



June 2026 Issue

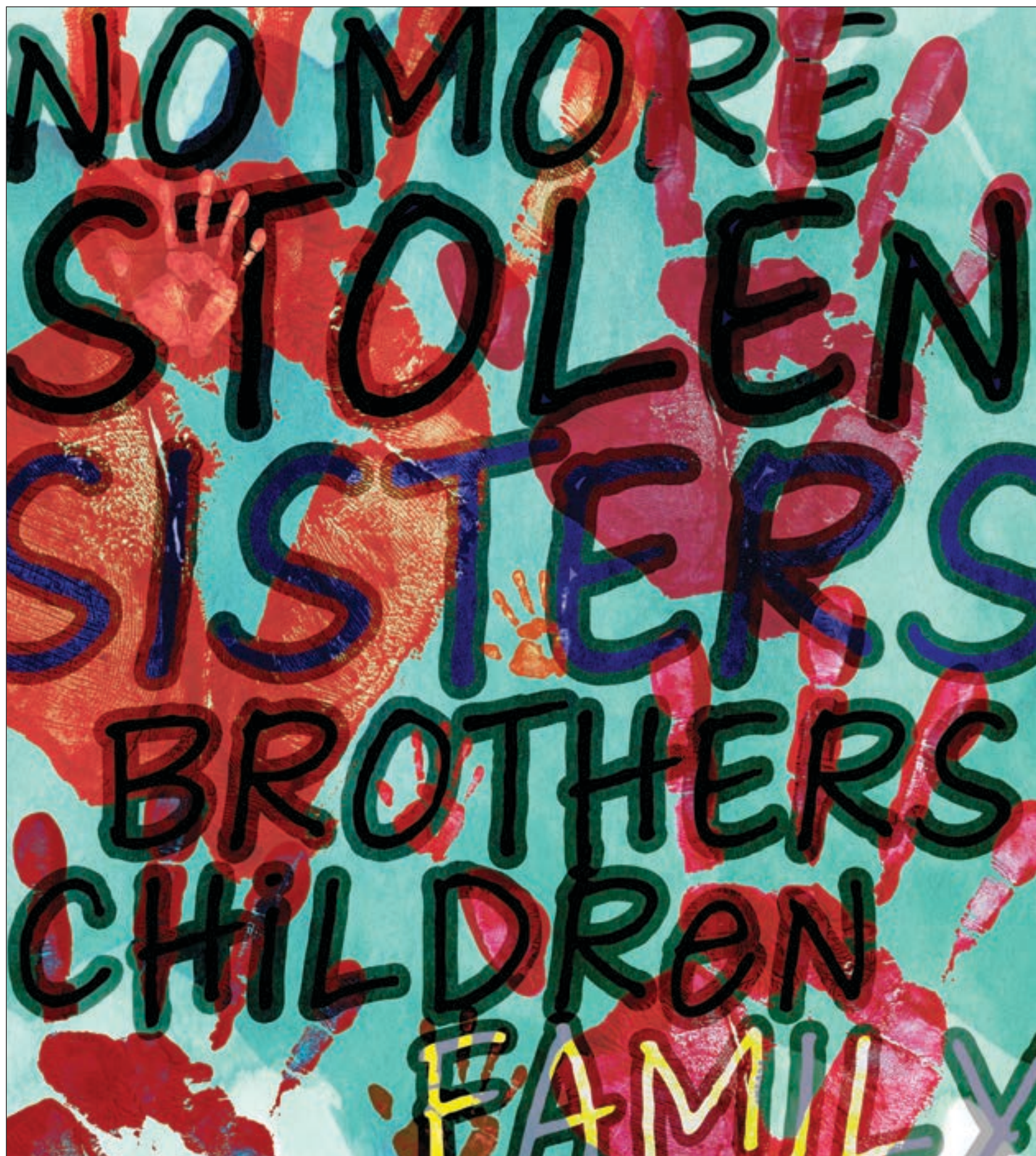


Illustration by Chris Jennings

## As federal support shifts, tribes continue efforts to address MMIP crisis

By Kendra Germany-Wall

Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Awareness Month may be over, but the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and others continue efforts to raise awareness.

Families across the country still search for answers as tribes and advocates address the MMIP crisis.

May 5 is observed as the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People, drawing attention to an issue that has long been underreported.

In recent years, the U.S. government has increased efforts to address gaps in MMIP data.

During President Donald Trump's first term, he signed a 2019 proclamation designating May 5 as the MMIP National Day of Awareness. He also signed Executive Order 13898, known as Operation Lady Justice, as well as the Not Invisible Act and Savanna's Act into law, all of which were aimed at addressing MMIP.

Those legislative efforts and federal momentum continued during President Joe Biden's administration. However, the Trump administration's approach seemingly shifted at the start of his second term.

In March 2025, a key MMIP report was removed from federal websites, as part of an effort to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) materials.

The "Not One More" report, created under the Not Invisible Act, was widely regarded as a major effort to address systemic challenges surrounding MMIP in the U.S.

The act, signed into law during Trump's first term, was the first U.S. bill introduced and passed by four members of Congress enrolled in federally recognized tribes.

Over a year later, a webpage about the act remains, but the November 2023 report is gone. A notice says the content is archived and DEI-related guidance is rescinded.

While "Not One More" data is inaccessible, existing national statistics continue to highlight the severity of the issue.

CDC data show homicide was the fourth-leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native males ages 1-44, and sixth for females in 2023.

A 2016-17 CDC survey found over 2 in 5 non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native women (43.7%) have experienced rape. Significant reporting gaps remain.

In 2016, over 5,700 Indigenous women and girls were reported

missing, but only a fraction were entered into federal databases. Thousands remain unsolved.

A 2023 Criminal Justice Policy Review study found the bodies of Native American women are 135% more likely to go unidentified than those of other groups in the U.S.

The crisis is not limited to women. Indigenous men also face high rates of violence.

The FBI's 2022 National Crime Information Center report listed 10,123 missing persons identified as Native American. Of those, 54% were female, 46% were male, 68% were younger than 18 and 32% were adults.

LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit individuals also face disproportionate risks, though limited data make the full scope difficult to measure.

Research from the Transgender Law Center reports that since 1990, at least 25 transgender and Two-Spirit Indigenous people have been reported killed or missing.

"The lack of reporting and knowledge about the plight of trans and Two-Spirit people in Native communities is one way that violence persists," the organization states on its website. "Trans and Two-Spirit Native people have been erased as if they never existed in the first place."

As federal attention to the MMIP crisis has grown, so have questions about what comes next. Advocates, experts and tribal leaders have raised concerns about whether those efforts will continue as federal priorities and funding evolve.

In 2025, the U.S. Department of Justice canceled 373 safety and justice grants to 221 organizations.

Subawards to 362 others were also terminated, affecting 554 organizations in 48 states and territories.

The cancellations rescinded nearly \$820 million in funding, much of it supporting nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations serving Indian Country.

As of May 2026, only a small number of those grants have been restored after appeals. Others remain unresolved or were permanently terminated.

Funding uncertainty has been compounded by delays in releasing grant funds, attributed to reduced staffing and extra review requirements.

At the state level, Oklahoma ranks among the most affected by the MMIP crisis. Both rural and urban areas, including southeastern Oklahoma, have felt the impact.

The crisis persists due to underreporting, lack of awareness, jurisdictional challenges and limited investigative resources, all of which delay responses and complicate cases.

Within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, raising awareness is key. Tribal leaders, law enforcement and community members stress vigilance, communication and support for families. Red dress campaigns and awareness events honor the missing and their loved ones.

Choctaw Nation Outreach Services hosted its annual MMIP 5K and 1-mile run May 9 in Antlers. Participants gathered to raise awareness and honor those affected.

Choctaw Nation Lighthorse Police and other tribal departments work with local, state and federal partners. Officials say collaboration and timely reporting are critical to improving outcomes of MMIP cases.

Lighthorse Police also work with the tribe's outreach and victim services programs to help ensure cases are reported quickly and that affected tribal members receive support and resources.

The department collaborates with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as advocacy groups such as MMIW-Chahta, to support education and outreach efforts.

While there is no comprehensive public list of MMIP cases specific to Choctaw Nation tribal members, officials encourage anyone with information about a missing person to contact law enforcement immediately. Resources such as the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs also assist in tracking and investigating cases.

Advocates say the MMIP crisis is not just a statistic, but a deep personal issue affecting Indigenous people across generations.



Councilman Joey Tom and other Choctaw drummers set the pace for racers at the Annual MMIP 5K and 1-mile Run.



Racers get ready before the race begins on May 9 in Antlers.



CNO Durant HQ staff (above), Tribal Council and staff (right), and the CNO Tribal Prosecutors' Office (left) wear red to honor MMIP Awareness Day.



### MMIP Resources

<p><b>Choctaw Nation:</b></p> <p><b>Family Violence Prevention</b> Provides resources and support to strengthen families and protect victims of domestic, family or dating violence.</p> <p><b>Project SERV</b> Transitional housing program for survivors of intimate partner violence facing homelessness, with stays from 6 to 24 months.</p> <p><b>Tribal Victim Assistance</b> Offers comprehensive services like emergency aid, shelter, counseling and advocacy for crime victims.</p> <p><b>Behavioral Health</b> Provides a variety of mental health services for all ages.</p> <p><b>Project EMPOWER</b> A coordinated system of care helping domestic violence victims secure housing, childcare and essential services as they rebuild their lives.</p> <p><b>Tribal Victim Services</b> Guidance for victims of crime and their families with counseling and therapy.</p> <p><b>Essential Life Skills</b> Provides assistance to qualified adult, youth and child victims of crime.</p> <p><b>Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program (SANE)</b> A specialized service that provides compassionate and expert care to individuals who have experienced sexual assault or abuse.</p> <p><b>Lighthorse Police &amp; Public Safety</b> Patrols and manages the 10,864-square-mile reservation. For emergencies, call 580-920-7000; non-emergencies, call 580-920-1517.</p> <p><small>Learn more about these and other CNO services at <a href="http://choctawnation.com/services">choctawnation.com/services</a>.</small></p>	<p><b>Oklahoma:</b></p> <p><b>MMIW-Chahta</b> Missing and Murdered Women-Chahta serves Tribal communities impacted by violence through advocacy, resources, and partnerships. Contact via Facebook or <a href="http://mmiwchahta.org">mmiwchahta.org</a>.</p> <p><b>MMIP Central Oklahoma Chapter</b> Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Central Oklahoma Chapter supports families by searching for missing relatives, seeking justice, advocating and raising awareness. Contact via Facebook or <a href="http://mmip-coc.weebly.com">mmip-coc.weebly.com</a>.</p> <p><b>National:</b></p> <p><b>STRONGHEARTS Native Helpline</b> 24/7 helpline for Native victims of domestic and sexual violence. Call/text 844-7NATIVE or chat at <a href="http://strongheartshelpline.org">strongheartshelpline.org</a>.</p> <p><b>The Tribal Resource Tool</b> <a href="http://tribalresourceool.org">tribalresourceool.org</a> is a searchable map of victim services for survivors of crime and abuse.</p> <p><b>BIA Victim Assistance Program</b> BIA Office of Justice Services aids victims in Indian country with crisis intervention and support. More info: <a href="http://bia.gov/bia/ojs/victim-assistance">bia.gov/bia/ojs/victim-assistance</a>.</p> <p><b>National Indigenous Women's Resource Center</b> NIWRC is a Native-led nonprofit ending violence against Native women and children. Learn more at <a href="http://niwrc.org">niwrc.org</a>.</p>
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## Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

### Remembering our Choctaw warriors

Each year, Memorial Day arrives with flags placed carefully at gravesites, the quiet echo of “Taps,” and a collective pause across the nation. It is a day of remembrance—but too often for some, this day set aside for mourning United States military personnel who died while serving in the U.S. armed forces, risks becoming a day of routine rather than reflection.

From the perspective of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, remembrance is not confined to a single Monday in May. It is a living practice, rooted in a cultural understanding that those who came before us are never truly gone. Their presence remains—in our communities, in our responsibilities, and in the land itself.

For Choctaw people, the concept of the warrior has always carried profound meaning. A warrior is not defined

by conflict alone, but by a willingness to stand in defense of others—to place community above self. That principle has endured across generations, long before the founding of the United States and continuing through every major conflict in which Native men and women have served.

Choctaw service members have answered the United States’ call time and again, often navigating a complicated reality: fighting for a country that did not always extend full rights or recognition to them. Yet they served with distinction—not out of contradiction, but out of conviction. Service, in this sense, transcends politics. It is rooted in protection, in duty, and in commitment to future generations.

Memorial Day calls us to remember those who never returned home. But remembrance must go beyond ceremonial gestures. It must be active. It must be intentional.

The fallen are not abstractions. They were individuals with families, aspirations, and stories left unfinished. Their sacrifice created a void that is still felt—by fellow service members, by loved ones, and by communities that continue to carry their legacy.

Within Choctaw tradition, honoring the fallen means more than speaking their names once a year. It means carrying forward the values they embodied: courage, humility, and responsibility. It means teaching younger generations that freedom is neither automatic nor without cost.

There is also a responsibility to the living—to the veterans who stand among us today. Memorial Day is not Veterans Day, but the two are not disconnected. Those who returned carry memories that shape how this day is understood. Their experiences remind us that sacrifice does not end on the battlefield.

If Memorial Day is to retain its meaning, it must remain anchored in truth. It is not simply the beginning of summer. It is not simply a long weekend. It should always be, at the very least, a moment to confront the cost of the freedoms often taken for granted.

From a Choctaw perspective, this day is a call to continuity. We remember because we are still here. We honor because we carry forward what others could not.

The question Memorial Day poses is not only whether we remember the fallen, but whether we live in a way that justifies their sacrifice.

That responsibility belongs to all of us.

Yakohe and God Bless our troops.



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

### The Appeal

Originally ran in the March 2022 edition of the Biskinik

In the Book of Revelation, chapter 3, verses 14-22 is a letter written to the assembly at Laodicea.

Laodicea was situated at the merging of three major roadways. The city grew into a highly successful commercial and financial center. It was a city of wealth.

In verse 14, our Lord presents Himself as the author of this letter. Verses 15-17 is the admonition to this assembly. Their estimation of themselves in verse 17 is declared untrue by the Faithful and True Witness. This church assembly had boasted of her material riches and resources but never gave one word of praise for our Lord. In verse 17, they said they were rich and had need of nothing. All the while, the Lord saw them as wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

In verses 18-20, the Lord appeals to this church assembly of Laodicea. “I counsel thee to buy of me, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

Our Lord is using language that is relevant to this assembly. These people were used to merchandising. They gained wealth by buying and selling with the merchants of the far East. Their riches were the gold of this material world. The Lord is introducing them to a new concept of riches and how to acquire it.

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Isaiah 55:1) In verse 18, the Lord says the best clothing of the world could never cover the moral nakedness of man. God himself is the only one who can clothe man’s moral nakedness with the white clean linen of His righteousness.

Then the Lord says, “Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

The Laodiceans could well afford to travel the known world of their day and see the wonders of the time. But only the Lord could open their eyes to perceive the spiritual world they had never seen. The natural man with all the riches of earthly knowledge and resources can never see the world of God. It is the anointing power of the eyesalve (Holy Spirit) that can open our spiritual eyes to see the world of God.

Just like the Laodiceans, we too are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. The Lord is counseling us as He did the Laodiceans in His appeal.

## WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matthew Gamble

Hunting and fishing technologies have rapidly advanced over the past decade. Guns, optics, blinds, camo patterns, trail cams, and even software programs have advanced and provided hunters with more information and tools than ever thought possible. Rods, reels, boats, electronics, lures, and even fishing line continually advance and give anglers more of an edge on the fish they pursue.

It is amazing to think that the ancestors before us were successful with nothing more than sharpened rocks, sticks, and leverage devices (atlatls/spears/bows).

While our modern technology can really help in scouting and efficiency, it can take away from our ability to connect with nature like those before us. Finding that balance will be important as time moves forward and technology grows even more. Sometimes our relationship with nature becomes more of a transactional one and less of a spiritual one. I have to say that I am guilty.

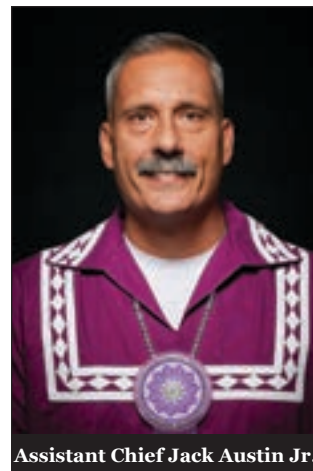
With today’s busy world, sometimes I feel rushed and just want to get my quarry and be done. That always creates a void for me. Having reverence for the game I harvest and a deep connection to the land that wprovides and sustains us is very important to me.

Technology is meant to make us more efficient in our pursuits. There’s nothing wrong with that, but it can lead to less time spent in nature and missing that connection to the animals around us. We can miss out on the notes of the whippoorwill as we wait for a tom to gobble or the sights of a bobcat hunting his next meal.

We can get so focused on watching a screen or waiting for the next notification from our cell phones that we miss the bigger picture and what we are a part of. God has his way of reminding us what is most important.

Having two boys who love the outdoors has been my greatest reminder. Seeing it all through their eyes has shown me what truly matters. It’s not seeing how fast you can get a limit or how big a buck you can get. It’s connecting with nature and those you enjoy it with. It’s seeing God move in the things he created. No matter what your passion is outdoors, remember to slow down and take it all in. You never know what you might hear when you turn off all the noise.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

### Be safe this summer

The sun is shining. The weather is warm. The outdoors is calling, and you are getting prepared for another active summer of fun in the sun. The Choctaw Nation has many outdoor amenities and fun events planned for this summer. I encourage everyone to go over to the Choctaw Nation website and check out our events calendar. No matter what event we choose to attend or participate in across the reservation, I also want to urge everyone to be safe and keep safety at the top of your mind as you have fun this summer.

Before you embark on a summer activity, please take time out to make sure you and your family are prepared for any emergency that could arise while you are enjoying yourself.

For instance, did you know that every day, an average of 11 people die in the U.S. from unintentional drowning, and one in five of those are children 14 or younger, according to the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention?

The American Red Cross has come up with summer safety tips that will help in an emergency. Below are a few tips to help keep you and your family safe this summer.

- Learning to swim and preventing unsupervised access to water for children are critical. Check for local learn-to-swim providers in your area. It’s best to swim in a lifeguarded area or designate a “water watcher” to watch over swimmers. Adding a life jacket to poor swimmers or children is a good plan.
- In the event of an emergency, reach or throw an object to the person in trouble. Don’t go in, or you could become a victim yourself. A child or weak swimmer can drown in the time it takes to reply to a text, check a fishing line or apply sunscreen.
- Watch the weather and get out of the water at the first sign of lightning or the rumble of thunder. Stay indoors and away from water for 30 minutes after the last lightning flash or thunder roar.
- Protect your neck – don’t dive in headfirst. Walk carefully into open waters. Watch out for and avoid aquatic life.
- If you are caught in a rip current, stay calm and don’t fight it. Swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current. Then, turn and swim to shore.
- When camping, pack a first aid kit to handle insect stings, sprains, cuts, bruises and other injuries that could happen to someone in your group.
- When hiking, plan for falls and sprains. Pack extra water to avoid dehydration.
- Share your travel plans and locations with a family member, neighbor or friend.
- Bring nutritious food items and water, light-weight clothing to layer and supplies for any pets.
- When planning picnics, wash your hands, utensils and workstation before preparing the food. Separate uncooked meats, poultry, and seafood from ready-to-eat foods like salads, fruits, vegetables, cheeses, and desserts. Use separate plates and utensils to prevent cross-contamination.
- Bring hand sanitizer if your picnic site doesn’t have hand-washing facilities. If you are going to cook on the grill, bring a food thermometer to be sure grilled foods are cooked enough.
- Always supervise a barbecue grill when in use. Don’t add charcoal starter fluid when coals have already been ignited.
- Never grill indoors – not in the house, camper, tent or any enclosed area. Make sure everyone, including pets, stays away from the grill. Keep the grill out in the open, away from the house, deck, tree branches or anything that could catch fire.
- Use the long-handled tools especially made for cooking on the grill to help keep the chef safe. Don’t leave perishable food out in the sun.
- Don’t let mosquitoes and ticks ruin your carefree summer fun. Use insect repellents containing DEET when you are outdoors. Be sure to follow the directions on the package.
- Consider staying indoors at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots.
- Use a rubber band or tape to hold pants against socks so that nothing can get under clothing. Tuck your shirt into your pants. Wear light-colored clothing to make it easier to see tiny insects or ticks.
- When hiking in woods and fields, stay in the middle of trails. Avoid underbrush and tall grass. If you are outdoors for a long time, check yourself several times during the day. Especially check in hairy areas of the body like the back of the neck and the scalp line.
- Inspect yourself carefully for insects or ticks after being outdoors, or have someone else do it.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying sources of standing water outside of the home, such as from flowerpots, buckets and barrels.

I have found an informative app that the American Red Cross has put out, and you can find it in the App Store or Google Play by typing in Emergency Severe Weather App. This app includes severe weather tips, locations of shelters, preparedness tips and can turn your phone into an alarm, strobe light or flashlight depending on what emergency you are in. Very helpful! You can also sign up for severe weather alerts on the Chahta Achvffa member portal.

If you are prepared, aware of your surroundings and take a little extra precaution, you can look forward to a worry-free vacation within the Choctaw Nation or wherever you choose to have your summer fun this year. My hope is that everyone has a safe and enjoyable summer, and we look forward to seeing everyone at the annual Choctaw Labor Day Festival.

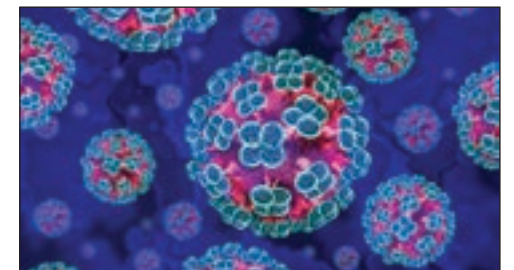
### Public Health Advisory: Hantavirus Risk Remains Low in Choctaw Nation

**DURANT, Okla. (May 12, 2026)** — The Choctaw Nation Department of Public Health (CNPH) is monitoring the ongoing hantavirus outbreak affecting passengers aboard an international cruise ship. At this time, the risk of hantavirus in the Choctaw Nation remains low. CNPH will continue monitoring the situation to help ensure the risk to public health remains minimal.

Hantavirus refers to a family of viruses most commonly spread through exposure to rodents, particularly contact with rodent droppings, saliva, or urine. Deer mice are a common carrier of the virus. Symptoms of hantavirus may include headache, dizziness, chills, fever, body aches, and gastrointestinal issues. These symptoms are also associated with many other viral illnesses and conditions that are more common within the region.

Severe complications may include Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), a serious respiratory disease that can affect the lungs and other organ systems. HPS typically develops four to 10 days after the initial onset of symptoms.

Individuals can reduce their risk of hanta-



Adobe Stock Image

Health officials say the risk of hantavirus remains low within both the Choctaw Nation and U.S. Andes virus, a type of hantavirus primarily found in South America, can cause severe respiratory illness.

virus exposure by preventing rodents from entering their homes, sealing cracks and gaps around windows and doorframes, and properly cleaning areas affected by rodent infestation.

Again, the risk of hantavirus remains low within both the Choctaw Nation Reservation and the United States. Between 1993 and 2023, 890 cases of hantavirus were reported in the United States. As CNPH continues to monitor the outbreak, we will inform the public if any increased risk to Choctaw Nation communities is identified. For more information about hantavirus, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hantavirus information page.

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.



James Dry

## District 9

Halito from District 9.

Back in March, we kicked off the spring with a ribbon cutting in Calera for 30 new Affordable Rental Housing units, with 175 additional units being completed this summer. Keys were given to families ready to move into homes that will provide them security, opportunity, and comfort. Pride is an understatement when it comes to seeing the growth in District 9.

The Bryan County Livestock Show was a huge success. These events are more than just showing animals; they're about the leadership skills, the work ethic, the responsibility, and the commitment our students learn through the process. I am so proud of all our students who have worked all year to prepare for this show, and I would like to personally thank all the families, teachers, mentors, and community members who make this possible.

Mark your calendars for June 16 to celebrate the ribbon cutting of our new Durant Community Center! The new center will be big enough for over 400 people. If you are an elder in District 9 and haven't had the chance to stop by, we encourage you to do so. Not only do we serve our weekly Wednesday lunches, but our seniors stay well involved in 30+ committees. From education to social event planning to culture, there is something for everyone to participate in.

Here at the Community Center, I have also been in the works of conducting elder interviews with our members. Cultural knowledge and heritage are passed down from generation to generation, and I believe it is so important to learn as much as we can from our elders. With these interviews, I plan to build a library that relatives and future generations can return to so that we can keep our culture alive.

We held our annual Gospel Singing in March, and there is nothing better than hearing a group of Choctaw people, young and old, come together to sing and fellowship. The singing was beautiful, the food was good, but the community was the best part.

Deanna Creel hosted her annual Twirl Around showcase to celebrate the projects the women in her sewing class have worked on throughout the year. She is a true example of Choctaw leadership through her encouragement of others to find creative expression, learn about Choctaw history, and proudly model their traditional regalia.

Another example of an impactful woman in leadership is Janie Dillard, who received the Matriarch of Indian Gaming Award from the Indian Gaming Association. Janie's contributions to the Choctaw Nation are inspiring. She has demonstrated true dedication to the Choctaw people through her skills and experience. Congratulations, Janie!

Lastly, I would like to congratulate everyone who is graduating this semester. Your hard work has paid off, and there are no limits to what you can achieve. Go make a difference, do big things, and serve others.

We are so proud of you and wish you all the best of luck in your future endeavors! Yakoke.  
James Dry District 9



Regina Mabray

## District 12

Halito and welcome to your District 12 update! Spring has officially sprung, and District 12 has been buzzing with activity. One of our first celebrations of the season was crowning the Valentine's King and Queen at our community centers. While all of our seniors are truly sweethearts, we were honored to recognize a few special individuals. At the Crowder Community Center, congratulations go to King Kenneth (Peewee) Rea and Queen Ellen Emery. At the Coalgate Community Center, congratulations go to King Jeff and Queen Marilyn Byington. We love our seniors and thank them for the joy, wisdom, and fellowship they bring to our communities each week.

Then the council was off to the state capitol for Oklahoma Legislature Day. I am incredibly proud of the strong relationships the Choctaw Nation has built with our state leaders and governing bodies. Those partnerships have made a meaningful

difference for our nation and our people, especially over the last several years.

February also brought a special evening in Antlers honoring the seniors of our Youth Advisory Board (YAB). YAB provides students in grades 8-12 with valuable opportunities to grow through community service projects that inspire positive change within their communities.

It is always encouraging to see young leaders developing confidence, character, and a heart for service.

The same spirit of leadership and responsibility was on full display during our local 4-H and FFA premium sales. I was able to attend the Hughes, Coal, and Pittsburg County premium sales and cheer on our Chahta youth who showcased their hard work and dedication in the show ring. Congratulations to all who participated and made the sale.

Next came OYE (Oklahoma Youth Expo), the "Super Bowl" of premium sales. The energy and excitement in the OG&E Coliseum were truly something to experience. It was inspiring to see so many young people proudly representing their communities and the results of months of hard work. Special congratulations to Coalgate's Natalie Shaw for receiving the Monte Womack Memorial Scholarship.

We also traveled to Shreveport, Louisiana and Fayetteville, Arkansas, for Community Cultural Events. These gatherings are always special opportunities to share stories, reconnect with friends and family, and celebrate the rich culture and traditions of the Choctaw people.

March began with a very important celebration, Read Across America.

Reading truly is fundamental, and it was a privilege to spend time reading to our Coalgate Head Start students. I deeply appreciate our Head Start teachers and staff for the care, patience, and dedication they pour into our children each day, helping give them a strong foundation and a true head start in life.

Later in the month, the Coalgate Community Center proudly hosted the Coal County Chamber of Commerce banquet. Guests enjoyed a wonderful meal prepared by Chahtapreneurs Nikki and Levi from Sweet Peaches, whose hospitality and delicious food made the evening even more special.

Congratulations to Choctaw tribal member Greg Peters, who was honored during the banquet with the Community Service Award, and Dr. Kay Helms, recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award. Both individuals have made lasting contributions to their communities and are so deserving of this recognition.

The evening also brought exciting news from keynote speaker and Kiamichi Technology Superintendent Shelley Free that Coalgate will be receiving a Kiamichi Technology Center campus in the near future. This is a tremendous opportunity for the area and an investment in the future of our students, workforce, and communities.

April began with the joyful celebration of Easter and a Rise Up Youth Summit featuring Tim Tebow. It was a powerful day filled with praise, worship, and a meaningful message of faith and encouragement. Seeing our young people boldly expressing their faith and growing in God's love is always a tremendous blessing and a reminder that the future is bright.

April and May also brought an amazing turnout at our Oklahoma City and Bakersfield, California, Community Cultural Meetings. It is always special to come together and share our history and culture with our fellow Choctaws.

Our quarterly Inter-tribal meeting was held in Thackerville this month. The facility is beautiful, and it is always valuable to gather with leaders from other tribes, share ideas, and hear about the successes and challenges facing Native communities across our region.

Looking ahead, we are excited to celebrate the ribbon cutting for the new Independent Elderly Housing in Coalgate on June 2 at 10 am. This beautiful new facility represents our continued commitment to honoring and caring for our elders by providing safe, comfortable housing within the community they call home.

Also, congratulations to our 2027 District 12 Choctaw Princesses, Checotah McCoy and Dorothy Rogers. I am so proud of these young women and know they will represent District 12 with grace, leadership and pride throughout the coming year. Yakoke!

Regina Mabray



## Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

How is your HVAC system holding up?

With temperatures as hot as we are experiencing, it's best to set your thermostat a little higher during the day so your system doesn't have to work as hard to cool your home. HVAC technicians will tell you to set the thermostat 20 degrees cooler than the outside temperature. Most of us are not going to set our thermostats above 80 degrees, but when heat indexes are over 105, 75-78 degrees is as low as you should set your system to prevent freezing. If a system is not cooling to the set temperature, setting it colder will not help. It's best to set the temperature higher to allow the system to rest, then maintain it.

Other things you can do to keep your system in top working order include regularly changing your filter. Most calls we send technicians to about a system not working properly involve a clogged filter. Changing your filter monthly is a good rule of thumb, but it should be changed at least every 3 months.

Keep your outdoor unit free of weeds and grass that prevent airflow. It's also best to keep shrubs away as well.

Lastly, it's never a bad idea to have your system inspected by a licensed HVAC technician annually, just to make sure it is working properly.

Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

Stay Connected  
CHOCTAWNATION.COM



## COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA May 9, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTES
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - a. Regular Session April 11, 2026
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
  - a. Veteran of the Month, District #8 – Donald Colley
  - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #8 – Donna James
6. COMMITTEE REPORTS
7. PUBLIC COMMENTS
  - a. Phillip Lewis – Group Speaker – Wellness Journey Ministries
8. NEW BUSINESS
  - a. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles
  - b. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Equipment
  - c. Authorize Entry into Grant Agreements for Community-Oriented Connectivity Broadband Program (Community Connect) FY25
  - d. Amend CB-21-26 and the Jones Academy Student Union Facility and Facility Realignment Plan
  - e. Resolution Supporting the Nomination of Dr. Amanda Chisum-Price to Serve on the Center for Indigenous Innovation and Health Tribal Advisory Committee
- f. Authorize the Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to Place Property in Choctaw County in Trust Status with the United States of America
- g. Approve the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's 2025 Opioid Settlement Funds Plan
- h. Approve the Choctaw Tactical Investment Fund
- i. Approve and Ratify Contributions to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Sovereign Wealth Fund
- j. Approve and Ratify Contributions to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Sustainability and Permanent Fund
- k. Approve Limited Waiver of Sovereign Immunity
- l. Approve Funding for an Addition of a Dedicated Banquet Kitchen at Choctaw Landing in Hochatown to Support Special Events, Catering, and Banquet Operations
- m. Approve Funding for an Equity Investment in a Hotel Development Located in Texas
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER

Environmental Protection Service Presents

# Chahta Kid's Corner

Reduce, reuse and recycle these dad jokes this Father's Day.

**What's the difference between a dad joke and an athletic rabbit (chukfi)?**  
One's a bit funny and the other is a fit bunny.

**Why should you never tell secrets near plants (nan offo)?**  
Because they might leaf them out.

**Why did the spider (chulhkván) go to school?**  
She wanted to be a web designer.

**What is brown (lusakbi) and sticky?**  
A stick.

**Why did the sun (hvshi) go to school?**  
To get a little brighter.

**Why did the cloud (hoshonti) stay home from school?**  
It was feeling a little under the weather.

Choctaw Nation Environmental Protection Service

# The next generation of culture keepers carry Choctaw traditions into the future

By Shelia Kirven

Rooted in culture and tradition, the younger generation of Choctaws is carrying their heritage forward while shaping what it means to be Choctaw for their generation. Strong in identity and connection to their Nation, they continue to honor the past while creating the future.

Driven to build strong futures for themselves and their communities, many young Choctaws are embracing their culture while making an impact through education, leadership and personal achievement. With increased interest in learning the Choctaw language and culture, they are helping preserve and strengthen tribal traditions while proudly sharing their identity with the world. Here are just a few stories of young Choctaws making a difference.

## Del Rosario and Myers Sisters

Sisters Yasmine Del Rosario, Aliyah Myers, and Arianna Myers are talented, creative and busy individuals.

Together, they collaborate for their online businesses, Cedar Sapling and Sapulpa Fashion House.

Cedar Sapling began as a dream between the sisters – a space where they could combine their individual talents, create freely, and collaborate with intention. They pride themselves on building something rooted, respectful and lasting.

Del Rosario said, “We aren’t here to rush to the spotlight. Our work is intentional, slow and deeply rooted in cultural understanding.”

You can view their creations by following them on Facebook at Cedar Sapling and Sapulpa Fashion House or at [www.cedar-sapling.com](http://www.cedar-sapling.com) and [www.sapulpafashionhouse.com](http://www.sapulpafashionhouse.com).

Yasmine Del Rosario is the founder of Cedar Sapling and Sapulpa House Fashion and a collaborating contributor.

She participates in the Santa Fe Indian Market, is a registered Choctaw artist (performance art, traditional Choctaw art, beading, and Indigenous fashion design), a seamstress who began her journey with stickball aprons and ribbon dresses, and specializes in textile art, basketry, beadwork, and other traditional art forms.

Del Rosario’s creations have been featured in several exhibits. She says she is always looking for more opportunities.

Yasmine plays stickball for Tvshka Homma Ohoyo and serves as the Public Programs Coordinator for the Choctaw Cultural Center.

Aliyah Myers is a southeastern tribal basket weaver, diamond maker, collaborating artist with Cedar Sapling and Sapulpa Fashion House, cultural educator at the Choctaw Cultural Center, traditional basket-weaving teacher, and stickball player for Tvshka Homma Ohoyo.

Her work has been featured in the Bok Abalya exhibit at the Choctaw Cultural Center, Cherokee Art Market, Choctaw Powwow Art Market, Artesian Gallery in Sulphur, Oklahoma, and Santa Fe Indian Art Market.

Her creations include woven corsets, elbow basket earrings, traditional moccasins flutes and woven corsets with arm cuffs. Aliyah was Miss Choctaw Nation for 2023-24 and a 2026 contestant in the Miss Indian Oklahoma pageant.

In addition to the business social platforms and websites, you can keep up with Aliyah on her Instagram account at [craftychulacreations](https://www.instagram.com/craftychulacreations).

Arianna Myers currently lives in Walla Walla, Washington, and attends Whitman College. She is also a contributing artist with Cedar Sapling and Sapulpa Fashion House.

Myers’ artwork explores various mediums, including painting, beadwork and printmaking.

Her creations are bold and innovative using vibrant color and a playful style, reflecting her deep connection to her cultural roots and personal experiences.

Her works have also been seen at the Bok Abaiya art exhibit at the Choctaw Cultural Center. She has modeled in the Indigenous Renaissance Fashion Show and participated in the Santa Fe Art Market. She also plays stickball.

Her products are also available through direct contact and at art shows. Follow Myers’ Instagram at [@arriannamyersart](https://www.instagram.com/arriannamyersart).

## Colt James

Colt James, 20, is a silversmith/coppersmith, basket maker, stickball player and cultural educator.

James is deeply connected to his heritage, drawing inspiration for his work from traditional tribal designs and patterns. He learned jewelry-making from his grandfather and father. James participates in the Santa Fe Indian Art Market and was first-place winner in basketry at the 20th annual Choctaw art show. He has also appeared in films, television shows, magazines and newspapers.

In the future, he wants to open a workshop and gallery where visitors can witness the jewelry-making process and pass down his knowledge and skills to future generations. He hopes to eventually have his work exposed worldwide. He also wants to showcase other tribal members’ artwork while honoring Choctaw history and culture.



Choctaw Nation Photo

This story brings readers the story of just a few of the Choctaw youth around the world who are preserving culture and traditions through leadership, community involvement, education and cultural teachings while helping shape the future of their tribe.

“I have been doing research about the Mississippian Copper Era (1000 BC – 1500 AD), along with doing copper work like our ancestors did hundreds of years ago, focusing on repousse and chase work of copper plates to create designs and patterns,” explained James. “As of now, I am using modern tools, but I am wanting soon to try making the same tools they would have had and to process raw copper.”

James’ merchandise is sold at several locations, including the Choctaw Cultural Center, Wheelock Academy Historic Site, Choctaw Store, and the Tvshkahomma Capitol Museum.

You can follow James on Instagram at [JamesNAJewelry](https://www.instagram.com/jamesnawjewelry) and Facebook at [JamesNativeAmericanJewelry](https://www.facebook.com/jamesnativeamericanjewelry).

## Mia Reich

Mia Reich is a senior at Wright City High School and attends the pre-engineering program at the Kiamichi Technology Center.

A four-year varsity member of basketball, cheer and the academic team, she has been a member of the cross-country and track teams and a state qualifier for academics, cross-country, track and dance.

She is vice president of her school’s Wisdom Council Club and was Miss Wright City High School.

Reich served as 2018-19 Little Miss Choctaw Nation, 2022-23 and 2023-24 District 7 Junior Miss Choctaw Nation, and 2024 Junior Miss Indian Oklahoma at the Oklahoma Federation of Indian Women pageant.

She enjoys learning the Choctaw language, singing Choctaw hymns with her grandmother and cooking traditional foods with her mother.

She was awarded the 2025 Nancy Tsoodle Award (female Native American student of the year) by the Oklahoma Federation of Indian Women and the Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest and most prestigious award in Girl Scouting.

She worked for two years to win the award by co-writing the pledge to the Choctaw Nation flag with her grandmother, Lillie Taylor Ott. The pledge, approved by Chief Patton and the Tribal Council, is recited alongside the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance at tribal events. Reich has been a Girl Scout for 11 years.

Reich has appeared in several commercials, provided voice-over work for Choctaw Cultural Center promotions, appeared alongside her grandmother in a Choctaw Nation calendar and participated in a variety of cultural projects, photographed for the Echoes of Kindness project.

She is valedictorian of her class, an Oklahoma Skills USA State Officer, a member of the National Honor Society and National Technical Honor Society, offensive basketball player of the Year MC6 Conference, Student Council Vice President, Senior Class Vice President, member of Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma Advisory Board, Oklahoma Skills USA State Champion in Job Interview 2025 and 2026, member of the Choctaw Nation Youth Advisory Board, Kiamichi Technology ACE, and was a Kiamichi Technology Center Student of the Month.

Reich will attend Seminole State College on a basketball scholarship, where she will major in biology.



She also studied abroad in Scotland and England, and had extensive academic and hands-on research experience in history, archival studies, and Indigenous cultural preservation.

Giles was a member of the Choctaw Nation 2025 LEAD Academy and Chief’s Leadership Class, is an active member of the Chief’s College Advisory Council, a former member of the College Freshman Year Initiative program, Junior Miss Choctaw Nation District 10 for 2016-17 and 2017-18, and Little Miss Choctaw Nation District 10 in 2016.

She was a Choctaw Language voice actor for Marvel’s mini-series Echo, which streamed on Disney+, and enjoys storytelling and giving cultural presentations to groups.

Giles said being a Choctaw woman “is a very big part of my identity, and it is the reason that I work so hard in my academics and extracurriculars.” She said that “everything that I do now is with the end goal of sharing our culture and serving our community.” Her future plans include pursuing her doctorate and returning to do research for the Choctaw Nation.

## Brendan Anna

Choctaw culture keeper, Brendan Anna, works at Choctaw Landing in Hochtawtown. In his spare time, he plays stickball, coaches stickball and referees games.

He has played stickball since he was eight years old.

He also makes stickball balls, which he learned from his father.

Anna enjoys doing stickball demonstrations at schools. He has even been part of a group that started a drum group for the Broken Bow High School football and basketball team. The drum is beaten as players walk onto the football field and basketball court. He is one of the drummers.

He participates in Choctaw dances at Labor Day and accompanied the dancers to California last year. He enjoys attending Choctaw events and powwows.

To purchase a stickball ball from Anna in any color, you can message him on Facebook at [Brendan Anna](https://www.facebook.com/BrendanAnna).

Today’s younger Choctaw generation has grown up benefiting from cultural revitalization and has a very strong tribal identity. They know where they came from and have a vision of where they want to go. They embody resilience and strength, as did their ancestors. They take ownership of their culture, work hard in the service of others, and strive to make the world a better place.

The Choctaw Nation likes to keep up with our youth and young adults who are doing great things. Please send your stories to [www.biskinik.com](http://www.biskinik.com).



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

CHOCTAW  
CULTURAL CENTER

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**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

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**Choctaw CAREERS**

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

# Upcoming Events

**Community Cultural Meeting – Eugene** | June 4 | 6 p.m. | Graduate Hotel Eugene | 66 E 6th Ave Eugene, OR 97401 | Come join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in the Eugene area that offers insight into the programs available to tribal members. Update your tribal membership card, ask questions about the Choctaw Nation, and share in the fellowship.

**Community Cultural Meeting – Tacoma** | June 6 | 2 p.m. | Courtyard Marriott Tacoma Downtown | 1515 Commerce St Tacoma, WA 98402 | Come join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in the Tacoma area that offers insight into the programs available to tribal members. Update your tribal membership card, ask questions about the Choctaw Nation, and share in the fellowship.

**Outreach at the Beach** | June 10 | 10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Sardis Lake | 432646 E 1625 Ln Clayton, OK 74536 | Join us at Sardis Lake for a day of fun, swimming, games, giveaways, and free food. Tribal program representatives will share information and answer questions.

**Wildlife Koni 5K** | June 13 | 8 a.m. | Tvshka Homma Capitol Grounds | Council House Rd Tuskahoma, OK 74574 | Bring your friends and family for a fun and active morning at this free community 5K in Tvshka Homma. Whether you plan to run, walk or simply enjoy the scenery, all are welcome. Shirts will be available on a first-come, first-served basis from 6:30-7:30 a.m. inside the Choctaw Nation Cafeteria Building. Parking will be available behind the cafeteria.

**Health Fair – Smithville** | June 17 | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Smithville Community Center | 39618 N US Hwy 259 Smithville, OK 74957 | This fair focuses on education, prevention and access to community-based health services. Offering health screenings, vaccinations and educational resources from Choctaw Nation departments to support community wellness for the elderly population.

**Community Cultural Meeting – Tulsa** | June 20 | 2 p.m. | DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Tulsa Downtown | 616 W 7th St, Tulsa, OK 74127 Tulsa, OK 74127 | Come join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in Tulsa that offers insight into the programs available to tribal members. Update your tribal membership card, ask questions about the Choctaw Nation, and share in the fellowship.

**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:** June 3, 2026, at 11 a.m. — District 8, Hugo. **District Pageants:** June 9, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. — District 9, Durant; June 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. — District 2, Hochtaw; 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/](http://choctawnation.com/events/).

## JUROR SUMMONS

Choctaw Nation tribal members, spouses of tribal members, and any Choctaw Nation associate residing within Choctaw Nation territory may be summoned to jury duty with the Choctaw Nation court system.

## CHOCTAW NATION ART SHOW APPLICATIONS

ADULTS APPLY HERE

YOUTH APPLY HERE

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Cinema at the Center: The Little Mermaid**  
Saturday, June 27, splash on over, grab some popcorn, and dive into an under-the-sea adventure with The Little Mermaid. We hope to "sea" you there! The movie starts at 1 p.m. Admission is complimentary to all.

**July Fourth Celebration**  
Join us for our July Fourth Celebration on Saturday, July 4 from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. Enjoy family-friendly fun including coloring contests, Choctaw trivia, concessions, late shopping at Hushi Gift Store and a fireworks show to end the evening. Admission is \$25 per car.

**Choctaw Cultural Center 5th Anniversary**  
Celebrate with us July 23 through Saturday Jul. 25, from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., as we celebrate five years of sharing the Choctaw Journey. Join us for special demonstrations and classes, contests and much more.

1919 Hina Hanta Way Calera, OK 74730 | 833-708-9582 | [choctawculturalcenter.com](http://choctawculturalcenter.com)

## CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

APPLY MAY 1 - JUNE 15

Scan to learn more about the program.

### Biskinik Submission Policy

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

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

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

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

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

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

## BISKINIK

The premier news source for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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

**Staff:**  
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Kristina Humenesky, Senior Director  
Kellie Matherly, Content Development Director  
Kendra Germany-Wall, Editor  
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Shella Kirven, Contributing Reporter

**Contact:**  
P.O. Box 1210 Durant, OK, 74702  
[biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)  
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.

### Albright receives playwriting award

Choctaw Nation member Anthony Albright has been awarded the National Playwriting Program's John Cauble Award for Outstanding Short Play at the American College Theatre Festival in Rochester, Minn. His play, now under consideration for the national festival (formerly held at the Kennedy Center), features a Choctaw veteran protagonist, Lena Wolf, who returns home to McAlester, Okla., to attempt to reintegrate with her community.

