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TULSAPEOPLE / MARCH 2016 / TEACHING LOVE, PRESERVING TRADITION

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Teaching love, preserving tradition

Tribal elder Sam Proctor has dedicated his life to teaching Creek customs.

GAIL BANZET-ELLIS



Sam Proctor at the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Council House, at the center of the historic Okmulgee town square.

A devoted advocate of Muscogee (Creek) Nation heritage, tribal elder **Sam Proctor** will be inducted into the Tulsa City-County Library's Circle of Honor this month. The award recognizes efforts made by American Indians to enrich the lives of others while preserving their native culture.

That Proctor will receive the award is no surprise. He has dedicated his life to teaching Creek customs that promote balance and harmony within the tribe and the world.

Born to a traditional Muscogee (Creek) family, he grew up in the small American Indian community of Weogufkee (Muddy Water) in southeastern Oklahoma. He attended Dustin High School and left the Creeks' ceremonial way of life, falling in step with his mother's staunch Western style of worship. He became a Baptist

preacher in his early 20s and served the church for 16 years before having an epiphany that redirected his life's path.

"I was traveling to an event to preach, and there was this feeling I had," Proctor says. "I knew it was the last time. Something told me to turn back to my traditional ways of the tribe. The creator said, 'I want to teach you to love people.'"

From that moment on, he was a changed man. He began living and teaching the Creek traditions he'd learned from his father as a young boy. Over the past four decades, he

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has taught the Creek language and met with descendants of the tribe across Oklahoma and the southeast, reintroducing ancient Creek culture and ideology.

“There’s no better place than returning to your heritage,” Proctor says. “I believe in my creator and what our ancestors have handed down to us. Now it’s time for the younger generation to keep that going.”

One of his passions is passing on sustainable Creek agricultural practices. In 2007, he assisted with the Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative in Okmulgee to help Creek members improve their quality of life through economic development and community engagement.

Proctor also helped create a monthly class to revitalize and preserve traditional Creek hymns, and he serves as the medicine man of the Tallahassee (Wvkokaye) Ceremonial grounds in rural Okfuskee County.

In tribal ceremonies, medicine is prepared for the members of the grounds. Its purpose is for purification and healing. Plant roots are gathered, blessed and placed in water for drinking.

“He makes the medicine for the good of all of us and starts the fire we consider our altar,” says his son, **David**, who works in the Creek Nation’s cultural preservation department. “Coals from that fire are carried to each camp on the grounds to signify a new start and the cycle of life.”

A kind soul with a weathered face and a warm smile, Proctor resides in Okmulgee and will turn 84 in April. He still travels at least once a month to speak on the preservation of Creek language and culture. His life’s work follows three principles taught by his family: love, long-suffering and patience.

Approximately 72,000 Creek Indians reside in the United States, and fewer than 1,500 of those are full-blood members, according to David Proctor.

Sam Proctor says it’s critical the tribe preserve its heritage for future generations.

“It’s never too late,” he says. “We need to ask ourselves, ‘What are we going to leave with them when we go?’ I love to talk about it.”



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March 5

Circle of Honor Ceremony with Sam Proctor

10:30 a.m. Hardesty Regional Library, 8316 E. 93rd St. The ceremony kicks off a month-long celebration of Native American achievements and system-wide library programs. Events are free and open to the public. Call 918-549-7472 or visit www.tulsalibrary.org/airc.

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