



The Seminole Tribune

Voice of the Unconquered

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Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood general manager Edward Aguilar, Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola, Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie and actor Adam Beach celebrate the debut of craps Dec. 7 at the Classic, the first of the tribe's casinos in Florida to have craps and roulette. Similar celebrations were held at the tribe's other casinos in Florida over the course of five days.



Beverly Bidney

Brighton Councilman Larry Howard watches as Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. tosses dice in a ceremonial first craps game at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa on Dec. 8.

Tribe, celebrities usher in new casino games, sports betting

BY STAFF REPORTERS

Taking it one casino at a time, Seminole Tribe leaders rolled out craps, roulette and

sports betting at the tribe's six casinos in the state during a whirlwind span of five days in December.

A slew of celebrities – including actors, athletes and singers – stood alongside the

gaming tables as members of the Tribal Council played ceremonial first games with winnings going to charities.

"The Seminole Tribe of Florida is proud to point to a new era in Florida gaming with

the unveiling of our new casino games," Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. said in a statement. "With the addition of craps, roulette and sports betting, we now offer a full complement of casino games and we

join the ranks of leading casinos around the world."

♦ See CASINOS on page 6A

Donna Harmon runs in New York City Marathon

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

New York City has always held a special place in the heart of the Seminole Tribe's Donna Harmon.

Visits as a teenager, attending culinary school in the city and, in recent years, serving as a medic volunteer at the New York City Marathon have helped solidify her adoration for the city.



Courtesy photo

A medallion shows Donna Harmon's name and her time in the New York City Marathon, which was 6 hours, 37 minutes and 51 seconds to finish the 26.2 mile course.

Competing in the marathon has been a longtime goal for the longtime competitive runner, who is a travel nurse from Flagstaff, Arizona, and has several relatives on the Brighton Reservation and elsewhere in the tribe. She finally got her chance in November.

Harmon was among the nearly 52,000 starters – the most for a marathon in the world in 2023 – that set out for the 26.2 mile run through the city's five boroughs Nov. 5. The race started in Staten Island and wove its way through Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx before concluding at Central Park in Manhattan. Treats along the way included views of the Statue of Liberty, crossing some of the city's most recognizable bridges – including the Verrazano-Narrows and Queensboro – and passing by world famous museums, such as the Guggenheim.

Harmon prepped in the months leading up to the race by using a one-on-one coaching program through the New York Road Runners organization. She ran three times a week and did cross-training, also three times a week.

She set a goal to finish the race between five and six hours. She missed her mark – her time was six hours, 37 minutes and 51 seconds – but simply finishing one of the world's most famous marathons provided consolation.



Courtesy photo

♦ See HARMON on page 4B Donna Harmon smiles as she stands in New York City, where she was among more than 52,000 runners who ran in the New York City Marathon on Nov. 5.



Courtesy photo

Seminole artists will soon be featured in a room like this one at the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens in Winter Park.

Seminole artists to be featured at Winter Park museum

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

A new art exhibition to open in January 2024 in Winter Park near Orlando will feature the work of a dozen Seminole artists for the first time.

"Yaah Ya Oke: Welcome Travelers," which runs from Jan. 16 to April 14 at the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens, is the latest in an increasing number of shows highlighting contemporary Seminole work. The featured pieces will include

watercolor, acrylic, mixed media, natural fiber and digital art. The Seminole artists in the show are Durante Blais-Billie, Tia Blais-Billie, Wilson Bowers, Hali Garcia, Jacqueline Osceola, Jessica Osceola, the late Jimmy Osceola, Leroy Osceola, Samuel Tommie, Gordon Wareham, Brian Zepeda and Corinne Zepeda.

An advisory committee consisting of Seminole artists, scholars, historians, History Fort Lauderdale curator Tara Chadwick, Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens curator Tamie

Diener-Lafferty and Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum officials helped to develop the exhibition.

"This is an exciting and innovative venture representing a pivotal moment for the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens in hosting their first exhibition of work by Florida-based Indigenous artists," the show description reads.

Meanwhile, the art exhibition "Chehantamo: How are you?" opened Oct. 22 at History Fort Lauderdale featuring the work of 15 Seminole artists. The show, on

display through Jan. 6, marks the 10th Native American heritage exhibition at the Fort Lauderdale museum.

"Chehantamo" features a room filled with more than two-dozen contemporary pieces spanning generations of Seminole artists, including the late Elizabeth Buster. An additional room has eight large panels provided by Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum officials that describe the history of the Seminole Wars.

♦ See ARTISTS on page 3A

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Visit the Tribune's website (seminoletribune.org) and Instagram (@seminoletribune) for news throughout the month

Editorial

A visit to Carlisle

• **Levi Rickert**
(Native News Online)

The sky was blue and temperatures were unseasonably warm as we pulled into the Carlisle Barracks campus at the former Indian boarding school. A couple of small children could be heard talking as they played and ran with a large yellowish-brown dog following closely behind. They were joyful. Then, one of the children, a young girl, ran onto a porch and disappeared into the white apartment building that is part of the large complex that houses officers who attend the U.S. Army War College.

A plaque facing the sidewalk identifies the apartment complex as being the Coren Apartments, which date back to the Revolutionary War. The apartments were burned down during the Civil War, but quickly rebuilt. During the Indian boarding school era, the apartments served as a girl's dormitory. At one point, the corner apartment the young girl had entered had served as the office of Lt. Col. Richard Henry Pratt, who founded Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879 and served as the school's superintendent until 1904.

In comments made at a social reform conference in 1892, Pratt said in an overview of his Indian boarding-school superintendent role: "Indians had been forced onto remote reservations, far from the 'civilizing' influence of English-speaking peoples."

In the speech, he cited a quote popular during the Indian wars: "The only good Indian is a dead one."

He expounded on the remark: "In a sense, I agree with the sentiment," Pratt opined, "but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

Pratt's comments that day became famous, if in a slightly pithier form: "Kill the Indian, save the man."

The phrase became the mantra for the federal Indian boarding school's assimilation period.

From 1879 until 1918, during its 39 years of operation, Carlisle Indian Industrial School housed 7,800 Native American children from more than 140 tribal nations from as far away as Alaska. The Native American children were exposed to a mix of Western-style education with a strong militaristic influence and hard labor.

The Native American students were forced to cut their hair, adopt English names, forbidden from speaking their tribal languages, and Christianized. Many endured physical and emotional abuse. Since the school was on the Carlisle Barracks, which dates back to the Revolutionary War, the campus was actually an Army base. It was convenient for Pratt to insist that the Native American students be treated as soldiers rather than school students. With the militaristic treatment of Native Americans came confinement in small prison-like structures that were used frequently to hold students in solitary — much like prisoners, rather than students.

While Carlisle was in operation, close to 200 children from 59 different tribes died there. Many died of diseases made worse by poor living conditions and abuse, and were buried at the school. According to the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report (Volume I), authored by Interior Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community), about one-quarter of those who died at the school were Apache.

Native News Online's senior reporter Jenna Kunze has covered three disinterments from the Carlisle Cemetery over the course of the past two years. Since I have not been able to attend these, I wanted to visit Carlisle

for my own experience. I did that on a recent Friday on my way back to Michigan from the White House Tribal Nations Summit in Washington. This was my first visit there.

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School closed in 1918 because the U.S. Army needed the facility after the United States entered World War I. The Carlisle Barracks returned to serve as a military base. Injured soldiers were nursed back to health at Carlisle.

I have read many books and stories about Carlisle. I have even written about Carlisle many times over the past dozen years, especially since 2021 when the Indian boarding school story emerged in public awareness. Carlisle is even romanticized because the great Jim Thorpe (Sac & Fox/Potawatomi) was a student there and played football.

The visit provided me with a better perspective of the militaristic side to how the boarding school was operated. Integrated into a small museum are photographs of the Carlisle Indian boarding school. Another section touts the alumni of the U.S. War College, including current Secretary of Defense Llyod Austin.

My tour of Carlisle concluded with a trip to the Carlisle Cemetery, which was relocated in 1931 to make room for new Army buildings. I was surprised to see the location of the cemetery was located inside a fence close to a street that is heavily used by the public. Through the black-iron fence, you can almost touch the rows of white headstones of almost 200 Native students who are buried there.

Walking through the cemetery and seeing the military-like white headstones of innocent, dead Native American children — all far from their tribal homes — was an overwhelming experience. The headstones bore a tribal affiliation, date and in some cases but not all, a name. I wept.

"They were so far from their homes," I told my friend, Eugene, who I was traveling with. The tears flowed like a river.

My visit to Carlisle was part of the personal journey I have been experiencing over the past three years covering Indian boarding schools and the era of assimilation. In May 2022 I walked the grounds of the Genoa Indian Industrial School in Nebraska where my grandmother Ellen Moore Whitepigeon attended as a child. Beginning in July, I attended 11 of the 12 stops on the Interior Department's Road to Healing tour that captured stories of the survivors of Indian boarding schools and descendants of those who attended.

Since my visit to Carlisle, I keep thinking about the vast contrast between the two joyful young children I had seen running so close to Pratt's former office, where he undoubtedly made decisions that caused hardships for Native children who were treated more as prisoners than students. Talk about a tale of two cities.

All children should be able to enjoy their childhoods as the children of Army officers I saw that day. Sadly, Native American children confined to Carlisle Indian Industrial School did not.

Thayék gde nwendémen - We are all related.

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

This opinion was published on nativenewsonline.net.

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

David Rahaḡ-tih Webb, a member of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina and a Seminole and Miccosukee descendant, is the author of a new book — "The Spanish Seminole: The Untold History of the Spanish Indians as Shared by a Descendant." The educator, historian, environmental scientist and artist, says his ancestors were members of the Spanish Indian rancho community of Sanibel Island, his hometown, located about an hour southwest of Fort Meyers.

"The Spanish Seminole" provides a detailed account of the Spanish Indians — their history, culture, and legacy — using documents, sources and oral histories. It is Webb's first book.

"In the 1700s, as Florida's Indigenous tribes were displaced, the forebears of the Miccosukee and Seminole descended along the southwestern Gulf Coast. They soon began working with Hispanic-Latino and Indigenous fishermen from various Spanish colonies, who had seasonal operations along the barrier islands," Webb writes in the book's description. "Eventually, these seasonal operations became prolific year-round fisheries and communities, incorporating the fishing practices previously learned from the 6,000-year-old Calusa culture. Their productive estuarine fisheries were called ranchos, which served the same significant commercial and cultural function that the deerskin trade did for their contemporaries."

Webb is scheduled to appear at four Florida events to promote the book in January 2024. The Tribune asked him about the book and his life. Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Tribune: What motivated you to write the book?

Webb: My Spanish Seminole ancestors had the first documented births in southern Florida and I think that is an essential piece of history to share. Many do not know about the Spanish Seminole and there is a lot of myth surrounding them. The most rewarding part for me has been telling my almost 90-year-old grandfather's story, and that of his family.

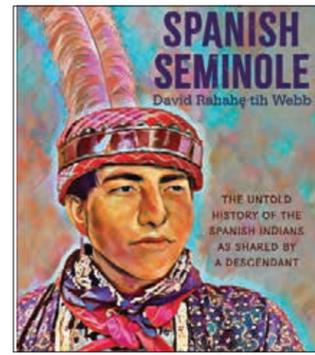
Tribune: Tell us more about the Spanish Seminoles.

Webb: Most of them were Elaponke/Miccosukee speaking people who were the earliest to migrate into the peninsula. They merged with or adopted remnant



Courtesy photo

Author David Rahaḡ-tih Webb



Courtesy image

The book was published in August 2023.

Calusa and their fishing practices, working with Hispanic-Latino fishermen based out of Cuba. There were about 600 Spanish Seminole, and they remained fluid with the towns and bands on the mainland to which they belonged. The vast majority was Indigenous, but some women married the fishermen and had families.

Tribune: It's a rich history?

Webb: During the Seminole Wars, the Spanish Seminole supplied arms and ammunition to the resistance, which they obtained from the Spanish. The Americans, who had just taken over Florida, were intent on removing the Spanish Seminole along with the rest.

My own family, the Montes de Ocas, was a large Spanish Seminole family. My ancestors, among others, were taken to Cuba on fishing vessels from Sanibel Island and Southwest Florida for baptisms. Their hometowns, such as Chokonikla and Ochese, were documented. My direct ancestor, Juan Montes de Oca, and his wife Mary (Johns) were captured by the U.S. Army and imprisoned at Fort Brooke. The owners of the rancho they lived at petitioned to allow them and others to stay rather than be sent to Indian Territory. My ancestor worked as a translator for the Army in exchange for their freedom, but they lived at the fort for several years afterward.

My family eventually returned to Sanibel Island and worked as fishermen until my grandfather's generation. I share this story from the perspective of a descendant who was raised in the same waters and islands as my ancestors.

Interior Department hosts third Tribal Nations Summit

STAFF REPORT

The Department of the Interior hosted the 2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit for the third time Dec. 6-7 in Washington, D.C. The summit served as the forum for a slew of Indian Country-related announcements from President Joe Biden's administration. It was also an opportunity for hundreds of tribal leaders to meet with government officials and discuss Native American issues and concerns.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) and her staff were the organizers.

Since 2020, tribal officials across the country have largely praised the work of Haaland and the Biden administration for helping to strengthen nation-to-nation relationships, honor trust and treaty obligations and advance tribal sovereignty and self-determination. The Biden administration's American Rescue Plan, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and Inflation Reduction Act have also contained historic investments in tribal communities for a variety of programs and services.

During the summit, Biden signed an executive order that he said would provide tribes with easier access to federal funds through grants as part of an ongoing effort to "heal the wrongs of the past." Other summit topics included tribal consultation, the fentanyl drug problem, and Biden's endorsement of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy lacrosse team competing under their own flag in the 2028 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Federal officials also announced a "new era of collaboration" with tribal leaders in managing public lands and other resources and incorporating more Indigenous knowledge into its decision-making on conservation and climate change issues. In addition, Federal Emergency Management Agency officials told tribal leaders that the agency began work this year to upgrade its disaster guidance in response to tribal needs.

In all, the Biden administration made public nearly 200 new agreements designed to increase federal cooperation with tribes across the country. The agreements cover a wide range of initiatives, including fishery

restoration projects in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, management of new national monuments in the Southwest, seed collection work in Montana, and plant restoration in the Great Smoky Mountains.

"The United States manages hundreds of millions of acres of what we call federal public lands. Why wouldn't we want added capacity, added expertise, millennia of knowledge and understanding of how to manage those lands?" Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community) said during a summit panel discussion.

The U.S. government controls more than a quarter of the land in the U.S. — much of it encompassing the ancestral homelands of federally recognized tribes.

A report that details the summit's announcements and agreements can be found on the White House's website by searching "2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit" at whitehouse.gov.

NCAI to hold winter session, youth summit

FROM PRESS RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The annual meeting of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) executive council will be held Feb. 12 to Feb. 15 in Washington, D.C. The council is one of NCAI's three main governing bodies. The meeting presents an opportunity for tribal delegates to hear from members of Congress and the Administration. It's also geared toward furthering the government-

to-government relationship between tribal nations and the federal government.

During the conference, the Native Youth Leadership Summit will meet to discuss strategies for improving local and tribal communities through policy development and the resolution process. The conference is an opportunity for Native youth to learn how to become advocates for their communities while networking with their peers and tribal leaders from across Indian Country.

For more information visit ncai.org.

Greg Masten to lead NCAI Foundation

FROM PRESS RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Greg Masten, an enrolled citizen of the Yurok Tribe and a descendant of the Hupa and Karuk Tribes, has been named president of the new National Congress of American

Indians Foundation.

"We are honored to have Greg Masten join our team and launch the NCAI Foundation," NCAI Executive Director Larry Wright Jr. said in a statement.

National Park Service, tribes to partner on history project

STAFF REPORT

Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) announced a new Native American history project between the National Park Service (NPS) and tribes during the 2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit on Dec. 6. (The NPS is a bureau of the DOI).

A DOI news release said the NPS would soon begin a theme study on the "Indian Reorganization Period," (1934-1950) which it described as "an important chapter in American history." The study would help identify places and events to provide more context on the period, and the data would be used to identify potential future National Historic Landmarks. The DOI secretary designates National Historic Landmarks as representing "the highest level of national

significance." There are currently more than 2,600.

