



**The Grand Traverse Band of
Ottawa and Chippewa Indians**

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August 12, 2026

To the GTB Tribal Community,

It is with a deeply heavy heart and profound sadness that we write to share devastating news with our Tribal Nation. The remains of our missing relative, Samson Raphael, have been found; he has walked on, and is now home with his ancestors. While we are grateful to bring our tribal member home, we are heartbroken by this tragic conclusion, and our community mourns this profound loss. As a lifelong resident of our reservation, he was deeply woven into the fabric of our community. He and his immediate family truly defined what it means to be a Tribal Nation—one rooted in mutual care, responsibility, and love for one another.

Our collective condolences, prayers, and heartfelt sympathies go out to Samson's family during this time of unimaginable grief. No words can ease the pain of losing a loved one under such difficult circumstances, but please know that you do not walk this path alone. Your entire tribal family surrounds you with love, prayers, and unwavering support.

In our traditions, we find strength through our culture and community connection. We gently urge all tribal members to keep our departed relative and his family in your daily prayers. We also ask that you offer tobacco (semaa) in a sacred way to honor and lift the family in spirit. Let us come together in unity, leaning on one another for comfort, strength, and healing in the days ahead.

In deepest sympathy and solidarity,

Sandra L. Witherspoon
GTB Chairwoman
Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians