BISKINIK

December 2025 Issue

Taking a look back at another successful year in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

By Kendra Germany-Wall

As the end of 2025 draws near, the Biskinik would like to express our gratitude to our readers for their continued support and readership. We look forward to sharing the good news of the Choctaw Nation with you in 2026.

In this story, we'd like to take a moment to reflect on some of our top stories from the past year.

The early months of 2025 brought many historic moments, including the introduction of Night Court. The Choctaw Nation District Court announced it would offer Night Court on the first Thursday of each month, allowing individuals with nonviolent warrants to resolve them after hours without fear of arrest or additional penalties.

The Choctaw Nation also celebrated the grand opening of the Ahni House – Children's Advocacy Center in Hugo, Oklahoma, on Feb. 5.

The Ahni House offers a safe and supportive environment for children affected by abuse. It provides forensic interviews, advocacy services, medical examinations, mental health services and referrals, minimizing the need for visits to multiple agencies.

"This important project, funded through a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, will serve as a tribal children's advocacy center to support both tribal and nontribal child victims across our reservation," Chief Gary Batton said. "This is a big step forward in protecting and supporting our most vulnerable community members."

In April, the Biskinik published a special Earth Day edition that informed readers of ways to be more environmentally conscious in their daily lives.

This edition highlighted some of the Choctaw Nation's contributions to environmental protection. These programs include public school spill prevention and education, recycling, wildlife conservation, partnering with the EPA to establish CNO Environmental Protection Service staff, completing the Broken Bow water project, air quality awareness and the creation of pollinator gardens.

It was announced in October that Choctaw Nation Recycling had reached a major milestone, processing more than 50 million pounds of materials.

In the spring, the Choctaw Nation released its first board game, CHOCTOPOLY, a Monopoly-inspired game that takes players on a journey celebrating the Choctaw Nation's culture, history, landscape and people.

In May, the Choctaw Trail of Tears Bike Team took its annual seven-day journey from Philadelphia, Mississippi, to Durant, Oklahoma. The Biskinik brought readers a firsthand perspective of what it is like to take part in this yearly ride.

This summer, elections were held in the Choctaw Nation. Jennifer Turner of District 5 and Regina Mabray of District 12 were elected to their first terms on the Choctaw Tribal Council, while Jess Henry was reelected in District 4.

Voters also cast ballots on five propositions to amend the Choctaw Constitution, all of which failed to receive enough votes to pass.

In July, the Chahta Foundation awarded more than $1.8 million in scholarships, helping Choctaw students reach their higher educational goals.

Also in July, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma made history, by sending its first youth stickball team, Tvshka Homma Himitta, to the World Series in Mississippi. The team, made up of Choctaw and Chickasaw youth, won their first game against Tiak Hikíya 3-1. They went on to play Beaver Dam in a nail-biting 2-3 game.

"Congratulations to our first Choctaw Nation Youth Team, Tvshka Homma Himitta," said the Assistant Chief in a social media post. "It was a joy to witness our youth making history and advancing in the tournament."

The 2025 Choctaw Labor Day Festival was held Aug. 29–31. Thousands gathered at the Choctaw Capitol Grounds for one of the biggest celebrations of Choctaw culture, community and tradition.

In September, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council unanimously approved a comprehensive expense budget of $2.6 billion for fiscal year 2026, representing a 10.5% increase over the previous year.

This year, the Choctaw Nation collaborated with various state and local governments to make history, including signing the first official land acknowledgment by the City of McAlester during its City Council meeting on Sept. 23, and being part of the historic moment when Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed Senate Bill 510 into law in April.

Choctaw Nation hosted its annual Outstanding Elders Banquet on Oct. 30 at the Choctaw Casino & Resort–Durant. You can learn more about the banquet on Page 12 of this month's issue of the Biskinik.

On Oct. 31, the Choctaw Nation announced it would offer a special one-time Temporary Food Assistance Program, providing a $150 payment to assist eligible tribal members whose SNAP benefits are being affected by the federal government shutdown.

"Many of our members around the Nation rely on SNAP benefits to feed themselves and their families," Batton said. "With the federal government temporarily unable to meet its obligations, we will look for ways to help tribal members in need."

The Annual Choctaw Powwow and Choctaw Heritage Festival took place in Durant, from Oct. 31 through Nov. 2, and was a weekend filled with song, dance and celebration of Indigenous culture and tradition. You can find photos and more information from the weekend on page 11 of this month's issue of the Biskinik.

During November and December, the Choctaw Nation organized several programs and drives to provide food, toys and warm coats to those in need.

These initiatives included Thanksgiving and Christmas food vouchers, Wellness Center food and toy drives, Head Start food and coat drives, the Angel Tree program, and Choctaw Environmental Protection's annual Used Toy Drive, to name a few.

The year isn't over yet, and many more events are scheduled to take place. Join the Choctaw Nation for a Christmas dinner or take a ride through the Christmas in the Park light display.

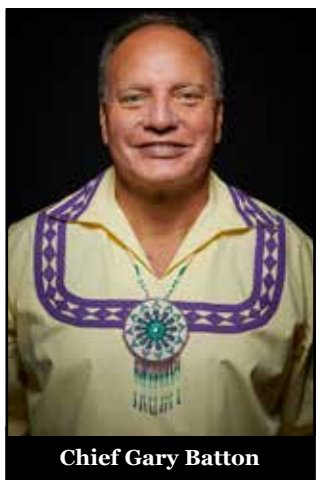
From our time reflecting and researching for this story, one thing became clear: The Choctaw Nation will continue to support its people and communities not only through the rest of this year but for generations to come.

There were far too many successes to fit into one story. For more 2025 highlights and articles, visit biskinik.com or choctawnation.com/news.

Find more photos and exclusive content in the online version of this story.

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Honoring Our Veterans

Halito,

Veterans Day is not only about history – it is about courage. It is about the strength of the soldier, the sailor, the airman, the marine, the guardian, who stood their post in the cold, the heat, the desert, and the jungle. It is about every person who chose duty over comfort and service over self.

The path of our Choctaw Warriors or Chahta Tvshka is sacred. Long before there was a United States, our ancestors defended their homes, their families, and their way of life. That spirit – of duty, protection, and sacrifice – lives on in every Chahta Tvshka veteran today.

Even when our U.S. citizenship was denied, even when our languages were banned and our ceremonies outlawed, Chahta stepped forward to serve. We did not fight out of obligation – we fought to protect the land, our people, and our way of life is what it means to be a Tvshka.

From the Code Talkers of World Wars I and II, who used our Choctaw language as unbreakable codes, to the Chahta Tvshka who fought in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan – our tribe has shown that honor is not just spoken, it is lived.

Every Choctaw veteran carries the legacy of our ancestors – those who stood their ground so that future generations could stand here today. On this Veterans Day, we remember that freedom is not free – it is paid for in courage, in sacrifice, and in love for something greater than yourself.

We honor those who came home changed, and those who never came home at all. Let us also remember that healing is part of honor – that the Chahta Tvshka's journey does not end when the uniform comes off. It continues in our communities, in ceremonies, and in the way we care for one another. It continues in the health of the Chahta Tvshka veteran who may require services after the battle has been won.

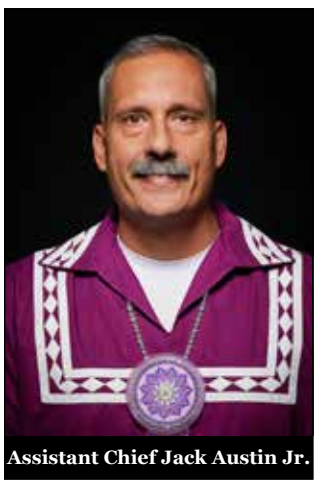
To all veterans, Yakoke Fehna. Your courage makes us stronger. Your service makes us free.

And to my Choctaw family in uniform – you carry the heartbeat of our people with you wherever you go. May we always walk the path of the Chahta Tvshka – with humility, respect, and honor. May we always remember the Chahta Spirit of Faith, Family and Culture that gives our great Choctaw Nation its path to a sovereign, free and self-empowered tribe.

Yakoke and God Bless the Choctaw Nation and the United States.

Veterans Day Ceremony

Photos by Kellie Matherly and Allyson Carter



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

The Christmas Season is Choctaw's Time to Shine

The Christmas season is here once again, and all the fun, joy and celebration of the season are on full display across the Choctaw Nation. First, we need to give thanks to God for sending his only son to wash our sins away, providing the reason for this season of giving.

All the Choctaw properties within the reservation are dressed up for the holidays, as well as the Choctaw Capitol at Tvshka Homma. The Christmas lights and decorations are up in the Capitol for you to enjoy the spirit of the holidays as we present our annual Christmas in the Park drive-through lights display. Each year, the event attracts more visitors, and we could not be prouder to add to your fun with this annual holiday display. The event begins at dusk and will remain open until 10 p.m. from Dec. 1 through Dec. 31. The first three weekends will have hot chocolate on Fridays and Saturdays, so come on out, bring a warm blanket and celebrate the season with us!

For more information on the Choctaw holiday events, please check out the Choctaw Nation website at www.choctawnation.com or follow Choctaw Nation on Facebook and Instagram for more details.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the tribal members who came to our lunch and dinner celebrations during the Thanksgiving holidays. Chief Batton and I look forward to meeting all of you at these events so we can share in the fellowship and good food. I would also like to thank our Choctaw associates and volunteers who prepare these meals and serve them to all our valued tribal members. It really is a special time for me, and I hope it adds to your holiday this year.

The holidays are a time for family and friends to get together to celebrate all the good tidings of the year. My family always enjoys the fun times we have celebrating the season, telling stories and creating memories each year to cherish. My hope is that everyone feels that warm Christmas spirit surrounding you with love and good times for you and your family as well.

Christmastime is also a time when the less fortunate feel a greater sense of loss. Some have a difficult time with the holidays due to loneliness, depression and poverty. I challenge you to reach out to your neighbors and give what you can, including your time. Every little bit helps when someone needs a kind word or encouragement. Think how you would feel if you felt abandoned, alone or without family during this holiday season. Make sure your family, friends and neighbors are healthy and happy during these cold winter months. It takes nothing to show concern for your fellow man, or, to put it another way, kindness costs nothing.

I hope that every person reading this has a Merry Christmas and a Wonderful New Year. Remember the reason for this wonderful season and give thanks to God for the gift of his son.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Chi Pisa La Chike!

Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Christmas

The name "Christmas" did not come into use until the Middle Ages. It is a contraction of the term "Christ's Mass."

In early centuries, Christians were more likely to celebrate the day of a person's death than the person's birthday. Very early in the life of the church, the people held an annual observance of the death of Jesus and the early martyrs on the day of their deaths.

Until around the fourth century, churches in the East observed "Epiphany." Epiphany is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi. (Matthew 2:1-12.) This was a feast commemorating the birth of Christ, His baptism, and the manifestation of God to the world.

Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ in the early part of the fourth century. This practice spread rapidly in the Christian world, so by the end of the fourth century, this new festival was observed by Christians everywhere.

The controversy over the nature of Christ led to an increased emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation. What is incarnation? Incarnation refers to the affirmation that God, in one of the modes of His existence as a Trinity, He revealed Himself to humanity. God becoming human: the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus of Nazareth. John 1:14 the scripture says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

The exact date of the birth of Christ is not known. Throughout the Roman Empire, festivals were celebrated in conjunction with the winter solstice. When Christianity became the religion of the Empire, the winter solstice seemed an appropriate time to celebrate the birth of Christ. The December 25 date was chosen for practical reasons as well as theological ones.

Roman Catholics and Protestants celebrate the birth of Christ on the 25th of December. As early as A.D. 326, the western churches celebrated Christmas on December 25. The Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate on January 6 and he Armenian churches celebrate on January 19.

Jeri's House empowers DeafBlind residents through unique in-home learning environment

By Shelia Kirven

Jeri Sue Lynn-Cooper's home in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, may seem typical on the outside, but what is happening inside is nothing short of miraculous. Inside Jeri's House, Lynn-Cooper and staff are transforming lives of DeafBlind individuals by providing temporary supportive housing and teaching independent life skills.

Jeri's House, is a training facility where individuals with combined hearing and vision loss can learn Braille, sign language, independent living skills, and orientation and mobility. They can also enjoy social activities while receiving advocacy support. Choctaw tribal member Jeri Sue Lynn-Cooper is the founder and executive director of the faith-based nonprofit organization.

Jeri's House is dedicated to transforming the lives of individuals experiencing combined hearing and vision loss by providing a supportive community rooted in compassion and faith. The goal is to guide DeafBlind adults on their journey toward independence, equipping them with the tools, confidence, and support to lead fulfilling, self-directed lives. The growth of the whole person is encouraged, and needs are met individually, considering where each participant is on their journey.

Lynn-Cooper's goal is to educate and empower individuals with disabilities and their families, as well as those who interact with them.

Drawing from her own experience, she helps residents reach their full potential and become self-sufficient and resilient.

Since opening its doors in 2021, Jeri's House has welcomed 12 residents from as far away as Florida. While the number may appear small, it reflects the home's individualized approach, where residents live there one at a time for varying periods in a one-on-one learning environment.

Each resident's experience at Jeri's House is tailored to their individual needs .

"Whatever it is, we do want to try to reach out and meet whatever their needs are if we can to where they might can take care of those services when they leave me and go back home or move into their own apartment," said Lynn-Cooper. "Maybe now they feel they can live independently."

Residents must be 18 years old, but outside services for younger children and their families may be provided.

Jeri's House is paid for by participants out of pocket, through donations, or are sponsored by their state. Jeri's House works through State Rehabilitation Services and has contracts with Oklahoma, Arkansas, Florida, and Tennessee. It is also in the process of becoming contracted with Texas.

Residents at Jeri's House are taken in on a first-come, first-served basis. If a person is unable to attend Jeri's House in person for services, distance learning can be arranged if there is a way to facilitate effective communication.

Bible study is offered on-site twice a month since many individuals sometimes find it difficult to attend church.