The "Indian Reorganization Period," also referred to as the "Indian New Deal," was a product of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 — federal legislation that sought to improve the status of Native Americans in the U.S. and encourage their culture. The period is generally known as a time when the U.S. government began to show a greater appreciation for Native culture and focused more on Native self-determination, self-government, and the development of economic opportunity on tribal lands. The purpose of the law was to reverse the government's previous goal of the forced cultural assimilation of Native Americans into American society.

The DOI news release said the study would build on its Indian boarding school

initiative, which was created by Haaland in 2021 to investigate defunct residential boarding schools that housed Native American children.

"Native American history is American history, and it should be told by Indigenous Peoples," Haaland said through a live remote at the summit. "The stories we share inform not just our present, but the future world we will pass on to the next generation of leaders. They help define us."

The study, including tribal outreach, is expected to take place in 2024.

"The study will contribute to a more complete understanding of our shared heritage, including the historical perspectives of tribes central to this period in American history," Will Shafroth, president and CEO of the National Park Foundation, a funder of the study, said in the DOI news release.

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To our readers: Starting with this issue, the Seminole Tribune issue dates reflect month and year instead of a full date. Publication and delivery schedules have not changed.

Community



Big Cypress youth home kids enjoy Christmas surprise

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — Christmas came a few days early at the Big Cypress youth home thanks to Brighton Councilman Larry Howard and Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola, who delivered an SUV full of gifts for the 11 children living there Dec. 22.

"I just had it in my heart to do this for them and went out and bought some stuff," said Councilman Howard. "This is a beautiful day."

Prior to the shopping spree, Howard

found out what the kids liked and didn't like. There was a guitar for a budding young musician and art supplies for an artistic girl.

The kids were excited to see the arrival of the presents and a few youngsters even helped bring them inside. Once there, the councilmen told the kids that they wanted to put smiles on their faces.

"We brought you some things and some lunch and will just hang out with you for a while," Councilman Osceola said.

Councilman Howard and Councilman Osceola engaged with each child as they opened their gifts. A large festively decorated Christmas tree had ample space in a corner.

The youth home, which is run by the Center for Behavioral Health, opened in 2015 to provide care for children whose families cannot. The 5,300-square-foot home has eight bedrooms, an open plan kitchen, dining room and living room with plenty of couches and a large family dining table.

The home welcomes the tribe's children up to 17 years old. Each child is provided with an individualized treatment plan to build skills, from hygiene and education, to social skills. As they get older, they learn more general life skills. There is an age-out program to prepare them for independence, which includes resume building, interview skills and a financial education.

"We want to make sure they can be successful in school and then we start with basic living skills



Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola, left, and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard greet children at the Big Cypress youth home Dec. 22.

Beverly Bidney



Beverly Bidney

A young resident of the Big Cypress youth home helps therapeutic treatment supervisor Corey Renken bring some Christmas gifts inside for all the children to enjoy.

and anything else that will help them live independently," said Christian Heinsler, CBH youth services administrator.

The kids attend the Big Cypress Preschool and the Ahfachkee School and receive tutoring like any other tribal student. The home works with every tribal department to ensure the children get every service they need.

"Reunification is the number one goal for every family, but our main concern is the safety, health and happiness of the child," Heinsler said. "It is profoundly awesome to be able to work with the kids and interact with the community. Our whole purpose of being here is to be part of the community. We go to all events and off-reservation outings. When the kids age out they remain part of the community; that's what we want."

While the councilmen were at the home, they discussed plans for building a new home on the same site. So far, there is no timeline for construction.

Beverly Bidney

Hollywood Council Representative special adviser Kyle Doney talks to a resident at the youth home.



Tribal Fair & Pow Wow to be held in February

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — The Seminole Tribal Fair & Pow Wow will be held Feb. 9-11 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood. It is a free event.

Juaquin Hamilton and Ruben Little Head are scheduled to be the emcees of the pow wow.

Grand entries will be held Feb. 9 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. and Feb. 10 at noon and 7 p.m.

A "Battle of the Guards," featuring Native American color

guards, will be held in honor of the late Seminole veterans leader Stephen Bowers. Dance specials will include fancy shawl, jingle dance, fancy dance and a northern/southern combined drum competition.

The pow wow will be held Feb. 9 and Feb. 10. The tribal fair, which will feature dozens of vendors, the Native Reel Cinema Fest and other events, runs all three days.

Country music singer Aaron Lewis will perform a free concert Feb. 11 at 3 p.m. Lewis has had No. 1 Billboard country albums and songs.

He has recorded with George Jones, Willie Nelson, Charlie Daniels, Alison Krauss and Vince Gill.

Lewis also has two shows lined up at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa's Hard Rock Event Center Feb. 6 and Feb. 7 at 8 p.m. both days. For ticket information visit seminolehardrocktampa.com or ticketmaster.com.

For more information about the Tribal Fair & Pow Wow visit semtribefair.com.

ARTISTS From page 1A

In addition to Buster, the "Chehantamo" artists are Tia Blais-Billie, Bowers, Nicholas DiCarlo, Elgin Jumper, Danielle Nelson, Alyssa J. Osceola, Jacqueline Osceola, Tina Osceola, Victoria Osceola, Daniel Tommie, Samuel

Tommie, Shonayeh Shawnie Tommie, Wareham and Corrine Zepeda.

History Fort Lauderdale's 2022 exhibit, "Chono Thlee: Sparking a new era in Seminole art," featured 60 pieces by 20 Seminole artists. In addition, the recently ended "Reclaiming Home: Contemporary Seminole Art" exhibition featured

the work of seven Seminole artists at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota — a first for the venue.

The Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens is located at 633 Osceola Ave. More is at polasek.org.

WISHING EVERYONE A JOYFUL HOLIDAY SEASON AND A

HAPPY NEW Year

2024

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Lakeland Reservation expands with newly purchased land

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

The Lakeland Reservation has grown by 187 acres thanks to the Seminole Tribe's recent purchase of land adjacent to it.

"The Lakeland property came on the market about nine months ago," said Jonathan Levy, Seminole Real Estate Fund executive director. "The initial thought is to continue to expand the existing reservation for housing and other services for tribal members."

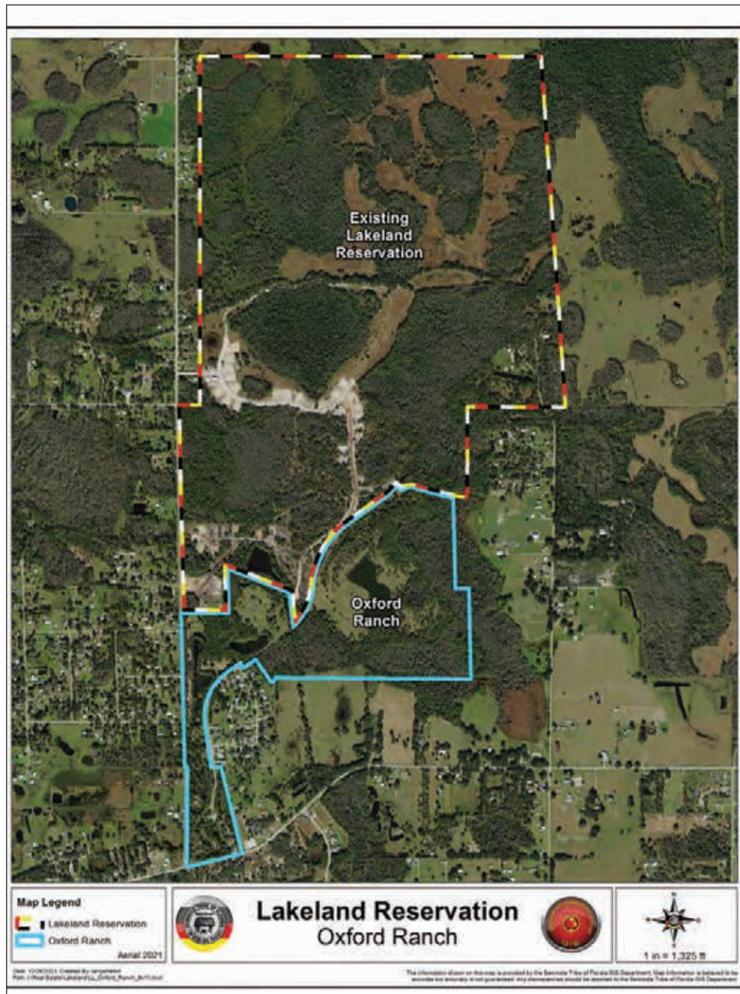
The tribe purchased the original site for the Lakeland Reservation in 2006 and then started the process to get the federal government to put its 747 acres into trust.

That happened in 2016. The trust process has since become quicker.

The purchase of the new Lakeland property, located to the south and east of the existing reservation, closed in early December 2023. The real estate department notified the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the purchase and began the process to get the land into trust.

"Learning from past experiences, we are getting our reports and environmental survey done so they will conform with BIA requirements," Levy said. "We estimate it could take 12 to 14 months to get the land into trust."

The new property was previously known as the Oxford Ranch.



A map shows the outline of the Lakeland Reservation, including its newly added property formerly known as Oxford Ranch.

ERMD helps expand sweetgrass harvest areas

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

IMMOKALEE — In her quest for the perfect sweetgrass to make traditional Seminole baskets, Donna Frank has traveled far and wide both on and off the reservations.

Frank recently enlisted the help of the Environmental Resources Management Department (ERMD) to locate areas with sweetgrass with the hopes of finding new locations to harvest it. The first step in the process was for Frank to identify the specific grass to ERMD staff members. They recently went on an expedition to a field near the Immokalee Reservation.

Frank and ERMD staff biological technician Mandy D'Andrea, forester Grant Steelman, environmental science manager Karli Eckel and wildlife biologist Sean McHugh explored the patch of land in November 2023 and found a wide variety of grasses.

"Over the years in conversations with tribal members, we have been told sweetgrass is scarce on reservations," Eckel said. "When it is found, it isn't as long as it is preferred. We want to implement targeted land management on reservations, but we need to see live samples and habitat to narrow down the specific grass."

During the outing, Steelman found at least six types of grasses, including some sweetgrass that had produced seed heads after it flowered. The area had an abundance of sweetgrass and saw palmetto plants.

"Sweetgrass thrives on fire," Steelman explained. "Saw palmettos flourish after a prescribed burn and the pups regrow. The sweetgrass also comes back after a fire."

In late November, Frank and the ERMD team went to a site in Jupiter, where she had previously found sweetgrass.

"The location had several species of grass and Donna pointed out the difference between sweetgrass and 'imposter' grasses," Eckel said. "They look similar but don't produce the same results in the baskets. They dry brittle, can break easily and don't have the same color or longevity. Donna showed us how she identifies and harvests the sweetgrass. It was traditional knowledge, and she was very helpful while teaching us. Now we can start identifying locations on reservations so we can enhance the habitat to promote the grass."

ERMD can also identify areas outside of the reservations and try to partner with counties and the state to coordinate cooperation to create more opportunities for tribal members to harvest. Eckel said ERMD has started the conversation with Palm Beach County and it seems open to a collaboration.

The Seminole Tribe has reserved rights on certain lands, including the Big Cypress National Preserve. The legislation that created the preserve included language giving tribal members the ability to practice culturally-based plant gathering usage there.

"It's always easier to coordinate at the federal level because that's where the rights already exist," Eckel said. "But we can work with local and state partners and identify a mechanism to create opportunities for tribal members."



Donna Frank, left, shows ERMD biological technician Mandy D'Andrea how to identify and pick sweetgrass during an outing in Immokalee Nov. 16.



ERMD biological technician Mandy D'Andrea, left, forester Grant Steelman, center, and environmental science manager Karli Eckel examine and photograph various grasses growing in Immokalee.

Artist Elgin Jumper hits the road à la Highwaymen

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BRIGHTON — Inspired by the Jim Crow-era artists known as the Florida Highwaymen, Seminole artist Elgin Jumper has been creating and selling his paintings in outdoor locations throughout Florida.

The Highwaymen were a group of 26 African American artists living in the Fort Pierce area in the 1950s. Because of segregation, they couldn't sell their art in galleries and sold them directly from the trunks of their cars.

"They took their paintings out to the people," Jumper said. "They seized the initiative and made art history in Florida. Now their paintings are everywhere, including in important museums."

The Highwaymen developed a method called the "fast style" of painting. The paintings were often done from memory instead of on the scene. The artists would line up canvasses or boards and approach the art as an assembly line and work on foreground, mid-ground, background, skies, waterways and vibrant parts of the landscapes. They

could sell up to 50 paintings a week.

According to the Highwaymen's website, the method became a business model for the Highwaymen, who created about 200,000 paintings from the mid-1950s to 1970. To sell the paintings, the artists brought them to various businesses along the state's east coast, including professional and medical offices, banks, and other businesses.

"The Highwaymen set a precedent and a road map for other painters to follow," Jumper said. "But my target customers are tourists."

Lately, Jumper has been painting a lot of landscapes. He said he enjoys traveling through the diverse landscapes of the Everglades from Trail to Big Cypress. Over the past few months, he has been to Brighton, Immokalee, Loxahatchee, Okeechobee and as far north as St. Augustine.

Jumper was taught to paint live in the outdoors from his friend, the late Jimmy Osceola, who was a very fast painter. Jumper is considerably slower; he starts by sketching the outline of a scene before painting it. Since he often finishes his paintings in the studio, Jumper also takes photos to document the



Elgin Jumper paints a holiday scene in Brighton featuring the reservation's large Christmas tree Dec. 14.



Elgin Jumper displays some of his paintings at the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Big Cypress.



Elgin Jumper talks to art lovers Jill and Mike Malchow about his paintings. The Malchows were visiting Brighton from Indiana.

light and sky of the moment.

"One time we were out painting and Jimmy signed his painting and gave it to me," Jumper recalled. "He was fast; I was still sketching and he was finished. He mastered the technique called alla prima painting, which means one session in Italian."

Jumper is currently working with oil instead of acrylic paint. Oil paint is an older and more traditional medium and dries slowly. He said the color of oil paint is more vibrant than acrylics.

"You can take your time working it and push the paint around the canvas," Jumper said. "I like the way the colors blend together. The oil does all the work, it does stuff that acrylic doesn't do."

A prolific painter, Jumper often sells his pieces before they are completely dry, just as the Highwaymen did.



Elgin Jumper starts a painting of the large community Christmas tree on the Brighton Reservation.

Tribal community, casino help bring joy to less fortunate with annual toy drive

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — The Seminole Tribe of Florida Inc. & Seminole Tribe of Florida Toy Drive was held Dec. 2 and Dec. 3 at the Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood.

Members of the tribal community, Seminole Gaming employees and the public donated toys for the less fortunate. Officials and staff from the Tribal Council and Seminole Tribe of Florida Inc., casino officials, members of the U.S. Marine Corps "Toys for Tots," Miss Florida Seminole

Thomlynn Billie, Jr. Miss Seminole Tahnia Billie and Santa Claus were among those in attendance to help.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Guillermo Laguna, President's special events coordinator Jojo Osceola, Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, Classic Casino general manager Edward Aguilar, Board President Holly Tiger, Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Tahnia Billie, Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers and U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Samantha Reed join Santa Claus as toys are donated Dec. 2 for the Marine's "Toys for Tots" program.



Calvin Tiger

Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie receives dropoff gifts for the toy drive.



Courtesy photo

Santa, Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers and Brian Billie stand along State Road 7 encouraging motorists to donate toys.



Courtesy photo

With Santa at the toy drive are, from left to right, JoJo Osceola, Kyle Doney, Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola and Alexandra Tommie-James.



Courtesy photo

Hundreds of donated toys fill a trailer at the toy drive.



Calvin Tiger

A large crate filled with donated toys collected by Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood is brought to the toy drive. Board President Holly Tiger, center, and, to her right, Classic Casino general manager Edward Aguilar were among those in attendance for the dropoff.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Big Cypress Board Rep. Nadine Bowers, Tony Presutti, Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, Jr. Miss Seminole Tahnia Billie, Anthony Amaroso, Kiki Espanol, Michael Cantu, Jojo Osceola, Santa Claus, Classic Casino general manager Edward Aguilar and Aaron Tommie, show their support for the toy drive.

