



February 2026 Issue

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma partners with Rosetta Stone

By Kendra Germany-Wall

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) announced Dec. 16, 2025, its partnership with Rosetta Stone to develop a digital language course, in hopes of continuing the preservation and revitalization of the Choctaw language, making learning Chahta anumpa more accessible.

"When we speak Chahta, our ancestors speak through us. Sharing our language ensures their voices will never fade," Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton said in a statement. "This partnership to share our language is more than a program. It is an act of love for our people and a promise to keep our culture alive for generations to come."

Chahta anumpa will be included in Rosetta Stone's Endangered Languages Program, which focuses on recording and teaching at-risk languages through partnerships with Indigenous communities. The program works with native speakers to document pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, while incorporating cultural context and imagery into its curriculum.

According to the company, Rosetta Stone has partnered with Indigenous communities worldwide to help preserve several endangered languages over the past two decades.

"Language is deeply personal. It connects us to family, history and place," said Paul Mishkin, CEO of IXL Learning, Rosetta Stone's parent company. "Through our Endangered Languages Program, we're honored to work alongside the Choctaw Nation to protect not just words, but the identities and cultures they carry."

The Choctaw Nation has made language preservation one of its key priorities, and the Rosetta Stone partnership is an addition to its existing efforts. The Tribe currently offers language classes, apprenticeships and community-based programs, and has developed several online language resources.

Still, tribal language leaders say additional tools are urgently needed.

"We are in what anthropologists and linguists call language death crisis mode," said Teresa Billy, first speaker and assistant director of the School of Choctaw Language. "We needed another avenue to provide for our tribal members in which to learn the language."

Billy is confident that this partnership will be a useful tool in the fight to preserve the Choctaw language, filling the gap created by the loss of so many fluent speakers and teachers.

"When I started (working for CNO's language department) in '04, we had 30 community teachers and they were all fluent speakers. Over half of them are now gone and have passed on," said Billy. "You can quickly see how many (fluent) teachers can be lost. You can't create new teachers fast enough."

According to Billy, the Rosetta Stone course will be structured in three progressive levels, each increasing in complexity and designed to help learners become conversational speakers by the final level.

"You add your pronouns, your possessive adjectives, your possessive verbs," she said. "The different aspects and structure of the language will be there for a person to be able to be a good conversational speaker at the end of Level Three."

The first level of the course is scheduled for release in June 2026, with the remaining two levels expected over the next two years. In the meantime, Billy encouraged interested learners to participate in existing classes and community programs.

"Many people are hungry for connection, for identity," she said. "There's nothing that connects you quicker to who you are than your mother tongue."

For the Choctaw Nation, the partnership represents a long-term investment in the survival of Chahta anumpa and a renewed effort to ensure future generations remain connected to their language, culture and heritage.



Choctaw Nation The School of Choctaw Language

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Looking Ahead to 2026

Halito and Welcome to 2026!

Each year, I take some time to look ahead to the projects and excitement that Choctaw Nation has in store for the upcoming year. Moving into 2026, we have a lot to look forward to and accomplish this new year.

There are a lot of exciting new programs and projects shaping up for 2026.

Along with our Rosetta Stone project, Choctaw Nation is currently in the production phase of an all-new Choctaw history book that we would like to include in school curriculum. We hope to have this valued, comprehensive historical record completed in 2026.

We strive to find the best value for our tribal members, and I hope that you are also taking advantage of the many discount opportunities we have available to you. We have a great web page available that shows all the discount opportunities for our Chahta tribe.

Along with all the other events, special projects and fun entertainment across the reservation we have ongoing projects that will wrap up in 2026. We are excited to look ahead and bring to completion all the hard work it takes to push these projects across the finish line and into service in support of our tribal members across the reservation. For instance:

The following projects are expected to finish up in Fiscal Year 2026:

- Durant Community Center
- Poteau Community Center
- McAlester Health Clinic Expansion / Remodel
- Durant Judicial Expansion
- McAlester Judicial
- Jones Academy Expansion
- Talihina Diabetes Wellness Center Expansion

Housing

- Affordable Rental Housing (ARH)
- 20 ARH (Atoka)
- 30 ARH (Calera)
- 23 ARH (Hugo)
- Independent Elderly Housing (IEH)
- 9 IE (Atoka)
- 10 IE (Antlers)
- 10 IE (Coalgate)
- 10 IE (Broken Bow)
- 5 IE (Hartshorne)
- 20 IE (Poteau)

Additional Projects

- Garvin Casino Too Addition
- Choctaw Casino Resort Pocola Expansion

I hope that we have another great year here at the Choctaw Nation and that all of you have a wonderful 2026. We are kicking the year of right by getting back to work and bringing new and exciting projects and services to our tribe.

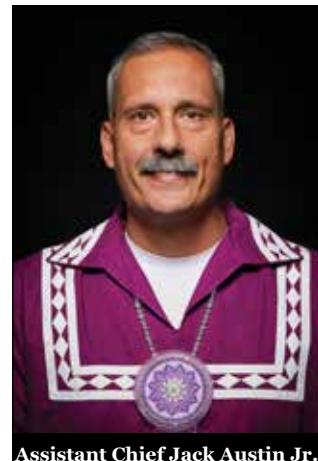
Yako and God Bless!

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.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

February is Heart Healthy Month, what are you waiting for?

The heart is the engine of your body. It runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without any time off for personal days. Your heart is only as good as the choices you make, the food you eat, the exercise you perform and how you manage to process your stress.

Your heart depends on your brain to make good choices to keep it and your other vital organs healthy, so they can enjoy life as long as they can. Their main job is to get and keep you up and moving so you can enjoy your life and be with family and friends for as long as humanly possible.

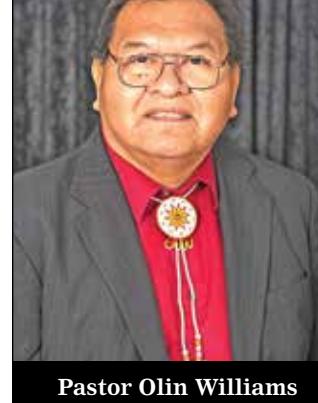
This is where you come in, as the heart and other vital organs rely on you to make good choices. If you're not making smart, healthy choices, there's no time like the present to start. Instead of reaching for a doughnut, energy drink or sugary cereals? If you start your day with better fuel, you will be better equipped to handle what the day has in store for you. In other words, good fuel helps make good decisions.

Heart disease has hit close to my family, and let me tell you, losing a loved one to heart disease is devastating to family and friends. I made a commitment to look at my lifestyle and have made simple changes to maintain a healthy weight. I hope that you will take the opportunity of this new year to change your lifestyle and get out there and enjoy your life to the fullest. What are you waiting for?

The Choctaw Nation has many ways for you to start your healthy lifestyle on a good footing. Our top-notch wellness centers throughout the reservation are there for you to get healthy and maintain your new lifestyle. To find a wellness center close to you, go to choctawwellness.com. The centers are designed to get you healthy around your schedule. There are trainers and staff at each wellness center location to help light the way to a healthier you.

I'm also pleased that the Choctaw Nation celebrates "Wear Red Day" each year (this year's "Wear Red Day" is on Feb. 6). The Choctaw Wear Red Campaign coincides with the national day that raises awareness for cardiovascular disease -- the No. 1 killer of women. We wear red to remind everyone that they are often the first responder in a cardiac emergency. Women are less likely to receive CPR from a bystander. Anyone can be the difference before professional help arrives, and this starts with knowing CPR. You don't need medical training to learn CPR; you need knowledge, courage, and the willingness to act. I'm like many who believe CPR is our civic duty, and we should do all in our power through training and education to be ready to perform CPR should we be called upon to act. For more information on Wear Red Day, go to goredforwomen.org.

By following a healthy lifestyle, taking advantage of all the health services that the Choctaw Nation has to offer, you are helping your tribe fulfill one of our newly initiated strategic plans – empowering our people. By getting healthy, your new lifestyle journey can shine a positive light for others to follow. You don't have to do this alone; take a family member or friend along on your journey. Our staff at the Choctaw Nation Wellness Centers is always ready to help. We are here for you, so I urge you to take advantage of the services we have to offer throughout the reservation.



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

What is Christianity?

Our scripture reading is from 2 Corinthians 4:3. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."

From the outside, the various Christian churches and traditions may look extremely different. The public worship services look so different. The Christian faith has spread across most of the cultures and regions of the world. Therefore, it has assumed an enormous number of different cultural forms.

Over the centuries, there have been great theological rifts. The first great division was between the eastern Greek and western Roman churches in the eleventh century. They are known today as the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

The second great schism was within the Western church, between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Nevertheless, all Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians assent together to the great creeds of the first thousand years of church history. These are the Apostles', Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian creeds. In these creeds, there is the belief of God as three in one.

Belief in the Trinity is profoundly different from the view of the polytheists, non-trinitarian monotheists, and atheists. So, for the purpose of defining Christianity, we go to the belief in the great ecumenical creeds.

They believe that the triune God created the world, that humanity has fallen into sin and evil, that God has returned to rescue in Jesus Christ, that in his death and resurrection Jesus accomplished our salvation for us so we can be received by grace, that he established the church, his people, as the vehicle through which he continues his mission of rescue, reconciliation, and salvation, and that at the end of time, Jesus will return to renew the heaven and the earth, removing all evil, injustice, sin, and death from the world.

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna
The School of Choctaw Language

Ikhvna. Anumpuli. Ilaueli
Learn. Speak. Lead.

We're building a new generation of Choctaw speakers, from toddlers to elders and classrooms to living rooms.

Explore our programs:

- Language Apprenticeship
- Online & Self-Guided Courses
- Language Nest Program
- Early Childhood Education
- Online Phrasebook & Dictionary Access

Start your journey today.



Scan the QR code to learn more and apply.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matthew Gamble

I was introduced to duck hunting in my sophomore year of high school. Hunting for me had been mainly deer, squirrel, turkey, and a few rabbits. None of my hunting mentors participated in waterfowl hunting.

That changed in the fall/winter of 1999. My brother had been invited a few times to hunt with a family friend that year and had taken him up on the offer. He fell in love with it quickly and knew I would like it as well. My first real duck hunt took place near Foreman, Arkansas, on my grandparents' farm. Honestly, it probably wasn't a great way to be introduced because it has been hard to beat those first times in the field.

We took eight people with us, and we were able to harvest a limit within an hour. I was hooked. I chased ducks for several years after that and had some great hunts back here in Oklahoma. Atoka Lake was one of our favorite spots, along with some ponds we had permission to hunt.

Unfortunately, I haven't been able to chase ducks like I once did. Family, work, sports, and other hunting pursuits have taken me away a little. A few days after Christmas, my friend invited me on a hunt on his pond.

I was able to take my kids on their first real duck hunt and my first hunt in seven or eight years. Despite some dry rotted waders, mud dauber caked decoys, and spinning wing decoys that didn't spin anymore, we were able to bring in four wigeon, three gadwalls, and one mallard. Now my kids are hooked, and I remember how much I enjoy hearing those sailing wings.

Choctaw Nation has some incredible waterfowl hunting. Whether it's a small pond in a cattle pasture or in the wetlands at Red Slough WMA, don't overlook the opportunity around you. Despite what you may hear, ducks are some of the finest table fare that you can gather. Don't believe those who say it is not fit to eat.

Duck hunting does require tribal members to purchase a Federal Duck Stamp and possess a Harvest Information Program (HIP) permit. Steel shot is required, and season dates and bag limits can be found at [https://www.choctawnation.com/about/eps/wildlife-conservation/](http://www.choctawnation.com/about/eps/wildlife-conservation/).

Duck season is over for this year, but you're going to want to put it on your to-do list for the 2026-2027 season.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation



District 6

Halito from District 6, the Heart of the Nation, District 6 welcomes the new year, 2026, and we are looking forward to new opportunities.

We were honored to be a part of the first-ever Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Native American Night at Wilburton High School gym and the Quinton High School Native American Night as well.

The half-time shows were filled with our Princesses performing the Lord's Prayer and a demonstration of cultural dances and songs. Isabella Hood, Wilburton JOM student, did a beautiful job of singing the National Anthem. Yako to our JOM committee for hosting the event.

Eastern Oklahoma State College in Wilburton will be hosting Choctaw Night during their basketball game on Feb. 4.

Come out and support the EOSC Mountaineers and help us represent District 6.

We are excited to announce that Eastern Oklahoma State College and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma have announced a new partnership, which will allow CNO associates to attend Eastern with deferred tuition. CNO associates will be able to enroll in up to eight academic classes per calendar year and defer eligible tuition charges for EOSC courses for approved degree programs. The memorandum of understanding was signed by Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. and EOSC President Dr. Randy Harp. Yako to our seniors for helping to empower the future of our tribe through education.

We will be holding our Valentine's lunch and senior party on Wednesday, Feb. 11. The seniors will be voting for their king and queen and enjoying a good lunch with door prizes and Cupid in the center, so watch out!

Feb. 20 is our YAB banquet. We appreciate our YAB leader, Chasity Busby and her students for their continued support at the community center for our seniors. They have been a tremendous help volunteering and serving our seniors whenever they are needed.

Our premium sale will be held at the Jennifer Woods Community Center on Feb. 21 at 6 p.m. Come support your 4-H students who have worked hard all year with their animals.

