

NC

WALKING TWO WORLDS

ACTIVIST + MODEL QUANNAH CHASINGHORSE

The National Center

INDIGENOUS
FASHION ON
THE RISE

A NEW
CHAPTER:
NATIVE
BOOK BIZ





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WALKING TWO WORLDS: Activist + Model Quannah Chasinghorse

When international model and climate activist Quannah Chasinghorse reflects on her childhood in Alaska, she speaks of two worlds: making food for her elders at potlatches, hunting caribou in the wilderness, and walking carefully in her mother's high heels, posing for imaginary photographers as she dreamed of the runway. This duality has come to define Chasinghorse's life.



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Activist + Model
Quannah Chasinghorse
Photo: Keri Oberly



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To Our New National Center Readers

A Message from Chris James, President and CEO of
The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development

Osiyo (hello) and thank you for supporting The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development and *NC Magazine*! This is the third edition of *NC Magazine*, which brings you the latest news and analysis on the topics most important to you, your business, your community, or your tribe.

This edition's cover story features a young woman who is quickly becoming known not just in Indian Country, but across the world. Quannah Chasinghorse burst onto the scene during the 2022 Met Gala, where her unique take on traditional Native style turned heads in the fashion world and beyond. Quannah was a featured speaker at RES 2022, where she shared her story and her journey to reach the top of her profession. This is just the beginning for Quannah, but you'll have to read the article to find out what's next for her.

Quannah is the tip of the spear for a growing Native fashion industry. It is also an increasingly important part of The National Center's work, including hosting our first fashion show at RES 2023. One of our feature stories in this edition of *NC Magazine* chronicles the rise of Native Fashion and where it goes next. Fashion isn't just about the models who walk down the runway or the designers who create the dresses; it includes people such as Cora Chandler, who is a fashion event planner. Cora is profiled in the pages that follow.

One of our goals at The National Center is to showcase the diversity of the Native economy. *NC Magazine* does that by telling the stories of people and businesses operating in a wide variety of fields, including publishing, gaming, energy, cannabis, and human resources. We are increasingly focused on international trade, in particular the outstanding work of our Arizona Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) Export Center. One of its clients, The Akana Group, is working to spark international trade among Indigenous communities and is featured in this edition.

As I often say, the work of The National Center would not be possible without our supporters, partners, and allies. *NC Magazine* highlights the work of several of them, including the National Minority Supplier Development Council, Alaska Airlines, Koniag, the Intertribal Council of Nevada, and the Council of Native Hawaiians.

Finally, I would be remiss not to plug one of our longest-serving board members and one of the most respected voices in Native American law, John Echohawk. John sat down for a Q&A to share his perspective on recent Supreme Court decisions and their troubling implications for sovereignty.

Again, thank you for reading our magazine and for everything you do to support the work of The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development. I look forward to continuing to share the positive news with you through future editions of *NC Magazine* – or perhaps seeing you at a National Center event near you.



Chris James
President and CEO
The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development



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Report on recent and current policy developments related to economic development in Indian Country.

POLICY & LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

WASHINGTON — The past two years have seen solid policy progress for Indian Country. President Joseph Biden has advanced an economic agenda that includes historic levels of funding specifically for tribal communities and Native people, including \$32 billion in the American Rescue Plan of 2021, \$13 billion in the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and \$700 million in the Inflation Reduction Act, which also passed in 2022. The funding is going to programs intended to improve tribal economies over the next several years by supporting tribal enterprises and Native American entrepreneurs and businesses.

The National Center recommended key provisions in those measures, Kate Boyce, president of KRBR Consulting LLC, reported at the annual White House Tribal Nations Summit, held on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 2022. Boyce, who has worked with The National Center for three decades, attributed that success to the close working relationships that the Center and other Native organizations have with the Biden Administration, as well as the re-establishment in 2021 of the White House Council of Native American Affairs. The council includes 17 Cabinet departments and federal agencies and is chaired by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo).

The National Center advocates for increases in appropriations for the key federal programs that enhance business, economic, and energy development in Indian Country. Over the last year, it sent requests to Congress for fiscal year 2023 funding, and it also submitted written comments for the first-ever Office of Management and Budget tribal consultations to recommend levels of funding for those programs in fiscal

2024. The Center also submitted written comments to the Federal Reserve Board on proposals to modify Community Reinvestment Act regulations in order to increase access to capital for Indian Country.

The White House Council of Native American Affairs says its actions to develop long-lasting foundations to protect tribal and other Native rights include the President's memorandum on uniform standards for consultation with tribes, announced at the Tribal Nations Summit; new consultation policies for federal departments and agencies; new best practices for tribal treaty and reserved rights; and strengthening tribal governments' role in the stewardship of federal lands and waters, based on policies outlined in a 2021 joint order by the Interior and Agriculture departments.

Below are some of the highlights listed in the Biden-Harris Administration's fact sheet on its actions to support Indian Country.

Access to Capital in Indian Country

New Initiative on Capital Access — The Small Business Administration (SBA) has launched a new initiative on access to capital in coordination with the White House Council of Native American Affairs; the Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, Energy, and Treasury departments; the Office of Management and Budget; and the White House Council of Economic Advisors. Its three goals are: 1) increasing awareness about loan and financing programs available to tribal and other Native communities and their businesses; 2) identifying barriers to obtaining capi-

tal, and summarizing policy, regulatory, and statutory ways to increase access to federal financing programs; and 3) increasing the utilization of federal capital programs.

Grants for Entrepreneurship Training and Business Development — The Minority Business Development Agency, led by Undersecretary of Commerce for Minority Business Don Cravins, now has more funding for business development. It awards grants to Native entities (The National Center is its oldest partner) to support entrepreneurship and business development, including training and curriculum development. The SBA also has awarded grants, using funds from the American Rescue Plan's Community Navigator Program and other sources, to support community-level training and technical and entrepreneurial development for Native American small businesses and their owners.

Enhancing SBA's Office of Native American Affairs — Responding to repeated calls by The National Center and other Native organizations it works with, SBA Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman now has the head of the agency's Office of Native American Affairs reporting directly to her. The Center is also promoting legislation to strengthen that office.

Broadband and Spectrum

In November, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Interior and Commerce departments executed a memorandum of understanding on interagency coordination to

promote access to and deployment of broadband and other wireless-spectrum services on tribal lands. The Interior Department's Office of Indigenous Communications and Technology, announced in November, will help tribes and tribal entities develop and manage broadband infrastructure and new mechanisms for leasing parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, and provide technical assistance for establishing wireless and related projects on tribal lands. The office will also facilitate partnerships between tribes and the tech industry in areas including electric vehicles; light detection and ranging used for mapping and surveying; and data science, coding, and software engineering.

Clean and Renewable Energy Deployment Initiatives

Deployment Initiative for Indian Country —

The Interior Department will centralize Native renewable-energy expertise and expedite the development of renewable-energy resources on Indian lands. Its aim is to streamline policies and procedures for such development, including leasing; to consult on needs and priorities; and to create incentives for renewable energy through technical assistance and updates to legal authorities.

Preference Access to Federal Energy Purchases —

To ensure that investments in the clean-energy economy reach tribal lands, the Energy Department – in coordination with the White House Council of Native American Affairs, the Department of Defense, and the General Services Administration (GSA) – has launched an initiative to increase federal agencies' use of tribally produced electricity and other energy products through a previously unused preference for purchasing them from Indian tribes and tribal enterprises. The Defense Department will integrate that preference into its electricity procurement strategies, and the GSA will lead a pilot program to develop procurement strategies. The agencies also promise training and resources for tribes and tribal businesses to gain expertise in developing carbon pollution-free electricity projects, encourage partnerships for developing them, and improve awareness of the tribal preference.

Electric Vehicle Initiative for Tribes — With the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law providing funding to secure American supply chains for

electric vehicles and build a nationwide network for charging them, the new EV Initiative for Tribal Nations involves 10 federal agencies. It's intended to map plans to deploy infrastructure for electric vehicles; prioritize projects that serve tribal lands and Native communities, among other rural and underserved areas; help Indian Country access funding opportunities; and expand training, teaching, and job opportunities for tribal members.

Expansion of Buy Indian Act Procurement Authority —

In December, the Interior Department announced its goal of making Buy Indian Act awards to native-owned businesses worth 75% of contract dollars from Indian Affairs (including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education, and the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration) and 10% of the department's other contract dollars. The Indian Health Service announced a more modest goal of 20%. If those levels are reached, the White House projects hundreds of millions of dollars more will be spent in Indian Country. The President's overall goal is to have half of all federal contract dollars go to small disadvantaged businesses by 2025. Oversight of both the Interior Department's and the Indian Health Service's contracting will continue to be necessary if these goals are to be met.

Installing Senior-Level Native Advisors in More Federal Agencies

Department of Commerce — The Secretary of Commerce finally appointed a director of the Office of Native American Business Development, to coordinate interagency efforts to advance business and economic development, trade promotion, and tourism in Indian Country. The office has important duties that have not been performed since Congress first authorized it in 2000, as emphasized in a Government Accountability Office report, "Tribal Economic Development—Action Is Needed to Better Understand the Extent of Federal Support," published in August.

Department of Defense — As urged by The National Center during tribal consultations in December 2021, the department created a permanent position for a senior advisor and liaison for Native American affairs. They will advise the Secretary and other officials on interactions with Native Americans, including Indian tribes,

Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations.

Department of the Treasury — The new Treasurer of the United States, Marilynn Malerba (Mohawk), is the first Native American in that post. She works closely with the new Office of Tribal and Native Affairs and the previously established Treasury Tribal Advisory Committee on critical issues such as dual taxation, tax treatment of tribally chartered corporations, and general-welfare taxation. The National Center has participated in several tribal consultations on dual taxation.

Office of Management and Budget — The President appointed the first-ever tribal policy advisor to advise White House and OMB officials, and serve as a liaison with other federal departments and agencies while annual budget requests are being prepared on federal funding for Indian Country.

AmeriCorps — This federal agency for national service and volunteering will create a new position of strategic advisor for Native American affairs. The advisor will implement the agency's plans to reduce barriers to obtaining services, increase investment in tribes and Native communities, and develop and manage initiatives to increase Native participation in its programs.

More New Tribal Advisory Committees — Committees have been established at the Departments of the Interior and Homeland Security to advise on tribal and other Native community issues.

DOI's New Office of Strategic Partnerships — Working with Native Americans in Philanthropy, this office will help tribes and tribal organizations develop and build long-term sustainable public-private partnerships and promote conservation, education, and economic development.

Agencies Updating Their Regulations

DOI's Fee-to-Trust Land Acquisition Regulations — The Interior Department proposes to update its regulations governing acquisitions that transfer land titles to the U.S. to be held in trust for the benefit of an individual Indian or tribe, including in Alaska. The changes are intended to make the acquisition process less cumbersome and less expensive.

New Regulations to Protect Tribal Reserved Rights and Water Quality

– The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will propose revising its rules to clarify that, when developing new or revised water-quality standards, states must evaluate tribal reserved rights to an aquatic and/or aquatic-dependent resource in the area or downstream. If a tribal right exists, states must evaluate data on the level of water quality necessary to protect that right, and if necessary, revise the state’s standards to ensure protection. The EPA also will propose a new rule to establish baseline water-quality standards for Indian reservation waters that do not have Clean Water Act standards in place, and safeguard water quality until tribes obtain authority to adopt such standards.

New Rulemakings by Army Corps of Engineers

– The Corps, the nation’s largest water-resource developer, plans to consider a wider range of benefits for water-resource development projects, including whether an investment achieves social and environmental benefits. As urged by tribal and Native Hawaiian communities, it is also proposing new rules to rescind its

Appendix C procedures for protecting historic properties, and to coordinate closely with tribes to develop new guidance.

Domestic Mining Reforms

– The Interior Department’s Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Agriculture are developing recommendations to reform hardrock-mining laws and policies to ensure that mining is conducted with strong environmental, safety, tribal-consultation, and community-engagement standards. They recommend notifying tribes when exploration work is about to occur, and inviting them to join pre-application meetings with mine developers. They have set aside \$5 million to enhance tribal engagement in permit-review and authorization processes.

New Gaming Regulations

– The Interior Department will consider amendments to the regulations governing the review and approval of gaming compacts between tribes and states, including allowable topics of negotiation and when the department must review a gaming compact.

Tribal Transportation Symposia and Roundtable

Tribal Transit and Aviation Symposia

– The Department of Transportation will hold its first-ever Tribal Transit Symposium to enable tribes to meet with Federal Transit Administration leadership, receive technical assistance, and learn about funding opportunities and the Tribal Transit Program (which funds planning, capital, and operating assistance for tribal public transit services). The department and the Federal Aviation Administration will co-host another symposium later this year to cover grant applications, tribal access to airports, commercial sea-plane access, drone usage, tribal youth engagement and education, and financial reimbursement and reporting procedures.

The Maritime Administration will host its first-ever Tribal Maritime Roundtable to update tribes on the Port Infrastructure Development Program, the Maritime Highway Program, and workforce-development opportunities in the maritime sector. ■

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Walking Two Worlds

Quannah Chasinghorse

(Photos: Keri Oberly)



When international model and activist Quannah Chasinghorse reflects on her childhood in Alaska, she speaks of two worlds: making food for her elders at potlatches, hunting caribou in the wilderness, and walking carefully in her mother's high heels, posing for imaginary photographers as she dreamed of the runway.

This duality has come to define Chasinghorse's life. While she models for the world's top brands in fashion shows across the globe, she carries her Hän Gwich'in and Sicangu-Oglala Lakota ancestors and a drive to protect the land her people have cherished for thousands of years. At just 20 years old, she is acutely aware that no one has quite ever walked the path she is on.

