



The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

www.seminoletribune.org • Free

Volume I • Number 8

August 2026

Naples' Serena Zepeda, Hollywood's Dahlia Sanders crowned Seminole princesses

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD— Serena Zepeda and Dahlia Sanders were all smiles and teary-eyed after being crowned the Seminole Tribe of Florida's new princesses July 25 at the 69th annual Miss Florida Seminole Princess Pageant in the Hollywood executive building auditorium on the Hollywood Reservation.

Zepeda, 24, earned the Miss Florida Seminole title. Sanders, 15, earned the Jr. Miss Florida Seminole title. They will serve one-year reigns representing the tribe.

"We support these young ladies every day," said Tribal Secretary and Miss Florida Seminole 1985 Naomi Wilson. "We have young ladies at the tribe who believe in each other, who believe in this sisterhood and say, 'This is what we wish to continue to do.'"

Zepeda, the oldest of all eight pageant contestants, is from the tribe's Naples community. Zepeda is a graduate of the University of Vermont with a bachelor's in elementary education and education for cultural linguistics diversity. She is the daughter of Brian Zepeda, the Naples Council Liaison. Zepeda volunteers for the tribe's Youth Empowerment Program and the nonprofit, Big Brother Big Sister, as a mentor.

"My platform is really on higher education and building up our youth," Zepeda said. "My goal is to help our youth see education as something that uplifts us. Hopefully I'll get the opportunity to read to students and encourage them."

Sanders is from the Hollywood Reservation and the Bird Clan. She is a sophomore at NSU University School in Davie and is the daughter of Mercedes Osceola and Neil Sanders.



Beverly Bidney

Newly crowned Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Dahlia Sanders, left, and Miss Florida Seminole Serena Zepeda bask in the spotlight at the 69th annual Miss Florida Seminole Princess Pageant on July 25 in Hollywood.

"What excites me most about the year ahead is being with Serena," Sanders said. "She's so inspirational, she's like a big older sister. I want to be an inspiration for other children my age because there were only three other contestants this year running for Jr. Miss Florida Seminole. I would love for more girls to get out of their comfort zone and run for this pageant. It's a good feeling—being up on stage and seeing everyone's faces."

Alongside Zepeda, the Miss Florida Seminole contestants were Leilani Burton, 21, from Okeechobee; Sarafina Billie, 19, from Hollywood; Carlise Bermudez, 21, from Immokalee; and Tahnia Billie, 18, from Clewiston.

Ada Bruised Head, 15, from Clewiston and Ciani Smith, 15, from Okeechobee, competed for the Jr. Miss Florida crown alongside Sanders.

Both Zepeda and Sanders were crowned on stage by their predecessors, Bailey Marie Latchford and Chaka Yani Smith.

Following each contestant's introduction, traditional outfit presentations showcased custom-made patchwork skirts and capes, while the contestant's talent presentations presented their passions for patchwork, beadwork, harvesting sweetgrass, preparing sofkee, and storytelling. Zepeda, Burton, and Tahnia Billie told stories of the box turtle and the rabbit, the supernatural twins, and the good hearted and the evil spirit.

Sanders and Sarafina Billie won the evening's talent division; Sanders and Burton won best essay; and Tahnia Billie won this year's Miss Congeniality award.

♦ See PRINCESSES on page 4A

Summer means shipping season for Seminole cattle

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — Summer is calf shipping season on the Big Cypress and Brighton reservations, where cattle owners and the Board sent about 5,000 calves to feed lots out west from July 6 to July 16.

The temperature in Big Cypress on July 13 was in the low 90s and humid with no rain. Fortunately, there was plenty of shade in the pens for the cattle and the cowhands who moved them from trailers to pens to the cattle truck.

"The morning went well," said Clint Raulerson, Natural Resources cattle operations general manager. "It was very cool and none of the calves were overheated."

The annual calf shipping event marks the conclusion of the time owners spent raising the calves. The animals will spend the next few months eating; when they reach about 1,350 pounds, they will be sent to market.

Work in the cowpens starts at sunrise to avoid the hottest part of the day. The work is dirty, crowded with cattle and potentially dangerous for the cowhands who work extremely close to the cattle. The animals are usually wary of people and tend to move out of their way quickly.

Bentley Osceola, 13, likes to help out in the cowpens with his uncle Sean Osceola.



Beverly Bidney

Bentley Osceola, 13, herds a group of calves from one pen to another in Big Cypress.

He has been working with cattle most of his life with his grandfathers Reno and Rodney Osceola's herds in Brighton.

"I like helping; it isn't really hard," said the PECS eighth grader.

Pauletta Bowers, who has spent her life working with cattle, shipped about 60 calves. The largest weighed 788 pounds and the smallest, which was born later than the rest of the calves, weighed 328. She said the weather this year has been good which created an optimal growing season for the calves. She has been tending to cattle all her life.

"I can't complain. I've been blessed," Bowers said. "I like the lifestyle and seeing your product from start to finish."

Ahnie Jumper was also raised in a cattle family in Big Cypress. This is the third year she has owned her own herd, which she purchased from Joe Frank. She shipped 54 calves and didn't keep as many as she usually does since she is about to have her third child this month. Jumper said she loves working the cattle with her children Hayze, Sawyer and Desmond.

"The challenge is buying more cows," she said. "The market is so high right now, it's insane. I want to have a bigger herd; I have 95 but I want 130."

♦ See SHIPPING on page 6A



Beverly Bidney

Todd Johns herds calves July 13 from the Big Cypress cowpens into the cattle truck that will take them to feed lots out west.

Broward bridge project to close Sheridan Street lanes

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — A major bridge project on Sheridan Street near the Hollywood Reservation and off-reservation tribal buildings is scheduled to start lane closures in early August for a project that is expected to be completed in spring 2027.

Led by the Broward County Engineering Department, the Sheridan Street bridge improvement project will increase the height of the bridge by two feet. Lifting the bridge from its current 14 feet, 6 inches to 16 feet, 6 inches is aimed at preventing strikes by trucks below it on the Florida Turnpike that have plagued the bridge. The county has hired Structural Technologies to raise the bridge to meet current vertical clearance standards.

According to the county, lane closures on Sheridan Street will begin Aug. 3. The bridge is near a Hard Rock Support Services building at the corner of Sheridan Street and North 64th Avenue and is less than a half-mile from the southern entrance to the reservation. The tribe's Taft Street buildings are a short distance away, too, at the corner of North 64th Ave. and Taft Street.

The initial phase will close westbound lanes on Sheridan Street on and near the bridge while the eastbound side will be reconfigured to carry one lane of traffic in each direction. In phase 2, the eastbound lanes will close while the westbound lanes will serve both directions.

At a June 2 community public meeting, project officials said full closure of the Sheridan Street lanes would be necessary at times, but would be "relatively minor at night and shouldn't be for long." They displayed a map of a detour that would divert traffic onto North 64th Street (south of the reservation) and then east on Taft Street. Westbound traffic on Sheridan would have to follow a detour south on 441 and then west on Taft Street.

The project also includes new lighting and sidewalks, a lane for bicycles and drainage improvements.

♦ See BRIDGE on page 2A

Editorial

The Army Corps Faces More Than a Permit Decision. It Faces a Promise.

• Whitney Gravelle

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is preparing to make what many will see as a permitting decision on Enbridge’s proposed Line 5 tunnel beneath the Straits of Mackinac.

For Tribal Nations, it is something much larger. It is another test of whether the United States will uphold the promises it made when it entered into treaties with our ancestors. For nearly two hundred years, Tribal Nations have heard the same assurances. The United States promised our treaties would be honored. It promised our rights would endure. It promised to protect the resources that make those rights meaningful.

Yet history tells a different story. Time and time again, whenever tribal rights have collided with economic development, industry, or political convenience, those promises have bent. Homelands were taken. Languages were stolen. Rivers were dammed. Sacred places disappeared beneath reservoirs and highways. Native children were separated from their families in the name of assimilation. Entire ways of life were sacrificed because someone else decided the cost was acceptable.

Each generation was told the harm was necessary.

Each generation was told to trust treaties are the supreme law of the land.

The Line 5 trial asks us to believe that this time is different.

When most Americans hear the phrase “treaty trust responsibility,” they think of lawyers, courtrooms, or dusty history books. I think of my grandparents.

I think of my uncle pulling fish from the waters of Lake Superior. I think of my family picking berries in the summer, hunting in the fall, making offerings of tobacco before a harvest, and teaching us that the Great Lakes are not resources to exploit but relatives to care for. For Anishinaabe people, treaties were never simply about land. They were about the future.

When our ancestors signed the 1836 Treaty of Washington, they did not surrender who we were. They reserved the right to continue living as Great Lakes people to fish, hunt, gather, and maintain what the treaty called the “usual privileges of occupancy.”

In return, the United States made a promise.

That promise became what is known today as the federal trust responsibility: a solemn obligation to protect Tribal Nations, our treaty rights, and the natural resources those rights depend upon.

I have spent the last decade fighting to decommission Line 5 and protecting the Great Lakes. During those years, I have sat with nearly every state and federal agency involved in this project. I have participated in consultation after consultation, hoping someone would finally step back and see what Tribal Nations have been saying from the beginning.

Instead, I watched government willingly operate in pieces. One agency studies wetlands. Another evaluates water quality. Another reviews archaeological sites. Another examines endangered species. No one asks what happens when all of those impacts fall on the same people. No one asks what happens when the project threatens not just water quality or cultural resources, but a treaty-protected way of life.

That is where the federal trust responsibility matters.

The trust responsibility is not simply a duty to consult with tribes before making a decision. It is an obligation, a legal, moral, and constitutional obligation, to ensure that the rights reserved by treaty remain real. The United States does not fulfill that obligation by inviting Tribal Nations into the room if it ultimately permits the destruction of the

very resources those treaties were meant to protect.

A treaty right to fish means little if the waters are placed at perpetual risk.

A treaty right to gather means little if construction destroys the places where medicines have been harvested for generations.

A treaty right to hunt means little if forests are cut down and wetlands are filled.

A treaty right to maintain our way of life means little if our ancestors are excavated, catalogued, and displaced to make room for infrastructure.

My family has lived that way of life for generations. My father was a fisherman. My grandfather was a fisherman. My family hunted, gathered, and lived from these waters long before Line 5 was ever imagined. We did not survive because governments took care of us. We survived because the Great Lakes did.

That relationship is exactly what our ancestors protected when they signed the 1836 Treaty. They had the foresight and the strength to preserve the “usual privileges of occupancy.” A relationship with land and water.

Throughout this review, Tribal Nations repeatedly warned the Army Corps, the State of Michigan, and Enbridge that ancestral villages and burial sites existed along both shores of the Straits. We knew because our oral histories remembered what maps did not.

We were right. Hundreds of archaeological sites have now been documented.

For many Americans, those discoveries are remarkable archaeological finds. For us, they are our grandparents, our history, our language, our proof that we have always belonged here. Proof of those “usual privileges of occupancy.” Yet, even after centuries of dispossession, we are still being asked to move aside so another project can proceed.

The United States has an opportunity to write a different chapter.

The Army Corps can continue the long history of treating tribal treaty rights as something to acknowledge before approving the project anyway. Or it can finally give substance to the federal trust responsibility by recognizing that protecting treaty rights sometimes requires saying no.

While the federal trust responsibility is unique to Tribal Nations, the responsibility to faithfully consider the public belongs to every federal agency. Thousands and thousands of people have participated in this process because they recognize that the Straits of Mackinac are not simply another construction site, they are one of the world’s greatest freshwater resources. The Army Corps now has both treaty obligations and a clear public mandate to protect them.

This decision will say far more than whether Enbridge receives a permit. It will answer whether the United States believes its promises endure when they become inconvenient. For a process that hears every voice but changes nothing does not build public trust. It erodes it.

For Tribal Nations, this question is as old as the Republic itself. The Army Corps now has the opportunity to answer it differently.

I hope it does, not only for Bay Mills Indian Community, but for every American who believes that when our nation gives its word, it should keep it. For the question before the United States is whether those words are merely written on parchment, or whether they still carry the weight of a nation’s honor.

Whitney Gravelle is president of the Bay Mills Indian Community in Michigan. This guest opinion was published on nativenewsonline.net.

Everglades, STOF’s McDaniel Ranch featured on ABC’s July 4 special

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

The Everglades and the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s McDaniel Ranch were featured on ABC’s 24-hour commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the United States July 4 in a segment called the “Seven Natural Wonders of America.”

National Geographic Explorer Carlton Ward Jr. interviewed Alex Johns, the tribe’s executive director of Agriculture, at the McDaniel Ranch located a few miles north of the Big Cypress Reservation. Johns and his crew moved about 110 head of cattle a few miles from a pasture to a pen for vaccinations as a drone captured the action for the broadcast.

In 2021, Ward worked to get the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act passed in the state legislature, in which 18 million acres are designated priority preservation landscape. That includes working ranches in the Everglades, such as the McDaniel Ranch.

“There was a time when the environmentalists didn’t favor the ranchers, then they found out we were actually the original environmentalists,” Johns said on the program. “Our people are called the ‘Cowkeepers’; we keep cows, we raise cows and we’ve fed our families for 500 years. You have to have these herding animals graze this land to keep it pristine and the prairies open and keep everything from growing over.”

“The open green space can filter the water and purify that water on its way down to the [Everglades] National Park,” added Ward, who comes from a ranching family in central Florida.

“Good Morning America” anchor Robin Roberts interviewed Betty Osceola, of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, who talked about protecting the ecosystem and her ancestral land as they explored the Everglades on an airboat.

“The Florida Everglades, it’s a magical place,” Osceola said. “It’s just like this secret garden you’re traveling into and there’s no other place like it in the world.”

Historically the Miccosukee people have lived in the Everglades on tree islands. The Miccosukee Tribe’s constitution states



Beverly Bidney

Alex Johns, who was interviewed on ABC’s “Seven Natural Wonders of America” that aired July 4 and drew more than 4.5 million total viewers, works at McDaniel Ranch on the day of the taping.

they have a duty to protect the Everglades. The greatest threat Osceola sees to her homeland is the pressure of development.

“This is my people’s home,” Osceola said. “For the Miccosukee to be Miccosukee we have to keep that deep connection here. In order for us to thrive, we need to protect the Everglades itself.”

California returns ancestral land to tribes

BY CALVIN TIGER
Staff Reporter

In June, the state of California’s Transportation Commission approved a return of 136 acres of ancestral land that includes the Blues Beach and Mendocino County bluffs to the Kai Poma, a nonprofit that represents: Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians, Round Valley Indian Tribes, and the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians. According to the California Transportation Commission (CTC), the transfer includes defining boundaries, an agreement to various environmental terms, and a completion of management plans.

“This is beyond huge,” Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians Chair J. Carlos Rivera told the Los Angeles Times. “It’s

enormous from our tribal perspective that we are basically obtaining the land that our people once lived on before colonization.”

The state of California had purchased the land back in the 1960’s for the expansion of Highway 1 and to also create a scenic viewpoint for travelers according to the CTC.

After the land transfer, Kai Poma plans on conducting cultural, archeological, and environmental studies and a resource management plan. A public access management plan has also been drafted to let the public access the lands from sunrise to sunset.

“This momentous transfer restores a sacred cultural connection between Native peoples and their ancestral homelands in the north state. By virtue of a collaborative effort among tribal nations, state agencies,

“The health of the Everglades is the health of us all,” Roberts said. “This is part of the country that people need to see.”

The “Seven Natural Wonders of America” segment aired from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and was watched by 4.5 million total viewers, according to Nielsen. It is available to watch on YouTube.

Tribes, states, and the federal government battle for Colorado River water rights

FROM KUNM (NEW MEXICO PUBLIC RADIO)

The largest proposed tribal water rights settlement in U.S. history — which could transform some Native American communities — continues to stall. KUNM’s Jeanette DeDios talked about tribal water rights to the Colorado River with Heather Tanana, who is Navajo and an assistant law professor for the University of Denver, on New Mexico in Focus.

Heather Tanana: So tribes, in order to exercise these water rights that are legal, have been legally acknowledged since 1908, you either have to go to the court and adjudicate your right, or you have to reach a settlement. And so that’s what three tribes did: San Juan Southern Paiute, the Hopi Tribe, and Navajo Nation. These are outstanding rights that they’ve been trying to reach an agreement on for literally decades. So the next step is getting that congressional approval. And so it’s been introduced twice. This is the second time, and I think we’re all really crossing our fingers that’ll make it over this final hurdle because they’ll secure much needed water for Hopi, Navajo, and give reservation lands to the San Juan Southern Paiute.

KUNM: And what has been the central conflict holding this water settlement back? **Heather Tanana:** So we actually had a hearing just back in March before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and we heard testimony from all three of the tribal leaders about how important this settlement is to their communities and how necessary it is

for their survival, again, economic growth and benefit. At the same time, we also had the Upper Basin states, so that includes New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming, who submitted these letters to the Senate committee, and they all kind of said the same thing. They said, you know, we recognize tribes have water rights. It’s important to settle and to quantify those, but as Upper Basin states, we have concerns — concerns that their water would be impacted, and that it’s doing something that hadn’t been done before. This exchange of inner basin tribe water in the upper or lower, and vice versa, and they’re concerned that that would create some kind of negative precedent, and just being able to account for, as I mentioned before, in this broader Colorado River governance, and so that seems to be the primary hangup.

KUNM: And the Upper Basin states say that the Navajo Nation’s ability to lease the water could create a precedent for other tribes to do the same. How realistic is this, and what would be the issue if it does?

Heather Tanana: It gets a little disingenuous when we’re talking about the law of the river and the original 1922 compact that made this division of the upper and lower. Well, Navajo is right there in the middle. They cross the Upper Basin and the Lower Basin, and this is exactly what Navajo President Buu Nygren said in his testimony. It’s a unique situation. Navajo is the only tribe to cross the basins, and so does it really set up a precedent when it can’t happen again because we don’t have

a tribe that again crosses that border, the imaginary line between the Upper and Lower Basin, and it’s really important to remember that in the 1922 compact, and really until the last five years or so, tribes have not been involved in Colorado River governance at all. The 1922 compact actually includes a provision that says nothing in this compact shall be construed as affecting the obligations of the United States to the Indian tribes. So they weren’t included in the law, and to try and use the law of the river now as a way to prevent them from exercising these legally recognized tribal water rights, I think, is a little problematic.

KUNM: Can you walk me through the process of what tribes typically have to do in order to get access from the federal government?



Heather Tanana (Navajo)

◆ BRIDGE From page 1A

The project will also impact traffic on the Florida Turnpike with nightly closures of

one lane in each direction.

For more information about the project go to wspengages.com/SheridanStBridge.