We would like to encourage our District 6 Choctaw veterans to bring a picture of themselves in their service uniforms and their service information, so we can add it to our Veteran wall as a way to recognize them for their service. We also want to thank our veterans and their families for all the sacrifices they have made. You have our deepest honor and respect for your service.

Stickball has begun, so be sure to come to Tuskaoma and support our players.

We are working to help preserve the Choctaw language with our monthly Chahta Anumpa classes on the fourth Tuesday of the month, taught by Steven Parish. Our language is important to carry on our heritage, and we encourage you to come and learn in person or on the internet, as we are now partnered with Rosetta Stone Endangered Languages Program to help preserve and teach our language to keep it from extinction.

We are very proud of one of our own hometown girls, Tammye Gwin, who was selected as Choctaw Nation Top Influencer 2026. Tammy is recognized as a top influencer within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, particularly in the realm of business development and economic growth. Tammye was a graduate of Panola High School. We know that her mother, the late Sharon Aaron, would be so proud of her, as we all are.

District 6-Heart of the Nation welcomes you to come and attend one or all of our monthly events. Prayer is held on the first Friday of each month at 7 a.m., followed by breakfast. We have potluck and bingo at 6 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month, Veterans Tvhsha Warrior Coffee on the third Thursday of the month at 10 a.m., and our senior meeting is held on the second Monday of the month at 1 p.m. There is also a beading class every two weeks on Monday from 2-6 p.m., casino trips, shopping trips and many other events that we encourage you to be a part of. Come by the community center and pick up a copy of the calendar of events as well as our menu for the month. Also, please fill out housing applications so we can build more homes in District 6.

God bless you all and Yako to the privilege to serve our great District 6.



Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Native American Nights were held at Wilburton and Quinton high schools, featuring cultural performances. Wilburton JOM student Isabella Hood sang the national anthem at the Wilburton game.



Clara Taylor is December First Language Speaker of the Month

Miss Clara May Bohan Taylor was the December First Language Speaker. Her parents were Anderson and Helen Bohannon. She has one son and five grandchildren.

Choctaw was her first language. She spoke only Choctaw at home with her parents. They attended Buffalo Presbyterian Church in Smithville, Oklahoma, where she continues to attend. She also enjoys singing Choctaw hymns.

She went to work at Smithville Elementary School as a bilingual language teacher with Christine Ludlow. After Smithville school hired her as a teacher's assistant, she worked for 36 years, retiring in 2008 after seeing many Choctaw children attend and graduate from there.

In her early years, she was part of the Choctaw revitalization movement, led by the Rev. Gene Wilson, who helped keep the culture alive. Choctaw dancing is still active today under different leadership.

She attends the Choctaw language class at the Choctaw Community Center in Talihina under the leadership of Raymond Johnson. He divided the people into groups and asked me to lead one group to help read the lesson sheets in Choctaw sentences, or read the Choctaw Bible and sing Choctaw hymns.

She attends the Choctaw Community Center in Smithville regularly. She was also part of the group in Talihina with Councilman Eddie Bohanan, who recorded Choctaw hymns on CDs.

COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA
December 13, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTES
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session November 8, 2025
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #3 - Bob Ludlow
 - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #3 - Clara Taylor
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None
7. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Assets - Vehicles
 - b. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Assets - Equipment
8. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
9. OLD BUSINESS
10. ADJOURNMENT
11. CLOSING PRAYER

All votes passed unanimously.



District 5

Halito from District 5, everyone,

The first five months of my term as District 5 Councilwoman have been extremely rewarding. During this time, I enjoyed wonderful fellowship while celebrating our Choctaw culture, and I have made many new friends along the way.

One of the highlights early in my term was attending my first Labor Day Festival as the District 5 Councilwoman. It was truly special to come together as Choctaws to honor our culture and our history. I was also proud of the District 5 Chair Volleyball Team for making the Final Four competition for the first time. Although they did not bring home the victory this year, our seniors are already training hard and preparing to take the win next year.

September was a very busy month, beginning with the Haskell County Livestock Show. It was wonderful to see months of hard

work by our students come to fruition as they proudly showcased their livestock. We also honored our hardworking Community Health Representatives at the CHR Fall Fest held at the McAlester Expo Center. This fun and informative event allows tribal members to learn more about the many programs available throughout the Nation. District 5 is blessed with two phenomenal CHRs, Tanya Leach and Yvette Edwards, and we sincerely thank them for their dedication and service.

On Sept. 24, I was welcomed by Stigler's Choctaw Nation Head Start for the annual "See You at the Pole" event. Worshipping and praying alongside our young children was incredibly uplifting. Anyone seeking to strengthen and revitalize their faith should consider joining children for this meaningful event.

Later in the month, I attended the Choctaw School of Language graduation. Seeing and hearing our young people learning the Choctaw language was truly inspiring. Chief Batton and Assistant Chief Austin have expanded the program from one year to a three-year program, which is a tremendous step forward. In my own family, we have only one first-language speaker remaining, so witnessing the revitalization and renewed interest in our language means a great deal to me.

October began with the Intertribal Council hosted by the Choctaw Nation in Durant, followed by my second Intertribal Council meeting hosted by the Cherokee Nation at the Hard Rock Casino in Tulsa, that I am just now returning home from. Both events were outstanding opportunities to collaborate and strengthen relationships with other tribes.

Despite cold and rainy weather, the Halloween Harvest Carnival in Spiro was well attended by children and families who came out to enjoy the festivities. I was also honored to attend the Outstanding Elders Banquet and recognize some truly remarkable individuals. Stigler's Outstanding Elders were Ken Davis and Joann Marlatt, while Spiro's Outstanding Elders were Joe Perry and Yvette Edwards.

From Halloween through Nov. 2, we celebrated the Choctaw Pow Wow. This powerful celebration of American Indian culture reminds the world that Native America is alive and well. The drums and dancing are not only cultural but deeply spiritual, making it a meaningful way to begin Native American Heritage Month.

We also honored our veterans at a ceremony held at Tushka Homme, where each veteran received a warm winter coat and a veteran's hat. While we honor our veterans every day, this special event allowed them to come together for fellowship and a delicious meal. It was a well-organized event, and I thank everyone who worked to make it such a success.

Thanksgiving dinners were celebrated in Stigler on Nov. 12, where Assistant Chief Austin joined us, and in Spiro on Nov. 19, where Chief Batton spent time fellowshiping with our members. Our tribal members always look forward to visiting with our Chief and Assistant Chief, who set a wonderful example as kind, godly leaders.

Another special event was Celebrate Recovery Native Nations Night in Durant. I was proud to attend, and I plan to make this a yearly event. I was also honored to participate in the ribbon-cutting for a one-mile resurfacing project on Sale Barn Road, alongside Haskell County District 2 Commissioner Watson and Kim Rose from KEDDO.

Additionally, I had the honor of presenting a \$13,389 matching grant on behalf of the Choctaw Nation to the Town of Keota and the Keota Police Department. This grant enabled them to purchase a fully equipped police vehicle for Officer Stillwell and his canine partner, Drax.

In Dec., we held Employee Service Awards ceremonies in Durant and Talihina to honor and thank our tribal and healthcare employees for their dedication and service. We also celebrated Christmas with our local tribal children in Spiro and Stigler, where each child received a toy and a visit from Santa. Seeing the joy on their faces was truly special.

We continued spreading the Christmas spirit by participating in parades in Stigler, Keota, Spiro, and McCurtain. Along with our tribal elders, we decorated the Choctaw Nation bus for the season and threw candy to the children. We all had a great time.

As we begin this new year, I hope and pray that all members of the Choctaw Nation receive abundant health and bountiful blessings from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It has been an honor to serve the District 5 tribal members and the Choctaw Nation. I sincerely thank all staff and community members who have worked alongside me and helped ensure our tribal members are connected to the many programs available to serve them.

Yako,
Jennifer Turner



Curtis Eyachabbe is January First Language Speaker of the Month

Curtis Ray Eyachabbe is a full-blood Choctaw and a fluent Choctaw language speaker. He was born in Pushmataha County to Mary and Rufus Eyachabbe.

He and his two brothers and two sisters were raised speaking Choctaw in their home. Curtis has enjoyed Choctaw culture his entire life. He has been a member of the Indian Methodist churches in Pushmataha, McCurtain and Le Flore counties.

The food, songs and fellowship included speaking his native language, which continues as he prays and sings in Choctaw as a member of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Talihina, Oklahoma. He is also a trustee of the Southeast Region of Oklahoma, Indian Missionary Conference.

He retired from the warehouse company after 32 years. During this time, he was known to many by his nickname, Gabby. He was also a legendary fast-pitch softball pitcher.

Carson currently lives in Wister, Oklahoma, with his wife, Patsy. He enjoys time with their family, including Mark, Jason, Amy, Dawson and Hayden.

COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA

January 10, 2026

12. CALL TO ORDER
13. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
14. ROLL CALL
15. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session December 13, 2025
16. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #4 - Rodney Derryberry
 - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #4 - Curtis Eyachabbe
17. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None
18. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Assets - Vehicles
 - b. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Assets - Equipment
 - c. Approve a Roadway Easement in Favor of the City of Hugo, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, in Choctaw County, Oklahoma
 - d. Approve a Roadway Easement in Favor of Deborah Drager, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, in Choctaw County, Oklahoma
19. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
20. OLD BUSINESS
21. ADJOURNMENT
22. CLOSING PRAYER

A, B, C, D, E, F, G and I passed unanimously. H passed 9 to 1 with Jess Henry voting Nay.

New documentary shines light on fight for future of Kiamichi River

By Shelia Kirven

The documentary "Drowned Land" tells the story of how citizens in Oklahoma are working to preserve their communities and halt the exploitation of the Kiamichi River. It has been shown around the country, recently ending its tour with six viewing locations within the Choctaw Nation Reservation.

Choctaw storyteller, producer, film curator and Tulsa-based filmmaker Colleen Thurston was inspired to direct the film, which spotlights Oklahoma's Kiamichi River and local water stories, as well as those of her grandfather's relationship with the lakes of the Choctaw Nation. She exposes projected plans for the river area that include the building of a hydroelectric plant by a Texas corporation, potentially destroying the land and displacing its communities.

The film was seven years in the making and features information about how the industrialization of southeastern Oklahoma's Sardis Lake and the Kiamichi Area River Valley has negatively changed what has existed for generations. It recounts the struggle of water protectors fighting to preserve the Kiamichi River from environmental exploitation, encompassing both present-day and historical struggles.

The film also visits the challenges local farmers and Indigenous residents are facing because of these changes, at times being eerily similar to displacement issues Indigenous peoples faced generations ago.



A free screening of the documentary film, "Drowned Land," was held Dec. 12, 2025, at The District at Choctaw Casino & Resort-Durant.

Thurston explained, "This is a source of life-giving water, and the risk that diversion and commodification bring not only threatens the river's survival but that of its surrounding communities. My hope is that by connecting our peoples' history of displacement due to resource extraction with the present-day struggle of water protectors, "Drowned Land" can offer a glimmer of hope that there are real solutions."

Dr. Kenneth Roberts, a native of southeastern Oklahoma and chair of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Tulsa, was one of the film's featured participants and said, "This isn't about money, it's to preserve a culture, a way of life, a heritage, that you just can't replace."

"Drowned Land" highlights the protective work being done in the heart of the Choctaw Reservation today.

The presentation also featured the work of artists and journalists who used storytelling expertise to elevate water issues across the region.

KOSU-NPR reported that, "Natural resource exploitation and displacement are the film's central themes. "Drowned Land" reflects examples of the manipulation of the earth to serve the needs of more populated areas in the state."

The documentary, which includes interviews and on-the-ground footage, premiered to a sold-out audience at the Environmental Film Festival in Washington, D.C., and was selected to launch Color Congress's inaugural Elev8Docs Multi-City Campaign, with simultaneous community screenings in Los Angeles and Santa Fe.

It also ran at other major festivals, including the Seattle International Film Festival and the Lumbee Film Festival in North Carolina.

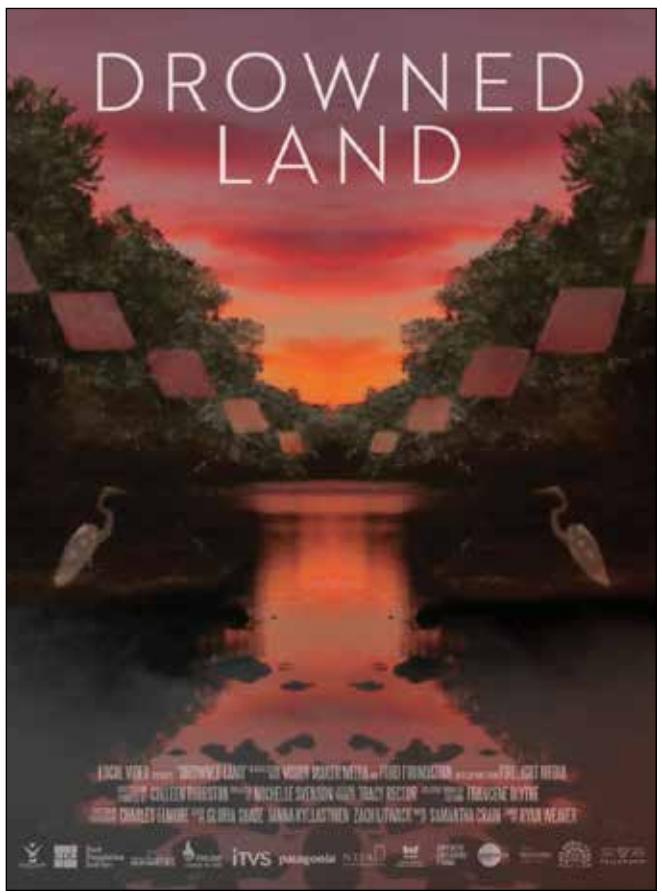
"Drowned Land" won the 2025 Best Documentary award at the sixth annual Circle Cinema Film Festival in Tulsa.

