



Hard Rock unveils Max Osceola tribute  
COMMUNITY 7A



Alfachkee class of 2024 graduates  
EDUCATION 1B



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SPORTS 3C

# The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

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July 2024

## Tribe's Greg 'Zae' Thomas picks FSU

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — Tribal members from the Seminole Tribe of Florida will soon be able to cheer for one of their own on the Florida State Seminoles football team.

Greg Xavier Thomas, who goes by the nickname "Zae," announced June 30 that he has committed to FSU. The 6-foot-3, 187-pound cornerback, who plays for American Heritage School in Plantation, said he will sign a National Letter of Intent in early December when the signing period for recruits begins.

Thomas, a lifelong FSU fan, made his announcement in front of family, friends, teammates, tribal leaders and others in the Bora Bora pools and cabanas area at the tribe's 34-story Guitar Hotel in Hollywood, which served as a picturesque backdrop. The hotel's dazzling light display — which can be seen for miles in South Florida — lit up with FSU colors to coincide with the announcement.

"It means everything. It's a dream come true," Thomas said about signing with FSU.

If everything goes according to plan, Thomas will become only the second tribal member from the Seminole Tribe to play football for FSU; he would be the first to do so as a scholarship player. Wide receiver Justin Motlow, from Tampa, was the first from the tribe to suit up for FSU. He was a preferred walk on who played in seven games during his career from 2015 to 2017.

It's possible STOF will have two tribal members playing in major sports at FSU at the same time. In addition to Thomas, the tribe's OB Osceola III, who is entering his junior year as a pitcher at Community School of Naples, committed to FSU for baseball last year.

◆ See THOMAS on page 4C



Kevin Johnson (2)

At left, Greg "Zae" Thomas dons the cap of Florida State University after announcing his commitment to FSU football on June 30 at the Guitar Hotel in Hollywood. Above, Thomas is congratulated by Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr.



Chip Dizard/NMAI

On stage, Spencer Battiest and Doc Native, far right, perform in Washington, D.C., on June 28.

## Battiest brothers perform on National Mall

### Spencer receives invitation to White House event

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Washington, D.C. put out the welcome mat for Seminole Tribe of Florida brothers Spencer Battiest and Doc Native as they made their marks around the district recently.

Together they performed at the National Museum of the American Indian's Smithsonian Folklife Festival on June 28. It was the first after-hours concert on the Four Directions stage in a show called "First Beats: Indigenous Hip Hop." They performed 11 songs, had a guest singer and two dancers from Indigenous Enterprise.

"We had a really good response from the crowd. We had about 15 family members with us," said Native, who won an MTV Video Music Award in 2017 with Spencer as part of an all-Native group.

The theme of the Folklife Festival, which ran from June 26 to July 1, was "Indigenous Voices of the Americas: Celebrating the National Museum of the American Indian." The festival on the National Mall featured more than 250 participants from 60 Indigenous communities from across the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil.

Additionally, the festival marked the 20th anniversary of NMAI in Washington and the 30th anniversary of the museum's New York City location.

Battiest and his partner Jay Valle also attended the White House's Pride celebration June 27.

"Everything this week leads up to when we perform at the museum," Battiest said. "When we got the invitation to the White

House it was the icing on the cake."

It has been a busy year for Battiest, who was honored with the Harvey Milk Medal in March. Valle, a journalist for NBC Universal in New York, won a GLADD media award this year.

"You work and you never know if people are paying attention," Battiest said. "Just being visible and being yourself is enough. We were honored to be [at the White House Pride event]."

Battiest asked his friend Melissa DeMayo to make him a pride jacket to wear to the Milk award ceremony, but instead he was inspired by fellow awardee Billie Porter and wore a traditional Seminole long shirt instead. In May, he asked DeMayo if she could make the jacket in time for him to attend the Pride parade in New York City on June 30.

◆ See BROTHERS on page 5A

## Tribe celebrates construction milestone for new Brighton hotel and casino

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — The placement of the final steel beam at the Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino was celebrated with a topping out ceremony June 26 on the Brighton Reservation. The event drew hundreds of people, including tribal leaders, dignitaries, members and employees, construction executives and workers, and area officials. They filled a ballroom-sized tent for the indoor portion of the ceremony on the site.

When the new hotel and casino opens in early 2025, it will replace the existing Seminole Casino Brighton which opened a few miles down the road in 1980. Brighton resident Josiah Johns was its first general manager.

"Josiah had a vision. He said we should bring bingo to Brighton," said Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. "I'm not sure this would be here without him. We are near the final destination, the opening of this casino. We are closer to making more history and another step closer to securing our future."

Marty Johns, Josiah's son, has been

general manager of the Seminole Casino Brighton since his father died in 1982.

"A lot of work has gone into this, day in and day out," Johns said. "It's really great to get to this point. I try not to get too excited, but I think about the last 40-plus years and it's pretty exciting."

President Holly Tiger grew up in Brighton and worked with Johns at the original red barn bingo hall and casino.

"I'm proud of you for sticking around all these years," President Tiger said. "It's good to see how far this community has come and the dedication everyone has put into it."

Brighton Councilman Larry Howard said he always wanted a casino hotel in Brighton.

"We build all these buildings around the world; I always wanted one in our own backyard," he said. "It was time for Brighton to get an upgrade. Today we are enjoying the fruits of our labor."

◆ See BRIGHTON on page 9A



Beverly Bidney

Polly Hayes, from the Brighton Reservation, signs the final steel beam for the new Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino during a topping out ceremony June 26 in Brighton.

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# Editorial

## A century of Native American citizenship

• U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk)

Today (June 2) marks 100 years since President Calvin Coolidge signed the Indian Citizenship Act into law, ensuring all Native Americans are counted as United States citizens. Before this, my ancestors were treated as foreigners in their own land without a voice in the country's most important systems. The act's passage kicked off a journey for Native American freedom and self-determination that continues to this day.

Generation after generation, Native Americans have worked to ensure our communities receive the full set of rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship while protecting the treaty rights that guarantee tribal sovereignty.

Ruth Muskrat, a Native college student who advised President Coolidge on Native American matters, summarized this duality in a 1923 speech: "We want to become citizens of the United States and to share in the building of this great nation that we love. But we want also to preserve the best that is in our own civilization."

The opportunities I have been given, as a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, speak to the progress we have made toward these goals. I am the daughter of a single mother who served in the U.S. Army for 20 years. I worked my way through community college and public university to become the first in my family to earn a college degree, and later a law degree from Cornell University.

Then, in 2019, alongside now-Secretary Deb Haaland, I became one of the first two Native women sworn into the United States Congress. I didn't run for office to be the first of anything, but it has been an honor to challenge the norms for who our leaders can be and enable others to see a path they hadn't noticed before.

Throughout my career, there have been many times when I was the "only" in the room. That experience is all too common among Native people and so many others. However, we have made significant progress over the past 100 years in ensuring these voices are better represented. I'm working in Congress on various issues to ensure we continue moving forward, not backward.

While the act was a monumental leap in tribal sovereignty, it didn't prevent steps from enacting laws that deprived Native communities of their right to vote. While Congress passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965, outlawing racial discrimination in voting laws, Native voters still today face many obstacles on election day. To help fix this issue, I have introduced the Native American Voting Rights Act in Congress, ensuring Native voices are fairly heard at the ballot box.

Also, nearly every Native person has been impacted by the federal Indian boarding school era — me included. My grandparents are survivors. Although these histories can

be painful, the federal government and our country should acknowledge its impact and listen to Native leaders who seek healing for generations of families affected. That's why Oklahoma Rep. Tom Cole, Republican and Chickasaw, my fellow co-chair of the Congressional Native American Caucus, and I proposed the creation of a Truth and Healing Commission to investigate and document these policies and address intergenerational trauma.

These examples underscore the critical importance of diverse perspectives in decision-making roles, enabling us to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by various communities. Whether it's returning our ancestors to their rightful homes, putting names to the children we lost, or shining a light on the continuing crisis of our missing and murdered Indigenous relatives — representation remains the key to solving these problems. It started 100 years ago with the Indian Citizenship Act.

Representation is how we ensure that tribal communities are not left behind in major policy achievements from infrastructure to health care to education.

It is how we bring attention to the disproportionate numbers of Native women who experience maternal mortality and complications in pregnancy, and direct resources towards saving those lives.

It is how we've gained recognition of Indigenous Peoples' Day to change the way this nation thinks about our history and our modern-day culture.

It is how we remind people that Native communities are resilient, we are diverse, and we are still here.

In 1915, Dr. Carlos Montezuma delivered a speech in Lawrence, Kansas — just outside the district I represent — to the Society of American Indians. He critiqued the federal government's handling of tribal relationships and encouraged solidarity among Native communities, saying, "we must act as one."

I respect his immense passion for advancing our people and his acknowledgment that the federal government still has much to do to uphold its responsibilities to tribes. Though he passed away just one year before the act was enacted, I also hope he would be proud — just like I am — of the strides we have made.

As the Indian Citizenship Act acknowledged, the Native American story is the American story. If we continue to push forward together — celebrating the enduring Native culture, art, and traditions that have shaped our country — the next century of our shared history will be even greater than the last."

*U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk) represents Kansas's 3rd District in the U.S. House of Representatives. This opinion piece was originally published by ICT News at ICTNews.org.*

## Land easement in Southwest Florida eyes protection of endangered Florida panther

STAFF REPORT

A partnership announced in June aims to help the breeding of the endangered Florida panther in Southwest Florida. The partnership is between the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Nature Conservancy in Florida, which will purchase a conservation easement in panther habitat, according to a news release.

The easement is at G Road Grove, an active citrus grove and tree nursery south of LaBelle in Hendry County. Purchase of the property's development rights will expand the protected area of the Panther Dispersal Zone, a 30,000-acre corridor in Hendry and Glades counties that connects panthers' current breeding populations south of the Caloosahatchee River with similar habitat north of the river.

The property is also part of the 18-million-acre Florida Wildlife Corridor, a network of connected lands and waters throughout the state. Florida panthers, which rely on a protected public and private land to hunt and breed, use ranch and other agricultural lands such as citrus groves and nurseries as safe movement pathways and sources of food and water.

"Florida panthers help balance our ecosystems," Wendy Mathews, senior

conservation projects manager with The Nature Conservancy in Florida, said in a press release. "The health of this species helps ensure we have stable wildlife populations and functioning natural areas. Florida panthers could be on the brink of extinction, surviving on less than 5% of their historic range. But by working with state and federal partners and private landowners to protect land, we can give panthers a chance at recovery. It's critical that we urgently act to protect the lands panthers need to survive."

Non-native, invasive wildlife and plant species damage habitats that native Florida species need, taking up valuable food, space and water resources and causing an imbalance to natural systems. The landowner of G Road Grove plans to work on controlling non-native, invasive plants on the property with the help of NRCS for cost-share programs.

Florida panthers once roamed the southeastern United States but are now found only in parts of southwest and south-central Florida. The Florida panther was added to the state endangered list in 1958 and federally listed as endangered on the first federal Endangered Species List in 1967. There are said to be only about 200 adult panthers in the state, most of which live in Southwest Florida.

## SCOTUS won't hear challenge to gaming compact

STAFF REPORT

The U.S. Supreme Court on June 17 declined to hear a challenge to the Seminole Tribe of Florida's 2021 gaming compact with the state, which grants the tribe exclusive rights to online sports betting in Florida. The court's decision leaves the compact in effect.

The court denied a petition from West Flagler Associates and the Bonita-Fort Myers

Corp., which argued the compact gives the tribe an online sports betting monopoly and violates the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

"The Seminole Tribe of Florida applauds today's decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to decline consideration of the case involving the tribe's gaming compact with the State of Florida," tribe spokesman Gary Bitner said in a statement. "It means members of the Seminole Tribe and all Floridians can count on a bright future made possible by

the compact."

The tribe, which is the parent entity of Hard Rock International, launched its sports betting — known as Hard Rock Bet — in late 2023. From December 2023 through May 2024, revenues paid from the tribe to the state were \$357 million. State economic forecasters predict that revenue sharing from tribal gaming could total \$4.4 billion through the end of the decade.

## Hollywood Comic Con debuts

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — The tribe's first Hollywood Health Comic Con took place June 28 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center. The event was sponsored by the Hollywood Councilman's Office and featured

several tribal departments, including the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, Recreation, Okalee Indian Village, Culture, Boys & Girls Club, Fire Rescue, Integrative Health, and Health and Human Services.

The event was a new way for the Health Department to reach younger adults and

teenagers in the community by having comic con-style vendors while also engaging them with health information. Fire Rescue administered blood pressure checks and demonstrated how to give CPR on a practice dummy.



Calvin Tiger

The Two Shoes family gets into the Comic Con spirit at the Hollywood event by dressing as characters from Ghostbusters.



Calvin Tiger

Hollywood Library assistant Taishmarie Ramos Soto walks down the cosplay runway during the Health Comic Con event. She is cosplaying Makima from Chainsaw man, which is a Japanese Manga series



Calvin Tiger

Seminole artist Wilson Bowers stands with one of his art pieces at the Hollywood Health Comic Con event.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, artist George Moss, aka "Gmoss," shares smiles and laughter while displaying his artwork to Brian Billie Jr and Russell Primeaux.



Calvin Tiger

Disney animator Peter Raymundo and Iretta Tiger speak about art at the Hollywood Health Comic Con event.

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# Community



## Martha Jones named Florida Cattlewoman of the Year

*Lucy Bowers becomes FCW's president-elect*

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**MARCO ISLAND** — Seminole cattlewoman Martha Jones was named Cattlewoman of the Year by the Florida Cattlewomen (FCW) at the Florida Cattlemen's Association's (FCA) annual convention June 20 at the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort on Marco Island.

Jones, who was among four cattlemen nominated for the award, said she was surprised to receive the honor. She said she enjoys working with cattle, which she has done nearly all her life. She has a 151-head herd in her pasture on the Big Cypress Reservation and loves what she does every day.

"When I wake up in the morning, I'm thankful that the Lord God gave me another day," Jones said.

The FCW also had its annual meeting

earlier in the day. Lucy Bowers, a Seminole cattlewoman who is also Jones' niece, was named president-elect of the organization. Bowers has served on the executive board since 2022 as parliamentarian and treasurer. She is slated to become president in June 2025.

The FCA also presented the Seminole Tribe with the Outstanding Service Award for its hurricane relief efforts at the convention's annual banquet.



Beverly Bidney

FCW President-Elect Lucy Bowers, left, and Florida Cattlewoman of the Year Martha Jones.



Beverly Bidney

Members of the Seminole Cattlewomen and the Florida Cattlewomen gather for the cattlemen's banquet June 20 in Marco Island.



Beverly Bidney

Martha Jones, center, with outgoing FCA President Pat Durden, left, and Holly Newsome, chair of the Imogene Yarborough Outstanding Cattlewoman of the Year Committee and a past president of FCW.

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Tribal officials and employees cut the ribbon for the Brighton culture center complex June 5.

Beverly Bidney

# Brighton's new culture center complex proves to be popular place

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — A ceremonial ribbon cutting was held June 5 for the Brighton Reservation's new culture center complex, which features new buildings each for the Community Culture Department, Boys & Girls Club and the Billy Osceola Memorial Library.

The community gathered in the neighboring Pemaevt Emahakv Charter School gym to hear from those who were responsible for developing the complex, including elected officials, directors of the three departments and the Tribal Community Development Department.

"I never thought we would see something like this in our lifetimes," said Brighton Councilman Larry Howard. "But if we were going to build it, I wanted it to look like chickees and the roofs look like them. A village is a village, and this is like a modern-day chickee village. We wanted to make sure everyone has what they need to carry on our culture."

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. remarked that all the construction going on tribalwide is about preserving the future of the tribe.

