

# The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

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## PECS earns 'A' rating

STAFF REPORT

**BRIGHTON** — Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School has earned an "A" rating, the state's highest. The Florida Department of Education released the grades in December 2023 for the school year 2022-23. FDOE based the grades on achievement in English, math, science and social studies. They were calculated using performance standards for the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) English language arts and mathematics assessments.

"It is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and collaborative spirit of our entire community," principal Tracy Downing wrote in an email to the Tribune. "This accomplishment reflects the commitment of our students to excellence in their studies, the unwavering support of parents and families and the collaborative efforts of the Brighton community and Tribal Council. Together, we have created an environment that fosters learning, growth and success."

The school earned the highest ranking among all of the 42 schools in the Heartland Educational Consortium, which is comprised of K-12 public schools in DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee county school districts.

"This outstanding accomplishment reflects the exceptional commitment to education, collaboration and excellence that defines our school," Downing wrote. "We have not only met but exceeded expectations, showcasing the remarkable potential and success that can be achieved through unity and a shared commitment to academic excellence."



Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie rode on Visit Lauderdale's float Jan. 1 in the Rose Parade. At left, Billie stands in front of a replica of the Guitar Hotel, which was part of the float. At right, Billie participates in the parade next to singer-songwriter Alexander Star.

## Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie represents tribe, Fort Lauderdale in Rose Parade

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

2024 began on a high note for Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie as she rode on the Visit Lauderdale float in front of a national television audience at the 135th Rose Parade in Pasadena, California, on New Year's Day.

"I never saw the parade before, so I wasn't sure what to expect," Billie said. "It was a great experience and really fun."

In the parade, Billie wore a skirt made by Veronica (Buster) Langley, of the Big Cypress Otter camp, and a cape made by the late Iona Billie (Miccosukee).

The Visit Lauderdale float was 24 feet long, 18 feet wide and 55 feet high and

featured iconic Broward county landmarks, including a replica of the Guitar Hotel. Designers used about 45,000 flowers along with flax seeds, Brussels sprouts, sesame seeds, heliconia, cymbidium orchids and more to construct the fantastical vision of Fort Lauderdale. It was the first time Visit Lauderdale participated in the Rose Parade.

Only a few people — all with ties to

Broward County — were on the float with Billie. Songwriter Alexander Star sang his Visit Lauderdale anthem "Lady Dayo" as the float made its way on the parade route.

◆ See ROSE PARADE on page 6A

## Seminole boxer Aaron Cypress wins pro debut

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

Professional boxers tend to sport big, sometimes flamboyant personalities, often accompanied by jazzy nicknames like "Iron Mike," "Sugar Ray," "Smokin' Joe," "Marvelous," "Bonecrusher," and "The Greatest."

That's not anywhere near the low-key persona of the Seminole Tribe's Aaron Cypress, inside or outside the ring.

"I'm a laid-back, quiet person," Cypress, 32, said in a phone interview with the Tribune.

Cypress let his boxing speak for itself Dec. 5, 2023, in his debut as a pro boxer at the Troubadour in Nashville, Tennessee.

In a cruiserweight division bout scheduled for four rounds, Cypress defeated Shabious Lynch, 24, of North Carolina, by technical knockout in the second round.

The 5-foot-9 Cypress weighed in at 186 pounds for the fight. He said he arrived for the fight five hours early. He had to warm up and cool down three times as his scheduled fight time was pushed back by more than an hour. He said the delay threw him off a bit and that he wasn't as sharp in the first round as he would have liked.

After a flurry of punches by both fighters early in the second round, it became obvious that Lynch was in trouble. He looked tired as he struggled to defend and soon signaled to the referee to end the fight.

"I was hitting him repeatedly with body shots. Body shots linger; that got him tired,"

Cypress said.

Cypress also said he connected with a pivotal left hook to Lynch's shoulder.

"He couldn't lift his arm," Cypress said.

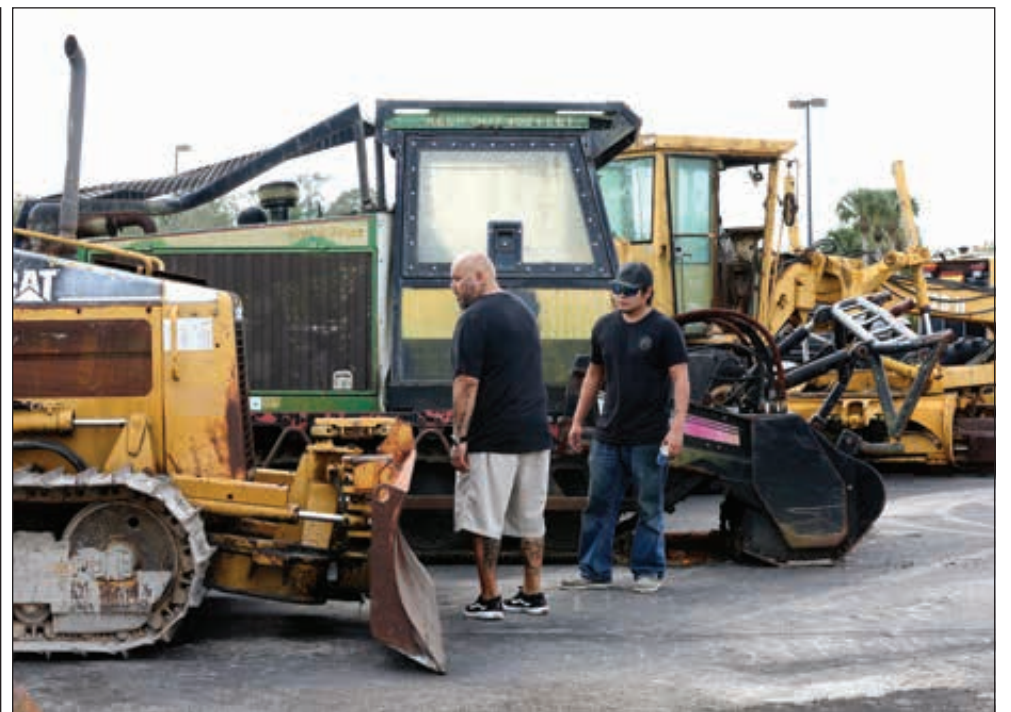
It was the right arm of Cypress that the referee lifted as the result was announced.

There was no showboating or big celebration from Cypress — that's not his style. In fact, he made sure he sought out his opponent.

"After the fight, I gave the guy a hug and said thanks for the opportunity," Cypress said.

Cypress said he was nervous before the fight, but once he stepped into the ring he settled down and focused on getting the victory.

◆ See BOXING on page 5A



Michael Onco, left, and Chaska Osceola examine heavy equipment at a tribal auction Jan. 25 in Big Cypress.

## Auction proves to be big hit with tribal members

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Tribal members came from every reservation to try their luck, not in a casino, but at an auction of everything from the kitchen sink to a hydraulic excavator.

More than 300 items were auctioned off in the parking lot of Billie Swamp Safari on Jan. 25 for tribal members and Jan. 26 for the general public. Everything was simultaneously available online so bidders faced in person and online competition for the items they wanted.

The auction was a one-time only event to dispose of excess equipment from Billie Swamp Safari and other departments.

"It started because tribal members wanted to buy some things from Billie Swamp Safari," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "I had to make it fair for everyone who wanted stuff. It's a good turnout and, for me, it's good entertainment. This is like a family reunion. We don't see each other that often during the year."

Royal Auction Group facilitated the

auction and spent three weeks staging, photographing, writing descriptions for every item and advertising it to the U.S. market. Everything for sale had a reserve price. If that wasn't met on the first day, the item was held for the second day when the general public was allowed to bid.

"All the items have exceeded their life cycles and have been replaced," said Fleet Services director Sandy Leonard. "It would have taken years to sell all this stuff. The auction brings some excitement, people are liking it."

During the auction, the auctioneer sat in a trailer with speakers outside. The trailer was pulled by a pickup truck and the crowd followed it down the aisles as each item was sold. Auction staff on the ground received people's bids and encouraged them to make more than one bid. One man's sole job was to stand with a large sign on a long pole which read "Selling this item" inside an arrow pointing down.

◆ See AUCTION on page 6C



A referee raises Aaron Cypress's arm after he won his debut as a professional boxer Dec. 5, 2023, in Nashville, Tennessee.

Country Box/Jimmy Adams Promotions

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Visit the Tribune's website ([seminoletribune.org](http://seminoletribune.org)) and Instagram (@seminoletribune) for news throughout the month



# Community



## Tibetan monks share culture with tribe during visit to Okalee

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Seminole Okalee Indian Village in Hollywood welcomed the Tibetan Sacred Arts 2024 tour Jan. 16. Monks from the Drepung Gomang Monastery, which was founded in the 1400s, shared their culture of Buddhist philosophy and traditions with the tribal community. The Tibetan monks are indigenous to the region of Tibet in East Asia.

“As we start off the new year, [this was] a great opportunity for our tribal community to meet the Tibet monks that share a similar story of loss of country, stripped of the freedom to practice their cultural practices and religion, and forced into assimilation. Like the Seminole, we share the same resilient spirit, and reverence to our land,” said Gordon Wareham, director of the tribe’s Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.

Part of the tour featured sacred sand mandala paintings, stone painting workshops, meditation teachings, Mala bracelet making, bring your pet for a blessing, and blessings for the sick and wellness.

The tour focuses on the contribution to world health and peace through Buddhist

teachings and traditions. The tour brings awareness to the public of tragedies from around the world and to extend compassion and prayer with all people to share a common goal. It also concentrates on raising support for the refugee monks community in South India, and for food, healthcare and education for monk students which in turn helps the preservation of Tibetan traditions and culture.

During the tour, the monks showed the audience at Okalee the art of sand mandala painting, which is a transient artform originally from India according to the monastery’s website. The sand mandala artform focuses on generating compassion, the simplicities of life and death, and a social/cosmic healing of the environment.

“Tibetan people and peoples indigenous to this land called the United States, share this history of loss and a remarkable history of resilience,” said Anne Walter, national coordinator for the tour. “People of the Seminole [Tribe] and people of Tibet can share solidarity in the struggle to maintain the wisdom, culture and practices that are unique to their peoples, including care for the Earth that is so essential today.”



Calvin Tiger

Tibetan monk Geshe Khenrab Choeden prays while Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum director Gordon Wareham plays his flute during the opening ceremony of the monks’ visit at Seminole Okalee Indian Village in Hollywood on Jan. 16.



Calvin Tiger

Tibetan monks prep for a sand madala painting.



Calvin Tiger

Members of the tribal community take part in the opening ceremony and watch the Tibetan monks hum a chant.

## Tribal Fair & Pow Wow runs Feb. 9-11 in Hollywood

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Seminole Tribal Fair and Pow Wow will be held Feb. 9-11 at the Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood.

The highly anticipated event draws hundreds of dancers and drummers every year, who compete for prize money in a variety of categories.

Competitive dance competitions will feature men’s straight, fancy and grass; women’s cloth, fancy shawl, buckskin and jingle; and men’s and women’s northern traditional. The drum competition will include northern and southern categories.

The “Battle of the Guards,” a competition featuring Native American color guards, is scheduled to be held Feb. 9 and Feb. 10. The event is in honor of the late Stephen Bowers, who was a Vietnam War

veteran (U.S. Army 173rd Airborne Brigade) and a longtime veterans’ leader in the tribe, Broward County and Indian Country. He led the tribe’s color guard for many years.

The Seminole Tribe’s own The Osceola Brothers band will open a free concert featuring country music artist Aaron Lewis on Feb. 11 at 3 p.m.

Fine arts, arts and crafts, and clothing contests will also be featured. Female arts and crafts categories include Seminole doll, basketry; a male-only category is woodcarving. Other categories are Seminole patchwork design, beadwork and Seminole clothing with patchwork.

Clothing contests will be held for adults and youth. Categories include old style, modern, traditional, contemporary, jackets (men only) and skirts (women only). Wildlife shows will also be part



Aaron Lewis/Facebook

Aaron Lewis

of the fair. For more information visit [sentrifair.com](http://sentrifair.com).

# SEMINOLE

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# New chickee blessed at historic McSwain House

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BONITA SPRINGS** — The Seminole Tribe's Jimmy Wayne Holdiness spent about two and a half days building a 40-foot by 20-foot chickee behind the historic McSwain House in Bonita Springs at the end of 2023. On Jan. 12, the chickee was dedicated in the most traditional Seminole way, with a blessing by medicine man Herbert Jim.

Located between Naples and Fort Myers, the McSwain House is part of the Bonita Springs Historical Society. It was built in 1915 by a pioneer family from Mississippi. The chickee project marked the first time the organization and the tribe have collaborated. It was funded by a member of the historical society.

"It's important to honor the Seminole culture," said Maikol Henriquez, the historical society's executive director. "The chickee creates an intimate setting for speakers and events. It's more fitting than a regular building; it pays homage to Seminole history in the area."

Chickee dedications are not unusual, but blessing one in front of an audience of about 60 mostly non-tribal people was anything but ordinary. Many of those in attendance are members of the historical society who were eager to learn about the tribe and its culture.

"This is one of the nicest floors I've seen in a chickee," Holdiness told the crowd. "I grew up in a chickee like this with a dirt floor, but my grandmother swept it every day. We knew she would get angry if we made a mess."

Holdiness, who learned to build chickees as a child, used to work in the tribe's casinos and build chickees on the side; he said building chickees was more fulfilling to him. He has been working with the same crew for 22 years.

After Jim blessed the chickee in Elaponce, he explained that during his ancestors' time when visitors arrived to see the Elders, they were welcomed into a chickee and taken care of with food and rest. The blessing in Bonita Springs reflected that tradition.

"I went to public and private schools, and they all think Native Americans are dead



The chickee behind the McSwain House in Bonita Springs.

Beverly Bidney



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Herbert Jim, Brian Zepeda and Jimmy Wayne Holdiness speak to the audience.

and are only found in history books," Jim said. "We can educate you about our society today."

"The Seminoles are all over Florida now," added Brian Zepeda, Naples council liaison. "When people think of Seminoles they think of casinos or Florida State University; we are much more than that. We still practice our rich culture and try to pass it on, not only to people in our tribe, but we try to share some of it with people like you here today."

Tribal members Lorraine Posada and her daughter, Lauren Posada, had a table under the chickee where they sold beadwork as Lorraine worked on a sweetgrass basket. Curious attendees asked about how the basket is made and some purchased necklaces and bracelets. Moleana Hall made fry bread and Indian burgers.

During a question and answer period

after the presentation, a person in the audience asked if the Calusa and the Seminoles were related.

"We intermarried with them and shared our culture," Zepeda said. "You can tell the families who did, they are all physically big. At ceremonies we do some dances that are theirs and sing some songs in their language. Some of the Calusa survive through us."

"My great-great-grandfather Concho Billie was 6-foot, 9-inches tall," Jim said. "His son was 7-foot, 1-inch. They say the Calusa were very tall. The bloodline is still in our family lines. Our tribe existed here before the Europeans came."

Jim explained how scores of Native Americans, including those in Florida, died from disease spread by the Europeans, often smallpox. On the east coast of Florida, they came ashore and spread the disease quickly. On the Gulf coast, the Calusa fought off

the invaders to keep them from landing their boats on shore. Fewer of the Calusa died from smallpox.

"That's why we usually don't shake hands or use eye-to-eye contact," Jim said. "It protected us from exposure to smallpox. It helped us survive. Covid is the modern version of a foreign invader."

An attendee asked if chickees are safe and how long they last. The chickees at restaurants in and around Bonita Springs survived the 2022 Hurricane Ian, Holdiness said.

"I built a chickee in Coconut Grove in Miami," Zepeda said. "Two days later Hurricane Andrew came, and it survived intact. In 1928, a hurricane hit Lake Okeechobee and many houses were destroyed, but the chickees remained intact."

Another audience member wanted to know if the Seminoles are truly unconquered and never signed a peace treaty with the U.S.

"Some people who weren't authorized may have signed something they couldn't read or understand, but we are still here," Zepeda said. "We never left."

Jim talked about the meanings of patchwork by using Lorraine Posada's skirt as an example. He pointed out patchwork that represented alligator heads, telephone poles and snakes. He also explained that beads used to represent wealth and were used for trading.

"This is so interesting. I've never met any Seminoles before," said Ruth Condit, a historical society board member. "The chickee references their historical roots in the area and is appropriate for outdoor events. It's perfect and belongs here."

"It's exciting to learn about Native Americans and their way of life," said Bonita



Beverly Bidney

Herbert Jim tells the audience about the Seminole clothing worn by Lorraine Posada.

Springs resident Jerry Carlin. "We are interested in the history and culture of the people here," said John Dzedzic, from Rhode Island. "There is so much richness; it's exciting to see and hear about it."

The chickee is the beginning of a partnership both parties expect to thrive. Derrick Botana, president of the historical society, plans to organize a trip to the tribe's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on the Big Cypress Reservation.



The blessing ceremony drew dozens of people.

Beverly Bidney

## Indian Country economic conference to be held at Hard Rock

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — NAFOA's 42nd annual conference will be held April 29-30 at the Seminole Hard Rock Casino Hotel in Hollywood.

The conference brings together tribal, state, federal, and industry partners to address important economic issues in Indian Country.

Prior to the start of the two-day conference, a member tribe meeting and reception will be held April 28 at 5 p.m.

The conference is scheduled to include general sessions, breakout sessions and a president's reception. A leadership awards lunch is scheduled to be held April 30 at 12:30 p.m. The lunch will honor tribal leaders and finance professionals for outstanding contributions to improving economic conditions in Indian Country.

NAFOA was founded more than 40 years ago as the Native American Finance Officers Association. Economic and fiscal issues pertaining to Indian Country are among areas it addresses.

To register and for more information visit [nafoa.org](http://nafoa.org).

