



Choctaw Nation continues to exercise tribal sovereignty and economic strength

By Kendra Germany Wall and Christian Chaney-Sackett

In past issues, we've covered important legal and political developments involving the Choctaw Nation and other tribes' interactions with the State of Oklahoma. Here are the latest updates on these ongoing issues.

Stroble v. Oklahoma Tax Commission

On April 6, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the Stroble v. Oklahoma Tax Commission case, leaving in place an Oklahoma ruling that allows the state to tax the income of a Muscogee Creek tribal citizen living and working on her reservation.

The U.S. Supreme Court's refusal to hear the case creates new uncertainty surrounding the taxation of tribal citizens, an issue previously thought settled by the 1973 McClanahan ruling, which protected such income from state taxation.

For now, the recent decision doesn't overturn the McClanahan ruling. However, it does raise questions about the Court's current stance on tribal law and sovereignty.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt applauded the decision, calling it a win for the state and saying that granting exemptions would lead to race-based policies.

"This is about fairness for all 4 million Oklahomans," Stitt said. "Time and time again, the courts have limited the McGirt decision, rightfully upholding state jurisdiction. This decision made it clear that someone's tax bill will not be based on their race."

Many tribal citizens object to Stitt's use of "race" in the debate over tribal sovereignty, noting the U.S. Supreme Court's 1974 Morton v. Mancari decision defines tribal citizenship as political, not racial.

"Recent attempts by Gov. Kevin Stitt to characterize these long-established legal protections as a 'racial preference' are simply false," said Muscogee Nation Principal Chief David Hill. "The United States Supreme Court has made it abundantly clear that tribal citizenship is a political classification, not a racial one."

Following the court's decision, Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, released the following statement.

"Unfortunately, the Justices missed an important opportunity to uphold a crucial part of tribal sovereignty. While we are disappointed, we respect the Court's decision and existing rules," said Batton. "We will continue to support efforts to clarify jurisdiction in both civil and criminal matters for the protection of all people. This key to protecting our rights as defined by treaties and federal law."

Hunting and Fishing

The Oklahoma Supreme Court on March 23 unanimously rejected a lawsuit by Gov. Kevin Stitt and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation seeking to overturn an opinion by Attorney General Gentner Drummond protecting tribal hunting and fishing rights on reservation land.

The ruling keeps AG Opinion 2025-19 in place and directs the dispute to federal court, where a related case is pending.

The justices said the issue must be resolved at the federal level, not in state court.

Drummond's opinion called the state's enforcement actions unlawful and damaging to tribal relations. The Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations say their wildlife codes align with state conservation goals.

"This ruling is another rejection of Gov. Stitt's unlawful campaign against tribal citizens," Drummond said.

Choctaw Chief Gary Batton called the decision a confirmation of tribal sovereignty and long-recognized hunting and fishing rights.

A separate federal lawsuit seeks to stop the state from enforcing wildlife laws against tribal citizens within reservation boundaries.

State officials say tribal members are still subject to state regulations.

Purchase of Big Lots Distribution Center

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has purchased the former Big Lots distribution center in Durant, ending months of uncertainty about the property's future.

Big Lots filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in September 2024, closing more than 315 stores nationwide, including the Durant center.

The closure left the 1.2 million-square-foot facility vacant and about 330 employees jobless.

Rumors circulated about a potential sale, with speculation that the site could become an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center.

Amid ongoing speculation, on Nov. 24, the City of Durant released an official statement addressing those concerns:

"Mayor (Martin) Tucker was recently contacted by a media outlet, and City officials have

reason to believe that a detention center is being considered for the Big Lots facility in Durant. At this time, the City has not been directly contacted regarding this proposed facility. We are currently evaluating the appropriate measures the City should take to ensure the continued prosperity, well-being, and growth of Durant."

The potential for a detention facility drew concern not only from residents but also from Choctaw Nation leadership.

On Jan. 10, 2026, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council passed a resolution stating its opposition to any ICE detention facility in Durant.

On Jan. 13, social media posts urged residents to attend a Durant City Council meeting to oppose the proposed facility. That day, Chief Gary Batton told local media the Choctaw Nation did not support a detention center and was interested in acquiring the property.

Later that day, the Durant City Council passed an ordinance requiring a conditional use permit to own or operate a detention center within city limits.

On March 25, the Choctaw Nation announced it had purchased the Big Lots distribution center and confirmed the acquisition in a press release.

"We are evaluating how to use this adjoining property as part of our efforts to support operational growth and exploring a variety of potential uses that align with our strategic vision," the release stated. "This is an opportunity to enhance our presence and continue driving economic prosperity for our tribal members and the surrounding community."

The following day, a Facebook post about the purchase went viral, amassing more than 120,000 likes and 20,000 shares. The Occupy Democrats post described the purchase as the Choctaw Nation "crushing" a proposed ICE detention center, drawing national attention to Durant and the tribe's actions.

The Choctaw Nation has not announced plans for the property.

McAlester Judicial Center

Marking a significant step towards expanding tribal justice, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma celebrated the opening of its new McAlester Judicial Center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held on April 3.

Located at 1129 S. George Nigh Expressway in McAlester, the new Judicial Center will address cases from Hughes, Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore, Pittsburg and Coal counties.

Tribal officials said the new center will improve access to court services in the reservation's northern region, where many cases originate.

"More than 40 percent of cases filed in the Choctaw Nation District Court originate from the northern counties of the reservation," said Chief Justice David Burrage. "These figures make clear that placing a courthouse in McAlester is not just strategic, but essential to expanding access to justice and strengthening the effectiveness of our court system."

The new facility will reduce congestion at the Durant Judicial Center and shorten travel for families in guardianship, divorce, and juvenile cases.

The McAlester Center will house probation, public defenders, and prosecutors, bringing together key justice partners to enhance efficiency and community support.

"Established by Constitution in 1836, the Choctaw Nation Judicial Department has grown and evolved with the changing needs of our citizens," said District 11 Council Member Robert Karr. "Today, our new Judicial Center will provide accessible, fair justice with integrity and compassion to all."

The opening expands the Choctaw Nation's judicial infrastructure as demand grows across its jurisdiction.

Economic Impact

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma recently reported a \$4.1 billion economic impact on the state in 2023, supporting nearly 27,000 jobs and paying \$1.65 billion in wages and benefits, according to a new report by economist Dr. Kyle Dean.

Building on the economic impact, the Tribe continued to prioritize education, paying \$45.1 million to the state through gaming fees and investing more than \$72 million in educational programs. The Choctaw Nation funded over 12,000 college scholarships and supported thousands of students in summer and early childhood programs.

These efforts reflect the Tribe's commitment to strengthening local communities and ensuring a bright future for all Oklahomans by providing resources and opportunities.

Future Developments

The Biskinik will continue to report on these issues and provide readers with information as these stories develop. In the meantime, it is always important to stay informed.

To keep up with what is happening in the Choctaw Nation, follow the official Choctaw Nation social media pages and visit choctawnation.com.

We also invite you to check out biskinik.com for more content and breaking news.

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Protecting Our Children is a Necessity

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and the Choctaw Nation joins this special focus during the month of April on bringing awareness to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The Choctaw Ahni Center designated April 8 as CNO's Go Blue Day to raise awareness. This national movement encourages people to wear blue to show their commitment to protecting children, promoting safe environments, and raising awareness to help prevent child abuse and neglect.

As part of the Choctaw Nation's recognition of Go Blue Day, associates were invited to wear blue on April 8, and came to the Choctaw Nation Headquarters lobby for a group photo, I also signed an official proclamation and encouraged the community to wear blue.

If you need further child abuse protection assistance, Choctaw Children and Family Services works on behalf of Choctaw

children and families in accordance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978. Choctaw Nation social workers join with state workers and the courts to ensure safe and healthy placements for Choctaw children removed from their homes.

The Choctaw Indian Child Welfare Program is an advocate for residents in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Reservation, as well as Choctaws nationwide. Choctaw ICW Oklahoma offices are in Ardmore, Coalgate, Durant, Hugo, Idabel, McAlester, Oklahoma City, Stigler and Poteau. Contact information for Indian Child Welfare Program, call: 580-924-8280 or 800-522-6170.

According to federal statistics, 8 out of every 1,000 children in the U.S. are victims of abuse and neglect; 1 in 7 seven children experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year; and 1,990 children died from abuse and neglect in 2022 (the last year of the recorded survey). The National Children's Alliance estimates that more than 550,000 children are known to be abused; with child advocacy centers servicing more than 370,000 children each year, helping them to recover.

While those statistics are sobering, there are things we can do to help. If you see something, say something and report child abuse. Every child needs an advocate and an even playing field to grow into good, productive adults. There is no excuse for abuse and our most vulnerable need to be protected.

It is our duty to protect, nurture and strengthen Choctaw children and families for the preservation of future generations. We work with Choctaw children and families to provide services and opportunities that promote safety, self-sufficiency, and well-being to sustain our tribe and culture.

These are our children, our tribe, and our future, so their protection is important to all of us as Chahta. If you see child abuse happening report it or reach out to Choctaw Children and Family Services at 800-522-6170. Unfortunately, some children may even have to be removed from their home for their own protection and become Choctaw foster children. These children are placed under protective care until the tribal court decides what is best for the wellbeing of the child. The Choctaw Nation is always on the lookout for good foster family candidates. If you're interested in helping our children and would like to foster a child, contact 580-924-8280.

I encourage everyone to help prevent child abuse and get involved with the foster program and do all you can to ensure a bright future for our Chahta youth. After all, our Chahta children are the future of the Great Choctaw Nation.

Yakoke and God Bless!

Program helps Choctaw entrepreneurs access loans through partnerships with participating banks

DURANT, Okla. — Funding remains available through the Choctaw Nation SSBCI Capital Fund, launched in late 2025. The Fund is designed to help Choctaw citizens living anywhere in the U.S. access the capital needed to start or expand their businesses.

Supported by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI), the program partners with banks to strengthen small business loans while maintaining traditional lending standards.

"Choctaw entrepreneurs are creating businesses that strengthen families and communities," said Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton. "This program helps ensure our citizens have greater access to the financing they need to grow and succeed."

The fund provides credit support that allows

lenders to finance more projects by reducing risk on qualifying loans. The program may support up to 50 percent of a loan through a participation or collateral pledge.

Loans supported by the program can be as small as \$10,000, certain upper limits may apply. Eligible uses of funds include working capital, equipment, construction, real estate and other business expansion needs.

"When our tribal members succeed in business, it benefits the entire Choctaw Nation," Batton said. "Supporting entrepreneurship strengthens our communities and creates opportunity for future generations."

Learn more about the program at www.choctawcapitalfund.com. The website includes program details, eligibility information and resources for both businesses and lenders.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Choctaw Princess Ceremonies

Each spring, Choctaw Princess ceremonies held in each District help make this a favorite time of the year on the Choctaw Nation calendar of events. While the Choctaw Princess ceremonies officially began in April, there are quite a few ceremonies in May as well. It is always amazing to see the work that these young Chahta ohoyo put into their presentations, tribal dress and Choctaw heritage. It gives me great hope for the future when I attend these pageants and see the dedication and smiles on the faces of each contestant.

While only one contestant can be crowned, each participant should be proud of their work. The poise and culture the contestants display each year bring pride to our tribe. I'm sure our ancestors would also be honored and filled with delight if they could see how our tribe has grown and flourished, as evidenced by the dedication of each new generation

of Chahta ohoyo taking part in our Choctaw Princess ceremonies.

There were three pageants held in April, and more scheduled for the month of May. Be sure to check out the Choctaw Nation website's Events Calendar to see if there is a ceremony near you. If you have never been to a princess pageant, I highly recommend that you take a moment to attend a pageant in your area. It is a great experience to see the Choctaw Nation's heritage and culture on full display.

Many of these young Chahta ohoyo work year-round to get ready for this event every year. The beaded tribal wear, tribal dance practice and dedication to the Chahta heritage are a wonderful sight to see. Contestants chosen to represent their district for a full year will gather memories that will last a lifetime, representing our tribe.

Annually, the Choctaw Nation crowns local princesses in each of the tribe's 12 districts. Qualifying contestants are judged on talent, poise and traditional wear. During district pageants, one representative is chosen in each division. The district princesses then advance to compete in the Choctaw Nation Royalty Pageant held during the annual Labor Day Festival at the Choctaw Capitol at Tvshka Homma. Three young women are crowned Little Miss, Junior Miss, and Miss Choctaw Nation and serve as ambassadors for the following year.

Each year, the application process opens online in Chahta Achvffa on Feb. 1 and closes on March 15 at 11:59 p.m. If you have a family member who wants to represent our tribe as a Choctaw Princess, I would highly encourage you to encourage them to apply, work hard and make our tribe proud!

