



The Talking Leaf

SAIGE FALL NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER 2025



A MESSAGE FROM OUR SAIGE CHAIR ED BLAAUVELT

Embracing the Crisp Fall Air: A Season of Unity and Achievement for SAIGE

It has been a challenging year for most of us, marked by numerous challenges and changes that will continue to impact us in the near future. However, as native people, it is nothing we cannot overcome. SAIGE will continue to support our members and look toward the future to bring more Native Americans into government, making changes, honoring our warriors, supporting our youth, and developing our nation's future leaders. As the year winds down, it is a time to give thanks and celebrate with our families for what we do have.

As the crisp autumn air sweeps across the land, carrying the scent of fallen leaves and distant woodsmoke, fall invites us to pause, reflect, and come together. For SAIGE, this season symbolizes renewal and community, a time when the chill in the breeze reminds us of our shared resilience and the warmth of our collective spirit. Just as the earth prepares for rest after a bountiful year, we gather in gratitude, celebrating our traditions, accomplishments, and the unbreakable bonds that unite American Indian and Alaska Native government employees.

Fall has long been a time of harvesting for our people, a sacred period of gathering crops, giving thanks, and honoring the land's generosity. From the cornfields of the Southwest to the wild rice lakes of the North, this season teaches us about the importance of abundance and stewardship. In SAIGE, we draw inspiration from these traditions, applying them to our professional lives. As federal, tribal, state, and local government workers, we reap the benefits of our labor, including policies that protect sovereignty, programs that uplift communities, and initiatives that preserve our heritage. This fall, let us recommit to nurturing these efforts, ensuring that future generations reap the benefits of our dedication.

No fall would be complete without the vibrant energy of powwows and rendezvous, where drums echo, dancers swirl in regalia, and stories are shared around the fire. These gatherings are more than events; they are lifelines to our ancestors, fostering cultural pride and intergenerational connections. Across the country, from urban centers to rural reservations, SAIGE members participate in these celebrations, blending tradition with modern advocacy. Whether attending a local powwow or a historic rendezvous, these moments remind us of the strength that comes from unity. As the leaves turn golden, they call us to dance, sing, and reaffirm our commitment to equity and representation in government service.

This year, SAIGE's Virtual National Training Program exemplified that spirit of coming together, even across distances. Due to limitations beyond our control, we hosted a hybrid event in September 2025 under the theme "Native Strength in Leadership and Culture," which drew attendees from across the nation. The program featured inspiring sessions on leadership development, cultural competency, and policy advocacy, with keynote speakers sharing insights on tribal sovereignty and environmental stewardship. We also honored our military members for their service to our great nation and our people. The success of our program underscores SAIGE's adaptability, demonstrating that technology can bridge gaps while upholding our communal values, even when we are hindered.

During the NTP, five recipients of the Military Meritorious Service Award were honored for their exceptional contributions as active-duty members, reservists, and veterans in government roles. These warriors embody dedication and sacrifice. See the Warrior Society Director's section for this vital program.

As we embrace the crispness of fall, let us carry this momentum forward. SAIGE stands stronger than ever, harvesting successes and sowing seeds for tomorrow. Together, we thrive—united in purpose, culture, and hope. Thank you all for your continuing support.

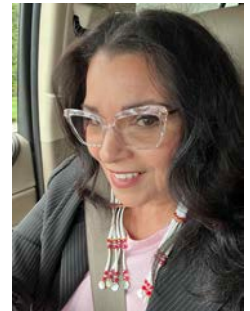
SAIGE WARRIOR SOCIETY PROGRAM

HONORING OUR WARRIORS

By Nieva Brock, SAIGE Warrior Society Director

Each year the SAIGE Warrior Society solicits nominations for active, reserve, and veteran Warriors who represent the values of SAIGE and the spirit of service to compete for the Military Meritorious Service Award. This year we were honored to recognize five of our top Warriors in service to our great nation. These 2025 Military Meritorious Service Award winners are recognized for their exceptional contributions as active-duty members, reservists, and veterans in government roles.