"There were no Native models in mainstream media when I was growing up," Chasinghorse said. "I didn't think that this was something that was going to be even possible for me ... and sometimes people are like, 'How can you do both? How can you be an advocate and fight for climate change and be a part of an industry that is a part of the problem?' But my community reminds me that I am here for a reason, a purpose, and I am showing up in these spaces, showing the world that we are still here."

Chasinghorse was born on Navajo Nation land in Arizona and spent most of her early childhood in the Southwest before moving to her ancestral homelands in Alaska. She lived in Kenny Lake — a town of about 200 people in the Copper River region, about 220 miles east of Anchorage — and later in Fairbanks. She was raised by a single mother and was heavily involved in her Gwich'in community.

She burst onto the modeling scene in 2020 when she was cast in a Calvin Klein campaign to encourage voting that featured young people in their hometowns across America. Chasinghorse, then 18, was a clear standout, with a striking Yidjiltoowith — a traditional face tattoo — drawing a line from her chin to the bottom of her full lips. She gazed at the camera, already emanating the fierce grace that has become her signature. Shortly afterward, she was signed to the international modeling agency IMG Models.

Her rise has been meteoric. In the past two years, she has graced the covers of some of the world's preeminent fashion magazines, such as *Vogue Mexico*, *Vogue Japan*, *V Magazine*, *Elle*, and *Porter*. She's appeared in ads for brands like Chanel, Savage X Fenty, and Tommy Hilfifer. And last spring, she caught



the world's attention when she appeared at the Met Gala wearing a gold cutout gown by designer Peter Dundas and Navajo turquoise jewelry. Refinery29 dubbed her the event's "breakout star."

Chasinghorse's ascent to the upper echelons of modeling has put her at the center of an unprecedented burst of Native representation. Native content creators — like @Notorious Cree and @Tiamiscihk — garner huge followings on social media. Hulu's *Reservation Dogs* series has received more than a dozen nominations and awards, including being named one of the 10 best TV programs of 2021 by the American Film Institute. Indigenous authors Tommy Orange and Angeline Boulley have won major awards, topped bestseller lists, and left readers eagerly awaiting more. Recently, a Jim Thorpe biopic was put on the production fast track, with award-winning First Nations director Tracey Deer at the helm.

With the eyes of the world on her and other Native stars, Chasinghorse sees an opportunity to bring long-overdue attention to Native issues.

"I am so honored to have this position and be where I am," she said. "I want to get more of our

young people having conversations about Indigenous visibility (and) try to get them to learn our languages, our culture, and traditions, because at the end of the day, young Native influencers have large followings because of our culture. It's because we are proud of who we are, and we are not just here for ourselves, but on behalf of our community, trying to get people to see us."

On the Front Lines

As her fame expands her reach (her Instagram and TikTok accounts have nearly 700,000 combined followers as of this writing), she is using it to fight for the protection of her Native lands.

Chasinghorse is a fourth-generation land protector of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which encompasses 20 million acres of largely untouched wilderness in northeast Alaska that are considered the traditional lands of her Gwich'in ancestors. The area's coastal plain is the calving ground of the Porcupine caribou herd, the primary food source for the Gwich'in and a species of deep cultural significance.

In 2017, Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which required the federal gov-



(Photos: Keri Oberly)

ernment to lease “non-wilderness” parts of the refuge — more than half of its coastal plain — to oil companies for drilling. In response, the Gwich’in Steering Committee launched a divestment campaign to discourage banks from funding leases for drilling. At age 17, Chasing-horse joined the fight. As part of the Gwich’in Youth Council, she traveled across the country to speak on the effects of climate change on Indigenous lands, meet with bankers and political leaders, and lobby against Big Oil.

She documented her work on social media. Her Instagram account features photos of her in action: with fellow youth activists and U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), in the halls of the Capitol building, brandishing a megaphone at an Alaska Federation of Natives rally, and holding a Gwich’in Nation flag on the streets of New York City.

The campaign so far has succeeded in preventing drilling in the refuge. While the Trump administration auctioned off nine leases there just before its term ended, no major oil companies bid on them, and the Biden administration suspended them in June 2021.





“I want to get more of our young people having conversations about Indigenous visibility (and) try to get them to learn our languages, our culture, and traditions ... because we are proud of who we are, and we are not just here for ourselves, but on behalf of our community, trying to get people to see us.”

—Quannah Chasinghorse

For Chasinghorse, climate activism is fundamental to her Indigenous identity.

“It’s in my blood; it’s survival,” she said. “We know that Indigenous people protect 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity, and we only take up five percent of the world’s population. That proves that we have been on the frontlines of these issues for generations, and we hold a lot of the solutions.”

Chasinghorse was featured in *National Geographic* magazine’s June 2022 cover story, “We Are Here,” detailing the Indigenous fight for sovereignty. The next month, she took over the magazine’s Instagram account for a day, sharing images by Indigenous photographers and Native stories to its more than 230 million followers. Last spring, she appeared on a CNN panel to discuss environmental equity and spoke in November at the White House’s Tribal Youth Summit.

She is both strikingly beautiful and strikingly Indigenous. Yidjitoos — hand-poked by her mother (tradition dictates that a woman administer the tattoos) — line her chin and draw a path from the corners of her eyes to her temples. The tattoos mark significant events in one’s life — in her case, overcoming personal and generational trauma. The practice, believed to be several thousand years old, is one way Chasinghorse carries her heritage with her as she navigates a world in which she is the first to step.

Keeping her tattoos — and her Native identity — visible is how Chasinghorse centers her values in her modeling work, no matter whom she is working with. This approach has set her apart in a fashion world in which models often are treated as empty mannequins, only made temporarily alive by whichever brand is driving the campaign. In a 2021 profile of her, *Vogue* magazine stated that Chasinghorse is “redefin-



(Photo: The National Center)

ing beauty” by keeping her defining characteristics front and center.

“By bringing my values to the fashion industry and not making any compromises, brands sometimes aren’t willing to make changes when they want to work with me,” Chasinghorse said. “I tell them, look: ‘Thank you for the opportunity. But if you want to work with me, here’s what you have to do.’ And I’m not going to compromise that because these are my values.”

National Center President Chris James says young Native people with aspirations can look to Chasinghorse for evidence that Native values and commercial success needn’t be mutually exclusive.

“Quannah has stayed true to herself and to her community while succeeding in a field which, until recently, had not seen anyone like her. That sets an example beyond modeling and fashion,” James said. “It shows you don’t need to reinvent yourself or change who you are to be successful. In fact, staying true to yourself can be beneficial in your business venture.”

By refusing to allow her Indigenoussness to be made invisible, she hopes to encourage people to educate themselves on Native Americans and deconstruct the harmful stereotypes that have persisted for centuries.

“Just being visible shines a light on the fact that we have been made invisible, and it also gets the conversation going and makes people want

to be part of the change,” she said. “I try to use my platform to let people know what is going on in Indian Country.”

Walking Two Worlds, a short documentary about Chasinghorse’s life presented by the outdoor brand The North Face, was an official selection of the 2022 Tribeca Film Festival in New York.

The film’s trailer shows a little Native girl about five years old, in jeans and a white T-shirt, with long dark pigtails tied with puffy pink scrunchies on top of her head, holding a spoon as a makeshift microphone, dancing and singing in the living room of a cabin. Off-screen, someone claps and says, “Yay, Quannah!”

“There is still a little Quannah living inside of me,” Chasinghorse said. “We all have our childhood selves still inside of us. We have specific memories that we look back on that make us happy, and for me, that was modeling. I was always posing, and I just loved watching fashion shows. I was fascinated by it.”

She hopes that she can show other little Native girls that they, too, can walk in two worlds.

“I would not be here without my values and without my people really helping me with guidance,” she said. “I’m very proud of being a model and having the voice that I have has allowed me to come into this industry with that power, with that voice, not just as a face, but as someone that stands for something other than my own image.” ■



FROM THE RESERVAT



TION TO THE RUNWAY

Indigenous Fashion on the Rise

Fashion-world warrior Kelly Holmes, founder of *Native Max* magazine, has observed the triumphant rise of Indigenous fashion from the catwalk-bird seat.

“When I was growing up, I didn’t see Native Americans in fashion, and especially models who I could relate to,” said Holmes (Cheyenne River Lakota). “I started out as a model myself, and I faced racism and discrimination. I have been asked to leave a photo shoot because I looked too exotic. They said I didn’t fit the all-American look.”

Holmes’ frustration with that twisted take on who qualifies as a ‘real American,’ plus her unstoppable drive to make Native Americans a respected and strong fashion force, moved her to start *Native Max*.

“In pursuing my passion for fashion, I wanted to create something so others like me, that look and sound like me, who are trying to pursue fashion won’t go through the same thing,” she said.

Holmes and Native fashion figures such as Bethany Yellowtail of B. Yellowtail Collective, which has given dozens of Native designers exposure and access to a wider market, the world-famous Luiseno and Shoshone Bannock designer Jamie Okuma, and longtime Crow designer Della Bighair Stump are determined to be seen, compensated, and celebrated in the fashion world. Their efforts are showing ravishing results.

Native designers are making their way from the reservation to the runways of Paris and New York, as the industry seeks out Native faces and talent. Hän Gwich’in and Oglala Lakota model Quannah Chasinghorse is the face of Chanel, and is representing her people on runways and magazine covers around the world. Native-owned brands are teaming up with major national brands, such as Urban Native Era’s partnership with REI. In April, Hidatsa couture and ready-to-wear designer Norma Flying Horse Baker, of Red Berry Woman, won the designer-of-the-year award at Phoenix Fashion Week.

In the pages of *Vogue* and other major fashion mags, style mavens and Indigenous allies like Ojibwe writer Christian Allaire are drawing attention to designers and wearable-art makers such as Lauren Good Day (Arikara, Hidatsa, Blackfeet, and Plains Cree) and Elias Jade Not Afraid (Crow). Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) graced the

cover of *InStyle*’s August issue, proudly clad in Native-designed clothing.

From ribbon skirts adorned with ledger art to intricately beaded jewelry to dresses dripping with dentalium shells and elk teeth, the elements of Indigenous style are being spotlighted in ready-to-wear collections and couture pieces, and being connected to their traditions, meaning, and the ancestors who have been sewing and beading for generations.

“Native designers are educating the world about our culture, our heritage, and even issues that we’re dealing with,” Holmes said, citing the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and boarding-school trauma. “Fashion serves as a method of cultural preservation too. Fashion serves all of these purposes. And Native designers definitely have all of these responsibilities. They’re doing it very beautifully, and I’m just so proud of everyone.”

For instance, Lakota designer Kayla Lookinghorse of K. Lookinghorse is working on a series of pieces emblazoned with lessons about treaty rights. She also designed a variation on the traditional Navajo three-tiered skirt to honor code talkers.

“Fashion is important for two primary reasons. For one, fashion is a business. You need the same skills to succeed in the fashion industry as you would in most other fields. It’s also an important cultural resource.”

—Chris James,
President and CEO of The National Center

“My fashion is my activism,” Lookinghorse said. “My family has a silver Congressional Medal of honor from my great-grandfather, who was a Lakota code talker.”

Designers and industry experts say there are several forces at play driving the Native fashion boom.

“There’s this growing interest in Native culture, Native pop culture, and Native talent. Big fashion magazines that in the past haven’t covered any Native fashion are now covering

it,” Holmes said. “There’s an increasing number of fashion shows happening in every corner of Indian Country, which is amazing, because the shows provide a platform for local Native designers and models to showcase their talents. Native designers and artists are also discovering their own ways of promoting content and their stories and their work with the world.”

The National Center recognizes the role fashion plays in economic development and empowerment, and is responding by supporting Indigenous people in every area of the industry by presenting fashion shows at the Reservation Economic Summit.

“Fashion is important for two primary reasons. For one, fashion is a business. You need the same skills to succeed in the fashion industry as you would in most other fields. It’s also an important cultural resource,” National Center President and CEO Chris James said. “When done right, Native fashion showcases and uplifts our community. One of our mantras is economic diversity. Fashion is an important part of that, and we’re proud to incorporate it into RES.”

At the 2022 RES, The National Center tapped Cora Kay Chandler (Aaniiih) of Cora Kay Productions to put on an elegant event during the “40 Under 40” reception. Chandler is currently hard at work putting together the fashion show for the 2023 RES.

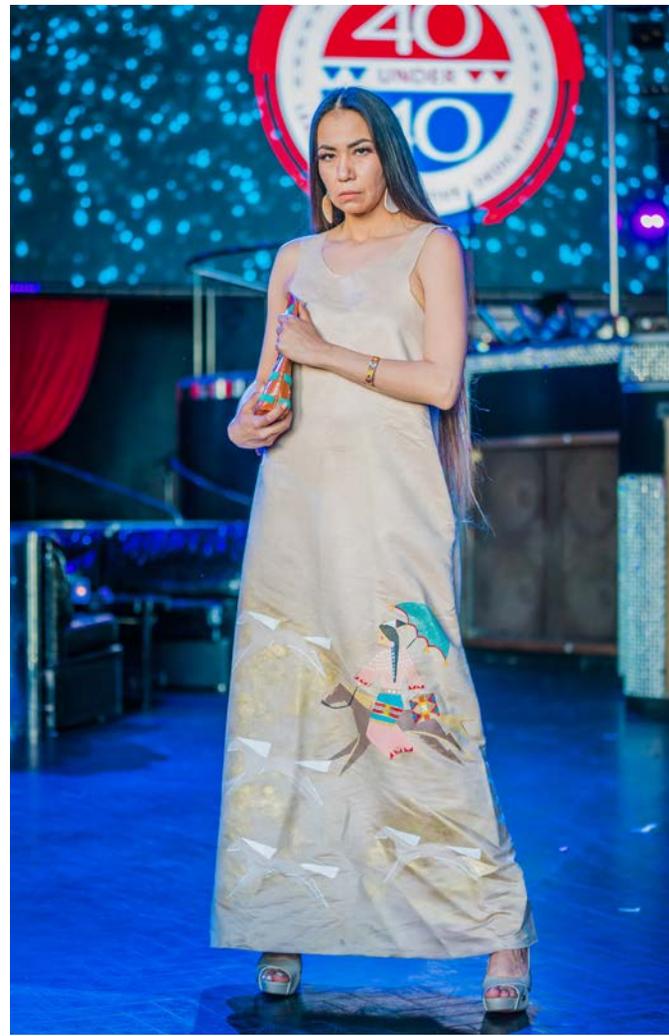
After fledgling Crow designer Angela Howe-Parrish of ChokeCherry Creek Designs showed her work at the 2022 RES, her career caught fire.