Anyone interested in attending is welcome to email Jeri; alternatively, they can also participate online.

For the first five years that Jeri's House was open, Lynn-Cooper handled everything from cleaning and paperwork to documentation, teaching and networking. Now she has staff members who relieve many of those burdens for her, allowing her more time with residents.

Lynn-Cooper's life story is one of resilience, transformation and compassion. From birth, she began having difficulties, and doctors tried to convince her mother to place her into an institutional setting, which she refused. Childhood bouts with detached retinas, cataracts and glaucoma left her blind. Subsequent nerve damage made her nearly deaf.

She attended the Oklahoma School for the Blind, graduated and then moved to Oklahoma City.

Lynn-Cooper didn't handle the loss of her vision and hearing well, eventally turning to alcohol and drugs to cope.

For around 20 years, she was involved in unsuccessful relationships, some even abusive. After awakening from surgery in 1994, Lynn-Cooper says she surrendered to God and His plan for her life, setting out to help others like herself.

Photo Provided

Jeri Sue Lynn-Cooper, founder of Jeri's House, has a mission to guide others from isolation to independence, turning challenges into stepping stones.

You can read more about Lynn-Cooper's story in her autobiography, "Eyes of My Heart," available for purchase at jerishouse.org, Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

She returned to college and earned her degree. Soon after she began working for the state, helping other DeafBlind people.

In her work with the state, she recognized a need for clients to be able practice daily tasks independently.

Often, she noticed many family members stepping in to "help" clients instead of allowing them to complete tasks on their own. Though usually well-intentioned, Lynn-Cooper said this behavior can be more of a hindrance and effect the individual's self-esteem.

"I don't mean that in a negative way, because families are helping in the name of love," Lynn-Cooper said. "But sometimes, you need to just let us fall and pick up ourselves again, because you're not always going to be there to help us and if we don't learn how, what are we going to do when the Lord takes you home or you're sick? Then where are we going to be?"

In 2017, Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin signed the Jeri Cooper Act into law, appropriating funds to support service providers (SSPs) of DeafBlind Oklahomans.

Lynn-Cooper was also recently recognized with the Anne Sullivan award (Anne Sullivan was Helen Keller's teacher and companion). Jeri said her mother was her own Anne Sullivan.

"It's because of her,"said Lynn-Cooper. "She was always watching us from afar like God does, but she knew I had to stand on my own two feet."

Jeri's House hosts regular fundraisers and sells merchandise on their website. Donations are also accepted.

"Anything that is worth it is going to take some effort," Lynn-Cooper said. "The more we can do for ourselves, the more fulfilling life is, and the more we want to improve, achieve, and do for others. Everyone is different and capable of doing so much more if only we are given the skills and opportunity. At Jeri's House, we turn stumbling blocks into steppingstones, and obstacles into opportunities!"

You can learn more about Jeri's House at www.jerishouse.org, through email info@jerishouse.org, or by calling 918-200-6550. Jeri's House is also online through Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

To sign up for the monthly newsletter, email info@jerishouse.org.

Chahta Foundation awards Gaming and Hospitality Scholarships

By Christian Toews

The Chahta Foundation, in partnership with Choctaw Nation Gaming and Hospitality, awarded 15 scholarships during its 2025 Awards Luncheon.

The Gaming and Hospitality Scholarship is funded by proceeds from the annual Gaming and Hospitality Golf Tournament, which has raised $400,000 between 2023 and 2025 and has provided higher education opportunities for 40 students to date.

The scholarships are designed to help Choctaw tribal members become future leaders in the gaming and hospitality industry. Recipients are pursuing degrees in hospitality management, hotel management, business, economics, accounting, finance, marketing, communications and culinary arts at vocational schools, two-year colleges or four-year universities.

At the 2025 luncheon, Alexander Robinson, a 2023 scholarship recipient, shared how the award shaped his path.

"This scholarship came at a pivotal moment in my educational journey. I was a student working full time and pursuing a degree in business management. I faced several challenges in balancing all the different responsibilities, but receiving this scholarship reminded me that I am not walking this path alone. It gave me the motivation and confidence to push forward, knowing that my goals are shared and supported by the very tribe that I am proud to be a member of and work for," he said.

Each Gaming and Hospitality Scholarship is a $10,000 award for the academic year, distributed as $5,000 per semester for the fall and spring semesters.

This year's recipients are from Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona and Iowa, reflecting the broad reach of the Choctaw Nation's commitment to education and leadership development.

For more information or to apply for a scholarship, visit chahtafoundation.com.

2025 Scholarship Recipients are:

- Abby Beck of Durant, Oklahoma
- Lydia Bleak of Camp Verde, Arizona
- Matthew Brame of Moyers, Oklahoma
- Alan Brott of Sioux City, Iowa
- Luke Clark of McAlester, Oklahoma
- Gavin Crouch of Pauls Valley, Oklahoma
- Jace Herald of Collinsville, Oklahoma
- Eedrick Johnson of Wagoner, Oklahoma
- Brett Lindley of Hartshorne, Oklahoma
- Kolton Mason of Calera, Oklahoma
- Sheena Rasha of Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Karis Rubert of Mounds, Oklahoma
- Abigail Smart of Morris, Oklahoma
- Maddox Smith of Mckinney, Texas
- Trystan Weeks of Midwest City, Oklahoma

Photo by Christian Toews

Past and current Gaming and Hospitality Scholarship recipients pose for a photo after the 2025 Gaming and Hospitality Scholarship luncheon.

SOSU announces Tribal Gaming and Hospitality degree pathway in conjunction with UNLV

DURANT, Okla. – Southeastern Oklahoma State University and the Tribal Education Initiative at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)'s William F. Harrah College of Hospitality announced a partnership to educate and prepare students for careers in Tribal gaming and hospitality enterprises in a ceremony on the Southeastern campus on Monday, November 10, 2025.

The ceremony featured the signing of a 2+2 articulation agreement opening doors for Southeastern students to seamlessly transfer credits to UNLV's College of Hospitality, where they can complete their bachelor's degree with a focus on Tribal Gaming or Hospitality Management. Students can choose to study in person on the UNLV campus or entirely online.

Southeastern President Dr. David Whitlock and Dr. David Cárdenas, dean of the Harrah College of Hospitality, were signatories to the agreement at the ceremony. The partnership will directly impact Southeastern's partner tribal nations, who will have immediate access to local students with a degree from the pre-eminent hospitality and gaming school in the nation.

"This will be an outstanding partnership for students in our area, who will have the opportunity to stay in Oklahoma, get an education from the AACSB-accredited John Massey School of Business at the best regional university in the state as well as the best hospitality and gaming school in the country, and work with tribes in Oklahoma," said Whitlock. "These types of partnerships are great pathways for students, and we appreciate the collaboration with the Harrah College of Hospitality at UNLV."

Photo by Dan Hoke, SOSU

Tammi Tiger, UNLV; Dr. David Cárdenas, UNLV; Dr. David Whitlock, SOSU; and Chad Harp, SOSU sign agreement.

"Education is the best investment you can make," said Cárdenas, "and we're so excited to work with Southeastern to expand opportunities for students. Through partnerships like this, we're not only growing our program; we're also helping Tribes across nations build a strong educational foundation in hospitality, tourism, and gaming."

Current Southeastern students interested in pursuing this pathway should contact Chad Harp, executive director of tribal relations, at charp@se.edu.

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna
Tisimba Language Lesson

WORD SEARCH

h	q	t	l	n	i	g	a	j	p	a	s	a	g	s
v	m	k	y	b	t	l	u	v	g	x	t	y	p	f
p	v	l	a	v	i	s	t	a	l	o	a	s	q	i
g	e	u	a	d	n	a	h	c	t	u	m	o	a	c
n	v	n	v	y	h	f	b	e	u	z	p	t	k	h
a	x	c	c	n	a	c	h	a	m	p	u	l	i	i
h	i	j	t	h	x	c	k	m	c	v	e	z	y	k
v	c	q	y	c	i	k	a	p	u	t	c	n	e	r
l	l	x	z	l	v	l	n	i	x	u	q	h	g	k
b	r	x	h	m	w	h	t	z	p	c	i	k	i	y
i	d	e	e	t	v	l	i	o	l	a	n	s	j	a
n	s	r	e	n	b	d	s	q	y	n	v	h	k	y
a	n	a	t	g	t	k	t	r	p	g	v	a	y	c
o	g	a	n	a	y	u	k	p	a	v	e	n	x	r
z	g	n	k	e	x	b	o	k	s	a	k	s	j	i

enchil – angel
fichik – star
iti – tree
kanti – candy
na champuli – sweets
na hvlbina – gift
na yukpa – joy
tvli ola – bells
oksak – nuts
pvla – lights
shemvchi – to decorate
taloa – songs

www.choctawschool.com

Answers on Page 7


Anthony Dillard

District 10

As we begin the FY2026 year, our work continues with focus, collaboration, and respect for those we serve. Our committee structure is not simply a set of responsibilities-it reflects our shared commitment to progress, transparency, and service to our people. Each committee plays a vital role in ensuring that our Tribe continues to move forward with purpose and unity. The four committees that I serve on are as follows.

Finance Committee

Our Finance Committee will continue prioritizing responsible planning, oversight, and accountability. We are committed to ensuring that every decision supports the long-term sustainability of our Tribe– protecting our resources, fostering growth, and investing in the future of our people.

Governance Committee

Strong governance provides the foundation for everything we do. This committee will focus on maintaining our sovereignty, aligning policies with our values, strengthening transparency, and ensuring our processes reflect fairness and integrity. Our goal is to support stable leadership and consistent decision-making for generations to come.

Health Committee

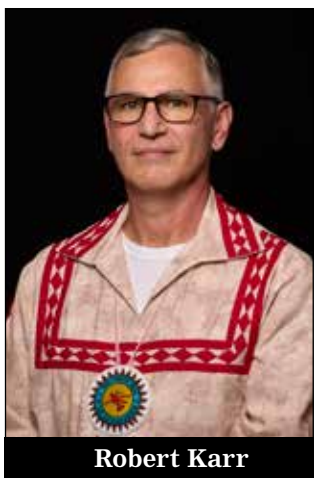
The well-being of our Tribal members remains a top priority. The Health Committee will continue advocating for access to quality care, wellness resources, prevention services, and culturally informed support. Our mission is to help our families, elders, and youth live healthier, stronger lives.

Education Committee

Education carries forward our identity, culture, and future. This committee will work to expand educational opportunities for students of all ages, from early childhood to higher education and workforce development. Some of our plans revolve around finding innovative ways of supporting our schools in the reservation area by whatever means necessary to ensure success for our area students. Supporting our learners means building pathways to success, pride, and community strength.

Our 2026 committee work is grounded in unity and service. Each step we take is for our children, our Elders, and all those who look to our Tribe for leadership and guidance. I look forward to the progress we will make together this year, with respect, accountability, and hope.

Yakoke,
Anthony Dillard
Councilman, District 10


Robert Karr

District 11

Nittak Hullo Chito Na Yukpa!

Season's Greetings, Tammy and I would like to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Yakoke for your trust and support this year. It has been a pleasure to serve as your Council member. Representing you is an honor, and I am incredibly grateful.

This year has been filled with many achievements while also overcoming challenges in District 11 and the Choctaw Nation. We are thankful for success, and our DNA allows us to persevere through hard times. The friendship and fellowship we share as Choctaws is inspiring and reminds me of how truly blessed I am. I look forward to continued prosperity for our people next year.

Congratulations to the newly crowned CNO, little Miss Leigha Scott from District 11, who was the overall winner in her category at the Labor Day Festival. Also, Congratulations to our 2025 Outstanding Elders from District 11, Becky Jones and Robert Smith. Both deserve to be recognized as outstanding Choctaw people who have made a difference in our community.

Our new McAlester Clinic opened in November. It's exciting to see the new state-of-the-art healthcare facility that will serve our people. You're invited to the official ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled for December 16, 10 am. Even though we will have temporary buildings for pharmacy, optometry, and physical therapy while renovation of the old building is being completed, we are thankful for the new expansion.

I would like to recognize several District 11 Small Business Chahtapreneurs who, in the past few months, had ribbon cuttings and 5K check presentations. They include Dalton Wood (All Season Nursery), Cherie Battles (True Living Daycare), Justin Few (Legacy Energy), Kimberly Troussel (Troussel's Taxidermy) and Diana Asher (Sellables). I encourage you to support and shop at these Choctaw-owned businesses.

As always, it's a privilege and honor to serve the Okla Achukma (good people) of District 11. Please be careful while driving during the holiday season to visit loved ones and have a safe and joyous Christmas season. Many of us will give and receive gifts, and it's a wonderful time to be with family and friends, but most of all it's a time to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ… The GREATEST GIFT OF ALL.

Yakoke,
Robert Karr, District 11



COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL
REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

November 8, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTES
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
   a. Regular Session October 11, 2025
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
   a. Veteran of the Month, District #2 – William Steele
   b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #2 – Marilyn Jefferson
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS
   a. Roland Wade – Group Speaker – Update and Invitation to Native Nations Night 2025
7. NEW BUSINESS
   a. Appointment Letter for Chloe Moyer to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Membership Appeal Board
   b. Appointment Letter for Ramona Wesley to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Membership Appeal Board
   c. Appointment Letter for Linda York to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Membership Appeal Board
   d. Appointment Letter for Donetta Murdaugh to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Membership Appeal Board
   e. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Assets – Vehicles
   f. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Assets – Equipment
   g. Approve Application for the FY26 Dental Preventive and Clinical Support Program
   h. Approve Application for the 2025 Community Development Block Grant Program for Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages (ICDBG)
   i. Approve Application for the 2025 Indian Housing Block Grant Competitive Program (IHBG-COMP)
8. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
9. OLD BUSINESS
10. ADJOURNMENT
11. CLOSING PRAYER

All votes passed unanimously


Regina Mabray

District 12

Halito! I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving with family and friends, and welcome to my first District 12 update in the Biskinik! On that note, I would like to say "yakoke" to the District 12 voters for putting your confidence in me to be your representative. While campaigning, I met many wonderful Choctaws. It left me with a deep sense of responsibility and a wish to make you proud for electing me. If you are not registered to vote in our Choctaw elections, I encourage you to "be a voice" and participate in our elections. Also, congratulations to the newly elected District 5 councilwoman, Jennifer Turner. She is already doing an outstanding job!

