

# ONEIDA

QUARTERLY MEMBER NEWSLETTER



## NATION CELEBRATES HISTORIC RECOGNITION

Polly Cooper featured on 2026

\$1 Native American Coin

Pgs. 4-5



Spring 2026

# A Message from the Nation Representative

**S**hekólih. The coming of Spring has brought about many blessings for our People, including national recognition of the critical role our Nation played in the founding of the United States, the continued preservation of the Onyota'a:ká: language, the near completion of the largest investment in our flagship enterprise that will help secure our economic future, and an impressive harvest by our team at the Wáhta' Maple Farm.

But, perhaps more important, our community recently came together to honor and celebrate its foundation - our Elders.

You are the ones who guide the next generation with your experience and wisdom, and you play an important role in passing on our traditions and history.

This summer, we will recognize a very important milestone in that history: the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. On July 4th and the weeks leading up to it, local, state and federal governments will celebrate this milestone, including the contributions of our ancestors that made our people America's First Allies.

This legacy was not always celebrated outside our Nation. The brave Oneida warriors who risked their lives—and often gave them—on the bloodiest battlefields of the war somehow slipped from the memories of those they fought alongside. Our stories were omitted from history books and largely forgotten.

Yet our people never forgot. Our Elders ensured that their grandchildren would one day tell their own grandchildren about our role in the founding of this country. This tradition carried on throughout our history. It is part of what has made the revitalization of our people possible. Our Elders have always protected and passed on our stories and traditions so that our culture continued to be a source of pride for their descendants.

Today, as we approach the 250th anniversary of American Independence, our Nation's contributions are a central part of the narrative; told in our own voices and represented accurately.

This includes a recent recognition of Polly Cooper, an Oneida heroine of the Revolutionary War, by the federal government. Nation leadership was able to partner closely with the U.S. Mint to release the 2026 Native American \$1 Coin, which features Polly Cooper and General George Washington. The coin commemorates the role of the Oneida people in providing General Washington's starving troops with food and supplies during the harsh winter at Valley Forge. Upon its release, we gathered with our partners in government to celebrate this recognition of our ancestor and our legacy as America's First Allies.

The work our Elders have done throughout the years to keep this history alive helped make such an honor possible. Without the determination of those who came before us and your continued persistence, so much of our story could have been lost to the past.

The work of preserving our language, our most cherished traditions, and our history exemplifies the highest principle that guides us: that all things must be done for the benefit of the Seventh Generation. By ensuring our legacy is never forgotten, you support all of the work we do as a Nation to ensure future generations will always have a community where they can embrace their culture and take pride in their identity as Members of the Oneida Indian Nation.

This is one of the many reasons it is always such a special honor to come together for the annual Elders Dinner. Like so many who came before, you have helped ensure our past and our present will be carried into the future of our youth.

Thank you to all of our Elders for the work you have done to preserve our heritage and form such a strong foundation for our community, one that will endure further into the future than we can even imagine. We will continue to create a bright future for the Seventh Generation.



Ná ki' wáh,  
Ray Halbritter  
Nation Representative

**ONYOTA'A:KÁ:**

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**TOLL-FREE MEMBER PHONE:**

**1.800.685.6115**

Contact: The Oneida Indian Nation, P.O. Box 1, Vernon, NY 13476 or use the Member App. Visit [www.OneidaIndianNation.com](http://www.OneidaIndianNation.com) for news, information and the latest edition of The Oneida newsletter in PDF format.



years instead of the 40 or more years required by most maple trees. The sap produced is also considerably sweeter, with up to 8 percent sugar content compared to the 1.5-2.5 percent sugar content of standard maple sap.

The new trees will be planted with a specially developed tool that allows just two people to plant up to 1,000 trees daily and protected by 6-foot tubes that prevent damage due to deer and other animals, without chemicals. Diversification of tree species within the sugarbush will also help protect the new maple trees, as the introduction of birch and cherry trees will minimize damage due to disease and pests.

Wáhta' Maple Farm's sustainable practices also continue inside its processing facility, where advanced reverse-osmosis equipment maximizes syrup yield and reduces waste products. All of the maple farm's syrup is certified organic by NOFA-NY Certified Organic LLC as well.



