

Tribal leaders dedicate mound at museum site

BY ROCHELLE HINES

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OKLAHOMA CITY — Tribal officials dedicated an ancient symbol of American Indian culture Tuesday as a key feature of a new center that will tell the story of all the federally recognized tribes in Oklahoma.

Members of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation sang and prayed in their native tongue in honor of the Central Promontory Mound — 1.7 billion pounds of red earth piled 90 feet high at its peak encircling part of the burgeoning American Indian Cultural Center and Museum.

The towering hill also represents the completion of the first major phase of construction of the 125,000-square-foot museum, which will include the experiences of people from 39 tribes.

“You may ask why did we build this big earthwork? For thousands of years, it may have taken a community hundreds of years to build something like this,” said Gena Timberman, executive director of the Native American Cultural and Educational Authority, the state agency



Creek Indian Felix Gouge sings Tuesday at the dedication for the Promontory Mound at the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum. Creek member George Tiger is at the right. Associated Press

that is building the museum.

It took two years and 42,000 truckloads of dirt to build the modern mound, which was inspired by earthen structures built in eastern North America and in Oklahoma, the most notable being

the Spiro Mound in Le Flore County, Timberman said.

“From all across this continent, cultures indigenous to this land have experienced a continuous uprooting and dislocating of our people. We refer to these as times

of moving fires,” she said. “Well, if you look around and you see the construction and what’s happening around the state, you see that the fires still burn. The progressive act of building something this challenging in today’s

world ... is proof that our cultures do endure.”

Creek Nation member George Tiger of Bristow said he was thankful that this day had come.

“We thank you for people, people of all races,” he said first in the Creek language, then in English. “We thank you for those of us who are native for we know that through you, we are all related.”

The museum, on a 300-acre site at the intersection of Interstates 35 and 40, has been years in the making. The Legislature approved a measure to create the authority in 1994, but work to clean up the site, an old oil field, took several years. Now, concrete slabs and walls stretch across the east side of the site, and a visitors center is nearing completion.

The state has provided much of the funding, including a \$25 million bond issue that Timberman said helped keep construction moving.

Chickasaw Gov. Bill Anoatubby, an avid supporter, and Seminole Nation Chief Enoch Kelly Haney, a former state senator who wrote the bill creating the authority, also attended the ceremony.