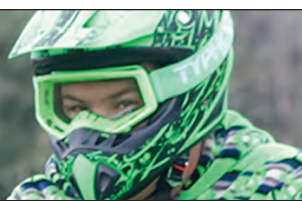


SPD teaches ATV safety in BC
COMMUNITY 4A



PEGS students visit Ag program
EDUCATION 1B



Hollywood hosts Betty Mae Jumper rodeo
SPORTS 1C



The Seminole Tribune

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Volume XLIX • Number 2

February 2025

New Brighton hotel-casino ready to open

STAFF REPORT

BRIGHTON — A grand opening celebration for the new Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino is scheduled to be held Feb. 6 on the Brighton Reservation. An opening celebration for invited guests will take place at 10 a.m. Doors will open to the public at 12 p.m. As part of the celebration, legendary rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd will perform at 8 p.m. "We are all eagerly awaiting our official opening on February 6," said tribal member and Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino general manager Marty Johns, in a statement. "It will be such a special moment for the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Brighton Seminole Reservation, and the entire region. This new resort is expected to increase the number of tourists to the area, which is especially important. We are excited to offer a new level of gaming, dining, and entertainment." The new hotel and casino replaces the existing casino, which opened in 1980 and is located a few miles from the new property. The resort features 640 slot machines and 18 tables for blackjack, craps, roulette, and other house-banked card games. A smoke-free gaming space includes 104 slot machines and a high-limit gaming area has 42 slot machines and four table games.

◆ See BRIGHTON on page 4A

Team Immokalee wins Rez Rally

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

IMMOKALEE — Despite chilly temperatures in the 50s, about 500 participants bundled up for the Seminole Tribe of Florida's annual Rez Rally, a 5K race which gives runners, walkers, strollers and wheelchairs from the tribal communities an active start for the new year. This year's 25th anniversary edition was held Jan. 4 on the Immokalee Reservation. "This is an event I consider a cornerstone of tribal gatherings because it supports exercise and diabetes health," said President Holly Tiger, who ran and walked the 5K course. "Tribal Council has supported this for 25 years and we are still alive because of that support and the community's participation." "I'm proud this happens every year because it helps our people," said Brighton Councilman Larry Howard. "A lot of us suffer from diabetes and exercise is a tool to fight diabetes. At the end of the day, we are here for our health and nutrition. We have a lot of people who beat diabetes and extended their lives." Rez Rally was started by Edna McDuffie, Connie Whidden, Patty Waldron, who worked at the health department at the time, and Mitchell Cypress, who was chairman. Cypress said people tend to eat more and exercise less during the end of the year holidays. "We do this to remind us to keep on exercising all year," McDuffie said. "I watch what I eat and exercise and I haven't gotten diabetes." Tribal members came from every reservation for the much anticipated event and competed in every category and age group. There were runners, walkers, strollers and wheelchairs vying to place in the top



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Team Immokalee's Mary Lou Alvarado, Amy Yzaguirre, Juanita Martinez, Jaime Yzaguirre, Cecilia Pequeno and Amy Garza celebrate winning the sweetgrass basket trophy Jan. 4 at Rez Rally.

three spots. Michelle Ford, of Immokalee, has participated in every Rez Rally and pushed her brother Pete Aguilar in this one. Steve Osceola, of Hollywood, was proud to have made it the entire way around the course. "I did the entire race and didn't come in last," he said. "I'm feeling good."

◆ See RALLY on page 6A

New Hollywood Senior Center breaks ground

BY TATUM MITCHELL
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — Tribal members and employees gathered Jan. 7 to break ground for the Seminole Tribe of Florida's new Hollywood Senior Center. Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola thanked everyone involved in the project and said the new center will have many amenities, including a game room, arts and craft area, an indoor and outdoor pool, massage rooms, a workout area and more. The new facility will be 31,102 square feet, and the expected completion year is 2028. "This is unbelievable, that's all I can say right now because it's really overwhelming," Dorothy Tommie, Hollywood senior, said. The center will be built near the U.S. 441 entrance on the eastern portion of the reservation. It will be part of a growing area of new development that includes the Betty Mae Jumper Medical Center, which opened in 2020; a preschool, which is under construction; and a skate park, which opened



Calvin Tiger

Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola speaks at the groundbreaking ceremony.



Calvin Tiger

Shovels dig into the dirt as the Hollywood Reservation celebrates the groundbreaking of its new senior center Jan 7.

in November 2024. There are no current plans for the existing senior center. "We're here to celebrate an exciting milestone. ... Thank you to the Hollywood community and the seniors for your support and inspiring us every day," executive director of Tribal Community Development Derek Koger said. "It was truly our pleasure to work with the seniors on this project. They had a lot of

great feedback when we were going to the Senior Center. If something was ugly, they would tell us, we appreciate that," Koger said as the audience laughed. Seniors shared that the area was once where they would play in the woods and walk through to get to school. "This is a great day for us. I remember when I was just a youngster, my father and mother had a camp just right where those old

palm trees are," Agnes Motlow said. "My neighbors were Joel Billie, who is President Holly's grandfather, and grandmother lived there. ... Bonnie's parents, Wanda Bowers, Eugene Bowers, all of the people that are, well, we were just children back then. We're seniors now, but back then, we were children, and we played — this was all woods — and we could play in the woods. We had a really great time, never realizing that we're going

to have something like this. And again, I'd like to say thank you for coming out. Thank you to the Seminole Tribe." President Holly Tiger said she appreciates the history the seniors in the community share with others and emphasized the importance of keeping those stories alive.

◆ See CENTER on page 4A

Editorial

Haaland changed how America faces its history

• Levi Rickert

During the White House Tribal Nations Summit on December 9, 2024, multiple cabinet members praised Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) for her advocacy of tribal issues at cabinet and high-level meetings. As the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary, Haaland has been a powerful advocate for Indian Country, bringing tribal nations' concerns to the highest levels of government.

Her impact on Indian Country has been significant.

Throughout her time in office, Haaland emphasized a core truth: "Native American history is American history." This principle guided her most significant initiatives, from the Indian boarding school investigation to the protection of sacred sites. Her leadership forced the federal government to confront difficult chapters of its past while creating new pathways for tribal consultation and cooperation.

Her tenure exemplifies the importance of representation. As she prepares to step down, Native representation in federal leadership will inevitably diminish. Hopefully, it will not disappear entirely—because Indian Country needs advocates. Indian Country needs representation.

While Haaland's voice was heard in some of the most powerful rooms of the Biden-Harris administration, her impact resonated deeply with ordinary Native Americans.

At one of the 12 Road to Healing Tour listening sessions on the Navajo Nation, I witnessed this firsthand. A Diné woman, who looked to be about 60 years old, said she had driven five hours from Utah to see Secretary Haaland. She described herself crying when then-President-elect Joe Biden nominated Haaland as Interior Secretary in December 2020, saying she never thought she would see a Native American in such an important position. The woman added she had prayed to the Creator to meet Secretary Haaland.

She said: "Today is the day I get to meet Deb Haaland!" Don't tell me representation doesn't matter. Haaland represented for Native women and girls—and Native males, for that matter—in America, Native Americans can have a seat at the table.

Haaland's role represented more than individual achievement. She brought forward the history of Native Americans to the highest level of the federal government. She represented those of us who are ordinary Native Americans, who know the history of the struggles of our ancestors and hardships within our tribal families. She represented us—those who seek parity for our tribal communities.

In June 2021, following the discovery of 215 remains of schoolchildren at the Kamloops Industrial Residential School in British Columbia, Canada, Haaland launched the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative during her appearance at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) 2021 Mid-Year Conference. She recalled how she wept along with the Indigenous Interior staff when they learned of Kamloops.

NDN Collective announces new president

STAFF REPORT

NDN Collective announced its new president, Wizipan Little Elk Garriott (Sicangu Lakota), on Jan. 22.

NDN Collective is an organization that focuses on activism and sustainability through Indigenous leaders and terms.

"The opportunity to continue to work on behalf of Indian country at NDN Collective is a blessing," Wizipan Little Elk Garriott said in a press release. "I'm honored to join such an amazing team driving and connecting grassroots, on-the-ground work with national movements and policies."

Prior to this new role, from 2021–24, he was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs in the U.S. Department of the Interior. Before that, he was CEO of Rosebud Economic Development Corporation from 2012–21, according to the press release.

The current CEO and founder of NDN Collective, Nick Tilsen, will remain.

Under the leadership of Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community), the Interior has published two volumes of findings in the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigation Report, Volume I and Volume II.

This investigation will stand as Haaland's greatest legacy, as its findings affect every Native American family. Many tribal leaders say the investigation would not have happened without her leadership.

The investigation led to the first presidential apology for the federal government's role in operating Indian boarding schools, where Native students endured horrific physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. It also resulted in President Biden proclaiming at national monument at the site of the Carlisle Federal Indian Boarding School.

Haaland also led the Board of Geographic Names in removing the derogatory term "squaw" from nearly 650 geographic sites in September 2023.

"Words matter, particularly in our work to ensure our nation's public lands and waters are accessible and welcoming to people of all backgrounds," Haaland said. "I am grateful to the members of the Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force and the Board on Geographic Names for their efforts to finalize the removal of this harmful word. Together, we are showing why representation matters and charting a path for an inclusive America."

Beyond her advocacy for Indian Country, Haaland managed a federal department with an \$18.1 billion budget and 70,000 employees across more than 2,400 locations. The Interior manages the country's natural and cultural resources, including national parks, monuments, wildlife refuges, and other public lands. It also oversees energy development on public lands and waters, while managing water resources in 17 western states.

Haaland brought unprecedented perspectives to the Interior Department: Native American insights, women's leadership, and a deep understanding of Indigenous communities. She led with resolve and, when needed, ferocity.

She readily admits she is not perfect and has had to make decisions that were not always popular, even among tribal nations. Still, credit must be given for her unwavering hard work and dedication to improving Indian Country. There is no way one person can correct the historic ill-treatment of tribal nations within four short years.

In Indian Country, we have a word for individuals like Deb Haaland: Warrior. And she has proven to be a fierce one.

Thayék gde nwéndēmen — We are all related.

Levi "Calm Before the Storm" Rickert (Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation) is the founder, publisher and editor of Native News Online. Rickert was awarded Best Column 2021 Native Media Award for the print/online category by the Native American Journalists Association. He serves on the advisory board of the Multicultural Media Correspondents Association. He can be reached at levi@nativenewsonline.net.

Michigan tribal entity earns Naval contract

STAFF REPORT

Bodwé, the professional services group of Mno-Bmadsen, the non-gaming investment enterprise and a wholly owned instrumentality of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi in Michigan, announced Jan. 16 that it has been awarded a U.S. Navy contract.

The contract is part of the Naval Supply Systems Command's (NAVSUP) Worldwide Expeditionary Multiple Award Contract (WEXMAC).

According to a press release, the 10-year contract for a joint venture known as Bodwé-KVG JV includes a five-year base period and five one-year option periods with a base ceiling value of \$225 million and the overall ceiling of \$455 million.

Bodwé-KVG works in several areas, including logistical, operational, and expeditionary support services.

Tribal employees become certified in operational technology cybersecurity

BY TATUM MITCHELL
Staff Reporter

Two employees from the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Public Works Department recently became certified in operational technology (OT) cybersecurity aimed at protecting physical infrastructure operations and control systems.

Gregory Gooden, a supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) network engineer, and Luis Sanchez, a system administrator, completed the OT cybersecurity specialist program.

According to a release from Automation Strategy & Performance (ASP), Florida is in the top five states for cyberattacks and fewer than 1% of critical infrastructure workforce have verified OT cyber skills.

ASP is the certifying entity for the program that is recognized in the industry to verify the skills of those being certified, like Gooden and Sanchez. The University of South Florida partners with ASP to facilitate people completing the program.

Melissa Boutwell, president and founder of ASP, said there's a difference between informational technology (IT) cybersecurity and OT cybersecurity.

"IT deals with informational technology. [OT] deals with operational technology. People that we are certifying run the machines that run the state of Florida. So in the case of the Seminole Tribe, the tribe will have water assets. It will have power assets. It will have other community assets that its members need to depend on," Boutwell said. "We're focused on the operational control systems that make sure that there are no cyber physical threats to whether or not you have power water, that you have safe air when you're in buildings and things like that. It's very much focused on the natural resources and critical things that our communities depend on to thrive."

There are fewer OT cybersecurity programs that focus on employees in the field compared to IT cybersecurity.

Gooden's role in Public Works includes leading a team to ensure operators can remotely monitor and control plant processes. He said he decided to do the certification program because cybersecurity, access and availability are vital in his position.

"It was a no brainer for me, for my team, to jump on. It's something that, for one, I have [researched], and I'm actually doing my doctorate in this space," Gooden said.

With 1% of infrastructure workforce having OT cybersecurity training, according to an ASP release, Gooden said the program is "well worth it."

"[The industry] is significantly understaffed in terms of somebody understanding OT necessities or idiosyncrasies of the space and how to implement or wrap cybersecurity over it while maintaining the capabilities that we need, because you can't take what you do in IT and drop it in our space," Gooden said.

The program, Gooden said, is one of the few that he has seen that can give someone a comprehensive understanding of what is required in the OT cybersecurity space.

"The course really spoke to me because that was their goal ... to understand what the technology is and how it's been massaged into a solid product. That is something that, as I said, I found lacking, because ...



Courtesy photo

From left to right, Derek Kroger, executive director of Tribal Community Development; Gregory Gooden, SCADA network engineer, who completed the OT Cybersecurity Specialist program; and Bruce Cole, director of Public Works.

you can't go anywhere and get that sort of [instruction]," Gooden said. "Because there's no one place where you can go and sit and say they're going to teach me how to ... implement network security, implement risk management in one setting."

Boutwell said this program benefits organizations and companies because usually OT cybersecurity is not distinguished as a separate job.

"The people that are performing the work of OT cybersecurity have immense responsibility today. They are very busy doing everything they can to make sure that our power runs properly, that our traffic systems are working," Boutwell said. "But there has not been an opportunity up until this time period to say, 'Hey, these are different skills. These are special skills. This actually requires separate time and maybe a little bit of extra time to do it.' So, it has given employers an opportunity to identify who in their organization is responsible for OT cybersecurity, and that is not something that has ever been done at a statewide level or at a tribal level."

Mark Koulianos, assistant vice president for University Community Partnerships at the University of South Florida, runs a

"lifelong learning" program for continuing education past college. The university partnered with ASP to run the certification program Gooden completed. Koulianos said since the number of people educated in the OT cybersecurity space is low, it's important to increase training and the amount of people with that skill set.

"Less than 1% had been trained in this methodology, yet they were responsible for the security, from a cyber security perspective, for this type of thing," Koulianos said. "They work full time. They don't have time to go back full time. They need a flexible program. They need someone teaching them not all the theory behind it, but like, this is what you do in this scenario if this happens, and here's the things that you need to be careful about. It's more more hands on, and it gets to the marketplace quicker. This is like a year program, which is long, but it's when you consider that we only have 1% of all the people that manage this stuff in Florida haven't been trained. We had to figure out a way to get it out there as a way to protect the critical infrastructure for these things."

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Community



Seminole 4-H kids show their work at South Florida Fair

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

WEST PALM BEACH — In an agricultural corner of South Florida's largest fair — the South Florida Fair — kids from the Seminole Tribe's 4-H program showed judges what they've been working on for the past several months.

Some kids raised swine since last fall. Wearing patchwork jackets, they guided the thick, burly creatures — in most cases weighing more than two times their young handlers — into the ring at the fair's market hog show.

Sheri Trent, the tribe's 4-H youth development extension agent, said a lot of hard work by the kids takes place leading up to the fair.

"The kids trained their animals to lead, spent time with them, groomed them, fed them multiple times a day, and worked very hard to make the weight and show successfully," Trent said.

The swine, or hog, portion of the fair featured three classes: seniors (ages 15-19), intermediate (12-14) and junior (8-11). It started with the market hog showmanship Jan. 16 — the day before the fair opened to the public — and continued the following day with the market show. The animals went to auction Jan. 18.

As he waited in the pens for his group to be called, Esteban Santibanez Jr., a fourth grader at Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School, said he received his hog in September when it weighed 80 pounds. Four months and 200 pounds later the male, which he named "Brownie," entered the ring at 277 pounds.

"Working the pig is harder than working the dog," Santibanez said. "He likes mud." His next-door pen neighbor, Amariah Lavatta, also raised a brown, male hog, and, coincidentally, also named it "Brownie," who tipped the scales at 263 pounds.

In the pen next to Lavatta was Nohea Collins, who kept the colorful naming trend going with her hog named "Bluey," who weighed 230 pounds.

Timothy Urbina has been raising and showing hogs for about the past four or five years. The Moore Haven High Student said he enjoys the entire process.

"It's messy, but it's fun," he said.

Seminole kids didn't win any championships with their hogs, but Trent said the purpose of these events — and what it takes to raise the hogs — reaches far beyond the showing,



Kevin Johnson

Koty Gopher-Turtle, left, and Khoal Cochran show their hogs Jan. 16 at the South Florida Fair.



Kevin Johnson

Amariah Lavatta, far right, is focused on guiding her swine while keeping eye contact with the judge.

selling and awards. "The responsibility, agriculture awareness, independence and self-confidence they learn is the primary focus of the project," she said. "All of these animals are sold at the sale for food production and provide healthy meat products for the community and families who purchase them." The grand champions from the hog show were: Makinley Garrett (junior swine), Leela Puffenburger (intermediate swine), and Madeline Zajac (senior swine).

Kevin Johnson

After participating in showmanship, Nohea Collins steers her swine back into the pen area.



Kevin Johnson

Esteban Santibanez Jr. with his 277-pound hog "Brownie" at the fair.

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Calvin Tiger

SPD Officer Keith Stripling shows Ayze Henry the importance of checking ATV tires and air pressure during the Big Cypress Public Safety ATV class on Jan. 11.

SPD promotes ATV safety

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The Seminole Police Department conducted its first safety class for ATV riders in the tribal community Jan. 11 at the Big Cypress Public Safety building. The class was instructed by SPD officers Keith Stripling and Orenthial Nicholson.

In a classroom, Stripling gave attendees an ATV safety booklet and discussed basic safety information for ATV riders. Helmets, gloves and goggles were provided at the start.

Outside, Stripling conducted an ATV inspection for those who brought their own ATVs. The inspection consisted of the TLOC method (tires and wheels, controls and cables, lights and electronics, oil and fuel, chain and driveshaft chassis). Stripling also talked about the importance of having tools ATVs in the event of unforeseen repair while out riding on a trail.

After the inspection, the first riding course consisted of straight line breaking. This course instructed the rider to ride in a straight line and brake at a certain point, to not skid or lose control of the ATV.