And even if you don't know any of the princess candidates, I would recommend that you make plans to come out and witness a Choctaw princess ceremony – you'll be glad you did. To all the contestants this year, I want to give you a Yakoke Fehna for all your hard work and dedication to keeping our Chahta heritage alive and well.



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Act of Compassion

Luke 10: 30-34, "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise, a Levite, when he was at that place, came and looked on him, and passed on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."

The priest had sympathy (recognizing or feeling for someone else's suffering, often from an emotional distance), but concerns about spiritual purity and ceremonial cleanliness may have kept him from helping the injured man. A priest was not to touch a dead body. This contact would render him ceremonially unclean. The Levite did look upon the wounded man but did not help. He had empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings of another), but did not help. The Levites assisted the priests and taught the Law. He, too, had to be ceremonially clean. This seems to be a neglect of the application of the very laws they taught. Their actions focused more on ritual observance than mercy and justice. Perhaps they were traveling to another city for a service and did not have time. Whatever the reason, they did not help. Now a Samaritan came by and had compassion (sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it) on him. Sympathy and empathy are good qualities, but compassion has the driving force.

"But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Matthew 9:36. The Samaritans were a mixed population and were despised by the Jews. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. This wounded man was probably a Jew. But the compassion of this Samaritan was not an idle compassion. He saw a soul in need. He reached out his hand to this needy soul.

This parable typifies our Lord. He came and saw our dying souls and extended His life for our salvation. He extended His hands upon the cross. There is a nail-scarred hand extended to you today.

Do you need a loan to grow your business?

We have lending support available to Choctaw Tribal Members nationwide.

Choctaw Nation SSBCI Capital Fund



Scan to learn more about the Fund.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

The Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers our tribal elders the opportunity to live in an age-restricted, independent living community for residents who can live on their own. In this type of community, seniors maintain independence for as long as is desired or possible.

Independent Elder housing is comprised of units designed for one person or one person and their spouse. Each unit is equipped with Energy Star appliances: refrigerator, stove, central heat and air, washing machine and dryer. Some site locations offer a community building, available exclusively to residents and their guests. Each site is overseen by a rental manager and maintenance technician who are responsible for the overall operations and physical integrity of each unit and the property.

Eligibility requirements for the Independent Elder Housing program are as follows:

- Applicant must have a CDIB Card.
- Applicant household must meet income guidelines.
- Applicants must be elderly or near elderly (age 55 or older).
- Household members must pass a nationwide background check.
- Tenant rent in the Independent Elder Program is based on 15% of the gross adjusted income for the household.

Independent Elder housing is currently offered at the following locations:

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| • Antlers | • Hartshorne | • Smithville |
| • Atoka | • Hugo | • Stigler |
| • Broken Bow | • Idabel | • Talihina |
| • Calera | • Poteau | • Wilburton |
| • Coalgate | • Savanna | |



Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

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WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matthew Gamble

The Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation has been very busy this past month. Our crew has been conducting largemouth bass surveys at Talawanda Lakes near McAlester, turkey gobbler counts in Pittsburg County, outreach at the Welcoming the Bison Home event at the Choctaw Cultural Center and the Total Archery Challenge at Beavers Bend State Park. Turkey season is also underway, and there's still plenty of time to get out there and tag that gobbler.

The Five Tribes Wildlife Management Reciprocity Agreement is in full effect. Choctaw tribal members only need to have proof of tribal membership while hunting or fishing within the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, or Seminole Reservations. Your tribal membership is your hunting and fishing licenses and your tags. Harvested turkeys should be checked through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal.

For the second year in a row, CNDWC is offering a prize drawing for hunters who register their harvest through the Chahta Achvffa membership portal.

This year, a FirstLite Treeline Turkey Vest in FirstLite Darkwater camo and a custom crystal pot call with the Choctaw Nation seal engraved in the wood, signed by Chief Batton and Assistant Chief Austin, will be awarded to two hunters.

Be on the lookout for our 2025-26 Big Game Report coming out soon. CNDWC associates are putting the finishing touches on this report, and it should be released by May 5. This report gives harvest statistics for the big game seasons in the Choctaw Nation and has some great information on new programs and ongoing projects. The report will be available on the CNDWC website and in limited print quantities. To request a printed version, email wildlife@choctawnation.com and give us your name and mailing address.

The CNDWC team wants to remind everyone that if you see young (baby) wildlife in the wild, it is best to leave them alone. Many times, young wildlife are left hidden away from predators while their mom is out feeding. The mother will return several times a day and is often waiting for humans to vacate the area before returning. If you suspect young wildlife may be injured or abandoned, contact your nearest game warden or wildlife professional for assistance. They have the training, expertise and knowledge to guide you through the proper steps to be taken.

CNDWC encourages you to get outside and spend some time in the Choctaw Outdoors and make some memories with friends and family.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation



Jennifer Turner

District 5

Halito from District 5,

The warm weather and sunshine are hopefully here to stay. While we welcome rain, please stay weather aware as we enter storm season. Effective tornado preparedness means planning ahead, identifying a safe shelter, assembling emergency supplies, and knowing what to do during and after a storm.

The Choctaw Nation has partnered with the mayor and fire chief in Tamaha, Oklahoma, to secure a matching grant for a tornado siren near the Tamaha Community Center. This siren will greatly increase rural residents' safety. In the past, sheriff's deputies had to warn residents in person, but now we are proud to ensure the community is better protected.

In February, we had the pleasure of attending the Haskell County Junior Livestock Show, which was a great success because of the students and their families. I was proud to represent the Choctaw Nation and support the youth who showcased months of hard work and dedication in preparing their animals.

Also in February, we were honored to recognize Julia Hensley as our First Language Speaker and John Baker as our Veteran of the Month. It is always a privilege to celebrate those in our district who preserve our language and serve our country.

High school and college graduations are right around the corner. Graduates, if you have not already ordered your graduation cords and stoles, please do so through the Chahta Achvffa portal.

We have begun Choctaw Language Classes in District 5 at both the Stigler and Spiro Community Centers. Raymond Johnson is teaching in Stigler, and Josh Daney is leading classes in Spiro. We have had a wonderful time learning with both instructors, and I encourage anyone interested to join us.

We were blessed with beautiful weather on Easter as we gathered to glorify and give thanks for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. At Bethel Indian Baptist Church, we enjoyed a large crowd, wonderful fellowship, and a meaningful time of worship together.

District 5 also crowned a new Stigler Princess: Little Miss Kynleigh Moore, daughter of Blaze and Jennifer Moore. We are excited to support Kynleigh as she represents our district and competes against princesses from across the reservation at the Labor Day Festival.

On April 10, we participated in the Kickoff – No Fear – Beat the Test state testing parade for the Whitefield School District. The students enjoyed the parade, and everyone did a great job making the event memorable.

Affordable housing remains a need in District 5, so we will be assisting families in McCurtain and Keota with LEAP applications. We have several qualified applicants, but we encourage more to apply so that we can hopefully receive the housing support the area needs.

I am excited to share that on April 23, we held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for 10 new Independent Elder homes located in Stigler. This means 10 elders can move into safe, affordable housing, and we are proud to celebrate this important milestone.

Finally, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council now has its very own Facebook page. Please like and follow the page for important updates, announcements, and upcoming events.

Yakoke,
Jennifer Turner
District 5 Tribal Councilwoman



Joey Tom

District 7

Halito!

As we enter spring, I want to remind everyone what this season represents. Toffahpi (spring) is a time of hope, growth, and renewal. It symbolizes new beginnings and transformation.

As we all know, the Choctaw Nation is no stranger to change or renewal. Recently, we have experienced new developments within our leadership, including the introduction of administrative assistants to the Council. It is our hope that these changes will help ensure matters are handled in a timely manner and allow us to be more present, responsive, and available to serve our community.

So far, 2026 has been a whirlwind of activity, filled with planning, meetings, and progress. In January, we settled

into our new office space in Antlers, navigating internet services, setting up the office, and establishing new routines.

In February, we celebrated Valentine's Day with a dance at the Wright City Center, complete with music, food, dancing, and laughter. The event had a wonderful turnout and provided a great opportunity for fun and fellowship.

In March, we celebrated Read Across America, and I had the pleasure of reading to Wright City and Antlers Choctaw Nation Headstarts. It was a joy to connect with our youngest community members and share the love of reading.

Looking ahead, we have several events planned. On May 14, we will host a Mother's Day dance at the Jack Austin Sr. Community Center in Antlers to honor all mothers in our community. The celebration will begin at 6 p.m. and will include music, food and fun for all.

On May 21, we will hold our Chief Appreciation Dinner to honor Chief Gary Baton. The event will also take place at the Jack Austin Sr. Community Center in Antlers at 6 p.m. and will feature traditional Choctaw singing, food and fellowship. We invite you and your family to join us to celebrate these special occasions.

I would also like to take this time to thank the staff and volunteers at the Antlers, Wright City, and Tushkahoma Community Centers. I truly admire your hard work and the dedication you bring each day. Because of you, our luncheons, events, and community activities continue to bring people together. Yakoke!

Finally, as we near the end of the school year, I would like to take a moment to recognize our graduating Choctaw seniors. You are not leaving; you are carrying our values, our culture, and our hopes into the future. I pray that your future is guided by purpose, filled with possibility and rooted in tradition. We are proud of all you have accomplished thus far and look forward to all that lies ahead. Chi pisa la chike.

Don't forget to follow our new Facebook page, "Choctaw Nation Tribal Council," for updates, events and important information. I am honored to serve District 7. Please reach out if you need assistance.

Yakoke!



Jennifer Woods

District 6

Halito from District 6, the Heart of the Nation. It has been a very busy past three months with many events and meetings, and we are loving this beautiful spring weather.

We are still encouraging our District 6 tribal members to apply for housing, as we want to build more homes in our district. We want to grow and build in Latimer County, in all areas of District 6, and in order to do that, we need a number of approved applications that are on the waiting list. These approved applications will determine where we build, whether in Wilburton, Red Oak, Quinton or Buffalo Valley. Don't prejudice your credit. Get those applications in and let's continue to grow our district.

In February, we had our senior Valentine's party and crowned this year's Valentine's King and Queen, Mark Underwood and Joann Baker. The seniors also enjoyed dinner

at the Catfish Barn in Pocola, and a movie night at the community center, where "Sarah's Oil" was played. I was able to attend our two Community Cultural events with other tribal council members in Shreveport, Louisiana and Fayetteville, Arkansas, where we were able to interact with other tribal members who live outside of the reservation. It is always great to visit with those tribal members, letting them know that they are not forgotten.

March is always a busy month, and it started with "Read Across America" and the Choctaw Nation's campaign to Read Across the Reservation. I enjoyed my time reading at the Wilburton Head Start and Jones Academy while dressed as Thing One, and my granddaughter, Raven, dressed as the Cat in the Hat. It is amazing to see young faces full of interest as they are read to and interacted with. We are feeding their minds with the love of reading that can take them to places that they can only go with their imaginations.

We also attended livestock shows, premium sales, and FFA events, which were held in our district. I was able to go to several livestock shows to support the students of District 6 and attend the Oklahoma Youth Expo in Oklahoma City. I am so proud of the students who work tirelessly, caring, training and showing their animals. It is not just the student who must make this commitment, but also the entire family, as it takes a full family effort to be successful. Congratulations to all the students and families. I am proud to support these young people as they are learning lessons that will accompany them all through their lives.

We attended the Eastern Oklahoma State College (EOSC) Sapphire Ball, which is a fundraiser for the college to provide scholarships for the students. We also attended the Wilburton Chamber Banquet, showing our support for the community. We are grateful for how they have embraced us as we work together to grow and better our community. I also had the opportunity to be a guest speaker for the EOSC Summit Leadership Conference, where I was able to encourage high school students and remind them that they have a golden road in front of them, as they are truly the future.

Our seniors hosted their monthly Indian Taco Sales as well as a Bingo Fundraiser recently. Our seniors are actively raising funds for their trips that they will be taking, with Albuquerque, New Mexico, being their first trip of the year. The seniors also try to attend as many events as possible, such as KEDDO Senior Day in April, monthly shopping and casino trips, day trips to the cultural center in Calera, chair volleyball games or whatever else they would like to do. Our buses are always moving. We encourage all our seniors to sign up and be involved in these activities so that they have the opportunity to fellowship with other seniors and stay active, which is good for both their physical and mental health.

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month, and we wore blue throughout the month to show our support to end child abuse. We also recognize and show our gratitude for those who are working to end child abuse. Our Indian Child Welfare, Family Preservation workers, and Lighthorsemen often see and hear things that are very difficult, so we ask for your prayers and support for all those who are on the front lines for strength as they continue to fight for the innocent.

