



The

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Voice of the Unconquered

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# Competition, culture, camaraderie, highlight Indian Day events

**STAFF REPORT**

Here's a recap of Indian Day activities held by Seminole Tribe reservations and communities.

**HOLLYWOOD**

Hollywood Indian Day activities took place Sept. 21-24.

Canoe races – an annual and popular Indian Day event for participants and spectators – was held Sept. 22 at a pond across Route 441 from the tribe's Guitar Hotel. In teams of two, the canoeists departed from the sandy shores and ventured about 200 yards before doing a U-turn and heading back to the finish line. They competed in adult and senior divisions in men, women and mixed categories.

All participants made it safely back and forth, and remained dry.

Some of the winners included Virginia Osceola and Tammy Osceola, who won the senior women's division. Virginia Osceola also won the mixed seniors division with Kevin Osceola, who was also a double winner as he captured the men's senior race with Peter Baker.

Hali Garcia and Justin Frank produced one of the fastest times as they won the mixed 18-35 category in 2:34. Cameron Osceola and Zaiden Frank won the adult men 18-35 category in 2:38.

◆ See INDIAN DAY on page 2A



From Brian Zepeda's gar fishing catch (Naples), to Cameron Osceola and Lena Osceola competing in canoe races (Hollywood), to Carlise Bermudez's fantacking skills (Immokalee), Seminoles tribalwide enjoyed Indian Day activities in September. All reservations held their own celebrations. See coverage on pages 2A, 6A and 3-6B.

## Indigenous jazz band to perform at Kravis Center

**BY DANIELLA HAKIM**  
Staff Reporter

Keeping Indigenous stories alive through the language and stylings of jazz, the Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band (JKIBB) will be performing at the Kravis Center's Alexander W. Dreyfoos Concert Hall in West Palm Beach at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 22 as part of the center's "PEAK" concert series.

An ensemble of Native and Indigenous jazz musicians from across Indian Country, the JKIBB is led by the Native American vocalist Julia Keefe. Acclaimed by the New York Times as "a songbird of a jazz vocalist," her direction highlights the history and future of Indigenous people in jazz. Keefe grew up on the Nez Perce reservation.

"Being able to serve my community in this capacity is the gift of a lifetime," Keefe said. "The performers in this band bring all their experience and history to the stage with them. While we are from different tribes and nations with different cultural norms and relationships to music, we have this shared experience of being Indigenous and this common language of jazz."

The band quickly gained its reputation after premiering at Washington Center for the Performing Arts in 2022, going on to headline marquee events including the Mary Lou Williams Jazz Festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in 2024.

The band also played at the Native American Music Experience concert that was part of the opening of the Bruce Springsteen Center in New Jersey in June.

◆ See BAND on page 3A

# Big Cypress invasive plants identified and mapped

**BY BEVERLY BIDNEY**  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — The land at Billie Swamp Safari is rich with natural beauty but too many non-native plants mar the landscape. The Department of Conservation is in the midst of a project to locate, identify and remove invasive plants on about 1,500 acres of the land.

DOC is conducting an inventory of the aquatic areas and pastures as the first step and to get a baseline to understand what and where the invasives are. They began the process in late August and expect to finish by the end of October.

"The priority is to map locations of melaleuca and Brazilian pepper trees to determine the area and severity of the infestation," said DOC project manager Olena Leskova. "We are creating a baseline to learn what it will take to remove the plants."

Mapping an area the size of Billie Swamp Safari is a tedious job that must be done by hand and on foot. Leskova and DOC restoration biologist Jose Torres walked



The area being mapped in Billy Swamp Safari. The red indicates Brazilian pepper plants and the yellow indicates melaleuca trees.



DOC project manager Olena Leskova and DOC restoration biologist Jose Torres use their devices to map the exact location of invasive species in Billy Swamp Safari.

part of the property Sept. 8 to document their findings using a professional global positioning system (GPS) device which uses a satellite to identify its exact location. The device is significantly more accurate than a cell phone GPS.

Leskova and Torres walked on land filled with weeds and tree islands filled with live oaks, sabal palms, saw palmetto and other small plants. They estimated about 25% of the species they found were invasive, the rest were natives.

"That indicates this is a healthy environment, but we need to help them by getting rid of the invasives," Leskova said.

"The community wants this place to look beautiful and we have a unique opportunity to do that," Torres said.

During a freeze last winter many of the Brazilian peppers died off but a few grew back. Leskova and her team collected seeds from the dead plants in three habitats: canals, oak hammocks and open land. When they

tested the seeds to see if they would grow, most were not viable.

"Maybe the freeze can be a limiting factor for the plants, we are working on that study," Leskova said. "Brazilian peppers are robust. Part of the plant may be dead, but we found there can still be new growth."

The process of ridding the land of invasives will be an ongoing one. Initial treatment to get rid of the invasives will be done in the dry season, then the property will be burned and the process will start again the following year. Over time, DOC will continue routine monitoring so they can catch new infestations early and address them right away.

"We are trying to restore the land to a time the Seminole elders remember," said DOC director Craig Van Der Heiden. "We want to have the same hydrology, vegetation and trees. It will take quite a while to map it and it requires ground trooping to verify everything on the ground. This is a

community driven endeavor."

Van Der Heiden said the plan for the land could be a low impact tourist destination with hiking trails, bike trails and stargazing but education is the primary objective. The department has been monitoring fish, doing animal surveys and has recordings of endangered Florida bonneted bats.

The department hopes to present a report to the community about their efforts soon.

**Jose Torres holds the professional GPS device to obtain data, which is automatically sent to an app on his phone.**



Leskova holds her phone and the professional GPS device to see the data.







Calvin Tiger  
Eliza Mora and her daughter Mayeli Hall enjoy ice cream during the ice cream social event Sept. 16 at the Dorothy Scott Osceola Memorial Library in Hollywood.

# Ice cream socials a big hit at libraries

STAFF REPORT

The Education Department’s Seminole Tribal Library System hosted family ice cream socials throughout the tribe in September. In addition to kids, those invited included parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. The socials were held at Billy Osceola Memorial Library in Brighton, Willie Frank Memorial Library in Big Cypress, Dorothy Scott Osceola Memorial Library in Hollywood, and Diane Yzaguirre Memorial Library in Immokalee.

The events also provided an opportunity to encourage people to get library cards as September was the American Library Association’s Library Card Sign-Up Month.



Calvin Tiger  
Addison Lopez receives her first library card from the Hollywood library during the Hollywood Education Ice Cream Social event.



Calvin Tiger  
Marlena Olson reads “Vanilla Ice Cream” to her peers during the Hollywood Education ice cream social event.

## ♦ INDIAN DAY From page 1A

The traditional clothing contest was held Sept. 23 in the Howard Tiger Recreation Center gym. The clothing contest consisted of a showcase of adult and youth traditional tribal clothing. Various types of traditional clothing were on display from members of the Hollywood community such as traditional, contemporary, formal, jackets and skirts.

The following day, more Hollywood Indian Day activities took place at Okalee Village. The day started with various field activities. Activities included Seminole challenge, log peeling, horseshoe contest, archery, axe throwing, skillet toss and a frybread contest.

Lunch was provided by various food trucks for attendees, who also enjoyed a musical performance from the Buffalo Tiger Band later that afternoon.

### NAPLES

As part of its three-day Indian Day celebration, tribal members from the Seminole Tribe’s Naples community gathered for a day of gar fishing, lunch and canoeing on Sept. 11 in Collier County.

Along the banks of a swampy area on the Tamiami Trail in Ochopee – whose water was patrolled all morning by an 8-foot alligator – the tribal members competed in a gar fishing contest that lasted about 90 minutes. In a similar way their ancestors fished, the tribal members used long, wooden poles with three-pronged metal spears. Early on there was plenty of success as they found their targets and delivered precise throws to pierce gar and then reeled them in with a rope attached to the pole. Although he

wasn’t competing in the contest, it took Naples Liaison Brian Zepeda only a couple minutes to conquer the first gar, which was measured at 25 inches by Marlain Weeks, Liaison office manager. Then came more accomplishments from Marissa Osceola (21 inches), John Kyle Osceola (22 and ¼ inches) and Kyle Deland Zepeda (20 and ¾ inches). Brian Zepeda snagged a second one (25 and ¾ inches) before the gar became tougher to catch. After a long spell of no catches and with only a couple minutes left, Pedro Zepeda caught the final gar of the competition (21 inches). All the gar was put in a cooler, slated to be cooked and eaten the following day.

After the gar competition, the group headed to nearby Collier-Seminole State Park for lunch. They were joined by Naples’ own Miss Florida Seminole Serena Zepeda. Canoe rides in the park’s inlet were led by Pedro Zepeda and John Kyle Osceola.

### BIG CYPRESS

Big Cypress held its Indian Day celebration Sept. 19, but unfortunately the weather didn’t cooperate. Many of the competitions weren’t held. Before the lightning put a stop to the day, tribal members gathered for the clothing competition.

### IMMOKALEE

The Immokalee community celebrated its annual Indian Day activities Sept. 12. The day started off with a canoe race across a pond. Lunch was organized for attendees after the race. Activities included skillet toss, archery, log race, frybread contest, fan tacking, and a swamp cabbage demonstration by Lenny Jim.

# Stream-of-consciousness writing

BY ELGIN JUMPER

*Author’s note: Having trouble falling asleep recently, I decided to do some quick writing, and perhaps that would help. I definitely enjoy writing in this literary style, as it seems to clear out the old attic every time. A few of my influences in this area are Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, William Faulkner, N Scott Momaday, Toni Morrison, and Hunter S. Thompson, among many others. In stream-of-consciousness writing there’s no indentations, long long sentences go on for miles, and the swiftness of the writing, just like the way we think, a continuous flow of thoughts and feelings and words. And so, it didn’t take long to get these words down, so wonderful how they arise, and pleasant sleep ultimately arrived as a result, thank goodness.*

Late at night, can’t sleep, so I write . . . in Hollywood town, on the Hollywood rez, I’ve let the words build up over the days (daze), full tank of words, so let’s write, I say, let’s ride, and snackin on skinny popcorn, all the while, yep, they make skinny popcorn these days . . . Can you imagine? Progress. I’m watching tv with the mute on, so I can write, Deniro’s Jimmy Conway is chewing out some guy for spending money and going to the showboat, when he shouldn’t have, they’re all Goodfellas, you see, save for the coppers. Thinking back over my life, at the outset, when I was young and naive, and yet,

I had already earned a PhD in cluelessness, wandering through shadowy neighborhoods where late at night phantom horsemen in turban and plume ride pell-mell through reservation streets, charging towards the ominous clamor and melee of midnight battles, where I cruise my bike afar off, alone, across fields and parking lots and city life, and when I hit the big jumps, I make sure to level it out and glance nonchalantly at the photographers as they snap the shots, they’re artists, you see, and they know how to take those pics, and nowadays everyone has a camera, taking photography to the next level, turning up the dial, while a vision of Seminole War plays on the drive-in movie screens of my mind, and I’m made aware, powerful aware, of the rich rich history of the Seminole past, which was seared onto my eyes eons ago, truth be told, and ancient storytellers thousands of years from now, shall perform the stories and poems in fireside brilliance with metallic warriors all animated in forward movement and theatrical flair, they’ll raise their arms in triumph, and so will I, and now, somehow, I can hear the howling winds, at once eerie and surreal, and just as the winds die down, at last, I hear a woman’s gentle voice call me by my name and I see her in a vision, she speaks like a philosopher, she inquires, “Tell me, Thou Wanderer, why is there Something, rather than Nothing?” I hear her, and empathize, yea, a deep inquiry, if ever I heard one, so I deliberate and I contemplate as to the

power of such questioning, for moments on end, horizons expanding, enriching my life, happening fast, like the trajectory of a spacecraft, without forewarning, and from the windows, I can see dreamlike warriors on a celestial battlefield, red-magenta hues, and I can hear voices urging, “Go now, my child, behold your people, henceforth proceed, take your place beside them, for they are all there now, at the Sacred Fire, waiting.” Oh, Urgency! Perhaps martial columns have crossed a crucial river, and time is of the essence, be bold, then, be daring, prompt action is needed, thusly, without delay, a confrontation! Wandering across Time is what I do, for I’ve traversed these realms and kingdoms on numerous occasions, writing at the speed of light, I’ve banished all stop signs and speed limit signs, exiled them to distant planets, ricocheting them off pulsars and moons and asteroid belts of the purple glow, and yes, the memories linger, and I’m reminded of how the indigenous leaders of the past truly cared for their people, conversing with them with the deepest conviction, and the sincerest words of hope, and that inspires me, how those who came before us stood their ground, fought and gave their all, and so, if only for a moment, I walk outside into the night air, up front, and catch the fleeting scent of freshly fallen rain . . .

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

## Elgin Jumper shares his artistic skills



Daniella Hakim  
Elgin Jumper demonstrates his methods abstract painting to students and teachers during an art program at the Dorothy Scott Osceola Memorial Library in September. Jumper donated the painting to the library. He previously held sessions about poetry and landscape art.



Daniella Hakim  
Marlena Olson experiments painting with different colors and shapes.



Courtesy photo  
Elgin with the team at the library.

### FORT PIERCE

The tribe’s Fort Pierce community spent a quiet afternoon Sept. 21 celebrating Indian Day at Chupco’s Landing. The gathering started with a prayer by Dean Stokes. After having lunch under the big chickee, participants ventured out to compete in activities such as corn hole, skillet tossing, archery and hatchet throwing with music emnating from giant speakers. Meanwhile, a giant water slide proved to be a popular attraction for the younger crowd who spent the mostly sunny day slipping and sliding down the giant inflatable.

The day wrapped up with dinner at 5 p.m. in the community center gymnasium followed by bingo.

### BRIGHTON

The Brighton Reservation gathered

Sept. 25 to celebrate Indian Day in the Fred Smith Rodeo Arena and the surrounding grounds. Tucker Ridge was host to canoe and kayak races in the late afternoon for kids and adults.

The morning began with horseshoe and cornhole tournaments. A little later, coordinated pandemonium broke out during the pig chase as a group of piglets tried to outrun the kids from 5 to 17 years old. Then it was on to the cypress run, thatch race, skillet toss and archery competitions.

The pumpkin bread contest was held in the food vendor area of the rodeo grounds, where seven women crafted the sweet treats. Courtney Osceola and Walker Lawrence, from President Holly Tiger’s office, served as judges. The winner in the age18-59 category was Amber Craig. Solina Dorgan took the title for best pumpkin fry bread in

the age 60+ category.

### TRAIL

Trail offered a little bit of something for everyone at its Indian Day celebration on Sept. 18 at Huggins Camp in Ochopee. Up first, breakfast was served at 9 a.m. Later, kids enjoyed ice cream and other tasty treats as well as games, character balloons, face painting and inflatables. For adults, there were arts and crafts and cooking contests. Skillet tossing was also on the agenda. Kids and adults participated in the clothing contest under a big white, enclosed tent. Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum staff served as judges.

### LAKELAND

The Tribune’s November issue will have coverage of Lakeland’s Indian Day that was held Sept. 26.

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.

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# Community



The Big Cypress seniors at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Connecticut.

Courtesy photo



Courtesy photo  
Paul Bowers and his wife Charlotte Tommie visit Washington, D.C., including the National Military Monument, where his name was found in its database of those who served in the military.

## Big Cypress seniors visit DC, CT, NJ

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

A group of seven Big Cypress seniors visited Connecticut, New Jersey and Washington D.C. from Aug. 27 to Sept. 2. The group consisted of Deloris Alvarez, Paul Bowers, Richard Bowers, Carol Cypress, Virginia Mitchell, Mary Tigertail and Charlotte Tommie.

They attended the 34th annual Schemitzun Feast of Green Corn and Dance, a pow wow, in Mashantucket, Connecticut, and visited the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, where they were greeted by Tribal Chairman Rodney Butler.

The seniors made their way to Atlantic City, where they enjoyed their stay at the Hard

Rock Atlantic City, then went to Washington D.C. They visited the National Museum of the American Indian and explored the U.S. Capitol and the National Mall.

