

December 2024 Issue

Choctaw Nation's YAB celebrates 20 years of empowering future leaders

By Christian Chaney

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) recently celebrated a major milestone, celebrating 20 years of empowering young people across the Choctaw Nation.

Originally founded as a health initiative, YAB has grown into a program that instills leadership skills, promotes community involvement and encourages personal growth among students.

Deputy Director Jason Campbell shared the program's beginnings and how it came to be such an impactful program for Choctaw youth.

"Originally, this organization was kind of created as a health initiative for youth," Campbell said.

He shared that Chief Batton saw a need for the youth to be involved in a program that could hone their leadership skills, so YAB was created.

The first YAB meeting took place with just 17 students in Hugo, Oklahoma.

Since then, the program has expanded to 29 chapters with around 400 members.

To honor this anniversary, YAB hosted a quarterly conference with a morning student-led business meeting, followed by remarks from alumni, Chief Batton, Assistant Chief and Speaker Williston.

Jason Campbell estimated 50 alumni and 100 current members to be in attendance. Attendees had the opportunity to mingle, play cornhole and participate in various other games.

The event aimed to encourage current students to get acquainted with some of the alumni.

It was a day focused on highlighting alumni achievements, allowing them to return, share how YAB had impacted them and update everyone on what they had been doing since their time with YAB.

"We've got some real amazing success stories out there, and so we just want our current members to see and understand that, hey, regardless of what challenges you may have in your life, what challenges you may be facing," said Campbell. "Some of these alumni, they came from these same areas, these same communities, where these current students are growing up and that these other folks kind of walked those same steps and found a way to overcome and, you know, and have a bright future."

Through monthly business meetings, community service projects and leadership activities, YAB strives to build strong, self-reliant leaders.

Campbell shared the program's mission to prepare students for life beyond high school, regardless of what that looks like—whether it's college, trade school or entering the workforce.

"We're very honored and proud to be that one extracurricular they chose to be a part of," he said. "We want them to be the most well-prepared that they possibly can be."

YAB goes beyond just leadership skills; it emphasizes teamwork, communication and perseverance.

"So, it goes way beyond just, you know, leadership," Campbell added.

"It's just trying to prepare them to be an active citizen, you know, a productive member of society."

The Youth Advisory Board's legacy over the past two decades is evident through the accomplishments of its alumni and the program's continuing growth.

As YAB looks to the future, the program remains dedicated to supporting the next generation of Choctaw leaders, helping them find their path, develop their potential and give back to their communities.

WHAT IS YAB?



The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) empowers youth to become leaders with a servant attitude toward others.

This program utilizes a leadership curriculum to develop students' potential through creative thinking, presentation, planning and team building to foster success as tomorrow's leaders.

Students are inspired to use their service leadership skills through community service projects to promote positive change within their communities. A transcript of accomplishments will be available to the student for resumes, scholarships and college applications.

Eligibility

The program is available to all students in grades 8 - 12 who live in the Choctaw Nation's service area. Participants must participate in two consecutive meetings. YAB participate in any combination of two projects/events, trainings, or quarterly conferences.

Choctaw Nation Sponsored Events

- Veterans Day
- Memorial Day
- Trail of Tears Walk
- College Connect/Career Expo

Community Service Initiatives

- Promoting Literacy
- Going Green Initiative
- Community Enhancement Projects
- Promoting Faith, Family and Culture
- Mentoring
- Prevention and Awareness Initiatives
- Active Duty/Veteran Appreciation

YAB Sponsored Events

- Speech Contest
- Quarterly Conferences
- Monthly Collaboration
- Professional Development Training

For more information, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/yab>.



Photo by Christian Toews

A group of YAB alumni joined the November 9 celebration.



Photo by Christian Toews

Current YAB students pose for a photo with Tribal Council.



Photo by Christian Toews

YAB celebrated 20 years with fun, fellowship and cake.

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Chief's Veterans Day Speech

Editor's Note: For those who were unable to attend the Veterans Day Ceremony in Tushkahomma on November 11, below is a transcript of Chief Batton's speech from the event.

Halito!

We come here today to pay tribute to the brave men and women who have served our country in the Armed Forces. The tenacity of our fellow citizens to place their life in harm's way and secure this country that we love so much and to ensure that freedom and liberty are here for future generations of Choctaw and Americans.

By Americans, I mean all Americans, who, regardless of political affiliation, take up arms to fight for our rights as human beings to live free, make our own choices and live our own lifestyle.

Our Choctaw ancestors were driven from their homelands and forced onto reservations under harsh conditions and circumstances.

We, as a proud and sovereign nation, endured and created one of the greatest success stories in history. Our tribe could have taken the easy road and focused on our own tribal affairs, but when the land that we call home needed us to protect it – we answered that call time and time again. Our warriors stood tall, rebuffed the advances of armies who meant to strip our freedoms and liberties. We were there during wartimes when our country needed us. Our Choctaw Code Talkers came through and altered the course of history by using our native tongue to get vital combat information across enemy lines without fail.

Our Chahta Tushka fought like the fierce warriors that our great tribe is known for. All gave some, but some gave all and for that, we as the Choctaw Nation and citizens of the United States are forever indebted to your bravery and sacrifice.

Let's look back for a moment, when the United States entered World War One in 1917, Choctaw tribal members had not yet been granted U.S. citizenship. The U.S. government-run boarding schools were attempting to wash our Choctaw culture, history and language from the minds of our tribal members. Even with that occurring on the reservation, Native Americans enlisted to fight for this country. Nearly 1,000 Native Americans joined the 36th Division alone which was made up of Oklahoma and Texas citizens.

Our Chahta Tushka, saw what was happening with the war effort and realized they were needed, once again, to protect our homes and families. Even without the benefit of U.S. citizenship, our ancestors risked their lives, took up arms and fought the evils of the world alongside other U.S. citizens.

Without the bravery of our Chahta family, who knows what would have happened, but isn't it comforting to know that we never had to worry about whether our tribe or any of several tribes who answered the call, would step up to meet this and all military challenges when called upon to do so. I look out over the great men and women in this audience today and see the faces of strength and determination that make our Choctaw Nation a force for good. I see in the eyes of our great Choctaw veterans the sacrifices made, and the good deeds accomplished, and that makes me proud to be Chahta. I am overwhelmed by the pride in our tribe, your country and your families that fueled you to become the citizens, soldiers and good people that you are today.

I salute each Choctaw veteran who was a shield for this great tribe, country and fellow citizens. Your sacrifices will not be forgotten, here on the reservation and in the history of the United States. We are here breathing free air and living out our Choctaw dreams because of you and the great sacrifices our ancestors made. They fought these fights, so our children did not have to.

Today, our country faces challenges at home and abroad. I choose to believe, because of our veterans' efforts, that we as Chahta and American citizens can come together to battle threats, challenges and ensure future generations that our best days are to come. If we cling together during these hard times, have faith in our Lord and the goodness of our fellow citizens, there is no dark force that we can't shed light onto.

On this beautiful Veterans Day, remember where we have come from, where we are and where we are going. Take time to focus on the reasons we fight for freedom, liberty and our way of life. Our very freedom was given to us by the sacrifices of our brave veterans. Yakoke Veterans for your service and sacrifice! We stand on the shoulders of our Choctaw ancestors to be here today to enjoy those freedoms. We lead, as a nation, so the World will know the sweet air of freedom. Yakoke Chito, Chi Pisa La Chike and God Bless!



Chief Batton delivered a moving speech during the 2024 Veterans Day Ceremony in Tushkahomma, honoring those who served. Check out more from the Veterans Day Event on page 3.



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Remember the reason for the season

The most wonderful time of the year is upon us – and not for holiday shopping, gift giving and the like. This is the time of year when we celebrate the birth of Christ, and all the blessings God has bestowed upon us, our families and the Choctaw Nation.

We have a lot to be thankful for this year. First, we are a free people living in a strong sovereign nation and we are progressing as a tribe to bring our tribal members the programs, services and facilities to meet their needs. Everywhere I travel within the reservation, I notice progress within our programs and services and that reflects the wonderful leadership of our Chief, Tribal Council Leadership, Associates and Tribal Members. It never fails to amaze me how, when a job needs to be done, we all roll up our sleeves and get to it. That servant leadership spirit is at the very heart of what makes the Choctaw Nation so special.

Just this past November, we held 26 Thanksgiving meals throughout the reservation. Volunteers showed up to deliver meals and share in the fellowship with our elder tribal members and their families. We held a prayer and showed thanks for the food and all the blessings the past year has given us. As we looked forward to another eventful holiday season, we took the time to acknowledge the here and now and how fortunate we are as a tribe.

The Choctaw Nation has carried our ancestors giving spirit into the new generation with food and clothing donation drives; elder angel programs, Jones Academy Angel program and we also have a robust food voucher program for our tribal members. The food voucher program ensures that tribal members have a good meal for the holidays, and it can be enjoyed with friends and family.

Receiving and giving gifts during the holidays is always great fun, but please remember the reason for the season. The birth of Jesus was a gift to humanity from our heavenly Father; and he loved each one of us the same. So, in honor of his birth, extend that love through donating to the needy if you can and lending a helping hand to someone in need. Love one another as God loves us. Take a moment, if you are angry, to turn the other cheek and try and understand your fellow man. The Bible teaches is that God's Love the Greatest is Love – and the world could use a lot more of that right now.

Yakoke to everyone who takes the time out this year to volunteer; donate and help their neighbors. Check in on family, friends and your neighbors – you never what someone else is going through in their personal lives. A kind word from a friend or a stranger can sometimes help get past a difficult time and show that there is hope for a brighter tomorrow.

The people of the Choctaw Nation have always gone above and beyond to donate, help, cook meals, offer guidance and give our fellow man hope for the future. Our tribal history shows that we, as a tribe, have always been giving people. We thrive as a tribe when our friends and neighbors thrive. Our ancestors would accept no less than to give to those in need, help our fellow man and rejoice in our abundance with our tribal members.



What is a Gift

The Webster's Dictionary states a gift is "something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation." A gift could be given as an expression of honor.

Matthew 2:11 reads, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him; and when they opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Not only were the gifts in honor, but they also personified the person's attributes. Gold was the first gift mentioned. Gold was given to royalty as gifts. This child was Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:16 calls him royalty, "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

The second gift is frankincense. Frankincense is a bitter and glittering resin from the bark of the incense tree. It was used as a fumigation or perfume at sacrifices. Exodus 30:7 reads, "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it."

In the Bible, frankincense symbolizes worship and prayer as well as the holy presence of God and is associated with sacrifice, offering and consecration. This is a type of commune with God. Jesus was born to be our savior and our intercessor.

Let's look at Hebrews 7:25. It reads, "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession."

The third gift is myrrh. Myrrh is a gum resin. It was used as an antiseptic and stimulant. One of the uses in biblical times was for embalming.

John 19:38 and 39 describes the procedure after the death of Jesus on the cross. "And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight."

All these gifts typify the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In John 4: 7-10, we find Jesus himself being offered as a gift to mankind, "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her; Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou would have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

2025 LABOR DAY FESTIVAL TRIBAL MEMBER RV RESERVATION APPLICATION

Please complete and mail application along with a copy of your tribal membership and a required \$25.00 deposit. Application will not be accepted without the deposit.

