



July 2026 Issue



Trail of Tears memorial events honor Choctaw ancestors

By Kellie Matherly

From the Capitol Grounds at Tvshkahomma to roughly 500 miles of roads stretching between Mississippi and Oklahoma, members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma spent time in May honoring the resilience of their ancestors.

Both events remember the forced removal of the Choctaw people from their homelands following the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Thousands died from disease, starvation, exposure and violence during the journey to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

Trail of Tears Walk

Nearly 700 people gathered at Tvshkahomma on May 16 for the annual Trail of Tears Walk. This year's walk featured a new route with Choctaw hymn singers stationed along the path.

Irish Consul General Robert Hull joined the pre-walk ceremony to commemorate the 179-year friendship between the Choctaw and Irish peoples.

During the ceremony, Chief Gary Batton presented Hull with a framed print of Jane Semple Umstead's painting "Irish Gift." Hull also joined the walk, alongside Chief Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

The walk coincided with the Irish remembrance of the Great Famine of 1847, when the potato crop failed, and many were starving. Having just endured their own forced removal from their homelands, the Choctaw people sympathized with the Irish and gathered \$170 (approximately \$5,900 today) for the relief fund. The two nations have been close ever since.

In his speech, Chief Batton spoke of the resilience of the Choctaw people, past and present. "We live in a strong, sovereign nation because of their strength and sacrifices made from that horrible journey," Batton said. "May we never forget the legacy that they set and may we bring honor to them every day by striving to live out the vision and prayers that they had for our people."

Trail of Tears Bike Ride

While participants gathered at Tvshkahomma, the Choctaw Nation Trail of Tears Bike Team was beginning its own 500-mile journey of remembrance hundreds of miles away.

The team departed Tupelo on May 16 and traveled much of the same route Choctaw ancestors followed during removal. Along the weeklong ride, cyclists stopped at sites significant to Choctaw history, including Creek Village, where deep ravines and embankments remain

visible from the thousands of people who once traveled the route on foot.

On May 22, the team of 11 riders arrived at Choctaw Nation Headquarters in Durant, where supporters welcomed them with signs and cheers.

The ride is grueling and sometimes dangerous. During the journey, Jana Pisachubbee-Boykin broke bones in her hand and wrist, and Teresa Eagleroad suffered from heat exhaustion. However, the riders accepted the challenge to continue in honor of their ancestors.

"We want to take a look back at what they went through and what they had to endure," Pisachubbee-Boykin said. "Even though we were on bicycles, and they were on foot, we still feel a challenge set for us."

Eagleroad echoed that sentiment, saying, "It was an experience for me to follow in their steps and be able to see the culture that I never knew was out there."

Follow the Choctaw Nation Trail of Tears Bike Team on Facebook for more info on the ride.

The History

Both the walk and ride commemorate one of the most significant events in Choctaw history. Until 1830, the Choctaw people occupied a vast area of land, spanning from modern-day Mississippi to Alabama. As the United States pushed its own boundaries westward, President Andrew Jackson and Congress instituted the Indian Removal Act, which drove thousands of Native Americans to relocate from their ancestral homelands to the newly formed Indian Territory in modern-day Oklahoma.

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, signed under coercion on September 27, 1830, forced the Choctaw Nation to cede the last of its remaining lands to the United States.

The journey was brutal, and the Choctaw people alone lost about a quarter of their population to starvation, exposure, illness and violence along the way. Other tribes suffered equally devastating losses. Over the next 70 years, several removals took place in waves, the final one being in 1903, when a final group was sent by train to Atoka, Okla.

Chief Batton sees the Trail of Tears as one of the most important moments in tribal history and often credits the resilience and ingenuity of Choctaw ancestors for setting up the Nation's success today.

"A story of love, a story of strength, perseverance, endurance—all those types of things," said Batton. "It's a wonderful story. It's not a sad story. Yes, we went through trials and tribulations but look at what the Choctaw Nation has become today."

For more information on the Trail of Tears, visit choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/.

Memories of the Past

For years, Choctaw tribal members have honored the strength and resilience of their ancestors through the Trail of Tears Walk and Bike Ride. Here's a look back at a few moments from past journeys.

Continue the journey at Biskinik.com with exclusive content from past and present Trail of Tears events.



Pictured is the first official Choctaw Nation Trail of Tears Bike Team in 2012.



The Choctaw Nation Trail of Tears Bike team during the final miles of their 2015 ride.



Choctaw Nation Photos Pictured are members of the 2025 Choctaw Nation Trail of Tears Bike Team.



In 2007, future Choctaw Chief Gary Batton walked with other participants during the Trail of Tears Walk.



Ernest Hooser participated in the 2011 Trail of Tears Walk at age 93.



Chief Pyle with Delia and Williston Wesley at the 2001 Walk. Delia's father, Ben Carterby, was a Choctaw Code Talker.



The 2021 Trail of Tears Walk was one of the first events Choctaw was able to host after the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Choctaw Honor Guard, then known as the Color Guard, led the way during the 2006 walk.



Participants walk past Rock Church in 2007. The Trail of Tears walk used to be held at Wheelock Academy.



Pictured are Virginia Rutledge, Sarah Belvin and Ima Holden at the 2002 Trail of Tears Walk.

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Importance of new plant guide

It's the time of year when many of us spent lots of time outside in our garden growing fruits and vegetables while adding beauty to the Reservation with flowers and plants displayed for us and our neighbors to enjoy.

Each summer, as I drive across the Reservation, I often wonder about the plants' meaning and tradition from a Choctaw Nation perspective. Did our ancestors grow a particular plant? What is the Choctaw Language word for a plant? Well, I'm thrilled to tell you we now have a new resource that can answer our botany and agriculture-related questions through a Choctaw Nation lens. The new Choctaw Nation publication called, "Culturally Significant Plants of the Choctaw Nation Reservation" is a community resource that combines a plant field guide with cultural knowledge and the Choctaw language to help community members identify and learn about plants that hold traditional importance.

The author of the guide, Choctaw Nation Environmental Coordinator Jamie L. Smith, took two years to painstakingly locate, photograph plants during the growing season while writing the guide during the dormant season.

"I used a variety of sources including some ethnobotanical publications which date back to the early 1900s as well as herbarium records from the 1850s," Smith said. "Dr. Ian Thompson's Choctaw Food books (and Dr. Thompson himself) are referenced quite a bit throughout the book as well. Our language department was also very helpful in ensuring the Choctaw words were correct and accurate."

Smith said that while researching the project she was surprised by the many documented uses that our Chahta ancestors used the plants for. She said it was interesting to see how many ailments were said to be relieved or cured by some of the plants. It made her curious to know how those would compare to modern medicine.

"I have a biased opinion of this, but I feel the plants are extremely important to our cultural lifeways," Smith said. "Having this information is, in a way, like holding on to a connection with our ancestors and is something we can pass on to future generations."

Smith said since the guide has been released, she's had conversations with many people who say they are trying to learn to forage for sustenance or medicines, and they've used her guide to grow that skill. From an ecological perspective, Smith is hopeful the readers will become better at plant identification and lean into the native plant movement that is slowly spreading into our area.

"Culturally Significant Plants of the Choctaw Nation Reservation" features native plants found across the reservation. The guide offers tips when harvesting or foraging in wild areas, take care to leave more plants than you pick. This helps make sure the plants continue to thrive. Copies of the field guide can be found at select Community Centers and at Choctaw Nation and community-hosted in-person events. Look for them at upcoming events or request your digital copy. The guide can also be accessed online.

It is fascinating to me all the wild grasses, herbs and plant life that our ancestral Chahta used for food, medicine and weaving. Learning more about our ancestors and what our tribe used to thrive is an interesting read and a good chance to get out into nature, exercise and learn more about the world around us. Pick up a copy today, get out there and start identifying plants that built our tribe.

Yakoke and God Bless!



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Mind the Work

Nehemiah 4:6, "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work."

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia. He had learned of Jerusalem's walls being in ruins. Being deeply grieved upon hearing this, he fasted and prayed for guidance. Being led in answer to prayer, he recognized the importance of rebuilding the walls for protection and security. Jerusalem's walls and gates lay in ruins after the Babylonian exile, leaving the city vulnerable, and the residents demoralized.

Nehemiah received permission from King Artaxerxes to go and reconstruct the ruins. His calling was to combine practical reconstruction with spiritual leadership through prayer while recruiting communal effort. With any effort of construction, there is opposition from without.

No sooner did the news of this reconstruction project become known than the enemies of God's people reacted.

First, they opposed Nehemiah and his workers through ridicule. Next, they mocked the work being done. These were Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and Tobiah, the governor of the Ammonites. Finally, these officials of the Gentile nations tried to stage a conspiracy.

There are always enemies, but God always delivers. There are always oppositions from without, and there are always oppositions from within. Nehemiah's workers began to complain. They were tired physically, had psychological fear of the enemy, wanted to return to their farms, and suffered financial loss.

Ministries in modern times face the same opposition that Nehemiah faced. In today's ministries or workplace, there are people who are constructionists, helping to get the job done. Others are destructionists, busy tearing down. A third group is made up of obstructionists who create problems for the people doing the work. Nehemiah committed his problems to the Lord, faced the issues, and emerged victorious. Work is a curse. Genesis 3:17-19 describes the curse placed upon man for disobedience. By nature, mankind resists labor. Jesus came to show the essentiality of work.

Jesus said in John 4:34, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. God started the work of redemption in Genesis 3:21, and Jesus finished this work by shedding his blood on the cross as the Lamb of God to take away our sin.

In John 9:30, He said, "It is finished." A mind to work is a decision made to follow the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:16, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Jordan Grotts

Warmer temperatures in the summer bring exciting times for outdoor fun that many have looked forward to since the longer nights of winter. With the end of another successful turkey season, we encourage everyone to remain safe during their summer adventures. One of the most popular ways to cool off during this time of year includes fishing and swimming in beautiful locations such as Broken Bow Lake, McGee Creek, Sardis Lake, and the many streams that flow in times of abundant rain. It is important to be prepared for these activities to ensure the safety of you and your loved ones.

By being prepared for wherever your outdoor adventure takes you, you can lessen the chances of life-threatening conditions such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, dehydration, severe burns from UV rays and venomous snake bites. Preparation starts with wearing proper clothing for the conditions, bringing sun protection, and carrying more than enough water for everyone in your group. A combination of light-colored, loose-fitting clothing, a hat and sunscreen provides protection from the sun's harmful rays.

Summer is also a time when encounters with snakes become more common. While most snakes found in Oklahoma are nonvenomous and play an important role in controlling rodents and other pests, it is important to give all snakes plenty of space. Venomous snakes that can be encountered in the reservation include copperheads, cottonmouths, timber rattlesnakes, western diamondback rattlesnakes and pygmy rattlesnakes. Rattlesnakes can often be identified by the rattle at the end of the tail, while copperheads and cottonmouths lack the rattles but may shake their tail amongst leaves to deter predators. If you encounter a snake, do not attempt to handle, kill or relocate it. Instead, slowly back away and allow the animal an escape route. Wearing boots and watching where you place your hands and feet around rocks, logs and brush piles can greatly reduce the risk of a snakebite.

A little preparation will go a long way toward ensuring a safe and enjoyable outing. Let someone know where you plan to be, carry a basic first-aid kit and keep a charged phone available for emergencies. By taking a few precautions, we hope you can enjoy the outdoors safely while waiting for fall hunting seasons to return.

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Celebrating the Fourth of July

We are in the thick of summer now, and that means outdoor activities and Fourth of July celebrations across the reservation. The Choctaw Nation will have its annual Boom in the Valley Show this year, but with a twist.

The Choctaw Nation will present a drone show for the annual Independence Day celebration, marking the nation's 250th birthday. Join us in Tvshka Homma on July 3 for Choctaw's first drone show as hundreds of colorful drones light up the night sky.

Grab your lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy an evening of family fun featuring food vendors, games, and activities for all ages. Gates open at 5:30 p.m. and the show begins at dark.

The Choctaw Cultural Center will host its July Fourth Celebration on July 4, featuring activities for all ages, including a coloring contest and Choctaw trivia. Admission is \$25 per vehicle.

The evening will end with a fireworks show. Champuli Cafe will offer concessions, and the Hvshi Gift Store will be open late.

Several Choctaw Casinos & Resorts will host fireworks shows and Independence Day celebrations this year. A full list of events is below:

Choctaw Casino & Resort – Grant

- Fireworks show at dusk on July 2.
- A pool party at The Cove will be held from 2 to 6 p.m. July 4.

Choctaw Casino – Idabel

- Fireworks show at dusk on July 2.
- The Stars & Stripes Independence Day Celebration will be held from 5 to 10 p.m. July 2. The outdoor event will feature food trucks, vendors, children's activities and free live entertainment by the Todd Freeman Band.

Choctaw Casino – Stringtown

- Fireworks show at 9:30 p.m. July 2.
- Outdoor food vendors will open at 6 p.m., followed by live entertainment from Jenna Peberworth and Shannon Raines beginning at 7 p.m.

Choctaw Landing

- Fireworks show at dusk on July 3.
- DJ Derrick will host pool parties from 2 to 7 p.m. July 3-5.
- Free live entertainment will be offered on Cypress Lawn from 8:30 to 11:30 p.m. July 4, featuring Lane Bricker.

Choctaw Casino & Resort – Durant

- Fireworks show at dusk on July 4. The display will be synchronized with a broadcast on KLBC radio.
- Hotel guests can attend a watch party at OASIS from 8:30 to 11:30 p.m. Children are welcome during watch party hours.

