

## For Immediate Release

Contact: **Todd Morris (646.734.4732)**

WHEN: Sunday April 23 at 5pm

WHERE: Mauch Chunk Opera House, 14 W Broadway, Jim Thorpe PA 18229

## Film Festival to Screen Exclusive Look At Sacred Gatherings Of the Area's Native Tribe *A Homecoming For The Lenape People*

Jim Thorpe, PA — [The Jim Thorpe Independent Film Festival](#) team is honored to present a forum for the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania to share a delicate look inside their history. Current tribal leaders and members braved significant sites along “The Walking Purchase”— The 1737 land swindle perpetrated by colonial leaders that cost the tribe more than 1000 square miles of their land. Lenape people who inhabited this land were forced to assimilate into the culture of their anglo-saxon conquerors. Native ceremonies were prohibited throughout the region and colonial oppression stripped the Lenape people of their true identity. Since the 1700's, no public Lenape ceremonies were held here until 2018. By retracing the traumatic path from Wrightstown, PA to Port Jervis, NY, stopping at significant landmarks along the way, the goal was to “cleanse the land” and reclaim the dignity of the indigenous people of the region —past, present and future. And for the first time in history, Lenape leaders **allowed cameras to roll** during their sacred gatherings.

*“I didn't realize the emotion and pain it would bring up being at these places,”* says Chief Chuck Gentlemoon.

**“Keepers of the Way”** was directed by Hudson Valley based filmmaker Evan Cohen and produced by Jim Thorpe local Elijah Lee Reeder. The short documentary documents the most telling moments of the 2019 journey and will screen at the Mauch Chunk Opera House (14 W Broadway, Jim Thorpe, PA 18229), Sunday April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5pm, just several miles from where parts of the film take place. Members of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania, including Chief Chuck Gentlemoon and others featured in the film, will be present and available to the press.

“It feels like a homecoming,” Gentlemoon says of the upcoming festival appearance. “To tell our story, about our people who would have been here [Jim Thorpe]”. The walking purchase ends outside of Jim Thorpe and the current landowners allowed the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania to hold closing ceremonies on their farm. The film has already premiered in other festivals, but this event brings the documentary to a much more sentimental stage. “We did good things for the land, and for our people” says Gentlemoon.

The JTIFF is one of the most unique film festivals in the world. While the programmers invite international talent and films from around the globe, they take great pride in selecting local work like “Keepers of the Way.” The festival features entire film blocks of work exclusively by Pennsylvania filmmakers. “Keepers of the Way” not only aligns with the values of the JTIFF team which includes uplifting local voices, but it furthers our mission by honoring the roots of Jim Thorpe and its indigenous population.

“We deeply value and wish to promote what our area has to offer through art,” says festival co-founder Jocelyn O'Neil. “Screening Evan Cohen's film will allow us to pay homage to the land, the indigenous people, and the authenticity of the home of our festival”. We invite all card-carrying members of the Lenape Nation to attend the screening free of charge.

The film program also includes a screening of **“Language Keepers”** produced by Ajuwak Kapashesit. In his short documentary, the actor/director invites viewers along for an exploration of his tribe's native tongue. Using technology, Kapashesit and other language activists set out to revitalize and preserve the indigenous language of the Ojibwe people. Set in the Great Lakes, “Language Keepers” is another

story depicting the fight to preserve the culture and dignity of Indigenous American Tribes in our region.

[2023 PRESS KIT Jim Thorpe Independent Film Festival](#)

- **Thursday, April 20 - Opening Night Red Carpet. Doors Open @ 7:00pm Mauch Chunk Opera House**
- **Friday April 21 screenings begin at 11:00AM / FILMMAKERS' GALA at the Mauch Chunk Ballroom**
- **Saturday April 22- 11:00am student film blocks begin, culminating in our notorious midnight (NSFW) GRINDHOUSE program**
- **Sunday April 23 - Local Heroes Film Block 11:00AM - Keepers of the Way Screening TIME, Press Opportunity time**
- **Awards Ceremony – 8:30pm @ Mauch Chunk Opera House. / Festival Wrap Party @ 9:30pm (Location TBD)**