



The Seminole Tribune

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Tribe moves to next phase of operations in pandemic

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

For the first time since July 2021, the tribe has returned to its phase three operations during the pandemic.

On Feb. 28, all tribal buildings, businesses and recreation facilities reopened at full capacity as and all programs resumed to normal operations as part of the shift from phase two to phase three. Tribal Council and community meetings will resume in person with a mask mandate in place; Council meetings have been conducted remotely for nearly two years.

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. made the announcement in a video Feb. 18. He acknowledged that Covid-19 has taken a toll on the tribe with illness and loss.

For the last two years, with recommendations from health and public safety officials, the Tribal Council made decisions to create an environment focused on health and safety while keeping government services operational. Some departments worked remotely. Popular annual events – such as Indian Day, the Princess Pageant and Brighton Field Days – were cancelled while Tribal Fair and Pow Wow was reduced to an online event.

♦ See PHASE THREE on page 4A

February Covid-19 diagnosis concerns Leonard Peltier supporters

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Leonard Peltier supporters have another reason to push for the 77-year-old's release from federal prison – a February Covid-19 diagnosis.

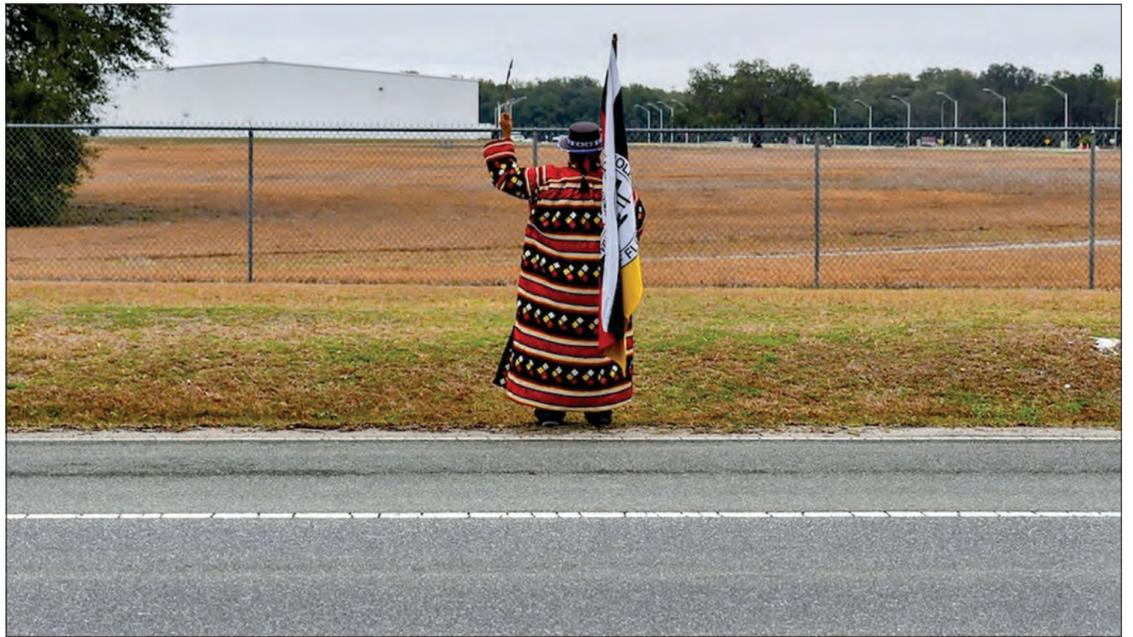
Amid concerns about his health, about 50 supporters – including Martha Tommie (Seminole Tribe) and Betty Osceola (Miccosukee Tribe) – held a rally and prayer vigil Feb. 6 urging officials to release the Native American who has been incarcerated for nearly 45 years.

Tommie and Osceola led a prayer circle at the vigil on a road in front of the Coleman Federal Correctional Institution in Coleman, Florida, where Peltier is serving two life sentences for the murders of two FBI agents during an uprising on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1975.

Many supporters and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, believe he was wrongfully convicted and consider him a political prisoner.

In addition to the Covid diagnosis, Peltier has diabetes, heart disease and an abdominal aortic aneurysm, according to the International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, which organized the rally. Sheridan Murphy, the group's president, credits its attorney for getting what little information is available about Peltier's health.

"He is elderly and compromised," Murphy said in a phone interview with the Tribune on Feb. 3. "He isn't in a medical unit, but in an isolation pod. We assume he doesn't need a ventilator; that's the limit of the information we have."



Martha Tommie, from the Brighton Reservation, stands in front of the Coleman Federal Correctional Institution Feb. 6 during an Indigenous-led prayer vigil for Leonard Peltier, who is incarcerated at the prison.

It is believed that Peltier (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) has been behind bars longer than any other Native American in the U.S. Peltier's family did not attend the rally, according to supporters in

attendance.

"Even though they weren't there, we prayed with them in spirit," Tommie said. "The prison tried to tell us to leave, but we were able to pray there anyway. The weather

was gloomy; it was a good day for a prayer. It felt like the spirits were there."

♦ See PELTIER on page 4A

Brighton Reservation has new radio station manager

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

Those tuning in to the Seminole Tribe's country music radio station – WTIR-FM 91.9 – can expect to hear a new voice on the air. Darlene Evans is the new manager of the station broadcasting from the Brighton Reservation. She started in the position Jan. 10, replacing 8-year station manager Charles "Chuck" Herlihy, who died last summer at 67.

Evans, 63, has spent more than four decades in radio – the last 32 years as an on-

air personality for KISS Country 99.9-FM based out of Miami. Fans knew her as the "Middy Mom" on the "Dar's Diner" show.

Evans was laid off in late 2020 at KISS Country after then-parent company Entercom restructured in the midst of the pandemic. Evans said it was a tough experience to go through, but she later saw the job opening with the tribe as a one-of-a-kind opportunity.

At KISS Country, Evans primarily lived at her home in Weston, but she won't have to commute that far to Brighton. In the early 2000s, she and her husband Larry bought

property in Lakeport, about 12 miles from the reservation. Evans mused that the drive to Brighton from Lakeport is at least an hour shorter than her previous commute.

But Evans' proximity to the Brighton Reservation isn't the only connection she has with the tribe. KISS Country has operated as a vendor at the Seminole Tribal Fair & Pow Wow since before the Hard Rock Hollywood was built. Evans has also introduced country music acts at tribal events.

Further, she said she was already a fan of WTIR before the job opening came up.

"I had always listened to WTIR when I was [in Lakeport] and talked to Chuck a couple times," she said. "He'd play Merle Haggard, Luke Combs, Tammy Wynette and the Everly Brothers. It was so much fun to listen to. I loved what Chuck did."

Evans said the structure that houses the radio station – the Florida Seminole Veterans Building – is also special to her. Her father, a colonel in the Air Force, was killed in Vietnam in a helicopter crash, and her brother, who died of cancer, was in the Army.

"When I found out I was working in the Veterans Building with the bronze [military] statues and the [Vietnam War-era] helicopter outside – it's amazing," she said with tears in her eyes. "I've always supported the military."

Evans said she's begun to meet the tribal community and plans to stay engaged – doing on-air interviews with tribal members and tribal employees when possible – and asking the community for feedback.

"The bottom line is I'm here to serve the tribe. Something that I really want to



Darlene Evans started managing WTIR on Jan. 10.

do is put on some Creek [speakers]. And I was told by [Brighton Councilman] Larry Howard: 'Don't mess with the Merle Haggard,'" she said with a chuckle.

Evans has two adult children – her 33-year-old son is a Miami club DJ and her 30-year-old daughter is a Miami makeup

artist. Evans' husband is an assistant to disco and funk musicians KC and the Sunshine Band.

The Florida Seminole Veterans Building is located at 800 East Harney Pond Road.



Darlene Evans met then-Miss Florida Seminole, Cheyenne Kippenberger, at a previous Tribal Fair & Pow Wow.

About those power outages... Renewables come to Big Cypress, Brighton

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — The tribe's leadership wants electric power disruptions on the Big Cypress and Brighton reservations to become a relic. An ongoing plan to use solar power and battery storage to achieve that goal has made considerable progress in recent months. The project is the first of its kind for the tribe.

Harvey Rambarath, assistant director of Community Planning & Development at the tribe, gave an update on the "rural

reservation resiliency projects" to attendees of the fourth "Renewable Energy and Sustainability Conference" that took place online Feb. 22 to Feb. 24 through the Native Learning Center in Hollywood.

Once completed, Rambarath said Big Cypress and Brighton would have a battery energy storage system (BESS) charged by solar panels. The battery storage would power generators at four different sites on each reservation so that essential services for tribal members wouldn't be disrupted during outages. It means less reliance on outside utility companies.

The rural nature and large size of Big Cypress and Brighton make both more susceptible to outages from storms.

Resiliency efforts were set into motion by Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. soon after Hurricane Irma caused significant power outages on both reservations in 2017 and affected government operations. Chairman Osceola would subsequently launch an energy committee to take a holistic look at renewable energy and sustainability projects the tribe could embark on. It was also the impetus for the annual conference – where tribal members and those who

work on behalf of Indian Country share information and ideas on similar efforts.

The Big Cypress project is scheduled to be completed first. Rambarath said it's now at a stage where solar panels configurations are being finalized at each location – the Frank Billie Field Office, senior center, health clinic and public safety complex. The solar panels are mounted in varying styles, such as on an existing rooftop or on the top of newly constructed carports in existing parking lots.

Rambarath said 60% of the design-build process for Big Cypress is completed and

has been submitted to the tribal inspectors office for permitting. He expects permits to be issued over the next three months, for construction to begin in June, and for the project to be completed sometime in November.

Rambarath said the Brighton project is in the request for proposals (RFP) stage. But the project will also involve four essential facilities – the administration building, public safety building, veterans building and the health clinic.

♦ See POWER on page 5A

INSIDE:

Editorial.....	2A	Sports.....	5B
Community.....	3A	Education.....	1B

Visit the Tribune's website for news throughout the month at seminoletribune.org

Editorial

A solemn milestone for Indian Country: More than 10,000 Covid-19 deaths

• National Indian Health Board

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of Covid-19 related deaths for the American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) reached 10,259 as of February 5, 2022. This somber statistic is a reminder of how devastating Covid-19 has been for Tribal nations. We mourn the loss of our family members, friends, neighbors, and Tribal citizens due to Covid-19.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, it is important that Tribal citizens remain vigilant. The best tool to prevent the worst outcomes from the virus is getting your vaccine and booster. The CDC data reinforces the importance of the vaccine and booster.

What does the CDC data show? The Covid-19 weekly death rate for the AI/AN community fell immediately after vaccinations began to be administered. The AI/AN weekly death rate peaked at 311 on December 19, 2020. This date coincides with when Pfizer and Moderna were both granted emergency use authorization. For the following six months, weekly Covid-19 deaths in Indian Country decreased to a low of 12 on June 26, 2021.

Weekly deaths began to increase again after June 26, 2021 although they have never reached the peak of 311 from pre-

vaccinated times. When the Delta variant was introduced into the community, weekly deaths in Indian Country began to rise and peaked on September 11, 2021 at 160, approximately half of the pre-vaccinated maximum weekly death toll.

What does this mean? While the weekly death rates have slowed down since the beginning of Covid-19, many Tribal citizens are still dying weekly of Covid-19. To stop this trend, show your Acts of Love to your community by:

-Getting your Covid-19 vaccine or booster shot

-Continuing to wear a mask or face covering over your nose and mouth in indoor public places

-Practicing physical distancing (stay six feet apart from others)

-Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitizer if soap and water is not available)

Visit the National Indian Health Board's Covid-19 Tribal Resource Center for more information on how to stop the spread of Covid-19 in your community. The Covid-19 Tribal Resource Center features previous NIHIB webinars, factsheets, and resources from partners like Area Indian Health Boards (AIHBs) and federal partners like CDC. It is also home to NIHIB's Act of Love webpage, where you can order Act of Love Post-Vaccination kits that include a face mask and hand sanitizer.

Every student should learn boarding school history

• Traverse City (Mich.) Record Eagle

History not taught will repeat itself.

That's why we applaud a bill introduced [in February] to the Michigan legislature that was crafted and proposed through a cooperation between lawmakers, including State Sen. Wayne Schmidt, R-Traverse City, and northern Michigan tribal leaders. That bill would encourage the Michigan Department of Education to help bring lessons about the state's Native American boarding school history into k-12 classrooms.

It's not surprising that mention of our state's painful history with those boarding schools isn't commonly surfaced in schools. But it's long past time our state leaders move to address the painful omission that persists in many history classrooms.

For more than 150 years the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs funded operation of more than 350 of those schools spread across the nation. Three of them were located in Michigan — one each in Baraga, Harbor Springs and Mount Pleasant.

The one in Harbor Springs operated until 1983, and many of our Indigenous neighbors have firsthand experience of the brutality that occurred inside the boarding school's walls.

Nationwide, the schools were a tool funded by the government and often operated by Christian missionaries, built to eradicate the cultural identities and traditions of Native American communities. Such objectives are documented in volumes of publications and documents generated by the people who built and operated the facilities.

Their objectives well known in most Indigenous families and communities where both history and trauma have been passed down from one generation to the next.

And in recent years, the schools' history has grabbed widespread attention as officials have discovered mass graves, many filled with children who died at the facilities, on former boarding school properties both in the U.S. and Canada.

Still, those lessons, and important acknowledgment of that history, doesn't make it into school history classes in our state.

That's why we are encouraged by the warm, bi-partisan reception the proposed change to the Michigan school code received in Lansing on Wednesday.

We are hopeful that enthusiasm will translate into an important change to our statewide history curriculum.

Because we are doomed to repeat history we aren't willing to teach.

This editorial is from the Traverse City (Mich.) Record Eagle (record-eagle.com)

Native history is essential to any successful public education

• Chuck Hoskin Jr.

Recently an online school in Georgia assigned a disturbing writing prompt. The school asked students to theoretically argue why removing the Cherokee people from their homelands on the Trail of Tears would "help the United States grow and prosper."

It showed an incredibly shortsighted approach to history, but fortunately we were able to correct it after talking with the school's administrators. We secured a promise from them to learn more about Native American history and to do better. For our part, we committed to provide educational resources and expertise going forward. We achieved all of this because both the school, and Cherokee Nation, were

willing to sit down, listen to each other and reach a genuine understanding.

The end result was a positive step forward in the teaching of accurate Native American history. Still, in too many public school curriculums, the history of America largely begins with European colonies. Our great societies prior to contact are largely ignored, and the painful history of removal isn't treated with respect. As a country, we should shift the timeframe and protagonists of our shared history.

Georgia was the Cherokee people's home before European contact. Although no tribes are present in Georgia today, more than 1,700 Cherokee citizens are currently living there.

◆ See HISTORY on page 3A

NCAI president: 'Doors once closed are starting to open'

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) hosted its annual "State of Indian Nations" address Feb. 14. The virtual event featured remarks by the organization's president, Fawn Sharp (Quinault), and was opened for the first time by the co-presidents of its youth commission — Jessica Lambert (Choctaw Nation/Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) and Simon Friday (Organized Village of Kake).

Lambert and Friday spoke about issues they said are important to tribal youth — the need for education reform in American schools; more resources and Indigenous knowledge to combat climate change; and a greater focus on mental health challenges and suicide prevention.

Sharp, who has been president since 2019, gave her remarks as the Covid-19 pandemic enters its second year — a pandemic that has disproportionately hit Indian Country in infection rates and deaths.

"The strain on our communities, our people and our leadership, has kept us physically apart — when our power as [Tribal] Nations comes from gathering together — and precisely at the time we need that connection the most," Sharp said.

Sharp noted that since the start of the pandemic, the Indian Health Service (IHS) received more than \$6 billion to combat it. Many tribal communities have since reported vaccination rates that are higher

than the general public.

The IHS investment is part of more than \$45 billion that has been committed to Indian Country through recent federal economic relief packages — including \$13 billion in new infrastructure bill. The access to such a level of funding has never been seen before among the nation's 574 federally recognized tribes.

"The inclusion of Tribal Nations in the political and public discourse over the past year has never been higher — and it's the decades of collective advocacy, education and outreach that have set the stage for the moment we are now in," Sharp said.

That moment, Sharp said, includes more tribal consultation and a historic number of Native Americans appointed to positions in the Biden administration — six so far. The most historic appointment has been that of Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo). Haaland has been credited raising the bar in a variety of ways on how the federal government should be working with tribes.

"Doors that were once closed are starting to open," Sharp said. "Doors that we open have become more welcoming in ways that neither we nor our ancestors have ever witnessed."

Sharp said the work continues in 2022, including to bridge Indian Country's digital divide — a lack of broadband access among many tribes — and the continuation of ending the era of offensive Native American mascots and names.

Legislation important to NCAI this year



Fawn Sharp is president of NCAI.

includes the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and passage of the Native American Voting Rights Act (NAVRA). Two other bills currently moving through Congress include the Urban Indian Health Confer Act, which would provide advanced appropriations for IHS; and the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act, which would establish a formal commission to investigate and document past assimilation practices.

"We've seen many promises fulfilled over the last year; we have seen strides where once there were baby steps ... If this year has shown us anything for certain, it's that it's never too late to mend broken promises," Sharp said.

Interior Department announces \$1.7B for water settlements with tribes

BY NATIVE NEWS ONLINE STAFF

The U.S. Department of the Interior announced Feb. 22 the allocation of \$1.7 billion of Infrastructure Law funding this year to enacted settlements that have outstanding federal payments necessary to complete their terms.