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

Publisher: The Seminole Tribe of Florida
Phone: 954-985-5700

Senior Editor: Kevin Johnson, ext. 10715
KevinJohnson@semtribe.com

Staff Reporter: Beverly Bidney, ext. 16466
BeverlyBidney@semtribe.com

Staff Reporter: Calvin Tiger, ext. 10739
CalvinTiger@semtribe.com

Staff Reporter: Daniella Hakim, ext. 10704
DaniellaHakim@semtribe.com

Advertising: Donna Mason, ext. 10733
DonnaMason@semtribe.com

Contributors: Byron Osceola, Mayli Tommie, Teresa Snow

© 2026 Seminole Tribe of Florida

◆ See WATER RIGHTS on page 4B

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

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

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

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

Issue: September 2026
Deadline: August 19, 2026

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

Community

Mitchellanie Cypress dances in Nashville

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Mitchellanie Cypress, an eighth grader at Immokalee Community Academy (ICA), sang and danced on the stage of the renowned Ryman Auditorium, former home of Nashville’s Grand Ole Opry, in late June.

Cypress wasn’t alone on that big stage; she was with 26 other dancers from her school’s Beta Club which was competing against other student groups. The group competes for national titles in academics as well. Cypress’s group came in fourth place in the song and dance category.

The theme was Wired for Success, for which the group performed two song and dance routines. The ICA Beta Club was a top three finisher in the prior Orlando competition, which qualified it for the Nashville competition. In Nashville, they performed twice. The first time they place in the top 10, the second time they placed fourth.

“It felt nice, I really enjoyed it,” Cypress said. “I didn’t get nervous at all.”

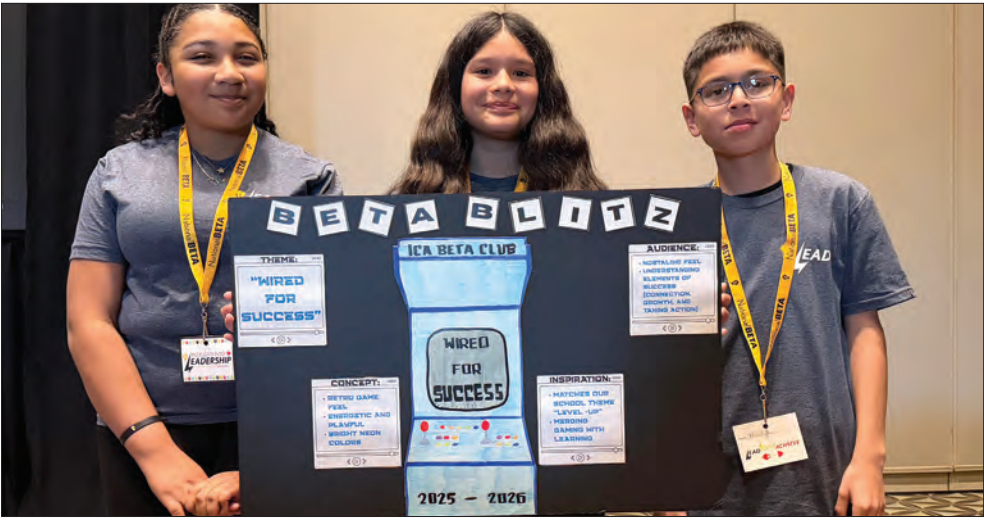
Cypress has been in the Beta Club since sixth grade and she’s been singing and dancing with the group ever since. She also attended a leadership summit in Jekyll Island, Georgia, in March.

ICA earned a National Beta School



Courtesy photo
Mitchellanie Cypress holds awards from the Beta Club Regional Leadership Summit in Georgia in March.

of Merit for the 2025-2026 school year. Founded in 1934, the national program encourages students to do well in school, become leaders, serve others and build strong character.



Courtesy photo
From left, Mariah Martinez, Mitchellanie Cypress and Noel Quintero with the Beta Blitz board they created as part of a group effort at the leadership summit.

Pedro Zepeda receives Folk Heritage Award

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Pedro Zepeda was honored with the 2025 Folk Heritage Award May 23 at a ceremony held at the 74th annual Florida Folk Festival held at the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center in White Springs.

The award is given by the Florida Folklife Program, which is part of the Florida Division of Arts and Culture. Founded in 1985, the Florida Folk Heritage Awards recognizes the stewardship of Florida’s traditions and are presented to folk artists and folklife advocates who have made longstanding contributions to the preservation of Florida’s traditional arts and culture.

“It’s an honor to be able to honor my teachers and others who taught me and pass it on to the next generation,” Zepeda said. “To get recognized for that is pretty cool.”

Zepeda has been carving dugout canoes from fallen cypress trees since he was 14 years old. He learned from Ingram Billie, Jr., his brother Brian Zepeda and

his uncle Leroy Osceola. Although Zepeda uses a combination of hand tool and power tools, the canoes are traditional Seminole watercraft which used to be the only method of transportation in the Everglades.

Zepeda educates people about Seminole culture at conferences and other events around the country. In July, he taught a three-day class in paddle carving at the College of the Muscogee Nation in Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

His canoes have been displayed at the Collier County Museum, History Fort Lauderdale and HistoryMiami Museum, where he was an artist-in-residence in 2019. Zepeda has also demonstrated canoe carving at the Florida Folk Festival, Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park and the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian.



Courtesy photo
Pedro Zepeda accepts the Folk Heritage Award and speaks to the audience at the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center.



Courtesy photo
State folklorist Dr. Dominick Tartaglia and Folk Heritage awardee Pedro Zepeda at the award ceremony in White Springs May 23.

Spencer Battiest named member of Recording Academy Class of 2026

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

The annual Grammy membership invitations were sent to established music professionals July 9 which included Spencer Battiest.

“I’m so excited to share that I’ve joined the Recording Academy’s 2026 New Member Class,” Battiest said in a statement. “It’s an honor to be part of a community of music creators and professionals who are helping support, uplift, and advocate for the people who make and shape music. I’m grateful for the opportunity to use my voice, contribute to the Grammy Awards process, and be part of conversations that help move our industry forward. As a Native artist, I’m especially proud to help elevate Indigenous voices and support greater recognition, opportunities, and representation for Native creators

across the music industry. Music is shaped by so many voices, genres, backgrounds, and perspectives, and I’m proud to add mine to the mix.”

The Recording Academy extended the invitations to over 4,000 music creators and industry professionals including Cash Cobain, Lola Young and Sombr. The annual selection of artists aims to diversity the voting body of the Grammys and strengthen advocacy for music rights.

“Every year, we look forward to welcoming a new group of dedicated music creators and professionals through our membership invitations,” said Grammys CEO Harvey Mason, Jr. “Our membership is the engine of the Grammys, and we’re excited for invitees to join our vibrant community, engage with their peers and help shape the future of the music industry.”



Still Here After 35 Years,
Guy Has Some Trustworthy Help.

“Great Reputation
and Worthy of Trust”

Meet **Andy Coffey**
Board Certified in **Criminal Trial**

If there is someone you love who needs help, contact us today.

 **GUY SELIGMAN, P.A.**
Attorney at Law

(954) 760-7600
GuySeligmanLaw.com AMCoffey.com

SEMINOLE
BRIGHTON RV
RESORT

FLEA MARKET

Shop local, support our community!

SEPTEMBER 5TH-7TH, 2026

14685 RESERVATION ROAD OKEECHOBEE, FL 34974

OFFICE: (863) 467-0474 | CELL: (863) 990-1978

BRIGHTONRVRESORT.COM

VENDOR
SET-UP FEE
\$25

WELCOME
TO THE
FLEA MARKET!
★ SHOP ★
★ SELL ★
★ ENJOY! ★

ANTIQUES

Buy, Sell, Trade.





◆ PRINCESSES
From page 1A

Former Miss Seminole Nation of Oklahoma Genesis Rene Talamasey from Seminole Oklahoma, treasurer Joseph H. Blanchard from the Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, and the founder of Nativemax Magazine, Kelly Holmes, from the Mnicoujou Lakota tribe, were judges tasked with selecting this year's princesses.

Both Talamasey and Holmes toured the Big Cypress Reservation prior to the ceremony, where they had the opportunity to visit the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum.

"I'm very grateful to be a part of this experience," Holmes said. "It's a different experience, for anyone to be a judge. Essentially, our decisions can have an impact here. I don't take that lightly, so I'm very honored to be here."

A tribute to the tribe's preceding princesses, Latchford and Smith, was projected prior to the farewell speeches that concluded their one-year reigns.

"As my reign comes to an end, I find myself searching for words large enough to hold my gratitude," Latchford said. "Our community stretches so far across the states and across our generation. I have constantly felt that embrace throughout this past year. Our people and our tribe have been blessed, profoundly so. But blessings are not a resting place—it is a responsibility."



Miss Florida Seminole Serena Zepeda is crowned by the previous princess, Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford.



Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Dahlia Sanders and Miss Florida Seminole Serena Zepeda stand together the morning after the pageant.



Ada Bruised Head



Tahnia Billie



Ciani Smith



During the pageant, Sarafina Billie models her traditional outfit as emcee Cypriss Billie describes what she is wearing and who made it.



Serena Zepeda



Ada Bruised Head describes her beadwork during her talent presentation at the pageant.



Dahlia Sanders describes the patchwork skirts and capes she made during her talent presentation in the pageant.



Holding a bundle of sweetgrass she picked, Carlise Bermudez explains the tribe's use of natural resources.



Leilani Burton tells the story of a pair of twins as her talent presentation.

Behind the scenes, pageant preparations help form bonds, friendships

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — Eight young ladies worked hard for three days to prepare for the 69th annual Miss Florida Seminole Princess Pageant, held July 25 at tribal headquarters in Hollywood. At the same time, the girls formed a strong bond that will likely last for years to come.

Jr. Miss Florida Seminole contestants were Ada Bruised Head, Dahlia Sanders and Ciani Smith. Miss Florida Seminole contestants were Carlise Bermudez, Sarafina Billie, Tahnia Billie, Leilani Burton and Serena Zepeda. They came from Big Cypress, Brighton, Hollywood, Immokalee and Naples to compete.

Day 1, preparations for the pageant begin

Contestants spent three busy days learning what was expected of them and how to project their best selves to the audience and judges. They were coached and supported by a committee of volunteers, all former princesses themselves.

Tribal Secretary Naomi Wilson, Miss Florida Seminole 1985, welcomed the contestants and their parents July 23 for the first day of practice in the auditorium lobby. She introduced each girl as they received their pageant contestant sash from current Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Latchford and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith.

After receiving their sashes, the contestants chose to sit together at one table instead of with their parents. The bonding among the group began immediately.



Leilani Burton studies her story for the talent competition during a break backstage.

"She decided she wanted to try it again and give it one more shot," said Micki Burton, Miss Florida Seminole 1995 and Leilani's mother. "She is the same Leilani, but a little more confident when speaking to people. She's come out of her shell a lot, I'm proud of her."

Tahnia Billie was Jr. Miss Florida Seminole 2023. "Tahnia does her own thing," said Alice Billie, Miss Florida Seminole 1997 and her mother. "She had to wait until she was 18 to go for Miss Florida Seminole."

The contestants brought their outfits and accessories backstage in the auditorium and then got down to the business of rehearsing. The first thing they learned was how to enter the auditorium with waves and smiles.

All contestants were previously given the list of possible impromptu questions they would blindly pick from a basket during the pageant. The girls studied before coming to the practices and went through them together backstage and with the committee in the auditorium. They were very engaged and supportive of each other.

Questions were about the tribe's history and culture and included: knowing the difference between the Council and the Board of Directors, name an iconic Seminole woman past or present, name an exemplary elected official past of present, the significance of the Council Oak tree, how the tribe uses its sovereignty and more.

Latchford and Smith coached the contestants during the study session.

"Lead with your heart, shoulders back," Latchford said. "Speak confidently, smile and say thank you. Don't overthink the answers and don't ramble. Just say what you're going to say."

Randee Osceola, Miss Florida Seminole 2017, led the practice sessions as stage manager and did so with purpose so there would be no surprises. She told the girls to "put some pep in your step."

During the talent and impromptu questions rehearsal, Cherelee Hall, Miss Florida Seminole 2003, sat in the furthest seat from the stage in the last row to make sure the contestants spoke loud enough to be heard clearly.

Later that evening, the contestants adjourned to Okalee Village for a dinner hosted by Latchford and Smith. Food was enjoyed, games were played and the girls relaxed as they continued to bond with one another.

Day 2, honing their skills

Practice was a bit more intense and the contestants wore the outfits and jewelry they would wear during the pageant.

"This is something big," said Bruised Head, 15. "I'm a little scared and nervous, but I wanted to try something new. Serving my tribe and being an ambassador is something I'd like to do, it's important."

The contestants practiced their talents using props and going through it from start to finish.

"Sewing is very important in my family," said Sanders, 15, surrounded by dress forms displaying three of her patchwork skirts and capes during her practice run. "I learned when I was very young and it stuck with me. My grandmother and my mother both sew."

◆ See PREPARATIONS on page 5A



At left, 2025-2026 Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith and at right, 2025-2026 Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford coach the contestants on how to project positively to the audience.

◆ PREPARATIONS

From page 4A

Zepeda, 24, told the story of the Box Turtle and the Rabbit and used the entire stage as she told the story in a very animated fashion.

Bermudez, 21, is passionate about her work at the Department of Conservation and gave a presentation about the tribe's use of its natural resources including the pop ash and cypress trees.

"We continue to use them and they support us," she said. "We found a way to survive in the Everglades and now we are protecting them. We also use sweetgrass for baskets and just planted some on the Immokalee reservation so we can pick on our own reservations."

Sarafina Billie talked about the history of patchwork.

"I grew up watching my mother and grandmother make patchwork," said Billie, 19, who displayed some of her work. "Sewing is a way to keep our culture alive. I come from a long line of sewers."

The pageant volunteers gave critiques; these are some of their comments: "Smile because people are always looking at you. This is your moment, don't be shy. Tell them you are ready for this. Don't talk too fast, have a conversation with the audience. Be confident and make sure your posture is on point. Look happy to be here. Your introduction is your time to shine, get rid of filler words such as like, um, sorry."

After the day's rehearsal, the girls dressed up and met on the pool deck of the Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood for a group portrait and the Seminole Princess Banquet. It isn't every day one sees pageant contestants in full dress parading through a resort pool deck. As the contestants walked to and from the photo location, sunbathers gazed at them intently.

At the evening's banquet, two or three contestants sat at tables with one judge. The judges rotated between the tables so by the end of the night, they had spoken with each contestant in an informal conversation. Contestants also went on stage and introduced themselves to the crowd and the judges, which was another chance to practice public speaking.



Beverly Bidney

Pageant stage manager Randee Osceola helps Ada Bruised Head put on a beaded necklace during practice.

Day 3, Pageant Day

The contestants dressed in business or traditional Seminole attire for their individual interviews with the three judges. The Jr. Miss contestants had 10-minute interviews, the Miss contestants had 20-minute interviews. Afterward, it was back to the auditorium for the final day of practice.

The girls were feeling mostly confident, but some had a few nerves thrown in to keep them on their toes.

"I feel grounded," Zepeda said. "I thought I'd feel nervous, but I don't. I'm just grateful to be here. There aren't a lot of girls my age in my community, so it's nice to be surrounded by other girls my age who have different backgrounds. Seeing the perspective of people from other reservations is always nice."

"It's amazing, it feels like we are sisters that I've known forever," said Sanders. "It's a really fun experience and I have gotten to know more about myself. I love meeting new people and making new friends."

"It's going really well," said Tahnna Billie, 18. "I thought I'd be more nervous, but now that I'm here, it's OK. I'm happy to be competing again. I feel hyped and ready."

"I'm excited to see what happens tonight," said Bermudez, whose mother was

out of town taking her brother to college. "The nerves of my mom not being here are there, but my aunt and some of my other family are here. My mom prepared me to do things for myself and I'm grateful she raised me like that. I'm passionate about my work and passing on tribal history. I was able to get a job that reflects and respects our culture, it's something I value."

"I'm nervous and excited," said Sarafina Billie. "I want to make my mother and grandmother proud. I have a little sister and I want to set an example for her. You have to be proud of who you are."

"I'm feeling really happy, it's going well," said Bruised Head. "We can't all get a crown, but we have a sisterhood. Meeting all these girls and getting to make new friends is amazing."

"I've gotten over being anxious," said Burton, 21. "I'm feeling a lot more calm and getting to know the girls has been great."

"I'm feeling pretty good and pretty confident," said Smith, 15. "I'm excited to go on stage and show what I've practiced for."

After the final practice, the girls went back to the hotel to relax before the pageant began.



Beverly Bidney

Contestants and pageant volunteers backstage on pageant day.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Serena Zepeda, pageant judge Genesis Rene Talamasey and Ada Bruised Head talk at the Princess Banquet.



Beverly Bidney

Contestants listen, learn and applaud the assistance they receive from princess pageant volunteers during a practice of how to best answer the impromptu questions during the pageant. From left to right are Dahlia Sanders, Ada Bruised Head, Carlise Bermudez, Tahnna Billie, Leilani Burton, Ciani Smith and emcee Cypress Billie.



Beverly Bidney

Posing together in front of the Princess Banquet ballroom from left to right are 2025-2026 Miss Florida Seminole Bailey Latchford, Tahnna Billie, Ada Bruised Head, Leilani Burton, Dahlia Sanders, Sarafina Billie, Carlise Bermudez, Serena Zepeda, Ciani Smith and 2025-2026 Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith.



Beverly Bidney

Miss Florida Seminole 2025-2026 Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford waves her final goodbye as she prepares to take the stage for her farewell remarks.

Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford Miss Florida Seminole 2025-2026

Cheehantâmo,
My name is Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford. I am the 21-year-old daughter of Amy and William Latchford, and the granddaughter of Marie and Jimmy Hank Osceola. I am a proud member of the Otter Clan and grew up in Pembroke Pines, Florida.

I am the 2025-2026 Miss Florida Seminole.

Throughout my reign, I have been fortunate enough to experience a plethora of cultures and meet a wide variety of people across the country. The opportunity to represent and serve as Miss Florida Seminole has been an honor I will cherish my entire life. Talking with tribal members from across the reservations, interacting with our youth, and educating people about our resilient history are just a few memorable times I cherish.

A year ago today, I was filled with nerves and questions. Thoughts like "will I do good?" or "what if I mess up" plagued my mind and had me a bit scared for what was to come. Because of the support from my family, Tribal Council and Board, and the encouraging tribal members, I was able to overcome these mental barriers and flourish in my role as Miss Florida Seminole. With the love I received this past year, it motivated me to be a good role model for our youth, to listen to our elders, and work hard to be the best I can be to show others anything they can dream of is achievable with hard work and dedication.

Thank you to the Tribal Council and the Board of Directors for always providing your support in my endeavors and trusting me with this role, the seamstresses who put in time and effort into my gorgeous outfits I wore when representing the Seminole

Tribe, the artists who worked hard to bead and create all of my beautiful jewelry, the Seminole people for the motivational and fun conversations and keeping faith in me to represent our people well, Florida State University for uplifting my platform and supporting me as a student while I balanced the crown and my education, and my family for always picking me up when I needed support and encouraging me no matter what.

A message I want to leave with everyone: Strive to be better than you were yesterday and take chances!

There are a multitude of paths life can take you down, but you'll never know if you don't go for it. It can be scary, the potential to fall down is present but you have the strength to get back up and keep going. Put the work into yourself to make the best impact in your life and the lives around you. Being 1% better than you were yesterday is still progress, remember that progress isn't linear.

