

THE "NATIVE BUSINESS TOP 50 ENTREPRENEURS"

ISSUE serves
to elevate
awareness of
the innovation,
professionalism,
competence
and tenacity
demonstrated by
Native
entrepreneurs
across
Indian Country.



Part of our impetus for highlighting 50 Native entrepreneurs is to underscore why Tribes and other Native entrepreneurs should invest in the goods and services of privately owned businesses in Indian Country — rather than sending money to border towns and non-Native corporations, which weakens reservation economies. These successful Native entrepreneurs are not only confident and capable, they are inspiring other Native business owners and raising the bar within their respective industries.

Many of the Native entrepreneurs within these pages go against the grain of what people consider common for Indian Country. As this list of high-achieving entrepreneurs indicates, Native business owners are involved in everything from making artisanal bacon to operating very successful federal contracting firms.

Many of these enterprising Native peo-

ple have developed and launched their business with little to no startup capital. They've been innovative and resilient enough to pursue their dreams, turning mere ideas into reality. They have proven their entrepreneurial competencies through their actions.

Our recurring list of the "Native Business Top 50 Entrepreneurs" illustrates the sheer number of Native entrepreneurs and Native-owned small businesses thriving across Indian Country. Native Business delivers a mix of snapshots and lengthier profiles of the 50 Native entrepreneurs, documenting and memorializing their innovation and self-determination. We organized our list of the "Native Business Top 50 Entrepreneurs" by category to demonstrate the diversity of industries where Natives are making an impact. This half of the magazine shines a light on entrepreneurs who operate businesses in the Retail, Federal Contracting, Food, Breweries, Accounting & Legal, and Beauty & Wellness sectors.

While recognizing 50 Native entrepre-

neurs, in no particular numerical ranking, only scratches the surface of the wealth of Indigenous business owners across Indian Country, *Native Business Magazine* believes that these Native entrepreneurs merit your attention now.

When Indian Country sources opportunity to Native entrepreneurs, and we invest in ourselves, we in turn pump more money into Native economies and strengthen the economic base of our Tribal Nations. To attain generational wealth, Indian Country must start supporting and buying from these Native-owned businesses. The upside of increased Native entrepreneurship is enormous, not to mention it accelerates the creation of more Native-owned businesses, which fuels a powerful Native entrepreneurial ecosystem.

As the saying goes: A rising tide lifts all ships. United, Indian Country is an economic force. The more we help Native entrepreneurs succeed, the greater prosperity we bring to Indian Country now and for future generations to come.



HALEY LAUGHTER

NAVAJO
HOZHO TOTAL WELLNESS

Haley Laughter's yoga studio is Mother Nature and conference venues. "Giving Natives access to yoga means that I have to be mobile. I'm bringing yoga to our people," says Laughter (Navajo), founder and CEO of Hozho Total Wellness.

Laughter launched Hozho Total Wellness in 2015 to help Natives release stress and historical trauma through yoga, a practice intended to heal the mind, body and spirit. Today, she travels to host energizing yoga classes and brief breaks of stretching and movement at business conferences across Indian Country.

In summer 2019, Hozho Total Wellness will begin offering 200-Hour Registered Indigenous Yoga Teacher Training. Laughter is also in the process of formalizing an Indigenous Yoga Instructors Association, launching a YouTube channel, and creating a crowdfunding platform to build an Indigenous Yoga app — "so every reservation has access to yoga," she says. A Hozho Total Wellness t-shirt line is coming soon.

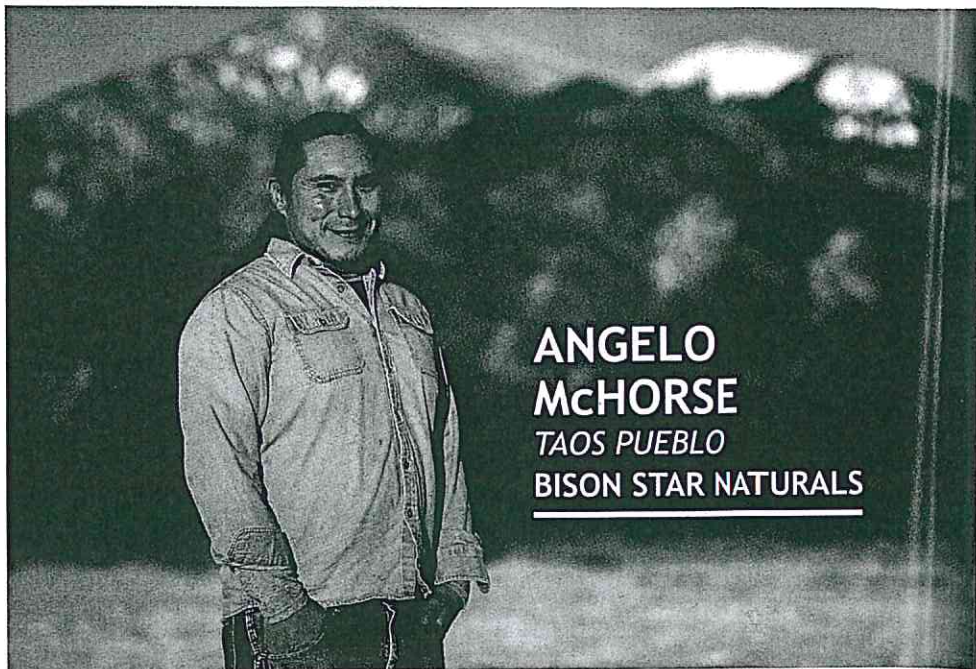


MARISSA FRAZIER

LAKOTA
ARTISTRY SALON

Marissa Frazier always dreamed of running her own business, envisioning a modern, sleek salon like those in New York or Los Angeles. Last year, the entrepreneur, who grew up on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation, opened Artistry Salon in Rapid City, South Dakota — so named because she believes hair-dressing is an art. "I have brought that metropolitan vibe to the Midwest," she says.

Currently, she's renting out chairs to stylists for a rate of \$500 a month, in addition to



ANGELO McHORSE

TAOS PUEBLO
BISON STAR NATURALS

Bison Star Naturals makes all-natural lotions, bath salts and more — infused with the beauty and intoxicating scent of the land of Taos, New Mexico. Not only is Bison Star Naturals in harmony with nature, it's rooted on the Taos Pueblo, where Angelo McHorse, co-founder of Bison Star Naturals, was born and raised.

In March, the Native-owned startup broke ground on a storefront and workshop on the Pueblo, surrounded by herb and floral gardens vital to the company's lotions, which anchor the Bison Star brand. Angelo and Jacqueline McHorse, the husband-and-wife team behind Bison Star, received an injection of support from the Native American Venture Acceleration Fund to fund production of their liquid jojoba and yucca root soaps, released this spring.

"It's really great to be back home and starting a project for some economic development for our Tribe," said McHorse, who earned his Agricultural Science and Business degrees from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. "It's awesome, be-

cause I think entrepreneurship is a growing sector. Our only economic development was basically a casino. Years down the line, the Tribe is developing a convenience store and possibly a gas station on the Taos Pueblo. It's really cool to be able to start a business, to grow it, and to break ground on a storefront and a warehouse on Tribal land. It has enormous potential and economic value for our Tribe, as far as employment and putting Taos Pueblo on the map."

Bison Star Naturals has engaged primarily in direct-to-consumer sales through farmers' markets, trade shows, and arts and crafts events. Their online store at BisonStarNaturals.com also leads to great returns, accounting for approximately 20-25 percent of Bison Star's overall revenue. Bison Star Naturals products can also be found throughout New Mexico and at stores in four different states. The McHorses have their visions set on new horizons in 2019 — acquiring more wholesale accounts to expand their reach.

counting hundreds of clients of her own.

Frazier is already looking ahead to her next big dream: opening an old-time, traditional barber shop right next door to Artistry Salon in about two years. "We don't have any barber shops here in Rapid City, so there is definitely a huge hole to fill in that market."

And her inner artist is not stopping there, either. This energetic entrepreneur, wife and mother is also exploring options to start her own product line and hair-care company as she says she wants to keep her hands in as many pots as possible in the cosmetology industry. "After your first dream comes true, you need new ones, then you just keep going," she says.



MONICA SIMEON & MARINA TURNINGROBE

SPOKANE

SISTER SKY

By Mary Belle Zook

Siblings Monica Simeon and Marina Turningrobe established their company Sister Sky in 1999. Both are citizens of the Spokane Tribe and utilize ancestral herbal wisdom and ethics to create natural hair and skin merchandise, and they continue carrying these principles into their newest venture, Sister Sky Inc.

Origins

Sister Sky's products started as a home-based business, and in the beginning, both sisters held full-time jobs outside of their company.

"We were mixing lotion, making candles and doing all these hobby-type things," Simeon said.

Simeon and Turningrobe enjoyed working together, packing their merchandise for trade shows and events every weekend, but they wanted to invest more time and energy into their business.

"And as fate would have it when my son Kevin was born with severe eczema, we really started looking at traditional herbal ingredients from our heritage," Simeon added.