The announcement came one day after Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) visited Phoenix to underscore the Department of the Interior's commitment to Indian Country and the historic investments from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to address the Western water crisis.

On Feb. 21, Secretary Haaland and Congressman Tom O'Halleran (D-AZ) held a listening session with the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona. While there, Haaland heard from tribal leaders about the issues impacting local communities, including the climate crisis and the ongoing water crisis facing the West.

"Water is a sacred resource, and water rights are crucial to ensuring the health, safety and empowerment of Tribal communities. With this crucial funding from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Interior Department will be able to uphold our trust responsibilities and ensure that Tribal communities receive the water

resources they have long been promised," said Secretary Haaland. "I am grateful that Tribes, some of whom have been waiting for this funding for decades, are finally getting the resources they are owed."

Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.), who chairs the House Natural Resources Committee, praised the announcement.

"Today's announcement is a long-awaited moment in history, and I celebrate it proudly," Chair Grijalva said. "Too many tribal communities have been waiting years—even decades—to finally have access to the water they've been promised by the federal government. I commend Secretary Haaland for her leadership in fulfilling our trust responsibility and for recognizing the devastation that two decades of drought has caused in Arizona and the southwest. At the same time, I know these investments only solve part of the problem. Congress must get back to work to pass permanent annual funding for the many tribal water rights settlements that still have yet to be paid."

Secretary Haaland highlighted the transformational Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which is delivering \$13 billion to Indian Country, including \$216 million for climate resilience programs and \$250 million to support water and health infrastructure. These critical investments will help bolster community resilience, replace aging

infrastructure, expand access to clean drinking water, and ensure that everyone has access to high-speed internet.

On Feb. 22, Secretary Haaland, Senator Mark Kelly, Chairman Raúl Grijalva, Congressmen O'Halleran, Greg Stanton, and Ruben Gallego visited the Gila River Indian Community to highlight today's announcement that Interior will allocate \$1.7 billion of Infrastructure Law funding this year to fulfill settlements of Indian water rights.

Working in consultation with Tribes, this funding will help deliver long-promised water resources to Tribal communities, certainty to all their non-Indian neighbors, and a solid foundation for future economic development for entire communities dependent on common water resources.

Later, Secretary Haaland, Senator Kyrsten Sinema, Congressmen O'Halleran and Stanton, and Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego visited the Salt River to highlight the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and the work of the Rio Salado Project that is helping protect, restore and revitalize the Salt and Middle Gila River Watershed.

This article is from Native News Online at nativenewsonline.net.

Navajo Nation woman confirmed as chair of National Endowment for the Humanities

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The U.S. Senate voted Feb. 2 to confirm Shelly C. Lowe as the chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The White House is expected to make the official appointment in the coming days and Lowe will begin her appointment shortly thereafter.

Lowe issued the following statement after her Senate confirmation:

"I am honored and privileged to serve the nation as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities and am grateful for the bipartisan support of the Senate and of President Biden and Vice President Harris.

"Having grown up in a small rural Navajo community in Northeast Arizona, I have personally seen how the humanities can help sustain and strengthen individuals, communities, and institutions, yet I am alert to the fact that access to humanities resources remains unevenly distributed across our country. I look forward to working with NEH staff and the network of state and jurisdictional humanities councils to expand opportunities for all Americans to participate in and benefit from humanities-centered research, education, and public programs."

Lowe is a citizen of the Navajo Nation and grew up on the Navajo Reservation in Ganado, Arizona. From 2015 to 2021 she served as a member of the National Council on the Humanities, the 26-member



Shelly C. Lowe

the American Indian Studies Programs at the University of Arizona.

Lowe has served in a variety of leadership roles nationally, most recently as a member of the University of Arizona Alumni Association Governing Board and of the Challenge Leadership Group for the MIT Solve Indigenous Communities Fellowship. She has served on the board of the National Indian Education Association and as a trustee on the board for the National Museum of the American Indian.

Lowe holds a bachelor's degree in sociology, a master's degree in American Indian studies, and has completed doctoral coursework in higher education from the University of Arizona.

"It is no wonder that Shelly Lowe has been tapped to serve the public as Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities," Harvard University President Lawrence S. Bacow said in a statement. "She is an individual of extraordinary experience, insight, and wisdom, and she cares deeply about the humanities and the central role they play in all of our lives. Though we will miss her at Harvard, we know that her care and skill will be put to their best use as she works to enlarge and enhance the role of art, culture, and history in this country and elsewhere."

advisory body to NEH, an appointment she received from President Obama. Lowe's career in higher education has included roles as Executive Director of the Harvard University Native American Program, Assistant Dean in the Yale College Dean's Office, and Director of the Native American Cultural Center at Yale University. Prior to these positions, she spent six years as the Graduate Education Program Facilitator for

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Community



Tribe purchases land near Brighton, Immokalee reservations

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe's Sovereign Wealth Fund purchased a few parcels of land in September 2021 near the Brighton and Immokalee reservations.

The purchases, which were made through its Seminole Real Estate Fund, or SemREF, include the 2,240-acre cattle land formerly known as the Lakeport Ranch, just east and southeast of the Brighton Reservation with one and a half miles of frontage on State Road 78. The site has been renamed Rio Ranch Sweetgrass.

"We talked to Culture about the name and they thought it was a good one," said Jonathan Levy, director of the Sovereign Wealth Fund.

SemREF is the division of the Sovereign Wealth Fund that makes real estate investments. The fund's mission is to invest in core real estate investments to enhance the intergenerational wealth of the tribe.

Levy said the tribe has begun the fee-to-trust application process, which means the Department of the Interior places land into trust on behalf of the tribe, similar to the tribe's 2019 purchase of the McDaniel Ranch just north of the reservation.

Before Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) fast-tracked the process, it could take about 10 years to get land into trust status. Levy said he has stayed on top of the process by requesting monthly calls between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the tribe.

"As soon as we did that, we started seeing real motion and activity on the McDaniel property," Levy said. "We went from step two to step 12 in just a few months. The BIA expects to have [McDaniel] completed before the end of the fiscal year in September 2022. I'm glad to see they think this is as big a priority for the tribe as we do."

Alex Johns, executive director of the

tribe's Agriculture department, will manage the Rio Ranch Sweetgrass property. Johns said he plans to keep it maintained and in a pristine state by doing regular maintenance. The ranch contains 12 main pastures and some cow pens.

"The tribe will have cows here to maintain the grass," Johns said. "I'm glad the tribe is diversifying its real estate holdings. Land appreciates and there is a lot of value in that. For it to appreciate, you can't let it degrade. It's cattle property."

The tribe also purchased two properties in Immokalee: the S.T. Immokalee property and the Indian Camp.

The S.T. Immokalee parcel is about 32 acres adjacent to the rodeo grounds on the Immokalee Reservation. The land is commercially zoned and is located off of State Road 29, a major thoroughfare in the area. The tribe is considering several options for the land.

"Warehouse property has gone up in value over the last few years because of the pandemic and all the online shopping," Levy said. "We are exploring that."

The Indian Camp property consists of 160 acres that belonged to the Brown and Rowe families for many years. It is considered culturally significant since tribal families used to camp on the land for generations.

"BIA gives higher value to properties adjacent to tribal property," Levy said. "Although the Indian Camp isn't contiguous [to the reservation], it is culturally significant."

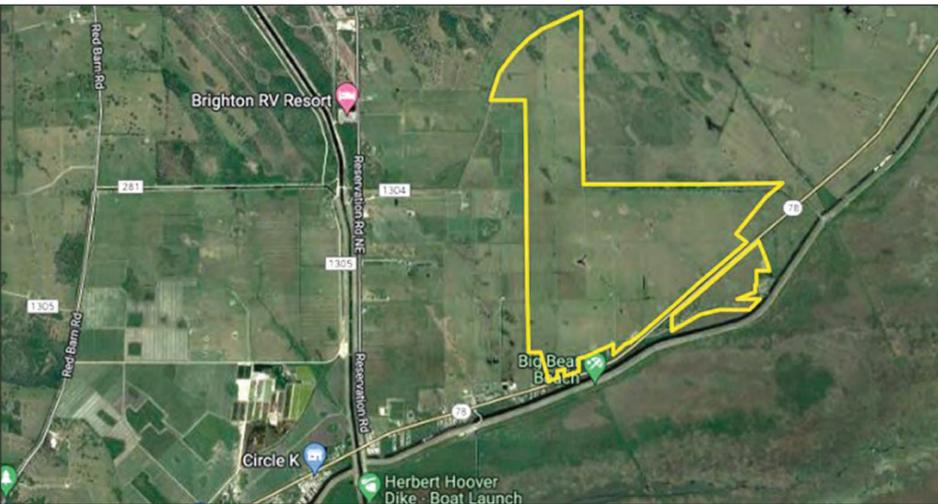
Each property in the Brighton and Immokalee purchases requires its own application for land into trust status.

In addition to the land purchases, the tribe's real estate portfolio has also grown in the past two years with the purchases of half a dozen multifamily buildings in the metropolitan areas of Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Denver and Tampa.



Courtesy photos (2)

Recent real estate purchases by the tribe include Lakeport Ranch (above) next to the Brighton Reservation and Indian Camp (below) in Immokalee.



Courtesy photos (2)

Above, the yellow outline shows the location of the Lakeport Ranch property along State Road 78. The property has been renamed Rio Ranch Sweetgrass. Below is a map of the Indian Camp property near downtown Immokalee.



160 Acres Downtown Immokalee

HISTORY From page 2A

In the 1832 Worcester v. Georgia decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Cherokee Nation is sovereign and not subject to the laws of Georgia. Despite the Supreme Court ruling, the state of Georgia continued pressure to force us from our homes, and President Andrew Jackson eventually signed the Indian Removal Act. The military put us in stockades and forced our ancestors to walk thousands of miles to Indian Territory in harsh winter conditions. This Trail of Tears killed upwards of 4,000 Cherokees, including many elders and children.

Our Cherokee ancestors who survived this atrocity rebuilt their lives on our reservation in northeast Oklahoma. The Cherokee people suffered greatly, but we never surrendered our sovereignty. This history contains important lessons for our lives today, but many textbooks still do not do it justice. We owe it to our youth and to our Cherokee ancestors to have these conversations.

Georgia is not alone in needing to improve the teaching of history. Other state education curriculums are lacking substantive materials, and some even debate reducing Native history lessons. Exposure to Cherokee history and Native history in America helps both Native and

non-Native youth better understand the roots of our country and appreciate everyone's culture.

Given an opportunity to learn, I think most young minds are curious and able to process difficult subjects. To respect our youth and honor our ancestors, Cherokee Nation will continue to offer meaningful dialogue and resources on our tribe and history to any student, teacher or school administration that needs them. By improving our appreciation of history, we build a better future.

Chuck Hoskin, Jr. is the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation. This opinion appeared in Native News Online (nativenewsonline.net).

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Big Cypress embraces 'Sunshine' drive thru

STAFF REPORT

BIG CYPRESS — Instead of pink hearts for Valentine's Day, the Big Cypress Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena was festooned with a sunny palette of sunflower yellow for the You Are Sunshine drive thru event Feb. 11.

The Big Cypress Council Office changed the Valentine's Day narrative to one of promoting care, love and respect for one's self to foster a happy life, supportive relationships and safe communities.

Not a speck of pink was in sight as the community drove through the arena where they were greeted by sunflowers, balloons and plenty of sweet treats such as donuts and candy.

Councilwoman Mariann Billie's office organized the event and handed out good wishes along with the treats.



Lewis Gopher Jr., left, and Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie pass out gifts to members of the Big Cypress community during the You Are Sunshine drive thru event Feb. 11.

Beverly Bidney (2)



A group of tribal members receive their gifts in an open air vehicle

Beverly Bidney



Edna McDuffie, left, and Marlin Miller-Covarrubias, who helped hand out flowers, enjoy their time at the event.

Beverly Bidney

◆ PHASE THREE From page 1A

"Difficult decisions had to be made knowing they weren't going to be the most popular, but the decision was going to be the best for the Seminole Tribe overall for health and safety," Chairman Osceola said in the tribalwide announcement. "With your help, we have persevered through the adversity to get to this point where we feel we can find a new normal acceptable to all of us."

In July 2021, the tribe briefly went into phase three before returning to phase two as Covid-19 cases spiked again.

Since a peak in early January amid a surge in the Omicron variant, cases and hospitalizations have been decreasing, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

Since the virus is still around and the pandemic is not over, a mask mandate remains in effect for all common areas of tribal government buildings.

"The last two years have been difficult for all of us, but our resilience as unconquered Seminoles have allowed us to overcome the challenges and adversity of Covid-19," Chairman Osceola said. "As we move forward, your Tribal Council will be taking the lead to ensure we wear our mask and we ask that you join us in this safety measure while we grow as a Seminole Tribe. Let's always remember the tribal members we lost and use their legacy to motivate us to work harder to keep each other safe. We cannot let our guard down just yet. Let's work together, find our new normal while continuing to keep each other safe. Please continue to wear your mask and look out for each other. Shonabish."

NCAIED receives \$300,000 grant

FROM PRESS RELEASE

MESA, Ariz. — KeyBank announced in January that it has awarded a \$300,000 philanthropic grant to the the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED).

The grant will be used to offer hybrid in-person and online Native Edge Institute training events in Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Utah and Washington that include business development training and counseling, as well as services specifically tailored to increasing Native and tribally-owned businesses' Covid-19 resilience.

◆ PELTIER From page 1A

Osceola included a summation of the day on her Facebook page.

"Today turned out to be a beautiful, powerful event," Osceola wrote. "You could feel the power of the prayers in the air. ... A lot of law enforcement presence, but they stayed back and even helped maintain traffic safety."

According to the Department of

Justice, more than 35,000 prisoners nationwide have been released to home confinement since the pandemic began, thanks to a provision of the CARES Act.

Peltier's supporters believe that he meets the qualifications for home confinement — in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines — due to his age and health.

"This has been stressful for his family and the people who are working

on his case," Murphy said. "The Covid-19 situation is escalating things and making it more urgent. Leonard meets all the criteria for early release to home confinement. He's not a threat to anybody; Turtle Mountain has asked for Leonard back."

Speakers at the event included Murphy, Robert Rosa and Garrett Stuart of the Florida Indigenous Alliance, traditional flute player Anamaria Vasquez and Indigenous musician Robby Romero, who sang a song he wrote about Peltier.

U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, sent a letter to President Joe Biden on Jan. 26 urging him to commute Peltier's sentence. Schatz, who is chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, cited a variety of factors, including Peltier's health status, age and time served, as to why he should be released.

"I'm not sure why he hasn't been released, other than politics," Murphy said. "That's the million-dollar question."

Courtesy photo

Members of the Florida Indigenous Alliance adjust a sign across the street from the prison.



Betty Osceola and Martha Tommie lead a prayer vigil during the rally for Leonard Peltier.

Courtesy photo



From left, Betty Osceola, Martha Tommie, Robby Romero, Anamaria Vasquez and others gather in a prayer circle outside of the Coleman Federal Correctional Institution.

Courtesy photo

Drilling opponents get good news, but battles continue

Texas company withdraws applications in Big Cypress National Preserve

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Texas-based Burnett Oil Co. withdrew its permit applications to dig on two prospective sites in the Big Cypress National Preserve on Feb. 22, but its pursuit to drill for oil in areas close to both Seminole and Miccosukee reservations might not be over.

Burnett indicated in a letter to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) that it plans to submit new applications. Stacy Myers, senior scientist and liaison for the Seminole Tribe's Heritage and Environment Resources Office (HERO), said Burnett will have to start the process over, which could take years.

Burnett had requested to dig on National Park Service (NPS) land in the preserve. Even though the preserve is part of the NPS, what is underneath the surface, such as minerals and gas, is privately owned.

In its letter to the FDEP, Burnett stated the NPS's decision to conduct an environmental impact statement (EIS) instead of an environmental assessment (EA) factored into the company's decision to withdraw the applications. An EIS can be

a long and expensive process.

"With the support against this from the tribe and everyone working together to help get this project denied, it goes to show you how when people come together they can really make a difference," Myers said about the withdrawal of the applications.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, the National Parks Conservation Association and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida are among the organizations that have expressed opposition to Burnett's applications.

Burnett's plans included a single well-pad with the use of three directionally drilled wells within the Noble Grade (about five miles south of the Big Cypress Reservation) and a single well-pad with four directionally drilled wells within the Tamiami site. Opponents have feared a directional or horizontal drill could extend drilling activity outside of approved areas.

Burnett provided no mitigation plan for the environmental concerns, including the threat to the water quality. Horizontal drilling is seen by opponents as a potential threat to the tribe's mineral rights.

A day before Burnett pulled its applications, Lewis Gopher, Jr., HERO mentee and Big Cypress Council office assistant, gave a WebEx presentation Feb. 21 to update the tribal communities about the activities of Burnett.

Burnett's plan for a pipeline was among the concerns discussed in the WebEx presentation. The plan included a 15-mile

above ground pipeline with an adjacent road, loading and distribution facility. In a letter to Thomas Forsyth, the preserve's superintendent, HERO requested an additional cultural assessment survey since the pipeline was slated to traverse culturally sensitive areas.

"Our biggest environmental concern is the magnitude of the pipeline and the potential for an ecological nightmare," said Danielle Simon, THPO compliance review supervisor. "It just can't be ignored."

Tina Osceola, Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) director, believes the Miccosukee Tribe is on the same page as the Seminole Tribe.

"The well pad is right next to their border," Osceola said. "Because of the horizontal drilling issue, they have zero confidence that Burnett won't be taking oil from Miccosukee land."

