



## Advocating for a Shared Future

*On Nov. 1 in honor of Native American Heritage Month, the Village of Waunakee raised the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin flag and installed new emblems on a welcome sign.*

The flag of the Ho-Chunk Nation dances in the wind at Bascom Hall. Photo by Althea Dotzour/UW-Madison

By Abigail Becker, UniverCity Alliance

While Elliott Funmaker of the Wisconsin Dells Singers drummed a song passed down through generations, officials raised the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin flag outside of the Waunakee Village Hall on the first day of Native American Heritage Month.

The flag will fly during November to honor all those who came before Waunakee existed. In a permanent installation, Waunakee and Ho-Chunk Nation officials also added new 15-inch diameter circular emblems on one of the village's "Welcome to the Only Waunakee In the World" entry signs, with plans to add them to the additional three signs.

"It really has been an honor for us to engage and build friendships with the Ho-Chunk Nation," Village Administrator Todd Schmidt said during the November 1 event.

These actions further build on the efforts of the Village of Waunakee to recognize and celebrate the Ho-Chunk Nation. In 2020, Waunakee entered into a multi-year partnership with [UniverCity Alliance's](#) hallmark [UniverCity Year program \(UCY\)](#), and much of the work focused on relationship-building efforts with the Ho-Chunk Nation.

"This is the first day of Native American Heritage Month," Ho-Chunk Nation Public Relations Officer Casey Brown said during the flag raising ceremony. "I'm really happy that in the Village of Waunakee, it's not just a month, especially with UniverCity Year. It's been an ongoing process. It's not just one day or part of the year."

The decision to work with UCY came after Waunakee began reflecting on how welcoming their community is toward employees and residents following the racially-charged murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis in 2020.

Waunakee launched community wide discussions about racial awareness and a campaign to tell individual stories of community members and learn how differences can unite a community in an effort to better understand how race and identity shape the quality of life.

Around this same time, the Village of Waunakee looked toward celebrating 150 years as a village in 2021. While a cause for celebration, the significant milestone prompted officials to deepen their understanding that Waunakee stands on land that is not theirs but that of the Ho-Chunk Nation of

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— Casey Brown,

Ho-Chunk Nation Public Relations Officer

Wisconsin. The Hoocagra (Ho-Chunk Nation), People of the Sacred Voice, have been stewards of their ancestral lands and waters, Teejop, since time immemorial.

The partnership with UCY was aimed at building on those efforts to realize transformational change.

During the November 1 ceremony, Village President Chris Zellner acknowledged that Waunakee strives to be welcoming and inclusive to everyone and that raising the Ho-Chunk Nation flag is an important part of that effort.

“I’m so proud of our community and our growth as an inclusive community,” Zellner said. “I’ve always said I want Waunakee to be a welcoming place to everyone. This is one of those steps in doing that.”

### Partnership impacts

As a result of the UCY partnership, Waunakee’s Village Board unanimously approved a [land acknowledgement statement](#) on Sept. 20, 2021. The statement recognizes that Waunakee is located on land that is part of the ancestral territory of the Ho-Chunk people, cites atrocities imposed on them and pledges that the village will “advocate for a shared future” through “relationship building, education, and action.”

Schmidt read the statement during the flag raising ceremony.

“There was a time when these sorts of agreements were thought of by Native Nations as ‘bad paper’ because one side didn’t uphold the words,” Schmidt said. “We in Waunakee don’t intend for this to exist as bad paper.”

“I give a lot of credit to Waunakee for acknowledging it had work to do on making their community one that’s welcoming of all people. This partnership shows what’s possible when the university listens to what communities need and get them to the right people at UW–Madison,” UniverCity Alliance Managing Director Gavin Luter said. “So many community partners — from the Ho-Chunk Nation to the public schools to the senior center — were involved in making these projects possible. We’re grateful to Waunakee for trusting us enough to engage in a partnership about this very sensitive and incredibly important topic.”

[Read more](#) about the partnership, including a [recent award](#) that Waunakee received.



Top: Ho-Chunk Nation public relations officer Casey Brown (center) installs an emblem on one of the Village of Waunakee’s “Welcome to the Only Waunakee In the World” entry signs. Middle: The permanent emblems on the village’s welcome signs further build on the efforts of the Village of Waunakee to recognize and celebrate the Ho-Chunk Nation. Bottom: On Nov. 1, officials raised the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin flag outside of the Waunakee Village Hall to mark the beginning of Native American Heritage Month. Photos by Abigail Becker