As a tribal council member, I am always busy working on behalf of our district to ensure that the needs of our communities and tribal members are taken care of. Many of the meetings with the state's legislators, Council meetings and Inter-Tribal meetings are where we work to ensure that our tribal members are looked after and tribal laws are upheld. We are working for you, our tribal members.

Yakoke.



COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL
SESSION AGENDA
April 10, 2026

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CALL TO ORDER 2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE 3. ROLL CALL 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Regular Session March 14, 2026 5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Veteran of the Month, District #7 – Wallan McKnight b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #7 – Eleanor Caldwell 6. COMMITTEE REPORTS 7. PUBLIC COMMENTS <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Phillip Lewis – Individual Speaker – Celebrate Recovery Native Nations b. Karen Cunningham – Individual Speaker – Evacuation Plan for Handicapped c. Lin Ogg, Individual Speaker – Information on Allergy Season d. Thea Benally, Group Speaker – Wakaya Research Project | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. NEW BUSINESS <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles b. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Equipment c. Approve Application for the FY26 Indian Highway Safety Program Law Enforcement Grant d. Approve Application for the FY26 Indian Highway Safety Program Child Passenger Safety Seat Program Grant (Occupant Protection Grant) e. Approve the FY2026 Budgets for the Indian Child Welfare Program and the Indian Family Preservation Program 9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS 10. OLD BUSINESS 11. ADJOURNMENT 12. CLOSING PRAYER |
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Choctaw Artist chronicles Japanese tea ceremony at Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

By Christian Toews

Choctaw artist D.G. Smalling served as the chronicler during a Japanese chanoyu tea ceremony March 28 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, where Choctaw and Japanese traditions intersected in a public display of hospitality and cultural preservation.

The Urasenke Tankokai Washington, D.C. Association hosted the event, centering on the practice of chanoyu (literally, "hot water for tea"). This tea practice involves preparing and drinking matcha, a powdered green tea. The hosts presented koicha, kneading matcha into a paste with hot water to create thick tea.

Koicha is traditionally served as the first round of matcha during a formal chaji tea gathering, following a kaiseki, or multicourse meal. Usucha, or thin tea, is featured in the second round and is prepared by whisking matcha with hot water, the standard style familiar to many people.

Attendees silently observed as presenters prepared koicha, watching the ceremonial movements and utensils unique to this longstanding tradition. Smalling expanded the museum's annual chanoyu program through a creative collaboration. Acting as chronicler, he created live drawings in his signature single-line style, documenting the utensils, participants, atmosphere, and details of the gathering.

His role drew upon the historic Japanese practice of kaiki, or record of a gathering, associated with 16th-century tea masters. In the Japanese tea tradition, the chronicler served as recorder and witness, ensuring the event's memory endures through disciplined observation rather than reinterpretation or leadership.

"This afternoon marks an intercultural moment in which a Native American master artist serves in the role of the chronicler within the Japanese tea context. This is not a cultural fusion, but disciplined witnessing between sovereign nations and their traditions," said Sol Jung, assistant curator of Japanese art at the National Museum of Asian Art.

The museum selected tea utensils for the presentation from the Kinsey Chanoyu Collection, a gift Gregory Kinsey gave to the National Museum of Asian Art. As a longtime tea practitioner and former museum trustee, Kinsey collected these pieces for his personal practice.

The museum added nearly 170 objects to the Freer Study Collection for use in public programs and events focused on traditional Japanese tea preparation. It chose another 16 objects, noted for their artistic and historical importance, for the permanent Freer Collection for future research and exhibition.

The ceremony celebrated the enduring spirit of cultural exchange between the United States and Japan on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Artwork created by Smalling during the ceremony was displayed after the presentation.

Smalling, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal member, is internationally recognized for his precise single-line drawings that emphasize beauty, simplicity, and human dignity. His work can be viewed at dgsmling.ai.

For more information or to watch the annual chanoyu presentation, visit asia.si.edu.



Photos by Christian Toews

D.G. Smalling serves as the chronicler during the chanoyu presentation, creating live drawings in his signature single-line style to document the gathering.



D.G. Smalling creates a piece of single-line artwork that will be displayed at the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, D.C.



Kerry Steve, Shauna Williams, D.G. Smalling, and Claire Young before the chanoyu presentation in Washington, D.C.

Collaboration between Tribe and ACHE brings Choctaw art to Fort Smith

By Shelia Kirven

The artwork of 15 Choctaw artists is currently being featured in a one-of-a-kind exhibit at the Arkansas Colleges of Health Education (ACHE). The Spring Art Exhibition: A Celebration of Choctaw Art and Culture is a collaboration between ACHE and the Choctaw Nation Public Arts Department. An opening reception featuring Choctaw vendors was held April 9.

ACHE is a private, not-for-profit institution located in Fort Smith, Arkansas. It educates and trains a diverse group of highly competent and compassionate healthcare professionals and houses a research institute health and wellness center that offers initiatives through classes and art galleries. It also features a biomedical research lab.

Featured artists for the exhibition are Norma Howard (via David Howard), Connie Phillips, Kristin Gentry, Gregg Standridge, Viv Howerton, Colt James, Jaime Misenheimer, Nancy Rhoades, Deana Ward, Jane Umsted, Margaret Riley Santhanam, Gwen Lester, Brenner Billy, Gene

Blackwell and Linda York Perry.

"The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Public Arts team is honored to see this collaboration with ACHE come to life through an exhibition that highlights both contemporary and traditional Choctaw art," said Claire Green Young, Choctaw Nation Public Arts Manager. "We are grateful for the opportunity to work closely with our partners in Fort Smith to ensure a respectful and meaningful representation of Choctaw culture and creativity."

Over 70 pieces of artwork and cultural objects by Choctaw Artists fill the display. The exhibit is a free, public event through May 22 in the Brenda and Anthony Altman Gallery.

The exhibit celebrates Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma artists through traditional and contemporary works reflecting ancestral knowledge, lived experience and modern expression.

To read more about Arkansas Colleges of Health Education, visit achehealth.edu.

For more on registered Choctaw artists, visit choctawnation.com/services/artist-registry/.



Photos by Claire Green Young

Left: Choctaw artist Colt James shows off his work at the ACHE Spring Art Exhibition.

Center: Visitors view the artwork on display at the ACHE Spring Art Exhibition: A Celebration of Choctaw Art and Culture.

Right: Viv Howerton poses for a photo in front of her artwork, which sold at the ACHE Exhibition.

City of Fort Worth unveils marker honoring Choctaw Code Talkers

By Christian Toews

A new Texas Historical Marker honoring the first Native American code talkers was unveiled April 1 at Veterans Memorial Park in Fort Worth. The marker recognizes Choctaw soldiers who used the Choctaw language to secure Allied victories in World War I.

Over 50 people attended the ceremony near Camp Bowie Boulevard, including leaders from the Choctaw Nation, city and military officials, and descendants of the 19 World War I Choctaw soldiers.

Choctaw Code Talkers from the 36th Infantry Division trained at Camp Bowie before deploying to France, where they used the Choctaw language to send coded messages. During the war, German forces intercepted U.S. communications, risking troop movements and supplies.

After overhearing Choctaw soldiers speaking, U.S. command realized their language could serve as a secure code. Messages sent in Choctaw provided the Allies with an advantage and contributed to key victories.

According to the new marker, words like "Tanampo Chito" (big gun) and "Tanamposhi Hussatpalhki" (little gun shoot fast) were part of the code developed.

The Choctaw Code Talkers laid the foundation for future Native American code talker programs, including those used in World War II.

Their innovation demonstrated the strategic value of Indigenous language, turning cultural heritage into a powerful military asset.

"Their ingenuity and bravery remind us of the power of cultural heritage and the importance of preserving Indigenous languages," said Brent Kemp, commander of the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Chief Gary Batton said the Choctaw Code Talkers' impact went beyond battles. They helped preserve the Choctaw language despite suppression and forced assimilation.

"It was at a time when our people could not even vote; we were not even recognized, if you will, as citizens," Batton stated at the ceremony. "That's not a bad story; that's a story about sacrifice and being unified and doing the greater good. That's what our people set the path for us. That's what we're trying to do today."

The marker was installed through a partnership with the city of Fort Worth, the Texas Historical Commission, and the Choctaw Nation.

According to city officials, this addition expands the park's mission to honor military service and the cultural contributions that have shaped the nation.

Nuchi Nashoba, a descendant of a Choctaw code talker and president of the Choctaw Code Talkers Association, hopes the site educates visitors about sacrifice, innovation and the Choctaw people's resilience.

Nashoba said they hope to continue expanding the preservation and recognition of the Code Talkers through monuments like this one.

Learn more about the legacy of the Choctaw Code Talkers and explore their story at Biskinik.com.



Photos by Christian Toews

Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. and Nuchi Nashoba unveil a marker recognizing the Tribe's World War I code talkers April 1 in Fort Worth, Texas, with the Texas Historical Commission, the city of Fort Worth and the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.



Chief Gary Batton addresses the crowd during the April 1 ceremony honoring Choctaw Code Talkers.



The new marker is located in Veterans Memorial Park near Camp Bowie Boulevard in Fort Worth, Texas.

REGISTERED CHOCTAW ARTISTS

IS YOUR INFORMATION ACCURATE IN CHAHTA ACHVFFA?

Please log in and update any information that has changed to ensure accuracy. This allows us to better connect you with artist opportunities.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Upcoming Events

Health Fair – Idabel | May 6 | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Idabel Community Center | 2408 E Lincoln Rd Idabel, OK 74745 | 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.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) 5K/1 Mile Run | May 9 | 8 a.m. | Antlers Community Center | 302 SW 2nd St Antlers, OK 74523 | Indigenous people experience violence at alarming rates. Please help us bring awareness to and honor Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) through this community event in Antlers. This event includes the 5K and 1 Mile Awareness Walk.

Best Frybread Contest | May 9 | 1 p.m. | Wheelock Academy | 91377 Wheelock Road, Unit C Garvin, OK 74736 | The public is invited to attend the event, taste frybread entries and enjoy the afternoon on beautiful and historic grounds. Applicants must be a member of a federally recognized tribe to enter. The application deadline is May 1, 2026.

Trail of Tears Memorial Walk | May 16 | 10 a.m. | Tvshka Homma Capitol Grounds | Council House Rd Tuskahoma, OK 74574 | The Trail of Tears is a part of our tribal history that will not be forgotten. Please join us as we remember our ancestors and their long walk from Mississippi to Indian Territory, later to become the state of Oklahoma. Cultural demonstrations, live village and vendor booths open at 9:00 a.m. Ceremony begins at 10:00 a.m.

Memorial Day Ceremony | May 22 | 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. | Tvshka Homma Capitol Grounds | Council House Rd Tuskahoma, OK 74574 | Please help us honor those no longer with us and remember their sacrifices that made us free. This year's event will include a 21-gun salute and placing of the wreath. Family and friends are welcome to attend.

Cinema at the Center | May 30 | 1 p.m. | Choctaw Cultural Center | 1919 Hina Hanta Wy, Calera, OK 74730 | Hop on over for this month's Cinema at the Center and watch Princess and the Frog! 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 & Crowning Ceremonies | Various Dates & Locations | The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has announced updated dates for its 2026 Princess Pageants, along with format changes in select districts. The public is invited to attend and witness these talented young women compete for and accept their titles. **Crowning Ceremonies:** May 27, 2026, at 11 a.m. — District 12, Coalgate; June 3, 2026, at 11 a.m. — District 8, Hugo. **District Pageants:** May 12, 2026, at 6 p.m. — District 11, McAlester; May 14, 2026, at 6 p.m. — District 10, Atoka; June 9, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. — District 9, Durant; June 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. — District 2, Hochatown; June 11, 2026, at 6 p.m. — District 1, Idabel; June 16, 2026, at 6 p.m. — District 7, Wright City. For more information, visit choctawnation.com/events.

For additional information on these events and more, visit choctawnation.com/events/.