Fireworks safety is a top priority for the Choctaw Nation, and trained professionals are on hand to set off any pyrotechnics at CNO-hosted events. Do not bring your own fireworks to these shows, as it is strictly prohibited. I am hoping to see a lot of attendance at these shows this year! I am particularly excited to see how these drones work to enhance your Fourth of July celebrations. Drone shows are being held across the world, and it will be great to see how this show will tell the story of the Choctaw Nation and the birth of the United States.

The Choctaw Nation's Emerging Aviation Technology Center has allowed the tribe entrance into the drone technology field with the opening of the unmanned drone center near Daisy, Okla. For more information on this program, check out cnoaa.com.

I hope that you will spend your Independence Day with the Choctaw Nation. Have a safe and happy celebration. I hope you can spend quality time with your family and enjoy this Fourth of July!

Yakoke and God Bless!

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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority



Jess Henry

District 4

Halito,
I hope everyone is enjoying their summer! We have had several exciting events and accomplishments to celebrate in District 4.
First, congratulations to our District 4 princesses who were crowned in April. We are proud to recognize Little Miss Breanna Ray, Junior Miss Tenley Reece and Senior Miss Shelby Reece.
Thank you for representing District 4. We appreciate your willingness to serve and look forward to your reign throughout the coming year.
We would also like to extend our congratulations to tribal member Ed Wilson, Superintendent of Heavener Public Schools, for being named Superintendent of the

Year. This is a tremendous achievement and we are proud to celebrate his success and dedication to education.

Another exciting milestone for District 4 was the ribbon cutting for 20 new LEAP (lease-to-purchase) homes. It is always a joy to see families move into their new homes and begin a new chapter. Seeing these homes completed and occupied was truly a proud Choctaw moment.

On May 8, we celebrated the ribbon cutting of the new Dale Cox Community Center. Mr. Cox, a former District 4 Councilman, dedicated many years of service to our community, making this occasion especially meaningful for both District 4 and his family. We were blessed with a wonderful turnout, filled with great conversation, community spirit, and a shared meal. It was a memorable day as we honored his legacy and celebrated this new gathering place for our community.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support and strengthen District 4. I hope you all have a safe and enjoyable summer, and I look forward to seeing you at future events. Yakoke!



District 4 members cut the ribbon on the new Dale Cox Community Center.



Council member Jess Henry poses with the newly crowned District 4 princesses.



District 4 members cut the ribbon on 20 new LEAP homes on April 23.

Cotton is CNO June Veteran of the Month

James Wayne Cotton of District 9 is the Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Cotton was born in Britton, Oklahoma, a small town north of Oklahoma City. He graduated from Northeast High School in 1965 and attended Oklahoma State University for one semester, paying his own way. While attending Oklahoma State, he served in the Air Force ROTC before transferring to the Navy Reserve. He drilled with the Navy Reserve in Oklahoma City and attended Central State College for another semester before entering active duty in October 1966. He joined the military because of his family's strong history of service and his deep sense of patriotism.

Cotton attended basic training in San Diego before being assigned to Andrews Air Force Base near Washington, D.C. He received extensive electronics training and specialized instruction in top-secret navigation and communication systems. When he left the military in December 1969, he held the rank of second-class petty officer (ATN2). Washington, D.C., was his favorite duty station because of the city's rich history and cultural significance.

He continued serving in the reserves, drilling in Dallas for the next several years. He then returned to the University of Oklahoma, where he studied electrical engineering. In 1972, he joined the IBEW electrician apprenticeship program, completing the training and becoming a journeyman electrician. He later worked for Osburn Electric in Oklahoma City.

Cotton transferred to Shaver and Sons Electric, where he managed the Braum's Ice Cream account and numerous other customers.

In 1985, he established his own business, Elec-



tro/Mech Service and Supply, which he sold in 1990. He then worked as an electrical contractor for the state of Oklahoma and became responsible for managing state-owned buildings. In 1994, he returned to school to complete his degree and earned credentials in robotic process automation. He later managed a building management agency and worked for the state of Oklahoma and Hertz Rentals before returning to Tinker Air Force Base. He then joined Canadian Valley Technology Center as an electrical engineering instructor, where he worked until his retirement in 2011. After retiring, he relocated to Durant and became involved with Choctaw Nation senior citizen programs.

In 1966, he married his wife, Chris. They have two sons, Jeffrey and James, and are the proud grandparents of eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Cotton expressed sincere gratitude to the Choctaw Nation, District 9, Ted Dosh and James Dry, whose support and encouragement contributed greatly to a successful retirement. He is deeply proud of his heritage and grateful for the opportunity to have been raised within it and enriched by it.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma holds its veterans in the highest esteem and appreciates their sacrifices and contributions to preserving the freedoms and way of life we hold dear.



Eddie Bohanan

District 3

Halito!
I hope everyone is having a wonderful summer and enjoying the sunshine. It has been a busy and rewarding season here in District 3, filled with opportunities to celebrate accomplishments, honor our elders and veterans, and spend time with our communities.

The past few months have given us many reasons to be grateful, and I am excited to share a few highlights.

The month of May was filled with community gatherings and celebrations. The District 3 Talihina and Smithville Seniors each hosted successful fundraisers that brought community members together in support of local senior programs. The Talihina fundraiser featured Indian Tacos while the Smithville fundraiser included a gospel singing. There is something special about hearing people of all ages come together to share their voices through Choctaw hymns, and it was wonderful to see such strong community participation.

May also brought exciting opportunities to recognize the achievements of tribal members. I had the privilege of congratulating Kody Ward and Retha Devine on their permanent employment with the Choctaw Nation. Both accepted cook positions at the Talihina Senior Nutrition. Their dedication and hard work have led them to this accomplishment, and I am proud of their success.

As the month came to a close, we gathered to celebrate the mothers and fathers who play such an important role in our families and communities. Mother's and Father's Day luncheons were held in both Talihina and Smithville, providing an opportunity to recognize and thank the parents, grandparents, and caregivers whose guidance, support, and love help strengthen our communities every day.

June has been a month of appreciation, growth and new beginnings. One of the highlights of the month was hosting Elder Veterans Appreciation Lunches in both Talihina and Smithville. These gatherings provided an opportunity to recognize the men and women who have faithfully served our nation. We are grateful for their courage, sacrifice and commitment to protecting the freedoms we enjoy today.

During June, Chief, Assistant Chief, and I also had the pleasure of visiting Helen Caldwell of Octavia, OK. Helen and her loved ones shared stories about their family history and their journey to Octavia. It was a memorable evening filled with fellowship, laughter, and valuable stories that help preserve our Choctaw heritage.

Another milestone this month was the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Choctaw Nation Talihina Community Clinic. For 15 years, the clinic has provided quality healthcare services while helping build a healthier future for our communities. Yakoke to the dedicated staff who work every day to ensure both tribal and non-tribal patients receive exceptional care. The clinic recently expanded and relocated to its new facility at 818 Dallas Street, Talihina, OK. This investment reflects the Choctaw Nation's ongoing commitment to meeting the healthcare needs of our people and strengthening services for future generations.

The All-Star Team, Tvshka Homma Himitta, will soon compete in the World Series of Stickball in Choctaw, Mississippi. I am excited to see how far this talented team will go and proud of the dedication each player has shown throughout the season.

I would especially like to recognize the players who were picked from District 3 to represent the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: Parker Fincher, Carmen Garcia, Gianna Ruiz, Hunter Johnson, Jaycob Crank, Kelton Samuels, and Tomi Ludlow. Congratulations on this accomplishment, and best of luck as you represent your communities on the world stage.

I am excited to announce that I will be transitioning into a new office space in downtown Talihina, to offer easier access for tribal members to find me. I am excited about what this change will bring for our tribal members and community. I am in the process of lining everything out so we can officially open, but be on the lookout on my Facebook page for an official opening date!

As we celebrate the Fourth of July and enjoy the remainder of the summer, I hope everyone stays safe and enjoys time with family and friends. Yakoke for your continued support and for helping strengthen District 3 and the Choctaw Nation. Working together, we continue to build stronger communities and a brighter future for generations to come.

Those are all the updates from District 3. Chi Pisa La Chike!
Yakoke, District 3 Councilman Eddie Bohanan



Choctaw leadership visits 96-year-old Helen Pittman and her family.



District 3 helps celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Talihina Community Clinic.

CNOSH offers safety education courses

DURANT, Okla. –Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Occupational Safety & Health (CNOSH) is partnering with the Choctaw Small Business Development (CSBD) Program to cover the costs of participation in Safety Education courses for Choctaw tribal member-owned businesses within the reservation.

This partnership will provide access to OSHA 10-Hour Construction Safety Education Course and CPR/First Aid training courses led by certified CNOSH instructors.

These courses are designed to:

- Strengthen safety awareness (for the Construction Industry)
- Enhance workforce readiness
- Support the long-term success of tribal contractors and community members working in or pursuing construction-related careers



Classes are limited to 20 participants per session. Pre-registration is open until the day classes start or the maximum number of participants is reached.

The first training sessions will be in McAlester at 301 Kiamichi Dr. McAlester, OK on July 13 and July 20 from 8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Additional locations and sessions to be announced soon.

More information about these trainings can be found at choctawnation.com/services.

Haag is June First Language Speaker of the Month

Marie Haag was honored as the May 2026 Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma First Language Speaker of the Month during the June 13 Choctaw Tribal Council Meeting.

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



COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA June 13, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTES
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session May 9, 2026
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #9 – Wayne Cotton
 - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #9 – Marie Haag
6. COMMITTEE REPORTS
7. PUBLIC COMMENTS
 - a. Faith Parra – Individual Speaker – Citizen Concerns Update
 - b. Nellie Meashintubby – Individual Speaker – Protecting our Resources for the Next 7 Generations
8. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Approve the Sale of HVA Equipment
 - b. Amend the Choctaw Nation Membership Act and Establish and Formally Designate the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Enrollment Registry as Official Governmental Record of Tribal Membership
 - c. Approve Application to the Indian Health Service Community Health Aide Program: Tribal Planning and Implementation (CHAP-TPI)
 - d. Approve the 2026 Youth Draw Hunt Opportunities
 - e. Approve the Native American Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA) Indian Housing Plan (IHP) for Year FY27
 - f. Approve Application to the Department of Energy Unleashing Tribal Energy Development Grant (Topic Area 2)
 - g. Amend CB-33-26 (Pipeline Easement)
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

The Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers tribal elders the opportunity to reside in independent living communities designed for seniors 55 and older who are capable of living on their own. These residential communities offer a safe, comfortable environment where tenants can maintain their independence as long as they choose and are able.

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

Eligibility requirements for the Independent Elder Housing program are:

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

Independent Elder Housing is currently offered at the following locations:

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

Elder Appreciation Day 2026

By Christian Toews

The Choctaw Nation held its 41st annual Elder Appreciation Day in May at the Choctaw Event Center in Durant, Okla. The event brought elders from across the reservation and beyond to enjoy fellowship, entertainment and recognition.

The long-standing event highlights the importance of elders in keeping Choctaw traditions, language and values alive for future generations.

Participants enjoyed a regalia parade, with a prize awarded for most traditional regalia, along with a name tag contest, a Choctaw hymn-singing contest and chair volleyball.

The gathering is more than a celebration. It gives elders a chance to reconnect with friends, learn about programs and find resources that support healthy, active living. Program representatives answered questions and shared information about health, nutrition and community services offered by the Choctaw Nation.

"It was a wonderful day filled with laughter, fellowship and time together," said Chief Gary Batton in a social media post. "Yakoke to everyone who came out and to all of our associates whose hard work helped make this such a special day for our wonderful elders. Your dedication and care are deeply appreciated."



Choctaw Nation Photos

Winners of the 2026 Elder Appreciation Day fashion show, name tag contest and singing contest are pictured. The contests give elders from all 12 districts a chance to earn plaques and bragging rights in friendly competition.



Photos by Christian Toews

The Choctaw Nation honored its elders at the annual Elder Appreciation Day on May 20. Elders from across the Choctaw Nation Reservation gathered at the Choctaw Event Center in Durant for a day of fun, food and fellowship.



Destaney Demmings, left, Kirra Gooden, center, and Council Member Tony Ward, right, were among the volunteers serving meals at Elder Appreciation Day.



Chief Gary Batton poses for a photo with a few Elder Appreciation Day attendees.



Woodrow Johnson, Michael Scott and Mathew Scott pose for a photo at the event.

Inside the Biskinik: Answers to readers' most common questions

By Kendra Germany-Wall

For nearly 50 years, the Choctaw Nation's Biskinik has served as the voice of the Chahta people.

First published in 1978, the monthly newspaper connects tribal members through news, cultural preservation, community updates and stories of achievement.

But did you know there is much more to the Biskinik than meets the eye?

The "Little News Bird"

The name Biskinik comes from the Choctaw word for the yellow-bellied sapsucker, a type of woodpecker, often called the "little news bird." According to Choctaw tradition, the biskinik alerted the Choctaw people to approaching visitors, danger and opportunities by tapping messages on trees. Today, the newspaper continues that tradition by delivering news to Choctaw tribal members around the world.

A Small Correction with a Big Meaning

For more than 30 years, the newspaper was known as the Bishinik. In 2010, research conducted by the Choctaw Nation Language Department revealed that the original Choctaw spelling should be Biskinik.

As part of ongoing language revitalization efforts, Tribal Council unanimously approved legislation restoring the correct spelling. Beginning with the August 2010 issue, the newspaper officially became the Biskinik once again.