## Brighton Field Day Festival takes place Feb. 16-18

STAFF REPORT

**BRIGHTON** — The 85th annual Brighton Field Day Festival — a celebration of Seminole culture and traditions — will be held at the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena on the Brighton Reservation Feb. 16, 17 and 18. The event will feature a concert by country music artist Dustin Lynch.

Visitors can see several shows, including a snake show, Native dancers and alligator wrestling as well as arts and crafts and authentic Native American food.

Admission for Feb. 16 is \$30 (seniors \$25 with ID), Feb. 17 is \$50 (event ticket includes the concert) and Feb. 18 is \$30 (veterans \$20 with ID). Admission is free

for children age five and under.

Lynch, from Tennessee, has released numerous albums, including 17 singles, eight of which reached number one on Country Airplay.

The festival will also include a Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo, which is scheduled to be held Feb. 16 at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m., and Feb. 17 at 3 p.m. The rodeo is expected to include bareback riding, bull riding, barrel racing, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, tie-down roping and team roping.

The Field Day started in 1938 and is one of the oldest Native festivals in the U.S.

For more information, visit [brightonfieldday.com](http://brightonfieldday.com).



Spectators watch a Seminole clothing contest at the Brighton Field Day Festival in 2023.

Beverly Bidney

## Immokalee casino to host free tribute concert

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**IMMOKALEE** — Fakefest, an outdoor tribute concert event featuring some of the best tribute bands in the nation, will be held April 20 from 2 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee.

Fakefest also will feature food trucks and craft vendors. Admission and parking are free.

The lineup of tribute bands includes:

- Kid Kentucky and the American

Badass Band (Kid Rock tribute)

- Hardwired (Metallica tribute to Metallica)
- Lovesong (The Cure tribute)
- Razors Edge (AC/DC tribute)
- The Linkin Park Tribute (Linkin Park tribute):
- Still Alive (Pearl Jam Tribute)

For more information, call (800) 218-0007 or visit [moreinparadise.com](http://moreinparadise.com) or [facebook.com/SeminoleCasinoHotel/](https://facebook.com/SeminoleCasinoHotel/).

## NARF launches Native voting information series

FROM PRESS RELEASE

During 2024, as part of a "Democracy is Native" campaign, the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) will be releasing a series of videos explaining the fight to protect Native Americans' right to vote. The campaign's goal is to support and highlight Native voters and raise awareness about the obstacles that they face. The videos will

feature stories from across Indian Country, speaking with Native voters and tribal leaders affected by discriminatory laws and policies.

The campaign's kick-off video was released Jan. 18 across NARF channels.

For more information visit [vote.narf.org](http://vote.narf.org).

# Makeup artist Petra Battiest making name for herself in LA film, TV industry

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Since moving to Los Angeles in April 2024, Petra Battiest has seen her career as a professional makeup artist blossom in the film and TV industry.

Battiest has been busy as she establishes her name in the industry. Among the projects she has applied her makeup talents to include a new film starring Native American actors Tantoo Cardinal and Gary Farmer, a national commercial for Toyota and a music video for Grammy nominated band "Spiritbox." Recently, she worked on major red carpet appearances – the Golden Globes and the Critics Choice Awards – for actress JaNae Collins ("Killers of the Flower Moon"), writer/director Tazbah Chavez ("Reservation Dogs" and "Rutherford Falls") and actress Simone Joy Jones (Peacock's "Bel Air"). She also did the makeup for designer Oscar de la Renta's fall 2024 bridal show and for Lauren Good Day's fashion show at the Santa Fe Indian Market.

"Now we are in the thick of awards season," said Battiest, who grew up on the Hollywood Reservation. "I have a whole routine and schedule with JaNae Collins. She wanted to make sure that her whole team were Indigenous People."

Battiest made the move to Los Angeles



Courtesy photo  
Petra Battiest wears a beaded necklace displaying her brand, Painted By Petra.

after she visited the city in March to do makeup for the GLADD awards. She immediately enrolled in a production makeup school to pursue higher education in film and TV makeup.

"I knew I wanted to further my career as a professional makeup artist," said Battiest, 19. "After graduating high school at 16, my brother, Spencer, encouraged me to enroll in a local beauty school in Florida. That really brought me out of my shell and helped me realize this is what I want to do forever."

Battiest's passion for makeup began at age 8 when she watched her mother's friend, a makeup artist, apply makeup. She saved Halloween makeup and created fake broken bones, turned herself into an old lady, a zombie and even Bruno Mars to the delight of her mother. When she was 13, her older sister, Coral Battiest, a makeup artist herself, noticed her interest and made her an assistant.

"She showed me what it means to be an artist and the importance of honing your craft," Battiest said. "She gave me advice and encouraged me to practice more."

Coral, 26, assisted Petra on her red carpet jobs for the Golden Globes and the Critics Choice awards, since Petra was too busy to take time off.

Applying makeup for a big event is more than just opening up a makeup case

and putting it on a client. The specific looks are created well before the event. For example, when creating makeup looks for Collins during awards season, Battiest collaborated with the stylist and attended some fittings. From the shape and color of the outfits, Battiest preplanned the looks and mapped them out on paper. Sometimes she also styles the hair to complete the look.

For Tazbah Chavez's look on the Critics Choice red carpet, Battiest had seen the striking green sequined gown she would wear. To accentuate it, she purchased numerous makeup products in various colors so she would be prepared for the day.

The film industry in Los Angeles has an active Indigenous community. The faces of their success can be seen on giant billboards throughout the city touting film and TV projects, as well as advertising campaigns featuring Native actors.

"Luckily, from the very beginning Natives here have supported and encouraged me," Battiest said. "I've met many Natives who are out here pursuing their dreams in the industry as well."

She works to keep her creativity alive by trying various looks and striving to avoid repetitiveness.

"The best thing is getting to do what I love and what I came here to do," she said. "I didn't get here to just wait for something."



Courtesy photo  
Writer/director Tazbah Chavez, wearing makeup done by Petra Battiest, attends the Critics Choice Awards in Los Angeles.



Courtesy photo  
Petra Battiest, right, applies makeup to actress JaNae Collins at an Apple Plus/Screen Actors Guild event in Los Angeles. Collins's acting credits include "Killers of the Flower Moon" and "Reservation Dogs."

I jumped right in and haven't stopped. Since I'm doing what I love, it doesn't seem like a job to me. It's been very fun."

Battiest's sister Turquoise Battiest, 27, moved to Los Angeles to attend culinary school and now they are roommates. Her presence has helped with Petra's transition from the reservation to the city. Petra is the youngest of seven siblings.

"My main concern was leaving my family," Battiest said. "I had a fear of the environment I'd be stepping into. Turquoise being here has helped me keep that family close by. My family never fails to remind me that my home will always be there if I need it. Many of my family members have come

and visited, so I don't feel as far from home when they are around."

Battiest said she is happy pursuing her dream in California's Hollywood and believes the timing is right.

"It's like every turn, every store, every stop is a sign of encouragement," she said. "It feels as if I couldn't have begun my journey in LA at a better time. Representation for us in Hollywood hasn't always been this way. I see a shift towards a more inclusive future in this industry that I am glad I'll get to be a part of."

Battiest's work can be seen on Instagram. Her handle is @PaintedbyPetra.

## BC to host Indigenous festival

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**BIG CYPRESS** — The second annual Indigenous Arts and Music Festival will be held Feb. 2 and Feb. 3 on the Big Cypress Reservation. The festival is scheduled to run from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Junior Cypress Entertainment Complex. Admission is free.

The music lineup includes One Way Sky (Gila River Indian Community and the Tohono O'odham Nation), Testify (Navajo), Chebon Tiger, Under Exile (Shiprock, New

Mexico), Supaman (Apsálooke Nation), the Capybaras, Sage Cornelius and others.

Native song and dance performances will be by Ashaa Takook bird song and dance group, youth Apache crown dancers and the Power of Dance. Choke Cherry Creek will host a fashion show Feb. 3.

A panel discussion Feb. 2 will feature Sterlin Harjo (Seminole Nation/Muscogee), co-creator, executive producer, writer and director of the hit show "Reservation Dogs."

For more information visit [indigenouamf.com/](http://indigenouamf.com/).

## ◆ CYPRESS From page 1A

"When I get in the ring, I get tunnel vision," he said.

A rigorous training regimen leading up to the fight played a key part in the win. Cypress likes to adhere to advice from his coach, Benny Collins, to "never say you can't do it."

In addition to the usual aspects of gym training for boxers – rope jumping, shadow boxing, sparring – Cypress said the cardio portion has played a critical role. He runs on roads a lot, including three miles at a faster pace on weekdays and five to eight miles on weekends. He does 50-yard sprints 10 times and drills in a pool for more than hour.

He often trains in his garage at his home in Florida or at boxing gyms wherever he goes. His goal as a pro is to "grab a belt." He said he would like to fight in the super middleweight division – two weight classes below cruiserweight – which would require shedding close to 20 pounds.

His youngest fan is his and his wife Joelli's 17-month-old boy.

"He watches me train. He points at the [punching] bag and smacks it," Cypress said.

Cypress said he wished there was more interest in boxing in the tribe.

"We have our slogan 'unconquered.' I would love to see more fighters in the tribe," he said.

Cypress, the son of Shane Cypress and

professional last year. Big Cypress Recreation site manager Cathy Cypress, said he was always active growing up in BC. He graduated from American Heritage School in Plantation, where he wrestled for one year.

Always a fan of combat sports, such as boxing, kick boxing and MMA, Cypress started boxing at age 15 and became serious about it at age 24. He honed his skills through amateur bouts leading up to turning

professional last year.

He doesn't need fancy nicknames – like some other boxers – but he does want people to know where he comes from.

"I want to be known [as being] from the Seminole Tribe of Florida," he said.

Cypress' next scheduled fight is Feb. 16 at the John Rhodes Sports Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.



Country Box/Jimmy Adams Promotions  
Aaron Cypress, right, connects with a right-hand punch in a fight against Shabious Lynch on Dec. 5, 2023.



Country Box/Jimmy Adams Promotions  
Aaron Cypress, right, and Shabious Lynch trade punches in a cruiserweight fight.



# 2024

SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA, INC.

## ANNUAL SHAREHOLDERS MEETING

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SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2024

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**ROSE PARADE**  
From page 1A

Others on the float included former Florida Panthers hockey player Bill Lindsay and the team's mascot "Stanley Panther," Stuart Milk, LGBTQ activist and nephew of the late Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to be elected in California; and Marie Hautigan, Broward County's principal of the year from Piper High School.

The five-and-a-half mile, two-hour long parade down Colorado Boulevard attracted more than half a million spectators, according to organizers at Pasadena Tournament of Roses.

"I knew it was a big deal, but I was in shock at how many people were on the side of the road," Billie said. "I was honored to

represent the Seminole Tribe as well as Fort Lauderdale."

Before the parade began, Billie and her mother Jane Billie met some of the volunteers that put the floats together. The volunteers were all ages, from college age to seniors. Some have been doing it for 50 years and some come from out of state.

The Visit Lauderdale float won the Past President award for the most outstanding innovation in the use of floral and non-floral materials. Billie believes the alligator made from Brussels sprouts might have had something to do with it.

The parade was broadcast live on ABC, NBC, Univision, and KTLA5.

Billie and her mom stayed in Los Angeles for a few days and attended the Los Angeles Lakers basketball game against the Miami Heat.



Courtesy photo

Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie visits a display case honoring past Rose Queens during a tour of the Tournament of Roses' Wrigley House.



Courtesy photo

Thomlynn Billie poses on the float with an alligator made of Brussel sprouts.



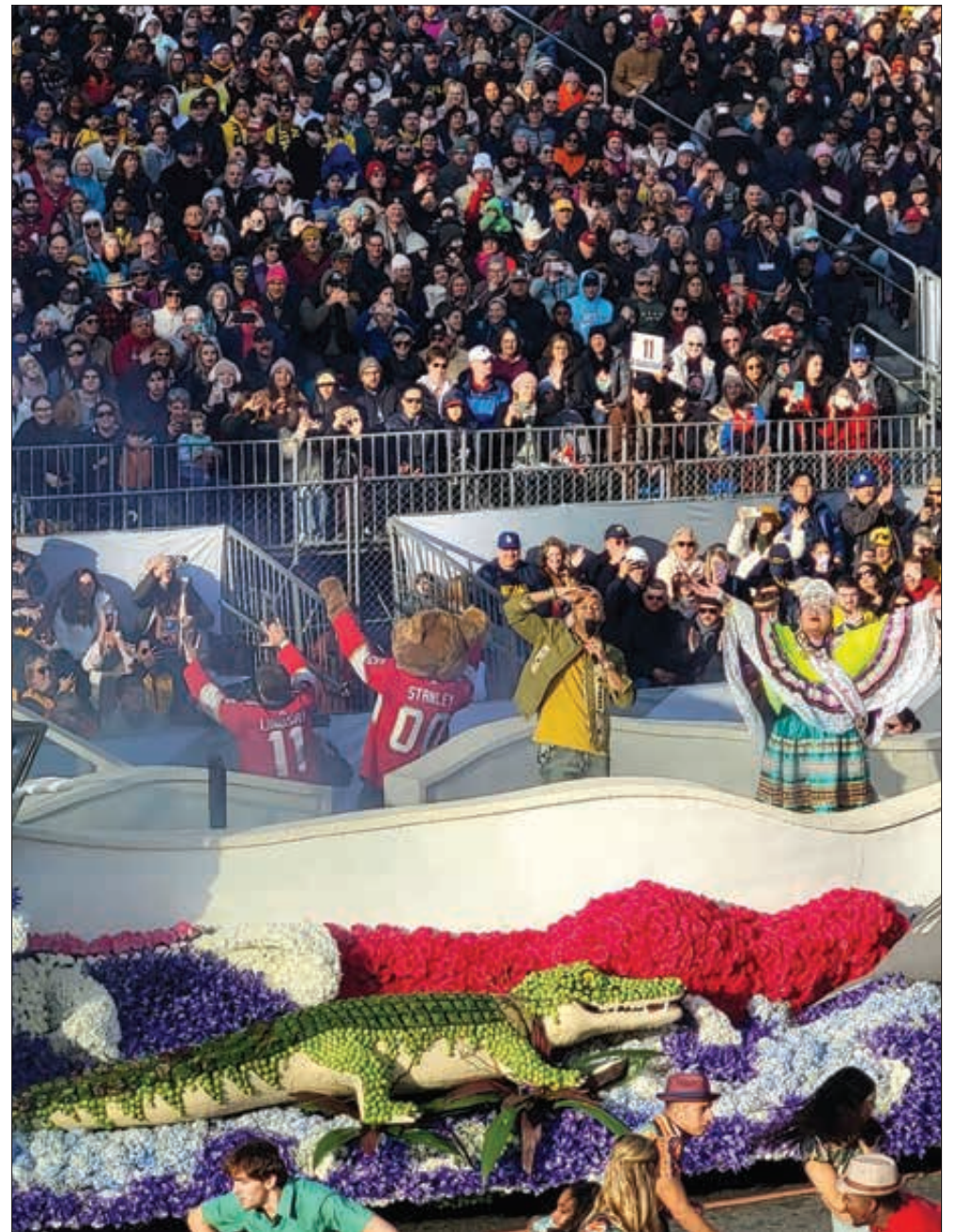
Visit Lauderdale

Visit Lauderdale's float included, from left to right, Alexander Star, Marie Hautigan, Bill Lindsay, Thomlynn Billie and Stuart Milk, along with the Florida Panthers mascot.



Visit Lauderdale

Thomlynn Billie is interviewed behind the scenes.



Visit Lauderdale

Singer-songwriter Alexander Star and Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie are the center of attention in a grandstand area.



Rose Parade

Singing, dancing and special effects were part of Visit Lauderdale's presentation in the mid-parade performance.

# Indigenous-led prayer walkers seek more participants

BY KELLY FARRELL  
Special to the Tribune

**OCHOPEE** — Whether through summer’s sweltering 100-degree heat or winter’s relative chill, Walk for the Homies prayer walks led by Garrett Stuart with guidance from Betty Osceola continue the second Saturday of each month. The first walk was organized by Stuart, of Lakota relations, with guidance from Osceola, of the Panther Clan of Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, whose family has long led similar walks.

The walks began after the signing of HB 1191 in June 2023 calling for the study of using an overly-abundant radioactive byproduct of fertilizer production, phosphogypsum (PG), in Florida roads. However, the purpose of the walks is much broader, as a way for humans to pray together for the healing of the earth and connection to the earth, Stuart said.

“I’d love if more tribal members came,” he said. “Everybody’s welcome to come and I’d appreciate more tribal support.”

The prayer walks are one of the few Indigenous-led ceremonies that are open to the public to participate, said Osceola, owner of Buffalo Tiger Airboat Tours in Ochopee.

Stuart and Osceola have each been leaders of Florida environmental causes. Stuart was concerned of the longterm effects of HB 1191 laying the groundwork for a toxic, cancer-causing material that makes up billions of tons of stacks of PG in Florida, as well as North Carolina and other states and countries. Florida-based fertilizer giant Mosaic is backing the use of PG in roadways to help find a use for the billion tons of the material kept in stacks on company’s private properties throughout Florida, according to Mosaic spokeswoman Jackie Barron. DOT officials are also supportive of the use of PG as traditional road aggregate prices increase, according to 2023 DOT budget statements.

Stuart, a biologist and owner of the educational Eco Preservation Project, is concerned about the effects PG would have on the ‘homies’ or nature relatives, including animals and plants if exposed to the radon and heavy metals in PG, he said.

“Imagine if the phosphogypsum was in the roads already,” said Osceola on a rainy day in October. “The toxic radioactive waste would be running right off into the water,” she said, as prayer walkers took a break along U.S. 41.

