

The Circle



\$7.99
SAAK
VOLUME 47, ISSUE 4
BACK-TO-SCHOOL SPECIAL ISSUE, 2026
ESTABLISHED 1980



**Work requirements are
coming to Medicaid.**

**American Indians
are exempt.**

**MAKE SURE
YOUR COVERAGE
IS PROTECTED.**



The Circle

NATIVE AMERICAN NEWS AND ARTS

Chief Editor: Robert Pilot

Advertising Executive and News
Editor: Victoria Fox

Board of Directors:

Chair: Melissa Buffalo

Vice-Chair: David Cournoyer

Treasurer: Alfred Walking Bull

Secretary: Shirley Sneve

Juleana Enright

Natalie Rademacher

Allison Waukau

Contributors:

Tom Garcia

Sean Sherman

Kayla Duoos & Maggie Lorenz

Miiskogihmiiwan Poupart-Chapman

Joe Hobot

Joe Andersen

Alfred Walking Bull

Tony Drews

Genevieve Lane

Natalie Rademacher

News tips & submissions
news@thecirclenews.org

Advertising
advertising@thecirclenews.org

Other inquiries
info@thecirclenews.org

Magazine printed by Visions First
visionsfirst.com

The Circle reserves the right to reject or edit any advertisement submitted. All opinions expressed by columnists and contributors are solely their own and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of The Circle. No part of this magazine may be reproduced by any means without the express permission of the publisher.

Table of Contents

LETTER FROM THE CHIEF EDITOR.....	PAGE 4
MEET KIKI, A 9-YEAR-OLD AUTHOR.....	PAGE 5
PEGGY FLANAGAN ADVANCES IN SENATE RACE.....	PAGE 6
INDIGENOUS MN IS THE FUTURE.....	PAGE 7
WAKAN TIPI EXPANDS WITH NEW CENTER.....	PAGE 8
EDUCATION FUNDS ON NOVEMBER BALLOT.....	PAGE 11
DOCUMENTING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY.....	PAGE 12
WHEN THE SCHOOL BELL RINGS AGAIN.....	PAGE 14
EDUCATION KEY TO DECOLONIZING.....	PAGE 16
MORRIS STUDENT ACCEPTED INTO MED PROGRAM.....	PAGE 18
17 YEARS OF NEW NATIVE THEATRE.....	PAGE 20
HISTORY OF MAIC.....	PAGE 22

Scan the QR code or visit
thecirclenews.org to access The
Circle's website and social media.
Thanks for supporting local
Native news!



WILLARD JR.

THE CIRCLE UPDATES

Letter from the Chief Editor

BY ROBERT PILOT
Chief Editor

As we share this special edition of The Circle, I want to take a moment to thank everyone who has helped make this magazine – and The Circle's continued growth – possible.

First, I want to thank David Cournoyer and Natalie Rademacher for their hard work, creativity, and commitment to bringing this publication to life. I also want to recognize Victoria Fox, whose dedication behind the scenes and across many areas of The Circle has been instrumental in moving us forward. To our Board of Directors, thank you for your leadership, guidance, and continued belief in the importance of independent Native media.

A special thank you also goes to our advertisers and sponsors. Your support makes this publication possible and en-

ables us to continue providing a platform for Native stories, voices, businesses, organizations, and communities. We are grateful that you believe in our mission and have chosen to support The Circle.

Most importantly, thank you to our community. The support and positive feedback we have received since our relaunch have been incredible. Every message, shared story, subscription, and words of encouragement reminds us why this work matters.

I also want to congratulate all the Native candidates who advanced in Minnesota's recent primary elections. Seeing Native people step forward to serve their communities and ensure our voices are heard is worth celebrating.

The Circle belongs to the community. We are grateful to everyone who is helping us write this next chapter, and we look forward to what comes next.



About the Author

Robert Pilot, a St. Paul resident and enrolled member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, has more than a decade of experience in Native American media as the founder and host of Native Roots Radio.



- Job Training
- Career Services
- Adult Basic Education
- High School

All Are Welcome!



YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Meet 9-year-old author Kiki

BY TOM GARCIA
For The Circle

In her formal introduction to audiences, Kiki makes sure to tell you her name, what Tribe she belongs to, and her clan. Each of these pieces of information tells you a lot about her and her story:

Like many other Ojibwe in the Great Lakes region, Kiki traces her ancestors to La Point at Mooningwanekaaning, Madeline Island, where her distant relatives in her family tree were known only by their Anishinaabe names. After our great Chief, Gitchi Weshkiinh (aka Chief Buffalo), and other leaders saved our homelands from the Americans, her aanikoobijiganag made a home at Bad River - Mashkiiziibiing, where she belongs. Kiki's Ojibwe name, Western Sky Woman, was received from the manidoog at a special spot at Odaawaa-zaa-ga'iganiing, Lac Courte Oreilles, and her clan is Migizi, the bald eagle. These are all sources of pride for this young Kwe, and she includes them in her stories.

Kiki was blessed by the Creator to be published at age 9 with her debut book, *Fishing by Torchlight*. She was given her start by Tom and Betsy Peacock at Black Bears and Blueberries Publishing, who took a chance on including her voice in the mostly adult world of publishing (a special miigwetch to them!) In Delores' stories, you will find the adventurous and creative mind of a person who loves her Ojibwe identity and finds joy in using humor to entertain and teach. Delores is a reader and learner at heart, and she takes the responsibility of her clan and the deeper meaning of her name seriously as a knowledge keeper and sharer, and as a harbinger of the good day to come.

Also included in her stories are the experiences of practicing her culture and defending our treaty rights as Native people:

"Me and Dad go ricing. Here the rice is tall, the sky is blue, and the minnows have a path to the end of the river. Our offering is floating beside us.



Photos courtesy of Tom Garcia

Ningaabi Gizhigukwe Delores "Kiki" Garcia became a published author at age nine, using humor to honor her Ojibwe identity.

"Dad, this is my special technique if you want to learn?"

"I sure do", he says.

Later I see the wild rice bird, and she sees me."

Ningaabi Gizhigukwe is affected by the everyday events that shape our lives, Native and non-Native, including the dark winter we Minnesotans bore together:

"Me and Dad Do Our Part. To be strong when things are hard is good medicine.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with our community. And we find ways to help.

"Dad, can we drive my friends to school?"

She wrote this portion of a manuscript after the reach of ICE found her friends in her school and neighborhood in St. Paul. She stood on the road, sign in hand, bundled up and unafraid. As a parent, I am so very proud of her, and I am hopeful for our future when Kiki and children like her know the good path.



They will need to draw on that strength for the struggles to come.

If Kiki were over my shoulder right now, she would make sure you know more about her, too, like being a fan of K-Pop, and that she's going to have many cats living at her house someday. Kids: if you meet her playing stickball or at a book event, and you like K-Pop, cats, or practicing your treaty rights, please say hello. She would love to talk to you!

Kiki also likes to say, "Ojibwe history is for everyone." Indeed, I see your light, my girl.

Note: Tom Garcia is Kiki's father.

ELECTIONS

Flanagan wins U.S. Senate Primary

In an overwhelming DFL Party primary victory on August 11, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan beat her challenger, U.S. Rep. Angie Craig, by a 59% to 39% margin to advance to the general election for U.S. Senate. In November, the White Earth Nation descendant will face Republican candidate Michele Tafoya, a former TV sportscaster. In their respective primaries, Flanagan received 411,432 DFL votes and Tafoya had 211,623 Republican votes. The following is an excerpt of Flanagan's victory speech at First Avenue in Minneapolis. Read the full speech at <https://thecirclenews.org>.