In September, our Choctaw Labor Day Festival was full of activities with the annual 5K, stickball, traditional dancing, traditional hymns, the princess pageant and much more. Congratulations to our very own District 12 Candis Battice Louis! She was crowned as Senior Miss Choctaw Nation. Candis is a Freshman at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and is on target to do great things. Also in September at Tvshka Homma, the council recognized Coalgate District 12 First Language Speaker Marsha Burgess and Veteran David Lee Battles. We honor our speakers for keeping our language alive and our veterans for their many sacrifices.

In October, we celebrated our Choctaw Heritage with "An Evening in Indianola". Special thanks to Michael Cathy for hosting the wonderful event, which included our Choctaw dancers, Crowder and Coalgate Choctaw singers, Choctaw princesses, and District 12 Choctaw history. The month also included an Indigenous Peoples' Day Parade in McAlester with delicious traditional food, captivating storytelling, and a variety of activities. At our Crowder Community Center, we helped to celebrate Doretha Bowen's 99th birthday. She's a wonderful lady and a great asset to our community center. The city of Coalgate honored former District 12 Councilman James Frazier with a key to the city, designating October 27, 2025, as Mr. James Frazier Day, and renaming a street in his honor. Yakoke, Mr. Frazier, for your 35 years of service and leadership to the city of Coalgate and the Choctaw Nation. October 30 was the Outstanding Elders Banquet in Durant. Outstanding Elders are selected by their peers, and the 2025 Coalgate Outstanding Elders were Mrs. Lola John and Mr. Greg Peters. Our 2025 Crowder Outstanding Elders were Mrs. Cathy Kitchens and Mr. Jim Bryan. Congratulations to all for this well-deserved honor!

November started with the Choctaw Nation's 20th Annual Powwow. What a powerful event! The drums, regalia, dancing, and vendors were stunning! If you have never attended, make plans for next year. You won't be disappointed. Our Thanksgiving meals at our Crowder and Coalgate community centers had great food, fellowship, and fun. A big shoutout to everyone who prepared, served, and cleaned! We invite all District 12 Choctaw members aged 55 and older, along with their spouses, to join us. A free lunch is served every Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Our elders at the community centers also raise funds for trips. In October and November, they traveled to Branson and Colorado.

As we near the end of 2025, I reflect on what a wonderful year it has been and look forward to celebrating the Christmas Holidays and the birth of our Lord and Savior with family and friends.

Let us enter the new year with renewed hearts, guided by the love of God and the wisdom of our ancestors. Yakoke for all you do to make our Nation strong!

Regina Mabray
580-380-7150
rmabray@choctawnation.com

Jefferson is November First language Speaker

Marilyn Jefferson was born on July 29, 1933, to Henry Bill Ludlow and Susan Wallace Ludlow of Talihina, Oklahoma.

In 1953, she married Osam Jefferson in Bethel, Oklahoma. The couple moved to Los Angeles, California in 1956 and returned to McCurtain County the following year.

Marilyn is blessed with three children, Harold, Austin and Martha, who all make their homes in McCurtain County. Her family has grown to include beloved grandchildren and a host of great-grandchildren who continue to bring joy to her life.

Marilyn is a devoted member of Kulli-Chito Presbyterian Church in Bethel, Oklahoma, where she has faithfully served in several roles, including superintendent, church treasurer and other leadership positions.

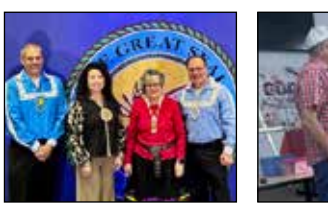
In addition to her church involvement, Marilyn enjoys being a part of the Choctaw Nation seniors in Battiest. She served as the group's treasurer for many years, contributing her time and care to the community she loves. As a member of the senior chair volleyball team, which won multiple times when the program first began.

In 2022, Marilyn was proudly nominated as outstanding female elder for District Two of the Bethell-Battiest Community Center in recognition of her dedication and contributions to her community.

Marilyn is proud to be part of the committee that helped create the revised Choctaw hymn songbook, a project close to her heart and heritage.

Want to learn more about Choctaw history?

Check out past and future Iti Fabvssas at https://www.choctawnation.com/biskinik/iti-fabvssa/.




Steele is November Veteran of the Month

William Steele, District #2, is the Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Steele was born in Talihina, but was raised and graduated high school in Wright City, Oklahoma. He attended Haskell Institute for two years, studying Auto Mechanics, before being drafted into the U.S. Army in 1969.

He was stationed at Fort Polk for Basic Training, then transferred to the Yuma Proving Grounds, where he tested mechanical equipment. He served with an artillery unit in Vietnam, remaining for the final year of his military career, concluding his service in 1971. He was honorably discharged with the rank of E-4.

He earned a Personal Career Development Award for his exceptional maintenance work on many vehicles, including Jeeps used by generals.

Steele returned home to eastern Oklahoma and began employment with the Valliant Paper Mill in 1971. Through dedication and skill, he advanced to the top of his field, operating and maintaining computerized boiler systems utilizing water and steam power. He retired in 2015.

He credits his military service with instilling a lifelong sense of order and discipline in his personal and professional life.

Steele married Evelyne Battiest-Steele in 1972. They have two sons, Kevin and Corey.

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

Upcoming Events

Runderland 5K-1 Mile| Dec. 6 | 9 a.m. | Talihina Health Care Center | One Choctaw Way Talihina, OK 74571 | Get into the holiday spirit with a festive run. Dress up in your favorite Christmas attire for the race and spread some holiday cheer. This event is free and open to the public, so gather your friends and family and come join the fun! Registration (open 7 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.) and the start/finish line are in front of the hospital's main entrance.

Cinema at the Center | Dec. 13 | 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 holiday classic, "The Santa Clause." We'd love to see you there!

Wheelock Christmas Open House | Dec. 11 | 5 p.m. – 8 p.m.| Wheelock Historic Site | 1377 Wheelock Rd, Unit C, Garvin, OK, 74736 | The Wheelock Academy Historic Site is special year-round, but it's especially magical at Christmastime. Join the Choctaw Historic Preservation Department for an open house with a meet-and-greet, holiday treats and memorable seasonal fun.

Christmas Eve, Tribal Holiday | Dec. 24 | All Day | All CNO Offices | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Christmas Eve.

Christmas Day, Tribal Holiday | Dec. 25 | All Day | All CNO Offices | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Christmas.

Blood Drives | Throughout the Month of December | Various CNO Locations | Througout the month of December, the Choctaw Nation willbe hosting serveral blood drives throughout it's reservation. By becoming a donor, you can become a lifeline for those who desperately need it. Together, we can save lives. Walk-in blood donations are welcome, but appointments can be made to get in quickly here and search "Choctaw" or search by city. Visit https://www.choctawnation.com/events/ for the full list of upcoming blood drives.

For more Choctaw Nation events, visit www.choctawnation.com/events/ or https://choctawculturalcenter.com/events/.

Programs & Services

Choctaw Princess in Training– Step into the 2026 Choctaw Princess in Training program and build the skills you need to compete with confidence. Take this opportunity to grow, connect and move closer to your dream of becoming a Choctaw princess. For more info, visit chocta.ws/services-royalty.

PRINCESS IN TRAINING DATES: All sessions are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Districts 3–6 meet Jan. 17 in Spiro; Districts 9–12 meet Jan. 31 in Hugo; Districts 1, 2, 7 and 8 meet Feb. 7 in McAlester.

Jerry Wayne Johnson Sr.

Jerry Wayne Johnson Sr., 83, passed away Sept. 30, 2025.

Jerry was born May 14, 1942, in Tom, Okla., to LC "Red" and Ruby Lee Long.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Velma Johnson; sister Carolyn Sue Headrick; grandsons William Gordon Johnson III and Michael Martinez Yanez; and daughter-in-law Geneva Kay Johnson.

Jerry is survived by sons William Gordon Johnson II, and Jerry Johnson Jr. and spouse Virginia; daughters Karen Johnson, Yvonne Willis and spouse Kevin Willis, and Melody Fisher and spouse Scott; eight grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren; one great-great-grandchild; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

Elizabeth Jane Clark

Elizabeth "Libby" Jane Clark, 71, passed away Sept. 12, 2025.

Libby was born March 10, 1954, in Houston, Tex., to David Havins and Maxcine McAnally Havins.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Melba Burns; and brothers David Havins and Roger Havins.

Libby is survived by her husband Charlie Clark; son Charles Clark; daughter Samantha Davidson; grandchildren Jacob Davidson, Zachary Davidson and spouse Maddison, Austin Pruitt, Rane Clark, and Kennadie Clark; brother Troy Havins and spouse Emma; sisters Susie Stephen and spouse Rusty, and Gay Lynn Havins; numerous nieces and nephews; beloved canine companion Rocky Levi "Biscuit"; and a host of extended family.

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

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

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.

Mildred Marie Davis

Mildred Marie Davis, 94, passed away Sept. 14, 2025.

Mildred was born Nov. 3, 1930, in Keota, Okla., to Willie and Rebecca (Cooper) Jones.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Leonard Davis; daughters Elwanda Wiggins and Patty Davis; sons-in-law Jim Rowe, Glen Goff and Larry Edwards; grandchildren Brandi Davis, Jody Davis, and Kevin Davis; great-grandson Maddox Sutter; siblings Mike Jones and Lucille Timmons; and stepsons Jerry Davis and Ted Davis.

Mildred is survived by her children Pam Goff, Charley Davis and spouse Kathy, and Peggy Rowe; grandchildren Rachel (Kevin) Motal, Stewart Goff, Eddie Goff, L. Don Dumas, Tracye Hughes, Kyle Lentsch, Brett (Jenny) Rowe, Trace (Nicole) Rowe, Afton Otto, Haley Otto, Candace Davis, Beth Long, J.C. Davis, Travis (Cleo) Davis, and Johnny Taylor; numerous great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren; sister Viola Harrell; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Dave Donnell Dillworth

Dave Donnell Dillworth, 66, passed away Sept. 3, 2025.

Dave was born Oct. 20, 1958, in Fort Brag, N.C., to David Lee Dillworth and Lois (Fulsom) Dillworth.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Sue Dillworth; and brothers Steve Dillworth and Theodore Dillworth.

Dave is survived by special friend Sue Ann; son Tanerrius Robinson; grandson Audan Robertson; brothers Charles Dillworth, Gerald Dillworth, Clifford Dillworth and spouse Sharon, Craig Dillworth, and Kenneth Dillworth; numerous nieces and nephews; and many relatives and friends.

Pat Devon Snow

Pat Devon Snow, 91, passed away Aug. 31, 2025.

Pat was born Nov. 3, 1933, in Wright City, Okla., to Robert and Lona Snow.

He is survived by his wife Bonnie; daughter Debbie Powell; son Delbert Snow; grandchildren Stephanie Stanfield, Spencer Owens and Lindsey Wolsey; great-grandchildren Toby Priest, Brody Benjamin, Natally Benjamin, Memphis Owens, Carma Katz, Quentin Owens, Lucy Owens, Lily Owens, Calley Wolsey and Colton Wolsey; and sisters Loretta Moye, Paula George and Linda Benton.

Delores Lawan Sandlin

Delores Lawan Sandin 65, passed away Sept. 27, 2025.

Delores was born June 18, 1960, at Kanima, to Aren Barnett McCann.

She was preceded in death by her mother; daughter Shelly Sandlin; sisters Katherine Smart and Laverne McCann; brothers Lawrence Sonny McCann and Dewayne McCann; father-in-law and mother-in-law Floyd and Betty Sandlin; and son-in-law Jason "Wally" Lovell.

Delores is survived by her husband Oliver Sandlin; daughter Elisha Lovell; sons Jason Sandlin and spouse Tara, and Seth Sandlin and spouse Bethany; special nephew Dustin McCann; grandchildren Ashlie and Justin Brassfield, Kayd, London and Wes Wisdom, Luke, Rush, Myles, Malachi, Brylar, Bryggs, Mason, Ellie, Rome, Sayde, and Dash; great-grandchildren Mason, Alvie, Jacie, and one on the way Ollie; brothers Phillip and Kenny McCann, Leo Perry Jr.; sister Susan Tyler; and three nephews and one niece.

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Seeking Information

Seeking info on David H. Hudlow and Catherine (Haney) Hudlow and daughters Sadie Shirley Hudlow and Amanda Rosetta Hudlow living in Albion/Tuskahoma Area 1932-1940. Contact Ronnie_Stanberry@yahoo.com or (405) 584-3108.

Growing Hope Survey

The Choctaw Nation Growing Hope program invites past participants to share their feedback through a brief survey, helping us improve the program and make future experiences even more impactful. Scan the QR code to take the Growing Hope survey.

OBITUARIES

Linda Whitlock-Reafsnyder

Linda Whitlock-Reafsnyder, 78, passed away Sept. 26, 2025.

Linda was born April 18, 1947, in Oklahoma.

She was preceded in death by her husband Arthur Reafsnyder, her parents; and two brothers.

Linda is survived by a younger brother; three devoted sisters; and nine grandchildren.

Patricia Joann Shoemake

Patricia Joann Shoemake, 86, passed away Sept. 22, 2025.

Joann was born April 14, 1939, to Alma Wilson Harrison Gooldy and Jesse Wilson.

Joann's is survived by her husband Marvin; daughters Dani Morales and spouse, and Laurie Bass and spouse; grandchildren; great-granddaughter; brother Ronald Harrison; and sister Cheryl Harrison Hein.

Nicholas Ray Tom

Nicholas "Nick" Ray Tom, 72, passed away Oct. 3, 2025.