Name:		
Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Phone Number:		
Email address:		
RV/Trailer description (All information must be complete for reservation consideration)		
Trailer type: <input type="checkbox"/> Bumper Pull <input type="checkbox"/> 5th wheel <input type="checkbox"/> RV	Length (tongue to tail):	# of slide-outs:
Additional information:		

Mail application to:

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma | ATTN: Janita Jeffreys
Labor Day RV Reservations | PO Box 1210 | Durant, OK 74702

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT,
LABORDAY.CHOCTAWNATION.COM

NO PHONE RESERVATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. PLEASE INCLUDE A COPY OF YOUR TRIBAL MEMBERSHIP CARD ONLY. SEND A \$25 DEPOSIT AT THIS TIME (REQUIRED). SITES WILL BE ASSIGNED BY LOTTERY. ALL APPLICANTS WILL BE NOTIFIED BY MAIL OR EMAIL.



Scan for
online application

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CHOCTAW
LABOR DAY

2025

ELDER & COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS MEALS

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND YOUR LOCAL MEAL.

December 6, 2023 - Wednesday

McAlester Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	McAlester Community Center
Talihina Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Talihina Community Center
Wilburton Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Wilburton Community Center
Battiest Elder Lunch	11:30 AM	Battiest Community Center
Smithville Community Lunch	12:00 PM	Smithville Community Center

December 12, 2023 - Tuesday

Wright City Community Dinner	6:00 PM	Wright City Community Center
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December 13, 2023 - Wednesday

Atoka Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Atoka Community Center
Durant Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Durant Community Center
Broken Bow Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Broken Bow Community Center
Hugo Community Lunch	11:30 AM	Hugo Community Center
Coalgate Elder Lunch	12:00 PM	Coalgate Community Center
Poteau Elder Lunch	12:00 PM	Poteau Community Center

December 19, 2023 - Tuesday

Antlers Community Dinner	6:00 PM	Antlers Community Center
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December 20, 2023 - Wednesday

Crowder Elder Lunch	11:30 AM	Crowder Community Center
Spiro Elder Lunch	11:30 AM	Sprio Community Center
Stigler Community Lunch	11:30 AM	Stigler Community Center
Idabel Elder Lunch	12:00 PM	Idabel Community Center

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Choctaw Nation celebrates Veterans Day

By Kellie Matherly

On Nov. 11, the Choctaw Nation held its annual Veterans Day ceremony to honor Chahta men and women who have served and are currently serving in the U.S. military. The ceremony was held on the capitol grounds in Tsvhka Homma.

Veterans from all branches of service and their families gathered for the service, which included messages from Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. and Chief Gary Batton, as well as Tribal Council Speaker Thomas Williston. Choctaw Royalty and the District 2 singers also performed.

A crowd favorite was the Salute to America's Finest, performed by the Talihina High School Marching Band, during which veterans were encouraged to stand during the playing of their branch's anthem.

This year's guest speaker was delivered by retired U.S. Marine Corps Col. Tray Ardesse, a Choctaw tribal member who piloted 257 combat missions during his enlistment.

Ardesse earned the Bronze Star with "V" for Valor in Combat and the Purple Heart. He currently serves as Director of Government of International Affairs for Magpul Industries and spends his free time volunteering for veterans' groups.

Ardesse spoke on the importance of leadership, humility and integrity, saying, "You have to do right when nobody else is looking. If you can't be trusted when nobody else is looking, you can't be trusted."

Following Col. Ardesse's address, Steve Byrd presented Chief Batton with a plaque recognizing the Choctaw Nation as a Purple Heart Tribe. This award honors Native American tribes for their service to the U.S. military.

Executive Officer of Membership Services, Stacy Shepherd presented the Heart of the Warrior Scholarship to Alan Brott, who gave his acceptance speech partially in the Choctaw language. This award recognizes active duty and retired U.S. veterans who are pursuing higher education.

Closing out the official ceremonies was a 21-gun salute, performed by the Choctaw Nation Honor Guard, and the playing of Taps.

"I know sometimes we take our freedom for granted, and we don't need to do that," said Chief Batton. "It's because of people like [veterans] who are here, but also those who are not here, who made the ultimate sacrifice, so we can even gather today. I'm so proud of our veterans for what they stand for, what they represent to us, and that our Choctaw people recognize them."

Veterans in attendance received a jacket from the Choctaw Nation and were entered into drawings for door prizes and a hunting trip to the Choctaw Hunting Lodge. Lunch was served immediately following the ceremony.

Choctaw Nation celebrates its veterans year-round through the Veterans Advocacy program.

For more info, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/veteran-advocacy/>.



Photos by Kellie Matherly and Allyson Howerton



How would Project 2025 affect Native communities?

Analysis: A look at the possible impacts of the conservative road map on Indian Country

Amelia Schafer

Indian Country Today + Rapid City Journal

Besides promising federal recognition to the Lumbee Tribe in North Carolina, Trump's campaign has not established a solid plan for Indian Country. However, Project 2025, a nearly 1,000-page book, does have some rough ideas for Indian Country.

While the president-elect has publicly distanced himself from the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation's highly controversial Project 2025, the project was written by many of his former staffers as a road map for Trump.

A majority of the plan relating to Indian Country focuses heavily on resource extraction, critiquing President Joe Biden's initiatives over the past four years, particularly in terms of his push for electric vehicles, reduced fossil fuels and climate change initiatives.

Aside from land management and mining, the report briefly outlines the desire to reform Indian Health Services, the Bureau of Indian Education and crime in Indian Country.

Chase Iron Eyes, director and lead counsel for the Lakota People's Law Project, said the Heritage Foundation and other Christian fundamentalist organizations have attempted to strip tribes of their sovereignty.

"The source of the attacks and the vitriol and the attempted usurpation of our rights, our human rights, our constitutional rights, our treaty rights, that is the Heritage Foundation," he said recently on Instagram. "Their ultimate goal is to assimilate all Indigenous nations. That is why we're called Indigenous peoples because they want to deny to us our nationhood."

Land

The Department of the Interior plan, written by Trump's former acting head of the Bureau of Land Management, William Perry Pendley, and assisted by former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in Indian Affairs, John Tahsuda (Kiowa), outlines growth potentials for gas, oil and mineral extraction.

A majority of the plan's details related to Indian Country come in the Department of the Interior section.

In this section, the project advises Trump to immediately roll back Biden's orders reinstating his previous energy agenda and that he withdraw bans on oil and gas leasing around the Chaco Cultural Historic National Park in New Mexico.

The plan also recommends Trump reinstate orders to work on the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, which Alaska Natives have long raised concern over and tried to work with Biden to protect in 2024.

The project recommends Trump approve the 2020 Willow EIS pipeline, the largest pending oil and gas projection in the United States within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska. This plan would expand approval from three to five drilling pads.

The 2025 Project critiques Biden's naming of several locations as national monuments and requests that Trump repeal the Antiquities Act of 1906 and retroactively remove already established site protections. This act was initially created to address the theft of Native artifacts on federal land.

The report claims the Biden administration has reversed efforts to put Native nations in charge of environmental regulations on tribal land. This appears to be in reference to the project's suggestion that Biden's focus on clean energy has negatively impacted tribes and limited their ability to mine fossil fuels.

Finally, the project requests that the new administration seek congressional reauthorization of the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations and provide a \$1.9 billion Trust Land Consolidation Fund to purchase fractional interests in trust or restricted land from willing sellers at fair market value. Funds would come from the Great American Outdoors Act.

Health

Project 2025 calls for reforming the Indian Health Services, the primary healthcare provider for Indigenous people. The

project critiques IHS's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indigenous communities, stating that IHS "abandoned tribes as their sources of COVID-19 tests and vaccine supplies disappeared."

Instead, the project suggests that tribal communities rely on alternatives to IHS through better access to private healthcare providers. The project suggests this could be done by exploring previous veteran healthcare reforms.

A report released by Senate Democrats states that changing IHS to focus more on privatized services would "destroy Indian Health Services."

Education

In general, Project 2025 seeks to eliminate Head Start programs, which over 28,000 Native children use.

In terms of Indian Education, the project suggests all federal Indian Education programs be transferred to the Bureau of Indian Education, as well as tribal postsecondary career and technical programs, to reduce "bloat" and streamline services.

Currently, tribes can either contract with the Bureau of Indian Education to provide educational services, or the bureau manages schools on tribal land.

"Schools on tribal lands and under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) are among the worst-performing public schools in the country," page 348 of Project 2025 reads.

Aside from this, the report doesn't offer much of a plan for what an Indian Education reform would look like.

Crime

The report offers little in terms of reprieve for high rates of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. It does, however, claim that the Biden administration's handling of the southern border has led to a tide of illegal drugs, particularly fentanyl, entering Indian Country.

The project notes that a majority of this activity occurs in southern tribal communities. In 2024, conservatives such as South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem made national news when she began to claim cartels had infiltrated reservations in South Dakota.

The project does not make any recommendations for increasing law enforcement in Indian Country.

Amelia Schafer is the Indigenous Affairs reporter for ICT and the Rapid City Journal. She is of Wampanoag and Montauk-Brothertown Indian Nation descent. She is based in Rapid City. Follow her on Twitter @ameliaschafers or reach her by email at amelia@ictnews.org



ALLISON DINNER/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Donald Trump at a rally on June 9, 2024.

CNO programs receive National Recognition

DURANT, OKLA. (November 6, 2024) – Guiding Adolescent Parents and Chahta Inchukka have earned the prestigious Blue Ribbon Affiliates endorsement from the Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. (PATNC). The designation is awarded to top-performing home visiting affiliates within the PATNC network.



"This designation shows that we are the best of the best," says Rebecca Morris, Program Manager for Guiding Adolescent Parents. "Our programs are the very definition of Faith, Family, and Culture and receiving this designation demonstrates that we deliver the highest quality services to our tribal and community members on the reservation."

CNO's home visitation programs equip parents with knowledge and resources to prepare their children for a stronger start in life and greater success in school. Each program utilizes home visits, which include facilitating parent-child interaction activities that assist in the children's development. Visits also focus on family well-being, helping find resources like housing, emergency services, and education assistance. The program also includes community-building events with parents in the program.

The Guiding Adolescent Parents program focuses on tribal members who are parents under 24 years old. Chahta Inchukka provides services to primary caregivers of all ages who are members of a federally recognized tribe. Both programs require the participant to be pregnant or parenting a child under the age of 1 year and reside within the Choctaw Nation reservation service area.

For questions or interest in applying for one of these programs visit the service pages for Guiding Adolescent Parents and Chahta Inchukka or call 800-522-6170.

SEE AND SHARE OUR STORIES AT
TogetherWereMore.com
Choctaw Nation

SCAN CODE TO VIEW STORIES

CHRISTMAS IN THE PARK
HOLIDAY LIGHTS DISPLAY
December 1-31 (opens at dark)
Choctaw Nation Capitol Grounds
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Anthony Dillard receives OSU American Indian Alumni Society Distinguished Alumni Award

By Shelia Kirven

Choctaw Nation Tribal Councilman Anthony Dillard was recently honored with the Distinguished Alumni Award from the Oklahoma State University (OSU) American Indian Alumni Society.

The award ceremony was held October 26, 2024, at the OSU ConocoPhillips Alumni Center in Stillwater, Okla., with a reception following.

The award was presented to Dillard by Olivia Bunch, a board member of the OSU American Indian Alumni Society, who read Dillard's nomination biography to those in attendance.

Anthony Dillard is passionate about improving local communities across the Choctaw Nation Reservation and beyond.

After high school, he earned a Federal Junior Fellowship through the USDA to work at the OSU/USDA Wes Watkins Research and Extension Center in Lane. Dillard says that part of the fellowship was to go to college and take classes that would benefit his position at the research center.

He attended school at Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant and then transferred to Oklahoma State University (OSU) in Stillwater, where he graduated in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Horticulture.

