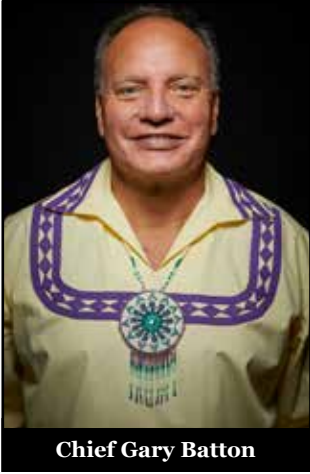






# Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

## Choctaw Takes Ag Seriously; FFA Honors our Tribe

I recently became the proud recipient of the 2025 Honorary American FFA Degree. According to the FFA, the award is given to those who advance agricultural education and FFA through outstanding personal commitment.

For those not familiar with the FFA, it is an organization that works to enhance the lives of youth through agricultural education. I am proud to say I was the FFA President of our Clayton, Oklahoma chapter when I was in high school.

Once you are engrained within the FFA organization, you never truly take the blue coat off. Many of the lessons I learned as a high school FFA student continue to be valuable to me to this day.

This honor from the FFA is not just a personal accolade, but it was earned through the hard work of our Choctaw leadership and associates who further the progress of our agriculture endeavours.

Whether it be the annual Choctaw Livestock Show, our beef production, pecan harvests, or any of the many other ways we create sustainable agriculture right here in Southeastern Oklahoma – the Choctaw Nation is an agricultural leader.

For fiscal year 2025, here are just a few statistics that we are proud of that reflect the importance of agriculture to the Choctaw Nation:

- Choctaw Beef Revenue: More than \$2.8 million
- Pecan Revenue: More than \$400,000
- Choctaw Stock Show Contributions: More than \$1.1 million across 37 area shows
- Also, of the \$4.5 million USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance grant, we have used more than \$2.6 million and have served more than 11,000 tribal members with more than 170,000 pounds of Choctaw beef and more than 80,200 pounds of Choctaw pecans.

### Choctaw Beef Sales

The Travel Plazas and Country Markets sell Choctaw Beef as well as a location in Caney and a not-yet-open store in Atoka. Choctaw Beef is also served in CNO Food & Beverage venues in Grant and Pocola and is also featured in certain Roots offerings. We have been approached by Texas Live (Texas Rangers), South Korean importers, Dallas-area restaurant associations, and importers from as far away as the Far East who have sought us out because of our reputation and unmatched product quality.

I hope you can see why I'm so proud of our agriculture program and leadership in these vital businesses across our reservation. We are constantly looking for new and sustainable ways to feed our tribe. It is our duty and honor as Choctaw to provide new and better ways to enhance our food chain and to take care of our people when the federal government can't or won't.

While it was a great honor to have received the 2025 Honorary American FFA Degree, make no mistake, I view this honor as one that belongs to our tribe and the hard-working associates who make our Choctaw agriculture program the best of the best.

Yakohe and God Bless!



**LEARN MORE AND ENTER**



**CHOCTAW NATION**  
**LIVESTOCK SHOW**  
JANUARY 31 – FEBRUARY 1, 2026

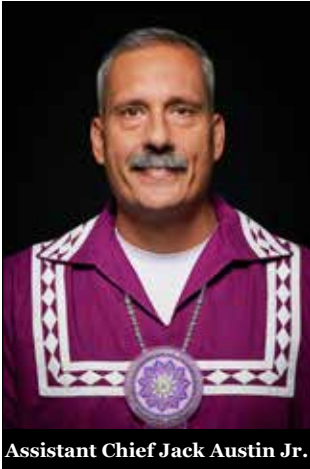
## Did You Know?



The Biskinik is the official newspaper of the Choctaw Nation and is named after the sacred sapsucker bird, which served as a traditional messenger in Choctaw culture.

The Biskinik has been published since 1978 and remains one of the longest-running tribal newspapers in the United States.

Each month, the paper mails more than 70,000 issues to tribal members worldwide and is available free online at its recently redesigned website, [choctawnation.com](http://choctawnation.com).



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

## Be safe this winter

As you can tell, Old Man Winter has blown into the Choctaw Nation, and temperatures have dropped. Whatever the weather is like today, rest assured, we are not promised it will stay that way, as we may experience all four seasons in one week this time of the year across the reservation. The calendar, though, tells us it is a good time to talk about winter weather safety.

Choctaw's "First 72 and You" program is where you can go for tips to keep you warm and safe for the winter months when our temperatures do reflect our calendar.

The Choctaw Nation launched the First 72 and You campaign to offer up tips for preparedness during any kind of emergency. Did you know that the first 72 hours of a disaster are critical to survival? We want to help your household have a plan and be as prepared as possible for the first 72 hours of

an emergency or disaster. To access this information, I urge you to go to [choctawnation.com/about/first-72-on-you/](http://choctawnation.com/about/first-72-on-you/) to help you and your family stay safe.

The website offers a link to [ready.gov](http://ready.gov), the federal government's emergency preparedness website that offers tips for winter preparedness. For instance:

Winter storms create a higher risk of car accidents, hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning, and heart attacks from overexertion. Winter storms, including blizzards, can bring extreme cold, freezing rain, snow, ice and high winds.

### Pay Attention to Warnings

Pay attention to weather reports and warnings of freezing weather and winter storms. Listen for emergency information and alerts. Sign up for your community's warning system. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio also provide emergency alerts.

### Preparing for Winter Weather

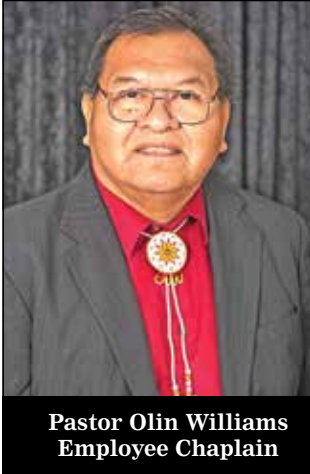
Prepare your home to keep out the cold with insulation, caulking and weather stripping. Learn how to keep pipes from freezing. Install and test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors with battery backups. Gather supplies in case you need to stay home for several days without power. Keep in mind each person's specific needs, including medication. Remember the needs of your pets. Have extra batteries for radios and flashlights. If you are unable to afford your heating costs, weatherization or energy-related home repairs, contact the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for help.

### In Case of Emergency

Be prepared for winter weather at home, at work and in your car. Create an emergency supply kit for your car. Include jumper cables, sand, a flashlight, warm clothes, blankets, bottled water and non-perishable snacks. Keep a full tank of gas.

Just a small amount of preparation can keep all our Chahta family safe this winter. Like our ancestors before us, preparation is key to beating the bitter cold that the winter months will bring! Whether our winter this year is lengthy and harsh or just a few weeks and not severe at all, we want you to be prepared. Please take advantage of the programs and services the Choctaw Nation has to offer to help your families stay warm and safe this winter.

Stay safe and Chi Pisa La Chike!



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

## The Eyes of the Lord

"The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." (Deuteronomy 11:12) The Israelites were almost into the Promised Land. God knows what they will face during the year. God inspires Moses to speak to the people at the beginning of the year.

In 1451 B.C., the Jews begin the year in the wilderness in wandering and suffering, but during this year, they will cross the Jordon River. This same year, they will fight and win the battle of Jericho. This same year, 1451, they will lose the battle of Ai because of the secret sin of Achan. The same year, 1451, they will conquer the land of Canaan. In 1451, they will wander in the wilderness, cross the Jordon, be victorious at Jericho, get defeated at Ai, and conquer the land of Canaan all in one year. God is revealing through

Moses that this year, the eyes of the Lord are upon his people. And so it is true for us today.

The keyword is "always." We may be in the wilderness this year. God doesn't spot-check his children in the wilderness; He always watches.

We would like to start the New Year with mirth and new hopes, and fresh beginnings. However, wilderness may darken our sunshine with tears at the Babyland Cemetery. Divorce may shatter your dreams of a home and family. You may shed some tears in the hospital room for a loved one who has just been diagnosed with a terminal disease. But the eyes of the Lord are always upon you from the beginning of the year, even unto the end. This year will also bring you victories of Canaan land. Perhaps you will be so proud of a child who is graduating from school. Maybe your eyes will tear up to witness a daughter becoming a bride and watch as the little girl you knew becomes a woman. Perhaps a job promotion or the purchase of a new home will inspire you to experience the security of your efforts. The eyes of the Lord will be upon you from the beginning to the end of the year.

Zechariah 4:10, "For who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth."

God also searches to see the small things. God notices your feelings deep behind the public courtesy smile. God sees your feelings of rejection, your disappointments, your quiet achievements. Your child may not be a sports star because it's difficult when you were born with limitations. But the child participates in the Special Olympics and wins by participation, and in that small crowd, he is a hero. The eyes of the Lord are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

## Do you need a loan to grow your business?

We have lending support available to Choctaw Tribal Members nationwide.



**Choctaw Nation**  
SSBCI Capital Fund



Scan to learn more about the Fund.





District 4

Halito from District 4!

I hope everyone enjoyed a wonderful Christmas season and is ready to welcome the new year. The end of 2025 was a busy and joy-filled time across District 4, with our communities coming together to celebrate accomplishments, traditions, and one another.

In October, our 4-H students proudly showcased their hard work at the Tulsa State Fair. We are incredibly proud of their dedication and achievements.

We also had the honor of celebrating Charlene Dunn's 97th birthday at the Poteau Senior Lunch—an inspiring milestone.

Both the Spiro and Poteau community centers hosted fun-filled Halloween events for the children, complete with candy, costumes, and plenty of smiles. Our associates and volunteers did an outstanding job creating memorable experiences for our kids. The Head Start students also visited the community center to trick-or-treat, always a highlight for everyone involved.

Senior News

Our Poteau seniors enjoyed a lively Halloween costume contest, while the senior volleyball team gathered for dinner and fellowship.

At the Outstanding Elders Banquet in Durant, District 4 was represented by nominees JC Byous and Sherry Benefield from Poteau, and Joe Perry and Yvette Edwards from Spiro.

Each month, Poteau seniors hold their First Friday Indian Taco Sale, and this season they also enjoyed special trip to the Ranch Restaurant and to the Capitol to view the Christmas lights.

