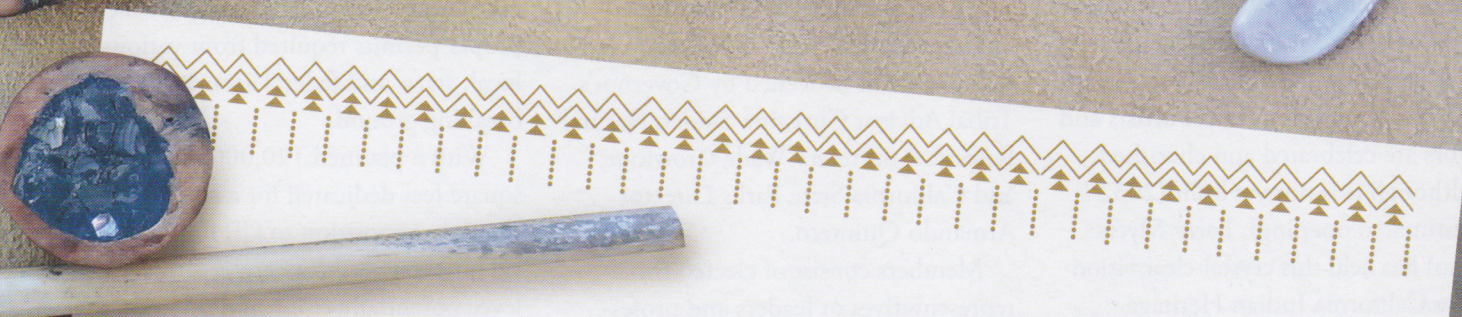




A New Tomorrow

ENVISIONING THE CALIFORNIA INDIAN
HERITAGE CENTER





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by
Jeanne
Ferris

**AT THE CONFLUENCE
OF THE POWERFUL
SACRAMENTO AND
AMERICAN RIVERS IN
WEST SACRAMENTO,**

there lie forty-three acres where you can walk on interpretative trails amongst the valley, black, and blue oak trees. Further ahead, in the shade of ponderosa, foothill, and sugar pines, a state-of-the-art heritage center will stand on the highest point, built for California's First People.

Here, tribes and leaders will convene and host cultural symposia. This sacred space will be a unique realm where traditional arts flourish in harmony with modern technology. Where non-Native guests can learn about the principles of Native land stewardship on Native land. And where California Native artists and authors are celebrated and cherished.

Although it is not yet built (2032 is the estimated opening), Larry Myers (Pomo) has held this crystal-clear vision for the California Indian Heritage Center (CIHC) since 1990. CIHC also supports the programming of the State Indian Museum in downtown Sacramento.

"This center can be a resource for everyone by electronically connecting with all the universities, like UCLA. You can research and access Native

information no matter where you are in the country," Mr. Myers said emphatically. "This is not a museum where artifacts sit under glass, but a tribal gathering area for cultural activities. It is for, about, and of California Natives. It would be even greater if we could have a restaurant and gift store to generate revenue." Or, at the very least, a kitchen for catering ancestral Native foods.

To bring home Mr. Myers's point about accessibility, the beautiful Barona Cultural Center and Museum offers a unique library of local out-of-print periodicals and Native literature. Still, it is only accessible in person, limiting academic or journalistic research.

Mr. Myers serves as chair of the CIHC Foundation. As a nonprofit foundation, it is led by a well-rounded task force and convened by Governor's Tribal Advisor Christina Snider, Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot, and California State Parks Director Armando Quintero.