While on the mall, Elder Services site manager Angelita Arreguin made sure they saw the National Military Monument. The monument, an interactive tribute to all who served the military, has a unique feature; a QR code. Anyone can click the code and find the record of one of the 41 million people who served, which will then be displayed on a screen. The monument is a temporary installation near the Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pool and will remain on display until Nov. 12.

## Peter Hahn completes Harvard leadership program

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

Peter Hahn, Treasurer of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, concluded a program at Harvard Business School on May 8, 2026, further strengthening his leadership and strategic development in community-focused investments.

“Leadership is a lifelong journey of learning and growth” Hahn said. “We all have a responsibility to help create opportunities for future generations. This program was an opportunity to learn from experienced leaders, gain new perspectives, and bring those insights back to the communities I serve.”

Harvard Business School’s executive education program, “Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities,” focuses on advanced leadership principles, sustainable economic development, strategic investment practices, and the long-term growth of resilient communities.

“Sustainable communities are built by investing in people,” Hahn added. “Lasting success comes from creating opportunities that empower others to grow and contribute. Its curriculum reinforced that meaningful change happens when leaders focus on long-term impact rather than short-term results.”

Harvard Business School’s executive education programs are internationally recognized for uniting leaders from business, government, nonprofit organizations, and community development sectors to address complex modern challenges through innovation, collaboration, and strategic leadership.

Nearly two decades ago, Hahn kicked off his career as deputy treasurer with the Seminole Tribe. Today, he continues to emphasize the importance of cross-sector collaboration in building resilient and sustainable communities.

“This experience reminded me that leadership is measured not only by what we accomplish today, but by the opportunities we help create for tomorrow,” Hahn said.



Courtesy photo  
Peter Hahn recently completed a program at Harvard Business School.

### ◆ BAND From page 1A

“Once I met my dear friend and collaborator, Delbert, we spent hours talking about jazz history in Indian Country and the jazz bands and musicians that came out of tribal communities all over the U.S. and Canada,” Keefe said. “Off-handedly we joked about forming our own Indigenous big band, but given that we only knew a small handful of Indigenous jazz musicians, I never thought it would come to fruition.”

Both Keefe and co-founder Delbert Anderson, from the Diné Nation, compose original works inspired by their traditional backgrounds—songs and rhythms of their Native heritage reimagined through jazz.

“Since the formation of JKIBB, there are close to 80 Indigenous jazz musicians on our roster,” Keefe added.

The Kravis Center’s “PEAK” concert series performances are made possible by the MLDauray Arts Initiative in honor of Leonard and Sophie Davis.

“This band is part history, part



Courtesy photo  
The Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band, which features Indigenous performers, will perform in concert Oct. 22 at the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach.

protest, and part celebration,” Keefe said. “We are still here and we will continue to be here for generations to come. To Native musicians—reach out, build community, and keep working on your art.”

For tickets, visit [kravis.org](http://kravis.org).

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# Doc Native single ‘Locked In’ hits No. 1

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

Doc Native is so focused on achieving his goals, he wrote a song about it. The song, “Locked In,” reached number one on the Indigenous Music Countdown (IMC) for the week of Sept. 12-18.

“It’s about achieving them no matter what and being proud of who you are,” Native said. “I wanted to make something the kids would enjoy and still keep a good message.”

It took two or three years for Native to finalize and release the song which he has been promoting for a few months. The IMC contest is driven by fans casting votes for their favorite song. There is a new contest every week.

“A shout out to everyone who was supporting and voting every day,” Native said. “It takes a lot to become number one. I had a big support system around me and new fans in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. It’s very exciting.”

Native collaborated with Makai “Kai” Venerable and John Fox to write and produce the record. They all promoted the song on social media and through word of mouth.

The song can be found on Sirius XM through the Indigenous Music Countdown, which has been around since 1998 when Native Communications Incorporated began airing a top ten playlist. It evolved over the years to the IMC, which spotlights the best of new Indigenous music. It also airs interviews with Indigenous artists from various genres

including hip-hop, rock, country, alternative, folk and pop/dance music.

Native will be taking “Locked In” mainstream when he appears on the digital “On the Radar Radio” show in Brooklyn, New York, on Oct. 6. The show showcases rising hip-hop talent with live performances and freestyles. Its mission, stated on its website, is “dedicated to highlighting the next generation of rappers, singers and superstars.”

“This will be my second time performing in New York in two years,” Native said. “Last year we [with his brother Spencer Battiest] performed with Mag 7 at the Global Citizen Festival in Central Park. Years ago we got to perform in New York City at the Native American Museum. Our ties seem to keep pushing us back to New York and I love it.”

Native has been performing as a solo act since 2019 but has been performing with his brother since they were kids in his family’s traveling gospel group. He is proud of the career he has made.

“I feel good for the simple fact that my career is standing the test of time,” he said. “It takes a lot of perseverance and fortitude to keep pushing. For lack of a better word, I’m locked in.”

Native wants to open the door for the next generation of creators, but he said he isn’t done yet. He wants to continue to get into spaces where there is little or no Native representation.

“New York is the Mecca of hip-hop,” he said. “So to be invited to go there and perform is a testament to how far music can take us.”



Doc Native

Courtesy photo

# Seminole Tribal Court hosts reception at Children and Families Summit

FROM SEMINOLE COURT

**ORLANDO** — The Administrative Office of the Seminole Court proudly hosted the Seminole Tribal Court Reception on Sept. 10 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. as part of the 2026 Children and Families Summit. The reception took place at the Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes.

Chief Justice Joe Frank and Director Moses Osceola welcomed Circuit Court Judges and General Magistrates in attendance. The program also featured remarks from Kate Williams, interim Secretary of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

During the event, Layne Thomas, Healing to Wellness Court Administrator, and Luz Borges, Judicial Advisor, provided an overview of the tribe’s new diversion

program designed to support Seminole youth. Jeanine Bennett, Court Counsel, also briefed attendees on the Tribal Court’s prior jurisdiction and its role within the broader justice system.

The reception provided guests with a valuable opportunity to engage directly with tribal court staff, discussing best practices and strengthening collaborative efforts. Each year, DCF brings together Florida’s child welfare professionals, advocates, and stakeholders to support and improve child welfare and family services statewide. The summit offers vital training, networking, and professional development opportunities to enhance outcomes for children and families.

For more information, contact the Administrative Office of the Seminole Court.



Courtesy photo (2)

Director Moses Osceola and interim DCF Secretary Kate Williams speak at the reception in Orlando.



Courtesy photo

Chief Justice Joe Frank and dozens of other people attend the reception.



Courtesy photo

From left to right, Chief Judge Mary Tigertail, interim DCF Secretary Kate Williams, Chief Justice Joe Frank and Director Moses Osceola attend the Seminole Tribal Court Reception at the Children and Families Summit on Sept. 10 in Orlando.



Courtesy photo

The Seminole Court table at the reception.

# Native American author Louise Erdich named winner of Gish Prize

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

Louise Erdich, an acclaimed author from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, garnered another major accolade on Sept. 25 when she was named the 2026 recipient of the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize.

Created in 1994 through the will of Lillian Gish, the Gish Prize is given annually to an individual who has “made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind’s enjoyment and understanding of life,” according to the Prize’s website.

The Gish sisters were movie stars from the silent era. Previous winners of the Gish Prize include Spike Lee, Robert Redford, Arthur Miller, Bob Dylan and Frank Gehry.

Erdich, 72, is no stranger to earning national recognition. Her novel “The Round House” won a National Book Award in 2012. Eight years later, she won a Pulitzer Prize for the novel “The Night Watchman.”

Biography information about Erdich in Britannica states that “Erdich’s novels are noted for their depth of characterization; they are peopled by a variety of characters, some of whom appear in multiple stories within her oeuvre. For many of the Native people about whom she writes, contact with white culture brings such elements

as alcoholism, Roman Catholicism, and government policies to tear down the Native community, though tradition and loyalty to family and heritage work to counteract these forces.”

In 2001, Erdich opened Birchbark Books, an independent bookstore in Minneapolis that emphasizes Native American authors and books.

Her latest novel, “I’m Hungry,” about a young, aspiring female writer in the 1970s Fargo, North Dakota, is scheduled to be released by Harper Collins on April 20, 2027. The Harper Collins’ website describes the novel as “A wiser, rougher, Chippewa cousin, a seductive gift shop owner, a wealthy New York lawyer passing through

town — ecstatic poets and lonely seekers inhabit her world. She is grounded by family as she seeks her own way. Driven by a hunger for experience, for love, for more life, more poetry, and, always, food, she travels, comes home, becomes entangled in the wild eccentricities of American life. Injustices and resistances boil around her. In the endless fallout of the historical massacre and recent occupation of Wounded Knee, she finds fellowship, grace, and begins to understand her family and her calling. “I’m Hungry” explores bitter betrayal, cold-blooded violence, unearthly beauty, and the depths of our voracious appetites, from sexual hunger to the need for a life transfigured by passion and poetry.”

# I-75 expansion begins from Naples to Fort Myers

STAFF REPORT

The Florida Department of Transportation recently unveiled its plan to widen I-75 for 21 miles between Naples and Bonita Springs in Collier and Lee counties. The project is scheduled to take four years and will begin in late fall 2026.

FDOT stated the purpose of the expansion is to increase capacity on the highway, improve traffic operations and enhance safety between Golden Gate Parkway to Alico Road. It is part of the Moving Florida Forward Infrastructure Initiative, a statewide program to relieve traffic congestion as the population grows.

When complete, the expressway will feature northbound and southbound express and auxiliary entrance lanes, a diverging diamond intersection at Immokalee Road, ramp modifications, resurfacing and about 16 miles of noise walls. Cost of the expansion is estimated at \$600 million.



FDOT

A map of where lanes will be added on I-75 in Southwest Florida.

# Energy conference returns to Hard Rock

STAFF REPORT

The 9th annual Seminole Tribe of Florida Renewable Energy & Sustainability Conference returns from Feb. 1 to Feb. 3, 2027, at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

The tribe will be partnering with the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy for a transformative three day experience that unites the conference and the Alliance’s 5th annual Tribal Energy Evolution Summit.

Serving as a platform for tribal leaders, energy practitioners, and partners to collaborate, share knowledge, and drive the next generation of energy solutions that aid Indian Country, the conference offers training and focuses on the newly changing landscape for tribal energy development and sustainability, including federal leadership, policy and regulatory changes, funding a project, and project planning.

This single trip combined event offers opportunities to connect, plan, and take actions toward a sustainable future.

Live streams will be available on YouTube and Facebook for streaming:

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@NativeLearningCenter>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kerretv>

For more information go to [nativelarningcenter.com](https://nativelarningcenter.com).

# Night Ranger coming to Immokalee, Brighton

STAFF REPORT

Hard rock legends Night Ranger will perform their hit songs on two Seminole Tribe of Florida reservations.

On Jan. 22, 2027, the band will perform at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee at 8 p.m. with doors opening at 7 p.m. Tickets are available via Ticketmaster or moreinparadise.com. Attendees must be 21.

On Jan. 23, 2027, the band will be at Seminole Brighton Bay Hotel & Casino for an 8 p.m. show. Go to [ticketmaster.com](https://ticketmaster.com) for tickets.

Night Ranger’s biggest hits include “Sister Christian,” “Don’t Tell Me You Love Me”, and “(You Can Still) Rock in America.”



# Firefighters ascend Guitar Hotel stairs on 9/11's 25th anniversary

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — Honoring the heroes who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, the Firefighters Benevolent of Davie, in partnership with the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Hollywood, presented its second annual “Rock the Climb.”

On the 34th floor of the Guitar Hotel, heavy breaths and footsteps echoed throughout the stairwell as firefighters completed their third and final trek up in full gear. The 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb marks the 25th anniversary of the tragedy. Several fire departments, including the Seminole Tribe Fire Rescue, joined veterans and community members in climbing 110 flights of stairs on September 11—retracing the height of the Twin Towers.

“Today we’re honoring the 2,977 innocent lives, including the lives of 343 firefighters and 72 police officers, that were lost that day,” said Aaron Shapiro, the memorial’s emcee. “It’s about remembering that within the first four minutes of that tragedy, firefighters made it to the 78th floor of the South Tower and the 65th floor of the North Tower. It’s about remembering the first responders who searched for survivors for 27 hours straight.”

More than 800 individuals participated in this year’s climb. Firefighters climbed in remembrance of first responders who lost their lives on 9/11; they wore lanyards with their photographs

The City of Saint Augustine Pipe Band opened the memorial with the tunes of



Calvin Tiger

A Fort Lauderdale Fire lieutenant carries the U.S. flag up the 34 flights of stairs at the Guitar Hotel.

Celtic pipes and drums at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino’s Oculus. Following the presentation of colors and the national



Calvin Tiger

The “Rock the Climb” drew hundreds of firefighters as a tribute to their 9/11 colleagues.

anthem, moments of silence took place prior to the climb at 8:46 a.m. when the first aircraft struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center, and at 9:03 a.m. when the second aircraft struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

Speakers included Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Hollywood Assistant General Manager Stacy Gallot, the President of the Firefighters Benevolent of Davie Erik Schwarz, the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Fire Rescue Deputy Chief Jorge Valdes, and

the Director of Operations at the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund Nick Cannon.

“This is about remembering and never forgetting the lives lost on that tragic day,” Valdes said. “This is a special memorial for those who risked their lives and never looked back—gatherings like this keep their memory alive.”

The memorial raised funds for the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund and the Firefighters Benevolent of Davie.

“The Wounded Veterans Relief Fund provides veterans with urgent financial assistance and critical dental needs,” Cannon said. “Because of us, we can continue to say ‘yes’ to our veterans, our first responders, and law enforcements when they have nowhere else to go.

Following the climb, participants were invited to a gathering at DAER Dayclub for food and camaraderie.



Calvin Tiger

Firefighters in full gear climb the stairs at the Guitar Hotel.



Calvin Tiger

Seminole Fire Rescue Deputy Chief Jorge Valdes speaks at the 9/11 ceremony on Sept. 11 at the Guitar Hotel.



Calvin Tiger

Seminole Tribe Fire Rescue firefighters ring the memorial bell on the 34th floor of the Guitar Hotel.

# Indigenous women seek key seats

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

This election season, several Indigenous female candidates are running for political office, including a governor’s race and two U.S. Senate seats.

Deb Haaland, a former U.S. Secretary of the Interior who served from 2021 to 2025, is leading in the polls against her Republican opponent Gregg Hull, 49% to 43%, in the New Mexico gubernatorial race, according to KOAT 7 News in Albuquerque. Haaland is a member of the Laguna Pueblo Tribe and running as a Democrat. If Haaland wins, she will become the first Native American woman to hold political office as governor in United States history.

Mary Peltola became the first Alaskan Native and first woman to be elected as U.S. Representative from Alaska when she served from 2022 to 2025. Peltola, a Democrat, is in the U.S. Senate race against Republican incumbent Dan Sullivan. Peltola leads Sullivan by five percentage points, according to an AARP poll conducted in September. Peltola is an enrolled member of the Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council in Alaska.

Current Minnesota Democrat Lt.



DebHaaland.com

Deb Haaland

Governor Peggy Flanagan is on the ballot for a U.S. Senate seat in Minnesota. According to a TIPP/League of American Workers poll, Flanagan is leading against her Republican opponent Michele Tafoya,

44% to 42%. Flanagan is a member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe of Ojibwe. Flanagan was elected as Minnesota Lt. Governor in 2019.

Election Day is Nov. 3.



MaryPeltola.com

Mary Peltola



PeggyFlanagan.com

Peggy Flanagan

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Kevin Johnson  
Celeste Stockton, hatchet throw



Kevin Johnson  
Josh Sneed, left, and Dean Stokes, cornhole



Kevin Johnson  
Kids have fun at Chupco's Landing on Fort Pierce's Indian Day as they enjoy a water slide and a day off from school on Sept. 21.



Kevin Johnson  
Sheree Sneed, archery



Kevin Johnson  
From left, Fort Pierce Liaison Tirell Timothy, Walker Lawrence and Coleman Josh, both from the President's Office, and Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie.



