



June 2024 Issue

NO MORE STOLEN SISTERS



2024 Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Movement Update

By Kendra Germany-Wall

On May 14, hundreds gathered in Antlers, Oklahoma, to bring awareness to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's movement.

The Annual MMIW 5K/Walk is a way for members of the Choctaw Nation and surrounding communities to honor the lives and memories of their stolen sisters.

KeyShod Baker of Tom, Oklahoma, was among those in attendance to take part in the race and spread awareness.

"This is one of my favorite runs because of the meaning behind it and the purpose that it pushes to make not only Indigenous women safe but all women safe," said Baker. "I think it is an amazing thing to get behind because, other than running, it's highly important how we live on this earth. That's what brought me out: the cause, the people, the community and, of course, a little fitness in the mix."

The overall winners of the 5K were Ryahn Witt and Tiffanie Burchfield. Don Tidwell and Ruth Wayman were the winners of the 80 and over category.

Murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

As of January 2024, Oklahoma was number two on the list of Top Ten States for Missing Indigenous Persons, with 86 out of 840 nationally reported MMIP cases, according to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System.

While thousands of Indigenous women disappear each year, their cases are less likely to be investigated by law enforcement than those involving other ethnicities.

The bodies of Native American women are 135 percent more likely to go unidentified than the remains of women of other ethnicities in the U.S., according to a paper published in the Criminal Justice Policy Review journal in March 2023.

This epidemic isn't exclusive to

women. The average age of an MMIP in America is 19.1 years old, and 69% of those missing were assigned male at birth, while 31% were assigned female.

According to research by the Transgender Law Center, since 1990, there have been at least 25 transgender and Two-Spirit Indigenous people killed or missing.

"The lack of reporting and knowledge about the plight of trans and Two-Spirit people in Native communities is one way that violence persists in such communities," states the Transgender Law Center on their website.

A lot has changed since the Biskinik began reporting on this issue.

Within the Choctaw Nation, events like the MMIW 5K and the actions of many departments and services have raised awareness and visibility of the issue of MMIP.

One of the most prominent voices for the MMIP cause is the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women-Chahta (MMIW-Chahta) organization.

Based in Calera, Oklahoma, MMIW-Chahta works tirelessly to raise awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, educating on domestic violence and healing.

In a recent interview, Karris Hodge, President and Founder of MMIW-Chahta, gave an update on the organization's activities since we last spoke.

For the first time, MMIW-Chahta hosted a Law Enforcement Appreciation Banquet at Tribal Headquarters in Durant.

"A lot of MMIP and MMIWs [Chapters] started because law enforcement wasn't taking our cases seriously. One thing that I did when I started was I really fostered those relationships and grew them. I can't say enough about how amazing our tribal police is within the Choctaw Nation Reservation," said Hodge. "They call us when one of our tribal people goes missing; they help us do flyers now. It's really become a partnership, which is beautiful because it's so hard for either team to do it by themselves."

To honor that collaboration, Hodge and her team wanted to show their thankfulness by hosting a banquet during Law Enforcement Appreciation Week.

During the event, Chief Gary Batton announced a proclamation designating May 15 as Tribal Law Enforcement Day in the Choctaw Nation.

According to Hodge, no other MMIP chapter in Oklahoma has ever been able to partner with law enforcement in this way before.

"No MMIP [chapter] and a tribal nation have ever created a proclamation before," said Hodge. "That's pretty cool."

Other local law enforcement, such as Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Calera and Durant, were also invited to attend so they could collaborate, mingle and discuss MMIP issues.

Fostering relationships with law enforcement is essential to bringing awareness and helps raise the potential of solving cases.

"Since McGirt, you know, a lot of separation has happened, and we've seen that really harm our cases," said Hodge. "We're trying to find new avenues for them to have training and new avenues for them to collaborate."

MMIW-Chahta also held a human trafficking training in Oklahoma City, and 26 members of law enforcement were in attendance.

The group also announced a new Vice-Chair, Jennifer Austin.

MMIW-Chahta won an Oklahoma Centers for Nonprofits Oklahoma Non-profit Excellence Award for "general impact."

Regarding community work, MMIW-Chahta doesn't just stop at missing and murdered cases.

"We have to kind of cover it all," said Hodge. "Domestic violence, suicide, un-housed and substance abuse because all of those things make us [Indigenous people] more susceptible to murder."

The group also helps to feed the un-housed and furnish the homes of those escaping domestic violence situations

via donations they receive from the community.

According to Hodge, the group's volunteers are amazing and are eager to help those who need it.

"We're partnered with Webstaurant now, so they donate kitchenware," said Hodge. "So, we're able to give them glasses, silverware, plates, you know, things like that."

According to Hodge, MMIW-Chahta collects items year-round. Those who would like to donate should reach out to MMIW-Chahta on social media to see what is needed.

The group hosts various events throughout the year. To stay up-to-date on what's happening with MMIW-Chahta, keep up with open cases or get involved, follow them on Facebook at Missing Murdered Indigenous Women-Chahta.

In the state of Oklahoma, a new missing persons alert system, specifically for tribal citizens, is now in place.

The Kasey System is designed to inform not only law enforcement but also civilians when a Native person goes missing.

The system is for Indigenous people deemed critically missing (someone between the ages of 18 and 59 whose whereabouts are unknown and who is believed to have been abducted).

Leaders of the Choctaw, Chickasaw Cherokee, Muscogee, and Seminole nations are urging the Federal Communications Commission to establish a new event code to help locate missing and endangered adults—a crucial tool for tribal nations impacted by the MMIP crisis.

The potential code would alert the public if an adult goes missing through the IPAWS network to radios, televisions and cell phones, much like the Amber Alert for children. The leaders of the five tribes formally passed a joint resolution at a recent Intertribal meeting supporting the move.

Continued on Page 10



Around 100 participants walked the one-mile event. Many wore MMIW shirts as they walked to raise awareness and support.



William Killman from Moyers, Oklahoma, finishes the 5K while the drummers welcome him across the finish line.



A group of District 9 friends gather together after the race for a photo after the 2024 MMIW 5K run/walk event.



A group of Choctaw Princesses and drummers gather to cheer on the runners and walkers.

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Grateful beyond words

Taking a breath to focus on all we have accomplished as a Nation is sometimes hard to do when you are busy with the next items on your to-do list. All the wonderful people that contribute to the Choctaw Nation and all the hard work that goes into caring and creating for our tribal members can sometimes be overlooked in the flurry of activity.

On April 26, I was given the great honor of a celebration of 10 years as Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Writing that down, it is almost impossible for me to believe that it has been a decade since I was first sworn in. Looking out over the audience of people at this celebration event and seeing the many faces that contribute to the success of our tribe gave me such a sense of pride and thankfulness.

People talk about accomplishments during a Chief's tenure, but the work is not accomplished by one; it takes a passionate, committed, determined and intelligent group who listen to our tribal members to get the nation over the finish line time and time again. As I have said before, the work of our tribal council to better the lives of our tribal members is inspiring. Our council comes together as one, not Democrats or Republicans, but Choctaw to work together for the success of the tribe.

The Lord has certainly blessed this tribe to allow our Choctaw Nation to flourish and offer the kinds of programs and services to our tribal members and associates to, hopefully, better their lives and the communities in which they live. When I was sworn in as Chief, my first thought was how we can as a tribe, better the lives of our tribal members and promote the culture of our ancestors. Over the years, our efforts have been rewarded, but we are far from done – this is a lifetime of work to keep the Choctaw Nation proud, strong, self-empowered and sovereign.

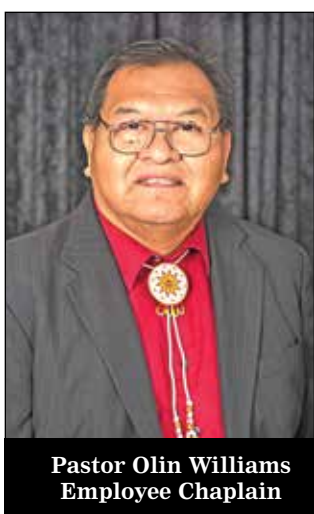
Through hard work, determination and collaboration of our leadership, the Choctaw Nation has flourished and remained strong. I am astonished by what our team has accomplished over the last decade, and it deserves recognition, here are just a few items that deserve notice:

- More tribal members access healthcare, clinics, pharmacies, wellness centers and elder care.
- More than 1,400 new homes and over 7,300 storm shelters for tribal members.
- Increased access to higher education, scholarships, youth camps and adult education.
- 128% growth in reservation business: Gaming and hospitality, Travel Plazas and Casino Too, franchises, country markets, commercial leasing, agriculture, pecan orchards, drone testing and print services as well as revenue-creating partnerships.
- Doubled the size of our Choctaw Nation employees.
- Language Apprentices was established in 2022 to preserve our language.
- Language Nest was established in 2023.
- Cultural Center opened in 2021.
- Tvshka Homma Chapel opened.
- Choctaw Language Greetings implemented across properties.
- Daily prayer implemented across properties.
- Disney and Marvel Studios partnership with ECHO Series to promote Choctaw culture.
- Choctaw Heritage Day was established.
- Choctaw Indigenous People's Day as holiday recognized.
- Participated in largest repatriation in history of United States.
- Established Chaplains at properties.
- Choctaw Dictionary published.
- Established Stickball and Cultural Camps.
- Established Youth Stickball Teams across the reservation in all Districts.
- Created Choctaw Pledge of Allegiance.
- Created Choctaw Veteran's Flag.
- Expanded Lighthouse Police/Law Enforcement across reservation.
- Established Fire Marshals.
- Established Probation Office.
- Appoint Native Americans to local, state, and national positions initiative.
- Strengthen Nation-to-Nation Relationships (France, Ireland, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand).
- First Tribal Public Defender's Office in Oklahoma.
- First In-house Tribal Prosecution Office in CNO history.
- Three full time District Court Judges.
- First Tribal Family Justice Center in Oklahoma, third in United States.
- First Multi-Disciplinary Team accredited by National Children's Alliance in Oklahoma and fifth in the United States.
- First Data Privacy Office at CNO.
- First CNO Health Information Privacy Act.
- The Wildlife Department was established and first tribally administered hunting and fishing seasons under inherent sovereign rights.
- The judicial department expanded with a new center opened in Durant in 2018.
- Expansion of Prosecutors and Defenders offices.
- Expansion of Environmental and Water Resource Management departments.
- Tobacco, Gaming, Motor Fuel, and Car Tag Compacts negotiated and renewed.
- Protection of water through settlement negotiations.

I am sure there are some accomplishments of our team that I am leaving out, but this list was to highlight the fact that the Choctaw Nation could not thrive and be strong without the hard work of everyone – by everyone, I am talking about leadership, associates, tribal members, and partners.

It is the honor of my life to be the Chief of the Choctaw Nation and work beside so many talented people who are all working in the same direction to better the lives of tribal members. I hope everyone reading this realizes how much your contributions, counsel and friendship mean to me. I thank the Lord each day for our determination to be better and our drive to meet our goals.

God Bless each and every one of you and Yakoke Chito for your efforts!



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Covenant of Salt

Originally published December 1, 2021

Salt was and is used for the seasoning of food (Job 6:6). "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" All meat offerings were seasoned with salt "And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13).

To eat salt with one is to partake of his hospitality and derive sustenance from him; and thus he who did so was bound to look after his host's interests. New born children were rubbed with salt (Ezekiel 16:4).

A covenant of perpetual obligation was called a "covenant of salt." When people ate together, they commemorated their friendship with a covenant of salt.

Salt was used as a form of payment when Roman soldiers were paid with salt. The modern word salary came from this practice of paying with salt. God is providing land for the Levite priests and He seals it with a "covenant of salt" (Numbers 18:19). Again when God gave the kingdom of Israel to David, He does it by a "covenant of salt."

In the New Testament, Jesus is speaking to the disciples during the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:13), and He says, "Ye are the salt of the earth...." Modern Christians have entered into a covenant with God when they became believers. It is a perpetual agreement to preserve, purify and permeate the Gospel on earth.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Choctaw Nation is committed to health and longevity

The Choctaw Nation is committed to the health and longevity of our tribal members. That is evident by the availability of our 13 wellness centers across the reservation, accessible to all tribal members and associates of the tribe.

Last month, we celebrated the 10-year anniversary of three of our Wellness Centers! We said Yakoke for a decade of availability to our Broken Bow and Idabel facilities on May 8 and to our Crowder Wellness Center on May 29. Coming this month, we have a 10-year anniversary on June 12 in Atoka and later in the year on Oct. 9 in Hugo. In 2023 alone, the Choctaw Nation Wellness Centers received 453,234 visits from tribal members and CNO associates.

The Choctaw Nation has several programs designed to monitor health and give tips to living a long and happy life.

The Wellness Centers, along with tribal clinics, Diabetes Wellness Centers, and behavioral health centers, offer our tribal members easy access to life-saving care and wellness programs.

We all have plans and events we would like to achieve – a strong body and mind is the only way to reach those goals. Without your health, you can't cross the finish line to accomplish your goals.

Taking care of yourself can sometimes seem like a daunting task, but all it takes is that first step to begin to prioritize your wellness and overall health. That first step could mean visiting with one of our many trainers at one of the Wellness Centers to get you on an achievable plan to take back your health. The Wellness Centers' programs are designed for any level of fitness whether you are just getting started or are looking for a better way to achieve your fitness goals.

We have all, at some point, let our health and fitness goals take a back seat to other things going on in our lives. It can sometimes seem impossible to get to a healthy place again after we have neglected our fitness goals. All it takes is that first step and the determination to get back to a healthier lifestyle to restart your goal. Our staff of Wellness Center trainers are there to assist you in whatever fitness goals you have in mind.

I would like to give a Yakoke Chito to the wellness staff for their hard work and dedication to sustaining our tribe through improving tribal members' overall health and well-being. Our tribe is stronger and healthier because of the efforts of these dedicated professionals.

So, I urge you to take command of your health, make an appointment with a fitness trainer on the Wellness Center page at choctawnation.com or drop by the Choctaw Wellness Center nearest you to see how your health can benefit from the services and workout tools available at our outstanding facilities. There is no better time to change your life and take control of your health than right now. And as we celebrate the 10th anniversary of several of our Wellness Centers in the coming months, I'm proud to say our Choctaw Nation Wellness Centers stand ready to help you achieve a healthier you.

2024 ELDER VETERANS MEALS

DATE	TIME
Wednesday, June 5	
Battiest	11:30 AM
Smithville	12:00 PM
Thursday, June 6	
Talihina	11:00 AM
Wednesday, June 12	
Atoka	11:00 AM
Broken Bow	11:00 AM
Coalgate	12:00 PM
Hugo	11:30 AM
Poteau	12:00 PM
Spiro	11:30 AM
Wright City	11:30 AM
Wednesday, June 19	
Antlers	12:00 PM
Crowder	11:30 AM
Durant	11:30 AM
Idabel	12:00 PM
Stigler	11:30 AM
Thursday, June 20	
McAlester	11:00AM
Tuskahoma	10:30AM
Wednesday, June 26	
Wilburton	11:00AM



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Choctaw Nation Student School & Activity Fund

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CHOCTAW NATION COLLEGE FRESHMAN YEAR INITIATIVE

McClanahan sisters blazed trails through show business and science

By Shelia Kirven

Dr. Melinda McClanahan, a globally recognized scientist, recently visited the Choctaw Nation Headquarters in Durant. She is the sister of movie, Broadway, and Hollywood star Rue McClanahan. Rue was best known for portraying Blanche Devereaux in the hit comedy series *The Golden Girls*. Dr. McClanahan's husband, Robert Porter, accompanied her on the visit.

The sisters grew up in Oklahoma, daughters of William Edwin "Bill" McClanahan, an oil field operator and WWII Chief Petty Officer for the Seabees in the Pacific theater, and Dreda Rheua-Nell (Medaris) McClanahan, a beautician.

Eddi Rue, or Rue as she was known, was born in Healdton, and Melinda, five and a half years younger, was born in Ardmore. They lived for several years of their childhood in Durant and completed high school in Ardmore, where Rue also owned and operated a dance studio.

Their Choctaw great-grandfather, Levi "Running Hawk" Airington, was born in Nashoba. He married Emma Mock and had six children. Airington lived his entire life in the Indian Territory.

When asked how she and Rue became so driven in their careers, Melinda attributed their mother as the guiding force.