ERMD's "Invasive Fish Event and Trash Bash" a smash

BY JOE ANDREOLI
Environmental Resource Management Department

BIG CYPRESS — The Environmental Resource Management Department (ERMD) was thrilled to host the first ERMD Big Cypress "Invasive Fishing Event and Trash Bash" from Nov. 17-19 with the support of the Big Cypress Council's Office and Public Works Department. Kids and adults helped beautify the Big Cypress Reservation by removing trash and invasive fish that could harm people and native wildlife. When all was said and done, tribal members and sponsored non-tribal participants removed 652.5 pounds of trash from the reservation, with first and second place winners separated by just under eight pounds.

Invasive fish, defined as fish causing environmental, economic, and/or social harm, were turned in by the bucketful. The results of the Invasive Fishing Event were even closer than those of Trash Bash. The top two teams by weight of invasive fish caught were separated by under two and a half pounds. One-hundred seventeen total pounds of invasive fish were turned in to

ERMD before being identified, measured, weighed, and securely disposed. The three most common species entered for a chance at a prize were oscars, sailfin catfish, and at a whopping 127 fish submitted, Mayan cichlids. If ERMD had laid all the invasive fish caught — from the tiny African jewel fish to the titanic sailfin catfish — in a single line from mouth to tail, that line would reach 54.32 yards, slightly more than the width of a football field.

Did you miss November's event and want to win prizes for the most trash collected, Invasive Fish Grand Slam, heaviest combined weight of fish, or longest fish? Are you defending your win from last year, or itching for a rematch? Do you want to start 2024 right by bashing some trash and invasive fish species on the Big Cypress Reservation? Then register for the next ERMD Big Cypress Invasive Fishing Event and Trash Bash from Jan. 19-21 by emailing ERMDWildlife@semtribe.com or picking up a registration packet at the Big Cypress ERMD office. ERMD is looking forward to once again hosting this fun and educational event for all ages.



Mandy D'Andrea/ERMD

Allie Billie practices how to safely handle a Mayan cichlid after a quick demonstration by biological technician Joe Andreoli.



Mandy D'Andrea/ERMD

From left to right, Clinton Billie, Camille Billie and Clint Billie show off their team's entry for an invasive fish grand slam of Mayan cichlids, butterfly peacock bass and blue tilapia.



ERMD

Some of the more than 600 pounds of trash removed from the Big Cypress Reservation.

Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee to host upcoming events

FROM PRESS RELEASE

IMMOKALEE — Here's a look at upcoming events at Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee:

- Celebration in the Sky on Jan. 13 at 9 p.m. Guests are encouraged to arrive early for the largest land-based fireworks show in Southwest Florida. All ages are welcome and admission is free. Guests should bring their own chair.
- Fourth annual Rockabillaque Florida on Jan. 20 starting at 11 a.m. Billed as the biggest festival of its kind in Florida, the event celebrates mid-century and 1950s Americana, and includes a classic car and vintage bike show. The entertainment lineup features free performances from headliners JD McPherson (California), Hillbilly

Moon Explosion (Switzerland), Peter & The Wolves (Canada), The Rock-A-Sonics (Maryland), Messer Chups (Russia) and others. A kickoff party will be held Jan. 19 at the Zig Zag Lounge featuring live music. The Atomic Splash Pool Party (ticketed) will be held Jan. 21 and feature a vintage swimsuit competition, live music and more.

- Willie Nelson on Feb. 7 at 8 p.m. With a seven-decade career, Willie Nelson has earned dozens of awards as a musician and amassed reputable credentials as an author, actor and activist.
- Country singer Aaron Lewis on Feb. 8 at 8 p.m.
- Country singer Dustin Lynch on Feb. 16 at 8 p.m.

For more information visit seminoleimmokaleecasino.com.

CASINO
From page 1A

Florida's only legal mobile sportsbook is available through Hard Rock Bet (hardrock.bet/florida/). A message on its website welcomes those in the Sunshine State to place bets on sports.

"It doesn't matter whether you're in Key West, Jacksonville, or Pensacola, sports betting in Florida is legal so long as you're 21+ years of age, are located in the state, and have an account with Hard Rock Bet in good standing," the message states.

The launch of craps, roulette and sports betting came after more than two years of court battles challenging the tribe and state's compact. A favorable ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in October helped clear the path for the debut of the new games.

"The chairman, myself, and (Brighton) Councilman (Larry) Howard went up to Tallahassee back in April of '21 and Chairman Osceola signed a compact with Gov. DeSantis that day and we thought we were off to the races," Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola said to the audience at the Seminole Casino Coconut Creek ceremony Dec. 7. "Lo and behold, somebody wanted to hold us up and here we are two and a-half years later and the race starts today."

"That's what we do, we persevere, we survive, we're resilient," President Holly Tiger said at the ceremony.

Hollywood/Coconut Creek

Ceremonies to celebrate the new games started Dec. 7 at the tribe's three casinos in Broward County.

First up was a morning ceremony at Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood, the location where the tribe's gaming began 44 years ago as a bingo hall.

Chairman Osceola had the honor of rolling the dice to open craps as he was accompanied by fellow tribal council representatives, Classic Casino general manager Edward Aguilar, actor Adam Beach and former NFL star Edgerrin James.

It was Seminole Casino Coconut Creek's turn in the afternoon. For years, pictures of the tribe's past have adorned the walls near an entrance to the casino. Visitors can see Seminole cattlemen in the 1940s aboard their horses on the Brighton Reservation; the pounding of corn into a meal in the 1950s; and Mary Osceola making lapale, Emma Micco making a palmetto basket and Moses

Jumper wrestling an alligator.

In his address to the audience, Chairman Osceola paid tribute to the tribe's ancestors.

"Because of their effort and their sacrifice and their dedication to survive, we're here today, we're able to celebrate on their behalf," he said.

NSYNC's Chris Kirkpatrick and Joey Fatone, actor and comedian Rob Riggle and actress Jacky Bracamontes were among the celebrities that helped kick off the games in Coconut Creek.

The day was capped off with a star-studded evening at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.

Red carpet appearances were made by tribal members, including the Tribal Council and Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, and Hard Rock International Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen. Celebrities involved in the evening included Jon Bon Jovi, Gloria and Emilio Estefan, Udonis Haslem, Sarah Hyland, Rick Ross, Dwayne Wade and others.

Tampa

At the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa, the red carpet was rolled out for tribal leadership, celebrities and sports stars to inaugurate the new games and sports betting Dec. 8.

"The impact will be on a global level, this will change a lot," Chairman Osceola said. "We have a lot of people already set up with lines of credit. Hollywood broke a lot of records last night. This is a game changer not only for us, but for the industry."

Chairman Osceola said Tampa is the top grossing casino in North America and that wouldn't have happened without the dedication of its employees.

"This is a historical day," said Brighton Councilman Larry Howard. "The tribe and the state are in this together. We made a better life for our folks, so now we can make a better life for everyone in the state."

"I'm just as excited as anyone," said Councilman Osceola. "This will bring a whole new customer base. There are a lot of people who will come for craps, roulette and sports betting."

Councilman Osceola said the tribe didn't get here alone and credited CEO of Seminole Gaming and Chairman of Hard Rock International Jim Allen for his vision and called the tribe's general council Jim Shore and his legal team unsung heroes.

◆ See CASINOS on page 11A



Kevin Johnson

As he is introduced to the audience in Brighton, Seminole Casino Brighton general manager Marty Johns receives handshakes and applause from, left to right, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., President Holly Tiger and Brighton Councilman Larry Howard at the opening of craps, roulette and sports betting Dec. 11.



Kevin Johnson

With President Holly Tiger next to him, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard delivers the first toss of the dice in a craps game at Seminole Casino Brighton.



Kevin Johnson

Enjoying a lighter moment with a dealer at the Coconut Creek opening ceremony are, from left to right, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., Brighton Board Rep. Bryan Arledge, President Holly Tiger and celebrities Joey Fatone and Chris Kirkpatrick.



Kevin Johnson

Paul Bowers says a prayer at the start of the ceremony at Seminole Casino Coconut Creek on Dec. 7.



Kevin Johnson

Sandy Billie Jr., center, meets Jimmy Johnson, left, and Evander Holyfield during the opening of craps and roulette at the Seminole Casino Brighton on Dec. 11. Johnson won a national football championship as coach of the University of Miami and won a Super Bowl as coach of the Dallas Cowboys. Holyfield is a former heavyweight boxing champion.



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, actor and comedian Rob Riggle, Brighton Councilman Larry Howard, Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola and Hard Rock International Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen are at the roulette table for the ceremonial first spin at the Seminole Casino Coconut Creek.



Beverly Bidney

Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie enjoys Immokalee's opening ceremony.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Amy Yzaguirre, retired mixed martial artist Tito Ortiz, Amy Garza and Juanita Martinez at the opening of sports betting and the craps and roulette games at the Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on Dec. 11.



Kevin Johnson

Tribal members in the audience for the Coconut Creek ceremony included Deloris Alvarez, left, and Edna McDuffie.



Beverly Bidney

Former college and NFL coach Jimmy Johnson, left, with Richard Osceola, center, and Ray Garza at the opening day of the new games in Immokalee.



Beverly Bidney

Tony Orlando gives a thumbs up during his performance in Immokalee.



Calvin Tiger
 With President Holly Tiger and celebrity couple Gloria and Emilio Estefan looking on, Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. rolls the dice as craps gets underway at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on Dec. 7.



Beverly Bidney
 Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. throws the first dice on one of the two craps tables at Seminole Casino & Hotel Immokalee as from left, President Holly Tiger, singer Ashanti and former college and NFL coach Jimmy Johnson watch Dec. 11.



Calvin Tiger
 Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood general manager Edward Aguilar speaks Dec. 7 during the launch of craps, roulette and sports betting.



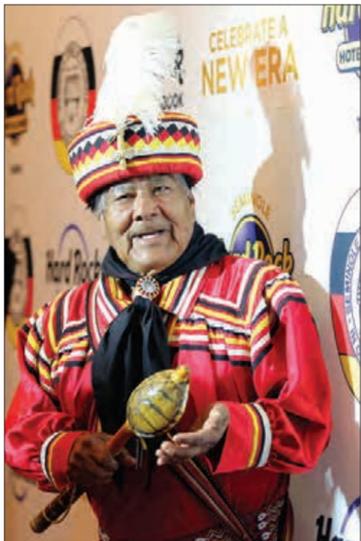
Calvin Tiger
 Summer Tiger and her husband, actor Adam Beach, attend the opening ceremony for the new casino games Dec. 7 at Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood.



Calvin Tiger
 Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola speaks to the audience at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood ceremony Dec. 7.



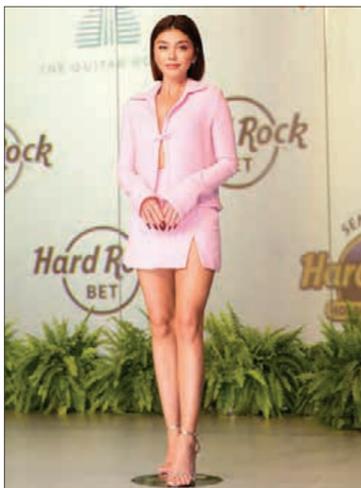
Calvin Tiger
 Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood is filled with tribal leaders, guests, media and spectators Dec. 7 for the debut of craps, roulette and sports betting at Seminole Tribe casinos.



Beverly Bidney
 Medicine man Bobby Henry arrives on the red carpet at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa Dec. 8.



Beverly Bidney
 Wrestling superstar Hulk Hogan talks to reporters at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa ceremony.



Calvin Tiger (2)
 Celebrities walking the red carpet at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood on Dec. 7 included actress Sarah Hyland, above, and former Miami Heat star Udonis Haslem, below.



Calvin Tiger
 Legendary rock n' roll star Jon Bon Jovi, left, and his son, Jesse Bongiovi, appear on the red carpet at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Dec. 7.



Beverly Bidney
 From left to right, Tampa Reservation administrator Richard Henry, and Tampa residents Sunny Ploch, Jessica Lopez and Corinne Zepeda attend the ceremony at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa.



Calvin Tiger
 From left to right, NBA star Dwayne Wade and rappers Ja Rule, Rick Ross and Fat Joe enjoy their time at the opening of craps, roulette and sports betting Dec. 7 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.



Beverly Bidney
 Eddie George, a former Heisman Trophy winner and NFL running back, center, places his bet at a roulette table at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa as MLB Hall of Famer Wade Boggs (with beard) looks on.

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

Christmas in the collection

BY LAURA DELLO RUSSO
Registrar

BIG CYPRESS — Christmas can be found even within museum collections. Mixed in amongst the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's nearly 240,000 cultural objects and archival materials, several holiday-themed items bring a touch of the Christmas season to the expansive vaults. Ranging from the early 20th century to today, these festive items show just how the Seminole community has celebrated the season throughout the decades.

First, a box housing two Christmas

Osceola to his friend Robert Peyinghaus is amongst the historic documents filed away on the shelves. The front of the card features an image of Santa Claus decorating an orange tree with garland, along with the greeting "Christmas Wishes from Florida." Inside the card, Douglas writes, "Hi Robert, The family's fine and Douglas in 3rd grade and Wanda in 2nd grade and both like school very much. I hope the greeting card will find you in a good health. Your Friend, Douglas Osceola." The card was included in a 2021 donation from Katherine "Kitti" Ginn, whose husband's great-grandfather was Robert Peyinghaus. Robert worked as a local county engineer in the 1940s and 1950s, at



Christmas stockings made by Judy Jim.



Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Photograph of a 1930s Christmas celebration in Brighton.

stockings can be found within the rows of intricately sewn patchwork skirts, lace capes, and historic big shirts. These stockings were made by Judy Jim in 2017, and they celebrate both the Christmas season and Florida's prominent sports teams. One, with patterns in orange, white, and teal, features a football helmet and logo for the Miami Dolphins. The other, a stocking with bands of gold, white, and garnet, includes the logo for Florida State University. Stockings like these showcase the merger of traditional patchwork with modern subjects and designs, a practice which is important to represent within the collection. Similar Christmas stockings are popular creations amongst the Seminole community, and they are often found being sold at markets around the holiday season.

In the archives, a 1955 Christmas card from Douglas

which time he befriended the Seminole and Miccosukee communities.

The archival vault is also home to thousands of photographs, including a selection of images from the historic William

and Edith Boehmer collection. Part of this collection chronicles a Christmas celebration on the Brighton Reservation in the late 1930s, and, in one of the photos, Harry Tommie, Jack Micco, Frances Tigertail, Alice Micco, Leoda Jumper, Casey Bowers and Storeman Osceola can be seen posing in front a shimmering, tinsel-covered Christmas tree. Other photos from this selection feature images of handmade Christmas decorations, gift-making, and other festive activities. Many of these images showcase some of the first Christmas celebrations held on the Brighton Reservation.

These are just a few examples of Christmas within the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's significant collection. A simple search through the online collection would result in an even greater array of objects which celebrate this festive time of year, including hundreds of photographs from the Seminole Tribune. These more contemporary photographs feature Christmas parties, festivals, and other holidays activities that the Tribune has documented from the 1980s to today. The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's collections division welcomes all Seminole community members to search through these photographs to find their own Christmas party memories. The photos can be accessed through the museum's website or by visiting semtribe.pastperfectonline.com.

Happy Holidays!



A Christmas card from Douglas Osceola, ca. 1955.

3 questions with Tara Backhouse on museum's achievement

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum on the Big Cypress Reservation was one of 41 museums to be reaccredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in 2023. The AAM made the announcement in a Nov. 28, 2023, news release. Fewer than 5% of the country's estimated 33,000 museums are accredited.

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum was the first tribally owned museum to be accredited by the AAM in 2009, and it is now the first to be reaccredited. The reaccreditation is good for 10 years.

"It is a massive accomplishment as it represents a continuity of excellence over a long period, which is always very hard to achieve," Paul Backhouse, the senior director of the tribe's Heritage and Environment Resources Office, which oversees the museum, said.

According to the AAM, reaccreditation is achieved through a rigorous and detailed process of self-assessment, and a review and site visit by a team of peers.

The Tribune asked the museum's curator, Tara Backhouse (Paul Backhouse's wife), to elaborate on the achievement with three questions. Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Tribune: Why is reaccreditation important?