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

OKC Tribal Alliance Wild Onion Dinner

Wild Onion Dinner | May 2, 2026 | 11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. | American Legion Post 73 | 5000 SE 24th St., Del City, OK
\$15 per plate with the choice of salt pork or chicken. Includes: wild onions, beans, frybread, tanchi labona, banana, fried potatoes, grape dumplings, tea or water. Bake sale, soda sale & vendors on site. Cash only – ATM available

Missing in Oklahoma Day

Families and agencies are invited to Missing in Oklahoma Day from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. May 2, 2026, in Edmond. Hosted by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation and the Oklahoma Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the event offers resources and support for missing persons cases. Register online or via QR code. For information, email okmissingpersons@gmail.com

Get Well-Informed Free Water Testing Day

The Oklahoma Well Owner Network, through Oklahoma State University Extension and Oklahoma Water Resources Center, will host a free "Get Well-Informed" water testing event May 1 from 8 to 10 a.m. at Extension offices across 14 Oklahoma counties including, Atoka County Extension Office — Atoka, Choctaw County Extension Office — Hugo, Coal County Extension Office — Coalgate, Hughes County Extension Office — Holdenville, Latimer County Extension Office — Wilburton, LeFlore County Extension Office — Poteau, McCurtain County Extension Office — Idabel, McIntosh County Extension Office — Checotah, Okfuskee County Extension Office — Okemah, Pittsburg County Extension Office — McAlester, Pontotoc County Extension Office — Ada, Pushmataha County Extension Office — Antlers, Seminole County Extension Office — Wewoka and Tahleahua Conservation District Office — Tahleahua. To learn more, contact Sadler at 405-744-8429 or jeff.sadler@okstate.edu.

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER
IBAIAYA VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Scan for additional details

CHOCTAW NATION ART SHOW APPLICATIONS

ADULTS APPLY HERE

YOUTH APPLY HERE

TVNVP ISHT IKHVNACHI
MEN'S STICKBALL CLINIC
TRAINING FOR WAR

MAY 2, 2026 | 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Scan for additional details

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER
5TH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATE 5 YEARS OF SHARING CHOCTAW CULTURE
JULY 23–25, 2026

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS
APPLY MAY 1 - JUNE 15

Scan to learn more about the program

Aimvhpesa Shali
Carriers of Culture: Honoring Generations of Choctaw Artistry
May 5, 2026 – October 16, 2026

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JOIN US FOR OUR JULY FOURTH CELEBRATION
July 4, 2026 | 7pm - 10pm
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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 | Mail: Biskinik, P.O. Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702 | Online: 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.

KE TOLI STICKBALL CLINIC
MAY 28, 2026
10:00 AM - 3:30 PM

Scan for additional details

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna
Me Language Lesson

Summer Words and Phrases

With the end of the school year approaching, here are some Choctaw words and phrases to try during summer break.

Words:

- toffa (n) summer
- leshpa (adj) hot (of weather, water, etc.)
- okshinilli (v) to swim (of a person, fish, duck, etc.)
- nvni hokli (v) to catch fish, fish (using a rod and reel, etc.)
- binachi (v) to camp
- washoha (v) to play (with a ball, a toy, etc.)
- towa (n) ball
- nowa (v) (one) to walk
- heshi tomi (n) sunshine, sunlight

Phrases:

- Heshi tomi hosh hikja. The sun is shining.
- Kucha yvt leshpa fehna. It's very hot outside.
- A nvni hoklit ia sv benna. Yes, I want to go fishing.
- Nowa micha nowut aya aiokpanch! li. I like walking and hiking.
- Towa washoha sv benna. I want to play ball.

choctawnation.com/about/language/

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.

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800-522-6170

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.

WHEN THE EARTH REMEMBERS
Community Workshop and Artist Talk

INVITATION ONLY EVENT
May 22 | 10:00 AM

OPEN TO ALL
May 23 | 10:30 AM

Scan to apply.

Scan to learn more.

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

Cleveland earns Ph.D.

Racine 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.



DeLaRosa honors ancestors with his work on powwow in California

Submitted by Angela Roberts

On Saturday, March 28, 2026, the newest Program Specialist for Modesto Junior College in Modesto, California, Jake DeLaRosa (member of the Choctaw Nation), brought together many Central Valley Native Americans at the annual Powwow he has brought back and hosted for two years in a row now.

The gathering was named: Tradition is Our Medicine: Knowledge is Our Fire: Inter Tribal Honoring Our Ancestors. This powwow is put together along with the MJC SIERRA program and the Indigenous People Alliance Club, which offers local college students a safe space for resources and opportunities to engage with higher education in meaningful and culturally respectful ways. Natives agree that there is a need for more gathering and Native community spaces in the Central Valley area, where MJC is also located in the Northern part.

As Program Specialist, Jake has played a key role in building community for these powwows among many local Natives and groups from Oklahoma to the Sierra Nevada. This year, he also brought in Sacramento offices, including the California Rural Indian Health Board (CRIHB) and Sacramento State's newest Ethnic Studies Department Native Program, giving students and the community of Modesto an even larger pool to find resources in for the future of their success.

Jake has also worked alongside the California Choctaws while creating and supporting opportunities for students to be a part of cultural preservation and connection in honoring our ancestors. He received an award from the County Board of Supervisors in honor of the work he and the SIERRA club have done for the greater community in holding this annu-



al powwow, and he currently serves as the Advisor for the Indigenous People's Alliance club, as a Council Member for the United Tribes of California (UTOC) and is also a Central Valley A.I.M. Gourd dancer. We want to acknowledge and thank one more proud Choctaw in California for keeping our culture alive across the Turtle Island diaspora, and for supporting Native people and giving many Natives in the Central Valley of California a space of community and belonging to come to. Our Choctaw spirit is loud all the way over in California, where many Choctaw continue to reside today.

When requesting a comment from Jake following this year's powwow, he said, "The annual Modesto Junior College Powwow is far more than a social gathering; it is a powerful declaration of sovereignty and a vibrant testament to the resilient strength of our Indigenous culture. It serves as a sacred space where the community reunites to reinforce ancestral bonds, turning collective heritage into a source of modern empowerment. In every dance and every drumbeat, there is a shared commitment to self-determination and the beautiful, resilient future of our people. Aho!"

Tyler family visits Kindred Spirits

On Aug. 2, 2025, Charlotte Molzahn of Michigan, Michelle Plumb of England and Butler Tyler of North Carolina visited the Kindred Spirits Monument in Cork, Ireland. The visit was a stop during their bucket-list vacation to Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Wight.

On the trip, they also met their cousin, John Tyler, for the first time. The family is descended from Carrie Gardner.



Beasley shoots to first place at State

Skylar Beasley, a junior from Antlers High School, won first place overall at the Oklahoma NASP Grand State Archery tournament.

Beasley shot a score of 297 out of 300.



Tonikha turns 13

"Happy 13th Birthday Samuel Tonikha! You are such a blessing to your family. Momma is so proud of you continue with your faith and trust in the Lord as you grow in this life!"

- Chi Hullo Li, Momma



Whitmore turns 18

Ivy Faye Whitmore, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, will celebrate her 18th birthday May 28.

She is set to graduate May 21 from Marietta High School, ranking in the top 10 percent of her class.

During high school, Whitmore was active in FFA, National Honor Society, Student Council, JOM, Speech and Debate, and served as senior class secretary. She attended Southern Tech during her junior year and completed the welding program.

Whitmore earned the Competency Award for Intro to Ag Power & Tech through FFA and will be honored at the 100th Annual Oklahoma State FFA Convention. After graduation, she plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in Native American studies.



McKnight is April Veteran of the Month

Wallen McKnight, District #7, is the Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Sgt. McKnight was born and raised in Darwin, Oklahoma, attending Sugar Loaf and graduating from Antlers High School.

Following graduation, he joined the U.S. Air Force, completed basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Tex., and began his service as a Munitions Specialist. He served honorably from 1954 to 1958 as an E-7, then joined the U.S. Army in 1961, where he served as a tank driver. He served for 20 years and was discharged as an E-7.

Sgt. McKnight served three tours of duty in Germany, Korea, and Okinawa, and served stateside in various places, including Fort Chaffe, Ark., and Fort Carson, Colo., his preferred assignment duty site. He received numerous honors and decorations, including the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Army Combat Award, four Good Conduct Medals, and Marksmanship badges for rifles and pistols.

Upon returning to Oklahoma, he worked with the Department of Corrections for 17 years, retiring in 1996.

He and his wife, Betty, have been married for 63 years, are proud parents of Wallen Dale, Melissa, and Rodney, and have numerous grandchildren. He has expressed deep appreciation for the lifelong support of the Choctaw Nation and the U.S. Army.

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.



Kaiser wins State

Garon Kaiser, a senior at Deer Creek High School, claimed the 2026 Class 6A 165-pound wrestling state championship. Kaiser capped his high school wrestling career with more than 100 wins, finishing with a record of 126-41.

After graduation, Kaiser plans to wrestle in college and major in finance. He is the son of Justin and Corie Kaiser and the older brother of Grady Kaiser.



Fisher earns degree from MBU

Haley Fisher is graduating from Mary Baldwin University in Staunton, Virginia, on May 9, 2026, with a Doctorate in occupational therapy.

She received a bachelor's degree in kinesiology from East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma.

Haley has accepted a position at Select Medical Rehabilitation Hospital in Oklahoma City.

She is the daughter of Tammy and Adam Sherfield of Hobbs, New Mexico and the wife of Garrett Fisher.

Haley is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation and embraces her native heritage.



Choctaws play in All-Star Showcase

A few Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma student-athletes were selected to participate in the 2025 Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase, hosted by the Atlanta Braves at Truist Park in Atlanta.

The annual showcase took place in June 2025, and featured top Native American high school baseball players from across the U.S. and Canada, providing opportunities for skill development and exposure to collegiate and professional scouts.

The following Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal members were named to the 2025 roster: Matthew Wise (Inola HS, Okla., Choctaw); Cashin Clifft (Kiowa HS, Okla., Chickasaw/Choctaw); Nicholas Shade Cody (Rattan Public School, Okla., Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma); Kollin Davis (Crowder HS, Okla.); Ty Freeman (Greenwood HS, Okla., Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma); Kaleb Gilreath (Dallas Christian School, Texas, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma); Aven Goodlin (Wagoner HS, Okla., Cherokee/Choctaw); Sanjiya Hickman (Nanih Waiya Attendance Center, Miss., Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians); Canyon Wright (Grace Christian School, La., Jena Band of Choctaw Indians).

These student-athletes will participate in a pro-style workout, skill development sessions and a showcase game coached by former Major League Baseball players.

The Native American All-Star Baseball Showcase is designed to highlight Indigenous talent while supporting athletes pursuing baseball at the next level through elite training and national exposure.

For more information, visit MLB.com.



Caldwell is April First Language Speaker of the Month

At the April 11 Choctaw Tribal Council Regular Session Meeting, Eleanor Caldwell from District 7 was recognized as First Choctaw Language Speaker of the Month.

Learn more about Caldwell's recognition by watching the recorded session at biskinik.com/tag/council-minutes/.



Corley wins State Championship

Kylie Corley, a member of the Choctaw Nation and a senior at Valliant High School, won the State Powerlifting Championship in the 168-lb class, marking another incredible milestone as her career with the Valliant Bulldogs comes to an end.

After missing the opportunity to compete at the state meet during her freshman year, Kylie made it her mission to earn a spot on that stage. That determination set in motion a career that would position her as one of—if not the most decorated powerlifters in Valliant High School history.

As a junior, Kylie won gold at Regionals, earning her place at State, where she finished 5th overall. The following year, she captured her second Regional Championship, proving she was the strongest 168-pound lifter south of I-40. That same season, she went on to win State Gold and set a new state record with a 370-lb squat.

This year's competition was especially fierce, with the top challengers all returning juniors—two of whom had also set state records. Kylie prepared for the challenge and rose to the occasion once again. As a senior, she captured her third straight Regional title and battled through tough competition to become a two-time State Champion.

Kylie finishes her Bulldog career as a three-time Regional Champion, two-time State Champion and State Record Holder, while also going undefeated her final two seasons.

"Thank you Kylie Corley for your contributions to the sport and inspiring the next generation of girl powerlifters."

- The Corley-Mckinney Family



Cole family visits Kindred Spirits

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal member Anthony Cole and his family recently traveled to Ireland during spring break, where they visited the Kindred Spirits Monument, a tribute commemorating the Choctaw Nation's historic gift to the Irish people during the Great Famine.

Cole said the visit to the monument, located in Middleton, County Cork, was an emotional highlight of the trip for the family.

Traveling with Cole were his wife of 38 years, Jill Cole; Emily Northcutt and her husband, Ryan; and Noah Cole and his fiancée, Megan.

The family explored the Middleton area during their visit and encouraged others planning a trip to arrange local transportation in advance.

The Kindred Spirits Monument honors the Choctaw Nation's 1847 donation to Ireland, symbolizing a lasting connection between the Choctaw and Irish people.

For more information about the monument and its history, visit official tourism resources for County Cork.



Karr graduates from Vanderbilt

Sadie Karr, daughter of Aaron and Jenny (Callaway) Karr; granddaughter of John and Jana Lou Callaway; niece to Jonathan Callaway and Marinelle (Callaway) McAlister; and great-niece to Char Williamson, will graduate May 8 with a Bachelor of Arts in English literature and theatre. Karr worked on 27 film and theatre productions during her college career and is pursuing a career in film production and set design.

