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INDIGENOUS SOLUTIONS

# GREEN FIRE TIMES

*News & Views from the Resilient Southwest*



## PUEBLO CONVOCATION 2026

*REFLECTING ON THE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE*

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*Green Fire Times* provides a platform for community-based voices—useful information for residents, businesspeople, students and visitors—anyone interested in the history and spirit of New Mexico and the Southwest. GFT’s articles and storytelling document the interrelationship of community, culture, the environment and the regional economy, uniting people from all backgrounds to create innovative and sustainable solutions.

Some people write off GFT as just an “environmental publication.” If you are a regular reader, you know that the environment is but one thread of a unique tapestry that highlights time-honored regional traditions of sustainability, while promoting culturally based economic development. You will also find articles on education, renewable energy, Indigenous solutions, growing a regional food system, and a lot more. You will find thought-provoking ideas, as well as passionate opinions. The wealth of article submissions we receive demonstrates the need for the unique platform that GFT provides.

*Green Fire Times* is owned by the nonprofit Southwest Learning Centers, Inc. (Est. 1973). Because of the ever-increasing financial challenges of maintaining a quality print/online magazine, it is uncertain how much longer GFT can survive. It is important for GFT to maintain the free print copies—still widely distributed from Albuquerque to Taos, including to some rural areas—because many people from rural and tribal communities contribute ideas, articles and images and really enjoy being able to share a hard copy. The print copies also provide exposure to people who wouldn’t otherwise find GFT.

In order for GFT to build on its accomplishments and stay alive, we really need to upgrade our operations. We have reached out to potential funders and foundations, as well as advertisers. Mostly, we receive small donations from devoted readers. We have been operating on a shoestring for a long time—and it’s not sustainable. As you’re aware, this is an especially critical time for independent, nonprofit, community-centered journalism.



If GFT matters to you and you value the work we do, a tax-deductible contribution or placing an ad in an upcoming issue would make a meaningful difference in helping us continue to publish and serve our community. A donation may be made through this QR code or via PayPal on [www.GreenFireTimes.com](http://www.GreenFireTimes.com). Or, send a check to Southwest Learning Centers (with a notation “for GFT”) to P.O. Box 8627, Santa Fe, N.M. 87504-8627. Thank you.

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Taos Pueblo Gov. Mike Martinez and former Gov. Gilbert Suazo; Pueblo Ph.D. Cohort graduates; Pueblo Governors; The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center was honored for its 50th anniversary; group photo; Grounded in Clay exhibition at the IPCC; Governors give their breath to Pueblo Convocation recommendations, offering of prayers for advocacy; Early morning walk at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya, Santa Ana Pueblo



# INTRODUCTION – PUEBLO CONVOCATION

BY REGIS PECOS



At the time of our Emergence, our Creator gave to our ancestors the gifts with which to maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit to sustain us along our journey. These gifts are essential for us to be good human beings in his world. We are taught that all things are related and interdependent. No being is superior to another. What we do to others, we do to ourselves. These are the Original Instructions of a Way of Life gifted to us.

At the Leadership Institute, we have realized that we are at a critical juncture in our journey, and that it is time to reconvene and engage in a dialogue as our forefathers did in their time to respond to the challenges deeply rooted in the history of colonialism that continue to this day. We have developed a timeline that examines the last 100 years of policies and laws that were conceived to disconnect us from the Gifts of our Creator. This timeline provides us context to appreciate how each generation responded to the challenges of their time.

## *The Original Instructions of a Way of Life gifted to us*

To fulfill our calling, we continue the process created in our first Convocation in 2012, to engage people who everyday are fulfilling their sacred trust in the maintenance of our Way of Life, guided by our Pueblo core values. We are bringing together those who represent the stewards of our lands, the gatekeepers and protectors of our places of worship and cultural resources. We are gathering people who have dedicated their lives to maintaining and preserving our Mother Tongue, the gift by which we understand the essence of our being and that provides for the understanding of our roles and purpose in our defined Way of Life, and of our place in the world.

We once again embrace those who nurture the spirit of our traditional laws and customs to continue the spirit of our relationships for the healthy wellbeing of our people and vi-

ality of community. We are gathering the guardians of our children and youth who maintain and instill the teaching of essential core values that allow us to maintain the spirit of community, a place of belonging.

Included are the protectors of our precious water, our sacred water serpent, the giver of life, to the resources that provide sustenance for all life. As we look to the future, we gather our cultural leaders who transfer the essential cultural knowledge to protect all that we cherish. We have called those whose vision and wisdom contribute to our consciousness in the maintenance of the integrity of space and in the center places of our existence that we call home. They will guide all of us to make clear the pathways so children yet to be born will follow our footsteps to continue the spiritual journey that our Creator gifted to us.

After many years, in our efforts to create a critical mass of several thousand people, we were guided by prayer that it was time to gather to replant the seeds of our Indigenous knowledge to be harvested. The first Pueblo Convocation was planned and convened in 2012. It was a time to celebrate the resilience of our foremothers and forefathers—a time to honor the profound ingenious way reflected in their sacrifices defining our inheritance. They did it by word of mouth from one generation to the next since time immemorial.

In this symbolic time of the planting season in 2026, we once again gather to ask ourselves, what do we want future generations to inherit from us? *What will be your contribution?*

Regis Pecos, *Cochiti*

Co-Founder, Co-Director, Leadership Institute

*Above: Taos Pueblo singers opened the convocation on the first morning with a song of prayer. Photo © Seth Roffman*



## PLANNING MEETING



*Regis Pecos and Carnell Chosa lead a Pueblo Convocation planning meeting at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque.*

# Pueblo Convocation 2026: Reflecting on the Past, Present, Future

BY DR. MICHAEL FOSTER



From May 20–22, leaders, elders, professionals and youth from New Mexico’s 20 pueblos came together for the third Pueblo Convocation, a multi-day gathering hosted by the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) and the Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School. Framed throughout by two central threads—cultural revitalization and sovereignty—numerous Pueblo community members shared conversations about the issues that matter most to their collective futures.

Opening remarks from Leadership Institute Co-Director/Co-Founder Regis Pecos set the tone. APCG Chairman Joey Sanchez welcomed the participants, followed by prayer from Santa Ana Pueblo leadership and then an icebreaker activity, “What do you love most about where you come from?”, led by Diane Reyna.

The Pueblo Convocation was grounded on three interlocking components: 1) the gifts of the Creator; 2) Pueblo core values; and 3) the traditional Pueblo ceremonial cycles of seasons. Together, these define a sacred trust—a responsibility to

*“What do you love most about where you come from?”*

connect the past, present and future so that traditional teachings from Pueblo ancestors continue to guide the next generation of leaders along the Pueblo Way of Life. Every part of the convocation, from its opening prayer to its closing session with the pueblo governors, was designed to honor that sacred trust and, in doing so, to enable the community to edify the Creator. With those sacred agreements in place, we will provide an overview of the 2026 Pueblo Convocation.

## PUEBLO TALK 1—LANGUAGE, WATER, ENVIRONMENT, AND LAND

The first plenary, hosted by Conroy Chino, took up four foundational themes: language, with Dr. Christine Sims; environment, with Phoebe Suina; water, with Laurie Weahkee; and land and cultural resources, with Brian Vallo. The speakers reflected on language as a living entity requiring deliberate care, water as a source of life reflected in Pueblo tradition for millennia, the health and environmental toll of contamination and disaster on Pueblo communities, and the enduring responsibility to protect ancestral and sacred land. The breakout sessions that followed carried these themes further, with groups on language instruction, land reacquisition, cultural resource protection, water, environment and food sovereignty, and two emerging-issues tracks covering Indigenous data sovereignty/AI/social media and community recovery from addiction.

## PUEBLO TALK 2—FAMILY AND COMMUNITY, HEALTH, AND ART

The second plenary turned to the wellbeing of families and communities, the state of Pueblo health systems, and the role of art in Pueblo life, with talks from Christy Chapman, Dr. Joyce Naseyowma Chalan, Dr. Kristyn Yepa and Marita Hinds. Discussion ranged from the impact of historical federal policy on Pueblo families to the challenges of building healthcare systems that honor both traditional practice and modern medicine, to art as a form of healing and cultural continuity stretching from petroglyphs to contemporary Pueblo artists. Its breakout groups covered child wellbeing, elder care, youth and young adults, general community wellbeing, health systems and infrastructure, behavioral and mental health, and traditional and contemporary art.

*Above: The Hyatt Regency Tamaya, owned by Santa Ana Pueblo, was the site of the third Pueblo Convocation. The last convocation took place in 2018. Photos © Seth Roffman*



*Traditional teachings from Pueblo ancestors continue to guide the next generation of leaders along the Pueblo Way of Life.*

**PUEBLO TALK 3—LAW, GOVERNANCE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The third plenary addressed Pueblo sovereignty under law, governance and leadership, community planning and economic development, featuring speakers Casey Douma, Alvin Warren, Dr. Ted Jojola and Marvis Aragon. Related breakout sessions explored Pueblo sovereignty and Indigenous justice, governance and leadership (including the emerging roles of Pueblo women in leadership and native voting rights), community planning and develop-

*Breakout sessions explored Pueblo sovereignty and Indigenous justice, governance and leadership (including the emerging roles of Pueblo women).*

ment, building human capital, economic development, and questions around tribal enrollment and membership criteria.

**PUEBLO TALK 4—EDUCATION**

The final Pueblo Talk focused on education across the lifespan, including the Yazzie/Martínez education case and its implications for Pueblo students. Speakers addressed early childhood education, public K-12 education, federal and tribally controlled schools, higher education, and community-based education models. Its breakout groups mirrored these tracks: early childhood education and care, public schools and the Yazzie/Martínez decision, federal and tribally controlled schools, higher education and community-based education.

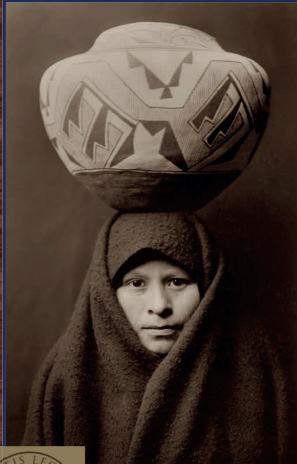
Between sessions, the convocation made space for reflection and connection: an evening reception and networking time on the opening night, dinner and special presentations from the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center and Santa Fe Indian School on the second evening and a community dance to close out day two. Throughout, hosts Tara Gatewood, Jasmine Toya, Teran Villa and Aliyah Chavez, helped guide participants smoothly between Pueblo Talks and breakout rooms.

The gathering closed with a special meeting of the governors of the 20 pueblos, during which the recommendations generated through the four plenaries and three breakout sessions were formally presented to, and accepted by, the All Pueblo Council of Governors. That step connects the grassroots dialogue of the Pueblo Convocation directly to tribal leadership and policy, ensuring that ideas raised in the breakout rooms have a defined path toward action. Closing remarks from Regis Pecos and APCG Chairman Sanchez, along with a closing prayer from Pueblo governors, brought the three-day gathering to a close.



Top: Pueblo governors enjoy each other's company before the convocation officially starts. Center: Walkers encountered a herd of deer amongst cottonwood trees on a nature trail. Below: Returning from an early morning walk, ready to start the day. Photos © Seth Roffman

**SAN GABRIEL HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS**



EDWARD S. CURTIS - 1903

**FROM THE PUEBLOS TO THE PACIFIC:**  
WESTWARD EXPLORATIONS ACROSS INDIAN COUNTRY  
DURING NEW MEXICO'S  
SPANISH, MEXICAN & AMERICAN ERAS, 1776-2026



**OLD SPANISH NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL 1829 - 1848**

**FRIDAY, JULY 3 — WEDNESDAY, NOV 4**  
**AT THE BOND HOUSE MUSEUM**  
**IN ESPAÑOLA**

**Section I: Spanish Era**  
Dominguez-Escalante Expedition  
From Santa Fe to Monterey in 1776

**Section II: Mexican Era**  
Old Spanish Trail from  
El Pueblo de Abiquiú to  
El Pueblo de Los Angeles  
1829-1848

**Section III: American Era**  
Previously Unpublished  
Southwestern Photographs  
by Edward S. Curtis  
1900-1930





The 2026 Pueblo Convocation reflected a deliberate effort to measure impact not just at the level of policy recommendations, but also by the extent to which it

connected the past, present and future, and how much it amplified the collective and individual voices of the Pueblo people to honor the sacred trust with which Creator has gifted Indigenous people.

For a region whose Pueblo communities have sustained language, ceremony and self-governance across centuries of pressure and change, the 2026 Pueblo Convocation offered a rare and valuable space: three days for Pueblo people, across generations, disciplines and perspectives, to speak plainly about what needs attention—and to create pathways that center the Pueblo Way of Life and honor the sacred trust that Creator has gifted them. ■

*Amanda Hatherly is the CEO of BPI. She lives in Santa Fe. Michael Foster is a program consultant with the Leadership Institute.*

*Above: The Rio Grande flows through the grounds of the 550-acre Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort.*

« 2026 INDIAN MARKET FREE EVENTS »



**GARY FARMER**  
**AND THE TROUBLEMAKERS**

| TUESDAY<br>AUGUST 11 <sup>TH</sup>      | FRIDAY<br>AUGUST 14 <sup>TH</sup>     | SATURDAY<br>AUGUST 15 <sup>TH</sup> | SUNDAY<br>AUGUST 16 <sup>TH</sup>              |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 6:00 p.m.                               | 6:15 p.m.                             | 1:00 p.m.                           | 1:00 p.m.                                      |
| Santa Fe<br>Summer Scene<br>Plaza Stage | Museum of<br>Indian Arts<br>& Culture | Indian Market<br>Plaza Stage        | Pathways<br>Buffalo Thunder<br>Resort & Casino |

## EVENING WELCOME FROM ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS CHAIRMAN JOEY SANCHEZ

**THIRD PUEBLO CONVOCATION**  
**MAY 20, 21 AND 22, 2026**

*Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort  
Santa Ana Pueblo*

Good evening Honorable Governors, Tribal Leaders, Pueblo Delegates and Distinguished Guests.

Thank you, Governor, for your prayer, which reflects the past, the present and the future of our people. It is a reminder of how each generation must fulfill their sacred trust to gift to the next generation and provide a clear path for those to follow to carry forward all that the Creator gifted to us that defines who we are and fulfills our purpose to humanity.

On behalf of the Pueblo Governors, I welcome you all to this historic gathering of Pueblo people for the third Pueblo Convocation. The first convocation



*Joey Sanchez, Chairman, All Indian Pueblo Council of Governors, welcomes guests to an Honoring Ceremony at the opening of the Pueblo Convocation*

*It is as the elders say, maintaining clear pathways for those to follow by remembering the beginning of our existence.*

brought together the largest gathering of Pueblo people since the Pueblo Revolt. As our forefathers and foremothers faced challenges on their migration journey, from time to time at critical points, they gathered, and through prayer, they sought guidance from those who had gone before them.

They came together in prayer to ask for guidance and to reaffirm their deeply embedded Pueblo core values. Our ancestors blessed them with directions to sustain all that the Creator provides us to maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit, fulfilling our sacred trust to sustain our Pueblo lifeways. The Pueblo Governors are honored to serve as the co-chairs of this convening in partnership with the Leadership Institute to prayerfully seek the same guidance for our continuance and define what future generations will inherit from us.

The gathering this evening begins with celebrating the blessings of our convocation honorees. They represent the many in our communities and beyond, the answer to the prayers of many over generations that we would be blessed with such children who exemplify the love for their people and all that defines who we are as gifted to us by our Creator.

We express our appreciation for our partnership with the Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute's gift and most signifi-



*Regis Pecos, former Governor, Cochiti Pueblo, co-director of the Leadership Institute*





Leadership Institute hostess Diane Reyna (Taos Pueblo)

individuals who have nurtured the spirit of our languages gifted to us by our Creator with which to find our purpose in life. We have among us those who have supported our leaders in protecting our places of worship and our precious resources symbolized by water, the life blood of all life. We celebrate those who engage with courage in the most difficult places to represent our voices among the most powerful influencers of policy and laws. We are blessed to have among us the defenders of our children, young people and elders. And we are blessed with those who are battling in the courts of the conquerors for justice and equity for our children to reclaim education for our purposes and for our needs and the wellbeing of our communities. We are blessed to have those who after decades and decades are breaking through to address the devastation of complex diseases. They represent the many more that are the answers to the prayers of many every day and for generations.

*The first Convocation brought together the largest gathering of Pueblo people since the Pueblo Revolt.*

In the next two days we will reflect upon where we have been and assess where we are today and ask ourselves difficult questions to collectively define how we reinforce the beauty of what we love most about where we call home, our strengths and how we respond to the challenges, the threat to what we love most about where we come from. What will future generations inherit from us? And how will future generations reflect upon what we did that history in time will reflect as our time. We will at some point, as our people do every day, become ancestors. How will we answer our Creator when we return our contributions in fulfilling our purpose?

Enjoy this celebration as we honor the blessings and spirit of the honorees epitomizing the core values of love, respect and compassion for our people. We look forward to an extraordinary next two days.

*What will future generations inherit from us?*

cant contribution is the ability and the means to bring us together to engage in thoughtful dialogue. They have been in the last 30 years a great support and partner to the All Pueblo Council of Governors. Through these thoughtful gatherings we have been able to articulate new ways to transfer old ways still at the heart of our existence today. It is as the elders say, maintaining clear pathways for those to follow by remembering the beginning of our existence.

This evening is a rich tradition of the Pueblo Convocation. It begins with honoring those whose lives exemplify a life of dedication driven by their deep passion and guided by their core values to be in the service of others. They are indi-

# STATEMENTS FROM A FEW OF THE HONOREES, SPEAKERS AND AN ORGANIZER



**Christie Abeyta**  
My name is Christie Abeyta. I'm the superintendent of Santa Fe Indian School. I'm in my fourth year of leadership. I come from the villages of Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Ohkay Owingeh and Isleta. What I most love about my community is the acceptance and warmth that family brings, and that the

core value of who we are is love. My grandparents showed unconditional love in everything that they did and, and it showed in our relationships. As we grow and develop into adults, those experiences of our youth really guide us. For this time, where our Pueblo people are, where our state, our nation, our world are, we have to come back to the purest value of all, and that's love. Once we find that love for each other, for our environments, for our spirits, for our natural resources, only then will things change and improve for us all.

Santa Fe Indian School has core values that are reflective of our Pueblo communities, but more importantly, reflective of what our tribal leadership wants of us. One of those values is care. We as Pueblo people have always been interdependent, and I credit this to Dr. Suina, who I've listened to talk about community and Pueblo culture and history. It's really at the core of who we are, this interdependency that's reliant on inherent care and the nature of wanting to support, right? So, when you think about who we are as people and what should continue to guide who we are and what we do in our communities, it's care for each other, care for language, care for our place and all the traditions, cultures and ceremonies that keep us whole.



**Conroy Chino**  
My name is Conroy Chino. I'm from the Pueblo of Acoma, and I've spent the last 18 years in the state Legislature advocating on behalf of tribes and tribal communities. I've worked closely with a number of organizations, a number of different tribes. The Center on Law and Poverty is a nonprofit that I represented. I've also worked closely with a group called the Tribal Education Alliance in our efforts to implement a lot of the court findings in that historic and landmark decision in the Yazzie/Martínez case.

What do you love most about where you come from? The one thing that



comes to mind quickly is the real sense of belonging and coming from a place that is, image-wise, when you look where the Pueblo of Acoma is located, on the top of a 350-foot mesa. What it symbolizes and signifies to me is this real sense of stability. The fact that it's been there for centuries, upholding our village, our cultural ceremonies, connection to land, and all things spiritual. It's the spiritual home for the Pueblo of Acoma. So when I think of home, I think of all of that, and the sense of place and the significance that it has embedded in my lifetime, since I was a child growing up there.

What is your core value that defines who you are? I think it really stems from what I was told early on as a child, and that was, have respect for others, in particular for tribal leadership, those who held traditional positions at the pueblo. But also, to respect myself and others. I think at the core of all that was just a respect for human life and the dignity of life. That was one of the more significant things that was passed on to me by grandparents, by elders in our family, by clan elders who would come to our house quite often. And it got really exemplified in our traditional ceremonies during midsummer. Knowing that the songs sung by the rainmakers were symbolic of life. That is one of the primary core values that was embedded in my heart and my mind.

Being a recipient of the honor at last night's ceremony, what are your thoughts? Well, I was surprised at first. I didn't know I was going to be a recipient. I thought it was just to honor those who had passed away recently. I was a little shocked when they introduced me. But what it really signified and represented to me was just recognition and acknowledgement for what I've been able to accomplish with my life, as a television reporter and a television anchor, and more recently, as a filmmaker and a writer, and also my life advocating on behalf of the welfare and wellbeing of tribal communities. But, at least in my mind, it was also a recognition of my sense of purpose, commitment and determination. It really made me feel that the work that I had been doing over the last 18 years advocating on behalf of tribes and tribal communities was being recognized by friends and colleagues. It made me feel touched, moved, especially by the honor song that was sung by the individual from Taos Pueblo.

*“That kind of curriculum, where there’s only one truth, really puts our Indigenous children on the outskirts of what counts as knowledge.”*

Being that this is the third convocation, what are my expectations going forward? I'd like to see some very achievable recommendations come out of this. Ways of addressing ongoing, persistent, perennial issues that often create challenges within our communities. Often, we spend a lot of time just verbalizing, vocalizing the issues and how they've made tribal communities very difficult and very tough. I'd like to be able to come away at least with a handful of good solutions and take those to those entities that hold the power and influence, whether it's within tribal government or state government or the federal level, and say, “These are what we'd like to see addressed, and here's a possible pathway to accomplish that.”



**Natalie Martinez**  
My name is Natalie Martinez. I'm from the Pueblo of Laguna. I am here at the convocation wearing several different hats. Part of what I'm hoping to do here is talk about my role in higher education. I serve as an assistant professor at New Mexico State University. I'm with

my colleagues, the other Dr. Martinez and Ms. Azella Humetewa. We'll be talking about the status of higher education, facilitating a group of discussions, looking at what we need to do in terms of educating teachers and educational leadership, how Pueblo and

Indigenous representation looks right now in higher education institutions. It's really exciting to be here. I hope that I'm going to be learning a lot.

The core value question was something that we were asked to start thinking about. My core value, really, is love. It all stems from love. We don't do anything without the love of everyone who came before us, the love for everybody who's coming after us. The passions that we have, especially for the issues, the people and all of the inner workings of what we're talking about here, really stem from love.

As an educator, what fundamentally needs to change in education for children to reach their full potential? I think, first and foremost, we really need to address the inequities in terms of the kinds of curriculum where there's only one truth. That really puts our Indigenous children on the outskirts of what counts as knowledge. And I think really looking at having a solid shift in, expanding the presence, the representation of indigenous peoples and indigenous ways of knowing is going to be fundamental for helping our children to access schooling and education that's going to be more meaningful.



Ron Martinez Looking Elk (Isleta/Taos Pueblo) and Carnell Chosa (Jemez Pueblo)

**Carnell Chosa**

My name is Carnell Chosa. I am from Jemez Pueblo. I co-founded and co-direct the Leadership Institute that created this event. First question: What do you love most about where you come from? Well, this is our main question in all the work we do at the Leadership Institute, from our Summer Policy Academy to our community institutes. What I love most about my community are the people. What I love about our people is that we always show up. We always make things happen. We're always there for each other. In our language, there's a saying, *Ķepe ti mi* or *Ķepe ti*. That translates to: I'm going to go attach my heart, or come attach your heart if there's an event happening.

I think I think that philosophy or that concept is woven into our Pueblo people, and that's what I love most about our community, our people who live that philosophy. The future rests in our hands. What will be your contribution? Right now, I feel like

I'm answering the prayers of my grandparents. They were both weavers and I believe their parents were weavers, and their parents were weavers. And my mom is a weaver. Just a couple years ago, I decided to learn to weave so that I didn't drop that line of contribution. And so, I'm hoping that my contribution to my community is continuing the tradition of weaving our capes, our kilts, our mantas. That's what I'm looking forward to more and more now.

As one of the organizers of this convocation, we're hoping that we can take these 10 topics plus the emerging topics, and learn about what else is pressing in our communities, and start moving them into community institutes, which are smaller gatherings. We used to do that before the convocations. We'd have community institutes where we'd bring 40 to 50 people together to talk about the issues that impact our community. We've had institutes on language, on art, with young professionals. So we're hoping that whatever comes out of this convocation, we're going to be able to transfer that into a more concentrated focus on those topics.

**Gilbert Suazo Sr.**

I am from Taos Pueblo. Last night I was honored. I was really appreciative, thankful that I was picked to be an honoree. At the beginning, I did not know exactly what I was being honored for. I've been involved in many things at Taos Pueblo. And what it was, was my involvement during the height of our fight for the return of Blue Lake. At that time, I was a young person. I was just a young community member, but one that was very concerned about the return of Blue Lake. For me, the fight for Blue Lake actually began when I was 10 years old. My father told me that the Taos Mountain that is close to our village and all the land behind it, including Blue Lake, was not ours anymore; that the federal government had taken that land, and that some of that land was Spanish land grants. I was shocked when he told me that land was no longer our land.