Kevin Johnson  
Aaliyah Alcaraz, left, and Madison Phillips make fry bread for the Fort Pierce Indian Day lunch.



Kevin Johnson  
Fort Pierce Liaison Tirell Timothy and Fort Pierce Council office manager Kristy Smith.

# Indian Day 2026 - Naples

Kevin Johnson  
Miss Florida Seminole Serena Zepeda, from Naples, gets ready for a canoe ride at Collier-Seminole State Park.



Kevin Johnson  
Kyle Deland Zepeda fires a spear into the water in an attempt to snag a gar.



Kevin Johnson  
Seminoles from Naples gather along a fishing spot on Tamiami Trail in Ochopee.



Kevin Johnson  
Marissa Osceola teaches her son Ryder how to fish for gar in a fishing spot on the side of Tamiami Trail in Ochopee as part of Naples Indian Day activities on Sept. 11.



Kevin Johnson  
A peaceful canoe ride in Collier-Seminole State Park with the Osceola and Zepeda families was the final activity of the day.



# F1 race becomes Hard Rock Miami Grand Prix

STAFF REPORT

**MIAMI GARDENS** — Hard Rock International -- owned by the Seminole Tribe of Florida -- and South Florida Motorsports announced Sept. 1 a new multi-year naming rights agreement for the Formula 1 Hard Rock Miami Grand Prix at the Hard Rock Stadium campus.

“Hard Rock has been part of Miami’s Formula 1 story from the very beginning, and we are incredibly proud to welcome them as the new title partner of the Formula 1 Hard Rock Miami Grand Prix,” said Katharina Nowak, President of the Formula 1 Hard

Rock Miami Grand Prix, in a press release.

The new agreement will now have the Hard Rock name incorporated into the official event title and logo and will also include branding across the podium, and trackside signage throughout the Miami International Autodrome.

“This partnership marks a new era for our race, as we look to build upon the success of our first five years and continue to evolve alongside one of the most iconic and culturally significant brands in the world in Hard Rock,” Nowak said.

The partnership will begin with next year’s 2027 race and is contracted to remain on the Formula 1 race calendar through

2041.

“Hard Rock has been a proud partner of the Formula 1 Hard Rock Miami Grand Prix since its inception, and it has emerged as one of the premier events on the global sports and entertainment calendar,” said Jim Allen, Chairman of Hard Rock International, in a press release. “This partnership reflects Hard Rock’s commitment to delivering world-class experiences to international audiences. We look forward to continuing our work with South Florida Motorsports to enhance the race week experience while further elevating the Hard Rock brand on one of the most impressive stages in sports.”



Hard Rock Stadium

Hard Rock has had a major presence at the F1 race in Miami since it came to Hard Rock Stadium campus. Now the race will be known as the Formula 1 Hard Rock Miami Grand Prix.



Calvin Tiger (2)

Tyson Osceola, left, and Cameron Osceola perform at Hard Rock Cafe in the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on Sept. 9. The performance was part of Hard Rock Rising competition.

## The Osceola Brothers compete in international Hard Rock Rising

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — The worldwide Hard Rock Rising music competition took place Sept. 9 at the Hard Rock Cafe at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Hollywood.

Hard Rock Rising is a global music competition in partnership with Coca-Cola and Hard Rock International that is held over 64 Hard Rock Cafes in 34 different countries.

Multiple bands performed on stage for cafe patrons as they voted for their favorite artists. Several bands performed, including the Osceola Brothers from the Seminole Tribe, the Mike Lee Band, and Los Wizards.

The Osceola Brothers advanced to the next round.

To be announced on Oct. 5, the global winner will receive \$10,000, an opening act slot at Hard Rock Live Orlando, a recording session at Coke Studio Los Angeles, and more.

## Nonprofits receive donations from Hard Rock Bristol

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**BRISTOL, Va.** — In September, Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Bristol presented checks to multiple local nonprofit organizations with funds raised by Hard Rock Bristol team members. Checks totaling \$34,697.91 were presented to local nonprofits that included: Stay Here, The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Virginia Chapter, and the Bristol, Tennessee Firefighters Association.

“Every person deserves to know that their life has value and that they are not alone when things feel overwhelming,” said Jacob Coyne, founder, CEO and director, Stay Here. “This support from Hard Rock Bristol will help us continue putting practical resources and messages of hope into the hands of people who need them. We are thankful for the opportunity to expand our reach and remind more people that there is always a reason to stay.”

Stay Here is a mental health organization dedicated to preventing suicide and helping people navigate through depression, anxiety, self-harm, addiction and other mental health challenges.

“Every conversation that opens the door to understanding and every resource that reaches someone at the right time has the potential to change a life,” said



Hard Rock Bristol

Hard Rock Bristol makes a donation to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Markita Madden, Virginia Executive Director, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Virginia Chapter. “This funding will help us expand our efforts to educate the community, encourage connection and make sure more Virginians know where to turn when they need help. We appreciate Hard Rock Bristol for recognizing the importance of this work.”

The American Foundation for Suicide

Prevention Virginia Chapter works with those affected by suicide through research, education, support and advocacy.

“Our firefighters answer the call whenever their neighbors need them, and this support gives us another opportunity to invest in the people behind the badge,” said Dwayne Honaker, Fire Chief, Bristol, Tennessee Firefighters Association.

## Hard Rock’s CJ Landau earns Emerging Leaders of Gaming 40 Under 40 honor

STAFF REPORT

**LAS VEGAS** — On Sept. 16, The Innovation Group in partnership with WorldGaming’s Global Gaming Business and iGaming Business, announced the honorees of the Emerging Leaders of Gaming 40 Under 40 Class of 2027. The 40 Under 40 recognizes 40 professionals under the age of 40 already making significant impacts in the gaming industry.

The honorees included CJ Landau, vice president of Slot Operations at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

Also making the list was April Herring, Director of Slot Systems at Choctaw Nation Casinos & Resorts.

“As gaming evolves rapidly across technology, regulation, customer experience, and market expansion, these honorees are helping define the industry’s trajectory. We’re proud to recognize them at this stage of their careers and to celebrate the contribution they are already making across the sector,” said Robin Harrison, global content director for WorldGaming, in a press release.

## Atlantic City casinos raise \$315,000 in suicide prevention walk

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**ATLANTIC CITY** — The Casino Association of New Jersey joined the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s 7th annual Out of the Darkness Community Walk on the Boardwalk on

Sept. 20, raising \$315,000.

“We are very proud to once again join the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in advancing its mission to save lives and educate the public about the importance of mental health,” said Michael Sampson, general manager at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City.

## Victim support organization receives Hard Rock Sacramento donation

FROM PRESS RELEASE

**WHEATLAND, Calif.** — Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain announced Sept. 10 that Casa De Esperanza has been selected as a 2026 Hard Rock Heals Foundation grant recipient. The organization will receive a \$5,000 grant to empower individuals through crisis intervention,

supportive services, comprehensive therapy services, and educational programs.

Nominated by the team at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento, Casa De Esperanza is one of 51 global nonprofit organizations to receive a grant as part of Hard Rock’s ongoing commitment to strengthening the communities it serves.

## Slot machines, cash seized in St. Petersburg operation

FROM PRESS RELEASE

On Sept. 10, the Florida Gaming Control Commission (FGCC) executed a search warrant on two locations in St. Petersburg in collaboration with Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office, Florida Highway Patrol, and the Department of Business and Professional Regulation’s Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco. The enforcement action, known as Operation Final Spin, took place at the Action Arcade located at 6541

54th Avenue North, and the Zoo Spirits Club and Grille at 5111 66th Street North in St. Petersburg.

According to a press release, the FGCC seized a combined 163 illegal slot machines and \$247,285 in U.S. currency. At Action Arcade, agents seized 90 machines and \$142,020. Two individuals were issued notices to appear; each charged with one count of possession of slot machines and one count of keeping a gambling house. At the Zoo Spirits Club and Grille, agents seized

73 machines and \$105,265. One individual was issued a notice to appear for one count of possession of slot machines and one count of agent or employee of a gambling house.

“Operation Final Spin and the more than 200 illegal arcades we have shut down before this, should make it clear that our goal is to disrupt and dismantle illegal gaming across the state of Florida,” said FGCC Vice Chair Tina Repp said in the press release.



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# RICHARD CASTILLO

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

**RICHARD CASTILLO**  
FLORIDA CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY  
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Black and white photographic print a group of Paul Bowers standing next to his 4-H calf.



Color interior photograph print of Creek Gopher and his calf during the 4-H Youth Livestock Showcase held at the Brighton 4-H barn on the Brighton Reservation.

# 4-H program connects tribal youth to centuries of traditions

MISTY SNYDER  
Museum Assistant

**BIG CYPRESS** — For over 70 years, the Seminole Tribe’s 4-H program has been one way that tribal youth are able to engage in caring for animals, raising crops, and developing other important skills. Unknown to many outside the tribe, these skills—including cattle raising—have been developed and refined not just for decades, but for centuries. Since the very first-time cattle stepped foot on American soil, the tribe and these animals became forever intertwined.

Cattle were introduced in the region in 1521 when Ponce De León attempted to establish the first Spanish colony in North America in Southwest Florida. The Spanish were forced to abandon this colony, including its cattle, by the tribe’s ancestors. This gave the tribe the opportunity to raise

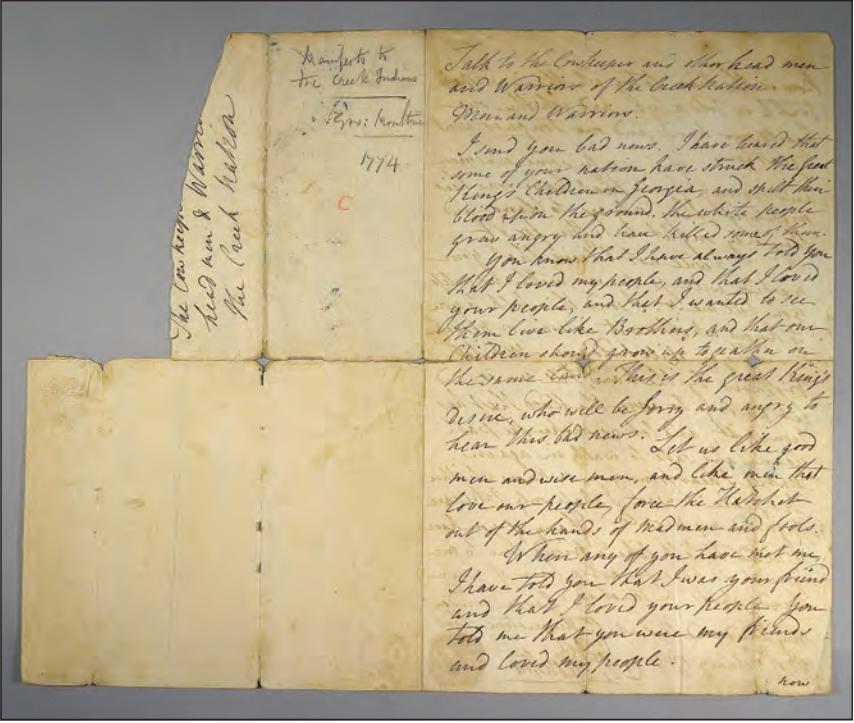
cattle for subsistence and, eventually, for business enterprise. The foundation of this tribal ecological knowledge was rooted in the tribe’s deep understanding of the Florida bison, which shared many of the same traits, behaviors, and characteristics. This knowledge was applied to the domesticated cattle, which today remain an important cultural resource of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. (Scheidecker, Mahoney, & Luque, 2023)

By the 1700s, Seminole leader Ahaya, also known as “Cowkeeper,” managed thousands of cattle in central Florida. Many of the strategies, such as employing cattle dogs for herding and open-range grazing, now used for cattle ranching across the country today, were pioneered by Cowkeeper and his band. Through this herd, the tribe amassed significant wealth, power, and influence. Unfortunately, with success came unwanted attention from

outsiders who wanted the herd, the land, or both, for themselves. Rising tensions led to skirmishes that eventually culminated in the Seminole War period. One of these conflicts is referenced in a letter (Image 1) from the museum’s collection. Sent to Cowkeeper by the Governor of East Florida in 1774, the letter implores Cowkeeper to maintain peace following a bloody confrontation.

Decades of war with the U.S. government, followed by turmoil after the American Civil War—when cattle thieves known as rustlers targeted Seminole herds—greatly diminished the tribe’s enterprise. Yet the 20th century brought a resurgence in cattle keeping. Through the tribe’s resilience, the cattle program was not only restored but expanded into one of the nation’s top producing operations and the only one that raises cattle from calf to market harvest size entirely within Florida. This allows for greater production quality

# SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA AH-TAH-THI-KI M U S E U M A PLACE TO LEARN, A PLACE TO REMEMBER.



Letter to Cowkeeper from Governor Moultrie of East Florida

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

control and assurance while supporting an ethic of sustainability by keeping cattle grown and harvested completely within traditional lands.

The museum helps preserve the tribe’s cattle legacy through acquiring and caring for objects such as the Cowkeeper letter and, most recently, through the acquisition and cataloging of a large group of more than 8,000 photographs from the tribe’s 4-H program. Through the 4-H program, tribal youth not only connect with the land and the animals that they care for, but with the

centuries of knowledge and generations of cowkeepers who came before them. This connection keeps the fire of strength, resilience and self-reliance burning from generation to generation.

In the photographs included here, you can see two 4-H participants, Paul Bowers and Creek Gopher, posing with the calves they raised 50 years apart. Their images illustrate how tradition continues and how participation in 4-H offers today’s youth a shared experience rooted in culture and community.

# Smithsonian Portrait Gallery to feature Seminole leader

STAFF REPORT

Upcoming exhibitions by Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., includes “Indian Peace Medals: Emblems of Diplomacy.” The show includes Billy Bowlegs and will run from June 17, 2027-June 4, 2028.

Billy Bowlegs, also known by his birth name Holata Micco, was a leader during the Seminole Wars and led Seminole resistance against the U.S. government.

According to historical information on the tribe’s website, Bowlegs “worked tirelessly to demonstrate that the Seminole and Americans could live peacefully together in Florida. Despite his efforts, the continued push for Indian removal drew him back to the battlefield and open conflict. Bowlegs eventually left with the last group of Seminole removed from Florida in what

would be the last voyage of Indian removal east of the Mississippi. When the American Civil War broke out, Bowlegs again led the tribe in war, this time alongside the Union army.”

Presidential portrait medals served as diplomatic currency in the federal government’s interactions with Native American leaders, starting with the George Washington administration. Known as Indian peace medals, they became part of the regalia of many leaders.

The exhibition will include 16 original peace medals from 1793 to 1881 and feature portraits of presidents from George Washington to Chester A. Arthur. In addition to Bowlegs, included are 19th century lithographs of other Native American chiefs Red Jacket and Naw-Kaw. All are shown wearing a peace medal.

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the story of the United States

through individuals who have shaped American culture. It portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the nation’s story.

For more information visit [npg.si.edu](http://npg.si.edu).

Courtesy photo  
“Billy Bowlegs” by unidentified artist, copy after Julian Vannerson, hand-colored lithograph on paper, 1865–70. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.



# Smithsonian exhibition about Native Americans comes to Okeechobee

STAFF REPORT

**OKEECHOBEE** — A Smithsonian traveling exhibition about Native Americans is coming to downtown Okeechobee.

“Americans” will open Oct. 17 in the Okeechobee Historical Courthouse. It runs until Dec. 4.

The exhibition is on a six-year nationwide tour that started in 2025. It is based on a major exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. According to the Smithsonian, the traveling exhibition emphasizes the ways in which American Indians have been part of the nation’s identity since before the country began.

Some of the exhibition’s highlights include features about Pocahontas, the young Powhatan woman who played a key role in

saving the colony of Jamestown; the Indian Removal Act of 1830; and the Battle of Little Bighorn, also known as Custer’s Last Stand.

The statewide exhibition tour of “Americans” is made possible by Florida Humanities.