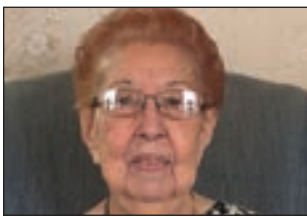
Through various interactions, she discovers that the home she left is not the one she has returned to, and she must bear the burden of her service for the rest of her life. Anthony's oldest child, Tohbi Albright, was also awarded Outstanding Performance in a Short Play at the festival. The play may also be in line to mount a full production at the next American College Theatre Festival in January. Anthony is a registered Choctaw artist.

To find his other plays, which often feature Choctaw characters, visit his New Play Exchange profile at [newplayexchange.org/users/101041/anthony-albright](http://newplayexchange.org/users/101041/anthony-albright).



### Hutain turns 92

Beatrice Snow Stone Hutain turned 92 on Feb. 22. Her family celebrated with a lunch at Catfish Hole in Alma, Ark. Beatrice, who has lived in Fort Smith, Ark., for more than 60 years, is originally from Kinta, Okla. She is the daughter of Raymond and Minnie Snow of Kinta. She married Alvin Stone of Bokoshe in 1950, and they were married for 44 years. They had two children, Dewayne Stone and Cheryl Stone Pitchford, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Following Alvin's death in 1994, Beatrice married Bob Hutain. They were married for 24 years. Beatrice and her family are very proud of their Choctaw heritage. Happy birthday, Bea!



### Burch begins his career in Texas fire service

Lane Burch, a firefighter and EMT, recently accepted a job with the Copperas Cove Fire Department in Texas. Lane was pinned by his father, Billy D. Burch, a fire captain for the Travis County ESD 12 Fire Department. Firefighting runs deep in the Burch family. Lane's uncle, Bryan C. Burch, is a battalion chief for the Fort Worth Fire Department, and his uncle, Brandon P. Burch, is a firefighter and paramedic for the Kennedale Fire Department in Texas. Lane received help from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Career Development Program, and his family would like to thank the program for their assistance. This year, Lane will continue his education with hopes of becoming a paramedic.



### Hotchkiss earns degree from OU

Amy Hotchkiss of Mustang will graduate summa cum laude from the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor of Arts in religious studies. Her studies focused on the Abrahamic religions, with emphasis on religious thought and Jewish history. She will continue at the University of Oklahoma in the master's program in history and will be part of the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies, where she will focus on Jewish history. Amy is grateful to God for his guidance and thankful for the support of her family, friends, mentors and community as she looks forward to continuing her academic journey.



## NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Livingston Buck and Angeline Mitchell-White Reunion

The 50th annual Livingston Buck and Angeline Mitchell-White Reunion will be held June 27, 2026, at the Dale Cox Community Center in Poteau, starting at 10 a.m. Lunch will begin at 12 p.m. Come early and visit. Bring a covered dish, dessert, a liter of pop, tea or lemonade. Also, bring your old pictures and your genealogy! For more information, contact Tracie Cox at 918-413-3325, Kim White-Robertson at 918-647-6153, or look us up on the family Facebook page, Livingston Buck & Angeline Mitchell White Family. Hope to see you at the reunion! We will have some door prizes honoring our 50th reunion.

### Ed Perkins' Traditional Choctaw Pottery

For four generations, my family has been farming our Indian allotted land. My name is Ed Perkins. In addition to farming, in my spare time, I build traditional Choctaw Pottery. Our farm forms the northwest corner of the Choctaw Nation, along the South Canadian River. Two of my grandchildren, Nova, Ples, and I, built a snow dragon from the recent 8 inch snow. The snow was so fluffy, most of the body of the dragon was shoveled and packed into piles with a grain scoop. After two days, it warmed up so the snow would stick together to form snowballs. At that point we added the fins, head, and tail to the dragon. This sculpture is very similar to the horned serpent, sinti lapitta. Our ancestors used this image when they lived in Moundville, Alabama in 700-1200AD. They did amazing work. In order to produce a horned serpent bottle, they would build it, burnish it, etch the image, and then fire it—turning it black in the process. Afterwards, they etched it a second time. This process produced a black vase with a light tan image. They also made many effigy bowls that included frogs, fish, turtles, men, beaver, bats, and owls to name a few.



My website, [perkinspottery.com](http://perkinspottery.com) has photos of the many facsimiles I've built of different kinds of Moundville pottery. My main motivation in building ancestral pottery is to let people know how tremendous our Choctaw ancestors were at building pottery. The variety of pottery they made shows their skills, techniques, life styles, and spiritual beliefs. Much of the Choctaw culture we've learned about was gleaned from studying pottery that they built.

—Ed Perkins

### Oklahoma Primary Election Information

Oklahoma's Primary Elections will take place Tuesday, June 16. Now is your chance to make your voice count. As members of the Choctaw Nation and Oklahoma, staying involved in our communities matters. Voting is a key way to take part and make a difference.

**Early Voting Dates & Times:**

- Thursday, June 11: 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- Friday, June 12: 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, June 13: 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

**Election Day Voting:**

- Tuesday, June 16: 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

**Before You Vote:**

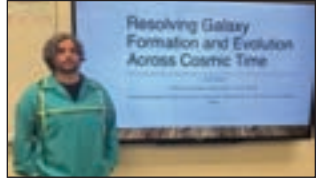
- Check your polling location
- Know your voting hours
- Bring valid identification

For more information on how to vote in Oklahoma's elections, visit <https://oklahoma.gov/elections/elections-results.html>. For questions about voting in state, federal, and local elections, please contact the Government Affairs team at [governmентаffairs@choctawnation.com](mailto:governmентаffairs@choctawnation.com).



### Gibson reaches for the stars

Justus Gibson is the son of Michael and Karen Gibson, and the Grandson of Bennie L. Gibson and Edna Gibson, late of Finley, Oklahoma. He received his PhD in Astrophysics from the University of Colorado in May 2025 and has accepted a position at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, to study galaxy evolution.



### Tiffie continues academic success

Eufaula High School senior Tucker Tiffie has built an impressive academic resume through advanced coursework, science programs and hands-on medical experience ahead of beginning his college career this fall. During his senior year, Tiffie completed a professional internship at McAlester Regional Health Center, gaining clinical laboratory experience while preparing for future studies in science and engineering. He also earned straight A's in concurrent college courses through Eastern Oklahoma State College. Tiffie previously excelled in his school's Biomedical Program and expanded his academic interests through an introductory engineering program at the University of Oklahoma. He is also a member of the National Society of High School Scholars, recognizing his academic achievement and commitment to excellence. A 2026 graduate of Eufaula High School, Tiffie plans to attend Rose State College before continuing his education at the University of Oklahoma to pursue a degree in bioengineering.



## CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

### IBAIAYA VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Scan for additional details

# Jones Academy Class of 2026

**HARTSHORNE, Okla.** – Jones Academy proudly announces the graduating class of 2026.

Founded in 1891 by the Choctaw Nation, Jones Academy is a no-cost American Indian boarding school located four miles north of Hartshorne in Eastern Oklahoma. The school is nestled among 540 acres of rolling pastures and trees at the foot of the Pochontas Mountains in Oklahoma's Ouachita Mountain range.

Approximately 200 students in grades H-2 each year attend from tribal nations across the United States.

Jones Academy and its partners are transforming learning experiences for Native youth by helping them discover life pathways and cultivate a sense of cultural identity.

Education at this American Indian boarding school isn't only about book knowledge. It's also about the life lessons that create mature, balanced, responsible and compassionate adults.

**Maya Clarabelle Baker, 18,** is the daughter of Travice Lewallen of Heavener, Okla. She is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. While attending Jones Academy, Maya participated in Family, Career and Community Leaders of America at Hartshorne High School. She served as an officer with the United National Indian Tribal Youth Council and was a member of the CNO Youth Advisory Board and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society. In fall 2025, she represented Jones Academy at the AISES Conference in Minneapolis. Maya also excelled in 4-H and showed hogs. She is enrolled at Eastern Oklahoma State College and plans to pursue a career in counseling.



**Emery Paige Comby, 18,** is the daughter of Jimmy and Alexandria Comby of Tucker, Miss. Emery is a member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. As a student at Jones Academy, she represented the school at the American Indian Science and Engineering Society conference in San Antonio. Emery was active in the Jones Academy UNITY Council and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America at Hartshorne High School. She was also a member of the National Honor Society and earned honor roll recognition. During high school, Emery completed concurrent courses through Eastern Oklahoma State College and will graduate with 18 college credit hours. She describes her sense of humor as being "as dry as the Sahara Desert." Emery plans to attend Carl Albert State College in Poteau, Okla., where she will enter the Physical Therapist Assistant Program.



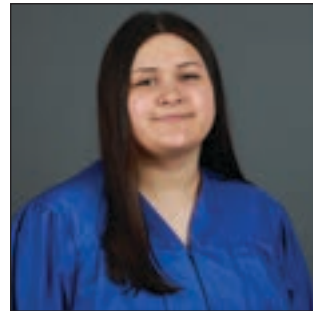
**Malakai Reye Franklin, 18,** is the son of Sarah Segura of Oklahoma City and Francisco Segura of McAlester, Okla. He is an enrolled member of the Creek Nation of Oklahoma. Through the CNO 477 Youth Employment Services program, Malakai worked at the Jones Academy cafeteria, working hard and making money. In the evenings, he joined a group of students whose Native American drumming became a familiar sound across campus. At dusk, they produced a sacred sound that moved the listeners' hearts to both a venerable tradition and the promise of a new generation of drummers. Malakai has enrolled at Francis Tuttle Technology Center in Oklahoma City, where he plans to prepare for a career in welding.



**Harold Joseph "Joey" Freeland III, 18,** is the son of Melissa Freeland of Wilburton, Okla., and John Patten of Mesa, Ariz. He is the grandson of Kathryn Garfield and Harold Freeland of Wilburton, Okla. Joey is a descendant of the Fort McDermitt Paiute-Shoshone Tribe of Nevada and Oregon. At Jones Academy, he participated in 4-H and the United National Indian Tribal Youth Council. Joey was also a member of the school's esports team and competed regionally. After graduation, he plans to attend Talking Leaves Job Corps Center in Tahlequah, Okla., to study construction technology.



**Adriana Lorene Montejo, 18,** is the daughter of Anita Montejo of Columbus, Ohio. She is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and has attended Jones Academy since first grade. Adriana participated in Family, Career and Community Leaders of America at Hartshorne High School and studied interactive media at Kiamichi Technology Center in McAlester, Okla. She was active in the United National Indian Tribal Youth Council and the CNO Youth Employment Services program, working in the dorm, gym and Student Success Center. Adriana was always volunteering to serve and ready to help. She was one of the SSC Director Mr. Barnes' favorites. Adriana plans to attend Carl Albert State College this fall and pursue a career in the cosmetics industry.



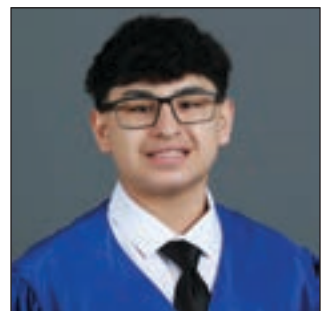
**Ruben Alexander Sharp, 18,** is the son of Cassandra Fraser of El Reno, Okla., and Ross Sharp of Weatherford, Okla. Ruben is a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. While at Jones Academy, he participated in the UNITY Council and played stickball. Ruben also worked through the CNO Youth Employment Services program. He studied construction technology at Kiamichi Technology Center, where he demonstrated strong aptitude in the field and worked toward certification in building and construction. After graduation, Ruben plans to work for the DREAMS program with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and hopes to transition into full-time employment with the tribes.



**Sweetie Amirah Shawnee, 18,** is the granddaughter of Lula Sankadota of Weatherford, Okla., who serves as her guardian, and the late Jasper Sankadota. She is the daughter of the late Jodi Sankadota and James Shawnee of Geary, Okla. Sweetie is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. At Jones Academy, she was active in the UNITY Council and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society. In 2025, she was selected as a delegate to the AISES Conference in Minneapolis. Sweetie completed the criminal justice program at Kiamichi Technology Center and interned this spring with the Pittsburg County Sheriff's Office. She plans to complete general education courses at Eastern Oklahoma State College before transferring to the University of Central Oklahoma to study forensic science. She dreams of becoming a crime scene investigator.



**Jimmy Andres Trejo-Rains, 18,** is the son of Stephanie Rains and Lucio Trejo of Oklahoma City. He is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and has attended Jones Academy since first grade. During his time at the school, Jimmy participated in 4-H and livestock shows and served as president of the UNITY Youth Council during his senior year. He studied construction technology at Kiamichi Technology Center, where he was inducted into the National Technical Honor Society and excelled in woodworking and cabinetry. In March, Jimmy interviewed with Mill Creek Lumber and Supply Company in Tulsa, Okla., and plans to begin full-time employment with the company after graduation.



## Students shine at Oklahoma Native Youth Language Fair

Students from Jones Academy and Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Head Start programs recently took part in the 2026 Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair, showcasing their dedication to preserving Indigenous languages.

Participants earned honors in several categories, including traditional and modern songs, spoken language, art and multimedia.

Winners included:

- Traditional Song Medium Group, 3rd – 5th-Grade, Chahta Shvpah Aiokpuchi – Honorable Mention
- Large Group Traditional Song, 6th – 8th-Grade, "Nahata Fichick Tohwikel" – Third Place
- Medium Group Skit/Short Play, 3rd – 5th-Grade, "Nita Lusakbi" – Third Place
- Modern Song Large Group, 3rd – 5th-Grade, "Chahta Shvpah Aiokpuchi" – Honorable Mention
- Individual Modern Song, 3rd – 5th-Grade, "Chisvs a Hullo" – Third Place
- Traditional Song, 3rd – 5th-Grade, "Pawnee War Song" – First Place
- Traditional Song, 9th – 12th-Grade, "Hvthvatken" – Third Place
- Traditional Song, 9th – 12th-Grade, "Traditional War Dance" – Third Place
- Poster Art, 9th – 12th-Grade, "My Language, My Home" – Second Place
- Spoken Prayer, 3rd – 5th-Grade, "Yakoke" – First Place
- Small Group Spoken Language, 6th – 8th-Grade, "Mississippi Choctaw Pledge of Allegiance" – First Place
- Small Group Modern Song, 6th – 8th-Grade, "Mississippi Choctaw National Anthem" – First Place
- Group Mobile Video, Pre-k – 2nd-Grade, Choctaw Nation Coalgate Head Start, "Chim Afvmmi Na Yukpa" – Second Place
- Group Mobile Video, Pre-k – 2nd-Grade, Poteau Child Care Center 3-Year-Old Class, "Chim Afvmmi Na Yukpa" – Honorable Mention

The Jones Academy first- and second-grade Choctaw language class was unable to attend the fair because of scheduling changes. However, teachers recognized the group as "most improved," highlighting its growth and continued commitment to language learning.

The Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair provides a platform for students to celebrate Indigenous languages through performance, art and storytelling. For participating students, the event represents more than competition; it is an opportunity to carry forward cultural knowledge and ensure the language continues for future generations.

## SE awards honorary degrees to three tribal leaders

**DURANT, Okla. (May 8, 2026)** – Southeastern Oklahoma State University awarded honorary Doctor of Business Administration degrees Friday, May 8, to Gary Batton and Bill Anoatubby and the late Gregory E. Pyle for their leadership and support of higher education.