"My mother was a raging independent businesswoman," said Melinda. "She was before her time and a go-getter, one of the most energetic, outgoing women you'd ever meet."

With their father being gone in the service during their growing up years, "She raised us to think it's just a given that we could do anything we wanted to do," said Melinda. "I never once heard her say, 'You can't do that because you're a girl.' It was a very free, very open environment that we were raised in. She encouraged us to be independent."

Melinda played piano from age five and had thought she would go into music. After high school, she married and began her family, then attended college part-time while her children were in school.

While at Texas Woman's University (TWU) in Denton, Texas, Melinda was required to take a biology class. She said she was hooked and changed her major to biology. She completed a bachelor's degree in 1971, a master's degree in 1972, and a doctorate in radiation biology in 1974, all with a 4.0 grade point average.

"At that time, it was kind of strange for women to be in science, so I was kind of a pioneer of the day," said Melinda.

She was hired as an assistant professor at Northeast Louisiana University.

"I was the first woman ever hired by that department," she said. There were 15 PhD tenured men on the faculty and her. "That was in 1974. Four years later, 1978, I became their boss."

Melinda became head of the Department of Biology and remained in that position for 12 years.

In 1984, The People's Republic of China invited her to Beijing to teach a three-week course at a medical school, which she said was life-changing.

In 1988, her husband took a job in New Guinea. She took a year's sabbatical and did research. In 1990, she accepted the Dean of Science and Engineering position at Highland's University in Las Vegas, New Mexico and earned an MBA degree. After four years, she felt the call for federal service and went to work for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington, D.C., as director of the Office of Exploratory Research. After five years, she moved to the Agricultural Research Service, Fort Collins, Colorado, as associate area director for the northern plains' region, overseeing eight states and 42 research labs. She returned to Washington, D.C. and became CIO for the agency, where she stayed until retirement in 2009.

In 2024-2015 she traveled to Cambodia to set up a science program for the American University of Phnom Penh. She also served as the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Soil and Water Conservation Society and as an advisor to the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES).

Melinda had four children. Her daughter MarCia is professor at a tribal college in Washington; son Brenden is a vice president for IBM, an AISES board member and very involved in Choctaw heritage; her son Shawn, an inventor and entrepreneur, passed away in 2013; and daughter Amelia is an animal communicator who travels the world lecturing and guiding safaris.

Rue McClanahan attended the University of Tulsa (T.U.), majoring in Theatre and German, making the National Honor Society, and graduating Phi Beta Kappa.

"Rue was always an actress. That's all she ever wanted to do," Melinda said.

After she graduated from T.U., Rue began acting in California's Pasadena Playhouse.

Melinda said, "It was a very hard road. It's a difficult business to break through."

She then acted in off-Broadway productions while working odd jobs to support herself.

"She never lost her focus, never ever," said Melinda. "She was always an actress, first and foremost."

When she was performing the off-Broadway production of "Who's Happy Now," world-famous screenwriter and producer Norman Lear hand-picked and cast her in a guest role in the highly acclaimed television series *All in the Family*. It was Rue's first television role.

After appearing in *All in the Family*, the actress/comedian became well-known for her roles in television sitcoms. McClanahan appeared as a regular in the 1970s hit television series "Maude" (1972-78), starring Bea Arthur. She appeared as Aunt Fran Crowley on "Mama's Family" (1983-84) and again as Blanche Devereaux in "The Golden Palace" (1992-93).

Maude and *All in the Family* were considered controversial yet critically acclaimed comedy shows. They gave a voice to real-life issues of the 1970s, including political, racial, and religious equality and gender discrimination. They provided a platform to identify and fight back against prejudices. As a woman during that time, Rue took on tough and challenging roles.

According to Melinda, it was important for Rue to be in a series that tackled those questions.

"Oh, completely. You realize Rue and the other actors around were reading lines. It was the writers and the director and producer who were really pushing these issues. The actors were just there to convey it across the screen or across the film. But she would not have done a role



Photo by Christian Toews

Dr Melinda McClanahan and husband Robert Porter visit with Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. during a recent trip to Durant, Oklahoma.



Photo Provided

Choctaw tribal member Rue McClanahan won the Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series for *The Golden Girls* in 1987.

that she didn't believe in. She had a great, very high integrity and a high moral compass. It sounds corny, but it was true of my sister," said Melinda. "She was very, very deeply devoted to justice and to equality, and to non-discrimination and to animal care and to health, just all of these social issues that we still have today. She really was glad that she could do a little bit, maybe, to open someone's eyes or heart."

Rue was probably best known as Blanche Devereaux in *The Golden Girls*, (1985-92) co-starring with Betty White, Bea Arthur, and Estelle Getty as four women living together in Miami. She won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series for that series in 1987. The four stars became television icons, and their legacies live on through television reruns and continued sales of memorabilia merchandise, even years after the show ended.

There is a certain cult-like following for *The Golden Girls*, and events are still held solely to connect fans, such as cruises and conventions. Melinda speaks at many events and says she has had people cry when they meet her, finding out that she is Rue's sister.

Rue could capture a room and command an audience. She appeared on and off Broadway, in movies, and on television.

Her final role was in the 2008 cable series "Sordid Lives." She died in New York in 2010 at the age of 76 after a series of health complications.

According to Melinda, Rue wasn't like any of the characters that she played.

"She liked to go home after work and do little crafty things. She loved animals. One time, when I visited her in Los Angeles, she had eight dogs and seven cats, I think. She cared for them; she really loved them. She was a warm-hearted family person," explained Melinda. "My kids, her nieces and nephews, she was very close to and loved them. But she did the glitzy things she had to do. She went to the Academy Awards, she went to the Emmys, she went to parties that she had to go to, and she would have an occasional party at her house. But she wasn't the type of person that had to have the constant praise and adoration. She could just go home and be a normal person."

Rue also became one of the first to help establish the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which became a household name.

Rue had one son, Mark Bish, a professional musician.

According to Melinda, Mark once commented that there was more to Rue than people knew. She was an artist and would create intricate drawings, had constant creative energy, and never turned down a request for an autograph.

When asked how Rue would feel about *The Golden Girls* still being so popular today and about the new fans of the show, Melinda said, "She would be flabbergasted! But she would also be truly thrilled about it. I talked to her about this several times after the show had been on four or five years and was really hitting on all cylinders. She said everywhere she went she talked with people who knew and loved her."

According to Melinda, Rue would say, "That's not me they love, it's Blanche they love. They don't know me."

"I would say, 'Rue, you can't separate the two. Your vivaciousness and your energy, your love for people and your sense of humor, all of that comes through in the role of Blanche,'" said Melinda. "She has some other characteristics that you don't have, but no, people love YOU."

Melinda is proud to have a sister who reached such showbiz heights.

"I was very proud of her. I was very proud of her then, and I'm proud of her now. We would call and talk on the phone; we were goofy together. As sisters, we were very close," said Melinda. "We liked to do stupid things together. We liked to exchange ridiculous, dumb gifts at Christmas and at birthdays. We really had fun together."

According to Melinda, the pair were like two peas in a pod.

"My voice sounds so much like hers; it confuses people. They think they know me, and I will say, no, you've heard my sister on television."

One of Melinda's favorite memories was of Rue sending a box of a hundred pairs of shoulder pads she had cut out of clothes as a gag birthday gift. Melinda immediately began to make a quilt out of them and sent it back to Rue for her next birthday. Rue laughingly replied that she could have used it as a stole if she had made it a bit longer. Melinda said Rue had the quilt on the back of her couch until she died.

Melinda said she and Rue's son, Mark, had talked of what they thought Rue would be proudest of in her career.

"I think she was most proud of the work she did on stage," said Melinda. "[and that she would want to be remembered as a] talented, creative, brave actress who kept her feet on the ground."

As for their Choctaw heritage, Melinda said she did the family genealogical research and found their great-grandfather, grandmother and her siblings listed on the Dawes Rolls, and their Choctaw heritage was documented from that.

"She [Rue] became very enthusiastic, knowing it wasn't just rumors and family tales," Melinda said, "She was very proud of being a Choctaw, and it's funny because in all her fame and all the movies she did and TV and stage, very few people today knew she had Choctaw heritage. So, I want to make sure people know it."

Melinda said that her sister was very smart and one of the most generous people she had ever known.

"She was a highly brilliant, intellectual woman," said Melinda. "I miss her like crazy."



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Choctaw Nation Johnson-O'Malley Program

Hudson is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month

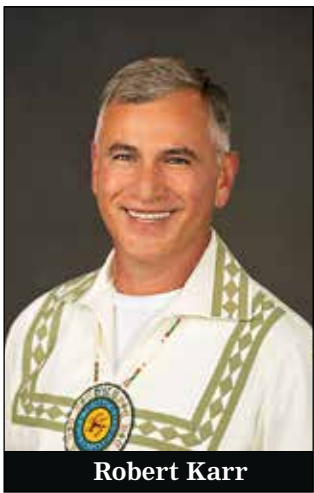
Loren Hudson of District 8, was born in Talihina, Okla., and raised in Smithville, where he graduated high school in 1955. Following graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He attended Basic Training in San Diego, Calif., and began his career as an aircraft mechanic.

He served aboard the USS Roosevelt, operating in the Mediterranean Sea for two years. He was then stationed in Norfolk, VA, for four years, where he participated in Search and Rescue missions at sea. Hudson was transferred to the Flight Test Center in San Diego, where he tested aircraft, including helicopters, jets, and propeller planes, while continuing involvement in search and rescue operations. A challenging mission was when he attempted to rescue a downed pilot whom he knew personally but was unable to reach in time. He was also assigned to Adak, Alaska, for work in radar reception. Upon returning to civilian life, Hudson worked as a garage mechanic before relocating to Spencerville, Okla., where he established his home. He became a building inspector for the Choctaw Nation Housing Authority, serving for over 16 years with dedication and commitment.

Hudson has been happily married to his wife, Adeline, over 60 years.

Adeline Frazier from District 8 was also recognized as the First Language Speaker of the Month.





District 11

Halito,
Congratulations to all the students that completed their educational goals in May and I wish you the best in your future plans! It is a busy time of the year and we've had several events in District 11 the past several months. I would like to share some of these with you and let you know what is coming up in June and July.

First, we crowned our new District 11 Princesses in April, congratulations to Little Miss Leigha Scott, Jr. Miss Jordyn Washington and Sr. Miss Alexis Futschka. All the contestants had a great pageant and performed extremely well. Let's go to the Labor Day princess pageant and support Leigha, Jordyn and Alexis. All three will be excellent representatives for District 11 for the next year.

Also, in April I attended the quarterly Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes in Thackerville. These meetings are where we learn what other tribes are doing and work with them to bring more opportunities to serve our people. One of the most rewarding events I have been to was the Adult Education Graduation ceremony in Durant April 19. I really enjoyed being able to experience the excitement of our tribal members who obtain a GED diploma and to see how proud their families were of them.

One of the best programs we initiated with the ARPA funding was the Elder (55 and older) and Disability food security program. It's been such a blessing to our members who received this food card, and we announced in April the program has been extended thru October of 2025. You can apply starting July 30, the only change will be an income limit for members between 55-74 years of age; individual income must be less than 40K to qualify. New food cards begin in October 2024. This will be the last year for the program as the ARPA dollars we use to fund these programs will be exhausted.

Quality housing continues to be a need for tribal members in our reservation and District 11. I'm excited that we will be building 20 Leap (lease to own) and 30 Affordable Rental Homes in Hartshorne and Alderson this year. We also have Independently Elderly homes in Savanna and Hartshorne. If you know of someone that would be interested, please have them apply on the Choctaw Nation website or pick up and application at the community center.

Our senior's Wednesday meal is open to all CDIB holders and their spouses. We have a great group of people who come to visit, eat, and be involved in all the activities. They have a bake sale every second Wednesday and, on the third Wednesday, a silent auction with a nice collection of items always up for bid; these are fundraisers for trips they plan during the year. On June 20, we will have a veteran appreciation meal for our senior veterans.

As always, it is an honor to be the councilman for the wonderful people of District 11. If I can help you or your family in any way, please let me know.

Yakoke, Chihowa vt Achukma! (God is Good)

American Stroke Association's Survivor Hero: Craig Northcutt

Dallas – Twelve years ago, Craig Northcutt fell off an ATV while it was moving at high speed, and his head hit the ground. He wasn't wearing a helmet. The injury caused a brain bleed that led to an ischemic stroke, and he nearly lost his life.

Immediately after the accident, Craig was able to talk to his best friend James, who was with him. Moments later, Craig started having trouble breathing, then became unresponsive. James called 911 and performed CPR until paramedics arrived. Craig was airlifted to a hospital, where he received an emergency craniotomy.

For the next three months, Craig recovered from his traumatic brain injury and stroke as an inpatient at different hospitals. The injuries severely impacted his speech, vision, cognitive abilities and ability to walk.

After three months of recovery, Craig was ready for inpatient rehabilitation therapy. Wearing a protective helmet, he arrived at the Centre for Neuro Skills in Dallas in a wheelchair. At first, Craig was hostile and refused to participate in therapy, not understanding why he needed it. Slowly he built relationships with the center's staff, who helped him realize that therapy would help him recover so he could return to the job he loved.

For nine months, Craig devoted himself to intensive neurorehabilitation. His physical therapist helped him strengthen his body, and doctors helped correct his vision. He relearned how to speak fluidly and fully regained his cognitive abilities. He began walking with a cane, which he no longer needs.



"It is an honor and a blessing to receive the 2024 Survivor Hero award. First and foremost, I thank God for granting the strength and ability to overcome a traumatic brain injury and an ischemic stroke. I'd like to dedicate this honor and inspire all the people who have or are recovering from a life-changing situation or circumstance from any type of stroke to keep walking and moving forward."

– Craig Northcutt

Less than a year after his accident, Craig returned to work for his Native American tribe, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, where he helps tribal nation members develop their career skills and find employment. He's celebrating his 30-year work anniversary.

Craig also visits high schools in Oklahoma and Texas to urge ATV riders to wear helmets, and to talk about traumatic brain injury and stroke. He has distributed more than 200 helmets to high school students to promote safety. He also shares his story with stroke survivors to help them find the motivation to recover.

The Survivor Hero Award honors an individual who has survived a stroke and used their experience to educate, inspire and bring awareness about stroke. Find out more at <https://www.stroke.org/en/help-and-support/stroke-heroes/stroke-hero-awards>.

Okla Chahta Annual Gathering

The Annual Okla Chahta Clan of California was held in Bakersfield, California on May 4 and May 5.

The event allowed California Choctaws to learn more about their culture and fellowship with other tribal members.

Chief Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr., members of Tribal Council and Choctaw Royalty were all in attendance. Representatives of various Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma programs were there to share information about tribal services and programs.



Choctaw Nation Photos

Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. and Chief Gary Batton pose for a photo with Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Royalty and the newly crowned Okla Chahta Princesses.



Choctaw Nation's Kay Jackson (left photo) and Ian Thompson (right photo) were honored for their many years of dedication to our culture and traditions.



Left, the Lord's Prayer is performed before the official ceremonies. Right, Chief Gary Batton shakes the hand of a tiny future Choctaw princess.

National Day of Prayer



Photos by Christian Toews

Employees and visitors celebrated the National Day of Prayer at the CNO headquarters office in Durant.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SERVICES

OUR GOAL | To assist our students with academic information to promote education and/or career path beyond high school.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ELIGIBILITY:

- Must be Tribal Member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- Must be attending an accredited high school, grades 9-12, and verified by the High School Student Services staff
- Each student must have a signed Student Record Release form on file with the Choctaw Nation High School Student Services program

SERVICES AVAILABLE

- Ikhvna Atoksvil - Monthly School Workshops
- Student Academic & Career Advising
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Scholarship Information & Workshops
- Student Academic & Career Advising
- ACT Prep Workshops
- Individualized Development Plans

REIMBURSEMENTS: (until funds are depleted)

- ACT/SAT Test Fees
- ACT/SAT Study Guides (up to \$20)
- ACT/SAT Prep Workshops (up to \$30)
- Drivers Education Courses (up to \$100)
- AP Test Fees
- Career Tech Expenses (up to \$100)
- Post-Secondary Fees (up to \$100)
- Cap & Gown (up to \$50)

Scan to learn more about the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 800.522.6170 OR EMAIL HIGHSCHOOLSTUDENTSERVICES@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation High School Student Services

WHELOCK FEASIBILITY SURVEY

Take the Wheelock Academy Feasibility Survey and let our architects and the Tribe know your ideas for how this important historic site could be reused. The short survey will take only a few minutes to complete.