“Americans” schedule in Florida:

- Amelia Island Museum of History: Aug. 22 – Oct. 10, 2026
- The Okeechobee Historical Society: Oct. 17 – Dec. 5, 2026
- Edison and Ford Winter Estates (Fort Myers): Dec. 12, 2026 – Feb. 6, 2027
- Sacred Lands Preservation and Education (St. Petersburg): Feb. 13 – April 10, 2027
- Historic St. Andrews Waterfront Partnership (Panama City): April 17-June 5, 2027

# ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

OCTOBER 2026

The ability to control fire may be the single most important technological advancement in history. Past populations restructured the way humans lived by learning to control fire as a tool. Last month’s artifact was a good example of past populations using fire for functional light source. While many of the artifacts recovered by TAS (Tribal Archaeology Section) are altered by fire, few of them show such a clear sign of human activity as this hearthstone.

A hearth is a structure designed around a fire using stones to insulate and protect the flame. Hearths can be built in many forms. To modern people, a hearth might look like a fireplace, while to older populations it may be a stoned-in campfire. The presence of a hearthstone serves as evidence of humans using fire to either cook food or keep warm (Kelley, 2024).



Hearthstones are an example of heat affected stones, also called fire altered rocks (FAR), heat altered rocks (HAR), or fire cracked rock (FCR). These are stones that show recognizable traits of being used alongside fire, such as changes in texture, color, or the presence of breaks and fractures (Speth, 2013). Our hearthstone shows significant cracks along one side and has a white coloration that is associated with ash. Heat affected stones may have been used for any number of purposes, such as stone boiling, hearthstones, longer lasting heat sources, stone griddles, and more.

Figure 1: The “top” side of the hearthstone. Likely to be the side that was exposed to fire due to the sooting (blackened discoloration) and “pot-lid” fracturing scars, shown by the arrow

Figure 2: An example of an open hearth. This style of hearth might be like the one the THPO hearthstone helped shape.



HAR can serve as a vital source of information for identifying the ways that past populations were using heat to make their lives better. In the past few years, some archaeologists have been trying to start a dialogue about how overlooked these artifacts tend to be (Cantelli et al., 2024). Usually, sites that include hearths or other types of HAR also include artifacts that are more traditionally popular among archaeologists and the public. The very site that this hearthstone was recovered from also included artifacts like shark teeth and pottery sherds.

Despite HAR being broadly understudied artifacts, archaeologists are working towards applying research methods that they’ve learned from studying how pottery is cooked to learn more from stones like our hearthstone (Neubauer, 2018). The humble hearthstone represents home, comfort and a full stomach, and may serve as a reminder that sometimes the most mundane things might be of great importance.

Cantelli, M., Terradas, X., Binder, D., Regert, M., & Colomese, A. C. (2024). Diamonds in the rough - reconsidering the scientific and heritage value of heat-altered stones in prehistoric archaeology through a systematic literature review. Open research Europe, 4, 254. <https://doi.org/10.12688/openresearch.18872.1>

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Speth, J. (2015). When Did Humans Learn to Boil? PaleoAnthropology, 2015:5467. <https://catin.anthropology.org/libraries/fahlibography/when-did-humans-learn-to-boil>



# POTTERY: THE KITCHENWARE OF THE ANCESTORS

SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - OCTOBER 2026



Pottery, or ceramics, had several important roles for the ancestors, but none was more important than providing the vessels to cook, serve, and store food. Just like ceramic vessels we use today, the pottery used by the ancestors was produced from clay. Clay is a component of soil and is common in most parts of the world. Interestingly, one area clay is relatively rare in south Florida, because the soil is mostly just sand. Yet, the ancestors were resourceful and located patches of soil with enough clay to make sturdy ceramic vessels. They also found a useful purpose for all the sand, adding it to the clay as temper, which made the vessels stronger and kept them from exploding during firing. The process of firing clay transforms it from soft, moldable mud into a hardened permanent vessel.

Soft clay that has been molded into a vessel can be decorated before it is fired by inscribing designs into the clay with a sharp object, pressing patterns into the clay with a paddle, or painting the clay with pigments. Some of the most impressive examples of decorated vessels produced by the ancestors in Florida are referred to as Swift Creek. Complicated Stamped vessels. Swift Creek vessels were made and used by ancestors who lived between about 200 CE and 700 CE in what is now northern Florida and southern Georgia, but the vessels were traded and used beyond that region and have even appeared in archaeological sites in south Florida. The ancestors made them by carving intricate designs into wooden paddles that they then pressed into the soft clay before the vessels were fired.

Today, archaeologists use the broken pieces of ceramic vessels, which they call sherds, to help them know when a site was occupied by the ancestors and the kinds of activities the ancestors engaged in at that site.

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

Photo: Ashlee Cypress, THPO NAGPRA Liaison, examines a pottery sherd found by the Tribal Archaeology Section. Photo by Adriana Almonte, THPO Laboratory Supervisor

Visit the Tribal Historic Preservation Office website at [stofthpo.com](http://stofthpo.com) or use the QR code on the right for more Seminole history resources





Health



## Waking up at 3 a.m.? Here is what your body is trying to tell you

SUBMITTED BY TERESA SNOW  
Health Contributor

### Why do I keep waking up at 3 a.m.?

Miss Lorna wakes up at 3 a.m. almost every night. She stares at the ceiling and starts thinking about the water bill, her grandson's cough, and the errand she forgot on Tuesday. By the time her mind finally slows down, the birds are singing and it is almost time to get up.

She feels tired all day and wonders if something is wrong with her. Maybe you know that feeling too. That 3 a.m. wake-up is far more common than you think.

### What it is

Here is the simple truth. Your sleep is not one long block. It moves in cycles, about every hour and a half. Some parts are deep, and some parts are light.

In the first half of the night, you spend more time in deep sleep. In the second half, you spend more time in light sleep. Around 3 a.m., many people are already in that lighter stage. So it is easy to wake up, even for just a moment.

Most nights, you drift right back to sleep and never remember it. The trouble starts when your mind switches on. Your body also has a built-in wake-up signal. In the early morning, it releases a hormone that helps get you ready for the day.

Think of it as your body's alarm clock warming up. If you are stressed or worried, that signal can feel stronger. You wake up, and then your busy brain refuses to be quiet.

### Why it matters to you

A few everyday things can make it worse. A heavy meal or too much sugar late at night can cause your blood sugar to drop while you sleep, and that can wake you up. A drink before bed might help you fall asleep, but it wakes you up later when it wears off.

As we get older, our sleep naturally gets lighter, so waking at night becomes more common. Sometimes the reason is as simple as a full bladder or a warm room.

Caffeine can also stay in your body longer than you expect. That afternoon coffee might still be keeping you up at midnight. And if you snore loudly or wake up gasping for air, your breathing may be pausing during the night. That one is worth talking over with a nurse or doctor.

Here is what you really need to know. Waking up once and falling back asleep is not a sign that your body is broken. That is normal and healthy.

It only becomes a concern when it happens night after night, when you lie awake for a long time, or when you feel worn out every single day. According to the CDC, most adults need seven or more hours of sleep each night. If your 3 a.m. wake-up keeps stealing that sleep, it is worth paying attention to.

### Did you know?

Your brain does some of its best clean-up work while you sleep. During deep sleep, it clears out waste and sorts through the day's memories. That is one reason a rough night can leave you feeling foggy the next morning.

If you have been lying awake at 3 a.m. feeling alone and tired, take a breath. You are not doing anything wrong, and a few small changes really can help you rest again.

### What to do

- Keep a steady bedtime and wake-up time, even on weekends. Your body loves a routine, and it will start to feel sleepy and wake up more naturally.
- Finish eating two to three hours before bed. Skip the late-night sweets and the nightcap, since both can wake you up a few hours later.
- If you wake up and cannot fall back asleep after about twenty minutes, get up. Sit in a dim room and read something calm until you feel sleepy, then head back to bed.
- Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet. A small fan, an eye mask, or thicker curtains can block out light and noise and make a big difference.
- Write your worries on paper before bed. Getting them out of your head and onto the page helps your mind finally let go.
- Put your phone away at least thirty minutes before sleep. The bright screen tricks your brain into thinking it is still daytime.

### Quick tips for a calmer night

- Dim the lights about an hour before bed.
- Sip warm, caffeine-free tea instead of coffee at night.
- Try slow breathing, in for four counts and out for six.
- Keep a notepad by the bed for middle-of-the-night thoughts.
- Turn the clock away so you are not watching the time.

### Closing takeaway

Waking up at 3 a.m. does not mean something is wrong with you. Most of the time, it is simply your body doing what bodies do. With a few gentle changes, you can teach yourself to sleep through the night again.

Start tonight with one small step. Set a bedtime alarm on your phone for thirty minutes before you want to be asleep. When it rings, put the phone down, dim the lights, and let yourself wind down. Rest is closer than you think.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Sleep and Sleep Disorders.*

## Hard Rock ready to turn October into Pinktober

### PRESS RELEASE

**HOLLYWOOD** — Hard Rock International has launched its 27th annual Pinktober campaign for October, which is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The global initiative runs throughout the month, uniting guests, team members and communities worldwide. It supports cancer awareness, research and patient services.

Underscoring its commitment to the principles "Love All Serve All" and "All Is One," Hard Rock unites the global communities it serves - across Hotels, Casinos, Cafes, Rock Shops and digital platforms - to amplify fundraising efforts and drive meaningful action throughout October. Raised funds will go directly to the Hard Rock Heals Foundation and is earmarked to support breast cancer research and awareness worldwide. To date, Pinktober has raised more than \$15 million.

Again this year, Hard Rock Heals Foundation is partnering with the American Cancer Society. The partnership helps individuals and families affected by breast cancer through advocacy, research and patient support programs.

"Breast cancer affects millions of people and families, and partnerships like this one help ensure no one has to face the journey alone," said Kerri Whetzel, vice president of



Hard Rock  
The 2026 "Stronger Together" pin was designed by Seminole artist Theron Tartsah Osceola.

Corporate Relations at the American Cancer Society. "We are incredibly grateful to Hard Rock International and the Hard Rock Heals Foundation for their longstanding commitment to Pinktober and for bringing their global community together to raise awareness and support for those affected by breast cancer. Through this collaboration, we can help advance lifesaving research, provide essential resources and services to patients and families, and move closer to a future where breast cancer is no longer a threat to the lives of so many."

## Effort to honor first Native American physician expands

BY PAUL HAMMEL  
Nebraska Examiner

**WALTHILL, Neb.** — For 37 years, Vida Stabler raised a family and carefully maintained a two-and-a-half story, Folk Victorian home in this reservation town.

It was a fixer-upper, she said, but ideal for her and her husband, newly married.

"I loved every morning here," Stabler said. "Sitting out on the porch. Being surrounded by all the trees. We have a multitude of birds."

But the house also had a presence, she said. Not a ghost, but the original occupant of the home — a physician and leader in the Omaha Tribe — whom Stabler could visualize walking up stairs, holding tribal meetings or seeing patients in the living room.

The first occupant was Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, the nation's first Native American doctor and a fighter for the rights of her tribe. Stabler said knowing that La Flesche Picotte had once lived in the home was an inspiration to her throughout her life.

"I always felt a warmth from this home ... a healing," she said.

Now, the home is, in a way, heading home.

Stabler, now 69, recently sold the 119-year-old residence to the nonprofit that purchased and restored the hospital built by

La Flesche Picotte on a high hill in Walthill in 1907.

The purchase of Dr. Susan's home, according to those associated with the Picotte Center, will help complete the amazing story of the doctor, who insisted on good hygiene and sanitation and quality medical care for hundreds of patients on the Omaha Indian Reservation in northeast Nebraska.

The Dr. Susan home was built in 1907 by her family. Until she was able to get a hospital built, the house served as the center of her medical practice. In 2010, the home was added to the National Register of Historic Places due to its role in the physician's life.

"She loved that home," said Joe Starita, author of the biography of Dr. Susan, "A Warrior of the People."

He called it the "spiritual comfort center" of Dr. Susan's life.

"It anchored her emotionally, it anchored her spiritually ... it served many purposes for this beloved doctor," Starita said.

According to his book, which has an entire chapter devoted to the home, "she began leaving a lighted lantern in the window each night, a beacon to guide the sick and the injured and the desperate through storms and darkness, a light to guide them to her door."

After a long fight with bone cancer, Dr. Susan died in an upstairs bedroom in the home in 1915. She was 49.

## National UNITY Conference to be held in Florida

### FROM PRESS RELEASE

Early bird registration is underway for the National UNITY Conference that will be held July 1 through July 5, 2027, at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Kissimmee

From Oct. 1 through Nov. 30, registration rate is \$400 per person. Thereafter, the rate increases, ranging from \$550 to \$875.

The conference is the largest gathering of Native youth in North America.

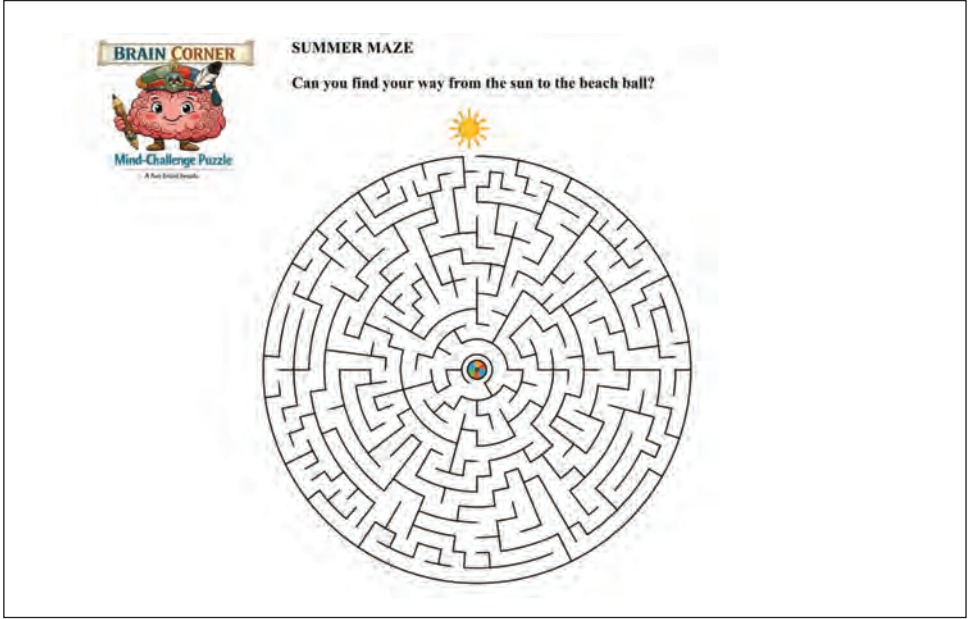
For more information go to UNITYinc.org.

## Zig Zag Lounge to hold Halloween costume contest

### FROM PRESS RELEASE

**IMMOKALEE** — Zig Zag Lounge at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee will hold a Halloween celebration on Oct. 31, hosted by Southwest Florida radio personality Babs. The festivities will include a costume contest that will award \$15,000 in total prizes to the winning costumes. Contest registration is from 4-7 p.m. with judging starting at 7:30 p.m. Please note that masks are only allowed on stage during judging and cannot be worn on casino floor.

There is no cover for live entertainment; entertainment is subject to change. For more information go to [moreinparadise.com](http://moreinparadise.com).



♦ See ANSWERS on page 4C

## IHS awards \$3.5M for tribal food and nutrition initiatives

### FROM PRESS RELEASE

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — On Sept. 22, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Indian Health Service, awarded \$3.5 million to 14 Tribal and urban Indian communities through the Produce Prescription Pilot Program (P4) to help establish and implement community-driven produce prescription programs across Indian Country. This funding advances P4 into Phase 2 with a goal to expand access to healthy foods and strengthening connections among healthcare, nutrition, and local food systems.

The following tribes, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations received up to \$250,000 each in 2026 grant funding to

implement a produce prescription program in their communities:

Chickasaw Nation (Okla.), Coeur d'Alene Tribal Health Authority (Idaho), Coquille Indian Tribe (Oregon), Gerald L. Ignace Indian Health Center\* (Wisconsin), Indian Health Council, Inc. (Calif.), Lake County Tribal Health Consortium, Inc. (Calif.), Native Health, Inc.\* (Ariz.), Norton Sound Health Corporation (Alaska), Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians (Michigan), Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (Washington state), Texas Native Health\* (Texas), Tunica Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana (La.), Urban-Indian Center of Salt Lake\* (Utah), Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (Alaska).

