



Revelatory depictions of
matriarchs and symbols

Chocolatier honors its
indigenous heritage

Films that hold a culture
in high regard

The scoop on ice cream in Alaska



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Artisanal chocolatier honors its indigenous heritage



Photos by Jill McDonald

Bedré means “better” in Norwegian, but Bedré Fine Chocolate does not come from Norway. The company is owned and operated by the Chickasaw Nation. Though the name’s origin is not Native American, the meaning certainly fits the chocolate products that come out of the Oklahoma chocolate factory.

The chocolate factory is situated at the intersection of Interstate 35 and State Highway 7 in Davis, Okla., a gateway to commerce in the local region. The factory is part of the Chickasaw Nation’s business interests in the area. A welcome center is also on the property.

“Visitors can come learn more about chocolate, more about Bedré and more about the Chickasaw Nation all in one place,” says General Manager Philip McWherter.

Bedré only recently moved into its new home in Davis. The new facilities offer a 35,000-square-foot space to make and package the fine chocolates.

Children and adults alike enter the chocolate factory tours with eyes aglow and broad smiles. While the machines are operated by real people rather than Willy Wonka’s Oompa Loompas, visitors get to watch the chocolate-production process from start to finish and understand why Bedré chocolate is so amazing.

“We are a relatively small company; we don’t purport to compete against the large chocolate conglomerates. Our specialty is high-quality chocolate – we don’t add any waxes or paraffin, and we use only the best ingredients,” McWherter says.

When the Chickasaw Nation bought Bedré (www.bedrechocolates.com) in 2000, its goals included adding to the diversification of the nation’s business base.

“A lot of people know about Native Americans and gaming ...” says McWherter. “Our goal is to spread more

information about Native American culture and history and also to expand our business base.”

Over the last 12 years, Bedré has grown steadily. Though it’s a regional company with one plant and a local reach of a 300-mile radius, it distributes products nationally and internationally. Chocolate lovers in the U.S. can find the chocolate treats in Bedré’s local retail stores and across the country in high-end retailers such as Neiman Marcus.

Not only does Bedré deliver some of the most delicious chocolate around, it also provides consumers with some of the most unique items on the market.

“We make chocolate-covered potato crisps that are a customer favorite. We also make white-fudge-covered, cone-shaped corn chips. People have a hard time just eating one of those,” McWherter laughs.

Bedré’s evolution is far from complete. According to McWherter, the next big push will be selling more products via the Internet and will include a focus on corporate gifting. Also on the horizon is a Bedré line of coffee.

“We’re developing a coffee with some really nice flavor notes,” explains McWherter. “It will be great for people who somewhat like coffee, but really enjoy chocolate. It will also be wonderful for coffee lovers.”

McWherter mentions that chocolate making is an industry that makes sense for the Native American community because of its origins. While many Americans have the idea that chocolate originated in Sweden or another European country, it actually got its beginnings with American Indians.

“Chocolate was initially a drink, and can be traced back about 3,500 years to the indigenous people of the Americas,” he says. “So chocolate is a part of our heritage. We’re happy to be able to offer such an excellent version of this product.”

Films that hold a culture in high regard



Emcee Johnny Greybird (actor James Bilagody) reacts to the kickoff of the First Annual World Wide Frybread Association Championship. Photography by Jake Johnson, courtesy of HoltHamilton.com

Travis Holt Hamilton believes assumptions are dangerous, and he laughs when people make them about him. Often thought to be Native American, Hamilton says he's "just some white-looking guy" born in Twin Falls, Idaho to a mother who was adopted and has no knowledge of her heritage, and a father of Scottish descent.

So how did Hamilton end up being a filmmaker who focuses on Native cultures?

"I grew up when you had to go to the video store and get VHS tapes. You'd get a whole stack of them to watch on weekends," Hamilton recalls. "My family only went to the movie theater a couple of times a year, so it was a really big deal." Many of the movies he watched as a kid, Hamilton says, were about Native Americans.

In high school, Hamilton's interest in Native cultures began to blossom. "What I knew was basically what I'd seen in movies – it wasn't necessarily the best or most accurate education. But one of my best friends in high school was Shane Ribley-Stevens, a Shoshone Peyote. He took

me to a couple of powwows to help me better understand a bit about Native cultures," Hamilton says. "I'm a Mormon, so after high school I got a call to do mission work. I went to a reservation in Albuquerque, N.M. Then, I ended up with a college roommate who was studying filmmaking. Before that, I didn't realize you could go to school to learn to make movies."

During college, and nearly out of money, Hamilton landed a part as an extra in a Disney film and fell for the film industry. Shortly after that, he joined the Army National Guard and got called to active duty.