Kevin's struggle with dry, sensitive skin furthered the company's mission to create

natural products rooted in Native American teachings.

"It's been a great opportunity for us to build upon that anchor that we've always had for Sister Sky's products division," Simeon said.

With two decades now under their belts, the sisters have served as leaders in the all-natural movement of today. They strive to honor traditional plant knowledge and herbal wisdom in everything Sister Sky does.

"By that I mean the natural ingredients that our ancestors used when there wasn't a Walgreens or a Wal-Mart or a drugstore that we could go to," Simeon added. "And anything we put in our blog or any products that we release or offer to the public, we really do ask 'Will this pass the test with our elders? Will they think this is OK?'"

Branching Out

The company began creating a business growth plan several years ago, and the siblings decided to launch Sister Sky, Inc. The offshoot enterprise expands the company outside of the beauty industry and into federal contracting. However, throughout its development, completing the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) 8(a) Business Development Program remained at the forefront of Turningrobe and Simeon's minds.

Turningrobe headed up the project, and two and a half years after applying, they received the certification notice from the SBA.

"It takes dedication, and it takes teamwork with whomever you're working with," Turningrobe recalled. "You really have to stay focused through the 8(a) ap-

plication process.

"It was from our intentions of diversifying that we now find ourselves with two companies, but our products division is still alive and well and running very healthy."

The services division, Sister Sky Inc., targets federal agencies that provide resources or health and wellness initiatives across Indian Country. It currently collaborates with several federal agencies, including the Administration for Native Americans, to support language revitalization across five Tribes. The company also holds an Indian Health Services contract with 12 Tribes who are currently integrating behavioral health into primary care.

"Not only is the approach to treat the patient who may have primary care symptoms — physiological symptoms — but it also addresses behavioral health as a potential link to some of the things that are going on with the physical," Simeon said.

"Our company has been deeply anchored in health and wellness, whether it's through products or services," she added.

The Future

Simeon and Turningrobe's children have returned home from college to carry on the Sister Sky legacy.

"They're talking about products they want to launch and divisions of the company they want to start, and ... I can look ahead and see an amazing vision that is yet to unfold," Simeon said.

The sisters are proud that the brand they have built together, with its foundations in Native American traditions, will continue for generations to come.



SEAN MCCABE
 NAVAJO
 MCCABE CPA GROUP

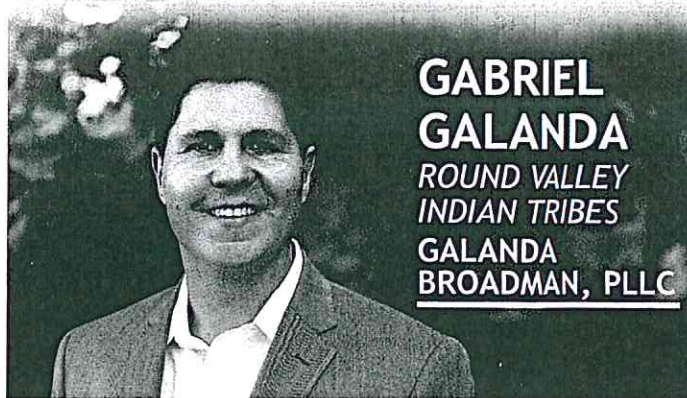
For 22 years, Sean McCabe, Diné, from the Fort Defiance Chapter of the Navajo Nation, has been crunching numbers to help businesses and organizations with their accounting practices. For the past 12 years, he's done so under his own banner, McCabe CPA Group, LLC, which offers full-service accounting,

including bookkeeping and audit services. He also has a payroll company that handles third-party payroll processing for his clients. Licensed in both Arizona and New Mexico, McCabe works nearly exclusively within Indian Country, focusing on Native governments and their entities like housing authorities, schools and casinos.

McCabe is passionate about hiring and training Native accountants. "At the end of the day I'm just a Native guy who loves to help our people and utilize as many Native American people as possible," McCabe says.

Speaking as an entrepreneur and a CPA, McCabe emphasizes the importance of Native-owned business engaging in solid accounting practices.

"A lot of times, plans go wrong or things don't work out because the numbers aren't quite right, so getting a professional to help you out is a good thing," McCabe says.



GABRIEL GALANDA
 ROUND VALLEY
 INDIAN TRIBES
 GALANDA
 BROADMAN, PLLC

Gabriel Galanda, a member of the Round Valley Indian Tribes, formed his own law firm in 2010. Galanda Broadman, PLLC, is dedicated to advancing Tribal legal rights and Indian business interests. With offices in Seattle and Yakima, Washington; Bend, Oregon; and Tucson, Arizona, Galanda Broadman, PLLC, counts eight lawyers, and tackles critical and complex litigation, bet-the-company business matters and regulatory disputes for Tribal governments, enterprises and citizens.

In addition to being recognized for his staunch disenrollment advocacy, Galanda is widely respected as a proponent for Tribal economic diversification. "Tribes need to start doing an inventory of what makes them a Tribe and what industries make the most sense for a diversified economy," he told Native Business.

Galanda writes frequently about Tribal litigation, sovereignty and Indian civil rights issues. He's been published more than 100 times and been interviewed and quoted by mainstream and international news outlets like The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, and Le Monde.

Galanda also founded the non-profit Huy (which in Lushootseed means "see you again/we never say goodbye"), dedicated to enhancing religious, cultural and other rehabilitative opportunities for American Indian prisoners.

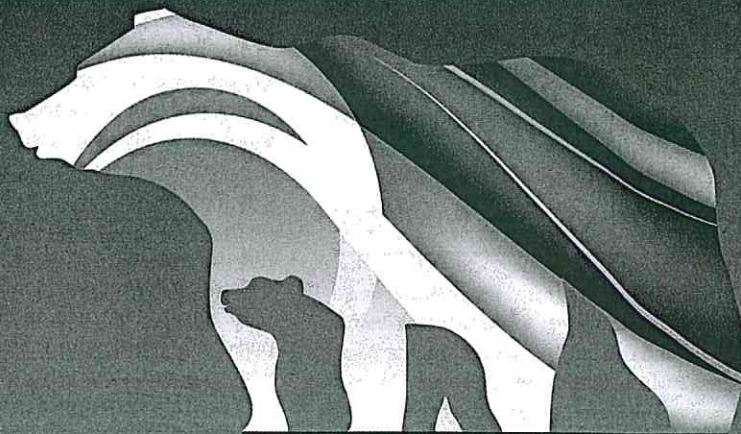
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SHYLA SHEPPARD & THREE AFFILIATED TRIBES MISSY BEGAY NAVAJO BOW & ARROW BREWING CO.

Shyla Sheppard and Missy Begay met while students at Stanford University in California's Bay Area, where they also received an introduction to craft beer. "There's a brew pub in Palo Alto and they specialized in German beer styles. We realized that there is a whole world of beer and it relates to geography and history and science," shared Sheppard, a member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. "It became a side interest or hobby of ours. Whenever we traveled, we'd seek out distilleries and breweries."

Sheppard studied economics at Stanford and started her career in venture cap-

ital and social impact investing. "We were in the heart of Silicon Valley. It was really eye-opening to learn about the power of capital and how it can accelerate growth and innovation," Sheppard told Native Business.

Meanwhile Begay, a member of the Navajo Nation, pursued her M.D., and today serves as full-time sleep physician, in addition to working part-time at the brewery, overseeing branding and marketing.

In 2015, the partners in business and life personally invested in their dream to open a brewery, and friends from Sheppard's venture capital days chipped in as well, "because they believed in us and wanted to support us," Sheppard said. They also secured a loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Sheppard, who was a founding team member at New Mexico Community Capital (NMCC), knew from experiencing consulting small businesses at various stages of growth that the first years of running a

Missy Begay, co-founder, Branding & Design, Diné, a member of the Navajo Nation (standing); and Shyla Sheppard, co-founder, President & CEO of Bow & Arrow Brewing Co., a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes

startup is "all-consuming in terms of your time and energy."

As Sheppard can personally attest now, it's true. Fortunately, she and Begay are passionate about craft beer and could talk about malt, hops and wild yeast all night. "Regardless of the industry you're in, there's always just the nuts and bolts that you need to get done. Those parts aren't always exciting, but the parts of the business that drive your passion are what really get you through the challenges along the way," she said.

One of those logistical pieces for Sheppard was navigating the legalities of federal, state and local licensing. "The fact that we have our small brewer's license and our wholesale license, and that I did that myself, is something that I am really proud of," Sheppard said.

The regulatory environment can shape how a business approaches craft beer. Bow & Arrow is essentially three businesses in one: production with a 15-barrel brew house, an on-site taproom, and a wholesale distributor. The business model also lends itself to intimate brewer-led tours, tastings and private event rentals.

