

## Tribe to vote on casino alcohol sales

Asheville Citizen-Times

CHEROKEE, N.C.— Members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians will have a chance to vote on whether alcohol sales will be allowed at Harrah's Cherokee Casino and Hotel.

A group of people who support a referendum on the matter got enough signatures to get the question on the ballot for the June primary or the September general election, said Shirley Reagan, chairwoman of the tribal Board of Elections.

Reagan said elections workers on Tuesday certified 1,536 signatures, which meets the requirement of getting 25 percent of registered voters to sign the petition.

The signature drive came after Principal Chief Michelle Hicks vetoed legislation from Tribal Council that would have set a referendum.

Alcohol sales are banned on the Cherokee Indian Reservation and have historically been controversial for the tribe.

The Aug. 7 legislation marked at least the third time in 18 years tribal leaders have taken up the matter.

A referendum in 1980 failed by a 2-1 margin. In 1999, Tribal Council canceled a referendum planned for the next year after backlash from conservative voters.

Two years ago, the Tribal Casino Gaming Board pulled a similar request for a referendum before the council could vote on it.

The board sponsored the request in August.

The tribe's 13,500 members receive a per-capita check twice a year from casino profits. Each member received \$9,438 this year.

The last check of the year, issued Dec. 1, was \$4,473 for each member. The amount was down 11 percent from June and marked the first time in the casino's 10-year history that profits to the tribe have decreased.

The casino in November said customer traffic was down 15 percent this year because of the recession and high gas prices this summer.

Harrah's Cherokee is one of the largest private employers in the region with 1,800 workers. The tribe made at least \$254.8 million on the business this year, with half the money going to members, according to a Citizen-Times calculation based on per-capita payment amounts.

In making its pitch for the referendum to Tribal Council, the gaming board this summer said alcohol sales combined with the expansion could double the current per-capita payment by 2015.

A spokesman for the casino on Thursday said the business had no comment about the referendum because the matter is now up to tribal voters.

Hicks vetoed the legislation, saying "an affirmative decision to open the door for alcohol would shame our forefathers for their efforts on this issue over the

## Mashpee tribe chairman hits infighting, media

MASHPEE, Mass. (AP) — The chairman of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe says infighting and media coverage are hurting the tribe's bid for an Indian casino.

The comments by Shawn Hendricks in a Dec. 16 letter to tribe members were his first since former tribal chairman Glenn Marshall admitted to fraud and corruption charges earlier in the week.

Hendricks said the tribe is being hurt by circumstances beyond its control and instigated by tribe members "who have a lot of personal grudges."

He also criticized tribe members who he said have ignored legal advice and spoken out about Marshall. He says that only implicates the tribe in something it didn't do and hurts its plans to build a casino in Middleborough.

Hendricks said the tribe can't have its own members undermining it "at the finish line."

## American Indian cremation pit found on island

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Exposed by erosion at the edge of a crumbling bluff, the pit discovered beneath 2 feet of sandy dirt at first appeared to be a grave just long and deep enough to bury a human body.

Excavation by archaeologists on Ossabaw Island revealed something more puzzling — just a few small bones, apparently from fingers or toes, mixed with charcoal, bits of burned logs and pottery shards predating the arrival of the first European explorers by at least a century.

The find has led researchers to suspect American Indians used the ancient pit to burn bodies of the dead, making it a rare example of cremation among the early native inhabitants of the southeastern U.S.

"It's a special sort of burial," said Tom Gresham, an Athens archaeologist who worked on the excavation and serves on Georgia's Council on American Indian Concerns. "The way Indian tribes over time buried their dead varied tremendously. But cremations are fairly rare."

Located six miles off the Savannah coast, Ossabaw Island remains one of Georgia's wildest barrier islands. Hogs, deer, armadillos and Sicilian donkeys roam the state-owned

island's 11,800 acres of wishbone-shaped uplands. Live oaks tower above the remains of slave plantations and ancient Indian burial mounds.

Researchers have found evidence that humans came to Ossabaw more than 4,000 years ago. It's believed Indians at first may have used the island as a winter camp to feed on shellfish before moving inland to hunt deer in the spring.

