

## Earth Day 2026: Honoring the environment the Choctaw way

By Christian Chaney-Sackett

Every year on April 22, people worldwide celebrate Earth Day and take action to protect the environment.

From cleanups to tree plantings, the day reminds people of their shared responsibility to care for the planet.

For the Choctaw people, this commitment is deeply rooted in traditional teachings about living in harmony with the land and honoring nature's gifts for future generations. While Earth Day was first observed in 1970 and now marks its 56th anniversary, the Choctaw Nation's values of respect and stewardship for the Earth have guided its people for centuries, shaping environmental efforts to this day.

This Earth Day, the Choctaw Nation is celebrating a major milestone in its environmental efforts.

The Choctaw Nation Recycling Department has processed more than 50 million pounds of recyclable materials, reflecting the Nation's ongoing commitment to protecting natural resources across southeastern Oklahoma.

According to Tracy Horst, director of environmental compliance, this recent recycling milestone highlights the Nation's long-standing commitment to environmental responsibility.

"This achievement is a testament to our values and reflects our responsibility to care for the land," Horst said.

The Choctaw Nation recycling initiative was established in 2007 to reduce landfill waste and encourage tribal members and employees to embrace environmentally sustainable habits.

Through its environmental programs, the Choctaw Nation offers several ways for community members to get involved in conservation efforts, reduce waste and adopt responsible environmental practices across the reservation. These initiatives include two recycling centers and access to roll-off dumpsters, making it easy for both tribal and non-tribal residents to recycle a wide range of materials.

The Choctaw Nation Environmental Protection Services Department also provides information and guidance to help tribal members protect natural resources and promote a sustainable environmental future for the reservation. The department works in several areas, including environmental assessment, environmental compliance, waste resource management, wildlife conservation and recycling.

The department oversees the Nation's environmental programs and credits much of the initiative's success to strong community participation and support from tribal leadership.

"This accomplishment wouldn't be possible without the participation of our Choctaw community, partners and dedicated team members," said Tye Baker, senior director of environmental protection services, in a recent press release.

There are more than 120 Choctaw Nation recycling collection sites across 10 counties in southeastern Oklahoma, providing convenient locations for residents to recycle materials that might otherwise end up in landfills.

Recycling centers are open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The recycling program accepts a variety of materials, including aluminum cans, cardboard, paper products, plastic bags, plastic film, several types of plastics, printer ink cartridges, shredded paper, steel and tin cans and Styrofoam.

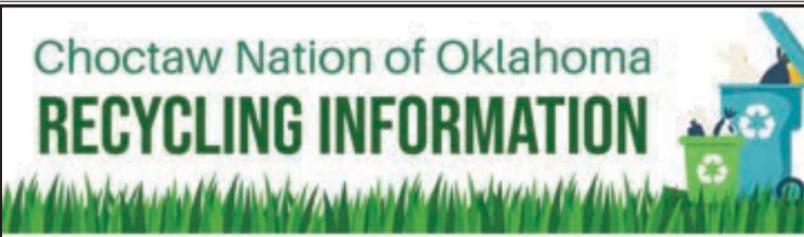
Officials request that recyclable materials be emptied before being dropped off. With dozens of recycling collection sites throughout the Choctaw Nation reservation, tribal members have ample opportunities to participate in environmental conservation efforts.

Although the holiday highlights environmental awareness each spring, individuals can help protect the planet year-round.

According to earthday.org, there are many simple ways people can make a difference in their daily lives.

Volunteering for local cleanup efforts, contacting local officials about environmental issues, shopping at farmers markets, switching to clean energy sources and growing an organic garden are just a few ways individuals can contribute to a healthier environment.

Whether participating in Earth Day events or making changes at home, every effort contributes to protecting the environment and preserving natural resources for future generations. This Earth Day, take an active role in conservation. Find the nearest recycling collection site, gather recyclables and make a drop-off. These actions can have a lasting impact on the community and the environment.



### Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma RECYCLING INFORMATION

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**CONTACT**

<p><b>Durant Recycling Center</b> 580-920-0488 3408 Enterprise Blvd Durant, OK 74701</p>	<p><b>Poteau Recycling Center</b> 918-649-0343 304 Kerr Ave Poteau, OK 74953</p>
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**DROP OFF LOCATIONS**

The Choctaw Nation has more than 100 recycling drop-off locations. See the full list at [choctawnation.com/services/recycling](http://choctawnation.com/services/recycling).

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**ACCEPTED PRODUCTS**

- Paper:** Any paper product that does not have a wax coating or is laminated.
- Plastics:** Plastics 1, 2 and 5 (as well as shrink film and plastic bags)
- Metal:** Aluminum, steel or tin cans.
- Styrofoam:** Styrofoam containers and packaging.
- Tires:** Tires are accepted at the Durant Recycling Center only. \*
- Cardboard:** Any cardboard product such as boxes, paper rolls, etc.
- Printer and Toner Cartridges:** Any printer or toner cartridge like those used in at-home printers and copy machines.

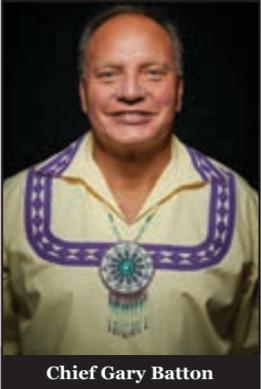
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**MORE INFO**

The Recycling Centers are open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
All materials must be clean, dry and empty.  
\*Tires must be dropped off at the Durant CNO recycling facility.  
Do not place them in roll-offs. For more info on accepted tires, contact CNO Recycling.

## Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

### CNO works to reduce poverty

For as long as the Choctaw Nation has been a tribe, the primary focus of the Chief has been to ensure the safety and livelihood of our tribal members.

Each year, the Tribal Council, the Assistant Chief and I agree on the best way forward for our tribe for the upcoming year and enact plans accordingly.

Creating opportunities for our tribal members is one of the many ways that we push the Tribe forward. The Choctaw Nation Job for the Day program gives tribal members an opportunity to decide what their career pursuit will be. One of our recent success stories, Jennifer Spainhour, came to our program in August 2020 before accepting a new position in Casino F&B, later becoming one of our Choctaw Nation recruiters.

“Working in the Job for the Day program with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has changed my life in ways I never expected,” Jennifer said. “It didn’t just provide opportunity, it restored confidence, purpose, and dignity. I’ve watched it do the same for other tribal members, opening doors to employment, stability, and hope. It’s more than a program; it’s a pathway to rebuilding lives and reminding our people that they are capable, valued, and needed.”

Just to give you some perspective on the Job for the Day Program, here a few statistics from the last three years of the program:

FY25	FY24	FY23
• Hires: 1,103	• Hires: 1,093	• Hires: 905
• Permanent Transfers: 211	• Permanent Transfers: 167	• Permanent Transfers: 171
• Transfers to another 477 (temp) program: 146	• Transfers to another 477 (temp) program: 199	• Transfers to another 477 (temp) program: 128

A key area that we focus on each year is combating poverty on the reservation. Our poverty rate is 23.5% compared to the U.S. poverty rate of 10.6% – that needs attention and improvement. Transparency is one thing we push here at the Choctaw Nation – we need to find new and better ways to combat poverty. We have plans in place, new programs and educational opportunities for our tribal members. I believe we offer exceptional programs and services to assist our tribal members in need, but we must work to ensure that those among us who need assistance or support know what is available so that they are in position to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them.

My challenge to you is to become empowered and seek ways where you may need guidance. We can’t change the poverty rate numbers in the Choctaw Nation without everyone’s help. For tribal members who are feeling helpless and believe hope is lost, please reach out to your tribe and find a solution for you and your family. My hope is that every Choctaw tribal member has a better way forward and promising future; my hope also is that tribal members in need see and understand the many programs and services we offer and take that first step to begin the process of getting help for them and their families in need.

For more information on how to kickstart your new career, you can visit the Choctaw Nation’s official Career website. We want you to be another Choctaw success story! Yakohe and God Bless!

### Choctaw Nation partners with OU to provide discounted tickets to some sporting events



Photo by Christian Toews

Representatives from the University of Oklahoma recently visited Choctaw Nation headquarters in Durant to thank the tribe for its ongoing partnership. Choctaw Nation and the university work together throughout the year to offer discounted tickets to OU athletic events for tribal members. This collaboration gives Choctaws more chances to attend college sporting events and experience the excitement of OU sports.

## WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matthew Gamble

As the days grow longer and the trees begin to bud, it’s the perfect time to dust off the fishing poles, restock the tackle box, and get ready for some of the best fishing of the year. Spring brings new life to the outdoors. Turkeys are gobbling, the weather is warming, and the bite is turning on.

If you’re fortunate enough to own or have access to a farm pond, spring can be an exceptional time to hook into a lunker largemouth bass or sometimes even a mess of crappie. Because ponds warm more quickly than larger lakes, fish move shallow earlier, making them easier to target.

Crappie are typically the first species to move in and begin spawning. Their spawn usually kicks off when water temperatures reach 45 to 55 degrees. In ponds, this happens earlier due to shallower water warming rapidly. During this time, crappie can be caught in less than 10 feet of water using marabou jigs, tubes, inline spinners, or live minnows. When the bite is hot, they’ll hit just about any small jig you put in front of them.

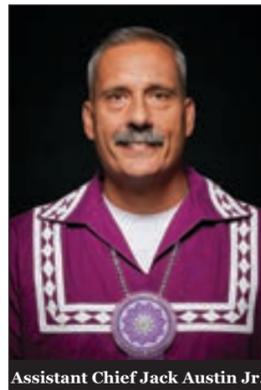
Bluegill and largemouth bass, being part of the same sunfish family, begin their spawn when water temperatures rise to around 62 to 68 degrees. As you walk along the shoreline, you may notice small circular depressions in the shallows; these are nests. Bass become especially aggressive during this period as they guard their beds, striking at nearly anything that enters their territory.

Because farm ponds are small, they’re prone to overcrowding. When fish populations become too dense, growth slows and fish become stunted. Crappie, which spawn earlier and more prolifically, often outcompete bass in these environments. As a result, ponds with crappie frequently end up with an overabundance of small crappie and undersized bass.

If this sounds familiar, the best solution is simple: harvest more fish. Allowing more anglers to fish your pond and encouraging them to keep what they catch can help restore balance. Reducing the number of fish gives the remaining population more resources to grow, leading to healthier, larger fish over time.

If you have questions about pond management or would like a consultation, you can contact the Choctaw Nation Wildlife Department at [wildlife@choctawnation.com](mailto:wildlife@choctawnation.com).

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

## A Time of Growth for CNO

Throughout the history of the Choctaw Nation, this time of year has always held an important place on the Chahta calendar. It is generally an important time to plant beans, corn, and squash, which can be harvested later in the year for food.

While there may not be quite as many farmers on the reservation as there were during the time of our ancestors, planting time is still in the spotlight for present day Chahta thanks to the Choctaw Nation’s “Growing Hope” program.

Growing Hope is our program that distributes heirloom Choctaw seeds to Choctaw tribal members and surrounding community members, helping keep our agricultural heritage alive and well.

Applications for the program can be found online – distributions are expected to go through April.

While supplies last, the following seeds are currently offered:

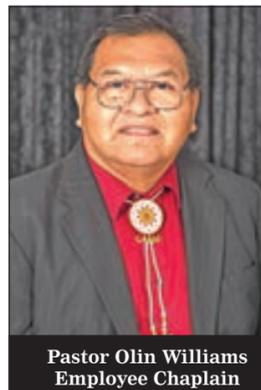
- Tanchi Tobi (Choctaw flour corn)
- Isito (Choctaw Sweet Potato Squash)
- Tobi (Smith Peas)
- Chukfi (Rabbit Peas)
- Hakchuma (perique Tobacco)
- Tvnishi (lambsquarter)
- Hvshi Pakanli (Seneca Sunflower)

Seeds from several additional Choctaw varieties are currently being grown to one day have enough to share. Traditional Choctaw produce is in many ways more nutritious than other popular foods in grocery stores, and health is as important to the nation as food sovereignty. Choctaw sweet potato squash is high in magnesium, zinc, vitamin A and iron. Choctaw Tanchi is a flour corn that can grow up to 20 feet tall. This corn is traditionally made into a corn-meal dough paste that the Choctaw people put beans in, wrap in corn husks and drop in boiling water, making a delicious meal called Banaha that is like tamales.

Seeds have always played an integral part of the Choctaw Nation’s early growth and prosperity. It ensured the Tribe was healthy and fit to do all the things needed to grow the Tribe and hunt for food to remain safe during the winter months. Our Choctaw ancestors were aware of the importance of seeds and what they meant to the Tribe.

When our Chahta ancestors were forced from their native lands during the Trail of Tears, Chahta women would sew seeds for traditional fruits, herbs and vegetables into the hems of their dresses to hide them from the US government.

To learn more about the Growing Hope Initiative and seed availability, contact Jacqueline Putman at 918-567-3709, extension 1016.



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

## The Two Resurrections

In the Bible, John 5:28-29 states, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice— And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

All that are in the grave shall hear Christ’s voice and shall come out of the grave.

Acts 24:15 says, “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”

Revelation 20:12 reads, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

The bodies of the wicked shall be raised with shame and disgrace.

Isaiah 66:24 states, “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”

Those bodies which on earth tempted and allured others with their beauty shall be loathsome and ghastly to look at when they are resurrected. They will be repulsive and abhorrent bodies. But the bodies of the saints shall be raised with honor.

1 Corinthians 15:43 says, “It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

The saints’ bodies shall shine as diamonds.

Matthew 13:43 reads, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

The bodies of the saints shall rise out of their graves with triumph, but the bodies of the wicked will be trembling. The bodies of the wicked will rise, knowing they are about to receive their fatal doom. The saints will awake from the dust, singing for joy.

Isaiah 26:19 states, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Without the doctrine of the resurrection, that the same body that dies shall rise again, all religions fall to the ground.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 says, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity!”

