

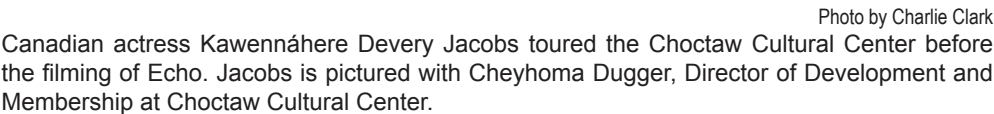
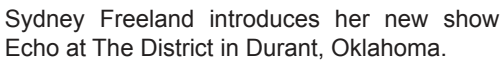
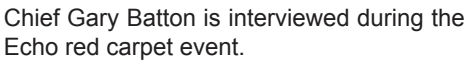
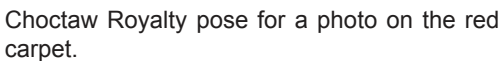
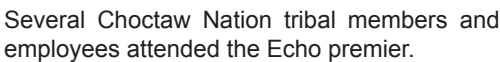
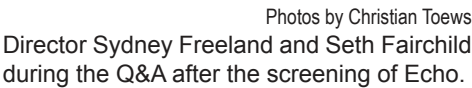


**By Shelia Kirven**

continues in Echo, where the character has hope for a new life from her previous effort of obtaining justice for her father.

Echo leaves the big city for her rural Oklahoma hometown to reconnect with her Native American roots, family and the community. She will be joined by Vincent D'Onofrio, portraying her "uncle", Wilson Fisk (Daredevil), Zahn McClarnon as her father, and Charlie Cox as Matt Murdock (Spider-Man: No way Home and She-Hulk.) Also appearing will be Graham Greene (Dances with Wolves), Tantoo Cardinal (Killers of the Flower Moon), Devry Jacobs (Reservation Dogs), and Cody Lightning (Four Sheets to the Wind.)

Chief Gary Batton said on his Facebook page, "I was like a little kid because of getting to partner with Marvel and Disney to highlight our language, culture and history in a series called Echo that will be coming out January 10 on Disney and Hulu. Yakoke to Sydney Freeland, who was the director, and to Stephen Judd, who was a writer and is from Broken Bow, gave so much detail and attention and respect to make sure everything was represented and said correctly. Yakoke to all of the staff who helped them on the sets during the filming. Go check out ECHO on January 10!"



According to Choctaw legend, only two birds survived the Great Flood. A sapsucker and a flicker flew above the rising waters. Becoming weary, they flew as high as they could and perched upside down on the sky. As they hung there, their tail feathers were drenched by the surging waters. The waves caused the feathers to separate and become scissor-like.

God blessed the two birds for their bravery. The sapsucker was very grateful for his blessing. God decreed that he would always be a special friend to His people, the Choctaw. The sapsucker was the friendliest of birds. It was accorded special treatment and became known as “the little Choctaw news bird.”

The sapsucker lived near Choctaw homes and let the people know when someone approached. This little bird accompanied hunting parties. It would tell the hunters when game was nearby and which direction they should go to find it. The sapsucker warned warriors of approaching enemies. When danger came near an encampment of Choctaw warriors in the night, the sapsucker tapped the message on trees throughout the camp.

The Choctaw people continue to honor this bird. The tribal newspaper bears its Choctaw name – Biskinik.

## Faith, Family, Culture



Chief Gary Batton

### The reason for the Choctaw Salute

The Choctaw Nation has announced its new flag pledge that was recently approved by the Tribal Council to be used at all official meetings directly following the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance. The pledge has been a long time in the making, and we, as a nation, should feel great pride in reciting the pledge and in being Choctaw proud. The pledge is a declaration of the Chahta Spirit of Faith, Family and Culture, and it also announces that the Choctaw Nation is a sovereign nation governed by self-rule, faith and traditions created from the sacrifices of our ancestors.

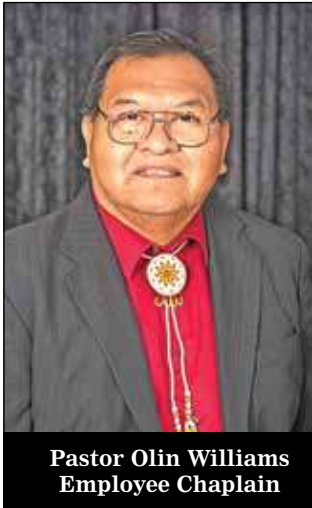
The Choctaw Flag Pledge is as follows: “I salute the flag of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, whose members, characterized by tenacity, resilience, and belief in God, will forever honor its representation of FAITH, FAMILY, AND CULTURE.”

I’m so appreciative of the action taken by the Tribal Council to approve this flag pledge for our Nation. Native American history under the U.S. Government has a violent and dismissive past. For too long, tribes have been pushed aside, ignored, and placated by a government who created the rules and did not abide by them. Still the Choctaw Nation persevered through it all – the lean times and the good. Our nation cannot be ignored. Our people will not be placated. Our Chahta Spirit will live on long past this generation of Choctaw people. That is what this flag pledge represents.

This flag pledge is a reminder of where we have been and where we are going. The pride of the Choctaw Nation and its people will be heard in this pledge. I challenge every Choctaw tribal member to recite this pledge loud and clear and let your voice be heard. The pride of the Choctaw Nation and its sovereignty deserves no less.

It is a simple pledge, but its meaning is great. The resilience of the Choctaw Nation should be celebrated and recorded. It is the least we can do as a nation, for the sacrifices made to be here today.

Yakoke and God Bless!



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

### Just a Just Man

Leading to the story of the birth of Christ, we read in Matthew 1:18, 19, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.”

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ is based on this event. To understand this story, we must not forget that wedding arrangements in Eastern places were vastly different from those in modern Western society. This Bible account is based on the Eastern wedding arrangement. A Jewish wedding was arranged in three stages. The first stage is the engagement.

This was an agreed arrangement when the girl was very young and was promised to a young man, chosen by the parents. This is very strange to the Western view because the bride and bridegroom had never met.

Parents were responsible for the continuance of the family name, and it was their task to find a husband for their daughter.

The second stage was to ratify the arrangement made. This was called the betrothal. This was like our modern engagement party. At this point, the entire affair could be canceled if the bride or bridegroom objected. Once the betrothal is approved, there was no way of escape. This betrothal lasted for one year. During this time, the couple were considered man and wife, although the marriage was never consummated.

The third stage was the marriage service. After one year of preparation, the ceremony was held and festivities lasted for several days. This is the background of this story. It was during this year of betrothal or espoused to Joseph that Mary was found pregnant.

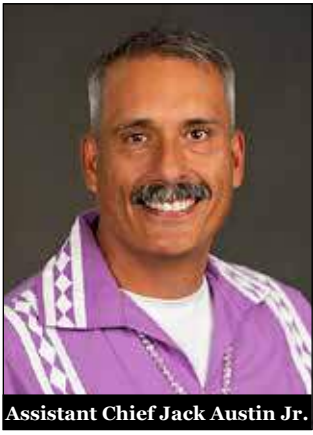
This was a devastating dilemma for Joseph and Mary. If Joseph denied having a marital relationship with Mary, she would have been tried by law and sentenced to death by stoning.

According to Jewish law, Moses said in Deuteronomy 22:20-21, “But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found in the damsel: then they shall bring the damsel to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father’s house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.”

Joseph was contemplating keeping this secret and somehow resolving this matter without having Mary stoned to death when the angel appeared and removed his doubt.

Verse 20 says, “But while he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”

One mistake from Joseph could have changed the gospel story. Joseph was a man of principle and a just man.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

### Giving is a Choctaw tradition to be proud of

Some of the great events that the Chief and I get to attend each holiday season are the tribal member dinners, where we get to have fellowship with many tribal members and their families. It is the perfect start to the holiday season for me and it gives us a chance to see all your smiling faces and to reflect on the good work we have accomplished in 2023 at the Choctaw Nation.

The Nation hosted 22 Thanksgiving luncheons throughout the reservation from Nov. 1 to Nov. 16 and we welcomed tribal members and their families to enjoy a good, hot meal and exchange stories and fun. We could not do these dinners without the help of our associates who volunteer with meal preparation, waiting tables and taking hot meals to tribal members who could not make it to the centers where the meals are prepared.

Dinners are just one way that the Choctaw Nation gives back without expecting anything in return – the same way our ancestors lived. The Nation also collects donations, canned goods, and clothing for families needing a little help this holiday season. The Nation does this not only during the holidays but throughout the year to help.

This holiday season, I hope that you take the time to open your hearts and give to people in need. It is the most selfless action we can do; it takes very little effort or time and it means so much to the people who need it the most. Life can have unexpected twists and turns, you never know when you, a friend or family member might need assistance.

Giving doesn’t have to be a material item. It can be a gift of your time to help with a donation drive, handing out food or lending an ear to someone who is having a difficult time. Give of yourself this holiday season and you might just be surprised how a small amount of your time can pay dividends to your overall wellbeing.

My hope to everyone reading this is that you are happy, fulfilled, warm and counting the many blessings from the Lord. From my family to yours, have a safe and Merry Christmas and a prosperous and joyous New Year!

Yakoke and God Bless!

### Choctaw Day

Choctaw Nation kicked off the The 18th Annual Choctaw Powwow weekend with Choctaw Day at the Cultural Center on November 3.



Kyra Hornbuckle and Deanna Byrd demonstrate the use of textiles.



Photos by Shelia Kirven

Cultural Outreach sings Choctaw hymns during a Choctaw Day demonstration.



Evangeline Robinson demonstrates traditional Choctaw pottery for visitors.




1883 Choctaw actor JP Gauna and Choctaw national model Ally Ott enjoy Choctaw Day.



The audience watches as Cultural Outreach sings Choctaw hymns.



Visitors from Ireland were on hand filming for a documentary.



CHOCTAW  
CULTURAL CENTER

NEW EXHIBIT

BOK ABAIYA: PRACTICED HANDS AND  
THE ARTS OF CHOCTAW BASKETRY

SCAN OR GO TO:  
BIT.LY/CCC-EXHIBITIONS

JULY 22, 2023 - MARCH 30, 2024



HIGHER EDUCATION  
TECHNOLOGY  
ALLOWANCE

APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN FROM  
JANUARY 2 - MARCH 1.

The one-time payment of \$500 is available to eligible  
Choctaw tribal members nationwide attending an  
accredited college or university.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/TECHNOLOGY-ALLOWANCE

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CHOCTAWNATION.COM

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# Choctaw Nation holds groundbreaking ceremony for new Emerging Aviation Technology Center

**Durant, Okla. (October 24, 2023)** – The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Emerging Aviation Technology Center (EATC) on Tuesday, October 24. The state-of-the-art facility, located near Redden, Okla. will serve as a hub for cutting-edge research, development, testing, and evaluation for crewed and uncrewed aerial system technologies.

Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton recognized the significance of the groundbreaking ceremony stating, “I truly believe this is going to be the gateway to the future for us, from manufacturing to all the opportunities that we desperately need here in southeastern Oklahoma, we believe this is the spark that’s going to grow our area.”

City, state and federal officials, including Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, OAC State Director of Aeronautics Grayson Ardies, and members of the Federal Aviation Administration as well as industry and regional university partners joined in celebrating the accomplishment.

“The number two industry in the state of Oklahoma today is our aerospace and aviation industry,” said Lt. Gov. Pinnell. “It’s these type of investments from our sovereigns and the state of Oklahoma that is positioning Oklahoma to truly be a top 10 state in the country when it comes to aviation and defense industry jobs.”

With a design spanning three stories and covering 6,387 square feet, the EATC will house various essential components. These include office space, telemetry rooms, workrooms for training and development, drone maintenance and mechanical repairs, conference lounge, an observation deck and more.

Fueled by Economic Development Administration (EDA) and U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants, the EATC is situated on 44,000 acres of remote reservation land owned by CNO.

The EATC’s strategic location provides an ideal setting for the exploration of innovative aerial systems, supporting research and development efforts. This unique facility will enable industry experts to safely collaborate and push the boundaries of aviation technology in a controlled and secure environment.

“This groundbreaking reaffirms the Choctaw Nation’s commitment to being a leader in the development and adoption of emerging aviation technologies,” said CNO executive director of Advanced Technology Initiatives, James Grimsley. “We are excited about the opportunities this effort will foster for our region and nation, and for the many societal benefits that these new technologies will bring.”

For more information about the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Emerging Aviation Technology Center, please visit [www.cnoaa.com](http://www.cnoaa.com).



Photos by Christian Toews

Above: City, state and federal officials, Choctaw Nation Leadership and tribal members break ground where a new Emerging Aviation Technology Center will be located.

Right: A drone is showcased in action during the Emerging Aviation Technology Center groundbreaking.

Below: A drone is on display during the Emerging Aviation Technology Center groundbreaking ceremony.



## Ohyo Hlampko Vhleha: Influence of Matriarchs exhibit opens at Choctaw Cultural Center

By Christian Toews

The Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant, Oklahoma, hosted a meet and greet for the opening of a new temporary installment by Choctaw artist Brad Joe on October 31, 2023.

Ohoyo Hlampko Vhleha: The Influence of Matriarchs will be displayed until March 16, 2024.

The exhibition honors the strong women who shaped Brad Joe into the multifaceted artist he is today. His photography, beadwork and music can be seen and heard at the exhibition.