Nick was born June 8, 1953, in Wright City, Okla., to Albert and Genese (Columbus) Tom.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

Nick is survived by his wife Kaye Tom; son Brian Tom; daughters Jennifer Tom and Angie Tom; special grandson Zachary Elias Winston; a host of grandchildren; great-grandchildren; brothers, sisters, and numerous extended family members.

William Charles Pusley

William "Bill" Charles Pusley, 79, passed away Sept. 27, 2025.

Bill was born June 15, 1946.

He is survived by the love of his life Laurie; daughters Tina (Joe), Tori (Mike), Tiffanie (Troy), and Tessa; grandchildren Abigail, Kaia, Izzabelle, Avery, and Alaska; sisters Betty and Kay; along with his large extended family and friends.

Ronald Morrison Springs

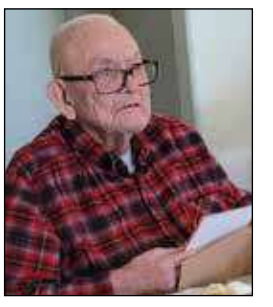
Ronald "Ron" Morrison Springs, 90, passed away Sept.16, 2025.

Ron was born May 15, 1935, in Cloudy, Okla., to Granville and Mary Springs.

He was preceded in death by siblings Winford Springs, Maybell Nelson, Willie "Auntie" Lewis, and Paul Springs.

Ron is survived by his wife Vi Springs; daughters Rhonda Springs, and Robin Burleson and spouse Hugh; granddaughters Macy Dennis and spouse Craig, and Grace Springs; and great-grandchildren Rory and Indy Dennis.

Walter Haskell Lancaster

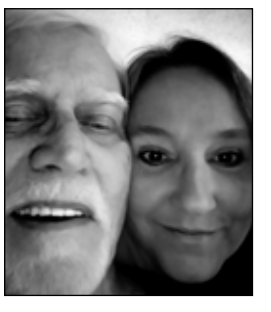


Walter Haskell Lancaster, 92, passed away Sept. 30th, 2025.

Haskell was born March 28, 1933, in Calera, Okla., to Victor and Lois (Thorton) Lancaster.

He is survived by his wife Carole; daughters Sunny Dodds, Sue Miller and spouse Lee, Kathy Lancaster, Jean High, and Patty Gagnet; six grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; and brother Don Lancaster.

Melissa Ann Robinson



Melissa "Missy" Ann Robinson, 57, passed away Oct. 12, 2025.

Missy was born Jan. 12, 1968, in Fresno, Calif., to John Thomas Sr. and Annette Joyce (Milsap) Staton.

She was preceded in death by her husband Gary Robinson; her parents; and brothers John Thomas Staton Jr. and Randy Bruce Staton.

Missy is survived by her children Amanda Grace and Wade Awtry, Jack Thomas Robinson and Ashlynn, Joel Conway Robinson, and Andrea and Charlie Ramirez; siblings Margaret and Lynn Loftin, Jayson and Lynda Staton, Denny and Connie Staton, and Albie and Wana Staton; grandchildren Sophia Mitchell and fiancé Ryan Gonzales, Chance Mitchell, Garrett Awtry, Sydney Awtry, Grady Awtry, Hadilyn Awtry, and Hayden "Little Man" Awtry.

CNO Recycling department celebrates America Recycles Day every day with help from EPA

By Tabatha Keton

CNO EPS's Going Green Department promotes sustainability and recycling across the Choctaw Nation reservation year-round, not just on America Recycles Day on November 15.

The department recently received a significant boost through funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Exchange Network Program. The EPA Exchange Network Program is designed to enhance data collection and information sharing among environmental partners. With this support, the Going Green Department purchased scales and other equipment for collection trucks and trailers, and created a new operations dashboard. These upgrades enhance coordination with recycling partners, increase efficiency, expand recycling capacity, and enable more accurate reporting of recycling totals.

"The improvements are part of the Choctaw Nation's ongoing mission to protect the environment, conserve natural resources, and promote sustainable habits across the reservation," said Daron Sharp, Executive Director of Risk Management.

Choctaw Nation Photo

Thanks to funding received through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Exchange Network program, the Choctaw Nation was able to install new equipment for its recycling efforts, including a drive-up scale at the Durant Recycling Center.

Keeping the Reservation Informed

Funding enabled CNO EPS to develop an operational dashboard that allows the team to track established recycling goals and accurately report recycling totals. By providing clear, up-to-date information, the dashboard helps the team identify trends, improve collection strategies, and set realistic targets. This transparency lets residents see how their participation directly contributes to progress, helps them understand the broader environmental impact, and encourages greater community engagement.

Key data from the dashboard and updates are shared regularly on the Choctaw Nation Environmental Protection Services' Facebook page. This helps residents stay informed about the program's progress and learn how their recycling efforts make a difference. Monthly reports and news about ongoing recycling initiatives are posted to keep the community informed and engaged in the latest developments in sustainability.

Working With Our Public Partners

Education is central to the CNO EPS Going Green Department's strategy. Through outreach and educational programs, residents learn about the importance of recycling and receive practical tips for waste reduction. The department aims to make recycling accessible for Choctaw Nation members and neighboring communities.

The Choctaw Nation Recycling Center recently welcomed the Durant Sustainability Coalition, Hoffman Sanitation, and Keep McAlester Beautiful, to discuss recycling basics and emphasize the impact of consistent community efforts. These collaborations are crucial for strengthening regional recycling efforts.

"The EPS team continues to develop educational programs, outreach initiatives, and infrastructure to make recycling accessible and effective for both tribal members and surrounding communities," Sharp said.

For more information on the Choctaw Nation's environmental programs or to find a recycling center near you, visit https://www.choctawnation.com/services/recycling/.

'Goose' set to soar as she commits to OU Softball

By Christian Chaney-Sackett

Juliana "Goose" Hutchens, a standout softball player and Choctaw tribal member, is taking her talents to Norman.

The Wagoner High School star recently announced her commitment to the University of Oklahoma on Sept. 11, joining one of the most dominant programs in college softball.

For Hutchens, playing close to home under Hall of Fame coach Patty Gasso is a dream that's now becoming reality.

In her social media announcement, she expressed gratitude and disbelief.

"This is one of the moments every little girl dreams of getting to experience," she wrote, thanking the Oklahoma coaching staff for believing in her.

Head coach Patty Gasso posted a celebratory "GO BOOMER," and the news spread quickly across sports media.

Hutchens, ranked the No. 1 prospect in Oklahoma and one of the top players in the nation for the class of 2027, is considered one of the best catchers in her age group.

Softball America ranks her as the No. 2 overall player in the 2027 class, while Extra Innings lists her as the No. 1 catcher in the country.

While she's known as one of the best catchers in the country, she is a versatile player, also shining at third base and shortstop. The numbers back up the hype.

During her sophomore year at Wagoner, Hutchens turned heads with impressive numbers at bat.

In 36 games, she scored 70 runs and had 45 RBIs while batting a .656 average.

She tied the state's single-season home run record with 23, showing off her power at the plate even as opponents often chose to walk her rather than risk giving her a pitch to hit.

Softball runs in the family. Her father, Johnny Hutchens, is the head coach at Wagoner.

Her passion for the game has been clear from an early age, extending well beyond high school competition, and she has been playing on big stages for years. She was a member of the Oklahoma team that won the 2021 Little League Softball World Series, the first team from the state to ever take home the title. Hutchens also competes with the Iowa Premier 18U National team and was chosen this summer for USA Softball's Under-18 team, where she will compete in the WBSC World Cup.

For the Sooners, Hutchens is another elite addition to their already stacked roster.

Photo Provided

Juliana "Goose" Hutchens announces her commitment to the University of Oklahoma's softball team.

Oklahoma's softball team has won eight Women's College World Series championships and made history with a remarkable four-peat from 2021 to 2024, claiming four titles in a row and establishing Norman as the heart of college softball.

Coach Patty Gasso's recent recruiting classes have been ranked No. 1 in the nation, and Hutchens helps set the tone for the class of 2027.

The Sooners have built one of the strongest dynasties in NCAA softball, consistently attracting top talent. By adding a player like Hutchens early in the 2027 recruiting cycle, Oklahoma sends a clear message about its commitment to remaining at the top.

For Patty Gasso, signing an in-state star like Hutchens not only strengthens the roster but also maintains the program's reputation as the preferred destination for elite athletes.

OU's new home field, Love's Field, a $43 million facility, has also become a significant draw for players like Hutchens.

With state-of-the-art resources and a history of winning, the Sooners continue to attract the best talent in the nation, and Hutchens is a testament to that success.

While Hutchens still has two more high school seasons to play, her future looks bright.

With her strong batting and defensive skills, along with her leadership on the field, she is expected to make an immediate impact once she puts on a Sooners uniform.

For now, Hutchens will continue to build her impressive resume at Wagoner, with her community, family and the Choctaw Nation cheering her on.

Her commitment to OU is a significant personal achievement and inspires young Native American athletes across Oklahoma who dream of competing at the highest level.

Editor's Note: Due to a small typo in last month's article, the Biskinik decided to re-run Goose's story.

Curtis turns 1

Miles James Curtis celebrated his first birthday Sept. 6, 2025.

He is the son of Evan and Kelly Curtis, the grandson of John and Sheila Hampton Curtis, and the great-grandson of the late Lewis and Lu Hampton.

Silas Gregory Albright

Silas Gregory Albright was born early to Anthony and Sarah Albright in May, but is growing well.

He is a descendant of Derion Albright, Donabelle James, Silas Jack James, Judge Silas Cadron James, and Roberson James.

The family lives on the shores of the Mississippi River in Minnesota and plans a road trip to the nation soon.

Thompson turns 18

Dawn Thompson would like to wish her daughter, Kiley Thompson, a wonderful 18th birthday celebration.

"I hope you achieve everything you set out to accomplish in life, pumpkin doodle. Love your family and your biggest supporter." –**Mom**

Ransdell turns 95

On Dec. 7, 2025, Mable Colleen Kirby Ransdell will celebrate her 95th birthday.

Mable is the daughter of Choctaw Nation tribal member Anthie Lois Franklin and Irishman James Cleburn Kirby.

Born in New Mexico, Mable lost her mother at age 4 and traveled through Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona and California with her father, a crop worker.

Her childhood included hopping freight trains, hitchhiking and farming, guided by a protective father. The family eventually settled in Phoenix, where Mable met Marvin Ransdell. The couple married for 40 years and raised three children. She now lives in Buckeye, Arizona, with her son. She also has two daughters, six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren, with a third on the way.

Mable enjoys spending time with her family, shopping and the occasional trip to the slot machines.

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Devin Lindley

As December rolls in across the reservation, it's time to prepare for furbearer season, which starts December 1 and runs until February 28, 2026. To legally take part in the harvest of furbearers, you must obtain a free furbearer permit through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal.

Within the Choctaw Nation reservation, the list of harvestable furbearers includes species such as bobcat, red and gray fox, river otter, mink, opossum, beaver, raccoon, coyote, skunk, etc. If you harvest any bobcats or river otters, you are required to have them tagged with a CITES tag from CNDWC by 10 business days after the end of furbearer season.

Furbearer management isn't just about harvest or tradition – it is about ecological balance. Predators and furbearing species play important roles in controlling pests and maintaining the rhythm of our forest and waters. Trapping can also benefit many species, such as turkey, waterfowl, and quail, by removing predators that kill hens and destroy nests. By removing these predators from the landscape, these species have a better chance of succeeding. By following the set regulations, we protect the resource not only for ourselves but for future generations of Choctaw hunters and trappers.

For centuries, Choctaw trappers have used the knowledge passed down from elders on how to read signs at the first frost, where a fox might trail, and how to set a trap without disturbing the land. This season is our chance to carry that legacy forward – respecting the land, using ethical methods of take, and sharing stories around a fire when the day is done. Let's approach the season with respect for our culture, our wildlife, and each other!

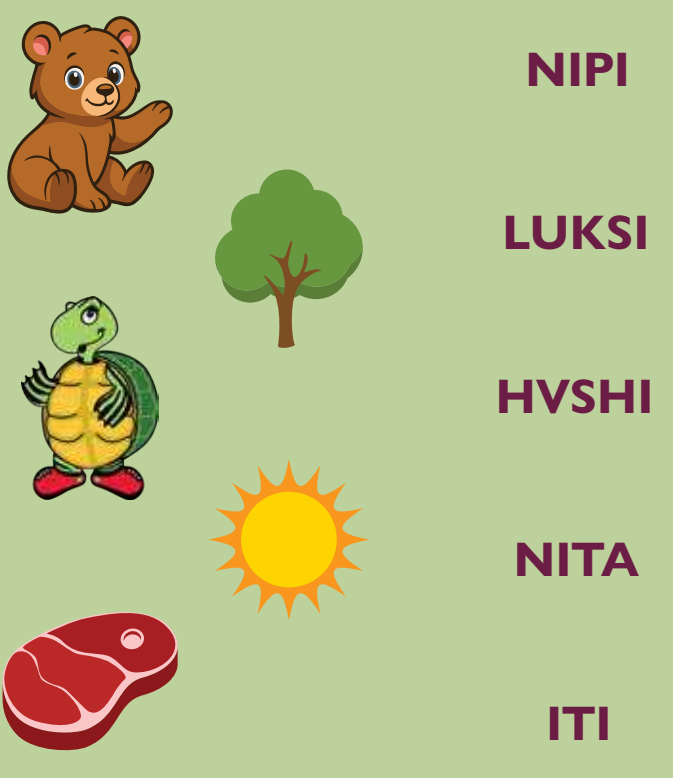
Please check the full CNDWC regulations & Title 110 Choctaw Nation Fish, Game, and Animals Code for your equipment, trap requirements, and tagging rules before heading out into the field. Remember to get your free furbearer permit and report your harvest in Chahta Achvffa, and as always, be safe in the outdoors.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

FLEX YOUR CHOCTAW LANGUAGE SKILLS!