Scan to take the survey

TO TAKE THE SURVEY, VISIT [CHOCTA.WS/REUSE-SURVEY](https://chocta.ws/reuse-survey)

Choctaw Nation Wheelock Academy Historic Site

CELEBRATE CHOCTAW CULTURE

JULY 27, 2024 | 10:30AM - 4PM
1919 HINA HANTA WAY, CALERA, OK 74730

The Choctaw Cultural Center is celebrating three years of sharing the Choctaw Journey. Join us for special demonstrations and classes, a new Champuli menu, contests, and more.

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

CHOCTAWCULTURALCENTER.COM

NOTES & EVENTS

Livingston Buck and Angeline Mitchell-White Reunion
 48th annual Livingston Buck and Angeline Mitchell-White Reunion will be held June 22, 2024, at the Dale Cox Community Center, in Poteau, from 10:00 until?. Come early and visit. We will eat at noon. Bring a covered dish and/or dessert, maybe even a liter of pop, tea, or lemonade. Also bring your old pictures and your genealogy!! For more information, contact Traci Cox at 918-413-3325 or Kim White-Robertson at 918-647-6153 or look us up on the family Facebook page, Livingston Buck & Angeline Mitchell White Family. Hope to see you at the reunion!

Dear Editor,

I am a proud member of the Choctaw Nation and the founder of The DigitalFableForge.com. I am excited to announce our Kickstarter campaign aimed at bringing digital storytelling to life. Our project harnesses the power of technology to create immersive, interactive narratives. We believe it will inspire creativity and foster a love for storytelling within our community. We humbly ask for your support in spreading the word about our campaign. Any contribution, big or small, especially sharing our campaign with others, would be greatly appreciated. <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/digitalfableforge/732425908?ref=edoiat>

Sincerely,
 Nathaniel Church

Sovereignty Symposium

The Sovereignty Symposium is an international event held for the past 36 years in Oklahoma to provide a forum in which ideas concerning common legal issues among those in the legal professions, federal and state officials, and the state's Native American tribes can be exchanged in a scholarly, non-adversarial environment. It was originally established by the Oklahoma Supreme Court and now transferred fully to Oklahoma City University and our School of Law.

The move to OCU came about because of the institution's long history within its School of Law of teaching and working in Oklahoma's Native American tribal community. OCU law houses the American Indian Law and Sovereignty Center as well as the American Indian Wills Clinic. We are also currently working with many tribes on a new sovereignty institute as well as language revitalization efforts and technology in schools, both in conjunction with Apple.

This year's symposium will take place June 11-12, 2024, at the Skirvin Hilton Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City. Titled "A New Beginning," the keynote speaker will be Geoffrey Standing Bear, principal chief of the Osage Nation. We also are looking forward to Southern Nation and their featured guest, the Osage Tribal Singers, who performed at the Oscars, playing at this year's Opening Ceremony on Tuesday, June 11th at 1:15pm. For more information or to register to attend, please go to thesovereigntysymposium.com.



EOSC Native Americans Who Code Summer Camp
 For incoming 8th-12th grade students June 10-13, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. at Eastern Oklahoma State College 1301 West Main Street | Wilburton, OK 74578. The camp is open to both beginner and experienced coders Learn Web Design or Drone Technology with Python. There is no cost to attend and space is limited. Register online by June 7 by scanning the QR code. Questions? Contact Brenda Strange | bstrange@eosc.edu or Kellje Semeski | ksemeski@eosc.edu.



OILS Choctaw Nation Outreach Events

OILS will be available to provide answers to legal questions and take applications for legal services. OILS cannot provide advice if you currently have an attorney. We cannot provide advice for criminal matters involving the state district courts. OILS must follow federal poverty guidelines to provide services. Wilburton Choctaw Community Center - June 5, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Hugo Choctaw Community Center - June 26, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Poteau Choctaw Community Center - July 10, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. www.oilsonline.org, 405.943.6457, 800.658.1497 (In-State Only)



HONOR GUARD
 — POSITIONS AVAILABLE —

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

VETERANSADVOCACY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
 ♦ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ♦

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

May 11, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER
 2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
 3. ROLL CALL
 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session April 13, 2024
 5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #8 – Loren Hudson
 - b. First Language Speaker of the Month, District #8 – Adeline Frazier
 6. PUBLIC COMMENTS – None
 7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
 8. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Equipment
 - b. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles
 - c. Approve the Application for the FY24 Preservation Reinvestment Initiative for Community Enhancement (PRICE) Competition
 - d. Approve Application for the FY24 Native Public Health Resilience (NPHR) Grant
 - e. Amend the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Public Health and Safety Code
 - f. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Harlan Wright to Serve on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans
 - g. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Dr. Amanda Chisum-Price to Serve on the Indigenous Innovation and Health Equity Tribal Advisory Committee
 - h. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Tasha Mitchell to Serve as a Member of the Oklahoma Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board
 - i. Resolution Naming Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Delegates to the National Congress of American Indians
 - j. Repeal CB-13-24 and Approve a Resolution for the Certification of Unserved Areas for the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program Grant Repeal
 - k. CB-09-24 and Approve Application for the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program
 9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
 10. OLD BUSINESS
 11. ADJOURNMENT
 12. CLOSING PRAYER
- All votes passed unanimously

Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna
Chun Language Lesson

Questions in Choctaw

Questions that do not begin with Choctaw questions words, but begin with "Did you?", will come at the end of the sentence with either "ha" and "tuk o", which are interchangeable.

Ish chompa ha/tuk o?	Did you buy/purchase it?
Ish hihla ha/tuk o?	Did you dance?
Ish nukshobli ha/tuk o?	Did you scare him/her/it?
Ish holissochi ha/tuk o?	Did you write it?
Ish kanchi ha/tuk o?	Did you sell it?
Ish im atahli ha/tuk o?	Did you provide for them?
Ish ikhana ha/tuk o?	Did you know him/her?

The sentences below include a noun with the same questions from 1-7.

Shulush himona ish chompa ha/tuk o?	Did you buy/purchase new shoes?
Chi kana ish iba hihla ha/tuk o?	Did you dance with your friend?
Chim vlla ish nukshobli ha/tuk o?	Did you scare your child?
Chiki ya ish i holissochi ha/tuk o?	Did you write to your father?
Chi kaa ish kanchi ha/tuk o?	Did you sell your car?
Ohoyo ma ish ikhana ha/tuk o?	Did you know that woman?
Anusi ish im atahli ha/tuk o?	Did you provide them with a place to sleep?

www.choctawschool.com

JUROR SUMMONS

Choctaw Nation tribal members, spouses of tribal members, and any Choctaw Nation associate residing within Choctaw Nation territory may be summoned to jury duty with the Choctaw Nation court system.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

LIFE IS BETTER WITH BLOOD DONORS

Every two seconds, someone in our community urgently needs blood. This could be a child battling cancer, a trauma victim, a patient undergoing surgery, or someone with a chronic illness.

Imagine the hope, relief and second chance your donation can bring them and their families.

By becoming a blood donor, you can become a lifeline for those who desperately need it.

Join the Annual Blood Drive Challenge and help save a life.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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
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 of the

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
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Kristina Humenesky, Senior Director
Kellie Matherly, Content Development Director
Kendra Wall, Content Development Manager
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www.ChoctawNation.com
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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.



EMPLOYMENT TRAINING SERVICES

Do you need assistance finding a job or paying for job training?

The 477 Employment Training Services aim to help people succeed in the workforce by providing opportunities for employment, education and training.

Services are available within **Choctaw Nation Reservation.**



Scan to learn more and to apply!

Choctaw Nation 477 Program

Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association & Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund

The Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association offers small business, home, home improvement and agriculture loans. The Choctaw Revolving Loan Program offers micro-loans, available for emergency home improvements and small businesses.

For more information, please contact Susan Edwards at (580) 924-8280 ext. 2161, ext. 2158 or toll-free (800) 522-6170.

Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association Loan

To Be Eligible to Apply:

- Must live within the 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation
- Must possess a CDIB card from a federally recognized tribe

Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund

To Be Eligible to Apply:

- Must live within the 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation
- Must possess a CDIB card from the Choctaw Nation

If you're interested in applying for a loan, a representative will be at the:
 Smithville Community Center
 June 14, 2024
 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.

JONES ACADEMY Graduating Class of 2024

Jones Academy proudly announces its graduating class of 2024.

Founded in 1891 by the Choctaw Nation, Jones Academy is a no-cost American Indian boarding school located four miles north of Hartshorne in Eastern Oklahoma. The school is nestled among 540 acres of rolling pastures and trees at the foot of the Pocahontas Mountains in Oklahoma's Ouachita Mountain range.

Approximately 200 students attend grades 1st-12th each year from tribal nations across the United States, in particular our neighboring communities in Oklahoma. There is no fee for students to attend Jones Academy. Admission includes travel, housing, and meals.

Jones Academy and its partners are transforming learning experiences for Native youth by helping them discover life pathways and cultivate a sense of cultural identity.

Education at this American Indian boarding school isn't only about book knowledge. It's also about the life lessons that create mature, balanced, responsible and compassionate adults.



Cylas Christian Baker, 18, born to Vanessa Niehaus and Damon Baker, is the nephew of Debbie James from Talihina, Okla. and he holds enrollment in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Demonstrating exemplary conduct, Cylas has been a dedicated student at Jones Academy for seven years, often assuming leadership roles among his peers. Serving as the vice-president of the Unity Youth Council at Jones Academy, he represented the school at the prestigious Unity Conference in Washington, D.C., in July 2023. During his time at Hartshorne High School, Cylas was a valued member of the varsity basketball team for four years and was voted basketball king. Compassionate and empathetic, he possesses a deep concern for the homeless and the underprivileged. With a passion for hands-on work, he is set to commence his studies in Electrical Construction Technologies at Oklahoma State University-Information Technology in Okmulgee, aspiring to pursue a career as an electrician.



Errika Lee Lowe, 18, is the daughter of Melanie Lowe of Coalgate, Okla. and the late Edward Carl Lowe. Her maternal grandparents are Bernice and Naman Vick of Olney, Okla. Errika's paternal grandparents are Joanna and Edwin Lowe of Happyland, Okla. She is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of North Dakota. This was Errika's first year at Jones Academy. At Hartshorne High School, she was an active member of Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, the CNO Project RISE and Yearbook. Errika developed a passion for participating in the school's service projects and relished the opportunities to help others in the community. She loves "all things artistic, creative and culinary." Errika has applied at Oklahoma State University-Information Technology in Okmulgee and will work toward an associate in applied science degree in Culinary Arts starting in the fall. Errika would like to take her culinary skills abroad and work as a chef aboard a cruise liner.



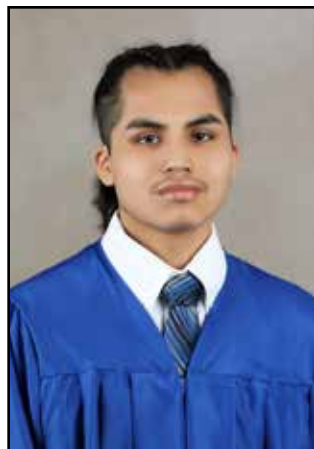
Anthony Bryce Robinson, 18, is the son of the late Phil Robinson. His sister, Ashrhonda Robinson, is Anthony's legal guardian from Choctaw, Miss. Anthony is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. As a student at Jones Academy, he served as a Unity Youth Council officer and represented the school at the American Indian Science and Engineering Society conferences in Palm Springs, Calif. (2022) and in Spokane, Wash. (2023.) Anthony competed with the Jones Academy robotics Botball team and was a member of the stickball club. His best attributes are that Anthony is a hard worker and delights in helping others. He volunteered in the evenings in the kitchen and assisted the staff with serving and cleaning up the cafeteria. Anthony has been accepted at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan. to study Media Communications and follow his passion of becoming a professional photographer.



Whitney Lynn Grizzle, 18, is the daughter of Herbert and Terry Grizzle of Pocola, Okla. She is a tribal member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. While in high school, Whitney was active in several educational programs including Upward Bound, GEAR UP, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, Girl Scouts of America, Lion's Club, the CNO Project RISE, the CNO Youth Advisory Board, and the Jones Academy Unity Youth Council. Through taking part in these organizations, Whitney was able to develop leadership skills and assist communities through service projects. She was also able to travel frequently, touring New York City, Washington D.C., Dallas, Houston, Galveston, and Denver. Whitney was enrolled in Teacher Prep/Early Care and Education (TPEC) at the Kiamichi Technology Center in McAlester, Okla. and was a member of the National Technical Honor Society and a Star Ambassador. She was chosen by her peers as the 2024 Jones Academy Prom Queen. Whitney has dreams of operating a daycare on a cruise liner and traveling the world. She has registered to attend classes in the fall at Carl Albert State College where she will work toward her Associate of Arts Degree in Child Development.



Isabel Marisol Lujano, 19, is the daughter of Ernestine Bearshead of Tulsa, Okla. She is a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. Isabel has been a resident of Jones Academy since the first grade. She is Hartshorne High School's Salutatorian for the 2024 graduating class. Isabel was in the Oklahoma Honor Society and on the Hartshorne High School Superintendent's Honor Roll. During her years at Jones Academy, she was a member of the school's Unity Youth Council, serving as its 2023-2024 chapter's president and as a representative at the 2023 Unity Conference in Washington D.C. Isabel participated in the Academy's 4-H program, garnering numerous awards and honors in hog shows through the years. She was also active in GEAR UP and the Choctaw Nation Project RISE programs. Isabel was enrolled in Teacher Prep/Early Care and Education (TPEC) at the Kiamichi Technology Center in McAlester, Okla. and received her Teacher Assistant Certification. Isabel expresses gratitude for the 12 years she has attended Jones Academy. She is thankful for all the "opportunities and the guidance" she has received in the place she called home. Isabel has been accepted at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., where she will pursue a degree in social work starting in the fall.



Dreshawn Kane Williams, 18, is the son of Joshua Williams and Cassandra Stephens of Philadelphia, Miss. He is the grandson of Ruby Williams and Earl Thomas. He is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. While a student at Jones Academy, Dreshawn was a member of the stickball team and excelled in robotics Botball competitions. This spring, the team placed in the top 10 overall and won the Judges Choice Award for their robot design at the 2024 Oklahoma Regional Tournament. At Hartshorne High School, he was a sprinter in track and field. He was also on the high school Principal's Honor Roll, was Jones Academy's Student of the Month in August, and the Jones Academy Prom King. Dreshawn has registered at East Central Community College in Decatur, Miss., where he plans to pursue a career in Early Childhood Education as a Private Childcare Provider.

Due to space limitations, the Biskinik does not run submitted high school graduation or GED announcements.

Jones Academy is owned and operated by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and Adult Education is a Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma program; this is why these graduates are featured in the Biskinik.



Fichik Malanta Willis, 18, is the daughter of Samantha Frazier of Carthage, Miss. and the late Jonah Willis. Fichik is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. During her years at Jones Academy, she was a member of the school's STEAM Program and the robotics Botball team. Fichik was an officer on the Unity Youth Council and a member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society. She was a representative of Jones Academy at the AISES symposia in Palm Springs, Calif. (2022) and in Spokane, Wash. (2023.) Fichik was also a representative at the Unity Conference in Washington D.C. (2023.) She participated in Botball team competitions in St. Augustine, Fla. and in Moore, Okla. Fichik was a member of the Jones Academy stickball team as well as the 4-H Club where she participated in livestock judging and public speaking contests. At Hartshorne High School she was active in track and field and was on the high school honor roll. Fichik was also a member of the Oklahoma Honor Society and was one of Jones Academy's best ambassadors, evangelizing several of her friends to come to school in Oklahoma. Fichik lives every day by her late father's words encouraging her to expand her horizons, to travel, to get an education and to faithfully serve others. She plans to attend Ft. Lewis College in Durango, Colo. and pursue a degree in law.