Spiro seniors celebrated the season with a memorable trip to Branson to enjoy Christmas lights and shows.

Veterans & Community Celebrations

We honored our veterans in both Spiro and Poteau, presenting each with a Choctaw veteran coat and cap in gratitude for their service.

Thanksgiving lunches across the district were filled with fellowship, gratitude, and community spirit.

In November, we celebrated Native American Heritage Month. I attended Poteau School's celebration, and it was wonderful to see our students participating and proudly representing their culture.

December Christmas Events

December brought even more joy to District 4. Heavener, Spiro, and Poteau hosted their annual Christmas toy giveaways for local tribal children. Santa joined in the fun and personally presented each child with a toy, making the day truly special.

Our community centers also held Christmas lunches, offering a wonderful opportunity for families, elders, and staff to come together, share a meal, and enjoy the Christmas spirit.

The Dale Cox Community Center is nearing completion! We are looking forward to moving in soon! It is going to be a great facility for District 4.

As we move into the new year, I look forward to more opportunities to support and celebrate the people of District 4. Yakoke for allowing me to serve you.



District 3

Halito from District 3!

As we reflect on the final months of the year, I am reminded of how meaningful it is to gather as a community, celebrate our culture, and support one another across District 3 and the Choctaw Nation. From fall festivals to holiday meals, the past season has been filled with connection, tradition, and gratitude. I am honored to share a recap of the events, recognitions, and partnerships that made this season so special for our tribal members.

In September, we kicked things off with the CHR Fall Festival held at the McAlester Expo Center. This annual event gives tribal members an opportunity to come together, visit with various Choctaw Nation programs, and enjoy fellowship. We were treated to special music from the CHRs themselves and surrounded by good company throughout the day. It was a wonderful event, and I want to extend my appreciation to the CHRs for their hard work in making it such a success.

October officially began our end-of-year festivities. We hosted traditional meals at both the Talihina and Smithville Community Centers, with local cooks preparing food for awesome turnouts in both communities. Our Kids Halloween Carnivals in Talihina and Smithville were also a highlight, and I truly enjoyed seeing all the children and families come out for an evening filled with candy and fun.

This year's District 3 Outstanding Elder nominees were Gary Lawrence and Peggy Lukas from Talihina and Leona Samuel and Jerry McKinney from Smithville. Jerry McKinney was honored as the overall Outstanding Elder of the Year. Each nominee was recognized for their exceptional involvement in the community, dedication to cultural engagement, and commitment to helping others without being asked. Congratulations to all four nominees. You make District 3 proud!

In November, we held our annual Thanksgiving Community Meals in Heavener, Talihina, and Smithville. It was great to see so many gather in fellowship, and I hope everyone enjoyed the meals prepared by Three Rivers Meat Company and the Choctaw Nation Senior Nutrition staff. I want to extend my sincere thanks to all the staff members who volunteered their time to prepare and serve meals to our tribal members. Your service does not go unnoticed.

I was also honored to present checks to the Town of Heavener, the Town of Talihina, and the Leflore County Commissioners. I am proud of the strong partnerships we continue to build between the Choctaw Nation and our local communities, despite those who would prefer to see us divided.

December brought our annual Kids Christmas parties, Christmas community meals, and Christmas Elder luncheons in Talihina, Smithville, and Heavener. I appreciate everyone who came out to celebrate, and I hope you all enjoyed the meals and activities.

As we move into a new year, I hope each of you had a blessed and joyful holiday season. Thank you for your continued involvement, support, and commitment to strengthening District 3 and the Choctaw Nation. I look forward to serving you in the year ahead and wish you all many blessings in 2026.

Yakoke,  
Eddie Bohanan, District 3 Councilman



Top Left: 4-H students on their way to the Tulsa State Fair. Top Right: Charlene Dunn's birthday celebration. Bottom left: Poteau High School students Shelby Reece and Princess Tenley Reece dressed in regalia for Native American Heritage Month. Bottom Right: Sherry Benefield, JC Byous and Yvette Edwards, nominees at the Outstanding Elders Banquet.

Oklahoma City Tribal Alliance Christmas Program



Submitted Photo  
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Tribal Council Members attended the Oklahoma City Tribal Alliance Christmas Program Dec 7.

Choctaw earns National Safety Council Award

**DURANT, Okla.** – For the third straight year, the National Safety Council has recognized the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma with the prestigious Occupational Excellence Achievement Award. The Choctaw Nation is the first tribe to receive this award, which recognizes organizations with injury and illness records that are better than or equal to 50% of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for their NAICS code (and have no fatalities during the previous calendar year).

During 2024, employees at CNO's facilities logged more than 21 million work hours without a single fatality and with only 47 incidents leading to

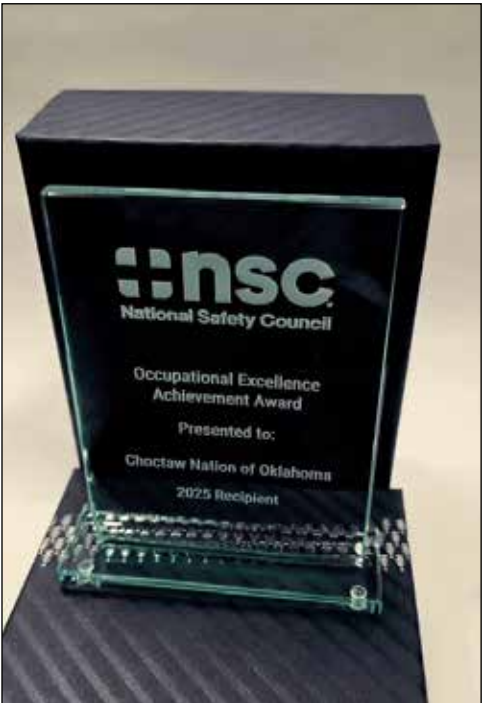


lost workdays. These statistics resulted in a "Facility Total Lost Workday Case Incident Rate" of 0.45, significantly below the NAICS Code 92 industry standard of 2.0.

"I'm so pleased and proud of the commitment to a safe workplace as reflected in being honored with this National Safety Council award for three straight years," Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton says.

Chief Batton points out that in addition to its ongoing safety training, the Choctaw Nation also works to highlight good safety performance with a quarterly safety recognition program led by the Choctaw Nation Occupational Safety and Health team in collaboration with Choctaw Nation work groups, departments, and divisions.

"This daily emphasis on safe work helps our associates understand the importance of safety and drives home the essential role that having a safe workplace plays in the success of the Choctaw Nation," said Batton. "Congratulations to our associates for working safely to earn this important safety recognition milestone for our team members and tribe and helping highlight another reason why the Choctaw Nation is an 'Employer of Choice.'"



Choctaw Nation Photo  
The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma recently won the National Safety Council's Occupational Excellence Achievement Award.

*Looking for a career with a NSC award-winning organization?  
Opportunities are available across the Choctaw Nation, including some remote and hybrid positions.  
Visit [careers.choctawnation.com](https://careers.choctawnation.com) to view current openings.*

### COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL  
SESSION AGENDA  
November 21, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTES

3. ROLL CALL

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. Approve Funding for the Investment in a Private Equity Real Estate Fund

b. Approve Funding for the Purchase of an Equity Investment in a Sports, Entertainment and Hospitality Venture

5. OTHER NEW BUSINESS

6. OLD BUSINESS

7. ADJOURNMENT

8. CLOSING PRAYER

All votes passed unanimously

Editor's Note: As of press time, the December Council meeting had not taken place. The minutes will be available online and in the next issue of the Biskinik, along with the First Language Speaker and Veteran of the Month.

## Want to work for your Tribe?

There's something for you here.

JOIN US FOR THE CHOCTAW NATION  
TRIBAL MEMBER RESOURCE FAIR

FEBRUARY 10 | 2 PM TO 4 PM  
DURANT CHOCTAW COMMUNITY CENTER

**Choctaw CAREERS**  
Apply at [Careers.ChoctawNation.com](https://careers.choctawnation.com)

CHOCTAW PROUD

CHOCTAW CAREERS



## Choctaw author and historian passes away

By Shelia Kirven

Clara Sue Kidwell, Ph.D., 84, passed away Nov. 26, 2025.

Kidwell wasn't just an author, historian, teacher, feminist, and academic scholar. She was someone who left a significant legacy. Her life was dedicated to educating others about Native Americans. She was Choctaw and Chippewa.

Kidwell earned all her degrees from the University of Oklahoma.

At the time she completed her doctorate, it was rare for a Native American woman to achieve such a milestone.

She became a leading proponent of Native American studies at universities nationwide. Her academic career included teaching at the Kansas City Art Institute; the University of Washington; Haskell



Indian Junior College; the University of Minnesota; the University of California, Berkeley; the University of Oklahoma; Dartmouth; and Bacone College.

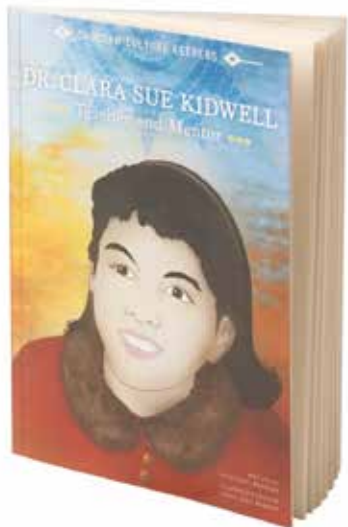
Kidwell also served as associate director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.; director of OU's Native American studies program; and founding director of the American Indian Center at the University of North Carolina. She later served as interim operations director of the Five Civilized Tribes Museum before retiring.

She authored numerous books, many of which have become key teaching tools in Native American studies.

In 2022, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Society for Ethnohistory for her contributions to the field.

In 2023, the Choctaw Cultural Center published "Dr. Clara Sue Kidwell, Teacher and Mentor," highlighting her national leadership in American Indian studies. Her work will remain influential and indispensable in academia for years to come.

Memorial gifts may be made to the Native American Student Association, 1501 Ash St., Owasso, OK 74055.



Choctaw Nation Photo

"Choctaw Culture Keepers: Dr. Clara Sue Kidwell" is available for purchase at hvshi.choctawculturalcenter.com.

