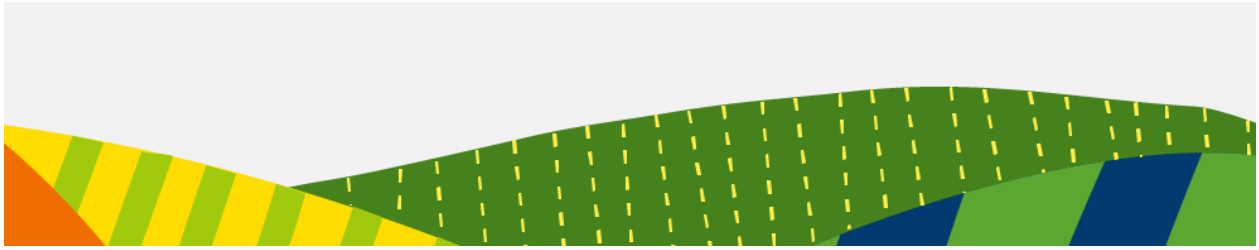

The Brookings Institution
Reimagine Rural podcast

"Connecting to family, community, and heritage in Eagle Butte, South Dakota"

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Guests in Eagle Butte, South Dakota:

ALISSA BENOIST, Director of Programs. Four Bands Community Fund

MARK BENOIST, Chief Administrative Officer, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe

CHERYL DUPRIS, Owner, Number Nine Steakhouse

KELSIE KAY HASKELL, Owner/operator, Kelsie Kay's Coffee Depot

LAKOTA VOGEL, Executive Director, Four Bands Community Fund

Host:

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Episode Summary:

In this episode of *Reimagine Rural*, host Tony Pipa goes to Eagle Butte, South Dakota, anchor of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation and Tribe. We hear how local business owners, tribal administration, and leaders from the Four Bands Community Fund are working to build credit, foster creativity, and center local voices in future development.

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A. BENOIST: Family's number one. That's how you were raised in the sense of you take care of your family, you stick up for your family, and you provide and support for your family. So, when you come back and you're here and you're part of Cheyenne River, it's just like the culture, your traditions, your family values, those are things that connect me here the most and why I chose to raise my family here as well. Being born and raised here and understanding the history of our people here and the things that we've overcome. This has always been home to me. Home is, where your heart is, in a sense.

PIPA: That's Alissa Benoist describing her emotional and cultural ties to Eagle Butte, South Dakota, the economic heart and center of the tribal government for the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe.

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In this episode of *Reimagine Rural*, we'll hear more about the complexities of Eagle Butte's past and present, and how it's emerging as a home for a new generation of Native American entrepreneurs and leaders.

I'm Tony Pipa, a senior fellow at the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution and your host for *Reimagine Rural*, the podcast series where I visit rural places across America that are making progress on their efforts to thrive amid economic and social change.

In our last episode, we started pulling stories from the mailbag that listeners are sending me. So, just a reminder to stay tuned for another at the end of today's episode.

But back to Eagle Butte. It's over 300 miles northwest of Sioux Falls, the largest city in South Dakota, and about 90 miles from the capital city of Pierre. Okay, I have to be honest—I always thought that the capital was pronounced Pee-AIR. But while the name has a French origin, a friend of mine who's from South Dakota schooled me that the locals say "peer."

Eagle Butte's importance is paramount to the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. The town is both the geographic and economic center of the reservation.

VOGEL: When we always describe the economy of Cheyenne River, we do mention that the heart of the center of Cheyenne River is the town of Eagle Butte. And so, a lot of the major anchor institutions are located in Eagle Butte, South Dakota. So, that includes your Indian Health Service, which is a major hospital system that serves the entire reservation. But most of the workers are employed here and live here. And then you've also got the school system. So, mentioning the Eagle Butte school system, which is large, that employs a large workforce. And then you've got the tribal government, which Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe employs over 500 people. So, most of those departments are located in Eagle Butte, South Dakota.

