

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Foster Care: Help children in need

Chief Gary Batton recently sat down with Kat Voorhees from Choctaw Nation Foster Care to discuss an incredibly important topic: becoming a foster parent. In their conversation, they covered the steps to becoming a foster parent, the different types of foster care options available, and even debunked some common myths about foster care. Kat also highlighted the urgent need for more foster families to provide loving homes for Choctaw children in need. Watch the full interview at <https://chocta.ws/cb-foster>. Your love and support could change a child's life forever. Follow Choctaw Nation Foster Care for updates or visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/foster-care/>. For more messages from Chief, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/news/>.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Chief Gary Batton sits down with Kat Voorhees of Choctaw Nation Foster Care to speak about the need for foster families to open their homes to children in need of direction and love.

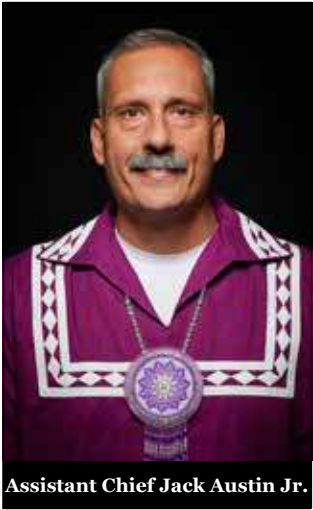


Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Newness in the New Year

New Years' Resolutions are made each year by people who desire self-improvement and personal growth. The beginning of a new year offers a symbolic fresh start. Here's a few suggestions if you haven't made one already. Like Paul, we can (FORGET) past mistakes or regrets. Philippians 3:13 says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." Like David, we can (LIFT) our eyes up toward God. Psalm 121:1-2. "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." Like Enoch, we can (WALK) with God. Genesis 5: 24 reads, "And Enoch walked with God : and he was not ; for God took him."

Like Gideon, we can (ADVANCE) with a few resources and little faith. Judges 6:12-14- "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him , and said Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Like Job , we can learn (PATIENCE). The term (Patience of Job) illustrates someone who suffers greatly yet never turn his back on God. Job lost his health, wealth, and children. His friends accused him of sinning against God. His wife tried to persuade him to turn from the Lord and give up. Job2:9-"Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die." Then Job replied, "But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall not we receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.' (Job 2:10) Having lost all, he sat amidst the rubble of his once prosperous life and sores all over his body, yet Job still proclaimed, " Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. (Job 13:15) Like Timothy, we can (STUDY) the Word of God. "Study to show thy self-approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed , rightly dividing the word of truth." (I Timothy 2:15) Most resolutions are made for the physical , but we shall consider the spiritual as well.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Ensure you are 'winter-ready' during cold weather

We are generally lucky here in Southeastern Oklahoma that we don't typically get the harsh winter weather that our neighbors to the north usually get. We still should be vigilant about what to do if frigid weather creeps in and drops the temperature below freezing. The Choctaw Nation's Emergency Management team offers tips each year on how to safeguard your home and family. Also, our Choctaw LIHEAP program can assist low-income families to ensure that the heat and utilities stay on during the cold winter weather. I'm proud that these resources are available to assist our tribal members and communities during especially difficult cold snaps. To ensure your knowledge of these resources, I would like to offer a few services and preventative mea-

sures that our team at the Choctaw Nation have put together.

LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program)

The LIHEAP program assists low-income Native American households within the Choctaw Nation service area with payment of home heating or cooling bills. Priority is given to elderly, disabled households, and homes with minor children. LIHEAP has served approximately 2,000 Native American Households since Oct. 1, obligating over \$900,000.00 to keep our members warm during the winter months.

Eligibility

- Must reside within the CNO service area
- Native Americans with CDIB or tribal membership card
- Applicants may not receive LIHEAP funding from Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Income limits do apply

How to Apply

Apply in the Chahta Achvffa member portal between Oct. 1, 2024, through May 31, 2025. You can apply online at choctawnation.com and search for LIHEAP in the search bar. For more information contact the LIHEAP office at 580-634-0686. From the Choctaw Office of Emergency Management, the Nation offers several tips to safeguard your home and family during harsh winter weather. For instance:

Safeguarding Your Water Pipes

- Know your pipes' and shut-off valve's locations and do preventative maintenance.
- Frozen pipe prevention and prep begins with identifying where your plumbing leads throughout the home and locating your main water shut-off valve. Insulate pipes before the winter with materials available at most hardware stores.
- Drain outdoor water lines.
- Winterizing your home and landscape is crucial when determining how to keep outdoor water pipes from freezing. Each fall, homeowners should completely drain any outdoor water lines to swimming pools and sprinkler systems and disconnect and drain hoses and close valves on outdoor hose bibs.
- Turn on faucets ahead of, and during, freezing weather.
- If you know that a cold snap is headed your way, leave a couple of faucets running at a trickle in the coldest areas of the house (where pipes would most likely freeze). This age-old trick is effective since the water flow can prevent pipes freezing.
- Leave sink cabinet doors open to warm indoor pipes.
- Open the cabinet doors under kitchen and bathroom sinks to expose cold pipes to warm air. To that end, be careful not to close off any indoor pipes from heat in cold areas of the home. During the coldest times of the year, plugging in space heaters to run on a low setting in these problem areas doesn't hurt, either.
- Keep your house extra warm when temperatures are at or below freezing.
- Never completely turn off the heat on days or nights that dip below freezing, even if you're out of town. Shutting down your HVAC system could put your pipes at a much greater risk of freezing—and even bursting—and the water damage when you return home could be extensive.

Winterize Your Car

- Service the radiator by maintaining the appropriate antifreeze level. Ensure tires are in good condition to drive safely on wet or snowy roads [if necessary]. Check car battery strength. Keep an emergency kit in your car that includes a blanket along with food and water in case you're stranded in the cold. Keep an ice scraper in the car.

Extreme Cold Exposure

- Limit time outdoors when temperatures fall below freezing. Dress in warm layers. When wind chills enter the forecast, cover all extremities. This will mitigate frostbite and hypothermia potential.

Winter Overall Plans

Winter weather can range from snowstorms, sleet, dangerously cold wind chills and ice storms. When temperatures drop below freezing, limit your time outdoors. If you must go outside, dress in layers of warm clothing and know the signs of frostbite [numbness, firm or waxy skin, and white or grayish-yellow skin] and hypothermia [shivering, exhaustion, confusion, memory loss, slurred speech or drowsiness and fumbling hands]. Seek immediate medical attention if you believe you or a loved one are suffering from prolonged cold exposure. The CNO is notorious for ice storms. Heavy accumulations of ice can bring down trees and powerlines, cutting off power and communication for days, creating dangerous driving conditions. Make sure you're prepared and safe for all winter weather and have a plan in case you lose electricity and traditional heating methods. When traveling in winter, ensure your car is equipped with an emergency kit that includes a blanket, food and water, and ensure tires and fluid levels are good.

How to Make Sure You Are Winter Ready

- Know what to do before, during, and after a winter storm.
- Listen to local officials.
- Have emergency supplies in place at home, at work, and in the car.
- Stay off the road during and after a winter storm.
- Use a carbon monoxide alarm, especially if using alternative heating devices.
- Use heating devices safely.

Preventing Heating Fires

Although trending downward since the early 1980s, heating fires remained the second leading cause of home fires in 2021. An estimated 32,200 home heating fires were reported to fire departments within the United States. These fires caused an estimated 190 deaths, 625 injuries and \$442 million in property loss.

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet from all heat sources including fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, portable heaters or grills inside to heat the home, and if you use a generator, make sure the generator is placed outdoors and not inside the home.
- Plug space heaters directly in an outlet, and make sure its cord isn't damaged or frayed.
- Never use an oven to heat your home.
- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected each year by a professional.

Winter brings cold temperatures, increasing the risk of fires and CO poisoning as folks heat their homes. Make sure to check the batteries in fire and CO detectors. Install these detectors in your homes if you have not already. If you lose electricity during a winter storm, do not use gas range ovens or grills inside to heat the home, and if you use a generator, make sure the generator is placed outdoors and not inside the home. Please note, CO is odorless and not easily detectible without a device. Signs of CO exposure include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain and confusion [your common flu-like symptoms]. CO exposure can be lethal. Seek immediate medical attention if you believe you or a loved one have encountered CO. Visit the U.S. Fire Administration Home Fires page to learn about how to prepare for and prevent home fires including tips for individuals with disabilities and older adults. Hopefully with these prevention tips and access to utilities help during the winter months your family will stay safe and warm during the cold winter weather.

Yakoke!

2025 LABOR DAY FESTIVAL

TRIBAL MEMBER RV

RESERVATION APPLICATION

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

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

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT,
LABORDAY.CHOCTAWNATION.COM

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

Scan for
online application

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CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Food programs at top of list of most utilized programs in 2024

By Shelia Kirven

Since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and in today’s challenging economy, Choctaw Nation has seen more need to serve our people with food than ever before. The Tribe has been able to assist through several different programs, and in 2024, a record number of households were given assistance with food for their families.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA FRF), funding for the Elder and Disability Food Security Programs, began as a response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency and provided food and nutrition assistance to over 17,000 elders (over 32,000 since program inception) and more than 5,000 individuals with disabilities (over 6,000 since program inception) in FY24.

Applications for the final allocation of funds closed on September 30, 2024. Federal law requires the Choctaw Nation to obligate all ARPA funding for the program by the end of December 2024, thus ending the program.

The Choctaw Nation Food Distribution Program served over 18,000 with healthy, nutritious foods. It has five markets located strategically across the Choctaw Nation to better serve our tribal members, including Antlers, Broken Bow, Durant, McAlester and Poteau.

During the summer break, the Summer Food Service Program supplied nutritious meals at 13 locations throughout the reservation. All children under the age of 18 were eligible for the grab-and-go kits.

From May through August, packets that included breakfasts, lunches, snacks and milk for a week were given out weekly. A total of 738,311 meals were distributed throughout the summer months. Choctaw Nation and the USDA funded the program for all children 18 and under, and it was immensely popular due to the rising cost of food, the fact that children were home during the summer from school, and families needed extra support.



Photo by Christian Toews

Andrea Goings and Andrew Hagelberger display the large pellet smokers that can hold up to 900 pounds of meat at Three Rivers Meat Company. The store, which opened in April in Octavia/Smithville, increased food availability in the area.

The Three Rivers Meat Company opened in Octavia/Smithville, Okla., in April, and people in the area no longer need to drive long distances to purchase fresh meat. Choctaw Nation partnered with area investors to build and operate the facility, which will increase food availability and employment security within the location, which has long been considered a food desert area. It is the only location within 800 miles to offer high-quality custom meat processing, top-shelf value-added products, a cafe, a retail store, a fresh meat market, and Oklahoma-sourced products under the same roof.

The Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) and the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs have also continued their service to clients this past year. WIC is a federally funded supplemental nutrition program that contributes to healthy

pregnancies, babies, and children. The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program is a USDA-funded program that provides local, fresh fruits and vegetables to participants of the tribe’s WIC program.

The Senior Nutrition Program provides meals to our elders at local Choctaw Nation community centers throughout the Choctaw Nation once weekly. The Talihina location serves meals five days a week.

The Choctaw Beef and Pecans Program, which has become a very popular new tribal program, provides eligible Choctaw Nation tribal members with the opportunity to receive ground beef and cracked pecans.

If you or your family would like to read more about these programs, please visit www.choctawnation.com.

Milestones celebrated in education and community service

By Christian Chaney

Education

2024 was a successful and rewarding year for education programs. The Adult Education program celebrated its largest graduating class yet, with 166 students. The College Freshman Year Initiative supported 129 students with over \$25,000 in funding, while the Higher Education program assisted 12,610 students with over \$15 million in financial aid. The Chahta Foundation awarded 273 scholarships totaling \$1.8 million, and the Career Development program provided \$8 million in support to 9,644 students building their skills and careers.

The STAR (Success Through Academic Achievement) program also saw record-breaking growth, benefiting 6,089 students with 7,191 awards and distributing over \$260,000 in funding. High School Student Services saw a 7.98% increase in participation in 2024, with 4,925 students participating. The program mailed and hand-delivered almost 2,000 graduation cords to tribal high school graduates and allocated over \$128,000 for reimbursement applications and ACT preparation workshops. Additionally, over 2,200 youth participated in summer camps organized by Youth Events and Activities. Students who attended the camps participated in sports, cultural activities and educational opportunities.



The Chahta Foundation recently awarded fifteen scholarships totaling \$150,000 to Choctaw Nation tribal member students pursuing degrees in fields that benefit the gaming and hospitality industry. The recipients were (left to right) Matthew Brame, Gavin Crouch, Ainsley Abernathy, Karsen Jefferson, Tucker Dry and Sarah Elizabeth Turner.

Jones Academy Library was awarded the Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS) Basic Library Grant. Jones Academy had over 150 enrolled students in 2024, with 74 residential female students and 69 residential male students. Students participated in various events like the Annual Student Art Show, sewing classes with Rowena Roberts, the AISES National Conference in San Antonio, Texas and multiple university visits.

These accomplishments are a product of Choctaw Nation’s ongoing commitment to empowering its members through education and personal development, ensuring brighter futures for students.

Community Service

In 2024, the Choctaw Nation celebrated milestones and took part in several exciting community initiatives.

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) celebrated its 20th anniversary of empowering youth through leadership and service, with approximately 50 alumni and 100 current members coming together to honor this achievement.

Choctaw Nation’s Early Childhood departments hosted their annual food drive, collecting and distributing over 3,100 cans of food across the reservation.

The Meals on Wheels program, coordinated through the Ron Cross Senior Activity Center, helped tribal associates deliver approximately 500 meals across 140 routes in Durant, continuing support for city seniors.

Throughout the year, the Oklahoma Blood Institute holds blood drives at various locations across the reservation. In 2024, OBI received nearly 8,000 donations from the Choctaw Nation Blood Drives.

Additionally, the Choctaw Nation contributed to several community development projects. In partnership with the City of Broken Bow, Choctaw Nation provided over \$240,000 toward a \$600,000 project to upgrade



Photo Provided

Students line up to spell “YAB” on the capital lawn at Tvshka Homma. YAB celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2024.

the Broken Bow Youth Complex with artificial turf, preparing it to host the 2D World Series baseball tournaments starting in 2025. Similarly, a \$200,000 contribution to the \$600,000+ Poteau Area Recreation Complex (PARC) project will transform the facility into a hub for regional activities, youth sports and cultural events like traditional Choctaw stickball.

These efforts reflect Choctaw Nation’s dedication to strengthening its communities and supporting its members.

Another year of progress for CNO Judicial Branch and Public Safety

By Kendra Germany-Wall

In 2024, the Choctaw Nation saw continued success in its Judicial and Public Safety sectors.

On January 19, 2024, several Lighthorse officers will be receiving the “Life Saver” award in appreciation of their outstanding efforts. Officer Christian Minyen was able to clear an airway obstruction on an infant. Officers Brenton Hall and Robert Rocha rendered aid to a suicidal subject who shot himself. Officer Danny Smith and Sergeant Jeff Bryant each revived an overdose subject with Narcan. Sergeant Jacob Heath revived a man with his Automatic External Defibrillator (AED). Sergeant Cody Donoley and Officer Zach Chavez performed CPR and utilized an AED to revive a female. In conjunction with the awards, officer Robert Toon was promoted to Lieutenant.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) held the swearing-in ceremony for Appellate Judge Fob Jones on Feb. 2 at the Choctaw Nation Judicial Center in Durant, Okla. CNO employees, CNO judges, and friends and family of the newest judge attended the ceremony.

On Aug. 25, Chief Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the grand opening of the Ahni Center at the Chief Gregory E. Pyle Tribal Complex in Durant. The center is the first tribal Family Justice Center of its kind in Oklahoma’s Indian Country. “Ahni” translates to “hope” in the Choctaw language.

The Ahni Center addresses the physical and emotional needs of victims of child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault and has services available to begin the healing process. The Center provides for forensic interviews, Sexual Assault Nursing Exams for adults and children, and therapy for child and adult victims. In addition, the Ahni Center will give referrals for victim services, assistance with victim services applications, victim advocacy, and court preparation.

The Choctaw Nation’s Department of Public Safety (DPS) works tirelessly to ensure the safety and security of everyone who lives within the reservation boundaries. Through various avenues such as the Community Protection Team, Lighthorse Police, Tribal Security, training workshops and more, the DPS is a versatile and responsive resource for tribal and local law enforcement.

The DPS also works closely with local law enforcement agencies to ensure jurisdictional laws are honored while keeping all residents safe.

This year, the DPS launched a public non-emergency dispatch line (580-920-7000). The dispatch center is located in Durant and sends out security officers and Lighthorse police from assigned zones.

The Choctaw Nation’s Injury Prevention program held



Choctaw Nation Photo

One of the biggest stories this year was the opening of the CNO public non-emergency dispatch line. The center is located in Durant and sends out security officers and Lighthorse Police from assigned zones.

several car seat checks throughout it’s reservation in 2024. Children Matter is part of the Choctaw Nation’s Injury Prevention program, which provides education for properly installing car seats for children who are members of a federally recognized tribe.

The goal of the Injury Prevention Program is to focus special attention on activities to prevent or reduce the occurrence of injuries for Native Americans residing in the Choctaw Nation service area.

One way this is done is by ensuring that Native Americans living on the Choctaw Nation reservation have access to adequate child passenger safety seats or equipment appropriate for their child.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) Office of the Tribal Prosecutors concluded its most recent series of law enforcement roundtables between tribal, local, and state law enforcement agencies and prosecutors. Four meetings were held across the reservation, with over 77 attendees representing over 30 law enforcement agencies.

In the meetings, Mike Haggerty, Tribal Prosecutor for the Choctaw Nation, discussed recent updates to CNO’s Tribal Codes and addressed ongoing challenges, along with the steps taken by the CNO Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and Lighthorse Police to address them. Agencies also discussed their challenges and networked with their law enforcement partners.

These are just a few of the successes of the Judicial Branch and Public Safety. Look for more highlights in future issues of the Biskinik.

To stay up-to-date on what’s happening in the Choctaw Nation, follow Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma on social media or visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/>.

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Choctaw Nation

The December 2024 Tribal Council meeting had not taken place at the time the January 2025 issue of the Biskinik was printed.

Tribal Council Minutes can be found at <https://www.choctawnation.com/about/government/tribal-council/meetings/>.

The December 2024 First Language Speaker and Veteran of the Month will be featured in the February issue of the Biskinik in order for them to be recognized in the paper.

2024 Outstanding Elders announced

DURANT, Okla. (December 3, 2024) – The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma hosted the 2024 Outstanding Elder banquet to honor the elders from each district who stood out as exceptional examples of the Chahta spirit, going above and beyond for their communities. Jerry Bohanan of Smithville, Okla., and Gina Self of Hugo, Okla., were the recipients of the 2024 awards.

“Every year, it is an honor to recognize these wonderful tribal members,” said Chief Gary Batton. “Our Elders are a shining light to our communities and an example for the generations that come after. Yakoke to each of you for giving your time and energy to help your peers.”

Bohanan is the male Outstanding Elder. Bohanan, from Smithville, Okla., was nominated representing District 3. His nomination reads, “On Wednesdays, he can always be found at the Community Center helping serve meals or taking food to homebound elders. (He’s) Never wanting credit or recognition, and Jerry takes pride in helping make the Smithville Choctaw Community Center the best it can be in its service to others.” Bohanan volunteers for fundraisers and cutting down trees. He helps wherever he can, “proudly representing the Choctaw people.”

Self is the female Outstanding Elder and lives in Hugo, Okla. A member of District 8, she began volunteering at the Choctaw Commu-



Choctaw Nation Photo
Pictured left to right: Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr., Tribal Council Member Eddie Bohanan, Jerry Bohanan, Gina Self, Chief Gary Batton, and Tribal Council Member Perry Thompson.

nity Center after retiring from her 28 years of service at the Choctaw County Health Department. Her nomination reads, “Gina’s presence is a constant at community events, where she is always ready to lend a hand whenever needed. She is well-known for organizing successful social events and assisting with Indian taco sales. Gina’s pride in the Choctaw heritage is evident in everything she does, and she embodies the principles of servant leadership, consistently putting the needs of others before her own.” Self attributes her dedication to serving her community to her deep-rooted values and strives to make a positive impact, leaving a lasting legacy of kindness and service.

The Outstanding Elders Banquet has been held since 1999. Each of the twelve districts nominate a male and a female each year who are invited to attend the banquet to celebrate the group’s service to their communities.



Photos Provided
Singer-songwriter Samantha Crain meets new people every day through her music, and one thing she has learned is that everyone has a story to tell.

her duty to be a part of passing it on to future generations.

Incorporating the Choctaw language into contemporary music is Samantha’s way of ensuring that the culture continues to evolve.

“We had so much music taken away from us. When so much of our cultural traditions were taken away from us, I think it’s important to give younger and future generations the confidence that they need to keep adding to this culture,” said Samantha.

Samantha believes that the arts, and particularly live music, are essential in bringing people together in today’s fragmented world. In an age when it’s easy to become isolated, live performances offer a rare opportunity for shared experiences and connection. She recalls a quote that resonates with her: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” For Samantha, this captures the essence of community and collaboration. Achieving something meaningful and long-lasting often requires the support of others, and she values the role of community in her own journey.

