

# Link



**Research with Impact**  
**How humans grow—from birth to old age** *page 10*

# message

*from the Dean*



Dear alumni and friends of Human Ecology,

The vision, leadership, and life-long learning that distinguish Human Ecology graduates are evident throughout this issue of LINK magazine. Updates from these graduates, whether they left Ithaca five or 35 years ago, include echoes of a common student experience we strive to create at the college today.

The four alumni featured in this issue of LINK work in extremely different fields, but each found success after discovering a way to connect their experience as a student with their passion to think big. With encouragement of a professor, a lot of resilience, and the courage to shape a vision, each story is an inspiring reminder of what the Human Ecology experience is all about. They are great examples of leadership and creativity.

The special feature titled "Research with Impact" highlights the Department of Human Development. New faculty members, increased cross-college collaborations, and strong outreach programs within the department are shaping our understanding of topics as varied as decision-making, child development, and aging. Student involvement in research also distinguishes the academic experience in the department. Students run experiments, master tools to analyze results, and gain valuable learning experiences as they prepare for careers or advance to graduate and doctoral programs.

Please enjoy this issue of the alumni magazine. The advances we make are a reflection of the generous support and partnership of our alumni.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean

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*Cornell College of Human Ecology:*

*Shaping the human experience through  
research, education, and outreach.*

The Magazine for Human Ecology **ALUMNI** Spring 2012

**link**



Hayley Paige Gutman '07 pg. 18

# contents

Alumni Briefs **2**  
 MVR Briefs **4**  
 Departments **5**

- PAM: Professor's studies shed new light on modern marriage
- HD: Student volunteers buddy-up to kids at Cornell daycare
- DNS: Symposium seeks ways to align food systems and health
- FSAD: Students devise products to ease seniors' pain
- DEA: Design students deliver new digs for local Head Start

**Special Feature: Research with Impact** **10**

In the labs of top scientists, students run experiments to understand how people—young and old—grow

Alumni Profiles **16**

- Gabrielle Tayac '89
- Hayley Paige Gutman '07
- Allison Fishman '94
- Bruce Stuart '86

Sloan Update **24**

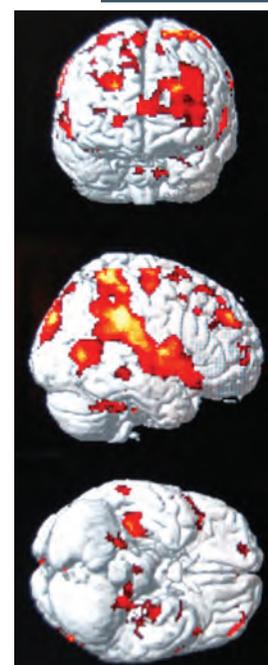
- Students get inside look at health policy on D.C. trip
- Scholarship campaign gains momentum
- Students shine in major case competitions
- Newest faculty member earns two research awards
- Anderson, Niro join as executives-in-residence
- Allen featured speaker for 2012 Wagner Weekend
- In Brief

HE and SLOAN Class Notes **28**

In Memoriam **28**

**LINKages** **back cover**

**On the cover:** A long-running research focus of the Department of Human Development is the social, emotional, psychological, and cognitive development of infants, toddlers, and adolescents. Picture: a three-year-old boy in the Early Childhood Cognition Laboratory. Photo: Lindsay France/University Photography



Human Development feature pg. 10



Human Ecology Building dedication, inside back cover



Photo: Guarina Lopez-Davis



Gabrielle Tayac greets Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley at the ceremony to officially recognize the legal status of the Piscataways. Photo: Jay Baker/Maryland Governor's Press Office.

# A voice for the PISCATAWAYS

BY TED BOSCIA

**Gabrielle Tayac '89** stands in the Maryland State House in disbelief. She is surrounded by a euphoric crowd of about 500 people, many of whom had been there for hours, all of them anticipating a moment centuries in the making. Tayac had often doubted the day would ever come.

While everyone waits for the governor, Tayac gazes about the rotunda. The oldest state capitol building in the nation, it dates to 1779 and serves as a reminder of how European settlers once uprooted her ancestors.