The resurrection of Christ is of vital importance to the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:12-14 reads, “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”

## Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

The Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation’s Home Finance Department is committed to helping Choctaw tribal members find the right mortgage product. We understand that every borrower is different, and a variety of products are offered to meet individual requirements. We make the process of securing a mortgage loan simple and straightforward.

Choctaw tribal members living within the Choctaw Nation Reservation can apply for purchase, refinance, and construction loans. These loans have a fixed market interest rate for up to 30 years.

Down payment assistance loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members nationwide. Borrowers must apply with Choctaw Home Finance and be referred to a participating lender for any loans outside the state of Oklahoma.

Streamline home improvement loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members throughout Oklahoma. The streamline loan is up to \$20,000 and allows home repairs and small home improvement projects. Appraisal and inspections may be required.

Credit repair loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members in the Choctaw Nation Reservation. This loan is up to \$10,000 and is subject to budget and credit counseling requirements. Loan qualification is based on income and credit history.

Let our knowledgeable staff assist you. Call us at 1-800-235-3087 or visit our website at [www.choctawnation.com/services/](http://www.choctawnation.com/services/) for more information.



Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

Stay Connected

CHOCTAWNATION.COM





## District 3

Halito,  
It has been a busy and exciting start to the year here in District 3! I truly appreciate everyone who puts in the effort to ensure our tribal members are taken care of and that their needs are met. I have had the opportunity to attend events centered around agriculture, education, sports and culture these past few months, so let's jump right into how these events went!

First off, I had the honor of attending a ribbon-cutting in January for the Small Business Department for T4BAR Kettle Corn, which is locally owned and operated right out of Talihina, Oklahoma. Congratulations to Chahtapreneur Daniel Toliver! Also, in January, the Tribal Council took a tour of the Three Rivers Meat Company in Smithville, Oklahoma. This company has provided the

meat and sides for many of my events in District 3, and I appreciate all that they have done for our communities!

February brought the LeFlore County Junior Livestock Show and the McCurtain County Premium Sale, both of which I was honored to attend. These youth put in many hours of hard work and training to ensure their animals are ready. The Choctaw Nation is proud to support these kids and their livestock. They represent the future of our communities and the continued success of our agricultural traditions.

In March, I had the pleasure of going to the Talihina Daycare, where I was honored to read to the children for Read Across America Day. Encouraging a love of reading at a young age is important, and it was wonderful to see the excitement and curiosity on the children's faces as they listened to the stories. Yakoke to Center Manager Deliah Humphreys and the Talihina Daycare staff for having me!

March also brought many sporting events across the reservation. I would like to especially recognize the District 3 teams and their accomplishments. Congratulations to the Whitesboro Lady Bulldogs and the Smithville Lady Braves on punching their tickets to the brand-new Coliseum in OKC!

I had the honor of attending the "Citation of Congratulations" at the State Capitol for two local teams for winning state championships! The Talihina Golden Tigers and Coach Kelly Gravitt won the Class A-2 Football State Championship back in December. They finished the season with a perfect record of 14-0. The Hodgen 7th and 8th-grade boys team also won the ORES State Championship! What an amazing accomplishment from both teams.

Stickball season has officially kicked off for our youth on the reservation! The team based in District 3 is Tvshka Waya, located in Talihina, Oklahoma, which is coached by the head coach Nakisha Garcia and assistant coaches Christene Ramirez, Chayla Anderson, Josh Anderson, Trinity Baker, Emma Battiest and Raben King. I am excited to see what this season will bring for all teams, and especially for the All-Star team, Tvshka Homma Himitta, which traveled to the World Series of Stickball in Choctaw, Mississippi, for the first time last year. This team is comprised of players from the Choctaw Nation Youth Stickball League.

We recently shared our 2023 Economic Impact on the State of Oklahoma. We have invested over \$4 billion in jobs, the community, education, housing and health. I am proud of the partnerships and support we have shown to our communities and the State of Oklahoma!

We have a few events coming up that I would like to invite you to listed below:

- Senior Citizen Easter Party | Talihina Community Center | April 6 | 10:30 a.m.
- Mother's and Father's Day Lunch | Talihina Community Center | June 2 | 11 a.m.
- Mother's and Father's Day Lunch | Smithville Community Center | June 3 | 11 a.m.
- Veteran's Appreciation Lunch | Talihina Community Center | June 9 | 11 a.m.
- Veteran's Appreciation Lunch | Smithville Community Center | June 10 | 11 a.m.
- Independence Day Block Party | Talihina Community Center | July 1 | 10 a.m. This specific event is open to the community!

Yakoke to the communities of District 3 for your support as we continue working together to strengthen our Nation!

Councilman Eddie Bohanan



Photos Provided  
Left: Councilmember Eddie Bohanan reads to kids during Read Across America. Above: the Talihina football team is recognized at the Oklahoma State Capitol.



## District 4

Halito from District 4,  
Welcome and celebrate spring! Warmer weather, sunshine, Easter, and gardening are just around the corner. Here is a recap of a few things that have happened in District 4 over the last few months, and some exciting things to come in the next few months.

At the January Tribal Council meeting, we recognized two outstanding District 4 tribal members. It was an honor to help bring attention to them for their service and commitment to our heritage. Veteran of the Month Rodney Derryberry served in the U.S. Army and continues to give back as the LeFlore County Sheriff. Yakoke, Rodney, for your service to our country and for continuing to serve our community.

We also recognized Choctaw first-language speaker Curtis Eyachabbe. Tribal members like Curtis help keep our

language, culture, and heritage strong by passing it on to the next generation. The LeFlore County Archery Tournament was held in February. It is always a fun event to attend and a great opportunity to show support for our talented youth.

The LeFlore County Premium Livestock Sale was also held, and more than 40 District 4 tribal members participated. The dedication and commitment of these young people were apparent as they proudly showcased their animals. Congratulations to each of you for making it to the sale.

Read Across America is an event I look forward to each year. The excitement, enthusiasm, and energy from our children are always inspiring. Yakoke to the educators and school associates for teaching and nurturing our children.

Congratulations to all our seniors, in the class of 2026! We are proud of your accomplishments and wish you much success in the next chapter of your lives.

Everyone is invited to attend the Princess Pageant. It will be held on Tuesday, April 7, at 6:00 pm at the Dale Cox Community Center in Poteau.

District 4 is growing!

We will have a ribbon-cutting ceremony for twenty new LEAP homes in Poteau on April 23 at 2:00 p.m. It is always exciting to see families move into their new homes and begin a new chapter.

The new Dale Cox Community Center will be opening in May. While we do not have an exact date, we will announce it as soon as it is finalized. This is a much needed facility as we have outgrown our current center.

This summer, construction on twenty Independent Elder Homes will be finished. Twenty of our elders will be moving into their new homes.

Come out and join us at the ribbon cuttings as we celebrate the continued growth of District 4!

The Tribal Council is now on Facebook! Be sure to follow our page to stay updated on council news, events, and announcements.

It is truly an honor to serve and represent District 4.

Yakoke,  
Jess Henry



Photos provided  
Left: Councilmember Jess Henry meets with contestants at the LeFlore County premium sale. Right: Councilmember Henry reads to kids during a Read Across America event.

## COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL  
SESSION AGENDA  
March 14, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - a. Regular Session February 14, 2025
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
  - a. Veteran of the Month, District #6- Janet Sam
  - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #6 - Paul Carney
6. COMMITTEE REPORTS
7. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None
8. NEW BUSINESS
  - a. Nomination of Lakesha Hawkins to Serve on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Committee (FRRCC)
  - b. Nomination of Dr. Jason Regan to Serve on the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force
  - c. Nomination of Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. to Serve on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Tribal Technical Advisory Committee
  - d. Letter of Appointment for Deanna Creel to Serve as a Commissioner of the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation and a Trustee of the HOME Finance Corporation.
  - e. Letter of Appointment for Janna McIntosh to be appointment to the Governing Board for the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority
  - f. Approve a Service Line Agreement in Favor of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, a Division of One Gas, Inc., on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation
  - g. Approve Oil and Gas Lease No. 4200525541 in Favor of Continental Land Resources, LLC, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in Carter County, Oklahoma
  - h. Approve a Grant of Right-of-Way for a Pipeline Easement in Favor of ET Gathering and Processing, LLC on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma (4-inch pipeline)
  - i. Approve a Grant of Right-of-Way for a Pipeline Easement in Favor of ET Gathering and Processing, LLC on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma (6-inch pipeline)
  - j. Approve a 20-Year Grant of Right-of-Way to Summit Utilities Oklahoma, Inc. for a Gas Line at Jones Academy on Trust and Federal Land in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma
  - k. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles
  - l. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets - Equipment
  - m. Approve Applications to the Tribal Transportation Facility Bridge Program for Funding Associated with Bridge Projects
  - n. Approve Funding for the Acquisition of Commercial Property and Related Capital Maintenance, and a Limited Waiver of Sovereign Immunity OTHER NEW BUSINESS
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER

Environmental Protection Service Presents

## Chahta Kid's Corner

EPLIL IM OMBA YUT ME !  
NA PAKANLI ISHT ULA  
APRIL SHOWERS BRING  
MAY FLOWERS

Use the word bank to fill in the blanks. First, look at what each Choctaw word means using the online Choctaw Dictionary!

Yakni, nihi, Tek Ihvshi, foi, bokushi

1. In the Choctaw calendar, April is called \_\_\_\_\_, honoring women as the givers of life who cared for the crops.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ begin increasing activity in the hive and start looking for nectar in April.
3. April is a good time to plant \_\_\_\_\_ outside! Remember to plant flowers that help pollinators like Milkweed, Coneflower, and Goldenrod.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Day happens in April.
5. Pollution harms the environment. Cleaning up the land and \_\_\_\_\_ keeps Mother Earth happy.



# Choctaw Nation helps cultivate the next generation of conservationists

By Shelia Kirven

Through hands-on learning opportunities offered throughout the year, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is teaching the next generation how to protect the environment and conserve natural resources.

The Choctaw Youth Events and Activities Program sponsors more than 40 annual events for Choctaw youth, including wildlife conservation activities. Participants can explore nature while learning about conservation, firearm safety and hunter responsibility.

Activities like animal tracking, habitat exploration, species identification, fishing and expert guidance from wildlife professionals deepen participants’ knowledge and offer a chance to earn a hunter safety card. Learn more at [choctawnation.com/services/yea/](http://choctawnation.com/services/yea/).

At the end of 2025, the Choctaw Nation hosted nearly 20 young Choctaw hunters in the Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation youth hunt.

The event was part of the department’s inaugural youth program, which provided access to hunting grounds and mentors, helping participants connect with the significance of hunting in Choctaw culture.

“These hunts teach essential skills while emphasizing the importance of safety and conservation,” said Devin Lindley, conservation education and outreach coordinator for the department.

Lindley said Choctaw youth are deeply connected to the land, reflecting the cultural significance of hunting to the Choctaw people.

Students from Jones Academy participated in the event.

According to Patrick Moore, Jones Academy senior director and superintendent, the event was a meaningful experience for his students.

“Our students were genuinely excited to be involved and eager to learn more about hunting and the outdoors. For every student who participated, this was their first hunting experience,” said Moore. “The level of engagement exceeded expectations and reflected a genuine interest and commitment, sparking curiosity that we believe will continue well beyond this season.”

Moore expressed his gratitude to the Choctaw Nation for allowing his students to participate in the event.

“We greatly appreciate the Choctaw Wildlife Department for providing this opportunity and look forward to working together to create additional experiences that help foster our students’ interest in hunting, conservation, and outdoor traditions at Jones Academy,” Moore said.

The CNO Department of Wildlife Conservation has several youth programs, including a hunter education program that issues hunter safety certificates.

The program gives presentations at schools to showcase wildlife management and conservation, and has held clinics to promote archery and fishing.

Follow them on Facebook at Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation-CNDWC or visit [choctawnation.com/about/eps/wildlife-conservation/](http://choctawnation.com/about/eps/wildlife-conservation/).

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) also connects conservation into its programming. YAB empowers youth to become leaders with a servant attitude toward others.

Students are inspired to use their skills through community service projects to promote positive change within their communities. One of their community service initiatives is Going Green. Learn more about YAB at [choctawnation.com/services/yab/](http://choctawnation.com/services/yab/).

The Choctaw Nation Natural Resources Department also offers educational opportunities through its Agriculture Demonstration Centers in Hugo and Lehigh.

These centers provide hands-on workshops, trials and demonstrations to showcase gardening trends for tribal members, communities and youth. The centers also promote agricultural opportunities and successes for tribal members through field days, on-farm research and demonstrations.

Anyone interested can contact one of the centers for more information or visit [choctawnation.com/services/ag-demo-centers/](http://choctawnation.com/services/ag-demo-centers/).

The Choctaw Cultural Center is displaying a temporary exhibit entitled: Hvpj Yakni, Hvpj Nan Ilhpita (Our Lands, Our Legacy: A Journey Through Choctaw Natural Resources).

The exhibit, which ends on April 18, focuses on the Choctaw Nation’s beautiful reservation of diverse landscapes and natural beauty.

Visitors can discover how timber, coal and water shaped tribal sovereignty, and explore



Choctaw Nation Photos

The Choctaw Nation encourages youth to protect and honor the environment, including through event appearances by Luksi, the official mascot of Choctaw Nation Recycling.



Bradyn Price proudly shows off his harvest from the recent Choctaw youth hunt.



Tracy Horst reads the book “I Love Earth” to Idabel Head Start students.



Shown is the Hvpj Yakni, Hvpj Nan Ilhpita exhibit at the Choctaw Cultural Center.

the Choctaw people’s connection to the land through an interactive recycling area.

Plan a trip to the Cultural Center by visiting [choctawculturalcenter.com](http://choctawculturalcenter.com).

