

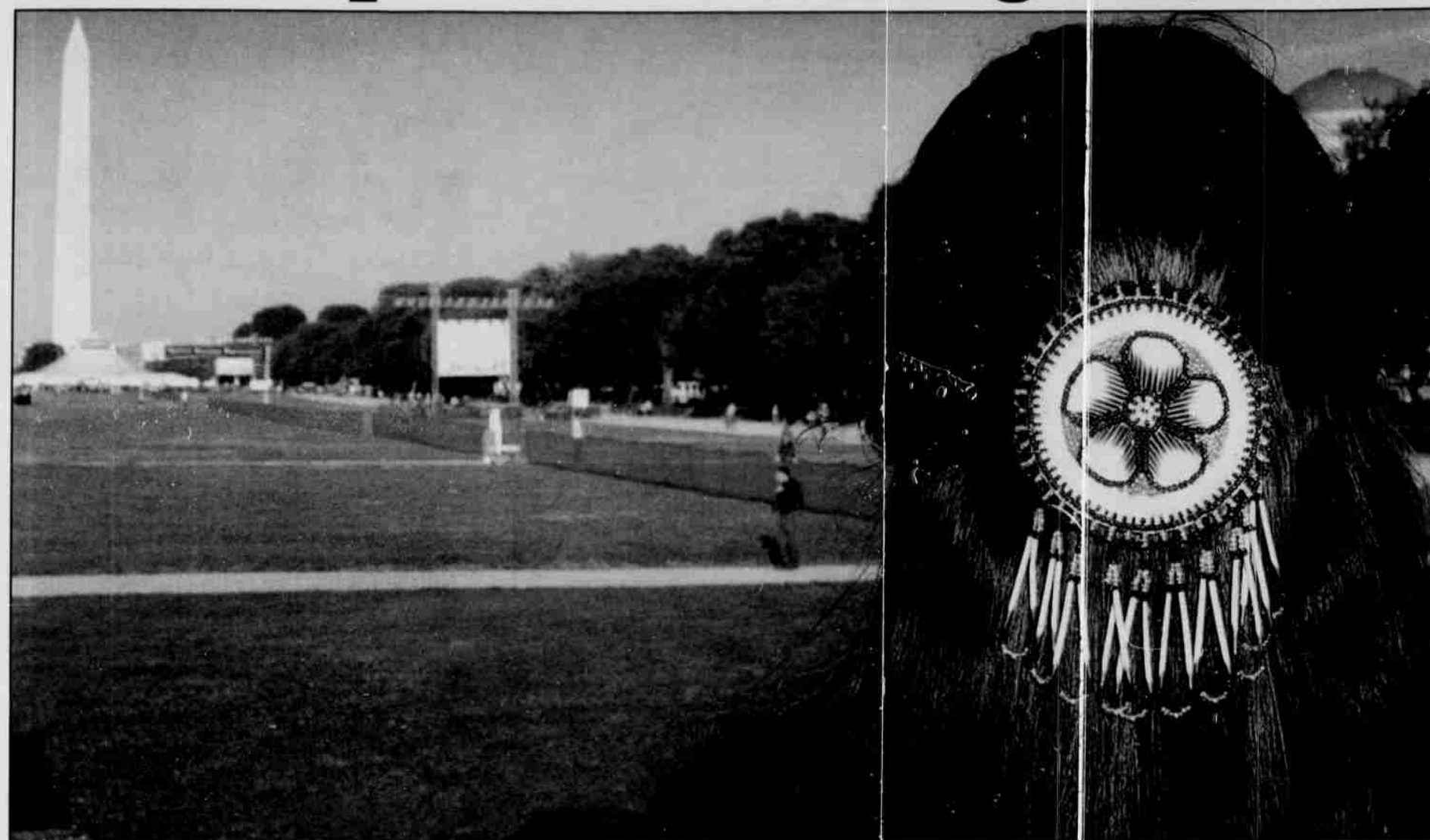
National Museum Of The American Indian Opens In Washington, D.C.



In The Lead— Senator Ben Nighthorse-Campbell, left, leads the procession dressed in traditional Plains regalia. Tens of thousands of Natives from Tribes across the United States joined in the opening day celebrations for the National Museum of the American Indian, the culmination of years of planning, fund-raising and effort by both Natives and non-Natives alike. The NMAI "is a monument to Native peoples' gifts to humanity," said Campbell.



