



# The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

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## Animal incidents mar May in SWFL

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

May was a tough month for panther, bear and human encounters in Southwest Florida. By May 6, four panthers, one man, a dog and three bears were killed during those confrontations.

### Panthers

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation's (FWC) Panther Pulse database, vehicle collisions were responsible for all of the panther fatalities.

The remains of a 1 to 1.25 year old male panther were collected May 1 on State Road 29, about 1 mile south of SR82 in Collier County; the remains of a 4-to-5-year-old male were collected May 2 on Keri Road in Hendry County; the remains of a 6-to-8 month old panther (gender unknown) were collected on Josie Billie Highway in Hendry County; and the remains of a 2-to-3 year old female were collected on SR29 in Collier County.

On a brighter note, a litter of three male panther cubs was found May 9 in the Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area, northeast of Immokalee.

Vehicle collisions are the primary cause of death for panthers. The FWC encourages motorists to observe all posted speed limits, especially in panther zones, which coincide with areas panthers are known to travel.

◆ See ANIMALS on page 6A

## Tribe celebrates inauguration day

BY TATUM MITCHELL  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Sixty-eight years after the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Constitution was formed, the tribal community gathered June 2 near the Council Oak Tree on the Hollywood Reservation to watch as six elected officials were sworn in.

The Board and Council officials sworn in are Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Hollywood Councilman Christopher Osceola, Big Cypress Board Representative Nadine Bowers, Brighton Board Representative Bryan Arledge and Hollywood Board Representative O'Hara Tommie, who is the only newly elected official; all others sworn in were reelected in the tribe's regular election May 12.

"A wholehearted, heartfelt congratulations to our ancestors for the reason that we're here. ... That's the strength and power that we have of survival to forge the future for our families. Congratulations to everyone in this room for keeping that alive," Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. said to the audience which sat under a giant white tent outside the Seminole Classic Casino.

Tribal royalty, students and members of the community came together to celebrate and watch the elected officials be sworn in. At the beginning of the ceremony, Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Violet Osceola spoke and participated in the Seminole pledges, which were said in Creek by Pemayety Emahaky Charter School students and in Elaponke by Ahfachkee School students.

President Holly Tiger congratulated and thanked everyone who put in the effort to run for office and put themselves out there. Having respect for each other and the positions they hold as elected officials is



Beverly Bidney

Following the inauguration ceremony June 2, the Tribal Council and Board of Directors gather in front of the Council Oak Tree. From left to right are Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., President Holly Tiger, Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers, Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge and Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie.

important, President Tiger said.

"One thing I've learned in the past year and a half is just understanding you're not always going to be the right one or the right answer, but collaboratively you can come to the right answer," she said.

Eric L. Wilcox, regional director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs eastern regional

office, presided over the installation of officials and swore them in.

"The election is over. It's now time to govern," Wilcox said.

All Board and Council members sworn in thanked their families, offices, communities and support systems.

"At the end of the day, you've given me

this opportunity to make me get up every morning and go to work for you guys, no matter what," Councilman Howard said.

◆ See INAUGURATION on page 4A

## 'Beautiful and Proud' Miss Florida Seminole exhibit opens at Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Since the Seminole Tribe of Florida was recognized by the U.S. government in 1957, the matriarchal tribe has celebrated its women through the annual selection of Miss Florida Seminole, who represents its traditions and culture.

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is honoring that legacy with an exhibit titled "Beautiful and Proud" which will run through the summer of 2026. The museum hosted a grand opening event May 28, at which 18 former and the current Miss Florida Seminole and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole attended.

JoJo Osceola, Miss Florida Seminole 2004 and assistant director of the museum

welcomed the crowd to the celebration with a summary of what Miss Florida Seminole means to the tribe.

"These special women have gone on to become tribal leaders, community leaders, business women, aunts, mother and grandmothers," Osceola said. "To our future generations of aspiring Miss Seminole to come, be proud and remember where we come from. Our intention with this exhibit is to honor our Seminole women and to inspire our young people to be part of something bigger than yourself."

The first and second Miss Florida Seminole, Connie Frank Gowen and Mary Motlow Sanchez, were appointed by Chairman Bill Osceola in 1957 and 1958 respectively. A contest to choose from a

group of young tribal women began in 1960, with Lawanna Osceola Niles being crowned.

The contest, or pageant, is a chance for contestants to showcase their knowledge of Seminole culture, tradition and history. The pageant is run by the Princess Committee, consisting of a group of women who are former Miss Florida Seminole who volunteer their time.

"This means a lot to me, to be a part of this sacred covenant," said reigning Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas. "All the women here are strong. We honor those who have done this before and I hope this legacy will be here forever. These ladies all mean something to our tribe and I'm thankful to be among you."

A few former Miss Florida Seminole

spoke at the ceremony.

"So many women have been a part of the program, it has touched so many lives over the years," said President Holly Tiger, Miss Florida Seminole 1992. "It's our version of royalty, but is so much more than that. They are our ambassadors. I look at my time as Miss Florida Seminole with gratitude. The program empowers our ladies to chase their goals, gives them an opportunity for personal growth, a chance to see the world and the country, gives another perspective and opens new doors."

"The program gives you a voice, what life does is give you something to do with that voice," said Tina Osceola, Miss Florida Seminole 1986 and the tribe's executive director of operations and THPO officer.

"The program taught us not to forget where we come from, taught us responsibility and the importance of public service. We learned how to get up and stand on our own. I look across the room at Council meetings and I see women I got to know through the program. We have a legacy to hand down; it's about public service."

"I never had the honor of being Miss or Jr. Miss, but it's a good opportunity to learn public speaking by being that spokesperson for the tribe, your family and yourself," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "You are all beautiful and proud and I love hearing Creek and Mikasuki here today. We are one tribe, but we have two languages."

◆ See PRINCESS on page 5A



Kevin Johnson

A large montage featuring Miss Florida Seminole greets visitors as they enter the new 'Beautiful and Proud' exhibit that opened May 28 at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.

# Alligator wrestler Billy Walker ready to tackle retirement

BY TATUM MITCHELL  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — A barefooted man in rolled up jeans crouches down on all fours in front of an alligator. In the shade of a moss-draped tree and vendors' tents, audience members gather to watch as Billy Walker eases his hand into the open jaws of an alligator.

Walker is a Seminole alligator wrestler and has been for most of his life. His family told him, "If you want to become a gator wrestler, you gotta put your life into it."

Now, Walker is easing into the retirement era of his career and entering a less hands-on role with shows. He spoke about his decision on May 10 at a Mother's Day event with live music and vendors on the Big Cypress Reservation.

"I always wanted to be a gator wrestler, and I'm a gator wrestler but now it's time I put it down. Other thing is, I am 50 years old, and it's time to move on," Walker said.

Within the Seminole Tribe of Florida, alligator wrestling has evolved from practical reasons to performance over the years.

The origin story of it varies depending on who you ask. One version, according to Walker and other accounts, says that a passerby witnessed someone who was

Seminole capturing an alligator in the wild and threw money at them.

"It makes for a great show," the person said.

He said something people misunderstand about alligator wrestling is if they are hurting the animal and the history of what it means to the tribe.

"Sometimes we get people that come in and [say], 'are you hurting the alligator?' Well, you know, I do [no more] hurt that somebody else done by putting a road in the middle of the Everglades. You know, that killed ... millions of alligators, and millions of animals," Walker said. "And they don't understand, if you kill the alligator and the animals and kill everything, you would kill the Indians too."

Walker started learning more alligator wrestling stunts to make a bit of money and teach Seminole culture at the same time.

"When we were younger, we didn't have a lot of money," Walker said. "So, a lot of the tourism stuff that we do, like the arts and craft and wrestling alligators and stuff, that's how we started earning our keep."

Just before the May 10 show, Walker unloaded an alligator from the back of his truck. He alternates between touching the alligator with a long stick and his hands, appearing to feel out the animal's reactions.



Tatum Mitchell  
Billy Walker "jump ropes" the alligator's tail May 10 at a Big Cypress Mother's Day vendor's event.



Tatum Mitchell  
Billy Walker shows the audience the inside of the alligator's mouth.



Tatum Mitchell  
Billy Walker tucks the alligator's mouth under his chin while holding his arms out.

"You can't really train the alligator, the alligator trains you," Walker said.

One of the most notable memories he has of alligator wrestling was in Hollywood. Before a show for Tribal Fair in the early 2000s, he walked by the alligator pits, talking loudly. He said as soon as the alligators heard his voice they started hissing and thrashing.

The people he was with said, "They recognize you, really. They know you're back."

They asked if he was sure he wanted to wrestle for Tribal Fair. He said yes.

"They said, 'They never really did this until they heard your voice.' ... But I had wrestled all of them alligators, and I, back then, I knew what gators did what. Just by looking at them, I could tell which gators did what and what show back then."

Eventually, during the May 10 show, Walker transitioned to other stunts ranging from putting his hand in the alligator's mouth to sitting atop its back with its jaws tucked under only his chin and his arms held out.

Nearly eye-level with the alligator, Walker moved his hand in between the rows of sharp teeth. Once Walker's hand was completely inside the open jaws, the

alligator snapped its mouth shut just as Walker artfully snatched his hand out.

He joked that it was a good nail trim.

Walker discussed what alligator wrestling will look like for him now. Though he is entering a less physically active role, he will continue mentoring others and speaking at shows.

"I'm getting older, and I've been doing it for over 30 years. I think it's time I did some cultural stuff, some studies."

Walker is currently mentoring Thomlynn Billie, and he teaches his son, Jonah. If someone wants to learn, Walker said they should hang out with him for a few days before anything else.

"There's a lot of teachings that we got to share, legends and stuff, like morals of life,

that I have to share with you, and then show you," Walker said.

From his career, he wants people to remember to hold onto their heritage.

"I have pride in what I do and also tradition and culture. Our roots, ... that's everything that I put out there," Walker said. "You know, we still here, we're still living. If you do wander off, go check other things out, come back, get rooted every now and then. And know where you come from, because that tells a lot about who you are."

"And I believe if you don't hold on to your roots, you'll be like a tumbleweed, you'll go away. You're nobody," Walker said. "So, hold on to your roots and who you are. ... That's why I wrestle the alligator."

## Economic forum in Canada to feature Max Osceola III

STAFF REPORT

Max Osceola III, from the Seminole Tribe of Florida, is among the guest speakers scheduled to participate in the Binasi Economic Reconciliation Business and Agriculture Forum on June 11-12 at the RBC Convention Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

A press release detailed Osceola's background in Native American economic development and Indigenous culture programs.

Osceola is the son of former longtime Seminole Tribe Councilman Max Osceola Jr., who helped lead the tribe in its acquisition of Hard Rock International and its growth as a major figure in the gaming and entertainment industries.

The Binasi forum's other guest speakers are Chief Tréchelle Bunn, the first woman and youngest person ever elected as Chief of Birdtail Sioux Dakota Nation; Ashley Callingbull, actress, model and activist from Enoch Cree Nation; Grand Chief Jerry Daniels from the Southern Chiefs' Organization; and Jim Ludlow, president of True North Real Estate Development.

According to the press release, the forum will feature discussions and perspectives on what economic reconciliation is and what it could be. The Southern Chiefs' Organization and Southern Chiefs Economic Development are the hosts of the conference. For more information go to [scoinc.mb.ca](http://scoinc.mb.ca).



SCED  
The economic forum's scheduled guest speakers include, from left to right, Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, Chief Tréchelle Bunn, Jim Ludlow, Ashley Callingbull and Max Osceola III.

## HUD funding includes \$1M for STOF

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced May 13 more than \$1.1 billion in Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) funding for eligible Native American tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and Tribally Designated Housing Entities (TDHEs) to carry out affordable housing activities in Indian Country.

According to HUD's fiscal year 2025 formula allocations, the funding for the Seminole Tribe of Florida is \$1,000,208. The funding for the Miccosukee Tribe is \$100,531.

"HUD has a strong partnership with tribal nations, and I look forward to collaborating directly with Tribal leaders to expand housing opportunities and remove burdensome regulatory barriers that impede progress," HUD

Secretary Scott Turner said in a press release.

The IHBG program is a formula grant that provides a range of affordable housing activities in tribal communities. Eligible activities include housing development, operation and modernization of existing housing, housing services to eligible families and individuals, crime prevention and safety, and model activities.

Presented By Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum Background Art by Elgin Jumper

# Seminole Artist

## EXPERIENCE

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# Community



## Community walks, prays for MMIR

BY TATUM MITCHELL  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Community members dressed in red gathered on the Hollywood Reservation May 16 for a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) prayer walk. Organized by Durante Blais-Billie, Tomasina Chupco and tribal departments, the walk honored and raised awareness for MMIR.

“This is a very important walk throughout all reservations, whether you came from Hollywood or Big Cypress or wherever, we just want to thank you all for being here. This is a walk for a prayer in motion, for those who don’t have voices anymore, those who are no longer with us, we’re here to honor them and keep them in our hearts,” Chupco said at the event.

According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, there are about 4,200 missing and murdered Indigenous Peoples cases that are unsolved, and many say this number is likely higher. An FBI report released in early 2025 analyzes violent and sexual crimes against Native people. There were 25,817 reported cases of violent crime and 8,575 sexual crimes against Native people from 2021 to 2023, according to an FBI release.

Blais-Billie said having conversations about MMIR is important to continue reminding people that this continues to happen.

“I think especially for us Seminole people going through the wars, protecting each other is something you’re really raised

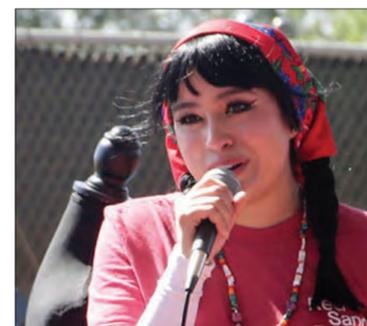


From left to right, Durante Blais-Billie, Courtney Osceola and Tomasina Chupco hold a red “No more stolen sisters, No more stolen Relatives” banner at the MMIR prayer walk May 16 in Hollywood.



Tatum Mitchell

A “No more stolen sisters” is carried during the walk.



Tatum Mitchell

Durante Blais-Billie speaks at the MMIR prayer walk



Tatum Mitchell

Above, Avianna Osceola, left, and Wanda Bowers hold a sign that says “Justice for Owachige Elice Osceola and all MMIP across Indian Country.” Below, from left to right, Mary-Sally Osceola, President Holly Tiger, Virginia Osceola, Courtney Osceola and Angie Martinez attend the prayer walk.



to focus on,” Blais-Billie said. “Being safe is something that our elders have really passed down different methods. ... Community safety is a huge part of our culture, so I think for a lot of Seminoles that’s kind of ingrained in us.”

There are many steps in community safety, but Blais-Billie said the first one is knowing each other and checking in with those you know.

“There’s a saying across Indian Country that culture is prevention, and I think that’s really true

for a lot of different aspects in community protection,” Blais-Billie said. “If we’re reconnecting to those things that are sacred, those teachings that women are sacred, children are sacred, all bodies are important, all people of all genders are valuable. If we’re really recentering those cultural teachings, that helps us keep each other safe, it helps us value each other and really see each other as relatives rather than just neighbors or people we go to school with.”

Community members and tribal employees gathered at the aimasium, walked with signs and prayers and shared a meal afterward.

“I hope the people that came today feel really empowered to be that safe space for people in their family. I think that’s how we really tackle this issue, making sure everybody has access to resources,” Blais-Billie said. “Especially here in the Seminole Tribe because we’re so blessed with amazing

governmental departments and amazing healthcare, but our issue is that people might not know the faces to reach out to or feel comfortable starting those conversations. So, my hope is that we encourage people to have this not just be an event, but a continued conversation in their families, in their classrooms, with their friends.”

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◆ **INAUGURATION**  
From page 1A

"At the end of the day, there's going to be peaches and cream, and some days there's going to be some storms out there. But normally, [when you] weather the storm, there's always a brighter day ahead.

