KEYNOTE

DONNA LORING

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

PENOBSCOT



Donna M. Loring is a Penobscot Nation Tribal Elder, author, and veteran of the U.S. Army Women's Army Corps. She served during the Vietnam War as a communications specialist, including during the Tet Offensive.

Loring later served as the Penobscot Nation Tribal Representative to the Maine State Legislature and is a longtime advocate for Wabanaki sovereignty, education, and cultural preservation.

She is the author of In the Shadow of the Eagle and continues her work through writing, public speaking, and cultural leadership.



SHERRY L. RUPERT

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

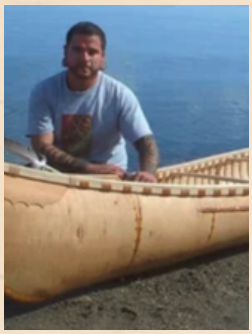
PAIUTE/WASHOE

Sherry L. Rupert (Paiute/Washoe) is the Chief Executive Officer of the American Indigenous Tourism Association, with nearly 25 years of experience advancing Indigenous tourism across the United States.

A nationally recognized advocate, she has helped promote tourism as an economic driver for Native Nations, supported landmark legislation, and expanded educational opportunities for Indigenous communities.

Her leadership has earned national recognition, including for her work preserving Indigenous cultural heritage and establishing the Stewart Indian School Museum and Cultural Center in Nevada.

SPEAKERS



ERIC OTTER BACON

PASSAMAQUODDY

An accomplished Indigenous artist and basket maker, Eric Bacon developed a passion for traditional arts at an early age, inspired by family members skilled in canoe building, carving, and woodworking. Since beginning professional basket making in 2004, Eric has earned recognition at Native art markets and had work featured in major museum collections across the country.

With experience in basketry, carving, and traditional canoe construction, Eric is dedicated to preserving and sharing Indigenous artistic knowledge while inspiring future generations.



NORMAN BERNARD

MI'KMAQ

Norman Bernard serves as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for the Mi'kmaq Nation in Aroostook County, Maine. In this role, he works to protect and preserve the Nation's cultural heritage and ancestral lands. He also represents the Mi'kmaq Nation through consultation and collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies to safeguard archaeological and historic resources.

Bernard also oversees the Mi'kmaq Nation Museum, managing and preserving its collections and cultural artifacts. His work extends beyond physical preservation to protecting the traditional knowledge, stories, language, and cultural practices that define Mi'kmaq identity. Through these efforts, he is committed to ensuring that the Nation's history and cultural heritage are respected and passed down to future generations.



COMMISSIONER MICHAEL DUGUAY

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Commissioner Duguay is charged with overseeing more than two dozen experts across several bureaus whose mission is to help communities and businesses prosper through a variety of programs that provide everything from targeted tax relief to community block grants to tourism marketing.

Previously, as Vice President for Innovation and Executive Director of the Harold Alfond Institute for Business Innovation at Thomas College in Waterville, he helped hundreds of entrepreneurs market their products and scale their businesses, and trained thousands of students to succeed in good-paying careers in Maine. Duguay began his economic development career at the Department of Economic and Community Development in 1990.



ALEXANDRA FRANCIS

PENOBSCOT

Alexandra (Neptune) Francis is a Peskotomuhkat (fisher clan) naka Panawapskewi (eel clan) citizen, mother, and artist. Raised at Sipayik, she developed an early interest in beadwork and later explored 2D art before returning to traditional and contemporary beadwork in 2019.

Now residing in Panawapskek territory, Alex serves as a Wabanaki Traditional Arts mentor, sharing her knowledge to preserve cultural traditions and pass ancestral teachings on to future generations.

SPEAKERS



RYAN KELLEY

PENOBSCOT

Ryan Ranco Kelley is a member of the Penobscot Nation, Guides with the Cultural tourism program, and works with Maine teachers to advance educational insights pertaining to Wabanaki studies initiative. Working in conjunction with Tribal educators, various organizations and Maine guides to provide safe and eye opening river routes experience with a concentration of decolonizing thought process.