\*Urban Indian Organization



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# SEMINOLE SCENES



Kevin Johnson (2)

**'REFEREES' TO THE RESCUE:** After the referees who were scheduled to officiate the PECS at Ahfackee varsity volleyball game Sept. 17 had to depart early, volunteers were sought. Up stepped Ahnie Jumper and Kalgary Johns — two of the top cowgirls in the tribe — who offered to handle the officiating. Johns was the referee on the podium while Jumper was the referee on the court.



Beverly Bidney

**SEMFUEL SALES:** The Semfuel gas station on the Big Cypress Reservation recently began offering food and beverages. Hot dogs, sausages and hot boiled peanuts are among the items available along with other usual convenience store items. The station opened in 2018.



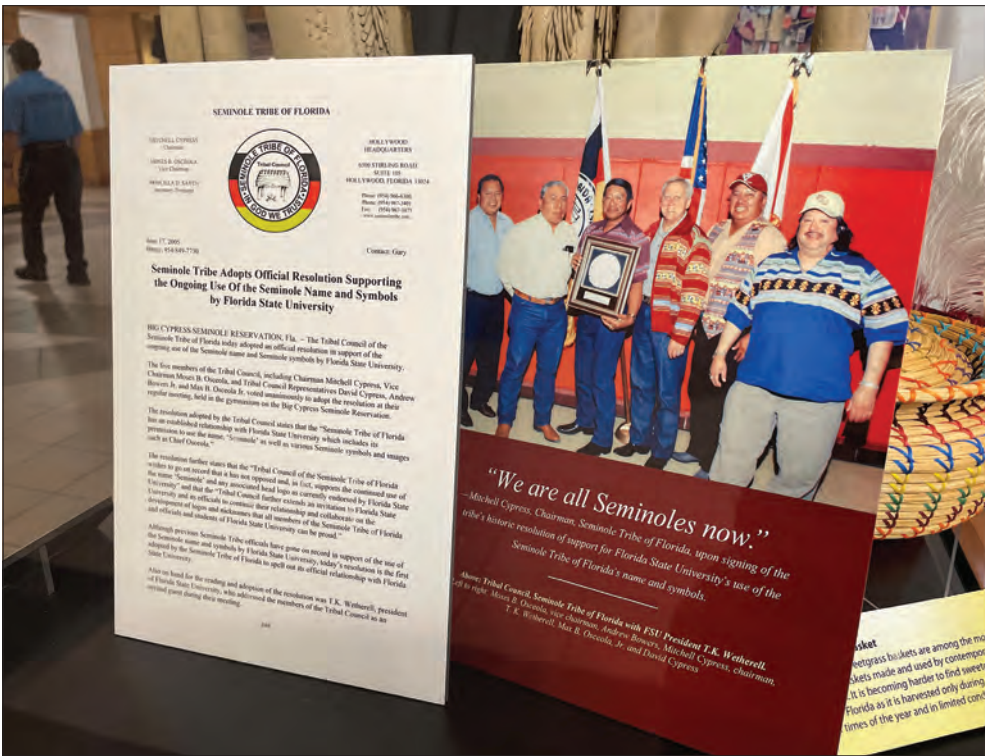
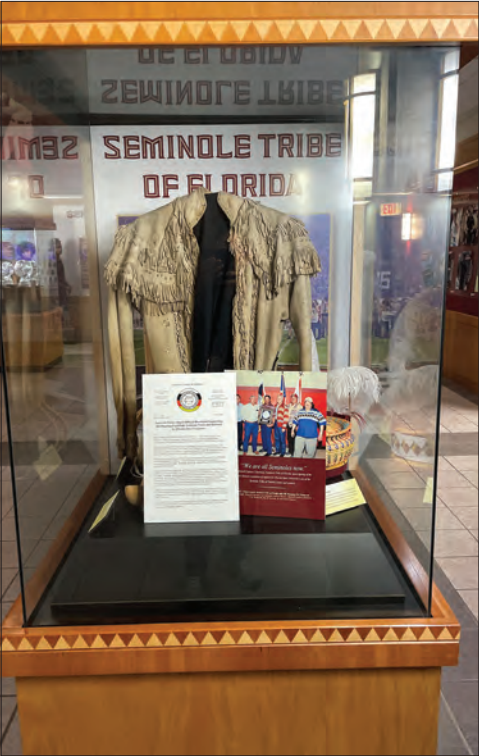
Kevin Johnson

**WINNER, WINNER:** During the Hollywood Reservation's Indian Day canoe races Sept. 22, Leon Wilcox announces a raffle winner after Hollywood Board Rep. O'Hara Tommie, center, picked a ticket from a raffle ball spinner held by Blake Osceola.



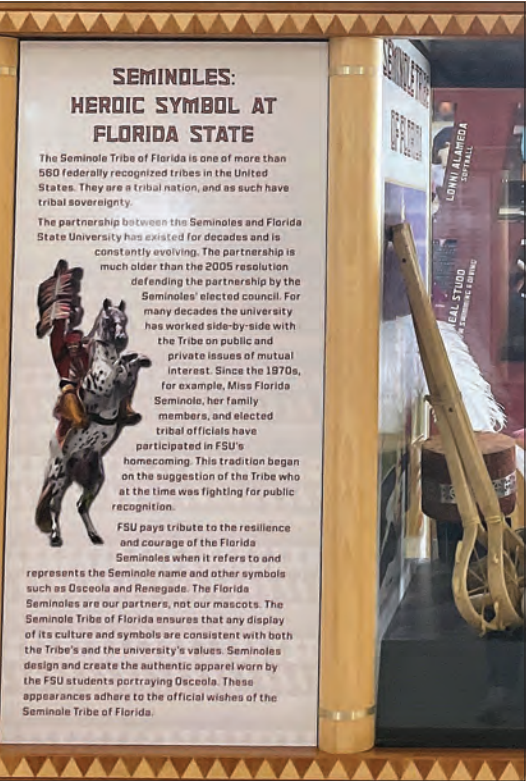
Kevin Johnson

**PRESCHOOL PEAK:** Here's a look at the new Brighton Preschool on Aug. 17. The school and playground are being built directly across the street from the current preschool.



Kevin Johnson (4)

**SEMINOLE HISTORY:** Florida State University's Coyle E. Moore Athletic Center features several displays highlighting the school's athletic achievements. One display prominently honors the relationship between the Seminole Tribe of Florida and FSU. The display includes a Seminole basket, stickball sticks and a turban. A 2005 press release about the Tribal Council's resolution in support of FSU using the Seminole name and symbols is accompanied by a photo of Tribal Council at the time, including Chairman Mitchell Cypress, Vice Chairman Moses B. Osceola, Brighton Councilman Andrew J. Bowers Jr., Hollywood Councilman Max B. Osceola Jr. and Big Cypress Councilman David Cypress, with then-FSU President T.K. Wetherell. The display also includes a large photo of current Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. planting a flaming spear at midfield at an FSU football game.



Kevin Johnson

**HERO DADS:** A sign at the front of Ahfackee School on Sept. 10 displays a thank you to "superhero" father figures. The poster emphasizes "Guide, support, inspire, protect, believe, be there" for father figures, including dads, stepdads, grandpas, brothers, uncles and mentors.



Hard Rock Atlantic City

**KUDOS FOR KURO:** For the second year in a row, Kuro restaurant at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City has been named Best Hotel Restaurant in the United States by USA Today. "This recognition is a reflection of the passion, creativity and dedication our team brings to the table every day," Hard Rock posted on social media in August. Kuro offers contemporary Japanese dishes. Rounding out the top 5 were La Padrona at Raffles Boston (#2), Chez Philippe at the Peabody Memphis (#3), The Wharf Restaurant at Madison Beach Hotel in Madison, Conn. (#4); and Blue Duck Tavern at Park Hyatt in Washington, D.C. (#5). Another Florida restaurant made the Top 10 list as Primo at JW Marriott Grande Lakes in Orlando finished ninth.



# NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

## Use of masked agents on Tohono O’odham land sparks outrage

The recent incursion by masked federal agents on Tohono O’odham land didn’t just anger that tribe, which has been trying to block border wall construction along the remote stretch it controls in Arizona.

It also infuriated Native Americans who had higher hopes for Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, the former Oklahoma senator who is only the second Indigenous cabinet member ever.

“This is especially disappointing when the DHS is headed by ... a member of the Cherokee Nation,” said Angelique EagleWoman, director of the Native American Law and Sovereignty Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law in Minnesota.

Agents from Customs and Border Protection and the Bureau of Indian Affairs entered the Tohono O’odham Nation at 4 a.m. on [Aug. 25] to prevent tribal authorities from blocking contractors, according to a statement issued that day by the Nation.

Jason Nichols, like Mullin a member of the Cherokee Nation, called the incursion by masked agents a “step backward” in federal-tribal relations – and surprising, given Mullin’s “knowledge on the importance of tribal sovereignty.”

The former mayor of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, was Mullin’s Democratic opponent in 2018 when he won a U.S. House seat. He was dubious about Mullin’s preparation for the homeland security post, he said, but had been relatively impressed with his performance on border policy until this incident.

“What I’m hoping for is that they take a deep breath, you know, take one step back,” Nichols said, referring to Mullin’s department. He called for “substantive consultation with the tribe, because I do think the tribes have proven to be willing and even eager partners.”

Indeed, the Tohono O’odham have long cooperated with the federal government on border security, though the Nation has also strongly opposed wall construction. One all-Native American unit of Immigration and Customs Enforcement called the Shadow Wolves patrols the Sonoran desert from its base on the Nation.

The Tohono O’odham has members and communities on both sides. Its land spans 62 miles of the border west of Nogales.

In April, a DHS contractor partly destroyed a sacred archaeological site. The Tohono O’odham filed a lawsuit in June to block further construction and in early August it posted “no trespassing” signs. But on Aug. 14, a federal judge in Washington rejected its request for a temporary pause, despite pleas that construction threatens many other sacred sites.

DHS defended the ongoing construction, though officials deflected questions about the use of force to keep tribal authorities at bay.

“The project will close one of the most dangerous smuggling and trafficking corridors on the Southwest border: remote desert that has facilitated decades of drug loads, migrant deaths, and cartel activity,” CBP commissioner Rodney Scott said in a statement his office provided to Cronkite News. “Congress funded this work, a Federal court has affirmed it, and CBP is carrying it out under the legal authorities that apply.”

According to the Tohono O’odham Nation, contractors engaged in “pre-construction activities” with drilling equipment at three locations. CBP and BIA agents and a SWAT team used a vehicle blockade to prevent their removal by tribal police, who could only monitor the activity from a distance, according to the tribe.

EagleWoman said “the trespassing and covert-style operations” likely violated internal DHS protocols.

Meghan Bishop, director of policy of the National Congress of American Indians, or NCAI, said federal authorities had plenty of better options.

“I don’t think any tribal nation wants to ban people from their lands, but as sovereigns they have the ability and capability to do that,” she said, “The federal government should respect that.”

“From everything that I have seen and understand, the Department of Homeland Security has not engaged in a collaborative, consultative, good fair manner with the nation,” Bishop said.

Another Oklahoman, Joe Deere, a tribal councilor of the Cherokee Nation, also criticized DHS for ignoring the tribe’s objections.

“They have violated treaties before, and they are overstepping the tribal consultation,” said Deere, also a regional vice president at NCAI. “Tribal sovereignty should come first, no matter what protection of the people.”

Aaron Wright, a preservation anthropologist with Archaeology Southwest who advises tribes, noted that Mullin’s experience in Oklahoma is very different from that of someone who grew up on a Nation that spans an international border.

“Obviously, the Cherokee Nation does not share a border with Mexico, and I suspect that there aren’t many, if any, enrolled Cherokee members who live in Mexico and cross that border to visit family and relatives on a semi-regular basis,” he said.

Delvina Charley, an Indigenous activist in Arizona and member of the Navajo Nation, called Mullin a “sellout” who cannot be trusted by fellow Native Americans.

“If this was someone else’s backyard – in Paradise Valley, [Ariz.], at the White House – this would be handled differently,” she said.

- Cronkite News (Phoenix, Arizona)

## Developers eye Native nations, tribal communities for new data center projects

Officials in Page, Arizona, a small city near the Glen Canyon Dam, passed a land sale agreement last fall that establishes a framework for future construction of a data center.

The sale of the 500-acre parcel about a mile away from the Colorado River’s Horseshoe Bend — one of the most visited natural landmarks in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area — to Huntley LLC for \$7 million specifies that the company intends to build a 1 gigawatt data center.

Residents have been pushing back and launched a petition earlier this year to stop the planned data center from being built.

About 5 miles south of the city, a group of tribal leaders began to take notice. The proposed data center borders the LeChee Chapter of the Navajo Nation, located in the northwest corner of the Navajo Reservation.

Like most of Arizona, the community has run into challenges from severe drought conditions this year. After learning how much water it could take to cool the thousands of servers housed in the massive facilities, members of the tribe grew increasingly concerned about the proposed data center.

The LeChee Chapter also passed a resolution opposing Page’s decision to sell the land to the developers.

“Water is precious to us,” said Irene Whitekiller, president of the LeChee Chapter. “... Water is used for everything, like with holy water in church and traditional ceremonies. But with a data center coming in, it’s going to take a lot.”

Data center developers are continuing to spread throughout the country as the demand for digital processing power grows — especially as artificial intelligence systems become more prevalent. But in addition to concerned residents, some federal, state and local officials are worried about how data centers could drive up utility bills, strain water resources and hurt the environment.

And now, tribal communities are grappling with the fact that more developers are eyeing their land for future data center projects.

“Because of the history with treaties, removal actions and those sorts of things, tribal lands are probably more pristine and not as developed as other state, federal or local government lands,” said Tana Fitzpatrick, the associate vice president of tribal relations at the University of Oklahoma and a member of the Crow Tribe in Montana and a descendant of the Lakota Sioux, Ponca and Chickasaw nations.

“That might be one of the reasons why tribes are finding that people are coming and wanting to build data centers on their lands.”

Some tribal leaders are also concerned about President Donald Trump’s ability to alter regulations related to federal lands. While most of Trump’s executive orders don’t apply to federal land belonging to Native nations or reservations, Whitekiller said that could change.

In July, for instance, Trump issued two executive orders to revise the boundaries of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and the Bears Ears National Monument so the lands could be “put to a higher-priority use,” such as extracting minerals to invest in national security. The orders faced backlash from environmental advocacy groups and Native nations.

“We’re trying to educate our people to say no to this kind of thing (data centers) because we want the land the way it is. This is a federal land that we live on, but Trump doesn’t respect that,” Whitekiller said.

In March, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma became one of the first Native nations to enact a complete moratorium on data centers. Honor the Earth, a national nonprofit organization advocating for the protection of Indigenous sovereignty and the environment, has helped communities like the Seminole Nation organize against data center development on their land.

Some companies see tribal land as a regulatory dream, said Ashley Leitka, an enrolled member of the Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and the director of the department of sovereignty and self-determination at Honor the Earth. She is also part of the Oglala and Sicangu Lakota nations.

While municipalities are pushing back against data center developers by tightening codes and enforcing stricter regulations, she said some companies are hoping that tribal nations will be more lenient. As sovereign, self-governing nations, tribes are not required to follow all state and local laws.

“These companies are really preying upon the lack of economic diversity in our tribal nations,” Leitka said. “The reality is our tribal leaders are given a mandate to care for their nations, and whenever there’s opportunities, it’s pretty difficult for them to assert why they would not consider it. I just think it’s several things happening at the same time — that makes tribal nations prime targets.”

A handful of other tribes have taken action against data centers. In July, the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma’s Business Committee formally declared its opposition to construction and operation of data centers on its lands.

And in August, following a report detailing the impact of data centers on economy and environment, the Cherokee Nation announced it would be banning hyperscale data center development on tribally owned and trust lands, according to the nation’s official news site.