So again, I want to thank my community for giving me this opportunity," he said. "As a representative, I will continue to support initiatives that are in the best interest of our people. And let's not forget, it is our duty as a tribe to empower the next generation. As Council members, it is our responsibility to ensure the policies that we enact today to lay that foundation,"

Councilwoman Billie said. Board Rep. Alredge emphasized improving tribal value in central tribal Florida businesses and being a transparent leader. "I look forward to working in community our efforts to make sure we create a stronger collaboration together and make sure that all of the decisions that we make are for the

betterment of the title shareholders," Rep. Alredge said. "And to the title shareholders, I will make sure I remain committed to you and earn your trust every day. I'll make sure that I work hard and stay dedicated and have good communication with me. ... So, in closing, I'd like to emphasize that our tribe is built on community, so let's stay together in one and continue to grow and make this

tribe prosperous." Guests in attendance included Chairman of the Miccosukee Tribe Talbert Cypress, Assistant Chairman of the Miccosukee Tribe Lucas Osceola, U.S. Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, City of Hollywood Mayor Josh Levy and Broward County Commissioner Alexandra Davis.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie, Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge and Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers are sworn in.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola are sworn in.



Beverly Bidney

Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas and students from Pemaetv Emahakv Charter School say the Seminole pledge in Creek.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Seminole Color Guard's Coleman Josh, Curtis Motlow, Gary McInturff and Sallie Josh perform the Presentation of Colors at the start of the inauguration ceremony.



Beverly Bidney

Paul Bowers watches the ceremony.



Beverly Bidney

Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Violet Osceola and Ahfachkee School students say the Seminole pledge in Elaponke.



Beverly Bidney

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., right, congratulates Council representatives after they were sworn in.

**STOF May 12 regular election results**

*Tribal Council*

**Big Cypress**

1. Mariann Billie 143
2. Manuel Tiger 112
3. Wesley Garcia 4

**Brighton**

1. Larry Howard 141
2. Helene Buster 75

**Hollywood**

1. Chris Osceola 163
2. Francine Osceola 104
3. Krystle Young 7
4. Raymond Stewart Jr. 5

*Board of Directors*

**Big Cypress**

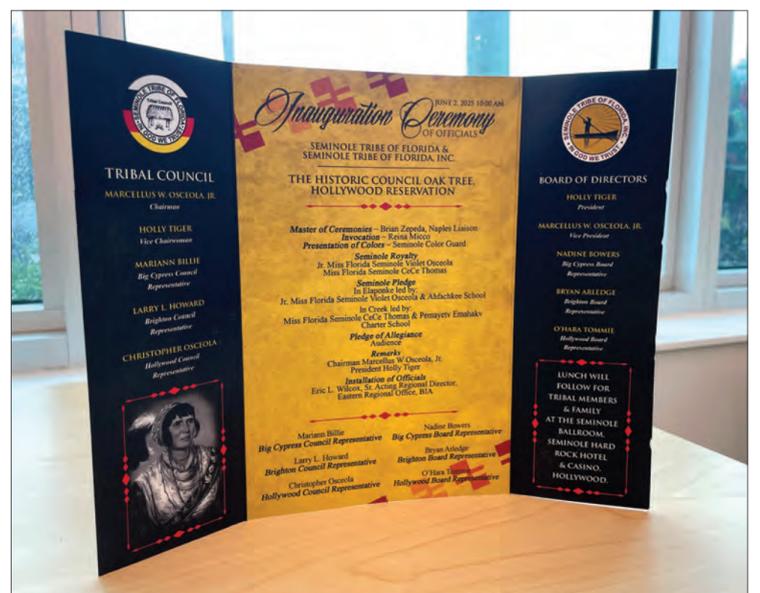
1. Nadine Bowers 114
2. Pauletta Bowers 101
3. Carradine Billie 44

**Brighton**

1. Bryan Arledge 210

**Hollywood**

1. O'Hara Tommie 167
2. Erica Deitz 77
3. Wilson Bowers 43



Kevin Johnson

The inauguration ceremony program.

◆ **PRINCESS**  
From page 1A

The exhibit meanders through the museum galleries with displays of crowns, clothing, photos and videos. One area of the exhibit was designed for more photos to be added.

"We have the "great wall" where we want former princesses to add their own photos from their experience as Miss Florida Seminole," said museum director Gordon Wareham. "The exhibit is supposed to grow all year long. We want your memories and your photos."

As the former princesses explored the exhibit they reminisced about their time as Miss Florida Seminole.

"It's so cool to see the different crowns, but we all represented our tribe and became its ambassadors," said Thomas, whose cousin D'Anna Osceola wore the crown in 2008 and her grandmother Dorothy Tommie ran for the title the first year a pageant was held.

Another feature of the exhibit is a video of former Miss Florida Seminoles talking about what serving as princess meant to them.

"You represent it every day with or without the crown," said Gowen, 1957.

"I still feel like I'm representing my tribe," said Niles, 1960. "Miss Florida Seminole meant more to me because I felt like I was doing something for my tribe."

"It [the pageant] was pretty small back then," said Wanda Bowers, 1969. "One year it would be in Hollywood, then the next year in Big Cypress and then in Brighton. Now it's gotten so big."

"Once a princess, always a princess," said Mercedes Osceola, 2001.

"Miss Florida Seminole gave me a voice for myself," said Kirsten Doney, 2016. "I was shy but it gives you confidence to always be a voice for yourself and the tribe."

"I was able to connect with other tribal royalty and build a community outside of Florida," said Cheyenne Kippenberger, 2018. "I know who I am and where I come from."



Part of the 'Beautiful and Proud' exhibit at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum features the first Miss Florida Seminole, Connie Frank Gowen (1957), and the original crown she wore.



Miss Florida Seminole JoJo Osceola (2004) speaks at the exhibit's opening ceremony.



From left to right, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie, Miss Florida Seminole CeCe Thomas and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Violet Osceola look at a Princess Pageant cape and skirt courtesy of JoJo Osceola.



From right to left, Miss Florida Seminoles Holly Tiger (1992), Thomlynn Billie (2023) and Alice Billie (1997).



The princess trophy crown worn by 1969 Miss Florida Seminole Wanda Bowers is displayed in the exhibit.



The exhibit's entrance.



From left to right, Miss Florida Seminoles Lawanna Osceola Niles, (1960) Cheyenne Kippenberger (2018), Tina Osceola (1986) and Erica Deitz (1993).

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## Apolonia Nunez qualifies to be Florida General Contractor

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Apolonia Nunez is about to become a rare young woman in the field of General Contractors in Florida. She passed the state exams in April and is about to receive her license.

Nunez's parents David and Anita Nunez own a construction business, Seminole Design Build in Okeechobee, and she was raised around construction sites. Nunez has always admired the idea of creating buildings that will be used for years to come.

After earning her certificate at the Gold Coast Schools, she took the three rigorous state General Contractor exams, repeatedly. Each exam was 4 1/2 to 6 1/2 hours long.

"There was a time when I had to seriously ask myself whether passing this test was even a real possibility for me," Nunez said. "One of them, in particular, was especially challenging. The passing score was 70%, and I found myself repeatedly making the two and a half hour drive to the testing center, only to score a 68.3% — just one question shy of what I needed. I did that four or five times before I finally passed. When I did, I exceeded the requirement by about ten points."

The construction industry in Florida is dominated by men, but about 13.3% of the workforce is women, the third highest of any state after Alaska, Hawaii and Delaware, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The General Contractor license will allow Nunez to build commercial and residential properties throughout the state. A General Contractor oversees and coordinates all aspects of a construction project including securing permits, hiring subcontractors, managing the job site and more.

"I grew up watching my parents build and it was really fulfilling to see," Nunez said. "I would like to build something where somebody can make their dreams come true. It's exciting and I'm looking forward to getting my feet wet."

Passing the state exams and getting her license has given Nunez the confidence to consider taking the national exam at some



Courtesy photo

Apolonia Nunez and her father, David Nunez, attend a ground breaking for a playground in Okeechobee in 2018.

point and become certified in multiple states.

"I often tell people that drive and perseverance will carry you further than any supposed natural talent," Nunez said. "Becoming a General Contractor is well within reach for many—it starts with the belief that you're capable. That was probably the major lesson for me through this experience. People sometimes assume it came easily to me, thinking I must learn things quickly. But that couldn't be further from the truth. I wouldn't say I'm especially smart—just curious, persistent, and unwilling to quit."

## Immokalee celebrates Mother's Day



Beverly Bidney

The Immokalee Reservation held a Mother's Day celebration May 22. From left to right, Cesar Carrillo, Kenai Micco, Leatrice Cypress, Aldricia Cypress and Mae'lee Cummings.



Beverly Bidney

Dolores Lopez, Daiton Garcia, Allison Garza and Ariel Concepcion.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, America Ramirez, Mary Jane Ramirez, Miracle Martinez, Nickolas Ramirez, Cyiah Avila and Hannah Barnhart.



Beverly Bidney

Michelle Ford, left, and Chelsey Ford.

## Tribe partners with FGCU Water School

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Tribal Council recently approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with The Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers to work together on projects related to water and the environment on the reservations.

"The MOU was developed with the protection of the Tribes data sovereignty and governance as the central component," said Paul Backhouse, senior director, Environmental Protection Office. "By providing a framework for collaborative projects to be proposed, while protecting the Tribe as each project, will also require subsequent approval from the Tribe."

The Water School has world-class experts on staff — including professors who cover many areas of the environment — and numerous modern instruments, equipment and laboratories.

The Water School reached out to the tribe when it was launched in 2022. Backhouse, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie and staff toured the university and participated in a think tank to talk about possible collaboration opportunities. The faculty spoke about their expertise, listened to the challenges facing the tribe and mapped out areas in which they could cooperate.

The EPO team was focused on a five-year plan with water quality at the top of the list of priorities. One of the tribe's concerns is algae blooms. Professor Barry Rosen is a leading expert on algae and can work with EPO on high-end analysis.

"We want to study and understand specifically what causes [algae blooms] so

we know what to do next time, or not to do," Backhouse said.

"We want a synergistic relationship with the tribe," said Brian Bovard, FGCU Water School associate dean of student and faculty affairs. "The Seminoles have been on this landscape for a very long time and understand it better than we do. We have all been affected by water issues."

Greg Tolley, Water School dean and professor, hopes the partnership will increase the tribe's scientific capacity through access to FGCU's latest instruments and equipment.

"Indigenous knowledge is very compatible with western science and shouldn't be viewed as competitive," Tolley said. "We can appreciate each other's world view and combine them. Data sovereignty is very important to the tribe. We understand the tribe owns the data and will decide whether or not the data will be made public for each project."

Tolley believes the collaboration with the tribe will be good for tribal students and other FGCU students.

"We would like to make tribal students feel comfortable here," Tolley said. "It's a huge benefit for students to learn how other cultures live on and use the land. They will all gain a fuller appreciation of the human experience."

Backhouse wants to build opportunities for tribal and FGCU students to engage and work together.

"They have made us feel really welcome," Backhouse said. "I think we have found an ally we can really work with."

"The MOU is just the beginning," Tolley said. "There are a lot of possible projects we can't even foresee now. The main thing is that the tribe will choose what projects are in their best interest."

## Brighton honors its moms



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Chastity Harmon, President Holly Tiger and Beulah Gopher.



Calvin Tiger

A festive atmosphere filled the Brighton community gym May 13 for the reservation's Mother's Day celebration. From left to right, Laverne Thomas and Lexi Thomas with Courtney Osceola, from the President/Vice Chairwoman's Office.



Calvin Tiger

Brighton Councilman Larry Howard talks to the Mother's Day attendees.



Calvin Tiger

Jo Johns, left, from the Brighton Council's Office, hands out gift bags, including to Dana Osceola.

## ANIMALS From page 1A

The Florida panther was added to the state endangered list in 1958 and federally listed as endangered on the first federal Endangered Species List in 1967. There are estimated to be only about 120-230 adult panthers in the state, most of which live in southwest Florida.

Panthers normally live in remote, undeveloped areas but with the amount of new development occurring in the state, the chance of an encounter grows more common. FWC has a list of guidelines for what to do if someone comes across a panther in the wild. They are:

- Keep children within sight and close to you. Pick up small children so they don't panic and run.
- Give the panther space. They will typically avoid a confrontation, so give them a way to escape.
- Do not run. Running may stimulate a panther's instinct to chase. Stand and

face the animal, make eye contact to let the panther know you are aware of its presence.

- Avoid crouching or bending over. That makes you look smaller, resembling a prey-sized animal.
- Appear larger. Make gestures that indicate you are not prey and that you may be a danger to the panther. Raise your arms, open your jacket, throw stones, branches or whatever you can reach without bending over or turning your back, wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice.
- Fight back if attacked. There has never been a verified panther attack in Florida. In western states, where attacks by cougars have occurred rarely, potential victims have fought back successfully with rocks, sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools and bare hands. Since large cats usually try to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the animal.

### Bears

FWC announced the first fatal Florida black bear attack in state history was

reported May 5 south of the Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area off SR29 in Collier County. Robert Markel, 89, and his dog were killed by one or more bears, according to FWC.

Markel's remains were found about 100 yards from his home. FWC found evidence indicating a physical encounter between a bear and a person, a dog recently killed by a bear nearby and signs that the bear entered the victim's home.

FWC guidelines outline the agency's response when faced with situations that require removal of a bear for public safety. Agency officers killed three bears suspected of being involved in the attack and sent the DNA samples to a Gainesville lab for testing.

Florida's black bear population, once classified as threatened, has rebounded in recent decades. The state has more than 4,000 black bears, according to the FWC. Bear sightings and interactions with people have become more common.

FWC is considering a proposed bear hunt in December, which would be the first in a decade. The proposal will be considered

at a meeting to be held in Ocala in late May.

During the last hunt in 2015, permits were sold without restriction, and 305 bears were killed in just over two days. The state has not permitted bear hunting since then, but FWC voted May 25 to approve a proposal for a hunt in December. The rules are scheduled to be finalized by in August and would likely limit the permits and grant them only through a lottery.

Florida black bears are found in every area of the state. Males can weigh between 250 and 400 pounds, require a 62 square mile range and tend to be risk takers. Females weigh between 125 and 250 pounds, need a range of just 15 square miles and are more secretive than males.

The bear diet consists mostly of plants and insects; about 80% plants and 16% insects. Only 4% of their meals are meat. They mostly forage for nuts and berries.

FWC guidelines on what to do during a bear encounter include:

- Never approach a bear, keep your distance. If a bear changes its behavior because you're there, you are too close.

If you encounter a bear at close range, stand with arms raised, back up slowly and speak to the bear in a calm, assertive voice.

- Do not turn your back, play dead or run from a black bear.
- Make sure you are in a secure area, such as a car or building, and the bear has a clear escape route, then scare the bear away with loud noises, like yelling, blowing a whistle, or using an air or car horn.
- Install a motion-activated device, such as flood lights, a water sprinkler or audio alarm, to temporarily scare the bear off so you can remove or secure attractants.
- Report any bear threatening the safety of people, pets or livestock, or causing property damage to the FWC (see back cover).
- Walk dogs on a non-retractable leash and be aware of your surroundings. Dogs can trigger defensive behaviors from bears.
- Alert neighbors of bear activity in your community and share information on how to avoid conflicts with bears.

## Seminole art Sale to be held at Seminole Hard Rock Tampa

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**TAMPA** — The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum will present the fifth installment of its "Seminole Artist Experience Art Sale," taking place for the first time at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa on June 21, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Hard Rock Event Center. This free public event will showcase a vibrant collection of fine art by Seminole artists.

Attendees can enjoy live painting demonstrations, explore original artwork exhibitions, and experience handcrafted works such as Seminole sweetgrass basketmaking, and other traditional art forms by Native Florida Seminole artists.

In addition to visual artistry, guests

will experience live musical soundscapes, oral storytelling traditions, and a Pow Wow exhibition dance performance by Little Big Mountain's Iron Horse Dancers. The celebration will also feature wildlife and critter shows by Pharoah's Wildlife Kingdom.

Guests can also indulge in fresh traditional Seminole frybread samples prepared by Seminole community members.

The Seminole Artist Experience Art Sale series began at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in July 2022. The unique celebration of Seminole art and culture will return to Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee in July with details to be announced soon.

For more information, visit [ahthahiki.com/seminole-artist-experience-art-sale/](http://ahthahiki.com/seminole-artist-experience-art-sale/).

## Hard Rock adds to memorabilia archive with majority purchase of Las Vegas company

STAFF REPORT

Hard Rock International's vast memorabilia archive – more than 88,000 pieces – is expanding.

In a May 23 press release, HRI announced its majority acquisition of Las Vegas-based Globe Entertainment and Media Corp (GEM), which has one of the world's largest private archives of music, celebrity and film photography assets.

