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Indigenous Peoples' Day highlighted by enterprise and advocacy in Rochester

By James Goldmeer
Independent/Sun News

As communities throughout Southwest Washington prepare to observe Indigenous Peoples' Day on Monday, Oct. 12, a Rochester business offers a look at how the culture of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, historical preservation and economic innovation intersect.

According to the National Museum of the American Indian, Indigenous Peoples' Day was first formally proposed at a United Nations conference in 1977. Today, the day continues to gain traction as a replacement for Columbus Day, with advocacy groups like Running Strong for American Indian Youth noting that 17 states, Washington, D.C. and hundreds of cities now officially commemorate Indigenous peoples on the second Monday of October.

In Southwest Washington, those contributions are woven directly into the local economy. Washington is home to 29 federally recognized Indian tribes operating as major economic drivers and charitable contributors across the region.

In Rochester, the Chehalis Tribe manages a growing economic portfolio under Chehalis Tribal Enterprises. Their footprint spans from agriculture to retail, civil construction, hospitality and entertainment.

Photo by James Goldmeer/DeVaul Publishing
Talking Cedar offers a Tribal Pale Ale benefiting Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Among those ventures is Talking Cedar, a 35,000-square-foot destination brewery, distillery and restaurant located on Sargent Road SW.

According to the Talking Cedar's website, the name reflects core cultural values: "Talking" honors the tribe's oral tradition of storytelling, while "Cedar" recognizes the tree's enduring role in daily life and craftsmanship.

Beyond its physical footprint, Talking Cedar represents a landmark victory for tribal sovereignty. When the Chehalis Tribe initially planned the facility, leaders confronted an 1834 federal law enacted under President Andrew Jackson that prohibited distilling on tribal land. Leaders worked alongside lawmakers to overturn the 180-year-old restriction, establishing the nation's first tribally owned distillery and the first spirits legally distilled on tribal land.

Beyond economic growth, Talking Cedar uses its craft to drive social advocacy. The brewery's seasonal Tribal Pale Ale, a brew featuring pine and citrus notes and original artwork by a

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Photo by James Goldmeer/DeVaul Publishing
Scott Hyder, Maleah Chachon, Ken Simeone and Keegan Sparr celebrate the hands-on work students put into Tenino High School's new sign.

Tenino's only clinic to drop Medicare plans in coming year

By James Goldmeer
Independent/Sun News

Local seniors enrolled in UnitedHealthcare Medicare plans may soon have to switch insurance carriers or find a new doctor, as Valley View Health Center prepares to sever ties with the insurer at the end of 2026.

The decision impacts all 15 Valley View locations across Lewis, Thurston and Pacific counties, including the clinic at 273 Sussex Ave. E., which serves as Tenino's sole medical facility.

The change takes effect Jan. 1, 2027. To keep their current primary care providers, affected patients must switch to an accepted Medicare carrier during the upcoming enrollment window, which runs Oct. 15 through Dec. 7, 2026.

Valley View did not disclose specific financial details behind the split, but stated it is reaching out to affected patients by mail, phone and text to assist with the transition.

"While this news may feel unsettling, Valley View is here to support you," the non-profit center said in a statement, adding that patient navigators are available to help residents review alternative Medicare options.

Patients undergoing active treatment for chronic illnesses may qualify for temporary extended coverage under UnitedHealthcare's "Continuity of Care" rules by calling the number on their insurance card.

As a Federally Qualified Health Center, Valley View provides medical, dental, behavioral health and pharmacy services regardless of insurance status, offering sliding-scale fees based on household income.

Patients with questions regarding plan transitions can contact the clinic directly at (360) 264-5665.

Toxic algae advisory in effect for Offutt Lake

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services is reporting a toxic algae bloom in Offutt Lake.

Lab results from a sample taken from Offutt Lake on 09/21/2026 detected Microcystin toxin levels above the state recreation guidelines.

Microcystins are a liver toxin and a possible human carcinogen. Microcystins can also cause illness in livestock and pets that drink affected water.

When an algae bloom is present, health officials recommend taking extra precautions to avoid the health risks posed by potential toxins, recommending that recreators not drink the lake water, avoid contact with the water bodies where algae blooms are present, keep pets and livestock away from where algae blooms are present and to not eat fish that come from the lake during an algae bloom.

According to County Public Health officials, even if the lake is visibly clear of algae, toxins may still be present.

County Public Health staff states that team members will continue to collect weekly samples until they receive two consecutive weeks of samples with microcystin levels below state recreational guidelines.

For more information about toxic algae blooms and health risks, visit thurstoncountywa.gov/algae-advisories.

Tenino announces Hall of Fame 2026 inductees

The Tenino Athletics Hall of Fame has formally announced its Class of 2026, honoring three Bob Hurley, Louise Rota, and John Vanderhoof for their decades of contributions as multi-sport athletes, pioneering leaders, and dedicated community volunteers.