It is Jan. 9, 2012, and the Maryland state government is at last ready to legally recognize two of its indigenous Native American groups—the Piscataway Indian Nation and the Piscataway Conoy Tribe—the first two native tribes to gain recognition in Maryland. It promises to be a major step toward remedying an ancient wrong.

Tayac and her two children squeeze into what seems like a joyous mosh pit. Nearby, singers in a Piscataway Conoy drum group make music. Word

comes that Gov. Martin O'Malley and the tribal leaders are about to enter. The press inches closer. The crowd hushes. Tayac clutches a framed painted eagle feather, a gift from the Piscataway Indian Nation to the governor. She has been fighting for this moment since her junior year at the College of Human Ecology.

## An activist scholar

Tayac is used to waiting for government, society, and other institutions to catch up with what is right. It took until 1989 for the U.S. Congress to pass legislation authorizing the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), part of the Smithsonian Institution. She's been on staff at the NMAI since 1999, five years before the museum opened on the National Mall in the shadows of the U.S. Capitol.

"Finally we had a place where indigenous people could speak for ourselves, not have someone else trying to tell our history," she says. "And to be

“I was drawn to the world-class intellectual rigor of Cornell, it was also important to take in all the amazing experiences and perspectives of the different world populations at Cornell.”

situated in such a highly visible place, at the seat of the highest powers of our country, is really remarkable.”

In the early stages, Tayac helped the museum get off the ground by planning exhibits, strengthening ties with American Indian organizations, and researching the traditions and culture of indigenous groups. Now she's on permanent appointment as a historian and considers herself an “activist scholar”—part champion for indigenous rights, part educator for the general public about Native American life, and part protector of traditions that might otherwise fade away.

She's overseen numerous popular exhibits, including “Our Lives”—an examination of contemporary American Indian experiences—and “IndiVisible,” the largely unknown story of African-Native American lives in the Americas. Tayac frequently lectures to academic and community audiences and even wrote a children's book, *Meet Naiche: A Native Boy from the Chesapeake Bay Area*, to illustrate the modern culture of the Piscataway people.

“It's important to engage all of these audiences, and there's something really thrilling to get to see people observing your work in a public space,” Tayac says. “Of course I want to connect with other scholars and the general public, but I've found it's always worthwhile to talk to a group of fifth graders, too.”

### An advocate for justice

Social justice runs in Tayac's family. Her mother descended from Russian Jews, who passed on lessons on the dangers of discrimination and hatred. Her paternal grandfather, Turkey Tayac, was the longtime chief of the Piscataway Indian Nation during the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the tribe's last medicine men, he kept alive the Piscataway culture and language while laying the groundwork for the tribe's recognition.

“Social justice was never about rebellion for me,” says Tayac. “It was just part of being a good girl, fighting for what's right, and doing what's expected of you. If you see something wrong, you have no choice but to address it.”

Tayac came of age in the late '70s and early '80s in New York's Greenwich Village—“a place and time where it was the norm to be socially active,” she says. She changed her last name to Tayac at age 15 during a period when people of all backgrounds were reclaiming their ethnic identities. The Red Power movement was reverberating around the country, rekindling Native American interests in tribal practices and waking up others to indigenous rights.

When Tayac arrived at Cornell in 1985 as a human service studies major—the precursor to policy analysis and management—she was primed for a life and career dedicated to preserving Piscataway Indian traditions and securing the rights of indigenous people. As a result, she immediately got involved with the university's American Indian Program (AIP). Tayac branched out to courses in anthropology and history and lived at the International Living Center, immersing herself in cultures from around the world.

“I was drawn to the world-class intellectual rigor of Cornell,” she says. “It was also important to take in all the amazing experiences and perspectives of the different world populations at Cornell.”

In December 1987, a friend asked if she wanted to join a Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador delegation to the war-torn country. Tayac convinced her Spanish professor to let her take her final

exam early, and soon after she was hearing stories from survivors about war atrocities.

As a civil war raged, Tayac and the delegation spent 10 days meeting with indigenous El Salvadorans. Almost all of them shared horrifying tales of relatives gone missing or enduring severe punishments in secret prisons because they were natives.

Despite stories of abuse, Tayac found reason for hope. In home after home she discovered an underground resurgence of native practices and culture, primarily the traditions of the Nahuatl people, in the face of laws suppressing them.