"Thank you, Minnesota. Chi-miig-wech, Minnesota.

For months now, I have been telling you that this campaign was about the many versus the money. Well, guess what? The many just won.

And make no mistake about it: This didn't happen because of me. This happened because of you. This happened because you said Minnesota is not for sale. Not now and not ever.

Now, I just got off the phone with Congresswoman Craig, and she assured me that she is in this fight with us....And I want to be very clear that, to everyone who voted for Angie Craig, I appreciate that you made your voice heard. But I also want you to know this: I will work my tail off to earn your votes and, most importantly, your trust, because I need you in this fight.

...Because Donald Trump has cost our state far too much already. And we are not about to give Donald Trump another loyal soldier like Michele Tafoya to take his orders and do his bidding. Michele Tafoya was all-in with Trump when ICE was terrorizing our neighbors. She even said ICE treated children really, really well. Michele, tell that to Liam Conejo Ramos. Tell that to the parents who are



disappeared. Tell that to the kids who don't know where their mom or dad are right now.

Because the last thing this country needs is to give Donald Trump another "yes, sir" senator. Trump cut 15 million people off their healthcare, and Michele Tafoya said, "Yes, sir." Tax breaks for billionaires? "Yes, sir. You betcha." Crushing tariffs? "Yes, sir." An illegal war that's costing us billions? Michele Tafoya said, "Yes, sir, Mr. President."

And when people said the war was driving gas prices too high, she told Minnesotans — and I quote — "Keep a stiff upper lip and take one less trip to Starbucks." Woof.

...And Michele Tafoya may not understand what you're going through, but I do.

I was raised by an amazing single working mom struggling to pay for food and rent. So, to me, food assistance isn't just another line item in the federal budget. It's why I was able to walk out of the food shelf with a block of commodity cheese under my arm like a football.

Section 8 wasn't just a number. It's how we moved into our apartment in St. Louis Park. And Medicaid isn't just some

abstract program. It's what kept me alive as a kid with really bad asthma. And that's why I've spent my entire career focused on helping families like mine get ahead, because I know what it's like to stretch 20 bucks through the end of the month.

...We need to start fighting for people again. So, as your next senator, here are the things that I'm ready to throw down for:

Ending the despicable priorities of an administration that hands out tax breaks to billionaires, builds gilded ballrooms, and spends billions on bombs while screwing over working people. Truly affordable housing, so that people can pay their rent and young people can buy their first home before they're middle-aged. Passing right to repair so that Minnesota farmers can fix their own damn equipment.

And getting rid of prior authorization so that some dude behind a desk — or, worse yet, an AI bot — isn't determining whether you get the life-saving healthcare that your doctor has prescribed. And passing Medicare for All, because we are going to make healthcare available and affordable once and for all.

And now let's talk about Donald Trump's out-of-control ICE force. We need to rip ICE apart and stop them from terrorizing our communities. And know this: I know that we can fix our broken immigration system, secure the border, and create a real pathway to citizenship that aligns with our values...

...And we know the folks that we are up against are...going to run a campaign of dishonesty, distraction, and division. And we know that because that's what Trump's candidates do. They run the same playbook everywhere they go."

Read the full speech at <https://thecirclenews.org>.

MNISOTA MAKOCE

Indigenous Minnesota is the future

BY SEAN SHERMAN
For The Circle

Walk almost anywhere in Minnesota right now, and you can feel it. Indigenous voices are louder, prouder, and more visible than they've been in generations. This is Dakota and Anishinaabe land, home to many other Indigenous peoples who now call Mni Sóta Makoce home. After centuries of being pushed to the margins, we are reclaiming space, story, and food across the state. If you're at the Fair reading this, you're standing on that history and still on Native land.

Minnesota is home to eleven tribal nations, each with its own land and gifts to share. Up north are seven Anishinaabe nations: Red Lake, whose people never ceded their great lake; White Earth, Minnesota's largest reservation by land area; Leech Lake in the Chippewa National Forest; Bois Forte along Nett Lake and Lake Vermilion; Fond du Lac near Lake Superior; Mille Lacs on its namesake lake; and Grand Portage on the North Shore. To the south, along the rivers of our Dakota homeland, are four Dakota communities: Prairie Island, Shakopee Mde-wakanton, Lower Sioux, and Upper Sioux. Each shares its culture and community through powwows, cultural centers, art, and food.



Consider the Indigenous wins piling up. Minneapolis became one of the first major cities in the country to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day back in 2014, and in 2018, the city's beloved Lake Calhoun was restored to its true Dakota name, Bde Maka Ska. In 2024, the state returned the land once called Upper Sioux Agency State Park to the Upper Sioux Community, returning it to Dakota hands after decades of persistent work. Just downriver, federal land at St. Anthony Falls is set to transfer to Owámmniy-omni Okhódayapi, a Dakota-led group restoring one of the most sacred sites in our homeland. That's land back, happening in our lifetimes.

And there's the Indigenous food scene. We opened Owamni on the Minneapolis riverfront in 2021, and it became Minnesota's first restaurant to win a national James Beard Award, taking Best New Restaurant in 2022. That dream has grown even bigger as Owamni recently became Indígena by Owam-

ni at the Guthrie. You can taste that same movement at Gatherings Cafe inside the newly renovated Minneapolis American Indian Center and at Dream of Wild Health, the Native-led farm in Hugo that grows traditional foods on Native land, with Native hands.

In 2019, we started an Indigenous Peoples Day celebration with North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NĀTIFS), and we return this year on Sunday,

Aug. 30, at the Dan Patch Park Stage. Come hear our collective music, voices, and stories. You don't have to be Native to walk these trails, eat this food, learn these words, or stand at these rivers to understand what they mean. While at the Fair, remember you're in Mni Sóta Makoce, the land where the waters reflect the skies. We've always been and are still here. We're not just surviving; we're creating, feeding, teaching, and leading.



stages

theatre company

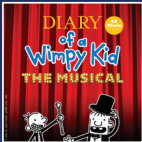
OUR STAGE,
YOUR STORIES

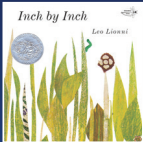
Join Us This Season!

2026-27 SEASON







Stages Theatre Company respectfully acknowledges that we live and work on the unceded, traditional land of the Dakota Nation.

To honor the land's traditional custodians, we warmly invite members of our Indigenous community to join us for any performance this season. We are pleased to offer up to 4 complimentary tickets per household for each production.

Please call our Box Office to reserve your seats at 952-979-1111.

STAGESTHEATRE.ORG

RESTORATION AND RECLAMATION

Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi's restoration

BY KAYLA DUOOS & MAGGIE LORENZ

For The Circle

A babbling brook, blooming prairies, and birdsongs permeate the space at Wakan Típi. This sacred site along the Mississippi River has been honored by the Dakota Nation for millennia as a place of burial, ceremony, gathering, and consensus-making.

The site's peace and tranquility were hard-won, shaped by generations of advocacy, prayer, and perseverance. Colonization violently disrupted not only Dakota Wicohan (the Dakota way of life) but also the vibrancy and health of this land.

After Euro-Americans laid claim to the land that would later become Saint Paul, industrial development began. Wetlands were filled in; trees were removed; the earth, air, and water were polluted; and Dakota People were exiled from their homelands.