Ultimately, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will need to approve or deny each use of phosphogypsum in roads, including any use by Mosaic and Florida Department of Transportation. Mosaic’s requests continue to be reviewed by EPA, said Jeff Landis, of EPA’s media relations. DOT has not applied for their own study or use, EPA officials said. Instead, DOT officials have said they will review other studies, including those paid for by the Fertilizer Institute, according to Michael Williams,



Kelly Farrell  
**Betty Osceola, left, and Ida Osceola stop for a break from the Walk for the Homies prayer walk along U.S. 41 in Ochopee on Nov. 11, 2023. The walks continue the second Saturday of each month beginning 8 a.m. at the end point of the previous walk, through April 2024.**



Kelly Farrell  
**Jemma Namath, of Jupiter, and Garrett Stuart, of Ochopee, on Nov. 11, 2023, outside Clyde Butcher Big Cypress Gallery along U.S. 41 in Ochopee during a break from a prayer walk led by Stuart.**

to a close, commitment and promises were among the lessons coming up among the group, noted Stuart and Osceola.

Too often, people say they will do something and then we let them change their minds at the last minute, said Stuart.

Osceola urged people to keep their commitments.

The walks are in-part a continuation of her family’s tradition. She considers Stuart to be a nephew, she said.

Stuart refers to Osceola as “Auntie,” which has caught on among many of the frequent walkers. A sense of community has arisen through the walks.

Osceola is guiding Stuart through his first series of prayer walks. Osceola has long led similar prayer walks following in the footsteps of her late Uncle Bobby C. Billie.

“When I first started doing the walks with my late uncle, he [Billie] didn’t have anyone to turn to,” Osceola said. “I had to earn to walk the path that I walk now,” added Osceola, who has led prayer walks more than 80 and 100 miles long, including around Lake Okechobee.

“It’s time for [Garrett] to get his feet wet, so to speak,” said Osceola prior to the first walk in August.

Many walkers return each month and others may attend just one. The effects of the walks have been experienced by the walkers and in the environment throughout the area where walks are held, participants and leaders said.

“We are praying to heal our Mother and to help the homies,” said Stuart. “You should see where we did our last prayer walk. I couldn’t believe my eyes, all the homies have returned,” said Stuart.

Birds, land, water and plants are returning with greater health following the prayer walks in the area, he added.

“It felt better after we shared our breath with her,” said Stuart of “Big Mama” as he refers to Mother Earth.

### Invitation to join the prayer walks

Walk for the Homies (Part 7) continues 8 a.m. Sat. Feb. 10 at the Collier-Miami Dade county line along U.S. 41 and ending about 5 miles later.

The walks are the second Saturday of each month along U.S. 41 picking up where the last one left off. The walks are each approximately 5 miles long.

Other ways to participate include praying from a distance; meeting at the beginning or end; providing a support vehicle; bringing water, snacks, food or other provisions to support walkers.

Visit or follow the event page [FB.com/ecopreservationproject](https://www.facebook.com/ecopreservationproject) for details and updates on the “Walk for the Homies” prayer walks.

# Hard Rock Hotel, residences planned for resort community on Oklahoma-Texas border

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

Development plans were announced Jan. 16 for a Hard Rock Hotel and residences component to be built in a 2,700-acre master-planned resort community along the shores of Lake Texoma on the Oklahoma-Texas border.

According to a news release, construction of the Hard Rock Hotel at Lake Texoma and a residence component named The Residences at the Hard Rock Hotel Lake Texoma within the Pointe Vista master-planned community will begin in March with a planned opening in 2026. The hotel is scheduled to have 189 rooms with 25 suites, and 168 residence rentals. The project is expected to create more than 9,000 jobs.

The project received praise from Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (Cherokee Nation).

“It’s my pleasure to welcome the development of the Hard Rock Hotel and Residences at Lake Texoma. This will provide even more opportunity for guests to visit this beautiful area and create huge economic opportunity for this community,” Stitt said in the news release.

Lake Texoma is about 90 miles north of Dallas and about 180 miles south of Oklahoma City.

“We’re excited to expand our award-

winning hotel portfolio and bring our unique brand of hospitality and entertainment to Lake Texoma and the Pointe Vista development,” Todd Hricko, senior vice president and head of Global Hotel Development for Hard Rock International, said in the news release. “We’re especially thankful to Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt for his support of our new Hard Rock development in Pointe Vista.”

Other features of the hotel include a signature Hard Rock guitar at the entrance, 18,000 square-foot conference center, lawn event area, an 11-acre Caribbean Bay water area with beaches featuring islands and cabanas, Rock Spa, Body Rock Fitness, Hard Rock Roxity Kids Club, rooftop bar, fine dining and all-day dining, and Rock Shop.

Pointe Vista, owned by Pointe Vista Holding, is located along 19 miles of shoreline on Lake Texoma, which is the 12th largest man-made lake in the country, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Golf and fishing are two big draws to the community, which includes the Chickasaw Point Golf Course and the 320-slip Catfish Bay Marina.

According to Pointe Vista’s website, the master plan concept for the community is to be completed in 11 phases and will include 2,100 homes at completion. Currently, according to the website, the project is in phase 2.

# Seminole Hard Rock promotes Keith Sheldon to president of Entertainment and Brand Management

### STAFF REPORT

Keith Sheldon has been promoted to president of Entertainment and Brand Management for Seminole Gaming and Hard Rock International.

Sheldon, in a new and expanded role, will be responsible for oversight of brand management, consumer marketing, brand partnerships, and sponsorship revenue generation, according to a Jan. 22 news release.

Sheldon has served as president of Entertainment at Seminole Hard Rock for the past four years. He will continue to oversee all facets of entertainment including programming, talent buying, nightlife, and industry relations.

Sheldon has booked several big names and events for Hard Rock, including performances by the Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen and Elton John, as well as leading partnerships with Formula 1 Grand Prix events in Miami and Las Vegas, Oracle Red Bull Racing and Sports Illustrated Swimsuit.

“Since Keith joined our team in

2020 to lead our entertainment efforts, he has played an integral role in elevating Hard Rock and Seminole Hard Rock brands through strategic partnerships and once-in-a-lifetime events for our guests,” Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, said in the news release. “We’re excited for Keith to continually build upon those incredible entertainment experiences with new partners and bolster our brands in new and exciting ways in his expanded role.”

Prior to joining Hard Rock, Sheldon was executive vice president of Programming and Development at BSE Global, where he led the development of special events at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y.

In 2016, he was named to Billboard Magazine’s 40 Under 40.



Hard Rock  
Keith Sheldon



Kelly Farrell

**Prayer walkers follow behind Garrett Stuart, leading Walk for the Homies, on Oct. 14, 2023, in Ochopee, Florida to pray for the healing of Mother Earth and raise awareness of HB 1191, a Florida bill signed in June 2023 that requires studying the use of a radioactive fertilizer byproduct, phosphogypsum, in Florida roads through April 2024.**



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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.

# Reimagining the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

**BY TARA BACKHOUSE**  
Curator

**BIG CYPRESS** — If you've been to the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum over the past 25 years, you've seen a wonderful museum that tells several stories of Seminole culture and history, from the 19th century to today. So you may be wondering, why are we talking about a re-imagining? A redesign and replacement of all the exhibits in the galleries? Knocking down walls, changing floors and ceilings and making sure that visitors have a totally different experience when they visit? There is one overall answer: This is a Seminole museum. It needs to share what the Seminole community wants to see, and also what it wants to share with the world.

Since its beginning, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum has shared Seminole culture and history with the tribal community and audiences from around the world. Thanks to the strong foundation laid by Billy L. Cypress and other key founders of the museum, along with the strength of the tribal community, the museum was firmly rooted within the Seminole community when it opened in 1997.

Nonetheless, the original design of the galleries limited the range of stories that could be shared. While our contemporary

galleries highlight current events and specific topics, the permanent galleries focus on Seminole life from the 1890s to the 1910s.

Over six years ago, the museum started down a path of research and collaboration in order to create exhibits that could reach back thousands of years to tell the Indigenous history of Florida. The ancestors were here before the invasion of colonial powers. The first people of Florida thrived on the land and sea. Their descendants continued these traditions until war and environmental changes led to forced removal and changing lifeways.

Then in the 20th century the Seminole people found opportunity in the developing world around them. Becoming business owners and artisans they produce beautiful patchwork, dolls and baskets. They became leaders in tourism, cattle and other businesses. The Seminole Tribe of Florida formed and the government started to provide for its people. Today the tribe finds success in the modern world while its traditions are firmly rooted in the past.

This project will revitalize approximately 6,500 square feet of space in the current museum building. The redesign will showcase the longstanding history and vibrant contemporary culture of the Seminole people.

During the next year there will be big changes. Now is the time to share your

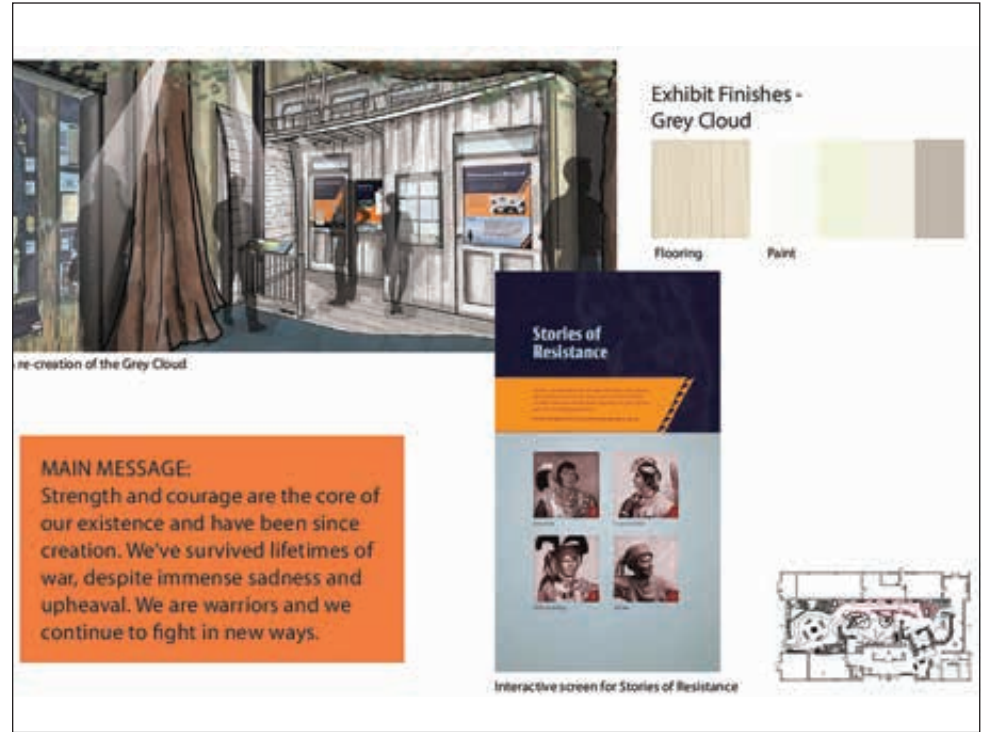
thoughts. Let's make sure the new exhibits are as rooted in the Seminole community as the original exhibits are. Call or email the museum if you have comments (863-902-1113 or museum@semtribe.com). No need to make an appointment. Just stop by the front desk anytime and tell them you want to talk to someone about the redesign.

### Acknowledgments

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum wants to thank community members and leadership who have shared and continue to share their time and knowledge during this project. We pledge to continue listening to community knowledge and wisdom.

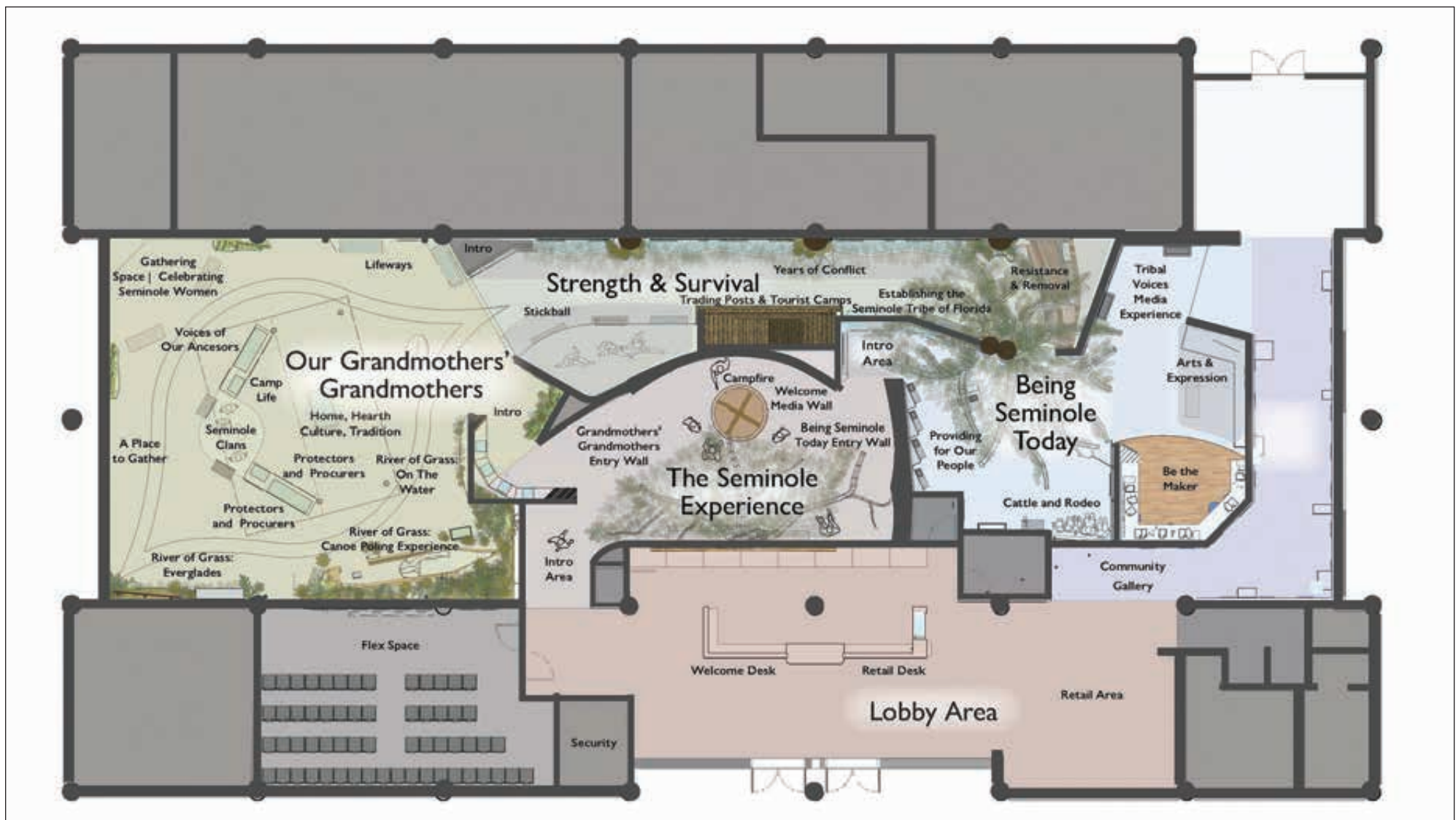
Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

**One story we plan on telling in the newly designed galleries is the Seminole War. This image shows some of the concepts so far: the main message, some of the colors and finishes that might be included, and what the exhibit might look like.**



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

A close-up of the "In the Camp" exhibit in the current ATTK Museum galleries. These two visitors to the camp are sharing a meal near the cooking fire.



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

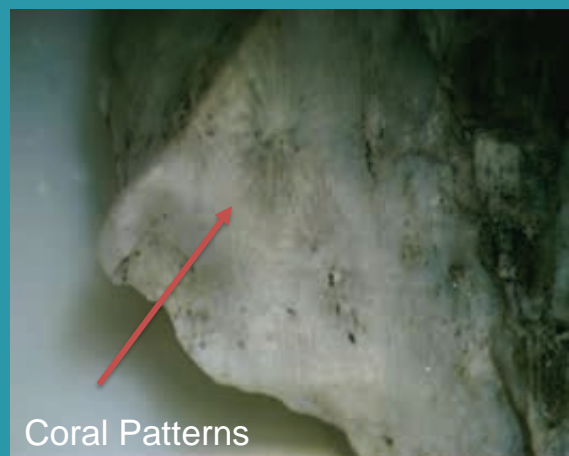
A proposed floor plan for the redesigned museum. A wide range of topics can be covered in this design.

## ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

February 2024

Sometimes things are not what they seem. There have been many artifacts found by the THPO's Tribal Archeology Section (TAS) that may look like nothing at first glance. This month, the THPO's Collections department is choosing to highlight one such example with this piece of lithic shatter.

First, let's break down the name of the artifact. Lithic means "relating to or made of stone" ([dictionary.cambridge.org](https://dictionary.cambridge.org)). The definition of shatter is "to (cause something to) break suddenly into very small pieces" ([dictionary.cambridge.org](https://dictionary.cambridge.org)). When we put those two together, we essentially get a broken piece of rock. What makes this an artifact? This piece of stone was possibly the byproduct of stone tool production, also called flintknapping. It could then mean that this stone was altered by humans.



Lithic shatter like this is not uncommon in many parts of Florida. However, it becomes less frequent the further south in the state you go. This lithic shatter was found in Lakeland Florida and is actually a piece of fossilized coral. It makes sense because Lakeland is relatively close to Tampa, where fossilized coral is known to have been a possible resource for past populations (Goodyear et al., 1983). If you look closely at the picture to the left, you can see some of the coral-like patterns on the surface. In the lab, sometimes we call it silicified coral. When we do this, we are simply specifying what kind of fossilization took place.