Joe was born in Ardmore, Oklahoma, and now lives in Dickson. He said he discovered his artistic abilities around the age of 12.

“My sister was creative in drawing and painting. I also began to be creative through her being creative,” said Joe.

According to Joe, he was taught how to bead by the women of his father’s family and was encouraged to pursue his artistic talents by his mother, grandmother and aunts.

Two of Joe’s sisters were among the many visitors who came to the meet and greet.

His sisters were incredibly proud of their brother and hoped that this was the first of many times his art would be displayed.

“It was really special to learn about your family and get to know Brad better. I’ve known you for a while and been a fan of your work before, I think you knew who I was,” said Claire Young, the curator at the Choctaw Cultural Center. “I’m very glad to get to display it here at the center. I think my role is pretty special because I get to work with community members and show what they are capable of.”

Joe said he hopes that through this exhibit, people can take away the importance of honoring the women in their families.

“I hope they can see the impact that my mother had on me and that they can adopt and do the same with their families, with their mothers, grandmothers, aunts,” said Joe. “That they see the importance of the women in their family.”

To plan your visit to see Ohoyo Hlampko Vhleha: The Influence of Matriarchs, visit <https://choctawculturalcenter.com>.




Photos by Christian Toews

Above: (Left to Right) Brad Joe’s sisters and niece attended the meet and greet. Elaine Day, Annette Aaron, Brad Joe, Elaine Day (Front) Rody Walker.

Below: Brad Joe’s family view his exhibit during the meet and greet at the Choctaw Cultural Center.





**CHOCTAW**  
CULTURAL CENTER

**OHoyo Hlampko Vhleha:**  
**THE INFLUENCE OF MATRIARCHS**  
TEMPORARY ART EXHIBIT – BRAD JOE

**OCTOBER 31, 2023 – MARCH 16, 2024**



**HIGHER EDUCATION  
COLLEGE CLOTHING  
ALLOWANCE**

APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN FROM  
**JANUARY 2 TO MARCH 1.**

This one-time payment is available to eligible Choctaw tribal members nationwide attending an accredited college or university.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT  
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**Choctaw Nation** Education Services

**SUCCESS  
THROUGH  
PERSONAL  
ACCOUNTABILITY  
AND CULTURAL  
IDENTITY**

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The program's purpose is to assist in removing barriers preventing our members from reintegrating into the communities in which they live.

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or visit our [website at choctawnation.com/ services/reintegration/](http://website.at.choctawnation.com/services/reintegration/)

P.O. Box 1210 | 1862 Chukla Hina Durant, OK 74701

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**



**TIS THE SEASON...  
CHRISTMAS IN  
THE PARK**

Enjoy the spirit of the holidays as we present our annual Christmas in the Park drive-through lights display at the beautiful Choctaw Nation Capitol Grounds.

Receive a cup of delicious hot cocoa the first three weekends from 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm. The event is free and open to the public.

December 1-31, 2023 (opens at dark)  
Choctaw Nation Capitol Grounds

FOR QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT TRIBAL EVENTS AT  
**TRIBALEVENTS@CHOCTAWNATION.COM**

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**



District 10

Halito,  
Chim Achukma from District 10! I hope you and your families are ready for the fall season! Just wrapping up Veterans Day weekend, we had the privilege of paying our respects to our veterans who have fought to keep our country free. Yakoke, Thank you. As we prepare for this Thanksgiving holiday, remember all the reasons we must be thankful for and our blessings in the Choctaw Nation.  
The Choctaw Nation Leadership recently visited France, where we were honored to participate in the 105th-year celebration of the battle at Saint Etienne-a-Arnes. Our Choctaw Code Talkers were involved in a war that liberated the town in WWI. Also, while in France, we visited the WWI Meuse Argonne American Cemetery and the Normandy American Cemetery, both of which had Choctaw Soldiers buried there. We saw each grave, where we placed flags, Choctaw Veterans coins, and Code Talker coins on each headstone; then, we sang Choctaw hymns—a humbling and emotional experience to participate in.  
Yakoke!



Photo by Christian Toews  
Representatives of the Choctaw Nation, including District 10 Council Member Anthony Dillard, pay their respects to Choctaw WWI soldiers who lost their lives in France.

Veterans Day



The Choctaw Nation honored its veterans at the Choctaw Veterans Day Ceremony at Tvshka Homma on November 11.  
Each year, the Nation recognizes Chahta service members and shares our gratitude for their service.



Melvin Tom is Veteran of the Month



Eli Engledow recently graduated from William Jewel College, Magna Cum Laude, in Liberty, Missouri with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry.  
Eli has been accepted to the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, Washington.  
He is the son of Chris and Nicole Engledow of Asotin, Washington and Grandson of Stuart and Victoria Craft and Clint and Linda Engledow.



Edgel Samuel is Choctaw Nation’s First Language Speaker of the Month

At the November 11 Tribal Council meeting, District 2. Councilman Tony Ward recognized Mr. Edgel Samuel as this month’s First Language Speaker.

CNO tribal members honored at the 15th Annual AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors

**OKLAHOMA CITY, (November 1, 2023)** – The 15th annual AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors event honored 47 Native American elders from 23 Oklahoma tribal nations for their achievements, community service and impact.  
Since 2009, AARP Oklahoma has honored nearly 700 Native American elders from Oklahoma’s 39 tribal nations.

Choctaw tribal members Concetta Gragg and Rev. Roger Scott were honored at the 15th annual AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors on November 1 in Oklahoma City at the First Americans Museum.

The ceremony was held in Oklahoma City at the First Americans Museum, 659 First Americans Blvd.  
The floor-to-ceiling windows in The Hall of The People overlooked the First Americans Museum (FAM) Mound. The FAM Mound, a 21st-century mound that pays tribute to the Oklahoma tribes who descended from Moundbuilder cultures, served as a poignant backdrop for the ceremony.

AARP Oklahoma State Director Sean Voskuhl welcomed the 300 attendees and said the Native American Elder Honors was established to memorialize the work and contributions of elders who inspire future generations. Voskuhl thanked the honorees for answering the calling to contribute and lift communities.

“Whether they are well known or exhibit quiet devotion to family and community, all our honorees represent the love of family, dedication to culture and respect for all,” Voskuhl said. “We are overwhelmed and inspired by the work you do.”

The program included a performance by the Oklahoma Fancy Dancers, an in-memoriam tribute, a presentation of the Dr. John and Tewanna Edwards Leadership Award to Carmelita Wamego Skeeter, and the presentation of 47 medallions to the 2023 AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors recipients. The medallions were presented to the honorees by AARP State President Jim Randall, AARP Oklahoma Senior Associate State Director Mashell Sourjohn, former AARP Oklahoma Executive Council Member Tewanna Edwards, June Kao, AARP Audience Strategy Manager, and AARP Oklahoma Sr. Associate State Director Mashell Sourjohn.

The 15th annual AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honor recipients included educators, veterans, artists, tribal leaders, culture preservationists and everyday heroes.

Downloadable event pictures are available at [hymerphotography.smug-mug.com](http://hymerphotography.smug-mug.com).

“These honored elders embody AARP’s mission and, through example, motivate others to follow suit and selflessly serve their communities,” Voskuhl said. “Individually, their accomplishments are remarkable. In totality, their impact is breathtaking throughout Indian Country and our nation.”

Nominations for the 2024 AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors will open in January 2024.



Photos by Jerry Hymer Photography  
Pictured with Concetta Gragg (Above) and Rev. Roger Scott (Below) are AARP OK State President Jim Randall, former AARP Oklahoma Executive Council Member Tewanna Edwards, June Kao, AARP Audience Strategy Manager, and AARP Oklahoma Sr. Associate State Director Mashell Sourjohn.



# CHOCTAW NATION LIVESTOCK SHOW

FEBRUARY 3-4, 2024

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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

## CHOCTAW EMERGENCY SERVICES PROGRAM

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT UPDATE

Effective October 1, 2023, updates will be made to the Choctaw Emergency Service Program eligibility requirements.

The Choctaw Nation Emergency Services Program assists tribal members in crisis situations. We are dedicated to helping our members during emergencies and are proud to play a role in assisting them to improve their quality of life. Because we are an emergency-only program, our guidelines have been updated to ensure we stay true to our tribe's values and goals of promoting member self-sufficiency and independence while supporting and empowering our tribal members.

Assistance will be available in a one-time-only payment per year up to a maximum of \$600.

**Emergency Assistance (for ages 54 and under):**

- Choctaw tribal member
- In need of emergency assistance of at least \$100 (payment amount equals emergency amount)
- Submit required documentation (such as paid receipts, etc. — no quotes or estimates)
- Meet income guidelines

**Hardship Circumstance Assistance (for ages 55 and over, Veterans or disabled individuals):**

- Choctaw tribal member
- Submit required documentation (such as a detailed written statement of your situation, etc.)
- Meet income guidelines

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/EMERGENCY-SERVICES](http://CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/EMERGENCY-SERVICES)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

ELDER & COMMUNITY  
CHRISTMAS MEALS

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND YOUR LOCAL MEAL.

December 6, 2023 - Wednesday		
McAlester Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	McAlester Community Center
Talihina Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Talihina Community Center
Wilburton Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Wilburton Community Center
Bartest Elder Lunch	11:30 AM	Bartest Community Center
Smithville Community Lunch	12:00 PM	Smithville Community Center

December 12, 2023 - Tuesday		
Wright City Community Dinner	6:00 PM	Wright City Community Center

December 13, 2023 - Wednesday		
Atoka Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Atoka Community Center
Durant Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Durant Community Center
Broken Bow Elder Lunch	11:00 AM	Broken Bow Community Center
Hugo Community Lunch	11:30 AM	Hugo Community Center
Coalgate Elder Lunch	12:00 PM	Coalgate Community Center
Poteau Elder Lunch	12:00 PM	Poteau Community Center

December 19, 2023 - Tuesday		
Antlers Community Dinner	6:00 PM	Antlers Community Center

December 20, 2023 - Wednesday		
Crowder Elder Lunch	11:30 AM	Crowder Community Center
Spilo Elder Lunch	11:30 AM	Spilo Community Center
Stigler Community Lunch	11:30 AM	Stigler Community Center
Idabel Elder Lunch	12:00 PM	Idabel Community Center

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Nation by subscribing to our  
weekly email list.

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choctawnation.com/subscribe

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Biskinik Announcement Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gary Batton  
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.  
Assistant Chief

The Official  
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of the  
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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

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

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

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

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

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

UNCLAIMED FUNDS

The Accounting Department of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is trying to contact the individuals listed below:

Blake Eldridge

Raven Baken

Jordan Large

Ravi Tata

Kylee Petersen

Stacy Carr

Matthew Bradley

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, please contact:

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma  
P.O. Box 1210  
Durant, OK 74702  
Attn: Lisa Jordan, Accountant  
Or Phone 580-642-7530

CHOCTAW VETERAN  
ADVOCACY PROGRAM

Are You a Choctaw Veteran?

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

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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma  
TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA  
TRIBAL COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

November 11, 2023

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE

3. ROLL CALL

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES a) Regular Session  
October 14, 2023

5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS

a. Veteran of the Month, District #2 – Melvin Tom

b. First Language Speaker of the Month, District #2 – Edgel Samuel

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None

7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

8. NEW BUSINESS

a. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Amanda Johnson to Serve on the Oklahoma Advisory Council on Indian Education

b. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Dr. Amanda Chisum-Price to Serve on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women

c. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles

d. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Equipment

e. Approve the Sale of Approximately 25.48 Acres at Daisy Ranch in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma

f. Approve Application for the Tribal Broad-band Connectivity Program

g. Approve the Donation of Wheelock Church to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

9) OTHER NEW BUSINESS

10) OLD BUSINESS

11) ADJOURNMENT

12) CLOSING PRAYER

All votes passed unanimously.

Southeastern Oklahoma  
Indian Credit Association  
& Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund

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

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

Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association Loan  
To Be Eligible to Apply:

- Must live within the 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation

- Must possess a CDIB card from a federally recognized tribe

Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund  
To Be Eligible to Apply:

- Must live within the 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation

- Must possess a CDIB card from the Choctaw Nation

If you are interested in applying for a loan a representative will be available at the:

Crowder Community Center  
December 15, 2023  
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Chahta Anumpa Aiiikhvna - December Language Lesson

Are You Sleeping

Chi nusi ho?  
Chi nusi ho?

Nakfi Chan  
Nakfi Chan

Tvli yvt ohonla  
Tvli yvt ohonla

Tink, Tink, Tonk  
Tink, Tink, Tonk

Chi

You

Nusi

Sleep

Ho?

Question marker

Tink, Tink, Tonk – mimicking the sound with a ‘t’, the Choctaw language does not have the ‘d’ sound.

We Wish You a Merry Christmas!

Nittak Hullo Chito  
Nittak Hullo Chito  
Nittak Hullo Chito  
Chim Achukma Chike!  
Afvmmi Himona  
Afvmmi Himona  
Afvmmi Himona  
Chim Achukma Chike!

Nittak Hullo Chito

Christmas

Afvmmi Himona

New Year

Chim achukma chike!