As the Director of the SAIGE Warrior Society, I bid CONGRATULATIONS to each honored Warrior for a job well done. Our honored Warriors embody dedication and sacrifice that our Warriors have always shown to their nation, community, and people throughout history. We are grateful and are in debt to their service. Please join me in congratulating these outstanding Warriors!



2025 MILITARY MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD WINNERS



Senior Airman Jalen Whitehorn, United States Air Force
Osage and Choctaw

Senior Airman Whitehorn actively contributed to the Spangdahlem and Osage communities. He served as the President and Vice President for the dorm's council, leading a planning committee making significant contributions to the dorm community, overseeing safety changes, assisting with restorations and cleaning, enhancing the quality of life of over 600 residents. He also chaired the 52 Fighter Wing Native American Heritage committee, organizing events, engaging, and educating about Indigenous tribes, providing information and resources to airmen and civilians, and leading an information panel for 1,700 Diversity Day attendees. Some of the events included an information

booth where he handed out gifts and told the community about his respective nations, an Indian Taco making class, volunteering over 12 hours with the food pantry to ensure a successful distribution of food before the Thanksgiving season, and building and expanding relations with members within the committee. The group grew from two active duty to five active duty, and four civilians with Native American backgrounds. He also made significant contributions to the Osage community planning and provided canned foods to families affected by a severe tornado, supporting multiple agencies and assisting the affected community, while also organizing a team to clean and maintain the Osage Nation Armed Forces Memorial. The distinctive accomplishments of Senior Airman Whitehorn reflect credit upon himself, the Native American community, and the United States and he was recently promoted to Staff Sergeant! Congratulations!



Staff Sergeant Garrett Anderlik, USAF
Oglala

Staff Sergeant Garrett Anderlik distinguished himself by meritorious service as Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, Force Health, 28th Operational Medical Readiness Squadron, 28th Medical Group, Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota. During this period, Sergeant Anderlik served as an ambassador for the Air Force Indigenous Nations Equality Team, connecting with over 2,400 students. He bridged relationships between the Air Force Recruiting Service and the Oglala Sioux Tribe, earning recognition from Air Force Recruiting Service and 343rd Recruiting Squadron Commanders. He demonstrated exceptional leadership coordinating Lakota cultural and youth camps, including the Knife Chief Buffalo Nation Society and Teca Woapiye Wicoti "Children and Youth Healing Camp," impacting over 75

Indigenous youth. His efforts earned him the Medical Group Verne Orr Award and the Peterson Space Force Base Commander in Chief's Installation Excellence Award. The distinctive accomplishments of Sergeant Anderlik reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

SAIGE WARRIOR SOCIETY PROGRAM



Technical Sergeant Bryce Dick, USAF
Snoqualmie

Technical Sergeant Bryce Dick distinguished himself as Flight Chief and Instructor Sensor Operator, 29th Attack Squadron, Holloman Air Force Base, Alamogordo, New Mexico from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024. Sergeant Dick honorably represented Native Americans in Government as one of four family lineage ambassadors for the Snoqualmie Tribe. He was appointed as 607 Air Operations Center Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance division lead planner for five multinational exercises coordinating efforts between two Major Commands and Republic of Korea partner forces. Additionally, during a wildfire plaguing southern New Mexico,

Sergeant Dick led 127 members to provide 635 man-hours of emergency response supplying vital sustenance to over 1,800 displaced citizens. Furthermore, he led the in-processing of 180 attendees and hosted a fundraiser event generating \$9,000 for tribal youth scholarships during the 2023 Society of American Indian Government Employee award banquet. For his efforts, he was recognized as the Squadron Non-Commissioned Officer, Volunteer and Wing Flight Chief of the quarter. The distinctive accomplishments of TSgt Dick reflect credit upon himself and the United States Air Force. TSgt Dick was just promoted to Master Sergeant. Congratulations!



