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Butte Tribe film celebrates premier

Belinda Brooks

"Guarding Tribal Lands," an NYTN film, premiered on Saturday, March 4 at the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and Northwest Louisiana History Museum. The venue was packed with tribal members, interested people from the community, and state and local dignitaries.

Elected officials included Louisiana State Senator Louis Bernard, State Representative Gabe Firment, Natchitoches Parish Clerk of Court David Stamey, Natchitoches Parish Sheriff Stuart Wright, and Natchitoches Mayor Ronnie Williams Jr.

The film was produced to help those interested in understanding the indigenous people of Bayou Bourbeaux. For over 200 years in silence, the Native American family lived, raised their families, and died on the same tribal land. Each chief beginning with White Smoke passed on the tribe's oral history and instructions for keeping the land safe from those who attempted to lay claim to it.

For 70 years, Chief Rodger Collum has lived his life on the exact same land occupied by his fourth great-grandfather, Chief White Smoke, and all the chiefs that followed him. Collum knows all the secret places: the mounds, the Indian trails, the mystic springs and the buffalo lick. "The land and he are one." In "Guarding Tribal Land," Collum shares the beauty of the families' inheritance, which he and a few cousins have spent a lifetime protecting.

Following the film, Jennae Biddiscombe, Director of the museum, hosted a Q&A panel discussion. The panel consisted of the filmmaker Danielle Romero, Chief Rodger Collum, Council Chief Belinda "Bella" Haag, and Vice-Chief Belinda Brooks.

Romero spoke of her adventure making the film on the land where her ancestors walked. Collum spoke of the challenges of keeping the land in the family and guarding the sacred places. Haag, council member in charge of the tribe's petition with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, reported on the status of the petition, which will be mailed within the next week. Brooks answered questions regarding the credibility of the documents used to prove the tribe's Native American bloodline.

The event's distinguished guests included Natchitoches Mayor Ronnie Williams Jr., Natchitoches Parish Sheriff Stuart Wright, Natchitoches Parish Clerk of Court David Stamey, Louisiana State Senator Louis Bernard, and Louisiana State Representative Gabe Firment. Each guest greeted the audience and told stories of their relationship with the chief throughout their years of friendship.

Butte Tribe of Bayou Bourbeaux is a non-profit organization seeking federal recognition. To learn more about the tribe's history, go to Buttetribe.org and click on the tab labeled "Chiefs' History." The "news article" tab provides a look back in history beginning with articles dating back to 1897.



"Guarding Tribal Land" enjoyed a turnout of approximately 200 people thanks the event production team. From left are Belinda "Bella" Haag, Jennae Biddiscombe, Daniel and Danielle Romero, Belinda Brooks, and Rodger Collum.



Many Natchitoches political figures who attended the premier are close friends of Chief Rodger Collum. From left are: Sheriff Stuart Wright, Clerk of Court David Stamey, Chief Rodger Collum, State Senator Louis Bernard, and State House Representative Gabe Firment.



Butte Tribe members join filmmaker Danielle Romero for a Q&A panel discussion of "Guarding Tribal Land," an NYTN film. Pictured from left are Butte Tribe's Vice Chief Belinda Brooks, Council Chief Belinda "Bella" Haag, Chief Rodger Collum, and Romero.