Former Choctaw Chief Pyle, a Southeastern alumnus, served the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma for nearly 40 years and helped grow the tribe into a \$1 billion enterprise while expanding investments in education, health care and culture. Patti Pyle represented her late husband at the ceremony.

Choctaw Chief Batton, also a Southeastern alumnus, has served as chief since 2014. Under his leadership, the Choctaw Nation has grown to employ more than 11,000 people and generates an annual economic impact exceeding \$3.2 billion in the State of Oklahoma. Southeastern recognized Batton for his continued support of the university and commitment to education and economic development.

Chickasaw Governor Bill Anoatubby was recognized for his longtime leadership of the Chickasaw Nation and his continued investment in education and student support programs.

For more information on this event, visit [se.edu/news-events](http://se.edu/news-events).



Regional University System of Oklahoma Regent Amy Ford and SE President Dr. David Whitlock present Chief Gary Batton with an honorary doctorate.



Patti Pyle accepts an honorary doctorate from Southeastern on behalf of her late husband, Chief Gregory Pyle.



Chickasaw Governor Bill Anoatubby receives an honorary doctorate from Southeastern.

## CNO Adult Education Class of 2026

**WILBURTON, Okla.** – The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma honored 72 graduates during its 2026 Adult Education graduation ceremony April 24 at Eastern Oklahoma State College in Wilburton.

The program helps tribal members earn a high school equivalency diploma and prepare for careers or higher education through academic and workforce support services.



2026 CNO Adult Education graduates:

April Adams, Tulsa, OK  
 Angel Aaron, Oklahoma City, OK  
 April Amarante, Crescent City, CA  
 Clint Apon, Tulsa, OK  
 Cahner Ardese, Krebs, OK  
 Jamie Arthur, Durant, OK  
 Kaylee Ayers, Wauchula, FL  
 David Ball, Porum, OK  
 Madelyn Battiest, Duncan, OK  
 Dakotah Beo, Sulphur, OK  
 William Belt Jr., New Castle, OK  
 Tyra Boston, Skiatook, OK  
 Kamarah Boswell, McAlester, OK  
 Daniel Brese, Durant, OK  
 Kylie Bruce, Shady Point, OK  
 Brittney Burch, Durant, OK  
 Eric Coddington, Broken Arrow, OK  
 Abbagael Cook, Wister, OK  
 Rebecca Courtney, Seminole, OK  
 Cody Davis, Ada, OK  
 Jolene Dunlap, Spokane, WA  
 Carrie Ehlenfeldt, Oklahoma City, OK  
 Macy Elliott, Broken Bow, OK  
 Alex Espericuta, Durant, OK  
 Dakota Etchison, Bartlesville, OK  
 Ethan Ethridge, Hugo, OK  
 Ezekiel Foster, Edmond, OK  
 Tommy Garcia, Durant, OK  
 Rily Goodgion, Terrell, TX  
 Brandon Hale, Sherman, TX  
 Deon Hamlin, Atoka, OK  
 Jesse Haney, Moore, OK  
 Nanaiya Harris, Round Rock, TX  
 Brandy Herndon, Tecumseh, OK  
 Hayden Heu, Mead, OK  
 Summer Hill, Calera, OK  
 Camryn Hotella, Harrah, OK  
 Erika Hotella, Wilburton, OK  
 Clayton Hoyle, Broken Bow, OK  
 Caydin Jones, McLoud, OK  
 Shelton Kirstin, Hartshorne, OK  
 Lasteria Lainez-Ortiz, Columbus, OH  
 Aden Lamb, Rockville, IN  
 Ricky Leal, Durant, OK  
 Jerri Leighton, Moore, OK  
 Tyler Looper, Blackwell, OK

Shannon Love, Tuskahoma, OK  
 Dakota Maisano, Newcastle, OK  
 Calvin Mangus, Sulphur Springs, TX  
 Jennifer Martinez, Victorville, CA  
 James McAlester, Oklahoma City, OK  
 Joseph McCarty, Hugo, OK  
 Kambri Mercer, Durant, OK  
 Trisha Meyer, Norman, OK  
 Eric Monds, Colorado Springs, CO  
 Jalen Moore, San Antonio, TX  
 Liam Murphy, Mustang, OK  
 Sara Ned, Mead, OK  
 Kevin Nixon, Poteau, OK  
 Joshua Nunn, McAlester, OK  
 Sherry Odle, Spiro, OK  
 Brice Oldham, Durant, OK  
 Elisa Palmer, Coalgate, OK  
 Ryan Pennington, Stillwater, OK  
 Monica Peters, Hugo, OK  
 Vincent Riner, Sherman, TX  
 Denisa Robinson, Ardmore, OK  
 Elijah Rogers, Norman, OK  
 Tina Ross, Moore, OK  
 Alexandra Ruiz, Moore, OK  
 Bella Ruiz, Tulsa, OK  
 Anna Selders, Fort Smith, AR  
 Leigha Shomo, Broken Bow, OK  
 Eric Simmons, Norman, OK  
 Kyra Simmons, Norman, OK  
 Natalie Sipe, Smithville, OK  
 Macy Slatton, Durant, OK  
 Brittany Smith, Durant, OK  
 McKenna Smith, Tulsa, OK  
 Gage Smith, Idabel, OK  
 Craig Stacey, Claremore, OK  
 Gregory Stumpf, Poteau, OK  
 Lance Sutherland, Oklahoma City, OK  
 Jathan Taylor, Valliant, OK  
 Baylyn Taylor, Garvin, OK  
 Kathleen Terral, Durant, OK  
 Payton Tubby, Boswell, OK  
 Connor Washburn, Tulsa, OK  
 Marcus Wells, Calera, OK  
 Diana Wheeler, Fruitvale, TX  
 Todd Wilmond, Norman, OK  
 Domanic Winningham, Colbert, OK  
 Makannah Wylie, Kingston, OK  
 Emily Wyatt, Sibley, LA

## Remembering Choctaw Historian Charles Roberts

Submitted by Kenny L. Brown,  
University of Central Oklahoma

Professor Charles Edward Roberts, one among many influential Choctaw historians, passed away on November 15, 2025. At California State University, Sacramento, where he began teaching in 1970, he created some of the first classes on American Indian History in the nation and helped in the formation of the ethnic studies program there.

He was born in 1941 near Bennington, Okla., at the home of his maternal grandmother, Lesa Phillip Roberts, a Mississippi Choctaw who had taken her allotment in 1903.

In 1944, Charles and his mother Pearl joined Lesa and many of their extended family in a move to Richmond, Calif., to work in the Kaiser shipyards. After WWII, they moved to Chowchilla, Calif., where his mother passed in 1948.

In 1962, he earned a bachelor's degree from Fresno State University and then joined the army, serving in Stuttgart, Germany, until his discharge in 1965.

He then took a master's degree and began work on a Ph.D. at the University of Oregon. In 1970, he gained a position at Sacramento State while continuing to work toward a Ph.D. at Oregon, which he completed in 1975.

During his career at Sacramento State, Professor Roberts became a favorite in the classroom and organized numerous symposia at the university on Native American History and Literature. He also successfully lobbied the university's library to increase its collection of books in the field and government documents pertaining to American Indians.

As a diligent reader, Charles excelled in historiography—the study of the changing interpretation of historians. His grasp of historical literature impressed students and history colleagues alike.



Photo Provided

The late Choctaw historian Charles Roberts poses for a photo with Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

In 1980, he co-authored *The Choctaws: A Critical Bibliography* with Clara Sue Kidwell.

Over the years, he published articles and presented papers centered on his family background that combined genealogy with ethnohistory, including a touching biography of his beloved grandmother, Lesa.

Though busy with academics, when he was in his 30s and 40s, Charles also continued the Choctaw athletic tradition by playing baseball and basketball for the Sacramento Indian Center and competing against other Indian teams in northern California. He also coached youth baseball and soccer.

Honoring Charles's retirement in 2009, Sacramento State held a prestigious two-day symposium on the history of Native Americans, California Indians, and Choctaws, which included many of the nation's leading Indian historians. In retirement, he continued to advocate for the preservation of American Indian studies. Also, from 2009 to 2011, he provided instruction to K through 12 teachers on the history of Native Americans and California Indians.

Charles was preceded in death by his grandmother, Lesa; his mother, Pearl; his brother, Randall Collum; and his wife, Elizabeth Jane. He is survived by sons Christopher (Heather) and Matthew (Laura), grandchildren Gavin, Clark, Madelyn, Leighton, and partner Stella Mancillas.

## Bleau turns 40

Grab your glow sticks and your spellbooks! Our favorite Wood Elf (at heart) is officially hitting a major milestone. Alicia is turning 40, and we're celebrating in true 90s-meets-Norrath style.



### The Vitals

- Player: Alicia
- Current Level: 40
- Class: Pom-Mom / BSB Superfan
- Mana: Recharging via coffee and dog snuggles

Whether she's raiding a dungeon in EverQuest or front-row at a Backstreet Boys concert, Alicia does everything with style. She's survived the Y2K scare, the era of dial-up internet, and countless "Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)" singalongs.

She might be entering a new decade, but as long as there's a Pomeranian spinning in circles nearby, she's still got that teenage energy. Sadie wants to say yakoke to the Choctaw Nation and her family for being a big part of her success in earning her degree.

## New princesses crowned at Okla Chahta Gathering

PASO ROBLES, Calif. — Sisters Amelia and Madalyn Olivo were crowned Miss Okla Chahta and Little Miss Okla Chahta during the annual Okla Chahta Gathering held May 2-3 in Bakersfield, Calif.

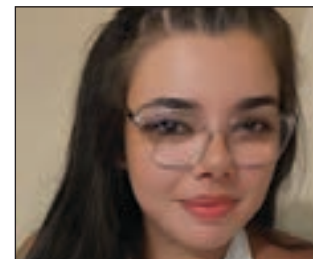


Amelia Olivo, a freshman at Cuesta College and paraeducator at Kermit King Elementary, and Madalyn Olivo, a seventh-grader at Georgia Brown Dual Immersion, were recognized for their leadership, cultural knowledge and dedication to Choctaw heritage.

Hosted by members of the Okla Chahta Clan of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, the gathering celebrates Choctaw culture through dance, music, storytelling and cultural education.

As titleholders, the sisters will serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting Choctaw culture through community events, presentations and hands-on activities, including beading classes.

## Caricia Rose uses art to express and explore resilience



Carissa Horton, professionally known as Caricia Rose, is a Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma artist listed on the Choctaw Nation Artist Registry and a multidisciplinary creator working across music, storytelling and performance.

Horton is the author of "Strawberry Wine With Cherry: Inheritance of Wings," a book exploring themes of generational trauma, cultural loss and resilience within Native communities. The work has reached national retail platforms, including Walmart.

In addition to her writing, Horton's music is currently receiving radio airplay on multiple stations, and she has been invited to perform at an upcoming event. Her growing body of work has also drawn media interest for a potential feature highlighting her artistic journey and cultural storytelling.

Her creative work blends her Choctaw heritage with Northern California influences, using music and narrative as a means of exploring survival, resilience and lived cultural experience.

Horton is currently seeking opportunities for media features, radio placement, live performances, book recognition and cultural collaborations.

Learn more about Horton on Instagram (@cariciaroseofficial).

## Straiton graduates from Delta flight attendant training



Miles Patrick Straiton graduated from Delta flight attendant training in Atlanta and received his wings on April 3, 2026. He will be based in Minneapolis.

## Cox wins bright path art contest



Congratulations to Tierney Cox, one of the Oklahoma students to win the 2026 Bright Path Red Ribbon Art Contest sponsored by the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame.

Tierney is a fourth-grade student at Spiro Upper Elementary School. Her art was selected from thousands of entries.

She was honored at a ceremony in Oklahoma City, where she received a medal, a signed commendation from Gov. Kevin Stitt and a gift card.

"Thank you, Tierney, for representing the Spiro Bulldogs well. We are proud of you!" — Spiro JOM

# Together, We're More

## JP Gauna's journey to the silver screen

By Kellie Matherly

Choctaw actor Jeremy "JP" Gauna didn't know his childhood was hard while he was living it. Like many people who grow up struggling as the norm, it wasn't something he questioned at the time.

It was only later, as an adult, that the weight of those early years became clear. Looking back, he understands just how much resilience was required simply to keep moving forward.

Work ethic was inherited in JP's world. It came from his grandfather, Jimmy Lee Barkus, whose lessons were always practical. If you had a car, it didn't matter how far away the job was. You showed up. You worked. That belief wasn't just personal; it was cultural. "Choctaws are hard workers," Gauna says, and that truth shaped how he approached every opportunity, whether he felt ready for it or not.

Before acting ever entered the picture, Gauna built a steady career in marketing and advertising at The Dallas Morning News, where he worked for seven years. It was a life with structure and predictability until one ordinary walk to work changed everything. Across the street, a television production crew was filming. Crew members waved him over, directing him toward a hallway marked for actors. Gauna laughed it off. He wasn't an actor. He had a job to get to.

But someone handed him a card anyway and told him to take a picture in front of a white wall and email it to them.

Five minutes later, his phone rang. He

had just been booked for background work on *Queen of the South*.

What began as coincidence quickly became a series of important connections. On set, Gauna met Indigenous actors who recognized something unique in him—his presence, his look, his timing. One encouraged him to take acting classes, telling him he was standing at the edge of a real opportunity. Though he held onto his job at the newspaper, Gauna used his paid time off to train, learning the craft between workdays and weekends.

The effort paid off. He landed a small speaking role on *Queen of the South*. That role led to signing with an agent. And suddenly, the path forward looked different.

Eventually, Gauna ran out of PTO...and excuses. He was forced to choose between stability and possibility. His colleagues at The Dallas Morning News encouraged him to chase his dream, offering a severance package and heartfelt support. Then, almost immediately, the COVID-19 global pandemic shut everything down.

Nothing was filming. Nothing was certain. The industry was silent.

That severance became a lifeline. So did flexibility. When his friend Willie Molina called and asked if he wanted to work as a production assistant on *The Chosen*, Gauna didn't hesitate. Even though he had no idea what the job entailed, he stepped in, grateful for income and purpose.

What he didn't expect was how deeply fulfilling it would become.

Being part of *The Chosen*, a histori-



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw actor JP Gauna inherited a strong work ethic from his grandfather, and that dedication and willingness to put forth the effort to succeed has led him to a successful on-screen career.

cal drama chronicling the life of Jesus, changed Gauna's life. It reminded him that storytelling matters. He is drawn to narratives that are difficult to hear and uncomfortable to watch. Stories that weren't explained in textbooks but lived by real people and real communities.

"You don't want to deal with it because it's too rough; it's too personal; it's too close to home. Those are the stories that I want to be a part of—the ones that make you feel uncomfortable and make you understand [what really happened]," said Gauna.

These are the stories Gauna believes still need telling. The stories of his grandfather. Of his Choctaw ancestors. Of Indigenous people whose experiences have been softened, erased, or ignored.

Gauna believes he was placed on this path for a reason. He is meant to love people regardless of how they look, what they

believe, or what they have.

He believes we should laugh at ourselves, listen without judgment, and understand that struggle is universal.

"I've been fortunate enough to walk and step through that door but then stick a boulder in the door to keep it open for others," Gauna said.

When we talk about our stories—honestly, openly—we grow. And together, Gauna believes, we grow stronger.

According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), Gauna has been cast in 13 productions from 2018 to 2025, including the wildly successful "Yellowstone" spinoffs "1883" and "1923." His most recent role was Kansas in five episodes of "Blue Ridge: The Series."

