

Choctaw Nation Trail of Tears Bike Team: The journey of remembering our ancestors continues







Watta James looks out at the passing storm on the morning of the fourth day of the seven-day cycling trip.

Editors Note: In this story, Biskinik's Christian Toews gives a special first-hand perspective of what it is like to be a part of the Choctaw Trail of Tear's Bike Team.

This year, the team once again embarked on their journey from Philadelphia, Mississippi to Durant, Oklahoma, in honor of their ancestors.

By Christian Toews

Flashes of lightning illuminate the sky over Camden, Arkansas. The alarm clock of distant thunder continues even after the riders of the 2025 Trail of Tears bike team wake up. It's 5:30 a.m., and the support vehicles are being arranged and loaded outside the hotel. The soft "ding" of the hotel door sensor chimes rhythmically with the movement of equipment and luggage.

Day four of the seven-day journey begins like clockwork. As each cyclist sleepily emerges from their respective rooms, they load their bags into the trailer and then check their bicycles.

They use the pump to check their tire pressure, help each other lubricate their chains, ensure their bottles are full of water, and pack enough snacks into their cycling jerseys. All that's left is to pedal a bike over challenging terrain in heat and humidity while hoping the rain bypasses the planned route.

Watta James, one of the support and gear crew or SAG as it's known in the cycling world, monitors the weather to ensure a safe start for the riders. After quietly watching the sky and checking his weather apps, he says, "I think this will blow over before the start time." The team gathers for a prayer, led by Choctaw Nation Tribal Councilperson Jennifer Woods, on the phone.

Severe storms have been in the area most of the night and, thankfully, have cleared just in time for the riders to make their day's journey before the next wave of rain.

After a quick breakfast, the team gathers for a prayer and a quick meeting regarding the route for the day.

"A lot of hills," one of the riders says hesitantly.

Daylight slowly emerges behind a cloud-covered sky, and after a final check of equipment and personnel, the riders set off. For safety, a Choctaw Lighthorse police vehicle leads the team away from the hotel, and the SAG vehicles follow them. These vehicles ensure that traffic cannot pass too closely to the riders.

These riders are taking the journey from Philadelphia, Mississippi, to Durant, Oklahoma, to retrace the Trail of Tears route that thousands of their ancestors were forced to travel from 1830 through 70 years following.

The trip allows the team to travel along the same route and the unique places along the Trail of Tears while learning more about the history of the removal.

According to Jana Boykin, one of the organizers of this year's ride, the cycling team has existed since 2012.

"The idea started in 2011, but the first official ride was in 2012," she said.

Boykin joined the cycling team in 2015.

According to Boykin, the team has made this journey every year except for 2020 and 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic restricted travel.

During the 2025 ride, the riders travel around 50 to 80 miles each day, take some time to rest at their destination, and then visit a historic cultural location.

There, they learn more about the removal and history



Roldon Sanchez helps Jana Boykin check the tire pressure on her bike before the start of the fourth day.



Colt James, Dr Padraig Kirwan and Shery Friloux push through the ride on day four of their journey.

The cycling team visit one of the many cultural and historic sites along the Trail of Tears route.

of the Choctaw tribe from Ryan Spring, who works in the cultural preservation department at the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

This year, instead of the typical seven-day journey, they added another cultural day at the beginning of the ride. This time was used to visit sites around Mississippi where the Choctaw people lived before the removal. They also visited with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians during their time in the state.

On the fourth day, the riders pedal toward Hope, Arkansas. Even though they start early in the morning, the humidity from the overnight storms is already bearing down on them. By 8:00 a.m., they are making good time, but all are feeling the fatigue from the previous four days in their legs.

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The team makes their way over the hills between Camden and Hope, Arkansas.

BISKINIK

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Choctaw Code Talker sculpture honors Chahta bravery

On May 22, 2025, the Choctaw Code Talkers sculpture was dedicated on the grounds of the Choctaw Cultural Center. The ceremony was held the day before this year's Memorial Day Weekend, and was especially fitting to unveil the sculpture during this time to honor our brave Chahta who laid down their lives so our people could thrive.

The 19 young Chahta soldiers, who are being honored by the sculpture, were the first to use their native language to confuse the enemy, essentially turning the tide during World War I.

Chief Gary Batton

It has been more than 90 years since the Choctaws of WWI volunteered their service to the United States and joined the Army to travel across the ocean to foreign land. Some of

the Choctaw men were over-heard speaking their Native language amid battlefields in France and an officer immediately had a brainstorm.

Training the Choctaws to use their words as "code," they were placed strategically on front lines and at command posts so that messages could be transmitted without being understood by the enemy. Nineteen Choctaw men have been documented as being the first to use their own language as a "code" to transmit military messages.

During the first world war, with the tapping of the American Army's phone lines, the Germans were able to learn the location of where the Allied Forces were stationed, as well as where supplies were kept. When the Choctaw men were put on the phones and talked in their Native speech, the Germans couldn't effectively spy on the transmissions.

Choctaws were citizens of the U.S. before 1924. Only about a fourth of Natives in the U.S. were not citizens when the 1924 citizenship act passed, and the Choctaws were both patriotic and valiant, with a desire to serve in the war effort. Choctaws were citizens because of the Curtis Act and Oklahoma statehood, which made them U.S. and state citizens. Many Choctaw men volunteered in WWI to fight for our country. Choctaw Code Talkers of WWI were instrumental in ending war. Members of Choctaw and other Tribal Nations also served with distinction, with Choctaws serving as code talkers in WWI and WWII.

We honor the sacrifices of the soldiers who laid down their lives in the struggle for freedom. Without the bravery of these soldiers, the Choctaw Nation would not be a sovereign nation, and we would not live in a free society in the United States. We owe a great deal of thanks and reverence to our brave military to keep this country safe and free.

It is my duty as a Chahta and a U.S. Citizen to honor these brave soldiers who used our native language to help bring about an end to the conflicts. We honor those who served, lives lost and the promise of America. It is no greater honor than to remember those who sacrificed all so that we could remain the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Yakoke and God Bless!



Pastor Olin Williams **Employee Chaplain**

Two-edged sword

"For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intent of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

The Bible is the Word of God. It is unlike any book in existence. It is the living word of God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord." Isaiah 55:8

The Word of God reveals our sinful nature that needs regeneration to have salvation for eternity in heaven. It also instructs us how to exist here on temporal earth. Like sheep, we wander here and there, not having a guide to direct us. But the Word tells us we have a shepherd who will guide us

in this pilgrimage journey. Psalms 23:4 says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thou rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Two things from the Word comfort us. These are the rod and staff. These two instruments were commonly used by the shepherd to lead the sheep. The rod was a tree sapling cut about three feet long, trimmed to fit the hand. One end had knobs where roots joined. The use of the rod was several. It was used in warfare, clearance of pathways, chastening the sheep and examining the sheep. As for examination of the sheep, the shepherd would stop each sheep as they came back to the fold at night. He would take the rod and part the wool to inspect for "scabs" or any injuries the sheep may have incurred during the day of foraging. The expression, "You can't pull the wool over his eyes," came from this. The shepherds also had an expression, "passing under the rod." This was taken from Ezekiel 20:37, which says, "And I will cause you to pass under the rod...." The Word of God is a rod which examines each sheep of God. The preaching of God's word is exposing the sins that may be hidden under the wool of righteousness in a person. The second instrument is the staff. The staff was a longer rod with a crook or hook at one end. It was used to draw sheep together for relationships. Sometimes, an ewe may lose her lamb in the crowd of other lambs. All lambs look alike, but they all have a distinctive smell that only the mother knows. The shepherd could pick up the baby lamb and take it to its mother, but the ewe can smell the smell of the shepherd on the lamb and reject her own lamb. For this reason, the shepherd would take the staff, hook the hind leg of the lamb, and guide it to its mother.



ssistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Choctaw fireworks show and being an independent nation

This time of year, has always been one of my favorites with summer fun and great outdoor activities at Choctaw Nation. Each July, the staff of the Choctaw Nation puts on a wonderful display to celebrate our great sovereign Choctaw Nation and the birth of the United States with various fireworks displays at our casino properties throughout the reservation.

Our main celebration is the Boom in the Valley, held Thursday, July 3, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. at the Tvshka Homma Capitol Grounds. We ask that you bring your lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy an evening of family fun. Food vendors will be available. The gates open at 6:30 p.m. and the fireworks start at dusk. We honor our faith, family, and culture as Choctaws and

Americans with this celebration of the United States' 249th

year of independence. It is an awe-inspiring event and, if you haven't ever been to the celebration, I urge you to come out and see for yourself. So many fireworks and so much hard work go into these events, and we would love to have as many people as possible come to, not only Boom in the Valley, but to the many other fireworks events at some of our casino locations throughout the reservation. Check out choctawnation.com for event specifics and times.

As we gear up for a great summer of activities, remember to:

- Dress for the weather.
- Bring lots of water.
- Bring some outdoor games for the family to enjoy.
- Bring chairs and blankets to sit on.
- Bring extra food if your plans are for a whole day outside.
- Bring sunscreen, hats and sun umbrellas to fend off the summer sun.
- Have fun and tell your friends and family about what the Choctaw Nation has to offer!

My hope is that you and your family have a wonderful summer vacation here at Choctaw Nation! Our beautiful reservation is made for family memories and fun summer events, and I would highly recommend that everyone check out the Choctaw Nation this summer for your vacation plans; I am confident you won't regret it.

Yakoke Fehna!

McKenna Roberts, National Guard

McKenna Roberts' journey into the Oklahoma Army National Guard is grounded in her childhood experiences and her early exposure to the importance of service and sacrifice.

Born and raised in Idabel, Oklahoma, McKenna found her calling in a place where patriotism and community support run deep. Today, she serves as a recruiter in Durant, Oklahoma, helping others find their path to service in the military. However, her story of dedication and commitment started long before that.

McKenna recalls the pivotal moment that ignited her interest in service when she was just a child in elementary school. Her class was given a unique opportunity to connect with active soldiers in honor of Veterans Day. The teacher organized a letter-writing project, and each student was assigned a soldier to send a letter of appreciation and gratitude.

The impact of that project stuck with McKenna. It left her with a deep sense of respect for those who serve. The simplicity of writing a letter as a young child somehow sparked something larger in her, and she began to understand, even at that young age, the value of supporting those in the military. Years later, this experience would be part of what led her to serve in the National Guard.

"I was so upset. That letter has always stuck with me. It's my motivation to do what I do now. It made me want to join," said McKenna.

She joined the Oklahoma Army National Guard with the mission of serving her community and country. After volunteering for a tour in Afghanistan, McKenna is now stationed in Durant, Oklahoma, where she serves as a recruiter. In this capacity, she works to inspire and guide others who are interested in joining the military, helping them navigate the recruiting process, and ultimately finding their own way into the service. Working as a recruiter brings a unique set of challenges and rewards. McKenna enjoys being able to share her own experiences with potential recruits, showing them the possibilities that come with military service. For her, it's not just about fulfilling the need for more soldiers; it's about giving individuals an opportunity to grow, learn, and become part of something greater than themselves. The pride she feels in her role stems from knowing she plays a part in shaping the future of others who may go on to have experiences similar to hers. "I wanted to become a recruiter because my recruiter had helped me out a lot," she said. "This isn't just a job for me. This is something I can do to help other young people. How do I help those kids that were from small towns like me get out in the world and see the things I've gotten to see and experience different things?" The values of discipline, honor, and service that McKenna upholds are at the core of who she is. She often reflects on the influence of her community and upbringing, which helped to mold her understanding of the importance of serving others. Growing up in Oklahoma, McKenna was surrounded by people who respected and valued the military, and that sense of respect for service was something that was passed down to her from an early age. Her personal commitment to service, however, wasn't just motivated by patriotism alone. McKenna genuinely believes that being part of something larger than oneself creates a sense of purpose and belonging. This philosophy fuels her work as a recruiter, as she encourages others to consider how joining the National Guard could help them build a life filled with new opportunities, discipline, and camara-



McKenna Roberts, raised in Idabel, Oklahoma, found her calling in a community rich in patriotism and support.

derie. But she wants young people to know that coming back and serving in their home communities is important, too.

The National Guard is critical in natural disasters like hurricanes, wildfires, and floods. McKenna remembers that the National Guard was instrumental in helping her hometown of Idabel with COVID-19 resources.

Though McKenna has already made a significant impact in her role as a recruiter, she remains focused on continuing to grow and serve in the National Guard. For her, the journey is far from over. As she looks ahead, she hopes to continue to inspire young people, especially in her home state of Oklahoma, to take up the mantle of service.

She also encourages young people to get out in the world and learn about other cultures. It helps people understand the differences between their world view and someone else's, but it also helps us understand the privilege we have in our own country.

"I think it's important for people to get out there and learn about different cultures and

The Word of God reaches out to a lost lamb and draws it back to God. This is why the church should use the Word.

Paul charged Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine." 2 Timothy 4:2



The program is here to help tribal members before, during, ind after emergencies. From severe weather to natura disasters, we're committed to keeping our communities safe and supported

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Emergency Management: Need updates or floods, or other disasters? CALL 844.709.6301

Emergency Services: Facing a crisis? We can provide utilities, rental, and mortgage assistance CALL 580.920.7015

Choctaw Nation Iner







the way things work in different places," she said. "Within your community, everybody's always talking about how they want this change, or they want that change. But the thing is, nothing is going to be changed if we don't learn how to change it.'

For McKenna, every recruit she talks to is an opportunity to change a life. She is deeply invested in ensuring that those who decide to join the National Guard have the support and resources they need to succeed both in their military careers and in their personal lives. Her passion for service is evident not only in her professional work but also in the personal relationships she builds with those she mentors and recruits.

McKenna Roberts' story is one of inspiration, purpose, and dedication to her country and community. From a young girl writing letters to soldiers on Veterans Day to becoming a recruiter in the Oklahoma Army National Guard, McKenna's life has been a testament to the power of service.