## Choctaw Nation loses two well known members

By Shelia Kirven

The Choctaw Nation is saddened to report the loss of two centenarian tribal members in November, Gilbert "Choc" Charleston and Ruby Pearl Young. The two passed one day apart. Both were exceptionally strong, deeply loved and respected elders who served as role models

and culture keepers.

The Biskinik featured both elders in its November 2025 issue, and we wanted to inform our readers of their passing. The Biskinik staff would like to extend our condolences to both the Young and Charleston families.

To see more of these elders' stories, visit biskinik.com.



### Ruby Pearl Young

Ruby Pearl (Hopkins) Young, born Aug. 14, 1925, died Nov. 26, 2025, a little more than two months after celebrating her 100th birthday.

Young grew up in a large family and attended Goodland School near Hugo, Okla., where she learned songs and Bible verses in the Choctaw language. All but two of her children were born at home. She was a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother, and she continued tending a garden through last year. She was also a dedicated seamstress and homemaker.

A woman of strong faith, Young cherished her family and friends and remained active throughout her life. Her motto was simple: treat people right.



### Gilbert "Choc" Charleston

Gilbert "Choc" Charleston died on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 2025, at age 101. He lived with courage, humility and a deep love for family, service and Choctaw tradition.

A World War II veteran, Charleston helped liberate Europe as a Sherman tank driver. Though he faced hardship and prejudice, he served with quiet strength, gaining wisdom from each challenge. He remained proud of the bonds he formed with fellow service members and worked throughout his life for his community, his country and for Oklahoma.

Known for his dignity and resilience, he often emphasized the importance of education and service. He once said the world would be better if people "would love our neighbors a little more than we do now."

## OBITUARIES

### Roger Ed Coley

Roger Ed Coley, 49, passed away Oct. 22, 2025.

Roger was born May 9, 1976, in Fort Smith, Ark., to Joe Ed Coley and Mary Frances (Mackey) Coley.

He was preceded in death by his grandparents Rufus and Lela (Yoda) Coley, and Raymond and Frances (Sam) Mackey.

Roger is survived by his wife Andrea Coley; children Melanie Pohl and Matthew Simons, Raven Coley, VeAndre McDaniel, Alexa Coley, Isaach Coley, Kaila Lawson, and Kinsay Lawson; his parents; father-in-law and mother-in-law Milton and Maria Montes; sisters Diane Coley and Heather Coley; sisters-in-law Angela (James) Burleson and JoAnne Sanchez; brother-in-law Milton Montes Jr.; nephew Ranes Riddle; aunts Laura Mackey and Tina Mackey; and numerous cousins, extended family, and many dear friends.



### Carla Sue Kidwell

Dr. Clara Sue Kidwell, 84, passed away Nov. 26, 2025.

Dr. Kidwell was born July 8, 1941, in Tahlequah, Okla., to Hardin Milton and Martha Evelyn Kidwell.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and nephew Steven Hatfield.

Dr. Kidwell is survived by her brother John Kidwell and spouse Barbara; sister Mona Hatfield and spouse Bill; nephews Chris Kidwell and spouse Laura, and William Hatfield and spouse Robin; nieces Vicky Sharma and spouse Sumit, and Brandi Fledler and spouse Zach; and great-nephews and great-nieces Micah Kidwell, Will and Ben Hatfield, Arjun and Clara Sharma, and Viktor Fledler.



### Patricia Kaye Choate

Patricia Kaye Choate, 70, passed away Oct. 19, 2025.

Kaye was born June 11, 1955, in Talihina, Okla., to Culbertson Noah Sr. and Ora Mae Watson Noah.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers Culbertson Noah Jr., Donald Noah, and Johnson Noah; and grandson Malachi Choate.

Kaye is survived by her husband Floyd Choate; sons Anthony Choate, Johnny Choate, and Jerold Choate and spouse Kristie; daughter Pam Estrada and spouse Lyndell Ludlow; brother Arnold Noah; sisters Doris Choate and spouse Leon, Darlene Estrada, Diantha Noah, and Angela Noah; grandchildren Tiara Estrada and spouse Alyssa, Dakota Estrada, Jordan Estrada and spouse Kyla, Addyson Choate, and Sabrina Choate; great-grandchildren Afton Estrada, Acen Estrada, Solomon Estrada, Lylah Estrada, Atrous Estrada and Lula Estrada; along with several nieces, nephews, and a host of other family and friends.



### Gilbert Mike Charleston

Gilbert Mike (Choc) Charleston passed through this life at 101 years of age on Thanksgiving Day.

He has asked that any family or friends who wish to remember him do so at an informal graveside gathering at the cemetery in Duncan, Oklahoma. His ashes and those of his beloved wife, Billie, will be placed together side by side.



### Sherri Danette Wolfe

Sherri Danette Wolfe, 64, passed away Nov. 9, 2025.

Sherri was born Nov. 9, 1961, in Crescent City, Calif., to Lonnie Joe and Edna Louise (Tramble) Burleson.

She was preceded in death by her father; and grandparents Ruby and Leebert Tramble, Emmett and Emma.

Sherri is survived by husband David Wolfe; sons Jon Wolfe and spouse Lisa, Jeremy Wolfe, and Joseph Wolfe and spouse Nikki; grandchildren Baylee, Haylee, Rylie, Brady, Trevor, Payton, Bentley, Presleigh, and Paislee; great-granddaughter Brynlee; her mother; brother Tony Burleson and spouse Delpha; and several nieces and nephews.



### Joe Lee Mose

Joe Lee Mose, 83, passed Oct. 1, 2025.

Joe was born May 14, 1942, in Oklahoma, to Guss and Mary (Lewis) Mose.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Winston; and sisters Yvonne London and Mary Mae Jaimes.

Joe is survived by sister Wanell Wallace; brothers Joel Lee Mose, David Wallace, and Jerry Wallace; and many devoted friends.



### Ruby Pearl Young

Ruby Pearl Young, 100, passed away Nov. 26, 2025.

Ruby was born Aug. 14, 1925, in Caney, Okla., to Thomas Otto Hopkins and Dora (Wade) Hopkins.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Kenneth Young, children Martha Goodwin and Michael Young; and all her siblings.

Ruby is survived by sons Leonard Young and spouse Donna, Kenny Young and spouse Linda, Robby Young and spouse Debbie, and Tony Young; daughter Donna "Sug" Dickey; 25 grandchildren; numerous great-grandchildren; and extended family and friends.



# CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## APPLY JANUARY 2 - MARCH 1



Scan to learn more about the program.

# 2026 LABOR DAY FESTIVAL TRIBAL MEMBER RV RESERVATION APPLICATION

To secure an RV parking spot, please complete the application and mail it in along with a copy of the front of your Tribal Membership card.

Application for RV Parking at the 2026 Labor Day Festival will begin on January 2, 2026 by mail or scan QR code to submit online.

Remember, only one request per address will be accepted, and no tents will be allowed in RV areas.



Scan the QR code for more information.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma







## Gladys Betsey Sockey celebrates 100th birthday

Gladys Betsey Sockey celebrated her 100th birthday in September, marking a century shaped by faith, family and a lively spirit that still defines her.

She was born Sept. 23, 1925, in Bentley, Oklahoma, to Jesse and Lilly Betsey.

Like many families of that time, the Betseys did not have much, but they made the most of what they had. Gladys recalls growing up with few toys and using glass bottles as baby dolls.

She attended Carter Seminary School in Ardmore through junior high and completed high school at Chilocco Indian School in Newkirk, Oklahoma.

Gladys says her favorite part of school was a simple comfort: “They had toilets.”

Gladys spent her school days playing checkers and basketball.

At Chilocco, a teacher once took several of her drawings and sold them in the city.

Her favorite memory, however, comes from her time at Carter. She recalls sneaking out at night with a friend, Else, by climbing a tree near their dorm window, then making their way to the school garden, known as The Patch, to eat sweet potatoes.

As a young woman, Gladys met the man who would become her husband, Roy Sockey, at the Trianon Ballroom, where Bob Wills, the King of Western Swing, performed.

Gladys loved to dance, especially the jitterbug, and her favorite song remains Glenn Miller’s “In the Mood.”



Gladys and Roy married Dec. 25, 1946. They shared 39 years of marriage before his death in 1985. She often says her favorite thing about him was his gentle nature.

Her long life is marked by a long list of favorites. She loves the movie “Heidi” and its star, Shirley Temple. Birds are her favorite animals. She favors the color blue, especially turquoise and baby blue, and the orange-speckled tiger lily is her favorite flower. According to her family, she still smiles when she remembers Roy’s green GTX, her favorite car.

Strawberry shortcake remains her favorite dessert, and she never turns down a steak sandwich supreme. Gladys also holds close her favorite hymn, “Amazing Grace.”

Gladys loved to travel. If she could go anywhere, she would choose the Himalayas. Her favorite vacation was visiting Sonny Betsey in Oregon, where one of her funniest memories occurred: watching her daughter flip an air mattress.

Gladys credits her longevity to one thing. Prayers, she says, have carried her through every season of her 100 years.

## Drummond rallies other state attorneys general to combat MMIP crisis

**OKLAHOMA CITY (Nov. 26, 2025)** – Attorney General Gentner Drummond is leading 39 state attorneys general in urging Congress to pass the Tribal Warrant Fairness Act, critical legislation that would provide tribal communities with equal access to federal law enforcement resources.

In a letter spearheaded by Drummond, the coalition calls for passage of the legislation introduced by U.S. Sens. Markwayne Mullen, R-Okla., and Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev. The Act would authorize the U.S. Marshals Service to assist tribal law enforcement agencies in locating and recovering missing children and apprehending violent fugitives.

Currently, the Marshals Service can only provide such assistance to state, local and other federal law enforcement agencies.

“Tribal communities deserve equal access to federal law enforcement resources,” Drummond said. “This legislation will help protect Native American children and increase public safety across Oklahoma by ensuring our tribal partners have the skilled assistance of the U.S. Marshals Service when they need it most.”

The letter highlights the urgent need to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP), a crisis that disproportionately affects Native American communities.

“We applaud Congress’s continued efforts



to increase tribal law enforcement agencies’ full access to federal public safety resources,” the letter states. “The Tribal Warrant Fairness Act is an important next step in a multi-government approach to address MMIP and to ensure equal treatment for our tribal partners.”