Backhouse: When a museum is accredited, it promises a high professional level of service to its community. Without striving to achieve this honor, a museum's historic collection could suffer damage, our exhibits might not be accurate and informative, our building may not be safe for staff and visitors, and our customer service might not be very good. Those are some of

the areas that have to be excellent in order to achieve accreditation. The museum preserves a historic collection of over 200,000 objects, our exhibits are community inspired, and our campus is beautifully maintained.

Tribune: Many pieces need to fall into place?

Backhouse: There are a number of core documents required, policies and procedures such as an emergency plan, a code of ethics, a collections management policy, a strategic plan and an interpretive plan. We also submitted a self-study in which we answered many questions about the museum's mission, programs and community engagement. The museum management team (executive director, director, collections manager, registrar, head of exhibitions, education coordinator, visitor services manager, retail manager and facilities manager) worked on this self-study and revised the core documents for approximately 12 months prior to a March 2023 submission.

Tribune: Anything else you want to share with the tribal community?

Backhouse: The accreditation and reaccreditation journey goes back many years. Tina Osceola did an amazing job when she spearheaded the original accreditation effort in the early 2000s. The museum became the first tribally owned museum to be accredited by the AAM. We are one of only two tribally owned museums that are accredited. The other is in Alaska. It is thanks to the leadership of our director, Gordon Oliver Wareham, that we have maintained these high standards and have achieved a second honor — the first tribally owned museum to be reaccredited by the AAM.

For more, go to ahtahthiki.com.



Courtesy photo

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum's reaccreditation was announced in November 2023.

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

January 2024

Foraging, the oldest method of human subsistence, is still practiced today by many peoples all over the world. For foragers, it is extremely important to know which plants, fungi, and other natural materials are safe for human consumption. That is why foraging should only be practiced strictly under the guidance of seasoned experts. When foraging in Florida, one might come across *Physalis walteri*, more commonly known as Walter's Ground Cherry.

The leaves of this plant are elliptical, oval-shaped, and the stems are pubescent, which means that they are covered in fine hairs (Ward, 2008:204). They produce yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers. The ripened fruit is a golden yellow, encased in a pale, papery husk ([Offbeet-Gardener.com](http://offbeet-gardener.com)).



The Spruce, 2023

Walter's Ground Cherry is one of nine ground-cherry species native to Florida. As a member of the Solanaceae family, *Physalis walteri* is related to many commonly eaten fruits, such as tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers ([Offbeet-Gardener.com](http://offbeet-gardener.com)). Species in the Solanaceae family are also known as nightshades, and many of these species can be very toxic. This applies to *Physalis walteri*, along with the rest of the ground cherries; thus, caution should be exercised when foraging for them. Only the ripe fruit is safe to eat, while the outer husk and unripened fruit are toxic and inedible ([Wild South Florida](http://wildsouthflorida.com)). They have also been found to be good sources of vitamin C (Shenstone et al., 2020).



THPO

Physalis walteri is a perennial plant, meaning that these plants live for multiple years. They thrive in the warmer climate of the southeastern United States, and can be found all throughout Florida and as far north as Virginia (United States Department of Agriculture).

To learn more about all the incredible artifacts within our collection, please visit the THPO website at www.stofthpo.com.

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SEMINOLE HISTORY STORIES - JANUARY 2024

TRIBAL ANCESTORS: THE CALUSA

The Seminole Tribe are the descendants of the Indigenous people of Florida, a continuous line of those that have lived in the peninsula for over 12,000 years. The ancestors were a diverse group, towns and cultures that interacted with each other in trade, competition, marriage, and battle. A great deal of knowledge on the Ancestors was lost due to the impacts of colonization but through the histories and culture passed to their descendants, they are not lost.

The Calusa are one of the best-known Ancestral groups. Making their homes along the southwest of the Florida peninsula, they were masterful sailors and fishermen, drawing enough food from the waters and trade to support their towns without farming the land. The ancestors of the Calusa came from the Caribbean, moving up the island chains from South America. The Calusa maintained trade and diplomacy with the Taino and other Indigenous people of Cuba.



These connections became crucial when Spanish colonizers arrived in the region. Refugees from Cuba warned the Calusa of the threat, and when Ponce de Leon landed his invading force on their shore the Calusa were prepared, driving the Spanish off and dealing the conquistador a mortal blow. They successfully kept the Spanish from colonizing their territory or establishing successful Missions, while also maintaining diplomatic relations and trade.

While the Calusa were able to keep from being colonized, they could not stop the other threats that came to Florida. European diseases dealt lethal blows to Calusa towns. Northern tribes allied with the English drove far into Florida on slave raids, targeting the Calusa and other tribes seen as Spanish allies. When Britain took control of Florida, some Calusa joined the Spanish in fleeing to Cuba. Others around this time were close with the Spanish fishing towns along the coast, and these groups would grow together to become known as the "Spanish Indians." Still others pulled back into the Florida swamps. When the Seminole War came, these now much smaller populations joined with the Seminole and other Indigenous people of Florida. The Calusa were adopted into the Bear Clan, and their descendants thrive today as part of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

TO LEARN MORE
 Visit the Tribal Historic Preservation Office website at stofthpo.com or use the QR code
 For more Seminole history resources



Health

CEO: Native American health care remains vastly underfunded

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Berkeley School of Public Health

Until the federal government spends more on healthcare for Native Americans, they will not reach parity with the rest of the nation, according to Trula Ann Breuninger (Diné, member of the Navajo Nation).

Breuninger, who earned her MPH from University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health in 1991, has spent more than 20 years in the healthcare and social services industries, working with private enterprises and tribal governments in Arizona, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Oregon.

In June, she became CEO of Native American Connections, a Native American-operated nonprofit organization, which works to improve the lives of individuals and families through culturally appropriate health, affordable housing, and community development services. She oversees a staff of 200.

We spoke to Breuninger in October. The conversation has been edited for clarity.

Berkeley Public Health: What is the current state of health—and healthcare—for Native Americans?

Breuninger: It's very complex. Over time if you look at outcomes for Native Americans, mortality rates have improved. Vaccination coverage among American Indian children is higher than national levels for most vaccines. But if you look at all the statistics and outcomes, it's still bad. Maternal health has improved over time, but there's a huge disparity in access to health [care services], that is related to funding. The government is not funding healthcare facilities at the levels we should get, based on need.

BPH: What are the greatest health care problems in Native American communities right now?

Breuninger: In every population, addiction is a huge problem. I would say behavioral health, mental health, substance abuse services, need to be funded at higher levels, and this is not just in communities of color. Organizations like NAC fight to address these issues, including opioid addiction. It's unconscionable that the

overprescribing of opioids is still occurring.

BPH: Where, specifically, is the health system for Native Americans underfunded?

Breuninger: The entire health care system that serves Native Americans: Indian Health Service, Tribal Health programs, and Urban Indian Health programs.

The federal government does not cover the needs and address the disparities. The healthcare systems are underfunded, even though the federal government is responsible for providing healthcare for all Native Americans.

BPH: How are you working to change that?

Breuninger: We, individuals, tribal governments, and national Native American advocacy groups advocate at the congressional level all the time. Of course, a Democratic congress is always better, but that doesn't mean it will still fulfill the healthcare needs.

BPH: Who are your champions on Capitol Hill?

Many individuals in political office champion our cause; generally, those who know about Indian health disparities and/or have constituents who are Native American.

BPH: What are your goals as CEO of Native American Connections?

We're always striving to reach more people and expand our services with a more robust integrated health model. For example, a systematic coordination of primary and behavioral health approach toward caring for people in need.

BPH: What are your biggest challenges?

For anybody who assumes a position of leadership in communities that are underrepresented, you're constantly advocating for the vulnerable populations you serve. You're trying to get more resources, a seat at the table, and building partnerships. That seems to be a majority of my job.

NAC is very active in the community; in city, county, state and the regional level. You have to be the voice for your clients, patients, and community.

I believe that people tend to listen because I am Native American representing my community, plus I have years of experience, the background, and education.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Suzanne Davis, Carline Osceola and Shirley Clay share laughter and smiles at the "Jingle Your Bells Walk/Run Challenge" on Dec. 20 at Seminole Estates on the Hollywood Reservation.

Hollywood walk promotes healthy holidays

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD —The "Jingle Your Bells Walk/Run Challenge" was held Dec. 20 at the Seminole Estates on the Hollywood Reservation for the tribal community. The tribe's Health and Human Services Department organized the event, which was led by health educator Jasmine Tennie.

Tennie started the event by teaching stretching exercises to the participants. Holiday prizes and healthy smoothies were provided at the end of the event.



Calvin Tiger

Health educator Jasmine Tennie and Jay Holata participate in the Jingle Your Bells event.

Native health, economic conferences to be held in California

FROM PRESS RELEASE

The 14th annual Native American Healthcare Conference will be held June 18-19 at Pechanga Resort Casino in Temecula, California.

Healthcare directors, decision-makers, and tribal leaders will hear from industry experts on preventative disease, wellness, and other health-related topics facing Indian Country. Tribal communities generally experience numerous health disparities and are among the most vulnerable and least resourced to address continuing care. Attendees will learn about cutting-edge

updates, the newest treatments, equipment, and opportunities, as well as discuss the current state of the industry and trends for the future.

This event is being held in conjunction with the annual Native American Economic Development Conference, the ninth Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference, and the sixth Tribal Finance Conference. All the conferences will be held in the same location and on the same days.

Registration for one conference provides access to all four.

For more information go to nativenationevents.org.



Calvin Tiger

From left to right, Seminole Fire Rescue Lt. Tyler McKerchie, Fire Rescue Firefighter/Medic Jenni Lebron, Abrielle Davy, Jasmine Tennie, Jay Holata, Shirley Clay, Richard Hendricks, Carline Osceola, Seminole Police service aide Dee Turing, service aide Colby Walker, Diana Pinot-Sanchez and Suzanne Davis gather after walk/run concluded.

Happy New Year!

Now is a great time to start new habits that will keep yourself, your family, and your community healthy.

Eating right, getting plenty of exercise and enough sleep are key to a healthy lifestyle. Talk with your health care provider about changes you can make to let the New Year be one of your best years.



As a tribal member, you can enroll in the Marketplace, Medicaid, or CHIP all year. Review your health coverage options.

For more information, contact your local Indian health care provider, visit HealthCare.gov, or call 1-800-318-2596



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SEMINOLE SCENES



Kevin Johnson, above, (2); Beverly Bidney, below, (2)

HOLIDAY CHEER: Reservations were filled with winter and Christmas scenes in December. Above is tribal headquarters at night and its lobby; below is a Candyland Christmas at the Immokalee gym and a Nativity scene in Brighton.



Courtesy photo

PRAISE FROM TRACE: Country music singer Trace Adkins, center, visited the Florida Seminole Veterans Building on Dec. 14 in Brighton. Adkins toured the building and WTIR radio studio with Stormin Youngblood, left, and Reina Micco. While there, Adkins recorded a message in which he said the building was impressive and so was the representation of tribal members who served in the military.



Beverly Bidney

UP AND COMING: The first walls of the Seminole Casino Hotel Brighton are in the process of going up on the busy 75-acre construction site on Reservation Road. The building is slated to open in 2024 and will feature a nearly 38,000-square-foot casino and a 100-room hotel.



Beverly Bidney

BANDING TOGETHER: Members of the Florida State University marching band join Seminole Tribe Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., center, at the governor's mansion in Tallahassee on Nov. 28 during a Native American Heritage Month event.



Kevin Johnson

ROCKIN' COPTER: A Seminole Hard Rock helicopter parks on the Brighton Reservation while a ceremony for the opening of craps and roulette at the Seminole Casino Brighton took place Dec. 11.

NATIONAL NATIVE NEWS

Arizona CEO allegedly embezzled millions of dollars intended for Native American health care

PHOENIX — The CEO of a health care provider for the White Mountain Apache Tribe has been indicted for allegedly funneling millions of dollars to a shell company he owned.

On Dec. 14, a grand jury returned a 40-count indictment against Kevin McKenzie, 47, and Corina Martinez, 41, for an alleged embezzlement scheme involving Apache Behavioral Health Services, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office of Arizona.

ABHS is tasked with providing services to members of the White Mountain Apache Tribe in eastern Arizona who are suffering from depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts, according to the ABHS website.

While serving in leadership roles between 2015 and 2023, McKenzie allegedly used two contracts to funnel money from ABHS into his pocket.

One contract paid \$32 million to Helping Everyday Youth, which had an agreement with McKenzie to allocate \$14 million to a company that the CEO owned, prosecutors said.

Investigators found no evidence of McKenzie's company providing legitimate services for ABHS, court records show.

Helping Everyday Youth, which provided counseling services at schools, had not performed any contracting work for ABHS since the relinquishment of HEDY employees to ABHS in 2015, according to the indictment filed against McKenzie.

McKenzie allegedly concealed the true nature of his "backdoor financial relationship" with HEDY to the ABHS's board of directors, court records show.

Another contract paid \$15 million to a company associated with Martinez that did not perform any services for ABHS. Portions of the proceeds were allegedly split between McKenzie and Martinez.

Court records show Martinez is the sister of McKenzie's significant other.

The defendants are accused of spending large sums of money on a \$925,000 home in Tucson, a \$125,000 Rolls Royce and \$800,000 in paying off credit card debt.

The charges listed in the indictment include embezzlement, wire fraud and theft concerning programs receiving federal funds. McKenzie is also charged with attempted witness tampering.

- 12News (Phoenix)

30,000 acres of land in Maine are being restored to Penobscot Nation

The Penobscot Nation and nonprofit Trust for Public Land announced Nov. 1 a plan to return nearly 30,000 forested acres in Maine back to the governance of the tribe. The land represents a portion of what was taken from them in the 1800s, and it's part of a larger effort to restore ancestral homelands to Indigenous stewardship.

The land near the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument is well forested and previously managed for industrial timber. It also contains more than 4,000 acres of wetlands and 53 miles of streams and rivers in the Penobscot River watershed. This is part of a larger area that is sacred to tribal culture and community.

"It's reconnecting us to that traditional territory, in a way. We're not getting that treaty land back but we're at least getting closer," says Chuck Loring, director of natural resources for the Penobscot Nation.

Loring says he's excited about stewarding wildlife habitat for bear, moose and salmon. Because of the parcel's size, elevation and biological diversity, Loring says it will also be important for mitigating the effects of climate change and will add to an existing network of conserved lands across 1.2 million acres.

The Trust for Public Land secured loans to purchase the property as an interim owner last year and is now working with the Penobscot Nation to raise \$32 million to pay them off.

Once the project is completed, the land will be transferred without a conservation easement in a way that supports Indigenous self-determination. The plan also calls for creation of a "much needed" southern point of access to the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

In a written statement, TPL said the move aligns with its commitment "to support Tribal nations and Indigenous communities in their efforts to recover, restore and protect their ancestral homelands."

And Penobscot Nation Chief Kirk Francis said the tribe is "ecstatic for the opportunity...to conserve more land in the Katahdin region for our future generations."

- Maine Public/New England News Collaborative

Manitoba First Nation sues feds, alleges unchanged \$5 annuity payments violate treaty

Fisher River Cree Nation (Manitoba, Canada) wants class-action status for its lawsuit against the federal government, which alleges the \$5 annuities paid to Treaty 5 First Nations over the last 148 years violate the agreement because they don't keep up with inflation.

The First Nation wants to represent all Treaty 5 nations and their members who opt in to the class action.

Stefan Lorne Cochrane, a former chief and band councillor of Fisher River, would be the lead plaintiff, according to

the statement of claim filed at the Manitoba court of King's Bench on Dec. 12.

In the suit, Fisher River claims the Crown breached its obligations under Treaty 5 by failing to regularly increase the \$5 annuities to maintain their value at the time of the document's 1875 signing.

None of the allegations have been proven in court. A statement of defence has not been filed.

There are 36 First Nation communities that make up Treaty 5, which spans about 260,000 square kilometres across northern and central Manitoba as well as small parts of eastern Saskatchewan and western Ontario, according to the suit.

The Crown entered into Treaty 5 with various Saulteaux and Swampy Cree First Nations in and around northern Manitoba in September 1875 with a promise to provide one-time and continuous supports in exchange for the use and occupation of their lands and resources, the suit says.

