

# Speaker celebrates womanhood, heritage

By Natalie Hanson

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**CHICO** » A journey through womanhood through the lens of the Native American experience was celebrated Tuesday evening at Chico State.

The fourth annual “Women of Wisdom” event in the Bell Memorial Union spotlighted Native American heritage and feminism with keynote speaker Kimberly Cunningham-Summerfield.

The event was free to the public and also offered refreshments and a space for children and DIY crafts.

Cunningham-Summerfield, Tsalagi (Cherokee) and culturally adopted Mewuk, has been demonstrating and presenting programs since the ‘70s. She is a cultural practitioner with skills in basket weaving, cordage making, food preparation, traditional resource gathering, traditional uses of fire, traditional land management, tool making and storytelling.

Cunningham-Summerfield also holds a bachelor’s degree in sociology with a minor in American Indian Studies from Chico State and an master’s degree in administration, planning and social Policy from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

“I am a storyteller, a mom, a wife, a grandma, a disabled veteran,” Cunningham-Summerfield said. She called her husband “the music to my life.”

Cunningham-Summerfield said speaking on Mechoopda-occupied land



CARIN DORGHALLI — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Kimberly Cunningham-Summerfield immersed herself in the audience as she shared stories raw with emotion and a touch of theater Tuesday during Women of Wisdom in Chico.

## Women

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at Chico State has a lot of significance for her still, after attending the university decades ago — “it really hasn’t changed.”

Walking around Chico State and seeing how the campus has transformed in the past few decades, “We talked about change, the things we saw and the things we miss,” Ben Cunningham-Summerfield, Kimberly’s husband, said.

Cunningham-Summerfield said she wishes the university would honor more Native American faculty and teachers on campus.

“I would love to see more



CARIN DORGHALLI — ENTERPRISE-RECORD

Heather McCafferty, left, assistant curator at the Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology and Coral Doyle, a museum studies graduate student, display baskets Tuesday in Chico that were weaved by Maidu women.

(people) recognized and honored ... and yet there’s no mention of any of the Mechoopda people that are local and indigenuous,” Cunningham-Summerfield said. “There are so many that could be — culturally,

artistically.”

For these reasons, Cunningham-Summerfield said she hopes there is more active listening in the community, to indigenuous people and to women.

Cunningham-Summerfield also hoped that female audience members would take away from her presentation that “they’re powerful, beautiful.”

“I would like them to realize their beauty and strength ... to laugh, and not be afraid to cry,” Cunningham-Summerfield said.

More events at Chico State can be found on the school’s calendar at [csuchico.edu/calendar](http://csuchico.edu/calendar).

Contact reporter Natalie Hanson at 530-896-7763.



# Chico Enterprise Record

## 7-29-2020

**\$4.5 MILLION DEAL**

# California Indian tribe gets back Big Sur ancestral lands

*The Associated Press*

**BIG SUR** » A Native American tribe has reclaimed a small part of ancestral lands on California's scenic Big Sur coast that were lost to Spanish colonial settlement nearly 250 years ago.

The Esselen Tribe of Monterey County closed escrow on 1,199 acres about 5 miles inland from the ocean that was part of a \$4.5 million deal involving the state and the Western Rivers Conservancy, The Mercury News reported Monday.

It marks the first restoration of any lands to the tribe, which lost 90% of its approximately 1,000 members to disease and other causes by the early 1800s.

"It is beyond words for us, the highest honor," said Tom Little Bear Nason, chairman of the tribe. "The land is the most important thing to us. It is our homeland, the creation story of our lives. We are so elated and grateful."

The land lies on the north side of the Little Sur River, where endangered steelhead fish spawn, and encompasses old-growth redwoods, oak woodlands and meadows.

"The property is spectacular, and on top of that it repatriates land to a tribe that has had a really hard go of it over the

years," said Sue Doroff, president of the conservancy.

Known as Rancho Aguila, the property was put up for sale by the family of Axel Adler, a Swedish immigrant who bought it in the 1950s and died in 2004.