"We went to Fort Bliss, Texas first. I was waiting to get deployed to Iraq and I started writing my first movie, 'Turquoise Rose.' When I got back, and the script was finally finished, I talked with my wife, Rebekah. We decided to go into debt making the movie instead of going into debt buying a house. I remember using something like nine credit cards to make that film. It's about a girl who grows up in Phoenix, and follows her journey back to the reservation to take care of her grandmother." Three other Native-focused films have followed.

Asked what kind of responses he receives from audiences when they see him and realize he's non-Native, Hamilton says, "Most of the responses we get are really positive. I've learned that films are kind of like – well – they're like food. Everybody has an opinion about food and no one dish is going to satisfy everyone."

His 2011 feature film, "More Than Frybread," actually uses a food common among Native Americans, frybread, to explore cultural pride, social norms and pressures, and various facets of community. The film has garnered accolades including the Durango Independent Film Festival Best Narrative Feature award.

James Bilagody, a Navajo who has been in two of Hamilton's films, says, "It's very apparent when Travis is directing that he cares about the actors. He creates an environment where all of the actors and movie crew members are able to do their best work. He's very nurturing. As soon as people see what a gem he is, there'll be no holding him back."

Hamilton says his goal is simply to make the best indigenous films he can: "I want to tell good indigenous stories that can help enlighten people."



Navajo representative Buddy Begay (actor Tatanka Means) stares down the frybread competition.



Tracy Lightning (actor MaryKim Tittle) reports live from behind the scenes at the WWFA Frybread championship.

Revelatory images of matriarchs and symbols

Unity Magazine celebrates Native American Heritage Month by featuring three artists whose work is influenced by their strong sense of family, community, identity and respect for Mother Earth. Each work showcases the theme of the matriarchal importance of women as well as traditional images and symbols.



"Sacred Unborn" by CH Owl Claw

CH OWL CLAW

CH Owl Claw grew up on the Colville Confederate Tribes Reservation in Washington and the Pima Reservation in Arizona. He is a member of the Sinixt or Lake Indians, one of the 12 bands making up the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

Owl Claw doodled as a child to cope with living on multiple reservations and the difficulty of attending boarding school. Owl Claw says his art reflects traditional Native American symbols and his life experiences.

Owl Claw's primary medium is black-and-white pen and ink. One can find images of women, animals, family and Native American patterns throughout his work. The eight roses in "Cherokee Rose" represent Owl Claw, his wife and six children, and is dedicated to his wife's grandmother. Owl Claw says "Sacred Unborn" was created with inspiration from his wife who is referred to as a "Split Feather," a Native American adoptee taken from her tribe and raised in a non-Native home. His wife's journey to connect with her



"Cherokee Rose" by CH Owl Claw



"Tilted Truth" by CH Owl Claw

birth family inspired "Tilted Truth." The woman's doleful look in this piece depicts the long and arduous search for her true identity.

Owl Claw says his work will prompt generations to explore the Native American culture and experience. His pieces have been showcased around the country and are internationally recognized thanks to various online media outlets.

DIANE SCHENANDOAH

Diane Schenandoah was born into a large Haudenosaunee (pronounced *Hau duno shawnee*) family in her ancestral Oneida Nation Territory in Oneida, N.Y. Her father was an Onondaga chief and her mother, an Oneida Wolf Clan Mother. Schenandoah says her mother was her greatest influence and supporter. As a young child, Schenandoah's mother recognized her gift and encouraged her to pursue her passion as an artist.

"As a Native American artist, I have a very rich culture to draw from," says Schenandoah. The soapstone mask, "From Earth to Sky Woman – We Are One," rests near the top of an elongated wooden pedestal. It represents the legend of Sky Woman's descent to earth, which was said to be a world of water. Legend has it that she was caught by a flock of swans and placed upon a turtle's back with a small amount of earth from the ocean floor. Turtle Island grew as a result into the land known today as North America.

The bronze piece "Haudenosaunee-Call for Peace" is carved from a caribou antler. The front of the hand is the symbol of the original



"Haudenosaunee-Call for Peace"
by Diane Schenandoah

five nations. The partial face represents an evil Onondaga chief who tied snakes to his hair to scare the people. Schenandoah's depiction of the eagle is a "sacred messenger that carries all prayers and good thoughts to the creator and warns of any peril," she says. Schenandoah remarks that the clay piece, "Beholding Beauty," honors women. "The Haudenosaunee



"Beholding Beauty"
by Diane Schenandoah



"From Earth to Sky Woman – We Are One"
by Diane Schenandoah



"The Turtle"
by Star Otsisto Horn

Confederacy is a matriarchal system. Women are held in high regard," she says. "It is the women that are responsible for the spiritual, social and political welfare of our people. It is through women that our lives flow."