Dillard went back to work at the research center as a research technician. There, his work emphasized several different disciplines of agriculture research, from genetics, plant pathology and molecular genetics. He was employed at the OSU/USDA Wes Watkins Research and Extension Center in Lane, Oklahoma, for a total of 20 years, working there following his senior year of high school, then his college fellowship, and his post-college days, until he was elected as the District 10 Choctaw National Tribal Councilman in 2005.

As the Choctaw Nation's District 10 Tribal Councilman, Dillard has used his agricultural background to support farming and ranching initiatives that promote responsible environmental stewardship and advance the region's economic goals.



Anthony Dillard is presented the OSU Distinguished Alumni Award by Olivia Bunch.

Other initiatives Councilman Dillard strongly advocates for are education, housing, health-care, and economic development. The tribe has seen tremendous growth in these areas during Anthony's time on the council.

He and his wife, Janie, reside in Caney, and he serves on various community organizations and boards.

Upon accepting the award, Dillard said he was honored and humbled and will continue to support the organization in the future. He also said he was proud of OSU's investment in promoting tribal sovereignty and though they are not the only college or university doing so, he believes they are setting a standard.

The OSU American Indian Alumni Society supports the efforts of the current generation of American Indian OSU students who are enrolling in record numbers.

Each year, the society selects an individual to receive the prestigious OSU Distinguished American Indian Alumni Society Award from the OSU family who exhibits outstanding career success, lifetime achievement in society and significant service to the university and the OSU Alumni Association.

The OSU American Indian Alumni Society's board members are Shauna Williams, Olivia Bunch, Amber Buettner, Tabatha Austin-Harris, Twauna Williams and Jeanine Logan.



Choate is Choctaw Veteran of the Month

Lyman Choate, District #2, is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Choate was born in Talihina, Okla., and raised in Miller, Okla. After his mother's passing, he lived with his great-aunt before moving to Antlers, where he began school. He attended Goodland Boarding School through 8th grade and moved to Chillico, Okla., where he graduated from high school.

During the summer, he worked in Okla. City and met his future wife while he was staying with his sister. With limited job prospects, Choate enlisted in the U.S. Navy in Feb. 1958.

Choate completed Basic Training in San Diego, Calif., before attending electrical school, specializing in ship electrical systems. He was stationed for 18 months in Subic Bay on the USS Bonhomme Richard (CV-31), an aircraft carrier based in San Diego. Following two additional months of training, he sailed to Yokosuka, Japan, where he was stationed for approximately eight months. He worked on "Mike" boats, transporting supplies to troops and maintaining and repairing electrical systems on Harbor Patrol Boats.

His service took him to various locations across Japan, but his favorite was watching night landings and takeoffs on the aircraft carrier flight deck. He served until Feb. 1962, and he and Ruby were married that June.

Upon returning to civilian life, Choate worked as a surveyor assistant, building the road across the Broken Bow Dam, and then as a Maintenance Electrician at Dierks Lumber (later Weyerhaeuser), remaining for 28 years until his 1998 retirement.

Choate and his late wife, Ruby, a nurse at the Ruby Choate Clinic, had five children, 17 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren, with another on the way.

He deeply respects military service and expresses concern for the country's future and world stability. He is proud to have served and enjoyed his time in the U.S. Navy.

Choate's hobby is creating and selling wooden sculptures using hand tools and small power tools.

The Choctaw Nation holds our veterans in the highest esteem and appreciates their sacrifices and contributions to preserve our freedoms and the way of life we hold dear.



Robert Karr

District 11

Nittak Hullo Chito Na Yukpa! (Merry Christmas). My hope is that everyone in District 11 has a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year. Spending time with family and celebrating our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's birth always makes this time of year special.

It's great to see all the progress going on in District 11 that includes a \$70 million health clinic expansion, \$5 million wellness center expansion and the \$6 million childcare center (daycare).

These are all expected to be completed in 2025. We are also building new LEAP and Affordable Rental Homes in Harts-horne and Alderson for tribal members in need of housing. We are blessed; I'm so proud and excited to see District 11 so prosperous and growing!

We have had a lot going on in the last few months, as well as events planned for December; that I would like to share with you in this letter.

On October 17 the outstanding elder banquet was held in Durant where we honored our elders. The District 11 representatives were Mary Wilkett and Richard Cooper. Congratulations to them both! They truly are outstanding people.

Our community center was busy in October. The elder Halloween party included a costume contest and bingo on October 30. It was a very fun day! The Choctaw Nation HeadStart came to visit, and the seniors gave them trick or treat candy. We always enjoy seeing the children at the center. On Halloween night, we had a trunk or treat at the center. Yakoke to all the employees who helped make the night a success.

November was Native American Heritage Month. We kicked it off with the CNO powwow. It's one of the nation's biggest powwows with large groups of dancers from across the country and even Canada. The tribal council participated in the Grand Entry on Saturday and Sunday. I am always amazed to see the beautiful regalia, and I love to watch each category of men's, women's, and tiny tots' competition.

November 11 was the Veterans Day ceremony at Tuskahomma, which is one of my favorite events of the year. I am so proud of the way the Choctaw Nation supports our Veterans.

On November 12, Marathon Petroleum and our Career Development department partnered to sponsor "Operation Warm" at the McAlester Boys & Girls Club to give new coats to children in need. We helped over 500 children pre-K through grade 5 in Pittsburg County schools.

The senior and community thanksgiving meals were on Nov. 13 and 21. We have such a wonderful Chahta community in D-11 and at our center. I am so thankful for each of you and to experience the warm fellowship, and friendship that we have.

The elder pecan harvest is December 5, we will be taking a bus from the center to the CNO pecan orchards. Don't forget to plan to attend the District 11 seniors "Choctaw Christmas Arts & Crafts Fair" at the community center Saturday, December 7, from 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM. Come and find gifts for Christmas.

Again, I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! It's such an honor and privilege to serve the okla achukma (good people) of District 11.

Yakoke, Chihowa vt Achukma!



Choctaw Nation Photos
District 11 Councilman, Robert Karr shows off his Chahta Spirit with his regalia.



December Council Corner



District 12, Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. and Chief Gary Batton honored Councilman James Frazier for his service and dedication.



Choctaw Nation Photo
Tribal Council kicked off Native November at the 2024 Choctaw Powwow in Durant. See more from the powwow on page 6.

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

November 9, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session September 14, 2024
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #2 – Lyman Choate
 - b. First Choctaw Language Speaker, District #2 – Julia Mae Billy McKinney
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None
7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
8. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Letter of Reappointment for Dempsey Wayne Tipps to the Choctaw Nation Election Board
 - b. Letter of Reappointment for Jane Parent to the Choctaw Nation Election Board
 - c. Letter of Reappointment for Sylvia Sigler to the Choctaw Nation Election Board
 - d. Letter of Reappointment for Kay Green to the Choctaw Nation Election Board
 - e. Approve the Disposal of Capital Assets – Vehicles
 - f. Approve the Disposal of Capital Assets – Equipment
 - g. Approve the Sale of Certain Assets – Airplanes
- h. Authorize Application to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Indian Health Services for the Joint Venture Program to Construct and Equip a Replacement Choctaw Nation Hugo Clinic, Authorize Negotiation and Execution of Joint Venture Agreement, and Authorize such Appropriations as Necessary to Construct and Equip the Replacement Clinic
- i. Approve and Support Pine Telephone Company's Application for the United States Department of Agriculture Community Connect Grant Program (Honobia)
- j. Approve and Support Pine Cellular Company's Application for the United States Department of Agriculture Community Connect Grant Program (Whitesboro)
- k. Council Bill Amending the Criminal Code of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- l. Approve Rescission of CB-129-22 and Approve Funding for the Development and Construction of a Multi-Family Housing Development in Durant, Oklahoma
- m. Approve Rescission of CB-48-22 and Approve Funding for Affordable Rental Housing Development in Calera, Oklahoma
- n. Approve Business Lease G09-2085 in Favor of Mr. Bill Black on Land Held by the USA

9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS

10. OLD BUSINESS

11. ADJOURNMENT

12. CLOSING PRAYER

All votes passed unanimously

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Devin Lindley

This cooler weather rolling into southeastern Oklahoma has the wildlife moving, including waterfowl, starting to migrate through Indian Country. If you've never been waterfowl hunting, you are missing out on the experience of sitting in a duck blind with a group of friends, which is unlike any other type of hunting. There are always good conversations to be had between groups of birds coming into your decoys and the memories of harvesting an array of species. At the end of the day, whether you shoot your limit or only a couple of birds, it is more about getting out and enjoying the outdoors and the companionship than the actual hunting.

The Choctaw ancestors created feather cloaks, robes, or capes by attaching feathers to a netting-like textile backing. These were made using feathers from turkeys, ducks or swans. Most seem to have featured small feathers carefully placed in an orderly fashion, appearing as if they were still on the bird. Some showed off the natural colors of the feathers, while others were dyed or painted. An example of a robe is on display at the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant, Oklahoma.

The US is split into four flyways: the Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic. Here in our neck of the woods, we fall into the central flyway. Our flyway stretches from northern Canada to Mexico. The northern stretches are some of the best nesting grounds for waterfowl in the world. The most common duck in our flyway is the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). The males, also known as drakes, have green heads that make them one of the most recognizable when in flight or on the water. If you are planning on hunting waterfowl or just want to learn how to identify ducks and geese better, it is a good idea to get a waterfowl ID guide; it's important to be able to identify the species and whether it is a drake or a hen, in the air and on the water. Waterfowl are federally regulated, so in order to hunt waterfowl legally, you will need to purchase a Federal Duck Stamp and a Harvest Information Program (HIP) permit. Make sure that you check the regulations for harvest limits and season dates for the area that you are hunting.

Remember to report your harvest in Chahta Achvffa and, as always, be safe in the outdoors.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

Upcoming Events

Runderland 5k-1m - December 7 | 10 a.m. | Talihina Health Care Center, One Choctaw Way Talihina, OK 74571 | Get into the holiday spirit with a festive run. Dress up in your favorite Christmas attire for the race and spread some holiday cheer. This event is free and open to the public, so gather your friends and family and come join the fun! Registration and the start/finish line are in front of the hospital's main entrance. Registration will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Pre-Registration must be completed by noon on Thursday, Nov. 14 at noon to be guaranteed a T-shirt.

Cinema at the Center - December 13 | 7 p.m. | This monthly series features a wide range of films designed around a fun, family-friendly theme. This month, check out the Christmas classic, Home Alone. We'd love to see you for movie night. Visit, bit.ly/cc-workshop-events for more information.

Virtual NASA Astro Camp - December 26 - December 27, 2024 | Virtual | The first 50 Choctaw tribal members in grades 5-8 who sign up will be accepted to attend the camp. Participants must have sufficient internet connection and access to a computer/tablet with Zoom application. Email and home address for participant must be provided to receive Zoom link to join camp activities and a box of supplies (scissors, stapler, etc.) that will be mailed. Participants must wear school appropriate attire during Zoom calls. This event is sponsored by the Choctaw Nation Youth Events & Activities Program and NASA. Visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/events/youth-camps/astro-camp/> for more information.

Christmas Eve Tribal Holiday - December 24 | 11:30 a.m. | All Locations | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Christmas Eve.

Christmas Day Tribal Holiday - December 25 | All Day | All Locations | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Christmas.

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

OKCTA Visits Choctaw Powwow in Durant

The OK Choctaw Tribal Alliance visited the Choctaw Powwow and we ran into Councilman Perry Thompson and Jess Henry who posed with Efen and Jovanny Flores with our Chahta Children's Language Class. OK Choctaw Tribal Alliance is a not for profit organization focused on education and charity & to educate about Choctaw culture, based in Oklahoma City. For more information, visit <https://www.facebook.com/OkChoctawTribalAlliance>



Programs & Services

Jones Academy - Jones Academy will continue to use all available resources to provide an exceptional academic and residential program for the students we serve. In cooperation with the Choctaw Nation and Bureau of Indian Education, we plan to improve facilities and other programs offered. Construction will begin on a new Student Union by the year's end, providing a state-of-the-art space for all student's meals and recreation activities. These improvements will allow students more opportunities and experiences educationally, academically and spiritually. To learn more about Jones Academy, visit jonesacademy.org.