However, some tribes are considering how data centers could help their people. Colusa Indian Energy, for instance, has

become one of the only tribally owned microgrid companies helping lead data center partnerships with Native nations.

And in the past few years, the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs has encouraged tribes to consider data center projects by offering financial and technical resources to assist.

Data centers are a significant way to bring economic opportunities to tribal communities, said Eric Mahroum, the office’s director. Mahroum said data centers also offer a number of jobs to community members.

“I think that’s why a lot of private companies are approaching tribal lands and the tribal governments to partner with them,” he said. “And we’re here to help them with that. I’ll be the first to say that there’s a lot of private companies and a lot of bad players that want to take advantage of the tribes. But then there’s a lot of great players that want to help the tribes.”

As more communities push data center developers out and states consider rescinding tax breaks, some of the country’s top tech developers and data center companies see tribal land as an easier option.

Microsoft, for instance, recently proposed a data center project in Fernley, Nevada, about a 10-minute drive from the boundary of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation, according to Honor the Earth’s Data Center Tracker. The company’s community-first AI initiative outlines steps Microsoft will take to be a “good neighbor” in the communities where they build, according to an unsigned written statement from the company.

In the meantime, tribal leaders have expressed the need to continue studying the impacts of data centers through task forces. And now, more Native nations are considering moratoriums to allow time for more discussions, said Fitzpatrick, of the University of Oklahoma.

“In general, every tribe is their own sovereign nation,” Fitzpatrick said. “Regardless of the issue, every tribe is going to have their own ways of governing, choosing their priorities and looking at their citizens’ priorities.”

- News From the States

## New Mexico tribe and pueblos wrap up case that Kalshi sports betting hurts their sovereignty

Three New Mexico pueblos and one tribe on [Sept. 4] wrapped up their closing arguments that a federal judge should step in to prohibit the online prediction market Kalshi from enabling what the plaintiff’s allege amounts to illegal sports gambling on sovereign tribal land.

In May, the plaintiffs — the Mescalero Apache Tribe, as well as the Pojoaque, Sandia and Isleta Pueblos — alleged in federal court that Kalshi violates tribal gaming compacts and federal law by providing anyone over age 18 access to sports gambling in New Mexico.

Under existing state gaming compacts and federal law, only people aged 21 and over in New Mexico can place bets on sports in person at tribally owned casinos. The plaintiffs argue that Kalshi is causing irreparable harm to tribal governments, which rely on gambling revenues to fund schools and other services.

Tribes and state attorneys general have filed similar lawsuits against Kalshi across the country. New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez also sued the company in state court in June, alleging the company is breaking state laws and creating a “public nuisance” by contributing to compulsive and addictive betting in a state that already has nearly four times the national rate of problem gambling.

The [Sept. 4] filing marks the plaintiffs’ final written arguments seeking a preliminary injunction from U.S. District Court Judge Margaret Strickland. The 19-page argument contends that the plaintiffs meet all the criteria to justify an order forcing Kalshi to immediately stop operating within tribal boundaries.

To avoid a ban, the company is relying on a “rash of red herrings via many material misstatements about this case and the law,” the plaintiffs wrote Friday. “None of that improves Kalshi’s odds.”

Kalshi’s lawyers have countered that the federal Commodities Exchange Act trumps the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, as well as state gaming compacts, and that regulating the platform is under the sole discretion of the Commodities Futures Trading Commission, the federal agency that oversees prediction markets.

In a response in late August, the company also said that a law forcing the app not to operate on tribal lands would “cause significant operational and commercial harm.”

Officials from Kalshi did not respond to Source NM’s request for additional comment Tuesday.

The New Mexico plaintiffs’ filing also cites an Aug. 28 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in a similar case that upheld a lower court’s decision allowing Nevada regulators to bar Kalshi from offering trades — known as “swaps” — on sporting events.

A coalition of 24 federally recognized tribes — including Mescalero, as well as the Sandia Pueblo and the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico — filed a brief urging the federal appeals court to allow Nevada officials to regulate Kalshi.

Federal court records do not specify when Strickland may rule on the tribal plaintiffs’ request for a preliminary injunction.

- SourceNM (New Mexico)

## Crow Creek tribal member to be South Dakota’s next Missing and Murdered Indigenous People liaison

A Fort Thompson, South Dakota, resident and member of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe who has more than two decades of experience working with crime victims will serve as South Dakota’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous People specialist.

Marlys Big Eagle will fill the role vacated earlier this summer by Allison Morrisette, who in 2022 became the first to serve in the position.

Attorney General Marty Jackley, under whose office the liaison serves, announced Big Eagle’s hiring in a press release [Sept. 2].

“Marlys has spent her career helping victims of violence and families looking for missing loved ones,” Jackley said in the release. “Her credibility with tribal communities, law enforcement, and prosecutors makes her an outstanding choice.”

Big Eagle worked with crime victims for the U.S. Department of Justice for 27 years. For 23 of those years, she worked as the supervisory victim witness coordinator for the U.S. Attorney’s Office in South Dakota. For the past four years, she’s worked for the department’s Washington, D.C., executive office as the agency’s first Native American outreach services liaison for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People cases occurring in tribal areas.

The job of state-level liaison was created by the Legislature in 2021 but not funded. Initially, Morrisette’s salary was paid by a nonprofit organization. Jackley successfully lobbied to make the position permanent and state-funded shortly after she was hired.

The liaison works to connect family members to resources and the law enforcement agencies investigating their loved ones’ cases.

- South Dakota Searchlight

## Recent land returns give Wabanaki Nations more authority over conservation, ancestral territory

The Penobscot Nation received 11,000 acres of ancestral land back [in September], the first phase of what is expected to be one of the largest land returns ever between a U.S.-based nonprofit and a tribe.

Located near the base of Katahdin, the land return affords the Penobscot Nation access to a culturally significant area, natural resources for hunting and harvesting, and more authority to expand its longstanding conservation work, said Penobscot Nation Natural Resources Director Chuck Loring. While specific plans are still being developed, one goal is to create an access route to the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

The 11,297 acres are part of a broader 30,000+-acre property surrounding Wåhschtak’ — the East Branch of the Penobscot River — that a national nonprofit, Trust for Public Land, purchased from timber harvesters three years ago with the intent to return it to the Penobscot Nation.

The Trust for Public Land, which took out loans to pay for the property, and the Penobscot Nation are working together to raise funds for the buy back. With an overall goal of \$32.5 million, the \$20.7 million raised so far allowed for the first phase to be initiated on [Sept. 16]. The rest of the land will be returned after the remaining \$11.8 million is raised.

The first phase brings the total land that the Penobscot Nation now stewards to approximately 140,000 acres. However, the Wabanaki Nations — the Penobscot Nation, Mi’kmaq Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and Passamaquoddy Tribe — only hold 1% of their ancestral lands in what is now the state of Maine.

The Wåhschtak’ effort is part of a larger push to return more than 50,000 acres to Wabanaki communities through 11 different projects in collaboration with conservation organizations.

“There have been a lot of decisions that conservation organizations have made over the past few decades that have not taken tribal nations and indigenous communities’ perspective and leadership into the picture,” said Betsy Cook of Trust for Public Land, which nationally has returned more than 200,000 acres of land to over 70 different tribal and indigenous communities.

One of the other projects in Maine completed in June doubled the amount of land owned and stewarded by the Mi’kmaq Nation with the return of 3,400 acres. And in September, the Mi’kmaq Nation, in partnership with Trust for Public Land, secured an additional 83 acres that abuts its existing tribal housing and community space, allowing for infrastructure upgrades, such as septic systems, to improve safety and environmental health.

Cook sees the land return efforts as evidence of “a real shift and recognition of the strong leadership that tribal nations bring to caring for lands and waters.”

The returned and to-be-returned land is categorized as fee land, or private property for which the owner owns the title. Loring said the Penobscot Nation will be working to transfer it to trust land, which is held by the U.S. government on behalf of a tribe and therefore affords tribes more authority over what can be done with it.

Still, the Wabanaki Nations have less sovereignty than other federally recognized tribes because of a 1980 land settlement agreement, under which Maine claimed roughly two-thirds of land in the state.

Wabanaki leaders have said that their Tribes signed the Maine Indian Claims

Settlement Act to get fair compensation for stolen lands, not to give up the level of sovereignty that has been interpreted by the state and courts to date.

The Wabanaki Nations have worked with state lawmakers and Gov. Janet Mills in recent years to pass piecemeal reforms, such as expanding Wabanaki authority over prosecuting crimes, permitting the Tribes to handle and reap profits from sports betting, and aligning the tax code with the rules that apply to other tribal nations throughout the country. But Mills blocked multiple attempts for sweeping overhauls of the Tribal-State relationship.

“The ability for the Wabanaki Nations and Wabanaki people to be able to connect with land, take care of land and interact with their land in a way that is free and honors the sovereignty of the tribal nations is critically important,” Cook said. “These things — the tribal sovereignty push and land returns — they are not disconnected.”

- Maine Morning Star

## Department of the Interior hosts Forum on Native Languages and Education

Tribal leaders, school administrators, language teachers and students from across Indian Country gathered at the U.S. Department of the Interior in September for the Forum on Native Languages and Education. This full-day convening on Native language revitalization was organized by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and the National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education, the congressionally chartered foundation for the Bureau of Indian Education.

The forum brought together presenters from tribal nations, BIE-funded schools, tribal colleges and Native language organizations to share what is working in their communities. Sessions covered language and technology, tribal language programming, Office of Indian Economic Development Living Languages Grant Program grantees and grantees of the Native Language Program operated by the BIE in partnership with the National Fund.

“Native languages are a foundation of Native identity and communities. President Trump recognized the importance of Native language when he became the first president to meet with and honor Code Talkers in the Oval Office in 2017, noting that the preservation of Native languages supported victory in WWII. Today, this work supports the educational and personal success for Natives across the country,” said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Billy Kirkland in a press release. “This forum demonstrated that the knowledge and expertise to sustain and revitalize Native languages already exists within our communities. The Trump administration is supporting and working to ensure tribes have resources and flexibility to lead language revitalization efforts in their own communities.”

Through Native Language federal funding, more than \$12.5 million has been made available to 17 BIE-funded schools to expand Native language programs, instruction and immersion programming. These schools also receive access to specialists in language curriculum development, instructional materials design, program evaluation and early childhood immersion methods.

“What these schools are showing us is that language is not separate from student success. It runs through it,” said Heath Clayton, Lead Executive Officer of the National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education, in the release. “Our job is to get resources into the hands of the people doing this work every day, and then get out of their way.”

Several schools presented early results at the Forum. Turtle Mountain Community High School in Belcourt, North Dakota, reported that Anishinaabemowin, the Ojibwe language, is now taught across five class periods daily, with an after-school language club open to any student.

“We are seeing students show up differently when their language is part of their school day,” Cindy Keplin, assistant principal at Turtle Mountain Community High School, said in the release. “That is what this funding made possible.”

In a survey of language program participants, 67% showed improved daily attendance, with some gains as high as 8.6% points, and 58% improved their grade point average, with gains ranging from 0.04 to 0.62 points. Turtle Mountain also reported that 511 language-eligible students took part in Anishinaabemowin activities during the January through March 2026 quarter.

Santa Fe Indian School described a program serving students from more than 23 Native language communities across six languages, built around Pueblo language teachers and a shared Native Language Philosophy developed with participants from seven Pueblos.

The Forum also previewed the National Native Language Summit, which the National Fund and the National Indian Education Association will convene Oct. 6 in Buffalo, New York, bringing together educators, students, researchers and language advocates from across Indian Country.

- From press release



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# Education



## New student council sworn in at PECS

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BRIGHTON** — A new Student Council for the 2026-27 school year was inaugurated at Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School on Sept. 24, after the school's annual traditional clothing contest.

Creek teacher Suraiya Smith told the student body the Student Council is the voice between them and the administration, teachers and leaders.

"The inauguration ceremony is a testament to the vibrant spirit of leadership and community that defines us," said Principal Tracy Downing. "Student Council is the embodiment of our school's democratic principles. It is a reflection of the trust that you, the student body, have placed in these

### 2026-27 PECS Student Council

Kindergarten: Trace Faye  
First grade: Adalyn Ellis  
Second grade: Haizley Baker  
Third grade: Evianna Nunez  
Fourth grade: Arlo Jackson  
Fifth grade: Jayda Torres  
Sixth grade: Hendrix Osceola  
Seventh grade: Ryker Miller  
Eighth grade: Dallyse Baker  
Chairwoman: Dylanie Peak



Beverly Bidney

Members of the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School 2026-2027 Student Council pose with, from left to right in back, Miss EIRA Mariah Billie, Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and Creek teacher Suraiya Smith. At far right are Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole Avani Smith and Miss Brighton Seminole Hayden Nunez.

individuals to advocate for your needs, ideas and concerns."

Brighton Councilman Larry Howard swore in each new member of the council after saying a few words to all the students

assembled in the gym.

"Being on the Student Council gives you the opportunity to lead the school," Councilman Howard said. "We need leaders for tomorrow. You will all be those leaders;

this is your first stop. You never know who is sitting in here, someone here may be on Tribal Council or even the president of the United States. We always say the sky's the limit. You can achieve anything, but you

have to work for it."

◆ See PECS on page 2B



Calvin Tiger

During the week of Indian Day activities on Big Cypress Reservation, the Big Cypress Preschool hosted its own youth fashion show where parents and family members were able to see students present tribal clothing. All preschool age groups participated in the show. Above, Sawyer Jumper hits the runway.

## BC Preschool hosts tribal clothing fashion show



Calvin Tiger (2)

At left, Zamani Flournah, and, at right, Amari Robbins make their fashion statements on the red carpet.

## Ahfachkee administration pleased with cell phone policy results

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

Although students are increasingly dependent on cellular devices, Ahfachkee School Principal Philip Baer is seeing the benefits of a new rule that locks up students' devices during the school day.

"At lunchtime, students are actually talking to each other instead of looking at their screens," Baer said. "Students are acknowledging each other in the hallways in between periods. It's gone better than I would've ever imagined."

Before first period each morning, administration greets students outside the gymnasium with phone bags. Teachers lock the students' devices in the bags. Students hold onto the locked bags until the end of seventh period, when the bags are unlocked

prior to dismissal.

"Parents are absolutely thrilled that we're doing this," Baer added.

In the coming weeks, schoolwide bag checks will be conducted to ensure students are abiding by the cell phone policy.

The new school year kicked off Aug. 10 with 206 students enrolled.

Team sports returned last winter as the school fielded basketball teams for the first time since pre-Covid. Interest in sports continues to grow.

"The students are particularly enthusiastic about athletics," Baer said.

There was no volleyball team last year, but this year the school has two sets of girls teams. The middle school team played its first game against Piper High School on Sept. 1. Thirteen students make up the team.

"The girls started off slow [in the first

game], but they built up momentum," Baer added. "I'll sit in on their practice sessions—the girls are really into it."

In addition to volleyball and basketball, plans are in the works to establish teams for sports like softball, baseball, and archery in the near future.

The administration is also looking to offer American Sign Language as a language option for students.

All in all, the start of the new school year has gone smoothly.

"Everything's worked out super well," Baer said. "With students no longer using social media or taking pictures throughout the school day, they're making friends. We're getting more and more positive comments from parents because they see the positive consequence it's had, too. I'm glad."

## Grant will help increase hands-on opportunities at libraries

BY CALVIN TIGER  
Staff Reporter

**HOLLYWOOD** — The Seminole Tribe's Education Department has received a federal two-year grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The grant includes support for a new STEM lab, digital technology equipment, which includes 3D printers, robotic kits and more hands-on workshops for tribal students and families.

The initiative for the grant was organized by Padmini Dukharan, the tribe's library

program supervisor; the Grant Department; and the assistance of Russell Brown, Education director, and Marisa Schnirman, Education assistant director, after hearing from parents from the Brighton community stating that they would like more hands-on learning opportunities for tribal youth.

The grant will be applied to all four libraries on the tribe's reservations.