After the land was left barren and polluted, Wakan Típi, once thriving with life, culture, and connection, was abandoned by those who had marred its landscape. By the 1970s, the land had become an informal dumping site.

Now, nearly 50 years later, the site has been restored, and a new cultural center has opened its doors to welcome the community back once again.

Dakota homelands and exile

Mnisota is the birthplace of the Dakota Nation. The area now known as the Twin Cities was once a thriving Dakota hub, with sacred places steeped in rich history and meaning. Bdote (the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers) is considered the center of the universe, a place of creation for Dakota people. Along the river are other sacred places, such as Oheyawahi (Pilots Knob), Owamniyomni (St Anthony Falls), Mni Owe Sni (Coldwater Spring), and Wakan Tipi (Carvers Cave). Each of these places holds a special purpose in the lifeways of Dakota People.



Photo courtesy of Wakan Tipi

The new Wakan Tipi Center opened in May 2026 in St. Paul, Minn.

Following early Euro-American settlements in the area, many treaties were made and subsequently broken by the U.S. government. Starving and with no options left, Dakota People fought back against the unfair treatment that led to the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. In the aftermath of that terrible war, Alexander Ramsey declared that "The Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of the State," a genocidal mandate that became known as the Dakota Exile policy. In 1863, Congress abrogated treaties with the Dakota and enacted legislation banishing them from Minnesota.

Even so, many Dakota people remained. Others who lived in exile continued to make secret journeys to these sacred places to honor their relatives buried here and to pray. Throughout this dark era, Dakota People never severed their connection to Wakan Típi.

Dakota reclaim sacred place

During the Civil Rights era, Native people, including those affiliated with the American Indian Movement and Red School House, protested to demand the closure of the Wakan Tipi cave to stop ongoing vandalism.

In the 1980s, Dakota spiritual leaders held ceremony and reinterred burial remains looted from the mounds at Wiçahapi (Indian Mounds Park) atop the

bluffs at Wakan Típi.

Wakan Típi Awanyankapi (WTA), a Native-led nonprofit, began in 1997 as a grassroots effort to bring more resources to greenspaces on the East Side, with a vision to restore the historic Phalen Creek. The nonprofit (formerly the Lower Phalen Creek Project) decided its first project would be the reclamation and restoration of the abandoned 27-acre site - Wakan Típi. This sacred place, once left polluted and abandoned by a railway company, had become an informal city dump. At its inception, the organization had no Native American representation. However, after learning about the land's sacred nature, the founders began working with Tribes to right the wrongs of the city's past. The organization then transferred leadership and decision-making to Dakota people.

Reclamation and restoration

In the early 2000s, Dakota tribes began partnering with the City of Saint Paul and WTA to develop plans for site restoration and cultural resources. These plans paved the way for the development of Wakan Tipi Center.

In 2002, work began to restore Wakan Típi. WTA, Trust for Public Land, and their partners worked together to transfer the land from the railroad to the City of Saint Paul. The following year, more than 50 tons of trash and 13 tons of con-

taminated soil were removed from the site, and clean soil was brought in. In 2004, WTA worked with partners and volunteers to clear invasive species and restore native habitats. The bluffs were stabilized and seeded, and volunteers planted native species.

After years of effort, Waḡaṇ Ṭípi (then, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary) opened to the public on May 21st, 2005, as a nature sanctuary. Now, two decades later, Waḡaṇ Ṭípi is thriving with five vibrant ecosystems, including floodplain forest, prairie, oak savanna, wetlands, and bluff woodlands. As the water and native plants have returned to heal this land, so has the wildlife. Turtles, muskrats, beavers, deer, and coyotes are among those who call this place home, while bumblebees, butterflies, and dragonflies buzz amongst the flowers in bloom.

WTA has changed over the years, but the dedication to protecting and caring for Waḡaṇ Ṭípi has never wavered.

Waḡaṇ Ṭípi Center

In May 2026, we experienced another historic moment for this place with the opening of Waḡaṇ Ṭípi Center. The Center is more than a building; it represents generations of resistance to genocidal attempts to sever the Dakota People from their land and the ultimate victory achieved through steadfast efforts to reclaim, reconnect, and restore this sacred place.

WTA's Executive Director Maggie Lorenz (Turtle Mountain, Spirit Lake) says, "The opening of Waḡaṇ Ṭípi Center represents the re-establishment of a critical piece of our Dakota cultural infrastructure in our homelands. Waḡaṇ Ṭípi has been a place of gathering and ceremony for the Dakota Oyate for millennia. While colonization violently disrupted that, we are now able to once again gather, practice our traditions, and care for this sacred site as we always have."

The 7,500-square-foot center is designed to be an intergenerational community gathering place that honors Waḡaṇ Ṭípi as a sacred site. It features an exhibit hall, a gathering space, and a teaching kitchen. Visitors can learn

about Dakota history and culture and build a shared responsibility to protect and care for the land and other sacred places.

A place to learn and connect

Waḡaṇ Ṭípi offers students a unique opportunity to learn about Dakota history, culture, and relationships to the land in the heart of the Twin Cities. With the opening of the Wakan Tipi Center, teachers and K-12 students can experience this history firsthand through guided and self-guided site visits, engaging exhibits, and culturally grounded learning experiences.

To support educators, Wakan Tipi

Awanyankapi has developed free, downloadable K-12 lesson plans and resources for use before, during, and after a visit. These resources invite students to explore Dakota homelands, language, plants, animals, water, and cultural knowledge while connecting their learning to the land around them.

We invite teachers and schools to make Wakan Tipi part of their students' learning journey—a place where Dakota history and culture are not simply taught but experienced. For more information about the Waḡaṇ Ṭípi Center, including visiting hours, volunteer opportunities, events, and teacher resources, please visit wakan tipi.org.

INDIAN HEALTH BOARD IS MOVING!

Later this fall, all Medical and Dental Appointments
will be at our new Clinic on Franklin

WE WILL BE
MOVING TO:

2027 E. FRANKLIN AVE.
MINNEAPOLIS MN

STARTING ON
SEPTEMBER 22ND

FOR SCHEDULING:
612.721.9800





Where every experience sparks
joy, curiosity, and connection.



SCAN FOR MORE

Bring Indigenous games to your **classroom, conference, community event, or organization** with engaging, hands-on experiences rooted in Ojibwe and Dakota traditions.

DEMOS & TABLING

CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS

GAME NIGHTS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WWW.NASHKE.COM

FOLLOW US:



SIGN UP:



EDUCATION

Education funding on the ballot in November

BY MIISKOGIHMIIWAN
POUPART-CHAPMAN
For The Circle

Minnesota voters will decide on November 3, 2026, whether to amend the state constitution to change how funding is distributed from the Permanent School Fund, which could affect overall education funding levels across the state.

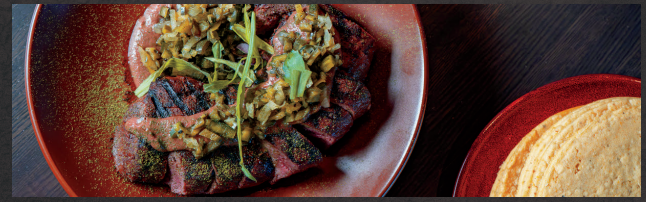
The proposed amendment would increase annual distributions from the fund from 2.5% to 4.5% of the fund's three-year average value. According to sources, the proposed bill will not affect taxpayers across the state because the funds are coming from the Permanent School Fund. The fund was established when Minnesota became a state and generates revenue through investments and natural resource management.