According to the release, the acquisition includes images of some of the world's most renowned celebrities, entertainers and pop figures; autographed sports equipment and portraits; and iconic concert tickets.

"For over 50 years, Hard Rock has cultivated an extensive archive of music memorabilia so our guests can experience and celebrate the artists they love from pop culture moments they cherish," said Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, in the release. "With the acquisition of Globe Entertainment and Media Corp, we now add an extraordinary visual archive to our



Globephotos.com

Globe and Entertainment Media Group's website features celebrity photos for sale, including, from left to right, Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley and The Beatles.

legacy that not only opens new doors in the collectibles market but allows us to preserve cultural history."

GEM's website ([globephotos.com](http://globephotos.com)) features photos for sale of some of the biggest names in the past 100 years in film, music, politics, sports and more. Among the photos is a wink from Elvis Presley and a smile from John F. Kennedy. Photos show The Beatles doing everything from skiing to golfing to drinking tea. Amelia Earhart is shown climbing into a plane and Frank

Sinatra sitting in a Thunderbird car.

"The Globe collection stands as the guardian of one of the world's most extensive collections of iconic pop culture imagery," said Klaus Moeller, CEO and cofounder of GEM, in the release. "By joining forces with Hard Rock, we're giving these incredible images a global stage, while entering an exciting new era where art, nostalgia and commerce converge."

## Seminole Gaming/Hard Rock earns gold standard in best managed company program

STAFF REPORT

**HOLLYWOOD** — Seminole Gaming/Hard Rock International - owned by the Seminole Tribe of Florida - has been named a gold standard 2025 U.S. Best Managed Company. It is one of only two businesses in Florida to attain the honor, which is sponsored by Deloitte Private and The Wall Street Journal.

The list of 61 winners in the U.S. was released May 14. It includes Tampa-based Coca-Cola Beverages Florida, a gold standard winner.

Being on the best managed list for five consecutive years earned Seminole Gaming/HRI the gold standard recognition.

"This honor reflects the exceptional talent and dedication of our nearly 65,000

team members worldwide whose collective efforts and commitment to excellence fosters an inspiring workplace culture and extraordinary guest experiences," Jim Allen, chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, said in a press release.

The honorees are private companies that have excelled in areas such as "strategic planning and execution, a commitment to their people, as well as maintaining financial performance and governance," according to the release.

The honor adds to a lengthy list of awards and recognition received by Seminole Gaming/HRI in recent years, including being among the best employers for diversity, women and new graduates, and for social impact and customer experience.

## David Lee Roth coming to Hollywood, Tampa

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Rock singer David Lee Roth will perform at Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on July 31 at 8 p.m. On Aug. 3, he will perform

at 8 p.m. at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Tampa Event Center.

Tickets start at \$55 for the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood event. All seats are reserved. Tickets are available at [www.myHRL.com](http://www.myHRL.com). Doors open

one hour before showtime.

Tickets starting at \$130 are available via [casino.hardrock.com](http://casino.hardrock.com) and Ticketmaster for the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa event.

## Tim McGraw to play Hard Rock Live

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**HOLLYWOOD** — Country music star Tim McGraw is coming to Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on Sept. 13 at 8 p.m.

Tickets start at \$85. Tickets are available at [www.myHRL.com](http://www.myHRL.com). Doors open one hour before showtime.

McGraw, the son of the late former Major League pitcher Tug McGraw, has several worldwide accomplishments,

including over 103 million records, 49 No. 1 singles, and 19 No. 1 albums. He ranks second-most in No. 1 country albums in the U.S. behind only George Strait.

## Gumball 3000 and Hard Rock International extend partnership

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The luxury car rally known as Gumball 3000 and Hard Rock International announced May 21 a five-year extension to their partnership making Hard Rock the official entertainment partner and official hotel partner for Gumball 3000 through 2030.

The next Gumball 3000 drive is scheduled for September with a starting location in Istanbul and a finish line in Ibiza, covering eight

countries along the way.

HardRock has played a pivotal role in amplifying the luxury and exotic vehicle experience for fans and participants. The partnership began with 2022's "Toronto to Miami" Rally, which included a stop at Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood, followed by 2023's European Tour and most recently, 2024's Gumball 3000 25th Anniversary Rally 'Saigon to Singapore'.

"Gumball 3000's celebration of driving culture and luxury

lifestyle perfectly complements Hard Rock's commitment to delivering world-class entertainment experiences," Keith Sheldon, president of Entertainment and Brand for HRI and Seminole Gaming, said in a news release.

According to the release, the future of the partnership includes more global experiences, more stars, new merchandise and more funds for Gumball 3000's youth-based projects around the world.

## Comedian coming to Immokalee, Tampa

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Comedian Trey Kennedy's "The Relatable Tour" is heading to the Hard Rock Event Center

at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa on Nov. 12 at 8 p.m. Tickets start at \$60 and are available via [casino.hardrock.com](http://casino.hardrock.com) and Ticketmaster.

Kennedy will also perform

at the Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on Nov. 13 at 8 p.m. Tickets start at \$59 and are available from Ticketmaster or at [moreinparadise.com](http://moreinparadise.com).

## 'CHiPs' star visits Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino



Seminole Brighton Bay

Erik Estrada, one of the most popular TV stars in the late 1970s and early 80s thanks to the hit show "CHiPs," made a guest appearance at the new Seminole Brighton Bay Casino & Hotel on May 10. Estrada posed for photos with casino patrons and awarded a lucky winner (above) a new Indian motorcycle. Estrada, 76, starred as the confident, upbeat motorcycle-riding California Highway Patrol officer Francis (Frank) Llewelyn "Ponch" Poncherello on the NBC series that ran from 1977-83.



## No stopping Verstappen

Oracle Red Bull Racing

Formula 1 auto racing star Max Verstappen, whose sponsors include Hard Rock (logos are on his sleeves), raises the winner's trophy after capturing the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix on May 18 in Italy. It was his second victory of the F1 season.



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# Bringing home the Crenshaw Slides

BY IRETTA TIGER  
Collections Assistant

**BIG CYPRESS** — Genus and Carol Crenshaw served the Seminole Tribe of Florida as missionaries for almost half a century, having moved to the Hollywood Reservation area in 1951. The Crenshaw daughters, Mary, Carol and Beth have recently donated hundreds of slides their father, Genus Crenshaw, took during his time with the tribe. This is incredibly cool. Having grown up with the Crenshaw family I had a general assumption that I knew all about them and their missionary work. But in the process of adding the Crenshaw slides to our archives it became clear that there was a lot to learn about them and their time with us. These slides are a door to the past, which might be new to some of us, but are incredible memories for our elders.

These slides date back to the 1950s, maybe even earlier. They capture some of the tribe's historic moments, such as the first Miss Seminole pageant. But there are other moments that are just as significant.

Did you know that they affectionately called all the children they cared for "Sunbeams"? The history of these Sunbeams goes back to the 1950s. It's fascinating to see many of our elders as Sunbeams. In the slides we get to see them hunting for Easter eggs and performing in the Christmas pageants. The most beautiful part is just being able to see them as children.

When you look at the dates of the older photos you begin to realize how long the Crenshaw family has been with us. As each daughter came into their family they also became part of our family. They grew up with us or helped to teach us and take care of us when we were preschoolers.



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Carol Crenshaw teaches Christianity at the Immokalee Bible School in January 1975

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



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

A meeting for organization of the First Indian Baptist Church in Brighton, on August 23, 1959.

As we grew so did the tribe. Through Mr. Crenshaw's camera we get to see the tribe develop. We witness the creation of tribal buildings and a few informal ones. Remember the pizza plaza that eventually became SPD headquarters in Hollywood? There's a photo of the groundbreaking for it.

But throughout the hundreds of photos there is another important essential side to this story. It is the whole reason the Crenshaws chose to be with our tribe and that was to share their religion. Even before

they moved to the Hollywood Reservation area they were holding bible school classes, bringing the youth to summer camps and many other gatherings. They were always fun and they had the atmosphere of being among friends.

From Brighton to Big Cypress to Hollywood, we see that these gatherings were an essential part of our communities. In the slides it is evident that the gatherings were always large but remember, they were not always just for special occasions. A lot

of them were time for fellowship after the church service. It's pretty impressive to see.

As the museum continues to create photo albums of the slides, we invite you to come and explore them. They are an incredible journey into the past that we shared with the Crenshaws. Thank you to Martha, Carol and Beth for bestowing them to us. I hope you realize how special they are.

## Seminole author Caché launches official blog, unveils book series under Sacred Lady Panther Press

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Seminole matriarch, author, and spiritual leader Caché (Lesley YG Billie) proudly announces the launch of her official blog, now live at [www.Sacred-Lady.com](http://www.Sacred-Lady.com), alongside the unveiling of her upcoming book series published through Sacred Lady Panther Press — a Native-owned and spiritually grounded publishing company.

With deep roots in the Panther Clan and a mission of cultural preservation, Caché's platform features sacred stories, raw healing truth, and teachings that walk the Red Road. Her blog speaks directly to those seeking connection, clarity, and ancestral wisdom.

As part of her 2025-2026 literary debut, she will publish four books in November 2025: "The Sacred Lady: The Alpha &

The Omega", "The 4 Sacred Agreements", "Seminole Legends & Stories", and "Sacred Lady's Book of Law", and three books in 2026: "7 Native Hands to Heal", "The 4 Sacred Laws of Attraction", and "Chickees to Casinos". Each book is a spiritual blueprint designed to preserve Native identity, restore feminine power, and revive cultural truth through prayer, storytelling, and sacred practice.

In her own words: "I didn't come for applause. I came aligned—with spirit, bloodline, and divine chaos. I walk with Spirit. I speak with purpose. And I write to reclaim our truth." Media assets, sample pages, and interviews are available upon request.

Visit [www.Sacred-Lady.com](http://www.Sacred-Lady.com) to read the blog or follow her journey online @ SacredLadyLLC.



Courtesy photo

Caché Billie

## Memorial Day remembrance at NMAI



NMAI

The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. held a Memorial Day ceremony. Father and son Ralph and Dennis Zotigh (both Kiowa/Isanti Dakota/Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo) performed an honor song and prayer to honor fallen Native service members.

## ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

June 2025

Since 2002, the first week of June has officially been National Fishing and Boating Week. In Florida, the state allows fishing without a license on the two weekends it falls on, one for saltwater and one for freshwater fish. Considering this, it is only fitting to look at a fish bone for this month's artifact.

These bones are vertebrae from a Bowfin (Figure 1). The bowfin (*Amia calva*) is a freshwater fish native to eastern North America (Fuller, 2020). They are often called "living fossils" because they have retained the traits of their fossil ancestors. This kind of fish has existed for almost 150 million years, so if someone caught this during National Fishing and Boating Week, it is almost like they caught a dinosaur (NYSM).

Bowfin vertebrae are the most recognizable fish vertebrae that THPO's Collections gets. When we get a full specimen, the identification is very simple. The transverse processes, as seen in Figure 1, along with their distinct round and flat nature, make them instantly recognizable. Transverse processes are what connect the fish's vertebrae to their ribs. Even when the transverse processes are broken off, they are relatively easy to identify. The middle area that funnels inwards, often called the centrum, is usually much shallower than in most other fish that also have them. This can be seen in Figure 3, which compares different species of fish vertebrae. It is truly one of the more unique species that we are fortunate enough to acquire in Collections.



Figure 1



Figure 3 (left to right): Bowfin, Catfish, Garfish



Figure 2



Figure 4 (left to right): Bowfin, Catfish, Garfish

Fuller, P. (2020, March 31). *Amia calva*. USGS.

<https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?SpeciesID=305>

*Ichthyology*. The New York State Museum. (n.d.).

<https://www.nysm.nysed.gov/research-collections/biology/ichthyology/news/living-fossils-bowfin>



SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - JUNE 2025

## THE DEATHS OF FRANCIS DADE AND WILEY THOMPSON

Three days after Christmas of 1835 two coordinated events ended the first cold period of the Seminole War: The Dade Battle and the assassination of Wiley Thompson.

Talks had been ongoing between the United States and Seminole since the Removal Act, but most refused to be forced out. Relations got worse after the controversial Treaty of Payne's Landing in 1832. American envoy James Gadsden stated the Seminole leaders signing had agreed to leave Florida once they saw the proposed lands in Oklahoma. Tribal leaders insisted that they had only agreed to visit the lands. American military officers present called Gadsden's dealings corrupt and duplicitous, but this didn't stop the government from declaring the treaty valid. After this, the Seminole prepared for open war.

America sent Wiley Thompson to take over negotiations, and things only got worse. While remembered as an "Indian Agent", his title was clear: Superintendent of Seminole Removal. A political friend of President Andrew Jackson, Thompson had taken a hardline on removal. He made clear he intended to use military force if the Seminole would not willingly leave, and decreed (with no authority) that Tribal leaders who objected were "struck from the council."

Both sides prepared for conflict. Americans brought in increasing numbers of troops and weapons, and Seminole merchants stepped up purchase of guns and powder. By winter of 1835 the situation was tense enough that when Fort Brooke was ordered to reinforce Fort King, necessitating a long march through Seminole territory, worries about the danger delayed the movement for over a month. Fort Brooke was understaffed, and Seminole envoys had made it clear they would not allow an army force through their lands. Major Francis Dade, who had only just arrived at the command and was eager to make a name for himself, volunteered to lead the march.

Seminole defenders, led by Micanopy and Alligator, attacked Dade's force from ambush. Most of Dade's force were struck down in the first round of fire, including Dade himself. Fifty miles north at the same time a Seminole team led by Osceola attacked and killed Wiley Thompson outside of Fort King. Newspapers reported the events as murders and massacres, giving the United States government the public outcry it needed to declare open war once more.



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

**Picture:** "The Dade Massacre" by Ken Hughes, 1974, courtesy Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, 2014.6.2



# Tribe's climate team featured in PBS station's documentary

BY TATUM MITCHELL  
Staff Reporter

**FORT LAUDERDALE** — Climate change's impacts range from rising temperatures and sea levels to flooding and droughts. This influences the Earth, its inhabitants and resources in multiple ways, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

So, all things considered, the climate crisis can be an anxiety-inducing topic.

Grappling with feelings about climate change, Ashley Stokes, filmmaker with WEDU PBS in Tampa, decided to take action with what she knows how to do — making a film. Her documentary, "Good Natured", includes the Seminole Tribe of Florida and screened May 15 at Savor Cinema in Fort Lauderdale with about 20 people in attendance.

"I did a lot of research on specifically people who were also experiencing eco grief and anxiety, and how they were moving through it and also creating a more sustainable future," Stokes said. "I had originally pitched the idea because I was feeling really overwhelmed with emotions about our changing climate, and I had talked to some friends about it, and none of us really knew how to cope with it, and kind of felt alone in the process. That's why I wanted to talk to more people about it and find experts in the field."

After pitching the idea in 2023 and finding people to interview, Stokes went through the process of meeting and talking with them before production. She ended up connecting with the tribe's Climate Resiliency Team.

"I had always wanted to include an Indigenous perspective, typically, because I felt that Indigenous people have always been very connected to the land, and that's just like a root of their existence. I felt that it was really important to be able to include that," Stokes said.

"Because this was a Florida centric documentary, I decided to reach out to the Seminole Tribe. To my surprise at the time, I didn't know that they had a climate team. It ended up working out perfectly because they talked about, not only their connection to the land and how we are the Earth, but also that they, we're all struggling with the climate crisis in different ways, and they're approaching it in a way that works best for the tribe."

Jill Horwitz, climate resiliency officer for the tribe's Environmental Protection Office, said she is looking forward to seeing how the tribal community and others react to the film. The documentary is available to watch at [wedu.org/goodnatured](http://wedu.org/goodnatured).

"There are a few tribal members on our own team that wanted to participate, and so they were interviewed by [Stokes] and shared their own personal stories about why climate change matters to them, what makes them nervous, what gives them hope,

what do they focus on to move forward and to try to make the world and their own community a better place," Horwitz said.

Tribal members and EPO employees Joseph John, community engagement coordinator; Krystle Bowers, assistant director; and Cody Motlow, climate resiliency coordinator, were included in the documentary.

"The land and me are one. We're not separate. And I think most Indigenous people think that way too," Motlow said in the documentary.

In the documentary, Stokes explores nature and connects with multiple people and experts about their feelings toward climate change and what work they are doing. She said meeting everyone and getting to interview them was one of her favorite parts.