Burial mounds on Ossabaw typically hold intact human remains, said Dave Crass, Georgia's state archaeologist. Archaeologists said Friday that carbon dating on charcoal from the pit place it between 1290 and 1420 A.D.

Archaeologists initially thought the pit could be 1,000 to 3,000 years old based on pottery shards they found. Though carbon dating revealed it to be more recent, the find is still considered prehistoric because it predates the arrival of the first European explorers in Georgia in 1520.

Crass said other prehistoric graves on Ossabaw tend to be bodies buried intact, in a near fetal position, in shallow bowl-shaped pits.

"What makes this particular site unusual is that the individual was apparently cremated and then the

remains were presumably taken from this pit and interred somewhere else," Crass said.

David Hurst Thomas, a curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, said the cremation pit sounds significant.

Thomas was not involved in the Ossabaw excavation but has been studying Indian burials on neighboring St. Catherines Island for 30 years. Out of about 900 graves he's studied there that predate the arrival of Europeans, only nine held cremated remains, he said.

"Based on our St. Catherines experience, this is about a one-in-100 shot," Thomas said. "As a mortuary feature of that antiquity, I would say that's a big deal."

The Ossabaw cremation pit, roughly 6 feet long and 3 feet deep, had other unique characteristics.

Crass and fellow archaeologists, at first, suspected it might be a more modern grave because of its flat bottom and straight sides.

Early Indian graves tend to have round bottoms because people lacked shovels or other digging tools, said Dan Elliott, a Savannah archaeologist who helped excavate the Ossabaw pit

last month.

"We're thinking it was a fairly formal structure that was used to deflesh people — it looks almost like a little oven," Elliott said. "That's so far back in history that we don't know what was on their minds, but it shows there was a special reverence for the dead."

The state Council on American Indian Concerns gave the archaeologists permission to excavate the Ossabaw pit because erosion was destroying it.

The few human bones found in the pit will be studied further in hopes of determining if they belonged to more than one person. Once that's done, Crass said, they'll be reinterred with the Council overseeing the burial.

Thomas said such a find is a step in helping researchers understand America's early inhabitants, though why they would choose to cremate some of their dead and bury others intact remains a mystery.

"We don't know whether that's high status or low status. Is that the way you treat elders or battle captains?" Thomas said. "We're buried according to who we are when we die. It tells us a lot about a society by the way they treat the dead."

## Mashantucket firefighters petition to organize

By Brian Hallenbeck  
New London Day

MASHANTUCKET, Conn. — Connecticut's affiliate of the International Association of Fire Fighters has petitioned the Mashantucket Pequots in a bid to be recognized as the exclusive bargaining unit for the tribe's fire department, a union official said Wednesday.

The Uniformed Professional Fire Fighters Association, which represents some 4,000 full-time career firefighters in the state, has proposed a tribal department of about 30 firefighters, according to the official, Matthew Flor, the association's director of research and informa-

tion services.

In a requisite, preliminary step, more than 50 percent of the Mashantucket Pequot Fire Department's members showed interest in affiliating with the union, Flor said. "They're looking to join a professional organization ... that promotes health and safety, increased skills and efficiency, provides better customer service and improved employer-employee relations."

The UPFFA filed its petition with the Mashantucket Employment Rights Office, which was created last year, and will adhere to tribal law as it proceeds to a formal vote of firefighters on whether to affiliate with the

union, Flor said.

"We're still filing paperwork. No date has been established (for a vote)," he said.

The tribe could not confirm that it had received a petition from the union, according to Bruce MacDonald, a spokesman. A phone message left with the office of Alice Munyan, interim director of the Mashantucket Employment Rights Office, was not returned.

The Mashantucket Pequot Fire Department, which provides coverage for Foxwoods Resort Casino, MGM Grand at Foxwoods and the rest of the tribe's reservation, has experienced "some changes in working conditions," Flor

said, adding, "There have been some layoffs. There may be some more."

Firefighters are among the more than 700 tribal-government employees offered voluntary severance packages this month. The tribe has not announced how many employees it plans to trim from its work force.