Sadie wants to say yakoke to the Choctaw Nation and her family for being a big part of her success in getting her degree.




CHOCTAW TRAIL OF TEARS
 MEMORIAL WALK

MAY 16, 2026 | TVSHKA HOMMA CAPITOL GROUNDS
 CEREMONY AT 10:00AM & CULTURAL DEMONSTRATIONS AND VENDOR BOOTHS BEGIN AT 10:30AM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CHOCTAW NATION
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Choctaw Nation Integrated Services

Baxter Holmes, Sports Journalist

By Kellie Matherly

Baxter Holmes' journey to becoming one of the most respected voices in modern sports journalism began far from the bright arenas and global platforms he would one day cover. Born outside Seattle, he spent his early childhood in the Pacific Northwest before his parents made the life-altering decision to move the family back to Oklahoma to reconnect with their Native American roots. Both sides of his family have deep ties to the region, and his parents wanted their children to grow up immersed in Choctaw history, culture and community.

Relocating to a rural community of roughly 80 residents, Holmes traded suburban life for a childhood steeped in tradition. His earliest memories include living for six months in a teepee while his father built a log cabin on their four-acre plot of land. The setting became a living classroom. His parents took him to tribal powwows, taught him about the Trail of Tears and Oklahoma's Indigenous history, and introduced him to cultural practices such as traditional foods and the game of stickball. That early grounding in heritage, storytelling, and community would later shape his worldview as a journalist.

Sports, especially basketball, played a central role in local life. Though he admits he "warmed the bench" until his senior year, Holmes found a powerful community connection in the sport. The gym became the town's gathering point, a place where people of all backgrounds came together. Those experiences planted the idea that sports could serve as a window into culture, identity, and shared human experience.

"One of the things that I learned growing up was the way that sports could connect people from all different kinds of backgrounds," Holmes said. "People will gather in a common bond over cheering for that team and supporting them."

Holmes never expected to become a journalist. Inspired by the 1996 film *Twister*, he initially dreamed of becoming a meteorologist and storm chaser. But the course of his life shifted during a high school math class when the local sports editor knocked on the door looking for someone to cover area teams. Holmes' coach recommended him.

"I had always enjoyed reading and writing. I really enjoyed the art of trying to capture in words what happened in a compelling and interesting way," said Holmes.

In sports journalism, Holmes discovered a passion for transforming movement, emotion, and narrative into stories. Soon,



Choctaw Nation Photos

Baxter Holmes' journey from covering Oklahoma high school sports to ESPN shows how hard work can take you anywhere.

he was writing constantly for multiple papers and earning the nickname "Mr. Newspaper."

"It's something I think about a lot," Holmes said. "How a career kind of knocked on the door and came out of nowhere."

College was always an expectation in Holmes' family, and he enrolled at the University of Oklahoma, where he quickly found his true home: the student newspaper. Under the guidance of longtime advisor Jack Willis, Holmes learned professional-level journalism from day one. Willis marked up every edition of the paper, holding students to the highest standards.

The newsroom became like a second home to Baxter, and he thrived in the competitive, creatively charged environment full of ambitious young writers pushing each other to excel.

"We took ourselves very seriously," he added. "I was around a lot of really talented people. We were making each other better all the time. I was really fortunate to be there at the time I was."

Internships across the country followed, culminating in an internship-to-entry-level position at the Los Angeles Times. Holmes packed his car, drove across the Southwest, and walked into one of the nation's greatest newsrooms just days after graduating.

Immersed in a world of Pulitzer winners and seasoned re-

porters, he confronted the reality of how green he actually was as a journalist. But the challenge energized him. He embraced the constant journey toward improvement and striving to reach the fullest extent of his abilities.

"I'm a big believer in the idea that it can just take time to get better," said Holmes. "I'm much better today than I was 10 years ago, but I'm not nearly as good as I want to be."

In his mid-20s, the Boston Globe offered him the Celtics beat. Covering a storied franchise in a ravenous sports market was sink-or-swim, but he was determined to rise to the occasion. The pace was relentless, the spotlight intense, and the learning curve steep, yet he describes those years as some of the most exciting and formative of his life.

"I was either going to do it well, or I was going to fail spectacularly in a very public way because it's a high-profile position, but I wanted to test myself," said Holmes.

Although he loved writing for The Boston Globe, Holmes is not one for passing up opportunities to improve as a journalist. So, when an offer came in from ESPN to cover the LA Lakers, he jumped at the chance to work with Henry Abbott, someone Holmes greatly admires.

"I got to do a lot of the work that I really cared about under him, and he made me better immediately," Holmes said.

Baxter Holmes credits mentors and colleagues for shaping his career, combining their influence with his work ethic and love of sports to drive his storytelling.

See and share Holmes' story at togetherweremore.com/.



Holmes work has appeared in major media outlets like The LA Times, Boston Globe and ESPN.

CNO Labor & Delivery Unit joins statewide TeamBirth Initiative

THALIHINA, Okla. (April 1, 2026) — The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA) Labor & Delivery unit has joined the TeamBirth Initiative through the Oklahoma Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative (OPQIC) at the Oklahoma Hospital Association (OHA).

CNHSA marked the milestone with a kickoff celebration on March 5.

TeamBirth is a nationally recognized program designed to improve communication and shared decision-making between patients and their care teams during labor and delivery. The model encourages structured conversations among patients, nurses, and physicians to ensure everyone understands the care plan and any changes that occur during labor.

The Oklahoma TeamBirth initiative is supported by Title V funding through the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

TeamBirth strategies include using a shared planning board in the patient's room to outline care plans and labor progress and conducting regular "huddles" with the patient, family and care team to discuss goals, concerns and steps.



Choctaw Nation Photos

Choctaw Nation Labor & Delivery Unit celebrates TeamBirth launch with OPQIC.

"We are excited to partner with hospitals across Oklahoma to implement TeamBirth and strengthen communication during one of the most important moments in a family's life," said Barbara O'Brien, director of the OPQIC. "Programs like this help ensure patients, families and care teams work together to support safe and positive birth experiences."

Through this initiative, Choctaw Nation Health Services continues its efforts to advance maternal health and improve outcomes for mothers and babies across the region.

Applications are now open for CNO Deer Herd Enhancement Program

DURANT, Okla. (March 30, 2026) — Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) tribal members owning or leasing over 640 acres within the CNO reservation can now apply to the Deer Herd Enhancement Program (DHEP) for assistance in managing the white-tailed deer population on their land.

Landowners and leasees accepted into this program will collaborate with a Choctaw Nation Department of Wildlife Conservation (CNDWC) biologist to create a survey plan and establish management goals and objectives, including habitat and harvest recommendations. The goal is to enhance deer habitat and improve population dynamics.

Program participants are responsible for a yearly enrollment fee (\$150 for 640-5,000 acres; \$350 for over 5,000 acres) and will be required to complete a series of deer population surveys.

Biologists will train participants to collect data and provide the necessary tools and standardized data sheets. Participants must comply with the program's



Choctaw Nation Photos

Choctaw landowners with 640+ acres can apply for the Deer Herd Enhancement Program.

requirements for future enrollment eligibility.

The deadline to apply is May 1, 2026. CNDWC will review applications and contact accepted applicants by June 1.

Applications are available on the Wildlife Conservation webpage or email CNDWC at wildlife@choctawnation.com. Completed applications should be emailed to the Wildlife Conservation team or mailed to Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Department of Wildlife Conservation, at PO Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702.

OBITUARIES

Peggy Sue Larney

Peggy Sue Larney, 81, passed away Jan. 24, 2026.

Peggy was born Feb. 11, 1944, in McAlester, Okla., to Johnson and Ethel (Perry) Taylor.

She was preceded in death by her husband Larry Larney; son Troy Larney; her parents; and brothers Arnold and Jessie Taylor.

Peggy is survived by her son Brian Larney; granddaughter Adara Cruz and spouse Brinks; great-granddaughters Amelia and twins Aria and Adelina; nieces and nephews Charlie Taylor, Brandon Taylor, Donya Battiest, and Starla Austin (Ed); a wide circle of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and the many friends and community members she served so faithfully throughout her life.

**Mary Elwina Mays**

Mary Elwina Mays, 93, passed away Feb. 11, 2026.

Mary was born March 31, 1931, in Erick, Okla., to Richard Wesley Vaughn and Ora Mae Harkins Vaughn.

She was preceded in death by her husband Robert C. Mays; her parents; and grandparents Albert Pike and Bessie Harkins.

Mary is survived by her children Karen Moore, James Crace, and Mary Bebee; grandchildren Jeremy Moore, Jason and Nadine Moore, Brad and Wendy Crace, Bryan and Tera Crace, April and Greg Starr, and Mary and David Walling; 11 great-grandchildren; and 3 great-great-grandchildren.

**Patti Jean Cooper Morrison**

Patti Jean Cooper Morrison, 76, passed away Dec. 12, 2025.

Patti was born Jan. 28, 1949, in Tulsa, Okla., to Winston Cooper and Frances Reynolds.

She was preceded in death by her parents; stepfather Joe Reynolds, brother R. Casey Cooper; and nephew Christopher Cooper.

Patti is survived by her husband Charles Morrison; daughters Christine Hancock and spouse John, Andrea Akeroyd and spouse Mike, and Allyson Wokoun and spouse Davis Light; grandsons Michael Hancock, and Matthew Hancock and spouse Caitlin; brother Michael Cooper and spouse Eunju Chang; sister-in-law Irene Cooper; and niece Kimberly Cooper.

**Bette Jean Grogan**

Bette Jean Grogan, 96, passed away Feb. 8, 2026.

Bette Jean was born Nov. 18, 1929, in Seminole, Okla., to Mattie (Eakin) Lowery and C.J. "Choc" Lowery.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and husband Kenneth Grogan.

Bette is survived by her son Rowell; daughter Kathy Barnett; stepdaughters Melinda Grant and Melissa McCaffrey; five grandchildren; many great-grandchildren; and a great-great-grandchild.

**Marcus Ike Wilmond**

Marcus Ike Wilmond, 72, passed away Feb. 17, 2026.

Marcus was born Oct. 6, 1953, in Ardmore, Okla., to Kelsey Wilmond and Ella Mae (Shoemaker) Wilmond.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and brothers Ray Wilmond, Ronald Willmond and Larry Shoemaker.

Marcus is survived by his wife Serena Wilmond; sons Dustin Wilmond and fiancé Yanasa Charcoal, Tyler Wilmond and Todd Wilmond; daughter Vanessa Wilmond; grandchildren Jeramiah Wilmond, Emkv Wilmond, and Tyus Wilmond; and sister Melissa Mose.

**Millie Nichols**

Millie (Winningham) Nichols, 96, passed away Oct. 15, 2025.

Millie was born Oct. 23, 1928, to Charlie and Adeline Winningham.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers Calvin Lonnie Winningham and Robert Lee Winningham; and sisters Muril C. Hodges, Edith Lillian "O'Dell" Carney, Tina Lee Stacey, Jo Ethel Stacey, and Gladys Contratto.

Millie is survived by her son Curtis Nichols; grandchildren Rebecca Nichols and spouse Kieth, Charles Winningham and fiancée Leona, and Brian Pullum-Calvert and spouse Benjamin; nieces Betty Ross and spouse Mike, and Tonya Carney; and numerous other nieces, nephews, extended family members, and friends.

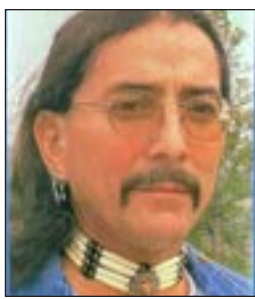
**Allen Wayne Tohkubbi**

Allen Wayne Tohkubbi, 72, passed away Dec. 29, 2025.

Allen was born April 9, 1953, to Alex and Louise Tohkubbi.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Carol Tohkubbi; brothers Donald and Charles Tohkubbi; and special friends Farris Griffin, Charlie Brown, and Bob Belknap.

Allen is survived by his wife, Loretta Tohkubbi; son Michael Tohkubbi; grandson Aaron Tohkubbi; many nieces, nephews, and cousins; and special friend Jim Harvey.

**Diane Gail Coley**

Diane Gail Coley, age 53, passed away Feb. 5, 2026.

Diane was born April 20, 1972, in Talihina, Okla., to Joe Ed Coley and Mary Frances (Mackey) Coley.

She was preceded in death by her brother Roger Coley; and grandparents Rufus and Lela (Yoda) Coley, and Raymond and Frances (Sam) Mackey.

