

September 2026 Issue



Choctaw Nation education programs support students at every stage

By Christian Chaney-Sackett

As students return to classrooms this fall, the Choctaw Nation continues its commitment to helping tribal members achieve their educational goals through programs that support learning from early childhood through career development.

Executive Director of Education Amanda Johnson said the Choctaw Nation Education Department is ready to help students and families start the new school year.

“Choctaw Nation Education Programs are gearing up for another successful school year with a strong commitment to supporting tribal members. Our team is ready to work hard, provide meaningful resources, and help students and families feel prepared, encouraged, and supported every step of the way.”

Whether preparing children for their first day of preschool, helping high school students plan for the future, assisting college students with educational expenses or providing workforce training for adults, the Choctaw Nation offers resources to help members succeed at every stage.

Building a Foundation

A strong education begins with a strong foundation. Head Start helps children ages 3 to 5 prepare for kindergarten by providing educational, health, nutritional and family support services that promote school readiness and early success in the classroom.

As students prepare for a new school year, the Student School & Activity Fund (SSAF) helps eligible Choctaw students purchase school clothing through a \$100 prepaid Visa card. Throughout the school year, the Johnson-O'Malley (JOM) Program partners with schools across the reservation to provide supplemental educational opportunities and services that support Native American students.

Academic achievement is also celebrated through the Success Through Academic Recognition (STAR) Program, which rewards eligible students for outstanding grades and perfect attendance each semester.

Families seeking a residential education experience may also consider Jones Academy, which serves students in grades 1 through 12 while promoting academic excellence, leadership and Choctaw culture.

Preparing for College and Careers

High school is an exciting time as students begin exploring future careers, college opportunities and life after graduation.

Through High School Student Services, students receive academic advising, ACT prep, scholarship information, individualized development plans and reimbursements for qualifying education-related expenses.

Students interested in technical education can receive assistance through High School Career Tech Assistance, while those earning college credit before graduation may qualify for High School Concurrent College Assistance.

Those interested in health care careers can also explore opportunities through Health Education in Rural

Oklahoma for Employment Success (HEROES).

Outside the classroom, students can continue developing leadership skills through the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), where members participate in community service projects, leadership training, conferences and professional development opportunities while making a positive impact in their communities.

Supporting College Success

The Choctaw Nation continues investing in students after high school through programs that help make higher education more accessible and affordable.

The Higher Education Program provides financial assistance to eligible students pursuing associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. Students attending Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Carl Albert State College and Eastern Oklahoma State College can also receive additional support through the College Freshman Year Initiative (College FYI), which helps first-year students successfully transition to college life.

Additional programs help students succeed beyond the classroom.

The Technology Allowance provides a one-time payment to assist with technology expenses, while the College Clothing Allowance helps eligible students purchase professional attire during their college careers.

As students reach graduation, the Graduation Honors Program recognizes eligible graduates with graduation cords and stoles that celebrate their accomplishments.

Students pursuing careers in education may also benefit from Teach 2 Reach, which provides financial assistance, mentoring, professional development and career placement support for future educators attending participating universities.

Education Beyond Graduation

Learning doesn't stop after graduation. Adults looking to build new skills or advance their careers can take advantage of several workforce and continuing education programs offered through the Choctaw Nation.

The Career Development Program provides career counseling, tuition assistance and workforce readiness services for members pursuing industry-recognized credentials, certifications and licensure.

Adults working toward earning a high school equivalency diploma can receive instruction and support through the Adult Education Program.

The Vocational Development Program helps eligible participants complete approved vocational and career technology training.

The 477 Program provides employment and training opportunities through classroom instruction, work experience, on-the-job training, youth employment services and child care assistance, helping participants prepare for long-term career success.

Education is a lifelong journey, and the Choctaw Nation stays committed to helping tribal members find the support they need at every step along the way.

Not sure where to start? Use the following guide to find the right program for you or your student.

CHOCTAW NATION

EDUCATION PROGRAM GUIDE

Find the right Choctaw Nation education program for you or your student with this guide to available resources and opportunities.

For eligibility requirements, application periods and program details, visit choctawnation.com/services/education or log in to the Chahta Achvffa member portal.

Early Childhood Up to Grade 12

Program	Who Can Apply	What It Offers
Head Start	Children ages 3-5	Early childhood education and school readiness
Student School & Activity Fund (SSAF)	Choctaw students enrolled in school or daycare	\$100 prepaid Visa card for school clothing
Johnson-O'Malley (JOM)	Native American students ages 3 through grade 12	Supplemental educational support through participating schools
Success Through Academic Recognition (STAR)	Choctaw students in grades 2-12	Rewards for academic achievement and perfect attendance
Jones Academy	Students in grades 1-12 who meet admission requirements	Residential education emphasizing academics and Choctaw culture

High School & Career Pathways

Program	Who Can Apply	What It Offers
High School Student Services	Choctaw students in grades 9-12	Academic advising, ACT prep, scholarships and reimbursements
High School Career Tech Assistance	Choctaw juniors and seniors enrolled in approved CareerTech programs	Assistance with required training expenses
High School Concurrent College Assistance	Choctaw high school students enrolled in concurrent college courses	Financial assistance for concurrent enrollment
HEROES	High school students and adult learners pursuing healthcare careers	Healthcare education and career development
Youth Advisory Board (YAB)	Students in grades 8-12 living within the reservation	Leadership development and community service

Higher Education & College Life

Program	Who Can Apply	What It Offers
Higher Education Program	Choctaw students enrolled in accredited colleges and universities	Financial assistance for degree programs
College Freshman Year Initiative (College FYI)	First-year students attending participating colleges	Support during the transition to college
Technology Allowance	Eligible Choctaw college students	One-time technology assistance
College Clothing Allowance	Eligible Choctaw college students	One-time professional clothing assistance
Graduation Honors	Eligible graduating students	Graduation cords and stoles
Teach 2 Reach	Students accepted into participating teacher education programs	Financial assistance and teacher preparation

Adult Education & Career Advancement

Program	Who Can Apply	What It Offers
Career Development	Choctaw members pursuing certifications, credentials or licensure	Career counseling, tuition assistance and workforce readiness
Adult Education	Adults seeking a high school equivalency diploma	High school equivalency instruction and support
Vocational Development	Eligible Native American adults pursuing approved vocational training	Career and technical education assistance
477 Program	Tribal members seeking employment or workforce training	Employment, training and workforce development services

Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Another successful summer season

Halito!

Every summer, we have an opportunity to make a lasting difference in the lives of our young people. One of the things that gives me great pride is seeing our youth come together to learn, compete, make new friends, experience our culture and build the confidence they will carry with them into the future. This summer, that commitment was on full display. Through our Youth Events & Activities program, the Choctaw Nation hosted 20 camps across Oklahoma, serving more than 2,300 young people this summer. From athletics to cultural activities, these camps provide our youth with opportunities to discover new interests, develop skills and create memories that will last a lifetime.

Our camps included Stickball, Rodeo, Softball, Baseball, Cheer, Football, Cultural, Golf, Wildlife and Basketball programs.

Each one offered something different, but together they represent something much greater: our commitment to giving Choctaw youth every opportunity to succeed. I am especially proud of the opportunities our youth have to participate in activities that connect them to our Choctaw heritage.

Stickball is a wonderful example. It is more than a sport. It is a tradition that connects generations of Chahta and gives our young people an opportunity to experience an important part of who we are.

This year's Stickball Camp was also our largest camp, with 181 participants. When our children learn our traditions and understand where they come from, they carry those traditions forward. That is how we keep our culture strong for generations to come.

Our summer programs also demonstrate what can happen when organizations and community partners come together around a shared commitment to our young people.

This year, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) participated in eight camps, providing guest speakers and distributing 771 Bibles to youth attendees. I appreciate the FCA representatives who took the time to invest in our youth and share messages of encouragement, faith and character.

Speaking of our youth, the Choctaw Youth Stickball Team competed in the World Series Stickball Championship and came home with Second Place! I could not be prouder of our team and the fight they put up during the tournament. Chahta Tvshka one and all!

We also kicked off the 2026 summer youth work program. This program has helped many Chahta youths with opportunities for employment, education, and training to help them succeed in the workplace. I am so proud of the accomplishments of this program and how it has given our Chahta youth a leg up as they start their careers.

I am grateful to everyone who helped make this summer possible – our Youth Events & Activities team, coaches, instructors, volunteers, community partners and the families who supported their children throughout the summer.

As the end of summer approaches, our attention turns to the annual Choctaw Labor Day Festival where tribal members of all ages are welcome to enjoy rides, sports, entertainment, and a multitude of cultural activities. This year's festival is Sept. 4-6 at the Choctaw Capitol in Tvshka Homma. I look forward to saying Halito to all of you at this wonderful event and want to invite you to attend the 2026 Labor Day Festival at 5 p.m. on Sept. 4, when I will have the privilege of delivering this year's State of the Nation live and in person at the Choctaw Capitol in Amphitheater in Tvshka Homma. We're thrilled to bring the live presentation of the State of the Nation back and look forward to delivering it as part of the 2026 Labor Day Festival! Yakoke and God Bless!