In her music, Samantha explores personal stories, often drawing from her own life experiences. Songwriting is her way of processing the past and gaining clarity. She believes that everyone, regardless of where they come from, benefits from looking back and understanding their experiences. For Samantha, music is a tool for this introspection, and her songs often reflect her own emotional journey. However, she has also written songs inspired by other people’s lives, using her craft to empathize with their experiences.

Samantha’s music has appeared in multiple television and film productions. Sterlin Harjo’s Emmy Award winning television series Reservation Dogs (Hulu) and Marvel Studios’ Echo (Disney+ and Hulu) both featured her songs. In addition, she wrote the score for Fancy Dance (Apple TV+), a feature film starring Lily Gladstone and Isabel Deroy-Olson. She also wrote the music for Together We’re More ads, which include the lyric, “We are Choctaw. We are here.”

Her music is available on major music streaming platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, and SoundCloud. Her new album, Dragonfly, will be released in March 2025.

Samantha’s artistry is a powerful blend of personal storytelling, cultural preservation, and a desire to connect people. Through her music, she continues to evolve as an artist and as a person, always looking for ways to bridge the past with the present and inspire future generations. Her work in keeping the Choctaw language alive through music stands as a testament to her commitment to both her heritage and the broader world of art. For more of Samantha’s story, visit <https://togetherweremore.com/>.



District 4

Halito,
I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season surrounded by family and friends! As we step into the new year, let’s take a moment to highlight the last few months of 2024 for District 4. At the Spiro Community Center, we celebrated a truly remarkable milestone—the 100th birthday of Leatrice Carter! It was a joyous occasion to honor a century of life and wisdom.

We also gathered in Durant for the Outstanding Elders Banquet, where we celebrated elders who have paved the way for us. Representing Poteau were Sherry McCullough and Gary Williams, while Spiro was proudly represented by Patsy Gist and Tom Tobler.

Both Spiro and Poteau Community Centers hosted Halloween Carnivals for the kids. These events brought plenty of smiles with candy, costumes, and laughter. Poteau also had special visitors from the Choctaw Head Start program, to trick or treat with the staff.

November began with the PowWow in Durant, a wonderful event that brought the community together to celebrate culture and traditions.

Thanksgiving was marked with community meals in Heavener, Spiro, and Poteau. It was heartwarming to gather and share the spirit of gratitude with so many familiar faces.

A special congratulations to Tenley Reece, who represented the Choctaw Nation in the 2025 Jr. Miss Indian Oklahoma pageant! She earned the Congeniality Award and the Entrepreneur Award. District 4 is so proud of you, Tenley!

Our seniors also enjoyed a day at Joy’s Pecan Orchard in Idabel. It was a delightful outing filled with pecan-picking, lunch, and meaningful fellowship.

District 4 seniors from both Spiro and Poteau took trips to Branson. They enjoyed the Christmas lights, shows, and had a great time.

December was a month of celebration and togetherness. The Kids’ Christmas with Santa events brought joy as children lit up with excitement receiving toys from Santa. Community Christmas meals at our centers were another opportunity to come together and celebrate the holiday season.

Of course, Christmas parades were a highlight, as always, with their festive energy bringing cheer to all who attended. We were able to attend the Poteau and Wister parades this year.

A particularly exciting moment was the groundbreaking for the new Dale Cox Community Center in December. We’ve outgrown our current center, and this new hub will serve as a vital space for gatherings and activities in the years to come.

As we step into 2025, we embrace new beginnings and the opportunities they bring. I’m excited for what’s in store for District 4 this year and look forward to continuing our journey together.

If I can be of any assistance, please don’t hesitate to reach out.
Wishing everyone a happy, healthy, and blessed New Year!
God Bless,
Jess Henry



Council Member Jess Henry hands out candy to trick-or-treaters.



Some District 4 elders pose for a photo with Council Member Jess Henry at the 2024 Elders Banquet.



Photos Provided
District 4 tribal members and staff pose for a photo during the Spiro Choctaw Community Center Halloween Party.



Photos Provided
Jess Henry announces the winner of one of the prizes at the Heavner kids Christmas party.

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matt Gamble

Happy New Year from the CNO Wildlife Department! For me it seems like 2024 went by in the blink of an eye. Many great things happened this year for CNO Wildlife and CNO tribal members. The Five Tribes Wildlife Reciprocity Agreement was an assertion of tribal sovereignty that honors tribal rights to hunt and fish within our reservation. Chief Batton, Assistant Chief Austin, and the Tribal Council were champions of this cause and made sure that the agreement made it across the finish line. CNO Wildlife is excited to work with our counterparts in the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole Nations to responsibly manage our precious fish and wildlife resources.

CNO received a grant in late 2024 to develop an archery education program. Our staff is really excited about this program. Currently, we are purchasing the equipment to hold training events at CNO Community Centers, schools, and other venues to teach the time-honored tradition of shooting a bow and arrow.

In Fall of 2024 the United States Fish and Wildlife Service awarded the CNO Wildlife Department a Tribal Wildlife Grant that will be used to purchase equipment for fisheries surveys. Water and the ecosystems that it supports are critical to our people. CNO Wildlife will be conducting fisheries surveys on culturally significant species as well as population surveys on sensitive drainage basins. This grant will help us collect valuable data to protect our resources.

CNO Wildlife also was able to put up almost 30 bat houses that provide additional habitat for native bat species. Over 200 deer were sampled and tested for Chronic Wasting Disease. Spotlight and thermal deer population surveys were conducted, turkey genetic information was collected for Texas A&M, conception dates were measured on whitetail does, and the list could go on but I’d like to talk a little about 2025.

This year we will be advertising our Deer Herd Enhancement Program (DHEP) that will make it possible for Choctaw Tribal Member landowners to receive assistance in managing their property for whitetail deer.

Our staff is continually evaluating ways to make improvements and provide opportunities for tribal members. That’s where you come in. Our staff wants to hear from you. Questions, concerns, or suggestions are always welcome at wildlife@choctawnation.com. You may also visit our website at <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/wildlife-conservation/> for up-to-date information and regulations. As always, find some time to enjoy nature in the outdoors, which God has blessed us with.

Choctaw Nation

Wildlife Conservation

Upcoming Events

Ouachita Switchbacks 25k/50k/10-mile - January 18 | 8 a.m. | TPashubbe Trailhead North of Big Cedar and East of US 259 Big Cedar, OK, 74939 | The 10-mile race is back, but this year it will start and finish with the others and turn around at the rock glacier. The trail run course is extremely technical with considerable elevation change. The race begins and ends in a remote location with no bathroom facilities.

Cinema at the Center - December 13 | 7 p.m. | This monthly series features a wide range of films designed around a fun, family-friendly theme. This month, check out The Twilight Zone (4 episodes). We'd love to see you for movie night. Visit, bit.ly/ccc-workshop-events for more information.

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Spiro Community Center Donates Hams to Bobby Wafford Foundation

The Spiro Community Center donated hams to the Bobby Wafford Foundation. Due, in part, to the generosity of the Choctaw Nation Community Center at Spiro, the Foundation was able to feed Thanksgiving Dinner free of charge to several families in the Spiro area. The Foundation operates on monetary donations as well as food donations. If you would like to donate for next year's Thanksgiving, contact "Bobby the Barber" in Spiro, Oklahoma.

UNCLAIMED FUNDS

The Accounting Department of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is trying to contact the individuals listed below. Choctaw Nation is in possession of unclaimed funds (uncashed payroll checks) that may be due to these individuals.

If you are an employee or former employee of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and your name is listed below, please contact: The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma P.O. Box 1210 Durant, OK 74702 Attn: Lisa Jordan, Accountant Or Phone 580-642-7530.

Danielle George
Destiny Barker
William Wright
Shana Mitchell

Freddie Michael Jones Jr.
Cassandra McGuire
Ollie Madbull
Ambry Todd

Programs & Services

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

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

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


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



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

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

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



Choctaw Nation Election Board

PUBLIC NOTICE OF GENERAL ELECTION CALENDAR 2025

To the Tribal Members of The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 14, 2024

In accordance with the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council Ordinance, adopted by CN-12-22, voters are hereby given the Secretary shall provide a notice of filing dates and election deadlines, as well as the location of the Election Board office, to be published in various newspapers under the jurisdiction of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, including the tribal newspaper, and in other media outlets.

Notice is Hereby Given, That the Election Board office is primarily maintained by the Director of Voter Registration, serving as Secretary of the Election Board. The office is located at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters, 1802 Chukka Hna Durant, OK 74701, in the Voter Registration Suite, Office #1253. The office hours shall be Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and will close to observe all holidays recognized by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The election schedule shall follow as:

PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE FILING PERIOD	
General District 18, and General District 19	Mon, April 22, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Tue, April 23, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Wed, April 24, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
CONTEST OF CANDIDACY PERIOD	
General District 18, and General District 19	Thu, April 24, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Fri, April 25, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES	
General District 18, and General District 19	Mon, April 28, 2025 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.
GENERAL ELECTION	
General District 18, and General District 19	Tue, July 15, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Wed, July 16, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Thu, July 17, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Fri, July 18, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.
General District 18, and General District 19	Sat, July 19, 2025 8:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.



CHOCTAW VETERAN ADVOCACY PROGRAM

Are You a Choctaw Veteran?

Let us help guide you to the benefits and services that you have earned.

580-642-8451 | [BIT.LY/CNO-VETERANS-ADVOCACY](http://bit.ly/cno-veterans-advocacy)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

HONOR GUARD

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

[VETERANSADVOCACY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM](mailto:veteransadvocacy@choctawnation.com)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

Biskinik Announcement Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gary Batton
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.
Assistant Chief

The Official
Monthly Publication of the
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Kristina Humenesky, Senior Director
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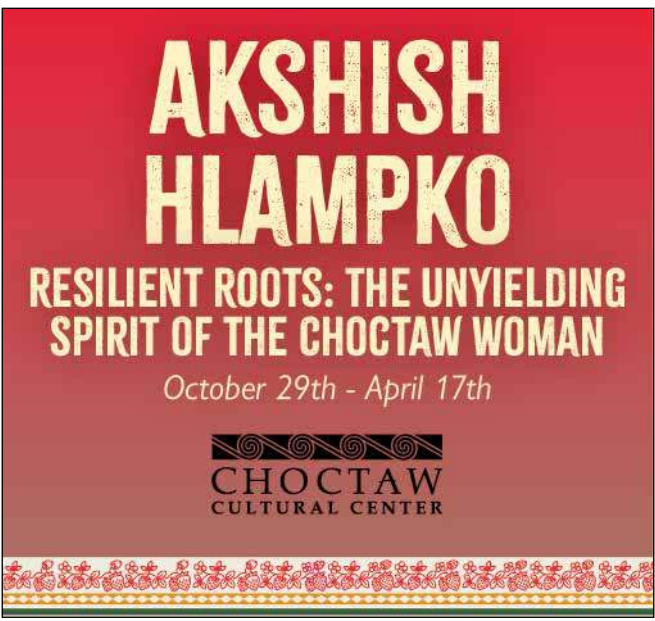
P.O. Box 1210
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CHOCTAW NATION LIVESTOCK SHOW

FEBRUARY 1 – 2, 2025

LEARN MORE AND ENTER



AKSHISH HLAMPKO

RESILIENT ROOTS: THE UNYIELDING SPIRIT OF THE CHOCTAW WOMAN

October 29th - April 17th

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

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. 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.