*Gilbert Suazo and Tesuque Pueblo Gov. Mark Mitchell*

because we were the ones that were going to inherit that land. So that's how I got involved officially, when I got asked to testify before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee on behalf of the younger generation of Taos Pueblo.

After we met with the President of the United States, a meeting was scheduled at the White House. On July 8, 1970, I was there with my tribal council when we met with President Nixon. He knew that we were there to fight for Blue Lake. In that meeting, he pledged his support for the return of Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo. He promised us, "When that bill that you're going to testify for tomorrow comes to my desk, I'm going to sign it." He also announced a new American Indian policy. He said, "This policy, I don't want it to be just a piece of paper. I'm going to make the return of Blue Lake the cornerstone of this policy." At that time, nobody knew that there was a new Indian policy being formed by his staff.

The next day, we had a very rough hearing before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. But on Dec. 15, President Nixon, as he promised, signed the Blue Lake legislation into public law 91-550. And as the years went on, that Indian policy that he announced began to grow. That's what became self-determination. In more recent years, it has evolved into self-governance.

A White House fellow working for the president at that time, who was very instrumental in the development of that Indian policy was Bobbie Killberg. Also, Sen. Fred Harris from Oklahoma, who led the fight in the Senate for the return of Blue Lake, and one of the Washington, DC lawyers that worked on the case, Jerry Strauss, and a Comanche lady, LaDonna Harris, who was an informal lobbyist for Taos Pueblo.

After the return of Blue Lake, I continued to be involved in other things. The big thing was in 1991, when I got involved with the adjudication of our water rights settlement, and I was assigned by the tribal council to be a co-spokesman for the adjudication of our water rights. In 2010, President Obama signed our water rights settlement. And then in 2016, the adjudication court signed the decree to solidify the return of our water rights. So that's what I've been involved with up until 2019 when I finally retired. Now I am 86 years old, I'm considered a senior tribal councilman. I'm still involved to the extent that I can on matters related to the tribe's economic and social and health wellbeing. I participate in tribal council meetings.

My family, my wife, was supportive of my work. When you do these kinds of things, it pulls a lot of time away from your family, but that's what it takes. And so, I humbly accept the honor on behalf of all of those that I've named, our tribal council, our tribal governing officials, my community members, my family and my late wife.

In the late 1960s, the fight moved to Washington, D.C. There was a lot of publicity against the Pueblo wanting Blue Lake back. Our tribal council does not fight its fights through newspapers, so nobody was answering those articles. So I decided to answer some of those articles, just as a private young person, and I think that's what got the attention of our tribal council and our tribal attorneys. I think that's when they decided that a younger voice in this fight was necessary because all of the ones that were testifying were tribal elders. One of the things that they were being told was that it was all old people that were fighting for their way of life, and that, "When these old men die out, that's gonna be the end of the culture because we don't see any younger people involved in this." So I became that younger person that began to assert our rights



## Brian Vallo

My name is Brian Vallo and I'm from the Pueblo of Acoma. I'm an independent consultant, but also serve as the chairman of the All Indian Pueblo Council's Chaco Heritage Tribal Association and also as chairman of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center and Indian Pueblos Marketing Incorporated.

What do you love most about where you come from? That's an easy question for me, and probably an easy question for a lot of us to answer, because we are all so closely connected to community and family and culture. Connections to place, our homelands, our landscapes where we are born, where we grow up, the family, the community, all of that.

It serves almost as a security blanket. But it's also knowing that you have identity, you have connection to place, you have the connection to people and to the culture, and knowing that you are part of this ongoing process of sustaining culture, the assurance that our cultures will continue, the people will continue.

One of the things that I've been mentioning lately is that we really need to prepare the cultural toolbox for our future generations. That is ensuring that we are sharing traditional knowledge. Not necessarily the sensitive components of traditional knowledge, but the history, the information about our lived experience. Our children need to know these stories. They need to know of these experiences because it will inform their continuance as Pueblo people. We are faced with many, many, challenging issues in this time around land, access, land protection, water protection, cultural resources protection, sacred sites protection, but also issues around health and wellness that are fracturing our family and community.

All of these things really impact the way in which we then evolve. So I hope that we will provide that cultural toolbox, and that it's something that is revered, something that is used by future generations. I always like to think 100 years out and what that might look like. I hope that whenever it is my time to go back to the Creator, that I will have made a small contribution to that toolbox along with many others who bring so much expertise, wealth of knowledge, experiences, foresight and vision to our way of living as Pueblo people.

We are addressing a lot of very, complex issues here. One of the things that is very encouraging to me coming to this convocation is the capacity that has been built in a very short period of time. The first convocation in 2012 was an incredible gathering, and we discussed many of the same issues that we are discussing today. But as I look at the discourse that is taking place, it's so much more informed and robust because since that convocation, we have paid close attention to making sure that we were accountable to the recommendations that were made. It's really enlightening because so many of our Pueblo people, brilliant people, are here and have come prepared to have these conversations and to have an involvement in the development of the next series of recommendations that will go to our Pueblo leaders.

I was surprised that I had been selected to receive one of the awards. My response when I was informed was, "Thank you. I will humbly accept this recognition on behalf of our Pueblo people of the past, our present and the future." In Acoma, men are given blankets at a certain time of our own evolution. The draping of a blanket in that traditional way is quite significant. So, to have that done here at the Pueblo Convocation was very emotional. I felt totally embraced by the blanket, which to me represented the people, all of our people. And so, I don't take the recognition lightly. It reminds me that I have more work to do for our people, and I'm so honored to do that on their behalf. ■





**Honoring Our Advocates** – Top: Dr. Cheryl Willman, Director, Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Care; Rep. Derrick Lente (Sandia) and Regis Pecos (Cochiti), Co-Director, Leadership Institute; Gov. Myron Armijo (Santa Ana) and Officer Montoya; attorney Greg Smith; Cheryl Fairbanks (Tlingit/Haida); former U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland (Laguna); Dr. Ken Lucero (Zia); Jenifer Romero (Santa Clara), Staff Director, Chief Counsel, U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs; Megan Hill (Oneida), inaugural Director, Self-Determination Program, MacArthur Foundation; APCG Chairman Joey Sanchez (Santa Ana) and Melissa Candelaria (San Felipe); Dr. Christine Sims (Acoma); former Gov. Walter Dasbeno (Santa Clara) with Regis Pecos and Tesuque Pueblo Gov. Mark Mitchell; Lyn Trujillo (Sandia), Deb Haaland and Laurie Weabkee (Cochiti/Zuni); Taos Pueblo Gov. Mike Martinez, Gilbert Suazo (Taos), Rep. Charlotte Little (Sandia) and Lyn Trujillo; Emmet Yepa (Jemez) sings an Honor Song to Pueblo honorees. Photos © Seth Roffman



# A SPIRITUAL AND SACRED SPACE FOR DISCUSSIONS ABOUT OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE

## OPENING REMARKS

**JOEY SANCHEZ, CHAIRMAN  
ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS**

*May 21, 2026*

Good morning.

Honorable Governors, Lt. Governors, Tribal Council members, cultural leaders, delegation representatives, distinguished guests and fellow Pueblo people, young and old. Welcome to this historic third gathering of the Pueblo Council.

*The old people teach us, the road we were given to travel would be the most difficult.*

Our opening prayers follow in the tradition of reflecting upon the past, the beginning. It speaks to the present and humbly asks for guidance, wisdom and strength to fulfill our sacred responsibilities for the maintenance of peace in our lives, in the lives of our people and for our communities and for the world. It also speaks of our sacred trust to those yet to come, our future. We are blessed that through the sacrifices of each generation since time immemorial, that the gift of our precious languages has survived despite efforts to kill our languages, to kill our cultures. The spirit of our languages is beautiful to hear.

I am Joey Sanchez, born and raised in Tamaya. I am the newly elected chairman of the All Pueblo Council of Governors. It is my honor to serve in this capacity. On behalf of the Pueblo Governors, I want to formally welcome you to this third Pueblo Convocation. By resolution, the APCG endorsed and requested the support and partnership with the Leadership Institute. We appreciate our partnership with the Leadership Institute and the co-directors, former Governor of Cochiti Pueblo, Regis Pecos, and former Lt. Governor of Jemez Pueblo, Dr. Carnell Chosa. We thank the many people it has taken to bring us together to reflect upon the past, where we have been, the present, where we are today and the future, where and what must we do to sustain our Pueblo Lifeways for all future generations. We thank all of you for the acceptance to be present to share your gifts and lived experiences. As our old people say, the people are the spirit and the heart of our communities. We cannot do what we must without you.

We gather today in the same way that our ancestors did in their time as the opening prayers reflect. In prayer and ceremony, they sought guidance on their migration journey to the center



*APCG Chairman Joey Sanchez (Santa Ana)*

*Our ancestors prophesized how striking the balance in education would be necessary in the future.*

points we now call home. At the beginning of each year, the governors gather at Kewa, Santo Domingo Pueblo to renew their vows, their pledges, their commitment to our people and Way of Life. There at Kewa, is the heart of our Pueblo spirit. Our ancestors came together at a critical time when colonizers threatened our existence and all the gifts the Creator gifted to sustain us. The spirit of our resistance and the advocacy necessary to protect those essential gifts is what we continue, recited in our prayers this morning. It is a prayer recited every morning and before we retire, giving thanks for the blessings of moving our people forward in our continuance. Former Gov. Chavarria of Santa Clara, often in his time of leadership as governor, always reminded us about the power of prayer.

The old people teach us the road we were given to travel would be the most difficult. But we were given all that would sustain us to nurture peace and balance among all living beings and for the people of the world. It would take much sacrifice, but through our sacrifices we would be rewarded greatly that we see, feel in ceremony what peace and joy feels like. That is what our old people teach us, that these words are in our prayers.

*We were given all that would sustain us to nurture peace and balance among all living beings and for the people of the world.*

The question posed by the Leadership Institute—what do we love most about where we call home?—defines all the gifts of the Creator, aligned with our Pueblo core values of love, respect and compassion. What threatens what we love most? These are the profound questions that are at the heart of our convening and our shared discourse at this convocation.

It is a time of reflection, of introspection and visioning. Across the spectrum we will see how all things are related; our languages, our lands, our governance, our customary laws, family, community, resources and water. These are the gifts that



*Dr. Christine Sims (Acoma) listens to Tara Gatewood (Isleta/Diné)*





The All Pueblo Council of Governors  
Regis Pecos (Cochiti), co-director, the Leadership Institute

*The old say, when we lose language and our culture, that will be the end of us.*

always sustained our people, their wellbeing and the vitality of our communities. Change is happening rapidly and our old people teach us to protect our children. What did they mean by that? We protect them by gifting them the core values that define who we are, what we do and why we do what we do. Finding purpose. Using our gifts to fulfill our purpose. It is teaching them and embedding the love for their languages, and our Way of Life. What will happen if we fail? Our ancestors also prophesized what the cost would be. The old say, when we lose language and our culture, that will be the end of us. These prophecies are shared to remind us of our sacred trust to push against these threats becoming a reality, as our ancestors have done since time immemorial.

I want to take time to recognize all the co-chairs, subject area experts who bless us all with their gifts and abilities to translate our precious knowledge to bring into the balance and transfer essential values and knowledge to sustain all that defines who we are. These are the children, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren who listened to the

*The question posed by the Leadership Institute—what do we love most about where we call home?*

words, go get an education. Someday you will contribute to our way of life in new ways and protect us. Our ancestors prophesized how striking the balance in education would be necessary in the future. We are now living in that future they spoke of. I want us to express our gratitude for their sacrifices for what they do. Will all of you and the writers and recorders and facilitators please stand?

In our prayers we heard the words asking our spirits to open our hearts and our minds to absorb the sharing and learning that we will be blessed with in this convocation. There was reference to embrace the enlightenment given to speak the words as guided to contribute in respectful discourse. The old people say, it comes to the heart and travels to the mind and forms into the words we speak. Be mindful that the words are a spiritual gift and respect one another in the discourse. The prayers have set a spiritual and sacred space for these discussions about our collective future.

I share in the prayers that we will all be richly blessed in our discussion. Blessings to all of you. ■



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# Pueblo Sovereignty: Protecting and Nurturing the Gifts of the Creator

BY CASEY DOUMA, ESQ.

Sovereignty, a term with many meanings, often accompanies recollections of Native resilience and the fight to secure our rights. Tribes fighting to protect their sovereignty, and tribes exercising their sovereignty, tell stories of many courageous acts to secure what is most precious to our existence as Native people. Land, water, family, language, health, governance, law and faith are among the many profound gifts bestowed upon our people by the Creator. The responsibility of protecting and nurturing these blessings forms a sacred shield, which serves as the very foundation of Pueblo sovereignty. Passed down from one generation to the next, this duty as a caretaker of these important gifts remains the cornerstone of Pueblo culture. By exercising inherent sovereignty, Pueblo people have built enduring nations capable of withstanding centuries of laws and policies deliberately designed to destroy our way of life.

To see a Pueblo community thrive is to see these exact gifts actively present in our daily lives. Growing up in Laguna Pueblo, I was surrounded by ranchers who knew the intimate value of land, water, animals, and providing for their families. I watched farmers carefully tend their fields, witnessing their deep appreciation for water because they understood it meant an entire community would be nourished. Growing up as the son of a teacher, I directly experienced the deep influence of an educator who genuinely understands the families and communities they serve. I learned how our native languages communicate the undeniable power of our traditional

*When we develop court systems that reflect our unique values and resolve disputes through restorative justice, we strengthen our community.*

knowledge and build healthy individuals, families and communities. These gifts are universal in the human experience, but Pueblo people have built enduring, resilient cultures directly tied to their protection and nurturing. Simply put, we protect what we love.

To understand tribal sovereignty is to acknowledge both the misalignment and the convergence between our Pueblo understanding of sovereignty and the way federal law has come to define it. This living, breathing reality stands in stark contrast to the legal principles established by the federal government. As a law student, I studied the foundational definitions of tribal sovereignty. I examined the United States Supreme Court decisions in the Marshall Trilogy, which labeled our people as domestic dependent nations and reduced us to wards of the federal government. I analyzed *Johnson v. McIntosh*, in which the Court used the Doctrine of Discovery to justify stripping our land ownership because we were not European or Christian. I examined Felix Cohen's *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, the premier treatise on this subject, which described our authority as the inherent powers of a limited sovereign. I dissected Congressional statutes rooted in the plenary power doctrine, asserting absolute authority to regulate or erase our existence.

These paternalistic, cold definitions failed to reflect the vibrant sovereignty I had known my entire life. The federal articulation is rooted in a unilateral legal framework originally intended to

*This duty as a caretaker of these important gifts remains the cornerstone of Pueblo culture.*

*Paternalistic, cold definitions [of sovereignty] failed to reflect the vibrant sovereignty I had known my entire life.*

serve policies meant to destroy us, while our definition is rooted in honoring the gifts that give our lives purpose and allow our people to thrive. Despite the paternalistic legal framework of tribal sovereignty, Native people still manage to protect and preserve our communities. This is the equivalent of the Olympic gold medalist Jim Thorpe of the Sac and Fox Nation winning two gold medals in the 1912 Olympics wearing mismatched shoes, after his shoes were stolen in an attempt to thwart his success. Tribal nations make do with the legal definition of tribal sovereignty because they know that, despite its shortcomings, they must use it to protect their rights.

*When we fight to secure tribal water settlements, we are defending the vital lifelines of our land and water.*

This legal framework is simply the modern evolution of historical efforts to pierce our shield and sever our connection to the Creator's gifts. Enduring the shifting empires of Spain, Mexico and the United States, our ancestors faced intentional campaigns of erasure. The Spanish empire utilized forced enslavement, the *encomienda* system of forced labor and the *Requerimiento* to demand violent submission and dismantle our traditional ways. Mexican policies encouraging property privatization resulted in the devastating loss of communal Pueblo lands and critical water resources. Later, United States



Teran Villa (Jemez) listens to attorney Casey Douma (Laguna)





Casey Douma discusses Pueblo sovereignty during a breakout session.

federal boarding schools directly attacked our families by attempting to sever the sacred transfer of knowledge between generations. Simultaneously, federal land grabs facilitated the ongoing loss of our traditional homelands. Each challenge prompted a fierce response from our people, emerging as champions by acting to protect and nurture our way of life.

Today, the battles have shifted to modern courtrooms and legislative chambers, but our commitment remains unchanged. When we fight to secure tribal water settlements or urge the federal government to protect the living history of sacred sites like Chaco Canyon from drilling, we are defending the vital lifelines of our land and water. By vehemently supporting the Indian Child Welfare Act, we safeguard our children and families. Demanding equitable education, as highlighted in the Yazzie/Martínez ruling, helps foster the enduring power of knowledge for our youth. Developing language programs in schools guarantees our ancestral voice survives. Furthermore, when we develop court systems that reflect our unique values and resolve disputes through restorative justice, we strengthen our community.

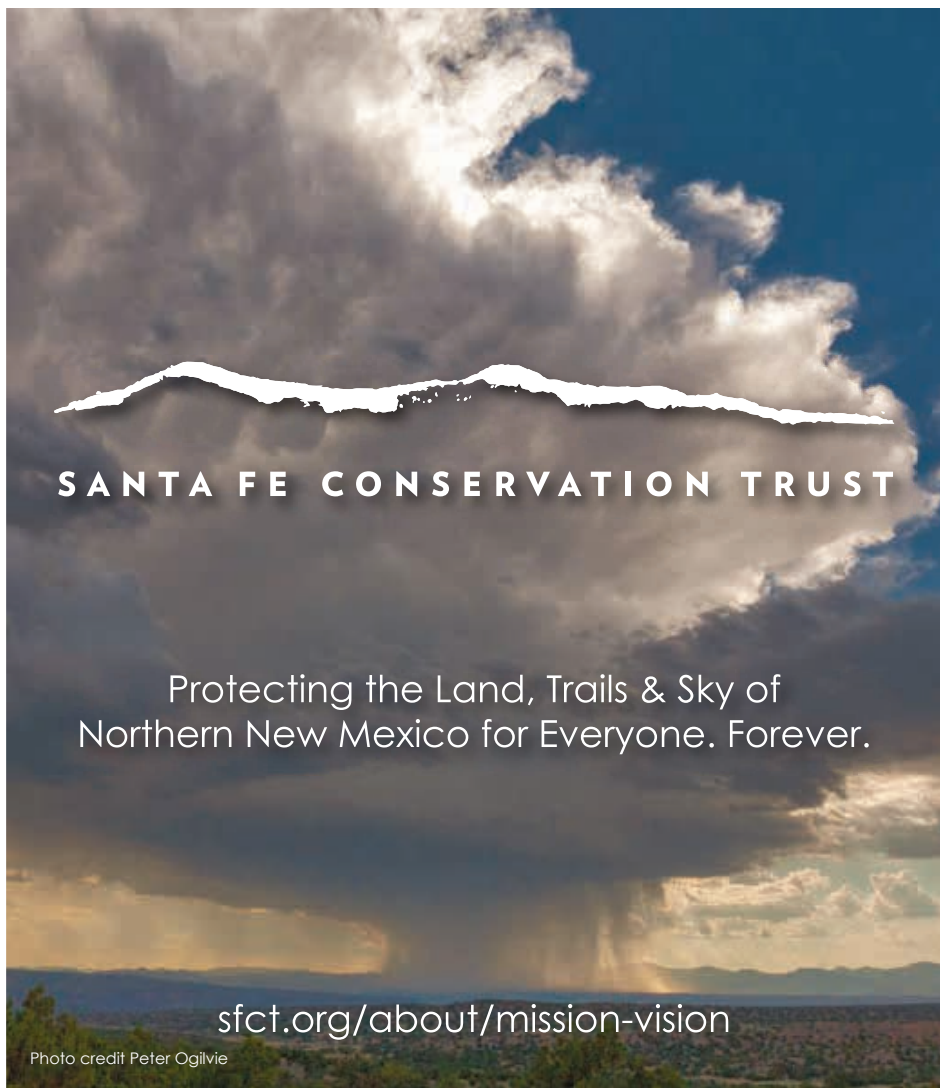
Sovereignty serves as our shield, defending us against external threats and providing a home for our gifts and core values to flourish, thereby empowering our people with the tools they need to thrive. We face different threats today, driven by private interest groups plotting to erode our legal standing for the exploitation of our lands. How we respond is a testament to how our generation will be remembered. What will our future generations inherit if we do not honor that duty? Despite what some claim, sovereignty was not given to us by the United States. It has always existed as our sacred responsibility to honor the gifts of the Creator.

Casey Douma is an attorney from the Pueblo of Laguna and Hopi-Tewa. He is co-owner of Douma Law, PLLC, representing tribal nations and entities. He received his Juris Doctorate from the University of New Mexico School of Law and his LLM Master of Law degree from the University of Arizona College of Law.



Top: Brian Vallo (Acoma) and attorney Aaron Sims (Acoma); Pueblo Ph.D. Cohort graduates (l-r): Dr. Doreen Bird (Santo Domingo), Dr. Corrine Sanchez (San Ildefonso), Dr. Michelle Suina (Cochiti), Dr. June Lorenzo (Laguna), Dr. Peggy Bird (Santo Domingo), Daelene Coriz (Santo Domingo), Dr. Daphene Littlebear (Santa Ana); Back row: Dr. Carnell Chosa (Jemez), Dr. Curtis Chavez (Cochiti), Dr. Rochelle Tenorio (Santo Domingo), Dr. Joyce Noseyoma Chalan (Taos/Hopi), Pueblo women leaders breakout session attendees; KOAT TV reporter Aliya Chavez (Santo Domingo) and Pueblo educators; Dr. Natalie Martinez (Acoma), Azell Humetewa, Dr. Glenabab Martinez (Taos Pueblo), Trisha Moquino (Cochiti/Ohkay Owingeh/Santo Domingo); Gov. Riley with the Acoma delegation; group photo; MC KOAT TV reporter/anchor Aliya Chavez; Aliya Chavez with Pueblo educators Dr. Natalie Martinez (Acoma), Azell Humetewa, Dr. Glenabab Martinez (Taos), Trisha Moquino (Cochiti/Ohkay Owingeh/Santo Domingo); Jasmine Toya (Jemez), Field Rep., Sen. Martin Heinrich; Pueblo Women Leaders panel: Laurie Weabkee (Diné/Cochiti/Zuni), former Nambe Gov. Lela Kaskalla, Rep. Charlotte Little, Monique Fragua (Jemez), President/CEO of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center





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# The All Pueblo Council of Governors

The All Pueblo Council of Governors has as its members the Pueblo tribes of New Mexico and Texas (Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Sandia, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Ysleta del Sur, Zia and Zuni pueblos). The APCG has maintained a continuous presence since its founding in 1598, demonstrating our four centuries of sustained operation, resilience and institutional continuity. This enduring legacy reflects a long-standing commitment to our mission, as well as an ability to adapt and remain relevant across generations of social, economic and historical change. The Pueblo Governors have remained committed to honoring the first recorded meeting at the Pueblo of Santo Domingo, by starting each year with a meeting held where it all began.

The APCG operated under structured governance. At the highest level are the Pueblo governors who provide strategic oversight, set organizational policies, and safeguard the mission and long-term vision. Reporting to this governing body are the officers, who are responsible for the day-to-day management and implementation of programs and initiatives. The current officers are Chairman Joey Sanchez (former governor, Pueblo of Santa Ana), Vice Chairman Governor Mark Mitchell (Pueblo of Tesuque) and Secretary Lieutenant Governor Cordelia Hooee (Pueblo of Zuni). Reporting directly to the officers is the executive director, who is responsible for implementing board-approved strategies, managing daily operations and providing leadership to the staff.

The APCG's mission is to advocate, foster, protect and encourage the social, cultural and traditional wellbeing of our Pueblo Nations. Through our inherent and sovereign rights, we promote the language, health, economic and educational advancement of all Pueblo people.

The APCG is currently focused on the protection and preservation of culturally significant landscapes, including Chaco Canyon and the Greater Chaco Region, and the Caja del Río Cultural Landscape. These efforts reflect APCG's commitment to safeguarding sacred sites that are integral to the identity, history and cultural continuity of Pueblo people. Research and community experience demonstrate that Pueblo children and youth are more likely to thrive when they possess a strong foundation and understanding of their heritage; the preservation of ancestral homelands is therefore essential to maintaining that connection.