According to Minnesota law, leaving the amendment

question blank on the ballot counts as a "no" vote. Consequently, individuals who favor the amendment must specifically choose "yes".

Local school districts across the state will feel the impact, as this allows for the distribution of capital toward essential student resources and vital educational programming. For Native communities, decisions can directly impact academic success, cultural learning, and student resources. American Indian Education programs work with schools and Tribal communities to address the unique educational needs of Native students.

The Circle is sharing resources to help Minnesota voters learn more about the proposed amendment before heading to the polls this November. These resources are here to support your informed choice. Follow The Circle News on Instagram and Facebook for more info.



OWNED AND OPERATED BY
NĀTIFS

INDIGENA BY OWAMNI
IN-DEE-HAY-NA



BORN OF THE LAND

Indigenous food from across Turtle Island — bison, elk, wild rice, oysters. All without wheat flour, cane sugar, or dairy. Every meal supports Native producers and funds the mission of NĀTIFS.

HOURS

Sun - Thurs Fri - Sat
11 AM - 11 PM 11 AM - 12 AM

Closed Mondays

Guthrie Theater · 818 S 2nd St, Minneapolis

OWAMNI.COM

NATIFS.ORG

Minneapolis American Indian Center

Gatherings Cafe
Two Rivers Gallery
Fitness Center and Group Activities
Cultural Events
Youth, Elder, and Family Programs
Event and Meeting Spaces for Rent



www.maicnet.org

1530 E. Franklin Ave.
Minneapolis, MN
55404

(612) 879-1700



Follow us!

Every donation to MAICC supports Native-led early childhood education!

Visit us at
www.maicmn.org



Photo by J Arthur Anderson

Minneapolis in the winter of 2026, during the federal government's immigration crackdown, coined Operation Metro Surge, that disrupted the city. The photo was accepted into the Minnesota State Fair's Fine Arts competition.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo selected for MN State Fair Fine Arts Exhibition

On Aug. 4, J. Arthur Anderson received a congratulatory email from the Minnesota State Fair announcing that his image had been accepted into this year's Fine Arts competition. The photograph, titled "In the Winter of '26," captures a moment during the occupation by federal ICE agents known as Metro Surge. J. Arthur is a photojournalist who has worked locally for the past decade, bearing witness to significant social events as they occur. Much of Anderson's work has focused on the Indigenous community. He was recruited by Clyde Bellecourt, co-founder of the American Indian Movement, to serve as AIM's official photographer, filling the position previously held by Dick Bancroft for 40 years. This year's image marks the eighth time that J. Arthur's photography has appeared in the fair's Fine Arts Building. He has been named the winner of the Gordon Parks Award for photojournalism on two occasions. The Fine Arts exhibition can be seen at the Minnesota State Fair from August 27 through Labor Day, from 9 a.m. – 9 p.m., at the corner of Randall Avenue and Cosgrove Street in St. Paul, Minn.



Photos by J Arthur Anderson

Top left: Standoff at Standing Rock – 2017, Recipient of the Gordon Parks Award

Top right: Braids – 2024

Bottom left: Spirit Buffalo – 2015

Bottom right: Honoring Wounded Knee – 2025, Recipient of the Gordon Parks Award

EDUCATION

When the school bell rings again...

BY DR. JOE HOBOT
For The Circle

Once again, back-to-school time is upon us. It is a notable point on the calendar, arriving in the waning days of summer and signaling the transition into the cooler, color-filled months of autumn. For some, it can be a time of excitement and wonder, as many youth embrace the moment with enthusiasm.

However, the mood within some households in our urban Indigenous communities can be very different. Shifting back to the often cold and regimented systems of public education can quickly evaporate a Native student's excitement, standing in contrast to the experiences of many of their non-Native peers. It is no mystery why this difference exists. We are all too well aware of the history of our nation's educational system and its treatment of Native Americans, as well as the continued shortcomings of public schools, which persistently fail to adequately educate our Indigenous youth.

The historical record has clearly shown that we are one of the few populations in the United States to have had the public education system weaponized against us as a tool of pacification and subjugation – all under the guise of the need for our “assimilation” into the dominant culture. This weaponization manifested in the form of boarding schools. The sheer brutality of the boarding school era has left indelible scars upon our people – and, in many instances, literally so. The inequities of these institutions were endured by our family members for decades, including relatives only one generation removed from us. Unfortunately, these horrors were not isolated to the far reaches of a long-ago past, as so many non-Natives wish to believe. As the era of boarding schools gave way to mass enrollment within public schools during the 20th century, little improvement in education was made or felt by our community's students. While we have come a long way towards enriching the

quality of the curriculum used over the ensuing years, current data centering on the “achievement gap” clearly indicates that the apparatus of public education continues to fail Native American students in a major way. It is only natural that the same questions are repeated by those who are suffering as a result of the system's many deficiencies: “What can be done? Is it worth it to send my child to that school? Mom, do I have to go back?”

Fortunately, beginning in Minnesota in the early 1970s, the urban Indigenous community took matters into their own hands and set out on a new path for how our children ought to be educated. It began with AIM and several other community leaders coming together to create their own schools – most notably the Little Red School House and the Heart of the Earth Survival School. With a newfound emphasis on cultivating and sustaining students' cultural identities within the learning space, families finally had an option that not only acknowledged our existence as Native Americans but also embraced the wisdom of our traditional teachings. Though these two schools are no longer with us, many new alternative schools that define themselves as “Indigenized” are currently in operation and owe their existence to these two forerunners.

Today, several alternative Indigenous schools are in operation that center their efforts on Native American culture while also teaching the core content areas needed for students to succeed within the dominant culture. Schools like Takoda Prep of American Indian OIC in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Native American Community Academy (NACA) in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Anawakalmekak University Prep in Los Angeles, California; the Indian Community School (ICS) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and the Many Nations Academy at NAYA Family Services in Portland, Oregon are just some of the amazing “indigenized” alternative schools in operation across Turtle Island. These schools have been meeting the needs of Native youth far better

than anything ever accomplished by the mainstream system. Their approach to the learning environment has been anchored in the teachings of our ancestors through an emphasis on Indigenous language development, embedding Native views and histories directly into the curriculum, and incorporating cultural teachings throughout the daily routine of the school. This is done to further develop key competencies relating to interrelatedness, positive self-image, personal accountability, community development, and alternative dispute resolution. In addition, these schools understand that our youth must also learn how to navigate the systems within our society today, so equal emphasis is given to STEM, literacy development, critical thinking, current events analysis, and independent living skills. When taken together, these incredible schools continually outpace their mainstream counterparts, and as such, they have become an integral part of the educational plans that many of our urban Indigenous families are making on behalf of their students.

A unique added support to these schools emanates from their strong relationships with the local community and the parents or guardians of their students. Through these important partnerships, schools work with families to reinforce the teaching and learning that occurs each day and carry it forward at home. This is not the classical conception of “homework,” but rather an effort to help families engage with their students at home in ways that can further the students' understanding of their Indigenous identities. This can take the form of practicing their language together, discussing their family's history and lineage, spending time with elders to hear their many stories, and, whenever possible, going with their families to local cultural events and ceremonies offered by their community. All of these activities are easily pursued by families on their own and in their own way. In so doing, they provide powerful support for the learning being pursued by the students within the Indig-

enized schools during the school day. In a very real way, the education of these youth has transcended the mere teacher-student dynamic and instead has reverted to the learning systems that had traditionally been used by Native peoples since time immemorial – that of the community coming together to contribute collectively to the development of the student, not just during school hours, but around the clock. The academic achievements of these schools can be attributed to their model and these partnerships. Their work has come to be considered by many as “revolutionary and innovative,” but for our communities it is just a return to our own ways, a coming back home to what we know to be true and effective.