Youth Employment Services - YES is offering exciting paid employment opportunities for youth aged 16-21 in the Choctaw Nation Reservation service area. YES is transitioning from a traditional 5-week summer work experience to a year-round employment opportunity with Project Auatvchi and Project Toksvli, allowing participants to work up to 200 hours at any time of the year. For more information, visit choctawnation.com/services/youth-employment-services.

Food Distribution Increases Amounts and Selections - Choctaw Nation Food Distribution Program participants will see an increase in the following food amounts they receive: Meat/Poultry/Fish (increase from five to six units) Vegetables (increase from 18 to 20 units) New food items will also be available. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Public Health Survey - Take the Choctaw Nation Community Health Survey and give your opinions on the availability and access to various services that provide for the welfare, safety and health of our communities.



Choctaw Connect - Make Chahta Connect your go-to resource for finding Internet Service Providers (ISPs) on the Choctaw reservation in Southeast Oklahoma. Whether you're looking to get connected or upgrade your service, Chahta Connect has you covered. For more information, visit chahtaconnect.com.

Food Distribution Report Household Changes - Food Distribution participants must report household changes. Household changes may affect your eligibility. Please report any household changes immediately to your Food Distribution pickup site. Examples: Change in household size, increase in gross monthly income of more than \$100, change in residence and/or address, household no longer paying for shelter (house payment, rent, etc.), household no longer paying for utilities (electric, gas, water) or change in receipt of child support. Failure to report changes may result in ineligibility and or a claim against your household for over-issued food items. For more information, visit choctawnation.com/food-distribution.

Choctaw Cultural Center Membership - Become a member of the Choctaw Cultural Center today! Your annual membership helps support the preservation of Choctaw culture. Membership benefits include: Complimentary admission to the Cultural Center; advance notice of special events and exhibits, invitations to members only events, discounts at Hvshi Gift Store and much more! Visit choctawculturalcenter.com for more information.

Healthy Aging - Provides wellness, social services, behavioral health services, case management and providers in geriatric-specific care to assist elders achieve a higher quality of life or maintain an optimal level of functioning and wellness. To be eligible, participants must be at least 55 years of age, verified by a tribal membership card and valid CDIB card. Case Management Services are available to non-elder high-risk patients. For more information, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/healthy-aging/>.

Choctaw Nation Tribal Court holds night court

DURANT, OKLA. (October 28, 2024) - Night Court provides additional opportunities for tribal members to attend court to pay fines and clear outstanding traffic, misdemeanor and non-violent felony warrants outside of the standard 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. hours.

Night Court will be held on the following dates at the Choctaw Judicial Center at 2250 Chukka Hina Drive, Durant, OK and the Courthouse will stay open until 7:30 p.m. The schedule will be updated as additional dates for Night Court are added.

Dates:

- December 5, 2024
- January 9, 2025
- February 6, 2025
- March 6, 2025

What you should bring:

- Photo ID
- Relevant documents to your case
- Credit Card or Money Order to make payments

You can access the Choctaw Nation Judicial Branch's ReSearch system to see if you have any outstanding warrants or owe any costs and fees. This website provides users with instant access to copies of case filings.

If you have questions about clearing your warrants or to see if you are eligible to attend, please contact the Choctaw Nation Public Defenders Office at 580-634-0678.

To inquire about costs and fees you may owe, contact the Court Clerk's Office at 580-920-7027.

HONOR GUARD

— POSITIONS AVAILABLE —

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

VETERANSADVOCACY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Biskinik Announcement Guidelines

We accept milestone birthday greetings for ages 1, 5, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 30, 40, 50, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80 and above.

Couples may send announcements of silver wedding anniversary at 25 years of marriage, golden anniversary at 50 years, or 60+ anniversaries. We do not post wedding announcements.

News from graduates of higher education only and sports submissions will be accepted as space allows.

We welcome all letters from Choctaw tribal members. However, because of the volume of mail, it isn't possible to publish all letters our readers send. Letters chosen for publication must be under 150 words. We require full contact information. Only the writer's full name and city will be published.

All events sent to the Biskinik will run the month of the event or the month prior to the event if the event falls on the first of the month.

Mail to: Biskinik
P.O. Box 1210
Durant, OK 74702
or email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

Gary Batton
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.
Assistant Chief

The Official
Monthly Publication of
the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Shauna Williams, Executive Director
Kristina Humenesky, Senior Director
Kellie Matherly, Content Development Director
Kendra Wall, Content Development Manager
Chris Jennings, News Reporter
Christian Toews, News Reporter

P.O. Box 1210
Durant, OK 74702
580-924-8280 • 800-522-6170
www.ChoctawNation.com
email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

The BISKINIK is printed each month as a service to Tribal members. The BISKINIK reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication shall be printed and reserves the right to edit submitted material which it finds inaccurate, profane, offensive or morally unacceptable. Copy may be edited for space, proper grammar and punctuation. Copy will be accepted in any readable form, but where possible, it is requested that material be typewritten and double-spaced. You must include an address and phone number where you may be reached. Due to space limitations and the quantity of article submissions, we are unable to include everything we receive. Items are printed in the order received. Faxed photos will not be accepted.

If you are receiving more than one BISKINIK or your address needs to be changed, our Circulation Department would appreciate hearing from you at ext. 4028.

The BISKINIK is a nonprofit publication of the Choctaw Nation. Circulation is monthly. Deadline for articles and photographs to be submitted is the first day of each month to run in the following month.

Editor's Note: Views and opinions in reader-submitted articles are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Choctaw Nation.

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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna Tisimba Language Lesson

This month's lesson will focus on the plural forms of big; large – chito, chinto

Singular form:

chito, chinto – large; big; huge; greatness e`tc.

Ofi mvt chito chiyyohmi.	That dog is extremely large.
Hushi chinto hosh hikant ia tuk.	A huge bird just flew by.

Plural form:

hocheti; verb, to be large; big

Nvni chaha yvt hoche-to fehna.	The mountains are very large.
Biscuits vt hoche-to chohmi.	The biscuits are kind of big.

hocheti; noun, greatness; great ones; generally, includes the leadership in the workplace.

Hocheto vhleha akosh nana hq anukfilli tuk ma, mako e yohma chi.	We will do whatever our big bosses or higher ups have planned.
--	--

Hocheto vlheha yvt pim atoksvli ya ant pisa chi.	The Leadership Team will come to see or check our work.
--	---

hochetochi; v. to cause to be large

Shatummi yvt palvska ya hochetochi.	Yeast causes bread to be enlarged.
Palvska lawat ish vpa-kma hvchi hoche-tocha hinla.	Eating lots of bread can cause you all to get big. (In weight gain)

hochetoli; v. to make large; loud; or great

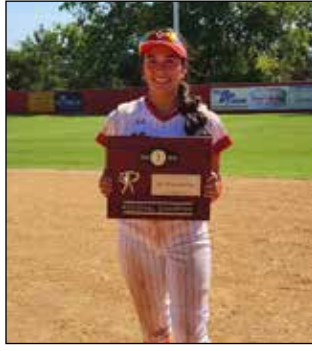
Palvska vlvvsha hoche-to lit ish ikbi tuk achini.	It looks like/appears you made very large frybread.
Chi holbvttoya ya okla hochetoli cha takohlichit tuk.	They enlarged your pictures and hung them up.

www.choctawschool.com

Langford has a successful season

Alyssa Langford, class of 2027, was nominated as a quarterfinalist and Top 20 All-State Player in fast-pitch softball for Class 3A.

She is a sophomore at Kingston High School, and her primary position is short stop. Her high school team made it to the State Tournament and finished eighth in the Class 3A rankings.



McDonald receives National Honor

The National Society of High School Scholars (NSHSS) recently announced that student Kaylee McDonald from Bokchito, Oklahoma, has been selected to join the esteemed organization. The Society recognizes top scholars who have demonstrated outstanding leadership, scholarship, and community commitment. NSHSS Co-founder and President James W. Lewis made the announcement.

“On behalf of NSHSS and our co-founder Claes Nobel, a member of the family that established the Nobel Prizes, I am honored to recognize the hard work, passion, and commitment that Kaylee has demonstrated to achieve this exceptional level of academic excellence,” said Lewis. “Kaylee is now a member of a unique community of scholars—a community that represents our very best hope for the future.”

“We are proud to provide lifetime membership to young scholars to support their growth and development,” stated Lewis. “We help students like Kaylee build on their academic success by connecting them with learning experiences and resources to help prepare them for college and meaningful careers.”

NSHSS members automatically become lifetime members at the time of their initial membership. Each step along the way—from high school to college to career—NSHSS connects outstanding young scholars with the resources they need to develop their passion.



Paxton named to 40 Under 40

Jessee Paxton, the Business Advisor at the Greenwood Women’s Business Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and recipient of the 40 Under 40 Award, is a member of the Choctaw Nation with a longstanding association with the SBDC.

A Southeastern Oklahoma State University graduate, Jessee holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Occupational Safety and Health, with minors in General Business and Native American Studies. His expertise extends beyond business advising, with certifications from the Emergency Management Institute in Hazmat and FEMA procedures and Export and Trade Counseling certifications from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Jessee began his journey with the Oklahoma SBDC as an intern in 2015 at the State Office in Durant, Oklahoma. He worked with numerous companies before becoming a business advisor in 2020. Jessee actively collaborates with the Greenwood Women’s Business Center and the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce to support minority and women-owned businesses in the Greenwood community.

Jessee was recently honored at the America’s SBDC national conference in Atlanta, Georgia. His commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and economic growth exemplifies the mission of the Oklahoma SBDC. We are immensely proud of their accomplishments and their recognition on the national stage by America’s SBDC.



Miles James Curtis

On September 6, 2024, we were blessed with the arrival of Miles James Curtis, 7lbs 13oz. The parents are Evan and Kelly Curtis of Dallas. Grandparents are John and Sheila Hampton Curtis, and late great-grandparents are Lewis and Mary Lu Hampton.



Tallant turns 70

Happy 70th Birthday to our beautiful Momma Joyce Tallant.

“Mom, you are one of the most beautiful women we have ever known. You are intelligent and kind and have an incredible sense of style. We wish you a happy 70th birthday, mom! and love you so much.” – Love, You’re Family



Bingham earns two degrees

Michael Bingham, 63, is the father of Brittney, Ashley, Ryan, and Evan and the brother of Edy and Blain.

Michael graduated from Trinidad State College with two degrees, an Associate of Arts and an Associate of Applied Science and Applied Technology.

Michael graduated Phi Theta Kappa with a 4.0 grade average and would like to thank the Choctaw Higher Education for all of their support.



Gregory makes name for herself in the golf world

Harlow Gregory, a proud member of the Choctaw Nation, had a successful golf season.

Gregory is currently ranked 51st in the world in her classification (2028). The freshman is ranked number three in the state of Oklahoma. Gregory has won three straight Native Youth National Golf Championships, which are held in Santa Ana, New Mexico.

She became the only Junior Golf Ambassador for the John Daly Hart of Lion Foundation.

Gregory also qualified for three straight Notah Begay III National Golf Championships, held in Louisiana and broadcasted on the Golf Channel.

She made the Finals of the Drive, Chip and Putt this past April, which was held at Augusta National on the Sunday before the Masters golf tournament.

