The mission of the Native American Institute is to work with tribes, American Indian organizations and various Michigan State University units to enhance the sovereignty, cultural continuity and well-being of tribes, Indian communities and Indian people.

Artwork provided from the collections of the Fort de Buade Museum, St. Ignace, Michigan

Greetings,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Native American Institute at Michigan State University. Our unit, which is Native led and staffed, is committed to increasing the quality of life for Michigan’s American Indian communities and works to facilitate Native lead projects that brings the resources of a tier I research institution to bear on issues and projects that advance the sovereign and sustainable efforts of our peoples in the Great Lakes. For over three decades, the Institute has collaborated with tribes and regional American Indian organizations and communities, and throughout this time period, we have worked to help Michigan tribes achieve significant advances in their community and economic developments. At our core, we work to add value to these community development efforts by emphasizing the importance of Native sovereignty and voice wherever possible. Our past and current projects have included natural resource and agricultural topics, ecosystem management, environmental protection, sustainable community and economic development, traditional/cultural preservation, tribal food systems, education, health and, more recently, American Indian veterans.

Our American Indian veteran’s initiative is a point of pride for the Native American Institute. The challenges our American Indian veterans have and continue to experience upon return to civilian life are often overwhelming and the general federal and state support system frequently fails to help them transition from military service into civilian life. According to the Department of Defense, American Indians and Alaska Natives have the largest number of enrolled soldiers per capita in the armed forces, yet they are the least likely to seek help from the current non-Native support systems available through Veterans Affairs. As we develop our initiative over the course of the next year, we see great potential for bringing the resources of Michigan State University to assist American Indian veterans successfully transition to civilian life and bring greater recognition to the largest ethnic group represented in our armed forces.
As part of our efforts, we are developing a program during the November Native American Heritage Month in partnership with the Fort de Buade Museum of St. Ignace, Michigan, which honors both our veterans and our tribal leaders. As part of this program, we have invited Dr. Herman J. Viola, curator emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution and senior advisor for a project to create a National Native American Veterans’ Memorial at the National Museum of the American Indian. Dr. Viola will visit Michigan State University from November 18th through the 20th, 2015. In honoring our American Indian veterans the Native American Institute will host an American Indian veteran’s dinner, scheduled for Thursday, November 19th. The dinner will be just for veterans with a short presentation by Dr. Viola regarding the proposed memorial and then an open evening to talk about the memorial and also the stories and experiences that have defined the American Indian veteran experience. In addition to the evening meal, the Native American Institute and those helping us sponsor this important event will provide transportation and hotel accommodations for veterans challenged by transportation costs.

On Friday, November 20th, we will be further honoring our veterans as well as our American Indian leaders, past and present, at Michigan State University’s Wharton Center for the Performing Arts. Dr. Viola will provide a paired set of lectures on his historical works on American Indian veterans, *Warriors in Uniform: the legacy of American Indian heroism* and leaders, *The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King*. For the latter, the Fort de Buade Museum is providing a selection of original and replica lithographs of Great Lakes leaders from the historic McKenney and Hall collection, which will be placed on display for attendees to view during both presentations. Dr. Viola will also introduce the memorial honoring our Native American veterans to a larger audience, including invited tribal chairs and leaders.

At this time, we are requesting monetary donations to assist with the dinner and hotel accommodations for our American Indian veterans and costs associated with the Wharton Center lecture. For your convenience, we have established a link which allows the transfer of cash funds from your credit or banking institution into an account administered by the Institute. (Press Control + Click on the URL below or copy and paste it into your web browser).

https://commerce.cashnet.com/msu_3774

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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