It also received the award for Best Oklahoma Documentary at the deadCenter Film Festival in Oklahoma City, and Thurston was named Best Emerging Filmmaker at the Thin Line Festival in Texas.

Thurston's work has aired on the Smithsonian Channel, Vox and PBS, and she has been commissioned by museums, tribal nations and nonprofit organizations.

Her films have been screened at international festivals and received wide support.

She is a founding member of the Indigenous Moving Image Archive, which has presented and curated numerous



Photos Via Drowned Land Social Media
Choctaw filmmaker Colleen Thurston releases a new documentary, "Drowned Land," that examines water rights and the fight for the future of the Kiamichi River.

programs and film festivals, is the project producer for the Indigenous series Native Lens and is a senior programmer for the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival.

Thurston is a 2024-25 International Documentary Association fellow and a 2025-27 Tulsa Artist Fellow. "Drowned Land" is her first feature-length documentary.

See more about Thurston on page II.

CNO opens new housing options, offers helpful programs to its tribal members

By Kendra Germany-Wall

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma marked another housing milestone Dec. 12 with a ribbon-cutting in Valliant, opening 10 LEAP homes and 10 affordable rental homes.

That same afternoon, the Nation hosted another ribbon-cutting ceremony in Hugo, marking the opening of five independent elder homes and 23 affordable rental homes.

With the addition of these homes, District 8 now has 108 completed homes, and 20 more LEAP homes approved for future construction.

Across the Choctaw Nation reservation, a total of 1,720 homes have been completed, with another 344 homes approved for construction.

These housing initiatives support elders, working families and individuals by providing stable housing that strengthens communities and promotes long-term well-being.

The Choctaw Nation Housing Authority offers several programs for tribal members on and off the reservation.

These programs include:

202 Supportive Elder Housing

Consists of one-bedroom elder units equipped with an Energy Star refrigerator, stove, and central heat and air.

Affordable Rental Housing
Provides affordable housing for lower-income households earning no more than 80% of the national median income.

Choctaw Homebuyer Advantage Program
Offers loans to eligible tribal members with no maximum income limits. Applicants must qualify for a mortgage loan based on credit and debt ratios.

Connect Home Program
Assists by providing internet access, devices, and digital literacy training to help bridge the digital divide in low-income communities.

Credit Repair Loans
Provides loans up to \$10,000 to help tribal members pay off collections, charge-offs, judgments, liens and repossessions.

Down Payment/Closing Cost Assistance
Assists tribal members with a second mortgage to help cover costs associated with purchasing a home, if allowed by the client's specific loan program and lender guidelines.

Emergency Management Wind Mitigation
Provides vouchers for wind mitigation projects to tribal members within the Choctaw Nation service area.



Residents and tribal leaders "cut the ribbon" on new independent elder homes in Hugo, Okla.

Home Rehabilitation Services
Provides emergency repairs, appliances and rehabilitation services (substantial rehabilitation or vouchers) for privately owned homes, including paid-off Mutual Help homes.

Homeowner Energy Management
Provides energy audit services and offers energy efficiency and cost recommendations to eligible tribal homeowners.

HOPE Development Corporation
Operates an eight-unit apartment complex for rent on the open market in Idabel.

HUD-Veterans Assisted Supportive Housing
Provides housing, case management and clinical services for very low-income veterans.

Independent Elder Housing
Provides affordable housing for low-income elders who can live independently. Units are located throughout the reservation and are designed for one or two people.

Lawn Services Voucher Program

Provides lawn care vouchers for eligible Choctaw tribal member homeowners or rental tenants living in the Choctaw Nation service area.

LEAP Program: Lease to Purchase
Offers a homeownership program for tribal members who meet eligibility guidelines.

Mutual Help Management Services (HMS)
Offers 3- or 4-bedroom brick homes built on one acre of land.

Rental Assistance
Provides very low-income applicants the opportunity to live in safe, decent and sanitary housing by keeping rent affordable for one year.

Section 184
Offers a loan guarantee program through approved lenders to Native Americans for homes in Indian Country, both on and off native lands.

Service Coordination
Links individuals to community services that empower them to live independently and become self-sufficient.

Storm Shelters
Provides storm shelter grants to eligible tribal members living in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas.

Streamline Rehabilitation Loans
Provides loans to assist tribal members with energy-efficient improvements and simple home repairs.

Tribal members can contact the Choctaw Nation Housing Authority at 580-235-3087 or visit choctawnation.com/services/ for housing program eligibility and applications.



The ribbon is cut on new Choctaw Nation housing options in Valliant, Okla.

2026 CHOCTAW NATION DISTRICT PRINCESS CONTESTS APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS, VISIT CHOCTAW.WS/SERVICES-ROYALTY
APPLY ONLINE AT CHAHTAACHVYFA. NO PAPER APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. ALL APPLICATIONS ARE DUE MARCH 15, 2026.

Choctaw Nation Royalty and Princess Program

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM RADON

1 OUT OF 15 HOMES HAS HIGH RADON LEVELS

Radon is a gas that you can't see, smell, or taste – but it can be dangerous. It's the second leading cause of lung cancer. Scan QR code to learn more about Radon Testing.

Scan to learn more

1 OUT OF 15 HOMES HAS HIGH RADON LEVELS

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

APPLY JANUARY 2 - MARCH 1

HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP
COLLEGE CLOTHING ALLOWANCE
TECHNOLOGY ALLOWANCE

Scan to learn more about the program.

Upcoming Events

Tribal Member Resource Fair | Feb. 10 | 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. | Durant Community Center | 2746 Big Lots Pkwy, Durant, OK 74701 | The Choctaw Nation will host a resource fair where tribal members can visit with representatives from different career and education assistance programs.

Presidents' Day Tribal Holiday | Feb. 16 | All Day | All Locations | All CNO offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Presidents' Day.

Youth Stickball Clinic: Tvhka Hofanti Himitthoa | March 19 | 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. | Choctaw Cultural Center | 1919 Hina Hanta Wy, Calera, OK 74730 | Join us this spring break for our Youth Stickball Clinic! Open to individuals aged 8-17 of all skill levels, the clinic teaches stickball fundamentals in a fun and dynamic setting. The event will be held rain or shine. Players must bring their own sticks, as sticks will not be provided.

Choctaw Community Meeting, Shreveport | Feb. 26 | 6 p.m. | Shreveport Convention Center | 400 Caddo St., Shreveport, LA 71101 | Join Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. for a Community Cultural Meeting in Shreveport, Louisiana! Update your tribal membership card, explore program booths, and enjoy a day of culture and fellowship.

Choctaw Community Meeting, Fayetteville | Feb. 28 | 2 p.m. | Graduate by Hilton Fayetteville | 70 North East Avenue Fayetteville, AR 72701 | Join Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. for a Community Cultural Meeting in Fayetteville, Arkansas! Update your tribal membership card, explore program booths, and enjoy a day of culture and fellowship.

United Way Be A Hero 5k/1-mile | March 7 | 9 a.m. | 201 W Evergreen, Durant, OK. | Run or walk to support Bryan County United Way and its partner agencies, including Red River Special Olympics. The 5K starts at 9 a.m., with the 1-mile following 10 minutes later. PACE members must sign up or cancel by noon on Thursday, Feb. 26. Race day registration and packet pickup: 7:30-8:45 a.m. at 201 W Evergreen, Durant.

District Princess Pageants | Various Dates & Locations | Young Choctaw women (1/16 degree or higher) are invited to participate in the 2026 District Princess Pageants, which will be held from April through June across multiple districts. April dates include District 5 on April 2 at 6 p.m. in Stigler; District 4 on April 7 at 6 p.m. in Poteau; District 3 on April 14 at 6 p.m. in Talihina; and District 6 on April 16 at 6 p.m. in Wilburton. For additional dates and more information, visit choctawnation.com/services/royalty-and-princess/.

For more information on upcoming events, visit www.choctawnation.com/events/ or <https://choctawculturalcenter.com/events/>.

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Unclaimed Funds

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

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

Jamie Chaney
Connor McCormick
Lailah Walton
Andrew Damron
Andrew Damron

Susan Cossey
Xavier Estaban Ochoa
Devon Christopher Clark
Dillon Brewer
Alexis Smith

Haskell County Spring Livestock Show

The Haskell County Spring Livestock Show will be held Monday, February 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Haskell County Show Barn. Local 4-H and FFA members will exhibit their goat and cattle projects, showcasing the skills and dedication they've gained through agriculture. The community is invited to attend and support these youth, who represent the future of local agriculture.

A buyer's dinner will take place on Tuesday, February 10, at 6:00 p.m., followed by the Premium Livestock Sale at 7:00 p.m., both at the Show Barn. The event thanks buyers and gives the community a chance to invest in Haskell County youth. Proceeds benefit 4-H and FFA members, supporting their educational and agricultural goals. For more information, contact the Haskell County OSU Extension.

Runderland 5K/1 Mile Results

Choctaw Nation's Healthy Lifestyle Department hosted the 4th Annual Runderland 5k/1-mile event in Talihina, Okla., during a cold early morning on Dec. 6, 2025. We had 377 participants in this festive event, who enjoyed hot chocolate and cookies after completing their run.



Overall Male
First Place-Steven Cruz of Heavener, Okla.
Second Place-Bradly Sam of Ringold, Okla.
Third Place-Tommy Brennan from Poteau, Okla.



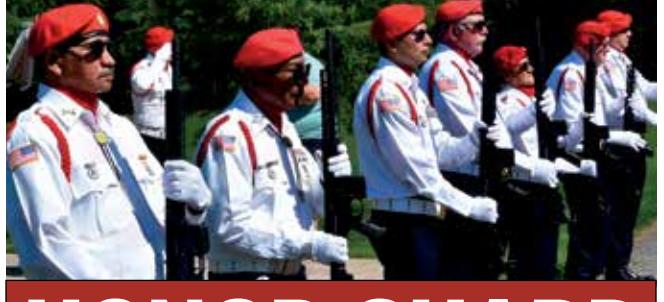
Overall Female
First Place-Chloe McMahan of Heavener, Okla.
Second Place-Elie Berger of Shady Point, Okla.
Third Place-Iris Martinez of Heavener, Okla.

For more information on upcoming races and the PACE Program, visit choctawnation.com/services/pace/.

ARPA Native American Elder Honors Nominations Open

Nominations are now open for the 18th Annual AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors, which celebrates up to 50 Native American elders who have positively impacted our country, Indian Country, the state, and their communities. The nomination period closes on March 31. This year's AARP Oklahoma Native American Elder Honors celebration will occur on October 28.

For more information and to submit a nomination, visit aarp.org/ok.



HONOR GUARD — POSITIONS AVAILABLE —

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna
Fibuali Language Lesson

Wesley I Chukka achvffa

Wesley i chukka achvffa yät chukka chito okla asha. I chukka yät aboha a nusi yät ushta micha abohushi yät tuchina. Mr. & Mrs. Wesley im aboha a nusi yät chito kvt moma i shahli. Selwi im aboha yät aboha ahoponi apata. Lewi im aboha yät Selwi im aboha misha i tännäp. Billy im aboha yät ishki micha iki aboha apata.

Wesley i chukka tikba ma abinili tohbi ushta yät hiyohmaya. I chukka achvffa yvt kucha binohmayat holiso okla hochefo kvt im achukma. Billy vt katos iba washoha im achukma. Im ofi lusa 'Booma' yut iti akkistula ma ittonlvt nusi. Hina misha i tännäp ma iti lawa hosh hiyohmaya. Hushi lusa lawa hosh iti paknaka ma okla binohli. Nittak kucha achukma ma Wesley i chukka achvffa yät na yukpa

Aboha a nusi micha
abohoshi yät katothmi
hosh Wesley i chukka
hiyohmaya?

How many bedrooms
are in the Wesley home?

Kuta hosh im aboha yät
chito moma i shahli?

Whose room is the
largest?

Kucha ya, nanta
katiohmi ho okla im
achukma?

What do they enjoy
doing outside?

I chukka achäffa ilvppa,
älla yät katothmi, micha i
hohchifo bika yät nanta?

How many children
are there and what are
their names?

Ofi yät katimma anusi?

Where does the dog
sleep?

Where does the dog
sleep?

What sits at the top of
the trees?

The Wesley Family

The Wesley family lives in a large house. Their home has 4 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms. Mr. and Mrs.

Wesley's bedroom is the largest. Sarah's bedroom is next to the kitchen. David's room is across from Sarah's room.

Billy's room is next to his mom and dad's room. There are 4 white chairs in front of the Wesley home. The family enjoys sitting outside and reading. Billy likes to play with the cat. His dog 'Booma' sleeps underneath the tree. Across the road there are many trees. Many black birds sit at the top of the trees. When it is nice outside the family is very happy.

www.choctawschool.com

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Programs & Services

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

PRINCESS IN TRAINING DATES: Districts 1, 2, 7 and 8 meet Feb. 7 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in McAlester.