Yeoman First Class Kylie Mobiglia, United States Coast Guard
Choctaw

Yeoman First Class Kylie Mobiglia is cited for superior performance of duty while serving at the United States Coast Guard Academy from 2022 to 2024. A proud Native American service member, she seamlessly integrated her cultural heritage into every aspect of her professional and personal endeavors, serving as a dedicated mentor, advocate, and leader for Indigenous Coast Guardsmen. As Lead Advisor for the Coast Guard Academy Tribal Council, she provided critical mentorship to cadets and junior enlisted personnel, leveraging specialized training in Native water rights, civil rights, reservation issues, and Native American education to guide future leaders in navigating heritage-

specific challenges. She further deepened cadet understanding by volunteering to audit the Academy's inaugural Native American Perspectives course, where she offered invaluable insight from both academic study and lived experience. Concurrently, she pursued a bachelor's degree in Tribal Organizational Leadership with a minor in Native Studies at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, using her education to mentor junior enlisted personnel and exemplify the balance of academic growth and military excellence. Petty Officer Mobiglia's commitment to Indigenous empowerment, cultural representation, and mentorship is most heartily commended and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.



Mr. Tyler Fish
Muscogee

During his tenure as the Attorney-Advisor to the Director of Equal Employment Opportunity and Special Advisor to the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Farm Credit Administration, (FCA), Mr. Tyler Fish's leadership, guidance, and knowledge resulted in the personal and professional development and advancement of American Indians as well as federal employees and corporate leadership. As the first plank holder of FCA's American Indian initiative program, Mr. Fish's programs reached federal regulators, military flag officers, and cabinet-level secretaries. His outstanding coordination and personal knowledge of tribal issues assisted both government agencies and tribal

nations in the development of initiatives honoring unique Federal-Tribal relationships. He conducted several national forums for issues and topics affecting American Indian farmers and ranchers, all while completing his required reserve military duty. Mr. Fish's extraordinary achievements, visionary leadership, and steadfast commitment reflect great credit upon himself, the FCA, The United States Air Force, and the Muscogee Creek Nation.

SAIGE STUDENT PROGRAM

SAIGE Scholarship Recipient, Mahpiya Win Spotted Tail

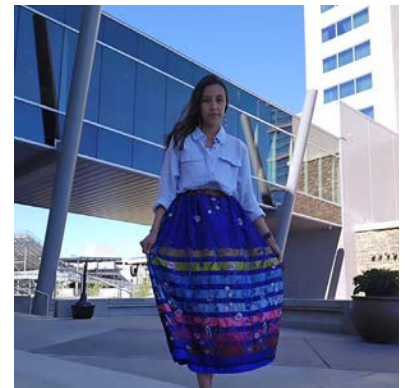
By JoAnn Brant, SAIGE Student Program Director

I am pleased to announce that Mahpiya Win Spotted Tail, an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe (Sicangu Lakota), is the recipient of the 2025 Carol Jorgenson Scholarship.

Mahpiya Win Spotted Tail is not just a scholarship recipient; she is a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change, embodying the values and aspirations of her community. She has earned multiple degrees from Sinte Gleska University, including an Associate of Arts in Lakota History and Culture and an Associate of Arts in Arts & Sciences. Currently, she is actively pursuing two Bachelor's degrees—one in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Additionally, she plans to pursue a master's degree in law, which will empower her to serve and advocate for Native communities more effectively.



Her commitment is evident in her active participation at the 2024 SAIGE National Training Program in Spokane, WA. There, she not only engaged deeply in the workshops, but also contributed insightful suggestions and innovative ideas. Mahpiya fosters a collaborative spirit, forming strong bonds with her peers and offering unwavering support to their needs.



