

May 17, 2019

During the last meeting in April we had a lengthy discussion on the origins of the Venice High School's mascot, which is an Indian, and the controversy surrounding that name. I was then asked to research this topic by members of the board. The following is my findings on the topic.

Venice High School was established in 1950 and during that time the original mascot of the school was called the Warrior. The Warrior was chosen in reference to a local Native American tribe called the Calusa. The Calusa, also known as the 'Shell Indians', was a fierce, and war-like society who lived along the beaches of southwest Florida. Early Europeans recorded that encounters with the Calusa were not very friendly and often turned hostile. The population of the Calusa varies from each source, with estimates of their total population ranging anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 people. They gathered most of their food by fishing in the ocean and rivers of the local area. They were also found to be shell collectors and used shells in most of their daily tasks as they made jewelry, utilities and weapons out of these shells. The Calusa population went extinct in the late 1700s due to warring with other tribes and diseases they got from European colonizers. Today, Native Americans represent less than a tenth of the city of Venice's overall population.

The high school chose the name Warrior in respect for the Calusa tribe. So why was it changed to the Indians? Through discussions with some of the school administrators it was concluded that the term 'Indian' was always used to symbolize the school's sports teams while the Warrior represented the entire school. Old yearbook evidence supports this as the Warrior name was on the cover of the yearbooks while the individual sports pages contained the name Indians. This tradition continued until at least the year 2002 (after that no more textbook evidence could be found). Venice High is a school that is very devoted and prides itself on their sports programs. Through the ever-increasing popularity of the sports teams at the school the name Indian increased in popularity as well. Sometime in the early 2000s the school officially decided to change their mascot from the Warrior to the Indian.

In 2014 a request was made to the Sarasota School Board by Sal Serbin, a Sarasota resident with Sioux heritage, asking Venice High to change their mascot from the Indian saying, "The schools get no extra benefit from having these mascots except to insult, mock and disgrace Native Americans". The request resulted in no lasting change as most Venice residents and former students were highly expressive in their opposition to the request. Overall the original name for Venice High School mascot was the warrior, meant to reference the local Native American tribe called the Calusa but as the sports teams at the school grew in popularity the Indian name, used to symbolize these teams, also grew in popularity. After time the Indian became more popular than the Warrior and in the early 2000s, Venice High officially changed their mascot to the Indian.