To the next Miss Florida Seminole: Remember to work hard, be humble but proud, and stay true to yourself. You represent your people, your family, and yourself in this beautiful role.

Thank you all for trusting me to represent our people well. Being your Miss Florida Seminole Princess will always be held near and dear to my heart. I hope I was able to make as meaningful an impact on your lives as you've made on mine. Now, I look forward to continuing my education and pursuing my goals to continue making my family, my tribe, and myself proud.

Shonaabesh -

Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford
Miss Florida Seminole 2025-2026



Beverly Bidney

An emotional address for 2025-2026 Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Chaka Yani Smith as she talks about her year as a princess and says goodbye for the last time wearing the crown.

Chaka Yani Smith Jr. Miss Florida Seminole 2025-2026

Estonko!
My name is Chaka Yani Smith and I am the reigning 2025-2026 Florida Jr. Miss Seminole. I am 18 years old, reside in Okeechobee, Florida but call Brighton my home reservation. My parents are Suraiya and Chaka Smith and I am a proud member of the Bird Clan.

My este-cate, or creek name is "Eslicet" which means "to sit with something". I recently graduated from Okeechobee High School where I also earned my Associate in Arts degree from Indian River State College. I will soon be leaving to further my education at Howard University located in Washington, D.C. to pursue my Bachelors degree in political science and then obtain my law degree. Eventually I would like to work in the Florida House of Representatives and one day, Congress, to make a positive difference not just for Florida, but for the rest of the country, especially my Seminole people.

It has been an honor to represent you, the members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, each community has welcomed me with open arms and I am grateful for the knowledge of our culture that has been shared with me from every person that I have

encounterd.

Throughout the year I have traveled to many locations across Indian Country and the State of Florida and have been told by many elders, "that it's good to see that the Seminole are still here", that statement alone has given me the drive to continue to represent my people after my reign commences.

Ultimately, I want to continue to be a bridge between generations, between tradition and our future. Being Jr. Miss Florida Seminole was just the beginning to serve my people, to listen and learn, and to proudly represent everything it means to be Seminole, exemplifying what we

Seminole people are: strong, proud, resilient and unconquered.

From the bottom of my heart, MVTO. Mvto to our leaders, our communities, and my family for this opportunity to represent you. Mvto for the encouraging words and the unforgettable opportunity of being your ambassador. It was truly an honor.

Mvto,

Chaka Yani Smith
2025-2026 Florida Jr Miss Seminole

◆ SHIPPING
From page 1A

Seminole 4-H kids typically receive their cattle from ranchers before calf shipping and bring them to the pens in Big Cypress and Brighton to be weighed during calf shipping. In Brighton 53 4h-crs received their animals, which were 38 steers, 12 commercial heifers and three registered heifers. In Big Cypress 4H-crs received 23 steers, three yearling heifers and one bred two-year-old heifer.

Each 4-H'er led their animal from the cattle trailer, through the pens to the scales and back onto the trailer again.

Cheyenne McInturff, 4-H program assistant and parent, was there to support her daughters Katelyn Mariscal, 11, and Dakota Mariscal, 16, who both got their steers from Clarissa Bowers' herd.

Katelyn has been in 4-H for four years, but this is her first steer. She named him Brisket.

"I'll learn responsibility for the animals and make sure he has good feed and water," said the Immokalee Middle School sixth grader.

Dakota has been in 4-H for six years and this is her fifth steer. She named him Cheez-It. She would like to work with cattle after high school and eventually have her own herd.

"I like the experience of it all," said the Immokalee High School junior. "I get a new



NIGC announces \$46.2 billion in FY25 gross gaming revenues

FROM NIGC

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Indian Gaming Commission announced July 21 gross gaming revenues of \$46.2 billion for fiscal year 2025, the highest ever for the Indian gaming industry. This figure reflects a \$2.3 billion increase over FY 2024, representing overall growth of 5.3% across the Indian gaming industry.

The gross gaming revenue figure is derived from independently audited financial statements submitted by 545 gaming establishments operated by 246 tribes across 29 states. Seven of the NIGC’s eight regions showed an increase over FY 2024.

“Indian gaming is an important contributor to tribal economies that empowers sovereign tribal governments to invest in their communities and provide their citizens with essential services,” said Vice Chair Billy Kirkland in a press release.

“I would like to wish the Indian gaming community a job well done on another strong year. These GGR results reflect the continued commitment of tribal regulators and operators to responsible growth and community benefit,” NIGC Associate Commissioner Sharon Avery said in the release.

NIGC uses gross gaming revenue as a key industry measure, defined as the amount wagered minus winnings returned to players. The agency collects this information annually to assess trends and help guide regulatory policy in support of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

August birthday for Hard Rock co-founder



Wiki Commons

Peter Morton, a co-founder of Hard Rock, turns 79 on Aug. 7. Morton and Isaac Tigrett opened the first Hard Rock Cafe in 1971 in London.

Hard Rock helps supply meals for earthquake victims

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — In reponse to the Venezuela earthquake, Hard Rock Heals Foundation, the charitable arm of Hard Rock International, together with Hard Rock Bet, is contributing \$60,000 to fund approximately 15,000 meals through World Central Kitchen, a nonprofit known for quickly deploying chef-prepared meals to communities affected by natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

On the ground, Hard Rock Cafe Caracas team members are preparing and serving 1,000 fresh meals each day for nearby families and residents affected by the disaster. The Cafe is acting as a central distribution center alongside World Central Kitchen.

“In moments of crisis, our responsibility is to move quickly and compassionately to help people in need,” said Jeff Hook, chief operating officer for Hard Rock International and Hard Rock Heals Foundation Board member. “Through the Hard Rock Heals Foundation, Hard Rock Bet, World Central Kitchen and our dedicated team at Hard Rock Cafe Caracas, we are helping deliver nourishment, comfort and care to families facing an incredibly difficult recovery.”

To support the relief, visit <https://donate.wck.org/campaign/816248/donate>.



Hard Rock

Hard Rock Caracas team members prepare food.

Patricia Tate to lead Salt River Community Gaming Enterprises

FROM PRESS RELEASE

SALT RIVER PIMA-MARICOPA INDIAN COMMUNITY, Ariz. — Salt River Community Gaming Enterprises (SRCGE) announced July 29 the appointment of Patricia Tate as president and chief executive officer, effective Aug. 1.

An enrolled member of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Tate becomes the first woman and first enrolled tribal member to serve as CEO of the Gaming Enterprises. She steps into the organization’s top leadership role following more than two decades of executive service, during which she has helped guide the growth of Casino Arizona and Talking Stick Resort.

“Today’s announcement marks an important milestone for our gaming enterprise and our Community,” said Martin Harvier, president of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, in a press release. “After 22 years of dedicated service, Ms. Tate brings a deep understanding of our organization, strong financial leadership, and a long-term commitment to its success. The

Community’s selection reflects confidence in her experience and vision, and I look forward to working alongside her as we continue to strengthen our gaming enterprise for the benefit of our Community.”

Tate joined the Gaming Enterprises in 2004 as controller, was promoted to chief financial officer in 2006, and served as executive vice president and chief financial officer from 2011 through 2026, a period which included the expansion of Casino Arizona and the opening of Talking Stick Resort.

As president and CEO, Tate will oversee all aspects of Casino Arizona and Talking Stick Resort, with a focus on sustainable growth, operational excellence, employee development, and continued investment in initiatives that support the economic well-being of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

Tate holds a Master of Finance & Accounting and a Master of Business Administration from Keller Graduate School of Management and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of Arizona.

Her professional achievements have earned significant recognition, including being named a 2026 Phoenix Business Journal Outstanding Women in Business honoree, 2015 Female Executive of the Year, a 2015 AZCentral Highest Ranking Executive Woman, a 2014 Phoenix Business Journal Outstanding CFO, and one of Arizona’s 50 Most Influential and 50 Most Dynamic Women in Business in 2013.

Beyond her executive leadership, Tate has a long record of civic and charitable service. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Arizona Humane Society and her past board roles on the Board of Governors for the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Scottsdale and Florence Crittenton.



Patricia Tate

Upcoming shows at Seminole Brighton Bay

BRIGHTON — Here’s a look at upcoming shows at Seminole Brighton Bay Casino on the Brighton Reservation:

- **Aug. 22** – Country music artist Elijah Scott, 8 p.m.
- **Sept. 5** – Classic Albums Live,

Classic Albums Live, a modern-day orchestra that brings the world’s greatest records to life on stage note for note and cut for cut, will present Led Zeppelin: II. Showtime is 8 p.m.

- **Nov. 6** – Grammy winning singer

Richard Marx, 8 p.m.

- **Dec. 5** – Legendary hard rock band Blue Oyster Cult will perform its classics starting at 8 p.m.

For more information visit casino.hardrock.com/brighton.

Memories of Elvis concert comes to Immokalee

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE — Chris MacDonald’s Memories of Elvis in Concert tribute to the King of Rock and Roll returns to Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on Aug. 15 at 8 p.m. with doors opening at 7 p.m. Tickets

are available from [ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com) or at [moreinparadise.com](https://www.moreinparadise.com).

MacDonald is the star and creator of Chris MacDonald’s Memories of Elvis in Concert, a national touring full-production, multi-media tribute, complete with a dynamic band and singers. With the ultimate honor of being the only tribute

artist hired by Elvis Presley Enterprises to perform at Graceland’s Heartbreak Hotel, MacDonald draws his audience in with the look, sounds and nuances that made Elvis the King. The show is not a parody or an overdone impersonation; rather, there is a true understanding of what Elvis did best, connecting with his music and the heart of

his audience. It is a natural, heartfelt tribute to an American icon and his music.

As an accomplished and experienced entertainer, MacDonald has performed in Vegas and Branson.

New restaurant to replace Ciproso

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood announced July 30 plans to introduce a new signature restaurant created by Major Food Group (MFG), an acclaimed hospitality company behind some of the world’s most celebrated dining destinations.

The forthcoming restaurant will succeed

Ciproso, which permanently closed July 19 following seven years of service. Guest favorites from Ciproso are being offered at Abiaka Wood Fire Grill, which has expanded its operations to seven days a week.

In 2024, a partnership between Hard Rock International and Major Food Group was created to develop and curate distinctive dining experiences across Hard Rock’s global portfolio of integrated resorts, hotels and casinos. Hailed as one of “the most

creative companies in the world” by GQ, Major Food Group has redefined luxury hospitality with internationally renowned restaurants, private clubs, and residential endeavors that include Carbone, Torrisi, and ZZ’s Club.

“Major Food Group has an extraordinary ability to create restaurants that become destinations in their own right,” said Jim Allen, Chairman of Hard Rock International and CEO of Seminole Gaming, in a press

release. “Bringing an exclusive MFG concept to our resort is an exciting next step in our partnership and reflects our continued investment in world-class dining and hospitality. We look forward to sharing what we are creating together later this year.”

Additional information, including the restaurant’s name, culinary direction, design renderings, opening timeline and reservation details, will be announced this fall, according to the press release.

Andy Matheis named SVP of Marketing at Hard Rock Tampa

FROM PRESS RELEASE

TAMPA — Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa announced July 30 the appointment of

Andy Matheis as senior vice president of Marketing, where he will lead the property’s marketing team and oversee strategic initiatives to strengthen the brand, enhance guest engagement and drive continued growth.

Matheis joins Seminole Hard Rock Tampa with nearly 20 years of gaming and hospitality marketing experience. Most recently, he served as senior vice president of Marketing and regional chief marketing officer for Caesars Entertainment, overseeing integrated marketing efforts across the company’s eight Las Vegas resort properties. In that role, he refined brand positioning, strengthened customer engagement and delivered measurable business results in one of the world’s most competitive gaming and entertainment markets.



Andy Matheis

Cha-ching for Chobee patron at Brighton Bay

FROM PRESS RELEASE

BRIGHTON — A lucky guest from Okeechobee won a jackpot totaling \$39,618.89 on July 22 at Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino.

The guest was playing Aristocrat Gaming’s Triple Supreme slot machine and placed an \$8.80 bet on a 10-cent denomination to land the jackpot.

The winner chose to remain anonymous.

Classic guest hits slot for \$258K

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — A lucky guest hit a massive jackpot totaling \$258,769.58 on July 13, while playing Aristocrat Gaming’s Dragon Link slot machine at Seminole Classic Casino in Hollywood.

The guest wagered \$25 on a \$1 denomination to land the grand jackpot. The progressive has since reset to \$200,000. A progressive slot machine starts with a base jackpot amount that increases as guests continue to play.

Richard Marx to perform Nov. 7

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE — Grammy-winner Richard Marx will perform his hit songs at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on Nov. 7 at 8 p.m. For tickets go to [moreinparadise.com](https://www.moreinparadise.com). Attendees must be 21.

Marx is a singer, songwriter, and producer whose career has spanned four decades of chart success and creative reinvention.



WHO’S YOUR ATTORNEY?

Travis W. Trueblood, LL.M
Advocacy for Sovereignty & Justice

Areas of Practice:

- Native American Law Matters
- Civil Rights & Serious Legal Matters
- Business Law
- Tribal, State and Federal Court Representation

Choctaw Tribal Member
Veteran - U.S. Navy and Air Force

Admitted to Practice:
Tribal Courts / FL / DC / MD / TX / U.S. Supreme Court

Call or Text:
(954) 871-ATTY (2889)
Calls Answered 24 Hours
Consultations Always Free

**Trueblood Law**
Advocacy for Sovereignty & Justice
500 East Broward Boulevard, Suite 900, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33397
www.truebloodlaw.com

Offices in Fort Lauderdale, FL, and Washington, DC



RICHARD CASTILLO

954.522.3500

HELPING THE SEMINOLE COMMUNITY FOR MANY YEARS

24 HOURS A DAY

Since 1990 I have protected rights like yours. My office defends DUIs, drug offenses, suspended licenses, domestic violence, and all felonies and misdemeanors throughout Florida and the United States.

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

RICHARD CASTILLO
FLORIDA CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY
WWW.CASTILLOLAWOFFICES.COM

New article series features Doris Duke Oral History Collection

BY ANTHONY ALVAREZ
Oral History Assistant

BIG CYPRESS — From 1966 to 1975, tobacco and energy billionaire Doris Duke funded seven universities regionally spread across the United States to document the diverse historical perspectives that Indigenous people have via recorded oral history interviews.

Chosen to document the diverse historical perspectives that Southeastern Indigenous people have, the University of Florida recorded over 1,000 oral history interviews with narrators from tribes throughout the Southeast, including the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Despite the project’s seemingly progressive objective to document Native American perspectives, the University of Florida used these oral history interviews as opportunities to research the Seminole Tribe, write several books on its history, and exploit its stories by using them to inform their research without consent and keeping them housed in an archive 285 miles away from the tribe’s reservations. To correct this, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum organized the transfer of the University of Florida’s entire collection of Florida Seminole oral histories to the museum in 2023. With this collection back on the reservation, the tribe regains control over how these oral histories are accessed, used, and are now made accessible to the community.

To raise awareness of this collection, we’re starting a new series that highlights the stories captured within it. This month,

we’re sharing Ivy Stranahan describing the fun that Seminole children had trying on shoes and hats for the first time in her and her husband’s trading post. If you’re a tribal citizen interested in listening to or receiving copies of these oral histories, please contact me at Anthonyalvarez1@semtribe.com or call the museum at (863) 902-1113.

Interviewer: You made your first contact through the [Seminole] children, did you not?

Ivy Stranahan: I made contact through the [Seminole] children entirely. They were very curious to see me, and they’d come over in the bushes around me in the cottage. I would see them and I was anxious to meet them, too. And I would come out on the porch and smile and say something. But of course, I didn’t know any Indian, but they understood what I said. It took about 6 or 8 months to a year for us to really get acquainted. But every time they would come in, they would come over to spy out to see what I was like, and eventually I got them to come up to the doorsteps and into the house. They were very curious, just like any child. They wanted to know. They came into the house, and they would try on the shoes. They had never worn shoes, you know? And the hats, the big hats that we used to wear at that time, and our dresses, and they would laugh and have more fun. I used to tell them they could laugh more than our girls. Nobody ever thought of an Indian laughing, you know? They are very stoic. But they had lots of fun.

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



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum
The rows of cassette tapes and transcripts being cataloged by Anthony Alvarez, Oral History assistant.

Quilt block honors MMIP

STAFF REPORT

In a recent social media post, the National Museum of the American Indian highlighted Emma Alcazar’s (Chickasaw) Quilt Block for NMAI’s theme of 20th century to present day (1902–2026).

These are her words:

"Because Native women and girls are victims of violent crime at a higher-than-average rate, I knew I wanted to highlight the plight of missing and murdered Indigenous people by including my handprint, created in red fabric, in honor and remembrance of lives that have been disrupted or lost, and to recognize the ongoing struggles that we still fight.

For the background of the block, I chose colors from the natural world, and I was inspired by the diamond shapes that appear in star quilts, fishing nets, leaves, feathers, decorated containers, and most personal to me—in Chickasaw and Choctaw beaded necklaces. These diamonds are individual, like our separate tribes, but interlock to create a connected pattern for the background of this quilt block. They represent our collective experiences during the past 125 years. I wanted to show that although we faced and still face adversity, we are still here."

—Emma Alcazar (Chickasaw).



Milo Osceola, Pedro Zepeda featured in Toronto art exhibition

STAFF REPORT

Stickball sticks made by Milo Osceola and a ball made by Pedro Zepeda are part of the GATHER in Toronto exhibition that opened July 23 at the Market Gallery in Toronto, Canada.

The exhibit features documentaries, the contemporary art by Osceola and Zepeda, both from the Seminole Tribe of Florida, as well as Marina Dempster, Maria Hupfield, Safoura Zahedi, Benjamin Spears, Daniel Henhawk, Elder Aceytuno and David Barnett, and new and historic items from the City of Toronto Art and Artifact Collection.

"This exhibition invites visitors to examine some of the ways people come together in companionship, competition and celebration through sport," said Tara Chadwick, chief curator, Toronto History Museum, who has previously worked with Seminole artists for exhibitions in Fort Lauderdale.

"The Creator’s Game, or lacrosse, has a long history



City of Toronto
Pedro Zepeda's "Seminole Lacrosse Ball" (first ball in the photo) at GATHER exhibition in Toronto.



City of Toronto
Tara Chadwick, chief curator



City of Toronto
"Seminole Sticks" by Milo Osceola are paired with sticks from Ojibwe and Mohawk in the Toronto exhibition. Osceola's sticks are the first two on the left and the first two on the right.

rooted in community and culture, helping to shape values, resolve disagreements and build unity. Works featured in GATHER in Toronto, including “Seminole Sticks” (2015) by Milo Osceola and “Seminole Lacrosse Ball” (2015) by Pedro Zepeda, help

tell a larger story about how traditional and contemporary ball games have strengthened social bonds, supported wellbeing and passed knowledge between generations.”

The exhibition allows visitors to listen to local sports origin stories alongside

artistic reflections on identity, resilience and belonging through works that highlight the power of connection across cultures and communities.

The exhibition runs through Nov. 1 at the gallery in downtown Toronto.

