

Wendell William Yowelunh McLester was born on October 24th, 1930, to Lee Gordon McLester I and Blanche (King) McLester. His childhood home was on Salt Pork Avenue in Oneida, Wisconsin. His family attended Holy Apostles Episcopal Church and were members of the Oneida Singers. By the age of ten, Wendell was regularly singing the Oneida hymns, and his love of singing, the Oneida language, and Oneida culture continued throughout his life. Wendell attended the Oneida Mission School in his early education, then the Green Bay Junior High School, and then graduated from East Green Bay High School in 1948.

Wendell served in the United States Navy and Naval Reserves during the Korean War with an honorable discharge. He then served in the United States Marine Corps from 1951 through 1953 as Private First Class with an honorable discharge.

Wendell graduated in electronics from the Milwaukee Area Technical College, studied education at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, and studied industrial and economic development at the University of Illinois at Champaign and the University of Oklahoma at Norman. Following his studies, he published the "Indian Industrial Developmental Manual" for the United States Department of Commerce in 1975. He has always been a lifelong learner, studying management, human relations, economics, and financial management in various seminars, workshops, and advanced training opportunities.

Throughout his education and after, he also was employed in various capacities, including as owner operator of Wendy's Television and Electronics Company until 1970, when he the Governor of Wisconsin, Warren P. Knowles, invited Wendell to intern with the State. Of Wisconsin Department of Economic Development, sponsored through the Ford Foundation. In 1971, Patrick J. Lucey was elected as Governor of Wisconsin and immediately appointed Wendell to Development Specialist of the Upper Great Lakes Regional Commission serving in Madison, Wisconsin, and Washington, D.C., offices. He provided technical assistance to local units of government and Tribes in developing economic projects covering 36 counties in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota, until Governor Lucey's service ended in 1977.

Wendell religiously attended General Tribal Council meetings as far back as 1971. The original meetings took place at the CC Camp and Chicago Corners in Oneida. From 1972 to 1982, Wendell was elected to the Oneida Business Committee. From 1979 to 1982, he served as the Tribal Treasurer. He worked hard toward the creation of a nursing facility for Oneida elders, the Anna John Nursing Home. Wendell was responsible for all Tribal assets, including all federal program accounts, developing a central accounting system, and improving indirect cost systems during his time on the Business Committee. He spent copious time developing a purchasing and inventory system and other budget systems for the Tribe still in use today. Following his service on the Business Committee, Wendell served on the Tribe's Finance Committee and on the Personnel Commission.

From 1982 to 1997, Wendell owned a specialty retail gift store, the Unique and Native Gift Shoppe. In 1984, he worked as a Business and Development Specialist for the Community Development Finance Authority of Wisconsin. He was the President of Hi-Impact, a business and development consulting firm in 1986. Wendell served as the director of the Senior Citizens Program for Oneida to comply with Title VI and implement registration of elder at home care.

Wendell also participated in many organizations, including being a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Robert Cornelius Post #7784, Disabled American Veterans Chapter #3 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, the Green Bay American Legion Post, the Green Bay Indian Community Development Corp, the Oneida Indian Singers and Cultural Association, the Wisconsin Indian Golf Association, the Crystal Springs Golf Course Board, the National Indian Council on Aging, the Steering Committee for the National Resource Center on Native American Aging, and many Wisconsin State Assembly events.

Throughout his life, he continued his love of singing, including performing for weddings, anniversaries, and other special events in the community, as well performing at the Indian Ceremonial at Wisconsin Dells in the summers and performing in New York City. In 1975, Wendell was given the honor of continuing the tradition of singing the Oneida Te Deum at Holy Apostles Episcopal Church by Oscar Archiquette, just before Oscar's passing. Wendell continued this tradition for the Oneida community until 2019, at the age of 89. In addition to his love for singing, he was also passionate about pow wow dance. He traveled to various reservations to participate in pow wows and exhibit his jewelry at these events. He, as well as Fred, Mary Edna, and George Greendeer organized the first Oneida Pow Wow in 1959, behind the Holy Apostles Episcopal Church with advertising in the Green Bay Press Gazette. In addition to his beadwork, silverwork, and precious stone jewelry he exhibited at powwows, Wendell also made traditional Oneida Kastowe headdresses, using silver, black ash, elm, sumac, unsmoked deerskin, sinew, and eagle, turkey, and goose feathers. The University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, still exhibits one of his Kastowe, which has been on loan since 1987.

While professionally accomplished, Wendell has always been family oriented. Wendell married Thelma Marie Kahalunkwa Cornelius on October 3rd, 1956. They welcomed their son, Wayne Steven Dekanohdus McLester to the world on March 28th, 1959, and their daughter, Joan Lynn Holoyhahokeke McLester, to the world on July 15th, 1960 while living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. After their children were born, they moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and then moved onto the Oneida reservation, to ensure their children had access to practicing their Oneida culture in the Oneida community. Wendell has remained in their family home on the Oneida reservation since 1967. Wendell welcomed his only grandchild, Dr. Lauren Wendell Yowelunh McLester-Davis, to the world on September 30th, 1997. He closed his business to spend more time with his grandchild and has helped in raising her in alignment with Oneida values and traditional extended family practices. He has enjoyed golfing, attending Oneida General Tribal Council meetings until the age of 90, traveling throughout the country, especially Door County, Wisconsin, and visiting with family in his free time.