The staff at Choctaw Nation Recycling Centers also have many ways they interact with youth. One way is reading stories to Choctaw Nation Day Care and Head Start students.

One book shared is “We Are Water Protectors” by Ojibwe/Métis author Carole Lindstrom and Tlingit artist Michaela Goade. The story uses a “black snake” as a metaphor for oil pipelines, urging readers to protect water and the environment. It highlights the sacredness of water, Indigenous culture and women’s connection to Mother Earth. “We Are Water Protectors” is available for purchase online and at major bookstores.

Other stories they share include “I Love the Earth” by Todd Parr, “We Are All Connected” by Gabi Garcia, and “I Can Save the Earth” by Alison Inches. These books teach children valuable lessons about recycling, protecting

the environment, and caring for the planet.

The Choctaw Nation Recycling Centers also connect with youth by offering facility tours.

Tracy Horst, environmental compliance director, said staff enjoys leading tours and welcomes schools, groups and individuals. For individual tours, visit any center during operating hours.

To schedule a group tour, call Durant at 580-920-0488 or Poteau at 918-649-0343.

The recycling centers regularly participate in school events, such as science fairs and STEM nights. Participating in these events offers program staff opportunities to set up a booth, talk to visitors about recycling, and pass out free handouts. The events also expose students and families to STEM opportunities within the community.

There are many ways that youth can participate throughout the year. To learn more about how to get more involved, contact any of the programs mentioned in this article and stay tuned for more activities coming soon.



By Claire Green Young

Women’s History Month has come to an end, but April offers us an opportunity to continue celebrating the remarkable contributions of Choctaw women whose creativity and vision enrich our nation. In this edition of The Art Beat, we honor Jane Semple-Umsted, a registered Choctaw artist whose work stands as a testament to cultural pride, artistic mastery and enduring legacy.

Jane’s art exudes the spirit of her Native roots. A descendant of two Choctaw Chiefs—Peter Pitchlynn and William F. Semple—she has spent a lifetime working in a variety of media, including oils, acrylics, watercolors, sculpture and the unique medium of batik. Her pieces are not only visually stunning but deeply connected to Choctaw heritage, making her one of the most influential artists within our community.

Visitors to the Choctaw Casino & Resort in Pocola, Oklahoma, are greeted by Jane’s artistry in a way that feels both intimate and monumental. The property proudly features eight original pieces by Semple-Umsted, primarily showcased in the hotel lobby area. These works transform the space into a gallery of cultural expression, where vibrant color and dramatic design invite guests to pause and reflect. One piece in particular commands attention. “I Lift Up My Eyes I” hangs above the grand stone mantle in the center of the lobby. The batik depicts a figure draped in a flowing red-and-black textile, gazing upward toward a soaring bird. The composition radiates strength and reverence, evoking themes of hope, prayer, and spiritual connection. Against the textured backdrop of batik, the figure’s upward gaze becomes a powerful metaphor for resilience and aspiration—a message that resonates deeply within Choctaw tradition.

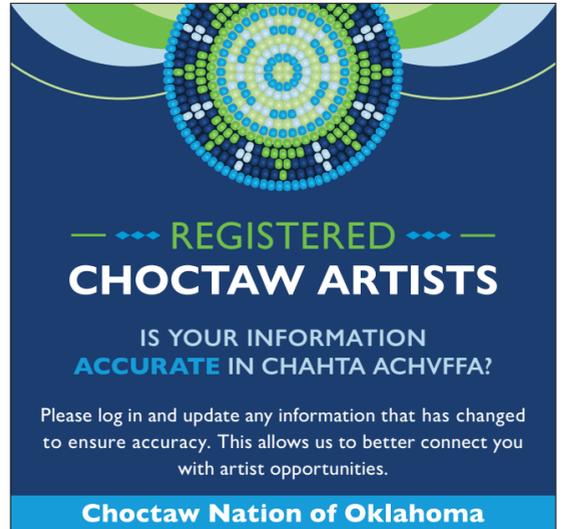
To fully appreciate Jane’s work, it helps to understand the art form she has mastered. Batik is an ancient method of painting with hot wax to create shapes on fabric. The process begins by applying wax to preserve areas from absorbing dye, then introducing colors one at a time in carefully planned steps. Each layer requires precision, as the wax holds each shape while new dyes are added. The final color—traditionally black—permeates the entire piece, adding depth and contrast. Once complete, the wax is removed using heat, and the artwork is flattened for mounting. This labor-intensive technique produces a distinctive, textured surface that feels alive with movement and complexity. For Jane, batik is more than a technique—it is a language. Through wax and dye, she tells stories of Choctaw identity, weaving together ancestral themes with contemporary artistry.

What sets Jane apart is her ability to infuse batik with cultural relevance. Since childhood, she has drawn inspiration from the visual imagery of Choctaw life—symbols, patterns, and narratives that speak to resilience and beauty. Her batiks often feature bold color palettes and dramatic compositions, reflecting both the vibrancy of Native traditions and the dynamism of modern art. In Pocola, her works do more than decorate; they define the space. Each piece serves as a cultural ambassador, reminding visitors that Choctaw heritage is not confined to history books; it thrives in living art. Through her mastery of batik, Jane bridges generations, ensuring that the stories and aesthetics of our people remain visible and celebrated.

Art has the power to shape environments and experiences. At Choctaw Casino & Resort in Pocola, Jane’s batiks create a sense of place that is uniquely Choctaw. They invite guests—whether tribal members or visitors from afar—to engage with the richness of our culture. In doing so, they affirm the importance of representation and the enduring relevance of Native artistry.

Jane Semple-Umsted honors Choctaw heritage through her art, inspiring future generations. Beyond Pocola, her work appears at Choctaw Casino & Resorts in Durant and Grant and at Choctaw Landing in Hochatown.

Look for the next Art Beat in the Biskinik as we continue to explore Choctaw artists and traditions. Meanwhile, visit Pocola to see Jane’s batiks—a journey through color, texture and history.





## Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma




# Upcoming Events

**Health Fair – Durant** | April 1 | 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. | Durant Community Center | 2746 Big Lots Pkwy Durant, OK 74701 | Stop by to learn about available services and receive free screenings aimed at supporting healthy aging. Offering health screenings, vaccinations and educational resources from Choctaw Nation departments to support community wellness for the elderly population.

**Good Friday Tribal Holiday** | April 3 | All Day | All Offices | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Good Friday.

**Ryan's Run** | April 4 | 8:30 a.m. | Jackie Brannon Correctional Center | 901 N West St McAlester, OK 74501 | Join us for a fundraiser race supporting Pittsburg County Child Abuse Response Effort, Inc. (PC-CARE Child Advocacy Center), a non-profit providing a safe, child-friendly facility for children involved in abuse investigations. Registration is for P.A.C.E. Members only. Early packet pick-up: Thursday & Friday, April 2-3 at Ryan's House Child Advocacy Center (635 Short Stonewall, McAlester, OK 74501). Race day registration and packet pick-up start at 6:30 a.m. The 5K starts at 8:30 a.m., with the Fun Run at 8:35 a.m.

**Dogwood Days 5K** | April 4 | 8 a.m. | Punkin's Coffee House and Eatery | 103 SE Ave A Idabel, OK 74745 | Idabel, the Dogwood Capital of Oklahoma, hosts its annual Dogwood Festival, McCurtain County's largest event, featuring blooming dogwood tours, the popular Dogwood 5K and exhibits at the Museum of the Red River. Registration is for PACE members only. Register by March 20 at noon; race-day check-in begins at 7 a.m. A completed 2026 PACE application is due March 19 at noon or registration will be denied. Members who pick up a packet but do not participate will forfeit membership for one year.

**Choctaw Community Meeting, OKC** | April 18 | 2 p.m. | Sheraton Oklahoma City Downtown Hotel | 1 N Broadway Ave, Oklahoma City, OK 73102 | Join Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. for a Community Cultural Meeting in OKC! Update your tribal membership card, explore program booths, and enjoy a day of culture and fellowship.

**Cinema at the Center** | April 25 | 1 p.m. | Choctaw Cultural Center | 1919 Hina Hanta Wy, Calera, OK 74730 | Buzz on over for this month's Cinema at the Center for a sweet showing of Bee Movie! Doors to Kowi Chito Theater open at 12:30 p.m., and the movie starts at 1 p.m. Admission to watch the movie is complimentary to all.

**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 Tahihina; 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/](http://choctawnation.com/services/royalty-and-princess/).

For additional information on these events and more, visit [choctawnation.com/events/](http://choctawnation.com/events/).

## NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### District 1 Community Spring Dinner

District 1 Tribal Councilman Thomas Williston will host the District 1 Community Spring Dinner at 6 p.m. Thursday, April 16, at the Idabel Community Center, 2408 E. Lincoln Road, Idabel, OK 74745.

Menu: wild onions, salt pork, banana, pinto beans, fried potatoes, cornbread, banana pudding, tea and coffee. For more info, call the Idabel Community Center at 580-286-6116.

### Grace Indian UMC Annual Gospel Singing

Grace Indian UMC will host its annual gospel singing on Friday, April 24, 2026, at Grace Indian UMC, 720 Burger Rd, Hartshorne, OK. Supper at 5:30 p.m. and singing starts at 7 p.m. The event will be emceed by Joe Coley. Come and enjoy some great gospel music and great food. All are welcome!

**PUBLIC NOTICE: Heirs of Thomas Johnson, Full Blood Choctaw, Roll #15896 S/2 SW/4 SW/4 of Section 14, Township 4 South, Range 3 East, Carter County, Oklahoma, containing 20 acres, more or less**

Heller Oil Inc. is attempting to locate the following:

Betty Johnson Harris; Donald L Johnson; Unknown Heirs of Jacob "Jake" Johnson, deceased and Unknown Heirs of Willie Palmer, aka Willie Johnson, deceased.

All the names listed are the heirs of Thomas Johnson, Full Blood Choctaw, Roll #15896. Our firm has been unable to get in contact with the mineral owners identified above, in the captioned lands. We desire to drill a well on the referenced lands and need to acquire an Oil and Gas Lease from each of the names listed above. If anyone knows the whereabouts and/or has any information on them, please contact us at one of the following: (Office) 580-226-5218, (Cell) 580-220-9279, (Email) [scott@helleroilinc.com](mailto:scott@helleroilinc.com).

### District 2 Crown Valentine's King and Queen

District 2 Valentine's Day Program was held on Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at the Choctaw Nation Community Center in Broken Bow. Mary Aaron, District 2 Senior President, led the singing of "Amazing Grace." Pastor Eveline Steele delivered a devotional on "Love."

Following the program was the crowning of the 2026 Valentine's King and Queen, Isaac Battiest and Betsy Yelloweagle.



Winners were chosen based on the amount of money each participant raised, which went towards their senior trips. The amount raised was \$2690.68.

Participants and amount raised included: Isaac Battiest with \$1209.85, Steve Jordan with \$162.95, Mary Aaron with \$273.25, Audrey Gonzalez with \$243, Lisa Aaron with \$264 and Betsy Yelloweagle with \$537.53.

The District 2 seniors wish to extend their heartfelt thanks to the community for contributing to their success.

### Newcomb Shares Heritage Through Quilting

Halito Chief Batton,

I am immensely proud to be a member of the Choctaw Nation. I have shared this heritage with my children, grandchildren, and now even my great-grandchildren. It has always been important to me that they understand where they come from and the strength and faith of our people.

Enclosed are photos of a quilt I made from T-shirts worn from attending the annual Labor Day Festival for years. (We camped in the camping area each year). Each shirt represents memories of fellowship, celebration, and unity within our Nation. A couple of the shirts feature the Choctaw Nation seal, which serves as a powerful reminder of our commitment to faith, family, and culture. Seeing those words and symbols stitched together in this quilt reminds me of how deeply rooted and connected we are as Choctaw people.

As I worked on the quilt, I also reflected on the bravery and sacrifice of our Choctaw Code Talkers in World War I and World War II. Their courage and service are lasting examples of the strength, intelligence, and patriotism of our Nation. Their legacy is one I am especially proud to pass down to the generations that follow me.

It is my hope that this quilt reflects not only the joy of my attendance at the Labor Day festivities but also the enduring spirit, resilience, and pride of the Choctaw Nation. I hope it brings you pride as well.

By the way, the quilt will go to my 26-year-old grandson, who traveled with his mother and siblings since he was young. I have



written pages of the meanings of our Great Seal, symbolism of our colors, our flag, history of stickball games, Code Talkers, our diamond pattern, etc.

Yakoke for your leadership and support of the annual Labor Day festival. I learned so much of our history each year...attended a wedding, Tim Tingle's EXCELLENT storytelling, etc.

With respect and gratitude,  
Peggy Newcomb

## Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna Eplil Language Lesson

### Pollinator Habitat Vocabulary Words

Pollinators play an essential role in helping plants grow and thrive. This month's language lesson shares vocabulary words related to pollinator habitats, offering a fun way to learn Choctaw words while celebrating the insects and plants that support healthy ecosystems.

yakni (n) land, earth, ground

osapa atokveli (n) farmer; field hand; gardener; planter

yakni pushechi (v) to till the ground, plow, pulverize

hokechi (v) to plant (seeds, plants)

oka ipeta (v) to water (a plant, etc.)

offochi (v) to cause (a plant) to grow

pakanli (v) to bloom (of a plant), blossom

foi ishki (n) honey bee

hvtapushik (n) butterfly

hvlambisha (n) bat (the animal)

chvushik (n) wasp

na pakanli (n) flower, blossom, bloom

[choctawnation.com/about/language/](http://choctawnation.com/about/language/)

**OKCHAHLI**  
BREAKING OF THE GROUND

APRIL 11, 2026  
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Scan for additional details

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

**EXPLORE AND DISCOVER**

A unique one-day getaway for the whole family!

