

TRIBAL TRADITION...

SEMINOLE-STYLE OPENING CEREMONY FOR NAJA CONFERENCE SHOWS NATIVE JOURNALISTS THE TRUE FLORIDA.



PHOTOS BY BRENT MERRILL



The entrance sign to the swamp safari, where the 16th Annual Native American Journalist Association (NAJA) Conference Opening Ceremony took place. Yearly, NAJA brings together Tribal and mainstream media — newspapers, radio, TV and the World Web — to educate all on news and issues pertaining to Indian Country.



The Seminole Tribe's Veterans Color Guard helped kick-off the conference's opening events.



This female hawk is one of the many animals at the Tribe's reserve on display to visitors.



Smoke Signals staff members Kim Mueller holds a three-year old alligator, while Justin Phillips takes the "danger sign" seriously — and Brent Merrill plays it safe behind the camera!



Seminole Tribal member and skilled alligator wrestler Thomas Storm pulls a 7 foot-long, 185 pound alligator from a holding pond at Billie Swamp Safari to show the crowd. At one point in the show, Storm held the gator's jaws open to show off its rows of teeth — the jaws slammed shut and surprised-looking Storm said "anything can and will go wrong. If you see blood, it's not part of the show." Storm put the gator through a series of moves that concluded with him placing the animal's jaws between his neck and chin to applause of the crowd.