Goodyear, A. C., Upchurch, S. B., Book, M.J., & Goodyear, N. N. (1983). Paleo-Indian Manifestations In The Tampa Bay Region, Florida. The Florida Anthropologist, 36(1-2), 55-56  
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## SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - FEBRUARY 2024

### THE NEGRO FORT AT PROSPECT BLUFF



In the aftermath of the War of 1812 British Forces left behind a unique gift for their allies, the Indigenous and African free people of Florida: a fully operational and stocked military fort along the Apalachicola river. The Seminole had little use for the European style fort, but for African war veterans, many of who had emancipated themselves from American slavery, the potential was clear.

Soon the fort was home to over 300 African soldiers trained in the use of arms. This included around 300 rifles and canons, as well as the supplies to use them. Farms developed using West African agricultural knowledge could be found for miles to feed the growing population. The fort traded regularly with Seminole towns and often hosted Indigenous visitors. Stories of the "Negro Fort" quickly spread, and it quickly became a beacon of freedom for the enslaved; a safe bastion in Spanish Florida that inspired hope, and hundreds of refugees would find a home at the fort.

For Americans the presence of a fully manned and armed garrison in the hand of Free Africans was a nightmare. Not only did it inspire those they held enslaved, but they constantly worried about the threat of attack. They labeled the fort a haven for outlaws and blamed them for acts of piracy, but the true threat was the possibility of an armed slave rebellion.

In July of 1816 American gunboats set out with orders to destroy the fort. In the opening salvos the American ships launched a "hot one", a cannonball heated up to set fires. The shot struck the fort's gunpowder supply, causing an explosion that stunned even the attackers. Nearly 300 men, women and children, African and Indigenous, were killed instantly. Yet over 1,000 others had managed to escape beforehand. The assault was one of the earliest battles of the Seminole War, and a warning of the willingness of American forces to invade Florida.

**ABOVE**  
Warriors from Bondage. The attack of Negro Fort on the Apalachicola River, 1816.  
Source: Jason Walker Studio  
**TO LEARN MORE**  
Visit the Tribal Historic Preservation Office website at [stfthpo.com](https://stfthpo.com) or use the QR code on the right for more Seminole history resources





# Health



## StrongHearts Native Helpline receives funding boosts

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**EAGAN, Minn.** — Recent donations to the StrongHearts Native Helpline have included \$100,000 from the San Manuel Band of Missions Indians of Southern California and \$50,000 from the nonprofit Together Rising.

StrongHearts is the first-ever phone and internet-based national helpline for Native Americans impacted by domestic and sexual

violence. It was created nearly seven years ago.

StrongHearts Native Helpline serves all individuals who reach out for their services regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, or any other factor protected by local, state, or federal law. Call or text (844) 762-8483 or chat online at [strongheartshelpline.org](http://strongheartshelpline.org).

## Native healthcare conference to be held in June

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**TEMECULA, Calif.** — The Native American Healthcare Conference will be held on June 18 and June 19 at Pechanga Resort Casino in Temecula, California.

Healthcare directors, decision-makers, and tribal leaders will hear from industry experts on preventative disease, wellness, and other health-related topics facing Indian

Country.

The event is being held in conjunction with the Native American Economic Development Conference, the Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference and the Tribal Finance Conference.

Registration for one conference provides access to all four. For information visit [nativenationevents.org](http://nativenationevents.org) or call (201) 857-5333.

## Seminole Tribe to host renewable energy conference

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Seminole Tribe of Florida sixth annual Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference will be held Feb. 6 to Feb. 8 at the Native Learning Center, 6363 Taft St., in Hollywood. Hours are 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.

The conference will focus on the newly changing landscape for tribal energy development and sustainability, including best practices, federal leadership, policy and regulatory changes, funding a project, and project planning/development trends. The conference will give tribes and First Nations an opportunity to explore the range of renewable energy and sustainability opportunities that exist and how to start the process.

Representatives from Tribes, First Nations, nongovernmental organizations, and private industry will give presentations and provide training objectives on a wide range of topics, including:

- Resources to help with Tribal energy projects
- Achieving self-sufficiency through energy planning and resource development
- Energy saving methods in design, development and construction
- Tribes undertaking large scale energy projects
- Developments driving change in the renewable energy and sustainability marketplace
- Tribal/private partnership opportunities
- Tribal case studies and lessons learned
- Funding sources for projects
- Leveraging available federal resources and materials to support Tribes and TDHE/Housing Departments

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

## Tribal forum to address air quality, climate change

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**CHEROKEE, N.C.** — The National Tribal Forum on Air Quality will be held from May 6 to May 9 at Harrah's Cherokee Casino & Resort in Cherokee, North Carolina. Discussions will be held about how tribes are implementing the Clean Air Act in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The theme is "Environmental Action in Native Communities."

The conference will provide strategies, subject matter experts, and resources to tribes and partner organizations looking to advance air quality and climate change efforts in Indian Country. Tribal representatives, youth, elders, tribal leaders and others are invited to share their experiences, stories, and efforts to advance tribal sovereignty and environmental protection.

The forum is organized by the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals. For more information visit [NTFAQ@nau.edu](mailto:NTFAQ@nau.edu)

## Native communities have the highest suicide rates, yet interventions are scarce

BY CHERYL PLATZMAN WEINSTOCK  
KFF Health News

Amanda MorningStar has watched her children struggle with mental health issues, including suicidal thoughts. She often wonders why.

"We're family-oriented and we do stuff together. I had healthy pregnancies. We're very protective of our kids," said MorningStar, who lives in Heart Butte, Montana, a town of about 600 residents on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Yet despite her best efforts, MorningStar said, her family faces a grim reality that touches Native American communities nationwide. About a year ago, her 15-year-old son, Ben, was so grief-stricken over his cousin's suicide and two classmates' suicides that he tried to kill himself.

"Their deaths made me feel like part of me was not here. I was gone. I was lost," said Ben MorningStar.

He spent more than a week in an inpatient mental health unit, but once home, he was offered sparse mental health resources.

Non-Hispanic Indigenous people in the United States die by suicide at higher rates than any other racial or ethnic group, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The suicide rate among Montana's Native American youth is more than five times the statewide rate for the same age group, according to the Montana Budget and Policy Center. Montana ranked third-worst among states for suicide deaths in 2020, and 25% of all suicides in the state from 2017 through 2021 were among Native Americans, even though they represent only 6.5% of the state's population.

Despite decades of research into suicide prevention, suicide rates among Indigenous people have remained stubbornly high, especially among Indigenous people ages 10 to 24, according to the CDC. Experts say that's because the national strategy for suicide prevention isn't culturally relevant or sensitive to Native American communities' unique values.

Suicide rates have increased among other racial and ethnic minorities, too, but to lesser degrees.

Systemic issues and structural inequities,

including underfunded and under-resourced services from the federal Indian Health Service, also hamper suicide prevention in Indigenous communities.

"I worried who was going to keep my son safe. Who could he call or reach out to? There are really no resources in Heart Butte," said Amanda MorningStar.

Ben MorningStar said he is doing better. He now knows not to isolate himself when problems occur and that "it is OK to cry, and I got friends I can go to when I have a bad day. Friends are better than anything," he said.

His twice-a-month, 15-minute virtual telehealth behavioral therapy visits from IHS were recently reduced to once a month.

Mary Cwik, a psychologist and senior scientist at the Center for Indigenous Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, said the systemic shortcomings MorningStar has witnessed are symptoms of a national strategy that isn't compatible with Indigenous value systems.

"It is not clear that the creation of the national strategy had Indigenous voices informing the priorities," Cwik said.

The cause of high suicide rates in Indigenous communities is complex. Native Americans often live with the weight of more adverse childhood experiences than other populations — things such as emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, substance misuse, mental illness, parental separation or divorce, incarceration, and poverty.

Those adverse experiences stack upon intergenerational trauma caused by racial discrimination, colonization, forced relocation, and government-sanctioned abduction to boarding schools that persisted until the 1970s.

"There's no way that communities shaped by these forces for so long will get rid of their problems fast by medical services. A lot of people in Indian Country struggle to retain hope. It's easy to conclude that nothing can fix it," said Joseph P. Gone, a professor of anthropology and global health and social medicine at Harvard University and member of the Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) tribal nation of Montana.

Most tribal nations are interested in collaborative research, but funding for such work is hard to come by, said Gone.

So is funding for additional programs and services.

Stephen O'Connor, who leads the suicide prevention research program at the Division of Services and Intervention Research at the National Institute of Mental Health, said, "Given the crisis of suicide in Native American populations, we need more funding and continued sustained funding for research in this area."

Getting grants for scientific research from NIMH, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, can be challenging, especially for smaller tribes, he said.

Officials at the NIMH and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration said that they continue to build research partnerships with tribal nations and that they recently launched new grants and multiple programs that are culturally informed and evidence-based to reduce suicide in tribal communities.

NIMH researchers are even adjusting a commonly used suicide screening tool to incorporate more culturally appropriate language for Indigenous people.

Teresa Brockie, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, is one of a small but growing number of researchers, many of whom are Indigenous, who study suicide prevention and intervention strategies that respect Indigenous beliefs and customs. Those strategies include smudging — the practice of burning medicinal plants to cleanse and connect people with their creator.

Without this understanding, research is hampered because people in tribal communities have "universal mistrust of health care and other colonized systems that have not been helpful to our people or proven to be supportive," said Brockie, a member of Fort Belknap reservation's Aaniiih Tribe.

Brockie is leading one of the first randomized controlled trials studying Indigenous people at Fort Peck. The project aims to reduce suicide risk by helping parents and caregivers deal with their own stress and trauma and develop positive coping skills. It's also working to strengthen children's tribal identity, connectivity, and spirituality.

In 2015, she reported on a study she led in 2011 to collect suicide data at the Fort Peck reservation in northeastern Montana. She found that adverse childhood experiences

have a cumulative effect on suicide risk and also that tribal identity, strong connections with friends and family, and staying in school were protective against suicide.

In Arizona, Cwik is collaborating with the White Mountain Apache Tribe to help leaders there evaluate the impact of a comprehensive suicide surveillance system they created. So far, the program has reduced the overall Apache suicide rate by 38.3% and the rate among young people ages 15 to 24 by 23%, according to the American Public Health Association.

Several tribal communities are attempting to implement a similar system in their communities, said Cwik.

Still, many tribal communities rely on limited mental health resources available through the Indian Health Service. One person at IHS is tasked with addressing suicide across almost 600 tribal nations.

Pamela End of Horn, a social worker and national suicide prevention consultant at IHS, said the Department of Veterans Affairs "has a suicide coordinator in every medical center across the U.S., plus case managers, and they have an entire office dedicated to suicide prevention. In Indian Health Service it is just me and that's it."

End of Horn, a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribe of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, blames politics for the discrepancy.

"Tribal leaders are pushing for more suicide prevention programs but lack political investment. The VA has strong proactive activities related to suicide and the backing of political leaders and veterans' groups," she said.

It is also hard to get mental health professionals to work on remote reservations, while VA centers tend to be in larger cities.

Even if more mental health services were available, they can be stigmatizing, re-traumatizing, and culturally incongruent for Indigenous people.

Many states are using creative strategies to stop suicide. A pilot project by the Rural Behavioral Health Institute screened more than 1,000 students in 10 Montana schools from 2020 to 2022. The governor of Montana is hoping to use state money to expand mental health screening for all schools.

Experts say the kinds of strategies best suited to prevent suicide among Native

Americans should deliver services that reflect their diversity, traditions, and cultural and language needs.

That's what Robert Coberly, 44, was searching for when he needed help.

Coberly began having suicidal thoughts at 10 years old.

"I was scared to live and scared to die. I just didn't care," said Coberly, who is a member of the Tulalip Tribes.

He suffered in private for nearly a decade until he almost died in a car crash while driving drunk. After a stay at a rehabilitation center, Coberly remained stable. Years later, though, his suicidal thoughts came rushing back when one of his children died. He sought treatment at a behavioral health center where some of the therapists were Indigenous. They blended Western methodologies with Indigenous customs, which, he said, "I was craving and what I needed."

Part of his therapy included going to a sweat lodge for ritual steam baths as a means of purification and prayer.

Coberly was a counselor for the Native and Strong Lifeline, the first 988 crisis line for Indigenous people. He is now one of the crisis line tribal resource specialists connecting Indigenous people from Washington state with the resources they need.

"It's about time we had this line. To be able to connect people with resources and listen to them is something I can't explain except that I was in a situation where I wanted someone to hear me and talk to," said Coberly.

Amanda MorningStar said she still worries about her son night and day, but he tries to reassure her.

"I go to sleep and wake up the next day to keep it going," Ben MorningStar said. "I only get one chance. I might as well make the best of it."

*KFF Health News, formerly known as Kaiser Health News (KHN), is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF — the independent source for health policy research, polling, and journalism.*

### February is American Heart Month!



Protect your heart by eating healthy, staying active, and managing stress. Heart disease can run in families, so talk with elders about your family history.

As a tribal member, you can enroll in the Marketplace, Medicaid, or CHIP year-round: review your coverage options to stay heart healthy.

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



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# SEMINOLE SCENES



Miami Dolphins (2)

**CHAIRMAN AT HARD ROCK STADIUM:** Above left, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., center, joins Miami Dolphins and Hard Rock Stadium owner Steven Ross, left, and Dolphins CEO Tom Garfinkel on the field at the Dolphins game against the Dallas Cowboys on Dec. 24, 2023. Chairman Osceola presented Ross and Garfinkel with Seminole patchwork jackets. The chairman received a game day ball. At right, Chairman Osceola talks to former Major League Baseball great Alex Rodriguez, left, and former Dolphins star quarterback and NFL Hall of Famer Dan Marino. Hard Rock Stadium has had its name since 2016 when the Seminole Tribe's Hard Rock International and the Dolphins signed an 18-year naming rights agreement. The Dolphins clinched a playoff spot thanks to their 22-20 win against the Cowboys.



Photos by Rodin Eckenroth/GA/The Hollywood Reporter via Getty Images

**ON THE RED CARPET:** Seminole Tribe of Florida/Choctaw singer-songwriters and brothers Doc Native, left, and Spencer Battiest attend the Marvel Studios "Echo" launch event at Regency Village Theatre on Jan. 8 in Los Angeles. The series premiered the following day on Disney+ and Hulu. Native and Battiest were among the invited guests who walked the red carpet. The series features several Native American actors, including leads Alaqu Cox (Menominee Nation) and Chaske Spencer (Lakota Sioux). Episodes were directed by directed by Sydney Freeland (Navajo) and Catriona McKenzie (Gunaikurnai).



Kevin Johnson

**FOOD AND HOOPS:** A variety of food trucks, including Fry Bread Heaven, were present at the NASA basketball tournament Jan. 11-13 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center on the Hollywood Reservation. The food trucks lined up behind the rec center. Fry Bread Heaven offers authentic Seminole food.



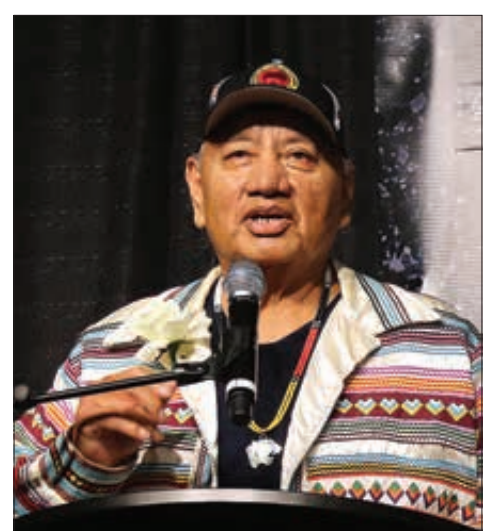
Courtesy photo

**RIBBON HONOR:** Miss Florida Seminole and Ahfachkee School graduate Thomlynn Billie puts scissors to ribbon during the grand opening of the school's new elementary school building.



Calvin Tiger (2)

**HOLLYWOOD HONOR:** The sign for the Max B. Osceola Jr. Boys & Girls Club in Hollywood was installed in December. It is located near the main entrance to the Howard Tiger Recreation Center, where the Boys & Girls Club is located. Osceola was a longtime leader in the Seminole Tribe and helped establish the tribe's Boys & Girls Club program in the early 2000s. He died Oct. 8, 2020. The club in Hollywood was named in his honor two years later.



File photo

Max B. Osceola Jr.

# NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

## New Mexico Supreme Court decides injured can't sue casino in state court

SANTA FE, N.M. — After allegedly getting injured while at a tribal casino, an electrical company employee tried to sue Buffalo Thunder Resort and other groups. The state's supreme court has ruled that state courts don't have the authority to make a decision in the case — and that could have big implications for cases against casinos.

The issue centered around a compact between the state of New Mexico and a handful of tribal groups that set the rules for gambling in New Mexico. Part of that agreement says that the safety of casino visitors is the responsibility of the tribal group operating the casino.

The compact said that the tribal groups would waive part of their legal immunity and could be subject to lawsuits in state court if someone was hurt at the casino. But in a new opinion released by the New Mexico Supreme Court, the justices say several legal cases over the last few years actually terminate the ability for injured individuals to seek compensation in state court.

In the opinion, Chief Justice Shannon Bacon noted that a previous case, *Pueblo of Santa Ana v. Nash*, and another case essentially triggered a clause in the compact that determines where people can sue casino operators. The injury lawsuit will be dismissed in state court, setting the precedent that injury lawsuits against casino operators will have to go through tribal court.

- KRQE (Albuquerque, New Mexico)

## Tribe swears in first appellate judges

The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas swore in its first-ever appellate court judges recently, including a tribal member who will serve as chief appellate judge. The Appellate Division of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Court System hears appeals from the Alabama-Coushatta Tribal Court, which handles civil, criminal and child custody matters, including child support. The tribe created the court system almost 10 years ago after a change in federal law granted tribes more authority to handle criminal matters, as long as judges are law-trained and public defender services are offered to those charged. The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe was one of the first in the country to set up its own court system in compliance with the new law.