Scan to Purchase Tickets

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

ChoctawCulturalCenter.com

**CAMPFIRES AND BIGFOOT**

APRIL 18, 2026 | 6:00PM - 8:00PM

Join us for a fireside chat with Troy Hudson at the Wheelock Academy Historic Site. This event is free and s'mores will be provided.

TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT, CALL WHELOCK AT 580.746.2139

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

**SERVICE COORDINATION DEPARTMENT**

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

Scan here to schedule an appointment

Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

**MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (MMIP) COMMUNITY EVENT 5K AND 1 MILE AWARENESS WALK**

MAY 9, 2026 | ANTLERS, OK

- 5K | \$25 (register by April 9 to receive t-shirt)
- 1 Mile Walk | \$15 (register by April 9 to receive t-shirt)
- Open to PACE and Non-PACE members
- Rain or Shine Event
- Same day registration 6:30 a.m. -7:30 a.m.
- Event begins at 8:00 a.m.

To register, scan QR code or visit [choctaws/mmip-run](http://choctaws/mmip-run)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

**beware of ticks**

**CHOCTAW NATION PUBLIC HEALTH NEEDS YOU!**

By reporting ticks, you will help everyone in your community. Public Health will be able to tell if there are any "hot spots" of tick activity to make the community aware! Report ticks you find by scanning the QR code.

Scan the QR code to report ticks.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

### Biskinik Submission Policy

The Biskinik reserves the right to determine whether submissions will be published and to edit for length, style, and clarity. Items are published on a first-received, first-run basis as space allows. Publication may take a few months due to high volume of submissions.

**Submissions may be sent via:**  
Email: [biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com) | Mail: Biskinik, P.O. Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702 | Online: [biskinik.com/biskinik-submission-guidelines](http://biskinik.com/biskinik-submission-guidelines)

**Events**  
Event announcements must be received by the submission deadline. The Biskinik is printed on the third Thursday of the month before the issue month (e.g., the January issue prints in December).

**People You Know (PYK)**  
Tribal members may submit announcements highlighting personal, educational, or professional achievements. Milestone birthdays are accepted for ages 1, 5, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 30, 40, 50, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, and older. Anniversary announcements are accepted for 25, 50, and 60+ years of marriage. Wedding, honor roll, and high school or eighth-grade graduation announcements are not published.

**Letters**  
Letters and thank-you notes from tribal members are welcome. Due to volume, not all letters can be published. Letters must be under 150 words and include full contact information. Only the writer's name and city will be printed.

For questions regarding submissions, please contact [biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com).

**BISKINIK**

The premier news source for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

The Biskinik, the official monthly publication of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, is printed each month as a free service to tribal members. To be eligible to receive the printed version of Biskinik, readers must be a Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal member. In effort to reduce waste, the Choctaw Nation restricts most mass mailings, including Biskinik, to one per household. The Biskinik is available to the public online at [biskinik.com](http://biskinik.com).

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**Biskinik or Bishinik?**  
On July 10, 2010, Tribal Council approved a bill correcting the spelling of the newspaper, changing Bishinik to the proper Biskinik as part of ongoing language revitalization efforts.

**Editor's Note:** Views and opinions in submitted articles are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Choctaw Nation.

# Celebrating Women's History Month

**DURANT, Okla.** — March is recognized as Women's History Month, a time to honor the achievements, leadership and lasting impact of women across generations. For the Choctaw people, recognizing women's contributions is deeply rooted in tradition.

Historically, Choctaw society was matriarchal, with women holding significant influence in agriculture and community decision-making. Their leadership helped sustain the Choctaw Nation's strength and resilience.

Today, Choctaw women continue to serve as the backbone of the Nation as leaders in their communities, careers and cultural preservation. Their dedication reflects the same strength and wisdom that has guided the Choctaw people for generations.

Though March has already passed, we still wanted to highlight Women's History Month. This page of the Biskinik highlights just a few of the many remarkable Choctaw women making a difference around the world. Through their leadership, talent and service, they continue a proud legacy of strong, smart and inspiring Choctaw women.

Though March has already passed, we still wanted to highlight Women's History Month. This page of the Biskinik highlights just a few of the many remarkable Choctaw women making a difference around the world. Through their leadership, talent and service, they continue a proud legacy of strong, smart and inspiring Choctaw women.

## Atwell turns 98

By Judy Allen

At 98, Jodie Atwell of Tulsa still holds close the memories of growing up in rural Oklahoma. A native of Tupelo, Oklahoma, Atwell now lives with her son, Roger, while her daughter Brenda lives next door. Two other children, Ronnie and Judie, visit often.

Raised by Harvey and Carrie Bullard alongside six siblings, Atwell said her family always knew they were Choctaw through her mother's side. Her father worked on the railroad and farmed, and Atwell remembers wanting to help pick cotton but often being told she was too small and needed to stay home to care for the house and younger children.

Atwell attended school in Tupelo through the 11th grade and walked two miles each day to a country school in Lone Oak.

Some of her fondest memories include listening to music near the country store on Saturday nights and walking to church on Sundays at the local schoolhouse.

Her memories of the "good old days" make her think maybe the world was better back then because there is "too much fighting today."

She later worked many years as a waitress and also spent time working at a Tulsa factory that produced copper coils. Atwell and her husband, LG Atwell, raised six children. Though she has lost two to cancer, she remains surrounded by a large family that includes 22 grandchildren and 27 great-grandchildren.

Reflecting on nearly a century of life, Atwell said faith, family and hard work have always guided her.

Jodie said she is happy to have lived a long life because she got to see her kids and grandkids grow up.

A message she would like to leave to all the generations of her family is, "Be good and take care of yourself!"

Her advice to younger generations is simple: "Obey God and obey the law."

For the full story, visit [biskinik.com](http://biskinik.com).



## Cleveland earns Ph.D.

Rancie Cleveland, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and a native of Prague, Oklahoma, has earned a doctoral degree from the University of Arkansas, becoming the first in her family to receive a Ph.D.

Cleveland previously earned a bachelor's degree in geography from Oklahoma State University in 2019 and a master's degree from the University of Arkansas in 2021. Throughout her college career, she received support from the Choctaw Nation Higher Education Program scholarship.

Her research focuses on planetary surfaces and atmospheres, using spacecraft imagery to study how landscapes reveal long-term atmospheric activity. Cleveland studies ice features at the south pole of Mars and sand dunes on Titan, which help scientists understand how wind, ice and climate shape planetary environments over time. During graduate school, Cleveland presented research at scientific conferences in Canada and Italy and conducted fieldwork in Namibia's Namib Sand Sea, an Earth analog for Titan's dunes.

Cleveland said her interest in space began when she looked through a telescope with her father as a child. She is also a descendant of Gilbert Wesley Duke, who served as chief of the Choctaw Nation from 1900 to 1902.

Her doctoral research was funded by NASA through the Research Opportunities in Space and Earth Sciences (ROSES) Program. She has published research on Mars and has additional work under review focusing on Titan.

Cleveland will next serve as a postdoctoral research fellow at Boise State University, where she will mentor undergraduate students studying planetary science and participate in outreach programs that bring telescope nights and space education to local schools.

She said she hopes to continue researching planetary science while encouraging young students to pursue careers in science.

"I am proud to represent my Choctaw heritage, my hometown and my family," Cleveland said.



## Boyer graduates from UNT

Chloe Josephine Boyter, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and daughter of Wayne and Holly Boyter, graduated in December 2025 from the University of North Texas with a Bachelor of Arts in broadcast journalism and a minor in history.

Boyer has accepted a position with an NBC affiliate in Oklahoma City, where she is now working as a producer for the morning news.

Her grandmother, Lily Mackey, would like to congratulate Boyter on her achievement and express gratitude to the Choctaw Tribe for the encouragement and support that helped her reach her goals.



## Boyer graduates from UT Dallas

Eddie Ginelle Boyter, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and daughter of Wayne and Holly Boyter, graduated in May 2025 from The University of Texas at Dallas.

Boyer earned a double major in speech, language and hearing sciences and child learning and development.

She has been accepted into the university's audiology program and began her doctoral studies in September 2025.

Her grandmother, Lily Mackey, also a Choctaw tribal member, said the family is proud of Boyter's accomplishments and grateful to the Choctaw Nation for the encouragement and assistance that helped support her education.



## Baker is February Veteran of the Month

John Baker, District #5, is Choctaw Nation's February Veteran of the Month.

Baker was born in McCurtain, Okla., and raised in the Stigler area. He graduated from Stigler High School in 1963 and was then employed in Ft. Smith, Ark., where he built air conditioning and refrigeration units.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army on Feb. 14, 1966, and was inducted in Oklahoma City the next day, with the understanding that he would likely be drafted soon. He completed his basic training at Fort Bliss, Texas, and was assigned to Fort Dix, New Jersey, to Company A-249 Engineer Battalion.

Sgt. Baker was assigned to the Gersvewski Barracks in Karlsruhe, Germany, as a member of MOS 76P40, working in association with supply and service operations, logistics, and inventory management, where duties included repair and maintenance of vehicles, including tanks and other military equipment. He was promoted to Sgt. E-5 and placed in charge of parts inventory. He traveled extensively throughout the region, including the Black Forrest, numerous neighboring countries, and historic castles. A camera documenting his travels and his bicycles were stolen, but he ultimately purchased an automobile to ensure transportation.

Baker's favorite duty station was in Germany, where he enjoyed the climate, the people, and the natural beauty of the country. While there, he attended the 7th Army NCO Academy for a month, where he received training in how to train and discipline people. Much of the class time was in Flint Kaserne, Bad Tolz, Bavaria, Germany, the location where Hitler's SS forces were trained.

After a year and 11 months, Baker returned to Fort Hood, Texas, SD Armor Division (Old Iron Side) for discharge. After honorably serving his country, he returned to McCurtain briefly before moving to Tulsa. He worked for Republic Van Lines for four years, traveling throughout the East Coast, packing up, and delivering households. He then worked as a carpenter for 14 years, building and remodeling homes and other buildings. For the next 25 years, he worked for Baker (Hughes) Oil Tool Company, based in California, where he began in maintenance and inventory control. Later, he built and inspected underground safety valves for oil wells, mainly overseas.

Baker currently lives in the Tulsa area, where he enjoys playing pool at the Broken Arrow Senior Center, an outstanding facility serving many fellow Choctaw retirees. He values the quality time spent with his special friend, Beverly Stevens, his children Shelia, Chris, Shelly, and Carl, and his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Jennifer Turner, District 5 Councilperson, and the Choctaw Nation for honoring his military service.

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.

## ConnectHome earns Seven Star designation

**DURANT, Okla.**—The National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) has once again honored the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Housing Authority (HACNO) ConnectHome program as one of its Seven Star Communities. Seven Star communities are models of excellence for sustainable digital connectivity solutions addressing the educational, health, economic, cultural, and social needs of their Tribal community. This is the second year NDIA has awarded this honor. HACNO was one of nine organizations to receive this award.

HACNO's ConnectHome was launched in 2015 to address the digital divide faced by residents on rural reservations. The program offers internet access, devices, and digital literacy training to individuals in over 1,500 properties, including those within its lease-to-own program, Affordable Rentals, and Independent Elder homes. In February 2025, the program was expanded to include Choctaw Nation employees.

"We are thrilled to have received the Seven Star community award for the second year. ConnectHome has worked hard to help bridge the digital divide with our tribal communities and cannot wait to see what the future has in store for the tribe," said Brooke Miller, HACNO's ConnectHome Assistance Director.

"ConnectHome has been able to connect 1,661 homes and over 630 employees to an affordable internet within the reservation. ConnectHome will continue to expand its efforts to link tribal members, employees, and communities on the reservation," said Miller.

## Hensley, Carney recognized as February and March First Language Speakers

Julia Hensley of District 5, pictured right, was recognized as First Choctaw Language Speaker of the Month during the Feb. 14 Choctaw Tribal Council Meeting.

Paul Carney of District 6 was recognized as the First Choctaw Language Speaker of the Month during the March 14 Choctaw Tribal Council Meeting, but was unable to attend.

For more information on these first language speakers,



watch the council meeting videos at [biskinik.com/council-minutes/](http://biskinik.com/council-minutes/).



## Casey named 40 under 40 honoree

Erin Casey, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, has been named a 2026 Native American 40 Under 40 Award recipient by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development.

The honor recognizes emerging Native leaders who are making significant contributions in business,

leadership and community development. Casey was recognized for her work as a meeting and events planner for the organization's annual Reservation Economic Summit, a national conference focused on connecting Indigenous business owners, entrepreneurs and leaders. Through this role, Casey helps support opportunities that strengthen Native economies and foster collaboration among Tribal communities.

Casey is proud to represent her Choctaw heritage in her work and to be recognized among other Native leaders making a difference across Indian Country.

## Cummings earns top retail honors in New York City

Tiffany Cummings, store director for the COS fashion brand in New York City's SoHo neighborhood, has received multiple company awards recognizing outstanding store performance in 2025.

Cummings earned honors for Best ACE (Aesthetic, Commercial, Engagement) Index Development with a 27% year-over-year increase, Best Executive in the MM2.5 Merchandising Model and Best Improved Store.

COS, a fashion brand launched in 2007 by the H&M Group, is known for its minimalist aesthetic and modern retail spaces. The brand's SoHo store has drawn attention for its design and atmosphere, which The New York Times described as refined and gallery-like, reflecting the brand's high-end fashion approach. The awards recognize Cummings' leadership in creating a retail experience in one of the world's most competitive fashion districts.

Cummings has helped dress celebrities such as actress, comedian and SNL alum Maya Rudolph and Stacy London, former co-host of TLC's What Not to Wear.

Cummings is the daughter of Tommy Cummings (Mvskoke/Menominee/Potawatomi) of Mansfield, Texas and Ramona Cummings (Choctaw) of Muskogee, Oklahoma. Her paternal grandparents were the late Thomas and Mildred Cummings of Hanna. Her maternal grandparents were the late Leroy and Stella Anderson of Talihina.



