



The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

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Volume XLIX • Number 12

December 2025

Tejon Indian Tribe, STOF open Hard Rock Casino Tejon

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Two Native American tribes celebrated the opening of Hard Rock Casino Tejon on Nov. 13 in Mettler, California. The project is a partnership that includes the Tejon Indian Tribe, whose land is where the casino is located, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida, which owns Hard Rock International.

Tejon Tribe Chairman Octavio Escobedo III and Seminole Tribe Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. stood side-by-side on stage with other dignitaries for the smashing of guitars in traditional Hard Rock fashion that marked the opening of the first phase of the project.

The property features a towering 57-foot Hard Rock guitar.



Hard Rock
Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. speaks at the opening of Hard Rock Casino Tejon on Nov. 13 in Mettler, California.

♦ See TEJON on page 7A

Princesses make impression at FSU homecoming

FSU student Bailey Marie Latchford represents STOF as Miss Florida Seminole

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

TALLAHASSEE — Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith helped Florida State University celebrate homecoming on Oct. 31-Nov. 1 in Tallahassee.

The weekend began with the traditional homecoming parade on campus featuring alumni honorees, the Seminole princesses, the Marching Chiefs band, sororities, fraternities, school clubs and more.

Perched on the back of a convertible driven by her father Will Latchford, Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford, who is an FSU student, waved to the crowd. Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith had her own convertible for the parade, driven by her mother Suriya Smith.

"I'm a student and also a tribal member and to be able to put those two identities together meant a lot," Bailey Marie Latchford said. "A lot of my friends were on the parade route and their biggest reaction was shock because they didn't know I was Seminole. I'm not one to brag, but I'm grateful to be in the position I'm in. I'm privileged to be an ambassador for the tribe."

"I was glad I got to talk to a lot of students," Chaka Yani Smith said about the weekend events. "I've never done anything like that; the energy was great."

The FSU Alumni association honored four "Grads Made Good" at an awards



Beverly Bidney

Stars of the halftime show, Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford, left, and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith, wave to the crowd of 63,677 at Florida State University's homecoming game Nov. 1 in Tallahassee.

breakfast Nov. 1. The grads were James "Chef" Barlow (1995); former Maryland governor Larry Hogan (1978), Eduardo Perez (1989) and Leslie Webber (1999).

After the breakfast, Smith had a conversation with Hogan about her desire to study government in college next year. Smith is considering FSU.

"I'm a senior [at Okeechobee High School] and want to figure out where to go," Smith said. "I need to decide if I

want to study state government or federal government. Since I was in kindergarten, I have known I want to make a difference in the world. By third grade I read a lot of history books and wanted to be President. That's probably when I decided I wanted to change the world."

In addition to the presence of the Seminole princesses, there was a football game during homecoming weekend. After the first quarter of the big game Nov. 1

against Wake Forest, which FSU won 42-7, the school honored Latchford for being the first tribal member and FSU student to be Miss Florida Seminole. Her family, FSU president Richard McCullough and FSU Vice President and Director of Athletics Michael Alford joined her on the field during a break between the first and second quarters.

♦ See HOMECOMING on page 4A

Big Cypress, Immokalee notch Rez Rally wins

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The weather was perfect with sunshine, low humidity and mild temperatures at the 26th annual Rez Rally, held Nov. 15 in Big Cypress. Known as the Rez Resilience Rally this year, about 2,100 tribal members and others participated in the 5K event through the reservation.

"It's nice to see everybody here because this is what [Rez Rally] was always supposed to be about," said Edna McDuffie, one of the event's founders. "This gives us time to see people we don't get to visit with that much and to fellowship together."

"This is one of my favorite events, it brings everyone out," said Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge. "Let's have some laughs, enjoy each other's company and the camaraderie."

During its 26 year run, Rez Rally's legacy has been to work on fitness, control diabetes and teach lifelong healthy habits to tribal members of all ages.

Rez Rally is a call to action to fight diabetes, which is prevalent throughout Indian Country. The idea is to get people moving to improve their physical and mental health.

"Diabetes is the No. 1 challenge for Native folks around the country," said Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola. "Sometimes it's hard to live a healthy lifestyle."

"I am an active walker; I walk 15 miles a week," said Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie. "It gives me mental clarity and keeps me healthy. Health is greater than wealth."

Prior to the start of the race, the Integrative Health department led the participants through a series of stretches to prepare them for the road. Young and old participated in the 5K, or three mile, course with seniors walking one mile.

Each person who completed the course was met with cheers and a medal. The winners in each category were given an additional medal on a beaded necklace along with handshakes from every member of Tribal Council and the Board.

The winning team with the most participants overall was Big Cypress. The team with the largest percentage of reservation residents participating was Immokalee.

After the race, everyone went through a farmers market set up in the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena where they received a bounty



Beverly Bidney

Kids take the lead as Rez Rally gets underway at the Junior Cypress Rodeo grounds Nov. 15.

of fresh fruits, vegetables, recipes, flowers and a sweet treat.

"We should always do this," said Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. "It's important to promote our health and wellness."

See pg. 4C for
photos, results



Beverly Bidney

Big Cypress won the trophy for most participants at Rez Rally. From left are Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers, Rez Rally co-founder and Big Cypress team captain Edna McDuffie, Big Cypress team captain Brian Billie holding the trophy and Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie.



Beverly Bidney

Immokalee team captains with the trophy for largest percentage of the reservation who participated in Rez Rally. From left are Juanita Martinez, Amy Garza, Amy Yzaguirre, Cecilia Pequeno and Mary Lou Alvarado.

Editorial

Museums and universities must reunite ancestors’ remains with tribes

• Jeannine Pedersen-Guzmán

Imagine your relatives’ bones stored in the basement of an unfamiliar university or museum. Boxes of ancestors and artifacts are often stacked on top of each other, for use in research, education or just curiosity. Mostly they are ignored or forgotten, left to collect dust.

When I first started working in museums, I thought they were magical places full of history, and that universities stood for truth and learning. But I soon realized that for Native people, these places can be painful.

What I saw as saving history, others saw as losing it. What I thought was education, others felt was misrepresentation.

Ever since museums and universities were created in the U.S., Native peoples’ stories have been told by those who colonized their lands and spread harmful ideas.

This led to more than 100 years of taking their heritage from them without permission. Museums and universities took hundreds of thousands of Native American human remains and millions of cultural items.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, enacted in 1990, challenged these practices. It gave Indigenous

communities a legal path to reclaim their ancestors and cultural belongings. California passed a similar law, the California Native American Graves Protection Act of 2001.

Yet decades later, too little has been returned to tribes, and some institutions still resist, saying the items are needed for education or research.

I’ve worked in museums and universities for 25 years as a curator and collections manager. I’ve seen how cultural collections are treated.

Museums only display about 1% of their collections; the rest is hoarded away in substandard storage. Universities have boxes of artifacts that haven’t been opened or studied since they were first collected.

I often had to fight for the basic care of collections. My concerns were ignored. I worked in storage rooms with leaking pipes. I’ve removed cultural materials from mold-infested containers. And I’ve tried organizing a warehouse of 5,000 boxes of archaeological material that had been ignored for years.

At one museum, collections storage was removed from a new building plan, leaving the collection without a proper home.

So why do these places want to keep their collections? Many don’t have the money, interest or cultural knowledge to care for them. Most of the public will never see

these things.

And how can scientists understand this material if they don’t work with tribes?

Change is afoot. New rules for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act passed last year. They make things clearer, remove roadblocks and require tribes to be consulted before items are shown or studied.

Some scholars feel the changes are a threat to knowledge, but they are long overdue.

Today, repatriation doesn’t always mean removing items. Sometimes tribes work with museums and universities through “hold-in-trust” agreements. This means the institution keeps the items, but the tribe has legal control and decides how their cultural heritage is used or shared.

Each tribe has different views: Some are okay with display and research; others are not. Some items can be used for teaching; others cannot. It is about pausing to ask, listen and ideally work together.

Jeannine Pedersen-Guzmán is the tribal archives, collections, and repatriation manager for the Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation in Highland, California.

This opinion was published on Calmmatters.org.

Pedro Zepeda receives 2025 Folk Heritage Award

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

NAPLES — Pedro Zepeda was named the recipient of the 2025 Folk Heritage Award on Oct. 30 by Florida Secretary of State Cord Byrd for his work on dugout canoes.

“It feels cool to be recognized for something you’ve been doing for a long time,” Zepeda said. “I’m trying to show that we are still here practicing our traditional arts and not just something from the past.”

Zepeda started working on cypress canoes when he was 20 years old and has continued to do it for 23 years.

“The Florida Department of State is proud to honor Pedro for his commitment to preserving and advancing the art of Seminole dugout canoes,” said Secretary of State Cord Byrd said in a press release. “His contributions have led to a greater appreciation and recognition of Seminole traditional arts and artists in our state.”

Zepeda considers himself a contemporary canoe carver and uses everything from a tool from 100 years ago, the adz, to a week-old chainsaw. He uses the best of what’s available today to construct his traditional dugout canoes.



Beverly Bidney

Pedro Zepeda

“I’ve been working on canoes for a long time and am still learning,” Zepeda said. “I’m not a master canoe carver but I know more than the average person, but not as much as my grandparents knew. Each canoe is a little quicker, easier and better.”

Zepeda’s canoes are on display or in the collections of numerous museums including a 13-foot one at History Miami, a 14-foot extra wide one at the Amelia Island museum, two 13-foot canoes at the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park’s visitor center

in Macon, Georgia and a 17-foot canoe he worked on with Daniel Tommie at the Macon, Georgia city hall.

“I have a log waiting for me to make another canoe,” Zepeda said. “It will be my biggest and widest one at 23 feet long.”

The Florida Folk Heritage Awards, established in 1985, are given to outstanding folk artists and folk culture advocates who have made long-standing contributions to the folk cultural resources of the state, according to its website.

Thousands attend AIAC

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum hosted its 26th annual American Indian Arts Celebration Nov. 7-8 at the museum’s festival grounds on the Big Cypress reservation. The event was held during Native American Heritage month to celebrate Native American culture.

Nearly 3,600 people came from

around the state to immerse themselves in Indigenous culture through dance, music, culture, Seminole food and arts. Vendors sold beadwork, patchwork, jewelry, clothing and other arts and crafts.

There were two grand entries each day, led by Seminole Medicine Man Bobby Henry, Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith and a host of pow wow dancers and competitors in a hoop dancing contest.

Billy Walker charmed the crowd with

his skill at wrestling a large alligator and ability to convey the history of Seminoles and alligator wrestling. Pharoah’s Wildlife Kingdom displayed various local creatures, the Ameyal Mexican Cultural Academy did traditional Aztec dances, on Friday the Ahfachkee school presented a fashion show and on Saturday Lenora Roberts staged a fashion show of Seminole garments. Crowds cheered as hoop dancers competed.



Beverly Bidney

Medicine Man Bobby Henry leads the Grand Entry of AIAC Nov. 8, followed by Miss Florida Seminole Baily Marie Latchford, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith and Native American dancers.



Beverly Bidney

Billy Walker wrestles an alligator to the delight of the crowd Nov. 8 in Big Cypress.



Beverly Bidney

A fancy dancer dances in the main stage tent.



Beverly Bidney

Daisy Jumper did some shopping with her dog, Gucci, in the AIAC vendor tents



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Mitchellanie Cypress, Nichele Cypress and Mitchell Cypress pose with Larry Yazzie, of Native Pride Productions, which brought the Native Pride dancers to the AIAC.



Beverly Bidney

A fancy shawl dancer shows off her skill during an exhibition of various Native American dances.

The Seminole Tribune is a member of the Indigenous Journalists Association.

Letters/emails to the editor must be signed and may be edited for publication.

Subscription rate is \$35 per year by mail. Make checks payable to: The Seminole Tribune 6365 Taft Street Suite 3003 Hollywood, FL 33024

The following deadline applies to all submissions to The Seminole Tribune:

Issue: January 2026
Deadline: December 17, 2025

Advertising rates along with sizes and other information may be downloaded online at: <http://SeminoleTribune.org/Advertise> Postmaster:

Please send address changes to: The Seminole Tribune 6365 Taft St. Suite 3003 Hollywood, FL 33024

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Community



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Paul Bowers Sr. honored with gold buckle at INFR

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Vietnam veteran and former rodeo competitor Paul Bowers was honored with a gold buckle for his service in the military during the Indian National Finals Rodeo (INFR) Oct. 18 in Las Vegas.

"It was a surprise, but they chose to honor me," Bowers said. "It feels good that people recognize you for what you did for your country, Native Americans and all people."

During his service as a Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam, from 1967-1970, Bowers earned two purple hearts and a bronze star. After just eight months in Vietnam, Bowers' eardrum was ruptured and he was honorably discharged.

When he got home to Brighton, he looked for work and eventually found it working for ranchers near Big Cypress and Brighton. That led to working as a cowboy for the tribe's herd. In the 1980s, Bowers



started his own herd on the Big Cypress Reservation and has been doing that ever since.

Bowers competed in rough stock in rodeo events, including bareback and bull riding, from 1971-1977, when he moved to team roping, which he did until 2014.

The INFR gold buckle isn't the only honor he has received for his service as a veteran. In 2022 the National Finals Rodeo presented him with a gold buckle for his military service.

Bowers met his wife Charlotte Tommie at a rodeo about 50 years ago. Together they have two daughters, Clarissa and Pauletta, and two sons, Wilson and Paul Jr.

His son Paul Jr. and Marty Johns raise horses and bulls in Brighton. They won a gold buckle at the INFR for best saddle bronc horse, "Rich Girl."

Courtesy photo

Paul Bowers Sr. with his INFR and NFR awards.



Courtesy photo

From left to right, Wendy Bowers, Richard Bowers, Paul Bowers Sr. and Charlotte Tommie on Oct. 18 at the Indian National Finals Rodeo at the South Point Arena in Las Vegas. Bowers is holding the award he received from INFR.

Kiana Bell aims to provide inspiration through basket making

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

SARASOTA — A couple of dozen art-loving patrons of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, in Sarasota, came to hear Kiana Bell speak about her sweetgrass baskets Nov. 18.

The event took place in the gallery where seven of her baskets are on display as part of the "Ancestral Edge: Abstraction and Symbolism in the Works of Nine Native American Women Artists" exhibition.

Bell explained how she picks the sweetgrass, gathers the palmetto fiber and creates a basket organically. Bell makes all of her baskets intuitively; she doesn't sketch them out or really think about their shape.

"I just let the basket tell me what it's going to be," Bell said. "Once I see the shape, I finish it the way it's supposed to look."

Bell started making baskets about 7 or 8 years ago when she went to the Hollywood culture center and saw some women making baskets. It was then that she decided to try to learn how to do it. The women helped her and Bell considers Donna Frank and her cousin Hali Garcia her mentors.

"It was hard at first because I'm left-handed, but I figured out a way that it was comfortable for me," she said.

For her first basket, Bell said the shape



Beverly Bidney

Kiana Bell in the gallery where her baskets are on display as part of the "Ancestral Edge" exhibit of modern Native American women's artwork.

didn't matter that much to her, she was just happy to work on it. She entered that basket in the Tribal Fair art competition, came in third place and received a lot of positive feedback. Now her baskets are more intricate, the colors of her thread are more thought out than that first one and some of the baskets incorporate beadwork,

gemstones and crochet.

The idea of using beadwork on the baskets came from observing how ceramicists decorate the outside of their pieces. Bell thought she could do something like that with the baskets. She's been doing beadwork since she was a child and uses wire to shape the beaded strands into flowers. She attaches them into the sweetgrass coils as she makes the baskets.

"I thought it would be easy, but it is a lot harder than I thought," Bell said.

During the question-and-answer period of the gallery talk, Bell was asked how long it takes to make a basket. She said she can make one or two small ones in a day but the larger ones take longer and she makes those one at a time. The colossal basket on display at the Ringling, took over her kitchen table and it took about five months of working all day every day to complete.

Another piece on display depicts a tree laden with beaded flowers in a basket. It wasn't Bell's original intent to make such a thing, but as she kept making the beaded flowers she wondered how they would look on a tree.

A vase-shaped basket holds a bouquet of crocheted roses, which Bell said takes more time to make than the beaded flowers. She loves creating sweetgrass baskets and plans to continue doing it.

"I want to inspire other people to keep the tradition going," Bell said. "I want younger people to see the hard work of the basket maker. Seminole women used to make baskets for an income to buy food but now I can just make a basket however I want."

"Ancestral Edge: Abstraction and Symbolism in the Works of Nine Native American Women Artists" is on display at the museum, located at 5401 Bay Shore Road in Sarasota, until April 12, 2026.



Beverly Bidney

Eyes are on Kiana Bell's sweetgrass baskets Nov. 18 at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota.



Beverly Bidney

Museum patrons examine one of Kiana Bell's sweetgrass baskets prior to her speaking about the process of making traditional baskets today.

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Tribe hosts Native American Fish and Wildlife Society conference

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The Seminole Tribe of Florida hosted the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society’s Northeast and Southeast Regional conference Nov. 12-13 on the Big Cypress Reservation.

“This is the first time it has been held here,” said Paul Backhouse, senior director of the Environmental Protection Office. “The goal is to help tribes look after natural resources on their reservations and to learn from each other.”

The Seminole Honor Guard presented the colors to open the program. Julie Thorstenson, NAFWS executive director, welcomed everyone and said the objective was to gather together, network and have a larger voice.

