



Immokalee fire station opens
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Ahfachkee Student Council takes office
EDUCATION ♦ 1B

FGCU softball comes to Brighton Reservation
SPORTS ♦ 5C



The **Seminole Tribune**
Voice of the Unconquered www.seminoletribune.org • 50¢

Volume XL • Number 12

December 30, 2016

DAPL decision draws optimism, pessimism from Seminoles

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced Dec. 4 it will not approve an easement to allow the proposed 1,172-mile Dakota Access Pipeline to cross under Lake Oahe on the Missouri River, near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota.

The pronouncement halted the project. Assistant Secretary for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy said the decision was based on the need to explore alternate routes and conduct a thorough environmental impact study, complete with public input and analysis.

Reaction to the decision could be heard all the way from the Oceti Sakowin, or Sacred Stone, camp in Cannon Ball, North Dakota to Seminole reservations in Florida.

Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault II released a statement supporting the decision and commended the Obama administration, the Army Corps and the Departments of Justice and Interior for taking steps "to correct the course of history and to do the right thing."

"Throughout this effort I have stressed the importance of acting at all times in a peaceful and prayerful manner- and that is how we will respond to this decision," Archambault wrote. "With this decision we look forward to being able to return home and spend the winter with our families and loved ones, many of whom have sacrificed as well."

Brighton Reservation residents Martha Tommie, Annette Jones and Theresa Frost

♦ See STANDING ROCK on page 3A

Rodeo coming to Hollywood

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD —The Eastern Indian Rodeo Association will start its new season in a new location in 2017.

The Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo and the Bill Osceola Memorial Rodeo will kick off the season in February. Both rodeos are scheduled to be held at the Hollywood Rodeo Arena in a corner of the Hollywood Reservation.

Moses Jumper Jr. said aside from a special rodeo that was set up in a parking lot behind the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino several years ago, rodeos haven't been held on the Hollywood Reservation.

"We have to put in chutes and add a few lights, but it's going to be a good rodeo," said Jumper, Betty Mae's son. "I think we'll have a good crowd. I think it will benefit all the people from the [Hollywood] Rez that they'll actually get to see that. We'll have cowboys coming from out west to be part of the rodeo."

Jumper said consideration to bring rodeos to Hollywood started more than a year ago. He said Hollywood Councilman Chris Osceola and Hollywood Board Rep. Steve Osceola have been instrumental in the process.

"About a year ago," Jumper said, "I went back there and checked it out and said, 'hey, let's get a rodeo back here.' In all reality, my mother and Bill were actually residents here

♦ See RODEO on page 6C



President Mitchell Cypress and Santa Claus surprise a young patient with a Christmas present Dec 6 at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood.

Eileen Soler

'A Christmas wish come true' as Tribe officials spread holiday cheer at children's hospital

BY EILEEN SOLER
Special to The Tribune

HOLLYWOOD — Santa Claus doesn't always rely on his sleigh and reindeer to bring Christmas joy — and he

doesn't always wait until Christmas Eve.

On Dec. 6, the jolly old soul laughed heartily "Ho, ho, ho" while delivering gifts to patients at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital thanks to Seminole Tribe citizen-elves and a Tribal van filled with toys.

"This is a Christmas wish come true,"

said Andres Fernandez, of Aventura, when his daughter Juliana, 7, received a surprise visit from old St. Nick and a Candy Land board game from Trail Liaison Norman Huggins.

Exactly 110 toys, divided into age groups, were delivered to sick children

throughout the hospital's oncologic and surgical floors by Santa, Huggins, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc. President Mitchell Cypress, Tribe firefighters and Board employees.

All of the gifts, and hundreds more

♦ See TOY DRIVE on page 9A

Big Cypress captures Trike Fest

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — Although it wasn't quite Christmas, the holiday spirit was alive and well at the 12th annual Trike Fest on Dec. 9 in Big Cypress. Seniors from Big Cypress, Brighton, Hollywood and Immokalee donned Santa hats and bicycle helmets as they vied for trophies in the friendly competition at the aviation hanger.

"It's wonderful, as always," Paul Buser said. "The Christmas spirit we have here today makes it much more special."

Organized by the Health Department, the goals for the day were fun, fellowship and exercise.

The events challenged competitors' skill, speed and gumption throughout the day. A drag race was added to the familiar weave, maze and target toss events. Trike Fest opened with a three-wheeled drag race down the runway. Competitors pedaled and spectators meandered outside to compete and cheer on friends.

Seniors competed within their age groups: Super Seniors 56-62, Golden Seniors 63-69 and Diamond Seniors 70 and up. The competition was fierce as waves of seniors and their trikes picked up speed on the runway to the finish line.

As always, the team relay raised the level of competition in the final event of the day. Participants had to weave through cones, get a package of puzzle pieces and weave back to the starting line with them. When all the packages were picked up, another team member completed the puzzle challenge. Teammates cheered and shouted advice until the deed was done.

It was Loretta Micco's first Trike Fest and she was up for it. Even though the



Virginia Tommie, Louise Osceola and Ronnie Billie Sr. have plenty of reasons to celebrate as the Big Cypress team won for most participants and the overall race in the 12th annual Trike Fest on Dec. 9.

Beverly Bidney

Hollywood team had only a few competitors, she was confident they would win. Alas, the Big Cypress team prevailed and Hollywood took second place.

"I've been doing the puzzle for the last

few years and I enjoy it," said Carol Cypress, of Big Cypress.

Not everyone had to pedal to compete. Hikers showed their skills in the arrow toss, target toss and ladder ball.

"The best part of Trike Fest is visiting with people we don't see all the time," Louise Osceola said. "BC won last year, we're hoping to keep the trophy."

Each reservation also created elaborately

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New Testament Baptist Church anniversary

Editorial

Can a holiday to honor Native Americans help heal a history of oppression?

• Editorial Board, Los Angeles Times

The Los Angeles City Council is considering joining a movement to replace Columbus Day with an official holiday called Indigenous Peoples Day, to recognize the contributions, as well as the suffering, of the nation's original inhabitants.

Of course, giving city workers a day off would not begin to make amends for centuries of discrimination, enslavement and government-sanctioned genocide of Native Americans. Nor would wiping Columbus Day off the calendar reverse the destruction of indigenous peoples' sacred spaces or the attacks on their cultural heritage.

Without question, Los Angeles, along with California and the nation as a whole, must do a far better job recognizing the violent history of oppression that decimated the country's indigenous people. California's political leaders in the 1850s made no secret of their desire to exterminate the area's native inhabitants. State legislators funded anti-Indian militias. Native people were massacred. Villages were destroyed and tribes forcibly relocated. Yet few Californians know the details of this terrible history.

Is it not possible to honor the spirit and ambition of exploration while also acknowledging the terrible damage inflicted by the colonial powers?

Would a holiday help Californians learn about this shameful period and encourage the process of reconciliation? Possibly. But only if the symbolic holiday is paired with meaningful policies and honest statements. California's leaders could consider, for instance, an official public apology for the state's history of mistreating native peoples. Or they could debate whether to compensate tribes that lost sacred sites or return land that holds special value. The city could, if it chose, provide greater protection for sacred sites threatened by building projects or it could offer its official support for local tribes, many of which are still seeking federal recognition. The true stories of native peoples, beyond the simplistic portrayal of the first Thanksgiving meal, must become part of our national narrative. Schools should be required to teach the history, warts and all. Los Angeles has the nation's second-largest population of Native Americans.

But the effort to raise public consciousness about the history of native peoples has become a zero-sum game. Proponents say it's not enough to designate an Indigenous Peoples Day. The government also has to remove Columbus Day from the official calendar because, in these observers' view, it honors a cruel slave trader whose arrival in the "New World" set into motion the mass killing of native peoples. Columbus represents the violent colonization of the Americas, they say, so in this war of symbolism Columbus Day must die so Indigenous Peoples Day can live.

But why must this be a binary choice? The debate over Columbus and his legacy reflects ongoing confusion in the United States about how the country's history of racism and oppression fits into a proud national identity. The U.S. is a nation that has taken in millions of needy immigrants — but also grew through a colonization process that devastated native people. It's a country that was founded by individuals fleeing oppression — but who then prospered on the labor of slaves. Even Columbus Day itself sends a bit of a mixed message: It wasn't created to celebrate colonial domination at all, but was designated as a federal holiday in the 1934 after a campaign by Italian Americans and Catholics, who were then targets of ethnic and religious discrimination, to help establish their place in U.S. history.

Erasing history is not the answer. The better approach is to confront it straight on, honestly and comprehensively.

Whether the holiday is called Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day or Explorers Day or History Day, is it not possible to honor the spirit and ambition of exploration while also acknowledging the terrible damage inflicted by the colonial powers? Isn't there a way to celebrate the rise of a democratic nation built on a promise of liberty and equality, while also recognizing that progress for some led to displacement, injustice and death for others? There should be.

Standing Rock is historic win for Native American religious freedom

• Charles C. Haynes

On Dec. 4, the two-year struggle by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to protect their sacred land and water ended — at least for now — when the Obama administration denied the easement needed to complete the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The cancelled route, located one half mile from the tribe's reservation in North and South Dakota, would have allowed the pipeline to cross under the Missouri River, an action that the tribe believes would threaten their life-giving water and destroy sacred sites.

Human rights advocates are savoring the moment. In the long, ugly history of persecution, exploitation, broken treaties, unkept promises and adverse court decisions, the victory at Standing Rock is a rare win for Native American religious freedom.

What is considered sacred by indigenous peoples — including, in this case, water, burial sites, sacred gathering spaces — has been, at various times in our history, debased, mocked, bulldozed or completely ignored by government officials and courts. In fact, for much of our history, many Native American ceremonies were illegal and people were imprisoned for practicing their religion.

The First Amendment's Free Exercise clause is supposed to protect all religious groups, including those with rites and rituals rejected, feared or misunderstood by the majority. But the Supreme Court has often failed to treat Native American religious practices on a level playing field with other religious claims. In fact, Native Americans have never won a Free Exercise case at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Consider the 1988 Supreme Court decision in *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association*. At issue was a plan by the U.S. Forest Service to build a road and harvest timber in a section of the Six Rivers National Forest considered sacred by the Yurok, Karok and Tolowa tribes.

Although the justices acknowledged

that the development plan would effectively destroy an entire religion, the Court ruled 5-3 that the constructing the road would not violate the free exercise of the tribes. As a result, Native Americans now have little recourse under the Constitution as they battle to preserve sacred sites on federally owned land.

Centuries of religious tradition can

blocked emergency services from reaching their camp and the nearby Standing Rock Sioux Reservation.

Fortunately, tribal elders defused that confrontation. But more serious conflicts were anticipated after state officials gave the protesters a Dec. 5 deadline to leave the area; an order protesters promised to defy. The Obama administration's action on Dec. 4 ended the standoff, handing Native Americans a rare religious freedom victory.

Not surprisingly, proponents of the Dakota Access Pipeline are outraged. Energy Transfer Partners, builders of the pipeline, accused the Obama administration of "currying favor with a narrow and extreme political constituency" by halting the project. North Dakota Republican Rep. Kevin Cramer described the move as a "chilling signal to others who want to build infrastructure."

Given the political clout of pipeline supporters, the tribes are aware that their victory is fragile — and could be undone after Jan. 20. A spokesman for Donald Trump has already announced that the president-elect supports completing the pipeline and will revisit the Obama administration's decision once he is in the White House.

What the new administration will soon discover, however, is that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, supported by hundreds of tribes from across the country, will not fold their tents and quietly disappear. If construction resumes, threatening sacred water and land, the protest camps will grow in size and strength.

The Trump administration will face a stark choice: Once again remove Native Americans by force — or, at long last, protect Native Americans to preserve and practice their religion on land they hold sacred.

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be wiped out — and invoking the First Amendment does nothing to prevent it.

Against the backdrop of this sad history, Native American protesters — calling themselves "water protectors" — gathered by the thousands and would not be moved. Representatives from more than 300 tribes flocked to Standing Rock, joined by human rights activists, veterans and ordinary citizens who know injustice when they see it.

Sprayed with water cannons in freezing weather, pelted with rubber bullets, tear gas and concussion grenades, the water protectors attempted to open a bridge barricaded by police, arguing that the barrier

Tribalwide senior Christmas party a big hit

IMMOKALEE — Seniors from every reservation filled the ballroom at the Seminole Hotel Casino Immokalee on Dec. 13 for a soiree that featured bingo games galore, sofkee and plenty of raffles. Seasonal joy and patchwork filled the room, as did the aroma of the Christmas feast.

Tribal leaders, including Immokalee Council project manager Pete Aguilar, President Mitchell Cypress, Big Cypress Councilman Cicero Osceola, Big Cypress Board Representative Joe Frank, Brighton Councilman Andrew J. Bowers Jr., Brighton Board Representative Larry Howard and Tribal Liaison Norman Huggins, welcomed the crowd.



Beverly Bidney

At right, Ginnie Bowers gets into the holiday spirit at the tribalwide senior Christmas party Dec. 13 at Seminole Hotel Casino Immokalee.



Beverly Bidney

Brothers Sandy and Jessie Billie cozy up to Santa during the tribalwide seniors Christmas party Dec. 13 at Seminole Hotel Casino Immokalee.



Beverly Bidney

Elizabeth Olea gets a holiday hug from Lorraine Posado at the seniors Christmas celebration.



Beverly Bidney

Geraldine Osceola makes a new friend at the tribalwide seniors Christmas party.



Beverly Bidney

Christine McCall, Wanda Bowers, Joe Dan Osceola, Virginia Osceola, Miss Seminole Florida Kirsten Doney and Francine Osceola enjoy the seniors Christmas party.

The Seminole Tribune is a member of the Native American Journalists Association. Letters/emails to the editor must be signed and may be edited for publication. Subscription rate is \$35 per year by mail. Make checks payable to: The Seminole Tribune 3560 N. State Road 7 Hollywood, FL 33021 Phone: 954-985-5700 Fax: 954-965-2937

The following deadlines apply to all submissions to The Seminole Tribune: Issue: January 31, 2017 Deadline: January 18, 2017 Issue: February 28, 2017 Deadline: February 15, 2017 Issue: March 31, 2017 Deadline: March 15, 2017 Please note: Submissions that come past deadline will be published in the following issue.

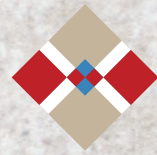
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Community



Seminole fire station opens in Immokalee

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

IMMOKALEE — Ever since Fire Rescue Chief Donald DiPetrillo became a Seminole Tribe employee eight years ago, one of his objectives was to open a fire station in Immokalee. That goal was realized with the opening of the Tribe's Immokalee Fire Station at 12:01 a.m. Dec. 2, one minute after Tribe contracts with the Collier County and Immokalee fire departments expired.

"We were here in Immokalee providing special event coverage, but we felt there was a gap in the continuity of services," DiPetrillo said. "Eliminating those contracts saves money for the Tribe and at the same time it upgrades the service for residents."

Advantages of having Seminole Fire Rescue on the reservation include faster response times, more privacy for patients and the ability to control the environment to protect the Tribe. Fire Rescue's coverage area also includes the Seminole Casino Hotel in Immokalee.

Based on call volume, DiPetrillo

believes it is necessary to be physically present on the reservation. In the past, response times were sometimes delayed because Collier County and Immokalee departments were overwhelmed serving the larger community.