May you have a Merry/  
Happy Christmas or New Year

www.choctawschool.com

LIFE IS BETTER WITH  
BLOOD DONORS

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

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

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

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

Scan to learn more about the challenge!

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

IT'S  
HOLIDAY  
TIME!  
CNO FOOD  
DISTRIBUTION

Delicious food is an important part of the holiday season. We can provide the healthy and nutritious items you will need to prepare the dishes you love.

Visit any Food Distribution market (Antlers, Broken Bow, Durant, McAlester or Poteau), a Choctaw Nation community center or apply online.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/FOOD-DISTRIBUTION 800.522.6170

Scan to learn more about the program.

HONOR GUARD  
POSITIONS AVAILABLE

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

VETERANSADVOCACY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma





## Wells turns 90

Rosa Hyahwahnah Kaniatobe Wells turned 90 on September 9, 2023, she celebrated with family and friends.



## Davies owns 86'd & Co.

Chad Davies Sr. is the owner and creator of 86'd & Co., a clothing company for anything sports-related. "I have been playing sports my whole life, I participated in all of the biggest Native basketball tourneys since high school and have countless jerseys being worn that I have made at the youth level, the high school level and adult level," said Davies. "I love what I do and am proud of who I am and where I am from. Doing what I love will hopefully inspire not only my children but any of the native youth to chase the dream, find your path and never give up."

To find out more about Davies' company, visit <https://www.mr86d.com> or check out 86'd & Co. on Facebook.

## Steels celebrate 62nd anniversary



Kenneth and Willie Steel celebrated their 62nd anniversary on September 30.

They met and fell in love in Texas and throughout the following years and various moves to different states, they raised their children. Vickie Osburne of Talihina, Oklahoma, Jairus (Trish) Steel of Stark, Florida, Kenneth Jr. of Tacoma, Washington,

Charlie (Kathy) Steel of Weatherford, Texas and Kimberly (Juan) Cacho of Adamsville, Tennessee.

They were surprised with a trip to Chattanooga, Tennessee, for a train ride with four generations in attendance. They are deeply loved by their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren and cannot wait for another generation to hopefully join the family soon.



## Thompson wins national award

Logan Thompson recently won the National Indigenous Award from the College Board.

He is a student at Jesuit College Prep in Dallas, where his father, Billy Thompson, is a teacher and coach.

Logan is the captain of the football team, a 4.0 student and editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. He also won the school's "Man of Others" award last year.

This summer, he attended the College Horizons program in Atlanta, where he met many other Indigenous students like himself and made some strong friendships across the country.

Logan's family is very proud of all of his accomplishments and for representing the Choctaw Nation so well.

## Price has play produced



Playwright and tribal member Rob Pierce recently had his play "River's Edge" produced by the Panhandle Players community theater group in Apalachicola, Florida.

"River's Edge" tells the story of a couple from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who move to Apalachicola. Their lives are changed forever by friends

and the greed of those who believe that ends justify means.

"River's Edge" played for four shows, three of which were sold out. Rob is also a retired Air Force veteran and is on the Choctaw Artists Registry.

## Engledow earns bachelor's from Jewel



Eli Engledow recently graduated from William Jewel College, Magna Cum Laude, in Liberty, Missouri with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry.

Eli has been accepted to the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, Washington.

He is the son of Chris and Nicole Engledow of Asotin, Washington and Grandson of Stuart and Victoria Craft and Clint and Linda Engledow.



## Purtell receives multiple awards

Jackie Purtell, daughter of Dr Clinton and Amber Purtell of McKinney, Texas, has received a number of academic and athletic awards in 2023.

Jackie, a senior at Legacy Christian Academy in Frisco, Texas, was recognized by Dallas Morning News and Rivals.com as a top 10 softball catcher in the class of 2024. Her team won their second Texas state softball championship in TAPPS Division II. She subsequently was awarded honors as Texas State All-Tournament Team, First Team All-State, Academic All-State, District Newcomer of the Year, First Team All-District and Varsity Defensive Player of the Year.

This fall, Jackie was recognized by the College Board as a top 10% National Indigenous High School Scholar. Next fall, she will play softball for the 11-time NAIA National Champion Oklahoma City University Stars where she will be majoring in pre-law.

Jackie aspires to work for NASA as an attorney in aerospace law, and is considering the Air Force JAG corps.



## Scroggins earns bachelor's degree

Amanda Scroggins is graduating in December from Wichita State University Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in English-Creative Writing with a minor in Criminal Justice.



## Kemp attends Boy Scouts Jamboree

William Kemp, a Choctaw tribal member living in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, is working on his Eagle Scout project and recently attended the Boy Scouts National Jamboree in Virginia.

Kemp is a member of Troop 6338 and is a senior at Broken Bow High School.

He is the son of Preston and Jennifer Rowden Kemp. He is also the sixth great-grandson of Chiefs Thomas LeFlore and David Folsom.



## Tarbert earns master's degree in Geneva

Vivian Rue Tarbert graduated in September 2023 with a Master of Arts degree in Development Studies from the Geneva Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland. She is spending Fall 2023 working as a congressional intern in Washington D.C.

She is a daughter of Jesse Tarbert and Jamie Rue of Washington DC. She would like to say "yakoke" to the Choctaw Nation for the support she received through the Choctaw Nation Higher Education program.



## Renner graduates from Tarelton

Kourtney Renner is graduating from Tarleton State University with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Renner plans to start her career at Cook Children's Hospital as a pediatric nurse.

"I am so thankful for everything Higher Education has done for me on this journey," said Renner.

## Cayden David Rosencrantz

Cayden David Rosencrantz was born September 1, 2023, at 8:15 a.m. to Victoria Sheehan and Brandon Rosencrantz.

Cayden weighed in at 9 pounds, 19 and 1/2 inches long.



## Bousman graduates from Purdue

Michelle Wishon Bousman will be graduating in December from Purdue University with honors and a Bachelor of Science degree in health-care administration.



## Taylor named Utility Player of the Year

Kaylee Taylor a junior at Turner High School was named Utility Player of the Year for the South Central Conference.

Taylor helped her team take home the fastpitch Class B State Runner-up title.



## Andersons host family reunion

Choctaw original enrollee Bethel Anderson and his wife Gertie Elliott Anderson started a family in Talihina in 1914. By 1933,

their family had grown to eight children.

On September 9, 2023, their descendants gathered for a family reunion at the Talihina Choctaw Community Center. Reunion attendees came together to enjoy good food, share family stories and photos and play games. A highlight was celebrating Ruthie Anderson's 88th birthday.

Friday before the reunion, family members toured the Choctaw Capitol Museum in Tvshka Homma. On Saturday after the reunion, some visited the Talihina cemetery to clean graves and pay respects to loved ones.

The Anderson family has great memories of reunions held at the old community center. This is the first year they have held their reunion at the "new" location. Reunion organizer Joe Anderson expressed that attendees are thankful to the Choctaw Nation for the use of the community center.

## Incarcerated population at SEC raises over \$6,000 for indigenousjustice.org



On July 11, 2023, Sierra Conservation Center (SCC) in Jamestown, California, through the Community Resource Manager's (CRM) office, distributed pizza and pies to incarcerated persons during a quarterly food sale. All proceeds from the

food sale were donated/presented on September 13, 2023, at the Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting held at City Hall in Sonora, California to highlight the positive fund raising efforts of the incarcerated population. The proceeds were donated to the non-profit Indigenous Justice organization ([www.indigenousjustice.org](http://www.indigenousjustice.org)) located in Sacramento, California. Indigenous Justice has several initiatives; however, the funds raised are specific to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Peoples (MMIP) initiative. These funds will help support family members & indigenous communities with prayer vigils, events, policy and advocacy efforts.

Pictured from left to right: Michael Hermann, Native American Spiritual Leader, Morning Star Gali, Indigenous Justice Founder, Raechel Ibarra, Indigenous Justice representative and Steve Smith, Warden (A).



## Weaver is NASW-LA president

Shelly Weaver currently serves as the President of the Louisiana Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-LA). She is the first President of NASW-LA to be a registered tribal member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.


Shelly is currently the Social Worker Manager for The Hospice of Baton Rouge in Louisiana. She has nearly fifteen years of experience in inpatient, outpatient and administration within the hospice and palliative care field. She earned her B.S. in Psychology from LSU and was an active member of the Native American Student Association and the Psychology Honor Society, Psi Chi. Shelly then received her MSW from LSU, and served as the President of the Social Work Honor Society, Alpha Delta Mu. Shelly has presented at multiple state and national conferences in addition to offering CEUs to Social Workers. She holds the ACHP-SW and APHSW-C credentials related to hospice and palliative care social work.

## Curtis family visits Kindred Spirits



Sheila Hampton Curtis and her Son Trevor Curtis traveled to Cork, Ireland. While in Cork, it was very important to them to visit the Kindred Spirits Choctaw Monument. The sculpture commemorates the 1847 donation made by the Choctaw People to the Irish famine relief during the Great Hunger.

"The monument is impressive and beautiful. We are Choctaw Proud," said Curtis.



## HOUSING EDUCATION

The Choctaw Nation Housing Authority Service Coordination Department is offering free Homebuyers and Rental Education Workshops in September for potential homebuyers, new homeowners and renters.

For dates, times and location of classes, please call or email:  
**580.642.8981**  
**HOUSINGEDUCATION@CHOCTAWNATION.COM**

Attend a workshop for your chance of a drawing.

**Choctaw Nation** Housing Authority



## SCHOOL OF CHOCTAW LANGUAGE NOW ONLINE!


Choctaw Nation proudly introduces Chahta Anumpa Aikkhvna webpage! Enroll in classes, explore the language

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
**CHOCTAWSCHOOL.COM**



Scan to learn more about the program.

**Choctaw Nation** School of Choctaw Language



## FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

Guide Rate Enhancements and New Food for Participants

Effective September 1, 2023, the amount of food items for participants of the Choctaw Nation Food Distribution Program will increase and new items will be available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO BECOME A PARTICIPANT, CALL 800.522.6170 OR VISIT  
**CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/FOOD-DISTRIBUTION/**

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

**Hazel Faye Larkins**

Hazel Faye Larkins, 82, passed away Sept. 24, 2023.

Hazel was born Jan. 31, 1941, in Boswell, Okla., to John Allen and Norene (Sanders) Darling.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Ustas Howard Larkins Jr.; son Jeff Waugh; grandchildren Laney Larkins and Lane Larkins; great-grandchildren Ryder Larkins and Ernie Suesz; brothers Jerry Allen, Joe Allen, Johnny Allen, and Terry Allen; and sisters Sue Owens and Rosa Lee Allen.

Hazel is survived by her sons Bobby Larkins, and Jeffrey Larkins and spouse Natalie; daughters Alice Tibbets and spouse Walter, Juanita Parker, Rosa Sweet and spouse Brian, and Sherrie Bragg; 29 grandchildren; 62 great-grandchildren; and 10 great-great-grandchildren; brothers George Allen and spouse Liz, Billy Chase, Jackie Allen and spouse Vicky, Danny Allen, and Robert Allen; sisters Roberta Allen and Dorothy Colescott; nieces Monica Larkins Hunter and Ruby Allen; brother-in-law Paul Larkins; sister-in-law Laura Smith; and a host of family friends and loved ones.

For the full obituary, please visit [Miller & Miller Funeral Home – Boswell](#).

**Michael Dean Pistokache**

Michael Dean Pistokache, 69, passed away Sept. 24, 2023.

Michael was born Nov. 14, 1953, in Fort Worth, Texas, to John William and Edith Montgomery Pistokache.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Johnny Pistokache and Wils Grimes; sister Patricia Grimes; and great-grandson Isaac Majaica.

Michael is survived by his wife Robbie Blankenship Pistokache; son John Michael Pistokache; daughter Shannon Marie Rodriguez and spouse Jacob; daughter Kelli Ann Pistokache; brother Jesse Pistokache; sister-in-law Donna; sister Sandy Locke; brother-in-law Joe; grandchildren Myranda, Shelby, John, Hailey, and Kenzie; three great-grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews.

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

**Margie Gail Hernandez**

Margie Gail Hernandez, 65, passed away Oct. 1, 2023.

Margie was born April 5, 1958, in Broken Bow, Okla., to Jacob James and Mary Alice Ebahotubi Battiest.

She was preceded in death by her parents; son Timothy D. James; daughter-in-law Teather Anna; brother Bradley James; and sister Nancy Jefferson.

Margie is survived by her husband Heriberto Hernandez; sons Dewayne Anna and Christopher S. Anna; daughters Shannon Yanez and Kristi Aranda; brothers Abbie James, Darrell James, Gerald James, and Bryan Battiest; sisters Carla Madu and Mary Ellen Battiest; 11 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

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

**Wanda Morrison**

Wanda (Whitehead) Morrison passed away Thursday, Sept. 7, 2023.

Wanda was born March 18, 1943, in Bailey, Okla., to Elton Lee and Blanch Beatrice (Davis) Whitehead.

She was preceded in death by her husband Phil; her parents; grandparents Oscar and Pearl Davis, and Clinton and Willie Mae Whitehead; brothers Clinton “Slick” Whitehead, Elton “Jiggs” Whitehead, and infant twin brothers Lloyd and Floyd Whitehead; sisters Claudine “Toosie” Manning and Rebecca “Becky” Nix; her in-laws; and many family members.