"I believe that it gave me a broader sense and more hope on how to approach the climate crisis that we're currently in. It was really cool to see that everybody really is working at it in a different way. And it solidified that not only is biodiversity important, but diversity in our approaches is the key to approaching this," Stokes said.

Her other favorite part was filming around Florida.

"I went with a production assistant, and we canoed for eight hours in the Everglades. I really wanted to get different creatures in the environment and the mangroves in general and just be able to sit in that space and be in it. It was a really powerful experience. We spent literally all day canoing, and there were very few people there. It was very quiet, and I felt like I got to really foster a deeper relationship with the earth," Stokes said.

Her team at WEDU was very supportive, and she could not have done the film without them, Stokes said. A good way to start getting involved with environmental action is homing in on individual skill sets, Stokes said.

"I want people to understand that we are all interconnected. So basically, when we harm the earth or other living beings, we are ultimately harming ourselves," Stokes said. "I also want to convey that it's never too late, and no action is too small to make a meaningful difference. ...

While our approaches to creating change may differ based on our unique skills and perspectives, when each of us taps into our individual strengths, we contribute to a larger collective effort that forms a powerful, interconnected web of impact."

The climate team with the tribe is currently working on a Climate Action Plan, which Horwitz said is aimed toward being community-centric to help brainstorm solutions.

"You see how everything is interconnected when you're in nature more," Bowers said in the documentary. "Maybe people don't understand how much people impact the environment. Even though we can go out to a forest and level it down pretty quickly, they don't see how long it takes for a tree to grow or a plant to grow. Once you go out and see how much has disappeared and not come back, I think you really start to appreciate it more and to fear what else could be lost."

Along with spending more time in nature, coming together and having conversations about climate anxiety and solutions can be therapeutic, Horwitz said.

"Dealing with this collectively can be very helpful," Horwitz said. "We're just very grateful for [Stokes] to begin to tackle this topic of climate anxiety and turning towards hope to get other through collective action and individual actions. I think it's a great message and a very inspiring film."

Earlier this year, there was an official film screening of "Good Natured" in Tampa. Horwitz said they also wanted to host a screening on the east coast so more tribal members and community members could participate and see the film. Stokes, Horwitz and other members of the climate team hosted the Fort Lauderdale screening along with a discussion afterward where community members shared their thoughts and asked questions.

"I think it helps to lean on each other, to lean on your friends, your family, your community," Horwitz said. "I hope that you know by us coming together, showing the film and having the discussion, people feel a greater sense of community and that they have that support, whatever support it is that they need."



Ashley Stokes, left, and Jill Horwitz speak at the 'Good Natured' film screening May 15 at Savor Cinema in Fort Lauderdale.

# Health

## Preventing skin cancer in Native communities

FROM TRIBALHEALTH.COM

Ah, summer. It's almost time for barbecues and beaches and pool parties and... skin cancer? From mowing the lawn to a round of golf to attending a music festival, the summer months are full of outdoor activities that involve sun exposure. Melanoma and other forms of skin cancer don't always get the spotlight when Indigenous health comes up — but recent research has shown Native people face the second-highest rates of skin cancer in the United States, surpassed only by White Americans.

Why isn't this better known? Up until recently, Native skin cancer rates were reported as half of what they really are. Because Native people are so often racially misclassified in clinical environments, skin cancer cases are often underreported, as The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Dermatology discovered.

The JAMA Dermatology study uncovered the truth because they did something smart: they focused on data from an Indian Health Service (IHS) population-based cancer registry spanning two decades, from 1999 to 2019. The IHS data involved only patients who belonged to federally recognized tribes. But past studies pulled their data from cancer registries, where Native people are frequently miscategorized as Hispanic, White, Asian, or "Other" more than 50% of the time.

The new research showed the true melanoma rate was 10.7 cases per 100,000 Native individuals. That's nearly double the previously reported rate, which hovered between 4.5 and 5.5 per 100,000 people.

That's a big discrepancy and it says a lot about the problem of inaccurate data. When individuals are misclassified, we can't really

see the size of population health disparities. Those disparities become icebergs, looking small on the surface, while hiding their true disastrous size beneath the surface. In turn, resources aren't allocated correctly, public health initiatives don't reach the right communities, and leaders miss opportunities to focus on targeted prevention strategies.

### Skin Cancer and Risk Factors

Melanoma is responsible for more than 9,000 deaths in the United States each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Men have twice the melanoma mortality rates than women do across all racial and ethnic groups. That's true in Native communities, where one study found women had 9.2 incidences and men had 13.0 incidences of melanoma per 100,000. Men 55 years and older had twice the incidence rate of melanoma compared with women of their same age.

This gender gap is partly linked to several factors. Men are often being less likely to protect their skin from the sun, they dominate outdoor occupations such as construction and landscaping, and their thicker skin has less fat and more collagen and elastin, which make their skin more likely to be damaged by the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Estrogen, on the other hand, can help increase immune response against melanomas.

Native communities share specific risk factors as well. The Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology reported a lower rates of sun protection measures and a higher rate of indoor tanning device use compared to other populations.

But these risk factors point to a positive conclusion: skin cancer is often preventable. Below are practices both patients and healthcare facilities can take steps

to reduce skin cancer rates.

### Prevention and Detection for Patients

Limit sun exposure. Avoiding the sun between 10 am and 2 pm is a good guideline; so is seeking shade whenever your shadow appears shorter than you. Just one sunburn can increase your risk of skin cancer — and about one-third of U.S. adults are sunburned each year.

Wear protective clothing in the sun. Wide-brimmed hats, lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and pants, and sunglasses that provide 100% UVA and UVB protection can protect you in the sun. If you spend a lot of time outdoors or live in a hot climate, look for clothing with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) label.

Apply sunscreen. Look for a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30+ and "broad-spectrum," which means the sunscreen protects against both UVA and UVB rays. Your sunscreen needs to be reapplied every 2 hours or immediately after swimming, to maintain its effectiveness.

Limit tanning bed use. There is no healthy tan, whether it's from the sun or a machine. If you use self-tanning lotion, remember that you can still sunburn even if you look tanned — so keep using sunscreen.

Get checked on a regular basis. If it's tough to find a dermatologist in your area, look into telehealth or sign up to be notified of free skin cancer screenings coming to your area.

We all want to have fun outdoors in the warmer months. Luckily sun safety doesn't mean staying indoors but rather, being smart about sun exposure. Following the right safety practices can minimize skin cancer risk, accelerate survival rates, and help everyone enjoy their favorite summer activities for years to come.

## INDIAN TRUST SETTLEMENT

## Are you an Heir of an Individual Indian Money Account Holder?

**\$38 MILLION IS AVAILABLE TO PAY HEIRS.  
THE DEADLINE TO FILE A CLAIM IS JUNE 30, 2025.**

A \$3.4 billion dollar settlement was approved in a class action lawsuit, called *Cobell v. Salazar*, that claimed individual Indian land, funds and other assets were mismanaged by the federal government. \$38 million is available to pay heirs and awards could be significant.

- Documentation showing the appointment of an estate Executor, Administrator, or Personal Representative; or
- A federal probate order that directs distribution of trust funds or trust lands.



A copy of a tribal, or state, or federal probate order is needed to establish whether the Settlement Administrator can pay the heir(s) directly for the estate's Settlement award.

If you do not have a tribal or state probate order but a personal representative or executor has been named for the estate, funds may be released to the representative or executor and they will be responsible for distributing the funds according to the wishes of the deceased Class Member.

**You must act quickly.**

**The deadline to file is June 30, 2025.**

After the deadline, all remaining funds will be distributed to the Cobell Scholarship Fund, which is managed by Indigenous Education, Inc.

**LEARN MORE**

**CobellSettlement.com**

800-961-6109

Indian Trust Settlement  
c/o Kroll Settlement  
Administration  
P.O. Box 5324  
New York, NY 10150-5324

### Who is eligible?

You are eligible for a money award if you are an heir of one or more of the over 17,000 Individual Indian Money (IIM) account holders whose *Cobell* settlement awards were not distributed. You must submit a claim form with proof that you are an heir. Claim forms can be submitted online or can be downloaded and mailed to the administrator by **June 30, 2025**. More details are available on the website.

### Here's what you need.

Heir eligibility proof includes any of the following:

- A state or tribal probate order identifying estate heirs; or
- A last will and testament approved by a probate order; or
- A small estate document from an approved state in accordance with small estate procedures; or

## DON'T WAIT until you have symptoms!

**Regular check-ups may catch health issues early.** Diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, prostate cancer, and other conditions are more treatable if they're caught early.

Ask your Indian health care provider what health checks are recommended for your age and lifestyle.

Visit [HealthCare.gov/coverage](http://HealthCare.gov/coverage) or call 1-800-318-2596.

# SEMINOLE SCENES



**READING OF RESULTS:** In front of a crowd outside tribal headquarters in Hollywood, Tribal Secretary Naomi Wilson reads the election results from the tribe's regular election on the evening of May 12. Reservation representatives were elected for the Tribal Council and Board of Directors.

Kevin Johnson



**BUSY BAKERS:** Immokalee seniors Linda Frank, left, and Connie Slavik, right, bake banana bread May 9 with the help of Immokalee Elder Services activity coordinator Zakir Esparza. In June, the scheduled baking activity is pizza.

Beverly Bidney

**INFORMATIVE DAY:** Edna McDuffie, center, shares information and registers Esther Gopher, left, and Moses Jumper Jr. as they review the tables of information at the Women's Health Day event in the Big Cypress clinic May 21.



Beverly Bidney



**FABULOUS FAREWELL:** The Pematv Emahavk Charter School softball team honored its two graduating eighth graders April 14. The eighth graders holding their gift baskets are Amalia Estrada, left, and Jalaaya Hunsinger. Joining them are assistant coach Lexi Thomas, far left, head coach Elle Rivero, far right, and the rest of the team.

Kevin Johnson



**LEGENDARY LIST:** A list with all the names of Miss Florida Seminoles is part of a new exhibit honoring the princesses at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.

Beverly Bidney



**BIRDING BOARDWALK:** The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has launched a newly redesigned Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail website. The site – FloridaBirdingTrail.com – includes the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum. The description reads: "Nature, history and culture intersect at the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum Boardwalk on the Big Cypress Reservation. Behind the museum, a 1.3-mile, wheelchair-friendly boardwalk loops through a cypress swamp, shrubby wetlands and open areas where you'll see an interesting mix of Everglades flora and fauna. Wading birds, raptors, woodpeckers and songbirds are well-represented at this site." The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail program features more than 500 birding and wildlife watching locations statewide. A major highlight of the new site is the "Find a Site" map, an interactive location finder that lets users easily discover destinations that match their interests by entering place names, addresses, or selecting desired activities and amenities.

FWC



Tatum Mitchell

**BC MOM'S DAY:** A disco-theme night was held for the Mother's Day event on the Big Cypress Reservation on May 20. A band and several disco-related decorations and characters were part of the retro evening. At left, Mya (Cypress) Crews holds her daughter, Dove, at a photo-op during the event.

# NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

## Supreme Court spurns Native American religious claim over copper mine on sacred land

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on May 27 rejected a last-minute plea from Native Americans seeking to challenge a massive copper mining project in Arizona that would destroy a sacred site used for tribal ceremonies, a weighty dispute that pitted religious rights against business interests.

The court turned away an appeal brought by the nonprofit group Apache Stronghold asserting that its members' religious rights will be violated if the Resolution Copper mine goes forward because it would obliterate Oak Flat, the site in question.

The Trump administration recently announced its backing of the project, which is now set to move forward.

Vicky Peacey, general manager at Resolution Copper, said in a statement that "extensive consultation" with tribes has already led to significant changes to the project.

Peacey added that the "ongoing dialogue will continue to shape the project."

Wendler Nosie Sr., a member of Apache Stronghold, said in a statement the fight would continue.

"While this decision is a heavy blow, our struggle is far from over. We urge Congress to take decisive action to stop this injustice while we press forward in the courts," he said.

The court order noted that conservative Justice Samuel Alito did not participate. It did not say why.

Conservative justices Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas said they would have taken up the case.

Gorsuch, known for his backing of Native Americans in other cases, said in a dissenting opinion that it was a "grievous mistake" not to hear the challenge and suggested the court would have acted differently if the claim were brought by Christians.

"Just imagine if the government sought to demolish a historic cathedral on so questionable a chain of legal reasoning. I have no doubt that we would find that case worth our time," he said. "Faced with the government's plan to destroy an ancient site of tribal worship, we owe the Apaches no less."

The focus of attention is a law passed by Congress in 2014, which transferred the land from federal ownership to Resolution Copper, a joint venture of mining companies Rio Tinto and BHP.

Resolution Copper says the mine could supply around 25% of the nation's copper, with the metal in high demand for renewable energy projects and electric vehicles.

Apache Stronghold said tribal members' religious rights were violated both under the Constitution's First Amendment and a federal law called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Oak Flat has been used for years by Western Apaches, a group of Native Americans that includes various tribes including the San Carlos Apache Tribe, which is based on a nearby reservation. Oak Flat is within the Tonto National Forest, about 70 miles east of Phoenix.

"Oak Flat lies within the tribe's ancestral territory and is central to traditional Apache religion as the home of Apache deities and the only place where Apaches can practice unique ceremonies," lawyers for the San Carlos Apache Tribe wrote in court papers backing the appeal.

According to Apache Stronghold, the site is the dwelling place of spiritual beings called the Ga'an and acts as "a direct corridor to the Creator." The site is used for sweat lodge ceremonies to mark boys reaching manhood and the multiday "Sunrise Ceremony" that celebrates girls reaching womanhood.

An environmental study found that if the mine is built, locations used for various ceremonies would be destroyed, with the land subsiding to create a giant crater almost 2 miles wide.

The case reached the Supreme Court after the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals narrowly ruled against Apache Stronghold earlier this year, concluding that the land transfer did not "substantially burden" the ability of tribe members to exercise their religious rights. A district court judge had earlier reached the same conclusion.

Key factors in the case are that the land at issue was owned by the federal government, not any of the tribes, and was transferred by an act of Congress.

The United States originally took control of the land in the mid-19th century. It signed an 1852 treaty with Apache chiefs that pledged to protect tribal interests, but as with other treaties with tribes, the government failed to live up to its obligations.

- NBC News

## New Oregon law allows tribes to petition for removal of state control from tribal affairs

A tribally backed bill that could simplify the jurisdictional patchwork in Oregon Indian Country was signed by Gov. Tina Kotek on May 22 after sailing through the state Legislature.

Passed unanimously by both legislative chambers, the new law will create a formal process for tribes to petition the state for the reversal of a 1953 federal law as it applies on tribal lands within the boundaries of Oregon.

Jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases on tribal lands is a complex picture that changes based on the Indian status of the people involved, making the crimes the potential responsibility of federal, state or

tribal authorities. Some of that is shaped by 1953's Public Law 83-280, also known as PL-280, which grants certain states jurisdiction on reservations. Many Native Americans view the law as an unwanted imposition on tribal affairs that undermines the basic principles of tribal sovereignty and hurts public safety on tribal lands.

In Oregon, PL-280 mandates that the state exercise criminal and civil jurisdiction over tribal lands.

The sponsor of the new bill, Senate Bill 1011, Oregon state Sen. Anthony Broadman, D-Bend, a lawyer who represented tribal governments and Indigenous rights throughout his career, said he's very happy with the huge support it received from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, adding that it shows a commitment to tribal sovereignty.

"It was important to me that we walk the talk," he said.

Broadman said formalizing the process builds a more equitable system and shows respect to tribes. Previously, tribes had to make requests that had no clear timeline to the governor to begin the process.

The 1953 law was passed over the objections of tribes who would be affected and without consulting tribal governments. It became law just before a federal policy called the Western Oregon Termination Act of 1954 unilaterally eliminated hundreds of tribes and bands in Western Oregon as political entities.

As reported by InvestigateWest in March, if the tribe and state's petition is then approved by the federal government, it would return to a pre-1953 jurisdictional arrangement, giving criminal jurisdiction to the federal government and empowering tribal courts to exercise jurisdiction over civil disputes between tribal citizens, a process known as retrocession.

"Oregon has a history that we need to acknowledge and confront, and the Western Oregon Termination Act and termination era, including PL-280, are part of that," Broadman said.

Broadman said the 1953 law has left public safety vacuums, and its negative effects have disproportionately affected Native American women and children, Broadman says.

