
Saginaw Chippewa Tribe has ancestral burial ceremony

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Even the unknown deceased are entitled to the respect and honor of a burial.

That's why the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan, partnering with the Michigan Anishinaabek Cultural Preservation and Repatriation Alliance, hosted an Anishinabe Ancestral Repatriation Observance ceremony to repatriate the human remains of a Native American from Ionia County.

The process began in October 1971 when human remains of an unidentified man were discovered in a gravel pit in Gratiot County. The discovery resulted in the remains being analyzed by the department of anthropology at Michigan State University.

In June 2013, the remains went back to Michigan State Police Lakeview Post 64, where Detective Christian Clute worked with the tribe on the legal process regarding burial. William Johnson, curator of the Ziibiwing Center, said tribe officials were able to complete and sign the required documents to receive the remains from the state police.

"The Ziibiwing Center is entrusted by the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Council regarding the reburial of ancestral human remains," Johnson said. "With everything that Ziibiwing does, its priority is the respectful and reverential reburial of ancestors.

"Even though he wasn't known by name, the Ziibiwing Center has a moral responsibility to make sure the ancestors are being cared for in the most respectful way."

The ceremony began at the Ziibiwing Center with a Preparing for the Journey ritual, which consisted of ceremonial protocols as final preparations before being buried. Next, the tribe members drove out to the Nibokaan Ancestral Cemetery for the Recommitment to the Earth ceremony, where they put the deceased Native American in a grave. Later, tribe members returned to the Ziibiwing Center for the Journey Feast, where everyone ate lunch to conclude the ceremony.

Ziibiwing is a grass-roots organization that was formed in response to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.