



Group photo taken of Garrison Tahmakhera's special before the gourd dance session at Thunderbird Pow Wow hosted on Mesa Community College's Southern and Dobson campus on March 9, 2024. (Photo by Ryan Hifler/ The Mesa Legend)

CULTURE NEWS

## **Thunderbird Powwow returns to celebrate indigenous culture for day long event**

Diego Esquivel 03/12/2024

**The Mesa Legend's Kat Carlson contributed to the article.**

Mesa Community College celebrated on campus indigenous pride with the 2024 MCC Thunderbird Powwow that featured food, vendors, and traditional Native American dances.

The annual event was held on Saturday for the entire day, and hosted by MCC's own Inter-Tribal Student Organization, in conjunction with sponsors MCC Athletics, MCC Administrative Services and the on-campus American Indian Institute.

Upon walking on MCC's soccer field, guests were greeted with the sounds of a drumming performance by host drum groups Wild Krew and Southern Slam, while vendors sold

artwork, jewelry and clothing that surrounded the field.

According to the AII, the 22 Tribal Nations unique to Arizona made MCC host to the largest indigenous population of all 10 of the Maricopa County Community Colleges. The Thunderbird Powwow was designed to celebrate and bring together MCC's indigenous students from all communities.

The celebration began at 10:00 a.m. with the powwow's first Gourd dance taking place at 11:00 a.m. A large circle was formed in the middle of the field where tribe members participated in the traditional dance that looked to honor others and is seen as respect towards returning veterans dancers and tribal leaders.



Drum group Wild Krew at Thunderbird Powwow hosted on Mesa Community College's Southern and Dobson campus, March 9, 2024. (Photo by Ryan Hifler/ The Mesa Legend)

The event had six food vendors available with fry bread established as a popular item sold by multiple makers. According to the [Oklahoma Historical Society](#), fry bread has become a common powwow tradition as it has been recognized as Native American cuisine since its creation in the 1800's.

For Andrea Preston, this was the first Thunderbird Powwow she had attended. She hosted her vendor booth to support her young daughter and her nephew, a MCC student and a

member of ISO.

“I decided to come out and support him, and then my daughter just recently started creating her own jewelry, said Preston.



One of the many booths at Thunderbird Powwow hosted on Mesa Community College's Southern and Dobson campus on March 9, 2024. (Photo by Ryan Hifler/ The Mesa Legend)

“I've been creating jewelry for a while, but I wanted to come and support her as well,” Preston added.

Cassandra Perez, a vendor selling her beaded jewelry pieces and other crafts, saw this as an opportunity to expand her business and a chance to participate in the powwow festivities.

“I wanted to go last year, but I didn't have that opportunity. This year I really wanted to go and also be a vendor,” said Perez, a graduate student at the University of Arizona.

The powwow looked to build a sense of unity between the many students and tribes that were present.

Jaden Bird, vice president of ISO, said his organization looked forward to participating in the powwow every year.

“It's something we were trying to build kind of a tradition in itself here on campus. A lot of our students in our student body here are away from their traditional, like where they're



actually from on the reservation,” said Bird.



A display of Tribal Nation flags at 2024 Thunderbird Powwow hosted on Mesa Community College’s Southern and Dobson campus, March 9, 2024. (Photo by Ryan Hifler/ The Mesa Legend)

Bird described the powwow as having a sense of home and of culture on campus that is irreplaceable and unique to MCC as one of the few district campuses to have such a gathering.

Bird explained that his hopes were that attendees had fun and got to see something different that you don’t see everyday in Mesa.

“It was something very monumental to us (ISO). So leaving here today, I hope that everyone leaves with a happy heart knowing that we did the best that we could to bring all of our people together and showcase our culture, but just to have a good time,” stated Bird

Kadence Sayles who was crowned Miss Native MCC, and First Attendant Kaitlyn Yazzie who was sashed during the 2024 winter pageant at MCC, were both in attendance to support their culture and show pride for indigenous representation on campus.

“This is my first year at MCC, I really wanted to get involved with being in Native or Indigenous spaces. For ISO, the Inter-

Tribal Student Organization, to have a space for that but also helpful resources for our Native students at the American Indian Institute, Having events like this is so important so we can raise more awareness to what we have on campus at MCC, but also to what there can be and how much growth that there still is to do,” stated Yazzie.



From left to right: Mesa Community College’s First Attendant Kaitlyn Yazzie, from the Navajo Tribe, and Miss Native MCC, Kadence Sayles, of the Ft. McDowell and Yavapai/Lakota Tribes, at the Thunderbird Powwow hosted on Mesa Community College’s Southern and Dobson campus on March 9, 2024. (Photo by Ryan Hifler/ The Mesa Legend)

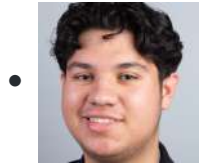
Yazzie describes the rejuvenation of the Miss Native MCC title this year ever since its absence during the coronavirus pandemic as a good way of bringing leadership back on campus for native voices.

“It’s good that we have such a big population of Indigenous students on our campus, and we’re also one of the largest Maricopa Community Colleges with a high Indigenous student rate. I think that having this representation is important because we have that percentage,” stated Sayles.

Yazzie and Sayles expressed the benefits of having the powwow on campus and the hopes of putting on more events like this in the future.

“I’ve already taken so much initiative but I think being able to engage more people in the future and inspiring indigenous identity and higher education I think is our main goal. I hope to do more events like this,” stated Yazzie.

With the success of this year’s powwow event, the American Indian Institute looks to continue showing Indigenous representation within MCC.



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