Radon Action Month – January is National Radon Action Month, a time to raise public awareness about radon, a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that is the second leading cause of lung cancer. The month's goals are to encourage people to test their homes for radon, promote mitigation if high levels are detected, and educate the public on the associated health risks and prevention methods. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can seep into homes from the ground. It is the leading cause of lung cancer deaths in non-smokers. Learn more and how to participate in National Radon Action Month at choctawnation.com.

SEE AND SHARE OUR STORIES AT
TogetherWereMore.com

Choctaw Nation

SCAN CODE TO VIEW STORIES

There's something for you here.
Choctaw CAREERS
Apply at Careers.ChoctawNation.com

Scan to apply.

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER
A unique one-day getaway for the whole family!

Scan to Purchase Tickets

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

Environmental Protection Service Presents Chahta Kids' Corner

This Valentine's Day, show love to your friends and the planet by making Valentine's cards from recyclable materials!

Materials you can use include:

- Old magazines or newspapers
- Cardboard from cereal boxes
- Scrap paper or used envelopes
- Paper bags or wrapping paper
- Clean food boxes (with an adult's help)

How to make your cards:

- Cut your recycled materials into heart shapes or fun designs.
- Decorate your card with drawings, kind words or messages of love.
- Give your card to someone special!

Reusing materials helps reduce waste and keeps our planet happy!

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Redman appointed CNO Tribal Prosecutor

Emily J. Redman has been appointed Tribal Prosecutor. Redman joins Choctaw Nation as Tribal Prosecutor after 31 years in law, including nearly three years as Special Judge for Bryan County District Court and about 30 years as Assistant District Attorney, First Assistant District Attorney, and District Attorney for Oklahoma's 19th District.

Appointed District Attorney in 2005, Redman was reelected in 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018 without opposition, where she prosecuted a wide range of cases, with a special emphasis on violent crimes, including murder, manslaughter, rape, domestic violence, and crimes against children.

She helped develop the first multidisciplinary team for the investigation and prosecution of child abuse in southeastern Oklahoma and was instrumental in the creation of the ABC House, a child advocacy center in Durant, Oklahoma.

Redman has also served on the Coordinated Community Response Team, which investigates and prosecutes domestic violence, and teaches legal classes to potential law enforcement officers. She has served as an officer for the Bryan County Peace Officers Association and is a member of the Bar Associations for Choctaw Nation, Bryan County, and the State of Oklahoma.

In addition to her professional responsibilities, Redman has been actively involved in the Durant community, serving on several boards and committees. She has served as President of the Durant Noon Lions Club, as an officer for Chapter G.V. of the P.E.O. Sisterhood, and as a member of Leadership Durant and Leadership Oklahoma. She is also very active at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Durant.

McDonald is Young Woman of Integrity

Eighteen-year-old Kaylee McDonald, a proud member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and junior at Rock Creek High School in Bokchito, has been awarded the prestigious Young Woman of Integrity Award by BBB Serving Central Oklahoma. The award was presented during the 2025 Revere & Revel Conference, held on Oct. 23, 2025 at the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City.

This distinguished honor recognizes outstanding young women between the ages of 12 and 22 who exemplify BBB's core values: accountability, adaptability, collaboration, integrity, and authenticity. Nominees are selected from across Oklahoma for their leadership, entrepreneurship, and service to their communities.

Kaylee, who is also enrolled as a concurrent student at Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology (OSUIT), opened her acceptance speech by introducing herself in the Choctaw language. Her heartfelt message centered on the true meaning of integrity and leadership:

"To me, integrity means choosing courage over comfort and doing what's right over what's easy. It's not always the popular choice, but it's the one that builds character, trust, and respect. Integrity is about showing up with honesty and purpose—even when no one's watching. This award reminds me that true success isn't measured by titles or achievements, but by the kind of impact we leave behind."

She concluded her speech by encouraging other young women to lead with authenticity and purpose:

"Let your values guide you like a compass. Be accountable when things don't go as planned, stay adaptable when life changes direction, lift others instead of competing with them, and always be authentic—because who you are matters more than how perfect you appear."

Kaylee's accomplishments extend far beyond the classroom. She currently serves as Secretary of the Choctaw Nation Youth



Choctaw Nation Photo

Redman attended Durant Public Schools, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and the University of Oklahoma College of Law. She currently lives in Durant with her husband, John Redman, who serves Choctaw Nation as an Economic Developer.

Redman is excited to bring her legal and administrative skills and experience to her new role as leader of the Office of the Tribal Prosecutor.

"One of the things that drew me to this role was the incredible wraparound services the Choctaw Nation provides to its citizens involved in the justice system. Having experienced the frustration of a lack of rehabilitative resources in the state court system, I'm excited to join an organization that is truly investing in its members, especially those struggling with addiction and mental health challenges," said Redman.



Advisory Board – Durant Chapter, President of the Rock Creek FFA, and National Ambassador for the National Society of High School Scholars. She's also a member of the St. Jude Leadership Society, the National Honor Society, Student Council, and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES).

Her hands-on experience includes serving as Summer Coordinator for the Choctaw Nation's Agriculture and Land Management Department, where she led educational workshops, promoted sustainable agriculture, and assisted with conservation projects. Kaylee has also participated in national leadership and academic programs, including Washington University's Rural Scholars Academy, The Perry Initiative for Women in Medicine, and the National Native American Youth Initiative in Washington, D.C.

Her passion for both healthcare and service drives her future goals. "My goal is to complete the Nursing-RN Program at OSUIT, continue toward a BSN, and ultimately become a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine," Kaylee said. "I want to serve others through patient-centered care and community health advocacy, especially in rural and tribal communities."

Kaylee's award reflects not only her integrity but her commitment to leading with heart and purpose. As a young leader, scholar, and advocate, she continues to set an inspiring example for her peers across Oklahoma and Indian Country.



Ludlow is December Choctaw Veteran of the Month

Bobby Neil Ludlow, District #3, is the Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Ludlow was born in 1944 at the Talihina Indian Hospital and graduated from Smithville High School in 1963.

He volunteered for the U.S. Army that October, motivated by the escalating conflict in Vietnam and having a strong sense of duty to serve his country. On three occasions, his units were trained and fully prepared for deployment, but at the moment of each transfer order, he was not sent.

Sgt. Ludlow served at multiple duty stations, including Fort Polk, Louisiana; Fort Lewis, Washington; and Alaska. He also served in Korea, where he gained a deep appreciation for the opportunities and way of life offered in the United States. He competed in 106mm and 81mm mortar competitions, excelling as a top competitor, and earned expert status in rifle and pistol qualifications.

He returned to Oklahoma and utilized the GI Bill to attend Eastern Oklahoma State College and the University of Oklahoma. He and his wife of 56 years, Ruby, have one son, Sean, who is an emergency room doctor in Mustang, Oklahoma.

Ludlow was employed by the USPHS Indian Health Service for approximately 25 years and retired in 1995. He began as a clerk and rose to the highest position of Administrative Officer.

Following his retirement, he held several part-time positions, including correctional officer in Hodgen, Okla., from 2000-2007, Dictionary Committee member from October 2010-2016, Institutional Review Board member from October 2010-present, Peace Maker (Judicial Branch) from June 2017-present, Sunday school teacher, and Choctaw interpreter and community advocate. He has served in the Choctaw Nation Honor Guard since 2008. He proudly recounts his gratitude for his military service and for the Choctaw Nation.

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



Derryberry is January Choctaw Veteran of the Month

Rodney Derryberry, District #4, is the Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Derryberry was born and raised in Poteau and graduated from Red Oak High School. While still in high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. Following graduation, he departed for Fort Benning, Georgia, for basic training.

He served on active duty until 1992, then became an active-duty reservist in 1997. He had a break in service from 1998 until 2000, then reentered military service by joining the National Guard in response to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. He concluded his National Guard service in 2013, remaining in stop-loss status.

Derryberry has rendered approximately 17 years of honorable service in defense of this country and concluded his service at the rank of Staff Sergeant.

He was assigned to Delta Company 14 from Fort Benning, Georgia, and attached to the 95th Infantry Division at Fort Polk, Louisiana. He served as a drill sergeant at Fort Carson, Colorado; Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; and Fort Sill, Oklahoma, training recruits. He served with the National Guard on peacekeeping missions for the Multinational Task Force throughout the world, including deployment to Afghanistan.

His decision to serve in the military is attributed to a proud family tradition of service. His father is a Vietnam-era Army veteran, and both grandfathers honorably served during World War II.

After returning to Red Oak in 1992, Derryberry pursued a career in the oil field and later in law enforcement. He served as a drug task force supervisor for almost 20 years and currently serves as sheriff of LeFlore County.

Derryberry and his wife, April, have been married for almost 22 years and are parents to Aiden, Madison and Ethan.

He expresses deep appreciation for members of the U.S. armed forces, the Choctaw Nation, and for the opportunity he was given to serve his country with honor and dedication.

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

Searles earns master's from UC, Davis

Kasey Searles recently graduated with a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of California, Davis.

Kasey is a proud Choctaw tribal member and celebrates this milestone with his wife, Jennifer and two daughters, Olivia and Lana.



Humphreys earns MBA from NSU

"Congratulations to Steven Humphreys on earning his MBA!

We are thrilled to cele-

brate Steven Humphreys for successfully complet-

ing his Master of Business

Administration degree

and graduating with honors. This achievement reflects Steven's dedication, perseverance, and commitment to personal and professional growth. We are so proud of you!

We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Choctaw Nation for their support throughout Steven's academic journey.

Please join us in congratulating Steven on this out-

standing accomplishment!"

-The Family of Steven Humphreys



Peterson's musical artwork showcases Indigenous culture

Patricia A. Lester Peterson, a member of the Choctaw Nation and granddaughter of original enrollees Melvina Tubby Willis, Jimson Harris and Alice Pitchlynn Lester, has developed a project to honor and preserve tribal culture through music and art.

Peterson's project features a print of the hymn "Silent Night" translated into the languages of the Five Tribes of Oklahoma: Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Seminole and Muskogee-Creek.

The inspiration came from her childhood memories of hearing her mother and grandmother sing traditional Choctaw hymns at home and in church.

For the project, Peterson worked with the language programs of each tribe to provide translations of the first verse of "Silent Night," as traditionally sung during the holidays.

The print features artwork by master artist Jon Tiger, Muskogee-Creek, depicting a manger under a traditional brush arbor used by the Five Tribes and a Pendleton blanket covers the manger.

The "Silent Night" print serves as a keepsake of Native languages and culture and is available in gift shops of the Choctaw Nation. The prints are available in the Choctaw Store and the Hvshi Gift Store.

Choctaw Nation Health Center welcomes first baby of 2026

The Matlock family welcomed CNHSA's first baby of the year with the arrival of Dani Jo Matlock.

Dani Jo was born at the Choctaw Nation Health Care Center in Talihina at 11:28 a.m. Jan. 2.

She weighed 8 pounds, 8.1 ounces and measured 20.5 inches long.

Her parents, Kalib and Kimberly Matlock of Spiro, said they "couldn't be more excited to bring in the New Year with a beautiful new addition to our family."

Dani Jo was also welcomed by her two brothers.

The family shared their gratitude for the hospital staff, adding they were "blessed to have such a great staff taking care of us and our baby."



Smith inducted into Higher Education Hall of Fame

Dr. Stephen E. Smith, president emeritus of Eastern Oklahoma State College, was among 12 people inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame during the 31st annual ceremony Nov. 3 at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.

Smith served more than 30 years in education, including 13 years as president of Eastern Oklahoma State College. Appointed at age 38, he was the youngest college president in the state at the time. During his tenure, Eastern expanded academic and online programs, completed \$14 million in campus construction and renovations, secured more than \$47 million in grants, and established the college's largest endowed scholarship.

A native of Quinton and a proud member of the Choctaw Nation, Smith has also held leadership roles at the state and national levels in higher education. He retired in 2020 and was previously inducted into the Oklahoma Association of Community Colleges Hall of Fame.

The Oklahoma Higher Education Heritage Society honors people for outstanding contributions to higher education in the state.



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



Mulford turns 95

Jackie (Smith) Mulford turned 95 in November 2025. Mulford, born in Maysville, Oklahoma, enjoys cooking, sewing and karaoke night with her son, Scott. She has met Zorro, Batman and the Lone Ranger on her past three birthdays. Mulford is proud of her four children and six grandchildren.

**Slaton Brown makes global impact**

Lesley Slaton Brown, a member of the Choctaw Nation, is the former senior vice president and chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer for the National Basketball Association and a retired Hewlett-Packard executive.

Brown graduated from Boise State University in 1988 with a Bachelor of Arts from the College of Arts and Sciences and was recently recognized as a 2025 Distinguished Alumni. The award honors exceptional alumni and friends who embody the loyalty, passion and innovation found in all dedicated Broncos. Brown's professional and personal achievements have made a global impact.

**Williams receives documentary grant**

Mark Williams, a Choctaw filmmaker based in Oklahoma and Mississippi, is one of seven recipients of the 2025 Southern Documentary Fund production grant.

Each project will receive a \$15,000 production grant. Recipients include a diverse group of filmmakers from across the South, representing first-time, emerging and established talent with projects in production.

Williams' project, "Stickball: The Little Brother of War," follows an underdog women's team competing in the World Series of Native American stickball. The team faces cultural differences and formidable opponents in Mississippi.

