



Vet check for 4-H animals  
**COMMUNITY 3A**



PECS shares culture in Okeechobee  
**EDUCATION 1B**



Moore Haven girls win 1st district title  
**SPORTS 1C**



# The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

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## Seminole Gaming, Hard Rock make leadership moves

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — Seminole Gaming and Hard Rock International have new leadership at four hotel and casino properties. The following appointments were announced Feb. 20:

- Randy Morton, president of Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood
- Travis Lunn, president of Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa
- Bo Guidry, president of Hard Rock Casino Cincinnati
- Justin Wyborn, senior vice president and general manager of Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas

"Each individual brings exceptional gaming and hospitality experience that will benefit our guests, team members and the local communities we serve," Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, said in a statement.



Randy Morton, president Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood

◆ See LEADERSHIP on page 7A

## Brighton Seminole Princess pageant returns

Hayden Nunez, Avani Smith win crowns

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — The Brighton Seminole Princess pageant returned Feb. 13 after an 11-year hiatus. Fifteen girls competed in the 36th pageant for the title of Miss Brighton Seminole and Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole in front of a crowd of more than 250 at the Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel and Casino event center.

Hayden Nunez won the title of Miss Brighton Seminole Princess and Avani Smith won Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole Princess.

Jaelee Weimann was first runner up and Bobbie Johns-Osceola was second runner up for Miss Brighton Seminole Princess. In the Jr. Miss, Klynn Lawrence was first runner up and Kalliope Puente was second runner up.

Founded in 1979 by Brighton matriarchs Jennie Shore, Lorene Gopher and Louise Gopher, the pageant was a fixture of the Brighton reservation until 2015. Solana Dorgan, Miss Brighton Seminole 1981 and Miss Florida Seminole 1988, ran the pageant for 33 years before stepping down.

"It's a lot of work and I'm glad someone stepped up to keep it going," Dorgan said. "At the casino opening [Feb. 6, 2025] when all the previous princesses, Brighton and Seminole, walked in I thought it would be good to bring it back."

Dorgan wasn't the only one who wanted to bring it back. Jaryaca Baker, Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole 2003, Miss Brighton Seminole 2008 and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole 2011, had the same idea and presented it to Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.

"We feel like this is a very important tradition in our community," Baker said.



Beverly Bidney

Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole Avani Smith, left, and Miss Brighton Seminole Hayden Nunez pose for photos after being crowned Feb. 13 at Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino.

"The girls are able to represent our tribe and bring awareness that we are still here and thriving. It's way past time to bring it back." Former princesses Baker, Wendi Bowers Riley - Miss Brighton Seminole

1989, Brianna Nunez - Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole 2004, Miss Brighton Seminole 2010, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole in 2012 and Miss Florida Seminole in 2014, Dorgan and Charlotte Burgess- Miss Florida Seminole

1987, formed the pageant committee and went to work organizing it quickly.

◆ See BRIGHTON PRINCESS on page 4A

## Brighton Field Day draws large crowds

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — The Brighton reservation was filled with thousands of visitors looking for a good time at the 87th annual Field Day Festival at the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena grounds Feb. 19-22.

Crowds of people spent their time getting a taste, literally and figuratively, of Seminole food, culture, arts and crafts at the festival. Other Native American cultures were also present with their arts and crafts on display and for sale.

The hordes of people took in the PRCA Rodeo, Xtreme Bulls, Freestyle Alligator Wrestling Competition (FAWC), Osceola's Warrior Legacy traditional warfare demonstration, a pow wow hoop dance exhibition and plenty of carnival rides and fare.

Clinton Holt runs the FAWC. They had five wrestlers competing for the top score on

Feb. 20, none of them tribal members.

"We will have two tribal members wrestling next year," Holt said. "They are learning and will be ready by then."

The newly crowned Miss Brighton Seminole Hayden Nunez and Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole Avani Smith attended Field Day Feb. 20 as their first event representing the reservation.

"This is the first time everybody is seeing us," Nunez said. "I'm so excited to meet people."

"I plan to wander around and meet people and shake a lot of hands," added Smith.

Rising country music star Tucker Wetmore performed as the headline attraction Feb. 21. He was presented with a Seminole patchwork jacket by Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.

◆ See FIELD DAY on page 4B



Calvin Tiger (2)

Above, a grand entry welcomes visitors to the Brighton Field Day Festival Feb. 21. Below, Seminole Tribe 4-H youth participate in the festival's parade.



Calvin Tiger

Jaw-dropping alligator wrestling performances wow the crowds at the Brighton Field Day Festival Feb. 21.



# Editorial

## Tribal economic development programs in the federal contracting environment: What they are, and what they are not

• Kevin Alliss

The SBA 8(a) Business Development Program serves as a central tool for Tribal economic development, yet public commentary has revealed significant misunderstandings about why Tribal Nations participate in federal contracting and how they operate within the program. Tribal eligibility for 8(a) is grounded in their political status as sovereign governments, not in race or DEI policy. This distinction has been recognized for generations, by the Constitution, treaties, federal statutes, regulatory frameworks, and landmark Supreme Court decisions such as *Morton v. Mancari*, which affirms that programs benefiting Tribes reflect political relationships, not racial classifications.

Tribal involvement in the 8(a) Program is best understood through the lens of economic development, not workforce development. For decades, research has shown that job-creation programs designed to place Tribal citizens in specific businesses often failed across Indian Country. These models faltered because they assumed Tribal populations, many located in rural or remote regions, could supply the specialized labor required for complex industries. Successful Tribal economic strategies instead focus on generating revenue that supports Tribal government operations, including healthcare, housing, education, cultural preservation, and public safety, rather than tying the success of an enterprise to the number of Tribal members employed in its contracting office.

Accordingly, Tribal 8(a) firms are structured as community-owned corporations whose boards are controlled by Tribal members, ensuring that profits and strategic direction remain in Tribal hands. The presence of non-Native engineers, program managers, or technical specialists does not diminish the Tribal character or compliance of these enterprises. To suggest otherwise misunderstands both the nature of Tribal corporate governance and the purpose Congress envisioned: strengthening Tribal governments by enabling them to establish self-sustaining revenue streams, not requiring that all, or even most, employees within a federal contracting subsidiary be Tribal citizens.

The federal government has never expected Tribal economic development programs to function as workforce programs limited to Native staff, nor has it interpreted non-Native employment as evidence of program misuse. Rather, it has recognized that strong Tribal economies depend on Tribes' ability to participate fully in broader markets, hire the expertise necessary to compete, and reinvest revenues into the well-being of their communities. The ultimate measure of success for Tribal 8(a) participation is the health of the Tribal Nation itself, its governmental stability, services, and long-term economic sovereignty, not the demographics of individual employees performing contract work.

### Executive Compensation and Market Realities

Recent public discourse has also focused on executive compensation within Tribal federal contracting entities. These discussions frequently omit necessary market context. Large federal contractors, including major defense, aerospace, and professional services firms, regularly compensate senior executives at levels reflecting the complexity, compliance demands, and financial risk inherent in federal procurement. High-level executives at such firms commonly receive base salaries in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, even in the millions of dollars, with total compensation reaching significantly higher when bonuses and incentives are included. These compensation levels are not characterized as fraud, waste, or abuse; rather, they are recognized as market-based necessities to attract leadership capable of managing large-scale federal operations.

Tribal contractors operate within the same federal procurement framework. They are governed by the same Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), subject to identical audit standards, responsible for contract performance under the same legal and regulatory obligations, and accountable for delivering high-quality goods and

services to federal agencies. Expecting Tribal enterprises to compete in this environment while compensating executive leadership at materially below-market levels would not serve Tribal communities, federal agencies, or taxpayers. Competitive executive compensation in Tribal enterprises is not an indicator of misuse; it is often a prerequisite for ensuring that the level of expertise required to successfully navigate federal contracting exists within Native-controlled entities. Effective executive leadership supports compliance, audit readiness, risk mitigation, operational scalability, and high-performance contract delivery. These factors directly protect taxpayer dollars and strengthen procurement outcomes.

High compensation within a small Tribal contractor, standing alone, is not fraud, waste, or abuse. It can reflect the legitimate need for experienced leadership capable of overseeing complex portfolios, managing regulatory exposure, and sustaining long-term growth. Sound executive governance in Tribal enterprises enhances, not undermines, program integrity.

It is equally important to reiterate that Native corporations and Tribal 8(a) entities are economic development operations designed to generate revenue streams that support Tribal government services and long-term sovereignty. Their boards of directors are controlled by members of the Native community, ensuring that ownership, oversight, and strategic direction remain firmly in Tribal hands. If compensation practices or resource allocations failed to reflect community priorities, Tribal citizens, who are shareholders and constituents, would be the first to raise concerns with leadership.

Outside commentary that seeks to impose personal preferences regarding executive compensation often misrepresents Tribal contracting programs as workforce development initiatives. Once again, Congress did not require Tribes to operate these enterprises at any specific employment composition or salary level. The legal requirement is ownership and control by the Tribal community through its governing board. Beyond that, Tribal Nations retain sovereign authority to structure their enterprises in a manner that best serves their economic, governmental, and community interests.

In conclusion, measuring the success, legitimacy, or transparency of Native federal contractors by the racial composition of their workforce or the compensation paid to executive leadership fundamentally misses the purpose of Tribal economic development and serves no legitimate role in identifying fraud, waste, or abuse. Federal contracting performance is measured by compliance, quality, cost control, and delivery, not by demographic quotas or externally imposed compensation preferences. To argue that smaller Tribal contractors should pay materially less for executive leadership while managing the same complex federal contracts suggests, implicitly, that the taxpayer dollars entrusted to small business contractors are worth less than those awarded to large firms. That premise is neither sound policy nor consistent with federal procurement principles. Tribal enterprises compete in the same regulated environment, under the same legal standards, and with the same responsibility to safeguard taxpayer funds. Their legitimacy is defined by performance and governance, not by workforce composition or compensation narratives detached from market realities. When viewed through this proper lens, their structure, staffing, and compensation practices align squarely with the federal government's long-standing policy objective: promoting Tribal self-sufficiency and economic sovereignty.

*Kevin J. Alliss is a Forest County Potawatomi Community Member, current President of Thunderbird Strategic LLC, former CEO for the National Congress of American Indians, former Executive Director of the Native American Contractors Association, former Board Chairman of Potawatomi Ventures (formerly known as Potawatomi Business Development Corporation), and current Executive Director of the Native American Aviation Association.*

*This opinion appears on [NativeNewsOnline.net](http://NativeNewsOnline.net).*

## Bonita Springs community dedicates chickee built by Jimmy Wayne Holdiness and crew

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

The 40-foot-by-20-foot chickee built by Jimmy Wayne Holdiness and his crew in December 2025 was dedicated Feb. 19 in a ceremony at the Wonder Gardens attraction in Bonita Springs.

Funding for the chickee was provided by the Rotary Club of Bonita Springs, whose members attended the event along with Holdiness and City of Bonita Springs officials. The chickee will provide a place to hold classes, summer camps, field trips and be a venue for other activities and special events.

Holdiness worked closely with Wonder Gardens and the Rotary Club, which did the groundwork of raising funds, obtaining the permits and taking care of the red tape so he could build the chickee. He said he had a good working relationship with them and thanked the mayor's office and Wonder Gardens president and CEO Neil Anderson during remarks at the dedication.

"I was honored to speak at the dedication," Holdiness said. "I talked about Seminole culture and the significance of chickees. It was a beautiful thing."

The chickee replaces a barn that was destroyed by Hurricane Ian in September 2022.



Courtesy photo

From left to right, Rotary Club of Bonita Springs board chairwoman Dr. Wendy Arsenault, Jimmy Wayne Holdiness, and Wonder Gardens President and CEO Neil Anderson during the chickee dedication ceremony Feb. 19 in Bonita Springs.



Courtesy photo (2)

Above, guests in the chickee at the dedication ceremony. Below, the interior of the chickee set up for the ceremony.



## Clewiston's Sugar Festival takes place March 13-14

STAFF REPORT

CLEWISTON — The annual Clewiston Sugar Festival will be held March

13-14. The annual festival, which dates back to the 1930s, honors Clewiston's sugarcane heritage.

The festival features vendors, amusement rides, classic car show, antique

tractors, vintage train rides, line dance lessons, wildlife and gator shows, and the Miss Sugar Pageant.

Music headliners on March 13 include Zach John King, Yacht Rock Revue and DJ

NuSound. On March 14, Tyler Hubbard, Justin Moore and Niko Moore will perform.

A half-marathon, 10K and 5K race will be held March 14 at 8 a.m. Also, a cornhole tournament will be held March 14 at 10 a.m.

A glow golf tournament, with a John Daly dress up theme, will be held March 12

at Clewiston Golf Course and Country Club with dinner at 6:30 p.m. followed by tee off at 8 p.m. or sundown.

The festival is held in the center of town. For more information go to [clewistonsugarfestival.com](http://clewistonsugarfestival.com).

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# Community



## Vet check as 4-H prepares for show and sale

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**IMMOKALEE** — The Immokalee 4-H hog barn was filled with the sound of squealing pigs as 4-H'ers and their parents got their animals ready for a check-up by a veterinarian Feb. 11.

In preparation for the 4-H show and sale to be held in Brighton March 12-14, all 4-H'ers' animals were checked by a veterinarian in Big Cypress, Brighton, Hollywood and Immokalee in February to gauge the health of the animals.

The veterinarian, Dr. Stephanie Bendall, checked the 18 hogs and three steers being cared for by the Immokalee 4-H youth. She looked for infections, cuts, warts and anything out of the ordinary.

In Immokalee, she found one hog with an infection around its ear tag, which she replaced and treated with antibiotic cream. Another one had conjunctivitis, which required an antibiotic shot. Both hogs voiced their apprehension loudly as the doctor worked.

Additionally, Dr. Bendall removed a steer's horns as easily as cutting a toenail, and gave another steer a dewormer. All the animals were cleared to be in the show.

Bebeyanna Quinones, 15, brought her steer Smokey to the vet check knowing he would have his small horns removed. She has had the steer since May and likes his coloring; brown and black with some orange fur atop his head. She is hoping to win grand champion at the show.

All 4-H'ers learn that raising livestock is a business and they must sell their animals after the show. Smokey is the third steer Quinones has raised.

"It's sad, but you know that's what you have to do at the end of the year," she said.

The kids are responsible for all expenses for their animals, but 4-H helps with the cost of the health certificate and the vet check. This year, 150 kids will present animals at the show, including 20 peewee participants who show small animals.

Siblings Ayden, 16, Shaley, 15, and Izayah Aguilar, 9, have three hogs between them. Aiden has been in 4-H for seven or



At left, veterinarian Dr. Stephanie Bendall removes horns from a steer during the vet check Feb. 11 in Immokalee. At right, 4-H program assistant Sara Whitehead holds the paperwork as Bendall makes notes during the 4H vet check.

Beverly Bidney (2)



Dakota Mariscal

Beverly Bidney



Bebeyanna Quinones

Beverly Bidney

eight years.

"I like the responsibility of 4-H," Aiden said. "It's teaching me how to manage my time."

The Garza brothers, Dylan, 13, and Marcelo, 14, have been raising hogs since they were each around 8 years old, according to their mother Demi Garza.

"They walk them from the pen to the corral and back every day," Garza said. "They have more experience and less fear. Later this year they will get a steer, which is a lot more work. But they will fit it into their daily routine."

Dakota Mariscal, 16, won grand champion for her steer in 2024 and is back this year with her fourth steer. She's been in 4-H for six years. She likes the excitement of the show.

"Raising them is tough at times," she said. "But it's good once you get to know them and walk them."

Ty Martinez, 17, has a steer for the first time. He has learned how to be calm from the steer.

"They are able to feed off your energy," he said. "It's a big responsibility; you have to feed it and train it every day. It's a lot harder than a hog and needs more maintenance. I feel accomplished."



Ty Martinez watches as Demi Garza moves a hog into its pen after being weighed. Two of Garza's sons are raising hogs for the upcoming show and sale.

Beverly Bidney

Martinez feeds his steer twice a day, the pen daily. works to train it to walk on a lead, and cleans

## Brian Zepeda artwork to be displayed at Naples museum

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Although Brian Zepeda is the Council Liaison in Naples, where he tends to the administrative needs of the community, he is also a prolific landscape photographer and beadwork artisan.

Zepeda's photography and beadwork will be on display at the Baker Museum in Naples from March 14 to August 2, along with an exhibition of the renowned landscape photographer Ansel Adams, "Discovering Ansel Adams."

Zepeda's artwork, which will be displayed in a gallery of its own as part of the Ansel Adams exhibit, includes four pieces of beadwork including panel belts, a bag and the first purse he made. There will also be 10 of his photographs displayed, one which was enlarged to cover an entire wall in the gallery.

In addition to the exhibition, Zepeda will hold a portfolio review

for aspiring photographers on March 20 at 5 p.m. The event is free and anyone may sign up for it.

"I'm giving up-and-coming photographers the chance to have their portfolios reviewed by me," Zepeda said. "I'll give them some guidance on how to achieve the vision they want."

This isn't Zepeda's first museum show. Over the last few years, his work has been shown at museums in Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Naples, Oklahoma, Sarasota and Winter Park. His beadwork was also part of "The Art of Seminole Craft" exhibit at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Big Cypress.

For more information about the show and portfolio review, visit the Baker Museum—Naples website.

The Baker Museum is located at 5833 Pelican Bay Boulevard in Naples.



Brian Zepeda

Courtesy photo

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Calvin Tiger

Torin Frank learns how to use a SPD spotlight during an Explorers meeting Feb. 3 in Hollywood.

## Explorers program provides youth with Public Safety experience

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Seminole Public Safety Explorer Program held a meeting Feb. 3 at the Seminole Police Department in Hollywood. The meeting was hosted by SPD Officer Patricia Johnson and Fire Rescue Lieutenant Nicholas Garcia.

Three young tribal members — Hawk Tommie, Torin Frank and Jayleen Frank — explored a police patrol vehicle with Officer Johnson. Part of the learning experience included Explorers filling out a vehicle inspection form while also identifying important parts inside a patrol car.

The Explorers experienced what a typical day is like for a police officer, including inspecting their patrol car before going on the road. Inspections explorers got to see hands on were checking tires, locating a first aid kit inside the vehicle

and checking the exterior of the patrol car for possible damage. During the inspection, Explorers were shown how to use the patrol car spotlight and siren.

"I've been in law enforcement for 16 years, and long before I wore this badge, I was a high school Explorer," Officer Johnson said. "That experience helped shape who I am today. My goal is to give young people real mentorship, hands-on exposure, and a safe place to learn about leadership, responsibility, and service."

Tommie has been in the program for a year. He said he is interested in law enforcement as a potential career choice when he gets older.

Explorer meetings are held twice a month on each reservation and are open to tribal and community members ages 6-19. For more information, contact SPD.



Calvin Tiger

SPD Officer Patricia Johnson and Hawk Tommie inspect a tire on a patrol car.



Calvin Tiger

SPD Officer Patricia Johnson with Explorers, from left to right, Hawk Tommie, Jayleen Frank and Torin Frank.

## Upgrades coming to Hard Rock Atlantic City

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**ATLANTIC CITY, N.J.** — Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City announced Feb. 9 a \$50 million capital improvement plan for 2026 that is already underway. The resort will renovate more than 700 standard guest rooms, over 60 suites, and eight penthouses in the hotel's North Tower, along with refreshing walkways and corridors. The majority of the capital improvement projects are expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

Additionally, the resort will expand its culinary landscape with several new dining concepts that include the anticipated debut

of Sitar, an artfully designed East-Indian restaurant, with modern Indian cuisine, shaped by cultural influences and featuring Boardwalk views. The property will also welcome Philadelphia's beloved Federal Donuts and Chicken, opening this Spring.

To further enhance guests' arrival as they enter the property, upgrades are underway for new carpet installation on the casino floor and second floor corridor. Plus, the addition of 16 electric vehicle chargers have been installed at Rocktane Gas & Wash, and South Tower exterior restorations are also underway.

## ◆ BRIGHTON PRINCESS From page 1A

Cheyenne Kippenberger, Miss Florida Seminole 2018 and Miss Indian World 2019-2021, helped with both days of rehearsals as she prepared for her role as emcee. The backstage helpers during the pageant were Mona Baker and Keyana Nelson.

"I always wanted to bring the pageant back," Councilman Howard said. "The reservation will get recognition and the princesses will be a showcase for the next generations to come. I want to make sure that what we do today is for tomorrow and beyond."

The day before the pageant, the contestants got together to rehearse and get acquainted with each other. At first they seemed timid, but as the day of rehearsals progressed they got more comfortable with each other.

Some parents sat in the event center during rehearsals and commented on their daughters' decisions to join the competition. Lewis and Sarah Gopher are parents of Jr. Miss contestant Kahnyah Billie, 11.