Chahta Kids' Corner

Match the pictures to their Choctaw word. If you need help, you can find these words in past Biskinik editions.



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Tagen Jamison, Wrestler

By Kellie Matherly

Tagen Jamison is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation and a Division I wrestler at Oklahoma State University. From an early age, Jamison has pursued excellence in athletics, balancing the demands of one of the toughest sports with his deep cultural identity, family values, and academic ambitions.

Tagen was first introduced to wrestling by his brother who competed. His father encouraged him to give it a try, taking him to practice several times a week. Watching the sport quickly hooked him, and wrestling soon became more than just a pastime—it became a lifelong passion. His father's enthusiasm and involvement helped deepen that connection, making the sport a shared bond between them.

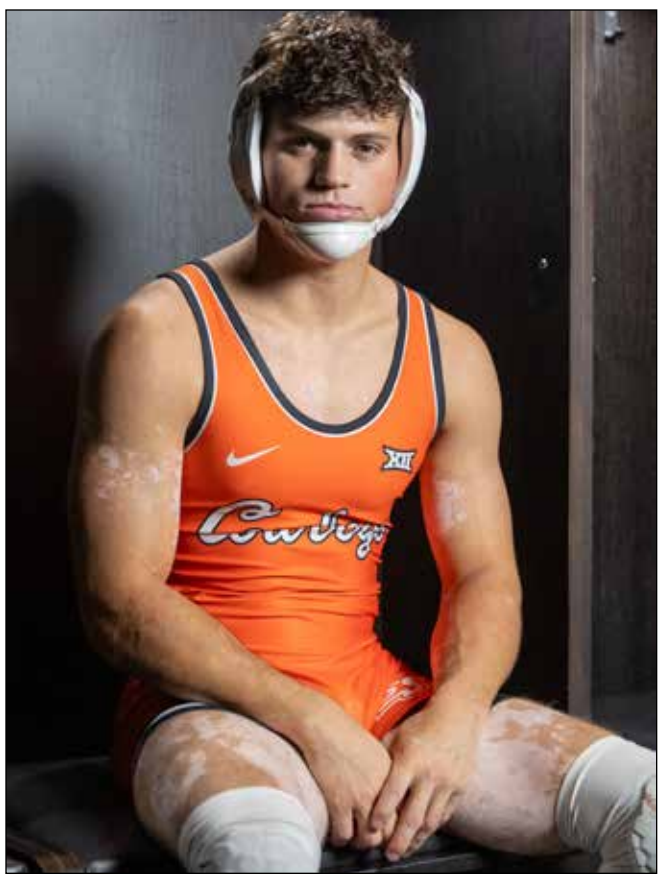
"I've looked up to my father in my life, so definitely him being into it probably helped me even fall in love with it faster and more," said Tagen.

By the time Tagen was eight or nine, he began competing in youth tournaments, testing himself against some of the best young wrestlers in the state. Though he didn't always win, his repeated success in placing among the top competitors fueled his dream of wrestling at the collegiate level. That dream became more concrete in high school, when he stepped away from other sports like football and baseball to focus entirely on wrestling.

Tagen's journey has been shaped by sacrifice and support from his family. In high school, his parents prioritized his training by moving him closer to quality coaching opportunities. His father immersed himself in learning about nutrition, recovery, and training methods, while his mother relocated with him to Texas to ensure he had access to the best resources.

Choctaw Nation Photos

Through discipline, perseverance, and pride in his Choctaw identity, Tagen Jamison exemplifies the spirit of a true competitor. His journey reflects not only his individual determination but also the collective strength of his family, his team and his tribe.



Their dedication and the foundation they provided allowed him to pursue wrestling at the highest levels.

"My mom sacrificed time with my dad and moved with me to Texas so that I could have the best coaching," Tagen said with gratitude.

As a first-generation college student, Tagen also carried the responsibility of setting a new path for his family. His introduction to Oklahoma State University came at age twelve, when he attended its renowned wrestling camps.

Meeting legendary coach John Smith inspired him to set clear goals for himself.

By his sophomore year of high school, he began achieving those milestones, opening doors to Division I programs across the country.

"I made it a goal to win the tournaments that I needed to win," said Tagen. "If you win those, you really have your pick of where you want to go to school."

Tagen initially committed to the University of Minnesota, where he experienced life away from home and adapted to new challenges. However, his time there was cut short by a torn ACL. Rather than letting the setback define him, Tagen used recovery as an opportunity to grow mentally, study film, set new goals, and learn to contribute in new ways. The injury ultimately strengthened his resilience and sharpened his mental toughness.

Returning home to Oklahoma and joining OSU's storied wrestling program fulfilled a childhood dream.

"I'm from Oklahoma. I love Oklahoma, so I wanted to come back to Oklahoma. My family's here; my friends are here," he said.

It helps that the OSU wrestling team is a tight-knit family.

"They act like they've known me my whole life," said Tagen. "Everybody here, we're all blood."

Competing under the guidance of elite coaches and alongside some of the nation's best wrestlers, Tagen has already achieved significant milestones, including helping his team capture the Big 12 championship and earning top five individual rankings.

He describes these victories as career highlights, comparing the thrill of team success to winning the Super Bowl.

"We got on the stage and took pictures with the big trophy. Glitter was falling from the sky. It was awesome," remembers Tagen.

Beyond the mat, Tagen remains deeply connected to his Choctaw heritage. He proudly represents the Choctaw Nation, acknowledging the support he has received through healthcare, youth camps, and academic resources.

He embraces opportunities to give back, whether through youth wrestling clinics, mentoring younger athletes, or simply sharing his story. He takes pride in being the only Choctaw wrestler on his team, engaging in lighthearted debates with other Native athletes about whose tribe is strongest.

Tagen's journey has not been without challenges. Living with vitiligo, an autoimmune condition that causes skin discoloration, taught him resilience from a young age.

What once made him self-conscious has become a source of strength, shaping his mental toughness and giving him confidence in embracing his uniqueness.

"Growing up with [vitiligo] was hard for me just because I'm different, and kids obviously noticed it," said Tagen. "So, growing up with it, I tried to hide it. It's taken me 22 years, my whole life, to live with it, accept it, and then embrace it."

Faith also plays a central role in Tagen's life. Raised in the church, he continues to draw strength from prayer, gratitude practices, and spiritual community with his team. His belief system grounds him through the pressures of balancing academics, athletics, and personal growth.

Currently pursuing a degree in marketing, Tagen dreams of starting his own business after his wrestling career.

Yet, his athletic goals remain ambitious—he plans to continue competing beyond college toward the ultimate goal of representing the United States—and the Choctaw Nation—at the 2028 Olympic Games.

"I love representing my heritage, so I try to do it the best way that I can," said Tagen.

Through discipline, perseverance, and pride in his Choctaw identity, Tagen Jamison exemplifies the spirit of a true competitor. His journey reflects not only his individual determination but also the collective strength of his family, his team, and his tribe—showing that together, they are more.

See and share Tagen's story at togetherweremore.com.

Senter turns 21

Happy 21st birthday to Cameron Senter of Lubbock, Texas.

Cameron is the son of Charlie and Tausha Senter, grandson of Jeanne Hartsfield, great-grandson of Gene and Flo Wilson, and great-great-grandson of Noel and Starlie Wilson of Lane, Oklahoma, all proud members of the Choctaw Nation.

Pharis turns 90

A. Rex Pharis turned 90 on November 29, 2025. Rex was born in 1935 to Walter Polk and Lois Pharis.

Rex is a dedicated Christian and believes hard work, exercise and eating healthy have helped him reach 90. Out of nine siblings, he has one sister (Avis June Pharis Mosley) still living.

Rex and June are very proud to be part of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Alexander gets 'Golden Ticket'

On Sept, 29, at Joe Rogan's Comedy Mothership in Austin, Texas, tribal member Jason "JJ" Alexander appeared on the world-famous comedy show Kill Tony — a stage where hundreds of comics sign up, but only a few are chosen each week. Each performer gets just one minute to impress the hosts and audience.

Before JJ's performance, out of over 700 episodes in the show's history, only 19 comedians have ever been awarded the prestigious "Golden Ticket." JJ became number 20.

Milani Ren Easley

Milani Ren Easley was born on July 30 in Oklahoma City to parents Julissa Rolen and Anthony Easley III, weighing 7 lbs, 5 oz, and measuring 20.5 in. long.

Milani is the granddaughter of Christina Yount, Anthony Easley Jr., and Patricia Mollman.

Bigfoot run a big success

The Healthy Lifestyle Department hosted the 21st Bigfoot 5K/1-mile event in Honobia, Oklahoma, on Oct. 4, 2025.

A total of 506 participants registered to run a scenic route known as the Home of Bigfoot.

Overall Male Winners:

First Place: Jaser Thurman, Talihina, Oklahoma
Second Place: Nolan Watson, Broken Bow, Oklahoma
Third Place: Bradly Sam, Ringold, Oklahoma

Overall Female Winners:

First Place: Shechinah Hollis, Muldrow, Oklahoma
Second Place: Tiffanie Burchfield, Rattan, Oklahoma
Third Place: Iris Martinez, Heavener, Oklahoma

For more information on the PACE Program and upcomming event, visit https://www.choctawnation.com/services/pace/

Cook graduates from Liberty

Lindsey Cook has graduated with distinction from Liberty University, earning a Master of Arts in Strategic Communication.

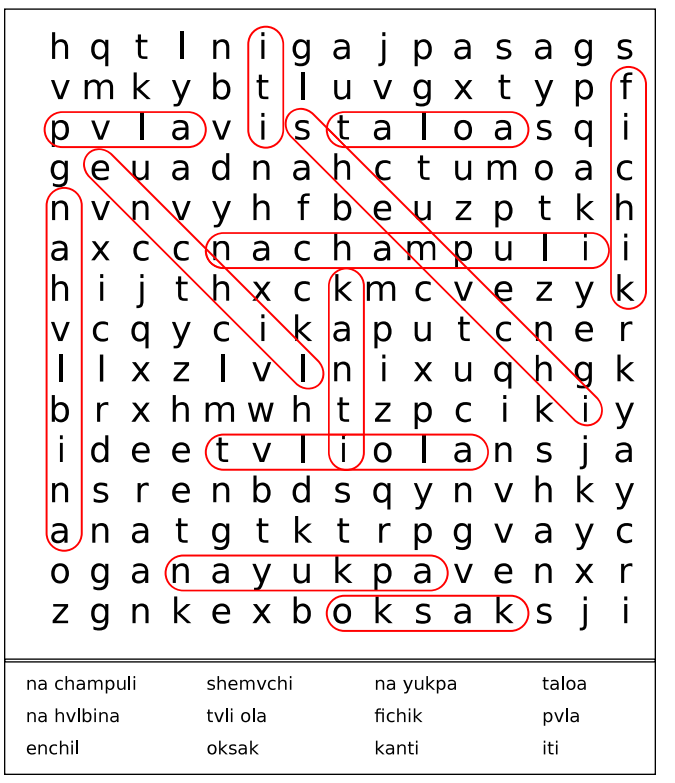
While working full-time in child protection in Texas, Lindsey successfully completed her graduate studies with a focus on strategic digital communication. Lindsey is interested in pursuing a career in writing and looks forward to new opportunities to apply her skills."

Reed wins at SFIM

Lauren J. Reed, registered Choctaw artist currently residing in New Orleans, has been awarded the Blue Ribbon for First Place in Mixed Media at this year's 103rd Annual Santa Fe Indian Market (SFIM).

Hosted annually in Santa Fe, New Mexico, SFIM is the largest and most prestigious Native art market in the world, drawing top Indigenous artists and collectors from across the globe.

"It is an incredible honor, and one of my life goals, to be recognized at Santa Fe Indian Market," said Reed. "I am proud to represent the Choctaw Nation and to share my work with such an esteemed community of artists and supporters of Native art.



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Montesano re-enlists

Choctaw tribal member and United States Sailor Electronics Technician First Class Anthony Montesano re-enlisted on June 28, 2025, for 4 years.

He has served dutifully for almost 10 years, and this will now bring his total active Naval Service to 14 years.

He served alongside the USS Nimitz and took the Oath of Enlistment from Captain Graber, who is the Commanding Officer of the USS Nimitz.

Senne turns 18

Christopher Senne celebrated his 18th birthday in July. In May, he graduated from Heritage Academy Maricopa with honors and Rio Salado College with high honors. He received an Associate's in Arts and an Associate's in General Studies from Rio Salado College.

Christopher played varsity baseball throughout high school and was a member of the National Honor Society and Symphonic Band. He was awarded the CAA Champions of Character award. He has been active in the youth group and the Technology Team at his church. Christopher will continue his education at Grand Canyon University in the fall.

Belton inducted into Hall of Fame

The Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame, Inc. (OAAE) recently announced the induction of Boynton career educator Mrs. Georgiann Seals Belton as a member of the 2025 class of OAAE Hall of Fame Inductees.

Georgiann Seals Belton is the daughter of Georgia (Kellum) and Emanuel Hardin Seals of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa in 1973. She received an Associate's degree in Home Economics (1975) from Northeastern A&M College in Miami; a Bachelor of Science Degree (1977) from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah; and a Master of Education Degree in Secondary Education (1983) from Central State University (now UCO) in Edmond. She taught Home Economics for 39 years (1979-2018) at the Oklahoma Children's Center in Taft, Oklahoma, and at Boynton High School. Additionally, she served as a Culinary Arts instructor at the Indian Capital Technology Center in Muskogee. Mrs. Georgiann Seals Belton is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

She and Jerry celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in August 2025. They have two sons, Jerry Jr. and Jermaine and nine grandchildren.

Regan graduates magna cum laude

Reese Regan graduated magna cum laude from the University of Oklahoma on May 10th, 2025, with a B.A. in Psychology.

Reese has been accepted to medical school and will attend Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine Tulsa in Fall 2025.