Beyond her academic and professional achievements, Mahpiya is a devoted mother to her Lakota son. She embraces motherhood with passion, finding joy in cooking, gardening, crafting, painting, hiking, and reading. Additionally, Mahpiya actively takes part in Lakota ceremonies and powwows, honoring and celebrating her rich cultural heritage.

Bridging Horizons: Representing SAIGE at the 2025 AISES National Conference

By Ed Blauvelt



As the Chair of the Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE), I stepped into the electric atmosphere of the 2025 American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) National Conference with a profound sense of purpose. Held in the heart of Minneapolis, MN, this annual gathering drew thousands of Indigenous

professionals, students, and allies united by a shared vision: to empower Native peoples through STEM excellence. Representing SAIGE, our mission to advance the interests of American Indian and Alaska Native peoples in government service felt more vital than ever. This trip wasn't just about networking; it was about planting seeds

for tomorrow's leaders, fostering connections that echo our ancestors' resilience.

From the moment I arrived, AISES enveloped me in a tapestry of innovation rooted in Indigenous values. The professional development sessions were a highlight—intimate workshops blending traditional knowledge with cutting-edge leadership strategies. These sessions grounded abstract ideas in lived experience, reminding us that authentic leadership flows from cultural wellsprings. Networking opportunities wove through every corner of the conference, building bridges across generations. In bustling hallways and evening receptions, I connected with elders who shared stories and youth who ignited conversations about AI's role in revitalizing endangered languages.

At the vibrant College and Career Fair, opportunity hummed like a well-tuned drum. Booths from NASA, to the Coast Guard, to tribal enterprises buzzed with résumés

SAIGE AT AISES (con't)

and dreams, opening doors to education and a sense of purpose. Here, I represented SAIGE's booth-sharing partnership with AISES, a collaboration born from our shared commitment to Native excellence. I spoke with dozens of attendees about SAIGE's mission: advocating for equity in federal employment, amplifying voices in policy, and honoring the Federal Indian Trust Responsibility. Conversations flowed naturally—future members eager for mentorship, veterans probing our resources.

I addressed several military and veteran attendees about SAIGE's annual Meritorious Service Award Program, our current crop of winners, and the application process for next year's awards. The trip's pinnacle came with meeting over 30 college students. We explored internship pipelines at agencies and SAIGE's Student Program held in conjunction with SAIGE's annual National Training Program. Listening to these students' aspirations and dreams reminded me of my youthful exploration of my future; it was tremendous.

Leaving Minneapolis, AISES reaffirmed that our paths—SAIGE's steady advocacy and AISES's bold innovation—converge in service to our peoples. This trip yielded not just leads, but also legacies: numerous prospective members and new student participation. In a world quick to marginalize Indigenous voices, events like this remind us: We are the architects, the connectors, the unrelenting force for the future.

Recent SAIGE Board Member Activities

Jay Spaan, Executive Director, Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium (SGCETC) - Under Jay's leadership, the SGCETC had a banner year commemorating a half-century of Self-Determination and Self-Governance authority. Notable achievements include: a "sold-out" registration for the April "2025 Tribal Self-Governance Conference" (Gila River's Wild Horse Pass, Chandler, AZ) - a forum to improve the Tribal-Federal partnership; influencing national policy through the Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty; and providing letters and statements to Federal Agencies and elected officials. A highlight of this year's advocacy for Tribal sovereignty and Self-Governance was Jay's outstanding testimony and recommendations to Congress, including the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on Wednesday, 9/17/2025. Joining Executive Director Spaan was Mr. Kennis Bellmard, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development, U.S. DOI; Mr. Benjamin Smith, Acting Director, Indian Health Service, U.S. HHS; The Honorable Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr., Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation; and Mr. Victor Joseph, Executive Director, Tanana Tribal Council. We thank Jay for his tireless dedication to public service, effective support for the Tribal-Federal partnership, and service to SAIGE! Learn more about Jay's work at: <https://www.tribalselfgov.org/>



Photo: Jay Spaan provides testimony before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, 9/17/2025