Tribal member Jeremy Sylestine, who has extensive experience as a prosecutor and a criminal defense lawyer, was sworn in as the tribe's first chief appellate judge on Jan. 8. He later swore in two other appellate judges — Alfred Urbina, the attorney general of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and Derrick Beetso, a professor of Indian law at Arizona State University.

"We are honored to take on this responsibility and to administer justice on behalf of the tribe and tribal citizens," Sylestine said. "The existence of this court system is an important exercise of our sovereignty."

The Alabama-Coushatta Tribal Court has two law-trained attorney judges, as well as a tribal prosecutor and two public defenders. A Peacemaker Court consisting of three tribal community leaders attempts to resolve disputes outside of the Tribal Court, using culturally appropriate resolution methods, when requested by the parties.

- East Texas News

## \$3 million grant will help Michigan tribes build more housing

Michigan is launching a \$3 million grant program to help tribal nations develop more affordable housing.

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority announced Thursday, Jan. 18 the Tribal Nations Housing Development Assistance Program will help Michigan tribes build new housing and upgrade existing homes. It will be a partnership between Michigan and tribal governments.

"MSHDA's new Tribal Nations Housing Development Assistance Program will support the production and preservation of housing by working hand-in-hand with sovereign tribal nation partners all over the state," Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said in a video announcing the program.

Grant funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis can be used to remove barriers, cover predevelopment costs, respond to existing building capacity needs and help bridge financing gaps, a news release said.

Native Americans living on tribal lands have "some of the worst housing needs" in the United States, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. And in Michigan, Indigenous people are twice as likely to experience homelessness, a recent state report found.

"We believe that the (housing assistance program) will make a real, lasting impact to tribes across Michigan," said a statement from Jamie Stuck, United Tribes of Michigan president. "We know that everyone deserves a safe and affordable home, and our partnership with MSHDA and FHLBank Indianapolis helps tribal nations get closer to that reality."

The grant will work alongside other efforts to support Indigenous people. Two Michigan tribes, Bay Mills Indian Community and Sault Sainte Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, were each awarded \$500,000 from the federal government last year to expand broadband internet access.

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority is working with the

National American Indian Housing Council to develop a toolkit and trainings for housing projects.

- Mlive.com (Michigan)

## North Carolina city takes first steps toward Cherokee cultural corridor

For decades, the town of Franklin, North Carolina, owned Noquisiyi (later interpreted as Nikwasi) Mound. The mound is the only thing that remains of a Cherokee settlement that dates back to the 16th century. The town's meeting hall once sat atop the mound.

Now, the Nikwasi Initiative is working to protect and honor local sites that play an essential role in the heritage of a regional Indian tribe — including the Nikwasi Mound.

The organization, which was founded in 2019, is the byproduct of a conflict that arose between Franklin city officials and members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, according to executive director Elaine Eisenbraun.

In an effort to reduce the maintenance burden of the mound, local officials decided to change the grass that grew on it. To do that, they sprayed herbicide on the mound to kill the old grass.

"To the Cherokee people, the mound is a living member of their community, and that was devastating," Eisenbraun says. But from that devastation and upheaval, came understanding and collaboration.

"The initial discussions were just about getting everybody to the table, getting representatives from the Cherokee community and the Franklin-Macon County community together, just to sit down at the table and start talking," says Bob McCollum, a lifelong Franklin resident and a member of the Nikwasi Initiative's board. "And that led us to the idea of, well what if we had a project that we can work on jointly? And the protection of the Nikwasi Mound ... was, of course, the focal point for both groups."

Those discussions led to the formation of the Nikwasi Initiative. Eisenbraun and Jacqueline Rhew, who serves as coordinator, make up the two-person staff, but the nonprofit counts local residents, civic leaders and members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians among its volunteers and board members. In May 2019, Franklin Town Council decided the mound to the Nikwasi Initiative.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is a tribe of 14,000 members located in western North Carolina. The city of Franklin is about 36 miles south of the Qualla Boundary, a territory the tribe has owned since purchasing it from the federal government in the 1870s.

"The mission is to preserve, protect and promote a culture and heritage in the original homeland of the Cherokee people," Eisenbraun says. "So a lot of it is landscaped-oriented. But we take on projects that are appropriate to our organization and help to preserve that mission."

The long-term vision for the Nikwasi Initiative is to create a Cherokee cultural corridor along the Little Tennessee River, running from Franklin to Cherokee, a town inside the Qualla Boundary. The organization has taken several steps toward this goal, including placing cultural information kiosks at Cowee and Noquisiyi Mounds and creating two trailways: the Blueway Trails and the Apple Trail. Its biggest project though is turning the Noquisiyi Mound and the area around it into the Noquisiyi Cultural District. Part of the project will include converting a former auto sales building into a cultural learning center. Other aspects of the cultural district include a cafe, green space and an amphitheater.

"It's a long-term project. There's no question," Eisenbraun says. "We're trying to raise funds to purchase some of the real estate around the [cultural learning center] and the mound to make a really special place to honor that mound."

The cultural center is estimated to cost \$3.75 million. The Nikwasi Initiative received funding for the center from Opportunity Appalachia, a consortium of eight regional partners coordinated by CDFI Appalachian Community Capital that aims to bring investments that create new jobs and businesses and support sustainable growth to Appalachian communities.

Although much work is left to be done, Eisenbraun and McCollum both agree that progress has already been made when it comes to enhancing community engagement and understanding. Through conflict and misunderstanding came a productive and respectful relationship between the two groups. It's something McCollum would like to see happen in more places.

"I'm hoping that this ... can be used as a model for all those other communities out there once they find out about it. That they too can calm the rhetoric, ease up on the hard feelings," he says. "The fact that if you just get people to sit down and talk to one another and better understand the other people's position, a lot of good can come from it."

- Nextcity.org

## St. Regis Mohawk Tribe reaches private settlement with Monsanto

ALBANY, N.Y. — The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe has reached a confidential settlement with Monsanto in its years-long industrial contamination lawsuit alleging the former chemical giant was responsible for increased risks of cancer and other diseases in tribal members exposed to PCBs.

The pollution at the center of the case originated at manufacturing sites adjacent to Akwesasne, the sprawling Mohawk tribal lands that straddle the U.S.-Canadian

border in northern New York, where toxic chemicals made by Monsanto were disposed of for years.

But the terms of the settlement to end the tribe's hard-fought lawsuit remain concealed from the public.

"Due to confidentiality considerations, all that I can say is that the parties have reached an agreement to resolve the pending actions but the terms are confidential," Dale White, St. Regis Mohawk Tribe general counsel, told the Times Union on Jan. 18.

A statement provided by a spokesperson for Bayer, which absorbed Monsanto in 2018, was identical to White's comment. Neither White nor Bayer responded to a series of additional questions, including whether the agreement prevents the tribe from disclosing the terms to its members.

In the civil complaint, which was initially brought on behalf of two individual tribe members, the tribe alleged that chemicals made by Monsanto and used in nearby industrial plants had increased members' likelihood of developing cancer and other conditions. The lawsuit named Monsanto along with a host of related companies as defendants.

The case, filed in Missouri where Monsanto had been headquartered, began in 2018 and dragged on until March — the same month it was slated to go to trial — when the parties tentatively agreed to settle out of court, records show.

The Mohawk territory of Akwesasne is spread along the southern bank of the St. Lawrence River and a collection of islands, divided between New York and the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario. The tribe's toxic pollution case stems from a trio of plants just upriver of the territory, most notably the now-defunct General Motors plant sitting on its western border.

Over about two decades, those plants dumped toxic industrial chemicals made by Monsanto into the environment, contaminating the soil, water, air and wildlife in and around Akwesasne.

The chemicals, called polychlorinated biphenyls — better known as PCBs — were banned in 1979 over concerns regarding their potential dangers to human health. The EPA has since dubbed them likely human carcinogens and has found they can cause reproductive, hormonal, cognitive and immune system problems.

Researchers have found evidence that Mohawk Tribe members in Akwesasne have been afflicted with many of those adverse health effects, even decades after their initial exposure. In a territory shaped by its rivers, residents can't eat the fish without risking consumption of dangerous levels of PCBs.

In 2013, General Motors and Alcoa, two of the companies behind the Superfund sites, agreed to pay nearly \$20 million to tribal, state and federal authorities to help remediate the damage.

The tribe joined the Monsanto lawsuit in late 2018. In a statement announcing their involvement, tribal leaders alleged that the contamination in Akwesasne was ongoing, and that Monsanto had continued to sell PCB products despite knowing the dangers they posed.

"It is for these reasons that the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe filed the lawsuit — to help the tribe manage the severe and ongoing consequences of its continued exposure to PCBs," the tribal nation wrote.

The case languished in a Missouri Circuit Court for more than four years as both sides gathered evidence and engaged in pretrial discovery. Company and tribal leaders were deposited, as were a number of expert witnesses, court records show. Monsanto performed environmental sampling in Akwesasne and the tribe requested medical information from members who'd been diagnosed with PCB-linked diseases.

In 2020, Bayer left the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe out of an \$820 million settlement to resolve several other Monsanto water contamination cases, a move that the tribe decried as racist but that Bayer chalked up to differences between the lawsuits.

Ten months ago — on the same day the case was slated to go to trial — the judge issued an order stating the two parties had tentatively agreed to settle the litigation.

In July, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and five co-plaintiffs filed to dismiss their case. Another hearing was scheduled for earlier this month.

- Times Union (Albany, New York)

## Colorado announces new agreement with Indigenous tribes for more wolves

DENVER — Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) announced it reached an agreement with Indigenous tribes in eastern Washington to capture and transport up to 15 wolves to Colorado.

The agreement with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation will allow CPW to catch the apex predators on tribal lands during the capture season that spans from December 2024 to March 2025.

"We are grateful to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation for working with our agency on this critical next step in reintroducing gray wolves in the state," said CPW Director Jeff Davis. "This agreement helps CPW to continue to meet our unanimously adopted Colorado Wolf Restoration and Management Plan goal of translocating 10-15 gray wolves per capture season for a total of 30-50 wolves."

Tribal representatives will work with CPW to identify target packs, CPW said. The agency said they will avoid packs with known active chronic depredation behaviors.

"The Colville Tribes is very pleased to partner with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to restore the wolf population in Colorado," said Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation Jarred-Michael

Erickson. "The Colville people strongly believe in preserving our environment, including its fish and animals. We are thrilled that our restoration efforts on our own lands have progressed far enough that we can share some of these magnificent creatures with the citizens of Colorado."

While CPW could catch and release up to five more wolves this season, they said they will wait until next capture season before releasing more.

CPW caught 10 wolves and relocated them to Colorado from Oregon in December. The wolves were released in Grand and Summit counties.

- 9News (Denver, Colorado)

## Cleveland Museum of Art conceals Native American pieces on display due to updated federal law

CLEVELAND — Some museums have either covered or taken down Native American exhibits after an updated federal law about how Native American artifacts can be displayed.

The Cleveland Museum of Art brings in people from far and wide, but today, not all artifacts are on display.

The museum said in a statement that concealing the Native American displays is in direct response to the updated 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

"Out of respect for the native American tribes and NAGPRA, the CMA has covered the display cases that contain items that might fit the new NAGPRA definitions until the appropriate determinations can be made and, if necessary, consents obtained," the statement reads, in part.

NAGPRA was created in 1990 to protect and return cultural items to the Native Americans; the provision now requires museums and federal agencies to obtain the consent of lineal descendants, Indian tribes, or native Hawaiian organizations to display cultural items.

"Basically, they're putting a fire under some particular museums," said Marie Toledo.

Toledo is a board member on Lake Erie's Native American council and sits on the advisory board for the museum. She said she was pleased to see how they responded.

"It is enough right now. Yes, they're following the guidelines. I think they've been proactive. There are many museums that have not even done that much," said Toledo.

She added that it's painful to see artifacts and pieces of Native American history on display, knowing how they were secured.

"When I go into a museum, and I maybe see a Cheyenne woman's dress and you can see holes in it. Well, those holes can be bullet holes, and you know, the history of that dress," Toledo said. "You know how that dress was gotten. It wasn't just given, some Cheyenne woman didn't make that dress and say here you go, you know, those were gotten in a really, really violent, genocidal manner."

Philip Yenyo, with the American Indian Movement of Ohio, feels the same way.

"It hurts for me; I feel like our ancestors aren't being respected. Our burial sites aren't being respected," said Yenyo.

Yenyo believes the museum could have done more.

"They should be consulting with the different native nations to begin with," said Yenyo.

But Yenyo's still happy to see they are moving in the right direction. He and Toledo just want their indigenous people to have a say in pieces of their history.

"I hope that it continues to evolve and that we continue to decolonize museums and listen to the people give the people their voice and, return our relatives and our items of significance, culturally and spiritually," said Toledo.

The Cleveland Museum of Art added that they are going through their records to see if consent has already been obtained for some items.

- News5 Cleveland (Ohio)

## Canada returns mineral-rich Arctic region to the people of Nunavut

The Canadian government made its largest land transfer in history Jan. 18 when it officially signed over the massive Arctic territory of Nunavut to its own government, who will now have control over the 808,200 square miles of sparsely populated mountains, tundra and vast mineral reserves.

The Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement signed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Premier of Nunavut P.J. Akeagok, President of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated Aluki Kotierik and the Minister of Northern Affairs Dan Vandal means the territory will have the right to royalties from any exploration and development that would have otherwise gone to the Canadian government, said a press release from Trudeau and Reuters.

"Nammiqumniq, or devolution, is one more step towards the vision of a self-reliant Nunavut. With the signing of this agreement, we can now bring decision-making about our land and waters home. It means that we, the people most invested in our homeland, will be the ones managing our natural resources. While it has taken generations of our leaders to achieve this work, today's signing of the devolution agreement is primarily for young Nunavummiut across our territory," Akeagok said in the press release.

The northernmost territory of Canada was created in 1999 and has a population of around 40,000 mostly Inuit Peoples.

"With the agreement, Nunavut and its residents will now be able to make decisions about how public lands, freshwater, and non-renewable resources are used in the territory, and reap the benefits of responsible and sustainable resource development," the press release said.

The territory is the coldest Canadian region and is lacking in infrastructure, which pushes operating costs through the roof.

Talks for the transfer of Nunavut to its people began in 2014, Reuters reported. Before the agreement, Nunavut was the only northern territory of Canada that did not have a devolution agreement.

- EcoWatch

## Proposed bill would give tribes more control over language programs

Lawmakers are trying once again to create a trust fund that would give New Mexico tribes more money and control to run their own educational programs.

The proposed legislation is sponsored by Rep. Derrick Lente (D-Sandia Pueblo). It would create a \$100 million Tribal Education Trust Fund that would disburse money directly to tribes over time to help build sustainable programs.

Randall Vicente, governor of Pueblo of Acoma, said this proposed bill can help sustain the Keres language in his community.

"During COVID, we lost a lot of our elderly, our fluent speakers, and our community members which were teaching the Acoma Keres language," he said.

Vicente said the funds could help pay community members to teach Keres.

"To teach as an elder or as an uncle or an aunt, or maybe as a mentor into classrooms to the students," he said.

The problem is finding a way to certify them as licensed language teachers.

"How do we qualify our Keres teachers?" said Vicente. "So while they speak Keres, yeah, they're from the college of hard knocks. They learned from our elders, they know they can speak our language."

The Pueblo of Acoma has a variety of schools that fall under Bureau of Indian Education, Grants/Cibola County schools and private schools, all of which have limited funds.

Vicente said additional funds could help bring more teachers and tutors to help aid students. The need for transportation is also crucial for students living in rural areas who stay behind for after school programs.

Rep. Lente and advocates pulled back on a similar effort last year to push for more money in this session.

The Legislative Finance Committee's budget proposal has \$50 million set aside for the fund. The proposed bill must pass both chambers and be signed by the governor to become law.

- KUNM (Albuquerque, N.M.)

## Coquille Tribe's long bet on contentious new casino may still pay off

The Coquille Indian Tribe has been trying to open a new casino in Medford for over 10 years. After hitting bumps along the way — including a hard 'no' from the feds in 2020 — the project is again moving forward. Among its most vociferous critics: other regional tribes.

The Coquille Indian Tribe's proposed new casino in Medford, although located on land they own, is over 150 miles from their reservation near the Oregon Coast.

To build the casino and collect its gaming revenue, the tribe needs to put the land under federal trust.

The U.S. Department of the Interior rejected that plan in 2020. But the Biden administration is moving forward with an environmental assessment, the results of which are expected soon.

Russell Attebery, chairman of Karuk Tribal Council that shares geography with Northern California, has joined other tribal leaders as well as senators from Oregon and California in opposing the casino.

He says it would cut into his tribe's gaming revenue and lead to less money for public services. He also warned that the precedent could spread harmful competition between tribes.

"To open the door to reservation jump and open casinos that are not [in] their homelands could be devastating to Indian country," said Attebery.

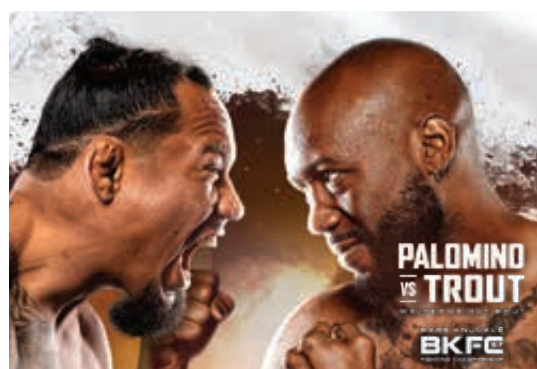
Ray Doering, who works with the Coquille Indian Tribe on economic development, says criticism of their proposal comes from a fear of competition.

"They have a market all to themselves. They've had a monopoly for a long time. And they don't want to lose that monopoly. And they don't want to have to face the competition," said Doering.

Assuming a favorable environmental assessment, the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the Department of the Interior will have a public comment period before making a final decision.