Diane is survived by her husband Joe Riddle; son Ranes Riddle; her parents; sister Heather Coley; sister-in-law Andrea Coley; aunts Laura Mackey and Tina Mackey; numerous nieces and nephews; and many other family members and friends who will cherish her memory.

**Gilbert Bryan Frazier**

Gilbert Bryan Frazier, 64, passed away Sunday, February 8, 2026.

Gilbert was born Aug. 10, 1961, in Oklahoma City, Okla., to Edmond Wilson and Louella Mae (King) Frazier.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Bonnie Frazier; nephew Jacob Allen; and several cousins.

Gilbert is survived by his brother Edmond Frazier, Jr.; sister Vanessa Allen and spouse Charles; nieces and nephew Ilean Arpoika and Jonathan, Amber Piorkowski and Michael, Reanna Allen, Dakota Smead, and Megan Sowers; and several great-nieces and great-nephews.

**Thedy Roy Gibson**

Thedy Roy Gibson, 86, passed away Feb. 7, 2024.

Thedy was born Nov. 21, 1937, in Battiest, Okla., to Robert Stephen Gipson and Evelina Winship Jefferson.

He was preceded in death by his mother; son David Keith Gibson; and siblings Thora Sue Jefferson, Theodore Perry Jefferson, Thelia Marie Jefferson, Thelma Lola Jefferson, and Thurman Isaac Jefferson.

Thedy is survived by daughter Linda Maria Gibson Thompson; grandchildren Tiffany Thompson Cotter, Jarod Thompson, Rosemary Gibson Stowe, Carolyn Gibson, and Barbie Gibson; great-grandchildren Zachary Cotter, Jaylynn Thompson, Xaviar Stowe, Elliott Stowe, Johnathan Ritchie, Jackson Langley, and Justin Freel.

**Debra Ruth Pruett**

Debra "Debbie" Ruth Pruett, 68, passed away Feb. 4, 2026.

Debbie was born June 18, 1957, in Long Beach, Calif., to Jerald Douglas Pruett and Rochelle Nadine (Reissinger) Pruett.

She was preceded in death by her husband Billy Guy Thornton.

Debbie is survived by her children Karna (Spain) Bennett (Russell), Michelle Spain (John), Patricia Elizabeth Thornton, Stephan Cummings (Kiera), and Tristan Cummings (Doni); grandchildren Aaron Winstead, Kailee Bennett, Kylie Batson, Kaylee Cummings, Callista Cummings, Pierce Cummings, Jude Cummings, and Padrih Pruett-Thornton; and siblings Denise Pruett and Glenn Pruett.

**Frankie McMurtrey**

Frank McMurtrey, 91, passed away Feb. 19, 2026.

Frank was born Nov. 29, 1934, in Haileyville, Okla., to Julia Daugherty and Clyde McMurtrey.

He was preceded in death by wife Carma; his parents; father-in-law and mother-in-law Gregg and Ethyl Doak; grandson Marc; brothers Joe and Horace; sisters Mickey, Charlene, and Shirley; brothers-in-law Jerry, Bill, Glen, Sam, Stan and Bob; sisters-in-law Barabara, Patsy, and Helen; nephew Marc; and nieces Roxane and Debbie.

Frank is survived by sons Frankie and spouse Traci, and Jeffrey and spouse Tina; daughter Lori Roan and spouse Brad; Marc's widow Leslie; grandchildren Travis, Nash and spouse Jessica, Christian, Cidney and spouse Tommy, Isabella and fiancé Zach, and Oliver and Eden; great-grandchildren Allison, Brighton, Harlan (Llewyn), Miriam, Callahan, and Carson; sister Doty Faith; brother Ed McMurtrey; nephews Bobby, Eddie, Rodney, Todd, Randy, Michael, Joe and Scott Butkis; and nieces Linda, Julie, and Renee.

**Elmer Louis Ardese**

Elmer Louis Ardese, 73, passed away Feb. 6, 2026.

Elmer was born Aug. 27, 1952, in Talihina, Okla., to Joseph Ardese and Agnes (Wade) Ardese.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Jimmy Joe, Anthony, Carl, Vincent, and Joseph Ardese; and nephews Clayton Ardese and Joseph Ardese.

Elmer is survived by his son Nicholas Ardese; stepdaughter Carri Lyddon and spouse Nathan; brother Mike Griffiths and spouse Lisa; sister Rosalie Ardese; cousins Jim Ardese, and Bob and Kate Stancliff; and a host of nieces, nephews and other family and friends.

**Michael Rodney Tenequer**

Michael Rodney Tenequer, 58, passed away Feb. 18, 2026.

Michael was born Dec. 7, 1967, in Talihina, Okla., to Roger Tenequer and Betty Margaret (Lewis) Tenequer.

He was preceded in death by his daughter Shyatesa Michelle Tenequer; aunt Faye Lewis; uncle Jimmy Murphy Sr.; grandparents Nannie Lewis and Edward Lewis; and great-grandparents Betty and Jesse Lewis.

Michael is survived by his wife Lucreta Lizette Tenequer; son Chris Tenequer; daughter Jessica Tenequer and Michael; step-daughter Breanna Roberts; sons Chase Tenequer and Shyanne, and Jared Tenequer; grandchildren Jacklyn Tenequer, Landin Tenequer, Jennifer Mann, Landry Tenequer, Paisley Tenequer, Emery Tenequer, Lilah Tenequer, and Charlie Tenequer; his parents; brother Jimmy Murphy Jr. and spouse Sharolyn; numerous cousins, relatives, and many dear friends.

**Willis Martin Eades Jr.**

Willis Martin Eades Jr., 79, passed away Dec. 4, 2025.

Willis was born Nov. 8, 1946, in Modesto, Calif., to Willis Martin Eades Sr. and Rosie Mae Sam Eades.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters Sally Eades, Dorothy Glass, and TeAta Dolezal; and brother Donald Eades.

Willis is survived by his daughter Sherri G. Eades; sons Billy Ray and Darrick Dion Eades; brother Billy Eades; sisters Mary Genn and Donna "Diane" Norton; special friend Leveta Reed; nine grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces and nephews.

**Judy Ann Phillips**

Judy Ann Phillips, 69, passed away Feb. 21, 2026.

Judy was born July 20, 1956, in Corrine, Okla., to Dave and Suzanne Wickson.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers James Morris LaFlore, David "Sonny" Wickson, Ray Wickson, Edmond Wickson, and Fred Wickson; and sisters Ethel Ishcomer, Marian Aaron, and Gladys Moore.

Judy is survived by her husband Thomas "Tommy" Phillips; sons Ronald McLemore, Rick McLemore and spouse Amber, and Ty Pemberton and spouse Jackie; daughters Julia Harris and spouse Jerry, and Jessica Smith and spouse Steven; grandchildren Brittany, Richard, Alexis, Amaya, Quentin, Daniel, Camden, Skylar, Alexandria, Jackson, Weston, Julian, Destiny, Jerry II, Dillon, and William; great-grandchildren Hayln, Isabella, and Arabella; sister Annie Wickson; brother Hoss Wickson; and many nieces, nephews, and cousins.

**Cecelia McLafferty**

Cecelia McLafferty, 89, passed away Feb. 18, 2026.

Cecelia was born March 15, 1936, in Wilburton, Okla., to Hagin and Pauline (Allen) Collins.

She was preceded in death by husband John Joseph "Joe" McLafferty; her parents; and two brothers.

Cecelia is survived by son Michael; four sisters; one brother; and numerous nieces and nephews.

**Juanita Watson Bad Bear**

Juanita Watson Bad Bear, 87, passed away Feb. 14, 2026.

Juanita was born Nov. 6, 1938, in McCurtain, Okla., to Simeon and Ora (Johnson) Watson.

She was preceded in death by her husband Mark Bad Bear; her parents; brother Wendell Watson; sister Orene Watson Sevier; daughter Lisa Bad Bear; and son Gary Bad Bear.

Juanita is survived by her daughter Gayle Bad Bear Yarlott and spouse Eugene; grandchildren Michael, Lori, Karrah, Jarret, and Lyssa; five great-grandchildren; brother Nathan Watson; and sisters Maxine Watson Harper and Margie Watson.

**Dave Jeffery Davis**

Dave Jeffery Davis, 78, passed away Jan. 23, 2026.

Dave was born Dec. 2, 1947, in Sherman, Texas.

He is survived by his children Roger F. Davis and Janice Davis-McWaters; brothers Murle Davis, Elliott Davis, and Robert Baker Jr.; and sisters Shirley Towers and Bonnie Gordon.

**Biskinik Obituary Policy**

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

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

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

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

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

ITI FABVSSA

Pineywoods Cattle

By Choctaw Historic Preservation

This month, Iti Fabvssa would like to share a brief history of the Pineywoods Cattle breed, a breed of cattle used by Choctaw people for over 200 years. Starting in the 16th century, Spanish explorers and soldiers brought cattle into North America (Thompson 2026:68). Serving as both food and as draft animals, these cattle were used by Spanish, French, and English settlers in what is now the Southeastern United States. Through interactions with Europeans, Choctaw people adapted the word “wak” from the Spanish word for cow, “vaca” (Byington 1915:361). By the 1730s, a few Choctaw families had adapted to ranching and had herds of cattle within the Choctaw Nation. Over time, the cattle would be shaped by their environment and agricultural use into a new breed, called the Pineywoods Cattle (ALBC).

Pineywoods Cattle are a very hearty breed that has adapted to the environment of a region along the Gulf Coast known as the Piney Woods or Pine Belt, Tiak Faya in the Choctaw language. This region was managed by range fires that promoted one of the most diverse regions outside of the tropics (Thompson 2026: 111). Large pine trees and tall grasses dominated the landscape as hardwood trees grew in the fertile bottomlands along the waterways. The Pineywoods Cattle lived in this region and became perfectly adapted to it. The Pineywoods Cattle are heat resistant, long-lived, have resistance to parasites and disease, and can be productive on marginal forage (ALBC).

By the 1770s, ranching had become more common within the Choctaw Nation (Thompson 2016:68). Pineywoods Cattle are on the smaller side, with cows weighing 600 to 800 pounds and bulls weighing 800 to 1200 pounds. They are rugged and can be used for beef, dairy, and as draft animals (ALBC). They come in every solid color and most spotted patterns, with their horns ranging from long and twisted to short and crumpled (ALBC).

As time passed, increasing numbers of Choctaw families began to raise cattle for livestock. By the 1820s, there were over 43,000 heads of cattle within the Nation (Carson 1995:506). As the United States prepared to move the Choctaw Nation west to Indian Territory, they stated in the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek that any cattle left behind in the homelands would be replaced upon the completion of the removal; this promise was not fulfilled. Some Choctaw families drove their cattle on the Trail of Tears and Death, but many cattle died due to the freezing temperatures and extreme conditions during the removal. Many were likely butchered along the journey to help feed starving Choctaw families.

Despite the thousands of cattle that were either left behind or lost due to removal, Choctaw ranching continued to increase once in Indian Territory. The tallgrass prairies in our new home, particularly along the Red River and the western boundary of today’s Choctaw Nation Reservation, were the perfect environment to continue the Choctaw cattle economy. In 1846, the Choctaw Nation passed laws on stray cattle and droving cattle. During the American Civil War in the early 1860s, Indian Territory was one of the largest producers of beef for the Confederate States of America; over 300,000 head of cattle were stolen from Indian Territory and resold, mainly in Texas. (CNHPD 2011). Principal Chief Wilson N. Jones, after the Civil War in 1866 or 1867, operated a mercantile business in Blue County, Choctaw Nation. He began ranching and took on a business partner named Myers. After they raised about a thousand heads of cattle, Myers took them to a livestock sale and stole the money. Chief Jones lost several thousand dollars, around \$120,000 today (Crims 2025).

Choctaws would continue to use the Pineywoods Cattle in Indian Territory until the 20th century, when other breeds of cattle were promoted by the US for both beef and dairy production. Mechanized agriculture also reduced the need for draft cattle on



Pineywoods cattle on the Brosnan Forest, South Carolina, courtesy of Norfolk Southern.

farms. Today, the Pineywoods Cattle are considered a threatened breed that has survived in isolated herds maintained by a few American families in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi.

Some organizations are using the Pineywoods Cattle to aid in regenerative farming practices, and others are using them for wildfire prevention.

To learn more, visit the American Livestock Conservancy website at livestockconservancy.org/pineywoods-cattle/.

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Scan the QR code to watch a YouTube video about Pineywoods cattle.

Choctaw Nation releases 2026 Tick Guide New tick pathogens identified on the Choctaw Reservation

DURANT, Okla. (April 14, 2026) — The Choctaw Nation Public Health Department has released the updated 2026 Choctaw Nation Tick Guide, (<https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/tick-guide-fact-sheet.pdf>) highlighting new findings identified during the 2025 tick collection period.