When the first day of school comes, it is important for us to remember that our urban Indigenous communities do not have to play a passive role in the schooling of our youth. We do not have to just sit back and allow the public school system to reaffirm its primacy in the education of our students. In fact, it is a terrible idea to continue to allow them to assert their dominion over the field of education because, despite their claims to the contrary, mainstream public schools are causing more harm than good. The annual data on their performance continually illustrates just how bad mainstream schools are at educating Native American youth.

Instead, let us take inspiration from our forebears from a generation ago who boldly said enough is enough and took control of how formalized education would be for their children. From this starting point, a myriad of alternative Native American schools have since been born and continue to operate to this day. As demonstrated by their unique models, these schools are intent on sharply deviating from the mainstream system and instead creating a learning environment that is both culturally supportive and academically rigorous. Our people did these things. Our elders embraced this vision and, without fear of sanction or need for approval, forged ahead and provided their people with a new way of doing school.

Their legacy is the gift of these alternative Indigenous schools. Our contribution to this legacy is to take advantage of what these schools offer and to further build upon the work our elders started on our behalf.

As the first day of school approaches, perhaps ask yourself these questions: Do you and your student’s chosen school work together to support their development? Is your student’s chosen school uplifting their cultural identity as a Native American? Are you and your student working in partnership with their school to further develop their knowledge at home with their own family and community? Does your student actually like attending their school? If not, then it is up to you to make the change you seek. Find out where these alternative Indigenous schools are, and consider enrolling your student there, as opposed to joining the masses at the mainstream schools. If there are none, set to work to build these schools in your

community, just as our elders did years ago. We are not powerless in determining these actions; in fact, we possess more power than we realize. If the public education system fails to meet our needs, we ought to follow the lead of those who came before us and create something that does. Just because the public education system is as large as it is and is buoyed by compulsory attendance does not mean we are beholden to it. At the most basic level, its lifeblood is our tax dollars; therefore, we have all the power we need. Let us not forget that, and let us strike out boldly in meeting the needs of our students in a way that is most beneficial to them and their Indigenous identities.

We have what we need to do this as long as it is necessary, so let us move forward confidently.

Let us do what we must for our students so that we can all be excited when that first day of school arrives and when the school bell once again rings.



Mitakuye Owas'ti

Wakantipi Center
Open Wednesday - Saturday
10 am - 4 pm
More info at wakantipi.org

EDUCATION

Education is key to decolonizing

BY ALFRED WALKING BULL

For The Circle

Of all the responsibilities we have as a community, one of the greatest is ensuring access to education.

Many of my family members, from my parents to my aunts, uncles, and cousins, would remind me to stay in school and get my education. And I did. Graduating from high school—an accomplishment when set against the 10-18% dropout rate in the 1990s—and going on to college felt like I had justified the faith my friends and family had in my abilities.

That is why dropping out three years later, during my junior year, felt like such a massive letdown. “We thought you could handle 18 credits; I guess we were wrong,” was all my journalism mentor told me when I finally worked up the courage to call him and tell him I had to withdraw from school.

At the beginning of that year, board members of the Native American Journalists Association (now the Indigenous Journalists Association) sat me down after a meeting and told me I would be their “poster boy” for recruitment. It was an honor and an achievement. It scared me witless, but I persisted through the year.

The honors kept racking up. I nabbed a prestigious student fellowship that included a paid summer internship and stipend at a major daily newspaper, along with additional training and mentorship. I was courted by another university’s journalism program in the next state over, and everything seemed set for me to achieve.

Then my father called. “I’m not doing too well. I want you to come home and take care of me.”

What I know now is that I went into a deep depression. I knew it even then and sought help, but the mental health services at a public university in South Dakota in the early 2000s were commensu-

rate with the prevailing attitude about mental health: it was extra. I was able to get a few sessions of free counseling with a grad student, and somehow they were able to provide a free, one-month sample of an antidepressant, but the trap was that it took a full month for the drug to titrate into my system, and I’d be back at square one.

After I flunked all but one of my classes, I tried to make plans for my summer internship and transfer, hoping that a change of scenery would help. As a young adult, I learned for the first time that public institutions are very strict about their rules.

The internship folks told me the fine print said it was contingent on successfully completing the previous semester of college. The university in the next state over then told me that transferring to their school was also contingent on successful completion of the previous semester. And getting an “A” in my third-year printmaking class wasn’t quite the definition of success they were looking for.

Every spring and summer for about four years after I dropped out of college, I told myself the story that I would go back the next semester and finish what I started. But that fourth spring is when my father finally died of a heart attack.

The feeling of failure was so palpable for years that it drove my alcohol and prescription drug use. I had a chorus of voices in my head who taunted me with the one label I’d learned in college for people who didn’t just fail but lived in the shadow of their failure: mediocrity. Pitted against an entire family’s expectation of high academic achievement, it felt like I had not only let myself down but also my ancestors and my late father.

One of his favorite things to do was ask me what I learned in school every day. One of my favorite responses was, “One plus one equals two.” He’d furrow his brow and say, “Hey! Really, what did

you learn today? I want to know!”

As the lovechild of two traditional Lakota families in the 1930s, my father grew up with multiple adopted (hunka) parents who made sure he attended the nearby day school through the eighth grade. Then he went to work. First, he picked spuds in the potato fields of western Nebraska or eastern Wyoming until he got homesick and hitchhiked back to the checkerboard jurisdiction of the borderlands between the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. He was a ranch hand who busted broncs until he learned his trade as an auto mechanic. For him, having educated children wasn’t just about achievement; he also wanted to know what he had missed out on because of the limited options he had in his youth.

When I think about what I missed out on, I look back at all the work I’ve had to do to bridge the gap between a formal undergraduate degree and what I do now, and I feel less like I missed out and more like the on-the-job training I received in nonprofit culture, journalism, and organizing amounts to what is essentially a master’s degree. In what field and discipline, I couldn’t even begin to tell you.

Having worked for a community foundation in communications and fundraising, I know that philanthropy is essentially the sixth estate that sets the tone for how our non-governmental, non-business/industry societies fund, govern, and perpetuate themselves. And for no better reason than that they have money. And having worked at nonprofits for most of my professional career, I can tell you that their origins as religious charities and tax havens mean that the fabric they’re made of tends to favor whiteness, Christianity, and maleness.

The Indigenous youth of today deserve to know the full context of a post-secondary American education (and the lack of one).

1. An education is valuable and vital. It helps us see events and people from multiple perspectives, and it helps us think critically without falling into the trap of believing what someone says just because we're drawn to their personality.

2. The higher education system in the United States and its colonies is a pay-to-play, capitalist system accessible only if you have the funds, either your own or someone else's, to pay for it. It is not a public service or good.

3. The academy exists to uphold itself

and keep the gate so that it generates its own value, like any other institution. Yes, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics have real-world applications, but unless they're taught with the weight of historical and sociological context, how they operate can become a trap that reinforces colonization.

