On Oct. 10, 2016, Metropolitan State University continued its new tradition of celebrating Indigenous People’s Day. Last year, the University observed this holiday with a special event at the David Barton Community Labyrinth and Reflective Garden, near the campus library. This year, the University brought the commemorations to the Great Hall with two events—a tipi demonstration with Charles Stately and a speech from Hinhan Loud Hawk.

For years, people have proposed recognizing this holiday instead of the traditional Columbus Day. Now, recognition of the new holiday is spreading to other cities and institutions across the nation. This year, Governor Dayton proclaimed the second Monday of October Indigenous People’s Day. This remarkable proclamation acknowledges the contributions and importance of Native Americans to our state’s history.

The day’s activities were planned by VOICES and their advisors, Renee Beaulieu-Banks and David Isham. VOICES is a student organization that helps American Indian students with their educational goals. They educate non-Indian students with challenges experienced by American Indians. They also expose students to events that can help them learn about American Indian culture and traditions.

Students and staff members on campus Oct. 10 got to see two tipis set up on the Great Hall lawn. They also had a chance to join a special dinner and guest speaker Hinhan Loud Hawk. Hinhan is a member of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. During the presentation, he discussed his experiences living on a reservation. It was a great opportunity to learn about Native American culture.

According to Hinhan, many Native Americans devote their lives to helping their community. They use their knowledge to help children learn about their heritage and values. They also teach children their language. During the presentation, he discussed how he teaches others traditional ways. These traditions include building sweat lodges, using natural healing methods, playing games, singing songs, telling stories, respecting elders and practicing ceremonies. He also spoke about how they strive to protect the earth and their respect for animals.