In addition to STOF, members of the Catawba Nation, Choctaw Nation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Penobscot Nation attended the conference.

The conference included a day of presentations at the former senior center in Big Cypress followed by a day of field trips on the reservation for drone training, fyke netting and a botanical walk through the native areas of the reservation.

Keynote speaker Tina Osceola, STOF executive director of operations and THPO officer, gave an overview of the tribe’s 4,500 members, government structure and services, and paid homage to the late Jim Shore, who served as the tribe’s general counsel for decades, for building the fabric and strategy of the tribe’s defense of its tribal sovereignty.

“Government to government consultation can be inconsistent and can pierce the veil of tribal sovereignty,” Osceola said. “Shore’s strategy was conservative

enough to shield us from that. He took the long view of policy and practice for further down the road, so we would be able to survive the ebbs and flows of [federal] administrations.”

The tribe uses its Native knowledge and Indigenous science in its decision making.

“Every consultation is done with intent; we don’t react emotionally,” Osceola said. “We developed Seminole science and it informs our decision-making process.”

The tribe has been involved in Everglades restoration for the last 30 years. It is the largest restoration project in the world, with a cost of \$23 billion. Osceola said the goal is to restore the environment for the humans who live on it and those who aren’t born yet. The tribe needs the right amount of water at the right time of year.

“If the restoration goes awry, we will lose the environment we depend on,” Osceola said. “Everything you see has been very strategic and very intentional; nothing happens quickly.”

The tribe has a groundbreaking water compact with the state and the South Florida Water Management District which Osceola said the tribe “guards with their lives.” She said some neighboring farmers and ranchers resent the compact that provides clean water to the tribe. Whatever happens to the water on the Big Cypress Reservation affects everyone living to the south, including the Miccosukee Tribe and half a million people in Miami-Dade County.

“Seminole science is informed by generations of Seminoles who have walked on this land and lived on it,” Osceola said. “They know their land, that’s Indigenous knowledge. When our Elders tell us we need to protect this part of the reservation because it’s the only place you can get a certain plant, we set it aside and don’t allow development



Calvin Tiger

Ecologist Alex Crow shows Dogfennel, one of a variety of plants viewed by attendees from the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society's conference during a tour Nov. 13 on the Big Cypress Reservation.

on it. That’s how tribal science and Indigenous knowledge informs our decision making. Elders inform us on what we need to protect. The very core of everything we do is to protect tribal sovereignty.”

As administrations change and their understanding of tribe changes, and law and policies change, the one thing that stays the same in the tribe is the preservation of the water rights in the name of tribal sovereignty.

“It doesn’t matter who the chairman is, doesn’t matter who the president is; that’s a legacy that we are responsible for defending,” Osceola said. “When I’m a tribal Elder, I’m going to hold the chairman accountable for our water rights. That’s Seminole science. That is who the Seminole

Tribe is.”

Craig Van Der Heiden, director of the tribe’s Department of Conservation (DOC), gave an overview of the reservations and the department’s mission.

“It’s important that we have a cultural aspect to what we do and have data to back it up,” Van Der Heiden said. “We do research to make informed decisions and inform state and federal agencies.”

Sergio Gonzalez, DOC fish and wildlife manager, talked about what his department does, which includes ecological monitoring, small mammal trapping, camera trapping, fish surveys and other activities in which it documents what is occurring in the tribal ecosystems.



Beverly Bidney

Tina Osceola speaks during the conference's first day.

DOC forester Grant Steelman explained that his department manages cypress trees, controls invasive species, protects culturally sensitive vegetation, habitat classification, monitors impact of wildfires and herbicides and more.

The following day the attendees went on field trips on the reservation.

◆ HOMECOMING From page 1A

“I found out about the honor the day of the game,” Latchford said. “To have my family with me was very special.”

Joining her in the end zone were her mother Amy Osceola Latchford, father Will Latchford, sister Bella Rose Latchford, brothers Brayden Latchford and Brady Latchford with his son Braylen and wife Emily Latchford.

During halftime Miss Florida Seminole and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole crowned the school’s homecoming Chief Christian Velazquez and Princess Delaney Lento on the 50-yard line of Doak Campbell Stadium.

This year’s homecoming game featured Seminole Tribe representation on the football team, too. Tribal member Zae Thomas is in his freshman season playing for FSU. He did not play in the homecoming game.



Beverly Bidney

Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford waves to the crowd during the FSU Homecoming parade Oct. 31.



Courtesy photo

In the President’s box at Doak Campbell Stadium, from left to right, are Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith, FSU President Richard McCullough, Jai Vartikar and Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford.



Beverly Bidney

Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith and Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford with FSU’s Grads Made Good honorees, from left to right, James ‘Chef’ Barlow, Leslie Weber, Larry Hogan and Eduardo Perez at the alumni homecoming breakfast. Hogan is a former governor of Maryland.



Beverly Bidney

Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford, an FSU student, waves to the crowd with her family, FSU President Richard McCullough and Director of Athletics Michael Alford behind her.



Beverly Bidney

Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith and Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford pose with the 2025 FSU Homecoming Court.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford, FSU homecoming Chief Christian Velazquez, Princess Delaney Lento and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith after the Seminole royalty crowned the students during halftime of the game Nov. 1.



Beverly Bidney

Zae Thomas, a freshman on the FSU football team, warms up at the homecoming game.



Beverly Bidney

Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith during the homecoming parade.

Spencer Battiest, Doc Native perform in front of 18,000 at NBA game

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Seminole Tribe of Florida brothers Spencer Battiest and Doc Native performed during halftime of the NBA game between the Oklahoma City Thunder and the Sacramento Kings Nov. 19. The performance honored Native American Heritage Month and was part of the Thunder's Native American Heritage Night. Attendance at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City was 18,203, as the defending champion Thunder won 113-99 and improved their record to 15-1, best in the NBA.

The Choctaw side of the brothers' family lives in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, and attended the game, along with other members of the community, to cheer them on.

"That's where we learned how to create music, sing and perform onstage," Native said. "It was a full circle moment for us. We got to come back and do it on one of the biggest stages in the world. I heard everyone screaming. Their support was definitely loud."

Battiest and Native sang a medley of songs, starting with Doc's latest single "Fear No Evil," followed by both singing their song "Dream" and then "One World", which they originally did with Mag 7. Emcee One, who is the DJ for the Thunder and has worked with the brothers in the past, accompanied them during the performance.

They shared the stage with other Native performers including Domingo Whiteman, chicken dancer; Courtney Whiteman, fancy shawl dancer; and Boye Ladd, fancy dancer.

"It was really great night and my family from all over the U.S. got to watch us on TV," Native said. "We don't get to do this too often except in the month of November,



Doc Native sings during the halftime show at the Oklahoma City Thunder's game vs Sacramento Nov. 19 in Oklahoma City.

so when we do, we try to do the biggest and best performance that we can. Representation matters and we wanted to represent in the best possible way for the championship

Oklahoma City Thunder. We left it all out there on the court. The Thunder won that night and everyone was extra happy."



OKC Thunder
In front of 18,203 at the home of the defending NBA champions, Spencer Battiest sings during the halftime show.



Doc Native and Spencer Battiest are joined by Emcee One, center, for the halftime performance at the Thunder's Native American Heritage Night game.

Tribes reintroduce deer to Everglades

BY KELLY FARRELL
Special to the Tribune

As Christmastime neared, a story about a man nicknamed Mike "Elf," short for Elfenbein, working with tribes to bring deer back to the Everglades couldn't seem more timely. But it's more than the holiday that makes this project so well timed.

For years, Betty Osceola of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians cried out for help as animals were drowning with unnatural water inundation near her home in the Everglades, near Water Conservation Area 3A.

Finally, a change in water management this summer is allowing water to flow and the land to once again be a suitable home for mammals, including deer.

"The timing was never right before in terms largely of the water levels," said Marcel Bozas, director of Fish and Wildlife for the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. "The reason why it is coming together now is because water regulations changed in the Everglades this year."

Elfenbein has been concerned about the declining deer population in that area for about 20 years, he said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District approved a multiyear deviation from— in order to correct— earlier regulations that had been causing the inundation and loss of

many species, plant and animal, in the area. "Now, Conservation Area 3A doesn't undergo unnaturally deep and prolonged wet seasons, which has caused a lot of wildlife death," Bozas said.

Central Everglades Restoration Project changes are to continue improving the water flow into Everglades National Park for a better balance and flow pattern, he added.

"With all of that, it looks like water conditions are finally going to be sustainable again for wildlife, terrestrial wildlife in 3A."

Still, because of the lay of the land, the deer will need some help to repopulate the Miccosukee Reservation, said Elfenbein, executive director of the Cypress Chapter of the Izaak Walton League.

Osceola is now vice president of the Chapter, collaborating on the efforts, including with Craig Van Der Heiden, the Seminole Tribe's director of conservation.

The Seminole and Miccosukee tribes united efforts with Izaak Walton League, which was founded on a national level in 1922 to sustain the outdoors and natural resources, as well as other area organizations and landowners to bring deer back to the Miccosukee Reservation where the population is once again to be healthy with these efforts.

The deer there were lost due to predation made easy by that unnatural water flow inundating the land, leaving them nowhere to go, Elfenbein said.

See DEER on page 7C



RC Gilliland

Deer are reintroduced to the Miccosukee Reservation in the Everglades after years of controlled water flow led to their near complete predation and population loss.



Mike Elfenbein

Craig Van Der Heiden, left, director of the Seminole Tribe's Department of Conservation, and Marcel Bozas, director of Fish and Wildlife for the Miccosukee Tribe, apply a new technology, a G1 Solar Satellite Ear Tag, to a deer relocated to the Miccosukee Reservation to reestablish the historic population after controlled water flow led to a near complete loss in their population.



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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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Grief that forged forgiveness: A conversation with author of ‘Audacious Seminole: From Ashes to Oaks’

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

(Editor’s note: For the purpose of this memoir, the author of “Audacious Seminole: From Ashes to Oaks” chose to publish her story under the pen name, or fictitious name, F.L. Jumper. The author is a tribal member.)

How do we learn to forgive? For F.L. Jumper, it took more than just love for her to forge forgiveness. It took grief. Her soon-to-be released memoir, ‘Audacious Seminole: From Ashes to Oaks,’ explores unfeigned themes concerning love, grief, and faith.

With Jumper’s parents navigating a troubling divorce after her birth, Jumper and her mother moved away from their home on the Seminole Tribe’s Hollywood Reservation. Living with her grandparents, Jumper eavesdropped on her grandparents’ calls, listening to her father’s gravelly voice on the other end of the line. It was in those moments that Jumper learned what forgiveness looked like. The conversation has been edited for clarity and concision.

Tribune: What guided you toward forgiveness?

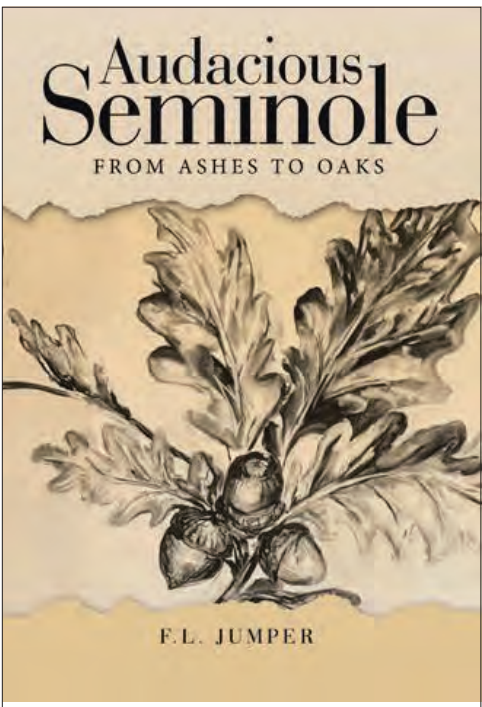
Jumper: I was struggling with grief and seeing a counselor, who often shared Bible verses to help me heal. One day, she shared Isaiah 61 with me: “He gives beauty for ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair(...)Let them rise like oaks of righteousness, planted by God to display His glory.”

A few months later, I visited the Council Oak Tree in Hollywood, where I felt a deep sense of pride in the Seminole people’s strength and perseverance. I thought about how powerful the oak tree symbolized their resilience, and then I remembered that my mom’s ashes had been spread around an oak tree at the house I grew up in.

That’s when it clicked. “Let them rise like oaks of righteousness,” became my mantra. I wanted to lead by example, to show that forgiveness could bring healing. This book became my way of sharing that message, living with integrity and letting my actions speak louder than words.

Tribune: What do you hope audiences get out of your book?

Jumper: I hope it inspires others to



WestBow Press

The cover of ‘Audacious Seminole: From Ashes to Oaks.’

forgive. Carrying bitterness and anger is heavy. Despite how badly my parents’ marriage ended, my grandparents were always kind to my father. They spoke with love and ended every call with prayer. Seeing that taught me what forgiveness looked, sounded, and felt like.

Tribune: What inspired you to write this memoir?

Jumper: After both of my parents passed, writing became a way for me to process and heal. I spent a lot of time writing and eventually asked the tribe to fund a book writing class through the education department. They did, and that’s when I realized I was writing a book. It took me four years.

“Audacious Seminole: From Ashes to Oaks” will be published by WestBow Press on Dec. 2. It is available for purchase on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and available for listening on Audible.

Tribes push for healthier Lake Okeechobee

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

On Nov. 5, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) officials heeded pleas and pledged to improve the ecological health of Lake Okeechobee.

Local conservationists and officials from the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians attended a FWC meeting at the Dolly Hand Cultural Arts Center at Palm Beach State College to express their heightened concerns for Lake Okeechobee’s growing loss of habitat.

“It is disheartening to see what is going on,” Seminole Tribe Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. told commissioners. “The problem is man himself. We’re bringing more people into the State of Florida, which is great, but it’s bad for our ecosystem.”

Osceola shed light on the lack of watershed throughout Central Florida. Lake Okeechobee is Florida’s largest lake. Prior to the 1900s, the lake’s water quality was characterized as clear and alkaline, and bottom sediments were described as “clean sand.”

“You can’t see the bottom of the lake anymore,” Chairman Osceola said. “We’ve got to do something better. We’ve got to do it now, before it’s too late.”

The application of herbicides and pesticides across Lake Okeechobee is killing its nourishing vegetation, according to Nyla Pipes, executive director of the One Florida Foundation.

“Spraying is an issue,” Pipes said “The fact of the matter is, if you let that floating invasive vegetation grow, it shades out all the submerged aquatic vegetation that we desperately need.”

The Florida Aquatic Weed Control Act gives the FWC the authority to manage and control the lake’s aquatic weeds. FWC Commissioner Joshua Kellam urged his fellow commissioners to act and suggested the establishment of an interagency task force.

“It’s important to put the right voices at the table that care about this lake, that care about the resource, that care about vegetation, that care about water quality,” Kellam said.

The prospective committee would include representatives from the Seminole Tribe, the Miccosukee Tribe, anglers, waterfowl hunters and a non-game bird organization.

FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto expressed his support.

“Our hands are not totally clean, but we get blamed for spraying that is not us,” Barreto said. “We need to take the lead. We need to do it the right way.”

The commission backed the initiative, directing staff to withdraw and make necessary changes to its 1989 memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).



The Florida Channel

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. speaks at a FWC meeting Nov. 5 at Palm Beach State College.



Calvin Tiger (3)

Scenes from the Veterans Day ceremony in Big Cypress on Nov 11: At left, Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie shakes hands with veteran Moses Osceola; center, veteran O.B. Osceola Sr. speaks to the audience with President Holly Tiger next to him; at right, Kaylynn Lawrence sings ‘America the Beautiful.’

Ceremony in BC honors veterans on Veterans Day

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The Big Cypress community celebrated tribal and non-tribal veterans at its 11th annual Veterans Day celebration Nov. 11 at the Herman L. Osceola gym.

The tribe honored Seminole veteran O.B. Osceola Sr., 91, who served in the U.S. Army. Osceola was presented with a tribal blanket and spoke briefly to the attendees after being honored.

The Veteran’s Day event began with an invocation by Josh Jumper followed by the presentation of the colors by the tribe’s Public Safety Honor Guard. Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith recited the pledge of allegiance followed by Kaylynn Lawrence, who sang “America the Beautiful.”

“I just want to say thank you for your service, thank you for coming home and showing us what bravery looks like because without you, I think we would not be able to have the courage to do the things that we do or have the freedoms and liberties we have,” President Holly Tiger said.

Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Cypress grew up in a military family and recognizes the sacrifices veterans make.

“Veterans, you are an inspiration,” Councilwoman Billie said. “Your bravery, your sacrifice, and your dedication will never go unnoticed.”

Brighton Councilman Larry Howard also acknowledged the veterans’ service.

“They came together, they fought together, to fight for what we believe in, so we can do what we do and have what we have today,” Councilman Howard said. “There were a lot of sacrifices made by individuals.”

The Native American Women Warriors gave a special presentation. The group was outfitted in traditional tribal attire paired with red, white, blue and pink to signify patriotism of both American and Native American history. The Warriors are dedicated to empowering Native American women veterans and ensuring their voices are heard within both the military and their communities.

Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford read a poem written by Moses Jumper Jr. that honored past and current veterans.