It “really kicked off my business and created all these opportunities, because I got to show in front of such a huge crowd of businesspeople, besides these amazing fashion designers,” she said. “I’m new and upcoming, and Cora chose to give me that opportunity to build my business. Soon after RES, I was invited to several fashion shows, and I was able to go to New York Fashion Week and Paris Indigenous Fashion Week.”

As she jet-sets to cosmopolitan style destinations and builds her business, Howe-Parrish always honors her skilled and inspirational ancestors.

“It’s not like we haven’t been doing (fashion design) all this time. It’s just grown because of social media,” she said. “My mom was doing it for years, and nobody knew about it. ChokeCherry Creek was originally her brand. She’s the one that taught me to sew, and inspired me. And then beading, which I learned from my grandmother,

At the 2022 RES, The National Center put on an elegant runway event during the "40 Under 40" reception. (Courtesy photos)





"When I was growing up, I didn't see Native Americans in fashion, and especially models who I could relate to," says Kelly Holmes, founder of Native Max magazine. (Courtesy photo)

is a really a big passion of mine too. I learned to bead my designs, which are mainly Crow designs like florals and geometric patterns."

Although the profile of Native designers is rising, it may be a while before they gain a significant economic share of the industry.

Holmes said she hasn't been able to find any official statistics measuring the impact Native fashion is having on the \$370 billion U.S. fashion industry, and that one of her current goals is finding a way to track its progress.

But she, Chandler, and others say it's unlikely that Native fashion is yet selling in noticeable amounts. Most of the businesses are small, with many Native designers working from home on reservations, where resources are limited and the majority of business must be conducted online or by mail.

According to Chandler, Native designers tend to be sole proprietors, with few, if any, employees, and the quantity of clothing they can produce is limited. Most of them sell directly to consumers without a middleman.

Those living on remote reservations face unique challenges in running a business.

"That is a challenge, because the idea that we've grown up with as Native people, and it kind of continues (to) this day, is that to make it big, you have to move off the reservation," Holmes said. "But then that has the potential of severing a connection. Being so far from home does take its toll on you, whether it's spiritually, mentally, physically, or financially."

On the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in central North Dakota, where Norma Flying Horse lives and creates her couture and ready-

to-wear clothing, the remoteness and severe climate combine to make everyday tasks like mailing out orders a lot tougher.

"Having a business and dealing with the weather is a challenge. We have three months of decent weather during the year, so the rest of the time, I'm white-knuckling it to the post office," she said. "It takes a lot of time and energy to get things here and there, and keep product. I struggle to try to meet the demand. But by the same token, I think people can relate to me, because I still live on the reservation."

Flying Horse considered moving after winning the title at Phoenix Fashion Week, but was "torn" by the choice.

"You really get torn as an Indigenous entrepreneur," she said. "It comes down to 'do I want my children to have that culture and grow up

“There’s an increasing number of fashion shows happening in every corner of Indian Country, which is amazing, because the shows provide a platform for local Native designers and models to showcase their talents.”

—Kelly Holmes, founder, *Native Max*

retail?’ They’ve really mastered direct-to-consumer models.”

It can be a bit easier for those who live on reservations nearer to major cities and commerce centers. But they also must be imaginative and resourceful.

Kayla Lookinghorse lives on the Shinnecock Reservation on Long Island, right next to the ritzy Hamptons resort towns, about two hours east of New York City. She is able to pay a couple of her neighbors to help with the work, and she also takes clever advantage of her proximity to the Hamptons.

“So because I’m in the Hamptons, I can often go to an estate sale, and they might be selling bolts of fabric, so I bought a bolt of silk velvet for a fraction of the cost that I would’ve paid at a store,” said Lookinghorse. “I feel like a modern-day hunter. It’s hunting and gathering. ‘Cause you’re out there and you have to go around and really look for specific fabrics, colors, buttons.”

Repurposing fabrics and materials fits well with her desire to take a sustainable approach to fashion, an environmentally conscious method that many Native designers share.

“Native American people are always in the forefront of protecting Mother Earth,” Lookinghorse said. “There’s been a huge sustainability trend, and our lifestyle is sustainability.”

With so many Native designers finding success on their own terms, uplifting their communities, and being seen by audiences all over the world, Holmes feels a sense of accomplishment and pride.

“All of the hard work over these past 10 years was worth it. It wasn’t easy at all, because all of these different spaces were so impenetrable, and very hard to navigate especially as a Native American person,” she said. “So it’s all worth it for sure.”

So, what is the next step in displaying Native fashion and everything that goes into it to the wider world?

“Growing our businesses, growing our operations. So keeping up with that interest and demand, and continuing to contribute to our communities. Just getting more out there with our work,” Holmes said. “I just feel like the sky’s the limit for Native fashion.” ■

around their relatives, or am I willing to sacrifice that time and move to the city and try to build on this fashion empire?”

Most important, it comes down to whatever the business owner’s idea of success is, Holmes said.

“I do notice the common measures of success with each Native designer are just remaining connected to their culture and giving back to their community, providing jobs to the community, contributing to the economy, being financially independent, and empowering others around them,” Holmes said. “Those are the measures of success that they look at, and not so much ‘are they in the big-box stores yet’, or ‘are they being sold in re-




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Enhanced Tribal Cards: More than just an ID card.

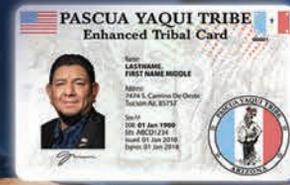
Sacred Path operated by the Pascua Yaqui Tribe recognizes that Tribes need identification more than ever. With the effects and transition from the pre-pandemic era fast forward to 2023, verification of one's identity is of crucial importance more than before.

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Q&A

Cora Kay Chandler, Indigenous Fashion Event Producer



(Courtesy photo)

Having their designs rock the runway at the annual Reservation Economic Summit is a priceless experience for Indigenous fashion-industry folks.

“All of the movers and shakers in Indian Country are right there at RES,” said Cora Kay Chandler (Aaniiih), who, along with Lillian Sparks, produced the first-ever Indigenous fashion show at the “40 Under 40” reception during RES 2022 in Las Vegas. “I’m really thankful for the opportunity to bring these designers to the table so that they can network and be a part of economic development.”

Chandler, owner of Cora Kay Productions, will be helming a style extravaganza at the 2023 RES in Las Vegas in April. She believes in weaving business education and mentorship into her events, and has emerged as one of Indian Country’s top event producers.

Since 2016, she’s been building her reputation by putting on chic shows with an impact, including last April’s Big Sky Indigenous Women in Fashion and Art Symposium and Gala in Billings, Montana.

NC Magazine chatted with Chandler about her work with The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development, what it takes to produce a fabulous and enriching event, and the importance of blending business with education — and style. *This interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

How did it feel when The National Center tapped you to produce the 40 Under 40 reception fashion show and how did you go about selecting designers?

I was very excited, because there’s been such a large boom of Native fashion designers and creators making ready-to-wear and couture. It was my dream to showcase these designers. I put a lot of care and thought into who to feature. We had Norma Flyinghorse Baker of Red Berry Woman, who had just been named Phoenix Fashion Week’s Designer of the Year; Loren Aragon from Aconav, who has been going to RES for years, and is a previous Phoenix Fashion Week Designer of the Year; and Angela Howe-Parrish of Choke Cherry Creek Designs, who had just launched her first collection. So it was really neat to bring two designers that were well established, and somebody who is just starting out.

What is the mission of Cora Kay Productions?

My mission is to empower, lift up, and provide mentorship to our entrepreneurs, designers, and artists. I really want our designers to get a taste of what it looks like in the business world. A lot of these designers don’t have business backgrounds. I want to be the connector. If there are opportunities, we should be bringing each other to those opportunities. We don’t want to be stingy with our information. We want to be able to share business tips.

Fill us in on Cora Kay Productions’ inaugural fashion event.

I started at Crow Fair at a family event. It was awesome. We had Red Berry Woman and Designs by Della by Della Bighair Stump, and it was so empowering, because we paid them. We gave them an honorarium. They told me that that was the first time anyone ever gave them money to do a show.

What are some of the most essential elements of producing a great show?

There’s so much that goes into having a suc-

cessful event. Most important, it’s getting a budget together for travel, for the venue, music, lighting, makeup artists, compensation for designers. It’s going to cost well over \$10,000. I put a budget together, and then have levels of sponsorship that go directly to the venue or to the artist themselves.

Give us an example of how you complement your events with business education.

At the Big Sky Indigenous Women in Fashion and Art Symposium and Gala, we offered a free business symposium. There’s so much need for it. Part of our agenda was creating a vision for your business, getting a business plan together, how to do your taxes. Bethany Yellowtail from B. Yellowtail Collective delivered a talk on how she started her business and how she was able to do pricing. She was encouraging. She told us we need to understand how much value we bring to the table as Indigenous people. There is so much meaning behind what we do, and that there are other brands that are looking for that value that we already have and we’re born into.

What’s at the top of your mind as you prepare to put on this year’s RES fashion event?

I want to thank The National Center for recognizing my work in production with Indigenous designers. It’s so important for me to advocate for our designers, our makeup and hair artists, and the small-business owners because, as we get ready for 2023, I’ll be advocating for sponsorships to make the production come to life.

How can potential investors and collaborators help promote a thriving Indigenous fashion industry?

People need to start recognizing these designers as business owners. When they’re asking them to do shows, they need to think about giving back and providing some kind of honorarium. They also need to ask themselves ‘How can we invest in this industry? How can we as tribal nations support them, not just by buying clothes, but by having business meetings with them and looking at how they can invest in them as a business?’ These designers take so much time and effort to make these designs come to life, and their time is valuable. ■



(Photo: Courtesy of Birchbark Books)

‘A Renaissance’ Reading into the Native lit boom

Inside her North Carolina home, Paperbacks & Frybread owner Dominique Burleson represents just one industrious microcosm in the steadily growing Native book-publishing industry. The demand is growing for Native storytelling and Burleson has answered the call.

“Paperbacks & Frybread is made up of just me,” said Burleson, who founded the online book-boutique company in August 2021. “From web design to branding, and from fulfillment to customer service — I do it all.”

In between raising and homeschooling six children from 18 months to 13 years old, the stay-at-home mother has another grass-roots mission: to “help families of all kinds to decolonize their bookshelves” through her diverse, inclusive online bookstore.

“We converted the foyer of our 1914 home into a mini bookstore. It’s lined with bookshelves for our inventory,” she said. “My

husband and kids help when they can, especially with off-site book fairs and other pop style events.”

Paperbacks & Frybread initially focused on selling Burleson’s own Native beadwork alongside “bookish-themed” gifts, like graphic tees and tote bags. By February 2022, that business plan had expanded.

“I took a leap of faith and went all in on my childhood dream of making it an online bookstore, with the hope of becoming brick-and-mortar in the future. I grew up rarely seeing books with kids like me that weren’t related to Thanksgiving.

“I wanted to make sure all kids and families had the opportunity to see themselves in stories,” Burleson added. “Storytelling is our culture. It’s in our DNA from our ancestors. I want to support sharing that tradition with as many people as possible. Our stories need to be heard.”

So what’s stocked at paperbacksfrybread.com? There are baby board books, children’s nov-



Dominique Burleson, owner of online book boutique Paperbacks & Frybread

“We assumed that with the book giant Amazon having book prices well below cost, it’d be a huge struggle ... but the truth is, people have been nothing but positive in having the opportunity to support our little shop.”

—Dominique Burluson,
Paperbacks & Frybread

els, young adult fantasy, and adult biographies.

“We have books for all ages and almost all genres,” she said. “Audiobooks are another option we have, as we partner with Libro.fm, a company that runs similar to Audible but supports indie bookstores.”

Paperbacks & Frybread also sells book-related products, such as bookmarks, mystery boxes, keychains, T-shirts, and hoodies.

“All of our gift items are created and designed by either myself or another independent artist,” Burluson said. “Our goal is to focus on supporting as many small businesses as possible.”

Burluson said that while Indigenous books make up a small part of the overall U.S. market, it’s “actively growing.” The boom is palpable, and industry decision-makers are noticing.

“With huge events in our society happening — like the Black Lives Matter movement, Stop Asian Hate, and, of course, MMIW Awareness — this is bringing so much eye-opening attention to the topic of marginalized voices and their importance,” she said. “Readers, agents, and publishing houses are all seeking our more diverse stories, especially ones written by individuals in those communities.”

With Jeff Bezos looming overhead, opening an online bookstore seems like an uphill battle these days. But Burluson said the immediate support has been incredible.

“People have been enthusiastic about learning more about Indigenous history and culture while purchasing these resources through an Indigenous-owned bookstore,” she said. “We assumed that with the book giant Amazon having book prices well below cost, it’d be a huge struggle to convince people to invest their hard-



Birchbark Books in Minneapolis is lovingly curated by a spirited staff that believes in “the power of good writing, the beauty of handmade art, the strength of Native culture, and the importance of small and intimate bookstores.” (Photo: Courtesy of Birchbark Books)

earned money with us. But the truth is, people have been nothing but positive in having the opportunity to support our little shop. We’ve had many say they were looking for an alternative to supporting Bezos and will gladly pay more to shop small.”