"It was an underserved community," he said. "This service is important to ensure the safety of Tribal members instead of relying on other entities to do that for us."

Four shifts of six firefighter/paramedics man the fire station on 24-hour shifts. The facility is equipped with two fire rescue trucks, a fire engine and a battalion chief vehicle. Although Fire Rescue is confident it can handle anything that occurs on the reservation, mutual agreements for larger emergencies are in place with the other fire departments in the area, just as at every other reservation.

"We are happy to be part of making history by establishing fire services on the Immokalee Reservation," said Lt. Mark LaMadeleine.

Housed in the former Seminole Police Department trailer, the firefighters have reconfigured the space to suit their needs.

Beds occupy an area that used to be offices. A common room has been furnished with recliners and a television.

"The transition is going exceptionally well and the community is giving us a warm reception," said Battalion Commander Jason Allis. "We offer service that is second to none, tailor it to their exact needs and provide them with more personalized service."

Days before Fire Rescue was scheduled to take over service on the reservation, a small fire in an air handler inside the Immokalee field office gave crews a chance to get their feet wet. As it turned out, it was mostly smoke and didn't require the use of fire hoses.

Immokalee firefighters hope every call goes as smoothly and the transformation continues to be a seamless one.

"It is like an early Christmas present to get this done," DiPetrillo said. "It's been on my to-do list since I got here but there were other considerations that were done prior to this. I was just waiting for the opportunity and it finally showed up."



Beverly Bidney

Seminole Tribe Fire Rescue vehicles are parked in front of the Fire Rescue station on the Immokalee Reservation. The station is housed in the former Seminole Police Department site.



Beverly Bidney

Immokalee Fire Station's engine and two rescues make an appropriate backdrop for this shift of firefighters Dec. 8. From left are driver Eduardo Costa, Lt. Mark LaMadeleine, battalion commander Jason Allis, Lt. Frank Rodriguez and firefighter Nicholas Garcia.



Beverly Bidney

During a call to the Immokalee field office for a minor incident in an air handler, the Immokalee firefighters prepare their equipment for action Nov. 29.



Beverly Bidney

Firefighters Frank Rodriguez, Sal Zocco, Chris Lebourveau, Kris Durthaler and Oscar Castillo enjoy a hearty lunch in the Immokalee Fire Rescue station on Dec. 19.

STANDING ROCK From page 1A

spent time at the Sacred Stone camp in late August into early September and were encouraged by the news.

"I cried when I got the news," Tommie said. "I was at a Christmas party, but my heart was still at Standing Rock. I feel like a big burden has been lifted. I have been standing strong and praying and praying."

Jones, who went back to North Dakota in late November, said the camp had grown a lot since September and the feeling of love and solidarity was intense.

"They didn't back down, people stood strong and prayed," she said. "They didn't let anything the police were doing to them break them down."

In a statement Dec. 8, the Indigenous Environmental Network responded to

Chairman Archambault's plea for Water Protectors at the camp to return home during the severe winter weather. It said this is a critical moment in the fight against the DAPL and the Army Corps' decision was a "tremendous victory, but it is a temporary one."

"With the pro-pipeline politics of the forthcoming Trump administration, the struggle to protect the Missouri River, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's drinking water and indigenous sovereignty will most certainly need to continue in the coming year and beyond," the statement read.

Joe Osceola, who also spent Labor Day at Standing Rock, agrees with the sentiment in the IEN statement.

"I don't think it matters what the Corps says; they are going to start drilling anyway with the new administration going in there," Osceola said. "Mr. Trump is in favor of pipelines in general and will keep it going, as far as I'm concerned. I think they need to keep doing what they are doing now in the camp. They just have to keep the fight going; it isn't over yet."

Jones and Tommie believe it is crucial to protect water for future generations.

"I want children to know what clean water tastes like. I am afraid they won't have that in the future,"

Jones said.

"If you see water being polluted, you have to protect it and Mother Earth," added Tommie.

Energy Transfer Partners and Sunoco Logistics Partners, the companies building the DAPL, released a statement Dec. 4 calling the Army Corps' decision a political action and stated the Obama administration "has abandoned the rule of law in favor of currying favor with a narrow and extreme political constituency."

"As stated all along, ETP and SXL are fully committed to ensuring that this vital project is brought to completion and fully expect to complete construction of the pipeline without any additional rerouting in and around Lake Oahe. Nothing this Administration has done today changes that in any way," the statement read.

Florida State University sophomore Daija Baxley, vice president of the American Indian Student Union, believes the Army Corps' decision could be ignored, as many treaties have been throughout U.S. history.

"For over a hundred years, we signed things with the government and they lie, or it never happens, or they keep half of the promises," said Baxley, 20. "This is a small victory, but they will find a way to build it anyway."

An anthropology student, Baxley wants

to use her education to speak on behalf of people who cannot speak for themselves. She believes the Standing Rock Sioux don't have the state on their side, unlike the Seminole Tribe, which she believes has a say in state matters.

"We built a name for ourselves and became very successful," she said. "We are very lucky. Some places don't get that lucky; North Dakota is one of them."

In a statement published Dec. 6, United South and Eastern Tribes President Kirk Francis said USET recognizes the value of the collective efforts to secure the Army

Corps' decision, but "we must remain equally vigilant and steadfast in our determination to ensure that the next Administration does not reverse this decision and that we not let our guard down as the possibility for conflict continues."

"Finally, the realities of DAPL serve to reinforce why it is time to replace the antiquated and paternalistic framework of the current trust model with a 21st Century model that recognizes Tribal Nations as sovereigns and equals within this special and unique Nation-to-Nation relationship," the statement read.



Beverly Bidney

Annette Jones and Martha Tommie wave to passersby in front of the Veterans Building in Brighton on Dec. 6. Tommie put the windshield sign supporting Standing Rock's protest against DAPL when she returned from North Dakota in September.

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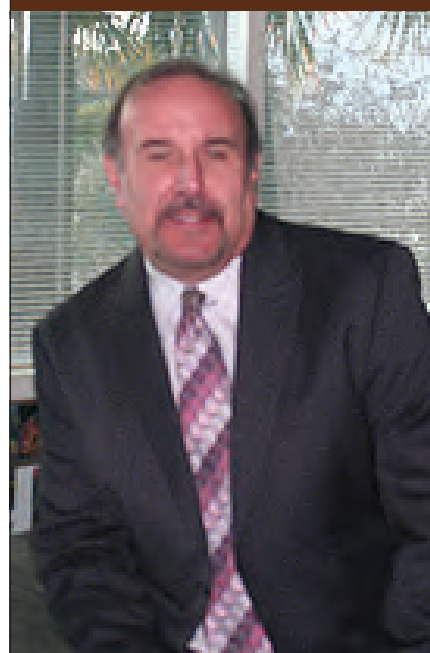


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Neil Baxley continues Gaming ascension through TCD

BY EILEEN SOLER
Special to The Tribune

HOLLYWOOD — Holiday gifts lined a table at the combined annual Christmas party and graduation celebration for Seminole Gaming's Tribal Career Development (TCD) program, but the greatest present Tribal citizen Neil Baxley received at the Dec. 15 event was a graduation certificate and rousing applause.

Baxley was honored during a short presentation amid the crowd of about 70 program co-workers, supervisors, mentors, friends and family members.

TCD director Ervina Capricien, who is also director of Human Resources at Seminole Classic Casino, said Baxley actually graduated from phase two of the program into phase three several months ago. He is currently learning while serving as the slots director at Seminole Casino Coconut Creek.

"From the time Neil came on board he began to mature into the position of success he is seeing now. He works hard and it shows," Capricien said.

The multi-tiered Seminole Gaming training program that launched in 2003 enables Tribal citizens to work in all gaming departments while learning and earning under the mentorship of seasoned supervisors. Sometimes the process takes many years. In fact, Capricien has achieved the highest graduation level but still sees herself as a student.

The only requirement for participation in the TCD program is a high school diploma or GED. Personalized training is provided in all five phases of the program, but participants can move through the phases as quickly or slowly as needed or desired. Phase one is an immersive overview of all disciplines associated with gaming operations, including food and beverage service, table games, slots and hospitality.

Fifteen Tribal members are currently in the program - most of them in phase one. Each phase, or tier, prepares the trainee for more intense responsibilities and leadership roles, and closer to careers in upper management.

"Getting to phase 5 can take a lifetime, but a person may not even aspire to that level. It depends on where you want to land in your career," Capricien said. Some find complete satisfaction working in gaming positions that require training only through the first few phases.

Baxley, 38, originally of Brighton Reservation, moved to Hollywood in 1997 to attend ITT Technical Institute where he earned a degree in electronic technology.

"I fell in love with city life and went on to do my own thing. I really enjoyed myself for a while on my own terms," Baxley said. When he heard about the training

program in 2007, he signed up thinking that his degree in electronics might be transferable to a job as a slot machine tech.

Baxley went through phase one like all other trainees, then spent phase two at Big Cypress Reservation's tiny casino at Billie Swamp Safari where he honed his skills at what he enjoys the most - serving people.

"The most pleasure I get is from taking care of guests whether I help them learn how to play the slot machines or get to reward them with jackpots. I think that's the reason I love the casino life," Baxley said.

Baxley, the son of Buster and Oneva Baxley, said he became intrigued with gaming when he was a boy. He liked stopping by the Brighton bingo hall where his mother often tried her luck. When he was 15, his parents took him to Las Vegas for the first time.

"I loved every minute of the casino. I like the action, the sounds; it's alive," he said. "Sometimes I wonder why I didn't start sooner with TCD."

But Baxley believes that his years in the program were essential to his growth as a professional and certainly to his future as a devoted husband and father. He met his wife Leslie four years ago at Seminole Classic Casino and the couple now has three daughters.

At the Big Cypress casino, Baxley was the acting general manager who oversaw a 32-slot machine operation. Nine months ago he was promoted to phase three and transferred to Coconut Creek where he is now the assistant slots director of 1,800 games.

Vice President of Gaming Operations Juan Martinez said Baxley does a "phenomenal job" every day, especially when it comes to interacting with guests.

"He's an overall great guy. He has the right character and demeanor to be a true ambassador to the guests," Martinez said.

Joseph Vosecek, slot manager at Coconut Creek, said Baxley listens to what guests and co-workers say. He communicates needs and ideas and gets involved with positive changes.

In the spring, Baxley helped roll out Power Bank, a new way to play slots that allows guests to transfer money directly to favorite slot machines. Also, since arriving at Coconut Creek, he helped establish a team incentive program and participated in the team evaluation process.

"When I think of Neil I think of great teamwork," Vosecek said.

Where does Baxley see himself 10 years from now?

"I used to think I wanted to be Jim Allen [CEO of Seminole Gaming and chairman of Hard Rock International], but I know now that I have a lot more to learn," Baxley said.



Eileen Soler

Ervina Capricien, director of Human Resources at Seminole Classic Casino and director of the Tribal Career Development program, presents Neil Baxley with a certificate of graduation from phase 2 of the program that places Tribal citizens in management positions within the Seminole Gaming organization.



Eileen Soler

Neil Baxley, currently the slots director at Seminole Casino Coconut Creek, is congratulated by Big Cypress Councilman Cicero Osceola during Baxley's Tribal Career Development graduation ceremony Dec. 15 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Hollywood.

Everett Osceola awarded Knight Foundation grant

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Everett Osceola was awarded a \$50,000 grant Nov. 28 from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's 2016 Knight Arts Challenge. The funds will be used for the N8tive Reel Cinema Festival, the first Native American film festival in the southeastern U.S.

Osceola's project was chosen from nearly 1,000 entries. The foundation awarded \$2.78 million to the 44 winning projects, which were submitted by individuals and small organizations from Key West to West Palm Beach.

The N8tive Reel Cinema Festival was recognized for highlighting the work and culture of Indigenous people through film.

"It's a really big honor to win, but now we have to step it up even more," Osceola said. "I've got to keep pushing."

Winners had a lot in common and brought art to diverse groups, such as writing classes for underprivileged youth, spoken word/theater performed by veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and one that turns melted guns and bullet casings into musical instruments.

"It was like being in your element," Osceola said. "It was all about bringing more positivity and light to people who have been hidden under the rug. Basically, we're all shedding light but using an artistic component to do that."

The festival debuted Feb. 5 during Tribal Fair at the Hollywood Seminole Hard Rock. About 400 film fans watched three short films by filmmaker Steven Paul Judd, one of which was co-produced by Osceola and Gordon Wareham.

Osceola also partnered with April Kirk,

executive director of the Historic Stranahan House Museum in Fort Lauderdale. In 2014, Osceola and the museum hosted a Seminole Cinema Night to showcase Native American talent, including the 1961 film "The Exiles", which documented a group of young Native Americans who left their reservations to live in Los Angeles.

Now serving on its Board of Directors, Osceola has been working with Stranahan House for more than a decade to promote Seminole history and culture through events at the museum.

The foundation began in 1940 as an education fund, but has evolved to support quality journalism and media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. It partners with artists and organizations that reflect the diversity and identity of the community. The foundation's website states that the arts are important catalysts for public dialogue and problem-solving and that such shared cultural experiences often build people's connections to each other and to their communities.

The next N8tive Reel Cinema Festival will take place during Tribal Fair and Pow Wow Feb. 10-11, 2017 at Paradise Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. The lineup of films and artists will be announced in January.

Budding or experienced filmmakers may submit short films for inclusion in the festival. All submissions must have an Indigenous or Native American component such as culture, language or history and be five to 10 minutes long. Deadline for submission is Jan. 13 and those selected will be announced Jan. 23. For more information email nativereel@gmail.com, call 954-393-7757 or visit the Native Reel Cinema Facebook page.



Photo courtesy Everett Osceola

From left, Adam Ganuza, Knight Foundation arts program officer; April Kirk and Everett Osceola, co-founders of N8tive Reel Cinema Festival; and Victoria Rogers, Knight Foundation vice president for arts, pose for a photo at the foundation's awards ceremony in Miami on Nov. 28.

Board brightens Christmas for Immokalee migrant workers' children

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

IMMOKALEE — Christmas was more joyful for about 90 children of Immokalee migrant families thanks to a toy drive on the Immokalee reservation sponsored by the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc.

Board Liaison Gale Boone delivered 142 unwrapped toys Dec. 19 to the Redland Christian Migrant Association, which cares for children up to age five at its two Immokalee day care centers.

"We chose RCMA because we felt theirs is the most needy group in this area," Boone said. "The parents are migrants; they work

in the fields, the packing houses late at night and they don't have vehicles."

As their children played outside on the playground, about 50 parents gathered in the RCMA cafeteria for gift wrapping. Each parent chose one gift per child and wrapped it onsite.

"Parents wrap them so the kids know the gifts came from a parent, not a stranger," RCMA program specialist Ida Eguia wrote in an email. "This is a way to make our families feel good about themselves, and in the eyes of their children they are their heroes."

To collect toys the Immokalee community held a softball tournament and put collection boxes throughout the

reservation. Tribal citizens, community members, elders and employees contributed to the effort.

Photo courtesy Gale Boone

Board Liaison Gale Boone, right, presents a gift to a parent during a gift wrapping program with the Redland Christian Migrant Association on Dec 19 in Immokalee.