Williams is among seven grantees selected from nearly 200 applicants.

"We're thrilled to support these remarkable documentaries that capture the spirit and stories of the American South," said Southern Documentary Fund Artistic Director Christopher Everett. "We look forward to accompanying these filmmakers on their journey as they bring their visions to life."

**Tribal nations advocate for Fort Smith, gateway to Indian Country**

By Tabatha Keton

On July 11, 2025, the Intertribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes (ITC) signed a resolution calling for continued funding for the Fort Smith Historic Site in Fort Smith, Arkansas, through the National Park Service.

The resolution notes that the council represents more than 815,000 Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole people, descendants of those who survived the Trail of Tears.

Those ancestors entered what was then known as Indian Country through the historic site the July resolution seeks to protect.

Fort Smith: Gateway to Indian Country

Often overlooked in regional history, Fort Smith served as the gateway to what became Indian Territory.

A boundary marker at the site predates statehood for both Arkansas and Oklahoma, delineating the reservation boundary with the Cherokee Nation and reaffirming the treaties that established the reservation.

The original marker is preserved in the site museum; a replica stands at its original location. Fort Smith remains an anchor for the shared history of tribal nations, underscoring why preserving and funding the site is vital for future generations.

Dr. J. Adam Beeco became the park's superintendent in December 2025, overseeing park management, resource protection, staff, budget, community engagement and strategic planning.

According to Dr. Beeco, what makes the site important is its unique coverage of over

80 years of American history.

"The site holds significant historical and cultural importance due to its crucial role as a 19th-century military outpost on the western frontier; its involvement in Native American migration, territorial issues and sovereignty; its position on the western front of the Civil War; and its later function as a federal court that brought national attention to law and order in the West, helping shape both regional and national narratives of westward expansion and justice," said Dr. Beeco.

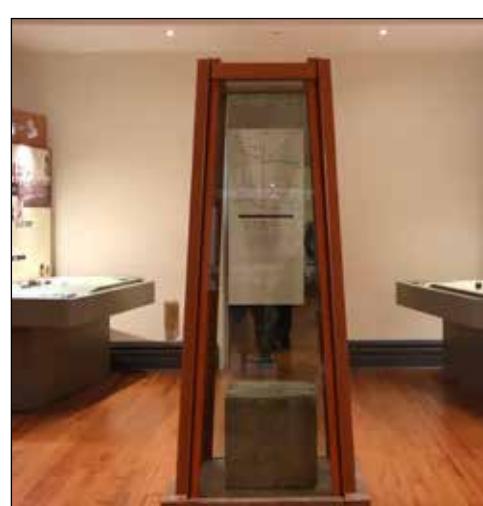
When asked about the site's significance to the broader history of the United States and its connection to the Choctaw story, Dr. Beeco explained that Fort Smith has been a part of this story from the very beginning from when it was established in 1817 to help keep peace between the Cherokee and the Osage, to the very end in the mid-1890s, when the federal court presiding over Indian Territory at Fort Smith was closed.

Proposed Federal Budget Cuts

In May, the Trump administration's proposed 2026 budget would have cut the National Park Service by more than \$1 billion, jeopardizing operations at more than 400 parks. It would have been the largest cut in the agency's 109-year history.

In response to these proposed cuts, both the ITC and the City of Fort Smith formally urged continued funding for the historic site.

The resolution passed by the ITC highlights the site as vital for sharing tribal and regional history, attracting thousands of visitors and serving as an official stop on the



Left: A replica of the boundary marker stands at the Fort Smith Historic Site. Right: The original marker is preserved in the site's museum.

Sadie Mae Powell

Army Capts. Samuel and Lara Powell of Fort Carson announce the birth of their daughter, Sadie May Powell, at 2:19 p.m. Oct. 25, 2025. She weighed 5 pounds, 11 ounces and measured 18.4 inches long.

Sadie is the grandchild of Sherry Powell and the great-grandchild of Dennis and Carol Choate.

**Capehart turns 18**

Hannah Capehart of Stigler, Oklahoma, celebrated her 18th birthday Oct. 9, 2025.

Her family sends her their birthday wishes.

"Happy 18th Birthday to our beautiful granddaughter."

- Love, Nana and Papa Capehart

**Tyler turns 95**

Zenobia Moheba Stephens Tyler celebrated her 95th birthday with family and friends at a surprise party. She was born Nov. 3, 1930, in Konawa, Oklahoma, and is the granddaughter of Isophene McCann Matthews and the great-great-granddaughter of Cornelius McCann.

A proud Choctaw, Tyler was recently recognized as the oldest Choctaw in attendance at the Choctaw Cultural Meeting in Tampa, Florida.

**Cate earns masters from SOSU**

Chara Cate received a master's degree in organizational management and leadership from Southeastern Oklahoma University, graduating with honors.

Cate, the daughter of John E. Ross and Anneisa Ross, is proud to share this milestone with her family, whose support made this accomplishment possible.

**Deason graduates flight school**

Dillon Deason, son of Mike and Jennifer Deason, completed all flight certifications from ATP Flight School in December 2025 at age 19.

His credentials include private pilot license, instrument rating, commercial pilot license, commercial multi-engine, certified flight instructor and certified flight instructor instrument.

Deason will now work to accumulate flight hours in order to fly for regional carriers. His family, church and community are proud of his achievements and future in aviation.

**Judge Glidewell earns Indigenous Peoples' Law LL.M.**

Jason Glidewell, a member of the Choctaw Nation, earned a Master of Laws, or LL.M., in Indigenous Peoples' Law from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in December 2025.

The LL.M. is an advanced law degree earned beyond the juris doctor, allowing an attorney to pursue focused, specialized study in a particular area of law.

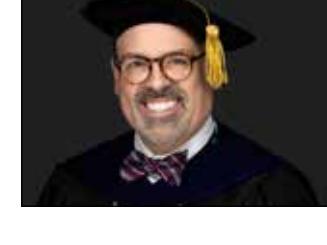
Glidewell serves as a special judge in the District Court of Oklahoma County, where he presides over felony criminal matters and manages a high-volume docket.

He also is an adjunct professor at Oklahoma City University School of Law, where he teaches federal Indian law, tribal jurisdiction and Indian gaming law. He previously taught at the University of Oklahoma.

Before joining the bench, Glidewell practiced law for more than two decades, including operating a private practice in Anadarko, Oklahoma. His service includes roles as chief magistrate for the Court of Indian Offenses, justice of the Supreme Court of the Wyandotte Nation, gaming commissioner for the Delaware Nation, and judge for the Oklahoma City Municipal Court of Record.

"My study of Indigenous Peoples' Law reflects both my deep connection and respect for Native American resilience and my personal commitment to honor my family, and my tribe, the Choctaw Nation," Glidewell said.

Glidewell also holds both a Bachelor of Arts and a Juris Doctor from the University of Oklahoma.



Photos by Tabatha Keton

As proposed federal budget cuts threaten National Park Service operations, tribal nations and city leaders are uniting to support continued funding for Fort Smith National Historic Site.

Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

The City of Fort Smith's resolution, signed a month later, called for continued and increased funding for the site through the National Park Service, emphasizing its national economic and historical significance to Fort Smith, Arkansas, Oklahoma, sovereign tribal nations, and the United States.

These partnerships are becoming increasingly important for the site's future.

"Strong relationships with partners—such as the City of Fort Smith and the tribes represented by the Intertribal Council (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee [Creek], and Seminole Nations)—are critical to our success at the Historic Site," said Dr. Beeco. "These partnerships enable collaboration across a wide range of initiatives, including the accurate interpretation of Fort Smith's deep and complex 19th-century history, regional and local tourism efforts, and educational collaborations."

Bipartisan efforts in the Senate as of Jan. 5, 2026, are focused on averting proposed funding cuts, reinforcing the critical argument for the sustained protection of the Fort Smith site.

Visiting the Fort Smith Historical Site

Fort Smith has several events planned at the historic site this year, including celebrations tied to America's 250th anniversary:

- **April 25:** 250th Anniversary/Fort Smith Darby Days
- **July 25:** Cherokee Bill Anniversary Symposium
- **Oct. 3-7:** Annual Fort Smith Fall Festival
- **Date TBD:** Exhibit on tribal treaties, in collaboration with tribal nations and the National Park Service

"Fort Smith National Historic Site is a remarkable community asset with national significance. For more than 80 years, it was the setting for pivotal events that helped shape the fabric of the United States," said Dr. Beeco. "Having such a historically rich and meaningful site right in our own backyard is an extraordinary opportunity for education, reflection and community engagement."

For more information on the site, visit <https://www.nps.gov/fosm/>.

SERVICE COORDINATION DEPARTMENT

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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

OBITUARIES

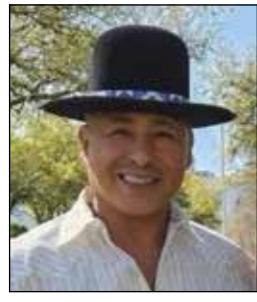
Roger Ed Coley

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, Isaac Coley, Kaila Lawson, and Kinsey 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.

**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, Addys-on Choate, and Sabrina Choate; great-grandchildren Afton Estrada, Acen Estrada, Solomon Estrada, Lylah Estrada, Atreus Estrada and Lula Estrada; along with several nieces, nephews, and a host of other family and friends.

**Stephen Hudson Butler**

Stephen Hudson Butler, 60, passed away Oct. 14, 2025.

Stephen was born Aug. 31, 1965, in Okla. City, Okla., to Virgil Hudson Butler and Linda Allen Canterbury.

He was preceded in death by his parents; stepmother Jan Butler; and stepbrother Matt Glazener.

Stephen is survived by his wife Shana Butler; son Mason Butler; stepfather Jerry Canterbury; brothers Taylor Allen Butler, Marcus Ainsworth Butler and Mitra Mechanic; stepbrother Phil Glazener; and nieces and nephews Brad and Tiffany Butler, Tabitha Butler, Creston Butler, Clayton and Erin Butler, Miles Butler, and Mitchell Butler.

**David Lee Darrough**

David Lee Darrough, 82, passed away Nov. 14, 2025.

David was born April 15, 1943, in Shidler, Okla., to Wanda (Vaught) Richardson.

He was preceded in death by his wife Patricia Ann Kempenich; his mother; infant son David Lee Darrough Jr.; sister Rhonda Gaskill; and nephew James Gaskill.

David is survived by his children Tammy, David (Maranda), Debbie (Andy), Kevin (Rachel), and Greg; 16 grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; brother Paul Richardson; brothers-in-law Jim Gaskill and Jerry (Barbara) Kempenich; and nieces and nephews he loved dearly.

**Leota Charlynn Violett**

Leota Charlynn Violett, 91, passed away Nov. 23, 2025.

Leota was born April 11, 1934, in Ada, Okla., to James Arthur and Jane Louise (Bigger) Elliott.

She was preceded in death by her husband Ted; her parents; and siblings Shirley Elliott and James Elliott.

Leota is survived by her children Charlynn Violett and spouse Randy Smith, Jenee Violett, and Tim Violett and spouse Tammy; sister-in-law Alverna Violett; grandchildren Tyler and Ben Violett, Devon McLeod, Erin McLeod and spouse Robert Price, and Christopher and Zachary Violett; great-grandsons Wyatt Price, Jensen Violett, and Casey Violett; and great-granddaughter Kinley Violett.

**Naoma Fay Frazier**

Naoma Fay Frazier, 79, passed away Nov. 25, 2025.

Naoma was born Oct. 28, 1946, to Elam Lee and Sarah Nohio Frazier.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Josephine Tyler; and brothers Robert Frazier, Willie Frazier Jr., and Herbert Nelson Jr.

Naoma is survived by sister Joanna Phenicie; brother Harrison Frazier; children Jonna Williams, John Williams and spouse Rachelle; Garry Williams and spouse Alissa; bonus children Jonathan and Carrie Williams, and Justin and Anna Williams; stepsons Jimmy Phillips and Johnny Phillips Jr.; special daughters Karen Williams, Rebecca Crawford Williams, and Jacqueline Williams; grandchildren Krysten Faith and Kevin Shown, Bailey Blythe, Elizabeth Fay, Vivien, Sydney, Annalisa, Cale, Taryn Fay, Anika, Ariana, Millie, Jalyn, John Michael and Kyler Bush; great-grandchildren Neal, Ryan, and Allie Shown; special friends Tom Parish, and John Williams; aunt Adeline Hudson and spouse Wayne; several nieces, nephews, cousins and dear friends.

**Johnnie Marie Lucas**

Johnnie Marie Lucas, 89, passed away Nov. 7, 2025.

Johnnie was born April 22, 1936, in Tishomingo, Okla., to Benjamin Walker and Agnes Dunn Walker.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Jack Lucas; brother James Walker; sisters Billie June Carr, and Mahota Salemo; her parents; and sons Robert Dale Elledge and Marcus Dean Elledge.

Johnnie is survived by sons Bennie Carr, Joseph Elledge, and Michael Lucas; and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**Paula Nell Nicholson**

Paula Nell Nicholson, 89, passed away Nov. 12, 2025.

Paula was born Jan. 20, 1936, in Wewoka, Okla., to Joe and Margaret Roebuck.

She was preceded in death by her husband Charles Ray Nicholson; and her parents.