Schenandoah has permanent collections at the New York State, Iroquois and Rancocas Fine Arts museums. She is also a published author and backup singer and percussionist for her Grammy-winner sister, Joanne Schenandoah.

of delicate, vulnerable babies against the thorny harshness surrounding them. Because the bird is a symbol of protection in many Native cultures, Horn created a "protector" paired with birds to watch over the babies in this black-and-white piece.

Created on an iPad, "Women Wail & the Earth Shook" portrays women reclaiming their power, guidance and wisdom. They hold the Two Row Wampum belt, a strong symbol of an agreement between Native and non-Native people from the year 1613.

A poem written by a friend was inspiration for "Her Soul, #5." The excerpt from the poem, "She sat down, weary from her thoughts and sank her head into her soul and found immediate comfort," says it all. The woman is dressed in traditional Mohawk designs.

In addition to her artwork, Horn also makes rustic wood furniture with painted and carved images and traditional aboriginal jewelry that she sells locally and online.



"Her Soul, #5" by Star Otsisto Horn

STAR OTSISTO HORN

Star Otsisto Horn grew up in a large extended family in Kahnawake, (pronounced *Kah na wha kee*) a reserve near Montreal. Her Mohawk name, Otsisto, means "star" in English. Horn grew up surrounded by books of old black-and-white photographs of her Native people in traditional regalia. She says the images showed a beautiful people holding strong to their culture while transitioning into a new one. Horn's work speaks of the beauty and respectful relationship that she believes all humans should have with each other, animals and Mother Earth.

"The Turtle" is from a series titled Storyteller and reflects Horn's belief that our lives are intrinsically woven with things animate and inanimate. The viewer must look closely to notice the tapestry of images that intermingle with each other. The piece on *Unity's* cover, "Birds & Babies," is from the same series. It is a juxtaposition



"Women Wail & the Earth Shook" by Star Otsisto Horn

Champion of Alaska's traditional foods



Chef Rob Kinneen

There's never a dull moment in the life of Chef Rob Kinneen.

This Alaska native's experiences as chef-contractor and host of "Fresh Alaska" include preparing muktuk sushi in Barrow for a healthy-eating demonstration in minus 40-degree weather; pulling a seal and whale out of the Bering Sea on a hunt; and foraging for food in Sitka, Anchorage and Kodiak. In the meantime, he's cooked, presented or catered everywhere in between.

"It is all exciting and memorable," he says. "I am proud to cook around the state and promote on a national level," Kinneen says. "It is a constant reminder of pride and connection to this special land I am from."

"Fresh Alaska," also known as "Fresh 49," was started with "Awareness and Accessibility of Alaska's Food Supply" as its mission. He says the state of Alaska imports 96 percent of its food, a statistic that is unacceptable to Kinneen.

"We have indigenous ingenuity, traditions and miles of land," he says. "As an Alaska native, I believe that by using the traditional foods and knowledge we can create a positive Native identity, bringing rewards to all Alaskans."

Kinneen is of Tlingit heritage and has been working in restaurants since he was 15. After completing the culinary arts program at the King Career Center, he attended the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., then began a career in prestigious restaurants across the country.

"My biggest culinary influences took place while working in the South – New Orleans, La., and Durham, N.C.," he says. "My cooking and dining experiences in these areas were driven by local seasonal ingredients and usually new interpretations of traditional recipes. This led me to wonder why Alaska couldn't do this."

Other career highlights include representing Alaska in the 2008 Great American Seafood Cookoff in New Orleans, contributing to numerous cookbooks and cooking with Al Roker of the "Today" show. Kinneen is currently creating a



Alaska's indigenous cuisine is the focus of Chef Rob Kinneen's promotional efforts.

new season of webisodes that highlight Alaska's current food culture, offering speaking engagements and chef demonstrations, and promoting his sauce line, Harvest49.

But his personal achievements bring Kinneen the most pride, including his upcoming 10-year anniversary with his wife, Carolyn, and his daughter, Sylvie. "To have a partner that is accepting of the crazy demands of this business and accepting of me and who I am has been a wonderful gift and something I try to be grateful for every day," he concludes.



Smoked salmon / white bean dip

1 lemon for zest and juice, should equal 1/2 teaspoon zest and 1 ounce juice
 1 15-ounce can of white beans, drained and rinsed
 2 ounces of the white bean "juice," reserved
 4 to 6 ounces salmon filet, skin off
 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
 Kosher salt
 Pepper

In a bowl, add zest, juice of lemon and drained beans. Mix, leaving a few beans broken and whole for texture. Add parsley and mix again. Flake in salmon, then fold in chunks to showcase the salmon. Season with salt and pepper, and serve.