In 2023 he completed an 1800 mile canoe journey across traditional indigenous water routes in the northeast. With a soon to be published book written by Freddie Wilkinson, National Geographic contributing writer.



MATTHEW LEWIS

PASSAMAQUODDY, SIPAYIK

ED, FOUR DIRECTIONS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Matthew is a citizen of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik and Executive Director of Four Directions Development Corporation, where he supports the preservation of Wabanaki culture and traditions through economic development.

With over a decade of experience working with Municipal, State, Tribal, and Federal Governments, he specializes in community development projects and financial initiatives. Outside of work, Matthew enjoys working with technology, automating household tasks, and exploring the Maine woods with his wife and daughter.

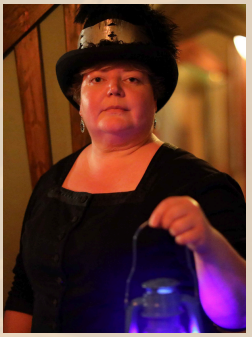


JENNIFER NEPTUNE

PENOBSCOT

Jennifer Neptune (Penobscot Nation) is the Director of the Penobscot Nation Museum on Indian Island, Maine, dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich cultural heritage of the Penobscot Indian Nation and the Wabanaki people. She is also a master basketmaker, beadworker, and Maine guide, who recently served as the exhibit writer for the Tekɑkɑpiməkˑ Contact Station at the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

The recipient of many national awards and grants for her basketmaking, she has worked to preserve and adapt traditions of ash and sweetgrass basketry and to mentor other artists. She holds a degree in anthropology from the University of Maine.



JENNIFER ‘RAE’ PICTOU

MI'KMAQ

Jennifer is a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation and a traditional Indigenous storyteller whose work has reached international audiences. She holds a Master’s Degree in American and New England Studies from the University of Southern Maine.

Her journey began in Northern Maine, growing up in a haunted farmhouse where paranormal experiences were part of everyday life. Inspired to share ghost stories, she founded the award-winning Bar Harbor Ghost Tours, ranked among the 10 Best Ghost Tours in the country by USA Today for seven consecutive years.

SPEAKERS



DARREN RANCO

PENOBSCOT

Darren Ranco, a citizen of the Penobscot Nation, is a professor of anthropology, chair of Native American Programs, and coordinator of Native American research at the University of Maine, where he has taught since 2009.

His research focuses on Indigenous knowledge, environmental justice and sustainability, with an emphasis on protecting cultural and natural resources. Through his teaching and research, as well as community partnerships, he works to strengthen relationships between universities and Tribal Nations while advancing Indigenous voices in environmental stewardship.



SARAH SOCKBESON

PENOBSCOT

Sarah Sockbeson is a member of the Penobscot Nation, as well as an award-winning Indigenous artist and culture bearer, known for her traditional yet contemporary brown ash and sweetgrass baskets.

Trained under renowned basketmaker Jennifer Sapiel, she has become a prominent figure in the Wabanaki arts community. Through mentorship and museum collaborations, Sarah works to preserve cultural traditions and challenge stereotypes, inspiring future generations of Indigenous artists.

ANASTASIA SOCOBASIN

PASSAMAQUODDY

Anastasia Socobasin is a member of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, born and raised in Indian Township, where she now raises her family. She manages Bear Lodge Cabins in Indian Township, Maine, and serves as Chair of the Indian Township School Board.
With a background in tribal programs and community service, she takes pride in Bear Lodge Cabins and the welcoming atmosphere it offers. As a mother and community member, she values strong connections and making people feel comfortable and cared for.

DONALD SOCTOMAH

PASSAMAQUODDY



Donald Soctomah is a citizen of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Native American historian, author, teacher, filmmaker, lecturer, and storyteller. He received a Forestry Bachelor degree and a Honorary Doctorate degree from the University of Maine system. He serves as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Passamaquoddy Tribal communities, and received a Presidential appointment to the board of the Roosevelt Campobello International Park Commission.

