

---

# O'ODHAM IN FILM: REPRESENTATION ON SCREEN AT THE PHOENIX FILM FESTIVAL

---

BY JOSEPH MORALES

The Phoenix Film Festival at Harkins Scottsdale 101 Theatre brought a fantastic lineup to the Valley. Opening weekend, Friday, April 9th, featured the Native American Directed Shorts, which included seven films. One of these stories was *Finding Fire*, directed by David J. Aberle, which features lead actress Susanna Osife, a member of the Gila River Indian Community. Her performance reflects a broader shift happening across the film industry that is beginning to create spaces for Indigenous stories to be told by those who live them.



Photo Courtesy by Susanna Osife  
Susanna Osife, Lead Actress & David J. Aberle, Director



Photo By Joseph Morales

The screening on the first day had added significance with the presence of 40 elders from the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community in attendance. It shows the importance of Native stories—not only being told, but witnessed and supported by those

who carry the traditions behind them. As Indigenous filmmakers and actors continue to push for accurate representation, festivals like the Phoenix Film Festival play a key role in amplifying those voices. “I’m representing O’odham people in spaces where we weren’t necessarily at the-

forefront of... I hope to give the community a familiar face on the big screen, because that kind of visibility matters,” stated Ms. Osife.

Films like *Finding Fire* show that our stories are still here and still alive. Osife’s performance highlights the importance of Native and Indigenous actors occupying lead roles. Her presence among the many directors and actors at the festival challenges long-standing industry norms and signals a shift toward inclusive and accurate storytelling.

For Indigenous creators and viewers, the rise of films like *Finding Fire* is a movement—one that continues to reclaim a narrative space for Native stories to be heard.

---