Luke Jones, Secretary, SAIGE - We thank Luke for representing SAIGE at several public administration forums this year and acknowledge the recognition he has received for his work to advance the Tribal-Federal partnership. Specifically, Luke was invited to present on "Current Trends in State-Tribal Relations" at the March "2025 Deil Wright Symposium," hosted by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), Section on Intergovernmental Administration and Management (SIAM) (Washington, DC). Luke also co-chairs the SIAM "Tribal Relations Working Group," an effort to increase the effectiveness of intergovernmental administration and management between Tribes and their Federal, State, and Local government partners and to help implement innovative government-to-government programs with Tribes. At the Symposium, SIAM presented Luke with their prestigious "Donald C. Stone Practitioner Award," established to recognize practitioners who make, "significant contributions to the practice and/or study of intergovernmental relations over a substantial period of time." We thank Luke for surrounding himself with scholars and practitioners passionate about the State-Tribe intergovernmental relationship, and service to SAIGE! Learn more about Luke's work at: <https://linktr.ee/tribalrelations>



Photo: Luke Jones (center) receives the 2025 "Donald C. Stone Practitioner Award" from the American Society for Public Administration, Section on Intergovernmental Administration and Management, 3/28/2025

SAIGE MEMBER PROFILE

JoAnn Brant, SAIGE Student Program Director



Photo: JoAnn Brant with student leader Brian Barlow at the 2019 SAIGE NTP.

I am a member of the Oneida Nation of the Thames. I grew up in Buffalo, NY. Both of my parents were from the Oneida Nation of the Thames. My family consisted of six children. My parents were involved in the Buffalo Native Community. My Dad served as an officer for the Native Community Lacrosse Association and Community Center. Like my parents, all my activities and friends were with the Buffalo Native Community. I attended the Indian Church of Buffalo, participated in the youth group and served my community with various fundraisers.

In Buffalo, I was also an employee of the Native American Community Services as a student coordinator. In 1987, I started my own business, Native American Services, which was a medical equipment supplier. My business served local and national Native American tribes and the IHS. After 48 years with the Buffalo Native community, I moved to Washington, DC for a federal position at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I have worked for the EPA for 22 years and served as the Pathways Student Program Director. I am married to Jim Brant who is a member of the Mohawk Tyendinaga Tribe. I have one daughter, Lori, who is married and has a family of four children.

In 2004, I attended the very first SAIGE National Training Program (NTP) in Ft Lauderdale, FL. At an open forum, a student questioned why there was not a program for students. My Office Director from EPA stood up and said EPA would provide funding for a student program at SAIGE. I became the Student Program Director in 2005, and since then have coordinated all student program activities at the SAIGE NTP's.

As the SAIGE Student Program Director, there are many moments with the students that have touched my heart. The ones that stand out are the student skits. The skits allowed the students to work as a group and use their creativity to provide their take on the conference. They were funny because they also mocked me. I loved the skits and the students.

I feel so blessed as I look at all the years I have had with the students. I cried with them and laughed a lot. They brought more joy into my life. I learned to care, love, appreciate and see the students grow into such beautiful people in the Native Community. What an honor.



Photo: JoAnn with students at the 2024 SAIGE NTP.

SAIGE VIRTUAL NTP RECAP: Native Strength in Leadership & Culture

By Fredericka Joseph, 2025 Virtual NTP Co-Chair

On September 27, 2025, SAIGE conducted their virtual National Training Program. The theme for this year's event was Native Strength in Leadership and Culture. The underlying message of the day was resilience and understanding what our federal family is currently undergoing in the workplace. Each speaker provided their ideas and wisdom of how to navigate the current working climate and continue to stay positive.