Wanda is survived by son Buddy Morrison and spouse Ena; daughters Lisa Huckabaa and spouse Alan, Kristi Jensen and spouse John, and Paula Huckabaa and spouse Russell; brother Roger and spouse Katrina; sister Linda Peddycoart; an aunt, uncle, many nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews, cousins, and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Callway-Smith-Cobb Funeral Home](#).

**Doyal Dean Akers**

Doyal Dean Akers, 77, passed away Oct. 21, 2023.

Doyal was born Oct. 21, 1946, in Wister, Okla., to Ruth Anna (Keifer) Akers and Hillard Akers.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Ronald Akers and Glenn Akers; granddaughter Erica Ladd; and great-grandson Camdyn Ladd.

Doyal is survived by his children Deanna Akers-Meadors and spouse Eric, Doyal Wayne Akers and spouse Debbie, Russell Dean Akers and spouse Susan, and Darrell Gene Akers; grandchildren Ashton Dyer and Sam, Michael Grier, Taylor Cox and spouse Stephanie, Alexis Brooks, Chase Ladd, Julia Ferrell and Kelby, Olivia Dickinson, Micahla Fettes, Darrin Akers, Nina Akers, and Gavin Akers and spouse Chelsea; great-grandchildren Bryleigh Dyer, Nataleigh Meadors, Allison Meadors, Harlee Williams, Brynlee Williams, James Cox, Ryker Cox, Gracie Cox, Chase Ladd, Callea Ladd, Hagen Ladd, Chaselyn Ladd, Easton Ferrell, Gracie Ferrell, Juno Maldonado, Zayn Taleco, Aydean Akers, and Lawson Akers; brothers Lanny Akers and spouse Sue, Don Akers and spouse Rocky; and sisters-in-law Barasa Akers and Shirley Akers.

For the full obituary, please visit [Evans and Miller Funeral Home](#).

**JoAnn Wade**

JoAnn Wade, 71, passed away Sept. 23, 2023.

JoAnn was born Sept. 24, 1952, in Honobia, Okla., to Jerry Arten and Nora Bond White.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Johnny Lee Wade; and sisters Janet Gonzales, Joyce Gonzales, Jeraldine Tims, and Betty Bond.

JoAnn is survived by sons and daughters-in-law Greg and Liz White, Tracey and Crystal White, Billy and Misty Harwood, Tim and Jessica Harwood, and Corey and Starla Salinas; daughter Melissa Harwood; sister Louise Taylor; 20 grandchildren; 22 great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

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

**Jacob Page**

Jacob Matthew Page, 21, passed away Sept. 21, 2023.

Jacob was born Feb. 1, 2002, in Idabel, Okla., to Jason and Kimberley (Hall) Page.

He was preceded in death by his grandmother Ramona Franco; great-grandmother Daisy Watson; great-grandparents TJ and Jackie Sherwin; and great-grandfather Jim Page.

Jacob is survived by his parents; siblings Elizabeth Hall, Juan Hall, and Hannah Page; niece Lilliana Marie; grandparents Judi and Van Page; great-grandmother Lucy Page; numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins.

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

**Maudie Ann Stubblefield**

Maudie Ann Stubblefield, 92, passed away Sept. 23, 2023.

Maudie was born April 28, 1931, in Quinton, Okla., to David Kemp and Lealer (Kirkland) Carney.

She was preceded in death by her husband Lawrence Stubblefield; her parents; children Robert Smith, Linda Smith, Karen Smith, Yancey (Kemp) Gimmiesaddle, and Merry Perkins; daughters-in-law Billie Ruth Perkins and Dixie Kemp; son-in-law Michael Pulsey; grandchildren Donnie Blood and Hope Smith; and great-granddaughter Madison Grace Blood.

Maudie is survived by her children Mike Tolbert and spouse Cyndi, Vickie Pulsey, Ronald Perkins, and Johnson Kemp; 28 grandchildren; 62 great-grandchildren; sister Mary Francis Moses; several half brothers and half-sisters; numerous nieces, nephews, and other family members.

For the full obituary, please visit [Chaney-Harkins Funeral Home](#).

**Justin Andrew Ratterree**

Justin Andrew Ratterree, 36, passed away Sept. 13, 2023.

Justin was born June 24, 1987, in Napa, Calif. to Daniel Ratterree and Jean Lee Ratterree.

He was preceded in death by his grandmother Betty Ratterree; and aunt Sharon Ratterree.

Justin is survived by his parents; and sister Jennifer Lian.

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

**Samantha Hayes**

Samantha Addison Hayes, 27, passed away Sept. 29, 2023.

Samantha was born Sept. 11, 1996, in Madill, Okla., to John Madison Hayes and Karen Lewis.

She was preceded in death by her paternal grandfather Virgil Hayes; and maternal grandfather Ivan Lewis.

Samantha is survived by her children Evan Wayne Noah, Braxton Shane Noah, and Cleo Lynn Noah; her mother; her father and his wife Carley; maternal grandmother Mary Lewis; paternal grandmother Debbie Goforth; brothers Brantley Hayes and Bryson Hayes; sisters and brothers-in-law, Kimberly and James Tyler, and Blaine and Koltan Meek; nephew Miguel Tyler; niece Ember Meek; several aunts, uncles, cousins, and a host of special friends and people she cared about.

For the full obituary, please visit [Bowser Family Funeral Home – Broken Bow](#).

**Norman David Micco**

Norman David Micco, 68, passed away Sept. 13, 2023.

David was born April 08, 1955, to Rev. Norman Micco and Bertha Micco.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

David is survived by sisters Debbie Childers and Pam Weaver; nieces, nephews, and cousins.

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

**Gloria Pat Marvin**

Gloria Pat Durant Jones Morgan, 88, passed away Aug. 30, 2023.

Gloria was born Sept. 5, 1934, in Lawton, Okla., to Albert Wayne Durant and Pearl Bell (Williams) Durant.

She was preceded in death by her husbands Otis Dean Jones and Lesley (Bud) Marvin; siblings Winona Partain, Dolores Taylor, and Wayne Durant; and grandson Walter Jones Jr.

Gloria is survived by daughter Quanna Sue Jones Embree; son Walter Dean Jones; stepson Doug Marvin; grandsons Jeremy Embree, Jesse Marvin, and Kevin Marvin; granddaughters Sommer Barwick and Deanna Jones; great-grandsons Elijah Embree, Ezra Embree, and Connor Barwick; great-granddaughters Ella Embree, Parker Barwick, and Ayla Marvin; 65 nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

For the full obituary, please visit [Wiers Mortuary Chapel](#).

**John David Parker**

John David Parker, 78, passed away Oct. 13, 2023.

John was born Aug. 5, 1945, in Sulphur, Okla., to John Neal Parker and Gladys Marie (Kirk) Scaff.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Robert, Bill, and Danny Parker; and sister Rosemary Dodson Wallow.

John is survived by son Eric Parker and spouse Sharla; daughters Tanya Parker, and Christy Colungo and spouse Michael; stepson Jared Adams; grandchildren Jay Parker and spouse Brennee, Christopher Colungo and spouse Jessica, Christine Parker, David Parker, and Alyssa, Ryder, and Taryn Colungo; great-grandchildren Aubree Parker, Milo and Lucas Colungo, and Alex Roberts; sister Carol Gardner; brother Jim Parker; stepsister Janis Wiles and spouse Tom; stepbrother Von Scaff and spouse Sandra; numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins; Steve Lunsford and spouse Susan; godchildren Stephanie Cornish and Donnie Lunsford; and many “adopted” OSD students and Boy Scouts.

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

**Florence Seely**

Florence (Barnes) Heavener Seely, 94, passed away Oct. 12, 2023.

Florence was born Oct. 21, 1928.

She was preceded in death by husbands Matthew Heavener and Reginald Seely; daughter Beverly Holbert and spouse Steve; and siblings AC Barnes, Alfred Barnes, Clarence Barnes, Charles Barnes, Monroe Barnes, and Juanita Buckman.

Florence is survived by her daughter Brenda Wooten and spouse Wayne; sister Edith Burrows and spouse Neal; brother Dean Barnes and spouse Anna Lee; grandchildren Scott Wooten and spouse Jackie, Nathan Wooten and spouse Tammy, Makayla Wooten, Nicholas Holbert and spouse Bambi, and Chad Holbert; grandchildren Laitlyn and Zayden; and several nieces and nephews.

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

**Ethaniel Nita Morgan Watson**

Ethaniel Nita Morgan Watson, 19, passed away on Sept. 4, 2023.

Ethan was born Oct. 9, 2003, in Tuba City, Ariz. to Twyla Watson.

He is survived by his mother; grandmother Alberta Watson; grandfather Curtis Watson, Sr.; aunt Michelle Dann; uncles Curtis Watson, Jr. and John Watson; cousins Miniti Watson, Tusie Watson, Jontal Watson, David Watson, and Jordan Watson; best friend Trent Howard; numerous other aunts, uncles, cousins, family members and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Jones-Harkins Funeral Home](#).

**Garrick Tyrone Watson**

Garrick Tyrone “Sonny” Watson, 47, passed away Oct. 15, 2023.

Sonny was born Dec. 22, 1975, in Talihina, Okla., to George Ray and Daisy Mae Bond Watson.

He was preceded in death by father; sister Debra Miller; and nephew Cameron Hodge.

Sonny is survived by his mother; daughter Kaylynn Watson; sisters and brothers-in-law Renae Watson, Sheala and Travis Crosby, Priscilla and Chad Wright, Alice and Carlos Rodriguez, Heather Watson, and Valerie Watson; several aunts and uncles; nieces and nephews; cousins; and a host of other relatives and friends.

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

**Ruby Mae Theophilidis**

Ruby Mae Theophilidis, 74, passed away Sept. 24, 2023.

Ruby was born Jan. 30, 1949, in Antlers, Okla., to Myrtle Wesley Loman and Jimmie Loman.

She was preceded in death by her brother Richard Loman, Howard Loman, Lloyd Loman, and James Loman; and her parents.

Ruby is survived by her husband Stephen Theophilidis; children Michael D. Loman and Nicholas Theophilidis; brother Terry Loman and Merry; sisters Paula Loman Jones and Jimmy, Clara Loman Battiest and Vic Eyachabbe, and Wanie Loman Morris; sisters-in-law Barbara Harris, and Joan Doherty and Richard; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and other relatives.

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



## 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](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)

# CNO hosts 18th Annual Choctaw Powwow

**DURANT, Okla.** – The 18th Annual Choctaw Powwow was the first event of November’s Native American Heritage Month scheduled for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO). Regarded as one of the nation’s largest and best powwows, it ran November 3 – 5 at the Choctaw Event Center.

The Choctaw Powwow offered one of the largest purses in the nation, including \$1,000 in some dance categories and \$10,000 for first-place drum competitors.

Kerry L. Steve, Choctaw Cultural Center director of arts said, “In past years dancers represented 65 tribes from across the United States and Canada. It has become an international event with live internet coverage reaching almost 700,000 views in more than 100 countries.”



Photos by Mallory Jackson and Shelia Kirven



Submitted Photo



Submitted Photo



CHAHTA  
REWARDS

12 DAYS of CHRISTMAS



Buy Any Size Fountain Drink for 50¢, Get a **FREE** Beanie



Buy Any Size Fountain Drink for 75¢, Get a **FREE** Beanie



Buy Any Size Fountain Drink for \$1, Get a **FREE** Beanie

Buy One Reign Storm Valencia Orange, Get Any Reign Storm **FREE**

Buy One Reign Storm Peach Nectarine, Get Any Reign Storm **FREE**

Buy One Reign Storm Kiwi Blend, Get Any Reign Storm **FREE**

Buy One Drip Coffee, 25¢ All Day

Buy One Drip Coffee, 50¢ All Day

Buy One Drip Coffee, 50¢ All Day

Buy One Fruit by the Foot, Get One **FREE**

Buy One Fruit by the Foot, Get One **FREE**

Buy One Fruit by the Foot, Get One **FREE**

Days 1 – 4

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# More than a Caregiver

By Kellie Matherly

Resilience. It’s a word mentioned often, but what does it mean to be resilient beyond the dictionary definition? What does resilience look like in real life? Tara Thorpe’s story illustrates the irrepressible spirit of generations of Chahta people who not only overcame obstacles but also passed their tenacity to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and so on.

Tara was born into the Choctaw culture. As soon as she could walk, she and her sisters put on shawls and learned to dance. “It was a really personal experience with my sisters,” she remembers. “It was really so sweet because my grandmother would sing in her Native tongue, and we would just dance in a circle.”

When Tara was still young, her mother passed away, and her grandfather adopted Tara and her sisters. They moved to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, to live with him. Her new community lacked the connection to Native American culture that she had before, which became a challenge, but Tara was determined not to lose her tie to her traditions.

“Being raised in a predominantly white community, I really had to find and discover who I was in the midst of assimilating into western culture,” said Tara. “I really had to discover my own roots.”

She recalls feeling alienated from her Choctaw heritage but trying to maintain a link to it through family stories and going with her family to powwows that were closest to home. Seeing the dancers and taking part in Choctaw traditions helped strengthen her cultural bonds. She also learned to make beaded jewelry and keeps her hair long “because it gives [her] strength.”

