

# Missoula County Media Release

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## **Missoula County Public Meeting Room to be Dedicated in Honor of Séliš (Salish) Cultural Leader Sophie Moiese**

Missoula County will honor one of the most highly respected Salish cultural leaders of the 19th and 20th centuries during a room dedication ceremony on Monday, Nov. 19.

Čłxʷm̓xʷm̓šhá, Sophie Moiese, (1864-1960) was considered an expert in virtually every aspect of traditional tribal life, from song, dance and material culture to the Salish spiritual and material relationship with plants. Missoula County Commissioners will name their public hearing room the Sophie Moiese Room in her honor during the dedication ceremony, which starts at noon in Courthouse Annex Room 151.

The ceremony will feature a blessing by Tony Incashola, director of the Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee, an honor song performed by tribal drum group Yamncut and a proclamation from the county commissioners.

“The Se’liš-Qłispe Culture Committee expresses its appreciation to Missoula County for naming this hearing room in honor of one of the most respected and beloved cultural leaders of the Séliš people,” Incashola said. “At a time when our state and our country are too often divided, this helps bring us together in mutual respect. We are grateful for Missoula County’s recognition of the original inhabitants of this land, and of the need for all of us to come together in working for a better world for the generations to come.”

According to a biography provided by the committee, Moiese taught countless young Salish people about the gathering, preparation, storage and use of the tribe’s traditional food and medicines. For many years, she led the springtime bitterroot ceremony, when the Salish welcomed the return of the bitterroot flower, the first major food of the year in the old way of life. The Missoula Valley was perhaps the single most abundant bitterroot grounds throughout the tribe’s vast aboriginal territories.

Moiese also passed on to the younger generations her extensive knowledge of tribal history. She often carried a buckskin string with knots in it, known as a memory string (łsispi? nłqʷlqʷelstn), which was the traditional way of ensuring the accurate transmission of oral history. She often recounted the painful story of the forced removal of the Salish from the Bitterroot Valley in 1891, when she was 27. She especially recalled the elder women weeping as soldiers pushed the people north to the Flathead Reservation.

“Missoula County is Indian Country,” said Commissioner Dave Strohmaier. “In recognition of the fact that the seat of Missoula County government sits in the heart of Salish aboriginal territory, I’m delighted

that we're renaming the commissioners' public hearing room in the courthouse after a respected tribal elder — Sophie Moiese. Renaming this room will serve as a lasting reminder of our friendship with the tribes and the land we share in common.”

For more information, call Allison Franz, communications coordinator, at 406-258-3161 or email [af Franz@missoulacounty.us](mailto:af Franz@missoulacounty.us).

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