Throughout the season, the farm engaged in collecting the sap around the clock. The sap was then turned into delicious products available this May. Wáhta' Maple Farm products, such as maple syrup, infused flavored syrups, maple cream, maple sugar, candies and a line in partnership with local brand Utica Coffee, are offered at:

- Maple Leaf Market locations
- SāvOn convenience stores
- The General Store at Turning Stone Resort Casino
- YBR Casino & Sports Book
- Sylvan Beach Supply Co., located at The Cove at Sylvan Beach
- The Shako:wi Cultural Center

In addition to continuing the Oneida Indian Nation's enduring commitment to sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, Wáhta' Maple Farm honors the special significance of maple sap and syrup in Haudenosaunee culture. Considered to be a gift from the Creator, maple sap provides a sweet reward for enduring the cold and challenging winters. To enjoy this reward, maple sap must be transformed into syrup, a process that requires a great deal of hard work and collaboration. ❖

## Wáhta' Maple Farm Experiences Record Season, Announces Plans for New Growth

It's been a sweet harvest for the Oneida Indian Nation's Wáhta' Maple Farm with a record-breaking season that nearly exceeds syrup production for the last three years combined. During the 2026 sugaring season, the Wáhta' Maple Farm team tapped 6,700 trees (550 more than the previous year) spanning 75 acres, all of which are maintained without the use of pesticides or other chemicals. The resulting harvest from these existing trees delivered a record-breaking yield of 181,000 gallons of maple sap to produce 2,440 gallons of organic table syrup.

Wáhta' Maple Farm will build upon this historic season and the Nation's long legacy of environmental stewardship with its three-year plan to expand the sugarbush with the planting of 16,000 new super sweet maple trees. This variety of maple grows quickly and will be ready to tap in just 10-15



# U.S. Mint Honors Polly Cooper with 2026 Native American \$1 Coin as America Approaches 250th Anniversary

## *Nation community celebrates historic recognition*

Nearly 200 Oneida Indian Nation Members and their guests filled the atrium of the Mary C. Winder Community Center on the sunny morning of March 1<sup>st</sup> to celebrate the legacy of Oneida heroine Polly Cooper. Earlier this year, the United States Mint honored Polly Cooper—and the Oneida Indian Nation’s history as America’s First Allies—by featuring her on the 2026 \$1 Native American coin.

Recognizing Polly Cooper and the Oneida Indian Nation in this way is especially timely, as this year the United States will observe the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The coin represents the Oneida people’s critical role in the founding of the United States through an alliance grounded in the strong belief in the right of all people to sovereignty and self-determination.



Sheri Beglen (Wolf Clan) gave opening words of thanks and welcome.



Veterans Gil Stout (Turtle Clan) and Irv Lyons Jr. (Turtle Clan), Turtle Clan Council Member Mitch Hoffmeister and veteran Mandy John (Bear Clan).

Beginning in 2009, the U.S. Mint has issued the \$1 Nation American coin to honor the important contributions made by sovereign Native American nations and individuals to the history and development of the United States. The 2026 coin continues this tradition, depicting Polly Cooper with General George Washington as she holds a basket of the white corn she and her fellow Oneidas brought to the Valley Forge encampment. Cooper remained at the encampment all winter, teaching the soldiers how to prepare the corn and cooking for troops to ensure they survived the harsh conditions.

During the gathering, Nation Members were each given their very own Polly Cooper coin with commemorative wooden boxes. A buffet breakfast reception followed, featuring corn mush and corn soup prepared in the traditional way Polly Cooper would have made them.

The inclusion of Polly Cooper in this series of coins “demonstrates the incredible progress we have made in our cultural revitalization and sharing of the true story of our foundational role in American history,” said Nation Representative Ray Halbritter. “Experience has taught us that unless we loudly and proudly share the stories of ancestors like Polly Cooper, whose contributions changed the very course of the Revolutionary War, our critical role in this conflict will be erased.”

Bear Clan Council Member James Patterson and his cousin and USMC veteran, Mandy John (Bear Clan).



Christy Kaulback (Turtle Clan) proudly displays her Polly Cooper coin.



Turtle Clan Council Member Derek Montroy, Nation Representative Ray Halbritter, USMC veteran Nichola Diaz (Turtle Clan) and Turtle Clan Council Member Mitch Hoffmeister.



Donna Stepien (Turtle Clan). Members who purchased extra coins also received commemorative pouches.

