

# Tribe names historical preservation officer

By SUSAN FIELD, The Morning Sun

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[1](#)Walking through exhibits at the Ziibiwing Center in Isabella County, Charmaine Shawana takes a personal road down memory lane.

Photographs of many of her relatives, including her great-great-great grandfather, Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Chief Naukchigamee, her mother and her aunt.

Sitting on a bench at one exhibit that describes blood memory - the ability to remember something that did not happen in one's lifetime, like hearing a Tribal drumbeat for the first time and knowing it is important.

At the same exhibit, Shawana can be heard singing a faith song with others over the speaker system.

Another exhibit houses a blowup of a Central Michigan Life front page from the 1970s, and includes Shawana in a photograph of Natives marching in Mt. Pleasant in support of the Oglala Sioux march on Wounded Knee in South Dakota.

Shawana, a former elected and appointed member of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Council and a member of the Tribal community for more than 40 years, has always had a keen interest in Native history.

She is the editor of the Tribe's history book, "Diba Jimooyung-Telling Our Story, A History of the Saginaw Ojibwe Anishinabek."

Now, she's also the first full-time Tribal historic preservation officer.

Sworn in Thursday morning by Tribal Chief Steve Pego, Shawana has twice retired but returned to work on the Tribal council and at the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways at the request of Tribal officials.

Stated simply, she can't say no because she is honored to be asked to contribute.

Shawana, who earned a bachelor's degree in social work from Saginaw Valley State University and a master's degree in literature and English from Michigan State University, will oversee the preservation of the Tribe's history.

"I'm excited," she said. "It's like a fresh start in helping to get where we need to be and how to negotiate all these relationships."

Shawana said she is looking forward to being part of preserving the Tribe's historical language, properties and burial grounds.

Shawana's job is grant funded through the National Park Service Tribal Preservation Program.

Operating under an 1855 treaty, the Tribe includes 3,700 members with 1,700 living on trust land that spans 138,000 acres in six townships in Isabella County.

It also owns 918 acres at the Saganing reservation near Standish.

One of the tasks of a Tribal historical preservation committee that is to be formed is to discuss what the future holds for the former Michigan Indian Industrial Boarding School, located at West Pickard and Bamber streets in Mt. Pleasant, Shawana said.

Filled with painful memories, the land and buildings are also contaminated with asbestos and lead.

Shawana said other Native boarding schools have become centers of historical preservation, while others have been demolished and replaced with monuments.

On April 9, the Tribe became the 142nd Tribal Historic Preservation Office in the United States and the fifth in Michigan, joining Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Bay Mills Indian Community and Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians.

"This recognition is another part of our sovereignty that the federal government is finally recognizing even though we have been assuming these duties as part of our own responsibility for quite some time now," Shawana said of the THPO assumption.

An open house to introduce the THPO is set for March 27 from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Ziibiwing Center.