The change involved just one letter, but it represented the Nation's commitment to preserving and accurately reflecting the Choctaw language and culture. If you've ever wondered how to say it, the pronunciation is simple: BIS-KIN-ICK.

By the Numbers

The Biskinik is mailed to about 70,000 households worldwide each month. Each issue is produced by a dedicated staff of six. Printing is handled through a partnership with Stigler Printing in Stigler, Oklahoma, and copies are hand-labeled and shipped by the Choctaw Nation's small but mighty circulation staff. This process keeps jobs and any generated revenue within the Choctaw Nation reservation.

More Than a Newspaper

In March 2025, the Biskinik launched a redesigned website, giving readers even more ways to stay connected. At biskinik.com, visitors can browse current and past issues, read breaking news, explore Choctaw history through Iti Fabvssa and submit content. Past issues dating back to 2001 are available on the website, helping preserve the voices, accomplishments and memories of the Choctaw people.

Whether in print or online, the Biskinik continues the work of the "little news bird," sharing the stories, accomplishments and history of the Choctaw people, one issue at a time.

How to Share Your News with the Biskinik

The Biskinik has long served as a place where Choctaw tribal members can celebrate achievements, share milestones, announce community events and connect with fellow Chahta across the country.

One of the most common questions the Biskinik staff receives is, "How do I submit something for publication?"

The good news is that submitting content is free and easy.

Tribal members may submit event announcements, letters, thank-you notes, "People You Know" announcements and story ideas for consideration.

All submissions require membership verification. Submitters must include the featured person's first and last name and date of birth.

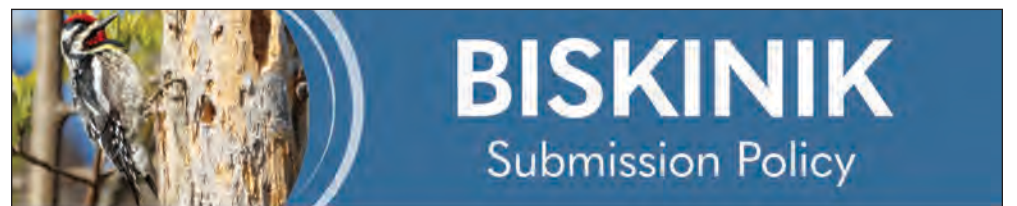
With more than 225,000 members and 12,000 associates, the Choctaw Nation is the third-largest tribe in the United States.

Due to the Tribe's size, the Biskinik receives many submissions each month. High demand means staff must follow strict publication guidelines.

All submissions are reviewed and published on a first-received, first-run basis as space allows.

Each month, Biskinik staff receive stories about achievements, family history and community connections. When you share a milestone, event or story idea, you help keep Choctaw communities informed and connected—just like the "little news bird."

For complete guidelines and submission forms, visit biskinik.com and click the "SUBMIT" button in the top right corner of the homepage.



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 the high volume of submissions.

Submissions

Submissions may be sent via:

Online: biskinik.com/biskinik-submission-guidelines

Email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

Mail: Biskinik, P.O. Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702 (if submitting by mail, please provide your name and contact information in the event we have questions)

The best way to send is via the online submission form. If sending by email or physical mail, you must supply the first name last name and date of birth of the subject of the submission to help with membership confirmation.

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). If possible, please send any announcements in advance.

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.

REGISTERED
CHOCTAW ARTISTS

IS YOUR INFORMATION
ACCURATE IN CHAHTA ACHVFFA?

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

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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PLACE BID AT:
CHOCTA.WS/HUNTING-LEASE-AUCTION

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

There's something for you here.

Choctaw CAREERS

Apply at Careers.ChoctawNation.com

Upcoming Events

Health Fair – Spiro | July 1 | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Spiro Community Center | 19400 Aes Rd Spiro, OK 74959 | 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.

Independence Day Tribal Holiday | July 3 | All Day | Tribal Offices | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday to celebrate Independence Day.

Boom in the Valley | July 3 | 6:30 p.m. | Tvshka Homma Capitol Grounds | Council House Rd Tuskahoma, OK 74574 | Experience Choctaw Country's new holiday drone show as 400 colorful drones light up the Tvshka Homma night sky. Bring lawn chairs or blankets for a family-friendly evening. Event begins at 6:30 p.m.; gates open at 5:30 p.m. The drone show starts at dark.

Health Fair – Stigler | July 15 | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Stigler Community Center | 2208 E Main St Stigler, OK 74462 | 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.

Cinema at the Center: A Goofy Movie | July 18 | 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. | Choctaw Cultural Center | 1919 Hina Hanta Way Calera, OK 74730 | Grab your snacks and join us as we hit the road with Goofy and Max for the ultimate father-son adventure! The movie starts at 1 p.m. Admission to watch the movie is complimentary to all.

Community Health Nursing Kids Wellness Fair | July 23 | 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. | Choctaw Nation Youth Center | 13835 SE 202 Road Talihina, OK 74571 | The Choctaw Nation Community Health Nursing Department is hosting a healthy lifestyles event for children ages 3-18. Health experts and partners will provide demos, booths, and activities for kids to make learning about health fun. All children are welcome. Families are invited to attend and access resources.


Jarid Taylor Memorial Run | July 25 | 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. | First Texoma National Bank Parking Lot | N. 2nd Ave and Evergreen Durant, OK 74701 | Join us for a 5K and 1-mile fun run honoring fallen Bryan County Sheriff's Deputy Jarid Taylor. Register or cancel by noon, July 8. Packet pickup is at 7 a.m.; races start at 8 a.m.

Health Fair – Talihina | July 29 | 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Talihina Community Center | 100 Railroad St Talihina, OK 74571 | 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 – Austin | July 30 | 6 p.m. | Austin Marriott South | 4415 S I-35 Frontage Rd Austin, TX 787442 | Come join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in the Austin 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 – Allen | August 1 | 2 p.m. | Courtyard by Marriott Dallas Allen at Allen Event Center | 210 E Stacy Rd Allen, TX 75002 | Come join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in the Allen 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.

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



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




CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS
 APPLY AUGUST 1 - OCTOBER 1



Scan to learn more about the program.

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

Scan the QR code for more information

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.

Staff:
 Shauna Williams, Executive Director
 Kristina Humenesky, Senior Director
 Kellie Matherly, Content Development Director
 Kendra Germany-Wall, Editor
 Chris Jennings, Senior Reporter
 Christian Toews, Senior Reporter
 Christian Chaney-Sackett, Contributing Reporter
 Shelia Kirven, Contributing Reporter

Contact:
 P.O. Box 1210 Durant, OK, 74702
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.

Unclaimed Funds

The Accounting Department of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is trying to contact the individuals listed below. The Choctaw Nation is in possession of unclaimed funds (uncashed payroll checks) that may be due to these individuals.

If you are an employee or former employee of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and your name is listed below, please contact: By Mail: The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma P.O. Box 1210 Durant, OK 74702 Attn: Lisa Jordan, Accountant | By Phone: 580-642-7530

Susan Cossey	Alexis Smith
Xavier Estaban Ochoa	Teresa Vazquez
Devon Christopher Clark	Draven Moore
Dillon Brewer	Aryana Joyce Miranda



FOSTER YOUR TRIBE

Long days, bright skies, and endless possibility. This summer, create memories that matter by opening your home to a child who needs stability and love. Sunshine feels brighter when shared.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/FOSTER-CARE

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



JOIN US FOR OUR JULY FOURTH CELEBRATION

July 4, 2026 | 7pm - 10pm
 THE COST IS \$25 PER CAR

The event will have fun activities, including a coloring contest for kids and adults plus two opportunities to play Choctaw trivia. Stick around for a spectacular fireworks show at the end of the evening. Champuli Cafe will have concession items for sale, and the Hvshi Gift Store will be open late that evening, too. Bring the whole family!




Scan the QR code for more information

MCALESTER CHAHTAPRENUER CENTER COMING SOON!

Where Big Ideas Come to Work

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS NEED?

- + Office desks
- + Printer
- + Training area
- + Coaching
- + Mentoring
- + Networking
- + Internet
- + Boardroom
- + Privacy room
- + Coffee




HOW DO I APPLY?
 For application details and current pricing, please scan the QR code.

CHAHTAPRENUER

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Whiteside voices support for tribal sovereignty

Although I don't live in the Nation, I fully support tribal sovereignty. I enjoyed the article by Kendra Germany Wall and Christian Chaney-Sackett. I am saddened and appalled by the U.S. Supreme Court's lack of action. Oklahoma Governor Stitt should be ashamed of himself.

– Brenda Whiteside
brendawhiteside.com

District 9 Native American Film Festival

The Choctaw Nation District 9 Elders Education Committee invites community members to save the date for a Native American Film Festival planned for October 31, 2026. Additional details about the festival will be announced as they become available. Community members are encouraged to mark their calendars and watch for future updates. Please contact Barbara Cates at ndnz12@yahoo.com for more info.

Red Clay Roots Festival

Join us Aug. 21-22 for the Red Clay Roots Festival, a celebration of Native culture, storytelling, art and the legacy of the World War I Telephone Warriors. Enjoy live music, film, visual art, cultural education and immersive experiences while supporting the preservation and educational efforts of the Choctaw Code Talkers Association.

The Red Clay Echoes encore show is set for Aug. 27, featuring live entertainment, special guests and reflection. More info can be found on the Red Clay Roots Music Festival's Facebook and Instagram pages.

Strye thanks Choctaw Nation for support

"Halito! I would like to give a big thank you to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma for all of their support throughout my four years of college. I am excited to announce that I will be graduating on May 11th from the University of North Texas with my Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology. In the Fall, I will continue my education by pursuing a graduate degree in Kinesiology with a concentration in Sports Psychology. I will also work as a graduate assistant for the fitness department at the UNT Pohl Recreation Center! I am forever grateful to the Choctaw Nation for all of their help and I am so proud to be apart of this community."

– Sarah Strye

OKCTA Hosts Stickball in the City Summer Series

OK Chahta Tribal Alliance invites you to join us every Tuesday at Scissortail Park in OKC, starting at 7 p.m., for children aged 8-17. Come learn, play, and help keep the tradition alive! Bring your sticks, or extra sticks will be available - all skill levels welcome! Pizza and drinks will be provided. Contact Jay Mule at 580-340-1672 for more info.



PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Petty graduates from Grayson

Tara Petty graduated Dec. 12, 2026, from Grayson College with a Bachelor of Science in nursing. Petty, who has been a registered nurse since 2004, returned to school to earn her bachelor's degree.


The Choctaw Nation provided scholarships and other support. According to Petty, completing the program while raising two children and working full time was challenging but worth it.



Leverts thankful for Choctaw Nation

Martin Leverts, 96, was recognized as the eldest honoree at the Community Cultural Gathering held on Feb. 26, in Shreveport, Louisiana.

A proud member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Mr. Leverts expressed his deep appreciation for the continued support and contributions the Nation provides for him and his family.



OKC Choctaw Veterans Association Post 319 invites visitors to join their monthly meetings

The OKC Choctaw Veterans Association Post 319 hosted a luncheon for veterans and auxiliary members on May 29 at Golden Corral in Oklahoma City.

The association welcomes veterans and non-veterans alike to attend its monthly meetings, held on the first Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. to noon. Meetings include a potluck meal and opportunities for fellowship and community involvement.

For information about meetings and locations, visit the OKC Choctaw Veterans Association Post 319 Facebook page.


For more information, contact Commander Harold Marris at 405-326-2621 or Vice Commander David Dorrough at 405-822-1150.



Choctaw Nation is represented at Texas powwow

Michael Rose, a Choctaw Nation tribal member, registered artist and member of the Multi-Cultured Native Council of The Indigenous Institute of the Americas, recently helped host the organization's annual educational powwow at the Chisholm Trail Outdoor Museum in Cleburne, Texas.

Rose serves as the museum's Native American cultural representative and helps coordinate the event, which promotes education and cultural awareness. This year's powwow featured guests from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, including Cheyhomia Dugger, director of development and membership for the Choctaw Cultural Center, and District 5 Tribal Council Member Jennifer Turner. Organizers said they were honored to share Choctaw culture and traditions with attendees.



Fite graduates from NAU

Cody Brian Fite is graduating from Northern Arizona University in 2026 with a bachelor's degree in English secondary education.

Fite has been a dedicated and accomplished student throughout his college journey. He was one of the preliminary members of the NAU Italian Club and served as president of the Vox Montes Choir (All Boys Choir) during his freshman and sophomore years. In his sophomore year, he earned the Outstanding Student Award in his American Literature class.

He received the Lumberjack and Presidential scholarships for all four years and was a member of the National Honor Society in high school and college. He made the dean's list every semester at NAU.

Fite also spent a summer abroad in Italy, enriching his educational experience. Despite facing a house fire during his junior year, he maintained a strong 3.5 GPA that semester without dropping a single class and graduated with an impressive overall GPA of 3.7.

He is the first in his family to graduate from college, a milestone they celebrate with immense pride.

His family would like to congratulate Cody on this remarkable achievement and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

"I can't express enough words to tell you how proud I am of you and it has been such a blessing to be able to watch you grow into the young man you have become. I just know you're gonna do great things. I love you, son!" – Mom



Summers graduates from Oklahoma Baptist University

Trenton Summers graduated magna cum laude from Oklahoma Baptist University with a bachelor's degree in exercise science with a pre-allied health focus.

Summers, 20, was a member of Beta Gamma Theta fraternity at OBU, where he served as treasurer.

He has been accepted into the Oklahoma Baptist University Occupational Therapy Doctoral Program, where he will continue his education in pursuit of becoming an occupational therapist.

