



LEGALS

Granddaughter searches for missing grandfather nearly 50 years after disappearance Francis Houle went missing from the Colorado Springs area in 1979

By *Jolan Kruse*
Reprinted from *Buffalo's Fire*

SUMMONS

TURTLE MOUNTAIN TRIBAL COURT - JUVENILE DIVISION
TURTLE MOUNTAIN RESERVATION
BELCOURT, NORTH DAKOTA

In the matter of the minor child(ren):
H.M., DOB: 10/08/2011
W.V., DOB: 05/03/2008
W.V., DOB: 12/29/2013

TM Child Welfare
Petitioner(s))
VS)
SUMMONS
CASE# JV-
CW-25-15018

Nina Vallie, mother
Derrick Malaterre, father

TO: Derrick Malaterre:

YOU ARE HEREBY summoned and required to appear before the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court in the above-entitled matter on the 20th day of May, 2026 at 9:00a.m., to defend against the Request for a Review Hearing in the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court in Belcourt, North Dakota and herewith that has been served upon filed by Turtle Mountain Child Welfare in Belcourt, North Dakota.

Dated this 10th day of April, 2026

/s/Jenna Belgarde
Juvenile Clerk
Turtle Mountain Tribal Court
714 Little Shell Street NE
P.O. Box 900
Belcourt, North Dakota 58316
(701) 477-6121 ext 220

(#31, 32, 33)

Samantha Houle sifts through a small stack of letters, carefully removing a card from an envelope. The paper is baby blue with a flower bouquet design in the upper left corner. The letter is dated Oct. 4, 1979.

“Well hi Claudia! Surprise. Surprise. Your daddy is fixing to write you a few lines to see how you are getting along.”

The letter wishes Claudia Barkie, Houle’s mother, a happy birthday. The letter, written by Houle’s grandfather, Francis Houle, ends with him wishing the kids would stop having birthdays “Because you know that makes me old too. Love you your Daddy.”

The letter is the last known connection to her grandfather. Despite never meeting him, Houle, 37, grew up hearing about him. She knows he was born and raised in Belcourt, North Dakota, and is a citizen of the Turtle



Francis Houle and Claudia Barkie celebrate Claudia's birthday in 1976 or 1977, Spokane Valley, Washington (Courtesy of Samantha Houle)



Samantha Houle (Courtesy of Samantha Houle)

SUMMONS

TURTLE MOUNTAIN TRIBAL COURT - JUVENILE DIVISION
TURTLE MOUNTAIN RESERVATION
BELCOURT, NORTH DAKOTA

In the matter of the minor child(ren):
M.P., DOB: 05/11/2011

TM Child Welfare
Petitioner(s))
VS)
SUMMONS
CASE# JV-
CW-23-15043

Krystal Vivier, mother
Matthew Poitra, father

TO: Matthew Poitra:

YOU ARE HEREBY summoned and required to appear before the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court in the above-entitled matter on the 1st day of May, 2026 at 10:00a.m., to defend against the Request for a Review Hearing in the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court in Belcourt, North Dakota and herewith that has been served upon filed by Turtle Mountain Child Welfare in Belcourt, North Dakota.

Dated this 8th day of April, 2026

/s/Jenna Belgarde
Juvenile Clerk
Turtle Mountain Tribal Court
714 Little Shell Street NE
P.O. Box 900
Belcourt, North Dakota 58316
(701) 477-6121 ext 220

(#31, 32, 33)

SUMMONS

TURTLE MOUNTAIN TRIBAL COURT - JUVENILE DIVISION
TURTLE MOUNTAIN RESERVATION
BELCOURT, NORTH DAKOTA

In the matter of the minor child(ren):
S.L., DOB: 04/10/2018; S.B., DOB: 08/29/2013

TM Child Welfare
Petitioner(s))
VS)
SUMMONS
CASE# JV-
CW-25-15011

Franki Jo Baker, mother
Joseph LaFournaise, father

TO: Joseph LaFournaise:

YOU ARE HEREBY summoned and required to appear before the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court in the above-entitled matter on the 1st day of May, 2026 at 11:00a.m., to defend against the Request for a Review Hearing in the Turtle Mountain Tribal Court in Belcourt, North Dakota and herewith that has been served upon filed by Turtle Mountain Child Welfare in Belcourt, North Dakota.

Dated this 8th day of April, 2026

/s/Jenna Belgarde
Juvenile Clerk
Turtle Mountain Tribal Court
714 Little Shell Street NE
P.O. Box 900
Belcourt, North Dakota 58316
(701) 477-6121 ext 220

(#31, 32, 33)

Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. She knows his name is Francis, but he goes by the nickname Frank. She knows he has three biological children, and he adopted two of his wife’s biological children, who took his last name.