On October 2, Gregory qualified for the USGA National Women’s Four-ball Championship, which will take place in May 2025, and is the 2024 Oklahoma Junior Golf Tour Player of the Year.

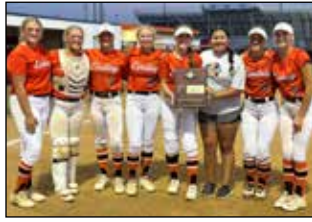


Lepoardettes have successful season

Eight Lindsay High School students and proud members of the Choctaw Nation won their Super Regional and punched their ticket to the class 3A State Softball Tournament.

Pictured, left to right, are Addison Dodson, Lili Dodson, Barran Cruce, Leslie Wilmot, Gentry Wilmot, Erica Medellin, Jasey Anderson and Breckynn Cline.

Though the team didn’t win the championship, Addison Dodson, Lili Dodson, Barran Cruce, Leslie Wilmot, Gentry Wilmot and Brecklynn Cline made the All-District and/or All-Region teams.



Wright recognized by Navy Admiral

Rear Adm. David Faehnle, commandant of Naval District Washington, visited Naval Support Facility Indian Head on September 13 to recognize Tommy Wright, cultural resources manager for Naval Support Facilities Indian Head Public Works, with a letter of appreciation for his unwavering support and outreach to indigenous groups in the local community.



Choctaw Nation Powwow 2024

The Choctaw Nation held its annual powwow from November 1 - November 3, 2024, at the Choctaw Events Center in Durant.

Thousands of people came together as a community to celebrate Choctaw culture, heritage, and unity. From the powerful drumbeats and breathtaking dances to the delicious traditional foods and vendors, it was a weekend filled with pride and connection.



Photos by Krislan Garside and Rylee Tollett

ITI FABVSSA

Hakha Aiola – Where the Canada Goose Cries

On your last trip to the Choctaw Nation Headquarters, you may have encountered what Choctaw people call Hakha or the Canada Goose.

The Canada Goose is a migratory species native to North America that likes open grassy areas near water. They have adapted to modern urban and suburban landscaping and can be commonly seen at parks and ponds where manicured lawns offer them the perfect environment for food and nesting year-round.

Like the Choctaw Nation Headquarters, the pre-removal Choctaw Village site of Hakha Aiola, Where the Canada Goose Cries, also had this park-like landscape that was a very popular spot for waterfowl.

This month, Iti Fabvssa would like to share a glimpse into what this Choctaw village site looked like.

Hakha Aiola was located on a flat-topped ridge between two creeks in what is today Kemper County, Mississippi. The village was spread out across several hundred acres atop the ridge.

Households were spaced out, with each located a couple hundred yards from its neighbors.

Often, the families occupying adjacent households were related to each other through the female line. Family members would work together to accomplish tasks and cook together. The households of extended families were clustered to form hamlets.

Each household had a summer and winter home, a garden, and arbors where they did their daily cooking and activities. Families positioned their hamlets near springs for fresh water. Families living at Hakha Aiola had access to plum and peach orchards that were located between hamlets.

Despite living distant from each other, the community was still closely knit. Each family did their share in planting, growing, and harvesting the communal fields. They grew corn, beans, and squash located down the ridge, nearer the streams of Pawtikfa and Blackwa-

ter Creeks. Pawtikfa Creek, or Poa Atikafa in the Choctaw language, means “where wild animals shed their hair.”

This likely refers to an area where bison wool was collected after the animals shed their hair in the spring.

A nearby small stream called Reedy Break tells us that Rivercane grew near the village.

At Hakha Aiola, the chief’s home overlooked a beautiful 7-acre pond that was very popular with wild geese, ducks, and other waterfowl.

The sounds made by Canada Geese that lived here are what gave the village its name.

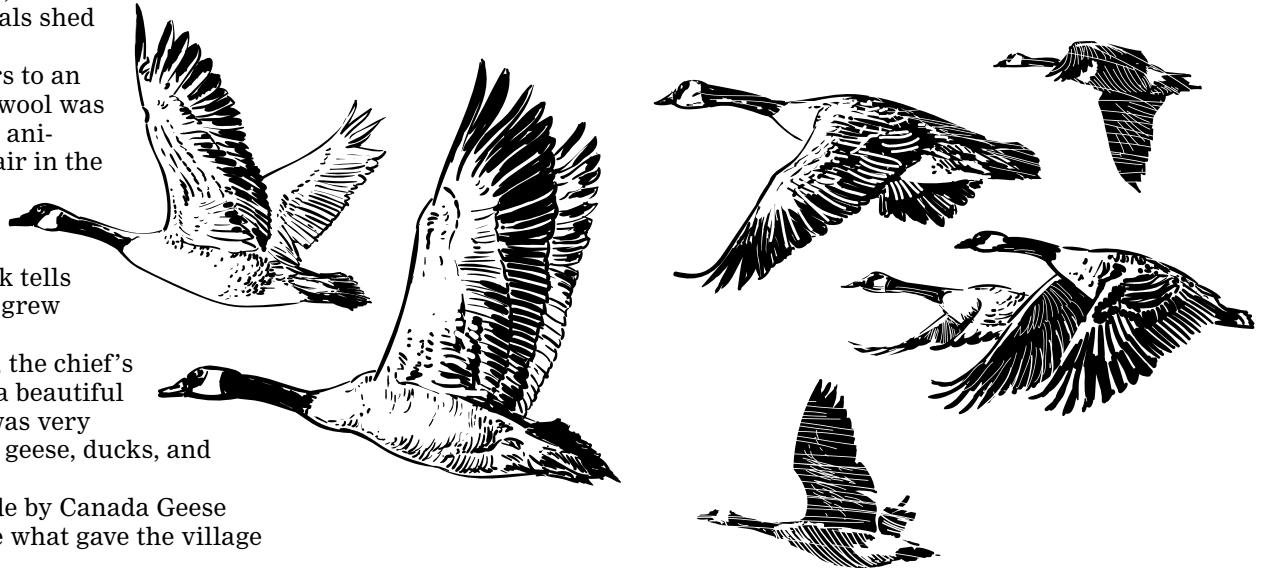
In some places, the pond reached 12 feet in depth and was surrounded by an oak forest. Choctaw people commonly used fire to manage the land; this would have caused the area around the pond to look park-like and the perfect spot for Canada Geese to call home.

Hakha Aiola can be seen on historic French Maps dating back to 1733. It had likely been located there for at least several decades previous to that.

In 1830, Chief Anumpulitubbee was recorded as the Miko or Village Chief. However, he and his people were forced to leave during the Trail of Tears.

In 1852, the pond was drained, and the trees were cut down by an American settler who had gained ownership of the land. Maybe one day, the cries of wild geese will be heard there again.

Note: The information provided in this article is from Halbert, Henry S. – ca. 1915 Unpublished manuscript on Choctaw history and culture. On file at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery Box 4, Folder 13 & 14.



Canada Geese at the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Headquarters.

Photo by Judy Allen



Artistic Depiction of the Village of Hakha Aiola by Allen Winters (2023)

McKinney is First Language Speaker of the Month

Julia Mae Billy McKinney was born southeast of Broken Bow to Gracie Billy on April 14, 1940. Choctaw was the only language she had known as it was spoken in her home. The time came for her to go to school, this meant entering a culture that spoke English. Her first years of school were spent learning to speak English through punishment for speaking her own language. She graduated from Broken Bow High School in 1959. On October 3, 1959, Julia married John McKinney. Together, they had six children, 18 grandchildren, 30 great-grandchildren and four great-great-grandchildren (and one on the way). Julia was active in the lives of her children and was present at any and all events.

In 1975, Julia and her family traveled to Mississippi with a small group of Choctaws and Reverend Gene Wilson’s family to learn the art of traditional Choctaw culture, art, language and dancing. Throughout the years, Julia has made many dresses for young girls.

From 1974 – 1976, Julia worked at the McCurtain County OIO satellite office. For the next 20 years, Julia was employed by the Choctaw Nation, working at the Family



Investment Center. It was during these years that Julia served at Oka Achukma Presbyterian Church in numerous capacities.

Throughout the years, Julia has played an integral part in the Choctaw Nation’s Cultural Revitalizations Movement. She has won several awards throughout her life and is a celebrated member of the community.

CHECK YOUR AQI AIR QUALITY INDEX

Pollutants in the air significantly impact both the environment and public health. Awareness of local air quality enables communities to take proactive steps, like limiting outdoor activities during high pollution periods or advocating for cleaner energy.

0-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-300	301-500
GOOD	AVERAGE	MODERATE	UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS	UNHEALTHY	VERY UNHEALTHY
Air quality is as good as possible. Everyone can breathe easily.	Air quality is acceptable. However, some people with respiratory issues may experience minor symptoms.	Members of sensitive groups may experience moderate to serious respiratory symptoms.	Everyone may begin to experience respiratory symptoms.	Respiratory symptoms may be more severe, and some people may begin to experience more serious effects.	Health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

Scan to find your AQI

Choctaw Nation Environmental Protection Service

Make a plan this holiday season, don't drive impaired

By Chris Jennings

Every 45 minutes, one person is killed in a crash involving an alcohol-impaired driver.

In 2020, 11,654 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes involving alcohol-impaired drivers, accounting for 30% of all traffic-related deaths in the United States.

These Center for Disease Control statistics do not include drug-related accidents because of a lack of sufficient studies involving drug-impaired drivers.

One study conducted at seven different trauma centers of the 4,243 drivers who were seriously injured in crashes found that 54% of drivers tested positive for alcohol and drugs or both between September 2019 and July 2021.

Of the 4,243 drivers, 22% were positive for alcohol, 25% were positive for marijuana, 9% were positive for opioids, 10% were positive for stimulants, and 8% were positive for sedatives.

“The lenses have shapes and color alterations. As they put them on, we have a description given to us by Drunk Busters that gives them the simulation of what they should be feeling after they wear them,” said Johnson. “That will mimic what they feel when under the influence.”

Johnson takes the goggles to places like Carl Albert College and the Talihina Boys and Girls Club to give the young adults and kids an idea of what it's like to be impaired.

Safe driving requires focus, coordination, good judgment and quick reactions to the environment. Johnson demonstrates this to goggle wearers.

When the goggles are put on, they're given real-life scenarios they may face while impaired. One is a pedal cart with cones and a course taped out on a gymnasium floor. Or finding keys that were in a bowl but knocked to the floor.

Johnson says she often hears comments like “This is wild” or “This did not make me feel good.” A common one is for the wearers to get nauseous after wearing them and be in disbelief that anybody does this.

“Their reaction says I will never do this; this is scary; what if I'm actually in a car and this happens,” said Johnson.

It's not just them as drivers but also as passengers and friends of people who may be impaired.

According to the CDC, passengers of alcohol-impaired drivers, occupants of another vehicle or people such as pedestrians accounted for 38% of the deaths in 2020.

Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) indicated that the estimated number of U.S. residents ages 16 years and older who drove under the influence in the past year was: 18.5 million for alcohol (7.2% of respondents ages 16 years and older), 11.7 million for marijuana (4.5% of respondents ages 16 years and older), and 2.4 million for illicit drugs other than marijuana (0.9% of respondents ages 16 years and older)

A lot is known about alcohol's effects on driving. Still, more research is needed to understand how drugs impact driving skills. However, research has shown that both legal and illicit drugs can have a serious impact on a person's ability to drive safely. For example:

Some of the effects of being impaired by marijuana that can affect driving include slowed reaction time and decision-making, impaired coordination, and distorted perception.

Other drugs like cocaine or illicit amphetamines can also impair skills like perception, memory, and attention in the short or long term.