In addition, APCG continues its involvement in the Yazzie/Martínez lawsuit, advocating for the rights of Pueblo children to receive a high-quality and equitable education. APCG also prioritizes the preservation and revitalization of Native Pueblo languages, recognizing their critical role in cultural identity and intergenerational knowledge transfer. APCG remains a steadfast advocate for Pueblo communities, working to advance access to quality healthcare, as well as programs and services that support both elders and youth. ■





# All Pueblo Council of Governors Meeting



Co-chairs and subject area experts share their recommendations with the All Pueblo Council of Governors

*"The elders teach us that when we pray for enlightenment, answers enter our hearts, travel to our minds, and we formulate the words to articulate. And when we speak those words, we give birth to our aspirations and they become our sacred responsibility to fulfill the intent of that spirit for the wellbeing of our people and way of life." – Regis Pecos, Leadership Institute*





# A LIVING LANDSCAPE, A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

BY THE ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

As nearly 500 Pueblo leaders, educators, youth, elders and community members gathered for the Third Pueblo Convocation this spring, the conversations were grounded in a shared question, *Where do we go from here?* The gathering celebrated Pueblo resilience and Indigenous leadership while confronting the challenges facing our communities, our lands and our future.

It was fitting that one of the Convocation's most significant announcements centered on one of the places that has helped shape Pueblo identity for more than a thousand years. During the Convocation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation announced that the Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape had been named one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places for 2026. Nominated by the Pueblo of Acoma and supported by the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the designation recognizes both the extraordinary significance of this ancestral homeland and the urgent need to protect it.

For Pueblo people, Chaco has never been simply an archaeological site or a collection of ancient ruins. The Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape is a vast, interconnected homeland stretching across thousands of square miles of present-day New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. It encompasses Chaco Culture National Historical Park, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, as well as ancient roads, great houses, shrines, springs, villages, petroglyphs, sacred places, migration routes and countless cultural sites that continue to hold meaning for Pueblo and Hopi peoples today. This landscape tells the story of our ancestors, but it is also part of our present. Our ceremonies, migration traditions, cultural knowledge and responsibilities remain connected to these places.

Chaco is not merely where our history occurred. It is part of who we are. As APCG Chairman Joey Sanchez of the Pueblo of Santa Ana explained during the announcement, "Chaco is not a museum, and it is not an isolated archaeological park. It is a living cultural landscape that our Pueblo people have sustained for more than a thousand years. The National Trust's recognition affirms what our Pueblos have said for generations. This place matters. To us, to the nation and to the world." That recognition arrives at a defining moment.

In 2023, after years of government-to-government consultation and advocacy by Pueblo Nations, the Hopi Tribe, local communities, elected officials and conservation partners, the federal government established Public Land Order No. 7923. The withdrawal protects approximately 336,000 acres of federal lands surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park from new oil and gas leasing for 20 years.



*We are calling on the  
Department of the Interior, on  
Congress, and on the public to  
stand with us in protecting this  
irreplaceable cultural landscape  
for future generations.*

Today, those protections face uncertainty as the Department of the Interior considers whether to revoke or modify the withdrawal. As Chairman Sanchez cautioned during the Convocation, "The protections we have built over more than a decade can be undone in a moment. We are calling on the Department of the Interior, on Congress, and on the public to stand with us."

For Pueblo communities, this debate extends far beyond public

land management. Industrial development does not threaten only individual archaeological sites. It threatens the integrity of an entire cultural landscape where roads, sacred places, traditional gathering areas, wildlife, viewsheds and ancestral connections remain inseparable from Pueblo identity. Once fragmented, those relationships cannot simply be reconstructed.

Governor Charles Riley of the Pueblo of Acoma reflected on that responsibility during the Convocation. "For Acoma, Chaco is not a distant or abstract place. It is part of who we are. Our ancestors built, walked and prayed in that landscape, and our descendants continue to do so today."

That enduring connection was evident only months earlier when the Bureau of Land Management provided just seven days for public scoping on the proposed revocation of Public Land Order No. 7923. Despite the compressed timeframe, Pueblo communities organized public meetings, assisted elders and community members without internet access, conducted door-to-door outreach, and submitted hundreds of individual comments. As Gov. Riley observed, "Each one comes from a person who knows what is at stake."

The National Trust's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places program has, for nearly four decades, drawn national attention to places whose futures hang in the balance. The Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape now joins that list for the second time, having first been recognized in 2011. While the designation highlights the threats facing the landscape, it also affirms something Pueblo people have always known, that Chaco's importance extends far beyond New Mexico. It is one of North America's great Indigenous cultural landscapes and an irreplaceable part of our shared heritage.

Recognition alone, however, will not protect Chaco.

As APCG Vice Chairman Gov. Mark Mitchell of the Pueblo of Tesuque observed, "The National Trust's recognition tells the country and the world that what is happening at Chaco is a matter of national consequence. We are deeply grateful to the National Trust and to the partners who have walked this road with the Pueblos for many years. This work has always been a coalition. The Pueblos and our partners are using every tool available—administrative, legal, and legislative—to ensure the federal government honors the cultural integrity of this landscape."

Today, the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the Hopi Tribe continue to call for three immediate actions. First, the Department of the Interior should preserve the protections established under Public Land Order No. 7923. Second, Congress should enact the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act to make those protections permanent. Finally, the public should stand alongside Tribal Nations in protecting this irreplaceable cultural landscape for future generations.

The Third Pueblo Convocation challenged participants to imagine the future our ancestors expected us to build.

The recognition of the Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places reminds us that protecting our ancestral homelands is not simply about preserving the past. It is about ensuring that future generations inherit a living landscape where culture, language, ceremony and identity continue to thrive.

Our ancestors entrusted this landscape to us. The question before our generation is whether we will do the same for those who follow. ■



## ABOUT THE ALL PUEBLO COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS' CHACO CANYON PROTECTION EFFORTS

The All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) is the collective leadership body representing the 20 Pueblo Governors of New Mexico and Texas. APCG's mission is to advocate for, foster, protect and encourage the social, cultural and traditional wellbeing of the Pueblo Nations. Through the exercise of their inherent sovereignty, the Pueblos work collectively to preserve their languages, cultures, ancestral homelands and the wellbeing of present and future generations.

For decades, APCG has served as a leading voice in the protection of the Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape through government-to-government advocacy, Tribal consultation, public education, coalition building, and collaboration with federal and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, elected officials and local communities.

This work has helped advance meaningful protections for the landscape, including a first-of-its-kind, Pueblo-led ethnographic study documenting the enduring cultural connections between the Pueblos and the Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape, years of advocacy culminating in Public Land Order No. 7923 and the recent designation of the Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.

To learn more about APCG's work, explore the history of Pueblo advocacy and learn how you can help protect the Greater Chaco Cultural Landscape, visit: [www.APCG.org/Chaco](http://www.APCG.org/Chaco).



*Chaco Canyon National Historical Park*

**OP-ED: DANIELLE LUCERO  
AND ALEENA M. KAWA**

## WATER IS SOURCE: REMEMBERING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SACRED WATERS

### **WATER IS THE PLACE OF BEGINNINGS AND BELONGING.**

Water is the sacred source of all life. It connects every living being through a global cycle, flowing from source to sea and returning as rain to nourish the land again. Water breathes as it moves between earth and sky, sustaining people and ecosystems, connecting us as a global community.

But what happens when that cycle is interrupted—when rivers no longer reach the sea?

For millennia, the Pueblos in New Mexico—the oldest irrigators in the Río Grande Valley—have relied on the river we regard as Mother for physical, cultural and spiritual sustenance. Today, this ancestral lifeline has been named one of the most endangered rivers in the United States by American Rivers. Once mighty, the Río Grande often runs dry before reaching the Gulf. Its diminished flow reflects decades of over-allocation, contamination and weakened ecological protections. These conditions increase the risks of waterborne illness, toxic exposure, food insecurity and chronic stress—key drivers of poor health—making protection of the river inseparable from the health of future generations.

*More than 60 Indigenous leaders, knowledge holders, youth and legal experts from the U.S., Canada and New Zealand gathered for A Meeting of Sacred Waters.*

### **A CONVENING GROUNDED IN INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP**

In June, more than 60 Indigenous leaders, knowledge holders, youth and legal experts from the United States, Canada and New Zealand gathered for *A Meeting of Sacred Waters*. Convened by the Restoring Balance Collaborative, the gathering sought to shape lasting systems change through law, policy, economics and management practices grounded in Indigenous values and worldviews.

Hosted at the Pueblo of Isleta, south of Albuquerque along the Río Grande, Sacred Waters opened and closed each day with prayer. Tribal leaders, department directors, community members and youth spoke, centering local knowledge and grounding every conversation in relation to the land and waters.

The theme, Remembering the Past into the Present, was inspired by a 1907 photograph of the Río Grande. Looking at the river today, it is difficult to imagine it flowing in the fullness captured in that image. The contrast evokes both grief and possibility. It calls us to look beyond the unsustainable practices that have brought us here and to turn toward those who hold knowledge of living in right relationship with the land. This is not simply a matter of belief; the evidence supports it.

### **INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A PATHWAY TO SYSTEMS CHANGE**

In the face of climate change, resource extraction and harmful policies, the U.N. has called for structural and systems-level change grounded in equity, including Indigenous rights, leadership and knowledge. Growing evidence shows that Indigenous knowledge systems are essential to the transformative change needed to address today's climate challenges. Yet colonial governance and institutions continue to impede Indigenous-led solutions, reinforcing structural racism and perpetuating health inequities.

Indigenous peoples' approaches are needed to restore balance and re-establish sustainable, climate-resilient solutions that benefit present and future generations. With the Río Grande





## WATER RETURNS: COMMITMENT, GRATITUDE, AND GENEROSITY

A Meeting of Sacred Waters was not a stand-alone event. It was a catalyst within a broader strategy to strengthen Indigenous-led river protections in New Mexico and across the globe. It was also an act of collective resistance to forces that sow disconnection from the land and from each other. The participants returned to relationships rooted in place, family and community. By embodying what it means to be ‘in relationship’ in that shared space, a collective sense of responsibility emerged at the intersection of time and place, people and ancestral knowledge.

Top: “Boat Crossing Río Grande,” Simeon Schwemberger, ca. 1907. IPCC00659.2021, Yonah An Cultural Center, Pueblo of Isleta, N.M. Courtesy of the Center for Southwest Research.

Above: Whanganui emerging leaders at “A Meeting of Sacred Waters,” Isleta Pueblo, May 2026

*The river today calls us to look beyond the unsustainable practices that have brought us here and to turn toward those who hold knowledge of living in right relationship with the land.*

facing escalating climate impacts and weakened federal protections, a rights-based, Indigenous-led approach may be one of the most powerful levers available to safeguard water, health and cultural continuity in the region.

## WATER BREATHES: CREATING SPACE FOR NEW POSSIBILITIES

Sacred Waters grew out of a transformative 2020 Indigenous-led exchange between leaders from the Colorado River Basin and the Whanganui River in Aotearoa New Zealand. That exchange explored how Māori leaders secured recognition of the Whanganui River as a living entity, opening new possibilities for tribal water governance in the U.S. Inspired by that example, the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) recently granted personhood to the Colorado River under tribal law, establishing an enforceable legal framework within their jurisdiction.

CRIT Chairwoman Amelia Flores and Tūrama Hawira, the tribally designated Pou Tupua (human face and voice of the river) were among the national and international speakers who helped connect these river-protection movements across place, law and culture. “Traveling to New Zealand and learning directly from Māori relatives expanded my understanding of what was possible for the Colorado River,” said Flores. “It reinforced the responsibility Tribal Nations carry to protect the river and affirmed that Indigenous leadership must be central to decisions that affect our waters for the benefit of future generations.”

“Sacred Waters was a profound experience and a shared articulation of reverence for the ‘Giver of All Life,’” said keynote speaker, Regis Pecos of Cochiti Pueblo. “I deeply believe there is no other paradigm that we, as Indigenous people, must follow and aspire to fulfill than our sacred trust. It is our gift to all future generations, as we were gifted by the Creator.”

We closed Sacred Waters in a circle with prayer, song and gratitude. After four days of exchanging experiences, sharing ideas and seeking innovative solutions, rain came to the Pueblo of Isleta and parts of New Mexico.

We invite readers to look to the once-abundant Río Grande. While we cannot return to the past, a regenerated Río Grande, flowing once again as a living, connected river must be our shared vision.

Danielle Lucero (Isleta Pueblo/Little Mountain Band of Chippewa) and Aleena M. Kawe (Yoeme, enrolled with Texas Band) are with the organization Restoring Balance Collaborative. ■

[HTTPS://WWW.RESTOREBALANCE.WORLD](https://www.restorebalance.world)





# Family Land Bequeathed to the Pueblo of Jemez

BY CAROLINE RACKLEY, DARYL LUCERO, CHRIS TOYA, MARK MAGDALENA, LEA KNUTSON

Caroline Rackley, artist and rancher, is donating her family's land in the Sapello Valley of northern New Mexico to the Pueblo of Jemez. Her father, John, and his brother, Max, purchased the acreage in 1932 from Elliot Barker, who later became head of New Mexico Game and Fish. Elliot was the son of Squire and Priscilla Barker, who homesteaded that portion of Sapello Canyon in 1888 after completing a wagon trip from Virginia. Priscilla gave the canyon the name Beulah, referring to the biblical Promised Land. The 478-acre ranch, an inholding property within U.S. Forest Service land, has short boundaries with private properties in the canyon bottom, where pastures and an orchard are served by three acequias.

The area consists of healthy, mixed conifer forest rising up the slopes of Lone Pine Ridge, which terminates in the east at the promontory of Hermit's Peak. Arrowheads found on game trails bear witness to the area having been a hunting ground of Native peoples prior to Spanish occupation. Trails dating from the homestead era connect with the adjacent Rociada Canyon in the north and with the Pecos Wilderness and Gallinas Canyon to the south.

Elliot Barker regarded the secluded cove of wooded canyons as the "wildlife refuge." Those little canyons are home to deer, elk, bear, coyotes, turkeys, squirrels, badgers, hawks, owls, blue herons and a wealth of smaller birds, animals and insects. The land offers wildlife a grazing/water corridor with the Sapello River and small wetlands and pastures that link Forest Service lands.

## Caroline Rackley, Landowner

When it became time to determine the future of the family land which had come to me, I needed a trust relationship that would receive the land and provide perpetual care and protection from development and exploitation. To my mind, the most appropriate option was an Indian tribe in the region. Indian blood in my father's family had not been acknowledged for many generations; however, my aunt, Mildred Rackley, brother, Davis Rackley, and I felt especially close to that lineage.

I know that I am not alone in desiring to provide love and care for the place of one's birth. Many people have questions about the future of land for which they are responsible. The



*Jemez Pueblo tribal officials and staff with Caroline Rackley during a visit to the property in Sapello, N.M.*



*Chris Toya and Daryl Lucero of Jemez Pueblo with Caroline Rackley at the signing*

words from Jemez folks in this article bear witness to the spiritual rewards of land return and point to the practical, lasting stewardship and protection available by Native people for special, sacred places.

The New Mexico Office of Historic Preservation provides a list of tribes seeking land return by county within New Mexico. I contacted all of the tribes interested in San Miguel County, and the Pueblo of Jemez responded immediately. Visits to nearby Pecos Monument had been a big element in my childhood, and I was impressed by the story of the great pueblo that once was there.

Having never undertaken anything like this before, research and education became necessary. *Pueblo Nations*, by Joe Santo, helped me understand the history of the Pueblos. I learned that surviving members of Pecos Pueblo had gone to Jemez and that a strong Pecos lineage exists there today. Google Alert: 'Land Return to Indigenous Tribes' has kept me updated on the restoration of Native lands worldwide.

Jemez representatives and I agree that it requires a team to make this land-return process complete, involving not just the landowner and the tribe, but immediate neighbors, the local community, conservationists, legal professionals and others concerned with

*This collaboration will unite neighbors, the people of Jemez and enrich the contribution of the Sapello River valley to our watershed.*

the preservation of wild lands. This process included sharing my own weaving lore and apple stock between high mountain and pueblo orchards, thanks to our generous neighbor, Michel Bode.

The satisfactions and joys of giving land to the Jemez Pueblo are, in a word, bountiful. In answer to my prayers, these new friends are prepared to care for Beulah Ranch, my home place, after I am gone. With this bequest, above all else, I feel grateful, knowing my stewardship passes into responsible Native hands that I honor and respect.





*Feasting at Los Ojos in Jemez Springs. Caroline Rackley, Chris Toya, Byron Andrew, Daryl Lucero and Mark Magdalena celebrate land return to the Pueblo of Jemez.*

**Daryl Lucero, Interim Assistant Tribal Administrator, Pueblo of Jemez**

I feel awe and deep respect for this beautiful place. Lands such as these have sustained generations of families, Native and white, since time immemorial. I believe they must be kept pristine and managed responsibly so that future generations are afforded the same opportunities we are being given.

As a Native person, I have always had an inherent connection to the land. My people view it as a resource to work with, care for and sustain, not a resource to exploit. This mindset provides a strong foundation for partnering with organizations such as Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance, whose goals and interests closely align with those of the pueblo. Through collaboration, we can better ensure that we achieve the shared objectives that benefit these lands and the communities connected to them.

*The goals and interests of Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance closely align with those of the pueblo.*

I deeply appreciate Ms. Rackley's confidence in trusting the pueblo to maintain and care for these lands long after we have all journeyed on. The Pueblo of Jemez will forever be grateful and honored that we have become stewards of this land. We remain committed to honoring the legacy of all those who have been connected to these lands. And we are grateful for the fine friendship that has grown through working together on this process.

**Chris Toya, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Pueblo of Jemez**

It was a hit-or-miss email I received from a person whose name I did not recognize back in November of 2021. It read something like "Is Jemez Pueblo interested in receiving a return of land in San Miguel County?" I thought it was a scam. Then I said to myself, "Oh what the heck, I will reply to this email, what do I have to lose?" I replied with a short message that read something like, "The Pueblo is always interested in gaining back land that is within its ancestral lands." It didn't take long before Caroline Rackley replied. She said yes, she is for real and is very serious about the offer of the place that is under her ownership to a tribe that is in alignment with her wishes. This email exchange began a long journey in which

*The Pueblo of Jemez will forever be grateful and honored that we have become stewards of this land.*

a true and lasting friendship has been created. We have met with Caroline numerous times, visiting with her at her home on Beulah Ranch, which is located on the east side of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, northeast of *P'á kílá* or Pecos Pueblo. Caroline has visited with our Jemez people at our annual August Pecos Pueblo Feast Day celebration at Pecos National Historical Park. She has also been to Jemez Pueblo on a few occasions to meet with our leadership regarding the ranch.

Beulah Ranch is a beautiful and pristine cultural landscape, a very special gem hidden in Sapello Canyon. Ancestral land such as this was used by our Pecos ancestors for procurement of medicinal plants, berries and other foods, animals and birds. We have been working with Caroline and the Hermits Peak Watershed Alliance to take on erosion control and other common goals and interests we have for protection and conservation. The Pueblo's goal for this land will be aligned with Caroline's wishes, "to protect it in perpetuity from commercial development and exploitation, kept in its natural condition, available for sacred purposes, non-invasive education, or environmental research." The Pueblo of Jemez will be forever grateful for this generous gift. God bless you, Caroline!

**Mark Magdalena, Cultural Resources Specialist, Natural Resources Department, Pueblo of Jemez**

I have had the opportunity to visit Beulah Ranch several times and learn about its significance. One experience that stands out was attending the first meeting in Santa Fe with Chris Toya, where we met Caroline and listened to discussions about the property's future and its connection to the pueblo. Being on the property itself, walking through the area, allowed me to see its natural beauty and better understand why it is important to preserve and protect it. This experience made me feel proud to be part of this journey we are on together, sharing history, culture and our relationship with the land. It's important to step toward strengthening our connection to our ancestral homeland here in northern New Mexico and creating opportunities for future generations to learn about and enjoy this special place.

**Lea Knutson, Executive Director, Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance, Las Vegas**

The Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance has been working since 2009 to restore health to our local watersheds: the Gallinas, Tecolote, Sapello and Lower Mora watersheds. We are excited to begin a wetland river restoration project in the Upper Sapello River valley in cooperation with Caroline, the Natural Resources Department of the Pueblo of Jemez and three other wetland-sharing landowners. The area of the project, covering .75 miles of the Sapello River, has historically supported many wildlife species in this remnant of wetland habitat that has been degraded, most recently by the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon Fire and subsequent floods. This collaboration will most certainly unite neighbors, the people of Jemez and enrich the contribution of the Sapello River valley to our watershed. ■



# PUEBLO OF POJOAQUE BUYS 470 ACRES OF ANCESTRAL LAND

The Pueblo of Pojoaque in northern New Mexico has reclaimed some of its ancestral land. A small piece of privately owned land in the upper Río Grande Basin in the Pojoaque Valley that is important to the tribe had been put up for sale. In late May, leaders of the pueblo announced that they had purchased about three-quarters of a square mile for an undisclosed amount. “We had to act quickly,” said the pueblo’s governor, Jenelle Roybal.

The pueblo got some help with negotiations and contracting from the Western River Conservancy, a nonprofit that had recently helped a California tribe reclaim some of its land.

“Over the years, we’ve been doing our best to reclaim and get any land that we possibly can back to our family,” Roybal said. “Since a young age, I remember discussions were hopeful that this land would come back to us. I wish it wouldn’t have been the case, but we did have to pay for it. But it’s ours now, and we won’t stop here. We will continue moving forward and regaining what is rightfully ours.” Roybal said that the pueblo will protect its newly reclaimed land from development and will care for the wildlife there.

## Land Transferred to Taos Pueblo

In December, officials at Taos Pueblo conducted a ceremony to accept a gift of land from a part-time Taos resident. The tribe’s administrative leaders, including 2025 Lt. Governor Benito Concha, met with Stephen Becker of Austin, Texas, to sign documents returning the culturally significant property to the pueblo. Becker’s partner, Julie Richey, who attended the event, said she believed a “great injustice” had been committed when the land was first taken. *The Taos News* reported that Concha said it came as a surprise when Becker offered to return the land, and he hopes the transfer may motivate other property owners to make similar offers.

# U.S. HOUSE PASSES ALBUQUERQUE INDIAN SCHOOL ACT

BY DANIELLE PROKOP – SOURCE NM

In June, a measure to return three tracts of land from the former Albuquerque Indian School campus to a trust for New Mexico’s 19 pueblos passed the U.S. House and advanced to its first U.S. Senate Committee. The federal legislation, titled the Albuquerque Indian School Act, would transfer 10 acres of a former boarding school to the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, which provides a museum, cultural programming and events serving the state’s 19 pueblos. Monique Fragua (Jemez Pueblo), president and CEO of the IPCC, called the bill “absolutely monumental.” She said the land would be used for an entrepreneur complex and would also include light industry- and manufacturing spaces.

U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury, who represents New Mexico’s 1st Congressional District and carried the legislation in the House, issued a statement noting that the congressional actions brought the delegation “one step closer” to making the transfer “a reality.” The bill received a hearing in front of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, during which co-sponsor U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) expressed his support. The committee has not yet scheduled a vote on the bill.

Albuquerque Indian School was part of a network of federally run schools that removed more than 18,000 Native American children from their families between 1819 and 1969. Children faced forced labor, assimilation, abuse and death. Zuni, Navajo and Apache children were buried in unmarked graves in Albuquerque. The school closed in the 1980s.

Members of New Mexico’s U.S. Congressional delegation said the return of land is more than just a land transfer. “It is about putting a small but important piece of land back where it belongs—with New Mexico’s 19 pueblos,” lead sponsor and bill author U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM) said in a statement. “The development of these under-utilized parcels of land will create jobs, foster entrepreneurship and expand business services for Pueblo communities and the broader public.”

In a statement, co-sponsor U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, who represents New Mexico’s 3rd Congressional District, said the land transfer transforms “a painful history into a future built on cultural sovereignty, opportunity and respect.”

# BOOK PROFILE

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR INDIGENOUS LAND ACCESS AND RETURN

A SUMMARY OF LEGAL AND RELATIONAL PATHWAYS

BY LISA WILSON, DIANA RUIZ AND FORREST KING-CORTES

LAND TRUST ALLIANCE (2025)

*The term “Land Back” encompasses various definitions: For some, it means access, stewardship or decision-making power over ancestral lands; for others, it signifies the full return of these lands to tribal nations or organizations. Despite these varied definitions, they share a common thread: the Indigenous desire to reconnect with their ancestral lands in meaningful ways. Land Back also encapsulates the protection of Mother Earth, the necessity to restore balance between the land and humans and resistance against assimilation. – From ‘Partnerships for Indigenous Land Access and Return’*

The Land Back movement is gaining momentum. But for many tribal nations and people, reconnecting to the land is obstructed by entanglements, confusing colonial laws, arbitrary borders, recognition status, financial limitations and challenges to tribal sovereignty.

*Partnerships for Indigenous Land Access and Return: A Summary of Legal and Relational Pathways* provides support for Indigenous-led organizations seeking to recover and protect land by providing practical strategies and solutions as they navigate these challenges. It is also for non-Indigenous-led land trusts interested in learning more about how they can support the goals of tribal nations and organizations.

The report is a resource on various approaches to land access and return, with a focus on strategies and solutions that have been developed in partnership by land trusts and tribes or Indigenous-led organizations. It was developed in collaboration with many Indigenous leaders.