Growing up away from the Choctaw Nation and her Chahta relatives left Tara searching for role models who could teach her what being Native meant. “I’m the middle child, and my sisters are just really strong Native women...the resilience they have, I really look up to,” said Tara. She also looks up to her aunt, who broke down barriers in her life to earn her Ph.D. in psychiatry and now helps people overcome mental and behavioral health challenges. “I get my strength from them for sure,” Tara said.

Finding out her great-grandmother was a medicine woman for the tribe was also a great influence on Tara. That bit of family history, coupled with an innate nurturing spirit, led her to the nursing field as an adult. Offering holistic care—treating the body, mind and

soul together—integrated with modern medicine sets her approach to healthcare apart from other caregivers. Educating patients on the importance of diet, exercise, and meditation leads to healthier people on the whole. “A lifestyle balance along with modern medicine is super important to live a really healthy and fulfilling, high-quality life,” said Tara.

Tara truly loves her career, but it is not without its challenges. As a nurse on the trauma floor in a level one, non-profit hospital, Tara often sees people on their worst days. Patients come in with overdoses, gunshot wounds, injuries from automobile accidents and many other conditions that could cause severe physical, mental or emotional damage. According to Tara, some patients feel a sense of powerlessness over their lives when they cannot perform simple tasks for themselves and must rely on her to do things for them. That feeling can lead to anger, but she remains grounded in empathy and tries to remember their frustrations are a result of their pain. “It has zero to do with me,” she said.

“I have this thing where I don’t cry while I’m at work because it’s not about me, but there are some days where I’m driving home, and tears are falling down my face because it’s painful sometimes. Like when you have to transition someone’s mom to the next life, when she’s passing and you have to be there for the family,” said Tara. But she sees a balance between the hard days and the good days. “To know light is to know darkness, so I can experience the happy days, the recovery days at work because I know the dark days at work, too.”

No matter how difficult her day is, though, she can’t see herself in any other profession.

“If I could have any job in the world, I would choose to be a nurse. It’s being able to be there for my patients on literally the worst day of their lives...I step in and take care of them—body, mind and soul...I love it.”

Because Tara is from a historically underserved population, she tends to relate easily to her patients who are also from underserved communities. She has become keenly aware not only of the trauma that presents itself in the moment but also the generational trauma that accompanies some cases.

Generational trauma stems from events in the past that affected a group of people in a particularly negative way. The anger, fear and grief felt in the wake of the event is passed down from generation to generation. Many Native American communities continue to deal with issues relating to forced relocation, dispossession of land, the outlawing of their



Choctaw Nation Photo

Tara Thorpe overcame plenty of challenges in her childhood to become a successful nurse and business owner.

languages, spiritual practices and traditions. Today, that trauma manifests itself in higher rates of suicide, depression, certain illnesses, substance abuse, poverty, domestic violence and other disparities.

Sometimes, people don’t realize that what they are experiencing is generational trauma. For Tara, diving into her own choices and behaviors in light of her family history was eye-opening, but she was not without hope. “With that trauma that’s passed down, resilience is a by-product, so I started focusing on the resilient part of myself, and I started to break past different barriers...I went through a forgiving process for the people who let me down, and then I didn’t spend the rest of my life fighting it. I just understood it.”

The future looks pretty bright for Tara Thorpe as well. She recently launched her own small business, Recovery Concierge, which cares for plastic surgery patients when it is time to transition back to their homes.

“I’m pretty proud of that because I literally founded this company by myself from the bottom up,” she said.

The company allows Tara to work in an area of nursing that involves less trauma but still gives her the opportunity to help people when they need it the most.

Before Recovery Concierge became a reality, Tara had company photos taken because she believed in manifesting her dream into reality. She thought to herself, “I’m going to break past these barriers. I’m going to become something. Then one day I’m going to create jobs for my people; I’m going to impact the world. I’m going to be able to change things on a macro level, and it begins with myself.”

In addition to being an outstanding care-

giver and a small business owner, Tara is representing Native women in science and medicine, a dream she has held since she was a child. According to her, “We need other Native people to be able to understand how to take care of our people the best.”

The fact that Native Americans are genetically predisposed to certain diseases like diabetes and heart disease is another reason the medical field needs more tribal members. Using culturally competent methods can help educate Native communities and help people live longer, healthier lives. Some of those methods are rooted in the lifeways of the past, like eating fresh vegetables and fruits and lean proteins.

“We were warriors. We ate well, we were hunting buffalo, we were gathering berries. We were healthy people, and I think we can get back to that through education,” said Tara.

Because she has conquered so many challenges in her life to get where she is today, Tara believes that resilience is one of the most important qualities a person can have, but it’s also the mark of a truly great culture like that of the Choctaw people.

“I think because I was able to overcome so much as a child, nothing really keeps me down. It makes me feel like I can get past anything, and I think that’s in my blood. As Natives, we are strong. We have the strength of mountains. If we can get through what we’ve gone through, we can overcome anything.”

If you or someone you know is interested in entering the nursing field, the Choctaw Nation can help!

Contact our Career Development Program for more information.

Interior Department releases new report outlining improvements for law enforcement programs

**WASHINGTON** — The Department of the Interior today released a new report offering a series of recommendations to assist federal law enforcement and communities strengthen trust, accountability and collaboration through community-focused law enforcement. The report lists 12 overarching improvements to enhance the trust afforded to Interior Department law enforcement, support the safety, health and wellness of officers, and ensure that law enforcement programs effectively continue to provide for safe and equitable access to public lands and the free exercise of fundamental rights in public spaces.

The Department’s Law Enforcement Task Force, established in 2021 by Secretary Deb Haaland and led by Deputy Secretary Tommy Beaudreau, was charged with implementing a vision of utilizing an equity lens and evidence-based decision making to identify opportunities for improvement in the law enforcement programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service.

“Law enforcement professionals at the Interior Department work every day to ensure that everyone who visits our public lands and waters can recreate safely. Their service is critical in helping the Department realize its mission as they work diligently to solve complex crimes and keep personnel, visitors and our nation’s natural resources safe,” said Secretary Deb Haaland. “I am grateful for the leadership of Deputy Secretary Beaudreau and the members of the Task Force who have spent months listening to the public and our workforce to develop recommendations that will help ensure law enforcement officers have what they need to do their job and help the Department lead the way towards community-centered law enforcement that ensures transparency and accountability.”

“The recommendations outlined in the Task Force’s report will help strengthen the



unique connection that law enforcement officers have with the communities that they serve and continues the Interior Department’s leadership in supporting law enforcement officers and strengthening policing practices to be more equitable and community-oriented,” said Deputy Secretary Tommy Beaudreau. “It’s been an incredible honor to work alongside dedicated career Interior officials and law enforcement leaders who come to work every day focused on creating a better environment for their peers and the public that they serve.”

The Task Force held listening sessions, invited public comment, engaged with Tribal stakeholders, and coordinated various internal and external questionnaires to ensure that a wide range of perspectives were included in the new recommendations.

The recommendations build on the Interior Department’s progress to develop law enforcement policies that advance transparent and accountable policing practices. In October 2022, the Department announced new policies that established clear guidelines on use of force standards, required law enforcement officers to wear body-worn cameras, and restricted the use of no-knock warrants. The updates were part of the Department’s continuing implementation of President Biden’s May 2022 Executive Order to Advance Effective, Accountable Policing and Strengthen Public Safety.

For more information visit the Law Enforcement Task Force webpage.

CNO receives over \$2.3 million in funding to support Native American victims of intimate partner violence

**DURANT, OKLA. (October 13, 2023)**

– Native American women will receive vital services thanks to three substantial grants awarded to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The more than \$2.3 million in grant funding from the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) will allow the Choctaw Nation Outreach Services programs Project EMPOWER, Project HOUSE, and the Tribal Victim Services Set Aside (TVSSA) grant to provide services for Native American women who are victims of intimate partner violence on the Reservation.

Native American women experience violence at a higher rate than any other ethnicity. A National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study showed that more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime. While American Indian and Alaska Native women are more likely to need services to address intimate partner violence, many victims do not have access to those services (NIJ). The Choctaw Nation will use grant funding to address the alarming rates of violence experienced by Native American women by offering them the support they need to rebuild their lives and restore balance.

Project EMPOWER provides rental assistance, utility assistance, transitional living assistance, healing circles, home visits, and safety planning services. The program includes the Choctaw Nation Sexual Assault Response Team consisting of sexual assault nurse examiners, victim advocates, law enforcement, and mental health professionals specially trained to work with victims of intimate violence.

Project HOUSE will use the grant funding to bridge the gap between crises shelters and permanent housing by enabling victims to find and secure permanent housing, employment, and community integration through comprehensive support services including substance abuse programs.

The TVSSA grant will address the waiting list from Project EMPOWER and Project HOUSE while also providing legal assistance for divorce and child custody, case management, and court advocacy.

“The Choctaw Nation is dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of its community members,” said Chief Gary Batton. “By addressing the unique challenges faced by Native American women, these programs will play a vital role in breaking the cycle of violence and promoting healing and resilience.”

For more information about the Choctaw Nation’s programs and services, please visit [www.choctawnation.com](http://www.choctawnation.com).



Choctaw Nation Photo

The more than \$2.3 million in grant funding from the United States Department of Justice will go to the Choctaw Nation’s Outreach Services programs Project EMPOWER, Project HOUSE, and the Tribal Victim Services Set Aside (TVSSA) grant.

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**Choctaw Nation** 477 Programs



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

Scan to learn more and to apply!



**Choctaw Nation** 477 Program

# Being vaccinated is still the best way to protect yourself, friends and family

By Chris Jennings

Looking back, 2020 doesn't seem very long ago. When it comes to talking about COVID-19 and vaccines, it can seem like a lifetime. 2023 will be only the third year with both COVID-19 and the flu actively circulating at the same time.

When it comes to COVID-19, the trend is promising, with a slight decrease or no change in positivity rates and emergency department visits for the week of October 22 to October 28, According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

However, the number of deaths shows that the virus is still out there and needs to be taken seriously. According to the CDC, there have been 176 provisional deaths in Oklahoma due to COVID-19 in the last three months.

Regarding the flu, the CDC reports that activity remains low but continues to increase slightly. The percentage of positive Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) rates is also rising.

RSV is a potentially dangerous, highly contagious virus that can cause respiratory disease. Symptoms can appear like the common cold. Anyone can get RSV, but it can be more serious for adults 60 and older, including those with underlying medical conditions, as well as babies.

The time of year with colder weather and holidays means more people will congregate indoors, where these viruses can spread more easily, potentially creating a "triple-demic" with all three viruses circulating simultaneously.

Andrea Winters, a resident pharmacist at the Choctaw Nation Health Center, says you should be particularly concerned if you're not vaccinated. "That is a concern with RSV, flu and COVID-19. However, we do have all three vaccines here at Choctaw Nation."

Brandi Burris, a Registered Nurse with the Choctaw Nation, echoes Winters, saying, "Vaccines are always the best defense that a person can use to protect themselves and others."

2023 is the first year vaccines have been available for all three of these major respiratory viruses. Monoclonal antibody injection (Nirsevimab) helps protect our infants from severe RSV illness. However, currently, it is in limited supply.

The Choctaw Nation has all three COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use: Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax. The Novavax vaccine is new and is different from the mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna in that it is more like the flu vaccine and already contains the spiked protein. In contrast, the mRNA vaccines teach the body to grow the spiked protein.

"Unlike mRNA vaccines, the spike protein is already pre-made in the Novavax vaccine; it's a shortcut. All this is happening outside of the body; we just give the end product, the spike protein," said Winters.

It will vary which vaccine is available at the outlying clinics due to the storage requirements.

When it comes to who is eligible for the vaccines, Burris says, "Everyone ages six months and up can have a flu and COVID vaccine. There are two RSV vaccines available on the market for people aged 60 and older: Arexvy and Abrysvo. Abrysvo is also recommended during the RSV season for use during 32 through 36 weeks of pregnancy."

COVID-19, flu and RSV are all spread in similar ways:

**COVID-19** - COVID-19 is spread through inhaling airborne particles, or droplets, when people breathe, speak, sing, yell, cough, or sneeze. Particles containing COVID-19 can sometimes circulate in the air for several hours. It is the most contagious of the three, as it can be airborne much longer than flu or RSV.

**Flu** - The flu is also spread through inhaling airborne particles or droplets. In addition, you can catch the flu from touching something with the virus on it, like a doorknob or a handle, and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose. According to the CDC, the flu virus can live on certain surfaces for up to 48 hours.

**RSV** - RSV is also spread through inhaling airborne particles or droplets or touching an infected surface. Additionally, you may contract RSV through direct contact with someone who has it, such as shaking hands.

Burris says that besides injections, there are healthy habits that you can use in your daily life that can help prevent these illnesses. "Hand hygiene, cover your cough and sneezes, stay home when you're sick. When it's impossible to stay home, try to keep your distance from others, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces in your home and work areas, and wearing a mask if you're ill or at high risk for infections," she said.

As you gather with friends and family for the holiday season, Winters says that preemptively testing yourself for COVID-19 may be a good idea.

"I think that's always just a very thoughtful, cautious thing to do. Especially if you feel sick or you may have been exposed, and you're going to be around a lot of people, especially your elderly family members," said Winters.

COVID-19 test kits are still available to tribal members on the Chahta Achvffa portal at [choctawnation.com](http://choctawnation.com).