The Tribal Warrant Fairness Act would expand the U.S. Marshals Service’s authority to include assisting tribal law enforcement in locating missing children, allow tribal law enforcement officers to join the U.S. Marshals Service’s elite Fugitive Apprehension Task Force, enable tribes to locate and apprehend fugitives through task forces and other lawful means, and require consultation with tribes on implementation.

Drummond also noted that Oklahoma has seen firsthand the effectiveness of the Fugitive Apprehension Task Force, with recent arrests including fugitives charged with murder, kidnapping and rape. Fully integrating tribal law enforcement into these task forces will increase the likelihood that fugitives from tribal justice are apprehended and provide more opportunities for advanced training to tribal officers.

## Vera Sofia Polverini

Vera Sofia Polverini was born July 17, 2025, at 5:04 p.m. at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center in Knoxville, Tennessee. She weighed 7lbs 13oz and was 20in long.

Vera is the daughter of Jordan and Becker Polverini and the little sister of Thea Polverini. She is the granddaughter of Ruthie Burner and the late Clifford Burner, and Barbosa and Celso Polverini. She is the great-granddaughter of Patricia Burner and the late Rex Burner, and the late Inez and Junior Cotton.



## Vengley graduates from Nevada, Reno

Congratulations to Leah Vengley on graduating with a Bachelor of Science in nursing from the University of Nevada, Reno.

She has been hired at Renown Hospital in Reno as a cardiac ICU nurse.

The Choctaw Higher Education Program played an instrumental role in helping her complete her nursing degree.

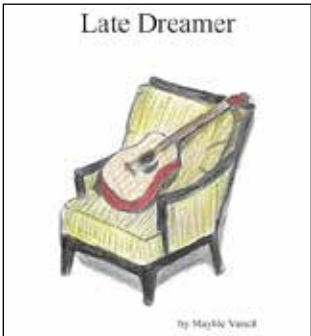


## Vancil publishes first poetry book

Mayble Vancil, 20, a Choctaw Nation member who lives outside Atoka, Oklahoma has published her first book of poetry, “Late Dreamer.”

The collection chronicles four years of her life, following her growth through the teenage years in a series of poems that explore identity, emotion and personal struggle. The book is arranged in chronological order, allowing both the poetry and the poet to develop together.

The book is available for purchase on Amazon.



## Everly LaNell Cargill

Brad and Brandy Cargill of Fort Smith, Arkansas, announce the birth of their daughter, Everly LaNell Cargill, on Oct. 10, 2025, at Choctaw Nation Medical Center in Talihina.

She weighed 7 pounds, 6 ounces, and measured 19 inches long. Everly joins her brother and sister, Cooper and Anaston Fields.



## Vengley graduates from SDSU

Congratulations to Noah Vengley on graduating with a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology from San Diego State University.

He is working to establish a career in medical sales.



## Ramsey retires

Congratulations to Brenda Ramsey, an RN at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Cancer Institute’s Otolaryngology Clinic, who recently retired after 40 years of service.



## Vest graduates police academy

The Vest family is proud to announce the graduation of Megan Erin Vest, who graduated from the Galveston County College Law Enforcement Academy in December 2024 and holds a Texas Basic Peace Officer certificate.

Megan is the mother of four children, the daughter of Adam Garcia from Electra, Texas, the sister of Macy Erwin of Holiday, Texas, and Race Garcia of Wichita Falls, Texas, and the granddaughter of Waylon and Judy O’Roark, also from Electra, Texas. The niece of Cindy, PD, and Jared.

“I’m thankful for the support from my family, and I’m proud to be a Choctaw tribal member. I thank the Choctaw Nation for all the support it has given me,” said Vest. “While serving my community, I will also make the Choctaw Nation proud and keep the culture close to me as I begin my journey in Law Enforcement.”



## Vaughn helps organize OSU homecoming

Oklahoma State University celebrated its “America’s Brightest Homecoming” with help from Choctaw student Ethan Vaughan, a junior professional pilot major who served on the executive director team. Vaughan oversaw all vendors and student organizations participating in Walk Around, screening, approving, arranging and coordinating security for more than 70 vendors.

Because of his organized system, more than 20 additional vendors were able to participate, raising an additional \$9,000 for the OSU Alumni Association to support student and alumni activities. Vaughan accomplished this while maintaining a full course load, serving as vice president of the OSU Bass Fishing Team and completing his instrument rating in the aviation program.

“We are so proud of Ethan and all of his accomplishments! More than that, we are proud of his dedication to making OSU a better place for all,” said Heather Vaughn.



## Delay recognized by OSU college

Jera Delay was recognized by the Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine after being accepted into its Early Admissions Program. She is the daughter of Robert and Kira Delay and the granddaughter of Jerry and Vera Kirkes and Brenda Delay.

The program secures Delay a seat in OSU’s College of Veterinary Medicine while she completes her undergraduate studies in environmental and organismal biology at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. After completing her undergraduate degree, she will return to Stillwater to pursue a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree.

While in high school, Delay was active in both athletics and academics and is known for her determination and compassion. The competitive application process identifies exceptional Oklahoma students with a commitment to veterinary science. For Delay, the acceptance marks an early step toward her goal of becoming a veterinarian.



## WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matt Gamble

Happy New Year from the Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation! Big game seasons are winding down, but so far, hunters have had a good year on the CNO Reservation. This year was the first season of our Choctaw Nation Draw Hunt opportunities. Twelve youth were selected to hunt during these opportunities. Ten were drawn for the Talawanda property near McAlester, and two were drawn for the Wardville property in Atoka County.

So far, we have completed two hunts. The two youths at Wardville were able to harvest one antlered and one antlerless each. The Talawanda youth harvested three antlered and two antlerless deer. In total, six youth hunters were able to harvest nine deer in a 2.5-day period. These deer are “bonus deer” and do not count toward the season bag limit. This is a program that we are very excited about and are looking to expand for the future. Our goal is to double the number of hunts for the upcoming year and explore additional properties to create more opportunities. Be looking for information on the 2026 Draw Hunt opportunities. They will be advertised in the Biskinik, on social media, and through community centers.

CNDWC staff were on site for each hunt and checked in each deer for the hunters. Associates pulled teeth from the harvested deer for aging, as well as pulled retropharyngeal lymph nodes for chronic wasting disease (CWD) testing. So far, all our samples have come back as not detected for the CWD. Many stories were shared by youth hunters and their adult companions that made CNO Wildlife staff smile and laugh. One young hunter was able to harvest his first buck on the first day of the hunt! He came back and harvested his first doe on the second day of the hunt. Two young hunters missed some large bucks and received gentle ribbing from their fathers. These youngsters made it count on the second day when they filled both of their tags. It was so encouraging to see such passion and involvement from the youth in a practice that is so important to our culture. It was also uplifting to see such strong bonds and passing down a heritage that is part of the fabric of our sovereignty.

No matter if you have a draw or hunt or are just participating in a general season, find a way to introduce a kid to hunting, fishing, and the outdoor way of life.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

## Tribes file federal suit against Gov. Stitt and Wildlife Department

TULSA, Okla. – Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Chickasaw Nation, and Cherokee Nation filed a federal lawsuit in United States District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma naming Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt; his recently appointed special prosecutor, Russ Cochran; and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) as defendants.

The lawsuit argues that Gov. Stitt lacks the authority to appoint a special prosecutor for wildlife crimes on tribal land. It also claims his directives to ODWC violate tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction, as affirmed by the Supreme Court’s 2020 McGirt ruling.

Leaders from the state’s three largest tribes reacted to the continued unlawful citation of Indigenous hunters on tribal land.

“The Choctaw Nation will defend its rights and those of its members against the Governor’s unlawful prosecution, as hunting and fishing are deeply rooted in our sovereignty and the traditions of the Choctaw people long before this state was founded,” said Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton. “Gov. Stitt’s attack of our members is causing harm and distress, and we won’t let this overreach continue. We remain committed to conserving, protecting and enhancing wildlife resources, including our continued strong working relationship with ODWC.”

“We are proud to stand today with our fellow sister nations in defense of tribal sovereignty, which protects our Native citizens on



tribal land,” said Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin, Jr. “By targeting hunters and fishers legally exercising their treaty rights, against the advice of the Oklahoma attorney general, Governor Stitt is once again showing Oklahomans he cares more about attacking tribal sovereignty than helping the state. The governor, as he did when he terminated our long-standing wildlife compacts, continues to reject a path of cooperation, and force a path of litigation. We appreciate the work of Attorney General Drummond and other partners throughout the state who respect tribal rights and Oklahoma values, and we will continue to defend our traditions and the rights of our people in federal court.”

“Our primary aim is to protect the rights of our people to fish and hunt, as protected by treaty and federal law,” said Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby. “Our treaties are among the supreme law of the land. Our citizens are good people acting in good faith. They are acting in compliance with federal and tribal law and with respect for Oklahomans’ private property rights. We stand ready to work with our friends in the state of Oklahoma to ensure accurate reporting of data and to facilitate safe and enjoyable hunting and fishing for all Oklahomans.”

See more on this issue on page 1 of this month’s issue of the Biskinik.



## Clements to be inducted into Oklahoma Music Educators Association Hall of Fame

**TULSA, Okla.** – Deborah Clements, adjunct instructor in the Department of Performing Arts at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, will be inducted into the Oklahoma Music Educators Association (OkMEA) Hall of Fame at the OkMEA Honor Awards Reception on January 22, 2026.

Clements teaches Voice I and II and Choral Methods at Southeastern and is director of the Chorvettes. She earned both her Bachelors in Music Education and Masters in Education from Southeastern.

In addition to 13 years as an adjunct instructor at Southeastern, Clements taught for 32 years in Durant ISD and five years in Texas City ISD. She was a finalist for Oklahoma Teacher of the Year in 1995, the 1994 Durant ISD Teacher of the Year and a three-time Durant Middle School Teacher of the Year. She was also named the Levi Fry Teacher of the Year in Texas City ISD in 2003.

In 2007, Deborah began teaching at Durant High School, where the Durant Choirs consistently received superior ratings at OSSAA state contests. In 2015, the Varsity Mixed Choir was chosen as an honor group to perform at the OkMEA state convention and Clements received the OkMEA Exemplary Choral Teacher Award.