‘Always room for growth and innovation’

One publisher that’s been around to witness this exciting trend is the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) Publications. Tanya Thrasher, the Smithsonian’s publications manager and editor-in-chief of American Indian magazine, said its imprint has a similar mission to Paperback & Frybread.

“The mission of our specific publishing program is to provide a platform for Indigenous communities, authors, and artists,” Thrasher said. “Naturally, we aim to embody the museum’s mission through our books, products, and magazine. For example, our quarterly magazine is available in a free online digital edition.”

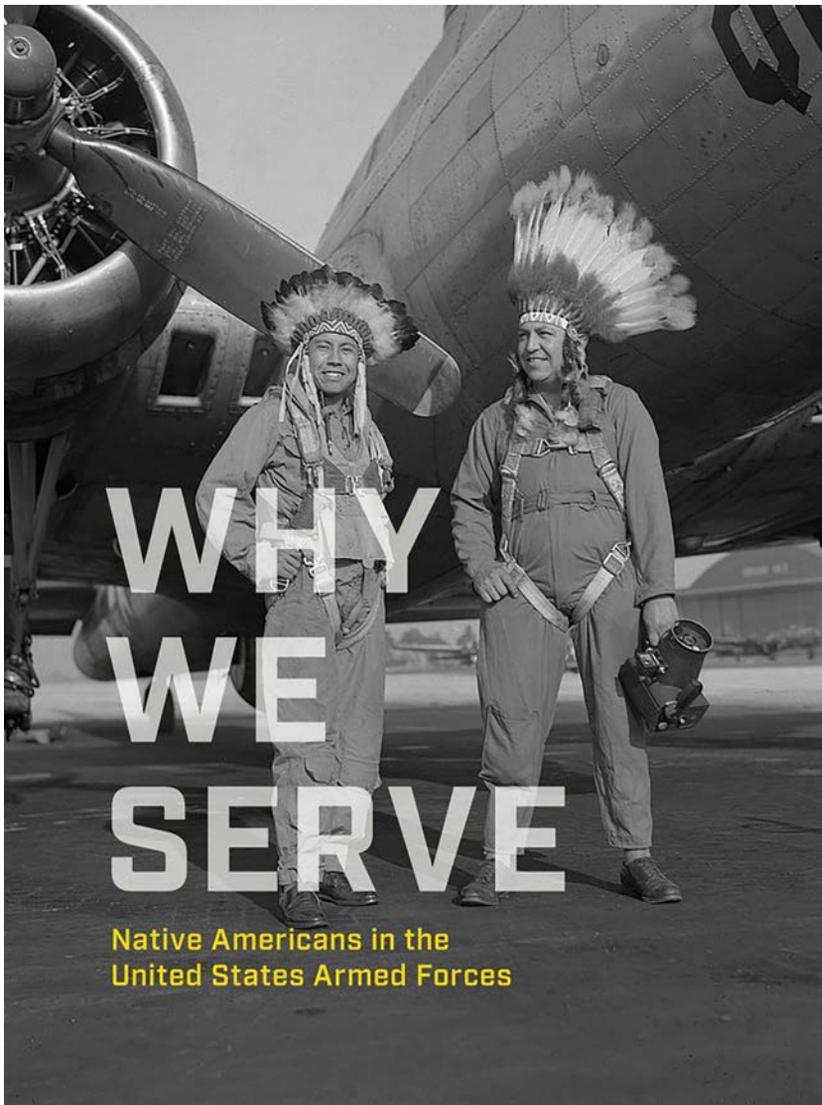
On average, NMAI Publications publishes one or two new titles annually, and all are based on the museum’s exhibition and projects, making for an eclectic collection. There are scholarly fine-art catalogs, children’s books, sym-



Cynthia Leitch Smith, author and curator of Heartdrum, a children’s series featuring Indigenous heroes.

posium-based collections, Spanish-language books, souvenir gift books, e-books, and more. These titles are kept in print for “well beyond the typical time frames,” according to Thrasher, who said they are currently digitizing backlist books, including those on topics such as ceramics and baskets, so they can once again be available.

“We recently published a set of books related to the National Native American Veterans Memorial,” Thrasher said, which opened on the museum grounds on Nov. 11, 2020. “Also,



“Early on, a lot of Native representation in books was clunky or inaccurate or disrespectful. Today, we have more kid-friendly page-turners that entertain, inform, and inspire young readers to become lifelong readers. Many of the best authors and illustrators for kids today are Native writers and artists.”

—Cynthia Leitich Smith, Heartdrum

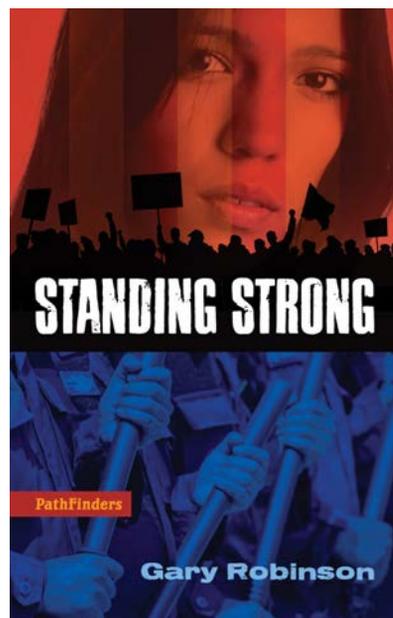
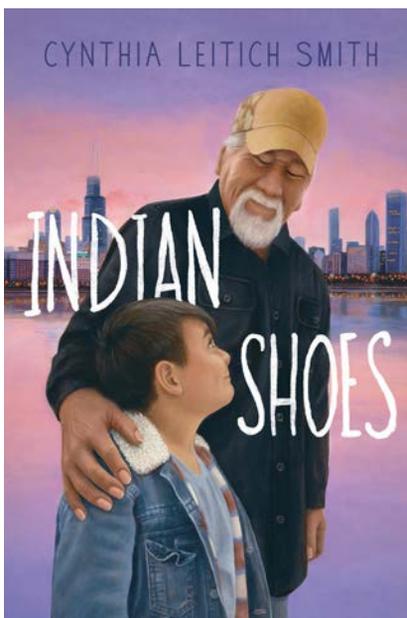
two museum staff authors co-edited and authored *Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces*, which chronicles the generations of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians who have served in the United States Armed Forces during every military conflict since the country’s founding.

“We also published a gorgeous retrospective this year,” she added. “It’s titled *Dakota Modern: The Art of Oscar Howe*, which accompanies a traveling exhibition of the same name.”

Even with a string of successful releases behind them, Thrasher said there is still room for some improvements in the industry overall, especially regarding language preservation and the production of multilingual content.

“There is always room for growth and innovation in publishing, and of course, I advocate for increased focus upon — and resources dedicated to — publishing Indigenous authors, stories, and histories,” she said. “We have made it a priority to respect all languages, especially Indigenous ones, and publish and produce in those languages when possible. I think all museums can improve upon their efforts in language justice and translation efforts.”

Still, Thrasher agrees with Burleson: It’s an exciting time.



Recent offerings from the National Indian of the American Indian’s NMAI Publications (top) and Heartdrum (bottom), an imprint of HarperCollins children’s books that is devoting resources to Indigenous books.

“It is gratifying to see that some tribes and Indigenous authors have established their own book and magazine publishing houses, and there are large publishing companies that are devoting resources toward multicultural and Indigenous book publishing, like Heartdrum, an imprint of HarperCollins children’s books.”

‘The market is bigger than one might assume’

Heartdrum’s curator, author Cynthia Leitich Smith, said the series, which launched in 2020, puts contemporary Indigenous young heroes on the page and Native book authors and illustrators behind the bylines.

To date, there are 11 titles available, and Leitich Smith promises that 2023 will be “a big year for new releases.” She said it’s impossible for her to pick a favorite or standout title.

“With the obvious caveat that I love them all,” she said, “*I Can Make This Promise* and *The Sea in Winter* by Christine Day (Upper Skagit) are especially noteworthy for the emotional resonance and sensitivity of her writing. For teens, Métis Jen Ferguson’s *The Summer of Bitter and Sweet* captures a swirl of adolescent vulnerability and resilience in a character-driven story with elements of mystery.”

Leitich Smith’s own title, “*Indian Shoes*”, is centered on a Cherokee-Seminole boy and his grandpa. “It celebrates being a good neighbor, intergenerational relationships, urban Native life, and returning home to tribal lands,” she said.

Of course, Heartdrum fans skew young. Its books are also popular with educators thanks to evergreen topics like friendship, respecting grandparents, and honoring military service.

“Kids have always been open to a wide, diverse range of stories,” Leitich Smith said. “But we’re making progress with the grown-ups in a position to connect them to Native narratives. Also, the market is bigger than one might assume.”

“A wide range of young readers enjoy the Heartdrum titles, from elementary kids as young as, say, age four, to teen readers through high school, and, in many cases, beyond. A lot of grownups read young adult books, too, especially people under 25.”

An added bonus of curating these titles, according to Leitich Smith, is getting to right some past wrongs in the literary world.

“Early on, a lot of Native representation in books was clunky or inaccurate or disrespectful,” Leitich Smith said. “Today, we have more kid-friendly page-turners that entertain,

inform, and inspire young readers to become lifelong readers. Many of the best authors and illustrators for kids today are Native writers and artists.”

Of course, representation for Indigenous children is another benefit from publishing the series. Sure, there’s outstanding writing and engaging art, but it also allows Native children and teens to see characters like themselves on the page — the longstanding issue that sparked the creation of Paperbacks & Frybread.

“It validates them,” Leitich Smith said. “It sends the message that they belong in the world of books, and that Native kids can be heroes everyone cares about. The fact that the books are also created by Native literary artists also tells Native kids that their own voices and visions matter and are worth sharing.”

But, of course, these stories are not exclusive. Leitich Smith said she hopes everyone takes in Native-penned titles — and it’s not just because she wants more sales.

“It’s also important for non-Native kids to read the books, to correct the Hollywood stereotypes and misinformation they may have picked up,” she said. “So they’ll have a more accurate and respectful understanding of who we are.”

Up next, Heartdrum is wrapping up work on “*Just Like Grandma*” by debut author Kim Rogers, who is Wichita. The book was illustrated by Julie Flett, who is Cree-Métis. It’s a loving, active celebration of a young girl’s nurturing relationship with her grandmother and all that they learn from one another. Leitich Smith said she hopes people will spread the word.

“I know there were hardly any good Indigenous titles when we were young, but the landscape really is improving,” she said. “We need your help to continue moving forward and to best serve our kids.”

‘Essential for understanding the past’

Along with the Smithsonian, another museum helping with this mission by distributing Native titles is the Field Museum in Chicago, which actively seeks out new Indigenous books to stock at its store.

The museum carries a range of Native books — from history to poetry to children’s books — and strives to carry at least 35 to 50 titles at any given time, according to Emilie Kristek, senior retail operations manager.

Along with displays in their store, Kristek said the museum’s recently renovated Native

“Native books are essential for understanding the past and bringing awareness of the present and future.”

—Emilie Kristek, Field Museum

North American Hall has helped shine a deserved light on the literary talent they distribute.

“Overall, we have seen an increased interest in Native books over the past few years,” she said. “While some of the interest may be tied to our recent exhibitions, many of our visitors seek authenticity and understanding in the media they consume. To help our visitors find Native books easier, we pulled them out of our regular book section and highlighted them in our Native Truths display.”

Attendees might be surprised at the selection of Indigenous authors and the various genre categories they fall into. Their titles go beyond historical accounts.

“Native books are essential for understanding the past and bringing awareness of the present and future,” Kristek said. “Typically, we sell historical nonfiction publications, but within our Native book section, we felt it was important to include contemporary nonfiction, fiction, and poetry. Including a wider assortment illustrates that Native stories are part of the living and breathing culture all around us.”

Of course, a quality selection doesn’t fall from the sky. Kristek said the Field’s team continuously scouts for exciting new literature to carry.

“We continue to look toward Native community partners, Field Museum curators, and publishers for this particular section,” she said. “Additionally, we do a lot of independent research to discover what selections we think work best for our visitors. Our goal is to ensure that our publications remain diverse and thoughtfully curated.”

‘A renaissance in Native literature’

But it’s not just esteemed museums carrying the torch for Native authors and publishers. Birchbark Books & Native Arts in Minneapolis is a lovingly curated shop operated by a spirited staff



Owned by Pulitzer Prize winner Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), Birchbark Books emphasizes Indigenous literature of all genres, while also carrying titles by non-Native authors, according to assistant manager Halee Kirkwood (above). (Courtesy photos)

that believes in “the power of good writing, the beauty of handmade art, the strength of Native culture, and the importance of small and intimate bookstores.”

Owned by author and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), the independent store is stocked with Native-language guides, kids books and best-sellers, as well as jewelry and a range of crafts including quillwork, traditional basketry, dream catchers, and Indigenous paintings.

Assistant manager Halee Kirkwood has been on the job for nearly three years and is a direct descendant of the Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe.

“We carry books as well as letterpress broadsides of Louise Erdrich’s poems, literary-themed games and puzzles, a small collection of literary magazines, and a variety of journals, including some hand-made Birchbark journals,” she said. “We emphasize Indigenous literature of all genres while also carrying titles by non-Native authors.”

Kirkwood said the shop, which opened in 2001, has also noticed the recent Native literature boom.

“We’ve been delighted to see a renaissance in Native literature across genres,” she said. “Particularly in the Native young adult and middle-grade genres. The Heartdrum imprint

is a prime example. Growth in Native literature can also be seen in the recent success of our online author event programming. Even in the era of Zoom fatigue, we still draw a considerable number of attendees virtually. It has been amazing.”