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Investing in our students, investing in our future

As summer comes to an end and students begin preparing for another school year, I can't help but feel excited about the opportunities ahead for our young people. Back-to-school season is about more than buying supplies or getting ready for the first day of class—it's a time to look ahead, set new goals, and continue building a brighter future.

At the Choctaw Nation, we believe education is one of the greatest investments we can make. Every student who walks into a classroom, every adult who decides to return to school, and every tribal member working to build a new career represents the future of our Nation. That's why we're committed to providing resources and support every step of the way.

For our youngest learners and school-aged students, we want families to know that help is available. Through our Student School & Activity Fund, eligible Choctaw students can receive a \$100 annual grant to help purchase school supplies and clothing. The Johnson-O'Malley Program also works alongside schools throughout the Choctaw Nation service area to provide additional educational opportunities that meet the unique needs of Native students.

As students begin thinking about life after high school, we offer programs designed to help them prepare for success. High School Student Services connects students in grades 9 through 12 with academic guidance and career planning resources, while our High School Concurrent College Assistance Program helps eligible students earn college credit before they graduate. For students who want to develop leadership skills and make a difference in their communities, the Youth Advisory Board offers meaningful opportunities to grow through servant leadership.

For those pursuing higher education, the Choctaw Nation remains committed to making college more accessible. Our Higher Education Program provides financial assistance to qualified tribal members attending accredited colleges and universities, and our College Freshman Year Initiative offers encouragement and support during one of the most important transitions in a student's educational journey. We know that the first year of college can be challenging, and we want our students to know they are never alone.

Education doesn't always follow a traditional path, and we recognize that every journey is unique. Through our Adult Education program, tribal members can earn their High School Equivalency Diploma online, creating new opportunities for themselves and their families. Our Career Development Programs provide financial assistance for training, career guidance, workforce skills development, and academic skill enhancement for those preparing to enter a new profession or advance in their current career.

For further information about these programs, visit choctawnation.com. I wish every student, teacher, and family a safe, successful, and rewarding school year. We look forward to seeing all that you will accomplish.

Yakoke!



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Why Do People Suffer

We are born into this world as sinners. "Behold I was shapened in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceived me." Psalms 51:5

And as sinners, we have a sin nature and are introduced into a world that is infected by sin (Genesis 3:1-21).

So, at birth, we take on the liability of sin and live in an atmosphere of sin. The consequences of sin (disease, accidents, vicious people, etc.) will affect us. People suffer because people live in a sinful world. God is not necessarily punishing us, nor is God the cause of pain and suffering. Sometimes, God may allow suffering to bring us closer to him. When people hurt physically, they cry out to God. They do the same with mental and emotional suffering. Sufferings cause us to fellowship with him.

Philippians 3:10 tells us, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Jesus was the only innocent person to ever live, and he had to suffer too. He was truthful, but they accused him of telling lies. He and the Father were one, yet they accused him of blasphemy.

The Scriptures say in Isaiah 53:7, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." Through our sufferings, we are delivered from self-reliance. We might think we can solve all our problems until we suffer. Then, we learn to pray and ask for God's help. God uses suffering to refine our faith, build character, and depend on God rather than on worldly comforts. Trials encourage us to pray, to be humble, and to rely on God's strength. David cries out for God's help in his affliction.

Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted." Psalms 25:16 Afflictions develop virtues such as patience, compassion, and mercy. Sufferings cultivate the pride in us to empathy and grow a Christlike character in believers.

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Kelsey Sample

Hummingbirds are among the most unique and fascinating birds found in Oklahoma. In our Choctaw culture, the hummingbird (Ihikoklo) symbolizes agility, joy, healing, and resilience. These tiny birds are among the smallest in the world, with many species weighing less than nickel.

Hummingbirds are remarkable fliers and are the only birds capable of flying backward and hovering in place. This ability is made possible by their specialized ball-and-socket shoulder joints, which allow exceptional wing movement.

Their name comes from the humming sound produced by their rapidly beating wings. Depending on the species, hummingbirds can flap their wings between 50 and 80 times per second while hovering and even faster during courtship displays.

This incredible style of flight requires a tremendous amount of energy. Hummingbirds must consume nearly twice their body weight in food each day and often feed every 10 to 15 minutes. Their primary food source is nectar, a sugary liquid produced by flowers that provides the energy needed to sustain their active lifestyle. As they move from flower to flower in search of nectar, hummingbirds play an important role as pollinators. In addition to nectar, they also rely on insects for protein and other essential nutrients. Small insects such as mosquitoes, gnats, aphids, and fruit flies make up an important part of their diet, and a single hummingbird may consume hundreds of insects each day.

Hummingbirds are found only in the Americas, ranging from Alaska to the southern tip of South America.

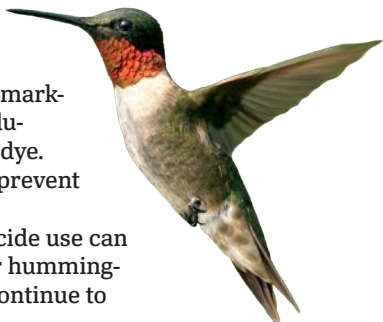
Because they depend on a steady supply of flowering plants and insects, many species migrate long distances between their breeding grounds and winter habitats.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the most common and is found throughout the reservation during the breeding season. They arrive here in March to mid-April to breed and raise their young and depart south in September to mid-October.

Unfortunately, hummingbird populations have experienced declines in recent years due to habitat loss, climate change, reductions in native flowering plants, and decreases in insect availability.

Fortunately, homeowners can help support these remarkable birds by providing feeders filled with a simple solution of four parts water to one part sugar, without red dye. Feeders should be cleaned every two to three days to prevent harmful mold growth.

Planting native flowering plants and reducing pesticide use can also provide valuable food sources and habitat for our hummingbirds, helping ensure that these extraordinary birds continue to thrive for generations to come.



Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

Give blood. Give hope.

CHANGE LIVES.

Join the Annual Blood Drive Challenge and become a lifeline for those who need it.

Scan QR to view upcoming Choctaw Nation blood drives.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Environmental Protection Service Presents

Chahta Kid’s Corner

Impress your teacher with these interesting facts! If you need help pronouncing any of these animals, you can visit our online dictionary at dictionary.choctawnation.com.

1.

There are more than 350 types of hushi (birds) and more than 170 types of nvni (fish) in the state of Oklahoma!

2.

Huchonchoba (alligators) can be found in the very tip of southeast Oklahoma! Huchonchoba are more closely related to hushi, which are direct descendants of dinosaurs, than to modern reptiles.

3.

The kinta (beaver) is the largest rodent in the U.S. and is common across Oklahoma. They can hold their breath for up to 15 minutes!

4.

Nashoba holba (coyotes) are one of the most vocal mammals in North America. They howl to let others know where it is; give short barks to warn others of danger nearby; and welcome new pack members with yips.

5.

Paddlefish can live up to 50 years. Their species is so old, they were around when dinosaurs roamed the land!

6.

Oklahoma is home to many different species of hulambisha (bats). The Easter Red Bat is the most widespread bat found in Oklahoma. Look up into the sky and trees at night, when they hunt, to see if you can find them!

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



Regina Mabray

District 12

WHEW and WHEW! The first WHEW is for the temperatures we’ve been having! I hope each of you has been able to stay cool, comfortable, and safe through the heat. The second WHEW is that I officially finished my rookie year in office, and what a wonderful whirlwind it has been. A special yakoke to my fellow council members and our Executive Officers at the Choctaw Nation. Your encouragement, guidance, knowledge, and willingness to share your expertise have meant more to me than you know. It’s truly a blessing to walk into our big, beautiful headquarters building and see so many people showing up every day with one common purpose: to do their best to make life better for our Choctaw people.

The greatest blessing of all is waking up each morning and knowing that I get to be a part of that work. I don’t take that

responsibility or the trust you place in me lightly.

September is a special month of commendations for District 12! This year, we are proud to recognize Jeffrey Jefferson as our Veteran of the Month and David Robertson as Language Speaker of the Month. We will be honoring these gentlemen for their contributions and the positive impact they have on our Choctaw people at our regular session council meeting at 10am on September 12th in Tvshka Homma.

We are also proud to recognize the Outstanding Elders of District 12! From the Coalgate Community Center, we are honored to recognize Jeff Byington and Doris Samuels. From the Crowder Community Center, we are honored to recognize Johnny Roberts and Patty Burge. These four individuals represent the strength, wisdom, history, and spirit of our communities. They will be honored at our 2026 Outstanding Elder banquet, which will be held in October in Durant.

