

2023 Michael John Kennedy Scholarship

Award Winning Essay

The third Michael John Kennedy Scholarship award winner, Casimir Szupica, is a Senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where is pursuing a Geosciences degree. Casimir also serves in the U.S. Army.

Potawatomi warriors have long influenced and molded the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. During the pre-colonial era, the Potawatomi warriors served in an important role that carried great honor and responsibility. After training for years under relatives and other warriors, they would assume crucial functions such as defending the village from attack, policing the community, and mustering war parties. They would develop their skills with the bow, knife, and club, or bgemagen, over their lifetimes. The warriors would also consult elders of the warrior society and the spiritual leaders of the tribe for support in decision making. When they were victorious in battle, they could be given the title of Wédasé, meaning strong hearted, or brave.

Throughout the colonial era and beyond, Potawatomi warriors shaped the CPN and its relations with other Tribal Nations, European colonizers, and Americans. From the 1620s to the 1820s Potawatomi warriors fighting in the Beaver Wars, Fox Wars, French and Indian War, American Revolutionary War, Northwest Indian War, Osage War, and the War of 1812 showed their prowess and bravery as warriors. Initially siding with the French against the Iroquois in the Beaver Wars, ultimately the Potawatomi understood that the colonization of the West by American settlers was the greatest threat to their way of life and consequently sided with the British in the War of 1812. Potawatomi warriors served in vital positions in all of these wars, demonstrating the qualities of leadership, duty, honor, and dedication.

The Potawatomi dedication to their warrior skills is an example of continuous self-improvement, even to the present day. As I viewed the online Potawatomi Veterans Memorial and began to search for my own family members, I was struck by the number of Potawatomi who followed and continue to follow the tradition of the Wédasé. Their duty to their country and selfless service is a great credit to the CPN and the tradition of the Wédasé. In my own family, my grandfather, Clark Richard McCauley, served in the Army during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, reaching the rank of Colonel. In addition, my uncle, Timothy Quinlin McCauley, served in the Vietnam war as a Specialist. Hearing stories about them and their service, especially as my grandfather died before I was born, encouraged me to join the Army and be a part of the tradition of the Potawatomi Warrior. One day, following in their footsteps, I hope I can be called Wédasé.