AUGUST 2026

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH



Figure 1: Fragmentary tiger shark tooth. Red: drill hole. Green: black coloration. Orange: enamel wear

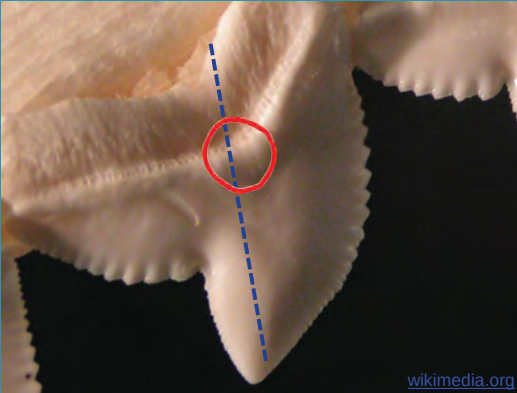


Figure 2: Whole tiger shark tooth. Red circle overlays the drill hole of the THPO's tooth. Blue line is where THPO's tooth is broken.

The Artifact of the Month for August is a fragmentary tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*) tooth. Tiger sharks can be found on both coasts of Florida and are widely distributed across the world (Compagno 2005). One place they are not naturally found is on the Brighton Reservation, where this tooth was excavated. The damage this tooth sustained prior to being in the ground allows archaeologists to piece together what it might have been used for.

Shark teeth are found in archaeological sites across South Florida (Kozuch 1993). At the time it was believed that the people inland did not have ready access to marine resources like shark teeth. However, sites like Fort Center and multiple sites in the Everglades show that shark teeth could be found with people throughout Florida, not just on the coasts.

Unlike other bones archaeologists find, which can be turned into awls, pins, hooks and other tools, with shark teeth, what you see is what you get. Shark teeth naturally have a cutting edge and a puncturing point. However, this does not mean that people of the past did not modify the teeth of sharks. Modification is the process by which peoples of the past altered the shape of a bone or tooth to better fit a purpose, either by blunting the tip, removing parts of the tooth, or drilling a hole for attaching to a handle. This tooth is a perfect example of those types of modification.

There are three telltale modifications on this tooth which point to it having been a tool. The root, the topmost section, is the most obvious as it has a bore hole drilled through it. This could be a sign that the tooth was used as a tool. The dark coloration near the drill hole could be remnants of resin or cordage used to attach it to a handle, or as a decoration. There are spots of wear on the edge of the tooth where the cutting edge is dulled and the enamel is chipped. This shows a possible point of contact between the tooth and whatever it was being used on, such as wood, meat, cordage, or leather.

SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - AUGUST 2026

ANCESTORAL ANSWERS TO PESKY PROBLEMS



How did the ancestors deal with the pesky problem of bugs? As you probably know, the simple answer is plants – including leaves, seeds and roots. But methods differed from place to place depending on what was available.

In many cases, fragrant oils from the leaves of plants like mint and eucalyptus were applied directly to skin to deter insects. In other cases, roots from plants like goldenseal were ground into powder, combined with greasy animal fats, and spread onto the skin. Compounds from the goldenseal repelled insects and the animal fats made it easier to apply the goldenseal powder and allowed it to remain on the skin longer. Interestingly, applying animal fats also served to protect ancestors from sunburn! (This method is probably what the professor was thinking of when he said ancestral Floridians used rotting fish to repel insects – except it was more likely that they used oil from fish combined with local plant materials.)

Ancestors also went to the source of the problem. Controlled burns helped to clear underbrush where many insects breed, which was also an effective method of driving off venomous snakes. This helped to reduce insect (and snake) populations around villages, camps, and gardens.

As with the other examples from this year’s Seminole History of the Month series, these methods were appropriated by colonizers who struggled to adapt to the conditions they encountered. What’s more interesting about this case, however, is that colonizers initially reacted to the methods with disgust and ridiculed ancestors for the practices, suggesting they were unclean (even though colonizers were known for poor personal hygiene, as records from the time indicate). Of course, it wasn’t long before colonizers stole the ancestor’s methods of repelling insects and added them to their own routines.

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

Top: An *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, Photo by Joao Paulo Burini via Getty Images
Middle: *Hydratis canadensis*, Goldenseal, was used as protection. Photo by Lonnie Galt-Theis
Bottom: A controlled burn through Everglades sawgrass. Photo by Michael Gue, NPS



Compagno, L.J.V., D. Dando and S. Fowler, 2005. Sharks of the world. Princeton field guides. Harper Collins Publishing Ltd., London. 368 p.
Kozuch, Laura (1993) Sharks and Shark Products of South Florida. Institute for Archaeology and Paleoenvironmental Studies University of Florida
Pollerspöck, Juergen & Straube, Nicolas. (2019). An identification key to elasmobranch genera based on dental morphological characters Part A: Squalomorph sharks (Superorder Squalomorphi). 18. 77-105.
Stienen, Karl T. (1971) Analysis of the Non-Ceramic Artifacts from a Hopewellian Affiliated Site in Glades County Florida, Florida Atlantic University
Sears, William H. (1994) Fort Center: An Archaeological Site in the Lake Okeechobee Basin, University of Florida Press



Health

More than a number on the scale

A plain-talk guide to healthy weight, and the small steps that get families there together

BY TERESA SNOW
Health Contributor

The smell of fry bread drifted across the yard as Linda watched her grandkids race to the swings. Ten years ago, she would have chased them. Now her knees ache by noon, and the shorts she wore last summer sit unworn in the drawer. Nothing dramatic happened. The weight just crept up, a few pounds each year, the way it does for so many of us. If Linda's story feels close to home, keep reading. Extra weight is one of the most common health challenges in our community, and one of the most manageable.

What It Is

So what do doctors mean when they say someone is overweight or obese? In plain terms, it means a person is carrying more body fat than is healthy for their height. Your body needs some fat to stay warm and store energy. Problems begin when the body stores more fat than it can put to use.

Most clinics use a screening number called Body Mass Index, or BMI. It compares your weight to your height. You do not need to do any math. Your nurse can tell you your number in seconds, and many pharmacies can too. A BMI between 25 and 30 counts as overweight. A BMI of 30 or higher counts as obese.

One important note. BMI is only a starting point. It does not measure muscle, and it does not tell your whole story. Think of it like the check engine light in your truck. It does not say exactly what is wrong. It simply says it is worth taking a look.

Why It Matters

Extra weight makes your heart work harder every hour of the day. Over time, that raises the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, and worn-out knees and hips. It can drain your energy, disturb your sleep, and cut into the moments that matter most, like keeping up with your grandkids at a tribal fair or dancing at a family celebration.

According to the CDC, about 7 out of every 10 American adults carry more weight than is healthy. Native communities have been hit especially hard. Healthy food has not always been easy to find or afford, and the active traditions of past generations have given way to desk jobs, long drives, and drive-thru dinners.

It affects our children, too. Kids who carry extra weight early in life often carry it into adulthood, along with the health risks that come with it. The habits our families build at the dinner table today shape the health of the next generation.

But here is what the numbers do not show. Weight is not about willpower or worth. It is about habits, surroundings, and

health. And habits can change, one small step at a time.

Take a breath, because none of this is set in stone. You do not have to fix everything at once, and you do not have to do it alone.

What to do

- Move for 30 minutes most days. A brisk walk counts, and you can break it into two or three shorter walks if that fits your day better.
- Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. Aim for five servings a day. One serving is about one piece of fruit or one cup of raw veggies.
- Trade sugary drinks for water. Cutting one soda a day removes about 150 calories, and that adds up fast over a month.
- Keep portions honest. A healthy serving of meat is about three ounces, roughly the size of a deck of cards.
- Make it a family effort. Kids copy what they see, so cook together, walk together, and keep the fridge stocked with fruit instead of soda.
- Limit screen time. Keep TV and phone time under two hours a day for kids, and swap some of it for outdoor play.

Quick tips for busy weeks

- Park farther from the door and let the walk count.
- Take the stairs whenever you can.
- Wash and cut fruits and veggies on Sunday so they are easy to grab.
- Eat slowly and stop when you feel satisfied, not stuffed.
- Weigh yourself once a week at the same time of day.

Did you know?

Losing just 5 to 10 percent of your body weight can lower blood pressure and blood sugar. For a person who weighs 200 pounds, that is only 10 to 20 pounds. Small steps make a real difference.

The takeaway

Linda's turnaround did not start in a doctor's office. It started in her own kitchen, with cold water on the table instead of soda and fruit within easy reach on the counter. By the next summer, she was out at the swings pushing the grandkids herself. You can start today, at your own table.

Here is your one action: at dinner tonight, set out a pitcher of water and skip the soda, and ask your family to join you. Small choices, made together, are how healthy habits and healthy families are built.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

Hollywood's health fair promotes preventative care

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

HOLLYWOOD — The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Health Department continues to save the day, encouraging youth and families to make health-conscious decisions, celebrating the third anniversary of their health fair and comic con.

"When we're healthy, we're able to participate," said newly crowned Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Dahlia Sanders. "And when we're able to participate, we're able to make a positive impact within our communities and connect with others."

The Howard Tiger Recreation Center brimmed with staff and tribal youth on July 31.

The fair proffered learning opportunities and demonstrations organized by the tribe's Integrative Health Department and its Center for Behavioral Health. In turn, vendors filled the gymnasium, showcasing Funko Pops, comic books, mangas (a genre of Japanese graphic novels), and art; tribal youth engaged in photo opportunities and games such as Dungeons and Dragons and Legos.

"We're promoting overall health," said the Integrative Health Department's registered dietitian, Karen Two Shoes. "Native Americans are at high risk of diabetes and kidney issues. We encourage everyone to get tested and are promoting preventative care. We're teaching families to make health-conscious decisions."

A1C testing for diabetes and prediabetes and GFR testing to measure kidney functioning was held at this year's fair.

"By bringing Comic Con into the mix, we're able to screen young adults that may not have been previously tested," said Jamie Diersing. "That way, if there are any concerns, we can catch them early."

"Our mission is to educate, but most importantly, we want everyone to connect," said the Integrative Health Department's Director, Suzanne Davis. "A lot of times, people choose to stay within the comfort of their home. We aim to bring people together."

"Everybody comes and brings a piece to make this possible," Davis added. "It's thanks to the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, Human Resources, the Health Department, the Seminole Police Department, and several other departments that we're able to bring these resources to the community."



Daniella Hakim

Aubrilee Billie, left, Brian Billie Jr., center, and Allie Billie, right, enjoy the health fair's activities including a cosplay contest and Funko Pop, comic book, and manga vendors, while partaking in learning opportunities and demonstrations organized by various departments.



Daniella Hakim

Daphne Sanders and newly crowned Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Dahlia Sanders represent the Culture Department.



Daniella Hakim

Thommy Doud, dressed up as Toy Story's "Woody," poses with Takaius Osceola, left, Yariah Osceola, center, and Nokaiyah Osceola, right.



Daniella Hakim

From left to right are Education staff members Lydiana Saintil, Shayla Brown, Janelle Bishop and David Atehortua, who handed out goodie bags filled with health-conscious snacks for attendees.

Upcoming NCAI events this fall

FROM NCIA

The National Congress of American Indians will hold its tribal impact days Sept. 15-17 in Washington, D.C. Sessions will allow attendees to hear from members of Congress and agency officials regarding their work for Indian Country.

Also, NCAI's 83rd annual Convention and Marketplace will be held Oct. 18-22 in Palm Springs, California.

Concert series continues in Okeechobee

STAFF REPORT

The Okeechobee Main Street Summer Concert Series continues Aug. 7 and Sept. 7 with live music in Flagler Park at Settlers Square. Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs. Start time is 6 p.m. The Sept. 7 event is the last event for this summer's series. For more information call 863-357-6246.

Rockabillaque returns to Seminole Casino Hotel

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE — Rockabilly, roots music, hot rods, vintage fashion and American car culture returns to Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee Nov. 13-14. The free festival is open to all ages. Music performers will be on stage throughout the festival. Go to rockabillaqueflorida.com for more information.



**Proud Vendor Partner
of the Seminole Tribe**

Residential and Commercial Property

**RECOVERY
EXPERTS**





Water Damage
Mitigation



Mold
Removal



Fire and Smoke
Restoration



Biohazard and
Disinfecting



Reconstruction
and Remodeling



Storm Damage
Repair



CGC 024735

For 24/7 Emergency Service
call, 877-711-8001

RRTFL.com



Brain Corner
Mind-Challenge Puzzle
A Fun Brain Teaser

Coffee Break Sudoku

Fill the grid so every row, every column, and every 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 exactly once. No math needed, just patience and a sharp pencil. This one is medium difficulty, and there is exactly one solution.

	4		3					5
3			9	7		8	2	4
					2	6	3	
5			7		3			
	7	4				1	5	
			1		4			8
	6	7	4					
4	2	5		3	7			1
1				6		4		

NEW TO SUDOKU? START HERE

Pick a number that already appears often, and hunt for the rows, columns, and boxes where it is still missing. Every number you place unlocks the next one. If you get stuck, walk away and come back. The grid will wait.

♦ See ANSWERS on page 6C

IHS selects projects

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The Indian Health Service announced in July the selection of seven projects for the fiscal year 2026 Capital Infrastructure Program. \$5 million was provided for the IHS to fund projects that support improvements to existing health care facilities to reduce operating costs, improve energy and water efficiency, and enhance overall facility performance.

The projects selected are:

Cheyenne River Health Center (2 projects) (Eagle Butte, S.D.) – ASHRAE 170 upgrades and exterior improvements.

McGrath Sub-Regional Health Center (McGrath, Alaska) – LED lighting retrofit

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde health clinic (Grand Ronde, Ore.) – HVAC

Quentin N. Burdick Memorial Health Care Facility (Belcourt, N.D.) – facility lighting replacement

Dena'ina Wellness Center (Kenai, Alaska) – Kenaitze Solar Installation Project

Consolidated Tribal Health Project (Mendocino County, Calif.) – Solar Carport.

SEMINOLE SCENES



HOMEGROWN TALENT: Aubee Billie, from the Brighton Reservation, sings at the reservation's July 4th celebration during the evening's concert performances. Billie is a 2026 graduate of Elon University in North Carolina, where she was a double-major in music theatre and arts administration and a minor in business administration.



WORLD CUP WATCH PARTY: President Holly Tiger joined thousands of soccer fans at Hard Rock Live in Hollywood to watch the championship game of the 2026 FIFA World Cup on July 19. They weren't alone. Spain's 1-0 victory against Argentina in New Jersey drew more than 60 million viewers in the U.S. on Fox and Telemundo, according to media reports. Hard Rock Live offered the watch party on massive screens free of charge; tickets went quickly.



SUMMER BREAK ALMOST OVER: With many schools in Florida set to open Aug. 10, summer break is close to ending. Kids were busy with activities on reservations, including RJ Powell, left, and his brother Knowledj Ervin. They spent July 29 practicing basketball in the gym at Chupco's Landing in Fort Pierce. Ervin is entering his freshman year at Fort Pierce Central; Powell will be heading into 8th grade. Both play basketball and football for local teams.



BUSY BC: Justice Jumper, left, and Dalaylah Cypress, center, practice their softball pitching with the 8U Wild Spirit team on July 21, a few days before the start of the NAYO tournament. At far right, Boys & Girls Club member Zendaya Quintana enjoys the slide at the Big Cypress pool on July 21. Below, kids compete in a game of dodge ball at the Herman L. Osceola Gymnasium in BC.



22 ZAE THOMAS

- DB
- 6-3 • 207 • R-FR
- FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA./AMERICAN HERITAGE



2025 (Freshman): Played two games in redshirt season...made Florida State debut against East Texas A&M...also played vs. Kent State... contributed to scout team.

BEFORE FSU: Four-star recruit from American Heritage in Plantation...ranked No. 204 overall in Class of 2025, No. 23 safety in America and No. 22 player in Florida by 247Sports...consensus top-100 player in Florida...recorded 43 tackles and one fumble recovery over 12 games as senior, helping lead American Heritage to 10-2 record, No. 1 seed in 4A state playoffs and spot in state semifinals on December 6...American Heritage beat St. Thomas Aquinas for first time in program history in Thomas's senior season...

notched two interceptions for 27 yards during junior year...first member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida to sign a football scholarship with Florida State...chose Florida State over Clemson and Miami, among others.

FSU (3)

UPCOMING SEASON: The 200-plus page 2026 Florida State football media guide was released in July. It features Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member Zae Thomas, a defensive back who is entering his second season on the team. The guide also has features about how the team incorporates STOF heritage into its uniforms, traditions and other experiences. The guide is available on the team's website under links and media center. FSU opens its season Aug. 29 at home against New Mexico State.



SEMINOLE SPEAR

Perhaps the most spectacular tradition in all of college football occurs in Doak Campbell Stadium when a student portraying the famous Seminole leader, Osceola, charges down the field riding an Appaloosa horse named Renegade and plants a flaming spear at midfield to begin every home game. Together, Osceola and Renegade highlight a pre-game ritual, considered to be one of the most popular in the nation.

Florida State's trademark helmet with the Seminole spear is well known throughout all of college football. This design was first introduced during Bobby Bowden's first year as head coach in 1976. Prior to that season, FSU had used a variety of different helmets ranging from gold with a garnet FSU, solid gold with garnet and white striping, an image of the state of Florida with STATE running down it, and various others. The refined spear now reflects the same visual language as the other elements of the identity system.



SEMINOLE PATTERN

In the early 1900s, a new decorative technique was developed by Seminole women, now commonly known as patchwork. Early patterns included blocks and bars of alternating color with occasional sawtooth designs that were sewn directly into garments. Patchwork was rapidly adopted as a standard means of embellishing the Seminoles' traditionally vibrant clothing. These authentic and meaningful patterns live on through today's Seminole natives, and are now an official element of the performance apparel palette for Florida State Athletics.

FSU and Nike were determined to incorporate meaningful symbolism into their uniforms and designers included Seminole lore in each element. The Seminole symbols for Arrow, Man on Horse and Fire (top to bottom, repeating) were the inspiration for this unique pattern.

SPECIAL LANDMARKS

"Unconquered"

Dedicated on Oct.10, 2003, Fritz White's bronze statue "Unconquered" was designed to capture the indomitable spirit of the Seminole people and those who have adopted that spirit as a symbol for their university. The massive structure, including its granite-covered pedestal base, stands approximately 31 feet in the air and depicts a spear-brandishing Seminole astride a rearing horse. At sunset the night before each home game, the spear is ignited and burns until sunrise on the morning after the game. George Langford's endowment of the project for up to \$1 million helped make the statue a reality. Fifty-one artists were then considered before White eventually saw the statue dedicated 10 years after the concept was inspired by attorney and FSU graduate Stephen Reilly's trip to South Bend, Ind. for an FSU football game.



NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

Lumbee Tribe votes against I-95 casino in Robeson County

Seven months after receiving full federal recognition, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina has officially voted not to move forward with a proposed casino development off I-95 in Robeson County.

According to unofficial results from the Lumbee Tribe Elections Board, voters overwhelmingly rejected the proposed amendment, with roughly 62% voting against it. The measure received 3,363 votes in favor and 5,553 votes opposed.