"She wanted to try out and applied at school," Lewis Gopher said. "We always support her; she also plays sports. She watched as her older sister Winnie Gopher competed for Miss Florida Seminole last year."

Dallas and Deanna Nunez are parents of Hayden, 14. Two of their other daughters were princesses. Brianna Nunez was princess four times and Destiny Nunez was Miss Florida Seminole in 2015.

"Hayden wanted to run for it and picked up her application," Dallas Nunez said. "She's very excited about it, as soon as she heard about it she was ready."

Lance Tommie watched his daughter Miranda Tommie, 13, as she rehearsed.

"She saw it as an opportunity," Tommie said. "She's always willing to try new things."

Myra Lawrence is the mother of Kylynn Lawrence, 10.

"She's pretty outgoing and likes to sing," Lawrence said. "I was a contestant before so I'm glad she's doing it. It runs in the family."

Crystal Huff is the mother of Jaelee Weimann, 15.

"She likes to stand up at church and sing, but this is bigger," Huff said. "I'm happy she's doing it. It's a good experience to represent your community and others get to look up to something she has done."

After rehearsal, the contestants went to the senior center for a community dinner and to have individual interviews with the judges. As they waited their turns, the girls spoke to two seniors who had arrived early for the dinner. Juanita Osceola had come to support her granddaughter Jaylee Osceola in the pageant.

"They are all like my granddaughters," added Junie Osceola. "It's good for them to interact with the community and elders. They aren't shy."

### Pageant Day

The contestants began rehearsing a few hours before the main event. Some of the girls said they were nervous knowing all those people in the audience would be staring at them.

"Just picture everybody naked, like in the Shawn Mendes song," Jaelee Weimann said. "Just pull a Shawn Mendes and you'll be fine."

The contestants had many reasons for competing, including Serenity Billie who said she wanted to show that non-clan girls can do big things and try new things.

"I want to give a positive experience to the youth in our community and represent our tribe in a positive way," Avani Smith said. "I want to show our culture and language to everyone, it needs to be shown more."

Before the pageant began, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith went backstage to talk to the contestants and share some advice.

"Just have fun and be yourself, authenticity sells," Smith said. "Don't be nervous, I'll be there in the front row cheering you on. Take your time and just breathe. These memories are going to stick with you forever."

Elected officials spoke before the pageant began.

"It's important that we encourage young ladies to be out there and stand out in front," said President Holly Tiger. "More and more women are in leadership in the tribe. We want [the contestants] to go off, get an education



Beverly Bidney

Contestants during rehearsal day Feb. 12, the day before the pageant.



Beverly Bidney

Hayden Nunez is crowned by Jennie Shore



Beverly Bidney

Contestants with current Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith, the sister of Avani Smith.

and come back because we need them."

"This is not an easy role to take on," said Councilman Howard. "They have to be out there and talk to people. These young women are the future of our tribe. Showcasing our culture is what we do. Tonight is a very special night for our community and these girls are part of history."

Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge thanked Baker and the committee for bringing the pageant back.

"That initiative she took on is important," Board Rep. Arledge said. "It takes a lot of bravery and courage for these

girls to come up on this stage. Thank you for believing in yourselves and thank you to the family members for encouraging them."

"These ladies are the ones who will carry on what we started," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "Ladies, be confident and shine brightly, not only tonight but everywhere you go."

With that, the contestants introduced themselves, modeled traditional clothing, presented their cultural knowledge and talent, and answered impromptu questions.

Winners were announced and Jennie Shore crowned each princess.



Beverly Bidney

Contestants walk on stage and wave to the audience.

# Tribe honors retiring Executive Director of Public Safety John Auer

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — Three members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Tribal Council joined dozens of police and fire personnel Feb. 26 to honor Executive Director of Public Safety John Auer, who is retiring after nearly 20 years working for the tribe.

Under the roof of an outside bay at Seminole Tribe Fire Rescue Station 108 in Hollywood and in front of more than 150 people, including his family, Auer was praised for his dedication and service to the tribe, which started Nov. 13, 2007 and ended March 1, 2026. His tenure included an ascension through the ranks at Seminole Police Department as captain, major, assistant chief, chief and his final role as leader of Public Safety, overseeing Police, Fire Rescue and Emergency Management.

The ceremony was hosted by Assistant Police Chief Anthony Rosa and included the Pledge of Allegiance by Auer's grandson, Hudson Tevini, and the Seminole Preschool Pledge from five Seminole preschoolers.

Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola thanked Auer for his work and wished him well in retirement.

"I'll say this not only for me, as a leader of the tribe, but this is for folks in this tribe, he treated everybody equal, and those are the folks I like working for us," Councilman Howard said.

Councilman Osceola said he had some concerns about how things would operate after Will Latchford, the tribe's previous executive director of Public Safety and police chief, retired in 2023.

"When you came along, John, you



Executive Director of Public Safety John Auer receives a standing ovation during his retirement ceremony Feb. 26 at the Hollywood Fire Rescue station. On the left is Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, to the right are members of Auer's family.

took all the worries away from me," said Councilman Osceola, who praised Auer for his dedication and professionalism and always being there for the tribe.

Other speakers included Emergency Management Director Jeff Maslan, Assistant Police Chief Kevin Tyrie, Seminole Fire Rescue Fire Chief Michael Mackey and Broward County Chiefs of Police Association President Gary Blocker. Chaplain Kendall Kerrigan provided the

invocation and closing prayer.

Auer received a Seminole patchwork jacket from Councilman Osceola, and Seminole patchwork vest from Councilwoman Billie. He also received several other items during the ceremony, including his retirement badge and service weapon, a fire axe and leather fire helmet, a framed display of his uniforms, and a framed display of badges marking each of his ranks within SPD.

"Thank you for your 19 years of dedicated service to the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Your leadership, tireless work effort and professionalism have set the standard for others to follow. We wish you the best in your retirement," reads the display surrounded by the badges and patches in a frame and his dates of employment: November 13, 2007, to March 1, 2026.

Auer's career in law enforcement extends back to 1980. He had a lengthy

career with the Broward County Sheriff's Office, who served in several roles, including detective, sergeant, lieutenant and colonel, before he joined SPD.

Auer received a plaque from the Broward County Chiefs of Police Association that noted "His integrity, professionalism, and leadership have left a lasting impact on law enforcement across Broward County."



With his grandson Hudson Tevini at his side, John Auer receives his retirement badge from Assistant Chief Anthony Rosa.



John Auer receives a congratulations handshake from Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola.



Hollywood Preschool students participate in the opening of the retirement ceremony.



John Auer receives a framed fire axe and leather helmet as gifts from Seminole Tribe Fire Rescue.



Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie presents John Auer with a Seminole vest.

## Comedy comes to Seminole Classic Casino

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Native comedians Tatanka Means and Gilarious Wolf Brown held a comedy show at the Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood Jan. 29-30 leading up to the Seminole Tribal Fair.

Means has appeared in numerous movies and television shows such as "Killers of the Flower Moon", "A Million Ways to Die in The West", "More Than Frybread", "Reservation Dogs", and "The Liberator."

Means was named "Entertainer of The Year" by the National Indian Gaming Association. Means represents the Navajo, Oglala Lakota, Yankton Dakota and Omaha Nations.

Wolf Brown, from the Gila River Indian Community, opened for Means during the two-day event. They shared culturally rich storytelling with the audience which resulted in plenty of laughs during the show.



Seminole Classic Casino General Manager Edward Aguilar, left, and Native comedian Tatanka Means exchange tribal gifts at the Seminole Classic Casino in Hollywood. Aguilar was gifted a Native blanket from Mean's Oglala Lakota Tribe and Aguilar gave Means a Seminole jacket before Mean's comedy show at the Seminole Classic Casino.



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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.

# 8th annual Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference

## The role of tribal historic preservation officers in energy development projects

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Like a vast majority of tribal nations across Indian Country, the Seminole Tribe of Florida (STOF), relies on external energy partners to provide power to its tribal members.

At the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Hollywood, Tina Osceola, executive director of Operations and Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) officer for STOF, was joined by Joseph Nicholas Butler, the tribe's THPO chief data analyst, for an open-ended discussion on the relationship between tribal nations and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers and the significant roles they play in up-and-coming energy development projects.

The National Park Service's Tribal Historic Preservation Program assists tribes in preserving their historic properties and cultural traditions through annual grant funding.

Established in 1990, the grant program emerged from a Congressional report titled "Keepers of the Treasures: Protecting Historic Properties and Cultural Traditions on Indian Lands" that studied tribal preservation needs, providing a foundation for the program and the establishment of two important grant programs that are funded through the Historic Preservation Fund.

While tribes can opt out of participating, as THPOs are not a requirement, those nations that do are assigned coordinators to assist in preservation efforts of tribal historic properties and cultural traditions.

"Although THPOs have been in operation for 30 years, we're still looking to establish a base consultation foundation for folks to work with tribes," said Ira Matt, Senior Advisor of the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO). "So that we can avoid litigation, for the projects to advance."

In 2011, STOF went to litigation against Florida Power and Light (FPL).

The case against Hendry County, McDaniel Reserve Realty Holdings LLC and FPL stemmed from a Hendry County ordinance that permitted the construction of a solar and gas-powered electrical generation plant on 3,127 acres beside the Big Cypress Reservation.

For tribal members, the suit was more about the land, water, and wildlife on property adjacent to tribal land and home to several endangered species, including the Florida panther.

"It's important to note that the litigation

period only lasted about three years," said Osceola. "It wasn't just a war of words. It was more than that. It was an exercise, not just in tribal sovereignty, but how tribes were able to use National Historic Inventory and Evaluation (NIVA) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to defend itself."

Enacted in 1966, Section 106 of the NHPA mandates that federal agencies assess the impact of their actions on historic properties either listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

An evaluation of the land provided by FPL and conducted by Florida archaeologist Bob Carr, revealed a military trail used during the Seminole Wars. Among nearly 30 identified archaeological sites, eight were listed as eligible for the NRHP.

STOF's GIS is a commonly used tool within the tribe to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage and present spatial or geographic data. To mitigate the physical loss of this culturally significant route in the overall Historic Trail Network, STOF's THPO, with the support of Florida Power and Light, created a GIS Story Map and educational video to capture and memorialize the Historic Trail Network.

"This was a creative solution to a problem," said Butler. "We wanted to capture that story, how the tribe has used this landscape for hundreds and thousands of years. We wanted to visualize that story so that it's not forgotten."

"Like all data collection, it doesn't mean anything if you don't provide any context, or storytelling, or visualization," added Butler.

Dr. Valerie J. Grussing, Executive Director of NATHPO, and GIS Coordinator, John Swigart, joined the conference virtually to discuss NATHPO's "LAND" approach. An acronym for Land Area and Name Directory, the database documents the locations of tribally important places, resources essential to their preservation, and tribal cultural resource contacts.

Unlike other directories, LAND will contain only information populated by tribes. Funded by the Inland Oil Spill Program, the beta product is expected to satisfy tribal needs for an emergency response tool in the case of oil spills, flooding, wildfire incidents, and more.

"Right now, I think we just need to remain vigilant," said Osceola. "It doesn't really matter what space you're in. We're remaining vigilant because that's the price to tribal sovereignty."



Joseph Nicholas Butler and Tina Osceola kicked off the session Jan. 26 with additional panelists Dr. Valerie J. Grussing, John Swigart, and Ira L. Matt virtually.

## Chairman Osceola receives 2026 Alliance Legacy Award

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy, Cheri Smith, the CEO and Founder of the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy, presented Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. with the 2026 Alliance Legacy Award.

"Years ago, you understood that clean energy is not simply a trend or a technology," Smith said. "It is a matter of sovereignty. It is about stability for our communities, resilience in the face of climate change, and responsibility to the generations coming behind us."

Under Chairman Osceola's guidance, the tribe has advanced solar-plus-storage projects that are strengthening resilience and reducing costs for tribal communities. On the Brighton Reservation, a \$6.3 million solar and battery storage project is powering critical facilities including the health clinic, administration building, public safety, and veteran's services. On the Big Cypress Reservation, the Seminole Rural Reservation Resiliency Initiative has installed hundreds of kilowatts of solar PV and over 1,500 kilowatt-hours of battery storage to ensure that essential facilities, from the health clinic to the senior center, can stay powered even during outages.

"Because of the example you and the Seminole Tribe of Florida continue



Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. accepts an award from Cheri Smith, president, CEO, and founder of Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy.

to set, more Tribes are imagining what is possible," Smith said. "With this, you now become part of an inspiring group of Native changemakers who are advancing clean energy as a means to care for Mother Earth and improve the lives of their people."

## Navigating the One, Big, Beautiful Bill

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — When the One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act (OB BB) signed into law in July 2025, it raised concerns over the possible omissions of incentives provided to companies, industries, and tribal organizations by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). According to Jonathan Stowers, Cherokee Nation citizen and President and CEO of Green Summit, this is not the case.

At the 8th annual Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference, Stowers introduced attendees to Green Summit and Wipfli, firms who assist tribal governments and housing authorities in navigating today's evolving energy and housing incentive landscape.

The IRA created a broad set of federal energy tax credits, deductions, and rebate programs supporting clean energy, energy efficiency, and electrification across residential, multifamily, commercial, and tribal markets.

The OB BB did not repeal the IRA, but accelerated several federal energy tax incentives. Programs remain available, such as the Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) and the Home Electrification and Appliances (HEAR) Rebate Programs.

The HEAR program proffers rebates on qualifying efficient electrification projects for low-to-moderate income households, while the HOMES program provides formula grants to fund building, buying, and/or providing direct rental assistance to low-income individuals.

"Many of the programs are currently still funded today and will be for a number of years," said Stowers. "Right now, timing and execution are extremely critical to a project's success."

In December 2024, the Department of Energy (DOE), released its final guidance for the HOMES and HEAR IRA rebate programs, establishing the national framework states will use as they roll out their offerings. The guidance outlines how energy savings must be modeled, how income eligibility is certified, how quality assurance will be conducted, and how multifamily projects are



Jonathan Stowers, Cherokee Nation citizen and president and CEO of Green Summit, leads a discussion on the One, Big, Beautiful Bill's impact on the housing incentive landscape.

to be evaluated under the program.

With the federal rules now finalized, states are actively launching their HOMES and HEAR on a rolling basis each week. As states come online, they are publishing their own measure lists, income-verification processes, modeling requirements, and contractor rules. All of these vary significantly from one state to another.

Four states - Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, and Wisconsin - already have HOMES programs operating today. Additional states are moving through approvals and are expected to come online throughout 2026.

"Wipfli and Green Summit, we really work together," said Stowers. "With Wipfli being the backbone administrative and financial side of this partnership, Green Summit is the on-the-ground engineering, doing everything from energy modeling

to certifying buildings. Whatever green building is out there, that's what we do."

Green Summit is a Cherokee-TERO certified company. The consulting partner determines what truly qualifies for these programs, performing audits, inspections, testing, and calibrated energy modeling. Wipfli, a licensed independent CPA firm, applies those results across HOMES, HEAR, and utility programs while managing applications and federal tax filings to ensure accurate outcomes.

"What this is really going to do is benefit tenants by lower energy costs," Stowers added. "Not for a short period of time—this is forever. These will make a serious impact in low-income communities across the country."

## Conference topics include BC, EVs, EPO

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Seminole Tribe of Florida's 8th annual Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference was held at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Hollywood Jan. 26-28. The conference focused on tribal energy sovereignty and included tribes from across the United States and First Nations in Canada.

One topic centered on the tribe's grid resiliency project as part of roadway improvement projects on the Big Cypress Reservation. Planning and Development Director Harvey Rambarath discussed how grants are used to fund specific projects, including roadway projects.

The U.S. Department of Energy has grants for tribal energy projects which include adaptive protection technologies, advanced modeling technologies, fire resistant technologies and fire prevention systems and hardening of power lines, facilities, substations, or other systems.

Aside from grants, Rambarath highlighted two projects that will take place on in Big Cypress: Melaleuca Trail and West Boundary Road. The projects include hardening the electric grid by burying electric lines and adding ground mounted transformers, improved paved roads and an updated drainage system.

Environmental Protection Office Climate Resiliency Officer Jill Horwitz and Assistant Director Krystle Bowers presented the "Energy Security Camp," which showed an overview of what the tribe's Environmental Protection Office does for the tribal communities.

Bowers and Horwitz spoke about the multiple efforts which are underway that the tribal communities benefit from including

external environmental compliance, environmental resources, water resources and the Department of Conservation. They also spoke about the ongoing effort to combat climate change for tribal communities that resulted in the creation of the Climate Resiliency Program in 2020.

Goals of the Climate Resiliency Program include integrate Indigenous values into research, policy and investments, meaningfully engagement with the community, and develop a strategic partnership.

In 2025, the tribe was awarded a Tribal Climate Resiliency Grant that helped the program hire an additional team member, create workshops, tours, active learning environments to bring tribal members and staff together and build a climate action plan. The tribe's first climate action plan will focus on renewable energy and sustainable operations, climate-safe communities, beautiful and heat-resistant communities and food sovereignty.

"EV Charging: Another Reason to Stay and Play" was presented by Oscar Martinez, President and CEO of NovaCharge and Valentino Ramos-Huggins. Martinez showed the annual U.S. market sales for EVs (electric vehicles) by various brands from 2025 versus 2024. He predicted that EVs will eventually be cheaper to manufacture, and batteries will cost less, which will result in EVs costing less for consumers when compared to internal combustion vehicles.

The presentation also discussed the differences between EVs, hybrids, and plug-in hybrids. Martinez addressed the battery size difference in a hybrid or plug-in hybrid when compared to a full electric vehicle. Hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles utilize an electric battery while also using an internal combustion drivetrain. Martinez said different chargers for EVs can be installed



Jill Horwitz, Climate Resiliency Officer, takes the stage and speaks to conference attendees about the tribes effort to combat climate change during their Energy Security Camp presentation at Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference.

on tribal land to assist tribal communities, such as a level two charger or a DC fast charger. These different types of chargers can be installed for various tribal businesses depending on needs and demands. Martinez also spoke about the ongoing evolution of EV technology and the benefits that will help communities transition to more EVs.



Krystle Bowers, Environmental Protection Office assistant director, highlights the multiple initiatives of the EPO during the conference.

Calvin Tiger



Courtesy photos (2)

Above, Seminole Cattlewomen gather together as they make pumpkin frybread for the crowd during the Great Florida Cattle Drive. Standing from left are Bobbie Johns-Osceola, Helene Buster, Cassie Pearce, Wendi Bowers Riley, Michele Thomas, Connie Whidden and Jayleigh Braswell. Seated is head cook Charlotte Burgess.

At right, Brighton cattle owner and former Councilman Andrew J. Bowers Jr. speaks about the Seminole Tribe's long history in cattle.



Courtesy photo

## Seminole participate in Great Florida Cattle Drive

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Native American ancestors of the Seminole Tribe were in the cattle business since the 1500s when Ponce de Leon abandoned his cattle in Florida. Over the centuries, Cowkeeper and other Seminole ancestors took control of the vast herds of cattle and the rest, as they say, is history.

Today, the tribe is a leader in Florida's cattle industry and has a sophisticated operation that has developed genetic lines suited to the state's environment.

But modern life took a step back in time from Jan. 26-31 as hundreds of participants, including Seminole cattlemen and cattlemen, drove a herd of about 500 cattle 80 miles from Yeehaw Junction to Okeechobee during the Great Florida Cattle Drive. The drive, which previously

took place in 1995, 2006, 2016 and 2022, commemorates Florida's historic cattle heritage and traditions.

On Jan. 29, tribal members joined the cattle drive for the day, which ended with a cultural exchange program arranged by the Seminole Cattlewomen Association. At the exchange, all the participants enjoyed traditional pumpkin fry bread made by Charlotte Burgess, listened as former Councilman Andrew Bowers Jr. talked about the tribe's history in cattle, observed alligator wrestling and joined tribal members around the fire to watch a stomp dance.

"The stomp dance demonstration went very well," said Michele Thomas, Seminole Cattlewomen member and one of the organizers of the program. "Folks always love joining in with the Indians for the Friendship Dance."



Courtesy photo

Brighton cattle foreman Jack Turtle at the Great Florida Cattle Drive. At right,



Courtesy photo

Leona Cochran on horseback during the cattle drive.



Tribal members and other cattle drive participants join in a stomp dance around the campfire.



Courtesy photo

From left to right on horseback are Aidan Tommie, Kerwin Miller, Aiyana Tommie, Jack Turtle, Leona Cochran, Jessie Carter and Aponi Cochran. Wendi Bowers Riley, in patchwork, stands in front. They participated in the Great Florida Cattle Drive on Jan. 29.

## Hard Rock's International Women's Month celebration includes \$100K donation

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — As part of International Women's Month, Hard Rock International is holding several special events in March. The celebrations include a goal of 1,000 global live music and special events celebrating women across Hard Rock Cafes, Hotels, Casinos and Live venues.