Jessica Osceola earns Master of Fine Arts

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

FORT MYERS — Embracing her bi-racial identity as a Seminole and American woman, Jessica Osceola created art from the issues she has faced throughout her life. After five years of study and work, she recently earned her Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture from Academy of Art University in San Francisco.

The result of Osceola's creativity was on display at Florida Gulf Coast University's ArtLab Gallery in her MFA thesis exhibition titled "Thirty-One" from Nov. 28–Dec. 8.

The show featured bas-relief ceramic figurative sculptures, self-portraits that represent different aspects of life. The sculptures are Osceola's expression of identity, culture, societal roles and motherhood.

"Portraits can tell a story and are a moment in life, a really short moment," said the 2008 FGCU graduate. "This is a reflection of 31 years of living. Figure studies have taught me that we live and we die; it's not like when I was 20 and thought I would live forever."

Osceola sculpted the pieces from selfies she took in the bathroom mirror. The four portraits of her younger self have color

and vibrancy, while the large pale portraits represent her life as a mother "who has figured out that in life it isn't the little things that matter, life is bigger than that," she said.

Bas-relief is an ancient technique where layers of images on a flat panel create illusion and depth. Two life-sized full body sculptures devoid of color, four colorful head and shoulder pieces and 15 smaller sculptures that served as sketches for the larger works, lined the walls of the intimate art gallery.

Friends, family, students and professors attended a closing Dec. 8 reception where Osceola spoke about her vision and technique, which included a lot of math and biology. She studied muscle, bone, flesh, color, light, shadows and gravity.

"Age affects our fatty forms," she said. "I feel like we look, think and act differently every day."

The foundation of her idea for her master's thesis began by contrasting her two distinct cultures.

"It started with tension but it wound up that the cultures complement each other," Osceola said. "Five years of this project and I realize the cultures don't oppose each other but work well together. The things that seem to pull you apart are the things that can unify you. In the end, we are all humans trying to



Beverly Bidney

Jessica Osceola stands near some of her bas-relief sculptures at "Thirty-One", her MFA exhibition at Florida Gulf Coast University's ArtLab Gallery on Dec. 8.



Beverly Bidney

During the closing reception of her MFA exhibition at FGCU on Dec. 8, Jessica Osceola explains some of the processes she used to create her sculptures.

live and survive, it's very basic. We're all just the same."

During the journey to her MFA, Osceola had a family and learned to carve out time to care for her son, Joaquin Velasco-Osceola, 3, and tend to her small farm.

"It gave me time to reflect on work and what's important in life," she said. "In the middle of my academic work, I had to shift my life. Working in ceramics wasn't easy. I used to ask my family why did I do this; I could have cast it in bronze and it would have been easy."

Osceola took courses online, but was always in contact with professors and other students via video.

"It took a super disciplined routine," she said. "School was in session seven days a week and my professors were in Germany, Italy and California."

An integral part of attending art school is the critiques. The professors and the other students commented on each other's art; Osceola said the feedback helped her to develop her work.

"The professors were tough, but that

helped," she said.

In addition to creating the artwork, she wrote a book-length thesis about her process, research, concept, glaze recipes, firing schedule and other details.

Osceola, who has been an artist since she was a small child, has shown her work in Art Basel in Miami Beach and at the Collier Museum in Naples.

"I used to draw things for her when she was not even 6 years old and the next thing I knew, she was drawing on her own," said Osceola's father Douglas Osceola. "She always took art classes and school. That's how she does things; she sticks with them."

Osceola's next path in life will be as a teacher; she begins as an adjunct professor at FGCU in January and will teach ceramics.

"I hope I can influence the program with figurative work," she said. "But I will also give time back to my family; I just want to come up for air."



Beverly Bidney

One of Jessica Osceola's bas-relief ceramic self-portraits on display at FGCU's ArtLab Gallery.

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Pipeline concerns spread to Florida

BY STEPHANIE RODRIGUEZ
Copy Editor

While the battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota has generated national attention for most of 2016, protestors in Florida have staged several demonstrations this fall and winter to halt the construction of the Sabal Trail and Florida Southeast Connection underground natural gas transmission pipelines.

Hundreds of Tallahassee residents have rallied as the 515-mile-long Sabal Trail pipeline cuts through Springs County. Two arrests were made in December and more than a dozen arrests for trespassing were made Nov. 12 near Gainesville amid protests against the pipeline that starts in Alabama, runs through Georgia and stretches into north and central Florida.

Meanwhile, other activists have protested the 126-mile Florida Southeast Connection pipeline, which connects with the Sabal Trail pipeline in central Florida near Osceola County and ends in Martin County at Florida Power & Light's Next Generation Clean Energy Center near Indiantown.

Protesters are concerned that the project will damage private property, harm Florida's springs, pollute water and introduce a risk of leaks and explosions.

Spectra owns the Sabal Trail pipeline. It has partnered with NextEra Energy and Duke Energy for the project. NextEra Energy, a subsidiary of FPL's parent company, owns and is responsible for the Florida Southeast Connection pipeline.

According to witness accounts in media reports, construction has destroyed wetlands, contaminated water, killed at least three otters, and spilled oil into creeks by equipment in-use.

Environmental groups are also claiming the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission didn't consider the impacts of the proposed \$3.5 billion projects that cut through minority and low-income communities, which they say are already overburdened with infrastructure and polluting activity.

"I am sickened by the irreversible destruction of our lands, waters, and wildlife; our wetlands are precious to us as they are the cooling system in Florida and provide a necessary habitat for many species," said activist Shannon Larsen, who has been protesting the Florida Southeast Connection since Sept. 12 and the Sabal Trail connection for three years. "Our waters we cherish and our lands we have sought to steward in a manner that insures that the next generations may enjoy what we have, and that the wildlife have places to call home as well."

Dave McDermitt, spokesperson for NextEra Energy, said the company respects the right for people to protest in a peaceful manner and the underground pipeline has received all needed approvals from federal, state, and local government agencies, which he said was nearly a three-year review process.

"More U.S.-produced natural gas is vitally needed to meet Florida's growing energy needs. Natural gas is good for the environment and good for Florida consumers, including lower electric bills and fewer emissions," McDermitt said. "We reached out to many stake holders and organizations, including Native American tribes, such as the Seminoles."

Similar sentiments were reflected by Spectra spokeswoman Andrea Grover, who also speaks for Duke Energy's minority share in Sabal Trail, when asked what the company will do to ensure there are no gas leaks, oil leaks, and killing of animals.

"Sabal Trail is dedicated to the safe, reliable operation of facilities and the protection of the public, the environment and our employees," Grover said in an email response to The Tribune. "Natural gas pipelines monitor and control safety in many ways and use many different tools. Collectively, these tools make natural gas transmission pipelines one of the safest forms of energy transportation. Our safety programs are designed to prevent pipeline failures, detect anomalies, perform repairs and often exceed regulatory requirements. Once the facilities are placed in service, we will implement operations procedures designed to monitor the pipeline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and we maintain the facilities per applicable federal and state regulations. The environmental impacts of this project have been determined by [the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission] not to be significant and each of the federal and state authorizations for the construction and operation of this project are conditioned to protect the environment."

Despite the companies' assurances, activists — including some Natives — have been continuously documenting the conditions of the construction of the pipeline and claim otherwise.

Activists have written letters to President Obama, provided images of oil leaks and trees that have been destroyed, and expressed their concerns about how both pipelines have been operating as they continue to monitor construction.

A two-hour protest in Okeechobee, which started on the corner of Parrot Avenue and Park Street on Oct. 16, was led by

Bobby C. Billie, of the Council of Original Miccosukee Simanolee Nation Aboriginal Peoples. The protest was held to stop the construction of the Florida Southeast Connection pipeline that Billie believes has already destroyed sacred land, including wetlands and trees that are hundreds of years old in Fort Drum Creek.

Since 2006, the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration recorded 25 incidents that caused more than \$12 million in property damage along Spectra's main line — the Texas Eastern Transmission that connects Texas and the Gulf Coast with big urban markets in the Northeast — and the causes ranged from equipment failure and incorrect operations to pipe corrosion, according to an article published in the Miami Herald in 2015.

The agency found numerous federal rules violations during the same period and slapped Spectra with a total of \$400,000 in fines — not counting another \$59,000 proposed penalty for failing to construct a pipeline in Pennsylvania in accordance with written specifications, according to the Herald article.

According to Spectra's website, the company is planning to merge with Enbridge, a company that is pending a minority share with the DAPL, in order to create North America's largest energy infrastructure company.

The recent controversy in North Dakota is about a 1,172-mile-long crude oil pipeline — a portion of which is slated to be built a half-mile from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's reservation — in a \$3.78-billion project by Energy Transfer.

However, according to Enbridge media spokesperson Michael Barnes, the company has not merged with Energy Transfer yet and they are pending a minority stake in the company.

"Enbridge has a good relationship with Native Americans in the U.S. and Indigenous tribes in Canada. We fully respect Native Americans in their customs and their beliefs and we always try to work with them," Barnes said.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's argues that any leaks from the DAPL would contaminate their only water supply. The tribe also said the construction of the pipeline would disturb sacred burial sites.

Natives from across the nation have camped on and near the reservation, located in Cannon Ball, North Dakota, to protest the pipeline that could potentially transport 570,000 oil barrels a day, according to reports.

Since the start of the protest in the spring of 2016, thousands of protestors, including Seminoles and other Natives from tribes across the country, have traveled to North Dakota to help the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. There have been more than 300 arrests and rising, according to various reports.

Unlike the DAPL, the Sabal Trail pipeline and the Florida Southeast Connection pipeline have not reached high levels of unrest but are starting to receive increased attention from environmentalists, activists, and Florida residents whose growing presence is apparent on social media with more than 7,000 members on the Facebook page 'Stop Sabal Trail Pipeline.'

According to a recent radio interview by 88.5 WMNF News in Tampa, one of the recent arrests in Gainesville was made because a man tied himself to the axle of a water truck that was scheduled to take water out of the Santa Fe River — a river protestors say is at a critical level.

Protestors claim the company was allegedly taking water from one side of the Santa Fe River and transporting it to another side of the river, where the company was allegedly drilling and mixing different chemicals and filters right back into the water, according to the WMNF News report.

Opponents are concerned the Florida Southeast Connection pipeline and the Sabal Trail pipelines are not receiving the attention they believe they deserve and wonder whether state lawmakers and other government officials will get involved.

"They're going after the most vulnerable and pristine land first," Winter Haven resident Ann Jackson said. "[Spectra gets] a slap on the wrist, fined, and keeps destroying the land. They will bring much devastation to the entire state of Florida if their pipeline leaks into the Floridan Aquifer."

Spectra has denied Jackson's claims and said Sabal Trail will not significantly impact karst terrain, springs, or the Floridan Aquifer with its construction or operations.

However, activist Ronald Reedy, who has worked as a commercial diver doing underwater welding and left the field because of an accident where thousands of gallons of oil spilled into the ocean, said fracking in Central Florida will affect the water in South Florida as it flows through the aquifer.

Fracking, also known as hydraulic fracturing, is the process of drilling down into the earth before a high-pressure water mixture is directed at rocks to release the gas inside of them. Water, sand and chemicals are injected into the rock at high pressure, which allows the gas to flow out of the rocks.

"We only have one Earth and so much water; after it's all polluted, we the people are done," Reedy said.

TRIKE FEST From page 1A

decorated trikes and hoped to be judged the best. The four trikes on display each showed Santa in his sleigh pulled by reindeer. Judges had a tough job, as one was as festive as the next. It was attention to detail that determined the winner and Immokalee went home with the trophy.

In the best dressed category, Lawanna Osceola-Niles won best dressed woman; Sandy Billie captured the men's category. Big Cypress took home the two big trophies of the day: most participants and Rez champions.



Above, a serious competitor, Jonah Cypress, does a wheelie while weaving his trike through the cones at Trike Fest on Dec. 9 in Big Cypress. At left, Sandy Billie shows off his crazy Christmas sweater during the costume contest. His outfit won him the ribbon for best dressed male.

Beverly Bidney

Beverly Bidney

Beverly Bidney

Beverly Bidney

Seniors rev up their trikes and work their legs for the drag race at the 12th annual Trike Fest in Big Cypress.



Diane Smith and Mahala Madrigal watch the action at Trike Fest in BC.



Loretta Micco has a good time watching teammates at Trike Fest.



Deloris Alvarez weaves her trike through the cones at the 12th annual Trike Fest.

Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church commemorates five decades of faith

BY EILEEN SOLER
Special to The Tribune

BIG CYPRESS — No one knows for sure when members of Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church first gathered, but families that date back at least five decades to when the plain block structure was built on a bubble of land off Josie Billie Highway marked the church's golden anniversary Dec. 3.

"The main reason for today's celebration is to share memories," said Pastor Arlen Payne, who has led the church for more than a decade, during the 50th anniversary celebration.

Frank Billie, who in 1957 became the Tribe's first board president, is credited for founding the church in 1966. He was ordained as a Baptist minister in December 1980.

Betty Cypress King, a granddaughter of Billie and his wife Eddie Cypress Billie, for whom the church's fellowship hall built in 2009 was named, recalls attending services at that address when she was 12, about 50 years ago.

"I remember the chickee where the services were held. Another chickee was the kitchen. It seemed natural then to be on

the reservation, at home, in a place to pray," King said.

Pastor Payne said older members of the Big Cypress faith community remembered meeting there in the 1950s for Saturday night meetings and Sunday morning worship.

Back then, the congregation was considered a mission of independent Baptist churches from Broward and Miami-Dade counties. Eventually, the churches pooled resources and labor from their own members to build the longhouse-style sanctuary that still stands today.

Pastor Payne said the Rev. Al Janney, of New Testament Baptist Church in Miami-Dade County, the Rev. Spencer Williamson, now of First Baptist Church of Hillsborough, and Williamson's son the Rev. Jerry Williamson, of Calvary Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale, took charge of construction. The Rev. Bernie Rodgers, of Plantation Baptist Church, installed the roof.

"They didn't just come with money and hire workers to do it — they came, laid the cornerstone and built the building with their own hands," Pastor Payne said.

King said the church was provided at no cost to the SeminoleTribe. Her grandfather Frank Billie, the son of medicine man Ingraham Billie, was a devout Christian who

left traditional medicine behind.

"Grandpa was adamant. 'God is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow,' he told us. When he converted, he converted all the way," King said.

Vincent Micco followed Frank Billie as pastor for a short time before he was replaced by the Rev. Johnny Shomo, of the Choctaw Nation. Pastor Payne became the church's pastor in 2005.

The anniversary celebration began in the fellowship hall with a meal that resembled Thanksgiving. Turkey, macaroni and cheese, string beans, corn and cornbread filled the buffet table. Sofkee was served on the side.

After Pastor Payne called celebrants to the church by ringing the church bell, King led the gathering in her grandmother's favorite Creek hymn "Heleluvyn Yvhihares" (I Will Sing Hallelujah).

The Master's Touch gospel group, that includes Devon Fobb, Bruce Redbird and Henry Battiest Jr., of the Choctaw Nation, provided a handful of favorites from their CDs. The group, well-known throughout Indian Country and the U.S., have performed at Seminole reservation revivals and events since the early 1980s.