The scoop on ice cream in the great state of Alaska



In Anchorage, temperatures in the summer typically average 64 degrees. The summer of 2013, however, proved to be an exception, with daytime readings reaching into the mid-80s for at least two weeks. During this heat wave, residents happened to shoot video and take photos of a moose attempting to cool off in a sprinkler. While seeking relief from the sultry (by Alaska's standards) weather, the hefty member of the deer family just might have appreciated one of the state's frozen, indigenous treats: ice cream known as akutaq (a-goo-duck).

Akutaq is a Yupik word that means "mix them together." Whipping akutaq by hand introduces air that helps to thicken it. This version of the yummy treat isn't made with cream. Instead, it is usually concocted by combining reindeer fat or tallow seal oil and other ingredients such as sugar, berries and even fresh snow. Akutaq can also be made with moose meat (probably best to not offer *this* version to moose seeking to beat the heat), caribou meat and fish.

Traditionally, the dish was not meant to be eaten as a tasty treat during the summer. Hunters used it during long trips to provide them with energy and sustenance. The dish – primarily prepared by women using whatever berry was



native to the tribe's location – was also served at celebrations, funerals, potlucks and other gatherings. This gave each family its own akutaq, distinguished by its own flavor and color. Its applications vary and it has been used as everything from a spread, to a meal, to a standalone dessert.

In more recent times, akutaq has been made with Crisco instead of reindeer fat. To make the treat sweeter, raisins and sugar have also been added to the recipe over the years. There is no right or wrong way to make akutaq, which might be one of the reasons the dish has endured for so long.

Akutaq

1 cup solid vegetable shortening*
1 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup water, berry juice or 2 cups loose snow (optional)
4 cups fresh berries, (blueberries, cloudberry, cranberries, salmon berries or blackberries)**

* *Crisco solid vegetable shortening is preferred.*

** *Use one or more types of berries.*

In a large bowl, cream vegetable shortening and sugar until fluffy. Add water, berry juice or snow and beat until well combined. Fold in berries, 1 cup at a time, until blended. Place in freezer to firm up before serving.

Yield: 10-15 servings



No more lip service

Preservation of Native languages gains advocates and support



Efforts to preserve Native languages benefit multiple generations.

At the heart of any culture is language. So what happens to a culture when the language begins to fade as Native speakers begin to dwindle?

This is the challenge that Native American tribes across the United States are facing. But they are taking the initiative to make sure their Native languages stay alive. From California to Virginia, Native Americans are working to preserve their languages and their rich cultures for future generations.

One such example is the Chukchansi Indian tribe in California. In 2012, the Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians pledged \$1 million to California State University, Fresno's Department of Linguistics to enlist help to document the Chukchansi language. The pledge will be spread over five years and will include a program in which university staff will work with the few remaining fluent speakers to create written documentation of the language.

The Chukchansi tribe isn't the only group working to document the ancient language of its ancestors. Native Americans in Montana are taking extra steps to keep their languages alive as well. The Crow tribe's Education Department has implemented language immersion programs to introduce the Crow, or Apsáalooke, language.

Three-year-olds in the Crow tribe's Head Start Program learn the language through a recently developed program specifically targeted to small children. Students will begin by learning the names of animals they already know, and build upon that knowledge, Shirleen Hill, a member of the education department, said in an interview with the Great Falls Tribune newspaper in Montana.

Young children aren't the only members of Native American tribes who are learning their tribes' classic languages. Many adults missed out on picking up their Native tongues when they were young.

Those born before 1950 often learned the language as youngsters, but might not have passed it on because of hardships they faced for being non-English speakers. The penalties were often high and punishments sometimes extreme when Native American students spoke their native languages in English schools. According to some of the Tribune's interviews with elders, they didn't want to expose their children to the possibilities of the same dangers.

Because most fluent speakers are between 65 and 80 years old, preserving languages is an urgent need. Most Native American languages aren't supported by written records. While teaching the younger generations to speak is a key component of keeping the languages alive, documentation of the languages will ensure that once the surviving fluent speakers are gone, there will be a way to teach the remaining members of the tribes.

But that effort requires a significant amount of time and money. While the Chukchansi tribe has found the funds to partner with a nearby university, not every tribe across the country has the same option. To help subsidize the language preservation efforts, Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy of Montana introduced Senate bill 342 in 2013. The bill calls for a two-year language preservation pilot program that will cost the state \$2 million. The money would be distributed to the seven tribal governments on Montana reservations, as well as the Little Shell Chippewa tribe, which has no reservation.

Whether through the help of local universities or implementation of educational programs, Native Americans recognize that their languages are a core part of their cultures and must be preserved.

Or as Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy – a member of the Chippewa Tribe – was quoted as saying in the Helena (Montana) Independent Record, "If we don't proceed forward with preserving (these languages), we'll be teaching 'Indian Education for All' in the past tense."