And then other than that, if you're not working in one of those anchor institutions—the school system, the hospitals, or the tribal government—you're most likely employed in the ranching, farming and ranching industry. We have a lot of land. That's the biggest group here. I think we have more cows per cap than people. So, a lot of ranching families live here and they're contributing to the economy in lots of ways. I believe there's over 30,000 head of Indian-owned cattle here.

PIPA: That's Lakota Vogel, the executive director of the Four Bands Community Fund. Four Bands is a Native American community development finance institution. We'll talk more about what Four Bands does a bit later.

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First, though, I want to appreciate just how diverse our rural landscape is in America. Eagle Butte has about 1,250 people, and it took me about an hour-and-a-half to drive there from the airport of South Dakota's capitol.

On the numbers, that's not too different from where I grew up in rural north central Pennsylvania—in a town of about 2,000 that's a little less than an hour-and-half drive from Pennsylvania's capitol in Harrisburg.

But the two are really worlds apart. On the drive to my hometown from Harrisburg, you pass many small towns and are surrounded by 18-wheelers on the interstate moving goods up and down the east coast. On my drive to Eagle Butte from Pierre, I saw mostly ranches, wide-open plains, and flat-topped inclines—as Lakota says, it's much more cattle than people. You're lucky if you see one car every few miles.

The reservation has a land mass about the size of Connecticut and approximately 12,000 people living there. Though it may be more remote than Shamokin or Globe, Arizona, which I visited in our second episode, the web of social, familial, and tribal connections fosters close relationships here. Lakota explains.

VOGEL: There's reasons why we all choose this. And I think that to me, it's about being neighborly and having neighbors that you can rely on. It's a system of support. You aren't remote out on your own. There's a community of people around you that support you. And it's you … don't even have to ask. It's just done.

But there's a feeling of being here. You put your feet on the ground and you can actually feel the earth beneath your feet instead of a sidewalk. You're connected to things here. You're connected to stories about your relatives from random people at the grocery store asking who you're related to.

And that that level of connectedness, the only way that I ever described it is like when I lived away from here it felt like, you know, when you're giving blood and you're just feeling kind of a piece of you drain out, like, you can last for a little while.

I did it for nine years away from here, but I sort of eventually just became a shriveled version of myself and needed to return and get my blood back.

PIPA: Every person I spoke to here expressed how important this connection to heritage, land, and community is. Here's Alissa again. She's director of programs at Four Bands.

A. BENOIST: Our community is tight knit. You know, I keep talking about families and traditions. A lot of people, it kind of depends on, you know, you have relatives everywhere. In our culture, we say we're all related in some way, shape, or form. And it's true. You can go to class with your three cousins or have a auntie that works at the cafeteria, or you have an uncle that drives a bus, you know. So, there's a really tight knit of support that you have going to school here.

PIPA: Alissa described how even playing high school basketball is a case study in community support.

A. BENOIST: So, it kind of takes a lot of family support as well. You know, you look at a map of our reservation and you're able to, you know, live 45 miles away and have to bus in and, you know, having to go to practice. High school, here sports are big. Cheyenne, Eagle Butte is, you know, basketball country. But high school basketball and athletics is kind of the ... takes the key here in the sense of, you know, it's hard work. You still got to travel, right? Your family has to find transportation for you to get to either your campus. And so, it's finding those support systems that can get you to and fro that can come to the games. Our gyms are always packed, regardless if we're winning or losing.

And you know, recently we got a charter bus here in the past three years, which has been really nice because some of those four-and-a-half hour bus trips on old cheese boxes, our students still call them right now, aren't always fun. Right?

PIPA: So, three to four hours to play a basketball game?

A. BENOIST: Yep. Yep. And our town follows them and supports them. So, that's kind of nice to see—

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—is that you always still have that support here, you know, regardless if it's athletics, regardless if you're starting a small business, regardless if you're starting a family.