Paula is survived by her son Greg Nicholson and girlfriend Luci Gratch; daughter Nanci Noakes and spouse Michael Noakes; sister Mary Jo Dudley; grandchildren Maegan, Randi and spouse John Stuart IV, Shelbi and spouse Denton, Hanna and spouse Austin, and Derek; great grandchildren Charli, John Stuart V, McGowin, Paislee, Samuel, and Declan.

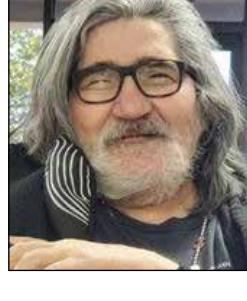
**Randall Dean Johnson**

Randall Dean Johnson, 66, passed away Dec. 2, 2025.

Randall was born Oct. 9, 1959, in Ada, Okla., to Murriel and Florence Johnson.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and brothers Murriel Jr. and Danny.

Randall is survived by brothers Roy, Terry, and Clark and spouse Michelle; sister Patty and spouse Oshiel; and a large extended family of nieces, nephews, and countless friends.

**Carman Nicole Rice**

Carman Nicole Murphy Rice, 34, passed away Nov. 5, 2025.

Carman was born May 27, 1991, in Stillwater, Okla., to William "Bill" Murphy and Jill Murphy Palma.

She was preceded in death by her husband Andrew Rice; maternal grandfather Mel Miller; paternal great-grandparents William and Ella Murphy; grandmother Opal McKinney; and aunts Carol Murphy and Merry Murphy.

Carman is survived by her father; her mother and significant other Anthony Pearl; son Aiden Duenas; daughters Graciella "Ella" Duenas and Rainey Rascon; brother Tyler Lee Murphy; sister Cailee Murphy; uncles Richard Lee Wilson, Brian Miller and spouse Kelly, and Ellis Miller; aunt Melissa Moynahan and spouse Terry; grandmother Mariann Miller; as well as numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.

**Justin Blake Tisho**

Justin "Boots" Blake Tisho, 32, passed away Friday, Nov. 28, 2025.

Boots was born Feb. 18, 1993, in Ada, Okla., to Allen Ray Tisho Sr. and Francis Gail Brandy Vega.

He was preceded in death by his father; maternal grandfather Raymond Brandy; paternal grandmother Mary Tisho; and paternal grandfather Newman Tisho.

Boots is survived by his wife Kathryn Tisho; his mother; stepson Payton Dean; daughters Rilynn Tisho, Kallen Tisho and Kopelin Tisho; brothers Allen Tisho Jr., Steven Brandy, Adrian Mendoza, Luis Vega, Brenton Tisho, Hadden Tisho, and Jake Tisho; sisters Alexis Mendoza and Lexy Battiest; adopted mother Lorenza Brandy; paternal grandparents Kenneth and Sue Tisho, and paternal grandmother Darlene Billy; several special aunts and uncles, nieces, nephews, and a host of other relatives and friends.

**Albert Van Shomo**

Albert Van Shomo Sr., 70, passed away Nov. 22, 2025.

Albert was born Sept. 11, 1955, in Talihina, Okla., to Van Shomo and Virginia Peters Jefferson.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and brothers Roydale Jefferson, Eugene Jefferson, and Jeffery Jefferson.

Albert is survived by sons Chicoty Shomo, Albert Shomo, Jr., and Cameron Shomo; daughter Mindy Shomo; brothers Russell Jefferson and Huey Jefferson; sisters Patricia Shomo and Deloris Samuels; nine grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

**Billy Joe Mayes Jr.**

Billy Joe Mayes Jr., 70, passed away Dec. 23, 2025.

Billy was born May 10, 1955, in Kimball, Neb., to Billy Joe Mayes Sr. and Caroline Green.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

Billy is survived by his daughters Sarah Bennett and spouse Cory, Tayler Mayes, and Kylie Everheart and spouse Keil; brother Steve Mayes and spouse Michelle; and grandchildren Brooks Bennett, Presley Bennett, Brody Williams, Tatum Cabello, Beckley Everheart, and Booker Everheart.

**Genevieve White**

Genevieve Coleman White, 83, passed away Oct. 22, 2025.

Genevieve was born May 13, 1942, in Talihina, Okla., to Jimmie and Lucille (Tims) Coleman.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sisters Rachel Ouellette and Virginia Coleman; brother James "Buddy" Coleman; sister-in-law Lou Ella Hansen; brothers-in-law Rodney Lester and George Clute; niece Gina Maldonado; and nephews Michael Collier, Richard Hernandez and Clemente Hernandez Jr.



Genevieve is survived by her husband Clifford; daughter Cindy (Clay) Young; son Anthony (Tammy) White; grandchildren Kasey (Jon) Watson, Karen (John) Province, Kristin Young, Kody Young, Dakota (Mariah) White, and Brandon White; great-grandchildren Jared Young, Preston Watson, Jalen Patton, Sophie Watson, Eastin Province, Jaxson White, Reese Province, and Dallas White; sisters Cheryl Sixkiller and Gwen Lester; sisters-in-law Gloria Coleman, JoAnn (Ron) Likens, Susie (Marcelino) Rosario; brothers-in-law Bob Ouellette and Vincent Orfiano; and many nieces and nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews, cousins and dear friends.

Glenda JoNaile Owen

Glenda JoNaile (Ward) Owen, 65, passed away Dec. 7, 2025.

JoNaile was born Feb. 5, 1960, in Talihina, Okla., to Tony and Mary Ellen (Cooper) Ward.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brother Tony Ward Jr.; sister Rebecca Bryant; and niece Brittany Ward.



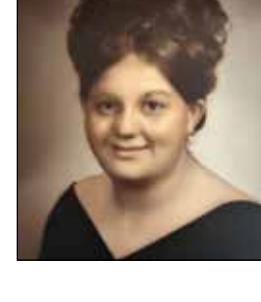
JoNaile is survived by her children Robbie Young and Summer Young; grandchildren Dristone Young, Trinity Young, Traeston Craven, Emma Maynard, and Westyn Wingo; siblings Lynn Morgan and spouse Jerry, Lisa Wright, Sherry Newby and spouse Rick, Payton Ward, and Jason Ward and spouse Mandy; special friend Susy Adcock; stepmother Doris Ward; and numerous nieces, nephews, and relatives.

Sheila Ann Spanhanks

Sheila Ann Spanhanks, 72, passed away Dec. 16, 2025.

Sheila was born Sept. 18, 1953, in Wichita Falls, Tex., to Buster Lynn and Thelma Bernice Spanhanks.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sisters Betty Spanhanks and Pat Spanhanks; brothers Wayne Spanhanks and Robert Spanhanks; nephew David Wayne Bruton; and great-niece Sutton Simpson.



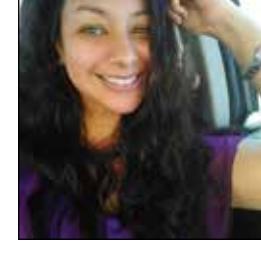
Sheila is survived by her sister Janice Spanhanks; nieces and nephews Elicia Lizarraga, Stephanie Graves and spouse Larry, Judy Simpson and spouse Greg, Sheila Hill, Karrie Hollingshead and spouse Ethan, Kiera and Brett Bagley, Kris Bruton, David Bruton Jr., Charity Kahout and spouse Grant, Raegan Nickerson and spouse Andy, Jason Spanhanks and spouse Emily, Derek Spanhanks and spouse Natasha, Vincent Spanhanks and spouse Lindsay; and many great-nieces and great-nephews.

Elizabeth Ann Tobias

Elizabeth Ann Tobias, 41, passed away Dec. 7, 2025.

Elizabeth was born Nov. 20, 1984, in Houston, Tex., to Michael Tobias Jr. and Vivian Ruth Bales Murray.

She was preceded in death by her maternal grandparents Ronald and Mary Bales; and maternal step-grandfather Aubrey Murray.



Elizabeth is survived by son Kashton Young; her father; mother and step father Vivian and Danny Murray; paternal grandparents Michael Sr. and Helen Tobias; maternal step-grandmother Linda Murray; brothers Joey Carrera, Micah Tobias and spouse Jolene; and Anthony Tobias; sisters Linda Toddy and spouse David, Danielle Tobias, and Tara Aleman and spouse Miguel; several nieces and nephews; and many other beloved family members and friends.

Cathie Jeynell Eubanks

Cathie Jeynell Eubanks, 72, passed away Nov. 12, 2025.

Cathie was born March 1, 1953, to Buster Gardner and Catherine Eileen (Wilson) Gardner.

She was preceded in death by her husband Jerry Eubanks; her parents; sisters Linda Haislip, Resa Waters, and Robin Gardner; and brothers Benny Gardner and Delbert Gardner.



Cathie is survived by daughters Kimberley Eubanks and spouse Phillip Hice, and Tracy Lentz and spouse Tony; son Jeffery Eubanks; grandchildren Leslie Canada, Adam Canada, Cheyenne Eubanks, Dakota Eubanks, Austin Castellon, Phoenix Eubanks, and Jacob Eubanks; great-grandchildren Eve Elebyany, Charlotte Lira, and Dominic Lira; brothers Darrell Gardner and spouse Carolyn, Gary Gardner, and Jessie Gardner and spouse Brandy; along with numerous nieces, nephews, extended family, and friends.

Biskinik Obituary Policy

The Biskinik publishes obituaries as a free service to Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal members.

Only official obituary notices are accepted. Funeral homes or family members may submit notices issued by a funeral home or published in a local newspaper. Self-written notices are not accepted, and any edits or additions must be confirmed by the funeral home. If no funeral home was used, special arrangements may be considered.

Due to space limitations, printed obituaries include only basic biographical details, "survived by" and "preceded in death" information.

Full obituaries are published online at biskinik.com/obituaries.

Submissions, including a link and photo, may be sent via: Email: biskinik@choctawnation.com | Online: biskinik.com/biskinik-submission-guidelines | Mail: Biskinik, P.O. Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702

ITI FABVSSA

Allies of the French: Continuing collaborations with the Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac

By Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation

France and Choctaw Nation were allies through some of the most significant years of the colonial period. In 1724, the leaders of French-allied Tribes were invited to travel to France on a diplomatic mission to meet with King Louis XV. For unknown reasons, Choctaw leaders declined the invitation.

The first ship headed to France sank off the Choctaw coast. Possibly for this reason, Choctaw leaders declined to participate, but other Tribes did.

In November 1725, a delegation of Tribal leaders from what are today the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma, Osage Nation, and Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma met with the king. In November 2025, 300 years after that meeting, leaders and representatives from historically French-allied Tribes returned to France to share stories, perspectives, and collaborative research about the historic alliance. This was not a one-off event, but a culmination of years of collaborative work involving a French National Museum (The Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac) and the historic preservation departments of a number of Oklahoma Tribes, including the Choctaw Nation. These international relationships have been valuable for several reasons.

One of them is learning more about 1700s Choctaw history and Choctaw culture in a way that can be of benefit to the Choctaw Nation as we work to expand modern sovereignty and reawaken parts of traditional culture that are currently sleeping. In this article, we will share resources where readers can access some of the information about Choctaw history and culture that has come to light through this collaboration. We hope you find it interesting and useful!

In 2016, the Choctaw Nation's Historic Preservation Department reached out to the Musée du Quai Branly Museum about objects in their collection that are or may be culturally affiliated with the Choctaw people. Relationship-building and information exchange led to an exhibit at the Versailles Public Library titled "An Inquisitive Prince", which drew attention to important cultural objects in the Branly's collection that may be affiliated with the Choctaw people.

This exhibit included information about the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to show French visitors that we're still here (see the October 2021 Biskinik Iti Fabvssa article titled "Renewing Choctaw-French relations through an exhibit collaboration", the online video "An Inquisitive Prince" Exhibit Virtual Opening, and the website Behind the Scenes of the Choctaw Video for the Exhibit "An Inquisitive Prince"). An expanded version of this exhibit, titled "Okhvt Chito Okhoatali: Choctaw and French Transatlantic Legacies" was hosted by the Choctaw Cultural Center in 2024 so that community members could see these objects and hear some of the stories.

The Branly has what is probably the world's foremost collection of 18th-century Native American cultural objects from the Southeast and central US. Some of these objects are almost certainly Choctaw, but many others are culturally affiliated with other Tribes.