"We have to learn about our history and culture and do something to preserve it," Chairman Osceola said. "No history about us is in history books. We find out who we are here. This is the vision of tribal leaders, and it is a tremendous upgrade from what you had down the street."

"These buildings aren't just for kids; adults can use them too," said Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge. "There were a lot of memories in the old buildings, but this will give us a chance to make new memories."

"We couldn't do this alone; these projects take a lot of effort, communication and dedication," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "What you have done here is a model for what we can do on all of our reservations. You are a testament to the commitment of teaching culture, it keeps us who we are. It's a pleasure to see we are moving forward and expanding."

"I see new faces and new homes going up on every reservation," said Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola. "It's a commitment made by Council a few years back to move us into the future."

After the speeches, the crowd walked to the complex, which is adjacent to the PECS immersion program and culture buildings. Department heads, employees and tribal leaders used enormous scissors to cut the bright red ribbon, after which tours of the buildings commenced.

Since the complex opened earlier this year, attendance has increased at all three facilities.

Brighton Community Culture manager Diane Smith said attendance at the new building has more than doubled compared to the previous building.

"We have had more participation since we opened, but we would like to see even more of the community get involved," Smith said. "We share what we have about our culture and traditions and our staff is eager to teach. Try to teach your children something about our culture and language. If they don't learn it, it's gone. Elders aren't going to say come and learn from me; it isn't their place. It's your place to say you want to learn."

The facilities were in use during the tours. Marilyn Doney was at a sewing machine and showed off a skirt she made with help from the Culture staff.

"They taught me how to do it," Doney said. "It's been my relaxation since I had Covid. I knew a little bit, but this is the first skirt I've ever made."

Brighton Boys & Girls Club manager Diana Greenbaum said membership has



Beverly Bidney

Boys & Girls Club member Aiden Carrillo, left, gets a drum lesson from music teacher David Almanza during the opening ceremony of the culture center complex in Brighton.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Robert North, Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and Thomasine Motlow check out the new library at the Brighton culture center complex.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, JJ John, Carson John-Carney, Martha Santibanez and Dana Osceola sit in the new Billie Osceola Memorial Library.



Beverly Bidney

Marilyn Doney shows off the skirt she made in the new culture center.

grown "by leaps and bounds." When BGC came to Brighton in 2011, it met in the school cafeteria, then moved into the old building which could handle a membership of 82 kids. The new building offers far more space with a capacity for up to 517 members.

During the tours, BGC staff kept kids busy with activities and even a drum lesson in the music room. The kids are divided into separate areas based on age. Teens have their space and younger kids have theirs.

Individual tutoring rooms are part of the new library. Jan Bishop, tutoring program supervisor, said students love the set up.

"The children who walk in the door are awed. They love the openness, the colors and the space," Bishop said. "It's inspiring them to do the work with their tutors."

"The kids say they miss the old library, but they like the new one," said Brighton library assistant Joss Youngblood. "They like the seats and say it's more comfortable here. We get up to about 25 kids at a time, mostly 6 to 10 year olds."

"With the library, Culture and Boys & Girls Club, people can learn things here every day," Councilman Howard said. "They told us what they needed and I'm glad we had the opportunity to give back to the community."



Beverly Bidney

The complex features buildings for the Culture Department, Boys & Girls Club and the Billie Osceola Memorial Library.



# Tribe welcomes national housing conference

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — The opening session of the 50th annual National American Indian Housing Council's conference and tradeshow was held June 25 at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

The Seminole Tribe of Florida played a role in the opening ceremony. Gordon "Ollie" Wareham, director of Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, played a traditional flute, and President Holly Tiger welcomed attendees and thanked NAIHC for the positive impacts it has made in Indian Country.

The conference featured several breakout sessions. STOF's Jamie Flynn (Housing director), Wendy Larson (Loan manager) and Fabian Lefler (director of Community Planning & Development) were among the scheduled presenters. The museum and the tribe's Native Learning Center had informational booths.



Calvin Tiger

President Holly Tiger addresses attendees at the National American Indian Housing Council's conference and tradeshow June 25.



Calvin Tiger

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum director Gordon Wareham plays a traditional flute at the start of the conference's opening session.



Calvin Tiger

Booths at the convention and tradeshow included the Seminole Tribe's Native Learning Center.

## ◆ BROTHERS From page 1A

"Melissa was able to combine all of who I am in the jacket," Battiest said. "It's man on horse patchwork done in pride flag and trans flag colors."

He wore the jacket to the White House event, where he met other Natives from Oklahoma. He said it was cool to see other Natives at the White House wearing their tribe's regalia, jewelry and clothing.

The POTUS, (President of the United

States) Instagram and Facebook accounts posted only seven photos from the event. The photo of Battiest and Valle was among the chosen few. The Instagram post read "Last night, the White House opened its doors to thousands of Americans from all across the country to honor the extraordinary courage and contributions of the LGBTQI+ community, and to celebrate their legacy and progress."

"I don't lead by being a queer artist, but it's who I am," Battiest said. "This year I've been celebrated more and I'm grateful for it."



POTUS/Facebook

Spencer Battiest, right, and his partner, Jay Valle, attend the White House Pride event June 27. The annual rainbow-themed event was held on the south lawn of the executive mansion. This photo appeared on the POTUS (President of the United States) Instagram and Facebook sites.

## Comedian coming to Immokalee

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**IMMOKALEE** — Legendary comedian Paula Poundstone will perform live at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on Nov.16 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$59 and are available at ticketmaster.com or at moreinparadise.com. Attendees must be 21.

Poundstone is known for her smart, observational humor and spontaneous wit

that has become the stuff of legend. She regularly plays theaters across the country, hosts a weekly comedy podcast, "Nobody Listens to Paula Poundstone," and is a regular panelist on NPR's "Wait, Wait... Don't Tell Me."

Poundstone has starred in several HBO specials, including "Cats, Cops and Stuff," which nabbed a cable ACE award for Best Comedy Special.

# Hands-on learning about the past for BC youth

STAFF REPORT

**BIG CYPRESS** — On June 20, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum communications specialist and Seminole Wars reenactor Tylor Tigertail led a hands-on workshop for 19 students from the Big Cypress Recreation Department's summer camp. Tigertail showed them how to construct a Seminole

Wars bag. The leather bags are used in modern day reenactments to recreate some of the scenes of the Seminole Wars. They were used in carrying gunpowder, musket balls, and other items. The bags were also used in hunting and as small storage on the go.

The workshop was held at the To-Pee-Kee-Ke Yak-Ne Community Center, where Tigertail teaches monthly workshops.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Dalayah Cypress, Amani Torres, and Shawnee Correa make bracelets at the Tylor Tigertail workshop.



Calvin Tiger

Tylor Tigertail teaches Harvey Bowers, left, and Braylon Carter how to construct a leather bag.



Calvin Tiger

Big Cypress Recreation aide Tedonshye Johnson, center, helps summer camp students. The students are, from left to right, Allie Billie, Clyde Bowers, Ryder Frank-Badbear and Yohokee Ayla.



Calvin Tiger

Braylon Carter smiles with his new leather bag at the Tylor Tigertail workshop.



Calvin Tiger

Karma Koenes, left, and Aubrielle Billie use hammers to help construct a traditional leather bag at the Tylor Tigertail workshop.



# Fathers honored by families, tribe

Fathers were celebrated throughout the tribe in honor of Father's Day in June. Here are scenes from Immokalee, Hollywood and Tampa.



Calvin Tiger

Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola, right, chats with Peter Billie Sr. and Peter Billie Jr. on June 11 at the Hollywood Father's Day event, which was held at Bowlero bowling alley and arcade in Davie.



Courtesy photo

The Tampa community celebrated Father's Day on June 18 with a dinner at Council Oak Steaks and Seafood at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Tampa. Sitting in front, from left, are Tampa Reservation administrator Richard Henry, medicine man Bobby Henry and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.



Calvin Tiger

Raymond Stuart and daughter Zara Stuart enjoy their time at the Hollywood Father's Day.



Beverly Bidney

Ocean Hernandez is cozy in her father Antonio Hernandez's arms at the Immokalee Father's Day celebration June 5.



Calvin Tiger

Neil Baxley rolls a strike at Bowlero, where he celebrated Father's Day with his family.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Evan Grant, Kyle Grant, Thunder Grant and Chaboe Grant gather for a family photo at the Hollywood Father's Day event.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Hazel Osceola, Tommie "TO" Osceola, Gage Osceola, Nina Frias, Terrance Osceola and Michael Gentry have fun and enjoy their food while at the Hollywood Father's Day event at Bowlero.



Beverly Bidney

Ray Yzaguirre, seated in center, is surrounded by his sons at the Father's Day party in Immokalee. In front are, from left, Ray Yzaguirre IV, Giovanni Yzaguirre, Jeremiah Yzaguirre. In rear are Zachary Yzaguirre and AJ Yzaguirre.



Beverly Bidney

Randy Osceola and his daughter Amari Osceola enjoy the celebration in Immokalee.



Beverly Bidney

Pete Aguilar, sitting center, is surrounded by family at Immokalee's Father's Day event. From left are Melissa Rodriguez, Caniah Billie, Taina Billie, Alexis Aguilar and Nyloni Billie.

## Tribe's annual energy and sustainability conference to be held in January at Seminole Hard Rock

**FROM PRESS RELEASE**

**HOLLYWOOD** — The 7th annual Seminole Tribe of Florida Renewable Energy and Sustainability Conference will be held Jan. 27-29, 2025, at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood. The conference will focus on the newly changing landscape for tribal energy development and sustainability, including best practices, federal leadership, policy and regulatory changes, funding a project, and project planning/development trends. The conference will give tribes and First Nations an opportunity to explore the range

of renewable energy and sustainability opportunities that exist and how to start the process. Representatives from tribes, First Nations, nongovernmental organizations, and private industry will give presentations and provide training objectives on a wide range of topics, including:

- Resources to help with tribal energy projects
- Achieving self-sufficiency through energy planning and resource development
- Energy saving methods in design, development, and construction
- Tribes undertaking large scale

energy projects

- Developments driving change in the renewable energy and sustainability marketplace
- Tribal/private partnership opportunities
- Tribal case studies and lessons learned
- Funding sources for projects
- Leveraging available-federal resources and materials to support tribes and TDHES/housing departments

For more information and to register visit [nativelearningcenter.com](http://nativelearningcenter.com).

## Discussion to be held about Joy Harjo book

**FROM PRESS RELEASE**

**WEST PALM BEACH** — A "Book & Art" program at Norton Museum of Art will focus on Joy Harjo's book "Crazy Brave" and artworks in a special exhibition "Rose B. Simson: Journeys of Clay" on July 13 from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. The memoir by Harjo (Muscogee (Creek) details her journey to becoming a poet with a story grounded in tribal myth, ancestry, music, and poetry.

Harjo served as the 23rd United States Poet Laureate. The book and art discussion will be led by museum and Palm Beach County Library staff. The program will be held at Norton's Stiller Auditorium, 1450 S. Dixie Highway, in West Palm Beach. Space is limited. Online registration is required. To register for the free event, go to [Norton.org](http://Norton.org).





Max Osceola Jr.'s family attends the unveiling of a memorabilia case in Max's honor with Hard Rock Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen, far right, on June 19 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

Kevin Johnson

## Max Osceola Jr. tribute night raises \$155,000 for Children's Harbor charity

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — Even though it's been four years since his passing, Max Osceola Jr. is still helping charities, and so is his family.

A tribute dinner and auction in honor of Osceola — the former Hollywood Councilman who was instrumental in the Seminole Tribe of Florida's purchase of Hard Rock — drew more than 500 people to Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on May 2. All the money raised from the evening — a whopping \$155,873 — went to Children's Harbor.

"It's huge. It's unprecedented for us. We're a very small charity," said Tiffani Dhooge, CEO of Children's Harbor, which is based in Pembroke Pines.

The organization serves ages 12 to 23, providing a family environment for teens in foster care and also helping those who have aged out of foster care. Its main campus serves ages 12 to 17; a second campus serves 18-23.

Dhooge said the donation will go toward helping the kids and young adults in the program further their education. She said the students won't have to worry about paying for "extras," such as tools a technical school student might need to purchase, or knives for a culinary student.

"We're going to endow the donation and we're going to be able

to offer scholarships in Max's name in perpetuity," she said. "This is going to enable them to pursue whatever dream they have in their hearts."

Dhooge praised the quiet support that the organization receives from Melissa Osceola DeMayo, one of Max's daughters.

"She makes sure every single child that we serve has the type of birthday party she would throw for her own child, and she does it quietly. She doesn't tell anybody that she does it. She's just like her dad," Dhooge said.

Children's Harbor received the check from the tribute dinner and auction during Max Osceola Jr.'s memorabilia case unveiling ceremony June 19 at Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood.

Family members stood next to the case as a black tarp was peeled away. The case includes a painting of Osceola and a panther, and some of his personal items, including a Seminole Tribe leather jacket, vest and Seminole Hard Rock cowboy boots.

Meaghan Osceola, the youngest child of Max and Marge Osceola, said she remembers her dad wearing the items that are in the case.

"Especially the boots. He had a whole collection; he had at least 50. I saved about six for my son when he is older," Meaghan said.

The words on a plaque in the case

describe Meaghan's dad as a "true legend." He served as Hollywood's councilman from 1985-2010.

"His unwavering dedication to preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Seminole Tribe, coupled with his tireless advocacy for tribal sovereignty and self-determination, made him an indelible figure in the tribe's history," the plaque states.

The case is located on a wall between the main casino playing area and the massive 35-foot-tall Oculus waterfall. The wall includes cases honoring Indigenous performers from the music industry, including one case for Taboo and the Seminole Tribe's Spencer Battiast and Doc Native. Other cases recognize Randy Castillo, Robbie Robertson, Stevie Salas, Lolly Vegas and Pat Vegas.

Speakers at the ceremony included President Holly Tiger, Hard Rock International Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen and other Hard Rock executives.



The memorabilia case with Max Osceola Jr.'s items.

Kevin Johnson

## First time visitor lands \$1.6M jackpot at Hard Rock Atlantic City

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**ATLANTIC CITY** — An out-of-state, first-time visitor to Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City has won a wide area progressive jackpot of \$1,593,457.

The lucky player bet \$10 on a Wheel of Fortune slot machine with a \$1 denomination. According to slot manufacturer IGT Jackpots, its Wheel of Fortune slot machines are the nation's most popular slots.

The lucky player's total amount wagered was \$87 during this extremely profitable visit to the casino resort.

\$1,593,457 is among the top five slot machine jackpots won at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City since its opening in June of 2018.

The jackpot amount is based on a 20-year annual annuity payout. The lucky winner declined to participate in jackpot publicity.

## Hard Rock names Eric Martino president of Cafe division

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**HOLLYWOOD** — Hard Rock International announced July 1 the appointment of long-time restaurant and hospitality leader Eric Martino as president of the Hard Rock Cafe division, overseeing operations of the company's nearly 200 eateries around the world. Additionally, Martino will oversee Hard Rock's Retail Division on a global scale. He reports to Jim Allen, Chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming.

"We're excited to welcome Eric, whose extensive background in culinary arts, marketing and operations will further elevate the already outstanding Hard Rock dining and retail experience," Allen said in a press release.

Martino joins Hard Rock with nearly 30 years of hospitality experience in ownership and management roles where he honed his skills in both culinary arts and business management.



Eric Martino

He previously served as president of MINA Group, Chef Michael Mina's restaurant management company, where he led marketing, culinary, operations and beverage teams that served, supported and managed thirty-plus restaurant concepts.

Martino was previously chief operating officer at José Andrés Group, overseeing a vast portfolio and spearheading operations across nine major international markets.

Prior, Martino was VP of Operations for MStreet Entertainment Group where he led operations for the group of multi-concept, high-volume restaurants including the professional development of in-store management teams and implementation of improved systems to drive sales and increase profits.