The inductees will be publicly recognized during halftime at Tenino High School's home football game against Rochester on Friday, Oct. 9. Ahead of kickoff, the Tenino Eagles will host a public community social hour from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., with complimentary shuttle transportation to the stadium provided by Tenino Athletics.

Visit teninosd.org for more information.

Student-built sign is unveiled above THS

By James Goldmeer
Independent/Sun News

A five-year effort by local high school shop students culminatedSept. 28 as Tenino School District officials and community members formally unveiled a massive, custom-fabricated aluminum sign above the high school's main entrance.

The multi-year project, which replaced a decaying wooden marker that was removed five years ago, transformed a routine facility maintenance issue into an immersive, hands-on trades production experience for dozens of students across multiple graduating classes.

The finished installation, a powder-coated, backlit aluminum emblem measuring nearly 5 by 7 feet, features a bold letter "T" over the word "Beavers" and lights up the campus entrance every evening.

Recalling the project's origins during the unveiling at the high school, Principal Scott Hyder described walking through the building five years ago with Superintendent Clint Endicott and identifying the rotting sign as a priority. Hyder brought the idea to technical science and shop teacher Ken Simeone, who suggested stepping away from wood entirely.

"Mr. Hyder came to me five years ago and said, 'You want to make a wooden replacement sign, wham-bam pretty quick?'" Simeone recalled. "And I said, 'Hey, why don't we make an aluminum sign?' And then that evolved into, 'Well, why don't we backlight it?' And then that evolved.'"

The project kicked into gear when Keegan Sparr, a 2024 Tenino High School graduate, tackled the initial computer-aided design (CAD) work during the 2022–2023 school year. Sparr developed a precise one-third-scale model of the layout, which now rests permanently on a lectern inside the high school as a piece of student history. Sparr returned his senior year to build the centerpiece letter "T."

"I got a picture with the 'T' in it and then it kind of just led from there," Sparr said during the event. "I threw them out on CAD and I figured lighting would make it pop at night. It really just spiraled as we went."

Sparr noted that this was his very first time working with CAD software, calling the entire undertaking a "learned-as-you-go project." That hands-on exposure reshaped his post-graduation goals.

"It made me find what I actually enjoy doing," Sparr said. "I never thought I'd start doing CAD or aluminum welding, but when I started doing it, I loved it. Hopefully, I can get into an apprenticeship at some point and actually use it for real work."

While Sparr established the design and internal layouts, senior Maleah Chachon stepped in during the latter stages of the build to handle the intricate finish work, earning praise from Simeone for her aluminum TIG welding.

"Keegan started it and then Maleah and some other students finished it. They really worked a lot last year," Simeone said.

The physical dimensions of the sign presented unique logistical challenges up to the very last minute. Because "Beaver" emblem to DTI, a waterjet cutting company in Tumwater, because the school's plasma cutter could not accommodate its scale.

Because of the sign's sheer size, administrators had to adjust its placement higher on the wall than originally planned. "It was so big that the initial place we planned on putting it, we were concerned kids would walk by and slap it," Simeone laughed. "That's why it's crowded all the way up against the top."

Reflecting on the five-year journey, Simeone highlighted how running his classroom like a real-world fabrication shop yields benefits traditional academic environments sometimes miss.

"The model that I've kind of come up with... is to run my shop as much like a real production shop as you can," Simeone explained. "The cool thing about shop programs in general is that there's kids that don't succeed to the fullest level in more traditional classes... and they get in shop and all of a sudden, they're good at something that very few people in this school can do. It sparks them to realize and get a love for learning."

Superintendent Clint Endicott echoed that sentiment, praising the endurance of students across multiple graduating classes. "High school students can have shorter attention spans, so to see so many of them committing to something for four years to see it completed is such an amazing thing," Endicott said.

With the high school sign complete and lit up, Simeone's shop classes are not slowing down. The team has already begun designing a companion sign for the district's middle school, applying lessons learned from the high school build.

Chachon said that the middle school project will benefit from a more streamlined approach right out of the gate. "We'll have a better plan versus this," Chachon said, explaining that the new sign will be scaled down slightly so students can perform all machine cuts in-house using their own equipment.

As community members gathered for photos under the newly lit fixture at the conclusion of Monday's ceremony, district officials said that while the sign serves a practical purpose, its true value lies in the pride and skills instilled in the students who built it.

Prep Sports Calendar

Thursday, Oct. 8

Soccer
- 4:00 Tenino vs Toutle Lake
- 6 p.m. Rochester @ Hoquiam

Volleyball
- 6:30 Tenino vs Bush
- 10/86:30 Rochester @ Hoquiam

Friday, Oct. 10

Football
- 7:00 Tenino vs Rochester

Soccer
- 10a.m. Rochester @ King's Way Christian

Tuesday, Oct.13

Volleyball
- 6:30pm Rochester vs Tenino

Soccer
- 7p.m. Rochester vs Tenino