"This is the third grant I've submitted, and I'm especially excited to begin the planning stages. It's the largest amount our Education Library Program has ever received

from IMLS outside of our yearly Basic Services grant, and it marks an important milestone for our department. My goal is to continue creating welcoming, innovative library spaces where community members of all ages can learn, explore, and discover their abilities," Dukharan said.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent federal agency that helps support the nation's libraries, museums, and archives.

## Sam McCracken invests in Indigenous youth with newest initiative

BY DANIELLA HAKIM  
Staff Reporter

The founder and visionary behind Nike's N7 Fund, Sam McCracken, announced the launch of his newest nonprofit organization at the 2026 National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development's Reservation Economic Summit earlier this year in Las Vegas.

The Sam McCracken Youth Project (SMCYP) is designed to broaden access to culturally grounded wellness programming aimed to address the mental, cultural, and

physical health needs of Indigenous youth.

"Native youth are our foundation," McCracken (Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine Tribe) said in a press release. "I created SMCYP to build the kinds of experiences that remind young people of the power in positive representation, strength in their culture, and the ability to play."

McCracken retired from Nike in 2025 after nearly three decades of supporting tribal-serving nonprofit organizations to "create a culture of belonging in sport that welcomes all Indigenous youth to play," Nike's website states. Under his leadership,

the N7 Fund awarded more than \$13 million in grants, supporting programs that have reached more than 500,000 youth. The fund's proceeds derive from its annual collections of footwear and apparel.

SMCYP intends to serve over 5,000 Native youth across 30 tribal communities within its first five years, focusing on four primary areas: youth wellness summits and community activations, community capacity building, policy and advocacy, and strategic partnerships.



# Ahfachkee Spirit Week focuses on Seminole culture

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY  
Staff Reporter

**BIG CYPRESS** — The Ahfachkee School celebrated Seminole culture and traditions with a week of activities leading up to the tribe’s Indian Day on Sept. 25.

Spirit Week, from Sept. 21-24, included “School Colors Day” that showcased the school’s spirit and values. “Our Past is Our Future” featured students and culture teachers who shared meaningful memories and items that symbolize their connection to Seminole culture, and storytelling allowed students to hear legendary Seminole stories from community members. The final day included a rousing game of stickball.

On Sept. 22, Billy Walker led “Our Past is Our Future” for the entire school. Students came to the culture camp chickee in groups by grades K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8 and 9-12.

Walker told Seminole stories about the creation of the stars and earth, including tidbits such as the first trees created were coconut trees, which provided food, water, fiber and wood.

“The creation story is a blueprint that has everything in there; plants, water, animals and us,” Walker said. “We have a way of life as sovereign people and we carry it with us. A lot of people don’t have that. It’s important to always remember who you are.”

He brought a dipper, or ladle, made from pop ash wood that was carved by Henry Jumper Sr. and given to him more than 30 years ago. He passed it around for every student to see and touch.

Walker told the story of the legendary baseball player Babe Ruth, who came to Florida for spring training in the 1920s and 1930s and traded with the Seminoles. He was looking for strong wood for a new bat and the Seminoles introduced him to pop ash, which is soft when first cut, but hardens like concrete over time.

Culture instructor Mary Jene Koenes showed baskets given to her and made by her family members, including her grandmother. She explained that sweetgrass baskets exist because the tribe traded alligator hides for various items from European settlers, including thread which is used to tie the sweetgrass rows together to form the baskets.

Koenes told the students the first basket she made took many months to complete, but she kept at it.

“Once you start something, you have to finish it,” she said.

Students stood before their peers and shared some of their favorite cultural items and memories, including a doll, a memorial candle and a rattle.

Zihnellie Burney, 8, shared a cherished doll her great grandmother made for her when she was about two or three years old. Jayley Billie-Perez, 7, told a story about her late aunt.

Cassius Billie, 9, brought a leather rattle filled with seeds that his aunt gave him and is used at corn dance. Lorraine Jumper, 9, brought a purple doll her grandmother Betty Mae Jumper made that is also in her favorite color.



Beverly Bidney

Culture teacher Mary Jene Koenes shows some of her baskets that were given to her by family as a group of fourth and fifth graders listen intently in Ahfachkee's culture camp on Sept. 22.



Beverly Bidney

Billy Walker shows a ladle given to him more than 30 years ago.



Beverly Bidney

Lorraine Jumper shows a doll made by her great-grandmother Betty Mae Jumper as classmate Diana Osceola stands with her.



Beverly Bidney

Cassius Billie shows a rattle given to him by his aunt.

## ◆ PECS From page 1B

“It’s important to learn and remember our past,” said Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge. “It shows how we can to where we are today. We need leaders and people to work for the tribe. Keep pushing forward and appreciate where we came from.”

With that, each member of the Student Council read the oath given by Councilman

Howard and addressed their fellow students before standing in the reception line to greet each one individually, including students, teachers, parents and dignitaries.

Earlier, the school held its annual clothing contest. Firefighters from Seminole Fire Rescue served as judges.

Every grade level competed for best dressed as they vied for the title and medals, which were bestowed on the winners by Miss Brighton Seminole Hayden Nunez and Jr. Miss Brighton Seminole Avani Smith.



Beverly Bidney

From left, Juliana Rodriguez, Kassi Jackson and Mahaila Henderson proudly wear the medals they earned in the clothing contest at the PECS annual event with the Student Council inauguration on Sept. 24.



Beverly Bidney

Third grade Student Council representative Evianna Nunez repeats the oath of office as Creek teacher Suraiya Smith looks on and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard administers the oath.



Beverly Bidney

Eighth grade Student Council representative Dalse Baker takes the oath of office, administered by Brighton Councilman Larry Howard.



Beverly Bidney

Members of the PECS Student Council greet well-wishers on the reception line after the inauguration ceremony. From left are Immersion teachers Jewel Lavatta and Jade Osceola.



Beverly Bidney

Contestants pose for the judges during the clothing contest.



Beverly Bidney

Creek teacher Suraiya Smith holds the mic as sixth grade Student Council representative Hendrix Osceola speaks after being inaugurated.

Beverly Bidney  
Samuel Slocum, Creed Snow and Isaac Osceola compete in their finest traditional clothing during the clothing contest.





Indian Day 2026 - Trail



Lea Osceola, skillet tossing contest

Daniella Hakim



Kathy Billie, clothing contest

Daniella Hakim



Daniella Hakim

Birdie Osceola indulges in cotton candy and shows off her balloon animal during Trail's Indian Day at Huggins Camp in Ochopee on Sept. 18.



From left, Justin Billie, Devontaye Steve and Wildcat Billie, clothing contest

Daniella Hakim



Gina Steve, clothing contest

Daniella Hakim



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# Indian Day 2026 - Brighton



Beverly Bidney  
Rosa Urbina, horseshoes



Beverly Bidney  
Jennifer Osceola, left, and Dana Osceola, cornhole



Girls try to catch pigs, but the animals decided to run every which way but toward the girls.

Beverly Bidney



Beverly Bidney  
Jaylen Baker, cypress log race



Beverly Bidney  
Ehricka Osceola, horseshoes



John Madrigal, left, and Shane Buck, archery

Beverly Bidney



Betty Billie, pumpkin fry bread contest

Beverly Bidney



Josh Madrigal, archery

Beverly Bidney



Beverly Bidney  
Jamelyn Anderson, skillet toss



Reina Micco, pumpkin fry bread contest

Beverly Bidney





Kevin Johnson  
Jaide Micco and Jay Sean Bowers, canoe race



Calvin Tiger  
Grant Osceola, log peeling



Calvin Tiger  
Paul Buster, clothing contest



Calvin Tiger  
Shirley Clay, Seminole challenge



Kevin Johnson  
Peter Hahn and Michael Gentry, canoe race

# Indian Day 2026 - Hollywood



Calvin Tiger  
Virginia Osceola, skillet throw



Calvin Tiger  
Mariah Bowers, cypress run



Calvin Tiger  
Peter Billie Sr., hatchet throwing



Kevin Johnson  
Patrick Doctor, canoe race



Calvin Tiger (2)

Above and below, contestants in the women's and men's clothing contest at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center on Sept. 23.



Kevin Johnson

Angelina Tigertail and Chandler Demayo, canoe race near the Guitar Hotel.



# Indian Day 2026 - Immokalee



Calvin Tiger  
Ray Yzaguirre and Norita Yzaguirre, canoe race.



Calvin Tiger  
Cecilia Pequeno, fantacking.



Calvin Tiger  
Roy Alvarado, cypress log race.



Calvin Tiger  
Cheyenne McInturff, fantacking.



Calvin Tiger  
Savannah Tiger, cypress log race.



Calvin Tiger  
Attendees find seats and shade to watch the Immokalee Indian Day events.



Calvin Tiger  
Jay Roberts and Caniah Billie, canoe race.



Calvin Tiger  
Spencer Jock, archery.



Beverly Bidney  
Emrys Osceola awaits her turn to compete in the clothing contest.



Beverly Bidney  
Ronnie Billie arrives at the Big Cypress Indian Day event.

# Indian Day 2026 - Big Cypress



Beverly Bidney  
Sabal Billie stands with her father Cypress Billie during the clothing contest in the infant to 3-year-old category.



Beverly Bidney  
The Osceola family competes in the family category of the clothing contest. From left are Randy, who is holding Austin, Amari and Arianna Osceola.



Beverly Bidney  
Alice Billie sews patchwork at her booth filled with items for sale.



Beverly Bidney  
From left to right, Sherri Garcia, Edward Garcia and Brian Billie, clothing contest.





Kevin Johnson

The volleyball teams from Ahfachkee School and Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School show tribal unity before they played each other Sept. 17 at PECS.

# Ahfachkee, PECS meet twice in 7 days

## Lady Seminoles extend winning streak to 60 games

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**BRIGHON** — Not every victory deserves a party-like celebration, but when a winning streak reaches 60, it's time to break out the hats and horns, or at least the confetti launchers.



Kevin Johnson

Ahfachkee's Adaleyah Hall, left, watches as teammate Ada Bruised Head keeps the ball in play.



Kevin Johnson

PECS' Avani Smith sets the ball during the team's win against Ahfachkee on Sept. 17.

In a match that featured a lot of Seminoles on both sides of the net, the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School varsity volleyball team reached 60 wins in a row with a 2-0 win against Ahfachkee School on Sept. 17 in Brighton.

Ahfachkee made sure No. 60 didn't come easy for PECS. The Warriors built a 16-12 lead in the first set before a series of strong aces by Gracie Gopher put PECS ahead, 17-16.

Powerful serves continued with aces by Jamelynn Anderson and a kill by Kanae Jumper that paved the way for a 25-19 win for the hosts.

Head coach Monica Atwell, who is assisted by Suraiya Smih, said the game plan was to start seventh graders in the first game in order to have the eighth graders on the court for the potential match-clinching 60th win.

"I wanted to start the seventh graders, that way the eighth graders that been a part of this journey with us, we wanted to let them have that moment on the court in the second game," said Atwell, who is in her fourth season, all undefeated, as head coach.

In game two, PECS jumped ahead early on three consecutive aces by Dalyse Baker and never trailed. Highlights included big kills by Jumper and Kaliyah Hodge with setter Avani Smith providing perfect passes, and aces by Dylanie Peak.

When match point was secured, blasts of colorful confetti — launched from the bench — showered the players to mark a milestone in a streak that stretches back to pre-Covid. In fact, the seventh graders on this year's team were in kindergarten the last time PECS lost a match, which was in 2019.

Covid cancelled the 2020 and 2021 seasons, but when the nets went back up, so did victories. Starting with the 2022 season, the team has gone 15-0, 16-0, 13-0 and 10-0.

The victory against Ahfachkee upped the Lady Seminoles' record to 6-0 this season, which includes a hard-fought match against Yearling. PECS prevailed 25-22, 27-26.



Kevin Johnson

In the team's 60th straight win, PECS' Jamelynn Anderson controls the ball with Dalyse Baker nearby.

See VOLLEYBALL on page 2C

# Zae Thomas makes 2 tackles in Florida State win

STAFF REPORT

The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Zae Thomas notched two tackles in Florida State's 34-7 win against Central Arkansas in front of 67,277 fans at Doak Campbell Stadium on Sept. 26.

The solo tackle and assisted tackle were the first two tackles of Thomas' career at FSU.

The assisted tackle came in the first quarter on a 19-yard kickoff return by Central Arkansas's Ty Durham. Thomas and Antonio Cromartie Jr. stopped Durnham at the Central Arkansas 21-yard line.

The solo tackle came in the final minute of the game. Thomas tackled Jalen

Washington at the FSU 29-yard line after a 14-yard run with :53 seconds left.

It was the third straight game Thomas, a sophomore defensive back who also plays special team coverage, has seen game action. He played in the team's losses against SMU at home and against Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Thomas has already surpassed the number of games he played last season when he appeared in two games.

FSU (2-2) has four games in October, including home games against Virginia (Oct. 3) and Clemson (Halloween). The Seminoles play at Louisville (Oct. 9) and will make a trip to Hard Rock Stadium to face the Miami Hurricanes on Oct. 17.



Kevin Johnson

FSU sophomore Zae Thomas (22) made his first two college tackles in the Seminoles 34-7 win against Central Arkansas.



# Seminoles shine in Moore Haven’s win against Bonita Springs

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

**MOORE HAVEN**— September was a rough month for the Moore Haven High School football team as the Terriers were on the losing end three times, but they did start the month on a positive note.

The Terriers feature Seminole’s Greg James, Milo Osceola, Storm Osceola, Andrew Williams and Brayden Hunsinger.

A 39-14 win at home against Bonita Springs on Sept. 4 gave the Terriers their first win of the season. The game couldn’t have opened any better for Moore Haven. On the opening kickoff, sophomore Milo Osceola helped set the stage for a strong first half. He was lined up on the far sideline, which is where he helped pave a path for Jarion Halliburton to return the kickoff 75 yards along the sideline for a touchdown.

James who played offensive tackle, handled center duties on the ensuing successful 2-point conversion. It was James’ first home game back in Moore Haven after he left last year to play one season for Bishop Verot in Fort Myers. The senior captain is listed as 6-foot-3, 310 pounds.

On defense, Milo Osceola had an active first half, that included a solo tackle-for-a loss. He was also in on a tackle that resulted in Bonita’s quarterback losing his helmet, and later was part of a sack that shook up the



Moore Haven sophomore Milo Osceola (23) tackles the Bonita Springs quarterback during the Terriers’ 39-14 win Sept. 4 at home.



Moore Haven senior lineman Greg James (73) chases the Bonita Springs quarterback.

QB. He was also in the vicinity of a fumble recovered by the Terriers.

Moore Haven enters October with a 1-4 record. The Terriers have an opportunity to

turn their season around as their first four opponents in October also have sub .500 records.



Senior lineman Greg James has returned to the Moore Haven football team after playing last season for Bishop Verot in Fort Myers.

## ◆ VOLLEYBALL From page 1A

“We have a good, even mix of eighth graders and seventh graders, so hopefully with the training of those seventh graders [they can] take over from the eighth graders next year,” Atwell said.

PECS won the JV match, 2-0.

### Volleyball returns to Ahfachkee

Volleyball has returned to the Ahfachkee School for the first time since pre-Covid.

With rosters full of players and a gymnasium full of fans, the Warriors have returned to the court with two teams. They hosted Pemayetv Emahaky Charter School on Sept. 10 as the healthy rivalry between the schools on STOF reservations continues to blossom. The reemergence of sports at Ahfachkee – and games against PECS – began last winter in girls and boys basketball.

Ahfachkee last had a volleyball team in 2018. When the sport was offered this academic year, there was plenty of interest, evident by the 16 girls who came out for the teams.

“I’m happy with the girls that turned out, and they’re all young. Our oldest player is a sophomore. We have good years ahead of us,” said head coach and athletics director Creig Freeman.

The “B” team is predominantly a middle

school team. The varsity, or “A” team, is considered the high school team.

Starting a program from scratch has gone smoothly so far. Both teams notched wins early in their schedules.