Gopher said the Miccosukee Tribe has launched a social media page opposing Burnett's plans.

In 2017-2018, Burnett was issued a special use permit to seismically explore for oil in the Mullet Slough area of the preserve. Extensive damage can be seen in satellite photos, according to opponents.

"It impacted 111 miles," Gopher said. "They removed over 509 mature dwarf cypress trees that were between 200 and 2,500 years old, which violated the special use permit. It's frightening that those trees were just completely wiped out from a

national preserve."

Osceola said a call to action could be an effective strategy to wield influence with those with the power to decide on the permits. However, now the process has slowed down immensely due to the NPS requirement for an EIS. This will give the tribe and others a chance to regroup, she said in an email to the Tribune.

"It's really important that we remember what rights we have as individuals," she said. "We can write letters to Tom Forsyth and appeal to our congressional delegation. Letter writing is really important; it's a true call to action."

"A lot of people want to do something, but they don't know how to do it," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "A call to action with a letter ready to send is really helpful."

Fire safety was another topic about the pipeline discussed in the WebEx meeting, which included staff and tribal members.

"The Everglades is a fire dependent ecosystem," said Joe Frank, a former Big Cypress Board Representative and forester with a degree in forest management from Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas. "I'm concerned about an above ground pipeline. It will be dangerous and costly to conduct prescribed burns."

Gopher posted Forsyth's address on the chat area of the WebEx meeting. It is:

Thomas Forsyth, Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve, 33100 Tamiami

Trail E Ochopee, FL 34141. Forsyth's email address is: thomas_forsyth@nps.gov.

Immokalee update

Meanwhile, the intentions of Trend Exploration were also discussed. The North Fort Myers-based company wants to drill a well more than two miles deep near the water wellfields in Immokalee, which could impact the city and the Immokalee Reservation if a spill occurs.

FDEP denied the company's application Nov. 5, 2021, but Trend appealed. Trend's case has been forwarded to the Division of Administrative Hearings. The Immokalee Water and Sewer District has been added as a co-intervener in the case.

"The good news is that the district is willing to challenge the application," Myers said.

Only one drop of oil near the wellfield, or aquifer, can irreparably contaminate the water supply, according to a HERO report in the presentation.

"Habitat can be mitigated, but water quality can't," Myers said. "You'll never restore water resources to where it was if there was a spill. Leaks can last for days, months, years. The impact is a greater magnitude the longer it is there."

Tribal water rights, issues remain a long game

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

As the new year kicks into high gear, work moves forward with state and federal agencies – particularly the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – on water issues that directly affect the Seminole Tribe.

Tribal leadership and staff at the Heritage and Environment Resources Office (HERO) and the Environmental Resource Management Department (ERMD) juggle the complex task of interacting with the Corps – particularly as it relates to the intertwining of Lake Okeechobee water interests and Everglades restoration.

It's important for the tribe because the trajectory of the Corps and other agencies can have huge implications for the health of cultural resources and the quality and availability of water on the Brighton and Big Cypress reservations.

The Corps dropped plans in 2021 for a reservoir north of Lake Okeechobee not far from the Brighton Reservation. The tribe fought against it for years with concerns of potential flooding damage and negative environmental impacts. The Corps' is now moving toward other options – ones that, ostensibly, wouldn't impact the tribe.

There's another proposed reservoir, however, to be located south of the lake and east of the Big Cypress Reservation. The tribe is currently neutral about the project, but is monitoring its progress to make sure it's done right and won't cause harm to tribal assets.

Stacy D. Myers, senior scientist and liaison for HERO, is one of the point people who monitors the Corps' proposals and stays connected with decision makers.

"What you're seeing now is a big push to move toward these storage areas and reservoirs and there's a mixed value for them," Myers said. "They provide storage and potential water supply and potential water quality benefits, but it's a far cry from the envisioned restoration of the Everglades."

Myers said the tribe has long advocated for a preservation mentality.

"To preserve and make it functional, but not to create these highly engineered systems that [the Corps has] justified in their minds as being necessary since the watershed has been reduced," he said.

Water compact, rights

Lake Okeechobee water issues and Everglades restoration won't be solved anytime soon if history is a guide.

The multibillion-dollar Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) has been in work since 2000, headed up by the Corps and the South Florida Water Management District. For the tribe, CERP requires navigating a bureaucratic web that involves multiple agencies and stakeholders and dozens of projects, proposals and timelines.

But with the Brighton Reservation-area reservoir issue put to rest, the tribe is focused on maintaining its Lake Okeechobee water rights. The tribe's water compact assures a certain amount of water allocation from the



Lake Okeechobee in 2021.

Beverly Bidney

lake. Myers and the tribe are looking ahead to what the reservations will need 20, 50 or 100 years from now.

Apportionment levels have implications for agriculture, irrigation, cattle operations, citrus crops and new potential crops the tribe might embark on – like raising palm trees, for example. It also affects the scope of projects like new housing and parks.

The Corps' latest update of its Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSUM), which affects water apportionment, has been moving through

phases since 2018 and may be nearing completion later this year.

"The tribe's position is we're concentrating on water rights because there will be a real battle for water in the future in Florida," Myers said. "We're taking steps toward that with our position on LOSUM – that we have special user criteria given to us by the Corps – and also by ensuring that a volume of water necessary to maintain the reservations into the future is maintained."

One recent appointment at the Corps that gives Myers and others hope is the

2021 hire of Jamie Pinkham by the Biden administration as principal deputy assistant secretary of the Corps for civil works. It carries promise because Pinkham is a member of the Pacific Northwest's Nez Perce Tribe.

"[The Corps is] looking at how they can be more open and [are] listening to the tribes right now," Myers said. "And that's a benefit in and of itself."

More information is at stoffer.com.

Elgin Jumper's 'Fluent Poetry' show opens at museum

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS – Elgin Jumper's latest show at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum showcases the versatility of his painting styles in an exhibit called "Fluent Poetry."

"I see a lot of poetry in everything," Jumper said. "God gave me the gift to paint and write. I think a sunrise or sunset is visual poetry and a scene that moves you and stays with you is poetry as well. I speak fluent poetry through art and writing."

Jumper's creativity is multifaceted. He writes stories and poems and founded the Seminole Writers Group. His painting styles run the gamut. "Fluent Poetry" highlights some of his pieces that are influenced by art genres including tonalism, Cubism, Fauvism, graffiti art, mixed-media, abstract and charcoal drawing.

"A lot of artwork you see is inspired by art from the past, so there is a dialogue going on," said Jumper, who lives in Hollywood. "That's what keeps art going. I really enjoy

having a dialogue with other painters from the past, they help me along."

The piece "Jimmy Osceola's Truck" is a painting of a white pickup truck next to a chickee. Jumper painted it in 2010 near the ball field on the Big Cypress Reservation.

"[Osceola] was my first painting instructor," Jumper said. "We would go to Brighton, Big Cypress, Immokalee and just paint outdoors. We spent a lot of time together. He helped me when I first got into painting. I used that painting in the show to have something to memorialize that time."

Another piece is an homage to graffiti art. The painting includes a Seminole boy who just painted a message on a wall: "Beware I speak fluent poetry." When Jumper created the painting he considered the frame as part of the canvas.

"That's a new direction I'm going in," he said. "I used a paint brush to imitate a spray can. Chief Billy Bowlegs is on there. I used a crown near him as a quote from [1980s artist] Jean Michel Basquiat, who used crowns in his work. I put it in there because Bowlegs' turban reminds me of a

crown."

Jumper is known for his use of color, as showcased in his colorful warrior series. One of those paintings is included in the exhibition.

"This is my third show at the museum, my hat trick," Jumper said. "The third time is the charm. There were a couple of lockdowns during the pandemic, but this is finally coming to fruition."

An opening reception is slated to be held at the museum March 16. The reception will start at 12:30 p.m. with poetry readings from the Seminole Writers Group (see page 3B for more about the group). At 2 p.m. Jumper will talk about the artwork in the exhibition. Refreshments will be served and attendees will have the opportunity to mingle with the artist and writers.

The show will be open through May 15 in the museum's Mosaic Gallery.

Courtesy photo

Elgin Jumper's "Fluent Poetry" exhibit is on display in the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's Mosaic Gallery through May 15.



POWER From page 1A

Both projects were awarded grant money from the Department of Energy's Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs.

Rambarath said the initiative would not only mitigate future power outages, but would save the tribe money by offsetting its energy needs for each building – 30% for Big Cypress and 26% for Brighton.

"During outages the BESS kicks in and

runs the facility for at least three hours," Rambarath said. "If the outage continues, the generator kicks in and recharges the battery system and powers the facility."

Rambarath likened it to a hybrid vehicle that uses fuel and electric charge – vacillating between the two.

"We are going to be saving a lot of wear and tear on the generators," he said. "In the event of another hurricane with extended outages, the generators won't be running nonstop for weeks on end."

In addition, Rambarath said the tribe

intends to train and employ tribal members to maintain both projects and added that the tribe is also considering installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in the future.

Florida Seminole Commerce

Meanwhile, tribal members Gem Osceola and John Osceola both presented at the conference on behalf of their business – Florida Seminole Commerce. Emre Erkul, an adviser, and Ed Wise, founder and CEO

of PositivEnergy, joined them.

Wise spoke about how the tribe could eventually become its own utility company – controlling its own energy through green technologies – while also generating revenue streams.

John Osceola, the owner of Florida Seminole Commerce, said he's helped facilitate the process of exploring such options between PositivEnergy and STOF Inc., Seminole Gaming and Hard Rock International projects like infrastructure for EV charging stations.

Osceola said his company has already facilitated uninterrupted power supply (UPS) projects and other power backup solutions for tribal interests.

"Florida Seminole Commerce handles a broad range of projects. Our main goal is to bring different opportunities and solutions to the Seminole Tribe and surrounding communities," Osceola said. "In the case of our partnership with PositivEnergy, we aim to bring sustainable energy solutions to tribal nations."



FSU Photography Services

Tribal member and Florida State University alumnus Kyle Doney, left, presents new FSU President Richard McCullough with a handmade patchwork jacket on behalf of the Seminole Tribe during an investiture ceremony as part of McCullough's inauguration Feb. 25.

New FSU president praises relationship with tribe during inauguration

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Richard McCullough was inaugurated as Florida State University's 16th president Feb. 25 with a formal investiture ceremony at the Ruby Diamond Concert Hall on the school's Tallahassee campus.

The ceremony began with a joint presentation of the colors that included the Seminole Tribe and FSU's ROTC and police department.

Tribal member and FSU alumnus Kyle Doney, who is the deputy director of the tribe's Native Learning Center, presented McCullough with a patchwork jacket on behalf of the tribe during the ceremony.

"As an alumnus, I'm excited for President McCullough's leadership," Doney told the audience. "As a tribal member, I look forward to working with him to maintain the longstanding relationship between my tribe and FSU."

The jacket was provided by Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. and was made by Amy Yzaguirre of Immokalee.

"The university honors its unique and collaborative friendship with the Seminole Tribe of Florida," McCullough said during his address. "I'm so honored by your special gift today. I will wear it with care and with pride. This university is not only located on the ancestral and traditional homelands of the Seminole Tribe, but we are entrusted by the tribe with a rare honor and responsibility of calling ourselves Seminoles. Among much else, this forms our solidarity with the Seminole Tribe – unconquered peoples – whose power inspires all activities at this university."

During his remarks, McCullough outlined an ambitious vision for the university which included a place in the top 10 ranking of American public universities.

"Florida State has indeed earned the right to be called a great university," he said.

"Now our challenge – and our responsibility – is to become even greater."

McCullough takes over as president from John Thrasher, who retired after serving in the position since 2014.

McCullough has more than 30 years of experience in academic research and leadership.

Since 2012, he served as vice provost for research and professor of materials science and engineering at Harvard University. Prior to that, McCullough spent 22 years at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, where he ascended to head of the chemistry department and served as dean of the Mellon College of Science before being named the university's vice president for research.

The investiture ceremony highlighted university traditions, including awarding the president's medallion and the lighting of the three torches which represent the university's motto, "Vires, Artes, Mores" or strength, skill and character.



WFSU Public Media via YouTube

The Seminole Tribe was represented in the presentation of colors at the start of FSU's investiture ceremony Feb. 25 in Tallahassee.

UNITY mourns loss of founder

STAFF REPORT

J.R. Cook (Cherokee), who founded the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), passed away Feb. 25 at age 83 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

UNITY announced the passing in a press release.

"We are deeply saddened to learn of J.R.'s passing. But his legacy and influence live on in the thousands of lives he has touched," Mary Kim Titla, UNITY executive director, said in a statement. "We will continue to honor his memory and spirit by living UNITY's mission and developing the next generation of Native youth leaders."

Cook started the UNITY organization in southwestern Oklahoma in 1976 with a small group of Native American youth. The focus of the group was leadership development. UNITY has since grown into the oldest and largest national Native youth leadership network organization in the U.S.,

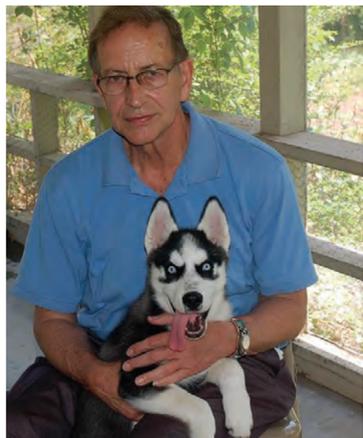
according to the organization.

"Without J.R., UNITY would not be the life-changing organization that it is today. He served as the organization's executive director from its founding in 1976 until 2013 when he stepped down to focus on recording UNITY's history," Loretta Tuell, chairman of the UNITY council of trustees, said in a statement. "We offer prayers to his friends and family and take comfort in knowing that he leaves a legacy of leadership behind."

Cook grew up on a farm in northeastern Oklahoma. He attended Coffeyville College, University of Oklahoma, and earned a master's degree from Southwestern Oklahoma State University, where he also served as an assistant basketball coach.

UNITY's was developed as an outgrowth of the Indian Education Project, a program Cook directed that focused on dropout prevention and cultural retention in Oklahoma.

Based in Mesa, Arizona, UNITY has more than 320 youth councils in 36 states.



J.R. Cook

Chamber to host business expo, senior services show

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The Broward County Chamber of Commerce will host the South Florida

Business Expo, Senior Services Show and Health Fair on March 24 at Assumption Catholic Church Community Center in Lauderdale By The Sea. Hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will feature free food, free

refreshments and door prizes. Admission is \$15. There is no admission fee for seniors. The center is located at 2001 South Ocean Boulevard. For more information call (954) 565-5750 or go to ChamberRSVP.com.

Climate Conversations

BY CODY MOTLOW

Editor's note: This interview was supported by the Seminole Tribe's Climate Resiliency Program. Cody Motlow is a tribal member and serves as the climate resiliency coordinator through the tribes Heritage and Environmental Resources Office (HERO). Originally presented virtually, this interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Cody Motlow: Hello, my name is Cody Motlow, I am a Seminole tribal member and the climate resiliency coordinator for the tribe's H.E.R.O department. Mr. Tommie, I would love for you to tell me a little bit about yourself.

Samuel Tommie: Hi, my name is Samuel Tommie. I was born in the middle of the Everglades about 40 miles west of Miami, which is now the northwest part of the Miccosukee Reservation. I moved permanently into Big Cypress and I've been here ever since. I went to school in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the Institute of American Indian Arts. Since then, I've been back and I've lived most areas in the traditional Everglades. My primary career is artist. I've been in film productions for a while. I'm swinging back into doing art, and I actually have about six careers, probably seven. So I juggle a lot, I'm still learning to manage myself.

Cody Motlow: I used to live in New Mexico for a short time and took online classes with the Institute of American Indian Arts once I moved back to Florida. It's a really great place. So, my next question is, are you familiar with climate change and what are your thoughts and opinions on that?

Samuel Tommie: Climate change; it's something I've been talking about probably for over 30 years so I'm hoping that everyone is educated on that or awake. I'm hoping a majority of Americans are awake. I used to educate people from the beginning about the environment. I worked at Miccosukee airboat tours and I talked about the chemicals in the water and how you can't fish. I remember going to different kinds of protests, like when Florida Power & Light wanted to put a power plant two miles from the Big Cypress Reservation. I've been to many, many protests. TV stations, radio stations, conferences, and panels. I'm still speaking at public appearances.

Cody Motlow: You mentioned your art earlier. Can you tell me more about it?

Samuel Tommie: With my art I can make the statements. I have a mural in Wynwood area. It's going to always have new things on there, but it reflects the Seminole culture and the Everglades. So this is one way to get my message out there and about climate change.

Cody Motlow: What is your history with teaching the youth and how have you supported young activists? What has your experience been like?

Samuel Tommie: Like I said, this is something I've been concerned about for more than half of my lifetime and it's like I've gotten to point where I'm really, really tired of it. You know young people, 17 and under, have their own environmental global groups and they're very effective. The young people deserve things to change immediately and to have these horrible politicians taken out that don't care about making changes. That's the position that I have come to, and my concerns for the environment, and so when I go to these places and talk, that's what I tell them. As far as our Seminole Tribe and other Native American tribes, I am afraid we may have become too complicit with leisure culture of America.

One of the most interesting, great chiefs in the past is Chief Seattle. He's a fine example of statements that he made to the president of the United States. He talked about the environment, he described the life of the pine trees, and how it can make a person feel different if you have a different respect for it. In his statements he made it clear back then, more than 100 years ago, he talked about where the human being is not the Creator of the web of life - we are a part of the web of life, if you break one strand, you're going to misalign the whole web. He made it clear to the United States that everything is connected. Everything is connected through science, molecules, atoms, everything's connected and climate change has been the result of not respecting that.