We are also incredibly proud to celebrate 5 District 12 Chahta Foundation Scholarship recipients: Keira Miller and Natalie Shaw/Coalgate, Nolan Stewart/Stuart, Alexis Lizik and Mar’Lee Williams/Crowder. These outstanding young people represent the bright future of our communities. I’m so proud of these young people and wish them every success as they begin this exciting new chapter of their lives. Congratulations to each one of you, and always remember that District 12 is cheering you on!

Our Choctaw Nation Small Business Development team hosted an absolutely beautiful and elegant ChahtaPreneur Awards dinner, celebrating the vision, hard work, and success of our Choctaw-owned businesses. I was especially proud to see District 12 ChahtaPreneur Latildra Fortenberry, owner of Kreative Kidz Learning Academy, recognized as District 12 Business of the Year. Congratulations to Latildra and all of this year’s ChahtaPreneur honorees. Your hard work and entrepreneurial spirit strengthen our communities and contribute to a brighter future for the Choctaw Nation.

We are so proud of our Coalgate and Crowder community centers for representing District 12 at the Senior Chair Volleyball Regionals in Durant! While we didn’t quite make it to the finals, our teams showed up with enthusiasm, teamwork, determination and plenty of heart. I’m so happy you all are having fun and staying active!



Chahta Foundation Program Director Tesia Nickles, scholarship recipients Keira Miller and Mar’Lee Williams and District 12 Councilwoman Regina Mabray.



Latildra Fortenberry, District 12 Chahtapreneur of the Year, is pictured with Choctaw Nation leadership.



District 12 Councilwoman Regina Mabray poses for a photo with Afganastan War veteran, Kaleb Swboni.



Anthony Dillard

District 10

What does a stronger Choctaw Nation look like? When you ask people what they want for the future, the answers are usually the same. They want a good job. They want to provide for their family. They want their children to have a better life than they had.

That is what a stronger Choctaw Nation looks like. Over the years, our Nation has made great progress. We have built businesses, created jobs, improved healthcare, and invested in education. Those achievements deserve to be celebrated. But our work is not finished.

The next step is to make sure more Choctaw families earn higher incomes.

A higher income is about more than money. It means parents can pay their bills without worrying every

month. It means young people are more likely to stay in southeastern Oklahoma because there are more opportunities. It means grandparents can retire with dignity. It means local businesses have more customers, and it means our communities continue to grow and prosper.

Good jobs are the key. Our casinos and tourism businesses are a strong foundation, but we also need more jobs in healthcare, construction, manufacturing, technology, transportation, and other skilled trades. These jobs often pay higher wages while giving people a chance to build a better future.

Investing in education also matters, but education does not only mean college. Trade schools, apprenticeships, and job training can lead to excellent careers, and every Choctaw citizen should have a chance to learn skills that lead to a substantial paycheck.

We should also support people who want to start their own businesses. If you would like to start a small business, please reach out to the Chahtapreneur program, and they will help you with training and technical assistance. A small business can provide for a family and create jobs for others. When Choctaw-owned businesses succeed, our communities become stronger.

As our economy grows, we must remember who we are. The Choctaw people have always believed in helping one another. We value family, hard work, respect, and service to our communities. Those values should continue to guide our decisions because even small steps today can make a big difference for our children and grandchildren.

Our ancestors overcame many hardships so that we could have a better life. We honor them by continuing to build a stronger Choctaw Nation.

A stronger Choctaw Nation is not measured only by the number of businesses we own or the buildings we build. It is measured by the success of our people. When our families prosper, our Nation prospers, and that is a future worth working for.

Many of these strategies are being offered across several different programs, and I plan to be very intentional about advocating for the expansion of these opportunities.

Yakoke,
Anthony Dillard District #10 Tribal Council



Robert Karr

District 11

Halito,

As another season comes to an end, I hope you and your family have enjoyed a wonderful summer filled with time together, vacations, and a well-deserved break from school. As we prepare for the fall season, it is once again time to attend the annual Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival. With all the activities and events planned, it is always amazing to see Choctaw culture on full display and to have the opportunity to reconnect with family and friends while making new memories.

This past summer was filled with plenty of excitement and accomplishments across the Choctaw Nation and in District 11.

The Nation once again operated the Summer Food Service Program across the reservation, providing meals and snacks for children ages 1-17. Across the reservation, an average of 62,000

meals were served each week, totaling more than 700,000 meals throughout the summer. This program is so vital for our communities while school is not in session, and it would not be possible without everyone who helped with the distribution of the meals.

Yakoke to all the employees and volunteers who worked with our youth at the many camps held this summer, where more than 2,300 children attended. The Youth Events team did an amazing job, offering plenty of opportunities for our youth to gain valuable experience in different areas such as stickball, sports, and culture.

The Choctaw Nation stickball teams traveled to Mississippi in July to compete in the World Series of Stickball, and they represented the Nation incredibly well. The Tvshkahomma (Men’s 35+) and Tvshka Homma Himitta teams battled their way to the championship games, competing with determination and heart. We are extremely proud of all our teams and the dedication they showed throughout the tournament.

Our District 11 Choctaw Veteran and Choctaw Language Speaker for the Nation were honored during the August Tribal Council regular session meeting. Congratulations to Elgie Hosay for carrying on his rich family history of service to our country, and to Shelly Westbrook for promoting and teaching the Choctaw language to others in District 11.

The Choctaw Small Business Development program held its Chahtapreneur Awards Dinner in June, where a Chahtapreneur from each district was recognized for the success of their Choctaw-owned small business. District 11’s Chahtapreneur of the Year was Justin Few of Platinum Appraisal LLC. Congratulations, Justin!

Our new 2026–27 District 11 Princesses are Little Miss Olivia Scott and Junior Miss Sophia McFarland. We wish them the very best as they represent District 11 and compete for the overall title at the Labor Day Princess Pageant.

I look forward to seeing you at the festival. It is a privilege and an honor to serve as your Councilman. As always, if I can be of assistance in any way regarding the Choctaw Nation, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Chihowa vt Achukma!



Pictured is the Tvshkahomma (Men’s 35+) team, which finished second in its division at the 2026 World Series of Stickball.



Councilman Robert Karr pictured with District 11’s 2026-27 princesses, Little Miss Olivia Scott and Junior Miss Sophia McFarland.



Choctaw Nation Leadership is pictured with District 11 Chahtapreneur of the Year, Justin Few of Platinum Appraisal.



James Dry

District 9

Halito from District 9.

It’s hard to believe that summer has already flown by and school is back in session. The last couple of months have been filled with many opportunities for community connection, youth engagement, and continued growth across District 9.

We would like to congratulate District 9 Little Miss Madeline Davenport, who was crowned at the District 9 Princess Pageant back in May. Madeline has become a passionate ambassador of Choctaw culture and has done a wonderful job representing our district these past few months. We can’t wait to cheer her on when she competes at the Labor Day festival.

The brand-new Choctaw Community Center in Durant celebrated its ribbon-cutting on June 16, and there was a fantastic turnout. Yakoke to everyone who joined us in celebrating this milestone of growth for Bryan County and our community. The new center is now open, and we encourage you to stop by to see the new facility.

We would also like to give a big congratulations to Chahtaprenuer Don Hyde, recipient of the District 9 Business of the Year award for Pearl Snap Limo Services. His business has introduced an innovative approach to transportation while providing our community with a unique and enjoyable travel experience.

The Quarterly Inter-Tribal Council Meeting was conducted on July 8-10 at the River Spirit Resort in Tulsa. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation was an exceptional host, and it’s always an honor to meet with fellow Tribal leaders to discuss relevant issues impacting our communities.

On July 17, members of the Tribal Council had the opportunity to meet this year’s Summer College Interns. There is so much talent and potential amongst our younger generations, and it is so encouraging to see the passion and drive these young Tribal members exhibit as they complete their studies.

Throughout this summer, the Youth Events Team has successfully hosted a variety of youth camps in Tuskahoma. From culture to football to rodeo, these camps offered different opportunities for our youth to learn new skills, connect with other young Tribal members, and spend the summer in a meaningful way. Yakoke to Kevin Gwin and all the coaches, associates, and volunteers who have invested so much time and effort in making these camps a great experience for our youth.

Although the Summer Food Service Program has concluded for the season, its impact across the Choctaw Nation Reservation was extraordinary. In Bryan County alone, more than 80,000 meals were distributed to help families while school was out for the summer. We are grateful for this important program and for the many individuals whose hard work made the distribution process run so smoothly.

On August 5-6, the Durant Johnson O’Malley held their annual school supply pick-up at the Durant Intermediate School. With more than 1,100 Tribal students enrolled in Durant Public Schools, it is encouraging to see the continued support provided to the families in our community.

We hope everyone has a great school year!

Yakoke,
James Dry District 9



Councilman James Dry with the 2026-2027 District 9 Little Miss Madeline Davenport.



