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CAIRS Newsletter 2010

tammy greer
USM, tammy.greer@usm.edu

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The University of Southern Mississippi and the College of Arts and Letters welcome you to this first edition of our CAIRS newsletter.

The Gathering

On September 26, we gathered to announce the new Center and minor in American Indian Studies. Our goal is to form collaborations that will involve education, research, service provisions and cultural exchanges that will enhance the cultural diversity of our university and provide much-needed opportunities for joint ventures between the university community and members of American Indian tribes within our area. Dr. Joe Paul, VP for Student Affairs, and Denise von Herrmann, dean of the College of Arts and Letters, welcomed guests to the event.

Jean Harris, a member of the Echota Cherokee Tribe of Alabama, along with Peggy Thompson, Harold Comby, Peter Steve and Rosalee Steve, members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians socialize a bit just before the activities begin at the gathering. There was social dancing, tours of the campus for the youth, and traditional food including bison meatballs, hominy, squash and muscadines.
I’ve traveled quite a bit lately recruiting for Southern Miss, attending festivals and otherwise enjoying the varied and numerous opportunities to meet other Natives, see old friends and learn more about the people who are the Southeastern American Indians. We are a diverse people with histories that, if they could be told in their entirety, would rival any epic adventure known in literature. Our cultures differ from tribe to tribe; our beliefs differ. And even within the same tribe we are some of us traditional, some of us more modern. We have this in common though—we have remained. We are here in the Southeastern U.S. just as were our ancestors, and theirs as well. We are the people of this place. Our ancestors lived, not in teepees, but in mud and straw homes. They lived and died, farmed and fished and hunted, prayed to the Creator and saw visions, right here in this ordinary place. We know because there are remnants of their existence in the mounds, because of the pottery shards and arrowheads, because of our languages and stories, because of our traditions. We know of our ancestors and their lives here because of who we are, because of what was left, because of their legacy. I was reminded, just recently, of how all of this happens, the leaving of a legacy. On a very cold day at the end of December, some friends in North Mississippi took me to see Mr. Tom Hendrix, who built a stone wall in Florence, Alabama, to memorialize his great-great-grandmother’s journey back from Oklahoma to her Yuchi home at the place by the “Singing River.” The stones in this mile-long wall were carried in a pick-up truck, hauled with a wheel barrow, and placed one at a time. It warmed my heart to be there, among all of those ancestors, listening to the story of a Yuchi woman and her journey home. I was impressed with the massiveness and beauty of the wall, touched by the devotion to his great-great-grandmother’s memory, as well as inspired by how one person’s vision was made manifest through hard work, dedication and perseverance. I will remember what Mr. Hendrix has done, what our ancestors have done, as we build this Center and minor one “stone” at a time. I am grateful to be reminded that we should take our time and do it right. We will do our best.

~Tammy Greer

Who’s Who in the Southeastern American Indian Tribes: Harold Comby

Harold “Doc” Comby is just larger than life in all of the important ways. I recognized this very early on in our getting to know one another, and my respect for him and admiration have only increased as I’ve come to know him better.

I first met Doc at a powwow where he was emcee for an event hosted by our student organization here at The University of Southern Mississippi. He has emceed for that event as well as numerous other powwows in Mississippi and elsewhere for many years now. I’ve had lots of opportunities to observe him in this capacity. Doc is the sort of emcee that everyone wants at their powwow. He has numerous and varied jokes to tell, stories that teach, a deep and rich understanding of a variety of American Indian traditions, a calm approach to maintaining the flow and keeping the peace and a thorough understanding of powwow etiquette. He is

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We have a garden here on the Southern Miss campus that was built in 2005 in the shape of a Medicine Wheel. Just last summer, we began the process of transforming this garden into a heritage garden, containing only plants native to this area. I guess it was long overdue because help arrived, and quickly. In the fall, Joe and Merrill Willis, owners of the Yoknapatawpha Heritage Museum in Oxford, donated 75 native plants, most from their own native forest area, and then brought another 75 or so a month later. Tribal members brought plants to the CAIRS dedication ceremony. The tribal princess from Poarch Band of Creek Indians brought corn. And the native plants keep coming. We now have common yarrow, buckeye, white snakeroot, switch cane, swamp cane, yaupon holly, iron weed, blueberry, chokecherry, flameleaf sumac, smooth sumac, panic grass, camphor weed, sweet bay magnolia, southern magnolia and pitcher plants. In a month or so I’ll head to Crystal Springs, Miss. to dig up and transplant a toothache tree. What I thought would take quite a lot of time—populating the garden with 200 or so native plants—took just a few short months to accomplish. It turns out that native plants like the slightly acidic soil, the climate and the sporadic rain. Go figure, this garden of native plants already requires less tending, less weeding and less watering. With just a little attention, some coffee grounds and some ashes, this garden will thrive. I believe that is true of the Southeastern American Indians as well. We are at home here. We can thrive again in this place.