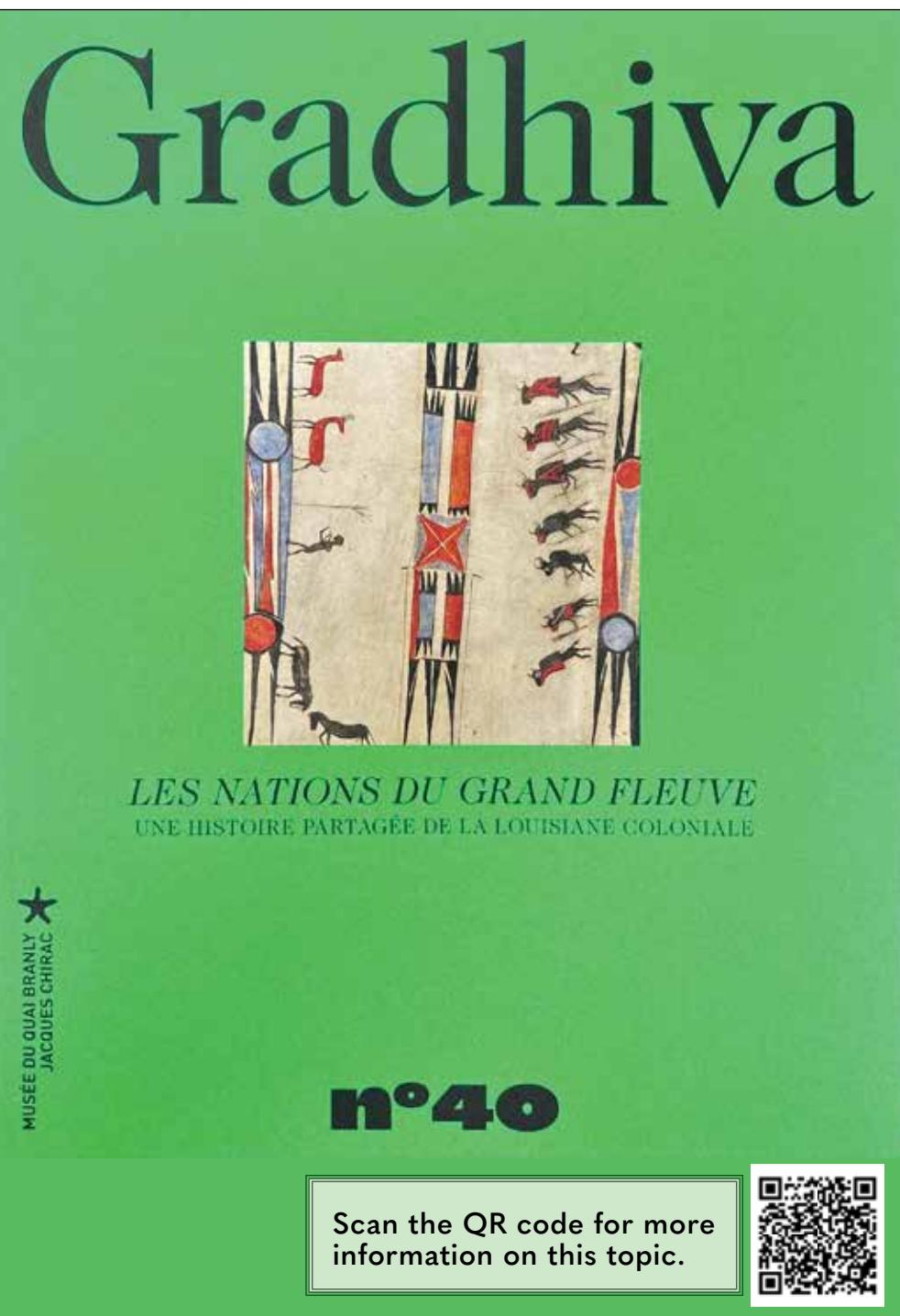
Through the CROYAN Project, the Branly made it possible for representatives from some of the historically French-allied Tribes (Miami, Peoria, Quapaw, and Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma) to look through its collections together. They made it possible for the Tribes to see other early Native American cultural objects curated by other French institutions like the National Library of France and the Versailles Public Library. They also made it possible for the Tribes to visit French archives and view early French maps of our home areas. These maps are important as they contain historical, linguistic, and cultural knowledge and provide examples of our ancestors' lifeways and relationships with the landscapes of our homeland. These maps are stored at the National Archives of France, the Vincennes Historical Archive Center, and the National Library of France. Many of them can be accessed online through the Gallica digital library.

In discussing the maps and cultural objects with our colleagues from the other tribes and our colleagues from France, we found something amazing. Through our own histories, cultures, and languages, each had parts of a bigger story.

When we brought these different knowledges and perspectives together in the same room, stories of Tribal history, Tribal traditional culture, and international alliances poured out and braided together into a holistic, vibrant picture in a way that none of the parties could have done on their own.

In November 2025, the Branly hosted the "Sharing Collections, Co-Writing History: New Collaborative Practices within Indigenous North American Contexts" symposium in Paris, France. The afore-mentioned Tribes, joined by others, and the Branly staff gave joint presentations with each other about the collaborative research that has been done over the past years.

Many of these collaborative research projects were also published for a wider audience (Gradhiva No. 40 "The Nations of the Great River: A Shared History of Colonial Loui-



Gradhiva

LES NATIONS DU GRAND FLEUVE
UNE HISTOIRE PARTAGÉE DE LA LOUISIANE COLONIALE

MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY JACQUES CHIRAC

n°40

Scan the QR code for more information on this topic.



Photo Provided

Gradhiva No. 40 is a French publication of the Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac and features articles by Choctaw and other Indigenous authors.

siana"). Hopefully, this kind of work will become the norm in the future. It's of value to institutions because it provides them with more knowledge about their collections. It's of value to Tribal communities working to restore, revitalize, and reconnect.

After the symposium, the Branly, in collaboration with the afore-mentioned Tribes, opened a joint exhibit at Versailles Palace, "1725. Native American Allies at the Court of Louis XV". This exhibit will run until March 3rd, 2026, at the Palace of Versailles. It speaks to the relationships between France and Native Nations during the 18th century and the trip by a delegation of Native Leaders to meet King Louis XV.

Tribal representatives from each of the Tribal Nations got to participate in the opening of the exhibition and interact with the French public. Our hope for the next collaborative project is to bring the exhibit to Oklahoma, where our communities can see the cultural objects and read the stories for themselves.

To learn more about these partnerships, we encourage you to view this Iti Fabvssa article online, as it contains many online links to additional web content. You can find the Iti Fabvssa online at choctawnation.com or on Choctaw Nation's social media.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

With winter weather approaching this season, it's time to think about protecting your home from becoming a winter weather casualty.

First, are your pipes protected? Any exposed pipe needs to be insulated or have a heat lamp placed on it to protect it from freezing, especially if it is on a north-facing wall.

The same applies to well houses; ensure they have a heat source or a heat lamp to prevent freezing. One other way to prevent freezing is to keep water dripping in your house. Running water won't completely freeze, so leaving a sink dripping will keep your water on and will not impact your water bill much.

Now is a great time to replace the filters in your HVAC system. Your system will be working hard to heat your house, so having a clean filter will help it not have to work quite as hard.

Also, remember that when temperatures drop into the teens and single digits, your system won't be able to keep your home as warm as it normally does. Find a comfortable temperature (around 65-68 degrees) and wear an extra layer of clothing to help stay warm.

If you have propane heat, get a little extra now. If you wait until after the winter weather hits, it may be a couple of days before your provider can get to you to fill your tank.

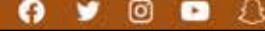
Other precautions to help your heat stay in the home include updating weatherstripping, checking under doors for drafting and applying draft protection around windows. The old saying goes that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Addressing potential issues now may save you high costs for repairs later.



Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

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Want to learn more about Choctaw history?

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



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

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma celebrates expansion of McAlester Health Clinic

MCALISTER, Okla. (December 22, 2025) — The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) marked the completion of its McAlester Health Clinic expansion with a ribbon cutting ceremony, highlighting a significant investment in access to high-quality, patient-centered care for Choctaw tribal members and the surrounding community.

The expansion enhances the clinic's ability to meet growing healthcare needs by increasing clinical space, improving patient flow, and supporting additional services designed to reduce wait times and expand access to preventive and primary care.

"Providing quality healthcare close to home is one of our most important responsibilities," said Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Chief Gary Batton. "This expansion reflects our commitment to strengthening the health of our people and ensuring families in this region have access to the care they deserve, now and for generations to come."

The clinic added six specialty services, including gastroenterology, car-

iology and orthopedics. The previous clinic building is now being renovated to attach to the expansion, providing a cohesive clinic for all patient needs. The renovations are expected to be completed in the summer of 2026.

"This expanded clinic allows our team to better serve patients with more space, improved workflows, and the capacity to grow alongside our community which is quickly becoming a major hub in Oklahoma," said James Haley, clinic operations director of the Choctaw Nation Health Clinic in McAlester. "We are proud to offer an environment that supports both excellent care and a positive experience for every patient who walks through our doors."

The facility also features more than 80 works of art from Choctaw creators. Artists featured include Jane Semple-Umsted, Norma Howard, Connie Phillips, Diana Folsom, and more.

In addition to the mural by Rhiana Deck, the walls are decked with paintings, photographs from the reservation and original cultural pieces.



Choctaw Nation Photos

Staff, Choctaw Nation leadership and McAlester community members gathered to celebrate the opening of the clinic expansion.



Rhiana Deck works on a mural in the front hallway of the clinic expansion.



Artwork throughout the clinic was created by Choctaw tribal members.

Choctaw Nation McAlester Health Clinic

1127 S George Nigh Expy McAlester, OK 74501
Phone: 918-423-8440
Business Hours: Monday - Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Closed Weekends and Holidays
Choctaw Nation Tribal Transit: Toll Free: (877) 892-1181



SERVICES

- Behavioral Health
- Medical Laboratory
- Radiology
- WIC
- Pediatrics
- Primary Care
- Same Day Clinic
- Geriatrics
- Specialty Clinic
- Diabetes Wellness
- Community Health Nursing -Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Respiratory Therapy
- Optometry
- Dental
- Outpatient Surgery Center

Please note: Some services require patients to meet specific eligibility criteria.

READY TO QUIT TOBACCO?

The Choctaw Nation Pharmacy offers monthly counseling, nicotine replacement therapy and long-term follow-up to support you through your quit journey.

Talk to your provider today about getting a referral.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

'Thank you' to our residents

By Dr. Cody McCorkle,
Residency Program Director



In a close-knit rural community, the Family Medicine residents are more than just doctors in training—they are neighbors, friends, and integral members of our healthcare family. On this "Thank a Resident Day" (February 28) and the entire month of February, we want to honor these dedicated individuals who play such a vital role in keeping our community healthy and cared for.

From newborn checkups to caring for our elders, these residents embrace the full spectrum of family medicine with compassion and skill. Their ability to connect with patients on a personal level and their commitment to learning and serving shine brightly in our small town.

We encourage our community to join us in recognizing the hard work of these healthcare heroes. Whether it's a kind word, a note of appreciation, or simply a heartfelt "thank you," let's make sure our residents know how much they are valued.

Your commitment doesn't go unnoticed, and we are deeply grateful for all that you do.

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.

February 2026

All markets open weekdays, January 2-28

Closed: February 16, 26 & 27

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 FEBRUARY 5

BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842

FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 12

DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773

FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 19

MCALISTER 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716

FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 10

POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431

FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 17

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

STAR PROGRAM
APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS CAN APPLY FOR REWARDS FOR THEIR STUDENTS IN GRADES 2 - 12 IN THE SPRING AND FALL SEMESTERS. APPLICATIONS FOR THE PREVIOUS FALL SEMESTER WILL CLOSE APRIL 1.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/star>
800-522-8179

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

February 3	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 4	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 6	Wright city	By Appointment
February 10	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 11	Crowder	By Appointment
February 12	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 13	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
February 13	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
February 17	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 18	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 20	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 24	Stigler	By Appointment
		Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday Call 580-640-6007 for an Appointment

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
Antlers 539.316.5089	Tuesday	8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Atoka 539.316.2050	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Battiest 580.920.7061	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Broken Bow 539.316.3011	Daily Monday - Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Durant 539.316.3517	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Heavener 539.316.4784	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Hugo 539.316.5089	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am - 4:00 pm
Idabel 539.316.4313	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
McAlester 539.316.2431	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Poteau 539.316.4606	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Smithville 580.920.7063	1st Thursday of every month	8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Spiro 918.962.5134	Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Stigler 918.967.4211	Monday & Tuesday	8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Talihina 539.316.6792	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:30 pm
Wilburton 580.642.7588	Wednesday	8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Mobile Van 580.745.4330	1st Tuesday - Boswell 3rd Tuesday - Coalgate 4th Tuesday - Clayton	9:00 am - 3:00 pm

Scan to learn more about the program.



Colleen Thurston, Filmmaker

By Kellie Matherly

Colleen Thurston is a filmmaker and proud member of the Choctaw Nation whose work connects tradition and modern innovation. With a deep respect for the power of stories, whether spoken around a family table or shared through film, Thurston has dedicated her career to elevating Native voices and perspectives while exploring the relationship between people, land, and water.

From an early age, Thurston was drawn to stories. Family narratives, cultural history, and everyday accounts fascinated her and nurtured her sense of identity. This love of storytelling evolved during college when she took an introductory media class. There, she encountered Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals*, a groundbreaking film that introduced contemporary Native characters to the screen.

"I had never seen Native people on screen in a contemporary role," said Colleen. "I'd certainly never seen Native people on screen laughing, joking around."

For Thurston, it was a transformative moment. She realized not only that Native people could tell their own stories through film, but also that she herself could become a filmmaker.

Nature has remained another profound source of inspiration in her creative life. Spending time with trees, rivers, and open skies provides clarity and sparks new ideas.

"I find a lot of inspiration for my work in the land. I feel like in those peaceful moments, ideas come to me, or I feel at my most calm, my mind is most open to receiving inspiration," she said.

Family influence also shaped her path; when her grandfather's eight-millimeter films were passed down to her, she understood that she came from a lineage of visual storytellers, adding weight and purpose to her own artistic journey.

Representation has also been central to Thurston's philosophy as a filmmaker. Growing up, she noticed that women on screen were often confined to limited roles such as mothers or love interests. Her childhood heroes came instead from characters like Marty McFly and Luke Skywalker, who embodied adventure and agency. Seeing Native people portrayed as full, complex individuals laughing, living, and thriving on screen was rare in her youth, but that scarcity fueled her commitment to creating films that expand what is possible.