Chahta Anumpa Aiiikhvna Chanuali Language Lesson

Tvli:	Halito, chim achukma?	Hello, how are you?
Meli:	A, vm achukma.	Yes, I'm good.
Tvli:	Ilvppvt chim ofi yo?	Is this your dog?
Meli:	A, i hohchifo yvt Booma.	Yes, his name is Boomer
Tvli:	Chim ofi yvt chi-to chiyvohmi.	Your dog is really big.
Meli:	A, ihkia, kvna moma i kana achukma.	Yes, but he's friendly to everyone.
Tvli:	Kopola hinla ho?	Does he bite?
Meli:	Keyu, kvna kia aiokpanchi.	No, he likes everyone.
	Chishnato, nan vlhpovt chi maya ho?	What about you, do you have pets?
Tvli:	Anato kiyo, amba svshki ato katos vt im antta.	I don't but my mother has a cat.
Meli:	Katos aiena aiok-panchi li	I like cats too.
Tvli:	Kanimikma a chukka ish ona chike, akma katos ish pisa hinla.	Come by my house sometime and you can see the cat.
Meli:	Ome.	Okay

www.choctawschool.com

Fastpitch honors for 4 Bulldogs

Calera High School students, Taylynn Conder, sophomore, Taibree Melton, freshman, Auhnesty Maytubby, freshman, Kaira Beller, freshman, were selected by coaches and made the 2024 Fastpitch All District team. Conder and Melton also made the 2024 Bryan County Fastpitch All- Conference team.



Taibree Melton - Catcher



Kaira Beller - Short Stop

Block integrates powerful and creative forces in dance piece

Emma Block, a third-year Anthropology Indigenous Worlds Concentration, Environmental Thought & Practice major and Dance minor at University of Virginia offered a dance piece centered on collaboration, a call to those before us and after. The work reaches forward and backward into the histories and stories of the humans and more-than-humans that perpetually define us. Block aims to uplift marginalized stories and cultural dances through this piece. This work has included collaboration beyond the dancers and choreographer, integrating what Block notes as “powerful and radical creative forces. These contributions including individuals in the Black & Indigenous Feminist Futures Institute <https://www.biffinstitute.com>, Katie Schetlick from the dance program, Noel Lobley from the music department, Minh Nguyen and others from UVA Bluegrass, ‘X’ from the Black Power Station situated in South Africa <https://theblackpowerstation.art>, and an extraordinarily infinite and cyclical list of nameable and unnameable forces.” Block is a third year recipient of a Cobell Scholarship, and will be studying at the University of Auckland for Spring Semester 2025. She is the great granddaughter of original enrollee Willie E Dodson, choreographed and performed a dance piece centered on collaboration, a call to those before us and after us.



Leach named TSU Dean of College of Education

STEPHENVILLE, Texas—Dr. Lesley Leach has been named Dean of Tarleton State University’s College of Education, effective Jan. 1, 2025. Currently Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Development, Dr. Leach has earned increasing levels of responsibilities at Tarleton State since beginning her time at the university in 2012 as an Adjunct Instructor. In addition to her teaching duties, some of her other roles at Tarleton have included serving as Coordinator for the Ed.D. in educational leadership program, as a Department Head and as Associate Dean for Research and Innovation. Since 2020, she has led the Center for Educational Excellence (CEE), providing faculty support in instructional design and course development, community-engaged learning, and experiential learning. She has played a key part in the strategic planning process for the CEE team. “With over 10 years of administrative experience, Dr. Leach will be a thoughtful and impactful leader for our College of Education,” said Dr. Diane Stearns, Tarleton State Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. “Her impressive ability to work with faculty, staff, students and external stakeholders to achieve goals makes her a strong fit for this opportunity.” Dr. Leach, a former elementary school teacher, is a 1997 graduate of The University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor’s degree in applied learning and development. She earned her master’s in computer education and cognitive systems along with her doctorate in educational research from the University of North Texas. She is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation.



Since 2023, she has served as the program chair and president-elect for the Southwest Educational Research Association. Additionally, she is an associate editor for the International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches and sits on the editorial board for the international, peer-reviewed *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice*. In 2021, she earned the Crystal Apple Society Award from Tarleton State’s College of Education. During her career, she has helped secure seven grants totaling over \$3 million in funding. “I look forward to working alongside our exceptional faculty, staff and students,” said Dr. Leach. “Together, we will build on the college’s strong foundation, advancing innovative practices and fostering partnerships that will benefit both the university and the communities we serve.” For more information on Tarleton State’s College of Education, visit www.tarleton.edu/coe/. A founding member of The Texas A&M System, Tarleton State University is breaking records — in enrollment, research, scholarship, athletics, philanthropy and engagement — while transforming the lives of approximately 18,000 students in Stephenville, Fort Worth, Waco, Bryan and online. For 125 years, Tarleton State has been committed to accessible higher education opportunities for all while helping students grow academically, socially and professionally through programs that emphasize real world learning and address regional, state and national needs.



Taylynn Conder - First Base



Auhnesty Maytubby - Pitcher

90 years for Smith

Harmon Kayle Smith recently celebrated his 90th birthday. He loves the blanket and says, “thank you” to the Choctaw Nation.



Ingram turns 13

“Happy 13th Birthday Jett! We love you son. Hope you have a great day.” – Love, Mom and Dad



Hickman signs with OSU

Beau Hickman, a senior at Tuttle High School in Tuttle, Oklahoma, has committed to the Oklahoma State University Wrestling Team. Hickman has won the State Championship three years in a row and will soon be trying for a fourth. In an Instagram post, Hickman stated, “I am extremely blessed and thankful to be announcing that I will be continuing my Academic and Athletic career at Oklahoma State. I would like to thank my family, friends, and coaches that have supported me along the way. Go Pokes!”



CNO partners with the City of Broken Bow on \$600,000 youth baseball complex improvement project

BROKEN BOW, Okla. (Nov. 18, 2024)- The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has partnered with the City of Broken Bow to enhance the Broken Bow Youth Complex with a \$600,000 improvement project. Choctaw Nation’s contribution of \$240,320 will help install artificial turf on the baseball fields, ensuring the facility is ready to host the 2D World Series baseball tournaments beginning in 2025. The city signed a three-year contract with Last Swing Events to host the World Series, which will attract teams from across the Southeast, bringing a boost in tourism and the local economy. The artificial turf installation is a critical upgrade, minimizing rainouts and ensuring consistent scheduling for year-round events. In addition to the World Series, the complex will host spring and summer tournaments, fall ball and other regional and cultural events, bringing in an estimated 40-60 teams per event. “It’s been a blessing to work with Choctaw Nation,” said Vicki Patterson, Broken Bow city manager. “This

CNO partners with City of Poteau on \$600,000 recreation complex improvement project

POTEAU, Okla. (Nov. 18, 2024) –The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has partnered with the City of Poteau on a \$600,000+ project to improve the Poteau Area Recreation Complex (PARC). A \$200,000 donation from the Choctaw Nation is helping transform the facility into a hub for local, regional and cultural activities, including youth sports and traditional Choctaw stickball. Enrollment at PARC has skyrocketed from 400 participants to over 1,300. With such a large increase, additional infrastructure was needed. With the assistance of the Choctaw Development Fund, the City of Poteau is installing awnings, fencing, lighting, a scoreboard and sidewalks with drain grates. They are also upgrading the dugouts and concession stands. “It was really exciting to find out we’d received this donation,” said Poteau Mayor Scotty White. “Six years ago we had around 400 kids in our ball program, and we had 1,350 last year. It’s not just Poteau kids who use it. It’s all of LeFlore County and beyond, with three different counties and two states using it. We get a lot

Choctaw Nation Jury convicts Broken Bow resident of sexual battery of a child

DURANT, Okla. (Nov. 19, 2024) – A Choctaw Nation jury found Jordan Ryan Caldwell, 33, of Broken Bow, Okla., guilty on one felony count of sexual battery in violation of the CNO Criminal Code on Oct. 28, 2024. The jury trial began on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024, and concluded with the guilty verdict. Sentencing is set on December 19, 2024. Based on the verdict, the defendant is facing up to three years imprisonment on a felony charge and will be required to register as a sex offender after he is released. Sentencing in tribal courts must conform with the federal Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, which imposes such limits. Choctaw Nation District Judge Richard Branam presided over the trial. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma was represented by Assistant Tribal Prosecutors Heather Cooper and Jennifer Saralino. According to Cooper, the guilty verdicts were the result of an . Caldwell’s victim, who testified against her abuser, was surrounded by her family when the jury delivered the verdict. Cooper stated, “The bravery of this young lady is unmatched and is a testament to her character. Verdicts like this send a message that preying on children will not be tolerated within the Choctaw Nation,” said Cooper: “Thank you to the Broken Bow Police Department and Broken Bow High School for their swift action in the days following the crime as well as the jurors for their time and careful consideration.”

Montgomery is FFA National Champion

Red Oak FFA member Titus Montgomery earned the National Champion in Agriculture Communications Entrepreneurship/Placement Award at the 97th National FFA Convention.



This award is one of the proficiency awards given to FFA members who, through Supervised Agriculture Experiences have developed specialized skills that they can apply toward their future careers. Titus has a weekly radio report called the Southeast Oklahoma Ag Report, which can be heard three times each weekday on The Mix 93.1 FM. Montgomery also started a podcast, “Brag on Ag,” which he produces on his own and is published on all major podcast listening apps. His Supervised Agricultural Experiences have provided him with skills in radio programming and production, advocacy and research, public speaking and writing, and even merchandising. For the awards, students compete in areas ranging from agricultural communications to wildlife management. Proficiency awards are also recognized at local and state levels and provide recognition to members exploring and becoming established in agricultural career pathways. The Red Oak FFA advisors are Troy Walker and Leland Walker. Titus is currently serving as an Oklahoma FFA State Officer as the Southeast Area Vice President and a student at Oklahoma State University majoring in Agricultural Leadership and Plant and Soil Sciences. He is the son of Johnny and Leilani Montgomery and the great-great-great-grandson of original enrollee, Lottie “Nan” Thomas West.