Tribal Chairman John Lowery, who also represents Robeson County as a Republican in the North Carolina General Assembly, expressed disappointment in the vote but noted the people have spoken.

“A majority of the Lumbee people have spoken, and they have said no to progress and have decided to stay with the status quo or simply staying with the way things are,” Lowery wrote. “As a federally recognized Indian tribe, we had the opportunity, like so many of our brother and sister tribes, to exercise our sovereign rights to the fullest and generate billions of dollars to assist our tribal members and lift this entire region. This decision by the majority of Lumbee voters is historic and ensures we will not move forward with gaming.”

The proposed amendment would have created a constitutional framework for gaming within the Lumbee Tribe. The measure would have authorized tribal leaders to negotiate gaming compacts, regulate gaming operations, and oversee any future gaming enterprises. It also would have removed a requirement that gaming-related ordinances receive approval from the tribe’s general membership through a referendum, instead placing that authority with tribal leadership.

Under current tribal rules, referendums require participation from at least 30% of eligible tribal members to be valid. Constitutional amendments, however, only require a simple majority of votes cast and are not subject to any minimum participation threshold. Supporters of the project estimate the casino could create between 2,750 and 3,500 full-time jobs, with priority hiring given to Lumbee tribal members. Salaries were projected to range from approximately \$45,000 to more than \$300,000 annually depending on the position.

Under federal law, gaming revenues would be dedicated to specific purposes, including tribal government operations, education, healthcare, housing, rehabilitation programs, public safety initiatives, economic development projects, charitable contributions, and programs that benefit tribal members. Because tribal gaming revenue is not subject to federal or state income taxes, the tribe would keep all earnings generated by the casino.

Lowery, said that he will support the majority opinion and not bring the issue forward again before his term expires in 18 months.

The Lumbee Tribe received full federal recognition in December 2025. Shortly afterward, the tribe purchased approximately 240 acres along Interstate 95 for \$6 million as the site of the proposed casino and entertainment complex.

- The Carolina Journal

Judge rejects California tribes’ latest attempt to kill blackjack at cardrooms

California’s dozens of private gambling halls can continue offering blackjack and other table games after a San Francisco judge ruled [in June] that Attorney General Rob Bonta overstepped when he tried to ban them.

San Francisco Superior Court Judge Richard Darwin ruled that Bonta’s Bureau of Gambling Control didn’t have the legal authority to issue statewide rules severely restricting the games at cardrooms.

The ruling, which followed Darwin’s temporary order in May, is the latest defeat for the state’s casino-owning Native American tribes. They have spent years and tens of millions of dollars unsuccessfully appealing to courts, voters, the Legislature and California regulators to put their only in-state competitors out of the blackjack business.

The tribes contend cardrooms have unscrupulously violated state laws prohibiting anyone but tribal casinos from offering “house-banked,” Las Vegas-style table games including blackjack, the most lucrative.

Cardroom operators say the ruling once again proves their business model is legal. It also ensures taxes that cities receive from blackjack revenues will continue to support local government services and cardroom jobs.

“For more than a year, we have said this case is about far more than gaming — it is about whether the attorney general and his regulators can bypass the Legislature and unilaterally rewrite decades of established law,” Kyle Kirkland, a Fresno cardroom owner and president of the California Gaming Association, said in a statement. “The court delivered a clear answer: they cannot.”

James May, a spokesperson for California Nations Indian Gaming Association, didn’t return an interview request.

Bonta’s office said in an email that officials were disappointed in the ruling and are reviewing their options.

- Cal Matters (Sacramento, California)

Deborah Begay wins JP primary while facing judicial misconduct charges over Facebook post

Maricopa County’s (Arizona) first Native American justice of the peace, Deborah Ann Begay, is facing charges of judicial misconduct for a complaint that she used her status as a judge to obtain special treatment for a friend’s son.

Begay, who is Navajo, worked as a justice of the peace for the Moon Valley precinct of the Maricopa County Justice Court from 2021 to 2025. After she lost the 2024 election, she worked as a pro tem judge for the Maricopa County Justice Courts.

In [a July 21] election, Begay won the Democratic primary for justice of the peace in the neighboring Encanto precinct, defeating businessman and former state legislator Ken Cheuvront. There is no Republican candidate, so Begay will win the November election by default.

In July 2025, Begay made a Facebook post saying that she had called some other judges for help after her friend’s son was detained over the July 4 holiday weekend for not having a driver’s license.

“Not the usual way things go but look for more of this if you have higher melanin content,” the since-deleted post read. “I didn’t have any local judges phone numbers but (Justice of the Peace) Jennifer Jermaine did. She helped me to help someone else.”

Begay went on to thank the three judges who she said had helped her: Jermaine, Gila County Justice Court Judge Pro Tem Javier Sobampo and Pima County Justice Court Judge Victoria Steele.

“Everything turned out fine,” Begay wrote.

After seeing the post, someone made an anonymous complaint about it to the Arizona Commission on Judicial Conduct.

“It must be nice to be a former judge,” the complainer wrote. “If you are, you get to ask current judges to get your friends out of jail.”

Begay deleted the post after Jermaine asked her to. Jermaine told the commission that she didn’t know why Begay had asked her for other judges’ phone numbers, according to the Commission on Judicial Conduct’s statement of charges.

In a December response to the complaint, Begay said that she didn’t believe she had done anything wrong.

“I respectfully deny the allegation that I have used, or attempted to use my judicial office to secure any personal advantage,” she wrote. “At no time have I invoked my title, authority or position as a judge — explicitly or implicitly — to influence decisions, obtain services, or gain treatment not equally available to members of the public.”

In a follow up letter to the commission’s disciplinary counsel Brian Bohan, Begay wrote that her only intention when reaching out to the other judges was to find out the process for holding people over the holiday weekend.

She added that the post was aimed at “general advocacy against racism and in support of due process. I wanted others to know this is a value shared by the judiciary.”

But the Commission on Judicial Conduct found that the post made it seem that Begay used her judicial connections to obtain favorable treatment for her friend’s son. In January, the commission formally reprimanded her, taking into account past warnings it issued to Begay about her campaign conduct as well as previous social media posts that it said violated the Judicial Code of Conduct.

In February, Begay requested a formal hearing on the charges against her, which is yet to be scheduled.

In a July 10 response to the formal charges, issued in May, Begay wrote of her “longstanding commitment to administering justice fairly, treating litigants with dignity, and faithfully carrying out my judicial duties.”

She wrote that the post was made to thank the judges for “making themselves available to the public” and was aimed at “maintaining public confidence in the judiciary.”

“The allegations accurately reflect neither my intent nor my conduct,” she wrote.

Begay asked the commission to consider her history of serving the public via her 20 years in the U.S. Navy and as a guardian ad litem for Gila River Indian Community children in foster care.

Begay also wrote of the gravity of her status as the first Native American elected to the Maricopa County Justice Courts and as a two-spirit person, who embodies both female and male, she has “advocated for inclusion, dignity, and equal access to justice.”

She wrote that, if the commission finds that she violated judicial ethics, it would stand in contrast to the rest of her judicial record.

“The totality of the circumstances reflects, at most, a word choice that could be (and was) misconstrued — not a willful or intentional violation of the Arizona Code of Judicial Conduct,” Begay wrote.

She asked that the commission dismiss the charges against her, or issue a private reprimand.

- Arizona Mirror

US Sen. Heinrich, New Mexico tribes seek rules to rein in prediction markets

U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), along with local Indigenous tribes and pueblos, is urging Republican senators to restrain online gambling apps, saying the

unregulated platforms pose an “existential threat” to tribal gaming rights and sovereignty.

Heinrich on [July 17] sent a letter to Republican chairmen of two U.S. Senate committees that are considering separate pieces of legislation that deal with digital assets like cryptocurrency. As drafted, according to the letter, both the CLARITY Act and Digital Commodity Intermediaries Act remove accountability for online platforms that allow users to bet on sports and other events online.

The “rapid expansion” of the apps, which allow users to bet on sports and otherwise engage in casino-style gambling, “poses an existential threat to tribal sovereignty by undermining the revenue that tribes rely on for government services,” Heinrich and 11 other Democratic senators wrote.

The letter argues that the apps bypass federal tribal gaming laws and also undermine states’ abilities to regulate gambling. In New Mexico, sports gambling is illegal except in-person at tribal casinos, which tribes rely on to fund services including education, public safety, healthcare and housing.

Sixteen tribes and pueblos in New Mexico signed on to the letter, according to a news release from Heinrich’s office, as did the national Indian Gaming Association and National Congress of American Indians.

The two bills are currently being negotiated in the U.S. Senate’s Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs and Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Heinrich’s letter warns that if enacted, the legislation would “effectively allow prediction markets to offer online casino-style gaming and sports betting across the United States, entirely bypassing the localized tribal-state regulatory systems required” in federal law.

Heinrich’s letter to leadership of both committees comes amid lawsuits from New Mexico’s attorney general and a group of tribes and pueblos seeking to crack down on Kalshi, one of the platforms that local plaintiffs accuse of subverting state and tribal law. Both lawsuits remain pending in state and federal courts.

U.S. Sens. Tim Scott (R-South Carolina) and John Boozman (R-Arkansas) chair the committees that are reviewing the legislation. Spokespersons for both senators did not immediately respond to Source NM’s emailed requests for comment [July 20].

The letter urges senators to amend the bills to prohibit the platforms from enabling sports betting and also make explicit that the platforms cannot be used to circumvent existing tribal-state gaming compacts.

Without those amendments, unregulated online gambling will undermine federal treaty obligations to tribal governments and their rights to self-determination, which represent a “primary pillar of tribal sovereignty,” the letter reads.

- Source New Mexico

WA tribes, environmental groups sue over Endangered Species Act rule change

Washington tribes and environmental organizations sued the federal government Tuesday, arguing that recent changes to Endangered Species Act rules defy scientific research and pave the way for the destruction of important wildlife habitat.

The two separate lawsuits, filed in U.S. District Court for Western Washington, challenge the Trump administration’s decision to rescind the legal definition of the word “harm” as used under the Endangered Species Act.

In a July 10 announcement, the Department of the Interior said the new rule would reduce permitting requirements and compliance costs for farmers, landowners and energy producers.

“For years, federal agencies abused the ESA to obstruct lawful land use and burden American families and businesses,” said Interior Secretary Doug Burgum. “This action restores common sense, respects private property, provides much-needed certainty for landowners and follows the statute Congress actually passed.”

But the environmental groups and tribes contend that the change will pose greater risks for species like salmon, steelhead, grizzly bears and northern spotted owls.

The rule is underpinned by a 2024 Supreme Court ruling, according to the Department of the Interior announcement.

When a species is listed as endangered, federal agencies such as the National Marine Fisheries Service designate certain areas of federal or private land as critical habitat.

Before the rule change, developers seeking permits were required to explain how they would limit habitat harm in these areas, but that is no longer the case, said Kristen Boyles, Earthjustice attorney representing the nine environmental groups suing the federal government.

“This is a big deal,” Boyles said, noting that she expects other lawsuits to be filed in the near future. She described the rule rewrite as “an assault on all of these resources that should belong to all of us,” which will enrich companies.

The conservation groups that sued include the Center for Biological Diversity, Columbia Riverkeeper, Conservation Law Foundation, Conservation Northwest, Friends of the Wild Swan, Oregon Wild, Sierra Club, Swan View Coalition and WildEarth Guardians.

Their suit names lead officials at the Interior and Commerce departments as defendants.

Swinomish and Squaxin Island Tribes fear the rule will undermine recovery efforts for the federally listed Chinook salmon in

the Puget Sound and Skagit River, which are reserved for the tribes to fish in under longstanding treaties with the federal government.

“We cannot save the ESA-listed Chinook salmon that are a pillar of our Treaty rights and our cultural lifeways when the habitat they need to spawn, rear and grow is under attack,” Steve Edwards, chairman of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, said in a statement. “This new rule is anti-science.”

The lawsuit from the tribes also alleges that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service violated the law by arbitrarily and capriciously rejecting Swinomish’s consultation request.

- Washington State Standard

After decades of denials, North Carolina’s Tuscarora Indians take a step closer to recognition

NC Newsline editor’s note: House Bill 600 does not have unified support from North Carolina’s Tuscarora communities. After publication of our story, the Tuscarora Indian Nation of North Carolina Prospect Longhouse, the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina (Maxton), and the Tuscarora Tribe of North Carolina (Saddletree) reached out to NC Newsline to dispute support for the legislation. They did not speak at the legislative hearing, but clarified the while Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina has continuously sought state tribal reaffirmation since the 1970s, their leadership does not recognize the newly formed Tuscarora Indians of Kahtenuaka Territories named in H600 as its government.

“I’m a firm believer. When somebody has been wrong, it has to be righted.”

Rep. Ed Goodwin (R-Chowan) choked back emotion [July 1] as he tried one last time to gain recognition for the Tuscarora Indians.

The 73-year-old Republican recounted how, in his childhood, the Tuscarora had worked long hours in the fields of eastern North Carolina helping his father bring their tobacco crop to market. Growing up, he marveled at Tuscarora history, but felt deeply frustrated that the tribe was repeatedly denied recognition.

“My heart has hurt because friends that I’ve had all my life couldn’t get recognized by the General Assembly. That just didn’t sit right,” Goodwin told members of the House Committee on American Indian Affairs.

On a week that the North Carolina legislature was focused on passing a \$34 billion state budget, Goodwin, the vice chair of the House appropriations committee, wanted to use his time to fight for a tribe largely dismissed by the state Commission of Indian Affairs.

“You may think I’m a nut, but I’m not. You may think I’m a crybaby, but I’m not. It pissed me off,” said Goodwin.

He has tried unsuccessfully each session since 2019 to pass similar legislation on behalf of the tribe.

“I’ve tried all different kind of angles, and I’m about on my last tire. My tire’s blown out on me now, but I think this is the final effort that I will ever have to have a chance to get the Tuscarora nation recognized,” Goodwin said.

This year, Goodwin is advocating for House Bill 600, which would officially recognize the Tuscarora Indians of Kahtenuaka Territories and grant two seats on the Commission of Indian Affairs and one seat on the American Indian Heritage Commission.

Language buried deep in this year’s state budget gives the Catawba Indians a seat on the commission, but not the Tuscarora.

The Tuscarora have long sought recognition from the state, arguing it is essential to preserve their culture and traditions. Tribal members and officials attended the hearing to make their case.

“Where will this tribe be located? Where’s the headquarters at?” asked Rep. John Lowery (R-Robeson), chairman of the Lumbee Tribe. The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina received full federal recognition last December after more than a century of lobbying Congress.

Brandi Locklear-Alvarez, a member of the Tuscarora, said the tribe does not have a central office, but has no desire to encroach on Lumbee territory.

Opponents of recognition of the Tuscarora have suggested for years that they are merely a splinter group of the Lumbee.

Tribal Council co-chair David Webb said H600 does not create or invent a new tribe, nor take anything away from another tribe.

“Instead, it recognizes our modern tribal government,” said Webb. “It’s really about fairness. It’s about correcting a historical error, and this committee has the opportunity to do that.”

Rep. Anna Ferguson (R-Jackson), a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, said while she was spiritually with the Tuscarora, she could not logically support the measure.

“I would like to see a more unified presentation, especially from the Commission of Indian Affairs,” said Ferguson. “You’ve been denied there in the past. What I would like to see is going forward that you work with the commission.”

“It appears that the commission does not have a desire to work with them based on the comments that were made,” responded Rep. Amber Baker (D-Forsyth). Baker said it was also unfair for the commission to base state recognition on whether the Tuscarora of New York could validate the tribal members in North Carolina.

After an hour of debate, lawmakers voted 6-2 to advance the bill sending it on

to the House State and Local Government committee. And while the legislation could stall as the session winds down, Rep. Carla Cunningham (U-Mecklenburg) reminded the Tuscarora no one on Jones Street should diminish or determine the value they bring to their community.

“Every day I fight for who I am, even when people don’t like it. They haven’t come from where I came from,” said Cunningham. “Stand for who you are. When people say no, you say, ‘God is watching. He is not finished.’ You aren’t either.”

- NC Newsline

After residential school survivors speak out, Ottawa reinstates funding to travel for counselling

Indigenous Services Canada has confirmed it now has funding available to pay for travel costs so residential school survivors and their family members can continue in-person counselling.

The news comes after mental health counsellors were told [in July] travel costs would no longer be paid for though the Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program.

Indigenous Services Canada told CBC News of the change in an email [July 29].

The funding will pay for travel costs in the N.W.T. and Nunavut for the rest of the current fiscal year. It applies to both clients and counsellors.

Earlier this week, ISC said funding was still in place for virtual appointments, but counsellors said many of their clients in remote communities didn’t have access to reliable internet or phone, or a quiet place to carry out such appointments.

Counsellors and Dene National Chief George Mackenzie have denounced that decision.

On [July 29], an Indigenous Services Canada spokesperson said the funding will allow both in-person and virtual services to continue, while the department works to develop a plan for the coming years.

- CBC (Canada)

Warm Springs Reservation faces years of recovery after Bench Fire sweeps through

Warm Springs tribal member Shana Johnson sat in her purple Scion in front of her barn and watched a firefighting crew leave for the night as thick wildfire smoke turned the setting sun a brilliant orange.

The Bench Fire that erupted [in July] upended life for Johnson and the three generations of her family living on a sprawling ranch on the outskirts of the 640,000-acre reservation. The winds shifted, forcing them to flee briefly to a nearby open field for safety. They lost electricity for seven days, lost power to their wells and rationed granola bars as their food spoiled.

“We were so frightened that we didn’t want to leave our animals, our cows and our horses and our dogs and cats,” Johnson said. “I mean, it’s not like for us, we can just pick up and move. So we pretty much decided that we were going to all stay and make sure that our animals were OK.”

The Bench Fire tore through the Warm Springs Reservation, burning at least six homes and forcing hundreds to evacuate as roads closed and the air filled with thick smoke. The fire is now about one-third contained, but it will likely take years for the tribe to recover from the disaster.

The fire is one of at least 30 fires that have burned nearly 1.8 million acres statewide as Oregon endures one of the worst wildfire seasons in years. Another fast-moving fire broke out late Saturday near Madras amid hot and windy conditions.

For the Warm Springs tribe, the blow from the Bench Fire has been both financial and emotional, from the loss of ancestral foods to revenue from timber sales, said Edward Henderson, Treasury-Secretary and CEO of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

“It’s the land, the fish, the animals, all of it,” he told OPB. “We see it as interconnected. Someone outside might say, ‘It’s just a forest, it’ll grow back.’ We live here and were supposed to take care of it,” he added, his voice catching with emotion.

Evacuation orders were downgraded this week and the tribal government offices reopened Thursday. But residents are still dealing with boil water notices and water shortages, sporadic electricity and closed roads, and many are still scattered.

Thousands more on the reservation who couldn’t get out have been under shelter-in-place orders for more than a week.

As the fire raged last weekend it threatened the tribal agency district where the government operates. For five days, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs’ offices were closed and tribal resources and communication suffered.