The celebration concluded with a recognition of current tribal and non-tribal veterans while also recognizing fallen Seminole veterans.



Calvin Tiger

The Native American Women Warriors’ Allyson Rosser, Tia Martin, Mitcheleen Bigman-Cyrus and Mitcheleen Big Man were part of the ceremony at the Veterans Day celebration in Big Cypress.



Calvin Tiger

Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford and President Holly Tiger with Sgt. Michael Dewitt, a special guest at the Veterans Day ceremony.

Community walk celebrates veterans



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Seminole veterans Mitchell Cypress, Sallie Josh, Paul Bowers Sr. and Curtis Motlow participate in the annual Veterans Day Walk on Nov. 4 at the Seminole Veterans Memorial Fitness Trail in Big Cypress. The community walk drew about 30 people and was organized by Big Cypress Integrative Health.

Brighton salutes veterans for Veterans Day

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

BRIGHTON — Cassie Pierce, an eighth-grade student from Pemayetv Emahaky Charter School grew teary-eyed as she recited a speech honoring her great uncle at the 38th annual Veterans Day Celebration at the Brighton Reservation’s Florida Seminole Veterans Building on Nov. 6.

Guests applauded, heartening Cassie. Among them were veterans, tribal officials and members, and community guests. The celebration recognized over 70 Seminole Tribe of Florida veterans and guest veterans.

“History is what brings us here today,” said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, who spoke alongside other tribal officials. “These stories will live on through all of us.”

Paul Buster’s heartfelt invocation, followed by the Honor Guard and Seminole Public Safety’s flag presentation commenced the ceremony.

This year’s special guest, Retired Command Sergeant Major Ronald L. Cook Jr., flew in from Seneca Nation of Indians’ Cattaraugus Territory.

“One of the things I’ve grown to appreciate more and more every year, is that I have the privilege of wearing a uniform,” Cook said. “There is an unbelievable and unbreakable bond that exists between shared experiences, not only amongst those we serve, but amongst those who have worn the uniform, spanning different generations.”

Throughout his 27 years of active-duty



Daniella Hakim

Retired Command Sergeant Major Ronald L. Cook shakes hands with attendees at the Veterans Day ceremony Nov. 6 in Brighton.

service, Cook held every enlisted leadership position. Ranging from team leader to command sergeant major, Cook earned two bronze stars, a Legion of Merit, and the Bronze De Fleury medal. In 2017, Cook returned home to his tribal lands, where he earned a post-commander position with the American Legion Iroquois Post 1587.

Cook bestowed a special honor from the Iroquois Confederacy to Seminole

veteran Sallie Josh—a blessed eagle feather, symbolizing strength.

“Veterans Day serves as an active reminder that the freedom we enjoy every day was burned through sacrifice,” said Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford. “Service does not end when a veteran comes home.”



Daniella Hakim

Seminole Tribe veterans are recognized on stage at the Veterans Day ceremony in Brighton.

◆ DEER From page 5A

Since 2017, the tribes and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission monitored deer.

The organizations noted a 95 to 99 percent decrease in terrestrial species, including deer.

“When you hear 90 percent, it’s hard to fathom that could even happen. But those are the numbers and they’re pretty reliable,” Bozas said.

In some areas of the Everglades residents note the eery lack of animals and many attribute the loss to pythons, panthers, bears and other predators. However, science shows in many cases, it’s been the water flow.

These native species might be able to come back, Bozas said.

“But there’s no connection to conservation 3A in the Everglades or north for these populations to naturally recolonize. And in what little portion they could, it is unlikely they would in a reasonable amount of time,” Bozas said.

Elfenbein coordinated people, getting landowners, tribes, government officials and scientists to collaborate, Bozas said.

Landowners, including former FWC Commissioner Liesa Priddy and many

others, allowed the deer on their private properties to be corralled and relocated to the reservation. Most of them were in nearby Collier and Hendry counties.

It was no easy task and was well organized by tribal scientists and research from other animal relocations.

The deer were corralled, tranquilized, captured and relocated in air-conditioned livestock trailers from the private land to the reservation.

Each deer is measured using numerous metrics from weight and size to gender, age and other attributes. Each deer gets either a GPS collar or new solar tracking device on their ear.

“In theory, we would like to see reintroductions for other species as well,” Bozas said.

There are few places where such a decline in wildlife has been noted.

“It rattles you. It throws everything out of whack. It’s definitely a very ominous thing. Even though it’s been so heavily impacted, there’s still hope,” Elfenbein said.

“Conditions have changed and there is a pathway forward to restore the wildlife and ecosystem function that has always characterized the Everglades.”

Aspects of the project are very unique. In the 1930s and 40s there were few deer left in Collier County after the government decided deer eradication would eradicate

ticks on cattle. Unfortunately, the ticks remained and the deer population was very low. Deer were then transferred from Glades to Collier County to bring the population back, said Elfenbein. But there was little scientific data from that project.

This deer reintroduction program is intended to last about 5 years with monitoring and augmenting populations as needed, he said. Protection through increased python monitoring and hunting is also occurring.

Both tribes are passionate about the area and the ecosystem, so it was natural to join efforts.

“We do want to see the panther come back into the region they once occupied. We need to make sure the prey base is conducive,” Elfenbein said.

As of Dec. 1, 28 deer were relocated to the Miccosukee Indian Reservation south of I-75.

“Already 80 percent of the does are pregnant. That’s not by chance. That was intended,” Elfenbein said.

The project suffered financially about halfway through when the government shutdown led to a loss of about \$55,000 in GPS tracking collars. Some deer will have newer solar ear tag technology and some have the collars. Gifts toward reintroducing deer in the Everglades are welcome. Visit cypressiwi-la.org/deerfriends to contribute to the efforts.

Broward County, Pembroke Pines honor tribe with proclamations

STAFF REPORT

On Nov. 13, Broward County’s Board of County Commissioners presented the Seminole Tribe of Florida with a proclamation in recognition of National American Indian Heritage Month in November.

Requested on behalf of Alexandra P. Davis, the county’s District 7 commissioner, the proclamation was presented during the opening of the commission’s weekly formal session at the Broward County Governmental Center in Fort Lauderdale.

Davis urged Broward County residents to take time to recognize, participate, and celebrate the special month. Cypress Billie accepted the proclamation on behalf of the tribe. He was joined by Everett Osceola.

Six days later, the City of Pembroke recognized Native American Heritage Month during a commission meeting. Miss Florida

Seminole Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford was scheduled to be the recipient of the proclamation however she was unavailable; her mother Amy Osceola Latchford received the proclamation on her behalf from Mayor Angelo Castillo.

“Whereas, Native American Heritage Month provides opportunities to celebrate the diverse cultures, traditions, and histories of Native peoples, and to honor the meaningful contributions of local families such as the Latchfords, now therefore, I, Angelo Castillo, Mayor of the City of Pembroke Pines, along with the City Commission, do hereby proclaim November 2025 as Native American Heritage Month in the City of Pembroke Pines, Florida, and all citizens are encouraged to honor the history, culture and contributions of Native Americans during this month and throughout the year,” is part of the proclamation read by Castillo.



Daniella Hakim

On behalf of the Seminole Tribe, Cypress Billie and Everett Osceola receive a proclamation from the Broward County Board of County Commissioners Nov. 13.



Calvin Tiger

On behalf of her daughter Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford, Amy Osceola Latchford receives a proclamation from Pembroke Pines Mayor Angelo Castillo on Nov. 19.

◆ TEJON From page 1A

“That guitar rising from our homeland is more than a monument; it’s a message,” Chairman Escobedo said at the ceremony. “It tells the world the Tejon Tribe stands proud, strong and ready to define our own future. It shines as a beacon of cultural pride, tribal sovereignty and a partnership built on respect. Together, we’ve built more than a casino; we’ve built hope, we’ve built opportunity. We’ve built a future where our children and grandchildren will look back and say ‘That was the moment everything changed.’”

“We’re just a small part of a bigger picture,” Chairman Osceola said at the ceremony. “As Octavio stated, our ancestors fought for us to be here today, whether it be in Florida or whether it be in California. For the Hard Rock and for our tribe back in Florida, these are the ones that mean the most, working with other tribes so they can carve their own path, their own true destiny now.”

Chairman Osceola presented Chairman Escobedo with a Seminole patchwork jacket.

The festivities included tribal songs, dances and the donation of \$100,000 spread among a handful of local charities. Country singer/songwriter Brett Young was the day’s featured performer. He also participated in the guitar smash.



Hard Rock

Opening day at Hard Rock Casino Tejon draws a large crowd.

The casino is 80 miles north of Los Angeles. It features 150,000 square feet of gaming space with more than 2,000 slot machines along with blackjack, poker and other card games.

Hard Rock Café and Deep Cuts, a steak and seafood restaurant, are among the dining options.

Memorabilia includes an autographed Johnny Cash guitar and items from music

legends with area connections such as Buck Owens and Merle Haggard.

According to a press release, the first phase of the project has created more than 1,000 permanent jobs and more than 5,000 construction-related roles.

The second phase is scheduled to include the construction of a 400-room hotel and 2,800-seat Hard Rock Live.

“Hard Rock Casino Tejon is only the



Hard Rock

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. presents a Seminole patchwork jacket to Tejon Tribe Chairman Octavio Escobedo III at the grand opening ceremony.

beginning,” Jim Allen, Chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, said in the release. “Phase II will bring the full Hard Rock experience to life with a world-class hotel and Hard Rock Live entertainment venue that will make Kern County a premier destination for travelers, artists, and fans from across California and beyond.”

The Tejon property isn’t the only Hard Rock casino with tribal ties in California. In 2019, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino at Fire Mountain, owned by the Estom Yumeka Maidu Tribe of the Enterprise Rancheria, opened in Northern California. The two properties are more than 300 miles apart.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Can you help us find them?

BY ROSA MARTINEZ
Collections Assistant, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

BIG CYPRESS—Continuing a project which spans over a decade long is no small task, as I have come to learn since I began working on the Seminole Tribune cataloging project over a year ago. This project, which began back in 2015, has required many hands to keep the effort going. In this past year, I managed to catalog over seven thousand photographs. So, who is needed to make the

work happen? It starts with a photograph and examining its physical condition, when needed, I consult our paper conservator to learn more about its current state and if it requires treatment to stabilize it. I then begin to ask myself very simple questions: Who, what, when, where? My goal when cataloging it is to identify the contextual information captured in a photograph so I can then write an accurate description of the object. That description can then help others in the future to find exactly what they are

searching for in the collection. After looking at thousands of photos, it has gotten easier to answer those questions myself, but I still need help.

In some cases, I ask another colleague for a second set of eyes to help me. I also conduct research by referencing the growing database Past Perfect, which we use to keep record of all the information on our collection and share with the public on the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's website. Sometimes I read older articles from the Seminole Tribune through their online archives. I find that the best information is found when we can share our collections with the community to learn and create knowledge together.

The photo binder program which has transformed into a public service allowing the collections team to connect the photograph collections back to the community it represents, The Seminole Tribe of Florida. This program, which had expanded under the hands of previous collection staff members and now currently through Iretta Tiger's work, is an opportunity to learn



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

From left to right, Priscilla Sayen, Mitchell Cypress, Henry Gopher, David Cypress, Jack Smith Jr., Mary Jane Willie and Fred Smith participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony.



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Children from the Hollywood Reservation sit in the wagon of a toy horse drawn carriage. In the background in the center of the photo is Carolyn Crenshaw, aiding another child onto one of these carriage toys. These are likely students of her kindergarten class. This was taken in May of 1956.

Okalee Village hosts powwow



Calvin Tiger (2)

Otter Oliver (Cree Dakota Nation) left, and, at right, Dakota Shaw Oliver (Sicangulakota Tribe) and Amber Saunders (Tuscarora Nation) participate in the 4th annual Powwow Marketplace on Nov. 14 at Seminole Okalee Indian Village in Hollywood. Visitors were treated to performances by Aztec and Polynesian dancers, arts and crafts, and Seminole food.



Calvin Tiger

Pharoah Gayle handles the wildlife portion of the program.



Calvin Tiger

Youngsters learn dance movements from Keoki McGowan.



Calvin Tiger
Salva Alba, Jocelyn Lavarregia and Paola Ramos educate the audience at Okalee.

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

December 2025

Wood is one of the most valuable natural resources utilized by humans. From tools to furniture to shelter, humans have come to depend on this resource for a wide variety of uses. This age-old reliance on wood has thus made the material instantly recognizable to most. However, some forms of wood, particularly those that have undergone radical changes, might be harder to discern to the untrained eye.

At first, the object to the right (Figure 1) gave the THPO's Collections a little trouble. Initially, we thought it might be a fragment of a long bone from an animal, but it was too hard and slick. On closer inspection, we realized it was petrified wood. Petrified wood is the fossilized remains of ancient trees that have undergone a process known as silicification, where organic material is replaced by minerals, transforming the wood into stone ([EBSCO, n.d.](#)).

This was not something that was expected, considering that Florida is not known for it. In fact, we have no other petrified wood in THPO's collection. Often called silicified wood by archaeologists, it can be found in riverbeds, but those areas are not places that the THPO's Tribal Archaeology Section usually operates ([Manchester, n.d.](#)). So, what do we make of this fragment? Trade would be the obvious explanation for how it got to the location. Petrified wood was used by populations in North America to create tools such as arrowheads and scrapers (Figure 2). However, petrified wood for the purpose of tool production is rare to find in Florida.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Bluemle, J. P. (n.d.). North Dakota's Petrified Wood. Department of Mineral Resources, North Dakota.

<https://www.dmr.nd.gov/dmr/indgs/petrified-wood>

EBSCO Information Services, Inc. (n.d.). Petrified Wood. EBSCO.

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/earth-and-atmospheric-sciences/petrified-wood>

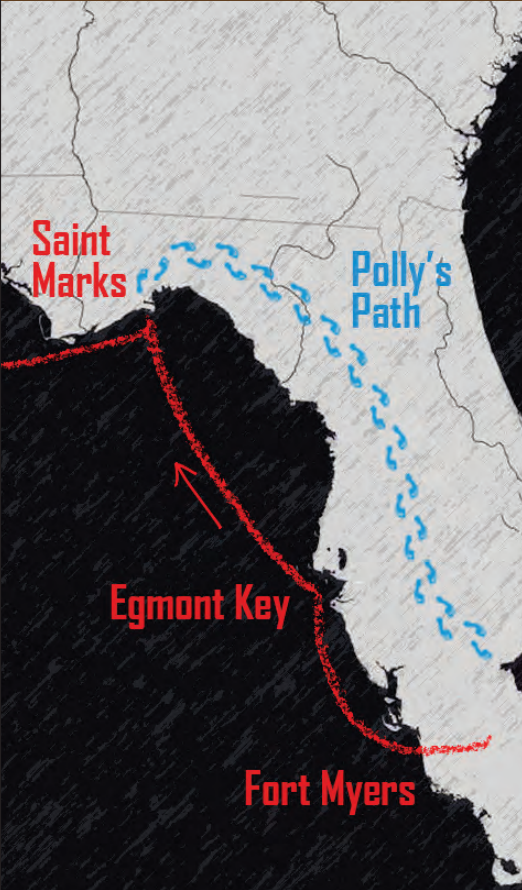
Manchester, S. R. (n.d.). Collecting fossil plants in Florida. floridamuseum.ufl.edu.

<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/paleobotany/collecting-fossil-plants-florida/#:~:text=In%20Florida%2C%20particularly%20well%20preserved,other%20kinds%20of%20fossil%20r>



SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - DECEMBER 2025

THE SEMINOLE WAR: GRAY CLOUD



In the last year of the Seminole War the United States built a blockhouse fort on Egmont Key, a small island in the mouth of Tampa Bay. The fort was made to hold Seminole prisoners taken from Florida before their forced removal to Oklahoma. Those held there were noncombatants, mostly women, children, and elders who were forcefully taken from their camps in armed raids. Messengers were sent to find the Seminole warriors with a message: Their families had been captured and would be sent west. If they wanted to be with their families, they should turn themselves in.

On May 7, 1858, at the Army encampment at Fort Myers, Billy Bowlegs and his followers turned themselves in so they could return to their families. After decades of struggle, their fight to remain in their homeland was over. They were taken onto the Gray Cloud, a steamer ship that had been used to transport prisoners before, and then to the prison camp on Egmont Key to load the other prisoners. While on the way Colonel Loomis interrogated Billy Bowlegs about Seminoles remaining in Florida. Bowlegs informed him that he was certain that Sam Jones and his people would never agree to leave.

The Gray Cloud took them to Egmont Key to join the prisoners there. The next day the Seminoles boarded the ship that would take them away from their homelands in Florida. When the ship stopped to refuel in Saint Marks, Florida an escape was staged by Ematloye (Polly Parker) and half a dozen other women, all of whom survived to return to Okeechobee. It was the only escape.

The United States inaccurately proclaimed victory and the Seminole War over, but Billy Bowlegs had been right. Sam Jones' band, along with others who would not go, remained in Florida, unconquered, with the gray cloud of war an unforgotten threat

To see more Seminole History Stories, please visit the THPO website at www.stofthpo.com

Above: Billy Bowlegs, (Ca. 1850)

If you'd like to learn more about Egmont Key, Polly Parker, and the end of the Seminole War,, you can read the Seminole Story book at <https://stofthpo.com/egmont-key/> or scan the QR code



Health

Native youth participate in Healing Circle training at First Americans Museum

FROM UNITY

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — In the heart of Oklahoma City, at the First Americans Museum, more than 50 Native youth from across the state and beyond recently gathered for an immersive two-day experience of peer bonding, community building, and resource mapping. This Healing Circle focused on highlighting the power of community and healing through shared stories.