She is the daughter of Dr. Jason and Staci Regan, the granddaughter of Charles and the late Brenda Regan, the great-granddaughter of the late Marcella Regan-Furry, and great-great-granddaughter of the late Lorena Wyers Furry-Laughlin (original enrollee).

Reese would like to thank Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr., Tribal Council Member Robert Karr, Tribal Council, and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma for their support while attending her undergraduate studies.

Maret connects with Twelve Days

Sherri Maret, author of The Cloud Artist, which was translated into Choctaw by Dora Wickson and illustrated by Choctaw artist Merisha Lemmer, was thrilled when her book was nominated for the First Nation Communities Read Award, Oklahoma Book Award, and Writers' League of Texas Book Award.

Now she is celebrating the upcoming fourth picture book in her Twelve Days series. Twelve Days of Winter was published by Muddy Boots in 2022. Twelve Days of Summer (2024) and Twelve Days of Autumn (2025) followed. Twelve Days of Spring is scheduled for release in early 2026. Thomas Hilley from Stillwater illustrated the series.

Maret loves wildlife and nature, so she wanted to share that with young readers. The series features wildlife from the United States. The author stated, "I realized that the song, Twelve Days of Christmas, had so many things or people that a child wouldn't connect with, so I created a version that was more child-friendly with animals in the different seasons.

The books can be sung or read. The author and illustrator also created an animal track activity to accompany the books, which can be found at SherriMaret.com.

"I was a teacher and library media specialist for years, so I wanted to create a fun activity to do following a reading of any of the books," said Maret. "I hope to encourage young ones to love nature like I do!"

Eldridge awarded first place

L. S. Eldridge, a registered Choctaw artist, won first place (the Kenneth M. Shuck Memorial Award) for her painting "Hashtag Harmony" at Watercolor USA 2025.

The exhibit was juried by Paul Jackson, a leading contemporary watercolorist.

Watercolor USA is a national competition founded in 1962 at the Springfield Art Museum in Missouri.

Sims graduates from Texas Tech

Kinley Sims is a proud graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Sport Management from Texas Tech University. Sims plans to pursue a career in Sports in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

I am deeply grateful to the Choctaw Nation for their love and support throughout this journey," said Sims. "Wreck 'Em Tech & Yakoke!"

Sims is the daughter of Shawn and Heather Sims, granddaughter of Iva Jane Parker (Sims) and the great-granddaughter of Harrison Dixon and Susan Parker.

CNO associates on Next Gen 30 Under 30 list

The 2025 NextGen Under 30 award-winners were announced in September.

This program recognizes Oklahomans, who are 30 years of age and younger who demonstrate talent, drive, and service to their communities. A panel of respected business and civic leaders serve as judges.

Current Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma associates on the prestigious 2025 list include:

- Adyson Barber
- Michaela Brewer
- Addison Davis
- Krislan Garside
- Claire Green Young
- Chloe Hodge
- Kellton Hollins
- Faith Hughes
- Emalyne King
- Kindal Malone
- Lane McIntyre
- Jordan Penn-White
- Rachel Reinert
- Matthew Throneberry

Holt graduates, hired at OU

Since graduating from the University of Oklahoma last December with a master's degree in management information systems (MIS), Trevon Holt of Bixby has been on a whirlwind journey.

In January, Holt competed with OU's co-ed cheer team in his final national competition at the Wide World of Sports facility in Orlando, Florida.

It capped off a successful co-ed cheer career at OU as Holt was reportedly the only OU co-ed cheer to win the top award each year – Outstanding First Year Member as a freshman, Sooner M.A.G.I.C. Values Award as a sophomore, Leadership Award as a junior and MVP Award as a senior.

Holt, the son of Chris Holt of Bixby and Darla Holt of Broken Arrow, then accepted a position with Weaver Accounting in Dallas, Texas, starting in February and worked at the firm until early August, when he resigned to accept a teaching position in OU's Michael F. Price College of Business.

He began his current position as an MIS instructor on August 15.

Holt was a two-sport athlete at Bixby, where he played on three state championship football teams and served as a co-captain of the football team during his senior season. He was also a starter on the baseball team.

He is the grandson of Ron and Becky Holt of Bixby and the great-grandson of the late Walon Dale Holt and Choctaw Nation elder Gladys Bowden Holt of Stillwater, who formerly lived in Thackerville and Ardmore. He has numerous relatives in Love County and Carter County.

"I appreciated all the support I received from the Choctaw Nation while in high school and at the University of Oklahoma," Holt said. "That assistance made it possible for me to reach my goals."

Allison turns 1

Rhyland Kane Allison recently celebrated first birthday. He was born Sept. 19, 2024, in Talihina, Oklahoma. He is the son of proud parents, Morgan and Lauren Allison.

"We love you so much and are so proud!" - Mom and Dad

Gilmore turns 1

Happy first birthday to Millie Rose Gilmore!

"You are a blessing to your sisters, Alexandria and Cori, and to the Chahta Okla.

Your ancestors will walk with you the whole way, once you figure out the walking part! May they guide you with strength, kindness, and pride as you continue to brighten the past, present, and future.

Yakoke for the joy you bring! Mama and Dada are honored to be your parents and to be the ones to start you on your journey."

Brothers graduates from Northwest

Jael Whitney Brothers graduated this summer with her M.A. in Community and Economic Development from Northwest University.

She will use this degree in her role as Assistant Director of the Honoring Nations program at the Harvard Project on Indigenous Governance and Development.

Jael is grateful to the Choctaw Nation's Higher Education Program for its support.

Jaques uses her talents to teach

Visual artist and jewelry maker Janine Jacques led a bracelet-making workshop Saturday, July 19, in the courtyard of BAAP Boutique in South Los Angeles. Participants created a stretch bracelet and a spiral memory wire bracelet.

Jacques, owner of Jewels by Janine, has shown her work in juried art venues, boutiques, and museum gift shops nationwide. A former organic body care entrepreneur, she became a self-taught jewelry artist whose designs drew on her art background and techniques such as wire wrapping, ceramics, enameling, and copper metalwork.

You can find more about Jacques and her artwork, visit https://jbj-collection.square.site/.

Samuel Allen Fleming

Samuel Allen Fleming was born to Allen and Megan Fleming on Feb. 3, 2025, at 6:47 p.m. He weighed 10 pounds, 6 ounces and measured 21.5 inches long.

He is the great-grandson of Sampson and Mary Parish, the grandson of Samuel and Wesla Parish, and the brother of Elijah and Hannah Fleming.

Taylors celebrate 60 years

Joe and Carolyn Taylor were married June 7, 1965, in Santa Paula, California, and celebrated their 60th anniversary on June 7, 2025, in Eugene, Oregon.

They enjoyed raising their sons, Ryan Lee and Kevin Alan, and have fond memories of camping, fishing and visiting Gold Beach on the Oregon Coast.

Joe, a proud Choctaw, served in the U.S. Army and later started a masonry contracting company with his family. Carolyn became a real estate appraiser. When Joe retired from the masonry trade, he and Carolyn worked together in their Taylor Appraisal Company in Klamath Falls, Oregon, where they raised their sons and lived for 44 years.

In 2015, they officially retired to Eugene to be closer to their sons and grandchildren, Mason and Makenna. In retirement, Joe enjoys building RC model airplanes, fishing and cooking, while Carolyn enjoys growing roses in her garden and reading.

They feel blessed to have shared 60 happy years together and look forward to many more.

Driskill earns Ph.D.

Madison Meredith Faye Driskill completed the Ph.D. program in chemical engineering at Stanford University on July 22, 2025.

She is the daughter of Jon and Kimberly Driskill and the granddaughter of John and Fay Driskill.

McIntire graduates from OU

Macy McIntire graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a minor in Sociology - Criminology.

"I plan on getting a government job where I can give back to Native Americans and help missing and murdered indigenous peoples," said McIntire.

ITI FABVSSA

Indigenous Alabama: Digital Resources for Research

By Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation

People usually think of the Choctaw homeland as being in Mississippi. That's not wrong, but many chapters of Choctaw history were written a little farther to the east, in what is now Alabama. This month, the writers of Iti Fabvssa would like to introduce a new online resource called Indigenous Alabama, which helps to share this part of Choctaw history from the perspective of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Through partnership with the University of South Alabama, the Alabama Department of Transportation, and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Historic Preservation Department, this website hosts annotated sources about Choctaw history, culture, and heritage in western Alabama. These come from archaeology, anthropology, and historical maps.

At the time of European arrival, and for centuries before, corn was the single-most important food for the Choctaw ancestors. Two main Choctaw oral traditions describe how our ancestors first obtained it. According to one tradition, corn was a gift from Ohoyo-osh Chishba, "Unknown Woman", the daughter of the Sun, given to two Choctaw hunters, who had shown her kindness. According to this tradition, she gave this gift on an earth mound village located on the Alabama River (Cushman 1899:276-278). The Alabama River exists entirely within the present-day state of Alabama, ending near Mobile Bay and beginning near the center of the state. A much older Choctaw oral tradition talks about the ecological impacts of the mammoth on the Black Belt Prairie, a landscape feature that extended from present-day northern Mississippi through central Alabama (Cushman 1899:207). Those animals went extinct 13,000 years ago. Centuries later, Choctaw-speaking villages would be located on the portion of the Black Belt Prairie in western Alabama. This is probably where Chief Tvshkalusa fought Hernando de Soto's army in 1540. In other words, western Alabama was home to some ancestral Choctaw communities for hundreds of generations.

For years, the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department has kept track of ancient Choctaw place names on the landscape. There are hundreds in Mississippi, but there are also many in present-day Alabama, basically from the Alabama River westward. More specifically, Choctaw place names cover an area of Alabama that extends from the central Tombigbee and lower Black Warrior Rivers on the north, southward to the coast, and as far east as the mouth of the Cahaba River.

It's important not to let the part of Choctaw heritage that lies in this area be forgotten. The purpose of the Indigenous Alabama website is to share and summarize sources that shed more light on this heritage. Choctaw history in Alabama is often overlooked by archaeologists and others doing Cultural Resources Management in the state, because so much focus is placed on Choctaw history in Mississippi. Indigenous Alabama was created initially as a resource for people doing cultural resources management work, so that they can have access to published information about Choctaw heritage in the State of Alabama. It is important for them to be aware of the Choctaw connection with this area so that they can help Choctaw Nation and other interested Choctaw Tribes to protect the Choctaw sacred and historic sites located there, share accurate information with public about the historic Choctaw presence in the area, and to do research that can shed even more light on Choctaw history, culture, and heritage in western Alabama. The website and the information that it contains are also intended for any Tribal members who might be interested in accessing it and learning from it.

So, what does the website actually contain? It's broken up into different sections that focus on presenting Information from archaeology, anthropology, historic maps, and other sources that shed light on Choctaw heritage in western Alabama. The archaeology, anthropology, and other sections of the website present summaries of many dozens of published articles and links to as many of them as possible. For each published source, the website provides annotations that summarize the contexts of the article and talk about how this information relates to Choctaw history and culture. The maps section includes images of dozens of historic maps tied to summaries that explain what they show. Many of these maps have information on where Choctaw people lived at specific times in the past, the environment and natural resources, and how our settlements were laid out. It's amazing to look at one of these maps and see the interconnected agricultural fields that interlaced between Choctaw villages or see the individual family hamlets of a Choctaw village, where female Choctaw family heads looked after their families.

By utilizing these multiple sources of evidence, viewers can learn about the past lives of our Choctaw ancestors, which still continue through today's Choctaw culture.

All in all, Indigenous Alabama is a tremendous new source for information about Choctaw history and culture in the east. We'd like to thank the Alabama Department of Transportation for funding this work, the University of South Alabama for taking on the physical creation of the website, and especially Sarah Price and Dr. Phillip Carr for their long hours of work entering and summarizing the data and working with the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department. Yakoke! Indigenous Alabama is a good example of what collaboration can accomplish and will be a resource that people can use for years to come.

Please check it out: indigenousalabama.omeka.net/s/choctaw.

Members of the Choctaw Collaborative Team meet with partners from Alabama during a visit to the Choctaw Nation. Pictured are Liam Hodges, Dr. Ian Thompson, Amy Thompson, Karen Downen, Dr. Ryan Morini, Dr. Philip Carr and Sarah Price.

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CNO hosts interim study on drone technology

DURANT, Okla. – Oklahoma state leaders visited the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) to learn about the Tribe's growing aviation technology program. CNO hosted a legislative interim study focused on how drones can help reduce fatal accidents on rural roads.

The event was hosted at CNO's Emerging Aviation Technology Center on Daisy Ranch, a 44,600-acre stretch of remote, tribally owned land.

The facility focuses on the technological development of advanced air mobility and drones, also known as unmanned aircraft systems (UAS).

"The U.S. faces many infrastructure challenges that drones may be able to solve," said James Grimsley, executive director of advanced technology initiatives for CNO. "Continued investment in the CNO program positions Oklahoma as a leader in aviation technologies and a model for rural innovation."

Members of the House Budget and Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, along with select staff, joined CNO representatives for the event. Attendees included Reps. Jason Blair, Jonathan Wilk, Ryan Eaves, Josh Cantrell, Tammy Townley and Subcommittee Chair Nicole Miller.

Legislators toured the facility's Remote Operations Center and observed a Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) operations demonstration. They also visited the prototyping facility to view advanced drone manufacturing.

"In Oklahoma, approximately 65% of traffic fatalities occur on rural roadways," said Grimsley. "UAS can lower fatal accident rates by limiting cars on the road for things such as deliveries. This study shows just one of the many ways drones can improve quality of life and safety."

The presentation also highlighted the need for a clear regulatory path for operators and UAS traffic management services to ensure safe and efficient operations, thereby increasing capabilities and usage in the state.

"Working with our tribal partners and rural leaders, we can turn local ingenuity into statewide progress," said state Rep. Nicole Miller. "By listening first and legislating second, we can craft policy that truly supports innovation in aviation and advanced transportation. I'm eager to take what we learned from today's discussion and turn it into meaningful policy that strengthens opportunity across Oklahoma. Thank you to the Choctaw Daisy Ranch for hosting us."