Clements served as the SEOkCDA Honor Choir



All-District Coordinator for eight years and was the OkMEA Children’s All-State Chair in 2001-02. She was the OkMEA All State Women’s Choir Chairperson in 2013 and was the OkCDA Southeast Representative in 2001-02 and 2016-18.

Currently she works with the Oklahoma Shakespearean Festival teaching voice lessons, serving as musical director for several productions, and serving on the OSF board. Her professional affiliations include National Association for Music Education (NAFME), OkMEA, American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Oklahoma Choral Directors Association (OkCDA), Oklahoma Music Adjudicators Association (OMAA), and National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). She is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation.

## Anderson earns county 4-H Hall of Fame award



Choctaw Nation tribal member Penelope Anderson was awarded the Hughes County Junior Hall of Fame Award for her first year in 4-H at Calvin Public Schools.

Anderson worked hard during her first year in the club and is looking forward to showing her first livestock animal, a pig named Minnie, in this year’s upcoming shows.

She is the daughter of Derek and Ashlan Anderson of Calvin, Oklahoma.

## Roses celebrate 50 years

Happy 50th Anniversary to Robin and Debbie Rose.

The couple will celebrate their milestone anniversary in January.

They were married in San Antonio, Texas and have resided in Rowlett, Texas for 43 years. They have two children, seven grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.

They are celebrating 50 wonderful years together by taking a trip to Hawaii—their first time visiting the islands.



## Martin joins Michigan State row team

The family of Addison Martin is proud to share that she was recently selected to join the Michigan State University rowing team as a freshman coxswain, an opportunity that is helping her develop strong leadership and communication skills.



In November 2025, Martin competed in the Ohio State Regatta as the coxswain of the Novice 1 boat. Her dedication and hard work embody excellence and perseverance. She said she is grateful for the chance to grow alongside such a committed team and is looking forward to the upcoming spring regattas.

Congratulations to Addison on this achievement, and best wishes to the team. Go Green and Row Green!

## Choctaw student-athlete helps lead Plymouth State to first title since 2004

Plymouth State University women’s volleyball celebrated a historic win on Nov. 15, 2025, as the team claimed the Little East Conference championship — the program’s first conference title in more than 20 years. Christa Imbriano, a Choctaw Nation tribal member, played a key role in the Panthers’ success.



Competing in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, third-seeded Plymouth State defeated top-ranked UMass Dartmouth in an upset victory. Imbriano’s hard work and determination were evident throughout the season, and her performance reflected the resilience of Choctaw athletes.

As a Native student competing at the collegiate level, Imbriano serves as an inspiration for other Choctaw students and athletes. Her family and community said they are proud of her accomplishments.

Her family and community are incredibly proud of her. "Yakohe, Christa, for representing the Chahta spirit with honor." - Your Family

# Charles Shadle, Composer

By Kellie Matherly

Charles Shadle is a composer and Senior Lecturer in Music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he has taught since 1991. A proud member of the Choctaw Nation, he was born in Ardmore, Oklahoma, and grew up in and around what is now the Choctaw Nation Reservation. His Oklahoma roots have always been central to his identity, and they inspire the music he creates.

From an early age, Shadle was influenced by music. Family gatherings often featured piano playing, and by the age of six he began piano lessons himself. Music was not only a pastime but part of his family’s legacy. At age eleven, his Choctaw great-aunt entrusted him with a remarkable heirloom: a fragile hymnal of shape-note music called The Sacred Harp. This book had traveled with his ancestors on the Trail of Tears, passed down from generation to generation. For Shadle, inheriting the hymnal was both a gift and a responsibility. It impressed upon him that music was not merely sound, but a vessel of memory, resilience, and cultural survival.

“It seems to have gone to the person in each generation for whom music was most important,” Charles recalled. “And I’ve always thought it was an incredibly important part of my story as a musician that this book was the thing that an ancestor decided was important to pack up and take on the Trail of Tears.”

This understanding shaped his path as a composer. By the time he received the hymnal, Shadle had already begun writing music, following a tradition that stretched back through his family. His great-grandmother published song texts in the early 20th century, and other relatives left handwritten compositions in the hymnal itself. This sense of continuity—linking generations through music—convinced Shadle that composition was his calling. He pursued formal studies, excelling in piano, flute, and viola, and ultimately chose to study composition at the university level.

“Music is very important, right? It’s not a tangible thing, but it’s something that we carry with us, and something that we use to kind of remake our world,” said Charles.

Shadle’s career as a composer spans more than fifty years. His early works often evoked the Oklahoma landscapes of his family ranch, north of Atoka. Over time, however, he came to understand that his truest voice was inseparable from his Choctaw identity. His music began to weave together Oklahoma’s geography, family history, and the cultural experiences of the Choctaw people. He thinks of music as a way for the past, present, and future to coexist—an art form capable of carrying forward and healing the profound trauma of history.



Choctaw Nation Photos

Charles Shadle is a composer and Senior Lecturer in Music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His Oklahoma roots have always been central to his identity, and they inspire the music he creates.

“I think my music engages with that Choctaw past,” he said. “We don’t ignore what’s happened to us, right? It’s part of who we are. But it also doesn’t define us.”

His compositions frequently incorporate traditional Choctaw musical elements, such as the rhythms and tones of social dance and hymn traditions. Shadle reimagines them, creating works that feel both rooted in the culture and entirely new.

One example is his piano cycle Choctaw Animals, written for musicians of all ages, including young Choctaw students. These pieces honor Choctaw stories and music while serving as an entry point for the next generation of artists. In doing so, Shadle models the belief that Choctaw voices deserve a place in the global artistic conversation and that Native youth can aspire to become composers, writers, and creators.

Alongside his creative output, Shadle has built a distinguished teaching career at MIT. Beginning as a graduate student hired to teach keyboard harmony, he steadily expanded his role, eventually becoming Senior Lecturer. He now teaches advanced courses in composition, music theory, and history.

For Shadle, teaching is both a joy and a responsibility.

“I get so much energy from teaching,” he said. “There’s something so refreshing and so important about sharing the craft, sharing the art, sharing knowledge with my students.”

He emphasizes listening to students as much as instructing them, encouraging each to find their own voice.

“Art is about communicating ideas and feelings and emotions and shadows of experience to other people,” said Charles.

For Shadle, to be a Choctaw composer is to carry forward a tradition of resilience. He views art as a responsibility to the community, a way of honoring the past while shaping a hopeful future. Whether writing symphonies for professional performers or crafting accessible works for children, he seeks to affirm that Choctaw culture is alive, dynamic, and essential to the wider world.

His music, like the hymnal carried on the Trail of Tears, is both a reminder of where the Choctaw people have been and a vision of where they are going.

See more of Shadle’s story at [togetherweremore.com](https://togetherweremore.com).

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# U.S. Department of Education hands off key programs without consulting tribes as required

By Amelia Schafer, ICT

Recent Department of Education shifts will transfer 24 programs serving Indian Country to the Department of the Interior, a move that tribal leaders say they weren’t consulted about.

Native-specific programs such as Title VI, Native Language programming, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Education, and tribal college-related programs, will move to the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The move is already underway, following the announcement on Nov. 18 amid continued efforts from the Trump Administration to begin to dismantle the Department of Education.

These changes will have significant impacts on the nation’s education system, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium said in a statement on Nov. 18.

“There should have been consultation then and there needs to be consultation now,” said Moriah O’Brien, the consortium’s vice president of congressional and federal relations.

In accordance with Executive Order 13175, the Department of Education must consult with tribal nations regarding any proposed regulation with tribal implications. According to the order, consultation should be done in a mutual effort to collaborate and cooperate on finding a good-faith solution in a timely manner. Tribes are to be given a 30-day notice to provide comments and prepare for formal consultation activities.

Earlier this year, career and technical education program administration was transferred to the Department of Labor, and the latest agreements also involve the State Department and the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services.

Other programs that aren’t explicitly

targeted toward Indian education but do impact Native students were moved to the Department of Labor on Nov. 18, including Title I, which provides funding to districts in high-poverty areas, and Title VI, rural education funding.

“All of this is just so much new information, and we weren’t told or consulted ahead of time,” said Julia Wakeford, Muscogee/Yuchi, the legislative and federal policy director for the National Indian Education Association. “Not knowing is not the biggest problem. Not getting a chance to consent and consult is the biggest problem.”

These changes are happening rapidly, Wakeford said, something that has caused even more stress for tribal leaders as they work to figure out what these changes look like for their communities.

Changes earlier this year gave some indication that the Department of Education would continue to be restructured and eventually even dismantled, but leaders weren’t aware these particular changes were set to happen on Nov. 18, Wakeford said.

“We had stayed in good conversation with the administration, and I know some tribes had had some good conversations with the Office of Management and Budget, but we didn’t know specifically, and more importantly, tribes didn’t get a chance to control consult officially,” she said.

Current funding levels for affected programs will be protected and maintained, according to the White House.

“(It’s) all hands on deck, trying to figure out exactly what the impacts are going to be, and then also trying to work with the administration and make sure that there are no lapses in programming during this transition,” Wakeford said. “And so far, we’ve gotten some



AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar

Tribes and advocacy organizations are working to understand the Department of Education’s changes, which could have a broad impact across Indian Country. Pictured is the Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Building in Washington, D.C.

good responses from the administration, so we’re going to keep pushing on.”

Organizations like NIEA and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium are carefully monitoring the changes and working closely to identify potential problems and solutions.

For now, AIHEC is focusing on making sure that eligibility and access to resources, program support and technical assistance are all available for tribal colleges and universities regardless of the changes happening in the White House.

“We don’t want to lose any of that knowledge and support,” O’Brien said. “So we’re absolutely dedicated to making sure, especially in this transition, that there’s no interruption. And we’ve had some good initial conversations with the Department of Education.”

O’Brien said AIHEC was able to discuss the changes with the Department of Education on Thursday, Nov. 20, and was assured there wouldn’t be an impact on the distribution of resources to tribal college and universities.

