

# **NAC GRANTS RESOURCE**

## **Folk & Traditional Arts - Sample Biographies**



### **Zoria Zetaruk**

#### **Ukrainian Traditions**

Zoria Zetaruk is a unique Nevada treasure. She was born in Alberta, Canada, to Ukrainian immigrant parents and grew up with the traditions, foods, and crafts of that culture. She learned the art of *pysanky*, or decorated eggs, from her mother, who used to pretend she could not see well in order to get Zoria to draw the designs for her.

*Pysanky* employs a traditional method of drawing tiny, intricate patterns of animals, plants, and geometric designs on eggs with wax. The artist applies successive layers of dye, followed by more wax designs, until the egg takes on a dark, misshapen form. When the wax is melted and wiped away, a bright jewel of color and pattern appears.

*Pysanky* were traditionally made for Easter and taken to church for a blessing by a priest. Over the years, they have become symbolic of Ukrainian culture as a whole in North America. Zetaruk has taught *pysanky* at Las Vegas senior centers and in school classrooms for more than thirty years. For her dedication to and mastery of this intricate art—and for her generosity in sharing it so widely—Zetaruk received a Governor's Arts Award for Excellence in Folk Arts in 2000.

### **Tony Ilardi**

#### **Cowboy and Western Music**

Tony Ilardi loves to entertain people and performs original poems as well as old classic cowboy poetry and music. He grew up working on the cattle and sheep ranches near Truckee and spent a lot of time with his grandfather, the town blacksmith. His grandfather and mother got him started performing cowboy poetry and music at a very young age. He recalls singing the old classic, "The Strawberry Roan," on the Major Bowes show on KGO radio in San Francisco when he was three years old.

Tony recorded an album called *Campfires and Memories*, which includes both poetry and song, accompanied by his gentle guitar style. He has had his original poems printed in such publications as *Mother Earth News*, *Artifact*, *Horse Tales*, and the *Nevada State Journal*. He has been a featured artist at the Rhymers Rodeer at Minden, the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering at Elko, and for seven years at the Cowboy Campfire.

Tony has performed on stage with such notables as the Sons of the Pioneers, Riders in the Sky, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Rose Maddox, Don Edwards, and Waddie Mitchell. Tony lives in Fernley, Nevada, where he and his wife love to explore the beauty and intrigue of the high desert.

## **Andy Allen**

### **Paiute Language and Storytelling**

A member of the Walker River Paiute Tribe, Andy Allen learned the Paiute language and traditional stories from his family and friends. The language and narratives give him a strong sense of community and enable him to remain close to his Native culture. Because of this, he has become an advocate of language preservation. He has taught the language and narratives of Northern Paiutes for decades to individual students and huge audiences. He is skilled at teaching Paiute and is both an educator and entertainer who weaves in cultural and historical information about his tribe, and recites Paiute creation stories and narratives of traditional animal tales of “coyote” and “crow”. Living in rural Schurz, he eagerly travels far from home to the urban and rural reaches of the state to be certain that the commodity he holds most precious—the Paiute language—will never die.

Andy’s presentations may include teaching Paiute terms for objects, animals, and other items in a formal, structured manner. He is also skilled in the telling of traditional narratives (often humorous) in Paiute, allowing the audience to get a feel for the sounds and rhythms of the language before providing English translations. Other traditional Paiute storytellers, such as Ralph Burns or Ben Aleck of the Pyramid Lake Paiutes, or Marlin Thompson from Walker River Paiutes in Yerington, frequently accompany Andy. Andy says, “Stories are a good way to put children to bed at night, but they can also bring together and inspire people.”

The Paiutes are one of the major Great Basin tribes of Nevada, and language is one of the premier distinguishing features of the tribe. Northern Paiutes are closely affiliated with the Shoshone in the geographical region they inhabit today. Paiute stories often have humorous endings, or incorporate creation narratives with descriptions of ancestors and the landscapes they inhabited. People in the stories may take the shape of animals or tricksters and undergo physical or spiritual transformations.

As an elder in his community, Andy is looked upon as a classic “tradition bearer,” one whose spirit and personality are intertwined with his intent to share, preserve, and teach the Paiute language. Some believe that his is the last generation with the knowledge and ability to sustain the Northern Paiute language and traditional stories. It is a rare treat to experience Andy and his associates sharing their linguistic and storytelling traditions.