James Dry poses with District 9 Chahtapreneur Business of the Year Don Hyde of Pearl Snap Limo Services.



Members of District 9 pose for a photo at the Choctaw Community Center in Durant ribbon cutting on June 16.

Serving up wellness: Chair volleyball is a hit within tribal elder community

By Christian Toews

The players may be sitting down, but there is nothing relaxing about chair volleyball. For Choctaw elders across the reservation, the sport has become a lively combination of exercise, competition, laughter and community.

On July 23, elders from all 12 districts gathered at the Choctaw Nation Wellness Center in Durant for the 2026 chair volleyball regionals. Thirty teams competed for a spot in the Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival finals.

Thirty teams from across the reservation competed for a spot in the Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival finals on Friday, Sept. 3.

Sitting shoulder to shoulder, players stretch, twist, and tap the ball high above the net while smiles are exchanged among focused faces. Like many sports, this requires agility, focus, teamwork, and a lot of fun.

For Choctaw elders, chair volleyball has become far more than a game. It is a celebration of wellness, friendship and district pride.

Candice O’Daniel, the Senior Wellness Coordinator for the Choctaw Nation, said that chair volleyball began in the original Wellness Center in Durant, within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, around 2008.

At that time, chair volleyball was one of several activities included in senior fitness programs. Elders took part in walking groups and chair aerobics before finishing their exercise sessions with fun games such as Frisbee golf or chair volleyball.

As the Choctaw Nation established more Wellness and Community Centers in southeastern Oklahoma, chair volleyball followed. The game has thrived alongside the Senior Wellness Program and is now available in all districts. Elders meet once a week at their local centers to practice and prepare for competitive play.

As participation increased, friendly games evolved into more organized competition. According to O’Daniel, more than 250 elders participate in the program each year, making chair volleyball one of the largest senior recreational activities in the Choctaw Nation.

The rise in chair volleyball’s popularity is largely due to its accessibility. Unlike traditional volleyball, players remain seated throughout the match, making it possible for elders of all mobility levels to participate.

The sport builds upper-body strength, flexibility, hand-eye coordination, and cardiovascular health, all while remaining gentle on the joints. Swapping a traditional volleyball for a beach ball softens the impact on fingers and hands and lets the ball stay in the air longer.

The benefits extend far beyond physical health. This sport offers elders a chance to forge friendships and stay spirited within their communities.

Linda Walthall played with her District 2 team in the July tournament.

Walthall enjoys chair volleyball because she can fellowship with other seniors, and it is great exercise.

“Believe it or not, you use everything on your body, and it’s always fun to hit that ball when you think about something that’s getting you down,” said Walthall. “You slam that ball, and it will make you feel good!”

O’Daniel pointed out that the sport has grown so much that four tournaments are now held throughout the year, each hosting around 30 teams.



Photos by Kellie Matherly
Elders from across the Choctaw Nation Reservation gathered at the Durant Wellness Center to compete in the 2026 Elder Chair Volleyball Regional Tournament. Over the years, chair volleyball has become a staple of the Choctaw Nation’s senior wellness programs, providing both friendly competition and a sense of community among elders.

The biggest annual tournament is the Elder Chair Volleyball Regional Qualifier, which takes place each summer at the Durant Wellness Center with teams competing under a double-elimination format.

The top four teams earn the right to compete at the championship during the annual Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival at Tvshka Homma, where they play for medals, a championship trophy, and bragging rights.

O’Daniel said that even though chair volleyball has been included in the Wellness Program for more than ten years, it only recently became an official championship event at the Labor Day Festival.

The addition shows the sport’s growing popularity and the important role it now plays in community and wellness centers. It now takes place with long-standing competitions such as stickball, softball, horseshoes and cornhole.

Chair volleyball has earned its place as one of the Labor Day Festival’s most anticipated events, drawing family members and supporters who gather to cheer on their elders.

This year, the teams competing for the championship are Wilburton, Broken Bow, Smithville and Wright City.

Chair volleyball proves that competition has no age limit and that true wellness is holistic. Health is not found only in movement but also in laughter, encouragement and the relationships built across the net.

To learn more about programs specifically for elders, visit your local community or wellness center or visit choctawnation.com/services/.



Martha Kelley celebrates a century of family, faith and adventure

By Judy Allen

Martha Kelley celebrated her 100th birthday in August. “I don’t feel as old as my age,” said the cheerful woman who answered the door of her home. Born to Ed and Ella (James) Jones in Stigler, Martha still enjoys trips to Stigler, where she can get one of her favorite meals at a local cafe—chicken-fried steak and mashed potatoes.

She has always enjoyed traveling, and her long-distance trips have included vacations to Hawaii, California and Michigan; an adventure to Illinois to see the Sears Tower when it was the tallest building in America; and crossing the desert by car between Oklahoma and California to work all summer in an apricot orchard in Fresno.

Martha was in ninth grade, between classes at Haskell, when she first drove the family car to Fresno with her mother and sister.

“I didn’t have a license, and I didn’t have any fear of driving, even in California traffic,” she said.

Early years of her life were spent on farms, and she loved to fish and hunt. She still enjoys fishing.

“Hunting once with my dad, he couldn’t shoot a squirrel out of the top of a tree. He told me to take the gun and try to hit it. I did with the first shot,” said Martha. “After that, I always went hunting with him if I was not at school.”

She fondly recalls spending Saturdays in town, getting a burger and soda at Blackies, then going to the movies. She also remembers the hard work of doing laundry at the creek.

Martha recalls living on a farm with about 20 Alberta peach trees.

“We had so much fruit,” she said. “We would sell it by the bushel!”

They always raised a big garden, although they had no plow and no farm animals. They broke the ground and made rows with a hoe.

Her family walked to church each week. “Folks from long distances would come in their wagons and fill up the churchyard.” Martha’s family didn’t have a wagon or horses, and it was the early 1940s before they got their first car.

She met her late husband, Grover, while living in Dallas. He was a police officer and had a motorcycle.

“I used to ride all around Dallas on the back of his motorcycle,” Martha said.

She remembers that after World War II ended, it seemed everyone in Dallas was celebrating. Martha was still living in Dallas when President John F. Kennedy was killed. They had attended the parade, saw him and the first lady in the convertible,



Photo by Judy Allen
Martha Kelley celebrated her 100th birthday in August, reflecting on a century filled with family, travel, adventure and cherished memories. At 100, she remains active, with a cheerful outlook on life and gratitude for her family.

and heard on the radio later that he had been shot soon after the car passed by.

Martha and Grover moved back to Oklahoma and made great memories with their children. They used to spend every Fourth of July camping at Robbers Cave and kayaking. She said her son got a thrill out of turning her kayak over and laughing when she came up gurgling. It was all in fun, and they enjoyed the game.

“One time, the fireworks didn’t go up in the sky before exploding, and everyone was running to get out of the way,” she said with a laugh.

Martha used to play piano at Bethel Church. She still plays at home, and her dog likes to sit at her feet and listen.

Today, Martha has a large family who love her dearly, including six children—Shirley, Joyce, Gerald, Billy, Kay and Mark—21 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

“I love all my children and grandchildren,” she said. “I hope they all will attend church, love and take care of each other.”

According to Martha, she would like to be remembered as being helpful and describes herself as a happy-go-lucky person.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is honored to share the stories of Choctaw centenarians like Martha Kelley. If you or someone you know is a Choctaw tribal member age 100 or older, please contact Judy Allen at judy.allen@choctawnation.com or 580.513.7984 to be considered for future stories and projects.

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

PROJECT RETURN

Choctaw Nation and the University of Iowa’s Native Policy Lab invite survivors of Indian Boarding Schools to request their records free of charge and in full confidence.

Living survivors can request records now at npl.lab.uiowa.edu. Forms also available at all Choctaw community centers.

Questions? Email native-policy-lab@uiowa.edu.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

There’s something for you here.

Choctaw CAREERS

Apply at Careers.ChoctawNation.com

Upcoming Events

Futures of Basketball Showcase | Sept. 13 | Girls: 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. | Boys: 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. | Bloomer Sullivan Arena | 1713 N 1st Ave Durant, OK 74701 | Interested in taking your basketball career to the next level? Join us Sept. 13 at Bloomer Sullivan Arena on the Southeastern Oklahoma State University campus. Competitive tribal athletes in grades 10-12 will have the opportunity to showcase their skills and be evaluated by local college coaches.

CHR Fall Fest | Sept. 16 | 9:30 a.m. | McAlester Expo Center | 4500 West, US-270 McAlester, OK | Spend the day browsing through informative booths, enjoying country western singing and registering for door prizes. Breakfast, snacks, and lunch will be provided. Buses will run from Choctaw Nation Community Centers. Please contact your community center representative to sign up for transportation.