"When you get everybody together and you start working together as a team, which is a lot of what the National Guard does, people are going to thrive. People are going to do better," she said.

Her commitment to helping others find their place in the military reflects the same sense of duty that inspired her to join in the first place. With her unwavering dedication, McKenna continues to be a role model to those who follow in her footsteps, showing that service to others is not just a career, but a lifelong calling.

To learn more about the Oklahoma Army National Guard, visit https://goguardok.com/ or reach out to McKenna directly at okngpao@ army.mil or 405-534-7476.

See her story at https://togetherweremore. com/inspirational/mckenna-roberts/.

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Trail of Tears Bike Team, the journey continues

Continued from Page 1

Colt James, the youngest on this year's ride, lingers toward the back of the group of cyclists as the team works their way through the first 20 miles of riding for the day.

When asked about his motivation in difficult times like these, James responded, "For example, when it's wet and cold, so were our ancestors, except we have a choice to go into the gas station, go into the car...we have options," said James. Our ancestors didn't have that option. Their homes were being burned down as they were leaving. They didn't have the option to go back; they just had to keep on walking, and it's just another cold day for us."

Dr. Padraig Kirwan came all the way from Ireland to participate in this year's ride. Kirwan packed his bike in a box and flew from Europe to Oklahoma. His motivation? To honor and remember the relationship between the Choctaw people and Ireland, which dates back to the 1840s, when famine swept across Ireland.

When the Choctaws, who had only recently traveled the Trail of Tears, heard about the Irish famine, they wanted to help. The Choctaw people donated \$170 (over \$5,000 in today's money), which they sent to support the Irish during the Potato Famine.

"I was invited by the organizing committee to come along, and we're honoring the gift that The Choctaw Nation sent to the islands on behalf of the people of Ireland," Kirwan said after the ride.

However, Kirwan's connection to the Choctaw Nation goes back much further than cycling.

He has a Ph.D. in Indigenous history and teaches in the English department at a College in London, England. He has researched and written about the Choctaw-Irish connection for nearly 14 years. That experience has connected him with many Choctaw people, which has only grown his passion and love for this relationship.

According to Kirwan, even though he knew about the Choctaw Nation, he was overwhelmed by the historical and cultural locations the team visited.

"In terms of book learning, there's a sense you understand the history," said Kirwan. "When you're here, and you also see how history is fleshed out and contextualized, you see things from other perspectives."

Kirwan has been a lifelong cyclist, and this union of sport and his passion for Choctaw history and culture was a dream opportunity for him.

"To be invited here is almost, for me, like there's a sense of diplomacy nearly. And you

know, it's very important to help that," said Kirwan. "Hopefully, it deepens our relationship." On the ride's last day, the team sweats their way back to the Choctaw Nation headquarters in Durant, Oklahoma.

Joined by Chief Gary Batton, they are met by cheers and celebrations from friends, family, employees and the media lining the large circular drive of the headquarters.

While the cycling journey is over, the experience and knowledge gained help to preserve the memory of the Choctaw People who made this same journey years ago.

If you want to learn more about the Trail of Tears bike team, you can contact Jana Boykin at jrboykin@cnhsa.com.

For more photos from the 2025 TOT Bike Ride, check out the online version of this story on the new and improved Biskinik website, www.biskinik.com.



Photos by Christian Toews

Colt James, the youngest rider on this year's trip, flies down a hill between Camden and Hope, Arkansas.





Shery Friloux gets a quick massage from Jana Boykin during one of the stops on the fourth day of riding.



stretch between Camden and Hope, Arkansas.

The team pedals their way over the hills that Dr. Padraig Kirwan rests on his bike before of the fourth day of riding.



FE & OUT

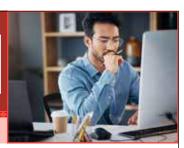
— BUSINESS — **CHAHTA**PRENEUR

What I've Learned from Listening to Hundreds of Small Business Owners

By Brad Erwin

Over the past several years, I've had the privilege of working closely with hundreds of small business owners, some just starting out, others well into their tenth year of operation. Each of them began with a vision, a challenge, and a desire to create meaningful change, not only for themselves, but also for their families and communities.

Through these experiences, I've gained valuable insight into what contributes to longterm success and what common pitfalls to avoid. I've also observed several clear trends that continue to emerge across industries. Whether you're considering launching your own business or simply having an interest in the world of entrepreneurship, these lessons are worth exploring.



team they've built around them.

Key relationships with business advisor, accountant, and attorney are essential to long term success.

Invest in building and nurturing these professional relationships. Having trusted advocates who can speak positively on your behalf, especially in rooms where you're not present, is an invaluable asset to any business.

4. No One Has It All Figured Out

People often view success and assume it stems from luck, natural confidence, or being in complete control. Success is rarely the result of a single moment, it's the outcome of

By Luke Taylor

It's time to get that boat out of the garage, wash the dust off, and hit the lake. Whether you enjoy fishing, skiing, or just cruising around, now is a good time to go through your vessel and make sure you have everything you need to have a safe and enjoyable voyage.

Boat safety is something that should not be taken lightly. There are many steps you can take to ensure your boating experience is safe for everyone on vour boat.

A pre-departure checklist is something that every good captain should have. This checklist should include checking the weather, inspecting your boat for potential problems, inspecting your boat and trailer for invasive species, letting someone know your boating plans, and making sure you have all necessary safety equipment on board before launching. Here are some recommended boat safety equipment items that could go on your checklist.

- · Life jackets (one for each person on board, with the right sizes)
- Horn or whistle to signal or warn others

· Flashlight to ensure you are able to see in case of power failure at night

- Type IV throwable device (throw cushion, ring buoys)
- · First aid kit with supplies for treating injuries and medical emergencies
- Tool kit for simple repairs to your boat Sunscreen to reduce the risk of sunburn
- Navigation lights for low visibility or night
- Fire extinguisher
- Extra drinking water to stay hydrated

Insect repellent

While having a pre-checklist for your boat is important for your safety on the water, having a post-checklist is a good idea, too. There are many invasive species in our waters, including zebra mussels and didymo algae. Reducing the spread of these throughout the reservation is vital. To help with controlling the spread of invasive species, always remember to:

Inspect: Check all surfaces of your boat and trailer for zebra mussels

Drain: Drain all water from your boat, motor, and equipment thoroughly.

Dry: Allow your boat and equipment to dry completely in the sun for at least five days.

Clean: Use a pressure washer to clean your boat and equipment with hot water (140 F).

Report: If you find zebra mussels or suspect an infestation, report it to the Choctaw Nation Wildlife Department.

Following these steps will help prevent the spread of zebra mussels and protect the Choctaw Nation ecosystems. Now get your boat out on the water and enjoy one of the beautiful lakes we have in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

1. Most Entrepreneurs Aren't in It Just for Money

While financial sustainability and profitability are essential, most small business owners I've spoken with are motivated by something far deeper: a sense of purpose.

They seek the freedom to be their own boss, a chance to solve meaningful problems, and an opportunity to serve their communities. It's this core purpose, their "why", that fuels their perseverance, especially during challenging times.

2. Confidence Grows with Action

What's the number one thing that holds people back from pursuing their goals? Fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of the unknown unknowns, fear of financial risk, and fear of failure.

While these fears are valid, they can be mitigated, especially with the right support system. Partnering with knowledgeable professionals, such as Choctaw Small Business Development, and creating a well thought out plan can significantly reduce uncertainty.

Still, the hardest part is often just getting started. It's important to understand that confidence doesn't come before you begin, it comes as a result of taking that first step. Even a small move forward can bring greater clarity, courage, and new opportunities. Growth rarely happens within your comfort zone; it begins the moment you step beyond it.

3. Support Matters More Than Strategy

You can have a flawless business plan, strong financial projections, and a comprehensive feasibility study, but without the right people in your corner who genuinely believe in you, the journey becomes significantly more difficult.

Many of the most successful business owners I've encountered thrive not only because of their strategic planning and purposeful decision making, but also because of the strong

sustained effort over time.

What's frequently overlooked is the power of consistency. The most successful individuals don't just focus on the result; they commit to a process. They develop a clear plan, break it into achievable milestones, pursue each goal with intention, celebrate small victories, learn from setbacks, and continuously adjust their course as needed.

This disciplined approach is what sets them apart. No exceptional product or business begins in its final form, greatness is built step by step.

5. Our Communities Need Them

Local businesses are more than just drivers of economic growth, they serve as cultural anchors within our communities. They sponsor youth sports teams, create jobs for our neighbors, and reinvest in the very places we call home.

Supporting small businesses goes beyond a simple transaction; it's a meaningful commitment to building a stronger, more resilient future for everyone. These businesses form the backbone of our communities, and by choosing to support them, we're investing in the long-term vitality and success of the areas we live in.

Final Thoughts

If there's one thing I've consistently observed, it's that small business owners are among the most resilient, resourceful. and community driven individuals you'll ever meet. They deserve our support, not just as customers, but as neighbors who share a vision for creating more opportunities in the communities where we live and grew up.

Together, we can strengthen our communities from the inside out. Supporting small local businesses is one of the most impactful ways to do just that.

If you find this article valuable, we invite you to visit our Facebook page at Choctaw Small Business and share your thoughts. We'd love to hear from you, let us know what topics you'd like us to cover next!

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District 2

Halito, Chim Achukma from District 2.

As we are closing the spring season and beginning summer, I would like to congratulate all the graduates at all levels. Good luck in all your endeavors! Also, our Summer Youth Camps are back in full swing, and we would like to encourage our youth to participate in the excellent camps the Choctaw Nation provides.

In May the Choctaw Nation held our annual Elder Appreciation Day celebration. It was great to see everyone enjoying themselves. We are very proud of our District 2 Seniors placing second in the singing contest and would like to congratulate District 10 for placing 1st. It was great to see and hear all the other districts perform. They all did great singing hymns that those who came before us sang and passed on to us to carry for many generations. District 2's very own Rachel "Lil Bit" Dixion

won the fashion show! Congratulations to all the winners!

Tony Ward

We had our Senior Citizens "Roaring 20s" Prom. We would like to say Congratulations to our Prom King Ivan Battiest and our Prom Queen Mary Aaron.

We had a fun and fabulous night of dancing, dining, and fellowship. A special "Yakoke" goes out to the staff for the awesome decorations and food; you all are the best! Keep practicing those dance moves, and we will do it again next year!

In District 2, we have been very blessed to have some new projects coming soon. We will be opening our Expanded Ruby Choate Clinic soon. We have expanded our Wellness Center and added to the walking track. Began move-ins on our Affordable Rental Homes and LEAP Homes.

District 2 crowned new Princesses for 2025-2026, and they are Little Miss Quinn Willia, Junior Miss Kaydence Young and Senior Miss Brooklyn Choate. Congratulations! We would like to thank the Beautiful Choctaw Landing for hosting it once again. If you have not visited the property, we encourage you to do this summer. They have many events all summer long!

This July, we have the great opportunity to exercise our right to vote in our tribal elections. I would like to encourage each and everyone to do so!

We would like to wish all mothers and fathers a Happy Mother's and Father's Day and thank a veteran! Be safe during the summer heat, and may God Bless you!

Yakoke, Tony Ward, District 2 Councilman



District 3

Halito, from District 3!

Many recent events have brought our people together and created new opportunities for the Tribal Members of District 3 and surrounding areas. Before I talk about those things, I would like to say that I hope everyone is having a great summer so far! It truly is a joy to serve you all and meet you or simply catch up during the events that we have both in District 3 and the Choctaw Nation as a whole.

In April, the District 3 Talihina Senior Citizen group held a BINGO fundraiser, and it was a great success for them. The funds raised at their fundraisers are used towards future fundraisers, events, and trips for the group! I would just like to thank the town of Talihina and its citizens and businesses for their contributions and support to the senior group. Without

the help from you all, events like this would not be possible. Yakoke fehna!

During May, we were finally able to open the much-needed NEW Wellness Center in Talihina, Oklahoma. This facility will offer a wide range of activities and opportunities for our Tribal Members to put their health and wellness first. According to the Indian Health Service (IHS), health issues such as heart disease and diabetes are two of the leading causes of death for American Indians. Because of this, we must offer these types of services, like our Wellness Centers, to our Tribal Members so we can strengthen our health and beat the statistics that surround us. Many may notice that the old Alco building in Talihina, Oklahoma, next to the new Wellness Center, is being renovated. There are some exciting things coming with the completion of the building, such as easier access to programs and opportunities. We will have more information on that in the coming months!

During June, we had our annual Veteran's Appreciation Lunch and Program for the local Veterans in Talihina and Smithville. It was a great time for all and thank you all for your service to our country. We have an exciting new event that we will be putting together for our Senior Citizens - a Block Party! Both Smithville and Talihina groups will be coming together for an Independence Day celebration on July 1, 2025. I am looking forward to a day of fun games, fellowship, and grilling!

We will soon be seeing the start and completion of the brand-new Affordable Rental housing units in Smithville, Oklahoma! This has been much needed in the area, and I am glad to see that it is becoming a reality. I encourage everyone, not just in District 3, to fill out the applications for Affordable Rental Housing and LEAP Homes. Even if there are no current homes in your area, fill it out! Once an area reaches 10 completed and approved applications, the process can begin

COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL

- **REGULAR SESSION AGENDA**
- June 14, 2025
- 1. CALL TO ORDER
- 2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SA-LUTES
- 3. ROLL CALL
- 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session May 10, 2025
 - b. Special Session May 17, 2025
- 5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #9 – Terry Cole
 - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #9 – Pam Wilson
- 6. PUBLIC COMMENTS
 - a. Crispin South Individual Speaker - The Need for a Stronger Bill of Rights in the Choctaw Constitution
 - b. Faith Parra Individual Speaker - Citizen Concerns for the great Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
 - c. Nellie Meashintubby Individual Speaker - Protecting our Chahta Citizens
 - d. Cynthia Savage Individual Speaker - Proposed Amendment to Choctaw Constitution's Bill of Rights
- 7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

8.8) NEW BUSINESS

a. Approve the Disposal of Sur-

plus Capital Assets - Equipment

- b. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets - Vehicles
- c. Approve Application for the Community Connect Grant Program FY25
- d. Approve Application for the FY25 Tribal Wildlife Grant (TWG)
- e. Approve Application for the FY25 Veterans Cemetery **Grants Program**
- f. Approve a Service Line Agreement in Favor of the Public Service Company of Oklahoma, on Land Occupied by Jones Academy, the Authorized Occupant being the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma
- **Resolution Supporting the** g. Nomination of Bobby Yandell for Reappointment to Serve on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Tribal Intergovernmental Advisory Committee
- h. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr., to Serve on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs

9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS

- 10. OLD BUSINESS 11) ADJOURN-MENT
- 11. CLOSING PRAYER

All votes unanimously approved



District 4

Halito from District 4!