The guide provides information to help community members stay informed and protected while enjoying the outdoors, particularly in southeastern Oklahoma.

Over the past two years, in partnership with Oklahoma State University (OSU) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Choctaw Nation Public Health collected more than 2,000 ticks from across the reservation to identify species and test for disease-causing pathogens. The most common tick identified was the Lone Star tick, an aggressive species known to transmit several serious illnesses, including Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS), Heartland virus, Bourbon virus, and ehrlichiosis.

Notably, Choctaw Nation Public Health identified a pathogen not previously detected on the reservation, Panola Mountain Ehrlichia, within Pushmataha County. While Panola Mountain Ehrlichia is not currently classified as a human pathogen in the United States, ongoing research continues to examine its potential to cause human illness.

Additionally, Borrelia lonestari was identified in five counties within the Choctaw Nation, and the number of counties with confirmed Ehrlichia detection increased to seven.

“The findings from our tickborne disease surveillance program emphasize the importance of tickborne disease prevention within our communities and demonstrate the Choctaw Nation’s

commitment to identifying potential public health concerns,” said Mason Emert, epidemiologist for the Choctaw Nation.

Public health data also indicate that rates of a tick-related food allergy to red meat (Alpha-Gal Syndrome), are higher within the Choctaw Nation than both Oklahoma statewide and the U.S. overall. These findings underscore the urgent need for proactive tick bite prevention.

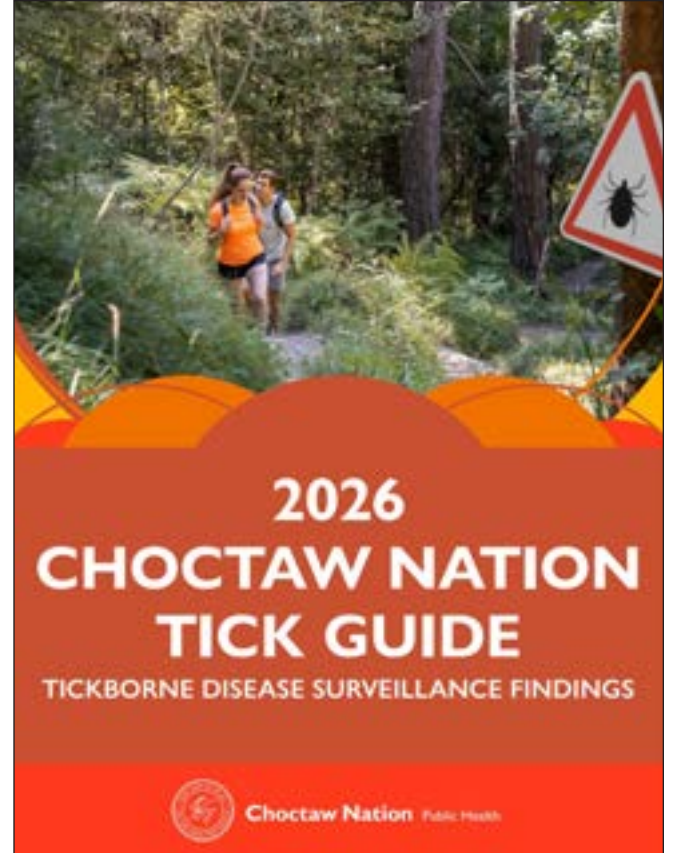
The Choctaw Nation Tick Guide offers practical tips for reducing the risk of tick bites, including:

- Wearing long sleeves and pants when outdoors
- Using EPA-approved insect repellents
- Checking for ticks after spending time outside
- Showering soon after returning indoors
- Keeping yards and play areas well maintained

Choctaw Nation Public Health is currently asking local veterinarian offices and animal welfare organizations to submit ticks for pathogen testing at no cost. For more information, please visit the onboarding page. (https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=J5wXR8vx0kOwdHfxONpxRJsUQxGBTWhBm-jSQB_duPZiUMVVZUEQ3QUY5WExRN0E3Q1paQTZJTEIZVS4u)

In addition, the entire community is able to report ticks found throughout the Choctaw Nation Reservation to help Public Health track where they are found.

Fill the form out on this page: <https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/714d09f7229647a4b82783fc747412b0>.



The Choctaw Nation Public Health Department released its 2026 Tick Guide, highlighting new pathogens and increased tickborne disease risks in southeastern Oklahoma.

Choctaw Travel Plaza launches scholarship fund

Each purchase of collectible cup goes toward scholarships for tribal members

DURANT, Okla. (April 15, 2026)- Choctaw Travel Plazas has launched its first ever scholarship fund, which will allow community members to donate toward local tribal member scholarships by purchasing a commemorative 32-ounce cup at any Travel Plaza across the reservation.

Choctaw Travel Plazas partnered with Coca-Cola to seed the fund, which will help send local students to college or trade school.

Cups are \$3.99 filled and will be available beginning Wednesday, April 15.

The Chahta Foundation will be matching each donation dollar-for-dollar at the conclusion of cup sales.

“We are incredibly excited to launch the Choctaw Travel Plaza Scholarship, which will help fund the education of our tribal youth,” said Marshall Wright, senior director of corporate marketing for Choctaw Nation. “We believe it’s integral to invest back into the communities that support our businesses, and we see no better way than to invest in their future leaders.”

The Choctaw Travel Plaza Scholarship will award at least three scholarships of \$1,000 each to Choctaw high school seniors this year, while raising funds to award more annual scholarships going forward.

The Choctaw Travel Plaza Scholarship application for 2026 has already closed, but 2027 seniors can find application information at choctawtravelplazas.com/scholarship/.



The Choctaw Travel Plaza Scholarship is partially funded by proceeds from the sale of special collector cups.

Want to learn more about Choctaw history?

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

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

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

New field guide plants the seeds of cultural knowledge

By Chris Jennings

Albert Einstein is often quoted as saying, “We still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us.”

As people drive down the highway, surrounded by others on the road, it has become the norm to become oblivious to the nature that surrounds us.

While ancestors relied on the knowledge of what certain trees and plants are and how they can help or hurt you, that knowledge is no longer necessary for survival.

As the general understanding of nature has dwindled, so has respect for it.

Jamie Smith, an environmental specialist with the Choctaw Nation, has a plan to turn that around, at least a little bit. Smith recently completed writing and photographing Culturally Significant Plants of the Choctaw Nation Reservation.

The book is a field guide to native plants on the reservation. It also includes Choctaw language and cultural knowledge, making it stand out from other guides.

Smith, who has a tendency to collect field guides, said, “I thought it would be a unique idea to be able to do this and have it as a resource for tribal members.”

The idea for the book started during budget meetings when her department director asked for suggestions for using Environmental Protection Agency General Assistance Program (GAP) funding.

“I get so many people asking me what those yellow flowers are right now. I usually know what it is and can say it’s probably one of three flowers that you’re seeing. So, I thought that this would be a good thing to have as a resource,” Smith said.

Smith graduated from Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SOSU) with a Bachelor of Science in biology with a special emphasis in botany.

According to Smith, it took about two years to put the book together.

“I spent at least the first year just researching historical uses of these plants by Choctaw people specifically,” she said.

Smith started with a list of 300 plants but had to narrow it down.

“I decided the criteria had to be that the plant had to have a Choctaw name or Choctaw word and then a documented Choctaw use, and it had to be present on the landscape today.”

Putting the book together was a lot of work, but Smith relied heavily on her coworkers’ help.

“I have a really amazing team of people that I work with,” Smith said. “My supervisors and managers are wonderfully helpful, and they are the reason that I was able to do this because they are very understanding of our team.”

Smith also relied on help finding some of these plants. “When we go out in the field, we always have another couple of people with us. So, there were days when I would pull up a list from iNaturalist.org and say I’m looking for these five types of trees to get a picture of it and to confirm that it’s here,” Smith said.

Smith grew up in the woods of Pushmataha County and is glad she can now work with nature as her job.

According to Smith, the most difficult part of the process was when all the research was done, and she needed to start writing the book.

“The hardest part was being able to write it in a way that is not going to make everyone’s eyes glaze over,” said Smith.

Her goal was to write it so that she didn’t sound like a botany professor. She wanted to make it easily digestible so that anyone could figure out what a certain plant looks like and find it on their own.

That also served as a learning experience for Smith. “I think that the technical writing part of it, to make it not so technical, is probably what taught me the most,” said Smith.

Her goal for the book is to create more awareness of the nature that surrounds us.

“I want to have a way to have more people familiar with the plants that we see around us. To know what they are and to know that some of them have uses,” Smith said.

Traditionally, the plants in the book have been used for food, construction, textiles and medicine.

In the book’s introduction, Smith explains that during her research, she found several medicinal uses recorded by botanists and naturalists.

By listing these medicinal uses, Smith hopes to show that these historical accounts remain relevant and that the plants are still available and can still be used.

Smith wants to raise awareness of native plants and their uses, as well as the importance of reducing plant blindness. If a plant can be used to help stop bleeding or heal a cut (Yarrow – Fvni hasimbish holba), that is an added bonus.

If you want to learn about plants on the reservation, Smith suggests going with someone experienced in foraging or wildcrafting.



Photos Provided

Jamie Smith collects samples of river cane for Conserve Research Group at the University of Alabama so they could sequence the genome of river cane.

“Don’t go out and just start eating stuff,” said Smith.

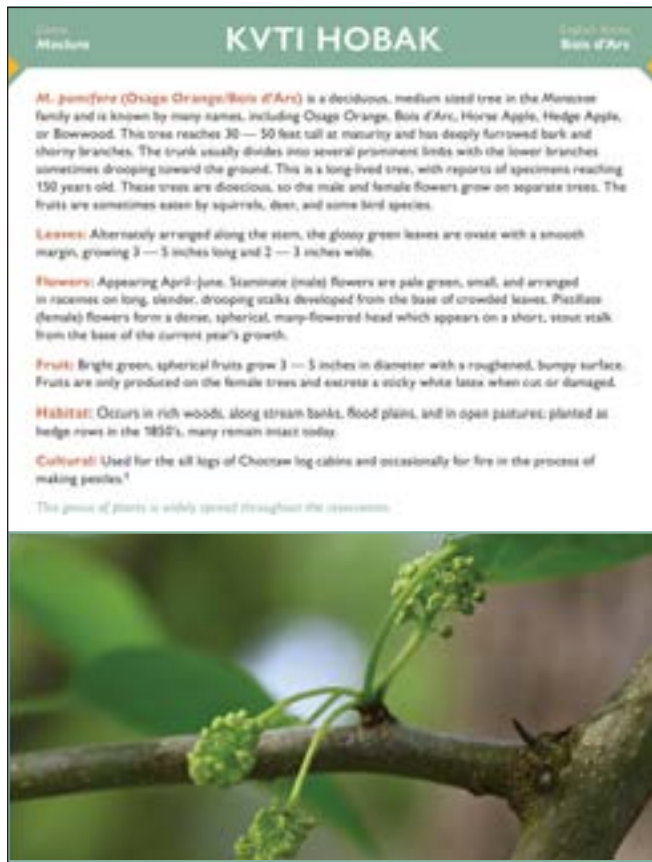
Smith said it’s important to use multiple resources to confirm what you’re seeing, because even touching the wrong plant can be dangerous. She also encourages people to leave more than they take when foraging.

Many of the plants used by early Choctaw people in Mississippi are also native to the reservation.

Smith’s book, which raises plant awareness among the current generation, is one way she is helping to preserve Choctaw culture.

Copies of the field guide can be found at select Community Centers and at Choctaw Nation and community-hosted in-person events.

To learn more or request your digital copy, go to choctawnation.com/about/eps/culturally-significant-plants/.



The plant guide is written and laid out in a way to make it easier to understand use to learn more about the plants.



FAVORITE PLANT

“I would say river cane is my favorite. It’s such a fascinating plant to me. There’s a lot of mystery to it, scientifically speaking. It has a lot of research gaps that I’m trying to fill.

Its population is very threatened, but lately, there’s been a lot more people interested in the plant itself, so it’s finally getting some well-deserved attention. We could say its population numbers are starting to grow, but that’s not confirmed. Botanically, it’s a weird plant, and it’s just really cool.”

- Jamie Smith

PLANT FIELD GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

This guide highlights plants found across the Choctaw Nation Reservation while sharing traditional knowledge and Choctaw language.

Copies of the field guide can be found at select Community Centers and at Choctaw Nation and community-hosted in-person events.

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO GET A DIGITAL COPY

Choctaw Nation Environmental Protection Service

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

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

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

Scan to learn more about the program.

