

by the peoples removed to Siletz. Along with languages from the Hoka, Penutian, Sahaptin, and Salish families, common use of chinuk wawa (Chinook Jargon) make Siletz one of the most linguistically diverse reservations in the country.

Over generations, language use declined due to forced assimilation, and then accelerated after the federal termination of Native American tribes in the 1950's, which disbanded tribal governments, sold lands and dispersed communities.

Despite the many challenges our community faced during these harsh times, modern efforts to preserve and revitalize Athabaskan began in the 1980's.

Tribal elders had worked with linguists to document the language in earlier decades, and in 1994, a standardized keyboard-friendly alphabet was developed by Tolowa language workers to support the creation of curriculum. By 2003, the tribe established a permanent position in the Cultural department, the Language and Traditional Arts Specialist and hired Bud Lane who did the major work of establishing the Language program.

Soon after this development, in 2005, early language classes were offered at Siletz Valley School taught in partnership with Tribal preservation efforts. Then, in the Fall of 2008, the tribe received a grant from the Administration for Native Americans making possible a combined effort to

address the status of our language, Athabaskan. The grant resulted in the creation of a small team of staff to develop a formal curriculum to strengthen language learning within the community. You can read more about the history of our Dee-ni or Athabaskan language preservation at siletzlanguage.org.

The Nuu-wee-ya' tribal language classes are another example of the ongoing efforts to preserve tribal language. The language classes teach Athabaskan otherwise known as Dee-ni or Nuu-wee-ya' in the language itself. The goal of these classes is to revitalize the language and to have it spoken daily.

Having a large population of Tribal Members speaking Dee-ni with peers, friends and family to create a strong connection to the language is the number one goal. Nick aspires to see the Siletz Dee-ni language flourish to such an extent that it becomes a natural, everyday part of community life, spoken so frequently and fluently that he may at times overhear it without even realizing it is being used, and being utilized by people he wasn't aware knew the language.

His vision is one in which the language is no longer confined to classrooms or ceremonial spaces, but instead lives and breathes across generations, in homes, schools, public events and informal conversations. Expanding the program to include those learning independently or through peer-to-peer interaction will be essential to building a deeper, more resilient foundation for the language.

By creating space for informal learning alongside formal instruction, the language can thrive more naturally within the community. This approach not only increases access but also cultivates an environment of mutual teaching, encouragement and cultural continuity among Tribal Members.

The language class has made a lot of progress in recent history. A strong group of participants is developing and is comfortable learning and speaking the language with Nick. Plus, many students are fully committed to the language, speaking amongst themselves and gaining the confidence to branch out outside of the language class.

One of the major challenges with the Dee-ni language at the moment is the lack of outside materials and its complexity. With common languages like Spanish or English, you can find learning materials without much effort, but that is not true for learning Dee-ni.

Although cultural programs have invested significant effort into developing language learning resources, the language's revival is still in its early stages.

As a result, it continues to face challenges due to a limited availability of materials compared to more widely spoken or long-established languages. The brunt of the effort is put on the Dee-ni language learner to immerse themselves in daily learning to strengthen their knowledge of the language.

The complexity of the language can present challenges for learners,

as its structure and spoken patterns are not always immediately intuitive, and that's perfectly natural.

Language learners may not fully grasp the reasons behind certain rules or phrases at first, but with continued immersion, these elements become more familiar over time. Dee-ni remains a living language, still evolving within the community, and as it grows, so do its speakers.

Embracing the learning process, even without always understanding every "why," is part of becoming fluent and keeping the language thriving.

Nick has developed a "come as you are" attitude for the language classes to encourage people to attend. Anyone, from beginner to an advanced learner is welcome, and people are free to participate at their own comfort level.

Summer community classes are currently ongoing and occur on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. and Thursdays at 12:30 p.m. over Zoom with a youth class on Tuesdays, at 4 p.m.

Fall Class times will be advertised on tribal social media and the Siletz News in September. The Language program is also working to expand digital tools that learners can use to practice the language and expect to be able to provide more details soon.

If you would like to keep up-to-date on class times, new resources, online resources, or to sign up for class visit the CTSI website at ctsi.nsn.us/heritage/language and contact Nick Viles at NickV@ctsi.nsn.us or by calling 541-270-5814 to get on the language email notification list.

First Monday Cuts events offer free fresh starts for Siletz youth

The Siletz Tribal Recreation Center kicked off our first Monday Cuts event on June 2, 2025, offering free haircuts for Siletz Tribal, JOM-enrolled, and tribal housing resident youth. The first event was a huge success, drawing a steady line of families and youth throughout the evening.

A special thank you goes to Siletz Tribal member Jeremy Sweet, who generously volunteered his time and talent. Jeremy provided premium cuts with skill and care, making each child feel confident and fresh to start the month.

The First Monday Cuts event is held on the first Monday of each month from 4-6:30 p.m. at the Siletz Tribal Rec Center. It's first come, first serve, so be sure to arrive early!

The next opportunity for a free cut is Monday, August 4, 2025.

Don't miss out on this chance to start the school year (and every month) in style.

This program is made possible through a collaboration between the Behavioral Health and Education Departments and is part of the Level Up initiative to support local youth.

For more information, contact:
Tony Blomstrom
541-270-1906
tonyb@ctsi.nsn.us





FIRST MONDAY CUTS

START YOUR MONTH IN STYLE

FREE HAIRCUTS FOR KIDS




JOIN US THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH FOR A FREE CUT

4:00PM - 6:30PM

FIRST COME FIRST SERVE

SILETS TRIBAL REC CENTER

1016 W Buford St. Siletz, Or 97380

SPONSORED BY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: TONY BLOMSTROM

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