PIPA: This interesting combination of distance and tight-knit community really sets Eagle Butte apart from the other rural places I've visited for the podcast. Eagle Butte also bucks the stereotypical image of a rural place having an aging, graying population. Here's Lakota explaining how this area's population pyramid is upside down compared to many parts of rural America.

VOGEL: We did a household survey of 800 people and the mode age reported was under the age of 1. And so, there's a lot of young population here. I think 45% of our population is under the age of 18. So, we stay here. We love it here. We want to make sure there's enough opportunity to keep up with that growing young workforce.

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PIPA: As a Native CDFI, or a community development finance institution, one of Four Bands' primary objectives is to unleash capital and investment to support that youthful energy and increase economic opportunity. Creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem, and increasing levels of wealth, are some of their main strategies for reducing the high levels of poverty that Eagle Butte has experienced over the past few decades. One of the people they've worked with is Kelsie Kay Haskell, who was born in Eagle Butte.

HASKELL: I have been a resident of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe my entire life with no intentions on leaving. I love how small it is. I love that I pretty much know everybody here. I know their families, their generations. I know from the grandkids all the way up to the great grandparents, I pretty much know a lot of family history of people that live here. That's probably my favorite part of being here.

PIPA: But even though she loves Eagle Butte, she dreamed of making it better by having a cool coffee shop. She grew up in and around Main Street, so she knew it well, and she knew how to work hard.

HASKELL: I wanted a coffee shop because there was nowhere here to buy an iced latte. I think that started in 2000. I must have been a freshman in high school.

I've worked in all kinds of industries here. I worked a little bit everywhere. Every building on Main Street I have, pretty much, you know, had something, either helped out or worked. But, you know, I grew up on Main Street, so I've been in all of these buildings my whole life. So, I was always a part of retail, customer service. Across from the coffee shop, which is now a pawn shop, my mom owned that, and that was a clothing store. And so I was 13 years old.

I worked in health care. I worked in gas stations here. I did the flower shop. I bartended. All these little jobs, sometimes two at a time, sometimes three at a time, and then went to school a couple of times.

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I don't have a degree, but I did go to college twice. But sometimes you don't need a degree. And then I have cows, and cows don't care if you have a degree or not. They're not going to stay where they're supposed to. So.

PIPA: But owning and running a coffee shop was trickier than working for someone else. And launching a downtown business in Eagle Butte has some complexities that aren't present in other rural areas. Lakota explains.

VOGEL: We're a credit invisible population. Many of our banks are ag banks and have chosen not to report on their credit bureau. So, you could have been living here for generations borrowing from the local banks and you're credit invisible because they don't report. So, we've built up a credit system here.

PIPA: So talk a little bit about that. What does that mean? Credit invisible, and they don't report.

VOGEL: Yeah, it was new to me too. I didn't know that banks get a choice of when or when they want to report to credit bureaus about borrowers' histories, but they get the choice not to. And so, many of our banks chose not to, mainly because their largest industry was not small business, it was ag producers, and it's an annual cycle of payments.

So, reporting on monthly payments didn't make sense for them because there were no monthly payments with an annual cycle. So, a lot of the populations just didn't have access and they didn't build in their infrastructure to report to the credit bureau.

PIPA: Like Lakota, I didn't realize that banks aren't mandated to report to the credit reporting agencies. In Eagle Butte, that has meant that even if people have a record of using and making good on their credit, their history isn't necessarily being reported to the three major credit reporting bureaus that calculate nationally-recognized credit scores. So, they might be able to get credit from the one bank that knows them. But any other institution, well, there's no way for them to show their history.

VOGEL: So, Four Bands noticed this back in 2009, 2010 and created a credit building product where you can come here. We set up ourselves to report to all three credit bureaus and start building people's credit histories. So, we've been doing that for ten years now. It's really, I think, developed quite a momentum around understanding credit here.

It helps people work with credit in different ways. Know this number that's assigned to you in America that you don't really have a choice about is really important to accessing capital.

PIPA: Other complexities have to do with the history of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe and its relationship to Eagle Butte.

