



Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

## **Commission Annual Report 2020**

Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

**Purpose:** To advise City of Tulsa and promote welfare and understanding of the Indian people. We also area a liaison to the general public both Indian and Non-Indian on Native American Affairs.

This has been a challenging year for the Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission (GTAIAC). Some of the challenges this year for us have been the unexpected death of two of our commissioners, Cathy Wilkins who chaired our Dream Keepers Award program in late June and another commissioner, Pauline Tsosie passing away due to COVID on November 16. Other challenges were working with Tulsa Public Schools over their proposed changes to the Indian Ed Program, putting on a Virtual Native American Day Event and cancelling two of our signature events for this year due to COVID, our language forum in the spring and our Dream Keepers Award program in November. We did manage to accomplish a few items that I will highlight in this report. GTAIAC has an active commission and we are very proud of the work that we have able to accomplish this year.

### **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

According to the 2010 Census, Tulsa is home to approximately 30,000 Native Americans and Oklahoma's Native American population is 314,203 or 9.3%. Oklahoma is home to 39 Federally Recognized Indian Tribes and even though Tulsa sits on land belonging to the Osage Nation, Muscogee Creek Nation and Cherokee Nation we have many different tribal citizens that reside in the Greater Tulsa Area. This year we have started reading a Land Acknowledgement prior to each meeting. See below.

**“I want to acknowledge the Native American communities whose land we are holding this meeting on today. Oklahoma is home to 39 federally recognized Native American Tribes. The city of Tulsa sits on the boundaries of three of these tribes, Cherokee Nation, Muscogee**



## Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

**Creek Nation, and the Osage Nation. We recognize their history and commitment to our community and the land on which they settled and we honor them.”**

The Commission has also been asked numerous times to provide our Land Acknowledgment statement for other entities that are wishing to start reading them as well and we have gladly shared that statement. One of them is TPS.

## INDIAN ED PROGRAM FOR TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This crazy year of 2020 started off with the GTAIAC continuing to work with Tulsa Public Schools on their proposal to dismantle the Indian Education Department through budget cuts. Chair, Vice-Chair and Members of the commission and the Indian Community rallied around TPS Indian Education Program and have been attending workshops and meetings with TPS to understand the program prior to their proposed decision for program cuts.

GTAIAC sent a letter to Dr. Gist at TPS voicing our concern at the announcement of changing the Indian Ed program and pointing out that this change cannot be linked to the current budget cuts for TPS as this is a Federal Program.



THE GREATER TULSA AREA INDIAN  
AFFAIRS COMMISSION

January 21, 2020

Tulsa Public Schools  
Attn: Dr. Deborah Gist – Superintendent  
3027 S. New Haven Ave.  
Tulsa, OK 74114

Re: Proposed reduction of force by TPS which includes  
Indian Education Employees Memo dated January 14, 2020

Dr. Gist,

The Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission would like to express their concern for the removal of the entire Indian Education Department employees except for the Manager. These employees were notified that they were being eliminated as of July 1, 2020. This elimination of positions you note in your Memo is due solely on the financial situation of the district

As you are well aware the Indian Ed Program at TPS is a Federal Program not funded by TPS and should not be affected by your budget cuts. Our area Native American Students depend on this program which is financially supplemented by the local tribes in our community.

The Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission would like to show our support of the TPS Indian Education Title VI program and ask you to reconsider this decision as the impact to the local area students would be significant. Specifically we would ask TPS to not cut the Tulsa Indian Education Program. We request that you meet with all the stakeholders to discuss the Indian Education Program for TPS prior to the special TPS Board Meeting in Mid February.

Regards,

Cheryl Cohenour  
Chair, The Greater Tulsa Indian Affairs Commission

Commissioners: Vice Chair Vanessa Adams-Harris, Robert Anquoe, Vanessa Cooper, Ann Dupice,  
Faith Harjo Jones, Sammy Haynes, Abby Mashunkashey, Jerri McClelland-Waldrup, Winnie Perdue,  
Patsy Powell, Teresa Runnels, Matthew Roberts, Kimberly Teehee, Pauline Tsosie, Cathy Walkingstick,  
Alice Whitecloud, Dorcas Williams, Shari Williams.

CITY HALL AT ONE TECHNOLOGY CENTER  
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<http://www.cityoftulsa.org/resilience>



Chair and Vice Chair attended several TPS and Parent Committee Meetings both in January and February. Meetings were also held with Dr. Gist as well as the Oklahoma Indian Ed Council and members of the Indian Community. These meetings were to understand TPS's position on cutting the program and then specifically, to look at the data on how the Indian Ed students were performing before TPS to make a decision to change the program. TPS conducted several workshops with both parents of students enrolled in the program as well as the Native Community

With our constant involvement and active role with TPS we were able to work with TPS and provide suggestions of public meetings regarding the Indian Ed Program. We were able to work through several options to revamp the program instead of cutting the program and identify needs for increasing enrollment in the Indian Ed program to continue to serve our Native Students at TPS. I think we came out stronger in the end and have an even better partnership with TPS and the Indian Community.

## STUDENT OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Each year the GTAIAC recognizes outstanding Native American students who have achieved success in their studies at Tulsa Public Schools. This year's program was set for May 5, 2020 but with the rise of COVID-19 virus the awards banquet was cancelled. GTAIAC prepared our certificates and sent them along with a congratulatory letter to each of the students.

### Students of Excellence recognition





Each spring the GTAIAC hosts a Language Forum at the Tulsa City County Library to promote our recognition of the importance of preserving our language. This year this Language forum was scheduled for March and had to be cancelled due to the rise of the COVID-19 virus.

### **ASSISTANCE FOR COMMISSIONER CATHY WILKINS AND FAMILY**

In late June the Chair was contacted by a member of the Indian Community that one of our Commissioners, Cathy Wilkins, was gravely ill and in the hospital and not expected to recover. They needed to have the commission to help them find her next of kin. We contacted the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma to assist us in locating her family as the commissioner had said she was Cherokee. We were not able to determine that she was a member of the tribe in Oklahoma however Cherokee Nation did help us contact the Eastern Band Cherokee and again could not find her registered there either. After getting permission from her landlord to enter her home to search for family documents, the Chair (Cheryl Cohenour) and another commissioner (Pauline Tsosie) were able to identify a family name and another commissioner (Kim Teehee) was able to find the phone numbers of these family members in North Carolina. Unfortunately, she had passed before we found the next of kin. It was the difficult task of the Chair to be the person to provide notice of her death to her family. We continued to work with her next of kin to retrieve and ship her personal effects back to her family and be of any assistance to them that we could.

### **LETTER TO SENATOR LANKFORD**

The Commission penned a letter to Senator Lankford rebuffing his proposal to replace Columbus Day as a Federal Holiday and make Juneteenth the new Federal Holiday. Our letter was in support of Columbus Day being re-named Native American Day and Juneteenth both added as Federal Holiday. (see letter below)



## Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission



GREATER TULSA AREA INDIAN  
AFFAIRS COMMISSION

July 4, 2020

Senator James Lankford  
316 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510.

Senator Lankford:

On behalf of the Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission, I write to express the Commission's opposition to your proposal to replace Columbus Day with Juneteenth as a Federal Holiday. In 2019, the Oklahoma legislature passed overwhelmingly a bill that Governor Stitt signed into law designating Oklahoma Native American Day on the same day as Columbus Day so that the State could celebrate the innumerable accomplishments and rich history of the Tribal Nations and Native peoples who call Oklahoma their home. Similarly, the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and other cities in our State have also designated Native American Day or Indigenous Peoples Day on the same day as Columbus Day so that we can honor the vibrant cultures of Native Americans who are also the original stewards of this land. These celebrations are statewide and growing every year. We request that you reconsider your proposal and instead consider replacing Columbus Day for Native American Day.

While the Commission appreciates the shared history between Native Americans and African Americans and our combined goals of unity, equality, and efforts to expand the understandings of our history, we believe that the dark chapters of the United States history should be told and that the dates and time to do so should be done in collaboration with our respective communities. Tribal Nations, Native peoples, cities and states across the United States have already memorialized our desire to replace Columbus Day with Native American Day. Our hope is that you will listen to our calls to action.