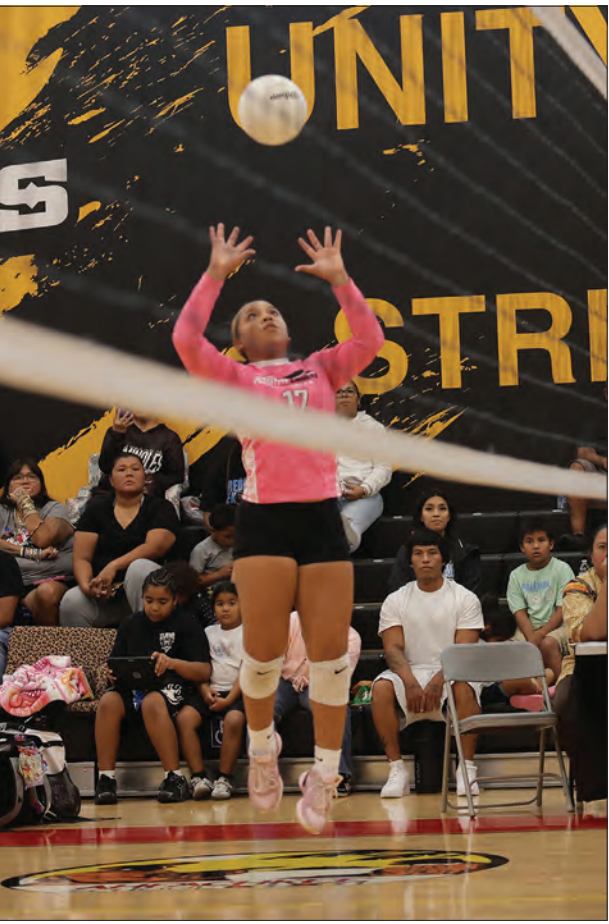
“They’re showing a lot of resilience. They’re responding to the challenge,” Freeman said.

As the program reestablishes itself, a familiar name at Ahfachkee is helping coach both teams. Mya (Cypress) Crews, who played on the last volleyball team at the school in 2018, is an assistant coach.

Meanwhile, PECS has been a middle school powerhouse for what seems like forever. With a 2-0 win against Ahfachkee’s ‘A’ team, PECS extended its undefeated streak to 56 matches which stretches back more than four years.

Game one was close until A’Milya Rodrigues and Kaliyah Hodge belted a bunch of aces on the way to PECS’ 25-7 win. In game two, Ahfachkee’s Dalaylah Cypress blasted an early ace and Adaleyah Hall provided inspiration as she returned from an injury and served a point that her team won. But PECS’ serve-receive and passing was strong all night as the Lady Seminole won, 25-11.

In the JV game, the teams split the first two games; PECS won game 1 (25-14) and Ahfachkee took game 2 (25-22) before PECS rode the outstanding serving of Ja’Vaiah Jones to the clinching victory in game 3 (15-6).



PECS’ Kaliyah Hodge keeps the ball alive on the left side in the team’s match at Ahfachkee on Sept. 10.



PECS’ JV player Lillie Coleman sprints through the “varsity tunnel” as part of the pregame introductions prior to the JV game at Ahfachkee.



Ahfachkee’s Natalie Shaffer focuses on the ball during the team’s match at PECS.



Ahfachkee coaches Mya Crews and Creig Freeman give players a final pep talk before facing PECS on Sept. 10 at the Ahfachkee School.





Jessica Burns (2)

Bullfighter Josiah Johns competes in a bullfighting competition on Sept. 19 at Mosaic Arena in Arcadia.

## Top 3 finish for bullfighter Josiah Johns

BY KEVIN JOHNSON  
Senior Editor

Josiah Johns, a bullfighter from the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Brighton Reservation, was among the top performers at the 7th annual Bulls & Bands on Sept. 19 at Mosaic Arena in Arcadia.

Johns earned a top three showing in the freestyle bullfighting, finishing third with 75 points. Freestyle features a bull and bullfighter only; there are no bull riders.

"Just a man, a bull, and a whole lot of fast footwork. It's a heart-pounding test of speed, skill and split-second timing," is how the event was described by its organizers.

The event included concert performances by country music artists Clint Black, Collin Raye and Darryl Worley.

In 2025, Johns earned his Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) bullfighting permit. His grandfather, also named Josiah Johns, was an all-around cowboy standout who was posthumously inducted into the Indian National Finals Rodeo Hall of Fame in 2012.

Jessica Burns

Josiah Johns goes airborne battling a bull at the Bulls & Bands event in Arcadia.



## Immokalee and BC recreation hold fall basketball league

STAFF REPORT

Big Cypress and Immokalee recreation has teamed up for a fall basketball league that runs from Sept. 1 through Oct. 12. Kids from both reservations participate in the league. Teams consisted of kids 5 to 7, 8 to 11 and 12 to 17 years old.



Beverly Bidney

The coed teams play as other kids wait in the bleachers for their games to begin.



Beverly Bidney

Teams of 5-to-7-year-old kids go to the basket during a game at the Immokalee gym on Sept. 9.



Beverly Bidney (2)

Above, Big Cypress Recreation coaches teach what to do during a free throw. At right, players listen to instruction from their coaches.







Kevin Johnson

Members of the Tigertail family attend the 17th annual Tigertail Oshaane Brothers Basketball Tournament on Sept. 18 at the Herman L. Osceola Memorial Gym in Big Cypress. The family organizes the tournament every year.

# Tigertail family hosts annual memorial basketball tournament

STAFF REPORT

**BIG CYPRESS** — Basketball serves as an annual way for the lives of three brothers to be remembered.

The 17th annual Tigertail Oshaane Brothers Basketball Tournament was held Sept. 17-19 at the Herman L. Osceola Memorial Gym and across the street at the Ahfachkee School gym.

Thirteen men’s teams and four women’s teams joined the Tigertail family at a tournament that honors the memories of Malcolm, Duane and Jody. The family provided free food and beverages for all players throughout the tournament.

The tournament used to be an all-Native gathering, but in recent years it’s been open to any teams. This year several teams from Miami joined the tournament.

2026 Tigertail Tournament results

Men  
1st Sac City  
2nd Plainzmen  
3rd Big Shot Takers

Women  
1st Lady Fire  
2nd Miami Vis  
3rd Locked and Loaded



BC Recreation

With tournament organizer DeForest Carter at far right, the women’s championship team Lady Fire holds the tournament bags they won.



Kevin Johnson

Former FSU player Xavier Osceola drives toward the basket in the Tigertail Tournament. Osceola played for the Rezfamous team in the tournament.



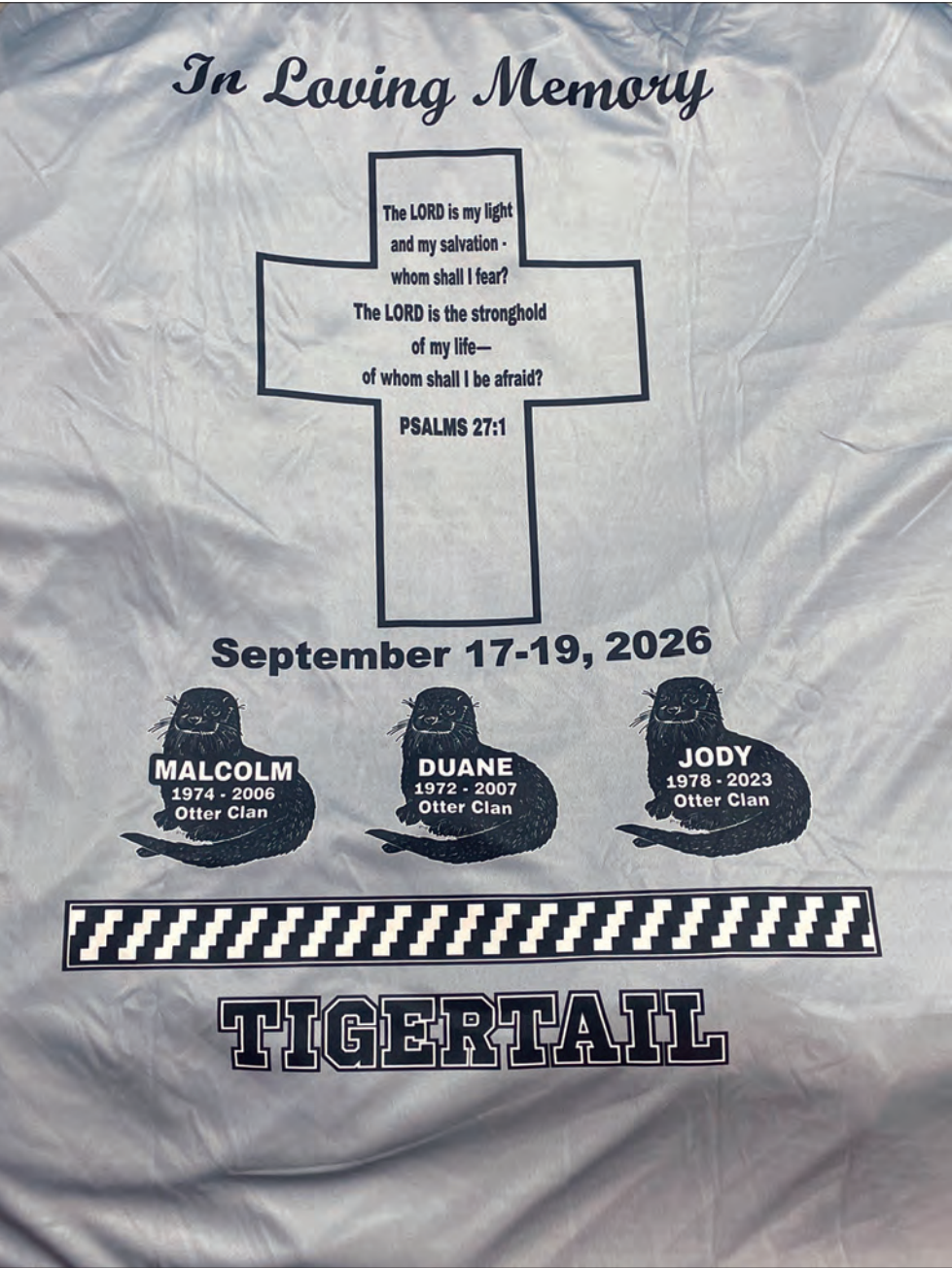
Kevin Johnson

The Rezfamous team in action, including Duelle Gore, above, and Ethan Cypress, right.



Kevin Johnson

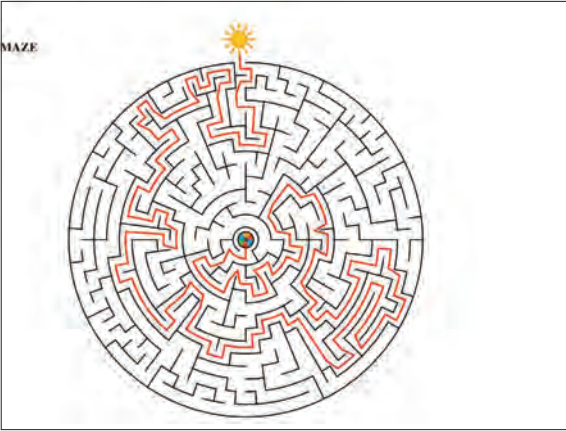
Above, the front of this year’s tournament T-shirts, and below, the back side honoring Malcolm, Duane and Jody.



Kevin Johnson

Tatum Billie tries to dribble past Jenna Plumley in a women’s division game at the Tigertail Tournament. Plumley’s Lady Fire team went on to win the championship.

♦ BRAIN CORNER ANSWERS  
From page 9A



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# Mary-Sally Osceola starts college volleyball career

STAFF REPORT

Mary-Sally Osceola, from the Hollywood Reservation, is in her freshman season on the Florida SouthWestern State College volleyball team in Fort Myers.

Osceola is one of only two players from Florida on the team’s roster, which includes players from as far as Bosnia, Brazil, Germany and Sweden.

Osceola has been used as a substitute early in the season. She’s played in six matches.

Ranked No. 6 in the nation in the National Junior College Athletic Association, Florida SouthWestern has a 13-3 record. On Sept. 26, the team had a showdown with No. 1 ranked Miami-Dade College. Miami prevailed in five sets. Osceola saw action in three sets and had one dig.



FSW  
Mary-Sally Osceola

# New outdoor recreation grant opportunity open to tribal applicants

FROM PRESS RELEASE

For the first time, federally recognized Tribes can apply directly for funding through the National Park Service’s Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program, expanding access to federal resources for locally led outdoor recreation projects. The change was authorized through the EXPLORE Act.

Funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, ORLP is a nationally competitive grant program supporting the acquisition of land and water for outdoor recreation, development of new recreation spaces, and significant renovation of existing facilities. Up to \$125 million is available through the current funding opportunity.

Application deadline is Nov. 1, 2026

Eligible Tribal applicants: Federally recognized tribes are eligible regardless of population.

Matching requirement: ORLP can fund up to 50% of eligible project costs, with applicants responsible for securing the remaining nonfederal match.

Technical assistance: Trust for Public Land is partnering with the National Park Service to provide free application resources, webinars, and one-on-one assistance to eligible applicants in 2026.

For more information go to nps.gov.

# Four players hit jackpots of more than \$500,000 total in August at Seminole Casino Hotel

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE —From Aug. 7 to Aug. 27, four lucky players won \$510,472 in total jackpots at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee, with all four taking home more than \$100,000 each.

The jackpots include:

- On Aug. 7, a player won \$154,037 with a \$150 bet on a Lock It Link Diamonds slot machine.
- On Aug. 20, a player scored a \$134,730 jackpot with a \$12.50 bet on a Dragon Link slot machine.
- Also on Aug. 20, another player won \$118,841 with a \$10 bet on a Buffalo Link slot machine.
- On Aug. 27, a player collected \$102,864 with a \$5 bet on a Dragon Link slot machine.

Over the course of 2025, players won more than \$444 million in total jackpots at Seminole Casino Hotel.

# Hard Rock Bristol awards \$5,000 grant to YWCA

FROM PRESS RELEASE

BRISTOL, Va. — Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol announced Sept. 17 that YWCA of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia has been selected as a 2026 Hard Rock Heals Foundation grant recipient. The organization will receive a \$5,000 grant to support affordable childcare and resources for local children and families.

Nominated by the team at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol, YWCA NETN and SWVA is one of 51 global nonprofit organizations to receive a grant as part of Hard Rock’s ongoing commitment to strengthening the communities it serves. The grant is awarded this year by the Hard

Rock Heals Foundation, with \$255,000 total supporting local nonprofit organizations around the world.

“We nominated the YWCA because of the important role they play in empowering young women across our region to recognize their potential, build confidence and develop the skills to become strong leaders in their communities,” said Allie Evangelista, president, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Bristol. “By creating these opportunities, the YWCA is helping shape the next generation of leaders who will make a difference throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. We’re honored to support their work and proud to partner with an organization that brings Hard Rock’s

mottos, ‘Love All – Serve All’ and ‘Take Time to Be Kind,’ to life in our community.”

The YWCA NETN and SWVA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening families, empowering women and creating opportunities for children and youth across the region. Serving communities throughout Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, the YWCA provides affordable childcare, youth programs, family support services and other resources designed to help individuals and families overcome barriers and build brighter futures.

# Miami Dolphins schedule

- Sept. 13 at Las Vegas L 27-13
- Sept. 20 at San Francisco L 35-13
- Sept. 27 vs Kansas City L 24-10
- Oct. 4 at Minnesota 4:05 p.m.
- Oct. 11 vs Cincinnati 1 p.m.
- Oct. 25 at NY Jets 1 p.m.
- Nov. 1 vs New England 4:25 p.m.
- Nov. 8 vs Detroit 1 p.m.
- Nov. 15 at Indianapolis 1 p.m.
- Nov. 22 at Buffalo 1 p.m.
- Nov. 29 vs NY Jets 1 p.m.
- Dec. 6 at Denver 4:05 p.m.
- Dec. 13 vs Chicago 1 p.m.
- Dec. 20 at Green Bay 1 p.m.
- Dec. 27 vs LA Chargers 1 p.m.
- Jan. 3 vs Buffalo 1 p.m.
- Jan. 10 at New England TBD

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