Summers' passion is rooted in service. His goal is to work with youth in rural areas of Oklahoma, with a special heart for serving his Choctaw Nation brothers and sisters. He is committed to making a meaningful impact by helping young people build independence, confidence, and opportunity through care and support.

"Please join us in congratulating Cody on this remarkable achievement and wishing him all the best in his future endeavors." – The Summers Family



Dastgheib graduates from Arizona

Shambre Dastgheib graduated summa cum laude from the University of Arizona on March 2, 2026, with a Bachelor of Arts in business administration.

Dastgheib, who earned a 4.0 GPA, credits the Choctaw Nation for support during her studies.

"As I wear my Choctaw Nation stole, I am deeply thankful for their support throughout my college journey." – Shambre Dastgheib



Ray earns scholarship and is inducted into OU Honor Society

Natalia Ray was inducted into the University of Oklahoma's Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society for academics on April 19, 2026.

She also received a scholarship to travel to Mexico this summer. Ray is the daughter of Brianna Ray and granddaughter of Cheri Ray, all of Tulsa.



Johnson graduates from OSU

Hollis Johnson graduated from Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor of Science in management information systems.

He founded NovaBuild LLC, a web development company that helps small businesses grow their online presence.

Johnson will begin working at Gartner, a global research and advisory firm, in Dallas this summer. He is grateful for support from the Choctaw Nation and proud of his Native heritage.



Zsa Zsa Gonzales

Parents Art and Mercedes Gonzales of Yuma, Arizona, joyfully announce the birth of their daughter, Zsa Zsa Metzli Gonzales.



Humphreys earns doctorate from OSU

Shauna Humphreys received a Doctorate of Healthcare Administration with honors from Oklahoma State University. Humphreys, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, has served the tribe for 18 years. As behavioral health director, she has led efforts to improve tribal healthcare services.

Balancing the demands of higher education while leading in healthcare is an extraordinary accomplishment on its own—but she has done so while also being a devoted wife, mother of five, a committed leader, and an active voice on local and national committees dedicated to advancing behavioral health and community wellness.

Her journey reflects resilience, faith, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to service. This achievement is not only a personal milestone but a testament to the power of determination and purpose.

"Please join us in congratulating Shauna Humphreys on this incredible accomplishment and celebrating the bright future ahead. Your hard work, sacrifice, and passion have made us all proud." – Steven Humphreys



Begay is Gathering of Nations Tiny Tot Champion

Okhish Homma "OE" Begay, 4, of Durant, Okla., was named the 2026 "Last Dance" Tiny Tot Champion Dancer at the Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque.

Begay made his debut in the Tiny Tot category, dancing fancy bustle at the historic final Gathering of Nations Powwow, held April 24-25 in New Mexico.

The event, known as "The Last Dance," marked the close of more than four decades of celebration and drew dancers from across Indian Country.

Begay earned first place in the Tiny Tot Boys Championship, representing his family, community and Choctaw heritage.



Amos turn 99

Louise Amos celebrated her 99th birthday on May 6, 2026.

"Happy 99th birthday to Louise Amos! Ninety-nine years of Love and Laughter! We are blessed to have her! She is the strength of our family. May God continue to bless you with good health and happiness!" – The Amos Family



Hale earns master's from SWOSU

Patrick Morse Hale received a Master of Education in school counseling from Southwestern Oklahoma State University on May 9, 2026.

Hale has worked as a nontraditional career specialist at Francis Tuttle Technology Center in Oklahoma City for four years.

He plans to continue supporting students pursuing STEM and other career technology or university opportunities.

Hale, a proud member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, wants to say "yakoke" to the Choctaw Nation for being a big part of his success in receiving his master's degree.



Parks displays his Choctaw pride at nationality parade

Cayson Parks, 6, a first-grader at Northridge Elementary in west Oklahoma City, recently represented the Choctaw Nation in the school's nationality parade.

For Cayson and his family, the opportunity carried special significance. His family has deep roots within the Choctaw Nation, including a great-grandfather who served as a Choctaw surveyor and helped survey land for the Nation generations ago.

His family said they are proud to see Cayson represent his Choctaw heritage and continue the family's cultural legacy.



BUSINESS CHAHTAPRENEUR CHIT • CHAT

How to Pick the Right Name for Your Business



Courtney Wesley

Choosing a business name is one of the most important decisions an entrepreneur can make. A strong name not only defines your brand but also shapes how customers perceive your company. Whether you are starting a small local shop or launching an online venture, the right name can set the tone for your success.

One of the first things to consider when selecting a business name is simplicity. A good name should be easy to spell, pronounce, and remember. If customers struggle to say or search for your business, you may lose potential opportunities. Short, clear names often work best because they are more likely to stick in people's minds and are easier to use in logos, advertising, and online platforms.

Another key factor is relevance. Your business name should reflect what you do or the value you provide. For example, a landscaping company might include words related to nature, growth, or outdoor services. While it does not need to describe your business exactly, it should give customers a general idea of your products or services. This helps build trust and makes your business easier to recognize in a crowded marketplace.

Originality is also essential. With so many businesses already in existence, it is important to choose a name that stands out. Avoid names that are too similar to competitors, as this can cause confusion and even lead to legal issues. Conducting a quick search to see if your desired name is already in use can save you time and trouble later. A unique name helps establish your brand identity and makes it easier for customers to remember you.

In today's digital world, availability is another critical consideration. Before finalizing your business name, check to see if the corresponding website domain and social media handles are available.

Having consistent branding across online platforms makes your business appear more professional and easier to find.

Ideally, your business name, website URL, and social media usernames should match or be very similar.

It is also important to think about future growth. While a name that is very specific might work now, it could limit your business later if you expand your offerings. For instance, naming a company "City Cupcake Shop" might feel restrictive if you decide to add other baked goods or open additional locations. Choosing a name that allows flexibility can help your business grow without needing a complete rebrand.

Legal considerations should not be overlooked. Once you have a name in mind, check local and state business registries to ensure they are available. You may also want to consider trademarking your name to protect it from being used by others. Taking these steps early can prevent conflicts and safeguard your brand as your business grows.

Getting feedback is another helpful step in the naming process. Share your ideas with friends, family, or potential customers to see how they respond. Sometimes an outside perspective can highlight issues you may not have noticed, such as unintended meanings or difficult pronunciation. Testing your name in real-world situations can give you confidence in your final decision.

In conclusion, picking the right business name requires careful thought and planning. By focusing on simplicity, relevance, originality, availability, and long-term potential, you can create a name that not only represents your business but also supports its success.

A strong name is more than just a label—it is the foundation of your brand and a powerful tool for attracting and retaining customers.

If you enjoy supporting small businesses, please check out our Facebook page at Choctaw Small Business and visit our website at www.choctawsmallbusiness.com.

If you have any questions, comments, or would like to learn more about specific topics, don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to help!

Jayda turns 5

According to her mother, Kelsey Isbell, Jayda was born 5 years ago, weighing just 1 pound, 15 ounces.

"She has been the biggest blessing in my lifetime! She is so Strong, smart, caring, and she loves taking care of all her animals at the Ranch! Happy Birthday Jayda Boo!" – Kelsey Isbell



Wilson turns 21

Happy 21st birthday to Cameron Ayden Van Wilson.

He is a history and engineering major at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and has been making planter boxes for his tribe's sacred seeds. His family is proud of his accomplishments.

His grandmother, Barbara (Holmes) Wilson of Chickasha; father, Tejay Wilson; brother, Caleb Colton Wilson; and mother, Tonya Wilson, all of Norman, celebrate with him.



Duncan advocates for his community

At the Stroud City Council meeting on April 9, Brendan Duncan, a Choctaw tribal member and Native environmental activist, raised concerns about the operations of a Plains Pipeline crude oil terminal and its impact on the community.

Duncan presented an analysis of hazardous emissions from the terminal, highlighting BTEX (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene) and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

According to Duncan the terminal's crude oil offloading process releases harmful vapors and that current containment measures, including the Vapor Recovery Unit, have not adequately prevented emissions. Duncan urged city leaders and regulatory agencies to increase oversight of the facility and to halt the offloading process until any leaks are fixed.

For a full video of the presentation, visit <https://www.youtube.com/@PointlessAbandon>.



Mills graduates from Cal Poly Pomona

Justin Mills, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, recently graduated from Cal Poly Pomona in Southern California with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and is already working as an assistant engineer with the City of Beaumont's Public Works Department.

Raised in California, Mills is contributing to infrastructure projects in the same communities where he grew up, including Beaumont Sports Park, where he once played youth football — bringing his education full circle through public service.

During his time at Cal Poly Pomona, Mills earned recognition as an Iana Williams President's Scholar and received the American Society of Civil Engineers' Donald G. Wells Memorial Endowed Scholarship. He also completed internships in public works and environmental engineering, and has remained committed to mentoring younger students, including returning to coach football at his high school alma mater.

"I've benefitted from people who supported me along the way, and I want to be that support for the next generation," Mills said.

While his work is rooted in Southern California, Mills represents the growing presence and contributions of Choctaw citizens across the country, particularly in STEM fields and community-focused careers.

For more of Mill's story, visit cpp.edu/news/ and entering Justin Mills in the search bar.



Conley graduates from UNE

When Brittany Conley was 4, her father survived a truck crash that left doctors doubting he would walk again.

A rehab team in Arkansas helped him recover, inspiring Conley to pursue a career in physical therapy.

On May 16, Conley, a member of the Choctaw Nation, earned her doctor of physical therapy degree from the University of New England.

"If it weren't for them, I don't know if I would have been able to become a physical therapist," Conley said of the physical therapy team who were her first role models. "It just changed everything. That's my passion behind this, because as I grew, I realized that things would have been totally different for my dad."

A first-generation college student from Smithville, Oklahoma, Conley said growing up in a rural community highlighted the challenges many tribal citizens face accessing health care.

Through the Indian Health Service Scholarship Program, which covered her final year of study, Conley committed to serving in tribal and underserved communities after graduation. She recently completed a clinical rotation at the Choctaw Nation Health Care Center in Talihina and hopes to return to serve her community.

I got to see a lot of elders and a bunch of people from Smithville. They asked what I was doing, and I said, 'Guess what? I'm a Doctor of Physical Therapy now.' They thought that was pretty cool," Conley said.

While Conley hopes to fulfill at least part of her three-year Indian Health Service Scholarship commitment in the Choctaw Nation, she is not worried if she must step into a new experience in a new place.

Conley said her experience at UNE taught her to embrace challenges and pursue opportunities, even when they seem intimidating.

"It's funny, I've done all these things scared," Conley said. "My brother, Bryan, wants to go to medical school and he's nervous. And I'm like, 'Just do it scared.' It will be uncomfortable, but if it's not uncomfortable, then you're not challenging yourself."

For the full story, visit une.edu/student-news/une-class-2026-student-profiles.



Thomas stars in historical film

Candace Thomas, a member of the Choctaw Nation, will portray Shawnee leader Nonhelema in the historical film "Stomping Freedom," a story about Native history and resistance in 1778 Ohio. Thomas will attend special screenings and community discussions in October at three independent theaters across Ohio.

Screenings include Oct. 11 at the Little Art Theatre in Yellow Springs, Oct. 12 at the Holland Theatre in Bellefontaine and Oct. 13 at the Avalon Theatre in Marysville.

"Stomping Freedom" explores the struggles faced by Shawnee and other Ohio tribal nations during the American Revolution and asks: What does it cost us for you to be free?"

Visit cftohio.org to learn more about the film and upcoming events at CFT Ohio/Stomping Freedom, and follow updates on Facebook at Caesar's Ford Theatre.



Coker shoots to championship

The Murray State College shotgun team delivered a standout performance in April, earning the title of college Helice champions and continuing the program's tradition of excellence.

Competing against top collegiate programs from across the country, the Aggies showcased depth and precision throughout the tournament.

On the women's side, Dayla Coker, a member of the Choctaw Nation, delivered a championship performance, capturing first place and earning the title of individual ladies champion. Her showing highlighted a dominant weekend for the Aggies in both divisions.

With the victory, the Aggies continue to solidify their reputation as one of the premier collegiate shotgun programs in the country.



Rakes graduates from ECU

Connor Rakes recently graduated from East Central University with a Bachelor of Arts in history. Rakes, who is Choctaw, has represented his tribe in numerous groups during his undergraduate career, including as a member of the McNair Scholars Program, a federally funded TRIO program designed to assist federally recognized minority groups in pursuing graduate school, and as president of the East Central University Russian Club. He also attended nearly a dozen conferences nationwide as an undergraduate.

Rakes has been accepted to the Pennsylvania State University School of International Affairs, where he will pursue a master's in international affairs. He hopes, after graduation, to assist his tribe as a vocal Choctaw working for the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service officer.

"The Choctaw Nation has given me so much support over the years," said Rakes. "I feel need to give back and lead by example so future generations know that they can work to make a change in the world."



Famous Dave Anderson and his recipe for success

By Kellie Matherly

"Famous Dave" Anderson's life story is rooted in resilience, creativity, and an unwavering belief that adversity can be transformed into opportunity. Born to parents who endured the trauma of Indian boarding schools, where they were punished for speaking their language and expressing their culture, Dave grew up with a deep awareness of both hardship and perseverance.

After World War II, Dave's parents moved to Chicago in search of work, joining thousands of other families chasing opportunity in postwar America.

Dave's father became an electrician, facing discrimination as a minority worker. Despite the racial tensions of the time, however, he earned respect and built a successful career. He also instilled in his son the values of hard work and pride in one's craft.