## Washington competes at State

Jordyn Washington, 17, a junior at McAlester High School and a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, earned a fourth-place medal at the Oklahoma Girls 6A State Wrestling Championships.

Competing in the 235-pound weight class, Washington finished the season as a state qualifier for the second consecutive year.

This was her second year participating in wrestling.



## Sam is March Veteran of the Month

Janet Sam, District #6, is the Choctaw Nation's March Veteran of the Month.

Sam grew up in Dallas, Tex., and different areas of eastern Oklahoma, graduating from Idabel High School. She joined the military after graduation at her sister's recommendation, who was also in the military. Sam joined the National Guard in June 1984.

She completed Basic Training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and was recognized for the quick assembly of her M-16 rifle.

Sam then went to Indiana for business classes, then to Fort Lee, Virginia, where she worked in the supply area and trained and competed in the Commanders Cup. Her favorite duty station was in Indiana, where she enjoyed the people she met.

Upon being honorably discharged in March 1987 with the rank of E-4, Sam married, moved to Tennessee, and started raising her family.

She later moved to Broken Bow and then to Wilburton in 1990. During her career, she worked in a factory making gloves, at the Choctaw Travel Plaza in Wilburton for 17 years, then began working in the Choctaw Community Center in Talihina, where she is still employed.

Sam is the proud mother of Taylor Ramsey, Thomas "Bubba" Billy, and Matthew Billy, and is the grandmother of Emma, Hata-pushik, Omba, and Kitsey. She enjoys playing cornhole with her son and occasionally playing chair volleyball.

She expressed her appreciation for this honor and for the work of Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr, and her councilperson, Jennifer Woods.

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.



CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

APPLY MAY 1 - JUNE 15



Scan to learn more about the program.

# Natalie Aguilera, CEO, NAHC

By Kellie Matherly

Natalie Aguilera serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Native American Health Center (NAHC) in Oakland, California. Her leadership and deep commitment to community care are rooted in a strong family legacy shaped by her grandmother, Alice Carnes, a respected Choctaw woman whose journey from Antlers, Oklahoma, to the San Francisco Bay Area helped lay the foundation for Native community support in the region.

In the early 1940s, Alice and her husband Jimmy came to Oakland, where he worked in the shipyards. When other Native American people began migrating to the area because of the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, Alice found herself drawn to supporting the new members of her community. Together with a small group of Native community members, she helped co-found the Intertribal Friendship House, one of the first urban Native community centers in the nation. There, she provided connection, cultural grounding, and vital resources to thousands of Native families navigating a new urban existence.

"You know, there's a promise of jobs, opportunities, education, health care, housing, and a lot of that didn't come to fruition. And so, how were you going to support those who came after you?" said Natalie. "The Intertribal Friendship House did that for many years and still does that today, building that connection and support and opportunity for Natives in the Bay Area."

Though Natalie didn't fully recognize her grandmother's influence as a child, she came to understand as an adult that Alice's commitment helped shape Native life in Oakland for generations.

"She did so much work for the community," Natalie said. "She just had that very caring and different type of personality and would take care of people."

Growing up, Natalie was deeply connected to her Choctaw heritage through a network of aunts and uncles, dozens of cousins, and community gatherings. Family pride and cultural connection were central values, even amid significant challenges.

According to Natalie, "We were just always proud to be Choctaw."

Her mother experienced severe health issues, mental illness, poverty, and the lingering effects of historical and personal trauma. As a child, Natalie often felt affected by her mother's difficulties, but her work at NAHC later helped her reinterpret her mother's struggles with a clearer understanding of trauma, systemic inequities, and the unmet needs of many Native people in urban environments.

"I was resentful of her at that time," remembers Natalie. "But when I got to the health center and started learning about historical trauma and learning what she went through, I really had a better understanding of what she was going through."

Natalie's path toward community health work began unexpectedly. While studying at UC Berkeley, she met her future husband in a Native American studies course. Their connection introduced her to Native student organizing and community service, planting the seeds for her future career.

After college, Natalie initially pursued work in law, imagining a career in tribal or civil rights advocacy, but soon realized the legal profession wasn't her calling. Her husband, who was already working at NAHC, encouraged her to explore opportunities there, believing she would find meaningful work that aligned with her strengths and passions.

In 2005, NAHC's then-CEO, Marty Waukazoo, reviewed her résumé and created an entry-level role that Natalie intended to hold for only a year or two. Instead, she fell deeply in love with the work and the people. Sitting among Native leaders, witnessing community-centered healing models, and seeing firsthand the struggles and resilience of Native patients transformed her. Two decades later, she has become one of the organization's most dedicated leaders.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Tribal member Natalie Aguilera honors her grandmother Alice's legacy in her role as the Chief Executive Officer of the Native American Health Center (NAHC) in Oakland, California.

Under her leadership, NAHC has expanded its cultural programming, prevention services, and integrated care model, blending Western health practices with traditional Native healing like smudging and sweat lodges.

"All the work we do at the Health Center is to help members like my mom in a holistic manner. I think what makes our community health center unique is the cultural aspect that we've always provided," said Natalie. Cultural activities like drum groups, sewing groups, and other meetings keep members connected to their cultures and each other. She helps with the Indigenous Red Market, a platform patients can use to sell the beautiful jewelry, ribbon skirts, and other art they created in their meetings.

She also supports a workforce development arm to help community members secure stable employment and is now overseeing a major development project that will add new clinical space and 76 units of affordable housing.

"We know our members can't focus on their health if they're worried about where they're living or if they're worried about a job," said Natalie. "We really want to help them get on their feet."

Natalie also founded the Seven Generations Scholarship Fund, which has grown from three applicants in its first year to nearly forty annually. Through generous community and foundation support, the program provides meaningful financial assistance to Native students pursuing college or trade school, emphasizing community pride and multi-generational achievement.

"We all might come from different tribes, but we all have that mission to serve not only our tribal members but everyone who walks through our doors," she said, adding that no matter who walks through the door, helping Native Americans remains central to the work they do at the NAHC. "I want to make sure that we stay true to our heart and our mission to our American Indian community."

See and share her story at [togetherweremore.com](https://togetherweremore.com).

# Advancing sovereignty and protecting our water resources

By Tabatha Keton

Water is the lifeblood that flows through our culture.

Water has provided Choctaw families with food, helped grow medicines, and made it possible to trade and travel.

Water defined the Nation's borders in the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. When Choctaw ancestors arrived in Indian Territory, they built new lives along these rivers, running ferries and water-powered mills. Learn more about the natural resources and their history on the reservation at the Choctaw Cultural Center's temporary exhibit "Our Lands, Our Legacy," through April 18, 2026.

## Protecting Water Resources

Water is just as important today as it was for Choctaw ancestors after the Trail of Tears.

That's why the Choctaw Nation works to protect water sources for everyone living on the reservation.

Ahndria Ablett leads the Water Resource Management Office. Her team monitors water quality, helps develop water policies at the local, state and federal levels, supports watershed conservation, provides resources to communities and plans for future water needs. Programs under her leadership include water policy and planning, sustainable communities, research and data acquisition, watershed management and surface mining.

To learn more about each department, visit [choctawnation.com/about/eps/water-resource-management/](https://choctawnation.com/about/eps/water-resource-management/).

When asked what she is most proud of about her role, Ahndria said, "I am proud of the work I am doing today because it will benefit future generations after I am gone."

For Ahndria, her work reflects her belief in being a servant for God and his people, inspired in part by her mother-in-law, Shirley (Carnes) Duran.

"She told me that we are here for others and that is how we are best servants for God and his people. The river does not flow to give itself life. It flows for others, to sustain them, to nourish their bodies as it flows to the sea. She said that as we flow through life, we help and love others as we flow to our final destination," said Ahndria. "I have taken her words to heart, and this is what I aspire to each day in service to the Choctaw Nation, its tribal members and all communities within the Choctaw Nation reservation."

Ahndria's team also shares this commitment to servant leadership and supporting future generations.

Reanna Workman, water resources senior planner, said, "Water is a huge, quiet part of the community that has been at the center of everyone's lives since the beginning of us. Not everyone gets to say that they change a generational amount of lives every day!"

Jeremy McBride, WRMO's sustainable communities manager, said, "I am most proud of the positive impact our Sustainable Communities team is having on our communities. None of this would be possible without my team, Mark Shelton and Jordan Mooney. We are becoming synonymous with a helping hand in the world of water and wastewater infrastructure."

When asked about their most memorable work, everyone mentioned helping local rural water systems.

Ahndria said her most memorable work is when "we can provide resources for water infrastructure improvements in places like Sardis Lake Water Authority that would normally not have the funds or ability to get those resources any other way!"

Both Reanna and Jeremy stated that the help their team has provided to the LeFlore Rural Water District #17 has been among their most memorable work to date.

"Originally, all we had to offer was technical support, but when additional ARPA funds became available, it was an easy decision to recommend them," Reanna said. "The chief didn't hesitate and immediately agreed with our recommendation. Telling them that the project they desperately needed would finally be funded, with \$23 million in CNO ARPA funding, was an emotional moment. It was incredibly rewarding to help people who work so hard for their community and make such a meaningful impact!"

"This water system is tiny and is run by a group of mostly volunteers, and they were staring at millions of dollars in work that needed to be done to not only reduce their large amount of water loss, but to maintain state compliance," Jeremy said. "When we told them that Chief Batton had agreed to fund their project 100%



Photo by Christian Toews

Sardis Lake, located in LeFlore and Pushmataha counties in Oklahoma, serves not only as a community gathering place for events such as Outreach at the Beach but also as a source of drinking water for residents of the Choctaw Nation reservation. Thanks to its sovereignty and water agreements, the Choctaw Nation is helping protect this and other vital water sources for generations to come.

with zero cost to the district, their response was emotional. It was that moment when I knew that what we were doing here with the Choctaw Nation was having a major impact on people's lives."

Thanks to these partnerships and the dedication of those running each system, both Sardis Lake Water Authority and LeFlore Rural Water District #17 received "Water for 2060" excellence awards at the annual state conference. These awards honor outstanding efforts in promoting water-use efficiency and conservation in the state of Oklahoma.

## Advancing Sovereignty: Water Settlement Agreement

Water is closely tied to sovereignty, which includes CNO's responsibility to care for the communities and land on the reservation now and for future generations.

The Choctaw and Chickasaw nations signed the Water Settlement Agreement with the state of Oklahoma, which affirmed the Nation's sovereignty over the protection of water resources on the reservations. Parties have a common interest in long-term sustainability of water resources under the agreement (Section 92).

The Water Settlement Agreement is one of the first of its kind. At its heart, the agreement is about working together to protect water through partnership, sustainability, and respect for the land and the people who rely on it.

The Water Settlement Agreement gives priority to local use and protects lake levels and in-stream flow for Sardis Lake located in Pushmataha and Latimer counties.

It limits how much water can be taken from cities outside the reservation, such as Oklahoma City, and requires the city to maintain a standard conservation plan with special considerations during extreme drought conditions. Since the agreement is federal legislation, it is enforceable in federal court.

## Citizens Supporting Water

Tribal members have many ways to help protect water resources for today and for future generations.

Watch what goes down drains and yards. Runoff from feces, fertilizers, and pesticides increases nutrients, causing harmful algae and poor water quality in lakes and rivers.

It is important to use water wisely. Individuals should avoid overwatering, plant native Oklahoma grasses, keep grass a bit longer and prevent runoff. It is also essential to follow community water conservation measures.

Practice water conservation at home and outdoors to protect clean, reliable water for future generations.

Use best management practices in commercial, agricultural and

industrial sectors, even if they cost more now, to prevent higher costs later.

Support responsible water rates and stay involved. Water fees fund treatment, infrastructure, and operations—attend board meetings and advocate for improvements.

## Water Operator Renewal Training

OWRM offers free water operator renewal training for certified water operators in Oklahoma. The training includes hands-on instruction focused on the operational, maintenance and regulatory aspects of water treatment systems and facilities.

Participants will earn the in-person continuing education hours required to renew their Oklahoma water operator licenses.

The next training offered will be in May at the Choctaw Community Center in Poteau, Oklahoma.

For more information, visit [choctaws/operator-renewal-training](https://choctaws/operator-renewal-training) or contact Mark Shelton, Water Infrastructure Planner, at [mbshelton@choctawnation.com](mailto:mbshelton@choctawnation.com).



## OBITUARIES

## Samuel Joe Stephenson



Samuel "Sam" Joe Stephenson, 70, passed away Nov. 06, 2025.

Sam was born Sept. 15, 1955, in Antioch, Calif., to Joe George and Geraldine Price Stephenson.

He was preceded in death by his parents; daughter Anneliese Stephenson Ponce; brother Joe David Stephenson and countless aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Sam is survived by his great-aunt Rosemary (Hahklotube-Price) Dugger; sons Samuel "Sammy" Joe Stephenson Jr. and Matthew Stephenson; daughter-in-law Sophi Stephenson; sisters Sandra Stephenson Looney and Rebecca Stephenson Traverso; nieces and nephews Jessica, Joanna, David, and Derrick; and grandchildren, grand-nieces-and grand-nephews Antonio, Alejandro, Sofia, Liliana, and Samontha.

## Donald Wayne Findley



Donald "Donnie" Wayne Findley, 67, passed away Nov. 28, 2025.

Donnie was born March 3, 1958, in Okla. City, Okla., to Franklin Wayne and Dixie Findley.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Donald Franklin Findley; many relatives and friends; and puppies Cindy Lou and Larry.

Donnie is survived by his wife Susan; sons Jessie Charles Findley and spouse Amanda, and Christopher Wayne Findley and spouse Julie; sisters Cheryl Ann Mainka, Brenda Gower, and Darlene Findley; three grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; aunts Marty Findley and Rita Findley; many nieces, nephew, and cousins; and his puppies Bonnie, Ellie, and Maggie.