We've had a busy and exciting few months in District 4, and I'm honored to share some of the highlights with you.

In April, we celebrated our graduating Youth Advisory Board (YAB) seniors with a special banquet. District 4 had seven YAB seniors graduate this year. All of our Chahta seniors received their graduation cords, and I had the privilege of attending many of the high school presentations. Congratulations to all of our District 4 seniors! We are proud of your accomplishments and look forward to seeing you achieve your dreams.

In May, a true Chahta hero, Charles Bank Wilson, was honored for his historic contributions. He was the first full-blood Choctaw appointed as a U.S. Marshal in the Choctaw Nation

under Judge Isaac Parker. Marshal Wilson gave his life in the line of duty on August 7, 1884. His bravery was recognized when the suspect was brought to justice in Judge Parker's courtroom and executed in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Thanks to the dedication of his great-grandson, Sam Garner, a monument now stands to honor Marshal Wilson's service and sacrifice. I am humbled to have played a role in this long-overdue recognition.

The Summer Food Program is now in full swing for all children ages 1–17. In District 4, meals can be picked up at the PARC parking lot on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

We were also blessed to celebrate a major milestone-Choctaw Tribal Member and WWII veteran Mr. Bill Logan turned 100! It was an incredible honor to spend time with him and

to start building the nomes.

As always, if there is anything that I can assist you with, please let me know! I am here to be an advocate for you. I wish you all a blessed Summer - Chi pisa la chike!

Wilson is June First Language Speaker

District 9's Pam Wilson was recently named the June 2025 First Language Speaker of the Month by the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council.

Pam was raised in Wright City, Oklahoma, by her parents, Leo and Elenor Cauldwell and is the youngest of six children.

Growing up, Choctaw was the only language spoken in our household. Choctaw was very important to her parents, and they wanted their traditions and language to carry on to future

generations. Her father would tell her and her siblings that "God gave the Choctaws a gift, and it was language." Some of her favorite memories from childhood were of listing to stories in the Choctaw language.

"As a grandmother, I am teaching my children and grandchildren that learning Choctaw is something no one can take away from you and to be proud of who you are," said Pam.

Cole is June Veteran of the Month

Terry Cole was born July 8, 1951, in Talihina, Okla. He was raised in Bennington, Okla., until age 8, when he moved to Durant, Okla., to live with his grandmother and begin third grade. He continued his education there until graduating from high school in 1969.

Inspired by family members and a strong sense of duty, he joined the United States Air Force in 1970 after being

drafted into the Army. On his brother's advice, he enlisted in the Air Force to obtain a better occupational opportunity. He completed Basic Training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas, and later attended Tech School at Kessler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Miss. He served in the 3560th Organizational Maintenance Squadron, Web Air Force Base, where he trained T-37 and T-38 aircraft mechanics. He also served in the jungles of Thailand in Southeast Asia. Then, he returned to the States aboard a military transport plane carrying the remains of fallen soldiers from Vietnam. He was honorably discharged from the United States Air Force with the rank of E-4.

Following his military service, he relocated to Big Spring, Texas, for a couple of years. He returned to Durant and painted horse trailers before beginning a long and distinguished career with the Choctaw Nation in 1994. He first worked at the Housing Authority and later became the first Historic Preservation Director, a position he held for 18 years. During his service, he received numerous commendations, including the prestigious National Historic Preservation Award presented by Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior. He established the "Bridge a Gap" program, collaborated with various governmental entities, and launched the Cemetery Restoration Program. He has worked with Mike Huckabee, former Governor of Arkansas, to improve governmental relationships. He completed an Archeological CSI class to enhance his understanding and sharpen his approach to preserving cemeteries.

Mr. Cole was named the Elder of the Year in 2011 for District 9. He continues to serve his tribe faithfully by delivering meals to the elderly each Wednesday, assisting with lawn maintenance for elderly residents through the Housing Authority, and participating in the Honor Guard for the past 18 years.

He expresses deep gratitude to Chief Baton, Assistant Chief Austin, and James Dry for bestowing upon him the honor of being named Veteran of the Month.

celebrate his remarkable life, service, and legacy. His strength, wisdom, and humor continue to inspire everyone who knows him.

Our seniors have been staying active and making memories! The seniors have traveled to Branson, the Choctaw Cultural Center, movies and dinner outings, bead shopping adventures, the Tulsa Zoo, Wheelock Academy, and even the Gathering of Nations in New Mexico. Our senior volleyball team continues to practice and compete weekly. I encourage you to join them—our seniors have a great time together!

Progress continues on the Dale Cox Community Center! The slab has been poured and the iron framework is up. This new center will soon become a central hub for gatherings and events in District 4, and we can't wait to open its doors.

Congratulations to our newly crowned royalty-Little Miss Kynleigh Moore and Junior Miss Tenley Reece! Kynleigh is the daughter of Blaze and Jennifer Moore, and Tenley is the daughter of Brandon and Patti Reece. We are so proud of you both and know you will represent District 4 with pride and grace.

It is truly an honor to serve the Chahta people of District 4. If I can be of assistance in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Yakoke and God Bless!



Above: Councilmember Jess Henry shakes hands with Bill Logan during Logan's 100th birthday party.

Below: Council member Henry poses for a photo with District 4's 2025 YAB graduating seniors.





Above: CNO honors Charles Banks Wilson, the first full blood Choctaw U.S. Marshall, with a monument

Above: District 5 crowns its 2025 princesses, Tenley Reece, Kynleigh Moore.







Cinema at the Center | July 12 | 1 p.m. | Choctaw Cultural Center | 1919 Hina Hanta Wy, Calera, OK 74730 | This monthly series features a wide range of films designed around a fun, family-friendly theme. This month, check out Disney's "Cars." We'd love to see you there!

Car Seat Checks and Safety Information Event | July 25 | 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. | Talihina Community Center | 100 Railroad St. Talihina, OK 74571 | It's important to make sure car seats are properly installed.

Second Chance Resource | July 10 | 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. | Wright City Old Head Start | 105 W 10th St.Wright City, OK 74766 | This is an opportunity to connect with free legal aid services, re-entry programs, and career and educational opportunities. You will leave empowered with knowledge and kickstart your next steps in life! Open to CDIB cardholders from any federally recognized tribe.

Circus City 5k | Sept. 6 | 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Choctaw Wellness Center-Hugo | 304 Chahta Circle Hugo, OK 74743 | Join us for the Circus City 5k 2025, "Race for Education." Your participation in this run supports Hugo Public Schools. For more information and to register today, scan the QR code.



Choctaw Code Talkers Sculpture Unveiled

DURANT, Okla. – A new sculpture honoring the World War I Choctaw Code Talkers was unveiled today at the Choctaw Cultural Center. The bronze sculpture, Chahta Anumpa i Tvshka Hoke (Warriors of the Choctaw Language) depicts the heralded soldiers who used the Choctaw language to help end the war.

At the ceremony, the sculpture was presented for the first time to descendants of those Army soldiers serving in France in 1918. The soldiers' use of the Choctaw language was unable to be deciphered by German forces, allowing key military operations to be executed.

The Choctaw Code Talkers were the first American Indian tribe to develop a code for their language to transmit military messages on the battlefield. Many tribes would follow in WWI and WWII.

While these young Choctaw men put their lives on the line in World War I to be warriors for the United States, about one-fourth of American Indians were not yet citizens. Many tribes did not receive citizenship until 1924.

The 6-foot-8-inch tall and 8-foot-wide bronze sculpture is artist Jane Semple Umsted's sixth sculpture she has made for her tribe, in addition to a number of paintings displayed throughout Choctaw facilities.

"The World War I Choctaw Code Talkers sculpture is probably the most significant piece of art that I have ever had the honor to create," said Semple Umsted.

Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.,



Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. visit with members of the crowd gathered to witness the unveiling



Photos by Christian Toews

Nuchi Nashoba, Janie Semple Umsted and Chief Gary Batton cheer as the new Choctaw Code Talker Monument, honoring the Choctaw Code Talkers of WWI and WWII, is unveiled.

Choctaw Tribal Council members, Choctaw Royalty and elders, associates and local civic leaders attended the ceremony.

The Choctaw Code Talker Association has verified 20 Choctaw Code Talkers of WWI and four Choctaw Code Talkers of WWII," said Judy Allen, Choctaw Tribal historian. "Their story begins when an officer discovered a couple of the Choctaws speaking their language to each other. He asked if there were others in their ranks. More tribal members were recruited and trained. Some were on standby, but never utilized, others discharged before they were needed."

Features to look for in the sculpture are its historic details, such as the map held by one soldier which shows actual locations, the transmitter, and uniforms, helmets and weapons. There is also a small luksi (turtle), a reminder of the Choctaw culture.

Nuchi Nashoba, president of the Choctaw Code Talkers Association and the great-grandchild of Code Talker Ben Carterby, said, "The project was launched in 2022, after the Code Talkers Association met with Chief Gary Batton, who was enthusiastic about the concept."

A call to artists then went out, and Semple Umsted's design was selected.

Chahta Anumpa i Tvshka Hoke (Warriors of the Choctaw Language) can be viewed during regular business hours at the Choctaw Cultural Center, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.



NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

27th Annual Father's Day Gospel Singing Sunday, June 15 at Blackjack Church located one mile west of Sobol, Oklahoma. Supper starts at 5 p.m. Singing starts at 6 p.m. The singing will be emceed by Lena Priddy and sound engineered by Lilbit Rachel Dixon. Bring your own lawn chair. Concessions will be available. 436735 State Highway 3, Fort Towson, OK 74735.

The Accounting Department of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is trying to contact the individuals listed below. Choctow Nation is in possession of unclaimed funds (uncashed payroll checks) that may be due to these individuals. If you are an employee or former employee of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and your name is listed below, please contact:

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

- Shana Mitchell
- Freddie Michael Jones Jr.
- Haliegh Saulter
- Cassandra McGuire
- Ambry Todd
- Jamie Chaney
- Connor McCormick
- Lailah Walton
- Meghan Read
- Andrew Damron

SSAF APPLICATION

Parents and students can now apply for the Student School and Activity Fund (SSAF), which provides a \$100 annual grant to purchase school supplies and clothing for eligible Choctaw students.

Submit your application today! CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/SSAF

RE OPEN UNT



EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

A unique one-day getaway for the whole family!



Scan to Purchase Tickets

of the Choctaw Code Talkers Monument in front of the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant.

Biskinik Announcement Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gary Batton Chief Jack Austin Jr. Assistant Chief

The Official Monthly Publication of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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

> 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.

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. WE TAKE CARE OF ONE ANOTHER TOGETHER WE'RE MORE SCAN QR CODE FOR MORE INFO

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna Chulai Language Lesson

Hopaii Im Anumpa

Chapta 3:5 – Chitokaka ak<u>o</u> chi ch<u>u</u>kvsh <u>a</u> mominchit isht ish <u>i</u> yimmi cha, chishno inli chik il anukchieto kashke.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6: Nana ish akaniohmi puta kvt Chitokaka <u>a</u> ish holitoblashke, yvmohmikma ish at<u>a</u>ya hi <u>a</u> chim abacha hi oke.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

7: Chishno inli chik ili yimmo hosh amba Chitokaka <u>a</u> ish <u>i</u> nukshopa cha nan ik achukmo <u>a</u> ish <u>i</u> filammashke.

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil.

8: Yvmmvt chi haknip im ikhish micha chiffoni $\underline{\mathbf{i}}$ nia oke.

It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Proverbs 3: 5-8- English-Choctaw Parallel Bible Na Hullo Im Anumpa Micha Chahta Im Anumpa Iti Abaiyvt Holisso Holitopa Hoke

www.choctawschool.com

$\begin{array}{c} C H O C T A W \\ CULTURAL CENTER \end{array}$ ChoctawCulturalCenter.com

GRAZING LAND LEASE AUCTION

All prospective bidders are encouraged to inspect property before the lease event. Sealed bids will be accepted, but each tract of land will be offered to the highest responsible bidder at public auction, so bidders are encouraged to be present.



BID AWARDING - AUGUST 7, 2025 | 3PM-SPM Choctaw Nation Headquarters (Big Conference Rooms 2-3) 1802 Chukka Hina Drive, Durant, OK

Scan to place your bid now.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 580.642.8988 OR EMAIL MMCCANN@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CHOCTAW NATION CREDIT AND LOAN DEPARTMENT

The Credit & Loan Department provides three types of loans:

- The Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Assocation
- The Revolving Loan
- The Employee Loan

A representative will be available at the following locations to answer any questions:

Wilburton Community Center: July 9 I I a.m. to I p.m.

Poteau Community Center: July 24 I p.m. to 3 p.m.

Coalgate Community Center: July 30 I p.m. to 3 p.m.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, SCAN THE QR CODE, OR CONTACT THE CHOCTAW NATION CREDIT AND LOAN DEPARTMENT AT 580.924.8280

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

The Atwoods celebrate 50 years

Dempsey Atwood and Claudette Eberting of Edmond, Okla. celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary March 22.

They have no children, but have many nieces, nephews and friend's children they have loved and spoiled as if they were their own.

Claudette is a proud Choctaw, and retired after working 30 years as a CPA/CFO with a non-profit organization. She and her husband also worked together in the three hardware stores they owned.