Within the walls of this modest indie shop, a lot happens behind the scenes. “A typical day includes a mix of attending to customers shopping in-store, answering a myriad of emails sent to us from across the globe, and processing online orders, which we’ve seen an explosion of since the onset of the pandemic,” Kirkwood said. “We’re receiving books from our distributors and occasionally purchasing jewelry and art from Indigenous artists. All of this is done in our small brick-and-mortar.”

As for improvements in the industry as a whole, Kirkwood has a couple of things in mind that could use some progress.

“I’d personally like to see more growth in Native young adult [books] featuring Two-Spirit protagonists. Also, I’d like to see more Native representation in all roles within the publishing industry.”

A noble mission

Another overarching issue in publishing was pointed out by Alayne Griffin, sales and marketing manager at the long-running Native

Voices Books in Summertown, Tennessee. The company publishes six fresh titles each year, fiction and nonfiction by Native American authors.

“Another change in the publishing business is the effect COVID had on society,” Griffin said. “Many people are now able to work from home, and supply chains and printers are all behind schedule. Beyond that, there is always room for growth, especially with the call for bilingual titles.”

Along with the downsides, Griffin also noted a couple of noteworthy technological improvements. “Probably the biggest change in the publishing business since we started in 1974 are computers and social media,” she said. “All publishing work is done on computers — thank goodness!”

Perhaps Native Voices’ steadfast endurance in the market comes from having and operating with a noble mission. Good intentions go a long way in business.

“We believe it’s important to publish accurate information about Native Americans and provide schools and libraries with information about the diversity found in Native America,” Griffin said. “Our company offered medical support in 1978 to the Longest Walk. After the intense experience and after creating bonds with members of the walk, our small publishing company published *A Basic Call to Conscience* in 1978. It was our first Native Voices book, and we have been working with Native authors ever since.” ■

NOT JUST HISTORY

In new books, Indigenous authors consider what it is to be Native in modern times

For decades, Native American stories in the U.S. were often relegated to history books.

In a way, that's not surprising. Consider: In 2018, a national survey found that 40 percent of respondents didn't think Native Americans still exist.

These days, thankfully, there is more awareness of Native Americans thanks to mainstream television and films, as well as prize-winning books by Native authors such as Louise Erdrich, Tommy Orange and Angeline Boulley.

There's also been rising interest in Native authors with authentic voices and books that portray what life is like for Indigenous people living in modern times. Here are a few of the new books that are generating interest.

Author Morgan Talty's debut, *Night of the Living Rez*, earned the Penobscot citizen plenty of accolades from the likes of the New York Times, NPR, Esquire and Oprah as one of the best books of 2022, as well as a finalist nomination for The Story Prize, which honors American short stories. The 12-story collection uses searing humor and deep insight to breathe life into tales of family, community about what it means to be Penobscot in the twenty-first century.

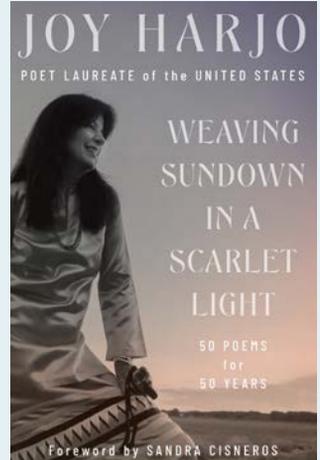
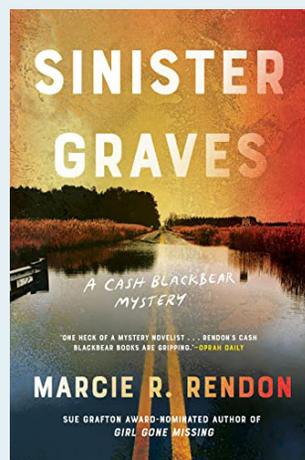
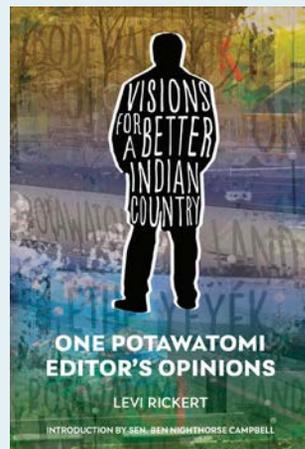
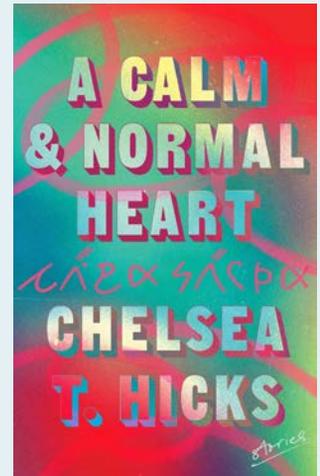
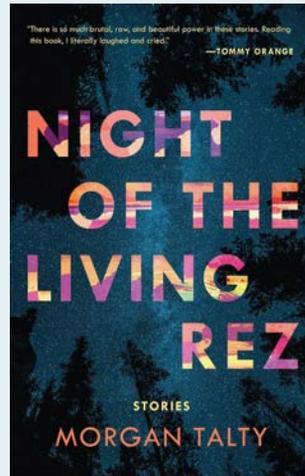
Visions for a Better Indian Country: One Potawatomi Editor's Opinions is compilation of columns by award-winning American Indian journalist Levi Rickert (Potawatomi). Written in a straightforward style, Rickert brings a Native American everyman perspective to topics like racist mascots, missing and murdered Indigenous people and other issues that matter to American Indians and Alaska Natives living in contemporary times.

Set in 1970s Minnesota on the White Earth Reservation, *Sinister Graves* is the latest in a series of Native crime novels featuring Cash Blackbear, a young Ojibwe woman who searches for the truth about the disappearances of Native girls and their newborns. The writing by author Marcie R. Rendon (White Earth Anishinabe) is "addictive and authentically Native" according to Pulitzer Prize-winning author Louise Erdrich, who adds: "I want a shelf of Cash Blackbear novels!"

Erdrich also offers praise for *A Calm and Normal Heart*, singling out author Chelsea T. Hicks (Osage) for her "deadpan dextrous wit (that) can make you laugh and cry in the space of a heartbeat." Hicks' collection of stories showcases everyday Indigenous heroes trying to find new places to call their own inside a country to which they don't entirely belong.

Still This Love Goes On by musical icon Buffy Sainte-Marie and Cree-Métis artist Julie Flett celebrates the spirit of Indigenous community and the enduring love we hold for people and places we are far away. Based on Sainte-Marie's song of the same name, this *New York Times* bestselling children's book combines Flett's breathtaking art with vivid lyrics to craft a stunning portrait of a Cree worldview.

Weaving Sundown in a Scarlet Light is a magnificent collection of 50 poems celebrating three-term US Poet Laureate Joy Harjo's 50 years as a poet. In this volume, Harjo, a member of Mvskoke Nation, traces the arc of her life, beginning with the early discovery of her own voice as a writer and ending with reflections on the time we are all living in today. Throughout, she traces the arc of life, with poems on birth and death, love and resistance, motherhood and the loss of a parent. ■



(Courtesy Photos)

DOUBLING DOWN

Tribes look to Vegas and beyond to diversify gaming interests

Tribes across Indian Country are packing the trunk with their gaming expertise and hitting the road for Las Vegas, joining the ranks of iconic players like the MGM Grand, Caesars Palace, and the Venetian Resort.

And there are no plans to stop there. Over the years, tribes have steadily made moves to expand their gaming operations off reservation lands, including international operations.

In the spring of 2021, the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut opened the Mohegan Casino at Virgin Hotels, once the site of the Hard Rock Cafe's Las Vegas location. At the same time, the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians purchased the Palms Casino Resort in a historic \$650 million deal. A few months later, the Seminole Tribe of Florida made headlines when it acquired the entire Hard Rock brand and the Las Vegas Mirage Hotel and Casino for \$1.08 billion.

For Uncasville, Conn.-based Mohegan Gaming & Entertainment, the decision to invest in a property in Las Vegas contained equal measures of diversification and the ambition to spread its operation into the country's biggest and best-known gaming destination.

"The Strip, in particular, was something the tribe had their eye on for a while," said Ray Pineault, president and CEO of Mohegan Gaming and Entertainment. "As everyone knows, Las Vegas is the most iconic gaming destination in the world. Partly the move was diversification, and it was also wanting to say that you're part of Las Vegas and the largest gaming destination in the United States. The tribe felt it was important to have their name as part of that iconic destination."

Tribal gaming was a \$39 billion industry as of 2021, according to data published by the National Indian Gaming Commission. Over the last decade, it grew 40 percent, up from \$27.9

billion in 2012 — an average of 3 percent year-over-year growth when not taking into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic suppressed revenues in 2020, but the industry rebounded in 2021, posting 11-percent growth compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Chris James, president and CEO of The National Center, views the diversification into Las Vegas as the next step in the evolution of tribal gaming, now well into its fourth decade of existence since the passage of the Indian Gaming Act in 1988.

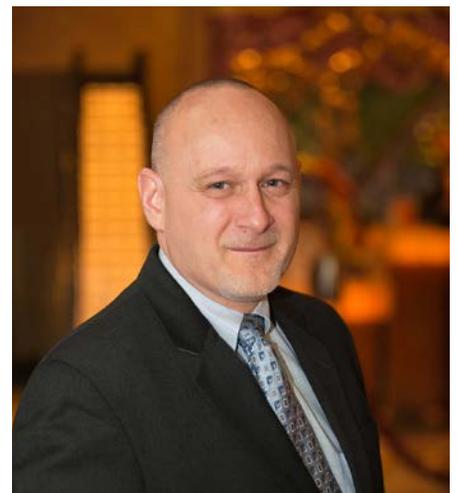
"Las Vegas really is right in the middle of Indian Country," James said. "It's a reasonable drive or short, direct flight for many of the largest tribal communities in the U.S. Plus, it's such a popular destination. I mean, who doesn't like to spend a few days in Las Vegas? Many tribes understand gaming, hospitality, and tourism. There's no better place to put those skills to use than Las Vegas."

Beyond Vegas

Beyond the headline-grabbing moves into Las Vegas, tribes have long understood the value in diversifying their commercial gaming interests outside their reservation lands, both into other parts of the country and across international borders.

"Before this country was even fully formed, tribes had treaties with Spain and France," said Jason Giles, executive director of the Indian Gaming Association. "There were all kinds of trading routes already there when the first settlers came. If you take a long view of history, which most tribes do, you see we've been engaged in this before. Tribes are very protective of what they have on the reservation, but also willing to branch out."

One of those tribes willing to branch out is the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. The tribe began in commercial gaming in the 1980s, running a successful bingo operation. However,



Top: Arthur Mothershed, Windcreek Hospitality. Bottom: Ray Pineault, Mohegan Gaming and Entertainment. (Courtesy photos)

that business declined after casinos were established along the Gulf Coast. The tribe dabbled in electronic bingo before opening its first casino in Atmore, Alabama, approximately 8 miles southeast of its reservation. It followed that up with two more casinos in Montgomery and Wetumpka, Alabama.

While these original operations were successful, the tribe understood there was a limit



(Courtesy Photo)

to how much its yearly revenue could grow, said Arthur Mothershed, executive vice president of business development and government relations for Wind Creek Hospitality, the company that runs the tribe's 10 gaming operations. With that in mind, in 2014, the tribe began looking to diversify its gaming interests outside Alabama. That search eventually led to a property in Aruba, which the tribe saw as an opportunity to expand the Wind Creek Hospitality brand internationally.

"While we were negotiating (the Aruba deal), we realized the same owners owned a property in Curaçao," said Mothershed, who also serves on the Poarch Band of Creek Indians' tribal council. "To be honest, Curaçao had never been on my radar, but it is a very unique country. Once we visited and saw that property, we decided to buy both at the same time, all the while trying to explore opportunities in the States."

Wind Creek also operates a casino and resort in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, which it purchased from Las Vegas Sands in 2019. As well,

Wind Creek is in the process of building out a new casino in the south Chicago suburbs, straddling the communities of Homewood and East Hazel Creek, after the Illinois Gaming Board selected the company in December 2021 for a new commercial license.

All of Wind Creek's gaming investments have roots in a regional investment strategy, Mothershed said. The organization focuses on those communities that have a strong regional base of customers to draw from, rather than destinations that are more dependent on tourist dollars.

"Even though we've looked in Las Vegas and poked around a few of those properties, one of the reasons we haven't pulled the trigger is because they're reliant more on fly-in business," he said.

The Mohegan Tribe also operates gaming interests outside of Las Vegas. It owns and manages properties in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and two locations on Niagara Falls in Ontario. The tribe also is currently in the process of building a 3 million-square-foot resort in Seoul, South

Korea, which will include three hotels, a casino, restaurants and other amenities. According to Pineault of Mohegan Gaming, the Seoul project is nearly 30 percent constructed and slated to begin operations in late 2023.

"It's going to be a substantial-sized project, and we're really excited about it," he said.

The Mohegan Tribe and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians plan to continue expanding their operations both domestically and internationally when the appropriate opportunities present themselves, Pineault and Mothershed said.

"We're still actively looking at other acquisitions," Mothershed said. "I have several on my desk right now."

The Double-Edged Sword Of Diversification

Despite the benefits of diversification, expanding commercial gaming outside of tribal lands can present problems with regulations, laws and general political maneuvering.

"State regulators inexperienced with tribal gaming, a new presidential administration, a

Supreme Court decision, or unfavorable legislation could all knock a tribe's gaming interests back down," said Giles of the Indian Gaming Association.

"It's a double-edged sword because you're branching out, trying to take advantage of your extra capital laying around, and on a whim, someone can come by and knock it down," he explained. "I don't think any other industries really have to worry about that."