Our chiefs in the past have tried to communicate with the United States, and they all made it clear that we are all connected. We have to work together. We're connected with each other. We're connected with the environment and we're connected with Creator, and that is how it is. It's because of our culture, for over 17,000 years, scientifically I can kind of pretty much put it back at least 17,000 years, I can see where our culture of respect in the Earth started, so we've had so many years doing this. We did not have to have the constitution on a paper. We were at a point where the constitution itself was within our hearts, how we lived day to day was the truth because we were a civilization far, far advanced.

Climate change is going to have a lot of effects. It's going to change the cities and every infrastructure that has been built. It's not going to match what the creator is doing. Climate change is sort of Creator's energy, because we human beings messed with the chain of events. So, you know, nature is doing its thing. And I see that as Creator's power, and that's the most important thing for me. I tell people nowadays, like, well, this is what I have seen and I'm not worried about changing your mind.

Things like over-development in Florida should be reconsidered. Florida is very fragile and a piece of creation that should be respected. I feel that overdevelopment is the opposite of respect to the creation, and that is my message. That is the message from my parents. My grandparents. Your grandparents. I'm not here to change your mind. I'm here to say I believe in Creator. I love how he operates. I love how he does things and if things don't change, things will change on their own beyond our own power.

Cody Motlow: On that note, my next question would be what would you like to see from our tribal youth in our community as a whole? What would be your advice on how people can help and how they can make a difference? What do you want to see from our community when it comes to climate change and everything that's happening on our reservations and on the land around our reservations?

Samuel Tommie: I'm really happy. It makes it feel good that the youth is concerned, and they're more aware of what's happening with climate change and all the effects that are going to be happening. I'm really happy to see that with our tribal youth. There needs to be more meetings within their own, gatherings of the minds at different levels, grassroots perhaps. But also with their respective representatives. They need to take the youth very serious, make sure to have it organized in a way of handling things, seeing what kind of problems do we need to face and what kind of solutions that we need to come up with. And we need to ask "How is our representative going to help us [and] how is our tribal government going to help us?"

Also, I believe in getting help from the outside, and I have done that several times and networked, so I feel like the youth need to be supported in this manner. I think first, they really, really need to figure out what it is that we are facing and figure out the timetables. Like what did we need to do in the past and what do we need to do in the next years five years, 10 years that will help us all get focused.

Cody Motlow: Yes, climate change is very real and the risks are so apparent and we know what we're facing with the sea levels rising and the risks of flooding. I compiled some data recently and based on that research, I found out that by 2080 - nearly half of the calendar year will be over 95 degrees in nearly all of our reservations. What else should we be thinking about?

Samuel Tommie: We need to be getting into having food sources like gardens. We need to have a place in Big Cypress that's designed for the community or even for the whole tribe, where a lot of plants and food can be grown out there. I've talked to others about this idea myself about 20 years ago and other tribal members have talked about this, so the ideas have been there, but nobody's pushing for it. And if we had pushed for it five years ago we would be doing great right now. I'm kind of wishing that I would have pushed harder for it five years ago because of the pandemic. The supply chain coming from other countries is backed up right now, the way to transport all these food and supplies to consumers is a problem right now, and it can happen again.

The tribe needs to be prepared and it's something that needs to happen as soon as possible, having our own food supplies out here. We need 20 acres out here or more. Our youth needs to be educated on food sovereignty, that needs to be heavily considered.

My message to the youth is that our tribal people and our sovereignties have always been attacked; it's been attacked since we established our sovereignty, and it's going to continue, but we don't see it's happening on political levels. There's organizations that are willing to and hoping to take away our sovereignty rights. And so we need to be aware of that. We need to know this. This is what's going on and it's part of our survival. We have to know what's important for us and our sovereignty rights are very important for us. It's our way that we can protect the future and our youth can protect their future and their young ones. It's very, very important to be aware.

I think food sovereignty is where they need to be educated and they need to set goals and be aware that our sovereignty can be taken away, and I've been warned about that by my grandparents and the elders there's always this pattern and it's always there, along with our histories, being aware of and knowing that we have to protect ourselves. We as tribal people are very unique and we have a very unique messages to the world. We have contributions that we can make to the world itself. We have integrity.

Paul McCartney, Billy Idol, Sting on Hard Rock Live's May menu

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — Hard Rock Live in Hollywood, which hosted the Rolling Stones last fall, will welcome another giant in the music industry this spring.

Hard Rock Live is among the 13 venues that Paul McCartney will play during his "Got Back" tour. The 7,000-seat arena at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood announced Feb. 18 that McCartney will perform May 25 at 8 p.m. The performance will be three weeks prior to his 80th birthday.

Some of the other venues on the tour include Camping World Stadium in Orlando (May 28), Boston's famed Fenway Park (June 7), MetLife Stadium (June 16) in New Jersey and So-Fi Stadium (May 13) in Los Angeles, site of this year's Super Bowl.

McCartney isn't the only Beatle with an upcoming performance at Hard Rock Live. Ringo Starr will perform June 25 at 8 p.m.

McCartney's concert is part of a star-studded lineup in May at Hard Rock Live.

Billy Idol, 66, will kick off the month with a concert May 1 at 8 p.m. On May 22, Sting will take the stage, also at 8 p.m. Both singers have been active since the early 1970s. Sting's concert is billed as "Sting: My Songs," which will feature some of his most notable songs from his career with The Police and as a solo artist.



Paul McCartney

MPL Communications/MJ Kim

Sting will also perform at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa's Hard Rock Event Center on May 21 at 8 p.m.

Hard Rock Live will also host the legendary group The Who on April 22 at 8

p.m. For more information about the Hollywood concerts go to myhrl.com. For the Sting performance in Tampa, go to seminolehardrocktampa.com/events/sting.

Beach, pools part of Hard Rock's presence in Miami's Formula 1 event

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Hard Rock International will have more of a presence in Miami's Formula 1 Grand Prix than just the name of the host stadium complex.

In a multiyear partnership announced Feb. 16 with South Florida Motorsports, HRI will be active in fan activities at the racetrack on Hard Rock Stadium's campus — the track is known as the Miami International Autodrome — as well as Seminole Hard Rock

Hotel & Casino Hollywood. The Formula 1 Crypto.com Miami Grand Prix will debut May 6-8.

"Hard Rock is proud to partner with the Formula 1 Crypto.com Miami Grand Prix on this international event," Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, said in a statement. "With venues in 70 countries around the world, we welcome the spotlight right here in South Florida where our flagship Guitar Hotel is located."

The Hard Rock Beach Club will be located near turns 11, 12 and 13 on the

track. The fan experience will feature a 24,000-square-foot beach, resort-style pools, musical performances and two levels of cabanas.

Hard Rock Hollywood will be the center of the race's social gatherings. It will host the official kick-off party May 5 as well as after race parties. Hard Rock will also be featured on the race's digital network and have trackside signage.

As a way to announce the new partnership in the event, Hard Rock used the race's colors and imagery in its Guitar Hotel light show.



Hard Rock

A rendering of the Hard Rock Beach Club, which will be a trackside fan experience featuring cabanas, pools and sand for the Formula 1 Crypto.com Miami Grand Prix from May 6-8 at the Hard Rock Stadium campus.

Free outdoor concerts, festival set for Immokalee

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE — Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee will host the Southland Bluegrass and Wilderness Festival from March 12-13.

The free event will feature outdoor

concerts, concerts in the Zig Zag Lounge, a large merchant section, RV show, outdoor expo and food trucks.

The lineup features Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Yonder Mountain String Band, Sam Bush, Del McCoury Band, Balsam Range, Rhonda Vincent & The Rage, The Travelin' McCourys, Russell Moore & Illrd

Tyme Out, The Grascals, Della Mae, The Barefoot Movement, The South Carolina Broadcasters, Breaking Grass and others.

Spectators are welcome to bring chairs and all ages are welcome. Coolers, backpacks and pets will not be permitted. For more information visit moreinparadise.com.

Hard Rock Atlantic City provides more than \$10M in bonuses to team members

FROM PRESS RELEASE

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City announced Feb. 18 that more than 2,400 of its eligible union and non-union team members will receive a bonus for the third consecutive year following a record-breaking year with the largest increase in coin-in, table games

drop, and gross gaming revenue over 2019. Additionally, eight randomly selected team members won cash prizes, two won all-inclusive stays at a Hard Rock resort destination and two grand prize winners each received a new car.

The bonuses, according to a press release, totaled more than 10 million dollars.

Hard Rock executives, including Chairman Jim Allen,

addressed team members and union representatives inside Hard Rock Live at Etess Arena for the property's "All Is One" themed team member town hall meeting.

"We want to focus on building companionship at work and creating a sense of family among our Hard Rock team members. This is what separates us and keeps us as industry leaders," Allen said.



Hard Rock

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City held a town hall meeting with employees Feb. 18.

Hard Rock hits high marks in U.S. News & World Report rankings

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — U.S. News & World Report has recognized 14 Hard Rock properties in its 2022 "Best Hotels Rankings" released Feb. 9.

Hard Rock properties located in the U.S., Mexico, Spain and the Dominican Republic received honors in "gold" and "silver" categories.

Four properties were listed as "gold" — in the top 10% of the ranked luxury hotels in each region. The properties are the Hard Rock Hotel Tenerife (Spain), Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza (Spain), Hard Rock Hotel Cancun (Mexico) and Hard Rock Hotel Los Cabos (Mexico).

There were 10 properties in the "silver" category — ranked in the top 30% of the ranked luxury hotels in each region. The properties are the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood, Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa, Hard Rock Hotel Orlando, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Biloxi, Hard

Rock Hotel San Diego, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tulsa, Hard Rock Hotel Vallarta (Mexico), Hard Rock Hotel Riviera Maya (Mexico) and Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Punta Cana (Dominican Republic).

The rankings are based on properties that "consistently provide unforgettable experiences for their guests." More than 35,000 luxury properties in 400 destinations are evaluated. The three main components taken into consideration are a property's reputation among professional travel experts, guest reviews and hotel class ratings.

"Despite all of the uncertainties this pandemic threw at the hospitality industry, Hard Rock continued to go above and beyond for our guests, no matter the circumstance," Jon Lucas, COO of Hard Rock International, said in a statement.

The Seminole Tribe is the parent entity of Hard Rock International.

More about Hard Rock is at hardrock.com.

Allie Evangelista named president of Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Allie Evangelista, a 25-year gaming industry veteran, has been named president of Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol in Bristol, Virginia. Hard Rock International (HRI) made the announcement Feb. 22.

"Allie's life and career has embodied the American success story," Jon Lucas, HRI's chief operating officer, said in a statement. "Allie has worked in every aspect of the gaming and hospitality industries and will bring this impressive experience to her role ... [She] already has hit the ground running and is busy assembling a talented team to operate the resort."

A temporary casino is scheduled to open at the former Bristol Mall before the end of the second quarter of 2022 as plans take shape for a permanent casino and hotel on the property. The temporary casino will feature about 30,000 square feet of casino space, including 900 gaming slots, 20 tables and a sportsbook. A restaurant, food outlet and sports bar and lounge with entertainment will also be part of the temporary casino. According to Hard Rock, the temporary casino will create 600 new jobs in Bristol; the permanent \$400 million casino is expected to create more than 2,000 jobs.

"I look forward to embracing the community in Bristol and working with the many partners who have been instrumental in supporting the project," Evangelista said in a statement. "As the 'Birthplace of Country Music,' Bristol is rich in history and culture. As someone with a passion for exploring new and diverse opportunities, I am excited to experience the region's natural beauty and its many wonderful music, entertainment and recreational offerings."

In 2006, Evangelista joined the gaming industry as an assistant slot operations manager in Missouri. Since then, she has ascended to a variety of roles in gaming, including director of casino operations and



Allie Evangelista

vice president of casino operations at an Iowa casino. She was also vice president and general manager of the Hollywood Gaming and Racetrack property in Ohio and, more recently at Hollywood Casino Perryville in Maryland.

According to a 2021 story in Games Magazine Brasil, Evangelista is originally from Brazil and she first came to the U.S. to complete a college internship at Disney in Orlando.

She earned a master's degree in business administration from Lindenwood University in Missouri and a master's degree in human resources management from Washington University in St. Louis. She is married to her husband of 21 years, Fabio Evangelista.



Hard Rock

A rendering of the planned Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol in Virginia.



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Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki offers vast oral history archives

BY ALEX BANKS
Oral History Coordinator
Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

BIG CYPRESS — Oral history and the practice of passing down history, legends, and stories has been and continues to be an important cultural practice for the Seminole Tribe. The museum's oral history collection helps to continue this tradition. The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum currently houses more than 300 oral history audio/visual files. Over 200 different tribal members — from the 1960s to present — have contributed to this vast audio-visual resource. A majority of the recordings are only available to tribal members for privacy and security reasons. Privacy and security are of paramount importance for

this collection.

The collections division has two hard drives with digital access copies of every oral history. If one were to come looking for a specific individual or topic, the oral history coordinator could then use a glossary of oral histories organized by interviewee's last name, a master list of oral histories organized by chronology, and/or key terms and a topics index to quickly find which oral histories are most relevant to their specific research interests.

One might expect a typical oral history interview to look like an interviewer and interviewee sitting down across from each other at a table, engaging in a lengthy question and answer session. While many of the oral histories in the museum's collection resemble this visual, there are also several demonstration videos, panel presentations,

public speaking presentations, sessions in which tribal members identify family members in photographs, and so on. To further illustrate this point, there are roughly five or six standard interviews about alligator wrestling, but there is also a recording of an alligator wrestling demonstration. Someone researching alligator wrestling would, therefore, be able to listen to thorough explanations of the history and technique of alligator wrestling, and then they would be able to actually watch a demonstration. This is just one brief example of the great level of detail one might be able to find on any given topic in the collection.



Billy Walker demonstrates alligator wrestling in 2008. A video is part of the museum's oral history archives.

SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA AH-TAH-THI-KI MUSEUM A PLACE TO LEARN, A PLACE TO REMEMBER.



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

An example of items set up for guests to view oral histories includes hard drives that are stored in the museum archives (left); a laptop displaying an oral history interview with Quenton Cypress, and the equipment needed to enjoy it (right).

Other frequent topics (whether just by interviewees bringing them up or because a series of interviews were conducted with questions about these specific topics in mind) are the organization of the tribe and federal recognition, the Seminole Wars, the Vietnam War, Okalee Indian Village, traditional camp life, environmental considerations in the Everglades, and so on.

All tribal members are invited to not only come explore and research the museum's oral history collection, but to also feel free to

sit down and have your story recorded and preserved for future generations. If you are interested in either looking through or adding to the oral history collection, you can email museum@semtribe.com or more directly the oral history coordinator at alexanderbanks@semtribe.com or (863) 902-1113 ext. 12214.

Tribes: NAGPRA process should be clearer, faster

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

Tribal officials across the country report shared frustrations when it comes to the resolution of NAGPRA claims — the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

The more than 30-year-old law was passed to give tribes legal tools for the return of ancestral remains and funerary objects typically held by universities, museums and various federal agencies. But tribal officials say that in most cases the process is unnecessarily complicated and the costs of follow through are exorbitant. At the same time, many institutions estimate it could take decades and millions of dollars to go through collections and effectively implement the law.

The Seminole Tribe and its repatriation committee, led by Tina Osceola at the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), are pursuing repatriation issues involving the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the University of Alabama, and

several other federal and state agencies.

"... I go into each meeting with an open mind — but they're not interested in repatriating ancestors. They're more dedicated to their own research and patrimony over ancestors — not in making the process easier for the tribes," Osceola said in an interview with the Tribune last month.

NAGPRA received more federal attention this month when the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing Feb. 2 to get feedback from tribal officials.

Rosita Worl (Tlingit), who served on a national NAGPRA review committee for more than a decade, told the committee that tribes put in an enormous amount of work into the NAGPRA process, but often without any results.

"Tribes go to a great deal of efforts and expense to bring that case before the committee — a committee comprised of scientists, museum professionals and tribal members — without any guarantee that the committee's finding will be acted upon," Worl said in her in-person testimony at the hearing.

Others who testified suggested that oversight of NAGPRA should be under the

auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs instead of the National Parks Service (NPS) — both of which fall under the Department of Interior (DOI).

In late January, the DOI hired a full-time employee at the NPS to investigate NAGPRA claims and violations of the law.

David Barland-Liles is now tasked with looking into allegations of museums failing to comply with the requirements of NAGPRA, and then presenting his findings to the Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo).

Barland-Liles' job also includes providing technical assistance to institutions and federal, state and tribal agencies. The DOI said in a statement that civil penalties could be assessed against any museum that fails to comply with NAGPRA requirements.

In addition, the DOI also recently completed its consultations with 71 Tribal Nations on suggestions to improve NAGPRA regulations. Publication of the proposed changes is expected to be made available soon for public comment and review.

The DOI reports that proposed changes would streamline requirements for institutions to inventory and identify

human remains and cultural items in their collections.

"The repatriation of human remains and sacred cultural objects, and the protection of sacred sites, is integral to preserving and commemorating Indigenous culture," Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan

Newland said in a statement. "Changes to the NAGPRA regulations are on the way and long overdue."

The initial draft of the proposed changes from tribal consultation is available on NPS' NAGPRA webpage.



Image via DOI

NAGPRA — the law regarding the repatriation of ancestral remains — has received more federal focus recently.