Native Land Conservancy Executive Director Diana Ruiz, Ph.D., is the report’s co-author, along with Lisa Wilson of Tahoma Peak Solutions and Forrest King-Cortes of the Land Trust Alliance. Ruiz highlights “cultural respect easements” as a tool for ensuring long-term access to land for tribes and Indigenous communities. She provides examples of how the

Native Land Conservancy is working with partners to put those agreements into place, explains how the easements are developed between partners, and compares and contrasts them with traditional conservation easements.





# BEING A GOOD RELATIVE REPORT

## *Education of Native American Students in New Mexico*

New Mexico is home to over 46,000 Native American students, representing 15 percent of the state's total child population.

- Native youth are served by a complex network of schools. While 82 percent attend District schools, others are enrolled in tribally controlled (8 percent), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)—operated (5 percent), and charter schools (4 percent).
- In a unique shift compared to national averages, 45 percent of New Mexico's Native youth reside in rural communities, while 55 percent live in urban areas.
- Many students navigate both worlds—attending school in urban centers like Albuquerque during the week while returning to tribal lands on weekends to maintain deep-rooted cultural, familial and ceremonial ties.
- Despite systemic barriers, Native students are shaped by a story of contemporary resilience and a deep sense of belonging.

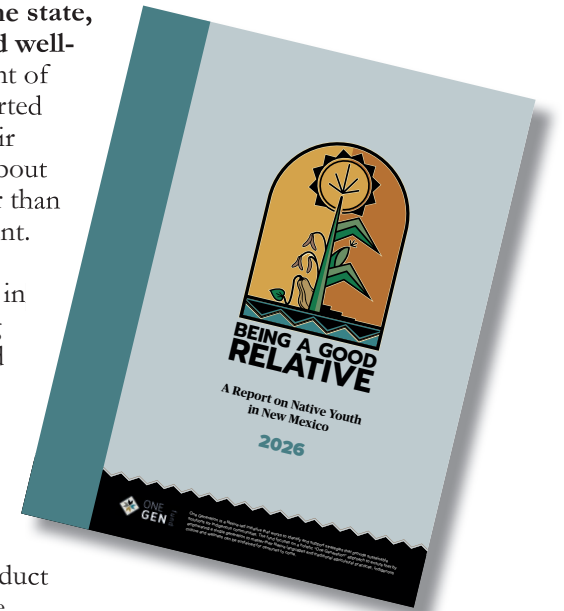
A new report called “Being a Good Relative,” created by the One Generation Fund, highlights why more holistic approaches can help Native students succeed. The report dives deep into where these students learn, where they live, and the unique strengths they bring to our communities.

### KEY FINDINGS OF “BEING A GOOD RELATIVE”

Across these indicators, several patterns emerge statewide:

- **Indigenous languages, culture and intergenerational relationships shape Native children's everyday life.** More than one-third (38 percent) of Native children in New Mexico live in households where Indigenous language is spoken. Language, beyond a means of communication, carries worldview, identity, history and connection to land and community. These patterns point to opportunities for schools and education systems to honor, build upon and sustain linguistic and cultural knowledge.
- **More students are learning Native languages in the classroom.** Statewide enrollment in Native language programs has grown from 7,270 students in SY20-21 to more than 8,500 students in SY24-25—a 17 percent increase over four years. Navajo language courses serve the largest share of students, while enrollment in Keres, Zuni, Jicarilla Apache and Pueblo languages—such as Tewa, Tiwa and Towa—have also improved. At the same time, proficiency levels are increasing—from 5 percent in SY18-19 to 13 percent in SY24-25. While most students are still developing fluency, these trends reflect ongoing investments and advocacy by tribal communities, educators and schools to strengthen language access and revitalization.

- **Native youth report the strongest sense of personal identity in the state, alongside persistent health and wellness challenges.** Sixty-six percent of Native high school students reported feeling confident in achieving their goals, and 61 percent feel good about who they are as a person—higher than the statewide average of 59 percent. Native students report persistent sadness or hopelessness, and one in 10 (12 percent) report attempting suicide in the past year, compared to 8 percent of students statewide. Native youth report lower alcohol use than their peers (10 percent compared to 16 percent statewide), though tobacco use remains higher, with 29 percent reporting use of any tobacco product compared to 22 percent statewide.



- **Native children in New Mexico experience substantially higher poverty rates than their non-Native peers.** Statewide, one in three (33 percent) Native children, ages 0-17, live at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL), compared to roughly one in five (21 percent) non-Native children. For reference, in 2026 the FPL is \$15,960 for one individual and \$33,000 for a family of four in the mainland U.S. These disparities emerge early and remain consistent across age groups, affecting more than one in three (35 percent) Native children ages 0-4 and remain elevated across childhood and adolescence. Living at or below this threshold shapes families' access to stable housing, food, transportation, healthcare and other resources that holistically support children's wellbeing.

- **Native youth are more likely to experience food insecurity.** Approximately half (51 percent) of Native children in New Mexico live in households that participate in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), compared to roughly one-third (32 percent) of non-Native children. While food assistance plays a critical role in helping New Mexican families meet basic needs, higher participation rates also reflect broader economic instability. These conditions underscore the important role schools play as a reliable source of daily nutrition for many children.

- **Housing costs are a heavy burden on Native families, limiting financial flexibility and stability.** About one in two Native children in New Mexico (50 percent) live in households that are housing-cost burdened, meaning expenses like rent, mortgage and utilities exceed 30 percent of household income. Many of these same children (44 percent) live in households facing severe housing-cost burden, with more than half of household income going toward housing. When housing takes up this much of a family's income, there is little left for everything else, including food, transportation and other basic necessities.

- **Native children in New Mexico are more likely to live in single-parent and/or multigenerational households.** Across the state, around two in five (43%) Native children live in single-parent households, compared to one in four (28%) non-Native children. At the same time, Native children are almost twice as likely (29%) to live in multigenerational households or with at least one elder than their non-Native peers (15%). These household arrangements reflect both strengths, such as support networks, exposure to language traditional teachings, stories and constraints, including increased financial strain, parental stress and the complexities of multigenerational and blended families.

- **Most Native students are not yet receiving the early literacy instruction they need.** Statewide, one in five (19%) Native third graders were reading proficiently in 2019, a rate that declined to 15 percent in 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic, before rebounding to one in four (27%) in 2025. While assessments shifted over this time period, the overall trend is clear: nearly three in four (73%) Native third graders are not learning foundational literacy skills. Because early literacy is closely linked to long-term academic success, these gaps can shape students' educational experiences well beyond third grade. ■

## DID YOU KNOW?

In NM, a Native student's education isn't always a straight line—it's a transition across jurisdictions. From a Federal Head Start to a State Pre-K, then a BIE School or Local Public School; our Native students navigate a complex web of different systems, with funding, accountability, standards, and data that don't always align.

Understanding this complexity is the first step to being a good relative.

### WHERE NATIVE STUDENTS ARE EDUCATED

| School Type         | Number of Students | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| BIE Operated        | 2,518              | 5%         |
| Tribally Controlled | 3,738              | 8%         |
| Charter             | 1,748              | 4%         |
| District            | 37,663             | 82%        |
| Homeschooled        | 530                | 1%         |
| GRAND TOTAL         | 46,197             | 100%       |

Data Sources: District and charter counts from NIMPEI; Indian Education Division, Tribal Education Status Report: School Year 2024-2025. BIE count from BIE Report Cards from SY23-24. Data on Native Students and Homeschooled count from NIMPEI; Options for Parents & Families Division, Homeschooling Annual Report - 2023.



LEARN MORE

[www.beingagoodrelative.org](http://www.beingagoodrelative.org)



# Addressing and Overcoming Cancer in Tribal Nations and Communities

BY REGIS PECOS AND DR. CHERYL WILLMAN, M.D.

American Indians and Alaskan Natives living in tribal nations and communities across the United States are impacted by a high incidence of cancer and poorer overall survivals. This is a health care disparity that we are deeply committed to overcoming.

Compounded by disproportionately low rates of cancer screening and more limited access to healthcare, American Indians are too often diagnosed at later stages of the disease when it may be more widespread and less treatable. As a consequence, American Indians have been reported to have the poorest overall survivals for *all* types of cancer when compared to any other racial and ethnic group living in the U.S. Indigenous people also tend to have a higher incidence of certain cancers including cancers of gastrointestinal tract, liver, kidney, and in certain communities, lung.

The causes of these differences in cancer incidence and outcome are currently unknown but may result from lower rates of screening and early detection; more limited access to health care, particularly for the diagnosis and treatment of complex diseases; differences in diet, metabolism and risk behaviors; and from cancer-causing environmental exposures. We also have very little knowledge of the spectrum of the *inherited* genetic variants that predispose American Indians to developing cancer. And we have virtually no knowledge of the specific cancer-causing mutations in cancer tissues in American Indians that are acquired through the processes of living, aging and environmental exposure. Importantly, knowledge of the unique cancer-causing mutations in each individual is essential to guide their proper treatment, as many new and highly effective cancer therapies are available that target these specific mutations.

Unfortunately, American Indians have had limited access to such sophisticated cancer genomic testing in the clinical setting, or choose to forgo such testing due to potential genetic privacy concerns or a lack of consideration of tribal sovereignty in genomic research and healthcare delivery. Indeed, in recent national cancer genomic initiatives, less than one percent of participants have been American Indians or Alaskan Natives. It has been our goal to address these concerns in a culturally appropriate way, respectful of tribal sovereignty and deeply conscious of genetic privacy, to assure that American Indians have equal access and benefit from these new healthcare technologies and treatments.

Funded under the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Participant Engagement-Cancer Genome Sequencing Centers Program, it has been our hypothesis that through appropriate participant and community engagement of tribal leaders and their communities in comprehensive genomic sequencing in the clinical healthcare setting—which is cancer patient and family-centered, and respectful of tribal sovereignty, genetic privacy and cultural concerns—we will discover the spectrum of genetic variants, cancer-promoting mutations and genome-wide mutational signatures that promote cancer in American Indians. Under the guidance of an established and highly engaged Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) our studies are being conducted within the healthcare facilities of the University of New Mexico (UNM) Comprehensive Cancer Center in Albuquerque; the Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center in Phoenix and Scottsdale, AZ; and Christus-St. Vincent Regional Medical Center in Santa Fe, a member of the Mayo Clinic Care Network. The program is also highly engaged and fully supported by the All Pueblo Council of Governors (APCG) through formal resolutions, as well as resolutions from individual Pueblo councils, who have been engaged in the project since its inception.

Under the guidance of the TAC and our Indigenous program staff, our PE-CGS Research Center was given the name JUNIPER (Journey to Understanding American Indian Peoples Engagement in Cancer Genomics Research: The JUNIPER Program). Our overall objective is to assure that American Indians affected by cancer have the opportunity to participate in state-of-the-art cancer genomic sequencing studies, both for their personal benefit (to inform their diagnosis and guide their precision therapeutic intervention) and for the creation of new knowledge of the genomic etiologies of cancer to benefit the community and this highly understudied population. Potential participants (newly diagnosed cancer patients, those in follow-up care, and

cancer survivors) are offered the opportunity to consent to the program and genomic testing at no cost. They and their family members receive cancer education, genetic counseling and patient navigation throughout the process. Their genomic sequencing results are returned directly to them (the patient) and their healthcare provider “in real time” (usually within two weeks) for their therapeutic benefit and for decision making. Should a germline cancer predisposition be discovered, patients and their extended families are offered free “cascade” testing and genetic counseling. All patients are navigated to high quality cancer care and treatment for their extended disease course.

To date, the JUNIPER Program has rolled over 490 American Indian cancer patients. Over 80 percent have received genomic sequencing results that directly benefitted them, facilitating their precise diagnosis and directing the selection and planning of their treatment. Nearly 20 percent have accessed new therapies in the context of clinical trials. Over 12 percent have been found to have a germline genetic mutation that predisposed them to cancer, which would likely be present in many of their relatives and family members. Many of these extended families have now completed “cascade” testing and are undergoing cancer screening. Such knowledge empowers them to participate in regular screening programs in the future for early detection and a stronger likelihood of cures.

## *A hallmark for how cancer genetic research should be conducted*

For the beneficence of their fellow man, all American Indian participants in the JUNIPER Program have consented to share their *fully anonymized, de-identified genomic sequencing data* (with no personal identifiers, location, or tribal affiliation) in the NCI Genome Data Commons (GDC) for future updates and continued research. However, such access is governed by a profound, landmark agreement—a first in cancer genomic medicine in the United States.

Any future access to this data is governed by agreements respectful of tribal sovereignty, tribal authority and decision-making, and individual and collective privacy. These include a Data Use Limitations (DUL) Agreement and a Collaborative Agreement (COA). While the DUL provides the limitations on use of the data by future users, the COA provides the processes, terms and conditions that must be met by any future users *before* they can access the datasets from GDC.

The TAC and tribal leaders consider the DUL and particularly the COA as “landmark agreements” and a “historic precedent” in biomedical research and human genome sciences as they acknowledge tribal sovereignty, engage tribal leaders along with the project leaders and their respective institutions in the review and approval processes for access to the data by all future users, and allow members of the COA review committee to review results derived from data analysis by future users (meetings, abstracts, publications) prior to presentation and publication. These processes and agreements stand as a hallmark for how cancer genetic research should be conducted in any population and community. ■



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*Dr. Cheryl Willman, M.D., is director of the Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center. She is also Distinguished Emeritus Professor and Director of the University of New Mexico Cancer Center.*

*Photos Word wrod word onrd word*

*“Landmark agreements” and a “historic precedent” in biomedical research and human genome sciences that acknowledge tribal sovereignty*



# CHILDREN AS SACRED BEINGS

BY REGIS PECOS



Our elders teach us that children are sacred beings. How we treat them, how we raise them will determine what kind of caretakers they will become. Do we want them to grow into loving, respectful and compassionate caretakers, capable of maintaining the health of our communities?

Core values are at the heart of how Pueblo society sustains the vitality and spirit of community. Our elders teach us that the gift of core values is the deepest expression of love for our children. We should take the time to consciously define what our core values are. They serve as an internal barometer for our social behaviors. We should ask ourselves: What are the core values that have guided me to define who I am or who I have become? What are the core values that direct what I do? We should further ask, who gifted me my core values? This will lead us to appreciate the people in our lives—most likely, Mom, Dad, Grandpa, or Grandma—who with the gift of values expressed such deep love for us. Living by our core values is how we honor those who gifted us our core values.

Our elders also teach us that there cannot be two sets of values—one in our personal life and one in our work life. Similarly, our children cannot be expected to leave behind their values, expressed through our language and culture, when they enter public kindergarten or



## *Mutual responsibilities, guided by love, respect and compassion*

school. They deserve a balanced education that nourishes their Indigenous identity while teaching the skills needed in Western society.

Seeking balance in all that we do is a fundamental part of fulfilling our Creator's original instructions. In Pueblo lifeways, this is central to our being and allows us to find our purpose in life. It is how we contribute to sustain the vitality of community. It is how we build relationships of interdependence. It is how we recognize and value every member of our community. Our elders teach us that every child, a sacred being, is gifted to parents, family and community so that humanity can continue and thrive. This creates mutual responsibilities, guided by love, respect and compassion.

These covenants were purposefully disrupted with the introduction of the first U.S. policy on Indian education in the late 19th century. This policy was built on the doctrine of killing Indigenous languages and cultures by removing children from their families and communities. Forcing Native children into boarding schools was an efficient—and violent—way of denying them their languages and cultures. Education became weaponized as a tool of forced assimilation. This was deemed more humane than the extermination policy of the Indian Wars that had just ended.

In more recent times, the introduction of federal Head Start programs in tribal communities became a classic example of the perpetuation of systemic racism through institutional mechanisms. Why did we, as tribal community members, not ask where Head Start was a head start to? Was it not a start to an early acquisition of and proficiency in English? Why did we not ask at what expense English language learning would come? We now know that it was at the expense of our own Indigenous languages. By embracing Head Start, we unwittingly participated in our own demise. Was this really so different from the first Indian education policy, when we had our mouths washed out with soap for speaking our language in school?

We learned the hard way that federal and state education policies and programs always extract a high price from us: They facilitate the death of our languages, the most precious gift from our Creator that is central to sustaining Indigenous lifeways. Education conceived by and for the dominant society was never intended to benefit Indigenous peoples.



Once this became clear, tribes across the country vehemently advocated for changing federal policies and laws. At our most fragile point in history, following the policies of relocation and termination, we secured a new policy framework designed to help us regain control of our destiny. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 provided pathways to effectuating Indigenous sovereignty, including in education. A balanced education for our children became a promise and a possibility.

We are now at the half-century mark of the so-called era of Indian self-determination. Have its promises come to pass? The vast majority of Native children attend public schools, where curriculum, instruction and testing are dictated by state and federal policy. Our youngest children are sent to early childhood centers that must meet federal and state standards. “English first” continues to be the mantra. Pueblo languages are listed as endangered by the United Nations.

That's why Indigenous leaders in New Mexico are pushing back against continued assimilation. In the wake of a watershed court ruling, which found the state in violation of Native and other marginalized students' constitutional right to education, tribes joined together and developed a framework for realizing Indigenous education sovereignty at the state level.

Step by step, we are making progress, as illustrated by New Mexico's early childhood education policy. The state's recent investments in early education have been exemplary, but they exposed Native children to the risk, once again, of being shunted into culturally





*Trisha Moquino (Cochiti/Ohkay Owingeh/Kewa), co-founder and education director of the Keres Children's Learning Center, a Keres-immersion early childhood classroom that uses Montessori methods*

inappropriate programs and subjected to assimilation pressures. Last year, tribal advocates succeeded in changing the law to ensure that tribes themselves can develop and deliver early childhood education programs, with state funding but without state interference. The rights of tribes to use their own culturally and linguistically relevant education standards, assessments and evaluations for early childhood education are now enshrined in state law.

We remain committed to achieving education sovereignty for the benefit of all Native children, from birth to college. To fulfill the responsibilities toward our children, tribal communities must be able to shape their education, guided by Indigenous values. These values are expressed through our languages. We must pass the gift of language to our children, just as we received this gift from our elders. We need an education system that makes this possible.

If we were to fail in fulfilling our responsibilities in this time of self-determination, it would be the ultimate irony. When the last speakers pass on, we would witness the death of our languages. This nation's cruel intent, expressed 150 years ago in the name of Manifest Destiny, would become a reality. We must not allow that. The seventh generation must be able to inherit their ancestors' language gifted to us by our Creator. ■

*Regis Pecos (Cochiti) is co-founder and co-director of the Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School.*

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY: INDIGENOUS TEACHER PREPARATION

Central New Mexico Community College is offering a paid, yearlong program for individuals who want to teach in and for Native communities. The residency-based teacher preparation program integrates immersive classroom experience with specialized coursework designed to honor Indigenous knowledge systems.

Residents work alongside a mentor teacher while taking CNM licensure coursework. Participants receive a \$35,000 stipend over their time in the classroom and become eligible for a New Mexico teacher dual licensure in Elementary (K-8) / Special Education (PreK-12) or Secondary (6-12) / Special Education (PreK-12).

Eligibility requirements include a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university and a commitment to teaching in a school serving Indigenous students and communities in New Mexico for three years.

- CNM is collaborating with schools and districts that can:
- Identify high-quality mentor teachers willing to host a resident for the academic school year
  - Provide residents with opportunities to gain hands-on classroom experience while working alongside an experienced mentor teacher
  - Consider hiring program graduates who successfully complete the residency and obtain licensure
  - Support a sustainable, community-centered teacher preparation model that strengthens Native education

The Indigenous Teacher Preparation Project is one way of addressing the teacher shortage. The school is actively recruiting for the fall 2026 semester. <https://www.cnm.edu/programs/programs-a-z/teacher-licensure/indigenous-teacher-preparation-project>

## OP-ED: REGIS PECOS

# NO EDUCATION PLAN WITHOUT US: AN INVITATION FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Transforming New Mexico's broken education system is an enormous task. It's a task that New Mexico's Public Education Department (PED) cannot achieve on its own. The stakes could not be higher: Systemic failures in education lead to low-wage jobs, generational poverty, poor health and ruptured communities. Indigenous children, English language learners, children with disabilities and those from low-income families disproportionately suffer these unconscionable consequences.

This is why the 2018 court ruling in the Yazzie/Martínez education lawsuit centered these four student groups. In April 2025, the court ordered PED to finally meet its obligations and develop an action plan to remedy the injustices faced by these students. Yet the plan submitted by PED on Nov. 3, 2025 fails to do that. It does not offer strategies and solutions that lift up children whose needs and rights have been ignored for so long.

But those strategies exist. They could have informed this plan had PED worked collaboratively and consultatively. The plan could have examined the roots of our education crisis and confronted the glaring disparities in educational inputs and outcomes. It could have begun transforming the underlying structures and norms that maintain an irrelevant, inequitable and ineffective model of education that harms the life chances of all children.

Instead, this plan continues business as usual. Cosmetic changes and piecemeal fixes address the symptoms rather than the causes of the failed system. It's like renovating a ramshackle house with sinking foundations when it would be safer and more cost-effective to build a new house.

A different approach was possible. This past summer, PED held regional meetings with families, students and communities across the state. More than a thousand people offered ideas for changing how and what their children learn. I had the honor of facilitating several of those discussions and were inspired by people's suggestions: new curricula and materials that sustain our diverse languages and cultures, many more educators from students' own backgrounds, shared decision-making with sovereign tribes, and much more.

Many wrote their suggestions on colorful Post-It Notes, which PED kept under wraps until the Yazzie plaintiffs obtained them through a freedom of information request. What was so threatening about these notes? One person requested humbly whether, if it's not too much to ask, schools could please record what they do to help struggling students.

Yet instead of carrying out people's ideas for change, PED's plan continues existing initiatives. Instead of treating tribes as coequal partners in education governance, the plan disregards the mandates of the Indian Education Act. And instead of holding schools accountable for helping struggling students, as requested on the humble Post-It Note, the plan lacks teeth for enforcement.

Rather than resolving the lawsuit, PED's plan will prolong the court's involvement. The plaintiffs, tribes and education reform coalitions have already issued statements rejecting this plan. A public sign-on letter calls for "deep, systemic remedies," including those

*The Tribal Remedy Framework is  
a collective tribal plan for education  
transformation.*



# *The PED plan perpetuates the very systemic failures the court found unconstitutional.*

contained in the Tribal Remedy Framework, the collective tribal plan for education transformation.

PED's plan is unacceptable in both form and substance. It is based on existing inputs rather than desired outcomes, lacks baseline data, does not connect actions to measurable targets, and has no cost estimates or budget. There is no mechanism for reviewing progress and ensuring long-term sustainability. The plan does not involve communities, families and educators in implementation and evaluation. It offers no strategies for eliminating disparities in inputs and outcomes. It does not target resources and interventions to the students who most need them. It does not address racism and discrimination.

In short, the plan perpetuates the very systemic failures the court found unconstitutional seven years ago.

In light of this ongoing deadlock, it's understandable if people shrug their shoulders; teaching and learning will go on, with a state plan or without. We are used to bureaucracies dragging their feet, hiding problems, standing in the way of solutions. When institutions claim they are responsive to calls for change but then do the same thing all over again, they gamble with our trust.

We see at the federal level what happens when there's a loss of public trust. Once disparaged, public institutions can be dismantled easily. But when there's no one left to protect civil, consumer, labor and immigrant rights, we all pay the price. For people facing oppression and injustice, that price is particularly high. This includes the four Yazzie/Martínez student groups. Without federal protections for universal public education, civil rights and disability rights, it is vital that we compel our state institutions, such as PED, to act in the public interest.

Public education is one of this country's greatest achievements—yet it has also been wielded as a destructive force. It sought to eradicate Indigenous peoples through assimilation. This has cost countless lives and may yet lead to the loss of our languages and ways of life.

Indigenous people will no longer conform to plans and standards developed without us, nor will other marginalized communities in our state. We have joined together and demand full participation in the development and oversight of a meaningful, transformative education plan.

Let's create a people's education plan, guided by community review teams, that purposefully embraces our rich cultures, languages, and histories, and that shares resources based on need. A people's plan will cultivate our children's relationship to the places, cultures and languages that shape their identities, belonging, and connections. Children can only excel as learners when they are rooted in what sustains them.

I invite PED to come to the table and collaborate with us in developing such a plan. Drop your defenses and rebuild trust by working with tribes and communities, students and parents, experts and advocates to create a long-term plan and budget that enables all of our children to thrive.■

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*Regis Pecos is Chairman of Tribal Education Alliance. Dr. Anja Ruger, Senior Policy Director of the Leadership Institute, also contributed to this article. <https://tribaleducationalalliance.org/>*

## SFIS Celebrates 50th Anniversary



The Albuquerque and Santa Fe Indian schools were established in the late 1800s by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as federal, off-reservation boarding schools. These schools' primary goal was the assimilation of Native Americans, as articulated by Captain R.H. Pratt in 1892: "All the Indians... in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." The approach to assimilation was built on a military model: buildings on campuses were in straight lines, students marched daily, and the use of military terms was embedded into daily life.