The second exercise was a wide turn around a figure eight pattern of cones in which the ATV rider used a wide left or right turn using the “Rider Active” function. The function utilizes the shift of the riders to right or left depending on the turn taking place to

keep the ATV as stable as possible.

The third exercise consisted of more in-depth training of turning even more aggressively while also using the “Rider Active” function. Riders moved forward and reversed around the figure eight pattern.

The fourth and final exercise was “The Serpentine,” which focused on having the rider go around tight turns and experience the use of a throttle while maneuvering around the cones and moving both forward and reverse while making sure the rider always keeps both hands on the handlebars.

“The purpose of this training is to equip riders with the knowledge, skills and ability necessary to operate an ATV responsibly and safely minimizing the risk of accidents and serious injuries,” Stripling said. “By teaching and practicing proper riding techniques, we hope to keep the members of our community safe. Recognizing hazards, practicing emergency maneuvers, and always assessing the terrain in which you ride, will promote a safer riding experience and potentially prevent any accidents. SPD acknowledges the fact that most tribal members have been riding ATV and SXS for years, we are hoping that providing this class will promote safer riding with fewer incidents and be an enjoyable experience for all participants.”

A similar safety class was scheduled for Jan. 18 in Brighton.



Calvin Tiger

Officer Stripling instructs Wyatt Bruised Head proper ATV riding during the Big Cypress Public Safety ATV class.



Calvin Tiger

Ada Bruised Head learns about air filter and cover during a safety inspection.

◆ BRIGHTON From page 1A

The 100-room hotel includes an outdoor swimming pool and a fitness center.

Dining options include Josiah Steakhouse, EE-TO-LEET-KE Grill and Marketplace. There is also a bar known as

Center Bar.

An indoor entertainment space with seating up to 900 and a 10-lane bowling alley are also part of the resort.

The property’s address is 17735 Reservation Road, Okeechobee, Florida 34974. For more information go to <https://casino.hardrock.com/brighton/hotel-and-casino> or call 863-467-9998.



Calvin Tiger

With hard hats and shovels, the Hollywood community breaks ground for a new senior center.

◆ CENTER From page 1A

“I want to say thank you to all the partners that we have here today that come and share this moment with us, though it may be another groundbreaking for construction companies for us it means a lot. ... I want to thank everybody for all the hard work and bringing it to life.”

“And I want to remember that we have humble beginnings, and this is where it all started,” President Tiger said.

Hollywood Board Rep. Christine McCall said one of her favorite parts of her job is spending time with the seniors and learning from them. She said she appreciated the council and how they make efforts to improve the community and life for the next generation.

“I’m always so grateful that [the seniors] let me share time with them,” Rep. McCall said. “I want to thank the Tribal Council for always taking care of our people and really showing the next generation how we’re supposed to be treating our Elders and how much respect we should have for them. Because they did pave the way for us, and they do teach us every day. ... We might be in the city, but we’re so tight knit, and I’m always so grateful that I can lean on my community, my tribe. Thank you to the Tribal Council. Thank you to the staff that you have employed that put all their dedication into these buildings.”



Calvin Tiger (2)

Joel Frank and Hollywood Board Rep. Christine McCall speak at the groundbreaking ceremony.

The list of recognitions for the project included Tina Osceola, TCD, the finance team, Joe Kippenberger and the elder center staff, Dr. Kiswani-Barley, the Tribal Council,

JJS Construction, the architect design team and the program management team, Jacobs Engineering.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Bonnie Motlow, Nettie Stewart, President Holly Tiger, Wanda Bowers, Agnes Billie-Motlow and Dora Tiger attend the ceremony.



Courtesy image

A rendering of the new Hollywood Senior Center exterior.

'We Ride For Her' screens at Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood, raises awareness for MMIWR

BY TATUM MITCHELL
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — Looking to increase awareness about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) epidemic, Lorna Cuney (Oglala Lakota Sioux) began organizing the Medicine Wheel Riders in 2019.

The Medicine Wheel Riders is a group of Indigenous women who ride motorcycles across multiple states to advocate and gather resources for MMIWR. Their story is documented in a short film, "We Ride For Her", which was screened Jan. 15 at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood and included a panel discussion.

Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member Durante Blais-Billie, host of the panel and the event organizer for Hard Rock and Seminole Gaming, said the event idea stemmed from January being Human Trafficking Prevention Month, as trafficking disproportionately impacts Native communities. More than 5,500 Indigenous women and girls are missing or murdered, and homicide is one of the leading causes of death for Native women. According to the Protect All Children from Trafficking (PACT) website, 27.6 million people are victims of trafficking worldwide.

Blais-Billie said the event and film aligned with her goals of community involvement, community healing and prevention against violence.

"We've been wanting to have a community event that combines the tribal community with all of our stakeholders and partners and employees at Seminole Gaming and Hard Rock for a while, but this just seemed like the perfect opportunity," Blais-Billie said. "Red Sand Project reached out to us with this film that specifically focused on Indigenous activism in the space. So, this is perfect, this is the perfect introduction. It's perfect to have these people open this space for us with their knowledge and their experience in it."

The panelists were Cuney, Katrina Massey (PACT Board of Directors and

Survivors Council Member), Prairie Rose Seminole (film co-director), Lori Cohen (CEO of PACT) and Molly Gochman (Film Executive Producer and Red Sand Project Founder).

The panel spoke before and after the film about systemic challenges Native communities face, the high rates of human trafficking and how to work toward prevention. Some takeaways included promoting community education, raising awareness, showing kindness and asking questions.

Cuney said she does not consider herself an expert on human trafficking or MMIWR, but she is a community member — and she knew she wanted to help. Her advice is to prioritize education on the topic and take responsibility for the community.

"When I see all my sister riders, these are some of the most compassionate women that I've ever met in my life. I think every single one of us has been affected by this in some way or some form, and we just wanted to help our communities," Cuney said. "Because it's very hard for our communities to get the resources and the help that they need whenever they're faced with this. Through doing that, it was something that I wasn't educated about. It's something that I really didn't have a whole lot of knowledge about. But I just knew that I wanted to help my community. And that's how a lot of women are, we just wanted to find ways to be active, to take action."

While communities can be advocating for MMIWR and raising awareness about human trafficking, Prairie Rose Seminole said at the same time, there is grief happening on an individual and collective level.

"So, with this film, not only do I want you to ask questions, but I also want you to see that here's a group of women who all have a deeply personal connection to tragedy and how they collectively move their grief into action," Prairie Rose Seminole said. "They collectively move their grief into advocacy and knowing that it's not just one individual going through these pieces. It's a community that is working together at all these different levels, from the front lines to



From left to right, Durante Blais-Billie, Hollywood Board Rep. Christine McCall and Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas speak at the 'We Ride For Her' event.



Panelists, from left to right, are Lorna Cuney, Katrina Massey, Prairie Rose Seminole, Laurie Cohen, Mollie Gochman and Durante Blais-Billie.

the halls of Congress, really trying to make this movement shift."

Bringing more people into the conversation, holding each other accountable and asking questions are some takeaways she hopes people get from the film.

Ramsey Mondesir, audience member for the screening and director of security and transportation for the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood, said the film and panel showed that education on trafficking is important even when the topic can be "taboo" to discuss.

"Starting a simple conversation goes a long way. Being security department, we strive to try and prevent this, and it's all about education," Mondesir said.

In addition, the panel discussed the preventative side of trafficking. Massey said doing preventative work on all sides of trafficking, with victims and perpetrators, is an aspect of prevention. Childhood traumas of victims and perpetrators can be very similar, Massey said, so setting children up for success and taking care of the community as adults is important.

Cohen said something she does as a parent is educate her two sons to "never buy another human being for sex." Though it can be a challenging conversation to have, Cohen said it is a necessary one to stop the demand and profitability of trafficking.

"We're thinking a lot about the victims, and we have to remember them and honor

them and respect and charge their memory. But what about the perpetrators, right? What is their responsibility, and what is our responsibility to stop men from buying women's bodies for their own pleasure and control and domination, right? Because in some cases, this isn't about pleasure, it's really about domination," Cohen said. "And I had worked with so many victims who had been so harmed by the commercial sex industry where they were being exploited and abused, and I really took it to heart."

Hollywood Board Rep. Christine McCall said she wanted to attend the screening to show support and advocate for Indigenous people and the Hollywood community.

"We're not talking enough about how to educate our young people about healthy relationships," Rep. McCall said. "As a young woman, I'm a mother, I'm always trying to educate my daughter about — not 'bad people' — but people that give you those uncomfortable feelings and not pushing them down."

Rep. McCall said she tries to raise awareness and teach her daughter about what to look for. "It's always been an important thing for me, as a community member of the tribe of this community that's right in the city, to bring awareness to things," Rep. McCall said. "And just make sure that I'm always trying to learn more, where that not only

the women in our tribe, but the men in our tribe can understand that if they have young children in their families, sisters, mothers, or even our own men, get exploited at times. It's just something that's very important that we need to be teaching with one another, not just Seminoles, not just Natives, but everyone needs to learn about the warning signs."

Hard Rock and PACT have an educational program, Social Identity Quest, that is aimed toward helping children navigate the internet safely to avoid online predators. To register a school or group visit socialidentityquest.com/siq-registration-form/. In addition, Hard Rock will donate \$10,000 to Medicine Wheel Ride to benefit families impacted by MMIWR and research efforts, according to a press release. To learn more or donate visit medicinewheelride.org.

Resources:
National human trafficking hotline: 888-373-7888 (humantrafficking.org)
StrongHearts Native helpline: 844-762-8483 (strongheartshelpline.org)
Tribal Victim Advocates, Center for Behavioral Health: 954-964-6338
Women in Distress of Broward County: 954-761-1133 (womenindistress.org)
More resources: docs.google.com/document/d/1-0Qw1-2DqkdKtercwKImq1MFWF0sYb8LymWKz171gBk/edit?usp=sharing



'We Ride For Her' is shown at Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood.

Chalo Nitka events run Feb. 22-March 1

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

A Moore Haven tradition that started in 1948 will continue Feb. 22 to March 1 as the town holds its annual Chalo Nitka events.

Chalo Nitka highlights the community's friendship with the Seminole Tribe. Last year, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard served as a grand marshal. The tribe's princesses are traditionally part of the parade, which will be held March 1 at 10 a.m. along Avenue J and feature floats, fire trucks, bands, swamp buggies and more.

Most of Chalo Nitka activities take place Feb. 28 and March 1 — including amusement rides — but events begin Feb. 22 with the Chalo Nitka Bass Fishing Tournament. Entry fees start at \$25 per person, with over

\$3,000 in guaranteed cash prizes.

The Chalo Nitka Rodeo will be held on Feb. 28 and March 1 at Bronson Arena. The rodeo is organized by the Glades County Youth Livestock organization.

The Chalo Nitka Festival on March 1 will feature several events, including a pancake breakfast, live music, local food and Seminole arts and crafts as well as the parade, rodeo and rides.

The roots of Chalo Nitka have Seminole connections. Chalo Nitka is Creek language for "Big Bass." The event started as a weeklong fishing contest for the community.

Admission to the festival is \$5. Wear traditional Seminole attire or a 2025 Chalo Nitka T-shirt for free admission. For more information, visit chalonitkafestival.com.

Chalo Nitka Schedule

Feb. 22: Chalo Nitka Bass Fishing Tournament (Ward Park/Boat Ramp)
Feb. 24: 6 p.m. — Pee Wee & Dairy Shows
Feb. 25: 6 p.m. — Swine Show
Feb. 26: 6 p.m. — Steer & Heifer Shows
Feb. 27: 7 p.m. — Pee Wee Parade & Livestock Auction
Feb. 28: 9 a.m. Small Fry Fishing Contest Registration; 9:30 a.m. start
11 a.m. Kids Day (Chalo Nitka Park)
5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Midway Opens (Chalo Nitka Park)
7 p.m. Ranch Rodeo (Bronson Arena)
9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Chalo Nitka Dance (Doyle Conner Building)
March 1
7 a.m. 5K Run Registration (Moore Haven City Park-Tom Perry Park); 7:30 a.m. start

7:30 to 9:30 a.m. Pancake Breakfast (City Park-Perry Park)
10 a.m. Parade Begins
11 a.m. Gates Open / Midway Opens (Chalo Nitka Park)
11:30 a.m. Flag Raising—G.C.S.O. Color Guard/MHHS & West Glades
11:35 a.m. Welcome & Introduction of Grand Marshal; Elected Officials; Chalo Nitka Royalty
12 p.m. Country Rhythm Cloggers
12:45 p.m. Live Entertainment By The Seminole Tribe of Florida
1:45 p.m. Clewiston Performing Art Center Dance Team
4 p.m. Music
7 p.m. Ranch Rodeo (Bronson)
9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Chalo Nitka Dance (Doyle Conner Building)

Martha Tommie, others rejoice over Leonard Peltier's release

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Leonard Peltier, who has been in prison since 1976, is scheduled to be released Feb. 18 to serve the rest of his life sentence in home confinement. Former President Joe Biden commuted Peltier's sentence as one of his last acts as President on Jan. 20.

Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member Martha Tommie cried when she heard the news. Over the years, Tommie has joined fellow Seminoles and other Natives in calling for Peltier's release at protest/prayer ceremonies outside Coleman Federal Correctional Institution in Sumterville, Florida, where he was imprisoned.

"Our prayers were answered. It might not have been on our time as we wanted it to be, but it was on the Creator's time," Tommie said. "He needs to be home with his family and his people."

Peltier (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians) was found guilty of the murders of two FBI agents during an uprising on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota in 1975, for which he is serving two life sentences. Many supporters and human rights organizations believe his conviction was tainted due to questionable evidence.

Peltier, 80, suffers from severe health ailments and has spent the majority of his life in prison.

"Tribal Nations, Nobel Peace laureates, former law enforcement officials (including the former U.S. Attorney whose office oversaw Mr. Peltier's prosecution and appeal), dozens of lawmakers, and human rights organizations strongly support granting Mr. Peltier clemency, citing his advanced age, illnesses, his close ties to

and leadership in the Native American community, and the substantial length of time he has already spent in prison," Biden's statement read.

Former Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), who was the first Native American cabinet secretary, said in a statement that she supports the commutation.

"His release from prison signifies a measure of justice that has long evaded so many Native Americans for so many decades. I am grateful that Leonard can now go home to his family. I applaud President Biden for this action and understanding what this means to Indian Country," Haaland said.

The day the commutation was announced, members of the NDN Collective, an Indigenous rights group in South Dakota, met outside Coleman and spoke to Peltier on a cell phone. After asking if there was a message he wanted to send out, they relayed his response to the public.

"Tell everybody in Indian country and all the supporters around the world I am very,



Martha Tommie, left, and Ryanna Osceola attend a rally for Leonard Peltier on Sept. 22, 2018, in Sumterville, Florida.

very grateful for what you've done. You got me one step home. Home confinement is going to be a million times better than what I'm living in. I'll be able to get good medical treatment, I'll be able to see my friends and I'll be able to get my shoulders fixed. I can start painting again. It's gonna be, it'll be like freedom. It'll be just as good as freedom. It don't matter if I have to stay in the house, but the whole nation should be home confinement. That's my home," Peltier said.

◆ RALLY
From page 1A

Dr. Vandhana Kiswani, Health and Human Services executive director, congratulated everyone for completing the race and starting the year off on the right foot.

Rez Rally includes a competition for turnout among the reservations. Immokalee won the team participation percentage of

the community trophy, which is a large sweetgrass basket made by Immokalee's own Linda Beletso some years ago. Immokalee also won the championship trophy for most participants overall.

"It's an honor and a privilege to have Rez Rally here," said Immokalee Council Liaison Jaime Yzaguirre. "It's great to have other reservations visit us. I'm proud of our staff and everyone involved in making this event."



Beverly Bidney

Edna McDuffie, left, and Connie Whidden listen as former President Mitchell Cypress talks about the early days of the Rez Rally. The three of them and Patty Waldren began the Rez Rally 25 years ago.



Beverly Bidney

Kids get off to a fast start at the starting line for the Rez Rally on Jan. 4 in Immokalee.



Beverly Bidney

Cordey Jumper sprints to the finish line.



Beverly Bidney

Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas speaks to the participants.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Charlie Tiger, Alan McInturff, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and HHS Executive Director Dr. Vandhana Kiswani.



Beverly Bidney

Dante Kippenberger, 18, ran so fast he was headed back to the finish line as walkers were still heading out.



Beverly Bidney

Jr. Miss Florida Violet Osceola wears her sash while competing in the run.



Beverly Bidney

Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, right, takes part in the walking race.

See Rez Rally Results page 6C



Team Immokalee gathers with its trophies after winning Rez Rally.

Beverly Bidney

Seminole Hard Rock Tampa celebrates \$65M in enhancements

STAFF REPORT

With giant red scissors in hand, Steve Bonner cut the ribbon on a celebratory day at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa.

Bonner, the property's president, joined other guests Jan. 23 to welcome the opening of a new gaming area, newly renovated smoke-free hotel rooms and the reopening of the Fresh Harvest Buffet. In total, more than \$65 million in project enhancements were made.

"We are extremely excited about taking our world-class resort to yet another level," Bonner said in a statement. "We're always attentive to what our guests want and need. They asked and we delivered."

The reopening of the buffet – with six live-action kitchens – created 200 new jobs, according to Hard Rock Tampa, which now has 4,293 team members.

Fresh Harvest Buffet will initially operate exclusively from Thursdays to Sundays. Hours on Thursdays and Fridays are 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., with lunch served from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and dinner from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays features brunch from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and includes gourmet selections such as create-your-own omelets, oysters Rockefeller, French toast, and eggs benedict. Dinner on Saturdays and Sundays is from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

A new gaming area on space previously occupied by the food court features close to 350 slot machines.

"After introducing live craps, roulette, and sports betting just over a year ago, we believe the new slots area just adds to the fully integrated casino experience for our guests," Bonner said. "Last month, we celebrated \$2 billion in jackpots for 2024, so clearly this is the luckiest place to be."

Nearly 250 guest rooms in the hotel's west tower have been upgraded. Hallways feature a nod to Hard Rock's musical roots with vinyl records displayed portraying some of the world's top musical artists. By the end of January, the hotel expects to offer 802 guest rooms.



Steve Bonner, president of Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa, triumphantly raises the oversized scissors he used to cut a red ribbon marking the property's \$65 million in upgrades.



A recently renovated luxury king guest room at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa.

Nevada Gaming Control Board receives update on Hard Rock Las Vegas construction

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

The Nevada Gaming Control Board received an update on the status of the Hard Rock Las Vegas construction project at its Jan. 15 meeting.

The board heard from Frank Cassella, senior vice president of Finance for Hard Rock Las Vegas.

Cassella appeared before the board as part of an application for his licensure as a key executive, which the board unanimously recommended approval to the Nevada Gaming Commission.