Henderson, the tribal official, said that he’s heard tribal members’ frustrations over the last week. Even after tribal offices reopened on July 30, there’s been confusion and anger with basic services that are affected.

“We haven’t been as fast forthcoming on some of the services that they need,” he said. “We understand that.”

- Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB)

SOUTH FLORIDA'S ULTIMATE ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION



AUG 5
DEREK HOUGH



AUG 6
MUMFORD & SONS



AUG 9
DEEP PURPLE



AUG 11
ELLA MAI



AUG 12
5 SECONDS OF SUMMER



AUG 14
JORDAN DAVIS



AUG 20
SQUEEZE



AUG 25
GOO GOO DOLLS



AUG 28
THE ULTIMATE DANCE AND FREESTYLE EXPERIENCE



AUG 29
BROOKS & DUNN



GET TICKETS!
TICKETMASTER.COM
MYHRL.COM • HARDROCKHOLLY.COM



Education



B



Beverly Bidney

Vanessa Osceola with the tractors she used during her time at SWEP in the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena.

Students receive hands-on experience as summer work program continues to grow

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

The 2026 Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) gives students a first-hand look at the working world, the experience of working every day and the satisfaction of earning a weekly paycheck.

This year SWEP had 81 high school and college kids working in a variety of tribal jobs from June 8 to July 31. Last year the program had just 55 participants, which is a testament to the power of exposure and promotion.

"We went to the reservations weekly to connect with the departments and build networks and relationships," said Charlene Marsh, Education Work Experience Program Supervisor. "We went to events, we showed up. The more they saw us, the more they knew. People started beating down the doors and before I knew it, the applications started flooding in."

SWEP began in 2005 with the goal of preparing students for the workforce by instilling in them a strong work ethic and familiarity with employment opportunities within the tribe.

"The placements are more aligned with what they want to do in life," Marsh said. "We had more of a diversity of placements and more career specific placements this year."

Over the summer students worked in the Hollywood clinic, tribal court, Tribal Community Development, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, the Department of Conservation and other tribal departments.

Vanessa Osceola, 18, a senior at Ahfachkee, spent her summer working at the Junior Cypress Arena. Her responsibilities included smoothing and moving the rodeo arena dirt by using tractors, cutting the grass, putting up and painting fences around the property.

◆ See EXPERIENCE on page 2B

'Largest turnout yet' as dozens of Seminole youth attend national UNITY conference

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. —Youth from the Seminole Tribe of Florida ventured out to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for the 2026 National UNITY Conference from July 10 to July 14. About 40 students were accompanied by Education Department staff, including higher education program manager Reginal Belizaire, education advisors Martha Santibanez, Dana Osceola, Jason Billie, Shayla Brown, Nancy Jimmie and Bianca Serpas, and education student success specialist Mackinley Rolle.

"This is our largest turnout yet," Osceola said. "In 2024, we were accompanied by 15 students. This year, we have around 40 students in attendance. Some Seminoles have traveled up on their own, as well."

The National UNITY Conference is a five-day youth-led annual event held every July in a pre-selected region of the United States. According to UNITY, which stands for United National Indian Tribal Youth, about 3,000 Natives attended this year's convention.

Workshops, keynote speakers, and interactive youth-led activities provided students with hands-on leadership development and an environment where native youth voices are encouraged. Panelists covered topics surrounding culture and leadership, with an emphasis on civic engagement, missing and murdered indigenous women (MMIW) prevention, personal development, and environmental concerns.

"This year's activities have been so much more interactive, and it's made me realize how other tribes are similar to ours, too," said Shyla Herrera from the Hollywood Reservation. "The workshops have been much more introspective, and I can take something back myself—like meditating." This was Herrera's second year attending UNITY.

The conference's keynote speakers included Lindy Waters III, a Kiowa and Cherokee Native with the San Antonio Spurs of the NBA; Chef Pyet DeSpain, a



Daniella Hakim

Making a heart shape with her hands, Curmya Smith smiles wide as she walks the UNITY Flashback Runway, representing the Seminole Tribe of Florida at the UNITY conference in Oklahoma City.

Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Native and award-winning global private chef; Dallas Goldtooth, a writer, actor, and Dakota from the village of Cansayapi within the territory of the Oceti Sakowin people; Julian Brave NoiseCat, a writer and academy award-nominated filmmaker from the Canim Lake Band Tsq'escen and descendant of the Lil'wat Nation of Mount Currie. In addition to listening to panelists, tribal youth took the opportunity to meet and greet the speakers one on one.

Students fashioned traditional garments such as regalia and ribbon skirts for culture night and 70s, 80s, 90s, and 00s costumes for talent night, where students across tribal nations opted to walk down the runway.

"I'm really thankful that you're all here," said Watson Whitford, the male co-president of the National UNITY Capsule Executive Committee. "We gather to honor native youth and those who continue to inspire their communities through leadership, service, culture, advocacy, and academic excellence."

On July 10, Seminole tribal youth

attended a dinner hosted by President Holly Tiger at a local restaurant. The following afternoon, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie organized and hosted a true crime murder mystery dinner show called, "The Dinner Detective." Both meals were sponsored by Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.

According to Seminole tribal youth, this gathering continues to shape the way in which students view leadership and the significance that comes with being a leader within their communities.

"Our time here has showed me that leadership looks different to different people," said Victoria Osceola-Bernard from the Trail Reservation. "Being here made me realize that we need a youth council, too."

"UNITY shows you how much you can do," said Curmya Smith from the Immokalee Reservation.

The 2027 National UNITY Conference will take place at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Orlando from July 1 to July 5.

◆ See UNITY on page 3B

SWEP students spend summer in natural areas of reservations

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — The Department of Conservation's Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) participants examined aquatic creatures captured in fyke nets in the Kissimmee Billie Slough on the Big Cypress reservation July 7 and got some good news; they found more native wildlife in the nets than invasive species.

Led by Joe Andreoli, DOC invasive wildlife biologist, Karter Puente and Marley Jimmie went thigh high in the water of the slough to see what animals were captured in the nets. They are veteran SWEP participants; both worked with the department last summer.

Puente chose DOC because he enjoys being outside and keeping an eye on fish, animals and plants. He can envision a future for himself in wildlife.

"It seems like a nice job to have," said Puente, 16, who will be in 10th grade at Moore Haven Middle High School in the fall. "I can see getting a job like this."

Jimmie is interested in environmental conservation and chose DOC to get more

experience. She wants to study botany in college.

"Students should do everything they can and try new experiences, including things they are afraid of," said Jimmie, who is an incoming 11th grader at Moore Haven Middle High School. "I used to be scared to touch a fish, but now I do it and it's fun."

DOC sets the cone-shaped fyke nets numerous times a year to establish a baseline inventory of aquatic species in the slough. The fish and other animals can enter the nets easily, but it's harder to get out.

The department checks the nets regularly to determine when each species enters and how long they stay in the slough. In the dry season, these species congregate in pools of water that remain. Sampling at the start of the wet season shows which species survived in the pools of water.

"Our findings in 2025 and 2026 show us that invasive species like the Brown Hoplo are very good at surviving in these pools," Andreoli said. "With this baseline data we can then compare how our results differ before, during and after the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP)."

WERP connects the slough to the rest of

the Everglades, which can make it easier for invasive species get into its ecosystem.

During the outing in the slough, in addition to other species Puente found a two or three pound Florida gar and Marley found a gar and an invasive walking catfish. Once they find the fish, invasive or native, they tag it on its fin with a hole punch and let it go.

They also found and kept two native species, a Greater Siren which is an aquatic salamander, and the American Flagfish, which is widespread in Florida. The department will bring them to outreach events such as career and college fairs, Earth Day and EPO department fairs to highlight the ongoing research being done by DOC.

The DOC SWEP program alternates between field work in forestry and the fish and wildlife section of the department. Students learn how to collect and analyze data and are trained to use ArcGIS Pro, field maps, Microsoft Excel and other apps. By the end of the program, students will have earned a certificate for ArcGIS mapping.

The SWEP program ran from June 8-July 31 and had 81 participants tribalwide.



Beverly Bidney

DOC invasive wildlife biologist Joseph Andreoli with SWEP students Marley Jimmie and Karter Puente in the Kissimmee Billie Slough examining the aquatic creatures caught in the fyke nets. The animals were then released back to the slough.



Beverly Bidney

SWEP student Karter Puente, left, DOC invasive wildlife biologist Joseph Andreoli, center, and SWEP student Marley Jimmie on the Big Cypress Reservation July 7 after spending time in the slough looking for invasive and native species.



Beverly Bidney

Karter Puente holds two pig frogs found in the slough.

Lauren Good Day explores matriarchy in fashion showcase

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

Debuted on the 2026 Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) Native Fashion Week gala runway in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Lauren Good Day’s “Sacred Lineage” Ribbon Dress Collection explores the matriarchy as a living system of reverence, care, and cultural continuity.

“The meaning of my art goes past the superficial—past the beauty of the object or garment,” Good Day said. “But each item’s appearance goes into the storytelling.”

Good Day’s art is rooted in its originality. The artist and multi-award-winning designer is an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nations of the Ft. Berthold Reservation in North Dakota and is a registered Treaty Indian with the Sweet Grass Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan, Canada.

The designer’s early childhood brimmed with color—attending Pow Wows and observing her mother and grandmother handmade Tribal regalia and moccasins for traditional ceremonies. At six-years-old, Good Day’s mother introduced her to beadwork.

“I learned by watching,” said Good Day. “I started out beading and crafting Tribal regalia, later expanding into different mediums such as ledger drawings and rawhide parfleche work.”

When asked to participate in SWAIA Native Fashion Week, designers were encouraged to create five looks representing their interpretations of handcraft and couture. “Immediately, I thought of the greatest works I’ve created—my cradleboards.”

The designer sources inspiration from her original art pieces, especially her ledger artwork. Good Day took inspiration from cradleboards she’d crafted months in anticipation, and ones she’d previously made for her own children, for her “Sacred Lineage” collection—exemplifying what it means to be a matriarch, nurture the next generation, and contribute to communities and society as a woman.

“Coming from a matriarchal tribe, women play very important roles in our

society,” Good Day said. “Exemplifying the power and knowledge of women has always been something I’ve wanted to communicate through my art. With this collection, I wanted to highlight Indigenous women from various tribes that have done important work and play pivotal roles within their own communities.”

Good Day handcrafted six ribbon dresses in just six weeks; the sixth look was worn by the runway’s opening performer.

Tomasina Chupco, from the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Fort Pierce Reservation, modeled Good Day’s pink patterned ribbon skirt and top on the SWAIA Native Fashion Week runway.

“I’d asked Tomasina if she was willing to come out to Santa Fe for the runway show, and luckily, she was,” Good Day said. “I admire the work and advocacy she does for the Seminole Tribe of Florida. I’m grateful she was able to join us.”

Chupco, an Indigenopathic Medicine Practitioner, is the founder of Indigenous Intentions, specializing in limited edition cause jewelry with partnerships extending to organizations such as the StrongHearts Native Helpline, the National Indigenous Women Resource Center, Indigenous Peoples Movement, and more.

“It never felt like I was simply modeling a garment,” Chupco said. “These garments hold family history, cultural teachings, memories, and relationships. Because of that, I felt responsible to walk the runway with respect—to honor the vision behind the work and the women whose stories inspired it.”

With the garments made specific to each model, Good Day stressed the importance of showcasing diversity and a strong representation of bold colors.

The vibrant ribbon dresses featured Good Day’s signature synched waist paired with studded belts, beaded moccasins handcrafted by Shawn Zephier, and dentalium-shell breastplates handcrafted by Russell McCloud. Select models carried cradleboards covered in quillwork and ledger artwork.

Alongside Good Day’s original and handcrafted one of one “dress” series,



Emily Seiler

Tomasina Chupco walks the SWAIA Native Fashion Week runway in Lauren Good Day’s “Sacred Lineage” collection.

SWAIA showcased the latest works of Indigenous designers Jamie Okuma, Pamela Baker, Patricia Michaels, and Jontay Kahm.

“We all come from different cultures and different communities,” Good Day said. “I would encourage young artists, or newcomers to Indigenous fashion, to explore their own cultural stories, perspectives, and aesthetics within their artwork. We all have stories to tell.”

Good Day’s artwork has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions at galleries and museums across the United States and Canada, including the National Museum of American Indian in Washington D.C. and New York City.

Good Day’s wearable art collections, limited edition prints, handcrafted jewelry, and ledger artwork are available for purchase on laurengoodday.com.



Emily Seiler

Lauren Good Day, center, stands alongside her models and looks designed for this year’s SWAIA Native Fashion Week.

◆ EXPERIENCE From page 1B

“It’s always hands on so I don’t have to sit in an office all day,” Osceola said. “I get to learn more stuff I didn’t know how to do, like drive tractors.”

Her father Dayne Johns and grandfather Rodney Osceola have herds. She grew up working with cattle and now has two bred heifers of her own.

“This isn’t the first year I’ve done SWEP here,” Osceola said. “I have a knack for the work.”

She also helps during rodeo season by pushing the animals into the pens and onto the rodeo floor. Osceola said she likes getting out of the house, meeting new people and learning new things.

Peyton Hill, 15, a junior at Montverde Academy in Clairmont, spent her summer working at the Big Cypress Boys & Girls Club. She helped out with the kids and created a painting depicting the Deer Clan, which will be hung in the community center with paintings of the other clans. She is a member of the Otter Clan.

Hill’s father Robert Hill used to draw and she learned to paint when she was 6 or 7 years old. She takes art classes at school and would like to be an animator one day; she has already created a cartoon world filled with a few characters. Hill also writes the cartoons’ stories.

This was Hill’s second year in SWEP



Beverly Bidney

Peyton Hill with the Deer Clan painting she was in the process of completing for the Big Cypress Boys & Girls Club.

and she enjoyed helping the counselors and spending time with the kids when she wasn’t painting.

“It gives me something to do and it’s nice to help out,” Hill said. “The kids like my drawing, they say I’m the best artist in the Boys & Girls Club. But some of these

kids have real talent.”

Hill said other kids should consider joining SWEP next summer.

“Just do it,” she said. “It will open your mind to a new hobby or activity. Now I’m thinking about working with kids when I get older.”

Science in the summer at Hollywood Preschool



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Victor Baker, Talena Castillo and VictorySue Baker experiment with mixing colors at a display during the Hollywood Preschool’s science event July 7. It was the first time the preschool has held a science event.



Calvin Tiger

Lakisha Coley Davis, Hollywood Preschool head teacher, works on an activity with Camille Sanders



Calvin Tiger

Elena Jim, left, and Jaidyn Sanchez check out the lava lamp exhibit.

NIEA convention to be held in Buffalo

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The 57th annual National Indian Education Association Convention and Trade Show will be held Oct. 7-10 at the Buffalo Convention Center in Buffalo, N.Y.

Each year, this gathering brings together Native educators, students, tribal leaders, and advocates from across the country to connect, learn, and move Native education forward together. The 2026 theme, “Strength in Community: Building the Future Together,” reflects the collective responsibility to support one another, uplift students, and shape education systems that honor sovereignty, language, and identity.

Educator Day (Oct. 7) is dedicated day for educators working in Native-serving schools and programs, focused on practical strategies, meaningful connection, and shared learning grounded in community and experience.

Student Day (Oct. 9) is for Native youth to come together, engage in interactive sessions, build connections, and experience learning that reflects who they are and who they are becoming.

Throughout the week, attendees can attend keynotes, sessions, cultural experiences, and an exhibit hall that brings together organizations and partners committed to Native education.

For more information visit niea.org.

Three College Fund faculty fellows earn doctorates

FROM PRESS RELEASE

DENVER — Three recipients of the American Indian College Fund’s (College Fund) Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship have completed their dissertations and earned doctorate degrees.

The program supports educational goals of faculty members and works to increase the number of tribal college and university (TCU) faculty who hold a doctorate and to cultivate leadership from within. The fellowship is only open to TCU faculty, and recipients may pursue a doctorate in any field of study. The following fellows received their doctorate degree this semester:

- Bobbi Lynn Frederick (Crow Creek Dakota), United Tribes Technical College, Doctorate of Educational Leadership and Innovation from Arizona State University.

Frederick’s dissertation shares the results of a qualitative study she conducted to examine how cultural knowledge, traditions, and artistic practices function as sources of resilience.

- Jennifer Rodin, Sinte Gleska University, Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on mathematics education from the University of Wyoming. Rodin’s dissertation focuses on mentoring relationships between TCU Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students and community members.
- Matthew Yates (Mvskoke), College of the Muscogee Nation, Doctorate of Business Administration from Oklahoma Wesleyan University. Yates’ dissertation explores the effects of cultural dissonance within organizations.



Seminole youth gather at Oklahoma City Convention Center for a group photo.

Daniella Hakim

♦ **UNITY**
From page 1B



Seminole youth at the conference included Victoria Osceola Bernard, far left, Jacob Colon, second left, Shyla Herrera, center, Luciano Boyce, right.

Daniella Hakim



The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Education Department staff gathers with President Holly Tiger at the UNITY Conference.

Daniella Hakim



Lena Cypress makes her name tag for the afternoon's murder mystery dinner.

Daniella Hakim



Seminole Tribe of Florida students Luciano Boyce, left, and Payton Hill walk the UNITY Flashback Runway and strike a pose.

Daniella Hakim



From left, Jalaaya Hunsinger, Alerie Billie and Daliyah Nunez spend the evening at UNITY's Gala Dinner.

Daniella Hakim

With a focus on Native youth, UNITY turns 50

BY DANIELLA HAKIM
Staff Reporter

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — The 1970s marked the beginning of United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), a movement founded by J.R. Cook, Cherokee, in Weatherford, Oklahoma on April 16, 1976, for the unification and development of tribal youth across the United States while fostering the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native youth through greater youth involvement.

Nearly four years later, UNITY organized its first Native youth gathering in Washington D.C. where the National Indigenous Australians Agency and the Department of Labor co-sponsored one of the organization's first conferences at George Washington University.

Throughout the event, Native youth assembled on the south lawn of the White House where President Jimmy Carter and his son James "Chip" Carter met with approximately 300 Native students, launching the non-profit's nationwide

leadership engagement.

UNITY has conducted a national youth leadership conference each year ever since, with a growing number of participants ranging from 2,000 to 2,300.

At this year's National UNITY Conference in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, UNITY Honorary Co-Chair and Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. emphasized the importance in tribal youth preserving tribal nations while representing their communities and carrying their cultural traditions into the future.

"You all descend from people that got knocked down, but they didn't stay down," Hoskin said. "You all descend from the people that, from time to time, have been in the face of so-called discovery, in the face of colonization, in the face of the imposition of the United States. You come from people that may have been in the face of all of that, but they never broke."

The organization's growing number of affiliate youth councils engage in annual projects in four areas: cultural preservation, environmental awareness, healthy lifestyles, and community service.

The 2026 National UNITY Conference's

50th Anniversary presenting sponsor was the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. Its Gala sponsor was the Gila River Indian Community, with career and education day presented by the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Pechanga Band of Indians.

UNITY is the only organization to have a formal network of youth councils. There are currently 320 in operation across 36 states.