Charleston turns 101

GM “Choc” Charleston turned 101 on December 24. The Choctaw elder and World War II veteran to be commemorated in Belgium for service in Battle of Bulge. The Belgian king and queen are recognizing GM “Choc” Charleston, for his role in a major turning point in the war.



OKC Thunder Photo

Charleston was also honored during the Nov. 11 OKC Thunder game, where he got to meet the players and wave to the fans. At the December 3 Bethany Oklahoma City Council Meeting, Charleston was presented with a certificate of recognition for his life and service.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Development Fund Manager Angel Rowland presents a check to Broken Bow City Manager Vicki Patterson and Broken Bow Parks and Cemetery Director MaKynlee Young.

is going to help our sports complex grow even more. Last year we signed a contract for the 2D Sports World Series tournaments, so turf is one of the things they asked us to work on. The partnership with Choctaw Nation has been such a blessing because without them we wouldn’t be able to do it.”



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Development Fund Manager Angel Rowland presents a check to Broken Bow City Manager Vicki Patterson and Broken Bow Parks and Cemetery Director MaKynlee Young.

of Arkansas kids who come over to play, so it really is a thriving facility. This donation is a perfect example of how Choctaw Nation is a true partner in everything we do. We can’t thank them enough.” The project is well underway with fencing and asphalt complete, and stage two will involve building two new fields. White said the city is aiming for a completion date of Spring 2025.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Development Fund Manager Angel Rowland presents a check to Broken Bow City Manager Vicki Patterson and Broken Bow Parks and Cemetery Director MaKynlee Young.

Tribal Prosecutor Mike Haggerty, who heads the Tribal Prosecutor’s Office, said “This case highlights how well we can partner with state and local agencies in helping our victims receive justice. The hard work put in by our prosecutors and staff and the Broken Bow Police Department has helped make the Choctaw Nation a safer place for everyone.”

ITI FABVSSA

Coal in Choctaw Nation, Part I

By Megan Baker, Guest Writer

While casinos have been one of Choctaw Nation’s most successful business endeavors, a lesser-known Choctaw economic project was their venture into the coal mining industry. As the United States and other nations over the world industrialized in the 1800s, coal became a high demand natural resource due to its efficiency compared to lumber. Concentrated in the northern half of Choctaw Nation, coal and its mining has shaped many communities and the history of the region. From the mining camps that became towns to the establishment of Little Italy, coal mining has had a clear legacy. In this three-part series, Iti Fabvssa will delve into the history of Choctaw coal and its mining to highlight its role in sustaining the sovereignty of the Choctaw Nation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Coal has long been known to exist in the region that is now the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. When the French explorer Bernard de La Harpe travelled through these lands in 1719, he noted that there were “many deposits abundant with coal” near a stream now known as Coal Creek.¹ Surveyors employed by the US government to document the lands before and after the removal of the Five Tribes to Indian Territory also recorded the abundant presence of coal. As Choctaws settled into their new territory, they used coal found at the surface of the land for fire. Some enterprising individuals gathered coal, loaded it in wagons, and sold it as far away as Fort Sill and Arbuckle.² Choctaws named the county where coal was found “Tobocksey,” based off the Choctaw word for coal, “tobaksi.”

Since removal, the Choctaw government had undergone massive changes to rebuild their government. Between 1830 and 1872, the government had ratified multiple constitutions, integrated in Chickasaws into the Choctaw government, allowed Chickasaws to have their own government, and massively expanded the number of courts, schools, and other government offices. Choctaws’ experiences with the US government had clearly taught them the value of integrating some aspects of Western society into Choctaw government in order to protect their way of life.

While some things in Choctaw society changed, other aspects did not. One of those aspects that is also key to understanding the history of Choctaw coal mining was the Choctaw system of land ownership. Unlike the US land ownership model that emphasizes exclusive rights, Choctaws’ land ownership in the 1800s was rooted in the Choctaw philosophy of communal land ownership which had been followed for thousands of generations. Families usually lived on plots of land that they could reasonably use and cultivate. For Choctaw people living within treaty territory, there were no absolute titles; rather, if someone stopped taking care of land that they claimed, it would go back to the community. One individual who lived in Choctaw Nation in the 1800s stated that “there were no fences in the country in those days.”³ By not viewing land as an object that could be owned, Choctaws continued to uphold old Choctaw values in the new homelands. Furthermore, to protect Choctaw lands from outsiders, Choctaw government established an intricate permit system that regulated non-Choctaw citizens who sought to work and live within Choctaw territory. But some individuals would find ways to undermine this system.

One non-Native businessman was able to manipulate Choctaw Nation’s permit system. While he lived in Arkansas, he worked with a surveyor who noted the vast amounts of coal in Choctaw territory and provided him with a map of coal outcroppings. This knowledge convinced him to move to the Choctaw Nation, apply for a permit to sell goods and wares, and acquire land that he could then lease to a mining company. But since only Choctaw citizens could claim and lease Choctaw lands, he had to first marry a Choctaw or Chickasaw citizen living in the Choctaw Nation to become an “intermarried Choctaw citizen.” Once he gained Choctaw citizenship through marriage, he was able to claim parcels of Choctaw lands that the surveyor maps had shown to have coal beneath the surface. Then, he, other intermarried citizens, and two Choctaws worked together to enter into contracts with companies to mine coal and provide each of them with a share of the profits. Alongside this, the Choctaw government also had to deal with issues regarding the US Civil War.

Before Choctaws signed their post-Civil War treaties

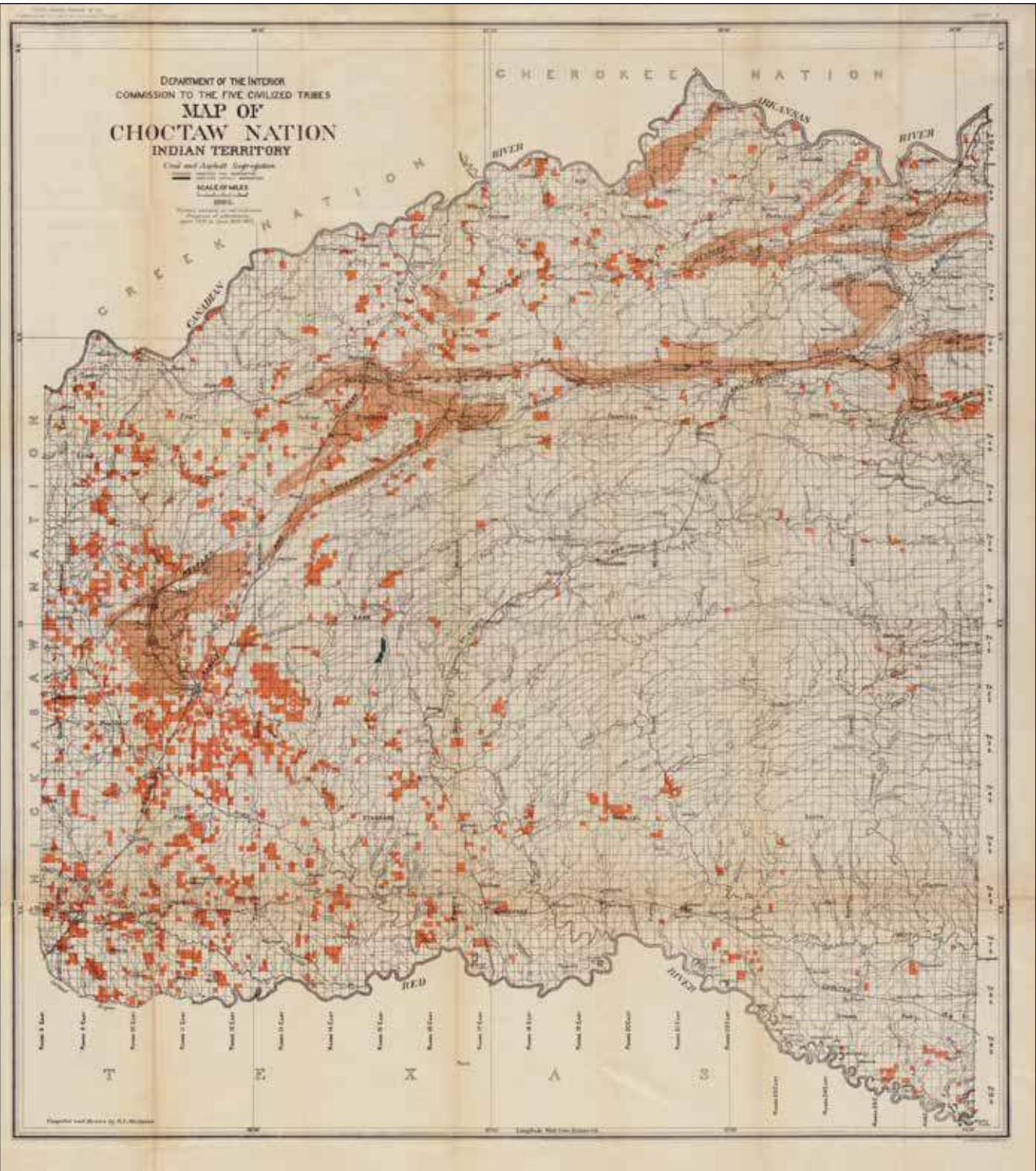


Photo Courtesy of Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Above is a map of Choctaw Nation, Indian territory, coal and asphalt segregation.

in 1866, railroad companies were blocked from entering Indian Territory. But since the Choctaws’ alliance with the Confederacy had failed, the US government punished the Choctaw Nation with a new, disadvantageous treaty. In the Treaty of 1866, Choctaw Nation had to agree to an allowance of one north-south and one east-west railroad to pass through its lands. This ultimately led to the construction of the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad through Choctaw Nation. Its completion and opening in 1872 was a critical moment in Choctaw history because the railroad brought in many outsiders into Choctaw territory. Many intermarried whites who prioritized business over maintaining traditional Choctaw lifeways, welcomed the railroad because it could transport coal out of Choctaw Nation to markets across the United States.

In 1875, the Osage Coal and Mining Company (no association with the tribal nation) opened the first commercial coal mine in Choctaw Nation.⁴ This mine was made possible because of the contract signed by non-Native businessman discussed above. As the leaser, the businessman and individuals who followed his example received money from the lease as well as royalties on the extracted coal. While he and other men got rich from this endeavor, these coal mines also brought in many outsiders to work in them. This massive influx of outsiders and rapidly growing industry would cause major problems for the Choctaw government that now would need to regulate both.

In Part II, Iti Fabvssa will cover the problems that arose from the introduction of the mining industry and how the Choctaw government sought to make coal mining an endeavor that could benefit all Choctaw people rather than a select few.