Kaya Leesann Zimiga, 17, is the daughter of Thedna Zimiga of Wanblee, S.D. Kaya is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe of South Dakota. In her years at Hartshorne High School, she took part in GEAR UP, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, and the CNO Project RISE. This spring, Kaya was selected to attend an underwater robotics certification course in San Diego, Calif. The trip was sponsored by GEAR UP in partnership with Stanford University. The group toured San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge and Pier 39. Kaya has also traveled with the RISE group to Washington, D. C., and New York City. Kaya loves history and the machinations of politics and government. Her ambitions are humble. She aspires to become president of the United States. She will attend classes in the fall at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan. After finishing her associate degree, she will transfer to the University of Kansas and work on her bachelor's in political science.



NAN ANOLI

"an announcer, newsman, reporter, publisher"

STAY UP-TO-DATE with what's happening in the Choctaw Nation by subscribing to our weekly email list.

Receive information on available programs and services, upcoming events and so much more!

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FOR MORE INFORMATION



Dodson graduates from Texas A&M

Congratulations Colby Dodson! He got his Bachelors at Texas A&M in Agricultural Economics. Now Working on his Master in Agricultural Economics. Thank you Choctaw Nation for all the scholarships.



Marshall graduates from OU

Abbygail Marshall graduated on May 11 from the University of Oklahoma. She earned a degree in supply chain management and is currently exploring job opportunities.



Casey graduates from Ball State

Amber Leah Casey graduated on May 4, 2024 from Ball State University with her Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science. Her concentration is in Cybersecurity and Secure Software Design. Pictured with her are her children, Eva and Flynn, also members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.



"I would like to thank the amazing people at the Higher Education Program," said Casey. "I could not have finished college without their help. I want to encourage everyone who wants to pursue an education: tikba ihiya-keep going. It is never too late."

Brooks graduates from SNU

Ashleigh Lauren Brooks recently graduated from Southern Nazarene University with a Bachelor's in Exercise Science and Pre-Physical Therapy. Ashleigh played rugby in high school and attended SNU on an athletic scholarship.



She is pursuing a doctorate in Physical Therapy. She has a great love for her Savior and a great pride of her Choctaw heritage. We are so very proud of her and her accomplishments thus far. We cannot wait to see what The Lord has in store for her.

Stockham graduates from KWU

Eric Stockham is a 2023 graduate of Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina, Kansas with a Bachelor of Arts in Emergency Management.



After working for a year in private security, he will be reporting to the Southern Region of the AmeriCorp NCCC in Vicksburg, Mississippi in July 2024 where he will be working for 10 months with the United State Forest Service. Eric will be applying his emergency management degree as he learns wildland fire fighting, forest preservation, and incident command.

Mason is Masonic Student of Today

Allison Mason receives the Masonic Student of Today Award. This award is voted on by faculty and administration and presented by the Masonic Lodge (#129 for our area).



One boy and one girl are selected who exemplify leadership, scholarship and citizenship. Allison is graduating the 8th Grade at Calera Schools, she is a tribal member, and an active participant in many programs: YAB, Calera Pom Squad, academic team, and choir.

Cokeley-Dan graduates from Northeastern

Rebecca Cokeley-Dan, graduated from Northeastern State University with a Master's Social Work on May 20, 2024.



"Many thanks to the Choctaw Nation for their assistance on her journey. We are very proud of her. CHOCTAW PROUD." – Family of Rebecca Cokeley-Dan.

Krivanek graduates from OU

Logan Krivanek graduated with Honors from the University of Oklahoma Physicians Associate (PA) program last October.



Her undergraduate degree from OU was in Psychology with a minor in Native American studies. During her studies she took classes where she learned the Choctaw language.

Everyone in the family enjoyed hearing her and her great grandfather speak in Chahta. She finished her entire academic career never dropping below a 4.0 GPA.

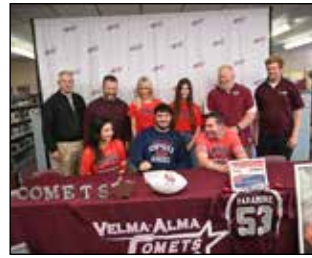
She has accepted a job and is working in Pediatric Cardiac ICU.

Paramore graduates from Cameron



Macey Paramore, member of the Choctaw Nation and sister to Cooper Paramore, graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education from Cameron University on May 2.

Paramore signs with Panhandle State Football



Cooper Paramore recently signed to play football at Panhandle State University this fall.

In addition to football, Paramore throws discus in track. He currently ranks second in Class 2A.

He is also a member of FCA and a member of Assumption Catholic Church.

He was also selected to play in the 2024 Native American All State Football game in June and was named to the Oklahoma Coaches Association as an All-Star by Class football player.

Bastion graduates from OSU-OKC

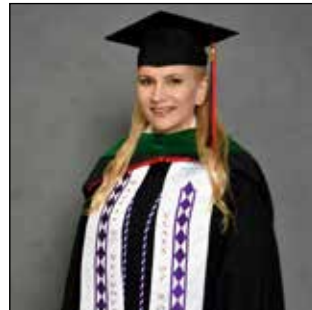


Kerry Bastion graduated with a degree in Radiologic Technology from OSU-OKC on May 10, 2024.

She will be working at Mercy in Ada and pursuing additional certification in Mammography and Bone Densitometry.

"I want to sincerely thank the Choctaw Nation for their support and help during this journey. I am truly grateful," said Bastion.

Smith graduates from CSU



Jennifer Michelle Smith (Arledge) recently graduated with a Master of Science with distinction in Assistive Technology and Human Services from California State University, Northridge

"I want to sincerely thank the Choctaw Nation for their support and help during this journey. I am truly grateful.

My life's journey has been a testament to resilience and transformation. In 1999 my mentor, Dr. Woolbright, encouraged me to enroll in my local community college. Despite struggles with trauma and learning disabilities as a child, I followed his direction and started my educational journey. Through the support of the Disabled Student Center at Orange Coast College, I discovered my intelligence and pursued higher education.

In 2002, I earned an Associate in Arts Degree, laying the groundwork for academic success. Subsequent achievements included Dean's and President's List honors. In 2006 I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science, with an emphasis in Comparative Politics and a minor in Anthropology from California State University, Long Beach. Additionally, for academic excellence, I was inducted into Pi Sigma Alpha the National Political Science Honor Society. I continued to excel, and recently earned a Master of Science Degree with distinction in Assistive Technology and Human Services from California State University, Northridge as well as, inducted into Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

In 2012, motherhood brought new purpose and joy to my life, reinforcing my commitment to serving others. Volunteer work at Phoenix House Detox and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center since 2020 furthered this dedication. Now, aiming for certification as an Assistive Technology Professional (ATP) through RESNA, I'm driven to specialize in custom rehab and wheelchair fitting.

With determination and the immeasurable amount of support I have received from my family, friends, mentors, and the Choctaw Nation my long-held aspirations are being achieved, guided by a belief in the power of service and community."

- Jennifer Michelle Smith (Arledge)



Norman graduates from UA

Tribal member, Holly (Parker) Norman, graduated from the University of Arkansas December of 2023 with a masters in education.



Mercer graduates from SWOSU

Don and Michelle Mercer are proud to announce the graduation of their daughter, Arissa Anne Mercer, as she obtains her PhD in Biomedical Science from Tulane Medical School.

Arissa obtained her Bachelor's of Science in Microbiology from Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She loves the outdoors, sports, and music; and is the great-great-granddaughter of an original tribal enrollee.

Gibson graduates from UT Tyler



Kevin Gibson graduated on May 4 from University of Texas at Tyler. Graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Art and a double minor in Curatorial Studies and Art History.

He will be attending Baylor in the Fall to start on his Master's program in Museum Studies.

Worley to play in All State Game



Jaxon Worley, has been Nominated and Selected to play in the 2024 Native American All State game. The game will be played on Memorial Field in El Reno June 7 at 7:00 pm.

Jaxon Worley, Choctaw, Osage, and Cherokee, is the son of Trent and Ashlee Worley of Kiefer, and the grandson of Gary and Carol Kliesen of Grayhorse.

McDonald wins FCCLA State



Brannon McDonald, a Choctaw tribal member, attending his Freshman year at Spiro High School, won State Champion at the FCCLA State Conference in Tulsa in April.

He presented on human trafficking for his presentation titled "Operation Freedom" in the Professional Presentation category. In June, he will travel to Seattle Washington to represent the state of Oklahoma at the FCCLA National Conference.

Shoptese turns 18



Bryce Lee Shoptese is graduating Ponca City High School May 24, 2024. He has received his welding certifications through Pioneer Technology Center, he plans to travel with a welding career.

His parents are Trent and Tiffany Shoptese of Ponca City, Grandparents are Mike and Michaelina Murphy of Ponca City, Great Grandmother is Morene Cummins Gooch of Ponca City.

Boone keeps fit



Lillie Boone, 85, is an Atoka County District #10 resident who works part-time at the Atoka wellness Center and Wednesdays at the Choctaw Community Center. She loves to fish with her son Rick Moore in her spare time.

Boone caught this white buffalofish, estimated to weigh 20-30 pounds, on April 15th while fishing at Atoka Lake. She had been fishing for about an hour when she felt a few nibbles on the line and then it just took off, she said. After about 15 minutes of working to get the fish in, she was surprised to see what she had caught, thinking it would instead be a catfish.

She said, "I was very excited to catch one that big. I owe it all to the Lord and my help."

Boone recently also walked in the Tvshka Homma Walk-A-Thon in the 85 and above age group and was the only female in her category to walk.

When asked what her advice is to others on how to keep going in their senior years, she said not to just sit around. "I go to the Wellness Center and do chair volleyball two days a week." She said if there are any challenges at the community center, she is a part of them. "If I can do them, I'm in them. I thank the Lord for my health every day. If it weren't for Him, I couldn't do anything."

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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

APPLICATION NOW OPEN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Higher Education Program application for Summer is now open. Apply now through June 15.

For more information, visit choctawnation.com/services/higher-education

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CNO Adult Education Class of 2024 Graduates

By Christian Chaney

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma held the Adult Education Graduation Ceremony on April 19, 2024.

The ceremony was hosted at the Choctaw Event Center and was the largest graduating class in program history. It was an exciting day for the 167 graduates who worked hard to earn their High School Equivalency Diploma.

The graduates reside from all over the United States, and the Choctaw Nation employs many after receiving their diplomas.

Among the graduates was a father and daughter and a brother and sister.

The ceremony was a testament to the dedication and determination of the graduates and a proud moment for the Choctaw Nation community.

Each graduate had a different journey to receiving their diploma.

Some persevered for years to complete the program.

The age gap between graduates in this class ranged from 16 to 56.

Solomon Tonihka, one of the graduates, took the opportunity to share his journey to obtaining his GED with Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

He encouraged those considering pursuing a GED, stating, "At my age, if I can get my GED, anybody, even the young ones, can. They can pursue whatever career they want to. Just keep pushing."

He thanked the Choctaw Nation for reaching out to him to continue his journey to receiving his GED.

Solomon Tonihka's story is a powerful reminder and an inspiration to never give up on your goals.

Guest speaker Kevin Roberts, Program Coordinator for the Choctaw Nation Veterans Advocacy Program, inspired graduates with his testimony.

Kevin is a 1st Lieutenant in the Oklahoma Army National Guard. Before joining the military, he earned a bachelor's degree in education.

However, Kevin's journey is far from typical. He struggled to find motivation and ambition, but with his loyal dog, Apollo, by his side, he enlisted in the National Guard, viewing physically challenging obstacles as opportunities for growth.

Kevin's story is a testament to the power of determination and the human spirit.

Kevin is a devoted husband and father who finds joy in simple pleasures. His story reminded graduates of the power of perseverance and faith.

In his closing remarks, Kevin advised the graduates, "As you move forward from this moment, I urge you to carry with you the lessons you've learned along the way. Remember the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity, the value of hard work and dedication, and the significance of never giving up on your dreams."

Ashley James, Adult Education Director, said, "We are so proud of all of them and their accomplishments, and we can't wait to see their continued successes."

To learn more about the Adult Education program, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/adult-education/>.

The Choctaw Nation extends its heartfelt congratulations to all the graduates and expresses gratitude to their families for their unwavering support throughout the past year.

List of graduates:

Brittany Artman, Bentonville, Ark.
Jacob Barkley, Calera, Okla.
Melissa Barnett, Kansas City, Missouri
Kara Batchelor, Coalgate, Okla.
Shayna Bennett, Broken Arrow, Okla.
Richard Berryhill, Broken Arrow, Okla.
Payton Bevers, Ada, Okla.
Sarah Bice, Wright City, Okla.
David Billy, Waurika, Okla.
Alexis Billy, Whitewright, Texas
Amanda Blevins, Wedgefield, S.C.
Jaron Bloxham, Okla. City, Okla.
Curtis Boswell, San Antonio, Texas
Linda Brassfield, Okla. City, Okla.
Stephanie Bringinggood, Hartshorne, Okla.
Olivia Brown, Bossier City, La.
Shawn Brown, Friendship, Texas
Amber Brumley, Pauls Valley, Okla.
Emily Burt, McAlester, Okla.
Rigo Bussey, Norman, Okla.
Marlena Calvillo, Whitesboro, Texas
Elijah Campbell, Ardmore, Okla.
Rhyanna Cannon, Moore, Okla.
Shelby Chaverria, Dallas, Texas
Bryce Cheadle, Atoka, Okla.
Kara Clearman, Ardmore, Okla.
Kalista Cogburn, Durant, Okla.
Destinee Conover, Layton, Utah
Jaden Converse, Ardmore, Okla.
Deana Cotton, Newalla, Okla.
Breana Cox, Andrews, Texas
Drenda Crosslin, Pocola, Okla.
Taylor Crowson, Hartshorne, Okla.
Miranda Daniels, Idabel, Okla.
Tye Davis, McAlester, Okla.
Anna Dillion, Catoosa, Okla.
Karter Dodds, Okla. City, Okla.
Kaci Duer Gainesville, Texas
Maddison Duncan, Stigler, Okla.
Benjamin Duran, Ada, Okla.
Arielle Edwards, Tulsa, Okla.
Hailey Edwards, Luther, Okla.
Wesley Edwards League City, Texas
River Edwards, Lequire, Okla.
Kelley Ellison, Bartlesville, Okla.
Cheyenne Espericueta, Durant, Okla.
Robin Flores, Harrah, Okla.
Rickey Floyd, Wapanucka, Okla.
Adrian Franklin, Okla. City, Okla.
Rebecca Frazier, Atoka, Okla.
Mary Friend, Tulsa, Okla.
Laila Garcia, Harrison, Ark.
Jerry Golden, Wilson, Okla.
Melinda Golden, Ardmore, Okla.
Maddie Gonzalez, Durant, Okla.
Micah Gonzales-Yuen, Albuquerque, N.M.



Photo Provided

Choctaw Nation celebrated the graduation of the Adult Education Class of 2024 on April 19, 2024.

Edward Gray, Ada, Okla.
Trenton Green, Poteau, Okla.
Cameron Griffin, Moore, Okla.
Abigail Griffith, Tulsa, Okla.
Logan Griffith, Decatur, Texas
Joseph Hallman, Antlers, Okla.
Ariel Hallmark, Woodward, Okla.
Gaylon Hampton, Spiro, Okla.
Patty Hankins, Idabel, Okla.
Holly Hanus, Ardmore, Okla.
Desaree Harjo, Ada, Okla.
Inola Henderson, Cameron, Okla.
Jordan Henderson, Stratford Okla.
Bailey Henington, McAlester, Okla.
Joshua Herring, Wynnewood, Okla.
Caleb Hogan, Frederick, Okla.
Seth Hogan, Frederick, Okla.
Kerri Horton, Westville, Okla.
Hailey Hubbard, Heavener, Okla.
Kallie Hudson, Antlers, Okla.
Jerry Hurd, Jr., Poteau, Okla.
Kristina Hurst, Ardmore, Okla.
Harlie Ivey, Cushing, Okla.
Alecia Jacoway, Durant, Okla.
Veronica Jasso, Durant, Okla.
Emily Jefferson, Broken Bow, Okla.
Abigail Johnson, Hartshorne, Okla.
Amaya Johnson, Tulsa, Okla.
Skylin Jordan, Durant, Okla.
Chayza Keene, Coalgate, Okla.
Nicole Kilgore, Ada, Okla.
Shyanna Knight, Durant, Okla.
Hunter Kuykendall, Broken Bow, Okla.
Alyssa Lara, Coolidge, Ariz.
Brandi Larkins, Boswell, Okla.
Nakoa Lennon, Durant, Okla.
Taylor Lennox, Mount Vernon, Texas
Jennifer Lewis, Durant, Okla.
Waylon Lewis, Durant, Okla.
Jada Marable, Fernley, Nev.
Katrina Martin, Troy, Texas
Cristi McBride, Wanette, Okla.
Kenneth McCarroll, Hartshorne, Okla.
Brittany McCarthy, Mount Vernon, Ill.
Makella McCartyDavis, Okla.
Meghan McClure, Broken Arrow, Okla.
Haylee McCoy, Broken Bow, Okla.
Emma McKinney, Stigler, Okla.
Ashley McLemore, Hillsboro, Ore.
Marcell Meadows, Tulsa, Okla.
Maria Medina, McAlester, Okla.
Damian Mendez, Stigler, Okla.
Lacie Mickler, Henderson, Nev.
Zachary Miles, McLoud, Okla.
Garrett Miller, McAlester, Okla.
Hillary Moore, Durant, Okla.

