



MID-AMERICA ARTS ALLIANCE

September 9, 2022

50 YEARS KANSAS M-AAA IMPACT

50 Stories | Return of Iⁿ 'zhúje 'waxóbe



Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) is celebrating its 50th year of ensuring more art for more people—strengthening and supporting artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. Founded in 1972, M-AAA has awarded grants to artists and arts organizations, helped to bring cultural programs to communities urban and rural, and empowered creatives throughout Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas; across the nation; and internationally. As part of its anniversary recognition, M-AAA is pleased to share **50 Stories | 50 Years**, a weekly series of stories and statements submitted by colleagues, program participants, and others that speak to M-AAA's profound impact on their lives, creativity, communities, and the region.

Pauline Sharp of the Kaw Nation describes M-AAA's important role in the Iⁿ 'zhúje 'waxóbe/[Sacred Red Rock Project](#), which returns a 28-ton sacred red Siouxan quartzite boulder to the Kaw Nation, after 93 years in Robinson Park, Lawrence, Kansas.

I retired from a career in information technology in 2012. I wanted to reconnect with my tribe, the Kaw or Kanza, so I joined the Kaw Nation cultural committee and served for four years; I also served on the Board of Trustees of the Mid-American All-Indian Center in Wichita. I took a class at Wichita State University taught by an Osage elder, who asked the students, "Where did Kansas get its name?" Nobody knew, and most of them were Indigenous. I decided to tell the story of the Kanza People through the character of my grandmother, Lucy Tayiah Eads, who was born in a tipi in Indian Territory and at age 34 became the first woman Chief of our tribe. Today my first-person historical performance



takes me all over the state of Kansas. I am a juried member of the Kansas Alliance of Historical Performers and was recently voted into the Arts Partners program as a teaching artist. Arts Partners inspires creativity and learning by using the arts to enhance the classroom experience for students from Pre-K to grade 12.

I am inspired by my ancestors, particularly Chief Wah-Shun-Gah, principal Chief of the Kanza in Indian Territory, and my grandmother, whom the people called Chief Lucy. The ancestors faced unimaginable hardships, but they survived. They would go to the Sacred Red Rock, Iⁿ 'zhúje 'waxóbe, and pray to Wakonda (the creator) to give them the attributes of strength and endurance like Iⁿ 'zhúje 'waxóbe. My favorite collaborations—in the past year and coming up—are events and community engagement surrounding the Iⁿ 'zhúje 'waxóbe/Sacred Red Rock Project, formerly known as Between the Rock and a Hard Place. The community outreach includes imaginings in the Lawrence community, events, and exhibits at the Spencer Museum of Art on the University of Kansas campus and at Haskell Indian Nations University. I am sure Chief Lucy will make some appearances too!

The grant from M-AAA's Interchange program in 2019 enabled artist Dave Loewenstein and me to organize a team to open dialogue with the city of Lawrence and the Kaw Nation, and hold community forums to imagine what the future might hold for “The Big Red Rock.” On March 16, 2021, the Lawrence City Commission formally adopted a resolution to return Iⁿ 'zhúje 'waxóbe to the Kaw Nation. Since that time, a generous \$5 million grant from the Mellon Foundation allows Kaw Nation to move the Sacred Red Rock to our ancestral home land in Kansas.

Kaw Nation Vice-Chairman James Pepper Henry articulated the significance of the funding from the Mellon Foundation, which was announced April 4, 2022: “This grant will also provide resources to implement an interpretive plan and infrastructure for our visitors to learn about the Kaw people, the original inhabitants of Kansas. We look forward to working in cooperation with the City of Lawrence, University of Kansas, and other project partners to facilitate this process, and to strengthen our relationship and visibility with the citizens of Kansas.”



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Empowering Community Through **Art**

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