Statue at museum honors Native American rocket scientist

BY JENNA KUNZE
Native News Online

Visitors to the recently opened First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City will soon be greeted by a bronze statue of one of Indian Country's leading female rocket scientists: Mary Golda Ross of the Cherokee Nation.

Born in 1908, Golda Ross contributed to contemporary studies of orbiting satellites, crewed Earth-orbit flights, and created preliminary designs for flyby missions to Mars and Venus. She worked as one of 40 engineers dedicated to an American aerospace manufacturer's top secret think tank at Lockheed Aircraft Corporation. After retiring, Golda Ross dedicated herself to encouraging Indigenous youth—particularly women—to pursue the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). She passed on at the age of 99 in 2008.

In 2019, Golda Ross was selected to appear on a special edition of a \$1 U.S. coin. Now, the First Americans Museum is following suit with the slated installation of her statue on Feb. 22, a spokesperson from the museum told Native News Online.

"Mary Golda Ross is an inspiration to all young women and to the First Americans community for her contributions to the aerospace industry as the first woman engineer of Lockheed," James Pepper Henry (Kaw Nation), director of the First Americans Museum said in a statement to Native News Online. "As a member of the Cherokee Nation, one of the 39 tribal nations in Oklahoma, we honor her for her many



Erin Silber Photography

A statue of Mary Golda Ross.

accomplishments."

As part of its campaign to uplift women's contributions to the field of STEM, the international cosmetic brand Olay is donating \$1 million to memorializing, celebrating, and fostering women in STEM. Part of that funding has paid for the Golda Ross statue. Olay also partnered with the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum to ensure the statue, along with its plaque, is historically accurate.

According to one research center, women make up just 28% of the workforce in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Olay's announcement was timed to draw attention to the United Nations International Day of Women and Girls in STEM later this week. The United Nations General Assembly declared February 11 International Day of Women and Girls in Science in 2015 as a way to encourage women and girls' full and equal access to and participation in science.

This story is from Native News Online (nativenewsonline.net).

Artifact of the Month

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

March 2022

Who remembers the days when they were in elementary school, waking up for the day only to find you have a cold? Those days had their ups (getting to stay home from school) and their downs (having to take medicine). For those of us in the Collections department, staying home meant hanging out on the couch with a caregiver (parent/guardian) nearby, who every so often checked to see how we were feeling. For some, staying home from school because of a cold usually meant getting a hefty dose of Vicks VapoRub put on their chest (Yuck!).



The Vicks products have come a long way, starting with the nose drop that was first introduced in 1931. This product was called Vicks Va-tro-nol Nose Drops and even came in cough drop form. In 2012, our archaeology team recovered a dropper-less bottle of the product on the surface of a site on the Brighton Reservation (above and middle). Instead of it being the cobalt blue color originally established, the bottle is an amber color making it more similar to the bottles manufactured in the 1950s (left).



Health

NICWA conference to be virtual for third year

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

Organizers of the National Indian Child Welfare Association's (NICWA) annual conference had planned to host it in Orlando this year after two years of a virtual-only format. But those plans have changed.

The "Protecting Our Children" conference from April 3-6 will now be offered in a virtual format only, "out of an abundance of caution due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic."

"While we all had high hopes of gathering in-person this year, we find it to be in everyone's best interest to take the conference back to a virtual-only platform again," organizers said in a statement Feb. 4.

The conference is the largest of its kind to focus on tribal child welfare and well-being. The Seminole Tribe is once again the lead sponsor of the event, which last year had almost 1,500 online attendees from dozens of states and Canadian provinces

representing hundreds of tribes.

Organizers said those who have already registered to attend in person and have paid in full would receive a refund for the difference in price between the in-person conference rate and the virtual rate. Those who have not paid in full will receive an updated invoice for the balance due.

"We will be in touch with existing conference registrants to facilitate the refund process via email by Friday, February 11, 2022," the statement said.

Organizers said there would be no changes made to those who have already registered for the virtual-only conference rate.

"Thank you for your support and understanding as we navigate another year of the Covid-19 pandemic," the statement said. "We hope you and your community are safe and well during this trying time."

Questions can be directed to training@nicwa.org. More information is at nicwa.org.

Covid cases decline in tribe

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — The tribe has entered phase three of reopening after almost two years of pandemic-related restrictions. The tribe made the announcement through a video message by Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. in mid-February. The new phase is to begin Feb. 28.

Phase three includes the return of in-person gatherings, however the facemasks are still mandated inside facilities and during outdoor events.

Health and Human Services department (HHS) executive director Dr. Vandhara Kiswani-Barley said the loosening of restrictions comes as positive Covid-19 tests at the tribe have declined. She said the reasons for the decline include the availability of vaccinations and also what is likely "pandemic fatigue," wherein fewer people are choosing to be tested.

On the heels of the Omicron variant,

Kiswani-Barley said there's no doubt that other variants will surface.

"We're just in much better shape now than when we started," she said. "We have more resources to treat people as an outpatient than before, rather than going to a hospital to be treated."

Beginning Feb. 28, vaccinations will be administered by HHS pharmacy or clinic staff, instead of Emergency Management personnel. Emergency Management had been administering vaccinations because there was a higher demand, Kiswani-Barley said. But now the average is about 10 shots per week.

Covid-19 testing will be done inside the tribe's health clinics with a 24-hour turnaround for results, she said. The tribe was previously operating drive-thru testing when demand was higher. Kiswani-Barley said HHS is administering booster shots as well, however, it's not time for a second booster just yet.

"But we're expecting it to happen.

It will likely end up being a routine shot similar to a flu shot," she said.

Kiswani-Barley said HHS would continue to evaluate the situation to see when, perhaps, the outdoor mask mandate might be updated. In the meantime, clinics are distributing free N95 masks to tribal members, what Kiswani-Barley said is the most protective mask available.

In addition, pharmacy staff has begun to offer free Covid-19 home testing kits — four per tribal member, per month.

"There needs to be some level of personal accountability. We're trying to get back to a sense of normalcy," Kiswani-Barley said. "If you're sick, don't come to any gathering. If you have symptoms, stay away. This is the only way we can return to some level of normalcy."

For more information, tribal members can call their local clinic or the HHS hotline at (833) 786-3458.

CLIMATE

From page 6A

Cody Motlow: Speaking on food sovereignty, our department actually created a food sovereignty group. It's a few Tribal members/employees and non-tribal employees from different departments, and USET, that have interest in it. We have talked about the possibility of community gardens and integrating healthy food choices for Tribal members.

We're hoping this spring to have Gathering Fires. We're going to try to have them at three of the reservations, and we would like to have the youth and elders come together and join us. We want to have speakers integrating our culture and tribal perspective with modern science when it comes to climate change and that's something we're hoping we get off the ground, because we really want to reach out to the community and have people involved and people take interest in this.

Samuel Tommie: That's so great. I appreciate what you have planned and I look forward to seeing that happen. I know your grandparents. I know your family. I spent time with them and talked to them and I received some wisdom from Jack Motlow. I was just thinking about that today. I think about that all the time. I feel happy and I have a strong feeling that you're following what's really in your heart. I think you're starting to get the hang of it and I'm really happy when a young person is doing that. So, it gives me a lot of hope and I appreciate what you're doing.

Cody Motlow: Thank you for saying that. This is all new to me and I'm learning along the way myself. That's my own message to my community is that you don't have to be an expert. If you see something you feel is wrong, just take interest and start somewhere. We're all learning together.

Native Americans look for ways to stop soaring overdose deaths

BY MELBA NEWSOME

In September 2018, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) made it onto a list they probably would have preferred to avoid. The Office of National Drug Control Policy identified the Qualla Boundary, the Eastern Band's 56,000-acre homeland just south of Smoky Mountains National Park, as one of 10 "high intensity drug trafficking areas" in the country.

Following a two-year undercover investigation targeting drug traffickers, federal, state and local law enforcement authorities raided the Boundary, arrested 132 people and seized an array of illegal drugs valued at \$1.8 million, including heroin, fentanyl, methamphetamine, oxycodone and marijuana. The operation was touted as a huge success and a possible turning point in the scourge that had plagued the community.

"The arrest of these drug dealers is a critical step towards ensuring that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is able to provide the healthy environment our people deserve," Principal Chief Richard Sneed said in a DOJ press release in 2018.

Instead of improving, the community's drug problems only got worse. Drug-related crimes and addiction rates continued apace and, like everywhere else in the state, grew worse during the pandemic. Statewide, deaths from drug overdoses increased more than 25 percent in the first six months of the pandemic, according to CDC data. Almost immediately, the lockdown on the Boundary led to a dramatic increase in fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses.

In a May 3, 2020 Facebook video, Sneed issued a warning to the drug dealers: "We're coming for you," he said. "It's a never-ending battle. Every time we take a dealer down, every time there's interdiction, every time there's a seizure, that supply chain seems to just continue to keep rolling. [Y]ou're killing our people, and I'm done. I've had it."

Meanwhile, state officials and experts have continued to say that a criminal justice approach to the opioid crisis won't solve it. Gov. Roy Cooper has repeatedly said that "we cannot arrest our way out of this problem."

There is a growing acknowledgement among treatment and drug policy experts that real solutions must center around prevention and treatment which include mental health counseling, medication-assisted treatment (MAT), as well as the time and support needed to recover.

Almost in recognition of that reality, Sneed later added a comment to the video. "I ask for prayers for our tribal citizens who are struggling with addiction as well as their

families. Please encourage [those suffering] to seek treatment, remind them that there is help, and there are people that care about them."

Racial disparities persist

More than a decade ago, an analysis from Seattle's Urban Indian Health Institute revealed that substance use rates are higher among American Indians compared to other racial and ethnic groups. A recent analysis in the North Carolina Medical Journal found a similar disparity in overdose rates in the state, as well.

North Carolina has the largest American Indian population east of the Mississippi River; they represent just 1.2 percent of the overall population, according to the latest available data. However, in 2020, the drug overdose death rate was 2.3 times higher for American Indians than white people in North Carolina (75.4 and 32.7 per 100,000, respectively), according to the state's Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan Data Dashboard.

"We really don't understand why that is very well," said Ronny Bell, a health equity researcher at Wake Forest School of Medicine. "In general, populations in rural communities are more likely to be impacted by this issue because you have more people in jobs that can result in injuries that can lead to pain. The eight tribal homelands are all in rural communities where there is an increased likelihood of being injured in the occupational settings and a lack of access to quality pain treatment."

A history of trauma, violence, poverty, high unemployment, lack of health insurance and racism also contribute to an increased risk of addiction.

The disproportionate impact of the opioid crisis

Western North Carolina has been hit particularly hard by opioids. Data from the state's Opioid Addiction Dashboard found the five western North Carolina counties that include the Qualla Boundary had an average of 43.6 unintentional overdose deaths per 100,000 in 2020, compared to 29.7 statewide.

On the other side of the state, the overdose death rate was even higher in 2020 for Robeson County, at 64.3 per 100,000. About 45 percent of the Lumbee Tribe's 55,000 members reside here. Significant numbers also live in Hoke, Cumberland and Scotland counties.

Erika Locklear oversees the Lumbee Tribe's Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) support program and has witnessed a disturbing trend in the Lumbee community.

"The problem is getting much worse," Locklear said. "Covid has been the biggest

factor. When Covid first started, I don't know if it was a fear factor or what, but things were getting a bit better. Then, after the first couple of months, the overdose rates just skyrocketed."

Providing solutions

A huge billboard stands at the Boundary's main entrance in Cherokee in Jackson County "Opiate Dependent Addiction Treatment. Confidential. Life Changing. Help."

Two decades ago, tribal leaders recognized the need for robust substance use and mental health treatment services for its tribal members. As the only federally recognized tribe in the state, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians receives significant financial support from the federal government, including free healthcare for its members through the Indian Health Service (IHS).

However, per capita spending on the health of Native Americans is significantly less than for the general population. According to data from the Indian Health Service, the national average for fiscal year 2019 was \$4,078 for AIs, compared to \$9,726 overall for calendar year 2017.

That imbalance carries over to treatment for opioid use disorder, as well. As more people of color struggle with and die from opioid use disorder, the funding is still targeted at white people almost exclusively. A \$54 million federal grant allowed North Carolina to provide treatment to 12,000 people. Despite being the population with the highest overdose rate, fewer than 1 percent of those who received care were American Indian.

Meanwhile, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians oversees and operates its own public health care system and provides some of the most extensive substance use and mental health care of any tribe in the nation without copays or deductibles.

Significant investments in its health and treatment services include an \$80 million hospital and a \$16 million, 20-bed adult residential treatment facility. The old hospital building is now a crisis stabilization unit for patients with mental health issues or who require detox services. Also, there are certified addiction counselors, psychiatric social workers, clinical psychologists and a variety of related community-based support groups.

Doing more with less

The Eastern Band's initiative is viewed as a model for the treatment of substance use disorder but it is not easy to duplicate, particularly for lower-wealth tribes like the Lumbee. The Lumbee is the largest tribe in North Carolina and east of the Mississippi

River, but they still lack federal recognition and the health care funding that goes with that. And, unlike the Eastern Band, they don't operate a casino that might provide them with revenue.

"The Lumbee tribe does have quite a few tribal members who are practicing physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners," Bell noted. "That is a benefit to many of the people from the community."

Lumbee's MAT program is funded by a three-year \$1.5 million grant from the state Department of Health and Human Services. It provides services for 65 Lumbee tribe members each year. Locklear doesn't have an exact number but estimates that they have served hundreds and referred many more to their partnering agency, Lumberton Treatment Center.

Eighty percent of the MAT patient population is male although there is no gender divide in substance use in the American Indian population.

"Based on data from the Injury and Violence Prevention Branch (of NC DHHS), the proportion of females who die from overdoses seems to be higher in the American Indian population," said Bell.

In addition to providing buprenorphine on-site, methadone is available at the Lumberton Treatment Center. The free services include support group sessions and individual and group counseling sessions.

In their North Carolina Medical Journal article, Community-driven Approaches to Preventing Overdoses Among American Indians, Bell and the co-authors recommend providing culturally appropriate, community-driven treatment and social support services. The tribal-run MAT program uses a talking circle approach in their counseling sessions and holds smudging ceremonies, a traditional spiritual cleansing ritual process Locklear describes as like going to church on Sunday. There is also a lot of education about the cultural traditions and history of the Lumbee people.

"A lot of people have kind of moved away from that so I think it helps and it's great that they developed this program," Bell said.

As addiction rates and overdose deaths increase, the MAT program becomes more vital but the funding runs out at the end of the month.

Locklear says the tribal administration is looking for resources to keep it going as long as needed, which seems to be for the foreseeable future.

This story is part of a reporting fellowship on health care performance sponsored by the Association of Health Care Journalists and supported by The Commonwealth Fund.



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SEMINOLE SCENES



Tallahassee Downtown

DOWNTOWN DISTINCTION: Florida Secretary of State Laurel Lee announced Feb. 21 that Tallahassee Downtown, which last year unveiled a mural featuring the Seminole Tribe's first chairwoman Betty Mae Jumper, center, has been designated the February 2022 Florida Main Street Program of the Month. "By hosting a variety of community events throughout the year and supporting public art projects, Tallahassee Downtown has created a sense of place as the heart of Florida's Capital City," Lee said in a statement. In 2021, Tallahassee Downtown received a facelift with the unveiling of "Project Daring," a large-scale mural located on the Lumen Technologies building in their district. Commissioned by the Junior League of Tallahassee, the mural features portraits of Jumper, Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Harris Carr, all of whom have been inducted into the Florida Women's Hall of Fame. Completed by two local Tallahassee muralists, Olivia Barattini, and Savannah Salinas, Project Daring intends to highlight the past achievements of Florida women and inspire future leaders.



Kevin Johnson

BRAHAM BASKETBALL: After helping the Okeechobee High School girls basketball team win a district championship Feb. 4, senior guard Adryauna Baker, left, from the Brighton Reservation, is joined by her cousin and former Braham athlete Alicia Fudge during the postgame celebration.



Beverly Bidney

GREAT GARDEN: Above, Ahfachkee high school student Marina Garcia harvests vegetables from the school's culture garden Feb. 25. Below, these seedlings are taking root in the culture camp at Ahfachkee. Students plant the seeds in cups and watch them grow until they are large enough to be transplanted in the ground of the garden.



Hard Rock Atlantic City

RIGHT ON RED: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City employees wore red Feb. 4 in an effort to raise awareness of heart disease and stroke during American Heart Month.



Beverly Bidney

GOBBLE, GOBBLE: A group of male and female turkeys are at home at Immokalee's 160-acre Indian Camp property, which was recently purchased by the tribe.

Seminole Scenes Rewind

15 Years Ago - March 5, 2007
Tribe finalizes Hard Rock deal

Redline Media Group

On March 5, 2007, the Seminole Tribe finalized the acquisition of Hard Rock International. A ceremonial signing by the Tribal Council was held at the Council Oak tree in Hollywood. From left are Councilman Max Osceola, Councilman Andrew Bowers Jr., Councilman David Cypress, Chairman Mitchell Cypress, Hard Rock President and CEO Hamish Dodds and Vice Chairman Moses Osceola. The tribe announced the purchase agreement from Rank Group PLC for \$965 million on Dec. 7, 2006, in New York City.



File photo

Chairman Mitchell Cypress looks at the ceremonial resolution on March 5, 2007.



NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

A California redwood forest has officially been returned to a group of Native tribes

A conservation group is returning guardianship of hundreds of acres of redwood forestland to a coalition of Native tribes that were displaced from the land generations ago by European American settlers.