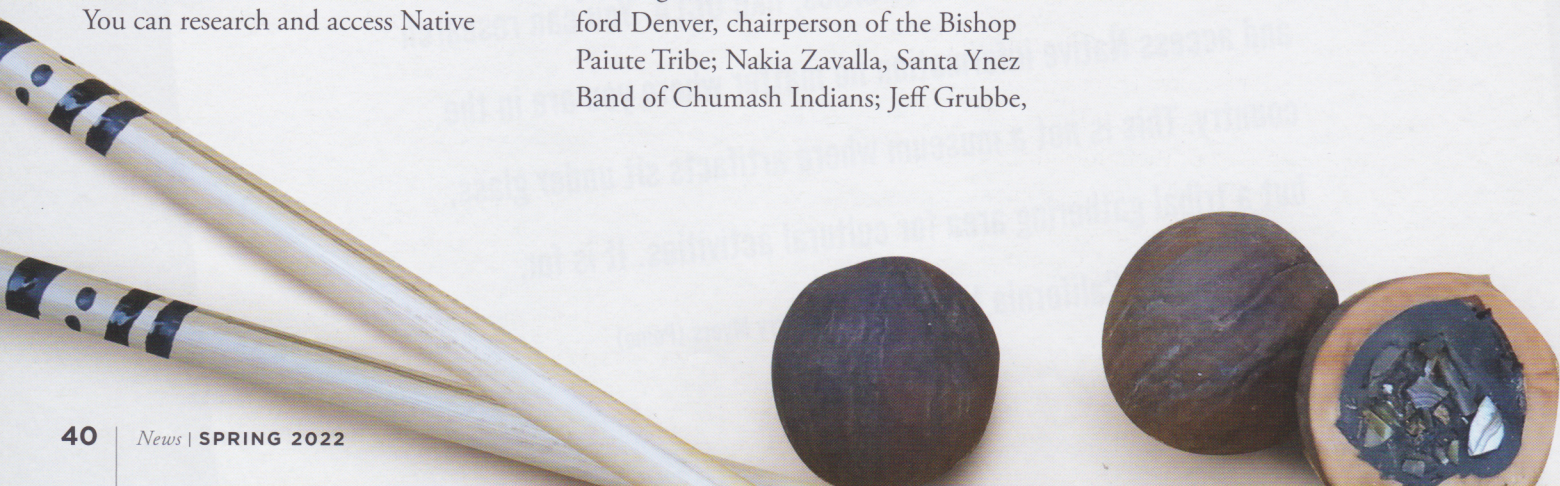
Members consist of elected tribal representatives or leaders and professionals: Anthony Roberts, chairperson of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation; Lorelle Ross, vice chairperson of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria; Mark Macarro, chairperson of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians; Tilford Denver, chairperson of the Bishop Paiute Tribe; Nakia Zavalla, Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians; Jeff Grubbe,

chairperson of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians; and Richard West, president and CEO, Autry Museum of the American West and a passionate advocate for Native arts, including this publication.

Funding is unprecedented—initially planned under Governor Brown's administration, the \$100 million of state funds come from a surplus account remained earmarked for CIHCF.

The competitive search for a like-minded visionary respectful of Native worldviews resulted in twenty-two architectural applicants, now pared down to a final five. In February 2022, CIHCF will announce the winning bid. After that, however, it will probably take another two years to acquire the proper permits required from various local, state, and federal agencies before breaking ground.

With a planned 120,000 indoor square feet dedicated for a structure, the only opposition to CIHC was local homeowners' concern regarding a levee potentially rising and flooding the surrounding area. But money follows money, and the tony neighborhood of multi-million-dollar homes alongside the riverbanks has ensured additional proper shoring nearby.





WHY SHOULD CALIFORNIA NATIVES CARE ABOUT THIS CENTER?

“California tribes will have input into its construction, design, and operations. The objective is to make the center a place where California Indian people will want to come and enjoy meeting and working with other Indian people. A feeling that this is their house, their home, a safe and comfortable place to be. This will be a place where colonialism starts to lose its control over Indian people,” Mr. Myers said.

“The truth of what happened and why will be on display for all people to understand and be knowledgeable [about] the atrocities and the inhumanity that was common practice by early invaders. Those actions were performed and condoned by farmers, gold diggers, militia, [the] federal government, state government, politicians, ranchers, etc. Very few people stood up against them. Why Indian tribes should care cannot be summarized in a few paragraphs,” Mr. Myers continued.

Lately, tribal synthesis appears to be an effective solution for strengthening Native voices in policy-making decisions and upholding judiciary changes. A center dedicated to the rich diversity of California Native culture with an interactive educational module and global connections can be a living example for others to follow and ensure the grief of extinction remains firmly in the past.

HOW WILL CALIFORNIA NATIVES BENEFIT?

“When Indian people gained control over their ancestral remains, a strong sense of achievement and pride started to emerge. They took back what had been deprived of them for hundreds of years,” Mr. Myers answered. “Starting to take back our culture and interpret it our way is another benefit that this center will foster with California Indian people.”



WILL THERE BE A USAGE FEE?

“[A] usage fee will be determined by the governance structure. Our ancestors certainly paid the price for future generations of California Indian people to enter and utilize the facilities without any fees,” Mr. Myers said. “Without a governance structure that is powered by California Indian people, this facility will be pretty but spiritually dead. It will not be a place where Indian people will gather.”

ARE THERE ANY OTHER CENTERS LIKE CIHC?

“Oklahoma has just opened a facility for tribes in that state. I have not visited it, but it seems to be a great facility that worked with the various tribes in Oklahoma,” Mr. Myers said. “There are other facilities built for one or two specific tribes. Tribes in California are doing similar facilities. There is no comprehensive center like this in California.”

May the wisdom held in the healing waters of a three-million-year-old river like the Sacramento always represent a hopeful today. So, spirit willing, may you find the gift of a new tomorrow under the elders called trees and the eternal called stars at the California Indian Heritage Center.