Cassella earned an accounting degree from Penn State University. He told the board he previously worked at KPMG and became involved in the gaming industry working in

auditing for PricewaterhouseCoopers. He went on to work for Wynn Resorts, where he served in a leadership role at its Macau resort and helped with the opening of Encore Boston Harbor resort and casino before joining Hard Rock. His work experience received praise from the board during the meeting.

"Extremely impressive background in the gaming industry," Kirk Hendrick, chairman of the board said.

"Your work history is beyond exceptional," said board member George Assad, a retired judge.

In response to board questions, Cassella provided an update on the construction of Hard Rock Las Vegas. The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Hard Rock International purchased The Mirage in 2022 for \$1 billion. HRI closed The Mirage in July 2024 and

immediately began construction.

"Construction is progressing very positively. Most of the work is still in the demolition phase," Cassella told the board.

The property, which is in a prominent location on the Las Vegas Strip, will include a new Guitar Hotel, twice the size of the first one built in Hollywood.

"Some of the pilings have gone up for the new guitar tower, which is going to be over 700 feet tall, 650 suites," Cassella said.

The property's 3,000-room hotel is receiving a redesign and new pool.

Hard Rock Las Vegas is slated to open in 2027. Convention and meeting bookings are being accepted for the fall of 2027 and beyond.

"Everything is on time and on schedule," Cassella said.

Players hit 3 large jackpots in consecutive days

STAFF REPORT

IMMOKALEE — In a span of less than 48 hours, more than a half million dollars in winnings was doled out to three players at

Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee.

The big jackpots started Jan. 16 when a player won a \$212,640.60 jackpot on a bet of \$58.80 on a Tree of Wealth slot machine. Later that day, a player won \$165,800.00 on

a Buffalo Link slot machine.

The winning trend continued the next day when a player hit a \$128,425.78 jackpot on a Dragon Link Panda magic slot machine with a \$25 bet.

Hard Rock Cafe in Chicago to close

STAFF REPORT

According to several media reports in Chicago, the Hard Rock Cafe in the River North section of the Windy City will

permanently close this spring. Citing a statement from Hard Rock International, the reports said the restaurant will close March 29.

There are two other Hard Rock Cafes in the region at Hard Rock Casino Northern Indiana, 30 miles from Chicago; and Hard Rock Casino Rockford, 80 miles away.

Hard Rock's Susan Renneisen to be honored by History Fort Lauderdale

STAFF REPORT

Susan Renneisen, vice president of Community Affairs and Special Events at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood, is one of the honorees of "Women Trailblazers: Champions of Change – Broward County."

History Fort Lauderdale and Galleria Fort Lauderdale announced the awards Jan. 10. The honorees will be recognized March 5 at Galleria Fort Lauderdale. The women will be honored through a photo exhibit for Women's History Month through March.

Renneisen has been with Hard Rock for over 21 years.

"I think I broke the glass ceiling years ago, because I'm very happy in what I do. I have always loved being part of the community, have always loved charitable giving, loved doing parties, loved creating new things. When you get up and do that every single day and you get paid to it, there's nothing better in the whole world, and I am so fortunate to work for a company that not only allows me to give back, but also encourages me and helps me do it. That is a recipe for success in my book—and I don't think I could do anything that would make me happier," Renneisen said in a story from South Florida Business and Wealth Magazine from 2023.

The other honorees are Rita Case, president, CEO and owner of Rick Case Automotive Group; Frances M. Esposito, chief strategy officer of Broward Partnership; Ina Lee, owner of Travelhost Magazine of Greater Fort Lauderdale; Juliet Roulhac, director of External Affairs for Broward

and Southwest Florida for Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) and corporate philanthropy for NextEra Energy (NEE), FPL's parent company; and Elaine Vasquez, owner of Broward's first bilingual newspaper, El Heraldo de Broward.



Susan Renneisen

"This year, on our fifth anniversary, History Fort Lauderdale is honored to celebrate these champions of change who have made indelible impacts on not only Broward County, but South Florida as a whole," Patricia Zeiler, executive director of History Fort Lauderdale, said in a press release. "These, passionate, innovative leaders and entrepreneurs represent the best of us in their respective fields of business development, tourism, community, philanthropy and journalism. As role models and achievers, their contributions to the economy and well-being of the City of Fort Lauderdale are immeasurable."

Tickets for the March 5 recognition and benefit reception are available at <https://bit.ly/HFLWomenTrailblazers2025>.

For more information about History Fort Lauderdale and Galleria Fort Lauderdale's "Women Trailblazers: Champions of Change - Broward County" 2025 visit historyfortlauderdale.org.

Tribal casino-hotel conference to be held in California

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The 17th annual Tribal Casino & Hotel Development Conference will be held April 28-29 at Harrah's Resort Southern California in Funnar, California.

The conference is dedicated to the design and development of tribal-owned casinos, resorts, and hotels. Tribal leaders will gather with industry professionals to discuss relevant topics in the casino and

hospitality business. Advancements in technology; the latest in gaming trends, renovation and expansion plans; government legislation; and the future of gaming will be discussed.

Scheduled speakers include Russell Attebery, chairman of Karuk Tribe; James Siva, vice chairman of Morongo Band of Mission Indians; and others. An exhibit hall will feature products and services.

For more information visit nativationevents.org.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol donates nearly \$50,000 to nonprofits

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol, which opened in November 2024, started the new year by making more than \$49,000 in check presentations to local nonprofits in Virginia and Tennessee.

Proceeds from a Hard Rock team member raffle raised \$5,145 for Branch House Family Justice Center.

"We are truly grateful for this donation," Lenee Hendrix, executive director, Branch House Family Justice Center, said in a statement. "Hard Rock continues to help us contribute back to the community through

their charitable donations."

Slot ticket donation boxes on the casino floor raised \$12,152 for Second Harvest Food Bank.

"All of us at Second Harvest Food Bank of NETN thank Hard Rock for this generous contribution," Karen Todd, Community Relations coordinator, said in a statement. "These donations will allow us to continue serving our neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity within our region in the coming months."

Hard Rock team members also raised \$31,815 for Bristol Lifesaving Crew through the Team Member Dining Room in January.



Branch House Family Justice Center, which provides support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, receives a check at Hard Rock Hotel & Bristol in Virginia.



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

RICHARD CASTILLO
FLORIDA CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY
WWW.CASTILLOLAWOFFICES.COM

Conservation of 19th century Naval sword reveals obscured artwork

BY JESSICA RUSCH
Objects Conservator

BIG CYPRESS — The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki (ATTK) Museum houses a remarkable piece of naval history, the Model 1841 Naval Sword (2002.90.7), a U.S. officer's sword featuring a brass hilt, a bone-carved pommel of an eagle, and a leather scabbard (Figure 1). Manufactured by N.P. Ames in Cabotville, Massachusetts, the Model 1841 Naval Sword is a decorative weapon that was typically presented as a ceremonial gift to officers at the end of their term.

In 2004, the museum acquired the sword, which is believed to have belonged to Alexander J. Dallas, who commanded the West Indies Squadron and fought in the Seminole War from July 1835 to January 1839. Dallas also commanded the Pensacola Navy Yard from 1832 to 1843.

When the sword arrived at the museum about 163 years after its creation, conservators examined it and deemed it to be in fair condition, presenting a unique challenge for conservation. After years of exposure and oxidation, the blade had become stuck within its leather scabbard. The "locking" of the blade to the scabbard was a result of excessive corrosion on the metal, which accelerated the

deterioration of the leather and affected the overall stability of the object. The leather had become brittle, shrunken, stiff, dark in color, and contained embedded corrosion products from the blade. Also, the cupreous (copper alloys) loops on the hilt and intricate designs, such as acorns, anchors, and leaves, exhibited verdigris corrosion, also known as bronze disease (Figure 2).

As one of the conservators at the ATTK Museum, specializing in objects conservation, I created a comprehensive approach to manage the conservation of the historic sword. My objective was to develop a treatment plan to halt the degradation and conserve the object's

appearance without compromising its historical integrity. To address the bronze disease, I implemented a combination of mechanical methods and chemical solutions. The process began with the careful removal of corrosion products from the affected areas using specialized tools such as copper brushes, soft wooden skewers, and scalpels under magnification. This allowed for the safe removal of the sword from its scabbard. Also, I employed a chemical solution to stabilize the object by forming stable complexes with copper ions through the process of chelation. This treatment mitigated the ongoing propagation of corrosion on the hilt and cupreous

components of the scabbard. After successfully treating the bronze disease, I applied a conservation standard sealant to the metal. The sealant created a barrier between the original surface of the object and the surrounding environment, slowing down ongoing oxidation.

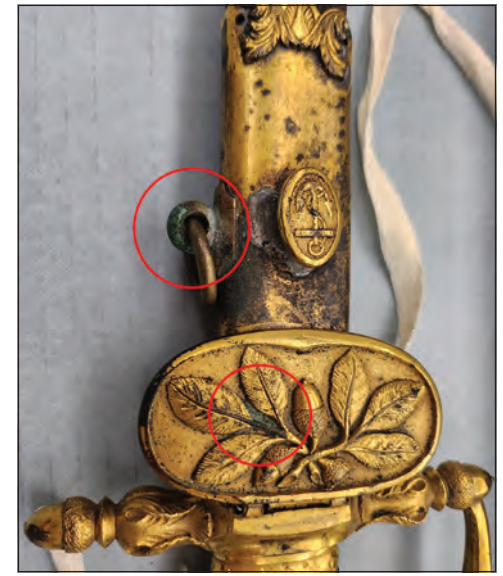
The conservation efforts have proven immensely valuable, not only halting the deterioration of the object but also revealing intricate icons and imagery etched upon the sword's surface. These details were previously hidden since the blade was stuck within its scabbard upon its arrival at the museum. The etchings on the blade

unveiled motifs, including depictions of sword-wielding battles, delicate leaves, swirls, floral designs, ships, and cannons (Figure 3). These elements showcase the exceptional craftsmanship of the era and deepens our understanding of the historical context in which the sword was forged.



Figure one

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Above, figure two and at right is figure three.



'Without Arrows' debuts

FROM PRESS RELEASE

"Without Arrows," released Jan. 13, is a documentary featuring a Lakota family and Indigenous culture.

The film was directed by Jonathan Olshefski and Elizabeth Day (Ojibwe). In the documentary, Delwin Fiddler Jr. returns to the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota after living in Philadelphia for 13

years.

"Leaving his big-city life behind, Delwin aims to protect his centuries-old Lakota heritage and heal from family tragedy, through his passion for dance," the preview webpage for the film said.

The film is available to watch at www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/without-arrows/



Delwin Fiddler Jr., left, with Kassi Phoenix Fiddler in the 'Without Arrows' documentary.

U.S. Mint offers new coin honoring Native Americans

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The United States Mint (Mint) started accepting orders for products containing the 2025 Native American \$1 Coin on Jan. 28.

The Native American \$1 Coin Program was launched in 2009 in celebration of the important contributions made by Indian tribes and individual Native Americans to the history and development of the United States. The 2025 coin celebrates Hawaiian scholar, author, composer, hula expert, and educator Mary Kawena Pukui.

Designed by Artistic Infusion Program Designer Christina Hess and sculpted by Mint Medallist Artist Phebe Hemphill, the 2025 Native American \$1 Coin reverse (tails) features Mary Kawena Pukui wearing a hibiscus flower, a kukui nut lei, and a mu'umu'u adorned with an aloha print. Stylized depictions of water appear in the background. Inscriptions include her name, "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" and "\$1." The inscription "Nānā I Ke Kumu" translates literally to "Look to The Source."

Nānā I Ke Kumu is the title of a series of books that Pukui helped to produce with the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center. The phrase itself is considered very evocative



U.S. Mint (2)

The new coin's tails side honors Hawaiian Mary Kawena Pukui, left, and it continues to feature Sacagawea, right, on the heads side.

of Pukui's life work and legacy, as she was someone who was continually consulted for her expertise on various aspects of Hawaiian knowledge. Hawaiian knowledge is symbolized through the leaves and nuts of Hawaii's state tree, the kukui.

The coin's obverse (heads), by sculptor Glenna Goodacre, continues to feature

Sacagawea carrying her infant son, Jean-Baptiste. Inscriptions are "LIBERTY" and "IN GOD WE TRUST." The year, mint mark (P or D), and "E PLURIBUS UNUM" are incused on the edge of the coin.

For more information about the coin, go to usmint.gov.

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

February 2025

Many times, when the THPO's Collections receives an artifact, there is a degree of randomness to it. A significant number of our artifacts have little context to them, so it is always refreshing to have artifacts that give us a little more to work with. The Powell's Town site artifacts were donated to the THPO in 2018. Powell's Town was Osceola's (see Figure 3) wartime camp during the Second Seminole War, and the excavation of it originally took place in the 1980s. We also received all of the original documentation of the site. This led to some challenges. It could sometimes be a grueling process to translate the original notes correctly. See if you can read them in Figure 2.

Some of the artifacts themselves left questions as well. This refitted pottery comes from the site (Figure 2). On first inspection, these pottery fragments look to be brushed, meaning that their surface was brushed with grass, pine straw, or some other semi-stiff bristle (peachstatearchaeologicalsociety.org). There are a few different types of brushed pottery. Chattahoochee brushed would be the expected type, as it is directly associated with Seminole sites. However, this pottery type was reportedly used in the 1700s, whereas the Second Seminole War took place between 1835-42 (floridamuseum.ufl.edu).

What explains this? Could it be that these are artifacts from a different time that were just below the camp? Is it possible that it is a different pottery type that just gives the illusion of being brushed from wear and tear? It is hard to say for certain, but questions like these offer the Collections section the chance to learn.

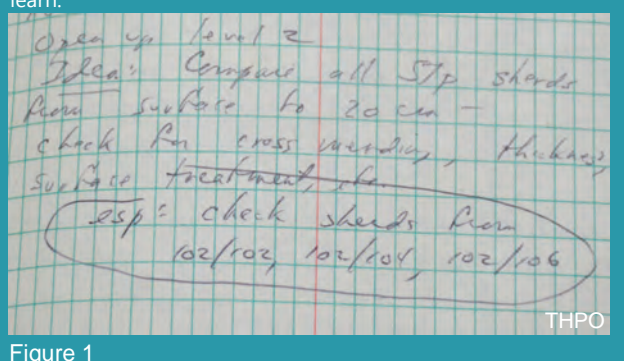


Figure 1



Figure 2

THPO



Figure 3

<https://oktavianian.com/chiefs-osceola/>

Brushed. Peach State Archaeological Society, (n.d.). <https://peachstatearchaeologicalsociety.org/artifact-identification/pottery/alabama-pottery/brushed/>
Chattahoochee brushed. floridamuseum.ufl.edu. (2019, June 6). <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/ceramiclab/pottery-types-gallery/chattahoochee/>



SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - FEBRUARY 2025

SEMINOLE WAR: THE START OF THE WAR

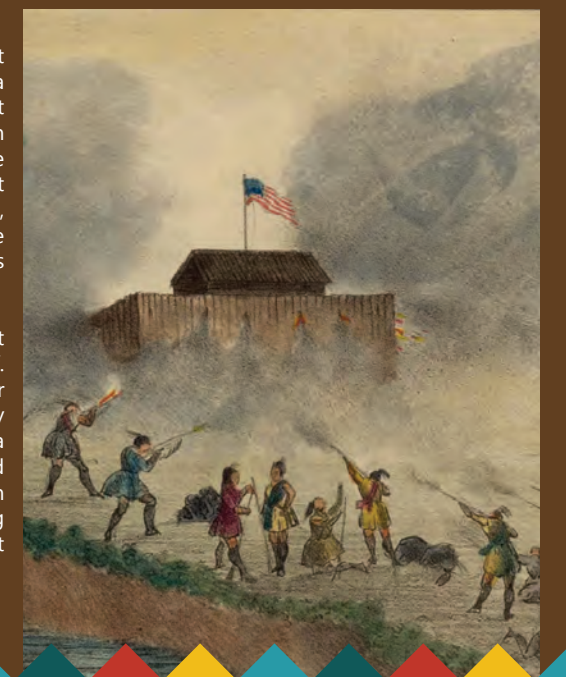
There is a debate about what counts as the beginning of the Seminole War. Not because there's a lack of information, but because there are so many different events that could qualify. The Seminole War didn't begin with an official declaration of war to mark the start, it was a series of events that eventually led to all out war. The easiest placement from the American perspective would be Andrew Jackson's invasion of "Spanish" Florida where his army assaulted three Indigenous towns, homes to thousands of people, and burned them to the ground. He would then march on the Spanish outpost of San Marcos (Now Saint Marks) where he was welcomed, before seizing it as well. This could be seen as a simple starting point, but the invasion was the culmination of many other events.

The first American invasion of Seminole Florida wasn't by Jackson, but by militia groups from southern Georgia in 1812. Under a congressional resolution kept secret at the time, General George Matthews and Colonel John McKee were given license to recruit a militia to invade Florida and try to seize control from the Spanish at Saint Augustine. This led to the "Patriot War" of Florida, with combat lasting until 1814 before the militias were pushed out. Payne, the micco of Alachua would lose his life in the war, passing leadership to his brother Bolek.

The first official military action in Florida was the assault on the Free African fort at what is now Prospect Bluff. The fort was given to African allies by the British after the War of 1812, and was home to a thriving community surrounded by farms. The existence of the fort was a threat to the American plantation owners, as it served as a beacon for those they'd enslaved to escape to. An American naval force attacked the fort in 1816, striking the gunpowder magazine resulting in an explosion that killed nearly everyone inside.

In 1817, the US Military demanded the Miccosukee town of Fowltown abandon their lands under a treaty enforced on the Creek Confederacy. Neamathla, the micco of Fowltown, refused as his people were not Creek. The American forces drove them from the town after two battles. Neamathla's retaliatory raid on a US Supply boat was used by many American politicians as justification to launch an invasion.

All of these actions have been described as the start of the Seminole War, but each was part of a long sequence. Regardless of when it may have started, Jackson's invasion in 1817 made the reality of war irrefutable, and the war would continue for over forty years.



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

Painting "Attack of the Seminoles on the Block House" by T.F. Gray
Courtesy Library of Congress

Visit the Tribal Historic Preservation Office website at stofthpo.com or use the QR code on the right for more Seminole history resources



Health

Native American patients are sent to Collections for debts the government owes

BY KATHERYN HOUGHTON AND ARIELLE ZIONTS
KFF Health News

Tescha Hawley learned that hospital bills from her son's birth had been sent to debt collectors only when she checked her credit score while attending a home-buying class. The new mom's plans to buy a house stalled.

Hawley said she didn't owe those thousands of dollars in debts. The federal government did.