Battiest, who toured with his own family gospel group back then, said he felt at home with the Seminole Tribe when he first stepped foot on the church property in 1982. He was barely 15.

"The first time we arrived here we were hot and sweaty and probably smelly after traveling so long and sleeping in a van all night, but we were given Spam, frybread and lapale — that's when Big Cypress became a big part of my life," Battiest said. "I feel like I grew up here."

By the mid-1980s, Battiest had married Seminole gospel singer June Baker and the two became a duo. He is the father of noted Seminole recording artists Spencer and Zac "Doc" Battiest who grew up in Hollywood.

Battiest shared many memories of Frank Billie and longtime Deacon Joe Osceola, who he called "Siamese twins" because they were always together. He pointed to the pews where the men and their wives used to sit and he lamented, "one by one they left us." Later, he held back tears when he led the gathering in Joe Osceola's dearest hymn, "The Unclouded Day."

Larry Ford, a Grammy award-winning tenor who is part of the Gaither gospel music family, also sung at the event.

Pastor Payne said the celebration likely drew a smaller than expected crowd because it was postponed twice. The first reschedule occurred under the threat of hurricane Matthew and the second date was changed to honor a mourning period.

"But as we go through life, one generation passes to the next," Pastor Payne said referencing Judges 2:7. He recanted how Bill Osceola started churches in Hollywood, Brighton, Trail and Big Cypress; how Jack Motlow got into a knife fight during one of his first attempts to spread the word of Christ in Trail — and prevailed; and how Frank



Eileen Soler

In the vestibule of the Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church are photographic reminders of the 50-year-old church's humble beginnings as a plain wooden building and of Eddie Cypress Billie, who was the wife of the church's founder and first leader Frank Billie.



Eileen Soler

At Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church's 50th anniversary celebration Dec. 3, members and guests pose in front of the sanctuary built a half century ago.



Eileen Soler

Janice Osceola (center) and loved ones pose for a portrait outside of Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church on Dec. 3 after a celebration service marked the church's 50th anniversary.



Eileen Soler

Members of The Master's Touch, Devon Fobb, Bruce Redbird and Henry Battiest Jr. belt out one of several gospel hymns during a performance Dec. 3 at Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church.



Eileen Soler

Betty King, whose grandfather Frank Billie founded and served as first leader of Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church, shares memories Dec. 3 during the church's 50th anniversary celebration service.



Eileen Soler

Pastor Arlen Payne opens the 50th anniversary celebration service for Big Cypress New Testament Baptist Church on Dec. 3 with a rousing rendition of "I'll Fly Away."

Seminole Brighton Casino, Ridge Area Arc float shines in holiday parades

FROM PRESS RELEASE

BRIGHTON — As part of its community outreach effort, Seminole Brighton Casino sponsored parade floats for The Ridge Area Arc in the Sebring and Okeechobee holiday parades.

The Ridge Area Arc/Seminole Brighton Casino float participated in the Sebring parade, sponsored by the Lake Placid Jaycees, and the Okeechobee parade, sponsored by Okeechobee Main Street. The 32-foot long "Oh What Fun It Is!" float was decorated in a winter wonderland theme, complete with falling snow. At the Okeechobee parade, the float earned first place overall out of 100 floats.

"Seminole Brighton Casino prides itself in partnering with nonprofit organizations, providing supportive means for fundraising through various donations, including charity bingo and sponsored community events," said Marty Johns, Brighton Casino general manager. "This season, our holiday sponsorship recognizes The Ridge



Photo courtesy Seminole Brighton Casino

The Ridge Area Arc/Seminole Brighton Casino float is decked out for holiday parades.

Area Arc for its ongoing service and advocacy for individuals with developmental and other disabilities.

"Employing over 200 people, Seminole Brighton Casino not only appreciates the struggles of families affected by disabilities but

also recognizes the blessings of the ongoing support and commitment of The Ridge Area Arc programs and volunteers."

The casino also presented The Ridge Area Arc with a donation of \$5,000.

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There once was a pepper farm

BY NATASHA CUERVO
 Registrar, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

At a museum one can never know how the next artifact will come to your door. In the past, Tribal and non-Tribal donors have called the Museum with family stories of objects being left to them; sometimes it's a purchase offer, and one time we even received a historic postcard in the mail with only a note saying it had been found in an old box. We have also worked with Tribal departments such as The Seminole Tribe or Ahfachkee School. This time our friends at the STOF Environmental Resource Management department were kind enough to keep us in mind when they found a mystery bag of slides this past summer.

And so the story begins. One day on a reservation called Big Cypress, ERMD handed one of our THPO archeologists a Ziploc bag of 134 slides found at an old farm site where they were working. They were very helpful in describing how and where they were found, but as with many incoming objects, we had very little information on the slides and their content. Upon initial review we saw that the slides depicted the story of a green pepper crop cycle from prepping of the field, to picking, to sorting and boxing for shipment to market – but when did this occur? We do know the images are from Seminole Farms – which happened to be located a short distance from where the Museum stands now, but how big was the field? What were the different types of machinery used and what was their purpose? And so on. One fact down, so many more to go...

There is so much information to be had in these slides and part of our job is to add as much information as possible to our database so that all visitors can search through and research objects in our collection. For example, if a researcher were writing a book on the history of agriculture in South Florida, they could search for farm, peppers, tractor and other terms to arrive at any object that might have a correlation. That search might bring up books, pictures, drawings, or documents, and in this case it would bring up the slides. Please note: I can barely keep my cilantro plant alive at home, so in order to tell these slides' story I had to become a detective and find out what I was seeing. I went to work researching the phases of farming: crop selection, land preparation, seed sowing, irrigation, growth, harvesting



A woman gathers peppers at Seminole Farms. The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum asks that anyone who knows about the farm, including its history and workers and the people in the photos, to contact the Museum.

etc. And I also investigated the different machinery seen in the pictures: bulldozers, dump trucks, excavators, tractors, spreaders etc., and described the slides as best I could.

The story is still not a 100 percent complete; we still don't know the year the images were taken or any of the people in the pictures. And while it appears that the pepper farm didn't last very long, by the end of cataloging I had a deepened respect for the complexity of commercial farming

and the resilience of the Seminole Tribe for daring to venture into previously uncharted territories. If you happen to know anything about the pepper farm or the people in the pictures please feel free to contact us at the Museum. We would love to hear your story.

To contact Museum Registrar Natasha Cuervo or Research Coordinator Mary Beth Rosebrough, call 863-902-1113.



A truck carries peppers harvested at Seminole Farms.

Photo courtesy Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum



Women sort peppers at Seminole Farms.

Photo courtesy Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Christmas memories

BY MOSES JUMPER JR.

We lived on a hill, or so it seemed, along Stirling Road. Two lanes, of course. The old wooden house on blocks had holes and we covered the cracked windows with blankets or sheets. The house itself was in need of painting. The old, cold nights seemed to blow extra hard under the house, but in spite of the wind the dogs would dig a hole along the supporting blocks and stay warm. It seemed we always had plenty of dogs around the house. I don't know why, but it always seemed to be cold around Christmas.

Mother told me we were given this house when they sent her and the family to live on the Dania Reservation. The rez was called Dania back then. She told me that my great aunts and uncles had plenty of cows and horses where they used to live in Indiantown. Our new house was old back then, but grandmother planted plenty of trees around it. We had sweet and sour oranges, mangos, avocados, lemons, grapefruit, cherries, guavas and plenty of coontie plants. I don't know why, but grandma seemed to always be curing those plants for a drink. Those plants during the curing process smelled so bad, but how it tasted so good.

We seemed to always be visiting somebody during Christmas. The car we had was a 1940s model and we used to drive it out to Trail to visit. We used to go to different camps out there during Christmas time. I liked Mike Osceola's camp best. He had animals there and he used to get old bread and pastries from some of the bakeries in Miami and give it to his guests. Some of the bread was moldy, but the stale doughnuts tasted good.

Our house was located across the field from Mekuskey Baptist and across Stirling Road from First Seminole Baptist. Each church would have a program and I would go to both because they gave us toys that were donated by various white churches in the area. I always tried to sneak in the back

room where they kept the toys and see which ones were the best shape.

I guess the best part of this time was when we would return from the church program and I would talk mother into letting us get our gifts early; most of the time she gave in. One year I received my best gift. It was a bike my mother got from the Salvation Army and she had a friend of ours paint it. The only problem was that I was too short to ride it, so we kept it in grandma's room for two years until I was tall enough to reach the pedals. The night I got my bike I slept in heaven dreaming of the day I would be able to ride that bike.

Christmas morning I got up and grandmother was already sewing on her hand-cranked sewing machine. She always sat on the side of the house facing the sun and out of the wind. She was always singing Creek songs and she would stop and laugh at me as I pushed that old bike around the house pretending I was big enough to ride it.

One day not long after the holidays when we had to go back to school, I remember one morning getting up late and missing the school bus. At that time I was enrolled in a school in Fort Lauderdale. After missing the bus, I thought, 'well, no school for me today.' I was going back to bed; my mother had other plans. She said I was going to school. She started to crank up the old '49 Ford, but it wouldn't start. Now I was sure I could go back to bed. Betty Mae Jumper had strong convictions about school. She was a strong supporter of education. She told me to get that bike that she got me for Christmas. She put me on the crossbar and started pedaling me toward Fort Lauderdale. I was maybe 6 or 7, but even at that age, it was embarrassing. Thank goodness a man with a truck picked us up and took me to school.

These are some of the memories of my youth. I pray that Christmas will have memories that you will forever cherish.

Seminoles to participate in White Pelican Celebration

CHOKOLOSKEE — The White Pelican Celebration will feature plenty of Seminole musicians, culture and history during the festival Jan. 7-8 at the Smallwood Store in Chokoloskee.

The Battiest family, Bobby Henry, James E. Billie and the Rita Youngman Band are among the scheduled guests. The event will help raise funds for the Smallwood Store, a historic trading post which welcomed Indians more than 100 years ago.

Master of ceremonies will be entertainer J.R. Battiest, whose sons, the Battiest Brothers, wrote and produced the award-winning "The Storm" that garnered Best Music Video honors at the American Indian Film Festival held in San Francisco.

Spencer Battiest, one of Indian Country's brightest stars and recent NAMMY winner, will join his father at the gala dinner Jan. 7 at the Oyster House for a screening of "The Storm" and a few tunes prior to a private showing of "Wrestling Alligators," the documentary about the life of James E. Billie,

who is scheduled to attend and participate in a question and answer forum. Cost for the dinner is \$50 and reservations are required.

Other Florida musicians scheduled to perform during the weekend include the Florida Boys, Raiford Starke, J Robert & The Walkin Trees, Valerie Wisecracker, Cindy Hackney, Bonefish Johnny, the duo of Frank Thomas and Eroc Hendle, James Hawkins and other special guests.

The festival will include boat and kayaking trips to see the gigantic snowy birds that spend their winters in the area. Cost is \$40 each. Raffles, auctions, and talks will also be part of the weekend. White pelican specialist Dr. Tommy King will be among the speakers. There will also be guided walking tours and Native American foods such as Seminole fry bread and Indian tacos as well as gator nuggets, key lime pie and more.

Admission is \$10; children age 12 and under are free. For more information and to make reservations, go to www.smallwoodstore.com or call 239-695-2989.



Ted Smallwood and Charlie Tigertail

Florida State Archives

The Wilson Cypress Camp

BY JACK CHALFANT
THPO Management Trainee

The Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) recently completed an investigation of the Wilson Cypress Camp and its eligibility for the Tribal Register of Historic Places (TRHP).

As development on the Big Cypress Reservation grows, the THPO surveys portions of the reservation as part of the On-Reservation Review Process to ensure culturally significant places such as historic camps and plant gathering areas will be respected.

The Wilson Cypress Camp is an early 20th century Seminole camp, which was rediscovered on May 26, 2015 in a hammock by the Tribal Historic Preservation Office.

Through personal communication with the elders in the Big Cypress community it was learned that a camp once existed in the area where the survey was conducted. The camp was

established in the 1930s by Wilson and his wife Ruby, though little evidence of it exists on historic aerial photographs until 1953. On that particular aerial, the ground



Mikasuki Indians of the Whitney and Wilson Cypress village

Courtesy photo

is exposed and some structures are visible. Wilson and Ruby had three children who lived in the camp with them: Frank Cypress, Betty Cypress and Marian Cypress Bowers.

The family lived in the camp until the HUD houses were built in the late 1960s. At that time, Wilson moved his family into modern houses that were built on Horseshoe Road on the Big Cypress Reservation.

During the THPO investigation, little archaeological evidence of the camp was recovered. One small animal bone (deer) was found in the southern part of the camp and highlights a small portion of the diet of those who lived in the camp.

By working with tribal members to document these important places and memories, THPO is building an archive of knowledge that tribal members can use to help tell future generations' important stories about life and culture on the reservation. To contribute your knowledge of historic camps on the reservation or memories about life in the camps, please call the Tribal Historic Preservation Office at 863-983-6549 or stop by any of the offices on the Big Cypress or the Brighton reservations.

New beadwork exhibit opens at Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

FROM PRESS RELEASE

BIG CYPRESS — The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum has opened its newest exhibition "Rekindled: Contemporary Southeastern Beadwork" in the West Gallery. In the 1990s, you would have been forgiven for believing that traditional beadwork forms among the Southeastern tribes did not exist. Beaded objects such as bandolier bags and sashes were thought to be the traditions of more Northern tribes. However, pictures and objects in museum collections prove

that Southeastern tribes created beadwork in the 1800s. Many of these traditions were lost altogether or became more underground during the 1830s-1850s as part of the forced removal commonly known by the Cherokee term, the Trail of Tears.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, several tribal artists began their own renaissance of traditional Southeastern beadwork. They rekindled the traditions within their own cultures to help reforge the chain of broken tradition. Each artist strives to create beadwork based upon traditional forms,

often using the knowledge of their Tribal elders and pieces in museums to learn about or rediscover these forms. In this exhibition, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum will feature seven contemporary beadwork artists: Roger Ellis Amerman (Choctaw), Karen Berry (Cherokee), Martha Berry (Cherokee), Carol Cypress (Seminole), Jerry Ingram (Choctaw/Cherokee), Jay Mccgirt (Creek/Seminole), and Brian Zepeda (Seminole). This exhibition will include bandolier bags, sashes, baldrics, and other beautifully ornate beaded objects.

TOY DRIVE

From page 1A

delivered later to local charities, were donated by Tribal members, employees and drive-by strangers via a toy drive presented by Seminole Gaming during a collection effort from Dec. 1-3 at the corner of Stirling Road and U.S. 441 in Hollywood.

The charity groups included Kids in Distress, HOPE, and the E.A.S.E Foundation. Books were donated to the Russell Reading Foundation.

President Cypress created the big-hearted toy drive in 2007 when he was Chairman. The good-deed effort was held every December through his administration and was relaunched last year when he became head of the Board.

President Cypress said a painful childhood memory inspired the effort. He recalled 1953 and a Christmas gift exchange run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs that connected Native children and kids from a local public school. Then, he was living in a tourist attraction along U.S. Route 27 with his single mother.

"We were so poor but my mother gathered up six pennies so I could buy a Baby Ruth candy bar to wrap up for the boy who picked my name," President Cypress said. He'll never forget the moment when the boy saw his gift.