The First Americans Museum (FAM) is a unique institution that blends cultural heritage with academic pursuits, providing a setting where the students could have a connection to the land and its history.

A Healing Circle is a traditional practice rooted in Indigenous cultures, designed to create a safe space for participants to share their stories, emotions, and experiences. The aim is to foster healing, understanding, and connection among individuals. In this training, youth will learn about the significance of storytelling, active listening, and the importance of honoring each participant's voice.

The training is facilitated by experienced leaders who guide the participants through

various activities and discussions. It begins with introductions, where each participant shares their name, background, and what they hope to gain from the experience. This initial sharing lays the groundwork for trust and openness.

As participants engage in different exercises, one can only notice how quickly the group begins to bond. Everyone engages in active listening sessions, learns about cultural sensitivity, and participates in role-playing scenarios to better understand the Healing Circle process. Toward the end, trainers and participants sit in a circle and have the option to share personal stories, thus creating a deep sense of empathy and understanding among all.

Attending the Healing Circle training at the FAM was an enriching experience that underscored the importance of community and connection in the healing process. For these youth who will share with their community, the skills and insights gained from this training will undoubtedly serve them well, both academically and personally. The Healing Circle not only bridges cultures but also cultivates a sense of belonging.



Native youth take part in a Healing Circle at First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City.

UNITY

AAIP names Siobhan Westcott physician of the year

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Siobhan Wescott, MD, MPH, has been named physician of the year by the Association of American Indian Physicians. Wescott is Athabascan from Fairbanks, Alaska.

She has helped to carry on the legacy of the first Native American physician, Dr. Susan Susette La Flesche Picotte, in an endowed professorship at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Wescott regularly infuses Indigenous storytelling in her public health work, such as producing the AAIP health education film “Conquering Chronic Disease with Olympian Billy Mills.” She has also devoted considerable efforts to increasing the number of Indigenous physicians.

During the entirety of medical school at Harvard, she worked with the Four Directions Summer Research Program to provide research opportunities and mentoring to Indigenous pre-meds. At the University of North Dakota, she was co-director of Indians Into Medicine Program.



Dr. Siobhan Wescott

AAIP

FBI says surge makes impact in Indian Country cases

STAFF REPORT

WASHINGTON — A six-month surge of FBI personnel to support investigations involving missing and murdered Indigenous people has yielded results, according to the United States Department of Justice.

Under Operation Not Forgotten, the FBI deployed 64 personnel to support field offices nationwide and work alongside the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Being one of the most prolonged and intense FBI operations addressing Indian Country crimes to date, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Missing and Murdered Unit provided deployed agents with investigative and technical support by assisting in over 330 investigations.

“These dedicated efforts by FBI agents, together with the BIA and our tribal law enforcement partners, have solved crimes, protected victims of violence, and brought much needed safety and security to communities in Indian country,” said Attorney General Pamela Bondi in a Nov. 25 press release. “We will never forget the

crime victims whose cases remain unsolved, and we will continue our pursuit until justice is served.”

Indian Country faces persistent levels of violent crime and victimization, with approximately 4,300 open investigations at the start of this fiscal year alone. This includes over 900 death investigations, 1,000 child abuse investigations, and more than 500 domestic violence and adult sexual abuse investigations.

“One of the biggest problems tribal communities face is the vast amount of land to account for, requiring significant resources to crush violent crime,” FBI Director Kash Patel said in the release.

According to the release, in this fiscal year, the FBI's Indian Country initiatives have led to 1,123 arrests, the recovery of 304 weapons, 1,260 individuals charged, and the identification and localization of 458 underage victims.

“Operation Not Forgotten is a major step forward in giving these communities the justice that they deserve,” Patel said.

Red Ribbon walks held tribalwide



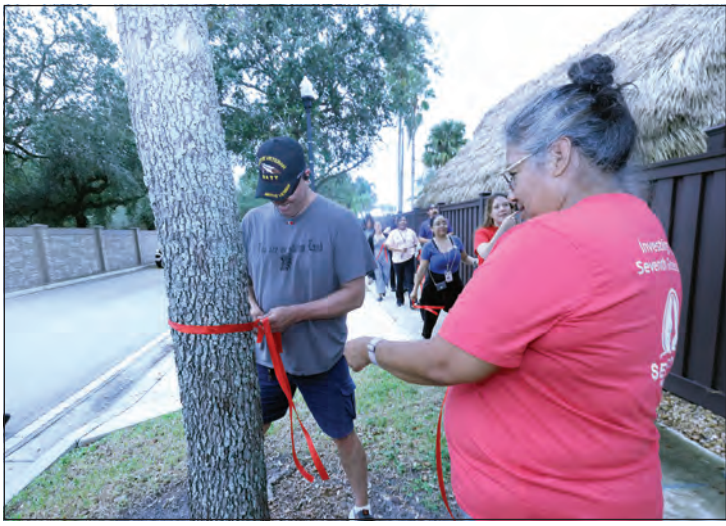
Kevin Johnson

About 30 people turned out Oct. 29 for the Red Ribbon Walk on the Hollywood Reservation. Organized locally by the Center for Behavioral Health, walks were also held on reservations in Big Cypress, Brighton, Immokalee and Lakeland. The Red Ribbon campaign is organized throughout the United States by the National Family Partnership, an organization that was founded in 1980 by a group of parents. It is dedicated to drug prevention education and advocacy.



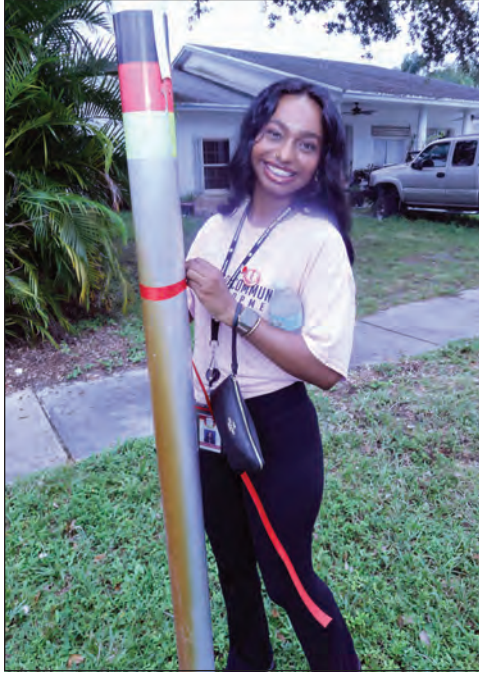
Beverly Bidney

Recreation Department employees Ruby Anzualda, Elsa Zamora and Torri Tavares walk with Alayna Ortega, 8, and Aria Ortega, 5, in the Immokalee Red Ribbon Walk.



Kevin Johnson

Seminole veterans Curtis Motlow Jr. and Sallie Josh participate in tying red ribbons during the Hollywood Red Ribbon walk.



Kevin Johnson (3)

In Hollywood, from left to right, Deandra Thomas (Advocacy & Guardianship), Diandra Edwards (Housing) and Vanessa Hernandez (CBH) tie red ribbons on poles and trees during the reservation's Red Ribbon Walk.



Calvin Tiger (2)

Walkers above and at right stroll down Josie Billie Highway during the Red Ribbon Walk on the Big Cypress Reservation.



SEMINOLE SCENES



SEMINOLE THREADS: Virginia Osceola set up shop along the FSU homecoming parade route Oct. 31, where she helped a customer try on a patchwork jacket.

Beverly Bidney



STARTING ON THE RIGHT NOTE: Jewel Lavatta and her daughter, Amariah, sing the national anthem before the start of the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School girls basketball team's home opener Nov. 13. PECS defeated Clewiston.

Kevin Johnson



PRINCESS AT THE PODIUM: 2025-26 Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford speaks at the Tribal Council meeting Nov. 10. It was Latchford's first appearance in front of the Tribal Council as princess. She spoke briefly and introduced herself.

STOF



WARMING UP FOR A CAUSE: Seminole Classic Casino General Manager Edward Aguilar participates in Tracy Bradford's 2nd annual Miles of Meaning, a 5K walk/run Oct. 11 in Davie. The event raises money for Gilda's Club South Florida, a nonprofit organization that provides free emotional and social support to anyone impacted by cancer, including patients, families, and caregivers.

Seminole Classic Casino



AWARD WINNER: Araena Osceola-Haunpo, center, earned second place at the 1935 American Indian Exposition beautiful baby pageant in the 5-6 year-old category. She is the daughter of Cara Osceola-Haunpo and Joshua Haunpo, and granddaughter of the late Curtis Osceola Sr. The contest was held Oct. 26 in Anadarko, Oklahoma, at the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma community building. Araena was honored in the exposition's parade Oct. 29.

Courtesy photo



CLEAR MESSAGE: Ahfachkee School students used a fence at the school to spell out their message "Say no to drugs" during Red Ribbon Week.

Courtesy photo



SEASON'S GREETINGS: A festive, wintry scene greets visitors at the main entrance to the Brighton Reservation's administration building.

Kevin Johnson



EAST MEETS WEST: Flags from the Tejon Indian Tribe in California, Seminole Tribe of Florida and State of California are in the background as Hard Rock Casino Tejon President Chris Kelley speaks during a ceremony Nov. 7 to unveil the property's six-story Hard Rock guitar.

Hard Rock



SEE YOU LATER ALLIGATOR: Two alligators find a comfortable spot in the sun along a canal next to Josie Billie Highway on the Big Cypress Reservation on Nov. 5.

Kevin Johnson

NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

Lawmakers urged to tackle housing challenges in New Mexico Native communities

Fewer Native Americans own their own homes compared to New Mexicans as a whole, and the state must help close that gap, members of the Southwest Indigenous Housing Justice Collaborative told lawmakers at a recent legislative hearing.

Without “aggressive interventions or support in terms of mortgage readiness and housing development,” the disparity will keep growing, member Dawn Begay (Diné) said at an Oct. 22 meeting of the interim Indian Affairs Committee in To’hajiilee.

In the spring of 2024, 660 people responded to a survey on Native American housing needs the city of Albuquerque conducted. They represented at least 60 tribes, and 78% of them lived in Bernalillo County.

One of the key findings was that 72% of respondents said they couldn’t afford monthly payments of \$1,500 on a house — an amount that is hundreds of dollars lower than the monthly payment required to purchase a home valued at the median price in New Mexico’s largest city, according to a report on the survey released earlier this year. And 34% of respondents said they’d been forced out of their housing by increased mortgages or rents.

State-level data paints a similar picture. Despite making up about 12% of the state’s population, only 5.2% of homeowners are Native American, according to a 2024 report from Housing New Mexico, also known as the Mortgage Finance Authority. Meanwhile, white households comprise 35.6% of the population and 37.8% of homeowners.

People living in reservation communities face unique barriers to homeownership, lawmakers heard.

For instance, citizens of the Navajo Nation can apply for a homesite lease, giving them the right to live on a small plot of land on the reservation held in trust by the U.S. government. Both tribal and federal agencies are involved, and they “don’t talk to each other,” Chenoa Bah Stilwell-Jensen (Diné), a member of the collaborative who works at the University of New Mexico’s Health Sciences Center, said during a follow-up presentation to the committee on Oct. 23.

That’s one reason New Mexico should hire a Native American housing director who “could bring together these entities that normally don’t talk, be a force to bring them together professionally in a respectful way to discuss what’s possible here,” Stilwell-Jensen said.

Stilwell-Jensen and Begay suggested the position could be created in the state’s Office of Housing.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has pushed during the last two legislative sessions for a formal office with authority to craft a plan for reducing the state’s housing shortage, but the proposal failed. The governor’s office opted to hire a few employees to focus on the issue, and that small team relocated to the Department of Workforce Solutions earlier this year, a move Lujan Grisham’s office said was meant to connect housing strategies with job creation.

The collaborative, which formed in 2020, is also recommending the Legislature fund tribally-led housing apprenticeship and trade certification programs to empower tribes to build and maintain their own homes. At least one organization that runs such programs receives federal funding, and there are fears about cuts, said Begay, who is the former Native American affairs coordinator for Albuquerque.

Lawmakers should also explore legislation granting tribes first rights of refusal on state-owned surplus land, according to the group, meaning they’d get the opportunity to buy land state agencies no longer need before anyone else.

- Source NM (New Mexico)

Arizona’s Turquoise Alert has been triggered just once. DPS explains that’s by design.

The Arizona Department of Public Safety, which reviews and distributes all statewide alerts for missing people, says Arizona’s new Turquoise Alert system is working like it’s supposed to.

The alert, established under House Bill 2281, has only been activated once since launching in July, even as nearly 300 people were reported missing in Arizona during that same period, according to an Arizona Luminaria analysis of local and federal databases.

Lawmakers promoted the alert earlier this year as a way to close gaps in the system by reaching more of the people who go missing but don’t qualify for an Amber or Silver Alert. They regularly pointed to the disappearance of 14-year-old Emily Pike as an example of the kind of cases they hoped to help and even renamed the law in her honor.

But its near-total inactivity in the face of hundreds of missing persons cases in recent months raises questions about its effectiveness. DPS, however, contends that the new alert’s limited use is intentional and rooted in state statute.

“The limited number of Turquoise Alert activations is not indicative of underuse but reflects the intentional scope of the program,” DPS wrote in a statement provided to Arizona Luminaria by Sgt. Kim Love-Ness of the agency’s Duty Office, which directly manages the alerts.

DPS explained it does not initiate or investigate missing person cases, but instead acts as “a pass-through authority” that reviews formal alert requests for compliance and then coordinates statewide dissemination, if approved. The agency said

it’s received several activation requests for a Turquoise Alert from local and county agencies, but none — apart from the one time it was approved — met all of the criteria outlined in state law. It did not provide specific details about any of those denied requests.

According to DPS, each Turquoise Alert request undergoes a rigorous review to ensure it meets all legal requirements for one — a threshold the agency says is essential to maintaining the system’s credibility.

“Issuing alerts outside of those parameters has the potential to dilute public responsiveness and reduce overall system effectiveness,” DPS wrote.

To issue an alert, all five of the following must be met:

A missing person report is entered into law enforcement databases
-The person is under 65
-Local resources have been exhausted
-Circumstances are unexplained or suspicious

-There is enough descriptive information to aid in recovery efforts, according to DPS.

The agency explained that state statute does not explicitly define terms like unexplained, suspicious or endangered, leaving their interpretation up to the law enforcement agencies. In practice, DPS generally defines unexplained as a disappearance that lacks a routine or voluntary explanation, suspicious as having facts that suggest possible criminal activity or coercion and endangered as involving a person who faces credible risk or harm.

“These operational definitions are intended as a guide, as each alert request is handled with thoughtful discretion, case by case, like all investigative cases, acknowledging each contains unique variables,” DPS wrote.

DPS did not respond to Luminaria’s specific questions about the missing children database on its website, which it referred to as the Arizona Missing and Exploited Children database, including exactly how it’s maintained and how many reflected children labeled runaway. It noted, however, that the database contains limited information as entered by investigating agencies and lacks the context needed to assess whether Turquoise Alert criteria are satisfied.

The agency also explained that Arizona law enforcement agencies generate hundreds of runaway juvenile reports each month and issuing a statewide activation for each case would “quickly desensitize the public and reduce effectiveness.”

“Many runaway cases, while important and investigated, do not present articulable danger or suspicious circumstances beyond leaving voluntarily, and therefore do not qualify for Turquoise Alert activation,” DPS wrote.

DPS said it continues to offer outreach and training to law enforcement agencies across Arizona about the state’s alert systems, including virtual sessions on how to submit a Turquoise Alert request. Participation in both the training and use of the state’s alert systems is voluntary, according to DPS.

Emily Pike, a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, went missing from a group home in Mesa earlier this year. She was labeled a runaway, and her disappearance was not widely known when Rep. Teresa Martinez, a Republican from Casa Grande, introduced a bill to establish the Turquoise Alert in January.

After Emily was found brutally murdered weeks later near Globe, her story was used by lawmakers to rally support for the legislation. But a DPS official during a ceremonial signing of the bill into law in April confirmed Emily’s case wouldn’t have qualified for a Turquoise Alert due to her being labeled a runaway and not considered endangered at the time she disappeared.

“As far as ‘runaway’ goes, in and of itself, a runaway isn’t necessarily a crime or a suspicious or unexplained circumstance,” Arizona DPS Captain Thomas Neve said at the time. “So if somebody decides to leave or go missing of their own volition ... it wouldn’t necessarily qualify.”

“But again, if the circumstances are suspicious or unexplained, adding that to somebody who maybe ran away might actually, I would say, tip the scale to actually meeting that criteria,” he continued.

Advocates — including Emily’s own Tribal Nation and family since she was found — say the runaway label shouldn’t be used for any missing child because it takes away the urgency from cases. A growing number of criminal justice experts also argue that any missing child under 18 should immediately be considered endangered.

“I hear two words, ‘runaway and missing.’ Two little words that make a big difference on whether an investigation is done or whether they just sweep it under the rug,” Emily’s uncle, Allred Pike Jr., said at the ceremonial signing in May. “Something that’s named after her wouldn’t have made a difference if she was still here, that’s something that we need to take a look at.”