"Retrocession just un-does the damaging impacts of Public Law 280," Broadman testified on April 22 before the House Committee on Emergency Management, Government and Veterans.

The power of tribal governments to apply law is seriously limited by the federal government. Due to the Supreme Court ruling Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe, tribes generally cannot prosecute non-Indians for crimes committed on tribal lands, with a few exceptions for domestic or sexual violence against tribal citizens. The federal government retains wide-ranging criminal jurisdiction over tribal lands.

While some tribal governments are hopeful for the eventual reversal of Oliphant and other laws that limit tribes' jurisdiction, they say beginning to remove unwanted state jurisdiction over tribal affairs is an important step toward respecting tribal sovereignty. While the new law doesn't contain the provisions to change jurisdiction itself, it creates a transparent process for tribes to follow.

"Tribal nations, which retain inherent sovereignty and the right to self-determination and self-governance, have faced numerous affronts to their jurisdictional powers, including through the enactment of Public Law 83-280," testified Corinne Sams, one of the nine trustees of the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation, on April 22.

Some tribes sharing geography with Oregon have already undertaken the informal process to go through retrocession, but six tribes still remain under Oregon state civil jurisdiction and five tribes remain under PL-280 criminal jurisdiction. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation has always been exempt from PL-280.

Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation underwent criminal retrocession in 1980, and today is at the forefront of advocacy for empowering tribal courts.

"(Retrocession) is essential to improving tribal self-governance and a further acknowledgment by the state of Oregon of tribal sovereignty," Sams testified.

Tribal officials and legal experts like Broadman say the forced imposition of concurrent state jurisdiction under PL-280 undercut the tribal-federal relationship and have ongoing negative effects on tribal communities in Oregon. The overlapping jurisdictions of state, tribal and federal agencies can lead to ongoing issues, including delayed law enforcement investigations and fewer prosecutions.

"PL-280, plain and simple, hurt tribes," Broadman said. "It took jurisdiction away from the United States and gave it to states. And that in itself — philosophically, allowing states to exercise jurisdiction in Indian Country — that really is inconsistent, again, with centuries of federal law when it came to how states and tribes are going to act toward one another."

When it was passed, PL-280 provided no additional resources or money to state law enforcement to account for the additional resources needed to adequately police tribal lands, even as tribes took significantly more land into trust in the past 30 years. Tribal officials say the federal governments used PL-280 as an excuse to underfund tribal courts, undermining the function of tribes' legal systems.

Most Native Americans face violence in their lifetime, according to the National Institute of Justice, and jurisdictional complexities can contribute to delayed investigations and fewer prosecutions. Distrust of law enforcement, particularly those from outside tribal communities, is a

longstanding issue, and tribal citizens are more receptive to tribal police officers from within their communities responding to calls for help.

"This bill is rooted in respect and a commitment to sovereignty that I know we here in the Legislature aspire to," Broadman testified on April 22.

- InvestigateWest

## Colorado joins the Eastern Shoshone Tribe in managing bison like wildlife

Colorado is joining the Eastern Shoshone Tribe in designating bison as wildlife.

Earlier this year, the Eastern Shoshone Tribe reclassified bison from being livestock to wildlife in an effort to manage the species less like cattle and more like big game such as elk.

On May 22, Colorado's governor signed the Protect Wild Bison bill, which creates a dual wildlife and livestock designation. Some conservation groups say it makes killing bison that cross into Colorado from other states illegal.

Jason Baldes is Eastern Shoshone and heads up the Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative. He says Colorado's move shows growing public support for bison restoration. "And the importance of people allowing this animal to exist and not be commodified, but really have an opportunity to exist on the landscape and protect it as wildlife," he said.

Michael Saul, regional director for Defenders of Wildlife's Rocky Mountains and Great Plains Program, said the change means the Colorado Department of Agriculture is no longer the sole entity managing bison.

"This now opens the door for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Southern Ute Tribe and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe to come up with a management plan for how to manage those dispersing bison as wildlife under tribal and state wildlife agency co-management," he said.

- Wyoming Public Radio

## Round Valley Indian Tribe sues California and county law enforcement after cannabis raids

The Round Valley Indian Tribe sued the sheriffs of Mendocino and Humboldt counties, along with the California Highway Patrol, [in April], claiming officers illegally raided cannabis cultivators on their reservation.

The complaint names three tribal members as plaintiffs and alleges law enforcement raids have "terrorized" the community. One of the plaintiffs, April James, is described as a grandmother who grows medicinal cannabis to treat her arthritis and a degenerative disc disorder.

Police allegedly showed up at her property with guns drawn while her 5-year-old grandson was home. The lawsuit says deputies used a tractor to destroy her marijuana plot and never presented a warrant.

According to Katherine Florey, a law professor at the University of California, Davis, county and state police in California are allowed to enforce criminal law on tribal territory under Public Law 280, a federal law enacted in 1953. But, she notes, authorities in the state cannot enforce civil or regulatory law on reservation land.

"The question here with cannabis, and this often becomes an issue with Public Law 280, is what is a criminal law and what is merely a regulatory law," Florey said.

She explained that if an activity is predominantly prohibited, then it is considered a criminal offense, and the state can enforce it.

"But cannabis is a gray area because in states like California, it's obviously widely permitted, but it is not permitted to an unlimited degree," Florey said. "I don't think that there is a clear answer at this point."

David Dehnert, an attorney representing the plaintiffs, said his clients were not involved in criminal activity.

"It's just a matter of these law enforcement agencies going onto the reservation and one — violating the tribe's sovereignty," Dehnert said. "And two — overstepping their jurisdiction."

The lawsuit claims police told James, one of the plaintiffs, they were enforcing environmental regulations. That action would not be supported under Public Law 280, according to Dehnert.

Mendocino County Sheriff Matthew Kendall did not respond immediately to a request for comment. But he told SFGATE that the Round Valley reservation has become a center for cartel activity.

He warned that without proper law enforcement, the region could become a "Narco state." He also said his officers target non-tribal people growing cannabis on tribal land and that the raids were legal and requested by Round Valley members.

Growing medicinal marijuana for personal use is permitted by the tribe.

The lawsuit seeks an injunction against further raids by non-tribal law enforcement and requests damages.

- Jefferson Public Radio (Oregon)

## Appeals court revives tribal lawsuit against SunZia transmission line

A federal appeals court reinstated a lawsuit challenging the construction of the SunZia transmission line, a 550-mile long project, which looks to take wind-generated energy from New Mexico to Arizona and

California markets.

The complaint, which was filed in January 2024, by the Tohono O'odham Nation, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Archaeology Southwest and the Center for Biological Diversity alleged that the federal government illegally granted permits that greenlit construction in 2023, before thorough consultation with the tribes.

[A May 27] decision stated that the Department of the Interior violated the National Historic Preservation Act by issuing two limited notices to proceed before satisfying its obligations.

The appeals court ruled that the plaintiffs "plausibly alleged" a lack of evaluation on whether the area should have been designated as historic property.

"The problem with them putting the power line up to San Pedro Valley is not only does it harm a relatively pristine desert valley but it is horribly destructive to the tribes because it destroys their sacred geography," said Robin Silver, co-founder of the Center.

He added that the latest court decision recognizes that the Bureau of Land Management on behalf of the energy company, Pattern Energy, failed to comply with the law.

"They decided to focus all their construction activities to try to do as much damage as they could, focused on the San Pedro, instead of working on the other 400 miles of their transmission line before the courts ruled," Silver said.

Last year, a district court judge in Tucson, Judge Jennifer Zippis dismissed the case alleging that the plaintiffs were too late in opposing the \$10 billion energy project and that BLM had fulfilled its obligations in identifying important cultural, historic and religious sites.

"We and the tribes were very clear from the beginning that there was no mitigation possible with them picking a corridor or picking a route that goes right up the San Pedro Valley," Silver said. "When all they had to do is go through Tucson."

According to its website, the California-based company anticipates commercial operations to begin in 2026, that could bring more than 3,500 megawatts of wind power to 3 million people.

- Arizona Public Media

## SaskPower and First Nations Centre of Excellence sign MOU to advance Indigenous participation in power sector

SaskPower and the Saskatchewan First Nations Resource Centre of Excellence have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), pledging to work together to find additional opportunities to include First Nations in the province's power system.

The announcement was made May 29 at the Saskatchewan First Nations Energy and Natural Resource Forum and Leadership Summit, which explores the potential for First Nations leadership in the North American energy sector.

"This MOU signals First Nations' openness to prosperity through partnerships and co-development of opportunities and outlines a pathway forward for working together," Sheldon Wuttunee, president and CEO of the Saskatchewan First Nations Natural Resource Centre of Excellence, said in the release. "Opportunities to support the planning and build out of the power system in Saskatchewan will transform our communities, by growing our economic participation and revitalizing relationships between First Nations and the province."

The MOU focuses on six areas: engagement, workforce development, supply chain development, energy development, Indigenous equity participation, and use of EXPORT, a database of training, employment and supplier opportunities.

The Saskatchewan First Nations Centre of Excellence is wholly-owned by 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan.

- From press release

## NY Gov. Hochul apologizes for 'ethnic cleansing' at Thomas Indian School

"Today, on behalf of the State of New York, I Governor Kathy Hochul, apologize to the Seneca Nation of Indians and survivors and descendants from all nations who attended the Thomas Indian School."

Governor Kathy Hochul there, during her visit to the Seneca Nation's Cattaraugus Territory, to formally apologize for the state's operation of the Thomas Indian School which went on for decades until 1957.

The boarding residential school was part of the United States policy of forced assimilation for Native youth, to strip them of their culture and identities, to "kill the Indian, save the man." Thousands died across the country and in Canada, and many Native students were subjected to physical and mental abuse at the hands of government and religious officials.

Seneca Nation President J.C. Seneca, whose father went to the school, said the apology is a step forward in healing for his own people, and relations with the State of New York.

"For the governor to come and apologize on behalf of the state for what happened here, I think it offers the opportunity for us to continue that process of healing, and I think it also shows that this governor has compassion and cares about our people," Seneca said.

Around 200 Seneca Nation citizens turned out for the event, with many either having been survivors of the school or having a family connection.

Hochul also met privately with survivors and their family members before the event.

In her approved state budget, Hochul is ensuring the history and impacts of boarding schools like Thomas are included in K-12 curriculum.

- Buffalo-Toronto Public Media

## North Dakota tribes ask circuit judges for rehearing of voting rights case

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Spirit Lake Nation and three tribal citizens this week asked the full 8th Circuit Court of Appeals to review a three-judge panel's finding that they lack standing to bring a voting discrimination case against the state of North Dakota.

In a 2-1 decision [in May], the panel overruled a North Dakota federal district court's decision that a redistricting plan adopted by the state in 2021 diluted the voting power of Native voters.

"Turtle Mountain fought hard for a fair and legal map. When the state draws unlawful districts, Courts must step in to protect voters — not pave the way for injustice," Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Chairman Jamie Azure said in a statement published by the Campaign Legal Center, one of the organizations representing the plaintiffs in the suit. "We will continue to fight for fair representation."

The panel's decision didn't speak to whether the map itself was discriminatory; instead, the judges found that private individuals cannot use a key federal civil rights law as a vehicle to file cases under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which outlaws race-based voting discrimination.

The panel in its ruling sent the case back to North Dakota U.S. District Judge Peter Welte with instructions to dismiss the lawsuit. If its ruling stands, North Dakota would revert back to the 2021 map.

But if the plaintiffs' request for an en banc rehearing is granted, the case would go before all 11 judges on the 8th Circuit for review.

"Section 2 is the foundational statute that Congress enacted to fight the scourge of racial discrimination in voting, but citizens in this circuit can no longer enforce the right it provides them," the plaintiffs argue in a brief urging the full appellate court to consider the case.

Private individuals and groups previously could file discrimination lawsuits against governments under just Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act without having to invoke Section 1983, a separate civil rights statute.

Then, the 8th Circuit in a controversial 2023 ruling on an Arkansas voting rights case found that Section 2 alone doesn't give private parties the right to sue. Instead, the circuit declared that it is the responsibility of the U.S. Attorney General to file Section 2 discrimination cases.

For more than a year, the question remained open as to whether Section 1983 offered a viable alternative for bringing such Voting Rights Act claims. In a May 14 ruling, the three-judge panel decided it does not.

In a majority opinion, the panel wrote that the language of the Voting Rights Act indicates that Congress didn't intend for citizens to file race discrimination claims through Section 1983.

The lone dissenting judge on the panel — Chief Judge Steven Colloton — noted in his opinion that private plaintiffs have brought more than 400 actions under Section 2 since 1982.

The plaintiffs in their brief point out that the 8th Circuit is the only appellate circuit in the country to rule that Section 2 cannot be enforced through lawsuits brought by private citizens. The circuit includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska and Arkansas.

"Outside of this circuit, every American citizen can rely on an unbroken line of Supreme Court and circuit precedent to enforce the individual rights given to them by Congress in the Voting Rights Act," their filing states. "But as a result of the panel decision here, and the prior decision in Arkansas, American citizens in this circuit are denied that right."

The lawsuit was triggered by a redistricting plan adopted by the North Dakota Legislature in 2021 that placed the Turtle Mountain and Spirit Lake reservations in new districts.

U.S. District Court Judge Peter Welte in 2023 ruled that the new map was discriminatory and ordered the Legislature to implement a new map that placed the reservations in the same voting district.

Three Native American lawmakers from that district were elected in 2024: Sen. Richard Marcellais and Rep. Jayme Davis — both citizens of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa — and Rep. Collette Brown, a citizen of the Spirit Lake Nation and plaintiff in the lawsuit.

"The fair map we secured led to a historic first — a Spirit Lake Nation member elected to the North Dakota Legislature," Spirit Lake Nation Chairperson Lonna Jackson-Street said in a Wednesday statement published by the Campaign Legal Center, one of the organizations representing the plaintiffs in the case. "This decision threatens that progress and weakens our voice in state government."

Marcellais had previously served 15 years in the statehouse until he lost his bid for reelection in 2022. He was reelected in 2024.

Davis was first elected in 2022, then reelected last year.

- North Dakota Monitor

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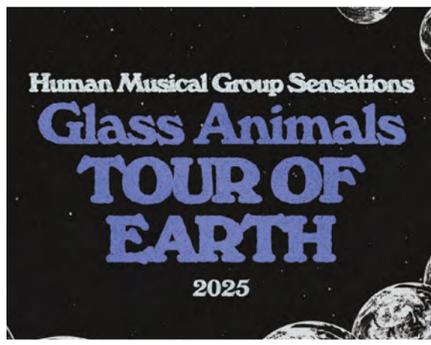
**JUN 5**  
**OMAR COURTZ**



**JUN 7**  
**FANTASIA AND JOE**



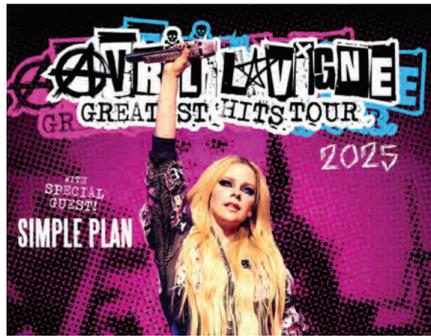
**JUN 14**  
**NATE BARGATZE**



**JUN 18**  
**GLASS ANIMALS**



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**RINGO STARR AND HIS ALL STARR BAND**



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# Education



## Ahfachkee celebrates 2025 graduates

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — Six Ahfachkee School seniors crossed a threshold in their lives when they walked down the aisle in the school's gym to receive their high school diplomas May 21.

Asliyah Billie, Jody Cabral, Gilbert Guerrero, Ian Hernandez-Osceola, Sarah Robbins and Xzavion Tommie were celebrated for their 12 years of hard work and perseverance by guest speakers at the graduation ceremony.

"Today you reach a significant milestone in your lives," Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie said. "Your journey at Ahfachkee is a testament to your determination. As you embark on this new chapter of your lives, approach the future with courage and optimism. Congratulations and may you have success, fulfillment and endless opportunities."

President Holly Tiger encouraged the graduates to embrace everything during the next phase of their lives. She said graduation isn't just the end of one thing, but is the beginning of the next thing in their lives.

"You are Seminole and you walk in two worlds," President Tiger said. "When you go out in the world, learn what you are going to learn and come back, because we need that. You guys are our future."