"He thought he would get a cool tomahawk from me, an Indian boy. But when he opened the present, he only saw a 6-cent candy bar. He just put it down and stared at me. I never wanted to disappoint anyone at Christmas again," Cypress said.

Stephen Bowers, who represented the Tribe's military veterans and the American Indian Veterans Memorial, Inc. during the hospital delivery, was moved to tears when he watched President Cypress present a crib toy to the parents of a 2-month-old cancer patient.

"I'm just really glad that we can do this for other people. For so many years we were grateful if churches would bring us something for Christmas," Bowers said.

Bowers smiled while remembering the early 1950s when the Hollywood Reservation



Santa Claus, Trail Liaison Norman Huggins and other Seminole Tribe representatives make a personal visit to Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital patient Brendan Gondek, 11, of Hallandale, during a surprise holiday toy giveaway Dec. 6.

Eileen Soler

was still called Dania Reservation, and one church group traditionally gave Seminole kids one apple, an orange and a piece of candy inside a brown paper bag. The Florida heat and humidity always melted the candy onto the orange peel.

"But we appreciated it," he said with a half-laugh. "It was always good to lick the candy off the orange."

Sometimes parents appreciate the generosity more than the children.

Seminole Tribe paramedic Robert Soto said he spent a lot of time in the cancer unit as a father when his son battled cancer two years ago. Being on the receiving end of caring strangers bolstered his strength, he said, because he felt a world of wonderful people supporting his family.

"Seeing the smiling faces of the parents and kids today reminds me of that time. It feels great to come back and be able to give back," Soto said.

Fernandez said none of the parents and children expected the Santa and Seminole visit, much less with them bearing dozens of gifts. He said his daughter was "star-struck" when she met President Cypress and

Huggins, even more than coming face to face with Santa Claus.

"She's been studying Native American history and now can't wait to get better and back to school so she can tell her friends all about it," Fernandez said. "For her, meeting Seminole people was like meeting all of the singers from One Direction."

Tips to prevent drownings

SUBMITTED BY BOB LAMENDOLA
Florida Dept. of Health in Broward

From two drowning tragedies in recent weeks came teaching moments.

In October, a Coral Springs mother dove into the pool at her apartment complex in an attempt to save her five-year-old, who was floundering. But mom couldn't swim and both lost their lives. Then in November, a Lauderhill toddler wandered from home and drowned in a neglected, overgrown pool in the neighborhood.

"These deaths were tragedies but they teach lessons that could save lives," said Cassie McGovern, manager of the Drowning Prevention program at the Florida Department of Health in Broward County (DOH-Broward).

Drowning is the No. 1 cause of accidental death among children under age 5. The best protections, of course, are for an adult to watch children exclusively every minute they are around water, and to set up "layers of protection" such as pool fences, locking gates, door alarms and rescue tools. Swimming lessons for the children and adults can help.

The mother's death shines a light on a rule everyone should follow in a water emergency: Don't go jump in to rescue someone unless you are an excellent swimmer. The person in trouble is desperate and struggling, and can pull a potential rescuer under the water.

McGovern says the best approach is to find a floating device — life preserver, pole, ladder, tree branch, etc. — that you can use to pull the person out of the water or keep them

afloat. And, call for help.

The mother-child drowning was not the only risky rescue attempt. Two days after the deaths, a North Lauderdale woman jumped into a neighborhood lake trying to save her two-year-old great-grandchild, but went under, too. Luckily, a witness summoned a Broward Sheriff's deputy living nearby, who was able to pull both of them from the lake. Both recovered.

The death of the Lauderhill toddler re-emphasizes the danger of neglected pools. Most adults are grossed out by the sight of a neglected pool with water that may be green and slimy, and may assume no one would go near the ugly water. But that's not always true of toddlers. They may be just as fascinated with filthy water as they are with a sparkling clean pool. Too often, the results are fatal. For one thing, it's harder to see children struggling if the water is dark.

DOH-Broward urges people to be extra vigilant if a pool becomes abandoned. Call the city or county code compliance offices, which can issue violations to the property owner in an attempt to safeguard the pool. Be persistent if action is slow. But be aware that solutions may be difficult, especially if the home is in foreclosure.

If the stagnant water spawns a swarm of mosquitoes, you can call DOH-Broward Environmental Health at 954-467-4700, ext. 4201. An inspector will visit the pool along with county mosquito control to kill the bugs and the larvae.

Safeguarding abandoned pools won't end drowning deaths, McGovern said, but it may help prevent one.

Boys & Girls Club focuses on fitness

STAFF REPORT

HOLLYWOOD — The Hollywood Boys & Girls Club participated Dec. 15 in a national program aimed at improving short-term fitness goals.

About 25 youngsters filled half of the basketball court for the two-hour program at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center. The menu included sprints, sit-ups, push-ups, agility drills and even a tug-of-war contest.

Each child's exercises were timed and recorded by instructors with an eye toward improving those marks when the kids do the same events in the spring.

The program is part of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Nestle's three-year partnership in a national fitness challenge competition that started in 2015. The BGCA and Nestle are challenging local clubs around the country to inspire kids to achieve short-term fitness goals.

"Creating a culture of health and wellness is critical as we work to enable our Clubs' kids and teens to have a great future. With more than 3 out of 10 kids today considered obese or overweight, Boys & Girls Clubs of America is laser focused on providing a variety of health and fitness programs that change this equation for the next generation," Jim Clark, president & CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of America, said in a press release.

Tribe, William G. Roe sell Blue Lake Citrus

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc. and William G. Roe & Sons sold their interest in Blue Lake Citrus Products, LLC Nov. 14 to Sun Orchard Juicery, Inc.

STOFI purchased a majority stake of Blue Lake Citrus, the parent company of Noble Food Service, in 2014 from the Roe family which founded the company in the 1920s.

Winter Haven-based Blue Lake Citrus makes the Seminole Pride Noble juice brand, which is sold at supermarkets including Publix, Ahold, ACME, Giant Eagle and Whole Foods as well as food service and specialty marketplaces.

"We have enjoyed our association with the Seminole Tribe of Florida, Inc. over the

past three years and are pleased with the success we have made together expanding the project lines and customer base for Blue Lake Citrus products," Blue Lake Citrus Products President Morgan Roe said.

Based in Miami, Sun Orchard is a national provider of premium juices, smoothie bases, culinary and mixology ingredients to the food service industry.

"We have known of the Noble/Seminole Pride brands for quite some time and have been impressed with their growth initiatives and expanding product offerings," said Jean-Marc Rotsaert, Sun Orchard executive chairman.

Sun Orchard is owned by Centre Partners, a New York private equity group.



Kevin Johnson

At left, Devin Stewart receives encouragement from instructor Chris-Paul Etienne during a running exercise as part of Hollywood Boys & Girls Club's participation in a national fitness challenge Dec. 15 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center. At center, Kenneth Tommie Jr. sprints toward a cone. At right, Tony Sanchez works hard at doing as many sit-ups as he can during a timed exercise.

SEMINOLE SCENES



Photo courtesy Lauren Tsuboyama

FOREIGN PRESS: Journalists from a variety of Arabic media get ready for an airboat ride Dec. 18 at Billie Swamp Safari on the Big Cypress Reservation. The tour was part of Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau's welcome of Emirates airline to Fort Lauderdale. Emirates' new non-stop daily service from Dubai International to Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport started Dec. 15.



Photo courtesy Robin Haines Merrill

LUNCHTIME LESSON: Pedro Zepeda explains his cypress dugout canoe carving project to the Work Matters business luncheon group in November. The group meets twice a month at the Upper Room Art Gallery in downtown Fort Lauderdale where the project is located. Zepeda worked on the canoe as part of the gallery's celebration of Native American Heritage Month.



Photo courtesy Seminole Casino Coconut Creek

SOPHIA IN SOUTH FLORIDA: Seminole Casino Coconut Creek will host An Evening With Sophia Loren on Feb. 10 at 8 p.m. The award-winning actress will share stories of her childhood in war-torn Italy, her family life and prolific career. Loren will be accompanied by Entertainment Tonight interviewer Bill Harris and she will also answer questions from the audience. Loren, 82, won the Academy Award for Best Actress in 1962. She has starred with some of Hollywood's top leading men, including Cary Grant, Marlon Brando, Gregory Peck and Paul Newman. For tickets go to www.ticketmaster.com or call 800-653-8000.



Wanda Bowers

PROUD VETERANS: Veterans honored during the Big Cypress Veterans Day event Nov. 11 were, in front row: President Mitchell Cypress, Big Cypress Board Representative Joe Frank; standing: Rollie Johnson, Gary McInturff Jr., Junior Miss Florida Seminole Thomlynn Billie, Marina Sally Josh, Miss Florida Seminole Kirsten Doney, Clarence Johnson and Jacob Osceola Jr.



Kevin Johnson

NATIVE COMIC RELIEF: The Navajo comedy duo of Ernest "Ernie" Davie Tsosie III, left, and James Junes entertain a packed ballroom during the Trail community's Christmas party Dec. 2 at the Miccosukee Resort. Ernie and James have performed throughout Indian Country while emphasizing positive messages.



Kevin Johnson

PLAY TIME: A newly installed playground, complete with a soft, artificial grass surface, recently opened at Ollie Jones Memorial Park in Brighton. The play area features swings and slides and other playground apparatus.



Beverly Bidney

YOU RANG?: One of Jessica Osceola's ceramic bas-relief sculptures, part of her Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition at Florida Gulf Coast University's ArtLab Gallery, appears to have an opinion about this art patron's use of a cell phone in the gallery Dec. 8.



Beverly Bidney

SWING TIME: Caleb Burton gets some serious swinging in before the rain comes down at the Pemaytv Emahakv Charter School Christmas celebration with the Real Life Children's Ranch at school Dec. 6.



Beverly Bidney

EDUCATIONAL TRIP: Silver Ridge Elementary school in Davie sent the fourth graders to Billie Swamp Safari Nov. 30 as part of the Florida curriculum.



Beverly Bidney

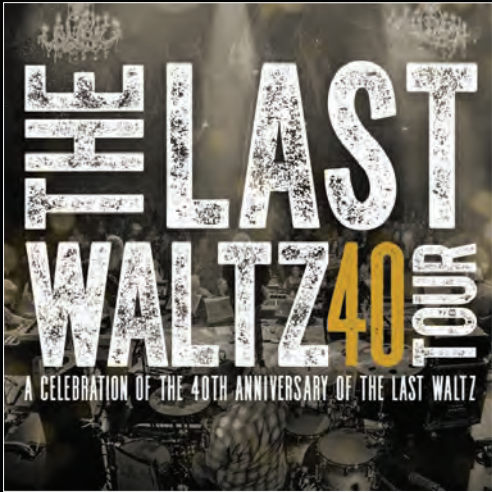
TREASURED TROPHIES: Alice Billie, of Big Cypress, poses with the treasure trove of trophies earned by the Big Cypress participants in Trike Fest Dec. 9 at the aviation hanger.



Photo courtesy Hard Rock

HARD ROCK OPENING: A celebration takes place in November for the opening of Hard Rock Cafe Porto in Portugal. The new cafe is housed in a six-story building erected in the 19th century.

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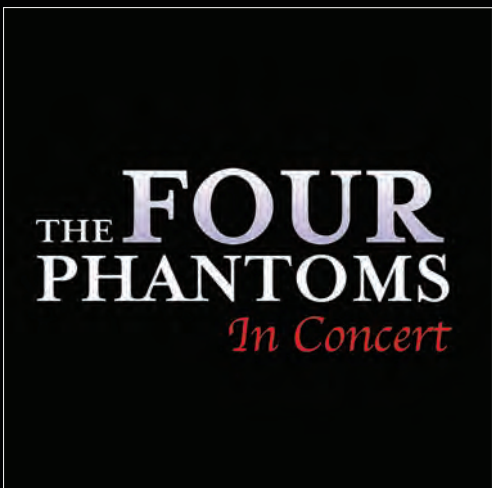
January 25
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WITH SPECIAL GUEST
JD & THE STRAIGHT SHOT



January 27 & 28
FRANKIE VALLI
& THE FOUR SEASONS



February 4
**LISA
LAMPANELLI**



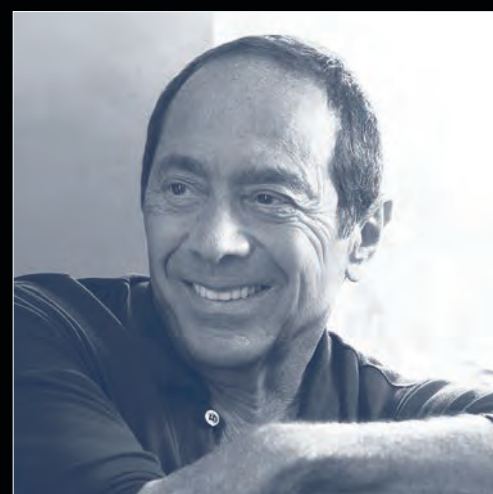
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Education

B

Goal-oriented Ahfachkee Student Council takes office

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BIG CYPRESS — With parents, teachers and students watching, the Ahfachkee Student Council was sworn in by Principal Dorothy Cain at the school's Dec. 6 Parent Teacher Student Organization meeting.

Elected in late October, the five officers — President Mya Cypress, Vice President Janessa Jones, Secretary/Treasurer Eyanna Billie, Middle School representative Billie Cypress and Elementary representative Abbiegale Green — have hit the ground running.

"They've taken ownership of it and are coming up with their own ideas and topics to address," said teacher coordinator and student council advisor Valerie Whiteside. "They are using the problem-solving process to identify an issue, determine how it got that way and figure out how to fix it."

The students' reasons for running for Council include the desire to make the school better by bringing back some old activities, improve their leadership skills, enhance their college applications and have fun doing it.

"I want to incorporate fun into learning to motivate people to come to school," said 10th-grader Mya, 15. "Having fun while learning is more appealing."

The Council has already accomplished two of its goals, including students being allowed to go outside and sit under the chickee during lunch. Younger students go as a class but older kids are now allowed to go out by themselves.

"My class loves it," said fourth-grader Abbiegale, 9.

Student Council also implemented Christmas Spirit Week Dec. 19-22, during which students were encouraged to rock their ugliest sweaters, dress as a Christmas character, wear red and green clothing and don Christmas accessories.

Other ideas on the Council's agenda for the year are to start clubs for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) as well as arts and economics, raise money for the Dakota Access Pipeline water protectors



The 2016-17 Ahfachkee Student Council, from left, Eyanna Billie (Secretary/Treasurer), Mya Cypress (President), Abbiegale Green (elementary representative), Janessa Jones (Vice President), Billie Cypress (middle school representative).

in North Dakota and work on bringing back sports for next year. Lack of a sports program pushed many student-athletes to attend other schools this year and the Council wants to get them back.

"We used to have spirit week and every day had a different theme," said 10th-grader

Janessa, 15. "We want kids to get excited and get involved in activities like prom and pep rallies."

The students also want to bring back more cultural activities such as attending Indian Day and playing stickball games. The Council plans to go before the School Board

to ask for permission to use cell phones during lunch and take more field trips outside of Florida.

"A lot of people don't realize how much potential the school has," Mya added.

Janessa said participating on the Council is an important part of her education.

