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James Beard Finalist and ‘Indigenous Food Warrior’ Chef Crystal Wahpepah Named Consulting Chef at First Americans Museum

EDITOR’S NOTE: High-resolution images and video footage of the March 28 event and Wahpepah are available for media use [HERE](#).

OKLAHOMA CITY (March 30, 2026) — After a landmark weekend celebrating the release of her new cookbook, “A Feather and a Fork: 125 Intertribal Dishes from an Indigenous Food Warrior,” First Americans Museum (FAM) is proud to announce that Crystal Wahpepah (Kickapoo) has been appointed as the new consulting chef for 39 Enterprises, which runs the museum’s dining, catering and private events operations.

Coinciding with the beginning of spring—a season of renewal and the traditional new year for many of the 39 tribal nations in Oklahoma today—the partnership marks a new chapter for 39 Enterprises and a homecoming of sorts for the chef. Wahpepah rose to national acclaim in her home of Oakland, California, where she founded Wahpepah’s Kitchen, the state’s first Native woman-owned restaurant. However, her roots and heritage are tied to the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma.

“Chef Crystal is more than a chef,” said Dr. Kelli Mosteller (Citizen Potawatomi), FAM executive director. “She is a visionary who has spent her career not only revitalizing Indigenous foodways and elevating traditional cuisine, but she’s also done so in a way that is focused on fostering community.”

The announcement follows a standing-room-only event on March 28, where Wahpepah was joined by “There There” author and MacArthur Fellow Tommy Orange (Cheyenne & Arapaho) for a book signing and discussion on food sovereignty and her new cookbook, for which Orange penned the foreword. The overwhelming community response to the event underscored a clear appetite in Oklahoma City for Wahpepah’s intertribal culinary vision.

“In our earliest conversations with Chef Crystal about this potential partnership,” Mosteller continued, “it was clear that her approach and philosophy of food sovereignty perfectly mirror FAM’s mission. And the turnout at her book signing with Tommy only emphasized that she is the perfect person for this role. We are thrilled to have her join our culinary team.”

Wahpepah will collaborate with executive chef Ben Hutton to infuse the museum’s food & beverage programs with her philosophy, enhancing the dining menus at 39 Restaurant and Café, as well as the catering options offered for private event rentals at the museum. Her vision focuses on “Indigenous food as medicine,” utilizing seasonal, local ingredients—such as venison, squash, heirloom corn and foraged foods—sourced from Indigenous producers.

“It feels like a full-circle moment coming on board at 39, deepening my connection to this land and these communities,” Wahpepah said. “The museum tells the stories of 39 distinct tribal nations, and our goal will be ensuring those stories are reflected on the plate. It’s a big undertaking, but we are building a dining experience that aims to honor our ancestors and nourish our future generations.”

Wahpepah succeeds Loretta Barrett Oden (Citizen Potawatomi), whose foundational work helped establish 39 Restaurant as a premier destination for Indigenous cuisine. The museum extends its deepest gratitude to Barrett Oden for her years of dedicated service and artistry.

Media Assets: A full digital press kit, including a .docx version of this release; high-resolution images, headshots, and event photography with Wahpepah and Tommy Orange; and video footage of Mosteller announcing Wahpepah’s appointment during a private dinner at 39 Restaurant, can be accessed [HERE](#).

About Chef Crystal Wahpepah: A finalist for the James Beard Emerging Chef Award and a U.S. State Department culinary ambassador, Wahpepah has been featured on Food Network, CBS and National Geographic. Her new cookbook, “A Feather and a Fork,” written with ethnobotanist Linda Black Elk and featuring a foreword by MacArthur Fellow Tommy Orange, serves as a cornerstone for her contemporary Indigenous culinary philosophy. Visit chefcrystalwahpepah.com for more.

About 39 Restaurant & 39 Enterprises: Located within First Americans Museum, 39 Restaurant honors Indigenous foodways by exploring the culinary innovation and artistry of the 39 tribal nations in Oklahoma today. Visit 39restaurant.com for hours of operation. FAM also offers premier Indigenous dining options to private event clients through 39 Enterprises. Visit famok.org/bookevent for more information.

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