The Commission fully supports a Federal Holiday commemorating Juneteenth as a national day of celebration recognizing the end of slavery in the United States. Juneteenth is an important day as it recognizes that on June 19, 1865, enslaved African-Americans in Galveston, Texas were finally informed that they were liberated albeit a full two and half years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. This day remembering the end of slavery has spread across the country from the largest cities to the smallest towns. We are at a precipice of sweeping change in America that is long overdue. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our African American brothers and sisters to usher in a new day of enlightenment, progress, and unity. We urge you to consult with the African American and Native American communities before proceeding on the current path you are on.

Regards,

Cheryl Cohenour  
Chair  
Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

175 East 2nd Street – 15th Floor – Tulsa, OK 74103  
Office 918.596.7411 | [resilient@cityoftulsa.org](mailto:resilient@cityoftulsa.org)  
<https://www.cityoftulsa.org/government/departments/resilience-and-equity/>

## LETTER TO UNION PUBLIC SCHOOLS RE MASCOT NAME

Since 2003 the GTAIAC has been actively trying to support the community in replacing the Mascot name at Union Public Schools. The Commission prepared and passed a resolution stating that the use of the term Redskins is considered the most offensive and derogatory to most American Indians, the Redskins name, and depiction though a logo and/or as a mascot, glorifies the murder and skinning of American Indians. At that time they were urged to eliminate and change their sports team in the interest of promoting peace in community relationships. Our Commission members have even attended their Board meetings and have been thrown out of these meeting for voicing their opinions. However, this year with the focus on race being so prevalent we took the opportunity to put a little pressure on the Union Board and send a letter and follow it up with attending their Board meetings where this was discussed. We were able to gain support from the Indian



## Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

Community to get as many to attend these meetings. We feel that our community efforts and outreach helped facilitate the Union Public School Board voting in early November to stop using the “Redskin” moniker and seek a new name for their sports teams mascot.



### GREATER TULSA AREA INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION

July 7, 2020

Dr. Kirt Hartzler  
Superintendent  
Union Public Schools  
6636 S. Mingo Road  
Tulsa, OK. 74133

Dr. Kirt Hartzler and Union Board of Education,

On behalf of the Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission (“Commission”) I would like to acknowledge your decision to review the removal of the Redskin name and imagery as the school’s mascot. I write to express the Commission’s opposition to Union Public Schools continued use of the name Redskins as the school’s mascot. We request that Union Public Schools to stop using this racist, derogatory name. As you know, the use of this name has been a source of racial controversy and unrest for decades.

In 2003, the Commission submitted a resolution to the Union Public Schools requesting renaming of the mascot. The resolution read, in part, “the membership of the Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission considers the use of the Union Public School District’s sports team name Redskins, and the sports team logo and/or mascot, as offensive and disrespectful to Greater Tulsa Area American Indians and our culture, heritage, and traditions, and we strongly urge the Union Public School District to eliminate and/or change their sports team name, sports team logo, and/or mascot to names and images that are not offensive to any minority group in the interest of promoting peace and harmonious community relationships.”

While the Commission’s views and request have not changed, our views have evolved. The use of derogatory American Indian images as mascots promotes a stereotypical image of American Indians that has a proven negative impact on the self-esteem of American Indian children. By not changing the mascot, Union Public Schools are perpetuating misrepresentations of our culture and teaching children that it’s appropriate to stereotype American Indians. The use of such images would not be tolerated if any other ethnic group were depicted in a similar manner.

The Commission appreciates that Union High School students participate in the annual City of Tulsa Native American Day celebrations. We hope to have your students participating in this special event for years to come. However, our guidelines for future events will prohibit the display of derogatory mascots or imagery of American Indians on floats or on a person. Our hope is that Union Public Schools will honor our requests and eliminate the stereotypical use of American Indians names and images as its mascot.

The Commission stands ready to discuss this matter with you. We support our public-school systems and I am certain we can work together to make a difference in Tulsa. Your support on this matter is greatly appreciated.