Since retirement, Dempsey and Claudette have enjoyed traveling and working on their small farm in the panhandle of Oklahoma.

Hunt graduates from OU

Austin Hunt, who is proudly wearing his Choctaw graduation stole, graduated Cum Laude with Honors from the University of Oklahoma on May 10, 2025.

He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a minor in Accounting.

While attending OU, Hunt was a member of the OU Presidents Leadership Class, the Kappa Sigma Fraternity, multiple groups and other organizations. Hunt also learned to speak and write his native Choctaw language, an accomplishment his great-grandmother Loeta Hays would be most proud of.

Hunt moved to Denton, Texas, in June to start his career in management with the Aldi Corporation.

He says, "yakoke," and is grateful to the Choctaw Nation and all the academic assistance they provided during his four years at OU.

Romines wins BBR 5D Championship

Choctaw athlete Avery Romines, 12, qualified and competed at the 2025 Better Barrel Races (BBR) World Finals held in April at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds. She won the BBR World Finals 5D Championship.

Avery is a student at Harrah Middle School and the daughter of Katie Jo and Chris Stephens, and Derrick Romines.

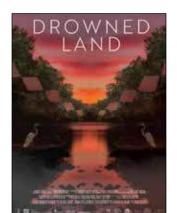
Drowned Land featured at cINeDIGENOUS

The 2025 Seattle International Film Festival featured cINeDIGENOUS, showcasing the best in Indigenous cinema.

Highlighted was the NorthWest Premiere of Choctaw tribal member Colleen Thurston's "Drowned Land," a feature documentary that shares the stories of a group of water protectors, deep in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, determined to preserve the lifeline of their community and end a cycle

of environmental exploitation on the Kiamichi River. Watch the trailer here, https://drownedland.com/home#trailer.

Wells graduates



Conque turns 1

"Happy 1st Birthday, Beau! We love you so much bubba!" - Love, Mom and Dad

Ratliff turns 90

Buddy Ratliff of Stratford, Connecticut, celebrated his 90th birthday on April 28, 2025.

He was joined by family, including his children

Jackie and Rodney, who traveled from Texas and Colorado. He also celebrated with his wife Rita and her chil-

dren Chris and Jenny, who came from New York. Buddy is a Mafo Chito to eight great-grandchildren,

with another on the way.

Chestnut graduates from LUL

Carson Chesnut graduated from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, with a Bachelor of Science in Camping and Outdoor Adventure Leadership with a Minor in Youth Ministry.

He was a member of the Men's swimming and rowing club teams. Upon graduation, he will be the men's lead counselor at Carolina Creek Christian Camps in Huntsville, Texas, and he will follow up with a fellowship at Sky Ranch Christian Camps in Horn Creek, Colorado.

Chestnut is extremely grateful for the financial support that he received from the Choctaw Nation.

Cody Campbell Sells graduated summa cum laude with his Bachelor's degree in Animal Science from Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas on May 9.

Cody also earned a certificate of Meat Science from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Cody and family would like to thank the Choctaw Nation for their continuous support throughout this academic journey.

Jude Matthew Martin

Marisa and Timothy Martin. were blessed with a son, Jude Matthew Martin, March 20, 2025.

Moya graduates from OPSU

Olivia Lauren Moya graduated from Oklahoma Panhandle State University on May 10 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Olivia lives in Poteau with her

husband, Mitchell, and their sons, Benjamin and Lincoln.











Fellowship Scholarship Durant, Okla. - Silo FFA Chapter proudly announces that Denver McBride, mem-

ber of the Choctaw Nation of

Oklahoma has been awarded

a Tribal Agriculture Fellow-

Aguilera graduates

from Bootcamp

enrolled member of

Dasan Aguilera, an



ship Scholarship to attend the esteemed Washington Leadership Conference (WLC) during Week 5 this summer.

The Washington Leadership Conference, hosted by the National FFA Organization in Washington, D.C., is one of the nation's premier leadership development experiences for young people. Throughout the week, students will engage in handson leadership training, civic engagement activities, community service projects, and team-building exercises all designed to help them discover their personal strengths and develop plans for creating positive change in their communities.

The Tribal Agriculture Fellowship's mission to build the next generation of Tribal agricultural leaders by supporting Native students through education. leadership development. and career advancement opportunities is closely aligned with the purpose of WLC. By sponsoring these students, the Fellowship is investing directly in the future of Native agriculture.

Through participation in WLC, Denver will gain essential leadership skills, craft a personalized "Living to Serve" plan, and be better prepared to return home as part of the next generation of agricultural leaders within their Tribal communities. This experience aims to empower students not only as individuals but as changemakers who will strengthen Native food systems, advocate for Tribal sovereignty in agriculture. and lead sustainable initiatives that benefit their people for generations to come.

Congratulations once again to Denver McBride and Silo FFA on this remarkable achievement and opportunity!

Meador graduates from OU

Dylan Michael Meador graduated from the University of Oklahoma on May 17, 2025, with his Doctorate of Pharmacy.

He has accepted a position with the University of Oklahoma's Nuclear Pharmacy. Dylan previously earned his Bachelor's of Science in Chemistry from Southern Nazarene University.

Dylan is thankful and grateful to the Choctaw Nation for their support over the last eight years. He is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation and is looking forward to caring for Oklahomans in his career in Nuclear Pharmacy.

Magaña graduates

Katie Magaña recently graduated from the University of Wyoming with a Bachelor of Science in Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management with an Undergrad Certificate in Remote Sensing.











Sells graduates from Texas A&M

from UCO

"I am beyond excited to announce my graduation from the University of Central Oklahoma with my Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree!



I've accepted my dream nursing position at Mercy, where I will be caring for the tiniest patients in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)!

I have been incredibly blessed with all of the love, support, and encouragement shown to me throughout my nursing school journey. I truly could not have accomplished this goal without it!" - Harli Wells

Sathers-Schrader earns master's from Augusta

Sophia Picabo Sather-Schrader from McAlester, Oklahoma, graduated on May 8, 2025, with a Master of Health Science in Clinical Laboratory Science from Augusta University College of Allied Health Sciences.

Sophia is a member of the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science, Health Occupation Students of America, and the National Honor Society. After passing her board exams, Sophia looks forward to starting her career as a certified clinical laboratory scientist.

"I'm still exploring where exactly I'll begin. There are so many paths within the field. I'm especially interested in molecular diagnostics or cytogenetics," Sophia said. "I feel drawn to those areas because of how cutting-edge and impactful they are for patient care."

According to Sophia, her heart is set on returning to work for the Choctaw Nation at some point in the future.

"Giving back to my community means everything to me, and I want to use what I've learned to help improve healthcare for the Choctaw nation. Whether that's through direct lab work, supporting community health programs, or helping expand access to advanced testing," said Sophia. "I hope to make a meaningful difference in the world of diagnostics and patient care and for the tribe I'm proud to be a part of."

Sophia is a part of the Okelley, Sather, Sams, Schrader families. She is pictured with her Choctaw stole and self-beaded graduation cap.

She is the daughter of Erick and Bobbi Gillham of Poteau, Oklahoma, and Troy and Bree Howerton of Greenwood, Arkansas. She is also the granddaughter of Mike and Rita Pope of Poteau, Oklahoma, and Bud and the late Mary Howerton of Spiro, Oklahoma.

Olivia is an Epic Hospital Billing Claims Analyst for Choctaw Nation Health Services. She will use her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree to strengthen her understanding of clinical workflows, patient care processes, and interdisciplinary communication. Her goal is to support and optimize billing systems that align with clinical and financial operations, ultimately contributing to more efficient, accurate, and patient-centered care within the Choctaw Nation health system.

Unruh turns 96

Madeline Hays Unruh will celebrate her 96th birthday on July 14, 2025.

She was born and raised in Garber, Oklahoma, with her own tribe of 13 siblings. She was the second oldest in the family and the oldest girl.

She will celebrate her special day with family and friends in Palestine, Texas, where she resides.

Jones graduates from UNLV

The family of Julianna Jones is proud to announce her graduation from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology.

Julianna is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation and has shown dedication to academic excellence and community service. While at UNLV, she was a research assistant in the Auditory Cognitive Development Lab, researching child misophonia and earning finalist recognition at the UNLV Office of Undergraduate Research Symposium. She has co-authored several peer-reviewed publications and held leadership roles on data and recruitment teams.

Her compassion for others and passion for mental health have led her to continue her education at the University of Oklahoma, where she is pursuing her Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She plans to obtain her doctorate and become a licensed psychologist.

We are incredibly proud of Julianna's achievements and commitment to healing and education. "Yakoke, Julianna, for representing the strength, resilience, and promise of the Choctaw people." - The Jones Family

Johnson turns 18

The family of Corinn Johnson would like to wish her the happiest 18th birthday.

Mena Sanders graduates from SWOSU

Mena Xandria Ruiz Sanders, daughter of Cullen and Corina Sanders, graduated Summa Cum Laude on May 10, 2025, from Southwestern







Oklahoma State University, with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Minor in Human Resource Management.

Mena plans to further her academic studies by pursuing a Master of Arts in Industrial-Organizational Psychology at the University of Tulsa, starting in the Summer of 2025. Mena brilliantly prospered during her undergraduate journey thanks to the help of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Higher Education Program.

The Choctaw Nation provided aid that was fundamental to her success academically. Mena, a proud member of the Choctaw Nation, is incredibly thankful for all the support they provide!

Sanders graduates from SWOSU

Rhey'lyn Nevaeh Sanders, daughter of Martin and Erica of Olustee, Oklahoma, graduated Summa Cum Laude from Southwestern Oklahoma State University on May 9,

2025, earning a Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences.

Rhey'lyn has been accepted to and will attend the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center's Doctor of Physical Therapy program beginning Summer 2025.

Rhey'lyn extends her gratitude to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Choctaw Nation Higher Education program for their support in helping her achieve her academic and career aspirations.



Harp graduates from Emory

Roderick Harp III, a member of the Choctaw Nation, graduated May 12, 2025, from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, with a degree in Human Health.

He has recently taken his MCAT and plans to attend medical school in hopes of providing care to Indigenous communities in the state of Oklahoma. Roderick and his family would like to thank the Choctaw Nation for their support in his educational journey from High School to College.

THE ODYSSEY

OF AMANDA

IRON BEAR

Wayne Adams

Adams releases new book

Wayne Adams is proud to announce his latest book The Odyssey of Amanda Iron Bear. It will be available on the websites of cyberwit.com and the Amazon Bookstore. It is also available on Kindle.

The Odyssey of Amanda Iron Bear is a compelling work of fiction that is based on a real-world crisis that is seldom discussed. And that is missing indigenous women in both the United States and Canada.

and Canada. The author watched a documentary on PBS during the COVID lockdown, about missing indigenous women. He had never heard of this before and began researching it on his phone. The library was closed due to COVID, and he researched his phone. During his research he developed the idea for the fictional book. Within the story, Amanda Iron Bear is a contemporary 17-year-old Sioux girl. She lives on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in eastern Montana. She experiences a series of disturbing dreams that warn her about evil people who wish to do her harm. To her utter surprise, she is kidnapped by human traffickers.

Yakoke from Dunn

"I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma for your generous support of Choctaw youth during the Oklahoma Youth Expo Premium Sale. Your

contribution not only made my first trip to the sale a truly memorable experience, but it will also help fund my future projects, feed and travel expenses for the coming year. Thank you for investing in my journey and in the future of Choctaw youth."

– Madison Dunn, Rush Springs FFA

Johnson graduates from OU

Congratulations to Audrie Johnson on graduating with honors from the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing. She will begin her career at the OU Medical Center in the pediatric emergency department.

Audrie is grateful for the support she received from the Choctaw Nation and is proud of her Native heritage.

Wilson graduates from MNTC

Cameron Ayden Van Wilson graduated with honors from Moore Norman Technology Center on May 15, 2025.

Cameron is a Choctaw Nation tribal member, a National High School Scholar, a SkillsUSA VICA State and Competition Winner in Mechanical Architectural

Drafting and Design, a member of the Moore Norman National Technological Honor Society, a Moore Norman Honor Society member (across all fields of study), a nominee for the Superintendent's Highest Achievement Honors Award, Student of the Year, and recipient of the STEM Director's Award and a Leadership Award.

Cameron plans to pursue online courses at Southeastern Oklahoma State University this fall before transferring to the University of Oklahoma's Engineering program to become a Mechanical Engineer. He also intends to work at Tinker Air Force Base concurrently.

Cameron is the son of Tejay and Tonya Wilson and the brother of Caleb Wilson of Norman, Oklahoma. He is also the grandson of Barbara Wilson-Holmes of Chickasha, Oklahoma.

"We are happy & proud to announce his Congratulations & Achievements." – Love Mom, Dad, Caleb, his grandmother, Barbra Wilson.

Hall wins award

Renee Hall, MBA of Kansas City, Missouri was awarded the number one overall performing Territory Manager award (out of over 100 colleagues) for her exemplary efforts in the cardiac monitoring field for iRhythm Technologies in 2024.

This is her second time winning President's Club with the company and she continues to be an outstanding leader and mentor beyond her daily responsibilities for new hires. Her friends and family are very proud of her!

Standridge earns RN degree from EOSC

"We would like to Congratulate Mrs. Carmelita Standridge on receiving her RN degree from the EOSC Nursing Program.



Congratulations and Best Wishes for a rewarding and fruitful career that will give back to you as richly as you will give to the patients and families you serve. Nursing is a Love; it is a profession that impacts so many people's lives. Take care of them. Always work to be the best nurse that you can be. We know that you will do good wherever you choose to go."

– The Noahubi Family

Yakoke from Lemke

"I'm filled with deep gratitude for the unwavering support of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma throughout my educational



journey. Thanks to their generous scholarships, I've been able to earn my bachelor's in education, a master's in educational leadership, and now, a doctorate in adult learning and development in the workforce. Yakoke for believing in me and investing in my future. I carry this honor with pride and purpose."