The training began at noon with the SAIGE Chair, Edward Blauvelt, introducing the presentation of colors by the Comanche Indian Veterans Association (recorded). Next, Mikko Maanaatilka, 2nd Chief, Alabama Coushatta Tribe of Texas, provided welcoming comments. The keynote speaker was Chuck Sams, Director of Indigenous Programs, Yale Center for Environmental Justice, and the 19th National Park Service Director. Alex Tremble, GPS Leadership Solutions, spoke on the topic, "Your Service, Your Strength, Embracing Resilience in Uncertain Times." Jay Spaan, SAIGE Board of Director and Executive Director of the Self-Governance Communication and Education Tribal Consortium spoke on tribal self-governance and self-determination. We were excited and inspired to hear from SAIGE Student Program alumni - Kelly Berry and Rosemary Reano shared about their time as Student Program participants, how it helped them and what they are doing now. Fellow alumni Brian Barlow was the moderator. We were honored to hear from James Crawford, U.S. Department of Transportation Assistant Secretary of Tribal Government Affairs, through a recorded message. The Warrior Society introduced us to five Warriors who received the 2025 SAIGE Meritorious Service Award. All these Warriors were worthy of receiving the award and we congratulate them for their Warrior spirit and service! Mitchelene Big Man, U.S. Army veteran, was the Warrior Program keynote speaker. She was amazing and we thank her for sharing the inspiring Native American Women Warriors Association origin story. The program ended with a panel on the "State of the Federal Government" presented by Traci DiMartini, Human Capital Officer, IRS, and Cynthia Dunn, Retired Division Director, IRS.

The training closed with the retiring of the colors by the Women Warriors Association (recorded). The four and a half hour virtual NTP was a success with a great audience who shared their Saturday afternoon with SAIGE. It was a pleasure to serve as the NTP co-chair with Sue Morris, and thanks to the SAIGE Board of Directors!

2025 Virtual NTP Speakers



Mikko Maanaatilka



Chuck Sams



Alex Tremble



Jay Spaan



James Crawford



Brian Barlow



Kelly Berry



Rosemary Reano



Mitchelene Big Man



Traci DiMartini



Cynthia Dunn

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Register Today - SAIGE 2025 Native American Heritage Month Commemoration

Each November, we make an extra special effort to honor the cultures, traditions, and contributions of Native Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians - please join us for our 2025 commemoration: "Honoring Our Ancestors through Government Service."

Keynote Address: Meghan Bishop, Policy Director, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)

Thursday, November 13, 2025

8:00 PM Eastern - Webinar - Free & Open to the Public

Register here: https://linktr.ee/saige_org

Meghan Bishop (Sugpiat/Native Village of Afognak) serves as the NCAI Policy Director and has a deep commitment to justice reform, tribal self-governance, and child and family welfare. Ms. Bishop previously served as Senior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior, where she managed a complex law and public policy portfolio spanning public safety, social services, education, community development, the PROGRESS Act, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), and other initiatives. Ms. Bishop holds a Master's degree in Political Management from The George Washington University, a J.D. from Willamette University College of Law, and a B.A. in Psychology and Humanities from Ohio Wesleyan University.



*Society of American Indian
Government Employees*



**"Honoring Our Ancestors
through Government Service"**

Meghan Bishop, Policy Director
National Congress of American Indians
Thursday 11/13/2025 - 8PM Eastern



FREE register here



[www.linktr.ee/saige_org](https://linktr.ee/saige_org)

Celebrating Native American Harvest with Hoe Mush Cakes

By Ed Blauvelt

One of my favorite pastimes is eating good food. As autumn approaches and the Native American harvest season begins, it is the perfect time to honor traditional foods that have nourished communities for generations. Among these is the humble yet versatile Hoe Mush Cake, a cherished American Indian dish that is simple to prepare and delightful to eat. Whether served at breakfast with a drizzle of syrup or as a savory dinner side topped with cheese, these golden cornmeal patties connect us to the land and its bounty.