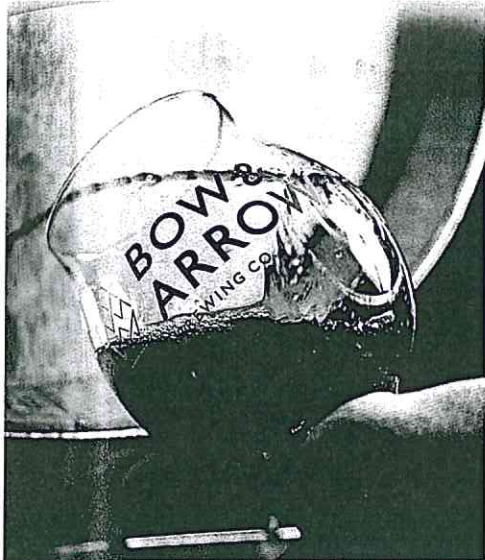
Bow & Arrow currently self-distributes exclusively across New Mexico to restaurants, bars, hotels and retail accounts, including big names like Whole Foods and Total Wine. Plans to expand distribution across the Southwest are on the horizon.

The brewing company additionally has the legal ability to open three satellite taprooms in the state. "Five years from now I envision multiple locations with maybe a unique concept at each one, but the heart and soul is still Bow & Arrow," Sheppard said. "We want to keep people on their toes and keep things interesting and continue to grow our production, but at a rate that we don't sacrifice quality."



To house their brewery, Sheppard and Begay purchased a former electrical contractor's warehouse and remodeled it. The on-site tap room is "the bread and butter of the business," Sheppard said, accounting for 90 percent of Bow & Arrow's revenue. "That's why it was so important to pay attention to the details around that experience."

Their award-winning conceptual design is a testament to their meticulous vision — and desire to create a space that cul-



tivated a sense of community. "We have long communal tables that were custom designed and built locally. Missy and I would sit across the table from each other with a measuring tape, because we wanted to think about what is the ideal distance between customers. I wanted something that fostered the elbow-to-elbow experience with your neighbors," Sheppard said.

In addition to considering how design informs the behavior of customers, they wanted to incorporate textures "to bring about this warmth, because it is an industrial space with concrete floors. We wanted people to feel comfortable and at-ease," Sheppard said.

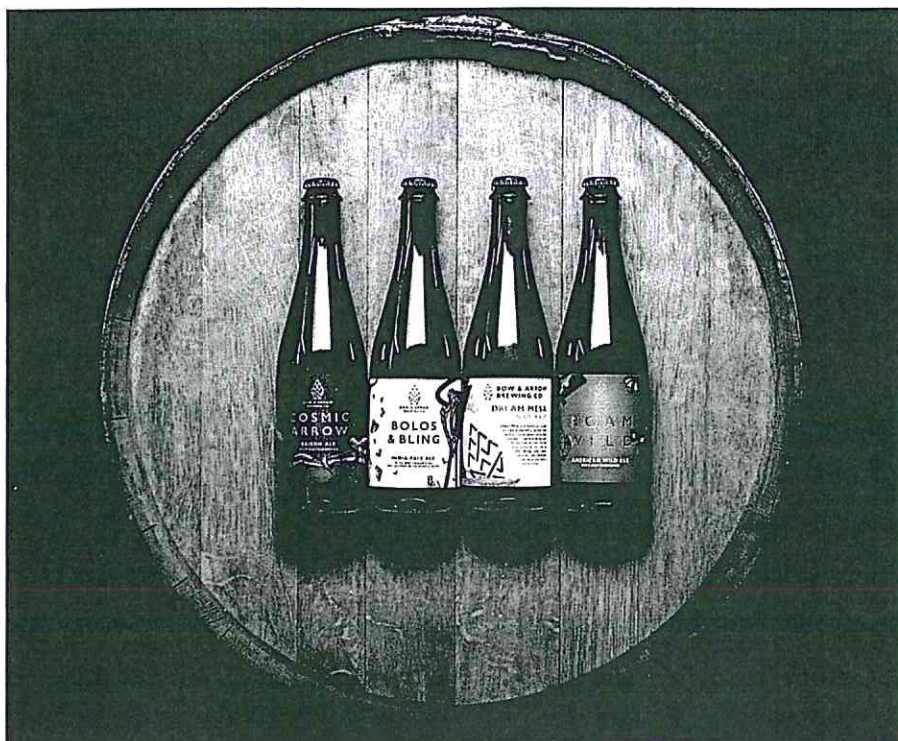
An all-wood herringbone design graces the wall behind the bar, and visuals of the vast southwest landscape reinforce the brewery's connection to the land.



While they're seasoned home brewers, Sheppard and Begay hired a professional brewer with experience brewing on a commercial scale. Bow & Arrow head brewer Ted O'Hanlan previously crafted the unique "Plow to Pint" beers that Fullsteam Brewery in North Carolina is known for, before heading to the award-winning Black Tooth Brewing company in Sheridan, Wyoming.

The couple still partake in the creative brewing process. "We collaborate on new beers and unique ingredients, and we're very much involved on our sensory and tasting panels," Sheppard said.

Bow & Arrow makes small-batch brews, often infused with southwestern ingredients like roasted blue corn kernels or wild sumac. They actively embrace incorporating "a sense of place, whether that's geography or culture" in their branding, Begay said. The brewery sources ingredients locally, and from Native producers when appropriate, such as Navajo Agricultural



Products Industries, an enterprise of the Navajo Nation.

Fun names like Cosmic Arrow Saison take inspiration from Native and popular cultures. "It's been helpful for us to draw from our unique Native backgrounds. We've found that having a story around the beers resonates with people. It's been really well-received," said Sheppard, adding that they strike a careful balance between drawing from their Native backgrounds while being culturally appropriate and respectful.

Dale Deforest, an Indigenous comic book illustrator, and Begay's high school friend, designs the beer labels. "I think that gives us a real unique style and look in the beer scene, and it also feels authentic. That's very important in terms of branding and marketing," Begay said.

Begay's favorite brand is the Bolos & Bling Brett IPA — featuring several different types of Bolo ties on the label. "It pays tribute to the fashion of the southwest," Begay said.

A recent addition to the roster is "Coyote Cool," which pays homage to Native stories of the coyote "being a trickster and getting into trouble," Sheppard said.

The Denim Tux Blue Corn Lager takes the prize for the most popular beer in the taproom and in wholesale accounts. "That's one where we have incorporated local roasted blue corn, and people really love it. Most people haven't tried a beer with blue corn, but that was an intentional move that we made to incorporate an

ingredient that is local," Sheppard said.

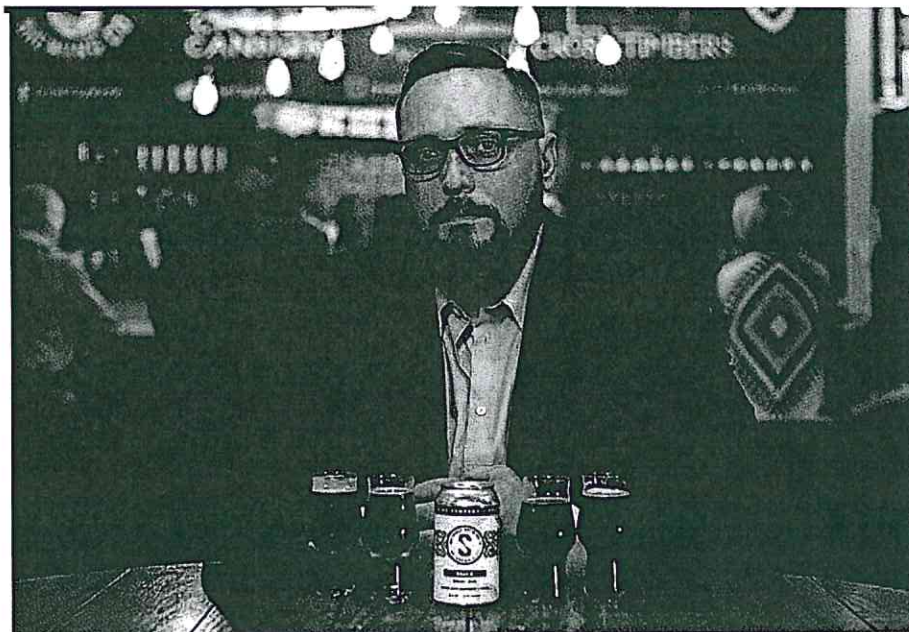


Raised on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota, Sheppard's entrepreneurial spirit is inspired by her grandma, who designed regalia and more. "She made star quilts and moccasins and traditional foods that she would sell" at pow wows from her pop-up camper. "It instilled in me a sense of self-determination and persistence — whether it was going to Stanford, working in venture capital, or entering the craft beer movement," Sheppard said.

Begay, Diné, likewise grew up on the reservation, where her father operated a transport company for more than 20 years, in addition to holding down a career as a physician. "I was exposed to that physician/entrepreneur side of things early on, which I think is pretty unique for somebody who grew up on the rez. We definitely have a lot of respect for mentors. Mentors are very important culturally," said Begay. "Being Navajo, I've learned to integrate culture into a business model."

And that's exactly what Sheppard and Begay have done — infuse the lessons of their Tribal heritages and the beauty of the southwest landscape into their craft beer business.