Indigenous children in particular go missing “at a disproportionate rate to their representation in the overall U.S. population of children,” according to a 2023 congressional report. Since the Turquoise Alert was implemented on July 10, more than 20 children identified as “Indian” were reported missing in Arizona, according to the missing children database on DPS’ website.

DPS noted that while the Turquoise Alert is the state’s only alert that specifically mentions it’s available to members of a federally recognized tribe, all of Arizona’s alerts have historically included tribal communities and been available for use to tribal law enforcement.

But the legislation establishing the Turquoise Alert system was initially introduced to focus exclusively on any missing Indigenous people in Arizona. It was later amended to apply more broadly to

any missing and endangered person under 65.

While the change made the alert system more inclusive, it also shifted attention away from its original purpose: To address the disproportionately high rates of violence Indigenous communities face and the long-standing inaction by government and criminal justice systems across the state and nation.

Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized Tribal Nations, and was identified in a 2018 study as having the third-highest number of Indigenous women and girls going missing or being murdered in the country.

In 2020, a legislative study found that 160 Indigenous women and girls were murdered in Arizona between 1976 and 2018 — a total that steadily increased in those 40 years. Additionally, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System showed just over 90 Native Americans were reported missing in Arizona since 1956, the database showed as of Oct. 29.

Arizona Luminaria recently launched an MMIP database, where nearly 100 women and girls who are missing or were murdered are reflected so far. That data has shown that women ages 19 to 46 accounted for about 70% of all the cases.

- Arizona Luminaria

Tribes and environmental groups sue to stop road planned for Alaska wildlife refuge

Three tribal governments and several environmental groups sued the Trump administration on Nov. 12 to try to block a land trade that would allow a road to be built through a national wildlife refuge in southwestern Alaska.

The land swap, approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior last month, would open up a section of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

Supporters argue that the road is needed to connect the community of King Cove, home to about 750 people, with a legacy military airstrip that can accommodate jets. That would give King Cove’s residents access to safer medical evacuations if needed. Opponents say the proposed road — to run 18.9 miles in total, most of that within what is currently refuge land — would damage world-class bird habitat that is in the heart of the refuge.

Nov. 12’s challenges came in three lawsuits filed in U.S. District Court in Anchorage. All assert that the land trade and road development pose dire threats to migratory bird populations that use Izembek’s wetlands, including species with Endangered Species Act listings, and to the wider ecosystem. All say the trade and planned road violate the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and other federal laws.

The three lawsuits have their individual characteristics as well.

One of them, filed by tribal governments in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages, focuses on threats to traditional subsistence hunters who depend on the birds that use Izembek’s wetlands. The tribal plaintiffs are the Native Village of Paimiut, Native Village of Hooper Bay and Chevak Native Village.

“Izembek’s eelgrass wetlands are a lifeline for emperor geese, black brant and other birds that feed our families and connect us to Indigenous relatives across the Pacific,” Angutekaraq Estelle Thomson, traditional council president of the Native Village of Paimiut, said in a statement. “Trading away this globally important refuge for a commercial corridor devalues our lives and our children’s future. We are joining this lawsuit because defending Izembek is inseparable from defending our subsistence rights, our food security and our ability to remain Yup’ik on our own lands.”

The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental organization, is also a plaintiff in the case.

A second lawsuit, filed by Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, Wilderness Watch, the Alaska Wilderness League and the Sierra Club, puts a special focus on the process used to achieve the land swap and what it may mean for all wildlife refuges.

“Trading the ownership of refuge lands that Congress designated for conservation is a terrible precedent for the privatization of public lands. Building a road will have tremendous impacts on fish and wildlife habitat and could also greatly increase both disturbance and sport hunting pressure on vulnerable species,” Marilyn Sigman, president of Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, said in a statement.

The third complaint, filed by Defenders of Wildlife, puts a focus on the wider environmental impacts.

The planned road enabled by the land trade would “result in incalculable and irreversible damage” to myriad wildlife species, including marine and land mammals as well as migratory birds, that lawsuit says. The lawsuit alleges that the land deal violates both the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act and the federal Wilderness Act.

“Under the Trump administration, the Interior Secretary entered into an illegal deal done in the darkness of a government shutdown: a sellout of one of our country’s largest and most pristine wildlife refuges and wilderness areas,” Jane Davenport, a senior attorney in Defenders of Wildlife’s Biodiversity Law Center, said in a statement. “Our treasured public conservation lands belong to all Americans. Defenders of Wildlife will stand up in court to hold this administration to account for recklessly and unlawfully trading them away.”

The Izembek Lagoon area, where the road is planned, holds the largest single stand of eelgrass in the world and the largest

bed of seagrass along the North American Pacific Coast, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The entire Pacific population of black brant, a type of goose, uses the refuge’s lagoon area, feeding on the eelgrass. The refuge and its eelgrass support several other bird and mammal species; about half the world’s emperor geese use the refuge as a migratory stopover, according to biologists.

A Department of the Interior spokesperson declined to comment Nov. 12 on the lawsuits.

[In October], however, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum touted the land exchange and planned road as long overdue.

He spoke about the project during an event called “Alaska Day,” a gathering in Washington with Gov. Mike Dunleavy and the state’s three-member congressional delegation. The Izembek land exchange was one of the pro-development Alaska actions announced at the event.

“It just seems preposterous to me that somehow, it’s taken 40 years for us to put people first,” Burgum said at the event. “Because I know one thing as a governor of a state: You can actually do things like build 18 miles of gravel road and still take great care of wildlife.” Burgum was North Dakota’s governor before being appointed as Interior secretary.

The land trade he approved would convey a little less than 500 acres of refuge land, most of it designated wilderness, to the Native-owned King Cove Corp. The corporation would give 1,739 acres of its land to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be added to the refuge, and the federal government would also pay the corporation for the land.

The idea of a road linking King Cove to the World War II-era military runway at Cold Bay dates back decades. The legal and political battle over the proposal has also been long. Some of the plaintiffs in the new cases were plaintiffs in previous lawsuits over proposed land trades. The dispute was being considered by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, but that court in 2023 determined that the case was moot and dismissed it because the Biden administration was not pursuing the plan endorsed by the first Trump administration.

- Alaska Beacon

Oklahoma Indigenous leaders at odds over whether Lumbee Tribe should be federally recognized

During a U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs hearing on Nov. 5, leaders of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina advocated for federal recognition through the Lumbee Fairness Act — an issue on which Chief of the Shawnee Tribe Ben Barnes and Oklahoma Senator Markwayne Mullin disagree.

Barnes spoke on behalf of two organizations he leads: The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition and the United Indian Nations of Oklahoma.

He argued the Lumbee Tribe does not have verifiable historical and genealogical evidence to support federal recognition. He said he asked a historian and genealogist he respects to analyze historical records to determine if the Lumbee Tribe has verifiable evidence for a claim. Barnes said, “The answer was a resounding no.”

“Our children’s trauma is not a credential. Our unmarked graves are not a strategy. Our ancestors’ suffering is not a political accessory,” Barnes said. “If identity becomes self-proclamation instead of documented history, tribal sovereignty becomes a sandcastle waiting for the tide.”

Oklahoma Senator and Cherokee Nation citizen Markwayne Mullin disagreed with Barnes and Principal Chief Michell Hicks of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, who was also in opposition.

“I do believe they’re Native,” Mullin said of the Lumbee Tribe. “I’ve been accused of not being Native, and I always laugh. And I said I can’t control who my ancestors loved.”

Lumbee leaders say they have fought for federal recognition since the 1880s and have documentation to prove it. Arlinda Locklear spoke on behalf of the tribe, noting that it’s not the name of the tribe that needs recognition, but rather the people.

“In a Supreme Court decision in 1901 called Montoya v. the United States, the Supreme Court gave us guidance as to what an Indian tribe is,” Locklear said. “The Supreme Court indicated that an Indian tribe consists of a body of Indians of the same race...who are united in a community in a particular territory.”

Locklear said the Lumbee Tribe adheres to that definition.

To gain federal recognition, the tribe either needs approval through an act of Congress or from the Office of Federal Acknowledgment within the Department of the Interior.

Chief Barnes and Principal Chief Hicks advocated for the Lumbee Tribe to go through the OFA process, doubting the validity of the tribe’s documented history.

Lumbee tribal chairman John Lowery said that process would stall their efforts and disadvantage their citizens.

“I don’t want my people waiting another 30 years to go through the process,” Lowery said. “And then once there has been a rendering done by BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs], there will be opponents who can then bring forth a lawsuit. And I have no doubt that Eastern Band of Cherokee, 30 years from now, will bring forth a lawsuit that will take us into another 10 to 20 years. And then 50 years from now, my grandson will be sitting here doing the same thing.”

- KOSU (Stillwater, Oklahoma)

\$45M fund unveiled to stimulate growth and opportunity in Indigenous communities

A new \$45-million investment fund is being established in Quebec to stimulate economic growth in Indigenous communities.

First Nations Venture Capital of Quebec (FNVCQ) announced the launch of the fund, describing it as a financial vehicle and one that is an equal partnership between private investors and the provincial government.

Designed and managed by Indigenous actors, it’s a “decisive step toward real economic self-determination,” according to a news release published Nov. 27 by FNVCQ.

The fund will focus investments on tourism, construction, renewable energy and service provided for the development of natural resources.

Haskan Sioui, chief executive officer of FNVCQ, says he wants to invest equally in these sectors, adding this marks a “new era” in Indigenous economic governance. He also says the investments with help create jobs.

“We’re expecting over 400 jobs,” he said, speaking with CBC after a news conference held in Wendake, Que., just outside Quebec City.

The site of the announcement, the Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations owned by the Wendat Nation, serves as an example of the potential benefits of investment, said Sioui.

FNVCQ invested in the hotel in 2008, he says.

“We created over 150 jobs here just with one project so can you imagine if we have more money, a bigger fund? The sky’s the limit for job creation,” he said.

More and more Indigenous communities are relying on the tourism sector, says Francis Verreault-Paul, chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador.

The organization is one of several Indigenous partners.

“There’s a lot of enthusiasm around Indigenous tourism, I think people want to know more about First Nations,” he said.

- CBC (Canada)

Governor handpicks Hualapai Tribe to supply this year’s Arizona Capitol Christmas tree

Another Arizona tribe has been named to keep a newer holiday tradition going by supplying this year’s Capitol Christmas tree. For three years running under Gov. Katie Hobbs, the Grand Canyon State has taken bids from among its 22 federally recognized tribes.

That all began with the White Mountain Apache in 2023, followed by the San Carlos Apache last year. Now the state Capitol tree will come from northwest Arizona and the “People of the Tall Pines” — or Hualapai.

“And I hope, no matter who is in the Office of the Governor,” Hualapai Chairman Duane Clarke told KJZZ, “that this holiday spirit of bringing all our communities together continues.”

In recent weeks, the state had approached the 2,300-member tribe, north of Kingman, with the news and sent foresters to survey their vast landscape dotted with pine trees alongside Hualapai leadership.

“Oddly enough, the one tree that has been selected, it’s close to, I want to say about 30 feet, was not one of the three options — to be honest,” Clarke recalled. “Councilman [Pete] Imus did a quick prayer. He turned to the right and said, ‘That’s the tree.’ We all looked and it was a moment of awe.”

Before being harvested, the tribe will bless that tree and then truck it more than 200 miles to the state Capitol in Phoenix from their million-acre-reservation hugging the West Rim of the Grand Canyon.

- KJZZ (Phoenix, Arizona)

Tule River Indian Tribe reclaims over 17,000 acres and reintroduces tule elk on ancestral land

California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Oct. 29 the return of 17,030 acres of ancestral land to the Tule River Indian Tribe. According to a press release, this is the largest ancestral land return in the Sierra Nevada foothills and Central Valley region, and a milestone in California’s efforts to address historical wrongs against California Native American tribes, as well as in the state’s work to restore and protect critical ecosystems. A land return and tule elk reintroduction ceremony was held with tribal leaders, state partners, and community members.

According to the release, the Tribal Nature-Based Solutions grant program builds on the governor’s direction for state entities to work cooperatively with California Native American tribes to return ancestral lands and advances one of the core pillars to partner with tribes in the state’s goal to conserve 30% of California’s lands and coastal waters by 2030.

“The Tule River Tribe has a long history of asserting and affirming its sovereignty,” said Tule River Tribal Council Chairman Leister “Shine” R. Nieto Jr. “This land return demonstrates the very essence of tribal land restoration, which expands access to essential food and medicinal resources. It also supports the ongoing preservation of cultural sites, deepens environmental stewardship, and restores wildlife reintroduction efforts.”

- From press release

SOUTH FLORIDA'S ULTIMATE ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION



DECEMBER 4
GUACO



DECEMBER 5
BKFC 85



DECEMBER 6
JOE BONAMASSA



DECEMBER 7
TOYS IN THE SUN RUN



DECEMBER 7
JOHN MULANEY



DECEMBER 9
GAY MEN'S CHORUS OF SOUTH FLORIDA



DECEMBER 11
REY RUIZ AND RONALD BORJAS



DECEMBER 13
SARAH BRIGHTMAN



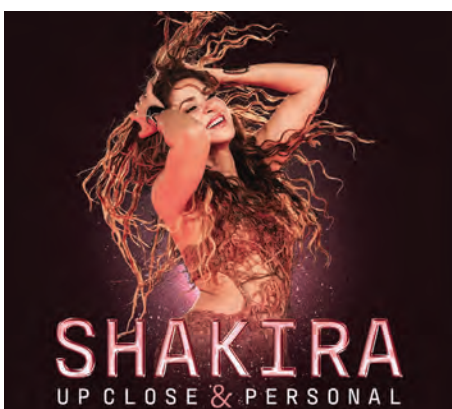
DECEMBER 14
MIKE TYSON



DECEMBER 18
JON PARDI



DECEMBER 19 & 20
CREED



DECEMBER 27 & 28
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HOLLYWOOD, FL

Education



Museum comes alive after hours for ‘Living Night’ experience

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum conducted its first “Living Night at the Museum” on Oct. 29. Gordon Wareham, museum director, and staff transformed the museum into an interactive experience for tribal youth from the Boys & Girls Club while encompassing tribal culture.

The evening started with a 17-minute video shown to the students. The video featured Wareham telling the audience that he wishes one day that the museum would come alive. After the video, Vandall Samuels led a tour for the students all while the lights dimmed and the museum exhibits started to become alive.

At the beginning of the tour, Tylor Tigertail posed as one of the museum exhibits that interacted with tribal youth during the tour. Tigertail was outfitted in traditional tribal clothing, speaking to the youth as his character is trying to survive in the Florida wildlands as a hunter in the early 1900s.

The next museum exhibit displayed tribal members, including Lenora Roberts and Kiki Roberts, at the Stranahan Trading Post that reenacted Seminoles and settlers trading. This exhibit highlighted the 19th and 20th centuries. Meilin Figueroa, the museum’s assistant retail manager, played the role of Mrs. Ivy Stranahan.

Some of the other museum exhibits consisted of a reenactment with Carla Cypress and Shawnee Tommie cooking over a fire at a camp, preparing traditional tribal food.

Jessica Lopez, museum multimedia coordinator, sat under a chickee and ripped fabric and explained to tribal youth how she was using the fabric for sewing. Daniel Tommie had his own interactive exhibit, which included woodcarving demonstrations.

The students also saw an interactive exhibit of the traditional tribal game



Calvin Tiger

Daniel Tommie, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum traditional interpretation coordinator, presents himself as a woodcarver at a tribal camp and speaks to the Boys and Girls Club students during their Night at the Museum tour.

stickball. Museum educators Cypress Billie and Pablo Cardenas demonstrated to the tribal youth how stickball was played. In the same exhibit area, Wareham and Billy Walker demonstrated traditional tribal music that would be played during a green corn dance ceremony.

The Living Night at the Museum Tour concluded with students at the Seminole Princess Pageant Exhibit that shows Seminole princesses throughout the years.



Calvin Tiger (2)

Above, from left to right, Lenora Roberts, Kiki Roberts and Meilin Figueroa recreate the Stranahan Trading Post, whereas Lenora and Kiki come to life as early 20th century Seminoles trading goods with Mrs. Ivy Stranahan, portrayed by Figueroa. Below, Shawnee Tommie, left, and Carla Cypress recreate a scene of Seminole ancestors preparing to make traditional tribal foods at a camp where Boys and Girls Club students were able to interact and watch during their tour.



Gwyn Garcia focuses on importance of culture, education in library spotlight program

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

IMMOKALEE — Library aide Gwyn Garcia shared her love of Seminole traditions during a Tribal Spotlight talk Nov. 10 at the Diane Yzaguirre Memorial library in Immokalee.

The talk was part of a series sponsored by the library program as part of Native American Heritage Month.

About a dozen kids came to the presentation and listened intently as Garcia asked them if they knew what clans they are in. She explained that Seminole clans are passed down through their mothers and that it is not allowed to marry someone within their own clan.

Language is an important part of Seminole culture and she advised the students to learn Elaponke and pass it on to the next generation.

“You need to talk Indian to make the tribe bigger,” Garcia said. “We won’t be here forever, so you have to know the language and culture. Learn the language when you are young so you can teach your kids.”

