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For Immediate Release:

See Native American Lacrosse, Now the Nation’s Fastest Growing Sport, in Public Television’s Newest Documentary, Sacred Stick

Lincoln, Neb.: Lacrosse is now the fastest-growing game in the United States. Originally, Native Americans played the game centuries ago. Outright competitive, the game involves wit, strategy, and athleticism. Sacred Stick brings lacrosse from these two worlds into an engaging one-hour documentary that showcases lacrosse as a cultural window into Native American communities and their historical relationship with each other and the dominant culture.

A central theme showcased in the film is the importance of lacrosse to Native American culture. Because of its importance to so many Native people, sharing this small glimpse into the sacred game was an amazing experience for director/producer Michelle Danforth (Oneida) and co-producer/educator Patty Loew, Ph.D. (Ojibwe).

The film examines the historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of lacrosse—the oldest sport in North America—from the ancient Maya, to European contact, to the world famous Iroquois Nationals team. The sport’s name “lacrosse” was given by French settlers.

Lacrosse has adapted and endured within the dominant culture, just like Native peoples themselves. Many would be surprised to know that lacrosse has also been used in times of battle. On June 2, 1763, in an effort to restore French possession of Fort Michilimackinac during Pontiac’s Rebellion, the Ojibwe led an attack on British troops garrisoned at the fort by ruse of a lacrosse game. Ojibwe ball players intentionally threw the ball over the picketing and when British troops opened the gates to throw it back, the Ojibwe rushed the fort and overwhelmed its occupants.

The film takes a fresh, youthful look at historical facts related to lacrosse and intermixes it with modern-day footage, reenactments, rare photos, and commentary. Footage from the nail-biting overtime gold medal game between the Iroquois Nationals and Canada will keep viewers on their toes. “That game was so exciting… I’d be jumping up and down while filming,” remarks Michelle Danforth (Oneida), the film’s director and producer. The Iroquois Nationals team is an all-Native professional lacrosse team representing the Six Nations of the Iroquois League and they compete at the world level.

Throughout the film, the influence of lacrosse on other mainstream sports is also addressed. Baseball, for example, at the turn of the century, had many players using lacrosse sticks to pitch batting practice. As Loew sums it up, “Everywhere you turn, it seems, you bump into the sport of lacrosse.”

Educationally, the very first college to organize a lacrosse team was New York University in 1877. Today, there are 400 college teams and 1,200 high-school men’s teams in the United States. Loew shared her son’s encounter, “I heard about an effort on the Red Cliff Reservation to reintroduce lacrosse to kids. Problem was, although they’d found equipment and instructors, there were no other Native teams to play against. A couple weeks later, my son’s high school announced it would introduce lacrosse as a varsity sport.”

Because much of lacrosse’s growth can be attributed to young players of the game, Danforth and Loew have really tried to blend the sport with the game’s rich history and culture to make a documentary that’s different and more interesting for young audiences.
This trend has also become visible in recent years regarding Native Americans in the media. As someone responsible for molding future members of the media—sports world included—Loew says she wants to instill some of her enthusiasm for the news and accurate representation of Native Americans in her students at the University of Wisconsin.

As lacrosse surges in popularity, it has now become the fastest growing sport in North America. But for many Native peoples, it has and always will be much more than a game.

To watch the film’s trailer, visit www.visionmakermedia.org/sacred_stick. Sacred Stick, a National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) offering, will be available to Public Broadcasting stations March 1, 2013. For broadcast information in your area, or to view the film’s NETA webpage, visit www.netaonline.org.

About Vision Maker Media
Vision Maker Media, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) which receives major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, shares Native stories with the world. We advance media that represents the experiences, values, and cultures of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Founded in 1977, we bring awareness of Indian and Alaska Native issues to the broader public conversation while encouraging the involvement of young people to learn more about careers in the media—to be the next generation of storytellers. Vision Maker Media is also your premier source for quality Native American educational and home videos. Located at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we offer student employment, internships and fellowships. For more information, visit www.visionmakermedia.org.

About NETA
The National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) is a professional association that serves Public Television licensees and educational entities in all 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. We connect people and ideas by providing quality programming, educational resources, professional development, management support, and national representation. For more information, visit www.netaonline.org.

Additional Information Regarding Sacred Stick:

Feed Date/NOLA: March 1, 2013, at 1330-1430ET/HD04 STIK 00H1 via national distributor National Educational Association (NETA)

Run time: approx. 57 minutes

Credits: A film by Michelle Danforth (Oneida) & Patty Loew, Ph.D. (Ojibwe)

Sacred Stick is a co-production of Wisconsin Public Television & Vision Maker Media.

Funding for Sacred Stick:

Major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting & Vision Maker Media. Additional funding provided by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF).

Press Kit available online at: www.visionmakermedia.org/sacred_stick

Listen to the filmmakers’ interview online at:

http://www.visionmakermedia.org/producer_profile_michelle_danforth_2010
http://www.visionmakermedia.org/producer_profile_patricia_loew

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Educational Version (with PPR): $225.00 | Available February 2013

Home Version: $29.95 | Available March 2013

Sign-up to get notified of when the DVD becomes available: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SacredStick

Crew Bios:

Producer/Director
Michelle Danforth (Oneida) is an award-winning independent producer in Green Bay, Wis., whose work includes The Oneida Speak, a 30-minute documentary for Wisconsin Public Television (WPT). In 2005, The Oneida Speak was nominated for a regional Emmy® Award and received the Award of Excellence from the Indian Summer Film Festival in Milwaukee. Danforth’s other documentaries include She Who Walks, Memories of the Oneida Elders, The Trouble with Rice Lake, A Queen’s Circle, and Growing a Farm: Oneida Nation Farm. Danforth has also produced segments for WPT
programs, including *In Wisconsin*. Danforth holds a B.S. in Accounting from Edgewood College-Madison and a Masters of Business Administration.

**Co-Producer**

**Patty Loew, Ph.D. (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe)** is a professor in the Department of Life Science Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and former producer/host for Wisconsin Public Television. She is the author of *Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal* and *Native People of Wisconsin*, along with dozens of scholarly and general interest articles on Native topics. Her 2007 documentary, *Way of the Warrior*, explored the contributions of Native American veterans in the twentieth century and was shown nationally on PBS. In 2008, it received the prestigious Unity Award from the Radio and Television News Directors Association. Other award-winning television documentaries, including *No Word for Goodbye, Spring of Discontent, Throwaway Future*, and *Nation Within a Nation*, have appeared on commercial and Public Television stations throughout the country. Loew focuses much of her outreach on science projects involving Native youth and new media.

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