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The reservation was created back in 1889 when the Great Sioux Reservation was broken up after the U.S. wars with the Lakota people. Eagle Butte was not always the economic and governmental hub for the reservation, though. In fact, that happened fairly recently, in the 1950s. Here's Alissa.

A. BENOIST: So, the history of, you know, why Eagle Butte is here and why the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe is here, it goes back to the flooding of the Oahe Dam and you know, the Cheyenne Agency, as it was called previously, was housed right on the river banks of the Cheyenne River and Missouri where it meets on the edge of the map there, you can see it. And when they put in the flood systems, the Pick-Sloan flood systems all the way from North Dakota through South Dakota, in other states as well, it really affected Indian communities in the sense of where they were located.

And so, we had to be relocated to a different location in the 1950s. It was coming, there was no way to stop it, right, whether you wanted to or not. It was happening. And so, it was where was this agency, where was this Indian agency going to go?

Eagle Butte was, like, jumping up and down saying, Come to Eagle Butte, we want you. We want you to be here. Wrote many letters to the Tribal Council and different authorities of the BIA, and the Indian Health Service to say, Come to Eagle Butte, we'll welcome you. We want you to be here. It was 50 miles away. And so everything you know, all the services, all the opportunities that they seen to build Eagle Butte into the town that is now.

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The Bureau moved here and said, Okay, we select Eagle Butte. And the process started. And so, it was recreating school systems, recreating the Bureau of Indian Education and Bureau of Indian Affairs offices and headquarters, and saying that Eagle Butte is the anchor, is the center of the reservation now.

PIPA: So, over the decades Eagle Butte has shifted from a predominantly white town to one where the population is now 90% Native American. And with the arrival of the administration for the tribe, land ownership in Eagle Butte took on added complexity. Tribal jurisdictions were added to the existing municipality. Lakota explains what that means.

VOGEL: So, there's deeded property where landowners actually own the property and you go to the county and you register your land with the county. Then there's the tribal trust land that is owned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and that's usually mostly tribal government property. And that's managed in a different way.

So, a lot of rural areas will … we have infrastructure issues with outdated buildings. You've got buildings built in the 1940s that don't have updated electrical. And so, if you're a startup entrepreneur and you're trying to think, hmm, will a coffee shop work in my community? It's hard to know. And it's really risky for you to go and buy an old building to try an idea on.

PIPA: Finding available deeded property downtown can be challenging, especially with the large presence of the tribal agencies.

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Four Bands recognizes that a healthy future for Eagle Butte and the reservation will depend on attracting investment and improving access to capital. To help residents interested in starting a small business, and build their financial skills, and knowledge of credit, Four Bands launched Cheyenne River Entrepreneurial Assistance and Technical Education, or CREATE. It's a business development course with a cycle of six-week classes. Kelsie Kay got her start there.

HASKELL: So, I start taking the CREATE classes. I graduated with that. And then there was just never any place to put it. And it's like, Well, do I put ... well I live in the country, so, is anyone going to drive 13 miles to get a coffee? You know, so then it's like, well, I asked Lakota, will you please build a building? You know, obviously nobody's gonna give me a chance here to buy a building. Nobody. There's nothing for sale. So, if you built something that we could rent, then I could have a place.

PIPA: Kelsie Kay wasn't the only graduate of CREATE who was articulating this need. Lakota explains what Four Bands did in response.

VOGEL: So, that class alone allowed us to sort of talk to the prime population and a group of stakeholders interested in starting businesses that we knew building a business incubator would be a viable idea. We did a lot of focus groups and community surveys. But we built a 6,000 square foot business incubator, which we're sitting in now. Half of it is Four Bands offices, because prior to this we were operating out of mobile homes that were set up like offices.

So, we finally upgraded in 2019 to a sit down, all of us located in one location, and then the other half is six leasable spaces, one purposely built as a commercial kitchen.

