

### Sipùwas Siputët: Project Summary

The Gordon Natural Area (GNA), an approximate 126-acre nature preserve on WCUs South Campus, is within *Lënapehòkink*, the ancestral homelands of the Lenape. Due to several forced removals intensifying with the 1737 Walking Purchase, the Lenape diaspora now includes Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Ontario. While Lenape retain strong ties to and an ongoing presence within *Lënapehòkink*, they also continue to struggle with erasure and invisibility due to those historic removals. This project situates WCU within this thousand’s year-old cultural landscape; and provides a campus community resource for discovering connections between land, language, and indigeneity, and authentic learning about specific communities connected to the area. The goals of this project were to present the campus and local community with a long-term resource for broadly engaging with indigeneity and developing contextual linkages between the GNA (as part of WCU) and *Lënapehòkink* in a way that enhances the campus climate.

The project involved extensive collaboration with the Delaware Tribe of Indians Cultural Education Director, Tribal Preservation Officer, and the GNA Stewardship Manager to develop narrative signage that includes a map of the GNA situated within *Lënapehòkink*, utilizes Lenape words connected to MP3 QR codes, and describes some of the deep cultural connections to the landscape and its natural elements. The project had two main parts: the production and installation of the narrative signage; and cultural programming in conjunction with their campus unveiling. The signage features *Sipùwas Siputët* (Plum Run); *Tekëne* (Woodland); and *Mëkëke* (Meadow) as points of orientation on the landscape. The project prominently features language as a powerful marker of identity and culture, using many words in the Unami Lenape dialect, and providing MP3 QR codes for hearing the words spoken in Unami by a native speaker. These signs are in highly visible, accessible locations along Stadium Drive, running through the GNA.

The main sign, *Sipùwas Siputët* (Plum Run), is located at the campus entrance to the GNA. It introduces *Lënapehòkink* and the Lenape diaspora and emphasizes the continued strong ties to and ongoing presence within the ancestral homelands. (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Sipùwas Siputët* sign text.

Heather A. Wholey, *Sipùwas Siputët*

Two thematic signs feature connections to the land by highlighting a variety of culturally significant plants and other natural landscape features within two habitats: *Tekëne* (Woodland) (Figure 2) and *Mëkëke* (Meadow) (Figure 3).

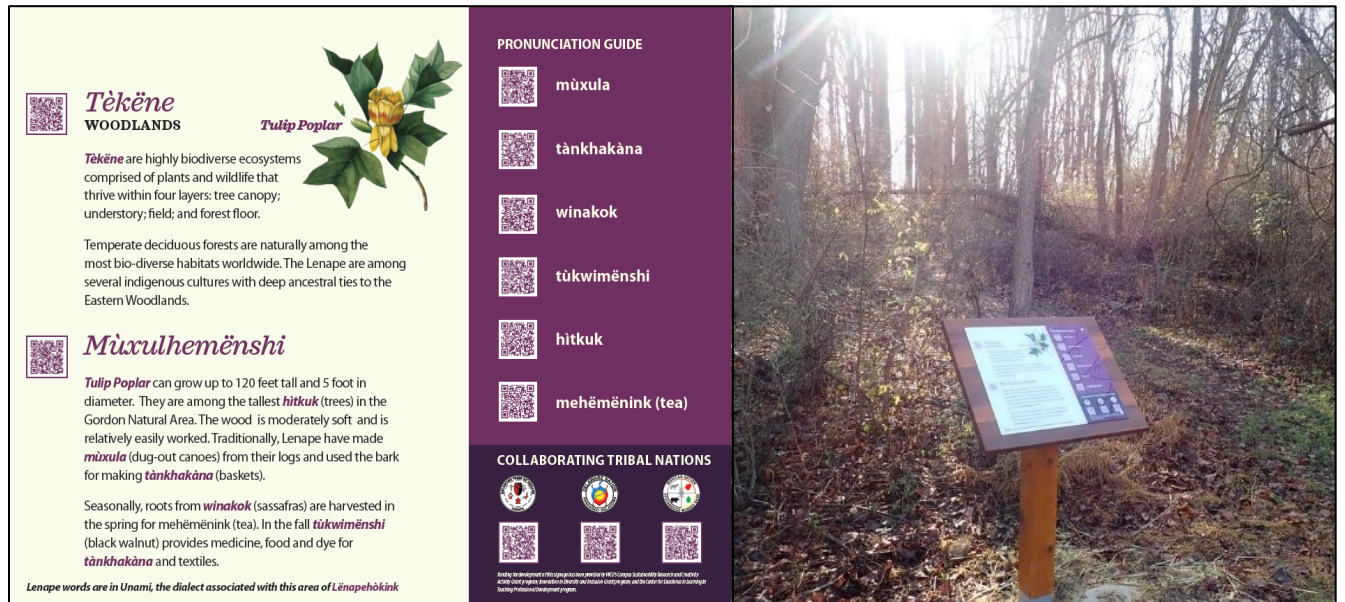


Figure 2. *Tekëne* sign text (left) and situated in the GNA (right).



Figure 3. *Mëkëke* sign text (left) and situated in the GNA (right).

All text was reviewed for appropriateness, context, and spelling in collaboration with the DTI cultural and language specialists, as well as cultural and preservation specialists from the DTI sister tribes (e.g. Delaware Nation, and Stockbridge-Munsee), and the GNA Stewardship Manager. Graphic design and layout were developed by the WCU Office of Graphics and Printing. The signs were printed on clear acrylic overlaminates and mounted on solid angled bases.

Heather A. Wholey, *Sipùwas Siputët*

constructed of urethane coated Western Red Cedar by Fast Signs in Exton. Sign placement was determined in consultation with GNA Stewardship Management, and installation will be done by GNA personnel and student interns.

The signage encourages self-awareness, fosters an inclusive perspective about the larger historic and cultural landscape, and contributes knowledge for interacting with cultural diversity through the Lenape language resources. The project provides students, faculty, staff, and the local community opportunity to foster a stewardship mindset that links to the diverse role that the natural world plays in our lives. The GNA Forest Fest, celebrating the GNA @ 50 (Figure 4), provided a welcoming environment for Lenape representatives, including the DTI Chief, Cultural Education Director, Tribal Preservation Officer, and tribal elders to meet and get to know the West Chester and WCU communities. A memorable element of this event was the DTI led *Malàxkwsitkan* (Bean Dance) in which everyone present was invited to participate (Figure 5). Highlights also included a private meeting between DTI Chief Kills Crow and WCU President Fiorentino, as well as a public gift exchange at the Forest Fest (Figure 6). The DTI and sister nations are pleased with the outcome of this project (Figure 7) and will continue to develop relationships with WCU through future initiatives.



Figure 4. Forest Fest invitation.



Figure 5. DTI led *Malàxkwsitkan*.



Figure 6. Gift Exchange at Forest Fest.

Figure 7. Chief Kills Crow, Mr. Johnson at Forest Fest.

Future work on this project will entail 1) uploading the signage files to Digital Commons @ WCU; and 2) analyzing signage for visitation and engagement. By making the sign files available digitally through Digital Commons, those unable to visit the GNA, including Lenape descendants residing in the diaspora, will be able to engage with the narrative and inclusive connections to land, culture, and people. Future analysis will involve reviewing video camera data collected at the GNA signs to estimate visitation numbers and get a sense of weather and to what extent visitors are engaging with QR codes. Ultimately this may inform the development of additional educational resources and learning outcomes, both for WCU and Lenape.