Tyler Moore, Leonard, Texas
Morgan Moore, Owasso, Okla.
Gianna Morris, Paris, Texas
Brandy Morris, Poteau, Okla.
Levi Muncey, Red Oak, Okla.
Jason Ned, Ardmore, Okla.
Kaitlyn Nix, Broken Bow, Okla.
Tayler Ortiz, Elgin, Okla.
Kayla Ortiz, Glenn Heights, Texas
Alicia Ott, McAlester, Oklahoma
Jennifer Parker, Carthage, Texas
Silas Parker, Ft. Jones, Calif.
Jennifer Paskero, Durant, Okla.
Allison Patton, Stigler, Okla.
Alexandria Pelts, Durant, Okla.
Destiny Perrotte, Poteau, Okla.
Brianna Platz, Harker Heights, Texas
Katie Putnam, Bristow, Okla.
Debra Ring, Sherman, Texas
William Roberts, Sierra Vista, Ariz.
Cassandra Robinson, Durant, Okla.
Stephanie Rodgers, Paris, Texas
Crystal Rodriguez, Las Cruces, N.M.
Gabriel Rodriguez Oklahoma City, Okla.
Christa Rogers, Oklahoma City, Okla.
Joshua Rowland, Roseburg, Ore.
Crystal Rozzell, Pauls Valley, Okla.
Amber Sams, Durant, Okla.
Christopher Saunders, Atoka, Okla.
Kira Setliff, Portland, Ore.
Randall Singleton, Tishomingo, Okla.
Brooke Smiley, Yukon, Okla.
Shawana Smith, Durant, Okla.
Ashlyn Snead, Tahlequah, Okla.
Bryant Stapp, Oklahoma City, Okla.
Kelsey Stiles, McAlester, Okla.
Allison Stinnett, Mead, Okla.
Christopher Teague, Minco, Okla.
Solomon Tonihka, Wright City, Okla.
Troy Travis, Moore, Okla.
Chayse Tugman, Ponchatoula, La.
Jordan Turner, Durant, Okla.
Tammy Vandehey, Hillsboro, Ore.
Javier Wall, Pauls Valley, Okla.
Caitlynn Walls, Canadian, Okla.
Kimberlyn Warren, Yukon, Okla.
Amber Wells, Sapulpa, Okla.
Leah West, Rome, Ga.
Dakota Willeby, Durant, Okla.
SheenaWood, Tulsa, Okla.
Taylor Wood-Benton, Claremore, Okla.
Heaven Yanev, Healdton, Okla.
Tara Yurkovic, Camino, Calif.
Lisa Zaragoza, Blue Springs, Mo.
Valarie Zell, Coolidge, Ariz.

Inaugural class graduates from OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine at Cherokee Nation

TULSA — Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine at the Cherokee Nation will celebrate a monumental achievement on May 16 as its inaugural class of 46 medical students graduates from the country's first tribally affiliated medical school.

The commencement ceremony for both OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine and OSU-COM at the Cherokee Nation was on May 16, at the Mabee Center in Tulsa.

This milestone is the next significant step forward in addressing the health care needs of rural, underserved and tribal communities across Oklahoma.

Much like the founding of OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine in Tulsa, OSU-COM at the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah was established with the mission to train physicians dedicated to serving rural and underserved populations.

"These graduates, who have completed their training in the heart of the Cherokee Nation, embody the values of service, compassion and excellence that define both the Cherokee Nation and Oklahoma State University," said OSU Center for Health Sciences President Johnny Stephens. "Their journey has been one of dedication, perseverance, and cultural understanding. As they embark on their careers, they will carry with them the unique perspective and knowledge gained from this groundbreaking partnership."

About 35 percent of the students from the inaugural class matched with rural or tribal residency programs.

And 20 percent of the graduating class from OSU-COM at the Cherokee Nation are Native American from several tribes including the Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. It's a substantial number compared to the roughly 0.2 percent of Native American students enrolled in medical schools nationally.

"As we celebrate the historic milestone of the first class

of students graduating from the OSU College of Osteopathic Medicine at the Cherokee Nation, we honor the resilience of our ancestors who faced adversity with courage and determination. Today, their legacy lives on as this exceptional group of future doctors prepares to break barriers and forge new paths in health care," said Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. "Their dedication not only addresses the critical shortage of rural doctors but also increases the representation of Native and Cherokee physicians within our health system and other tribal health systems in this state, ensuring top-notch care rooted in culture for generations to come. Our ancestors would undoubtedly be proud of their achievements, knowing that their perseverance continues to inspire progress and healing in our communities."

Ashton Glover-Gatewood, an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation and descendant of the Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations of Oklahoma, was working as a nurse and health care administrator at the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic when she applied to be part of the first class of medical students on the new Tahlequah campus.

"I love being a member of the inaugural class. We've been through a lot as a class. I think we had a unique set of challenges, but we've really grown together; we uplift each other, and we help each other. Our faculty, staff and facilities make this a premier medical school, especially for students interested in primary care, rural health and tribal health," Gatewood said. "I also feel a responsibility to represent my tribe. I hope that my story can inspire others to continue pursuing their dreams, especially Native students and women who may not have many mentors in their communities."

For more information please contact Communications Coordinator Sara Plummer at sara.plummer@okstate.edu or call 918-561-1282.



Hartshorne duo win at fishing tournament

Jordan Lalli and Clifford Cantrell of Hartshorne High school recently competed in an Oklahoma High School Fishing Tournament in Grove, Oklahoma. The duo had a second place finish, just behind first place, with 18.06 lbs and 4 oz.



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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

Choctaw Landing
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Choctaw CAREERS

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MEDICAL SUPPORT

Did you know Jones Academy offers full medical support, including transportation and medication administration by a full-time nurse and medical coordinator? The on-campus Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health Counseling Center provides confidential outpatient counseling services, and educational group sessions assist students in adjusting to life at Jones Academy.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JONES ACADEMY, PLEASE VISIT: [JONESACADEMY.ORG](https://jonesacademy.org)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Robbie Maxville



Robbie Maxville, 80, passed away April 4, 2024. Robbie was born June 22, 1943, in Hartford, Ark., to Leroy and Robbie Sewell in Hartford, Arkansas. She was preceded in death by her husband Bobby Maxville; and her parents. Robbie is survived by her son Timothy Wallace Maxville and spouse Heather; grandchildren Saige and Timothy Maxville; sister Sandy Prather and spouse James; brother Phillip Sewell; and a host of nephews, nieces, and cousins. For the full obituary, please visit [Dillon Funeral Home.](#)

Hazel Estelle Lee



Hazel Estelle Lee, 90, passed away April 7, 2024. Hazel was born Oct. 3, 1933, in Ringold, Okla., to McVay Carlo Wilson and Ludie Armenta (Whisenhunt) Wilson. She was preceded in death by her parents; daughter Kim Sigbey; brothers Clark Wilson and Winston Wilson; and sister Helen "Polly" Burton. Hazel is survived by her brother Kenneth Wilson; sisters Maxine McCary and spouse J.D., and Alyene Sparks; numerous nephews, nieces, and cousins; along with a host of other friends and loved ones. For the full obituary, please visit [Biskinik.](#)

Daniel L. McMurtrey



Daniel L. McMurtrey, 78, passed away March 24th, 2024. Daniel was born March 16, 1946, in Richland, Wash., to Claude and Eunice McMurtrey. For the full obituary, please visit [Sunset Gardens.](#)

James Vernon John



James Vernon John, 90, passed away April 12, 2024. James was born March 2, 1934, in Garvin, Oklahoma. He was preceded in death by his wife Maria. James is survived by daughter Charlene Bennett and spouse Larry; son David John and spouse Gayle; grandchildren Michael Goodness, Jessica Goodness, Madyson Lawlor and spouse David, and Drayton John and spouse Brianna; great-grandchildren Presley Goodness and Allira Goodness; and many family members in Northern California, Oklahoma, and the Philippines. For the full obituary, please visit [Heritage Oakes Memorial Chapel.](#)

John R. Williams



John Robert "Johnny Bob" Williams, 77, passed away April 19, 2024. Johnny Bob was born June 21, 1946, in Evansville, IN, to John Roscoe and Rosemary Ann (Taylor) Williams. He was preceded in death by his parents; and brother Ricky Williams. Johnny Bob is survived by his wife Bobby Lou; children John Winans Williams and spouse Theresa; Bradford Brown Williams and spouse Jerri; and Elizabeth "Libby" Gandy and spouse Ken; grandchildren Connor Williams and spouse Anna, John Ross Williams, Molly Williams, Rian Williams, Peri Thomas, Cedar Thomas, Abbie Gandy, Emma Gandy; and many dear friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Winans Funeral Home.](#)

Mildred Richardson



Mildred (Millie) Gertrude Richardson, 91, passed away April 11, 2024. Millie was born March 13, 1933, in Eagletown, Okla., to Loren and Ruby Mombi. She was preceded in death by her parents; sisters Loretta Lasch and Linda Ivan; brother Benny Mombi; and daughter Terri Boring. Millie is survived by son Randy Mathers; granddaughter Jessica Saunders; grandchildren Brecken, Harper and Haven Saunders; and a host of other relatives and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Bowser Family Funeral Home.](#)

William Roscoe Gamble III



William "Bill" Roscoe Gamble III, 80, passed away April 13, 2024. Bill was born March 13, 1944, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is survived by his wife Sharon Smith Gamble; sons William Gamble IV, Adam Gamble, Brian Gamble, Brent Gamble, and Brandon Gamble; and dog Roscoe. For the full obituary, please visit [Beyers Funeral Home and Crematory.](#)

Loie Kay Livingston



Loie Kay Livingston, 88, passed away April 13, 2024. Loie Kay was born Nov. 3, 1935, in McCurtain, Okla., to Grover and Iva (Hester) Sumner. She was preceded in death by her husband George Livingston; her parents; brothers C. B. Sumner, Rex Sumner, and Ernest Sumner; and sister Doris Lewis. Loie is survived by her brother Claude Sumner; sister Twilla Thornton and spouse Jim; and many nieces, nephews, cousins and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Fisher Funeral Home.](#)

Imogene Florence Ann Terrell



Imogene Florence Ann Terrell, 97, passed away April 5, 2024. Imogene was born October 22, 1926, in Bethany, Okla., to Murray Lee Terrill and Ethel Mae (Vawter) Terrill. She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Ben Terrell; sisters Altha Lee Murray, and Vivian Seaman; and grandson Joshua White. Imogene is survived by sons Robert White and Herb White; daughters Vonda Lusk Dye, Nancy Baker, and Sandy Vigil; and many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. For the full obituary, please visit [Barnes Friederich Funeral Home.](#)

Willie Allen Bowden



Willie "Bill" Allen Bowden, 101, passed away March 25, 2024. Bill was born March 14, 1923, in Hugo, Okla., to Ruben and Annie (Williams) Bowden. He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Robert Bowden; and sister Alta Mapp. Bill is survived by his wife Helen Darlene (Perryman) Bowden; son Greg Bowden and spouse Dana; daughter Brenda Clinton; grandchildren Bryan, Lauren, and Rebecca; great-grandchildren Lane, Kendall, and Sophia; brothers Charles Bowden, Bob Bowden, and Jim Bowden; sisters Gladys Holt, Novella Shebester, Jean Cullum, and Paula Phillips; as well as a large multitude of nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews; and great-grandnieces and great-grandnephews. For the full obituary, please visit [Craddock Funeral Home.](#)

Kenneth Garland Marshall



Kenneth Garland Marshall, 82, passed away Feb. 3, 2024. Kenneth was born May 25, 1941, in Talihina, Okla., to Clyde H. and Amanda Marie Marshall. He was preceded in death by his parents; first wife Roxie Marshall; daughter Kayla Edington; and brother Clovis Marshall. Kenneth is survived by his wife Melinda; sons Kenneth G. Marshall, Jr. and spouse Sharon, and Jeff Pilcher; daughter Jennifer Pennington and spouse Chris; grandchildren Meghan Major, Cheyenne Marshall, Nic Marshall, Taylor Dorety, Madison DeHaas, Blake DeHaas, Isabella Thompson, Kyle Edington, Kolbey Jarvis, Cooper Edington, and Camey Allison; 12 great-grandchildren; sister Oleta Knowles; sister-in-law Tina Buice and spouse David; sister-in-law Hazel Marshall; and nieces, nephews, numerous other family members and many friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Bishop Funeral Home.](#)

Bobby Allen Sealy



Bobby Allen Sealy, 55, passed away April 17, 2024. Bobby was born May 26, 1968, in Talihina, Okla. to Leroy Jay Sealy and Mary Alice (Anderson) Willis. He was preceded in death by his parents; stepfather John Willis; brothers Leroy Sealy, Amos Willis, James Willis, Willie Willis, and John Willis; nephews Le Willis and Rodney Sealy; great-nephew Rylan Willis; and grandparents Sally McMillan, John Anderson, Lorene Scott, and McCormick Sealy. Bobby is survived by his sisters Roxie Whitelance and Randall Sam, Sr.; Jaxie Willis, Jolene Willis, and Barbara Willis; nieces Rhonda, Lakota, Pamela, Patricia, Cheyenne, and Brandi; nephews Kenneth, Brandon, Kevin, Jr, Eddie, Jonathan, and Thunder; numerous great-nieces, great-nephews, cousins, and other family and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Chaney-Harkins Funeral Home.](#)

Stephanie Wingfield



Stephanie Gayle (Baker) Wingfield, 54, passed away April 30, 2024. Stephanie was born April 20, 1970, in Talihina, Okla., to Aryon Elum and Ramona (Billy) Baker. She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers Marlin Baker, Aryon Elum Baker, Jr., Terry Baker, and Ricky Baker; and nephew, Bradley Lowe. Stephanie is survived by her husband Wingfield; children Marisa Hernandez. and Robert "Bobby" Wingfield, Jr. and fiancé Kelcie Avery; daughter-in-love Jade Ferguson; son-in-love Zachary Morris; grandchildren Neko Hernandez, Kiowa Hernandez, Jovani Flores, and Alivia Wingfield; siblings Joann Baker and spouse David Gill, Michelle Lowe and spouse Donny, Tina Baker; Cheryl Deramo and spouse Shane; Carol Baker Suggs; and Jeffery Baker and spouse Sherrie; along with numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins. For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home and Crematory.](#)

Sue Hubbard



Sue Hubbard, 78, passed away April 24, 2024. Sue was born March 15, 1946, in Talihina, Okla., to Williston and Miriam Samuels Samuel. She was preceded in death by her husband Galen "Sal" Hubbard; her parents; sisters Doris Stolby, and Delores Marris; and brother Timothy Samuel. Sue is survived by sons Sean Hubbard and spouse Robin, and Duane Hubbard; daughters Galenna Nelson and spouse Darrin, and Miriam Hubbard and spouse Mark; sisters Mary Etheridge and spouse Ron, and Jeannette Maytubbi; 14 grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. For the full obituary, please visit [Chapel Oaks Funeral Home.](#)

Terri Winklepleck



Terri Jean Winklepleck, 48, passed away April 29, 2024. Terri was born June 26, 1975, in McAlester, Okla., to Jerry and Janice (Adams) Holliday. She was preceded in death by her parents; son Remmington Cameron Winklepleck; grandson Caxton Jay Turnipseed; and father-in-law Jimmy Winklepleck. Terri is survived by her husband Jimmy; daughter Chelse Turnipseed and spouse Colby; son Cayce Winklepleck; grandchildren Camden Joe Turnipseed, Chett Jaxon Turnipseed, and Cilvee Jean Turnipseed; and son-in-love Jance Welch. For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home and Crematory.](#)