One change that could affect Indian Country in general involves how student loans are serviced going forward. While TCUs don’t supply student loans, many students benefit from programs like the Pell Grant fund and could end up taking out loans down the line during their academic journey.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which is located in southern North Dakota and northern South Dakota, confirmed it was not contacted about the recent restructuring.

“This move reflects a troubling return to historical patterns of federal control over Native education, including the era of the Indian boarding school system,” said Chairman Steven Sitting Bear in a Nov. 21 statement. “The transfer brings no additional support to our schools and merely shifts us from one inadequate system to another.”

Sitting Bear said this change isn’t progress and without tribal input it disregards sovereignty and undermines Native tribes’ visions for how their own children should be educated.

## State Rep. Dempsey congratulates Oklahoma’s 2026 Kid Governor

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – Rep. Eddy Dempsey, R-Valliant, congratulated Valliant Elementary School fifth grader Kate-lynn Talley on being elected Oklahoma’s 2026 Kid Governor, a statewide honor through the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy’s youth leadership program.

“Katelyn demonstrated a strong desire to make a difference for others,” Dempsey said. “She represented her principles with confidence, and all of Valliant is proud to see her chosen as Kid Governor. I look forward to seeing how she will make an impact on our state in her new role.”

More than 1,100 students from 37 classrooms across Oklahoma participated in this year’s Kid Governor election, which is part of a national civics education effort led by the Connecticut Democracy Center. The program engages fifth graders in a real election by teaching them about state government, leadership and the voting process.

Talley first won her classroom election at Valliant Elementary before advancing to the statewide race. Her platform focused on preventing animal abuse. After all statewide candidates submitted two-minute campaign videos, former Oklahoma governors David Walters, Frank Keating, Brad Henry and Mary Fallin joined OICA board members to help narrow the field before students cast their final ballots on Election Day. Talley secured the most votes and will serve a one-year term working with OICA to promote her platform and engage with students across the state.

Dempsey attended a local celebration at Valliant Elementary and presented Talley with a formal citation from the



Oklahoma House of Representatives and a challenge coin to mark the occasion.

“I am proud of the way Katelyn and all of the students embraced the election process,” Dempsey said. “Their hard work showed a real understanding of how government works and what it means to lead with purpose. Her commitment to protecting animals and standing up for what matters to students her age is inspiring. She earned this recognition through hard work and thoughtful advocacy.”

OICA guides classrooms through the Kid Governor program using free lesson plans that teach students about state government, the voting process and civic participation. The organization funds the program through donations and fundraising efforts supported by Oklahoma’s former governors.

The Kid Governor, Junior Governor and their respective cabinets will be inaugurated at the State Capitol on Feb. 2, 2026, the opening day of the Oklahoma Legislature’s session.

## Thomas publishes first children's book

Gary Thomas of Wellington, Texas, a member of the Choctaw Nation, has published his first children’s book, “The Bean Hill Kids,” inspired by his early years in Wellington. The book is intended for readers ages 6-12. Thomas previously authored “How to Plan a Funeral” and “How to Start Your Own Business.”

A graduate of Columbia College (business administration) and the University of Phoenix (master’s degree), Thomas also completed professional training at the Dallas Institute of Funeral Service. He has extensive experience in the funeral industry, including ownership and management of family and corporate funeral homes and cemeteries, and has written on the topic.

Thomas has more than 15 years of corporate management and marketing experience with a Fortune 500 company and has been teaching in the Denver area for the past 20 years, both in classrooms and online. He currently teaches at Luna College in New Mexico and the American Academy McAlister Institute in New York.

Active in the Knights of Columbus, Thomas serves as a district deputy, overseeing multiple councils and providing guidance and mentorship.



## Cox's beadwork takes the spotlight

Wyoming-based beadwork artist Caitlyn Cox recently celebrated two major milestones in her creative career.

Cox, a Choctaw Nation tribal member, had three of her designs showcased in the 2025 Aya Con Indigenous Reclamation fashion show in October.

Her work is also currently on display at the Denver Art Museum. The featured piece, titled “Mind, Heart, and Soul,” is an intricate beaded sculpture depicting an anatomical heart and brain balanced on a scale, symbolizing the internal equilibrium individuals strive to maintain.



## Senter turns 50

Charles Christopher “Charlie” Senter celebrated his 50th birthday on Nov. 28.

A native of Lubbock, Texas, Senter is a graduate of Coronado High School and has worked in the security industry for 30 years.

He is a proud fourth-generation Choctaw. He is the son of Jeanne Hartsfield, the grandson of Gene and Flo Wilson, and the great-grandson of Noel and Starlie Wilson.



## Speckheuer speaks at event

Mary Lou Speckheuer and Dave Hennaman recently shared their Native American heritage with the German-American Club in Norfolk, Virginia. Each presented on the history and current status of their respective tribal nations.

Speckheuer is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and Hennaman is chief emeritus of the Nansemond Indian Nation, located along the James River in Virginia. The Nansemond Indians were part of the Powhatan Confederacy.



## Pannell honored with memorial highway

On the late Mike Pannell’s 70th birthday, a stretch of Murray County highway was named in his honor. Friends and family gathered to celebrate the occasion.

The Choctaw Nation Honor Guard presented the family with a flag during the ceremony.

State Sen. Jerry Alvord also attended and read a citation recognizing Pannell’s service.

SSgt. Kenneth Michael Pannell retired honorably from the U.S. military, the Davis Police Department and the Sulphur Fire Department, leaving a legacy of courage, integrity and selfless duty.

Alvord said the well-organized dedication ceremony reflected Pannell’s long-standing impact on the community.



Photo by Alisha Thompson/The Davis News

## Mallen graduates from CSU Chico

Riley Mallen graduated from California State University, Chico, in December 2024 with a degree in construction management.

Mallen is now working as a project manager for Teichert Construction in Sacramento, California.



## Lane graduates from Texas State

Rylee Lane, daughter of Casey and Kristina Lane, graduated in December from Texas State University with summa cum laude honors.

She majored in education and plans to pursue a teaching position in her hometown of Georgetown, Texas.



## Salvatore Cahir Tringali III

Salvatore Cahir Tringali III, the first child of Victoria and Carmelo Tringali, was born at 3:34 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 26, in Northern Virginia.

He measured 20 inches and weighed 7 pounds, 8 ounces.

Salvatore is the grandchild of Charity and Paul Lively and Genelle and Salvatore Tringali. He was born at home with assistance from midwife Story Jones and her team. His family is overjoyed at his arrival.



Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna Chanuali Language Lesson		
Hvshtula - Winter		
bvchalusha – sleet	kalampi – freeze	hotonti – frost
okti – ice	weki – heavy	hvshtula - winter
ofobi – deep	okti lusa – black ice	oktusha – snow
Oktusha chi!	It's going to snow!	
Hina yvt kalampikma okti lusa toba hinla	When the road freezes, it can turn to black ice.	
Onnahinlikma bvchalusha chi.	It's going to sleet in the morning.	
Oktusha yvt ofobi chohmi.	The snow is kind of deep.	
Hotonti yvt a kaa im okhissushi ompoholmo tuk.	The frost covered the windows of my car.	
Kapvssakma ilefoka weki ish fokka hinla.	The frost covered the windows of my car.	
Kapvssakma ilefoka weki ish fokka hinla.	Wear heavy clothing when it is cold.	
Himak vno hvshtula yvt vla.	Winter has now arrived.	
www.choctawschool.com		



ITI FABVSSA

The Buffalo are coming to the Choctaw Cultural Center

A rare gem of Choctaw culture and land is located right next to the Choctaw Cultural Center in Calera, Oklahoma. It’s 100 acres of native tallgrass prairie. This prairie has been here on this same piece of ground for thousands of years. When Choctaw people arrived on the Trail of Tears, they encountered prairie landscapes across the western and southern portions of the reservation - areas around present-day Valiant, Durant, Atoka, and McAlester. In the intervening years, almost all of the tallgrass prairie has been destroyed on the reservation and across the American heartland. Representing what was once common in our area, the section of tallgrass prairie at the Cultural Center is now one of the highest quality still-surviving remnants anywhere on the Southern Plains.

Driving into the Cultural Center, some visitors may look at the prairie beside the road and see it as just open space, but really, this is our region’s rainforest. In 2025, the Oklahoma Biological Survey documented more than 200 native plant species growing in this remnant prairie. Many of them are rare. Many of them have names in the Choctaw language and uses in Choctaw culture. This remnant is also home to rare native insects and to grassland birds that are disappearing across the American heartland. Yet, the biggest part of any prairie is what you don’t see, the part that lives underground. With their roots extending down as much as 15 feet, the prairie plants essentially farm tiny microorganisms in the soil, which provide essential ecological functions, like trapping nitrogen, protecting plants from disease, and holding onto soil moisture. There are millions of species of tiny life forms living in the prairie soil. Most have not yet been named by science, but they might very well be able to one day teach us how to make powerful new medicines, how to farm to feed the world’s growing population, and how to make our communities and land more resilient.

In September, Iti Fabvssa talked about the important place that prairie has in Choctaw culture and history (<https://www.choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/culture-on-the-prairie/>). As Indigenous people, our relationship with the land is timeless. In other words, our cultural connection with the land is not just something from the past; it’s also something that is relevant today. In our area, prairie remnants exist only through a continuing relationship between people and the land. The tallgrass prairie is alive in every sense, constantly changing. The appearance of the Cultural Center shifts from week to week, influenced by temperature, rainfall, and many other factors. If left on its own, a prairie like this one will grow up into a cedar grove or a thorny thicket in a few years. It needs regular disturbance to continue to be a prairie. Historically, this disturbance came from two main sources: range fire (a future Iti Fabvssa topic) and grazing animals. For the Cultural Center prairie to be at its best, we need to provide those.