The Portland, Oregon-based Western Rivers Conservancy initially negotiated to purchase the property and transfer it to the U.S. Forest Service. But some area residents were concerned about potential increased use of the land by visitors and the agency's ability to care for the land.

The conservancy then started working with the Esselen Tribe and received a \$4.5 million grant from the California Natural Resources Agency to cover the \$4.35 million purchase price and pay for land studies.

The money came from a 2018 voter-approved parks and water bond that included \$60 million for competitive grants to acquire Native American natural, cultural and historic resources in California.

Nason said the tribe will build a sweat lodge and traditional village to conduct traditional ceremonies and teach the public about their culture. There will be no permanent homes or businesses on the land.

## Delivered from hunger

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS RALLY TO DISTRIBUTE 22,000 POUNDS OF FRESH FOOD TO FAMILIES



Wallace Clark, Maple Gramps and Joe Nelson (from left to right), of the Konkow Valley Band of Maidu Indians, loaded boxes of food for tribe members. (Photo by Ashiah Scharaga)

Jenny Lowrey couldn't contain her excitement when the semi pulled into Yankee Hill Hardware on July 31.

"Oh my god. Seventeen-hundred families are going to get free food today," she said. "Ah, I love this!"

That day, Lowrey and her organization **From the Ground Up Farms** facilitated the distribution of 22,000 pounds of fresh food from the **USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program** to more than a dozen other local organizations and groups providing food assistance across Butte County.

Lowrey is the co-founder and executive director of From the Ground Up Farms, which has been offering no-cost food to locals in need since 2013. Her Concow home was one of thousands destroyed by the Camp Fire, and since the disaster the organization has served as a connector and catalyst for support and relief for survivors from outlying areas within the burn scar, including Concow and Yankee Hill. The all-volunteer organization typically offers educational activities and events regarding nutrition, gardening and other life skills that have been on hold since the coronavirus shut down California.

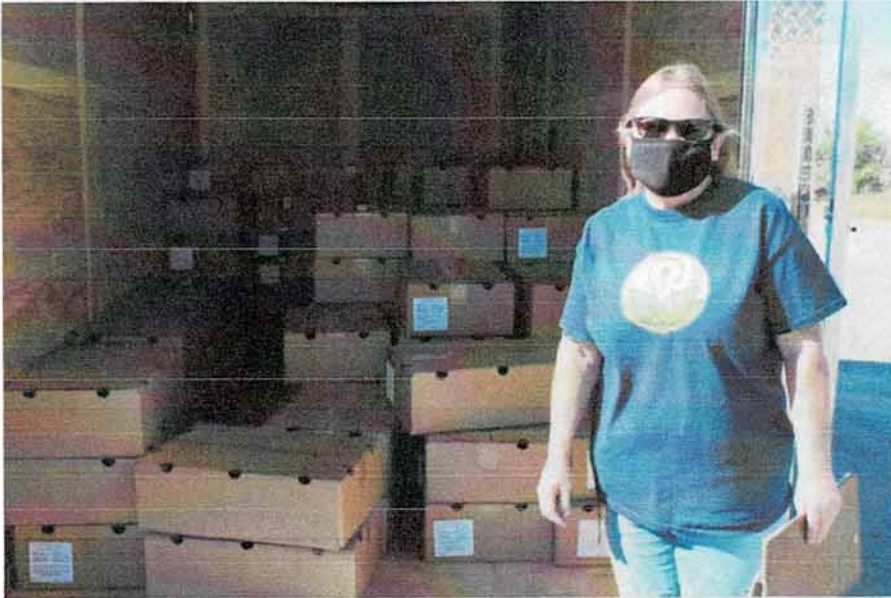


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That morning, the Yankee Hill Hardware store was a flurry of activity. Shoppers dropped by to browse at the store, while volunteers (some also fire survivors) lifted and secured hundreds of boxes of food into truck beds and trailers in the parking lot. From there, the food was transported to low-income households and others in need during the pandemic, including Camp Fire victims, homeless folks, seniors and indigenous Native American families.