Just as influential was his father's devotion to Southern home cooking—especially barbecue. Weekend trips, carefully sourced ingredients, and meals filled with flavor and care left a lasting imprint on Dave and planted the earliest seeds of what would become his life's work.

"Barbecue is how we celebrate. Barbecue is really a southern success," said Dave. "And my dad, being from Oklahoma, loved his

southern cooking, but more than anything, he loved his barbecue."

School was not easy for young Dave. Struggling with math and English and labeled a "troubled kid," he barely graduated high school. It wasn't until later in life that he was diagnosed with ADHD, a realization that reframed his childhood challenges. What once appeared as distraction and restlessness became, in adulthood, his greatest strength: the ability to see possibilities others missed. A pivotal moment came when an art teacher pulled him aside and told him, "You see things other people don't." That insight stayed with Dave and became foundational to his vision.

"I was bouncing off the walls in school, always daydreaming," said Dave. "One of the things I learned is the ability to take your weaknesses and turn them into strengths."

At just 19 years old, believing college was out of reach, Dave started his first business. Armed with little money but endless determination, he learned early lessons about persistence, humility, and integrity. Earning his first major order from a Chicago florist taught him a lesson he carried forward for life: never work solely for today's paycheck; work for tomorrow's opportunities.

A major turning point came in 1991, when Dave attended a motivational seminar that



Choctaw Nation Photos

"Famous Dave's life story is rooted in resilience, creativity, and an unwavering belief that adversity can be transformed into opportunity. See and share his story at togetherweremore.com.

changed his worldview. For the first time, he believed success was governed by principles anyone could learn. He immersed himself in personal development, replacing negative influences with books, cassette tapes, and constant learning. With the motivational tapes, his car became his university, and his growth mindset fueled the next chapter of his life, even helping him achieve and maintain sobriety.

"You know, if you don't give up on yourself, and you stay the course, you will come out on the other side," said Dave. "You always will. It's the adversities in life we need to embrace."

Though many questioned his decision, Dave opened a barbecue restaurant in the unlikely setting of northern Wisconsin, where Scandinavian and Native American roots run very deep, and southern cooking was a novelty.

Drawing from his childhood memories, his father's insistence on quality ingredients, and his own relentless experimentation, Dave created something distinctive.

The restaurant quickly gained a reputation for excellence, serving thousands in a town of only a few thousand residents.

What began as a single barbecue joint grew into Famous Dave's, a brand that would earn hundreds of awards and become one of the most recognized names in American barbecue.

Dave's success was driven not just by food, but by attention to detail and his experience with music, atmosphere, hospitality, and authenticity. He expanded the brand carefully and thoughtfully, eventually pioneering the move from restaurant to retail. Eventually, he brought barbecue sauces, seasonings, and products into grocery stores nationwide.

Today, Famous Dave's is one of the most widely represented restaurant brands in retail, a testament to Dave's original vision of being present not just on the table, but in homes across America.

Now a third-generation barbecue legacy, Dave sees that passion carried forward by his son, whose own barbecue journey honors family tradition while forging a new path. For Dave Anderson, success has never been about ease or perfection; it has been about persistence, learning, and believing that even the toughest beginnings can lead to something extraordinary.



Famous Dave's sells its products in major retail stores and operates 120 restaurants in North America, as well as several locations in Canada and the Middle East.

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Scan the QR code to learn more.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

OBITUARIES

Catherine Stacie Carlson

Catherine Stacie "Cathie" Carlson, 49, passed away April 8, 2026. Cathie was born Dec. 2, 1976, in Tahihina, Okla., to Margie (Ward) Jones and Eugene W. Jones.

She was preceded in death by her parents; two babies; grandmothers Katherine Anderson-Ward, Florence Ben, and Sally Jones; grandfather Jackson Jones; uncles Wayne "Windy" Ward, Melvin "Moses" Ward, J.D. Ward, Buddy Taylor, and John Emmert; aunts Daisy Perry, Evelyn Taylor, Gloria Ward, Cindy Ward, and Lucille Ward; along with numerous cousins and relatives.

Cathie is survived by her daughter Joleigh Carlson; brothers Michael Jones, spouse Paula and family, and David T. Jones, spouse Regina and family; numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, relatives, and a host of friends.

**Randie Teresa Graves**

Randie Teresa Graves, 74, passed away March 17, 2026.

Randie was born Jan. 20, 1952, to J.C. and Faye (Storey) Ary.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Randie is survived by her husband Kevin; daughters Dawn Sanders, and Leigh Grandinette and spouse Tony; grandchildren Jacie Wolfe, Bryson Wolfe, Tyler Sanders, Katey Sanders, and Kinley Grandinette; great-grandchild Vivi Wolfe; brother Mike Ary and spouse Debbie; sisters Carolyn Jones and spouse Don, and Ann Herndon and spouse Lee; numerous nephews and nieces; and a wide circle of friends.

**Donald James McAlvain**

Donald James McAlvain, 87, passed away May 2, 2026.

Don was born March 1, 1939, in Krebs, Okla., to Gerald and Jewell Parker McAlvain.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Jack and Harold McAlvain; sisters Betty Patterson Cathers and Phyllis McAlvain; mother-in-law "Mother" Ethel Orr; and father-in-law Milton Orr.

Don is survived by his wife Sharon; daughter Melanie McClary and spouse Kevin, and their children Britnee Blankenship, Hunter and Toni McClary, Lake McClary, and Ridge and Ralee McClary; sons Bret McAlvain and companion Jennifer Link, and his children Gibson, Jaxson and Kaitlyn, and Parker McAlvain, Jet McAlvain and his children Amber and Michael Oglelsby, Turquoise and Sheldon Love, Unity McAlvain, and Jarred McAlvain; He is also survived by 13 great-grandchildren and one due in October; brothers-in-law Paul Orr and spouse Donna, and Leroy Orr and spouse and Joye; and many nephews, nieces, and friends.

**Sean David Martin Curd**

Sean David Martin Curd, 24, passed away April 19, 2026.

Sean was born Nov. 30, 2001, in Tahlequah, Okla., to Shawn and Jennifer Jo (Adcock) Curd.

He was preceded in death by his mother; maternal grandfather James Adcock; and paternal grandfather Jerry Stephens.

Sean is survived by the love of his life Arlen Gaytan; his father; sister Delaney Moncrief and spouse Ethan, grandmothers Susy Adcock and Jackie Stevens; uncle Seth Adcock and spouse Amanda; aunt Shari Roggow; cousins Taze and Zeke Adcock, and Adrienne Karner and spouse Logan; nieces and nephews Emma, Khloie, Juni, and Silas; brothers-in-law Benny Gaytan and Amador Junior Gaytan; sister-in-law Karla Gaytan; father-in-law and mother-in-law Amador and Christina Gaytan; and numerous cousins, relatives, and friends.

**Laura Ann Belt**

Laura Ann Belt, 79, passed away April 22, 2026.

Laura was born July 1, 1946, in Durant, Okla., to William Home and Lois Ann Bully Bacon.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Elvis Leogene Belt; brother Ben Lee Carnes; and son Jody Lee Long.

Laura is survived by her daughter Debra Ann Belt and spouse Zachary.

**James Earl Turnbull**

James Earl Turnbull of Jay, Okla., 93, passed away April 29, 2026.

James was born Sept. 21, 1932, in Boggy Depot, Okla., to George Turnbull and Millie Coates Turnbull.

He was preceded in death by his parents; his two brothers; and his three sisters.

James is survived by his children Robert Turnbull and spouse Bobbie, Jamee Page and spouse Leon, and Marsha Fields and spouse Larry; brothers Richard Mason and spouse Leatta, and Larry Mason and spouse Dina; sisters Faye Brockman and Dottie McMaine; grandsons Shawn Turnbull and spouse Mollie, Roger Page, Nathan Page, and BoShane Turnbull and spouse Cheyenne; granddaughters Sabra Esparza and spouse Carlos, Christy Doyle and spouse Larry, and Tricia Fields; 13 great-grandchildren; 3 great-great-grandchildren; nephews and nieces; longtime companion Margie Morden; and extended family and friends.

**Hoite Glen Pugh**

Hoite "Glen" Pugh, 85, passed away April 24, 2026.

Glen was born Feb. 3, 1941, in Lawton, Okla., to Sadie (McCoy) Armstrong.

He was preceded in death by his mother; sister Mildred Euliss; twin brothers Gene and Johnnie Dumont; and niece Angela Shuffield.

Glen is survived by his brother Jackie Dumont; and sisters Brenda Sykes, and Vickie Shuffield and spouse Jimmie.

**Evelyn Marrie Detten**

Evelyn Marrie Detten, 73, passed away April 18, 2026.

Evelyn was born July 20, 1952, in Sudan, Tex., to Delter G. Whisenhunt and Bessie Mae Samis Whisenhunt.

She is survived by her husband John Detten; son Jason N. Detten; daughter Andrea N. Lee; five grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and a huge extended family and wonderful wealth of great friends.

**Charles Edward Roberts**

Dr. Charles Edward Roberts, 84, passed away Nov. 15, 2025.

Charles was born Aug. 25, 1941, near Bennington, Okla., to Pearl Roberts.

He was preceded in death by his mother; brother Randall Collum; grandmother Lesa; wife Jane; and many aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Charles is survived by sons Christopher and Matthew; grandchildren Gavin, Clark, Madelyn, and Leighton; and loving partner Stella Mancias.

**Jackson Brian Willhite**

Jackson Brian Willhite, 51, passed away April 16, 2026.

Brian was born Oct. 27, 1974, in Claremore, Okla., to Carolyn Jean (Brown) Willhite and Tommy Willhite.

He was preceded in death by sons Jackson Brian Willhite Jr. and Jacob Ryan Willhite; and niece Sharon Rena Gates.

Brian is survived by his parents; wife Laura Willhite; daughters Jacquelynn Willhite (Dustin Hamman) and Alyssa (George McGuire); son Levi Willhite (Carissa Ford); sisters Barbara Albertson, and Kellie Burdick and spouse John; brother Tommy Allen Willhite; grandmother Shirley Hamilton; grandchildren Braisen Willhite, Bryten Hamman, Wyatt Willhite, Camille McGuire, Rosalie McGuire, George Dante McGuire, and Chenoa Idarra; numerous in-laws, nieces, nephews, extended family members, and friends.

**Marsha Elaine Lloyd**

Marsha Elaine Lloyd, 70, passed away May 4, 2026.

Marsha was born June 25, 1955, in Chula Vista, Calif., to Nancy Naomi (White) Hines and Edward Albert Hines.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers Bill Hines and Jimmy Hines.

Marsha is survived by her husband J.B. Lloyd; sons Jason Lloyd and spouse Crystal, and Micky Lloyd and spouse Kristen; grandchildren Sydney Bishop and spouse Elic, Micah Lloyd and spouse Arizona, Brenner Lloyd, and Chani Vogle and spouse Ace; two great-grandchildren on the way, Nicholas and Wayne; siblings, Jean Evans, Tema Crawford, and Eddie Hines; and numerous nieces, nephews, and extended family members.

**Toni Jon Reed**

Toni Jon "T.J." Reed, 58, passed away April 27, 2026.

T.J. was born Feb. 14, 1968, in McAlester, Okla., to Hugh and Jerry (Cudd) Reed.

She is survived by her children Ashton Evans, Stormie Reed-Grand, and Hazen Reed; siblings Greg (Carrie) Reed and Lisa (Kenny) Prather; aunt Johnny Cudd; grandchildren Christian Clifton, Alex Evans, Aliveyah Evans, and Ransome Morgan; great-grandbaby Khalil Ford; nieces and nephews Brooke Daney, Kody Reed, and Taylor Owens; and many great-nieces, great-nephews, and cousins.

**Charles Stanley Scroggins**

Charles Stanley Scroggins, 91, passed away April 8, 2026.

Charles was born Sept. 1, 1934, in Francis, Okla., John Franklin Scroggins and Essie Akins.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Nelda; son Curtis Scroggins; brothers Wib, O.C. "Spud", and Ted; and sisters Thelma and Helen.

Charles is survived by his daughter Tonya; brother Dale and spouse Sharon; sister-in-law Juanita; daughter-in-law Cynthia; grandchildren Steven and spouse Mary Beth, Shaphan, Shenir, and Torren; great-grandchild Jaydon; and many nephews, nieces, cousins, and friends.

**Valerie Janet Peisley**

Valerie Janet Peisley, 88, passed away May 6, 2026.

Valerie was born Dec. 16, 1937, in Spiro, Okla., to Leta Lucille (Avery) Frye and Haskell Frye.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband William T. Peisley; brother Jackie Haskell Frye; and grandparents Julia and Alex Avery.

Valerie is survived by daughters Linda Peisley and Penny Lynn Peisley; grandchildren Kayla Beth Loudermilk and spouse Matthew, Kasey Lynn Swanner and spouse Jeremy, Dustin Lumm and spouse Jessica, and Ryan Lumm; great-grandchildren Asher, Hayden, Cole, Landon, Carsin, Ben, Kayla, Kelly, and Kinsley; great-great-grandson Ryder; brother Alex Frye; two nephews; and numerous other relatives, loved ones, and friends.

**Janie Elizabeth Pollard**

Janie Elizabeth Pollard, 69, passed away April 26, 2026.

Janie was born August 25, 1956, in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Robert Wynn Jr and Mary (Shelton) Wynn.

She was preceded in death by her father Robert; husband Dave; son Timothy; and all her grandparents.