Works Cited

- 1 Anna Lewis, “La Harpe’s First Expedition in Oklahoma, 1718-1719,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 2, no. 4 (1924): 331–49.
- 2 Harris, Amelia F. “Interview with Mrs. Arthur Walcott,” *Indian Pioneer Papers*, Volume 94: 228.
- 3 Bolinger, Bradley. “Interview with John E. McGee,” *Indian Pioneer Papers*, Volume 58: 140-143.
- 4 Gene Aldrich, “A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907” (Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1952).

Want to learn more about Choctaw history?

Check out past and future Iti Fabvssa’s at <https://www.choctawnation.com/biskinik/iti-fabvssa/>.



STAR PROGRAM APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



DID YOU KNOW?

Before Oklahoma was admitted to the union as a state in 1907, the Choctaw Nation was divided into three districts: Apukshunnubbee, Moshulatubbee, and Pushmataha.

Each district had its own chief from 1834 to 1857; afterward, the three districts were put under the jurisdiction of one chief.

Pictured is Moshulatubbee.

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COLLEGE CLOTHING ALLOWANCE
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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

Louise Push Taylor

Louise Push Taylor, 82, passed away Nov. 6, 2024.
Louise was born Dec. 2, 1942, in Honobia, Okla., to Nora White and Simeon Push.

She was preceded in death by her husband Milton Taylor; daughter Cathy Taylor; son Jeffery Taylor; and grandchild Joey Taylor.

Louise is survived by husband Donald Robert; daughters Teresa Taylor Longoria and spouse Mike, and Connie Taylor; son Michael Taylor; sisters Joyce Gonzales, Betty Bond, Geraldine Tims, Joann Wade, and Jeanette Gonzales; grandchildren Frencho Garcia, Christopher Garcia, Hope Garcia, Michelle Taylor, Alex Ferrell, Lisa Ferrell, Cameron Ferrell, Christopher Ozuna, and Susan Natt; great-grandchildren Scarlett Garcia, Hayley Garcia, Frencho Garcia Jr., Bryson Taylor, Kiera Taylor, Lea Taylor, Kaylynn Taylor, Logan Taylor, Mickey Taylor, and Deena Taylor.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory Martin Funeral Home – Spiro](#).



Lucy Jean (Isaac) McLemore

Lucy Jean (Isaac) McLemore, 75, passed away Nov. 11, 2024.

Lucy was born Feb. 8, 1949, in Philadelphia, Miss., to Rev. Byrd Dixon and Pauline (Jim) Isaac.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Rev. Dan McLemore; brothers Jesse, Calvin, Carlston, Edward, and Brant Isaac; and sisters Julia Willis, Rella Billy, Bernice Garcia, and Katherine McMillan.

Lucy is survived by daughter Candace Leach and spouse Garry; granddaughter Amber Watkins and spouse Garyn; sisters Virgie Soloman, Wilma Lewis, and Waudine Brown.

For the full obituary, please visit [Holmes-Coffey-Murray Funeral Home](#).



Jesse Eugene Pistokache

Jesse Eugene Pistokache, 69, passed away Nov. 5, 2024.

Jesse was born Oct. 11, 1954, in Fort Worth, Tex., to John William and Edith Pearl Montgomery.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and siblings Mike Pistokache, Johnny Pistokache, Wils Grimes, and Patricia Grimes.

Jesse is survived by wife Donna; son Jesse Pistokache Jr.; daughters Angela Prichard and spouse Chris, and Lisa Cherryhomes and spouse John; sister Sandy Lock and spouse Joe; sister-in-law Robbie Pistokache; granddaughters Kayleigh Pistokache, Tayla Pistokache-Doyle, Zoe Prichard, Alyssa Cherryhomes, Madison Baker, and Julie Frees; and grandsons Nicholas Pistokache and Courbin Prichard.

For the full obituary, please visit [Lone Star Cremation](#).



Joe Storey Flowers

Joe Storey Flowers, 76, passed away March 4, 2024.

Joe was born April 26, 1947, in Paris, Tex., to Herbert Davidson Flowers and Juanita Ann Storey.

He was preceded in death by son-in-law Mark John Wood.

Joe is survived by his former wife Cynthia; children Joley, Justin and spouse Jen, and Jordan and spouse Amy; grandchildren Jonah, JimiJade, Hudson, and Vera; sister Nita and spouse Ed; nephew Erik and spouse Esther; niece Anna and spouse Chris; and many family members and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Lucas Funeral Home](#).



Andrew Jackson Johnson

Andrew Jackson “Andy” Johnson, 78, passed away Nov. 4, 2024.

Andy was born May 29, 1946, in Pittsburg Co., Okla., to Arthur J. and Emma Lou (Scroggins) Johnson.

He was preceded in death by his parents; an infant sibling; brothers and sisters James Johnson, Harvey Johnson, Ora Dority, Homer Johnson, Nina Johnson, Vera Nalley, and Stella Hampton; sister-in-law Demett Johnson; brothers-in-law Tommy Nalley and Jimmie Brown; and nephews Thomas Nalley, Kenny Nalley and Butch Johnson.

Andy is survived by his wife Juanita; son Andrew Timothy Johnson and spouse Beth Kalyn; daughter Daphne Nicole Johnson; granddaughter Nakaia Isabelle Johnson; brothers Troy Johnson, Chester Johnson and spouse Lonnie, and William Johnson; sisters-in-law Louise Brown, Rhydonia Baucom and spouse Greg; nieces and nephews Alfred Nalley, Judy Nalley, Jody Johnson, Crystal Johnson, Brandy Johnson, Raylene Homer, Donnie Ellis, Danny Ellis, Aaron Brown, Matt Brown, Angela McKee, and Brian Baucom; along with numerous other family members and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Bishop Funeral Home](#).

Wyona Sue Meshaya

Wyona Sue Meshaya, 71, passed away Nov. 21, 2024.

Wyona was born July 26, 1953, in Talihina, Okla., to Martin and Ruth (Ishcomer) Meshaya.

She was preceded in death by her daughter Kristi Meshaya; sisters Maudell Meshaya and Dorothy Willie; brother Martin Meshaya; and her parents.

Wyona is survived by her siblings: Jimmy Meshaya, Terry Meshaya, Preston Meshaya, and Geraldine Gill; and granddaughter Lindsay Alexander.

For the full obituary, please visit [Serenity Funeral Service](#).



Herman Johnson

Herman Johnson, 69, passed away Nov. 1, 2024.

Herman was born Dec. 1, 1954, in Talihina, Okla., to Margaret Ruby Frazier.

He was preceded in death by his mother; stepfather Johnny Frazier; sister Faye Johnson; daughter Ami Standridge; niece Miranda Johnson; and several aunts, uncles and cousins.

Herman is survived by sons Tyler Johnson, Jake Johnson and spouse Sierra, and Ty Johnson; brothers Howard Johnson and spouse Lisa, Jerry Don Johnson, Billy Joe Johnson and spouse Ruth Ann, and Glenn Johnson; grandchildren Riley Johnson and Kylin Johnson; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and other family members.

For the full obituary, please visit [Serenity Funeral Home – Antlers](#).



Clarence Edward Ishcomer

Clarence “Chuck” Edward Ishcomer, 91, passed away Oct. 24, 2024.

Chuck was born May 31, 1933, in Broken Bow, Okla., to Clayton and Minnie Ishcomer.

He was preceded in death by his wife Barbara Irene Ishcomer; son Lance Edward Ishcomer; and daughter Sherry Lynn Ishcomer.

Chuck is survived by daughters Dawn Laverne Ishcomer, Tamara Ishcomer Dufour, and Christine Marie Myers; son Stephen Frederick White; grandchildren Aaron, Anthony, April, Brian, Danielle, Desiree, Elizabeth, Jessica, Lyndsi, Naomi, and Tammy; multiple great-grandchildren; nephews, Jim, Jack, Jerry, Jeff, and niece Judy.

For the full obituary, please visit [Price Funeral Chapel](#).



Frankie Izeta Ervin

Frankie Izeta Ervin, 92, passed away Nov. 4, 2024.

Frankie was born Oct. 19, 1932, in Pocola, Okla., to Virgil L. and Esta V. (Karl) Oliver.

She was preceded in death by her husband James Calvin Ervin Jr., her parents; siblings Julian and spouse Gee, Euel and spouse Dute, Linal and spouse Tod, Derotha and spouse Dot, Virginia May, Lavada and spouse Tater; and stepson David Ervin.

Frankie is survived by her children Patricia Owens, Virginia L. Ervin, and Grady Ervin and spouse Jennifer; stepson James Ervin; grandchildren Karlee Davis (Ben), Claire King (Rob), Sara Friedman, Vanessa Bowman (Chris), Allison Dew (Dale), Elisabeth Knapp, Mary Jeffery (Kyle), Calvin Owens, Summer Van Gilder, and Randy Moore; 18 great-grandchildren brother Sonny Oliver and spouse Brenda; sister Cindy Lorene Jackson; beloved nieces, nephews, extended family members and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Park View Funeral Home](#)



Shane Allen Page

Shane Allen Page, 42, passed away Nov. 14, 2024.

Shena was born Aug. 13, 1982, in Antlers, Okla., to Stephen Page and Starla (Ward) Stutzman.

He was preceded in death by his father; and grandparents David and Vera Ward.

Shane is survived by his children Montana Page-Davis, Hunter Page, Dalton Page, and Ivey Page; his mother; stepfather Dano Stutzman; brothers Stephen Page and spouse Jessica, and Sheldon Page and spouse Brittany.

For the full obituary, please visit [Serenity Funeral Home](#).



Ellen Louise Tullius

Ellen Louise (Overstreet) Tullius, 71, passed away Oct. 26, 2024.

Ellen was born July 30, 1953, in Okla. City, Okla., to Muriel Overstreet and Omega (Cannon) Overstreet.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Teresa Wilige; aunt Karen (Cannon) Grant; and father-in-law and mother-in-law Leroy and Betty Tullius.

Ellen is survived by her husband Jeff Tullius; son Chad Tullius; daughters Traci Tullius and spouse Jason Head, and Katrina and Dylan Muir; grandson Hollis Tullius Head; brother David Overstreet; brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law Jeannie Zachary, Jake and Mary Anne Tullius, Teresa and Tom Dotson, August Willige III, and Betty Tullius and spouse Jeff Rose; aunt and uncle-in-law Jane and Bill Jennings; many nieces, nephews, cousins, and the Robinson Church family.

For the full obituary, please visit [Dignity Memorial](#).



Earl Gilbert Caldwell Sr.

Earl Gilbert Caldwell Sr., 92, passed away Sept. 13, 2024.

Earl was born March 13, 1932, in Slim, Okla., and was raised by Cephus and Ina Caldwell.