**Cook’s Corner: Pokeweed or Poke Salad**

In mid spring, gather young shoots (6”-8” tall). Wash, trim and boil in two changes of water for five minutes each. Cover with water and boil until tender, then drain. Season with oil, salted meat, small onions with green tops or vinegar as desired. You may add scrambled eggs or sliced boiled eggs on top. Properly precooked pokeweed shoots can be added to soups, stews and other greens. **Mature leaves and all other parts should not be eaten.** Berries can be used to make purple dye.
What’s Going on in the Southeast

Mississippi: February 13. Valentine Powwow. Petal Civic Center, Petal, Miss. 601.307.7188 or cdeewaites@aol.com or www.petalpowwow.webs.com

Georgia: February 19-20. INAS Conference: Southeastern Indians Through Time: Land, Geography and Environment. University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. 706.542.5356 or jweaver@uga.edu

Florida: February 19-21. Vero’s Thunder on the Beach Powwow. Indian River County Fairgrounds, Vero Beach, Fla. 772.567.1579 or deede1579@aol.com or thunderonthebeachpowwow.net

Mississippi: February 23 at 7 p.m. ECHO Performing Arts Festival. Philadelphia/Neshoba County Arts Council Theatre, Philadelphia, Miss. www.echospace.org/about or MBCI Cultural Preservation Program at (601) 650-7331.


Texas: March 6. NASA Powwow. Texas State Technical College, Waco, Texas. 254.867.3622 waconasa@tstc.edu or http://www.waco.tstc.edu/activities/NASAclub.php


Texas: March 27. Texas Indian Hobbyist Association Spring Powwow. Galloway Hammond Recreation Center, Burnet, Texas. pandpriley@gmail.com Traders: mtwidal@aol.com

Georgia: April 1-3. Cherokee of Georgia Spring Powwow. Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Grounds, Saint George, Ga. 912.843.2230 / 912.285.2738 or fmmcgahee@bellsouth.net or hathaway_tribe@yahoo.com or www.cherokeeofgeorgia.us

Mississippi: April 9-11. Southern Miss Golden Eagles “Honor our Military” Powwow. Southern Miss Campus, Hattiesburg, Miss. 601.466.0948 or Tammy.Greer@USM.edu or www.usm.edu/geis


Tennessee: April 10-11. Pow Wow on the River. 1st Tennessee Pavilion (Chattanooga Market Bldg.), Chattanooga, Tenn. 423.240.7270 or NASofTN@aol.com

Alabama: April 16-18. United Cherokee 12th Annual Festival & Native American Powwow. National Guard Armony; 3550 Creek Path Road, Guntersville, Ala. 256.582.2333 or ucanonline@bellsouth.net or http://www.ucan-online.org

Louisiana: April 16-19. 43rd Annual LIHA (LA Indian Heritage Association) Powwow. Lamar-Dixon Expo Center, Gonzales, La. 504.367.1375 or www.liha-news.com or djpm2@cox.net

Texas: April 17-18. Big Spring Powwow. Howard College, Big Spring, Texas. 432.263.3255 or powwowbigspring@suddenlink.net
willing and able to take on any task that is needed from bringing benches for seating in the circle, to storytelling and demonstrating stickball and blow guns on school day, to making a much-needed staff for the Southern Miss student group, as well as other crafts to raffle off to support the group, to finding head staff in a pinch and on and on. I came to recognize that Doc was the sort of emcee that everyone wants at their powwow not only because of his emcee prowess—great jokes, wise old stories, cultural knowledge, keeping the events flowing, knowledge of powwow etiquette—but also because he is a really great guy.