In 2022, Martino founded and is now executive chair of Culture Hospitality Group, a consulting, coaching and recruiting company providing executive coaching and operational support to hospitality professionals.



Melissa Osceola DeMayo, second from right, joins Children's Harbor CEO Tiffani Dhooge, center, and Board Chair Stephanie Parker along with Hard Rock leaders in the check presentation at the ceremony.

Kevin Johnson



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The hiring of an attorney is an important decision that should not be based solely upon advertisement. Castillo worked as a Public Defender in Broward County from 1990-1996 and has been in private practice since 1996. In 1995, he was voted the Trial Attorney of the year. He graduated from Capital University in 1989 and was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1990, Federal Bar in 1992, and the Federal Trial Bar in 1994.

RICHARD CASTILLO  
FLORIDA CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY  
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# Historic newspapers are now digital

BY JOSEPH ABRAM GILBERT  
Research Assistant

**BIG CYPRESS** — 1768 to 1898, 130 years and over 613 newspapers. That is the scope of the historic newspaper collection housed at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum. Over the past three years the Museum has been working to recontextualize and expand access to this collection. It is a valuable source of information on southeast Indigenous communities and the Seminole War. In that effort we have written descriptions for every object in our collection that include a disclaimer, a factual description, and a bias description. The goal of this project is to point out the inherent bias, problematic stereotypes, and misinformation that make up these articles. The descriptions and disclaimer help the reader understand the context of the newspaper articles. We have tried to highlight the hypocrisy of the newspaper content. At the same time, we have tried to create a safer space for those still affected by the Seminole War to interact with the collection. Warnings regarding violent and potentially disturbing content help to do this.

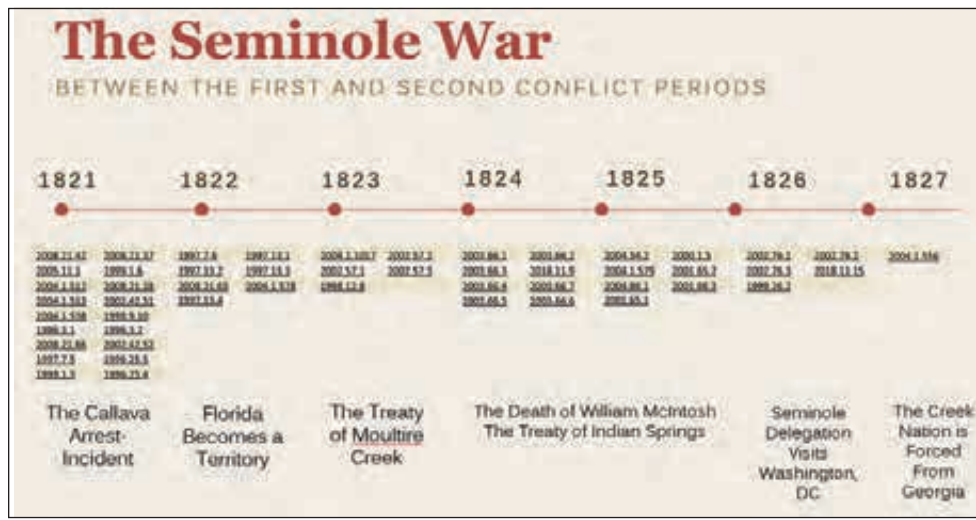
This collection is enormous. There are thousands of words and hundreds of topics covered in these papers. Navigating them without guidance is similar to swimming through a river dyed a deep red, where you cannot find your way. In an effort to provide guideposts for prospective historians and veterans alike, we have created a finding aid organized into a timeline. This finding aid, used in conjunction with

the online collection, can help readers learn about the long and complicated history of the Seminole War and see how views about indigenous people changed during the 1800's. The timeline can be obtained through contacting Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki's Community Archive (formerly known as the Library). The newspaper descriptions are available through our online collections, and the finding aids link to this resource: [ahtahthiki.com/collections/](http://ahtahthiki.com/collections/). Soon, also through the Community Archive, high quality scans of the newspapers will be available. To expand the accessibility of the collection we have been hard at work scanning each page of every newspaper and processing the images to make them searchable. During the process of digitizing the collection, with the help of the University of South Florida's digitization technology, we created high quality pdfs that can be searched for content. The processes started with the objects themselves. Each and every page had its picture taken and turned



This historic newspaper is one of hundreds preserved at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on Big Cypress.

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



This timeline snapshot shows one of the pages of the finding aid with clickable links that take you to the online collection to read the newspaper that is being referenced.

into an archival quality TIFF file. These files were then converted into PDFs and run through an artificially intelligent computer program to turn the image into searchable text that was then overlaid over the PDF. The resulting document makes finding and reading the article much easier than working with the newspapers themselves!

Historic newspapers are a valuable source of information that connect important events together. Our collection is both sizable and unique enough that increasing the accessibility of these papers by digitizing

them, putting the descriptions online, and creating finding aids means that researchers will come to the museum for their research. The Seminole Tribe of Florida will be able to have a greater impact on how the Seminole war is viewed, studied, and understood as history continues to be told. Please call (863) 902-1113 or visit us if you want to learn more about this project.



Joseph Gilbert adjusts the camera before taking pictures of each page of a newspaper. The images will be turned into searchable pdf files.

# BC community discusses Billie Swamp Safari future

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Billie Swamp Safari (BSS) opened in 1993 on the Big Cypress Reservation as a cultural tourism destination, but to determine what it will be in the future the Environmental Protection Office (EPO) and Big Cypress Council Office invited the community to voice their thoughts about the 2,200-acre property.

BSS used to attract tourists with its wide variety of animals, critter shows, swamp buggy and airboat rides, and even overnight stays in chickee huts. It shut down in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The only part of the park that has reopened to visitors is the Swamp Water Café.

The meeting was held June 20 at the Café. It was led by acting Executive Director of Operations Tina Osceola, who is also the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer.

Over the years, the landscape and hydrology of the BSS landscape have changed. Numerous invasive plants have

moved in and need to be controlled.

"Critical work is already being done with the property," Osceola said. "We are doing ecological restoration. It all ties back to the health of the environment. How we use the land we are protecting is a community decision."

Environmental Protection Office (EPO) senior director Paul Backhouse, Environmental Resources Department assistant director Craig Van Der Heiden, EPO climate resiliency policy coordinator Krystle Bowers and EPO climate resiliency officer Jill Horwitz each spoke. BSS employees Kim Royal and Hans Lago also attended, along with BC council special assistant Jake Osceola.

"The environment has changed a lot over the years," Backhouse said. "It used to be more open with more grasslands and water flow. The canals changed how the water flows."

The BSS environment was historically a mix of uplands, cypress domes with pop ash centers, wet prairies and freshwater sloughs. The changes in the landscape are primarily

due to the federal flood control project canals, installed in the 1950s and 1960s, according to an EPO PowerPoint presentation.

"We are trying to change policies to better prepare for a sustainable future," Bowers said.

"We are looking at extreme heat, flooding and energy independence," added Horwitz. "We are doing the best we can to work with the community."

In 2001, the tribe constructed a 4,015-foot channel for BSS airboat operations. Now in the dry season, there isn't enough water for the airboats, so it is pumped in from the canals, which are part of the larger water system on the reservation.

"The land has always been used for tourism; the public would pay to come in," Osceola said. "One idea is to have it designated for tribal use only, like a park. Or, do we want overnight camping for outsiders? We haven't made any decisions yet. We want to hear from the community."

At its height, BSS was successful and even had a concierge program with hotels that would bring busloads of visitors. In the

late 1990s to 2010 there were a lot of bus tours; in 2007 or 2008 there were about 150,000 visitors.

At the meeting, tribal members shared numerous ideas for the property, which ran the gamut from education to recreation for the public or just for the tribe.

Some ideas included fishing, camping, off-road tours, hiking and biking trails, zip lines and airboat rides. "Glamping" and overnight camping in the BSS chickee cabins for stargazing or birdwatching were also mentioned. Focusing on education was mentioned repeatedly.

"We need to be an example to our kids and teach them about the land," Gary Frank said.

"We could restore it to make it more of an education park for the public and show how we take care of the land," Barbara Billie said. "We could also have science programs, teach our kids and leave the door open for universities to come and do research."

In Van Der Heiden's previous job with the Miccosukee Tribe, he got the youth involved in the natural world through

internships. He taught them western science and had tribal elders come in to teach the traditional Native ways.

"What they learn when they are young, they will do when they are old," Van Der Heiden said.

Other ideas expanded on the education theme, such as giving youth summer jobs at the park for education credits. Another idea was to open the park to the public only during certain times and keep it for tribal members the rest of the time.

"I'd like to see it rehabbed and native plants introduced," Joe Frank said. "Our young folks can be brought out here and educated. It has to be a tribal program, not an enterprise. The continued education of our young people is critical. We are going to need a place for the following generations to learn it."

"The first thing we have to do is change the name," Brian Billie said. "We are a swamp, not a safari."

There was no word on when a decision will be made about the future of BSS.

JULY 2024

## ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

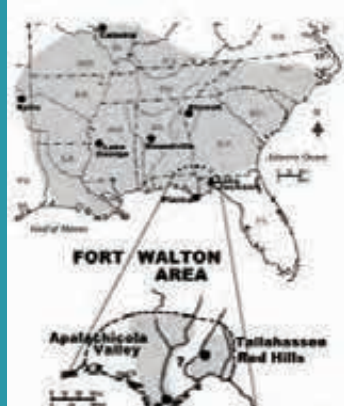
Sometimes looking at things with fresh eyes can provide a new perspective. July's artifact of the month is a perfect example of such an experience. This month, we are highlighting a pottery sherd from our collection that was found on the Big Cypress Reservation and was originally identified as Fort Walton ticked pottery. The Fort Walton culture falls under the broader Mississippian culture umbrella, and its presence extended from northwest Florida to south Alabama and southwest Georgia (Marrinan & White, 2007). Vessels within the Fort Walton ceramic tradition might have been plain or decorated using a range of techniques. Examples of these include incisions, indentations, stamps, cord and cob marks, and painted motifs (Scarry, 1985).

Decorations are an excellent diagnostic tool for identifying pottery; depending on the technique and style, decorations can inform us of when and where a vessel was made. Sometimes, however, we might misinterpret decorations, leading us to misidentify the kind of pottery a sherd belongs to; that is what happened in the case of this month's artifact.



Indentation or possible tick mark.  
THPO

Now, a year after it was first identified, we have gone back and taken a closer look at this sherd. Upon reexamining it, we have called into question its initial classification. There are a few reasons why we are now skeptical that this is Fort Walton ticked; from differences in decoration compared to other Fort Walton ticked pieces to the location where this artifact was found, which is well outside of the Fort Walton region (although finding artifacts outside of their region is not too uncommon of an occurrence), all the information we have about the artifact points to the improbability that it is Fort Walton ticked pottery. One might think we would feel frustrated about misidentifying the artifact, but this is not the case. Rather than seeing it as a step back, we see it as a step forward in the right direction. For now, while we can't say what type of pottery it is, we can say what it probably isn't, and that still brings us closer to correctly classifying this artifact.



The area highlighted in red is the location of the Big Cypress Reservation, where our artifact was found. If it was originally from Fort Walton, it could have ended up in Big Cypress through trade, migration, etc.

Marrinan & White (2007)

To learn more about all the incredible artifacts within our collection, please visit the THPO website at [www.stofthpo.com](http://www.stofthpo.com).

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SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - JULY 2024

## TIGERTAIL'S BRIDGE



The Tamiami Trail began construction in the early 20th century, designed to allow easy travel for Americans through the Everglades. But in order to cross the Everglades, they hired Seminole guides to find the best path. These Seminole pathfinders saw how the highway would cut off the traditional canoe routes used by the Seminole people to travel between their camps. The road that would give Americans the freedom to travel across the Everglades would be the end of that same freedom of movement for the Tribe.

It was for this reason that in 1919 a construction crew arriving to work on the trail were met by Jack Tigertail and over one hundred other Seminole. Tigertail himself was incredibly popular in the growing Miami and Hialeah community. Two years before he had led a search party for one of the trail's survey teams, and two years from then his likeness would be made into a sign over 30 feet tall welcoming travelers to Hialeah. Still the lessons of the past endured, and the Miami Herald reported that each Seminole present was armed with a rifle or shotgun. It was a show of strength to back a straightforward request.

A representative spoke with the foreman, explaining how the road and canal would disrupt Seminole travel. What they asked for was simple: a bridge at that spot that would allow the Tribe to move about as they always had. The request was granted, and the commission planned and built the Bridge at that spot, 12 miles west of Miami, near where the Miccosukee reservation is now. Unfortunately, by the time it was finished the canals built to drain the Everglades had already done their work. The region had been drained, and travel by canoe was no longer possible north or south of the Trail.

To see more Seminole History Stories visit the THPO website at [www.stofthpo.com](http://www.stofthpo.com)

Photo  
Jack Tigertail on Canoe, the Everglades, Florida, 1910  
Photo by Julian Dimock  
Courtesy the American Museum of Natural History





# Health

## Health, wellness info provided to Hollywood community

**STAFF REPORT**

**HOLLYWOOD** — Human Resources and Integrative Health hosted a health and wellness fair June 18 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center gymnasium. Information

about health screenings, insurance and nutrition were provided to tribal members, community members and employees. Raffle prizes and lunch were also part of the program.



Calvin Tiger

Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola chats with Joanne Osceola at the Hollywood Health and Wellness Fair.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Arifa Khan, Kapone Solano and Samuel Josh check out the berrylicious table that was hosted by Helesi Two Shoes at the Hollywood Health and Wellness Fair.



Calvin Tiger

Skylinn Billie is given a truffle surprise by Health head cook Lorraine Posada at the fair.

◆ **BRIGHTON**  
From page 1A

Another amenity that will come later is a boat lock and marina for the community and guests to get directly to Lake Okeechobee by boat. Councilman Howard looks forward to the Brighton Bay Hotel Casino hosting fishing tournaments.

"It will drive more people to our venue," Councilman Howard said. "They can come eat, gamble, enjoy the entertainment and stay overnight."

The South Florida Water Management District plans to replace the existing spillway and upgrade the pump station, which are located near the casino. The district approached the tribe to ask if they wanted anything else while they did construction. According to the tribe's external environmental compliance director Stacy Myers, they mentioned the boat lock. Once the lock is operational, the district will operate it. There is no time frame for construction as of yet, as details are still being worked out.

Before the topping out ceremony, the



Beverly Bidney

The final steel beam is lifted up at the Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino.

final beam was positioned outside so tribal members and the community could sign it

before it was raised to the highest point of the building. A tree was placed atop the beam to symbolize the completion of the building's structure.

The ceremony also honored the workers who have contributed to the project's progress. The tradition of the ceremony serves as a milestone and symbol of good fortune for occupants of the building. The long-standing tradition is attributed to ancient Scandinavians, who conducted the ceremony for each completed building.

After the speeches, the crowd went outside to witness the hoisting of the final beam to the top of the building as the sounds of air horns, cheers and applause.

The hotel and casino will include a 38,000-square-foot casino, a 24-hour restaurant, steak house, fast-service carry-out café and a pizza kitchen. It will also have an event space for banquets and performances and a 10-lane bowling alley. The 100-room hotel is a first for Brighton.



Beverly Bidney

The crowd watches the lifting of the beam.



Beverly Bidney

Signatures on the beam include those of the tribe's royalty.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Tahnna Billie, Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, Brighton Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Vice-Chairwoman Holly Tiger and Seminole Casino Brighton General Manager Marty Johns.

## Mental Health Awareness

Mental health is just as important as physical health.

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# SEMINOLE SCENES



Beverly Bidney

**PAINTBALL WARRIORS:** The Big Cypress Recreation Department's summer camp brought kids to a paintball adventure June 22 at Extreme Rage Paintball in Fort Myers. From left to right are Karma Koenes, Chance Frye, Terrance Robbins, Jayceon Billie, Blaze Cypress, Josephine Billie and Chanel Cypress.