– Rebekah Reed Lemke

Ford graduates from East Texas A&M

Congratulations to Richard Ford on graduation from East Texas A&M University, Cum Laude, Bachelor of Science in Construction Engineering.

He currently works for Westmoreland Builders as a Preconstruction Manager based in Texas.

Baker earns master's from Gannon

Trey Baker recently graduated with a Master of Education and was honored as the 2024-2025 Gannon University Football Team MVP.



A dedicated student-athlete, Baker has demonstrated leadership both on and off the field throughout his academic and athletic career. Trey's future is bright as he plans to embark on his professional journey in Ohio, where he will begin his career in education as a Dean of Students.

His commitment to excellence, service, and personal growth inspires those around him. Trey's family, friends, teammates, and mentors proudly celebrate his achievements and eagerly anticipate the positive impact he will make in the lives of students and the school community he will serve.

Kat Gardner-Vandy, Professor

By Kellie Matherly

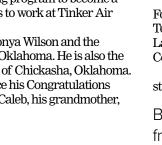
Choctaw tribal member Kat Gardner-Vandy cannot remember a time in her life where she was not completely entranced by what lay beyond the earth's atmosphere.

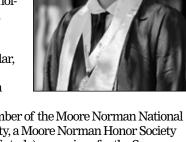
"I would look up at the stars and wonder what those bigger objects were, particularly the moon, and I could feel almost a sense of other tribal nations who were bringing their cultures into the laboratory with them.

As she grew into her role as a planetary scientist, Kat learned more about her Choctaw roots and culture, leading her to feel deeply bonded to those who came before her and appreciate the interconnectedness of the world around her.

She also began to see the meteorites and











7

homesickness," she said.

This sense of wonder and curiosity only grew stronger as she got older, leading her to immerse herself in all things related to astronomy, physics, and the vast possibilities of space travel.

A visit to the Air National Guard with her uncle helped shape her dreams of studying space and aviation together.

Today, she serves as an assistant professor of aviation and space at Oklahoma State University, where she shapes the minds of the next generation of engineers, astronauts, and space enthusiasts.

Kat's academic journey began at a time when opportunities for women in aviation and space were becoming more prominent, but there was still a long way to go.

"When we as Native Americans or when we as women are not getting ourselves into those places or having people who are allies who can help us get into those places, our voice is not being heard," said Kat. "And we are by definition limiting the way in which we are solving the really big problems that we have in our world."

Despite the challenges, Kat pursued her passion with relentless determination, excelling in her studies and showing a natural aptitude for the sciences. She earned her undergraduate degree in geology at the University of Oklahoma, which served as the foundation for her future career.

Her desire to unlock the mysteries of the universe through the study of rocks only deepened as she continued her education. After completing her undergraduate degree, Kat moved on to graduate studies, specializing in planetary sciences at the University of Arizona, where she earned her Ph.D. Throughout her academic career, she sought out mentors and peers who could help guide her along the way.

These relationships were instrumental in refining her knowledge, honing her skills, and encouraging her to aim higher than she ever imagined.

Growing up near Tulsa, Kat was outside the geographic boundaries of the Choctaw Nation and didn't really understand what the Choctaw culture looked like. Fortunately, as part of a cohort of graduate students at the University of Arizona, she had the opportunity to learn alongside students from rocks she studied in a new light.

"When I think of meteorites, I think of them as being these serendipitous gifts from our solar system. And for me, that means they are gifts from the Creator. Creator has put into each rock a story. Rocks are storytellers. They have all of this information about their early history just waiting for us to uncover them," she said.

A key part of Kat's professional development was her decision to pursue a career in academia. The desire to teach and mentor future generations of students became clear to her early on.

She wanted to inspire young people in the same way that her professors and mentors had inspired her. In her role as an assistant professor at Oklahoma State University, Kat can combine her passion for space with her love for teaching, creating an environment where students can explore the mysteries of aviation and space in depth.

As an educator, Kat looks for opportunities to bring science and Native American culture together.

The NASA Science Activation Program became the perfect conduit for that work. The result was a collaboration with multiple tribal nations, including the Choctaw Nation, to develop curriculum for middle school students that would fuse Native culture and worldviews with modern scientific approaches. The curriculum is based on stories and language from each nation. Once the cultural foundation is established, earth and space sciences are added in.

She was also instrumental in a collaboration with the Choctaw Nation to send heirloom seeds to the International Space Station through the Center for the Advancement of Science and Space and a partnership with Boeing. The seeds were launched successfully and have returned to Earth. They are currently at home with the Growing Hope Program, waiting to be planted by students at Jones Academy.

Outside the classroom, Kat is a frequent speaker at conferences and events, where she shares her knowledge and experiences with others in the industry.

She is passionate about encouraging more women to enter the fields of aviation and space, recognizing that gender parity is still a significant challenge. She often

Choctaw Nation Photo

As a planetary scientist and professor at OSU, Choctaw tribal member Kat Gardner-Vandy explores the connections between Choctaw culture and space.

mentors young women who aspire to follow in her footsteps, helping them navigate the challenges they may face and offering guidance as they chart their own career paths. Her story serves as an inspiration to anyone with a dream of reaching for the stars. See Kat Gardner-Vandy full story at https://togetherweremore.com/.



By Dr. Evan Whitley

My first "real" job (or the first where I actually got paid) was working at the feed store in the small town where I grew up.

At the time, I guess I viewed it like most teenagers would: "Hard work. Low pay," which it definitely was as most of my duties involved delivering feed, hauling square bale hay (yes, it was that long ago) and unloading delivery trucks.

The experience taught me about hard work, created in me a work ethic that stands to this day and - to an extent - helped shape my decision to pursue further education and a career in agriculture and natural resource stewardship.

However, in retrospect, one of the most important aspects of these developmental years was the personal relationships formed with the many farmers and ranchers who sometimes just came in for a hot cup of coffee and a round or two of checkers. Most of them were just killing time, but each were eager to share what I call "nuggets of wisdom" — some more than others, so long as you were willing to listen.

During one of these morning rendezvous, I was preparing a delivery and heard an expression that's stuck with me ever since: "You can have an egg for breakfast every morning, but you can only have chicken for supper once."

Now, over the years, I've heard other phrases that essentially mean the same thing, but the point this gentleman was making - or, at least how I took it - was one should be intentional with each decision, and be willing to sacrifice short-term acknowledgment for long-term success.

In my opinion (and experience), this is a crucial cornerstone to leadership often overlooked for various reasons, but usually due to simple ego. The stewardship of natural resources ingrained in biological principles - require this perspective because progress often just doesn't happen as quickly as we'd like... which reminds me of another phrase I like: "Check your ego at the door."

This column was written by Dr. Evan Whitley, Executive Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources and appeared in the Choctaw Ranches Quarterly Agriculture Newsletter.

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George Edward Davis, 81, passed away on Sunday, February 23, 2025.

He was born on April 14, 1943, in Clovis, NM, to Joe L. and Edna Davis.

George is survived by his wife, Dianne; his sons Jason, and Ethan his brother, Jimmy

Davis; sisters-in-law Marie Davis and Debra Bilberry; and brother-in-law Rodney (Steve) Stein. He also leaves behind a cherished extended family of nieces and nephews who held him dear.

Nellie Fay Miller Hunter

Nellie Faye Miller Hunter, 86, passed away May 16, 2025, in Tupelo, Okla.

She was born on Feb. 12, 1939, in Clayton, Okla., to the late Jack Fulton and Catherine Gardner. Nellie was preceded in death

by her parents, Jack Fulton and Catherine Gardner; sister, Ruby

Kerr; brothers, Joe Miller, Jack Miller, Pete Miller, Elmer Miller, Jimmy Miller, Henry Miller, and Cecil Miller; daughter, Mary Smith; and grandson, Dustin Stein.

She is survived by her sister, Elizabeth Harkins; children, Joe Stein and wife Renee, Dennis Stein, David Stein and wife Lisa, Bill Stein and wife Stacy, Ollie Maple, Darvin Gore and wife Denay, and David Hunter; grandchildren; and great-grandbabies.

Alfred M. Ward

Alfred M. Ward, 72, passed away April 19, 2025.

Alfred was born Jan. 19, 1953, in DeQueen, Ark., to Nelson and Sarah (Noahubi) Ward.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters Imajean and Rena; son Michael; and brother Teddy.

Alfred is survived by his wife Ramona; brother Travis; sister Mavis; and many nieces and nephews.

Dante Arthur Belvin

Dante Arthur Belvin, 82, passed away April 25, 2025.

Dante was born May 8, 1942, in Boswell, Okla., to Henry and Sarah Belvin.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Baby Belvin, Virgil "Buddy" Belvin, John Belvin, Henry "Poochum" Belvin,

Richard Belvin, Vernon Belvin and Soloman Belvin; sisters Lavada Duke, Jimmie Lou Hunt and Virginia "Weaver" Rutledge.

Dante is survived by his wife Loretta; daughter Katosha Nakai and spouse Errol; grandchildren Ellisia Nakai and Gabriella Nakai; brother Jerry Paul Belvin; sister Debra Bacon; numerous nieces, nephews and cousins; and a host of friends, family and loved ones.

Sean David McGuire Sr.

Sean David McGuire, Sr., 36, passed away April 25, 2024. Sean was born in Oklahoma

Donna Wood Bishop, 74, passed away March 7, 2025. Donna was born May 13, 1950, in Dallas, Tex., to Eugene D.

Wood and Freda Webster Wood. She was preceded in death by her brother Bobby Wood.

Donna is survived by daughters Rachel Gist and Courtney

Donna Wood Bishop

(Carmy) Kent; grandchildren Grayden McLaughlin, Austin Aguirre, and Manny Aguirre; sister Janis Wood Preslar: niece Ruth Preslar: nephews Luke Preslar and Mark Preslar; and extended family members and many close friends.

Naomi Lee Le Flore

Naomi Lee Le Flore, 74, passed away May 11, 2025.

She was born Aug. 1, 1950, in Le Flore, at Coal County, Okla. to Abel Paul and Rebakah (Jones).

Naomi was preceded in death by her parents, Abel Paul and Rebakah (Jones); children, Douglass Glenn Cole and Deanna Genese

Cole; brothers, Glen Le Flore and Miran Le Flore and sisters, Margie Gibson and Lena Frazier.

and James Cole and wife Amanda; Grandchildren, Michael Douglass, Amanda, Devin, Carol, Jacob, Savannah, Austin, Mallory, Lacy, Lance, Naki, Demetria and Kendal; many great-grandchildren; sisters, Mary Lou Jones, Sharon Le Flore, Shirley Cummins and husband Randy; and significant other, Donald Weakley.

Arch "Buzz" Glover, 75, passed away May 3, 2025.

in Talihina, Okla., to Arch and Alyce (Folsom) Glover.

Buzz was preceded in death by his parents, his brother Christopher Manis, and his mother-inlaw Grace Dehart and father-inlaw Frank Dehart.

He survived by his wife Janell Glover; his son Michael Carsello and wife Tiffany; his grandchildren Gracelynn and Andrew Carsello; his twin sister Pamela Day and husband Keith; his brothers, Deen Manis and wife Lisa and Mike Glover; his nieces Deena Manis and Melissa Day; and his caregiver Corey Hahn, along with a host of beloved family and friends.

Evelyn Ann Self

Evelyn Ann Self, 52, passed away on April 12, 2025. Evelyn was born Oct. 15, 1972,

in Talihina, Okla., to Joe Gay and Linda Ann (Pickens) Self.

She was preceded in death by her grandparents Gay and Evelyn Self, and Eastman and Evelyn Pickens.

Evelyn is survived by her parents; stepfather Nathan; sons Joseph Easley and Brenden Buntz; sisters Prissy Powell and spouse Bob, Tanya Odle and spouse Gary, Melinda Harrelson, and Belinda McIntire; faithful companion Dave Shackelford; and numerous extended family and friends.

Judith Alison Lee

Judith Alison Lee, 62, passed away May 13, 2025, in Bolton Valley, Vermont.

She was born Oct. 20, 1962, in Syarcuse, New York to Bill and Joann Ott.

band, Robert Machado; her children, Stuart Lee, Jacqueline Lee, and Yohanes Lee; her brothers, David and Stuart Ott and their families: countless friends. colleagues, and loved ones across the globe.

Garlena Rebecca Vickers

Garlena Rebecca (Standridge) Vickers, 79, passed away May 13, 2025, in Heavener, Okla. She was born Nov. 17, 1945, to Garland Roland and Lula Myrtle (Casey) Standridge.

Garlena was preceded in death by her parents, Garland and Myrtle Standridge; her sisters,

Anna Lou Denny and Bettie Arnold-Reynolds; and one brother, Wayne Standridge.

She is survived by husband, Mike Vickers; children, Michael Vickers and wife Cindy of and Todd Vickers; grandchildren, Haleigh (Vickers) Bramlett and husband Carson, Lakota Vickers, Jastyn Vickers, Sada Vickers, and Jacob Vickers; great-grandchild, Georgia Bramlett and a multitude of nieces, nephews, extended family, and cherished friends.

Alvin Bruce Hunter

Alvin Bruce Hunter, 53, passed away May 16, 2025, in Oklahoma City.

He was born July 6, 1971, in Hugo, Okla., to Billy Gene "Bill" Hunter, Sr. and Edith (Heady) Shiplet.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister, Patrica Mark-

cum-Shannon; brother-in-law, Kenneth Kelley; nephews, Leeland Markcum and Anthony Songer; and niece, Angel Ramsey.

Alvin is survived by his family; brothers, Harvey Hunter and wife, Lisa, Billy Hunter, Jr. and wife, Robin, Darnell Markcum and wife; sister, Retha Kelley; aunt, Judy Campbell; cousin, Paula Campbell; along with numerous aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins and other family.

Bobby James Wrisner

Bobby James Wrisner, 78, of Princeton, Texas, passed away May 11, 2025.