"One of Canada's key promises was to make annual payments to Treaty 5 nations and their members," the suit says. That included \$5 for members, \$25 for chiefs, \$15 for councillors and \$500 for the nation each year.

The annuities were presented in a specific monetary amount but represented "a level of purchasing power," the suit says.

First Nations interpreted that promise as a guarantee that the annuities would improve their quality of life or at least provide their basic needs into the future, the suit says.

Fisher River members have seen their day-to-day expenses rise, but their treaty annuity amount remains frozen in 1875, the suit says.

"Over the same period of time, the value of the land and resources claimed by Canada through Treaty 5 has grown astronomically, yielding billions of dollars in revenue for the benefit of the Crown and settlers," the suit states.

"No one could have reasonably expected that prices would rapidly rise and the purchasing power of the annuities would fall," it says.

The federal government promised Treaty 5 nations a level of monetary value each year and then contributed to the inflation that destroyed most if not all of it, which means it was required to increase the annuities to compensate for that difference, the suit claims.

The lawsuit seeks aggravated and punitive damages. It also requests liquidated damages for breaches of Treaty 5 that amount to the difference between the annuities adjusted for inflation and what was actually paid, and special damages accounting for interest on that lost money.

In the alternative of liquidated or special damages, the First Nation would also accept equitable compensation for the Crown breaching its fiduciary duty as outlined in Treaty 5, according to the suit.

Fisher River also requests court declarations that say the annual payments must be adjusted for inflation and the Crown has breached and continues to breach Treaty 5 by not modifying them.

Last month, the Supreme Court of Canada heard Ontario's appeal of a provincial court's decision that it had an obligation to increase Robinson-Huron treaty annuities, which were capped at \$4 per person in 1874 and haven't increased since.

In February, Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation also sued the federal government for \$11 billion on behalf of Treaty 1 status members, arguing they're owed "full and fair" annual payments promised by the Crown as part of treaties signed in the early days of Confederation.

CBC News reached out to Fisher River Cree Nation and Crown-Indigenous relations for comment but has not heard back.

- CBC News

Hoopa Valley Tribe reclaims 10,000+ acres of ancestral lands in historic deal

HUMBOLDT COUNTY, Calif. — The Hoopa Valley Tribe announced they have acquired over 10,000 acres of land bordering the western boundary of the tribe's reservation.

According to Tribal officials, the acquisition of the 10,395 acres, previously held by New Forests—an Australia-based forestland manager—constitutes the tribe's largest re-acquisition of land since the Hoopa Valley Reservation was established in 1864.

"Today is a day of intense celebration for our tribe," said Hoopa Valley Tribal Chairman Joe Davis. "As a tribal nation that has long led the way in self-governance and self-determination, the Hoopa Valley Tribe worked hard to secure this once-in-a-generation opportunity to reclaim a meaningful portion of our ancestral lands."

They say New Forests put the land up for sale in 2022, allowing Tribal leaders to work with The Conservation Fund—a non-profit in U.S. land and water protection—to negotiate the deal and secure the necessary public land and private funding to close on the purchase. The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit focused on improving access to the outdoors, reportedly provided vital support in securing funding as well.

Officials with the Hoopa Valley Tribe say the re-acquisition includes the headwaters of Pine Creek, which flows into the Klamath River and is a spawning stream for sacred salmon. They say the land also provides gathering sites for food and basketry materials, along with a variety of plant and wildlife species that hold great importance in the tribe's culture.

"There is still a lot of work to do," Davis said in regards to the restoration projects planned for Pine Creek. "But we continue to make progress in getting back to where we

need to be." According to officials, the tribe will restore the historic salmon run in Pine Creek, building on the inter-tribal and inter-agency efforts underway to restore Trinity river and remove the dams on the Klamath River.

Tribal officials claim wildlife managers have plans to rebuild the elk population—a traditional food source, according to the Hoopa Valley Tribe—by creating a network of high-elevation meadows.

Tribal forestry staff will reportedly expand their work to aggressively fight sudden oak death, which affects acorn crop and creates hazardous fire conditions that threatened both homes and the Tribe's drinking water supply, according to tribal officials.

"Managing the land is an integral part of our identity and culture," Davis said. "Acquiring our ancestral territory allows the Hoopa Valley Tribe to sustain our traditions and improve the health and well-being of our people." Officials say the Tribe's work to regain and restore ancestral lands is ongoing.

"The Tribe's reclamation of the Hupa Mountain [property] is a major step toward restoring balance in the region and the state will continue to support efforts like this in the spirit of truth and healing," said California Governor Gavin Newsom.

- KRCR-TV (Redding, California)

Louisiana tribe files civil rights complaint over state's New Isle resettlement project

The tribe representing current and former residents of a rapidly-sinking Louisiana island has filed a civil rights complaint against the state over its handling of the New Isle project, the country's first federally funded resettlement of a community threatened by climate change.

The Jean Charles Choctaw Nation alleges the state Office of Community Development subjected the tribal members to "serious and ongoing racial and ethnic discrimination" by taking over the tribal-led Isle de Jean Charles resettlement project, pushing tribal leaders out of the decision-making process, and producing a "shoddy" subdivision that took several years to build and is now expanding with homes that will be available to non-tribal members.

The complaint, filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on Dec. 21, asks that the 515-acre New Isle subdivision north of Houma be turned over to the tribe or that OCD provide a new resettlement site.

"They butchered that project," Jean Charles Choctaw Nation Chief Deme Naquin said Friday. "We were mistreated as Native American Indians. We worked together to get the federal grant, but once the money was awarded, the state pushed us out."

OCD declined to comment on the complaint. Agency officials have said in the past that the project's focus shifted after some island residents told them they identified with other tribes or said the island's tribe didn't represent them.

"Naturally, from that point, (we) gravitated to working with residents, which really is more realistic than working with a tribe," OCD Director Pat Forbes said last year.

New Isle's first batch of 34 homes, given for free to people who had been displaced from the island after Hurricane Isaac in August 2012, were completed late last year.

On the front lines of hurricanes, sea level rise and coastal erosion, the tribe initiated resettlement planning in 2002. The plan gained traction when OCD agreed to apply for a HUD grant on the tribe's behalf. The tribe is formally recognized by the state but not the federal government, and was ineligible to apply on its own.

Awarded in 2016, the \$48 million grant drew international attention and was celebrated as a potential template for other coastal resettlement efforts around the world. The grant covered the purchase of the property, located at a former sugar farm in Schriever, and the construction of homes, community buildings, roads and other infrastructure.

Once the money was in OCD's hands, the tribe says it was cut out of the planning process.

"Among OCD's changes, some of the most harmful have been downgrading the tribe's status as a grant beneficiary to that of a mere stakeholder, creating stricter eligibility requirements for tribal members who were displaced before 2012, (and) requiring participants to sign away their rights to island properties..." the complaint says.

- NOLA.com (New Orleans)

Upper Peninsula tribe closer to compensation for land seized by the U.S. government

A Native American tribe is one step closer to being compensated for land seized by the federal government.

The U.S. Senate has approved legislation called The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Land Claim Settlement Act of 2023, sponsored by Democrat Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters.

The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC) claimed the land was taken by the federal government in violation of two treaties signed in 1842 and 1854. The tribe said the loss of approximately 2,700 acres caused substantial economic harm over the decades.

Part of the disputed land was given to the state of Michigan by the federal government to defray the cost of building the Sault Ste. Marie Canal.

If the legislation is approved, the tribe would get \$34 million dollars in

compensation.

Republican Representative Jack Bergman has introduced it in the U.S. House. In an emailed statement, he said in part that he's "proud of the non-partisan solution to right the wrongs of the federal government and ensure that all parties involved — from the KBIC to the current landowners — have a lasting solution to this decades-long challenge."

The bill must be approved by the House and signed by President Joe Biden before it can go into effect.

- Michigan Radio

Defense bill grants Native American veterans more paths to advocacy

An organization representing Native American veterans is set to receive a congressional charter after a nearly 20-year effort, making it the first-ever Native American-dedicated group recipient and the first of any veterans group to receive a charter in almost 15 years.

A charter for the nonprofit National American Indian Veterans, or NAIIV, was included in the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act. The national defense policy bill passed through Congress [in December] and is headed to the desk of President Joe Biden, who is expected to sign it.

The charter will allow the organization to testify about veterans' issues before Congress, said Joey Strickland, a retired colonel of Choctaw descent who works as the group's chief of staff. It also provides a pathway for NAIIV to have some of its members accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs, permitting them to log into VA systems and help veterans and their families with benefits claims — assistance that is currently lacking on tribal lands.

"It was a long, hard fight," Strickland said. "When we found out it passed, it was euphoric. This has been denied to Indian veterans for so many years, and we've finally made a breakthrough."

The organization was created in 2004 and is headquartered on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Reservation in South Dakota. That's the home of its national commander,

CASINOS From page 6A

"They have been fighting behind the scenes in the legal trenches," Councilman Osceola said. "Tribal members, without your support this wouldn't be happening. We appreciate the love you show us and that you have our backs means the world to us."

"Forty-four years ago this week, the original Classic casino opened," said Allen, who has worked for the tribe for more than two decades. "I started working in casinos in Atlantic City that same week. Today, almost half of the total revenue in the U.S. comes from Indian gaming and that all started with the Seminole Tribe."

"The tribe is a partner with the state," said Councilman Osceola. "The state wins, the tribe wins, the residents and people of Florida win because all the money stays here Florida."

Before the speeches, the red carpet was filled with sports legends such as former NFL quarterbacks Joe Theismann, Doug Flutie and Warren Moon, former NFL running back and current Tennessee State University head coach Eddie George, MLB Hall of Famer Wade Boggs and professional wrestlers Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair.

"Sports betting is going to be everywhere," said Theismann. "It will even be in the stadiums where people on their phones can place bets on the game they are watching."

"It's on the back door of every club house, [MLB's policy on sports betting]," said Boggs. "Players can't bet on baseball, but now it's all over the place."

Immokalee

Craps, roulette and sports betting were rolled out at the Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee on Dec. 11 with tribal and community members, celebrities, sports stars and dancing girls in extra-large martini glasses.

Edward Aguilar, general manager of the Classic Casino in Hollywood, began his career at the property in his hometown of Immokalee.

"This has been a long time coming for the tribe and Immokalee," Aguilar said. "The growth in the Southwest Florida market has been great and this is the icing on top of the cake. It's a game changer. I'm proud of the effort of this team, it's a good day for Immokalee."

Celebrities in the house included R&B singer Ashanti, former college and NFL football coach Jimmy Johnson, former NFL running back and Immokalee native Edgerrin James Jr., actor Rudy Ramos and retired mixed martial arts fighter Tito Ortiz. Singer Tony Orlando performed at a luncheon for tribal members and guests.

Standing between Ashanti and Johnson, Chairman Osceola threw the first dice to open the craps table. He hit an 11, which means everybody won, including the Hard Rock charities that would benefit from the proceeds of the day.

"Now we can bring in customers who have been looking for craps, roulette and sports betting," Chairman Osceola said. "With Jim Allen's imagination, we have a guitar hotel. Without his leadership on the gaming side, we wouldn't be where we are

today." Don Loudner, a 91-year-old Korean War veteran who founded the group with the goal of providing more representation for Native American veterans who were fighting for VA benefits, Strickland said.

American Indians and Alaska Natives serve in the military at a higher rate than any other ethnic group, but they're less likely than other veterans to have health insurance or a service-connected disability, according to VA data.

Some advocates blame the disparity on a lack of culturally competent representation, which NAIIV now hopes to provide.

"Native veterans have served our country from Valley Forge to Afghanistan, and with this action, Congress has shown Native American veterans past and present the respect that is so well-earned," Loudner said in a statement Friday.

NAIIV has pushed to receive a charter from the time it was founded. The group struggled to gain support in Congress until Sens. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., and Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., took up the effort in 2021. This year, Rounds and Lujan were successful in adding the measure to the national defense policy bill, which is viewed as a must-pass bill by most lawmakers and has advanced through Congress for more than six decades.

In a statement [Dec. 15], Rounds noted that while many demographic groups have been granted a congressional charter, Native American veterans organizations had never been among them.

"This charter will help give the NAIIV a larger platform to continue advocating for and serving the more than 140,000 Native American veterans living in the United States," Rounds said.

With the charter, NAIIV now joins the ranks of prominent veterans service organizations to be recognized by Congress, such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans.

- Military Times

today."

President Holly Tiger thanked Allen, and the state of Florida for providing the tribe with this opportunity.

"They have been working with us hand in hand over the years," President Tiger said. "Seeing this building go up has meant a lot for this community," said Big Cypress Councilwoman Mariann Billie. "The people will make the magic here."

Councilman Howard spun the first ball at the roulette table.

"You used to have to go to Las Vegas for craps and roulette, but not anymore," Councilman Howard said.

Allen said Hard Rock Digital, the umbrella platform that includes Hard Rock's mobile sports betting and other online gaming, has created 350 jobs. The tribe has exclusivity in Florida, but gave all 32 of the state's pari-mutuels the opportunity to work with it. As of Dec. 11, 16 are working with the tribe's sports betting operation.

"This place is jumping," said Johnson, who won a national championship as coach of the Miami Hurricanes and a Super Bowl as coach of the Dallas Cowboys. "People like to wager and I think sports betting will be great for Florida; it will bring revenue to the state and entertainment to the people."

"This is a new opportunity for the community," said Immokalee Council Liaison Jaime Yzaguirre. "It's a great venture."

"This is going to be good for Immokalee," said Immokalee Board Liaison Rafael Sanchez. "I never would have thought that Immokalee would be the center of attention in Florida. Thanks to God, because without him none of this would be possible."

Brighton

The final stop on the tour came in the afternoon of Feb. 11 at Seminole Casino Brighton, where the loudest applause came for Marty Johns, its first and only general manager. Johns told the audience about the casino's growth from being a bingo hall in a little red barn decades ago to where it is today and where it's going, which will be a new casino and hotel that is being built a few miles down the road.

"There's walls going up in the hotel," Johns said as he gave an update on the construction.

Johns started his talk by saying he would probably become emotional, which he did with a heartfelt thank you to the team members he works with.

"I could not do it without you," he said. Johns said he's done a little bit of everything during his gaming career in Brighton, including working concessions, bookkeeping and even doing bingo calling when needed. He said he will retire someday, but not before the new property opens.

Johnson, Holyfield and Elvis impersonator Chris MacDonald were the headliners.

Invited guests were treated to a dinner and live band after the ceremony.

This story was compiled by staff reporter Beverly Bidney and senior editor Kevin Johnson.

SOUTH FLORIDA'S ULTIMATE ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION



JAN 12
MITCHELL
TENPENNY



JAN 13 & 14
MIAMI COMEDY
FESTIVAL



JAN 18 & 19
TOOL



JAN 20
FISTS OF FURY



JAN 21
TINA FEY &
AMY POEHLER



JAN 25
GLADYS KNIGHT



JAN 26
FLORIDA
BY NIGHT



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Education

B

Doctoral program in Indigenous health addresses disparities

BY CNN

Cole Allick remembers growing up on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in northern North Dakota and watching his mother struggle to navigate the overburdened and under-resourced health care system.

Allick said his mom, who suffered from lupus and thyroid disease, would often struggle to get appointments with doctors. And her referrals for specialty physicians, he added, were sometimes denied because the Indian Health Service — a federal health agency that serves American Indians and Alaska Natives — didn't have the funds to cover the appointments.

"There are times when our system runs out of funds to support everyone that may need that specialty care," Allick said. "That's where the increased resources for this system need to happen."

But, Allick said, those experiences shaped and inspired his career path and in August he graduated with his doctorate in Indigenous health from the University of North Dakota in the program's inaugural class.

"That was the best decision I've made," Allick said. "It has really refined my interest not only in health systems, but how to use health research as a tool for healthy equity and policy work."

The Indigenous health doctoral program, which launched in 2020, is the first of its kind in the U.S. according to the university's website, and it was designed to offer students a deeper understanding of the unique health challenges faced by Indigenous communities.

◆ See PROGRAM on page 5B

Tribe's FSU relationship grows stronger with new center

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe's relationship with Florida State University in Tallahassee has increasingly gained a foothold beyond the sports world. In February, the school will open the Native American and Indigenous Studies Center (NAIS), located on campus in a 2,600-square-foot craftsman-style home near to the historic Wescott Building and university administration offices. While the center has operated as part of the history department since the summer of 2023, it is the first time it will have its own physical location.