Hard Rock Heals Foundation, Hard Rock's charitable arm, is donating \$100,000 to Women in Music. The funds will support the organization's education and empowerment efforts for women in the arts.

"While music is our heart, philanthropy is Hard Rock's soul and we are proud to support nonprofit organization Women in Music's commitment to advancing equality, visibility and opportunities for women in the musical arts," Elena Alvarez, senior vice president of Marketing and Brand Partnerships at Seminole Gaming and Hard

Rock International, said in press release.

"Women in Music is proud to partner with Hard Rock Heals to unite our communities around the world in celebration of International Women's Month," said Nicole Barsalona, president of Women in Music. "This year's campaign underscores our shared commitment to championing not only diversity on stage, but also the wide range of roles across the music business—and the women behind the scenes whose work drives our industry forward."

Hard Rock will also offer custom-designed retail merchandise, limited-edition Coca-Cola specialty drinks and food items at participating Hard Rock Cafes, and curated listening experiences at Hard Rock Hotels focusing on female artists. Hard Rock has teamed up with Coca-Cola for a micro-documentary series spotlighting the women making an impact in the music industry.

## LEADERSHIP From page 1A

Morton comes to Hollywood with vast experience in the industry, including a dozen years at Bellagio Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, where he guided the property to AAA Five Diamond awards as its president and COO. He's also worked in leadership roles at Waldorf Astoria Las Vegas, Oak View Group's hotel and casino development in Las Vegas, and served as co-CEO of Foley Entertainment Group, which

owns the Vegas Golden Knights of the NHL.

Lunn will lead the Tampa property with more than 25 years of gaming and hospitality leadership experience, including recently with MGM Resorts International as president and COO for Mandalay Bay, The W, Luxor and Four Seasons. His career path also includes leadership roles at The Borgata Casino, MGM Resorts Southeast Group overseeing Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in Biloxi, Miss.; Gold Strike Casino Resort in Tunica, Miss., and others. The Cincinnati-bound Guidry

worked for the last seven years as president of Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood, where he played a vital role in the property's expansion with the Guitar Hotel and introduction of sports betting, craps and roulette.

Wyborn previously served as president of Hard Rock Casino Cincinnati. He'll handle SVP/GM duties as construction of a Guitar Hotel and transformation of the Hard Rock Las Vegas continues at the former Mirage.

## Supercar Saturdays returns March 14 at Hard Rock

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**HOLLYWOOD** — Supercar Saturdays Florida, a free, family-friendly monthly gathering at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel

and Casino Hollywood, will be held March 14 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. The event features supercars, hypercars, classic cars, and custom vehicles. Attendees can spectate, interact directly with vehicle owners, and

even register their own exotic vehicles to display.

For more information go to [supercarsaturdaysfl.com/](http://supercarsaturdaysfl.com/).

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## Preserving historic glass lantern slides

BY MARIA DMITRIEVA  
Paper Conservator, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum  
and  
BY LAURA DELLO RUSSO  
Collections Manager, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

**BIG CYPRESS** — The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's collection includes a number of historic glass lantern slides ranging from the early to mid-twentieth century. Last year, two additional lantern slides believed to be from the 1940s were donated to the museum. These images were taken by C. Verne Klintworth and generously donated by his grandson, William Powell.

Glass lantern slides are small photographic transparencies on glass that were used for image projection before the advent of modern projectors and film slides.

Widely used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they played an important role in public education, storytelling, and community presentations.

One of the newly donated slides depicts a group of four individuals—three men and a woman—wearing patchwork clothing consistent with the 1940s. The man sitting in the chair is possibly the photographer, C. Verne Klintworth, or a relation of his. The second slide, entitled Seminole Madonna, shows a woman holding a young child, with another child peeking out from behind the woman's skirts. This has become a well-known image, and several copies exist within the museum's collection.

These lantern slides are glass positive photographs produced using a silver-gelatin emulsion on glass, enclosed between two glass plates and originally secured with

adhesive tape around all edges. The images appear to be professionally produced, with Seminole Madonna including a label from the November 1944 issue of *The Commercial Photographer* magazine.

When the slides arrived at the museum, both were in overall fair to poor condition. The glass plates were chipped along the outer edges, as well as having abrasions, surface grime, and debris build-up on both plates. However, no major cracks were observed.

The image layer showed lifting and flaking of the gelatin binder along the lower edge, silver mirroring in darker tonal areas, and embedded surface dust and fingerprints, although the images themselves remained mostly discernible. The original binding tape was brittle and delaminating, with numerous losses. The adhesive had also oxidized to a yellow-brown color and become friable, leaving the glass plates no longer securely held together. Dust and small fragments were present in the space between the plates.

Professional conservation treatment was undertaken to stabilize the objects and prevent further deterioration. Dry surface cleaning was performed using a soft brush



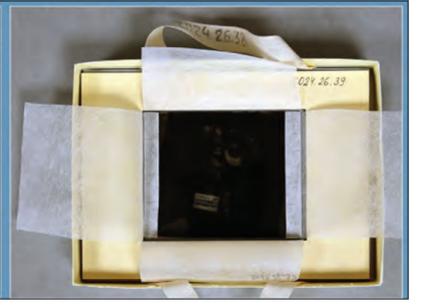
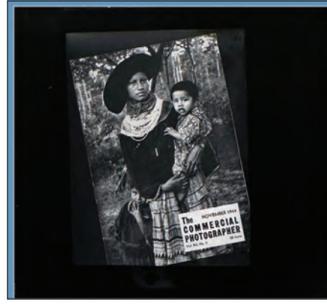
Glass slide and conservation treatment.



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

# SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA AH-TAH-THI-KI MUSEUM

A PLACE TO LEARN, A PLACE TO REMEMBER.



Glass slide and archival housing.

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

and microfiber cloth, and localized dust and debris was reduced with cotton swabs lightly dampened with deionized water and ethanol. The deteriorated binding tape was carefully removed using a spatula and ethanol, allowing the glass plates to be safely separated and the interior surfaces cleaned. The plates were then reassembled and secured using Japanese tissue strips adhered with wheat starch paste, providing a stable and reversible binding. Finally, custom archival housing was created to support the slides and protect them from physical damage and environmental fluctuations.

Following conservation treatment, the glass lantern slides were carefully placed

in the museum's archival vault, ensuring their long-term preservation as both fragile material heritage objects and valuable visual records of Seminole history.

To find out more information about the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's archival collection or the work of the Conservation Lab, please contact Laura Dello Russo, Collections Manager, at lauradellorusso@sentribe.com.

## 'Remaining Native': Running in remembrance of Indigenous survival

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

Kutoven Stevens pictures himself running for his life as his great-grandfather



once did at eight years old.

Stevens's great-grandfather, Franklin, was among hundreds of children who resisted assimilation by running away from federally funded, church-run boarding schools across the United States.

In "Remaining Native," director and first-time feature filmmaker, Paige Bethmann, relates Stevens's coming-of-age story as a 17-year-old Native American navigating dreams of becoming a collegiate athlete while grappling with the history of his ancestor's escape.

On May 27, 2021, the discovery of 215 unmarked graves at a former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia, was released by the Tk'emlups

Courtesy photo  
"Remaining Native"

te Secwépemc First Nation. The deceased children are believed to be as young as three years old.

"When the news broke, it brought up a lot of emotions, especially because of the stories I grew up knowing," Bethmann said. "A friend of mine, who's Paiute, shared an article about Ku and his plans to retrace his great-grandfather's 50-mile escape from the Stewart Indian School in Nevada. I was moved and felt compelled to reach out."

Taught to hone his craft from a young age with the help of his father, Stevens had strong inclinations to broaden his horizons and run for the University of Oregon. Growing up on the Yerington Paiute Reservation in western Nevada, Stevens lacked a formal coach and team. With hardly any Native collegiate runners to look up to, this dream seemed far from attainable.

Upon reaching out to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, a national strategy aimed to increase public awareness and cultivate healing for traumas experienced by Natives resulting from the adoption and implementation of the Boarding School

Policy across the United States in 1869, Bethmann relocated from New York City to Reno, Nevada.

"I wanted to ensure they were on board with me pursuing this film," Bethmann said. "They're on the forefront of advocating for survivors and descendants, and if 'Remaining Native' wasn't in service of the work that they do every day, then I didn't want to do it."

The "She Carries Her House" production, in association with the RandomGood Foundation's "The Denovo Initiative," concluded after nearly four years of filming.

"Production moves at the speed of trust," Bethmann added. "This story, and relationship, was one that I had to be vulnerable for."

Stevens's story is one of resilience and remembrance. "Remaining Native" channels the concept of tapping into ancestral muscle memory, showcasing how Stevens's great-grandfather's tenacious spirit courses through him whilst training on historic land.

"The experience of a boarding school is not something that you talk about," Stevens said. "It's trauma. It hurts. Despite that pain, he became a man of great respect within his community. He was able to love after such an inhumane experience."

The documentary highlights the creation of the Remembrance Run, a 50-mile journey over a course of two days,

retracing the escape route Stevens's great-grandfather attempted numerous times to escape the compulsory boarding school. What started off as an effort towards community involvement has amassed hundreds of Natives and non-Natives from across the United States.

"Nearly 150 people showed up to the first Remembrance Run," Bethmann said. "People traveled from out of state to be there. We had attendees from Denver, Washington, Arizona, and California. This run captured a lot of attention."

Bethmann, a Haudenosaunee Native, is the descendant of a survivor. Her great-grandmother was taken from the St. Regis Mohawk reservation as a young girl and brought to a Catholic boarding school where she suffered physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

"This film is not meant to speak for anyone else's experiences," Bethmann said. "Remaining Native is about how this history is ever-present in our lives today through the eyes of this teenager who's navigating the world as a modern Indian, using the strength of his community to bring him closer to his dreams."

"It's not so much about running, but about creating spaces for healing," Bethmann added.

♦ See NATIVE on page 9A

March 2026

## ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

The distinctive fizzy carbonation and sugary sweet taste of soft drinks make them a refreshing treat that has been enjoyed by children and adults alike for generations. Perhaps the most iconic American soft drink is Coca-Cola, invented in 1886 by Dr. John Stith Pemberton and named by his partner Frank M. Robinson (MOAS).

Like many other soft drinks, Coca-Cola was originally sold in pharmacies and was marketed as a medicinal beverage. Today, it is the most widely consumed soda, both within the U.S. and internationally (World Population Review).



The Coca-Cola Company

Coca-Cola sets itself apart from other soft drinks, using unique branding techniques to make it instantly recognizable among other brands. The classic contoured Coca-Cola bottle design was born from this effort to make the product as easily distinguishable to consumers as possible (The Coca-Cola Company).

By the late 1960s, however, the Coca-Cola Company had branched out from its original bottle and now also began selling their product in aluminum cans, like this month's artifact, pictured below.

Cans with this design were produced through the 1970s and early 1980s. Due to the presence of a bar code on the can — bar codes were not implemented in goods sold in stores until 1974 (Datacor) — we can assume that this can was not produced before this time, making 1974 the earliest year the can could have been produced in. However, it is more likely that the can was produced in the late 1970s, as that is around the time that bar codes started to become more widely used in the production of Coca-Cola cans (Can Museum).

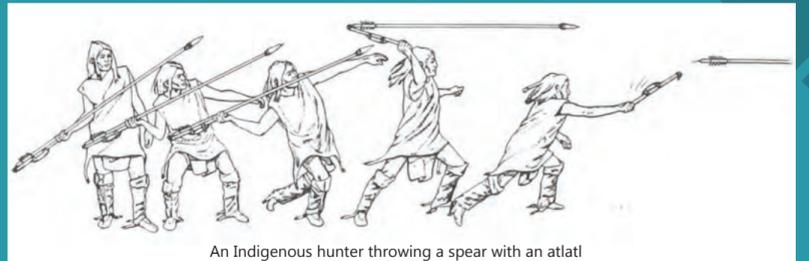


Close-up image of the can showing the bar code

THPO

SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - MARCH 2026

## ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE: THE ATLATL



An Indigenous hunter throwing a spear with an atlatl

The word atlatl comes from Nahuatl, a language of the Mexica (Aztec) people. Though not unique to the Americas, it held great importance for the ancestors as a hunting weapon that helped the ancestors survive and thrive. As a weapon, the atlatl allowed the ancient ancestors to hunt large animals with great effectiveness and efficiency, while permitting them to remain a safe distance from dangerous prey. Despite its English name (spear thrower), the atlatl used flexible darts, rather than spears. The long dart was balanced at the end of the atlatl and launched toward prey. As the dart left the atlatl, force from the thrower's arm was transferred directly to it. The flexibility of the dart allowed it to bend as it flew, which allowed the dart to retain its force over distances. The atlatl increased the accuracy of the dart as well, allowing it to hit targets far more precisely.

By the time colonizers landed in the Americas, the atlatl had largely been replaced by the bow and arrow. However, the atlatl had a very important role for early ancestors by greatly increasing the success of hunting over thousands of years. This innovation contributed directly to the success of later generations of ancestors, laying the foundations upon which great communities were established.



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

Top: An illustration of an Atlatl in action. Illustration by Donald Monkman (1996)  
Bottom: Pan Saltz Caballeratos demonstrating atlatl usage. (2019)



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# Health

## Advocacy and Guardianship profile: Sherlotta Brown

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

National Child Abuse Prevention Month, held each April since 1983, is dedicated to raising awareness of child abuse, creating strong communities to prevent it and promote strong family ties.

The Advocacy and Guardianship Department will hold its annual Blue Ribbon week to commemorate the month with daily activities from April 6 to 10, which culminates with the 11th annual tribal wide community walk and ice cream social.

The core principle of the A&G department is the health and well-being of children. Department services usually begin after someone reports domestic violence, abuse, environmental concerns about the home or just believes a child is being abused or neglected.

The department provides services during a Florida Department of Children and Family Services investigation and after. It offers families opportunities for counseling, mental health evaluation and parenting classes.

Child advocacy supervisor Sherlotta Brown provides oversight and support to the child advocates who work directly with the children and families. She also works with DCF and other outside agencies to ensure Indian Child Welfare Act protocols are being followed with tribal children.

"I collaborate and explain the process to the agencies so they understand the expectations of the tribe and ICWA," said Brown, who works in the Brighton office. "They aren't always familiar with ICWA, so it's an ongoing process to educate them."

Brown also recruits tribal members to be foster parents if a child needs to be placed outside of the home, which will ensure the preservation of tribal culture.

"The goal is to provide child safety and family preservation," Brown said. "If the child must go into foster care, tribal placement is our first priority. If not family, then with a tribal member in their clan or other tribal members."

Brown works closely with the parents to make sure they continue to have a relationship with their child. The advocates act as a liaison between parent and child. If children are removed



Sherlotta Brown

Beverly Bidney

from the home, the department works closely with the parents to make sure they are reunified, if possible.

"We are there when critical decisions need to be made," Brown said. "Everything is always done with the best interest of the child in mind because child safety is paramount."

The A&G department has grown tremendously in the seven years Brown has been working with the tribe. She was a child advocate for two and a half years before becoming supervisor and maintains relationships with those families. Prior to working for the tribe, Brown was a case manager for 13 years at a community partnership in Flagler County.

"It's a big job and as supervisor, I wear many hats," Brown said. "I have a rapport with families in Brighton, Lakeland, Tampa and Fort Pierce and make sure our team is visible at community events."

Brown said the best part of her job is serving the community and making a difference in their lives. "I really love what I do because I get to help people," Brown said. "The tribe is a special group of people and I enjoy working with them."



Calvin Tiger

Renee Tigertail, left, and Anna Howard participate in the "Love Your Heart Walk" Feb. 25.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Lou Italice, Matt Mallo and Daniel Tommie enjoy the morning walk in BC.



Calvin Tiger

Participants in the "Love Your Heart Walk," many wearing red, gather for a photo before heading out onto the trail.

## BC hosts heart healthy walk

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — The tribe's Integrative Health Department conducted a "Love Your Heart Walk" at the Big Cypress Seminole Veterans Memorial Fitness Trail on Feb. 25. Part of the walk included health information for the community consisting of heart health, blood pressure, diabetes,

sodium, physical exercise, and kidney health.

Edna McDuffie, Health Outreach Coordinator and Jamie Diersing, Health Education & Wellness Program Coordinator, assembled a variety of beneficial heart health and exercise information that cover topics such as saturated fats and unsaturated fats to determine which foods are a healthier choice, ways to reduce sodium, reduced sitting time, blood pressure, finding healthy

ways to reduce stress, and protecting your kidneys by getting checked yearly by a health professional.

The event coincided with American Heart Month, a national observance held each February with a mission to increase awareness about cardiovascular disease.

**Child Abuse Prevention Blue Ribbon Week**

**MONDAY - APRIL 6<sup>TH</sup> 2026**  
**KICKS OF AFFIRMATION**  
 WEAR YOUR FAVORITE KICKS AND SHIRTS WITH POSITIVE WORDS OR ADVOCACY MESSAGES

**TUESDAY - APRIL 7<sup>TH</sup> 2026**  
**COZY CARE DAY**  
 WEAR YOUR COZY SOCKS, CARDIGANS, & HOODIES

**WEDNESDAY - APRIL 8<sup>TH</sup> 2026**  
**SUPERHERO DAY**  
 WEAR YOUR FAVORITE SUPERHERO GEAR (COSTUMES ENCOURAGED)

**THURSDAY - APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup> 2026**  
**HATS OFF TO THOSE WHO SERVE**  
 WEAR ANY HAT & YOUR FAVORITE BOOTS

**FRIDAY - APRIL 10<sup>TH</sup> 2026**  
**BLUE OUT: EVERY CHILD MATTERS**  
 WEAR ALL BLUE FOR CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION WALK

TOGETHER WE CAN BUILD A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR OUR TRIBAL CHILDREN AND TRIBAL FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT ADVOCACY & GUARDIANSHIP DEPARTMENT AT 954-965-1338

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**STOP CHILD ABUSE**

**YOUNG VOICES DESERVE BIG PROTECTION**

JOIN US AND WEAR BLUE FOR OUR 11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION COMMUNITY WALK & ICE CREAM SOCIAL

**FRIDAY, APRIL 10<sup>TH</sup> 2026**

**MEET AT:**  
**HOLLYWOOD - BETTY MAE JUMPER CLINIC: 10:00AM**  
**BRIGHTON - TRIBAL OFFICE: 10:00AM**  
**IMMOKALEE - THE GYM: 3:00PM**  
**BIG CYPRESS - THE GYM: 3:00PM**  
**LAKELAND - THE MAIN GATE: 3:00PM**  
**FORT PIERCE - THE COMMUNITY CENTER: 3:00PM**

TOGETHER WE CAN BUILD A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR OUR TRIBAL CHILDREN AND TRIBAL FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT ADVOCACY & GUARDIANSHIP DEPARTMENT AT 954-965-1338

### ◆ NATIVE From page 8A

"Remaining Native" won the Special Jury Award and Audience Award at the SXSW Film and TV Festival last Spring. The documentary received the Special Jury Mention for Cinematography at the 2025 Dallas International Film Festival, the Emerging Documentary Jury Award from the Milwaukee Film Festival, and the Young Cineastes Award at the 2026 Palm Springs International Film Festival.

In conjunction with nationwide screenings of the film, the documentary's widespread appreciation has garnered the support of athletic companies like Nike to sponsor its 5k runs. Over 17 runs have been hosted at select film festivals and community screenings.

With the last Remembrance Run held in 2022 and 2023, the Stevens family, in collaboration with Remaining Native's Impact Campaign, has returned to host this year's Remembrance Run.

Beginning on Aug. 14 at the Yerington Paiute Tribe, the non-competitive journey will consist of overnight camping and storytelling at Sunrise Pass and conclude on Aug. 16 at the Stewart Indian School to honor survivors and the children who never returned home.

"We need more young leaders like Ku," Bethmann said. "My grandmother instated Rochester's first Native American education program to fight against this notion of losing one's identity. I've felt a resurgence to uphold this legacy and lean to it. It's never too late to come back to our communities and surround ourselves with those things that make us who we are."

"My great-grandfather ran back for his family," Stevens said. "He ran back for the love of his people, his culture, and his life. He was running for me."

To attend or host a screening for "Remaining Native" near you, visit remainingnativedocumentary.com.

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# SEMINOLE SCENES



TCD (3)

**HOLLYWOOD HAPPENINGS:** The Hollywood Reservation continues to be busy with major construction projects, all within close proximity of each other. Here are drone photos taken Feb. 18 by Tribal Community Development. Above, the Estates clubhouse and pool are gone, having been demolished to make way for a new community center. Upper right, the new Senior Center continues to take shape. Lower right, an addition to the Betty Mae Jumper Medical Center is being built in the rear of the property.