Children were stolen from their communities and forced to attend school. Their tribal clothing was destroyed, their hair was cut, and they lived a regimented life learning skills the Western world thought important: housekeeping for girls; farming and industrial work for boys. Students received corporal punishment for speaking their native languages, thus forcing them to learn English. The academic portion of the day was short, with low expectations for learning. Much of the day was spent in labor—for example: girls being sent to work as housekeepers and boys building furniture—the fruits of which benefited the boarding school employees or the surrounding non-Native communities.

In the early 1920s, severe cuts were made to federal services for Indian people, despite the United States' treaty and trust responsibilities for the health, education and welfare of tribes. A group of influential, well-educated non-Native people made a case to the Department of the Interior (where the Bureau of Indian Affairs sits) regarding the devastating impacts that resulted from these and prior policies. In response, in 1926, the secretary of the Interior commissioned a study of Indian education, health care and reservation life. The result was the Meriam Report, which was published in 1928. The report's dismal findings regarding the education of Native American children paved the way for the inclusion of more culture-based classes and renovated buildings at Santa Fe Indian School (SFIS).

## *New buildings include academic, student living, administration, traditional outdoor learning spaces and a gym/wellness center.*

In the 1930s, Dorothy Dunn taught painting to students at SFIS, which developed into the Studio Style and led to hiring local Native artisans to teach local arts and crafts. Also at this time, through the Works Progress Administration (WPA), architect John Gaw Meem renovated the campus so the buildings were more reflective of the pueblos, and he also designed and built a special U-shaped building for cultural learning.

By the 1960s, however, several impacts from federal policy resulted in the closing of Santa Fe Indian School.

- More Pueblo students were attending public schools close to their home communities.
- In New Mexico, there were two federal boarding schools in Pueblo country.
- Santa Fe Indian School's reputation grew as a school that excelled in the arts caught national attention.

The BIA repurposed the Santa Fe Indian School campus into the Institute of American Indian Arts—a fine-arts school offering the last two years of high school and the first two years of college—to serve all tribes in the United States. SFIS students were moved to Albuquerque Indian School (AIS). Pueblo tribal leadership was not consulted, and many mourned the loss of SFIS. Additionally, the BIA did not provide appropriate support for the education and housing of AIS students.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Pueblo tribal leaders through the All Indian Pueblo Council (AIPC), simultaneously advocated for the BIA to uphold federal trust responsibilities to tribes while also laying a foundation for true self-determination. These concepts were included in the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Under that Act, in 1976, AIPC assumed tribal control of the Albuquerque Indian School (AIS). In 1979, AIS merged with SFIS and relocated to its historic campus in Santa Fe. The visionaries who took tribal control of AIS and





resurrected SFIS had ongoing impacts on federal legislation, most notably, the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988.

In the first 25 years of tribal control, the success of tribal leadership exercising its right to educational sovereignty and self-determination resulted in:

- SFIS becoming a tribally controlled grant school that is owned and operated by the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico under Public Law 100-297, the Tribally Controlled Schools Act; and
- The transfer of the 115-acre campus in trust to the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico as an educational institution under the Santa Fe Indian School Act.

In anticipation of the land transfer to the 19 Pueblos, construction to replace the outdated buildings began. In 2000, the first of the new buildings was completed for state-of-the-art math, science and technology learning spaces. To date, new buildings include academic, student living, administration, traditional outdoor learning spaces and a gym/wellness center. A major construction project that SFIS is currently undertaking is the renovation of the historic Paolo Soleri Amphitheater as a performing arts educational center. Donations are being sought for this project.

The early years of SFIS as a tribally controlled school set a visionary foundation that, through Pueblo approaches to education, students will be well-prepared for life. In 2010, the current Vision Statement was adopted to honor this concept. After over 30 years in development, in 2012, SFIS officially adopted the Ideal Graduate Statement as its mission. SFIS's mission meets the criteria of a graduate profile, and the school's 10 Ideal Graduate Skills align what is important to Native communities to the Common Core State Standards.

- All SFIS graduates complete a Senior Honors Project as a capstone to demonstrate achievement of the 10 Ideal Graduate Skills.
- SFIS consistently closes the achievement gaps for students, including continued growth during the pandemic, according to the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP).
- The 2021-2025 average 4-year cohort graduation rate is 96 percent.
- Cognia, SFIS' accrediting agency, identified SFIS as a 2022 School of Distinction for exemplifying excellence in education and standing out as a global example for the school's service to learners.

*A major construction project that SFIS is currently undertaking is the renovation of the historic Paolo Soleri Amphitheater.*

The continued success of SFIS can be attributed, in large part, to the commitment of tribal leaders, who regularly meet with students to help educate them about core values and support the school's work in preparing students to be contributing members of their communities. The school also credits its staff for their daily dedication to supporting the students, and commends the students for their contributions to SFIS's learning community. ■

# The Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School

BY REGIS PECOS



Photo: Matthew Raspanti, Communications Office, Princeton University

The Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School, now in its 30th year, has been quietly working to build a solid foundation for capacity building and leadership cultivation in New Mexico, using community-based priorities and culturally based approaches. The program design of co-founders, Dr. Carnell Chosa and Regis Pecos, originally stemmed from the need to bring tribal people together to discuss, debate and reframe the most critical issues of our time—linking priorities at home with a voice in the process of understanding self-determination at multiple levels in order to protect an Indigenous way of life. Since 1997, the institute has created spaces for discourse on a wide range of public policy and community issues that challenge the vitality and spirit of New Mexico's tribal nations.

*Cultivating generations of tribal community members through leadership, community service, public policy and critical thinking*

## THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE HAS BEEN:

- 1) to provide sustainable opportunity for the appreciation of the uniqueness of Indigenous cultures and traditions, the arts, governance, health and economic development within the context of a changing global society;
- 2) to provide meaningful, solution-oriented opportunities for engagement in intellectual discourse regarding critical Indigenous issues of our time;
- 3) to transform the impacts of externally-developed policy on tribal community institutions by nurturing current and emerging intergenerational leaders.

The Leadership Institute has worked to address historical inequalities through policy awareness, analysis and recommendations at all levels—tribal, state and national—which has led to consciousness building about tribal issues, creating and maintaining a system of networking, promoting intergenerational mentorship opportunities and providing enrichment opportunities for tribal members. In short, the Institute approach can be summarized as cultivating generations of tribal community members through leadership, community service, public policy and critical thinking.





*We have reached 400 young people and the return is the blessing of these young people in places of influence.*

Known for its Community Institutes, modeled after a think-tank approach to tribal dialogue and exchange, the Institute has also established programs that promote students' vision of capacity building at multiple levels of community—in particular impacting high school and college students and girls programming. Most notably, the Institute has co-produced the Senior Honors Project, Brave Girls, American Higher Education Resources (AIHER), Pueblo Ph.D. Cohort and the Summer Policy Academy. The Summer Policy (SPA) was created to provide high school students an understanding of the impact of state and federal policies and to appreciate how the challenges we face today are deeply rooted in our history. SPA is now a four-year program designed to provide cohorts of approximately 18-20 students, beginning in high school, through a rigorous curriculum; focusing first on tribal and state Indian policy, pressing issues in Congress, community internships and international experiences.

In Year One, partnered with multiple organizations and higher education institutions, rising high school juniors and seniors are exposed to current tribal challenges, as well as strengths. They design and carry out a community service project that demonstrates their commitment to building on those challenges and strengths. In Year Two, led by co-director Regis Pecos, through a partnership with his alma mater, Princeton University School of Public Policy and International Affairs, students spend two weeks on the Princeton campus, taking intensive coursework in preparation for a visit to Capitol Hill for presentations to their congressional delegation, the U.S. Senate on Indian Affairs, the Interior, the White House Domestic Policy Council and the National Congress of American Indians on issues of immediate relevance to them and their communities on education, health, environment, sacred site protection, language loss and housing, among other critical issues. Over the years, the SPA fellows have contributed significantly on legislative initiatives, resulting in establishing the Violence Against Women Act, the Native American Social Workers Institute at New Mexico Highlands University School of Social Work, the first Pueblo-led Ethnographic Study on Chaco Canyon and the national apology on the impact of Boarding Schools, to name a few.

As a signature Institute program, SPA has built its curriculum using a culturally and community-based approach that prioritizes local Indigenous knowledge. Community members serve as faculty. This approach involving Indian philosophies and practices of intergenerational collaboration are reflective of core values, framework and principles of leadership and recognition of the unique existing and potential contributions that tribal youth bring with them. Perhaps one of the most meaningful things about SPA is the program's profound usage of Pueblo and other Indigenous philosophies that acknowledge the sacredness of young people and their development—the belief that all people are gifted and that all have the right to rich opportunities that cultivate those gifts. An artist, a writer, a scientist, a farmer and so forth, the convergence of identities, historical and contemporary issues, rigorous curriculum, creativity nourished and the active practice of service to one's community all impact young minds and hearts.

The vision when we began was to engage and provide these life-changing experiences for 500 young people in 25 years. The vision was to intentionally create a critical mass and network of policy influencers and authors and architects of policies and laws for our purposes, best interests and our well-being, protecting the Gifts of Our Creator, guided by our Core Values with a deep sense of faith embedded in us through our ceremonies. Today, we have reached 400 young people and the return is the blessing of these young people in places of influence. They are attorneys, engineers, teachers, education leaders, social workers, environmentalists, water protectors, policy advisors, cultural protectors, farmers, nurses and young parents teaching and nurturing their children in their return to the Original Instructions of to be, how to live and maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit with love, respect and compassion. Our children are sacred beings with gifts to share and contribute to our well-being. They are becoming our caretakers. ■

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*Regis Pecos is a former Governor of Cochiti Pueblo. He graduated from Princeton University, UC Berkeley, and was a 2023 Hauser Fellow at Harvard University. Dr. Carnell Chosa, Jemez, former Lt. Governor is a graduate of Dartmouth College, Harvard University and Arizona State.*

## THE LEGACY OF SUPERINTENDENT JOSEPH ABEYTA

*One Man's Fight Against Assimilation*

BY REGIS PECOS



### THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO KILL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE USING EDUCATION AS THEIR WEAPON

The Santa Fe Indian School, established in 1890, was built on the mantra that the way you kill languages and cultures is to remove the children from their language and culture. For nearly 100 years, that was the reality until the elders prophetically proclaimed that “Whoever controls the minds and hearts of our children will determine our destiny,” and called on their leaders to reclaim and redefine education for our purposes. From the initial tragic and traumatic era, when children were removed from their families and forced to be transformed through education to be assimilated, Pueblo people endured.

### THE CHILDREN ARE AT THE HEART OF OUR CULTURAL SURVIVAL

Taking to heart those words, the All Indian Pueblo Council, responding in the same way as our ancestors, when they organized the Pueblo Revolt when their Way of Life was threatened, came together to prevent the elders' prophetic vision from becoming true. The elders also cautioned, “When language dies, our culture will die and that will be the end of us.”

*“When language dies, our culture will die and that will be the end of us.”*

### OUR PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED

No person has had a greater influence in the reclaiming and redefining education than Joseph Abeyta, the longest serving superintendent of the Santa Fe Indian School, a position he held for 30 years.

*A new vision in education: centering language and culture*

### FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Mr. Abeyta came from the humblest of beginnings. He was raised by his parents, Erlinda and Joe Abeyta, who was the face and voice of St. Catherine's Indian School and became a legend among New Mexico coaches for a small school defeating giants in all the sports he coached. Erlinda Abeyta was a homemaker, beloved for her saintly life as a loving mother to generations of children, and she was as prominent in her own right. Both were intimate personal friends with the founder of St. Catherine's and of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Mother Katharine Drexel, who dedicated her life to serving Native American and African-American communities. Mr. and Mrs. Abeyta walked beside her and followed in her footsteps in the service of others. They lived on campus for most of their lives, raising, teaching and caring for the children.

### DEVELOPING THE SKILLS AND TOOLS TO HELP OUR PEOPLE

Joe Abeyta was at St. Catherine's from 1948 until his graduation in 1961. He followed many first-generation students to New Mexico Highlands University, which produced



*“When language dies, our culture will die and that will be the end of us.”*

the highest number of Native teachers. Their activism established it as a Native American-serving institution. He received his BA from NMHU in 1966. Mr. Abeyta was one of our most profound Pueblo thinkers. He was greatly influenced by one of the nation’s most prominent education reformers, Jerome Bruner, at Harvard University. He was the first Pueblo graduate from Harvard’s School of Education, where he earned a Master’s in Education Administration. The late Hayes Lewis (Zuni), the first Pueblo Superintendent of a public school district in New Mexico, would say, “Joe Abeyta paved the way for many of us and taught us to think and believe we belonged in these places.”

## ABANDONED AT THE CROSSROADS

The impact of the first Indian Education Policy that created boarding schools in the late 19th century, like the Santa Fe Indian School (SFIS) in 1890, and a decade earlier, the Albuquerque Indian School, subjected our people to the cruelties of the inflictions and impositions of the federal government’s weaponization of education to assimilate us. However, Pueblo leaders persistently advocated for language and culture as necessary for the education of their children and to push against the injustice of imposing Western models upon their children. By the 1930s, led by Pueblo artists and cultural educators, they achieved this by infusing a focus on the richness of their culture and traditions. This balanced approach was central to Mr. Abeyta’s vision of education transformation.

With a shift in federal policy in the 1940s, Pueblo students were forced to integrate into public schools. By the ‘50s, *Termination* became the new policy, and in 1962, SFIS was closed. Students who desired to remain in the boarding school system (the lesser of two evils) were forced to attend Albuquerque Indian School. By that time, with diminished federal support, that school quickly deteriorated and repeatedly was threatened to be closed and condemned. It became, as Joe Abeyta described it, “a warehouse of children no one wanted.”

## “IF IT’S GOING TO BE, IT’S UP TO US.”

In one of the historic moments in recent Indian education, the All Pueblo Council of Governors, led by its visionary chairman, Delfin Lovato (Santo Domingo/Ohkay Owingeh), began an extraordinary quest and campaign to reclaim the SFIS. The APIC would use the new federal policy introduced by President Richard Nixon and signed into law by President Gerald Ford, the Self Determination and Indian Education Act, as the vehicle.

The chairman and the All Pueblo Council would call on a young Harvard Indian educator, who was in pursuit of his Ph.D. at the University of New Mexico, to join the effort to reclaim and redefine education as envisioned by the elders. The chairman said, “If it’s going to be, it’s up to us.”

## THE JOURNEY TO SELF DETERMINATION

At the age of 32, Abeyta was asked to take on the task on behalf of the Pueblo governors to prepare to take control. In 1977, in just six months, a proposal had to be put together to establish a contract for the Albuquerque Indian School. One governor stated, “Why are we contracting for a school in such dilapidation? We would be better off to contract for the war in Vietnam.” But another elder governor said, “This is for our children. We must take responsibility for the love of our children.” Thus began a storied journey.

## FROM ALBUQUERQUE INDIAN SCHOOL TO RECLAIMING THE SANTA FE INDIAN SCHOOL

The All Indian Pueblo Council (AIPC), led by Mr. Abeyta (to the disbelief of many), became the first consortium of tribes in the nation to seek to effectuate and establish a contract under the new law of self-determination in education. With a brilliant strategy, they forced the federal government to close a school that had deteriorated because of their own neglect, and resettle Pueblo children on their own lands at the Santa Fe Indian School. They were given an impossible mission to get all of the federally recognized tribes to sign on in order to relocate the national Institute of Indian Arts (IAIA).

Crisscrossing Indian Country, former Gov. Frank Tenorio, secretary of the AIPC, and others, secured that requested support. With that prerequisite met, Mr. Abeyta appeared before Congress to make the case. Three months later, the Secretary of Interior informed the AIPC that a decision was made to move IAIA to a new location and transfer students in grades 7-12 to the SFIS. An elder San Felipe man summed it up: “It was because of our faith and prayers that we did this for our children.”

## TRANSFORMING EDUCATION TO A SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE CONTROLLED BY PUEBLO PEOPLE

From a “warehouse of children no one wanted” to the first contracted tribal school under Self Determination and the Indian Act, the SFIS went on to receive the Excellence in Education Award. Upon its return, Mr. Abeyta and I, as Chairman of the Board of Trustees, took the emblem given to Mr. Abeyta and school leaders in a White House ceremony to a Pueblo medicine man to be blessed. In a prayer of thanks, the medicine man said, “I have given it my breath to bring it to life to guide the school to nurture the minds and hearts of our children to love, respect and have compassion.” It was the ultimate statement of the vision Mr. Abeyta espoused in creating a balance of all that defines who we are, while developing the skills and tools needed to protect our way of life. He said, “We want our children to survive and thrive as Indian people. A true Indian education has got to be a system that prepares our kids to continue their own way of life and survive as Indian people in an American world.”

*No person has had a greater influence in the reclaiming and redefining education.*

## OUR CHILDREN DESIRE THE BEST

In 1990, the SFIS celebrated its centennial. As alumni remembered their time at the school, inspections revealed that little new construction had taken place. Two significant efforts led by Mr. Abeyta and myself took place. First was an unprecedented breakthrough against the State of New Mexico Attorney General’s argument citing constitutional violations if the SFIS were to receive state resources. We argued and eventually prevailed in making SFIS eligible to receive state appropriations for programs and infrastructure investment. The second effort was the task of advocating for new school facilities. With the support of senators Domenici and Bingaman, and Congressman Richardson, after a long and difficult journey, SFIS secured support for the largest single Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school construction. Mr. Abeyta nurtured his congressional relationships over many years. With State of New Mexico and Congressional appropriations, the SFIS today has state-of-the-art school facilities second to none. Mr. Abeyta would consistently say, “our children deserve the best.”

## SECURING LANDS FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN

Perhaps equally significant was the effort to secure and return the SFIS lands to the Pueblos. This effort had a nuanced history and layers of land tenure complexities. Early discussions with the city and addressing land grant claims were difficult. But Joe Abeyta’s political astuteness was unwavering. Overcoming local challenges, working with multiple mayors and city councils, was possible because of longstanding friendships since boyhood and through sports. He got the most difficult things accomplished because of his core values and because of the respect, understanding and integrity with which he approached complex situations. It took work with local leaders, the city council, the state Legislature, and ultimately, congressional action to secure the lands and, as Mr. Abeyta coined, “have SFIS become the twentieth pueblo.”

## “OUR PEOPLE WILL SURVIVE BECAUSE OF PEOPLE LIKE MR. ABEYTA.”

This statement from Dr. Joe Sando is fitting in recognizing Joe Abeyta’s accomplishments including the transference of lands into perpetuity. No person has had a greater impact on SFIS’s national prominence and giving legitimacy to community educators as a necessary paradigm shift. He articulated a new vision where language, culture, history and governance are at the heart of education. All of these critical elements were the basis for the enactment of PL 297, the Tribally Controlled Schools Act.

He did not take becoming an architect of policy and legislation lightly. To be in the presence of someone with such a sense of purpose was a blessing. To be part of it is to be blessed. ■

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*Regis Pecos is the longest-serving Chairman of the Board of Trustees at SFIS. He was one of Joseph Abeyta’s close friends.*



# THE HEALTH OF OUR PEOPLE BEGINS BEFORE THE CLINIC: PUEBLO VALUES, YOUTH VOICE AND POLICY ACTION

BY DR. KRISTYN YEPA

Early in my career as a public health nurse, I learned that health begins long before a person enters the health center. I remember receiving a referral to visit an elder in their 90s to check their blood pressure and blood sugar and review their medications. I arrived eager to follow the nursing care plan I had been taught, complete with nursing diagnosis, goals and Western strategies for improving health. But once I entered the home, I quickly realized that none of that could happen respectfully until the elder knew who I was, where I came from and whether I could be trusted.

I was fortunate to be accompanied by a community health representative who had already built that trust. The CHR helped me understand how to enter the community with respect, reciprocity, humility and care. Through those visits, I learned that health and wellness were already present in the elder's life: in their stories, in speaking their native language, in feast days, in traditional foods and in their connection to community.

*Thinking beyond individual behavior and considering the social and tribal determinants of health*

That experience changed my understanding and perspective on tribal health. It taught me that health in a Pueblo community is not only clinical but also relational, cultural and rooted in belonging. For me, the central lesson is clear: Pueblo health is shaped before a clinic visit, through the values and relationships that sustain our people. This belief has guided my work and my understanding of what health means for our people.

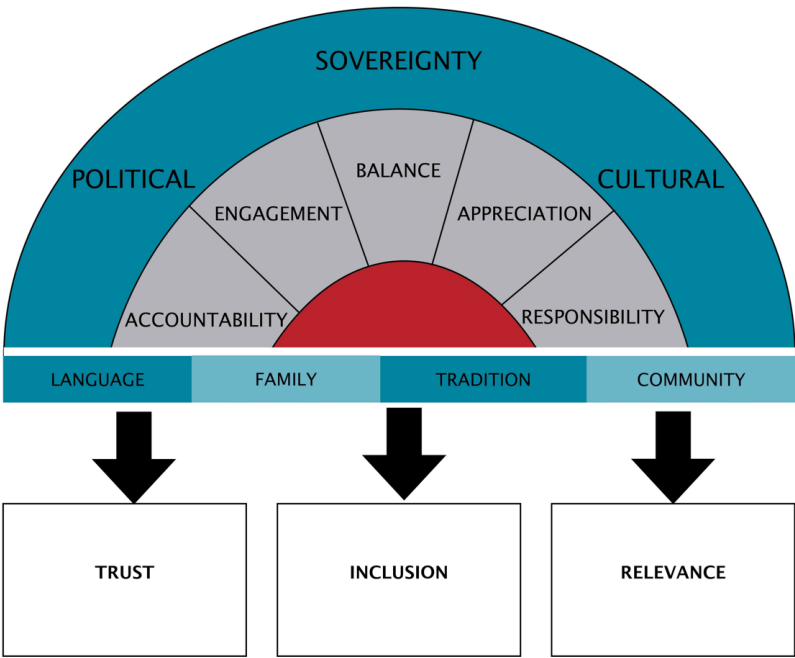
Our Pueblo communities continue to experience health disparities. The data continues to tell the same difficult story: diabetes and diabetes-related deaths, cancer, premature mortality, chronic disease, behavioral health challenges and barriers to specialty care. The data is speaking to us. It should not make us feel hopeless. It should remind us that every number represents a relative, a family member, an elder who holds our stories, or a community member. These disparities also point to policies and systems that shape unequal outcomes, and it is our responsibility to understand them. We must ask ourselves why this remains our reality and what it will take to move from what is to what could be.

My understanding of these issues deepened while visiting elders and patients with diabetes in their homes. I provided education about food, exercise, medications and blood sugar control, but I soon understood that information alone was not enough. A family that often experiences unstable housing, transportation barriers, caregiving responsibilities, financial stress or limited access to healthy food cannot simply be told to “eat better” and “exercise more.” I realized that our health is shaped by the conditions that surround us.

Those experiences pushed me to think beyond individual behavior and consider the social determinants of health. Even further, I considered tribal determinants of health. It made me wonder what had allowed earlier generations to remain active, connected, and live well into their 80s and 90s. What has changed? Just as importantly, what strengths remain? I became interested in the cultural, relational and community conditions that help people feel valued, have autonomy, and experience a good quality of life. Those questions continue to guide how I think about Pueblo health today.

Tribal determinants of health include governance, sovereignty, culture, language, tradition, family and connection to community. These determinants are all connected and influence the conditions that help our Pueblo communities remain balanced, whole and well. They also shape the principles and values that guide our organizations, programs and health systems.

To deepen my understanding of how those systems could better support our communities to thrive, I returned to school and focused my doctoral work on health systems improvement through a Pueblo lens. I wanted to better understand how Western systems are designed,



while also identifying the Pueblo strengths and values that should be carried into those systems. My dissertation used appreciative inquiry to explore the values that help Pueblo people experience trust, inclusion and relevance within health systems.

The conceptual framework that emerged places language, family, tradition and community at the foundation. These support values such as accountability, engagement, balance, appreciation and responsibility, all within the larger context of sovereignty, political authority and cultural identity. Together, these elements shape whether a health system feels trustworthy, inclusive and relevant to the people and community it serves. I believe that when Pueblo values form the foundation of our systems, we are more likely to create care that reflects community priorities and strengthens accountability to our people.

*Pueblo health is shaped before a clinic visit, through the values and relationships that sustain our people.*

COVID-19 made this even clearer. Every decision made by Pueblo governors, tribal councils, boards, directors and program leaders had an immediate effect on health. These decisions affected and shaped our ability to connect with one another, practice our traditions and how we protected our communities. The policies shaped access and



Pueblo Convocation speakers Marita Hinds, Dr. Kristyn Yepa, former Acoma Pueblo Gov. Kurt Riley, Dr. Joyce Noseyoma Chalan



*Our health is shaped by the conditions that surround us.*

accountability. Workforce decisions affected continuity of care. Data infrastructure influenced decision-making.

Partnerships determined whether state and federal resources reached communities. It also revealed the strength of internal tribal partnerships in maximizing resources. Through these experiences, I came to understand that leadership is not simply authority; it is stewardship. Governance is a health practice because the way we lead, allocate resources, and hold systems accountable directly shape the conditions in which our people live.