FSU officials and tribal leaders expect the center to achieve several goals. It would serve as a hub for Native American and Indigenous research and artistic practices; encourage educational initiatives and collaborative scholarship; offer curriculum and programming geared towards undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in learning about Native American and Indigenous cultures; and further enrich the university's relationship with the tribe.

FSU history professor Andrew Frank, the center's director, spearheaded its creation with consultation from tribal officials. He's an ethnohistorian who specializes in the history of the Seminole Tribe and Native American tribes in the U.S. South. He previously taught Native American history at Florida Atlantic University.

"At FSU, our students all know the Seminole name but many want to know something beyond the iconography," Frank said. "The [Seminole history] classes are popular, the students come in with a real passion to know something legitimate."

For years the history department has offered students the class: "The Seminoles and the Southeastern Indians."

"The new center is in a house, which is great because we want to find a way to create a community with Native American students on campus and for visitors — to find a way to get to know each other," Frank said.

Frank has collaborated with the tribe



Courtesy photo

The center will be located in this former residence on FSU's campus.

on various projects for many years, working especially with staff at the Heritage and Environment Resource Office (HERO), Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) and Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum in Big Cypress. He's worked with museum director Gordon "Ollie" Wareham, the late Willie Johns (a historian and Tribal Court chief justice), HERO senior director Paul Backhouse and THPO director Tina Osceola, among others.

"There's a way about them that encourages participation and engagement, but also provides a clear sense of how to do it," Frank said of working with the tribal community. "It's not my place to descend on the reservations and poke around. I want to come on invitation."

Osceola and Frank both participated in the FSU/NAIS-hosted "Conference of the American Society for Ethnohistory" last November. Osceola was part of a panel of THPO officials who discussed the role of THPOs, and how researchers and ethnohistorians can engage with tribes. It was the first time the tribe participated in the

annual conference.

"We have a very good relationship with Andrew Frank," Osceola, who has known Frank for more than a decade, said. "Andrew is one of those professors who understands the role of the tribe. To put it really simple, he gets it. That's not always the case."

Osceola said Frank has been consulting in earnest with staff at HERO, THPO and the museum on the new center.

"We've had an influence on the direction the center takes at the university," she said.

Osceola said she and others at the tribe are scheduled to attend a strategic planning session about the center in February at FSU.

"We've seen positive results when we collaborate with these universities, especially in terms of [repatriation efforts] and research," she said. "The new center is a turning point for the tribe."

The center is located at 535 W College Ave. For more, go to nais.fsu.edu.



Courtesy photo

Andrew Frank

Brendan Osceola Latchford graduates from FSU

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe's Latchford family added another Florida State University graduate to its growing list.

Brendan Osceola Latchford graduated Dec. 15, 2023, with a degree in geography and a minor in urban planning and development. He is the third Latchford FSU graduate among his six siblings. His older brothers Brady and Bradley graduated from FSU in 2021 and 2022, respectively. His sister, Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford, entered her freshman year at the school in the summer of 2023.

Latchford finished his schooling a semester early while also caring for a new seven-month-old baby girl.

"Graduating is a heck of an accomplishment, but doing it a semester early and raising a family is a tremendous accomplishment," Will Latchford, his father, said. "It's a testament to his dedication, hard work, commitment to his future, and the love he has for his studies and his family. We've watched him grow from a curious child to a determined young man."

Will Latchford is the tribe's former longtime executive director of Public Safety who retired in April 2023. He is married to Amy Osceola Latchford.



Courtesy photo

Newly graduated Brendan Osceola Latchford poses with his parents Amy Osceola Latchford and Will Latchford.

Brendan Latchford said his immediate plans are to spend time with his daughter Koa Marie and his girlfriend August Riddle (Osage Nation). He said his future goal is to find a job in Florida.

"I'll enjoy some time off and then go into a field that's a good fit," he said. "I learned the GIS (geographic information systems) program, mapping, coding and network analysis — skills people look for in the geography field. Geography was something that was always easy for me to learn and understand and was interesting."

Latchford's FSU experience began with the challenge of navigating the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The first year or two wasn't normal. It started off slow and nothing was open, classes were online, you had to wear a mask and make appointments to go anywhere," he said. "Everything on campus was closed, so it wasn't the typical college experience."

Latchford said there were times he questioned whether he wanted to stay in school, but as he entered his junior year he became more focused.

"I started to mature a little bit and saw my brothers finish their degrees and go into a field they wanted, so I thought I needed to buckle down and start to be serious," he said. "I knew it was important to get my degree."



Courtesy photo

In back, from left to right, are Bradley Osceola Latchford, Brendan Osceola Latchford and Brady Osceola Latchford. In front, from left to right, are Bella Rose Osceola Latchford, Braden Osceola Latchford and Bailey Marie Osceola Latchford.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Isabella Virto, Amariah Lavatta and Jaydin Ottiwell skate on a synthetic ice rink during Brighton's Christmas break bash Dec. 22.

Brighton marks Christmas break with plenty of fun

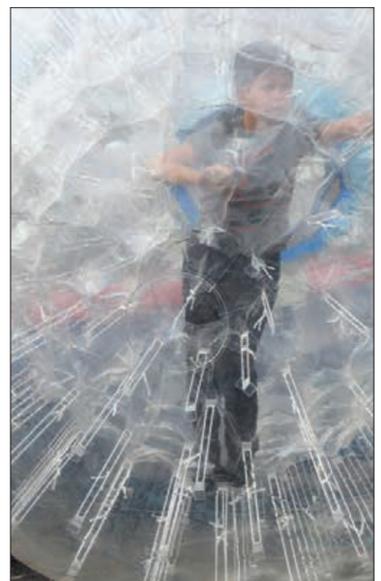
BRIGHTON — Brighton threw a Christmas break bash outside of the reservation's gymnasium Dec. 22 to get students in a festive mood for the winter break. Pemaevt Emahakv Charter School released students at noon and a lot of them came to have

some fun, which included skating on synthetic ice, rolling around in a huge transparent ball, playing in a bouncy winter wonderland and shooting hoops in a bouncy court. Pizza and drinks were served.



Beverly Bidney (2)

Above, Elgin Fish, 7, left, and Ellis James Gopher, 8, play tag in the winter wonderland bouncy world. At right, Elaikaiah Collins, 9, tries to navigate a court from inside a huge transparent bouncy ball.



Ahfachkee, PECS students visit governor for Native American Heritage Month event

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

TALLAHASSEE — Pemaaytv Emahakv Charter School and Ahfachkee School students commemorated the end of Native American Heritage Month on Nov. 28 in Tallahassee, where Gov. Ron DeSantis hosted them at a reception in the governor's mansion.

Native American Heritage Month in the state is a collaboration between the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Volunteer Florida and the Florida Department of Education. It is held in conjunction with the national commemoration month.

The governor spoke about the relationship between the state and the tribe and said the theme for the month was "Celebrating Tribal Sovereignty and Identity" before he introduced Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr.

"I'm grateful for our friendship and partnership with Governor DeSantis," Chairman Osceola said. "This has long been needed in the state of Florida and I hope it continues long after we have both left our offices. We have fought long and hard to preserve and protect our sovereignty and identity."

Ahfachkee was represented by 15 students and five teachers; PECS had 13 students and three teachers, including principal Tracy Downing and administrative assistant Michele Thomas.

DeSantis announced the winners of statewide art and essay contests that are part of the heritage month.

PECS fourth grader Maddox Newkirk won for his essay on the legendary Osceola, a warrior who led the Seminoles during the Second Seminole War.

"I like Osceola. He was a very good leader," Newkirk said. "It feels amazing to win."

PECS fifth-grader Dylanic Peak also won an essay award.

Art contest winners included PECS second-grader Mahala Bishop and first-grader Maverick Gabbard.

Essay contest winners received a two-year scholarship from the Florida Prepaid Scholarship Foundation and a \$100 gift card for school supplies. Art contest winners received a \$100 gift card for school supplies and a one-year pass to Florida State Parks.

In addition, four teachers were recognized at the ceremony with the Excellence in Education Award, a contest that is open to all full-time educators in an elementary, middle, or high school in Florida. PECS winners were teachers Eduarda Anselmo, Nicole Platt and Stephanie Tedders.

Florida Department of Education commissioner Manny Diaz Jr. congratulated the winners and said, "We acknowledge the vital role Native American Heritage Month plays to preserve the history."



Gov. Ron DeSantis stands with winning essay contest winners.

Beverly Bidney



Beverly Bidney

Gov. Ron DeSantis poses with the winning teachers, from left to right PECS teachers Eduarda Anselmo, Nicole Platt and Stephanie Tedders. At far right is Victoria Gwaltney, who is a teacher at another school.



Beverly Bidney

Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. attends a Native American Heritage Month reception with Ahfachkee students and teachers in the governor's mansion in Tallahassee on Nov. 28.



Beverly Bidney

At left, PECS principal Tracy Downing and administrative assistant Michele Thomas join students in front of the governor's mansion before the ceremony with the governor.



Beverly Bidney

Gov. Ron DeSantis, with football, and Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. share a fun moment at the Native American Heritage Month reception Nov. 28 at the governor's mansion in Tallahassee.



Beverly Bidney

Budding young artist and PECS second grader Mahala Bishop and Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. stand next to her winning artwork.

Beverly Bidney
Surrounded by band members of the Marching Chiefs, Maddox Newkirk proudly walks down the path leading to the governor's mansion.



Hollywood hosts seniors Christmas celebration



Calvin Tiger (5)
 The annual tribalwide seniors Christmas party was held Dec. 12 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood. Food, music, gifts, photos and stretching exercises led by Kenny Bayon were among the highlights.

Clockwise from left, Paul "Cowbone" Buster plays his guitar and sings Christmas songs; Tampa Reservation administrator Richard Henry speaks to the seniors; Lonnie Osceola gives a happy wave; enjoying their day at the party are Wanda Zepeda, left, and Barbara Osceola; Patrick Doctor Sr. and wife, Anna, enjoy their time.



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

FROM PRESS RELEASE

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

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

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

For more information go to niea.org.

UNITY conference to be held in Phoenix

FROM PRESS RELEASE

MESA, Ariz. — United National Indian Tribal Youth, Inc. (UNITY) will hold its midyear conference Feb. 2 to Feb. 4 at the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown in Phoenix, Arizona.

Guest speakers are scheduled to include hip hop artist Christian "SupaMan" Parrish, actor Kiowa Gordon, visual artist Tomás Karmelo Amaya, and Netflix star Charley Hogan, who landed her first lead role as the character Dawn in "Frybread Face and Me."

Early registration rate of \$375 is available through Jan. 15. The rate increases to \$450 on Jan. 16.

For more information and to register go to unityinc.org.

Seminole Casino Coconut Creek to host upcoming events

FROM PRESS RELEASE

COCONUT CREEK — The following special events are scheduled to be held at Seminole Casino Coconut Creek:

Tesla

Tesla is scheduled to hit The Stage at Coco on Jan. 14 at 8 p.m. Visit ticketmaster.com for ticket information.

Created in the mid-1980s, California-based Tesla features a bluesy, soulful sound that is strongly embedded in the roots of organic, authentic, 1970s rock and roll, similar to the roots that produced bands like The Allman Brothers, Grand Funk Railroad, AC/DC, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Aerosmith.

Their debut album in 1986 earned platinum.

In 1990, TESLA helped reshape the face of modern rock music by stripping down to the Five Man Acoustical Jam, an informal collection of their biggest hits peppered with rock and roll classics by the Beatles, Stones, and others. This album produced their biggest hit single to date, a cover of Five Man Electrical Band's "Signs."

Jo Dee Messina

The Stage at Coco will host the Jo Dee Messina: Heads Carolina, Tails California Tour as the second stop on her tour Feb. 4 at 7 p.m. Go to jodeemessina.com/tour for ticket information.

The country star has been nominated for "Musical Event of the Year" at the upcoming CMA Awards.

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NEW 2023 GMC SIERRA 1500 CREW CAB

LEASE FOR **\$289** OR **0.9% APR** OR DRIVE FOR **\$12,200**

PER MONTH

With approved credit. Must finance through dealer preferred lender. On select in-stock models. Advertised one pay lease includes \$4,399 due at signing plus the total of all monthly payments (\$289 a month x 27 Months), 27 month lease, 10k annual miles. \$4,399 down, \$0 security. Plus tax, tag, title, first payment and fees. Must qualify for all incentives including Lease Loyalty or Co-Lease. May not combine with other offers. See dealer for details. Expires month end.

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Sports life leads Mary Huff to Brighton Recreation

BY DAMON SCOTT
Staff Reporter

The Seminole Tribe's Mary Huff was hired as the Recreation Department site manager on the Brighton Reservation. Her first day on the job was Nov. 27, 2023. She oversees the department, its staff and programs.

Huff, 33, has an extensive sports background. She was previously an elementary school physical education teacher at Brighton's Pemaevv Emahakv Charter School for seven years. She coached the school's volleyball team for one season and, more recently, was head coach of the softball team.

Huff is a longtime softball player and coach – she's coached the sport at Okeechobee High School for 10 years in all. When private lessons are included, Huff has coached softball to youth for 13 years.

"Softball was the majority of my life," Huff said. "My parents took me all over the country doing [softball] showcases."

Softball showcases are designed to allow athletes to complete drills and play in front of college coaches.

Huff said she was nine when she first played the sport, and she excelled at it. She was a four-year letterman at Okeechobee High School before attending St. Petersburg College in Clearwater as a freshman, but she said the school wasn't a fit.

"I wasn't a fan of the area or the coaching style so I transferred my sophomore year to

Indian River [State College]," Huff said. She'd tear her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) – one of the ligaments in the knee joint – during a game, and while she was recovering, was recruited by the University of Central Florida as a junior.

After not seeing playing time her senior year, Huff started to play and coach slow pitch softball. She's played high-level slow pitch since 2021 – the year she was named the MVP of the United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA) women's "A" world tournament in Viera, near Melbourne.

"It was pretty cool to play [Division I] in college and then play in the majors – the highest division in slow pitch. I'm still trying to do it," Huff said. "Out of college I came home and when you're a former collegiate athlete they are ready to jump on you."

Her current softball team at Okeechobee High School has been in the midst of off-season conditioning. Its preseason games begin in February.

"It's my first year back after a two-year leave," Huff said. "There are a lot of new faces, a ton of them, and a ton of tribal girls, which is exciting. The previous nine years I



File photo
Mary Huff

coached, I only had one or two [tribal girls] a season, now there are eight or nine. It's exciting."

She said she's learning to juggle coaching and playing, the duties of her new job, and family life and responsibilities.

"I'm in charge of implementing the Recreation programs for the youth, but it's for the entire community too – the seniors and the adults," Huff said. "We also help a lot with community activities, Field Day stuff. My department handles all those events, activities, sports, fitness – all those daily things."

Huff isn't completely new to Recreation. Before her physical education job at PECS, she was a supervisor in the department for a year.

Huff's father is the late John Wayne Huff Sr., who died in 2019. Her mother, Vickie Huff, is the site manager for Brighton's Elder Services Department. Her sister, Rebecca Billie, lives in the Trail community, while brothers John Huff Jr. and sister Jimi Jameson both live in Brighton. Jameson is a Creek teacher at PECS.

Huff has three children – Maverick Gabert, McCoy Gabert and Tatum Thomas. Trey Thomas is her partner.

"He's been a godsend since I coach, have a full-time job and play. It's important to have support like that at home – helping out and letting me continue to do what I do to better our community and better our youth. I take it very seriously," she said.



Hard Rock

Seminole Tribe Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr., front row, third from left, joins leaders from the Tejon Indian Tribe and others at a groundbreaking ceremony Dec. 14 for the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tejon in California.

Hard Rock Tejon breaks ground in California

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Leaders from the Seminole Tribe of Florida and Hard Rock International helped the Tejon Indian Tribe break ground Dec. 14 on the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tejon, located in Mettler, California, about 90 miles north of Los Angeles.

The groundbreaking ceremony occurred on the 44th anniversary of the Seminole Tribe's opening of a bingo hall (now the Seminole Classic Casino) in Hollywood that paved the way for Native American gaming.