She knows after he divorced her grandmother in 1972, when Barkie was about 13, he moved to Washington state to work as a laborer for a few years before moving to Colorado. His children came with him to Washington, but moved back to Williston, North Dakota, after he left for Colorado.

During his travels, he would write to his children in North Dakota, telling them he loved them.

What she doesn’t know is what happened to him after the letters abruptly stopped in 1979.

“I’ve read them a lot, and I just kind of felt sad for my mom,” Houle said, adding that it sounded like her grandfather had a lot of love for his kids. “The letters have been a big part of why I’ve been pushing over the years to find out as much as I can what happened to him.”

Barkie said she remembers her father as being very present and loving. “He always made me feel safe,” she said.

When the letters stopped, Barkie said her mother told her that her father likely took off and decided to move on with his life.

“I never believed that,” Barkie said. “My dad would never just up and not keep in some contact with one of his kids. I think she was trying to make us feel better, maybe that he was still out there.”

Prior to his disappearance, Barkie heard from her dad at least once a month, usually in the form of a letter or a card. Decades went by and the family never heard from him. His children grew up and eventually had children of their own.

Throughout the years, family members tried tracking him down without any luck.

In 2021, Houle, a Turtle Mountain citizen who describes herself as white-passing, found herself wanting to discover more about her Native American heritage after feeling like she “lived in my whiteness for so long.” She created an ancestry.com account and began mapping out her family tree. She found each of her deceased family members had a proper death certificate, except for her grandfather.

With no death certificate, no missing person report and no trace of her grandfather past 1979, Houle decided to start investigating. In September 2021, she began searching online for information about missing people and stumbled across NamUs, the FBI’s national missing person’s database. An employee at NamUs connected Houle with the Colorado Springs Police Department. Houle said she gave the police what little information she had, but it wasn’t until four months later, in January 2022, that they issued a missing persons report.

The Colorado Springs Police Department did not respond to a request for comment regarding when the report was filed and if the investigation is still open.

“I feel like it shouldn’t have taken that long,” Houle said, adding she had similar issues with filing a missing person’s report in Williston, where Francis Houle moved after having kids. Houle said her grandfather was added as a missing person on North Dakota’s Office of Attorney General website in 2022, but his race was reported as unknown, even

though he was a tribal citizen.

She noticed he later disappeared from the database altogether. In Jan. 2026, he reemerged on the database as a missing Indigenous person.

Williston Police Department lieutenant detective Michael Wilson told Buffalo’s Fire that Francis Houle’s race was improperly classified on the attorney general website, so his missing persons entry was amended.

Wilson said additional questions would have to be directed to the public information officer, who did not answer questions by press time regarding when Francis Houle was originally added, taken down and re-added on the attorney general’s website.

With little new information from police, Houle began searching public records and using the letters to track her grandfather’s last known locations. She learned he was living with his niece before moving away and sending Barkie letters from a duplex in Colorado Springs. She said a child support document showed he was later living in a hotel in the same area.

The Williston Police Department assisted Houle in collecting DNA to compare with John Does in NamUs. Houle’s mother and uncle both gave samples of their DNA to test for potential matches, but a match has not been made.

Missing & Murdered Indigenous Relatives Task Force of Colorado also assists Houle, who said they “have really advocated for me over the years.”

Houle found the task force to be helpful, but she said she hasn’t had any luck getting information from police, adding if they had any findings beyond what she shared with them, she has not been notified. Houle said she contacted her tribe, but they can’t provide information unless she has a death certificate.

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians did not respond to a request for comment about Francis Houle’s case.

In many MMIP cases, it is common for multiple agencies to investigate. While it can be good to have extra eyes on a case, it can also lead to jurisdictional challenges and confusion about who is responsible for what.

Houle said the Colorado Springs Police Department, Williston Police Department and Colorado Bureau of Investigations are all involved in the case, yet Houle feels as if it’s up to her to find answers.

She described the process of searching for her grandfather as a waiting game: “It’s hard to keep up hope when you have to wait years between getting new information.”

“I tried to come to terms,” Barkie said. “I know he is gone, but I

wish he wasn’t. I wish he was in my life to see my kids.”

Barkie said her father, who would now be 92, is likely not alive due to his age and the amount of time without family contact.

Now, Houle is trying to locate remains for her grandfather so she can get a death certificate and bring her grandfather home.

Barkie said seeing her daughter advocate for her grandfather has made her incredibly proud.