Winters says that if you're going to get vaccinated, the time is now. "It takes 14 days for the flu shot to get into the body and start creating those memory cells and start working. So, you're still exposed for 14 days to the Flu." COVID-19 and RSV both take time to start working as well.

You can get all three of these vaccines simultaneously, and Both Burris and Winters encourage you to get the vaccines you're eligible for.

When it comes to choosing or picking one vaccine over another, Burris says that is a difficult question.

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
<b>Antlers</b> 580-916-5609	Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Atoka</b> 580-889-5825	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Battiest</b> 580-241-5458	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Broken Bow</b> 580-584-2746	Daily   Monday – Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Durant</b> 580-916-2100 x83517	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Heavener</b> 918-974-1820	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Hugo</b> 580-326-9707	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Idabel</b> 580-286-2510	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>McAlester</b> 918-423-6335	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Poteau</b> 918-649-1106	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Smithville</b> 580-244-3289	1st Thursday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Spiro</b> 918-962-5134	Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Stigler</b> 918-967-4211	Monday & Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Talihina</b> 918-567-7000 x6792	Daily   Monday - Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Wilburton</b> 580-642-7588	Wednesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Mobile Van</b> 580-380-8193	1st Tuesday – Boswell 3rd Tuesday – Coalgate 4th Tuesday – Clayton	9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Choctaw Nation Health Services

Help Prevent Flu, COVID-19 & RSV

Get vaccinated against the flu, COVID-19 and RSV.

Practice good hygiene, such as hand washing, covering your coughs and sneezes.

If sick, keep your distance from others and wear a mask if you're ill or at high risk for infections.

"I'm often asked by a parent requesting an alternative vaccine schedule, which one should I get today. I feel as if I am choosing which disease you would like to risk getting," said Burris.

Often, this question of picking vaccines comes from some common misconceptions about vaccines in general. Winters says one of the big ones she hears is that they're not safe in pregnancy.

"That's what people always ask me, or they tell me as more of a statement. These [vaccines] are absolutely safe in pregnancy," Winters said.

Some of the other misconceptions or myths that Winters and Burris have heard are:

**Myth:** I don't need vaccines. My natural immunity is better than a vaccination.

**Fact:** Many preventable diseases are dangerous and can cause lasting side effects. It's much safer—and easier—to get vaccines, instead. Plus, being vaccinated helps keep you from spreading the disease to unvaccinated people around you.

**Myth:** Vaccines cause autism spectrum disorder.

**Fact:** There is proof that vaccines do not cause autism. A study published more than 20 years ago first suggested that vaccines cause the disability known as autism spectrum disorder, but it has been disproved.

**Myth:** Vaccines don't work

**Fact:** Vaccines prevent many diseases that used to make people very sick. Now that people are vaccinated for those diseases, they're no longer common. One example is measles. It used to be a serious respiratory illness that affected children. But once the vaccine was developed and people were immunized, it has almost been eliminated.

**Myth:** Vaccines give you the disease you are vaccinating against.

**Fact:** None of these vaccines contain any live virus. Therefore, they cannot give you the disease.

**Myth:** I get sick every time I take the vaccine.

**Fact:** Vaccines can cause mild side effects such as pain at the injection site, fatigue, muscle pain, chills, headache, fever, and sometimes nausea. These symptoms resolve in a couple of days. Vaccines rarely cause serious reactions.

"You can schedule an appointment by contacting your primary care clinic or through the CNHSA app. If you are just curious about what immunizations you may need or have questions about the vaccines, call your clinic's Community Health Nurse. You can also get these vaccines while at your doctor's appointment," Burris said.

If you don't live on the reservation, Winters says you should make an appointment with your primary care provider and inquire about your current vaccines.

"Your provider has many avenues to ensure you are up to date and make necessary recommendations," she said.

## Simple steps for healthy eating this holiday season

By Britney Speer MS, RD, LD  
Director of Nutrition Service, CNHSA

Halito! It's December, and that means tasty treats and feasts are inevitable. With all the temptations around, it can feel like healthy eating is an impractical journey. However, there are simple steps that can help you take strides in the healthy lane this holiday season.

1. Try using pureed apples, carrots, bananas or pumpkin instead of all the oil/butter in baked goods. These fruits and vegetables can add nutrients, flavor, and moisture while simultaneously cutting back on calories.

2. Pick brown rice over white rice. Brown rice has more fiber when compared to white rice.

Fiber adds more bulk, making the meal more filling.

3. Try using more egg whites instead of the whole eggs. The egg yolk contains almost 200 mg of cholesterol, and it is recommended to consume <4 yolks a week to help control cholesterol levels. You can try using two egg whites for each egg to save on calories and cholesterol.

4. Choose multigrain or whole grain breads and pastas over white breads and pastas. Similar to the reasons for picking brown rice, whole grain breads and pastas have more fiber. Fiber is beneficial for your gut and heart health.

5. Opt for low-fat dairy products, including cheese, yogurt, and milk. In the dairy industry, when milk goes from whole milk down to skim, the only thing that happens is the fat is removed. The amount of carbohydrates and protein does not change. By selecting lowfat dairy products, you can cut back on fat which in turn reduces the number of calories.

6. Cook with ground turkey, chicken, extra-lean ground beef, and venison. By utilizing leaner cuts of meat, you can once again save on calories, fat, and cholesterol.

7. Make half your plate fruits and veggies. Fruits and vegetables have an array of health benefits plus are low in calories.

8. Keep portion sizes in check. Read the food label and know the serving size. A balanced meal allows for a



CANDY CANE COOKIES

YIELDS: 24 servings(1)

PREP TIME: 45 mins

TOTAL TIME: 1 hour

Ingredients:

2 sticks salted butter, softened

1 c. powdered sugar

1 large egg, room temperature

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 1/2 tsp. peppermint extract

3 c. all-purpose flour

1/2 - 1 tsp. red food coloring

3 candy canes, crushed, optional

Instructions:

1. Place the softened butter and sugar in a large bowl (or the bowl of a stand mixer). With a hand mixer (or stand mixer with a paddle attachment) on medium speed, beat until light and fluffy, 2-3 minutes. Add the egg, vanilla and peppermint extract and mix well to combine. Add the flour 1 cup at a time, mixing on low to combine completely in between each addition. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl as needed.

2. Remove half of the dough from the bowl and form into a disc shape, about 1-inch thick. Wrap tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour (or overnight).

3. Place the red food coloring in the bowl with the remaining dough. Mix on low to incorporate the coloring into the dough fully (add more food coloring until you reach your desired shade of red). Remove the red dough from the bowl, knead it a few times on a clean surface to incorporate all of the coloring completely, and form into a disc shape, about 1-inch thick. Wrap tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour (or overnight).

4. Line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper. Preheat the oven to 375°F.

5. Unwrap both pieces of dough and pinch off 1/2-tablespoonful pieces of each color. With the palm of your hand, roll each dough ball on a clean surface into a 5-inch long rope. (It's best to roll all of the white dough in one spot on your counter, and all of the red dough in another spot, so that the white pieces don't pick up any red dough left on the surface.) Place the ropes side by side and twist, pinching the tops and bottoms to stick together. Carefully transfer to the sheet trays and form into a candy cane shape. Continue to roll, twist and form all of the cookies. (If the dough starts to get too sticky, or difficult to roll without breaking, re-wrap it in plastic wrap and pop it back in the fridge for 15 minutes to firm up again).

6. Bakes the cookies 12 minutes, or just until the white dough looks lightly golden. If decorating with crushed candy canes, sprinkle as soon as they come out of the oven. Let cool completely on the baking sheets. Store in an air-tight container in a single layer, between sheets of parchment paper, for up to 1 week at room temperature.

Note: You can use 1/4 teaspoon of gel food coloring (which is more concentrated), or 1 teaspoon of liquid red food coloring for this recipe.

<https://www.meniscocooking.com/2020/12/01/candy-cane-cookies-recipe/>

variety of foods, but to avoid overeating, it is important to make sure your portions are appropriate.

Healthy eating does not have to be hard. Simple changes can set you up for success long-term.

As a Registered Dietitian, healthy eating practices have been drilled into me, but I am not that perfect healthy eater. The goal is consistency and continued baby steps on the healthy track, and eventually you will be able to make the healthy choices instinctively. I hope this holiday season that you can enjoy the feasts and treats at your events but can also try to incorporate some of the tips listed above.

*This column was written by a guest contributor from the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority.*

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

MARKET HOURS

Open 8:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday

Thursday: 9:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m.

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

December 2023

All markets open weekdays, November 1-28

**Closed:** December 15, 25, 26, 28 and 29

Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation

Participants can request a calendar at their location.

**ANTLERS** 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443  
*Food demo December 12*

**BROKEN BOW** 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842  
*Food demo December 20*

**DURANT** 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773  
*Food demo December 14*

**MCALESTER** 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716  
*Food demo December 7*

**POTEAU** 106 B St., 918-649-0431  
*Food demo December 21*

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

<b>December 1</b>	<b>Crowder</b>	<b>By Appointment</b>
<b>Decenber 5</b>	<b>Wright City</b>	<b>10 a.m. - 1 p.m.</b>
<b>December 6</b>	<b>Antlers</b>	<b>10 a.m. - 1 p.m.</b>
<b>December 7</b>	<b>Wilburton</b>	<b>10:30 am - 2 pm</b>
<b>December 8</b>	<b>Atoka</b>	<b>8:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.</b>
<b>December 8</b>	<b>Coalgate</b>	<b>12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m</b>
<b>December 12</b>	<b>Broken Bow</b>	<b>10 a.m. - 2 p.m.</b>
<b>December 13</b>	<b>Poteau</b>	<b>11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.</b>
<b>December 19</b>	<b>Idabel</b>	<b>10 a.m. - 1 p.m.</b>
<b>December 20</b>	<b>McAlester</b>	<b>10 a.m. - 2 p.m.</b>
<b>December 20</b>	<b>Stigler</b>	<b>By Appointment</b>
<b>December 22</b>	<b>Talihina</b>	<b>10 a.m. - 2 p.m.</b>
<b>Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday</b>		
<b>Call 580-642-6007 for an Appointment</b>		

# More than an artist

Take a good look at a piece of Native beadwork. A really good look. Each bead is unique. Maybe one is a slightly different color, or another one isn't perfectly round. One is a tiny bit bigger than the rest; one is smaller.

Now, hold the artwork at a distance, and what emerges? A beautiful, recognizable pattern, cohesive and balanced. None of the differences show. Each bead, no matter its peculiarities, plays a role in creating something completely original that can never be replicated.

Beadwork is a fitting metaphor for tribal communities everywhere. Native people with diverse experiences, talents, skills, and knowledge contribute to the fabric of their distinctive cultures in countless ways, and each community is as unique as the people who compose it.

Beadwork artist Julia Harjo embodies that community spirit, not just in her craft but also in her everyday life.

Growing up in Idabel, Oklahoma, Julia was surrounded by the cultures of six individual tribes. Her maternal grandmother (Choctaw) met her maternal grandfather (Hochunk) at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas. On her father's side, Julia's lineage is Paiute, Shoshone, Seminole, and Mvskoike (Creek).

As a child, Julia attended the Kvlli Tuklo United Methodist Church just outside of Idabel. Established in the early years of the Removal, Kvlli Tuklo is one of the oldest Choctaw communities in Oklahoma. The original log building was erected in the late 1830's. Here, in the congregation of her ancestors, she learned to sing hymns in the Choctaw language, but at home, her father spoke Creek. Today, Julia speaks mostly Creek in her own home, but Choctaw culture and language play crucial roles in her life as well.

"It's what I grew up with, mainly," said Julia. "It's what I was immersed in."

While she was aware of Native American cultural arts and crafts, Julia didn't pick up beadwork until 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic was claiming millions of lives around the world. Indigenous communities felt the loss even more acutely as elders and culture keepers passed away, often taking their knowledge of tribal traditions with them.

During the lockdown, Julia needed something productive to do. When a friend sent her a kit with beading supplies, she gave it a try.

"I realized quickly that I really liked it," she said. "I felt so much better doing that than being on my phone or computer. And I figured also that it would be something I could teach my daughter when she got older."

Julia was the only person in her family who could bead, and she was happy to share her creations with her relatives.

"I gifted everything I made for the first year because I was just so excited to be able to make these things with my own two hands, and to give these gifts that literally come from my heart."

Beadwork is more than a skill, though. According to Julia, an artist must be in a positive frame of mind when they approach a project because they are putting a piece of themselves in their work and passing that on to others.

The hours and attention to detail it takes to create anything beaded by hand means each piece is unique and precious, but not everyone appreciates, or is even aware, of that. Sometimes people underestimate the value of these pieces at art shows and end up insulting the artist with low offers. Others may have inherited or been gifted hand-crafted Native items, and they simply don't understand the importance of the gift. Sometimes, these items end up in thrift stores or lost to time.

When she travels, Julia often looks in thrift stores and pawn shops for Native American clothing and artwork that she can give back to tribal members who will care for them. In one instance, she found several Seminole patchwork items in a pawn shop in Wisconsin. She bought the entire lot for just \$50.

She shared another story about a friend of her family who found a Choctaw dress at a Goodwill in Kansas. She bought the dress for five dollars and brought it to Julia's grandmother, who now wears it with pride.