- Jefferson Public Radio (Oregon)

# SOUTH FLORIDA'S ULTIMATE ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION



**FEB 2**  
**BKFC 57**



**FEB 4**  
**PICKLEBALL SLAM 2**



**FEB 8**  
**TIM MCGRAW**



**FEB 9**  
**FRANKIE VALLI & THE FOUR SEASONS**



**FEB 13 & 14**  
**ROD STEWART**



**FEB 16**  
**HAVASI**



**FEB 17**  
**GILBERTO SANTA ROSA**



**FEB 21**  
**DANCING WITH THE STARS LIVE!**



**FEB 22**  
**FRANK REYES**



**FEB 23**  
**LOS ÁNGELES AZULES**



**FEB 24**  
**STEVIE NICKS**



**FEB 25**  
**WE THEM ONES**



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# Education



## Ahfachkee celebrates new elementary school building

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Ahfachkee School students, staff and parents joined others from the Big Cypress community and Seminole tribal leaders to celebrate the ribbon cutting of the school's new elementary school building and gymnasium Jan. 17.

The nearly 50,000 square-foot building features new 21 kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms, a music room, computer lab and multipurpose spaces. The gymnasium, which is for the entire K-12 school, includes a full-size basketball/volleyball wood floor court with bleachers and a stage. Locker rooms and a wellness center with exercise equipment are also part of the new look.

The elementary school building is connected to the middle and high school building by a central entry. The upper school building was completed in 2019.

About 200 people attended the ceremony, which included speeches before the ribbon cutting. Lunch and tours of the building were provided.

"We have come a long way. It's exciting to see the progress," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "As our youth population grows, it's good to have a school for them to learn their language, culture and academics. We hope the kids and their families will be happy with this school for years to come. This is a monumental moment."

Councilwoman Billie said the school was designed to accommodate the reservation's growth, including recent new housing developments.

Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, an Ahfachkee graduate, had input in the creation of the upper school a few years ago.

"I was one of the students they interviewed," Billie said. "They wanted to know our ideas for the new building. I didn't get to attend it since it was finished after I graduated."

Lee Zepeda, executive director of Administration, spent five years as a teacher and five years as principal of Ahfachkee in the 1990s and early 2000s.

◆ See AHFACHKEE on page 3B



Beverly Bidney

A ribbon is cut Jan. 17 signifying the completion and opening of the Ahfachkee School's new elementary school building. From left to right are Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers, Tribal Community Development executive director Derek Koger, student Curmya Smith, principal Phil Baer, Carol Cypress, Virginia Tommie, Mary Jene Koenes, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., executive director of Administration Lee Zepeda, President Holly Tiger, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Tahnia Billie, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola and Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie.

## California legislation would require K-12 education accurately reflect historical mistreatment of Native Americans

BY SIERRA SUN TIMES  
Mariposa, California

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** — When teaching about the Spanish Mission and Gold Rush eras, California public schools would be required to teach the true history of the impact on California Native Americans during those periods if AB 1821 is approved. Assemblymember James C. Ramos (D-San Bernardino), the first California Native American elected to the legislature, introduced the measure Jan. 11.

Ramos said, "This bill builds upon my previous legislation, the California Indian Education Act, approved in 2022. For far too long California's First People and their history have been ignored or misrepresented. Classroom instruction about the Mission and Gold Rush periods fails to include the loss of life, enslavement, starvation, illness and violence inflicted upon California Native American people during those times. These historical omissions from the curriculum are misleading. I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this bill and get it to the Governor's desk."

Late last year, a poll released by the Institute of Governmental Studies showed strong support to require California schools to incorporate teaching about Native American tribes' history and culture. An overwhelming 80% of respondents were in support of a requirement such as AB 1821.

In 2022, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed AB 1703 — the California Indian Education Act — into law. It encourages local educational agencies to create California Indian Education Task Forces to develop curriculum about the history and culture of tribes native or residing in their region. Although AB 1703 was a significant step toward inclusion of Native voices, it stopped short of requiring the change in curriculum. AB 1821 would take that extra step.

AB 1821 is sponsored by the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians. The bill is joint authored by Assemblymembers Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella) and Devon Mathis (R-Porterville). Assemblymembers Dr. Joaquin Arambula (D-Fresno), Eloise Gomez Reyes (D-San Bernardino), and Luz Rivas (D-Arleta) and Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera) are coauthors.

## Pizza generosity leads to surprise honor for Charles Cypress

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Whenever someone asks Charles "Catfish" Cypress to mow a lawn, he takes the money and spends it on pizza. Lots and lots of pizza, but not for him. Instead, the pizzas go to students who come to the Willie Frank Memorial Library in Big Cypress for tutoring after school.

"It just makes me happy to see them happy eating pizza," Cypress said. "Back in my day, we were poor and didn't get to have pizza."

Three years of these weekly pizza deliveries caught the attention of tutoring program supervisor Jan Bishop, who believed Cypress needed to be recognized for his generosity. So the Education Department threw him a surprise party with plenty of non-pizza snacks such as sandwiches, chicken wings, chips and a congratulatory cake.

After school Jan. 17, Cypress entered the library with a stack of pizza boxes in his arms and was surprised indeed. Students and Education staff, including tutors, were there to greet him with hugs and well wishes.

Bishop presented Cypress with an engraved plaque thanking him for his service to the children. The plaque was in appreciation for his "unwavering commitment to the children of Big Cypress."

"We wanted to acknowledge his generosity in purchasing pizza, snacks and treats every week," Bishop said.

"This makes my heart feel very beautiful," said Cypress, who has six children, 15 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.



Beverly Bidney

Education staff gather around Charles "Catfish" Cypress to congratulate him for his years of generously bringing free pizza to students after school at the Willie Frank Memorial Library in Big Cypress.



Beverly Bidney

Charles "Catfish" Cypress delivers an armload of pizzas for the students in the Big Cypress library after school Jan. 17.



Beverly Bidney

Charles "Catfish" Cypress is surrounded by students who appreciate the pizzas he brings them to help them get through tutoring and homework time.



Beverly Bidney

Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers with Charles "Catfish" Cypress, who displays the plaque presented to him by the Education Department.

## After earning degree, Klayton Sanders focuses on sustainable farming

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Klayton Sanders studied business in college and plans to put that knowledge to use to start a closed loop sustainable farm on the Big Cypress Reservation.

“This was a goal I wanted to achieve,” said Sanders, 30. “I recognized that I needed funding and this will allow me to get grant money.”

Sanders graduated Jan. 27 with an associate of arts degree from Keiser University. He has a passion for closed loop sustainable agriculture. His plan is to start a farm and get other Big Cypress residents interested in the process to ultimately become self-sustaining.

Closed loop sustainable farming recycles all nutrients and organic matter back into the soil, which preserves its nutrient and carbon levels. Permaculture, the idea of a natural method of farming, promotes biodiversity of plants instead of just one crop, which is not beneficial to the soil. Together they create a sustainable way to feed a community.

“You aren’t taking anything from the earth, you give it all back,” Sanders said. “You aren’t ruining the earth with chemical fertilizers. It also means you aren’t getting resources from outside of the farm. You grow everything you need to grow things.”

Sanders plans to grow seasonal items, such as fruits and vegetables, and plant fruit trees. He hopes the community will share his passion and learn about sustainable farming. His grandmother, Virginia Tommie, and



Courtesy photo

Klayton Sanders

his mother, Arlene Tommie, have offered Sanders their land for the farm.

“They are absolutely 100% behind me,” Sanders said. “They are excited for what this can bring to the community.”

Part of his plan includes creating raised hugelkultur beds to plant the crops on. They are made from rotting wood, branches and logs, along with other organic material like compost, which are dense with indigenous microorganisms, to create a healthy growing environment. According to the Farmer’s Almanac, the beds have been used for centuries in eastern Europe and Germany as part of a broader permaculture system.

“The beds will last 50 years,” Sanders said. “You don’t have to add anything but water, and not use fertilizer. You get nutrient dense food from the crops.”

Sanders decided to pursue this type of farming when he realized he wasn’t building or producing anything to leave behind for his children.

“My goal is to show people it’s possible to have small scale farms in your backyard,” he said. “If you get together on a grassroots community level, you can show you can do this. I’d like to have events and growing competitions to get the community involved.”



Courtesy photo

Keiser University graduate Klayton Sanders, center, with mother Arlene Tommie, left, and grandmother Virginia Tommie on the Lakeland Reservation after graduation.



Courtesy photo

Klayton Sanders with his family on the Lakeland Reservation.

## Native Learning Center offers tribal business startup training

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Native Learning Center will host “Steps to Starting a Tribal Business” on March 18 and March 19.

The training will provide attendees with an understanding of business model strategies for starting a small business.

The training program is designed to empower tribal members with the essential knowledge and practical skills needed to embark on the journey of starting a small

for-profit business.

- Topics include:
- overview of the needed and required steps
  - typical operational structure
  - marketing types and strategies
  - developing components of a business plan
  - accounting and finance processes
  - small business resources
  - processes for becoming a vendor
- For information call (954) 985-2315 or visit [nativelearningcenter.com](http://nativelearningcenter.com).

## Grants awarded for Native language revitalization

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Twenty American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and tribal organizations were awarded grants in December 2023 from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to help document and revitalize languages that are at risk of disappearing due to declining Native-speaker populations.

The grants are for \$200,000 to \$300,000 per year for three years through the BIA’s Living Languages Grant Program. The total amount of the funding is \$5.7 million.

“Investing in Native language revitalization is just one part of our all-of-government approach to addressing the harms caused by federal policies of the past, such as Federal Indian Boarding School which actively worked to suppress Native languages and cultures,” Bryan Newland, assistant secretary for Indian Affairs, said in a news release.

The tribes and organizations receiving the grants are from Alaska, Arizona, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

## PECS names teachers, employee of year

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School announced its 2023-24 teachers and employee of the year. Quenten Pritchard is teacher of the year, Marilee Johns is culture teacher of the year and Temperance Williams is non-instructional employee of the year.

### Teacher of the year: Quenten Pritchard

Seventh and eighth grade civics teacher Quenten Pritchard is one of the original PECS teachers and has taught at the school since it opened in 2007. During the years he has seen changes in the students, and he has adjusted his teaching methods to make them more successful. This year, in a first, 100% of his students passed the state’s end of course exam in civics. Pritchard said only 15 schools in the state achieved that.

He calls his teaching technique a spiral review. He teaches a subject and comes back to revisit it a few times during the year.

“All students at the college level have to pass a Florida civics exam,” Pritchard said. “This curriculum helps them down the road. Students come back and tell me that their seventh-grade experience helped them in college. It’s a good plan.”

Pritchard is a veteran teacher with 29 years under his belt. He said the best part of teaching is when students come back to see him after they graduate.

“They tell me about things I did in class that they remember,” he said. “It’s fun to reconnect and see how I’ve had some impact on them.”

To encourage students to do well, Pritchard uses incentives, including what they would get to do to him if they reach a goal. Examples include shaving his head, getting his ears pierced and getting a tattoo. This year, the goal was 100% passing the exam. In past years, it’s been in the 80s percentile.

“What are the odds they will get 100%?” Pritchard asked. “We’ve always been number one in the Heartland Consortium of Schools and beat the state average.”

Pritchard will choose a tattoo from the students’ design and will get the new tattoo by the end of the school year.

### Employee of the year: Temperance Williams

Kindergarten para-professional Temperance Williams has also worked at PECS since it opened. She has seen the curriculum evolve and the students succeed in kindergarten. As a para-professional she is trained to assist the teacher, but Williams believes she does much more than that.

“I help the teachers out and that makes me feel good about myself,” she said. “And when the students get the lesson, I know I had a part in that. I love my little ones; I get to help mold them.”

Williams said the best part of her day is when she walks in the classroom and sees the children’s faces ready to learn. She also loves it when they come back and see her years after kindergarten.

“It’s such an amazing feeling seeing how they grow up,” Williams said. “Several students who see me out and about at school still come over and hug me.”

Williams likes keeping the classroom in order, but also likes to do more teaching as well.

“I like to be engaged with the students,” Williams said. “It makes me feel good inside and that I’ve done my job. My motto is ‘happy classroom, happy life.’ If I’m doing that, I’ve succeeded today.”

### Culture teacher of the year: Marilee Johns

Pre-K and kindergarten Creek teacher and arts and crafts teacher Marilee Johns has seen a lot of growth in the Culture program and says it is working better than ever.

“The Immersion program is definitely working, but I see other kids using Creek outside of the classrooms,” Johns said. “They are speaking to peers and to other teachers in learn Creek so they can help us out.”

Johns said students today are more



Beverly Bidney

Quenten Pritchard



Beverly Bidney

Temperance Williams



Beverly Bidney

Marilee Johns

mature than their age compared to students when she started teaching at PECS more than a decade ago. She loves to see the youngest students around school during the day.

“They are so eager to learn and they want to use the language all the time,” Johns said. “When I see them in the hallway or lunchroom, they stop to tell me something in Creek.”

Johns, a Seminole descendant, said being part of the revitalization of the language is important and she is glad to be working with others who want it to succeed as much as she does. The best part of her job is seeing the language grow.

Johns was one of the elementary school

students who was pulled out of Seminole Elementary in Okeechobee to attend the tribe’s pull out program, which ultimately led to the creation of PECS.

As the head arts and crafts teacher, Johns’ challenge is to manage all the projects each grade level does throughout the year.

“We do what we can do here,” Johns said.

“Even the small amount they get exposed to at school is better than not getting it at all. I’m thankful that I have the opportunity to be part of this and part of a family that’s helping each other. I hope no one forgets what a big job we are doing to revitalize the language.”

## Grant opportunities available for advancing tribal nature-based solutions

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The Colorado-based First Nations Development Institute is providing grants and technical assistance to tribes and Native organizations working toward climate adaptation and disaster preparation using nature-based solutions based on Native knowledge.

A competitive RFP will launch on March 4. Six grants of \$200,000 over 22 months will be awarded to support Native community-based projects that build adaptive capacity and disaster preparation through the application of Native knowledge and nature-based solutions. A Q&A application webinar will be hosted on March 20. Webinar registration is now open.

Strategies rooted in Native knowledge

and nature-based solutions demonstrate innovative ways to address human-caused climate change on ecological, economic, cultural, and social systems. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- clam bed restoration and expansion to address flooding and beach erosion
- reintroduction of ecocultural plants to prevent erosion
- cultural burning to sustain biodiversity
- grass farming to address desertification

Funding support comes from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies and First Nations’ Tribal Lands Conservation Fund.

For more information visit [firsnations.org](http://firsnations.org).

## NIEA’s Hill Week to be held Feb. 27-29

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — The National Indian Education Association’s Hill Week will be held Feb. 27-29 in Washington, D.C. During the week, NIEA members and partners engage with Congressional members about Native education issues.

According to its draft agenda, Hill Week’s first day will feature seven Congressional speakers. Congressional meetings on Capitol Hill are scheduled to be held throughout day three.

A pre-convening event featuring an introduction to Hill Week is slated to be held Feb. 26.

For more information go to [niea.org](http://niea.org).

**AHFACHKEE**  
From page 1B

“The families and community are woven into the fabric of the school,” Zepeda said. “This new building shows how much the tribe believes in the power of education. Today the doors are open to the next generation of learners and leaders.”

“This building is a symbol of progress in the pursuit of knowledge,” said Ahfachkee principal Phil Baer. “It embodies the spirit of learning and collaboration and is designed to empower students to reach new heights. It will transform lives, foster an environment of responsibility and understanding and create memories to last a lifetime.”

Mary Jene Koenes, traditional preservation instructor at the school, never imagined a school like Ahfachkee would be built right near her family’s camp, where she grew up.

“I can’t describe how I feel; I’m just glad,” Koenes said. “I was sent to school not to lose my culture, but to learn a tool: English.”

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. said it is important for students to have a school to call their own.

“There is so much excitement around this school,” Chairman Osceola said. “It’s been a long time coming and we appreciate what you have done to build this community.”

Although she wasn’t an elected official at the time, President Holly Tiger drove past the school every day for the past two years and watched it take shape during construction.

“Education is an important component of life, you never stop learning,” President Tiger said. “Find something you are



Teacher Kerry Guevara with her first grade class in Ahfachkee's new elementary school building.

Beverly Bidney

passionate about and learn about it. It could be anything. I love the individualism of the students here. They are allowed to be who they are in a safe and accepting environment.

That’s a beautiful thing. They are so happy. That’s what you want in your leaders: someone who stands out and stands up.”

“This school allows students to reach

their full potential,” said Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers. “Education is not just about acquiring knowledge, it’s also about building character.”

“This puts us on the map,” said Brighton Councilman Larry Howard. “Our ancestors gave us the opportunity to do this. The future is here today, and our future leaders are here today. Education is everything.”

Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola noted that as a tribal leader, he listens to people to find out what are their needs. He said he is impressed with Ahfachkee and Pemaayev Emahakv Charter School in Brighton.

“When you have your own school, you can teach your language and culture,” Councilman Osceola said. “We can’t do that in Hollywood now, but you may see buses come from Hollywood to Big Cypress for that. We made a commitment to invest in the future so these children can reach their maximum potential.”

After the ribbon cutting, people reflected on the school. Lenora Roberts has two children at Ahfachkee, an eighth grader and a 10th grader.

“I’m excited that they have a building with everything they need,” Roberts said. “We’ve wanted this for so long and now the day is here. This is very exciting.”

Students were equally excited about the school.

“It’s a good building,” said 11th grader Sautva Billie. “The music room is really great, it’s where I spend most of my time.”

“It’s my last year, but I’m glad to be able to see it completed,” said 12th grader Jaylee Jimmie. “I’m excited for my little sisters to be here.”

“This is a big upgrade,” said student Little Tigertail. “We have our own gym and equipment and all the stuff we need. The building will be the biggest step for Ahfachkee. I feel like my little brother will be happy here.”