As Sheppard puts it modestly: "Our backgrounds have given rise to what we found is a unique approach in the greater craft beer industry."



If anyone owns the romantic version of a startup, it's Jake Keyes.

Like a lot of entrepreneurs, Keyes converted a passion into a bona fide business. But getting there involved a dark twist.

Keyes, a member of the Ioway Tribe, and owner, brewmaster, and head of the sales department at Skydance Brewing Company in Oklahoma City, grew up dirt poor in Little Axe, Oklahoma. Raised by a single dad

with a knack for home brewing, Keyes had a tendency of "getting nosy and messing up a couple of batches when his dad wasn't looking." So, his dad taught him to brew at age 12, and by age 20, Jake "fell in love with the business."

"My dad and I always dreamed about opening a brewery," Keyes recounted. But that dream was dashed when his father quickly succumbed to multiple sclerosis at age 56.

JAKE KEYES

IOWAY TRIBE

SKYDANCE BREWING
COMPANY

By Renae Dittmer

But not before Jake "found his dad's old beer recipes in a book, brewed some up, and took one up" to his ailing father. His dad liked it so much that Keyes took it to a home brewing club that encouraged him to enter a Dallas competition.

Keyes won that medal, so he learned via a phone call. But it was another phone call that day that changed his life. "By the time I got to my hotel room, a second call relayed that my dad had passed away. I decided then and there to open a brewery, and not procrastinate like my dad," Keyes recalls.

Skydance Brewing Company — the first Native-owned craft brewery in Oklahoma City — opened in late 2018. Currently housed in a co-op, Keyes has a 2020 plan to expand in the Oklahoma market where he wants to pay homage to his Native heritage.



MORGAN OWLE-CRISP

EASTERN BAND
OF CHEROKEE

SEVEN CLANS BREWING

By Renae Dittmer

Morgan Owle-Crisp, president/owner of Seven Clans Brewing and the Native half (Eastern Band Cherokee) of the Crisp duo with her husband Travis, operations manager/owner, is a serial entrepreneur.

Well-embedded in the hospitality and beverage industry, her first foray into entrepreneurship was her purchase of a company that published and distributed Cherokee books. Now, after 15 years in hospitality, Owle-Crisp has launched into craft brewing in North Carolina, with Seven Clans, the first Native-owned craft brewery in a state with \$2.1 billion in craft beer sales in 2018.

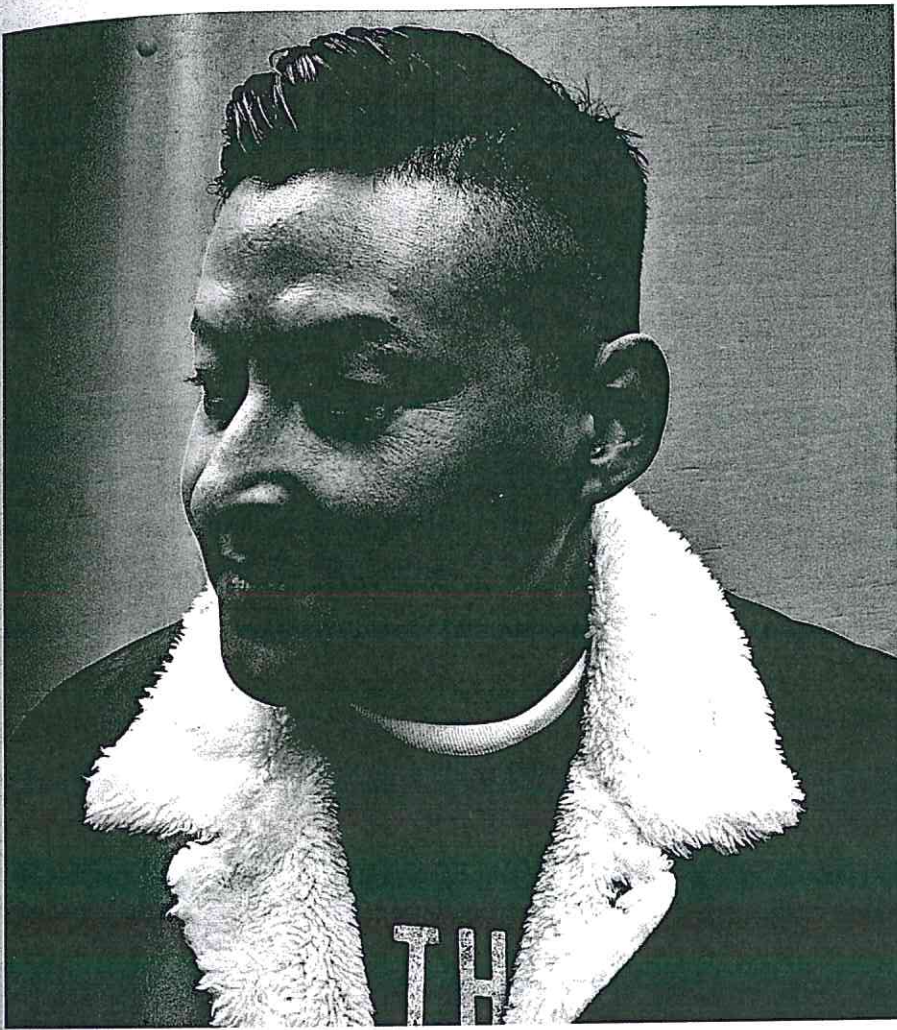
But Owle-Crisp's impetus wasn't just the love of beer. She was out shopping when she noticed Cherokee symbols that she had grown up with on merchandise, but which were not Native

made. It prompted her to think about the food and beverage industry where "Native designs and concepts are often appropriated, but not Native-owned," and wondered out loud, "Why aren't we branding us?"

Then came the moment when she began looking at companies from all over that carried Indigenous names and symbols but had no ties to Tribes and no real thought given to what being Native American meant. Commercialization and mass marketing were separate from the people those symbols came from.

"I thought it was important for Native people to come out and take their stance and show who they are in the industry," Owle-Crisp said. "It was a matter of how we present ourselves as Cherokee to the rest of the world and how people on the outside look at Native people," she said.

The importance of having a good message and sharing it with everyone else now drives her brewery business model. Today Owle-Crisp tells the story of her people in everything she does, and reception has been good. The Crisps partnered with a local brewery and debuted their first product at a local casino in March 2018. They now look forward to the day when they can both produce and sell on the Cherokee reservation.



HEAT LALIBERTE

CREE-MÉTIS

ONE ARROW

A distinguished chef, Heat Laliberte has worked in Vancouver's top restaurants and hotels. His resume includes positions at Blue Water Café and the Fairmont and Westin Hotel brands, since his cheffing career started in 2005. He's even cooked for world-class athletes at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, and for the 2018 Winter Olympic games in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

But Laliberte (Cree-Métis) was hungry for more.

During the time he was refining the charcuterie and butchery program at the Fairmont Pacific Rim in Vancouver, he came across an ad for the Aboriginal Business & Entrepreneurship Skills Training program at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre. That altered the trajectory of his career. Laliberte applied, got accepted, and learned how to develop a busi-

ness plan and start a business.

"Because I'm a chef, I knew that I wanted to do something around food. I'm very passionate about making charcuterie — especially sausages and bacon. It's something that I'm really good at," Laliberte told *Native Business Magazine*.

After Laliberte graduated from the Aboriginal Business & Entrepreneurship program in November 2016, he put his salary toward self-funding One Arrow, his artisanal, naturally-smoked bacon business.

"It's always been a dream of mine to be a vendor at the farmer's market, so my idea was to open a stall at the farmer's market selling my artisan bacon. We had a couple months to prepare for the final presentation [through the Aboriginal Business & Entrepreneurship program], so I was working on different recipes, glazes and different kinds of pork belly," he said.

In January 2017, Laliberte won the best business idea and presentation for the course. "That gave me the confidence to apply to the Vancouver Farmer's Market as a vendor," he said.

Today, Laliberte is all about making customers smile. His client-base is growing at



the farmer's market. "People want to hear about your product and how you make it and where you source everything from," he said.

So, what's his spiel? Laliberte tells potential customers that he's a First Nations entrepreneur who started One Arrow to make small-batch, hand-cured, naturally smoked, hormone-free bacon.

"I use natural ingredients to support the local B.C. [British Columbia] economy. I have different flavors. I have a hickory-smoked maple bacon; the maple syrup is from Squamish. I have a black pepper and honey; and I use honey from White Rock, which is a suburb of Vancouver — so it's local, wild flower honey. I have a Chinese Five Spice; and I have a bacon that I call Salt and Smoke that has no sugar added — which is great for people with health issues like diabetes. That is actually selling quite well, because a lot of people are trying to stay away from sugar these days. I take a lot of pride in my product, and I just want to share it with the people of Vancouver," he told *Native Business*.

In addition to the farmer's market, One Arrow supplies small butcher shops in the greater Vancouver area, and residences and small businesses in Vancouver can order the bacon through a delivery service called SPUD.ca. Laliberte is also talking with a grocery store chain right about supplying four of their stores.