"Right now, you live in a time which there is a great deal of division in the United States," Hoskin added. "Sometimes it feels a little hopeless, but I think back to my ancestors in 1839. They looked around at the precious resources they had left, and I think the most precious resource they looked at was the children, the youth."

Daniella Hakim

Keynote speaker Julian Brave Noisecat discusses the themes behind his newest novel, "We Survived the Night."



Generations and reservations share passion to continue sweetgrass legacy

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

IMMOKALEE — About two dozen tribal members from Big Cypress, Brighton, Hollywood and Immokalee converged on a two-acre plot of land at the Immokalee Indian Camp June 29 to plant sweetgrass.

First they gathered under a tent to discuss the process of planting sweetgrass, among other things, before they went into the field.

“This is the last time I’m going to work the fields,” said sweetgrass basket maker Linda Beletso, who used to pick tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and watermelons in Immokalee fields. “It’s hard to find sweetgrass now. This is a good thing for the women and young girls who make baskets. It’s good to see you girls pick it up and keep it going.”

After the tribal volunteer planters did their work during the hot, humid summer morning, Department of Conservation (DOC) workers planted the rest. The department’s forestry program had 22,000 sweetgrass seedlings ready to go in the ground on the trust land about three miles from the Immokalee reservation.

Sweetgrass has been found and picked in Immokalee over the years, but this was the first time it was planted for tribal members to use to make sweetgrass baskets.

“This is for you,” said DOC director Craig Van Der Heiden. “You can come whenever you want to harvest the sweetgrass. It should take a couple of years for it to mature enough for picking.”

Sweetgrass picker, basket maker and teacher Donna Frank said she has been chased off land while picking sweetgrass numerous times. Once she was chased away by a man with a gun in his belt. She had to drop the bundle of grass she collected and leave. Luckily, she already had a bundle she picked in her truck.

“I’m very passionate about this,” Frank said. “I never imagined I’d be able to pull grass off our own land. In the past, baskets were important to our survival. We had to have currency to buy food, and tourism gave us the opportunity. It was starting to die out and I didn’t want that. This is a sense of who we are, a strong people.”

Hali Garcia learned the art of basketmaking from Frank and now teaches others how to do it. She’s been making baskets since 2013 and is a fourth generation sweetgrass basket maker. She has high hopes for the Immokalee field of sweetgrass and said time will tell how well it grows.

“Two or three years ago we had a conversation about bringing back sweetgrass,” said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. “I’m glad the Department of Conservation tested the grass and found the exact strain we use to make baskets. Donna, Hali and a few others go out to pick, but we are trying to have them avoid going to places they shouldn’t be. This place will be safe and provide an area for teaching.”

Procuring sweetgrass is a rigorous endeavor that involves more than just finding the grass and picking it safely. Once it’s picked, it must be scrubbed clean and left



Beverly Bidney

DOC conservation technician Carlise Bermudez plants sweetgrass seedlings in Immokalee.

out to dry. All that activity is the reason a bundle of grass is so expensive for those who don’t pick it.

“For me, making baskets is therapeutic,” Beletso said. “I’m willing to teach, but I’m left-handed. My daughter [Lorraine Posada] learned from watching me and even though she is right-handed, she makes them the left-handed way.”

Maggie May Jimmie and Rosalinda Jimmie have been making baskets for less than a year, after they took a class with Garcia.

“We always hear we are using up all the sweetgrass,” said Maggie May Jimmie. “Now we can plant it and know we will have more.”

DOC previously planted some plants in Big Cypress and they did well. When the Indian Camp land became available and accessible after it was put into trust, the department started working on the property.

“We aren’t worried about floods here, we’ve worked on the property,” said DOC forester Grant Steelman. “Once the grass is established, we will plant some shade trees. The biggest objective is to provide access to the grass.”

Once out in the field, tribal members planted the seedlings as fast as a DOC worker drilled holes in the dirt.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Frank said as the planting commenced. “I can’t help crying, its all about the next generation knowing this. This is incredible.”



Beverly Bidney

Stacy Jones, Brighton community culture assistant manager, plants sweetgrass in Immokalee.



Beverly Bidney

Craig Van Der Heiden, director of the Department of Conservation, shows Cheyenne Kippenberger, Maggie May Jimmie and Rosalinda Jimmie how the sweetgrass seedlings will be planted.



Beverly Bidney

Sweetgrass seedlings sit ready to be planted in this Immokalee field.



Beverly Bidney

Sweetgrass basket makers and pickers Hali Garcia, left, Donna Frank, center, and Linda Beletso pose together in the Immokalee field before it was planted with seedlings, which should be ready for picking in a couple of years.



Native American artist, whose work involves willow and pine nuts, earns \$15,000 grant

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Melissa Melero-Moose doesn’t just paint the Great Basin, she gathers it. Willow, tule, cattails, and pine nuts collected from her Northern Paiute homelands are embedded in the layered, abstract surfaces of her mixed-media paintings, alongside acrylic washes and rice paper.

That practice has now earned her the Walker Youngbird Foundation’s Emerging Native Arts Grant, a \$15,000 award given twice a year to Native artists developing new bodies of work. Melero-Moose, an enrolled

member of the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe based near Reno, Nevada, will use the grant to create a new series of paintings for a public exhibition, with venue and dates to be announced this fall.



Courtesy photo

Melissa Melero-Moose, ‘Access Denied.’ Mixed media with pinenuts on canvas. 36” L x 48” W x 2” D. Permanent collection, Smithsonian, NAMI.

Funding available for independent producers to train Native youth in film and media

FROM PRESS RELEASE

Vision Maker Media (VMM) is offering funding to independent producers or Native youth organizations who have an interest in training Native youth in short-format media story development and production.

“Native heritage and Native perspectives must be prominent on all of today’s media platforms. For that reason, the Native Youth Media Project is one of the most important initiatives that Vision Maker Media has launched in our fifty-year history,” said VMM CEO and President Francene Blythe-

Lewis in a press release. “Native youth can build upon the cultural storytelling talents of their elders while achieving invaluable media expertise and personal life skills.”

VMM’s call for the Native Youth Media Project includes experienced independent producers or Native youth organizations working with Native youth ages 15-21. The intended goal is for Native youth to produce a media piece focused on topics such as health & wellness, science, climate & environment, education, art, culture, history, language, and empowerment. Finished projects will then be shared in a local community setting and the screening format will be determined by

the independent producer or Native youth organization.

Interested independent producers or Native youth organizations can apply for up to \$25,000 in funding support. All completed projects should be in an exhibitible digital format and archived in the highest quality available. Eligible independent producers or Native youth organizations must be U.S.-based and the call is open year-round. For the guidelines and online application, visit: <https://visionmakermedia.org/fund-your-film/>.

WATER RIGHTS

From page 2A

Heather Tanana: What we are really able to achieve through settlements that you can’t if you go through the courts are infrastructure projects. And so I think you know again in recognition of the federal treaty and trust responsibilities to tribes, right? That they gave up millions and millions of acres of land to be restricted on reservations, often in arid areas, that the government has a duty to protect them and to ensure their survival. And so, again, going back, water is life. Water is necessary for everything. And so, even if you get, you know, quantification on paper, the tribe can’t put that to use, they need those infrastructure projects to bring in the water to provide services, and so that’s again another big component about this settlement is it includes some large infrastructure projects that will be life changing for Navajo and Hopi.

KUNM: How are tribal members on the Navajo Nation currently finding and sourcing water?

Heather Tanana: It’s a struggle. I mean, it’s a daily struggle. If you’re Diné, right? You or your someone close to you and your family is hauling water right now. Just the average American today uses 100 gallons. If you took a really quick five-minute shower today, you probably used about 12.5 gallons of water. That is more than the average Navajo water hauler who uses seven gallons a day. Some even have to confine down to two. So I encourage you think about your water usage today. How in the world are you going to meet all of your needs on seven gallons a day? We have Navajo families where their children are going to bed thirsty because they have to conserve that water. It’s just more costly. Aside from the public health challenges, It’s wearing to go and haul water from these source points takes time out of your day to do it. Really, really challenging.

KUNM: So, with all that said, why has

it taken this long to propose and to agree on a settlement?

Heather Tanana: I mean, that’s such a good question, but I think, quite frankly, it’s because there’s powerful interests at play. If we look at again the basin, it’s over-allocated. We do not have enough water to meet all of the needs, and so, as a practical matter, the water that these tribes are going to utilize, it’s gonna cut off someone else who is already using that water, and I think that creates tensions. But we have to go back to again, kind of this recognition that the tribes, they’re sovereigns. This isn’t like a charity project. This is a legal obligation that’s owed to them, and it’s something that others have been taking advantage of. We’ve had tribal water being used by other non-tribal users for free. And just think of how much we paid under the bipartisan infrastructure law, Inflation Reduction Act. All these farmers and other users got money to help stabilize the system. This is really just kind of allowing tribes to be on an equal foot as other users.

SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA AHTAHTHI-KI MUSEUM PRESENTS

AMERICAN INDIGENOUS ARTS CELEBRATION

FREE EVENT | NOV 6 & 7

Native American Month

POWWOW, DANCE, ARTS, MUSIC, HISTORY & CULTURE

MUSEUM ADMISSION, FIELDTRIPS & GROUPS WELCOME

ahtahthiki.com | Big Cypress Indian Reservation | 863-902-1113

Reservations hold 4th of July celebrations

Hollywood



Daniella Hakim

Jules Gentry enjoys Hollywood's 4th of July celebration, which offered rides, games, contests, food, music, fireworks and other activities.



Daniella Hakim

Jayden Benitez has fun at the 4th.



Daniella Hakim

Tommie Clark, left, and Marley Clark play one of the many carnival games at Hollywood's 4th of July celebration.



Daniella Hakim

Budha Jumper, left, and Phalyn Osceola compete in Hollywood's 4th of July horseshoe tournament.



Daniella Hakim (2)

The hatchet-throwing contest included Adrianne Bell, far left, and Gordon Wareham.



Calvin Tiger

Joe Hughes eyes a ringer in the horseshoe competition.



Calvin Tiger

Hollywood's 4th of July activities got underway at 7:30 a.m. on July 2 with the Firecracker Walk/Run. Participants included Patrick Doctor.



Calvin Tiger

Mercedes Osceola enjoys walking in the Firecracker Walk/Run.



Calvin Tiger

Leon Wilcox competes in the horseshoe tournament.

Brighton



Kevin Johnson

From left, Jeff Johns, John Madrigal and Amos Tiger compete in the pie-eating contest at Brighton's 4th of July celebration on July 4 at the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena as the United States turned 250 years old. The celebration included a variety of contests, bounce houses and slides, community dinner, concert and more.



Kevin Johnson

Nehemiah Hardy has a blast on a water slide.



Kevin Johnson

John Huff Jr. and his daughter Whitteigh enjoy their time at Brighton's 4th of July.



Kevin Johnson

At left, members of the Hardy family get ready for a photo op with a patriotic background. From left to right are Aurora, Kimberly and Naylahine.



SMP

Country music artist Elijah Scott serves as the headline performer at the celebration.



Kevin Johnson

A group of girls has fun at the 4th under a chickadee.



Kevin Johnson

Miguel Estrada gives it his all in the seed-spitting contest.



Kevin Johnson

Mesa Gopher enjoys participating in the Brighton activities.



Kevin Johnson

Fred Smith Rodeo Arena was decked out in red, white and blue throughout the arena for 4th of July.

YOUR VISION IS OUR FOCUS!



Alan Mendelsohn M.D., F.A.C.S.
Nathan Klein O.D.
Alec Chaleff M.D.



Voted Gold Favorite Eye Surgery

We are honored to have been selected as South Florida's premier practice for eye surgery, being renowned for laser cataract surgery!

Our expertise includes:

- Comprehensive Eye Examinations • Laser Cataract Surgery
- Multifocal Lens Implants • Laser Refractive Lens Exchange
- Contact Lenses & Scleral Contact Lenses • Red Eye
- Macular Degeneration Prevention & Management
- Diabetic Eye Disease
- Glaucoma Treatments w/ in-office laser procedures
- Myopia Management
- Optical with quality lenses, frames, & sunglasses

We would like to invite you and your family to consider the benefits of becoming patients at Eye Surgeons & Consultants in Hollywood, and allowing us to become your family's eye physicians. With kindness, compassion, and honesty, we will do our utmost to ensure that you will receive the best care possible!



954.894.1500 | MYEYESURGEONS.COM
4651 Sheridan Street, Suite 100, Hollywood, FL 33021
Hours: Monday-Friday 7:15am to 5pm • Sunday 7:15am - Noon

Sports



Native Soldiers finish 2nd at NABI

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Led by head coach Skyla Osceola from the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Native Soldiers team is no stranger to championship games, having advanced to the Native American Basketball Invitational's girls division title game a few times in recent years.

This year was no different as Native Soldiers, which includes guard Kash Cooper (STOF), dominated several games on their way to the championship game July 18 in Phoenix, Arizona. It seemed the only thing that could derail them was another powerhouse, which is what happened in front of a packed gym at Phoenix College. RezBombers, an Arizona-based team that includes several players from New Mexico, won their third straight NABI championship and fourth in the past five years with a 65-51 win against Native Soldiers.

Native Soldiers finished the 64-team tournament for high school-age players with an 8-1 record, which included massive blowouts early. In fact, Native Soldiers' closest margin of victory was 34 points in their first four games. Their defense didn't allow more than 18 points in any of those four games.

After pool play, the games eventually got tougher, but so did the Native Soldiers, who beat NWT (58-35), Team Stronghold (47-30) and 509 Road Warriors (42-37) to advance to the championship.

Cooper, who averaged more than 16 points and 7 rebounds last winter for Bishop McGuiness High School in Oklahoma, was the only Seminole on the squad. The team included several Choctaws from Mississippi as well as players from Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma. Recent college-signees on the squad included Caris Dale (Navajo) with Northern New Mexico College, Jiar Henry (Choctaw) with Southeastern Baptist College, and Dazlie Tubby (Choctaw) with Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College.

In the weeks leading up to NABI, the team held practices on the Hollywood Reservation. Finishing runner-up was only



Darin Sicurello

Native Soldiers coach Skyla Osceola speaks to her team during a break in a game at NABI in July.

part of the story.

"These young women blossomed in just two months, and with the addition of a few key pieces, we continue to grow even stronger together," Osceola posted on social media. "What we are building has never been just about basketball—it has always been about family, growth, resilience, and creating opportunities that last far beyond the game."

The other two Florida-based teams at NABI were in the boys division.

RezBallers, with all Seminole/Miccosukee players, showed that they could excel under pressure. Coached by Eric Osceola, RezBallers won several close games, including their tournament opener,

49-48, against First Nation Warriors, all the way from Australia.

RezBallers went on to beat teams from Arizona, Minnesota and New Mexico. They took a perfect 5-0 record into their playoff game against Red Bears from Minnesota. Red Bears eliminated RezBallers in a tight game, 53-48.

Unconquered, which included Kingston Billie (Miccosukee), Jamere Osceola (STOF) and players from other tribes, finished with a 2-3 record. They notched wins against Arizona-based teams WE R1 (68-30) and Real Team 6 (93-65). Unconquered was ousted with a narrow loss to Rockhawks, from Montana, 51-49.



Darin Sicurello

Native Soldiers guard Kash Cooper gets past a defender during the NABI girls championship July 18.



Darin Sicurello

The Unconquered boys team included Jamere Osceola (14) and Kingston Billie (30).



Darin Sicurello

Rez Ballers Glenardo Stubbs dribbles past an opponent.



The NABI girls division runner-up Native Soldiers from left to right are Lacy Alex, Jiar Henry, Nalayah Phillips, Yazzlyn Alex, Dazlie Tubby, Caris Dale, Taelyn Mingo, Kash Cooper, Mya Lopez, Aubrey Lopez



Darin Sicurello

Rez Ballers guard Christian Shaffer looks for an open teammate.



Darin Sicurello

Rez Ballers forward Remy Griffin powers his way to the basket.



Darin Sicurello

RezBombers, coached by Eric Osceola, went 5-1 at NABI. They are, from left to right, Christian Shaffer, Kalijah Osceola, Remy Griffin, Jeremiah Johns, Tayin Fairclough, Antonio Tosca, Curtis Smith, Louis Billie and Glenardo Stubbs.

Seminole teams capture several NAYO championships

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

OKEECHOBEE — A smaller than usual NAYO baseball and softball tournament still featured plenty of big moments.

Hosted by the Seminole Tribe of Florida and its Brighton Reservation’s Recreation Department, the annual three-day NAYO (Native American Youth Organization) tournament ran July 23-25 in Okeechobee at Darrell Enfinger Sports Complex.

Most of the teams were from the Seminole Tribe with a few from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. They competed for championships from 8U to 17U, mostly under sweltering conditions with temperatures in the mid-90s.

A few local Chobee All-Star teams played scrimmages against some Seminole teams due to the lack of teams in the tournament.

In fact, the tournament drew only 22 teams, down more than half compared to last year’s tournament that featured about 45 teams in Choctaw, Mississippi. NAYO members Haudenosaunee (New York) and Coushatta (Louisiana) did not have any teams.

The divisions were tiny. With four teams, the 17U softball division was the largest. The rest of the divisions featured three or two teams. 17U baseball had only one team, which meant no games were played, making it an easy path to the banner for the Seminoles team.

Day One

In the tournament’s first game, Seminole AMP put up 14 runs in a 17U softball win against Stonecoat Killers. Highlights for AMP included a two-run triple by winning pitcher Charisma Micco and a 3-run double by Kiera Snell.

Perhaps the day’s most exciting game was in 8U softball between STOF’s Diamond Dolls and Cherokee’s Line Drive Elite. The Dolls trailed 6-4 in the fifth, but rallied to take a 7-6 lead on clutch hits by Jhennie

Baker and Kiara Jackson. Line Drive Elite was down to their last out in the sixth, but found a way to push across two runs and emerge with an 8-7 win.

Championship Saturday

17U softball

Most of the champions were crowned on July 25, the final day. One of the most anticipated championship games came in 17U softball. It featured an all-Seminole championship showdown with plenty of talented players on both sides as Seminole Impact faced Seminole AMP.

Impact built a 2-0 lead in the first inning which proved to be more than enough runs for hard-throwing Haydn Billie, who kept AMP’s powerful bats quiet.

Impact increased its lead to 4-0 in the second thanks to a leadoff double by Paizley Billie, a sacrifice bunt by Dyani Kayda, a squeeze bunt by Tehya Nunez and an RBI double by Paiton Billie.

Impact won, 4-1.

8U baseball

There was a lot to like about Florida Made’s journey to winning the 8U championship. In the field, they played clean, crisp ball with few errors. At the plate, the hits kept on coming.

With a roster of 14 kids, Florida Made made sure it went home as champions.

“It was all around, hitting, fielding the ball, catching popflys, doing double plays, laying out for the ball. It was a lot. It was very exciting,” said coach Mitchell Kunkles.

10U softball

The Florida Girls 10U softball team overcame early obstacles to win a championship. The Girls lost their first game, but rebounded to win out. The loss may have been a blessing in disguise.