OHS/Facebook

**TASSEL TURN:** "Mr. OHS" Carriss Chilsom Johns, son of tribal member Stephanie Johns, leads Okeechobee High School's class of 2024 in the turning of the tassel at the school's graduation ceremony May 25 at the Okeechobee County Agri-Civic Center. The turning of the tassel is a symbolic tradition marking students' completion of high school and moving into the next phase of their lives.



Hard Rock Shop

**PARIS PIN:** A Hard Rock Cafe pin shows a runner crossing a "Paris 2024" finish line with the Eiffel Tower in the background. Paris will host the Summer Olympics July 26-Aug. 11.



Kevin Johnson

**PRESCHOOL PROGRESS:** Construction continues for the new Hollywood Preschool, shown here June 30. It is located in the Seminole Estates section of the reservation next to the Betty Mae Jumper Medical Center, which opened in 2020.

Calvin Tiger (3)  
**SPLISHING AND SPLASHING:** The Education Department in Hollywood held an end-of-the-school-year bash June 10 at The Estates. The event featured games, food, music, a photo booth and plenty of fun in the pool. At right, Konstance Sanchez goes down a giant inflatable slide at the pool. In the middle photo, Emmett Osceola and Caden Jumper participate in a dunk tank game. In the bottom photo, Aniyah Thompson and others enjoy playing in a foam-filled inflatable.



Calvin Tiger (2)

**FUN HOUSE:** Kids in the Big Cypress Recreation Department's summer camp enjoy their visit to the Flying Squirrel indoor trampoline park in Weston on June 18.





# NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

## California and Shasta Indian Nation collaborate on historic land back plans

On June 18, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced that the state is working with the Shasta Indian Nation to transfer 2,820 acres in Siskiyou County back to the tribe. It marks a significant moment for the tribe, which has been without a land base for over 100 years.

The land lies at the heart of the Shasta Indian Nation's ancestral homeland, which they call K'ika-c'é-ki; until very recently, part of this land was submerged under the Copco 1 reservoir, a narrow lake east of I-5 and just south of the Oregon-California border.

"This is the culmination of over 16 years of consistent pressing forward and struggle to get to this point," said Michael Olson, council member for the Shasta Indian Nation. "It's a very amazing time for us."

The acreage is contained within the Lower Klamath Project, a series of four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River. It was formerly owned by the utility PacifiCorp. Copco 1 and two other reservoirs were drained at the beginning of this year; the three remaining dams are being deconstructed this summer.

Olson witnessed the uncovering of sacred sites as the lake was drawn down and has been serving as a cultural monitor for the Shasta Indian Nation during dam removal.

"It's the center of the Shasta world," he said. "It's a very important area for all of us, but working there, it has become more important to me as time has gone by as I work there—just to be in that area."

For California, the land transfer marks another milestone in the state's effort to right the wrongs of the past. Just over five years ago, Governor Newsom issued a formal apology "for the many instances of violence, mistreatment and neglect inflicted upon California Native Americans throughout the state's history." Returning land is one of several initiatives intended to help repair relations with the state's tribes.

Starting in the 1850s, ancestors of the Shasta Indian Nation suffered violence at the hands of gold miners, settlers, and the U.S. army. By the early 20th century, they had patched together a land base in the remote and rugged but fertile valleys along the upper Klamath River. Then, plans for the hydroelectric project intervened. People were forced off their land by eminent domain and village and ceremonial sites and fishing grounds were flooded to create Copco Lake and the other reservoirs. Since then, the Shasta Indian Nation has been without a land base.

"You know it's one thing to be a Native person; it's another thing to be a Native person that doesn't have any access to your tradition and culture, and have that spiritual piece cut off," said Sami Jo Difuntorum, culture preservation officer for the Shasta Indian Nation, during a meeting with Governor Newsom earlier this month.

The governor toured the dam sites and met with several members of the Shasta Indian Nation on June 5.

Olson described the meeting with the governor as a "whole new level of engagement" with the state. "We appreciate that so much, and we're looking forward to a strengthening partnership with them," he said.

It was the governor's first visit to the area since the reservoirs had been drained.

"I think he was generally impressed with the scale and the progress and very optimistic for the future," said Mark Bransom, chief executive officer at the Klamath River Renewal Corporation. Dam deconstruction is proceeding at least two weeks ahead of schedule, and thanks to the efforts of crews with Resource Environmental Solutions, the reservoir footprints have transformed from muddy expanses to a vegetated mosaic of green, purple, and orange.

The timing of the land transfer is still uncertain, as are details about public access to the river and adjacent land once it occurs.

"The intent of the settlement agreement is that the transferred lands be managed for public interest purposes such as fish and wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement, public education, and public recreational access," said Bransom. Several new recreation sites are being planned along the "hydroelectric reach" where the dams, infrastructure, and reservoirs once were.

The tribe has several plans for the land, including the creation of a public "heritage trail" that will highlight Shasta Indian Nation culture and history, along with plants that are important for food, medicine, and ceremonies. There will also be an interpretive center at the decommissioned Copco 2 power plant.

Olson is looking forward to establishing a food sovereignty program, "where we will be working to make sure food plants are reintroduced to areas where they haven't been for over 100 years." Having access to these foods will benefit the health of tribal people, he added.

The land transfer is a "game changer" for his people, said Olson. "The return of the land is very amazing, but I'm also looking forward to us being able to return to the land," he said.

- Jefferson Public Radio (Ashland, Ore.)

## Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, Catawba Nation sign historic agreement

MAXTON, N.C. — The Catawba Nation and the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina marked a new era of partnership and friendship June 20 with the signing of a new agreement.

The historic signing of the Government-to-Government Principles of Agreement took place at the Lumbee Tribe Cultural Center. The agreement symbolizes a commitment to work together and protect the sovereignty of each nation.

The event included a traditional fire ceremony, drums, and the presentation of colors, all of which highlighted the cultural significance of the agreement.

The Lumbee Tribe, known as the "People of the Dark Water," has a history dating back 12,000 years, with continuous native presence in their territory. The Catawba Nation, known as the "People of the River," has been documented in the Carolinas for at least 6,000 years.

"This is a symbol of our efforts to move beyond the mistakes of the past and to forge a new partnership based on trust, respect, and collaboration," said Chief Brian Harris of the Catawba Nation.

John Lowery, chairman of the Lumbee Tribe, emphasized the significance of the agreement.

"We're going to work together on issues at the federal level that mean a lot to our tribes, for instance, for us working together to get our full recognition as Lumbee people as well as us working with the Catawba on their Restoration Act," Lowery said.

The agreement serves as a modern-day treaty between the two tribes, celebrating their rich histories and future collaborations, leaders said. The signing also helps ensure the ongoing success and longevity of both nations for generations to come.

- WBTW News 13 (Myrtle Beach, S.C.)

## B.C. First Nations involved in salmon farming demand apology from William Shatner, Ryan Reynolds

A coalition of British Columbia First Nations involved in open-net salmon farming have called on Canadian actors William Shatner and Ryan Reynolds to apologize for a profanity-laced video criticizing the wider industry.

The video was released June 20 by the conservation group Pacific Wild, and features 93-year-old Shatner unleashing a stream of bleeped-out expletives directed at salmon farms — a response to the federal government's recent decision to extend the facilities' licences to operate off the B.C. coast for another five years.

While Reynolds does not appear in the video, it was created by Maximum Effort, the production company and digital marketing agency he founded.

On June 21, the Coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship released a statement calling the video an "atrocious attack" on the dignity of members who "choose to host salmon farming" in their territorial waters.

"We have been the stewards of our lands, waters, and elements for over 10,000 years, including wild Pacific salmon, the life blood of our people," the statement said. "Due to the impact of colonization on wild salmon stocks, we have had to include salmon farming alongside salmon stewardship to fill the economic gap caused by the decline of wild salmon."

The coalition is made up of 17 First Nations that hold formal agreements with the salmon farming industry, and claims the sector brings in \$133 million to Indigenous communities in the province annually.

"Sadly, this response from people like Mr. Shatner and Mr. Reynolds is all-too-common in today's Canada. This is a classic example of ... rich, elite, removed, urban white men overriding the wishes of vulnerable Indigenous communities," the statement added.

The light-hearted video from Pacific Wild was released as part of a campaign calling on the government to act faster to end the use of open-net pens on the B.C. coast, as officials previously promised to do by 2025 — a push supported by the First Nation Wild Salmon Alliance. According to the alliance, more than 120 other First Nations in the province support transitioning away from open-net salmon farming.

Critics have argued the farms can spread disease and lice to wild fish, though recent science indicates uncertainty over the risks.

Canadian officials said the five-year licence extensions offered will allow farmers a "responsible, realistic and achievable" grace period for companies to transition to closed-containment or land-based facilities — though the industry has raised concerns that the technology necessary to do so will not be ready in time.

On June 19, the B.C. Salmon Farmers Association argued five years was an unreasonably short period for making such a major transition.

"This focus on unproven technology jeopardizes the sector's ability to fulfill agreements with rights-holder First Nations and will cause further harm to our communities," executive director Brian Kingzett said in a statement.

- CTV Vancouver with files from Canadian Press

## U.S. Forest Service moves forward with Leech Lake land transfer agreement

The U.S. Forest Service has taken a big step in restoring land to a tribal nation in northern Minnesota.

"It's been a pleasure and an honor to work with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe as we implement the Reservation Restoration Act to transfer back approximately 11,778 acres to this sovereign nation," Chippewa Forest Supervisor Michael Stansberry said. "We understand the importance the

land holds to the Band and will continue to work with the Band as we move through this process," Stansberry said.

A memo returning 345 parcels of land was signed by U.S. Forest Service regional forester Antoine Dixon.

Former President Donald Trump signed the Leech Lake Restoration Act in December of 2020. The act compensates Leech Lake for approximately two-thirds of land erroneously transferred in the 1940s and 50s. The Bureau of Indian Affairs incorrectly interpreted an order from the Secretary of the Interior to mean it had the authority to sell the land without gaining the consent of the majority of tribal owners.

The U.S. Forest Service news release stated that the land holds both historical and cultural significance for the tribe.

Leech Lake chairperson Faron Jackson Sr. said Leech Lake is looking forward to completing the restoration process.

"On behalf of the Band, I want to express my gratitude to the Forest Service and tribal staff collaborating behind the scenes to move this land transfer towards completion. This is one of the most monumental and positive developments to take place on Leech Lake since the first treaties were signed and the reservation was established in 1855," said Jackson.

Leech Lake Band worked jointly with the leadership of the Chippewa National Forest to identify the restored parcels, according to the U.S. Forest Service news release.

"The intent was to limit fragmentation of ownership boundaries while honoring private property rights. The legislation language made provisions for honoring any existing private property rights such as easements, permits, or other encumbrances," according to the U.S. Forest Service news release.

A map of the restored lands on the U.S. Forest tribal relations webpage shows the restored parcels across all sections of the Leech Lake reservation.

The tribe shares more than 2,000 miles of boundary with the Chippewa National Forest, and nearly 40 percent of the forest lies within Leech Lake tribal lands.

- MPR (Minnesota Public Radio)

## Despite gains, Native Americans still face voting barriers

WASHINGTON — Native Americans today say they still face barriers to casting their votes, six decades after U.S. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

Many live miles away from voter registration and polling sites and lack access to reliable transportation.

Others may not have traditional mailing addresses and cannot satisfy voter registration requirements. Voting by mail can be "iffy," according to O.J. Semans, a Sicangu Lakota citizen living on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and co-executive director of Four Directions, a voting rights advocacy group that has worked on behalf of tribes in several states.

"You must remember, the old Pony Express [mail delivery on horseback] wasn't meant for reservations. It was for outposts and settler towns," Semans said. "The U.S. Postal Service has neglected every Indian reservation in the United States when it comes to ensuring we have equality."

A 2023 study of mail service on the Navajo Nation — the largest reservation in the U.S. — notes that when deciding where to open post offices during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the U.S. Postal Service picked locations that would "advance military objectives and serve the interests of Anglo-American settlers."

"Post Offices are fewer and farther from each other on reservation communities; there are fewer service hours; and we show in a mail experiment that letters posted on reservations are slower and less likely to arrive," the study said.

Post offices exist on Seman's Rosebud Reservation, but they no longer accept general delivery.

"So, if you want to vote by mail, you can request an absentee ballot and fill it out. But you'd never get the ballot back," he said.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act banned traditional forms of voter discrimination such as literacy tests, character assessments and other practices widely used to disenfranchise minority voters.

It authorized the federal government to oversee voter registration and election procedures in certain states and localities with histories of discriminatory practices, and it also required those jurisdictions to obtain "preclearance" from the Justice Department or a federal court before changing voting laws or procedures.

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the formula for deciding which localities needed preclearance as unconstitutional, opening the way for states to pass new voting laws.

During a Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearing in 2021, Jacqueline De Leon, an enrolled member of the Isleta Pueblo and a staff attorney at the Native American Rights Fund, or NARF, described some conditions for Indigenous voters.

"In South Dakota, Native American voters were forced to vote in a repurposed chicken coop with no bathroom facilities and feathers on the floor," she testified.

In Wisconsin, Native Americans were required to cast their ballots inside a sheriff's office.

In 2021, President Joe Biden created the Interagency Steering Group on Native American Voting Rights to report on barriers facing Native voters.

"Native American communities have not been immune, but indeed have been packed or divided by district lines that dilute

their vote or otherwise discriminate," the group reported.

In November 2021, North Dakota's Republican-led legislature approved a new legislative map that separated state House districts on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation and the Fort Berthold reservation, home to the Three Affiliated Tribes.

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and Spirit Lake tribes filed a federal lawsuit arguing that the new map violated the Voting Rights Act by packing the Turtle Mountain band — that is, concentrating them into a single electoral district to reduce their influence in other districts, and cracking — or dividing — the Spirit Lake tribe across districts to dilute their voting power.

"A conservative judge found this was a clear violation of the Voting Rights Act," De Leon told VOA. "And rather than protect its Native constituents where there was a violation, the state has appealed, trying to just block the cost of action as opposed to remedying the discrimination."

Arizona passed a law in 2022 requiring voters to provide proof of their physical address.

"And that was really an attack on the Native vote because about 40,000 homes in Indian Country in Arizona don't have traditional addresses on them or any way to prove residential location," De Leon said.

With NARF's support, the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Gila River Indian Community in 2022 filed suit in U.S. District Court for Arizona. In 2023, the court ruled in their favor, finding that the address requirements violated tribe members' constitutional right to vote.

With five months to go before November's general election, Semans said, Indigenous voting rights activists must stay vigilant.

"With this new Supreme Court, even rulings that we got years ago that were positive for Indian country could change before then," he said. "Things can change on a dime."

- Voice of America

## BNSF Railway ordered to pay \$395 million after years of trespassing on Swinomish land

A federal judge on June 17 ordered BNSF Railway to pay the Swinomish Tribe \$395 million for illegally running mile-long oil trains through the tribe's reservation for nearly a decade.

Since 2012, BNSF has been hauling Bakken crude from North Dakota to a pair of oil refineries in Anacortes, Washington. To get there, the mile-long trains roll through the Swinomish Reservation, about 50 miles north of Seattle.

BNSF has permission from the tribe to run two oil trains a day, totaling no more than 50 tanker cars, through its reservation.

Instead, BNSF has been running oil trains with 100 or more cars each across the reservation's northern end up to six times a day.

"The trespass was willful, knowing, and conscious throughout the trespass period," U.S. District Judge Robert Lasnik said in his ruling.

As a "conscious wrongdoer," BNSF "will be stripped of the net profits obtained from its unauthorized interference with another's property," Lasnik ordered.