4. Everything you learn will eventually need an update. Learning isn't a one-and-done process but a lifelong commitment to improving yourself and growing to meet the needs of whoever you choose to serve.

5. Your authority will always be tied to your educational achievement in this society, but it's still weighted by the contexts of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.

These are not reasons to despair or to avoid higher education.

In fact, they are reasons to be clear about who you are as an Indigenous person and which aspects of colonization you are willing and not willing to engage with. May your knowledge lead to wisdom and may your wisdom lead you home.

Party among the stars at the Bell

Statewide Star Party

September 17–19

Celebrate Ursa Minor, Minnesota's official constellation!

October Star Party

Friday, October 16

Explore the world of Roman—NASA's next space telescope!

November Star Party

Friday, November 20

Enjoy telescope observations, planetarium shows, and more!



Star party details here:
z.umn.edu/star-parties

The Bell Museum waives general museum admission for Dakota and all Indigenous peoples. For more information visit bellmuseum.umn.edu/mnisota-makhoche



bell museum

Support local independent Native news!

The Circle
NATIVE AMERICAN NEWS AND ARTS



Scan the QR code or email advertising@thecirclenews.org to get started

EDUCATION

UMN-Morris student accepted into prestigious medical program

BY TONY DREWS
For The Circle

Angelina Drews (Minwewegiizhikwe), an Anishinaabe young woman from the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and a member of the Sturgeon clan, has been accepted into the prestigious Front Line Indigenous Partnership (FLIP) M-PATH Program at Mass General Brigham (MGB) in Boston, Massachusetts.

Angelina, a pre-med student entering her third year at the University of Minnesota Morris, was selected for this highly competitive program, which provides Indigenous students with immersive healthcare experiences, professional development opportunities, mentorship, and exposure to medical careers while working alongside Harvard-affiliated physicians and healthcare professionals.

This achievement reflects Angelina's commitment to serving Indigenous communities through medicine and increasing Native representation in healthcare. For Angelina, however, this opportunity represents far more than an academic accomplishment. It is the next step in a journey shaped by resilience, personal loss, family experiences, and a deep desire to serve others through healing.

The path toward medicine is deeply personal. Her interest in healthcare was shaped long before she ever stepped into a classroom. Before she was born, her father, Tony Drews (Chi-Noodin), was diagnosed with leukemia and experienced a relapse during her mother's pregnancy. Just one week after Angelina entered the world, she lay on her father's chest as he underwent a life-saving bone marrow transplant.

A few years later, when Angelina was four years old, her mother, Jodi Drews



(Kimiwanaanakwadok), was diagnosed with late-stage melanoma. Over the next two years, her mother's illness became the defining reality of family life as they navigated treatment, hope, grief, and preparations for the future. Jodi passed away when Angelina was just six years old.

From her earliest days, Angelina witnessed both the fragility of life and the extraordinary impact that compassionate healthcare professionals can have on patients and families. These experiences instilled in her a profound respect for medicine and a desire to one day provide the same care and support that her family received during some of their most difficult moments.

As an Anishinaabe woman, Angelina is especially passionate about increasing Indigenous representation in medicine and helping ensure that Native communities have access to culturally responsive, equitable, and compassionate healthcare. She hopes to use her education, experiences, and cultural values to help bridge gaps in healthcare

access and outcomes for Indigenous people.

Being selected for the FLIP M-PATH Program marks an important milestone on her journey toward becoming a physician. The opportunity will allow her to learn from leading medical professionals, strengthen her clinical knowledge, and further develop the skills needed to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others while honoring her commitment to her community and future generations.

Angelina has always understood that achieving her dreams would require more than passion alone. It would take dedication, perseverance, and the support of her family, community, and mentors. As she continues her journey toward becoming a physician, she remains committed not only to pursuing her own goals, but also to creating opportunities for future generations of Indigenous students.

Her aspirations are especially meaningful given the significant underrepresentation of Native Americans and

Alaska Natives in the medical profession. While Indigenous people make up more than one percent of the United States population, they account for less than one-half of one percent of practicing physicians nationwide. This disparity has contributed to longstanding challenges related to healthcare access, cultural understanding, and health outcomes within Indigenous communities. Through her education and future career in medicine, Angelina hopes to help address these inequities and serve as a source of representation, advocacy, and healing for Native people. Programs like FLIP are helping to change that reality by creating pathways for Indigenous students to enter healthcare professions.

"Representation matters," Angelina said. "It's important for Native youth to see people who look like them succeeding in medicine, science, and healthcare. I hope that by pursuing this path, I can help create opportunities for others and contribute to improving healthcare outcomes in our communities."

Research has consistently shown that patients often experience better outcomes when healthcare providers understand their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. For many Native communities, historical trauma, healthcare inequities, and limited access to providers continue to create barriers to care. Increasing the number of Indigenous physicians is one important step toward addressing those challenges and building stronger, healthier communities.

While Angelina is incredibly excited about the opportunity that lies ahead this summer, she is also quick to recognize that she would not have reached this point without the love, encouragement, and support of her family, friends, and community. In particular, she is deeply grateful for the guidance of another strong Anishinaabe woman, Katelyn France, who entered her life as she was preparing to begin college.

At the time, Katelyn was pursuing her own medical journey, completing her Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Over the past three years, she has taken Angelina under her wing, serving as a mentor, role model, and source of unwavering

support. Through her encouragement, guidance, and belief in Angelina's potential, Katelyn has helped fill a void left by the loss of Angelina's mother at a young age.

Their relationship has become a powerful example of the importance of mentorship, community, and Indigenous women uplifting one another as they pursue their dreams.

As Angelina prepares for this next chapter, she carries with her not only her own determination, but also the strength, wisdom, and support of those who have helped guide her along the way.

A dedicated student and emerging leader, Angelina graduated from high school with a 4.02 GPA and currently maintains a 3.99 GPA at the University of Minnesota Morris.

Her academic success reflects years of hard work, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to her goal of becoming a physician. Her acceptance into the FLIP M-PATH Program places her among a select group of Indigenous students from across the country who are working to address one of the most significant disparities in American healthcare: the underrepresentation of Native Americans in the medical profession.

Throughout Indian Country, many Native students interested in medicine face challenges navigating educational systems that often lack Indigenous mentors, role models, and culturally relevant support networks. Programs like FLIP help bridge that gap by connecting students with professionals who have successfully walked the path before them and are committed to supporting the next generation of Indigenous healthcare leaders.

Hosted by Mass General Brigham, one of the nation's leading healthcare systems and a teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School, the FLIP M-PATH Program provides Indigenous students with meaningful exposure to healthcare careers through mentorship, networking, professional development, and hands-on learning experiences. Participants are connected with physicians, researchers, and healthcare



professionals who help guide them through the often-complex pathway to medical school and beyond.

That dedication has been evident throughout her academic journey. Yet those who know Angelina best say her success is about far more than grades. Friends, family members, and mentors describe her as thoughtful, compassionate, hardworking, and deeply committed to helping others. Whether through academics, volunteer work, or community involvement, she consistently seeks opportunities to learn, grow, and serve.

As she prepares to travel to Boston this summer, Angelina is eager to learn from medical professionals, build relationships with other Indigenous students, and gain experiences that will help prepare her for medical school.

"My goal is to become a physician who provides excellent care while remaining connected to community," she said. "I want to continue learning, growing, and finding ways to use medicine to help people."