Regards,

Cheryl Cohenour  
Chair  
Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

175 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street – 15<sup>th</sup> Floor – Tulsa, OK 74103  
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<https://www.cityoftulsa.org/government/departments/resilience-and-equity/>

## DREAM KEEPERS AWARD CEREMONY

Every year the Commission recognizes outstanding Native Americans that have contributed to their community. This award banquet is a highlight of our year and honors Native American Leaders who exemplify strong character and have made a difference through solid dedication to public service. This event is held every year in November which is National Native American Heritage Month. The commission decided to cancel this event for 2020 for two reasons. First this event





## Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

is chaired by Cathy Wilkins who passed away at the beginning of July and secondly that it would not be wise to have an award ceremony at this time due to social distancing.

### VIRTUAL NATIVE AMERICAN DAY

The Native American Day committee decided early on this year that we could not in good conscious have the same type of event that we usually do to celebrate Native American Day so we started planning a virtual event for this year. Our Committee selected “Protect the Sacred” as our theme this year and we selected J Nicole Hatfield as our highlighted artist for this year.

Our sponsors this year were OneOk, OneGas, Williams, Oklahoman’s for Equality, Public Service Company of Oklahoma, Tulsa Public Schools and Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa. Without these wonderful sponsors we could not have pulled off a Native American Day celebration this year. Our sponsors give us committee members that spend countless hours of volunteer time to help us pull together this event. This year in particular Tyler Post of OneGas and Tonie Gist of Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa went above and beyond in helping us figure out how to put on a live streaming Native American Day event.

If you missed Tulsa's 4th Annual Native American Day celebration you can watch it on our YouTube channel <https://youtu.be/ef60mWPwmws>.

Greater Tulsa Area  
Indian Affairs Commission

4TH ANNUAL  
**NATIVE  
AMERICAN  
DAY**

*Protect the Sacred*

**MONDAY  
OCTOBER 12, 2020  
9 AM—5 PM  
VIRTUAL EVENT**

**FOLLOW FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
[www.facebook.com/tulsanativeamericanday](https://www.facebook.com/tulsanativeamericanday)  
Art by J. NiCole Hatfield: [www.jnicolehatfield.com](http://www.jnicolehatfield.com)



## Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

The response to our event this year was outstanding! We reached viewers all across the world. We had people checking in from Australia, Scotland, Wales as well as many tribal members from across the US. We received feedback that said there was nothing out there like this that showed Native American Culture and heritage and people really appreciated our event. This means that next year we will have to incorporate a virtual portion to our event.







## **2020 CENSUS AND ROCK THE VOTE CAMPAIGN**

We participated in the 2020 Census push to get the word out how important it is for Native Americans to participate in the Census to both our City and State. Typically, Native Americans do not participate in the Census count nationwide but this year many of the tribes as well as GTAIAC really pushed out information to the Native Community on the importance to participate. GTAIAC also participated in Rock the Vote events to encourage voting in the all elections but specifically the National Election.

Our commission has a robust email list that allows us to blast out to the Native America Community information about events, celebrations, Pow Wows and notable events to the community. This email list had been managed by Cathy Wilkins in the past but has been taken over by Commissioners Sammy Haynes and Abby Mashunkashey as well as Communications employee for City of Tulsa Kim Meloy. They have really stepped up our outside communication with this email list and continue to add to this list.

## **OWEN PARK MEMORIAL RE-DEDICATION**

In October the GTAIAC had a request to assist the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) on a re-dedication of an Indian Memorial located at Owen Park. November, Native American Month was the month the Daughters of the American Revolution selected to re-dedicate the Owen Park Indian Memorial.

The Indian Memorial Marker was placed in a triangle of Owen park, facing Edison Street in November 16, 1935. This marker is a bronze grill work of Indian corn, squash, and beans considered to be the Three Sisters by the Indian Community. The memorial was designed by Mrs. Charles Haralson and manufactured in Tulsa. East of the marker, 682 feet, a round bronze plate was inserted in the pavement to show the exact spot where the lands of the Cherokee, Creek and Osage tribes joined at the time of the original dedication. We are not sure if this bronze plate is still located near I-244.