BNSF officials declined to comment on the ruling. Swinomish Tribal Chairman Steve Edwards declined, through a spokesperson, to be interviewed but issued a written statement.

"This land is what we have," Edwards said. "This is what we kept as our homeland when we signed the Treaty of Point Elliott. We have always protected it and we always will."

BNSF and the Swinomish Tribe agreed that the company had trespassed but had been arguing over how much profit the company should be forced to disgorge — the legal term for coughing up illegal profits.

"We know that this is a large amount of money. But that just reflects the enormous wrongful profits that BNSF gained by using the Tribe's land day after day, week after week, year after year over our objections," Edwards said.

The rail line was built over the tribe's and the federal government's objections in 1889.

A century later, the tribe and Burlington Northern Railroad Company reached an agreement allowing one eastbound and one westbound oil train to roll through the reservation daily. Under that 1990 agreement, Burlington Northern also paid the Swinomish Tribe \$125,000 as "payment in full for all rent, damages, and compensation of any sort, due for past occupancy of the right-of-way from date of construction in 1889 until January 1, 1989."

In 2023, BNSF Railway reported earning \$5.1 billion in profit on revenue of \$23.9 billion. BNSF's revenues fell 8% and its profits fell 13% in 2023.

"Railroads don't get much attention when they are working but, were they unavailable, the void would be noticed immediately throughout America," Warren Buffett, CEO of BNSF's parent company, Berkshire Hathaway, said in his 2024 letter to shareholders.

The June 17 decision is a long-delayed result of the Swinomish Tribe's 2015 lawsuit against BNSF, but it is unlikely to be the last word on the dispute.

Swinomish officials said they expect BNSF to appeal the decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

- KUOW (Seattle, Wash.)

## US acknowledges harm to tribes from Pacific Northwest dams

The U.S. government is acknowledging that hydropower dams in the Pacific Northwest have harmed tribes.

A new report from the Interior Department showed that dams built in the early 1900s along the Columbia River blocked fish migration and flooded thousands of acres — including sacred sites and burial grounds.

Accordingly, the government acknowledged, tribes lost access to salmon that had historically provided them sustenance.

"Acknowledging the devastating impact of federal hydropower dams on Tribal communities is essential to our efforts to heal and ensure that salmon are restored to their ancestral waters," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the U.S.'s first Native American Cabinet secretary, said in a written statement.

The report states that their impacts included flooded villages that displaced people, impacted burial grounds, and impacted ecosystems of the river itself.

It specifically lays out harms to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Nez Perce Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

The Biden administration has taken steps to attempt to restore salmon in the Columbia River, including a 10-year plan that could involve dam removal.

The administration said in December that it had reached an agreement with state and tribal leaders, which would contribute more than \$1 billion to restoration.

- The Hill

## Arizona, tribes receive NPS Historic Preservation funds for cultural and historical projects

As part of the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund, more than \$2.5 million in funding is coming to 10 Arizona tribal nations to support various programs and projects to preserve cultural resources and history.

"The National Park Service is proud to support our state, Tribal, and local partners with annual funding that helps them preserve their significant historic and cultural places," National Park Service Director Chuck Sams said in a press release. "Importantly, these grants aid communities across the country to invest in local stewardship of treasured resources."

The Historic Preservation Fund was established in 1977 and has been authorized at \$150 million per year through 2023, according to NPS. The fund has provided over \$2.7 billion in grants to states, tribes, local governments, and nonprofit organizations.

The funding supports various historic preservation programs and projects, according to NPS, which helps preserve the nation's cultural resources and history.

Annual Historic Preservation Fund grants have funded preservation programs at 59 state historic preservation offices, according to NPS. To ensure support for local preservation efforts, 10% of the funding awarded to states must be granted to their Certified Local Governments.

Providing grants to tribal historic preservation offices across the country ensures the safeguarding of tribal sites and cultural traditions.

The 10 tribal nations in Arizona will receive more than \$1.3 million, and the state will receive another \$1.2 million.

"Preserving our history is crucial as it serves as a testament to our state's rich heritage," U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly said in a written statement. "This investment not only honors our past but also ensures that future generations can continue to learn from and cherish Arizona's diverse traditions and history."

The 10 tribes that will receive funding include the Colorado River Indian Tribes, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi, Hualapai Tribe, Navajo Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation and the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

"Arizona's rich, diverse culture and history are part of what makes our state so great," Senator Kristen Sinema said in a press release. "I'm proud to deliver this investment to preserve our traditions, landmarks, and resources for generations to come."

NPS has distributed over \$62 million in Historic Preservation Fund grants this year to historic preservation offices, according to NPS, with \$23 million going to tribal historic preservation offices.

- Arizona Mirror (Williams, Ariz.)



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# Education



The Ahfachkee School class of 2024 at the graduation ceremony in Big Cypress June 11.

Beverly Bidney

## Ahfachkee graduates urged to 'shine bright, make us proud'

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Dressed in red caps and gowns embellished with patchwork, Ahfachkee School's class of 2024 received their diplomas at the school's graduation ceremony June 11. It was the school's first graduation in its new gym, which was filled with family and friends.

The class of 2024 consists of Colten Bert, Lania Bert, Jaylee Jimmie, Ronnie Jimmie, Dyami Koenes, Mara Osceola-Turtle, Micah Stockton, Kadin Tommie, Thomas Tigertail, Shaun Tommie and Armani Torres.

The event celebrated the students' hard work and

determination. As they headed into adulthood, tribal leaders took the time to share some words of wisdom.

"Today is another milestone as you go into the world as adults and become citizens of our community," said President Holly Tiger. "Some of you are going off to college, some are taking life as it comes. There is a lot of learning in life, education happens in all phases of your life. You can become a master at something; find your passion and learn about that. If you do something you love, you won't work a day in your life."

"As you approach the end of high school and embark on a new adventure, I congratulate you," said Big Cypress Board

Rep Nadine Bowers. "Your hard work and dedication has paid off as you face a new chapter in life. This experience has shaped you. Embrace the next step in life with courage. The road may not always be smooth, so trust in your abilities. Surround yourself with those who encourage you. Don't be afraid to take risks. Remember to pause and celebrate your accomplishments."

◆ See AHFACHKEE on page 4B

Beverly Bidney

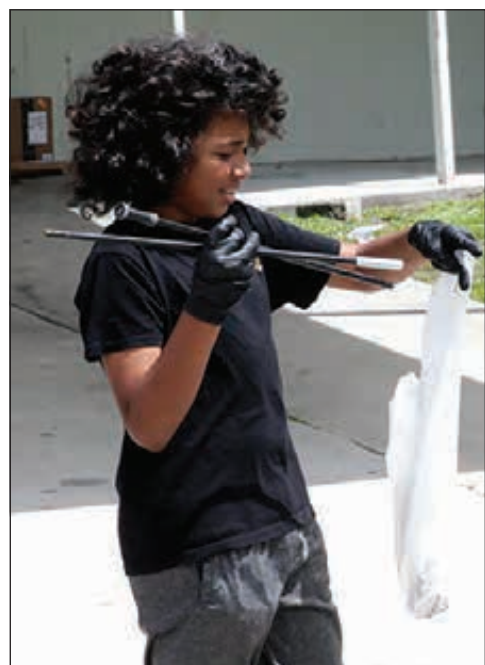
The class of 2024 makes its way down the aisle at the Ahfachkee gym. From left to right are Micah Stockton and Thomas Tigertail.



## Students participate in Hollywood cleanup day

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — Armed with plastic bags, rubber gloves and a sense of community pride, a group of students joined others from the community to clean up the sides of roads



Kevin Johnson

Michal Lanier places a couple of trash items into a plastic bag.

on the Hollywood Reservation.

The June 21 program was organized by the Education Department in Hollywood. It served multiple purposes, notably ridding a few streets of small items such as discarded bottle caps, plastic utensils and cup lids while allowing students age 13 and older to earn community service hours needed for graduation requirements in Broward County.

Education's Chris Paul-Etienne provided an energetic pep talk to the group before it headed out. He said the idea of the event was to give students a head start on meeting the community service requirements rather than waiting until their senior year. "Start the package now and be proactive," he said.

According to Broward Schools, the service requirements range from 40 hours to 250 depending on which academic tier a student pursues.

Representatives from a variety of departments either joined the clean up effort or provided assistance in other ways. Departments involved included Education, Building & Grounds, Recreation, 4-H, Climate Resiliency and SPD.

Some students, including Kai Tommie and Samuel Josh, returned with a full bag of trash. Mission accomplished.

"It's all about awareness, making sure the youth understand that this is their community, and don't wait until you're 30 or 40-years-old to say 'Now, I want to make sure everything is clean,'" Paul-Etienne said.



Kevin Johnson

Participants in a clean up program gather June 21 at the airnasium in Hollywood before heading out into the community with their bags.



Kevin Johnson

Chris Paul-Etienne, center, holds a bag of trash whose contents were picked up by Kai Tommie, left, and Samuel Josh.



Kevin Johnson

4-H special projects coordinator Kimberly Clement, left, and Ariana Sim do their part to clean up small pieces of trash in Hollywood.



# Class of 2024



**Lexi Thomas**  
Okeechobee High School  
Lexi will attend Indian River State College. She plans to become an esthetician and enter the beauty world.



**Uriah Tommie**  
Hollywood Hills High School  
Uriah's plans include attending a trade school. He would like to become an electrician and work for the tribe, including being part of the career development program.



**Jaylee Jimmie**  
Ahfachkee School  
Jaylee will attend the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, where she plans to study fine art painting with a minor in art history. When she graduates, Jaylee wants to work as an archivist to preserve history in a museum setting.



**Saylor Gowen**  
NSU University School  
Saylor will continue her education in South Florida by attending Lynn University in Boca Raton. Her interests include art, social sciences and politics. She is undecided about her major and career aspirations.



**Micah Stockton**  
Ahfachkee School  
Micah plans to go to school and become an automotive mechanic, with the ultimate goal of eventually opening his own shop.



**Maddox Osceola**  
Know-It-All Preparatory School (Davie)  
Maddox is interested in attending a technical school and possibly studying to be a diesel mechanic. His career goal is to "help out the culture of my tribe."



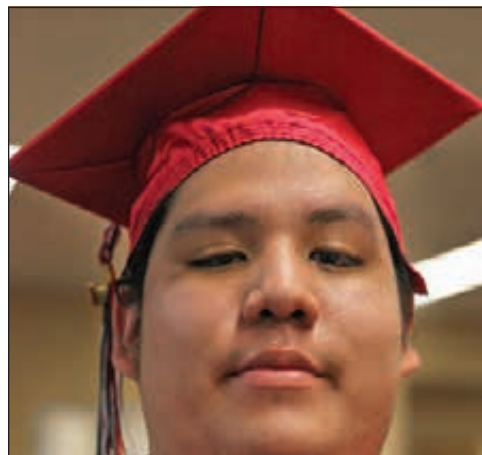
**Madasyn Lyn Osceola**  
Florida Virtual High School  
Madasyn will be pursuing her degree in hospitality and tourism management. She plans to enter the field of hospitality within the Hard Rock franchise.



**Alyssa Bowers**  
NSU University School  
Alyssa will attend St. Thomas University. She plans to study sports management and communications and play volleyball for STU.



**Saniya Rodrigues**  
Moore Haven High School  
Saniya, who earned her Associates of Arts degree before graduating high school, will attend Florida State University. She plans to study accounting and would like to ultimately work for the tribe in the Treasury Department.



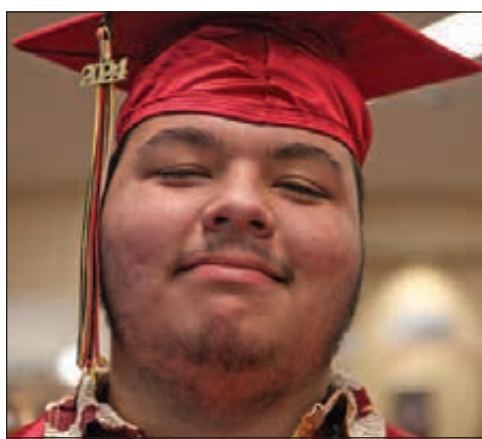
**Colten Bert**  
Ahfachkee School  
Colten will attend Palm Beach State College and study film and editing. He would like to have a career as a film director.



**Draven Osceola-Hahn**  
NSU University School  
Draven will attend the University of Hawaii at Manoa.



**Apple Billie**  
Neshoba Central High School (Philadelphia, Miss.)  
Apple will attend East Central Community College in Decatur, Miss. She plans on studying liberal arts. Her career goal is to own a business.



**Dyami Koenes**  
Ahfachkee School  
Dyami will attend trade school to learn diesel mechanics. He would like to own a repair shop for trucks.



**Cakiyah Koger**  
Okeechobee High School  
Cakiyah plans to go to trade school and become an electroencephalogram (EEG) technician and measure brain waves.



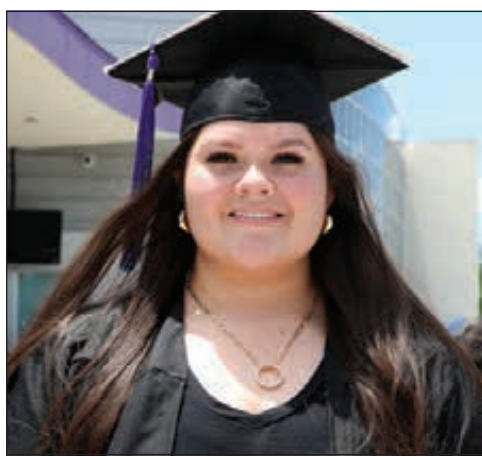
**Scott Sisto**  
Calvary Christian Academy (Hollywood)  
Scott will attend Keiser University. He hasn't decided what will be his major or his career aspirations.



**Ruby Deitz**  
Know-It-All Preparatory School (Davie)  
Ruby will attend Broward College. She is interested in the fine arts and would like to pursue a career as an artist.



**Bryce Osceola**  
Calusa Preparatory School (Miami)  
Bryce has drawn interest from colleges for basketball, but he might do a post-graduate year with hopes of improving his college possibilities.



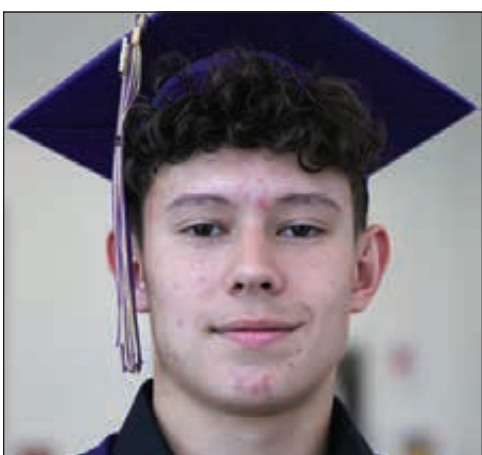
**CeCe Thomas**  
Moore Haven High School  
CeCe will attend Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, where she plans to major in Indigenous and American Indian Studies. She earned an Associate of Arts degree from Florida SouthWestern College while she was in high school.



**Marcos Reyna**  
Okeechobee High School  
Marcos plans to get a job with his father, who is a dog breeder.



**Ronnie Jimmie**  
Ahfachkee School  
Ronnie plans to move to New York and pursue his dream of fashion design and styling.



**Zach Riley**  
Okeechobee High School  
Zach will attend Indian River State College in Fort Pierce. He will study political science. After earning a degree, he plans to transfer to the University of Florida for a bachelor of arts degree. He would eventually like to return to the tribe and become a political leader.



**Joelle John-Carney**  
NSU University School  
Joelle will continue her education at Tulane University in New Orleans. She plans to major in health science and dance, and would like to minor in Native American studies. She's undecided on what career path she would like to pursue.