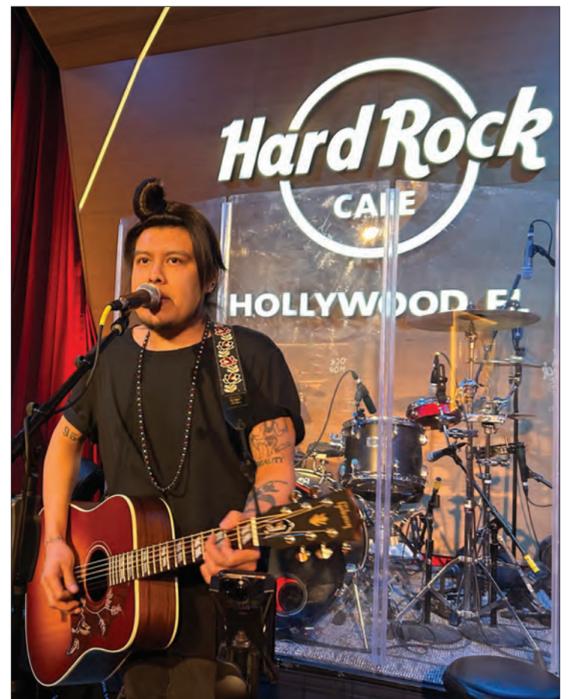
PECS

**HURRICANE HELP:** The Pemayevt Emahavk Charter School Student Council held a fundraiser to help a family in Jamaica affected by Hurricane Melissa. The fundraiser raised \$1,800. Front row, left to right, Student Council members Ariella Gopher, Skyler Smith, Evianna Nunez, Jayda Torres, River Leitner and Messariya Hardy. Middle row, left to right, Student Council members Serenity Bishop, Ianna Cypress, Hayden Nunez and Jaiden Fludd, and PECS Administrative Assistant Michele Thomas. Back row, left to right, Principal Tracy Downing, Student Council sponsor Suraiya Smith, and Lennox Russell, whose family is the recipient of the donation.



Courtesy photo

**FIELD DAY HONOR:** Brighton Councilman Larry Howard presents country music artist Tucker Wetmore, 26, with a Seminole patchwork jacket during Wetmore's concert Feb. 21 at the Brighton Field Day Festival.



NLC

**MORNING ENERGY:** Cameron Osceola, from the Osceola Brothers band, performs during a breakfast gathering at the 8th annual Seminole Tribe of Florida Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference in late January.



Beverly Bidney (center photo), courtesy photos (2)

**RODEO ROUNDUP:** Miss Indian Rodeo Cajun Cleveland (Navajo) was a guest at the Miss Brighton Seminole Princess Pageant in Brighton. She visited with Miss EIRA Mariah Billie (left photo), Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge and Little Miss Chalo Nitka Briella Hall (center photo) and Cheyenne Kippenberger, a former winner of Miss Florida Seminole and Miss Indian World (right photo). Cleveland posted on Facebook: "It was such an honor to be warmly welcomed to the pageant hosted by the Seminole Tribe of Brighton. After a time of hiatus, witnessing the return of this special event was truly inspiring. The pageant beautifully highlighted Seminole traditions, the resilience of the community, and the powerful impact these cultural celebrations continue to have on our youth and future leaders. I am deeply appreciative of the kindness shown by the pageant committee, the council of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and my dear friend who served as Miss Indian World in 2022 for making this visit so meaningful. It was also exciting to reconnect with rodeo family and run into the newly crowned queen of the Eastern Indian Rodeo Association—congratulations on your title and year ahead!"

# NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

## Tribes, plaintiffs ask judge to reject New Mexico's education reform plan

The Public Education Department should throw out its court-ordered plan for remedying inequities in how the majority of public school students in New Mexico are educated and start over. That's what the plaintiffs in the long-running Yazzie/Martinez case told a state judge [in February].

They're asking the court to order PED to consult with experts in Native education, school finance, and other fields, along with tribal governments, to craft a new plan.

Almost all 23 tribes in New Mexico have also formally objected to PED's plan, in resolutions and in letters sent to the judge. The All Pueblo Council of Governors, representing the 19 Pueblos in the state, wrote that the agency did not consult them about it.

In a [Feb. 25] email to New Mexico In Depth, PED spokesperson Martha Pincoff's wrote the agency "rejects the premise that progress is stagnant" and that the plan is insufficient. The plan "builds on measurable momentum already underway," Pincoff's wrote, pointing to investments in structured literacy that have "driven the highest literacy growth in New Mexico's history" and legislative efforts to "achieve similar progress for math and special education."

The plaintiffs, in a 53-page document outlining their objections, argue the plan "provides no credible basis to conclude" that New Mexico "will ever remedy the constitutional violations or extensive deficiencies" identified eight years ago.

The 190-page plan, submitted by the agency in November, doesn't adequately tailor programs to each of the four student groups recognized as "at risk" in the case and doesn't provide cost estimates for the actions it does propose, the plaintiffs wrote.

"Here we are in 2026, still looking for a comprehensive remedial action plan that would address the disparities affecting these four student groups," Melissa Candelaria (San Felipe Pueblo), an attorney for the Yazzie plaintiffs, said in an interview. "And the plan that was submitted is fundamentally deficient."

It's been over a decade since parents and school districts sued the state for failing to provide a sufficient education to Native American students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

A state judge agreed in 2018, but PED never finalized a plan for righting that wrong.

The plaintiffs returned to court in 2024, arguing the agency hadn't complied with the court's previous rulings. Last spring, First Judicial District Court Judge Matthew Wilson ordered the state to develop a "comprehensive remedial action plan" that would give the Legislature and state executive branch guidance, "particularly when making difficult budgetary decisions that need to survive political and economic shifts."

The agency, contracting with two nonprofits, gathered public input through a survey and a dozen meetings around the state before delivering a draft plan last fall, which Native education experts criticized as vague.

The final version "falls woefully short," the Yazzie plaintiffs' legal team wrote to the court last week. The Martinez plaintiffs signed on and filed similar objections.

One of the key points of contention is that PED organized the plan by four general areas for improvement. It should have instead structured it around the four student groups named in the case, with strategies specific to each of them, along with timelines, funding, and who's responsible for those actions, the plaintiffs argue.

"[I]mproving inputs on a universal basis, without deliberate attention to disparate impact, does not close equity gaps and may exacerbate them by further advantaging students already better served by the system," they wrote. To examine the plan, the plaintiffs say they collaborated with experts in special education, teacher preparation, and other fields.

The plan also fails, the plaintiffs wrote, to provide "achievable compliance measures" related to the New Mexico Indian Education Act — meant to ensure Native students receive a tribally-controlled education that relates to their cultures and protects language — and other relevant state statutes.

While it notes the importance of heritage languages broadly, they added, it is "silent as to the linguistic needs of Native students," including language revitalization. The plan doesn't describe, for instance, how PED will work with tribes and Native language experts to develop instructional material, the plaintiffs wrote.

For many advocates, the case is about much more than improving academic outcomes.

"We have an incredible responsibility that we cannot fail, because failure is going to result in language loss that will lead, as the elders teach us, to cultural loss, and when that happens, that will be the end of us," said Regis Pecos, a former governor of Cochiti Pueblo and co-founder of the Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School.

A Navajo Nation Council committee and the Mescalero Apache Tribe passed resolutions rejecting the plan. The Jicarilla Apache Nation and All Pueblo Council of Governors, meanwhile, addressed letters to Wilson, the judge, with the council writing that the plan doesn't incorporate the Tribal Remedy Framework, a roadmap for educating Native children that was endorsed by leadership of every tribe in the state.

Students have "inherited a broken system," with classroom materials that don't reflect them and their communities and teachers who sometimes don't know how

to best support them, said Loretta Trujillo, an educator and the executive director of Transform Education NM.

"So accountability is not blaming students. It's not blaming families," Trujillo said. "It's asking the question, 'How is the systemic design fundamentally not working for our communities in New Mexico?' And this lawsuit really is designed to raise the question and require that the state has to move beyond what is comfortable."

The plaintiffs, in a joint motion last week, asked the court to order PED to go back to the drawing board, arguing its plan is neither comprehensive nor actionable, which is what the judge mandated. The court should also, the motion argues, compel the agency to contract with various experts and meaningfully consult tribes in the development of a new plan with a cost analysis and a five-to-seven-year timeline.

"The Defendants have had ample time and opportunity to remedy the Court's previous orders and ongoing constitutional violations of students' rights through extensive, adequate and meaningful planning and community engagement," the motion reads. "The Defendants have missed their chance to do so."

The state has a little less than 30 days to respond.

- *New Mexico In Depth*

## Washington tribes could get more say in management of state logging lands

Two Washington tribal leaders could soon snag seats on the state's Board of Natural Resources, which guides logging sales and other management decisions for millions of acres of public land.

Sen. Claudia Kauffman, a Democrat from Kent who's the first Native American woman to serve in the state Senate, proposed Senate Bill 5838. [In February], it was voted out of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources. The bill originally called for only one tribal representative to be appointed to the board, but it was changed to two members as it moved through the committee process.

The proposal is backed by Public Lands Commissioner Dave Uptegrove, who chairs the board and leads the Department of Natural Resources. The department requested the legislation.

If enacted, the governor would appoint a tribal representative from each side of the Cascades, bringing the board's membership from six to eight. Eligible tribal members must hold an elected position in a federally recognized tribe whose reservation or treaty-cessed lands are in Washington.

The board approves timber sales, manages conservation land, establishes sustainable forest harvest levels and oversees the sale and exchange of state trust lands. The board's decisions guide the work of the state Department of Natural Resources, which manages about 6 million acres of public land in Washington.

Having stewarded Washington's lands for thousands of years before statehood, supporters say the unique tribal perspectives would benefit the board's decision-making.

"We can't undo the past, but we could create a more just and inclusive future," Uptegrove said in committee testimony.

It's time to stop talking about tapping into Native American knowledge, he added in an interview with the Standard, and to "actually do it."

A handful of the bill's supporters testified at House and Senate hearings. Among them was Bill Iyall, chairman of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and former Tacoma city engineer.

"We're consulted late in the game oftentimes after major decisions are made by the state," Iyall said in an interview. "The bill supports proactive collaboration instead of reactive problem-solving."

"We do as much restoration in southwest Washington as any single entity. We do that out of our own resources," Iyall added.

Critics of the proposal worry that tribal members would sway the board away from timber sales that benefit counties and public schools.

"I've got timber mills that rely on jobs and children who rely on the food that comes from their parents having jobs in those mills," said Sen. Keith Wagoner, R-Sedro Woolley. "You can understand my reticence to put somebody there who might be voting against my district's interest."

Wagoner's concern partially stems from the commissioner's directive to preserve about 77,000 acres of forests, he noted.

"I would not presume how any individual would vote," Uptegrove said during a hearing, responding to Wagoner. "We have timber tribes, non-timber tribes. We have a lot of diversity of views in tribal government."

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe is "in a position where we can economically gain from commercial timber harvests," said Iyall. "Why can't we be a part of that game? We can make it work for everyone as well."

Another concern is that tribal members are not direct beneficiaries of logging sales on state lands, which fund schools and other local government services.

"As the fiduciary of state forest lands, DNR is obligated to act in the county's best interests and no one else's," said Paul Jewell, government relations director of the Washington State Association of Counties.

But Uptegrove insisted the proposal does not change the legal responsibilities of the board.

Seven tribes signed in as pro for the proposal, including the Spokane Tribe of Indians, the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

"We've just done a poor job as a state,

historically, honoring that government-government relationship," said Rep. Chris Stearns, D-Kent, who sponsored a House companion bill.

Last October's Centennial Accord meeting, Stearns noted, started new progress in addressing that issue. During the event, Gov. Bob Ferguson signed an executive order requiring state agencies to create meaningful relationships with tribes and to establish tribal consultation policies.

If the bill is passed and signed by Ferguson, the tribal representatives would serve four-year terms and assume the responsibilities of any other board member.

Currently, the board includes a governor's appointee, the state superintendent of public instruction, the commissioner, the director of the University of Washington's School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, the dean of Washington State University's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences and a representative from a county with state forestlands.

The bill now awaits a Senate floor vote. If enacted, the governor would appoint tribal members to the board by July 1.

"We have vast monoculture forests, quite frankly, because of the past timber and logging practices," said Iyall. "I think if the tribes had more of a voice in it over the last hundred years, we wouldn't be in the position we're in right now."

- *Washington State Standard*

## California Coastal Commission approves transfer of permit violator's property to tribe

In a settlement reached [in February], the California Coastal Commission approved the transfer of a property in Humboldt County with a history of permit violations to Wiyot-area tribes.

Developer Travis Schneider had run up a long list of infractions since beginning construction of his home near Humboldt Bay in 2018. Although planners approved an 8,000 square-foot residence, Schneider's property grew to over 21,000 square feet. A section of the home encroached onto a protected wetland buffer area, and an unauthorized road removed native vegetation.

The county issued a stop-work order in 2021 after becoming aware of the violations, but construction continued.

The land near the site of a historic Wiyot village is culturally important to area tribes, including Blue Lake Rancheria, the Wiyot Tribe, and the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria.

"There is no other known or similar site in the Humboldt Bay region that contains such uniquely well-preserved cultural materials," a California Coastal Commission report stated.

The commission declined to disclose the location or nature of those cultural materials, citing their sensitive nature.

"When the tribe and others alerted the county to the violations, we were met with public displays of racism, threats, accusations — called liars," Wiyot Tribal Administrator Michelle Vassel said during a commission meeting.

After years of negotiation, the commission reached a settlement with Schneider on Feb. 4, ordering the property's transfer to the three Wiyot tribes.

Commission member Caryl Hart celebrated the decision.

"You want to talk about environmental justice, there is no more just result than the one here," she said.

Schneider must also pay a \$400,000 fine and restore the land to its previous condition and fund tribal monitors to observe the process.

"I do feel a sense of, frankly, joy about the outcome," said commission chair Meagan Harmon.

While Schneider's attorney, Brad Johnson, supported the agreement, he pushed back against some of the characterizations made during the commission meeting on the settlement. He noted that an archeologist visited the site and produced a report for local planners and tribes.

"Their report is unequivocal... that the activity did not result in the destruction of any cultural resources on the site and did not result in the destruction of the site's ability to convey cultural significance," Johnson said.

He noted that the home's increase in square footage was due to a second level, with the property's footprint remaining the same as approved.

Schneider has two months to begin the process of transferring the land to a tribal-run nonprofit.

- *Jefferson Public Radio (Oregon/California)*

## US Attorney General endorses call to make tribe repay town in Northwoods roads dispute

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said she's willing to work with a Republican congressman who wants to force a northern Wisconsin tribe to reimburse the town of Lac du Flambeau for payments to access roads.

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, R-Minocqua, first asked Bondi in an August letter to seek compensation for the town in its longstanding dispute with the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

In January 2023, tribal officials placed barricades on four roads after failed negotiations between the tribe, the town of Lac du Flambeau and title companies. The feud stemmed from long-expired easements, or the right to cross someone else's land, on the roads. The tribe eventually reopened them in March that year, but the federal government later sued the town for trespassing on the tribe's behalf.

On Feb. 11, Tiffany raised the issue again with Bondi at a House Judiciary Committee hearing. He reiterated that road closures prompted people to snowmobile across frozen lakes to reach vehicles parked at neighbors' homes and raised concerns about access to emergency services.

"The perpetrators of this, the tribe out there, they demanded compensation from the town. I would call it extortion," Tiffany said. "They ultimately got \$600,000 from the town of Lac du Flambeau."

Tiffany asked Bondi directly if she would investigate the matter and seek compensation.

"We would more than welcome working with you," Bondi said.

The U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment. Tiffany's plea follows a letter sent by the town to the tribe, requesting reimbursement for road access payments.

In a statement, Lac du Flambeau Tribal President John Johnson Sr. fired back at Tiffany, calling the congressman's statements "false and inflammatory."

"To mislead the public by calling the tribe 'perpetrators' is not only irresponsible, it is a direct attack on our sovereignty, our treaty rights and our reputation as a sovereign government," Johnson said.

The tribe said the roads cross land that's held in trust by the federal government for the benefit of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and its members. The tribe maintains the town trespassed on that land for years because it lacked valid easements.

In August, U.S. District Court Judge William Conley rejected that argument and sided with homeowners, saying they have a legal right to access their homes. The judge ordered the four roads must remain open.

The U.S. Department of Justice appealed the decision, but the appeal was withdrawn [in February].

Stephanie Greenaway, a town supervisor, said she had to cross a frozen lake for months to get to her vehicle at another neighbor's home, hauling groceries and other items across the lake.

"I did feel trapped. There was no point where I could just go and ask to be let out of there," Greenaway said. "We had a family emergency. I was told once I left, I could not come back. That is a feeling of not having some access when an emergency struck."

Greenaway said she supports Tiffany's call for an investigation into the \$600,000 that the town paid the tribe.

The tribe said permits granting temporary access were "voluntary and lawful," adding they were designed to protect public safety and offer a temporary solution for the town and homeowners.

"These payments were not extortion, and any claim to the contrary is both inaccurate and inflammatory," the tribe said.

The Lac du Flambeau tribe said it remains committed to protecting its treaty-protected lands and working with government officials "to resolve road and access issues in a manner that respects tribal sovereignty, resident safety, and the legal framework governing Indian lands."

- *Wisconsin Public Radio*

## Atikamekw and Innu leaders file lawsuit over ancestral land rights in Quebec

Nearly 40 Indigenous land guardians, alongside hereditary and traditional chiefs, have filed a lawsuit seeking formal recognition of their rights over a vast stretch of Quebec. Their legal challenge aims to curb industrial logging and ensure the protection of their traditional way of life.

The application, filed in Quebec Superior Court [in February], covers a territory spanning between the St. Lawrence River, the Saint-Maurice River valley and the forested areas of northern Mauricie, according to the document.

The plaintiffs are specifically asking the court to declare all supply guarantees and intervention permits granted to forestry companies null and void.

This legal move follows a summer of tensions marked by numerous blockades across the ancestral lands of several Indigenous nations.

These actions were spearheaded by MAMU First Nation — a collective of land guardians from the Atikamekw and Innu nations — to protest a proposed overhaul of the province's forestry regime.

Although the Coalition Avenir Québec government ultimately abandoned the reform, the plaintiffs decided to go to court.

"There is a lack of trust toward the government. This move is also a warning to other potential land developers, such as mining companies," said Dave Pétiquay, one of the land guardians involved in the claim. He said that since the document was filed, other Innu and Atikamekw chiefs have expressed their interest to join the movement.

Quebec's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests did not respond to a request for comment in time for publication.

The plaintiffs' argument is essentially based on Section 35 of the Constitution Act, which protects ancestral or treaty rights and imposes the duty to consult. The document details the history of the occupation of the Nehirowisiw Aski territory and supports the fact that this occupation is "spiritual, political, and economic in nature," and that it was established long before the arrival of the first European explorers.

- *CBC News (Canada)*

## Michigan lawmakers, tribal leaders question Native boarding school report withheld by the state

In 2022, Michigan commissioned a report on the state's history of Native

boarding schools and the impact of those schools on the state's Native population, but when the over-300-page report was completed, it was not released to the public. On Feb. 26, the House Appropriations General Government Subcommittee heard testimony from the authors of the report and a number of tribal leaders from around the state.

The role of the Attorney General's office in the investigation and the report was a central element of the testimony, as committee Chair Rep. Tom Kuhn (R-Troy) said at the start of the hearing that the office declined to participate in hearings on work projects, including the funding for the report in question, and that the Department of Civil Rights also declined to attend any hearing on the boarding school work project, which he added he has "no doubt that their refusal was at the behest of the Attorney General."

Jo Ann Kauffman, the founder of Kauffman and Associates Incorporated, or KAI, the Washington-based consulting firm that created the report, also said that one challenge in putting it together was "the disconnect between our contractual scope of work and the conflicting verbal directives from those overseeing our work on behalf of the State," especially once the Attorney General's office became involved.

"The AG representatives led the project calls and provided substantive direction to KAI," Kauffman said. "AG representatives gave new directives to KAI to significantly shift and narrow the scope of our study."

She continued that those changes included the removal of an originally planned tribal advisory group and subject matter experts, deletion of references to children being sent to boarding schools outside Michigan and to county involvement, and the removal of the testimony of descendants of those who attended boarding schools.

Kauffman noted that these concerns were also documented in a letter sent to the Attorney General's office, the Department of Civil Rights and the Governor's office in August 2025.

Also in August, Kauffman said, "KAI committed to honoring the tribal feedback and to restoring all items previously omitted at the request of the AG. Needless to say, responding to directives inconsistent with our contract diverted valuable time and undermined the collaborative process vital to producing a quality final report."

In response to the claims from Kuhn, Kimberly Bush, a spokesperson for the Attorney General's office wrote, "It is shameful that Chair Kuhn weaponized his committee and exploited boarding school survivors in an attempt to smear this Department. The Department's only role in this report was that as legal counsel to the Michigan Department of Civil Rights."

Attorney General Dana Nessel also announced in December that her office would begin its own investigation into the impacts of Native boarding schools in Michigan.