Blood Drive – McAlester Casino | Sept. 21 | 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. | Choctaw Casino – McAlester | 1638 S George Nigh Expy. McAlester, OK 74501 | Donating blood saves lives, supports the community, and boosts your health. Take part in the Annual Blood Drive Challenge—walk-ins welcome or schedule an appointment at yourbloodinstitute.org/donor/schedules/name (search “Choctaw” or by city).

Blood Drive – Poteau | Sept. 24 | 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. | Rubin White Health Clinic | 109 Kerr Ave Poteau, OK 74953 | Donating blood saves lives, supports the community, and boosts your health. Take part in the Annual Blood Drive Challenge—walk-ins welcome or schedule an appointment at yourbloodinstitute.org/donor/schedules/name (search “Choctaw” or by city).

Community Cultural Meeting – Reno | Sept. 24 | 6 p.m. | Whitney Peak Hotel Reno | 255 N Virginia St Reno, NV 89501 | Join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in the Reno 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.

Blood Drive – Idabel Clinic | Sept. 25 | 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. | Idabel Health Clinic | 902 E Lincoln Rd Idabel, OK 74745 | Donating blood saves lives, supports the community, and boosts your health. Take part in the Annual Blood Drive Challenge—walk-ins welcome or schedule an appointment at yourbloodinstitute.org/donor/schedules/name (search “Choctaw” or by city).

Blood Drive – Stigler | Sept. 25 | 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. | Stigler Health Clinic | 2204 E Main St Stigler, OK 74462 | Donating blood saves lives, supports the community, and boosts your health. Take part in the Annual Blood Drive Challenge—walk-ins welcome or schedule an appointment at yourbloodinstitute.org/donor/schedules/name (search “Choctaw” or by city).

Community Cultural Meeting – Mesa | Sept. 26 | 2 p.m. | Delta Hotels Phoenix Mesa | 200 North Centennial Way Mesa, AZ 85201 | Join Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton for a fun, educational, and cultural event in the Phoenix-Mesa 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.

Wheelock Arts and Crafts Fair | Sept. 26 | 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. | Wheelock Historic Site | 1377 Wheelock Rd Unit C, Garvin, OK 74736 | Shop handmade goods, support local artists and explore Choctaw history at the Wheelock Academy Historic Site Arts & Crafts Fair. Artists of all backgrounds are invited to participate. Applications are due Sept. 11. To apply, visit choctawnation.com/events/cultural/wheelock-arts-and-crafts-fair/.

Wheelock Alumni Open House & Reception | Sept. 26 | 2 p.m. - 5 p.m. | Wheelock Historic Site | 1377 Wheelock Rd Unit C, Garvin, OK 74736 | Wheelock Academy Historic Site invites Wheelock alumni, former students and their families to an Open House and Reception celebrating the legacy of Wheelock Academy. Guests can tour the museum, reconnect and share memories. For more information, call 580-746-2139 or email Dawn Standridge at dstandridge@choctawnation.com.

Cinema at the Center: Ratatouille | Sept. 26 | 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. | Choctaw Cultural Center | 1919 Hina Hanta Way Calera, OK 74730 | Bring your appetite for fun, grab some snacks, and enjoy an afternoon full of laughter, inspiration, and a taste of Parisian charm! This event is fun for the whole family! The movie starts at 1 p.m. Admission to watch the movie is complimentary to all.

District Cinema Screening: Tiger | Sept. 27 | 2 p.m. | District Cinema at Choctaw Casino & Resort – Durant | 4216 US-69, Durant, OK 74701 | Walk the red carpet at the District Cinema’s screening of Tiger, a short film by Loren Waters about the resilience of a family in the face of tragedy. This family-friendly event will offer complimentary popcorn and drinks during the film.

Fall Family Health Night | Oct. 8 | 5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. | Atoka Choctaw Nation Community Center | 1201 W Liberty Rd, Atoka, OK 74525 | Make your family’s health a priority this fall! Join the Community Health Nursing Department for a come-and-go evening free health screenings, body composition assessments and flu vaccines. All ages welcome; open to tribal and non-tribal families.

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



HONOR GUARD

— POSITIONS AVAILABLE —

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

CHOCTAW NATION HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

APPLY AUGUST 1 - OCTOBER 1



Scan to learn more about the program.

Biskinik Submission Policy

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

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

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

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

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

For questions regarding submissions, please contact biskinik@choctawnation.com.

Tony Batton
Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Jack Austin Jr.
Assistant Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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.

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

A unique one-day getaway for the whole family!

Scan to Purchase Tickets



CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER ChoctawCulturalCenter.com

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

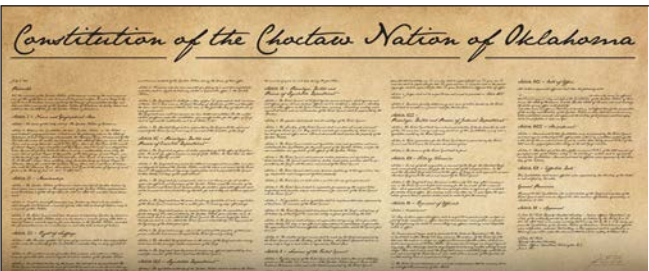
IBAIAYA VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Scan for additional details



HEADQUARTERS GALLERY

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY EXHIBIT



ITTACHAKULI TOK: WHAT IS THE CHOCTAW IRISH CONNECTION?

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT CHOCTAWNATION.COM/ABOUT/CULTURE/TVSHKAHOMMA-CAPITOL-MUSEUM/ OR CALL 855-569-4465

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



Aimvlhpesa Shali

Carriers of Culture:
Honoring Generations of Choctaw Artistry

May 5, 2026 – October 16, 2026

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

FOSTER YOUR TRIBE

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



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.

Choctaw Feast of the Dead
Join us Saturday, November 14, 2026, from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. for the annual Chahta Feast of the Dead at Choctaw RV Park, 3650 Enterprise Blvd., Durant, OK 74701. Honor the memory of loved ones during this traditional Choctaw mourning custom. The Feast of the Dead is a time for families and the community to gather in remembrance, share a meal, create family heritage crafts and tell stories around the memorial fire.

Petition of Adoption
In the District Court of the Choctaw Nation, State of Oklahoma, in the matter of adoption of Joylynn Elisabeth LaRose, minor child.
The State of Oklahoma, to the above-named respondent, Gregory Rodocker:
You will take notice that you have been sued in the above named court by the above named petitioners, Dustin and Amanda Prock, for petition of adoption and that unless you answer the petition filed by these petitioners in said court on or before the 29th day of September 2026, said petition will be taken as true and judgment granting the petitioners a final decree of adoption with you and for other relief rendered according to the prayer thereof.
Witness my hand and the seal of said court this 4th day of August 2026.
Carl P. Funderburk
4825 S. Peoria Ave, Ste 4
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74105
Attorney For Petitioners

Haskell County Fall Fair and Livestock Show
The Haskell County Livestock Committee, Haskell County OSU Extension, local 4-H clubs, and FFA chapters invite the public to the 2026 Haskell County Fall Fair and Livestock Show. The annual event celebrates the hard work and accomplishments of local youth through indoor project exhibits, livestock competitions, and agricultural contests.
September 8: Indoor Project Check-In, 4–6 p.m.
September 11: Poultry & Rabbit Show, Livestock Skill-A-Thon, Tractor Driving, and Ag Mechanics Contest
September 14: Lamb and Swine Show, 6 p.m.
September 15: Premium Sale and Buyers Dinner, 6 p.m.
The community is encouraged to attend, support local exhibitors, and celebrate the dedication and leadership developed through 4-H and FFA. Haskell County residents are also invited to participate in the OHCE-hosted Open Exhibit Division.
For more information, contact Haskell County OSU Extension at 918-967-4330 or koli.rossi@okstate.edu.

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.



STAY AHEAD OF ALLERGY SEASON

Real-time pollen information available with the new Pollen Sense widget. Check current pollen conditions, plan outdoor activities and better manage seasonal allergies.



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



JUROR SUMMONS

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

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Smith earns her master’s degree

Andrea (McKnight) Smith earned her Master of Nursing from Oregon Health & Science University with a 4.0 GPA, combining academic excellence with real-world impact. Her graduate work focused on psychology, trauma-informed care, substance use disorder in pregnancy, and nursing education. During her program, she spent three terms working with a street nursing team, gaining hands-on experience caring for people experiencing homelessness and learning how compassion, advocacy and health care intersect outside traditional hospital settings.

With more than 20 years as a labor and delivery nurse at a high-risk birth center in southern Oregon, Andrea has dedicated her career to supporting patients, mentoring nurses and improving perinatal care. Her graduate work also included education projects focused on bereavement care, harm reduction, simulation training and trauma-informed nursing practice. Her achievement reflects not only academic dedication but also a deep commitment to caring for vulnerable populations and shaping the future of nursing education.



Hornbuckle wins Tricia Saunders Award

Dalani Hornbuckle was selected as the Tricia Saunders Award winner for her outstanding performance as a wrestler and student. One wrestler is selected from each state. Tricia Saunders was a pioneer of women’s wrestling, winning four world championships for the United States.