“It was a very dangerous time for them to identify as Indian,” Tayac says. “I was awestruck by their incredible spirit, their power to carry on in this dark, terrifying time.”

### A catalyst for change

As a junior at Cornell, Tayac began a research project that would become her passion for the next two decades. Under professor **Donald Barr**, she began to trace the lineage of the Piscataway Indian Tribe—what she calls “a small oral history”—that was eventually published in *Northeast Indian Quarterly*.

After Cornell, Tayac enrolled at Harvard University where she earned her master's and doctorate degrees in sociology. Advancing the research she accomplished at Cornell, Tayac assembled historical records from churches and censuses and then compared them to secondary sources and interviews with tribal leaders. Her research led to a 308-page dissertation documenting the Piscataway history back to the 1500s.

At last, it seemed she and other Piscataway proponents had an airtight case to prove the tribe's long, uninterrupted presence in Maryland. In 1995, Tayac and supporters submitted thousands of pages of evidence to support its petition to a state panel demanding proof of the existence of Piscataway communities in Maryland back to 1790. Two years later, the state acknowledged that the Piscataway Indian Nation and the Piscataway Conoy Tribe had met the criteria for official recognition; however, final approval stalled for more than a decade, a casualty of political squabbles and competing interests.

### A witness to history

As Tayac and the boisterous crowd jam into the Maryland Capitol on this cold January morning, the excitement builds for the big moment. Most had given up hope they'd ever witness such an event in their lifetimes. Tayac's father had died in 2004 after giving decades to the cause.

As the governor moves to the podium, Tayac settles in just behind him—a front row seat to history. The crowd is buzzing and erupts at one line in particular: “To all the Piscataway peoples, we know that you did not need an executive order to tell you who you are.”

Tayac experiences a blur of emotions at the conclusion of the speech: stunned the day has come, angry that it took so long, and proud and overjoyed to see her son wearing her late father's ceremonial clothing.

The crowd departs for a celebration at the governor's mansion and fresh snow blankets the Annapolis streets. It's one of the few cold days in a historically mild winter, but a fitting coda to the event, Tayac thinks. In the Piscataway tradition, snow symbolizes purity, renewal, and new beginnings.

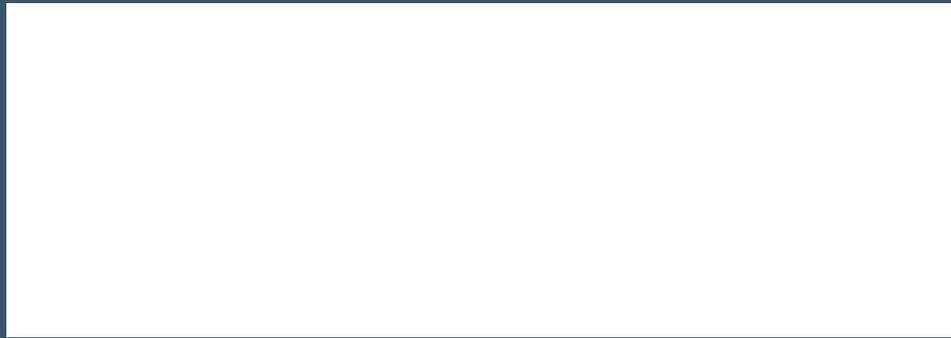
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## LINKages

2012 marks the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Act of 1862—Congressional legislation that made possible America’s land-grant colleges, including the founding of Cornell University in 1865. From the start, public engagement—embodied by Ezra Cornell’s famed vision of Cornell as a place suitable for “any person ... any study”—became a priority.

Martha Van Rensselaer, the first co-director of the College of Home Economics, put that vision into action in 1901 with the launch of the Cornell Reading Course for Farmers’ Wives. Its first bulletin, *Saving Steps*, focused on more efficient homemaking. The courses—focused on what Van Rensselaer called “domestic science”—grew to include as many as 75,000 New York women. The success of the bulletins led, in part, to the college’s founding in 1925 as the first state-chartered institution of its type. For decades after, print bulletins continued to be a valuable medium to extend the knowledge generated at Cornell into homes and communities across the state.