PIPA: Kelsie Kay was one of the first to take advantage of the incubator, and ultimately she became the first to graduate and move into her own building. But the story of launching Kelsie Kay's Coffee Depot, which she owns and operates, had its fair share of twists and turns. She had her eye on a particular building as the perfect location for her coffee shop.

HASKELL: The piece of property I wanted was this funeral home. And the reason I want it is because it had a corner door, it was prime time location, it was right across from the bank, corner lot. So, I had reached out to her in 2012 and I said, Mandy, will you sell this? And she said, We're really, you know, we're not ready. Even though they had this location in Eagle Butte, I don't want to say they didn't use it, but they used it for casket viewing, for you to pick out a casket. You know, none of the embalming was done here. Some of the paperwork might have been done here, but their main location is in Gettysburg and they do service the entire reservation.

PIPA: But even as she waited for the property to open up, her experience in the incubator let her know she was on to something. Kelsie Kay's sales in January of 2020, which she described as normally a pretty bad month for everybody, were, in her words, "insane," and even better in February.

Two important things happened next. First, COVID hit, which put lots of pressure on her business. Second, the owner of the funeral home offered to sell. Kelsie Kay was in a bit of a quandary.

HASKELL: And I think she must have approached me in October, so we were a few months in to corona. And so she had called me and said, I'm ready to sell. And I said, I'll buy it. But I said, Lakota, can we can we get the building even if it just sits there? At

least we'll own it. Right? And then I'll take out a separate loan for renovations or whatever we need to do. Or if we can just add on to it. So, she said, Yeah, we'll just do the paperwork, we'll get it bought.

PIPA: With the help of a contractor who was willing to get started without being paid up front, and with Four Bands providing financing, Kelsie Kay renovated and opened her coffee shop in the new location.

She fought to survive during COVID, and while she received a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, it was only for a little more than $4,000, so it didn't help much.

While she's still having to closely manage finances, it's clear: Kelsie Kay's coffee shop has become a downtown destination and a community gathering place.

HASKELL: You know, the atmosphere's good. People love it. I get compliments all the time from people that aren't from here.

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You know, we have people that come from different reservations and are detailed here to work. And I had a guy from Aberdeen and he's like, Kelsie, this is crazy. We don't have anything like this in Aberdeen.

PIPA: Kelsie Kay is not the only entrepreneur helping downtown move forward. Cheryl DuPris has also taken advantage of Four Bands training and financing to create the only full-service sit-down restaurant in Eagle Butte: Number Nine Steakhouse. She's a military brat who came to Eagle Butte from California when she was twelve years old.

DUPRIS: I was actually born in Japan. My mother's Filipino and my dad's Native American. So, I kind of have two different perspectives as to the way life is. So, fast paced, slow paced, moving home. This is my hometown, though. This is God's country right here. So, it's really where I call home.

PIPA: Cheryl became an entrepreneur almost immediately.

DUPRIS: I was 13 years old. And being like I said, we lived as a one family income home, I went out every morning and sold *lumpia*, which is a Filipino egg roll from my mother's country. And I remember growing up eating it at parties and events and whatnot. And it was just something that I'm like, I bet you they would really like it here, Mom. And so, there I was with a cooler selling *lumpia*, dollar a piece from about 8 to 10 every morning as a 13 year old during holiday, spring break. And then my mother finally was like, comfortable enough. And then she started doing it. And so, we was able to start our first family business here.

PIPA: Cheryl continued to draw on her mixed heritage to launch a food truck when she hit her 20s.

DUPRIS: Growing up and being able to experience, like, the way we gather as people, as Native Americans from around the country and see all our friends from different reservations at powwows, I figured out that there was a need. There was a need at these powwows, and that was the food that my mother and that I made was, like, Oriental food. So, I started my first food truck when I was 21, after I had my daughter.

Oh, man. It was like the most mom-pa set up you ever seen in your life. Today the there's food trucks and I have a, I have a food truck and a concession stand. And, but man, when we first started, we call it we called it the "Yellow Whale." We had this great big old 32-foot RV and we pull it up to a powwow. And back then, and probably still today, they have three burners in the RV. And so, then we had that set up. And then we set up a fry tent outside. And so, we had an enclosed building to keep for obviously for sanitation purposes and slinging fried rice and burgers out the window like you wouldn't believe. Man!