Halbritter and the Oneida Indian Nation Council personally presented commemorative Polly Cooper coins to several Oneida Members who are veterans of the armed services. Halbritter noted that Oneida veterans have sacrificed for the greater good, not just for fellow Oneidas, but for all Americans—just as Oneida ancestors did some 250 years ago. Their commitment, Halbritter explained, “is among the many reasons we work so hard to preserve and share this legacy through initiatives like this coin.

The Oneida Indian Nation worked closely with the U.S. Mint to develop the coin’s design and with partners in Congress to secure this federal recognition of Polly Cooper and the Nation’s historic legacy. In February, the Oneida Indian Nation Council joined prominent members of Congress and federal officials in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the coin’s release just months before the 250th anniversary of the nation’s founding; an event Polly Cooper’s courageous actions helped make possible.

Speakers included U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), U.S. Representative Tom Cole (OK-4); Co-Chair of the

Congressional Native American Caucus and Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and enrolled member of the Chickasaw Nation, U.S. Representative Jeff Hurd (CO-3), House Chairman of the Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs and U.S. Representative Sharice Davids (KS-3); The second Native American Women to serve in Congress and Co-Chair of the Congressional Native American Caucus and member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin.

“I often say that tribal sovereignty is not something granted by Congress, it is inherent.” said U.S. Rep. Jeff Hurd (CO-3), House Chairman of the Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs. “Self-determination works when tribes are empowered to decide their own futures. And Congress’ responsibility is to respect that sovereignty, and to honor its commitments.”

The event held in Washington and the support from partners reflects the broad bipartisan support this recognition received and growing appreciation for the Nation’s role as America’s First Allies. ❖



Birdy Burdick (Turtle Clan) and her great grandson, Jesse Alter Jr., descendants of Polly Cooper.

# Elders Honored at Annual Celebration

The Oneida Indian Nation honored one of its most cherished generations in April—our Elders. Each year, the Elders Dinner brings Elders and their families together for a special evening at Turning Stone Resort Casino.

“Attending this year’s Elders Dinner—my very first as an Elder—was truly special,” said Tammy Patterson (Wolf Clan), who is typically busy in her role as Activities Leader in the Elders Program. “I felt honored to be there in a way that was different from any other time I’ve attended. In the past, I came with my mom or as an employee at the Elder Center, but this experience as a guest meant so much more.”

The event gives the community an opportunity to reflect on the impact Elders have had on strengthening the Nation for the current and future generations.

“I brought my daughter with me, and together we were deeply moved, continued Tammy. “Seeing photos of my mom [Rose Tompkins], who has passed, brought us both to tears. In that moment, we felt her presence and missed her dearly. This evening will stay with me, and I’m so grateful to everyone who made it so meaningful. I look forward to many more years attending the Elders Dinner.” ❖



Tammy Patterson with her son, Austin Thomas and daughter, Brooke Dowdy (all Wolf Clan).



David McKinnon (Turtle Clan), Gerard Hill (Turtle Clan) and Carol McKinnon (Turtle Clan).



Pam Hjort (Turtle Clan)



Gloria Kopp (Turtle Clan)

Guests of the 2026 Elders Dinner were treated to a delicious meal that included favorites such as roast sirloin, chicken and turkey, maple glazed salmon, Three Sisters succotash, corn soup, fry bread and more.

Onyota'a:ká: Language Instructor Chelsea Jocko (Wolf Clan) recited the Thanksgiving Address to begin the event and after-dinner entertainment was provided by Chris Thomas (Onondaga) and the Ongwe'hon:wehkah Dancers plus a DJ. Attendees also were eligible to win several door prizes and raffles.



Loretta (Onondaga) and Jim Devereaux (Turtle Clan) and Deb Montroy (Turtle Clan).



Edith Oakly (Wolf Clan) and Wolf Clan Council Member Chuck Fougner





Luanne Pierce (Turtle Clan)



Paul Ordiway (Turtle Clan)



Deb Carey (Turtle Clan)



Barbara George-Winton (Wolf Clan)

## MEMBER PROFILE

# Jeremy Kennedy's Music Journey is Just Beginning

Jeremy Kennedy (Wolf Clan) carried his big news quietly, holding it in for what felt like a lifetime.