**SUMMER POLICY ACADEMY, JUNE 2026**

The Santa Fe Indian School Leadership Institute’s Summer Policy Academy (SPA) gives Native high school students an opportunity to study the connections of our history, culture, health, governance and public policy. They use their own lived experience and cultural knowledge to advocate for change. This year, students representing Cochiti, Santo Domingo, Zia, San Felipe, Jemez and Acoma pueblos developed a policy proposal for a tribally led regional healing center in New Mexico. Their vision responds to substance use, alcohol dependency, mental health challenges and related health concerns through a system grounded in Native values, family, language, culture and community.

The students in the health group that I shared my knowledge and experience with connected present-day health disparities to historical policies and laws that disrupted land, family life, language, identity and traditional systems of care. Rather than accepting Western treatment models as the only option, they proposed a culturally grounded continuum of prevention, early intervention,

*This year, SPA students developed a policy proposal for a tribally-led regional healing center in New Mexico.*

treatment, recovery and long-term wellness. Their framework is organized around four principles, referred to as the “4 Rs”: restoration of the individual, reconnection to relationships and identity, revitalization of culture and community and reformation of systems and policies that have not adequately served Native people.

Their recommendations call for stable, direct federal funding, stronger tribal behavioral health infrastructure, development of the Native behavioral health workforce, support for CHR and peer-led services, and meaningful tribal consultation throughout planning and implementation. SPA demonstrates what is possible when young people are given the tools to connect lived experience and cultural knowledge with policy analysis and advocacy, and to turn that into action.

The young people have reinforced that our future generations are thinking and yearning for reconnection. They have brilliant minds, strong cultural values, and love for their families and community to create a brighter and better future for our people. ■



*Dr. Kristyn Yepa is a senior research associate. She was formerly director of public health services at the Pueblo of Isleta and worked for the pueblos of Jemez and Sandia.*

**NEW INDIAN CARE CENTER PLANNED FOR SANTA ANA PUEBLO**

The first major expansion of Indian Health Service services in decades is being designed for Santa Ana Pueblo. Planning for the facility began in 2020. A 235,000-square-foot, multistory facility will provide outpatient services such as diabetes care, tele-behavioral health and traditional healing. Construction is expected to start soon, according to the pueblo’s governor, Myron Armijo.

The new center will be called the Albuquerque Indian Care Center West. It will be located on the pueblo’s land near Tamaya Boulevard in Tamaya Venture’s 1,800-acre Master Business Park next to the New Mexico Soccer Complex.

The clinic will initially serve Santa Ana tribal members but will expand to serve other tribal members in the area. It is projected to have 536 full-time employees by 2035, according to Tamaya Ventures, the pueblo’s economic development arm.

Twenty-two million dollars was allocated by the federal government for the design process in 2025. The total cost of the building has not been announced. The Indian Health Service is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that is responsible for providing federal health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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Since 1926



# More Than Food: Expanding the Conversation on Pueblo Food Sovereignty

BY **TIANA SUAZO**

Pueblo leaders, educators, farmers, artists, youth, officials and knowledge-keepers gathered this spring for the Third Pueblo Convocation with a shared purpose: to reflect on the past, confront today's challenges, and envision a stronger future for Pueblo communities. The Pueblo Convocation provides a space for Pueblo communities to strengthen leadership, identify shared priorities and develop recommendations that can inform tribal, state and federal policy while remaining grounded in Pueblo values.

Among the many conversations taking place was one deceptively simple question: What does food sovereignty mean for Pueblo communities today?

For me, that question has always been rooted in a teaching my grandfather shared many years ago: "Sovereignty means autonomy." It is a simple phrase, yet one that has continued to shape how I understand food, community and responsibility. As I prepared to co-facilitate the Food Sovereignty breakout session, I found myself returning to those words and considering how they might help frame a conversation about the future of Pueblo food systems.

While discussions throughout the Convocation explored topics ranging from language revitalization and governance to education, health, economic development and cultural resources, one breakout session focused on food sovereignty and the role it plays in the future of Pueblo communities.

I had the privilege of co-facilitating that discussion with Aaron Lowden of Acoma Pueblo and the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps. Together, we designed our presentation with a simple goal: before discussing policy, we wanted participants to think more broadly about what food sovereignty actually means. Too often, we begin conversations about food sovereignty with solutions before developing a shared understanding of the issue itself, or even a shared understanding of what food sovereignty truly encompasses. We hoped that by broadening the conversation first, the policy recommendations would emerge from a common vision rather than individual perspectives.

Too often, food sovereignty is reduced to the ability to grow food. While growing food is certainly central, Pueblo food sovereignty reaches much further. It encompasses our relationships with water, healthy soils, seeds, pollinators, livestock, wildlife, climate resilience, traditional ecological knowledge, culture, health, governance, and ultimately, one another. It asks us to consider not only *what* we grow, but *how* we care for the systems that have sustained our communities for countless generations.

*Food sovereignty ultimately means having the ability to make decisions about our own food systems according to our own values.*

This understanding reflects how Pueblo communities have long viewed food, not simply as sustenance, but as a living relationship with land, water, culture and one another. It also aligns with the broader Indigenous food sovereignty movement, which affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to define their own food and agricultural systems according to their own values, knowledge and traditions.

Once participants began exploring food sovereignty through that broader lens, the conversation naturally shifted toward what is needed to strengthen it. Although each

*Thinking critically about how food, culture, governance and policy are connected*



Taos Pueblo farm. Photo: Tiana Suazo

Pueblo brings its own history, priorities and experiences, several unifying themes emerged throughout the discussion.

One of the strongest themes was stewardship. Participants spoke about the responsibility to care for the lands and waters that make agriculture possible. Healthy soils, functioning acequias, clean water, biodiversity and climate resilience were all recognized as essential components of healthy food systems. Caring for these resources is not simply environmental work, it is cultural work, community work and an investment in future

*Strengthening community resilience and creating opportunities for future generations.*

generations.

Another recurring theme was knowledge. Again and again, participants emphasized the importance of preserving traditional agricultural knowledge while creating more opportunities for young people to learn directly from elders. Conversations highlighted seed saving, traditional farming practices, language preservation, and integrating Indigenous agriculture into schools so future generations can continue carrying these teachings forward. Food sovereignty, in this sense, is not only about producing food but about preserving the knowledge that allows Pueblo communities to thrive.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of rebuilding local capacity. Participants envisioned stronger local food systems supported by farmers, community gardens, greenhouses, food hubs, processing facilities and markets that make it possible for Pueblo-grown foods to remain within Pueblo communities. Building that capacity requires investment, collaboration and long-term support, but it also strengthens community resilience and creates opportunities for future generations.

Underlying each of these conversations was the principle of self-determination. Food sovereignty ultimately means having the ability to make decisions about our own food systems according to our own values. Participants recognized that achieving this vision requires collaboration across tribal, state and federal governments while ensuring that Pueblo voices remain at the center of decisions affecting Pueblo communities. The recommendations that emerged from the Convocation reflected this commitment to





Harvested squash, melons and vegetables. Photo: Tiana Suazo

strengthening tribal capacity, protecting cultural knowledge, investing in Indigenous agriculture and supporting community-led solutions.

As I reflected on those conversations, I was reminded that the work of food sovereignty does not end when a meeting concludes. A few weeks later, I had the opportunity to facilitate a session on food sovereignty for students participating in the Summer Policy Academy through the Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School. While the audience was different, the purpose was much the same: to encourage students to think critically

about how food, culture, governance and policy are connected.

What struck me most was how naturally students made those connections. They spoke about water conservation, composting, wildlife management, livestock integration, traditional ecological knowledge, school food, and caring for the land. Their ideas extended far beyond agriculture alone. They already understood that healthy food systems depend upon healthy relationships, with our environment, our communities, and one another.

That gives me hope.

My grandfather has often reminded me that sovereignty means autonomy. Over the years, I have come to understand that autonomy is not built by any one individual, farm, or program. It is cultivated through our relationships with water, land, seeds, language, elders, youth and community.

Food sovereignty is, and always has been, more than food.

Because when we talk about food sovereignty, we are ultimately talking about our future. And the relationships we choose to cultivate today will determine what future generations inherit. ■



Tiana Suazo (Taos and Jemez) is the Regenerative Agriculture and Ranching Program Manager for the Albuquerque-based nonprofit Center of Southwest Culture, Inc. She previously served as executive director of the Red Willow Center on Taos Pueblo, leading farm operations, youth programs and a farmers' market. <https://www.centerofsouthwestculture.org/>



Breakout sessions: Aaron Lowden (Acoma Pueblo) and Tiana Suazo presentations on Native agriculture at the Pueblo Convocation. Photos © Seth Roffman

## TRIBAL WATER RIGHTS

The Navajo, Hopi and San Juan Southern Paiute tribes have negotiated the largest tribal water rights settlement in U.S. history. The total cost? \$5 billion. Congress hasn't approved the settlement, and four Colorado River Basin states (including New Mexico) continue to stand in the way as part of a broader battle over how to divide the dwindling Colorado River.

The fight for these water rights goes back to the landmark 1908 Winters v. United States decision, which affirmed that tribal reservations carry federally protected water rights. Ethyl Branch, a former Navajo attorney general who helped negotiate the settlement, said that the seven basin states are all benefiting in the absence of a settlement. "Everybody's getting free Navajo, Hopi and San Juan Southern Paiute water right now. The water has been stolen for over a century."

If the tribes were to use every drop to which they are entitled, the system of sharing the river that supports more than \$1 trillion in annual economic output would collapse.

To this day, in 2026, thousands of Navajo (and some Hopi) families still don't have running water in their homes. Some estimates indicate that roughly 30-40 percent of homes on the Navajo Nation still lack running water and indoor plumbing. That \$5 billion would be partially used to construct a pipeline that could get running water to people who currently do not have sinks, toilets and showers in their homes. It would also help them build more housing, grow sustainable economies, better protect public health and preserve cultural practices. "Five billion dollars is a small price to finally honor a legal obligation and a basic human necessity," said Justin Kú Huenemann, president/CEO of the New Mexico Community Foundation.



## JEMEZ PUEBLO-BASED NONPROFIT DISTRIBUTING \$1.14M IN FEDERAL BISON GRANTS



A Native-led nonprofit is distributing more than \$1 million in federal grants to tribes and tribal organizations for bison production projects. The Flower Hill Institute (FHI), based in Jemez Pueblo, N.M., received \$1.1 million through the USDA's Bison Production and Marketing Grant Program, which awarded a total of \$3.38 million to three organizations in September 2025. The National Bison Association and Mad Agriculture, both based in Colorado, also received funds to distribute. FHI, the sole Native-led organization, is coordinating with the other grant recipients to maximize impact across the bison industry.

FHI will make approximately six sub-awards of up to \$150,000 for projects that expand bison production and build long-term capacity in Native agriculture. The program encourages whole-animal utilization and aims to reduce waste from processing. Eighty percent of Flower Hill's funds have been directed to sub-awardees, with 20 percent reserved for administrative support and staff. Letters of intent were due at the end of June.

The national bison production and marketing grant is designed to address systemic barriers facing the U.S. bison industry. It helps bison producers address common barriers such as limited processing capacity, market access, or business support. FHI's grant focuses on strengthening business capacity, advancing product innovation, expanding processing knowledge, and increasing industry-wide education and engagement. Flower Hill will fund projects that improve business planning and management, value-added product development, processing knowledge and training, and education opportunities for producers and processors.

"This grant can help us work with tribes and others to make sure that there's the opportunity to bring more bison production back, which in turn can help bring cultural and economic development back," said Dave Carter, Flower Hill's regional technical assistance director. "It lets us put bison back at the center of a food system that helps address those issues in tribal nations."

For Native communities, the bison restoration movement is grounded in the understanding that buffalo are not simply a species to be managed, but relatives whose return helps heal lands, communities and cultural connections that have been disrupted for generations. For many Indigenous nations, in addition to food sovereignty, bison represent ecological balance and a living relationship of reciprocity. Bringing bison back also means bringing back stories, teachings, values and ways of relating to the world that sustained Indigenous peoples for generations. Their restoration also supports biodiversity and opportunities to reconnect youth with traditional knowledge.

*For many Indigenous nations,  
in addition to food sovereignty, bison  
represent ecological balance and a  
living relationship of reciprocity.*



## PUEBLO FARMING: A HISTORY WORTH REMEMBERING

BY GREGORY CAJETE, PH.D.

Pueblos created their communities around the activity of farming. The soils in Pueblo territory were variable, as was the availability of water. Given these environmental challenges, Pueblo people became masterful farmers and evolved numerous and effective strategies for farming. Pueblo farmers ranged far and wide in search of potential farming possibilities. They first ranged through the mesa tops where soils suitable for farming had accumulated. The mesas of the Southwest became the first sites for full-scale food production by the Pueblos.

"The mesa tops had become covered with windblown deposits of reddish soils (loess) that made them a fertile place for growing crops. There are no rivers or perennial streams; in most canyons water runs only following heavy summer thunderstorms or intermittently during the spring snow melt. Annual precipitation varies from 14 to 18 inches, with most of it coming as snow between January and March. This winter precipitation is important for vegetation. There are also reasonably dependable summer rains from mid-July through August. Many small springs and seeps provide drinking water. The frost-free growing season is reasonably long (161-170 days), and there are moderately hot summer temperatures for crop growth." (Ebeling, p. 548.)

The early Pueblo farmers were highly successful in the application of their dryland farming techniques even when cycles of drought, common in these mesa lands, would occur. They accomplished this through the use of multiple strategically-placed garden plots and the construction of many check dams and terraced plots which would collect silt in small washes and canyon bottoms that could then be planted in a short time to provide crops even in the driest seasons. These early Puebloan farmers were experts at anticipating runoff water and working with the unique characteristics of southwestern mesa lands.

Later Pueblo farmers (1300-1600) practiced flood water and irrigation farming as Pueblo populations began to move to more adequate water sources along the Río Grande after the "great drought" that occurred during the 1200s.

At different stages of Pueblo agricultural history, farmers practiced dry farming, runoff farming, flood water farming and irrigation farming. Each of these techniques were practiced as necessary to capitalize on the full utilization of terrain and rainfall.

Farming, traditional foods, pottery, basketry and community are all highly interrelated aspects of Pueblo history, life and tradition. The acts of gathering, growing, preparing and storing food are at the core of Pueblo community life, health and wellbeing. This highly complex relationship to food, combined with its deep cultural meaning, informed the spirit and practice of Pueblo farming.

"The spirit of farming and connection to nature in our Native communities is disappearing with the modern ways of farming. One does not realize the value of the land and crops. Farming used to be done by families who were involved with nature. It was good to get your hands all muddy and dirty; feeling and smelling the earth. We knew which areas were good for planting vegetable gardens and where to plant wheat, corn and alfalfa." (Esther Martinez, 1997.)

There has always been a special relationship between Pueblo people and their gardens. They cared for their gardens as they would care for their family and community. In tending and nurturing their gardens, they also nurtured their own lives. This is the essential lesson of Pueblo gardening. Although much has been lost, Pueblo people still continue to garden and remember the importance



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*Gil Vigil irrigates a field at Tesuque Pueblo. © Seth Roffman*

of gardening as a way to come to know what is important in life, individually and communally.

Plants such as corn, beans and squash have been given a special place in Pueblo Indian traditions. Stories of the origin of corn are connected to the origin of Pueblo people themselves. As has been stated many times, for Pueblo people, corn, in a metaphoric symbol for human life, represents relationship to nature and the expression of a deeply embedded sense of caring for life.

Traditions of farming are still strong in some Pueblo communities. In others, traditions lie dormant as a result of the interplay of historical, economic and socio-cultural factors whose cumulative effect has been to disconnect a whole generation of Pueblo people from their gardening roots, traditional foods and nutritional health.

A natural place to begin the regeneration of the Pueblo gardening tradition is through the creation of Pueblo teaching gardens. There is the natural inclination on the part of many young Pueblo people to bring forward their best qualities when gardening or just being in nature. The garden becomes not only a place to watch plants grow, but a direct way for young people to participate in a greater circle of life. As young people work the soil, plant seeds, nurture seedlings and harvest crops, they experience the fuller development of their “natural connections” and participate in the age-old Pueblo way of connecting to place and living a healthy life.

### **PUEBLO FOODS: AN ENDURING TRADITION**

Traditional uses of plants and animals by Puebloan peoples present at once a unique and highly representative case study of indigenous dietary forms. Pueblos today represent all of the stages of indigenous use of plants and animals, extending from the Paleo-Indian hunters of 8,000 to 15,000 years ago through the hunter-gatherer phase, then through the agricultural phase to the present phase of transition to modern dietary habits. The Pueblo story of traditional foods is also representative of the dilemma of the forces of cultural assimilation and cultural preservation working simultaneously in the modern context of Pueblo communities. The Pueblos have adapted the foods of many traditions into the context of Pueblo life through a selective process that has

categorized foods as traditional, Spanish and American. These categories are very much in line with the historical introduction of these foods to Pueblo communities.

Traditional foods have long been a central form of Pueblo peoples’ life and tradition. Pueblo foods connect Pueblo people to their land, community and to a hunting-gathering and agricultural way of life that has sustained them through a 10,000-year history of relationship in the Southwest. Only within the last few generations has this “way” of traditional food use begun to give way to significant changes. As is true of other Indigenous peoples, with these significant changes in food and lifestyle have come significant incidence of diet-related illness and all the inherent social consequences.

Some important questions include how changes from traditional diets have affected Pueblo health and what are some of the ways Pueblo people may be assisted in their efforts to revitalize their traditional diets and relationship with food.

Traditional Pueblo foods are not only a matter of tradition as a source of historic survival; they are also a sacrament and in and of themselves a representation of

the sacred. Symbolic foods such as corn have a central place in Pueblo traditions. Corn is a part of all aspects of Pueblo social and ceremonial life.

“Corn is who we are,” a phrase used by some Pueblo elders, captures the sentiment and relationship Pueblo people have with regard to corn. As a Pueblo elder relates, “Ever since our emergence from the underworld, corn has had a very special meaning to Pueblo people. We use it in our ceremonies. We use it to live, we use it to feed our animals; we start with it; we end up with it. We give thanks to our creator for its existence.” (Dasheno, 1994.)

In Pueblo tradition, corn is a symbolic representation of a whole complex of agricultural and gathered foods that have been a part of Puebloan adaptation to the southwestern environment. The Pueblo relationship to corn embodies a long history of adaptation of plants as food resources. The Pueblo symbolization of corn, along with that of deer, elk, buffalo and other wild game, represent the twofold foundation of traditional subsistence on plant and animal life. This primal relationship to plants and animals is celebrated in planting, harvesting and rain-bringing dances associated with corn and various animal dances that are performed in conjunction with the yearly cycle of the ceremonial calendar. Such activities commemorate these essential Pueblo relationships in ways that perpetuate key understandings about the use and preservation of these life-giving foods.

In ancient times these plant and animal foods included almost everything edible in the southwestern environment. Excavations at various Paleo-Indian, archaic and basket-maker sites reveal a wide range of species of plants and animals used by Puebloan ancestors.

Bat Cave excavations in the Mogollon region of southwestern New Mexico reveal 61 species of plants and over 1,600 identifiable animal bones. Besides early forms of corn, the gathered plants included varieties of grasses and seeds, prickly pear, cacti, yucca, piñon, mountain sheep, deer, pronghorn, antelope and elk. The bones of small animals found include kangaroo rats, pocket mice, dog, wolf, coyote, rabbits, porcupine, badger, woodrat and pocket gopher, to name only a few.

Bat Cave findings are reflective of what has been termed the “Lakeshore Ecology Phase” dating 8,000 to 10,000 years ago during the beginning of the transition of Southwest Indian populations, from hunter-gatherer cultures to agriculturalists. Bat Cave is an example of settlements established by glacial lakes at the end of the last Ice Age. These ancient lakes provided fish, aquatic insects and varieties of edible plants as food sources for Indian populations of that time as well as excellent soil for planting. It is estimated that well over 600 species of plants, animals and insects may have been used by southwestern Indian groups in this area alone. (Ebeling, p. 456 and p. 461.)

A list of the most common wild plants used by Puebloan peoples would include piñon, juniper berries, cattail, mesquite, Indian rice grass, sedge, wild onion, sego lily, agave, yucca, cottonwood,





Top: Farming at San Ildefonso Pueblo  
Above: Nambe Pueblo harvest  
© Seth Roffman

consistently gathered by Puebloan peoples. Gathered plants such as these combined with the varieties of cultivated corn, beans, squash and, later on, chiles, to form the

mulberry, juniper, mistletoe, wild rhubarb, goose fat, salt bush, amaranth, pokeweed, chickweed, purslane, barberry, desert plume, pepper grass, watercress, Rocky Mountain bee plant, tansy mustard, gooseberry, currant, wild rose hips, thimbleberry, chokecherry, service berry, cat claw, milk vetch, desert mallow, canyon grape, bee balm, puccoon, dog bane, milkweed, snakeweed, buffalo gourd, plantain, devil's claw, wild potato, cut leaf nightshade, green thread, sunflower, rabbit brush, sagebrush, prickly lettuce, marsh elder and chicory.

This is by no means an exhaustive list but is, nonetheless, representative of the diversity of wild edible plants

foundation of traditional plant foods. Traditional foods of the Pueblos also form the foundation for the distinct physiology that evolved among Pueblo people as a result of their adaptation to this unique diet. And, indeed, indigenous peoples' physiology and physical characteristics were largely a subset of the nutritional characteristics of their diets. The historic differences in physical appearance between Indigenous groups residing in different regions and subsisting on different diets were quite apparent. This is to say that there was a characteristic Pueblo physique that was distinct from a Lakota physique that was in turn distinct from a Tlingit or Iroquois physique.

Historically, Puebloans tended to be small to medium in size, sinewy, small muscled and small boned. The Puebloan physique contrasted with that of the Plains Lakota, who tended to be characteristically tall, long-muscled and long-boned as is typical of aboriginal herdsmen around the world. The point here is that nutrition influences physiques of Indian people, and physiques varied from region to region based largely on the types of food that were traditionally eaten. As both Pueblos and Lakota people transitioned to modern diets, their characteristic physiques also began to change. This process continues in today's Pueblo children.

While physical characteristics and their changes can be seen and recorded, physiological changes, on the other hand, are more difficult to track and are noticed only after they become symptomatic. Current tendencies of Puebloan people toward diabetes, heart disease and obesity may, in this context, be said to be symptomatic.

Biologically, desert and semi-desert peoples have adapted to feast and famine cycles characteristic of desert ecologies. It is logical to assume that the physiology of desert- and semi-desert peoples evolved to meet the challenges of their environments. When their lifestyles change dramatically, so does their relative health.

"NIH (National Institute of Health) researchers have long postulated that a developed 'thrifty gene' may be at work, a genetic change that allowed the first inhabitants of North America to adapt to 'feast or famine' conditions before European colonization. According to this theory, the availability of water and food was inconsistent and led Native Americans to store food in extra fat cells for later use... storing calories as fat enabled the tribes to survive famines, resulting in increased insulin secretion. Developed over centuries, this pattern has resulted in a high level of obesity among Indians today, because of high glucose levels and ineffective use of insulin." (Higgins, 1991.)

The above excerpt refers to recent studies done among the Pima. Like the Pima/Papago peoples of Arizona, Puebloan peoples of New Mexico and Arizona share not only a predisposition to diabetes but similar cultural and political challenges such as marginalization and poverty, which also add the reliance on "*the poor man's diet*" as the highly refined, processed, salt/sugar-filled modern diet is sometimes called.

The transition from the traditional diet to the modern (poor man's) diet and lifestyle provides the broad-based context for the dramatic change in Pueblo health. Education about the reasons for this change also sheds light on the reasons for poor health now being experienced by Pueblo people. This transition has a history that must be understood and must be taught about if real and sustained progress is to be made in addressing the compendium of health problems such as diabetes. How did Puebloans and other tribes come to adopt the "poor man's diet," and for some contemporary Pueblos, how can they once again have the opportunity to revitalize their traditional diets as part of their everyday life? These interrelated questions form the foundation for the next segment of this chapter.

## INTRODUCTION OF FOODS, DIETARY CHOICES AND NUTRITIONAL EDUCATION IN PUEBLOAN COMMUNITIES

Food is central to Pueblo communal thought and traditions. Traditionally, every aspect of the gathering, cultivation and sharing of food is steeped in ritual and meaning. In earlier days, the whole of every Pueblo community was intimately tied to securing "food" in some form. As such, food figured in every important traditional education process in Pueblo communities. For instance, young would-be farmers were traditionally taught in formal and informal ways everything they needed to know about planting corn and other traditional Pueblo food staples such as squash, beans, pumpkin, melons and chile. Young Pueblo women were traditionally taught all aspects of food preparation—from grinding corn to baking bread to preparing varieties of meats and stews. This metaphoric and practical relationship to food in turn extended to Pueblo art forms, dance, music, land use and tenure, social organization and world view. Pueblo pottery, for instance, is imbued with symbolic meaning from its very conception, through its production,





Taos Pueblo blue corn and blue corn bread  
© Seth Roffman

and into its use as a utilitarian container of food. The meaning of pottery as a container of life connected to the sacredness of food is a traditional expression of Pueblo understanding of relationship to the sources of life. “Corn is who we are,” therefore has a literal as well as metaphoric meaning in Pueblo history and tradition.