"Unlike the spectacle that occurred in today's committee, we will use our victim-centered, investigative approach to learn more," Bush added about the office's investigation. "We welcome the opportunity to speak with survivors' families and supportive networks, and are grateful for everyone who has taken the time to contact our office and to testify before the committee today."

Rep. Will Snyder (D-Muskegon) also raised his own concerns throughout the hearing — about the report itself, not the Attorney General's involvement. He specifically referenced concerns about a lack of sourcing and citations of legal theories in the report, as well as there being no independent review board like a university-run or government-run study would have.

Snyder also referenced concerns about video being included in a promotional trailer in the fall of 2024, to which both Kauffman and Dr. Chesleigh Keene, the firm's vice president for research and evaluation said there was one individual who, after seeing the video recording at a tribal consultation meeting, elected to remove her consent.

"Not only did we honor the request from the tribal member at the consultation, we extended a reconsenting process to all participants in the video testimony, and so in confirming those consent, what we have now are only participants who verified their consent after consultation," Keene said.

But that person, Winnay Wemigwase, tribal chairperson of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, also testified in the hearing.

Wemigwase attended the Holy Childhood of Jesus Indian Boarding School in Michigan, and she is at least the third generation in her family to have attended that school. She described the traumatic experience of attending the school, and how in her nearly two-hour interview for the report, she shared experiences that she has not even spoken to her family about.

Then, she explained, in August 2025, she was preparing for a consultation meeting for the report when she noticed a link to a "trailer."

"There was a couple of other people that were on the video, and then there was me, and on there, I'm talking about sexual abuse that was suffered by myself and my brother, and I had no idea," Wemigwase said.

"The response to that was, well, you signed the consent form," she said about the response when she raised her concerns with being included in the trailer. "Best practices are to continually check in with the people in your study, especially if it's video recording. Yes, you sign that form, but you should also show people the raw footage. You should also show people the edited clips so that they can again reiterate their informed consent. And that did not happen in my case."

- *Michigan Advance*

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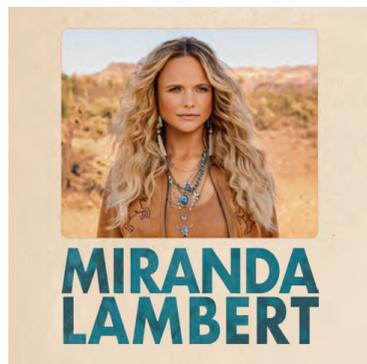
**MARCH 1**  
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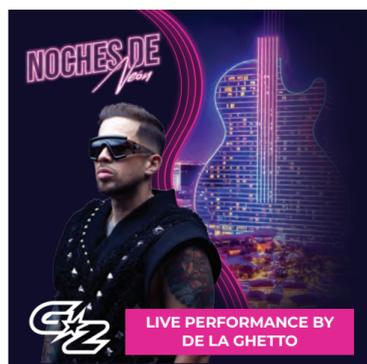
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**HUGH JACKMAN**



**MARCH 12**  
**MIRANDA LAMBERT**



**MARCH 13**  
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HOLLYWOOD, FL

# Education

B

## PECS shares Seminole culture with area 4th graders

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**OKEECHOBEE** — Pemaetv Emahakv Charter School fourth grade students attended a reenactment of the Battle of Okeechobee at the Okeechobee Battlefield Historic State Park.

Fourth graders from throughout the region attended Feb. 27 when the park was open only for students.

The statewide fourth-grade curriculum focuses on Florida's history. PECS added a taste of Seminole culture to the day. PECS students from every grade level set up in a tent and demonstrated their skills in beadwork, basket making, patchwork and frybread as students from area schools saw firsthand what they created.

Eighth grader Cassie Pearce and tenth grader Zoey Bowers made bite-sized frybread for all the students and teachers who came through the tent to see the culture.

"I usually come back every year to help," said Bowers, a PECS alumna who attends Moore Haven Middle High School. "I like cooking."

Culture teacher Taylor Johns explained to the area students which traditional craft each grade level learns as she held up the PECS students' works in progress.

First through fourth graders learn different types of beadwork including loom beading and daisy chains. Fifth graders learn to make the more complex medallions. Sixth graders make sweetgrass baskets, seventh graders make dolls and eighth graders make patchwork.

PECS students Evianna Nunez, Sloan Bowers, Saede Johns, Sarah Randolph and Kalliope Puente sat at a long table working on their individual pieces as crowds of students came through and asked them questions.

"They were very respectful and asked a lot of questions," said fifth grader Sarah Randolph. "They were all astonished that we used real needles."

The students said they liked answering the questions and enjoyed meeting the kids from other schools.

"I hope [PECS students] loved sharing their culture," culture teacher Marilee Johns said. "I hope they had pride showing it and



Beverly Bidney

At left, culture teacher Taylor Johns explains to area fourth graders what aspect of Seminole culture students at PECS learn to master each year. The PECS students worked on their pieces as the other students listened to Johns.



Beverly Bidney

Evianna Nunez works on her project of beading on a loom in the school's tent at the Battle of Okeechobee State Park Feb. 27



Beverly Bidney

Zoey Bowers and Cassie Pearce make enough mini-frybreads for every person who came through the culture tent.



Beverly Bidney

A reenactor of the Battle of Okeechobee, dressed as a U.S. Army soldier, fires his antique gun during the battle.

that they will continue to carry on their traditions."

The day also included the reenactment of the Battle of Okeechobee between the U.S. Army and the Seminoles during the Seminole wars on Dec. 25, 1837. The participants used antique rifles, which didn't always fire when the trigger was pulled.

Apparently, that also happened during the actual battle, which may have helped the Seminoles win the skirmish and get away safely.

PECS and other fourth graders toured the other exhibits which included a U.S. Army camp surgeon who explained the gory details of being injured during that

time period when there were no antibiotics or anesthesia. He held up various tools used for specific tasks, including amputations and retrieving bullets from wounded soldiers. He told the students that the surgical tools were not sterilized and were used repeatedly after being rinsed in water or a creek, along with reused bandages.

At the Seminole reenactor's campsite, they explained how the Seminoles were able to ambush the soldiers by cutting pathways through the woods, which the U.S. soldiers followed. After the battle, in which about 150 U.S. soldiers were killed, the Seminoles retreated down the Loxahatchee River to Lake Okeechobee and home.

## UNITY council adopts 'Healing Trauma & Ending Violence' resolution

FROM UNITY

**PHOENIX** — In January, during the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) Midyear Conference in Phoenix, the National UNITY Council adopted a powerful resolution titled "Restoring Balance: Healing Trauma & Ending Violence in Native Communities." Approved at the National UNITY Council Business Meeting with a quorum present, the resolution establishes a unified, youth-driven framework to address some of the most urgent challenges facing Native youth and communities today.

Representing more than 300 affiliated UNITY youth councils across 34 states, the National UNITY Council serves as the largest and oldest Native youth leadership network in the United States. Grounded in UNITY's mission to foster the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of Native youth, the resolution reflects both lived experience and data-driven insight.

The resolution builds on extensive youth engagement, including the 2025 National UNITY Council Survey, which gathered responses from 836 Native youth. These findings, combined with regional discussions and youth-led deliberations, confirmed the urgency for coordinated, culturally grounded action.

National data cited in the resolution highlights disproportionate challenges faced by Native youth, including elevated rates of substance abuse, suicide, violence, educational inequities, and the enduring impacts of historical and intergenerational trauma linked to boarding schools, relocation policies, and systemic inequities.

Through a collaborative consensus process, the National UNITY Council formally adopted the following Top 10 Issues Facing Native Youth:

- Substance Abuse
- Mental Health Disparities
- Generational Trauma
- Health Disparities
- Lack of Native Representation in Educational Curriculum
- Violence Against Native People
- Bullying and Lateral Violence Within Native Communities
- Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention
- Problems at Home
- High Dropout Rates

From these 10 issues, the executive committee identified two national priorities requiring immediate and sustained focus:

- Generational Trauma
- Violence Against Native People, including MMIP/MMIW/MMIW2S+.

These priorities will guide UNITY's national advocacy, leadership training curriculum, and program initiatives throughout the coming year.

## Brighton Field Day Festival educates students

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — Hundreds of students came from near and far to attend the annual Brighton Field Day Festival Feb. 20.

Pemaetv Emahakv Charter School students attended the festival Feb. 20 and participated in the parade on Feb. 21. Students from the volleyball team, basketball players, student council representatives and safety patrol/crime watch members waved to the crowd as they entered the amphitheater to the sound of cheers.

"They were doing more than participating in a parade," wrote principal Tracy Downing in an email. "They were representing excellence, discipline and the

strength of our community. We have students march because recognition matters. When young people see their hard work honored publicly, it reinforces that effort, discipline and commitment are valued."

A group of PECS kindergarten students attended the festival with their teachers, who wanted them to experience everything at the festival.

"A lot of them have been here before," said teacher Amber Kelly. "They are so excited about the alligator wrestling and the rodeo."

Somerset Academy, from Port St. Lucie, brought its entire third grade to the festival for the first time.

"We don't know what to expect," said teacher Michele Ingram. "It's exciting for



Beverly Bidney

PECS kindergarteners are ready to explore Brighton Field Day with their teachers on Feb. 20.



Beverly Bidney

Students from schools around the region fill the amphitheater stands as they watch the Grand Entry Feb. 20.

them to see a different culture and get a perspective other than the city life they know."

Yearling Middle School in Okeechobee brought about 300 students to learn about the tribe's culture.

Acreage Pines Elementary in Loxahatchee was represented by about 50 second graders, who all seemed to love being

at the festival. It was their first experience with the Seminole Tribe and most had never been to a rodeo before. The students also said they were most impressed with the snakes, alligator wrestling, the rodeo and shopping.

"I hope they learn about the different culture, traditions and food other than what we are used to," said teacher Dawn Chapman.

## HistoryMiami's digitization includes Seminole and Miccosukee artifacts

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

**MIAMI** — For more than 80 years, HistoryMiami Museum (HMM) has shared South Florida's stories. Among Miami's chronicles is history of the Seminoles.

Through the support of the John. S and James L. Knight Foundation, alongside Patricia West's generous donation of materials, HistoryMiami published hundreds of digitized records of Seminole and Miccosukee artifacts.

Operating one of the largest private, regional history organizations in the southeastern United States, its collections include more than 37,000 three-dimensional artifacts; its Archives and Research Center collection includes more than two million images. In conjunction with the museum's core exhibition, "Tropical Dreams: A People's History of South Florida," the museum composes and offers a wide-array of

temporary exhibitions each year, such as the "Yakne Seminoli" exhibition in partnership with the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on the Big Cypress Reservation.

"We've been collecting since the 40s," HMM's Director of Collections, Adriana Jaen Millares said. "We've received donations of Seminole material since."

Upon acquiring the adequate resources and funding from the Knight Foundation for digitization, it took the museum nearly five years to complete.

♦ See DIGITIZATION on page 3B



HistoryMiami

HistoryMiami's Object Collection includes Seminole dolls. Covered in palmetto fibers, this doll features a man on horseback. The date in which it originated is unknown.

# PECS honors outstanding employees

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School in Brighton honored its teachers and employees of the year at a community meeting Feb. 3. Teacher of the Year Nicole Platt, Employee of the Year Jena Spencer and Culture Employee of the Year Melanie Jones were recognized at the meeting by Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.

PECS principal Tracy Downing made remarks about each of the winners and said first grade teacher Platt “creates a classroom environment that is warm, structured and joyful where every child feels safe, valued and encouraged to take risks and grow.”

“Because of Mrs. Platt, our students build strong academic skills, confidence and a love of learning that will stay with them for years to come,” Downing said.

Downing said middle school is a time of growth, challenge and transition and seventh and eighth grade paraprofessional Spencer is a constant source of stability and support for the students.

“Her presence makes our school a better place,” Downing said. “She reminds us that the work done behind the scenes is just as important as what happens at the front of the classroom, and that relationships are at the heart of student success.”

Culture Employee of the Year Jones is committed to uplifting and preserving the culture, heritage, history and values of the Seminole Tribe, Downing noted.



From left to right, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, PECS Culture Employee of the Year Melanie Jones, Teacher of the Year Nicole Platt, Principal Tracy Downing and Administrative Assistant Michele Thomas at the Brighton Community Meeting Feb. 3.

“Through her actions, her words and her dedication, [Jones] helps ensure that culture is not something we only talk about-but something we live, honor and pass on to the next generation,” Downing said. “She

reminds them that their identity is something to be celebrated and that their culture and history are sources of strength.”



Kevin Johnson

Students at the Hollywood Preschool welcomed a special guest Feb. 26. Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie spent part of the morning reading to about 50 students as part of the Broward Read for the Record program which unites thousands of children and adults across Broward County to read the same book on the same day. The book read by Board Rep. Tommie was “See Marcus Grow” by Marcus Bridgewater.

## Board Rep. Tommie reads to preschoolers



Kevin Johnson (3)

Above and below, Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie is joined by classes at Hollywood Preschool after his reading of “See Marcus Grow.”



# NAAF and IFAI discuss tribal agriculture

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

From policy innovation to on-the-ground investments, Tribal agriculture is experiencing renewed momentum and setting standards for the future of the industry.

Moderated by Mark Trahan, the Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) and Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative (IFAI) hosted a panel on Feb.19 to discuss how Tribal agricultural investments are strengthening food systems and rural economies while shaping national conversations about agriculture, land stewardship, and sovereignty.

“Agriculture touches every single one of us,” Trahan said. “We all eat; we all depend on land, water, and the people who grow and produce our food to make everyday life possible. Whether we think about it or not, food connects us to place, to community, and to each other.”

Established in 2018 as a result of 1999’s Keepseagle v. Vilsack litigation settlement, NAAF is a private, charitable trust with a mission to empower Native and rural communities with the knowledge, resources, and support to foster robust agricultural practices, resilience, and economic self-sufficiency.

Trahan was joined by NAAF CEO Toni Stanger-McLaughlin, IFAI Executive Director Carly Griffith Hotvedt, Principal Chief of Osage Nation Geoffrey Standing Bear, and Skoden Farm Founder and Fort Lewis College student Kiera McCabe.

A decade ago, IFAI launched the Model Tribal Food and Agriculture Code Project, providing tribes with a comprehensive set of laws to adopt and start their own department of agriculture. These model laws have given tribal governments the opportunity and structure to exercise sovereignty and food security within their regions and homelands.

“Federal funding that has come through is now being pushed towards states,” McLaughlin said. “It’s very timely that tribes step into this place.”

With the mission to enhance the health and wellness of Tribal communities by advancing healthy food systems, diversified economic development, and cultural food traditions while monitoring federal regulations, IFAI and NAAF continue to work together to strengthen tribal food sovereignty and agricultural governance.

“Tribal Departments of Agriculture exist to prioritize and put forth the will of the people through the tribal governance structure,” Hotvedt said. “The intent is to get in the driver’s seat and take control of each tribe’s food sovereignty practices by incorporating those cultural practices and traditionally relevant food systems.”

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, “638” for short, empowers federally recognized tribes to manage federal programs and services. Since its enactment, “638” only allows tribes to enter into two main types of agreements: self-determination contracts or self-governance compacts.

Among the programs under “638”,

the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) is a self-determination demonstration project that provides U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) foods to income-eligible households on Indian reservations and to Native American households residing in designated areas near reservations or in Oklahoma.

This “638” demonstration project was made possible by the 2018 Farm Bill, thus allowing Tribes to purchase food products directly for the FDPIR. Participating Tribes are able to select one or more foods to procure for inclusion in the food package, establish contracts with vendors for the selected foods, and distribute the tribally acquired foods alongside other USDA-provided foods.

“We see a lot of tribes are having better access to federal programs without having to go through a state,” Hotvedt said. “These programs support sourcing opportunities, which many tribes used to self-source. We’ve seen tribes that have brought on meat processing facilities where they’re able to grow, raise, harvest, package, and deliver foods that have been completely sourced on reservation to the people that are participating in that program.”

NAAF, IFAI, and Tribal Departments of Agriculture are working to expand tribal access to federal food assistance, while supporting the permanent expansion of “638” into the USDA.

“We cannot be truly sovereign unless we are food sovereign,” Hotvedt said.

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum Presents

# Earth Day

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## Larry Pemberton Jr. becomes first Native American elected to CT General Assembly

BY CHRIS POLANSKY  
Connecticut Public Radio

Larry Pemberton Jr. was sworn into office in the chamber of the Connecticut House of Representatives [in January], becoming the first Native American elected to the state’s General Assembly.

Pemberton, a Democrat representing the 139th House district of Norwich, Ledyard and Montville, is a member of the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation.

“It’s an exciting day of celebration,” said Lawrence Wilson III, chairman of the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation. “We have a tribal member who is an elected representative now here in Hartford in the Norwich district, the first American Indian to occupy one of these seats after so many years.”

“I was very pleased that our tribal family was here, but so were the other state-recognized and federally recognized tribes: Mashantucket and Mohegan, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill joined with us to celebrate the newest addition to this body,” Wilson said.

Pemberton’s swearing-in ceremony featured an honor song performed by Native drummers and remarks from House Speaker Matt Ritter, House Minority Leader Vincent Candelora, and House Majority Leader Jason Rojas.

“You are making history,” Rojas said to Pemberton. “Your ancestors were here before there was a state government, and I think that’s really important to acknowledge.”

Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Chairman Rodney Butler also gave remarks.

“To walk into a building that has a depiction of the burning of a Pequot village, and to stand here on this stage in this moment with a Pequot elected to the office of state representative, it’s historic and monumental,” Butler said.

Shortly after his swearing-in, Pemberton told Connecticut Public he feels a “weight” in being the first Native American elected to the Assembly.

“I feel like a lot of eyes are on me, and I feel like I’ve got to do good work,” Pemberton said. “My tribal families across the state, we’ve really had no support in here, really, and I think it’s a major move forward for us. I just look forward to doing the work for the 139th District and my tribal families, as well.”

Pemberton fills a seat left vacant following the death of Rep. Kevin Ryan. He said his main priority in the House will be issues of affordability.

Connecticut State Historian Andy Horowitz said he attended Pemberton’s swearing-in Wednesday because he wanted to witness history.



CT Public Radio

Larry Pemberton Jr.

“I think people have a sense in the United States and in Connecticut that progress can happen on its own, that just because a certain amount of time has passed, a good thing will necessarily come,” Horowitz said. “That’s just not true. The arc of history doesn’t bend on its own.”

“Change is possible,” Horowitz said. “This is a centuries-long struggle on behalf of the Pequots and Native people in Connecticut, but also on behalf of the voters of Connecticut to come to have a wider sense of who we are as Connecticut, and to know that it can include elected representatives from the Pequot Tribe and other Native tribes.”

# Hard Rock to build casino, hotel in Puerto Rico

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Hard Rock International and three other companies are partnering to build the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino San Juan in Puerto Rico.

In a Feb. 5 press release, the companies detailed the \$850 million project, which is expected to start construction in mid-2026 and open in 2029. The other companies involved are real estate developer The Interfin Companies, and Miska Hospitality and Stonecrest Investment Management, both based in Puerto Rico. The property will be designed by Klai Juba Wald and CMA Architects.

According to the release, the destination and residence project “will honor the rich soul and rhythm of San Juan” and the design “will be inspired by the island’s cultural and musical heritage, integrating beautiful work from community artists.”

The project, which is expected to create more than 2,500 direct construction jobs and 1,250 permanent team member jobs, received blessings from local officials.

“The launch in San Juan of the first hotel, casino, and residential complex by the prestigious firm Hard Rock International, with construction set to begin mid-year, opens a world of possibilities for economic

development,” Puerto Rico Governor Jennifer Gonzalez-Colon said.

“We welcome Hard Rock International’s first hotel project in Puerto Rico as a significant milestone for our tourism industry, strengthening our lodging portfolio through the addition of new hotel room inventory, supporting job creation, and enhancing the island’s visitor experience while elevating a strategically located area near the cruise ports and historic Old San Juan, and supporting the island’s long-term destination growth,” said Williamette Robles Cancel, executive director of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company.

The venue will feature about 415 rooms, 58 suites, 186 branded residences and offer views of San Juan Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

The property will feature dining, a Rock Spa, fitness center, three terrace-level pools and kids areas. Also featured will be event venues, a recording studio and local memorabilia.

“Music is at the heart of both Hard Rock and Puerto Rico, making this a perfect union,” Jeff Hook, chief operating officer at Hard Rock International, said in the release. “San Juan is a natural extension of our portfolio, creating a seamless Hard Rock experience for guests traveling between our international properties.”



Interfin Companies

A rendering of the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino San Juan.



Kevin Johnson

Attendees, including judges from the Seminole Tribe and throughout Indian Country, gather at the Native Learning Center on Feb. 25 during a four-day course hosted by the National Judicial College.

## Judicial course at Native Learning Center draws judges from throughout Indian Country

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — The National Judicial College hosted a course in February designed to give tribal judges more confidence in handling all aspects of hearings and trials.