Save the Redwoods League purchased the 523-acre area (known as Andersonia West) on the Lost Coast of California's Mendocino County in July 2020. It announced on Tuesday that it had donated and transferred ownership of the property to the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, a consortium of 10 Northern California tribal nations focused on environmental and cultural preservation.

The forest will be renamed "Tc'ih-Léh-Dũn" — which means "fish run place" in the Sinkyone language — as "an act of cultural empowerment and a celebration of Indigenous resilience," the league said in a release. The tribal council has granted it a conservation easement, meaning use of the land will be limited for its own protection.

"Renaming the property Tc'ih-Léh-Dũn lets people know that it's a sacred place; it's a place for our Native people. It lets them know that there was a language and that there was a people who lived there long before now," said Crista Ray, a tribal citizen of the Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians and a board member of the Sinkyone Council. She is of Eastern Pomo, Sinkyone, Cahto, Wailaki and other ancestries.

- NPR

Tribal leaders in Maine, other groups testify in support of bill to overhaul 1980 agreement

Maine lawmakers heard more than eight hours of testimony on Feb. 15 in support of a bill that would dramatically change a decades-old agreement between the state and tribal nations in Maine. The hearing comes at a time when Gov. Janet Mills' administration has been negotiating a separate proposal with tribal leaders.

In February of 2020, leaders of tribes in Maine stood before state lawmakers to support a series of recommendations aimed at restoring tribal sovereignty. Two years and one global pandemic later, many of those tribal leaders were back — albeit virtually — along with more than 1,000 others who submitted written testimony in support of a bill to overhaul the state's relationship with the four tribes in Maine. The bill, LD 1626,

has also garnered support from a broad array of organizations, including religious coalitions, environmental groups and other nonprofits.

"For myself, I feel like I have poured everything I can into this and I feel everyone else around the table has done the same," Chief Clarissa Sabbatis with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians told members of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee. "I am as dedicated to the passage of these recommendations of this bill put forth today as I was at the beginning."

Tribal leaders and their many supporters regard 2022 as a potential make-or-break year to dramatically re-write a 1980 agreement that they say has severely harmed their communities. That 42-year-old agreement was supposed to resolve the tribes' land claims against the state. But tribal leaders say the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act has resulted in their communities being treated as "wards of the state" rather than the sovereign nations, and has stymied economic development on their territorial lands.

Darrell Newell, vice chief of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township, said it's a "no brainer" that federal Indian law should apply to all 500-plus federally recognized tribes across the country, including those in Maine.

"It's insulting to know that Natives in this state have less rights than Natives in other places just because the state of Maine insists that it be this way," Newell said. "We have lived a 40-year mistake in the negotiations of this settlement. LD 1626 would undo this 40-year-old violation of our sacred sovereignty."

LD 1626 is a sweeping bill that would overhaul state and tribal relations on a host of complex issues. The bill is sponsored by House Assistant Majority Leader Rep. Rachel Talbot Ross, D-Portland, and has the strong backing of other legislative leaders. Based on the recommendations of a special commission, the bill would explicitly say that the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians enjoy the rights, privileges, powers and duties of every other federally recognized tribe.

The bill would also severely limit the state's ability to regulate fishing and hunting on tribal lands and would expand the jurisdiction of tribal courts to handle criminal offenses committed on tribal lands. The legislation also gives tribes exclusive jurisdiction to tax tribal members or entities on Indian lands and creates a more robust process for consultation between tribes and state agencies. While earlier proposals would have allowed tribes in Maine to

operate casinos or other gambling venues, LD 1626 does not delve into gaming issues. Mills vetoed a tribal gaming bill last year.

Penobscot Nation Chief Kirk Francis says the word "restoration" is important.

"Nothing in this bill is about granting special rights to Maine's Wabanaki people," Francis said. "It is about restoring rights after time has shown that the restrictions in the 1980 settlement act have been hampering the ability of tribal communities to reach their full potential of self-sufficiency."

Two years ago, the proposals ran into stiff opposition from municipalities as well as the out-of-state corporations that operate Maine's two existing casinos. Although they didn't testify Feb. 15, some of those same groups are expected to oppose the latest bill. Meanwhile, Gov. Janet Mills, who is a former attorney general, also opposed various aspects of the bill.

The governor's top attorney, chief legal counsel Jerry Reid, was the only person to speak against LD 1626 on Feb. 15. Reid said lawmakers need to be careful to avoid ambiguous language that will inevitably lead to more court battles, just like the 1980 agreement has done. But Reid said the administration is not closing the door on the effort to change that decades-old agreement.

"While we are not able to support LD 1626 as drafted, I am happy to report that the administration and the tribes, with support from the attorney general's office, have made significant progress toward an agreement that would cover some of the issues addressed in this bill," Reid said.

Under the governor's proposal, Maine tribes would gain authority to offer online sports betting. Mills is also proposing to offer relief from state income and sales taxes to the tribes and members who live in Indian territory.

Tribal leaders are welcoming the proposals but not giving up on the broader, more sweeping reforms.

- Maine Public Radio

First Nations parents face challenges registering baby's traditional name in Manitoba

A First Nations couple in Manitoba is calling for changes to the province's Vital Statistics Act after they were told at the hospital there might be issues registering their daughter's birth with the traditional spelling of her name.

"We're trying to preserve that custom of the Haudenosaunee people ... and it's like your name has to be approved by the English or by the French," said Carson Robinson, who is Anishinaabe from Sagkeeng First

Nation in Manitoba.

Robinson's partner Zaagaate Jock gave birth to their daughter in February in Selkirk, Man. Jock is Anishinaabe-Haudenosaunee from Akwesasne, which straddles the U.S.-Ontario-Quebec border.

They named their daughter Atetsenhtsén:we, which translates to "forever healing medicine" in Kanien'kéha, the Mohawk language. They were given the name through ceremony via the birth mother's traditional longhouse in Akwesasne.

When they submitted the birth registration form they were notified by the nurse-in-charge at the hospital that Vital Statistics might have issues with the colon symbol.

According to Robinson, the colon is commonly used in Kanien'kéha orthography and is necessary to say her name properly.

According to Manitoba's Vital Statistics Act, when registering a child's birth, "the given name and the surname must consist only of the letters 'a' to 'z' and accents from the English or French languages, but may include hyphens and apostrophes."

"The nurse-in-charge actually called the higher ups of Vital Statistics regarding her name and I guess higher management at Vital Statistics said that it's an ineligible name because of the colon in the baby's name and then possibly because of the [accented] e," said Robinson.

Jock, whose first name Zaagaate translates to "the sun shining through the clouds" in Anishinaabemowin, said she was disappointed that there was an issue with the spelling of the name and wants for Indigenous names to be accepted.

"When I was born, I was given a traditional name, so to me it is a very important part of her identity and where she comes from," said Jock.

Wab Kinew, leader of Manitoba's Opposition NDP, spoke to the parents and wrote a letter addressed to Finance Minister Cameron Friesen, asking him to assist them in ensuring the registration reflects the name they gave her.

"The naming of children in the Indigenous community with Indigenous names is a key part of cultural survival and resurgence, particularly set against the history of Indigenous children having their Indigenous names erased when they were taken from their families during the residential school era," wrote Kinew in the letter.

A spokesperson for the province wrote in an emailed statement to CBC News that Manitoba's Vital Statistics Branch respects the right of all parents to name their children. "The agency works with parents and

families of all backgrounds to ensure names of choice are accommodated in the registration process," the statement said.

"The province encourages the applicant to contact the A/Director at the Vital Statistics Branch to discuss the inquiry."

- CBC

Detroit police apologize after breaking up Native American sugarbush ceremony

DETROIT — The Detroit Police Department has apologized for breaking up a Native American ceremony that was taking place in a city park.

The ceremony was held at River Rouge Park as part of the Detroit Sugarbush Project on Feb. 18. Traditionally, it has involved Anishinaabe and Potawatomi people teaching others about the tradition of making maple syrup from boiling tree sap.

In a statement, chief James White said officers responded to the park after a Michigan State Police helicopter reported seeing fire from the sky. Officers spoke with event organizers who claimed the group had valid memorandum of understanding (MOU) and burn permit to hold the event.

However, the officers on the scene said they observed an expired MOU and no evidence of compliance with key components of the expired MOU, such as a fire permit and proof of insurance, according to the statement.

Videos posted to social media later showed officers standing side-by-side ordering attendees to leave the park amid an extinguished fire. Officers also indicated attendees were violating city ordinances by being in the park after dark.

According to Detroit Code of Ordinances chapter 33, "All City parks and public places shall be closed to the public from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., unless posted signs designate a different period of closure."

"We tried to talk them about the Religious Freedom Act," Rosebud Bear-Schneider, a ceremony organizer told the Detroit Free Press. "We tried to tell them about our sovereignty. They didn't want to hear anything of it."

White's statement said the officers' actions were only due to the bonfire in the middle of a public park without a permit and was not directed as a means to break up a sacred cultural ceremony.

"On behalf of the Detroit Police Department, we would like to apologize for the interruption of a sacred ceremony," White said in a statement.

- mlive.com



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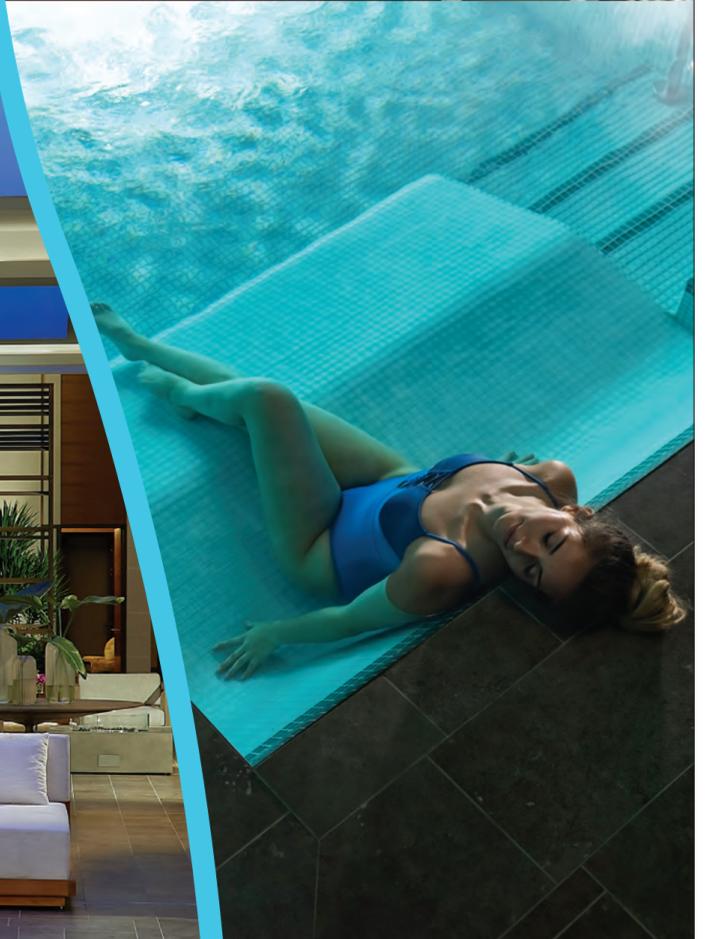
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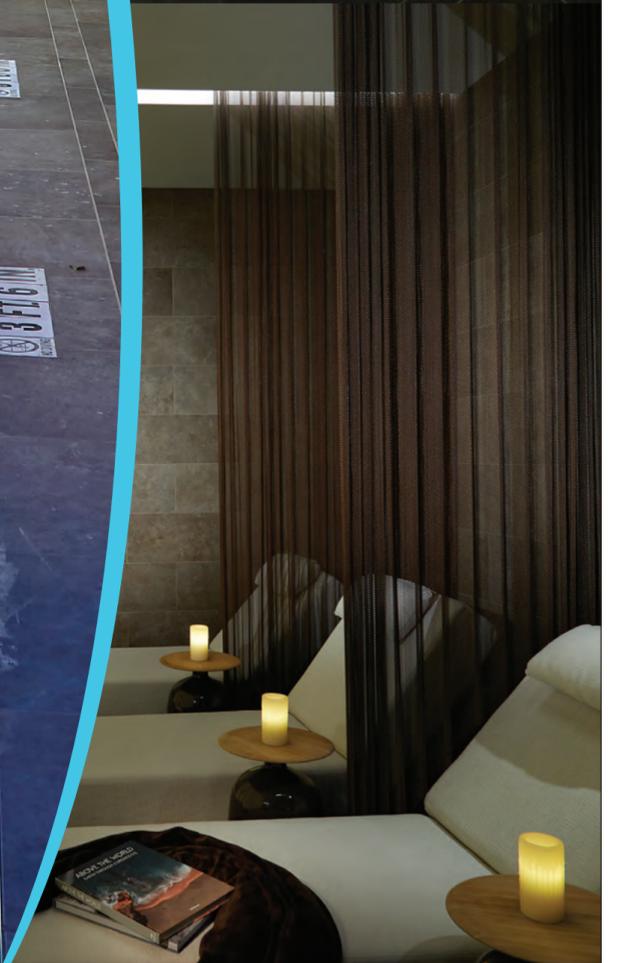
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Education



New name part of changes at Education

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

Focus: tribal members

HOLLYWOOD — The tongue twister has been put to rest. The Seminole Tribe's Center for Student Success and Services (CSSS) — has been renamed as the Education Department. Department officials sought the name change and Tribal Council recently approved it.

While it might seem like a formality, Education director Michael Giacchino said it represents a reconnection with the tribal community.

"When I would call tribal members I'd say: 'Hey this is Michael from the CSSS' and they'd say: 'From where?' We had to chop it up into pieces as to who and what we are. It presented an obstacle. Once we changed it, most people were very happy," Giacchino said.

The original intent for the name CSSS, was to convey a department that would create independence among tribal members.

"It used what's called strength-based language, however it just didn't catch on with the community. There was a total disconnect," Giacchino said.

Giacchino said staff uniforms, brochures, banners, business cards and the like will soon begin to reflect the name change.

It's one part of what's been a transitional period for the department as a whole.

Giacchino's first day as director was Nov. 12, 2019. Just four months later, in March 2020, he was in a meeting with Emergency Management about the Covid-19 threat. In-person school instruction stopped about a week after the meeting.

"Things became really process driven, particularly because we were acquiring remote learning devices — computers, laptops, iPads," he said. "There were hiccups with schools and platforms, but overall it flowed very smoothly."

Almost two years later, students are back in the classroom, but some still attend virtually for health and safety reasons, Giacchino said.

Giacchino has made staff changes as well. He recently hired a new assistant director, Marisa Schnirman; and Reginal Belizaire is the new tribalwide K-12 program manager. In addition, recent Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) participant, Dana Osceola, is now a community member liaison for the department.

ELP was previously called Advanced Career Development (ACD). Tribal members Randee McDonald and Calvin Tiger are currently in the program.

Giacchino said the Education department is now more customer service oriented and data driven as well.

"It's a more mature crowd in here," he said. "In the past it's been very young and more cliquish. It wasn't tribal member focused at all, and we worked to break that

mold by hiring more seasoned veterans." Giacchino said the days of simply handing out scholarship applications and hoping for the best is over.

"We actually try and have a conversation now and develop a relationship and develop the trust of the community," he said. "It's no secret that tribal members are sometimes off-put by seeking assistance or guidance from non-tribal members. In order to overcome that, you'd need that relationship and rapport, rather than hiding behind your desk or picking up a phone and giving it three rings and hanging up."

Tribal member Rollie Gilliam III, Education's quality assurance analyst, describes the changes as "forward motion, rebuilding and departmental balance." He's been in the position since July 26, 2021, and quickly developed outreach programs like the "drive-thru popcorn pop-up," where staff meets and greets tribal families with information about programs and services that are available.

"We're looking to be able to demonstrate our outcomes through data, which never was done before," Gilliam, who is from Fort Pierce and an ELP graduate, said. "It's not good enough to say we did an event. We need to do outreach. How can we say we're helping students by just handing out an application?"

Education serves about 900 students in K-12; 210 in higher education; 200 are in tutoring programs; and about a dozen are currently under the Tribal Professional Development (TPD) umbrella. The



Michael Giacchino



Rollie Gilliam III

department itself has about 50 staff members.

Giacchino and Gilliam, who said they developed a strong professional bond during the pandemic, would like to see more tribal members hold staff positions.

"We're moving in that direction. We have five now and the idea is to have more," Giacchino said.

Giacchino has also instituted quarterly "SOS" (Save Our Students) meetings to provide support for those students who are

at risk of losing a scholarship.

"Other than the health department, we are entrusted with nurturing the most valuable thing — the children of the tribe," he said. More information is at seminoleeducation.com.

Despite hurdles, student Kadin Tommie succeeds through pandemic

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Education during the pandemic has been a challenge for some students. During virtual school, paying attention to a computer screen all day is very different from being in a classroom with a teacher.

Kadin Tommie's grades were good as a seventh and eighth grader at the Ahfachkee School, he even made the honor roll. But when the pandemic began and classes went online, he struggled to keep up.

"He didn't want to do online school, so he completely shut down," said Virginia Tommie, Kadin's grandmother. "They thought I didn't push him enough, but what else could I do?"

Although his grades suffered in the virtual classroom, Kadin Tommie still had the desire to attend school, but in person. After he missed the first semester of ninth grade, his grandmother enrolled him at LaBelle High School. They agreed it would be the best place for him. She has a home near LaBelle and the school had in-person classes.

"I didn't like sitting in front of a computer for eight hours," said Tommie, 16. "I don't like computers that much."

