

Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation Celebrates Santa Barbara's Limuw Street As A Collective Win For Chumash People

The renaming of Calle Cesar Chavez brings an ancestral Chumash place name back to Santa Barbara's coastline

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“

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Mati Waiya

Chumash Foundation celebrates the Santa Barbara City Council's decision to rename Calle Cesar Chavez as Limuw Street. Limuw, which means “in the sea”, is the original Chumash name for Santa Cruz Island. Spanish explorers renamed the island in the 1700s. Approved by a 6–1 vote on September 30, the change puts an ancestral Chumash name on a half-mile of the city's waterfront.

Limuw Street runs from East Gutierrez Street to East Cabrillo Boulevard, where it meets the ocean. On a clear day, the island of Limuw can be seen across the channel.

For Chumash people, the view is a reminder of where they come from.

“Limuw is not just an island on the horizon. It is the place of origin of the Chumash peoples where life began,” said Mati Waiya, founder and executive director of the Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation. “For far too long, the names our ancestors gave to these lands and waters have been erased. Now, every time someone writes, reads, or says Limuw Street, they will be using a Chumash word, one that carries the ancient history of the first peoples of the Santa Barbara region. That is how our culture stays alive.”

In Chumash tradition, the earth goddess Hutash created the first people on Limuw. When the island grew crowded, she made a bridge from a rainbow so the people could cross the channel and settle the mainland, including the coast where Santa Barbara exists today. That rainbow bridge, called Wishtoyo in the Šmuwič language, is the Foundation's namesake and guides its work connecting Chumash lifeways with the protection of the region's land, water, and culture.

Restoring Indigenous place names is part of a broader movement to make Native history visible. The Chumash were never a footnote to Santa Barbara's past. Our villages have thrived along this

coastline for thousands of years, and our descendants are still here. Naming a street after Limuw reminds residents and visitors alike that Chumash history, culture, and people are alive and remain an important priority of this region.

Wishtoyo encourages the City of Santa Barbara to bring more Chumash voices and consultation with tribal leadership into future decisions about the naming, interpretation, stewardship, and protection of public spaces. The Foundation continues to stand with the broader Chumash community to ensure that the names, stories, and places of our ancestors are honored and protected for generations to come.

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