Hawley, a citizen of the Gros Ventre Tribe, lives on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana. The Indian Health Service is a federal agency that provides free health care to Native Americans, but its services are limited by a chronic shortage of funding and staff.

Hawley's local Indian Health Service hospital wasn't equipped to deliver babies. But she said staff there agreed that the agency would pay for her care at a privately owned hospital more than an hour away.

That arrangement came through the Purchased/Referred Care program, which pays for services Native Americans can't get through an agency-funded clinic or hospital. Federal law stresses that patients approved for the program aren't responsible for any of the costs.

But tribal leaders, health officials, and a new federal report say patients are routinely billed anyway as a result of backlogs or mistakes from the Indian Health Service, financial middlemen, hospitals, and clinics.

The financial consequences for patients can last years. Those sent to collections can face damaged credit scores, which can prevent them from securing loans or require them to pay higher interest rates.

The December report, by the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, found these long-standing problems contribute to people in Native American-majority communities being nearly twice as likely to have medical debt in collections compared with the national average. And their amount of medical debt is significantly higher.

The report found the program is often late to pay bills. In some cases, hospitals or collection agencies hound tribal citizens for more money after bills are paid.

Hawley's son was born in 2003. She had to wait another year to buy a home, as she struggled to pay off the debt. It took seven years for it to drop from her credit report.

"I don't think a person ever recovers from debt," Hawley said.

Hawley, a cancer survivor, still must navigate the referral program. In 2024 alone, she received two notices from clinics about overdue bills.

Frank White Clay, chairman of the Crow Tribe in Montana, testified about the impact of wrongful billing during a U.S. House committee hearing in April. He shared stories of veterans rejected for home loans, elders whose Social Security benefits were reduced, and students denied college loans and federal aid.

"Some of the most vulnerable people are being harassed daily by debt collectors," White Clay said.

No one is immune from the risk. A high-ranking Indian Health Service official learned during her job's background check that her credit report contained referred-care debt, the federal report found.

Native Americans face disproportionately high rates of poverty and disease, which researchers link to limited

access to health care and the ongoing impact of racist federal policies.

White Clay is among many who say problems with the referred-care program are an example of the U.S. government violating treaties that promised to provide for the health and welfare of tribes in return for their land.

The chairman's testimony came during a hearing on the Purchased and Referred Care Improvement Act, which would require the Indian Health Service to create a reimbursement process for patients who were wrongfully billed. Committee members approved the bill in November and sent it for consideration by the full House.

A second federal bill, the Protecting Native Americans' Credit Act, would prevent debt like Hawley's from affecting patients' credit scores. The bipartisan bill hadn't had a hearing by mid-December.

The exact number of people wrongfully billed isn't clear, but the Indian Health Service has acknowledged it has work to do.

The agency is developing a dashboard to help workers track referrals and to speed up bill processing, spokesperson Brendan White said. It's also trying to hire more referred-care staff, to address vacancy rates of more than 30%.

Officials say problems with the program also stem from outside health providers that don't follow the rules.

Melanie Egorin, an assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said at the hearing that the proposed legislation doesn't include consequences for "bad actors" — health facilities that repeatedly bill patients when they shouldn't.

"The lack of enforcement is definitely a challenge," she said. But tribal leaders warned that penalties could backfire.

White Clay told lawmakers that some clinics already refuse to see patients if the Indian Health Service hasn't paid for their previous appointments. He's worried the threat of penalties would lead to more refusals.

If that happens, White Clay said, Crow tribal members who already travel hours to access specialty treatment would have to go even farther.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau report found clinics are already refusing to see any referred-care patients due to the program's payment problems.

The bureau and the Indian Health Service also recently published a letter urging health care providers and debt collectors not to hold patients accountable for program-approved care.

White, the Indian Health Service spokesperson, said the agency recently updated the referred-care forms sent to outside hospitals and clinics to include billing instructions and to stress that patients aren't liable for any out-of-pocket costs. And he said the staff can help patients get reimbursed if they have already paid for services that were supposed to be covered.

Joe Bryant, an Indian Health Service official who oversees efforts to improve the referral program, said patients can ask credit bureaus to remove debt from their reports if the agency should have covered their bills.

Leaders with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Washington state helped shape the proposed legislation after their citizens were repeatedly harmed by wrongful billing.

See DEBTS on page 3B

Brighton festival runs Feb. 13-16

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe of Florida will celebrate its annual Brighton Field Day Festival on the Brighton Reservation Feb. 13-16. The festival is open to the public.

Country music artist Brantley Gilbert, from Georgia, will be the headliner with a concert Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. It will be his first stop on a cross-country tour that features 25 dates, including April 11 at Florida State University's Tucker Center. In 2023, Gilbert opened for Nickleback on its Get Rollin' tour.

Many Seminole favorites will return to the festival, including the PRCA Rodeo and Xtreme Bull Riding, which will be held Feb. 13 at 7 p.m., Feb. 14 at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m., and Feb. 15 at 3 p.m. at Fred Smith Rodeo Arena. Last year's rodeo featured a hometown champion as the tribe's Jobe Johns won all-around cowboy.

Other highlights include clothing contests, American Indian arts and crafts, and Native foods. Attendees can visit a Seminole culture camp where a living Seminole Indian Village will be on display.

The event will also feature Native dancers from neighboring tribes, storytelling, additional musical performances, alligator wrestling, and wildlife presentations.

Tickets will be available at the event gate and at select retailers. There are no online ticket sales. Saturday tickets include the Gilbert concert. For more information go to brightonfieldday.com or call 863-467-6039.



Brantley Gilbert



File photo
Freestyle alligator wrestling, shown here in 2024, will return to Brighton Field Day Festival.

86th Annual Brighton Field Day Festival Rodeo Schedule

Thursday, February 13, 2025

Time	Event	Location
9:00 AM	Gates Open	Main Entrance
10:00 AM	Grand Entry & Introduction of Tribal Officials	Amphitheater
10:30 AM	Indigenous Enterprises Dance Group	Amphitheater
11:30 AM	Venomous Snake Show - David "The Cobra Kid" Weathers	Amphitheater
12:30 PM	Billy Walker - Alligator Show	Amphitheater
1:30 PM	Roping Demonstration	Arena
2:30 PM	Freestyle Alligator Wrestling (FAWC)	Amphitheater
4:00 PM	Venomous Snake Show - David "The Cobra Kid" Weathers	Amphitheater
5:00 PM	Indigenous Enterprises Dance Group	Amphitheater
7:00 PM	PRCA Rodeo	Arena

Friday, February 14, 2025

Time	Event	Location
9:00 AM	Gates Open	Main Entrance
10:00 AM	Grand Entry & Introduction of Tribal Officials	Amphitheater
10:30 AM	Indigenous Enterprises Dance Group	Amphitheater
11:00 AM	PRCA Rodeo	Arena
11:30 AM	Osceola's Warrior Legacy - Traditional Weapon Demo	Amphitheater
12:30 PM	Venomous Snake Show - David "The Cobra Kid" Weathers	Amphitheater
1:30 PM	"In Tlanextli Tlacopan" Aztec Fire Dancers	Amphitheater
2:30 PM	Freestyle Alligator Wrestling (FAWC)	Amphitheater
4:00 PM	White Mountain Apache Dancers	Amphitheater
5:00 PM	Indigenous Enterprises Dance Group	Amphitheater
5:30 PM	Venomous Snake Show - David "The Cobra Kid" Weathers	Amphitheater
6:00 PM	"In Tlanextli Tlacopan" Aztec Fire Dancers	Amphitheater
7:00 PM	PRCA Rodeo	Arena

Saturday, February 15, 2025

Time	Event	Location
9:00 AM	Gates Open	Main Entrance
10:00 AM	86th Annual Brighton Field Day Parade	Amphitheater
11:00 AM	Grand Entry & Introduction of Tribal Officials	Amphitheater
11:30 AM	White Mountain Apache Dancers	Amphitheater
12:15 PM	Osceola's Warrior Legacy - Traditional Weapon Demo	Amphitheater
1:15 PM	Freestyle Alligator Wrestling (FAWC)	Amphitheater
2:00 PM	Florida Seminole Kids & Senior Clothing	Amphitheater
2:30 PM	Venomous Snake Show - David "The Cobra Kid" Weathers	Amphitheater
3:00 PM	"In Tlanextli Tlacopan" Aztec Fire Dancers	Amphitheater
3:30 PM	Indigenous Enterprises Dance Group	Amphitheater
3:00 PM	PRCA Rodeo	Arena
4:30 PM	Osceola's Warrior Legacy - Traditional Weapon Demo	Amphitheater
5:00 PM	"In Tlanextli Tlacopan" Aztec Fire Dancers	Amphitheater
6:00 PM	Opener - Will Mosley	Athletic Field
7:00 PM	Concert - Brantley Gilbert	Athletic Field

Sunday, February 16, 2025

Time	Event	Location
9:00 AM	Gates Open	Main Entrance
10:00 AM	Grand Entry & Introduction of Tribal Officials	Amphitheater
10:30 AM	Seminole Men & Women Clothing Contest	Amphitheater
12:00 PM	Freestyle Alligator Wrestling (FAWC)	Amphitheater
1:30 PM	Venomous Snake Show - David "The Cobra Kid" Weathers	Amphitheater
2:00 PM	White Mountain Apache Dancers	Amphitheater
2:30 PM	"In Tlanextli Tlacopan" Aztec Fire Dancers	Amphitheater
3:00 PM	Indigenous Enterprises Dance Group	Amphitheater
3:00 PM	Xtreme Bulls	Arena
4:00 PM	Osceola's Warrior Legacy - Traditional Weapon Demo	Amphitheater

Poolside party at Guitar Hotel in Hollywood

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD —The Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood's poolside party, "Noches de Neón," returns to The

Guitar Hotel on Feb. 21 from 8:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. The Latin poolside celebration will feature the renowned Colombian artist and one of the most polarizing voices in Latin music today, Jessi Uribe.

Tickets start at \$85 and include a premium open bar. For tickets, go to myHRL.com.

Choctaw doctor named to IHS field operations post

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The Indian Health Service announced Jan. 16 the appointment of Dr. Beverly Cotton, an enrolled member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, as the new IHS deputy director for field operations for four IHS Area Offices: Albuquerque, Navajo, Oklahoma City, and Tucson.

As the newest deputy director for field operations, Cotton provides management oversight and resource allocation to the four areas under her leadership. Cotton joins Rear Adm. Chris Buchanan and James Driving Hawk in this position, with each deputy director of field operations responsible for four IHS areas. IHS is the 18th largest public health care system in the nation.

"Dr. Cotton exemplifies the quality leadership that the Indian Health Service prides itself on," said IHS Director Roselyn Tso. "She has dedicated her career to the health and well-being of American Indians

and Alaska Natives—first as a direct care provider and then as a leader within IHS for over a decade. I could not be more confident entrusting our Albuquerque, Navajo, Oklahoma City, and Tucson Areas to her leadership."

Cotton previously served as the director for the Nashville Area, the largest geographic and culturally diverse region in the IHS, spanning 24 states and serving 36 tribal nations and three urban Indian health programs. She also served as the previous acting director for the IHS Office of Clinical and Preventive Services, where she was the principal advisor for policy development, budget formulation, and delivery of headquarters programs, services, functions, and activities related to clinical, preventive, and public health services throughout IHS. She has served as acting deputy director of field operations since September 2024.

"I am honored to serve as one

of the deputy directors for field operations working in partnership with the area directors for the Albuquerque, Navajo, Oklahoma City, and Tucson Areas to deliver on the IHS mission," said Cotton. "In this role, I look forward to executing on a common goal to streamline and maximize operational services."

Cotton joined the IHS in 2011 as the national sexual assault nurse examiner coordinator and later established the Tribal Forensic Health Care Training Program. In 2013, she became the director for the IHS Division of Behavioral Health, leading a team of professionals in the development of new grant programs, training projects, and initiatives. Before joining the IHS, she worked as a primary care pediatric nurse practitioner and in several registered nurse roles, including as the emergency department nurse manager for her tribe's hospital in Choctaw, Mississippi.

Show your heart some love.



Make appointments for preventive services that help keep your heart healthy.

For more information, contact your local Indian health care provider, visit [HealthCare.gov/coverage](https://www.healthcare.gov/coverage) or call 1-800-318-2596.



SEMINOLE SCENES



Calvin Tiger



Brent Frank

Calvin Tiger



Teonna Rock

Calvin Tiger



Ted Thomas

Calvin Tiger



Ashley Osceola

Calvin Tiger

TRIBAL FAIR TOURNAMENT: The Tribal Fair pool tournament, organized by the President's Office, drew dozens of pool players to the Estates clubhouse in Hollywood on Jan. 24-25. Above, Jessica Osceola lines up a shot.



Calvin Tiger

READY TO DIG: With the Guitar Hotel in the background, hard hats and shovels are placed at the site of the future Hollywood Senior Center during its groundbreaking ceremony Jan. 7.



Kevin Johnson

CROWDED CHUTE: Kids enjoy playing in a practice chute Jan. 25 at the Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo in Hollywood.



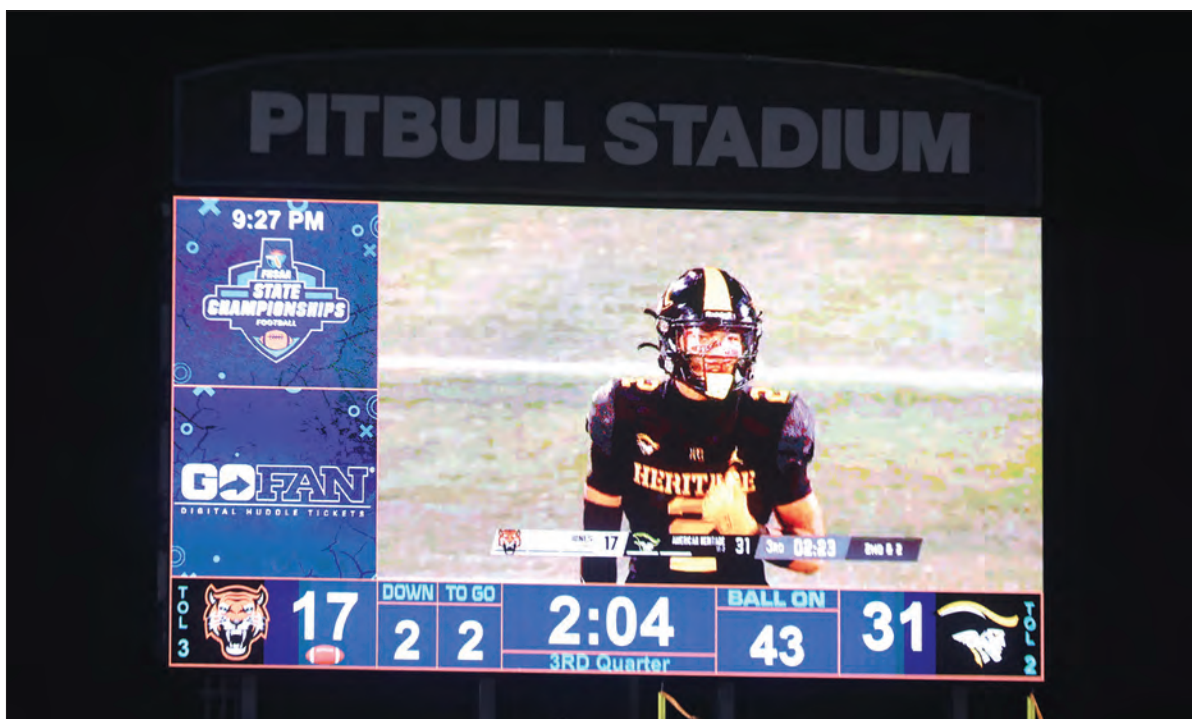
Kevin Johnson

PRESCHOOL PREP: Here's a look on Jan. 25 at the new Hollywood Preschool that is being built on the Estates portion of the reservation.



Seminole Casino Coconut Creek

WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE: Formed in the early 1970s, the legendary band Kansas is still rocking, including this performance at The Stage at Coco at Seminole Casino Coconut Creek on Jan. 23.



Kevin Johnson

SCREEN TIME: Seminole standout football player Zae Thomas appears on the Pitbull Stadium scoreboard while playing for American Heritage in its Class 4A state championship win Dec. 13, 2024, at Florida International University in Miami. FIU and the singer Pitbull signed a stadium naming rights agreement earlier in the year.



Beverly Bidney

LUNCH BUNCH: Wood storks, egrets and one white pelican search for food in a pond on the Immokalee Reservation on Jan. 4.

NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

Feds approve Coquille casino in Medford

The federal government has approved a new casino for the Coquille Indian Tribe in Medford. That comes after over a decade of pushback from state and local officials, as well as other tribes in the region.

On Jan. 10, the U.S. Department of the Interior put Coquille property in the Rogue Valley under federal trust, effectively expanding the tribe's reservation. The tribe's headquarters are in North Bend on the coast.

"Waiting almost 13 years for an environmental review process to review two acres was a ridiculous weaponization of the federal NEPA process used to punish the Coquille Tribe for taking a legal course of action to provide for its own citizens after termination," said Brenda Meade, chair of the Coquille Indian Tribe.

Currently Roxy's Bar & Grill, and formerly a bowling alley, the tribe can now open a Class II casino on the Medford property. That type of gaming facility allows bingo and bingo-based games where players bet against each other rather than the house. The tribe runs a Class III casino in North Bend that includes Las Vegas-style slot machines and card games.

"This finally allows the tribe to just start the project. For many, many years... this project has languished. And now we're going to be able to provide hundreds of new jobs in our community," said CEO of Tribal One, the Coquille tribe's economic development arm, Judy Farm.

Tribal opponents of the project say the new casino will drain customers from their own casinos and upend an informal one-casino-per-tribe agreement in the state. This month, a judge denied a request by three regional tribes — Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Karuk Tribe and Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation — to halt approval of the project. That complaint alleged federal authorities didn't properly consult with the impacted tribes.

In its final days the Obama administration also gave a favorable ruling to the proposed casino, before that decision was reversed under President Trump. Carla Keene, chair of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, said in a statement that allowing the Coquille to claim lands outside their ancestral territory harms other tribes.

"We have seen this play before, and it is not the final word. Secretary Haaland is following in the steps of the Obama [Bureau of Indian Affairs], issuing a decision that, were it legitimate, would have been approved long ago and in the light of day, not the 11th hour before leaving office," said Keene.

A law passed by Congress in 1989 to restore Coquille lands lists Jackson County as a potential service area for the tribe.

In a statement, Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon says the federal decision will lead to the "uncontrolled escalation of gambling." He said he'll fight the decision with all options available, including the Congressional Review Act that "empowers elected representatives to battle back against rogue federal agency decisions just like this one."

Judy Farm, with the Coquille's economic branch, said the tribe is prepared for more battles.