"Congratulations on this achievement, you should be proud," Board Rep. Nadine Bowers said. "Your future is bright and full of possibilities. Never underestimate your potential. Keep pursuing your passion and believe in yourself. Now go out there and shine."

Lee Zepeda, executive director of Administration, thanked the graduates for "showing us what determination looks like." "Stay curious," Zepeda said. "Learning doesn't end today, it never stops."

Haskell Indian Nations University graduate, professional basketball player and Seminole tribal member Duelle Gore gave the keynote address.

Gore, who played basketball in high school, college and in the pros, now travels to different tribes throughout Indian Country to promote Native athletics, fitness and culture.



The Ahfachkee School class of 2025 celebrates after receiving diplomas May 21. From left to right are Xzavion Tommie, Sarah Robbins, Ian Hernandez-Osceola, Gilbert Guerrero, Aaliyah Billie and Jody Cabral.

"This is a big moment for you," Gore said. "You are young, this is the time to take a risk. The adversities you will go through will

make you who you are. Take care of yourself and be kind. The community supports you so go out there and learn; then come home and give back."

◆ See AHFACHKEE on page 3B

## 2025 grads return to Pemayetv Emahakv

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School welcomed back 15 alumni for the school's annual grad walk May 22. The former students returned to their K-8 alma mater as high school graduates from the class of 2025.

PECS students lined the corridors to cheer, congratulate and high-five the graduates as they passed by looking regal in caps and gowns. Teachers were also excited to see their former students and gave out numerous hugs.

A PECS tradition since 2016, the grad walk also serves as an inspiration for current students.

Principal Tracy Downing gathered the group in the media center before the grad walk for snacks, photo opportunities and speeches.

"You have worked hard to reach this

point and you should be proud of all you have accomplished," Downing said. "Now is the time to take what you have learned and apply it to the real world. Don't be afraid to take risks, try new things and step outside of your comfort zone. It's through these experiences that you will discover your passions and develop your skills."

"We are extremely proud of you guys," Michele Thomas, PECS administrative assistant said. "Your success is our success. You should be proud of yourselves."

With that, the graduates took one last walk through the hallways they once traveled every day.

The graduates who participated were Lason Baker, Preslynn Baker, Merlelaysia Billie, Maylon Foster, TL Gopher, Kalissa Huff, Willo James, Jordan Johnson, Neela Jones, Candice Melton, Kobe Micco, Serenity Micco, Meleah Rodrigues, Airo Tommie and Kayden Warrior.



PECS alumni who graduated high school in 2025 gather at the school's playground before doing the grad walk May 22.

Beverly Bidney

Kayden Warrior, left, and Candice Melton are greeted by young students.



Beverly Bidney

It's a happy homecoming for Candice Melton, left, and TL Gopher as they meet staff.



From left to right, Preslynn Baker, Merlelaysia Billie, Willo James, Neela Jones and Lason Baker enjoy their return to PECS.

Beverly Bidney

# PECS students learn status of local wildlife

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — Students may have been aware of the many species of wildlife on the Brighton Reservation, but thanks to a wildlife workshop presented by the Departments of Conservation and Environmental Resources, now they know which ones are protected, threatened and endangered.

The assembly was attended by all K-8 students and began with Brighton community culture advisor Johnnie Jones talking about growing up Seminole.

“We are supposed to take care of the land and the animals,” Jones said. “The bald eagle is sacred to us, but you can’t ever look it in the eye. It is the biggest bird we have and it flies high and watches over everything.”

Jones told the students that he learned about the animals when he was home schooled “the Indian way” and they teach it today at the Brighton culture center.

“We are responsible for all the species on the reservations to make sure they are here for the future,” said Craig Van Der Heiden, director, Department of Conservation.

Karli Eckel, ERD environmental science manager, went through a photo presentation of protected, threatened and endangered species on the Seminole reservations.

Protected species include osprey, red shouldered hawk, great blue heron, sandhill crane turkey vulture, black vulture, northern cardinal and bald eagle.

Threatened species are Suwannee alligator snapping turtle, West Indian manatee, wood stork, red cockaded woodpecker, loggerhead sea turtle, Florida scrub jay, Audubon’s crested caracara and leatherback sea turtle.

Endangered species include the Kemp Ridley turtle, key deer, Florida bonneted bat, Everglades snail kite, Florida grasshopper sparrow and Florida panther.

Eckel asked the students if they knew of any extinct species. Many hands went up and students mentioned dinosaurs.

“We are here to make sure these animals don’t go extinct,” Eckel said. “It’s important to make sure the manatee doesn’t go the way of the dinosaur.”

Sergio Gonzalez, DOC fish and wildlife manager told the students that invasive species who are not from Florida, such as the Burmese python, throw off the balance of nature. He also talked about hunting and fishing on the reservations.

“There is a Seminole wildlife code of ethics for hunting and fishing,” Gonzalez said. “Tribal members may hunt and fish only for personal use for themselves and their families. Don’t take more than you need, use as much of the animal as possible and respect the wildlife.”



Brighton Community Culture advisor Johnnie Jones talks to PECS students May 16 about the importance of respecting wildlife and growing up Seminole during the wildlife workshop presented by the Conservation and Environmental Resources departments.



Bald eagle, Brighton Reservation. Listing status: Protected.



Craig Van Der Heiden, Department of Conservation director, talks to the students about his department’s responsibility to ensure the animals survival for the future.



Audubon’s Crested Caracara, Brighton Reservation. Listing status: Threatened



Graduate Sage Motlow and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard smile for the cameras at the dinner. Motlow graduated from Penn Foster.

## Brighton honors 2025 graduates

BY TATUM MITCHELL  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and his office honored 2025 high school and higher education graduates with the Education Department on May 27 at the Florida Seminole Veterans Building on the reservation.

Councilman Howard opened the dinner celebration by congratulating the graduates and their parents for their hard work.

“I appreciate all that you do, all the work you’ve done. But don’t let today stop, keep it moving,” Howard said.

The dinner recognized five higher education students and 28 high school graduates.

“Keep up the good work, keep striving,

go and do something ... and come back to work for our tribe,” Howard said.

Joseph John was a guest speaker at the dinner. He congratulated everyone and spoke about his experience as a Dartmouth College student and employee with the tribe.

“You have faced the world that hasn’t always made a space for you, but still, you made a place for yourselves. You didn’t just survive, you rose to the occasion. Be proud of yourselves and your family. ... Graduation took effort and growth,” John said.

Along with a dinner, students took photos, received gifts and certificates, and heard from Miss Seminole CeCe Thomas, Education director Russ Brown and learned about the tribe’s Work Experience Program.



Moore Haven High School graduate Willo James is honored by Brighton Councilman Larry Howard during the graduate dinner May 27.



Brighton Councilman Larry Howard congratulates Okeechobee High School graduate Jonah Garcia.

## Tribune Class of 2025 profiles to be in July issue

The Seminole Tribune will publish its Class of 2025 profiles of high school graduates from the tribe in the July issue. If you’re a tribal member from the Class

of 2025 and haven’t been contacted by the Tribune for the profiles, please email us at [tribune@semtribe.com](mailto:tribune@semtribe.com) and let us know you want to be included.

# 'Slime Friday' rewards Ahfachkee students for test success

STAFF REPORT

**BIG CYPRESS** — Ahfachkee School principal Philip Baer and assistant principal Nuria Suarez started the morning with clean clothes, and they left covered in various colors of slime.

The school hosted a "Slime Friday" event May 23 on the Big Cypress Reservation to recognize 10 students who scored a level 5 on testing this year. The students who achieved a level 5 got to pour slime on Baer

or Suarez with their peers and teachers in the audience.

Some students had multiple level five scores, so they had multiple buckets to pour. Baer and Suarez were good sports, smiling and laughing, even through the slime.

The students who excelled on the test and in slime dousing were Aiyana Crespo, Willow Cypress, Kasyn Hannahs, Simarra Osceola, Curmya Smith, Curtis Smith, Akira Tommie, Cole Tommie, Michael Williams and Shakur Williams.



Aiyana Crespo enjoys pouring green slime over Principal Philip Baer.

Tatum Mitchell



Tatum Mitchell (2)

Above, Ahfachkee Assistant Principal Nuria Suarez successfully lobbies Kasyn Hannahs to dump green slime over Principal Philip Baer. Below, Baer enjoys watching slime being poured over Suarez by Akira Tommie.



## ◆ AHFACHKEE

From page 1B

After the speeches concluded, students presented important people in their lives including family, friends, teachers and school employees, with gratitude gifts. The gifts are a long-standing Ahfachkee tradition that often results in hugs, smiles and even some tears.

The Warrior Award, which is given to the graduate who best demonstrated perseverance and determination in the face of adversity, was presented to Jody Cabral, who was also the school's salutatorian.

Valedictorian Hernandez-Osceola addressed his classmates.

"I've been waiting for this day since kindergarten," he said. "Now as we enter the paths of our ancestors, our job is to continue our ways. We are the unconquered people."

After the ceremony, the graduates accepted hugs, kisses and congratulations from family and friends, posed for photos and enjoyed lunch before they pondered their next steps as adults.



Byron Osceola

Graduate Gilbert Guerrero walks down the aisle at the start of the Ahfachkee School graduation.



Beverly Bidney

Aaliyah Billie is congratulated by, from left to right, President Holly Tiger, Executive Director of Administration Lee Zepeda, Brighton Board Rep. Nadine Bowers and Brighton Councilwoman Mariann Billie.



Beverly Bidney

Assistant Principal Nuria Suarez introduces class valedictorian Ian Hernandez-Osceola.



Beverly Bidney

Keynote speaker Duelle Gore plays flute before addressing the students at the graduation ceremony.



Byron Osceola

Sarah Robbins enters between the Class of 2025 display.



Tatum Mitchell

2025 graduates at the Hollywood graduation dinner join Councilman Chris Osceola for a group photo May 29 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

# Actor D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai speaks at Hollywood graduation dinner

BY TATUM MITCHELL  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola and his office celebrated 2025 high school and higher education graduates at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino on May 29.

“Congratulations to you, I think you’ve hit your first big milestone,” Councilman Osceola said. “Thank you to your families for helping you guys get there, we know you guys can’t do it on your own. Somebody’s got to be there encouraging you, kicking you in the butt every morning, telling you to get on that bus, telling you to get to school and those kinds of things.”

Councilman Osceola said there are multiple different paths to success, but to go out and gain new skills and bring those back.

“What I see here is the future of this tribe. You guys are our greatest resource. You guys are the future. We count on you guys to get your education and come back and work for your tribe,” Councilman Osceola said.

Graduates received a gift and shared short speeches with the audience after accepting it. A common theme was thanking family, friends, the tribe and the education department.

There were multiple speakers including “Reservation Dogs” and “Warfare” actor D’Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai, First Nation Ojibwe.

“I want to say congratulations to all of the students. I know and can see the dedication on the faces in all this room. And as somebody who’s once in your shoes, I know what long nights, early mornings, stressful tests and stressful weeks it took to

get here. So again, congratulations,” Woon-A-Tai said.

Woon-A-Tai shared his experience and hardships from his years in school.

“You probably know me as an actor ... but before that, I was just a kid like you guys. ... I was just a kid trying to navigate life with little resources and who felt lost and didn’t know what you wanted to do after school, and honestly didn’t really plan on it,” Woon-A-Tai said.

He shared how movies and acting helped him through struggling with school. Finding a teacher who believed in him and took time to teach him made a difference.

“I want you to hear this clearly. You are powerful enough. You are capable to build a future and dreams that you dream about. You carry your people’s stories and dreams. So, keep dreaming, because the legacy of

those who have never given up, not in the face of colonization and not in the face of injustice, nor anything else in your way. That being said, don’t shrink to fit into a world that refuses to see your greatness,” Woon-A-Tai said.

While that passion gave him direction and opportunities, he said there were still failures and doubts to persist through. He encouraged students to chase what they want to do in life.

“Look, I know what it feels like feel isolated sometimes, to feel like the world isn’t paying enough attention to you, to feel like the bigger opportunities, the life-changing ones, are out there somewhere else and for other people. But I’m here to tell you that is not true. There’s no place so far, no circumstances so tough that you can’t rise up. You can be a scientist, you can be a

writer, you can be a director, you can be an actor, and anything in between.”

After speaking, he answered questions from the audience and students had the opportunity to speak and take photos with Woon-A-Tai after the event.

“You can walk in two worlds and honor where you come from and still earn the future that’s yours,” Woon-A-Tai said. “But to do that, you got to believe in yourself, even when it’s hard. Especially when it’s hard. That your perspective, your language, your identity, all of it is a gift, not a weakness, nor something to be ashamed of. So, whatever you want to do after this, make sure you give it your all. Have fun doing it, and just do what makes you happy.”



Tatum Mitchell (2)

Above, actor D’Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai joins, from left to right, Mary-Sally Osceola, Xiya Osceola and Gabriella Diaz for a photo taken by Everett Osceola. At right, Woon-A-Tai and Councilman Chris Osceola congratulate Victoria Osceola Benard.



## Brighton Preschool celebrates 2025 graduates

STAFF REPORT

**BRIGHTON** — It was a festive sendoff for the Brighton Preschool’s class of 2025 on May 15 at the Florida Seminole Veterans Building on the reservation. The graduates performed dance and song skits before receiving their diplomas.

Each graduate received congratulations from Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Alredge and President Holly Tiger.



Calvin Tiger

The Brighton Preschool class of 2025 performs a routine for the audience at the graduation ceremony May 15.

◆ See BRIGHTON on page 5B

# Immokalee Preschool graduates ready for next challenge

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**IMMOKALEE** — Ten Immokalee preschoolers reached a milestone in their young lives May 13 as they graduated and are ready for “big school” in the fall.

Outer space was theme of the preschool’s graduation: a photo backdrop read “Don’t tell me the sky is the limit when there are footprints on the moon.”

Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann

Billie thanked the school’s teachers and the students’ parents and families. When she asked the children who was ready for big school, all hands shot up into the air.

“These children are very confident,” Councilwoman Billie said. “Every time I come to the Immokalee preschool I see their confidence.”

Big Cypress Nadine Bowers gave each graduate a high-five for doing so well.

“Congratulations to the parents, who are the foundation for these kids,” Immokalee Council liaison Jaime Yzaguirre said.

Once the speeches were over, the children sang a few songs. Culture instructor Tammy Billie, who taught the students culture and language throughout their time in preschool, led the students in a travelling song with roots in the Seminole Wars. The children sang it in Elaponke.

Billie described webs on the grass made by spiders overnight, which are visible in the early morning dew. During the Seminole Wars, U.S. soldiers would track the Seminoles by following their tracks made clear by the broken spider webs. The

song asks the spiders to spin more webs in the grass to hide their footprints so soldiers wouldn’t find them.

The graduates also sang a Florida alphabet song and another in which they sang “the future’s looking good to me and I’m ready to go.”

Diplomas were given out, hands were shaken, photos were taken and lunch was served as the graduates looked forward to their futures.

**Class of 2025  
Immokalee Preschool**  
Amaya Aranda-Billie  
Ryan Davis  
Eliana Frank  
Olivia Garcia  
Elijah Garza  
Harjo Garza  
Aria Ortega  
Aniya Osceola  
Caliyah Osceola-Fuller  
Aria Rochelin



Beverly Bidney

Graduate Elijah Garza with Justin Garza and Vanessa Garza.



The class of 2025 looks at the audience filled with family members May 13 during the Immokalee Preschool graduation May 13.



Beverly Bidney

Amaya Aranda-Billie wears sunglasses during one of the class's performances.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Caliyah Osceola-Fuller, Eliana Frank, Olivia Garcia and Elijah Garza.



Beverly Bidney

Caliyah Osceola-Fuller receives a congratulatory handshake from Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers as Immokalee Council Liaison Jaime Yzaguirre, left, and Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie look on.

## ◆ BRIGHTON From page 4B



Calvin Tiger

Brighton Councilman Larry Howard hands a diploma to Trace Faye during the Brighton Preschool graduation ceremony.



Calvin Tiger

Emmarie Jones



Calvin Tiger

Kenai Smedley



Calvin Tiger

Elois Billie receives a congratulatory handshake from President Holly Tiger.



Calvin Tiger

Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Alredge congratulates Amaya Houze on graduation day.