Corn, beans, squash and chile in their various forms combined with gathered foods and wild meats comprised the traditional Pre-Columbian Pueblo diet. With the coming of the Spanish in the mid-late 1500s, extensive additions were made to the foundational diet. Being agriculturalists, the Pueblos accepted many new foods and plants appropriate to Pueblo tastes and the environmental conditions of their homelands. Pueblos learned to eat beef, mutton, chicken, pork and various forms of fruits such as apples, pears and grapes. They also learned to grow and use various new crops such as wheat and herbs such as anise. Yet,

in spite of new introduced foods, Puebloans continued to rely on their traditional cultivated foods as their staples.

When the Santa Fe Trail was opened in the early 1800s, new foods such as coffee, cane sugar and rock salt were introduced to Puebloans for the first time. This was the beginning of the Pueblo transition to the Western diet. But even this was a gradual process, largely based on availability of “American Foods.” Puebloans remained essentially an agricultural society still utilizing their traditional foods until the late 1920s. It was in the 1920s that the railroads arrived in New Mexico and brought with them the full impact of American society and American diets to Pueblo communities. Changes accelerated after World War II as many Pueblo men returned from the military assimilated to many American ways and American foods. After World War II, there was added economic pressure to become more wage-work oriented. This trend had a direct effect on Pueblo agricultural lifestyles. Literally, within two generations, Pueblo communities moved from self-sustaining agriculturally based economies to wage-based economies. The Pueblo generations after World War II adopted wage-work as the predominant means of economic survival.

Economics has enormous influence, not only on lifestyle but also “food style.” As Pueblo people increased their intake of processed foods, degenerative diseases also increased in direct proportion. Beginning with tuberculosis and then evolving to include heart disease, stomach disorders, obesity, diabetes and cancer, the portrait of deteriorating Pueblo health since the early 1920s has been dismal.

Changes in lifestyle and diet among the Pueblos mirror similar changes in other Indigenous groups. Moving from the physicality of farming to the sedentary nature of most wage-work, combined with the “poor man’s diet” and the “ethno-stress” of attempting to live in two worlds are certainly all interrelated factors contributing to the relatively poor state of Pueblo health today.

In all of this, education at various levels is a key to reversing the deterioration. Education of those already afflicted is of course an obvious area of focus. However, chronic illness such as diabetes evolves over time, and the best cure is prevention. An educational emphasis on prevention necessarily begins with awareness, training in diet and nutrition. Awareness as a wise consumer is the first step. Learning to create low sugar-, salt- and fat meals, implementing exercise programs and community awareness are also helpful.

However, all such educational interventions fall short if the factors of revitalization of traditional diet and an understanding of physiological adaptation are not given serious consideration. The revitalization of Indigenous gardens and sustainable gathering of wild foods,

especially those which have protective qualities with regard to diabetes, need also be encouraged.

Ultimately, the choice is that of Pueblo people themselves. By determining to recover their original diets, lifestyle, the tradition of gardening and adopting new and more healthy nutritional habits, Pueblo people can recover from the degenerative diseases of the modern “poor man’s diet.” Such recovery will require a form of health education that is culturally specific and that comes from the revitalization of Pueblo wisdom regarding traditional diet and concept of health and wholeness. This can occur first by introducing Pueblo youth to their own “food history.” This introduction necessarily begins from within Pueblo communities themselves and then extends to include appropriate historical and dietary education as a part of the curricula of schools that Pueblo youth attend.

Next, Pueblo communities must consider the re-introduction or enhancement of Pueblo farming at a “communal” level in ways that each community deems appropriate. This re-emphasis on communal farming creates a context in which important understandings and orientations may be shared and practiced. Finally, it is important for Pueblo communities, and the schools which serve their children, to find ways to collaborate in the education of Pueblo children as it relates to health and nutrition.

Pueblo peoples, and their relationship to their traditional foods, embody the very essence of Pueblo philosophy and ecological ethic. Pueblo people must respond anew to the perennial question of “what is education for” from their own unique frames of reference. Their collective answer to this ancient question carries with it consequences that are more profound now than they have ever been in Pueblo history. There is an old Pueblo saying that is often evoked when these sorts of crucial questions are posed. Variably translated, the saying simply relates that it is time to go to “that place the people talk about.” This is not only a physical place, but also a place of consciousness. It is a place of soul and natural orientation. ■



Gregory Cajete, Ph.D. (Santa Clara Pueblo), is an author and former director of the Native American Studies program at the University of New Mexico. He has pioneered reconciling perspectives on Native science (with its emphasis on health and wellness) and education.

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# RED WILLOW, WATERSHED AND CYCLES OF STEWARDSHIP

BY **MONIKA NEULAND**

Basketry in the Southwest predates pottery. The craft evolved through generations learning about and working with plant materials. Along the Río Grande and its tributaries, the cultural practice of red willow basket weaving remains tied to seasonal observation and water movement. Snowpack, drought, flood cycles, moisture, freeze, regrowth and erosion shape when gathering can begin and whether it happens at all.

“The *yan* (Tewa for willow) is a historian of the winters,” said Jilli Oyenque, an Ohkay Owingeh basket weaver. “The colder the winter, the darker the willow. After frost, leaves fall from the willow. Its skin tightens along the rods. Cold deepens its red color.”

“The willow along the river is at its strongest during its female cycle,” Oyenque explained. “It holds the banks of waterways during the earth’s wakening, when the waterways begin to flow at greater capacity due to snowpack melt and spring rains. I was taught that, during that time, it is working, and to not harvest, to give the *yan* respect.”

*“I learned to weave on the floor. I tell people it is Tewa yoga.” — Jilli Oyenque*

“People want to come into class and have the materials provided,” she said. “Not trek about for an entire day to gather.” Students must learn the willow’s cycles and how to move through cold, wet winter conditions, she said. Harvest begins only after hard freeze, when the plants have gone dormant.

Gathering areas are tended over years of careful stewardship to regenerate the plants for future use. This requires recognizing new shoots and selecting usable rods. “To sustain good growth, I trim from the bottom, never topping the plants,” Oyenque said. “If a plant is very thick, I trim it so that it does not get overly large and overgrown.”

She has returned to some gathering areas for 26 years. Apprentices follow and observe. “My gathering is a solitary effort. I bring someone along for safety, but nothing is required of them except to be present. I enter the area and say a prayer of thanks and just put my head down to gather,” Oyenque described hearing water, birds and wildlife while constantly remaining aware of her surroundings.



*Jilli Oyenque, a basketweaver from the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh*

Bundles of rods are tied and laid along the return path. They are carried home and allowed to rest for several days before weaving begins. What returns from the riverbanks is carried directly into daily life. It is often closely tied to utilitarian uses, such as for carrying, storage and food. A basket remains close to the body and close to nourishment.

The weaving of these baskets demonstrates sophisticated systems of structure and observation. Rods move over and under one another. Tension, spacing, flexibility, compression and patterns gradually emerge, mimicking the way vegetation along the water’s edge—willow, roots, brush, flood debris and regrowth—is



*Oyenque’s baskets*



*Oyenque with red willow branches*

held together.

Oyenque’s work reflects a long history of teaching and stewardship in the Río Grande corridor. “I learned to weave on the floor,” she said. “People always comment on the way I sit. I tell them it is Tewa yoga.”

In 2009, she participated in the Los Luceros Basketmakers Gathering, organized through the New Mexico Arts Folk Arts Program. That event brought together weavers from tribes and pueblos across New Mexico. They discussed how they gather materials, exchanged techniques and talked about how weaving knowledge could be passed on to future generations. For years,

she has also attended an annual event at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, where basket makers from across the Southwest teach, exchange ideas, and publicly demonstrate their work.

This spring, Oyenque returned to Los Luceros Historic Site near Alcalde as one of the featured lineage holders at the Northern Río Grande National Heritage Area Cultures and Creators Festival. She presented both traditional basket forms and red willow animal figures inspired by ancestral Pueblo art.

As water levels decline across New Mexico, the willow continues to record drought, freeze, flood and recovery. In that way, the river remains inside the basket. “The willow has become shorter from the time I began weaving,” Oyenque said. “What was once 10- to 12-foot tall is now four to six feet. Our seasons are drier, and the heat is increasing. In drought seasons I have not gathered, so that the animals have nourishment.” ■

*Monika Neuland is director of development and programs for the Río Grande National Heritage Area.*



# Grounded in Clay

## – The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery

Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque

THROUGH FEBRUARY 21, 2027

*Grounded in Clay – The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery* is a landmark exhibition at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (IPCC) that honors the ancestors and uplifts the enduring strength, creativity and sovereignty of Pueblo people. The exhibition brings forward contemporary Pueblo voices to reclaim and recontextualize historic pottery from Pueblo communities, centering Indigenous knowledge, traditions and lived experience. More than 100 historical and contemporary works celebrate Pueblo pots as vessels that carry community-based knowledge and personal experience.

For centuries, Pueblo pottery has served not only as an utilitarian art form but also as a powerfully intangible element that sits at the very heart of Pueblo cultures. Whether it exists in the forefront of one person's life or remains a gentle hum in the background of another, pottery and the clay from which it is born is reflected throughout the origins, histories and homes of Pueblo families and communities. Pueblo pottery vibrates with the stories and experiences of those who made them, as well as the many people who have become a part of their history. This exhibition is a rare opportunity to explore these intrinsic relationships and stories from a first-person perspective. Recognizing the diverse viewpoints and multitude of stories held within and on the walls of these vessels, *Grounded in Clay* highlights just some of the thousands of stories that they contain.

*Pueblo pottery is imbued with symbolic meaning from its very conception, through its production and into its use as a utilitarian container of food. The meaning of pottery as a container of life connected to the sacredness of food is a traditional expression of Pueblo understanding of relationship to the sources of life. – Gregory Cajete, Ph.D.*

The exhibition is being presented by the IPCC in partnership with the School for Advanced Research (SAR) and the Vilcek Foundation. It was curated by the Pueblo Pottery Collective, a group of more than 60 individuals from Pueblo communities throughout the Southwest. The collective includes potters, designers and other artists, as well as writers, poets, community leaders and museum professionals. A small number of non-Pueblo museum professionals worked as facilitators and writers for this project, and are also part of the collective. The IPCC's presentation of *Grounded in Clay* also celebrates and emphasizes the importance of water through dark blue and light turquoise colors.

In February, curators, IPCC staff and museum visitors gathered to celebrate *Grounded in Clay's* return to the Southwest after a four-year national tour. After visiting the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Vilcek Foundation, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Saint Louis Art

Museum, it is now the headline program of the IPCC's 50th anniversary celebration. The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, founded by the 19 pueblos of New Mexico, was designed to remind visitors that the lands from which this pottery comes hold deep history. Once the site of the Albuquerque Indian School and within the unceded homelands of the Tiwa people, today the IPCC and the 19 Pueblos District is a vibrant hub for Pueblo expression and community. ■



Photos shot at the opening of "Grounded in Clay"  
© Seth Roffman



# I AM CLAY: ACOMA LIFE IN FIGURES

## FIGURATIVE POTTERY TRADITION OF ACOMA PUEBLO

*Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe*  
**THROUGH NOV. 30**

The Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) is currently presenting *I Am Clay: Acoma Life in Figures*, a community-curated exhibition that explores the rich tradition of figurative pottery from Acoma Pueblo. The exhibition highlights the creativity, resilience and artistic innovation of Acoma potters through more than 120 works from the museum’s collection alongside significant loans from regional institutions and private collections.

*I Am Clay* is the first exhibition devoted exclusively to the figurative pottery of Acoma Pueblo, one of the oldest continuously inhabited communities in the United States. While Acoma pottery is widely celebrated for its thin-walled traditional forms



with fine-line painting and geometric designs, this exhibition expands the narrative to foreground human and animal figures as well as scenes of everyday life. These works reveal the ways artists have responded to family traditions, economic realities, the influence of tourism and ongoing artistic innovation.

Curated by Acoma potters Prudy Correa, Claudia Mitchell, Marilyn Ray and Maria “Lilly” Salvador, alongside cultural consultant and guest curator Brian Vallo, the exhibition centers Indigenous knowledge, lived experience and artistic voice. Through artist-written texts, filmed interviews, a gallery guide and newly commissioned works, *I Am Clay* emphasizes self-representation and storytelling. “For generations, Acoma potters have been guided by the clay mother, molding and shaping her into the form that she chooses to become,” said Vallo.

The exhibition is MOIFA’s contribution to Handwork 2026, a nationwide initiative organized by Craft in America to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. The initiative seeks to highlight often overlooked stories of American craft, including Indigenous art.

“*I Am Clay* recognizes the depth and innovation within Acoma figurative pottery, a genre that has often been overlooked in broader conversations about Pueblo ceramics,” said Laura Addison, curator of North American & European Collections at MOIFA. “These works carry stories of



Brian Vallo (Acoma Pueblo) at the third Pueblo Convocation

family, community, adaptation and creativity, reflecting how Acoma artists have continually shaped tradition while responding to changing worlds.”

Following its presentation in Santa Fe, *I Am Clay: Acoma Life in Figures* will travel to Haak’u Museum at Acoma Pueblo, where it will open in February 2027. ■

## FROM THE INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER



**Indian Pueblo Cultural Center**  
Gateway to Pueblo Culture since 1976

As the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center marks its 50th anniversary, we honor the foresight of our founders and the enduring leadership of the 19 Pueblos

who have carried this vision forward for five decades. Rooted in shared values and a profound respect for our Pueblo culture, IPCC stands as a place of learning, pride and connection where our history is preserved, our present is celebrated and our future is shaped.

Situated on the former grounds of the Albuquerque Indian School, our campus represents far more than a physical space. It embodies a collective commitment to stewardship, the expression of Pueblo values, and the creation of a lasting legacy. Today, that vision continues to grow: The IPCC campus is evolving into a globally recognized cultural and economic corridor dedicated to preserving, sharing and celebrating Pueblo culture. In doing so, it strengthens IPCC’s role as a premier destination for cultural tourism, education and meaningful exchange, welcoming Pueblo communities and visitors from around the world.

To commemorate this milestone year, IPCC has created a special 50th Anniversary logo. The design retains the familiar look of the IPCC logo with the Avanyu [Pueblo water serpent] and names of the 19 Pueblos encircling Avanyu to represent unity and collective strength. The border draws inspiration from Pueblo pottery designs—many of which can be seen in the museum—and incorporates turquoise, a traditional Pueblo color, adding a vibrant and meaningful element to the anniversary design.

## STATE AWARDS \$92.9 MILLION TO NEW MEXICO TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

*Funding for critical water, wastewater, road, broadband and infrastructure*

The New Mexico Tribal Infrastructure Fund Board has announced \$92.9 million in awards for transformational infrastructure projects across New Mexico that will enhance quality of life for tribal communities and benefit surrounding communities. The projects address critical water quality concerns including arsenic and radionuclide contamination. They will support healthcare and wellness facilities, public safety infrastructure, educational facilities, roads, community centers and government buildings.

Pojoaque Pueblo, Santo Domingo Pueblo, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Sandia Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo, Santa Clara Pueblo, Zuni Pueblo, Fort Sill Apache, Jemez Pueblo, San Felipe Pueblo, and multiple chapters of the Navajo Nation all received awards this cycle.

“These awards reflect investment in infrastructure projects tribal communities have identified as critical to public health, safety and long-term sustainability,” said New Mexico Indian Affairs Secretary Josett Monette. “Since 2006, the fund has awarded nearly \$419 million for more than 363 projects across New Mexico.”

The funding comes from state appropriations and severance tax bond allocations authorized by the Legislature. Funding recommendations are evaluated through a competitive review process led by the Tribal Infrastructure Fund Board, which includes tribal and state representatives.

This year’s awards fund 23 projects including:

- \$2,506,725 for Pojoaque Pueblo Wellness Center renovations to restore health services, including reopening the center’s pool, which served more than 800 people each month from the pueblo and surrounding communities.
- \$13,939,000 for the Sandia Pueblo Health Care Facility expansion, increasing access to comprehensive health care services. This project will modernize and enhance the 30-year-old facility that provides medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmaceutical, diagnostic and preventive care services.
- \$24,005,300 for multiple Navajo Nation chapters, supporting seven water infrastructure projects, improvements to aging and deteriorating water systems, expanding access to safe and reliable potable water, reducing the necessity of hauling water for rural families.



# Indigenous Solutions: Culture as Economic Development Strategy

BY DEBORAH TORRES

For generations, Indigenous communities have carried forward knowledge systems that have sustained people, places and traditions through periods of tremendous change. Today, those same knowledge systems are helping shape innovative solutions to some of the most pressing economic and social challenges facing Native communities.

Across New Mexico and throughout Indian Country, Indigenous leaders are demonstrating that economic development does not require communities to abandon their cultural values. Instead, many of the most successful initiatives are rooted in culture itself.

Too often, economic development has been measured solely through traditional metrics such as jobs created, buildings constructed or dollars invested. While these indicators remain important, Indigenous communities frequently define success more broadly—considering the health of families, the preservation of language, the continuation of cultural practices, stewardship of land and water, and opportunities for future generations.

This perspective is creating a different model of development. Native-owned businesses are increasingly serving as examples of how entrepreneurship can strengthen both economies and communities. Artists, farmers, guides, educators, food producers, technology innovators and small business owners are building enterprises that create revenue while also preserving cultural knowledge and supporting local traditions.

## *Entrepreneurship can strengthen both economies and communities.*

Tourism provides one example. Visitors to New Mexico are increasingly seeking meaningful experiences that connect them to the people, cultures and histories of the places they visit. Indigenous-led cultural tourism offers opportunities for authentic engagement while ensuring that Native communities maintain ownership of their stories, perspectives and cultural resources.

When developed thoughtfully, these experiences create economic opportunities for artists, guides, entrepreneurs and communities while fostering greater understanding among visitors. More importantly, Indigenous-led tourism allows Native people to tell their own stories rather than having others tell those stories for them.

Education is another area where Indigenous solutions are making an impact. Programs that connect youth with language, cultural knowledge, traditional practices, entrepreneurship and leadership development are helping prepare the next generation while reinforcing cultural identity. These efforts demonstrate that cultural preservation and economic advancement are not competing priorities—they are complementary investments in community resilience.

Collaboration is also emerging as a powerful Indigenous solution. Tribal governments, Native entrepreneurs, nonprofits, educational institutions, municipalities and

## *Values that have guided Native communities for centuries: respect, reciprocity, stewardship, community and relationship*



Deborah Torres (third from left) with Native women entrepreneurs

## *Many of the most successful initiatives are rooted in culture itself.*

private-sector partners are increasingly working together to create pathways for business development, workforce training, resource access and community investment. These partnerships recognize that long-term success requires shared responsibility and mutual respect.

Yet significant challenges remain. Many Indigenous communities continue to face barriers related to infrastructure, access to capital, broadband connectivity, workforce development and historical inequities. Recognizing these realities strengthens the case for Indigenous-led solutions by highlighting the importance of investments that are designed with communities rather than imposed upon them.

Perhaps the greatest lesson Indigenous communities offer is that sustainable development must be grounded in relationship—relationship to people, place, culture and future generations.

As communities across the country search for solutions to economic uncertainty, workforce challenges and cultural disconnection, Indigenous approaches provide valuable insight. They remind us that prosperity is not simply about growth. It is about balance.

## *Indigenous-led cultural tourism ensures that Native communities maintain ownership of their stories, perspectives and cultural resources.*

It is about responsibility. And it is about ensuring that progress benefits both present and future generations.

The most powerful Indigenous solutions are not new. They are rooted in values that have guided Native communities for centuries: respect, reciprocity, stewardship, community and relationship.

Those values continue to offer a path forward—not only for Indigenous communities, but for all of us. By recognizing culture as an asset rather than an obstacle to development, policymakers, business leaders and community partners can help create economies that are not only stronger, but more inclusive, resilient and sustainable. ■

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Deborah Torres is a Native-led tourism professional and co-founder with her husband, Elmer Torres, of Passport to Pueblo Country, dedicated to authentic, community-centered Pueblo tourism in New Mexico. 505-301-3956, [WWW.PASSPORTTOPUEBLOCOUNTRY.COM](http://WWW.PASSPORTTOPUEBLOCOUNTRY.COM)



# WHAT’S GOING ON

## ALBUQUERQUE / Online

### **JULY 14 HEALTHY BEVERAGE SUMMIT**

*Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, 2401 12th St. NW*

Youth leaders, educators, researchers and community changemakers uplift Native perspectives that support healthy beverage choices and positive health outcomes for Native communities. \$150. Youth & elder rates available. [NB3FOUNDATION.ORG/HEALTHY-BEVERAGE-SUMMIT/](https://NB3FOUNDATION.ORG/HEALTHY-BEVERAGE-SUMMIT/)

### **JULY 15, 10 AM–2 PM 14TH ANNUAL JOB FAIR**

*Río Grande High School, 2300 Arenal Rd. SW*

126 employers have been featured. Presented by Sen. Michael Padilla.

### **JULY 18, 9 AM–5 PM YOUTH ART MARKET**

*Indian Pueblo Cultural Center*

Young Pueblo artists showcase traditional art techniques. [INDIANPUEBLO.ORG](https://INDIANPUEBLO.ORG)

### **JULY 18, 3–5 PM EXHIBIT OPENING CULTIVATING LIFE: AGRICULTURE IN THE SO. VALLEY**

*Gutiérrez-Hubbell House*

[HTTPS://AMPconcerts.org/event/462434/cultivating-life-agriculture-in-the-south-valley](https://AMPconcerts.org/event/462434/cultivating-life-agriculture-in-the-south-valley)

### **JULY 18, 5–10 PM ROUTE 66 SUMMERFEST**

*Nob Hill*

A tribute to a century of travel along Route 66. Four stages. Music, food, classic cars, artisan vendors. [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YC4XMEKD](https://tinyurl.com/YC4XMEKD)

### **AUG. 29, 5:30–9 PM IPCC GALA 2026**

*Indian Pueblo Cultural Center*

Celebrating the IPCC’s 50th anniversary. Gather in community, honor Pueblo voices and support the ongoing work of cultural preservation and education. \$175. [INDIANPUEBLO.ORG](https://INDIANPUEBLO.ORG)

### **SEPT. 2–3 GOVERNOR’S CONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

*Isleta Resort & Casino*

Priority topics: workforce development, economic diversification, entrepreneurship, energy, infrastructure, leadership development, community growth strategies and emerging economic trends. [NMIDEA@NEWMEXICOIDEA.ORG](mailto:NMIDEA@NEWMEXICOIDEA.ORG)

### **SEPT. 17–19 38TH ANNUAL GREAT MINDS IN STEM CONFERENCE**

*Albuquerque Convention Center*

GMIS inspires and supports students and professionals—especially from underserved communities—to build a diverse and inclusive STEM workforce. Hosted by the Hispano Chamber of Commerce. Info: 323-791-9295

### **SEPT. 19 NM SCIENCE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

Fall conference. Bridging cultures and communities with STEM learning. [WWW.NMSTA2026.COM](https://WWW.NMSTA2026.COM)

### **SEPT. 19, 4 PM SOMOS ALBUQUERQUE**

*National Hispanic Cultural Center, 1701 4th St. SW*

Indoor and outdoor festival featuring local artists, performers, makers and community alongside national music headliners. \$24.95. [HTTPS://WWW.EVENTBRITE.COM/](https://WWW.EVENTBRITE.COM/)

### **THROUGH MAY 31, 2028 COILING KIN: THE LIFE OF PUEBLO POTTERY**

*Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, 500 University Blvd. NE*

23 potters from 14 pueblos selected 70 works from the permanent collection. A deep reflection of clay in Pueblo life. Presented in the round with audio-visual materials. [MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU](https://MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU)

### **TUES.–SUN. 9 AM–5 PM “ONLY IN ALBUQUERQUE”**

*Albuquerque Museum, 2000 Mountain Rd. NW*

Permanent exhibit told through four galleries: Spirited, Courageous, Resourceful and Innovative. Hundreds of the city’s beloved artifacts are featured. \$3–\$6., Free Sun., 9 am–1 pm. [CABQGOV/ARTSCULTURE/](https://CABQGOV/ARTSCULTURE/)

[ALBUQUERQUE-MUSEUM](https://ALBUQUERQUE-MUSEUM)

### **TUES.–SUN. 9 AM–4 PM INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER**

“Gateway to the 19 Pueblos of N.M.” Through Feb. 21, 2027: “Grounded in Clay: The Spirit of Pueblo Pottery.” Special 50th anniversary programming. Cultural dances, restaurant. \$12/\$10/children under 5 free. 505-843-7270, [INDIANPUEBLO.ORG](https://INDIANPUEBLO.ORG)

### **TUES.–SAT. 10 AM–4 ON MAXWELL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

*500 University Blvd. NE*

“People of the Southwest” permanent exhibition celebrates the cultural history of the SW, especially the close relationship people have had with the land. Free admission. 505-277-4405, [HTTPS://MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU](https://MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU)

### **TUES.–SUNDAY, 10 AM–4 PM NUCLEAR PAST AND FUTURE: ART IN ACTION**

*National Hispanic Cultural Center, 1701 Fourth St. NW*

Exhibit explores NM’s nuclear legacy. \$3–\$6. Through Jan. 24, 2027. [NHCCNM.ORG](https://NHCCNM.ORG)

### **NM MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY AND SCIENCE**

*1801 Mountain Rd. NW*

Reopened after seven months of renovations. 505-841-2800, [NMNATURALHISTORY.ORG](https://NMNATURALHISTORY.ORG)

### **RESILIENT FUTURES INITIATIVE**

Dangerous heat, pollution and natural disasters affect all New Mexicans, especially frontline communities. This initiative, facilitated by the City of ABQ’s (CABQ) Sustainability Office, is an effort to future-proof communities in Central NM. [RESILIENTFUTURESNM.ORG](https://RESILIENTFUTURESNM.ORG)

## SANTA FE / Online

### **JULY 9, 6–8 PM**

### **CLIMATE RISK, INSURANCE AND THE FUTURE OF HOMEOWNERSHIP IN THE SOUTHWEST**

*SF Farmers’ Market Pavilion*

Homewise livability speaker series conversation with environmental economist Judson Boomhower. Free. [MBENCOMO@HOMEWISE.ORG](mailto:MBENCOMO@HOMEWISE.ORG)

### **JULY 9, 6–7 PM RIVER TALKS 2026**

*Iconik Red, 1366 Cerrillos Rd.*

UNM Research in the SF Watershed. Dr. Alex Webster of the UNM Biology Dept will explain how scientific studies are transforming water resource management and ecosystem health. Sponsored by The RainCatcher.