"I guess I would say we're not afraid of any legal maneuverings or things that might be coming our way. We've overcome a lot. And we've prevailed," said Farm.

- Jefferson Public Radio (Ashland, Oregon)

Department of Interior: United Keetoowah Band shares Cherokee Nation reservation

The U.S. Department of the Interior says two tribes should share the Cherokee Reservation.

The U.S. Department of the Interior's legal opinion allows the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians (UKB) to build a casino in Tahlequah.

The memorandum's central finding is the latest twist in a battle over jurisdiction between the two Cherokee tribes.

In 2012 the Department of Interior granted the UKB's fee-to-trust application, so the tribe could build a casino within the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Nation later challenged that approval in federal court.

The court ruled that the land could be placed into trust, but did not sufficiently conclude that it could be used for gaming.

After the 2020 McGirt v. Oklahoma decision reestablishing tribal lands, the UKB rescinded its application and retried based on McGirt.

In a Friday memo, the Department of Interior sided with the UKB, ruling that the Cherokee Nation's reservation also belongs to the UKB.

"This conclusion is based on my findings that 1. UKB has an ownership interest in the Cherokee Reservation as a successor in interest to the Tribal signatory of the Treaty of 1846; and 2. Congress intended for UKB to possess governmental jurisdiction over the Cherokee Reservation when it enacted the Keetoowah Recognition Act," the memorandum reads.

As such, the UKB will now be allowed to build a casino in Tahlequah. The UKB celebrated its win.

"This is a victory for righteousness and justice," said Chief Jeff Wacoche, UKB. "For too long the UKB has been sidelined by needlessly antagonistic Tribal relations. I thank the Department of Interior for this determination, placing our Tribe on a renewed path towards prosperity. I want to recognize and thank our Keetoowah brothers and sisters — and our array of supporters and advocates — for tireless work to make this new page of history possible."

Officials for the tribe say they want to work with their fellow Cherokees.

The Cherokee Nation says the decision is unfounded. Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. panned the opinion in a lengthy statement, arguing that the UKB should not have authority on the reservation.

"But the truth remains: the Cherokee Nation has sovereign authority and exclusive tribal jurisdiction over our 7,000 square-mile Reservation in Oklahoma," Hoskin Jr. said in a statement. "We look forward to working with the members of our congressional delegation to ensure this ill-advised opinion is not implemented."

Hoskin Jr. said he will engage with Oklahoma's congressional delegation to reverse the decision.

- KOSU (Stillwater, Oklahoma)

First Nations reject \$3.6B treaty settlement offer

The First Nations of the Robinson Superior Treaty said they are rejecting a \$3.6 billion dollar compensation offer and will be challenging it in court.

The Supreme Court of Canada gave the provincial and federal governments six months to negotiate a settlement with the First Nations.

Those negotiations have failed, Gull Bay First Nation Chief Wilfred King told *Newswatch*.

"Well, it's very disappointing," said King. "The First Nations really thought that the Supreme Court rendered a decision that would assist us in terms of seeking justice through the courts and through a negotiated process. And many of our First Nations, they're very disappointed with the what the end result was after six months of hard negotiations on our part, and yet we feel the other parties did not come to the table with, with open hearts and did not act in a just and honourable way."

The settlement was intended to compensate the First Nations for at least 150 years of underpayment as treaty annuities had not been increased since 1875 when they were set to \$4 a person per year.

"The amount of wealth that's been taken from our territory should have reflected in the offer," said King.

"We feel that had the number been much higher, there would have been, you know, more of us buying into the process."

- *SNnews*

Esselen Tribe of Monterey County gets over 300 acres back

MONTEREY COUNTY, Calif. — Western Rivers Conservancy has given a 327-acre property to the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County for permanent conservation and stewardship.

The property is located at the base of a white limestone-topped mountain they call "Pixchi," which the Esselen Tribe considers to be the "center of the Esselen world." It's where the tribe's creation story began.

"The Pico Blanco area, defined by the Little Sur River, is the spiritual, cultural and geographical center for the Esselen Tribe," said Tom Little Bear Nason, the tribal chairman and president. "To have the opportunity for our tribal members to reconnect with more of the river and these ancient redwoods fulfills a deeply meaningful part of our mission."

Ecologically, the land features 1.3 miles of the Little Sur River, which provides critical habitat for numerous imperiled species, as well as one of the largest stands of old-growth redwoods on the Central Coast.

Western Rivers Conservancy has worked with the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council of Boy Scouts of America and the Esselen Tribe since 2019 to acquire the property.

The Pico Blanco property is made up of two parcels of undeveloped land that was formerly part of a Boy Scouts camp and was once owned by newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, who donated the land to the Boy Scouts in the 1950s.

- *KSBW (Salinas, Calif.)*

Removed tribes, Ohio History working together to return 7,000 ancestral remains

At the Ohio History Center museum in Columbus, a recently redesigned exhibit details the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks and Indigenous cultures in Ohio.

There's scaled images of ancient rock art, models of Ohio's environment centuries ago and excavated items used in Native American rituals.

But out of view are over 7,000 human remains from Ohio's removed tribes that the Ohio History Connection possesses — one of the nation's largest collections of human remains and funerary objects.

Updates to a federal law known as NAGPRA have the history connection and tribes on a countdown to identify and decide what to do with those remains.

The nonprofit is the state's preservation hub and runs the historical museum. It's actively consulting with the 45 tribes tied to the Ohio River Valley to repatriate these remains.

But Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee tribe of Oklahoma said work's been slow moving.

"Without question, this is a very delicate but crucial conversation and one that is very important to all of us," Wallace said. "There is an urgency about it. It has been on the back burner for far too long."

The urgency Wallace is referring to is due to the Native American Graves

Protection and Repatriation Act, also known as NAGPRA. This law requires federally funded museums to return Native American remains and funerary objects to the tribes from which they were taken.

The law passed in 1990. But the U.S. Department of Interior didn't enforce it until last year. That's when it gave institutions five years to at least consult with tribal nations and identify what's in their inventories.

"These changes to the department's NAGPRA regulations are long overdue and will strengthen our ability to enforce the law and help tribes in the return of ancestors and sacred cultural objects," Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland told *ICT News* last March.

Ohio History hosted last year's Ohio Tribal Nations Conference in October. Most of the week was dedicated to consulting tribes to identify the remains and establish plans for re-burial, Wallace said.

"The executive director of OHC Megan Wood gave a very emotional and truthful acknowledgment at the Thursday night banquet that Ohio History needs to do better. And this is an area, particularly where they did not know how to proceed, and have now indicated that they will commit to greater resources," Wallace recounted of the conference.

Stacia Kucyjeski, chief operations officer of Ohio History Connection, said it has three staff members to do the work. It's not a process they want to rush, she said.

"We have a lot of remains to get through," she said. "Our NAGPRA staff has to cross-reference what timeframe (the ancestral remains are) from with the geography of where they came from, and then who would have been on that land at that time period."

Several tribal leaders say it's good to finally see progress on returning their remains. But they also find it difficult to navigate these new requirements.

For one, tribal nations and museums foot most of the associated costs.

Federal grants are available for consultation, documentation and repatriation — but they're so competitive, some refer to NAGPRA as an unfunded mandate. There's also a cap on the amount of money institutions and tribes can apply for.

For the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, four of the five people dealing with NAGPRA consultations aren't paid to do the work, according to the tribe's historic preservation officer Logan York.

"We are now on this timeline to make sure that our ancestors are treated with respect, but we have no more funding to make sure it's done correctly," York said.

Besides a lack of funding and time, none of the tribes are based within Ohio's borders.

The U.S. government forcibly removed all Native American tribes from the state by the early 19th century. This has left a footprint for several historic Ohio tribes across the country.

Chief of the Shawnee Tribe Ben Barnes said it has to work within 26 states for NAGPRA consultations, and with only two staff members to do it.

"There's no single NAGPRA consultation that's typical. Some can take years. Some can take months, some can take weeks. Some collections are overseas. Some are split collections, some of the ancestors were loaned out to another institution," Barnes said.

Chief Glenna Wallace said each tribe has their own approach to repatriation. But they are all looking for the same outcome.

"We need to unite those human remains with Mother Earth. Our belief is that that spirit is not at rest, that spirit is not at ease until it goes back to Mother Earth. And that has not happened. And that's what needs to happen," she said.

Wallace said working to re-inter these remains is a challenge, but it's a challenge each tribe is capable of doing.

- *WYSO (Ohio)*

Alberta First Nation voices 'grave concern' over Kevin O'Leary's proposed \$70B AI data centre

An ambitious plan from celebrity investor Kevin O'Leary to build the "world's largest" AI data centre in northern Alberta is facing opposition from a First Nation in the region.

In December, O'Leary Ventures announced plans to build Wonder Valley, a \$70-billion data centre in the Municipal District of Greenview, near Grande Prairie.

The project has been widely praised, including by Alberta Premier Danielle Smith.

Its location would put it on traditional territory of the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation.

"Our people have been working and living in this territory for a millennia, so it's concerning when we have the government and Mr. O'Leary talking about big plans and there was no mention of First Nation consultation," Chief Sheldon Sunshine told *CBC News*.

O'Leary has described the project as transformative for the local and provincial economy, with the potential to create thousands of jobs and make Alberta a global leader in AI infrastructure.

His company has emphasized Alberta's advantages for such a large-scale operation, citing its proximity to a nearby city, abundant natural gas, cool temperatures, and available space for the infrastructure.

The data centre would be powered by a combination of off-grid natural gas and geothermal energy sources. The first phase of the development would cost \$2 billion and generate 1.4 gigawatts of power, with additional phases planned to increase capacity.

For the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation

however, the development is seen as an infringement on treaty rights.

In an open letter to the Alberta premier, Sunshine expressed "grave concern" with the proposal, and reminded Smith that the province is bound by its obligations under Treaty 8.

Sunshine accused the province of working with O'Leary "behind closed doors and to the exclusion of our Nation, for a massive development on our traditional territory."

"This co-ordination is even more troubling, given the premier's and Mr. O'Leary's favourable statements towards [president-elect Donald] Trump following his threats to annex Canada," he said in the letter.

He said the First Nation's opposition is focused on the environmental risks posed by the construction of such a large-scale data facility in an ecologically sensitive area.

First Nations members have traplines in the area, rely on water from the Smoky River and use the area "to exercise our way of life, which has been systematically eroded by unmitigated cumulative effects from the provincial government's authorizations of industrial development in our territory," Sunshine wrote.

In a statement, the Alberta government told *CBC News* it is committed to appropriate consultations with First Nations at later stages of the project. The statement cited the economic benefits Wonder Valley would bring to the area.

"Alberta's government understands how important it is for Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation to exercise their Treaty rights and traditional uses now and into the future," said Jonathan Gauthier, press secretary to Technology and Innovation Minister Nate Glubish.

"Environment and Protected Areas issued a preliminary certificate which will allow a Water Act licence to be issued in future, provided various mandatory conditions are met," Gauthier said in the statement.

"These conditions include appropriate consultation with First Nations."

The Alberta Utilities Commission said electricity generation aspects of the scale proposed for Wonder Valley would require AUC approval before the generation facilities could be built or operated. The commission has not received an application related to the proposed development, it said.

The Municipal District of Greenview told *CBC* that early engagement by the developer has commenced, well in advance of any requisite consultation in the future.

"The M.D. of Greenview looks forward to the results of any ongoing and future consultation and sincerely wishes all parties involved in the proposed development to come together for the benefit of all in the region," it said in a statement.

Andrew Leach, an energy and environmental economist at the University of Alberta, said that while consultation with the First Nation would have been ideal, it isn't expected at this stage since there's still a long road ahead for a project of that magnitude.

"At this point, it certainly couldn't be seen to have impacted any treaty rights that would trigger duty to consult," Leach said in an interview.

"If they went ahead and gave a permit for construction or put major government funding behind its construction without consultation, that's where you're running afoul."

Meanwhile, Sunshine said Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation wants more transparency from all parties involved.

"We're not opposed to business," he said.

"As long as it's done in a sustainable way and our resources are not impacted. We want to be part of the solution, and I think First Nation people can be part of the solution."

- *CBC (Canada)*

Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe and Kw'tsán Cultural Committee sign co-stewardship agreement with BLM

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe (FYQIT) announced Jan. 15 that it entered into co-stewardship of the Quechan Ancestral Landscapes with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management California Desert District Office (BLM). This agreement is intended to establish and memorialize processes between FYQIT and BLM on how each party will plan, resource, share expertise, services, not otherwise available during the resource management and land management planning of areas located within the traditional Tribal territory of the Quechan people.

The Tribe's homelands are located in Imperial County, California. These lands, currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management, contain incredible cultural, ecological, recreational, scenic, and historic values. Last year, the FYQIT launched a public campaign asking President Joe Biden to designate this area as a national monument so it could be preserved for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

"As a Tribe, we believe this is a great step forward in how we are able to engage with the agency about a landscape that holds so much of our history," said Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe President Jordan Joaquin. "We take seriously the responsibility we have as the original stewards. And we look forward to implementation of this agreement which we believe will strengthen land management effectiveness, enhance natural and cultural resource protection, and facilitate Tribal involvement in management and implementation decisions."

The Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe partners closely with its appointed officials within the Cultural Committee to ensure that it is accountable to the preservation of its cultural values, belief systems, life ways, and traditional practices. Kw'tsán Cultural Committee Chairman Manfred Scott says that the agreement is long-awaited and that his Committee is ready to engage in ways that protect what is sacred to the Tribe. "As the Chair for the Kw'tsán Cultural Committee (KCC) it brings me great joy to see all the Tribal support and solidarity - our unity around protection of this landscape goes to show what can be accomplished. I've been doing the work for more than 40 years and I feel that we are finally at a place where we are seen and heard. This co-stewardship agreement came together in under ten days and today, the KCC were happy to, on behalf of Quechan Tribal Council, witness one of BLM Principal Deputy Director Nada Wolff Culver's last moments in her position. The ink is dry and now we can move forward to the next phase of getting a bill passed within the next year and a half. Today's a great day to be Kwatsan!"

The Quechan Ancestral Landscapes are part of a greater cultural landscape, connecting Avi Kwa Lal, Palo Verde Peak, the newly designated Chuckwalla National Monument, and Spirit Mountain in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, which was designated by President Biden in 2023. The ancestral landscape boundary incorporates the Indian Pass Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Pilot Knob (Avikwalal), Singer Geoglyphs (ACEC), Buzzards Peak, and Picacho Peak Wilderness areas.

Key outcomes of co-stewardship would be to provide protections for wildlife, cultural places, sacred sites, scenic features and other conservation values and would also prevent new harmful activities, including new mining claims and large industrial development within its boundaries.

The Fort Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe is a federally recognized tribal nation with more than 3,200 Tribal citizens and 45,000 acres of reservation land, located along both sides of the Colorado River in Imperial County, CA and Yuma County, Arizona.

- *From Fort Yuma Quechan Indian press release*

Alabama-Coushatta Tribe installs new second chief

The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas installed Herbert Johnson Jr. as its new Second Chief, Mikko Istimaatokla, in a traditional inauguration ceremony held on New Year's Day on the tribe's reservation.

A proud member of the Deer Clan, Johnson's appointment marks a significant moment in the tribe's leadership and heritage. Mikko Istimaatokla, or Second Chief, is a revered role within the tribe, responsible for assisting in the tribe's governance, cultural preservation and the passing down of traditions to future generations.

Johnson has demonstrated a lifetime of commitment to his community and culture. He graduated from Big Sandy High School in 1992 and attended Lon Morris College on a baseball scholarship. His dedication to education continued at Angelina College, where he pursued early childhood education while working as a teacher assistant at the Alabama-Coushatta HeadStart program. He also attended the Texas A&M Extension Service Fire School, further contributing to his engagement with the tribe's safety and well-being.

Johnson currently plays an integral role in the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Nation Volunteer Fire Department where he serves alongside other volunteers to ensure the safety and service of his community. He is actively involved in various community programs, including the Lil Dribblers basketball program, Children's Powwow, Annual Powwow and the Tribe's Fourth of July celebrations. One of his beloved traditions is hosting the annual Christmas Eve drive with music, which has become a cherished event in the community.

- *East Texas News (Livingston, Texas)*

Mashantucket Pequot swear in tribal leaders

MASHANTUCKET, Conn. — The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation held its inauguration ceremony Jan. 2 at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. Tribal leaders sworn in included Chairman Rodney A. Butler, who has served in that position since 2010, and re-elected officials, Councilors Daniel Menihan, Jr., Michele Scott and Elders Council Secretary/Treasurer-Elect Toni Hall-Hillyer.

The tribe also swore in three Youth Council members: Chairman-Elect David Smith Sebastian, Vice Chairwoman-Elect Shyann Mckee and Secretary-Elect Jyaida Colebut.

Each elected official will serve a three-year term of office.

In the spring of 2024, Butler was named president of the Native American Finance Officers Association (NAFOA) during its conference at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

The tribe owns and operates Foxwoods Resort Casino and other businesses, including Lake of the Isles golf resort, the Spa at Norwich Inn and Pequot Health Care, along with a variety of complementary business enterprises, including Connecticut's premiere luxury golf experience, Lake of the Isles and the decadent Spa at Norwich Inn. The Tribe's health and wellness company, Pequot Health Care

- *Staff Report*

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FEB 8
GEORGE LOPEZ



FEB 11
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FEB 15
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Education



Asah Jumper attends military academy, hopes to inspire tribal members

BY TATUM MITCHELL
Staff Reporter

Asah Jumper, a tribal member and freshman at Fork Union Military Academy (FUMA) in Virginia, knew he wanted to go to military school for a couple of reasons.

His father, Eric Douglas Sanders, and grandfather, Harley Jumper, served in the military, and he wanted to make a personal change. He said his mom, Virginia Garcia Sanders, researched options for schools, and then they toured FUMA.

"I realized, this school can really bring out the better version of myself and help me with a lot of things that needed to be straightened out with," Jumper said.

Though he misses home every day and wishes he could hang out with his mom and his dogs, Jumper said he has learned a lot in his first six months at FUMA. He has been liking it, and said the students are told the best way to get through school is to "do as you're told and don't do anything stupid."

Currently, the school is going into parade season, so they are going to spend more time outside practicing for upcoming parades, Jumper said. FUMA was supposed to perform at the presidential inauguration in January, but it was cancelled because the event was moved inside due to cold weather.

"I was bummed out. Six months, you know, that's hard work. Because they told us at the beginning of the year, we will have a chance to go perform in front of the president. And we've been working for that ever since, and then we got the news two nights before, and we were all bummed out,"



Courtesy photo

Asah Jumper, center and closest to the camera, at parade practice.

Jumper said.

He said he has met great friends and brothers at FUMA, and he's learned how to be more mature.