The course was held Feb. 23-26 at the Native Learning Center in Hollywood.

The National Judicial College is a Nevada-based nonprofit organization that teaches courtroom skills to judges of all types from all over the country, Indian Country and abroad.

The Hollywood sessions were designed to help tribal judges in the following ways:

- preside over fair and impartial trials
- create an appropriate trial environment
- articulate and enforce ground rules for

trial conduct by advocates

- efficiently handle unexpected events that frequently occur during a trial

The course also provided an opportunity for the tribal judges to learn from each other and establish connections that could be useful as resources.

The Seminole Tribe’s Tribal Court had four members in attendance:

- Joe Frank, Chief Justice
- Mary Tigertail, Chief Judge
- Moses Osceola, Director of the Administrative Office of the Court
- Layne Thomas, Youth Healing to Wellness Court Program Coordinator

They were joined by judges from throughout Indian Country, including the Southern Ute Indian Tribal Court in Colorado, Seneca Nation Peacemakers Court in New York, the San Carlos Apache Tribal Court and Quechan Tribal Court, both

in Arizona, the Kenaitze Indian Tribe Tribal Court in Alaska, the Wind River Inter Tribal Court in Wyoming, and Fort Peck Tribal Court in Montana.

“Being a judge is such a unique experience, and being able to have colleagues that understand the uniqueness of that, the challenges that come along with it, the decision making that impact the lives of others, the responsibilities to make those decisions and wanting to get it right each time...is immeasurable,” said Gayle Williams-Byers, a retired judge who works for the National Judicial College. “When they go back to their separate courts and their tribes, they’re not going to forget each other; they’re always going to have each other as contacts, as resources.”

For more information about the National Judicial College, go to [judges.org](http://judges.org).

## Broad gambling legislation moves to House floor

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

Florida’s lawmakers are moving forward with a general bill that would impose stricter regulations on gambling throughout the state. Sponsored by Fort Pierce Republican Representative Dana Trubusy, House Bill 189 (HB 189) passed through the House Commerce Committee, its third committee approval, with an 18-5 vote.

HB 189 broadens criminal penalties for illegal gambling and strengthens oversight of the Florida Gaming Control Commission (FGCC), while elevating certain offenses to third-degree felonies, clarifying ethics requirements, and imposing stricter licensing and ownership disclosure standards.

The bill would fine operators up to \$5,000 and increase prison sentences to five years for unlicensed internet gambling, sweepstakes casinos, or sports betting outside legal frameworks. Additionally, the bill would introduce new criminal offenses, limit commission members’ post-employment options in gambling-related roles, and remove ownership thresholds for pari-mutuel permit transfers.

The measure has cleared the Criminal Justice and Industries and Professionals Subcommittees and now awaits scheduling for a House floor decision on March 13.

“This bill isn’t about picking winners or losers,” Trubusy said in a statement published by the Florida House of Representatives. “It’s about responsible governance. By updating our statutes, reinforcing

oversight, and preempting inconsistent local rules, we create certainty for operators, fairness for Floridians, and protections for the most vulnerable.”

Companion measures include House Bill 953 (HB 953) and Senate Bill 1404 (SB 1404); all three bills form part of the legislative effort to regulate online gaming in Florida. Introduced in late February, both HB 953 and SB 1404 target sweepstakes casinos and internet sports wagering beyond the 2021 compact with the Seminole Tribe of Florida, preserving its agreements while closing gaps that enable unregulated operations. The 2021 agreement guarantees at least \$500 million annually to the state and allows Hard Rock International to offer mobile sports betting, which began in December 2023.

## DIGITIZATION From page 1B

“This was the first project that we experimented with artifact digitization,” Millares said. “Our collections manager, Emily Vera, and our museum registrar, Rosabel Gomez, worked on getting their feet wet using the platform,” Millares said. “We wanted to ensure that those who came to see the collection had enough information on the artifacts.”

Nearly 500 Seminole and Miccosukee artifacts are accessible online for viewing.

“Not everything in our possession was digitized,” Millares added. “We chose our most recent donation for this project. We knew that because it was such a nice, comprehensive grouping of materials that we wanted to use this collection for artifact digitization.”

HistoryMiami’s Object Collection consists of three-dimensional artifacts ranging from pre-Colombian pieces to contemporary items, such as tools, furniture, boats, aviation materials, clothing, musical instruments, and religious objects. Its subcollection of Seminole and Miccosukee artifacts includes female and male figures carved from wood, palmetto fiber dolls, patchwork, animal figures and canoes carved from cypress wood, brooches, beadwork, palmetto and sweetgrass baskets and bowls, and more.

The artifacts are catalogued numerically and accompanied by photographs and descriptive text. HistoryMiami’s Research Center maintains a strong relationship with the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s

Tribal Council to prevent misinformation or outdated information.

“We’ve always done a good job of being sensitive to what information we’re telling and who’s telling that information,” Millares said. “Since we’re compliant with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), we maintain that open communication with them. We’re grateful to have that. It’s great to have them close by.”

NAGPRA and associated regulations govern the return of Native American remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations.

“We were careful not to contextualize information that’s not ours, so the Seminole Tribe is consulted as needed,” Millares added.

HistoryMiami’s Research Center houses thousands of its artifacts onsite in secure climate-controlled spaces. Offering reading rooms for researchers looking to consult the Special and Object Collections, its staff encourages the South Florida community to reach out.

“Our entire collection is available for research,” Millares said. “This is truly one of our greatest assets. You don’t have to be a scholar or a member. Anyone in the community can make an appointment to view our archival objects.”

Researching and consulting artifacts requires advanced notice



HistoryMiami

Originally owned by Josie Billie, this Seminole patchwork shirt originates from the 1930s and was gifted to Charles Gould at the Chicago State Fair.

and is dependent on the size, location, and condition of the object. Contact [archives@historymiami.org](mailto:archives@historymiami.org) for more information.

“We’re happy and grateful to house pieces of Seminole culture,” Millares said. “Cataloguing these items online helps people connect, especially if they’re not able to visit us in person. Accessibility is a big part of what we try to do.”

You can browse through HistoryMiami’s extensive collections catalogue, including Seminole and Miccosukee artifacts, at [www.historymiami.org/collections](http://www.historymiami.org/collections).



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LAW OFFICES OF DAVID A. FRANKEL

# Brighton Field Day Festival



Beverly Bidney

From left, Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith, Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole Avani Smith and Miss Brighton Seminole Hayden Nunez.



Beverly Bidney

Aponi Cochran carries the U.S. flag at the start of the rodeo.



Beverly Bidney

Jennie Shore.



Calvin Tiger

FSU's Marching Chiefs.



Beverly Bidney

Culture Camp cooking.



Calvin Tiger

Seminole veterans Sallie Josh and Curtis Motlow.



Calvin Tiger

President Holly Tiger, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr.



Beverly Bidney

A big crowd in the grandstand is entertained by alligator wrestling demonstration.



Calvin Tiger

FSU's Osceola and Rengade.



Calvin Tiger

Little Miss Chalo Nitka Briella Hall.



Calvin Tiger

Eastern Indian Rodeo Association Jr. Rodeo Queen Kalani Billie, left, and EIRA Rodeo Queen Mariah Billie.

# Undoing of a land grab restores Picayune Strand

BY KELLY FARRELL  
Special to the Tribune

A ruse to sell real estate causing environmental degradation decades ago was finally restored by the Picayune Strand Restoration project in Collier County.

Dozens of dignitaries gathered to celebrate the project's completion in late January and spoke of the interagency coordination required to complete the project—from tribes to county, state and federal agencies—government and nonprofit alike.

"The completion of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project is an important milestone in restoring flows to the western bays, a critical component of wholistic Everglades Restoration," said Talbert Cypress, Micosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida Chairman in a statement to the Seminole Tribune.

"Our shared Micosukee and Seminole traditional camps, Pa'am Hammock and Big Cypress Bend, will be the primary beneficiaries of this work, as new freshwater flows push back against saltwater intrusion."

South Florida Water Management District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection along with many other federal, state and local officials, partners and stakeholders celebrated the completion as a cornerstone aspect of the nation's most ambitious ecosystem restoration effort—Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

The officials joked a bit about how long it took to complete this project, as the scope was significant.

"85 square miles of wetlands and uplands is massive. I fly over to look at the hydrology and it's massive. I see new parts every time. This is one of the rare times that nature gets a second chance," said Charlotte Roman, South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Member and Chair of the Big Cypress Basin.

It's no wonder it took 17 or more years. And this completion in 2026 moves completion of the Everglades reservoir up five years, Roman said.

But this debacle started long before then.

## Swindling land owners

Like much of Everglades Restoration, the project in Picayune Strand State Forest was a long undoing of development. But Picayune Strand perhaps even more so.

Conservancy of Southwest Florida Environmental Science Director Kathy Worley describes Picayune Strand State Forest's partial development as a "greed driven environmental disaster turned into a restoration project."

Brothers Leonard and Julius Rosen became notorious for selling

land in South Florida that couldn't be developed, thus swindling the purchasers.

This is where the saying "I'll sell you some swampland in Florida came from" as the equivalent of saying "I'll sell you something worth nothing or deceive you," says Worley.

Worse, at the time, all too often, the swamp was blamed for the losses.

"Swamp swallows up money from middle class speculators," said the St. Petersburg Times, in an article regarding the Rosen's development and land sales in Cape Coral during the late 1950s.

By 1977, the Rosens, who made money first from selling hair product, bragged about their real estate endeavors. Gulf American Land Corporation was their company and by 1967 they turned toward Golden Gate Estates, buying the land from the Collier family, the namesakes of the county. The Rosens developed nearly 200 miles of limestone road, dug nearly 1,200 miles of canals, crushed the trees and mangled the landscape of southern Golden Gate Estates in the Picayune Strand.

"When the history of Florida is written, the names of my brother and myself will figure in it prominently," said Leonard Rosen in the Nov. 26, 1977 St. Petersburg Times. Such article clippings were collected and shared by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

The Rosens sold land in Golden Gate Estates to 17,000 to 18,000 people from all over the world, Florida Conservancy of Southwest Florida President & CEO Rob Mohr.

The Rosens had bought the Golden Gate Estates land for \$100 per acre and sold it for \$800 per acre, Worley said.

They created brochures and targeted the "unsophisticated investor," she said. Every major newspaper included their land deals. They flew people "for free" to see the southern Estates during the winter when the land was dry. They didn't know it was under water come summer.

By 1966, the Rosen's corporation lauded \$122 million in sales, Worley said.

They got away with such fraudulent sales pitches for a long time through political connections, she said. They eventually filed bankruptcy in 1975 and by then Collier County, Florida and the inhabitants of the area had a mess on their hands.

The Rosens had lowered the water table by a couple feet, leading to disastrous environmental effects, endangering people and wildlife alike.

## Restoration of the real estate ruse

The Conservancy took on the task of contacting each one of the

17,000 or more land owners, so the state could purchase the land—all of which had to occur before restoration could begin.

Canals had to be filled, roads restored, waterways reconnected. Nearly 20 years after funding for the project was secured and work with heavy machinery on the land began, and the project's results are at least as expansive as the landscape.

"Reducing flood risk to Floridians and completing rejuvenation of this natural wonder is a gargantuan challenge," said Adam Telle, assistant secretary of the Army for Civil Works.

He lauded President Trump and officials acknowledged it was the coordination of many Administrations spanning the decades.

"The amount of time and effort that we are contributing to this project is extraordinary, and the result is a testament to the hard work of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, our partners with the State of Florida, and everyone involved in making today a reality," Telle continued.

"We have worked for decades to get to the finish line of this vital Everglades restoration project," echoed Roman.

A flock of white pelicans landed in the waterway near the gathering in Picayune as if joining the celebration Jan. 29.

The Picayune Strand Restoration Project involved a partnership between USACE and SFWMD, when in 2009, it became the first Project Partnership Agreement that USACE executed with SFWMD as part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

Spanning 55,000 acres between Alligator Alley and Tamiami Trail in Southwest Florida, this restoration project included the removal of 260 miles of roads and the plugging of 48 miles of canals, officials said. The project has successfully restored the natural flow of water to the region, revitalizing wetlands and improving overall water quality, officials said in a prepared statement.

This restoration project improves water flow into Collier Seminole State Park, Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge and the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The project has numerous environmental benefits, including restoration of wetlands; restored and enhanced habitat for fish and wildlife, including the Florida Panther; reduced drainage of adjacent sensitive ecosystems; improved aquifer recharge to protect underground water supplies and prevent saltwater intrusions; reduced freshwater releases with improved health of downstream estuaries.

# Program links Native students with wildland firefighting education

FROM PRESS RELEASE

WASHINGTON — The Department of the Interior announced Feb. 3 a new partnership between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education to prepare Native students for careers in wildland firefighting, strengthening the workforce while creating clear school-to-career pathways for tribal youth.

Through the Native Youth Firefighter Training Program, high school and post-secondary students receive hands-on instruction, mentorship and technical training

that prepares them for seasonal and permanent positions with tribal, federal and state fire programs.

Students from Pine Ridge School, Cheyenne Eagle Butte School, and St. Francis Indian School in South Dakota, as well as Two Eagle River School in Montana, Northwest High School in New Mexico, and Sequoyah High School in Oklahoma, are currently participating. Officials are exploring future student participation through a dual enrollment program at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in New Mexico.

"By linking tribal schools

with high-demand public service careers, this program honors tribal communities, supports self-determination and helps young people build futures of service, leadership and stability," said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Billy Kirkland.

BIE schools and colleges provide daily oversight and student support, while BIA fire training staff lead virtual instruction and mentorship. The program uses the Wildland Fire Learning Portal and other web-based tools to deliver flexible, high-quality training.

# Tampa Hard Rock celebrates gaming-related social media influencers

FROM PRESS RELEASE

TAMPA — Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa hosted sold-out crowds numbering in the thousands for the recent Lady Luck HQ & Friends: Birthday Triathlon Weekend in Hard Rock Event Center.

The three-day celebration brought together top gaming-related social media influencers, including Lady Luck HQ (Francine Marie), NG Slot (Narek Gharibyan), Vegas Matt (Stephen Morrow) and The Big Jackpot (Scott Richter).

"Thank you, Seminole Hard Rock Tampa, for an unforgettable weekend," said Marie. "This has been the best birthday ever."

"These influencers are extremely popular," said Travis Lunn, President, Seminole Hard Rock Tampa. "They have a collective reach of over 15 million across YouTube, Facebook, X, Instagram and TikTok. But beyond the metrics, these partnerships are rooted in genuine relationships. Events like this create meaningful moments where influencers, guests, and team members connect in ways that go far beyond a transaction."

Seminole Hard Rock Tampa continues to lead the industry by innovating how guests experience gaming and live fan interaction in one of the most ambitious multi-influencer experiential events in casino marketing today.

"Ultimately, this weekend reflects our commitment to evolving with the times while staying true to who we are, using social platforms to tell our story in a way that feels authentic, engaging, and connected to millions of fans worldwide," said Lunn.

The opening night event in Hard Rock Event Center drew a sold-out crowd of 1,350 and featured Hard Rock Spins for the Gold & Celebration Drawing. Guests also watched the influencers compete in a Slot Pull Spinoff Challenge, followed by 12 lucky guests taking the stage for a chance to win up to \$1 Million on Dragon Link.

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA HOUSING DEPARTMENT

TRIBAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA HOUSING DEPARTMENT

# HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

MARCH/APRIL ISSUE SERVING THE TRIBE WITH PRIDE! 2026 EDITION



## TRIBAL MEMBERS STILL HAVE TIME TO ACCESS THE \$20K PROGRAM ENDING SOON

The Health and Safety Program is scheduled to end on September 30, 2026, but tribal members can still access the program to fund approved home services.

The five-year Health and Safety Program which began October 1, 2021, will end Wednesday, September 30, 2026. The program, which is often referred to as the \$20K Program, was created by Council to help preserve a tribal member's most essential asset — the HOME. Under the management of the Housing Department, the program helps to minimize the occurrence of unsafe and unhealthy conditions in the house.

With the maximum of \$20,000 for an insured, qualifying home, tribal members can access the funds, subsequent to an insurance claim, for a range of improvements. Some include: window replacement, new roof replacement, fence replacement, new A/C system, shelter, plumbing, electrical, and so much more with the \$20,000.

Since the beginning of the \$20K program in 2021, the Housing Department has helped 888 tribal homeowners (as of February 13, 2026), to safe guard their homes using the five-year Health and Safety funds.

If you have not utilized the Health and Safety Program as an insured homeowner, you still have time to do so before it expires September 30, 2026. Contact the Service Center at 954-967-3609 to walk you through the process and get you on the right track to accessing these funds.

## MEET YOUR HOUSING TEAM: LAKELAND/TAMPA SPOTLIGHT

Under the management of Senior Property Manager Aaron Duke, the Housing team serving the Lakeland and Tampa region brings a deep expertise, proactive communication, and hands-on approach to every housing need served by the department. The team is known for its responsiveness, attention to detail, and commitment to maximizing asset value while delivering exceptional service to tribal members.



Senior Property Manager Aaron Duke (left) along with his Property Manager Kimberly Lane (center), technicians, and other tribal-wide personnel.

OUR TECHNICIANS

Carlos Fariñas, MAINTENANCE COORDINATOR

Other technicians: [Names and photos of other team members]

SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA Housing Department Kadeja Jackson, Housing Director

Contact Us! 954-967-3609 HousingRequest@SemTribe.com

PAGE 002 SERVING THE TRIBE WITH PRIDE! HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS NEWSLETTER

## VENDOR RELATIONS

### HOUSING BEGINS ITS VENDOR MEET AND GREET SERIES

Director Kadeja Jackson who shared insight regarding the importance of timely, high quality service.

"Vendors are an essential component of the Housing Department," Jackson explained. "It is a partnership that we value and continually strengthen through collaboration and team work."

Housing Tribal Wide Senior Project Manager Brian Clark who facilitated the meeting stated that the Housing Department is committed to the ongoing success of its vendors and created these partnership events to ensure that they have the resources that they need to experience a seamless process as they serve the tribe in every region.

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a vendor with the Housing Department, contact the TW Procurement and Contract Manager Madge Dale at MadgeDale@semtribe.com.

The next Vendor Meet and Greet Session is scheduled for Wednesday, April 22, 2026, 10AM-12PM, in Brighton, Florida.



With nearly 50 business representatives gathering in the Seminole Tribe of Florida Fire Station Conference Room in Big Cypress, the Housing Department kicked off February with its annual series of Vendor Meet and Greet sessions to strengthen its working relationship with the companies. The sessions are designed to help existing vendors doing business with the Tribe successfully navigate the registration, purchasing and procurement processes.

In addition to the Housing Department's contracts and procurement divisions, several Tribal departments presented to the group including Vendor Relations and the Purchasing Department.

Presentation topics covered such areas as project management workflow, communication, quality of work as well as scheduling, permitting, and even ERD clearance. The engaging discussion fueled many questions from the audience and allowed staff to provide additional guidance and clarification.

The business representatives at the meeting had an opportunity to meet key personnel throughout the work journey and hear from the Housing Department.

## Tip of the Day!

Our Furry Friends!

To keep your pets safe and cozy, please have them take a little break in a separate room while we quickly service your home!



## HOME INSURANCE OPENS MORE DOORS TO HOUSING SERVICES

In an effort to optimize housing services across the tribal regions, the Housing Department recently teamed up with the Risk Management Department and AMERIND Risk to heighten alignment among the three entities. The half day session held at the Tribal Community Development (TCD) Headquarters in the Hollywood Region on February 20, 2026, covered the homeowners insurance claims process, beginning with First Notice of Loss and continuing through claim payment procedures.

Big Cypress Senior Property Manager Zulema Mendez and Brighton Property Manager Marqus Coleman shared insight regarding their regions and offered ways to assist their members during the insurance claims process.

Since home insurance coverage is required to utilize a broad range of Housing programs with limited or no cost, tribal members are encouraged to obtain home insurance. For information about home insurance, please contact your regional representative.

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"Improving the quality of life through the services we offer"

- Housing Department

SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA HOUSING DEPARTMENT

Contact Us! 954-967-3609 HousingRequest@SemTribe.com

# Big Cypress hosts 4th Indigenous Arts and Music Festival

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — The Indigenous Arts and Music Festival, held Feb. 5-7 in Big Cypress, featured numerous performers, plenty of Native arts and crafts, authentic Seminole food, wildlife presentations and a performance of the all-Indigenous musical “Distant Thunder: A New Native Musical in Concert.”

Seminole Tribe of Florida performers Spencer Battiest and Aubee Billie made their off-Broadway debuts in 2024 as cast members of “Distant Thunder.” The performance at IAMF in the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena Feb. 5 was the first time the show was performed as a concert.

The format was similar to a professional reading of a play or musical, in which the

cast members read from the script and perform the musical numbers live.