CNO is the only tribal government selected by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to take part in national drone research programs and is the only tribal government participating as a lead participant in the follow-on BEYOND Phase II program, which focuses on expanding drone operations safely. CNO has also earned federal approval to test drones that can fly longer distances without being seen from the ground, or BVLOS.

Choctaw Nation Photo

Oklahoma representatives at Daisy Ranch listen to a presentation from James Grimsley, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's executive director of advanced technology initiatives.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

Our fifth year of offering the lawn care service is about to begin. You can apply for the program now.

To qualify, applicants must be Choctaw, at least 65, or have a documented ambulatory disability and meet income guidelines.

Homeowners and renters are eligible if they are responsible for lawn care. Once approved, participants receive a booklet of 20 vouchers, each worth $25.

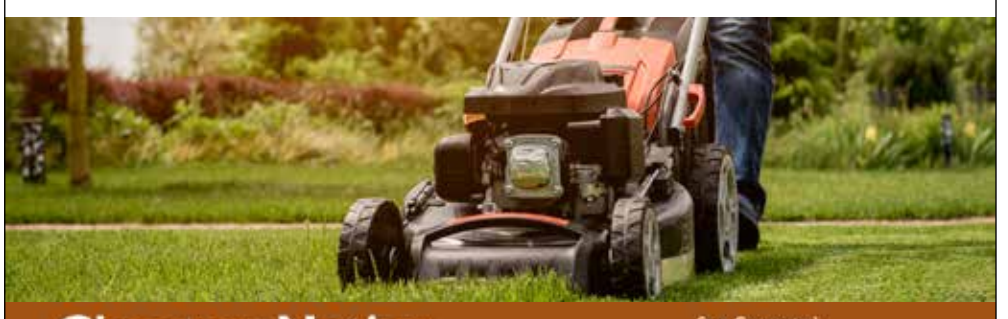
The program works similarly to the storm shelter program. Give a voucher to the person you choose to mow your yard, and they can redeem it with the Housing Authority. Mowers must be at least 16 and cannot live in the home where the work is performed.

For example, if your yard costs $45 to mow, you would provide the vendor one $25 voucher and pay the remaining $20, cutting your cost by more than half.

The vouchers cover an average mowing every 10 days from April 1 through October, giving you flexibility to use them as needed.

For questions, contact Lawn Care Services at the Housing Authority at 580-642-6353 or lawncareservice@choctawnation.com.

Applications are available on the Chahta Achvffa portal and CNO community centers.



Community centers create a stronger, healthier tribe

By Chris Jennings

As you age, healthy habits like quitting smoking, eating well, and socializing can make a big difference in your quality of life.

Simply fellowshipping with other people can even have a impact on your health.

According to the National Institute on Aging, participating in hobbies and other social activities may lower the risk for developing health problems, including dementia, heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer.

Making social connections can be challenging, and the Choctaw Nation recognizes this, along with the importance of staying connected to your tribe.

That's why there are 17 different community centers across the reservation.

These centers are designed to offer assistance to any tribal member and occasionally to individuals outside the tribe who are part of the community. The McAlester Center recently shared on Facebook that they had free oranges available for anyone to pick up.

The community centers are a place tribal members can get help with program applications and other services, particularly for the elderly who may sometimes struggle with online portals.

One of the biggest benefits of the community center is disseminating important information. During a recent weekly lunch at the McAlester community center, District 11 Councilman Robert Karr used several minutes before the meal to share information about what was happening in the district and on the reservation.

For some, these lunches are the only opportunity they have to access this information. After he was elected, Karr said he had several people approach him, "I had several of them tell me that they just come to hear the updates and hear what's going on."

No two community centers are alike. The Hugo center serves popcorn and cappuccinos on Wednesdays, and the Broken Bow center has a senior ball every year.

Robyn Morgan, program manager for the community centers, said the ball is something special.

"They love it, because the workers will take these women, fix their hair, put makeup on them, they'll wear prom dresses, the men will wear suits. They have a blast at this prom," said Morgan.

Julia Crafton said she appreciates having the community centers as a reason to get out and stay active; Crafton has made several friends at the center. "I have some really good friends, like Pat, Phyllis and Lisa. We also have a great bus driver who entertains us with music all the time, and it's just fun to get out and see the country and the beautiful trees and things," Crafton said.

Seniors will also go on trips all over the country that are planned and organized at the community centers. Morgan said some of the places seniors have traveled to are Colorado, South Dakota and Branson, Missouri. These trips are funded through various fundraisers organized by the seniors, allowing them to visit these places.

"The best part of the trips is all of us on the bus together because we're laughing, talking, making jokes and teasing each other; just having fun," said Crafton.

These positive social interactions seniors experience through various activities can help lead to a longer and healthier life.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Disease Prevention and Promotion, social isolation and loneliness are associated with serious health problems in older adults.

The relationships that develop at community centers can help seniors cope more effectively with stress and the challenges of daily life.

According to Karr, many seniors plan their whole week around the weekly lunches.

"Coming out here and visiting with all the other people, fellowshipping together, planning their trips, and then eating a good meal," said Karr. "It's just such a blessing."

Lisa Ward prefers to come to the community center because it's an Indian community, and many of them grew up together.

For Ward, it's also nice to meet new people.

"You can get to talk to them and get to know their ways and find out some history that's totally different from yours," said Ward. "It's interesting to hear somebody else's history."

Gloria Sirmans, a clerk at the McAlester clinic, said providing essential services, such as emergency housing, is something that many would lack without the center.

"It's really rewarding. Sometimes we have people that come in, down on their luck, and we're able to help them," said Sirmans. "It's a good thing."

Sirman sees friendships develop between the seniors, and that they have all become like an extended family to her.

The Choctaw Nation community centers are truly about community.

Whether it's for seniors participating in games or if a tribal member needs help, that's what the center is for.

A list of Choctaw Community Centers can be found below.

Photo by Christian Toews

District 7 Councilman Joey Tom talks with tribal members at the 2024 Thanksgiving meal in Tvshkahomma. Community center events often serve as their main source of tribal connection.

Choctaw Nation Photos

Choctaw elders have the unique opportunity to attend parties, events and meals at Choctaw community centers throughout the reservation. From weekly lunches to Super Bowl parties, these community centers offer a fellowship and fun.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
COMMUNITY CENTERS

Antlers | 302 SW 2nd St Antlers, OK 74523 | (580) 298-5450
Atoka | 1625 W Liberty Rd Atoka, OK 74525 | (580) 889-6147
Battiest | 3839 Battiest Pickens Rd Broken Bow, OK 74728 | (580) 920-7061
Broken Bow | 1346 E Martin Luther King Dr Broken Bow, OK 74728 | (580) 920-7062
Coalgate | 103 E California Ave Coalgate, OK 74538 | (580) 927-3641
Crowder | 707 Bond St Crowder, OK 74430 | (580) 920-3124
Durant | 2746 Big Lots Pkwy Durant, OK 74701 | (580) 924-7810
Hugo | 1304 W Victor St Hugo, OK 74743 | (580) 326-7551
Idabel | 2408 E Lincoln Rd Idabel, OK 74745 | (580) 286-6116
McAlester | 3274 Afullota Hina McAlester, OK 74501 | (918) 423-1016 ext. 5220
Poteau | 208 B St Poteau, OK 74953 | (918) 647-9324
Smithville | 39618 N US Hwy 259 Smithville, OK 74957 | (580) 920-7063
Spiro | 19400 Aes Rd Spiro, OK 74959 | (918) 962-3832
Stigler | 2208 E Main St Stigler, OK 74462 | (918) 967-2398
Talihina |100 Railroad St Talihina, OK 74571 | (918) 567-2106
Tushkahoma | 10 Council House Rd Tuskahoma, OK 74574 | (918) 569-4465
Wilburton | 1455 NW Highway 2 Wilburton, OK 74578 | (918) 465-2389
Wright City | 5718 Rodeo Grounds Rd Wright City, OK 74766 | (580) 981-7064

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
Antlers 539.316.5089	Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Atoka 539.316.2050	Daily | Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Battiest 580.920.7061	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Broken Bow 539.316.3011	Daily | Monday – Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Durant 539.316.3517	Daily | Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Heavener 539.316.4784	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Hugo 539.316.5089	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:00 pm
Idabel 539.316.4313	Daily | Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
McAlester 539.316.2431	Daily | Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Poteau 539.316.4606	Daily | Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Smithville 580.920.7063	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 580.745.4330	1st Tuesday – Boswell 3rd Tuesday – Coalgate 4th Tuesday - Clayton	9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Scan to learn more about the program.

Choctaw Nation Health Services

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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

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

December 2025

All markets open weekdays, December 1-23
Closed: December 24, 25, 30 & 31
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation
Participants can request a calendar at their location.

ANTLERS 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 5
BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 10
DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 18
MCALESTER 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 9
POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431
FOOD DEMO DECEMBER 16

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

December 1	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
December 2	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
December 3	Stigler	By Appointment
December 5	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
December 5	Coalgate	12:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
December 8	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
December 9	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
December 10	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
December 12	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
December 16	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m
December 17	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
December 30	Crowder	By Appointment

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

Choctaw Powwow and Heritage Festival

DURANT, OKLA. – The Choctaw Nation had a successful kick off to Native November with its annual powwow and Choctaw Heritage Festival held Oct. 31 through Nov. 2.

Visitors and dancers from across the world joined in to watch, shop, celebrate, learn and share Indigenous cultures.

Check out just some of the photos from this years events.

Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Tribal Council members pose for a photo with the producers of "Drew's World" and the star of the upcoming animated film.

Photos by Kendra Germany-Wall

Shopping is a crowd favorite at the Powwow, with work from Choctaw artists like Meridith Cantrell (left) and Sherri Graza (right) for sale.

Photos by Christian Toews

Choctaw elders sing hymns during the Choctaw Heritage Festival at the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant.

Photo by Krislan Garside

Choctaw elders take part in grand entry at the Choctaw Powwow held at the Choctaw Event Center in Durant.

Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Tribal Councilmembers take a photo with various royalty at the Choctaw Powwow.

Photo by Sherrie Stewart

OK Choctaw Tribal Alliance members traveled from OKC to visit the Choctaw Powwow.

Visitors were able to take part in numerous workshops during the Choctaw Heritage Festival, including demonstrations from Dr. Charles Shadle (left photo) and D.G. Smalling (right photo).

Photo by Mike Mushulatubbe Simpson

Actors JP Gauna, Aminah Nieves and Mike Mushulatubbe Simpson reunite at the powwow on Nov. 1. The trio worked together on the set of Taylor Sheridan's "1923."

Photos by Krislan Garside

Dancers take part in grand entry at the 2025 Choctaw Powwow in Durant on Sunday, Nov. 1.

Choctaw beliefs and religion, Part II

By Chris Jennings and Shelia Kirven

In the November issue of the Biskinik, we discussed how traditional Choctaw beliefs are still practiced by some tribal members despite a strong Christian presence.

According to a 2023 Public Religion Research Institute survey, 63% of Native Americans identify as Christian, most as Protestant. About 7% are non-Christian, 5% affiliate with other non-Christian religions, and 31% identify as nonreligious.

Today, the Choctaw Nation identifies as a Christian nation. Prayers are offered before meals and tribal events, Christian hymns are sung, and tribal members worship together at community gatherings.

Editor's Note: The views expressed in this story are those of Olin Williams and Les Williston and do not represent the Choctaw Nation as a whole.

In the Beginning

Spanish and French Catholics were the first Christians to contact Native Americans.

Williams said Roman Catholicism was the first form of Christianity introduced to Native people by the Spanish, presenting them with a new type of deity.

He noted that because Catholicism is a monotheistic faith emphasizing the mother-son relationship, it resonated with Native people.

Although the Spanish shared Christian beliefs, they were primarily focused on taking resources. Because of this, and due to distrust, the Choctaws retained their original beliefs.

About 300 years later, the English introduced Protestant Christianity, which emphasized that all people were created equal. Williams said Protestant teachings introduced the concept of the Father and the Son.

He said the English felt God had blessed the Natives with resources, but they believed those resources were not being utilized in ways they considered beneficial. Because of this, the English sought to become a kind of paternal figure to Native people, even calling themselves "the Great White Father in Washington" in treaties.

This attitude created a divide. "While Euro-Americans strived for dominance over the world they lived in, the Native Americans strived to live in harmony with the environment in reverence of living things," said Williams.

Williams said Europeans interpreted the Bible as teaching that God gave the world for their use, shaping their view of natural resources.

In contrast, Native people venerate all living things and share what has been given to them. Williams gave the following example.

"When they see a tree, they see its value," said Williams. "It could be a boat. It could be furniture. They see it differently."

Native people regarded all things as living beings and lived freely, with a shared understanding that what had been given by God was to be shared.

Ceremony and Fellowship

One traditional expression of gratitude is the Green Corn Ceremony, a ceremony that has remained largely unchanged for about 1,000 years.

"When corn first came to the southeast, it was given to us by a deity called the Corn Woman," said Williston. "After that, the admonition was that we have corn now, and it was given to support our tribe, our families and to feed us. Now it feeds the whole world."

George Catlin's, Green Corn Dance - Minatarrees, 1861, National Gallery of Art

Traditional ceremonies such as the Green Corn Ceremony and sweat lodges have played a significant role in Choctaw life, with sweat lodges dating back nearly 1,000 years in northeastern Alabama.

A March 2010 Iti Fabvssa article described the Green Corn Ceremony as "the most important social and spiritual event in the traditional seasonal round of the Choctaw and other Tribes."

Less is known about the Choctaw ceremony compared with other Southeastern tribes because details were considered sacred and many specifics were withheld.

According to a 1937 account by Lucy Cherry, the Green Corn Ceremony began a week earlier with hunting and harvesting and lasted four days. The first day involved setting up camp and sharing food. The second day included fasting and cleansing by the Alikchi, or Choctaw doctor. The fast was broken on the third day, followed by dancing after an opening prayer. The fourth day focused on breaking camp and visiting with family and friends.