"It is kind of sad. She had mixed feelings about it because it's something that was made by hand with love for certain people, but it ended up at a Goodwill. Who knows why? Was it just in the wrong bag? Did they do it on purpose? It's kind of hard to see those things," said Julia. "For me, personally, I like to buy them and take them home."

Being an advocate for Indigenous artists and using her voice to educate others on the nuances of Native American art is a point of pride for Julia. She often promotes and participates in the work her friends from other tribes and communities are doing.

"I love being able to help my friends in any way that I can, whether that be modeling, whether that be sharing something on social media for them to help highlight a sale or a new line dropping," she said, "it really is important to have that kind of community."

Julia also loves the idea of sharing beads and materials with other Native artists because when they use the gifts she sends them in their own artwork, it's like they are bonded with each other across the miles. And she does the same with beads others send to her. It's like a little of her friend is carried into her project. It gives her a sense of community to know that she is using beads that someone else has used before or that she is using beads that have been shared among a group of people who care for each other and for their crafts.

"Just to know that something like a shared hobby and a shared love that we have, it makes me feel a sense of resiliency, like 'I'm still here; I'm still able to do these things and make these things for my family and friends. If it weren't for my ancestors being so strong-willed and strong all around, I wouldn't be here doing this.'"

A sense of resiliency isn't the only thing Julia gets from beadwork. She also sees it as an act of defiance. For generations, Native American ancestors were forbidden from speaking their languages and practicing many of their traditional arts and crafts. Today's artists are working to reclaim the lost knowledge of their forebears, and sometimes that means setting boundaries for what is acceptable for non-Native people to do with Native arts and crafts.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw beadwork artist Julia Harjo believes in the power of Native American artists to preserve and protect their cultures.

The debate between what counts as appreciation versus cultural appropriation is not new, but it has been thrust into the spotlight in recent years, with the changing of sports team mascots and the removal of other harmful stereotypes from corporate branding.

Julia says, "It's something that we haven't had access to for a long time, and now that we do, it's ours to take back. It's ours to wear and use. We have a voice now to say, 'No, that's not okay.' We have a sense of community; we have people to back us; we have people in higher places. We are CEO's, lawyers, teachers."

Now that young Native artists are emerging on the scene, Julia is excited to see the creative ways they are bringing Indigenous culture into their modern artwork, particularly in the fashion world. Because of her modeling experience, Julia has been called upon to participate in shows for Native fashion designers, who are incorporating symbols and ribbons in new and innovative ways. Bethany Yellowtail (Northern Cheyenne), creator of the fashion franchise b. yellowtail, turned heads with her power suit ribbon blazer and trousers, which is a twist on the traditional ribbon skirt, and Jamie Okuma (Luiseno, Shoshone Bannock, and Wailaki) is bringing traditional tribal patterns and beadwork to the world of haute couture. She even has a pair of beaded stilettoes in the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

"I love going out in public and seeing people with tribal print or different Native brands," said Julia.

This resurgence of Native representation is also becoming more prominent in television and movies. Julia has recently accepted opportunities to be on-screen in Native productions. She is excited about her upcoming appearance in Marvel's Echo, which is based on a Native American heroine, and a cameo in the award-winning television series Reservation Dogs, where she played a hospice nurse in the season two episode "Mabel."

"Sterlin Harjo reached out to me for Rez Dogs and asked if I wanted to be on the show. That made me feel really, like, up there," Julia said, beaming. She is particularly proud that Sterlin Harjo called her one of his favorite hymn singers in an interview. "That did something to me. That

made me feel so good about myself," she said.

Television shows like Reservation Dogs bring to light the everyday lives of Native people, rather than painting them as victims of circumstance or presenting them in ways that perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Julia finds it comforting that her daughter Tehcet (pronounced Dih-chit) will grow up in a world where seeing Native Americans on television and in film is normal and commonplace, rather than a refreshing surprise.

Tehcet's first language is Creek, thanks to her mother's teaching, but there are times when she prefers to speak English. It is then that Julia explains why speaking her Creek language is so important.

"We are in a safe place now to be able to speak our language and not be persecuted for it. Our great-grandparents weren't allowed to speak their language. They went to boarding school, and they didn't pass that on. For me to be able to pass that on to her and be able to continue this language journey is important."

Tehcet often helps Julia in the kitchen when her favorite, grape dumplings, are on the menu. But she especially loves to do beadwork alongside her mother.

"I have a little lamp with a magnifying glass, and every time I turn that on, she asks, 'Is it time to bead? Can I bead now? Is it my turn?' So, she'll get her little tray out and get her beads and pick the colors," said Julia. "She loves to make really long earrings. They're so random, but they're so beautiful."

For anyone who wants to learn how to get more involved in Native American artwork, Julia encourages them to support Native artists, ask lots of questions and learn everything you can about the language and culture.

There are countless ways tribal members can carry on the practices of their ancestors and teach them to future generations.

The future of Indigenous culture depends on people being inspired to pick up a needle and bead, grab a brush and paint, dig for clay and make pottery.

To learn more about Choctaw artists, please visit the Choctaw Artist Registry or see what classes are available at the Choctaw Cultural Center here.

## Choctaw Development Fund donates \$250,000 to McAlester Airport project

**MCALESTER, Okla.** – The Choctaw Nation Development Fund donated \$250,000 to construct a \$2.7 million state-of-the-art airport terminal for the City of McAlester that will enhance overall travel experience for residents and visitors alike.

These funds will be instrumental in the partnerships with the other state, federal, and local funding agencies that have worked collaboratively to make this project possible. The City of McAlester, Choctaw Nation and the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission celebrated the collaborative effort earlier this month with a groundbreaking ceremony.

"This is such a great opportunity for Choctaw Nation to work with the City of McAlester. One of our slogans is 'Together we're more,' and this is a great example of that," District 11 Councilman Robert Karr said. "By investing in the new airport terminal, Choctaw Nation is empowering the region to seize economic advantages. Economic development is what this city needs and what Southeastern Oklahoma needs, and we're proud to be a part of it."

McAlester Mayor John Browne thanked Choctaw Nation for its generosity, noting that there will be images of Choctaw culture inside the terminal that speak to the city's identity within the Choctaw Nation.

"We have incredible community partners who helped us get to this point in Choctaw Nation, Chief Gary Batton and councilman Karr," Browne said. "With the work Choctaw Nation is doing in Daisy, this is the closest place that has restaurants and hotels available to them. This will be a boon for that business."

Choctaw Nation has garnered national attention for its drone research, and the Department of Advanced Technology Initiatives (ATI) is based just 30 minutes



Photo Provided

Funds from Choctaw Development Fund will help build new terminal, aid in drone program at McAlester Airport.

from McAlester. The department's five-year plan includes completing the Emerging Aviation Technology Center, creating aviation corridors within Choctaw Nation and establishing advanced technology companies in the region. These collective efforts will further spur economic development in the region, bringing in new businesses and jobs. The airport will play a critical role in the region's ability to grow and develop in the way ATI envisions it.

"Aviation aerospace is what we hope to be our state's No. 1 industry in the next 10 years," Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission Executive Director Grayson Ardiess said. "At McAlester, what you're doing today in breaking ground is securing your legacy in the aviation aerospace industry for the next half century."



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# More than a leader

By Kellie Matherly

Today, Gary Batton leads the third-largest tribal nation in the country, but his life could have turned out to be drastically different.

As a child, Chief Batton's family lived in Wichita, Kansas. His parents divorced, and his mother, who was full-blood Choctaw, stayed in Kansas. Fortunately, Gary's dad moved him and his brother Joe back into their Indian home in Oklahoma near Gary's Choctaw grandfather, aunts, uncles and cousins. This kept him grounded in Chahta culture. "If my dad wouldn't have been willing to do that, I would have lost a lot of the cultural pieces. I have great memories of spending time with all my family."

Aside from being apart from his mother, Gary experienced life in poverty. "Probably the biggest piece for me is you start limiting your mind. So, you can't do this because you don't have enough money. You can't do that because of your mom and dad. You start believing I can't do this because I'm Choctaw, I'm poor; I live in Clayton, Oklahoma, so there are no opportunities for me. You just start getting that depressed mindset."

It's easy to get bogged down in the hard parts of life and feel like things will never turn around. For Chief, his family and his teachers helped him get over those feelings. He related a conversation he had with Ms. Walker, his fifth-grade teacher, who helped him gain the confidence he needed to give his first public speech at a 4-H event.

"Believe it or not, I was terrified to get in front of people to speak," he remembers. But Ms. Walker wouldn't take no for an answer. She told him, "You're capable of doing it; I know you can do it, and I'll help you do it." Gary left the event with a blue ribbon and a huge boost of confidence.

Another influential teacher for the future chief was an Ag teacher, Dusty Smallwood, who helped Gary become FFA president, another position that required public speaking. He also remembered his third-grade teacher, Ms. Joslin, who pushed him to the limit in class, and a guidance counselor, Mr. Lockhart, who made sure he got all the help he needed to go to college.

Chief said, "I was so broken in spirit that I got to the point where I just said I don't care. I don't want to try." Although he hated it at the time, he grew to appreciate the ambitious standards and tough love he got from these teachers and mentors. He is grateful that they saw something special in him and refused to give up.

At home, Gary's father and grandfather were sticklers for self-discipline. They wanted him to be mentally and physically tough.

"My grandpa used to make me take a drink of water, hold it in my mouth, and I would run a quarter of a mile down and a quarter of a

mile back and then spit the water out to see if I could do it," he said. It's tempting to swallow that water when you've been running, and it's hot out, but the goal was to push through the times when he wanted to quit.

His challenges as a young man, Chief says, have helped him relate to Choctaw tribal members more, especially Choctaw youth. "I see so many of them who are lacking hope, and we just want to give that spark to them."

One way to overcome feelings of hopelessness is staying connected to your tribal family.

Many Choctaws are growing up separated from the Chahta culture and may be trying to reconnect or just don't know their heritage and traditions, which can feel isolating. Being curious and seeking out opportunities to learn the culture, though, is key. Family members, community members, tribal members and elders are great resources, even if you don't live near them.

"All it takes is a phone call to reach out to your Grandma; reach out to your Grandpa; reach out to your cousins. That's all it takes, and they will be more than happy to share it with you," he said.

Another way to encourage that spark is by creating a balance between physical, spiritual and mental health.

One of the earliest lessons in finding that balance happened when Batton experienced great tragedy at age fourteen. His older brother Joe committed suicide while their father was recovering from a catastrophic car accident that left him paralyzed from the chest down, a situation that could bring down even the most optimistic youth.

"A lot of people would see that as a bad thing, but I think being broken helped me accept Jesus as my savior and created an awareness at a very young age," he said. "I think I've been blessed to empathize with people's struggles and strengths."

A bit of perspective is always helpful in seeing the larger picture and greater good, and something his father used to say has stuck with Chief Batton all these years:

"My dad had the mindset that if you can believe it, you can make it happen...If there's a will, there's a way."

To illustrate that point, Chief relates one of his favorite stories about a tribal member who had lost her sight but completed the interior of her own house with materials the Nation gave her:

In addition to looking for positive outcomes and teachable moments in a tough situation, Chief relies heavily on his faith to help ground him in the things that matter most.

"My belief in God has been huge because at the end of the day, there are things in this world that happen, and you can't control it. You have to accept that things are out of your control sometimes and be willing to just pray the Serenity Prayer—accept the things I cannot



Choctaw Nation Photo

Chief Gary Batton believes in working hard to overcome life's obstacles, but he also knows that having support and encouragement are crucial to succeeding in beating those challenges.

change, have the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference" he said. For Chief, faith, family and culture are the foundations of who he is today.

"To have a positive mindset, you have to look for simple, positive things to do, like look up," said Chief. "You have to see that there's a sky, there is a wind blowing, that you're breathing... There are positive things happening all the time. You just need to find the things that give you hope. You are blessed beyond measure, even when you think you are at the most desperate, desolate time of your life."

After graduating from Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Batton wanted to give back to the tribal community and went to work at the Choctaw Nation, where he has been since 1987.

Over his 36-year career at the Choctaw Nation, Batton has done many jobs—purchasing, housing, health, WIC and many others. His positive attitude, people skills and work ethic caught the attention of his supervisors, and he quickly moved up the ranks into leadership.

As the Executive Director of Health, he accomplished one of his greatest goals: building the first tribally-funded health facility in the U.S. The hospital at Talihiina was a major part of Batton's overall vision for the Choctaw health system, a vision that began at age 16, when he had a case of mono that was initially misdiagnosed as cancer.

"I thought, I am not going to have a health-care system that tells a 16-year-old kid that they've got cancer and without even knowing that to be true. That's why my vision was to have the best rural healthcare in America," he said.

At age 30, he didn't know anything about building a hospital, but as the leader of the health system, Batton was determined to get it done. He put together a team of like-minded people who were experts in their fields to make the project happen. But that doesn't mean he didn't have to get his hands dirty. When a torrential rainstorm threatened to ruin the grand opening, Chief remembers calling on the com-

munity to help him put the final touches on the building the night before the ceremony.