Calvin Tiger

Quinlee Smith

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# Sports



Kevin Johnson

With winning pitcher Hadyn Billie in the center (black visor), the Evangelical Christian School softball team celebrates after winning the Class 1A state championship May 21 in Longwood. ECS defeated Geneva School, 17-14.

## Tyler Hiatt earns 1st Team All-American at NCAA championships

STAFF REPORT

Tyler Hiatt completed his senior season on the University of Sioux Falls Track & Field team in style.

Hiatt, the son of Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member Stephanie Bowers Hiatt, earned First Team All-American status at the NCAA Division II Outdoor Championship May 22-24 at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Hiatt attained the All-American honor by placing eighth in shot put with a throw of 17.68m (58-0 ¼), which was his best throw in five attempts. He also competed in the hammer throw, where he finished 20th with a best 56.43m (185-1).

Earlier in May, Hiatt won a conference championship in shot put with a throw of 18.59m (61-00.00) at the NSIC Outdoor Track & Field Championships in Duluth, Minn.



NCAA

Tyler Hiatt raises his award for placing eighth in shot put in the NCAA Division II Men's Outdoor Track & Field Championships on May 24 in Pueblo, Colorado.

## Billie and Yzaguirre sisters win state championship with ECS

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**LONGWOOD** — The Evangelical Christian School softball team, which features five Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal members, captured the FHSAA Class 1A state championship with a wild 17-14 win against The Geneva School on May 21 at Boombah Soldiers Creek Park in Longwood, about 15 miles north of Orlando.

“Emotionally charged,” ECS coach Johnny Manetta said. “Two teams that I felt were exhausted from yesterday’s games and the season. It was hot. Both teams had players that were cramping. I’m not going to take anything away from [Geneva]. What a strong group of young ladies. Every time we punched, they punched back; every time they punched, we punched back. Luckily, at the end, we came out on top.”

ECS, which has no seniors on its roster, won a state championship for the second year in a row and finished with a 28-3 record. The Fort Myers school features two sets of sisters from the tribe. They are the Billie sisters — Hadyn (pitcher), Paizley and Paiton — and the Yzaguirre sisters — Angelina and Riley. Hadyn (pitcher), Paizley (first base), Paiton (third base), and Angelina (left field) are starters; Riley, an eighth grader who is the youngest of the group, is a reserve.

Last year’s state championship hero freshman Paiton Billie (2 hits, 3 RBIs, 3 runs scored, 1 walk) and freshman Paizley Billie (2 hits, 1 RBI, 1 run scored) were among the offensive stars in a slugfest between the teams that featured a combined 31 runs and 31 hits, including four home runs, and yet amid all those balls in the air, only one error was committed.

“It was a crazy, tough game,” Angelina Yzaguirre, a junior, said.

“I honestly didn’t expect our opposing team to be as hard,” Hadyn Billie, also a junior, said about Geneva, which is located four miles from the park.

The final score was shocking considering ECS entered the game having outscored its opponents a whopping 108 to 7 in its previous 10 games. That minuscule amount of runs allowed was due in large part to Hadyn Billie, who struck out 208 batters this season in 144 innings and compiled a



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, Paiton Billie, Hadyn Billie, Angelina Yzaguirre, Riley Yzaguirre and Paizley Billie wear their Class 1A softball state champions medals after Evangelical Christian School edged Geneva School, 17-14, on May 21 at Boombah Soldiers Creek Park in Longwood. ECS won a state title for the second year in a row.

2.13 ERA.

Being the winning pitcher in the state championship game concluded a remarkable undefeated season in the circle for Billie, whose record was 24-0 or 25-0 (the exact number wasn’t immediately available). She didn’t pitch in the team’s three losses.

The first few innings were uncharacteristically shaky for Billie.

Geneva’s Ella Ingram hit a 3-run home run in a four-run top of the first. Manetta said Billie didn’t feel well before the game and it showed early. The coach said it was likely the heat from the previous day’s semifinal — with temperatures in the mid-90s — that contributed to Billie’s performance.

“Her team had her back. She never gave up. I asked her a couple times how she was

and she said ‘I’m going to keep fighting,’ and she did,” Manetta said.

Indeed, Billie battled back. In the final three innings, she held Geneva to just one run, which was unearned when a routine infield popup that should have been caught fell to the ground.

◆ See STATE CHAMPS on page 6C



Kevin Johnson

Evangelical Christian School’s Angelina Yzaguirre sprints to first base on a bunt attempt against North Florida Christian in a state semifinal May 20.



Kevin Johnson

ECS joyfully greets Paiton Billie (helmet) as she scores on Samantha Yzaguirre’s home run in the state championship.

## Kashlynn Cooper receives honor in Oklahoma

STAFF REPORT

Heritage Hall high school freshman standout girls basketball player Kashlynn Cooper earned a conference postseason honor. Cooper, a 5-foot-8 guard, was named Newcomer of the Year in the Greater Metro Athletic Conference in Oklahoma. Cooper, a Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member, helped Heritage win a district championship.



Courtesy photo

Kashlynn Cooper at the line in the 2024-25 season.

# NAYO basketball comes to BC, Hollywood

**STAFF REPORT**

**HOLLYWOOD** — The NAYO tournament rotation brought the girls and boys basketball tournament to the Seminole Tribe of Florida in April. Players from the Seminole Tribe, Miccosukee Tribe, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and Seneca Nation competed in 14U and 17U divisions.

Rez Ballers Elite 14U boys was the only Florida team that won a championship. Coached by John Osceola, the Rez Ballers won their games by large margins on the way to winning a first place trophy and jackets. Games were played at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center, the Classic Gym and the Davie Police Athletic League gym in Broward, and the Herman Osceola Gym and Ahfachkee School gym in Big Cypress.



Kyrie Huggins - Rez Ballers Elite 14U boys

Kevin Johnson



Quinton Wilson - Rez Ballers Elite 17U

Wilson Bowers



Micah Jimmie - Brighton Seminoles 14U boys

Kevin Johnson



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, the NAYO 14U champion Rez Ballers Elite boys: from left to right, "Bean" Brown, Captain Osceola, Homer Huggins, Tayin Fairclough, Lanvin Fairclough, Derek McQueen, Lucan Frank, Kyrie Huggins, Terrence Osceola and coach John Osceola.



Jaiden Fludd - FL Rebels 14U girls

Kevin Johnson



Kevin Johnson

Betty Osceola, left, and Tatum Billie hold the second place trophy and jerseys that their team won at NAYO. They played for a Mississippi team.

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# Cheyenne Nunez leads New College of Florida softball team through success and sorrow

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

Triumph and tragedy marked Cheyenne Nunez's season as the interim head coach for the New College of Florida softball team in Sarasota.

Nunez grew up on the Brighton Reservation as a passionate softball player and went on to play in college, including in NCAA Division I at the University of South Carolina-Upstate.

She's about five years removed from her playing days, but the mother of three young children still loves the sport and is determined to remain a part of it. At 27, she's in the infancy of a coaching career in the collegiate ranks.

This year Nunez guided the young New College program to a successful season, accentuated by its first postseason appearance and first playoff win. However, the accomplishments on the field paled in comparison to the heart-wrenching situation off the field.

Alyson Bermudez, the team's 32-year-old head coach known as "Aly," spent most of this season away from the team as she continued her battle against mucinous ovarian cancer, a rare, aggressive form of the disease. Nunez, who had been a volunteer coach at State College of Florida in nearby Bradenton when she was hired by Bermudez as an assistant coach a year ago, took over with the interim tag.

On April 27, one day before the team's final regular season game, Bermudez died. She had excelled as a player growing up in New Hampshire and went on to play for Laselle University in Boston. She moved to Florida in 2021 and joined the softball staff at Bishop Verot High School in Fort Myers. She was hired to lead the new softball program at New College starting with the 2024 inaugural season.

Not surprisingly, when Nunez and the players met for the first time after the passing, there was an outpouring of emotion.



Kevin Johnson

New College of Florida softball coach Cheyenne Nunez watches an at-bat during the team's game against the University of Fort Lauderdale on April 22 in Oakland Park. Nunez served as interim head coach this season as the team coped with the illness and passing of its head coach, Alyson Bermudez.

Nunez said it was the toughest thing she's ever had to do in her life.

"A lot of tears; a lot of Aly stories," Nunez said. "I burst into tears when I spoke to them. I told them that she's here with us; she loves you guys; I love you guys."

Nunez offered the players the option of canceling the final regular season games (it was a doubleheader) or playing. The team opted to play in what turned out to be an afternoon of healing.

"They wanted to play for coach Aly. Everyone from the community came to the field. We wore teal (in honor of fighting cancer). We dedicated the game to her," Nunez said.

The team had only two days before making its first postseason appearance. Seeded sixth, New College opened the Sun Conference playoffs May 1 against No. 3 Keiser University, which won all three games between the teams in the regular season, but

the playoffs turned out to be a different story.

The game was scoreless until the top of the seventh when Nunez opted to insert a pinch hitter to try to ignite the offense. The strategy paid off as Madison Garcia led off with a single. The hit helped lead to the winning run in a 1-0 victory.

"When it does work, it's like, 'wow,'" Nunez said.

Nunez said she was proud of her players, not only for how they handled the difficulty of the passing, but also how they performed all season.

"They worked their butts off day in and day out since August," she said.

New College lost its next two games and was eliminated from the tournament, ending with a 17-30 record.

The team reunited May 21 and joined the college community on campus at a celebration of life in memory of coach Aly.

# Moore Haven softball wins district championship

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Staff Reporter

Preslynn Baker stamped an exclamation point on her athletic career at Moore Haven High School by belting a grand slam in her second to final game as a Terrier.

Baker's blast helped lead Moore Haven to a 10-7 win in nine innings against Fort Meade in the Class Rural District-8 Championship on April 30.

In addition to Baker, the Seminole Tribe is also represented on the team by Tahnna Billie, Teena Maree Covarrubias, Charisma Micco, Truley Osceola and head coach Preston Baker.

The grand slam came in the third inning and gave Moore Haven a 5-1 lead. Fort Meade rallied to take a 6-5 lead. The Terriers forced extra innings with a run in the top of the seventh. Both teams scored one run in the eighth before Moore Haven won it in the ninth.

Baker finished 2-for-2 with two runs scored and four RBIs. Charisma Micco also

had an outstanding game with three hits and two RBIs. Both Baker and Micco saw action in the circle along with freshman Brooklyn Sargent.

The victory earned Moore Haven a spot in the FHSAA Class Rural regionals. On May 8, the Terriers traveled to the Gainesville area to face Trenton in a regional semifinal. Trenton won, 10-0, and went on to win the state championship.

Moore Haven ended the season with a 14-8 record, which included wins against teams with at or above .500 records, including Glades Day, LaBelle, Southwest Florida Christian and Vero Beach.

Micco (.490) and Baker (.476) finished second and third on the team in batting, respectively. Baker led the squad in several categories, including home runs (7), doubles (6), RBIs (29) and hits (30). Osceola also had a strong season at the plate. She drove in 20 runs, the second most on the team, and also had two home runs, four doubles and two triples.



Kevin Johnson

Preslynn Baker



Courtesy photo

The 2025 Class Rural District 8 softball champions Moore Haven High School.



Kevin Johnson

Deric Allen, Moore Haven's new head football coach, watches his players go through drills during a spring practice session May 15.

# Moore Haven football welcomes new coach Deric Allen

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**MOORE HAVEN** — For some of the rising juniors and seniors on the Moore Haven High School football team, getting accustomed to a new head coach is nothing new.

In May, the Terriers wrapped up spring practice with Deric Allen at the helm in his first season. Allen brings playing and coaching experience to the program, but he also knows first-hand how difficult it is for players to adjust to new coaches multiple times.

When Allen was an offensive skill position player and a defensive back at Chiefland High School — 40 miles west of Gainesville — his teams went through three head coaches in four years, so he already had something in common when he first met the Terriers, who have their third head coach in the past four years.

"When I first got here, I was like, 'Guys, I've been here, I've experienced it. I know how hard it is to buy in to new coaches over and over,'" Allen said during a spring practice session May 15.

Two months into the job, the 2012 Chiefland High graduate with a 4.23 grade point average has already settled in and been warmly welcomed by the team.

"The response has been great. I couldn't have asked for more," said Allen, who attended Florida A&M University and Santa Fe Community College. He's pursuing a degree in sports management.

As they prepare for the upcoming season, Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member Greg James and Seminole descendant Thaddeus Johns said they like what they've seen from their new coach.

"My third head coach. You just got to get used to it. He's a good coach. He's not out here just to be out here so he can have that title; he knows football," James said.

"He's good. I like him. He cares about us. He's giving everybody chances. He works with everybody," Johns said.

One early change by the new coach is that James could see more time on both sides of the line come August. James, who was listed at 6-foot-3, 270-pounds last season, saw far more playing time on the OL last fall.

"He's been showcasing his skills on the offensive line, but I think this year everybody — the community, colleges — will get to see his versatility playing both ways. We're excited about that," Allen said.

With the loss of about 15 seniors from last year's team, James will be relied upon not only as a lineman, but also as a leader.

"Greg has been stepping into that leadership role," Allen said. "He's transitioning from one of the younger guys to being one of the upperclassmen. He's been working hard and helping out the younger guys and showing them to how to do the right thing. He's been great for us."

James is entering his junior year, a pivotal season for any high school player with aspirations of playing in college.

"The junior year is critical. That's when the colleges are really locking in on prospects," Allen said. "If you come out that junior year and you kill it, your senior year the sky is the limit."

Meanwhile, Johns is heading into his senior year. He saw limited time as a backup wide receiver last season, his first year of football. Johns, a three-sport athlete at the school, has made a good impression with his new coach. All indications are that Johns will have a greater role in the upcoming season, likely as a starting slot receiver who will also play some defensive back.

"He's real crafty. I think he's one of the smoothest route runners on the team. Nice hands," Allen said. "The opportunities weren't there too much for him last year, but I think this year he'll get a chance to show what he's got."

Tribal member Andrew Williams played guard during the spring session. He said he was with the team last spring, but didn't stick with it. He said he wants to be on the team for the upcoming season, which begins Aug. 15 with a fall classic preseason game at North Port.

The schedule also includes a Halloween night game at Lake Placid, which will be a reunion of sorts for Allen. He previously served as an assistant coach for the Green Dragons.

Having coached at Lake Placid and played at Chiefland, Allen is very familiar with rural high school football and small towns like Moore Haven.

"Chiefland is a small, country town. That's one of the things that attracted me [to Moore Haven]. I'm not one of those city slickers expecting the world," he said.

Allen takes over a Moore Haven squad that is coming off a rollercoaster 5-5 season. On most nights, the Terriers were either very good or not so good. In each of their five victories, they never allowed more than two touchdowns, however, four of the five losses were by margins of 25 points or more.

The returning players will have some playoff experience under their belts. Last season as the No. 15 seed in the 16-team Rural Class tournament, they were eliminated in the first game — the regional semifinals — with a lopsided loss to Madison County, which went on to win the state championship.

Allen said it's been a positive spring for his young team. He praised the camaraderie and work ethic.

"We've got 26 [players]. I feel like for spring [football] in an area like this, that's a pretty decent number," Allen said. "We're heading in the right direction. I feel like it's going to be a great season."



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, Moore Haven High football players Greg James, Thaddeus Johns and Andrew Williams at spring practice May 15.



Kevin Johnson

Okeechobee coaches Danny Bonilla and Mary Huff speak to the team after its 4-2 loss against American Heritage in a Class 4A regional quarterfinal May 7.

# Okeechobee nearly pulls off stunning upset at American Heritage

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**PLANTATION** — When it comes to high school softball in Florida, the American Heritage (Plantation) program is a heavyweight. The Patriots have won eight state championships, third most in the state.

On May 7, Okeechobee, a young team with several Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal members, never flinched in a classic battle for seven innings against powerful American Heritage. The Brahms, seeded No. 8 in the regional, entered the game as big underdogs with a 9-14 record going up against No. 1 American Heritage with a 20-2 record.

Okeechobee used nearly flawless defense and a strong pitching performance from Lilly Larson to throw a major scare into American Heritage. Okeechobee was four outs away from pulling off a shocking upset, but with one swing the Patriots managed to escape with a 4-2 win in a FHSAA Class 4A regional quarterfinal in Plantation.