"We're kids [at FUMA], and we joke around, but we actually know when to lock in to be serious. You can joke around, you can have fun, but when it's time to lock in, it's time to lock in," Jumper said. "And, you know, I realized that kids my age just don't really take serious things serious anymore."

From that, Jumper said, he has more respect for listening to elders.

"When elders come talk to [some kids], they're just [thinking], 'I can't wait until this guy stops talking so I can go on my phone or go play basketball,'" Jumper said. "And for me, ... I used to be that too, but now, I'm going to take my time to listen what to this man is saying, because it can help me either tomorrow or later in life."

Jumper said he hopes to show other Native children that they have options for their future.

"If I can do it, other Native kids can also do it," Jumper said.

Though military school is challenging and takes sacrifice, Jumper said it taught him a lot, and he wants to inspire other Native students and their parents to do the same.

"To the native parents, I want them to know that you can help your kid. You have to make a sacrifice, or you have to do something that you were not willing to do few years ago. Like my mom, she knew I needed this, and she knew the distance was long, but she did it anyways, because she knew it was for my well-being. I want to still show the parents, you could give your kid a second chance, or you can bring your kid here so they could become that better person that you wanted to become."

Jumper said his advice for potential military school candidates is that "every day is going to be a struggle, but you gotta keep going. You can't be thinking about the past or anything. You gotta think about now. You gotta think about what are you doing now, and what you're going to do in the future. Because what FUMA has taught me is that you can't do anything about the past, it's already happened. What we can do is learn



Courtesy photo

Asah Jumper, far right and holding the banner, practices for the U.S. presidential inauguration parade at Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia. The school's appearance in Washington D.C. was canceled when the inauguration was moved inside due to cold weather.

from the past, and that's what they teach us here. And then we learn from it, and we move from it. And I would just say to them, like, keep your head up. You know, keep calling your moms, your family, because they're all rooting for you, my whole family's been rooting for me."

Jumper said he has been recognized as a future leader at FUMA, and hopes to make Corporal, a higher rank, by the end of the year.

"I want that rank to show people and to show other schools that I go to ... because I didn't really have the greatest background ... but I want them to look at my record and [say], 'He did this, but then he went to [FUMA] and now he's disciplined. He has good leadership skills, and that he is just a good person all in all.'" Because I want to show people that people can change. Because I have a lot of people still thinking the same bad kid that I was, and I want to show them I could be that, and at the same time I can change and be better."

In the future, Jumper said he may transfer to Admiral Farragut Academy, a military school closer to home in St. Petersburg. His younger brother plans to attend as well. After high school, Jumper said he hopes to join the Marines.

"I wanted to be a Marine because I want to fight for my nation, but I just don't want to fight for my people, because there's not a lot of Native Americans going into the military and going, 'Hey, I want to go do this and bring pride to my people.' I rarely see that anymore. ... What inspires me is my grandpa, he was in two military branches. If he could do two, I can do one," Jumper said.

Bella Garcia receives award from UNC American Indian Center

BY JALYN OXENDINE
UNC American Indian Center

Editor's note: Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member Bella Garcia received the 2024-25 Faith Danielle Hedgepeth Award from the University of North Carolina's American Indian Center. The award honors and celebrates the life of Hedgepeth (Haliwa-Saponi Tribe), who was a UNC student in 2012 when she was murdered. The annual award was established in 2015 and "serves to support current Tar Heels along their academic journey while providing an avenue for impact outside the classroom through extracurricular engagement, as Faith did during her time on campus."

The recipient of the 2024-25 Faith Danielle Hedgepeth Award from the University of North Carolina's American Indian Center is Bella Garcia of Cherokee, North Carolina. Garcia, a member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, is a sophomore double-majoring in dramatic arts and American Indian and Indigenous studies. Garcia is also a member of the Phi Sigma Pi national honor society.

"Being the recipient of the Faith Danielle Hedgepeth award is extremely meaningful to me. She was such a shining light in the world and was stolen from us far too soon," Garcia said. "I want to honor her legacy by being a representative for Native women like us, and instill in us that we are capable, strong and resilient. Nobody will be able to take that away from us."

Garcia has loved to read since she was a kid. "I always took pride in that, and I was always the first person to grab two books off of the shelf." That love of books led to a passion for learning and fueled her to take pride in higher education.

As an imaginative child, she also liked to watch movies and musicals and began to act in middle school. The teacher of a musical theatre elective class became her role model. In high school, Garcia performed in the musicals "Clue" and "Legally Blonde."

When it was time for college, family members who attended UNC-Chapel Hill and returned to the community to practice journalism and social work inspired her to attend Carolina. Garcia hopes to work in film or on Broadway after graduation and eventually open a

studio in her hometown to encourage more Native kids to pursue acting.

"Native kids don't see themselves on stage or on screen or even going to college. Having someone that has achieved these goals will drive them to reach for the stars. They need to know that they can be just as successful," Garcia said.

While Native people are often invisible in the Hollywood community, Garcia said, the situation is changing. "There are productions like 'Rez Dogs' and actors/actresses like Lily Gladstone who are breaking out into this world of film. We need to see more Native people on Oscar stages and on the big screen," she said.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, the Carolina Indian Circle is a big part of Garcia's life and like a family to her. She is serves on the steering council and culture committee and will help plan the CIC annual banquet as banquet co-chair.

"I want to make sure our celebration is as memorable as it can be and a space where everyone can embrace our Indigenous identities together," she said.

Participating in the circle's Indigenous People's Day celebration is her favorite memory at Carolina so far. "That day just healed my soul being in community with everyone. We danced, ate Chipotle and had a good time," she said.

For self-care, Garcia loves to run and work out as it. The exercise clears her mind and makes her feel healthy. She also winds down by listening to true crime podcasts or watching "Law and Order" during evenings spent with her boyfriend and dog, Gucci.

"Don't make yourself small to make anyone else more comfortable" is Garcia's personal motto, one she thinks about daily. "If you are trying to be successful, you're going to have a big presence, no matter what, and people will be envious and tear you down."



Courtesy photo

University of North Carolina sophomore Bella Garcia is this year's Faith Danielle Hedgepeth Award winner.

PECS fourth graders learn about Florida agriculture at Okeechobee AgVenture

STAFF REPORT

About 34 Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School fourth graders attended the Okeechobee Ag-Venture program Jan. 8 where they learned about Florida agriculture. The goal of the program is to bring students an awareness, understanding and appreciation of the local agricultural industry.

The immersive day began with students

exploring farm equipment including a large tractor and engaging with interactive exhibits which showcased livestock feed and soil. They rotated through a series of educational exhibits where they learned about the alligator, beef, citrus, dairy, poultry and vegetable industries.

Each station lasted for 18 minutes where they learned from experts and participated in hands-on activities to better understand the importance of each aspect of the local agricultural industry.



Courtesy photo

PECS students listen to a presentation about poultry at the Okeechobee Ag-Venture program at the Okeechobee County Agri-Civic Center on Jan. 8.



Courtesy photo

Students get up close with chickens as they learn about the poultry business at the Ag-Venture program.



Courtesy photo

PECS students arrive at the Okeechobee Ag-Venture program.



Courtesy photo

PECS students got a hands-on lesson about the citrus industry as they squeezed some oranges into juice.

Big Cypress Preschool puts on Christmas show



Beverly Bidney

Emoryelle Cypress hugs Santa at the Big Cypress Preschool Christmas show Dec. 19, 2024.



Beverly Bidney

Cashton Tommie eyes Santa as he accepts the colorfully wrapped present given by the bearded man in red.



Beverly Bidney

Dressed as the cutest Grinch imaginable, Cher Osceola gives it her all as she and her classmates sing Christmas songs.



Beverly Bidney

The youngest preschoolers aren't quite sure what to do with the jingle bells in their hands, but they sure do enjoy playing with them as the song "Jingle Bells" played.

University of Arizona expert works to preserve Native American sign languages

BY KYLE MITTAN

University of Arizona's University Communications

Melanie McKay-Cody's research career technically began when she was 10 years old.

That's when, as a student at the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, McKay-Cody found a book about Native American sign languages.

The signs in the book looked different from the American Sign Language she had been using since she was 5. McKay-Cody, fascinated with her own Native heritage, was enthralled.

"It immediately piqued my interest, and I immediately recognized the differences between these Indian signs and American Sign Language," McKay-Cody said.

In the decades since that day in the library, McKay-Cody has made it her mission to document, preserve and revitalize North American Indigenous sign languages. An assistant professor in the University of Arizona College of Education's Department of Disability and Psychoeducational Studies, McKay-Cody is one of the world's leading researchers on North American Indian Sign Language, a vast network of sign languages and dialects whose use goes back millennia.

"That book set me out to ask, 'Where did this come from?'" McKay-Cody said while reflecting on that day in the library. "It really did make an impression on me."

Falling in love with history

McKay-Cody was born hearing and raised in southeastern Oklahoma. She became deaf at age 5 due to spinal meningitis, and her family moved to Sulphur, Oklahoma, to be near the Oklahoma School for the Deaf. About a month later, she was signing fluently in ASL.

McKay-Cody's family, all of whom are hearing, did not formally learn ASL, though her mother and sister picked up some signs. Her dad and brother communicated with her using their own signs.

"Back in those days, parents didn't often sign," McKay-Cody said. "You have to remember, this is the 1960s, when parents weren't really educated about

communication and engagement with their children the same way that that we are now."

McKay-Cody grew up knowing about and researching her paternal Cherokee heritage, and in high school she began digging deeper into her lineage, finding ties on her mother's side to nine tribes in the eastern U.S., including the Shawnee Tribe, the Powhatan, the Montauk, the Narragansett and the Pequot.

"I became really interested and got involved with older deaf folks who would tell their stories," she said. "That really got me interested in history, and I really fell in love with it."

'There was something there'

McKay-Cody attended Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., a bilingual institution whose mission is to ensure the intellectual and professional advancement of deaf and hard-of-hearing people. She spent her days studying museum studies, art history and the history of the American West.

While working at the National Archives and in Gallaudet's archives, McKay-Cody came across historical records on Native sign languages. She took them home and pored over them, knocking dust off the pages as she read.

After graduating in the late 1980s, McKay-Cody took a temporary research position in Santa Fe, where she catalogued and cleaned artifacts for an anthropology lab. The work wasn't glamorous, she said, but it helped prepare her for the historical research she would later do.

One day, McKay-Cody was asked to analyze Puebloan petroglyphs carved on the walls of a canyon near Santa Fe. As McKay-Cody studied the drawings, she was reminded of Native hand signs she had seen in her research. She sensed that there was more to the way the artists communicated than what was on the rock.

"By observing all the different canyons, I just knew that there was something there," she said. "I just needed the training that would coincide with that."

The 'missing puzzle piece'

That training would continue in the Southwest. McKay-Cody began her master's program in sign language studies at the U of

A in 1993.

By then, McKay-Cody was not the only researcher studying the history of sign language in Native communities. Sam Supalla, a researcher in the U of A College of Education, had published research about sign language use on the Navajo Nation.

McKay-Cody felt called to do similar work, but with a focus on sign languages used by Indigenous peoples across the Great Plains of the central U.S. and southern Canada.

"I felt like I was the missing puzzle piece that needed to be a part of this," McKay-Cody said.

In the decades since, McKay-Cody and other researchers have sketched out a map to better understand the network of countless sign languages and dialects used by Indigenous communities across nine regions of North America. Collectively, these languages are known as North American Indian Sign Language. Some languages are colloquially referred to as Hand Talk.

Many of the minor differences between the languages were for practical reasons, McKay-Cody said. Tribes in the northern plains of Canada, for example, would encounter entirely different animals and have different ceremonies than tribes in the southern plains.

Much of these differences were documented through McKay-Cody's research for her first master's dissertation, published in 1996, which focused specifically on Plains Indian Sign Language, a subset of North American Indian Sign Language that refers to a set of languages that were used in the Great Plains of the U.S. and Canada.

"Sometimes, I will be signing with one group and the group will say, 'No, no, that's the sign that belongs to the other group,' and vice versa," McKay-Cody said. "So, that's a moment where I document the differences between the two tribes' sign languages."

Since completing her master's program at the U of A, McKay-Cody has focused on translating, documenting and revitalizing North American Indian Sign Language. That took her to the University of Kansas, where she earned a second master's degree, in linguistic anthropology, in 2014.

With two decades of research experience since her time in the canyon near Santa Fe, McKay-Cody now had evidence for what she sensed when she first saw the drawings: that some of them were based on corresponding hand signs that Puebloan people used to communicate.

For example, a horizontal line across a figure's torso looked just like the line a signer would draw across their stomach with their hand to say they're hungry. A drawing of a line with a half circle appeared just like an arm reaching out with a cupped hand, or the sign for "water."

"I was able, as a deaf person, as a Native signer, to see that and make those connections from my own Native sign knowledge to the images," McKay-Cody said.

A 'heavy responsibility'

Since she began studying North American Indian Sign Language, McKay-Cody has become one of the foremost experts at the intersection of Native and Deaf identity. She returned to her home state to earn a doctoral degree in sociocultural and linguistic anthropology from the University of Oklahoma in 2019.

She was featured prominently in a 2022 video by the media outlet Vox explaining the history of North American Indian Sign Language.

When Gallaudet University, McKay-Cody's alma mater, planned to install a mural featuring Native deaf signers, McKay-Cody helped ensure the signs were accurate.

When the National Association of the Deaf, in partnership with the NFL, wanted to nominate Native American sign-language performers for the 2023 Super Bowl's pregame show, they turned to McKay-Cody. She referred them to Colin Denny, a U of A research assistant who went on to perform sign language for "America the Beautiful."

Judy Heumann, a renowned advocate for the rights of disabled people, interviewed McKay-Cody for her podcast, "The Heumann Perspective," in February 2023, just weeks before Heumann passed away.

"As a deaf Native person, I will say that I do carry quite a load. I do view that as a heavy responsibility, because nationwide, I am the only person pursuing this very

specific field," McKay-Cody said. "There's really no one else doing this work."

McKay-Cody is now largely focused on building a video dictionary, with the help of a network of Native signers, that collects as many individual signs from across North American Indian Sign Language as possible.

The dictionary currently includes 900 terms representing 13 tribal sign languages and dialects and is stored and managed by University Libraries and with participating tribes' language programs. Each entry includes an English translation, a video of a Native signer signing the term, and an explanation in English of how to make the signs. McKay-Cody is working with 15 tribes across the U.S. to film the signs and ensure their historical accuracy.

While McKay-Cody expects parts of the dictionary could eventually become public, she plans to restrict access to some of the terms to members of the tribe who originated the language. How widely the signs are shared will be determined through discussions with each tribe.

Restricting access, McKay-Cody said, ensures that the tribes have control over their own languages.

"The language belongs to Native people," she said. "Native people are afraid of their language, of their Hand Talk, being polluted by ASL. So, a goal for the dictionary, when I'm done, is to make sure that those tribes who have been involved in the research, who have been doing the work and are interested, will have access to that."

A grant from the National Science Foundation in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities, for about \$440,000, is funding the video dictionary project.

McKay-Cody's career, she said, has come full circle since the day she picked up that library book when she was 10.

"Back then, if somebody had told me, 'You're going to go on to a Ph.D. and travel the world and do research, I never would have believed them,'" she said. "That little 10-year-old me could never have imagined where I would be today."

Tribe soaks in the benefits, savings from solar power

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Located in the Sunshine State, the Seminole Tribe of Florida is taking advantage of the sun's energy to power tribal facilities on the Big Cypress and Brighton reservations.

The Rural Reservation Resiliency Initiative, led by Harvey Rambarath, acting director of Planning and Development, and Harry "Skip" Edmondson, Construction Management senior project manager, was created to improve the durability of the power grid on the reservations.

Project partners included the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Indian Energy, three consultant groups, a contractor and Glades Electric Cooperative.

Hurricane damage was the main reason for building the solar projects. The powerful storms can impact huge areas and have knocked the power grid offline for long periods of time. After Hurricane Irma devastated Big Cypress in 2017, the reservation was without power for almost a month. The generators there ran continuously for weeks, which shortens the life of the generator, according to Rambarath. Solar panels produce energy, but to be fully resilient a battery energy storage system (BESS) was added.

"It's the first project of its kind in Florida," Rambarath said. "We interconnected batteries to the grid and have generators that recharge the batteries. It's the first true hybrid system created in the state."

Big Cypress' four solar projects are for the administration building, senior center, health clinic and public safety buildings. Solar arrays which power the buildings are located on the ground, carpools and the rooftop of the clinic.

The design of the Big Cypress solar projects began during the pandemic in September 2021. Construction encountered numerous supply chain delays; the first was completed in April 2022 and the last one in May 2024.

"The lead time of getting the really important equipment hit us hard,"

Edmondson said. "It took over 12 months; they were integral to the functionality of the systems. That shouldn't happen going forward. The Brighton projects are running much more smoothly."

The cost of Glades Electric energy usage for the Big Cypress Public Safety building was cut in half from Nov. 2022 to Nov. 2023. That was a bit higher than normal, savings are usually between 30% and 40%.

Brighton's three projects send power to the administration, Public Safety and Florida Seminole Veterans buildings. They are located on the roofs of a large carport between the administration and Veterans buildings. Construction began in April 2024 and is scheduled to be completed in March 2025.

During a power outage, the batteries are designed to run the facilities for three hours; after that they switch to the generators. As the generators run, they charge the batteries, like a hybrid car.

"Many people didn't believe a battery could run a building, but it does," Rambarath said. "In most cases, the generator doesn't even need to start."

The solar panels are designed to provide about 30% of necessary power to the buildings. That allows the tribe to save money, including when the cost of power spikes based on demand. Instead of the tribe's power grid having to rely on outside energy, it uses the solar energy during those peak power times.

"The energy that goes to the buildings is much cleaner," Rambarath said. "By doing that, it also prevents equipment from getting burnt out and lessens the likelihood of being damaged by power surges."

Rambarath and Edmondson have some ideas for adding more projects for other locations, such as the Brighton Culture Center and the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School immersion program building. They plan to apply for grants.

"Providing projects of this scale provides good optics for the tribe," Edmondson said. "When people drive through the reservations, they see these large-scale projects; that reflects well on the tribe, which is the steward of the land."



Kevin Johnson

Solar panels provide energy benefits and covered parking in Brighton.



STOF

One of Big Cypress's solar projects is on the roof of the health clinic.

Legislation introduced to remove BIE from operating Haskell

BY LEVI RICKERT
Native News Online

Legislation has been introduced in Congress by two Kansas lawmakers that will give the Haskell Board of Regents governance over Haskell Indian Nations University. If enacted, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) would be removed from operating the Lawrence, Kansas-based university.

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran and Rep. Tracey Mann, announced the draft legislation in a news release [in December].