He was born on Nov. 19, 1946, to Frank James and Ruth Wesley Wrisner, in Durant, Oklahoma. He was preceded in death by his parents, Frank and Ruth

Wrisner; partner, Bonnie Davis

Wrisner; grandson, Justin Ray Ross; brothers, Troy Lee and Roy Lee; stepbrother, Paul Ray Williams; and sister, LouAnn Wrisner.

Bobby is survived by daughters, Bobbie Sue Ross, and Lela Wrisner Keel (Kidd); grandchildren, TJ Keel (T-ball), Amberlee Keel Rivera (Ambro) and her husband Raul Rivera, Kimberlee Keel (Kimbro) and her partner Rudy Avalos; 13 great-grandchildren; half-sister, Sue Ann Davenport.





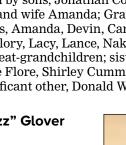






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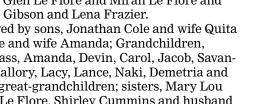




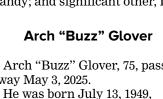


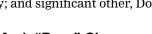
Judith was preceded in death by her parents. She is survived by her hus-

She is survived by sons, Jonathan Cole and wife Quita









City, Okla., July 7, 1988, to Sherry McGuire.

He was preceded in death by his mother; brother Brian Pham, Sr.: grandparents Red and Marie Roy; mother of his son Tori Bak-

er; uncles Harold McGuire and Charles McGuire; and aunts Janice McGuire and Patricia "Trit" Hadley.

Sean is survived by his son Sean David McGuire Jr.; daughter Jaydee Kay Anne McGuire; siblings Mitchell Dao and spouse Jennifer, Michelle Dao-Curry and spouse Earl, Mindy McGuire, David "Bull" Hadley, Jr. ,Randi Johnson, Kristie Rains and spouse Marshall, Melissa "Poca" Hadley, Jennifer Moore and spouse Blaze, Tara McGuire, Nicole Edwards, Manuella Edwards; special nieces Kynleigh and Kenedi Moore; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins that were loved very much.

Mickey Dan Wilson

Mickey Dan Wilson, 93, passed away April 18, 2025.

Mickey was born Dec. 5, 1931, in Tulsa, Okla., to Natalie Folsom and Gordon Wesley Wilson.

He was preceded in death by his wife Carol A. (Hockenson) Wilson; his parents; daughter-inlaw Blanca Wilson; and siblings

Patricia Morrison, Gordon W. Wilson, Jr., and Bettye Sue Rucker.

Mickey is survived by his wife Ann Henry Lake; son Christopher Michael Wilson and spouse Yvonne, daughter Laura Wilson Lason and spouse Scott; grandchildren Michael and Daniel Wilson, and David, Melissa and Carolyn Lason; great-grandsons Santi and Teo Wilson; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Brian Mark Fleming

Brian Mark Fleming, 65, passed away April 20, 2025. Mark was born May 4, 1959, in Wichita, Kansas, to

Bluford Fleming and Nellie Cochenauer Fleming. He was preceded in death by his parents; and siblings Daniel, Nancy, Dana, John and Paul.

Mark is survived by his wife Theresa; daughter Lacy Fleming; son Micah Fleming; and stepson Cody Johnson and spouse Tiffany; grandchildren Jace Fleming, Madison Brun, Collin Brun, Jordin Hawkins, Mason Brun, Kyra Britt, Myah Fleming, and Colton Johnson; sister Pat Bond; brothers David Fleming and spouse Sue, and Phillip Fleming and spouse Glenda; nephew Gary Bond and spouse Kathy; other nieces and nephews; and fur babies Rocket and Barkley.

Tommy PM Crowder

Tommy PM Crowder, 79, passed away May 6, 2025.

Tommy was born Dec. 22, 1945, to Thomas and Lola Crowder.

He was preceded in death by his parents and siblings.

Tommy is survived by his wife Dorothy Crowder; daughters Julie Korf and spouse Shane, and

Sonya Dills and spouse Randall; son Geron Crowder and Kristin; grandchildren Destiny Dills, Mariah Stamper and spouse Bailey, Maddie Nelson and spouse J.C., Gabriel Korf, Camryn Crowder, Brody Crowder, and Brinley Crowder; and great-grandson Banks Stamper.

Shirley Ann Farrow

Shirley Ann (Brice), 87, passed away April 28, 2025.

Shirley was born Jan. 4, 1938, in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

She was preceded in death by her husband Alvan Edward "Pete" Farrow,

Shirley is survived by sons

la), and Kenny (Angela); daughters Debbie McGreal (Bob), and Karlene Mowles (Jim); grandchildren Steven McGreal, Craig McGreal, Monica McGreal, Alexander Farrow, Timothy Farrow, Juliana Farrow-McClelland, Isabella Farrow, Matthew Farrow, Olivia Farrow, and Kaitlin Mowles; and great-grandchildren Peter McGreal, Philip McGreal, Henry McGreal, Audrey McGreal, Avery Farrow and Aiden Farrow.

Jeanne Margaret Allen

Jeanne Margaret Allen, 67, of Sand Springs, Oklahoma passed away on May 21, 2025, in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

She was born on Oct. 25, 1957, to John E. Allen and Margaret E. (Maxwell) Allen in McAlester, Oklahoma.

Jeanne was preceded in death

by her parents, John E. Allen and Margaret E. Allen.

She is survived by her brother, John Allen, and his wife, Linda; her sister, Sue Ann Hannah and her husband, Ricky; her nieces, Amy Allen, and Rachel Allen; a friend, Gina Sherwood; along with numerous other family members and friends

Kenneth Paul Clay

Kenneth "Keno" Paul Clay, 64, passed away May 9, 2025.

Keno was born Nov. 21, 1960, in Lawton, Oklahoma, to Blue and Mary Clay.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Gail; brothers Kerry Dale and Kevin; son Clifton; granddaughter Taylor; and grandson Kasius.

Keno is survived by his soulmate Staci: sons Lavman and spouse Donna, and Kerry and spouse Marcella; stepson Zac Harber and fiance' Bayleigh Choate; grandchildren Alexis, Arayleah, Nokona, Keilani, Kashton, Tristan, Tyler, Jasmine, and Titan; bonus grandchildren Jordan, Brackus, Nakitha, Kaige, Kyeareha and Kinleigh; great grandson Israel; numerous bonus great-grandchildren; brothers Dave, Russell, Wendall, Darrel and Leslie; sister Sharon; stepbrothers Gary and Raylene Burleson, Terry and Andy Burleson; and Allen and Sherry Burleson; stepsister Diane and Eddie Isom; along with a host of nieces and nephews.

Full obituaries can be seen at www.biskinik.com

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.

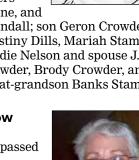
Family members/individuals may submit funeral notices as long as the notice is from the funeral home or printed in their local newspaper through a funeral home service.

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

Douglas (Maria), Kurtis (Pau-







ITI FABVSSA

The Butterfield Overland Mail Route through Choctaw Nation

The Butterfield Overland Mail Company's Butterfield Stagecoach Line operated from 1858 to 1861, covering an immense distance of over 2,800 miles across a variety of terrains. The Butterfield Overland Mail Company provided vital transportation for both passengers and U.S. Mail from Memphis, Tennessee, and St. Louis, Missouri, to San Francisco, California-bridging the eastern United States with the rapidly expanding West. From Fort Smith, the stagecoach journeyed southwest across Choctaw Nation, passing through key stops in Skullyville and Old Boggy Depot before reaching Colbert's Ferry on the Red River. The Indian Territory segment alone stretched roughly 192 miles and utilized existing wagon trails that had been established during the Choctaw and Chickasaw Removals, as well as U.S. Army Movements, which took an estimated 38 hours to traverse (Everett 2010). Although its operation was brief, the overland mail route was an ambitious and complex undertaking and an extraordinary logistical achievement for its time. The establishment of the Butterfield Trail led to increased traffic and new infrastructure throughout the Choctaw Nation. While no longer a continuous route, many traces, structures, landmarks, and markers related to the Butterfield Overland Mail Company in Choctaw Nation still remain (Dragoo 2024).

In 1858 and 1859, the General Council of the Choctaw Nation enacted legislation granting individuals the privilege and authority to construct and operate toll bridges, turnpikes, and toll gates along the route. Stations strategically placed about every 16 miles through Indian Territory offered essential services, including fresh teams of horses, hay, grain, and water for livestock, as well as food, drink, and occasionally lodging for passengers, which ensured efficient and reliable travel. The Overland Mail Company issued contracts to keep the relay stations open at a rate of \$125 to \$175 per quarter. The station keepers in Indian Territory were predominantly Choctaw, Chickasaw, or Intermarried White. Station owners also collected tolls from every non-citizen person, animal, and wagon wheel that passed through. This system not only supported the movement of people and goods but also generated revenue and encouraged local enterprise within the Nation. Within Indian Territory, twelve official Butterfield stage stations were established, supplemented by informal stops where travelers might secure supplies or assistance. From Fort Smith, the stations were as follows: Walker's Station, Trahern's Station, Holloway's Station, Riddle's Station, Pusley's Station, Blackburn's Station, Waddell's Station, Geary's Station, Boggy Depot, Nail's Crossing, Fisher's Station, and Colbert's Ferry.

Walker's Station, located at Skullyville, near present-day Spiro, was in the old Choctaw Agency building, which had been used by the U.S. Indian Agent assigned to the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw Agency served as a liaison between governments, similar to how the U.S. Consulate functions today. The Choctaw Agency at Skullyville was later taken over by Tandy Walker, then Governor of the Choctaw Nation. In September 1858, Waterman Ormsby, the first through passenger on the Butterfield, reported that Governor Walker personally came out and helped hitch a fresh team of horses to the stage. Trahern's Station, near present-day Latham, was situated near the Moshulatubbee District's Council House, while Holloway's Station at the Narrows was located in Red Oak, where meals were also served at Edwards Store five miles to the east.

The next stations included Riddle's Station, near present-day Lutie; Pusley's Station, near present-day Higgins; Blackburn's Station; Waddell's Station, near present-day Wesley; and Geary's Station, near present-day Stringtown.

Approximately 10 miles west of present-day Atoka, the trail also ran through Boggy Depot, which was a key hub and served as the Choctaw Capital around this time. In 1858, Ormsby described Boggy Depot as "several painted houses and a store" and commented on recent violence nearby precipitated by the political crisis around the 1857 Skullyville Constitution. In present-day Bryan County, stations included Nail's (or Blue River) Crossing near Kenefic, where a bridge was under construction over the Blue River at the time of Ormsby's visit, Fisher's Station at Carriage Point near Durant, and Colbert's Ferry on the Red River near present-day Colbert in the Chickasaw Nation.

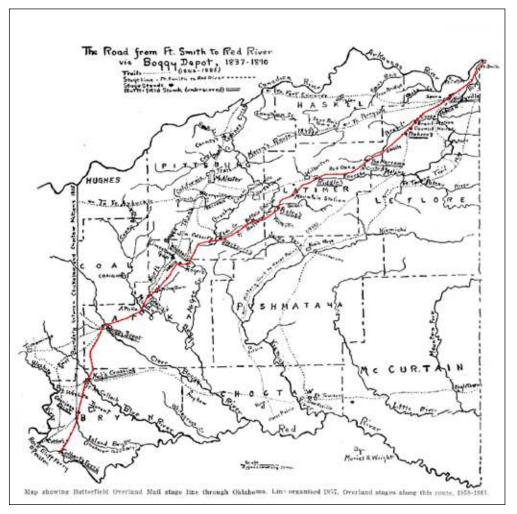
At its peak, the Butterfield mail stages traveled this route twice each week, facilitating America's westward expansion.

The outbreak of the Civil War in mid-1861 brought a sudden halt to mail service across Indian Territory, disrupting the vital communication lines established by the Butterfield Overland Mail. In March 1861, Congress voted to move the Overland Mail service, and the Butterfield shifted operations to northern routes less affected by the conflict. Although mail service resumed after the war, the landscape of American trans-

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Map of the Butterfield Stage Line by Muriel H. Wright, Chronicles of Oklahoma Vol. 35 No.1 1957.

portation was significantly altered. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 marked the end of overland stage routes for long-distance mail delivery. While the Butterfield Trail ceased to function as a national thoroughfare, segments of it remained in use for years afterward.

The U.S. National Park Service (NPS) officially designated the Butterfield Overland Mail Route a National Historic Trail on Jan. 5, 2023. It is perhaps the longest National Historic Trail to date. Signage and interpretation will be developed and implemented as NPS trail planning proceeds. The Oklahoma Chapter of the Butterfield National Historic Trail Association (OK-BNHTA) is working with the National Park Service in this effort. For more information on the Edwards Store, which still stands along the Butterfield trail in Latimer County, see The Edwards Store on Facebook. A comprehensive set of resources on the Indian Territory segment of the Butterfield is also available at https://susandragoo.com/butterfield-oklahoma/.

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Tribes' economic impact exceeded \$23 billion in 2023

OKLAHOMA CITY (June 11, 2025)—First American tribal nations in Oklahoma contributed \$23.4 billion to the state's economy in 2023, according to a new study released Wednesday (June 11). Tribal leaders announced the results of the study – commissioned by United for Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association – on Wednesday at the Oklaho-



QR code or visit, bit.ly/healthy-together

This program is an equal opportunity provider.

Choctaw Nation Summer EBT

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

The Section 184 Home Loan Guarantee Program is a home mortgage product specifically designed for Native Americans to provide access to mortgage financing. Congress established this program in 1992 to facilitate homeownership and increase access to capital in Native American communities. With Section 184 financing, borrowers can purchase a home with a low down payment. Section 184 loans can be used, both on and off Native lands, for new construction, rehabilitation, purchase of an existing home, or refinance. Loans must be made in an area approved by HUD and deemed as an Indian Servicing area. All loans are approved by manual underwrite and not by an automated system. Fees are monitored and restricted to protect against predatory lending. Interest rates must be fixed, not adjustable, and based on the current market rate, not by credit score. By serving Native communities, Section 184 increases the marketability and value of Native assets and strengthens the financial standing of Native communities. Section 184 is synonymous with home ownership in Indian Country.