Garcia also told them the importance of going to school and getting a good education to get a good job. She attended the Ahfachkee School and said it is a lot bigger and better than when she was a student. She has six grandchildren at the school now.

“When we were growing up, we didn’t have a library to come to after school,” Garcia said.

Garcia was wearing a patchwork skirt passed down to her when her mother died. She plans to pass it down to her niece when she grows up. Her biggest inspiration in life was her grandmother Tommie Jumper.

“She taught us a lot of things; to speak our language, how to make patchwork, dolls and beadwork,” Garcia said. “I try to teach my kids to greet people at home by saying Che-hun-tamo. They know three languages; Indian, English and Spanish.”

She spoke to the students in Elaponke, which they recognized from culture class at



Beverly Bidney

Gwyn Garcia speaks to students Nov. 10 at the Diane Yzaguirre Memorial Library in Immokalee.

Ahfachkee.

Garcia shared other tidbits about Seminole culture including the fact that girls keep the Indian names given to them at birth for the rest of their lives. Boys also get an Indian name at birth, but get a man’s name when they are 18 years old during the corn dance ceremony.

“When I was little I didn’t pay attention,” Garcia said. “But now I’m learning. If you want to learn, ask. No one will know that you want to learn unless you ask.”

Garcia is originally from Big Cypress but has lived in Immokalee since 1997.

Teresa Jumper reconnects with former Ahfachkee colleague

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — Teresa Jumper met Geraldine Cusack back when they were both teachers at the Ahfachkee School in the 1970s. Since then, they have seen each other only once, about 20 years ago when Cusack came to Florida from her native Ireland. On Oct. 29, they saw each other again when Cusack came to Big Cypress for what she calls her final visit.

Jumper and Cusack both worked at Ahfachkee in the bilingual program, where they were tasked with writing down the Seminole language, Elaponke. In the 1970s Cusack lived in Big Cypress for four years, left and came back for two years and then again for another year.

“It feels so good to be together again,” Jumper said. “We’re older now and it’s good to see her.”

While they were teaching, the duo traveled to the University of Alaska, which was creating a written language for a local tribe that didn’t have one. Teresa was fluent in Elaponke and Cusack wasn’t, but they learned how to approach the challenge. They ultimately made some books for Ahfachkee students to use in the classroom.

“When you are developing a written language, it takes a long time,” Cusack said.

Jumper said the community at the time wanted to use their own alphabet for the language, so she went to Santa Fe, New Mexico to learn its pronunciation. She believes that prevented the Seminole language from becoming fully written and has contributed to its loss in the community.

“It’s still the same language and it’s still not written,” Jumper said. “They are losing it.”

In Ireland, Gaelic, also known as the Irish language, is taught in the schools along with Irish culture. Cusack said over the summers, students go to camp to learn more about their language and culture.

“It becomes part of them,” Cusack said. “If they had that here, kids would learn it and love it. Irish has survived for thousands of years because it’s part of our life, not just a subject in school. It’s who we are.”

Jumper said she would like to go to Ireland and see how they hold on to their history.

“I feel like going back to Alaska with her,” Jumper said. “She taught me how to be on a plane. Flying to Alaska was my first



Beverly Bidney

Geraldine Cusack, left, and Teresa Jumper sit under a chickee at the Big Cypress Senior Center Oct. 29.



Courtesy photo

A photo of Teresa Jumper, Geraldine Cusack and an unnamed Ahfachkee employee from the 1970s in Big Cypress.

time on a plane and I was scared. It was also my first time off the reservation.”

Jumper and Cusack shared a nice

afternoon in Big Cypress before Cusack returned to Ireland, where she said she plans to put her feet up and take it easy.

Jada Holdiness participates in FSU Homecoming Live

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Florida State University’s Homecoming Live featured a little bit of everything to get the campus and community revved up at the start of homecoming week. Music, cheerleaders, the marching band, dancers and R&B singer-songwriter Mariah the Scientist were all part of the evening Oct. 25; so was the Seminole Tribe’s Jada Holdiness.

The second-year Ph.D. student in FSU’s Department of Sociology welcomed a chance to briefly speak to the soldout Tucker Civic Center crowd. She was introduced as one of FSU’s very own Ph.D. students and member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Holdiness, who grew up in Immokalee, spoke in general about the research she does, which is focused on what impact colonization and forced assimilation has had with current health disparities and reduced quality of life among older Native Americans.

“The research I do at FSU not only allows me to stay connected to my tribe and Indian Country through its focus on Native American populations, but it also allows me

to shed light on a group of people who are so often overlooked and counted out. As both a Seminole and a scholar, I carry the legacy of my people – their strength, resilience, and pride,” she said in her remarks.

Being invited to speak happened by chance. Holdiness is treasurer for the Sociology Graduate Student Union. She received an opportunity to speak at Homecoming Live thanks to meeting a homecoming representative at a workshop. The homecoming folks also provided her a front row seat for the performances.

“That was very nice,” she said.

The recognition continued beyond Homecoming Live. Holdiness was part of Seminole Heritage game ceremonies for FSU volleyball and soccer.

Holdiness, who has a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from UCF, said she would like to work for the tribe someday, perhaps in data analysis – and possibly be a professor – but for now she’s focused on her journey toward a Ph.D.

Jada Holdiness speaks to the audience at the soldout FSU Homecoming Live on Oct. 25.



Turtle Mountain College receives \$22M gift

FROM MINOT DAILY NEWS

BELCOURT, N.D. — Turtle Mountain College in Belcourt, North Dakota, announced Nov. 24, it has received a \$22 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott.

The college described the historic gift as the largest private donation it has ever received, which followed a prior \$8 million donation from Scott in 2020.

Dr. Wanda Parisien, president of Turtle Mountain College said Scott’s gift lays the foundation for the college’s future. “We are profoundly grateful to Mackenzie Scott for this extraordinary commitment to our students and our mission,” Parisien

said. “This gift is a powerful investment in Indigenous education and self-determination. It will create opportunities for generations, providing the resources for TMC to grow as well as for our students to thrive academically while honoring their heritage and traditions. This funding could not have come at a better time. With the uncertainty of funding for tribal colleges recently, this donation will ensure financial stability for TMC.”

Turtle Mountain College is a fully accredited tribal college offering a range of certificates, associates, bachelor’s and master’s degree programs.

Third show added for Shakira

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — Due to demand, Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood has added a third show for global superstar Shakira’s

“Up Close & Personal” on Monday, Dec. 29.

Tickets are on sale now and start at \$145. Tickets are available at myHRL.com. Additional fees may apply.

Afhachkee serves ‘gratitude’ at breakfast

STAFF REPORT

BIG CYPRESS — The Ahfachkee School held its annual Thanksgiving/Gratitude breakfast Nov. 14 in the school’s gym. All parents and guardians were invited

to the breakfast, which was held before the Thanksgiving holiday break. Culture instructor Mary Jene Koenes said a prayer and Big Cypress Councilwoman said a few words to the parents before breakfast was served.



Lorraine Jumper, Justice Jumper, Akira Gore and Zendaya Quintana.



Samuel Caldwell, Dakotah Caldwell, Adelyn Caldwell and Grayson Caldwell.



Annette Mizell and Marzh Edwards.



Daniella Hakim

Heith Crum represents Florida’s Adopt-a-Cowboy Program as he demonstrates the cracking of his bullwhip to students from Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School, Afachkee School and other area schools during a youth agriculture program Nov. 20 in Moore Haven.

Tribe’s 4-H program participates in educational program for region’s 4th graders

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

MOORE HAVEN — Although fourth graders in the Seminole Tribe’s 4-H club are familiar with livestock, there are areas of agriculture they may not have explored as deeply. To broaden their understanding of food and nutrition, cattle, and agricultural science, the Hendry and Glades Ag Venture Committee, made up of University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Science (IFAS) representatives, organized a learning experience for fourth-grade students throughout Hendry and Glades counties.

On Nov. 20 and 21, school buses arrived at the Bronson Rodeo Arena in Moore Haven for 4-H’s second annual Ag-Venture. Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School and the Ahfachkee School were among the 750 students participating in this year’s educational event.

“We’ve partnered with the Board of Education’s benchmarks to meet the curriculum requirements for Hendry and Glades county schools,” said Lindsey Crum, the University of Florida’s regional livestock extension agent for Hendry, Glades, Charlotte, Lee, and Collier. “At each station, students will sit with an expert, farmer, or rancher to learn about each one of the commodities we’re covering today. We want these fourth graders to leave with an understanding of the impact the agricultural industry has on the economy, environment, and our everyday lives.”

A variety of group activities and interactive stations presented by U.S. Sugar, University of Florida dairy and agriculture extension agents, and Florida Gulf Coast University nurses addressed commodities such as aquaculture, soils, bees, fruit and vegetables, sugar, dairy, and beef.



Daniella Hakim

U.S. Sugar representatives teach Hendry County and Glades County fourth grade students about sugarcane, citrus, and sweet corn crops.

Diné College breaks ground on STEM facility

FROM PRESS RELEASE

TSAILÉ, Ariz. — Diné College officials and community leaders gathered at the Tsailé Campus on Nov. 21 to break ground on a new STEM building designed to transform scientific education for the Navajo Nation. The ceremony marked the start of construction for a modern facility tailored to meet the evolving academic requirements of the college’s science programs.

The project addressed a critical need to upgrade infrastructure installed in the late 1970s. Science classes previously occupied the Gorman Classroom Building, a structure intended initially for general instruction rather than complex scientific inquiry. As the college expanded its offerings to include four-year degrees in lab sciences and a master’s programs in biology, administrators prioritized the creation of a dedicated, versatile laboratory.

“This STEM building has been a long time coming,” said Leon Jackson, director of project operations, capital projects at Diné College. “As our academics evolved, it became evident that makeshift classroom laboratories were not sufficient to meet

the criteria for specific fields of study. We needed a versatile laboratory that meets the demands of various disciplines for research and lab work.”

The design process involved extensive collaboration between college leadership and Dyron Murphy of Dyron Murphy Architects. The planning team visited laboratories at major research institutions, including the University of New Mexico and Arizona State University, to benchmark high academic standards. Murphy worked through 28 iterations of the floor plan to ensure the facility would accommodate everything from introductory courses to advanced microbiological research.

Funding for the project came from the U.S. Department of Education through a Title III grant. Acting President Glennita Haskey emphasized the initiative’s student-centered focus in her remarks.

“It is all about the students. The students are the core of all of this,” Haskey said. “You might use the building next year, but it’s going to be your children and their children who are going to come through these doors and utilize our facility. We’re setting a true foundation here.”



Daniella Hakim

Students from Glades and Hendry counties, including Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School and Ahfachkee School students, watch as U.S. Sugar Corp. representatives grind sugarcane.



Daniella Hakim

Matilda, a dairy heifer.

program allows students to learn about the dairy industry.

“We bring the calves to events like this to help connect the kids who have adopted them to the lessons they’re learning virtually,” Larson added. “This is Matilda and Daphne’s first event.”

The Florida CattleWomen Association participated in Ag-Venture’s pilot program in Collier County. Founded in 1961, the guild has fostered the well-being of the beef industry through education and promotion.

“We appreciate the tribe’s involvement, and it’s important here because of the vital role they’ve played in shaping the cattle industry throughout Florida and the United States,” said Crum.

Education Department offers variety of higher education, workforce experience for tribal members

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Education Department has various programs to help the tribal community with work experience and higher education pursuits. The goal is to grow tribal member participation in the tribe's workforce while assisting in professional growth.

For tribal youth, the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) is a program available for tribal members ages 14-24 who gain experience with paid working internships during spring and summer. Participants gain hands on experience, professional development, and exposure to tribal culture.

For tribal members who want to obtain work experience full time, the Education Department's Work Experience Program (WEP) is available. Requirements for working in WEP are a high school degree or GED. WEP is a two-year program for tribal members to build employability, professional skills, and work history. WEP participants receive mentorship, training, and support while developing teamwork and career readiness.

For tribal members who are college graduates and would like work experience, the Education Department has created the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP). The two-year program prepares college educated tribal members for leadership roles focused on supervision, project management, and strategic leadership. Participants will gain mentorship and career coaching while bolstering their professional and decision-making skills.

"I had a great experience. Miss K. (Kerlande Chrisostome) was very helpful (and) checked in with me weekly," Farrah Peak said. Chrisostome is the Tribal Professional Development Program supervisor.

Peak initially started working in WEP with Buildings and Grounds and eventually merged into ELP after receiving her college degree. After completing ELP, Peak now works as an assistant to Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge.

Carlise Bermudez is another tribal member who started in SWEP in 2018

and eventually merged into WEP this year working full time in Big Cypress for the Department of Conservation which includes forestry, fishing and wildlife.

"I was working with Forestry and Wildlife, and with them, they helped me to get more involved, and I like being outdoors, so I winded up enjoying my time with them," Bermudez said.

Additionally, the Education Department assists tribal members with higher education aspirations such as post high school degrees and certifications utilizing the Billy L. Cypress Scholarship. Throughout the years, the scholarship has benefited the tribal community by having tribal members obtain associate, bachelor, and Ph.D. degrees.

Tribal student Jada Holdiness is pursuing her Ph.D. in Sociology at Florida State University. She praised the tribe's Higher Education program.

"They care not only about my academic success but also about my overall well-being," she said. "Some employees, such as Kajir "Kai" Harriott – who has witnessed my journey firsthand from high school to college – have continued to show nothing but grace and kindness to me and to all their students over the years. Likewise, newer staff members like Jeri Joiner bring a genuine passion for their work and take great pride in supporting us Seminole students. Without the tribe's Higher Education Department, my academic journey would not be as smooth as it has been. They hold high hopes for me, and I hope to make them proud."

Joiner is the program manager in the Higher Education program; Harriott is a student and professional development coach.

"The Higher Education program is designed to assist tribal members with their post-secondary and adult education needs. Our program supports a wide range of students from recent high school graduates to non-traditional adult learners returning to school. Our goal is to ensure that all students successfully complete their educational journeys. We believe in mentoring and advising the whole student, providing guidance and support both academically and personally," Joiner said.

To learn more about the Higher Education programs, contact the Education Department at 954-989-6840.

Big turnout for Immokalee Thanksgiving



Beverly Bidney

Linda Frank, left, and Mary Jane Billie enjoy the atmosphere at the Immokalee Thanksgiving celebration at the Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee Nov. 24.



Beverly Bidney

Big Cypress Councilwomen Mariann Billie and Immokalee Council Liaison Jaime Yzaguirre pose in the ballroom as the Immokalee community arrives for Thanksgiving.



Beverly Bidney

Children were kept busy with arts and crafts activities. Delliah Jimmie shows off her beautifully decorated squirrel.



Beverly Bidney

From left, siblings Nehemiah Posada, Lauren Posada and Lindsey Posada are happy to be together for the community Thanksgiving dinner.



Beverly Bidney

Friends Deloris Alvarez, left, and Louise Osceola arrive in style for the Immokalee community Thanksgiving.



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The Osceola sisters together in the cooking chickee, from left to right, are Jessica, Karie and Marissa Osceola.

Beverly Bidney

Memorial pie sale offers holiday goodies

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

NAPLES — The holidays came to life at the Douglas M. Osceola Jr. third annual memorial pie sale and lunch Nov. 19 thanks to Osceola’s daughters Jessica, Marissa and Karie Osceola. The sale was held at the Juanita Osceola Center in Naples.

Douglas loved pies and he always came around when the sisters baked so he could sample everything. Jessica said he was their best taste tester. The Osceola patriarch passed away three years ago, but the pie baking tradition lives on in his memory.

Jessica manned the tables filled with pies and other home-baked goodies inside the center while Marissa cooked a hearty lunch including spam and tomatoes, chicken wings, hot dogs and guava sofkee with dumplings in the cooking chickee.

Shoppers came in looking for pies for their Thanksgiving tables and also found a selection of pumpkin bread, cookies, granola, jams and cranberry sauce.

Gift baskets were also available and included a Christmas potpourri meant to be simmered on the stove to create that inimitable smell of the holidays. The potpourri included fresh cranberries, star anise, cloves, cinnamon sticks and dried orange slices.

New this year were individual slices of brownies, with or without buttercream frosting, and pumpkin bread. The pies, breads and cookies all freeze well, so they will be fresh for Thanksgiving.

Douglas was a regular contributor to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and the sisters held a fundraiser for the hospital in his honor.



Beverly Bidney

At left, Jessica Osceola helps her sister Marissa Osceola prepare lunch for the community in the Naples cooking chickee.



Beverly Bidney

Jessica Osceola sells pies and other holiday goodies in the Juanita Osceola Center in Naples Nov. 19.

College plans to build Jim Thorpe Center as an act of ‘healing and reclamation’

STAFF REPORT

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Nov. 8 for the Jim Thorpe Center for the Futures of Native Peoples on the campus of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Construction is expected to begin in 2026, according to the school.

According to the college, the center will serve as “a premier educational resource and a global destination for those who wish to explore Indigenous studies and cultures.”

Dickinson announced Oct. 29 that a \$20 million gift from alumnus and philanthropist Samuel G. Rose will be go toward the building of the center. The gift will include the Samuel G. Rose ‘58 Art Gallery, celebrating Indigenous art, at the center.

The center, which the college describes as “a powerful act of healing and reclamation,” will be located near the site of the former Carlisle Indian Industrial School (CIIS), whose dark history more than a century ago included assimilation of Indigenous children and young adults.