Dalani won three state championships and was named the outstanding wrestler of the state tournament twice. She graduated with a GPA above 4.0. She was also the Supergirl 64 champion and USA Southern Plains champion, and helped Rogers High School win three dual state championships and two state tournament championships. She will compete at Carl Albert State College next fall.

She is the great-great-granddaughter of original roll member William Free and a former District 4 Junior Miss Choctaw Princess.



Nelson celebrates dentistry milestone

Dr. Erik Nelson has served as a Choctaw Nation dentist since July 2018. This June marked his 35th year of dental practice. Nelson spent more than eight years as an IHS officer before 19 years in private practice in Chicago.

Nelson was recently inducted as an emeritus fellow in the Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology. His research at the University of Oklahoma College of Dentistry with Dr. Tom Glass led to a study on toothbrush contamination. The team found that toothbrush bristles can harbor bacteria, viruses and fungi, and that most disinfection methods were ineffective or damaged the brush. Ultraviolet light was most effective. Their research recommended changing toothbrushes monthly, or more often if ill, and discouraging bathroom storage.

The research gained attention through lectures and media appearances. While the dental industry promoted changing brushes every three months, the work contributed to current hygiene standards.

Nelson presented his research internationally and received the Oral Pathology Outstanding Achievement Award in 1991. He has given lectures on oral pathology and completed training in forensic science and post-mortem identification with the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

Nelson is proud to serve his tribe as a clinician and remain involved in Choctaw culture and the faith community.



Attocknie earns bachelor’s degree

“Celebrating a major milestone, I am thankful and blessed to graduate with my Bachelor’s in Applied Science in Energy Management from Bismarck State College (BSC). At 48, this achievement reflects perseverance amid juggling family, work, and school. This would never have happened without the love and support of my wife, Virginia, and our children, Brandyn, Angel, Izzy, and Dean. I began my college adventure in 2020, earning my Associate in Applied Science in Electrical Lineworker from BSC in 2022. My employer, Garland Power and Light (GP&L), has also been a source of great support for my college career. I have been a supervisor for 7 years and plan to use my 31 years of experience in the Energy Field and my newly earned degree to advance to higher executive roles within GP&L.

My wife of 27 years also earned her Bachelor’s in Nursing degree this past year. We work diligently to be a guiding light for our families and show our children, nieces, and nephews that anything is possible with hard work and perseverance. Reaching these educational milestones together fills us with pride and hope for the future. I could not have completed my degree requirements without her support. She has been my rock and moral compass for 30 years. I want to thank her for everything she does to keep me in line and show me that she will always be in my corner, and I in hers. Lastly, thank you, Mom and Dad, Amanda and Robert Weaver, for believing in me and teaching me how to grow through adversity.”



Darrell Attocknie Fate, Texas

Indian Health Service honors CNO associates for outstanding work

DURANT, Okla. (Aug. 4, 2026)— Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA) associates received numerous honors at the Annual Oklahoma City Area Director’s Indian Health System Awards in Oklahoma City, on July 16 recognizing excellence in healthcare service.

29 Choctaw Nation associates received an award.

“It was an honor to celebrate the achievements of so many of our hard-working Choctaw Nation Health associates,” said Assistant Chief, Jack Austin, Jr. “Although a select number of associates are being recognized today, they are a small part of the thousands of amazing healthcare workers we proudly have taking care of our tribal members.”

Service awards were presented to those who have served Native Americans for 30 years or more.

- Choctaw Nation associates recognized for their years of service, included:
- 50 Years: Rita Carter
 - 40 Years: Leslie Crank, Artis Potts, Debbie Dalpoas
 - 35 Years: Cheryl Collins, Lawanda James, Tracie Cox, Jacqueline Box, Evelyn Jones
 - 30 Years: Lisa Isaac, Wendy Brown, Shaunna Roberts, and Sharla Scarberr

The Oklahoma City Area Director’s IHS/Tribal/Urban Awards Committee reviews nominations from tribes across the region and to recognize exceptional contributions to Native American health care.

Mattox graduates from NSU

Gracyn (Thompson) Mattox graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in May 2026.

Mattox is married to Todd Mattox of Poteau, Oklahoma, and is the daughter of John and Christi Thompson of Poteau and the granddaughter of Gary and Elaine Youree of Heavener, Oklahoma.

She would like to thank the Choctaw Nation for their help in achieving her degree.



Labor graduates from ECU

Madison Paige Labor graduated May 15 from East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, with her Bachelor of Science in nursing.

She is a first-generation college graduate with a four-year degree.

Madison is the daughter of Wade and Tammy Labor; granddaughter of Leon Labor and the late Shirley Labor; granddaughter of the late Zay and Doris Phillips; and great-granddaughter of the late Peachie and Skeet Labor.

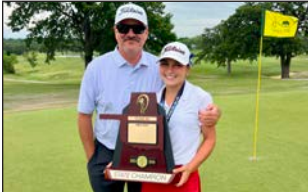


Bryant is State Champion Golfer

Gracie Rose Bryant, a proud young Choctaw, recently celebrated an achievement by helping lead the Plainview Lady Indians to the 2026 Oklahoma Class 4A Girls State Golf Championship on May 4-5 at Dornick Hills Golf & Country Club. The Lady Indians captured the state title in dominant fashion, finishing 46 strokes ahead of second-place Metro Christian. Bryant played a key role in the championship run, finishing 12th overall in the two-day tournament and helping secure the school’s sixth girls golf state championship in program history.

A junior at Plainview High School, Bryant has already established herself as one of Oklahoma’s outstanding young athletes. In addition to her success on the golf course, she also qualified for the 2026 Oklahoma Class 4A state track and field meet in the 4x400, 4x200 and 4x100 relays. Her relay teams placed fourth in the 4x400, seventh in the 4x100 and eighth in the 4x200.

Bryant’s dedication, discipline, and hard work have helped her become a state champion golfer, and her determination is evident every time she steps onto the course. Beyond athletics, she is known as an outstanding Christian young woman who gives God the glory and strives to put Him first in everything she does. As Bryant looks ahead to her senior season and another opportunity to compete for a state championship in 2027, she reminds herself: “With GOD all things are possible.” She is pictured with her father, TC Bryant.



Latvala is Native Student of the Year

Gemma Marie Latvala, daughter of Vanessa (Ervin) and Chris Latvala of Tulsa, has been selected as Jenks Public Schools’ eighth-grade Native American Student of the Year. This prestigious honor recognizes Latvala’s outstanding academic achievement, leadership and positive contributions to her school and Native American community.

In addition to excelling in the classroom, Latvala is an accomplished violinist and talented artist. Her dedication to both academics and the arts reflects her creativity, perseverance and commitment to excellence.

Latvala is the granddaughter of Connie Ervin of Harts-horne, and the great-granddaughter of the late Hawk Ervin, whose legacy continues to inspire her commitment to hard work and achievement.



- CNHSA associates and programs recognized included:
- Michelle Settlemire, Moneka Baker, Ashley Corbin, Joshua Cart, Paige Bowers, Sarah Morris, CDR Joseph Smith, Belva Humphrey, and Carla Spruell: Peer Recognition Tribal Award for outstanding work in their respective fields.
 - Eric Burwell: Merit Tribal Award
 - Choctaw Nation Chi Hullo Li: Exceptional Group Performance Award
 - Choctaw Nation Public Health Department: Area Director’s Group Area Impact Award
 - Clint Morrison: Area Director’s Individual Customer Service Award
 - Kayla Price: Area Director’s Individual Patient Safety Award
 - Wendy Brown: Area Director’s Healthcare Leadership Award
 - Candice Vaughn: Area Director’s Lifetime Achievement Award

Guthrie graduates from Texas Tech

Roger Guthrie graduated from Texas Tech University on May 14 with an interdisciplinary Master of Science in energy, environment and natural resources law.

Guthrie, who wore a Choctaw Nation stole during the commencement ceremony, also earned a Master of Science in safety, security and emergency management from Eastern Kentucky University in 2022.

He serves as director of safety and compliance for Paxon Energy & Infrastructure, a pipeline inspection company.

His wife is Melany Guthrie, and their son, Andrew, graduated from Lubbock Christian High School on May 17.



Halcomb cruises into Guinness World Record

Choctaw veteran Royce Halcomb of District 8 drove his 1985 Chevrolet Monte Carlo in Tulsa’s historic Route 66 Capital Cruise on May 30. The event, part of the Route 66 Centennial celebration, set a Guinness World Record for the largest parade of classic vehicles, with 3,596 cars traveling 5.5 miles along historic 11th Street.



Johnson turns 65

Floyd Johnson of Holdenville, Oklahoma turned 65 on July 28.

Johnson is thankful for another day and year and is “super proud of all the graduates and youngsters still in School. Halito, Myto and Wado.”