Bison, “yvnvsh” in the Choctaw Language, are natural prairie managers with deep ties to Choctaw culture, both in the homeland and here in Oklahoma (see <https://www.choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/choctaw-and-buffalo/>). Their favorite food is native grass. A bison has front teeth only on its lower jaw; its upper jaw lacks incisors. This helps to prevent it from damaging the grass by grazing it too low. When a grass plant gets grazed, the plant pulls resources from its deep roots and sends up new growth above ground. The new growth is highly nutritious to bison, who eagerly graze it. For a few weeks or months, the grazing/regrowth process repeats, but eventually the grass roots start to weaken, and the plant quits sending up vigorous growth. With the grass stunted



Choctaw Nation Photo  
Pictured are a bison cow and calf, Nan Awaya Farm, Atoka County.

from repeated grazing by the bison, diverse wildflowers start to take over the landscape. They provide food and habitat to hundreds of species of native bees and butterflies (species which, like the birds, are disappearing across the American heartland). Most wildflowers are not tasty to the bison. In the past, when a landscape became dominated by them, the bison would move on in search of fresh grass elsewhere. The wildflowers would dominate for a year. As the grass rested, its roots would regain the resources needed to send up new shoots. In the absence of grazing, the grass begins to build up thatch (dry dead matter from the previous season’s growth). The thatch would carry a range fire, set by Native people or a lightning strike, right across the landscape. The fire would blacken the ground with nutrients and clear space for the grass to grow. Immediately, the grass would send up new, fresh shoots. The bison would be attracted to the tasty treats, graze the fresh grass, and start the cycle over again. This cycle of burning and grazing is what maintained the prairies in southeastern Oklahoma and in the Choctaw homeland. In the absence of grazing, prairie is less diverse and provides a less ideal home for native birds and other creatures.

In the near future, Cultural Services will be bringing a small herd of bison out to live on the Choctaw Cultural Center prairie to help us maintain it. If you drive by, you’ll see the Choctaw Nation Cemetery Crews building fences for them. The bison will be partners in helping us to be good stewards of this irreplaceable native landscape. We’ll manage them through a technique called patch burn grazing, where the land will be exposed both to bison grazing and controlled burns, mimicking the same conditions that shaped and maintained this same prairie as a dynamic ecosystem over thousands of years.

Cultural Services has begun offering hands-on programming to groups on the prairie remnant. These will be expanding in the future, and soon, will include getting to visit and learn about the bison. We’re not set up to accommodate programming for individuals, yet, but if you have a school group, church group, or community group and would like to schedule an educational visit to the Cultural Center’s prairie, please reach out to the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department at [ithompson@choctawnation.com](mailto:ithompson@choctawnation.com).

Choctaw announced as official Dallas World Cup 2026 Host City Supporter

**(December 3, 2025)** – The North Texas FWC Organizing Committee announced today that Choctaw Casinos & Resorts has been named an Official Dallas World Cup 2026 Host City Supporter, joining a select group of leading brands helping to bring the world’s biggest sporting event to North Texas.

“Unity, culture and togetherness are core values of the Choctaw Nation, and they have guided us for generations,” said Chief Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. “As we welcome the FIFA World Cup to North Texas, we’re honored to celebrate an event that reflects those same global ideals. We look forward to sharing this meaningful experience with fans from around the world.”

As a Host City Supporter, Choctaw Casinos & Resorts will play a key role in supporting community engagement initiatives aligned with the North Texas FWC Organizing Committee’s legacy initiatives.

The brand’s involvement will also include visibility throughout the region through special activations and promotions designed to celebrate the world’s game and connect with fans leading up to 2026.

“Choctaw Casinos & Resorts has been an incredible partner in elevating sports and entertainment across the region, and we’re proud to welcome them as an Official Dallas World Cup 2026 Host City Supporter,” said Monica Paul, Executive Director of the Dallas Sports Commission and President of the North Texas FWC Organizing Committee. “Their longstanding commitment to the North Texas community and support for major sporting events make them a perfect fit as we prepare to host fans from around the globe.”

Choctaw Casinos & Resorts has built a long-standing legacy of investment in North Texas sports, serving as a proud partner of organizations, including the Texas Rangers, Dallas Mavericks, Dallas Stars, CJ Cup Byron Nelson, Charles Schwab Challenge, Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo, and Dickies Arena.

With 23 casinos across its brand, Choctaw Casinos & Resorts stands as a leader in gaming and entertainment. As a premier entertainment destination for North Texans and for soccer fans from around the world visiting the region for the FIFA World Cup, Choctaw delivers an unmatched experience defined by a world-class gaming experience and an elevated level of entertainment and hospitality.



Choctaw Nation Photo  
The North Texas FWC Organizing Committee recently announced Choctaw Casinos & Resorts as an Official Dallas World Cup 2026 Host City Supporter, joining a select group of leading brands helping to bring the world’s biggest sporting event to North Texas.

The flagship property in Durant, Oklahoma, located just a short drive from Dallas-Fort Worth, offers guests an exceptional gaming experience with 7,400 slot machines, more than 100 table games – including blackjack, craps, and roulette – and a dedicated poker room. The resort also features a full-service spa, more than 20 restaurants, 21 bars, along with a wide range of family-friendly amenities including pools, a movie theater and bowling alley.

With the FIFA World Cup 26™ coming to North America for the first time in 32 years, Dallas will serve as one of 16 Host Cities, hosting nine matches, including a semi-final, and events throughout the tournament. The North Texas FWC Organizing Committee continues to build momentum through corporate partnerships, legacy initiatives, and community programs designed to ensure that the impact of the tournament extends far beyond 2026.

# Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

Our sixth year implementing the lawn care service is about to begin! Get your application in now.

To be eligible, you must be Choctaw, be at least 65 years of age, or have a documented ambulatory disability and meet income guidelines. You will be eligible if you own your home and also if you rent your home but are liable for lawn care. Once eligibility is established you will be given a booklet of 20 vouchers. Each voucher will be worth \$25.

This program will be similar to the storm shelter program. You will give the voucher to the person you choose to mow your yard who will then redeem it with the Housing Authority. You can choose anyone you want to mow your yard as long as they are at least 16 years of age and do not live in the home where the work is being done.



Choctaw Nation

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CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Housing Authority

Environmental Protection Services Presents

# Chahta Kid’s Corner

Kucha Yvt Pisa Katiohmi?  
What is the weather like?

Kucha Yvt Pisa Katiohmi Ho?  
Is it freezing outside?

Oktusha Tuk O?  
Did it snow?



Choctaw Nation

Environmental Protection Service



# Choctaw Nation Tobacco cessation program available to CDIB members and employees

By Chris Jennings

According to the CDC, Native Americans have a higher smoking rate than other groups at 43.3% compared with 27.7% nationally. Tobacco use among Native American men is even higher at 49.7%.

These higher smoking rates are reflected in key health statistics. Cardiovascular disease, which is often linked to smoking, is the leading cause of death for Native Americans. Lung cancer, largely tied to smoking, is the leading cause of cancer deaths. The risk of developing Type 2 diabetes is 30% to 40% higher for smokers, and Native Americans are nearly three times more likely to have type 2 diabetes than white adults.

A National Institutes of Health study found that tobacco companies targeted Native communities with price promotions, casino and bingo advertising, and powwow sponsorships, making cigarettes more accessible and increasing addiction risks, especially for youth. An NIH report also cited an internal cigarette company memo describing smoking as a symbol of rebellion, a message designed to appeal to young people.

Children are more likely to smoke if a parent does. For many, access begins at home. Quitting reduces that risk.

The Choctaw Nation’s Tobacco Cessation Program offers four months of support for CDIB-eligible patients and employees. The program includes monthly in-person visits, nicotine replacement therapy and two medication options. Clinic Director Heidi Hackett says it often takes multiple attempts to quit and that having consistent support, even from pharmacy staff, can make the difference.

According to the FDA, nearly 70% of U.S. adult smokers wanted to quit in 2015. In 2018, 55% tried, but only about 8% stayed smoke-free for six to 12 months. Cigarettes are engineered to deliver nicotine rapidly to the brain, which makes quitting difficult.

Hackett encourages anyone trying to quit to keep

going, no matter how many past attempts they have made. The first appointment includes a discussion of your tobacco history and any concerns. Participants also receive a survival bag with items meant to motivate them during cravings.

Quitting brings immediate and long-term health benefits:

- After two weeks, breathing improves.
- After one year, heart attack risk is cut in half.
- After five years, stroke risk matches that of someone who never smoked.
- After 10 years, lung cancer risk is reduced by half.

The program also supports people quitting e-cigarettes, dip and snuff. According to the 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey, 16.1% of Native American middle schoolers and 40.4% of high schoolers used e-cigarettes, rates that are higher than the general population.

Hackett says participants often inspire others. “I have seen where a family member or friend said, ‘So-and-so was able to quit, and they used y’all, so I decided it was time for me too,’” she said.

Every quit attempt is different, whether it is the first or the tenth. Whether you quit cold turkey or use patches, gum or lozenges, the Choctaw Nation’s Cessation Program can help you live a healthier life. To get started, talk with your primary care provider or employee health office for a referral.

For those not eligible for the program, additional resources include:

- Indian Health Service tobacco prevention information: [ihs.gov/forpatients/healthtopics/TobaccoPrevention](https://ihs.gov/forpatients/healthtopics/TobaccoPrevention)
- Quit-Smoking Guidance: [smokefree.gov](https://smokefree.gov)
- CDC Quitline: 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)

## Traditional tobacco vs commercial tobacco

The Choctaw name for tobacco is hakchuma. Traditional hakchuma and commercial hakchuma are very different. They’re planted, grown, harvested, prepared and used in different ways. Traditional hakchuma has been used by Native Americans for centuries, with some varieties known to have been grown and smoked in eastern North America for at least 2,000 years.

Commercial tobacco contains chemicals and additives not found in traditional hakchuma. Traditional hakchuma has nicotine, but at lower levels, due to the natural curing process and mixing with other plants.

The way that hakchuma is used among different tribes varies greatly. When used as a medicine, hakchuma can be prescribed as a way to promote physical, spiritual, emotional, and community well-being. It may be used as an offering to the Creator or to another person, place, or being.

In some tribes, the roles of growing, harvesting, and preparing traditional hakchuma are held by specific groups of people who use traditional ways to prepare it for a specific use.