**Lania Bert**  
Ahfachkee School  
Lania will attend the Ringling College of Art and Design where she will study illustration and improve her art skills. She would like a career as a 2-D or 3-D animator.



**Kayley Zepeda**  
Clay High School (Green Cove Springs)  
Kayley is attending the University of North Florida where she is majoring in Pre-K primary education with a minor in American Sign Language. She plans to become a teacher after she finishes college.



**Amber Cypress**  
American Heritage School (Plantation)  
Amber will attend the University of Alabama where she will study sports management. After she graduates from college, Amber would like to be a sports agent or work in sports marketing.



# Class of 2024



**Nena Youngblood**  
Okeechobee High School

Nena will attend the University of California at Los Angeles to study astrophysics. She hopes to eventually become a professor.



**Armani Torres**  
Ahfachkee School

Armani will take some time off to travel and then plans to attend either trade school or the University of Texas at Austin to study business management. One day she would like to own her own business.



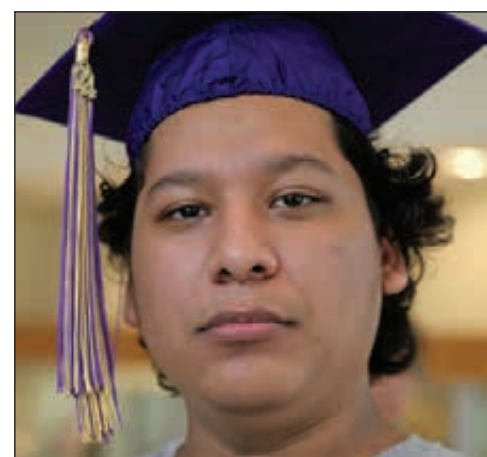
**Niksen Motlow-Viveros**  
St. Thomas Aquinas High School

Niksen will be headed more than 3,000 miles away from South Florida for college. She will attend the University of Washington in Seattle where she plans to major in psychology. She's undecided on what career path she would like to follow.



**Tony Sanchez IV**  
NSU University School

Tony will attend Louisiana State University. He plans to major in kinesiology and physical therapy and minor in entrepreneurship.



**Valentine Martinez**  
Okeechobee High School

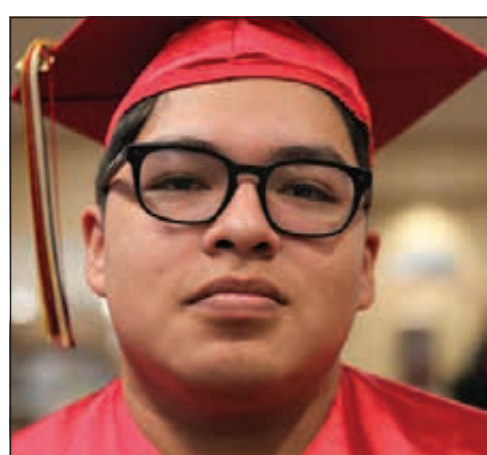
Valentine plans to attend Universal Technical Institute in Orlando where he will study welding.



**Kate Jumper**

Christ Church Episcopal School  
(Greenville, S.C.)

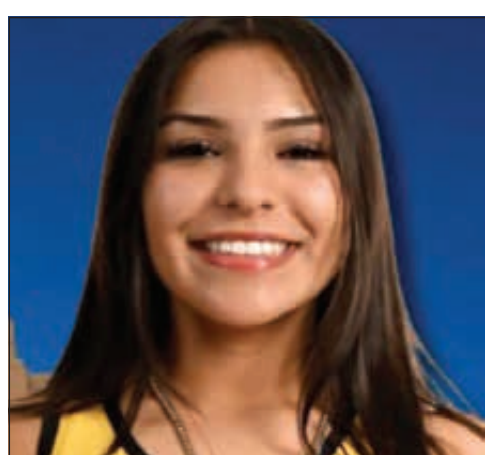
Kate will attend Sewanee, University of the South, in Tennessee. She plans on majoring in creative writing. Her career goal is to be a published author.



**Thomas Tigertail**

Ahfachkee School

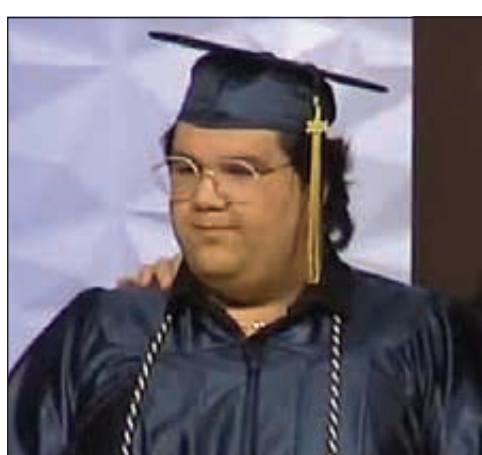
Thomas is undecided about his future aspirations, but he wants to be independent.



**Kenna Martinez**

Bishop Verot High School (Fort Myers)

Kenna is attending Florida State University and is studying in engineering. She hopes to get an internship while she is in school and have a career working with a team of people.



**Sean Bradley Scheffler III**

Southwest Florida Christian Academy  
(Fort Myers)

Bradley will attend the Community College of Philadelphia, where he'll pursue a business degree.



**Shaun Tommie**

Ahfachkee School

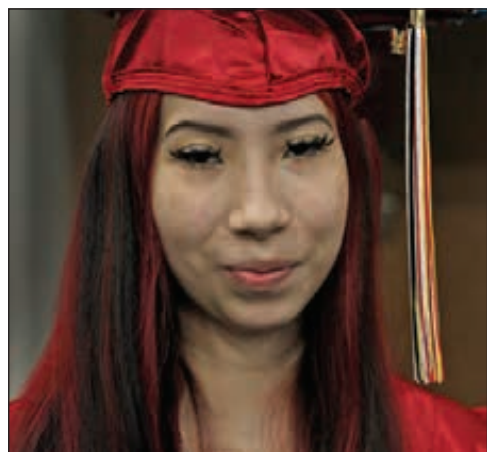
Shaun will attend the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, where he will study fine arts. He would like a career as a museum curator.



**Eric Puente**

Moore Haven High School

Eric plans to go to trade school to learn a trade, possibly HVAC.



**Mara Osceola-Turtle**

Ahfachkee School

Mara will attend Santa Fe College in Gainesville and then transfer to the University of Florida to study animal sciences. She plans to become a large animal veterinarian.



**Maycee Holata**

Penn Foster

Maycee is planning on attending college with psychology as a potential area of study.



**Kadin Tommie**

Ahfachkee School

Kadin might attend trade school or enter the workforce, possibly at Hard Rock.



**Phoenix Kimble**

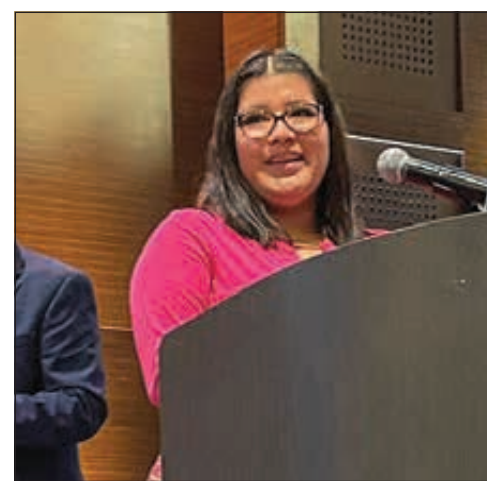
Leon High School (Tallahassee)

Phoenix will attend Florida A&M University in Tallahassee.



**Leighton Jim**

Sagemont Preparatory School



**Mary Cypress**

Calusa Preparatory (Miami)

## Additional high school students from class of 2024

(The Tribune was unable to get additional information about these students who were scheduled to graduate in 2024).

Student	School
Emma DiCarlo	Penn Foster
Chanon Frye	IMG Academy
Bryce Baker	Penn Foster
Jakeb Betscher	Sebring High School
Tiera Garner	Okeechobee High School
Keenan Jones	Penn Foster
Ashton Jones	Penn Foster
Joshua Madrigal	Penn Foster
Lauren Smith	Living Stone Academy
Clarissa Urbina	Penn Foster
Aaron Arroyo	West Port High School
Marie Billie	Vista Grande Charter
Caidence Guzman-Billie	Sagemont School
Burton Harjo	Penn Foster
Arianna Osceola	Know-It-All Prep
Markayla Cypress	Freedom High School
Charles Osceola	Know-It-All Prep
Jack Tiger	SunEd High School
Kendra Thomas	Know-It-All Prep
Victor Parilla III	Xceed Prep Anywhere
Levi Phillips	Penn Foster
Kaylee Storm	Astronaut High School
Lola Veliz	LaBelle High School
Niya Osceola	Lehigh High School

## Higher education graduates 2023-24

Student	Institute	Degree	Major
Kasera Cypress	Broward College	Associate	General Studies
Joshua Madrigal	Penn Foster	HS Diploma	
Jennifer Tommie-Romanik	DATS of Florida	Certificate	Dental Assistant
Matthew Wideman	Udemy	Certificate	Screenwriting
Evan Cypress	GED	GED	
Jada Holdiness	University of Central Florida	B.A.	Sociology
Brendan Latchford	Florida State University	B.S.	Geography
Joshua Colon	Palm Beach Atlantic University	B.S.	Management
Davin Carrillo	Indian River State College	Certificate	CNA
Klayton Sanders	Keiser University	Associate	General Studies
Xavier Michael-Young	University of Wyoming	Bachelors	Agriculture Business
Monique Jimmie	Paul Mitchell School	Certificate	Cosmetology
Isiah Thomas	GED	GED	
Rebecca Vasquez	Aveda Institute	Certificate	Esthology Full Specialist
Chloe Chalfant	Spokane Community College	Associate	General Business
Tia Blais-Billie	New York Film Academy	Certificate	Eight-Week Acting for Film
Destiny Diaz	New York Film Academy	Bachelor of Fine Arts	Filmmaking
Turquoise Battisti	Institute of Culinary Education	Diploma	Culinary Arts
Bradley Latchford	University of Central Florida	Masters	Athletic Training
Layla Petrillo	Aveda Institute	Certificate	Esthology
Alycia Cypress	Syracuse University	Bachelors	Broadcast/Digital Journalism
Lena Stubbs	Arizona State University	B.S.	Nursing
Kassandra Houseman	Trocaire College	Associate	Registered Nurse
Clarissa Urbina	Penn Foster	HS Diploma	
Asiana Billie	Pace University	B.A.	Psychology
Leanne Diaz	Fashion Institute of Technology	Associate	Photography/Related Media
Summer Smith	Florida Technical College	Diploma	Medical Assistant Technician
Lazzlow Billie	I-Tech Glades	Certificate	HVAC/Refrigeration
Silas Madrigal	North Park University	Bachelors	Business
Eyanna Billie	Savannah College of Art and Design	B.A.	Sequential Art
Kaiya Drake	Nova Southeastern University	B.A.	English



◆ **AHFACHKEE**  
From page 1B

“You’ve come a long way, through good and not so good times,” said Lee Zepeda, executive director of Administration. “It’s all brought you to this moment. Embrace your success. Remember the goal is always progress; if you stand still the world will pass you by.”

Principal Philip Baer shepherded the students through school and told them they would always be part of the Ahfachkee family.

“You have met the academic challenge and did so while embracing your culture,” Baer said. “Your heritage is powerful and provides you with a unique perspective as you step into the future. The world beyond



Beverly Bidney

Graduate Kadin Tommie presents his grandmother Virginia Tommie with a gratitude gift during the Ahfachkee graduation ceremony.

these walls is full of opportunities. Go forward, shine bright and make up proud.”

Keynote speaker Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie spoke to the students next.

“Your journey through the halls of Ahfachkee is a testament to your dedication,” Councilwoman Billie said. “Carry the lessons and your memories as you are ready to leave your mark. [Apple founder] Steve Jobs said, ‘Your time is limited, so don’t waste it.’ As you go forward, may you always remember where you are from and who you are. May your paths be filled with success, fulfillment and responsibilities.”

After the speeches, the students participated in the school’s longstanding tradition of presenting gratitude gifts to those who are important to them. Guidance Counselor Chip Osborn announced the gifts as students found their family, friends and favorite educators in the crowd.

The Warrior Award, which is for perseverance and determination in the face of adversity, was awarded to Lania Bert.

Salutatorian Micah Stockton and Valedictorian Dyami Koenes received special cords designating the honor. Koenes addressed his peers from the podium.

“Our time at Ahfachkee has been more than just academics,” Koenes said. “It’s been a journey of growth, discovery, and transformation. We survived Covid and learned not only virtually but from each other. Through challenges that tested us and experiences that shaped our character, we persevered. To my fellow graduates, let’s embrace the future with courage and enthusiasm. Let’s be bold in our dreams and steadfast in our pursuits. Remember, the road ahead may be uncertain, but our education has equipped us to navigate it with confidence.”

After the students received their diplomas, assistant principal Nuria Suarez had some final words of advice.

“You are the architects of your own destinies,” Suarez said. “Remember your moments of triumph and those of defeat, for they have made you who you are.”

With those words, the graduates went into the crowd for hugs, kisses and photo opportunities with family and friends before they ventured into the world to start life as adults.



Beverly Bidney

Ahfachkee valedictorian Dyami Koenes gets ready to make his speech at the graduation ceremony.



Beverly Bidney

After receiving their diplomas, Ahfachkee grads move their tassels from side to side, signifying their graduation.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers, Big Cypress Councilwoman Marian Billie and President Holly Tiger congratulate Micah Stockton as he receives his diploma.

## OHS students receive scholarships from STOF, Brighton casino

**STAFF REPORT**

**OKEECHOBEE** — The Seminole Tribe of Florida and Seminole Casino Brighton were among the dozens of businesses and organizations from the Okeechobee community that provided scholarships to graduates from Okeechobee

High School’s class of 2024.

The tribe and casino are annual providers to OHS’s scholarship program.

According to the school, 340 scholarships worth \$1.2 million were awarded to 125 members of the class. Military scholarships accounted for \$560,000, state scholarships \$104,500, and community partner scholarships \$552,680.

All recipients and donors were recognized at the school’s annual awards night ceremony May 10.

Dana Osceola, tribalwide Education community liaison, and Acealyn Youngblood, Brighton Council event representative, represented the tribe. Seminole Casino Brighton human resources director Justin Adorno represented the casino.



OHS

The Seminole Tribe and Seminole Casino Brighton combined scholarship recipients are, front row, from left to right, Isabella Puga, Arianna Granados, Clea Judilla, Justin Adorno (presenter), Tori Trent and Clea Judilla. Middle row, from left to right, Dana Osceola (presenter), Alton Crowell, Carriss Chilsom Johns, Acealyn Youngblood (presenter) and Justin Adorno (presenter). Back row, from left to right, Chester Underhill, Jose Ordenez- Zarraga and Penelope Van Emann.



OHS

The Seminole Tribe of Florida scholarship recipients are, from left to right, Alton Crowell, second from left, and Carriss Chilsom Johns, second from right. They are joined by presenters Dana Osceola, far left, and Acealyn Youngblood.



OHS

The Seminole Casino Brighton scholarship recipients are, front row, from left to right, Tori Trent, Isabella Puga, Arianna Granados, Clea Judilla, Justin Adorno (presenter). Second row, from left to right, Penelope Van Eman, Colton Collins, Chester Underhill, Jose Ordenez-Zarraga. Not pictured: Sydney Matthews, Brandon Perez.



# Square root of pie equals fun at Ahfachkee



Calvin Tiger

Anthony Valdez pitches a strike as he blasts assistant principal Nuria Suarez with a pie, which principal Philip Baer seems to enjoy watching.

## STAFF REPORT

**BIG CYPRESS** — Ahfachkee School students who excelled in the statewide assessment tests were rewarded at the expense of their principals.