**Jenny Lowrey, co-founder and executive director of From the Ground Up Farms, facilitated the distribution of 22,000 pounds of free food to Butte County families late last month. (Photo by Ashiah Scharaga)**

A key component of the program is its offerings of fresh produce, including onions, tomatoes, plums, apples, lettuce and potatoes. That's why Lowrey—and many organization representatives picking up food that day—were so thrilled.

The reality for so many Camp Fire survivors, Lowrey said, is one of picking and choosing between vital resources.

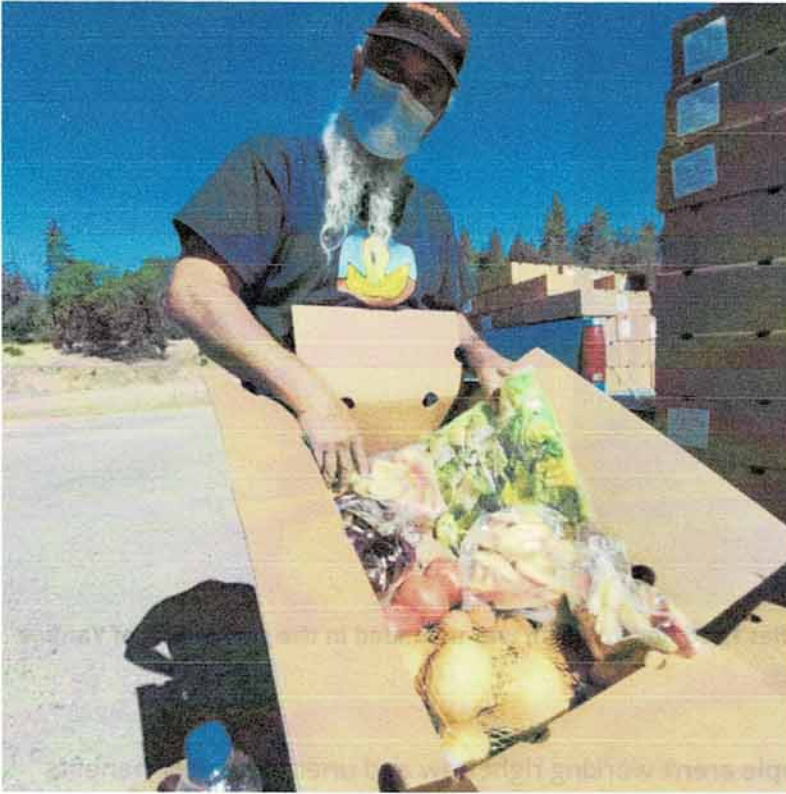
"Do you choose healthy food or do you buy dollar store groceries so you can put \$20 into the generator?" she said, referring to those living on properties without power.

Nancee Ellsworth, the coordinator of the food pantry for First Christian Church of Paradise, explained that it's not easy for survivors to secure fresh food. The church has been providing rations to 150 families every weekend. Most of what the congregation has been able to offer are pantry items that are canned, preserved or have a long shelf-life.

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**Bruce Matthews, co-founder of From the Ground Up Farms, shows what's inside each USDA food box. The volunteer organization recently helped distribute 1,700 of these boxes to local families. (Photo by Ashiah Scharaga)**

This giveaway also was significant because, like many other locals providing food assistance to fire victims, Ellsworth has noticed a **surge in food insecurity** due to the pandemic, she said.

"There's so much need. I thought maybe it'd get better as time went on, but that's not happening," she said. "This [resource] is awesome. Our families don't have access to a lot of fresh food. ... It's such a treat for our families."

While Ellsworth loaded up provisions that day, across the parking lot, Wallace Clark, leader of the Konkow Valley Band of Maidu Indians, worked with volunteers and other tribe members to load 200 boxes of food into the back of a truck. Clark told the CN&R that the rations were going to the tribal office in Oroville, where they would then be distributed to Konkow Maidu families scattered across the North State.

Clark emphasized the importance of this donation for Native American families, which experience some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the U.S. The pandemic has compounded their need.