In any event, Flor said, the department's staffing level is just one factor contributing to the members' interest in unionizing. "It's not directly related to that (layoffs)," he said. "It's a combination of reasons."

In discussing the unionizing effort last month, a firefighter who spoke on the condition of anonymity said

department members were also concerned about job descriptions and scheduling.

He said the department was down to 25 firefighters who cover four shifts. The shifts, each of which used to include eight men, including a captain, were down to five, the firefighter said, adding, "That's not safe for those of us working, residents or guests (of Foxwoods)."

The firefighter said about 85 percent of department members had indicated their interest in affiliating with the union.

The UPFFA represents about 95 percent of the career firefighters in the state.

## Hope for buy back



Associated Press

Jeff Mitchell, a member of Klamath Tribes tribal council, stands Dec. 8, on Round Butte north of Chiloquin, Ore., looking over a piece of the tribes' former reservation that they hope to buy back. The tribes lost their reservation after Congress terminated them as a tribe in 1954, but they hope to use the 90,000-acre parcel to leverage a revival of the timber industry that once sustained them.

## Kansas family breathes life into Indian traditions

BEATRICE, Neb. (AP) — As the elders of the tribe have died, Duane and Melinda Scates have watched as the old traditions of their ancestors slowly disappear.

That's why it has been their mission to teach those traditions to the younger generations.

"It's like a small crusade to bring some of it back," Duane Scates said.

The Scates and their 16-year-old daughter, Andrea, shared the traditions of the Ioway people recently as part of the Homestead National Monument of America Winter Festival at the Heritage Center near Beatrice.

The Scates family lives in White Cloud, Kan., where the Ioway Reservation for Kansas and Nebraska is situated.

As part of the Winter Festival event, the Scates family shared with

visitors the traditions of hunting, foods, regalia and celebration used by the Ioway tribes and the Pottawatamie tribes.

Duane spoke of the symbolism of the eagle staff and the blessing proceedings used by the Ioway Tribes. He then blessed the grounds of the Heritage Center.

Symbolism is an important part of the Ioway culture, Duane said. The color of their flag and even the designs of their clothing are symbolic.

He also shared information about the different hunting practices of the Bear and Buffalo clans of the Ioway Tribe.

Melinda Scates then talked about the different foods eaten by the Ioway Tribe, which included a large amount of corn, wild rice, squash, berries and other seeds found on the prairie.

The preservation and preparation of the food, particularly corn, was often a long process and often required the help of everyone, she said. Food is an important part of their culture.

"No matter where you go ... if they invite you for a meal, you best eat," she said.

Melinda uses many recipes passed onto her from her grandmothers, she said.

"I always loved to be in the kitchen," she said. "I learned a lot."

Andrea Scates, dressed in the traditional regalia of a shawl dancer, demonstrated a dance used at powwows. Her dress is handmade with intricate beading done by her father. She also wore a jingle dress, which weighs 30 to 40 pounds, to demonstrate another dance.

The regalia worn by the dancers is full of symbolism, too, Melinda said. It will have some type of symbol or pattern that reflects the family.

Andrea has danced at many powwows and even served twice as a powwow princess, an honor given to young girls who demonstrate great dancing ability. As the powwow princess, it is her duty to then represent her tribes at other tribal gatherings around the country.

At the end of the program, Duane sang some of the traditional songs of the Ioway Tribe. Song is an important part of his life and he has sung for many years, he said.

He now uses song to teach the younger generations the Ioway language, he said.

"The language is dying," he said. "But, we're bringing it back in song."

## Tribe sues, says police blockaded reservation

NEW YORK (AP) — An American Indian tribe is suing Suffolk County, saying a police blockade of entrances to its reservation was a case of harassment and racial discrimination. The Unkechaug Nation filed suit Friday in U.S. District court in Brooklyn. The daylong incident on Dec. 6 stemmed from the tribe's practice of selling tobacco products without charging state tax. The suit alleges the action violated the constitutional rights of the Unkechaug. Tribe lawyer James Simermeyer says the police blockade was "deliberately set up to harass tribe members" by stopping people entering and leaving the Poospatuck Reservation near Mastic. Suffolk County officials did immediately respond to a request for comment Sunday.