He was preceded in death by his parents; his wife; youngest son; brother; and two sisters.

Earl is survived by four children; three sisters; eight grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren; and many relatives and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Biskinik](#).



Debi Sue Lobaugh

Debi Sue Lobaugh, 67, passed away Oct. 16, 2024.

Debie was born Feb. 16, 1957, in Claremore, Oklahoma.

She is survived by her husband Gary Lobaugh; her mother Pat Ash; and sisters Krissy and Cindy.

For the full obituary, please visit [Biskinik](#).



Terry and Virginia Ashby

Terry and Virgenia Ashby, 53 and 54, passed away June 2nd, 2024.

Terry was born Dec. 1, 1970, in Talihina, Okla., on Dec. 1st, 1970, to Neal Ashby and Freda Colbert.

Virginia was born Sept. 12, 1969, in Gainesville, Tex., to Jose and Rosa Mendez.

They are survived by their children Geoffrey Ashby (Amber Mays), Kirsten (Ashby) Harrison, Grady Harrison, Jose Garcia, Cecilia Garcia, Carlos Garcia, Melany Oropeza, Jazmyn Conejo, Esau Pedroza, Carlos Munoz, and Kailyn Gutierrez; and grandchildren Kaydena Pedroza, Hatcher Harrison, Everly Edwards, River Ashby, Porter Harrison, Otto Harrison, Olivia Carpentier, Adrian Munoz, Leilani Munoz and baby Munoz to be born in August.

For the full obituary, please visit [Brown’s Funeral Service](#).



Joe Cephus Christie

Joe Cephus Christie, 79, passed away Oct. 24, 2024.

Joe was born Sept. 24, 1945, in Valliant, Okla., to Marjo (Davis) and Cephus Christie.

He was preceded in death by his parents; stepfather Howard Davis; brother Robert Christie; and sister-in-law Blossum Christie.

He is survived by his wife Stephanie; children Mike (Shawn), Traci Pepper, Cephus (Melissa), Katherine (Jesse) Henson, Neal, and Joe Jr. (Brandi); 14 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

For the full obituary, please visit [Riverside Funeral Home – Albuquerque](#).



Sandra Jean McCoy

Sandy Jean “Sandy” (Cole) McCoy, 73, passed away Nov. 24, 2024.

Sandy was born April 7, 1951, in Tamaha (Bugskuffle Community), Okla., to Billie Jean (Semore) Cole and John Cole.

She was preceded in death by her husband Ben McCoy; her parents; infant sister Vonetta Long; sister Deborah (Long) Tillery; maternal grandparents Shuler and Jewell Semore; paternal grandparents Edgar and Lorena Cole; aunts Jo (Semore) Stout, Maxine (Semore) Barbee, and Sonja (Semore) Kilgore; and uncles Jay Stout, Stanley Lewis and Calvin Barbee.

Sandy is survived by stepmother Norma (Cole) Gam-mill; half-sisters Lori (Cole) Carpenter, Cheril (Cole) Payne, Ronda (Long) Berry, Renee (Long) Francis, and Tracy (Benson) Coffee; half-brothers Preston Cole and Allen Dry; cousins Rick Stout (Janell), Fred Kilgore (Mary Jo), and Shanna (Kilgore) Grogan (Tim); special love and caregiver Ed Tatman; special nieces Alecia Long and Marilyn (McCoy) Presley; cousins, nieces and nephews; teacher friends; Choctaw senior friends; and ladies’ grief-recovery group.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home & Crematory](#).



Pearlyne Carnes

Pearlyne Carnes, 88, passed away Oct. 22, 2024.

Pearlyne was born June 5, 1936, in Ludlow, Okla., to Ellis Ludlow Sr. and Rhoda (Harrison) Ludlow.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sons Hubert “Sonny” Homer, Eddie Homer, and J.B. Carnes; daughter Ramona Carnes Swilling; her brothers; a sister; grandsons Joey Hornsby and David Carnes; granddaughter Amber Ludlow; and great-granddaughter Staci Ludlow.

Pearlyne is survived by her sister Merrill Thomas; daughters Linda Hornsby, Sheila Carnes, and Jennifer Carnes; son Gerald Ludlow; grandchildren Aquanetta Ludlow, Missy Butler, Joseph Swilling, Charles Swilling, Cody Carnes, Ashley Collins, Rhoda Carnes, and Jarod Ludlow, Karenda Ludlow, and Eric Ludlow; and numerous great-grandchildren.

For the full obituary, please visit [Holmes-Coffey-Murray Funeral Home](#).



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

Renowned Choctaw artist unveils new sculpture and is inducted into Hall of Fame

By Shelia Kirven

Choctaw artist Jane Semple Umsted’s newest sculpture, The Two Brothers, was officially dedicated October 4, 2024, and is prominently placed at Legacy Plaza on the campus of Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SE) in Durant. It portrays brothers, Chahta and Chiksa, and is a testament to how the tribes work collaboratively together and with the university, where a large population of Native American students attend.

The sculpture is based off the legend of the brothers who were originally of the same tribe, each having led their own group. The brothers decided to go their own way, yet never lost respect and admiration for the other. The story has been kept alive for generations.

Umsted said she couldn’t think of two tribes that are closer than the Choctaws and Chickasaws.

The 1,700-pound sculpture took over two years to create and represents a history of mutual friendship and respect. Both tribal nations have accomplished many goals and efforts together, including educational opportunities for their members, a top priority.

Choctaw Chief Gary Batton and Chickasaw Governor Bill Anoatubby attended the ceremony and spoke about how well the tribes work together to impact their tribes, communities, state and the nation.

At the dedication ceremony, the SE Student Government Association proclaimed the day as Ittibapishi Tuklo Nittak, or “Two Brothers Day” on campus. Umsted said she hopes the students of SE who are Native American, no matter the tribe, will feel pride in the sculpture.

She wants viewers to be able to walk up to the sculpture and be mesmerized, to get the feeling of the relationship that the figures represent.

Umsted researched and chose the 16th century Mississippian era to model the brothers from. She said she wanted the bodies to be strong and represent power. The jewelry is modeled after shell and clay jewelry of the time, using insignia from the era.

She said she read of the brothers, Chahta and Chiksa, years ago in the book, The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Nation, by Angie Debo. Debo was a well-known authority on Native American history. When Umsted discovered the legend was about the tribe splitting into two tribes, she realized there was no art depicting the story. That’s when the concept of The Two Brothers was born.

When President Thomas Newsom came to SE, he had a goal of highlighting the university’s Native American heritage and wanted to place a sculpture on the front lawn. “His idea coincided with my concept. It melded together, which I am just such a big believer in that. There’s a time for everything. You have to be ready for opportunities in your life. You have to be ready because they don’t come by your way very often, but things line up like that. They just lined up for me to be the person that had the opportunity to

do something that I wanted to do but couldn’t do by myself.”

Umsted has always created art, primarily tribal in nature, and draws inspiration from her Choctaw ancestry which goes back to two Choctaw Chiefs, Peter Pitchlynn and William Finley Semple.

She is drawn to challenging, larger-than-life projects and enjoys working on long-lasting pieces. Her passion is re-creating moments of Choctaw culture, telling stories through her art. She spends a great deal of time in research, ensuring each piece is historically accurate.

“For most of my life, I have been connected to Southeastern,” she said.

Umsted’s parents went to SE. Her maternal grandfather was on the first football team, and her paternal great-aunt, Clara Petty Semple, president of her class, was one of the first five graduates in its all-women graduating class. She also became the first alumni association president. Clara’s husband, William Finley Semple, was Choctaw Chief in the 1920s.

Umsted’s maternal grandfather’s cousin, C.D. French, was a teacher at SE during the Great Depression, and his industrial arts students built the SE amphitheater which is still in use today.

She grew up down the street from SE and with so many of her family attending there, she said it felt like an extension of her education, although upon graduation from high school, she attended the University of Oklahoma (OU) on a scholarship, graduating as a sculpture major, and receiving her degree in art.

In 1984, Umsted began entering art shows, becoming totally emersed in the history of the Choctaw tribe. “My granddaddy was an original enrollee, and I am a history buff, so I just kind of dived into my Choctaw heritage. Always since I was a child, I have done Native American art.” She said as an adult, she felt compelled to do more Choctaw art to give back to the Tribe.

Umsted earned her second degree in elementary education at SE, and then a master’s degree from there, as well.

She has taught music and art at Denison, Texas, art at Atoka High School, and at Durant Public Schools, where she retired.

In 1990, she became SE’s Director of Public Relations and Alumni Office where she remained for ten years. During that time, a 93-piece art collection was gifted to SE, and Umsted oversaw the collection. It became her goal to have a building to house the collection. That goal eventually became the Semple Family Museum of Native American Art, of which she is a family founder and curator. The museum is located on the SE campus.

She was appointed to the Institute of American Indian Arts Board of Trustees by President Joe Biden in 2023.

In September, Umsted was inducted into the Oklahoma Women’s Hall of Fame through the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women. She and five others joined the 141 women inducted since 1983.



Photos Provided

Above: Choctaw artist Jane Semple Umsted is shown with Chief Batton and Chickasaw Governor Anoatubby at the dedication ceremony of her sculpture, The Two Brothers, on the campus of Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant.

Right: The Two Brothers sculpture is based on a generational legend of Chahta and Chiksa.

She said the nomination shocked her. “I didn’t think of myself as being that caliber, and so I was very surprised, and then after a little bit, it just humbled me so much because I thought someone values my lifelong contributions to the state of Oklahoma, so it was thrilling. The other women that were honored, to be a part of that legacy, made me feel an awful lot of pride. My family was there to support me. The tribe was there to support me. It was a wonderful experience.”

Umsted and her husband, Gus, just returned from Mobile, Alabama, where 18 pieces of her art which had been on display at the Choctaw Cultural Center are being shown at the University of South Alabama. Her paintings and sculptures can be seen throughout the Choctaw Nation and in the city of Durant.

She is involved in tribal and community affairs and is an active volunteer. With no plans to retire anytime soon, she said of her art, “I have to do it as long as I can. In fact, I have so many things I want to do, it’s going to take another lifetime to do it, so many ideas. I’ll do it as long as I can.”

A healthy nation is a strong nation, Choctaw Nation prioritizes the health on the reservation

By Chris Jennings

The health of Native Americans within the reservation boundaries has always been a top priority for the Choctaw Nation. In 2024, over 1 million encounters across all Choctaw Nation Health Services Authorities (CNHSA) services drove that point home.

Mental health is also a top priority for the Nation. In 2024, CNHSA’s behavioral health programs helped adults, adolescents and children with several services. One service brought back for this year was the media camp. Teens gathered at the headquarters office in Durant and developed a short film about anti-bullying.