The legislation comes on the heels of a congressional hearing held on July 23, 2024 that was filled with accusations of decades of mismanagement, nepotism, and toxicity at Haskell Indian Nations University.

"The bureau has failed to protect students, respond to my congressional inquiries or meet the basic infrastructure needs of the school," Moran said in the release. "It is clear that the best path forward is for the university to be led by an independent Board of Regents nominated by the Tribal Community and no longer fettered to the Bureau of Indian Education."

Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Chairman Joseph Rupnick praised the legislation.

"I am thankful that Sen. Moran and Rep. Mann have introduced this legislation to strengthen Haskell as a federally chartered university to further the federal government's treaty and trust responsibility to Indian people," said Joseph Rupnick, Chairman of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. "I look forward to discussions in the new year with Tribal leaders and Haskell alums, faculty and students so that this bill can safeguard Haskell's future and its funding."

Sen. Moran and Rep. Mann are seeking feedback from the Native American, Lawrence and higher education communities on the proposed legislation to ensure the bill effectively addresses key issues at Haskell University.

The university was once an Indian boarding school. It opened in 1884 under the name of United States Indian Industrial Training School with an enrollment of 22 Native American students. Within a semester the enrollment grew to 400 Native students from various tribes from various points of the country.

In 1887, the school was renamed for Dudley C. Haskell who fought during the Civil War in the Union Army in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and in the Indian Territory. Some 20 years later, Haskell served in Congress as a representative from Kansas. While in Congress, he served as the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for two years. During this time, he supported legislation to establish off-reservation Indian boarding schools in Kansas, Nebraska and in Indian Territory to be modeled after the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Haskell died unexpectedly in late 1883.

◆ DEBTS From page 9A

Tribal Chairman Jarred-Michael Erickson said problems began in 2017, when a regional Indian Health Service office took over the referred-care program from local staff.

It "created a domino effect of negative outcomes," Erickson wrote in a letter to Congress.

He said some tribal members whose

finances were damaged stopped using the Indian Health Service. Others avoided health care altogether.

Responsibility for the Colville Reservation program transferred back to local staff in 2022. Staffers found the billing process hadn't been completed for thousands of cases, worth an estimated \$24 million in medical care, Erickson told lawmakers.

Workers are making progress on the backlog and they have explained the rules to outside hospitals and clinics, Erickson said. But he said there are still cases of wrongful

billing, such as a tribal member who was sent to collections after receiving a \$17,000 bill for chemotherapy that the agency was supposed to pay for.

Erickson said the tribe is in the process of taking over its health care facilities instead of having the Indian Health Service run them. He and others who work in Native American health said tribally managed units — which are still funded by the federal agency — tend to have fewer problems with their referred-care programs.

For example, they have more oversight

over staff and flexibility to create their own payment tracking systems.

But some Native Americans oppose tribal management because they feel it releases the federal government from its obligations.

Beyond wrongful billing, access to the referred-care program is limited because of underfunding from Congress. The \$1 billion budget this year is \$9 billion short of the need, according to a committee report by tribal health and government leaders.

Donald Warne, a physician and member

of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in South Dakota, called the proposed legislation a "band-aid." He said the ultimate solution is for Congress to fully fund the Indian Health Service, which would reduce the need for the referred-care program.

Back in Montana, Hawley said she braces for a fight each time she gets a bill that the referral program was supposed to cover.

"I've learned not to trust the process," Hawley said.



February schedule

FROM NATIVE LEARNING CENTER

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

Webinar: Natural Resource, Energy, & Climate Adaptation Plans

Instructor: Amy Wilson,
Founder & Principal Consultant
SEE Renewal, LLC

Date: Feb. 4
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.

Course Description:

Natural resource, energy, and climate adaptation plans are a fundamental tool for evaluating existing conditions and agreeing on and advancing Tribal Community, environmental, and economic goals. This webinar is designed to equip you with the

knowledge and skills to effectively assess existing conditions, identify community needs, agree on goals, and set a framework for decision-making. The presenter will discuss the different plans and their unique elements, providing you with a comprehensive understanding. You will also learn the steps for developing a structured roadmap, which will enable you to define clear objectives, allocate resources efficiently, anticipate potential challenges, and guide actions toward desired outcomes. Featured materials for this webinar include a PowerPoint slide presentation and informational course resources to refer to when preparing natural resource, energy, and climate adaptation plans.

Course Objectives:

- Understand the key differences between natural resource, energy, and climate

- adaptation plans

- Recognize key features across the plans

- Identify how to use natural resource, energy, and climate adaptation plans to justify

- funding requests

Webinar: 10 Ways to Improve Relationships with Grantors

Instructor: Diane Leonard, GPC, RST
Grant Professionals Association
Approved Trainer

Owner, DH Leonard Consulting & Grant Writing Services, LLC

Date: Feb. 6
Time: 2- 3:30 p.m.

Course Description:

This training provides in-depth information and discussion about the importance of an organization's relationships with its grantors in securing, maintaining, and receiving additional grant funding. This class will help you to be more competitive in the grant seeking process and it will assist you in increasing your success ratio.

Course Objectives:

- How to approach stewardship of grantmakers

- How to avoid treating a grantmaker in a transactional way

- How to utilize the individual stewardship activities of your organization to help improve relationships with grantmakers

Webinar: Crafting Grant Language to Increase Funding Success

Instructor: Diane Leonard, GPC, RST
Grant Professionals Association
Approved Trainer

Owner, DH Leonard Consulting & Grant Writing Services, LLC

Date: Feb. 13
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.

Course Description:

This training provides in-depth information and discussion about the importance of word choice in grant proposals to increase clarity. This class will help you to be more competitive in the grant-seeking process and assist you in increasing your

success ratio.

Course Objectives:

- Increase understanding of language choice to align with the funder guidelines

- Increase knowledge of practices as well as tools to help craft strong language when within tight character and word limits

- Learn how to utilize a mock review process to ensure that the final application aligns with the funder's priorities and guidelines

Webinar: Executive Leadership and Engagement in the Time of Crisis 4-Day Webinar Series

Instructor: William Latchford,
President,
Native Peacekeeper Consulting Group

Date: Feb. 18-21
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.

Course Description:

These 90-minute webinars explore the critical role of executive leadership in navigating crisis situations, with a specific focus on the unique challenges faced by Tribal Officials and senior leaders. Participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of crises and learn strategies to prepare their organizations in advance for potential emergencies.

Course Objectives:

- Understand the critical dynamics of crisis situations and how they differ from routine emergencies

- Learn the role leadership plays in crafting and executing appropriate responses and preparing organizations in advance of a crisis

- Develop skills for working decisively in the highly concentrated timeframe of an emergency, while maintaining a focus on managing and motivating a team

- Gain insights into the critical coordination demands of large-scale crises that engage multiple response organizations

from many jurisdictions and levels of government

- Explore the tensions that frequently arise between senior emergency management professionals and political leaders and strategies for working together effectively

Webinar: Grant Writing: Mastering the Basics and Beyond

Instructor: Diane Leonard, GPC, RST
Grant Professionals Association
Approved Trainer

Owner, DH Leonard Consulting & Grant Writing Services, LLC

Date: Feb. 27
Time: 2-3:30 p.m.

Course Description:

This training provides in-depth information about the variety of granting organizations, the process of applying for grant funding, and the most common components of a grant application. This class will help you to be more competitive in the grant seeking process, and it will assist you in increasing your success ratio.

Course Objectives:

- Learn how to move your grant seeking efforts from reactive to proactive

- How to expand beyond SMART objectives to SMARTIE objectives

- Learn how to build grant justifications/narratives that sell your application story

Follow the Native Learning Center on social media or visit www.nativelearningcenter.com to keep up-to-date. For technical assistance, feedback, or more information, please contact us through our website or call 954-985-2331.

Big Cypress to host Indigenous Arts & Music Festival Feb. 6-8

FROM PRESS RELEASE

BIG CYPRESS — The Indigenous Arts & Music Festival will be held on the Big Cypress Reservation Feb. 6-8. The festival

Event schedule

Thursday, Feb. 6

9:30 a.m. Gates open
10 a.m. Opening prayer
10:15 a.m. Video for elders
10:30 a.m. STOF social dance
11 a.m. Polynesian Proud
1 p.m. Cowbone Band
1:30 p.m. Bearhead Sisters
2:15 p.m. Video for Seminole elders
2:30 p.m. Ahfachkee School Band
3:30 p.m. Creek Hymn Singers
4:45 p.m. STOF seniors clothing contest
6 p.m. John Anderson

Friday, Feb. 7

9:30 a.m. Gates open
10 a.m. Opening prayer/Seminole Princess welcome
10:15 a.m. Video for Seminole elders
10:30 a.m. Wildlife presentation
11:30 a.m. Bird Family performance

on the grounds of the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena will feature live music, arts & crafts, food and more. For additional information go to indigenouamf.com.

12:30 p.m. Andy Buster

1:30 p.m. Creek Hymn Singers
2 p.m. Video for Seminole elders
2:30 p.m. Cecil Grey
3:30 p.m. Ahfachkee School Band
4:30 p.m. Sage Cornelius
5:30 p.m. Indigenous

Saturday, Feb. 8

9:30 a.m. Gates open
10 a.m. Opening prayer/Seminole Princess welcome
10:15 a.m. Video for Seminole elders

10:30 a.m. Wildlife presentation
11:30 a.m. Pura Fe
12:30 p.m. Polynesian Proud
1:30 p.m. To be determined
2:30 p.m. Bird Family performance
4 p.m. Chebon Tiger
5 p.m. Sage Cornelius
6 p.m. Osceola Brothers

Princesses attend conference



Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas speaks Jan. 27 at the opening day of the Seminole Tribe of Florida's 7th annual Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood. Next to her is Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Violet Osceola. See full coverage of the three-day conference in the March issue of the Tribune.

Tatum Mitchell

How more tribes are working to bring bison back to their land

BY ANNA POPE
Harvest Public Media

It's a quick drive through a couple of gates and up a hill for Jimmy Jestes to look out over about 300 acres where the Pawnee Nation's bison herd will soon roam.

Jestes, the director of the nation's agriculture division, has been working with a team to clear thickets and red cedar trees on the land in preparation for what he refers to as buffalo.

"Right now, we're getting ready to build a fence for the buffalo herd," he said.

The Pawnee Nation hopes to start off with a small herd of about 10-15 cows and their calves on their land in northern Oklahoma. Any meat from the animals won't be sold. Instead, these animals will be for cultural purposes.

Still, Jestes knows keeping a healthy herd of non-domesticated buffalo will be challenging.

"What the tribe had 150 years ago is totally different than what we're doing now, getting buffalo back," Jestes said. "Whereas, 150 years ago, they was running free on the plain."

Buffalo are central to many Indigenous groups' traditions, history and spirituality, especially for Plains tribes that once used the animals for food, shelter and clothing.

Today, buffalo are also a symbol of resiliency for Indigenous groups. After being hunted to near extinction, there are roughly 450,000 Plains bison now living in the U.S., according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Each year more tribes and tribal nations seek to have buffalo restored to their lands.

Jessica Evans, the Pawnee Nation's agriculture land manager and outreach coordinator, said as a Plains tribe, buffalo are an integral part of their culture. Reestablishing the animals on the landscape is about reconnection.

"For me personally, it will feel really

good to get to have a piece of that back and share that with everybody else who also has that hole in their heart of what could have been, what was and just is not anymore," she said.

About 30-60 million bison once roamed the continent. It took less than 100 years of over hunting to bring the animal to near extinction, according to the National Parks Service.

"It seemed like overnight that they just disappeared," said Rosalyn LaPier, a history professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. "So for a vast majority of people, it would just seem sudden, like all of a sudden. It was just like, 'Wait, there aren't any more.'"

Even as Indigenous peoples were removed from land or massacred, they were also dealing with fewer bison, LaPier said.

"Since bison are primarily an animal of the plains and prairies, many of the tribes that had the closest relationship were the Plains tribes," she said.

In the early 1900s, conservation efforts began to protect small herds of bison. Those efforts and the herds grew throughout the 20th century with the environmental movement, and later, tribes worked to see bison restored on their land.

The InterTribal Buffalo Council, founded in the early 1990s, has been an important part of that work.

The council has more than 80 members, who manage about 20,000 bison on over 1 million acres. ITBC President Ervin Carlson said their mission is to return buffalo to tribal lands for cultural and spiritual connection.

"You know, it's real gratifying to see when we first bring back a herd to a tribe — how excited or emotional to them to finally get buffalo back on their lands," he said.

The group has grown from an initial seven to 10 tribes to eight times that size, and Carlson said the organization continues to welcome more members, including the Pawnee Nation.

"Some of the tribes don't have herds yet but are in the process of doing that, and we help them put together, getting ready to have a herd," Carlson said.

The council has programs, hosts educational events and worker trainings. It also provides technical services to assess land and looks at needs such as infrastructure and water.

Carlson said the biggest need for the tribal nations that have buffalo herds is funds to sustain and build their herds. He said he has been working on raising the amount of federal money for buffalo programs for years.

"I mean, that never covers all their needs, but it's actually helped them to just to exist and keep going," he said. "And, of course, way below what is needed. But the tribes are just like buffalo. They're resilient, and things keep on going."

The Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma welcomed bison back to their land a couple of decades ago with help from the InterTribal Buffalo Council.

Lush grasses flutter in the field where the tribe's herd of just over 30 bison roam. In the adjacent field, there is a big red corral and squeeze chute. Lyle Washington, the tribe's agricultural assistant director, drives a pickup truck into the field to take a look.

"We do routine checks," Washington said. "And we feed on Mondays and Fridays and we'll go out and get a count, and just kind of spend time with the herds and see how they're moving and acting and just kind of inspect each and every animal."

Washington has seen the herd grow to as many as 100 buffalo and every year, he said, a few animals are processed for the tribe's meat distribution program.

"It's real fulfilling and getting to raise and nurture these animals, and seeing them grow and thrive, and then be able to bless our tribal members with food, you know?" he said. "It's awesome."



Osceola Brothers/Facebook

The Osceola Brothers are scheduled to be the festival's final act Feb. 8 at 6 p.m.

Miccosukee Tribe helps plan prescribed fire project

STAFF REPORT

A prescribed fire operation is set to go from late January through February. The prescribed fire will be conducted by the National Park Service, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

According to a press release, the fire will take place south of U.S. Highway 41 between mile markers 36 and 44 in a 151,434-acre area. Jurisdictional boundaries will be removed to conduct the project with federal, tribal and local resources, according to a release.

The project is expected to "reduce hazardous fuel accumulations, create a critical fire break on the south side of the Miccosukee Reserved Area to protect the Tribal Community from wildfire, enhance landscape resiliency, aid in ecosystem restoration, protect cultural values and improve firefighter and public safety," according to the release.

The project will be conducted in three phases led by tribal and agency efforts. The

first two phases include perimeter work and securing residences. Phase three is prescribed burning.

"The Tribe is very pleased to partner with the National Park Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs to execute these important land management actions for the benefit of promoting robust resources and ecosystem health," Chief of Sustainability Officer Kevin Cunniff of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida said in the release. "We are collectively embarking to do so in a manner based in, and informed by, the traditional knowledge and practices that Miccosukee people have used to help shape the Everglades and Big Cypress over thousands of years."

For more information, visit: InciWeb interagency all-risk incident information management system: Flep Boundary Prescribed Fire Information | InciWeb

Everglades National Park - <https://www.nps.gov/ever/planyourvisit/conditions.htm>

Big Cypress National Preserve - <https://www.nps.gov/bicy/planyourvisit/conditions.htm>

Show added at Hard Rock Live for Grammy Award nominee

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino has added a second and final show for Chris Stapleton's "All-American Road Show" on Oct. 11 at 7:30 p.m. Stapleton will also perform Oct. 10.

Chris Stapleton is a singer, songwriter and guitarist who is nominated for two awards at the upcoming 67th annual Grammy Awards: best country album for

"Higher" and best country solo performance for "It Takes A Woman."

Stapleton won three awards at the CMA Awards this past fall, making him a 19-time CMA Award winner. With this achievement, Stapleton tied the record for most CMA wins ever with Brooks & Dunn, while also extending his own record for most wins in the Male Vocalist of the Year category, counting eight so far.

For tickets, go to myHRL.com.

Martin, Short show moves to October

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — Steve Martin and Martin Short's "Dukes of Funnytown" show, originally scheduled for Jan. 11 at Hard Rock Live Hollywood, has been rescheduled to Oct. 4 at 8 p.m.

For guests who have already purchased tickets, all tickets for the originally scheduled Saturday, Jan. 11 show will remain valid for the rescheduled date. Guests who can no longer attend can get refunds at point of purchase within 60 days, by March 28.

For tickets, go to myHRL.com.

Sequoyah High School launches agriculture program

STAFF REPORT

Sequoyah High School is starting a new agricultural education program in partnership with the Cherokee Nation, Bureau of Indian Education, the Native American Agriculture Fund and the Tribal Agriculture Fellowship.

Sequoyah High School, in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, has about 400 Native American high school students, according to a press release. An agriculture teacher will be hired "to start an agriculture program, create a school garden and explore options to grow beef and utilize the garden for a farm to food program in the school's cafeteria," according to the press release.

Agriculture curriculum will be incorporated into classrooms as well.

"At the root of our culture, our Cherokee people have always believed in food sustainability and a holistic approach to health and wellness to ensure our entire tribe was cared for and this partnership today carries forward those traditional ways of life for our students," Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said in a release.

Sequoyah High School joins Chemawa High School in Oregon and Fort Wingate in New Mexico as a BIE school in a program geared toward cultural agriculture education, according to the release.

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Sports



Kevin Johnson

Jacoby Johns is in full control of his bareback ride Jan. 25 at the Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo in Hollywood. Johns won the event with a score of 79 points.



Kevin Johnson

Josh Jumper (header), grandson of Betty Mae Jumper, competes in team roping with Dakota Louis (heeler).

Jacoby Johns, Boogie Johns notch wins at Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — Rodeo fans in Hollywood were treated to two evenings of action-packed riding, roping, wrestling and more at the annual Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo, an INFR Tour event.

Top performances at the Seminole Tribe's Hollywood Rodeo Arena on Jan. 25 — the second night — came from Seminole cowboys and cowgirls and those from other parts of the country. The out-of-state competitors came from rodeo-rich states such as Arizona, North and South Dakota, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

Several members of Betty Mae's family — representing four generations of Jumpers — were among the competitors, the workers and the spectators, including her son Moses Jumper Jr.



Kevin Johnson

A screen at the rodeo arena highlights the Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo.



Kevin Johnson

Moses Jumper Jr., center, son of Betty Mae, joins some of the winners from the youth rodeo and the rodeo announcer Markus Houston.



Kevin Johnson

Lillie Coleman guides her horse through a tight turn in the youth rodeo's barrel racing.