"It's a step in bettering my leadership qualities," she said. "I plan to come back and work for my Tribe, so being on Student Council is a way to improve myself."

Real Life Children's Ranch, PECS team up for Christmas celebration

BY BEVERLY BIDNEY
Staff Reporter

BRIGHTON — A Pematyv Emahakv Charter School Christmas tradition played out Dec. 6 as 24 kids from the Real Life Children's Ranch in Okeechobee spent an evening enjoying Christmas carols sung in Creek, games, Indian Tacos and quality time with Santa.

The annual gathering at PECS began about four years ago. Students had been delivering gifts to the group foster home for a few years when the administration invited the children to school for a traditional Seminole celebration.

"Delivering the gifts was eye-opening and emotional for the students," said PECS Principal Brian Greseth. "They learned Christmas isn't always wonderful for everyone."

Founded in 1957, the non-profit Real Life Children's Ranch is a 30-acre, faith-based ministry that offers four family-style group foster homes for children from infants to age 20. House parents live in the homes

full time, which house six boys or six girls each. The goal is to offer children a safe and nurturing home until they can be reunited with their families or placed with new families for adoption. The average stay is about a year.

fellowship mean a lot. I can't tell you how much the kids enjoy this; every year they leave beaming."

Before the skies opened up and stormy weather rolled in, the students and children played together on the school's playground in a mad dash to beat the rain. Their abundant energy burned up, the group then waited for Santa, who arrived in a Seminole fire engine instead of his usual sleigh.

After plenty of smiles and hugs, the group adjourned to the cafeteria where students caroled for their guests before they all feasted on Indian Tacos and other treats.

"It means a lot to the school to give these kids a chance to have a good time," said student government chairman Heath Lawrence, 13. "It's good to see everyone in the happy-go-lucky Christmas spirit."

The impact of the evening wasn't lost on the students.

"It's great to come together and spend time with each other like a family," said Tammy Martinez, 12. "Helping them and caring for them makes me feel great."



PECS students sing Christmas carols in Creek for children from the Real Life Children's Ranch on Dec. 6.



Santa visits PECS as it hosted kids from the Real Life Children's Ranch for a Christmas party.





Stephanie Rodriguez

Ashton Doctor and other Hollywood Rez Torch Club kids are thrilled and stunned Dec. 7 as they enter a room and find out what they won for being grand prize winners of the Climate Superstars Challenge.



Stephanie Rodriguez

Hollywood Boys & Girls Club's Franklin Primeaux, Ivory Vasquez, Mae'Anna Osceola-Hart and Genesis Pagan enjoy prizes that came with being grand prize winners in the Climate Superstars Challenge.

Hollywood Rez Torch Club wins national climate challenge

Boys & Girls Club group nets \$25,000 worth of technology

BY STEPHANIE RODRIGUEZ
Copy Editor

HOLLYWOOD — Hollywood Rez Torch Club members from the Boys & Girls Club won a national environmental grand prize worth \$25,000 from the Climate Superstars Challenge, a contest designed to raise awareness about climate change throughout the country's communities.

Sponsored by Samsung, the competition featured 185 Torch clubs across the nation and lasted about seven weeks. Hollywood's reward for being a grand prize winner included a full technology suite upgrade highlighted by two 55-inch ultra high definition LED smart TVs, three virtual reality devices, 30 Galaxy tablets, one Gear 360 camera, and 30 notebook laptops.

A grand prize celebration event was held Dec. 7 to unveil the merchandise to all the kids who participated in the competition.

In order to win the technology makeover, the Hollywood Rez Torch Club kids engaged in activities related to environmental causes that promote energy efficiency, conservation and sustainability.

Torch Clubs are small-group leadership and service clubs for boys and girls ages 11 through 13 that contribute activities in four areas: service to the club and community, education, health and fitness, and social recreation.

This year the Hollywood Rez Torch Club decided to participate in the second annual Climate Superstars Challenge that not only teaches youth about the importance and awareness of conservation, but also serves to empower them to explore a future in science, technology, engineering and math.

The Hollywood Torch Club participated in a variety of activities, including planting trees, identifying energy efficient certified products such as Energy Star and coming up

with creative projects to conserve water and reduce waste.

The kids constructed a rocket made from a pasta box to use as a learning tool and also made a snow globe by filling an old glass jar with water and glitter before sealing it.

"It was a fun experience cleaning the environment and planting trees near the Airnasium," said Mariah Bowers, 17, who participated with the Torch Club and has

since moved up to the next level known as the Keystone Club.

Torch Club President Mae'anna Osceola-Hart, 12, said her favorite part about the Climate Superstars Challenge was picking up trash around the reservation.

The Torch Club also visited and toured the Seminole Tribe of Florida Public Works facility with Hollywood Councilman Christopher Osceola, giving them an opportunity to learn about utility installation

and maintenance as well as meet workers with STEM careers.

"I liked going to the water plant because we were able to see where our water comes from," said Zion Edwards, 14, president of the Keystone Club. "This challenge changed the way we do things at the Boys & Girls Club because now we're more environmental about everything."

At the end of the competition, the Hollywood Rez Torch Club exceeded the

activities necessary to win the Samsung Climate Superstar title and garnered bonus points for their commitment to showcasing their understanding of the value of reusing materials for different reasons.

"Thanks to the Torch club's dedication we have more technology today than what we have ever had," Mariah said. "It's not only fun for all the kids but we get to learn about new technology."



Stephanie Rodriguez

Hollywood Boys & Girls Club's Torch Club members and Hollywood Councilman Christopher Osceola, center back row, celebrate winning the Climate Superstars Challenge national grand prize Dec. 7.

PECS names November students of the month

BRIGHTON — The following Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School students earned Student of the Month honors in November:

Elementary — Cash Jumper, Juan Solis-Howard, Azariah Washington, Augustana Banda, Peyton Thornton, Melaine Bonilla, O-Shaa-ne Rodriguez, Braylen Thomas, Dahlia Turtle, Ila Trueblood, Devon

Mitchell, JB Anderson, Ava Taylor, Jessie Martinez, Carlee Osceola, Maycee Holata, Candice Melton, Iann Jimmie, Tiera Garner, Santana Alvarez, Talena Holata

Middle — Jarrett Beecham, Leilani Burton, Haylie Huff



Photo courtesy PECS

Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School middle school students of the month for November are Jarrett Beecham, Leilani Burton and Haylie Huff.



Photo courtesy PECS

Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School elementary students of the month for November.

Preschoolers give, receive holiday joy



Stephanie Rodriguez

Hollywood Preschool's 3- and 4-year-old class performs on stage together for the Dec. 19 Christmas production at Tribal Headquarters.



Stephanie Rodriguez

With encouragement from his mom, Mayan Macias approaches Santa to take a photo by the Christmas tree after Hollywood Preschool's annual Christmas production Dec. 19.



Stephanie Rodriguez

Kendrick Osceola Jr., John Josh, and Lakota Correa portray the Three Wise Men in Hollywood Preschool's Christmas production Dec. 19 at Tribal Headquarters.



Beverly Bidney

Julian Clay, 4, and David Clay, 2, peer up at Santa during the Big Cypress Preschool Christmas party.



Beverly Bidney

Martha Osceola-Turtle, 4, gets some serious face-time with Santa at the Big Cypress Preschool Christmas party Dec. 20



Beverly Bidney

Miguel Estrada, 3, unwraps a present at the Brighton Preschool Christmas party Dec. 14.



Beverly Bidney

Damon Cypress, 4, examines his new toy truck at Big Cypress Preschool Christmas party.



Beverly Bidney

Ianna Cypress, 3, poses patiently with Santa and her presents during the Brighton Preschool Christmas celebration.



Stephanie Rodriguez

Nnamdi Tommie, center, performs in the Hollywood Preschool's Christmas production in front of a large audience at the Tribal Headquarters' auditorium.



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RICHARD CASTILLO
 FLORIDA CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY
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Photo courtesy Sunny Ploch

Shelly Duckett, Delilah Young and Janiya grate carrots for a fresh apple-carrot salad during the Tampa Recreation Department's student cooking class Dec. 3 at The Rolling Pin Cooking Emporium in Brandon.

Tampa kids learn cooking from the pros



Photo courtesy Sunny Ploch

Chef Dave West, center, demonstrates how to ready dough for a quick chill in the freezer during the Tampa Recreation Department's student trip to The Rolling Pin Emporium. The youngsters are, from left, Delilah Young, Jalen, Azaria Simmons and Tyrek Lasane.

Hollywood Preschool hosts funny sweater breakfast



Stephanie Rodriguez

Clea Billie-Correa and her son La'Kota Correa wear their funny sweaters for the Hollywood Preschool's funny sweater breakfast Dec. 8.



Stephanie Rodriguez

At left, Phil Bowers and son Jax Bowers sit and wait for breakfast to arrive at the Classic gym for the preschool's funny sweater breakfast. At right, Mckenna Macias smiles after eating breakfast.



CHRISTMAS 2016

Reservations celebrate Christmas

COMPILED BY TRIBUNE STAFF

Tribal citizens celebrated the holiday season throughout December with Christmas parties on every reservation. Friends and family enjoyed the season with festive, fun-filled parties full of tasty treats, entertainment and, of course, Santa and his entourage.

The Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena was transformed into a winter wonderland Dec. 16 for the Big Cypress community Christmas celebration. Carnival rides and Santa were popular, but the evening's main event was the Ahfachkee School's Christmas show. Every student had a part in the performance; they danced, sang, played musical instruments and acted in the Charlie Brown Christmas play.

An enormous peaked white tent and a carnival with rides, games, and cotton candy filled the grounds of the Immokalee field office Dec. 19. Kids rode the rides, played on a big pile of trucked in "snow" and vied for stuffed animals at the games. Inside the tent, Christmas was in full bloom; Santa and his helpers greeted every celebrant and posed for photos.

A group of current and former Immokalee council and board liaisons, dating back to the formation of the reservation, each said a few words about their community. Their

pride was apparent as Nancy Motlow, Elaine Aguilar, Delores Jumper, Gale Boone, Norita Yzaguirre, Ray Garza, Ralph Sanchez, Ray Yzaguirre, Jr. and Pete Aguilar shared their experiences in leadership roles.

The Fort Pierce Christmas celebration Dec. 12 was a small, intimate delight for Tribal members at Chupco Landing's Community Center.

A stage was decked out with ornaments along with a Christmas tree and life-size toy soldiers. Lights danced around the room everywhere. The dinner menu included lobster, chicken and steak. Entertainment kept kids busy with face-painting, Christmas wash-off tattoos, a paint spinner souvenir, breakdancing on the dance floor, and visits with Santa. Guests had their photos taken at a station setup by photographer Tammy Billie.

The Hollywood Christmas party was held at the Hard Rock Live on Dec. 17. Moses Jumper Jr. and Sally Tommie hosted the evening, which featured plenty of entertainment. Tribal members watched aerial acrobats, a hula hoop dancer, fire performers, trained performing dogs, and a Tim McGraw impersonator.

The night was filled with laughter and fun. The main highlight was a performance by KC and the Sunshine Band which drew

plenty of the guests to the dance floor. Kids' activities included video games, a paint spinner, a balloon artist, breakdancing, face-painting, baking gingerbread houses and cookies, and a photo booth.

The Brighton Christmas party featured bright lights and winter scenes as Fred Smith Rodeo Arena was turned into winter scenes. Next to the arena kids played in a mini-carnival, where candied apples and cotton candy and rides were available. Stations were set up for hot chocolate, milk and cookies, pineapple desserts, popcorn, face-painting, a balloon artist, and other treats.

Santa walked around and said hello to children along with his helpers, an elf, a snowman, and a reindeer.

The Trail community kicked off the Tribe's Christmas celebrations with a party Dec. 2 at the Miccosukee Resort. Members filled a large ballroom that featured dinner, new toys for every kid and arts and crafts. Entertainment was provided by the Navajo comedy team of Ernest "Ernie" Tsosie III and James Junes. Santa, Mrs. Claus and a helper proved to be a popular attraction with the Trail youngsters throughout the evening.

The celebrations concluded with the Tampa community, which held its party five days before Christmas



Stephanie Rodriguez

BRIGHTON: Jason Tommie holds his granddaughter while Harmony Urbina takes the wheel on a ride at the mini-carnival during Brighton's Christmas party Dec. 15.



Kevin Johnson

TRAIL: Dalika Sanders and her brother Draven Osceola-Hahn inform Santa of their Christmas wishes during Trail's Christmas party Dec. 2 at the Miccosukee Resort.



Beverly Bidney

IMMOKALEE: Allyson and Gil Yzaguirre pose together at the Immokalee Christmas party Dec. 19.



Stephanie Rodriguez

BRIGHTON: Teo Estrada, Miguel Estrada and Emanuel Estrada have a blast on a carnival ride at the Brighton Christmas party.



Stephanie Rodriguez

HOLLYWOOD: KC and the Sunshine Band rock the stage at Hard Rock Live as part of the Hollywood Christmas party.

CHRISTMAS 2016



HOLLYWOOD: Hollywood Councilman Christopher Osceola, Santa and Moses Jumper Jr. join Sally Tommie as she announces raffle winners during Hollywood's Christmas party Dec. 17 at Hard Rock Live.



IMMOKALEE: Children have fun with snowballs and the slippery slope of a pile of "snow" at the Immokalee Christmas party Dec. 19.



FORT PIERCE: Trent Timothy stands next to his brother Tristen Timothy as he receives a toy while Remiel Griffin takes a sneak peak next to his dad Remus Griffin.



TRAIL: Isabella Coco Miranda gets into the holiday spirit by wearing antlers and making designs on gingerbread cookies during Trail's Christmas party Dec. 2 at the Miccosukee Resort.



BIG CYPRESS: Jason Melton, Tucomah Robbins and Blaze Osceola enjoy the fellowship, fun and food at the Big Cypress Christmas party Dec. 16.



TRAIL: Madison Phillips, 6, visits Santa and Mrs. Claus during Trail's Christmas party Dec. 2 at the Miccosukee Resort.



HOLLYWOOD: Caitlyn Billie and Mikayla Cypress are resplendent in patchwork at the Hollywood Christmas party.



BRIGHTON: Micah Jimmie and Gabriella Bowers ride the tea cup ride during the Brighton Christmas party's carnival Dec. 15.



BRIGHTON: Students Ciani Smith, Kohal Cochran, Ross Fish, Melanie Bonilla, Linidi Carter, Marley Jimmie and Dominique Gaucin sing a Christmas song for the audience at the Brighton Christmas party.



HOLLYWOOD: As part of a full night of entertainment at Hollywood's Christmas party, a trainer and her dog perform stunts at Hard Rock Live.

CHRISTMAS 2016



BIG CYPRESS: Ahfachkee students perform at the Big Cypress Christmas celebration Dec. 16 in the Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena.



FORT PIERCE: Marrisa and Kiera Stockton pose for a photo with Bessie Tommie at the Fort Pierce Christmas party Dec. 12.



IMMOKALEE: Allison Yzaguirre, 17 and Monique Williams, 19, enjoy the thrill of the Scrambler ride at the Immokalee Christmas carnival and party Dec. 19.



BRIGHTON: Raylen Johnson holds Melanie Steve's arm as they walk into the rodeo arena for the Brighton Christmas party.