Another priority for the Nation is ensuring that access to healthcare is available in healthcare deserts or areas where people must travel long distances to get medical care.

This year CNHSA looked at areas across the reservation that could benefit the most from walk-in urgent care clinics. These non-emergency health facilities are designed to provide easier access to qualified medical professionals in a timely manner.

The first of these clinics will be in Antlers, scheduled to open early 2025. Wilburton will be next, helping to lessen the burden of receiving health care in these areas.

Because the health of everybody who lives in the reservation boundaries can affect the overall health of the Nation, these clinics will be open to both tribal and non-tribal members. The clinics will bill non-tribal members’ insurance in the same way that an urgent care clinic would.



Photo Provided

The crowd waves to the camera at the Residency and Specialty Clinics expansion ribbon cutting.

To ensure adequate staffing at these rural clinics, CNHSA has also begun partnering with the Oklahoma State University Physician Assistant Program to provide virtual care for patients at same-day clinics on the reservation.

Some other highlights from CNHSA are:

- Started the DAISY Award program to recognize exceptional clinical skills and compassionate care provided by nurses with 1-3 awards handed out every quarter
- The Durant Wellness Center celebrated its 20th anniversary, and several other Wellness Centers celebrated their 10-year anniversaries.
- Broke ground on new Talihipina Wellness Center project that will convert the “ALCO” building into a Wellness Center
- Signed contract with Epic and began the process of getting ready to implement the new Electronic Medical Records system in 2025
- Held Annual Navigating Mental Health and Substance Misuse Conference
- Graduated several medical residents who have all chosen to continue their careers with the Choctaw Nation.
- The Choctaw Nation Hospital in Talihipina celebrated its 25th year of being open.
- Several winners at the annual Indian Health Services awards
- Stigler health clinic celebrated its 20th anniversary.
- Partnered with Lighthouse Behavioral Wellness Centers to open a Pediatric Urgent Recovery Center in Durant, a first in the state
- Began expansion of the McAlester and Broken Bow clinics to be completed in 2025

This is far from a comprehensive list of what the Nation has done this year to improve the health of the Native Americans living within the reservation.

Every day, doctors, nurses, therapists and many others work hard to make the Choctaw Nation as healthy as possible.



Photo Provided

A ribbon cutting was held for the new Pediatric Urgent Recovery Center in partnership with Lighthouse Behavioral Wellness Center in Durant.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation		
January 7	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 8	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
January 10	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
January 14	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
January 15	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 17	Atoka	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
January 17	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
January 21	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 22	Stigler	By Appointment
January 24	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 28	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
January 29	Crowder	By Appointment
Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday Call 580-326-8304 for an Appointment		

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION	
MARKET HOURS Open 8:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday Thursday: 9:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m. <i>Markets will be closed the last two days of each month for inventory.</i>	
January 2024 All markets open weekdays, January 2-29 Closed: January 1, 30 & 31 Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation Participants can request a calendar at their location.	
ANTLERS 400 S.W. “O” ST., 580-298-6443 FOOD DEMO JANUARY 7	
BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842 FOOD DEMO JANUARY 14	
DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773 FOOD DEMO JANUARY 21	
MCALESTER 3244 Afulkota Hina, 918-420-5716 FOOD DEMO JANUARY 9	
POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431 FOOD DEMO JANUARY 16	
<i>This institution is an equal opportunity provider.</i>	

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

Community Meals

Throughout the holiday season, tribal members gathered at community centers throughout the Choctaw Nation to celebrate faith, family and culture. Pictured on the following two pages of the Biskinik are photos from Thanksgiving meals in Antlers, Atoka, Battiest, Broken Bow, Coalgate, Crowder, Durant, Hugo, Idabel, McAlester, Poteau, Smithville, Spiro, Stigler, Talihina, Tvshka Homma, Wilburton and Wright City.



Antlers



Atoka



Atoka



Battiest



Battiest



Battiest



Coalgate



Durant



Durant



Crowder



Crowder



Coalgate



Broken Bow



Hugo



Hugo



Idabel



Idabel



McAlester



McAlester



Poteau



Poteau



Smithville



Spiro



Stigler



Stigler



Battiest



Tushkahomma



Tushkahomma



Talihina



Wright City



Wright City



Atoka



Durant



Broken Bow



Talihina



Hugo



Idabel



Wilburton



Wilburton



Talihina

History in the making: 2024 was packed with Choctaw cultural excitement

By Shelia Kirven

It was a busy and exciting year for cultural events and activities in 2024. Here are just a few of the highlights from the past year:

Chahta Anumpa Alkhvna, the Choctaw language program, served over 4,000 people with its wide range of language teaching tools. The program also graduated 15 students from the Language Apprenticeship Program.

Choctaw Nation partnered with Boeing to send heirloom seeds on SpaceX’s 29th Commercial Resupply Services mission to the Internal Space Station. Five types of seeds, exposed to microgravity for several months before returning to Earth, will be grown alongside non-flown space seeds for study. Students at Jones Academy will study the growth of both seed groups in a CNO Growing Hope Garden to see if the exposure to space affected their development. They will be integrated into the middle school earth-sky STEM curriculum designed for NASA’s Science Activation program, Native Earth | Native Sky, at Oklahoma State University.

A sculpture, *Eternal Heart*, honoring the Choctaw Irish connection, was unveiled at Tvshka Homma during the Labor Day Festival. The 8-foot-tall sculpture was built by Choctaw tribal member Samuel Stitt and was a joint commission funded by the Government of Ireland and the Chahta Foundation.

A solar eclipse in April drew visitors from all over the country to the Choctaw Nation reservation and its path of totality. Viewing events were hosted in several locations, and attendees participated in traditional Choctaw cultural activities.

The Five Tribe Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement, announced by the Inter-tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, allows hunting and fishing licenses issued through each tribe to be recognized by the other tribal participants in the agreement.

Disney+ began public streaming of ECHO, part of Marvel’s Phase 5. The series focused on its character, Maya Lopez, and its Choctaw heritage and Indigenous roots. Several Choctaw tribal members were featured and consulted on the series.

In March, new School of Choctaw Language teachers were certified and recognized by the Tribal Council.

The Choctaw Nation Cultural Center hosted a Spring Equinox Celebration, and visitors came together to observe and participate in a day of cultural learning about how the changing of the seasons historically



2024 was a year packed full of historical moments. From a solar eclipse to a statue honoring the bond between the Choctaw and Irish people, the Choctaw Nation celebrates the past and looks forward to the future.

impacted Choctaw people. Artwork by seven Choctaw artists was displayed throughout the year at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters lobby gallery. Chief Batton’s Easter Celebration, for all ages, was held at Tvshka Homma, and the annual Trail of Tears Memorial Walk was commemorated and attended by hundreds to honor our ancestors. A Memorial Day celebration included a wreath-laying ceremony, and a 21-gun salute was held at the Choctaw Nation Capitol



Choctaw Nation Photos

to keep tribal members connected with each other, engaged in Choctaw traditions and cultural activities, and informed of programs and services.

The Choctaw Cultural Center hosted the “Okhvta Chito Okhoatali” exhibit from July through November, showcasing a collection of Choctaw artifacts from the 1700s. 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.

Choctaw Nation stickball teams, Tvshka Homma and Tvshkahomma Ohoyo, participated in the World Series of Stickball Tournament in Mississippi.

The Labor Day Festival was held at Tvshka Homma. From cultural education to musical entertainment, it is always a crowd pleaser.

Youth camps ran from May through August, with over 2,200 registrations. They offered a wide range of activities for various interests, including many of a cultural nature.

Choctaw Nation’s annual powwow was held in Durant, giving dancers and guests a weekend of Choctaw culture, heritage, and unity. Tribes from all over the U.S. traveled to Durant to participate.

November saw many cultural and traditional events, gatherings, teaching and learning opportunities. Native November was filled with something for everyone, including Choctaw Hymns, Choctaw artwork, foods and much more.

Choctaw veterans were honored at the annual Choctaw Veterans Day Ceremony. The event, held at Tvshka Homma, honored Chahta men and women who have served and are currently serving in the U.S. military.

A proclamation commemorating the service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces men and women was signed, declaring the Choctaw Nation a “Purple Heart Reservation.”

The Code Talker Virtual Walk was held during the month of November, and a new Choctaw Nation Veteran Archive Website was introduced.

Chief Batton announced that the first-ever film to shoot on the Choctaw Nation Reservation, *Brave*, will begin production in Summer 2025.

Next year will be just as busy and exciting as this year has been, with more reasons to celebrate our faith, family and culture as members of the Great Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. We hope you will join in as many of the activities as you are able.

Choctaw Elder Pecan Harvest

IDABEL, Okla. (December 5, 2024)– The Choctaw Nation’s Agricultural Department held its annual Elder Pecan Harvest on Thursday, December 5, 2024. The event drew around 300 elders from every district in the Choctaw Nation, who were shuttled in from their community centers to the pecan orchard near Idabel, Oklahoma.

“This is the sixth year the Choctaw Nation has hosted the Elder Pecan Harvest and each year, more seniors come out for the day,” said Jody Standifer, executive officer of agriculture. “The orchard has around 1,000 pecan trees, and this year elders were able to pick and take home around 3,000 pounds of pecans.”

This is the first year for Lou Phillips, District 3, to attend the Pecan Harvest. She came out to spend the day with her Choctaw family, enjoy fellowship, and gather pecans for baking cookies, brownies and pies.

Rachel Dickson, District 2, enjoyed her first trip to the Pecan Harvest. “I have never picked pecans before, so I wanted the experience,” she said. “I plan to use the pecans I gathered for pecan pies for Christmas.”

Veteran pecan picker Karen Blake, District 3, returned for a third time to Idabel for the Elder Pecan Harvest. She was able to gather enough pecans for holiday baking.



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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ♦ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ♦

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Exploring the successful year of CNO programs and services.



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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma communities gather for Thanksgiving meals.

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.

TRADITIONAL CHOCTAW SEEDS GROWING HOPE PROGRAM

Request by application only

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____
Phone: _____

Please check the **three** plants that you would like to receive seed for:

☐ **Tanchi Tohbi** Choctaw Flour Corn
☐ **Tobi Smith** Peas
☐ **Isito** Choctaw Sweet Potato Squash
☐ **Tvnishi** Lambsquarter
☐ **Hakchuma** Perique Tobacco
☐ **Chukfi** Peas
☐ **Hvshi Pakanli** Seneca Sunflower

MAIL THIS FORM TO:
Growing Hope Project
163665 N 4355 RD
Tushkahoma, OK 74574

Seeds from the Growing Hope Program are intended for Choctaw People and Community members. They will be given out on a first come, first served basis while supplies last, hard copy mail in application only. **YAKOKE!**

Choctaw Nation

Historic Preservation