“If it wasn’t for her, things would be at a standstill and nothing would be accomplished,” she said. “I can’t say enough of how much I appreciate her and her willingness to try to find results about my dad.”

Houle described the gap in knowledge about her Native American heritage as a “spiritual wound.”

“It’s something that I desperately want to get close to, but I’m not quite sure how to approach it,” she said.

While she is still learning about her Native American culture, Houle said searching for her grandfather has opened doors into discovering more about herself.

Corrections

A previous version of this article incorrectly stated that Francis Houle had two biological children. The text has been updated to reflect that he had three biological children.

ADVERTISEMENT – REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS April 6, 2026 Procurement of Architectural and Engineering Services

Construction of New Physical Education Gymnasium for Belcourt School District #7 Located on the Turtle Mountain School Campus in Belcourt, North Dakota

Belcourt School District #7 is soliciting proposals from qualified architectural firms with architectural, structural, civil, mechanical and electrical engineering capabilities to provide design, planning, drawings, and specifications for construction of a new physical education gymnasium to be located on the Turtle Mountain School campus in Belcourt, North Dakota. This facility is intended to support the physical educational space needs of our students in a modern, functional, and sustainable environment. This new facility is envisioned to be 22,000 square feet.

Scope of Work:

- Develop comprehensive architectural and engineering plans for a state-of-the-art facility that meets physical education standards & requirements for students, community spectators and sports competitors in a setting within budget as specified by the District.
- Provide full architectural and engineering services, including conceptual design, schematic drawings, detailed construction plans, specifications, and cost estimates.
- Ensure the design complies with local, state, and federal regulations, as well as the unique needs of the Belcourt School District community.
- Incorporate sustainability and energy-efficient practices into the design.

Eligibility:

- Firms must have prior experience in designing educational facilities and projects of similar scope and size.
- Architects and engineers must be properly licensed.
- Firms must be licensed by the State of North Dakota at time of proposal submission. Firms submitting proposals are responsible to comply with the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance (TERO) Requirements. Successful firm must also hold a current Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa TERO license prior to contract.

Proposal Requirements:

- A comprehensive fee schedule which shall include a fee scale based on final project cost from design planning to specifications through construction administration to final inspection of the project.


Belcourt School District #7 is an equal opportunity employer and will accept proposals from all qualified firms. The Belcourt School District #7 reserves the right to reject any or all proposals. The District will not be responsible for costs incurred by firms in preparation of proposals. The contract will be with the Belcourt School District #7.

Questions/Clarifications: Any questions regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing by email to Duane Poitra, Business Manager at duane.poitra@k12.nd.us cc: kevin.davis@k12.nd.us with a read receipt request no later than April 27, 2026 at 4:00 pm.

Proposal Submission Deadline: Firms must ensure all required documentation is included and submitted by the indicated deadline. Sealed proposals must be received no later than April 27, 2026 at 4:00 pm. Late submissions will not be considered. Proposals will be opened and reviewed at a meeting of the District’s construction committee, scheduled no later than April 28, 2026 at which meeting firms may present their proposals to committee if they so choose.

Proposal Submission Address: All sealed proposals must be submitted to the following address:

Belcourt School District #7
Attn: Duane Poitra, Business Manager
1207 William Hardesty St
PO Box 440
Belcourt, ND 58316



Starion BANK

Starion Bank is looking for an experienced Ag Banker in Bottineau! Join our team as an Ag Bank, VP!

Are you a disciplined, customer-focused banking professional driven to truly know your customers and meet their needs? Do your strong ethical standards, community involvement, and get'er done attitude inspire trust and long-term relationships? If so, Starion Bank would love to talk with you!

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Starion Bank is a growing community bank known for local leadership, personalized service, and deep community loyalty. We foster a culture where you can grow both professionally and personally — an where employees are our most important organizational asset.

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Location: Oakes, North Dakota
Position level, officer designation, and salary dependent on experience.

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- Initiate new agricultural banking relationships and grow existing ones through proactive sales calls, community engagements, and collaboration with Starion colleagues.
- Manage and administer agricultural loan portfolios using diligent, data-driven practices.
- Ensure compliance with all bank policies, credit standards, and regulatory requirements.
- Maintain a strong understanding of local agricultural businesses, community initiatives, and national economic trends.
- Deliver exceptional customer service by understanding customer needs and offering appropriate financial solutions.

Qualifications:

- 3-5 years of direct Ag Banking experience is required.
- Bachelor's degree in business, finance, economics, agriculture, animal science, or a related field.
- Knowledge of credit, compliance, and regulatory standards preferred.
- High level of self-awareness and sound decision-making ability, with the skill to communicate decisions clearly
- Customer-focused mindset

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