LaBelle High School wanted to send him back to eighth grade, but they gave him a chance and let him finish the second semester of ninth grade if he agreed to do the first semester over the summer. He made up the work and was promoted to tenth grade.

"He is self-motivated," Virginia Tommie said. "He just likes to learn. He has all A's and a couple of B's and he is on the honor roll. He even got a letter from Governor DeSantis congratulating him for his accomplishment."

Kadin Tommie is now thriving in tenth grade. His favorite subject is agriculture, but he also enjoys welding and construction classes. After graduation, he plans to go to trade school in Colorado to learn gunsmithing.

Now that he's back in the classroom, he feels right at home.

"I like the in-person connection, it feels right. I always knew I was going to make it up. I knew I could do it," he said.



Courtesy photo

Kadin Tommie at home with his grandmother Virginia Tommie.

New reading program at Ahfachkee focuses on Native books

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — Ahfachkee students are reading books by and about Native Americans in a new program called "Read Native."

The program was inspired by the American Indian Library Association's inaugural program of the same name, but was modified for Seminole students. The school launched the program in January for third to sixth graders with plans to expand it next year.

"We wanted to motivate the kids to

read while learning about their own and other Native cultures," said Michele Horrell, Ahfachkee media specialist.

The program includes a list of categories on a bingo card with books to match each category. Students choose which categories they are interested in and figure out which books to read to get a winning bingo. Prizes are given for each bingo winner, including candy bars and fidget spinners.

Some of the categories on the bingo card are books about the Seminole Tribe and other tribes, including Native celebrations, food, politicians, leaders, language, scientists, celebrities, artwork, myths or legends, history, culture and current affairs.

Together with Horrell, a sixth grade class read "Classified: The Secret Career of Mary Golda Ross, Cherokee Aerospace Engineer," by Traci Sorell (Cherokee).

Ross was the first Native American aerospace engineer and one of NASA's "hidden figures," whose contributions to the space industry remained unknown for years. She was also the first female engineer at Lockheed Aircraft Corp. and worked on projects such as the Apollo program, which sent astronauts to the moon.

"She never bragged," Horrell read from the book. "She believed no one person deserved credit for what they did together as a team."



Beverly Bidney

Kathy Dixon, media clerk, helps Ahfachkee sixth grader Thanoke Roberts with the Read Native program Feb. 11.

Kansas governor calls on state education commissioner to resign over alleged racist comment

FROM KANSAS NEWS SERVICE

WICHITA, Kan. — Kansas Governor Laura Kelly has called on Education Commissioner Randy Watson to resign, following what she called a "derogatory and discriminatory" comment Watson made at a conference [in February].

"While Education Commissioner Randy Watson has had a long career in advocating for our children in Kansas, the State and the Kansas Board of Education must take issues of derogatory and discriminatory language seriously," Kelly said in a statement.

"There is no question that Randy Watson must resign his position immediately, given his comments last week. However, the Board of Education must also focus on ways to address these issues going forward. Let's build on this moment to celebrate diversity and ensure that all Kansas school children are treated with dignity and respect." The state school board has called a

special meeting for [Feb. 25].

Watson made the remark during a conference on virtual education. A video released by the Kansas Department of Education on Feb. 24 includes the following:

"I had some cousins in California. They were petrified of tornadoes. They'd come visit us, you know, in the summer. They're like, 'Are we going to get killed by a tornado?' And I'd say, 'Don't worry about that. But you gotta worry about the Indians raiding the town at any time,' Watson says on the Zoom call.

"And they really thought that, you know? Grew up in California, I guess you don't know much of the history of Kansas."

Watson was named education commissioner in November 2014 and took over the position in 2015. He previously served as superintendent of McPherson public schools.

Jim McNiece, a member of the state school board who represents the Wichita

area, said earlier Feb. 24 that he had "heard several versions" of what Watson allegedly said during the conference. McNiece said he assumes the reason for the state board meeting is to discuss Watson's comments.

"I can tell you this: I don't support him resigning," McNiece said. "He's done a great job. He's been by far the best commissioner I've ever worked with."

Reached by phone, state board member Betty Arnold of Wichita said she would not comment on personnel matters.

During Watson's tenure with the Kansas Department of Education, he introduced the "Kansas Can" vision for education, which focuses on social-emotional education, kindergarten readiness, civic engagement and individual plans of study.

The Kansas News Service website is ksnewsservice.org.

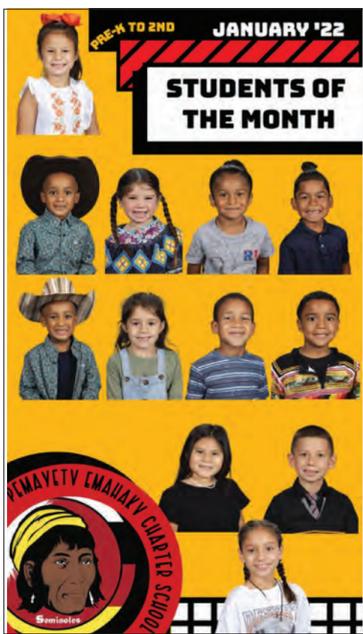
PECS students of the month January 2022



Middle school students of the month



Grades 3-5 students of the month



Pre-K-2nd grade students of the month

Q&A with Michele Thomas, recently honored by PECS, Glades County School District

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Michele Thomas was recently named non-instructional employee of the year for Pemayetv Emahaky Charter School and the Glades County School District. Thomas, from the Brighton Reservation, has been an employee at the school since its inception 15 years ago. Thomas's history with the school on the reservation began even before it existed.

How were you involved in the creation of PECS?

I was one of the parents trying to convince [the Tribal] Council to build the school. My son was in preschool...we [the parents] realized there was no more language classes when they left preschool. The one-day-a-week pullout program came from that, but we lobbied for a school so they could be taught their Native language every day.

How did you get the job?

I thought working at the school would be a temporary stop for me. I worked for Andrew Bowers and James Billie in politics for years. When Andrew lost an election, I thought this was my chance to be a stay-at-home mom. But when my son went to school, I didn't know what I was going to do. I called the principal Russ Brown and he said I could have any job I wanted. He was looking for a bridge to the community and said "We need a Michele Thomas on this staff." I thought it would be two years and then I'd go back to politics, but I couldn't leave the school. I love working with these kids and I liked having time off for Christmas, spring break and summer.

I see myself staying right here until I retire. I'm 54 and I've seen people wait too

long to retire and not be able to do the things they wanted to do in retirement. I don't want to be one of those people; I want to enjoy retirement.

What is your title and what is your job description?

I am the administrative assistant to the principal, but I am also the liaison between the school and the community and the school board. In administration you have to be flexible. If you see a need, someone has to cover it. We step in wherever we are needed. Lately I've been a bus monitor because of contact tracing. It's nice to connect with the kids one on one.

I have the opportunity to interact with the youth of our community and see the light in their eyes about education and I get to learn what their dreams and fears are. Some of the kids who were there when I started are parents now and their kids are in these halls. We have a second generation of kids coming through now. I love being part of their educational success.

What are some of the challenges?

The pandemic and the Covid gap. We are trying to bridge the gap that was created by virtual learning. It's a big gap for some kids, but for those students who don't need extra resources, we don't see it as much. We were blessed to have had the mechanisms in place when we had to close down. But we would have liked to have them on campus, there's not a doubt in our minds. The school still has a virtual learning option, but only a small percentage took it; 98% of our students are back in school face to face.

How did you get chosen as the school's and the district's non-instructional employee of the year?



Courtesy photo

Michele Thomas, left, receives a plaque from the Glades County School District.

Every school chooses a non-instructional employee of the year, the staff votes on it. Then the principal writes a recommendation letter to the district. I know every one of those ladies who were nominated and they are all crucial to their schools. We were all deserving.

It's an honor to be selected by my peers. It's the second time for me; I was also selected after our first year. We have a great team here. My job is to do whatever I can do to make their job easier in the classroom, to be as helpful as I can. I enjoy being part of

this environment and seeing students reach success. I beam when they graduate; their success is our success.

We are blessed in this community because we are afforded the opportunity to provide an excellent education to our children. Tribal Council is committed to our youth, so we are able to keep them in our community and educate them in our backyard.

University of Minnesota regents approve repatriation of Native objects

FROM THE MINNESOTA DAILY

The University of Minnesota board approved a resolution Feb. 11 to return Native American Mimbres objects at the Weisman Art Museum to their Native American tribes.

The university has begun consultations with 28 Native American tribes that are, or are likely to be, affiliated with the Mimbres objects. The Mimbres Collection includes Native American funerary objects like stone tools, arrowheads, beads and pottery that belonged to the Mimbres people who resided in the southwest U.S. beginning around 1000 AD.

Criteria to determine the objects' cultural affiliation and intended location include geographical kinship, folkloric information, archeological information and several other categories of relevant information and expert opinion.

"The university is exhibiting the values of what it means to be a land-grant institution by authorizing the repatriation of the Mimbres objects to their rightful home," board chair Kendall Powell said at the meeting. "We express our regret that it was not done sooner."

Between 1928 and 1931, the university and the Minneapolis Institute of Art excavated Native American materials in New Mexico, including human remains and material objects of the Mimbres people. The university then transferred some of these remains to other U.S. universities or museums.

In 1989, the university transferred the human remains to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, and in 1992, the university's Department of Anthropology transferred the remaining objects to the Weisman Art Museum.

The university has faced criticism from Native American tribes, the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council and anthropologists for delaying the return of these objects after affiliated tribes asked for them to be sent back.

Exhibition in St. Pete provides glimpse into Indian boarding school history

STAFF REPORT

A traveling exhibition featuring the infamous history of Indian boarding schools in the 19th and 20th centuries is in the midst of its only Florida appearance. "Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories" is on view at The James Museum in St. Petersburg until March 16.

The exhibition features interviews, objects, photographs and art related to

the boarding school era when the U.S. government attempted to eradicate Native American cultures through the forced assimilation of Native children in federally operated, off-reservation boarding schools.

Due to sensitive content, the exhibition is recommended for ages 13 and up.

The traveling exhibition will run until March 2025. Its future destinations are mostly in the midwest and west, although there are stops in the Carolinas. The

exhibition was made possible by NEH on the Road, a special initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities. It was adapted from the permanent exhibition, *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories*, organized by The Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona.

The James Museum is located 150 Central Avenue in St. Petersburg. For more information call (727) 892-4200 or visit thejamesmuseum.org.



Library of Congress

Sioux children on their first day at school in 1897.

New app provides guide to Indigenous points in DC

FROM AMERICAN UNIVERSITY NEWS

Thanks to the new Guide to Indigenous DC app (Apple/iOS), visitors to the nation's capital can now experience the city in a whole new way. The app brings them on a guided tour of 17 local sites that are filled with Indigenous history and importance, from the Marine Corps' Iwo Jima Memorial to the Department of the Interior's New Deal murals, to the National Native American Veterans Memorial.

Guide to Indigenous DC was developed by Elizabeth Rule, an American University assistant professor of Critical Race, Gender, and Culture Studies and an enrolled citizen of the Chickasaw Nation. The app has received the 2021 Library Company of Philadelphia's Biennial Innovation Award, which is presented to a project that critically and creatively expands the possibilities of humanistic scholarship.

For Rule, it's been a rewarding project. "By highlighting sites of importance to Native peoples within, and contributions to, Washington, DC," she said, "Guide to Indigenous DC showcases empowering stories of how this prominent city is a place of tribal gathering, presence, and advocacy with a long, rich history."

NAJA fellowships available

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) is accepting applications for the 2022 Native American Journalism Fellowship through April 30. Selected fellows will build their reporting and interpersonal skills in a digital newsroom experience before, during and after the 2022 National Native Media Conference set for Aug. 24-27 in Phoenix, Arizona.

The 2022 class of fellows will participate in a virtual curriculum with selected mentors representing broadcast, radio, print and digital media. This innovative experience will be designed to leverage the advantages of online learning while allowing fellows to participate in the National Native Media Conference, network with other Indigenous journalists, and strengthen reporting skills.

In partnership with the Walter

Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, NAJA will facilitate a conference program featuring best practices in Indigenous media, training and workshops. Fellows will be encouraged to report on relevant program content and explore deeper coverage of Indigenous issues in order to complete their fellowship requirements.

Fellows will participate in a series of instructional webinars and will be eligible to receive three hours of college credit through the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) at the undergraduate or graduate-level through their respective universities.

Conference attendance from Aug. 24-27 is encouraged but optional around Covid-19 risks for applicants or their loved ones as well as fall semester schedules. For more information visit najanewsroom.com.

SAVE THE DATES! SEMINOLE TRIBE 4-H LIVESTOCK SHOW & SALE

PEEWEE SHOW & SWINE SHOW
Wednesday, March 9th 7pm

CATTLE SHOW
Thursday, March 10th 7pm

PEEWEE PARADE
AND LIVESTOCK SALE
Friday, March 11th 7pm

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For questions, contact the 4-H Office:
863.763.5020



Hall of fame induction set for April 9 for painter of Seminole life

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

After a long delay due to the pandemic, artists from the classes of 2020, 2021 and 2022 will be inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame.

The class of 2020 includes painter Guy LaBree and singer/songwriter Rita Coolidge. The ceremony will be April 9 in Tallahassee. LaBree died Jan. 1, 2015, at age 73.

"Inducting into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame is the highest honor bestowed on artists by the State of Florida," Secretary of State Laurel Lee said in a statement. "Induction in the Florida Artists Hall of Fame recognizes our state's most distinguished artists who have made significant contributions to their craft and whose work continues to inspire millions of people in Florida, the United States, and globally."

LaBree grew up in Dania, attended

school with tribal members and spent his career painting Seminole history, legends, culture and people. His paintings are popular collectables among tribal members.

The self-taught artist's life work includes about 1,000 paintings, of which 500 are Seminole related. He also illustrated Betty Mae Jumper's book "Legend of the Seminoles" and was commissioned by tribal families to paint their portraits.

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum has about 40 LaBree pieces in its collection and was instrumental in him being nominated. Since 2017, the museum assisted Carol Mahler, author of "Guy LaBree: Barefoot Artist of the Florida Seminoles," with the nomination process by providing letters of support. It took until 2020 for inclusion in the hall of fame to be granted.

"No one else has painted the battles the way the Seminoles see it, with very little clothing," museum collections manager Tara Backhouse said when the nomination was



File photo (2)

Two of Guy LaBree paintings that depict Seminole life.



File photo

Guy LaBree working on a painting in his studio in 2014.

announced in 2020. "His are more realistic; they didn't fight in long shirts."

The class of 2021 consists of illustrator Mary GrandPre and cinematographer, producer and director Tom Fitz. The class of 2022 includes performer Wayne Brady, visual artist Buster Kenton, painter Sandra

Lloyd and painter Bob Ross.

The hall of fame, established in 1986 by the legislature, recognizes people, alive or deceased, who have made significant contributions to the arts in Florida. The hall of fame consists of more than 50 inductees including singer Ray Charles,

actor Burt Reynolds, writers Zora Neale Hurston, Tennessee Williams and Ernest Hemmingway, filmmaker Victor Nunez and visual artists Duane Hanson, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist.

Native American musical featuring Spencer Battiest heads to Oklahoma City

FROM PRESS RELEASE

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma will open its 2022 season this spring with the Native American musical "Distant Thunder," whose cast includes Spencer Battiest from the Seminole Tribe.

Battiest, who grew up on the Hollywood Reservation, plays the role of Tonto in the performance.

The production was originally slated as part of Lyric's 2020 season, but after Covid-19 forced a two-year delay, "Distant Thunder" will be staged outdoors at the new First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City from March 23-27. Sponsorship opportunities as well as single and season tickets are now available.

The production centers on Darrell Waters, a brash, young attorney, who returns to his childhood home in Montana to broker a deal that can benefit his tribe, the impoverished Blackfeet Nation. He soon

faces his reclusive father about their painful past and grapples with the paradigm of what it means to be Native American in the United States. Through a childhood sweetheart, Dorothy Dark Eyes, he rediscovers his identity and feels his perspective shift — his clever business deal will destroy her language school, further erode Blackfeet culture and taint their land. Cultures collide and unite through music, dance, stories and faith.

In addition to Battiest, casting includes: Shaun Taylor-Corbett (Darrell), Ryan Duncan (Hector/Sam Silver), Xander Chauncey (Jim Running Crow), Jonathan Lynch (Smudge), Chelsea Zeno (Shareen/Tourist), April Ortiz (Betty Still Smoking), Brent Florendo — Sitwallapum (Old Man), Jeff Barchand (White Feather), Matoaka Little Eagle (Grandma Jingle Dress), Karsten Tate (Roberta/Tourist), Katie McCollum (Aiyana), Johnlee Lookingglass (Sheriff Running Buck), Angela Gomez (Dorothy Dark Eyes), Aiden James LeIdin Rogers (Young Darrell) and Chava Florendo (Pow

Wow Singer/Musician).

Lyric received a production grant, part of the Frank Young Fund for New Musicals, from the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) to assist with the production of "Distant Thunder." Additional show support has come from the The Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, the Osage Nation Foundation, Citizen Potawatomi Nation/Grand Casino, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes/Lucky Star Casino, Sac and Fox Nation and others.

In addition to his stage performance, Taylor-Corbett is also a co-writer of the musical with his mom, Lynne Taylor-Corbett, who is the director and choreographer.

For more information and tickets visit LyricTheatreOKC.org or call Lyric's box office at (405) 524-9312. For information on how to support Distant Thunder through individual donations or sponsorship opportunities, contact Kerrie Brinkman-White at (405) 524-9310, ext. 211 or Kerrie@LyricTheatreOKC.org.