Opening Day—Thousands of tourists and spectators visited the museum on opening day. The Museum's opening also marked the launch of a six-day First American festival with songs, dance arts and demonstrations, held on the National Mall.



Pathway—Spectators and participants for the opening of the museum began to arrive early at the Capitol Mall. Here Joy Persall, an Ojibway from Minneapolis, looks across the mall to the Washington monument. Soon the mall was filled with thousands of Natives from across the Nation.

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sion made its way to the north side of the museum.

Located directly in front of the U.S. Capitol, the 250,000 square foot Museum is home to the most comprehensive collection of American Indian cultural objects in the world, according to the Smithsonian.

The five-story curvilinear building sits on a 4.25-acre site and calls to mind natural rock formations carved by wind and water.

The structure is clad in Kasota Limestone, with its natural maize-yellow color. The \$199 million museum was designed, curated and landscaped with input from hun-

dreds of Natives from all over North and South America.

Special features of the museum include an east-facing entrance, a prism window projecting rainbows across the floor and the nearly 100-foot high Potomac space devoted to contemporary Native performances. These features are a direct result of extensive consultations with Native peoples.

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy said she was very impressed with the museum.

"It's a wonderful addition. I think the museum will be an asset and people will come to view it as such. Indian people have been very patient... We still have our purpose, which is to help people understand,

and I think the museum will help with that."

But there was controversy as well as celebration. In a press release issued the same day, leaders of the American Indian Movement said the museum "falls short" by not speaking to the "tragic history of America's holocaust against the Native nations and the peoples of the Americas."

Jim Northrup, Native author and syndicated columnist, was at the capitol and shared a similar view.

"First of all, as the first people, we should have been here first. It's sad that it took so long and it took casino money for it to happen," said Northrup, referring to the contributions that wealthy Tribes such

as the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Mohegan Tribe. Both Tribes donated \$10 million to the museum.

Northrup also said that he would have liked to have seen more living exhibits.

"I think that America prefers to see us in the eighteenth century as opposed to today."

Kennedy thought so too. Though she still recommends the museum "It was different than I expected," she said. "It didn't address the issues. I think they omitted them."

Joy Persall, an Ojibway from Minneapolis who volunteered to help with the event, saw the museum in a opposite light. She said that people often think of museums as holding dead things, while she

thought "the whole building is alive and flowing. If you get a chance to go in, you'll see that it is very much about living people."

Senator Ben Nighthorse-Campbell, a Northern Cheyenne and the first American Indian to Chair the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, spoke to the crowd saying "It is often said that Washington is a city of monuments, but there is not one to Natives. Now, we have this beautiful building, and in it we will tell our story."

He said that the NMAI was also a monument to the more than 190,000 Native American Veterans "who served with honor and courage, defending the nation in every war since the Revolutionary."

NMAI director Richard West

greeted the procession dressed in a traditional white buckskin outfit. West said that the museum "is an ongoing testimony to the vitality of Native cultures."

Mark Trahan, an Editor with the *Seattle-Post Intelligencer* and former President of the Native American Journalists Association, also had a positive take on the new museum. "So often the story that's told is the story of dying Indians," he said. "What's cool here is that you have a museum about the future, the next 100 or 1,000 years. In a way, it's the opposite of a museum."

Like all of the museums on the National Mall, the NMAI is free and open to the public. ■

Photos by Peta Tinda



Dressed Up—A pair of Natives dressed in traditional Plains regalia strike a pose for a camera-toting tourist at the opening ceremony.



Inside View—The interior of the National Museum of the American Indian features a 120-foot high gathering space called the Potomac. The floor is made of maple and is composed of four quadrants that symbolize the four directions. A wall of woven copper bands encircles the room, evoking traditional basketry patterns.



Courage—Dozens of Color and Honor Guards marched in the procession. A much greater percentage of Natives have served and are serving in the armed forces, compared to the rest of the population.



Future Photographer— Helissi Tommy-TwoShoes, a Seminole and Nakota Tribal member whose name means "Medicine Gatherer," was at the NMAI opening. She is the niece of *Smoke Signals*' photographer Peta Tinda and appears to already like the camera.



Sacred Objects—A collection of Lakota bibles and hymnals with beaded and porcupine-quill embroidered covers. The museum is home to 8,000 such artifacts, also including everything from ceramic figures to baskets, masks to totem poles. This vast permanent display is free and open to the public.