"Ever since then," Seminole Tribe Chairman Marcellus W. Osceola Jr. told the audience in Mettler, "we've always reached out and asked how can we help because we were fortunate then to test the waters of sovereign immunity, our sovereignty, and what we can do and what we can accomplish, and how it changed our lives, and, oh boy, it's going to change your lives here, too. Not just the tribe, but the people who live around the area."

According to Hard Rock, the project is expected to create about 2,000 construction jobs and approximately 5,000 direct and indirect jobs, both full-time and part-time, when completed.

The project is slated to be completed in two phases, starting with the opening of the first phase in 2025 with 2,500 slots, more than 40 table games and some restaurants.

Phase 2 includes more slots, tables

and restaurants, including Council Oak and Kuro, a 400-room hotel, resort-style pool and a 2,800-seat Hard Rock Live performance venue.

Tejon Indian Tribe Chairman Octavio Escobedo III thanked the Seminole Tribe, Hard Rock and others for standing "shoulder-to-shoulder with us to help make our dream of restoring our land base and this groundbreaking possible."

"This is an exciting day for the state of California, Kern County and the Tejon Indian Tribe," Escobedo III said in a statement. "This groundbreaking is a symbolic ceremony for the tribe, which was landless for more than 150 years, and has been a priority for us since we were reaffirmed as a federally recognized Indian tribe. From the start of our relationship with the United States government in 1851, our tribe has fought for a homeland for our people. Today we are one major step closer to the dream of self-determination through economic development."

During the ceremony, Hard Rock donated \$10,000 to the Kern Coalition Against Human Trafficking. Hard Rock Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen said he would double that amount with a \$10,000 donation of his own.

The Tejon project joins Hard Rock's other locations in California, including the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Sacramento at Fire Mountain, which opened four years ago in northern California.



Hard Rock

Hard Rock International Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen, left, presents a check from the Hard Rock Heals Foundation to Dustin Contreras of the Kern Coalition Against Human Trafficking.

Oklahoma governor continues to clash with tribes in second term

BY PUBLIC RADIO TULSA

OKLAHOMA CITY — Gov. Kevin Stitt started his second term aiming for a fresh start with Oklahoma's tribes, but his past year in office has been a continuation of much of the same state-tribal conflict that shaped his first term.

Throughout the year, Stitt has continued to clash with tribal leaders over intergovernmental agreements and tribal sovereignty in disputes that have continued to spill into the courtroom.

At a Native American celebration at the governor's mansion in November, Stitt said the state and the tribes should work together. He also expressed optimism that some of the inflammatory rhetoric will die down.

But whether the governor will change his confrontational approach to working with the tribes remains to be seen.

"We should be working together," Stitt said on Nov. 28. "So, (to) kind of die down some of the rhetoric, that'd be my goal for this next season."

The event at the governor's mansion celebrating and honoring Native American heritage and families may have been the first of its kind, but the leaders of some of the state's largest tribes said they were not invited.

In a mid-November interview, Stitt, who is a member of the Cherokee Nation, was upbeat as he talked about his relationship with other tribal members. He also praised his new Native American liaison, Wes Nofire, whose appointment drew condemnation from the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes.

"My door's always open," Stitt said. "I want to have a good relationship with everyone. I have a great relationship with tribal members."

Stitt added that he represents all of Oklahoma's nearly four million residents and he wants everyone to be treated equally when it comes to issues like paying income taxes and toll road charges.

"If you're asking me to move away from protecting Oklahoma when I'm dealing with another government, I'm not going to do that," Stitt said. "My job as the governor of Oklahoma is to protect Oklahoma's interests."

Rep. Ken Luttrell, R-Ponca City, said the governor's relationship with the tribes has worsened this year. Luttrell, who is Cherokee, co-chairs the Oklahoma Legislature's Native American caucus and he has worked with Sen. Bill Coleman, R-Ponca City, to try to legalize sports betting.

"We've continued to reach out to the Governor's Office and invite him to our Native American caucus meetings," Luttrell said. "Sen. Coleman and I have offered to facilitate a sit down with the tribes to discuss gaming and try to find a path forward we can all agree on."

Luttrell said his attempts were unsuccessful.

But he remains optimistic that Stitt can improve his working relationship with the tribes through open-mindedness and cooperation.

"I'm hopeful we can get past this," Luttrell said. "In my conversations with tribal leaders, they're hopeful, too. They're eternal optimists and hope for better relations and working together to make the entire state better for everyone."

Stitt personally invited the leaders of all 39 tribes to his January inauguration in an attempt to start fresh in his second term. Many tribal leaders attended the ceremony and expressed optimism about working with the governor going forward.

HARMON From page 1A

"The last two miles were tough, but I had come too far to quit," Harmon said in an email to the Tribune.

Her thoughts when she crossed the finish line?

"I did it. I just ran and finished the NYC marathon," she said.

Her time placed her 48,992 out of 51,348 finishers; 21,350 out of 22,813 female runners and 1,168 out of 1,323 runners in the female 55-59 age group.

Harmon had a few cheerleaders along the route, including her daughter Anna, also an accomplished distance runner (runner-up in the 2022 National Junior College Athletic

Association's women's cross country national championship); and her cousin Lucy.

Brooklyn was Harmon's favorite part of the course.

"I absolutely loved running through Brooklyn. The crowd was amazing. There was so much excitement surrounding the marathon. It was a huge block party," she said.

Harmon subscribes to the Sinatra mantra that "if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere." The NYC Marathon was her fifth marathon; she is eyeing more in big cities, such as London, Paris, Rome and Tokyo. She also hopes to return to New York for the 2024 marathon.

"I'd like to shoot for that five-hour time," she said.



Courtesy photo

Donna Harmon crosses the finish line at the New York City Marathon.



Courtesy photo

Donna Harmon points to her name on the "Runners Wall," an exhibit that featured the names of more than 50,000 runners entered in the 2023 New York City Marathon.

Longtime Seminole Hard Rock executive promoted

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — Seminole Hard Rock has promoted one of its longtime employees, Elena Alvarez, to senior vice president of marketing and brand partnerships for Seminole Gaming and Hard Rock International. The company made the announcement in a Dec. 12 news release.

Alvarez is responsible for brand development and asset integration for Seminole Hard Rock's hotels, cafes, retail shops and casinos, including the development of new revenue-generating platforms, the release said. Alvarez also oversees the global marketing of Hard Rock International's Cafe division.

"Elena is an essential senior marketer with a proven track record elevating the Hard Rock brand for our Cafe division that includes spearheading [food and beverage] innovation and initiating and evolving the company's successful multifaceted partnership with Lionel Messi," Jeff Hook, executive vice president of marketing/brand marketing officer of Seminole Hard Rock Support Services, said in the release. "With nearly 20 years of experience at Hard Rock alone, we have the utmost confidence that Elena will continue to elevate the Hard Rock and Seminole Gaming brands in new and exciting ways."

Messi is an international soccer star with the Inter Miami CF soccer team. He has been a brand ambassador for Hard Rock since 2021.

Alvarez began her career with Hard Rock International as a sales and marketing manager for Hard Rock Cafe Barcelona



HRI

Elena Alvarez

(Spain) in 2005. She's held other sales and marketing roles in the Europe, U.K. and U.S. Cafe divisions, where she developed regional and global marketing strategies, brand programs, and corporate sponsorships, the release said. In 2019, after moving to the U.S., Alvarez was promoted to vice president of global sales and marketing for the Cafe division, where she oversaw the marketing for more than 150 Hard Rock locations.

"I've had the privilege of building my career with the iconic Hard Rock brand and I'm excited to continue in an era of excellence for Hard Rock and Seminole Gaming through impactful brand partnerships for our guests and fans," Alvarez said in the release.

The Seminole Tribe is the parent entity of Seminole Gaming and Hard Rock International.

Seminole Classic Casino receives special visit from Bon Jovi

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — One of the biggest days in the history of the Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood wrapped up Dec. 7 with a visit from rock ‘n’ roll legend Jon Bon Jovi.

Bon Jovi and his son, Jesse Bongiovi, were briefly at the casino to promote their Hampton Water wine brand. They met with Classic general manager and tribal member Edward Aguilar.

Aguilar said the visit by Bon Jovi was an ideal fit with the Classic’s customer base.

“Of all the artists out there, I think that generation of music hits home with the core base of my customers,” Aguilar said.

Before he departed, Bon Jovi signed a bottle of the wine and gave it to the casino. He also posed for photos with his son and Aguilar.

Hampton Water, a rosé wine, comes from France. In a May 2023 review, Decanter.com regional editor James Button described the wine as “...inspired by those of Provence but has its own identity. Ripe, fresh cherry and strawberry fruit aromas are joined by a herbal touch, while in the mouth it’s impressively sapid and mineral. Flavors of strawberry and herbs lead the way, with some peppery spice emerging on the fresh finish.”

The wine is available at Hard Rock Cafes.

Earlier in the day, the Classic Casino welcomed other celebrities as it kicked off the Seminole Tribe’s debut of craps and roulette. Aguilar said Bon Jovi’s visit was a perfect way to end the day.

“It’s really a cool thing because the Classic customer really doesn’t get this kind of visit or that kind of talent in this building very often. For this to happen on top of the



Jon Bon Jovi, left, and his son, Jesse Bongiovi, talk with Edward Aguilar and his wife Cindy at the Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood on Dec. 7.

Kevin Johnson

addition of craps and roulette and the launch we had today, there’s no better day to do it than today. What a cherry on top for the day,” he said.

Bon Jovi’s visit and the start of the new

games came seven days before the 44th anniversary of the debut of gaming in the Seminole Tribe – and Indian Country – in the form of a bingo hall on the site of the Classic Casino.

Aguilar said Bon Jovi was aware of the property’s current and past history.

“We talked about the significance of today,” Aguilar said. “He was congratulatory. He did speak to the historic factor of this

property. For me to hear that from him, that he’s knowledgeable about the story of this property, that kind of hit home for me.”



Kevin Johnson

Jon Bon Jovi and Edward Aguilar shake hands at the Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood.



Kevin Johnson

Jon Bon Jovi signs a bottle of Hampton Water wine at the Seminole Classic Casino Hollywood as his son Jesse, left, and casino general manager Edward Aguilar look on.

Hard Rock ready to ascend in Athens

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Dubbed the first integrated resort of its kind in continental Europe, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Athens broke ground Dec. 22 in the historic city in Greece.

Hard Rock International Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen participated in the groundbreaking as officials used hybrid shovels – part guitar and part shovel – for the ceremonial first dig.

“Today is a very special day as we celebrate this momentous occasion to bring our unique brand of world class entertainment to Athens,” Allen said in a statement. “We are grateful to all the political leaders, our partners at Gek Terna and the people of Athens for supporting us and this project.”

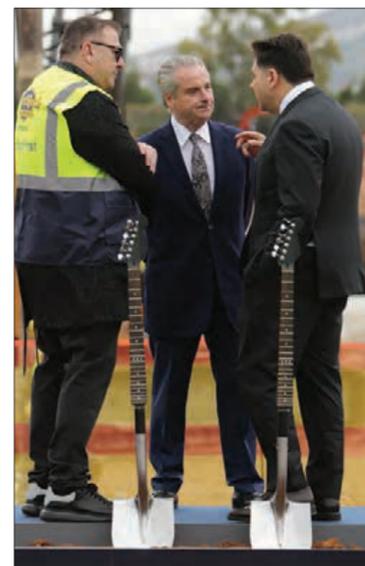
The project is a partnership between HRI (51%) and Gek Terna (49%) with the latter being responsible for the entire construction of the venue, according to a news release from Gek Terna, whose business includes construction and other segments.

Estimated to cost more than \$1 billion, the project is expected to create 3,000 construction jobs and 3,000 permanent jobs, according to a news release. The planned opening is in 2027. The property will feature a 1,100-room upscale hotel described by Gek Terna as “a 5-star luxury hotel with suites and rooms with sea view or city view across Athens and the Parthenon.” The gaming component will include 180 tables and 1,500 machines. The venue will also include meeting and convention space, a 3,000-seat Hard Rock Live entertainment



A rendering of the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Athens, which towers over the Aegean Sea.

Hard Rock



Hard Rock

Hard Rock International Chairman and Seminole Gaming CEO Jim Allen, center, attends a groundbreaking ceremony Dec. 22 for a new hotel and casino in Greece.

venue, 15 dining options, a Rock Spa, pool and retail.

“We are delighted that in cooperation with a world leader in this sector, Hard Rock International, we are realizing an investment much higher than its already

significant nominal value, offering Greece a development project that will be a reference point for our country’s tourism product internationally, will offer employment to thousands of people and yield significant revenues to the national budget,” George

Peristeris, chairman and CEO of Gek Terna Group, said in a statement.

The property is located on the site of the former Hellinikon International Airport along the Athenian Riviera. According to the release from Gek Terna, the groundbreaking

ceremony also featured several government officials, including George J. Tsunis, the U.S. Ambassador to Greece.

PROGRAM From page 1B

Native Americans often face barriers to medical care, such as lower incomes, inadequate sewage disposal, cultural differences, and geographic isolation on reservations, according to the U.S. Department of Health of Human Services.

The life expectancy for Native Americans is also decreasing. A report from the National Center for Health Statistics found the average life expectancy among Native Americans was 67.9 years in 2022, a modest increase from the previous year’s average of 65.2 years, but down significantly from 71.8 years in 2019.

The decrease in life expectancy was exacerbated by the pandemic, the report found. The average life expectancy for all races in the US in 2022 was 77.5 years.

Melanie Nadeau, interim chair of the doctoral program, said the university’s goal is to develop graduates who will go out and connect with Indigenous communities.

“Our students are trained to be systems-level thinkers,” Nadeau said. “We focus a lot on getting to know the community that you’re working with, so that you can understand historically what happened with that community and how we can support and advance their health and wellness.”

Danya Carroll, who also graduated with her doctorate in Indigenous health in August, said she feels the knowledge she gained in the program is essential to providing

more culturally competent health care on reservations.

Carroll, who grew up in Navajo Nation and is a member of the White Mountain Apache Tribe, said there is often high turnover and a language barrier with medical professionals who aren’t Native American. Her grandmother, who speaks the Navajo language, often struggled with doctor’s appointments, Carroll said.

“We need our own people in those spaces,” she said. “You just have that understanding when you are from that community.”

Carroll said after graduating from the program, she hopes to help build health care systems and promote policies that are more inclusive of Indigenous culture and values.

She is now completing a post-doctoral

program at the University of Western Ontario.

Nadeau said graduates from the program are equipped to work in academia, conduct research, and partner with community health programs such as the Indian Health Service.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among Native Americans, according to the National Library of Medicine. Allick, who is now a research coordinator and tribal liaison at Washington State University, said one of the disparities he hopes to address through his work is improving access to lung cancer screenings on Indian reservations.

Allick said there needs to be a system that not only makes screenings more accessible but helps identify people who are at higher risk and need to get screened.

“A lot of our communities are deeply rural,” Allick said. “So, if they aren’t being told to get lung cancer screenings, they are not going to go for it. And when they do need it, it’s often a really long drive or the resources aren’t available for them to access it.”

While there is no silver bullet to solving health challenges faced by Indigenous communities, Nadeau said she hopes the doctoral program, with its focus on engaging Native communities and understanding their needs, will be a step in the right direction.

“I am so hopeful,” Nadeau said. “Because our students, they are going to change the world.”

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Sports



PECS co-ed soccer scores, wins for first time

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

Amber McKinney was more than happy to have to splurge for pizza.

The head coach of the co-ed soccer team at Pematyvtv Emahakv Charter School promised her players that if they won a game this season, then she would reward them with a season-ending pizza party.

There were no playoffs to play for, but there was pepperoni.

The players achieved their goal by defeating Clewiston Middle School, 2-1, on Dec. 12. Ross Jones and Elaine Fonseca scored the goals. Amalia Estrada notched assists on both goals. PECS goalie Josephine Snow was a standout between the posts as she made 12 saves on 13 shots.

Not only did the victory secure a taste of pizza, but it was also the first time a PECS soccer team ever tasted victory.

It was no surprise that the final whistle set off jubilation on the PECS side.

"We were all hugging each other," said assistant coach Marci Garcia.

PECS has had a soccer team only one other year, and that squad in 2019 didn't produce a win nor score a goal. So there were

plenty of firsts up for grabs this season and the players didn't disappoint their coaches.