“Distant Thunder” tells the story of Darrell Waters, a successful young attorney who, as a child, left his Blackfeet Nation home in Montana with his white mother. He returns years later to try to broker a deal with an oil company that could benefit the tribe financially, but the drilling location is at the site of an existing immersion language school. While he was there, Darrell realizes the business deal could destroy the school and Blackfeet culture.

Battiest has been with the show since its beginning as a Native Voices program in 2012 in Los Angeles. There was another reading in New York in 2018, the first staged performance was in 2022 at the First American Museum in Oklahoma City, followed by a six-week run at the Amas

Musical Theater in New York City in the fall of 2024.

“It’s so special, I never would have thought we would be able to bring it to my people with two tribal members in the cast,” Battiest said. “This is the icing on the cake of the journey of “Distant Thunder” through its many stages.”

Billie, who is studying musical theater at Elon University in North Carolina, was cast in the show before its New York run.

“It’s incredible, I can’t believe how far this show has come,” Billie said. “Now I get to be in this role and do it for my family and friends; people who have watched me grow up. I’m living my dream.”

Although the weather was blustery with temperatures in the 50s and a wind chill that made it feel like the 40s, there was a good crowd in the rodeo arena. Everyone was

bundled up in plenty of layers including hoodies, jackets, coats and blankets to withstand the unusually cold weather.

Shaun Taylor-Corbett wrote the play with his late mother Lynne Taylor-Corbett and Chris Wiseman and also plays the part of Darrell in the show. He is trying to put together a tour of the “Distant Thunder” concert through Indian Country and regional theaters. Taylor-Corbett is of Blackfeet, Scandinavian and Black ancestry.

“This has always been my dream destination because the Seminole Tribe has supported us more than any other tribe,” said Taylor-Corbett, who directed the performance. “I’m excited to be the headline act tonight, it recharges us and gives us the energy to go on. This is a dream to be here.”

“I hope this opens up other tribes to inspire their youth to have a life in the arts,”

Battiest said. “Music was always my outlet, my safety net. It not only gave me a career; it gave me a purpose.”

The fourth annual IAMF featured Native arts, crafts, food, wildlife demonstrations, carnival rides, games, live music and performances, including hoop dancers of the southwest, Billie Walker alligator demonstration, Aztec Cultural Experience, the Bearhead Sisters, Bird Singing and Dancing by the River and the Ahfachkee School band.

Performers also included country artist Ricky Valido, Mista Chief, Tatanka Means, Carradine Billie, Blaine Bailey, Tia Wood, former Seminole Tribe Chairman James Billie and Rayford Stark Band and Neal McCoy.



Beverly Bidney  
During the performance of “Distant Thunder”, cast members Xander Chauncy, Spencer Battiest and Aubee Billie complete their musical number.



Beverly Bidney  
The cast of “Distant Thunder” gather backstage at IAMF before performing the songs and story of the musical, which appeared off Broadway in New York City for six weeks in the fall of 2024.



Beverly Bidney  
Alice Osceola shreds her guitar as she performs with the Prayers Resilience band, comprised of members of the Big Cypress Boys & Girls Club’s music program.



Beverly Bidney  
Country music artist Ricky Valido plays onstage in the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena.



Calvin Tiger  
Taven Edwards, Halloe Martinez, Curtis Smith, Ollie Ballentine and Zechariah Tigertail perform.



Calvin Tiger  
Gene Jimmie, left, and Neila Bowers perform Feb. 6, the second day of the festival.



Beverly Bidney  
Aztec Cultural Experience dancers perform at the festival.



Calvin Tiger  
Justin Igualeda handles wildlife presentations at the festival. Here he shows a gila monster to the audience.

## ‘The Process’

BY ELGIN JUMPER

*Author’s Note: The writing is a blending of styles and formats, a hybrid, if you will, which thereby gifts a surreal quality to the piece. It is also stream-of-conscious writing, intermingled with prose poetry and imagery, crafted with fact and fiction, history and myth. The writing also imitates the essay format, at times. Indeed, the piece wears many hats. The rewrites and tweaks were few and minor. So, it’s very close to the first draft.*

There’s no set of rules to follow. It’s something that’s all your own. It’s a blend of various components, actually, leading to glorious illuminations within and without, where ideas and connections are made. Begin within. Liftoff and Ascent. Initially I go through a series of amusing writings, and sketches, for starters, just limbering up, visualizing on the laptop, brandishing drawing materials, exploring, don’t you see. And by way of my creative processes, I journey out into the unknown:

Hear me! What are the words that need to be set down? I wake up on any day, I ready myself for what’s to come, I begin the process. At first, I peer into a laptop screen, I am a bold figure, I declare to no one, electric, regalia-adorned. Why when I speaking do I say, “I should’ve said this or I should have said that?” Typically I lay siege to phantom forts in Old Florida, chipping away at the stronghold, climbing, climbing, when I’m

not painting or writing, or texting friends, simultaneously at the same time. What withholds words at certain times? I can feel the fall of a feather in a forlorn forest, on a misty day. Rumor has it I’ve joined a two-bit outfit of outlandish outcasts. I’m the lowest on the totem-pole of life, by trade.

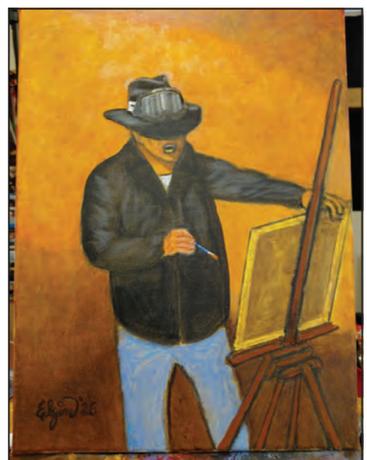
I pawn my violin, quite remorsefully, weathered case and all. I translate outsider poetry for those who feel as though they’re all alone. But are not. Even so, I write award-winning monologues for captive audiences the world over. Every so often, I melt into the exciting pages of books, launching into swordplay and daring feats. And I discover that I was in this same proximity five-thousand years ago, can you imagine, traveling via flying machine, noting the characteristics of all I encounter, telling stories, when Lake Okeechobee was still a pond of the morning sun. It’s a process, you see.

Lo! I get banned from guitar stores for overplaying the same Heavy Metal riff. I get artstore workers to carry my large canvases to the car for me. I conduct two-hour painting sessions in three-hours. I’m a lecturer on thermonuclear rocket science, a wandering wizard of our dear Mother Earth, and a patch-wearing pirate of a jagged empire of sawgrass, as far as the eye can see. I recite a poem of the future, in the present.

Meantime, I survive for days on end, on only food and water. I play cardboard boxes like a true Classical percussionist, I invent games that incorporate football,

basketball, painting and writing, in one, I am remembered for my innovative work in film, radio, and theatre, when the poetry was fresh and unavailability.

I have passed this way on numerous occasions. For I’m a Baroque-era portraitist, a Contemporary Abstract Expressionist, and a rebel with some flaws. Furthermore, on an ancient, dying planet, I’m a yo-yo trick champion, just for the thrill of it. When working, I am calm, cool, and collected,



Elgin Jumper  
“The Process” by Elgin Jumper.

without fail . . .

And yet Seminole history and culture are a morning field of flowers. All colorful and brilliant. It is always morning there. I walk through it, taking in everything. The live oaks are the pillars, strong and tall and formidable. Wildlife and wildflowers are part of the scene. The waters reflect the skies of our imagination. And in every detail we can see it - as one - through the blue lens of a single raindrop.

I enter the painting studio and see a blank canvas on the easel. I am undaunted. I know what needs to be done. I foresee miracles. I keep ideas in my back pocket. Some stay longer than others, just a-chillin, marinatin. I drive to the artstore for oil colors, medium red, medium yellow, and cobalt blue, flake white, and ivory black. I acquire what I need and then it’s back home. I put coffee on, which is pure gold in these here parts. I set the tone with Mozart and then I tone my canvas in mid-grey. Hurricanes loom. Mozart deploys whispers, then, a gentle voice, and then, thunder and lightning! I swear! Like Shakespeare, he’s in a class all by himself. I am awestruck, thinking.

I changeover to a notebook and pen and a mission I accepted long ago, which requires action and production, it’s all about action and production. Ruler of Words. Distractions beckon, like Sirens from perilous shores, but I say no, not until it’s time. For now I strive to write heartfelt words. In my thoughts, I hear warrior’s poetry in battle, I see the conflict, the yellow-

red of the setting sun and fiery red blaze. Then a world is being rebuilt from the ashes, where two sorrow-ridden strangers meet in an ancient city, alone as they had once been, but now they smile and gaze into each others sparkling eyes, and walk throughout a new world, hand in hand. And, as for me . . . well, I am merely the narrator (of this little love story).

I write this down and think of poets on spirit horses, singing in clear, resonating voices, urging adventures on. And though the vision’s mesmerizing, in a spiritual sense, there’s a long cold winter, when the winds turns bitter, to contend with. It’s a journey from word one, to the finished piece, from abstract to the tangible. And this process has magic in it. Of which I know enough to plainly state: “It’s beyond me, my friend. And that’s perfectly fine by me.”

And voila! there you have it! A work of art from thin air, from nothing but the unexplored. Writing has it’s successes, no less celebrated than those of Painting. Thus the work becomes an armor suit of gold, impressive, magical, one of a kind. To the senses, it is the royal purple, glowing, where wondrous scents linger. May the ink and the paint forever flow your way! In closing, as I see it, the creative process is a sacred gift, like heavenly rain, descending upon a drought-choked land, and in this way, enriching life.

Seminole artist, author and poet Elgin Jumper is a contributor to the Seminole Tribune.

# Sports



## Moore Haven girls win 1st district title

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**MOORE HAVEN** — In a gym filled with banners marking the achievements of other sports teams throughout the decades, the Moore Haven High School girls basketball team finally has earned its place on the walls.

For the first time in school history, the Terriers are district champions in girls basketball.

Moore Haven trailed Fort Meade in the first few minutes, but surged ahead and never looked back on its way to a 46-37 win Feb. 6 in the Class Rural District 8 championship game in Moore Haven.

"It's historic for these girls to do this," said Moore Haven coach Jeff Gonzales. "They're very coachable; that's important. Super good girls. I couldn't ask for a better team."

The Terriers feature four tribal members from the Seminole Tribe of Florida: senior guard Truley Osceola, junior forward Charisma Micco, sophomore guard Cherrish Micco and freshman guard Jalene Smith.

"The Seminole Native girls on the team are great basketball players. Very aggressive. They are a huge asset," Gonzales said.

The victory kept Moore Haven's undefeated record alive at 25-0, but the Terriers' season ended in their next game seven days later, a lopsided 65-14 loss at Williston in a Class Rural regional semifinal.

"[Williston] is the No. 12 team in the state. It's tough competition," Gonzales said. "You have to play the best to be the best, and learn to get better. The girls played their hearts out, they played their best. You can't

win them all."

Moore Haven had only about five fans at the packed Williston gym about 20 miles south of Gainesville. The Terriers were uncharacteristically shaky with and without the ball from start to finish in a game that was never close, and one that nobody at Moore Haven is likely to dwell on; rather the memories of the previous 25 games and district title will be etched in minds for years to come.

"It was a great season," Gonzales said. "I'm really proud of them. They're great girls and they're going to do great things in life. I'm real proud of the season. They did Moore Haven proud."

In the district title game, senior point guard Sa'Nyree Myers, one of the state's leading scorers averaging about 30 points per game, led the Terriers with 25 points. Tied 10-10 after the first quarter, the Terriers never trailed after Myers sank a 3-pointer early in the second quarter.

After trailing 28-15 at halftime, Fort Meade trimmed the deficit to eight points entering the fourth quarter, but a key 3-pointer from the corner by Cherrish Micco to start the fourth halted Fort Meade's momentum and the lead was never challenged again. Cherrish finished with six points. Chanel Hunter contributed seven points.

In the first half, Osceola, in her final home game, had a couple assists. Defensive pressure by Osceola, the Micco sisters and other Terriers forced turnovers. Charisma Micco had a block in the third.

After the final buzzer, the Terriers celebrated and proudly put on championship T-shirts for the first time ever.



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, the Seminole Tribe's Jalene Smith, Cherrish Micco, Charisma Micco and Truley Osceola celebrate winning a district championship Feb. 6 as Moore Haven beat Fort Meade, 46-37. It was the Terriers first district title in girls basketball in school history.



Kevin Johnson

Moore Haven's Charisma Micco takes a short jump shot in the Rural District 8 championship game against Fort Meade Feb. 6 in Moore Haven.



Kevin Johnson

With teammate Cherrish Micco behind her, Moore Haven's Truley Osceola leads a fastbreak against Fort Meade.

## Tatum Billie helps Western to district title, 20 wins

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

This winter the Western High School girls basketball team produced one of the best seasons in school history. Tatum Billie played a big role in the team's success, which included capturing a district championship for the second straight year and winning 20 games for the first time.

"Tatum averaged 11 points this season and really elevated her play against the tougher teams we faced. She has a high basketball IQ, which enables her to make great decisions and also effectively facilitate for her teammates," said Western coach Brandie Taylor.

After playing for NSU University School last season, Billie shifted to Western. It was a smooth transition.

"She was critical to our success, and we are very grateful she joined us," Taylor said. "Tatum made a seamless transition into our program, quickly building chemistry with her teammates and earning everyone's trust. She is highly coachable, works extremely hard, and genuinely cares about the success of those around her. Off the court, she is a pleasure to be around, and all her teachers speak highly of her."

The versatile Billie — a junior shooting guard — led the team in rebounds (6.1 per game).

"She finished the season with 141 rebounds, which is outstanding for a guard and highlights how complete of a player she is," Taylor said. "Even on nights when her shot wasn't falling, she consistently played hard on defense and continued to rebound, demonstrating her selfless, team-first mentality. She is also exceptional at timing



Mayli Tommie

Western High guard Tatum Billie looks for open room during a regional quarterfinal against Boca Raton on Feb. 13 at Flanagan High School in Pembroke Pines.

shots and angling her body to contest and block attempts without fouling. I've never coached a guard who was able to do this with such precision and success."

Billie was second in points per game and assists. She scored in double figures 13 times, including a season-high 21 points in a win against King's Academy in December.

It was in December and January when her offense flourished as she hit double digits in scoring in eight consecutive games.

She also shined in the district

championship win with 9 points, 6 rebounds and 4 steals against Cypress Bay.

Western finished with a 20-8 record. After winning a regional quarterfinal, Western was eliminated by South Dade, 59-46, in a regional semifinal.

"As a team, I was very proud of how we performed this season," Taylor said. "The group showed great growth, toughness, and commitment from start to finish."



Courtesy photo

Western High School girls basketball player Tatum Billie, right, celebrates winning a district championship with her coach, Brandie Taylor, and teammate, Madison Ojeda.

## Miami Open tennis coming to Hard Rock Stadium in March

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**MIAMI GARDENS** — The Miami Open presented by Itaú has announced the singles entry lists for the March 15-29 tournament that will be held at Hard Rock Stadium.

The fields include eight past champions and players representing 34 countries. The entries also include 17 players who have won titles this season, 16 Major champions and seven players who have held the No. 1 ranking. View the full fields

The top two players from both tours are among the former Miami Open champions in the field. ATP No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz won the 2022 title and No. 2 Jannik Sinner was the 2024 winner. The WTA No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka will return to defend her title while No. 2 Iga Swiatek was the 2022 champion.

Alcaraz was a tournament-record 18 years old when he claimed his title. The second-youngest men's champion was crowned last year when 19-year-old Jakub Mensik won the title. Mensik defeated six-time Miami Open winner Novak Djokovic to lift the trophy.

At 38, Djokovic will be the oldest player in the men's field, while 19-year-old Brazilian Joao Fonseca is the lone teen among the ATP entries. A handful of teenagers are on the WTA entry list: 18-year-olds Mirra Andrejeva, Iva Jovic and Tereza Valentova along with 19-year-olds Victoria Mboko and Maya Joint.

There are 27 Americans among the more than 150 initial entries, highlighted by five players who are in the Top 10 of their respective tour's rankings: No. 4 Coco Gauff, No. 5 Jessica Pegula and No. 6 Amanda Anisimova from the WTA and the ATP's No. 8 Taylor Fritz and No. 9 Ben Shelton.

Play begins with qualifying rounds Sunday - Tuesday (March 15-17). Main draw action will begin on Tuesday, March 17, which will feature a Stadium Court night session for the first time to close Women's Empowerment Day at the Miami Open. The tournament will conclude with the women's singles championship on Saturday, March 28 followed by the men's final on Sunday, March 29.

For more information go to [miamiopen.com](http://miamiopen.com).

## Native Youth Golf Championship to be held in New Mexico

FROM PRESS RELEASE

NB3 Foundation, started by former Native American PGA Tour golfer Notah Begay III, will host the annual Native Youth Golf Championship July 19-21 at Santa Ana Golf Club in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico. Now in its seventh year, the championship continues to grow as an opportunity for Native youth golfers to compete, connect and take the next step in their golf journey.

More than just a tournament, the Native Youth Golf Championship is a family-centered event where young athletes ages 10 to 18 can showcase their skills while building confidence, friendships and exposure to future opportunities in the game. The event reflects NB3 Foundation's ongoing commitment to expanding access and removing barriers so Native youth can thrive in sport and in life.

For additional tournament details and registration information, contact Clint Begay, Director of NB3FIT, at [clint@nb3f.org](mailto:clint@nb3f.org).

## NAYO to be held in Mississippi

STAFF REPORT

The annual NAYO Basketball Tournament will be held April 2-4 in Choctaw, Mississippi. Hosted by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the tournament will feature 12-14 and 15-17 age divisions for boys and girls.

## Rodeo in BC to be held March 27-28

STAFF REPORT

**BIG CYPRESS** — The annual Junior Cypress Cattle Drive and Rodeo will be held March 27-28 at the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena in Big Cypress. Honorary trail bosses are Martha Jones and the late Carl Baxley.

Events start March 27 with the Eastern Indian Rodeo Association rodeo at 7 p.m. On March 28, the day gets started with the cattle drive at 10 a.m. followed by lunch at 12:30 p.m. A kids rodeo will be held at 4 p.m.

## Wisconsin Assembly passes bills on online sports betting, college athlete endorsements

BY WISCONSIN EXAMINER

The Wisconsin Assembly on Feb. 19 passed bills to legalize online sports betting and add state regulations for University of Wisconsin athletes receiving money for their name, image and likeness rights.

Both bills passed with no or little debate and the NIL bill passed with just a single no vote. They will now be sent to the state Senate.

Last fall, Republican lawmakers introduced the online sports betting bill with a lot of momentum. A public hearing on the measure just days after the bill's introduction.

The Wisconsin constitution requires that any legal gambling be managed by the state's federally recognized Native American tribes. Under current law, people can place sports bets in person at tribal casinos but online sports bets — a market that has grown exponentially as legal sports gambling has spread across the country — remained prohibited. Under the bill, Wisconsin would follow a legal framework first established in Florida that would allow online sports betting if the infrastructure to manage the bets is housed on tribal land.

The sports betting bill was introduced and hearings were held in both chambers of the Legislature in rapid succession, but the bill did not come up for a floor vote until the

last day of the Assembly's schedule.

The Assembly passed the bill with bipartisan support despite objections from lobbying groups representing the country's largest online sportsbooks. The state's tribes have supported the legislation, arguing that the proliferation of live betting markets on websites such as Kalshi and the ease with which many Wisconsinites can cross the border to Illinois where online sports bets are legal, has damaged their business.

The NIL bill adds regulations for how University of Wisconsin schools manage payment to collegiate athletes. The NCAA officially allowed collegiate athletes to be paid for appearing in advertisements or commercial products such as video games

in 2021.

Under the bill passed Thursday, student-athletes will be allowed to hire agents to represent them and individual universities can facilitate NIL agreements on behalf of their athletes. Students will not be allowed to endorse tobacco products, alcohol or illegal activities. Some records related to NIL agreements will be exempt from the state's open records law "when competitive reasons require confidentiality."



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# Kenna Martinez takes pride in representing STOF, FSU

BY CELINE JOHNSON  
Special to the Tribune

TALLAHASSEE — Kenna Martinez, a 19-year-old civil engineering student and member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, is breaking barriers as the first female member of the tribe to take the mat in college. Martinez discovered the Florida State University Wrestling Club during her application process and knew it would be a major factor in her decision to attend the university.

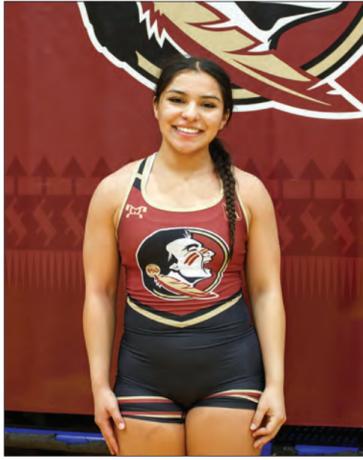
Martinez feels honored to be a student at Florida State University and proud to represent her tribe through both sports and academics.