For a young Anishinaabe woman whose passion for medicine was shaped by both loss and resilience, acceptance into the FLIP M-PATH Program is more than an achievement, it is the beginning of a journey dedicated to healing, service, and creating a healthier future for Indigenous communities.

NATIVE ARTS

17 years of New Native Theatre

BY GENEVIEVE LANE
For The Circle

"I'm more surprised that I've been supported," says Rhiana Yazzie, reflecting on nearly 17 years of New Native Theatre. She founded the company in 2009 as space for Native people to engage with theatre as playwrights, artists, and audiences. In every way she has Indigenized a process of bringing productions, spanning across Native worldviews, to Twin Cities stages and regional Native Nations.

In an arts landscape marked by shrinking funding, institutional instability, and longstanding barriers for Native artists, she doesn't describe resilience as toughness or recognition. Instead, she speaks about responsibility to Native artists, Native audiences, and the community that continued believing in the work even when she struggled to do so herself.

"The only reason New Native Theatre exists," she says later in our conversation, "is so Native people can be healthy and strong."

For her, resilience is not symbolic. It must materially sustain Native lives.

Much of the contemporary arts world measures success through visibility: famous stages, institutional recognition, reviews, awards, and career advancement. But throughout our conversation, the focus repeatedly returns to a different question entirely. Centrally important to Yazzie is whether Native artists are actually able to live, work, and remain healthy within the communities they serve.

"You can't eat prestige and visibility," she says bluntly.

The statement arrives during a broader reflection on what Native artists are often encouraged to pursue within predominantly white institutions, namely symbolic inclusion and proximity to elite cultural spaces. She does not dismiss those accomplishments entirely, but questions what they ultimately provide if Native artists themselves remain un-

supported.

"The thing that I'm doing is getting food on a person's table," she explains. "Helping them pay their car and their mortgage."

Even when discussing her own career, she repeatedly redirects the conversation toward community responsibility.

Rather than concentrating institutional success around herself as an individual playwright or director, she speaks most proudly about creating stability for other Native people through New Native Theatre. The structure she's built includes full-time positions, competitive wages, mentorship, and long-term artistic development. In a nonprofit arts landscape where even established organizations often rely heavily on temporary labor or stipends, that commitment stands out.

Again and again, the conversation returns not to acclaim, but to responsibility. She emphasizes the theater company's role as a resource to younger artists, to Native audiences, and to ensuring that the next generation has more support than she did.

Resilience, in this framework, is not measured by how visible one Native artist becomes inside a predominantly white institution. It is measured by whether the community itself becomes stronger and more capable of sustaining the people within it.

Part of that understanding was shaped by moving through arts institutions that often felt transactional rather than relational.

As a young playwright, she recalls repeatedly encountering enthusiasm for her work, but without the deeper mentorship necessary to help Native artists build long-term careers. Praise frequently existed without follow-through.

She describes being invited into institutional spaces that felt personal. There were dinners at people's homes, repeated invitations, professional opportunities, praise as encouragement. Over time, she slowly realized those relationships often remained transactional.

"It boggled my mind that you could invest so much time in an artist and not actually be their friend," she says.

The realization was painful not simply on a professional level, but on a cultural one. Yazzie describes entering theater spaces without the institutional fluency or inherited networks that often help artists navigate predominantly white artistic environments. What she needed was not simply recognition, but guidance.

"I just needed someone to say, 'Hey, you have really great talent. Could I just take you step-by-step through this and help you?'"

Instead, she watched many Native artists struggle within systems that often treated Native work as interesting or marketable without necessarily investing in Native people themselves.

"I saw other Native people getting discarded left and right by that system," she says.

Those experiences helped shape New Native Theatre's philosophy of mentorship and artistic development. The organization became not only a producing institution, but the kind of sustained creative community she herself had once been searching for.

Storytelling itself becomes a form of resilience. Not because stories offer easy healing, but because they allow people to recognize themselves honestly.

Throughout our conversation, Yazzie returns to the importance of stories centered on the interior human experience rather than symbolic representation. Mainstream institutions, she suggests, often ask Native work to explain culture or identity to outside audiences. New Native Theatre approaches storytelling differently.

"Our audience just wants to know about themselves," she says.

That philosophy shapes the kinds of plays NNT chooses to develop and produce. As the Artistic Director, she typically selects stories grounded in emotional truth. Borrowing Faulkner's phrase, she

describes the stories that most interest her as those centered on “the heart in conflict with itself.”

That recognition matters more than spectacle or polish. Audiences may forgive imperfections in production, she argues, if the story itself feels truthful.

“If you have a really good story,” she says, “you will overlook flaws in acting.”

Over the years, Native audience members have approached her after performances crying, telling her they had never seen a play that felt like it was truly for them. Those moments continue to affirm the purpose of the work.

“Plays don’t try to help the individual understand themselves anymore,” she says. New Native Theatre, by contrast, continues insisting that self-understanding, especially within community, remains essential not only to art, but to resilience itself.

Despite the emotional weight carried by many New Native Theatre productions, humor also remains central to her artistic worldview.

Comedy, she explains, is not distraction, but another form of survival rooted in misunderstanding and failed communication.

“Comedy is people getting things wrong.”

As a playwright deeply influenced by Theater of the Absurd, Yazzie often finds herself drawn toward stories where people struggle to understand one another, even when they desperately want connection. That tension, she believes, reflects a broader Native experience inside institutions that frequently misunderstand Native life altogether.

“As a Native person,” she says, “you are constantly in a world where everyone is getting everything wrong about you.”

Rather than collapsing under that frustration, she often turns toward humor: “You might as well laugh.”

At the same time, she is careful to distinguish between humor with emotional depth and what she describes as “buffoonery,” comedy that strips Native stories of their humanity. Humor only works when it’s balanced against emotional truth.

Otherwise, “You miss the weight that helps the pendulum swing,” she ex-

plains.

That balance, grief alongside humor, has become one of the defining characteristics of New Native Theatre’s work. In her hands, laughter is never separate from resilience. It is one of the ways people continue surviving institutions and the misunderstandings that accumulate across a lifetime.

Yet, after nearly 17 years, she speaks less like someone preoccupied with measuring artistic success than someone trying to remain accountable to a community she loves.

She speaks of support from audiences, artists, colleagues, donors, and community relationships built over time. This circle appears throughout,

defining nearly every part of her understanding of resilience.

At one point during our conversation, I tell her that perhaps New Native Theatre’s longevity is evidence that the community loves her back. She pauses thoughtfully before agreeing.

That reciprocity may ultimately explain why New Native Theatre continues resonating so deeply within Minnesota’s cultural landscape. The company’s work doesn’t ask Native people to become symbols, lessons, or abstractions. Instead, it insists on the fullness of Native humanity.

That has always been the deeper purpose of the work, both in image and in practice.



EVENING CLINICS ARE ON TUESDAYS 5PM TO 8PM

Angela
Erdrich,
MD



Dr. Erdrich offers Evening
Pediatric Appointments

Indian Health Board
understands the week can
get busy. Schedule your
appointment with us in the
evenings so we can take
care of you on your time.

To Schedule:
612.721.9800



TWIN CITIES

A space centered in community

BY NATALIE RADEMACHER

For The Circle

Drive to the northernmost end of Bloomington Avenue in South Minneapolis and a large building greets you at the stoplight. It's hard to miss the Minneapolis American Indian Center when you drive by – the 60,000-plus-square-foot building greets you at the Franklin and Bloomington Avenue intersection, and the bright warm wood and big windows give the building a welcoming feeling.