Fellowship is central to both Christian church gatherings and traditional ceremonies.

Traditional ceremonies are typically shared through word of mouth.

According to Williston, these events are not promoted publicly, but elders can guide those who ask.

"If you're a Native, you can find it," Williston said.

Life After Death

Photo by Christian Toews

Christian beliefs hold that the afterlife is spent in God's presence. According to Williston, traditional beliefs also include a next world shaped by how a person lived.

"In Native culture, there's a next world," said Williston. "What's going to happen over there, just might be determined by how you live this world, and that's how I believe."

According to Williston, many consider Jesus Christ a European construct created to account for one's sins, while in Native culture, saving one's soul is determined by one's actions.

"Who has the ability to save your soul? That's you. By your actions. If you're going to go through life and be a bad person, you're going to have a bad life. Maybe here, maybe next world," Williston said. "You'll be judged."

Growing in Faith

Williams believes people can combine some of both belief systems but must know which one guides their life.

"I'm a Christian and I minister the Word, but sometimes my flesh wants to go back to watch a good stickball game or a good dance or something. But I know from within when not to let that addict me," said Williams. "If our tribe keeps going back, we're going to step behind every time. Our young people, even the church, need to advance."

He said some churches stay rooted in Old Testament teachings instead of moving toward New Testament ideas about grace.

The New Testament teaches believers to deny self-righteousness and love others by grace.

"It's the soul that you want God to change, but the law wants to change the outside appearance," said Williams.

Williams says issues such as homosexuality and race have existed throughout history. However, for him, "it's how much maturity spiritually we have or how infant we are in our spirituality."

Photo by Christian Toews

Williston said each person has a relationship with the Creator, and that relationship develops between the individual and the Creator.

"We're all born knowing right from wrong," said Williston. "We're taught that much. It's inside of us."

According to Williston, there are no conservative or liberal divisions in traditional belief, and " not a lot of difference between the traditional belief systems across this country."

Similarities in Beliefs

When asked whether he sees similarities between traditional religion and Christianity, Williams said, "I think everything is similar because we're trying to have a deity."

According to Williams, it is human nature to seek a greater power.

"We're a people of need and affection, and that's when religion came. We need to feel accepted, to feel there is a higher power," said Williams. "That's why all races, all cultures have some kind of religion."

According to Williston, Christianity incorporates elements of Indigenous societies.

"They've taken part of the Indigenous society there and parts of their beliefs and put it into their Christianity to form a big system that will draw more people in," said Williston.

As the beliefs and practices of Choctaws continue to evolve and differ from person to person, there remains more to learn for those who wish to explore.

Readers can find more information about Choctaws and religion by visiting the Iti Fabvssa section of biskinik.com. To hear traditional Choctaw ceremonial songs, visit www.biskinik.com.

One Choctaw version of the Great Flood

From the February 1996 BISHINIK, page 7

In the far distant ages of the past, the people, whom the Great Spirit had created, became so wicked that he resolved to sweep them all from the earth, except Oklatabashih (People's mourner) and his family, who alone did that which was good. He told Oklatabashih to build a large boat into which he should go with his family and also to take into the boat a male and female of all the animals living upon the earth.

He did as he was commanded by the Great Spirit. But as he went out in the forest to bring in the birds, he was unable to catch a pair of biskinik (sapsuckers), fitukhak (yellow hammers), and bakbak (large red-headed woodpeckers); these birds were so quick in hopping around from one side to the other of the trees upon which they clung with their sharp and strong claws, that Oklatabashih found it was impossible for him to catch them, and therefore he gave up the chase, and returned to the boat; the door closed, the rain began to fall increasing in volume for many days and nights, until thousands of people and animals perished.

Then it suddenly ceased and utter darkness covered the face of the earth for a long time, while the people and animals that still survived grouped here and there in the fearful gloom. Suddenly far in the distant north was seen a long streak of light.

For the rest of the Choctaw Flood story go to www.biskinik.com

Choctaw Nation honors Outstanding Elders for dedication and service to its community

DURANT, Okla. (November 5, 2025) — The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma honored two distinguished tribal members during its annual Outstanding Elder Celebration, recognizing their exceptional dedication to community service, leadership, and the preservation of Choctaw culture and values.

This year's honorees are Jerry McKinney of District 3 (Smithville) and Mary Aaron of District 2 (Broken Bow). Both individuals exemplify the Choctaw Nation's core values of faith, family, and culture through their lifelong commitment to serving others and strengthening their communities.

Known for his selflessness and compassionate nature, Jerry McKinney, the outstanding male elder, is recognized throughout his community for his commitment to helping others. Whether assisting elders at the Smithville Community Center, delivering firewood to community members in need, or providing transportation for those without vehicles, McKinney continually demonstrates humility and kindness through action.

He volunteers his time freely, offering support to the sick and homebound by performing household tasks such as carrying heavy pots, starting fires for warmth, or even taking home laundry to wash himself. McKinney's quiet generosity and willingness to serve have made him a cornerstone of the Smithville community.

"Jerry's dedication to others represents the very best of the Choctaw spirit," said his nomination. "His humility, good humor, and heart for service make him an inspiration to all who know him."

Mary Aaron, the outstanding female elder, has long been a pillar of strength and leadership in District 2, serving as secretary of the district's fundraising committee and helping organize monthly community events. A fluent speaker of the Choctaw language, Aaron actively promotes cultural preservation through music, poetry, and fellowship with other elders.

In addition to her community service, Aaron is a talented artisan and caregiver. She creates handmade blankets and pillows for new parents, homebound elders, and cancer patients, often accompanying her visits with prayer, scripture, Choctaw hymns, and her well-known fried pies. Her compassion extends beyond physical gifts, offering comfort, connection, and cultural continuity to those she serves.

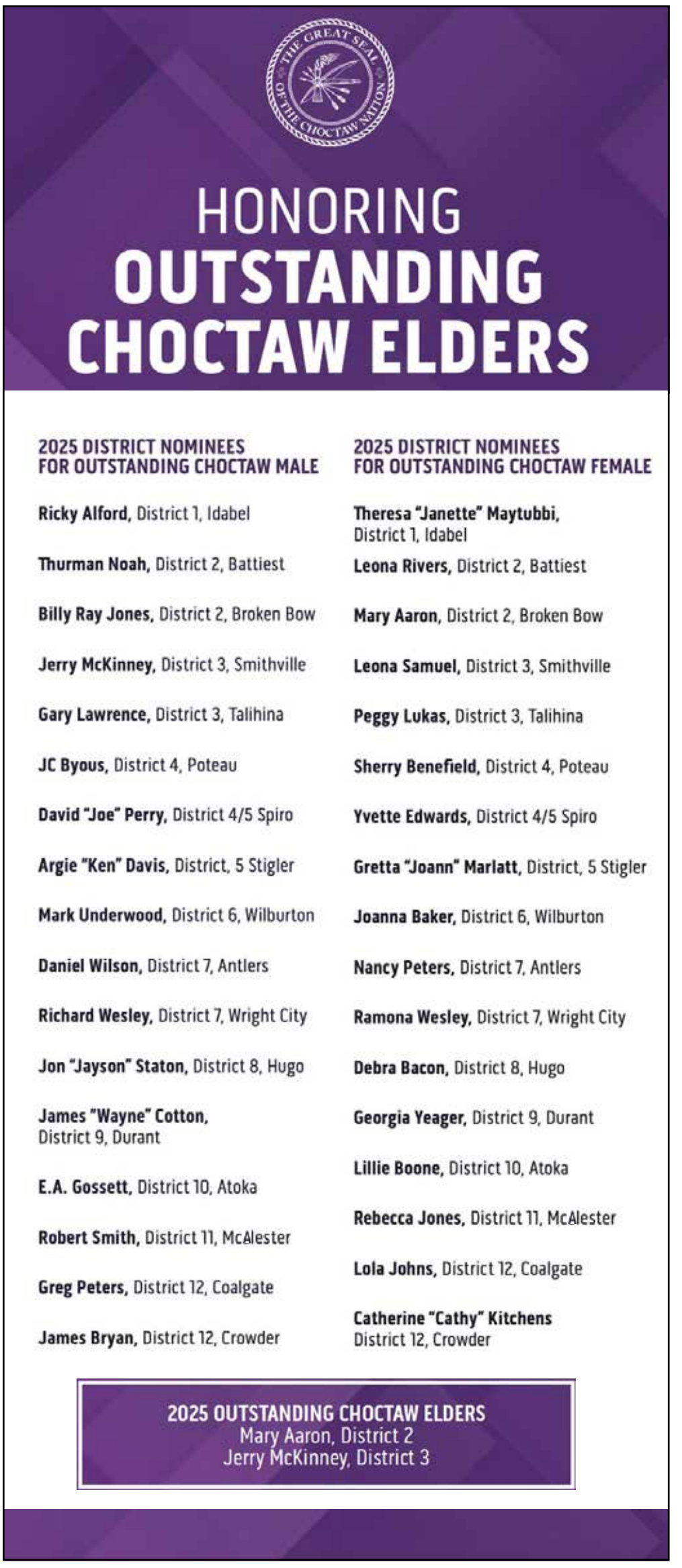
Aaron is also an accomplished writer whose poetry has been published in the Biskinik, the Choctaw Nation's newspaper. Her work reflects deep faith and gratitude, and she attributes her many blessings to Chihowa (God), giving thanks for her family, her husband, the Choctaw Nation, and the enduring power of the Choctaw language.

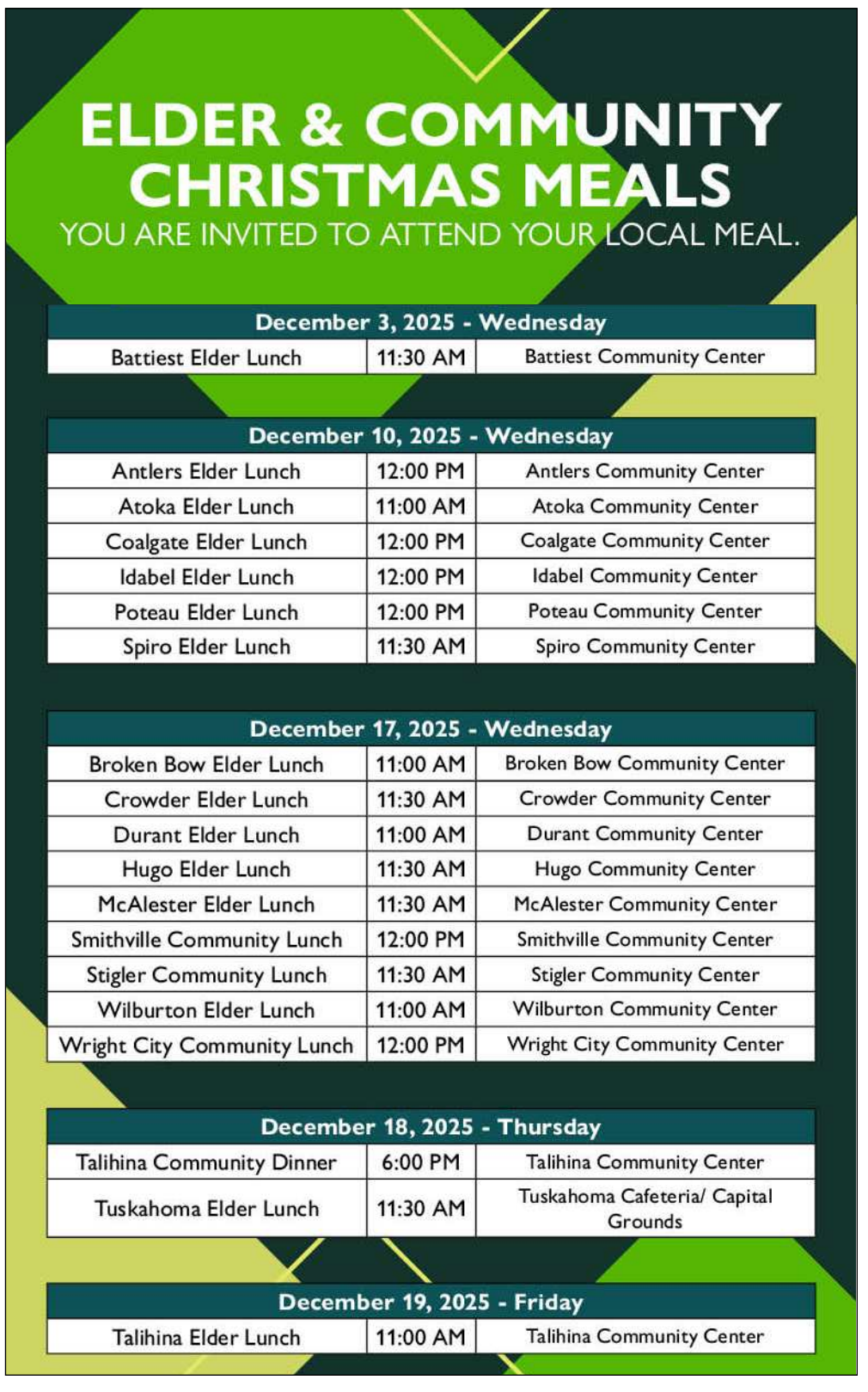
"Mary's faith-driven service and commitment to preserving our language and culture embody the essence of what it means to be Choctaw," said her nomination. "Her example inspires others to live with purpose and generosity."

"The wisdom and generosity of our elders are the foundation of who we are as a Nation," said Chief Gary Batton. "We are proud to honor Jerry McKinney and Mary Aaron for their compassion, service, and leadership. Their contributions remind us all to live out the Choctaw values of faith, family, and culture each day."

Photo by Kendra Sikes

Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr, Tribal Council Member Eddie Bohanan, Jerry McKinney, Mary Aaron, Tribal Council Member Tony Ward, and Chief Gary Batton pause to celebrate our outstanding elders of the year.





BISKINIK
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ◆ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ◆

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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.