Spreading Tribal Culture

Each of the sources interviewed for this report agreed that tribal gaming operators bring something special to the table, unlike other commercially owned operations. For one, both the Mohegan and Poarch Band of Creek Indians cite the family-like nature of their gaming operations, allowing them to be more flexible and longer-sighted than the competition.

"We don't have some of the constraints that commercial operators, particularly publicly traded operators, may have. We're a family-owned business, as all tribes are," Pineault said. "That familial relationship and atmo-

sphere, caring for our team members and spirit of cooperation — that's what we call the Spirit of Aquai. Quite honestly, bringing that to Las Vegas is a differentiator, and something I don't think you see anywhere else on the Strip."

Giles believes tribally run casinos and venues operate with a more customer-focused and welcoming atmosphere than other organizations. Moreover, he believes the cultural aspects tribes chose to integrate into their properties, be it museums or restaurants focused on traditional cuisine, will continue to be a large draw for customers.

"When people come to the tribal casino, they're immediately attracted to the little museum up front, or anything that speaks to tribal history," he said. "People really get sucked into that. ... I really think those are the two biggest advantages tribes have. They have a story to tell and, just by necessity of where they were removed to and forced to go, they had to get along with their neighbors, or they weren't going to survive. I've seen that at all the successful tribal casinos, when you walk in, it's super-friendly. Any other casino, you walk in and you're just a dollar sign." ■



(Courtesy Photo)



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Cannabis Industry Comes Full Circle for this Native Leader

Talk to Mary Jane Oatman, and she'll tell you she hid cannabis in her closet for years.

Too much pressure, she said.

Too risky for her tribal law enforcement career, she added.

But that was then.

Now, she's the chief operating officer of the Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association (ICIA), navigating the cannabis maze in Indian Country with family and history on her side. It's why she started the Indigenous Cannabis Coalition in 2019, an advocacy group that helps Indigenous people interested in the cannabis industry.

According to Oatman, who also serves as editor and publisher of *Tribal Hemp and Cannabis* (THC) magazine, the Bad River and Ho-Chunk tribes have already joined the coalition.

More will follow, said Oatman, a citizen of the Nez Perce Tribe.

"A lot of states are marrying their policies with how states are run," she said. "If it's in South Dakota, a medical state, for example, the Flan-dreau Santee Sioux tribes have already opened up a medical dispensary. Now we have a lot of tribes working in that direction with cannabis."

NC Magazine spoke with Oatman recently about the cannabis business. *This interview has been edited for clarity and length.*

NC: You mentioned having a career in law enforcement. How did you get into the cannabis industry?

Oatman: When I was working for the tribe, I was a medicinal cannabis user, and I was trying to figure out how to game the system, just like everybody else was. I felt like more than anything, I had to disassociate myself from my family, because they were also very active cannabis users, and I was working as a federally commissioned law enforcement officer for our tribe. So I had to go into the closet.

How long did that job last?

About two years.

How did you get around some of the stigmas around cannabis?

I was a little girl in Idaho, one of the last states to

hold out against any legal form of cannabis, and my grandmother, who was 84 years old, went to federal prison for growing marijuana. I was actually on the family's property when the DEA and the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the local county raided our family's medicinal cultivation that my grandmother was growing in the early '80s. So, as I was working on policy, I was really getting frustrated by the social inequities.

And when did that vision for cannabis in Indian Country change?

My vision really shifted to start telling stories about people like my grandmother. In the very first issue of *THC* magazine, I put my grandma on the cover and told her story about going to federal prison.

What does the public not know or understand about Native tribes' relationships with cannabis and hemp?

A sad thing happening with this "green rush" is a lack of acknowledgment that Indigenous people were already connected with sacraments and healing through plant medicines. It's well-documented in the earliest settler journals, so much so that it became a stereotype of "the Indian and the peace pipe." Now that cannabis is becoming patchwork legalized, their only acknowledgment or reference to Indigenous peoples in cannabis is through misappropriation of Indigenous relationships (by) companies that have no ties or connections or relationships with Indigenous communities, for example.

How are you navigating this hurdle?

We really have to amplify our voices and become more united as tribal nations for federal reform, not for inclusion necessarily, but as standalone tribal provisions, and doing something that really protects tribal sovereignty.

Can you talk a little bit more about your coalition?

The Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association is in its infancy. So our member tribes are going through tribal government resolutions processes, which take a little bit of time, but we do have several tribes who are working through that process so that they can formally endorse the Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association.



Mary Jane Oatman, chief operating officer of the Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association. (Courtesy photo).

"Now that cannabis is becoming patchwork legalized, the only acknowledgment or reference to Indigenous peoples in cannabis is through misappropriation of Indigenous relationships (by) companies that have no ties or connections or relationships with Indigenous communities, for example."

—Mary Jane Oatman, chief operating officer of the Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association

What kind of opportunities do you see available for tribes?

Many of our tribes are in that catch-22 [where] they are growing [hemp], but they don't know exactly what their endpoint is. That said, we're really excited about how Prairie Brand Ag has stepped up to lead the way for the Winnebago tribe and put tribes on the map with production and processing facilities, and doing it as a wholly owned tribal nation company. ■

Financial Capital, Human Capital Will Be at a Premium in Indian Country in 2023

Economic development is surging in Indian Country, with more and more tribes diversifying to create pathways to prosperity and independence. While business in itself is a challenging endeavor (20 percent of small businesses fail within a year, and 70 percent within five years), the unique challenges facing Indian Country, such as with persistent poverty and systemic barriers, make the road even more challenging for tribal enterprises and Native entrepreneurs.

Securing capital via a Native community development financial institution (CDFI), federal grant dollars, or investors is just the first step on the journey to profitability for Native entrepreneurs, according to employment and labor attorney Nicole Atallah.

“You need access to capital, but you also need to be able to keep the capital,” she said. “You need to grow your business, and that means you need to make sure your money is going where you want to go.”

Atallah is a partner at the Washington, D.C. law firm Piliero Mazza, which has been involved with The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development and served tribal governments and businesses for more than 30 years.

“I am very passionate about The National Center’s mission, and it is a nice synergy between what we do as lawyers and the business and advice and counsel we are able to provide Indian Country,” she said.

For new businesses — Native and non-Native alike — unanticipated regulatory hoops can eat up a lot of cash flow while creating an environment where they’re constantly reacting instead of acting.

“We live in a world of regulations and rules and taxation and fees,” Atallah said. “The best thing to do is really use the business resources available for free. There are a lot of information sources out there, and you need to dedicate

time to gaining knowledge, so you don’t end up spending money on fees because you weren’t aware of something.”

For many on-reservation Native businesses, access to markets is a significant issue, as they face the challenge of starting a business to drive economic development in a community that may not have the means to support and sustain it.

A 2020 survey of Native-owned businesses by the Center for Indian Country Development in partnership with The National Center found that while there was no perceived difference in the cost of operating a business off-reservation or on-reservation or off-reservation, businesses on the reservation produced lower sales overall.

Atallah suggests that Native entrepreneurs and tribal businesses leverage opportunities to reach customers, both in and out of their communities — a feat that is becoming more and more possible, as the Federal Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program has deployed more than \$1 billion into Indian Country to bridge the digital divide.

“We live in a world where your customer doesn’t have to be your next-door neighbor,” she said. “But you can still bring money into your community.”

Politics and Preference

Karla Bylund (Potawatomi) is a human-resources specialist and owner of Soaring Bird Solutions, a firm in the Las Vegas area that helps tribal enterprises and small businesses with HR support and strategy.

She first came into contact with The National Center when she worked for her father’s Native-owned business in the ’90s. She is a regular attendee and vendor at its annual Reservation Economic Summit (RES) conference, and she credits The National Center with helping her business thrive during the COVID pandemic.

“When COVID hit, my business dropped by 75 percent,” Bylund expressed. “The National Center did a spotlight on my business, and then business just boomed.”



Nicole Atallah, employment and labor attorney. (Courtesy photo)



Karla Bylund, owner, Soaring Bird Solutions. (Courtesy photo)

Bylund has worked with tribes on large-scale tribal businesses, such as the Casino Del Sol in Tucson, Arizona and the Quinault Beach Resort and Casino in Ocean Shores, Washington; smaller businesses; and government agencies, including the Cheyenne Arapaho Housing Authority in Clinton, Oklahoma.

She says one of the biggest challenges she sees tribes face is balancing tribal politics with the needs of running a successful business.

“Sometimes, those tribal politics can interfere with the success of a business,” Bylund said. “What I often advise tribal councils and tribal boards is [that] you need to separate the tribal politics from the business, while at the same time you need to maintain your culture with your tribal preferences, your codes, and policies that are outlined in your constitution.”

Strong constitutions and ordinances are a foundation on which tribes can build employment codes, policies, and procedures. With those documented measures in place, tribal enterprises can execute long-term planning and execution toward profitability, uninterrupted by changes in government and the winds of politics.

“For instance, if you have an HR director who has [the] tribal council telling them to do something that is contradictory to the policies, they can just refer to the policy,” Bylund explained. “That is how you create balance.”

Within tribal employment codes, Bylund recommends that tribes reduce friction in the organization by spelling out exactly what its

rules are for tribal preference, and who it applies to and in what circumstances.

“Tribal preference is truly a unique issue tribes face, as all other businesses follow Title VII [of the Civil Rights Act of 1964],” she said. “Tribal preference makes absolute sense — you do want to give members those opportunities. That’s one reason why tribes start businesses in the first place, she added.

Businesses in Indian Country also grapple with workforce development, as difficulty finding workers with the right skills can lead to struggles with sustainability and growth, while leaving tribal members financially stagnant.

According to a 2017 report by the Center for Indian Country Development, Native Americans are over-represented in entry-level, minimum-wage positions. Given the problems of geographic isolation, persistent poverty, lack of access to education, and systemic racism, Bylund suggests that tribal enterprises implement workforce development into their business models, ensuring that employees can expand their own economic prospects while improving their skills to match the needs of the firm.

There are several tribes that are putting substantial funding behind workforce development

that others can look to. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw is building it into the workday to eliminate any challenges employees may have to getting training. The Muckleshoot Tribe in Washington state has built its program with the goal of elevating tribal members to executive positions in its enterprises, and has held annual conferences to share insights with other tribes.

“Providing opportunities for job-shadowing, mentoring, tuition reimbursement, or other incentives is really critical,” Bylund said. “Creating those opportunities for tribal members to move up so they can keep them there, instead of losing them to go to another organization to get experience.”

She also recommends utilizing programs and networks designed to elevate tribal businesses and Native entrepreneurs in Indian Country, such as the RES conference.

“They open with a prayer, they bring traditional speakers — there is a real respect for the uniqueness of Indian Country, and they are not trying to force Western thought into Indian Country,” she said. “They are thinking about what are the challenges Indian Country is facing, and how do we overcome them?” ■

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TRADING VISIONS

The Akana Group hopes to spark international trade among First Nations

First Nations have practiced the art of commerce for thousands of years. In North America, tribal trade distributed goods ranging from obsidian and bear teeth to copper and furs across the continent. Meanwhile, certain tribes hosted vast trading rendezvous, attracting other tribes from far and wide. The Shoshone hosted in what is now southern Wyoming that gathered tribes including the Flathead, the Ute, the Nez Perce, and the Crow to trade.

Capturing and reinvigorating that spirit of First Nation commerce was top of mind for Chad Johnson when he pushed his company, The Akana Group, across the Pacific, becoming the first native-owned business incorporated in Australia in October 2022. The Akana Group provides tribes and Indigenous farmers with access to agricultural and construction equipment, filling a gap left from traditional equipment dealerships in Indian Country. Johnson, who founded the firm in 2010 and serves as its managing director, plans to capitalize on the momentum from opening the Australia office for further international expansion.

“It’s all about facilitating that First Nation to First Nation trade that we’ve been doing since the beginning of time,” Johnson said. “We’re not starting anything new, we’re standing on the shoulders of giants. Traders from Chaco Canyon to the Spiral Mounds, they’ve been doing that forever. We’re just taking it up.”



Chad Johnson, The Akana Group. (Courtesy photo)

The Akana Group operates fundamentally like a dealership. The company creates purchase orders, takes titles on machines, and arranges for delivery. However, it conducts its business at a more grass-roots level in Indian Country than a traditional dealership would, Johnson said. The Akana Group takes a more hands-on approach: It delivers the equipment to the Indigenous farmer, who might be 200 miles away from the nearest dealership, and gives

them an overview of running the machine.

The company hopes to increase its Australian presence and relationships with local businesses to the point where it can create an operator-exchange program. That program would give young Indigenous talent in Australia the opportunity to work with Indigenous farmers in the United States, and vice versa.

“The equipment is great, but it’s not the end game,” Johnson said.

“It’s what can we do with that base in terms of expanding.”

Export Assistance

To assist in expanding its international presence, The Akana Group leaned on the expertise of the Arizona Minority Business Development Agency Export Center, a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce, housed within The National Center. The Arizona MBDA Export Center works across industries with minority-owned businesses to assist in the process of exporting and identifying opportunities in the global market.

“Akana is one of our best clients because they are very proactive in identifying opportunities and they participate in the trade missions,” said JoAn Begay Notah, project director of the Export Center. “I really love how they’re proactive and really engaged in the export process and executing on any opportunities they may find.”

The Akana Group is currently working with the Export Center in Africa to identify suppliers for 92 dump trucks needed as part of a government contract instead of relying on the beleaguered domestic supply chain.

Beyond the work in Africa, The Akana Group also works with the Export Center to mentor and support other companies looking to export or import products.

“No one is ready to export unless you’ve already done it,” Johnson said. “It’s like being a parent. You have no idea until you get into it. The willingness to be uncomfortable, to me that’s being ready.”

Entrepreneurship As An Engine

The Akana Group understands what it's like to be born from humble origins. It was launched in 2010 as a logistics, warehousing, and distribution service, and its first major break came three years later. In 2013, the company struck a deal with John Deere to provide small agricultural equipment to Indigenous farmers.