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**Several tons of fresh food from the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program was unloaded in the parking lot of Yankee Hill Hardware on July 31. (Photo by Ashiah Scharaga)**

"For all of us, it's a really big deal, because a lot of people aren't working right now and unemployment benefits are running out," he said.

The Farmers to Families Food Box Program, which was created in response to the pandemic, has distributed more than 35 million boxes across America, with plans to distribute a total of nearly 60 million by the end of August. The program may be extended beyond then, but that depends on its success and available funds. The USDA has spent \$1.2 billion so far, and aims to purchase up to \$1.47 billion on additional 21.3 million food boxes through this month.

The program starts with the USDA purchasing fresh produce, dairy and meat from national, regional and local distributors that have been significantly impacted by restaurant, hotel and other food service business closures. These distributors then package the products and transport them to food banks, community and faith-based organizations and nonprofits.

The Yankee Hill distribution event was a community effort, Lowrey said. She heard about the program from Butte County Supervisor Tami Ritter, who connected her with Josh Cook, of California Senator Brian Dahle's office.

Ritter told the CN&R she had worked with Cook, Dahle's chief of staff, on Camp Fire emergency housing projects. When Cook told her the office was looking for communities in need for this program, the Concow area immediately came to mind, Ritter said. Many Camp Fire survivors are living there in RVs and other temporary homes without power and water, she added.

"I felt like if the distribution happened in Chico, then we probably weren't going to see it go to the areas most in need, so connecting them to Concow seemed the best bet," she said.

Lowrey said when she was given this huge opportunity to help distribute fresh produce on a scale she'd never attempted before, she told herself, "I have to figure it out."

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**Nancee Ellsworth, of the First Christian Church of Paradise, said the congregation's food pantry serves 150 families each week, and fresh produce is hard to come by. (Photo by Ashiah Scharaga)**

She began making phone calls and assembled a roster of just over a dozen agencies. On July 31 over the span of about two hours, 22,000 pounds of food had left the parking lot of Yankee Hill Hardware and were en route to the neediest families in the county.

"I am blown away at how well it went!" Lowrey told the CN&R later. "The agencies all showed up as scheduled, the volunteers poured in even with masks required."

From the Ground Up has forged other connections in order to provide healthy food to hungry families. For example, the organization partnered with Chico Natural Foods to provide \$50 and \$100 gift cards to Camp Fire-affected families. Lowrey also coordinated with the **Butte County Local Food Network**, which now delivers fresh produce twice a week to Concow. From the Ground Up facilitated a partnership with Chico farmers' markets, and now offers surplus produce to families in Concow.

"We're just trying to find really innovative ways to get fresh fruits and vegetables to these families," Lowrey said.





**LENORA VIGIL**  
"Sue"

Lenora Rosa Vigil (Ramirez) 65 was born on October 14th, 1955 in Oroville Ca. to Frank and Harriett Ramirez and lived in Chico all but a few years.

She was called to Heaven to be reunited with her loved ones on October 19th, 2020 and will be laid to rest at the Mechoopda Indian Cemetery.

Lenora is survived by her two sons Tobias Vigil II and John Vigil Sr., her brothers Frank and Grover Ramirez and her aunt Thelma Wilson. She is preceded in death by her husband Tobias Vigil, her parents, and her little brother John Ramirez.

VIGIL (RAMIREZ), Lenora Rosa  
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10/22/2020

Sue and Toby built a beautiful family with their two boys Tobias and John, 16 grandchildren, 30 great-grandchildren and endless nieces and nephews whom she loved and adored.

She was her family's ROCK! Everyone knew they could always count on her for love support and honesty.

Lenora was also an active tribal member of the Mechoopda Indian Tribe in Chico and loved to plan gatherings for the community.

To view obituary and send condolences online, go to [NewtonBracewell.com](http://NewtonBracewell.com).