A Taste of Tradition

Hoe Mush Cakes, rooted in Native American culinary heritage, reflect the resourcefulness of using staple crops like corn. Cornmeal, the star of this recipe, was a dietary cornerstone for many tribes, providing sustenance and versatility. These cakes, cooked on a “hoe” (a flat tool) over an open fire in historical times, embody the ingenuity of Indigenous cooking. Today, they are a delicious way to celebrate harvest season, bringing warmth and flavor to any table.

Quick and Easy Recipe

This recipe yields six servings, takes just 5 minutes to prepare, and 10 minutes to cook, making it an accessible dish for busy households. Here is how to make it:

Ingredients:

- 2 cups yellow or white cornmeal
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Directions:

1. Place cornmeal in a heat-resistant bowl.
2. Bring 2 cups of water to a boil in a saucepan.
3. Pour boiling water into the cornmeal, stirring until well combined. For a sweet twist, add a splash of vanilla or almond extract.
4. Allow the mixture to cool slightly, then form into patties.
5. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium heat.
6. Fry patties until golden brown on both sides, about 3-5 minutes per side.
7. Drain on a paper towel and serve hot.

Versatile and Flavorful

Hoe Mush Cakes shine in their adaptability. For breakfast, pair them with maple syrup or honey for a sweet, hearty start. At dinner, top with melted cheese or a savory sauce to complement roasted vegetables or meats or slathered in cheese and Green Chilis from New Mexico. Their crisp exterior and soft, corny interior make them a crowd-pleaser for any meal.

Honoring the Harvest

As we embrace the harvest season, preparing Hoe Mush Cakes is a meaningful way to connect with Native American traditions. This dish not only celebrates the abundance of the earth but also invites us to appreciate the simplicity and ingenuity of Indigenous cuisine. With just a few ingredients and minimal time, you can bring a piece of this heritage to your table, sharing in the flavors that have sustained communities for centuries.

A Journey to Chaco Canyon: Ancestral Echoes and Cultural Reverie

By Ed Blauvelt



Photo of Chaco Canyon taken by Ed Blauvelt

On April 23, 2025, I embarked on a pilgrimage that I had always wanted to take, an excursion to Chaco Culture National Historical Park in Northwest New Mexico. This sacred site, nestled in the high desert, was sort of preparation for my upcoming Gourd Dancing at the 2025 Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque. The visit to Chaco Canyon, home to the Ancestral Puebloans, was a profound experience that blended awe-inspiring landscapes, historical imagination, and a newfound connection to recent scientific discoveries linking the site to the modern Picuris Pueblo tribe.

The drive to Chaco Canyon was a journey into isolation, with the final stretch along a rugged and bumpy road past remote little ranches and a scattering of old hogans emphasizing the site's remoteness. Upon arrival, the vast desert floor stretched out, framed by dramatic cliffs that seemed to guard the ancient structures. The scale of the great houses was staggering. These multi-story stone buildings, constructed between 850 and 1150 CE, showcased intricate masonry and astronomical alignments. Its design reflects a sophisticated society that thrived, and the discovery of trade goods from all over North and Central America, such as pottery, seashell, macaw feathers, timber, and cacao, indicates the city was a central cultural and economic hub. Standing there, I envisioned the Ancestral Puebloans living, playing, and celebrating in this very spot. The site's kivas, circular, subterranean rooms used for rituals, hinted at spiritual gatherings that connected the people to the cosmos.

The imposing walls of Pueblo Bonito against the cliff backdrop, the sandstone glowing under the spring sun, and in the distance stood Fajada Butte. This solitary

landmark anchors the landscape. The silence of the desert is amplified here, broken only by the wind carrying whispers of ancient stories. Petroglyphs, spirals, and animal figures etched into the cliffs, capturing the Ancestral Puebloans' artistry and worldview. Walking the trails, I imagined the Ancestral Puebloans expanding outward, establishing trade routes that stretched across North and Central America, exchanging trade goods. The canyon's role as a regional center was palpable, its great houses serving as gathering places for communities across the Southwest.