Clagg graduates from OU

Hailey Elizabeth Clagg graduated cum laude from the University of Oklahoma in May 2026 with a Bachelor of Science in nursing. She is a member of Alpha Phi and serves on the executive board of the Wellness Society at Oklahoma as the director of programming. After licensure, she will work as a nurse in the emergency room at OU Children’s Hospital.

Clagg is the daughter of John and Tracy (Mar) Clagg and the granddaughter of John Wayne and Sharon Clagg, and Richard Mar and Tammy Squires. She is the great-granddaughter of Austin and Helen (Reed) Clagg. Clagg is a descendant of Choctaw original enrollees Dora Marie (Anderson) Reed, Anel Anderson and Rhoda (Folsom) Anderson Bowen.



Dearmon earns master’s degree

Dana Dearmon, a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, graduated from the University of Mississippi with a Master of Science degree in Public Health, with concentrations in Community Health and Epidemiology. She previously graduated summa cum laude from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2023 with a bachelor’s degree in public health. Throughout her college career, Dana received support from the Choctaw Nation Higher Education Program scholarship.

While completing her graduate studies, Dana continued her professional work with Living Water International, a global non-profit organization that serves developing countries through improved access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services. Her work focuses on community and population health, epidemiology, program evaluation, and strengthening public health programs in underserved communities. Dana plans to continue advancing evidence-based public health initiatives both locally and globally.



HOUSING
EDUCATION
FOR HOMEBUYERS
AND RENTERS

CONTACT THE SERVICE COORDINATION DEPARTMENT
FOR MORE INFORMATION:
580-634-0705
HOUSINGEDUCATION@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

FREE WATER
OPERATOR
RENEWAL
TRAINING

SCAN THE QR CODE TO
VIEW THE FULL LIST OF 2026
TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Choctaw Nation Water Resource Management

2026 CHR
FALL
FESTIVAL

FOR MORE INFORMATION, EMAIL OR CALL
OCLAY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM
800.522.6170

Choctaw Nation Community Health Representative Program

Napier earns OSU Orange Gown

Olivia Napier, a recent Oklahoma State University graduate, was named the College of Education and Human Sciences' Orange Gown Honoree, one of the university's highest distinctions.

The honor recognizes one distinguished graduating student from each academic college. Honorees wear a distinctive orange gown at commencement.

Napier earned a Bachelor of Science in apparel design and technology with a minor in entrepreneurship, as well as certificates in business essentials and 3D digital product creation.

Napier, an Oklahoma native and member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, maintained a 3.9 GPA while balancing a demanding academic program.

Napier said college helped her grow, sharpening her time management and problem-solving skills and building her confidence.

Napier showcased her collection at the 2026 Euphoria Fashion Show, with student models presenting her work on the runway. She began planning and sketching last October, and construction lasted through the spring semester.

Her collection featured seven womenswear outfits totaling 14 pieces, including reversible jackets, dresses and skirts. Napier's collection, inspired by the film "McLintock!," featured Western details, lace and repurposed denim to honor her Native heritage.

"I am very proud of my collection," Napier said. "In the beginning, this seemed like a daunting task that would never end. However, the closer I got to the deadline the more light I could see at the end of the tunnel."

She plans to eventually own a business and sell her own apparel designs. After graduation, she will work locally as a management trainee at a clothing retailer.

For Napier, being named an Orange Gown Honoree reflects years of dedication and hard work.

For a full story about Napier published by Oklahoma State University, visit news.okstate.edu/archive.



Stetson Bryant, Kart Racer

By Kellie Matherly

Stetson Bryant, a talented and determined young go-kart racer, first discovered his love for the sport in 2022 at just five years old.

That Christmas, his nana and papa gifted him his very first yard kart, sparking a passion that would quickly grow into a defining part of his life. From the moment he climbed in, Stetson instinctively handled the kart, showing the raw talent that would take him on an incredible journey with plenty of support from his family.

"It was enjoyment for me, for one, because I want him to do anything he wants to do," said Stetson's father and crew chief, Matt Bryant.

Racing runs in Stetson's blood. His papa raced, and several uncles and cousins spent their lives competing on the track. Growing up around Kiamichi Mountain Speedway, where generations of his family raced, Stetson was surrounded by the sights, sounds, and culture of motorsports and Oklahoma karting from the start. That early exposure shaped his competitive spirit and gave him the confidence to challenge more experienced drivers, always pushing himself to improve.

Stetson's father, Matt Bryant, became his crew chief and biggest supporter. Together, they developed a strong team built on trust and collaboration.

"I couldn't do it without him, and he couldn't do it without me," Stetson says, reflecting the close bond they share.

Equipment upgrades over time allowed Stetson to feel and control his kart even better, sharpening his instincts and racecraft. Despite occasional early scares—like flipping his yard kart—he embraced speed and learned quickly, transitioning to more advanced karts and tougher competition.

Yet racing for Stetson has never been just about winning. Through his involvement in events like "Team Haley Bug," he has used his skills and platform to make a difference in the lives of others. Team Haley Bug was formed to support a young girl named Haley who was battling cancer, and Stetson raced in her honor. The experience deeply impacted him, showing him the power of bringing joy to kids facing challenges far greater than any race track could offer.

"Yeah, just knowing that there's kids that can't do that, and they watch me, root for me. It kind of makes you want to do better and try to win for them and all that," said Stetson.

From there, Stetson and his family expanded their outreach, supporting the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Northwest Arkansas Children's Hospital events, and community car shows. They



Choctaw tribal member and kart racer Stetson Bryant finds purpose both on and off the track. See and share more of his story at togetherweremore.com.

donate parts like wing panels to organizations such as Doors for Dreams, always with the goal of brightening a child's day.

For Stetson, knowing that kids who can't race themselves are watching him compete—sometimes live-streaming his events—drives him to push harder, not for trophies, but for the smiles he can bring.

His kart's design reflects his values and personal inspirations. The purple in his wrap honors his late grandmother, a woman he describes as a "Jesus warrior," while blue accents and a fading ribbon symbolize ongoing support for children like his young friend Eli.

Each year, Stetson's team selects a child to spotlight and encourage, giving updates and rallying community support.

Though he's only ten, Stetson dreams big. He talks about possibly playing in the NBA one day, but if that doesn't work out, racing will always be his path. His family stands ready to support whichever road he chooses, knowing his natural talent and work ethic can take him far. Those who have seen him race believe he has the ability to compete at the highest levels, should he decide to pursue motorsports professionally.

For Stetson Bryant, the thrill of racing is matched only by the joy of giving back. Whether he's overtaking opponents on the track or sharing his kart with a child at a charity event, his passion is driven by more than speed—it's fueled by love for his family, respect for his roots, and a commitment to bringing happiness to others. In every lap he runs, both his competitive spirit and generous heart are on full display, making him not only a rising star in racing but also an inspiration far beyond the finish line.

Smith is Sacramento's new city historian

Ty Smith will begin serving as Sacramento's new City Historian on June 1, bringing more than two decades of experience in public history, museum leadership, interpretation and education.

Smith previously served as museum director of the California State Railroad Museum and Old Sacramento State Historic Park, with leadership experience at cultural landmarks including Hearst Castle and the California State Capitol Museum.

As City Historian, Smith will oversee the Center for Sacramento History and help guide efforts to preserve and share Sacramento's history through education, culture and community engagement.

Smith said he is honored to help gather, preserve and share the stories that shape Sacramento's past and future.

"Sacramento's local history is world history. I am honored to be a part of gathering, holding, and telling Sacramento's stories. In Sacramento, the past didn't go anywhere; it flows into our lives and expresses itself through our lived experiences," said Smith. "The highest calling of a public historian is to help people see themselves in history and, in so doing, help people imagine their futures through understanding our collective past. I look forward to building on the previous success of the Center for Sacramento History and in serving my community."

The Center for Sacramento History serves as the official archives and research center for the historical records of the City and County of Sacramento, preserving collections that document the region's political, cultural, social and economic history. For more information, visit centerforsacramentohistory.org.



Aldridge graduates from Texas A&M

Sterling Aldridge recently graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science, double-majoring in forensic sciences and entomology.

A proud Choctaw tribal member, he appreciates the tribe's support throughout his education. He has plans for a career in crime scene investigation and celebrates with his parents, Kevin and Megan Aldridge, and siblings, Cody, Jayden and Ethan.



Harris retires after 30 years in education

Tribal member Scott Harris retired at the end of June as technology director of Springfield Public Schools in Springfield, Missouri, after 30 years in three school districts.

Harris was Miami, Oklahoma, Public Schools' first technology director, serving 13 years, and was tech director of Neosho, Missouri, Public Schools for 13 years before becoming Springfield's director in 2022.

He plans to return to Joplin, Missouri, to be closer to family and his granddaughter, Rosalind.