**FIRE RECOVERY**

# Tribes hope for a say on lands

Management, restoration of regional lands among areas where inclusion is sought, particularly in wake of fires

**By Natalie Hanson**

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**CHICO »** The future of land stewardship in Butte County may greatly depend on partnerships with its indigenous communities, and county relationships with the region's multiple tribes are already shifting in the face of disastrous fires.

The Camp Fire destroyed many acres of land that particularly impacts the Mooretown Maidu and Konkow Maidu tribal communities, which claim original occupancy of some of the land. The North Complex fires also tore through the landscape once again, affecting tribes residing in the Berry Creek and Yankee Hill areas, much of which burned or was destroyed.

To address restoration of these lands, local tribal representatives say it has become impossible to ignore the voices of those who have known the land for thousands of years and are also

affected by its destruction. It's also an opportunity to bring more economic opportunities to the table, which is where the non-profit Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions program came in.

Local activist Ali Meders Knight works with Traditional Ecological Stewardship Chico and Chico State educating youth on land management practices. She emphasized that the recent incredibly destructive fires only demonstrated the damage done since the area was settled "over 180 years ago."

Meders Knight and fellow organizer Mel Figueroa said the consequences of colonization, extractive industry and timber plantations mean today's forest is very different from the land's historic nature — which is why tribal knowledge of the land's past is so important. Meders Knight said the lands of Butte County should be wetlands, as the Maidu tribes were once accustomed to "swamps" — a far cry from the county's many acres of dry brush and thick, overgrown tree canopies and undergrowth.

Faced with such destruction, to have a chance to repair lands and restore ecosystems properly, Meders Knight said relationships with tribes will be vital.



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Beginning work with the nonprofit began as “We were looking at what we could do for restoration after the Camp Fire,” she said. The program’s approach is to employ members of indigenous communities so they share and acquire knowledge about land restoration and stewardship, getting certified and earning job advancement opportunities.

Meders Knight said they are developing a workforce as well as mainly working with tribes that are federally recognized that “have the authority to negotiate with Washington D.C.”

“Our local representatives are basically only used to working with tribes on casino issues,” she said. “They don’t have a lot of info on how land management works with federal Indian law.”

This reality is insulting for indigenous tribes who live on local land, but haven’t been invited to conversations about that land, she said.

“Tribes have a straight conduit to federal agencies ... and place based knowledge for managing the ecosystem, based on what we consider thousands of years of science. To look at watershed restoration, we have to look at long term stewardship contracts,” she said. And the program encourages such contracts and economic development for indigenous communities.

“We have 10 local Butte County folks in their second week of training ... at Yosemite and El Dorado County,” she said.

“They would get certified for tree removal but also in traditional knowledge in what to plant,” and they also qualify for higher wages with a higher knowledge of restoration, she added.

Meders Knight is planning a local work base in the county’s forests, to restore biomass using funding over the next several months to hopefully “introduce the right plants within the correct watershed.” The program is hoped to “show resilience from cooperation from tribes and municipal (bodies),” she said.

## Including the unrecognized

However, the Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions program may not work for all tribal communities in the region.

The Konkow Maidu are one local tribe that are not federally recognized. Traditionally claiming Concow and Pulga lands in the Camp Fire burn scar, their homeland was heavily destroyed in the Camp Fire, yet they have not been able to receive federal wildfire aid. They also do not receive federal COVID-19 aid.

Tribal Affairs Chair Jessica Lopez said the Konkow Maidu are feeling shamed largely due to disagreements and not being federally recognized, are now working to form their own traditional ecological stewardship program, to utilize and enrich the generational knowledge of their own people independently.

High Leader Wallace Clark said the rancheria is working with the Sierra Institute on repairing the landscape of the Concow area. He spoke proudly of his ancestors as “caretakers of the north fork of Feather River ... and basins from Paradise to the Cherokee area.”

“Our stories say we’ve been there since the beginning of time,” Clark said. “We were the first to be taken out of there because we were the larger group. When the gold rush happened, they had to remove us. My great grandfather was forced to take all people out .... they were force marched over to the Mendocino area, the Round Valley Reservation.”

But many hid from capture, who produced many of today’s descendants, he said.