When it came to developing his brand, Laliberte turned to his friends skilled at website or logo design. "My new logo with the pig is done by an Ojibwe artist-in-residence at our Aboriginal Hotel downtown," Laliberte shared.

Laliberte currently works full-time as the butcher at the highly regarded Culinary Capers Catering & Special Events in Vancouver, where he additionally rents 6,000 square feet of space for One Arrow — "ideal for product storage," he said.

Still, Laliberte's considering when he can make the leap to full-time entrepreneurship.

"It's also about that fear of the unknown," he said. "If you quit your full-time job, you're going to have to make your business succeed."

THOMAS BEGAY

NAVAJO/HOPI
CHIEF BURGERS



Thomas Begay (Navajo, Hopi) had to overcome a series of logistical challenges to launch Chief Burgers, a gourmet burger and picadilly business on wheels, based in Window Rock, Arizona, on the Navajo Nation reservation. "We're winning the trust of the people with the quality of the food and the quality of our service," Begay told Native Business.

Begay graduated from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2016 with degrees in management and marketing. Immediately after graduation, he struggled to land a job — so he looked to entrepreneurship. He took his detailed, 80-page business plan for a food truck business and began scouring for funding sources. He turned to the Navajo Nation, his local Veteran's Affairs office, organizations near Window Rock, and the U.S. Small Business Administration. Yet his applications for business loans were denied.

"They wanted assets and three years of sales history and also projections. I had the projections, but I wasn't in business long enough to secure funding," he said. "I kept working on my budget, doing personal budget cuts."

Eventually, he turned to microlenders. "The gist of all their statements was 'no-capital for food truck start-ups,'" Begay said.

Left with little options, Begay turned to banks and credit unions to see if he could obtain a loan as a startup.

"Not being brick and mortar is one thing, but a startup that most envision as a taco truck, let alone trying to sell the idea of getting a slice of the burger industry — people think it's crazy or disruptive. Lack of business startup history was a common objection I was often confronted with," Begay shared.

Ultimately, he needed to self-fund.

Grinding it out in the restaurant industry, Begay and his wife Kindra Begay (Navajo, Hopi) saved \$15,000 to purchase an old FedEx truck to house Chief Burgers. (Kindra oversees marketing, customer service and sales for Chief Burgers.)

He took a job as a server at Applebee's. "It was sustainable, earning about \$200 per day

in tips," Begay said. The vast majority of that money went toward Chief Burgers—outfitting the FedEx truck with cooking equipment, painting it and buying vendor space.

While high-quality, homemade burgers are the focus, his business actually began to soar when he introduced a novelty food from his youth. "We're known for our fresh ingredients for our burgers; they're fresh-pressed every day," he said.

But Chief Burgers needed an edge. He started selling Picadillies. "Koolaid and pickles is one of my childhood favorites. It really took off and helped revive the Chief Burgers brand. Our picadillies are known for quality and attention to detail. They have to be picture-perfect and it has to look crazy. It never fails, the first thing people do is take a picture," Begay said.

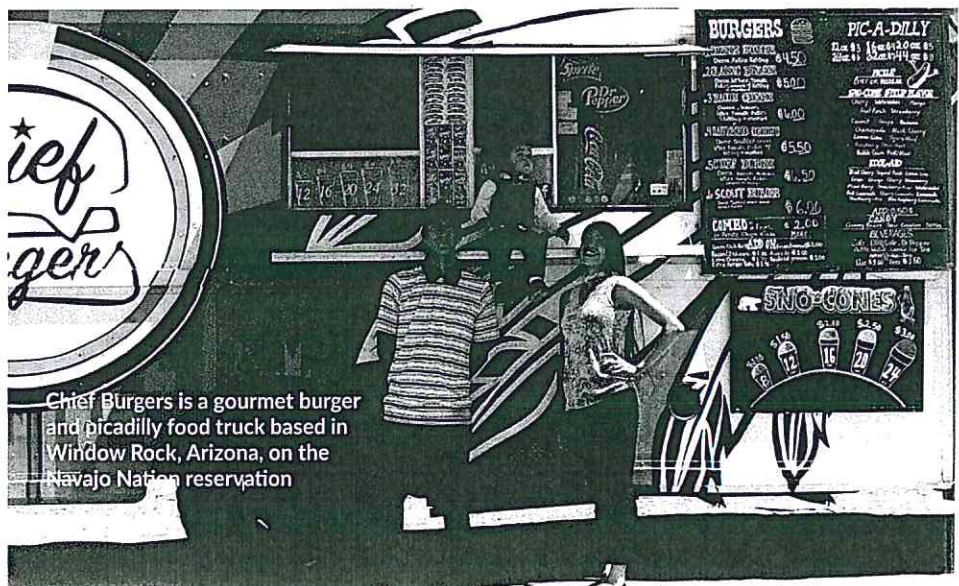
He added with confidence: "They're not over-powering flavors. It's perfectly balanced, and hard to replicate."

Begay has encouraged customer loyalty through a rewards program. "When you earn enough points, you get a free picadilly or burger. The redemption codes are sent directly to customers' phones," Begay said.

Ultimately, Chief Burgers is a reflection of self-sovereignty, he emphasized. "It's a Native brand. Chief Burgers is trademarked, patented and copyrighted by the Navajo Nation."

But Begay has high-hopes for expansion. He hopes to bring in and set aside enough earnings to travel to pow wows, operating as a vendor across the country. He also envisions Chief Burgers locations across the country, with logos redesigned to reflect the Tribe.

"I can tailor Chief Burgers' logo to any state or to any Tribe. They could plug-into an established growing network that allows for location-based alterations and additions, while practicing their sovereignty and independence," he said.



Chief Burgers is a gourmet burger and picadilly food truck based in Window Rock, Arizona, on the Navajo Nation reservation



LEE MEISEL

LEEWAY FRANKS
LEEWAY BUTCHER

Three years ago, Lee Meisel, opened Leeway Franks, a beloved sausage shop and restaurant in Lawrence, Kansas. Meisel and his "tight-knit crew" of employees make the all-natural, locally sourced frankfurters, bratwursts and sausages in-house — a skill Meisel garnered as a teen, working at a butcher shop in rural North Dakota.

"There's a parallel between indigenous values and resourcefulness — not wasting anything, and making sure that you are doing the best job that you can," Meisel, Lakota, told Native Business.

In December 2018, Meisel opened his second operation, a

door down from Leeway Franks. Leeway Butcher, a full-service, whole-animal butcher shop and retail store, offers "a variety of locally-sourced, humanely-raised meats from small family farms in the surrounding area," Meisel said.

Reflecting on entrepreneurship, Meisel shared: "I'm a sole proprietor. My whole life is tied up in the restaurant, and my intellectual property in the brand. When you think of it in those terms, decision-making becomes more real. You know you can't take big gambles. I think having some restriction on funds, it makes you more responsible."



KARLENE HUNTER

LAKOTA

NATIVE AMERICAN
NATURAL FOODS

Karlene Hunter and her business partner Mark Tilsen founded Native American Natural Foods on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation more than 10 years ago. A member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Hunter previously founded Lakota Express

(LEX), a full-service direct marketing company located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. She holds an MBA from Oglala Lakota College, and also counts decades of experience working on educational and economic development on the reservation.

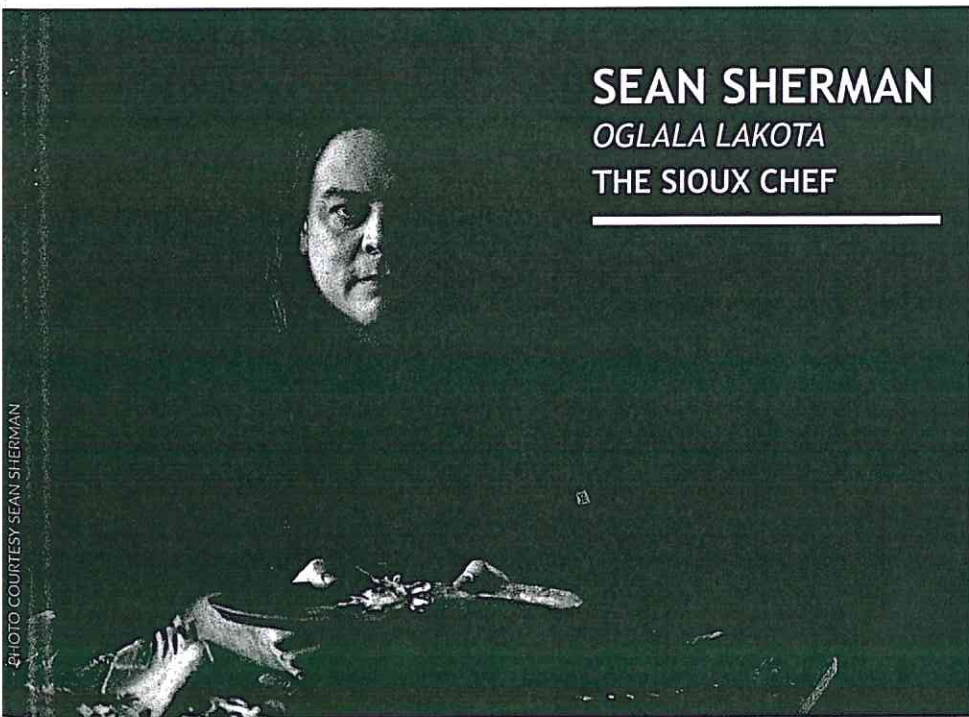
In 2007, Native American Natural Foods debuted its first food product, the Tanka Bar. Today Native American Natural Foods' products are sold at more than 8,000 retailers, including REI and Costco.