Prescription and over-the-counter medications can cause many side effects that can impact driving, such as sleepiness, impaired vision, and impaired coordination.

Use of multiple substances (such as marijuana and alcohol) at the same time



Photo Provided

Two men try out the Drunk Busters goggles at a booth set up at Wheelock Academy. One of the tests given while wearing the Drunk Busters goggles is stacking cups into a pyramid. The goggles simulate how being impaired can affect your depth perception and reaction time.

can increase impairment.

With more states passing laws regarding the legal use of drugs, either recreationally or medically, it's important to remember that driving under the influence means under the influence of anything.

“As far as this classifying driving under the influence, that can be from marijuana through prescription drugs, alcohol. A DUI can encompass any of those things, but I would say there's not one that's worse than the other; they're all equally bad,” said Meghan Bruce, a Lighthorse Police Officer with the Choctaw Nation.

According to www.alcohol.org, a first-time DUI offense could cost anywhere between \$10,000 and \$25,000 or more when the tally is finally completed.

Time away from work, property damage or injuries are not included in these totals; costs can skyrocket once those are factored in.

There are things you can do to enjoy your time without risking these financial burdens or putting yourself and others at risk.

“First and foremost, you can designate somebody [to drive] if you plan to travel home. If you don't plan to travel home, just stay put,” Bruce said.

One suggestion Bruce made was to be sure you stock up on enough alcohol for the event.

She explains a common scenario she often sees, “What will happen is they get to whatever event that they're going to, and they run out of beverages.”

It's on that quick trip to the store that Bruce says tragedy can strike, “The most dangerous person on the road isn't the person that's blackout drunk. The most dangerous person on the road is the person that doesn't think that they've drunk enough to be under the influence,

so they're overly confident.”

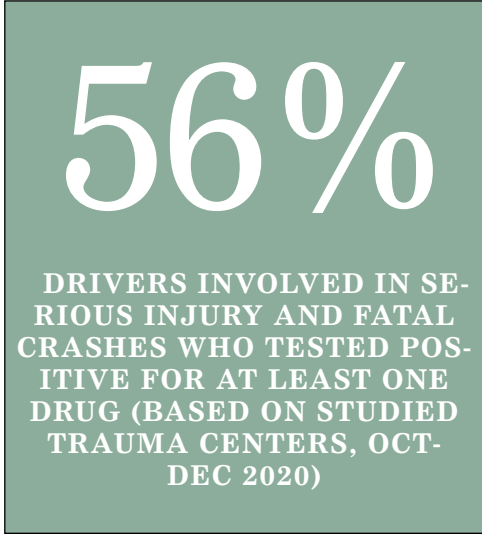
Bruce says reaction times are often affected before you realize it, or you may think you're fine because you've just had a little.

There's nothing wrong with being a responsible adult and enjoying yourself. Part of that responsibility is having a plan, though. Johnson recommends planning ahead, “Always have a backup plan. Always have a safe person that you can call. Assign that designated driver if you know that you're going to be drinking around the holidays, or make that plan to stay where you're at.”

If you're hosting a party where drinking will be involved, you can do your part by reminding people to plan ahead.

Bruce puts driving impaired more bluntly, “You can die; You can kill somebody; It can follow you throughout the entirety of your life. Those are some of the results and the consequences of driving impaired.”

If your organization wants to host the Drunk Busters goggles, you can contact Kelsea Johnson at kjohnson@cnhsa.com.



Source: US Dept. of Transportation

The statistics don't get much better for Native Americans.

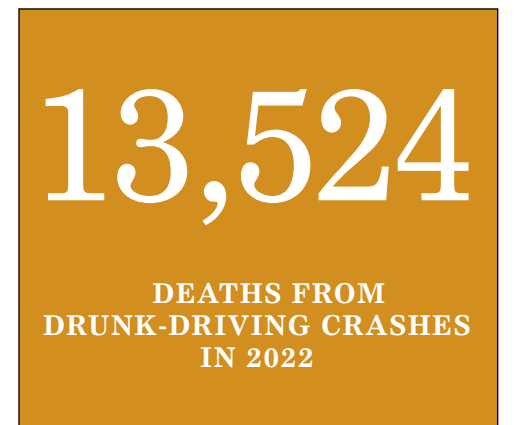
Non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native people have the highest alcohol-impaired driving death rates, 2 to 11 times higher than other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

To raise awareness for impaired driving, December has been designated as National Impaired Driving Month to reduce the number of avoidable traffic deaths.

The Choctaw Nation is also doing its part to contribute to the prevention of these deaths in the form of drunk or drug-simulated goggles that are taken to different places around the reservation.

Kelsea Johnson with Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health says they use four different goggles to simulate various levels of impairment.

The four levels are alcohol blood level above the legal limit, impairment under the influence of marijuana, near opioid overdose and finally, one that simulates the effects of being under the influence of Molly, LSD and ecstasy.



Source: NHTSA

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- Career Tech Expenses (up to \$100)
- Post-Secondary Fees (up to \$100)
- Cap & Gown (up to \$50)

*Until funds are depleted

To apply for reimbursement, scan the QR code

The student must be a HSSS member to apply. To become a HSSS member, fill out the Student Record Release through the Chulita Advivia Member Portal.

Choctaw Nation High School Student Services

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS		
LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
Antlers 580.916.5609	Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Atoka 539.316.2050	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Battiest 580.241.5458	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Broken Bow 539.316.3011	Daily Monday – Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Durant 539.316.3517	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Heavener 539.316.4784	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Hugo 539.316.5089	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:00 pm
Idabel 539.316.4313	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
McAlester 539.316.2431 539.316.2430	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Poteau 539.316.4606	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Smithville 580.244.3289	1st Thursday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Spiro 918.962.5134	Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Stigler 918.967.4211	Monday & Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Talihina 539.316.6792	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Wilburton 580.642.7588	Wednesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Mobile Van 580.380.8193	1st Tuesday – Boswell 3rd Tuesday – Coalgate 4th Tuesday – Clayton	9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Choctaw Nation Health Services

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

December 3	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
December 4	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
December 6	Atoka	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
December 6	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
December 10	Poteau	11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
December 11	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
December 12	Crowder	By Appointment
December 13	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
December 17	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
December 18	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
December 18	Stigler	By Appointment
December 20	Idabel	10:00 - 1:00 p.m.

Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday
Call 580-326-8304 for an Appointment

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

MARKET HOURS
Open 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday
Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Markets will be closed the last two days of each month for inventory.

December 2024
All markets open weekdays, December 1-27
Closed: December 24, 25, 30 & 31
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation
Participants can request a calendar at their location.

ANTLERS 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 4

BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 12

DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 19

MCALESTER 3244 Afulotta Hina, 918-420-5716
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 10

POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 17

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Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna celebrates graduates from two of its programs

By Christian Toews

The Choctaw Nation's Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna (School of Choctaw Language) celebrated 25 graduates from two programs on September 20.

The Language Apprentice program graduated 12 students, and the Second Language Interlocal High School Teachers program graduated 13.

These graduates are a large part of preserving the Choctaw language, culture and history for future generations.

Chief Gary Batton emphasized this idea during the graduation ceremony.

"Truly, this will keep our tribe alive... you are truly keeping the memory of our ancestors alive by doing what you are doing today by continuing to speak the language," he said.

According to Anjanette Williston, the Language Department's program director, the main objective is to preserve the language.

"My hopes are they (the graduates) will go and share that language...continue their learning as well but share their language with others," said Williston. "The more we have out there who are knowledgeable or learning or have that desire to learn, the more we are going to keep our language alive."

Completing the apprenticeship program is no easy task. It is 52 weeks long. During the course, students cover speaking, reading, and writing to become conversational Choctaw speakers.

One of the current highlights of this course is that students get direct instruction from a first speaker—someone who speaks Choctaw as their first language.

Williston is unsure how long the program will be able to offer instruction from a first speaker because of the dwindling number of first speakers available.

There are currently only nine first speakers working with the School of Choctaw Language, and Williston said one of their

goals is to absorb as much information from them as possible before they retire.

"We're here at the end, and it's scary, it really is. When you stop and think about it, I mean, geez, we're not going have that spoken language," said Williston. "We're losing those enunciations; we're losing all of the knowledge that each of them had from birth on that they spoke their language with their parents."

That is precisely why the school is designed to teach the language to the next generations.

The Second Language Interlocal High School Teachers program is another vital program at the school. This program focuses on certified teachers and allows them to become more fluent in the Choctaw language so that they can pass this knowledge on to high school students.

The School of Choctaw Language began teaching in high schools about 20 years ago. Today, the Choctaw language is taught in 48 high schools across the Choctaw reservation and surrounding areas. This program has been a vital pipeline for students to be exposed to the Choctaw language early and inspire them to continue learning it.

Another program offered by the School of Choctaw Language is the Language Nest program. This program centers around whole-family learning. A Choctaw language teacher meets with eight families weekly to teach and practice the language with them.

According to Williston, the program hopes to build collaboration and work together to learn.

"They are getting some togetherness. Hopefully, they will keep collaborating together," said Williston. "So, as a whole community, they can build up the language and foster it for generations."

Investment in this language program has continued to allow growth over the years, and the program's future looks bright.

USDA Rural Utilities Services – Distance Learning and Telemedicine awarded a \$261,687 grant for the purchase of distance



Photos by Christian Toews

During the September 20 graduation, 12 Language Apprentice Program graduates and 13 Second Language Interlocal High School Teachers Program graduates pose for a photo with Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr., members of the tribal council, and officials from the School of Choctaw Language.



During the ceremony, Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. and members of the tribal council presented the first speakers with a medallion.

learning equipment in Jones Academy and 19 southeast Oklahoma public schools that teach the Choctaw language. Each language lab will be updated with a video bar, a 65-inch display monitor, a mobile cart, and new Zoom Pro licenses.

Chief Gary Batton said in a recent Facebook Post that the Choctaw Nation has pledged to match this grant with \$39,253.

"Together, we're preserving and promoting the Choctaw language and culture for future generations," he said.

The following schools are receiving upgrades: Achille, Atoka, Battiest, Buffalo Valley, Colbert, Hartshorne, Haworth, Kinta, Kiowa, McAlester, Mill Creek, Panama, Pocola, Poteau, Spiro, Stuart, Talihina, Whitesboro, Wilburton and Jones Academy for grades 1-12.

The School of Choctaw Language contin-

ues to grow and offer new and exciting ways to learn, whether you want to participate in an immersive program or learn at your own pace.

Resources on the Language website allow learners of all levels to grow.

From an online Choctaw dictionary, a catalog of Choctaw Hymns, daily lessons and even videos that guide you through different conversational scenarios.

There are two online courses offered on the website.

You can enjoy a self-paced Choctaw I or Choctaw II course.

These online classes allow you to learn the Choctaw language through comprehensive lessons, downloadable resources and audio clips at your own pace.

For more information, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/about/language/>.

Together, We're More: Bobby Von Martin, Artist

By Kellie Matherly

Bobby Von Martin is a multifaceted fine art artist, muralist, and motivational speaker hailing from Fresno, California. With a profound commitment to using his art as a form of medicine, Bobby's journey is a testament to the transformative power of creativity in overcoming personal adversity.

Bobby's early life was marked by instability and neglect. He and his brother often found themselves alone, navigating the complexities of childhood without the safety and support that many take for granted. Their environment was rife with violence and substance abuse, leaving them to entertain themselves with little more than pencils and paper. In these challenging circumstances, art emerged as a vital coping mechanism.

"I was surrounded by negativity, violence, and a pretty unhealthy environment for children. When I saw other kids happy and playing, I thought something was wrong with me. I couldn't comprehend how they could be so happy while I was dealing with so much turmoil at home," said Bobby.

