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# Miami University and The Miami Tribe of Oklahoma: A Unique Relationship

A thriving and mutually enriching relationship has developed over more than 40 years between Miami University and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. This relationship spans academic and interpersonal dimensions. Miami University is situated in the traditional homelands of the Miami Tribe, an area of the Northwest Territory, which opened after the signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. In October 1846 the Myaamia people were forcibly removed from their homelands to lands west of the Mississippi River. It seems very fitting that an institution that carries the Miami name provides a presence for the Myaamia people in this area of their homelands again. See [www.miamioh.edu/miamitriberelations](http://www.miamioh.edu/miamitriberelations) for additional information.

In March 2006, the Chief of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and the President of Miami University signed the first Memorandum of Understanding that officially agreed to expand the already strong and trusting relationship, to support educational and developmental needs, and to commit to further exchanges and projects of mutual interest. The Armstrong Student Center showcases the relationship between Miami University and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma in two different locations: a panel of photos and information are in the Shade Family Room, and the 2nd floor Smucker Wiikiaami Room has informational display cases. The room is embellished with traditional diamond pattern wood inlay made by Miami Tribe artisan Jody Gamble.

Several things have helped develop this relationship in an intentional and deliberate manner. Each activity, project, class, or visit is treated as one piece of a much broader relationship. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to become better informed about the history of the relationship and to explore possible connections.

### Scholarships for Miami Tribal Members

Scholarship funds are available for qualified Miami Tribal members to attend Miami University. These funds have been influential in recruiting the 110 Myaamia students who have attended Miami since 1991. There have been 85 Tribal graduates so far, 80 undergraduate and 8 graduate degrees (with 3 earning a 2nd degree from Miami). Thirty undergraduates are enrolled for 2019-20.

### University-Tribe Visits

Douglas Lankford is the current Chief of the Miami Tribe and he and the four other elected officials comprise the

Business Committee which, oversees the day-to-day operations of Tribal services and programs. Miami University has been honored that Miami Tribe Chiefs have graciously agreed to play many roles on campus including speaking at our Bicentennial Convocation and presidential inaugurations, and presenting programs about Miami Tribe history and contemporary affairs. Tribal officials and visitors have graciously given of their time to come to Oxford for special events and conferences, to visit classes, and to meet in small groups with students. In return, students, presidents, vice presidents, deans, faculty, and administrative staff have traveled to Miami, OK. to participate in Tribal annual events, research and service.

### Extraordinary Programs on Campus

- The Myaamia Center hosts a biennial Myaamiaki Conference to showcase the ongoing research and publications about the Miami Tribe. Many Myaamia people travel to campus to attend these events.
- Special music performances occurred at recent Myaamiaki Conferences. Two new Miami alma mater verses in the Myaamia language were premiered by the Miami Men's Glee Club in 2012. A newly commissioned choral piece with lyrics in the Myaamia language was performed by the Choraliers women's chorus in 2014. Haley Strass, Myaamia 2013 graduate, composed and performed an original song in the Myaamia language that she performed at the 2014 Conference.
- In October 2010, a special program for the visit of the Dalai Lama of Tibet included remarks about Miami Tribe history, the relationship with Miami University, and concluded with Miami Tribe students and members singing a song for His Holiness in the Myaamia language.
- In collaboration with Miami University's Green Teacher Institute, a summer two-week workshop, *A People and Their Homeland: The Miami Tribe (Myaamia)*, was offered in 2008, 2009, 2010. Almost 100 local area K-12 teachers learned ecological perspectives through the cultural lens of the Miami Tribe.
- In 2008, the Miami University Art Museum hosted a special exhibition, *myaamiaki iisi meehtohseeniwiciki: How the Miami People Live*, celebrating the vibrant heritage and contemporary life of the Miami Tribe.
- In fall 2000, three chiefs, Miami Chief Floyd Leonard, Delaware Chief Dee Ketchum, and Shawnee Chairman James Squirrel, talked about their tribal histories,

cultural traditions, and current operations. Following this presentation an outdoor Oklahoma stomp dance was held on campus.

- For 20 years, academic courses have often engaged students in academic inquiry as well as service learning projects with the Miami Tribe.

### **Special Recognition**

- In May 2019 the Miami University Alumni Association awarded the Miami Tribe its Bishop Medal representing distinguished service to humanity through the Tribe's ongoing revitalization efforts.
- In May 2005, Chief Floyd Leonard received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Miami University for his extraordinary commitment to education for Miami Tribe and University students.
- Three Myaamia students, Brad Kasberg in 2012, Mary Tippmann in 2010, and Kimberly Wade in 1999, were awarded the President's Distinguished Service Award for helping Miami students better understand Miami Tribe history and culture.
- In 2001, Julie Olds, Cultural Resource Officer, was recognized on campus for her many efforts to share the rich Miami Tribal culture with Miami University students, faculty and staff.

### **Myaamia Center**

The Myaamia Center, an effort created at Miami University in 2001, is advancing the research needs of the Miami Tribe with a focus on Myaamia language, history and culture. Directed by Tribal member Daryl Baldwin, these efforts are part of the rebuilding of the Miami Nation after many years of forced economic, social, and cultural changes. In addition to producing multiple publications that are shared with Myaamia households, the Center provides a variety of academic and cultural opportunities for students to assist in developing language curriculum and tools. Visit [www.myaamiacenter.org](http://www.myaamiacenter.org).