Based on traditional wasna and pemmican, the Tanka Bar combines high-protein, prairie-fed buffalo and tart-sweet cranberries. The lean meat has provided fuel to Lakota warriors for centuries. "Our runners used buffalo and berries when they would go out on hunts; they'd pack it in a buffalo horn," Hunter, co-founder and CEO of Native American Natural Foods, told *Native Business Magazine*.

PHOTO COURTESY KARLENE HUNTER

SEAN SHERMAN

UGLALA LAKOTA
THE SIOUX CHEF



Chef Sean Sherman, the Oglala Lakota founder of "The Sioux Chef," is on a mission. He wants to help indigenous peoples across the world reclaim their ancestral food knowledge, while creating sustainable economies around indig-

nous foodways.

Sherman and his tight-knit, indigenous Sioux Chef team, including co-owner Dana Thompson, are working on two major projects in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, area. This summer, they plan to debut the first

of many Indigenous Food Labs, featuring a nonprofit restaurant. The following year, The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen, a for-profit restaurant, is scheduled to open in the popular Water Works park pavilion.

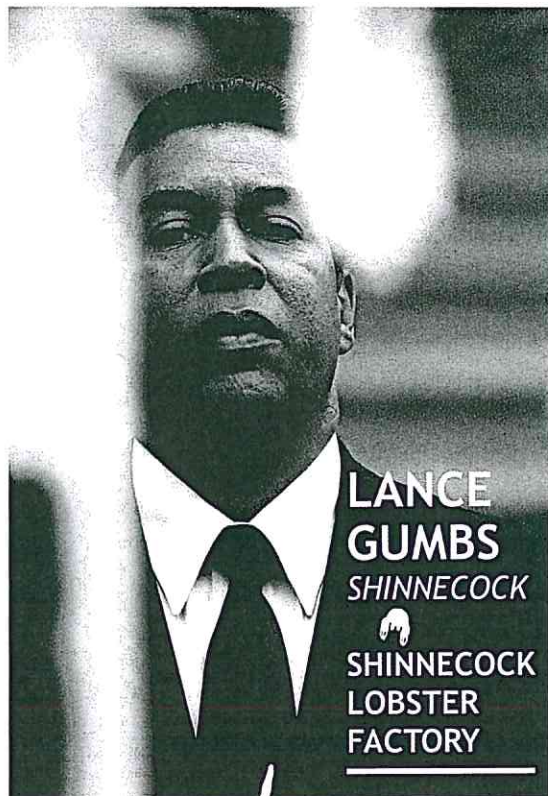
The Sioux Chef restaurant will churn out healthy, indigenous foods, primarily from the Minneapolis-St. Paul region — cutting out foods not ancestral to Turtle Island, like wheat flour, dairy, processed cane sugar, and even beef, pork and chicken.

"We prioritize our purchasing from indigenous vendors first, and then use a lot of partners and growers growing indigenous foods in our region," Sherman said.

Meanwhile, the premiere Indigenous Food Lab will help to create opportunity for indigenous foodpreneurs: chefs, producers, educators and other food industry professionals. The live, nonprofit restaurant will feature a classroom kitchen, created through The Sioux Chef's existing 501(c)3, NATIFS (North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems).

In 2019, the James Beard Foundation awarded Sherman another honor, a Leadership Award. Last year, his cookbook *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* won the James Beard Award for Best American Cookbook.

PHOTO COURTESY SEAN SHERMAN



PHOTOS COURTESY LANCE GUMBS

Over the course of his entrepreneurial career, Lance Gumbs has succeeded as a club venue operator and DJ, as well as a proprietor of a gift shop, smoke shop, delicatessen and café. He recently added co-owner of the Shinnecock Lobster Factory in the Hamptons to that list.

Gumbs' first foray into business was a youth club. While still attending prep school, Gumbs gutted a home — a gift inherited from an elder — and turned it into a teen club. "I didn't understand entrepreneurship," he says, "but I made a ton of money!"

Each Friday and Saturday night, Gumbs would open the club and spin tunes. That's how he started out as a DJ.

While a freshman in college, he opened an outpost to sell Native jewelry, clothing and other indigenous-made accessories. Although situated across the street from the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, he struggled to turn a profit. Good fortune came knocking in the form of a Mohawk man, driving a van, who asked Gumbs, "Are you interested in selling cigarettes?" The man offered Gumbs \$10,000 worth of inventory in consignment. "I made \$2,800 my first day," he says, "and the third day, I ran out of stock." The rest is history.

When it came time to diversify, Gumbs opened a deli and café at his Shinnecock Indian Outpost.

Most recently, Gumbs added a lobster roll concession to his portfolio. Lance Gumbs' lobster roll joint, located on the reservation, on the East End of Long Island, opened for business Memorial Weekend 2017.

The Shinnecock Lobster Factory serves up variations of the Hampton's quintessential lobster roll — from the BLT to the Cajun to the Shinnecock. The menu also boasts bisques, seafood sides, sea burgers (think crab cakes and yellow fin tuna) and more.

He and business partner Chef Marco Barrila are so busy, they can barely keep the lobster in the pot. "During the U.S. Open, we sold 5,000 pounds of lobster," Gumbs says.



Matt Chandra (left), Ben Jacobs (right)

A decade ago, Ben Jacobs opened the doors to Tocabe, an American Indian Eatery in Denver, Colorado.

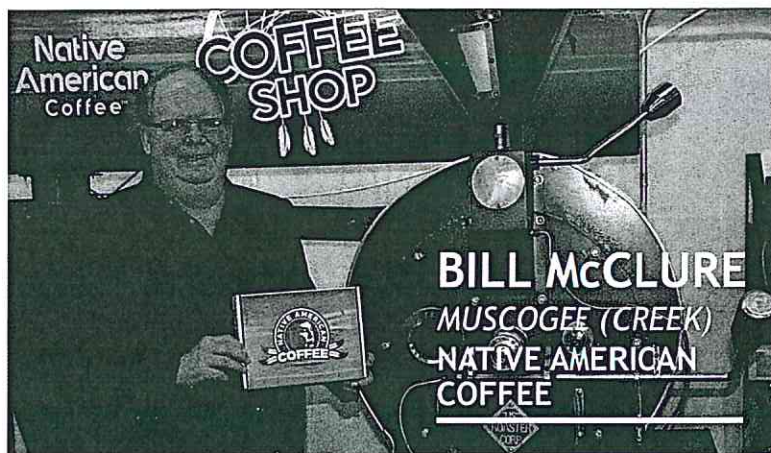
Tocabe, which means "blue" in Osage, stands by its philosophy: "Native first and local second." The fast-casual restaurant purchases ingredients from Native vendors whenever possible to put money back into Native economies. Tocabe also embraces an ingredient-driven concept, meaning they'll create a unique dish around one exciting, indigenous ingredient.

Tocabe also takes a community-led approach to business. Every Tocabe member tastes each new food item. "We always say that we are a kitch-

en by committee," Jacobs told Native Business.

Today the successful operation counts two brick-and-mortar locations, plus a food truck, and the Osage co-founder and his business partner Matt Chandra are in growth mode, looking to expand beyond Colorado's borders.

"The plan from the beginning was to become a regional if not national brand," Jacobs said. "I think within the next five years, we should be in multiple states; my goal is for six to eight additional restaurants."



Bill McClure started NativeAmericanCoffee.com with his daughter, Ellie, in 2008. The proud Muscogee (Creek) owner attributes a lot of his success to hustle and old-fashioned business practices. Native American Coffee, a business-to-business and wholesale company, has sent out 40,000 handwritten notes with its orders, and generally includes cookies with each one. About one million cookies to date, in fact.

McClure employs a strong hire-Native preference at his 12,000-square-foot operation in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and three quar-

ters of his 14 full-time employees are Native American, he says, from the Choctaw, Cherokee and Creek Tribes. "I love training young people," he says. "It opens the door for young Native Americans to build a new career."

He also counts some Tribes as his customers, including the Muscogee (Creek) Nation where he supplies both their casinos and some of their offices as well. In addition, the firm supplies a number of small airlines, as well as Campbell's Soup, a number of different Fortune 500 companies, and some hospitals and hotels.