PIPA: It wasn't glamorous. Cheryl told me that they made $328 in sales during their first powwow, which was all mud and rain. But they built a whole circuit traveling to powwows in the food truck.

DUPRIS: But that's what put me through college. And that was where I was able to start the floor plans, the blueprints of everything else to come, which I am very fortunate and blessed to be standing in today, which is the Number Nine Steak house. And to be able to go from ranch to plate with my organization, with the two different entities.

PIPA: Yeah, you heard correctly. In addition to owning a food truck and the town's only sit-down restaurant, Cheryl is also a cattle rancher.

DUPRIS: Being a rancher, the whole point of that is to create beef. Well, no better place for beef than in my own steak house. So, that's been the focus that I've been actually on for a number of years now. And it all started with the leg work that I created in that food truck. And those are the things that I don't think people understand that builds that grit for actually committing to having a business here in rural country. Because that's really the foundation of how any business can honestly survive in this climate today. You have to have grit because it's not easy.

PIPA: That grit enabled Cheryl to successfully navigate the intricacies of launching her restaurant.

DUPRIS: I leveraged my whole life for my steak house. Yes, I did. At that time, I think by the time I opened my doors, I had $4 left. And it's been a whirlwind ever since.

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PIPA: Four Bands has had a hand in each of Cheryl's restaurant enterprises and ultimately helped her get a loan insured by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

And Four Bands' ability to make investments in Eagle Butte will continue to increase, as they are part of a consortium of nine Native CDFIs that was approved for approximately

$45 million from the Economic Development Administration. The EDA is a U.S. Department of Commerce agency that's making this investment available through a one-time program called the Build Back Better Regional Challenge using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act.

At the same time, it also seems clear that the future of Eagle Butte is tied to the leadership of the tribal government. So, I asked Mark Benoist, who's the chief administrative officer of the Cheyenne Sioux River tribe, to help us understand how the different levels of governance work. Oh, and yes, he's also Alissa's husband.

M. BENOIST: The tribal government is 15 council members, and there are three executives—treasurer, secretary, and chairman—and one vice chair that's elected from the council members. The council members are from six districts throughout the reservation: from Eagle Butte, which is a centralized hub and center of Indian Health Service—IHS—Bureau of Indian Affairs—BIA—the BIE, which is Bureau of Indian Education Schools, and then also basically the business hub for Eagle Butte.

The tribal government is one of three institutions here in Eagle Butte that are very key and critical to the business community, to the health and welfare of our residents. And so, the other two again are the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. So, when you look at those institutions along with the tribe, the amount of hiring done, the amount of money invested back into the economy from these three entities and the surrounding communities.

PIPA: The tribal government is responsible for more than 60 programs, from public safety to roads and maintenance to human services. It has to balance investments it would like to make in longer-term economic development with ensuring its residents receive the services they need right now. Like many rural places, the tribe is constrained by its financial base and would benefit from additional investment.

M. BENOIST: Well, I think there are a lot of a lot of pieces to the puzzle that sometimes work together, sometimes do not. And as an example, access to capital has always been a historical challenge for business development. And coming from a reservation, there are jurisdictional issues that sometimes come up.

In addition to that, when we look at business development, there's limited infrastructure here on the reservation. There is limited access to and from in terms of wares, meaning if you wanted to build a widget, you know, you have to haul in your materials from somewhere else. And we're located about as rural as you can get.

PIPA: The implication is that adding just one piece of infrastructure is not enough, that to be successful, there needs to be a holistic approach. This was borne out by his experience in launching state-of-the-art broadband for the tribe—while a step forward, complementing it with other improvements would have maximized the economic growth potential.