## Houston Harrison Johnson



Houston Harrison Johnson, 38, passed away Jan. 11, 2026.

Houston was born Jan. 12, 1988, in Talihina, Okla., to Melvin Noahubi and Geneva Carol Shomo.

He was preceded in death by his father; and brothers Falcon Rodriguez Shomo and Justin Shomo.

Houston is survived by his mother; stepfather Fausto Coyote; brothers Fausto "BoBoy" Coyote, Tremain Shomo, Dustin Johnson, Ronelius Shomo, Darren Neil Noahubi, and Timothy Noahubi; sister Sylvia Shomo; special friends Steve and Vikki Hamilton; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

## Kay Lynn Winningham



Kay Lynn Winningham, 81, passed away Jan. 10, 2026.

Kay was born Oct. 14, 1944, in Holdenville, Oklahoma.

She was preceded in death by her grandparents Ethel Pearl and Jess Kibby; and brother-in-law Bob Owen.

Kay is survived by her husband Mike Winningham; children Toby and Tina, and Tracy; sister Barbara Owen; grandchildren Hayley, Mallory, Harlan and spouse Evan, and Linly; great-grandchildren Zander, Zane, Stella, Kallee, and Hollyn; and great-grandchild Braxton.

## Sandra Bowers Watson



Sandra Lorraine Bowers Watson, 65, passed away Jan. 11, 2026.

Sandra was born Dec. 13, 1960, in Muskogee, Okla., to Willie and Marie Lee (Harris) Bowers.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and brother Earley Bowers.

Sandra is survived by her children Krystal Marie Watson, Whitney Renee Watson, and Nicole Diane Watson; sisters Joan Bowers, Susan Johnson, and Loretta Bowers; and a host of nieces, nephews, and other relatives.

## Daisy Mae Perry



Daisy Mae (Ward) Perry, 81, passed away Jan. 14, 2026.

Daisy was born June 19, 1944, in Talihina, Okla., to Sherman and Katherine (Anderson) Ward.

She was preceded in death by her parents; daughter Lisa Perry; brothers J.D., Windy, and Melvin Ward; sister Margie Jones; grandchildren Richard Perry and Courtney Seybold; and son-in-law James Ford.

Daisy is survived by her children Kim Ford, Billy Perry, Pam Perry, and Angie Perry and spouse Stephanie; grandchildren Jamie Miller and spouse Chris, Jace Ford and spouse Brittany, Chipper Jones, Stanley Phillips, Stephan Phillips, and Nahali Phillips; great-grandchildren Abigail and fiancé Jacob, Logan and Liam Miller, Bella and Flint Ford, and Graeson and Braxton Jones; brother Sherman Ward and Charlotte Pugh; sisters Marie WhiteEagle and Betty Ward; and numerous nieces, a nephew, and relatives.

## George Douglas Riddle



George Douglas Riddle, 85, passed away Jan. 9, 2026.

George was born Jan. 9, 1941, in Corpus Christi, Texas.

He was preceded in death by his wife Temple.

George is survived by his many children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

## Ryan Scott Brazeal



Ryan Scott Brazeal, 33, passed away Jan. 19, 2026.

Ryan was born Aug. 29, 1992, in Dallas, Tex., to Thomas Lee Brazeal Sr. and Stephanie Lynn (Cole) Valadez.

He was preceded in death by his paternal grandmother Lorraine Holt and her spouse Jerrell; and aunt Michele Anakalea.

Ryan is survived by his children Myleigh Brazeal and Maveryck Brazeal; his parents; stepfather Ray Valadez; stepmother Rachael Brazeal; brother Thomas Brazeal Jr. and partner Mindy Cooper; sister Brittany Brazeal and fiancé Elijah Roebuck; special parents Carey Cole and spouse Pamela; nephews and nieces Trevyn Brazeal, Amyllia Brazeal, Jordan Walker, and Chloe Roebuck; uncles Brandon Cole and Joe Brazeal; aunts Melanie Martinez, Yvette Culppepper, and Beverly Reavis; great-aunt Regina Anderson; great-uncle Irvin Cole; and many other dearly loved family members and friends.

## Jo Ellen Ward



Jo Ellen Ward, 82, passed away Jan. 17, 2026.

Jo Ellen was born July 22, 1943, in Keota, Okla., to John Lewis Wood and Priscilla (Taylor) Wood.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers Edward Wood and spouse Barbara, and Philip Wood; and brother-in-law: Carl Nicolas.

Jo Ellen is survived by sons Greg Ward and spouse Lori, Eric Ward and spouse Sun, and Sean Ward and spouse Kathy; 11 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren; sisters Jackie Nicolas, and Carol Holden and spouse Steve; brothers David Wood and spouse Doresa, and Tommy Wood; along with numerous nieces and nephews.

## James David Worrell



James "Jim" David Worrell, 85, passed away Jan. 12, 2026.

Jim was born Sept. 8, 1940, in Stillwater, Okla., to Ruby Louise Garrison and Jones Danforth Worrell.

He is survived by his wife Joanna N. Worrell; children Molly W. and C. Cid Anderson, and David N. and Kendyl K. Worrell; grandchildren Alexa S. and Karl Keane, Madeline Stafford, Henry, Eva, and Oscar Worrell; step-grandson Christian Anderson; and brother Dan Worrell.

## Jay Lynn Slate



Jay Lynn Slate, 57, passed away Jan. 30, 2026.

Jay was born July 10, 1968, in Santa Maria, Calif., to James David Slate and Trena (Motley) Slate.

He was preceded in death by his grandparents Johnny and Jay Slate, and Rose and John Motley.

Jay is survived by his parents; brother Jamie Slate and spouse Amanda; and nieces Ashlyn Slate and fiancé Chris Franz, Alexa Eefting and spouse Aidan, Kallie Slate, Rheagan Slate, and Charli Slate.

## Judy Carole Moffitt



Judy Carole Moffitt, 90, passed away Jan. 20, 2026.

Judy was born June 23, 1935, in Grant, Okla., to Jack and Lucille Norris.

She was preceded in death by her husband Don; her parents; sisters Ray Jean (Harold) Streetman, Joy Parker, and Ann (Bice) McMurray; brothers Jackie (Peggy) Norris and Joe Pate Norris; great-grandson Jaxon Robbins; brothers Alvin (Rosalee) Moffitt, Odas (Doris) Moffitt, Eldon (Monte) Moffitt, Alton (Betty) Moffitt, Johnny (Faye) Moffitt, Bobby Hamm and Thomas Moffitt.

Judy is survived by son Don Moffitt (Carla); daughters Judith Moffitt, Cindi Briscoe (David Allen), and Angela Chadwick (Jimbo); grandchildren Tara Taylor, Amy Robbins (Casey Corey), Matt Moffitt (Carlye), Scott Moffitt, Brandon Chadwick (Chelsea), Blake Chadwick (Kate); great-grandchildren Nichole Taylor, Michelle Price, Jayci Robbins, Macy Moffitt, Max Moffitt, Mabrie Moffitt, Katie Brown, Blair Chadwick, Nolan Chadwick, Wyatt Chadwick and William Chadwick three great-grandchildren; sisters-in-laws Joan Hamm and Ralphann Moffitt; and many nieces, nephews, former students, colleagues and dear friends.

## Ollie Mae Marris



Ollie Mae Marris, 78, passed away Jan. 26, 2026.

Ollie was born June 14, 1947, in Talihina, Okla., to Charley John and Pauline (Lewis) John.

She was preceded in death by her parents; grandmother Ollie John; brother Walter John; and sister Patsy Willmond.

Ollie is survived by her husband Carl Winston Marris; children Charles Marris and Kimberly Yates, and Valerie McDonald and spouse Jeff; grandchildren Amber Kosmic-ki, Justin Marris and spouse Michele, Kristen Marris Oates and spouse Warren, Brandon Marris and spouse Sarah, Caleb McDonald, Sydney Marris and partner Jameson Parks, and Kobe Carlile and spouse Jimmie; great-grandchildren Henley Marris, Haidyn Marris, Hadleigh Marris, Nashoba Marris, Autumn Marris, Aurelia Parks, Kamille Rose, Jhett Rose and Kloe Welch.

## Betty Jean Armstrong



Betty Jean (Burlson) Armstrong, 81, passed away Jan. 12, 2026.

Betty Jean was born Feb. 8, 1944, in Coalgate, Okla., to David Burlson and Jean Peabworth.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and sister Patti Brown.

Betty Jean is survived by daughters Tamy Richardson and Annabell Callison; sons James Richardson and Bruce Hamil Jr.; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

## Sandra Kay Myers



Sandra Kay (Colley) Myers, 73, passed away Jan. 23, 2026.

Sandra was born Oct. 17, 1952, in Antlers, Okla., to Delbert "Babe" Mart Colley and Betty Jo (Rose) Colley.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and daughter Angela Allensworth.

Sandra is survived by her daughter Stephanie Curd; son-in-law Donnie Allensworth; grandchildren Ashley Allensworth, Adam Allensworth, and Luke Curd; great-grandchild, Loretta Allensworth; brothers Jack Colley, Rickey Slagle, and Ronnie Slagle; sister Karen Dornin; and many other family, friends and loved ones.

## John Merle Jones



John Merle Jones, 71, passed away Jan. 26, 2026.

John was born July 14, 1954, in Talihina, Okla., to John Warren and Annie Lou (Tatum) Jones.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

John is survived by his brothers Gary Jones and spouse Kelly, and Greg Jones; sister Cathy Faries and spouse Bobby; big sister and cousin Mary Green; aunt Martha Kelly; six nieces and nephews; 14 great-nieces and great-nephews; and former wife Rita Jones.

## William Keith Amos Simpson



William "Bolo" Keith Amos Simpson, 63, passed away Jan. 24, 2026.

Bolo was born Jan. 16, 1963, in Okla. City, Okla., to Mary Jane Lee.

He was preceded in death by his mother; brother Melton; uncles and aunts William Nelson, Bill Nelson, Rachel Day, and Lula Pete; mother-in-law Mary Carterby; brothers-in-law John Ray Carterby and Adam Carterby; and granddaughter Bristina Colbert.

Bolo is survived by wife Melinda; sons Charles and spouse Ashley, Bud and spouse Shannel, and Billy; daughters Linda Noah and spouse Bruce, and LaDonna Battisti and spouse Daniel; grandchildren Cheyenne, Andrew and great-grandbaby Boo Boo, Alexia, Charlie Jr., Bentley, Gavin, Mason, David, Adam, Kenan, Paizley, Nevaeh, Brayson, Harrison, Kadence, and Cavan; sisters-in-law Bertha Going and Martha Carterby; nephews Cris Carterby, Isaac Going, John Going, and Kevin Carterby; other nieces and nephews; friends Roger Wesley, Wes Tisho, Alfred Crosby and Bobby Drinnon, and other relatives and friends.

## Kenneth Joel McCann



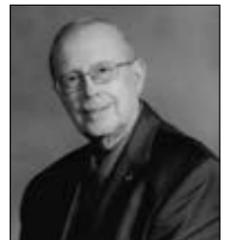
Kenneth Joel McCann, 69, passed away Feb. 3, 2026.

Kenneth was born May 4, 1956, in Talihina, Okla., to Simpson and Aren (Barnett) McCann.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters Kathryn Smart, Laverne McCann, and Delores Sandlin; and brothers Lawrence "Sonny" McCann and Simpson Dwayne McCann.

Kenneth is survived by his brother Phillip McCann; brother-in-law Oliver Sandlin; two nieces; six nephews; and many cousins and relatives.

## Edward Alfred Simms Jr.



Edward "Ed" Alfred Simms, 80, passed away Feb. 5, 2026.

Ed was born Aug. 24, 1945, in Tulsa, Okla., to Edward Simms Sr. and Katrina (Cochneuer) Simms.

He was preceded in death by his parents; daughter Paula Elizabeth; brother-in-law Joe Bigbee; and sister-in-law Billie June Houston.

Ed is survived by his wife Susan (Bigbee) Simms; daughters Alicia Hight, Laura Fulencheck, and Holly Case; 11 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; niece Jennifer Vance; and cousins Georgia Ann Gibson and Steve Nail.

## 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](http://biskinik.com/obituaries).

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

ITI FABVSSA

# Ancestral Arrows: Continuing collaborations with the Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac

By Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Staff

In this edition, Iti Fabvssa continues sharing information from the one-of-a-kind Native American cultural objects in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac in Paris, France. As a quick recap, the CNO Historic Preservation Department has been partnering with the Branly and with other Tribes to document, study, and connect this collection with culturally affiliated Tribal communities since 2017. Last year, some of the items in this collection that have a fair likelihood of being Choctaw in origin were displayed at the Choctaw Nation Cultural Center in Calera. Thousands of people came to see them.

One of the most impressive parts of the collection, a part that has not yet come to Oklahoma, is the arrows. The Branly has 115 arrows from the Southeast and Central U.S. that date to the 1700s. Based on their construction, most of these arrows fit into groups that likely represent eight different arrow-makers from several different tribes, along with a handful of miscellaneous individual arrows. The arrows in this collection hold neat human details. On a few arrow shafts are bare teeth marks left when the maker straightened the arrow in his mouth 300 years ago. Other arrows were made by the same maker at different times and showed how he used different raw materials when they were on hand.

For Southeastern cultural revitalization work, the Branly arrows are extremely important because they date from about a century earlier than the earliest Southeastern arrows available for study in U.S. museums. Made long before the Trail of Tears, they give us a unique opportunity to learn about this part of Indigenous culture, directly from the workmanship of the grandfathers.

As someone who makes Choctaw bows and stone-tipped arrows and hunts deer with them every year, I was deeply honored to get to handle this collection. Many gems of traditional knowledge can be learned or confirmed from studying these pieces. Focusing on the arrows in the collection that could conceivably be Choctaw-made (about 88), some of what we see is expected. Many of the shafts are made of river cane; some are split hardwood; only a few are hardwood shoots. Many of the cane arrows were tipped simply by sharpening and fire hardening the end of the cane. Others were tipped with garfish scales attached with sinew and hide glue. The way these were attached would have limited penetration, suggesting small game as the intended target. A few other arrows are tipped with carved deer antler. Of the arrows that could possibly be Choctaw-affiliated, only one has a chipped stone point, and two have chipped glass points. Given the rarity of chipped arrow points at 1700s Choctaw archaeological sites, this was expected. The smooth transitions on these particular arrows suggest that they were intended for punching deep holes into big animals or enemies. The entire collection of arrows includes only a few with metal tips. All of the arrows that are still complete enough to tell, have fletchings made from three split feathers, wrapped with sinew or plant fiber at both ends and glued to the shaft down the length of the quills. All of this was pretty much expected, based on what has been passed down to us.

Other characteristics of these arrows were unexpected, and this is where some of the best learning comes from. Most of the Choctaw arrows that we have in the U.S. to study date from the late 1800s or early 1900s. They are thick-shafted, heavy, and have big air-catching fletchings. Old, written accounts indicate that in previous generations, Choctaw bows had been even more powerful than they were in the late 1800s. I had expected the arrows in the Branly collection to be massively made to match those powerful early bows, but they are exactly the opposite. Nearly every single arrow in the Branly collection is lightweight, one-third of what some later Choctaw arrows weigh. The shafts on the 1700s arrows are thin, and our ancestors must have had a means for overcoming the archer's paradox. The surviving fletchings are cut short and parabolic, more like a modern store-bought arrow.

Since the advent of the bow, there have been two competing schools of thought on arrow design. One group advocates for heavy, relatively slow-moving arrows that hit with high momentum. The other group advocates for light arrows that fly far and hit with high velocity. The design of Choctaw archery equipment from the late 1800s falls squarely into the heavy camp. A century earlier, Choctaw archery design was on the light and fast side of things.

We wouldn't even know about this change in arrow design if it weren't for the Branly's unique collection of arrows. How can we identify the reason for the change? Multiple early accounts from the Southeast talk about bows so powerful that European soldiers couldn't pull them back. Using these, Native men could fire arrows to engage individual targets out to 200 yards and penetrate deeply. Doing that took a tremendous amount of skill, both in making the archery equipment and shooting it. The same accounts describe highly com-



The tips of four arrows in the Musée du quai Branly collection are shown in flat and side views. From left: chipped glass, garfish scale, sharpened river cane and carved deer antler.



Pictured are some of the points and fletchings on a few of the arrows in the Musée du quai Branly collection.

petitive Native archery traditions in which males vied against each other in bow design and marksmanship from age 4 onward. Later, when the gun came along, it made it possible to engage distant targets while investing only a fraction of the time and practice required to do that with a bow. The redesign of Choctaw arrows in the 1800s could be explained as Choctaw communities adapting to the gun by shifting archery to focus on closer-range targets and hitting them with more knockdown power.

We are out of space for now, but there is much more to share. In the coming months, the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department will continue working to make the traditional knowledge in the Branly collection more accessible to the Choctaw community.

## BUSINESS CHAHTAPRENEUR

CHIT • CHAT

Your Network Is Your Net Worth



By Brad Erwin

In business, people often focus on the obvious things that drive success, such as capital, equipment, marketing, and location. While those things certainly matter, there is another factor that is just as important and often overlooked: relationships. In many ways, your network truly is your net worth.

This is especially true in rural communities. In smaller towns, businesses do not just compete with one another; they rely on each other. Word of mouth is powerful, reputations matter, and relationships often open doors that advertising alone cannot.

Networking is not about handing out business cards or trying to sell to everyone you meet. At its core, networking is about building relationships with people in your community. Be honest with yourself: when you attend a networking event, do you make an effort to shake hands with everyone in the room? Do you take a moment to smile, introduce yourself, and ask someone their name or how they have been?

In rural communities, networking often happens in places you might not expect. It can happen at a chamber event, a ribbon cutting, a local festival, or even during a conversation at the local coffee shop. These interactions may seem small in the moment, but they are often where trust begins to form.

Trust is one of the most valuable currencies in business. When people know you, respect you, and believe in the work that you do, they are far more likely to be honest about their challenges and recommend your business to others. In rural communities, referrals can become the backbone of a business. A single recommendation from someone who is trusted locally can carry more weight than any Facebook post.

Another important aspect of networking is learning from others. Every business owner faces challenges, whether it is navigating regulations, managing finances, or finding new customers. Having a network of fellow entrepreneurs, bankers, advisors, and community leaders gives you access to knowledge and experience that can save you time, money, and frustration.

Networking also strengthens the entire business community. When local businesses support each other, everyone benefits. A thriving business environment creates more jobs, brings more customers into town, and builds pride within the community. Instead of seeing one another only as competitors, local entrepreneurs can become partners in helping the entire area grow.

One of the simplest ways to build your network is to get plugged in. Attend local events, support other businesses, and introduce yourself to people you have not met before.

Ask questions about their work and take a genuine interest in what they are building. Over time, those conversations can turn into partnerships, collaborations, and opportunities you may have never expected.

In the end, business is about people. Products and services matter, but relationships are what truly sustain long-term success. The connections you build today may become the opportunities that shape your business tomorrow.

So whether you are just starting out or have been in business for years, remember this simple idea: your network is your net worth.

If you have topics you would like to see covered in future articles, or if you have questions about starting or growing a business, reach out to us on Facebook or visit your local Chahtapreneur Center.

Past issues

### MORE ABOUT THE CHOCTAW BOW AND ARROW



There have been several past issues of Iti Fabvssa that have touched on the Choctaw bow and arrow, including topics ranging from what they meant to the Choctaw people to how they were used and made. To learn more, go to [biskinik.com/past-issues](http://biskinik.com/past-issues) and filter by year to see these issues:

- **How important was the bow and arrow to our ancestors?**  
January 2010, page 12
- **Making a Choctaw bow**  
October 2010, page 16
- **Choctaw 'arrowheads' capture interest**  
July 2011, page 20
- **Making Choctaw arrows**  
March 2012, Page 18
- **Making a Choctaw war arrow**  
April 2012, page 14
- **Making a Choctaw stone arrow point**  
May 2013, page 19

## FOSTER YOUR TRIBE

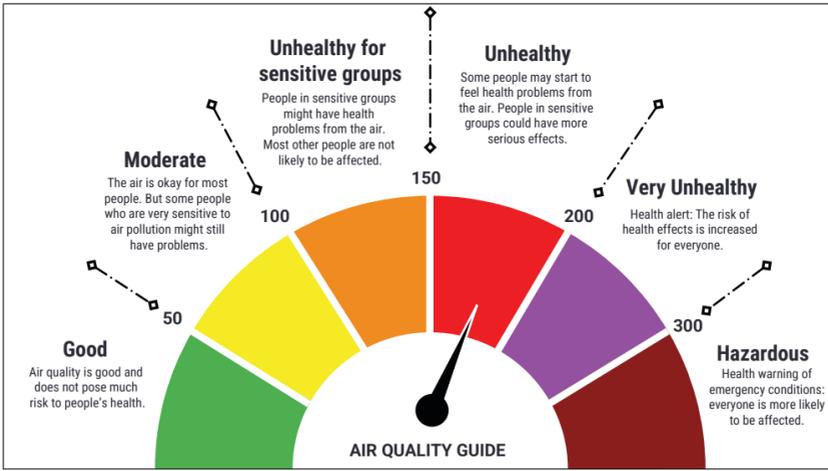


Spring is a season of new beginnings—fresh starts, growing roots, and blooming hope. For a child in foster care, you can be the beginning of something beautiful. There are currently hundreds of children hoping for someone like you to come along. Help a child grow.

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

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

# Cleaner air helps provide healthier environments



## AIR QUALITY INFORMATION

By Chris Jennings

The air we breathe is not as empty as it may appear. Particles that are invisible to the eye enter your lungs with every breath. Sometimes, there are more particles than other times. The current levels can be affected by where you live, the amount of traffic, and even the direction the wind is blowing, which can determine what enters your lungs.

Wildfire smoke and Saharan dust can travel great distances, even across oceans and fill the air you breathe.

Knowing the air quality conditions before you go outside can help reduce your exposure to poor air. The Choctaw Nation uses the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality Index (AQI) to show what the air quality is outside. The AQI uses an easy to identify color-coded system to alert people to the AQI.

- Green = Good
- Yellow = Moderate
- Orange = Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
- Red = Unhealthy
- Purple = Very Unhealthy
- Maroon = Hazardous

In addition to AQI flags placed around the reservation, you can get current conditions and sign up for text alerts by scanning the justair.com QR code.



## DIY AIR CLEANERS

By Chris Jennings

DIY air cleaners are most commonly called Corsi-Rosenthal boxes. You can make your own by attaching multiple MERV 13 filters to the sides of a standard box fan using duct tape and cardboard, creating an effective, low-cost air filtration system. Simpler versions that use only a single filter attached to a fan are often called filter fans.

- DIY air cleaners were as effective as a small commercial air cleaner in reducing fine particle, or PM2.5, concentrations.
- DIY air cleaner performance could be improved by adding a no-cost cardboard shroud to block recirculating air flow past the fan blade tips.
- Designs that incorporated multiple filters showed increased air cleaning capacity and were more cost effective.
- DIY air cleaners with dirty filters loaded with smoke or dust were almost completely ineffective. Be sure to replace dirty filters.

EPA research showed that DIY air cleaners were just as effective as commercial air cleaners. However, they were louder and required more power to operate. The lower up-front cost and less expensive replacement filters made DIY air cleaners more economical.

### DIY Air Cleaner Designs: Beyond the Basic

**Ways to Improve Effectiveness:**

- Add a cardboard shroud (no-cost improvement)
- Use thicker filters (4" rather than 2" MERV 13 filters)
- Use multiple filters (2-5 filter designs)

**Key Reminders:**

- Only use certified fans with UL or ETL marking (2012 model or newer)
- Keep extra filters on hand
- Replace filters when dirty

**Basic Supplies:**

- 20" x 20" box fan
- 20" x 20" x 1" or 4" MERV 13 air filter
- 20" x 20" cardboard shroud (cutout the size of the fan blades)
- Clamps, duct tape, or bungee cords

**Additional Supplies:**

- Two - MERV 13 air filters
- Triangle cardboard cutout for base on top

**Additional Supplies:**

- Four or five - MERV 13 air filters
- If using five filter design, use leg supports (e.g., blocks) to allow airflow through bottom

Credit: Environmental Protection Agency

# Choctaw Nation brings more than \$4.1 billion impact to Oklahoma in 2023

**DURANT, Okla. (March 3, 2026)**— The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma announced today that the tribe had a significant \$4,138,358,471 impact on the State of Oklahoma in 2023.

Tribal officials made the announcement during an economic impact press conference for several tribal, state, county and local officials.

The economic impact report was prepared by Dr. Kyle Dean, an economist that recently retired from the Center for Native American Studies at Oklahoma City University. His report showed the Choctaw Nation is a driving force in southeastern Oklahoma, as well as the overall state. In 2023, the Tribe supported 26,917 Oklahoma jobs, representing \$1.653 billion in wages and benefits paid to Oklahomans.

“The Choctaw Nation’s \$4.1 billion economic impact is not just a statistic—it represents jobs created, communities strengthened, and opportunities expanded across Oklahoma. As strong economic partners and good neighbors, the Choctaw Nation consistently demonstrates how sustained investment, collaboration, and shared prosperity can lift the entire state, benefiting both tribal and non-tribal communities alike,” said Dr. Dean.

“The Choctaw Nation’s \$4.1 billion in 2023 (up from \$3.2 billion in 2021) economic impact is helping improve lives across Oklahoma. These dollars extend well beyond the Choctaw Nation and Southeastern Oklahoma, positively impacting the lives of all Oklahomans and tribal members,” said Chief Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation. “The Choctaw Nation is proud to be a partner and neighbor to all the people of this great state. We are fortunate to help push our state’s growth and economic prosperity”

**Education.** Choctaw Nation has paid more than \$422 million in exclusivity fees to the State according to the Gaming compact, including \$45.1 million in 2023. These funds go directly to support public education statewide. The Choctaw Nation funded over \$72 million (beyond exclusivity fees) for educational programs. In addition to providing statewide education support, the Choctaw Nation funded 12,368 college education scholarships to the tune of \$11.8 million, provided summer school education to 4,821 Oklahoma students across 52 school districts, and had 758 elementary-age children attend Choctaw Head Start and Choctaw Childcare programs.

**Housing.** The Choctaw Nation is building a pathway to safe and affordable housing. In 2023, the Choctaw Nation invested \$24.5 million to build 153 new homes across the reservation as part of the Lease-to-Purchase (LEAP) program (90); Independent Elderly Housing program (8); and Affordable Rentals (55). The Nation also provided \$3.6 million in rental assistance to 1,068 households and installed 566 storm shelters to help protect tribal members across the reservation

from severe weather. The Nation also utilized the Connect Home Program which helped connect 153 homes in rural areas to the internet.

**Healthcare.** Providing access to quality healthcare to tribal members is a primary focus for the Choctaw Nation. The nation operates a full-service hospital in Tahihina, Okla. It also operates an outpatient surgery center and clinic in Durant, Oklahoma. In addition, there are eight health clinics, three of which are community clinics serving non-tribal citizens; four behavioral health clinics; two inpatient recovery centers; and 16 wellness centers. The Choctaw Nation’s health services encompass several service lines, including cardiology, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, pulmonology, and dental care.

**Community.** Through the Choctaw Community Partnership Fund and Choctaw Development Fund, the Choctaw Nation has provided \$3,632,608 in contributions and community grants to cities, towns and counties to support economic development, infrastructure and sustainability, including \$5.2 million invested in Oklahoma highways and roads.



Choctaw Nation Photo

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma recently announced during a press conference that the tribe generated a \$4.14 billion economic impact in Oklahoma in 2023 and remains committed to expanding jobs, health care and education opportunities across the state.

## 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.*

**April 2026**

All markets open weekdays, April 1-28  
**Closed:** April 3, 29 & 30  
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation  
Participants can request a calendar at their location.

- ANTLERS** 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443  
FOOD DEMO APRIL 7
- BROKEN BOW** 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842  
FOOD DEMO APRIL 14
- DURANT** 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773  
FOOD DEMO APRIL 21
- MCALESTER** 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716  
FOOD DEMO APRIL 9
- POTEAU** 106 B St., 918-649-0431  
FOOD DEMO APRIL 16

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

## Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

April 1	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
April 7	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
April 8	Crowder	By Appointment
April 9	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
April 10	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
April 10	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
April 14	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
April 15	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
April 17	Wright City	By Appointment
April 21	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
April 22	Sigler	By Appointment
April 28	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

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

## WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

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

Scan to learn more about the program.

**Choctaw Nation** Health Services

# River cane

## Preserving culture, saving the planet

By Christian Toews

For centuries, river cane has woven its way into the daily lives of the Choctaw people. Long before the American Revolutionary War, Indigenous tribes across the southern United States relied on this unique and useful resource.

In "A New Voyage to Carolina" (1709), English explorer John Lawson documented river cane and its various uses among the Native communities he encountered.

The Choctaw people have historically used river cane to produce arrow shafts, blowguns, fishing spears, fish traps, tools, mats, flutes and roof-sealing materials.

Ryan Spring, a cultural research associate with the Choctaw Nation, said, "Culturally, river cane is a plant that Choctaw people used every day of their lives."

Spring further explained, "I've heard it called basically Choctaw plastic. How we think about plastic today, how it's used for almost everything, that was river cane in the past."

Among its many uses, river cane shines brightest in basketmaking. Historically, these baskets were both beautiful and practical for everyday use. They served as essential tools for preparing corn, gathering herbs and plants, storing items and more.

Today, the tradition of river cane basketmaking still lives on in Choctaw culture, though some aspects have evolved over time.

The first step in basketmaking is to locate a stand of river cane.

While these areas have sometimes been referred to as canebrakes, Jamie Smith, an environmental coordinator with the Choctaw Nation and botanist, clarified that historically, a canebrake referred to a much larger area of dense river cane. Currently, the term "cane stand" is preferred to describe the smaller patches of river cane present in and around the Choctaw reservation.

Smith also authored Choctaw Nation's Plant Field Guide. This guide highlights plants found across the Choctaw Nation Reservation while sharing traditional knowledge and the Choctaw language.

Copies of the field guide can be found at select Community Centers and at Choctaw Nation and community-hosted in-person events. Look for more information on this guide in next month's issue of the paper and online at choctawnation.com.

River cane stands are areas where river cane grass grows, sometimes covering up to an acre and forming dense thickets that shade out other plants, becoming the dominant species. These stands create distinct ecosystems that support birds, insects and other wildlife.

Spring noted, "You can listen to a cane stand and get an idea of how healthy it is by hearing the birds and other wildlife interacting in the stand."

Sadly, cane stands are becoming more difficult to find because river cane is at critically low levels.

According to Smith, 99% of the indigenous river cane has been lost due to urbanization and agriculture.

Though there are commercial options, Spring reiterated that it is different from using the real thing.

"The newer generation of artists who want to make baskets have to learn with commercial reed," said Spring. "Which is fine, but it's not the same thing."

Because every artist has different size requirements and preferences for river cane, finding the right size can be challenging. That's why Smith is creating a database to help approved cane harvesters find canebrakes and cane stands suited for various applications.

She has gathered data on cane stands near the Choctaw Nation reservation for years and aims to create a process for artists to access and harvest them.

According to Spring, this process will help protect and preserve cane stands. He emphasized the need for proper cane harvesting education and warned against improper or overharvesting, which can destroy stands and damage the ecosystem.

After finding a cane stand, harvesting the cane requires skill and a lot of practice.

Certain indicators show whether a culm, the hollow, stalk-like part of river cane, is ready to harvest. The harvester should be able to visually distinguish between mature and immature culms. Despite advances in technology, one of the best ways to tell if a culm

is mature is to tap it with a tool or knife. The sound produced by tapping varies with the culm's maturity and size.

It is very important to cut the culm as close to the ground as possible to prevent creating a sharp stake that could injure animals or people.

Once harvested, the cane is carefully bundled and immersed in water to preserve its flexibility and prevent it from drying out.

This is where the real work begins.

Each culm is split into four pieces and each quarter is split again. Each strip is then peeled to create a long, flexible length of river cane. Spring says this process can be dangerous, and inexperienced artists often end up cutting themselves with the knife they are using to peel the cane.

Once enough of these strips are produced, they can be dyed in the artist's chosen color. This dyeing process may take months, depending on the type of dye used.

Basketmaking can begin with green cane, or the strips can be dried, a process that may take up to a year. When the artist reaches their desired strip color and texture, they begin weaving the basket.

Beyond its cultural significance, river cane has countless positive effects on both people and the landscape where it grows. This essential resource has influenced much of the United States by supporting larger ecosystems, providing food and shaping waterways.

Not only does it shape waterways by solidifying the nearby soil, but river cane can also help clean water supplies.

Water sources across the South are becoming increasingly polluted, and river cane could help provide a solution. Many agricultural and livestock operations use fertilizers with high nitrogen levels, which can make nearby drinking water toxic.

One of the unique qualities of river cane is its ability to absorb large amounts of nitrogen from water. According to Spring, 50 feet of river cane can absorb 100% of nitrogen runoff.

Spring noted that there is not much research on river cane, but the Choctaw Nation is collaborating with other organizations to study, conserve and develop educational materials about the plant.

Some of the partnerships include the U.S. Forest Service, CONSERVE's Rivercane Restoration Alliance and the USACE Tribal Nations Technical Center of Expertise.

"As we respect our environment and as we interact with these different ecosystems and landscapes again, we come back to thinking and acting like Choctaw people," Spring said.

To learn more about the traditional art of basketmaking, find additional related Iti Fabvssa articles at biskinik.com.

For exclusive content and to watch a behind-the-scenes video of a recent river cane harvest, visit biskinik.com.



Photos by Christian Toews

Dyed, woven river cane begins to resemble the base of a basket next to some fresh green river cane as part of a river cane workshop hosted at the Choctaw Cultural Center in 2025.



Aliyah Myers smiles as she holds a bundle of freshly harvested cane inside a large cane stand.



MK Wilhite carries a bundle of freshly harvested cane.



Scooter Fisher carries a zip-tied bundle of freshly harvested river cane to a vehicle during a harvest.



Sarah Smith holds a bundle of harvested cane in the middle of a river cane stand.



Choctaw artist Rose Fisher demonstrates how to peel, split and scrape river cane to prepare it for basketmaking, a tradition Choctaws have practiced for centuries.



Choctaw artist Colt James inspects the cane before harvesting.



Debbie Baker uses clippers to remove smaller branches from a freshly harvested cane culm.



# Pollinator habitats take root with support from the Choctaw Nation

By Kendra Germany-Wall

Pollinators may be small, but they carry a huge impact on the environment and food supply. Bees, butterflies, birds and other pollinating species work hard to help fertilize plants by transferring pollen between flowers, allowing crops to develop.

### The Impact of Pollinators

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), pollinators help produce about one in every three bites of food people eat. Three-fourths of the world’s flowering plants and about 35% of global food crops depend on animal and insect pollinators to reproduce.

Pollinators come in many forms. Bees are one of the most recognized and effective pollinators. However, butterflies and moths also contribute by visiting flowering plants for nectar. Birds such as hummingbirds, as well as bats and beetles, play a vital role in pollination.

### Conservation Efforts

Loss of habitat, disease, parasites and pollution have contributed to the decline of many pollinator species.

Conservation groups and governments across the United States have launched initiatives to help protect these essential species. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) has joined these efforts by promoting stewardship of the land and protection of wildlife that sustains ecosystems and food systems through its conservation efforts and education programs.

CNO has partnered with groups such as the Okies for Monarchs and Tribal Alliance for Pollinators to create and maintain pollinator habitats around its reservation.

According to Steve Anderson, an environmental coordinator with the Choctaw Nation’s Environmental Protection Service, there are currently three official pollinator habitat projects maintained by the Tribe, located at Choctaw Nation headquarters in Durant, the Wheelock Academy historic site in Garvin and the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant.

There are also plans for additional habitats throughout the reservation.

The creation of these spaces helps provide food and shelter for species that are critical to maintaining the nation’s ecosystems.

The Tribe has also provided beekeeping workshops, sharing techniques for managing and caring for beehives. In addition, the Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation Department installs bat houses and uses monitoring and education efforts to help protect the 16 bat species that live on its reservation.

### Creating Pollinator Habitats

One of the easiest ways the public can help these tiny but mighty species is by planting a pollinator habitat/garden.

Experts, including those at CNO EPS, recommend selecting a variety of native plants that

bloom throughout the seasons to ensure pollinators have access to nectar and pollen during the most crucial pollination months, from spring through fall.

Flowers with different shapes and colors can also help attract a wider range of species.

Avoiding pesticides is another key step, as many chemicals can harm pollinators. Providing shallow water sources, such as small dishes with stones for insects to land on, can also help pollinators stay hydrated.

The USDA says many flowering plants can grow in sun or shade, but it is important to consider which pollinators you want to attract. For example, butterflies like to bask in the sun, and many of their preferred wildflowers thrive in full or partial sun, protected from the wind.

One of the best resources for creating pollinator habitats is the Tribal Alliance for Pollinators (TAP), a Native-led initiative in Oklahoma. The alliance provides training, seed banks and restoration support to help tribes restore pollinator habitat using native plants and traditional ecological knowledge.

For southeastern Oklahoma, TAP recommends native plants such as:

- Swamp milkweed
- Bee balm/wild bergamot
- Foxglove beardtongue
- Sawtooth sunflower
- Buttonbush
- Slender mountainmint

Readers can find resources, videos and other tools for habitat restoration at [triballiancefor-pollinators.org](http://triballiancefor-pollinators.org).

The Oklahoma Monarch Society offers two seasonal seed mixes, produced by Johnston Seed of Enid, for central/western and eastern Oklahoma. For more information and to purchase seeds, visit [okmonarchsociety.org](http://okmonarchsociety.org).

Choctaw EPS staff also hand out seeds at events such as Labor Day and CNO Health Fairs.

For those who live outside Oklahoma, there are many different resources.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offers a step-by-step guide to building a pollinator garden for beginners at [fws.gov/story/how-build-pollinator-garden](http://fws.gov/story/how-build-pollinator-garden).

The U.S. Forest Service also offers several resources, including a pollinator gardening guide. Readers can find more information at [fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wildflowers/pollinators](http://fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wildflowers/pollinators).

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is an international nonprofit that protects the natural world by conserving invertebrates and their habitats.

The group conducts research and offers up-to-date resources and ways to get involved in pollinator conservation.

Readers can learn more at [xerces.org](http://xerces.org).

By creating pollinator-friendly spaces and supporting habitat initiatives, individuals and tribes can help these vital species thrive for generations to come.



Choctaw Nation Photos

The pollinator habitat near the mound at the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant is one of three sites maintained by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.



The pollinator habitat at the Wheelock Academy Historic Site in Garvin is one of CNO’s sites supporting native species.



Showy evening primrose, left, grows in the pollinator habitat at Choctaw Nation Tribal Headquarters in Durant.

**CHOCTAW LABOR DAY FESTIVAL**

INFORMATION UPDATES

**For more information, visit [laborday.choctawnation.com](http://laborday.choctawnation.com). To stay update to on all Labor Day information, text **LABORDAY** to 888777.**



Scan QR code for details.

**ARTS & CRAFTS VENDOR APPLICATIONS**

Applications for Labor Day Arts & Crafts Vendors are now open on the Choctaw Labor Day website. The deadline to apply is April 17, 2026. For more information, call 580-740-0826 or email [tribalevents@choctawnation.com](mailto:tribalevents@choctawnation.com).

**FOOD VENDOR APPLICATIONS**

Applications for Labor Day Food Vendors are now open on the Choctaw Labor Day website. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2026. For more information, call 580-740-0826 or email [tribalevents@choctawnation.com](mailto:tribalevents@choctawnation.com).

**LABOR DAY RV APPLICATIONS**

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 now by mail or online. Remember, only one request per address will be accepted, and no tents will be allowed in RV areas.

## Five Facts About Pollinators



- 1.** White-tailed deer help pollinators in surprising ways. As they browse on plants, they encourage new growth and more flowers. Pollen can also stick to their fur and travel with them, helping spread it to other plants.
- 2.** There are approximately 4,000 species of native wild bees in the United States that contribute to agricultural pollination.
- 3.** The Choctaw Nation Reservation is home to 16 bat species, including the endangered gray bat, Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat and Ozark big-eared bat.
- 4.** Pollinators play a significant role in the production of over 150 food crops in the U.S.—among them apples, almonds, blueberries, cranberries, kiwis, melons, pears, plums and squash.
- 5.** Some of the most common native pollinators of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma are the monarch butterfly, American bumblebee, and ruby-throated hummingbird.

Sources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation and Choctaw Nation Environmental Protection Service

# BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ◆ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ◆

## April (Eplil) 2026

### In This Issue

- 2 FCC
- 3 Council Corner
- 5 NTN
- 6 PYK
- 7 Water Conservation
- 8 Obits
- 9 Iti
- 10 Air Quality
- 12 Pollinator Habitats



#### Page 1

The Biskinik brings you an Earth Day update, featuring milestones from CNO Recycling.



#### Page 4

See the ways CNO is helping to sprout a new generation of land protectors.



#### Page 11

Explore the ways the Choctaw people are working to protect river cane.

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