The initial "arm's length" agreement with John Deere did not last long, Johnson said. By 2019, The Akana Group represented John Deere's entire portfolio of equipment, along with other manufacturers including Bobcat, Hitachi, and Polaris. As the company expanded, so did its offerings. The Akana Group currently operates seven separate companies under its corporate umbrella. Each one, from transportation services to

used-equipment sales, was born out of the initial mission of helping Indigenous farmers.

"We wanted to try to change how we get Indigenous farmers and growers access to equipment, and it's just grown from there," Johnson said.

He and The Akana Group are far from done. Johnson says the "end game" is to expand the company's services to include more support for tribal entrepreneurs. The company is now working on implementing financing options for Native farmers that include tribal financial institutions. By providing financing, Johnson hopes to support more entrepreneurs and independent operators in Indian Country.

The Akana Group also plans to create a deployable training program that can be used domestically or in international markets to train

"It's all about facilitating that First Nation to First Nation trade that we've been doing since the beginning of time. We're not starting anything new, we're standing on the shoulders of giants."

—Chad Johnson,
The Akana Group

operators on machine maintenance and repair.

"We're working more toward the sustainability of those machines and how you use them," Johnson said.

"What we've seen and heard is operator training and maintenance training are really important to get going. I can sell you a piece of machinery, but if you don't know how to operate it or maintain it, then it just sits."

The Akana Group's initiatives, from equipment sales and exporting to supporting tribal entrepreneurs, are underpinned by Johnson's philosophy that entrepreneurship can create an economic engine for First Nations, helping to bring outside dollars into the community to build wealth and empower people.

"If you have economic empowerment, you can actually create business engines that go out and bring dollars back," Johnson said. "Tribal entrepreneurs are more nimble, they hire faster, and they keep those dollars in those areas. We support and push for this as much of this as we can." ■



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CONNECTING FLIGHTS

How Alaska Airlines promotes connectivity across Indian Country

Alaska Airlines is no stranger to serving as a connector for Indian Country. For many rural Alaskans, the airline serves as the sole hub for critical goods, specialized services and transportation — linking communities throughout the state and to the rest of the country.

“We’re the ambulance, the school bus and the grocery store on a daily basis, whether it’s going into the belly of the plane (or) onto one of our freighters,” said Tim Thompson, external affairs manager for Alaska Airlines. “We keep many of these places in rural Alaska supplied and connected.”

That spirit of connection is what drives Alaska Airlines to participate and support the annual Reservation Economic Summit (RES), hosted by The National Center. The airline views the event as a further conduit for promoting connections throughout the Native American and Alaskan Native communities, particularly from a business level, according to Thompson, who has attended RES for the past six years. For him and the Alaska Airlines team, RES provides a self-contained and structured opportunity to network and interface with suppliers and vendors from the entirety of the tribal community.

“RES is really a great opportunity to make connections,” Thompson said. “There’s a lot of business and economic activity taking place in these areas of Indian Country, especially Alaska with native corporations and tribal governments. It allows us to have an opportunity to hear what is taking place in these communities. That’s what we’re based on. As much as we provide leisure travel, we also do a lot of business travel as well, especially up here in Alaska.”

Alaska Airlines plans to up the ante this year at RES by sending representatives of its newly minted supplier diversity program. Still in its infancy, the program launched in early 2022 with the overarching goal of creating a playing field



(Courtesy photo)

where minority-owned suppliers can compete fairly for business opportunities. Traditionally, the company focused efforts on incorporating all small businesses into its supply base. However, under a directive from its board, Alaska Airlines recently launched this program to specifically serve minority suppliers.

“This initiative is something that was developed from within the company, something that had strong support from our board,” said Denise Williams, who heads the supplier diversity program for Alaska Airlines and also serves as manager of supply chain management, contract and compliance. “It’s something the company is passionate about. It’s not just a new procurement expectation, it’s something we want ingrained into the Alaska Airlines culture.”

Though Williams and her team are still developing some of the more complex initiatives, they’ve already implemented requirements making it mandatory for Alaska Airlines’ sourcing team to include at least one minority sup-

plier on the bid list for a project. Under Alaska Airlines’ definition, any supplier that is at least 51% owned, managed and controlled by one or more diverse individuals or groups qualifies for the company’s supplier diversity program.

Going forward, Alaska Airlines hopes to expand its supplier diversity program deeper into its supply base. It also aims to expand training and outreach efforts to diverse suppliers. To that end, Alaska Airlines plans to host a networking event between minority suppliers and the company’s food and beverage team to educate the suppliers on how Alaska Airlines chooses its food for its airport lounges and in-flight service.

Overall, Thompson and Williams hope bringing representation from Alaska Airlines’ supplier diversity program to RES will increase the program’s exposure to tribal businesses, seeding relationships for years to come.

“It’s a great opportunity to match and see what may burgeon in the future,” said Thompson. ■

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Helping MBEs Win A Seat at the Table

To get a piece of the pie, you must find your seat at the table.

In so many ways, that's the situation for Native Americans, whose percentage of the U.S. population is growing, but who are still underrepresented when it comes to the effects their businesses have on the national economy.

Kurtis Trevan is intimately familiar with the seating charts of corporate boardrooms when tribally owned businesses try to grow from small businesses into mid-sized corporations. He believes that the No. 1 barrier for Native American businesses to punch above their weight class economically is being able to understand and use capital appropriately.

"I believe that capital is the most material missing piece of our investment ecosystem today," said Trevan, who recently joined the executive team of the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC). "Perhaps our most important objective now is to educate MBEs (minority-owned business enterprises) on how to obtain capital for growth and what is the best kind of capital to use to meet their needs."

Trevan has experienced the situation from both sides of the table: first as a citizen of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Potawatomi Indians, or Gun Lake Tribe, and CEO of Grand Rapids, Michigan-based Gun Lake Investments (created by the tribe to manage non-gaming investments), and now as vice president of minority business enterprise growth and entrepreneur-in-residence at the NMSDC. His appointment signals the organization's new emphasis on being a primary resource for Native American-owned companies.

"Kurtis joining NMSDC as the first Native American leader signifies a crucial step forward for the organization," said NMSDC CEO and President Ying McGuire. "His deep connections to this community will ensure we create the increased business opportunities Native American entrepreneurs need to address the economic inequities they face."

As the organization's first entrepreneur-in-residence, "Kurtis has a crucial role in our march toward our goal of \$1 trillion in annual revenue generation for NMSDC-certified minority owned businesses," McGuire added.

While he was trying to certify some of Gun Lake Investments' portfolio companies, Trevan took issue with the way the NMSDC was applying definitions for MBE certifications on Native American businesses.

Now that he is working directly for NMSDC on the side of helping Native-owned companies navigate corporate waters, Trevan is showing MBEs how they can raise significant equity without losing their minority supplier status, and educating capital providers on how they can take larger equity stakes in MBEs. This allows MBEs to start taking the same path as high-growth Silicon Valley-type companies.

"We have had a program called Growth Initiative that allows MBEs to take in outside equity capital from professional investment firms," Trevan said. "We have not communicated and promoted that program as well as what we could have."

Growth Initiative has created a new certification category — minority-controlled firms — that allows the ethnic minority ownership of a tribally owned business to fall below 51 percent as long as the majority investment is made by a professional investment firm.

But Trevan is taking a much more active role as a matchmaker between MBEs and their potential equity partners than just redefining certifications.

"We are making it easier and more efficient for the MBEs to learn about the use of capital and connect with the right capital provider," he said. "At the same time, we're working with capital providers to help them identify MBEs that can benefit from their capital."

Tribally owned businesses can fall into "paralysis" when they are looking to take the next step toward growth simply because "it's very difficult to know where to start with all the information out there," he said.

Because it is focused on assisting a specific group with defined needs, NMSDC has organized the chore of capital acquisition into a cohesive program.

Capital acquisition is only part of the total success equation, however. NMSDC also has programs that help certified MBEs with developing everything from an elevator pitch to a five-year forecast about where an industry sector may be headed.

In general, there is minimal cost for MBEs to



Kurtis Trevan, National Minority Supplier Development Council. (Courtesy photo)

take advantage of NMSDC programs. Founded in 1972 to help companies diversify their spending with minority-owned companies, NMSDC helps connect more than 15,000 MBEs with some 1,500 corporations throughout the United States.

Continued growth of Native American-owned companies is likely, Trevan said. A study by Miami-based Hackett Group Inc. last year that found the percentage of global corporate spending targeted toward minority suppliers is expected to rise from 7 percent to 13 percent by 2025.

Further, the population of those who identified themselves as American Indian and Alaska Native in the 2020 census was 9.7 million — a whopping 87-percent increase from 2010.

One example of new opportunities for MBEs is in the domestic semiconductor industry, as evidenced by Intel Corp.'s plan to invest an estimated \$20 billion in chip-manufacturing plants in central Ohio. The investment was announced after Congress passed the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act (CHIPS Act) in August.

Trevan said the close coordination between the NMSDC Ohio regional office and its national headquarters illustrates the organization's far-reaching nature.

"The Ohio regional office was extremely well positioned to assist, given their local relationships with MBEs," he said. Nationally, the NMSDC works with policymakers, trade groups, regional councils, corporations and MBEs to be a resource for "major industry shifts like we saw with the CHIPS Act."

"We want to connect the dots of activities across the country to better help support all of our stakeholders," he added. ■

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Seven Generations of Clean Energy



Shane Seible, Southern Ute Growth Fund. (Courtesy photo)

The Seven Generation Principle is a philosophy common throughout Indian Country. Some sources say the principle originated with the ancient Iroquois, others point to the Ojibwe. Regardless of its beginnings, the concept has spread throughout Indigenous culture. It holds that leaders should make decisions with the impact of those decisions on the next seven generations of descendants in mind.

For Shane Seible, executive director of the Southern Ute Growth

Fund, the Seven Generation Principle is at the forefront of his management strategy as he steers the organization toward a future in clean energy. The Ignacio, Colo.-based fund forms the business arm of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and encompasses a number of organizations in energy, real estate, and other industries. Seible, who has led the fund since 2019, believes a balanced, long-term vision is essential for his fellow tribal members to thrive.

“The decisions our elected officials made when I was a kid growing

up in the ’70s and the ’80s had an effect on where I am, where my family and where my fellow tribal members are today,” Seible said. “We’re living proof of the effectiveness of a little bit of planning, foresight, and thinking about the future. We have to reciprocate that in our decisions, our portfolio, and our management of our investment.”

When it comes to ensuring the success of the next seven generations, Seible and the Southern Ute Growth Fund are focused, in large part, on clean energy. The fund is making significant investments into an initiative dubbed the “Coyote Clean Power Project.” It aims to create the first zero-emissions power plant on the Southern Ute Reservation by combining carbon capture with other cutting-edge technologies. The fund partnered with North Carolina-based 8 Rivers Capital to bring the project to life.

“We’re excited about the project,” Seible said. “It’s a considerable investment here locally, but it’s part of the solution. We want to put our money where our mouth is. We want to be able to provide real-world solutions here first.”

Focus On People

Seible’s leadership and management philosophy focuses extensively on people, whether those employed by the Southern Ute Growth Fund, members of the Southern Ute Tribe, or tribal members throughout Indian Country.

That focus on people was on full display when Seible agreed to drive five hours north to deliver the opening remarks for a Native

“We wouldn’t be here today if seven generations ago they didn’t think about us. Our work has to reciprocate that. We’re not short-sighted. Our decisions are seven generations ahead.”

—Shane Seible, Southern Ute Growth Fund

Edge Institute Training program in the Denver area, hosted by The National Center. Yvette Fielder, a program director with The National Center, reached out to him ahead of the event, and he agreed to participate in the discussion.

“Indian Country is pretty small, and we all know each other,” Fielder said. “But I didn’t know Shane, and he was very warm and welcoming.”

Fielder hopes to host a Native Edge Training Institute on the Southern Ute Reservation, based on the relationship created during that first meeting.

For his part, Seible sees his work as one stitch in the fabric connecting all people, both now and seven generations into the future.

“We wouldn’t be here today if seven generations ago they didn’t think about us,” he said. “Our work has to reciprocate that. We’re not short-sighted. Our decisions are seven generations ahead. We understand that.” ■

SHARING THE CATCH: How Koniag Inc. empowers and supports Alutiiq people

It's not often that a corporation receives handwritten thank-you notes and glowing text messages after it pays out a dividend — but then Koniag isn't your average corporation.

Rather than touting phrases such as “maximizing shareholder value,” Koniag describes its corporate philosophy as “sharing the catch,” an allusion to how Alutiiq fishermen have plied the coast of Kodiak Island in Alaska for centuries and distributed their take among the community.

If the shareholders of Koniag, based on Kodiak Island, consider themselves more like a family 4,400 strong — where it's only polite to thank someone for a gift — it's largely due to the fact that they are treated as members of a village, with benefits that span entire lifetimes, officials said.

Among several programs, Koniag provides everything from funeral benefits for shareholders to scholarships for descendants ages 3 to 18.

“Sharing the catch is rooted in the traditional Alutiiq values of caring for a whole community,” Koniag President Shauna Hegna said. “Growing up in a small village, you quickly learn that it's not about you as an individual — caring for just yourself — it's about caring for your entire community. That's often taught through the engagement with elders, which you can see in Indian Country all across America.”

It turns out that the “sharing the catch” philosophy can also have some solid business benefits, said Koniag Chairman and CEO Ron Unger. The corporation employed about 3,000 people and posted revenues of about \$700 million last year.

Koniag, which encompasses the villages on and around Kodiak Island at the southwest tip of the Kenai Peninsula, is one of 13 Alaska Native Regional Corporations that were established by the U.S. Congress in 1971 to settle land and financial claims by Alaska Natives. The Koniag region covers approximately 12,000 square miles of the Kodiak Island Archipelago, and Koniag's land holdings include about 226 square miles of surface and 1400 square miles of subsurface estate.