As a child, he would often depict a house with a smiling face—a symbol of the stability and happiness he craved. While his reality was filled with chaos, his imagination transported him to a place of joy and security. These early experiences shaped his understanding of art as a powerful tool for expression and healing.

"At the time, I didn't realize it, but art became my refuge. Whenever I felt anxious or nervous, I needed a pencil in my hand. It worked out and developed into the skill and craft I have now," said Bobby.

A pivotal moment in Bobby's life came when he was thirteen, living in a drug-infested hotel with his mother, who battled alcoholism, and his brother. An elder from the community, noticing the boys' hunger, took them to the Totally Indian Reservation. For Bobby, this journey was life changing. It exposed him to a community that shared

meals, joy, and spiritual connection.

"What that did was motivate me not just to honor my ancestors, but to honor Indigenous communities in general," Bobby said.

Bobby's commitment to raising awareness about issues such as alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence became a cornerstone of his mission. He reflects on the confusion he felt as a child, wishing for someone to explain the dynamics of addiction and its impact on families. Today, Bobby uses his art to engage in conversations about these often-ignored topics, aiming to educate others while fostering understanding and empathy.

"I wish someone had been there to explain why my mom was absent, why she was leaving, and why people act the way they do when they're under the influence of substances," he said.

One of the defining features of Bobby's artwork is its vibrant use of color. He likens the importance of color in art to the way a beautiful sunset captures attention. Just as a sunset draws people outside to witness its splendor, Bobby strives to create pieces that stop passersby in their tracks, inviting them to engage with Indigenous issues. His murals and portraits, filled with vivid hues, are designed to spark dialogue and raise awareness about pressing concerns, including the history of boarding schools and the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

Bobby's work has not only served as a personal healing process but has also become a platform for community engagement. He has spent over eight years teaching art classes, mentoring young people who share similar struggles. Through his involvement in local organizations and community projects, he aims to provide guidance and support to those who feel lost, offering them a glimpse of hope and the possibility of a brighter future.

"It took off and became a way for me to engage with the public and raise awareness on issues that are important to me. Raising awareness is so important because I'm still

that kid at heart, and I want to help. I want to support youngsters who went through the same struggles I did," he said.

Despite the challenges of his upbringing, Bobby has cultivated a deep understanding of the importance of vulnerability and emotional expression, particularly among men. By sharing his story and encouraging open conversations about mental health, he empowers young people to embrace their emotions and seek healthy outlets for their struggles.

"Whether it be writing, journaling, speaking to somebody, or art, that's where I get my emotions out. I really like to get in these communities and work with these young people, letting them know it's okay to cry. It's okay to ask questions. It's okay for you to have these feelings of anger. You just have to learn how to control them," said Bobby.

Bobby's art also serves as a bridge between generations. During his first art show, he encountered an elder moved to tears by one of his pieces that centered on the issue of Indian boarding schools.

The elder thanked Bobby for his art and said she felt like she had a voice through the piece. Her reaction illuminated the profound impact art can have, allowing individuals to articulate pain and experiences that may have been too difficult to express.

Bobby's work offers a voice to those who have suffered in silence, creating a space for healing through shared understanding.

"Some of these paintings that I paint, that's what they are, because a lot of our elders in our communities, some of these things are too rough, too painful to talk about. But now they have an image, a painting out there that's letting people know what happened to these people as children," he said.

Collaboration and community are central to Bobby's philosophy. He and his brother, both talented artists, have supported each other throughout their journeys. This bond has allowed them to process their shared



Choctaw Nation Photo

Bobby Von Martin's story takes him from a childhood surrounded by drug abuse and violence to a life filled with color, art, and community engagement.

experiences while celebrating their heritage and their art together.

"To have that bond in common, just to call someone up and talk about art, talk about what your next project is, talk about what's on your mind. For us to share that with each other is pretty special," said Bobby.

Today, Bobby continues to make an impact through his art and advocacy. He serves on the board of the Fresno American Indian Health Project, working to provide youth with pathways to success that he himself lacked. He actively participates in community events, donating his artwork to support local initiatives and honoring the memories of those who have passed away.

For every painting Bobby sells, he gives one away. He has gifted over 400 paintings to the community in his career. His philosophy is simple: by sharing his blessings, he not only uplifts others but also enriches his own life in return.

"It really is a circle, a continuation of giving. If I'm going to help you, I know I'll get it back tenfold. That's how I view art. All of my blessings that happen to me and my art—I truly believe it's because I give," he said.

Bobby Von Martin is a living testament to the healing potential of art, and through his work, he inspires countless individuals to find their own voices and embrace their creative journeys.

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Scholarships awarded to Choctaw tribal members in gaming and hospitality educational endeavors

By Shelia Kirven

The Chahta Foundation recently awarded fifteen scholarships totaling \$150,000 to Choctaw Nation tribal member students pursuing degrees in fields that benefit the gaming and hospitality industry.

Recipients were chosen from the hundreds of applications that were submitted. Funds for the scholarships are raised through an annual Choctaw Nation Gaming and Hospitality Golf Tournament. The Gaming and Hospitality Scholarship was established in 2023.

Scholarships are awarded to Choctaw students who are pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees in the fields of hospitality management, hotel management, business, economics, marketing, communications, or culinary arts.

Each scholarship in the amount of \$10,000 is awarded at \$5,000 per fall and spring semester while the recipient is attending an accredited vocational/technical, 2-year program, or 4-year program institution.

The 2024 scholarship recipients are:

- **Ainsley Abernathy** from Lucas, Texas (University of Oklahoma)
- **Braylen Lyday** from Mead, Oklahoma (Southeastern Oklahoma State University)
- **Carolyn Billy** from Wright City, Oklahoma (Eastern Oklahoma State College)
- **Edward Cobb** from Newark, Delaware (Delaware Technical Community College)
- **Gavin Crouch** from Pauls Valley, Oklahoma (Southeastern Oklahoma State University)
- **Gracelyn Tramba** from Oklahoma City (United States Naval Academy Preparatory School)
- **Karsen Jefferson** from Tahlequah, Oklahoma (University of Oklahoma)
- **Kayla Bacon** from Idabel, Oklahoma (Oklahoma State University)
- **Mackenzie Kimmel** from Phoenix, Arizona (University of Mississippi)

- **Marissa Barnett** from Bentonville, Arkansas (University of Oklahoma)
- **Matthew Brame** from Moyers, Oklahoma (University of Oklahoma)
- **Sarah Turner** from Atoka, Oklahoma (Mid-America Christian University)
- **Shelbi Goss** from Dewey, Oklahoma (Rogers State University)
- **Tucker Dry** from Durant, Oklahoma (Southeastern Oklahoma State University)
- **Zackery Wilson** from New York, New York (Florida State University)

Chahta Foundation Executive Director Angela Palmer said the gaming and hospitality industry provides essential revenue and vital services, strengthens our sovereignty and supports opportunities such as those for the scholarships which were awarded.

According to Palmer, it also opens the doors for countless careers, allowing growth and prosperity for generations to come and that the Chahta Foundation and the Choctaw Nation are committed to supporting the next generation as they prepare to step into their goals.

At a banquet awarding the scholarships, Heidi Grant, Senior Executive Officer of the Commerce Division for the Choctaw Nation, said, “We want to congratulate all of our recipients and thank the Choctaw Tribal Council, the Chahta Foundation and our gaming partners for supporting these scholarships. Your investment is helping to identify and educate our next generation of industry leaders.”

Chief Batton spoke individually with each recipient at the banquet, telling them that they stand for the future of the Choctaw Nation. He said it was exciting to see what they were going to be able to do and challenged each one to continue to be lifelong learners.

Chief Batton said, “For me, I think it’s very inspiring, and I don’t know if they intentionally meant to do this or not, but each one of them talks about how they want to have a positive impact on people’s lives, and that’s just awesome to see our upcoming leaders wanting to do that.”

For more information, visit chahtafoundation.com.



Photo by Shelia Kirven

Recipients of the Choctaw Nation Gaming and Hospitality scholarships who attended the ceremony were (left to right) Matthew Brame, Gavin Crouch, Ainsley Abernathy, Karsen Jefferson, Tucker Dry and Sarah Elizabeth Turner.



Photo Provided

The Chahta Foundation works to empower the next generation with information through education. Every project is designed to produce high-impact initiatives that bring positive change to the Choctaw community.

BUSINESS

CHAHTAPRENEUR

CHIT ♦ CHAT

Marketing Your Business This Holiday Season

By Brittany Rice

Holidays are right around the corner. Here are some tips on marketing your business throughout the holiday season.

1. Create Holiday-Specific Promotions

Special Discounts & Bundles: Offer exclusive holiday discounts, flash sales, or bundle deals. Customers often look for value during the holiday season, so creating limited-time offers can drive urgency.

Gift Cards/Certificates: Promote gift cards as easy and flexible holiday gifts. Many people buy them when they’re unsure what to get, and they can bring in future business.

Holiday-Themed Products: Consider creating or packaging products with a seasonal twist, like limited-edition flavors, colors, or holiday gift sets.

2. Leverage Social Media Festively

Festive Content: Use holiday-themed images, GIFs, and videos to bring a festive feel to your social media posts. Create countdown posts, giveaways, or contests related to the holidays to increase engagement.

User-Generated Content: Encourage customers to post photos with your products using a branded holiday hashtag. Repost their photos to build a sense of community and show real people using your products.

Holiday Stories & Reels: Use Instagram or Facebook Stories to showcase behind-the-scenes holiday preparations or special offers. Story highlights for holiday gift ideas or product collections can be useful for quick access.

3. Engage with Your Local Community

Collaborate with Other Small Businesses: Consider partnering with local businesses for joint holiday promotions or gift bundles. This can introduce you to new customers and benefit everyone involved.

Participate in Local Events: If your community hosts holiday markets or fairs, consider setting up a booth or pop-up shop. Even if it’s virtual, these events help you reach local customers directly.

Sponsor or Host a Community Event: Hosting a holiday workshop, storytime, or charity event could help boost visibility.

4. Send Out Holiday Emails

Holiday-Themed Newsletters: Craft emails with holiday branding, including gift guides, product highlights, and special discounts. Remember to use engaging subject lines to improve open rates.

Personalized Recommendations: Use customer data to personalize gift suggestions based on previous purchases. This added touch can make customers feel valued.

Countdown to Last-Minute Shopping: Remind customers of holiday shipping cutoffs with a countdown email series.

5. Optimize Your Website for Holiday Shopping

Holiday Gift Guide Section: Create a holiday gift guide with categories like “Gifts Under \$50” or “For the Person Who Has Everything.” Make it easy for customers to browse and choose.

Add a Festive Banner: A holiday-themed website banner that highlights your seasonal deals or free shipping offers can set the mood and make promotions more visible.

Simplify Checkout: Make checkout as smooth as possible. Consider offering a guest checkout option, which can improve the conversion rate among new customers during the busy season.

6. Highlight Last-Minute Deals and Shipping Options

Express Shipping Options: If possible, offer express shipping for last-minute shoppers and clearly communicate the cutoff dates.

Local Pickup or Delivery: If you have a brick-and-mortar location, promote options like curbside pickup, same-day delivery, or local delivery. It’s convenient for shoppers who need gifts in a hurry.

7. Show Appreciation to Loyal Customers

Exclusive Deals: Offer loyal customers early access to holiday sales or special perks as a thank-you for their support.

Personalized Holiday Cards or Emails: Send personalized holiday messages to top customers to show gratitude. Including a small discount code or exclusive offer can make it extra special.