Participating tribes make a request to the Office of Loan Guarantee to determine the areas where the Section 184 loans can be used. Loans must be made in an eligible/approved area. Currently, 24 states are fully approved, and fifteen states are partially approved lending areas.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma sent a request to The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Native American Programs, Office of Loan Guarantee, and has been approved for an expansion of fourteen counties in Texas to be deemed an Indian Service Area for Section 184 loans. Bowie, Collin, Dallas, Denton, Fannin, Grayson, Harris, Johnson, Lamar, Montgomery, Red River, Tarrant, Travis and Williamson are now Section 184-approved Texas counties and available to Native Americans who reside there. Previously approved Texas counties are El Paso and Hudspeth. There are now sixteen approved counties in Texas eligible for Section 184 loans, and there are 12 approved counties in Arkansas.

Down payment assistance is offered with Section 184 loans to Choctaw tribal members who apply with Choctaw Home Finance and use a partner lender. The down payment loan is up to 2% assistance at a fixed 5% interest rate for up to 5 years. Borrowers must make a minimum investment of 1% from their own funds. There are no set income limits to be eligible. Qualifying credit guidelines must be met. We understand the unique circumstances and want to assist with all homeownership goals. Let our knowledgeable staff assist you.

Call Choctaw Home Finance at 1-800-235-3087 or visit the website for more information: https://www.choctawnation.com/services/.



United for Oklahoma Photo First American tribal nations in Oklahoma contributed \$23.4 billion to the state's economy in 2023.

ma History Center, where 19 tribes were represented. Compared to previous periods, the new report indicates the largest increase in economic activity between the years studied. From FY 2019 to FY 2023, economic activity rose \$4.9 billion, nearly double the increase recorded between FY 2017 to FY 2019.

The study found that the tribes directly employed more than 55,600 Oklahomans and supported a total of 139,860 jobs to tribal citizens and non-citizens, accounting for more than \$7.8 billion in wages and benefits to Oklahoma workers in 2023.

"The contributions of tribal nations to Oklahoma's success are substantial and enduring," said Matt Morgan, chairman of the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association. "Through our business enterprises and health care facilities, we support jobs in rural areas where economic opportunities are often limited. Tribal impact reaches far beyond employment. We invest in infrastructure, fund health care, champion public education and deliver programs that meet critical community needs. We honor the legacy that brought us here and remain focused on building a bright future for all Oklahomans."

The report highlights significant tribal contributions to health care, public education and workforce development in 2023:

- Tribes spent \$582 million providing health services to Oklahomans with over 3.5 million unique patient visits.
- Through gaming compacts between tribal governments and the state, tribes submit a percentage of their Class III gaming revenues for the exclusive right to operate gaming in the state. In 2023, tribes sent \$208 million in exclusivity fees to the state a 36% increase since 2019. More than \$177 million of the fees went to fund public education across Oklahoma.
- When combined with the education portion of exclusivity fees, tribes delivered \$351 million for Oklahoma education programs in 2023.

The economic impact study was conducted by Dr. Kyle Dean, professor of economics and director of the Center for Native American and Urban Studies at Oklahoma City University. Dr. Dean analyzed data from 19 tribal nations based in Oklahoma. "Tribal nations serve as a significant economic force, consistently contributing to the state's economy with increasingly transformative impact," said Dr. Dean. "With over 100,000 jobs supported and an ever-expanding scope of investments, tribes help build sustainable economies and stronger communities across the state." Learn more at UnitedforOklahoma.com.

About United for Oklahoma

United For Oklahoma is a public education initiative supported by a coalition of tribes that are committed to nurturing mutual respect, shared strength and productive partnerships. The mission of the initiative is to raise awareness of tribal impact across the state.

About Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association

Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association (OIGA), established in 1986, is a non-profit organization of Indian Nations with other non-voting associate members representing organizations, tribes and businesses engaged in tribal gaming enterprises from around Oklahoma. The common commitment and purpose of OIGA is to advance the welfare of Indian peoples economically, socially and politically.

Protecting young minds – Managing screen time & technology use

By Gabriella Pierce, MD, OKCIC

Supporting Children in a Digital World

Children are spending increased time using screens, such as phones and tablets, making the content they are viewing a large part of their exposure to the world. Parents have both an immense challenge and great opportunity to shape how their children learn to use technology and ensure their relationship with media is healthy.

Researchers are working to understand the effects of media exposure on children's brain development. Studies have shown that increased screen time is related to decreased abilities in memory, language, and social skills as well as increased behavior problems at school and home.

The Hidden Risks of Too Much Screen Time

Teens with more social media exposure have higher rates of depression and anxiety. In addition, increased screentime is linked to both decreased quality of sleep and increased risk of childhood obesity, which is a risk factor for heart disease and diabetes.

Teach Children Healthy Use of Technology at Home: Model Healthy Electronic Use

Children take lessons from watching caregiver's use of technology. Avoid leaving the TV on as "background noise," being distracted by phones during playtime, or "binging" TV.

Use Parental Controls & Review Media Content

Websites such as CommonSenseMedia.org publish reviews of movies, video games, and social media apps to help parents determine if it is appropriate for their child's age. Many phone and tablet apps are available to help parents block ex-

plicit content as well as monitor total screen time. Explain Why Limiting Screen Time is Important

Children are more likely to break rules or push boundaries if they don't understand why the limits exist. Speak with them about the negative health effects of screen use and explain why certain rules have been chosen in the home to help their understanding.

Create Screen-free Zones

Set the expectation that certain areas of the house, such as the dinner table or the bedroom, are not locations where screen use is allowed so to better monitor their usage and ensure healthy sleeping and eating habits.

Set Aside Times to Unplug

Collaborate with your child about a plan on when screen use is appropriate and keep to those boundaries. Discuss the expectation that homework and meal times should be undistracted by screens.

Discuss Internet Safety

Cyberbullying and predatory online behavior is a serious issue and teaching children what to watch for as they develop more independence on the internet is critical. They should never video or message chat with anyone they do not personally know or share information about their name, age or address. Keeping an open dialogue with children about internet safety can encourage them to speak up if something happens online that they feel uncomfortable with.

Encourage & Plan Other Activities

Children are more likely to break rules or push boundaries if they don't understand why the limits exist. Speak with them about the negative



Photo Provided

Studies have show that increased screen time may be related to problems with memory, language, and social skills as well as increased behavior problems at school and home.

health effects of screen use and explain why certain rules have been chosen in the home to help their understanding.

Make Screen Time a Privilege, Not a Right

Reminding children that screen use is a privilege they get to enjoy if they are maintaining their other responsibilities will help them with learning how to prioritize tasks.

OKCIC

Oklahoma City Indian Clinic (OKCIC) is a contractor of the Indian Health Service to provide culturally sensitive health and wellness services from talented and devoted providers. From pediatric and prenatal care to family medicine, OKCIC services not only included basic medical care but also dental, optometry, behavioral health services, fitness, nutrition, and other family programs.



Expanded Health Services Coming Soon to Broken Bow!

The Ruby Choate Health Clinic is growing to better serve the community. New services will soon be available to all patients, including non-tribal members.

What to expect:

- Drive-thru Pharmacy
- Lab and X-ray Services
- Integrated Counseling
- Choctaw Referred Care (CRC)
- New Family Practice Provider
- CNO Employee Health Clinic
- Community Clinic coming soon to tribal and non-tribal patients

Quality care is coming soon to your neighborhood. 1300 E Martin Luther King Drive, Broken Bow, OK 580.208.2204

From patient to provider: Choctaw Native embarks on journey to serve her people through medicine

By Jenna King, Contributing Writer

Born at the Choctaw Nation Health Care Center in Talihina, Oklahoma, Jenna King finds deep meaning in knowing that, as a medical student, she may one day return to the very place where her life began. This time not as a patient, but as a provider. This fall, she will begin her medical education at Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Tulsa, carrying with her a deep sense of pride in her Choctaw heritage and a powerful drive to give back to the community that helped shape her.

Jenna's passion for medicine began with her own experience as a patient. Growing up in poverty, healthcare was often out of reach for her and her family. "There were years when we didn't have access to regular checkups or treatment unless it was an emergency," she recalls. That changed when her family moved closer to Durant, where she became eligible for services through the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority. For the first time, she was able to receive consistent, comprehensive care, from medical visits to dental and vision services, all without financial burden. "It felt like a lifeline. For the first time, I experienced

what it meant to be truly cared for in a healthcare setting. That experience didn't just change my health, but it changed the course of my life."

The kindness and compassion she received at Choctaw Nation clinics became the foundation of her calling to pursue medicine. "It was the first time I saw healthcare as something that could be empowering, not just something to endure. I knew then that I wanted to become a doctor who could provide that same kind of care, care that is accessible, judgment-free, and rooted in dignity." As she prepares to begin medical school, her focus is on becoming the kind of physician who never forgets what it feels like to be on the other side of the stethoscope.

While the journey to becoming a doctor is long and demanding, Jenna remains grounded in her purpose: to provide unhindered, compassionate care to communities who need it most. Her dream is to return to the Choctaw Nation after her training and serve Native patients who face many of the same barriers she experienced growing up. "I want to be a part of a future where no one is forced to go without healthcare because of cost, geography, or background," she says. "That's what was given to me, and I feel deeply called to give it back." Jenna takes great pride in being a member of the Choctaw Nation and sees her culture as the foundation of her identity and values.

"Being Choctaw has taught me resilience, community, and humility these are the same qualities that make someone not just a good doctor, but a trusted one. I want my future patients to see themselves in me and know they are understood."

Though she doesn't yet know where her medical journey will take her after graduation, Jenna hopes it will bring her back home. The idea of someday returning to Talihina, where her life began, fills her with hope and purpose. "To come full circle in that way would be such a privilege," she says. "But no matter where I end up practicing, my heart will always be with the Choctaw people."

Jenna King's story is one of strength, gratitude, and vision. Her path from a child without access to care, to a future physician inspired by the care she finally received, reflects the power of community-based healthcare, and the promise of what's possible when we invest in our own people. As she takes her next steps into medicine, she carries with her the hope of bringing healing, representation, and compassion to the next generation.

....



Visit us at Antlers Community Health Clinic today for fast, reliable service!

Patients must be at least 2 years old to receive care

Choctaw Nation Heate Servers 200 MED



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to learn more



Choctaw Nation Health Service

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.

July 2025 All markets open weekdays, July 1-29 Closed: July 4. 30 &31 Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation Participants can request a calendar at their location.

ANTLERS 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443 FOOD DEMO JULY 11 BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842 FOOD DEMO JULY 18 DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773 FOOD DEMO JULY 24 MCALESTER 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716 FOOD DEMO JULY 16 POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431 FOOD DEMO JULY 23 This institution is an equal opportunity provider. COMING SOON! NEW TEMPORARY EXHIBIT *Our Lands, Our Legacy* July 26, 2025 – April 18, 2026



RECEIVE \$50 TO SPEND ON PRODUCE

The Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program offers \$50 in benefits to eligible seniors living in the Choctaw Nation service area. These benefits can be used to buy fresh fruits and vegetables from authorized area farmers.

Choctaw Nation Seniors Farmer's Market Nutrition Program

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

July 1	Antlers	10:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.
July 2	Talihina	10:00 a.m 2:00 p.m.
July 8	Idabel	10:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.
July 9	Poteau	11:30 a.m 1:00 p.m.
July 11	Crowder	By Appointment
July 15	Wilburton	10:30 a.m 2:00 p.m.
July 16	McAlester	10:00 a.m 2:00 p.m.
July 18	Atoka	8:30 a.m 12:00 p.m.
July 18	Coalgate	12:30 a.m 4:30 p.m.
July 23	Stigler	By Appointment
July 25	Wright City	10:00 a.m 1:00 p.m.
July 29	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m 2:00 p.m.

Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday Call 580-640-6007 for an Appointment

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

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

Choctaw Nation Health Services

ONES Class of 2025

Jones Academy proudly announces its graduating class of 2025.

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

Approximately 200 students attend grades I-I2 each year from tribal nations across the United States, in particular our neighboring communities in Oklahoma. There is no fee for students to attend Jones Academy. Admission includes travel, housing, and meals.

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

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



Choctaw Nation and Jones Academy honored the 2025 graduates during a ceremony on May 28.



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

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



Taleah Ann Eva Bull Bear, 18, is the daughter of Allen and Lisa Grimes of Interior, S.D. She is the granddaughter of Georgia Rooks and the late Hobert Zimiga. Taleah is a descendant of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. She has attended Jones Academy for three years. At Hartshorne High School, Taleah was an active member of the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America and a manager on the varsity

football team. She was also part of the CNO Project RISE program. Both FCCLA and RISE provided Taleah several opportunities to serve in the community which she enjoyed immensely. She has registered to begin classes in August at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan. to start her general studies.



Kadance Jada Carlile, 18, is the niece Barbara Morgan from Red Oak, Okla. This year was Kadance's first year at Jones Academy. She participated in the academy's 4-H program, showing hogs and finding success in the limited time that she was here. Kadance also participated in softball at Harthorne High School. This coming fall she will enroll at Haskell Indian Nations Univer-

shia Comby of Philadelphia, Miss. Wyatt is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw

Indians. As a student at Jones

Academy, he was active on the

school's stickball team and

served as a representative at

the American Indian Science

and Engineering Society con-

ference in San Antonio, Texas.