"They scored goals all season and we won our first game," McKinney said.

Estrada, Peyton Thornton and Karter Puente also scored goals during the season.

Improvement was the name of the game for a team which only had a few experienced players; most were new to soccer. As the season progressed, so did the skill level.

"We feel we've slowly gotten better each game," McKinney said.

The team's seven-game schedule ended Dec. 20 with a loss at Moore Haven Middle School.

The win against Clewiston was PECS' lone victory, but next season the goals might be bigger – and perhaps the pizza offer, too – since only one player will be moving on to high school. With about 17 players on the roster this season, a foundation is in place to grow.

"It's a good group of kids. I hope they stick with it," McKinney said. "We've got some fifth graders who are soccer players who are coming up and we hope they try out."



The 2023 Pematyvtv Emahakv Charter School co-ed soccer team won a game this season for the first time.

Courtesy photo



Koty Gopher-Turtle heads the ball while teammates look on in PECS' game Dec. 20.

Kevin Johnson



Karter Puente is congratulated after scoring a goal against Moore Haven Middle School on Dec. 20.

Kevin Johnson



Amalia Estrada kicks the ball away from Moore Haven players during a game Dec. 20.

Kevin Johnson



PECS goalkeeper Josephine Snow makes a save on a penalty kick against Moore Haven Middle School.

Kevin Johnson



PECS' Aven Fonseca controls the ball.

Kevin Johnson

Sylas Billie generates award-winning season in Perfect Game

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — Sylas Billie is only 15 and he's just starting his high school baseball career, but the Seminole from Hollywood has already caught the attention of college programs.

Thanks in part to outstanding performances at regional and national showcases and tournaments, Billie has drawn interest from NCAA Division I teams. He said playing for a D-I school has been a goal of his for a long time.

Having the eyes of college coaches on him and his travel ball teammates is nothing new to Billie, who has played in the Perfect Game organization since age 10. Perfect Game is a national organization that brings together high quality youth players and teams for showcases, which serve as scouting opportunities for colleges and pros. Perfect Game counts among its alumni more than 2,000 players who have played in Major League Baseball, including current stars Gerrit Cole, Bryce Harper and Mike Trout.

Billie is a 6-foot-1, 175-pound right-handed pitcher whose strong 2023 season has been rewarded with awards. He's won three most valuable pitcher awards at Perfect Game events this year, including the East Fall Championship in Sanford. Billie notched the victory on the mound in the championship game and had a no-hitter before it was broken up in the final inning.

In April, he fanned 11 batters in a game. Billie plays for the Wow Factor National 15U team. Some of his teammates are from Florida, but others are from Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and as far as Hawaii and Washington state.

The team's schedule includes in-state venues such as West Palm Beach and Sanford, but also farther places such as Georgia and the Carolinas.

As for high school, Billie said he's looking forward to playing his freshman season at South Broward High School. The team's regular season starts in February.



Sylas Billie winds up on the mound.

Courtesy photo



Sylas Billie shows pitching awards he's won this year in Perfect Game.

Kevin Johnson

Fall basketball league a big hit with players

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — A basketball league had just wrapped up in Big Cypress. Some players figured it might be a while before they played competitive games again, but thanks to Charles Osceola they had a place and league to play in the fall.

Osceola mirrored the new Hollywood fall league after the one in BC. The fall league was held Tuesday and Thursday nights with two games per night for each team. It drew five teams and plenty of praise from its participants, including DeForest Carter, who drove to Hollywood from his home in Daytona Beach each week to play.

“It was fun. It was competitive games, some came down to the last shot, a few games in overtime. You have all of us on the court and it’s going to be competitive. None of us like to lose,” Carter said after his War Party team finished runner-up Dec. 7.

It was Native Soldiers who captured the championship with a 61-39 win at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center.

A hot hand from Ethan Cypress put War Party ahead, 14-6, early, but Native Soldiers received a boost from Hunter Osceola late in the first half. Osceola scored seven points in the waning moments of the half to give Native Soldiers a 28-25 lead.

In the second half, Osceola and Xavier Osceola each hit 3-pointers as Native Soldiers built a lead that continued to grow until the final buzzer.

Grant Osceola and his brothers helped organize the Native Soldiers team.

“It was a really good league. We just got through playing in BC and this one started two weeks after. It was fun to keep playing,” Osceola said.

For younger players — such as high school teammates Xavier Osceola and Bryce Osceola — the league provided a chance to compete against older players. Xavier scored 13 points in the championship and Bryce had 11.

For those older players, the league served as a way to keep playing competitively and also as a tune-up for the NASA tournament, which Hollywood will host Jan. 11-13.



Native Soldiers' Bryce Osceola drives toward the basket in the fall championship game Dec. 7 against War Party at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center.

Kevin Johnson



Kevin Johnson

War Party's DeForest Carter tries to get past the defense of Native Soldiers' Grant Osceola.



Kevin Johnson

Native Soldiers' Hunter Osceola goes airborne trying to block a shot by War Party's Ethan Cypress.



Kevin Johnson (2)
At left, War Party's Ethan Cypress takes a jump shot. At right, War Party's Greg Carter (44) battles for the ball against Bryce Osceola (10) and Grant Osceola (35).



Kevin Johnson

The fall league champion Native Soldiers.



Kevin Johnson

Charles Osceola, center, congratulates both teams after the championship game.

PECS girls basketball shines at both ends of court

STAFF REPORT

When a basketball team's offense and defense are clicking, it usually means they are tough to beat. Case in point is the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School girls team, which entered the holiday break having outscored opponents 187-53.

Kulipa Julian and Azariah Washington have been standouts offensively, combining to score more than half of the team's points.

Coach Jovanny Torres said Jalene Smith and Eri'Mya McQueen have led the way defensively.

"Whether we are in man or zone, they find ways to get steals and shut teams down. We have been finding ourselves up very quickly because of them, so it's allowing me to play all 16 players which is great for the team morale," Torres said.

A pair of eighth graders – Melaine Bonilla and Eleanor Osceola – have been contributing either as starters or coming off the bench.

"Eleanor is a great shot blocker and rebounder and Melaine is a knockdown shooter that is feisty on defense," Torres said.

PECS has also received a boost from newcomers Margaria Fudge and Cordelia Snell.

"They have come in and really helped the team this year," Torres said. "Margaria is probably one of the best shooters I've had here so far and she's only in 6th grade. I'm excited to see her progress the next couple years."

PECS boys and girls teams are scheduled to resume action in the new year Jan. 10 at home against Moore Haven with games at 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Fast start for Moore Haven boys

Kevin Johnson

Moore Haven High School's Thaddeus Johns (10) battles for a rebound against Seacrest Country Day on Dec. 20 at Moore Haven High School. Johns made a key 3-pointer late in the first half that helped propel the Terriers to a 55-53 overtime win. Johns scored nine points in a 46-43 win against Avon Park on Dec. 12. Moore Haven entered the new year with a 7-3 record.



Season ends for Greg Thomas, Heritage football



Kevin Johnson

With a boot on his right foot, American Heritage (Plantation) cornerback Greg "Zae" Thomas stands on the sideline during his team's Class 2M state semifinal against Tampa's Berkeley Prep on Dec. 1. Thomas did not play due to an injury he suffered in the previous game. Thomas finished his junior season with two interceptions and 19 tackles. Heritage fell to Berkeley, 17-14. Berkeley went on to defeat Miami-Norland in the state championship. Heritage finished with a 10-2 record.

Tyler Hiatt wins shot put at SDSU Holiday Invitational



Courtesy photo

University of Sioux Falls' Tyler Hiatt won the men's shot put at the South Dakota State University Holiday Invitational on Dec. 1 with a 16.27 meter toss. He also broke the school record for the men's weight throw with an 18.73 meter toss while taking second place at the event. Hiatt is the son of tribal member Stephanie Hiatt and grandson of the late Stephen Bowers.

Undefeated FSU women's soccer wins national championship



The Florida State women's soccer team concluded an undefeated season Dec. 4 with a 5-1 win against Stanford in the NCAA national championship game. The Seminoles finished with a 22-0-1 record. It was FSU's fourth national title in the past 10 years (2014, 2018, 2021 and 2023).



FSU (2)



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RICHARD CASTILLO

FLORIDA CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY

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Tribe celebrates Christmas



Beverly Bidney

Caniah Billie holds her daughter Nyroni Billie, 1, at the Immokalee Christmas party at the Seminole Casino Hotel Immokalee ballroom.



Kevin Johnson

S.R. Tommie, left, and Steve Osceola speak to the audience at Hollywood's holiday luau party Dec. 15 at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood.



Jessica Burns

Amari Vazquez gets to sit in Santa's lap during the Tampa-Lakeland Christmas party Dec. 12.



Beverly Bidney

Alayna Rodriguez, center, and her sister Jordan Rodriguez, left, charm Santa Claus at the Immokalee Christmas party Dec. 16.



Kevin Johnson

Nellie Osceola, left, Amelia Cypress get ready to ride one of the several amusement rides that were part of the Big Cypress Christmas celebration Dec. 8 on the grounds of the the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena.



Kevin Johnson

Myron Osceola smiles as he receives a toy from Santa at the Trail Christmas party Dec. 15 at the Miccosukee Casino & Resort.



Beverly Bidney

Winter Hernandez gets a warm and fuzzy hug from Santa Claus at the Immokalee Christmas celebration.



Jessica Burns

President Holly Tiger, left, and Connie Osceola enjoy the Tampa-Lakeland Christmas party Dec. 12 at Bonnet Springs Park in Lakeland.



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, Goldie Hanks, Mykel Garza and Nancy Shaffer soar in the air on the "Screamer" amusement ride at the Big Cypress Christmas party.



Kevin Johnson

From left to right, Adriana Huggins, Amos Billie IV, Amos Billie and Kathy Billie come dressed for the holidays at Trail's Christmas party at the Miccosukee Casino & Resort.



Kevin Johnson

Santa and Mrs. Claus receive a visit from Charlotte Tommie and Paul Bowers at the Big Cypress Christmas party.



Kevin Johnson

Xadrian D'Aleo raises his arm as he wins a carnival game at the Hollywood party. In addition to games, youth also had a teen zone, dance floors, a movie theater offering and other activities.



Kevin Johnson

Hollywood Board Rep. Christine McCall hands out gifts at the holiday party in Hollywood.



Beverly Bidney

From left to right, Katelyn Mariscal, Cheyenne McInturff, Nayeli Mariscal and Roggy Mariscal celebrate family at the Immokalee Christmas party.



Makynna Ramirez does the limbo with Santa's helpers during the Trail Christmas party Dec. 14 at the Miccosukee Resort & Casino.

Kevin Johnson



Tammy Martinez, left, and Shyllynn Tester are ready for the Brighton party as they pass a line of Mickey Mouse-inspired Christmas trees.

Beverly Bidney



From left to right, Susie Doctor, Nancy Frank, Peggy Cubis and Linda O. Henry are in a cheerful mood at the Tampa-Lakeland Christmas party Dec. 12 at Bonnet Springs Park in Lakeland.

Jessica Burns



From left to right, Trail employees Jason Lue Shue and Juan Galeano, and Trail Council Liaison Caryn Billie gather at the gift table during Trail's Christmas party.

Kevin Johnson



Zechariah Stockton, a guitarist in the Ahfachkee School band, performs at the Big Cypress Christmas party.

Seminole Media Productions



Singer-songwriter Spencer Battiest entertains the audience with a performance at Hollywood's luau party.

Kevin Johnson



Jose Solano, 9, and his mom Sheila Aguilar pose in a photo booth at the Immokalee Christmas party.

Beverly Bidney



From left, Skyler Smith, Holden Smith, Amiyah Henderson, Harley Johns and Melissa Yates arrive at the Brighton Christmas party.

Beverly Bidney



Peyton Doctor is given a lei at the Hollywood luau party.

Kevin Johnson



Sisters Toby Gopher, left, and Allison Gopher don festive holiday headbands at the Brighton Christmas party.

Beverly Bidney



Angellena Green, left, and Martha Osceola Turtle check out the inside of a giant Santa display at the Big Cypress Christmas party.

Kevin Johnson



Beverly Bidney

Andy and Helene Buster enjoy the festivities at the Brighton Christmas celebration.



The First Indian Baptist Church choir performs at the Brighton Christmas event Dec. 14.



Jessica Burns

Beverly Bidney

Aaron Frank joins Santa at the Lakeland party.



Kevin Johnson

Annamarie Osceola, left, and Makynna Ramirez sit in a colorful sleigh at the Trail party.



Jessica Burns

Herbert Jim speaks at the Tampa-Lakeland Christmas party.



Kevin Johnson

Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, left, and Jr. Miss Florida Seminole Tahnia Billie stand at a festive display at the Big Cypress Christmas party.



Kevin Johnson

Sidney Sanders, left, and Heide Cypress attend the Trail party.



Kevin Johnson

Youngsters at the Trail Christmas party participate in a conga dance in a ballroom at the Micosukee Casino & Resort.



Beverly Bidney

Ellis Gopher, left, and Rosalie Runkels have their hands full of gifts at the Brighton party.

NEW AUCTION PROCESS

The Seminole Tribe Fleet department will be transitioning to a new auction process in January and onboarding an auction company to facilitate the online auction and website. The existing link will be used until we fully onboard the new company.

Things to know:

Prior to registering, review terms and conditions in link below.

<https://royalauction.auctioneersoftware.com/auctions/6299/lot/21316-seminole-tribe-of-florida-members-terms-and-conditions>

Registration will need to be accomplished using link for Royal Auction.

<https://royalauction.auctioneersoftware.com/auctions/6299-seminole-tribe-25th-and-26th-auction>

Terms and Conditions



Registration



The link will also be posted on the Seminole Tribe intranet at:

[Fixed Assets Login \(mysemtribe.com\)](#)

[Tribal Portal - Login \(mysemtribe.com\)](#)

A one-time onsite and combination online auction will be held at Big Cypress, Billie Swamp Safari on January 25 for Tribal Members and on January 26 the auction will be held. The subsequent auctions will be online using link provided.

If a tribal member wishes to bid on other items not being sold by the Seminole Tribe on the Royal Auction Group website, they will need to register in the non-tribal link.

Payments will be made to Royal Auction Group. When completing the registration, the terms and conditions agreement will be provided. The Terms and Conditions will explain how payments can be made and where payments can be made.

Examples of payment: Personal checks but require a five (5) day hold, credit card up to \$5,000 with a 3.5% processing fee. Cash can be paid to Royal Auction Group locations or paid at any Chase bank account # provided in the terms and conditions. Money orders and e-checks are accepted.

Payments will no longer be made to the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

The auction for Tribal members will be 15 days in duration and if not purchased. The assets will be transported to one of the auction locations hosted by Royal auction Group.

Title Processing - Royal Auction will process all titles when purchased.

Questions contact Fleet@ 954-967-3480 or fleetservices@semtribe.com

Sandy Leonard, Sheryl Walters, Walter Bishop, Ryan Lewis, and Richard Chin.

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226739	2012	DODGE SEDAN	CHARGER POLICE (RWD) BLACK	103,865	Poor	\$2,828.00
245737	2014	CHEVROLET SUV	TAHOE LT (RWD)	151,797	Fair	\$8,084.00
322067	2017	FORD CARGO VAN	TRANSIT CONNECT XL (FWD)	181,246	Fair	\$6,951.00
C30717	2013	FORD SUV	EXPLORER XLT (FWD)	149,572	Poor	\$6,570.00
A06972	2015	FORD SUV	EXPLORER XLT (4WD)	202,948	Poor	\$5,200.00
F03328	1999	FORD PICKUP	F250 REG 4X4 SUPER DUTY (4WD)	152,440	Poor	\$993.00
B32987	2014	FORD PICKUP	F150 XL SUPER CREW (4WD)	142,625	Fair	\$8,995.00
A28301	2015	FORD PASSENGER VAN	15 PASS TRANSIT XL 350 (RWD)	58,672	Poor	\$15,628.00

Note - Previously advertised items are not reflected on this advertisement, only new listings. For more information contact Fleet Services.

954-967-3480, 954-966-6300 ext. 20199.

Tribal Members Only website: <http://semtribe.com/FixedAssets>. (Registration required)

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