My visit gained even greater significance after reading a recent DNA study published in *Nature*, which confirmed a genetic link between the Picuris Pueblo people and the ancient inhabitants of Chaco Canyon (Johnson, 2025). Researchers sequenced DNA from 13 modern Picuris members and 16 individuals who lived at Picuris Pueblo 500 to 700 years ago, comparing it to ancient DNA from Chaco Canyon remains. The findings revealed a continuous genetic thread, affirming the tribe's oral histories that trace their ancestry to Chaco (Johnson 2025). The study, initiated by Picuris leaders to strengthen their voice in protecting Chaco from oil and gas drilling, underscores the living connection between past and present (Johnson 2025).

This scientific validation resonated with me as I prepared for the powwow. As dancers from across Native nations came to celebrate a shared heritage, where regalia and movement honor ancestral traditions, Chaco Canyon felt like a spiritual prelude. The powwow, held annually in Albuquerque, draws thousands to celebrate Native unity. Dancing there, I carried the inspiration of Chaco's enduring legacy, a spirit that persists in modern Native communities.

Chaco Canyon is more than an archaeological site; it is a testament to our people's ingenuity and continuity. As I left the canyon, the vastness of the high desert lingered in my heart, a reminder of the Ancestral Puebloans' expansive vision and the living cultures that carry it forward.

References:

Johnson, Carolyn. 2025. "DNA Links Modern Picuris Pueblo Tribe to Ancestors Who Lived in Chaco Canyon Hundreds of Years Ago." MSN, May 8, 2025.

National Park Service. 2025. "Plan Your Visit: Chaco Culture National Historical Park." Accessed May 9, 2025. <https://www.nps.gov/chcu/planyourvisit/index.htm>.

SAIGE MERCHANDISE STORE

With fall weather creeping in on us, we thought we would tell you that there are new additions to the SAIGE Merchandise store. There are now knit pull-on hats, fleece vests and throw blankets for those football games or lazy evenings on the couch.

We are also pleased to offer a donation option now as well, where you can add a bit to your order to help SAIGE out.

How to Get Started

1. Visit the store here: <https://yourmpstore.com/saige>
2. Create an account using your email address
3. Start exploring and enjoy some fun shopping!

Get Involved

We would love to hear what you think about the store! After you have checked it out, feel free to share your feedback with us. Is there something you would like to see? We will be adding more items as time goes on. Your input will help us make the store even better. We want to show how much we appreciate your support so all these quality items are priced at cost, with no profit to SAIGE.

Thank you again for all your support, your engagement and what you do every day. We are excited to finally share this with you and look forward to seeing people wearing that beautiful SAIGE logo wherever you go.

Let us celebrate and show off our SAIGE pride together!



ONLINE STORE NOW OPEN!

Order your custom merch in 3 easy steps



- 1 Scan the QR code to start shopping now! Or go online to <https://yourmpstore.com/saige>



- 2 Choose your items and add them to your cart
- 3 Check out securely with a credit card



All items are at cost, with no profit to SAIGE.
Any questions or comments, please reach out to us at info@saige.org.

Talking Leaf Newsletter

The Talking Leaf Newsletter is issued twice a year - Spring and Fall. SAIGE welcomes your stories, suggestions, and ideas. If you want to contribute to the newsletter, please email Georgia Madrid at **newsletter@saige.org**

SAIGE Board of Directors

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- Phil Hamel
- Duane Matt (Confederated Salish Kootenai and Pend D 'Oreille)
- Georgeie Reynolds
- Jay Spaan (Cherokee Nation)
- Lori Windle (White Earth Chippewa)

<https://saige.org/home/board-members/>

About SAIGE

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) is the first national non-profit organization representing American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Federal, Tribal, State and local government employees. Formed in 2002, SAIGE provides a forum on the issues, challenges and opportunities of American Indian Tribal Nations and the government workforce, and to foster a professional network among AI/AN government employees.

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