The Commission reached out to the Osage, Muscogee Creek, and the Cherokee Chiefs to invite them to the Re-Dedication and assisted with the facilitation of the



## Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

ceremony and communication with the tribes and arranged for them to attend and speak at the event. GTAIAC also assisted with the wreath design and generally consulted with the DAR in their planning and assisted them. Many of the Commission attended this event since it was held outside and we practiced social distancing.

The Tulsa Chapter, NSDAR has worked diligently to preserve, protect and rededicate this monument to the Native American History of Tulsa, Oklahoma.



### THREE SISTERS THREE TRIBES





Photo courtesy of Ana Arellano  
"the three sisters" corn, squash and beans.

The bronze grill work on the monument is representative of the Three Sister Legend. The sisters are different from each other but work together to produce a better harvest. The same can be said of the Cherokee, Muscogee Creek and Osage Tribes. They work together for a better Tulsa.

TULSA CHAPTER, NSDAR  
for more information contact:  
[tulsadarcontact@googlegroups.com](mailto:tulsadarcontact@googlegroups.com) or  
Visit [DAR.org](http://DAR.org)

### OWEN PARK: INDIAN MEMORIAL



Tulsa Chapter,  
National Society Daughters of the  
American Revolution  
Rededication Ceremony  
Sunday, November 1st, 2020  
2 pm  
Originally dedicated:  
Statehood Day, November 16th, 1935



*Vickie Hoskinson, DAR; Chief Hoskin, CN; Chief David Hill, Muscogee Creek; Chief Standing Bear, Osage Nation, Osage Nation Princess.*

## **BYLAWS UPDATE**

In January we received comments back from City Legal on our proposed changes to our bylaws. Our discussions continued throughout the year at our monthly commission meeting and in October and November we finally voted on our changes and will be submitting them for final adoption. The major changes to our bylaws had to do with membership on the commission where the commission felt that members should be Native American and either be a member of a Federally recognized tribe, or hold a tribal enrollment card, or have a CDIB card.

## **GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR 2021**

1. Fully Functioning Commission: This end of year leaves the GTAIAC with several openings on the commission. One left by the death of Pauline Tsosie who represented the American Indian Heritage Center and One by the death of Cathy Wilkins who represented the American Indian Arts Association. We will contact both organizations and see if they will be replacing these members. Recently, Joe Deere was appointed as a Mayoral Appointee taking the place of Mitch Cain who resigned in 2019. We also have one available Mayoral Appointee opening as Robert Anquoe, whose term is up in January, has decided to roll off the commission. The Commission would request to have a representative from the Osage Nation and will be happy to submit some names to fill this vacancy.
2. To develop a City-wide Land Acknowledgement statement that can be read at the beginning of all our City meetings and gatherings.



Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

3. Revamp Native American Day Celebration that includes a Virtual Program for the 2021 Celebration.
4. Language Forum in the Spring that will be partnered with the Tulsa City County Library.
5. Revamp Dream Keepers banquet to only seek awardees for the top most meaningful awards. Streamline our awards. Possibly showcase the awards during Native American Day to give the awardees more publicity for their accomplishments.
6. Continuation of working with the City of Tulsa Parks Department on re-naming several of the City's parks that currently have no name affiliation with anyone or any company after notable Native Americans.
7. Continuing the distribution of information to the Indian Community on Food distribution by the local tribes for those that are having food insecurities during this year and for as long as needed.
8. Continue to monitor the Indian Education Program with Tulsa Public Schools to make sure the Indian students are receiving the best educational assistance that they can. Our partnership with TPS will allow us to move forward in this area.
9. Move forward with a movement and campaign on social media and through our email list to encourage Native Americans to get the COVID vaccine once it becomes available for the general public. COVID has had a huge impact on minority communities and we want to provide information on the benefit of getting immunized.

This is the summation of the Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs year for 2020 and our goals for 2021. We are open for any suggestions to each of our goals for next year and any additions.

Sincerely,





Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission

Cheryl Cohenour, Chair  
Greater Tulsa Area Indian Affairs Commission