“Just a few miles from the former grounds of a place that sought to erase our cultures and identities, the new space will stand as a testament to our strength and thriving presence,” Amanda Cheromiah (KawaiKa-Laguna Pueblo), executive director of the Center for the Futures of Native Peoples (CFNP) and a granddaughter of six CIIS students, said in a press release.

According to Dickinson, the project reflects the school’s work confronting its historical ties to the CIIS, which operated in Carlisle from 1879 to 1918. The college is home to a comprehensive digital archive of CIIS materials and established the CFNP in 2023 in a smaller building with Mellon Foundation support.



Dickinson College

Rendering of the Jim Thorpe Center for Native Peoples.

The center honors legendary Native star athlete Jim Thorpe, a member of the Sac and Fox and Potawatomi Nations, who attended the CIIS. Thorpe won Olympic gold medals, played professional football and baseball, and is often regarded as one of the greatest athletes of all time.

Elgin Jumper's art, a showcase of rebelliousness

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — Elgin Jumper has regrets, but pursuing his passions is not one of them. Jumper is a poet, short story writer, essayist, and an artist. Serving as outlets for Jumper’s advocacy on the preservation of tribal lands and Seminole history, Jumper channels his rebelliousness into both his artwork and writing.

On Nov. 5, Jumper showcased his art at the Dorothy S. Osceola Memorial Library in Hollywood. Students listened to Jumper read from his extensive collection of prose and poetry. “Nightfall,” a series of poems published by the American Native Press Archives and the Sequoyah Research Center at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, was among them.

“This is something that became a part of me,” said Jumper. “It saved my life.”

Paintings from the Seminole artist’s “Colorful Warrior” collection were displayed. The “Nook Exhibit” at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Clewiston at the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation houses the rest of Jumper’s work.

Jumper reflects on his artistic journey, stemming from childhood, surrounded by framed prints and artwork in his home. With

time, Jumper learned there was more to poetry than rhyme and rhythm, and by 2006, after five years of painting, he had explored impressionism and began interweaving both artforms.

“Poetry is a persona or character,” said Jumper. “I just let it take over and allow my imagination to roam. That’s how I see poetry.”

Today, there’s a unique hybridity to Jumper’s work. The audacious voice he channels into his writing also makes its way across each of his canvases; it holds dominion in a series of bold colors and fearless strokes, creating striking images.

Jumper often finds himself venturing into the Everglades and the Big Cypress Reservation, painting landscapes and capturing technicolor sunsets. His work spans both acrylic and oil paints.

“We need more Native artists,” Jumper admits. “I’ve never regretted pursuing the arts. I encourage students to pursue creativity. I wish I had honed it earlier.”

Jumper’s upcoming series of projects will be featured in “How We Got Here,” an anthology set to be released in 2027, and he is currently working on a novel adaptation of his poetry. Jumper is a co-founder of the Florida Indigenous Writers Group, together with Krystle Young Bowers. He is a regular contributor to the Seminole Tribune.



Daniella Hakim (2)

Above, Elgin Jumper is surrounded by his artwork Nov. 5 during a program at the Dorothy S. Osceola Memorial Library. Below, his art on display.



Department of Conservation brings spay and neuter clinic to Big Cypress Reservation

FROM DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

On the Big Cypress Reservation the Department of Conservation (DOC) has taken crucial steps toward enhancing animal welfare and offered pet owners a free spay and neuter clinic. This initiative is not just a preventive measure to control overpopulations, but also part of the tribe’s ongoing commitment to preserving animal health.

Over the years, the community has seen a growing need for spay and neuter services due to a rising number of stray and unwanted pets, particularly dogs and cats. Rural communities often don’t have access to affordable veterinary services. In response to this issue, DOC’s spay and neuter clinic has become an essential resource for local residents, providing much-needed services to prevent the further spread of unwanted litters and reduce the number of animals needing rescue and adoption.

The clinic offered a range of services, primarily focusing on spaying and neutering, but also provides basic veterinary care, like vaccinations. One of the clinic’s main goals is to make these services affordable and accessible to everyone in the community. By offering low-cost and free services within the community, the clinic ensures that pet owners can take preventive measures to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Additionally, the clinic works to educate pet owners about responsible pet ownership, including the importance of regular veterinary care, vaccinations, and the benefits of spaying and neutering.

Spaying and neutering are vital for controlling the pet population, but their benefits go beyond simply reducing numbers.

For pets, these procedures contribute to longer, healthier lives. Spayed females are at lower risk for certain cancers and infections, and neutered males tend to be less aggressive and are less likely to roam or engage in undesirable behaviors like marking territory.

For the community, the benefits are equally significant. Spaying and neutering reduce the number of stray animals, which in turn minimizes the spread of diseases such as rabies and parvovirus. Fewer stray animals also mean less pressure on local animal shelters, which are often overwhelmed by the constant influx of animals in need of care and adoption.

The clinic is part of a broader initiative to work collaboratively with other organizations, such as Cape Coral Animal Shelter (CCAS), for spay and neuter programs. A big thanks to Animal Wildlife Services Officer Albert Rivera who initiated partnering with CCAS to offer the free veterinary services to the tribe.

Looking ahead, DOC hopes to expand its programs to include mobile spay and neuter services for other reservations.



Dept. of Conservation

Spay and neutering clinic.

Fun at Hollywood’s Fall Festival



Calvin Tiger

CBH’s Jonathan Rentler, Amy Bain, Rosa Arce, Stacy Layer, Caitlin Arrigo and Grace Celis do their part to make the Hollywood Fall Festival a festive occasion on Oct. 30.



Calvin Tiger

The Boys & Girls Club’s Ben Stone, Jon Thundercloud, Lexus Barkdoll, Arifa Khan, Ashley Navalo and Sarai Corbie.



Calvin Tiger

Renata Arantes, Alexandra Ellis, Vanessa Hernandez and Selina Aseff.



Calvin Tiger

Culture Language Department’s Francine Osceola, Rubie Osceola and Trisha Osceola.



Calvin Tiger

Yahn Billie.



Calvin Tiger

Melody Jones.



Calvin Tiger

Jalyn Osceola and Kyzen Osceola.

Renewable energy and sustainability conference to be held in January

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — The 8th annual Seminole Tribe of Florida Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference will be held Jan. 26-28, 2026, at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood.

Join tribal leaders, energy experts, and sustainability champions for three days of impactful discussions, innovative solutions, and meaningful collaboration focused on tribal energy development, renewable energy projects, and sustainability initiatives across Native communities. Hotel room reservations at Seminole Hard Rock with a government rate must be booked by Dec. 29.

For registration and more information, visit nativelearningcenter.com or call 954-985-2331.

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The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood is the preferred lodging for conference attendees. Rooms in the conference block are located in the Hard Rock Hotel Tower and are available at the government rate of \$269 per night, inclusive of the resort fee.

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Guitar Hotel debuts new winter wonderland experience

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — Already known for its dazzling light shows, the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Guitar Hotel at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood has become even more festive as it transforms into a winter wonderland.

“Hard Rock the Holidays,” a new family experience with more than two million LED lights and holiday displays on 24 acres in and around the Guitar Hotel pool, runs Nov. 29, 2025, through Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026. It is open to the public.

A special night for tribal members was held Nov. 25.

Twenty themed areas, interactive photo opportunities and a Guitar Hotel light and music show synchronized to holiday classics will be among the highlights. All ages are welcome to enjoy holiday food, drinks, treats and live entertainment.

“Hard Rock the Holidays’ transforms the Guitar Hotel into a dazzling winter wonderland that brings people of all ages together in the spirit of joy and celebration,” said Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, in a statement. “This event is about more than lights and music; it’s about creating meaningful moments for our guests, families, and especially children, whose wonder and excitement remind us what the holiday season is truly about. We’re proud to celebrate and give back to the South Florida community that has supported us for so many years, and to begin a new holiday tradition that families can enjoy for generations to come.”

A sample of some of the displays are:

- Frozen Flame (ice sculptures, arctic scenes)
- Santa’s Celestial Ride (Santa and his reindeer soar across the sky)
- North Pole Passage (tunnel of lights)
- Whimsy Woods (elves and gnomes)
- Glowing Palm Paradise (28 palm trees transformed into a tropical winter escape)



Calvin Tiger

Santa opts for a ride on a guitar rather than reindeer at this display, which is part of the Guitar Hotel’s ‘Hard Rock the Holidays’ family experience at the hotel’s pool areas.

- Penguin Promenade (50 illuminated animal sculptures)

Also featured are six themed islands, a family scavenger hunt and specialty food stations.

For more information and tickets, visit hardrocktheholidays.com or follow @HardRockHolly.



Calvin Tiger

Patrick Doctor gives the thumbs up to the winter wonderland display at the Guitar Hotel on Nov. 25.



Calvin Tiger

Gilbert Guerrero, and Kysleyana Anderson enjoy their stop at Santa Claus’s station.



Calvin Tiger

Tribal Career participants Nicholus Andrews, left, and Dylan Robbins take a photo with Santa helper Alexandra Williams during the Hard Rock the Holidays lightshow.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Bruce Paredes, Sage Motlow and Colton Vazquez enjoy their tour of the ‘Hard Rock the Holidays’ experience.

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Sports



OB Osceola III signs with Florida State University baseball

STAFF REPORT

The Seminole Tribe of Florida's representation on the Florida State University Seminoles sports teams continues to grow.

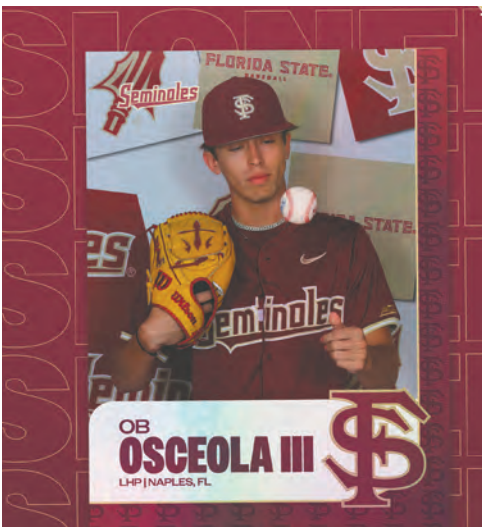
Tribal member and baseball standout OB Osceola III, from Naples, officially signed with FSU on Nov. 12, the initial signing date for many NCAA Division I sports. FSU has been Osceola's choice ever since he verbally committed to FSU in May 2023.

Osceola, from the class of 2026 at St. John Neumann Catholic High School in Naples, is a 6-foot-2, 185-pound left-handed pitcher who also plays outfield. As a junior last season, he played a key role in his first year with Neumann as the team won 20 games and reached the Class 1A regional finals. He previously played at Community

School of Naples. He has played in Perfect Game and USA Baseball tournaments and showcases throughout the country for several years, earning accolades along the way.

The baseball roots run deep in Osceola's family, which includes his grandfather, OB Osceola Sr., who held a record for no hitters at Everglades City High School, and his uncle, the late Harry Billie, who signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates and played in the minor leagues in the 1960s.

Osceola will be joining a growing list of tribal members from the Seminole Tribe of Florida on FSU teams, which currently includes Zae Thomas (football), Xavier Osceola (men's basketball) and Kenna Martinez (wrestling club).



Ahfachkee School resumes sports

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

BIG CYPRESS — For the first time in six years, the Ahfachkee School has sports teams.

Ahfachkee's boys and girls middle school basketball season is scheduled to start Dec. 3 in Davie against Championship Academy of Distinction.

The first game for the coed elementary basketball team is scheduled for Dec. 5 at West Broward in Margate at 4 p.m. followed by the girls middle school game at 5 p.m.

Ahfachkee's home opener for the elementary and middle boys teams is slated for Dec. 8 against A.E.F. at 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.

Dec. 12 and Jan. 7 are other home dates. All schedules are subject to change.

Ahfachkee last had regular team sports in 2019. Creig Freeman, who previously worked for Big Cypress Recreation, was

recently hired as the school's athletics director. He met with about 20 parents Nov. 5 and presented the school's plan to offer sports at the elementary, middle and high school levels. He emphasized the goal of developing a high caliber program and foster a culture of excellence.

Parents expressed support for the return of sports and the opportunity to watch sports in the school's new gymnasium.

As of now, elementary and middle basketball are the only winter sports that have scheduled games. Freeman said he hopes to be able to schedule a few high school boys basketball games. Not enough players signed up for a girls basketball team.

Other sports on the agenda for the remainder of the academic year include archery, girls flag football, kickball, track & field, softball and wrestling. Cross country and volleyball, which are fall sports, could start next summer.

PECS winter sports get underway

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

BRIGHTON — With another undefeated volleyball season in the books, it's time for Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School to shift to winter sports, which means boys and girls basketball, and coed soccer. All teams started their seasons in November.

COED SOCCER

Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School's coed soccer team opened its season Nov. 10 with a hard-fought 5-4 loss at Moore Haven



PECS soccer player Daniel Nunez wins a battle for the ball against Moore Haven.

Middle School. The Estrada brothers – Teo and Miguel – accounted for all of PECS goals (Miguel 3, Teo 1). First half goalkeeper Alakai Bert was sharp between the posts as he made seven saves.

The teams were tied 2-2 at halftime. Moore Haven scored three quick goals to grab a 5-2 lead, but PECS showed plenty of heart and determination to fight back. Late in the game, Miguel Estrada scored twice in about a minute to pull PECS to within one before time ran out.

Teo Estrada was a force all over the field



Kevin Johnson

PECS' Nakoa Smiley rejects a Clewiston player with a clean block in the Seminoles' win.

with scoring chances, throw-ins and even goal kicks.

"They've been playing since they were little. They have a lot of experience," PECS coach Abril Bert said about the brothers.

PECS has 19 players. Its starters against Moore Haven were, at forward, Kahnilyah Billie, Willena Tommie, Bryant Hunsinger and Cody Tommie; at midfield, Ciel Cypress, Kalliope Puente and Cordy Jumper, and in the backfield, Miguel Estrada, Dylanie Peak, Teo Estrada, and goalkeeper Alakai Bert.

Coach Bert, who is in her second year, said she was pleasantly surprised at how well her new players played.

"There are quite a few new players, and they showed me a lot. They did good and they hustled," she said.

Compared to last year's results, Bert was happy that the game was close right until the end.

"That's an improvement. I'm not complaining," she said.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

The Pemayetv Charter School girls basketball team improved to 2-0 with a 46-11 win against Clewiston Middle School on Nov. 13 on the Brighton Reservation.

Kaliyah Hodge and Margaria Fudge led PECS in scoring with 15 points each followed by Dalyse Baker (8), Kanae Jumper (5) and Macayden Sardina (3).

PECS led 19-3 at halftime. Early in the second half, Fudge was especially impressive as she made a steal and layup, hit a free throw and drained a 3-pointer, all within about a minute or so.

Jamelynn Anderson suffered an injury in the first half and was stretchered off the court by Seminole Fire Rescue, but she returned in the second half to help the team finish the win.

BOYS BASKETBALL

The Pemayetv Charter School boys basketball made it a sweep as the Seminoles defeated Clewiston Middle School, 43-15, in the second game on the Brighton Reservation on Nov. 13. PECS upped its record to 2-0.

Silas Snow was a dominating force throughout the game as he poured in a game-high 21 points. Other strong performances came from Nakoa Smiley (9 points), Damahni Bonilla (7 points), Elakaih Collins (2 points), Tyse Osceola (2 points) and Maddox Osceola (2 points).

The Seminoles were in control from the opening tip as they built a 20-0 lead after one quarter.



Kevin Johnson

PECS' Margaria Fudge wins the opening tip against Clewiston on Nov. 13.



Kevin Johnson

PECS boys basketball coach Kamani Smith gives his players a final talk before they defeated Clewiston on Nov. 13.



Kevin Johnson

Dylanie Peak controls the ball for PECS in its game at Moore Haven.



Kevin Johnson

PECS guard Kanae Jumper heads up court with teammate Kaliyah Hodge (4) nearby.



Kevin Johnson

Girls start their sprint in Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School's track and field meet Oct. 30. Races were run throughout the day. Grades 3 through 8 competed in the morning followed by kindergarten, first grade and second grade in the afternoon. The students competed in sprint and distance running, relays, long jump and softball throw. The meet served as a qualifier for the county track meet, which is scheduled to be held Dec. 12 at Okeechobee High School.