“It made them realize they were going to have work for it,” said coach Kalgary Johns, who stressed hard work with the players before and throughout the tournament.

“Making them work for it. They’re a



Kevin Johnson

Seminole Impact – 17U NAYO softball champions. In alphabetical order: Haydn Billie, Paiton Billie, Paizley Billie, Emilee Brady, Dyani Kayda, Daliyah Nunez, Hayden Nunez, Joleyne Nunez, Tehya Nunez, Hannah Platt, Remy Rodriguez. Coaches: Eddie Rodriguez, Cheyenne Rodriguez.

good team, but they get lazy sometimes, so we have to keep them motivated.”

In perhaps the most exciting championship game, Florida Girls had to fend off a determined Diamond Cutters team, who, despite trailing most of the game, never quit.

Alison Garcia came through with clutch hits for the Diamond Cutters, including a two-RBI hit that helped send the game to extra innings tied 6-6.

Alijah Osceola and Charity Turner belted RBI hits in the extra inning to put

Florida Girls on top for good as they won, 9-6.

“A great group of girls between both teams,” Johns said.

14U baseball

John Madrigal has been coaching the same group of baseball players for four years. Championship wins in NAYO have eluded his team, until this year.

Native Boyz was by far the class of the 14U division, winning all three of its

games by wide margins, including the championship game, 17-3.

“I’m proud of them. We did some good hitting today,” Madrigal said.

Native Boyz also had a strong game on the mound as Miguel Estrada and Damahni Bonilla combined to hold Pink Flame to just three runs.

Most of the players will be moving to 17U division next year. For now, Madrigal will cherish the championship win.

“Maybe I can retire now,” he said.

Kevin Johnson

Florida Girls - 10U NAYO softball champions. In alphabetical order: Lillie Coleman, Kaillin Coleman, Ja’Onna Jones, Mila Madrigal, Jailen Navarro, Alijah Osceola, Jaylee Osceola, Myani Puente, Josie Smith, Autumn Jumper, Amari Torres, Charity Turner. Coaches: Kalgary Johns, Jacee Jumper, Naha Jumper.



Kevin Johnson

Seminoles - 17U NAYO baseball champions. From left to right, coach Randy Osceola, Blaze Cypress, Leland Billie, Thaddeus Johns, Tim Urbina, Ashton Garza, AJ Yzaguirre, coach Raymond Mara.



Kevin Johnson

L7 - 12U NAYO baseball champions. Front row, left to right: Elakaih Collins, Samuel Slocum, Isaac Osceola, Ryker Miller, Nakoa Smiley. Back row, left to right: Maddox Newkirk, Makai Newkirk, Manny Estrada, Maddox Tommie, coach Marshall Tommie, Charlie Julian.



Kevin Johnson

Native Boyz - 14U NAYO baseball champions. In alphabetical order, Alakai Bert, Damahni Bonilla, Miguel Estrada, Teo Estrada, Caden Jumper, Chance Madrigal, Chosen Micco, Silas Snow, Tiger Snow, Ray Yzaguirre, AJ Yzaguirre. Coaches: John Madrigal, Ray Yzaguirre.



Kevin Johnson

Florida Made - 8U NAYO baseball champions. In alphabetical order, Jeremiah Ash, Jherricko Baker, Axton Baxley, Isiah Bradley, Jaxston Crews, Aliyas Fludd, McCoy Gabbard, Ethan Gopher, Haze King, Ja’Khaza Jones, Billy Osceola, Makiyo Osceola, Thatcher Thomas, Mordecai Yzaguirre.

NAYO



Brighton Bombers - 10U NAYO baseball champions. Front row, left to right, Drayton Billie Jr., Blayne Osceola, Lennox Fudge, Maverick Gabbard, Zachary Yzaguirre, Ellis Gopher. Middle row: Kreed Snow, Kash Osceola, Jaiden Gore, Asher Micco, Chastin, Esteban Santibanez Gopher. Coaches: Shyla English, Mitchell Kunkles, Mary Huff.



Florida Heat - 14U NAYO softball champions. In alphabetical order, Dalyse Baker, Faith Billie, Okalani Collins, Kaliyah Hodge, Shaelah Issac, Ja'Vaiah Jones, Kanae Jumper, Amariah Lavatta, Ameliana Osceola, Kohlani Rodriguez-Osceola, Bella Virto. Coaches Jewell Lavatta, Adrian Baker.



Pink Flames - 14U NAYO baseball runners-up



Diamond Cutters - 10U NAYO softball runners-up. In alphabetical order: Danasue Bear, Zai Bear, Allie Billie, Hayleigh Billie, Neka Cortez, Dalayah Cypress, Allison Garcia, Dannie Gonzalez, Delaney Gonzalez, Bella Jimmie, Talia Osceola, Natalie Shaffer. Coach: James Toombs



The Florida Girls 12U softball team shakes hands after a game. They finished runner-up.



Nakoa Smiley - 12U baseball



Kaleyah Hodge - 8U softball



Jaxston Crews - 8U baseball



Amariah Lavatta - 14U softball



Zach Yzaguirre - 10U baseball



Daliyah Nunez - 17U softball



Byron Osceola

The men’s tournament champion Team RFM are, from left to right, Ethan Richardson, Trazil Lane, Eric Sanders, Emmitt Taylor III, Quenton Raynor, Duelle Gore, Trewston Pierce, and Freddy Brown III.

Double-OT thriller as Team RFM captures Trail tournament

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

The fourth annual Trail Summer Basketball Tournament’s last game was also its best.

Team RFM, which includes the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Duelle Gore, Trewston Pierce and Eric Sanders, needed two overtimes to claim the men’s championship July 11 at the Harry Johnson Billie Center.

Team RFM outlasted Plainzmen, 80-76, in the thriller that concluded the 3-day, double elimination tournament hosted by the Miccosukee Tribe.

Team RFM built a 39-32 lead at halftime, but a quick surge by Plainzmen early in the second half served as an indicator that this title tilt would go down to the final seconds.

Tied at 64-64 with less than 10 seconds left in regulation, both teams had chances to take a lead; Plainzmen missed the front end of a 1-and-1 with seven seconds left. RFM snagged the rebound, but a last-second shot rimmed out.

The teams remained close until RFM

went ahead 78-74 with one minute left in the second overtime and emerged as tournament champions.

The men’s division featured 11 teams. Team RFM players are:

Ethan Richardson/Chickasaw/California

Trazil Lane/Lummi Nation/Washington

Eric Sanders/Seminole/Florida

Emmitt Taylor III/Yakama/Idaho

Quenton Raynor/Yakama/Washington

Duelle Gore/Seminole/Florida

Trewston Pierce/Seminole/Florida

Freddy Brown III/Makah Nation/Washington

The women’s championship didn’t match the men’s drama. Lady Ballers led for most of the game against Burning Feathers. Lady Ballers was up 27-23 at halftime and surged ahead by 10 points within the first five minutes of the second half.

When Jenna Plumley sank a 3-pointer with 7:50 left, the lead grew to 50-38 and remained in double digits for just about the rest of the game.



Byron Osceola

RFM’s Trazil Lane splits the defense for two points on a layup.



Byron Osceola

RFM’s Duelle Gore takes a free throw during the Trail Summer Basketball Tournament in July at the Harry Johnson Billie Center on the Miccosukee Reservation.

Okeechobee High’s new school, gym open



Kevin Johnson (2)

The new Okeechobee High School (above), which includes a new gym (at right), is scheduled to open for the 2026-27 academic year starting Aug. 10. The volleyball team’s first game in the new gym is slated to be Aug. 18 against Lincoln Park. The gym, which has bleachers on both sides of the court, features all gold and purple bleacher seats to match the school colors.



Hard Rock Live to host Fists of Fury

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — Fists of Fury boxing series returns to Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on Aug. 16 at 4 p.m. For tickets

go to myHRL.com.

Blue-chip twin phenoms Ari (6-0, 2 KOs) and Andrey Bonilla (6-0, 5 KOs), of El Paso, Texas, by way of Pasadena, California, look to continue their rise in a historic double main event.

The event will also feature rising

junior welterweight Montaser “The Boy King” Aboughaly (7-0, 3 KOs) of Tampa. Rounding out the card are light heavyweight veteran Jose Cortes (12-5, 4 KOs) and welterweight prospect Mohamed Farea (1-0), who will compete in separate bouts.



Courtesy photo

Aspen Cifuentes competes on the Santa Fe Indian School girls soccer team in June during its trip to the Puyallup Tribe in Washington State.

Aspen Cifuentes gains international playing experience with trip to Puyallup Tribe

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Aspen Cifuentes watched the FIFA World Cup on TV along with 60 million other people in the United States.

But Cifuentes’ experience extended beyond the screen. As a member of the Santa Fe Indian School girls soccer team in New Mexico, she and her teammates were invited to join the host Puyallup Tribe in Washington State and other Indigenous soccer players for international matches and opportunities to learn about each other’s cultures.

The Puyallup Tribe was very involved in the World Cup experience in the Seattle area as an official host city supporter, including bringing young soccer players from the U.S. and Canada together for a memorable experience in a program sponsored by Bank of America.

In email responses to the Tribune, Cifuentes, a Seminole Tribe of Florida tribal member, said she enjoyed being able to compete against teams from other parts of the U.S. and Canada and also meet the players.

“We played against NIFA which is an organization in Canada that supports Indigenous athletes,” she said. “We also played against the Puyallup Tribe’s local youth team. An Indigenous team from Mexico was also supposed to play but because they could not get their green cards in time they could not make it to the event.”

Cifuentes, a senior who is entering her fourth season on the Santa Fe team, played forward and midfield in the matches, which were more akin to scrimmages.

“I noticed that the [opposing] teams were very talented and passionate about

the game,” she said. “Some of the teams were also more aggressive than the other, but besides that everyone played the same. I thought it was interesting how this game and the culture of soccer is universal and this experience made that apparent.”

Cifuentes is the daughter of Shannon and Oscar Cifuentes. Soccer heritage is in the family. Her sisters play. Oscar is Colombian and Guatemalan. He played for Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton and had the opportunity to train with the América de Cali team in Cali, Colombia, as a teenager.

So there was plenty of cheering in the Cifuentes family for Colombia in its World Cup matches.

In addition to playing soccer, Cifuentes said the trip included a chance to attend a pow wow and visit the tribe’s new soccer complex.

Shannon said the tribe’s Elders were very welcoming to the players.

“They prayed for them and thanked them for traveling for the event,” she said.

Considering her final season of high school soccer has arrived, Cifuentes is cherishing every moment with her team, which made the trip even more rewarding.

“This experience was so special as a senior because I got to spend extra time with my teammates while doing the things we love,” she said. “I really appreciate my coaches for making the experience really memorable by taking the extra step to help us explore Washington. I also enjoyed the experience because it inspired me to stay active and have fun this summer. While soccer can be a very competitive environment this exhibition was a reminder that the point of soccer is to build community and have fun”



DAVID FRANKEL, ESQ.
Attorney and Counselor at Law
Hollywood, Florida

Fighting for Native Rights for 20 Years
Former Lawyer for Leonard Peltier
Counsel to the Protestors at Standing Rock

Former Broward County Prosecutor for 22 Years
Specializing in Criminal Defense

www.BlueLotusLaw.com
954-683-0300


LAW OFFICES OF DAVID A. FRANKEL

Calgary Stampede hosts inaugural Indigenous rodeo and relay

Seminole Tribe’s Jacoby Johns finishes 3rd

FROM PRESS RELEASE

CALGARY, Alberta, Canada — The inaugural Calgary Stampede First Nations Rodeo & Relay concluded June 13 at GMC Stadium, bringing together some of North America’s top Indigenous rodeo athletes and relay racing teams for a day of competition, culture and celebration.

Hosted by the Calgary Stampede in partnership with the Indian National Finals Rodeo (INFR), the event attracted a crowd of more than 8,150 people.

“The atmosphere was incredible,” INFR posted on social media. “The grandstands were full, the competition was outstanding, and the support shown to Indigenous athletes was truly inspiring. Together, the Calgary Stampede and INFR created an opportunity that many competitors will remember for a lifetime.”

“The inaugural First Nations Rodeo & Relay was an incredible success, showcasing remarkable athleticism, and horsemanship - and gathering our community together in a new and unique way,” said Kristina Barnes, Director of Agriculture & Western Events for the Calgary Stampede, in a press release. “Today’s competitors demonstrated the skill, determination and pride that make these sports such an important part of Indigenous culture and tradition.”

Alberta’s own Ty Ferguson of Foremost earned top honors in bareback riding with an event-winning score of 80 points. Close behind Ferguson in third place was Jacoby Johns from the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Johns’ score was 77.

In saddle bronc riding, Alan Kole Gobert of Browning, Montana, was crowned the champion with a score of 79 points.

“To be able to compete here is a dream come true. I rode here in the rookie bronc riding at the Stampede just a few years ago and to be able to come back and to hear my name being called behind the bucking shoots - that was pretty cool,” said Kole Gobert.

The ladies breakaway roping title went to Justine Begay of Fountain Hills, Arizona, who stopped the clock in 2.37 seconds.

“I’ve been excited for this all day and I’m so happy to be leaving here with a win at the Calgary Stampede. I wanted to win this for my family and I worked my butt off to make sure that happened.”

In relay racing, the Chief Enoch Lapotac team delivered the fastest run of the day, crossing the finish line in 3:10.99 to earn the title and a qualifying spot for the 2026



Calgary Stampede (2)

Above and below, scenes from the inaugural Calgary Stampede First Nations Rodeo & Relay.



Calgary Stampede.

“This means a lot because we practice a lot and nobody likes to lose, we all like to win. And if you believe it, you can achieve it. That’s one thing I always stick by,” said Tyrone Jackson, the rider for the team. “My family would be so proud of me right now because I come from a rough background and I’m just doing my best out here to strive and prosper.”

Additional event champions included Tuck Johnson of Browning, Montana, who won steer wrestling with a time of 5.28 seconds; Jackson Louis (header) and Trey Camarillo (heeler), who captured the team roping title in 10.07 seconds; JC Hawk of Scottsdale, Arizona, who won ladies barrel

racing in 17.291 seconds; and Jay Guerrero of Wadsworth, Nevada, who claimed the tie-down roping title with a time of 11.44 seconds.

No champion was crowned in bull riding after no competitors recorded a qualified ride.

The First Nations Rodeo & Relay brought together competitors, families and fans to celebrate Indigenous excellence in sport while honoring the traditions and community connections that continue to make rodeo and relay racing an important part of Indigenous culture across North America.



Calgary Stampede

Winners in the inaugural Calgary Stampede First Nations Rodeo & Relay were (in alphabetical order): Ladies Breakaway — Justine Begay (Fountain Hills, Arizona); Steer Wrestling — Nolan Conway (Cut Bank, Montana); Bareback — Ty Ferguson (Foremost, Alberta); Saddle Bronc — Alan Kole Gobert (Browning, Montana); Tie-Down Roping — Jay Guerrero (Wadsworth, Nevada); Ladies Barrel Racing — JC Hawk (Scottsdale, Arizona); Team Roping — Jackson Louis and Trey Camarillo.

INFR names class of 2026 hall of fame inductees

FROM PRESS RELEASE

In July, the Indian National Finals Rodeo announced its class of 2026 hall of fame inductees. They are Benny Begay, Marty Hebb, Donna Hoyt, Jim Stevens, Ralph Williams, Michael Bo Vocu and Dr. Steve Williamson.

In commemoration of INFR’s 50th anniversary, this year’s Hall of Fame carries particular significance. In addition to honoring the distinguished members whose accomplishments have helped define the organization’s legacy, we also recognize the dedicated individuals whose contributions behind the scenes have been instrumental in bringing INFR to this historic milestone and in commemorating 50 years of tradition.

This year’s INFR will be held Oct. 13-17 at the South Point Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. Josh Jumper, from the Seminole Tribe of Florida, is a defending champion in team roping.



INFR

INFR will celebrate its 50th anniversary in October. The organization is selling anniversary clothing.



NB3 Foundation

Notah Begay III, far right, joins some of the top finishers in the boys tournament.

Eight champions qualify for NB3 Junior Golf National Championship

FROM PRESS RELEASE

SANTA ANA PUEBLO, N.M. — The 2026 NB3 Foundation Native Youth Golf Championship brought together talented junior golfers from Native communities across the country for two days of competition at Santa Ana Golf Club.

Eight champions earned qualifying spots to compete at the NB3 Junior Golf National Championship that will be held in early November at Koasati Pines in Coushatta, Louisiana. Returning to the national stage are past champions Santana Parraz, Navajo Nation; Braxton Thomas, Cherokee Nation; and Kezia Danner, Navajo Nation; along with five newcomers.

2026 NB3 Foundation Native Youth Golf Championship champions

- Girls 10-11: Santana Parraz (Navajo Nation)

- Boys 10-11: Braxton Thomas (Cherokee Nation)
- Girls 12-13: Zoe Reid (Cherokee Nation)
- Boys 12-13: Adam Martinez (Cherokee Nation)
- Girls 14-15: Ellery Hogeland (Chickasaw Nation)
- Boys 14-15: Mason Piccolella (Pawnee Nation)
- Girls 16-18: Kezia Danner (Navajo Nation)
- Boys 16-18: Drake Kanuch (Chickasaw Nation)

This year’s championship was especially meaningful as Notah Begay III joined youth and families throughout the event. Participants had the opportunity to meet Begay, spend time with him and receive their awards from the founder of NB3 Foundation. Begay was recently named the 2026 recipient of the Payne Stewart Award.



NB3 Foundation

Notah Begay III, far left, joins some of the top finishers in the girls tournament.

Hard Rock Bet named official sportsbook of Miami Marlins

FROM PRESS RELEASE

HOLLYWOOD — The Miami Marlins and Hard Rock Bet, the only place to legally bet on sports in Florida, announced July 22 a new multi-year partnership that names Hard Rock Bet the official sportsbook of the Miami Marlins.

The partnership will deliver exclusive promotions, premium experiences, original content, and integrated activations at loanDepot park and across Marlins digital and broadcast platforms. Beginning in August,

eligible fans ages 21 and older attending Marlins home games can take advantage of a special grand slam promotion, unlocking a bonus bet in the Hard Rock Sportsbook app whenever the Marlins hit a grand slam.

Hard Rock Bet will receive prominent branding throughout loanDepot park, including digital outfield signage and featured content on the MarlinsVision videoboard. Fans attending select Marlins’ home games will also have opportunities to access exclusive Hard Rock Bet offers.

♦ BRAIN CORNER ANSWERS

From page 9A

SOLUTION (no peeking until your pencil gives up)

2	4	9	3	6	8	7	1	5
3	5	6	9	7	1	8	2	4
7	8	1	5	4	2	6	3	9
5	1	2	7	8	3	4	9	6
8	7	4	6	2	9	1	5	3
6	9	3	1	5	4	2	7	8
9	6	7	4	1	5	3	8	2
4	2	5	8	3	7	9	6	1
1	3	8	2	9	6	5	4	7

TRIBAL MEMBERS ONLY



SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA
VIRTUAL AUCTION

Contact Fleet Services: 954-967-3480 or fleetservices@semtribe.com