said. Much of these transferable skills have been beneficial to her new appointment as administrative assistant.

"I learned a lot and it was mentally challenging but it was good for me-to get more organized, more detailed and focused," she said about her military training.

Mrs. Sanchez resides in Middle Verde with her 2 children and husband.



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