The surrounding neighborhood has been coined the American Indian Cultural Corridor, and the center is often considered the heart of the Minneapolis urban Native community. It's the home of many powwows and community events, and it's often the first place Native people go for community and resources when they move to the city.

History of MAIC

The center opened at 1530 East Franklin Avenue in 1975 in response to the flood of Native people moving from reservations to cities through federal relocation policies that promoted jobs and opportunities in urban areas. The center – originally called the Minneapolis Regional Native American Center (Mr. Nac) -- was started by local Native community members who saw a need for a central communal gathering space and tailored services, and this legacy continues today with the center's majority Native leadership and staffing.

Many urban Native centers opened at that time in cities across the country. Federal cuts in the 1980s shuttered many of their doors, but several – including the Minneapolis American Indian Center – weathered the storm. Today, the center serves one of the largest urban Native populations, with more than 71,000 Native people living in the Twin Cities, according to Minnesota Compass.

The programs have adapted over



the years to meet current community needs, but the mission of the center has stayed consistent – to provide excellent services within a framework of cultural values that meet the needs of the American Indian community. The mission is lived out through youth, elder, and intergenerational programs that help provide stability, strengthen connection to culture and community, improve health and wellness, achieve academic success, and establish pathways to living wage jobs that break the cycle of generational poverty. The center's large gym and other spaces are often used for purposes beyond its programs – nu-

merous political campaigns have been announced at the center and this newspaper was even started in the basement 40 years ago.

Steady, stable leadership has guided the center since its inception – in its more than 50-year history, there have only been four executive directors. Frances “Frannie” Fairbanks is responsible for most of that. Frannie (Red Lake Nation) served as executive director from 1984 until her retirement in 2012. She made her journey to the spirit world in 2018, but the impact of her kind leadership and steady presence is still felt today. The renovated gymnasium was

renamed in Frannie's honor, and a giant plaque outside the gym entrance ensures her legacy is not forgotten.

Meeting the moment

The center strives to be accessible, so its programs and services are provided at no cost to participants. About 28,000 people partake in the center's programs each year, many of which are available online so they can reach people beyond the Twin Cities. The free online Ojibwe language classes often have to close registration early because the software maxes out at 1,000 participants. Beyond its programs, many more people visit the center for events and to enjoy crafts, art, and food. Gatherings Café is part of the growing Indigenous food sovereignty movement in the area, serving healthy accessible food rooted in ingredients native to Turtle Island, such as bison, corn, wild rice, and squash. Two Rivers Gallery is the first Native-run gallery in the region, and it helps uplift emerging Native artists by providing a space to share their work. Woodland Indian

Crafts, also known as Charlie's Shop, offers handmade crafts and goods, and is often people's first stop during a visit to the center. The programs are geared towards Native people, but the center's spaces are open to all, and provide opportunities for anyone to connect with, learn about, and honor Native culture.

Stop by the center today, and it looks very different than the space that many grew up visiting. In 2024, the Minneapolis American Indian Center reopened after undergoing a massive \$32.5 million renovation and expansion that transformed the building and moved it into the 21st century.

The foundation stayed intact, but 20,000 square feet was added, including a new kitchen and dining space for Gatherings Café, a new home for Two Rivers Gallery, a conference space, and a central rotunda that looks like a drum, which is considered the heartbeat of the community. The renovation includes a new roof to replace the old one that often leaked during rain events and big windows that brighten the place up. The

spaces were updated to better serve community needs, and many can be rented for meetings and events.

Last year, the center reached a major milestone — celebrating 50 years as the heart of the Twin Cities' urban Native community. Many of the kids who grew up playing basketball and visiting the center now bring their families there. The roof no longer leaks, the spaces have been modernized, and the available resources and programs have expanded, but the heart of the center has remained the same.

It continues to be a central gathering space that is important to so many people, as a place to receive resources, attend a powwow, and be in community. Everyone seems to have an "Indian Center story" and it's beautiful how much pride and love there is for the space. The renovation and expansion set the center up to continue serving future generations.

I'm excited to hear more Indian Center stories as they unfold.



Are you a homeless Native youth in need of housing?

Ain Dah Yung Center's Emergency Shelter provides shelter 24/7/365 to homeless American Indian youth and immediate physical necessities (food, clothing, and hygiene kits), as well as crisis intervention, academic support, and cultural engagement.





Learn more at adycenter.org

651.793.8946
ADYCenter.org

1089 Portland Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104

Eligibility:

- American Indian
- Ages 5-17
- Homeless/Runaway (including couchsurfing)

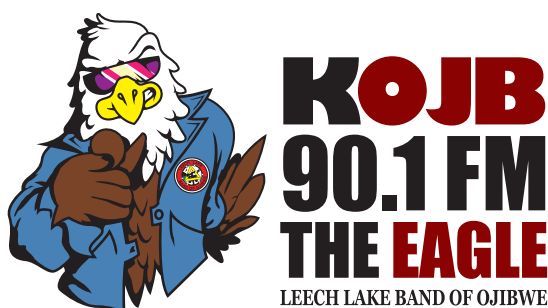
 **Youth Services Network**
<https://ysnmn.org/>

National Runaway Safeline
1.800.RUNAWAY
1800runaway.org
66008

KOJB IS COMING TO THE TWIN CITIES!

KOJB IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE OPENING OF OUR NEW SATELLITE STUDIO

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe – Twin Cities Office
2438 27th Ave. South • Minneapolis, MN 55406



BRINGING NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMMING TO THE TWIN CITIES METRO AREA

KOJB's goal is to provide the Twin Cities metro area with quality, informative, and entertaining Native American programming for everyone who enjoys and supports Native voices and stories.

Our programming will include:

- Entertainment
- Local News & Community Stories
- Health Topics
- Employment Information
- Emergency Management
- Native American Culture & Language
- Community Information
- And Much More!

Our goal is to provide the local community with information that is important, relevant, and meaningful to our community.

TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN, WE NEED YOUR HELP!

KOJB is looking for individuals interested in contributing their talents and experience to our Twin Cities satellite studio.

OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- 1. ON-AIR VOICE TALENT / DJs**
Bring your voice, personality, and passion for radio to KOJB!
- 2. NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE PROJECTS**
Help develop and support Native language programming and projects.
- 3. STORYTELLING**
Share stories, experiences, history, culture, and community perspectives.
- 4. COMMUNITY EVENTS COORDINATOR**
Help KOJB connect with and participate in events throughout the Twin Cities.
- 5. AUDIO PRODUCTION**
Assist with recording, editing, production, and other audio projects.
- 6. SOCIAL MEDIA**
Help KOJB connect with our audience and share community programming and information online.

ALL POSITIONS LISTED ARE CONTRACT POSITIONS.

KOJB staff will provide additional details regarding responsibilities, qualifications, and contract opportunities at the time of inquiry and interview.

INTERESTED IN GETTING INVOLVED? WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

contactkojb@llojibwe.net

Twin Cities Office: **612-315-3179**

KOJB LOOKS FORWARD TO SERVING THE COMMUNITY!

Quality • Informative • Entertaining
Community-Focused

KOJB is also pleased to announce that we are broadcasting "Indigenous Day" on August 30th and an additional broadcast on Friday, September 4th in the education building. We look forward to seeing you there.

**Underwriting Opportunities are also available.
Please call Chris @ 218-407-7333**

*Native voices. Community stories.
Information that matters.*