Seminole Writers Group tackles writing exercises

STAFF REPORT

The Seminole Writers Group met for the first time in December. One exercise required writers to pitch in one word each. With nine words to work with, each member had 10 minutes to use those words in anything he or she wanted to write.

The words were:

- corn liquor
- atrocious
- shining
- existential
- euphoria
- tremendous
- pencil
- hat
- responsibility

Here's what the group's Elgin Jumper came up with:

The Surrealist Poem:

I listen
as the atrocious
pencil of imagery
brings euphoria
to my hat
shining to
the bitter taste
of corn liquor
responsibility
Is this
what it means
to be
Existential?

"Now, I thought I had used all words, but discovered afterwards I had overlooked one word, 'tremendous,' much to my chagrin," Jumper said.

In the group's most recent meeting Feb. 16, the task was to write haikus, which are unrhymed poems whose structure rules are five syllables in the first line, seven in second line and five in the third line.



Beverly Bidney

Elgin Jumper

Here is Jumper's piece:

Six Haikus

Light on the waters
moving through thought and visions
Writing Poetry

Seminole splendor
Let me dream of you today
You are heartfelt poetry

Riding a haiku
like an airboat in the sun
across the paper

Boat made of haikus
like Noah's ancient ark
sailing on till the bright dawn

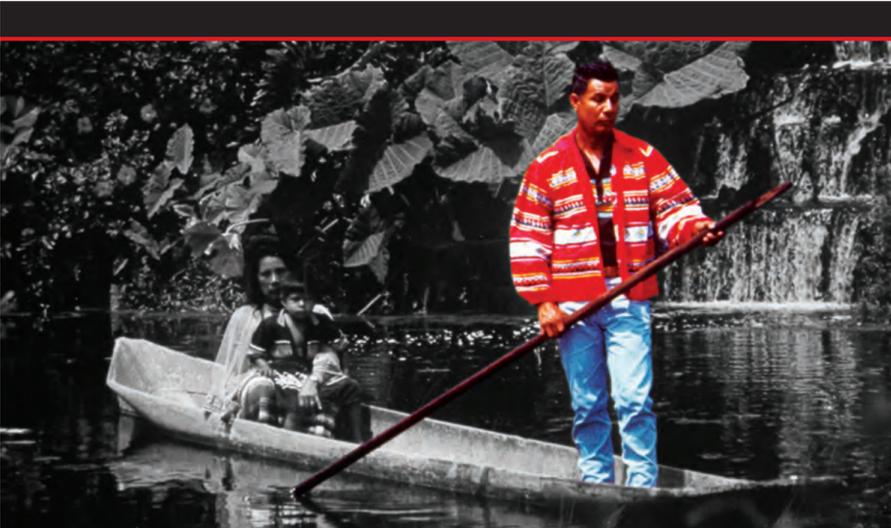
Drop me in a maze
haikus lining the ramparts
striving here and there

Then bicycling on
See us flying at full speed
and winning a race

			
Shaun Taylor-Corbett Darrell Waters	Ryan Duncan Hector/Sam Silver	Spencer Battiest Tonto	Xander Chauncey Jim Running Crow

Lyric Theatre

Some of the main characters in "Distant Thunder" are from left, Shaun Taylor-Corbett, Ryan Duncan, Spencer Battiest and Xander Chauncey.



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Sports



The Okeechobee High School girls basketball team celebrates after winning the Class 5A-District 13 championship Feb. 8. The tribe's Adryauna Baker, a senior guard, is in the front row, second from right. The team is coached by Jovanny Torres, far right, who is also the athletics director at Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School on the Brighton Reservation.

Fast start for Brighton's Trevor Thomas on Warner baseball

STAFF REPORT

Warner University outfielder Trevor Thomas, from the Brighton Reservation, started the season on a positive note with a pair of hits in his first game Feb. 1.

Thomas, a senior, had two singles in the team's 10-9 home loss to Ave Maria University in Lake Wales. He batted eighth in the order and started in left field.

In his next game, Thomas continued his strong start with one hit and one RBI in a 9-6 win against Edward Waters College. His RBI came on a fourth inning single that knotted the score at 3-3.

On Feb. 12, the former Okeechobee High Brahman notched a hit and RBI and scored a run in a 9-6 win against Montreat College.

As of Feb. 20, he had a .217 batting average.

Thomas has been in the Warner program since 2018. Last season he started 15 games and batted .220 with three doubles and six RBIs in 50 at-bats.



Trevor Thomas
Warner Athletics

District championship, two regional wins highlight Adryauna Baker's final season

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

PLANTATION — A season-ending loss by 36 points to powerful private school American Heritage-Plantation couldn't dampen the upbeat spirits of the Okeechobee High School girls basketball team. The Brahms seemed determined to leave Heritage's gym in a good mood despite the outcome in the Class 5A-Region 4 final.

After doing the postgame handshakes, the Brahms immediately found their fans on the other side of the court and started happily chanting "selfie, selfie" as the cell phones and smiles came out for one final time this season following a 72-36 loss to Heritage on Feb. 18.

Indeed, Okeechobee, which included starting senior guard Adryauna Baker from the Seminole Tribe, had plenty of reasons to smile this season. There was a 20-5 record, a 10-game winning streak, a district championship for the second year in a row and two regional playoff wins, including an overtime thriller against Norland High School of Miami Gardens.

But Heritage — and especially Florida State recruit Ta'Niya Latson — proved to be too much to handle. Before the game even started, the Brahms found themselves short-handed because senior Jasmine Shanks, who was supposed to guard Latson, did not play. Although they led 4-2 early, the Brahms got into foul trouble as Heritage went on a 16-0 run. At one point, Okeechobee had seven fouls and Heritage had one.

"That kind of hurt our players who are fighting so hard and they're playing great defense and they get called for fouls," said Okeechobee coach Jovanny Torres. "It's a blow to your stomach; it takes all the fight, all the will out of you and that's kind of what happened."

Both Baker and freshman standout center McKenzie Neal sat for portions of the first half due to foul trouble. When they returned, neither one was as aggressive defensively as they usually are as they tried to remain in the game. Neal eventually fouled out in the fourth quarter.

Latson, a 5-star recruit who is ranked by ESPN as the nation's top shooting guard in the 2022 class, racked up 40 points, most of which came on layups.

"It was really tough. Our goal was to stop her, but then we got into foul trouble," Baker said.

"I don't think anyone has ever scored 40 points on us," Torres said.

Despite the foul trouble, Okeechobee trailed by only 12 at halftime and pulled to within 10 early in the third quarter before Heritage pulled away.

"I'm proud of [my team]. They could have easily given up with all these foul calls. They kept fighting," Torres said.

Okeechobee came up one win shy of reaching the state final four. The team's only final four appearance came in 1979 when the Brahms lost to Tarpon Springs in the state semifinals.

Heritage went on to win its fifth straight state championship the following week in Lakeland. It defeated all opponents in the playoffs by 28 points or more.

A strong contingent of Seminoles attended the Okeechobee-Heritage game, including many from the Brighton and Hollywood reservations.

"There's so much support from the tribe," Torres said. "We appreciate everything they do for us. They sponsor us every year. The Brighton Seminole Council, (Councilman) Larry Howard, Boogie Johns, they're tremendous for us. We couldn't do it without them. Their support is amazing."

In her final season with Okeechobee, Baker averaged 7.6 points, 4.7 rebounds, 2.6 assists and 3.1 steals per game, all of which placed her in the team's top four in each



Okeechobee High's Adryauna Baker brings the ball up court during the Brahms' district championship victory against Rockledge.

Kevin Johnson

category. Nine times she hit double digits in scoring, including season-highs of 19 points in games against Port St. Lucie and South Fort Myers.

In the playoffs, Baker was the star in a 53-39 win against Rockledge in the regional quarterfinals Feb. 10. She scored 15 points and notched seven steals — both game highs. Baker hit three 3-pointers. She also had five rebounds, one assist and one block.

A few days earlier, Rockledge was also on the losing end of Okeechobee's second straight district championship. Nobody celebrated as much as Baker, who leapt into the arms of teammates at the final buzzer of a 47-36 win the District 13 title game.

When Okeechobee athletics director Kenny Buckner presented the district trophy, Baker was the first to hoist it above her head before being swarmed by her jubilant teammates.

"It's a much different feeling," Baker said in comparison to last year's district title,

"but we knew we could do it. We kind of had to push ourselves a little bit more."

Baker helped propel the Brahms into the district final with a huge night in a 63-55 semifinal win against Eau Gallie. She had 13 points, three rebounds, two steals and two assists.

"She played great," Torres said. "She was knocking down 3s. She played on the wing. She knocked down some deep 3s. Defensively, she's been amazing."

Torres said Baker, who has been a big presence in Okeechobee basketball for four years, will be greatly missed.

"She's an outstanding player," Torres said. "She stacks the stat sheet. Since her ninth grade year, she's been amazing. Not having her next year is going to break my heart."

Top tennis players coming to Hard Rock Stadium

STAFF REPORT

Most of the world's top tennis players will be at Hard Rock Stadium for the Miami Open from March 21-April 3. Overall, 73 of the top 75 ranked men and 73 of the top 75 ranked women are entered to compete in Miami.

The men's draw includes defending champion Hubert Hurkacz, world No. 2 Daniil Medvedev, No. 4 Stefanos Tsitsipas and Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev.

The women's entry list features Australian Open and two-time defending Miami Open champion Ashleigh Barty and reigning US Open champion Emma Raducanu.

Some new changes to the site include a new Butch Buchholz Family Stadium with seating for more than 3,500, new multi-level structures hosting culinary options, live entertainment, retail stores and more. Guests will have the opportunity to ride the gondola, giving them a unique bird's eye view perspective of the site.

For tickets go to miamiopen.com.



Emma Raducanu
Facebook

Strong start for Yearling softball

STAFF REPORT

The Yearling Middle School softball team opened its season with a 17-1 win against Storm Grove Middle School in mid-February. Yearling's team includes three players who attend Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School, which is not offering sports this academic year due to the pandemic.

The PECS trio are Melaine Bonilla, Dyani Kayda and Alyssa Madrigal. In the opener, Madrigal was the starting pitcher and received the game ball. Last fall, Bonilla and Madrigal played for Yearling's conference championship volleyball team.



Courtesy photo (2)

The Yearling Middle School softball team includes Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School students Melaine Bonilla, front row, second from left; Dyani Kayda, back row, second from right, and Alyssa Madrigal, next to Kayda.



Courtesy photo

Starting pitcher Alyssa Madrigal delivers a pitch in Yearling's opening day game. She earned the game ball honor.

After five state championships, Allie Williams ready to roll with Ottawa University

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

By the time Allie Williams rolled her final ball for the Neshoba Central High School girls bowling team in February, the tribal member from the Seminole Tribe had racked up plenty of accomplishments in her six-year career with the team.

She was on five state championship teams with Neshoba Central in Philadelphia, Mississippi, dating back to when she was in seventh grade. She was named the team's most valuable player three times, including this season as a senior. Her top score this season was a 732 series and her season average was 200. She earned All-State recognition this season, an honor she has also previously won.

Additionally, she signed a letter of intent with Ottawa University as she'll embark on her collegiate bowling career in Kansas. During her signing day ceremony in December 2021 she was surrounded by her teammates and family, including her parents Brandi and Gavin Williams and her brothers Marin and Malloy. With the stroke of a pen, her ambition to bowl on the college level – and to do so on a scholarship – became reality thanks to years of practice and determination.

"Following my ninth grade year, I became more focused on improving my skills to play collegiately. I had to make hard decisions and made bowling a huge priority to get to where I am now," Williams said.

Ottawa University is a private college 50 miles south of Kansas City and about a 10-hour drive from her home.

"I love it. It reminds me of home, but it is different enough to open myself to the world," Williams said.

Williams and Neshoba Central came up just shy in their bid for six straight state championships. The team finished runner-up in the Class 2 final in February.

"It was very disappointing. I believed that we had done almost everything we could to prepare ourselves, yet we still came up short," Williams said. "We strongly believed we had a good chance of winning again. I'm content with how I performed during the regular season, however, I'm left disappointed with how I finished at state championship."

Williams said she will learn from the rare setback and hopes others will, too.

"I want to remind myself, my teammates, and others that no matter how much you prepare and work hard for something, it won't always work out as planned; that is okay. All you can do is reflect, learn and move on," she said.

Most high school athletes never win a state championship, let alone five. There's no doubt Williams' career will be tough to match for future bowlers at the school.

"I hope I left a positive mark on Neshoba Central's bowling team, and I hope to see them come back stronger next year," she said.



Neshoba Central High School bowler Allie Williams wears the colors and T-shirt of her future school - Ottawa University in Kansas - during a signing ceremony in December 2021.



Allie Williams is joined by her mother Brandi, father Gavin and brothers Marin and Malloy during her signing ceremony.



NSU University School seventh graders Charleze Osceola, left, and Tatum Billie recently finished their first seasons on the school's varsity girls basketball team.

Future looks bright for two Seminole at NSU University School

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

DAVIE — For NSU University School girls varsity basketball coach Nicole Riscica, there's a lot to like about the two Seminole on her team.

Seventh graders Tatum Billie and Charleze Osceola made quite an impression in their first seasons on varsity.

"Charleze is a very smart player that plays down low. Tatum plays a guard and shoots lights out from 3-point," Riscica said. "Both girls hustle, work hard and never give up. As a 25-year varsity coach, I am highly impressed with these two future stars. They will make their mark at NSU University School."

Both girls are from the Hollywood Reservation. They've known each other since they were very young and have attended University School for many years.

They admitted that playing against bigger and older opponents on the varsity level – some players they faced were 17 or 18 years old – was overwhelming at times, but they said it will help them become better players.

"You've got to stick with the motivation that you have to win," Billie said.

"You have to have a strong, positive mindset," Osceola added.

University School had five seniors this season, which meant Billie and Osceola not only played against older players in games, but also in practices.

"I think I had some difficulty playing with a varsity team for the first time, but then I got the hang of it," Billie said. "It was

really good to play with the seniors and to get along with them."

Riscica said both players bring different skills to the court with Billie being a smooth-shooting guard and Osceola being effective in the post position as a forward.

Billie, who started several games, scored in double digits a few times, including 15 points in one game.

Both girls said their parents have helped them with their basketball development. Billie's parents are Isiah Billie and Meredith Bullard; Osceola's parents are Brande Clay and Chief Osceola.

The girls said they want to play college basketball when their days at University are over, but they don't follow college hoops. Instead, they like to watch the NBA. Billie's favorite player is superstar LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers; Osceola's favorite is Tyler Herro of the Miami Heat. When she attends Heat games, Osceola is more than just a spectator; she's taking mental notes.

"I watch the way they pass the ball and their communication and their overall teamwork," she said.

"Char is very smart," Riscica said. "She knows the game. What impressed me the most is how much of the game she knows, where to be on the court, why things happen, how to create."

University finished runner-up in its district, but did not qualify for the regional playoffs. Riscica expects that to change in the near future as her young team, which includes another seventh grader and an eighth grader, continues to improve. In a couple years "I don't think anybody will touch us as long as everyone stays and commits to offseason work," she said.

Chobee volleyball takes second in Miami



The Chobee Volleyball Academy 14U team reached the championship match at a tournament in Miami in early February with an undefeated record. Chobee lost in the final and earned runner-up honors. The team includes tribal members (in alphabetical order): Preslynn Baker, Miley Jimmie, Alyssa Madrigal, Chaka Yani Smith and Kashyra Urbina. Also on the team are Jenessa Arana, Tatiana Flores, Lindy Harwas, Emma Pereira and Daniela Sanchez. The head coach is Monica Koger and the assistant coach is Mona Baker.

All Native American team selected for PBR Global Cup USA

STAFF REPORT

The Professional Bull Riders (PBR) Global Cup USA will feature two teams from the U.S., including one all Native American squad.

Team USA Wolves will be comprised of Cannon Cravens (Cherokee – Porum, Oklahoma), Cody Jesus (Navajo – Window Rock, Arizona), Stetson Lawrence (Chippewa and Sioux – Williston, North Dakota), Dakota Louis (Cheyenne and Blackfeet – Browning, Montana) and Keyshawn Whitehorse (Navajo – McCracken Springs, Utah).

The group brings plenty of experience. Lawrence and Whitehorse have appeared at three prior iterations of the event, while Cravens, Jesus and Louis have earned two selections to the all Native American squad.

The Wolves, who will be coached by Ryan Dirteater, from Oklahoma, finished in second place in 2019, but fell to last place in 2020.

PBR's announcement about rosters Feb. 10 also included Team USA Eagles, which will feature Boudreaux Campbell (Crockett, Texas), Chase Dougherty (Decatur, Texas), Dalton Kasel (Muleshoe, Texas), Mason Taylor (Maypearl, Texas) and Stetson Wright (Milford, Utah).

The PBR Global Cup USA is a six-team nation versus nation competition that also includes teams from Australia, Brazil, Canada and Mexico. It will be held March 5 at AT&T Stadium – the home of the Dallas Cowboys – in Arlington, Texas.



The all-Native Team USA Wolves include Cannon Cravens (Cherokee) above, and Dakota Louis (Cheyenne and Blackfeet) below.



Fast car at Hard Rock

The No. 22 car of NASCAR driver Joey Logano made an appearance at Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach during racing's biggest week of the year. Although Logano did not win the Daytona 500 on Feb. 21 - he finished 21st - his Team Penske teammate Austin Cindric captured the checkered flag.



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