"If you can imagine, we don't have a picture on the wall, we don't have all the furniture up, we don't even have sod. So, I'm laying sod, and I'm soaked. Angie, my wife, brings the kids over: Paula Wingfield, our Chief Financial Officer, and many others from the offices in Durant show up to the hospital to hang everything up. The next day, no one knew all the struggles we had. All they saw was a beautiful, brand-new facility," said Chief.

Moments like those, when the community comes together to accomplish something great, are precious to Batton.

At the time, the hospital was the biggest financial commitment to tribal members. It showed them the Nation cared about them and wanted them to have pride in the accomplishments of their tribe.

From the healthcare system, Batton went on to be appointed Assistant Chief under Chief Gregory E. Pyle in 2007. During their administration, the Choctaw Nation grew exponentially, increasing the tribe's business holdings, expanding programs and services, and bringing hundreds of jobs to the area.

When Chief Pyle retired in 2014, Batton stepped into the role as Chief, a position he has held ever since.

Chief Batton has a long list of accomplishments under his belt, but he says the thing he is most proud of is his family. "We've been able to endure," he said. "We've had our ups and downs." For every challenge they have faced together, there has been a blessing to balance it out.

One of the most important things Chief Batton does when it looks like everything is going wrong is to go out into the community and visit tribal members. "They inspire me; they motivate me," he said. This has been true of Chief Batton throughout his career. No matter what his job was—housing, health, business, etc.—he has always believed in providing the best resources and growing the wonderful friendships he has with the people he serves.

# More than a singer

By Kellie Matherly

For many people, music is part of everyday life. It's unusual to go a single day without hearing or humming some kind of tune. It is the accompaniment to the mundane tasks we perform every day; it is the soundtrack to our most important milestones; it can soothe us, break our hearts, and elevate our moods.

For Erica Cunningham, music is how she celebrates her faith and keeps her Choctaw culture.

Erica's earliest memories are grounded in Grace Indian Baptist Church near Achille, Oklahoma, which has been home to multiple generations of her family. In the early days before the church building was erected, the congregation met in the homes of different community members, including Erica's grandparents, Atchman and Elizabeth Arkansas.

Erica's parents divorced when she was very young, but her tight-knit family offered all the support she needed. Her grandparents brought her to church often, and her aunt Christie helped out after her grandparents passed away. Erica's life centered on her congregation and school.

"Growing up in the church, we were there probably four times a week, and when we weren't there, we were traveling to other churches," said Erica. She recalls attending Friday night singings and youth rallies and conferences at Native American churches. "Those Native Americans I wasn't closely related to, but they all helped with my upbringing and learning more about my culture and being part of a group of Native Americans because I'm Choctaw and Chickasaw."

Erica's family encouraged her to take full advantage of her educational opportunities. She was active in athletics from a young age, and her academic success was always important to her, but it was music that would broaden her horizons.

In 2004, Erica was chosen to be part of a choral group that toured Europe. They performed in nine countries over two weeks. In Switzerland, Erica felt like she could "really see God's work in the mountains."

She also had the opportunity to visit the sites of WWII concentration camps, which left a lasting impression on her. She felt a sort of kinship with the people who were held captive there, not only because her ancestors were also subjected to unspeakable horrors, but also because her grandfather was a prisoner of war during WWII, where he was forced to endure terrible conditions and starvation. He was awarded the Purple Heart when he eventually returned home.

In 2005, Erica was a senior in high school, and she decided to run for Miss Choctaw Nation in the Choctaw Princess Pageant, where she chose to sing a Choctaw hymn for her talent demonstration. She ended up winning her district and the final pageant. For a year, she served as an ambassador for the Tribe.

Traveling with the Choctaw Nation helped Erica come out of her shell, but perhaps most importantly, it helped spark a desire to learn about Choctaw culture and participate in traditional activities. "You know you're Choctaw; you know who you are. Generations now can see who our tribe is and how important it is and can be a part of this group. You see your headline, you see your ancestry, and you're prouder of it because you can put a stake in it. You can touch and feel it," Erica said.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw singer Erica Cunningham uses music to celebrate her faith and culture. See how God and her Chahta heritage have impacted her life.

Part of being Miss Choctaw Nation is attending powwows and meeting people from other tribes. Although she had always enjoyed going to powwows because of the community feeling and the connection she felt with the drumbeats, going as Miss Choctaw Nation led her to a deeper understanding of her story and heritage. People began to open up to her about their own stories.

"Whenever they addressed me as ambassador or princess, it was an honor to be able to have so many people want to talk to you and share their history and who they are," said Erica. "It was so beautiful to hear where this person had come from, to actually see in my head their line of ancestors going way back and where they came from, who they are, what they went through, and how beautiful it is for them to be here standing in front of me right now."

As a mother of young boys, Erica knows how important it is to keep her children grounded in their faith and their culture. She and her husband prioritize God in their home, and they ensure their boys reflect kindness and community in everything they do because those are both Christian and Choctaw values.

Several times a year, Erica takes the boys to the Choctaw Cultural Center to learn more about their history and participate in hands-on traditional activities. She also works to incorporate the Choctaw language at home, so they can help preserve and protect it.

"I want to teach my sons to make something of their lives because our ancestors sacrificed to make sure they have one," she said. "They come from a long line of warriors on both sides of the family."

To learn more about Choctaw hymns, visit our Language Department's page. The Choctaw Hymn Book is also available in the App Store for Apple users.

If you are interested in participating in or learning more about traditional Choctaw activities, check out the Choctaw Cultural Center's website.



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# Tribal Council approves Official Choctaw Flag Salute

By Kendra Germany-Wall

On October 14, 2023, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council approved the Resolution adopting the Official Flag Salute of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The Salute honors the Choctaw flag and will immediately follow the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance at official meetings.

The Pledge in Chahta reads:

*Chahta okla i shvhp̄a aiokpuchi li; yakni yvt Chihowa i yimmi hokmvt hlamp-ko hosh hikia chi. Ibai achuffa vhleha yvt NA YIMMI, CHUKKACHVFFA, MI-CHA AIIMVLHPESA ya isht o hikia hosh holittobli bilia chi.*

The English translation states:

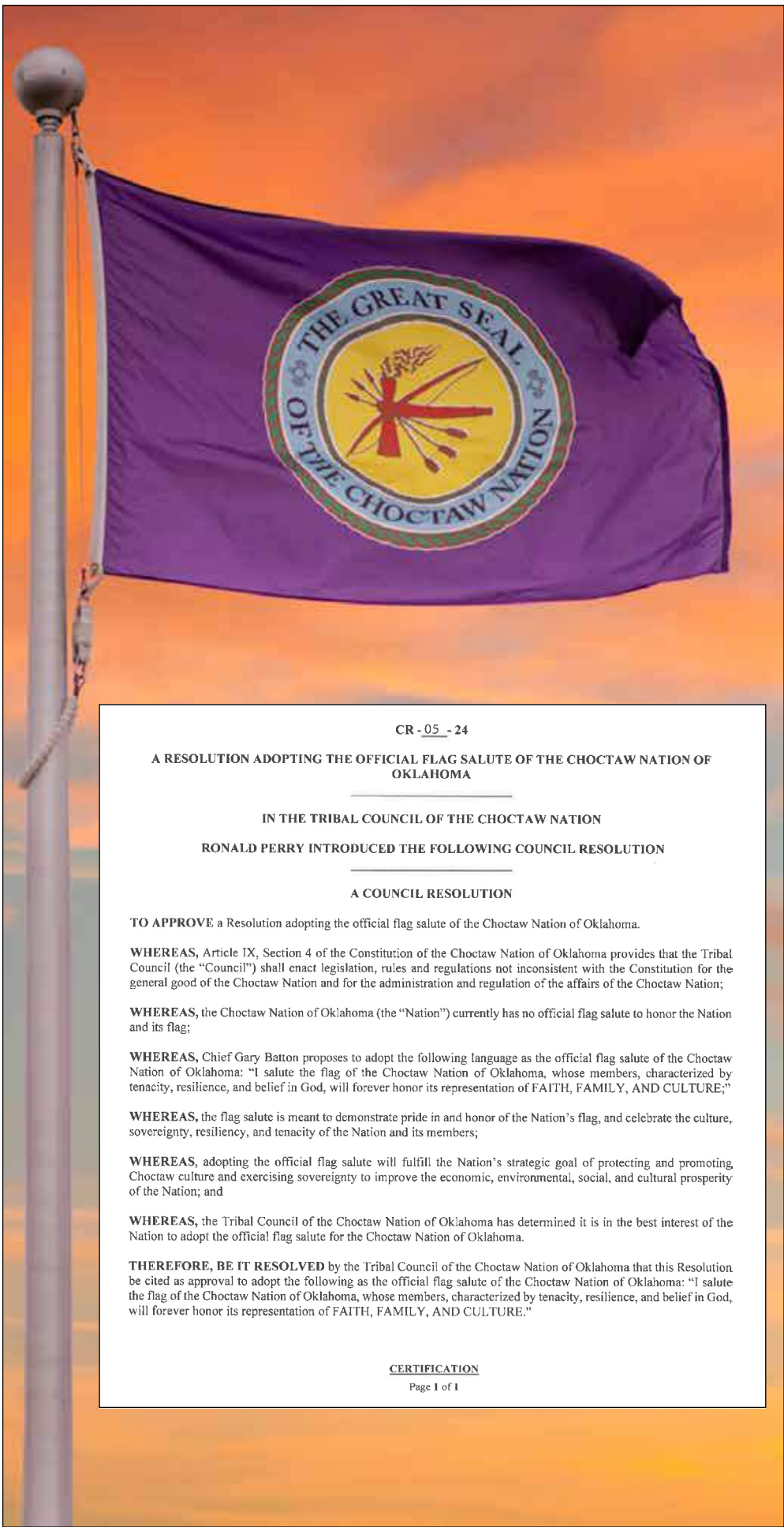
*I salute the flag of the Choctaw Nation; a nation characterized by belief in God, tenacity, and resilience, whose members will forever honor its representation of FAITH, FAMILY, AND CULTURE.*

The Resolution, proposed by Chief Gary Batton and introduced by Councilmember Ron Perry, was approved unanimously during the October 14 meeting.

The Choctaw Flag is purple and features the Choctaw Nation's Great Seal, an important image to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

"A reminder of our history and traditions is on display in everything we do at the Choctaw Nation through our Great Seal. On October 16, 1860, the Choctaw General Council, led by Chief George Hudson, passed an act at the regular annual session held at Doaksville, that created the Great Seal of the Choctaw Nation, said Chief Batton. "The Great Seal of the Choctaw Nation, which consists of an unstrung bow symbolizing a peaceful Nation; encompassing three arrows honoring our three Chiefs Pushmataha, Mushulatubbe, and Apukshunabbe; and a smoking pipe-hatchet that represents the desire of the Choctaw people to establish beneficial alliances with neighbors, but also perhaps prowess. The seal has been used on all official papers of the Choctaw Nation since 1860. The seal is a guide for visitors to the Nation to see what we stand for, our traditions and culture."

Choctaw Nation celebrated its Inaugural Flag Day on October 16, 2021. Since then, tribal members have celebrated Choctaw Flag Day by representing the Choctaw Flag Across the world. Below are a few photos from previous years.



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Marvel Studios screens the first two episodes of the upcoming series Echo during Choctaw Nation's annual Powwow.

Page 10:

CNO receives over \$2.3 million in funding to support Native American victims of intimate partner violence.

Page 12:

Learn how Jula Harjo uses her voice and art to speak up for Native communities everywhere.

Biskinik

Mission Statement:

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

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Tribal Council approves Official Choctaw Flag Salute

By Kendra Germany-Wall

On October 14, 2023, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council approved the Resolution adopting the Official Flag Salute of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The Salute honors the Choctaw flag and will immediately follow the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance at official meetings.

*I salute the flag of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, whose members, characterized by tenacity, resilience, and belief in God, will forever honor its representation of FAITH, FAMILY, AND CULTURE.*

The Resolution, proposed by Chief Gary Batton and introduced by Councilmember Ron Perry, was approved unanimously during the October 14 meeting.

The Choctaw Flag is purple and features the Choctaw Nation's Great Seal, an important image to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

"A reminder of our history and traditions is on display in everything we do at the Choctaw Nation through our Great Seal. On October 16, 1860, the Choctaw General Council, led by Chief George Hudson, passed an act at the regular annual session held at Doaksville, that created the Great Seal of the Choctaw Nation, said Chief Batton. "The Great Seal of the Choctaw Nation, which consists of an unstrung bow symbolizing a peaceful Nation; encompassing three arrows honoring our three Chiefs Pushmataha, Mushulatubbe, and Apukshunabbe; and a smoking pipe-hatchet that represents the desire of the Choctaw people to establish beneficial alliances with neighbors, but also perhaps prowess. The seal has been used on all official papers of the Choctaw Nation since 1860. The seal is a guide for visitors to the Nation to see what we stand for, our traditions and culture."

Choctaw Nation celebrated its Inaugural Flag Day on October 16, 2021. Since then, tribal members have celebrated Choctaw Flag Day by representing the Choctaw Flag Across the world. Below are a few photos from previous years.



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Marvel Studios screens the first two episodes of the upcoming series Echo during Choctaw Nation's annual Powwow.



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CNO receives over \$2.3 million in funding to support Native American victims of intimate partner violence.



**Page 12:**

Learn how Jula Harjo uses her voice and art to speak up for Native communities everywhere.

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