Choctaw Nation Health Services

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

MARKET HOURS
Open 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday
Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Markets will be closed the last two days of each month for inventory.

May 2026
All markets open weekdays, April 1-28
Closed: May 25, 28 & 29
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 MAY 5

BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842
FOOD DEMO MAY 7

DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773
FOOD DEMO MAY 13

MCALESTER 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716
FOOD DEMO MAY 6

POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431
FOOD DEMO MAY 12

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

May 5	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 6	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 8	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
May 8	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
May 12	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 13	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 15	Crowder	By Appointment
May 19	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 20	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 22	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 26	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 27	Stigler	By Appointment

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

Sweet Support: Girl Scouts donate cookies to CNO Lighthouse

By Kellie Matherly

On March 27, the Choctaw Nation Lighthouse Police got a very special visit from the Girl Scouts of the Magnolia Service Unit in Durant, Okla.

Dressed in their iconic vests and armed with Thin Mints, Do-Si-Dos, and plenty of smiles, these young ladies were on a mission to show first responders how much they appreciate the work they do for communities on the Choctaw reservation.

Each year, from January to March, Girl Scouts across the U.S. set up booths and tables to sell their famous cookies.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the organization sells about 200 million boxes of cookies annually during their fundraising window. The profits, most of which are returned to local councils and troops to pay for camping trips and other activities, top \$800 million.

The Girl Scouts also operate a community donation program called Gift of Caring, which teaches girls the importance of philanthropy and gives the community a chance to support a wide range of non-profit organizations, from military personnel to local food banks.

Candice, a troop leader and mom to a Girl Scout, said, “The girls learn to give back. The community gives so much to them, and then they learn to bless their community in return. They always learn a different lesson about people that are different than them, who are doing things they haven’t heard of or who are from different positions in life.”

It is through community donations to Gift of Caring that the Magnolia Service Unit was able to donate 20 boxes of cookies to the Choctaw Lighthouse.

The service unit has also donated to Meals on Wheels, Feeding Hope, Families Feeding Families and other charitable organizations in the area.

“Some people want to buy cookies but can’t because of health problems like diabetes and gluten,” said Kierston, whose favorite cookies are Lemon-Ups. “Then they will put some money in the donation box, and then we pay for certain cookies and we give them away.”

Lucie, who recommends Samoas, said it’s important to donate cookies because, “they go out to the first responders, and I feel like those people deserve it. And they go to people who are maybe less privileged than other people.” She also made sure to note that the troop can decide where the cookies go, so they know they are going to a good cause.

The girls didn’t know what to expect from their visit at first.

The term “Lighthouse” was new to them, and as one might imagine, it conjured up images of ponies and unicorns, not police officers.



The Magnolia Service Unit from Durant, Okla. poses with Police Chief Michael Woodruff, Executive Director Mike Hall and Officer Andrew Lee outside a Lighthouse patrol vehicle. Photos by Allison Britton

Ava, who loves the new Exploremores, explained, “They used to be police who would ride around on horses and arrest people, but after that, they just changed to normal policemen.”

During their visit to the Department of Public Safety, the Girl Scouts were able to tour the facility, including a walkthrough of the offices, a look-in on Dispatch and some time spent exploring a patrol car and the S.W.A.T. team’s Bearcat, a specially designed tactical armored vehicle.

Lucie said her favorite part of the visit was the Bearcat. “It’s super cool! We got to sit in the front seat and look in the back.”

Police Chief Michael Woodruff, Executive Director Mike Hall, and Officer Andrew Lee accepted the cookie donation and led the tour, fielding questions from the troop as they went. One Girl Scout asked whether there were any women serving in the Lighthouse, and the group was delighted to learn there was a former Girl Scout about to graduate from the police academy.

Kierston was surprised to hear this.

“You always hear about these famous cop stories about how they’re always saving people and helping people, but you never actually meet them or know them personally, and the fact that one of my troop leaders helped raise that girl that is now going to be a cop just kind of lit me up.”

Malori Lawson, who graduated from the academy on April 17, was a member of Girl Scouts from 2008-2012 and belonged to the Magnolia Service Unit herself. When asked what she learned in Girl Scouts that could help in her new career as a Lighthouse officer, Malori recalled all the community support activities she did, from trash pickups and recycling to decorating Main Street for Christmas.

“Girl Scouts definitely taught me how to be a part of my community,” said Lawson. “Doing these things as a little girl pushed me into wanting to do more for my community, being there for people who are in need. My passion for law enforcement started when I saw what I could do for people, even just those small things, when I was with Girl Scouts.”

The visit was equally special for the Choctaw Nation Lighthouse. Community outreach is a priority for the Department of Public Safety, and officers can often be found at day cares, headstarts, and public schools handing out stickers, answering questions and letting the children look inside a patrol car.

Police Chief Woodruff’s favorite outreach activity is when officers sit with children and read stories to them.

“When young people interact with officers in positive, non-enforcement settings, they start to see them as helpers—not just authority figures,” said Chief Woodruff. “That trust carries into adulthood and makes communities safer overall.”

This sentiment was echoed by the volunteer leaders of the Magnolia Service Unit.

“The biggest thing that we teach in our house is that our officers are helpers. I think that it’s super important for our daughters to see our Lighthouse men and women as someone they can trust, someone that is a solution finder,” said Allison, mother to two of the Girl Scouts and volunteer troop leader in the Magnolia Service Unit.

Woodruff also believes that Lighthouse officers represent more than policing; they are part of a long tradition of sovereignty and heritage.

“Engaging youth helps pass on respect for tribal values, identity and community responsibility,” said Woodruff.

At the end of the day, most of the donated cookies were shared with CNO dispatchers, who play a vital role in ensuring Lighthouse officers arrive on scene quickly and well-informed.

“I just want to say,” said Kierston of the experience visiting the Choctaw Lighthouse, “I loved it. It was amazing. Ten out of ten. Five stars. Would recommend.”

For more information on the Gift of Caring or to donate to Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma, visit gseok.org.

To learn more about the modern Choctaw Lighthouse, visit choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/the-modern-day-choctaw-lighthorsemen/.



The Magnolia Service Unit from Durant, Okla. shows off their cookie donations with their new friends, Choctaw Lighthouse.



Photo Provided by Michael Woodruff
Lieutenant Toon sits with local students during a recent visit to their classroom.

Easter Celebration

Check out these photos from the 2026 Choctaw Nation Easter Celebration, which took place March 28 at Tvshka Homma.



Photos by Chris Jennings
Melvin Himes collects eggs during the elder egg hunt as his rescue dog Boomer gets excited in the background.



The helicopter egg toss is a fan-favorite Easter event.



Cannon Wilcox reaches for a rare golden egg.



Lorelai and Eli Cash get Easter treats from a tribal services booth at the Easter celebration.



Pastor Olin Williams delivers the Easter message.



When the gates opened, children of all ages rushed to start the egg hunt, with many eyeing the special golden eggs.

CHOCTAW NATION MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

MAY 22, 2026
10:00 AM–1:00 PM
TVSHKA HOMMA
CAPITOL GROUNDS
163655 N. 4355 RD, TUSKAHOMA, OK

Please plan to attend and help us honor those no longer with us as we remember their sacrifices that made us free. This year’s event will include a 21-gun salute and placing of the wreath.

Family and friends are welcome to attend.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CAMP CHAHTA 2026

Starting college is a big step, but Choctaw students don’t have to take it alone.

Camp Chahta invites incoming Choctaw freshmen attending Carl Albert State College, Eastern Oklahoma State College or Southeastern Oklahoma State University to connect with other Choctaw students and begin their college journey with confidence.

Participants will explore campus resources, hear advice from current college students and take part in cultural activities that celebrate Choctaw heritage.



Scan to learn more.

- CARL ALBERT STATE COLLEGE | AUG. 3-6
- SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY | AUG. 10-12
- EASTERN OKLAHOMA STATE COLLEGE | AUG. 13-14



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Where can CNO take you?

Come find out!

JOIN US FOR THE CHOCTAW NATION TRIBAL MEMBER RESOURCE FAIR

MAY 5 | 2:00 PM TO 4:00 PM
DURANT CHOCTAW COMMUNITY CENTER
2746 BIG LOTS BLVD
DURANT, OK 74701

Choctaw CAREERS
Apply at Careers.ChoctawNation.com

Choctaw Nation welcomes buffalo to their new home at the Choctaw Cultural Center

DURANT, Okla. (April 10, 2026)—Hundreds gathered April 10 to welcome bison to their new home at the Choctaw Cultural Center, marking their return to the prairie.

Once widespread across North America, bison disappeared from southern Oklahoma by the 1800s due to hunting and habitat loss. Now, with support from private donors, the Choctaw Nation is restoring the species on 100 acres of fenced tallgrass prairie.

“It’s really diverse and special,” said Ian Thompson, tribal historic preservation officer. Additional bison are expected to be added later this year.



Photos by Christian Toews

Bison graze on tall grass at their new home at the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant.



Visitors of all ages observe the bison at the cultural center.



Everest Smith came prepared to get the best view of the bison.



Sebastian Menjivar takes a closer look at the bison.

Choctaw Cultural Center Eggstravaganza


DURANT, Okla. (March 21, 2026)—The Choctaw Cultural Center hosted its annual Easter Eggstravaganza on March 21, welcoming families for a full day of activities, including Easter egg hunts, photos with the Easter Bunny and hands-on workshops.

For more information on upcoming Choctaw Cultural Center events, visit choctawculturalcenter.com.



Photos by Krislan Garside






CHOCTAW LABOR DAY FESTIVAL

INFORMATION UPDATES

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



Scan QR code for details.

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.

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.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ◆ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ◆

May (Me) 2026

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Check out the most recent updates of news topics regarding Choctaw sovereignty.



Page 4

Discover how the Choctaw Nation is making an impact nationwide in these recent events.



Page 11

Girl Scouts deliver cookies and get a behind-the-scenes look at CNO Lighthouse and Public Safety.

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.

Stay Connected to the Nation
CHOCTAWNATION.COM

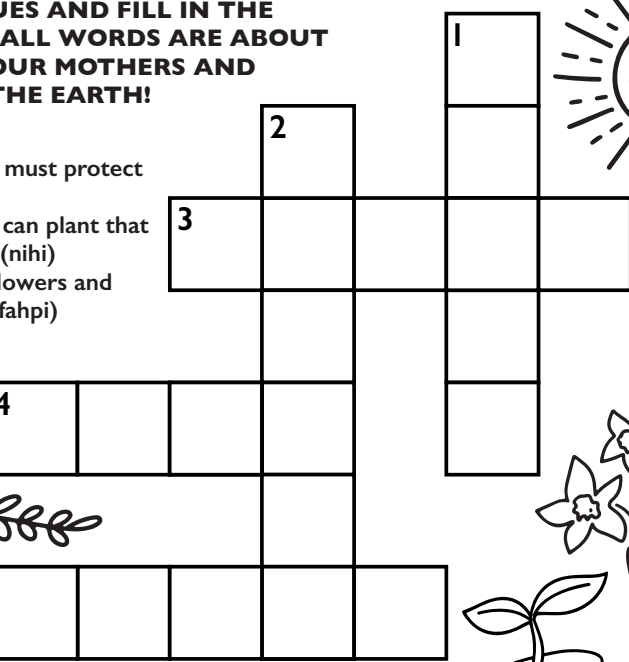
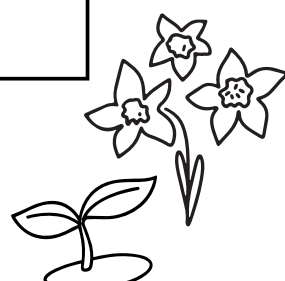
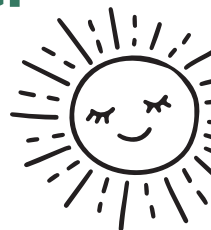
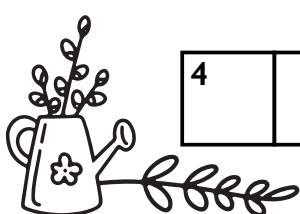


Environmental Protection Service Presents Chahta Kid's Corner

READ THE CLUES AND FILL IN THE CROSSWORD. ALL WORDS ARE ABOUT CARING FOR OUR MOTHERS AND CARING FOR THE EARTH!

ACROSS

- 3. Clear liquid we must protect and save (oka)
- 4. Something you can plant that grows into a tree (nihi)
- 5. The season of flowers and Mother's Day (tuffahpi)



DOWN

- 1. A color often seen on plants and leaves (okchamali)
- 2. The place where flowers, vegetables, and love grow (osapushi)
- 5. Bright light from the sky that helps plants grow (hvshi)

Answer Key | Across: water, seed, spring; Down: green, garden, sun