Donald works on the protection of culturally significant sites, artifacts and knowledge. He has written several books about Passamaquoddy history, as well as co-authored two children's books, Remember Me: Tomah Joseph's Gift to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and The Canoe Maker. Donald has appeared on National Public Television, Maine Public Television, Canadian Broadcasting, Animal Planet and is a frequent consultant to the Smithsonian Institution, US Library of Congress, and Maine State Museum.

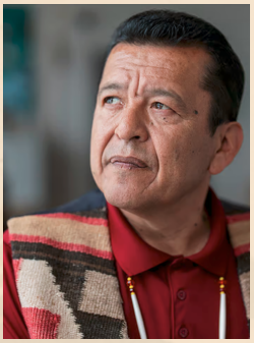
SPEAKERS



ISAAC ST. JOHN

HOULTON BAND OF MALISEETS

Isaac St. John is a member of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (Wolastoqiyik) and a trustee of the Abbe Museum. He earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology and archaeology from Bates College and worked as a resident curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. In 2020, he became the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians.



DWAYNE TOMAH

PASSAMAQUODDY

Dwayne Tomah is a Passamaquoddy Language Keeper, educator, and the youngest fluent speaker of the Passamaquoddy Tribe. A former Tribal Council member, he has dedicated his life to preserving and sharing Passamaquoddy language, culture, and traditions through teaching, storytelling, song, and dance.

He has contributed to the Passamaquoddy dictionary and helped develop the Passamaquoddy Language App. He is currently working with the Library of Congress to translate historic Passamaquoddy wax cylinder recordings from 1890, among the earliest recordings of Indigenous languages. His work also includes cultural preservation, repatriation, and Land Back initiatives, as well as sharing Indigenous perspectives on history, including the Doctrine of Discovery.



SARAH WOOG

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FOUR DIRECTIONS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Sarah is the Deputy Director and started with FDDC in January of 2023. Sarah comes to FDDC from a career in education, during which she served in various teaching and leadership roles in tribal and public schools, higher education, non-profits, and government.

Sarah has a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics and American Studies from Trinity College in Hartford, CT, and a Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine at Orono. Sarah brings to her work a passion for serving tribal communities and diverse experiences in grants management and program design. She believes deeply in FDDC's mission and is excited to work daily towards it.

Sarah enjoys spending time with her daughter, Maddy, and their dog, Sherman.

ARTISTS



ISAAC SYLIBOY

MI'KMAQ AND PASSAMAQUODDY

Isaac Syliboy is a Wabanaki artist, traditional dancer, singer, and educator who belongs to both the Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy nations. Rooted in the Indigenous communities of Sipekne'katik, Nova Scotia, and Sipayik, Maine, he currently resides on the Penobscot Indian Reservation in Old Town, Maine.

Isaac has practiced Wabanaki artistry for most of his life and travels throughout the United States and Canada to share his cultural traditions. Through song and dance, he helps audiences deepen their understanding of Wabanaki cultures.



LAUREN STEVENS

PASSAMAQUODDY

Lauren Stevens is a citizen of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk, a traditional song sharer, and a member of the Wabanaki Nations Wampum C.I.S.M. Network, supporting Indigenous communities during times of need.

A lifelong singer, Lauren shares Wabanaki traditions and values through song, fostering connection across cultures. She also co-directed and appeared in the 2022 documentary Weckuwapok: The Approaching Dawn and has participated in musical collaborations across Turtle Island.



CIPELAHQ EHPICIK - THUNDERBIRD WOMEN

PASSAMAQUODDY

Cipelahq Ehpicik is one of the most distinguished Wabanaki drumming groups in the region and has been performing together for many years. Their performances focus on songs of water, love, and caring for each other. They are a women's drumming and singing group from the Passamaquoddy Tribe based out of the Sipayik (Pleasant Point) reservation, and they play a vital role in cultural preservation, spiritual healing, and community resilience.