Norma Howard



Norma Howard, 65, passed away April 30, 2024. Norma was born Dec. 19, 1958, in Stigler, Okla., to James and Edith (Morris) Williams. She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers Ted Williams and Bigabe Williams. Norma is survived by her husband David Howard; son Daniel Howard and spouse Amy; grandchildren Daniel Howard, Jr., Hiahni Howard, Daylen Howard, and Toli Howard; siblings Leon Morris , Virginia Terrell, Topsy Williams, Imogene Wind, Ann Roach, and Van Williams; numerous nieces, nephews, and other relatives. For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home and Crematory.](#)

Eddie Keys



Eddie Ray Keys, 69, passed away April 26, 2024. Eddie was born March 10, 1955, in Kansas City, MO, to Clarence Eddie Keys and Vida Keys. He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Vi Ann Hall; and brother Larry Lucas. Survivors include wife Colleen (Miller) Keys; children Billy Keys and spouse Mandy, Angie Bird and spouse Ben, Jessie Richardson and spouse Daniel, and Gabe Keys and spouse Merritt; grandchildren Skylar, Allison, Alexis, Kennedy, Seth, Izzy, Chloe, Reid, Vida, and Miller; sister Monta Sue Richardson; sister-in-law Pearl Lucas; nieces, nephews and their families. For the full obituary, please visit [Ford and Sons Funeral Home.](#)

John Robert Hornbrook



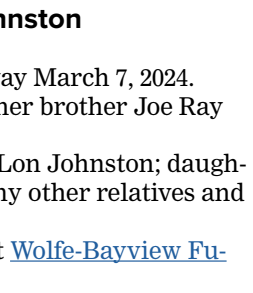
John Robert Hornbrook, 80, passed away April 29, 2024. John was born May 17, 1943, in Lawton, Okla., to John Paul and Mildred Hornbrook. He was preceded in death by his parents. John is survived by his wife Colene; children Robert and spouse Ginger, and Shellee and spouse Justin; grandsons Lucas and spouse Emily, Tristan Collins, Aidan Colline, and Noah Collins; granddaughter Addilyn Grace Hornbrook; and great-granddaughter Alberta Kay. For the full obituary, please visit [Sunset Funeral Home.](#)

Christine Sue Lofton



Christine Sue Lofton, 56, passed away Feb. 26, 2024. Christine was born on Oct. 12, 1967, in Lawton, Okla., to Robert Lee Baptiste Jr. and Vivian (Johnson) Baptiste. She was preceded in death by her father; and brothers Chris Baptiste and Kevin Murray. Christine is survived by her husband Cory Lofton; son Tyler Lofton; daughter Ronni McQueen; parents Vivian and Ronnie Murray; sisters Chasity Strebeck and spouse Donald, Cece Norman, and Elizabeth Timothy; brother Jason Murray and spouse Tiffany; nephews Brandon Strebeck, Minko Chitto Strebeck, Benny Strebeck, Riley Reedmer, and Zachary Norman; great-nephew Zion Reedmer; and great-aunt Josephine Taylor. For the full obituary, please visit [Griffin-Hillcrest Funeral Home.](#)

Janet Lorena Johnston



Janet L. Johnston, 85, passed away March 7, 2024. Janet was preceded in death by her brother Joe Ray Balack. She is survived by her husband Lon Johnston; daughter Renee (Don) Andrews; and many other relatives and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Wolfe-Bayview Funeral Home and Crematory.](#)

Obituary Policy

Obituary submissions are for Choctaw Nation tribal members only and are free of charge. The Biskinik will only accept obituary notices from funeral homes. Family members/individuals may submit funeral notices as long as the notice is from the funeral home or printed in their local newspaper through a funeral home service. Full-length handwritten notices will not be accepted. The Biskinik strives to serve all Choctaws. Therefore, any handwritten notices received will be searched online for official funeral home notices. If none are found, efforts will be made to contact the family and make arrangements for an official notice. Due to space limitations, there is a 150 word limit for obituaries. The online issue of the Biskinik will contain links to the full obituaries. Send official obituary notices to: Biskinik PO Box 1210 Durant OK 74702 or email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

ITI FABVSSA

Choctaw Removals: Indian Urban Relocation Program

Today, the Choctaw Nation has over 225,000 tribal members with more than three quarters of our members living outside the Choctaw Nation Reservation. Many families have their own stories of why they voluntarily or involuntarily left, however one of the most common stories involves moving to large cities. This month, Iti Fabvssa will delve into a later government sponsored removal for Choctaw people, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)'s Indian Urban Relocation Program.

In 1940, the US Government realized that it had not succeeded in its goal of assimilating Native people to the American way of life. Throughout the 1940's and 1950's, Congress passed laws in the effort to end its relationship with tribal nations through Indian Termination. Termination would end federal recognition of tribal governments, eliminate government support for tribal nations and end protection status of Indian-owned lands (National Archives, 2023). Although Choctaw Nation was not part of the original Termination legislation, it had its own brush with similar legislation with the federal government ending assistance for things like healthcare, education, utilities, fire and police.

To further assimilate Native people, Congress passed the Indian Relocation Act in 1956. The goal of this legislation was to create vocational training programs for Native people, which would involve moving them from their communities to large urban cities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs began the Indian Urban Relocation Program to assist relocating Indian families. Indian families were moved to major cities like: Cleveland, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle, St. Louis, Tulsa, and others. From 1950 to 1968, over 200,000 Native people were removed. Before 1956, only 6% of Native people were living in big cities and by the year 2000, more than 64% of Native people lived in

big cities (National Archives, 2023).

The Indian Urban Relocation program offered relocation assistance in the form of housing, employment, transportation, vocational training, medical insurance, and other incentives. It also offered grants for clothing, household items, night school, and other assistance. In reality, these promises were not fulfilled or continued after people moved, and many newly urban tribal families suffered from unemployment, low-end jobs, discrimination, homesickness, homelessness, and loss of traditional cultural support (ibid). Some families returned home and had issues acclimating back into their communities (ibid).

The Choctaw Nation continues to host Community Cultural Meetings in different cities around the United States. These community meetings serve to keep tribal members connected, engage in Choctaw traditions and cultural activities, and connect with programs and services. For a list of upcoming Choctaw Community Cultural Meetings please visit the Events Page on ChoctawNation.com

As the Historic Preservation Department continues to do research on the Indian Urban Relocation Program, we hope to find more information on specific Choctaw experiences. In the meantime, we wish like to encourage our Choctaw families to share their relocation stories with your young people. If you would like to document and record your stories, please reach out to the Choctaw Cultural Center's Education Department at (580) 642-7759.

Works Cited:

National Archives and Records Administration

2023. American Indian Urban Relocation. Electronic document, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/indian-relocation.html>, accessed May 15, 2024.



Scan for video

MMIP Update

Continued from Page 1

The Justice Department recognized May 5 as National Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Awareness Day.

In recognition of MMIP Awareness Day, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland highlighted ongoing efforts to tackle the MMIP and human trafficking crises in American Indian and Alaska Native communities and other pressing public safety challenges, like theentanyl crisis, in tribal communities.

"There is still so much more to do in the face of persistently high levels of violence that tribal communities have endured for generations, and that women and girls, particularly, have endured," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "In carrying out our work, we seek to honor those who are still missing, those who were stolen from their communities, and their loved ones who are left with unimaginable pain. Tribal communities deserve safety, and they deserve justice."

In July 2023, the Justice Department announced the creation of the Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Regional Outreach Program, which permanently places 10 attorneys and coordinators in five designated regions across the United States to aid in the prevention and response to missing or murdered Indigenous people.

U.S. Attorneys and MMIP personnel engaged in events with tribal and law enforcement partners, communities, and stakeholders today across the U.S., and will continue to do so in the days to come.

The MMIP Regional Outreach Program dedicates five MMIP Assistant U.S. Attorneys and five MMIP coordinators to providing specialized support to U.S. Attorneys' offices to address and combat MMIP issues. This support includes investigating unresolved

MMIP cases and related crimes and promoting communication, coordination, and collaboration among federal, tribal, local, and state law enforcement and non-governmental partners on MMIP issues.

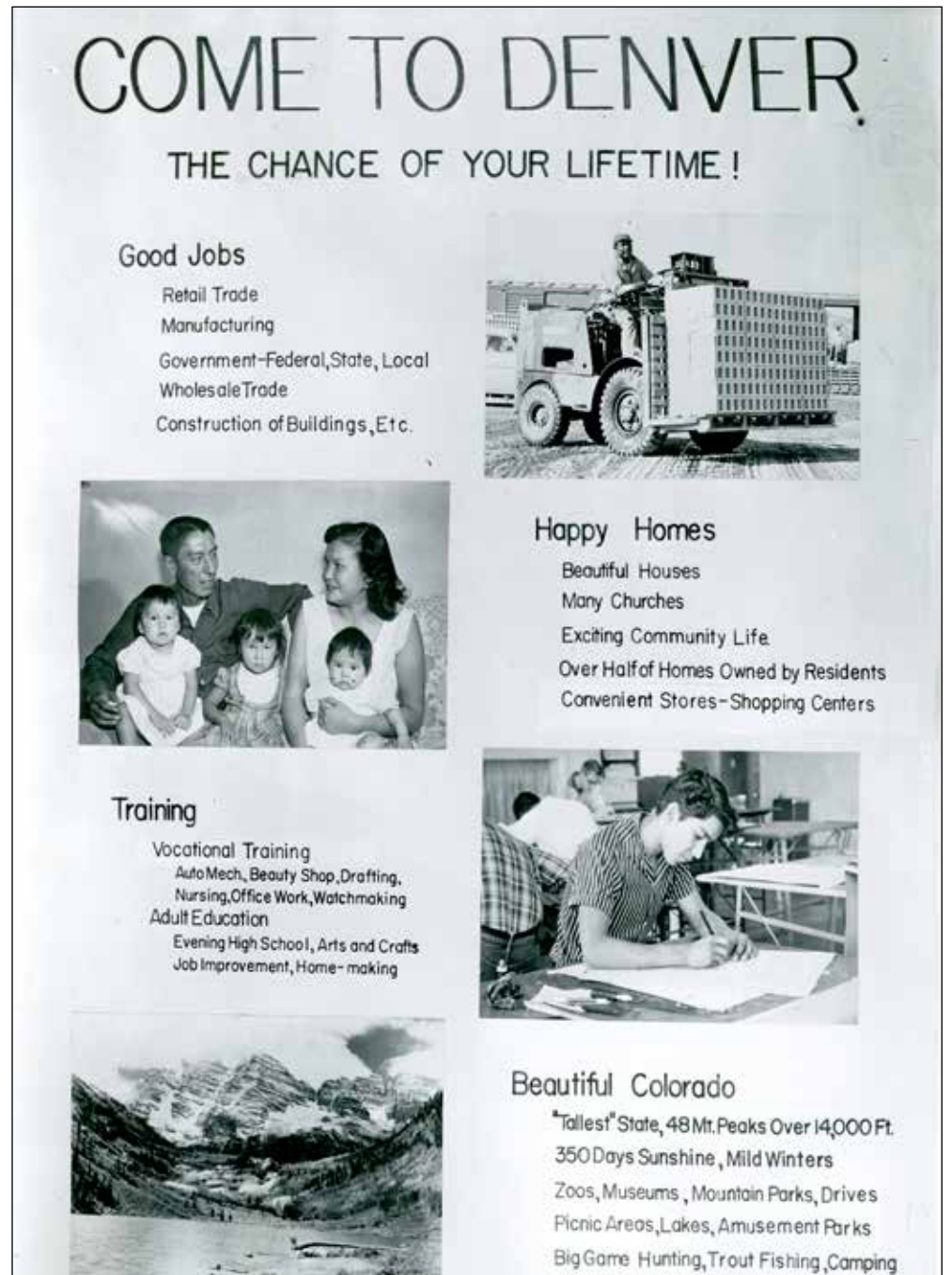
Not Invisible Act Commission Response

In March, the Departments of Justice and the Interior released their joint response to the Not Invisible Act Commission (NIAC)'s recommendations on how to combat the missing or murdered Indigenous peoples (MMIP) and human trafficking crises. The NIAC response recognizes that more must be done across the federal government to resolve this long-standing crisis and support healing from the generational traumas that Indigenous peoples have endured throughout the history of the United States.

The Department is in the process of implementing its response now, addressing several areas in the near term, including:

- Improving coordination, funding, and operations of efforts to combat MMIP and human trafficking; Enhancing research to better trace the underlying causes of MMIP and human trafficking, to reduce barriers to accessing resources, and to identify data sharing opportunities with healthcare systems; Improving access to funding aligned with tribes' needs; Developing guidance on the effective use of the media and social media to engage the public when someone is reported missing; Improving communications with families of victims or missing people and working with a multi-jurisdictional working group to address factors that lead people, particularly young people, to voluntarily go missing.

Last year, the Justice Department increased funding to the FBI Safe Trails Task Forces to build on their success in bringing together agencies, including tribal police departments, to combat public safety threats, violent crime, and drug trafficking. The FBI has increased its investigative resources in some of the Indian



"Come to Denver" Flyer, Courtesy of National Archives, NAID: 311785051

Country field offices that needed the most personnel.

Last year, the FBI undertook Operation Not Forgotten, which surged more than 40 personnel, including agents, intelligence analysts, tactical specialists, and victim specialists, to 10 field offices, where they were able to supplement more than 200 pending investigations related to violence against indigenous women and children, with a focus on homicide, serious bodily injury, and physical and sexual child abuse.

To date, there have been seven successful indictments. Special Agents identified four previously unidentified child victims and recovered one child victim. Numerous other cases were referred for federal or tribal prosecutions based on these efforts.

The U.S. Marshals Service has developed a legislative proposal to formalize its role in enforcing tribal violent felony arrest warrants that would expand a pilot launched last year where the marshals served tribal warrants at the request of, and in close coordination with, Tribal law enforcement and the Department's Office of Tribal Justice. This effort has successfully targeted extremely dangerous offenders.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) recently assigned a Special Agent/Certified Fire Investigator to the MMIP Initiative to conduct case reviews for each of the five regions. ATF's National Integrated Ballistic Identification Network (NIBIN) and Crime Gun Intelligence Centers (CGIC) are used as an investigative resource for MMIP cases involving the criminal use of a firearm.

Over the past year, the Department awarded \$268 million in grants to help enhance tribal justice systems and strengthen law enforcement responses. These awards have also gone toward improving the handling of child abuse cases, combating domestic and sexual violence, supporting tribal youth programs, and strengthening victim services in tribal communities.

For additional information about the Justice Department's efforts to address the MMIP crisis, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/tribal/mmip>.

Visit <https://www.justice.gov/action-center/report-and-identify-missing-persons> for more information about reporting or identifying missing persons.



Photo by Kelsey Janway

Various non-profit, tribal, state and federal government agencies continue to work on ways to end the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People epidemic in America.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

On June 7, 2018, the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (HACNO) was selected by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as one of 17 EnVision center Pilot communities and was the only tribal nation selected to participate. Currently, there are 100 En Vision Centers across the United States, with three of those being a tribal designated EnVision Center.

The goal of an EnVision center is to offer families access to support services that can help them achieve self-sufficiency by making resources readily available. The EnVision Centers is premised on the notion that financial support alone is insufficient to solve the problem of poverty.

Other EnVision Centers are located in metropolis areas where the idea is a brick and mortar "one stop shop" for services and programs. However, the HACNO concept is to create a "pop-up" or virtual EnVision Center due to the immense reservation area.

Through the EnVision Center mission, HUD identified four pillars as the focus items that will focus on fostering long-lasting self-sufficiency.

1. Economic Empowerment
2. Education Advancement
3. Health and Wellness
4. Character and Leadership

Classes will be conducted at community centers or other public areas across our region for tribal members and participants in the Choctaw Nation Housing Authority Program.

Individualized counseling for tribal members and participants in the Choctaw Nation Housing Authority Program is offered as well.

The EnVision Center has partnered with the IRS to become a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site. This Tax season the EnVision Center had filed 158 returns totaling a federal amount \$248,681 and a state refund of \$23,026 going back to the Tribal Members.