You can find more information about JP on [imdb.com](https://www.imdb.com) and see the rest of his story at [togetherweremore.com](https://togetherweremore.com).

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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

## OBITUARIES

## Clinton Tyler Purtell

Dr. Clinton Tyler Purtell, 50 of Stillwater, Okla., passed away March 9, 2026.

Clinton was born Oct. 2, 1975, in McAlester, Okla., to Marsha and Vaughn Clinton Purtell.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and grandparents Frank and Marcella Regan.

Clinton is survived by his wife Amber Purtell; children Brooklyn Purtell, Jacquelyn "Jackie" Purtell, and Clinton "Chip" Purtell; parents-in-law Harry and Kathy Grider; sister and brother-in-law Scott and Ashley Lacefield, and their children Tegan and Jenny; and numerous cousins, aunts, and uncles.



## Clarence Franklin Schornick III

Clarence "Jack" Franklin Schornick III, 74, passed away Feb. 13, 2026.

Jack was born Oct. 10, 1951, in Seminole, Oklahoma.

He was preceded in death by his mother Irma; sister Toni; and brother-in-law Noel.

Jack is survived by his wife Glenda; cherished dog Jake; children Vanessa (Brad), Dmitri (Stephanie), Shay (Jason), and Chloe; grandchildren Mackenzie (Colby), Donovan, Eli, Daphne, Noah, Rex, Cyrus, Wesley, Miles, and Margot; great-grandchild Bonnie Mae; sisters Jeannie (Bobby), and Brandy (Robert); brother-in-law Greg; and many nieces, nephews, and cousins.



## Glenna Mary Miller

Glenna Mary Miller, 90, passed away March 8, 2026.

Glenna was born March 9, 1935, in Fort Arbuckle, Okla., to C.W. "Dick" Grant and Kathryn Ann Grant.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Amy Lou Turner, nephew Andrew Miller; and grandson Garrison Miller.

Glenna is survived by sisters Marilyn Saylor and Charlotte Kesinger; sons Donald Grant Miller and Joel Kurt Miller; daughters Amy Maria Lemke and Mary Susan Pierce; grandchildren Christopher Pierce, Hannah Pierce, Ellis Pierce, and Hayley Thompson; great-granddaughter Ida Safran; and many nieces and nephews.



## Georgia Kay Collier

Georgia Kay (LeFlore) Collier, 77, passed away March 5, 2026.

Kay was born May 8, 1948, in Crowder, Okla., to Buster C. and Florence Alma (Farris) LeFlore.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Larry Collier; brother Lynn E. LeFlore; and sister Lorraine Lossing.

Kay is survived by her son Buster Garrett and Sonya; daughter Mechelle Taggart and spouse Phillip; stepson Ethan Collier and spouse Julie; grandchildren Jake Taggart and spouse Sabrina, Jude Taggart and spouse Cassidy, Kelly Garrett and spouse Casey, Shenia Mick, Dakota Garrett and spouse McKayla, Mackie Lee Garrett, and Aiden Collier; great-grandchildren Waylon Garrett, Gracelynn Garrett, and Jameson Taggart; nieces Cheryl Cody and Sheila LeFlore; nephews Lynn LeFlore and spouse Angie, Gregg Lossing, Warren Lossing, Bill Harris and Kevin Abrahamsen; and many other nieces, nephews, extended family members, and friends.



## Johnny Wayne Ishcomer

Johnny Wayne "Tomahawk" Ishcomer, 60, passed away March 24, 2026.

Johnny was born Oct. 4, 1965, in Talihina, Okla., to Leroy Jackson Ishcomer Sr. and Ethel Bell (LaFlore) Ishcomer.

He was preceded in death by his parents; niece Marissa Ishcomer; brother Robert Ishcomer; and sister Rita Ishcomer.

Johnny is survived by brothers Julius Ishcomer, Neil Ishcomer and Leroy Ishcomer; sisters Linda Cannon, Lena Priddy, Mary Woody and spouse Turner, and Sarah Kuykendall; nieces and nephews Perry, Jacob, Josh, Corey, Cheryl, Keanna, Jada, Gracie, TJ and Eric; numerous great-nieces and great-nephews; many other family members, friends and loved ones.



## Sammie Kay Beshirs

Sammie Kay Beshirs, 78, passed away April 3, 2026.

Sammie was born July 8, 1947, in Caddo, Okla., to Willie "Granny Bill" Myrtle (Braudrick) and Sam Houston Armstrong.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband John Beshirs; brothers Dick Armstrong, Kenneth Armstrong, and Laith Armstrong; sisters Blanche Williams, Bobbie Stillwell, Ethel Peters, and Midge Ellis; and beloved friends Doris Purcell and Sally Tucker.

Sammie is survived by her daughter Lisa Ann Elliott; sons Jason Blake Shoemaker and Chad Shoemaker; stepdaughter Tyanna Dishroom; grandchildren Brooke Nicole Elliott, Tommy Espinoza Jr., Zackery Blake Shoemaker, and Madison Blake Morris; great-grandchildren Zayden Dakota Woodruff and Brinley River Shoemaker; special friends Pamela Murphree, Tammy Davenport, and Shelly Elliott; many nieces and nephews; as well as other extended family and friends.



## Evelyn Tims

Evelyn Tims, 90, passed away Feb. 11, 2026.

Evelyn was born May 28, 1935, in Idabel, Okla., to Rev. Isaac and Alice James.

She was preceded in death by her husband Rev. Sampson Tims; son Nathan Tims; her parents; brothers Dalton, Norris, Manuel, and Neal; and sisters Anneice James and Hazel Forbit.

Evelyn is survived by her sister Cleedith Harding; children Lee Tims, Susie Tims, Andrea and Gene Joslin, Michael Tims, Marvin Tims, and Christine Tims and fiancé Eric Archer; grandchildren Kathryn and Chase Hagan, Brandon Tims, Cheyenne Joslin, Olivia Tims, and Victoria Shatswell; and great-grandchildren Kaden Tims, Jaxon Tims, Damien Shatswell, Jahvon Tims, Kloe Tims, Elijah Tims, and Islam Tims; and a host of extended family, church family, and friends.



## Jimmy Dale Howard

Jimmy Dale Howard, 92, passed away Feb. 13, 2026.

Jimmy was born Dec. 23, 1933, in Holdenville, Okla., to Cecil and Etta Howard.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Jesse Lee Howard; sister JoAnn; father-in-law and mother-in-law Sam and Willette Nolen; and sisters-in-law Georgia Lee and Billye.

Jimmy is survived by his wife Norma Ruth Nolen; sons Stephen Howard and Eric Howard; grandsons Joseph, Jakob, and Toby; great-grandson Ellis; brother Wayne Howard; sisters Carlene Castaneda and Linda Bible; nieces and nephews Gary, Gina, Andrea, Anecia, Beth, Daron and Matthew.



## Phebe Ann Harley

Phebe Ann Harley, 72, passed away March 22, 2026.

Phebe was born May 4, 1953, in Talihina, Okla., to Joseph and Mary Amos Wallace.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and brother Samson Wallace.

Phebe is survived by her husband Billy Harley; son Kenny Wallace and spouse Brenda; daughters and son-in-law Christy and Foueti Harley, Crystal and Galen Harley, and Lorinda Wallace; sisters and brother-in-law Joyce and Lee Watkins, and Barbara Wallace; eight grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and many other beloved family and friends.



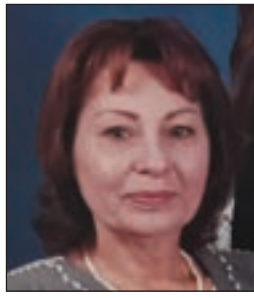
## Nova Etta Walker

Nova Etta (Hankins) Walker, 80, passed away March 3, 2026.

Nova was born May 11, 1945, in New Mexico, to Henry Hankins and Annie Hankins McKinney.

She was preceded in death by her mother; sisters Judy Calhoun and Sarah Reynolds; brothers Henry Hankins, Gerald Hankins, and Lou Allen Hankins; son-in-law Charles Cooper; grandchild Kimberly Prescott; and great-grandchild Waylon Harrison.

Nova is survived by her children Joe Prescott and spouse Delmy, Tim Hunter, Nova Cooper, and Robert Walker and spouse Kristi; grandchildren Arline, Joey, Davy, Philip, Tiffany, TJ, Amber, and Hannah; her great-grandchildren; and many other family members.



## Neal Malcolm Galloway

Neal Malcolm Galloway, 40, passed away March 13, 2026.

Neal was born May 22, 1985, in Virginia Beach, Virg., to John Galloway and Dona Galloway.

He was preceded in death by his maternal grandparents Cameron and Shirley Pundt; and paternal grandparents Richard "Mr. G" and Janice Galloway.

Neal is survived by his wife Corinne Galloway; daughter Lana Galloway; his father; his mother; stepmother Judy; mother-in-law Denise Haramia and life partner Mark Goley; father-in-law Brian Haramia; brothers Dru Galloway and spouse Chilita, and Jesse Galloway; sisters-in-law Christina Lohman and spouse Tony, and Stephanie Reese; brother-in-law Gary Catchot; and nieces and nephews Taylor, Leann, Katelynn, Hailey, Serena, Brooklynn, Lexus, Tony Jr, Jude, Reef, JJ, Cameron, and Caden.



## Cody Reed Molzahn

Cody Reed Molzahn, 39, passed away Feb. 11, 2026.

Cody was born May 6, 1986, in Kearney, Neb., to Leschia and Neil Molzahn.

He was preceded in death by his maternal grandfather Harold "Gene" Benton; paternal grandparents Kenneth and Opel (Rodenbaught) Molzahn; uncle and aunt Paul and Brenda (Backes) Molzahn; uncle Rick Berry; and cousins Ian Molzahn and Kendra Berry.

Cody is survived by his parents; grandmother Sharon Lue Benton; aunts and uncles Kay Berry, Charlotte Jay and spouse Chad, and Teresa Seyler; cousins Benton Seyler, Chase Seyler, Maggie McConnell and spouse Michael, Connor Jay, Austin Molzahn and spouse Kristen, Kayne Molzahn and spouse Joni, Maren Johnson and spouse Bowde, Jessica Shrader and spouse Logan, Travis Berry, and Brian Berry; along with other relatives, and friends.



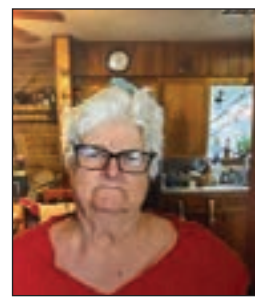
## Sandra Ranell Mahan

Sandra Ranell Mahan, 80, passed away April 1, 2026.

Sandra was born May 4, 1945, in Henryetta, Okla., to Leona (Smittle) Robertson and Ted Robertson.

She was preceded in death by her husband Orvan Mahan; her parents; grandchildren Babe and Dalton; sisters Teddy Brassfield, Glenda Brown, and Sue Olson; and brothers Don Robertson, Johnny Robertson, Tommy Robertson, and Norman Robertson.

Sandra is survived by her son Travis Mahan; daughter, Nena Tucker and spouse Ralph; grandchildren Dakota Tucker and spouse Erika, Kayla Fight and spouse John, and Trey Tucker; great-grandchildren Blakely Fight, Hallie Fight expected in July, and Aliyah Tucker; numerous nieces and nephews; other relatives and friends.



## Rosalie Lillie Ardesse

Rosalie Lillie Ardesse, 69, passed away March 30, 2026.

Rosalie was born May 3, 1956, in Talihina, Okla., to Joseph Ardesse and Agnes (Wade) Ardesse.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers Jimmy Joe, Anthony, Carl, Vincent, Joseph, and Elmer Ardesse; and nephews Clayton Ardesse and Joseph Ardesse.

Rosalie is survived by her brother Mike Griffiths and spouse Lisa; nephews and nieces Trey, Joleta Brett, Christina, Annette, Eric, Buster, Angela, Crystal, Nicholas, Carri, Nicholas, Michael, Donnie, Chris, and Jeff; cousins Jim Ardesse and Katie Von; and other relatives and friends.



## Ramona Lee Warden

Ramona Lee Warden, 82, passed away March 30, 2026.

Ramona was born Oct. 2, 1943, in Ada, Okla., to late Lester and Thelma (Payne) Neal.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and daughters Darla Parsley and Lori Lee Harrison.

Ramona is survived by daughters Sherri Lynn Bardwell and Star Neal Harrison; grandchildren Erik Lee Harrison, Rhiannon Clopton, Austin Harrison, Darla Harrison, Abbey Harrison, and Tillee Bardwell; great-grandchildren John Harrison, Nicholas Hendrix Clopton, Mateo Harrison, Gabriella Harrison, Freya Clopton, Shawn Wolfe, and Levi Wolfe.



## Patricia Ann Crowder

Patricia Ann Crowder, 77, passed away March 12, 2026.

Patricia was born March 23, 1948, to Bennie and Helen Caldwell.

She was preceded in death by her father; son Stacy Crowder; sister Gwen McKay; brother Terry Caldwell; and niece Jaime McKay.

Patricia is survived by her mother; her children Christopher and spouse Jo, Stacy and spouse Holly, Damon and spouse April, and Corey; grandchildren Cameron, Delaney, Caitlin, Emily, Jay, Josh, Chloe, Sophie, Reese, Merrit, Sadie, and Josie; great-grandchildren Zayden and Grace; sister Ava; and many nieces and nephews.



## Dallas Haskell Quinn-Lewis

Dallas Haskell Quinn - Lewis, 84, passed away March 30, 2026.

Dallas was born July 21, 1941, in Talihina, Okla., to Lillie (Ripley) Thompson and James Quinn.

He was preceded in death by his parents; son David Lewis Sr.; sister Juanita Thompson; and three brothers.

He is survived by his wife Kay Quinn; daughter Kay Walls; brother Jackie Bush; nine grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren.



## Jimmy D. Lloyd

Jimmy D. Lloyd, 81, passed away March 13, 2026.

Jimmy was born August 21, 1944, in Bennington, Okla., to Charlie H. and Amelia Lee Etta (Gardner) Lloyd.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Charlene Lloyd; son John David Lloyd; brothers Roscoe Lloyd, John Lloyd; and sister Mary Chalakee.

Jimmy is survived by daughter Sandra Rhae Heskett; grandson Blake Heskett; granddaughter Julia Rhae Heskett; brothers Ervin Lloyd and Anthony Lloyd; his nieces nephews; and many other relatives and friends.



## Biskinik Obituary Policy

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

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

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

Full obituaries are published online at [biskinik.com/obituaries](http://biskinik.com/obituaries).

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

ITI FABVSSA

Painted Hides: Continuing Collaborations with the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac

By Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation

This month, Iti Fabvssa shares more information from the one-of-a-kind Native American cultural objects in the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac in Paris, France.

As a quick recap, the CNO Historic Preservation Department has been partnering with the Branly and with other Tribes to document, study, and connect this collection with culturally affiliated Tribal communities since 2017.

In 2024, some of the items in this collection, which have a fair likelihood of being Choctaw in origin, were displayed at the Choctaw Nation Cultural Center in Calera. Thousands of people came to see them.