I’ve come to see over the years that Doc gives of himself in every way imaginable—his time, his effort, his money—to his family, to his community, to the Southern Miss student group, and to people in need as Captain of Operations for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

Doc is, indeed, larger than life, in all of the important ways—in the way he follows the powwow trail and gives of himself there, tirelessly, in the way he embraces his own culture and has respect for other cultures as well, in the way he offers what he has, all of what he has, to whomever and whatever he touches.

It’s a very rare thing, knowing someone who is larger than life. I’m very lucky to know Harold “Doc” Comby. I would like to honor him in this way in this first newsletter.

Doc is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. He graduated from Jackson State University in 1978. He has four daughters: Jasmine, Natasha, Misty and Nikki. Both his sister, Susie Alex, and his daughter, Nikki Comby, are Southern Miss graduates.

What’s Going on in the Southeast (Continued)

Alabama: April 23-25. 10th Annual Cherokee River Homecoming Festival. Bankhead National Forest, Moulton, Ala. 205.221.3873/205.271.2493 Kbagwell1@gmail.com or www.webjam.com/hogobeggeeindiancenter

Texas: May 1. Sacred Springs Powwow. Aquarena Center, San Marcos, Texas. 512.393.3310 jciinfo@indigenouscultures.org or www.IndigenousCultures.org

Florida: May 7-9. Mother’s Day Powwow. Withlacoochee River Park, Dade City, Fla. 352.583.3388

Alabama: May 8-9. Huntsville Powwow Honoring Our Fallen Brothers and Sisters. Cahaba Shrine Park, Huntsville, Ala. 256.880.8987 or bettyabbou@att.net

Georgia: May 8-9. 21st Annual Cherokee County Mothers Day Powwow. Boling Park, Canton, Ga. 770.735.6275 or chipa1@earthlink.net or www.rthunder.com

Tennessee: May 15-16. Cumberland Plateau 9th Annual Powwow. Putnam County Fairgrounds, Cookeville, Tenn. 931.544.4908 or 931.372.0495 or iicpowwows@yahoo.com

Texas: June 11-12. 54th Annual Texas Indian Hobbyist Assn Summer Powwow. Galloway Hammond Recreation Center, Burnet, Texas. pandpriley@gmail.com Traders: mtwidual@aol.com

North Carolina: July 9-11. Strong Sun Powwow. Tanglewood Park, Clemmons, N.C. 336.816.7747 or Chief@nearriverdwellers.com or http://nearriverdwellers.com
Southeastern Historical, State- and Federally Recognized American Indian Tribes

Adai Caddo Indian Nation, AL Coushatta Tribe of TX, Biloxi Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees, Bayou La Fourche Band of the BCCM, Chero Creek Intratribal Indians, Cherokees of Northeast AL, Chitimacha Tribe of LA, Choctaw Apache of Ebarb, Clifton Choctaw Indians, Coushatta Tribe of LA, Four Winds Tribe of the LA Cherokee, Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of the BCCM, Isle de Jean Charles Band of the BCCM, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, MaChis Lower AL Creek Indian Tribe, Miccosukee Indian Tribe, MS Band of Choctaw Indians, Mowa Band of Choctaws, Piqua Shawnee Tribe, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Pointeau Chien Indian Tribe, Seminole Tribe of Fl, Star Clan of Muscogee Creeks, Tunica Biloxi Tribe of LA, United Cherokee Ani Yun Wiya Nation, United Houma Nation, Alabama, Atakapa, Bayogoula, Calusa, Chatot, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Hitchiti, Muskogee, Natchez, Timucua, Tunica, Yuchi
On the Red Road

Guardian Stones are located at the entrance to a mile-and-a-quarter-long stone wall in Florence Ala., near the Tennessee River. The wall was built by Mr. Tom Hendrix to honor his great-great Grandmother, Te-lahnay, a Yuchi woman who returned from Oklahoma to her home near Florence along the “Singing River.” Mr. Hendrix is a storyteller, and so the story is told, as well, in a book titled, If the Legends Fade. To learn more about Mr. Hendrix’s great-great-grandmother, about her journey, and about this wall, you can visit ifthelegendsfade.com.

The memorial wall has over 7 million pounds of stone with stones from all 50 states.

Guardian stones are placed at the entrance to the memorial wall.