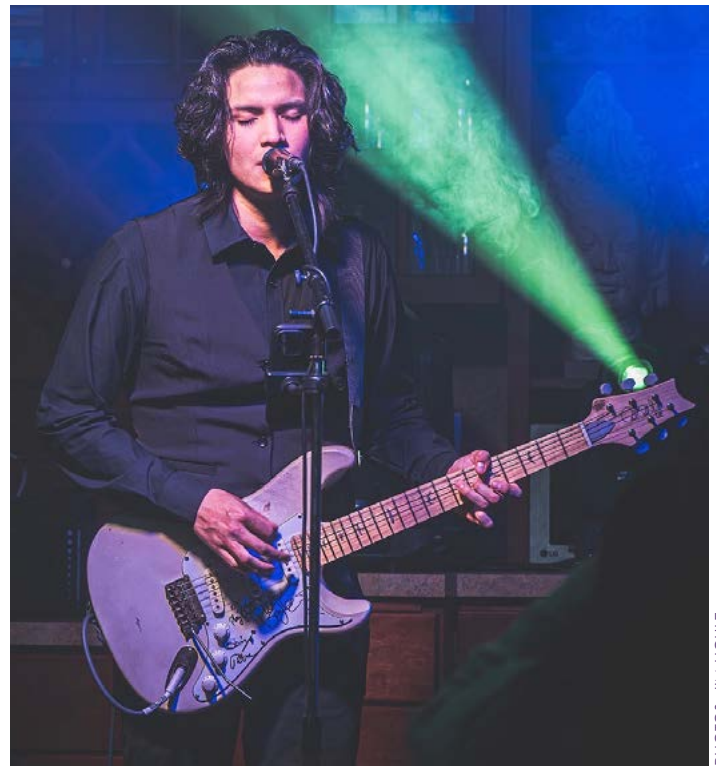
When the call came four months before the Syracuse Area Music Awards (SAMMY's), it caught him completely off guard. They told him he had won the SAMMY Award for Best New Artist, but for now, it had to stay a secret.

Jeremy recalls the brief call: "She told me I was going to receive the award, but not to tell anyone until a certain date... all I could remember thinking was, 'oh my goodness is this really happening?'"

It felt surreal at first, but as the event approached, the moment began to sink in. The award was a tangible acknowledgment of his talent and dedication to his new craft. Jeremy thought about how far he's come in such a short time.

"I just remember how excited I was...and it's such an honor," he said. "But I was walking around with this giant secret in my head that I couldn't say to anyone."

That meant keep it from the people closest to him—his bandmates, the ones he shared stages and rehearsals with, and his parents, who had supported him from the beginning.



PHOTOS: JIM HOULE

When he finally accepted the award, Jeremy reflected on the role his parents played in shaping his musical journey. Music had always been a constant in his life, filling the background of his childhood. At home, his mother Tammy Bluewolf-Kennedy (Wolf Clan) always had something playing—classic rock from the '70s, alternative from the '90s, and early 2000s bands that blended genres.

Being surrounded by music felt natural. Learning to create it, however, was something he had to figure out on his own.

At nine years old, Jeremy discovered a piano interface on his mother's tablet and began experimenting. There were no lessons or formal instruction—just instinct, curiosity, and repetition. Even now, he laughs at how confidently he approached it, trusting himself to figure it out as he went.

A few years later, that curiosity expanded to guitar. After attending his first concert—Green Day—he left with a clear sense of direction. He wanted to perform, and guitar became the path forward.

Even that moment came with a bit of anticipation. The first guitar he received had a small crack, and his parents planned to return it. For a while, it stayed in the box—out of reach, but impossible to ignore. The wait only made him more eager.

Eventually, he convinced his parents to keep the guitar. From there, the shift was immediate.

Still, performing didn't happen overnight. Jeremy didn't play his first live set until he was almost 18, stepping onto the stage at an open mic after some encouragement from a friend. What started as a single performance quickly became something more consistent.

Open mics turned into bar shows. Bar shows grew into festival opportunities. Each step forward required initiative and persistence. Looking back, it was a constant reminder that success in music isn't passive. You have to be willing to put yourself out there.

That same mindset carried into the formation of Jeremy's band, Sacred Medicine. The name reflects a deeper belief that music is more than entertainment. It's something that heals and connects people. For Jeremy, that idea has always been central to what he creates.

"I've always believed music's been healing," he said. "It brings people together. It's something sacred."

Playing alongside bandmates who share Indigenous roots added another layer of meaning. It wasn't just about making music—it was about channeling something larger than themselves.

"I've always believed music's been healing. It brings people together. It's something sacred."

- Jeremy Kennedy

By the time the award ceremony arrived at the Palace Theater in Syracuse's Eastwood neighborhood, Jeremy had spent months processing the moment. Even so, stepping into it felt new.