The Branly collections include an assemblage of Native American painted hides that is like no other collection in the world. These hides, dating to the 1700s, come from Tribes in the central and southeastern US. They are skins of bison, deer, and possibly other animals that were skillfully dressed and softened, then painted with designs that made them beautiful and conveyed important meanings. The painted hides were worn as robes, used for home decoration, and as gifts. These ancient hides hold a library of cultural information stored in their outlines, surface textures, toolmarks, thicknesses, and many other attributes, if you know the details to look for. I have been doing traditional hide work for most of my life and can read a few of the details in the hides. I'm honored to have been able to work with these hides in the collection and want to share the benefit of that experience with the community by detailing a few highlights in this article.

The first thing that stands out, not at all surprisingly, is the quality of workmanship that most of these hides represent. Even after 300 years, some of them are still soft and stretchy. The hides were skinned in several different ways, but all produced a finished hide with a basically rectangular outline. This is different from the way that most hunters skin today, which leaves an hourglass-shaped hide. Most of the deer hides in the Branly collection had been processed by exposing them to wood ash (which makes the softening process easier), then scraped with a flat-edged tool on a beam. Some of the bison hides have tell-tale parallel grooves on the flesh side, showing that the meat and fat were removed from the hides using a toothed flesher.

The hair side of a few hides have patches with a very rough



Upper Left: A glass scraper blade from the University of South Alabama Center for Archaeological Studies collection. Right: A similar scraper used to thin a bison hide for tanning.

surface. These were created by lacing the hide onto a frame and scraping portions of it with a chipped stone or chipped glass scraper blade. The latter have been found at 18th-century archaeological sites in Choctaw country, made from French glass bottles.

As part of the collaboration with Tribes, staff at the Branly found three different 18th-century French accounts about how bison robes were tanned by Mississippi tribes. The emulsified oils from the animals' brains are the chemicals used to soften the hides. The same accounts say that hides intended for use outdoors were smoked to prevent water damage, but hides intended for indoor use were not smoked so that their natural white color would offset the painted designs like a canvas.

Many of the hides in the Branly collection fit this latter class. The paints were rubbed into the hides to make the designs. These were created by mixing hide glue with powdered mineral pigments. On the Branly hides, you can see how the artists mixed in a stronger concentration of hide glue to bind down the black pigment and keep it from smearing over the hide after the paint dried.

The majority of the hides in the Branly's collection come from the Quapaw, Illini Confederacy, and eastern Plains Tribes.



A detail of a pottery design from Mobile Bay, taken from Fuller 1996, showing an eye depicted with a design technique similar to that seen on the pottery.



An example of a detail within a painted hide design on an 18th-century Choctaw pipestem, showing the shrub growing from a long, rectangular shape with alternating triangles.

However, at least one is from the Southeast, and available evidence connects it with the Choctaw-speaking communities on Mobile Bay. This hide is from a deer. One of its designs shows the connection that Southeastern Tribes perceived between the Sun and the Sacred Fire, captured by the Choctaw term Luak Hvshthli Itichapa "Fire, the partner of God."

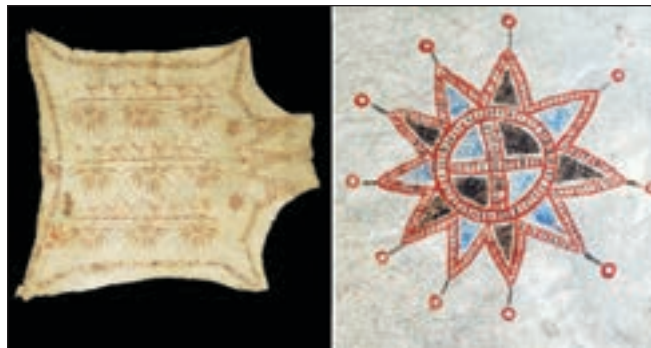
This hide's painted design also features calumets, pipes used in ceremony and alliance-building that had rosettes of eagle feathers hanging from them. An old Choctaw concept is that the sun was God's eye watching the earth. The way that the rosettes of feathers are shown on the hide resembles the rays of the sun, with an eye depicted at the center. Choctaw people traditionally conceived of the sun as God's eye watching the earth. On this painted hide, the depiction of the eye is done in the same way that Choctaw-speaking potters on Mobile Bay depicted the eye on ceramics during the 1600s and early 1700s.

In addition to the calumets, the other main part of the design on this hide consists of birds sitting in greenery. We don't know the meaning of that part of the design, but the way that the greenery is depicted closely matches the design on a Choctaw pipestem dating to the 1700s. We don't know for certain if this painted hide was created by Choctaw artisans, but it certainly has a lot of Choctaw cultural and visual connections. Because of these connections, this hide traveled from France to be on display at the Choctaw Cultural Center for 6 months in 2024. We hope that you got to see it, and that this article provides some more cultural background to that experience.

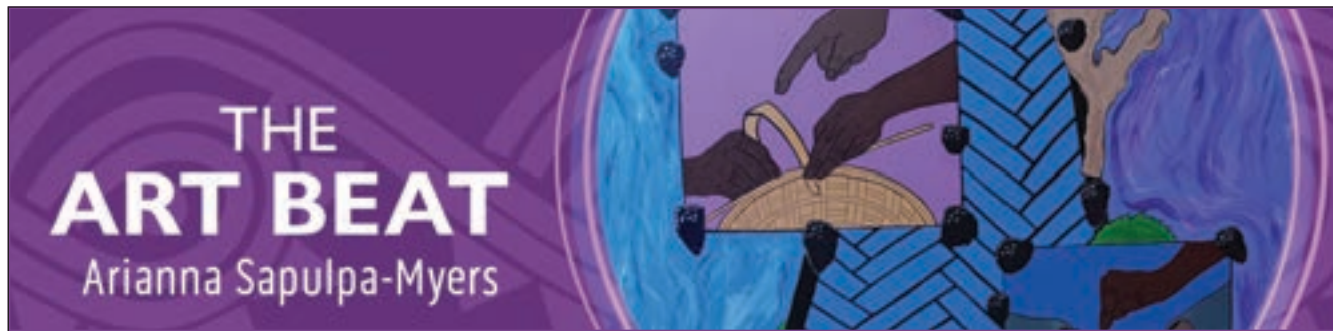
In the coming months, the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department will keep working to make the Branly collection's traditional knowledge more accessible.



Left: A bison bone fleshing tool removes meat from a bison hide. Middle: Marks left on the fresh bison hide by the toothed flesher. Right: Similar marks on a 300-year-old bison robe in the Branly collection.



Left: Painted hide in the collection of the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacque Chirac #71.1934.33.5D. Right: In the Luak Hvshthli Itichapa design, the inner area symbolizes the logs of the Sacred Fire, while the outer area represents sun rays.



By Claire Green Young

At just 20 years old, Arianna Sapulpa-Myers is already making waves in the world of contemporary Native art. A citizen of the Choctaw Nation with Mvskoke Creek and Cherokee heritage, Arianna represents a new generation of artists who are blending traditional teachings with modern creativity. Her work challenges notions that Native art must be solemn or confined to historical forms. Instead, Arianna's vibrant, whimsical style proves that cultural knowledge can be joyful, dynamic, and deeply relevant today.

Her painting "Inheriting Tradition" debuted in the 2023 exhibit "Bok Abaiya: Practiced Hands and the Arts of Choctaw Basketry" at the Choctaw Cultural Center. The exhibit celebrated generations of Choctaw basket makers alongside contemporary artists who draw inspiration from ancestral practices. Arianna's acrylic-on-canvas piece stood out for its bold colors and storytelling.

"This piece was created to depict three generations of Choctaws teaching and learning from each other," Arianna said. "In this piece, there are parts of the mulberry plant incorporated to show some of the items that would be used in traditional basket and textile dyeing. While I was designing this piece, I was reminded that it is my pleasure and responsibility to learn from my elders and pass along our traditions."

That sense of responsibility—and joy—radiates from the canvas, where cultural continuity is portrayed not as a burden but as a shared celebration. The painting was later acquired for the Choctaw Cultural Center's permanent collection, a testament to its significance.

Arianna's artistic journey doesn't stop at the gallery wall. She is also a member of Cedar Sapling, a creative brand launched with her sisters, Aliyah Sapulpa-Myers and Yasmine Del Rosario. Cedar Sapling is more than a business—it's a collaborative space where the sisters combine talents in beadwork, basketry, illustration, regalia, and fashion design. Their mission is rooted in cultural continuity and community care: "Every piece we make carries the knowledge and values taught to us by our elders," the sisters share on their site. From woven corsets and ribbon skirts to jewelry and original paintings, Cedar Sapling celebrates Indigenous design through collaboration and creativity as medicine.

For Arianna, Cedar Sapling offers a platform to expand her artistic voice beyond traditional canvases. Her contributions often explore themes of identity and storytelling, using color and form to honor heritage while embracing innovation. This approach mirrors a broader movement in contemporary Choctaw art—one that values experimentation without losing sight of cultural roots. By creating alongside her sisters, Arianna demonstrates how art can strengthen family bonds and empower Native youth to lead in cultural preservation.

Encouraging artists like Arianna is vital to sustaining Choctaw traditions in a modern world. The Choctaw Nation recognizes this and actively invests in programs that nurture youth creativity.

The Art Ikbi Camp, hosted by the Choctaw Cultural Center, provides hands-on instruction in traditional and contemporary art forms for tribal youth ages 10–18. Led by accomplished Choctaw artists, the camp fosters technical skills and cultural knowledge in a supportive environment. Similarly, the annual Choctaw Art Show introduced a youth category for the first time in 2025, giving emerging artists a platform to showcase their work alongside established creators. These initiatives affirm that Choctaw art is not only about preserving the past—it's about inspiring the future. Programs like these matter because they create pathways for young artists to see themselves as culture bearers.

Arianna's success illustrates what happens when those pathways are supported: a teenager's painting becomes part of a major cultural exhibit, her voice joins a collaborative brand, and her vision helps redefine what Native art can be. Through bold colors and imaginative storytelling, Arianna reminds us that tradition is not static—it is alive, playful, and full of possibility.

As the Choctaw Nation continues to champion youth artistry through camps, exhibitions, and cultural programming, the message is clear: our stories endure when we empower the next generation to tell them. Arianna Sapulpa-Myers is doing just that—painting a future where Choctaw art thrives in every form, from gallery walls to wearable designs. Her work invites us all to celebrate heritage not as something frozen in time, but as something vibrant and evolving, carried forward by practiced hands and creative hearts.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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Chun Language Lesson

**Nanta Katiohmi?**  
*What are they doing?*

**Word Bank**

Nusi - to sleep  
Balili - to run  
Impa - to eat

Tolabli - to jump  
Hochefo - to read  
Nowa - to walk

# McAlester clinic expansion puts patient care first

By Chris Jennings

Ashley Banks had been dealing with severe back pain for two years. Different doctors gave her different diagnoses, some including anxiety and caregiver burnout. Banks said those diagnoses just didn't feel right.

What she found at the Choctaw Nation McAlester Clinic was different. A friend recommended that she visit Dr. Daniel Stacy at the clinic. Banks said Dr. Stacy took the time to listen, ordered thorough blood work and, most importantly, followed up with her, something she says none of her other doctors had done.

Banks' experience shows what can happen when primary care physicians have the time and space to do their jobs without being rushed. That's exactly what the Choctaw Nation's expanded McAlester Clinic is designed to provide.

The McAlester Clinic, which originally opened in 2007, is undergoing significant upgrades. An expansion will more than double the facility's square footage from about 50,000 to more than 100,000 square feet, bringing together services scattered around the McAlester area and, at the same time, introducing state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment.

One of the clinic's most significant upgrades is the new Hologic mammography machine, making it the first Choctaw Nation clinic with the equipment.

The machine offers benefits that go beyond standard mammography. According to Hologic, it provides a clearer, layered view of breast tissue, reducing callbacks by 32%. That means fewer false positives and fewer callbacks for additional testing.

"It's the current gold standard, so we were able to switch over to it," said James Haley, clinic operations director. "We are unique in that we are the first ones to have it," he said.

The clinic has also expanded its diagnostic imaging capabilities. McAlester now has a CT machine, making it the third Choctaw Nation clinic to offer CT scanning. The old building only had one X-ray machine; the expanded clinic now has two. Ultrasound capacity has also doubled, from one to two machines.

But equipment is only part of the story. The same-day clinic now has its own dedicated space, separate from primary care. Before the expansion, same-day services were located within the primary care area.

Now, with dedicated space and three providers, the same-day clinic can operate independently while primary care physicians get more dedicated exam rooms.

Haley stressed what the same-day clinic was not for: "Same-day clinic, it is not an emergency room. It's for coughs, colds, aches, sprains and rashes," Haley said.

Primary care, by contrast, is where patients go for scheduled checkups, management of chronic conditions and



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Nation leadership and McAlester community members gather to celebrate the opening of the clinic expansion.

more complex visits that require time and attention.

This separation matters more than it might seem. When primary care physicians aren't dealing with the demands of the same-day clinic, they have time to notice the details that might be missed in a rushed appointment.

"Previously, they had at most two exam rooms. So now each provider in primary care has three exam rooms to use," Haley said. "This really helps with the flow of seeing patients and getting them in and getting them seen."

That breathing room is exactly what may have helped Dr. Stacy notice something was seriously wrong with Banks. When her blood work came back showing alarmingly high liver enzymes, he called her immediately with instructions.

"He called me immediately, as soon as he got the results and told me that basically, if I turned yellow, or if I started having pain again, I needed to go back to the emergency room," Banks said.

When she did return to the ER showing signs of jaundice, the doctor initially didn't take the concern seriously until her husband insisted that Dr. Stacy had sent her back in.

"Finally, the doctor listened, and he referred me to Fort Smith." At Fort Smith, Banks was diagnosed with a severe gallbladder condition that would require immediate attention. Without Dr. Stacy, Banks said the situation could have been much worse.

"I was very impressed with Dr. Stacy," Banks said. "He was very thorough. He was caring. He was nonjudgmental, and his follow-up was great," Banks said.

The McAlester Clinic has also expanded its provider team. The pediatrics department has grown from three full-time providers and one part-timer to five full-time and one part-timer. Two new mid-level providers were added to the primary care team. And when the remodel is complete,

specialty services will be available right at the clinic.

"We hired a second podiatrist, and we're working on adding orthopedic and cardiology services a couple of days a week here at the clinic," said Haley. "Which will help the patients from having to go to Talihina or Durant for that."

The expansion will also bring patient relations and behavioral health services in-house, consolidating services that are currently spread across separate locations.

According to Haley, the clinic is expected to add 56 new staff members, bringing the total to about 200 employees. The expansion is projected to increase patient visits by 9,000 annually, a potential 65% increase.

For patients like Ashley Banks, the enhanced clinic means better access, better technology and more importantly, better care.

It means doctors have time to listen and make follow-up calls, the kind of attention that can save lives.

The McAlester Clinic expansion demonstrates the Choctaw Nation's commitment to making quality healthcare, including advanced diagnostic technology and specialized treatment, available closer to home for its tribal members.

To schedule an appointment, call 918-423-8440 or use the MyChart app. For more information on other CNHSA services, visit cnhsa.com.

## Natural healing opportunities can be found just about anywhere

By Chris Jennings

For many people, the world of natural medicine is a mystery. Misconceptions surrounding unfamiliar supplements and complicated regimens often put people off. Dr. Carmen Jones, a licensed naturopathic doctor, wants to change that perception, one cup of tea at a time.

"I honestly think the largest barrier is our knowledge," Jones said. "People don't know where to start, or sometimes they start to explore things, and they get a little bit overwhelmed."

According to Jones, she takes a whole-person approach with her patients, examining physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, as well as diet, stress, relationships, and their environment. By taking a big-picture approach to treating her patients, Jones often finds their root causes and sets them on the path to healing.