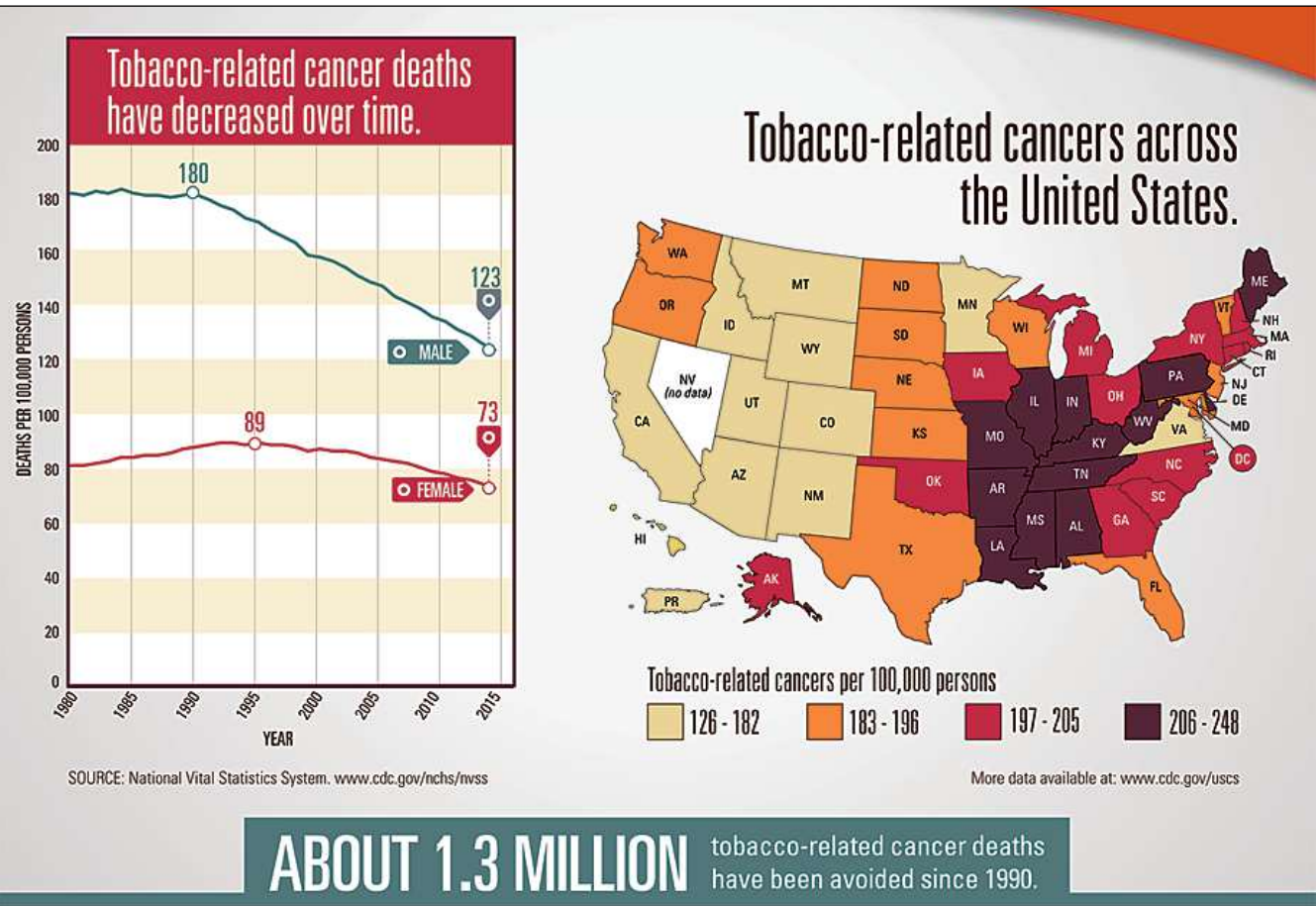
The January 2011 Iti Fabvssa talks about some of the ways the early Choctaws used hakchuma:

Hakchuma plants were traditionally planted and tended by Choctaw medicine people, both male and female. After the plants matured, their leaves were removed and stored as dried rolls, tied up with bark strips.

Choctaws often added various ingredients to their tobacco to produce different flavors, including leaves from the sweet gum tree and the leaves of two different species of sumac. These leaves were dried and rubbed into small pieces before they were mixed with the tobacco.

In times of scarcity, Choctaws of the past, and some people still today, smoke a wild native plant called “rabbit tobacco,” or bvshuchak.

Go to [choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/choctaw-smoking-pipes-and-tobacco/](https://choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/choctaw-smoking-pipes-and-tobacco/) to read more.



According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease accounts for about 800,000 deaths in the United States each year, making it the nation’s leading cause of death. Nearly 20% of those deaths are linked to cigarette smoking.

### Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna

The School of Choctaw Language

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**CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER**

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### COLD OUTSIDE?

IT'S WARM IN THE CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

Scan to learn more

**CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER**

[ChoctawCulturalCenter.com](https://ChoctawCulturalCenter.com)

### 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.*

**January 2026**  
All markets open weekdays, January 2-28  
**Closed:** January 1, 29 & 30  
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation  
Participants can request a calendar at their location.

**ANTLERS** 400 S.W. “O” ST., 580-298-6443  
FOOD DEMO JANUARY 6

**BROKEN BOW** 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842  
FOOD DEMO JANUARY 13

**DURANT** 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773  
FOOD DEMO JANUARY 20

**MCALESTER** 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716  
FOOD DEMO JANUARY 8

**POTEAU** 106 B St., 918-649-0431  
FOOD DEMO JANUARY 15

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

### Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

January 6	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 7	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
January 9	Wright city	By Appointment
January 13	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 14	Crowder	By Appointment
January 15	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
January 16	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
January 16	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
January 21	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 23	Stigler	By Appointment
January 27	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
January 28	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

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

Scan to apply.

There's something for you here.

## Choctaw CAREERS

Apply at [Careers.ChoctawNation.com](https://Careers.ChoctawNation.com)

### WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
<b>Antlers</b> 539.316.5089	Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Atoka</b> 539.316.2050	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Battiest</b> 580.920.7061	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Broken Bow</b> 539.316.3011	Daily   Monday – Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Durant</b> 539.316.3517	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Heavener</b> 539.316.4784	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Hugo</b> 539.316.5089	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Idabel</b> 539.316.4313	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>McAlester</b> 539.316.2431	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Poteau</b> 539.316.4606	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Smithville</b> 580.920.7063	1st Thursday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Spiro</b> 918.962.5134	Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Stigler</b> 918.967.4211	Monday & Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Talihina</b> 539.316.6792	Daily   Monday - Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Wilburton</b> 580.642.7588	Wednesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Mobile Van</b> 580.745.4330	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



# Community Meals

Throughout the holiday season, tribal members gathered at community centers across the Choctaw Nation to celebrate faith, family and culture. Tribal members and employees came together for a meal and to spend time with friends and family they don't see often. Pictured below are a few shots from the November community and elder meals.

To see more photos, visit [biskinik.com](http://biskinik.com).



Smithville



McAlester



McAlester



Atoka



Atoka



Smithville



Stigler



Tushkahomma



Durant



Idabel



Spiro



Durant



Stigler



Idabel



Spiro



Battiest



Broken Bow



Stigler



Crowder



Battiest



Wilburton



Stigler



Crowder



Poteau



Wilburton



Coalgate



Coalgate



Poteau



Hugo



Hugo



# Avoke Productions announces new animated film ‘Drew’s World’

Celebrating inclusion and representation through special friendship

**DURANT, Okla.** – Avoke Productions has announced the start of production on “Drew’s World,” an animated feature film that highlights Native culture and inclusivity through an uplifting story of friendship and understanding.

“Drew’s World” is created and produced by Steven Vandrilla of Avoke Productions, with Max Howard serving as executive producer.

Director Ryan Bellgardt, writer Rene Gutteridge, and composer Kitt Wakeley are all Oklahomans.

“‘Drew’s World’ is more than an animated adventure,” said Howard. “It’s a story about connection and understanding created to bring viewers into their world and perspective.”

The film follows Bo, a misunderstood Choctaw boy, and Drew, a sweet and imaginative girl with Down syndrome. When the two become lost in the woods, they must learn to communicate and trust one another to survive a dangerous journey and discover who they were meant to be.

“This story is deeply personal,” said Vandrilla. “It was inspired by my granddaughter, Drew, and by the belief that every child deserves to see themselves represented in the stories we tell. Partnering with the Choctaw Nation has allowed us to bring that vision to life in a way that honors both inclusion and culture.”

Avoke Productions has partnered with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to ensure the film authentically represents Choctaw language, values and traditions.

Cultural advisors are working directly with filmmakers to incorporate accurate storytelling elements, symbols and teachings that reflect the heart of Choctaw identity.

“Representation matters not just for our people, but for everyone who learns through these stories,” said Choctaw Chief Gary Batton. “‘Drew’s World’ reflects our values of friendship, resilience and understanding. We’re proud to help bring this story to life in a way that honors both Choctaw culture and the Down syndrome community, showing the world what inclusion truly looks like.”

Drew’s World is currently in development, with production expected to continue through 2026.



Choctaw Nation Photo  
Choctaw Nation staff meet with Drew’s World production team to announce the new project.

## ACHIEVE YOUR DREAM OF BEING A CHOCTAW PRINCESS

### 2026 CHOCTAW PRINCESS IN TRAINING

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [CHOCTA.WS/SERVICES-ROYALTY](http://CHOCTA.WS/SERVICES-ROYALTY) OR CALL **580.642.7961**

## FOSTER YOUR TRIBE

When the world feels a little colder, your home can be the warm place someone desperately needs. There are currently hundreds of Choctaw children waiting for someone like you to step up. This winter, please consider opening your heart and your home to a child who’s waiting for a safe, supportive home. Warmth starts with you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/FOSTER-CARE](http://WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/FOSTER-CARE)

### Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

## Give blood. Give hope. CHANGE LIVES.

Join the Annual Blood Drive Challenge and become a lifeline for those who need it.

Scan QR to view upcoming Choctaw Nation blood drives.

### Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

# BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ♦ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ♦

## TRADITIONAL CHOCTAW SEEDS GROWING HOPE PROGRAM

Request by application only

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

**YAKOKE!**

### Choctaw Nation

Historic Preservation

## January (Chanuali) 2026

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Biskinik give update on Stitt’s continued attacks on Tribal sovereignty.

### Page 3

Read about how buffalo coming to Cultural Center.

### Page 11

Check out photos from Choctaw Nation’s annual Community Meals.

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

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[CHOCTAWNATION.COM](http://CHOCTAWNATION.COM)