"It was sold out," he said. "I got to do a speech, saw a lot of familiar faces, met new artists...it was a really wonderful experience."

His bandmates were there, along with his parents—the same people who had supported him from the very beginning, driving him to gigs, helping him get equipment, and showing up no matter the setting.

But even as Jeremy stood on stage, recognized for what he had accomplished, his thoughts quickly turned forward.

He's been working toward a full-length album, something he sees as a critical next step. More than just live performances, he wants to create something lasting that people can return to anytime.

"What I want to do is create something bigger than myself," he said. "A real musical legacy."

Later that night after the event, the meaning of the moment came into focus.

For Jeremy, the recognition is special, but it's also a step forward. One that brings more opportunity, more visibility, and more reason to keep going. ❖



## Share Your News

The Oneida Indian Nation would love to celebrate your achievements.

From graduations for high school seniors to certificate honors to doctoral dissertation defenders, and everything in between, the Nation is proud to share Member accomplishments.

Whether it's college, career, or other exciting endeavors, share your news with the community by emailing information and photos to [memberadvocate@oneida-nation.org](mailto:memberadvocate@oneida-nation.org).



## Oneida Indian Nation Language Program Publishes Sixth Book in Collaboration with Madison-Oneida BOCES

Earlier this year, the Oneida Indian Nation released its newest children's book, *Wisk Remembers*, a warm and inspiring Onyota'a:ká: language-learning story that encourages readers of all ages to appreciate the beauty and teachings found in the natural world. Rooted in a traditional lesson about balance, gratitude, and mindfulness, the story reminds us that taking time to notice the world around us is essential to well-being.

Created in collaboration with Madison-Oneida BOCES, *Wisk Remembers* is the sixth book in this language-learning series and includes original illustrations by Mohawk Valley Community College graduate Isabella Liscomb. The book is presented with both the Onyota'a:ká: text and full English

translation, along with highlighted vocabulary words and phonetic guides to help readers learn correct pronunciation. A QR code inside the book links to an online audio recording of the story in Oneida, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at the illustration process.

Oneida Indian Nation Language Instructor Chelsea Jocko (Wolf Clan), developed all Onyota'a:ká: language content and worked closely with Madison-Oneida BOCES to create an accurate English translation.

*Wisk Remembers* follows a family of chipmunks preparing for winter by gathering food. While his siblings tirelessly collect supplies, Wisk chooses to sit quietly, observing the colors, sounds, and scents of autumn. During the long, cold nights of winter when the family begins to despair, Wisk comforts his family with stories of the sights, smells and sounds of the warmer seasons. His story serves as a reminder that while physical nourishment is important, so too is taking time to appreciate the natural world and care for our mental and emotional well-being.

"This book beautifully reflects one of our most important cultural teachings—that gratitude is not just something we speak, but something we practice," said Ray Halbritter, Oneida Indian Nation Representative. "*Wisk Remembers* encourages young readers to slow down, observe, listen, and truly appreciate the gifts that surround them. We hope it inspires families, educators, and communities to embrace new opportunities and to strengthen their connection to the natural world.



"We are pleased to partner with the Oneida Indian Nation once again to support culturally grounded learning that extends far beyond the classroom," said Rebecca Copp, Staff and Curriculum Development Director at Madison-Oneida BOCES. "With *Wisk Remembers*—and all of the books in this

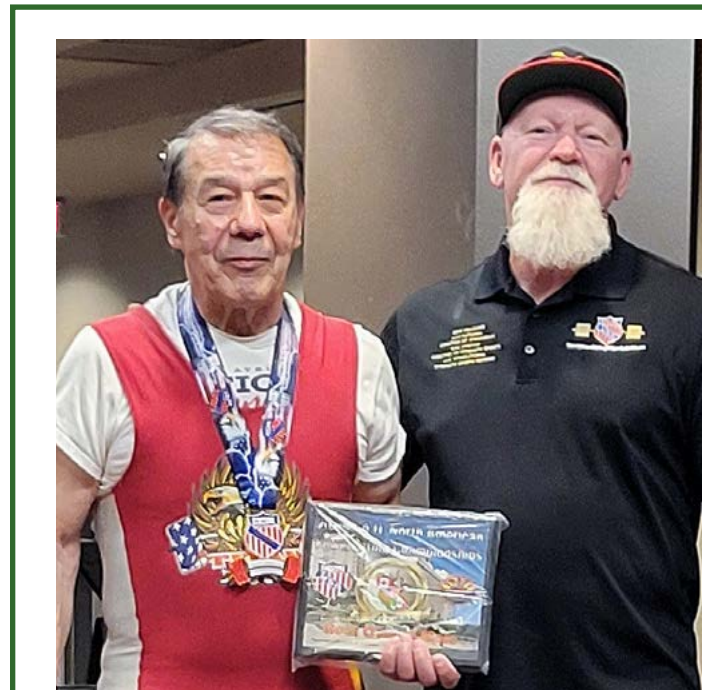
language learning series—we are helping expand access to the Onyota'a:ká: language for educators, students, and families across the region while reinforcing the value of collaboration and shared learning."