Jones hears many things about naturopathic medicine. One common misconception is that starting is expensive or intimidating. "I would encourage people to just try teas. They're readily available these days," Jones said.

According to Jones, you don't have to find an exotic tea dealer, either. "You can find them at Walmart, and the companies often market them for what they do."

"[Labels will say] things like digestive aids, or to help with gas and bloating or things for allergies, sleep, stress or energy," Jones said.

Another misconception Jones hears is that teas need to be drunk while they're hot. "A lot of people think herbal tea has to be ingested hot, and that's not true. You can make iced tea out of

any of those teas," she said.

For Jones, those grocery store shelves represent a gateway, a good way to explore herbal medicine.

For those who want to explore beyond the teas, there are more options to consider.

Beyond the tea aisle, Jones points out that the backyard, the porch, or even a windowsill is a great place to grow some of your own food.

Jones encourages people to try growing some of their own food, not just for the health benefits, but because of what's been quietly disappearing from conventionally grown food over the past several decades.

"Some of the availability of micronutrients has changed over the last 40 or 50 years just because of conventional agriculture and farming practices," she said. "Our soil doesn't have the same amount of nutrients in it as it used to."

When soil isn't replenished with minerals, those deficiencies show up in the food we eat and eventually in our bodies.

According to Jones, growing even a small amount of your own food allows you to amend the soil yourself with organic matter and nutrients and recover some of what's been lost.

"Whether that's in a container on your windowsill, potted plants on the back porch or a full-blown garden," said Jones. "I'm always encouraging people to try"

For those without space to grow, farmers markets and working with friends or family who already garden can make a real difference.

Even if you can't grow plants, Jones says there's something that can help,



Photo Provided

Dr. Carmen Jones at her booth at the 2025 Labor Day Festival.

and you likely step over or on it daily.

Many of the plants we call weeds, she says, are among the most medicinally valuable available.

Her personal favorite is yarrow, a plant she learned about as a kid.

"It was one of the first plants I learned as a little girl," recalled Jones. "When you're riding your bike and fall off and scrape your knee, yarrow kind of came to the rescue."

Yarrow has a history of battlefield use due to its natural antibacterial properties. It can help slow bleeding, which can promote faster wound healing. Jones uses it in several of her own products, including a first aid salve.

"It's also great for allergies and bug bites," Jones said.

Jones recommends starting with "Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide" by Rosemary Gladstar or exploring available educational resources at mountainroseherbs.com.

As for the skeptics? Jones welcomes them to the conversation.

"When they experience the healing power of the body, they're often more motivated," Jones said. "In a way, they're easier to work with."

Learn more about Dr. Carmen Jones, Naturopathic Doctor on Facebook and at drcarmenjones.com.

### CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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Open 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday  
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**June 2026**  
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Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation. Participants can request a calendar at their location.

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**MCALESTER** 3244 Afulolta Hina, 918-420-5716  
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June 2	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 3	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 5	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
June 5	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
June 9	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 10	Stigler	By Appointment
June 12	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 16	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 17	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
June 23	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 26	Crowder	By Appointment
June 30	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

**Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday**  
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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

### WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

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

Scan to learn more about the program.



**Choctaw Nation** Health Services

# Bracefully Karleigh: 11-year-old turns scoliosis journey into advocacy

By Christian Sackett

At just 11 years old, Karleigh Miles is turning her health journey into a message of strength, confidence and advocacy. Miles, a Durant, Okla., resident and the current National United Miss Southern Plains Preteen, was diagnosed with scoliosis at age nine. What began as a difficult adjustment quickly became the foundation for her advocacy work. Scoliosis affects nearly 3% of the U.S. population. Although there is no cure, early treatment and consistent care can help manage the condition. For Miles, that meant learning to live with a back brace, something that changed her daily life almost overnight. Simple daily tasks, like sitting comfortably or choosing clothes that made her feel confident, suddenly became challenges. Even getting a good night's sleep required patience and adjustment. "It was really hard at first. Learning to wear my back brace took time because it was uncomfortable, especially when I was trying to sleep," said Miles. Like many children undergoing treatment, she had to adapt both physically and emotionally, navigating not just discomfort but the confidence that can be shaken at such a young age. Still, Miles refused to let those challenges define her. At just 11 years old, she continues to embrace the things she loves, playing Roblox and Minecraft, watching Marvel movies and dreaming of one day opening her own slime bar. Over time, she said, facing these challenges made her stronger. Each adjustment, uncomfortable night and small victory built resilience. So rather than letting her diagnosis define her, Miles used it as a starting point to help others. Her diagnosis inspired the Bracefully Karleigh Scoliosis Awareness Initiative, supporting children on similar journeys. "After my scoliosis diagnosis, I knew I wanted to turn something hard into something that could help others," said Miles. "We created Bracefully Karleigh to help other kids like me navigate their scoliosis journey, feel less alone, and know that they are strong, brave and supported every step of the way." Through her platform, Miles bravely shares her story, connects with other children and advocates for awareness efforts, including Choctaw Nation Goes Green for Scoliosis Awareness.

The initiative encourages Choctaw Nation employees, schools and families to wear green in recognition of National Scoliosis Awareness Day June 29. "When our whole community comes together, it can make a big difference. Even something as simple as wearing green can help a child feel seen, supported and strong, and that's why it matters so much to me." According to scoliosis.org, 1 in 40 children and up to 1 in 3 adults have scoliosis, with many going undiagnosed for years. Health professionals claim that scoliosis often develops during periods of rapid growth, making early detection critical. "Early detection is important because it helps doctors find scoliosis sooner and start treatment early. This can help prevent it from getting worse and may help avoid long-term problems with your spine. It can also possibly reduce the need for surgery later on, which is why getting checked early is so important," said Miles. Miles' advocacy is also shaped by her experiences living with autism and ADHD. "Having ADHD and autism has taught me to never give up, to speak up for myself, and to understand that being different doesn't make me weak, it actually makes me stronger." In addition to raising awareness, Miles creates care bags for children receiving braces at Shriners Children's Hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana. Looking ahead, Miles hopes to expand her efforts beyond her local community by increasing her outreach, involving more schools in early detection efforts, and continuing to support children across the country. She hopes to continue growing her social media presence so she can reach a larger audience and keep making care bags for patients at Shriners Children's Hospital. Karleigh especially wants other kids facing health challenges to feel encouraged and supported. "I want other kids with scoliosis to know that they are brave, strong and seen. It does get easier, and having scoliosis doesn't stop you from making your dreams come true. You are not alone; your family, your community, and people like me are here to support you. We might be bent, but we are not broken." Show your support by wearing green June 29 and sharing photos on social media with #ChoctawNationGoesGreenForScoliosis.



Photo Provided  
Choctaw tribal member Karleigh Miles is the founder of the Bracefully Karleigh Scoliosis Awareness Initiative.

## Colley is veteran of the Month

Donald Colley, District #8, is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Colley was born in 1945 in Artesia, New Mex., but his earliest memories were growing up on his grandmother's Indian allotment land near Grant, Oklahoma. His family moved to Rattan until he was 11 and then relocated to Manhattan Beach, Calif., where he graduated from high school in 1963. Following graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, completed Basic Training in San Diego, Calif., and was then stationed at Mare Island, Vallejo, Calif. for two years. He was assigned to the USS Kearsarge aircraft carrier (CVS-33) for an additional two years. His duties included tracking inventory, preparing legal reports, and documenting inventory for each base to combat black-market activity during the Vietnam era. He traveled with a Lieutenant to various bases, ensuring accurate accounting of equipment and supplies. Colley honorably served through 1969, earning the rank of 3rd Class Petty Officer. His favorite tour of duty was aboard the USS Kearsarge, where he valued the opportunity to travel, including service off the coast of Vietnam. He earned the Good Conduct Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Vietnam), and Sharpshooter Medals. Upon returning to the U.S., he worked as an accountant for Morriss P. Kirk and Son, a lead refinery, and later pursued higher education at Long Beach State College. He went on to teach high school mathematics, including algebra, until his retirement in 2008. Colley expresses deep gratitude for the many contributions his tribe has made to his life and sincerely appreciates the leadership and their continued service to the tribe. 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.



## James is First Language Speaker of the Month

At the May 9, 2026, Choctaw Tribal Council Regular Session Meeting, Donna James from District 8 was recognized as First Choctaw Language Speaker of the Month.

Learn more about Cadwell's recognition by watching the recorded session at [biskinik.com/tag/council-minutes/](https://biskinik.com/tag/council-minutes/).



## Council at Okla Chahta

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (May 2, 2026) — Members of the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council traveled to California during the first weekend of May to attend the annual Okla Chahta Clan Gathering, joining Choctaw tribal members and families in celebrating culture, community and tradition. During the gathering, council members prepared and served a traditional meal for attendees. Special recognition was given to Councilman Eddie Bohanan for transporting food and supplies from Talihina to Bakersfield for the event. Hosted by the Okla Chahta Clan, the annual gathering brings together Choctaw families from across the country to celebrate through traditional dances, games, storytelling and cultural activities. Tribal leaders said the event provided an important opportunity for fellowship and cultural preservation within the California Choctaw community.



Choctaw Nation Photos  
Choctaw Nation Tribal Council members work together to cook and serve a traditional meal to gathering visitors.



## Wheelock Denim Day

GARVIN, Okla.— The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma hosted Wheelock Denim Day 2026 at the Wheelock Academy Historic Site to raise awareness about sexual violence and support survivors through education and community fellowship. The event featured awareness activities and exhibits, encouraging conversations about prevention and support.



Photos by Christian Toews

Visitors gather at the Wheelock Denim Day event for a day of awareness and remembrance of survivors of sexual violence.



The "What Were You Wearing?" exhibit is displayed inside the Wheelock Museum, featuring clothing inspired by victims and their stories of survival.



**PROTECT YOUR HOME AND FAMILY FROM FIRE**

MOST HOME FIRES ARE PREVENTABLE. HERE ARE A FEW SIMPLE STEPS THAT CAN SAVE LIVES.

**TOP WAYS TO PREVENT HOME FIRES**

- Install and maintain smoke alarms
- Never leave cooking unattended
- Keep flammable items away from heat sources
- Check electrical cords for damage
- Blow out candles before leaving a room
- Clean the lint filter in your dryer after every load.

**BE PREPARED, NOT SCARED**

- Create a fire escape plan and practice it with your household.

Choctaw Nation Emergency Management

**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

**BOOM IN THE VALLEY**

DRONE SHOW

Don't miss Choctaw Nation's new and exciting Boom in the Valley Drone Show with at least 400 colorful drones that will light up the beautiful Tvshka Homma night sky. **You won't believe your eyes!**

**Friday, July 3, 2026**  
**Gates open at 5:30 p.m. (show begins at dark)**

TVSHKA HOMMA CAPITOL GROUNDS  
163665 N. 4355 Road, Tuskahoma, OK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

# Choctaw Nation care teams earn national recognition

**DURANT, Okla. (May 6, 2026)** — Four teams from the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority have been honored with the 2024 Director's Award from the Indian Health Service.

The Indian Health Service Director's Awards honor those in Indian Health Service, tribal, and urban Indian health systems whose work advances the agency's mission by expanding care, improving quality and safety, or strengthening health operations.

The following CNHSA teams received national recognition:

- Choctaw Nation Breast Center Team — cited for transforming patient safety through risk recognition, sustained high-reliability practices and innovation as a Center of Excellence.
- Choctaw Health Services Laboratory Team — cited for unified collaboration advancing health within the Choctaw

Nation through coordinated, purpose-driven teamwork and excellence.

- Choctaw Nation Special Diabetes Program for Indians — cited for culturally grounded diabetes prevention and care through the Diabetes Wellness Center and Prevention Program.
- Antlers Community Health Clinic Team — cited for providing innovative, culturally grounded care that expands rural access and builds lasting trust between patients and physicians.

"These teams represent the very best of our mission to serve the Choctaw people," said Todd Hallmark, executive director of CNHSA. "Their dedication to quality care, patient safety and culturally grounded services strengthens the health of our communities and reflects the commitment our associates bring to serving Choctaw Nation every day."



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Nation CNHSA representatives attended the National IHS Awards in Rockville, Maryland. Left to right: Brandy Griffin, Jason Manifold, Tammy Thompson, Kristy Melton, Wendy Brown, Lisa Isaac, Todd Hallmark, Dr. Amanda Chisum-Price, Kayla Price, Renee Robinson, Janet Maddox.

# Choctaw Nation provides summer food benefits to thousands of kids

**DURANT, Okla. (April 29, 2026)** — The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) will once again participate in the 2026 Summer EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) program, helping eligible school-age children access nutritious food during the summer months when school meals are unavailable.

Across Oklahoma, about 403,000 children are expected to qualify for the program. More than one in four school-age children in the state, about 223,890, experience food insecurity.

Children, regardless of whether they are members of a tribal nation, will be automatically enrolled in the program if they attend a participating school district within the Choctaw Nation reservation, are enrolled in prekindergarten through 12th grade and receive free or reduced-price meals at school.

Families whose children do not meet those criteria may apply online at Healthy Together.

Eligible families will receive a one-time \$120 EBT benefit per child to purchase approved healthy food items at participating grocery stores. Benefits help families buy nutritious foods similar to those approved under the WIC food list and are intended to support children during May, June and July. Families may call 580-916-9239 to confirm enrollment or ask questions about the program.



Adobe Stock Image

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Summer EBT program provides \$120 in food assistance for each eligible child during the summer.

"Making sure our children have access to healthy food is essential to their growth, their education and their future," said CNO Chief Gary Batton. "Programs like Summer EBT help ensure that when school is out, our children and families still have the support they need to stay healthy and strong."

"Many children rely on school meals during the school year," said Shelly Rector, USDA Food and Nutrition manager for CNO. "Summer EBT helps bridge that gap by giving families resources to continue providing healthy, balanced meals while school is not in session."

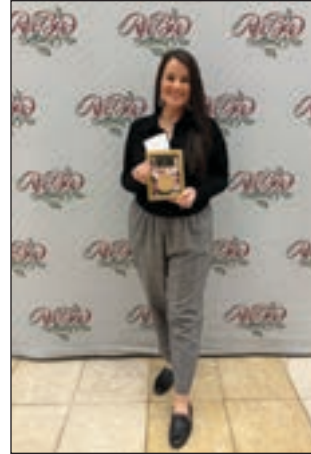
Summer EBT programs are available statewide. Families outside the Choctaw Nation reservation can learn more about eligibility and enrollment at oksebt.org.

# Cultural Center receives recognition for 2025 Choctaw-Irish Festival

**DURANT, Okla.** — The Choctaw Cultural Center received the Merit Award for Outstanding Event at the Oklahoma Conference on Tourism Redbud Awards for the 2025 Choctaw-Irish Friendship Festival.

The annual festival celebrates the enduring connection between the Choctaw and Irish people through culture, demonstrations, music, food and community. Organizers thanked all who helped make the event a meaningful experience for guests and the community.

Pictured is Cheyehoma Dugger, director of development and membership.



**QUILT SHOW INFORMATION**

The 2026 Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival Quilt Show will be held Sept. 4-6 at the Tvshka Homma Council Grounds. Quilt entries will be accepted Friday, Sept. 4, from noon to 5 p.m. with judging that evening. Ribbons will be awarded Saturday, including a People's Choice award, and entries may be picked up at 5 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 6. For more information, call 580-642-8011.

**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 ◆

**June (Chun) 2026**

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

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