Trailing 2-1 in the bottom of the sixth, American Heritage had runners at first and second when freshman Mia West belted a three-run home run that landed on the roof of a school bus beyond the fence in centerfield. The late-inning rally kept Heritage's season alive. Meanwhile, the experience of playing in a hard-fought regional playoff game against one of the state's top teams should benefit Okeechobee in the coming seasons.

"They had an up-and-down season," said Okeechobee coach and tribal member Mary Huff. "They're young, inexperienced. Everyone counted them out, but they stayed together, and they fought and worked hard; it definitely showed. [American Heritage] beat us tonight; we didn't give away outs, we didn't have a bunch of errors. It was a really good game."

Okeechobee's sub .500 record was an indication of its roller coaster season, but playoff wins against Jensen Beach and Garcia earned the Brahms a district championship, a spot in regionals and an abundance of confidence. The loss to American Heritage earned them plenty of

respect from a two-time NCAA champion in the other dugout.

"They literally gave us one of the best games we've played this year," said American Heritage coach Samantha Banister, who won NCAA titles as a player at the University of Arizona in 2006 and 2007. "I was more than impressed with that pitcher, and I made sure to tell her after the game. Their defense was awesome; their offense stayed up the whole time."

As the innings passed, Okeechobee, which committed just one error, maintained a slim lead. American Heritage was in a position — playing from behind — that it's not accustomed to.

"They had me thinking for the first time this year that 'wow, we're going to lose,'" Banister said.

Okeechobee succeeded in not being overwhelmed by its opponent's history, including the bevy of state championship banners on the outfield fence and walls on a nearby school building.

"We weren't fazed at all. I told the girls that you're the eighth seed, you're playing the one seed. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose," Huff said.

Larson appeared cool and calm as she limited American Heritage to three hits and three walks while fanning two.

"She did a good job mixing in her fastball and changeup. She kept us off balance until the sixth inning. She was impressive," Banister said.

Okeechobee's defense looked sharp all game and made all the right plays and decisions. Catcher Melaine Bonilla threw out a runner at second base on a steal attempt in the second. In the fifth, Audra Friend fielded a sharp grounder at third, looked back a runner at second and threw to first baseman Joleyne Nunez for an out. Shortstop Janessa Arana had a busy game and successfully fielded a handful of grounders for outs. The outfield caught everything that came its way. Centerfielder Tehya Nunez, right-fielder Dyani Kayda and left-fielder Hayden Slovenski each made two catches.

At the plate, Tehya Nunez set the early tone that Okeechobee wasn't going to go

away easily. She sparked the team in the first inning with a leadoff single on a solid hit up the middle.

After a walk to Arana and a sacrifice bunt by Larson, Nunez scored the game's first run when Bonilla singled up the middle, which led to an early change in pitchers by American Heritage.

Okeechobee made it 2-0 in the second. Hayley Pendry led off with a single and Kayda followed with a walk. Kiera Snell advanced the runners on a hard hit ground out to the pitcher. A bunt single by Nunez loaded the bases and set the stage for an RBI single from Arana.

American Heritage closed the gap in the bottom of the second on an RBI bunt, but Larson and the Brahms' defense kept the Patriots' offense quiet until the rally in the sixth.

American Heritage went on to reach the state championship game, where the Patriots lost, 7-6, to Fort Walton Beach.

The good news for Okeechobee — even though its season ended — is that all but one player can return next year. The tribe's Adeline Garcia, who didn't play this season as she recovered from an ACL injury, is the team's only senior. The roster will likely have a significant presence of tribal members on it again in 2026 with Bonilla, Kayda, Snell, Alyssa Madrigal, Tehya Nunez, Joleyne Nunez and Dalayah Nunez.

Huff received help this season from Danny Bonilla, who filled in as head coach starting in April after Huff had a baby.

"Danny has done an amazing job with them and worked them hard and kept everything — the standards and expectations — going. The girls really responded well," Huff said.

In its district championship game, Okeechobee defeated Garcia High School, of Lake Worth, 9-3, on May 1. Friend was the star of the game by going 4-for-4 with three RBIs. Madrigal, Bonilla, Pendry and Larson each had two hits.

"We got a taste of postseason and what it's like to win a district title," Huff said.



Kevin Johnson (3)

From left to right, Kiera Snell, Tehya Nunez and Joleyne Nunez in action against American Heritage.



Kevin Johnson

The Okeechobee High School softball team departs the field for the final time in the 2025 season after its loss to American Heritage.

# PECS softball honors 8th graders, beats Moore Haven JV

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**BRIGHTON** — After honoring its two eighth graders, the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School softball team won its final home game of the season April 14 against the junior varsity squad from Moore Haven High School.

PECS scored seven runs on bases-loaded walks in the first inning and cruised to an 18-7 win.

Amid the walk-fest, there were some hard hit balls, including a two-run double by Macayden Sardina to right field.

Defensively, PECS shined, too, as the infield executed a perfect rundown between first and second. Amalia Estrada, who was the starting pitcher, moved to catcher in the second inning and promptly picked off a runner at third base, firing the ball to Jamelynn Anderson for the out.

Before the game, Estrada was honored along with Jalaaya Hunsinger as the team's only eighth graders. They were given gift baskets by their teammates and were joined in the pitcher's circle by their families, head

coach Elle Rivero and her assistant coach and younger sister Lexi Thomas.

Principal Tracy Downing read the future plans of both players to the crowd. Estrada will attend Okeechobee High School. She wants to earn a degree from Florida State University and become a teacher. Hunsinger will be headed to Moore Haven High School. Her career plans are to be a cosmetologist or lawyer.

The recently married Rivero said after the game that she enjoyed coaching the players this season — her second year as head coach — but that she's not planning on returning next season. Rivero said the team, which won most of its games, should be strong again next year considering most of the players were sixth and seventh graders this season.

Rivero brought plenty of softball experience to the team, having been a standout at Okeechobee High and then playing at Indian River State College.

PECS wrapped up its season with an away game the following day. There was no postseason tournament this year.



Kevin Johnson

PECS eighth grade softball player Jalaaya Hunsinger is honored with her family before her final home game April 14.



Kevin Johnson

Amalia Estrada and her family are honored during the pregame 8th grade ceremony.



Kevin Johnson

PECS joins hands as it gets ready to face Moore Haven JV.



Tatum Mitchell

Pitcher Amalia Estrada winds up.



Tatum Mitchell

Jalaaya Hunsinger at the plate.



Angel Goodrich attends the National American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame ceremony.

## Firefighter, former WNBA player Angel Goodrich receives Hall of Fame honor

STAFF REPORT

Angel Goodrich, who went from knocking down 3-pointers to knocking down fires, was inducted into the National American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame on May 2.

The ceremony was held at the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City. Goodrich (United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians) was honored with fellow inductees from the class of 2025: tennis player Vance McSpadden Jr. (Cherokee Nation), lacrosse player Neal Powless (Onondaga Nation), and football player James Winchester (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma).

As a high school star in Oklahoma, Goodrich led Sequoyah High to three girls state championships in the early 2000s. She overcame serious injuries early in her college career and went on to star for the University of Kansas, where she scored more than 1,000 points. She played three seasons in the WNBA.

"Angel Goodrich embodies the spirit of resilience and excellence that defines our people," Chief Jeff Wacoche of the United Keetoowah Band said in a press release. "Her achievements reflect her unwavering determination, and her legacy as a role model continues to uplift the next generation of Keetoowah and Native athletes. We are beyond proud of her induction into the National American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame – it is a momentous and well-deserved honor."

Goodrich also received praise from the Tulsa, Oklahoma, community, where she serves as a firefighter.

"Her hard work, perseverance, and achievements both on and off the job are truly inspiring," Tulsa Firefighters Local 176 posted on Facebook.

"...Angel's work ethic and competitive spirit are an inspiration both on and off the court. Today, she shows that same drive and commitment protecting our community, making us all proud to have her on our team," the Tulsa Fire Department posted, also on Facebook.



Tulsa Firefighters /Facebook

Former basketball standout Angel Goodrich is a firefighter with the Tulsa Fire Department in Oklahoma.

## Ava Nunez, Thomas University softball show vast improvement

STAFF REPORT

The Seminole Tribe's Ava Nunez played a big part in a much-improved season for the Thomas University softball team in Thomasville, Georgia.

After finishing 11 games under .500 last year, Thomas turned things around with a 30-22 record this year and an appearance in the NAIA tournament. In a preseason poll, Thomas was picked to finish sixth in its conference, but instead finished second.

The team's improvement coincided with a much better season for Nunez, whose batting average was 130 points higher compared to her sophomore year.

Nunez, the team's starting third

baseman, produced her best season with several career highs, including batting average (.265), hits (30), doubles (6) and a team-leading 18 walks. She tied for the team lead in sacrifice hits with seven. She also had 10 RBIs and hit one home run – the second of her career – April 26 against Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

In April, Nunez generated a solid stretch at the plate when she hit safely in nine of 12 games.

In May, Thomas won its opening game at the NAIA tournament, but was eliminated with two straight losses.

Nunez completed her third season with the team. She is a graduate of Immokalee High School, where she was a standout pitcher.



Ava Nunez

Thomas University

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◆ **STATE CHAMPS**  
From page 1C

It helped that Billie had her sisters on the corners not only in the championship game, but all season.

“Literally, being able to look right and look left and see them on my side because one plays first base and one plays third base made it easier knowing that your home is right there with you,” she said.

With ECS trailing 14-12 in the bottom of the fifth, Paiton Billie reached on an infield hit and proceeded to cause a rundown which helped Anayeli Guzman score. Billie was safe diving back to first base. Two batters later, Samantha Yzaguirre drilled a three-run home run to left field that put ECS ahead, 16-14. Samantha Yzaguirre is not a tribal member, however, she is the aunt of Angelina and Riley Yzaguirre.

“That home run was amazing,” Angelina said.

ECS shortstop Karsyn Mootz shined on offense and defense. She had six RBIs and four hits, including a two-run home run in the first inning. In the field, she made two

difficult catches while backpedaling into shallow left center.

A year ago, ECS rode the arm of Zoe Yzaguirre to a state title run as Billie served as the backup. After Yzaguirre graduated and the team lost Kylie Shaw, who graduated early this academic year and joined the Florida Gators softball team, there was no guarantee that the young ECS squad would be hoisting another state championship trophy, but it did.

“We had big shoes to fill. Down this path we made this season; we made our own shoes with the path we created,” Billie said.

**Seminoles star in semifinal win**

In the state semifinal May 20 in Longwood, all five Seminoles contributed to ECS’s 13-0 win against Tallahassee’s North Florida Christian School. The game ended after four and a-half innings due to the 10-run rule.

Hadyn Billie tossed a two-hitter with three strikeouts in a complete game. She allowed only a single in the third and a double in the fifth. Paizley Billie (1 hit, 1 RBI, 2 runs scored) and Paiton Billie (RBI

triple, walk, run scored) provided sparks at the plate. Paizley sprinted all the way around the bases when her squibber to third was thrown into right field. Angelina Yzaguirre had a walk and a perfectly executed sacrifice bunt. She also made two catches in left field. Riley Yzaguirre scored a run as a courtesy runner.

A key inning for ECS came in the second when a determined Samantha Yzaguirre won a gritty battle leading off the inning. She fell behind 0-2 in the count and fouled off four pitches in a row before her hard work paid off with a triple to left field. One out later, Paizley Billie, down 0-2 in the count, did her job by bringing home Yzaguirre on a groundout to make it 2-0.

Whether it was solidly hit extra base hits or small ball execution, ECS cheered for both with equal enthusiasm.

“It’s the little things like that, getting a bunt down in a key situation; hitting a right-side ground ball to let a run score, sacrificing your out for the greater good of the team; it’s stuff we preach the entire season and when they do it, they celebrate it,” said ECS coach Johnny Manetta.



Paiton Billie safely scrambles back to first base during a rundown in the Class 1A state championship against Geneva School on May 21 in Longwood.



At left, Paizley Billie plays first base in the state semifinal. At right, Hadyn Billie delivers a pitch in the state semifinal with Paiton playing third base.



The Evangelical Christian School softball team cheers after Hadyn Billie (center with black visor) advances the ECS name on a bracket poster following the team’s 13-0 win against North Florida Christian in a Class 1A state semifinal May 20 at Boombah Soldiers Creek Park in Longwood.

**Atlanta Braves to host annual Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase**

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**ATLANTA** — Fifty high school baseball players from Native American descent will play in the Atlanta Braves’ fourth annual Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase on June 21 and June 22 at the Braves stadium.

The players represent 31 tribes from 22 states and Canada. Ethan Abram, from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, is the only player on the roster from Florida. He plays for Fleming Island High School near Jacksonville.

The showcase highlights Native American high school baseball players who aspire to play the game at the next level. The players will participate in development

training with former MLB players and have the chance to play in front of college and Major League scouts on a big-league stage, offering exposure for players who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to at this level.

The players will compete in a pro-style workout and a few will participate in a home run derby on June 21.

On June 22, all athletes will be divided into two teams for the showcase game, with former Major League Baseball players as coaches.

Players and families will also hear from Atlanta Braves scouting supervisor Travis Coleman, Savannah State University head baseball coach Tino Burgos, and Braves alumni Julio Franco through a panel.

**U.S. EPA PUBLIC NOTICE**

**Underground Injection Control (UIC) Program  
Notice of Proposed Permit Issuance for:**

**Seminole Tribe of Florida – Public Works Division**  
5700 Griffin Road  
Davie, Florida 33314

**EPA Requests Public Comments on the proposed Permit Issuance.  
All Public Comments on the permit issuance must be emailed or postmarked by July 7, 2025.**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 (EPA) proposes to issue a permit under the authority of the federal Underground Injection Control (UIC) regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Parts 124, 144, 146, and 147 to the Seminole Tribe of Florida – Public Works Department (Applicant).

**Description:** The Applicant submitted a timely application for a renewal permit covering one (1) UIC Class I – nonhazardous industrial injection well for the injection of: 1) concentrate from reverse osmosis operations at the Applicant’s Brighton Reservation Water Treatment Plant as well as raw water and flush water from the operation of the plant’s reverse osmosis system and: 2) secondary treated effluent from the Applicant’s Brighton Reservation Wastewater Treatment Plant. The injection well is located at the Applicant’s Brighton Reservation Water Treatment Plant at 17000 Water Plant Road, Okeechobee, Glades County, Florida 34974. If the EPA issues the final permit to the Applicant, the permit will remain in effect for ten (10) years. A permit is required to meet the provisions of the EPA-administered UIC Program on Tribal Lands in Florida.

All data submitted by the Applicant in support of the draft permit, unless deemed confidential, is included in the Administrative Record. The Administrative Record for the draft permit is available for public review and can be requested by contacting the EPA staff listed below.

Copies of this public notice, associated fact sheet and the draft permit are available for review and inspection on the EPA’s website at <https://www.epa.gov/fl/florida-events-public-notice-and-press-releases>.

**Public Hearing:** The EPA is not required to hold a public hearing but may do so if there is sufficient public interest in the proposed decision. Any person desiring such a hearing must submit a written request, which identifies the proposed issue(s) for discussion at the hearing. Requests must be sent via email or mail to the contact information below. If a public hearing is deemed necessary, the EPA will issue a public notice of the hearing at least 30 days prior to the scheduled date.

**Final Permit Decisions and Appeals Process**  
After the close of the public comment period, the EPA will review and consider all comments relevant to the draft decision. The EPA will respond to each comment submitted by the Applicant and the public. The EPA’s response to comments will contain: a response to all significant comments on the draft decision; the EPA’s final decision; any changes in the conditions in the draft permit, and the reasons for such changes; and procedures for appealing the decision.

**General Notice:** If you would like to be added to a general mailing list for notice of any of the EPA’s future UIC permitting actions in any of the EPA Region 4 jurisdictions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, notify the EPA by sending an email to [R4GWUIC@epa.gov](mailto:R4GWUIC@epa.gov). Please specify if you are interested in all or specific permitting actions in all or specific jurisdictions. If you do not have access to email, you may also send a request to be included on the mailing list at the physical address below.

Send comments on the draft permit, requests for additional information, requests for public hearings and mailing list requests to:

**US EPA Region 4 – WD/SDWB**  
**ATTN: Jason B Meadows – PN SE25UIC001**  
**Atlanta Federal Center**  
**61 Forsyth Street SW, MC 9T25**  
**Atlanta, GA, 30303-8931**  
**[R4GWUIC@epa.gov](mailto:R4GWUIC@epa.gov)**  
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