Beverly Bidney

After speaking to the audience, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie stands among Ahfachkee students during the ribbon cutting ceremony.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Ahfachkee students Sautva Billie and Chance Frye with former student Billie Cypress say the pledge of allegiance at the ceremony.



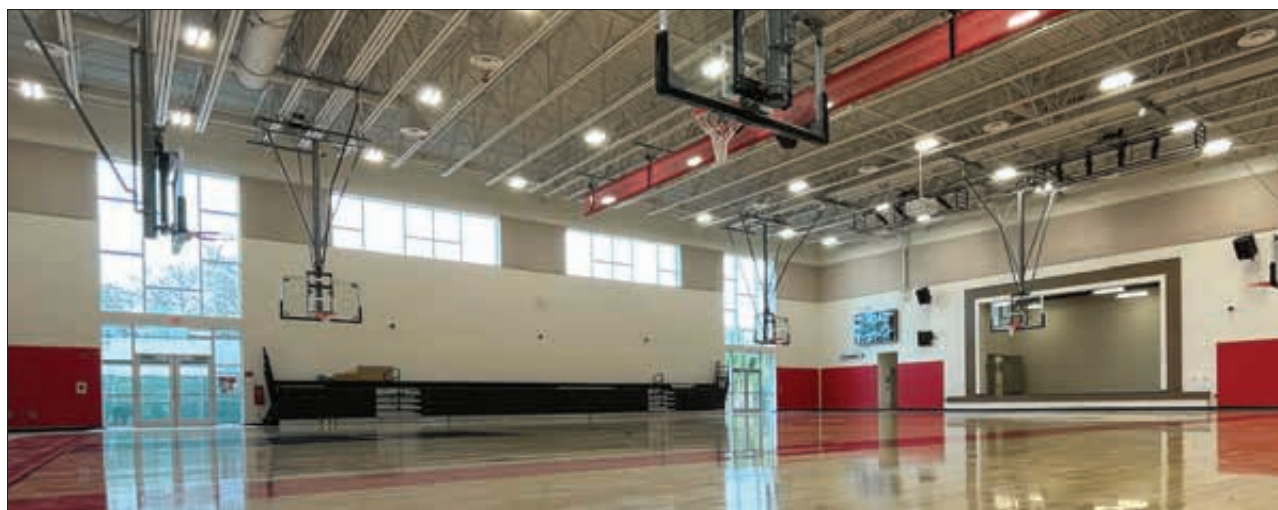
Beverly Bidney

A new wellness room, next to the new gymnasium, features exercise equipment.



Beverly Bidney

The completed Ahfachkee School in Big Cypress with the new elementary school building in the foreground.



Kevin Johnson, left, Beverly Bidney, right

At left, Ahfachkee's new gymnasium. At right, President Holly Tiger, left, Ahfachkee culture instructor Mary Jene Koenes and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard chat before the school's ribbon cutting.



Beverly Bidney (2)  
At left, the new entrance to the Ahfachkee School with the upper school on the left and the elementary school on the right. At right, elementary school students enjoy using the new playground.



# New townhomes available for sale in Seminole Park

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — The tribe's Real Estate Department held an open house Jan. 24 for Seminole Park phase III townhomes that are currently under construction on the Hollywood Reservation. Eighteen tribal members attended the open house; 19 of the townhomes are already under contract.

In this phase, the tribe is building 29 townhomes consisting of 11 three-bedroom and 18 four-bedroom; all with two and a half bathrooms and a garage. The three-bedroom townhomes are 2,199 square-feet; the four-

bedrooms are 2,323 square-feet. All come with quartz countertops, washer and dryer, refrigerator, stainless steel range, microwave and dishwasher.

The townhomes are for sale, not for rent. "We are very excited to be offering phase III to the tribal members. We are excited to see them have their dream of homeownership come true," said Real Estate loan manager Wendy Larson.

All new townhomes will feature impact windows and a metal roof. A dog park and play park are also part of the project.

"The tribe's Planning and Design Departments did a fantastic job working with Lennar on coming together with these

new townhomes and fitting a large amount in such a limited amount of space," said tribal member Tauni Cypress, who also works in the department as a Work Experience Program employee. "I am purchasing one of these homes myself, and I find it's the very best option for someone my age."

The Seminole Park community is located on the east side of State Road 7/U.S. 441 on property that was previously a mobile home park. Phase I consisted of rentals and phase II consisted of single-family homes.



Calvin Tiger

Phase III of Seminole Park includes 11 three-bedroom townhomes and 18 four-bedroom townhomes.



Calvin Tiger

An interior look at one of the new townhomes in Seminole Park.



Calvin Tiger

Roy Cypress, left, and Darwin Cypress tour a new townhome at Seminole Park on the Hollywood Reservation on Jan. 24 during an open house hosted by the Real Estate Department.



Calvin Tiger

The kitchen at the open house was shown fully furnished and included water and snacks for visitors.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right at the open house event are Real Estate loan counselor Shikahra Pugh, Work Experience trainee Tauni Cypress, Real Estate loan manager Wendy Larson and construction manager Joseph Strassner.

# Library, Culture, Boys & Girls Club move to new complex

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — Brighton's Billy Osceola Memorial Library, Culture Department and Boys & Girls Club have new homes, all in the same newly-built complex. The three buildings form a cultural center complex on a spacious plaza east of Pemaeytv Emahakv Charter School.

## Billy Osceola Memorial Library

Library employees began the massive task of moving 14,538 books into the new 5,980-square-foot building at the end of December and were still at it in January.

In addition to books, the new library also has a homework room and tutoring area. On Jan. 5, the library was filled with education staff from Big Cypress, Brighton, Hollywood and Immokalee libraries who unloaded and organized books on the shelves.

The library is a wide-open space with plenty of natural light thanks to its large windows. There are separate areas for adult books, young adult/teen books with cushioned chairs to curl up in and a children's area with child-sized furniture.

"[Former library program supervisor] David Blackard did the layout of the library; I did the aesthetics," said Padmini Dukharan, tribalwide library program supervisor. "He did the hard part."

Blackard was the library supervisor from 2007 until his death in 2022.

The library features a large number of Seminole history books, including vintage books published by the Seminole 4-H Club documenting the kids with their small animals, hogs, steers, heifers and calves.

A conference room, craft room and media area for watching movies round out the space.

The new library is nearly double the size of the old 3,100 square-foot library building.

"Kids have known that library all their lives," said library assistant Joss Youngblood. "[The new library] is definitely more kid-friendly. It's more open and I can see everything that's going on. We expect a

lot more foot traffic."

Students age 6 and older may use the library alone; those younger than 6 must be accompanied by an adult or older family member. The library has programs for all ages including story time, crafts, special holiday events and summer activities in which they collaborate with the Boys & Girls Club.

"We hope to collaborate with Culture, too," Youngblood said. "It's so inviting and spacious here."

The homework room in the library has eight computer stations, white boards and plenty of space for one-on-one help. The separate tutoring space is smaller and more private, which is conducive to individual tutoring sessions.

"It's more modernized," said education tutoring program supervisor Janelle Bishop. "We are bringing it into the 21st century with updated technology and decor. It's a vibrant and bright space."

Tutoring and homework help used to be in an older trailer with little natural light. Typically, between 15 and 20 students utilized the trailer every day. Bishop expects that number to increase in the new building.

## Culture

The new Culture center is bright and spacious. It's filled with items needed to create traditional Seminole cultural items including patchwork, beadwork, sweetgrass baskets, shakers for corn dance and wood carvings. A village outside has a few chickees including a large one for cooking.

The main room is filled with sewing machines, thread, rick rack and worktables. A glass-walled room with shelves for fabric and more rick rack is adjacent to the sewing space. A large multipurpose room will be used for beading, doll making, basketry and making shakers.

"This space is going to bring in a lot more people," said Brighton Community Culture Center manager Diane Smith. "A lot of the time people come in but all the sewing machines are full."

◆ See BRIGHTON on page 6C



Beverly Bidney

The complex as seen from its central plaza. At left is the Culture building, center is Boys & Girls Club, and at right is the Billy Osceola Memorial Library.

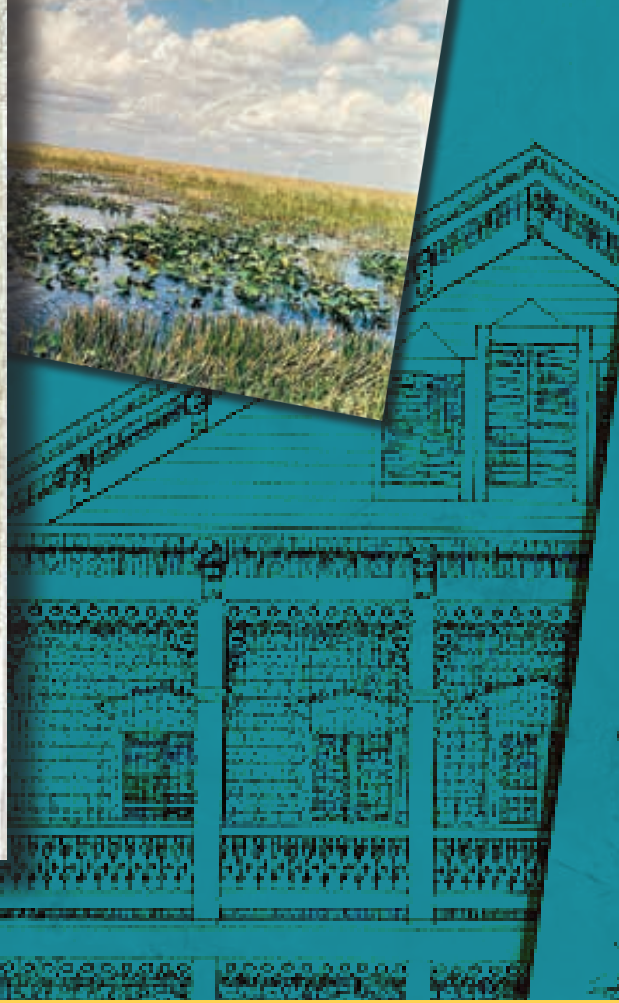


Beverly Bidney  
Library staff from Big Cypress, Brighton, Hollywood and Immokalee along with tribalwide education staff work together to get the Billy Osceola Memorial Library ready for its opening day, scheduled for Jan. 29.



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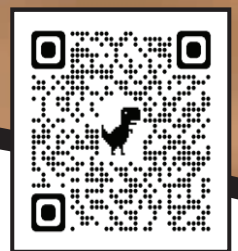


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# Sports



## Defense is key as PECS wins championship

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**BRIGHTON** — The Pema yetv Emahakv Charter School girls basketball team completed an undefeated season with a 28-17 win against LaBelle Middle School in the Around the Lake Conference championship Jan. 24 on the Brighton Reservation.

PECS finished with a 12-0 record and became only the second girls basketball team at the school with a perfect season. In fact, the last team to do it was more than a decade ago when Shae Pierce, Sydnee Cypress, Sunni Bearden, Alicia Fudge and others led the 2012-13 team to an undefeated season.

The 2023-24 version started Kulipa Julian, Eri'Mya McQueen, Eleanor Osceola, Jalene Smith and Azariah Washington against LaBelle.

The teams were tied 2-2 in the early moments before PECS used its suffocating defense to seize momentum and went on a 17-0 run the rest of the half. PECS' half-court trap — led by Julian and McQueen — overwhelmed LaBelle guards.

"What's special about this group is that they love to play defense; they love it," said PECS coach Jovanny Torres. "At practice, we have a trap drill and the player who gets

the most traps gets prizes. They love to work, and they love to practice."

The big 19-2 halftime cushion allowed Torres to send more players from the bench into action, and the Lady Seminoles have plenty of players. Sixteen players suited up.

The game became closer in the third quarter as LaBelle drew to within 19-10 with the starters on the bench.

LaBelle's comeback hopes were dashed when the starters returned. In the final minutes, Julian had a steal and assisted on baskets by Washington and McQueen. Margaria Fudge stamped an exclamation point on the undefeated season by draining a 3-pointer for the game's final points.

Washington was dominant in the paint at both ends; she led all scorers with 11 points. Fudge finished with 5 points. McQueen and Smith each scored 4 points. Julian and Osceola each scored 2 points.

Next season the Lady Seminoles should be tough again to beat when they seek a third straight conference championship. The team loses only four players (Melaine Bonilla, Eleanor Osceola, Cordelia Snell and Jalee Weimann) from this year's squad.

Just like their defense on the court, PECS will no doubt be hungry to defend their title.

"It's all about defense here," Torres said.



The 2023-24 Around the Lake Conference champion PECS girls basketball team with head coach Jovanny Torres, far left, and assistant coach Amanda Julian, far right.



PECS' Eri'Mya McQueen closely guards a LaBelle player while teammates Eleanor Osceola (23), Azariah Washington (10) and Kulipa Julian (14) provide additional defense.



PECS' Kulipa Julian eyes a layup against LaBelle Middle School in the Around the Lake Conference championship game Jan. 24 in Brighton.



Margaria Fudge fires a pass to a teammate.



PECS players on the bench give a hearty cheer for their teammates.



Jalene Smith eyes the basket as she attempts a 3-point shot.



Eri'Mya McQueen lines up a foul shot.

## Determined PECS team wraps up season

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**BRIGHTON** — Pema yetv Emahakv Charter School assistant boys basketball coach Vidal Lavatta said there was a lot to like about the team this year.

Everyone getting along with each other and having a good time — regardless of the outcome of games — stood out for Lavatta.

"They always find a way to have fun. That's a big part. Win or lose, they're having a good time," Lavatta said after PECS' final regular season home game Jan. 10 against Moore Haven.

Another reason to like the team is its never-give-up attitude that was displayed against Moore Haven Middle School.

After PECS fell behind by seven points in the second quarter, the Seminoles rallied in the third quarter. Derrick McQueen hit a 3-pointer to close the deficit to one point. Liam Berry sank a jump shot to give PECS a 21-20 lead.

A coast-to-coast layup by Amani Billie gave PECS a 23-22 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Billie kept his team's hopes alive with a steal and layup that regained a one-point lead for PECS, but Moore Haven finished the game on an 8-2 run to claim the victory.



Milo Osceola lines up a shot.

Storm Osceola led PECS scorers with five points.

Lavatta said the team played with a lot of heart.

"They gave it their all. They were really pushing, doing as much as they could," he said.

Before the game, the team's three eighth

graders were honored — Billie, Berry and Logan French, who did not play due to an injury.

Although PECS struggled to notch wins this season and didn't reach the conference championship, most of the team should be back next season, one year older and poised to improve.



PECS' Amani Billie, left, and Derrick McQueen double team a Moore Haven player Jan. 10 in Brighton.

"Overall, I'm proud of these guys and everything they're doing," Lavatta said. "The only thing they can do is keep improving and get better."

# Seminole teams sweep NASA adult championships

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**HOLLYWOOD** — Who could pass up two and a-half days of nearly nonstop basketball combined with South Florida's warm winter weather and beaches, not to mention everything the Seminole Tribe's Hollywood casinos have to offer next door.

The annual NASA basketball tournament — for adults — was held Jan. 11-13 in Hollywood and Davie. In all, it drew 38 teams from the Seneca Nation from New York, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians from North Carolina and the host Seminole Tribe.

Not a lot of arm-twisting had to be made to entice players to sign up, especially those from New York where feet of snow fell during the tournament.

"They always like coming down here," said Courtney Osceola, who not only played in the tournament, but also was a main organizer. "It's a good mix of every tribe."

Osceola, a fitness specialist with the Hollywood Recreation Department, said it was a tribalwide team effort that made the tournament run smoothly.

"All of our Rec departments came together, so that makes it so much easier. We have good staffing that is always ready to help," she said.

She said this was the first time badges were distributed to players and coaches, a move to make sure participants played in their proper division.

The lineup included 15 teams in the men's division, 13 in the women division, four in the 40 and over for women, three in the 40 and over for men and three in the Trailblazer (50 and over) for women.

The tournament utilized the Hollywood Reservation's Howard Tiger Recreation Center as its main court with several games also played next door at the Classic Gym and in Davie at the Jewish Community Center. Food trucks filled a portion of the ballfields



The NASA women's champion Native Soldiers. From left to right are Skyla Osceola, Krystal Bowers, Alicia Fudge, Shae Pierce, Kyannah Grant and Charli Frye.



The NASA men's champion Seminole. From left to right are DeForest Carter, Hunter Osceola, Xavier Osceola, Duelle Gore, Bryce Osceola, Grant Osceola and Greg Carter.

on the reservation.

### Seminole sweep

As for the games, Seminoles teams dominated the men's and women's divisions with a weekend full of mercy-rule wins.

In an all-Seminole championship, the team known as Seminoles outran Eight Clans to win the title.

Seminole was put together by Hunter Osceola and featured a mix of generations.

Seminole's guard DeForest Carter said he likes to come to the Hollywood gyms

because he can see the banner from 2006 when he and older brother, Greg, won a NAYO championship as youth players.

Nearly 20 years later, Carter's role has changed.

"Now I'm one of the older guys. I'm the experience, not the young legs," he said.

Seminole built a 52-30 halftime lead

Former pro player Duelle Gore scored 31 points. The younger generation duo of Bryce Osceola (16 points, including four 3-pointers) and Xavier Osceola (13 points) also provided plenty of scoring punch.



Seminole's Duelle Gore finishes a dunk



Eight Clans' Ricky Garza tries to keep the ball away from Seminoles' Hunter Osceola.



Skyla Osceola sets her eyes on another two points in the women's championship game.



Alicia Fudge looks for an open teammate during the women's championship game.



The Seminoles 50 plus women's team. From left to right are Stacy Jones, Angela Hundley, Carlene Osceola, Virginia Osceola, Beverly Tiger and Shirley Clay.