### **JULY 14, 6 PM BOOK PRESENTATION**

*Collected Works Bookstore, 202 Galisteo St.*

Maceo Carrillo Martinet, author of *Healing the Land Teaches Us Who We Are: How Indigenous Resistance Can Restore the Earth, Recover Community and Create Sustainable Futures*. [COLLECTEDWORKSBOOKSTORE.COM/EVENTS](https://COLLECTEDWORKSBOOKSTORE.COM/EVENTS)

### **JULY 16–19 WATER/WIND/WISDOM**

Synergia Ranch Conference. Inspiring Regenerative Solutions to Desertification. Keynotes by Jan-Willem Jansens, James and Joyce Skeet and Amanda Bramble. [HTTPS://IE-WATER-CONFERENCE-2026.VERCEL.APP](https://IE-WATER-CONFERENCE-2026.VERCEL.APP)

### **JULY 18, 9 AM–1 PM NATIVE HEALTH RESOURCE FAIR**

*SF Indigenous Center, 1420 Cerrillos Rd.*

Connect with local organizations, community resources, learn about wellness and prevention and receive support for your health needs. Free. 505-660-4210, [WWW.SANTAFEINDIGENOUSCENTER.ORG/HOME](https://WWW.SANTAFEINDIGENOUSCENTER.ORG/HOME)

### **JULY 23, 6 PM BOOK PRESENTATION**

*Collected Works Bookstore*

Acclaimed agrarian activist and ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan, author of *Water in the Desert*. [COLLECTEDWORKSBOOKSTORE.COM/EVENTS](https://COLLECTEDWORKSBOOKSTORE.COM/EVENTS)

### **JULY 28, 4–8:30 PM REPLANTING THE FUTURE: REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE IN NM**

*Christ Church SF, 1213 Don Gaspar Ave.*

Creative SF – Beyond Profit. An evening of inspiring conversations, community connections and practical solutions. Tickets: <https://lnkd/dp/T4KdPu>

### **AUGUST 7–9 TRANSFORMATION & HEALING CONFERENCE**

*New Earth Institute of Southwestern College, 3960 San Felipe Rd. and Online*

“Navigating Modern Chaos: Integrating Ancient Wisdom, Somatic Healing and Creative Practices.” [NEWEARTHINSTITUTE@SWC.EDU](mailto:NEWEARTHINSTITUTE@SWC.EDU)



**AUGUST 7–23**  
**DICHOS EN NICHOS**

*Teatro Paraguas, 3205 Calle Marie*  
A new play from the heart of 1950s northern NM by Sage Vogel. Fri & Sat 7 pm;  
Sundays 2 pm. 505-424-1601, [TEATROPARAGUAS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:TEATROPARAGUAS@GMAIL.COM)

**AUGUST 9, 5–6 PM**  
**“EL AGUA ES VIDA!”**

*The Lensic Performing Arts Center*  
Youth-led intergenerational performance of acequia traditions of northern NM. VIP  
Celebration, 6:30–8:30 pm at the Eldorado Hotel. Tickets: <https://lensic.org/events/>,  
[MOVINGARTSESPANOLA.ORG](http://MOVINGARTSESPANOLA.ORG)

**AUGUST 14**  
**INDIGENOUS WAYS FESTIVAL**

*SF Railyard Water Tower*  
Music, art, culture, storytelling festival presented with Lensic360. [HTTPS://WWW.](https://www.indigenousways.org)  
[INDIGENOUSWAYS.ORG](http://INDIGENOUSWAYS.ORG)

**AUGUST 14–JAN. 3, 2027**  
**STATES OF EROSION: RESHAPING AND RECLAIMING**

*IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, 108 Cathedral Pl.*  
Exploration of contemporary Indigenous art from Canada and the U.S., examining how  
artists engage processes of erosion—material, cultural and political. [HTTPS://IAIA.EDU/](https://iaia.edu/event/states-of-erosion-reshaping-and-reclaiming/)  
[EVENT/STATES-OF-EROSION-RESHAPING-AND-RECLAIMING/](http://EVENT/STATES-OF-EROSION-RESHAPING-AND-RECLAIMING/)

**AUGUST 15–16**  
**SF INDIAN MARKET /FREE INDIAN MARKET**

SF Plaza, Federal Courthouse grounds and surrounding streets. [SWAIA.ORG](http://SWAIA.ORG),  
[FREEINDIANMARKET.ORG](http://FREEINDIANMARKET.ORG)

**THROUGH AUG. 19**  
**QUERENCIA: FINDING ONE’S PLACE IN NATURE**

*H&H Arts, 662 1/2 Canyon Rd.*  
Retrospective of Jack Loeffler’s immersive soundscapes, photography and essays tracing  
ecological thought and Indigenous ways of knowing, spanning decades of work rooted  
in landscapes of the Southwest. [WWW.H-AND-H.ORG](http://WWW.H-AND-H.ORG)

**AUGUST 27, 9:30 AM–12:30 PM**  
**SLOW FOOD SF 2026 FARM TOUR**

*Camino de Paz Montessori School and Farm, Santa Cruz, NM*  
See cows, goats, pastures, greenhouses, milking parlor, creamery and bakery. Taste  
products. Learn how hands-on experiences are integrated with academics for students.  
\$44.52. [SLOWFOODSANTAFE@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SLOWFOODSANTAFE@GMAIL.COM)

**AUGUST 28–30**  
**SANTA FE TRADFEST 2026**

*Bishop’s Ridge Camp and Retreat*  
Presented by Friends of Traditional Music. \$25–\$80. Under 18 free. [SANTAFETRADFEST.](http://SANTAFETRADFEST.ORG)  
[ORG](http://ORG)

**THROUGH SEPT. 7**  
**INDIAN THEATER**

SITE Santa Fe, 1606 Paseo de Peralta and IAIA MoCNA, 108 Cathedral Pl.  
“Native Performance, Art and Self-Determination since 1969.” Major exhibition  
highlights performance as a foundational force in contemporary Native art. Free.  
[SITESANTAFE.ORG](http://SITESANTAFE.ORG)

**SEPT. 9–11**  
**SACRED ROOTS, SOVEREIGN FUTURES**

*Buffalo Thunder Resort, Pojoaque, N.M.*  
Tribal leaders, educators, families, advocates and community partners from across  
Nations, pueblos and tribes of NM will come together to strengthen early childhood  
systems. @NewMexicoECECD

**SEPT. 18–20**  
**EARTH USA 2026**

*Scottish Rite Center*  
13th International Conference on Architecture & Construction with Earthen Materials.  
Podium presentations, poster sessions, reception, tours. <https://www.earthusa.org>

**SEPT. 27**  
**INDIGENOUS WAYS RED ROAD POW WOW**

*Santa Fe Rodeo Grounds*  
Song, dance and intergenerational connection. [INDIGENOUSWAYS.ORG](http://INDIGENOUSWAYS.ORG)

**THROUGH SEPTEMBER**  
**MAKOWA: THE WORLDS ABOVE US**

*Museum of Indian Arts & Cultures*  
Exhibition exploring Indigenous relationships with the sky and how stories and sciences  
speak to one another. [WWW.INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG](http://WWW.INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG)

**OCT. 3–DEC. 19, FRIDAYS. 8:30 AM–12:30 PM**

**EV OPERATIONS BOOTCAMP**

*SF Community College*  
Understanding hybrid and electric vehicle diagnostics, repair and safety.  
Free to qualified NM residents. [HTTPS://SFCC.AUGUSOFT.NET](https://sfcc.augusoft.net), 505-428-1324,  
[CANDICE.MIRABAL@SFCC.EDU](mailto:CANDICE.MIRABAL@SFCC.EDU)

**OCT. 11–12, 9 AM–4:30 PM**  
**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY WEEKEND**

*Santa Fe Plaza*  
10/11: Gourd Dance. 10/12: Honoring Native Nations Powwow. Grand entry,  
Parade of Nations. Gather in community. Hosted by the SF Indigenous Center. Free.  
[SANTAFEINDIGENOUSCENTER.ORG](http://SANTAFEINDIGENOUSCENTER.ORG)

**THROUGH OCT. 18**  
**CONTINUUM: BLINDFALL, FIRST STRIKE (CONTINUUM)**

*Vladem Contemporary/ NM Museum of Art*  
Immersive exhibition by Virgil Ortiz and Eric F. Garcia evokes the spirit of Pueblo  
people through clay, painting, fashion, film and installation. The past is reimaged as a  
living force that shapes the present and future. \$3–\$12. [NMARTMUSEUM.ORG](http://NMARTMUSEUM.ORG)

**OCT. 19–21**  
**AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION–NM**

State Conference. Theme: Planning Close to Home: Good Neighbors, Great Places.  
[HTTPS://NEWMEXICO.PLANNING.ORG](https://newmexico.planning.org)

**THROUGH OCT. 4**  
**ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS**

*New Mexico Museum of Art, 107 W. Palace Ave.*  
Photographic exhibition of Route 66 landmarks traces visual and cultural legacy of  
America’s storied highway. [HTTPS://WWW.NMARTMUSEUM.ORG](https://www.nmartmuseum.org)

**THROUGH NOV. 30**  
**I AM CLAY: ACOMA LIFE IN FIGURES**

*Museum of International Folk Art, 706 Cam. Lejo*  
Community-curated show of figurative pottery works by Acoma Pueblo artists from  
ancient times and today. 505-476-1204, \$3–\$12, [MOIFA.ORG](http://MOIFA.ORG)

**THROUGH JAN. 3, 2027**  
**BUILDING WORLDS: KEN FURY AND GARY MEDINA COOK**

*IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts*  
Contemporary Genízaro artists shed light on a long obscured history of cultural  
narratives of the Southwest. [HTTPS://IAIA.EDU/EVENT/BUILDING-WORLDS-KEN-FURY-](https://iaia.edu/event/building-worlds-ken-fury-gary-medina-cook/)  
[GARY-MEDINA-COOK/](http://GARY-MEDINA-COOK/)

**THROUGH MARCH 7, 2027**  
**“STARS, STRIPES AND FIRST AMERICANS”**

*Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, 710 Cam. Lejo*  
The many meanings of the American flag, as seen on objects from the late 19th century  
through the 21st. Also, “Route 66 Is Indian Country.” \$7–\$12.Closed Mondays. 505-476-  
1269, [INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG](http://INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG)

**SEPT. 5 OPENING**  
**“1912”**

*NM History Museum*  
New exhibition offers a snapshot of the state at a time of remarkable change and growth,  
exploring what formally tied 327,000 Nuevo Mexicanos to the union. Through Sept. 12,  
2027.

**SATURDAYS THROUGH DEC., 9 AM–2 PM**  
**SANTA FE ARTISTS MARKET**

*The Railyard north of the Water Tower*  
Local juried artists sell fine art and crafts. [INFO@SANTAFEARTISTSMARKET.COM](mailto:INFO@SANTAFEARTISTSMARKET.COM)

**SUNDAYS**  
**RAILYARD ARTISAN MARKET**

*SF Farmers’ Market Pavilion*  
Gifts, souvenirs and mementos from local artisans and creative small businesses.  
[SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM](http://SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM)

**MON.–FRI.**  
**POEH CULTURAL CENTER AND MUSEUM**

*78 Cities of Gold Rd., Pueblo of Pojoaque*  
Di Wae Powa: They Came Back: Historical Pueblo pottery. The Why, group show of  
Native artists. Nah Poeh Meng: core installation highlighting Pueblo artists and history.  
\$7–\$10. 505-455-5041

**MON.–SAT., 8 AM–4 PM**  
**RANDALL DAVEY AUDUBON CENTER & SANCTUARY**

*1800 Upper Canyon Rd.*  
Free guided walks to see birds, Sat., 8:30–10 am. RSVP for Randall Davey House tours.  
505-983-4609, [RANDALLDAVEYAUDUBON.ORG](http://RANDALLDAVEYAUDUBON.ORG)

**TUES., SAT., 8 AM–1 PM**



## SANTA FE FARMERS' MARKET

*Market Pavilion, 1607 Paseo de Peralta*

Farmers and producers from northern NM. 505-983-4098, [SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM](http://SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM)

## TUES.–SUN., THROUGH SEPT. 7.

### ROOTED STRONG: VISIONS OF AMERICA FROM NM

*New Mexico Museum of Art*

Exhibition exploring the layered histories of NM's lands and peoples, highlighting communities, traditions and artistic voices that shape the state and its place within the American story.

## WEDS–FRI. THROUGH DECEMBER

### NUEVO MEXICANO HERITAGE ARTS MUSEUM

*750 Camino Lejo, Museum Hill*

100 Years of Collecting/100 Years of Connecting, historical and contemporary artworks and articles representing daily life in New Mexico. Free admission. 505-982-2226, [HTTPS://NMHERITAGEARTS.ORG](https://NMHERITAGEARTS.ORG)

## WEDS–SAT., 10 AM–6 PM; FRI.–SAT., 10 AM–6:30 PM

### SANTA FE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Interactive exhibits, play areas, weekly programs. \$10/\$8/\$7/\$3/1 & under free. 505-989-8359, [SANTAFECHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG](http://SANTAFECHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG)

## WEDS–SUN.

### EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS

*334 Los Pinos Rd., La Ciénega*

Living History Museum dedicated to the heritage and culture of 18th- and 19th-century New Mexico. 505-471-2261, [GOLONDRINAS.ORG](http://GOLONDRINAS.ORG)

## SAT., 9 AM–2 PM THROUGH DECEMBER

### SANTA FE ARTISTS MARKET

*SF Railyard north of the water tower*

More than 40 artists from around NM. Ceramicists, photographers, woodworkers, jewelry makers, fiber artists, sculptors. Free. [SANTAFEARTISTSMARKET.COM](http://SANTAFEARTISTSMARKET.COM)

## SAT., 9–4, SUN., 10–4

### EL MERCADO DE EL MUSEO

*El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe*

Many vendors. Art, jewelry, herbal remedies, textiles, beads, tapestries, books, furniture and more.

## EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS

### LA CIÉNEGA, N.M.

*Living history museum.* [GOLONDRINAS.ORG](http://GOLONDRINAS.ORG)

## IAIA MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ARTS

*108 Cathedral Place*

Closed Tuesdays. \$5–\$10; under 16, Native and Indigenous peoples free. 888-922-4242, [IAIA.EDU/MOCNA](http://IAIA.EDU/MOCNA)

## MUSEUM OF INDIAN ARTS & CULTURE

*710 Camino Lejo (Museum Hill)*

Maatakuyma: Essential Elements: Art, Environment and Indigenous Futures, Makowa: The Worlds Above Us; Here, Now and Always. \$7–\$12. 10 am–5 pm. Closed Mondays. 505-476-1269, [WWW.INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG](http://WWW.INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG)

## MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART

*706 Cam. Lejo, Museum Hill*

“Protection: Adaptation and Resistance.” More than 45 artists explore themes of climate crisis, struggles for social justice, strengthening communities through ancestral knowledge and imagining a thriving future. \$3–\$12. NM residents free first Sunday of the month.

## NATIVE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

*SF Business Incubator, 3900 Paseo del Sol*

Monthly gatherings for Native American entrepreneurs, artists and business owners to connect, share resources and build pathways to success. Presented by UNM Rainforest Innovations and the City of SF Economic Development Dept.

## NEW MEXICO HISTORY MUSEUM

*113 Lincoln Ave.*

The Lamy Branch of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad model train; Palace Seen and Unseen: A Convergence of History and Archaeology, photos and artifacts; Telling NM: Stories from Then and Now. Closed Mondays. 505-476-5200, [NMHISTORYMUSEUM.ORG](http://NMHISTORYMUSEUM.ORG)

## SANTA FE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Seeking land, donated or for sale, to build affordable housing. Low-income homeowners help build homes and make mortgage payments to the nonprofit HFH. Property owners can qualify for 50% Affordable Housing tax credit through the NM Mortgage Finance Authority. 505-986-5880, ext. 109

## SANTA FE WATERSHED ASSN. EVENTS CALENDAR

[HTTPS://WWW.SANTAFEWATERSHED.ORG/EVENTS/](https://WWW.SANTAFEWATERSHED.ORG/EVENTS/)

## STATE MUSEUMS

Museum of International Folk Art (10 am–5 pm), Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (10 am–4 pm), N.M. History Museum (10 am–4:30 pm), N.M. Museum of Art (Tues.–Sun., 10 am–4 pm). [NEWMEXICOCULTURE.ORG/VISIT](http://NEWMEXICOCULTURE.ORG/VISIT)

## WHEELWRIGHT MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

*704 Cam. Lejo*

10 am–4 pm Tues.–Sat. \$10., children under 12 free. 505-982-4636, [HTTPS://WHEELWRIGHT.ORG](https://WHEELWRIGHT.ORG)

## YOUTHBUILD / YOUTHWORKS!

Paid training for Youth 16–24. Construction, Culinary, GED. 505-989-1855, [WWW.SANTAFEYOUTHWORKS.ORG/SANTA-FE-YOUTHBUILD/](http://WWW.SANTAFEYOUTHWORKS.ORG/SANTA-FE-YOUTHBUILD/)

## ESPAÑOLA

## JULY 11, 10 AM– 2 PM

### NORTHERN NM GARLIC FESTIVAL

*Sostenga Farm, NNMCM, 1028 N. Railroad Ave.*

A celebration of Land, Water, Seeds, Food & Community. Lunch-time speakers and youth activities. Free.

## THROUGH NOV. 4

### FROM THE PUEBLOS TO THE PACIFIC

*Bond House Museum, 706 Bond Street*

Westward explorations across Indian Country during NM's Spanish, Mexican and American eras. Presented by the San Gabriel Historical Society. 505-747-8535, [SG.HISTORY65@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SG.HISTORY65@GMAIL.COM)

## TAOS / Online

## JULY 24–26

### TAOS WRITERS CONFERENCE

*SOMOS, 108 Civic Plaza Dr.*

Early bird registration ends 6/1. [HTTPS://SOMOSTAOS.ORG/TAOS-WRITERS-CONFERENCE/](https://SOMOSTAOS.ORG/TAOS-WRITERS-CONFERENCE/)

## THROUGH FEB. 28, 2027

### DESENTERRANDO FUTUROS / UNEARTHING FUTURES

Exhibit explores adobe as a living practice connecting art, architecture and ancestral knowledge across the Americas. Harwood Museum, 238 Ledoux St.

[HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG](http://HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG)

## THROUGH MARCH 1

### “HONORING THE LIFE AND WORK OF DEANNA AUTUMN LEAF SUAZO”

*Millicent Rogers Museum*

1504 Millicent Rogers Rd.

Open daily. [HTTPS://WWW.MILLICENTROGERS.ORG](https://WWW.MILLICENTROGERS.ORG)

## LA HACIENDA DE LOS MARTÍNEZ

*708 Hacienda Way*

Northern NM-style Spanish colonial “great house” built in 1804 by Severino Martínez. Open daily. [TAOSHISTORICMUSEUM.ORG](http://TAOSHISTORICMUSEUM.ORG)

## HERE & THERE / Online

## JULY 15: LETTER OF INTEREST DUE NM FOOD PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Eligible organizations and food retail enterprises can apply for reimbursement funding for projects that improve food access in underserved communities. [HTTPS://WWW.NMFOODPATHWAYS.ORG](https://WWW.NMFOODPATHWAYS.ORG)

## JULY 17, 5–7 PM

### PRESIDENTIAL FORUM ON THE NAVAJO ECONOMY

*Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort*

A non-partisan forum to elevate economic discourse—centered on entrepreneurship, infrastructure and sustainable growth across the Navajo Nation. Hosted by Change Labs, funded by Native Voices Rising. Open to the public.

## JULY 18, 6:30 AM–4 PM

### URANIUM TAILINGS SPILL COMMEMORATION

*Red Water Pond Rd., Pipeland Rd. Communities, NM*

47th annual. Walk, speakers and discussion, educational booths, silent auction, kids' corner. 505-728-9350, 505-979-0552. Donations: [REDWATERPONDROAD@GMAIL.COM](mailto:REDWATERPONDROAD@GMAIL.COM)

## JULY 19 PUBLIC COMMENT DEADLINE

### URANIUM MINING NEAR MT. TAYLOR

Public comment on the Roca Honda Mining Operations and Reclamation Plan can be emailed: [MMD.MARP@EMDRD.NM.GOV](mailto:MMD.MARP@EMDRD.NM.GOV)



POEH CULTURAL CENTER presents

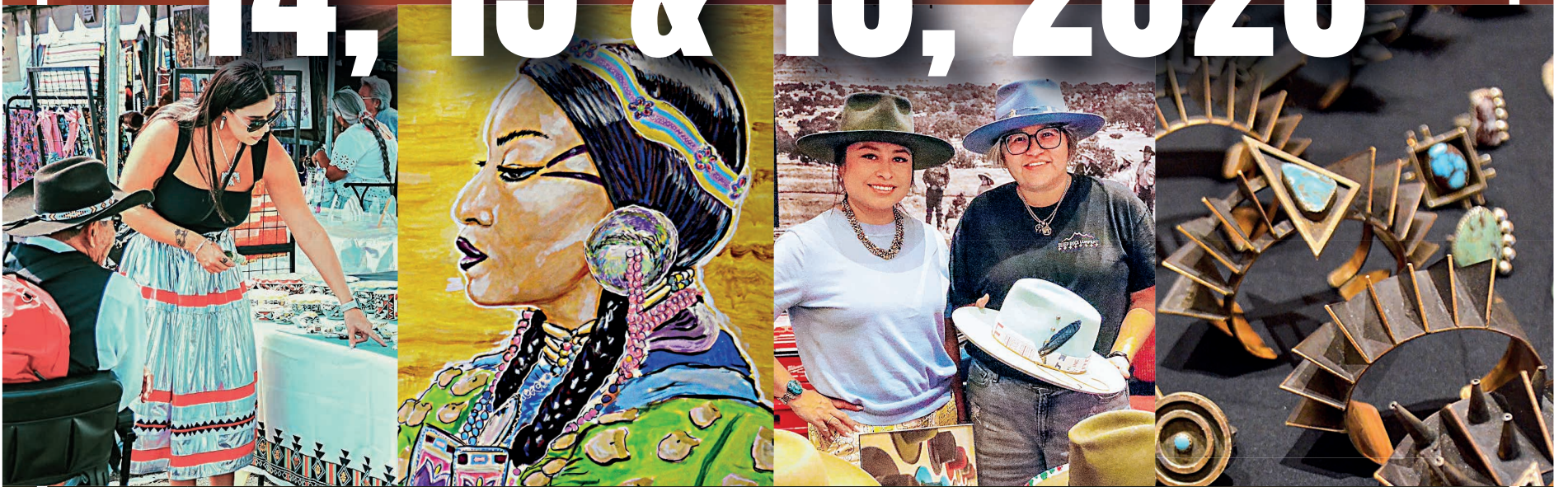
# pathways

## INDIGENOUS ARTS FESTIVAL

BUFFALO THUNDER RESORT & CASINO

# AUGUST

## 14, 15 & 16, 2026



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