Those who attained Level 5 scoring — the highest level — earned a right to throw a pie into the face of principal Philip Baer or assistant principal Nuria Suarez on June 3.

The students didn't miss their mark.



Calvin Tiger

Aubriana Billie enjoys throwing a pie at assistant principal Nuria Suarez.



Calvin Tiger

The students and principals take a break after the pie throwing event.



Calvin Tiger

Above, Ashaa Ramirez, and below, Aiyana Crespo and Taina Guzman-Billie throw pies at their principals.



# NATIVE LEARNING CENTER

## July calendar for Native Learning Center

### FROM NATIVE LEARNING CENTER

**HOLLYWOOD** — The NLC offers free Training, Technical Assistance, and Keretv Online Webinars to Native Americans and those working within Indian Country. The NLC's housing-related training opportunities and resources focus on areas that are critical to the growth and improvement of Tribal Communities. Stay informed about the latest trainings, webinars, and podcast episodes.

### Hoporenkv Native American Podcast Release: "Meet Native American Bank: Creating Economic Independence, Development, and Sustainability"

Special Guest: Veronica Lane, (Navajo) Vice President, Marketing Director Native American Bank, N.A.  
Date: July 3  
Time: 12 p.m.

Join us as we sit down with Veronica Lane, Member of the Navajo Nation and Vice President and Marketing Director of Native American Bank, N.A. Veronica shares the serendipitous story of how she went from working in the same building and marveling at the existence of a Native American Bank to being one of its valued employees. Veronica tells us all about the services that Native American Bank offers to Indian Country along with detailing the exciting growth the bank has experienced, especially since rebuilding following the financial crisis of 2008. Veronica explains the proud vision of Native American Bank, to provide banking to Indian Country while employing members of the Tribal Communities they serve. Native American Bank is grateful for the opportunity and up for the challenge of working with new Tribes and learning new Tribal Law while honoring sovereignty in a way that other institutions cannot offer. Tune in today and learn more!

**Webinar: Tribal Response Programs**  
Instructors: Eugene Goldfarb, MUP, JD, Adjunct Asst Professor,

Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago

Dr. Cynthia Annett, Research Associate Professor, Kansas State University  
Oral Saulters, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Environmental Justice, and Equity; Co-Director, Tribal Technical Assistance to Brownfields

Jennifer Clancey, Director, Outreach Innovation & Marketing; Co-Director, Tribal Technical Assistance to Brownfields

Date: July 10  
Time: 2-3 p.m.

**Training Description:**  
States and Tribal Nations are responsible for developing brownfields cleanup standards and policy and conducting or overseeing assessment and cleanup of brownfield sites in their jurisdictions and/or responding to spills that affect the public's health and safety. EPA provides funding and technical assistance to help establish or enhance state and tribal response programs and Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) helps Tribal TRPs talk to each other.

**Training Objectives:**  
-What a Tribal Response Program (TRP) is  
-How a TRP is established  
-What does a TRP do  
-What TRP staff can do for other arms of the tribe

**Webinar: Communications Concepts 1**  
Instructor: Lisa Perez, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, Human Resources Consultant, Founder & CEO, HBL Resources, Inc.  
Date: July 11  
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.

**Training Description:**  
These communication skills sessions focus on the various aspects and methods of an effective communication process and identify barriers that prevent people from having a common understanding or effective dialogue.

**Training Objectives:**  
-Identify and understand the 5 elements that form the communication process  
-Identify and create awareness of barriers to the communication process  
-Identify three major components of effective listening

-Understand the differences between telephone, virtual, and face-to-face communication  
-Set goals for practical application of concepts to improve communication

**Webinar: NAHASDA Essentials Training Days 1 - 5**  
Instructor: Cheryl A. Causley, Principal, Cheryl A. Causley and Associates  
Dates: July 15-19  
Time: 2-3 p.m.

**Training Description:**  
These webinars will provide a comprehensive introduction to the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA). Attendees will become familiar with regulations, program guidance, and PIH Notices. We will review eligible participants and activities including rental housing, homebuyer programs, rehabilitation, and housing and crime prevention.

**Training Objectives:**  
-This class will provide a basic summary of the NAHASDA program rules and key elements to webinar participants, thereby enhancing overall capacity at their housing program and ensuring on-going compliance with the array of NAHASDA federal requirements  
-Multiple sessions will provide a thorough understanding of Indian Housing and NAHASDA which is a critical element fundamental to the success of a Housing Authority

### Hoporenkv Native American Podcast Release: "From the Rez to the Rec Center: A Passionate Seminole Fitness Specialist Shares Her Story"

Special Guest: Courtney Osceola, (Seminole Tribe of Florida), Recreation Fitness Specialist, Seminole Tribe of Florida Recreation  
Date: July 17  
Time: 12 p.m.

This week, we sit down with Courtney Osceola, Seminole Tribe of Florida Member and Recreation Fitness Specialist for the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Recreation Department. Settle in with us and allow Courtney to take you on a journey. She shares her passions for sports, organized recreation, and fitness. A self-identified "Rez Kid," Courtney tells of how her life with sports led to visiting places she would have never thought possible and being exposed to different experiences and perspectives. Hear about the sage wisdom and guidance lovingly given by her father and the unique bonding experience that sports, and basketball in particular, has facilitated between her and her beloved nephew. She also shares the beautiful transformations she is able to witness in her clients based on the integration of fitness into their lives and how movement and perseverance can help to bring you out of a dark place.

Courtney, a true coach, is able to take us past the rules of the game to identify what is at the heart of things: motivation, teamwork,

resilience, and healing.

**Webinar: Whatever Happened to the Customer Service Revolution?**  
Instructor: Russ Seagle, Executive Director, The Sequoyah Fund, Inc.  
Date: July 23  
Time: 2-3 p.m.

**Training Description:**  
Is customer service as we once knew it gone forever? Not exactly, but it has changed. 25 years ago, Customer Service was all the rage. The Customer Service Revolution was going to save small businesses. Then, attention turned from making customers happy to making them "satisfied." Businesses forgot that without customers, there's no business. This program will teach you critical customer service principles that will keep customers coming back over and over. You'll also learn a proven technique for dealing with unhappy customers.

**Training Objectives:**  
-These objectives aim to equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to thrive in today's customer service landscape and drive sustainable business growth through exceptional customer experiences  
-Explore the importance of prioritizing customer satisfaction and its impact on the success and sustainability of businesses  
-Identify critical customer service principles essential for fostering positive customer experiences and building long-term customer loyalty  
-Learn effective communication techniques and strategies for engaging with customers to exceed their expectations and create memorable interactions  
-Acquire skills in handling challenging situations and resolving conflicts with unhappy customers in a professional and empathetic manner  
-Develop a proactive approach to anticipate and address customer needs, thereby enhancing customer retention and fostering a loyal customer base  
-Apply practical tools and resources to continuously improve customer service processes and adapt to changing market dynamics  
-Cultivate a customer-centric mindset within the organization and empower team members to deliver exceptional service at every touchpoint

**Webinar: Management Challenges in a Post-COVID World**  
Instructor: Russ Seagle, Executive Director, The Sequoyah Fund, Inc.  
Date: July 24  
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.  
**Training Description:**  
From WFH (Work-From-Home) to 'Bare Minimum Mondays' to 'Quiet Quitting,' COVID caused numerous changes in how we work and manage employees. Some of these changes have been frustrating, while others have been needed for a long time. This webinar will help you identify some of the most common post-COVID issues employees and their managers are

dealing with, and you'll learn strategies for making your workplace stronger, more productive, and happier - even if you can't turn the clock back to 2019.

**Training Objectives:**  
-These objectives aim to empower participants with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to navigate the complexities of post-COVID workplaces, foster employee well-being and productivity, and build stronger, more resilient organizations for the future  
-Recognize and understand the various changes in work patterns and employee management practices resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, including WFH (Work-From-Home), 'Bare Minimum Mondays,' and 'Quiet Quitting'  
-Identify common challenges faced by employees and managers in adapting to post-COVID work environments, such as remote work fatigue, blurred work-life boundaries, and communication gaps  
-Explore strategies for effectively managing remote and hybrid teams, including fostering collaboration, maintaining team cohesion, and promoting work-life balance  
-Learn techniques for addressing employee burnout, stress, and mental health concerns in the context of evolving work arrangements and heightened uncertainty  
-Examine the role of leadership in driving organizational resilience, empathy, and trust in the face of ongoing changes and challenges  
-Discuss best practices for communication, feedback, and performance management in virtual or hybrid work settings to enhance employee engagement and productivity

**Webinar: Communications Concepts 2**  
Instructor: Lisa Perez, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, Human Resources Consultant Founder & CEO, HBL Resources, Inc.  
Date: July 25  
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.

**Training Description:**  
These communication skills sessions focus on the various aspects and methods of an effective communication process and identify barriers that prevent people from having a common understanding or effective dialogue. Participants will also explore basic listening skills and the importance of questioning techniques with an interactive listening skills activity.

**Training Objectives:**  
-Identify and understand the 5 elements that form the communication process  
-Identify and create awareness of barriers to the communication process  
-Identify three major components of effective listening  
-Understand the differences between telephone, virtual, and face-to-face communication



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# Sports



## Bronson Koenig shares personal peaks, valleys with Hollywood graduates

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — Before he shook hands with Hollywood graduates from the class of 2024, former University of Wisconsin basketball star Bronson Koenig (Ho-Chunk Nation) shared his experiences as a kid and an adult that shook his life.

Koenig, 29, was the guest speaker at the Hollywood Reservation's graduation dinner May 30 in a ballroom at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

Koenig played four seasons for the Badgers. He averaged 10 points per game in his career, which is also how many points he scored in the 2015 NCAA championship game, a 68-63 loss against Duke.

He spoke to the graduates for about a half hour, explaining the challenges he overcame while growing up as well as the problems he incurred from a lifestyle in college that included drinking, partying and smoking, all of which played roles in derailing his attempts at becoming an NBA player.

Koenig retired from basketball just before Covid hit. These days he visits tribes and First Nations across the U.S. and Canada talking about his past while addressing current problems in Indian Country.

"Everywhere I go, I see the same exact issue in everyone one of our communities. A lot of depression, a lot of anxiety, a lot of suicides, a lot of health problems, addiction," he told the audience.

Koenig said he can relate to those types of problems, having grown up in a broken home.

"From a young age, I experienced a lot of depression and a lot of anxiety," he said.

His emergence from darkness came by playing basketball, and excelling at it.

"My passion was playing basketball, and the Creator gave me a gift, to play basketball, to play well. I was obsessed. I was at the YMCA eight hours a day...in my driveway until 11 p.m. as a kid," he said.

He was heavily recruited by colleges across the country, but opted to stay close to home and become a Wisconsin Badger. While he was a big reason for the team's success on the court, which included winning a Big Ten championship and reaching the 2015 championship game, he drifted into areas off the court that he didn't handle well.

"For white people, that culture of going to college and getting drunk and partying all the time, that might work for them; but for Native people, that does not work for us," he

said.

Those problems accompanied Koenig as he tried to secure a spot on an NBA roster.

"As an NBA rookie, getting black out drunk day before practices; called in sick and other excuses. Really bad idea," he said.

"I made it to the NBA, but I didn't make it in the NBA because I hadn't addressed all this stuff."

Koenig didn't stick in the NBA and instead bounced around a few other pro teams and leagues without much success. The partying had caught up to him.

"I lived that life in college, after college for a few years, and that was probably when I was the most miserable in all my entire life, the most depressed, the most not wanting to live, all that stuff," he said.

Eventually, Koenig managed to extinguish his demons through his "healing journey," rooted in meditation, prayer, self-discipline, talking to Elders, eating proper foods, and not drinking, all of which he carries with him as a father of two children and a speaker who is trying to help others by telling his story.

"I've made a lot of stupid mistakes, but I've come to a place in my healing journey where I feel empowered because I have fully accepted myself and I can walk in my authenticity, unapologetically, I am who I am, and it allows me to get here in front of all you and tell my story," he said.

Koenig received applause from the audience when he told them: "I'm proud to say I am fully sober. I'm feeling the best I've ever felt, literally, even when I was a professional basketball player, I never felt this good."

After his talk, Koenig joined Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola in congratulating each graduate, who came up on stage and received gifts and handshakes.

Earlier in the program, the graduates heard from the reservation's elected leaders, who congratulated them and their families.

"We are filled with resources and opportunities, so never think that there's nothing out there for you," Hollywood Board Rep. Christine McCall said.

"This is not the end of the journey, it's the beginning," Councilman Osceola said. "You've got your whole lives in front of you. You've made your parents and your families proud, so be proud of yourselves. I'm certainly proud of you guys. I feel the tribe is in good hands here; we've got a bright future and I look forward to watching you guys grow and prosper."



Former University of Wisconsin basketball star Bronson Koenig (Ho-Chunk) speaks at the Hollywood graduates dinner May 30 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.



2024 graduate Bryce Osceola, one of the top basketball players in the tribe, shakes hands with Bronson Koenig while Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola looks on.

## Casino, hotel right there with Panthers' for Stanley Cup win



The Seminole Casino Coconut Creek signage is right next to the Florida Panthers celebration of the biggest goal in franchise history. Sam Reinhart's goal in the second period proved to be the game-winner as the Panthers edged the Edmonton Oilers, 2-1, on June 24 to win their first Stanley Cup.



The Guitar Hotel lights up a Florida Panther logo after the team won the Stanley Cup.

NHL.com

Hard Rock



# Immokalee kids celebrate end of school year



Milani Garza tries not to topple the tower during a game of giant Jenga.

Beverly Bidney



From left to right, Jadayah Gustave, Sofia Garza and Katelyn Mariscal enjoy a game of corn hole at the Immokalee Education end-of-year bash June 6.

Beverly Bidney



Kids have a ball as they leave their handprints and other creative paintings on the Seminole fire truck at the Immokalee end of the year bash. Not to worry, the paint is water-based and washed off after the party was over.

Beverly Bidney



Elana Kendrick and Gia Garcia show off their hands before they leave their mark on the fire truck.

Beverly Bidney

67<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
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Kevin Johnson

Bull riders from the Florida Freedom PBR team tip their cowboy hats to the crowd at the Hollywood rodeo arena June 29. The team will compete in Sunrise in August.

# Pro bull riders come to Hollywood Reservation

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — If Seminole Tribe of Florida rodeo fans want a team to cheer for in PBR, they don't have to look far. The Florida Freedom — a PBR (Professional Bull Riders) team based in Sunrise — held a training exhibition June 29 on the tribe's Hollywood Reservation. The PBR team series concept was born two years ago. The Freedom moved to Sunrise from Oklahoma and will make their Sunshine State debut Aug. 2-4 at Amerant Bank Arena, home of the Stanley Cup champion Florida Panthers. The team concept idea is to

give fans a team to cheer for. The 10 team-league includes teams in Arizona, New York, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas. There's a draft, too. "It's pretty fun. [Fans] get to root for their team. It's pretty cool they started it up two years ago," said John Crimber, who has quickly ascended to elite status in PBR even though he's only 18. The Freedom selected Crimber with the first overall pick in the draft. Caden Bunch (Cherokee), from Oklahoma, said he feels like he's representing Indian Country in PBR. "I'm proud of it, too," said Bunch, who competed in an all-Indian rodeo in Hollywood a couple years ago.

For the exhibition, Bunch and the other Freedom riders rode bulls from Five Star Rodeo, owned by tribal members Paul Bowers Jr. and Marty Johns. "The ground got a little soft. This is what we call probably the "B" team. I think that's the caliber of bulls that they were looking for for today's event," Johns said. The riders showed the crowd why they are the top of their profession. Each rider produced excellent rides. Caden Bunch battles a bull during the Florida Freedom's exhibition on the Hollywood Reservation.