“Not only was it a great accomplishment just to be accepted, but I feel as though FSU puts a great effort into recognizing us tribal students and the Seminole Tribe as a whole,” she said.

Martinez jumped at the opportunity to get involved and help grow the wrestling club by joining the executive board as the social chair. Her responsibilities include running the club’s Instagram, contacting photographers and videographers for events and coordinating a media day with a focus on the overall promotion and recognition of the club.

Martinez hopes to use the knowledge she gains at FSU to contribute to the tribe.

“I have always loved the thought of giving back to the Seminole Tribe and working for them as a civil engineer,” Martinez said. “I believe engineering is one of the most impactful jobs there is — we’re constantly researching, experimenting and actively trying to make the world a better



Casey McCarthy

Kenna Martinez

place. I hope to find a job that fulfills my belief in engineering and helps me to be a part of advancing the world.”

As a first-generation student, Martinez came to FSU through the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) program, which provides preparation, orientation and academic support programming for students who are among the first in their families to attend college. She credits the CARE program with creating a sense of community and support which helped her get where she is today.

“CARE gives us a lot of information



Casey McCarthy

FSU's Kenna Martinez gets ready to face an opponent from the University of North Florida during a wrestling match Jan. 31 in Tallahassee.



Casey McCarthy

Kenna Martinez and her opponent from UNF battle on the mat.

about where to ask for help and never makes anyone feel ‘less than’ for not knowing how something about college works,” Martinez said. “The staff makes sure we get all of our questions answered. CARE has been a huge part of my academic success.”

A notable moment in Martinez’s collegiate wrestling journey was being able to wear the Florida State University logo while competing.

“I remember receiving the FSU wrestling club singlet and trying it on as soon as I could. I showed all of my family and friends because it meant a lot to me,” Martinez said. “Being a part of the Seminole Tribe can feel isolating, as many are not educated as to who we are and what we have gone through. Once I put on that singlet, I felt as if all of the different parts of myself came together as one. It brought me tears of joy.”

The Seminole Tribe has experienced a recent uptick in student athletes on FSU sports teams including Zae Thomas, the first member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida to sign a football scholarship with Florida State, Xavier Osceola, who is believed to be

the first NCAA Division I men’s basketball player from the Seminole Tribe, and OB Osceola III, who has committed to FSU baseball and will be the first Seminole to play on the team.

Martinez feels proud of the continued academic excellence amongst the tribe and the commitment to athletics at the collegiate level. She hopes to inspire other young tribal members who dream to follow in her footsteps.

“Not only does this surge of tribal student-athletes encourage younger members to attend college, but it also brings attention to the Seminole Tribe of Florida. I am a big advocate for having pride in who you are and being a Seminole is something to be proud of,” Martinez said. “I hope our younger tribal members find motivation in this impressive number of student athletes at FSU and realize they can make it too. Whether their dreams are in education or in sports, it is all possible.”

Martinez recognizes that wrestling is a humbling sport, requiring discipline and drive to succeed. Wrestling puts competitors in a vulnerable position where, no matter

the circumstance, you must keep fighting: an ideology Martinez carries with her not only through wrestling, but also through her Seminole heritage.

“I hope representing the Seminole Tribe in wrestling for FSU inspires many others to start wrestling and sends the message that you should never give up on your goals and must continue pushing,” she said. “The most important thing in life is to keep trying — try scared, try tired, try while not knowing and just keep moving.”

*Celine Johnson is a senior at Florida State University. She currently works in the FSU Office of University Communications, writing and editing for News.fsu.edu. She will graduate with her B.S. in public relations in the Spring of 2026. Contact Celine at cmj22g@fsu.edu.*

## Baseball returns to PECS

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

CLEWISTON — Baseball is back in Brighton.

For the first time in at least four years, there’s a baseball team at Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School.

So far, so good.

Getting enough players to field a team was the first step. That goal was accomplished when 15 players joined.

Next goal: getting a win. That mission was accomplished right off the bat as PECS won its season opener, 6-1, against Glades Day on Feb. 19. A strong performance by starting pitcher Damahni Bonilla led the team to victory. Nakoa Smiley finished up in relief.

PECS used a bunch of walks to move around the bases against Glades Day. A week later, in game two, the bats were needed in a slugfest against Clewiston Christian at Sugarland Park in Clewiston.

PECS appeared to be on its way to another win, having built a 5-2 lead behind RBI singles from Bonilla, Maddox Tommie and Ryker Miller.

But Clewiston Christian began a rally in the bottom of the third and eventually surged ahead, 11-5, heading into PECS’ final at-bat.

Down to its last out, PECS didn’t depart quietly, a positive sign that the team has ample heart. An RBI single by Miller



Kevin Johnson

PECS shortshop Nakoa Smiley tags out a Clewiston Christian School player Feb. 26 in Clewiston.

brought home Tyse Osceola. Miguel Estrada sprinted around the bases with a two-run inside-the-park home run that pulled PECS to within 11-8, but the final out came on the next batter.

Estrada was a star behind the plate, too. He threw out two runners trying to steal second base.

PECS’ defense also looked sharp thanks to two perfectly executed pickoffs from Tommie, the starting pitcher, and Smiley, the shortstop.

Smiley was a standout on offense, too,

as he smacked two singles in his first two trips.

PECS coach Marshall Tommie said the focus this season isn’t so much on wins and losses, but rather pouring a foundation.

“We’re building a team. We haven’t had a team for a while. Trying to build something again and go from there,” he said.

It’s a quick season that features six games and about a month. PECS and Clewiston Christian will meet again March 11 in Brighton for PECS’ 8th grade night at 4:30 p.m.



Kevin Johnson

Chance Madrigal sprints to first base.



Kevin Johnson

Starting pitcher Maddox Tommie, a lefty, delivers a pitch.



Kevin Johnson

Damahni Bonilla pitches in relief against Clewiston Christian.

## Bill Osceola Memorial Rodeo results

Bill Osceola MEMORIAL RODEO HOLLYWOOD, FL JANUARY 30 31, 2026					
Total Payout: \$44,697					
<b>Barback</b>	Score	Amount	<b>Ladies Barrel Racing</b>	Time	Amount
1 Steven Dewolfe - Buffalo Gap, SD	69	\$1,903.50	1 Ashley Parks - Dania Beach, FL	15.030	\$1,363.00
2 Jacoby Johns - Okeechobee, FL	63	\$1,269.00	2 Quinley Inman - Vinita, OK	15.394	\$1,128.00
			3 Baylee O'Leary - Colcord, OK	15.712	\$893.00
			4 Sallie Williams - Skiatook, OK	15.813	\$658.00
			5 Kalgary Johns - Okeechobee, FL	15.841	\$423.00
			6 Chyenne Rondeaux - Alpine, TX	15.961	\$235.00
<b>Steer Wrestling</b>	Time	Amount	<b>Bull Riding</b>	Score	Amount
1 Dakota Louis - Browning, MT	6.02	\$1,056.33	1 Cody Jesus	79	\$1,158.55
2 Quinton Inman - Ketchum, OK	7.8	\$874.20	2		\$1,418.00
3 Dontre' Goff - Henryetta, OK	18.1	\$692.08			
4 Clint Bruised Head	19.1	\$509.95			
5 GS		\$327.83			
6 GS		\$182.13			
<b>Ladies Breakaway</b>	Time	Amount	<b>Sr. Breakaway</b>	Time	Amount
1 Kim R Jim - Shiprock, NM	4.15	\$1,465.23	1 Delvin Ereaux - Hays, MT	3.80	\$733.20
2 Reneille Sells - Chinle, AZ	5.37	\$1,212.60	2 Jan Biakoddy - Leupp, AZ	3.91	\$549.90
3 Chelsey Gibson - Thoreau, NM	5.63	\$959.98	3 Jeff Jim - Shiprock, NM	4.47	\$366.60
4 GS	0.00	\$707.35	4 Ralph Williams - Skiatook, OK	6.52	\$183.30
5 GS	0.00	\$454.73			
6 GS	0.00	\$252.63			
<b>Saddle Bronc</b>	Score	Amount	<b>Jr. Breakaway</b>	Time	Amount
1 Randin Wagner - Browning, MT	76	\$1,974.00	1 Colter Yazzie - Coyote Canyon, NM	3.00	\$634.50
2 Jalen Joaquin	72	\$1,316.00	2 Robbie J Sells - Chinle, AZ	3.03	\$423.00
<b>Tie Down Roping</b>	Time	Amount	<b>Sr. Team Roping Header</b>	Time	Amount
1 Dontre' Goff - Henryetta, OK	10.5	\$1,294.85	1 Gerald Daye & Germaine Daye	14.93	\$545.20
2 Gerald Daye - Gallup, NM	10.6	\$1,071.60	2 GS		\$408.90
3 Quinton Inman - Ketchum, OK	10.7	\$848.35			
4 Ryan Cody Nez - Shiprock, NM	12.2	\$625.10			
5 Aaron Johnson - Morris, OK	12.4	\$401.85			
6 Deon Osborne - Morris, OK	12.6	\$223.25			
<b>Team Roping Header</b>	Time	Amount	<b>Sr. Team Roping Heeler</b>	Time	Amount
1 Josh Jumper & Dakota Louis	7.58	\$1,294.85	1 Gerald Daye & Germaine Daye	14.93	\$545.20
2 Leanna Billie & Ivan Bruised Head	13.7	\$1,071.60	2 GS		\$408.90
3 Robbie J Sells & Calvin Grieve	14.2	\$848.35			
4 Robie Inman & Ralph Williams	25.88	\$625.10			
5 GS		\$401.85			
6 GS		\$223.25			
7					
8					
<b>Team Roping Heeler</b>	Time	Amount	<b>Jr. Barrel Racing</b>	Time	Amount
1 Josh Jumper & Dakota Louis	7.58	\$1,294.85	1 Quinley Inman - Vinita, OK	15.81	\$634.50
2 Leanna Billie & Ivan Bruised Head	13.7	\$1,071.60	2 Harleigh Sells - Chinle, AZ	16.75	\$423.00
3 Robbie J Sells & Calvin Grieve	14.2	\$848.35			
4 Robie Inman & Ralph Williams	25.88	\$625.10			
5 GS		\$401.85			
6 GS		\$223.25			
7					
8					
<b>Jr. Bull Riding</b>	Score	Amount			
1 NO QUALIFIED RIDES					
2					

# Eliza Osceola-Thomas wins soccer state championship with American Heritage

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

PLANTATION — The header that Eliza Osceola-Thomas knocked into the net for her first varsity soccer goal was only part of the story.

The American Heritage-Plantation sophomore stamped an exclamation point to the goal with an acrobatic celebration that included a couple of running forward flips that evoked even louder cheers from her teammates.

“That’s her first goal. She played really well. She did exactly what we do in practice; she scored a goal off a header, and did a little flip at the end,” American Heritage coach Cindy Marcial said after the team’s 7-0 win against Mater Lakes Academy in a Class 4A regional semifinal Feb. 11 at Heritage.

Osceola-Thomas is in her first season on varsity. She’s not a starter on the powerful Patriots, but she makes the most of her playing time.

“She comes in off the bench, and when she comes in, she does a great job. I’m happy she got a goal; that builds her confidence,” Marcial said.

American Heritage comfortably led 5-0 at halftime. Osceola-Thomas entered the game at outside-midfielder to start the second half.

Early in the half, Alivia LaBarbera took a corner kick. Amid a crowd, Osceola-Thomas managed to get her head on the ball and drive it into the goal.



Kevin Johnson

Eliza Osceola-Thomas wins a battle for the ball against Mater Lakes.

“I just hit it because it was right there,” Osceola-Thomas said.

After hugs and high-fives from teammates came the flips.

“That’s what I planned to do. [My teammates] didn’t know I was going to do that,” she said.

Osceola-Thomas wasn’t done. She assisted on the team’s final goal to finish the



Kevin Johnson

American Heritage’s Eliza Osceola-Thomas does a flip after scoring her first career varsity goal in the Patriots’ 7-0 win against Mater Lakes Feb. 11 in a Class 4A girls soccer regional semifinal in Plantation.

night with two points. American Heritage was far from finished, too. The Patriots went on to win the regional championship, 4-1, against Somerset Academy. They headed north to DeLand and Spec Mark Stadium, where they won a state semifinal, 1-0, on Feb. 26 against Bishop Moore, and two days later captured the state championship, 2-0, against Bishop

Kenny. It was the fourth consecutive state title for American Heritage. The team finished undefeated with an 18-0-1 record. The only blemish, if you can call it that, came in the first game of the season, a 2-2 tie against Somerset Academy. Osceola-Thomas, whose older brother Zae won state championships with American

Heritage football and now plays for Florida State, doesn’t take for granted being part of one of the nation’s top high school soccer programs.

“It means a lot. Everyone is really good. I worked hard to get here,” she said.

# With nearly all-Native roster, Everglades City wins district championship

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

EVERGLADES CITY — The last time a high school boys basketball team from Everglades City School won a district championship was many years before any of the current players were born.

A 31-year draught ended Feb. 7 when the Gators edged Donahue Academy, 50-47, in the Class 1A-District 12 championship game.

“31 years. I couldn’t be more proud of them,” Everglades City coach Gerald Lewis said.

The team features an almost all-Native American roster with Miccosukee and Seminole players.

Louis Billie and Jamere Osceola led the team in the championship win with 13 points each. Homer Huggins contributed 10 points. Billie went 4-for-4 from the free throw line in the crucial fourth quarter.

The same teams met a week later on the same court at Everglades City School in a 1A regional quarterfinal; this time the outcome was different.

Led by Blaise Copeland (25 points) and Corban Copeland (23 points), Donahue had an outstanding night shooting and pulled away for a 77-69 win that ended Everglades’ season.

“They’re a very good basketball team and they wanted this really bad,” Lewis said. “We played pretty good defense. We stuck to our plan. We executed. We scored. We did everything we had to do to win; they just did a little bit more.”

Osceola (24 points), Huggins (16) and Antonio Tosca (15) were Everglades City’s top scorers.

Everglades City trailed by as many as 13 points in the first quarter, but clawed back to trim the deficit to 40-36 at halftime.

A 3-pointer by Osceola with :52 left in



Kevin Johnson

Everglades City guard Homer Huggins tries to elude Donahue Academy’s Blaise Copeland during the 1A regional quarterfinal.

the fourth quarter narrowed Donahue’s lead to 69-67 and brought the home fans out of their seats in the packed gym. But Donahue stole an inbounds pass with 40 seconds left and made their free throws to advance to the next round.

With a district championship and a 20-9 record in its pocket, Everglades City will try to keep heading in the right direction next season, but will have to do so without some key seniors, including Tosca, Billie, Jovanny Torres and Logan Wagner.

“We have seven coming back, and they can all play. I know that core seven can go. I think we’ll be alright next year,” Lewis said.



Courtesy photo

The Everglades City High School boys basketball team celebrates after winning the Class 1A-District 12 championship Feb. 7 with a 50-47 win against Donahue Academy. Players from left to right are Amos Huggins, Lavin Cypress, Louis Billie, Homer Huggins, Jamere Osceola, Kyrie Huggins, Antonio Tosca, Jovanny Torres, Prayze Williams, Logan Wagner and Tayin Fairclough.



Kevin Johnson

Antonio Tosca and Everglades City fans celebrate Tosca’s 3-pointer in the fourth quarter of a 1A regional quarterfinal against Donahue Academy.



Kevin Johnson

Everglades City’s Jamere Osceola splits two defenders for a layup attempt.



Kevin Johnson

Everglades City’s Lavin Cypress, left, Tayin Fairclough, center, and Antonio Tosca, right, provide tough defense against Donahue Academy.

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# Seminole Tribal Fair & Pow Wow Arts and Crafts results

**HOLLYWOOD** — Here are results of the arts and crafts competition at the Seminole Tribal Fair & Pow Wow that was held Jan. 30-Feb. 1 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

**SEMINOLE DOLL 10-17**  
1st – Amalia Estrada

**SEMINOLE DOLL 18-32**  
1st – Fairuza Billie  
2nd – Talia Jones  
3rd – Taylor Fulton

**SEMINOLE DOLL 33-45**  
1st – Clarissa Urbina  
2nd – Cecilia Pequeno  
3rd – Sally Osceola

**SEMINOLE DOLL 46-59**  
1st – Samantha John  
2nd – Nelda Melton  
3rd – Jennifer L Osceola

**SEMINOLE DOLL 60&up**  
1st – Scarlett Jumper  
2nd – Judy Baker  
3rd – Rose Tiger

**BASKETRY 10-17**  
1st – Amalia Estrada

**BASKETRY 18-32**  
1st – Kiana Bell  
2nd – Elena Jim  
3rd – Camryn Mills

**BASKETRY 33-45**  
1st – Cassandra Jones  
2nd – Clarissa Urbina  
3rd – Tasha Osceola

**BASKETRY 46-59**  
1st – Christina Billie  
2nd – Lorraine Posada  
3rd – Trisha Osceola

**BASKETRY 60&up**  
1st – Joanie Henry  
2nd – Geneva Beletso  
3rd – Tina DeVito

**WOODCARVING 10-17**  
1st – Chance Madrigal  
2nd – Teegan Osceola-Bartlett  
3rd – Justin Rodriguez

**WOODCARVING 18-32**  
1st Chandler DeMayo  
2nd Donavin Osceola  
3rd – Francisco Rodriguez

**WOODCARVING 33-45**  
1st – Joshua Smith  
2nd – Clifford Sanchez

**WOODCARVING 46-59**  
1st – Howard Osceola  
2nd – Larry Tiger  
3rd – Vinson Osceola

**WOODCARVING 60&up**  
1st – Bobby Henry  
2nd – Manuel Garza  
3rd – John Madrigal

**SEMINOLE PW 10-17**  
1st – Mary-Sally Osceola  
2nd – Dahlia Sanders  
3rd – Ariette Micco-Spivey

**SEMINOLE PW 18-32**  
1st – Le'Andra Mora  
2nd – Jordan Osceola  
3rd – Alanis Bowers

**SEMINOLE PW 33-45**  
1st – Juanita Martinez  
2nd – Allison Garza  
3rd – Cecilia Pequeno

**SEMINOLE PW 46-59**  
1st – Melissa DeMayo

2nd – Susan Davis  
3rd – Jennifer L Osceola

**SEMINOLE PW 60&up**  
1st – Mary L Tommie  
2nd – Christalee Coppedge  
3rd – Virginia Osceola

**BEADWORK 10-17**  
1st – Amalia Estrada  
2nd – Alakai Bert  
3rd – Dalina Rodriguez

**BEADWORK 18-32**  
1st – Alanis Bowers  
2nd – Christina Clark  
3rd – Layton Thomas

**BEADWORK 33-45**  
1st – Lazara Marrero  
2nd – Clarissa Urbina  
3rd – Susannah Severe

**BEADWORK 46-59**  
1st – Lorraine Posada  
2nd – Laverne Thomas  
3rd – Susan Davis

**BEADWORK 60&up**  
1st – Rose Tiger  
2nd – Loretta Micco

3rd – Virginia Osceola

**SEMINOLE CLOTHING W/ PATCHWORK 10-17**  
1st – Dahlia Sanders  
2nd – Mary-Sally Osceola  
3rd – Decklan Tiger

**SEMINOLE CLOTHING W/ PATCHWORK 18-32**  
1st – Christina Clark  
2nd – Mari Veliz  
3rd – Priscilla Alvarado

**SEMINOLE CLOTHING W/ PATCHWORK 33-45**  
1st – Juanita Martinez  
2nd – Cassandra Jones  
3rd – Sally Osceola

**SEMINOLE CLOTHING W/ PATCHWORK 46-59**  
1st – Lenora Roberts  
2nd – Mahala Madrigal  
3rd – Samantha John

**SEMINOLE CLOTHING W/ PATCHWORK 60&up**  
1st – Virginia Osceola  
2nd – Rose Tiger



Seminole Doll 18-32: 1st Fairuza Billie (right), 2nd Talia Jones (center), 3rd Taylor Fulton (left).

Kevin Johnson



Wood carving 60 and up: 1st Bobby Henry.

Kevin Johnson



Wood carving 18-32: 1st Chandler DeMayo (center), 2nd Donavin Osceola (right), 3rd Francisco Rodriguez (left).

Kevin Johnson



Kevin Johnson

Beadwork 33 to 45: 1st Lazara Marrero.



Basketry 10 to 17: 1st Amalia Estrada.

Kevin Johnson



Beadwork 46-59: 1st Lorraine Posada.

Kevin Johnson



Kevin Johnson

Basketry 60 and up: 1st Joanie Henry.



Seminole clothing with patchwork 10 to 17: 1st Dahlia Sanders (left), 2nd Mary-Sally Osceola (center).

Kevin Johnson

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