This release is part of an ongoing educational partnership between the Oneida Indian Nation and Madison-Oneida BOCES, which also prints the books through its in-house publishing program. *Wisk Remembers*—along with all other titles in the series—is available to the community at the Nation's Library and Early Learning Center. ❖



## Youth Get a Sweet Look at Wáhta' Maple Farm

Participants in the Oneida Indian Nation's youth programs at the Mary C. Winder Community Center were treated to an up-close look into the workings of maple syrup production at the Wáhta' Maple Farm in March. Kids had the opportunity to examine the entire process, from the sugarbush to the production facility where the maple products are processed and produced. Maple Production Manager Jeff Weeden, and Production Technician Neil Kimball gave the kids an in-depth tour that included a hands-on demonstration of how a tree is tapped as well as samples of the syrup and candies. ❖



Ray Fougner (Wolf Clan) with the Best Overall Male Lifter Award presented by Mikel Meadows, AAU Director of Strength Sports.

## Ray Fougner Continues to Lift the Record Book

Ray Fougner (Wolf Clan) recently took home three gold medals and set eight new world records at the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) North American World Single-Lift Powerlifting Championships. He also earned the AAU Powerlifting Best Overall Male Lifter Award.

Ray, who turned 83 earlier in April, has competed at the AAU North American, World and International Powerlifting Championships for more than ten years, setting new records every time in the raw master's division, where participants within his age range (80-84) do not use equipment to assist their lift. Ray continues to serve as an inspiration to the Oneida Indian Nation community for his dedication to health and fitness.

In 2025, Ray was inducted into the North American Indigenous Athletics Fall of Fame. ❖

# Shako:wi Cultural Center Participates in Nation-to-Nation Ribbon Skirt Exchange

***Creations by community members help raise awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) crisis***

The Oneida Indian Nation's Shako:wi Cultural Center recently displayed several beautiful, hand-crafted ribbon skirts as part of an exhibit to help bring awareness to the alarming numbers of missing American Indian and Alaska Native people. The skirts, made in honor of the memory of these people, are part of the Seven Dancers Coalition Nation-to-Nation Ribbon Skirts for MMIP awareness exchange between participating Native communities.

Oneida Indian Nation Members who participated in the exchange included: Nichola Diaz (Turtle Clan), Vicky Schenandoah (Wolf Clan), Teyekahli:yos Edwards (Wolf Clan), Cindy Schenandoah-Stanford (Wolf Clan), Doris Wilkins-Wilt (Wolf Clan) and Wanda Wood (Wolf Clan). Each skirt was crafted as a deeply personal and spiritual act by the participants, expressing cultural identity and strength.

The 13 skirts received in the exchange were from the Tonawanda, Tuscarora, Akwesasne, Unkechaug, Cattaraugus and Seneca communities.



Skirts from the participating Native communities in the New York area.



Made by Doris Wilkins-Wilt



Made by Doris Wilkins-Wilt



Made by Cindy Schenandoah-Stanford



Made by Vicky Schenandoah



Made by Nichola Diaz



Made by Wanda Wood



Made by Teyekahli:yos Edwards

The exchanged skirts were on display at the Shako:wi Cultural Center through May 5, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

According to the U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, American Indians and Alaska Native people are at a disproportionate risk of experiencing violence, murder, or abduction and make up a significant portion of the missing and murdered cases in the U.S. These cases are often under-reported and under-investigated, leaving families without closure. MMIP reflects ongoing systematic inequality, jurisdictional gaps, a history of forced removal, illegal land transactions and historical injustices that continues to endanger indigenous people today. ❖

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