“We are here to empower and support our Alutiiq people,” said Unger, whose family hails from Afognak, one of the region's original villages. Koniag has been able to fulfill that function through organic growth and acquisition of com-

panies involved in four main sectors: government contracting, commercial I.T., energy and water, and real estate. Its in-region investments include the Kodiak granite quarry and the luxury Kodiak Brown Bear Center and Lodge.

Koniag's strategic direction appears to be paying off. The heritage distribution by the corporation rose to \$20 per share this year, up from \$13.50 last year, and the annual elder benefit was raised from \$1,000 to \$1,200.

“Those payments are really critical,” Hegna said. “Every year that we do an elder benefit, we get handwritten notes from them saying: ‘Thank you so much: I'm able to use the money to heat my house this winter,’ or ‘I was able to buy Christmas presents for my grandkids.’”

Other benefits include a \$1,500 payment to the family of a deceased shareholder for funeral expenses, and annual \$750 payments under the corporation's youth scholarship program that can cover anything from tee-ball leagues to high school tutors.

Koniag has been able to afford to increase payments and fund programs through good financial performance from its more than 26 subsidiaries and limited liability corporations. Its real estate holdings range from its Class A office space in Kodiak to its Crystal Village mixed-use development in Leander, Texas.

Koniag experienced a brief rough patch in 2012, when the corporation experienced its first financial loss in nine years, but it was able to correct the downturn with a strategic realignment that got back to basics, Unger said.

“It's how you respond to those downturns that sets you up for the next level of success,” he said. “We focused on key areas where we felt we had core capabilities; we decided we didn't have to do so many things — we can do just a few things very well.”

Key to the turnaround were a renewed focus on I.T. services to federal government agencies and the commercial sector, and emphasis on its energy and water delivery, where it had expertise in engineering and design services that dealt with the harsh environments in Alaska.

“And as we grew, we were able to recruit people who are very motivated to help our Alutiiq people,” Unger added.

The top corporate principle remains service to the community, according to Hegna and Unger.



(Courtesy photo)

That philosophy keeps vibrant by maintaining connections with communities and their elders.

“You learn by seeing and doing,” Hegna said. “Through that process, you learn to emulate the values of prior generations.” In her case, it took the form of her family's annual deer hunt in her home village of Port Lions, population 170, where a household's stock of venison is essential to weather the winter.

“When my son was nine years old, I took him hunting for the first time — a hunt that includes three generations of our family,” she said. “When he got a deer, we took it back for processing at my Dad's workshop and packaged the meat. I looked at my son and said: ‘OK, now it's time to give it away.’”

“And my son was like: ‘What? I just worked really hard for this deer, and now we're going to give it away?’” To make the point, Hegna and her son delivered packages of deer meat to elders, great aunts and uncles, and single mothers with young children in the village.

“Through that act, he was recognized by the community as a provider,” Hegna said. At the same time, her son obtained “an incredible gift” from one of the elders — advice passed from generation to generation on how to handle a bear in the woods after you've just slain a deer.

“So that's what makes this all work,” she said. “At 4,400 shareholders, we are a big family. But at the end of the day, we are a family.” ■

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ITCN Uses Partnerships, Collaboration to Spur Economic Growth for Member Tribes

The Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada (ITCN), which provides resources and services to the 28 tribal communities in the state, is partnering with nonprofits, tribal leaders, and its local government to spur economic growth for its member tribes.

To accomplish that goal, though, some barriers need to be removed, said Deserea Quintana, the Reno-based council's executive director.

"There are a few Nevada tribes who've experienced growth over the past few years; however, many of our smaller, remote tribes continue to struggle with building the capacity for growth, projects, and initiatives," she said. "Although there appear to be numerous barriers to building strong tribal economies, I believe tribes view economic development as a need and critical to building a strong infrastructure for future tribal economic sustainability."

In 2022, ITCN partnered with The National Center for American Indian Enterprise

Development to share training and engagement events for Nevada tribal members, partners, and staff.



Deserea Quintana

ITCN is also working with Nevadaworks and WestEd to fund awards geared at improving the economic sustainability and resiliency of manufacturing, logistics, health care, and the IT industries in northern Nevada. Nevadaworks provides training for skilled jobs for people in Nevada's northern half and helps employers connect with them. WestEd, based in San Francisco, is an education-research agency.

The Northern Nevada Equity in Employment project aims to fill 650 jobs over the next three years. The project will focus on the "underserved, rural, and tribal communities who have historically experienced employment barriers



(Courtesy photo)

and inadequate federal investment," according to the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

According to Quintana, the project plans to increase the number of jobs and skilled workers in all of Nevada's 17 counties, and in 16 of the 28 tribal communities.

"ITCN will be working with NevadaWorks and tribes to use the funding to address unique shortages in the workforces by providing skills training and offering solutions to overcome access and equity for the excluded workforce who may otherwise be employable," she said.

The council is also using a federally funded Native workforce-development program to support employment and training for tribal members in Nevada to develop more academic, occupational, and literacy skills.

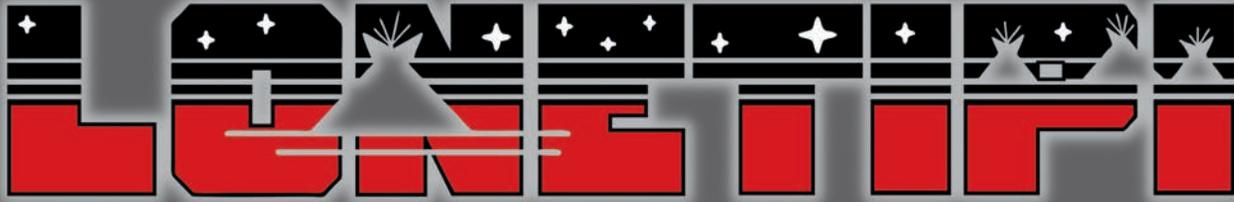
"This is to make individuals competitive in the workforce and to equip them with en-

trepreneurial skills necessary for successful self-employment and promoting economic and social development in communities," said Quintana, noting that The National Center offers her members support for small-business development.

Early on, she added, The National Center "met with our Nevada tribes to establish a collaborative partnership and learn more about their specific needs, interests, and challenges. We've been continuing to strengthen and build the relationship with The National Center for future efforts, training, and opportunities, including future networking and partnerships."

The National Center also presented a few workshop sessions during ITCN's 50th Annual Convention, Dec. 11-15.

RES 2023, a networking event focused on growing American Indian enterprise, will be April 3-6, 2023, in Las Vegas. ■



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CNHA Works to Elevate Native Hawaiians Through Cultural Forward Economic Development

For more than two decades, the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA) has worked to improve the quality of life for Native Hawaiians.

In the face of pervasive inequities and generational trauma wrought by historical injustices, Native Hawaiians suffer worse educational outcomes, shorter life expectancies, and higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse, depression, and suicide than non-Native Hawaiian citizens.

While CNHA, a member-based nonprofit located in Kapolei on the island of Oahu, works to elevate Native Hawaiians through culturally forward economic development, CEO Kūhiō Lewis says it's essential to maintain awareness of these injustices and traumas.

"As we try to promote economic development for Native Hawaiians, we must keep in mind the other issues we must simultaneously address," Lewis said. "Native Hawaiians were struggling before the pandemic, and we continue to struggle as we emerge from the pandemic."

CNHA is a community development financial institution (CDFI) that operates a community loan fund through its business and consumer lending-services program. By also supporting clients with a wide range of technical assistance and financial education, it maintains a delinquency rate below 2% on its loans.

Hawaii tops the nation for the highest median mortgage payment: According to Census Bureau estimates from before the pandemic it's \$1,903 a month, 75% above the national average. The numbers aren't much better for renters, with the median rent \$1,651. This, coupled with Native Hawaiians' lower median household incomes and higher rates of unemployment and homelessness, meant the population was primed for the devastating economic impact of COVID-19. Thousands faced homelessness.

Since 2020, CNHA has administered more than \$105 million in federal emergency relief funds on behalf of the state of Hawaii, the city and county of Honolulu, and the State Depart-

ment of Hawaiian Home Lands, playing a crucial role in keeping Native Hawaiians in their homes.

"CNHA is incredibly proud of all the work we did to support Hawaii's families during the pandemic," Lewis said.

Additionally, as Native Hawaiian artisans were cut off from in-person markets during COVID-19 shutdowns, CNHA launched Pop-Up Mākeke, a centralized digital marketplace featuring products from Native Hawaiian business owners, artisans, and vendors. In the last three months of 2020, the market sold over 100,000 items for Hawaii-based vendors who otherwise would have lost that revenue.

Pop-Up Mākeke has continued to grow. In 2022, the market sold 2500,000 items and generated \$3 million in revenue.

CNHA also has programs to promote entrepreneurship and workforce development. Its KūHana Business Accelerator bolsters entrepreneurs and small businesses with training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities.

Graduates of the eight-week program walk away with a completed business plan, a polished business pitch, and collaboration opportunities to collaborate with fellow participants in their cohort. Since the program kicked off in 2019, KūHana has graduated eight cohorts, and has helped more than 150 Native Hawaiian-owned businesses acquire roughly \$750,000 in funding.

Its Hawaiian Trades Academy, also launched in 2019, supports Native Hawaiians in raising their household income by providing skill development, mentoring, and certification to enter trade industries such as carpentry, trucking, fire, police, and solar-electricity installation. To date, the Trades Academy has seen more than 300 graduates across 13 cohorts.

Earlier this year, as the state government announced a shift to culturally centered, sustainable tourism to mitigate the fallout from record-high tourism, CNHA was awarded a state contract to provide destination-management services related to tourism.



CEO Kūhiō Lewis

"As we try to promote economic development for Native Hawaiians, we must keep in mind the other issues we must simultaneously address."

—CEO Kūhiō Lewis

"We are excited to begin engaging in work to transform Hawaii's visitor industry so that it gives back to our communities more than it extracts," Lewis said. "It seems as if the broader public sentiment has caught up with Native Hawaiians' unease with the industry. As we finalize the details of the contract, we look forward to working with the state to reshape the visitor industry." ■

Q&A

John Echohawk on Tribal Sovereignty and the Supreme Court

John Echohawk (Pawnee), who cofounded the Native American Rights Fund in 1970, has been a member of The National Center's board of directors for over 40 years. As one of today's most renowned scholars in Indian law, he knows tribal sovereignty is tied to economic development in Indian Country.

NC Magazine caught up with Echohawk to discuss his long service on The National Center's board, the impact the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions might have on tribal sovereignty, and their possible ramifications on economic development. *The conversation has been edited for clarity and brevity.*

How long have you been on the board of directors of The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development, and how has it evolved?

I have been on the board since the 1980s. The National Center emerged from the United Indian Development Association, which originated in Southern California, and really worked on a state and local level.

So, a change happened as The National Center moved to Mesa, Arizona. It had more of a national scope. The organization's change was really driven by the tribal-sovereignty movement. With the advent of tribal sovereignty and tribal businesses, all the tribes were kind of wanting assistance on their business development and economic development. With the advent of tribal sovereignty and tribal businesses, all the tribes were wanting assistance on their business development, economic development. But [the United Indian Development Association], being from Southern California, didn't really know about tribal sovereignty, because they were just working under state and local law.

The [United Indian Development Association] executive director, David Lester, and I knew each other, and he knew what I did. So, he reached out to me to teach the group about tribal sovereignty.



What was your reaction to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta case, handed down in June 2022? How did it threaten tribal sovereignty?

Well, it was a real shocker to all of us in federal Indian law, because it basically reversed 200 years of federal Indian law, with the majority of the Court holding that Indian Country is part of the states, and that the states have jurisdiction unless Congress somehow says they don't in specific instances. That reversed what we all knew in federal Indian law for 200 years, beginning back in 1832 with the *Worcester v. Georgia* decision that Indian Country is separate from the states, and the states have no jurisdiction in Indian Country unless Congress says they do.

So it just completely reversed everything. And just like I said, a real shocker to us.

How do you think the oral arguments in Brackeen v. Haaland went during the Nov. 9, 2022 hearing?

We're all concerned that the constitutionality of the Indian Child Welfare Act has been challenged in that case, and that it went all the way up to the Supreme Court. That's what our enemies have been trying to do for a long time.

This was their strategy. They've been working on this for many years, and they finally got before the Supreme Court.

We're all really very concerned, because their basic argument is that Congress did not have authority to pass the Indian Child Welfare Act. And if somehow that limits the authority of Congress to enact legislation relating to tribes,

then we're concerned that it could impact other laws that Congress has passed to help tribes as well. It could really jeopardize all of federal Indian law and tribal sovereignty.

So we're really concerned, but overall, we thought the hearing went well. We didn't see too many signs, coming from the questions that some of the justices were asking, indicating that there might be a majority for doing away with the Indian Child Welfare Act. So most of us felt pretty good with the way the argument went, and we're really hopeful that we're going to be able to win.

I feel Justice [Neil] Gorsuch illustrated that he's got a good understanding of the Indian Child Welfare Act. We're really pleased that he's on the Court. He knows federal Indian law.

How could a negative decision relating to tribal sovereignty be detrimental to economic development in Indian Country?

The prognosis would be that states have jurisdiction in Indian Country, unless somehow that's been pre-empted by Congress. And so, this might eliminate some efforts by tribes to regulate their economies and conduct their tribal businesses. State laws that might interfere with them. That could be problematic.

The civil side of Castro, [which] it was a decision that dealt with criminal jurisdiction, [and] the sweeping language used by the Court in the case, really opened up these civil-jurisdiction issues as well. That's what could impact Indian businesses and economic development. ■



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