Kevin Johnson



Kevin Johnson

The Guitar Hotel serves as a backdrop at the the Florida Freedom's training exhibition.



Kevin Johnson

Conner Halverson battles a bull as Freedom coach Paulo Crimber, far right, and Five Star Rodeo co-owner Marty Johns, second from right, look on.

Presented By Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

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◆ **THOMAS**  
From page 1A

Thomas received more than 30 college offers. The four-star recruit dwindled his choices to Clemson and FSU. Hats of both teams were on a table for the announcement. Thomas initially put on the Clemson hat, but quickly switched to the FSU hat.

Thomas will start his senior season at American Heritage on Aug. 23 when the Patriots face Georgia's Milton High School in a powerhouse matchup between two of the best programs in the country.

Before making his announcement, Thomas first thanked God and then thanked several people, including his parents - Greg and Alice - his siblings, tribal leaders, coaches, trainers, teammates and the coaches from schools who made offers to him.

Afterwards, he said he was grateful for the tribe's support that helped make the evening at the Guitar Hotel so special.

"I love it. It means everything to me," he said.

Tribal leadership attended the event, including Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., who praised Thomas's accomplishment and work ethic.

"It's pretty awesome. His dream is coming true. He worked hard to be here," Chairman Osceola said.

Very few Native Americans are on major college football rosters. Thomas said he hopes to be a role model in Indian Country.

"I want to set an example for everybody else that comes after me," he said.



Greg "Zae" Thomas is the center of attention for a group photo after he made his decision to attend Florida State.

Kevin Johnson



The crowd cheers as Greg "Zae" Thomas makes his way to the microphone to announce his decision.

Kevin Johnson



Greg "Zae" Thomas walks toward a platform to make his announcement.

Kevin Johnson



A photo of Greg "Zae" Thomas and FSU head coach Mike Norvell is shown poolside on a screen at the Guitar Hotel.

Kevin Johnson



After announcing his commitment to FSU, Greg "Zae" Thomas is joined by tribal leaders. From left to right are Miccosukee Tribe Chairman Talbert Cypress, Seminole Tribe Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., President Holly Tiger and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.

Kevin Johnson



Greg "Zae" Thomas puts on an FSU cap as he announces his decision.

Kevin Johnson



# Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase a hit in Atlanta

BY RICK FARLOW  
For MLB.com

ATLANTA — Fifty high school baseball players participated in a once-in-a-lifetime experience June 8-9 at Truist Park in Atlanta.

The Braves hosted their third annual Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase, and on June 8, 50 top high school baseball players of Native American descent went through a pro-style workout on the field at Truist Park.

The workout was followed by a home run derby. On Sunday, the players were split into two 25-man teams for a seven-inning All-Star contest.

The pro-style workout, executed by the Marquis Grissom Baseball Association, gave players a chance to work on fielding and take batting practice on the Braves' home field. The workout ran for about an hour before the home run derby began.

Based on batting practice performance, a select few players participated in the home run derby following the workout.

Greg McMichael was a Brave for five of his eight MLB seasons, helping Atlanta to its 1995 World Series title. McMichael is now the Braves' senior director of alumni relations & growing the game and is heavily involved in the Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase, which began in 2022.

"This is very unique because we're the only ones that do it," McMichael said. "I'm really proud of the fact that we have given 50 young men an opportunity to come and play on a big league field to get some exposure from some great coaches and mentors."

Twenty-plus tribal affiliations from 16 states and Canada were represented. Michael Stopp is the Executive Director of the Native American Athletic Foundation, and the foundation has partnered with the Braves in spearheading the event's planning and execution. Stopp also acts as an advisor to Braves president and CEO Derek Schiller about Native issues.

"The Braves have been great partners with Indian Country," Stopp said. "This was the brainchild that came out of that working group. This is our third iteration. It gets better every year. The kids always have a great time and they learn."

"One of the best things they do is not just the professional clinic they had [Saturday], but talking to recruiters and scouts and understanding how their thought processes work. Then, playing in a Major League stadium, they love it."

The student-athletes received Major League coaching during the showcase as five Braves alumni -- Grissom, Johnny Estrada, Terry Pendleton, Terry Harper and Jerome Walton -- were tabbed as coaches for the weekend.

"I love that, from an alumni perspective, we have guys that want to give back in that way," McMichael said. "Marquis' group is working with us. We've done it all three years. ... We have a really healthy relationship with all of our alumni."

"We work with Greg and his office here at the Braves," Stopp said. "We really get started in January putting together the logistics. We do a lot of marketing through Facebook, through tribal news sources to get the word out. Then [the players] do an application process on the Braves' website. Then our mentor coaches go through the film and the players to determine who really are the star players."

June 8 wasn't just a learning experience for the student-athletes. During the workout, about 10 mentor coaches participated in an hour-long question-and-answer session with former players McMichael and Collin McHugh, former Emory University head baseball coach Mike Twardoski and Braves scout Alan Butts.

"We try to do something just for the mentors because they volunteer their time to come here and be a part of this," McMichael said. "They're not getting paid. They want to see these young people get better. We're kind of aligned in that because they are the ones who helped us start this. We wanted to do something just for them."

"That is the other thing that I love so much about what Greg puts together here," Stopp said. "[We] have that time where he really does pay attention and invests into our mentor coaches, who are the ones who are going back [to their communities]. Maybe the kids who didn't get picked for this game, [the mentor coaches] are still going back and investing in the kids for next year and years after that. We want to get as much experience and exposure as we can to Native coaches as we do with Native players."



Atlanta Braves  
Players in the Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase shake hands in Atlanta.



Atlanta Braves  
The Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Oneida Indian Nation were among the tribes represented in the showcase.

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## Josiah Johns Memorial Rodeo to be held in Brighton

STAFF REPORT

BRIGHTON — The Josiah Johns Memorial All-Indian Rodeo will be held July 12-13 at the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena on the Brighton Reservation.

The adult rodeo July 12 starts at 7 p.m. The schedule includes bareback riding, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, tie down roping, ladies breakaway roping, team roping, ladies barrel racing and bull riding.

On July 13, the kids rodeo will be held at 6 p.m. and feature dummy roping, mutton busting, youth pony riding, pony riding, jr. bareback riding, calf riding, steer riding, jr. bull riding, chute doggin, jr. breakaway roping and barrel racing.

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# Council Oak restaurant earns honor

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Wine Spectator magazine has presented its 2024 Award of Excellence to Council Oak Steaks and Seafood Restaurant at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City. Council Oak has earned the prestigious 2024 Wine Spectator award, which celebrates the world's best restaurants for wine.

Council Oak Steaks and Seafood Restaurant received the award for its outstanding wine program. Council Oak offers over 350 wines from more than a dozen countries with an extensive by-the-glass, half-bottle and large format selection. The Council Oak wine list represents numerous varietals, regions and prices and features Napa Valley classics, award-winning champagnes and first-growth Bordeaux wines. Council Oak's bar offers well-known liquors alongside an exclusive list of high-end spirits. All wines and spirits are optional and priced separately.

Overlooking the famed Atlantic City

Boardwalk, Council Oak Steaks and Seafood Restaurant offers sophisticated, classic American steakhouse fare, including USDA dry-aged prime steaks and the freshest seafood. Cuts of meat are dry-aged for up to 45 days, personally-selected and hand-sculpted inside its own Butcher Shop, which features a Himalayan salt-brick-walled chamber. The Council Oak open kitchen provides chefs with the finest culinary equipment, including a Jospier Charcoal Oven and Argentine-style wood burning grill.

"Earning the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence validates the intensive focus of our Council Oak team on the restaurant's wine program," Peter Brattander, vice president of Food and Beverage at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, said in a statement. We want to thank Wine Spectator for recognizing Council Oak Steaks and Seafood Restaurant, and our talented Team is committed to continue to delight our guests with the finest food and wine experience in Atlantic City."

# Elle King to perform at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE – Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee welcomes multi-genre singer-songwriter Elle King and her "Baby Daddy's Weekend" tour Saturday, Oct. 26 with doors opening at 7 p.m. and the show beginning at 8 p.m. Tickets start at \$69 and are available from Ticketmaster or at [www.moreinparadise.com](http://www.moreinparadise.com). Attendees must be 21. Parking is free.

King is the first female artist in history to have scored radio No. 1 singles on four different formats, including Adult Pop Songs, Adult Alternative Songs, Alternative Songs, and Country Airplay charts. Her debut, 4x platinum-certified single "Ex's & Oh's," earned her two GRAMMY nominations, and her award-winning "Drunk (And I Don't Want To Go Home)" with Miranda Lambert

has nearly 300 million worldwide streams.

She recently released her new single, "Baby Daddy's Weekend," which brings all the swagger King is known for. Her unique blend of music has found her a diverse fanbase, and she tours with multi-genre artists like Jelly Roll, Tyler Childers, Dierks Bentley, Melissa Etheridge, and The Chicks.

King has already been heating up the summer with fiery performances at fan-favorite festivals like In the Pines in Bristol, Tenn./Va., Railbird Festival in Lexington, Ky., Tailgates & Tall Boys Festival in Bloomington, Ill. with Eric Church, and Stagecoach in Indio, Calif., where the Orange County Register proclaimed, "Country rocker Elle King brought her signature sass and grooves to her sunset set, treating the audience to a mix of new music and covers."

# Native Americans see omen in Yellowstone's rare white bison

FROM BBC

An incredibly rare white bison calf has been photographed in Yellowstone National Park, exciting Native American tribes who view it as a religious sign heralding major change.

It was spotted in the Lamar Valley area, and is the first white bison to be born in the last wild herd in the US, according to modern records.

Other recent white bison births have happened in captivity and from parents that contained cow DNA. Tribes consider a wild birth more religiously significant.

Montana photographer Erin Braaten took photos of the young buffalo in the Lamar Valley on 4 June while visiting the park with three of her eight children.

Stuck in traffic caused by a slow-moving herd, she noticed the young calf across a river, nearly 100 metres (330ft) away, and initially mistook it for a coyote because of its sandy light colour.

"There were so many different thoughts and emotions," Braaten told the BBC.

"It was so amazing. I thought I'd have a better chance of capturing Bigfoot than a white bison calf."

The birth of a white buffalo is a sacred event for many Native tribes of the Great

Plains, including the Lakota people, who believe that it relates to a time around 2,000 years ago when food was scarce and the bison were rarely seen.

The Lakota legend tells of a beautiful woman who appeared and delivered the gifts of a sacred pipe and bundle to the people.

The woman told them she would return to restore harmony in a troubled world, and then rolled on the ground four times, changing colour each time before becoming a white buffalo calf.

Her departure led the bison to return, and white buffalos are now seen as a sign that prayers are being heard and that change is coming.

The white buffalo woman is considered the central prophet in the theology of many tribes including the Sioux, Cherokee, Comanche and Navajo.

Her story is often likened to that of Jesus in Christianity.

Simon Moya-Smith, an Oglala Lakota writer who was also raised on the white buffalo woman's story, told the BBC that tradition says the arrival of a white calf is seen as both a "blessing and a warning".

Every time a white calf is seen, "you have this prophecy of something good or something bad will happen. But we know that it's going to be great - great in the sense

that it's going to be significant".

Moya-Smith said that tribes were working to interpret the meaning of the calf's arrival.

Yellowstone park officials have not officially confirmed the birth of the calf.

An event to celebrate its arrival was planned for 26 June in the town of West Yellowstone, Montana, and is being hosted by Buffalo Field Campaign, a group that advocates for the buffalo.

Lakota elders will attend the event and other tribes may send delegates.

Chief Arvol Looking Horse, who is the 19th generation keeper of the pipe believed to have been given by the white buffalo woman, said that the calf's arrival was a sign "we must do more".

"All nations should come together at their sacred places and unify with us in prayer," he said. He called the calf's arrival "a blessing and a warning".

"I'm so overwhelmed. It's a miracle," the spiritual leader told BBC News on June 13.

"It makes my hairs stand up just to even talk about it, because I can't believe this is happening - the spirit of the white buffalo calf woman sending a message to us."



A recently born white buffalo was photographed in Yellowstone.

Eric Braaten

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# Choctaw artist Norma Howard inducted into Native American Artists Hall of Fame

FROM CHOCTAW NATION

Choctaw/Chickasaw artist Norma Howard was posthumously inducted into the Native American Artists Hall of Fame on Saturday, May 18, during the 2024 Native American Artists Hall of Fame Gala at the Semple Family Museum of Native American Art in Durant, Oklahoma.

Howard's husband, David, accepted the award. Members of Howard's family were on hand for the presentation. Cherokee artist Traci Rabbit and Chickasaw artist Mike Larsen were also honored at the gala.

A resident of Stigler, Oklahoma,

Howard began drawing at an early age but didn't launch her career in the art world until her mid-thirties. She was a self-taught watercolorist and painted images of personal reflection and true-to-life Native American heritage.

She was well known for her paintings, which were highly sought after and collected by art lovers nationwide. Her work has been featured across the country and won many awards.

Howard passed away on April 30, 2024, at the age of 65.

The Howard family was also honored with a reception at the Choctaw Nation Tribal Headquarters in Durant on June 7

and presented a certificate of appreciation for Howard's many contributions to the Choctaw culture through her artwork and love of Choctaw history.

The reception honored Howard and her contribution to the Choctaw Nation and its history and culture through her outstanding talent illustrating the Chahta Spirit of Faith, Family and Culture.

A special temporary exhibit of Howard's art is currently on display in the front lobby of the tribal headquarters in Durant. The exhibit is free and open to the public.

# Latin Grammy winner comes to Immokalee July 12

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE – Internationally known Colombian vallenato artist Jorge Celedón will perform at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on July 12 at 9 p.m. with doors opening at 8 p.m. Tickets start at \$67 and are available from Ticketmaster or at

[www.moreinparadise.com](http://www.moreinparadise.com). Attendees must be 21 years of age. Parking is free.

A multiple Latin Grammy award-winner, Celedón has always been at the forefront of bringing vallenato music to many countries around the world. The artist, who was recently acclaimed at the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Turén, Venezuela, continues to cross borders to make the world

fall in love with his heartfelt songs: "Mi Locura," "Ay hombre," "Cuatro rosas," "No puede separarnos," "El invierno pasado," "La invitación," "Parranda en El Cafetal" and "Esta vida."

## ◆ NLC From page 5B

**Hoporenkv Native American Podcast Release: "Protecting Our Homelands: A Look at Tribal Response Programs"**

Special Guest: Eugene Goldfarb, MUP, JD, Adjunct Asst Professor, Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences, School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago

Date: July 31  
Time: 12 p.m.

This episode dives deep into the critical world of Tribal Response Programs. Our guest, Eugene Goldfarb, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences at the School of Public

Health for University of Illinois at Chicago, sheds light on the innovative ways Indigenous Communities are addressing environmental and health challenges on their ancestral lands. Join this important discussion on the unique needs and challenges faced by Tribal Nations regarding environmental health, the rise of Tribal Response Programs and their impact on communities, how these programs incorporate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with modern science, and the importance of empowering Tribal communities to advocate for the health of their environment.

This podcast episode will pair with Eugene and his fellow colleagues' webinar on Tribal Response Programs, happening on July 10th. This gives webinar (and webinar recording!) viewers the timely opportunity to submit any questions for follow up to the Native Learning Center website and have

them answered on the podcast episode!

Whether you're a member of a Tribal Nation, an environmental advocate, or simply interested in learning more about Indigenous knowledge and resilience, this episode is for you.

Follow the Native Learning Center on social media or visit [www.nativelearningcenter.com](http://www.nativelearningcenter.com) to keep up-to-date. For technical assistance, feedback, or more information, please contact us through our website or call 954-985-2331. The Native Learning Center values your input and welcomes your questions. Let us know what courses you and your community would like to see offered or if there are insights and lessons you and your community would like to share with others through the Native Learning Center.

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