Shirley Clay, left, and Beverly Tiger try to steal the ball or force a timeout in a 50 plus game.



Everglades City High School basketball players listen to coach Gerald Lewis during halftime of the Gators game Jan. 18 in Ave Maria.

Kevin Johnson

## Tribal players leading young Everglades City High basketball

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**AVE MARIA** — There is plenty of tribal talent on the Everglades City High School boys basketball team.

It didn't take long for Gerald Lewis — the team's first-year coach — to appreciate the players from the Seminole Tribe and Miccosukee Tribe.

"I'm honored to have an opportunity

to coach such great, talented players and with so much potential," Lewis said after his team's game against Donahue Catholic Academy on Jan. 18 in Ave Maria.

The tribal players are: Randall Billie (Miccosukee, Tayin Faircloth (Miccosukee), Homer Huggins (Miccosukee), Kelvin Huggins Jr. (Seminole), Jovanny Torres Jr. (Miccosukee), Jemere Osceola (Seminole) and Mike Petrucz (Miccosukee).

Most of them flashed their skills at various times against Donahue, be it sharp shooting from beyond the arc, making that one extra smart pass for a basket or upping the tempo of play.

Unfortunately for Everglades City, it ran into a strong team that shot the ball better in the first half than they did.

Despite an outstanding first half from Jemere Osceola, whose 12 points in the half included two 3-pointers and 2-for-2 from the line, Everglades City had a 17-point deficit to stare at during halftime.

Everglades City wasn't about to allow a blowout. The Gators came out in the third quarter and played crisp basketball.

Osceola led the charge with back-to-back 3-pointers to start the third quarter. A 3-point play from Kelvin Huggins Jr. on a layup and free throw trimmed the deficit to nine.

Everglades City eventually sliced Donahue's lead to seven in the fourth quarter, but their comeback hopes faded when Huggins, who was a force at both ends, was injured and did not return.

Donahue, which had a 15-3 record as of late January, emerged with a 76-50 win.

Osceola led the Gators with 20 points followed by Huggins with 13.

Lewis loves his young team's work ethic, which was displayed in the second half rally.

"You saw that heart tonight. They never gave up. They kept coming back," he said.



Jemere Osceola (14), who scored 20 points, provides defense in Everglades City's game against Donahue Catholic Academy on Jan. 18.

Kevin Johnson



Tayin Faircloth (2) goes airborne to snag a rebound.

Kevin Johnson



Jovanny Torres Jr. looks at taking a potential 3-point shot.

Kevin Johnson



Mike Petrucz goes hard to the basket against three Donahue defenders.

Kevin Johnson



Kelvin Huggins Jr. leads Everglades City on a fastbreak against Donahue.

Kevin Johnson

## Kashlynn Cooper to play overseas for USA in United World Games

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

Kashlynn Cooper and her young basketball career are going places that not many eighth graders could attain.

Having already played in several states, Cooper (Seminole Tribe of Florida/Wichita from Oklahoma) will take her talents overseas in June. She was selected to play for Team USA in the United World Games (UWG), an Olympic-style competition that will be held June 20-23 in Klagenfurt, Austria. The UWG draws thousands of athletes from more than 800 teams in 17 sports across the globe in an environment that organizers say promotes international friendship and cultural exchange.

"I'm very excited to compete, and see how they do things in another country. I have never been overseas before. This will be my first time along with my family," Cooper said in an email to the Tribune.

Cooper's family includes her parents Rakee and Lorri Stevenson (Osceola). Cooper is a great-granddaughter of the late Jack and Maggie Osceola, and a granddaughter of the late Curtis Osceola Sr., and Tara and Norman Clark.

Cooper knows she'll be representing more than just her team at the UWG.

"I am very excited for this opportunity and can't wait," Cooper said. "I'll be representing not only myself but my family, our tribe, and the Native American community."

Cooper was also recently nominated to play in a class of 2028 all-star game to be played prior to the NCAA women's Final Four championship in Cleveland, Ohio. Selections hadn't been made as of press time.

Cooper began playing basketball at about age 5. She recalled that around the fourth grade she told her mom that she wanted to do basketball training. That desire led to her connecting with Jayden Oliver, a friend of the family and trainer who has been training her for four years.

"She pushes me to be the best version of myself," Cooper said.

Currently, Cooper plays on a strong varsity team at Heritage Hall, a college preparatory school in Oklahoma City. Through 12 games, Heritage Hall had an 11-1 record and won the Bishop John Carroll Tournament. Cooper, a 5-foot-8 guard, notched a season high 22 points in a game.

Versatility is a big part of her game.

"I like to play everywhere. I love to make a move to score inside the paint, but I will also shoot a 3, something I have been coming more confident about this season,"



Kashlynn Cooper

Courtesy photo

she said.

Basketball is No. 1 with Cooper, but it's not her only sport. She also plays volleyball for Heritage Hall and a club team called Dynamite TNT.

Basketball, though, is never far away from her at any time. In addition to the upcoming overseas competition, Cooper plays AAU in the summer for Unity, coached by AJ Hawkins.

"He has multiple girls go (college) Division I in his program, and I am grateful to be a part of it," Cooper said.

Through AAU, Cooper has played in Florida, Kentucky and Texas.

As for Native tournaments, Cooper plans on playing in NAYO (March 28-30 in Cherokee, N.C.) for Skyla Osceola's Native Soldiers. When she becomes age eligible to play in the Native American Basketball Invitational, she also plans to play for Native Soldiers.

Osceola was one of the best high school and college players from the Seminole Tribe, a distinction that no doubt could someday apply to Cooper.



Heritage Hall's Kashlynn Cooper (23) battles for a loose ball in a high school game in Oklahoma.

Courtesy photo

## PECS elementary school spelling bee winners



The Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School second through fifth grade spelling bee was held Jan. 16. The winners, who happened to be all fourth graders, were Maddox Newkirk (first place), center, Tommie Jackson (second place), left, and Serenity Bishop (third place), right.

Courtesy photo



Silas Madrigal, second from left, with his North Park University relay teammates after they set a school record in the 4x200.

North Park

## Silas Madrigal helps set North Park track and field record

### STAFF REPORT

The Seminole Tribe's Silas Madrigal was part of a record-setting performance for the North Park University men's track and field team Jan. 19.

Madrigal and his teammates Ubaydullah Kromwell, Tim Singmandeewised and Jason Adkinson established a school record in 4x200 relay with a time of 1:35.05. The time

was good enough for fifth place at the Aurora Grand Prix in Chicago.

North Park began its season in December. Coach Bisrat Kidane had high praise for Madrigal in a season preview on the team's website.

"He is one of our team leaders and is very driven to help lead the men's 4x4 group to new heights as well as make a big push in the 800-meter race. I'm very excited to see

what he does this season," Kidane said.

Madrigal finished seventh out of 18 runners in the 400-meter with a time of 54.27 at the Carthage's Firebird First Invitational on Jan. 13 in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Madrigal is a senior at North Park in Chicago. He is a graduate of Okeechobee High School.

## Allie Williams earns all-tournament team honor at Iowa match

### STAFF REPORT

The Ottawa University women's bowling team, which includes the Seminole Tribe's Allie Williams, notched its first tournament win of the season Jan. 20 and Jan. 21 at the Clarke Invite hosted by Clarke

University in Dubuque, Iowa.

Ottawa was first after qualifying with a 7,608 pinfall, and placed three bowlers on the all-tournament team, including Williams, who came in second with a 954 pinfall for five games.

Ottawa kept its momentum going

the following week by winning the Eagle Invitational in Belton, Missouri.

Williams is a sophomore from Pearl River, Mississippi. Before attending Ottawa, which is located in Ottawa, Kansas, she starred for state championship teams at Neshoba Central High School.



Ottawa University

Allie Williams, third from left, and her Ottawa University women's bowling teammates celebrate after winning a tournament Jan. 21 in Iowa.

## Track & field standout Tyler Hiatt meets Olympic legend Billy Mills

### STAFF REPORT

The final weekend in January turned into a memorable one for Tyler Hiatt.

The University of Sioux Falls track and field star won the weight throw and shot put at a meet hosted by the University of South Dakota.

Victories are nothing new to Hiatt, who has won several events in his career, but meeting an Olympic legend was out of the ordinary.

Hiatt and his parents – Seminole tribal member Stephanie Bowers Hiatt and Jon Hiatt – met Billy Mills at the meet. Mills talked with the family for about 20 minutes.

Mills (Oglala Sioux Tribe) won a gold medal at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo when he captured the 10,000-meter run. Mills, who grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, has been the subject of several books and a movie about his life and accomplishments. He's a three-time NCAA all-American cross country runner and has received several honors in his career, including being inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame and National Track and Field Hall of Fame.



Courtesy photo

From left to right, Jon Hiatt, Tyler Hiatt, Billy Mills and Stephanie Bowers Hiatt.

# EIRA set to kickoff 2024 season

### STAFF REPORT

The 2024 Eastern Indian Rodeo Association (EIRA) season is scheduled to start Feb. 3 and run through the summer.

Up first are back-to-back annual rodeos at the Hollywood Reservation Rodeo Arena. The Betty Mae Jumper Memorial All Indian Rodeo will be held Feb. 3 followed by the Bill Osceola INFR Qualifier Rodeo on Feb. 9 and Feb. 10.

#### 2024 EIRA rodeo schedule (tentative)

##### Betty Mae Jumper Memorial All Indian Rodeo

Hollywood Reservation Rodeo Arena - Hollywood  
Feb. 3 – 11 a.m. kids events  
Feb. 3 – 7 p.m. adults events

##### Bill Osceola Memorial INFR Qualifier Rodeo

Hollywood Reservation Rodeo Arena - Hollywood  
Feb. 9-10  
Feb. 4 - kids rodeo

##### Brighton Field Day Rodeo INFR Qualifier Rodeo

Fred Smith Rodeo Arena - Brighton Reservation  
Feb. 13 – 7 p.m. - Sanction & INFR Jr. and Sr. events

##### Junior Cypress Memorial All Indian Rodeo

Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena - Big Cypress Reservation  
March 23 – 11 a.m. - kids events  
March 23 – 7 p.m. - adult events

##### All Indian Rodeo

Fred Smith Rodeo Arena - Brighton Reservation  
April 13 – 11 a.m. kids rodeo  
April 13 – 7 p.m. adult rodeo

##### Cinco De Mayo All Indian Rodeo

John Jimmie Rodeo Arena  
May 4 – 11 a.m. kids rodeo  
May 4 – 7 p.m. adults rodeo

##### Josiah Johns Memorial All Indian Rodeo

Fred Smith Rodeo Arena - Brighton Reservation  
July 6 – 11 a.m. kids events  
July 6 – 7 p.m. - adult event  
Call In: July 1 and July 2 – 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

##### Regional Finals Rodeo

Fred Smith Rodeo Arena - Brighton Reservation  
TBA

### ◆ PECS From page 1C



Kevin Johnson

PECS' Storm Osceola leads a break out of the defensive zone against Moore Haven.



Kevin Johnson

PECS' Derrick McQueen dives for a loose ball against Moore Haven.



**◆ BRIGHTON**  
From page 4B

The old space had four commercial and seven regular sized Juki sewing machines. The new space has doubled that with eight commercial and 14 Juki machines.

The center will put out a full program schedule when the building opens and Smith anticipates updating the calendar weekly. The center has four full-time, three part-time staff members and four Work Experience Program employees.

Around events such as Indian Day, Tribal Fair and Field Days, the center stays open in the evenings for people to complete projects. Staff is also available to give individual attention to those who need it.

“When we get ready for events, we get a lot of people,” Smith said. “Now we have room for a lot more.”

Offices for staff include one for language instruction and material development for preschool programs to learn the Seminole Creek language. A large commercial kitchen completes the indoor space.

**Boys & Girls Club**

With 12,649 square feet of space, the new Boys & Girls Club (BGC) building is more than three and a half times the size of the old one. Capacity in the new space is large enough for 516 people; the old one could handle only 82. That’s a good thing since the BGC currently has 452 members from age 5 to 17.

Brighton BGC manager Diana Greenbaum has been working with BGC since 2011. Prior to that she worked at Pematv Emahakv Charter School, so she is well acquainted with the reservation.

“Some kids of the kids I had at PECS are here now,” Greenbaum said. “It’s so exciting to have them in our program. We are on our second generation now.”

The new space includes a multimedia room for family nights and other events. There are separate spaces for 5 and 6 year olds, a youth club for 7 to 11 year olds and a teen room for ages 12 to 17.



Beverly Bidney

**Big Cypress library assistant Claudia Doctor helps organize books as part of a team effort by the tribal libraries to stock the new Billy Osceola Memorial Library in Brighton.**

Each room is bright with a multitude of seating and lounging options, tables and chairs for activities, computer stations, cubbies and a sink in every room. The sink will allow the kids to clean up their own spaces after activities.

“We are teaching them life skills,” Greenbaum said. “We are letting them be responsible for more things. Our biggest goal is the safety of the kids.”

One of the core programs of BGC activities include STEAM - science, technology, engineering, art and math – as well as music and outdoor fun. Outside there are two grassy areas, one for the youth group and another for the little ones and the teens, who won’t use it at the same time. Each has a basketball half-court, a chickee and plenty of space for outdoor games.

Kids may use the computers in the last hour of each day for digital play time. They can play games, but without internet access. When the teens come to the BGC, they put their phones away in a designated

box. However, they are allowed to use their phones during the digital play time.

“We are trying to grow our teen population, but at that age they are doing sports and spending time with friends, so we have to have a wow factor,” Greenbaum said.

The club already collaborates with the library during school breaks and Greenbaum hopes to also collaborate with Culture since they now share the same plaza.

The club is proud of its members of the month recognition program at all age levels. Kids are recognized for a variety of things including behavior, participation, willingness to try new things and more. With parents’ permission, the names of the BGC members of the month are sent to WTIR, the Brighton radio station, which broadcasts the winners.

“I love our new space and what we will do here,” Greenbaum said.



Beverly Bidney

**A spacious room for kids age 7 to 11 at the new Boys & Girls Club in Brighton.**



Beverly Bidney

**From left to right are Education tutor program supervisor Jan Bishop, Billy Osceola Memorial library assistant Joss Youngblood, tribalwide library program supervisor Padmini Dukharan and Immokalee library assistant Dolores Lopez outside of the new Billy Osceola Memorial Library.**



Beverly Bidney

**A room for ages 5 and 6 at the Boys & Girls Club features plenty of light and modern furnishings.**



Beverly Bidney

**At the sewing area in the new Culture Center are, from left to right, assistant manager Stacy Jones, Kashyra Urbina, manager Diane Smith, Harmony Urbina and instructor Clarissa Urbina.**

**◆ AUCTION**  
From page 1A

Some auction items included heavy equipment, such as a large hydraulic excavator, tractors, backhoes, bulldozers and more. Chaska Osceola and Michael Onco closely examined a mulcher – used by the Wildland Fire Department to clear land ahead of a fire – for Osceola’s landscape and lawn care business.

Rita Youngman was looking for a good deal on equipment, cars and anything else that caught her eye.

“I have a lot of land to clear, so I’m looking for bulldozers and backhoe loaders to take down some trees,” she said.

Riding mowers and generators from small to large enough to power houses, ATVs, UTVs and side-by-side vehicles of various sizes and condition were all popular items. But cars, pickup trucks and SUVs were perhaps the most popular items.

Some tribal members purchased more than one vehicle. Ally Posada, who attended the auction with two of her sons, bought a 4x4 pickup truck and two SUVs. Virginia Osceola got a 4x4 pickup truck, an SUV and a Polaris Ranger UTV.

“I drive back and forth to Trail a lot, so the Tahoe was a good purchase,” Osceola said.

Helene Buster won the bid for one of the most popular vehicles, a Ford Flex. She plans to give it to one of her granddaughters.

“It was a tribal vehicle, so you know it was well maintained,” she said.

Cassandra Jones took a practical approach to the auction; she bought a UTV for her kids to use to feed their 4-H animals.

A few of Billie Swamp Safari’s large

swamp buggies and airboats attracted numerous bidders. Some were in decent condition and some were in rough shape. Cory Wilcox bought one of the airboats and lost in the bidding on a second one, but he is happy with the purchase.

“It’s a project boat,” Wilcox said. “I’ll fix it up and get it running; I enjoy that.”

Other buggies and airboats in various states of repair went quickly as well as two never-used aluminum Tracker boats. Other items included about a dozen adult tricycles and some trailers and flatbeds.

Reese Bert was looking for landscaping or welding equipment, but he bought one of the large Billie Swamp Safari buggies.

Mary Jene Koenes bought a 40-foot shipping container, which she will put in her pasture to store equipment.

“I’ll raise it up on concrete so moisture won’t get inside and keep the wood floor from rotting,” she said. “I have a smaller one in my backyard that’s been there for years and no moisture has ever gotten inside.”

The auction was deemed a success. Executive director of Finance John Woodruff said such a big auction might not be necessary again.

“Now that we have a Fleet Department, I hope we plan on disposing of equipment in a timely manner,” he said.

About 150 people attended the auction on the first day, including 98 registered bidders. Tribal members bought about 200 items. The second day had about 50 attendees. Leonard said he was satisfied that they exceeded their goal for the auction.

“The big picture is that we improved our process of getting rid of obsolete stuff that is an eyesore,” he said. “And the tribal members really enjoyed it.”



Beverly Bidney

**Cory Wilcox, center, and his wife, Crystal Wilcox, make a bid on an airboat as the auction staff member acknowledges the bid. They won the bidding for a large airboat with bench seating.**



Beverly Bidney

**Noel Posada, left, Isaiah Posada, center, and Ally Posada try to decide whether to continue bidding on a pickup truck.**



Beverly Bidney

**Audrey Osceola and her father, Eric Osceola, think about bidding as the auction staffer encourages them to do so with gestures.**



Beverly Bidney

**Potential bidders eye kitchen supplies up at the auction.**