Kevin Johnson

Boogie Johns turns the corner on her way to winning barrel racing.

It didn't take long in Saturday evening's

performance for a Jumper to give the crowd something to cheer about. In bareback riding — the night's opening event — Talen Jumper showed plenty of determination and skill as he stayed on the bucking horse for far longer than the required eight seconds. He earned a score of 40 points from the judges.

But the big point-getter in bareback belonged to Jacoby Johns — another Seminole — who also earned big cheers from the crowd in his acrobatic performance. Johns, from the Brighton Reservation, stayed on for more than eight seconds atop a fierce, angry foe. His standout performance received 79 points (100 points is the maximum a rider can receive).

There was still plenty of elite bareback talent after Johns — including 2022 INFR world champion Steven Dewolfe, who earned 62 points — but nobody surpassed Johns.

Later in the evening, the Brighton Reservation shined again in ladies barrel racing as Boogie Johns captured first place with a sizzling time of 15.11 seconds.



Kevin Johnson

Miss Indian Rodeo Autumn Sells smiles as she takes a lap at the start of the rodeo.

♦ See RODEO on page 6C



Kevin Johnson

The Guitar Hotel is lit up in a colorful way as Jacee Jumper sprints back to the line in barrel racing.

Champions crowned in Tribal Fair Youth Basketball Tournament

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — The Tribal Fair Youth Basketball Tournament wasn't large in terms of the number of teams, but it certainly featured one giant performance.

Walt Fortner poured in 38 points — including 22 in the final 10 minutes — to lead Native Select to the championship victory, an overtime win against Unconquered in the 13-14 boys division.

Native Select trailed most of the game, but as the minutes became fewer Fortner's game became larger. He scored 12 points in the six-minute fourth quarter and then dominated the four-minute overtime with 10 more points, almost all coming on layups or offensive rebounds.

Native Select also received strong games from Zaiden Spencer (13 points) and

Milo Osceola (7 points).

Native Select and Unconquered were the only teams in the division. Native Select, coached by Danny Bonilla, won both games.

Three teams competed in the 15-17 boys division. Rez Ballers, coached by Eric Osceola, emerged as champions.

Rez Ballers featured balanced scoring that proved to be tough to defend. In one game, they received 15 points each from Steven Brown and Louie Billie, 12 points from Jared Billie and 10 points from Antonio Tosca.

In the youngest division — 10-12 co-ed — YVL, from Trial, went 2-0 against Hollywood Rez. In the clincher, YVL received a big game from its biggest player — Riley Osceola — who scored a game-high 17 points. D.J. Reid starred for Hollywood Rez with a team-high 12 points.



Kevin Johnson

Native Select's Walt Fortner scores two of his game-high 38 points.



Kevin Johnson

Antonio Tosca makes a layup for the Rez Ballers.



Kevin Johnson

Hollywood's Taylor Battiste controls the ball while battling against YVL's Shiloh Archambeault Tiger in the 10-12 co-ed division.



Kevin Johnson

Tayin Fairclough grabs an offensive rebound.



Kevin Johnson

YVL's Riley Osceola looks for an open teammate.



Kevin Johnson

The 15-17 champion Rez Ballers. From left to right, coach Eric Osceola, Zaiden Osceola, Steven Brown, Louie Billie, Antonio Tosca, Jared Billie, Kalieja Osceola, Christian Shaffer, Glenardo Stubbs II and Tribal Fair Committee director Virginia Osceola.



Kevin Johnson

The 13-14 boys champion Native Select. From left to right, in back row, are coach Danny Bonilla, assistant coach Lindsay Sauls, Milo Osceola, Walt Fortner, Zaiden Spencer, Storm Osceola, Derrick McQueen, Amani Billie, Tribal Fair Committee director Virginia Osceola and assistant coach Kelsey Spencer. Front row, from left to right, are Damahni Bonilla and Kowi Osceola.



Kevin Johnson

The 10-12 co-ed champions YVL. From left to right, back row, are assistant coach John Osceola, Riley Osceola, Kylan Tiger, Shiloh Archambeault Tiger, Khace Sanchez and head coach Wild Bill Osceola. Front row, from left to right, are Alice Billie, Xavier Osceola and Nicholaus Schilling.



Kevin Johnson

Kowi Osceola launches a 3-point shot for Native Select.



Kevin Johnson
Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School guard Derrick McQueen closely defends a Yearling player during a middle school boys game Jan. 16 in Okeechobee.



Courtesy photo
PECS' eighth-grade players and their families were honored by coaches and teammates prior to the team's victory against West Glades on Jan. 16. The eighth graders are Zaden Spencer (10), Milo Osceola (23), Kowi Osceola (13) and Augustice Jumper (21). Coach Kamani Smith is in the center.

Rookie coaches praise their teams as PECS seasons end

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

BRIGHTON — After enduring a rough night at Yearling Middle School, the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School basketball team rebounded less than 24 hours later. Both teams won their final home games against West Glades on Jan. 16.

The victories tasted even sweeter because they came on eighth-grade parent night where teammates and coaches honored the eighth-grade players before their final middle school games at PECS.

Fittingly, eighth graders led the way for both teams. Azariah Washington led the girls with 12 points and Milo Osceola led the boys with 8 points. The girls won, 30-26; the boys triumphed, 32-21.

Other scorers for the girls were Jalene Smith (11 points), Dalysé Baker (4) and Jaïden Fludd (3). Additional scorers for the boys were Silas Snow (7), Kowi Osceola (6), Josiah Gopher (3), Derrick McQueen (3), Dahmani Bonilla (3) and Makai Newkirk (2). Nova Baker (girls) and Kamani Smith (boys) returned to their middle school alma mater this year as both made their coaching debuts.

As the season neared conclusion with one road game left, the coaches said they were proud of their players and are looking forward to coming back for year two. Both had similar comments about the losses at Yearling, noting that they liked how their teams battled until the end.

After attending PECS, Baker went on to star at Okeechobee High School. Now she's 21 and eager to give back to the tribe and to lead by example for the girls.

"In our tribe, we are matriarchs, so I want to show them you can do whatever you put your mind to."

The team entered its final game with a 7-2 record. Baker said her transition from

player to coach has been enjoyable.

"I really liked it. It was refreshing [compared] to playing because I am in control and I control the energy of the team and how it flows and a bunch of different things," she said.

Even in a defeat, Baker saw plenty of good in the Yearling game.

"They fought to the very end and I told them I was very proud of them for that. It's nice instilling that into younger Native women as a young Native woman also."

When Baker was in sixth grade and just starting her PECS playing career, Smith was in grade eight and wrapping up his three-year middle school career.

After playing sports at OHS, Smith headed to LSU, where he attended as many football, basketball, baseball and softball games as he could. After earning his degrees in just three years (he majored in mass communication with a concentration in public relations and a minor in business administration), he shifted his attention to coming back to Brighton and helping the tribe.

"I like to give back to my community. Ever since I left LSU, I knew I wanted to come here and do something with the kids or with the tribe. Working at the school and being able to coach...just making a difference in my community," said Smith, who works as a paraprofessional in grade six at PECS.

As his first season came to a close and after guiding the team to an improved record compared to last season, he was thankful for a strong core of eighth graders and already looking forward to next year.

"They've been great. I couldn't ask for a better group of eighth graders," he said. "[My first season] has been a learning experience. First time for everything. Ups and downs; I'm grateful for it all. I'm having fun and I'm ready to come back next season," he said.



Kevin Johnson
PECS girls coach Nova Baker, center, is joined by her eighth graders Jan. 16 before the team's victory against West Glades. From left to right are Ciani Smith, Caysie Platt, Zoie Snow, coach Baker, Azariah Washington, Jalene Smith and Jalaaya Hunsinger.



Kevin Johnson
Dalysé Baker takes a left-handed shot against Yearling with teammate Kanæe Jumper (3) nearby.



Kevin Johnson
Zaden Spencer and Milo Osceola (23) go airborne trying to get a rebound.



Kevin Johnson
Azariah Washington shows plenty of determination to get to the basket against Yearling.



Kevin Johnson
PECS' bench and coach Nova Baker react in the frantic final seconds of the team's loss at Yearling.

Moore Haven basketball to host district tournaments

STAFF REPORT

The sentiment in Moore Haven is that the Terriers are glad to host their girls and boys district tournaments, but they want to win them as well.

Both tournaments are scheduled to be one day only, with the girls taking place Feb. 6 and the boys Feb. 7.

The Terrier girls notched a statement victory Jan. 14 when they overcame a shaky first quarter and rallied to beat Babcock, 71-50.

Preslynn Baker helped key the comeback at both of the court. She scored 18 points and was a force on the boards at both ends.

Moore Haven is hitting its stride at the right time; it was the Terriers' ninth win a row. With one game left in January, the team had a stellar 14-3 record.

The Moore Haven boys have had more of a rollercoaster season that included a five-game losing skid and a five-game winning streak. The Terriers had a 10-7 record as of late January.



Beverly Bidney

Preslynn Baker, who is averaging more than 15 points per game, drives toward the basket against Babcock.



Kevin Johnson

The Moore Haven High School girls basketball team had plenty of reasons to smile after its win against Babcock on Jan. 14.



Kevin Johnson

Carlee Osceola controls the ball in the paint against Babcock.



Kevin Johnson

Willo James takes shots during warmups.

Everglades City notches home victory against Naples team

STAFF REPORT

EVERGLADES CITY – The Everglades City boys basketball team stood at the .500 mark with a 10-10 record with

three games left in the regular season.

Everglades City received seven 3-pointers and 23 points from smooth shooting Jemere Osceola to roll past Mason Classical Academy of Naples, 81-50, on

Jan. 14. Homer Huggins contributed 11 points and Amos Huggins had 8 points that included two 3-pointers.



Kevin Johnson

Everglades City's Tayin Fairclough dunks during a win against Mason Classical Academy on Jan. 21 in Everglades City.



Kevin Johnson

Jemere Osceola lines up a 3-pointer for Everglades City. Osceola had the hot hand in a win against Mason Classical with seven 3-pointers.



Kevin Johnson

Randel Billie goes airborne as he drives toward the net.



Kevin Johnson

Everglades City players enjoy their victory against Mason Classical.

Seminole student-athletes excel in college

STAFF REPORT

Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal members Chanon Frye and Allie Williams and descendent Fresh Walters have been shining in college sports in the Southwest and Midwest.

CHANON FRYE

Chanon Frye, a 6-foot-6 freshman forward, is averaging 5.3 points and nearly four rebounds per game for the Murray State College men's basketball team in Tishomingo, Oklahoma. Frye scored 10 points in a 78-65 win against Seminole State College (Seminole, Oklahoma) on Jan. 6, 2025. He also had six assists, two rebounds,

two blocks and one steal in 22 minutes. Nine of Frye's points came in the first half. Murray State coach Josh Davis said Frye was one of the key players in the team's eighth win a row.

"...Chanon Frye gave us a nice spark offensively in the first half," he said in a recap on the team's website.

ALLIE WILLIAMS

Allie Williams has the fifth-best average (175) on the Ottawa University women's bowling team in Ottawa, Kansas. Her top two scores came in the fall at the Jayhawk Collegiate Challenge (184) in Kansas and the Glenn Carlson Las Vegas Invitational (181) in December 2024.

FRESH WALTERS

Fresh Walters played a big role in his first season on the Iowa Western Community College football team, which compiled an 11-2 record.

Walters, a 5-foot-10, 180-pound redshirt freshman, was named National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) First Team All-America wide receiver after hauling in 75 catches for 870 yards and seven touchdowns.

He had six catches for 59 yards and two kick returns for 51 yards in the NJCAA Division I national championship game, a 28-23 loss to Hutchinson Community College on Dec. 18, 2024, in Texas.



Chanon Frye, left; Allie Williams, upper right; Fresh Walters, lower right.

Courtesy photos

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2025 Rez Rally Results

Jan. 4 at Immokalee Reservation
Most Participants Overall: Team Immokalee

Most Tribal Participation: Team Immokalee

Tribal Youth 6-11 Male

1. Ira Davis
2. Kaleb Osceola
3. James Billie

Tribal Youth 12-17 Male

1. Zaiden Frank
2. Dante Kippenberger
3. Carter Wilcox

Tribal Run 18-36 Male

1. Brandon Posada
2. Justin Motlow
3. Kory Sanders

Tribal Run 37-54 Male

1. Charley Cypress
2. Billie Garcia
3. Raul Escobar

Tribal Run 55-68 Male

1. Richard Keyser
2. Stanlo Jeff Johns
3. N/A

Tribal Run 69+

N/A

Tribal Walk 18-36 Male

1. Todd Johns
2. Bryan Arledge/Adrian Baker
3. Pete Osceola

Tribal Walk 55-68 Male

1. Sandy Billie
2. Joe Kippenberger
3. Charlie Tiger

Tribal Walk 69+

1. Tamecia Motlow
2. Ronnie Billie Sr.
3. N/A

Senior 1-Mile 60-74 Male

1. Amos Tiger
2. Jonah Cypress
3. David Cypress

Senior 1-Mile 75+ Male

1. Mitchell Cypress
2. Joe Osceola Jr.
3. Elbert Snow

Stroller Male

1. Tyrek Lasane
2. Lewis Gopher
3. Randy Osceola

General Youth 6-11 Male

1. Gage Escobar
2. Alexavier Yzaguirre
3. Arlo Jackson

General Youth 12-17 Male

1. Terrance Osceola
2. Ashton Garza
3. Ray Yzaguirre IV

General Run 18-54 Male

1. Giovanni Alvarez
2. Andrea Nocentini
3. Idael Perez

General Run 55+ Male

1. Thomas Foss
2. N/A
3. N/A

General Walk 18-54 Male

1. Alexander Vallejo
2. Pedro Martinez Sr.
3. Noel Posada

General Walk 55+ Male

1. Kenneth Doney
2. Jose Ramirez
3. Edward "Ted" Clewell

Wheelchair

- Betty Billie/Natalie
- Pete Aguilar/Michelle
- Carol Cypress/San Juanita
- Teresa Jumper/Winneh
- Lawanna Niles/Ceci
- Tammy Martinez/Eduardo

Tribal Youth 6-11 Female

1. Kahniyah Billie
2. Ella Snow
3. India Richardson

Tribal Youth 12-17 Female

1. Anna Tigertail
2. Rebekah Tigertail
3. Violet Osceola

Tribal Run 18-36 Female

1. Carlise Bermudez
2. Abby Tigertail
3. Jillian Rodriguez

Tribal Run 37-54 Female

1. Jo-Lin Osceola
2. Cathy Cypress
3. Desiree Smith

Tribal Run 55-68 Female

1. Mary Lou Alvarado
2. Bonnie Motlow
3. N/A

Tribal Run 69+ Female

1. Patty Waldron
2. Mary Tigertail
3. N/A

Tribal Walk 18-36 Female

1. Natasha Billie
2. Marissa Osceola
3. Kirsten Doney

Tribal Walk 55-68 Female

1. Cecilia Pequeno
2. Jessica Billie
3. Amy Yzaguirre

Tribal Walk 69+ Female

1. Helena Cypress
2. Almira Billie
3. Rhonda Nunez

Tribal Walk 69+ Female

1. Shirley Clay
2. Elizabeth Shore
3. N/A

Senior 1-Mile 60-74 Female

1. Connie Slavik
2. Maggie Porter
3. Diane Smith

Senior 1-Mile 75+ Female

1. Connie Whidden
2. Bobbie Billie
3. Louise Osceola

Stroller Female

1. Nina Frias
2. Stacy Smith
3. Ahnie Jumper

General Youth 6-11 Female

1. Gia Garcia
2. Arrow Johns
3. Katelyn Mariscal

General Youth 12-17 Female

1. Ava Leadingfox
2. Andria Sigurani
3. Aubee Rodriguez

General Run 18-54 Female

1. Spring Noganosh
2. Rose Acre
3. Dinorah Johns

General Run 55+ Female

1. Faye Frank
2. Martha Suta Ramirez
3. N/A

General Walk 18-54 Female

1. Nancy Jimmie
2. Samara Yzaguirre
3. Keyana Nelson

General Walk 55+ Female

1. Georgette Smith
2. Bettilee Johns
3. Maria Galeano

Hard Rock Bet teams up with Miami Heat

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Hard Rock Bet, a sports betting platform, announced Jan. 17 that it has become the official sportsbook of the Miami Heat.

Hard Rock Bet will have exclusive promotions and offers for Heat fans at the Heat's Kaseya Center and throughout Florida.

"Hard Rock Bet is the preeminent sportsbook on the market," Glen Oskin, Vice president of Corporate Partnerships for the Heat, said in a statement. "This is a perfect

union of two well established Florida brands coming together to deliver fans a new level of fun and excitement through some truly innovative experiences."

The partnership includes a variety of co-marketing elements with marquee signage, digital campaigns, in-game entertainment, and the launch of the Hard Rock Bet Heat Club – a free, opt-in club for fans to receive special promotions and engage with their favorite team. In addition, Hard Rock Bet players will enjoy 'money can't buy' experiences at Kaseya Center and exclusive VIP access to HEAT off-site events. Some of

the best seats in the house will also feature Hard Rock Bet branding with a soon to be installed courtside platform for Hard Rock Bet players and other VIPs to enjoy the game in style.

The partnership started with activations at the Heat's game against the Denver Nuggets on Jan. 17.

Operated by the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Hard Rock Bet is Florida's only legal sportsbook. For more information go to HardRock.bet.

RODEO

From page 1C

Jacoby and Boogie were the only Seminole winners. Some of the other top Seminole performances came from Betty Mae's great-granddaughter Ahnie Jumper (5th in breakaway); Shelby Dehass (4th), Ace Youngblood (5th) and Mackenzie Bowers (7th) turned in strong runs in barrel racing.

The Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo is the first in a trio of Seminole-hosted INFR Tour events. The Bill Osceola Memorial Rodeo will be held Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at the Hollywood arena. The action shifts north to the Brighton Reservation for the Brighton Field Days rodeo Feb. 9-10.

The Betty Mae and Bill Osceola rodeos also feature youth rodeos. Several kids spent the morning of Jan. 25 competing in mutton busting, barrel racing, breakaway, chute dogging, dummy roping and other events.



Moses Jumper Jr. congratulates 2024 EIRA youth rodeo champions Asaiah Flood, left, and Thomas Koens, right. Winners from the 2024 season received their prizes at the Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo.



Sue Osceola and her horse are careful to avoid the barrel in youth barrel racing.



Norman Osceola battles as he tries to stay on for eight seconds in bareback.



Justin Gopher (header) and Betty Mae Jumper's grandson Happy Jumper (heeler) team up in team roping at the Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo.



The Guitar Hotel serves as a colorful backdrop while Taylor Johns holds the U.S. flag during the national anthem at the Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo.



Rez Rally participants reach the finish line.

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