The road to federal recognition by the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Branch of Acknowledgment and Research has not been fruitful, “because they removed the majority of the tribe.” Since 1997, Clark said the tribe has worked on the traditional route to recognition (a seven-step process) which was submitted in 2016, but as regulations keep changing from the federal government, the proposal was returned.

Although continuing to seek federal recognition, without it, the tribe has little money, Lopez said.

“Any of the grants or funds that come out there only go to federally recognized tribes,” Clark added.

This problem contributed to Lopez’s reasons for not feeling able to participate in the nonprofit’s program, saying while she feels the program has good intentions for workforce development, she felt a lack of open communication with the program and with other tribes.

“I think the problem



Council member George Engassen, of Palermo, adds his signature Saturday, Sept. 17, 2016, to the Konkow Valley Band of Maidu petition to the federal government for recognition as an independent tribe at Riverbend Park in Oroville. The request for federal recognition later failed, and the tribe continues to seek recognition in other ways, after two fires in 2018 and 2020 which severely damaged their traditional lands.

Note: Name in caption above is George Engasser not En

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here especially in Butte (County) is there's so many of us," Lopez said. "I think our tribe feels unnoticed because it's not federally recognized."

Yet the generational knowledge of her people should be respected, she added.

"We have elders who have knowledge, who know what our common practices are," Lopez said, and this knowledge is critical when considering different approaches to managing different types of land. For example, what works on valley land will not work on the highest peaks in Concow or Yankee Hill, she said.

"Traditional knowledge has gone back thousands of years ... a lot of companies tend to forget that," she said. "But they don't give us the same respect because we're not federally recognized. They don't see us as actual stakeholders because we don't have money. But we're the original occupants of that soil."

There have been some positive changes. Lopez said the city of Oroville's declaration recognizing the tribe was a great acknowledgement of the relationship with the community. And the county has been "very open" to working with the tribe within the last few months, respecting the community as a separate sovereign entity.

"It's taken myself (and the council) to create that relationship ... to reach out to agencies. These agencies have started to include us in that open forum of what our concerns are for proper land management. They are beginning to recognize us as a tribe and respect us in our sovereignty."

Still, Lopez said even many local people did not know who the Konkow Maidu were until recently. This will be an issue for all tribes getting included in the local conversation around land stewardship, she said.

"The bigger issue is everyone wants to classify us as all Maidu," Lopez said. "That is not the case. I am Konkow Maidu. Mechoopda (Tribe) is valley Maidu ... Enterprise (Rancheria) is Estom Yumeka Maidu. We have different dialects."

Gaining further recognition will be key to understanding the wealth of all tribes' knowledge to manage the land going forward, and to begin restoring it after wildfires.

"Once people start obtaining cultural knowledge of who their ancestors were, it becomes more powerful ... then they start to respect the land, to have proper land management," Lopez said.

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Contact reporter Natalie Hanson at 530-896-7763.





**STEELE, Merle Edwin**  
**Chico Enterprise Record**  
**12-1-2021**

**MERLE EDWIN STEELE** Merle Edwin Steele, 88, of Oroville, CA passed away on Nov. 20, 2021 at Enloe Hospital in Chico, CA. Eddie Steele was born to Gertrude and Luther Steele on May 8, 1933 in Dobbins, CA. Eddie was one of 15 children, 5 boys and 10 girls. He went in the U. S. Army during the Korean War. After the war, Eddie found an interest in auto mechanics and loved fixing peoples vehicles. He was a proud Maidu man who loved his people and family. Everyone who knew Eddie knew he had the biggest smile that would brighten anyone's day. Eddie is survived by wife Ruth of Oroville; sisters Merry Amukon, Vera Johnson, Trudy Archuleta; 3 sons and a daughter; grandchildren, great grandchildren and so many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents; 4 brothers, 7 sisters and daughter Ruth Ann Rodriguez. Graveside services will be held at Sitto Cemetery in Berry Creek on Friday Dec. 3, 2021 at 11:30 A.M.