She is survived by her mother; son Frank "Junior" Wynn; daughter Rebekah Lynn Wisener; brother Robert Wynn and spouse Nelda; sister Patty Hatch and spouse Gary; brother Ricky Wynn and spouse Mary; six grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; a niece; five nephews; and extended family and friends.

**Linda Dianne Heitfeld**

Linda Dianne (Hays) Heitfeld, 76, passed away April 14, 2026.

Linda was July 1, 1949, in Ardmore, Okla., to Thomas Russell and Azaline (Ladner) Hays.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Linda is survived by her son Rob Louis Heitfeld and spouse Kendra; daughter Belinda Dawn Marsh and spouse Paul; grandchildren Taylor Allen Marsh and spouse Cris, Kaylee Jaden Heitfeld and fiancé Ryan Sanchez, Amber Dawn Marsh, and Kaden Garrott Heitfeld; great-grandson Benjamin Allen Marsh; brother Tom Hays and spouse Valorie; niece Lisa Hays; and father of her children Rodney Heitfeld; along with many other family members and friends.

**David Lowell Keyes**

David Lowell Keyes, 80, passed away May 7, 1945.

David was born June 26, 1945, in Hugo, Okla., to John Lowell Keyes and Jean (Skelton) Keyes.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

David is survived by his brothers Todd Keyes and Larry Keyes and spouse Debrah; nieces Lisa Emmons, Tricia Keyes and Jeanalla Keyes; nephews Jacob Keyes and Wyatt Keyes; great-nieces and great-nephews Sydnee Emmons, Emily Emmons, Easton Emmons, Jayden Emmons, Sophia Keyes, Eva Keyes and Isiah Keyes; along with many other family, friends and loved ones.

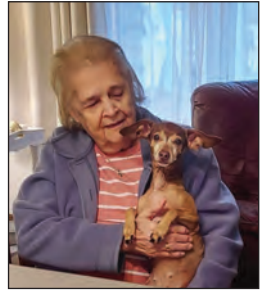
**Billie Faye Lewis**

Billie Faye Lewis, 91, passed away April 23, 2026.

Billie was born July 15, 1934, in McAlester, Okla., to Cecil Compelube and Ruby (Royston) Compelube.

She was preceded in death by her parents; son Norvel J. Lewis Jr.; grandson Robert F. Long Jr.; brother Jimmy Compelube; and sisters Tina Weeks and Corina Compelube.

Billie is survived by her daughter Donetta Lewis; daughter-in-law Kim Lewis; grandchildren Katie Clement and spouse Brandon, and Rachel Lundy and spouse Alex; seven great-grandchildren; sister Sharon Walters; and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and dear friends.

**Cecil Rayburn Hogan**

Cecil Rayburn Hogan, 66, passed away April 22, 2026.

Cecil was born April 22, 2026.

He is survived by his wife Diana Hogan; daughter Barbara Hogan; son-in-law Stanley Gutshall; grandsons Alvin Gutshall and Travis Gutshall; and sister Tina (Hogan) Weber.

**Biskinik Obituary Policy**

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

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

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

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

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

ITI FABVSSA

Five Years of Storytelling: The Choctaw Cultural Center's Living Legacy

By Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation

When the Choctaw Cultural Center opened in Durant in 2021, it fulfilled a dream carried quietly but powerfully through generations. As early as the 1960s, Choctaw leaders and community members spoke at Labor Day gatherings about the need for a cultural center, a place where Choctaw history, language and culture could be practiced and protected. Through many decades, that vision found momentum through the hard work and determination of many. For Sue Folsom, often called the grandmother or dream keeper of the project, the Choctaw Cultural Center emerged from a deep sense of responsibility. Reviving a silent culture is a powerful intergenerational process, she explained, one that requires documenting oral history, strengthening language immersion, and keeping traditional arts alive. For her, the Choctaw Cultural Center had to be a place where elders were honored, youth were engaged, and heritage remained part of everyday life.

Folsom's leadership was pivotal, but she was never alone in the dream to make this vision a reality. She chaired the Cultural Center Committee, a group that shaped almost every aspect of the project, from building design and interior detailing to exhibit content and the extent of tribal community members involved. As part of the development, the cultural committee visited more than 25 Tribal cultural centers across the country, receiving guidance about what other established institutions would and would not do to their centers differently, if given the chance. The culmination of the feedback received helped shape the Choctaw Cultural Center from the very beginning to how it stands today. Chief and Tribal Council were also key in ensuring the project received the support and funding needed to bring the vision to life. Folsom hoped the Choctaw Cultural Center would change things for both Choctaw people and visitors.

For Choctaw families, she envisioned a space that fostered cultural revitalization and empowered self-determination. For visitors, she hoped it would dismantle stereotypes and offer an authentic understanding of Choctaw history.

She imagined a cultural space that breaks down the invisible walls that often keep people out of traditional museums, a place where hands-on workshops, tribal events, and living culture would transform how people understand the Choctaw Nation and its people. In recognition of those who helped bring the center to life, and to those who continue to keep Choctaw culture going, a Culture Keeper's statue stands on the north side of the cultural center in their honor.

To bring this vision to life, the Nation partnered with exhibit designer Michael Hanke, who describes the project as unlike anything he had ever worked on.

"It is one of those once-in-a-lifetime projects," he said.

From the beginning, the cultural committee insisted that the story be told in the Choctaw voice. Every panel, every recreated environment, every media element was reviewed and approved by Choctaw cultural leadership. What made the exhibits unique was Hanke's ability to work with the Choctaw community, not to tell their story for them, but to help create the space and platform for the community to tell their own story, from their perspective. "We did not do anything without their approval," Hanke recalled. "It comes across in the exhibit. It is their story!"

The building itself, designed by JCJ Architecture, reflected the same commitment to authenticity and cultural relevance. Rather than a traditional timeline, the team developed a series of landscapes that guide visitors through fourteen thousand years of Choctaw history. These landscapes are rooted in place, reflecting the deep relationships between Choctaw people and the land. Hanke and the exhibit design team traveled with Dr. Ian Thompson through the Choctaw Nation Reservation and ancestral homelands in Mississippi and Alabama. Those trips shaped the authenticity of the landscapes and left a lasting impression on Hanke.

"There was warmth and a sense of welcome," he said. "We all really appreciated it!"

The Choctaw Cultural Center's immersive quality is one of its defining features. Visitors encounter a recreated cave for the creation story, a stickball film shown from bleachers overlooking a field,



Photos Courtesy of Michael Hanke
Sue Folsom during construction of the Children's Activity Room at the Choctaw Cultural Center.



Ian Thompson visits the Black Warrior River with the Cultural Center Committee.

a full-scale church that evokes Choctaw faith, and the acclaimed Moundville model praised by archaeologists for its accuracy.

More than 50 Choctaw artisans and community members who created clothing, tools, and ceramics are credited by name, a deliberate choice to honor living culture and contemporary artists.

One interpretive shift came directly from Choctaw leadership. We do not want to look at the Trail of Tears as something that defeated us, Hanke said. We want to look at the trail as something we survived and then prospered thereafter.

This perspective shapes the emotional arc of the exhibit, emphasizing resilience rather than tragedy.

For Cheyehoma Dugger, Director of Membership, the Choctaw Cultural Center's impact is visible every day.

"Guests are often surprised and impressed by the amount of history and culture shared within the Choctaw Cultural Center," Dugger said.

For Choctaw citizens, the Choctaw Cultural Center has become a source of pride and a place to reconnect with family stories. For non-Choctaw visitors, it is often their first encounter with an Indigenous-led narrative.

Many guests experience strong emotions, especially in the treaty hallway and the Removal landscape. Some express pride in the Nation's accomplishments. Others feel sadness or anger at the mistreatment of the Choctaw people. Dugger sees these reactions as signs that the Choctaw Cultural Center is doing exactly what it was meant to do; present history honestly while highlighting the strength of the Choctaw Nation.

Over the past five years, the Choctaw Cultural Center has continued to grow. Under the leadership of Dr. Scott Wesley, the current Senior Director, the Choctaw Cultural Center continues to expand its programming and strengthen its community engagement. Additions include The Gift statue by Brendan O'Neill, the Chahta Anumpa i Tvshka Hoke (Warriors of the Choctaw Language) statue by Jane Semple Umstead, updated artifacts, a repatriated pipe bowl, expanded earth ovens in the Living Village, numerous stickball tournaments and clinics, and more than ten temporary exhibitions. These changes reflect the Choctaw Cultural Center's commitment to remaining a living, evolving cultural space.

The permanent exhibits Chahta Nowvt Aya follow a four-part journey. Visitors begin with People of the Mother Mound, which shares the origins of the Choctaw people and the creation stories rooted at Nanih Waiya. From there, they enter Chahta Pia, an immersive landscape that recreates the sights and sounds of



Jared Tom and Ryan Spring demonstrate stickball with Cultural Center Committee member Charles Mann.



Pictured is a planning model of the Choctaw Cultural Center's permanent exhibits.

the Mississippi homelands as they existed in the 1600s through Removal. The journey continues into Moving Fires, where the story of removal is told through the eyes of two families traveling at different times and on different routes. The final gallery, Oklahoma, highlights how the Choctaw Nation rebuilt, maintained sovereignty, and invested in the well-being of its people, honoring the past while preparing for the future.

I have watched these spaces come alive in ways no blueprint or script could predict. I have stood quietly in galleries as elders found their own stories reflected back at them. I have seen visitors pause in front of a panel or artifact, their expressions shifting as understanding settled in. I have watched children lean forward in wonder during the creation story or run excitedly toward the stickball field in the Living Village. I have listened to family members whisper memories to one another, and to guests who arrived as strangers but left with a sense of connection.

In those moments, I have been the silent observer, witnessing how the Choctaw Cultural Center does exactly what it was meant to do. It teaches. It heals. It inspires. It reminds people who they are, and it invites others to understand who we have always been.

Five years after its opening, the Choctaw Cultural Center stands as a testament to cultural sovereignty, community collaboration, and the power of Indigenous-led storytelling. It honors the grandmother whose vision sparked the project, the designers and cultural leaders who shaped it, the Choctaw community who helped bring it to life, and the visitors who continue to learn from it.

Most importantly, it honors the Choctaw people, past, present, and future.

The Choctaw Cultural Center is a living legacy, continually evolving, expanding, and inspiring.

As it enters its next five years, it remains what it was always meant to be, a place where Choctaw culture is not only remembered, but lived.

References:

- Choctaw Cultural Center (2026) Exhibitions. Choctaw Cultural Center. <https://choctawculturalcenter.com/exhibitions/>
- Folsom, Sue n.d. Email interview with the author, June 8.
- Hanke, Michael n.d. Phone interview with the author, June 12.
- Dugger, Cheyehoma n.d. Email interview with the author, June 9.

Chief Allen Wright Bicentennial Day

By Kendra Germany-Wall

On June 5, 2026, 32 descendants of Choctaw statesman and former Principal Chief Allen Wright gathered at the Choctaw Nation headquarters to mark the 200th anniversary of his birth and honor his lasting contributions to the Choctaw Nation and the state of Oklahoma.

As part of the event, Gary Batton shared remarks through a recorded video message and signed a proclamation officially recognizing June 5, 2026, as Chief Allen Wright Bicentennial Day.

During the event, a descendant, also named Allen Wright, donated a journal containing Chief Wright's handwritten sermons and biblical teachings to the Choctaw Nation.

Alexandria Gough accepted the gift on behalf of the Choctaw Nation Cultural Center, where it will help preserve a significant piece of Choctaw history for future generations.

Born in Mississippi in 1826, Allen Wright moved with his family to the Choctaw Nation in Indian Territory as a child following removal. Wright's birthname was Kilihote, but he was given an "English" name upon attending school in 1834.

A Presbyterian minister, educator and statesman, Wright held numerous leadership roles, including as a member of the Choctaw General Council, national treasurer and principal chief of the Choctaw Nation. He is best known for proposing the name Oklahoma during discussions about the future of Indian Territory after the Civil War.

Wright's influence extended beyond government service. A graduate of both Union College and Union Theological Seminary in New York, he dedicated much of his life to faith, education and the advancement of the Choctaw people.

Like many aspects of his era, Wright's story is complex. To learn more, visit choctawnation.com or okhistory.org.



Photos by Kendra Germany-Wall
Descendants of Chief Allen Wright are pictured at the 200th birthday celebration of the former Choctaw chief on June 5.



Photo by Shauna Williams
Alexandria Gough and Allen Wright take a look Chief Wright's journal, which has been donated to the Choctaw Cultural Center.

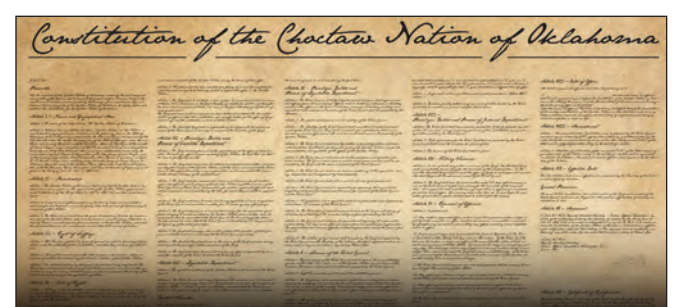


Current Choctaw Royalty perform the Lord's Prayer as Cassidy Lee sings.



Left: District 9 Elders sing a Choctaw hymn.

Above: Chief Batton delivers a special message via video.



HEADQUARTERS GALLERY TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY EXHIBIT

This exhibition marks the 200-year anniversary of the Choctaw Nation's original 1826 Constitution, honoring the formal establishment of a written government while recognizing that Choctaw sovereignty did not begin - and does not end - on the page.

Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna The School of Choctaw Language

Summer Weather Phrases

From sunny days to sudden downpours, summer brings all kinds of weather. Expand your Choctaw vocabulary with these useful weather-related words and phrases.

Kucha yvt lushpa chiyohmi.	It is very hot outside.
Kucha yvt lushpa chohmi.	It is kind of hot outside.
Toffa ilvppa nowvt isht ia ch! ho?	Will you be going on vacation this summer?
Toffakma hvlba ish pisa hinla.	In the summer you can see lightning bugs.
Okshinilit kil ia.	Let's go swimming.
Oka kapvssa ishko sv bvna.	I want to drink cold water.
Onnahinlikma kapvssgchi.	It is cool in the mornings.
Tvbokolikma hvshi tomi yvt lvshpa.	The sunshine is hot at noon.
Hashuk vt vmo avbna.	The grass needs mowing.
Hashuk vt shilat ishtia.	The grass is starting to dry.
Bokoshe ya oka anowvt kil ia.	Let's go wading in the creek.
Shutik vt okchakko.	The sky is blue.
Hoshintika nuta ke chiya.	Let's (two of us) sit under the shade.
Laksha yvt sv nashuka yanvlli.	The sweat is running down my face.

Want to learn more about Choctaw history?

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Shining a light on UV awareness

By Chris Jennings

Summer brings beach trips, backyard barbecues and long days in the sun. That’s why July is recognized as UV Safety Awareness Month, highlighting the need for sun-safe habits.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Native Americans are the second-highest group to get melanoma, a type of skin cancer.

Choctaw Nation health experts have a message for anyone who thinks their darker complexion shields them from the sun’s damage: it doesn’t.

“It is a myth that if you have a darker skin tone, then you don’t have to worry about getting sunburned,” said LaRoche, a public health director with the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA). “You still need sun protection, no matter what your complexion is. It can still damage you in the same way. It just might not be as apparent to our eyes.”

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Dermatology found that Native Americans have the second-highest rates of skin cancer in the United States, surpassed only by white Americans.

Ultraviolet radiation is emitted by both the sun and artificial sources. While it has some benefits for people, including the creation of Vitamin D, it can also cause health risks.

“UV is radiation that’s emitted from the sun,” said Mason Emert, an epidemiologist with CNHSA. “It’s, of course, naturally occurring, but it’s a risk factor associated with skin cancer.”

You can be exposed to UV rays from artificial sources, such as tanning beds, and from certain lighting equipment, including mercury-vapor and some halogen, fluorescent, and incandescent lights. Whether those UV rays are natural or artificial, the effect on the body is the same.

“It poses a risk to human health because it damages the skin barrier,” Emert said. “It can reduce your immunity barrier, increase the risk of skin cancer, cause dry skin or other skin conditions, and, like any other form of radiation, it can be a harmful component to human health.”

LaRoche added that eyes are often overlooked in conversations about sun safety. Over time, prolonged UV exposure accelerates the breakdown of eye tissues, significantly raising your risk of developing cataracts, macular degeneration and abnormal growths.

How Exposure Happens

It’s not just bright, sunny days that can lead to ultraviolet exposure. UV risk can still be high, even on cloudy days.

“Dermatologists typically still recommend wearing sun protection, SPF 30 or higher, even when it’s cloudy outside or with only brief outdoor exposure,” Emert said.

LaRoche added that cool or overcast days may actually be when people sustain the most damage because they let their guard down. “We tend to not apply our sunscreen or take protective measures. If it’s not hot outside or if it’s cloudy outside, that doesn’t mean that the UV is not harmful. It’s still there.”

Haskell, IHS partner to expand opportunities for students

LAWRENCE, Kan. (June 1, 2026)—Haskell Indian Nations University and the Indian Health Service, in partnership with the Haskell Indian Health Center, have signed an agreement to support the construction of a new, state-of-the-art health care facility on Haskell’s campus. This collaboration will strengthen health care access for the Lawrence community while creating expanded educational and workforce training opportunities for Native students.

The agreement allows Indian Health Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to construct a new clinic on 4.4 acres of Haskell land while ensuring uninterrupted health care services during construction. Once the new facility is complete, the current clinic will be returned to Haskell for future academic and training use — expanding the university’s capacity to support students pursuing careers in health and public service. The Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Education operates and manages Haskell Indian Nations University as a federally funded higher education institution serving Native American and Alaska Native students from across the United States.

The new Indian Health Services facility on campus will provide Haskell students with a unique opportunity to gain first-hand experience in a modern clinical environment. Students will be able to complete training, observational learning, and other professional preparation activities directly alongside Indian Health Services providers. This partnership strengthens the pipeline of future Native doctors, nurses, public health workers, and allied health professionals ready to serve in Indian Country.

The new facility will increase the capacity of Indian Health Service to deliver high quality, culturally informed health care. These expanded services will support the growing needs of the Lawrence community, while offering Haskell students more pathways to engage with clinical practice, preventive health, and community wellness programs.

“This partnership reflects our commitment to giving Native students more opportunities to learn, lead and serve in their own communities,” said Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum. “Expanding Haskell’s campus resources while improving access to modern health care services is a practical investment in the future of Indian Country and in the long-term strength of tribal communities.”

Peak UV hours run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. LaRoche recommends a simple tool most people already carry.

“Most weather apps on your smartphone have the UV index for your area that’s really easy to check.”

Checking the daily index before heading out, whether for work, a sporting event or any outdoor activity, allows people to plan their protection before exposure.

The Base Tan Myth and Cumulative Damage

Another common belief health professionals hear is that getting a base tan before extended sun exposure somehow reduces the risk of a burn. Emert says that’s not the case. “Any form of a tan from UV exposure is skin damage from the UV radiation,” he said. In other words, pre-tanning to prevent sun damage is giving yourself skin damage to prevent skin damage.

The danger also grows over time. Emert described UV exposure as cumulative, with some individual burns rising to the level of what dermatologists call a “life-changing sunburn,” one that increases a person’s long-term skin cancer risk on its own.

“The greater exposure, of course, has a greater risk of adverse effects,” he said.

That means people who have spent years working outdoors, like farmers and construction workers, are more likely to have accumulated risk, even if they’ve never had a single serious burn. The good news, Emert said, is that it’s never too late to start protecting yourself.

“You can’t necessarily reverse the skin damage, but you can prevent further damage,” he said. “Reducing that risk and reducing that greater exposure would be beneficial.”

Building the Habit

The National Weather Service recommends the following five tips for sun protection:

- Check the UV index forecast before you go out.
- Apply and reapply sunscreen.
- Seek shade.
- Wear sunglasses.
- Wear protective clothing.

When it comes to sunscreen, the recommendation is SPF 30 or higher, applied generously, about one ounce for the full body 30 minutes before going outside, then reapplied every two hours or after swimming or sweating.

For active use, products labeled as sport or mineral formulas tend to stay on longer.

“The best sunscreens are the ones you’ll continuously use daily,” Emert said. “I use one of the clear ones daily on my face just as a habit, as I’m getting out of the shower, going about my day. Whichever one you feel comfortable working into your daily routine is the best option.”

Tightly woven, dark clothing or UPF-rated garments, block more UV than light, loosely woven fabrics. Wet or stretched fabrics let more UV through. Dry, well-fitted clothes offer the



Haskell Indian Nations University Photo

Haskell Indian Nations University and Indian Health Service are partnering to bring a new health care facility to campus, expanding health services and student opportunities.

“For generations, Haskell has helped develop Native leaders who strengthen their communities and serve this country,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. “My father visited Haskell in 1968 because he understood the importance of investing in Native students and tribal communities. This partnership carries that mission forward by expanding access to healthcare, strengthening tribal health systems, and preparing the next generation of Native health professionals.”

The agreement reflects a shared commitment to tribal self-determination, interagency collaboration, and long-term community well-being. It also ensures compliance with all applicable federal preservation and environmental laws, including the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the National Environmental Policy Act, underscoring both agencies’ dedication to cultural stewardship and sustainability.

For more information on Haskell Indian Nations University, visit haskelledu.edu.

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July 8	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
July 10	Crowder	By Appointment
July 14	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
July 15	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
July 17	Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
July 17	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
July 21	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
July 22	Stigler	By Appointment
July 28	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
July 29	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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

SUNSCREEN	SUNBLOCK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absorbs UV radiation and converts it into heat to release from the skin Must be applied 20 minutes before going outside so it can be absorbed Thin, lightweight, and rubs in completely clear Usually needs reapplication after 40-80 minutes of swimming or sweating Can sometimes cause irritation or allergic reactions in sensitive skin types. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sits on top of the skin and deflects/scatters UV rays away like a mirror Effective immediately upon application Thick, opaque, and may leave a visible white or chalky residue on the skin. Generally hypoallergenic and less likely to cause irritation or allergic reactions Can be very water-resistant, but washes off easily if rubbed.

best protection.

Hats should have a brim of at least 3 inches to cover the face, ears and neck. Sunglasses labeled 100% UV-blocking or UV400 are the best option for protecting your eyes. Pay attention to the label when shopping for sunglasses. Just because the lens is dark does not mean it protects the eyes from UV rays.

Sunscreen is not recommended for infants younger than 6 months. Instead, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends keeping them out of direct sunlight entirely or using protective clothing.

Who’s More at Risk

LaRoche identified several groups who should be especially consistent about protection: the elderly, children and people who spend extended time outdoors for work or sports.

“I think it would be our most vulnerable populations in general,” LaRoche said. “The elderly, children, outside workers, those who are involved in sporting events. They’re in the sun for longer periods of time.”

Moving Forward

Both LaRoche and Emert emphasized that protection is only part of the equation. Regular skin screenings with a dermatologist or primary care provider round out a complete approach to UV health.

“I also recommend going to your care provider or dermatologist for your annual skin cancer check,” LaRoche said.

Caught early, skin cancer is highly treatable. Caught late, melanoma is one of the most dangerous cancers there is. The annual check, like sunscreen, is a small step that can make a big difference.

“UV awareness is just little small steps,” she said. “It’s really about prevention. Sunscreen, shade and protective clothing can help prevent long-term issues. Small steps now can equal a healthier future,” LaRoche said.

For more information, tips and tricks regarding sun safety, visit cdc.gov/skin-cancer/sun-safety/.

Choctaw Nation partners with IHS to bring new clinic to Hugo

DURANT, Okla. (June 9, 2026) — The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA) and Indian Health Services (IHS) have entered into a joint venture partnership to build a new health clinic in Hugo. The clinic will be over 100,000 square feet and is targeted for completion in about three years.

In addition to services already provided in the current 50-year-old facility, the additional space will allow for more services to be provided to any Tribal member. Additional services will include pediatrics, enhanced radiology and therapy services, and other specialty providers.

“Partnering with IHS for this new clinic allows us to accelerate our strategic goals faster and better serve our patients,” said Todd Hallmark, executive officer of health services for CNHSA. “The current services will be expanded and with the new services, we’ll be able to see patients without referring them to other Choctaw Nation clinics or even other facilities in the area.”

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION	
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">MARKET HOURS</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">Open 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em; font-style: italic;">Markets will be closed the last two days of each month for inventory.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.1em;">July 2026</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">All markets open weekdays, July 1-29</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 0.8em;">Closed: July 3, 30 & 31</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.7em;">Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation. Participants can request a calendar at their location.</p>	
ANTLERS	400 S.W. “O” ST., 580-298-6443 FOOD DEMO JULY 7
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LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
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Atoka 539.316.2050	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Battiest 580.920.7061	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Broken Bow 539.316.3011	Daily Monday – Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Durant 539.316.3517	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Heavener 539.316.4784	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Hugo 539.316.5089	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:00 pm
Idabel 539.316.4313	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
McAlester 539.316.2431	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Poteau 539.316.4606	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Smithville 580.920.7063	1st Thursday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Spiro 918.962.5134	Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Stigler 918.967.4211	Monday & Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Talihina 539.316.6792	Daily Monday - Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Wilburton 580.642.7588	Wednesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Mobile Van 580.745.4330	1st Tuesday – Boswell 3rd Tuesday – Coalgate 4th Tuesday - Clayton	9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Scan to learn more about the program.

Choctaw Nation Health Services

Boom in the Valley puts new spin on classic event

By Kendra Germany-Wall

The Choctaw Nation's annual Boom in the Valley celebration will return July 3 with a new twist as hundreds of illuminated drones take to the Tvshkahomma sky.

For years, Boom in the Valley has been a summertime tradition, bringing together tribal members and guests to celebrate Independence Day weekend with activities, entertainment and a fireworks show.

This year, instead of fireworks, organizers are introducing a drone light show featuring at least 400 drones that will illuminate the night sky with choreographed formations and vibrant displays.

The event is open to the public and begins at 6:30 p.m., with gates opening at 5:30 p.m. Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or blankets and enjoy an evening of family-friendly activities before the show begins at dark.

The Event will take place at the Tvshka

Homma Capitol Grounds Council House
Rd Tuskahoma, OK 74574

Activities include:

- Food Vendors
- Bubbles Foam Machine
- Chalk Painting
- Free Play Cornhole
- Karaoke
- Stickball and Rabbit Sticks Activities
- Emergency Services Vehicle Tours
- Dunk Tank

Boom in the Valley continues to provide an opportunity for families to gather, celebrate and create lasting memories while enjoying one of Choctaw Country's signature summer events.



Photo Provided

Colorful drones will take shape and light up the night sky during the new take on the annual Boom in the Valley event on July 3 in Tvshkahomma.

