



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Miccosukees of Florida, kin to the Seminoles and Creeks, but consistently aloof from both tribal organizations, have emerged from the Everglades after more than a century and are now going into their own tribal business.

With a constitution and bylaws that were formulated and approved in January 1962, the Miccosukees are now, for the first time in the history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, accepting Federal aid from the United States.

The Department of the Interior reports that December 19 is set for the dedication of their first tribal enterprise--a restaurant financed in part by a \$150,000 Bureau loan. Located 40 miles west of Miami, it is expected to attract the steady stream of tourists who travel U. S. 41, the Tamiami Trail. The restaurant and an adjacent new filling station are expected to provide employment to tribal members and produce revenue for the tribal budget. The enterprise, to be maintained by Miccosukee workmen and staffed with Miccosukee waitresses, has already brought some measure of prosperity to Miccosukee families. Tribal members were among the construction workers.

The restaurant is only the beginning. Ground was broken earlier this month for a two-room schoolhouse to serve the three dozen school-age Miccosukees who are enrolled tribal members. At present these children, ranging in ages from 6 to 15, are attending class in a one-room portable structure provided by Dade County. The Bureau of Indian Affairs will finance the new school and has already provided two teachers.

A community center and 15 modern "chickees" will complete the Miccosukee tribal complex. Construction of the multipurpose center will be financed by the Bureau, and the homes will be underwritten by the Public Housing Administration. A model house, already completed, retains the traditional thatched roof (under which is modern beam-and-board roofing) and is composed of four large rooms, kitchen and bath. The local public power company has sent homemaking demonstrators to the Miccosukees to show women how to use the modern stoves, refrigerators and other appliances that will change the way of family life on this stretch of the Tamiami Trail.

There are 140 enrolled members of the Miccosukee Tribe, but the Bureau employees who have been working with them estimate that there are probably 200 or more other Miccosukees who are living in the Everglades area and it is expected that they will eventually take part in the tribal activities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is providing job training so that tribal members may be employed in the tribal ventures.

The Miccosukees are no strangers to residents of southern Florida. Jimmy Tiger's Indian Village--the homestead of his family and relatives about 30 miles west of Miami on the Tamiami Trail--is open to the public; and a crafts shop markets jackets, blouses, skirts and similar clothing of Miccosukee creation and design, as well as moccasins and other handicrafts from the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina.

While crafts work is not as prevalent among the Miccosukees as among some of the tribes of the Southwest, visitors to the new restaurant and other buildings being planned will be able to feast their eyes upon a variety of Indian-made artifacts created by Indian art students as part of the interior decor. (The students attend the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.) For example, the windows in the restaurant, an i-frame structure, will be decorated with fenestrations by a youthful Seneca weaver. Paintings, sculpture, lamps, murals, and even the stone carvings on the concrete buttresses are products of the Institute's students, all Indians, who represent several tribes from all parts of the United States. The motif is in keeping with the tropical environment and faithful to Miccosukee tradition.

Why, after centuries of isolation in the Everglades, have the Miccosukees decided to change their way of life? Philleo Nash, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, suggests a reason:

"The Miccosukees," Nash says, "recognize the root of the Indian's problem today--he is often so far removed from the mainstream of American society that he gets only the backwash. The Miccosukees are learning to choose, in this time of change, the things they should keep and the things they must discard."