"I think representation is incredibly important," Colleen said. "It's important for anyone to be able to see themselves in other characters."

Thurston began her career in traditional documentary production, honing her skills at institutions like the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., where she worked on film programming and later produced digital content for the Smithsonian Channel. Despite early success, she felt called to return home to Oklahoma, where she discovered a thriving Native film community led by creators such as Sterlin Harjo. Immersed in this environment, she began working with Native crews and telling stories rooted in her own homeland.

Her first feature documentary, *Drowned Land*, marked a turning point. Initially conceived as an environmental project, the film evolved into a personal exploration of family, land, and water. Drawing on her grandfather's connection to Oklahoma's rivers and dams, Thurston intertwined her own story with broader histories of displacement and resilience.

"I've always been aware of our history as displaced peoples and living in diaspora," said Colleen. This awareness led her to get to know more about the people who are in danger of losing everything they have to the commodification of water. She saw a pattern of displacement for Choctaws and other Native people over time, from the Trail of Tears to other relocation efforts, where Native Americans were encouraged to move to California and other areas away from their homelands.

Drowned Land deepened her role not only as a filmmaker but also as an advocate for water rights and environmental stewardship. While she resists labels like "activist," she acknowledges that telling stories of rivers, lakes, and communities naturally intersects with issues of sovereignty, treaty rights, and survival.

"It's about protecting the water. But it's also about how our history is still relevant to today and how our history continues to live. And there are traumas within that history as well," said Colleen. "There's great resiliency, but we can end those cycles, and we can end those traumas. We can make sure that doesn't happen to our people anymore."

Thurston's environmental filmmaking reflects her training in science and natural history media. She believes strongly in the power of moving images to educate, inspire, and effect change. For her, documentary film is more than storytelling—it is a tool for narrative change,



Choctaw Nation Photo

Emmy Award-winning Choctaw filmmaker Colleen Thurston elevates Indigenous voices through documentaries and creative storytelling, honoring Choctaw tradition while ensuring Native experiences are seen and valued.

one that can shift public understanding and spark real-world action. She points to moments like the Standing Rock protests of 2016, where media visibility helped demonstrate the urgency of Native struggles and contributed to a flourishing of Indigenous representation in film and television.

"Narrative change effects real change. As soon as people see themselves on screen, as soon as people see their stories represented, that has an effect off screen," Colleen said.

As one of the first female tribal members to direct a feature documentary, Thurston feels both humbled and energized by the current renaissance in Native media. She sees her work as part of a continuum of Choctaw filmmakers, including her grandfather and others who laid the groundwork for today's visibility.

Whether documenting rivers, amplifying voices of water protectors, or exploring lighter subjects such as Indigenous puppetry, her guiding principle remains constant: to honor the Choctaw tradition of storytelling and ensure that Native experiences are seen and valued.

"We can get ahead of the story. We can also get ahead of the issue, so we can tell our own stories. We can control the narrative," she said. "I want people to know how beautiful our nation is, how beautiful the reservation is, and how special places like the river are."

For Thurston, success is measured in the gratitude of those whose stories she tells. Her greatest fulfillment comes from working collaboratively with communities, protecting what is sacred, and inspiring the next generation of storytellers. Through her films, she continues to illuminate the beauty of Choctaw culture, the urgency of protecting the land and waterways, and the enduring power of stories to shape identity and create change.

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



By Claire Green Young

We are excited to introduce "The Art Beat," a new bimonthly feature in the Biskinik dedicated to celebrating the creativity and cultural richness of the Choctaw Nation. This column, written by the Public Arts team, will explore many aspects of the art found across our communities — artist profiles, artwork highlights, exhibition features, discussions of traditional and contemporary mediums, and more. Our goal is to honor the stories and visions that shape Choctaw culture and inspire future generations. Keep an eye out for "The Art Beat" every other month as we share these journeys with you.

For this first article, we turn to a remarkable installation that bridges millennia: DG Smalling's "Reawakening Design from Deep Time," on display at Choctaw Landing in Hocchatown, Oklahoma. The exhibit opened in November in honor of Native American Heritage Month and will remain on display through April 2026. This display offers visitors an experience that is both visually stunning and deeply meaningful.

DG Smalling is a masterful Choctaw artist known for his bold, elegant linework and commitment to cultural storytelling. Smalling has exhibited internationally and is widely recognized for his "one-line" drawing technique, which reflects both discipline and fluidity. His work often explores themes of identity, continuity and reclamation, positioning Choctaw aesthetics within a global conversation about art and heritage. In addition to his artistic achievements, Smalling has actively cultivated relationships with numerous tribal nations, engaging in cultural collaborations that span design, ceremonial traditions and community projects. Through these partnerships, he amplifies Indigenous voices and fosters intertribal connections that enrich the broader narrative of Native art. Through projects like "Reawakening Design from Deep Time," Smalling demonstrates how traditional motifs can inspire modern design without losing their cultural integrity.

In this exhibition, Smalling presents tile and carpet patterns created with Esmer Tile and Encore Hospitality Carpets. This collaboration exemplifies how Indigenous aesthetics can transform contemporary environments. Through his Cultural Design Collaborations, Smalling invites us to imagine homes, workplaces and gathering spaces infused with intentional beauty and cultural continuity. The exhibit at Choctaw Landing is not only a celebration of Choctaw artistry but also a milestone in contemporary Native design. Unveiled at the 2025 Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association trade show, this collaboration coincided with an extraordinary honor: The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art named Smalling the first U.S. citizen and Native American Kaikee/Chronicler, recognizing his role in the upcoming 2026 Spring Tea Ceremony in Washington, D.C. This event will unite Choctaw and Japanese tea traditions, featuring these designs alongside ceremonial vessels and yaupon tea — a drink shared by our ancestors and continued by traditionalists today.

The patterns in Smalling's custom tile and carpet collection are striking — geometric, rhythmic and intentional — but their story reaches far beyond aesthetics. These designs originate from a pottery shard discovered in our ancestral homelands, estimated to be 3,000- to 5,000-years-old. Once buried and unseen for millennia, this ancient motif now lives again — not as artifact, but as living design. Smalling brings the shard's legacy into the present with vibrant colors that pulse with energy. One carpet showcases rich earth tones, reflecting the natural hues of land, sky and fire through striking shades of blue, green and orange. In contrast, his other carpet and tile captivate visitors with bold, eye-catching bursts of hot pink and radiant yellow. His ceramic tiles, laser-cut with precision as part of a new custom line, transform the ancient motif into contemporary art — each piece a fusion of heritage and innovation. The interplay of bold pigments and meticulous craftsmanship ensures that every tile and carpet is not only functional, but also a radiant celebration of cultural continuity.

Through Smalling's vision, what was dormant has been reawakened, layered with meaning and relevance. It reminds us that the past is not behind us; it lives within us, shaping how we see, build and move through the world today. By reclaiming and reinterpreting ancestral patterns, Smalling celebrates both the beauty of our forebears and the enduring power of their vision. These designs are more than surfaces — they are symbols of strength, echoes of origin and visions for generations yet to come.

This exhibit is more than a display — it is a conversation across centuries. It asks us to consider how art can serve as a bridge between heritage and innovation, between what was and what will be. For visitors to Choctaw Landing, these patterns offer a moment of reflection: a chance to experience designs that carry the weight of history and the promise of tomorrow. If you are interested in seeing these works on display, visit Choctaw Landing or keep an eye out for them on exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art in 2027.

As we launch "The Art Beat," we invite you to join us in exploring these stories. Art is not static — it moves, evolves and speaks. Through this column, we will continue to highlight the artists and traditions that make Choctaw art and culture so rich and resilient. From beadwork to murals, from pottery to performance, every piece has a story worth telling. Keep an eye out for "The Art Beat" in future issues of the Biskinik. Together, let's celebrate the creativity that connects us to our roots and shapes our future.

BUSINESS

CHAHTAPRENEUR

CHIT • CHAT



From Receipts to Results: Getting Ahead of Tax Season

By Brad Erwin

This season marks more than just the start of a new year. For small business owners, it also signals the beginning of everybody's favorite time of year: tax season. While taxes are rarely an exciting topic, they can feel especially overwhelming for entrepreneurs who are balancing daily operations, family responsibilities and long-term growth goals.

The good news is that approaching tax season early and intentionally can make a significant difference in both your financial health and your peace of mind.

Many small business owners wait until March, April or even October to start thinking about taxes. By that point, receipts are scattered, accounts are unclear and stress levels are high. Now is the ideal time to slow down, take inventory and set yourself up for a smoother filing season. It is also a valuable opportunity to reflect on the past year and evaluate goals for the year ahead.

One of the first steps every business owner should take is organizing financial records. This includes income statements, expense receipts, mileage logs, payroll records and bank statements. Even if you work with a tax preparer, having clean and organized records saves time, which ultimately saves money. More importantly, it helps you clearly understand where your business truly stands. Knowing your numbers is not just about compliance; it is about control.

Another important new year task is reviewing how your business is structured. Whether you operate as a sole proprietor, LLC, S corporation or C corporation, your business structure directly affects how you are taxed and what deductions are available. Many entrepreneurs set up their business quickly when they start and never revisit that decision. Tax season is a good time to ask whether your current structure still aligns with your goals or if adjustments should be considered moving forward.

Deductions are another area that is often misunderstood or underutilized by small businesses. Common deductions may include office supplies, business use of a vehicle, equipment, marketing expenses and certain home office costs. However, deductions must be legitimate and properly documented. A helpful rule of thumb is this: If

you cannot clearly explain how an expense directly supports your business, it probably should not be deducted. When in doubt, it is always better to ask a professional.

Now is also the time to prepare for required tax forms. Businesses that paid contractors during the year may need to issue 1099 forms, while employers must prepare W-2s for their employees. Missing deadlines or filing incorrectly can result in penalties that are easily avoidable with early preparation. Even businesses with no employees should confirm which forms apply to them to avoid surprises later.

Beyond compliance, tax season offers a chance to reflect on the bigger picture. Did your business grow last year? Did expenses increase faster than revenue? Are there areas where you could operate leaner or more efficiently? Taxes are not just a reporting requirement; they are a mirror that reflects how your business is truly performing.

For many small business owners, especially those in rural areas or within the reservation, access to resources can sometimes feel limited. The good news is that help does exist. Local business advisors, community development organizations and certified tax professionals can provide guidance tailored to your specific situation. Seeking help is not a weakness; it is a smart and proactive business decision.

Perhaps most importantly, it is the time to shift your mindset from reactive to proactive. Instead of dreading tax season, use it as a planning tool. Set aside money regularly for taxes throughout the year, generally around 25% to 30% of income. Track expenses monthly and schedule quarterly check-ins with yourself or a professional. These small habits can significantly reduce stress and help build long-term stability.

Small businesses are the backbone of our communities. When local entrepreneurs succeed, families are supported, jobs are created and communities grow stronger. Taking tax season seriously is an important part of protecting that impact.

If you found this information helpful or are interested in starting a business or taking your current business to the next level, visit www.choctawnationsmallbusiness.com or follow us on Facebook.

Have questions or ideas for future articles? Please reach out and let us know.

From stickball to fry bread: Choctaw Cultural Center looks ahead to 2026

By Kendra Germany-Wall and Christian Toews

The Choctaw Cultural Center wrapped up 2025, a year full of memorable events, hands-on workshops and strong community turnout, and is carrying that same energy into an exciting lineup for 2026.

From stickball clinics and curator talks to seasonal celebrations and cultural workshops, 2025 brought visitors together to learn, create and celebrate Choctaw history and traditions. Families, youth and elders alike filled the center throughout the year, reinforcing its role as a welcoming place to connect with culture in meaningful and fun ways.

Here are a few events planned for the next few months that Biskinik readers can add to their calendars.

February kicks off with a Fry Bread Workshop on Feb. 14, followed by a Curator Talk on Feb. 20 and Cinema at the Center on Feb. 28.

March brings one of the center's most popular events, the Choctaw Irish Friendship Festival on March 13-14, along with a Youth Stickball Clinic on March 19, a Curator Talk on March 20, the Easter Eggstravaganza on March 21 and Cinema at the Center on March 28.

April wraps up the spring schedule with a Women's Stickball Clinic on April 4, a Fry Bread Workshop on April 11, a Curator Talk on April 17 and Cinema at the Center April 25.

Between special events, visitors can also participate in creative, hands-on workshops. Mini Woven Elbow Basket workshops and Beaded Heart workshops are scheduled throughout February. Woven Textile Bags and Windy Month Windmills workshops will be offered on Fridays and Saturdays in March and April.

The fun continues later in the year with a Fourth of July celebration on July 4, and a major milestone as the Choctaw Cultural Center celebrates its fifth anniversary from July 23 to 25.

With a growing calendar and something for all ages, the Choctaw Cultural Center is looking ahead to another year of learning, laughter and cultural connection.

Visit choctawculturalcenter.com for more information about the Cultural Center and upcoming events.

Check out some highlight photos from 2025.



Photos by Rylee Tollett

Following a successful 2025, the Choctaw Cultural Center is looking ahead to a full schedule of cultural events and workshops in 2026. Pictured are highlights from 2025 events.



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

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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!**

BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ◆ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ◆

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Stay Connected to the Nation

CHOCTAWNATION.COM