BRIGHTON: Tamara Bowers, Janet Smith, and Jaryaca Baker pose for a picture together at the Brighton Christmas party Dec. 15.



IMMOKALEE: Ja'Dayah Gustav, 3, has the best seat in the house on Santa's lap at the Immokalee Christmas party Dec. 19.



BIG CYPRESS: Ahfachkee first graders perform Jingle Bells for family and friends at the Big Cypress Christmas party Dec. 16.



BIG CYPRESS: Cattaleya Guzman, 1, examines one of her presents at the Big Cypress Christmas soiree.



TRAIL: Waylon Osceola admires the amount of gifts that are ready to be handed out during Trail's Christmas party Dec. 2 at the Miccosukee Resort.

Sports



Kevin Johnson

Shots Fired and X-Factor battle in a women's division game in the annual Randall Huggins Memorial Big Ballers Tournament on Dec. 9 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center in Hollywood.



Kevin Johnson

Tough defense from Amos Huggins in the lane helps lead Big Town past Chak-Ha-Chee in an opening round game of the annual Randall Huggins Memorial Big Ballers Tournament on Dec. 9 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center in Hollywood.

Big Ballers Tournament draws big names from Indian Country

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

HOLLYWOOD — The 13th annual Randall Huggins Memorial Big Ballers Tournament has been a popular destination for some of Indian Country's top basketball players for more than a decade.

"This is one of my favorite tournaments," said Sadie In The Woods. "I've been coming here for more than 10 years. It's smooth. Everything is on time. Very gracious hosts."

While In The Woods is a veteran of the tournament, former University of Louisville standout Jude Schimmel played in it for the first time Dec. 9-10 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center in Hollywood.

"I've never been to this tournament before. I heard it was pretty big, so I wanted to check it out," Schimmel said moments after she finished chatting in the stands with former Embry-Riddle star DeForest Carter, one of the top players in Seminole history

who suited up for the Native Soldiers team on the men's side.

Carter and Schimmel weren't the only big names in the tournament. There were plenty of other Native stars, including sharpshooting guard Jenna Plumley, who led the Lady Ballers to the women's championship title. In the men's division, Milton Garner scored 22 points to help rally Lords of the Plains (LOP) to yet another championship victory. While gathered with members of the Huggins family for a photo, LOP players held up three fingers for winning the tournament three years in a row.

The tournament is held each year in memory of Randall Huggins. A strong turnout featured 15 teams and more than 100 players, including Amos Huggins, who played for Big Town on the men's side, and Adriana Huggins, who played for the champion Lady Ballers.

"For us, it helps keep my son's memory alive; that helps a lot," said Norman Huggins.

For the players, the tournament serves as an opportunity to show support for the Huggins family.

"Thank you to the Huggins family for always having one of the best tourneys to hoop in," Plumley wrote on Instagram. "They always take care of the players and fans with gear, serving lunch and dinner and just always providing an awesome atmosphere of hooping for everyone."

"We have respect for the family. It's a special thing. We're real close to that family," said LOP forward Jay Liotta.

Teams featured rosters with players from all across Indian Country.

"They're from all over," Huggins said. "New York, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Mississippi, North Carolina, Wisconsin. The level of play is good, so I'm happy with that."

LOP's level of play surged in the second half of the championship game. After trailing the Plainzmen 35-32 at halftime, LOP used 18 second-half points from Garner — the tournament MVP — to rally for a 72-64 win.

"We started off pretty slow," Liotta said. "We put it in second gear about 10 minutes into the second half; that's when we woke up. Milton stepped up."

The champions also received 10 points from Ronnie Battle and nine points each from Kallan Glasgow and Alfonzo Hubbard.

The Plainzmen settled for runner-up honors. They reached the title game by

edging Native Soldiers in a semifinal, 54-52. Native Soldiers featured some of the Seminole Tribe's top players, including Carter, former Haskell star Duelle Gore (11 points) and Hunter Osceola (23 points).

Earlier in the tournament, Native Soldiers received a remarkable performance from Brady Fairbanks. The former Bemidji State guard couldn't miss from 3-point range in a 98-38 win against West Indies. Fairbanks hit nine 3-pointers in the first half and finished with 11 tres and 35 points.

In a similar display of lighting up the scoreboard, Plumley, the women's 3-point shooting star and tournament MVP, scored 32 points in the Lady Ballers' 85-51 championship win against X-Factor. Plumley made seven 3-pointers in the second half and 10 overall.

The Lady Ballers were also propelled by WNBA player Angel Goodrich with 22 points and Ariah Osceola with 13 points.

Abby Scott (13 points) and Jude Schimmel (11 points) led the runner-up X-Factor.

Schimmel, 23, said she's glad to be back playing with and against fellow Natives.

"Before I got into college or high school basketball, we always played in Native tournaments. It's kind of going back to my roots, and it's really fun," she said.



Kevin Johnson

Jude Schimmel, center, joins her teammates on the X-Factor team in a huddle for a first round game in the annual Randall Huggins Memorial Big Ballers Tournament on Dec. 9 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center in Hollywood.



Maury Nepris

Lords of the Plains (LOP) celebrate their third straight Big Ballers Tournament championship with members of the Huggins family Dec. 10 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center.



Maury Nepris

Shauna Long, a former Lamar University player from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, drives to the hoop during the Randall Huggins Memorial Big Ballers Tournament on Dec. 9 at the Howard Tiger Recreation Center in Hollywood.



Kevin Johnson

DeForest Carter, who holds multiple records at Embry-Riddle, tries a reverse layup during the Big Ballers Tournament.



Kevin Johnson

Former Haskell Indian Nations University player Jimmy Wilkett, right, wins the opening tip for the Native Soldiers squad at the Big Ballers Tournament.



Maury Nepris

Lionel Brown (11) grabs a rebound for Big Town.

Pemayetv Emahakv soars above tall competition

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

BRIGHTON — It may not have been the biggest test for the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School boys basketball team, but it was certainly the tallest one.

The Seminoles hosted Yearling Middle and its 6-foot-7 center Steven Thornton, a 14-year-old eighth-grader who towered over everyone on the floor, including the officials. "It was pretty hard. He was too tall," said Jayton Baker, who went up against Thornton for most of the game on Dec. 8.

PECS successfully handled the challenge as the Seminoles shook off a shaky first half to post a 51-36 win.

How did PECS tackle the challenge of trying to score against a tall opponent and prevent him from piling up points?

"Ball movement and defense," said PECS guard Donovan Harris.

Thornton grabbed plenty of rebounds, blocked a few shots and put in 10 points to lead Yearling, but PECS' quickness gave the visitors fits. Trailing 20-15 at halftime, PECS used a relentless full court press to force turnovers and create essentially two quarters of headaches for Yearling. Donovan

and fellow guards Dathen Garcia and Dakoya Nunez didn't allow any easy trips up the floor.

PECS quickly erased the five-point deficit. Dakoya hit a 3-pointer that knotted the score at 22-22 and PECS went ahead for good moments later after converting a steal by Dathen.

A steal and short jumper by Donovan put PECS up 28-22 with four minutes left in the quarter.

"When we had things working for us, we put a lot of pressure on their ball handlers, and that's kind of our style of play — a lot of pressure up front and create turnovers," said PECS coach Kevin Jackson, whose team improved to 4-0.

Every time Yearling tried to mount a comeback, PECS answered back. Dakoya hit another 3-pointer from the corner to give PECS a 39-32 lead and Yearling never got closer.

Donovan led PECS with 16 points while Nunez, Jayton Baker and Jaylen Baker each scored 10 points. Through the early part of the season, that type of balanced scoring has made PECS difficult to defend with so many weapons.

"They're definitely some things we're



Kevin Johnson

Pemayetv Emahakv's Jaylen Baker soars through the lane during a game against Yearling Middle on Dec. 8 in Brighton. PECS won, 51-36.

improving on," Jackson said. "I like where we're headed. I think we can compete with anybody."

Against Moore Haven, Donovan had the big night on the scoreboard with 15 points. Against LaBelle, it was Jaylen with 17 points who led the charge along with eight points each from Dakoya and Ramone Baker.

Before the boys game against Yearling,

the PECS girls had a more comfortable victory. Caylie Huff (13 points) and Karey Gopher (10 points) were standouts for PECS, which cruised to a 41-17 win against Yearling with Jewel Buck at the helm filling in as a substitute for coach Tim Thomas.

Karey was the only player who made 3-pointers; she hit two of them. PECS shined at the foul line, too, with a 7-for-9 performance.

Caylie made several steals and smart passes as PECS built a 25-6 lead at halftime.

Shayla French (8 points) and Haylie Huff (4 points) had impressive games on the boards.

The Seminoles boys and girls schedule will wrap up with six games in January, including 8th grade parent night on Jan. 19.



Kevin Johnson

Pemayetv Emahakv's Ramone Baker tries to find a way past the outstretched arms of Yearling Middle's 6-foot-7 center Steven Thornton.



Kevin Johnson

Substitute coach Jewel Buck leads the Pemayetv Emahakv girls team before the Lady Seminoles faced Yearling Middle on Dec. 8.



Kevin Johnson

Pemayetv Emahakv guard Donovan Harris drives toward the basket against Yearling.



Kevin Johnson

Pemayetv Emahakv guard Caylie Huff gets triple-teamed by Yearling during the Lady Seminoles' victory Dec. 8.

Smith, Matthews rally Okeechobee past Moore Haven

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

MOORE HAVEN— From Tribal members to descendants to former Pemaayev Emahakv Charter School players, the Okeechobee versus Moore Haven varsity girls high school basketball game Nov. 30 was filled with Seminole connections.

They didn't disappoint the post-Thanksgiving crowd at Moore Haven's gymnasium with a seesaw battle that wasn't decided until the final seconds.

Julia Smith and Raeley Matthews led a furious comeback for Okeechobee, which erased an 11-point halftime lead and pulled out a 54-50 win.

Smith is only a freshman, but she played with the poise and smarts of a varsity veteran as she dished out three assists and made a layup during a critical juncture of Okeechobee's comeback.

"She's an all-around good player," said Okeechobee coach Joe Smith. "We're glad to have her with us. She listens well and she plays her heart out and that's all I can ask the girls to do at the end of the day."

A steal and assist by Smith put Okeechobee up 43-41 with six minutes left in the game. Her layup late in the game gave Okeechobee a 47-46 lead. She finished with eight points.

"When she has the opportunity to score, she does," coach Smith said. "She stepped right in at the shooting guard position and she's owned it."

Matthews led Okeechobee with 18 points. She made a couple of key steals in the final minutes, but it was her streak of six consecutive unanswered points late in the third quarter that gave Okeechobee a three-point lead going into the final quarter.

"Raeley is the foundation of our program. Everything is built around her," coach Smith said.

When Raeley fouled out in the final minute, Caroline Sweat came off the bench to finish up the job.

"Caroline is doing real good. She played at Moore Haven before. She's a small forward, and she can play forward. She doesn't shy away from shooting the ball," said coach Smith, whose team improved to 6-1.

The Okeechobee rally came despite a determined effort from Moore Haven, which was playing its third game in as many nights. "We probably ran out of gas," said Moore Haven coach Vincent Lewis.

Moore Haven was sparked by senior

♦ See GIRLS BASKETBALL on page 5C



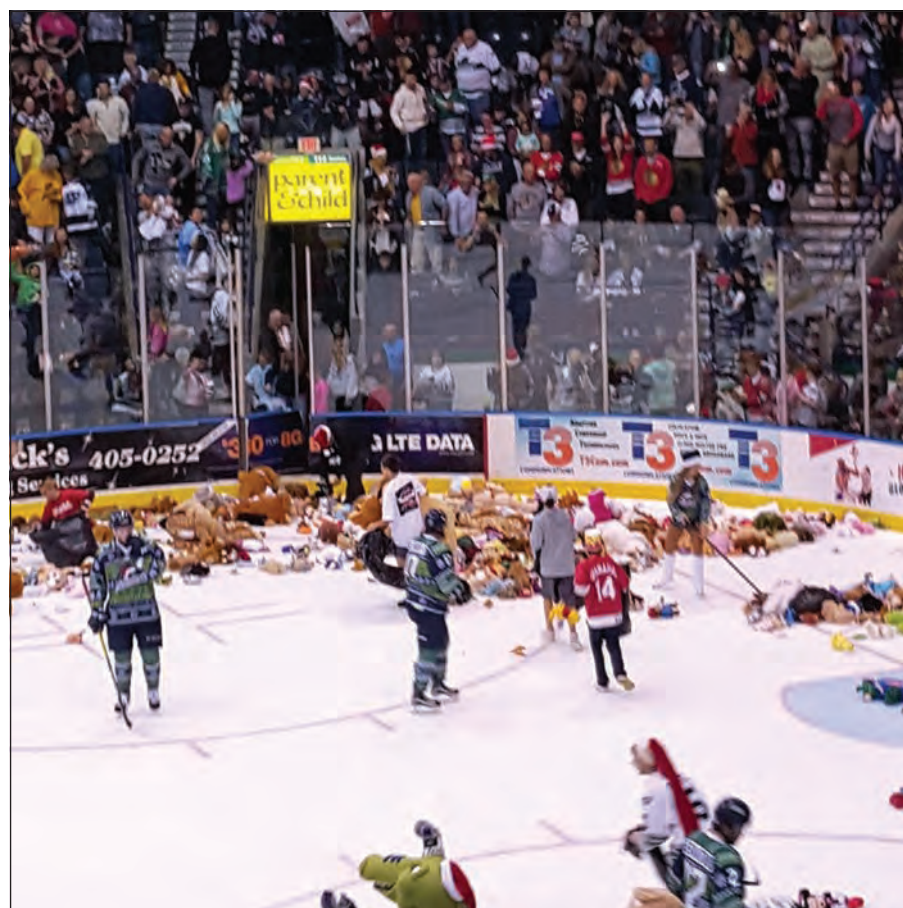
Kevin Johnson
Okeechobee's Julia Smith, left, and Moore Haven's Sunni Bearden battle for the ball during Okeechobee's 54-50 win Nov. 30 at Moore Haven High School.

Kevin Johnson
Moore Haven's Sunni Bearden drives to the hoop while defended by Okeechobee's Raeley Matthews in a girls high school basketball game Nov. 30. In the background are Moore Haven's Sydnee Cypress (4) and Aleina Micco (12) and Okeechobee's Julia Smith (21).

Teddy bear toss a big hit



Courtesy Photos
The Florida Everblades hockey team's annual Teddy Boss Toss Night on Dec. 10 drew more than 7,000 fans, including some from Immokalee. After the Everblades scored their first goal of the game against the Elmira Jackals, fans littered the ice at Germain Arena in Estero with new stuffed animals that were scooped up by players and later brought to children in area hospitals. Among those helping out with tossing teddy bears onto the ice were (in alphabetical order in above photo) Antonio Billie, Tony Billie, Crystal Garcia, Geneva Garcia, Marina Garcia, Thoya Robbins and Tito Sanchez.



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Kevin Johnson

Jillian Rodriguez (2) warms up with a smile as the Immokalee High School varsity girls soccer team prepares to face Lely on Dec. 13 in Immokalee. Jillian never played soccer until this season, but she has earned a spot as starting midfielder.

First-year soccer player Jillian Rodriguez quickly makes impression at Immokalee High

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

IMMOKALEE —High school girls varsity soccer in Collier County is loaded with players who have racked up years of experience playing for youth, school and club teams during their careers.