The EnVision Center and Service Coordination Department are offering a holistic approach to addressing the needs of their participants in their housing program as well as other Tribal members.

Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, EnVision Center 511 Nanih Waiya Rd. Poteau, OK 74953, 918-647-3668, EnVisionCenter@choctawnation.com

Choctaw Nation Housing Authority. Stay Connected. CHOCTAWNATION.COM. Includes social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat.

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matt Gamble

One of the calls that we receive often in our office is from people that have found young wildlife while out and about in nature. Often it is a whitetail deer fawn, or a young fledgling bird fallen from a nest. It is easy to assume that these animals are orphaned or in danger but that is most often not the case.

Whitetail will often leave their fawns in fields or forests where they forage during the day. They usually do not go far and will come back several times during the day to feed their young. At a young age fawns are scentless and blend in extremely well with their environment. This is an extremely effective strategy for predator avoidance at a young age. As the fawns grow stronger and are more adept at evading predation on their feet, they will accompany the doe on her daily routine.

Rabbits, birds, squirrels, and other young wildlife are best left alone if encountered in nature. Most often the adult animal is waiting for you to leave so they can tend to the young. More often than not, human intervention is not needed as natural processes play out. As humans, we often feel the need to help and aid animals that we feel are in need. We have good intentions, but our instincts to help may not be the best thing for wildlife. That fledgling bird on the ground may be getting lessons from Mom on how to fly. She's just waiting for us to leave so she can continue.

Most of the calls we receive concerning young wildlife require no intervention. Occasionally there are a few where wildlife may need our help. The most obvious way to tell is visible injuries to the animal. Protruding bones, bleeding, or any obvious trauma may indicate a need for help. If you find yourself in this situation, the first thing you need to do is make sure you are in a safe location. Even a whitetail doe can be aggressive and cause you harm if she thinks you are hurting her young. The second thing you need to do is call a wildlife professional. Call a game warden, biologist, or licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Wild animals require a very specialized, high level of care and these professionals are best equipped to help the situation. They have the training and skills necessary to help in a safe manner.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

Sexually transmitted infections still a cause for concern

Cases of STIs have reached the highest levels since 1950

By Chris Jennings

In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a report that said sexually transmitted infections (STI) cases were the highest they've been since the 1950s. One possible cause is that the treatment options now available, such as antibiotics, antivirals, and pre-exposure prophylaxis, have affected sexual behavior.

These diminished concerns of long-term complications from STIs have led to a decrease in condom use and an increase in the practice of polyamory, which is having romantic relationships with more than one partner with the informed consent of all partners involved.

The COVID-19 pandemic can also be attributed to some of the rise in STIs. The pandemic led to a reduction of sexual health screenings either from fear of exposure or from difficulty finding a place to test.

There are eight common STIs, also known as sexually transmitted diseases. Choctaw Nation Community Health Nurse Brandi Burris said, "A person can come in contact with any of these if they have unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person." Syphilis can also be spread by having direct contact with the infected person's syphilis sore.

Chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and trichomonas are curable with antibiotics.

Hepatitis B, Herpes, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) can be managed with medications.

HPV is by far the most common sexually transmitted infection. Hepatitis B and HPV can be prevented with a vaccination. "It's great that we can medically manage them [STI's/STIs]. However, prevention is still as important as the cure," said Burris.

Burris says it's not just yourself or your partner you need to worry about. According to the CDC, there has been a sharp increase in the number of babies born with congenital syphilis in the United States.

Congenital syphilis (CS) is a disease that occurs when a mother with syphilis passes the infection on to her baby during pregnancy. "Congenital syphilis is a preventable disease that has been on the rise in the United States. It can cause devastating health problems to a fetus or a newborn," Burris said.

Congenital syphilis can cause miscarriage, fetal death, premature delivery, blindness, deafness, meningitis, bone deformities, and liver problems.

Testing and treatment are available during prenatal visits with the Choctaw Nation. "Prenatal visits can help prevent and lower the risk of spreading the infection to the baby,"

Burris said.

The Choctaw Nation also provides prevention, treatment and testing for tribal members at all the outlying clinics and the Choctaw Nation hospital in Talihina. Burris says Appointments can be made via the app or by calling your clinic. Many clinics also see patients as walk-ins.

Burris says some people may not know they need to be tested because they are asymptomatic or have symptoms that resemble something else, such as itchy genitals, burning while urinating, or vaginal discharge.

Often, people's reluctance to get tested can come down to one thing.

"They can feel embarrassed and uncomfortable talking about their sexual health with their healthcare provider. I encourage everyone not to feel embarrassed; your provider is trained to treat all parts of the human body," Burris said.

Robbie Bright, a public health specialist from the Southern Plains Tribal Health Board, says Oklahoma has two options for at-home testing.

The programs are Native Test and I Want the Kit (IWTK). Both offer free, accurate, and confidential in-home specimen collection and lab-based testing for STIs, Chlamydia and Gonorrhea, as well as Trichomoniasis testing for those assigned female at birth.

These tests are also available for residents of Alaska, Kansas, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Idaho and Baltimore City.

Syphilis, HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Pregnancy testing has been initiated in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, South Dakota and North Dakota.

If internet access is a problem, you can request an HIV self-test kit by texting NATIVE TEST to 55291 to get a rapid HIV and STI self-test kit mailed for free.

"Native Test is a nationwide reaching project coordinated by the Oklahoma Area Tribal Epidemiology Center and is for anyone 13 years or older," said Bright.

The program can also provide individuals with access to information on HIV preventative care and links to free STI testing in select areas.

"Most STIs are treatable, and for the ones that are not curable, there are treatment options available for management. The sooner you know, the sooner you can begin preventing long-term complications," Burris said.

If treatment is needed, being open and honest with your healthcare provider and following their instructions is important.

"Talk with your health care provider...Complete your treatment plan as your healthcare provider instructed. Follow-up care is also important; most people will need to be retested again after they complete their treatment," said Burris.

If left untreated, STIs can cause problems with your heart, nervous system, and reproductive system, increasing your risk for other infections. "Prevention, testing and treatment are all provided at no cost to the tribal members," Burris said.

There are several common misconceptions or myths when it comes to STIs.

- **Most people do not realize that condoms do not protect from every STI.**

HPV and Herpes can both be spread by skin-to-skin contact

- **They do not have any symptoms, so they must not have an STI.**

You cannot tell by looking who has an STI. That is just not true. Signs such as drainage, herpes lesion, wart, or a sore may not be present at the time; however, someone can still have the disease and spread it to others.

- **You can only get an STI once.**

A person can become infected with many STIs more than once. Each time will require treatment.

- **You can't get an STI from oral sex.**

You can get an STI from any kind of sex. Male condoms and a dental dam can provide some protection during oral sex.

- **Using a male and female condom together is double protection.**

They should never be used together. This can cause them to break or fall out of place. The best protection is a male condom.

- **I can get an STI from a toilet seat or eating after someone.**

They cannot be spread through casual contact, such as eating, drinking, hugging, holding hands, or sitting on a toilet seat.



CDC Image

Secondary stage syphilis sores (lesions) on the palms of the hands.

- **The best place to carry a condom is in your wallet or purse.**

Condoms should be kept in a place that is dry and cool. They should not be used if they are expired, discolored, look old or have a hole

- **Douching can protect against getting an STI.**

Douching or showering after sex does not prevent STIs

Burris says anyone can get an STI. Abstinence from all types of sexual relationships is the only 100% assurance of never contracting some kind of STI. However, a few ways exist to reduce risk and protect yourself and your partner.

- Getting vaccinated: Hepatitis B and HPV are two common STIs that can be prevented with a vaccine.
- Reduce your number of sex partners.
- Get tested and share your test results before having sex.
- Use condoms correctly, and every time you have any type of sex.

Burris urges everybody not to be complacent in how they think of STI, saying, "STIs can have a serious effect on your health and quality of life...It's great that we can medically manage them; however, prevention is still as important as the cure."

Practice Abstinence

The surest way to avoid STDs is to not have sex.

This means not having vaginal, oral, or anal sex.

Use Condoms

Using a condom correctly every time you have sex can help you avoid STDs.

Condoms lessen the risk of infection for all STDs. You still can get certain STDs, like herpes or HPV, from contact with your partner's skin even when using a condom.

CDC Graphic

Every year, there are an estimated 20 million new STI cases. Condoms, vaccinations, getting tested and abstinence are some of the ways to prevent STIs.

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.

June 2024
All markets open weekdays, June 3-26
Closed: June 27 and 28
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation
Participants can request a calendar at their location.
All food demos TBD. Once confirmed we will update on Facebook..

ANTLERS 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443

BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842

DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773

MCALESTER 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716

POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

June 4	Wright City	10 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 5	Antlers	10 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 7	Atoka	8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
June 7	Coalgate	12:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
June 11	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 12	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 14	Crowder	By Appointment
June 18	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 19	Stigler	By Appointment
June 19	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 21	Coalgate	12:30 pm. - 4:30 p.m.
June 21	Atoka	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
June 25	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 26	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM SCHEDULE

STARTS IN MAY
SERVING TIMES WILL BE FROM 10:00 AM TO 1:00 PM,
AND WE WILL BE PROVIDING BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND A SNACK!

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

• Antlers	• Calvin	• Itabel	• Spiro
• Atoka	• Durant	• McAlester	• Stigler
• Broken Bow	• Hugo	• Poteau	• Talihina
			• Wilburton

ALL SITES WILL BE AT THE CHOCTAW NATION COMMUNITY CENTERS EXCEPT:

- Poteau - Donald Reynolds Community Center
- McAlester - Dreams City Church
- Calvin - Old Calvin Store
- Talihina - Alco Parking Lot
- Durant - Wellness Center

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FOR DATES/TIMES OF AVAILABILITY PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT
CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/SUMMER-FOOD-SERVICE

Choctaw Nation Health Services | CHOCTAWNATION.COM

WARRIOR WELLNESS CHARITY WINE RUN

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2024
10:00 AM

Join us for the Annual WW Charity Run! Come experience hand-crafted wine while you relax and enjoy the scenic Blue River Valley Winery. Whether you want to run, walk or just enjoy the wine, this race promises to be a great time and an incredible experience.

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma | CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Help and hope is available for every Choctaw family

By Chris Jennings

This story is told with the permission of the Wilson family, who want to share their story with other tribal members who may be in a similar situation, to let them know that there is hope and help available.

Several Choctaw Nation programs, community members, and outside organizations have come together to help Delbert Wilson and his family escape extreme poverty.

When Delbert Wilson talks about how things were, he says things weren't always this bad. Over time though, due to illnesses, things got progressively worse.

At the time, Delbert, Trish and their three children, Jeff, Josh and Ashton, lived in an 85-year-old family home that belonged to the children's great-grandparents.

When they moved in, the home needed work, but Delbert was able to do some of the repairs himself. When the couple were both working, they got by okay.

"The roof was leaking into rooms real bad, but I managed to put a new roof and trusses up," said Delbert Wilson.

He was also able to do some electrical repairs and other things to try to keep the house in as good a shape as he could.

In 2010, Trish was diagnosed with Huntington's disease. This genetic condition causes brain cells to lose function and die slowly. Due to symptoms of the disease, which can include dementia, difficulty swallowing, and an inability to walk without assistance, it eventually got to the point Wilson's wife couldn't work and needed complete care at home.

On top of Trish's illness, Delbert also struggled with diabetes, and it eventually got to the point that he was not able to work and was on disability as well.

After Trish fell ill, and her income was lost, things started to get harder, and much-needed repairs had to be put aside for the time being.

Delbert's niece, Shelly Maxey, explains,



The Wilson's old home was in serious need of repair.

"They were at the point of her [Trish] not being able to work because of her health and him not being able to work because of his health. No one in that house was healthy enough to fix it, and there was no money to fix it."

Eventually, Wilson's wife passed away from the Huntingtons Disease; that was a particularly hard time for the family. Not only did they lose a wife and mother, but around the same time, Delbert's diabetes had progressed to the point that he had a leg amputated.

At this point, the family was living in a slowly dilapidating house. Delbert's leg didn't heal correctly and atrophied at an angle, meaning he could not walk.

For Delbert, getting around and doing basic

everyday tasks requires a lot of help from his son, Josh.

"It's not what I wanted, but it's what I've been dealt. Before, I did everything myself, working on cars, roofing and plumbing; I've done it all and would still do it if I could," said Delbert. "I try to tell my kids how to do it, and Josh has worked on my vehicle by me telling him what to do, but I can't get in there and help him at all."

Delbert, who has dialysis three times a week, can still drive to his appointments, but Josh has to help him get in the car. He also gives his father baths and assists with other general everyday tasks that many take for granted.

Josh graduated high school from a special education program.

One of his classmates, Hailey Kiefer, says Josh had a profound impact on her life. Because of her experience helping Josh in Home Economics class for two years, Kiefer went to college to be a special education teacher.

"It is the reason that I do what I do. I had never worked with anyone with special needs until that year started. So, when it was time for me to go to school, I picked the only thing I had any interest in," Kiefer said.

Now, the man who required enough help in high school to inspire someone to become a special education teacher is taking care of his father.

Over the years, after his wife's death, the Wilson house slowly degraded around Delbert and his family. The windows had to be boarded up; the concrete in the bathroom floor was broken to the point that it would shift when Josh walked on it; the kitchen sink had fallen in, and the family was forced to use bottled water.

After an argument with his father, Jeff, the oldest son, moved out with nowhere to go. Thankfully, with Maxey's help, Jeff Wilson could get into an apartment with the help of the Choctaw Nation.

As she was helping Jeff get settled, Maxey realized he needed help learning to do some of the most basic things required when living independently and caring for himself.

According to Maxey, Jeff had containers of cooking grease everywhere. And he hadn't taken the trash out. "And I'm like, Jeff, you have to take the trash out every day, especially if there's food in it. And he said, 'Well, I couldn't fit that one box in the trash chute. So, I didn't know what to do.' He just didn't know how to function," Maxey said.

Maxey explains that over the years, the family has helped the Wilsons out of predicaments.

"I'm ashamed to say it's something that we just grew up knowing. When the little boys were very small, people would put in Department of Human Services (DHS) referrals, and we would all rush over there, clean the house and help make it better. So, I kind of existed knowing that things were not great over there," said Maxey.

As Maxey was helping Jeff Wilson at his new apartment, he said something that shook her. He said he wanted to bring his family to the apartment because it was too cold for them to live in that house, and he couldn't stay there knowing that they were freezing to death.

According to Maxey, that comment made her decide that if she could do this on a small scale with him, she could do it for the whole family, too.

Getting them help was going to take a lot of work. After the revelation from Jeff, she went to the house and saw the condition it was in. That's when she made it her mission to get the family help.

For years, Maxey said she prayed for the family.

"I'm praying about it, and praying about it, and praying about it," said Maxey. "I finally just said, I gotta get them connected; I have to do something."

Even after going in to help the Wilsons over



Photos by Chris Jennings

From left, Josh, Ashton and Delbert Wilson sit in their new affordable rental home thanks to help from the Choctaw Nation, family, both local and non-local organizations and churches, Choctaw Nation employees and many community members. Over the years, the Wilsons have experienced several setbacks in the form of illness and bad luck that plague many across the country.

the years, Maxey was still surprised at the house's condition.

"They stopped letting us inside about eight years ago. But I got in just a few feet several months ago, and the smell coming from the rotten home -- the smell would have knocked you out," said Maxey.

Delbert admits to not letting people in because he was afraid Ashton Wilson would be taken away from him when they saw the house's condition.

"I've been worried about that for years. That's why we didn't have people coming in. There was a fear of that, and I just couldn't stand it because I love her to pieces," said Delbert.

Maxey, who previously worked with Child Protective Services (CPS), said, "There has to be some extreme allegations of physical and or sexual abuse to get a court order to burst into someone's home. If someone calls and makes child abuse referrals on the condition of the home or neglect, they cannot just burst in. So he [Delbert Wilson] learned years ago, just don't let anybody in, and then everything will be fine; she won't get taken away."

The thought of being taken away scared Ashton, too.

"I was so scared; I didn't want to lose my two brothers or my dad because I already experienced losing my mom," she said through tears. "I didn't want to lose anybody else."

According to a study on science.org, living in poverty can lead one to make poorer decisions.

The researchers called this the "burden of poverty."