M. BENOIST: One of the businesses that I worked for, I talked about standing up, was called Lakota Technologies.

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At the time that we developed that business, we were and we still are in Indian Country, meaning amongst all other tribes, is a leader in telecommunications. At the time that business was initially started and developed was there right around 1999. And at that time we had infrastructure. We were getting fiber optic in place, which was a pretty big deal back then. I know that when we started marketing that business, we had better telecommunications in place here in Cheyenne River than they did in the metropolitan area of Denver as an example. But yet at the same time, we weren't able to leverage that just because other factors that come into play as far as economic development.

PIPA: Four Bands was started through one of the tribe's economic development strategies. And the tribe has created an umbrella company called CREDCO to launch other enterprises.

M. BENOIST: I think for the most part, when we start progressing forward, we've seen some positive steps, such as Four Bands, such as CREDCO. CREDCO is a umbrella company the tribe created to oversee several subsidiaries owned by the tribe, including a grocery store, office and janitorial supplies, a propane company fits under there, as does a landfill, our local Subway this falls under that as well. And I think there are a couple of other, a movie theater. So, those type of entities under one common board now hopefully will strengthen that.

PIPA: Mark reminded me during our conversation that the Cheyenne River reservation does not have a casino. Given the distance to the surrounding urban areas, and the number of casinos already around, it's not an attractive option. But there are other ways that the tribal government can spur investment and development.

M. BENOIST: Most recently through the planning office, we were able to secure a grant through the funding that came to EDA, the ARPA funding. It was … the money we secured was the Indigenous Community Grant. And what we what we did with our application is we submitted an application for a master plan. The tribe currently has a site—I forget the size of it, but it's a good sized site here, purchased just north of Eagle Butte. And this site we are going to have a new BIE school built, I would say within the next five years, which is going to generate employment but also generate jobs and even more importantly, be an update to our educational system facility, which is in dire need of replacement.

In addition to that, the location will allow us space to do residential housing for the school and will provide for space for construction projects, which could include the Lakota Thrifty Mart, which is a local grocery store owned by the tribe. Basically, they have outgrown their location both in size as well as our population base. And then also opportunity to instill other maybe incubator or infrastructure that would allow for

business growth, which is along the Highway 212 corridor. And then also out there would be a new tribal administration building, which we currently do not have.

PIPA: This is something that Kelsie Kay is also excited about.

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She's become a newly elected member of the tribal council. She told me that she ran because she was mad about the tribal government's 10-day shutdown of the town during COVID and her inability to access support to pay her employees. So, she committed her own leadership. She sees significant opportunity in the plans for the new school, and she's also determined to help secure new council chambers and a new tribal office.

HASKELL: I hope that we get all of our businesses open on Main Street. Every building should be open and operating, whatever it may be. If it's a gift shop, if it's a cafe, if it's a bead store, that was another part of my business plan. I just ran out of room.

PIPA: Kelsie Kay Haskell is just 33 years old. And that's indicative of where Eagle Butte is right now—increasingly in the hands of a young generation of entrepreneurial leaders who have a vision for building its economy and leveraging its social connections. There's energy and innovation. Alissa Benoist feels a responsibility to unleash that innovation.

A. BENOIST: My hope for Eagle Butte for the future, I guess, is just to provide more opportunities, right, for the next generation. I think that that's always the forefront just in our culture as well as you know, we always, our leaders and would always talk about the next seven generations, right. Seven generations ahead, planning that far it was always something that historically we tried to do and keep that in mind of what is it going to look like, what opportunities, what things are going to be here, what can we do now to provide that?

PIPA: In addition to the development that will come from the new Bureau of Indian Education school, Four Bands itself has bought property and is thinking of developing it. Here's Lakota on how they'll tackle this.

VOGEL: But what Four Bands does is we never push ourselves into any space, like we are a space for people to bring ideas to. We're a platform. But we're never going to point out that this is where an accounting building is needs to go. You know, we're never going to say this space right here is where an ice cream shop. That type of initiative really does need to come from an individual. Running a business in a rural community is hard. It is not easy. The risk is not just for the individual. It's also stress on the family.