Jillian Rodriguez isn't among that group. Her soccer career is far briefer than the opponents she faces as a starting midfielder for the Immokalee High School girls varsity team. Until this fall, Jillian had never played soccer. No youth games; no tournaments; no showcases; no practices.

Despite her inexperience, Jillian, a sophomore, has rapidly ascended into a key role for Immokalee as she's become one of the few Seminole Tribe members to play the sport. Her eagerness and athleticism helped her earn a starting spot in the midfield and she scored her first goal within the first few weeks of the season.

"There are players that have gone through this program their whole career and never scored a goal," said Immokalee coach Ruben Lucio. "About four or five games into the season, she scores her first one. It was good to see her celebrate."

Jillian's goal was her team's first goal in a 2-2 tie against LaBelle on Nov. 14.

"I felt so good. My first year playing and I scored," said Jillian, who sent the ball into the net on a rebound after a shot by a teammate was blocked by the LaBelle goalie. "Once the goalie blocked it, it bounced back off and I got the shot."

Scoring a goal isn't the only thing Jillian has accomplished on the field that has caught the eye of her coach.

"You have to remember that she's 10 games into her whole career and she picked up the sport three months ago, so the fact that you even see her turn with the ball, you see her give passes, you see her stop the ball, you see her tackle; it's one of those things where it's like how far she's come in a matter of only two months," Lucio said as his team warmed up to face Lely at home Dec. 13.

Jillian's primary sport takes place in the spring; she's an outfielder for Immokalee's varsity softball team. She's also a cheerleader, but she said soccer has always appealed to her, yet the timing never seemed right to join a team. This year she decided to make the time right.

"I've always watched the sport and I liked it, but I never had the time. My mom [Rhonda Rodriguez] encouraged me to come out and try it, and I actually really like it," Jillian said.

Jillian's first steps as a soccer player didn't go smoothly. She suffered an injury in her first practice with the team.

"I heard last year that she wanted to play. She's a very skilled softball player. Most players stick to one sport," Lucio said. "I asked her if she wanted to come out and she said yes. First practice and she sprained her ankle. I finally get her out here and she sprains her ankle."

Jillian recovered from the injury and stepped right into a young starting lineup, having to face far more experienced players. "She's going against players who have played for eight years," Lucio said.

It's not just more experienced players Jillian has to battle, but also taller ones. At 5-foot-2, Jillian often encounters opponents in the midfield who are four and five inches

taller, but she doesn't give an inch in competitive terms.

"Most teams average about 5-6, 5-7; we average 5-foot. It's a difference, but you have to use your body and how to play the sport," Lucio said. "She battles. The good thing is she plays other sports, so she has that competitiveness to her already. I think [soccer] is the most physical sport for a young girl to play in high school. You need that toughness."

"Make sure you defend them well and make sure that you don't let them run all over you just because you're smaller than them," Jillian said.

Immokalee's young team reached the Christmas break with just one win and two ties in 15 games, but Jillian said she's glad she opted to play this season and plans to keep playing for the remainder of high school.

One reason opening the new chapter in her sports career has been made easier, Jillian said, is because of her teammates, which include descendent and fellow midfielder Jada Holdiness. The pair handled midfielder duties in the center and left side in a 2-0 loss against Lely.

"Jada's done very well," Lucio said. "They have the athleticism and she's done a great job."

Jillian said the team has helped make her first season an enjoyable experience for someone without any experience.

"The girls have helped me a lot," Jillian said. "This team is based on teamwork, and it's a lot of fun working with the girls and having a team behind you."



Kevin Johnson

Jillian Rodriguez, left, battles a Lely High player during a game.



Kevin Johnson

Immokalee High midfielder Jada Holdiness controls the ball against Lely.

Sports Notebook

Annie Osceola thrives for Kansas college

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

It didn't take long for Annie Osceola to make an impact on the Garden City Community College women's basketball team.

Osceola (Miccosukee) is averaging 4.9 points and 3.6 rebounds per game in her freshman season for the Broncbusters in Garden City, Kansas. The 5-foot-7 guard scored a season-high 11 points, dished out two assists and made two steals as Garden City hit the holiday break with a 69-50 loss

to South Plains College on Dec. 11 in Texas. Osceola, who has come off the bench in most of her 12 games, also reached double figures Nov. 30 with 10 points in just 16 minutes of playing time in a 66-64 win against Dodge City Community College.

Garden City (6-7) plays in the Kansas Jayhawk Community College Conference.

Osceola, the daughter of Nora Billie and Floyd Osceola, was a standout at Ferguson High School in Miami, where her brother Charlie is a high-scoring guard for the boys team.



Smith Rodeo Photography

The Immokalee High School varsity boys basketball team, including Jon Jimmie (second from right standing), gets ready to face Palmetto Ridge on Dec. 13.

Jon Jimmie makes Immokalee varsity

After spending last season on the Immokalee High School junior varsity boys basketball team, Jon Jimmie earned a promotion this season to varsity.

Jimmie, a junior guard, has been coming off the bench to help the squad, which reached Christmas on a three-game winning streak and 5-6 record.

"He's doing great," said Immokalee

coach Garrett Hull. "He gets after it on the court. He's a shooter; he can shoot the ball really well."

Jimmie has been making the most out of his opportunities, which sometimes come with just a few playing minutes per game.

"Right now he gets sporadic minutes and he hits shots when he's open," Hull said.

Hull added that he's seen a lot of

improvement from Jimmie during the past year.

"He's shown how much better he's gotten," Hull said.

Immokalee reeled off consecutive wins against Gulf Coast, LaBelle and Gateway Charter.

Top three finishes highlight Luke Baxley's cross country season

John Carroll High School senior Luke Baxley wrapped up his final high school cross country season in late October with a pair of impressive performances.

Baxley notched second place in the St. Lucie County meet and finished third in the Class 1A-District 11 meet.

In the county meet, nobody was going to catch Florida State-bound and state champion Caleb Pottorff, one of Florida's elite prep runners. Pottorff, a senior at Lincoln Park, won the race by more than two minutes. Baxley proved he was the best of the rest that day in a field of 63 runners as

he captured runner-up honors with a time of 18:12.

Eleven days later Baxley shined again in the district meet when he took third, narrowly missing out on second place by less than four seconds. His time was 17:21 in a field of 35 at Holy Trinity Academy in Melbourne. Baxley's performance earned him a spot in a Class 1A regional where his season ended Oct. 29 with a 33rd place finish.

FGCU softball clinic draws big crowd in Brighton

BY KEVIN JOHNSON
Senior Editor

BRIGHTON — Saturday morning sports clinics are hit or miss when it comes to participation, but one guarantee on the Brighton Reservation is that softball — whether it's a clinic or a game or a tournament — will draw plenty of interest.

So it was no surprise that when Florida Gulf Coast University's softball team pulled into Ollie Jones Memorial Park on Dec. 3 in their colorful van, eager eyes and gloves were waiting. About 60 girls from age 5 to high schoolers took part in the free clinic.

"I knew the numbers could come out. You always plan for it and hope for it, and I'm glad for the success today," said Brighton Recreation site manager Dallas Nunez.

Longtime FGCU coach Dave Deiros brought a couple assistant coaches and seven current players for an intense four hours of fielding, hitting and pitching instruction. Deiros emphasized positive messages to the kids.

"More than anything else, the two things we try to emphasize in our speech and in our work today is make sure you love the sport and show that you love the sport in everything you do. Even if you make a mistake, or strike out, make sure you have joy every single time you hit the field, and the game will always pay you back," he said. "Always try your best at whatever you're doing. Try your best at your practice, your games, but also with your relationships with your friends, your family, with your schoolwork. If you try your best, you're going to get paid back because life is always going to reward those who give to others."

Basketball, volleyball and golf teams from FGCU have held clinics on Seminole reservations in the past couple years, but this was the softball team's first clinic on a reservation. New and additional lights have recently been added to the fields at Ollie Jones Memorial Park, which means kids will be able to play and practice for longer periods. Travel club teams from Brighton and the Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School field strong teams year after year, and serve as a feeder for Okeechobee, Moore Haven and other area high school teams.

"It's great to see a grassroots effort like the Seminoles and what they're doing with a sport that you really have to organize and put a lot of infrastructure, a lot of money into it," Deiros said.

The clinic drew players from beyond the reservation, including Okeechobee, Moore Haven, LaBelle, Immokalee and Hollywood.

Armando Nunez, a coach with the Southwest Florida Phoenix club team based in Immokalee, brought 14 players with him. He having Division I college coaches and players on the reservation was a thrill for his players. He's taken some of his players to clinics at FGCU run by Deiros.

"He's been there for a while. He's got a good thing going on there," Nunez said.

For LaBelle High School player Amber Barnett, the clinic paid immediate dividends.



The Florida Gulf Coast University softball clinic draws a big crowd of softball-lovers to the Brighton Reservation's Ollie Jones Memorial Park on Dec. 3.

Kevin Johnson



FGCU softball player Taylor Wade provides instruction to a youngster during the clinic.

Kevin Johnson



FGCU pitching coach Erika Bennet gives pitching advice to youngsters during a drill at the clinic.

Kevin Johnson



Florida Gulf Coast University softball coach Dave Deiros provides instruction to youngsters during the team's clinic at Ollie Jones Memorial Park on Dec. 3 in Brighton.

Kevin Johnson

"I liked the drills we did and how [Deiros] explained to do everything the right way, step-by-step," Barnett said. "I'm not very good at hitting an inside pitch, so he taught me a quick way to hit it."

Barnett and the rest of the girls were split into three groups of about 20 players each and spread across the park's three fields.

In smaller groups, the youngsters had opportunities to show their skills as they received instruction from Deiros and his assistants Erika Bennett and Lindsey Ubrun along with players Taylor Wade, Riley Randolph, Caley Chappel, Clarissa LiCata, Erica Ward and Brittany McGuire.

"I know they're not out here trying to recruit, but talent will stand out and they'll remember that," Dallas Nunez said.



Truly Osceola takes a big cut during hitting instruction with FGCU players and coaches in Brighton.

Kevin Johnson

◆ GIRLS BASKETBALL From page 3A

guard Sydnee Cypress, who led all scorers with 23 points. On a few occasions, after making a basket, Cypress immediately flashed her defensive skills by picking off passes that set up more scoring opportunities.

"Sydnee is my leader. She's what makes us go," Lewis said. "She keeps going. We ask a lot of her."

In addition to Cypress, Moore Haven's offense revolves a lot around the guard play of Sunni Bearden and Alicia Fudge. The trio combined for all but four of Moore Haven's points. Alicia scored 14 and Sunni had nine.

"Sunni is doing real good. She's still growing and learning the game. She shoots the 3-ball real well," Lewis said. "It may not show up in the box for scoring, but [Alicia] makes good decisions that help us out."

Moore Haven has also received contributions from Aleina Micco and Martina Herrera this season. Micco scored two points against Okeechobee and at times handled the point guard duties.

After a slow start to the season, the Terriers won four of their final five games before the Christmas break.



Moore Haven guard Alicia Fudge lays the ball in during the Terriers game against Okeechobee High School.

Kevin Johnson

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Announcements



Photo courtesy Cecelia Garcia

The Seminole float, loaded up with children and decorations, prepares to drive through the streets of Immokalee for the Around the World Parade Dec. 10.

Immokalee Christmas float wins best all around

By Beverly Bidney
(inspired by *The Night Before Christmas*, by Clement Clarke Moore)

Twas the weeks before Christmas and all through Immokalee, Thoughts of parades filled people's heads, Including a float with a chickee.

The Around the World Parade would cause such a clatter, The design would be crucial, It would certainly matter.

From culture, from education, from all through the Tribe, Everyone worked together to show off their pride.

With lights and with snow, some reindeer and a sleigh, The float was festooned in a most cheerful way.

Folks lined the streets, It was a generous crowd, Children and adults on the float were so proud.

On the 30-foot float everything was just right, It garnered many cheers and earned the biggest prize of the night.

Best All Around Float, the trophy did read, If Santa had seen it, He'd surely be pleased.

As he nibbled a cookie, Santa would say in delight, "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"



Photo courtesy Cecelia Garcia

Keeping the Christmas spirit alive on the Tribe's float in the Around the World Parade Dec 10 in Immokalee.

◆ RODEO From page 1A

on the Dania (Reservation), but we've been having their rodeos in Big Cypress."

The Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo will be held Feb. 4 followed by the Bill Osceola Memorial Rodeo seven days later.

"These are good things to show the legacy," Moses Jumper said. "My mother was a cattle woman, and Bill was a cowboy. He was one of the first cattlemen in the Tribe. He helped establish the cattle program."

Moses said the appeal of being able to rodeo and bask in the South Florida sunshine in February should attract names from states whose winters are far harsher.

"This is the first time, and I think once we get it established you'll see a lot more

Native cowboys coming from out west because they'll know they can come here for three weeks in the sun, and rodeo, and at the same time make some money," Jumper said.

The rodeos in Hollywood will also allow youngsters from the Hollywood Reservation — such as those from the 4-H Club — to see the pros up-close without having to travel.

"They've got a good little program here for kids and horses and stuff like that, so hopefully this will really generate some interest," Jumper said.

Seven rodeos are slated for the EIRA season. In addition to two in Hollywood, Brighton is scheduled to host three events, including the EIRA Regional Finals in June. Big Cypress and Chupco's Landing in Fort Pierce will host one rodeo each.

2017 Eastern Indian Rodeo Association Schedule

Feb. 4 – Betty Mae Jumper Memorial Rodeo (Hollywood Rodeo Arena), Hollywood, 7 p.m.

Feb. 11 – Bill Osceola Memorial Rodeo (Hollywood Rodeo Arena), Hollywood, 7 p.m.

Feb. 14 – Brighton Field Day Tour Rodeo (Fred Smith Rodeo Arena), Brighton, 7 p.m.

March 18 – Junior Cypress Memorial Rodeo (Junior Cypress Rodeo Arena), Big Cypress, 7 p.m.

April 22 – Chupco Ranch Rodeo (Fort Pierce Reservation), Fort Pierce, TBD

July 1 – Josiah Johns Memorial Rodeo (Fred Smith Rodeo Arena), Brighton, 7 p.m.

July 7 – EIRA Regional Finals (Fred Smith Rodeo Arena), Brighton, 7 p.m.

Institute of American Indian Arts holds groundbreaking ceremony in New Mexico



On Nov. 9, the Institute of American Indian Arts held a groundbreaking ceremony for the new IAIA Performing Arts and Fitness Center on its 140-acre campus in Santa Fe, New Mexico. IAIA officials and U.S. Senator Tom Udall participated in the ceremony. From left, IAIA Trustee Cynthia Chavez Lamar (San Felipe Pueblo/Hopi/Tewa/Navajo), IAIA Trustee JoAnn Balzer, IAIA Chairman of the Board of Trustees Loren Kieve (Cherokee), IAIA President Dr. Robert Martin (Cherokee), KOAT-TV's Royale Dá, Sen. Udall, IAIA trustee Bidtah N. Becker (Diné), IAIA trustee Brenda L. Kingery (Chickasaw), IAIA trustee Barbara J. Ellis, and IAIA trustee Deborah Goodman (Caddo/Cherokee).

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