At Hartshorne High School,

he was a member of the CNO

Arianna Adessia Ellison,

18, is the daughter of LeeAn-

na Hernandez of Oklahoma City. Arianna is a member of

the Kickapoo Tribe of Okla-

homa. She has been a student

of Jones Academy since third

Unity Youth Council member

and represented the academy

grade. She has served as a

at the American Indian

Science and Engineering

Society conference in San

Antonio, Texas in October of

2024. Arianna was a valued

Project RISE program and

sity in Lawrence, Kan. to begin her general studies. Kadance is seeking a career in Criminal Justice.



excelled in mathematics. He has received the math class pin in geometry. Wyatt was employed at Jones Academy through the CNO 477 Youth Employment Services and was a dedicated worker. He took delight in serving the evening meals to students and staff at the school's cafeteria. Wyatt is enrolling at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan. to take classes in the fall. After his studies at HINU, he will transfer to Mississippi State University to pursue a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

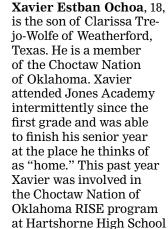


worker at Jones Academy as an employee of the CNO 477 Youth Employment Services. She has also been a member of the Hartshorne High School band since the eighth grade and the Choctaw Nation Project RISE program. She received a pin for excellence in U.S. History. Arianna is interested in a career in Information Technology. She will begin her studies this fall at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan.

CNO Adult Education Program helps 134 students earn their GED



Wyatt Sam Todd Comby, 18, is the son of Jimmy and Tene-



and was employed by the CNO 477 Youth Employment Services at Jones Academy. He was also recognized by Jones Academy staff as the September Student of the Month. Xavier has been accepted at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan, and will study for a career in Business Administration.



Akaysha Syntae Polk, 18, is the daughter of Damion and Kendra Polk of Philadelphia, Miss. She is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Tribe. Akaysha has attended Hartshorne High School for 2 years where she was active in the Choctaw Nation Project RISE program. At Jones Academy, she participated in traditional activities such as native beading and skirt making. Akaysha was also

part of the successful Jones Academy Botball Robotics team that placed ninth overall in regional competition in Oklahoma City in April of 2025. In the fall, Akaysha will attend Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, KS to work on her general education classes. She then will transfer to Ft. Lewis College in Durango, Colo. to complete her bachelor's degree in psychology.



Carlos Eduardo Pajaro, is the son of Brittany Hernandez of McAlester, Okla. Carlos is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. He participated in varsity football, track and field, and the **CNO Project RISE pro**gram at Hartshorne High School. Carlos was also active in stickball and the United National Indian Tribal Youth organization at Jones Academy. He has enrolled in Weld-

ing Technology at the Kiamichi Technology Center in McAlester, Oklahoma where he will attend in the fall.

Adult Education

Adult Education is an online academy for Native American students who did not finish

igible to enroll in online classes to obtain their high school diploma and will be responsible for

2025 Adult Education Graduates: Avery'Ana Akers, Oklahoma City Angelica Alvarez, Oklahoma City Jeremy Anderson, McAlester, OK Joey Avila, Clovis, CA Kaeson Bailey, Broken Bow, OK Jade Baird, Idabel, OK Daniel Barnett, Durant, OK Izzabella Barnett, Durant, OK Maddison Bennett, Broken Arrow, OK Payton Bigham, Savanna, OK Courtny Billy, Ardmore, OK Danielle Bockover-Matthias, Nowata, OK Dana Bohanon, Oberon, ND Victoria Boswell, Ardmore, OK Tiffany Bowers, Broken Arrow, OK Mariyah Bradstreet, Oklahoma City, OK Rhyan Bray, Oklahoma City Victoria Bryant, Caddo, OK Jayda Burris, Broken Bow, OK Sarah Callaway, Durant, OK Chelsie Carroll, Midland, TX Matthew Carshall, Indianola, OK Troy Carver, Oil City, PA Kaia Christy, Tulsa, OK Zori Chubbee, Hugo, OK Hayden Clem, Boise, ID Emily Cogburn, Texarkana, AR Kaylee Copeland, Moore, OK Haley Crocker, Eight Mile, AL Shawnie Cunningham, Beggs, OK Brennon Cunnish, Sulphur, OK Danielle Dewberry, Ada, OK Kendra Dollar, Durant, OK Mary Duckworth, Atoka, OK Monica Dudley, Ardmore, OK Hannah Duran, Ada, OK Jada Fisher, Broken Bow, OK Cody Folsom, Madill, OK Hannah Foutch, Jenks, OK Rhon'E Fulton, Central Point, OR Tammy Gaona, Wapanucka, OK Zakkary Gilmore, Durant, OK Starla Gilreath, Bella Vista, AR Alexis Gonzalez, Oklahoma City

Jackson Goodner, McAlester, OK Crystal Gray, Idabel, OK John Hargrove, Durant OK Kimberley Harkins, Lawrence, KS Robert Harlin, Joplin, MO Bradly Harrington, Stroud, OK Melissa Harwood, Broken Bow, OK Lacey Henderson, Atoka, OK Kayleigh Henry, Coweta, OK Peter Hicks, Caddo, OK Olivia Hill, Oklahoma City Eyan Hinchey, Okarche, OK Sam Hodges, Stigler, OK Alaysia Holt, Poteau, OK Tori Honeycutt, Coweta, OK Kaelyn Hooper, Tulsa, OK Kenna Hooper, Tulsa, OK Serenity Hull, Durant, OK Tristan Ingram, Payson, UT Cordelle James, Antlers, OK Korbin Jamison, Boswell, OK Stanley Johnson, Moyers, OK Madison Johnston, Durant, OK Dillon Jones, Idabel, OK Cheyenne Joyce, Lindsay, OK Kinzey Kelsey, Durant, OK Isabella Kuykendall, Bethany, OK Quintin Letterman, Tulsa, OK Destiny Llerena, Rio Linda, CA Jonathan Martinez, Yukon, OK Emily Martinez, Idabel, OK Joseph Mauldin, Hugo, OK Trinity McDonald, Hobart, OK Corey McDonald, Hobart, OK Joseph McFarland, Ardmore, OK Emily Milburn, El Reno, OK Colby Musgrave, Jennings, OK Samuel Nevarez, Ardmore, OK Jeremiah Nichols, Durant, OK Lauren O'Leary, Spring, TX Santana Osborn, Kiowa, OK Brittany Owens, Luther, OK Shanaya Parker, Yukon, OK Janet Patterson, Bartlesville, OK Jaxyn Perez, Durant, OK

Patsy Perkins, Paris, TX Kayleigh Pistokache, Clifton, TX Deserae Pitts, Lehigh, OK Bridget Pogue, Heavener, OK Jonah Pollard, Durant, OK Jamya Pope, Florissant, MO Maci Pope Sand Springs, OK Brittny Prado, Cedar Hill, TX Cameron Quarles, Durant, OK Devon Rafdal, Ardmore, OK Harley Robinson, Huffman, TX Elijah Roebuck, Coalgate, OK Marvin Romero, Okmulgee, OK Tyneshia Sanders, Broken Bow, OK Tazera Saunders, Atoka, OK Kaya Sego, Shawnee, OK Katherine Serna, Gainesville, TX Destiny Shoate, Oklahoma City Sarah Simpson, Norman, OK Ayden Sloan, Stigler, OK Jennifer Snoke, Grand Junction, CO Samantha Snoke, Ardmore, OK Hyde Snowden, McAlester, OK Jaron Swearingen, McAlester, OK Tashina Taylor, Talihina, OK Christopher Teague II, Minco, OK Timothy Templeton Jr, Pocola, OK Lindsey Terrell, Stigler, OK Crystal Thomas, Oklahoma City Meridian Thomas, Durant, OK Joshua Todd, Durant, OK Jamie Totty, Bixby OK Destinee Tyree, Durant, OK Julian Valdez, Poteau, OK Zoey Vann, Stigler, OK Brian Walker II, Lexington, OK Harmony Wilks, Savanna, OK Casey Williams, Wilburton, OK Micheal Willis, Durant, OK Tara Willis, Durant, OK Samantha Willis, Ardmore, OK Dayton Winn, Spring Hope, NC Jakob Wiseman, Oklahoma City Candice Wolf, Calera, OK Johnethan Young, Oklahoma City

nigh school and want to earn their High School Equivalency Diploma.

Eligibility:

 Must be a member of a federally recognized tribe

• Aged 16 and up; interested 16-17-year-olds not enrolled in public school must complete a required state of Oklahoma underage form (other states may have different underage guidelines.)

 Copy of CDIB or tribal membership card Copy of current

driver's license or state issued ID

• Non-tribal Choctaw Nation associates are el-

COLLEGE FYI INVITES YOU TO

their testing iees.

 Prospective online academy students outside the Choctaw Nation area must be a Choctaw tribal member to participate in the online academy.

Applications are available in the Chahta Achvffa member portal.

For more information. visit https://www. choctawnation.com/services/adult-education/.



САМР СНАНТ College FYI is hosting the annual Camp Chahta for incoming college freshm The camp is designed to orient first-year students to college life and create a cl wnity of Choctaw students For more information can the QR code





STAR PROGRAM APPLICATIONS NOW OP

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT HTTPS://WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/ SERVICES/STAR

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Summer Food Service and Summer EBT Programs help feed families

By Chris Jennings

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, and South Carolina had food insecurity above the U.S. average between 2021 and 2023.

Large portions of the Choctaw Nation lie in USDA-designated food deserts. These food deserts are census tracts with both low-income and low access, meaning they have a high poverty rate or a family income below a certain threshold. When a significant portion of this population lives more than a certain distance from a supermarket or large grocery store, the USDA will designate it as a food desert.

With summer in full swing, many children who normally eat two to three times at school could go hungry, living in one of these food deserts. With help from a grant from the USDA, the Choctaw Nation is assisting these families with food for their children

The Summer Food Service Program provides grab-and-go, shelf-stable meals to children aged 1-17.

The program operates at 11 sites, offering weekly boxes with five breakfasts, five lunches, and three milk cartons, enough milk for the week.

Senior Director of Health Service Food and Nutrition Programs Shelly Rector said, "We live in a food desert across the reservation. Inflation is at an all-time high, and parents struggle during the summer feeding their children."

There are no applications or qualifying guidelines; the Summer Food Service Program is open to anybody, regardless of tribal affiliation. "Summer Food Service is first come, first serve at any of the locations, and it's a drive-through service. People just drive through and tell us their kids' names, and we load their car with the boxes," said Rector.

District Nine Councilman James Dry often volunteers to help load cars at the Bryan County location.

This is for all kids, regardless of tribal affiliation," said Dry. "It just helps make sure that these kids get nutritious meals throughout the summer." Dry emphasized that some families are on a fixed income, with many grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Qualifying families can also utilize the benefits of a separate program that mirrors the Special Supplemental Nutritional Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food package. The Summer EBT program provides qualifying families with \$40 per child per month for grocery benefits from mid-May through early August. This federally funded program is open to everyone who meets eligibility requirements, regardless of tribal affiliation, and is an equal opportunity provider.

To qualify for Summer EBT, children must live within the Choctaw Nation and be at least one of the following:

- Enrolled in a participating school district in grades pre-K-12 within the Choctaw Nation Reservation
- Receive free or reduced-cost meals at school. (If the child/children were on the school's list, they are automatically qualified and enrolled in the program. If nothing has been received yet, verifying the mailing address with the program manager may be required.)
- Free and reduced-cost meal programs offered by schools operating Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) may have additional criteria to qualify.
- Enrolled in a charter school or homeschooled and have a household member receive specific state or federal benefits.
- Enrolled in the foster care system.

Specific income guidelines may also need to be met. Families can apply online or get more information about the Summer EBT program. Families can also call 580-916-9239 with any questions.

"It's important that the Choctaw Nation has these grant programs where we can step in, and we can assist households to ensure that children are getting food that they need," Rector said. Last year, the Summer Food Service Program provided



Photos by Chris Jennings

Cars are lined up around the building in Durant to pick up food packages from the Summer Food Service Program, which provides shelf-stable meals for children who usually get meals or snacks at school.

over 700,000 meals. According to Rector, they aim to serve a million this year and are well on their way.

"In [the first] three weeks, they have already distributed 140,660 meals," said Rector.

Dry is very happy to see the cars of both tribal and non-tribal members loaded with food.

"It means the world to me because that's what the Choctaw Nation is all about," said Dry. "Not only serving our tribal members but giving back to the community."



Volunteers load Summer Food Service packages into cars in Durant during the monthly pickup. During the first three weeks

Summer Food Service Pickup Locations

Atoka County

CNO Community Center - Atoka Tuesdays from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Bryan County

Echo Warehouse Building - Durant Fridays from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Choctaw County

CNO Community Center – Hugo Tuesdays from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Haskell County

CNO Community Center - Stigler Mondays from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Latimer County

CNO Community Center – Wilburton Mondays from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

.eFlore County

Choctaw Community Center – Talihina Thursdays from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Poteau Expo Center Parking Lot Wednesdays from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

McCurtain County

CNO Community Center - Idabel Mondays from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Pittsburg County

Dream City Church – McAlester Thursdays from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Choctaw Community Center - Crowder Thursdays from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Pushmataha County

of the program this year over 140,000 weekly packs have been handed out.

CNO Community Center – Antlers Tuesdays from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.







INFORMATION UPDATES

For more information, visit laborday.choctawnation.com. To stay update to on all Labor Day information, text LABORDAY to 888777.



Labor Day Games and Tournaments - Pre-register for individual and team events for this year's Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival. Deadline for online registrations is August 1, 2025.

Gospel Singing - Choctaw Gospel singers and groups can now sign up for the Annual Labor Day Festival Gospel Singing. Applications will be accepted from July 7 - July 11, 2025. Please call 580-642-6722 and leave your name, contact number and group name (if applicable). Event staff will contact selected participants once lineup has been selected.

Quilt Show - Quilts can be dropped off on Friday, August 29, from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Tribal Membership Building. Quilt judging will take place on Friday evening with ribbons awarded on Sunday in three categories. People's Choice will be voted on Sunday, August 31. Quilts and ribbons can be picked up at 5 p.m. on Sunday, August 31.

Tent Scramble - Beginning Saturday, August 23 at 10:00 a.m.. the gates at Tvshka Homma Capitol Grounds will open for in-person tent campsite marking to begin.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Take the journey with the 2025 Choctaw Trail of Tears Bike Team.



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Congratulations to the 2025 graduates of Jones Academy and the Adult Education Program.

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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Choctaw Nation helps feed families through summer food programs.