We recently purchased 4.65 acres of available open space. I'm pointing to it outside here, and this is a podcast. But you know, and we're thinking about developing it. But Four Bands as a developer never wants to say, This whole thing is going to be for

restaurant. You know, we're going to grab a group of community members, get an advisory group, start talking infrastructure development, but it's going to be a phased development plan of what are the needs in this community, what would be supported?

PIPA: Lakota Vogel has her own vision for Eagle Butte's future.

VOGEL: You know, I think I think what Alissa and I represent a little bit is like next generation leadership in rural communities. And I think what's valuable about being a rural citizen and loving living rural is that you do have levels of generations that came before you that are telling you like nostalgia, like what it used to be like.

And I think it's important for us as we're making decisions about how to develop the economy here. You know, there are differences, but neither stage or era of rural living was better or worse than the next.

PIPA: No matter what, Eagle Butte's future will be grounded in that tight-knit sense of community, one of entwined histories, relationships, and familial connections.

[music]

Cheryl DuPris recognizes that's what makes it possible to juggle all the different facets of her life: mother, rancher, food truck owner, restaurant owner.

DUPRIS: So, I am … I'm really lucky. I'm very fortunate to have the support group that I have. And so I'll go feed with my dad. My son will go feed. I mean, everyone just kind of pitches in and it's kind of how it has to work around here because everything ... it's just us. It's a rural community. It's literally your cousins, your friends, your uncles, and kids, everybody you've grown up with just trying to pitch in to make it all work, I suppose.

One of my favorite quotes I kind of live by is, "Be humble on the mountaintops. Be steadfast in the valley, and be faithful in between." And I think that everyone can use a little reminder that be humble, be quick on your feet, but just keep going.

PIPA: What a beautiful and fitting way to capture the uniqueness that is Eagle Butte, South Dakota and the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation.

Thanks for listening.

[music]

And now let's go to the mailbag, where I heard about another community with a strong Native American presence, Ada, Oklahoma. A town of almost 17,000 about 85 miles southeast of Oklahoma City, Ada is home to the headquarters of the Chickasaw Nation and is an emerging rural hub for innovation and technology.

Jim Eldridge and the Ada Jobs Foundation have been working with our friends at the Center on Rural Innovation as part of their Rural Innovation Network, and helped secure a Build to Scale Venture Challenge grant from the Economic Development Administration to accelerate the growth of scalable technology startups in the region.

The Ada Jobs Foundation also partnered with the City of Ada to receive a grant through the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy program, or RISE, which is overseen by the Rural Development division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That funding will help transform the community's original fire station into an innovation hub. Already home to an online legal platform as well as the Pontotoc Technology Center, which offers training and education, Ada is seeking to maximize opportunities for its residents in the 21st century economy.

So remember—keep sending me stories of positive change happening in your rural town. Email me at GlobalMedia at Brookings dot edu. Maybe we'll feature your story on the air.

[music]

PIPA: "Reimagine Rural" is a production of the Brookings Podcast Network. My sincere thanks to all the people who shared their time with me for this episode. Also, thanks to the team at Brookings who make this podcast possible, including Fred Dews, producer; Gastón Reboredo, audio engineer; Zoe Swarzenski, project manager and policy analyst; Andrew Wallace, Heinz Policy Fellow; and Emma Uebelhor, former research and project coordination intern, all at the Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings; Ian McAllister and Colin Cruickshank, who traveled with me to some of these places, captured the audio, and took great pictures and videos; Chris McKenna, who helped get the show off the ground; and the great promotions teams in the Brookings Office of Communications and the Brookings Global Economy and Development program.

Katie Merris designed the beautiful logo.

You can find episodes of "Reimagine Rural" wherever you like to get podcasts, and learn more about the show on our website at Brookings dot edu slash Reimagine Rural Podcast. You'll also find my work on rural policy on the Brookings website.

I'm Tony Pipa, and this is "Reimagine Rural."