CNHSA 2026 Residency Graduates

DURANT, Okla. (July 2026) – The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma recognized four graduates from the Family Medicine Residency Program this summer. Doctors Lance Frost, Benjamin Harris, Punam Mulji, and Hillary Patocka finished their three-year residency with Choctaw Nation and will begin careers across the United States.

"Every residency program aims to arm the doctors in their program with tools to best diagnosis and treat patients wherever they end up in their career," says Cody McCorkle, M.D., residency program director. "Choctaw Nation has developed strategic partners across the area to make sure these physicians have the most tools possible."

Lance Frost, D.O. grew up in Mustang, Oklahoma. He started his education at the University of Oklahoma, graduating in 2019 with a bachelor's in chemistry and biochemistry. He then continued to Kansas City University to graduate with his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine in 2023. When not working, he enjoys backpacking and pickleball, and is currently training for a half-marathon. Dr. Frost recently married his fiancée, Lizzie Beaver. After graduating, Dr. Frost will be working for CoxHealth system in Ozark, Missouri, in outpatient family medicine.

Growing up in Denver, Colorado, Dr. Benjamin Harris received his bachelor's in science in society from the Metropolitan State University of Denver in 2016. In 2019, he received his master's in biomedical sciences from Bluefield College in Bluefield, Virginia. Dr. Harris then pursued his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, graduating in 2023. He is looking forward to a summer of spending time with his wife, De'ja, and child, Damon. After the summer break, he plans to begin working at the Holdenville, Oklahoma Family Medicine Clinic.

Punam Mulji, D.O., M.S., spent the first part of her life in Spartanburg, South Carolina. In 2017, she graduated from Wofford College with a bachelor's in biology with a minor in accounting. Dr. Mulji furthered her education with a Master's in Bioscience from Kansas City University, graduating in 2018. She received her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Kansas City University in 2022. Dr. Mulji moved to the Midwest nine years ago to pursue medicine and chase tornadoes. She's happy to have achieved only one of those goals. She has found it exciting to experience being around so many Dallas Cowboys fans but is eager to return home to her family in the Carolinas. She plans to become a nocturnist.

Hillary Patocka, D.O. grew up in Enid, Oklahoma. Graduating from Southwestern Oklahoma State University with a bachelor's in biology and a minor in chemistry in 2019, she further pursued her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine at Oklahoma State University and graduated in 2023. When not working, Dr. Patocka enjoys spending time with her husband, Skylar and getting ready to welcome their first child this September. After graduation, she plans to move back to Enid and work at a sliding scale outpatient clinic.

The residents completed the program on June 30, 2026, and are board certified in family medicine. They gathered with family and friends for a recent graduation ceremony to celebrate.

For more information on the Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program, visit choctawnation.com/services/residency/.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Recent graduates of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Residency Program are, from left, Punam Mulji, Hillary Patocka, Benjamin Harris and Lance Frost.

BOOM IN THE VALLEY
— DRONE SHOW —
Friday, July 3, 2026
Gates open at 5:30 p.m. (show begins at dark)
TVSHKA HOMMA CAPITOL GROUNDS
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Chickasaw Nation Governor announces retirement

By Kendra Germany-Wall

Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby announced his retirement June 8 after nearly 40 years as governor and more than 50 years of service to the Chickasaw Nation.

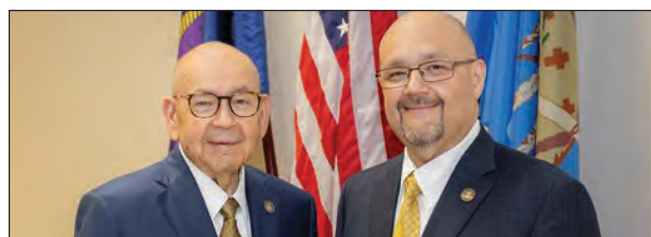
Anoatubby began his career with the tribe in 1975 as health services director, was elected the first lieutenant governor in 1979 and became governor in 1987. During his tenure, the Chickasaw Nation grew from about 250 employees and an \$11 million operating budget to nearly 15,000 employees with an economic impact exceeding \$8 billion. The nation now operates more than 100 businesses that help fund nearly 400 programs and services.

"After much thought and prayer, it is time to transition to the next generation of capable Chickasaw leaders," Anoatubby said in a statement.

Under the Chickasaw Constitution, Lt. Gov. Chris Anoatubby will be sworn in as governor following Gov. Anoatubby's resignation. This article was published on June 17, before the resignation officially went into effect on June 26.

Chris Anoatubby has served the Chickasaw Nation for nearly 30 years in a variety of leadership roles, including chief pharmacist, health care executive and commerce and health department administrator. He was first elected lieutenant governor in 2019 and reelected in 2023.

Bill Anoatubby expressed confidence in the leadership team



Chickasaw Nation Photo

Pictured are Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby and Lt. Governor Chris Anoatubby.

and said he expects a smooth transition as the Chickasaw Nation continues pursuing its long-term vision and goals.

Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma released the following statement following Gov. Anoatubby's retirement announcement.

"Gov. Anoatubby's impact on the Chickasaw Nation, Oklahoma and all tribes in our state has been immeasurable," Batton said. "It has been an honor and a joy to work with him over the years, and I'm grateful to call him a friend. He has helped people understand the value and importance of tribal sovereignty and has been a role model for tribes seeking to expand their business activities to provide more services to their members and communities. His vision and leadership, along with his kindness and compassion, will live on and not be forgotten. We are confident in Chris Anoatubby's abilities to continue moving the Chickasaw Nation in a positive direction, and we look forward to continuing our work on shared goals and priorities."

CHOCTAW POWWOW 2026
SAVE THE DATE
NOVEMBER 6 - 8

SCAN QR CODE FOR DETAILS

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION SERVICE PRESENTS
Chahta Kids' Corner

Help clean up after your 4th of July celebrations! Match items to the right bin. It's quick, fun, and makes a difference!

ISHT ISHKO (Red cup) NA WAYA OKCHAKI (Flowers) AHE (CINPS) COLA (NAN ISHKO CHAMPULI) AMPO (Sandwich)

TRASH COMPOST RECYCLE

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

BIG NEWS FOR FAMILIES PLANNING THEIR CHILDREN'S FINANCIAL FUTURE!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE PROGRAMS AND TO LEARN HOW TO GET STARTED, VISIT TRUMPACCOUNTS.GOV

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Native stories take center stage at The District film screenings

By Christian Chaney-Sackett

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma recently hosted two documentary screenings that explored Native culture, identity and community through film.

Through stories of stickball and powwow culture, the films explored Native identity, tradition and the people who continue to preserve those traditions today.

The first screening, “Stickball: The Little Brother of War,” was held on May 30 at The District Cinema inside Choctaw Casino & Resort Durant.

Tribal leaders, cultural representatives, athletes, filmmakers and invited guests attended the red-carpet-style premiere, which was followed by a panel discussion.

Directed by Choctaw filmmaker Mark Williams, the documentary explores the history and cultural significance of stickball, one of the oldest Indigenous games in North America. Often referred to as “the little brother of war,” the game has long played an important role in Southeastern tribal communities.

Through game footage and personal stories, the film shows that stickball is more than a sport. It highlights the game’s role in preserving cultural identity, strengthening community ties and connecting generations.

A major focus of the documentary is the growing role of women in the sport.

The film follows the Choctaw Nation women’s team, Tvshkahomma Ohoyo, and its rivalry with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians women’s team, Koni Hata.

The documentary explores not only the competition between the two teams, but also the cultural bonds they share despite generations of separation following the Trail of Tears. Viewers see the physical demands of the game alongside the relationships formed between teammates, families and communities.

Following the screening, Williams joined producer Matt Hanisch and several players for a question-and-answer session moderated by Claire Young.

Williams said the documentary was inspired by years of following Tvshkahomma Ohoyo and watching the team continue to improve.

He described the rivalry with Koni Hata as a “David versus Goliath” story, in which the Oklahoma team overcame challenges and earned respect through competition.

During the discussion, Williams said he wanted audiences to experience the energy and emotion of the Women’s World Series firsthand.

“Being down there for the World Series is something you have to experience on your own, and so I wanted to try to capture that and put it on the big screen,” Williams said.

Players also spoke about the impact of stickball on their lives and communities.

Several discussed the strong bonds formed through the sport and the importance of serving as role models for younger generations.

The discussion also addressed misconceptions about women’s participation in stickball. Players noted that Choctaw women have long been involved in the game and said the documentary helps highlight a tradition that has existed for generations.

“It wasn’t always common knowledge that Choctaw women did play stickball,” Yasmine “Yaz” Del Rosario said.

“Even today, you’ll still hear some people say that we’ve started to allow women to play stickball, and that’s not the case for Choctaw women specifically.”

Del Rosario said she hopes the documentary helps young Choctaw girls see themselves as both leaders and athletes while continuing to honor their cultural responsibilities.

“I think it’s just a really beautiful thing that we can be, you know, supportive of our community and life givers in our community, but we can also show how fierce we are whenever we are defending each other and taking care of each other or whenever we have a mission and a goal that we’re all unified in,” Del Rosario said.

Williams has spent much of his career documenting Native athletes and cultural traditions through film.

The award-winning Choctaw filmmaker was inducted into the North American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame for Media in 2023 and has earned recognition for several documentaries focused on stickball and Native sports.

His previous feature-length documentary, Tvshka Nowvt Aya (Warrior’s Journey), won Best Film at the 2018 NatiVisions Film Festival.

The second screening, “Powwow People,” was held June 14 at The District Cinema and included a discussion with director Sky Hopinka following the film.

Released in 2025, “Powwow People” follows a single day at a powwow, from early morning preparations to evening dance competitions.

Rather than documenting an existing event, Hopinka and the production team organized the powwow themselves at Seattle’s Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center and invited dancers, singers, vendors and community members to participate.

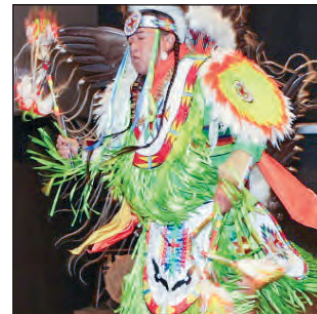
The documentary follows four individuals whose experiences help tell the story of contemporary powwow culture.

Gina Bluebird-Stacona oversees event preparation and organization; Ruben Littlehead



Photos by Christian Toews

Sky Hopinka, director of the film “Powwow People,” poses with the Roberts family in their powwow attire before the screening at District Cinema in Durant, Oklahoma.



Left: Mark D. Williams, director of “Stickball: The Little Brother of War,” poses for a photo with Miss Choctaw Nation Candis Battice Louis, who is featured in the film. **Center:** Choctaw Nation’s Shauna Williams, addresses the packed theater after the screening of “Powwow People.” **Right:** Michael Roberts dances in District Cinema before the screening of “Powwow People.”



Left: Mark D. Williams, director, and Zach Garcia, composer, pose next to the “Stickball: The Little Brother of War” poster at District Cinema in Durant. **Right:** Shauna Williams interviews director Sky Hopinka during a Q&A session after the free public screening of Hopinka’s film, “Powwow People.”

serves as one of the gathering’s central voices; Jamie John reflects on the future of powwow traditions; and Freddie Cozad shares perspectives on history and cultural continuity.

The film also features performances from the Black Lodge Singers and Cozad Singers. A central theme of the film is Native self-representation.

Instead of presenting powwow culture through the perspective of an outside observer, Hopinka places participants at the center of the story, allowing them to share their own experiences and perspectives.

Throughout the film, audiences see more than dance competitions and performances. Viewers witness the work behind the scenes as families prepare regalia, vendors set up booths, singers gather, and volunteers help organize the event. These moments highlight the many people whose efforts make a powwow possible.

The film also explores how traditions are carried forward through families and communities. Through the experiences of its participants, Powwow People examines how cultural knowledge is shared across generations while adapting to modern Native life.

Families, children, dancers, singers and community members all play a role in the story. Together, they demonstrate how powwows remain important places for cultural expression, connection and learning.

Hopinka, a Ho-Chunk and Pechanga filmmaker and recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, is known for work exploring Indigenous language, identity, memory and place.

His films have been shown internationally and often center on Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

While the documentaries focus on different traditions, both screenings emphasized the importance of Native storytelling and cultural preservation.

Through stories of stickball and powwow culture, audiences were given an opportunity to learn more about the people, traditions and relationships that continue to shape Native communities today.

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

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ChoctawCulturalCenter.com

INFORMATION UPDATES

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

Scan QR code for details.

LABOR DAY ENTERTAINMENT

The Choctaw Nation has announced the free concert lineup for the 2026 Choctaw Labor Day Festival. Things kick off Saturday night, Sept. 5, with performances by festival favorite Neal McCoy and country music star Mark Chesnutt. Sunday’s Christian music concert will feature the Southern gospel group the Williamsons, gold record artist Hope Darst and Dove Award nominee Ben Fuller. For more details about this year’s entertainment, visit laborday.choctawnation.com.

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 ♦

July (Chulai) 2026

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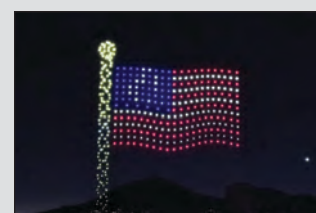
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Discover legacy and history of Choctaw Nation’s annual Trail of Tears events.



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Find answers to the most frequently asked Biskinik questions.



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Learn more about this year’s twist on a classic event, the Boom in the Valley drone show.

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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