And they're off...PECS holds track meet

Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School track & field results (for ages 9 and up) Oct. 30 at Ollie Jones Memorial Park

Ages 9-10 100 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Maverick King 2. Adrian Fonseca 3. Maycen Buck
Girls: 1. Kaillin Coleman 2. Mahala Bishop 3. Kali Jumper

Ages 9-10 200 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Maverick Gabbard 2. Adrian Fonseca 3. Reid Trent
Girls: 1. Azalea Washington 2. Jayda Torres 3. Kali Jumper

Ages 9-10 400 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Jaden Micco 2. Everett Leitner 3. Blayne Osceola
Girls: 1. Azalea Washington 2. Jayda Torres 3. Malleia Alvarez

Ages 9-10 400 Meter Relay

Boys: 1. Reid Trent, Adrian Fonseca, Lennox Bush, Brian Gil 2. Maverick Gabbard, Eli Cummings, Arlo Jackson, Everett Leitner. 3. Kingson Jumper, Blayne Osceola, Eastyn Gopher, Mason Smith
Girls: 1. Rowen Van Houten, Kali Jumper, Ailynn Tommie-Smith, Jayda Torres 2. Azalea Washington, Whiteleigh Huff, Arya Kayda, Maelynn Tommie 3. Mahala Bishop, Aadilyn Castro, Aleigha Smedley, Kailean Jones

Ages 9-10 Softball Throw

Boys: 1. Maverick Gabbard 2. Ellis Gopher 3. Ja'khaza Jones
Girls: 1. Kaillin Coleman 2. Nohea Collins 3. Mahala Bishop

Ages 9-10 Long Jump

Boys: 1. Adrian Fonseca 2. Josiah Smith 3. Eli Williams
Girls: 1. Kali Jumper 2. Azalea Washington 3. Alijah Osceola

Ages 11-12 100 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Asai'ah Fludd 2. Isaac Osceola 3. Samuel Slocum
Girls: 1. Willena Tommie 2. Kalani Billie 3. Kaniyah Billie

Ages 11-12 200 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Isaac Osceola 2. Cody Tommie 3. Asai'ah Fludd
Girls: 1. Willena Tommie 2. Kaniyah Billie 3. Arrow Johns

Ages 11-12 400 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Cody Tommie 2. Jeremy Smith 3. Charlie Julian
Girls: 1. Emery Spencer 2. Kalani Billie 3. Ameliana Osceola

Ages 11-12 400 Meter Relay

Boys: 1. Isaac Osceola, Hendrix Osceola, Wyatt Lafoy, Kih'yon Hodge 2. Samuel Slocum, Kreed Snow, Hatton Chapman, Maycen Buck 3. Drayon Van Houten, Elakai Collins, Charles Julian, Ryker Miller
Girls: 1. Emery Spencer, Willena Tommie, Kaniyah Billie, Kalani Billie 2. Jessa Davis, Claire Randolph, Serenity Bishop, Arrow Johns 3. Nohea Collins, Kaillin Coleman, Lillie Coleman, Alijah Osceola

Ages 11-12 Softball Throw

Boys: 1. Charlie Julian 2. Samuel Slocum 3. Kih'yon Hodge
Girls: 1. Serenity Bishop 2. Ameliana Osceola 3. Javaiah Jones

Ages 11-12 Long Jump

Boys: 1. Isaac Osceola 2. Jeremy Smith 3. Wyatt Lafoy
Girls: 1. Kalani Billie 2. Jessa Davis 3. Willena Tommie

Ages 13-14 100 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Cordey Jumper 2. Maddox Osceola 3. Damahni Bonilla
Girls: 1. Kanae Jumper 2. Kaliyah Hodge 3. Dylanie Peak

Ages 13-14 200 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Silas Snow 2. Cordey Jumper 3. Koah Osceola
Girls: 1. Kaliyah Hodge 2. Dalyse Baker 3. Dylanie Peak

Ages 13-14 1600 Meter Dash

Boys: 1. Silas Snow 2. Alakai Bert 3. Marlin Ottiwell
Girls: 1. Kanae Jumper 2. Dalyse Baker

Ages 13-14 400 Meter Relay

Boys: 1. Silas Snow, Damahni Bonilla, Koah Osceola, Ciel Cypress 2. Cordey Jumper, Parker Branthoover, Maddox Osceola, Bently Osceola
Girls: 1. Kanae Jumper, Dalyse Baker, Kaliyah Hodge, Dylanie Peak

Ages 13-14 Softball Throw

Boys: 1. Nakoa Smiley 2. Damahni Bonilla 3. Brace Miller
Girls: 1. Jaiden Fludd 2. Kaliyah Hodge 3. Macayden Sardina

Ages 13-14 Long Jump

Boys: 1. Silas Snow 2. Cordey Jumper 3. Noah Olivares
Girls: 1. Kanae Jumper 2. Hayden Nunez 3. Dylanie Peak

The top two finishers in each category advance to the county track meet at Okeechobee High School on Dec. 12th.



Kevin Johnson

Jeremiah Ash, right, sprints to the finish line as he finishes first in a 100-meter dash.



Kevin Johnson

Ollie Buck winds up for a long throw in the softball throw competition.



Kevin Johnson

Nia Peak competes in the softball throw competition.



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, Oneisha Tiger, Kalayanita Moore and Haizley Baker proudly hold the ribbons they won.

Greg James makes big impression with Bishop Verot football

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

FORT LAUDERDALE — The Bishop Verot High School football team in Fort Myers received more than just a big offensive lineman when Greg James joined the program for the 2025 season.

James, from the Brighton Reservation, fit in right away and made a significant impact, even if it was for just one season.

“Greg was an incredible addition to our program this year, both on and off the field,” said Bishop Verot head coach Richie Rode. “He added such incredible tangible and intangible value to our team. He is moving back to Moore Haven for next year, so we are going to miss him a great deal.”

After being a prominent starting lineman for Moore Haven for the past couple seasons, James opted to head to the west coast for his junior season and try to gain more experience and exposure playing in Fort Myers for a Class 2A team. He excelled as the team’s starting left tackle, a pivotal position for the protection of quarterbacks.

“Greg was a consistent stud for us this year,” Rode said. “He worked incredibly hard each day at practice, and he was reliable and relentless each game all season. Greg prepared and played at a high level for us week in and week out vs some of the best competition in the state.”

James said he made a good decision to join Bishop Verot.

“I like Verot; I love it. It’s like a big



Kevin Johnson

Bishop Verot offensive lineman Greg James provides blocking during the team’s 22-14 win against Calvary Christian in a Class 2A regional quarterfinal on Nov. 15 in Fort Lauderdale.



Kevin Johnson

Greg James is congratulated by a Bishop Verot coach after helping the offense score a touchdown.

family here,” James said following the team’s loss to Miami Palmetto on Oct. 30.

Playing against strong programs such as Palmetto, Tampa Jesuit, Cardinal Mooney and Venice allowed James to accomplish one of his goals in his junior season: get good film for recruiting purposes. He said he has received some college communication via texts, including from Duke University.

In terms of wins and losses, it was a rollercoaster ride. The team, with a demanding schedule, never won two games in a row but still battled throughout and earned a spot in the 2A playoffs. On Nov. 14, No. 5 seed Bishop Verot pulled off an upset with a 22-14 regional quarterfinal win at No. 4 Calvary Christian in Fort Lauderdale. Bishop Verot was one of only three teams in 2A to win a first round game on the road.

Thanks in part to James and the rest of the offensive line, Bishop Verot dominated the game for the first three quarters. A drive early in the third quarter didn’t result in a touchdown – rather a field goal – but four first downs ate up valuable clock and prevented – or delayed – Calvary from establishing momentum. James had key blocks on a third down and one and a fourth down and three,



Kevin Johnson

Greg James and his teammates on offense watch plays from their game on a screen on the sideline.

Fresh Walters catches 1st TD catch for Youngstown State

STAFF REPORT

Seminole Tribe descendant Fresh Walters caught his first touchdown pass for the Youngstown State (Ohio) football team Oct. 18 in a 40-35 win against Illinois State.

The TD couldn’t have come at a better time as Youngstown trailed 28-26 before Walters, a sophomore wide receiver from Fort Pierce, caught the 53-yard pass with 8:06 left in the game.

The victory ignited a strong surge by Youngstown State, which won five of its last six games and qualified for the FCS playoffs.

Youngstown appeared headed to a comfortable win against Yale in the first round on Nov. 30 as the Vikings built a 35-7 lead at halftime and a 42-14 cushion midway through the third quarter. However, Yale rallied in dramatic fashion and won, 43-42, to end Youngstown State’s season. Walters played in the game, but did not register any stats.

For the season, Walters had eight catches for 101 yards and the one touchdown.



Youngstown State

Youngstown State’s Fresh Walters (13) celebrates with teammates after catching a 53-yard touchdown pass against Illinois State on Oct. 18.

Rez to Rez field trip takes BC, Immokalee campers to water park

STAFF REPORT

NAPLES — Big Cypress and Immokalee recreation departments brought their Thanksgiving campers to the Big Corkscrew Island Regional Park aquatic complex in Naples for a Rez to Rez field trip Nov. 25. It wasn’t the first time the two

recreation departments brought their campers together, they have Rez to Rez activities on a regular basis.

Campers all had to take a swim test before they were set free in the water park’s competition-size pool and diving boards. Non-swimmers enjoyed the water park’s wading pool which has waterfalls and other fun water features.



Beverly Bidney

Zachariah Tigertail appears to be flying as he jumps off the three-meter springboard.



Beverly Bidney

Campers watch as one of their own takes a swim test before being allowed to swim in the large pool Nov. 25 at Big Corkscrew Island Regional Park.



Beverly Bidney

Allie Billie takes the watery plunge.



Beverly Bidney

After jumping off the high diving board, Jacob Tigertail goes into the water feet first.



Beverly Bidney

Evaliah Puentes and Zendaya Quintana enjoy the wading pool and it’s waterfalls.

2025 Rez Rally Results

November 15 on Big Cypress Reservation

1. Tribal Youth 6-11 Male Justin Billie	1. Tribal Youth 6-11 Female Natalie Shaffer
2. La'shawn Pascal	2. Amari Torres
3. Austin Billie	3. Kathy Billie
1. Tribal Youth 12-17 Male David Joe	1. Tribal Youth 12-17 Female Mitchellani Cypress
2. Terrence Robbins	2. Miley Jimmie
3. Joshua Billie	3. Marley Jimmie
1. Tribal Run 18-36 Male Byron Billie Jr	1. Tribal Run 18-36 Female Abigail Tigertail
2. Damion Frank	2. Mailani Perez
3. Brandtley Osceola	3. Cheyenne Kippenberger
1. Tribal Run 37-54 Male Charley Cypress	1. Tribal Run 37-54 Female Cathy Cypress
2. Tyrone Cypress	2. Mercedes Osceola
3. Robert Hill	3. Resha Doctor
1. Tribal Run 55-68 Male Charlie Tiger	1. Tribal Run 55-68 Female Loretta Peterson
2. Patrick Doctor SR	2. Mary Lou Alvarado
3. Stanlo Johns	3. Bonnie Motlow
1. Tribal Run 69+ Male N/A	1. Tribal Run 69+ Female Patty Waldron
2. N/A	2. Helene Buster
	3. Mary Tigertail
1. Tribal Walk 18-36 Male Layne Thomas	1. Tribal Walk 18-36 Female Rosa Urbina
2. Reggie Cypress	2. Robin Sanders
3. Adam MacElroy	3. Tahnia Billie
1. Tribal Walk 37-54 Male Bryan Arledge	1. Tribal Walk 37-54 Female Jessica Billie
2. Nathan Billie	2. Marcia Cypress
3. Mahokin Tiger	3. Cecilia Pequino
1. Tribal Walk 55-68 Male Joe Kippenberger	1. Tribal Walk 55-68 Female Almira Billie
2. Sandy Billie	2. Michele Thomas
3. N/A	3. Diane Snow
1. Tribal Walk 69+ Male N/A	1. Tribal Walk 69+ Female Rose Tiger
2. N/A	2. Shirley Clay
3. N/A	3. N/A
1. Senior 1- Mile 60-74 Male Amos Tiger	1. Senior 1-Mile 60-74 Female Janice Braswell
2. Bryan Youngblood	2. Mahala Madrigal
3. Jonah Cypress	3. Rebecca Martinez
1. Senior 1- Mile 75+ Male Mitchell Cypress	1. Senior 1- Mile 75+ Female Nancy Frank
2. Andrew Bowers	2. Connie Whidden
3. Thomas Billie	3. N/A
1. Stroller Male Tyrek Lasane	1. Stroller Female Stacy Smith
2. Jared McInturff	2. Brydgette Maldonado
3. N/A	3. Alice Billie
1. General Youth 6-11 Male Landon Frank	1. General Youth 6-11 Female Arrow Johns
2. N/A	2. Katelyn Mariscal
3. N/A	3. Zarianna Simmons
1. General Youth 12-17 Male Michael Simmons	1. General Youth 12-17 Female Andri Sigurani
2. N/A	2. Gia Garcia
3. N/A	3. Nayeli Mariscal
1. General Run 18-54 Male Garrett Ricardo	1. General Run 18-54 Female Dinorah Johns
2. Andrea Nocentini	2. Kyra Thomas
3. Anthony De Oleo	3. Kamryn Sigurani
1. General Run 55+ Male Thomas Foss	1. General Run 55+ Female Anna O'Hara
2. Jesus Puente	2. Vonda Allen
3. Paul Connor	3. N/A
1. General Walk 18-54 Male Alexander Vallejo	1. General Walk 18-54 Female Cheyeann Schaeffer
2. Noel Posada	2. Anupa Rahaman
3. Mario Posada	3. Nancy Jimmie
1. General Walk 55+ Male Jonathan Spurlock	1. General Walk 55+ Female Bettielee Johns
2. Robert Peterson	2. Georgeette Smith
3. Mark Jock	3. Maria Galeano
1. Wheelchair Lawanna Osceola/Kathlyn Ojeda	1. Wheelchair Mary Robbins/Makenzie
2. Betty Billie/Natalie Martinez	2. Yvette Jumper/Lakesha
	3. McPhason
1. Jane Billie/Mohayla Billie	1. Dale Grasshopper/Josephine
2. Elbert Snow	2. Grasshopper



From left to right in the receiving line, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. and Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge congratulate Rosa Urbina, of Brighton, who won in her category.



An enthusiastic Immokalee team shows their spirit in the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena after reaching the finish line in the Rez Rally on Nov. 15.



Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. gives two thumbs up as he leaves the Rez Rally starting line.



Cristie Bari and Ana Garcés, of Hollywood, take selfies as they cross the finish line.



Miguel Estrada, left, and Elakaih Collins, of Brighton, cross the finish line with energy to spare.



Byron Billie, of Big Cypress, easily passes some walkers on his way back to the finish line at the rodeo grounds.



Integrative Health operations supervisor and Immokalee health educator Andrea Kuzbyt gives out medals to participants after they crossed the finish line.



From left, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge, Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard congratulate Jonah Cypress, of Big Cypress.

New team for tribe’s Kashlynn Cooper

STAFF REPORT

The Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Kashlynn Cooper, one of the top, young high school girls basketball players in Oklahoma, is her first season on the Bishop McGuinness Catholic School in Oklahoma City. The season starts Dec. 2. Cooper, a 5-foot-9 sophomore guard, previously played for Heritage Hall.



Kashlynn Cooper

Courtesy photo

Tennis stars hit the pickleball court at Hard Rock

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — The center of the pickleball world will be at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on April 15, 2026, at 7 p.m. The Pickleball Slam showdown pits Andre Agassi and James Blake against Genie Bouchard and Anna Leigh Waters. The match will be broadcast on ESPN.

Agassi, Blake and Bouchard are all from the tennis world; Waters is an acclaimed pickleball player.

“I’ve enjoyed the challenge of competing in a new sport and am proud of winning three Pickleball Slams in a row. I’m excited to partner with James and ready to defend my title against Anna Leigh and Genie,” said Agassi, who will for the first time participate in an event under his Agassi Sports Entertainment Corp. banner. “I’ve had the luxury of teaming with Anna Leigh and have been blown away by her skills and commitment to excellence. Facing off against these two great athletes won’t be easy, fortunately, I’ve been playing racket sports longer than they’ve been alive.”

Go to ticketmaster.com for tickets.

Largest fireworks show in SWFL comes to Immokalee

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE — Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee will light up the sky with “Celebration in the Sky,” Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026, at 9 p.m. The fireworks display will be choreographed to lights and a custom soundtrack. Stereo FM, an Orlando-based band, will perform at 8:30 p.m.

Attendees are strongly encouraged to arrive early. Parking at Seminole Casino Hotel will be limited, with clearly identified overflow parking nearby. All ages are welcome and admission is free. Guests should bring their own chairs to the viewing area for the show. Food and beverage options will be available for purchase at the event.

“Celebration in the Sky” is the largest land-based fireworks show in Southwest Florida. The show is produced by Zambelli Fireworks, one of the largest fireworks companies in the world. A traditional outdoor Zambelli Fireworks production is a complete sensory experience unlike anything else! Zambelli’s productions are some of the largest in the world, and their displays include a variety of shells and high-intensity multi-shot devices that awe and inspire.

Magician coming to Hard Rock Tampa

FROM PRESS RELEASE

TAMPA — Magician Lance Burton will perform in Hard Rock Event Center at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa on Sunday, February 1, 2026, at 7 p.m.

For tickets, go to casino.hardrock.com and Ticketmaster.

Burton is widely considered by his peers to be the greatest stage magician of the past century. Born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, he burst onto the national stage on October 28, 1981, by making his first appearance on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.

FSU men to play in Sunrise Dec. 13

STAFF REPORT

The FSU men’s basketball team, which includes freshman guard Xavier Osceola from the Hollywood Reservation, will play in Sunrise on Dec. 13 against UMass. Osceola is not expected to play this season as he redshirts while recovering from an injury.

The Seminoles started the season on a strong note, winning five of their first six games before suffering a lopsided loss on Nov. 28 to Texas A&M which dropped the ‘Noles record to 5-2.

The FSU-UMass game is the opener in the Orange Bowl Classic. Tip is at 12 p.m. at Amara Bank Arena. The University of Florida will face George Washington at 2:30 p.m. For more information go to orangebowl.org.



FSU Athletics

Xavier Osceola works out on an exercise bike at FSU.

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