The study says, "Lacking money or time can lead one to make poorer decisions, possibly because poverty imposes a cognitive load that saps attention and reduces effort."

This burden of poverty can explain why Delbert couldn't get the family into another home. Wilson said that without any real help, it was overwhelming when he had previously filled out applications for rental assistance with the U.S. Government.

Now, that much-needed help was available. Maxey was there every step of the way, helping the family fill out the required paperwork to get into a Choctaw Affordable Rental Home.

Now, with the help of several other people and different programs in the Choctaw Nation, they successfully got all the required paperwork and now live in a much smaller, more efficient home.

Previously, much of Delbert's limited income would go to heating and cooling the older, less efficient home.

Maxey quickly points out that she was not alone.

"I could not do this by myself. So many people helped," explained Maxey.

As she tried to thank those who helped, she came up with 36 different people, Choctaw Nation programs and outside organizations that came together to get the family help.

Laura Beshear with Choctaw Nation Family Preservation said it's an ongoing process saying, "We're still in the process of amending their case plan, because we're still finding other needs that they have that we need to connect them with."

Family Preservation is an in-home service provider for native children at risk of abuse or neglect. They provide parenting and education, case management, and referrals to other Choctaw Nation programs and community resources. They can also identify a family's strengths and needs and try to get them met.

Maxey says Delbert is getting set up with the Advantage Program so that Josh won't need to be his care provider anymore.

They [Family Preservation] are also working on getting the family mental health counseling so that they can communicate better.

"We also plan on working with them on basic things, like making a grocery list from meal planning so that they're not spending all their money on eating out. Ashton is capable of cooking but not grocery shopping and meal planning," said Beshears.

The family will also get help planning meals using the commodities available through the Choctaw Nations to help make their dollars stretch.

Family Preservation can also provide financial assistance if it reduces the risk to the child.

"We could purchase things for Ashton because she's the child in the home, but we could not purchase things for the adults, so we had to get donations for all of their needs," said Beshears.

Some of the programs that helped were Choctaw Nation Housing, Family Preservation, Community-Based Social Workers and Food Distribution programs.

Help not only came from these programs but also from individuals within the programs who saw a need and donated money, time or items to help the Wilson family.

Outside organizations also contribute to the family. Stipe Senior Center provides hot meals; the Advantage Program is working on a helper for Delbert, so Josh doesn't have to do it all; Hilldale Church in Tulsa donated money for household items; the KEDDO program donated a wheelchair and walker; Shared Blessings donated bedding; Mike's Club donated household items; Leader Group Realty donated money for household items, and the list continues to grow.

While the move to the new home has affected the whole family, Maxey says she has seen the most profound effect on Ashton.

"Just six months ago, she would just stare at me and not speak. I would ask her a question, and she would just stare at me," Maxey said.

"It [living in that house] was just so depressing for me; when we finally got the news that we were going to be moving, I just broke down," Ashton said.

Having lived in the old house since she was born, things were never like they should be for a young girl.

"When I was living there, it just seemed so hopeless to me," said Ashton. "I would always get mad at my brothers, or I would cry in the laundry room by myself because I didn't want anybody to hear me."

Many programs across the reservation assist families, such as Family Preservation, Dental Services, Affordable Rental Housing, and Food Distribution.

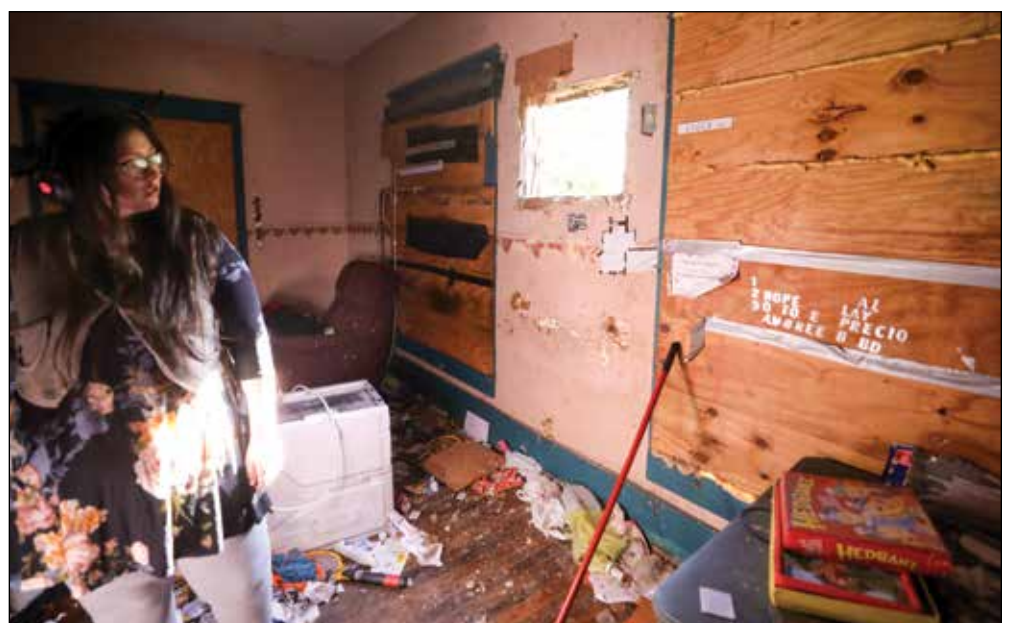
However, you must know those programs exist before you can ask them for help.

For Delbert, because he wasn't the Native parent for his Choctaw kids, he wasn't aware of everything available to them through the Choctaw Nation.

"It's deeply appreciated. It's something that not too long ago, I didn't envision at all," Delbert said. "Like Shelly said, I just didn't have no hope."

The story of the Wilson's is just one of the many cases Choctaw Nation's programs and services help with on a daily basis.

If you or someone you know is in need of help and you are unsure who to contact or where to get started, contact Family Preservation at 800-522-6170. They will be able to help you get in touch with the right programs and services. A complete list of Choctaw nation services can be found at www.choctawnation.com/services/.



Ashton Wilson stands next to the spot in the living room of her old house where her bed used to be, directly under an award she received for academic success in science that's still taped to the wall. Her father, who is unable to walk on his own, would sleep in the recliner in the corner, and her brother would lie on couch cushions on the floor.

CHAHTAPRENEUR AWARDS DINNER

Business Meets Culture



Tuesday, June 25, 2024
CHOCTAW CASINO & RESORT – DURANT
GRAND THEATER



Choctaw Nation Small Business Development



Trail of Tears Memorial Walk 2024

Members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma came together in remembrance of the Trail of Tears and to honor their ancestors who made the journey at the historic Choctaw Capitol Grounds at Tvshka Homma on Saturday, May 18. This event was the 193rd anniversary of the first Choctaws' forced migration from their ancestral lands in Mississippi and Alabama to their new home in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. The initial journeys of removal from 1831-1833 involved approximately 15,000 tribal members with one-fourth to one-third of them perishing on what came to be called "The Trail of Tears and Death."



Photos by Kellie Matherly, Karl Mayer and Jed Stockton



The Choctaw Cultural Center, French Museum Partner Again

By Charlie Clark

On September 18, 2021, a collection of Choctaw artifacts from the 1700s went on display in the Versailles Public Library in Versailles, France.

The exhibit featured part of the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac's French royal collections of North America.

In a unique collaboration, staff from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Historic Preservation Department assisted in its preparation. Now, those items will be on display in Choctaw Country for the first time in three centuries.

In 2021 it was called "La Curiosité d'un Prince" or "An Inquisitive Prince – The Fate of the Ethnographic Cabinet of the Count of Artois."

That successful effort of the two nations – and the desire for Choctaw people to see these items on the Choctaw Reservation – led to the creation of the new exhibit "Okhvta Chito Okhoatali: Choctaw and French Transatlantic Legacies." "Okhvta Chito Okhoatali," Choctaw for "To Cross The Ocean" opens to the public at the Choctaw Cultural Center on Saturday, July 6.

Unlike many other European nations, when French explorers arrived in Choctaw homelands in 1699, the French and the Choctaw became respectful friends, allies in war, and trading partners.

Items in the exhibit are believed to have been received in trade. Choctaws were largely settled in what became the state Alabama, and a major French trade center was in "Old Mobile."

While Choctaws were France's largest Native trading partner, trade was also conducted with other tribes in the southeast part of North America. However, the style and design of the objects in the exhibit indicate that most are likely Choctaw in origin.

In addition, archaeological items on loan from the University of South Alabama have been contributed and provide further understanding of the alliance between the two nations.

Visitors to the exhibit can expect to see exceptional pieces, including a pair of bear paw moccasins, a man's beaded trade cloth legging, a finger-woven bison hair-and-bead sash, shell and trade bead jewelry, a gar fish skin quiver, rivercane darts, and a painted hide.

"Okhvta Chito Okhoatali" runs July 6 through November 30. Hours at the Choctaw Cultural Center, 1919 Hina Hanta Way in Durant, are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and closed Sunday and Monday. Regular admission prices apply, including complimentary admission for Choctaw tribal members and cultural center members. In addition, the Hvshi Gift Store and Champuli Café will be open. Visit www.choctawculturalcenter.com.



Photo by Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac

A curator prepares a pair of bear paw moccasins from North America for the exhibit "Okhvta Chito Okhoatali" opening at the Choctaw Cultural Center on July 6.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT CHOCTAWNATION.COM/FOOD-DISTRIBUTION

Choctaw Nation Food Distribution

ARPA Elder and Disability Food Security Programs coming to an end

Kellie Matherly

Federal law requires the Choctaw Nation to obligate all ARPA funding for the Elder and Disability Food Security Programs by the end of December 2024. To help tribal members for as long as possible through these services, the Nation will roll out a final set of payments intended to cover applicants through September of 2025. Eligible tribal members can apply for assistance starting July 30, 2024.

The Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) allotted federal funds for relief efforts during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, including a substantial amount paid to tribes to use for projects and assistance programs on reservations across the country. The Choctaw Nation received \$944 million in initial funding.

According to Council Bill 88-21, \$627,154,677 of ARPA funding was allocated to the Tribal Member Relief Fund to provide assistance, "including but not limited to assistance with food security, housing security, necessary living expenses, childcare, and internet and technology access."

Two of the ARPA-funded programs the Nation gave eligible elders and tribal members with disabilities who applied a \$200 per month stipend for groceries. Since its inception, these programs have helped well over 100,000 people.

The initial ARPA funding was always set to expire in December 2024, which is just around the corner, so the Nation has allocated the remaining funds to comply with the federal mandate.

Beginning July 30, 2024, eligible tribal members can apply for the final payments through the Chahta Achvffa Member Portal. Both programs are nationwide. Applications will close September 30, 2024. Once the application is approved, the applicant will receive a new card, which will be loaded each month from October through December.

The structure of the final phase of the program will be \$200 in October and \$200 in November. In December, program participants will receive \$2000, which is meant to cover their \$200 stipends through September 2025.

Eligibility requirements for the Elder Food Security program are as follows:

- Tribal members aged 55-74 with individual income less than \$40,000.
- Tribal members aged 75+ at any individual income level.
- Anyone wishing to receive assistance must apply, even if they have received Food Security funds before.
- Tribal members must attest that they have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eligibility for requirements for the Disability Food Security program are as follows:

- Disabled tribal members under age 55 at any income level.
- Disabled tribal members aged 55-74 making more than \$40,000.
- Anyone wishing to receive assistance must apply, even if they have received Food Security funds before.
- Tribal members must attest that they have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to remember that tribal members who meet the eligibility criteria for both programs can only receive funding for one of them.

Tribal members can get more information at www.choctawnation.com/covidrelief.

**CHOCTAW NATION
AMERICAN
RESCUE
PLAN ACT**

Federal law requires the Choctaw Nation to obligate all ARPA funding for the Elder Food Security Program by the end of December 2024.

Applications for this final allocation of funds open July 30, 2024, and close September 30, 2024.

COMING SOON

Income restrictions may apply.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/COVIDRELIEF

**CHOCTAW NATION
AMERICAN
RESCUE
PLAN ACT**

**APPLY NOW FOR
DISABILITY FOOD
SECURITY FUNDS**

Federal law requires the Choctaw Nation to obligate all ARPA funding for the Disability Food Security Program by the end of December 2024.

Applications for this final allocation of funds open July 30, 2024, and close September 30, 2024.

COMING SOON

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/COVIDRELIEF



INFORMATION UPDATES

Labor Day Festival Games and Tournaments
- Pre-register for individual and team events for this year's Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival. Deadline for online registrations: August 2, 2024.

For more information, visit laborday.choctawnation.com.

To stay update to on all Labor Day information, text **LABORDAY** to 888777.



Rodney Atkins, Mark Chesnutt Headline Labor Day Concerts

DURANT, Okla. (May 15, 2024) - The concert lineup for the 2024 Choctaw Labor Day Festival will feature country music classics, gospel favorites and more.

This year's festival, August 30-September 1, will be held on the historic Choctaw Capitol Grounds at Tvshka Homma.

Headliner Rodney Atkins performs his string of country hits beginning at 9 p.m. Saturday, August 31. Mark Chesnutt goes on at 7:30 p.m. Two Choctaw acts open the program, the Joey Green Band and The Close.

Sunday, September 1 will be an evening of Christian music with Casting Crowns topping the bill at 8:30 p.m. Jason Crabb returns to the festival, going on at 7 p.m., and Gold City performs at 6 p.m.

Concert attendance, like the rest of the festival is free and open to the public. Performances will be in the outdoor amphitheater.

Lawn chairs and picnic blankets are welcome. Festival schedules will continually update. For information, visit <https://laborday.choctawnation.com/>.

When Rodney Atkins is not in the studio working on new music, he is on the road connecting with fans in cities and military bases across the country. He's had repeat performances on the popular television show "TODAY with Hoda & Jenna" and was featured in Curb Records' 60th Anniversary at CMA Fest in Nashville. Atkins has sold more than 14 million records, had over 1.5 billion on-demand streams, and multiple No. 1 singles, including "If You're Going Through Hell," "Watching You," and "These Are My People."

Mark Chesnutt's traditional country songs have been a fixture on radio for more than

three decades. His sound has yielded him 14 No. 1 hits, 23 Top 10 singles, four platinum albums, and five gold records making him one of Billboard's 10 Most Played Radio Artists of the 90s. "Bubba Shot The Jukebox," "Blame It On Texas," "Going Through the Big D," and "It's A Little Too Late" are instantly recognizable, along with "I Don't Want To Miss A Thing" which spent four consecutive weeks at top of the charts. The CMA Horizon Award-winner's tour dates this year take him from Canada to Kansas City, Las Vegas and - Madill.

Choctaw artist Joey Green debuted his album "Heart Lessons" when he opened for CMA Entertainer of the Year Lainey Wilson at Billy Bob's Texas in 2023. His music videos for "This House Ain't Big Enough" and "Heart-broke" continue successful runs on CMT. The alum of NBC's The Voice was recently added to the 2024-2025 USO Tour roster.

The Close is made up of Lori Rowton, Shannon Walker and James Mckinney who share songwriting duties and lead vocals. Rowton is a member of the Choctaw Nation, originally from Tushka. The band released its debut album "Orbit" in 2023.

Grammy and Dove award-winning Casting Crowns is a Christian rock band based in Georgia, where some members also work as ministers. Their single "Voice of Truth" spent a record-breaking 14 consecutive weeks at No. 1 in 2003.

Jason Crabb is a GRAMMY winning Christian artist. A repeat performer at the Choctaw Labor Day Festival, he has been named Gospel Music Association's Male Vocalist of the Year and received Song of the Year award.

Alabama-based Gold City is a southern gospel quartet, made up of Chris Jenkins, Josh Feemster, Daniel Riley, and Jeff Chapman. The group's music has charted 10 number one Christian hits.



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



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Chun 2024

In This Issue

- 2 FFC
- 4 Council Corner
- 5 NTN
- 6 Jones Grads
- 7 PYK
- 8 Adult EDU Grads
- 9 Obits
- 10 Iti
- 11 Health
- 12 Trail of Tears Walk



Page 1:

2024 Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Movement Update.



Page 3:

McClanahan sisters blazed trails through show business and science.



Page 12:

Family in dire need gets help from many.

Biskinik Mission Statement:
To serve as the source of information for Choctaw Nation tribal members by delivering community news through a variety of communication channels.

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