

November is American Indian Heritage Month, and in North Carolina we have particular cause to celebrate. Our state has the largest American Indian population east of the Mississippi. This includes one federally recognized tribe—the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians—and several state-recognized tribes.

“The largest tribe in the state, the Lumbee, is based in Robeson County,” said Charlene Hunt, program coordinator for the North Carolina American Indian Health Board in the [Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity](#). “Our state also has large concentrations of American Indians in urban regions, and there are urban Indian centers in Raleigh, Charlotte, Greensboro, and Fayetteville.”

As a member of the Lumbee tribe, Hunt works hard to keep her heritage alive—both personally and publically.

“In modern life, we have more people living away from their tribes, which can make it harder to keep our traditions going,” she said. “So we rely on community resources and events to help us maintain our unique customs.”

## Community is Key

Urban Indian centers keep Indian traditions alive by providing cultural classes for American Indian children. There are four such organizations in North Carolina, the closest being Guilford Native American Association (GNAA) in Greensboro.

Powwows are another cultural resource for American Indians. These heritage festivals can be found throughout the state during the summer and fall months, and are also open to the general public.

“It’s great that we can share these festivities with everyone,” said Hunt. “American Indians are an important part of North Carolina’s culture and history.”

It’s in that spirit of awareness that all eight tribes will gather this month for the 19th annual American Indian Heritage Celebration on November 22 at the North Carolina Museum of History. Hunt is on the planning committee for the event, which will be free and open to the public.

## Teaching Future Generations

Hunt has found that even in her own life, she works hard to stay in touch with her Lumbee roots. Early on, when she was a student at Salem College, she wrote a children’s book called “You Don’t Look Indian to Me” as a way to share her experiences growing up as an American Indian. Now that she has a son and daughter, she exposes them to Lumbee culture through classes at GNAA.

“There, they can experience dance lessons, storytelling and fellowship,” she said. “It’s very important to me that my kids know their roots. To keep our heritage alive as American Indian people, we must always think ahead to future generations and how we can continue passing our traditions down.”

An important custom to the Lumbee is participating in quilting circles. Lumbee women often add a pinecone design to their patchwork as a distinct tribal signature. The pinecone has represented the Lumbee tribe—even appearing on dancer regalia—for generations.

## Learn and Celebrate!

There are several ways you can learn about and celebrate North Carolina’s rich American Indian heritage this month:

- **November 12:** From 11:30 am to 12:30 pm, a table will be set up in the cafeteria where Wake Forest Baptist Health employees, patients, families and visitors can learn more about North Carolina’s tribes. Hunt will also have information available on health risks and disparities faced by American Indians.
- **November 22:** The official state [American Indian Heritage Celebration](#) will be held in Raleigh at the North Carolina Museum of History. Festivities will include tribal music and dancing, as well as arts and crafts displays.
- Additional information on American Indians in North Carolina can be found at the [UNC American Indian Center](#) and the [Commission of Indian Affairs](#).