PHOTO COURTESY BEN JACOB



**VICTORIA
VASQUES**
DIEGUEÑO
TRIBAL TECH, LLC

Today Tribal Tech, LLC, Victoria Vasques' 8(a) startup, has an impressive and growing collection of awards as one of the fastest-growing small businesses in the Washington, D.C. federal marketplace. It has a spot on the 2018 11th annual list of the 50 Fastest Growing Woman-Owned/Led Companies for 2018 from the Women Presidents' Organization for the third consecutive year. It's on the Virginia Chamber of Commerce's 23rd Annual List of Virginia's Fantastic 50, and it's been included on *Inc. Magazine's* 5000 list for four consecutive years. And in 2015, Vasques earned her own recognition as the U.S. Small Business Administration's Person of the Year in the Northern Virginia Region.

But the journey from her start 19 years ago, when she decided to retire from the federal government, to her stunning suc-

cess today has been anything but overnight. With 25 years of public service at the U.S. Departments of Education and Energy, Vasques stepped down from her position at the U.S. Department of Education in 2000 to launch her own business on the advice of friends.

Initially, acquiring clients was a slow roll, by her own account. Although she thought she could easily snag contracts with both federal agencies she had worked for, the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) made that difficult without past performance as a business — even as a woman-owned, Native-owned small business. (Vasques is part Diegueño of the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians based in Valley Center, California.) Consequently, she describes the period from 2000 to 2009 spent “literally knocking on doors to

get people to give her work.”

Eventually, she got a single person on a contract doing work as Tribal Tech. It was enough to get by, but not flourish, and when the opportunity to run as a Republican candidate for state delegate in Virginia's largely blue 45th district in 2009 came about, she took it.

There, however, she suffered a stinging political loss that led to the epiphany that drove Vasques back into business. “If I can knock on all the doors in the district and work as hard as I had to run for delegate, I could work that hard to start my own business,” she told *Native Business Magazine*. And so she did. Thus, it wasn't until 2010 that she “did anything serious” and “really put the pedal to the metal to build Tribal Tech's past performance” that would greatly improve her ability to bid competitively in the federal marketplace.

During that time, she also garnered U.S. Small Business 8(a) certification, which was approved in 30 days — something nearly unheard of. Vasques is a huge advocate of the Small Business Administration's (SBA) 8(a) program, and advises everyone considering getting into the federal space to get certified as soon as possible. “The education, training and technical support that the SBA offers can be the difference between success and failure,” she advises.

To help fund Tribal Tech's growth, Vasques “established a close relationship with a banker at a financial institution,” she said. “We took baby steps, growing Tribal Tech together. I would also add that establishing a realistic line of credit, especially if you're in the government contracting business, is essential.”

Today, Tribal Tech has a healthy portfolio of over \$8.3 million with about 100 people working nationwide for Tribal Tech, providing training and technical assistance to various entities including Tribes, federal agencies and private businesses. Tribal Tech's specialized services include training and technical assistance, grants management, communications, outreach and event planning.

“People, Performance and Partnership” are Vasques' watchwords — and woven into every aspect of her company.

Her advice to fellow Native entrepreneurs is confidence and devotion. “Definitely go after what it is that you do, and do it well,” she said. “If you have a passion, go after it! Stay true to who you are, and be truly committed.” Vasques concedes that entrepreneurship requires a “110 percent effort... and one you have to be engaged in every day” — yet effort well worth it.



CLARA PRATTE

NAVAJO STRONGBOW STRATEGIES

"My mother always told me that there's no such thing as saying, 'That's not my job,'" says Clara Pratte, CEO of Strongbow Strategies, a multi-disciplinary firm that supports agencies and private companies in need of IT and cyber security support, geographic information system (GIS)

strategies services, emergency management and even facilities support.

Pratte, Navajo, spent much of her post-university career working in the public sector before launching Strongbow in 2013. She has served as the national director of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Native American Affairs, as chief of staff for Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, and as executive director of the Nation's Washington, D.C., office.

Even after starting Strongbow, she worked nights and weekends to build her small company until 2016, when she brought in a minority partner to grow the firm.

One of Strongbow's most unusual contracts involves Antarctica, Doritos tortilla chips and expensive, sensitive scientific equipment. "Strongbow supplies workforce augmentation for various needs," says Pratte. "Our staffers are used to inspect cargo that will be loaded on barges to supply the National Science Foundation's facilities in Antarctica."



JOY HUNTINGTON

KOYUKON ATHABASCAN UQAQTI CONSULTING

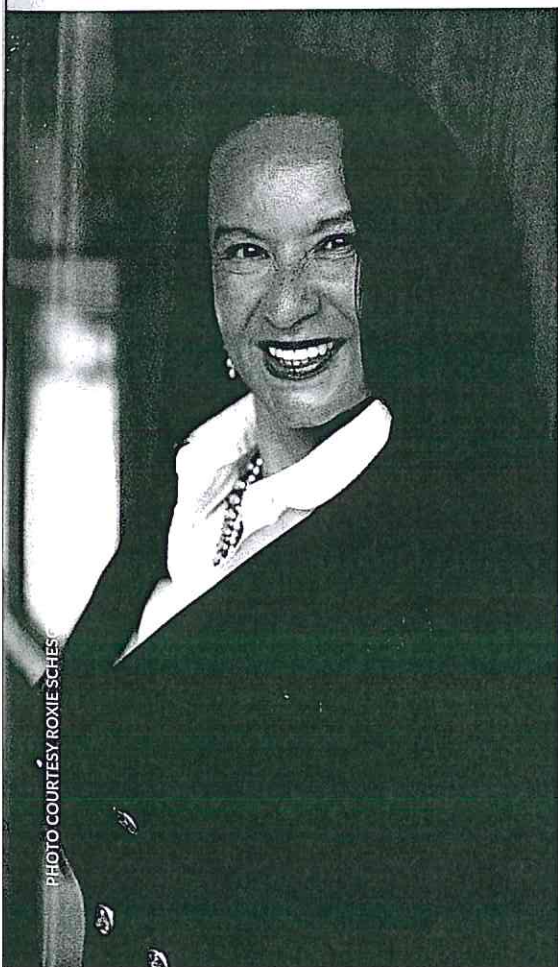
A Koyukon Athabaskan entrepreneur is achieving her goals through a combination of grit, an in-born ability to foster productive communications between people, and a firm footing in her Tribal heritage.

Huntington launched Uqaqti Consulting in 2011. Uqaqti, pronounced "oo-kuk-ti," is Inupiaq for "one who speaks." The title was given to Huntington by the Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly, and Huntington accepted the honor by renaming her business, saying that being the recipient of the title from another Alaska region signifies how she builds bridges across the state.

Uqaqti's main business lines are planning and facilitating community meetings, coordinated communications and marketing strategies, and government relations. Huntington is a DBE-certified public involvement consultant. Combined with her cultural ties and knowledge of Tribal protocols, she's become a sought-after facilitator for jobs ranging from meetings involving environmental impact statements on the North Slope of Alaska to transportation planning meetings. "Any time we work in rural Alaska, we call Joy," says Maryellen Tuttell of DOWL, a civil engineering and planning firm. "Her calmness and warmth make a huge difference in sometimes very contentious meeting situations."

Her advice to aspiring Native entrepreneurs? "Go all in," she says. "Grow your skills, push yourself to the next level."

PHOTO COURTESY JOY HUNTINGTON



ROXIE SCHESCKE

LAKOTA INDIAN EYES, LLC

After holding down several positions in construction and management, Roxie Schescke decided to make good on her dream of owning her own business. In 2005, Indian Eyes, LLC, was born.

The Lakota entrepreneur bootstrapped her operation out of a two-car garage made into living quarters and an office. Getting started required sacrifices. "It's tough to live within your means when you don't have any means," Schescke says. For several years, Schescke put everything she made back into the business.

Headquartered in Pasco, Washington, with offices across the U.S., Indian Eyes specializes in project management, staffing, plant operations and construction interface, equipment logistics, human resources, environmental and waste management services, and more. Indian Eyes has performed work for the U.S. Departments of Energy, Interior, Defense, Justice and Homeland Security; as well as major

prime contractors.

Today, her original team of two has grown to more than 60 employees, but has peaked at more than 100 (the variance is due to the contract-driven nature of her business). The company's revenue holds steady between \$25-27 million annually. To date, Indian Eyes has generated more than \$100 million in total revenue.