8. Prepare for Post-Holiday Sales

Clearance Sales: Plan for post-holiday promotions to keep the momentum going. Many people look for deals right after the holidays, and a clearance sale can help you offload seasonal inventory.

Gift Card/Certificate Redemption: Encourage customers to redeem gift cards they received during the holidays. An exclusive offer for those with gift cards can drive further engagement.

Burrage named Chancellor of Oklahoma State System of Higher Education

OKLAHOMA CITY (October 9, 2024) – Sean Burrage, who served as the 20th President of Southeastern Oklahoma State University from 2014-19, has been selected as the next Chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE), as announced at a special meeting Wednesday.

Burrage will assume the role of Chancellor-Elect on November 4 and take office as Oklahoma’s 10th chancellor on December 2, 2024, succeeding Chancellor Allison D. Garrett, who has served in the office since November 2021 and will retire December 1.

Burrage is the fourth Oklahoma Chancellor with ties to Southeastern. The first Chancellor - M.A. Nash - taught at Southeastern, the second Chancellor - E.T. Dunlap - graduated from Southeastern, and the eighth Chancellor - Glen D. Johnson - served as president at Southeastern from 1997-2006.

“This is a great day for higher education in the state of Oklahoma and for Southeastern, and I applaud the regents’ selection of Sean Burrage as our next Chancellor,” said current Southeastern President Dr. Thomas Newsom, who also serves as the chair of OSRHE’s Council of Presidents. “As someone who is intimately aware of the operations of all of the sectors of higher education in our state, and someone who is a true friend of Southeastern, I’m certain that he is the right choice to advance the priorities of OSRHE and provide exceptional opportunities for the students of Oklahoma.”

“I’d also like to thank Chancellor Garrett for her leadership of higher education in Oklahoma over the last few years and congratulate her on her successes. She has served our students with honor and has been a champion for their success. I look forward to our continued collaboration during the transition period and congratulate her on what she has been able to accomplish before her retirement.”

Currently serving as vice president for executive affairs and chief of staff at the University of Oklahoma, Burrage brings a wealth of experience in higher education, the private sector, and the state Legislature. In addition to his past presidency of Southeastern, Burrage was managing partner with the Taylor Burrage Law Firm in Claremore. He served two terms in the Oklahoma State Senate, representing Rogers and Mayes counties, during which he served as minority floor leader from 2011-14.

“I am honored to have this opportunity to serve Oklahoma,” said Burrage. “Oklahoma public higher education must continue to adapt to ensure our graduates are equipped with the skills required to thrive in the modern workforce. I look forward to



Photo by Dan Hoke/SE

Choctaw tribal member, and former SE president, Sean Burrage was recently named next Chancellor of Oklahoma State System of Higher Education.

working with the State Regents, our institutions, and other stakeholders to create more educational and career opportunities for all Oklahomans.”

Born in Durant and raised in Antlers, Burrage is a member of the Choctaw Nation and holds a bachelor’s degree in accounting and a juris doctorate from OU. He and his wife, Julie, a Tulsa native and nonprofit consultant, have four sons.

Under Burrage’s leadership, Southeastern streamlined operations, including establishing a shared vice president position with Murray State College, and significantly increased both undergraduate and graduate enrollment.

During his tenure as a state senator, Burrage represented approximately 80,000 constituents, authored or co-authored over 50 bills that were enacted into law, and served on several legislative committees and task forces, including the 2008 legislative task force on Oklahoma’s Promise.

Burrage has been a member of numerous boards and committees, including the State Regents’ Blueprint 2030 Strategic Planning Committee and the 2017 Task Force on the Future of Higher Education; Gov. Mary Fallin’s Education Advisory Committee; the Rogers State University Foundation; the University Hospitals Authority and Trust; and the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. He served as associate bar examiner for the Oklahoma Bar Association and was named among the Best Lawyers in America and as a Super Lawyer, both designations conferred by his peers. He was a Litigation Counsel of America Fellow and an Aspen-Rodel Fellow in Public Leadership. In 2007, he was voted the Higher Education Alumni Council’s “Best Newcomer Legislator of the Year.”

To fill the position, the State Regents established a search committee, comprised of Casey, Regent Jeffrey W. Hickman, Regent Steven W. Taylor and Regent Courtney Warmington, who developed the position profile that outlined the qualifications sought in the next chancellor and conducted the national search.

The fight to protect native rivercane

Historic Preservation, scientist and artists unite to conserve a staple feature of southeastern Oklahoma ecology

By Tabatha Keaton

In previous Biskinik and Iti Fabvssa articles, we highlighted how rivercane baskets are made, including how the materials are gathered, the techniques and motifs artists have used for generations, and the purposes these baskets serve in everyday life. It is a cultural keystone species with a rich history of traditional uses, including arrows, basketry, blowguns, fishing spears, knives, traps, pottery tools and medicine.

Chief Gary Batton made rivercane the star of his February 2023 Chief's Blog, stating, "The river cane is a symbol of the Choctaw Nation. The native bamboo grass is represented at the Choctaw Nation headquarters in its design in numerous areas of the building for its historical significance. We, as a nation, honor our faith, family, and culture by remembering where we came from and how our early Choctaw family relied on the river cane for survival. River cane is not only important to the Choctaw Nation, but to the stability it brings to the soil and the home it provides for animals."

For this month's Biskinik article, we wanted to highlight the life of rivercane and its importance to the environment.

The science of rivercane

Rivercane is a native species of bamboo that is endemic to the eastern United States and can be found growing around the Choctaw Nation reservation, as well as in our ancestral homelands of Mississippi and Alabama. Canebrakes are typically found along or near creeks and rivers but never in the water. They can grow, on average, 18 feet tall.

When asked about her role at the Choctaw Nation, Jamie Smith says she "serendipitously finds canebrakes."

As an Environmental Coordinator, she conducts site visits to different properties around the reservation. In the process, she finds canebrakes. Once she locates a canebrake, like any good scientist, she measures.

"I measure the diameter of the brake and note its exact location and features, such as its proximity to a water source. I note how the surrounding land is used and its potential impact on the canebrake. I also take a rhizome, a part of its root system, which I will look at under a microscope to determine its genus. Once I have that data, I record it in our private GIS mapping system."

Mapping existing canebrakes provides future rivercane research opportunities while allowing our natural ecosystems to heal. Ac-

cess to our map and associated data is heavily restricted and protected.

Unfortunately, these canebrakes are less abundant than our ancestors would have enjoyed. Among other factors, the conversion of wild spaces for agricultural use has led to a detrimental reduction in this species, and it is estimated that less than 2% of historic canebrakes remain.

Not only does the severe reduction of rivercane impact our cultural practices, it also impacts our environment. Rivercane is essential to the health of our environment.

The ecological benefits of rivercane include water filtration, stream bank stabilization, enhanced air quality, natural fire breaks, wildlife habitat, black bear hibernation and is a larval host for several butterfly species.

The lifecycle of rivercane is slow to progress, and little research is available on what triggers the flowering cycle - a process that may take up to 40 years for a single plant.

Rivercane is a grass, and a single plant can be several acres long.

After a canebrake flowers, it dies. If the resulting rivercane takes root in a similar location, we can retain that canebrake.

University of Alabama Water Institute researchers are sequencing the rivercane genome. Extracting rivercane DNA and mapping its genetic history will allow us to document the best growing conditions for each strain of rivercane, increasing our ability to ensure its survival.

"This is one of the most critical plants to me, my ancestors, and the region, and it truly aligns our cultural and environmental practices," says Smith.

A partnership of scientists, Historic Preservation, artists, and community

Smith's work does not stop after she locates and collects data on the canebrake. Once all the information is recorded, she contacts Ryan Spring, Research Coordinator and GIS Specialist in Historic Preservation, and together, they work to bring in more people who know how to work and harvest the rivercane.

"We bring in a blended group of artists, landowners and managers, traditional and academic scientists, and anyone who wants to learn more about rivercane to restore and work these canebrakes. We are building a community around rivercane," says Spring.

Rivercane conservation includes active engagement and use of the canebrakes. Stewardship practices that connect scientists and artists are an effective conservation method to ensure the longevity of this species.



Choctaw Nation Photos

Rivercane is critically threatened. Choctaw Nation has been involved in the River Cane Alliance, a partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the River Cane Gathering, a partnership with the U.S. Forestry Service.

"Canebrakes like to be worked on. If left alone, canebrakes can become overgrown and invasive species can take over, resulting in it not growing as strong," says Smith.

Basket weavers play a critical role in this process because they carry important traditional ecological knowledge. In their article "The burdens that these baskets carry - A rivercane reflection," Michael P. Fedoroff and Ms. Rose Fisher of the Rivercane Restoration Alliance state that "a skilled Choctaw artist can identify the right time of year, correct age class, appropriate stem diameter, stand health, and harvest technique to gather the right cane for the right basket."

In his blog post, Chief Batton outlines how and why tribal members should get involved in rivercane restoration efforts. "You can help by seeking out river cane restoration efforts and help with transplanting or giving to groups who are working to preserve the native grass. This river cane has provided tools, comfort and food for early Choctaws and, with our help, can continue to provide well into the future."

"I want people to understand how important rivercane is not only to us, but to the environment as well. We have to respect the rivercane again, like our ancestors did. We want future generations to know rivercane and have the ability to go out and harvest it responsibly," says Spring.

Individuals can share possible rivercane locations with Smith's office by going to <https://www.choctawnation.com/river-cane-stewardship-program/> or scanning the QR code located in the main image of this story.

Smith assures private property owners who have canebrakes on their property that "we are not claiming ownership. We only want to partner in efforts to conserve and protect rivercane as a keystone species. Rivercane can be an important ally in your land management practices."

An essential element of conservation is education. Several resources are available to learn about rivercane conservation and restoration efforts, including CONSERVE's Rivercane Restoration Alliance (conserve-group.org/rra) and Rivercane Genome Project (conserve-group.org/rivercane).

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Forestry, in partnership with the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, held the first annual Rivercane Gathering, which brought together tribal communities, federal employees, and university researchers to discuss rivercane's cultural significance and conservation best practices.

Since 2013, the River Cane Initiative has been actively identifying and mapping existing canebrakes on tribal land here in northeastern Oklahoma. You can keep up with their efforts on their Facebook group, River Cane Initiative.

"We want the younger generations to learn about it, how it grows, how to harvest while protecting it, and what to make with it," says Jamie. "If we lose these efforts, we lose the ability to continue important culturally relevant practices. Scientists, historic preservation, artists, and community members must unite to protect this cultural and ecological keystone species."



Photo by Louise Vaughn, User Support for the Southeast Blueprint

The hard work, time and research put into the preservation efforts of Native rivercane, has resulted in education for future generations to harvest, grow and protect the precious plant. Check out the word search below to learn terms associated with rivercane.

RIVER CANE

N	Q	Y	Q	V	G	F	L	Y	V	Q	B	J	J	B
U	S	X	O	S	K	I	S	B	V	I	A	F	H	M
C	Y	N	W	R	O	O	B	B	P	M	M	R	J	E
O	O	K	Q	W	P	M	B	X	S	O	B	R	I	T
N	R	I	Z	B	F	L	P	A	S	G	O	E	W	S
S	R	U	F	U	M	M	E	F	S	Z	O	V	E	Y
E	E	J	I	T	A	C	Y	L	Q	K	P	I	W	S
R	T	B	S	T	T	G	Z	B	T	N	E	R	Y	O
V	A	D	H	E	S	Q	O	H	R	U	W	T	P	C
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O	S	P	Y	L	D	Q	E	U	B	X	B	H	Q	F

bamboo
basketry
fishing

blowgun
oka
oski

butterfly
cane
conservation

tools
ecosystem
water

BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ♦ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ♦

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Biskinik
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