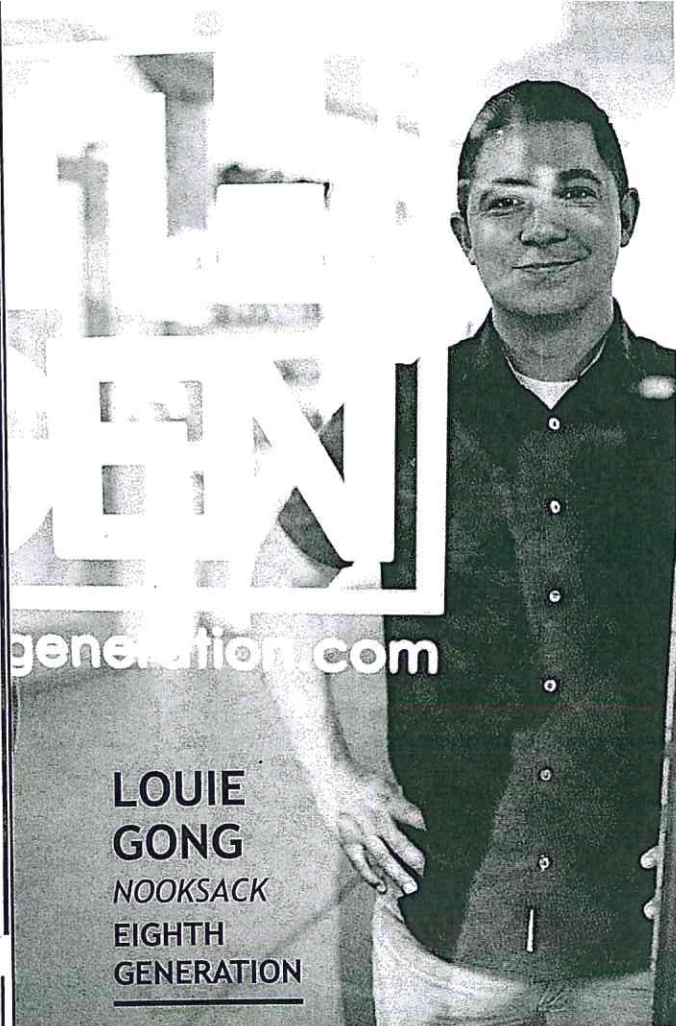
"It took many years to get to that point, because I never had anyone to lean on or help me out," she says. "But I was determined."

Focusing on their core competencies is part of the reason Indian Eyes has had zero incidents since their founding — a nearly unprecedented feat in the fields of staffing, security, equipment logistics, and construction and engineering. "We only do what we know," Schescke says.

She believes that if she can show the outcomes of drive, perseverance and tenacity, others in Indian Country might follow her lead. "For me being all by myself, with a 100 percent Native American Woman Owned business, I'm pretty proud of what I've done," she says. "If anything can be told or heard from my story, it is to motivate other fellow Native people to make a difference."

PHOTO COURTESY CLARA PRATTE

PHOTO COURTESY ROXIE SCHESCKE



**LOUIE
GONG**
NOOKSACK
EIGHTH
GENERATION

The scale of Eighth Generation's success is totally unprecedented for a Native-owned business in the arts space. Among the fastest growing Native-owned companies in North America, Eighth Generation represents what founder Louie Gong refers to as "a radical update to the American dream."

"Our success has come while subtly giving the middle finger to large brands with a tradition of selling fake Native art, and an outdated gallery system that has not made much of a difference for Native artists," Gong said.

But Gong (Nooksack) isn't wasting time being outraged. He's creating avenues for the self-determination of fellow Native arts entrepreneurs.

A former nonprofit president and educator, Gong has never lost sight of Eighth Generation's purpose. Just a decade ago, he was illustrating contemporary Coast Salish art on Vans in his living room. While the Tribal-inked shoes became the impetus for Eighth Generation, that phase of the company's development only reflects its formative years.

In 2015, Eighth Generation became the first Native-owned company to produce high-end wool blankets fea-

turing stunning Tribal designs. Business has more than doubled each year, and Gong anticipates even bigger strides going forward.

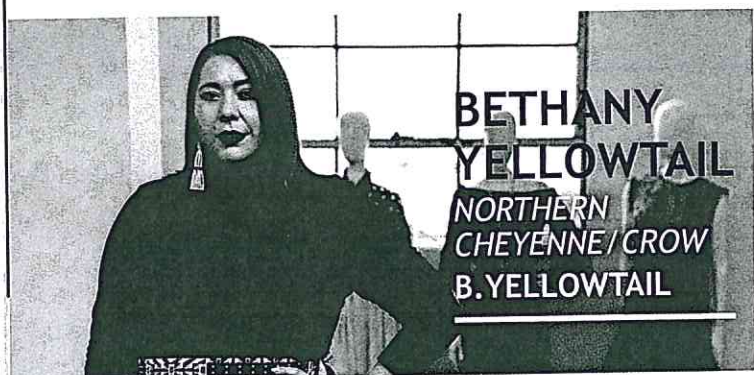
"Even though we're doing business of much greater scale, our values haven't changed," Gong emphasized.

Since Gong launched Eighth Generation in 2008, the company has remained committed to community engagement and collaboration. "Eighth Generation sets the gold standard for how businesses should align with cultural artists," Gong said.

Unlike traditional gallery system, Eighth Generation gives Native artists direct access to buyers. "I believe that's the true pathway to sustainability," Gong noted.

Eighth Generation also gives artists leverage to produce in mass, which is critical to meet consumer demand before a larger company swoops in and replicates ideas and aesthetics. "The key is being able to transition from producing one-off pieces to producing art in quantity," Gong said.

In addition to e-commerce, Gong's rapidly growing empire showcases its products from a storefront with prime real estate: Seattle's Pike Place Market.



Bethany Yellowtail, Northern Cheyenne/Crow, founded her fashion label in 2015 in Los Angeles. As CEO and designer of the B.YELLOWTAIL label, Yellowtail specializes in storytelling through wearable art. One day when the young entrepreneur was visiting the Crow Reservation in southern Montana, where she was born and raised, she recognized that local Native artisans were undervaluing their handmade, heirloom-quality jewelry, textiles and accessories. Recognizing that technology could bridge the gap, Yellowtail launched B.Yellowtail Collective in 2016. The online shop features handmade work by Native American artists, and provides the respective artist with the majority of the proceeds.

"With tradition and culture at the heart of what we do, we've set out to share our indigenous creative expression, while providing an empowering, entrepreneurial platform for Native peoples," states the website B.YELLOWTAIL.com.

While B.YELLOWTAIL primarily manufactures in downtown Los Angeles, Yellowtail continually seeks ways to bring jobs back to the Crow community.



Partners in life and business Sally Snow and Will Parry founded Wolf's Run, a restaurant, smoke shop, gas station and grocery on the Seneca reservation in western New York State. It all started in 1988 when Parry was 27 years old. While on welfare, Parry convinced a company by the name of Shorts Oil to front him a load of gas, scraped together enough money to buy two 5,000-gallon tanks and a dispenser tank, and started pumping gas. Three years later, when Snow entered his life, they added a 50-seat restaurant, a grocery store, a fuel station, store selling Native crafts, and a trucking operation. The couple has also expanded to other locations, and is building a new, replacement restaurant on the current property.

The couple's advice to new entrepreneurs? Grow the business, and don't borrow. "We always kept investing our money back into our business and adding on," said Snow. "We never ever got a drop of money from a bank."

PHOTO COURTESY BETHANYYELLOWTAIL

STEPHAN CHENEY

LAKOTA

HIGH REZ WOOD COMPANY

ground when they came over to visit him and his wife.

The self-taught furniture artist has since grown his product inventory. To date, he has created dining tables, coffee tables, benches, cutting boards, serving trays, spoons, paddles and eel hooks, a traditional fishing tool. He says it can take anywhere from two days to two weeks to complete a project, depending on the complexity and size of the piece.

The Lakota Native's dream is to one day have his own wood shop and create furniture in a much larger capacity "than what I am able to do right now in my little laundry room."

To get there, he knows he needs to follow his own advice: "It takes knowing ourselves and believing in ourselves to really grow," he says.

For now, he is content "bringing new life to wood" when he is not working full-time for Seventh Generation Fund as the special assistant to the president.

Stephan Cheney, a 29-year-old Lakota entrepreneur, hunts for wood around his Northern California home to make his signature furniture. "I am self-educated and it all starts with the belief, 'Yeah, I think I can do that!'" Cheney told Native Business.

Cheney has worked with many different types of wood, including birch, madrone, redwood (from his own backyard), maple,

cedar, Douglas fir, pine, oak, eucalyptus, Chechen, cherry and walnut. "Whenever I am working with any piece, I am doing it in a prayerful way and offer up tobacco. As indigenous people, we have a relationship with trees, so I am thanking the wood for the gift it is giving and whatever it might become next," Cheney said.

Cheney made his first dining table because his Relatives were sitting on the

JUSTIN NOTAH

NAVAJO

NOTAH'S SOUTHWEST CONNECTION

By Lynn Armitage

When Justin Notah went off to college at Colorado State University, his mother gave him a shoebox filled with trinkets from the family jewelry business his father started in 1970. "She wanted me to sell them on weekends to make extra cash for school," Notah, a Navajo, explains.

After selling jewelry at some powwows, Notah was smitten and jumped into the business full-time. Now 44, Notah, who says he's married to the business, has been peddling handmade sterling silver bracelets, rings, earrings and necklaces at Native American conferences and jewelry



shows for 20 years.

He is both jewelry maker (with his brother Larson) and wholesaler, representing 18 jewelry artists from the Zuni, Hopi and Santo Domingo Pueblo Tribes. His mother, Eleanor, is still by his side literally. She, too, owns a sterling silver jewelry business and usually sells in a booth right next to her son.

Notah laughs, "We have some friendly competition going. But she'll always be my mom."