Stewart turns 21

Caleb Stewart celebrated his 21st birthday on July 21, 2026.

He graduated from Big Spring High School in Newville, Pennsylvania, in June 2023 and moved to Texas to attend Texas Christian University. He is set to graduate from TCU in May 2027 with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology. Stewart is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and appreciates the tribe's academic support.

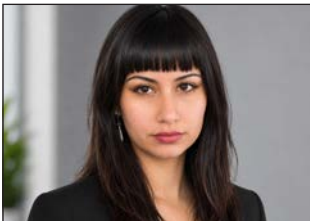
He is the son of Charles and Cindy Stewart, grandson of Josephine Stewart and brother of Jessica Unseth and Joshua Stewart. His family and friends wish him a happy birthday and success in his future endeavors.



RedHawk graduates from Baruch College

Taw-Cre-Nee RedHawk graduated from Baruch College in 2026 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy.

She is taking a year off before pursuing a master's degree. A proud Choctaw and active in her Native community, RedHawk carries strong traditions wherever she goes. Her family is proud and excited for her future.



Scroggins earns her master's from Pacific

Amanda Scroggins received a Master of Fine Arts from Pacific University in Oregon on June 27.

Scroggins works as a court transcriptionist in Kansas and plans to continue while expanding her library of published works.

Her family congratulates her on this achievement and wishes her well in her future endeavors.



Brown turns 21

Beau Brown celebrated his 21st birthday on August 23.

"Happy birthday, son. We love you. You've turned into a great young man. We love you very much. Mom and Dad are proud of you. We can't wait to see you reach your dreams." – Mom and Dad



Ray shines in first year with academic team

Choctaw tribal member Easton Ray, a student at Wister Schools, recently competed in the National Academic Competitions (IAC) United States Division National Championships in Orlando, Florida.

Ray qualified for nationals in three scholastic subjects during his first year as a member of the Wister Academic Team, highlighting his dedication to academic achievement.

He has also earned a spot at the International Academic Competitions International Championships, which will be held in Washington, D.C.



Wright turns 1

Cooper William Wright turned one on February 27, 2026. He's celebrated with a dinosaur birthday party with all his family.



Atlas Summer Wright

Atlas Summer Wright was born May 24, 2026, at in Anchorage, Alaska. She weighed 7 pounds, 10 ounces, and was 19.9 inches long.

She is the daughter of Brandon and Melanie Wright and granddaughter of Larry and Deanna Henry and Pamela and Mike Divis.



Wright turns 40

Brandon Wright celebrated his 40th birthday on June 17.

"Happy 40th Birthday to my Husband," said his wife, Melanie. "Your family loves you so incredibly much and we are so thankful for you."



YOUTH DRAW HUNT

2026 APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

Scan QR code to apply!

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

SEE AND SHARE OUR STORIES AT

TogetherWereMore.com

Choctaw Nation

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna

The School of Choctaw Language

ONLINE CHOCTAW LANGUAGE CLASSES AVAILABLE

Summer is here, and it's a great time to enroll in an online class through the Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna (School of Choctaw Language).

Online classes are free and at your own pace.

Scan QR code to find out how you can enroll.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Joseph Gable Woolery Jr.

Joseph “Joe” Gable Woolery, Jr., 84, passed away April 28, 2026. Joe was born May 12, 1941, in Ardmore, Okla., to Joseph Gable Woolery and Dorothy Hutchings. He was preceded in death by his parents.

Joe is survived by his children Joseph “Joey” Woolery III, Patricia “Patty” Sherrin and spouse Derrell, and Sunny Murphy and spouse Alex; grandchildren Kari (Nikki) Sherrin, Tyler Woolery, Steven Sherrin and spouse Allie, Kylie Rock and spouse Chris, Katie Mosley and spouse Kolby, Emily Woolery, Jacob Woolery, and Lexy Dowty and spouse Jim; cousin Diana Walters; great-grandchildren Kaylie, Colton, Parker, Kynzee, Kace, Aubrey, Mason, Harper, Karter, Karsyn, Ady, Easton, and one more on the way; and many close friends who he all loved dearly.



Victor Locke Underwood Jr.

Victor Locke Underwood, Jr. 89, passed away June 8, 2026. Victor was born August 11, 1936, in Antlers, Okla., to Victor Locke Sr. and Lila Underwood.

He was preceded in death by his wife Evelyn Faye; daughter Melissa; his parents; sisters Joyce Daniels and Jerri Burton; and brother James A. Underwood.

Victor is survived by his sons and their spouses Stephen and Kathy, Phillip and Kim, and Kennedy and Marni; Victoria Underwood; Jessica and Amanda Underwood; sister Glenna Cash; six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.



Wayne James Fromme

Wayne James Fromme, 30, passed away June 7, 2026. Wayne was born Aug. 10, 1995, to Mary Wilson Fromme and David Fromme, Jr.

He was preceded in death by his brother Brandon Fromme; nephew Star Doctor; grandparents George Wilson, Sr. and Corena Wilson; aunt Ruby Wilson; and cousin Christopher Wilson.

Wayne is survived by his parents; siblings Blake Fromme, Victoria Doctor, Melissa Johnston, Jeremy Fromme, Jeffery Fromme, and Gregory Fromme; adopted brothers Shawn Biggs and Danny Burcham; aunts and uncle George Wilson, Jr., Barbara Wilson, Diane Wilson, and Janet Abercrombie; nieces and nephews Kenzlee, Bryer, Emery, Sophie, and Mekko; and many cousins.



Jackie Lewis Allen

Jackie Lewis Allen, 83, passed away June 28, 2026. Jackie was born March 11, 1943, in Boswell, Okla., to John Lewis Allen and Norene (Sanders) Darling. He was preceded in death by his son Jackie Lewis Allen Jr.; his parents; brothers Johnny Allen, Jerry Allen, and Terry Allen; and sisters Sue Lindamood and Hazel Larkins.

Jackie is survived by his wife Vicky; daughters Tanya Impson and spouse Aaron, and Jonie Brown and spouse Stacy; brother George Allen and spouse Liz; grandchildren Preston Egan, Blaine Brown, Gavin Summerville and spouse Attalee, Aryza Impson and spouse Kalan, Darin Brown and spouse Jacy, Jaden Brown, Khloe Impson, and Miranda Allen; eight great-grandchildren; along with numerous nieces, nephews, extended family members, and dear friends.



Johnny Frank James

Johnny Frank James, 64, passed away June 25, 2026. Johnny was born Feb. 27, 1962, in Talihina, Okla., to Johnny and Norma Dean James. He was preceded in death by his grandparents Guy and Oma Giles; his parents; grandson Tade James; brother Joe James; nephew Dillon Wilkett; niece Kimberley Wilkett; great-nephew Aiden Clark; brother-in-law Mike Thomason; and father-in-law Harold Clay.

Johnny is survived by his wife Judy James; children Johnny James and spouse Lindsay, Dustin James and spouse Andrea, Linda Jo Anson and spouse Brian, and Brandy James Langley and spouse Tyson; grandchildren Ethan McDiffett, Khilyn Raileigh, Carter James, Teigen McDiffett, and Will James; great-granddaughters Everleigh McDiffett and Valleigh McDiffett; sisters Betty Sartor and spouse Junior, Linda Cohen and spouse Billy Jack, and Stacie James; along with many nieces and nephews, including a special niece Tracy Wilkett.



Marilyn Louise Taylor

Marilyn Louise Taylor, 88, passed away June 17, 2026. Marilyn was born March 9, 1938, in Hugo, Okla., to Gertrude L. Fort and Tommie Guess.

She was preceded in death by her husband Fred L. Taylor Sr; her parents; and brother-in-law Nathaniel S. Hawthorne.

Marilyn is survived by her children Monica M. Taylor, Marcella A. Taylor, Terry L. Taylor (Esmarelda), Anita L. Taylor, Cassandra R. Taylor, Lori A. Taylor, Fred L. Taylor Jr. (Kendra), Kendria L. Taylor, and Katerina Y. Taylor; her special child Jerrick “Bobby” Eskridge; siblings Yvonne Hawthorne, Gerald Fort and spouse Wilma, Anthony Fort and spouse Linda, Victor Fort and spouse Norma, and Ronnie Fort; grandchildren Jessica, Tamara (Willard III), Terry Jr., James Michael, Tara, Talisha, Alexandria, Ashley, Alyssa, Sophia, and Fred Taylor, III; six great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, extended family members, and dear friends.



Richard Arnold Foley

Richard “Bo” Arnold Foley, 92, passed away April 29, 2026. Bo was born Oct. 13, 1933, in Sand Springs, Okla., to Harry Foley and Winonda (Wilson) Foley. He was preceded in death by his wife Janice; his parents; brother Jack; and sisters Anita “Skeet” Pulliam, and Gloria “Toodle” Hedges.

Bo is survived by daughters Angela Goleman and spouse Russell, and Kim Jones and spouse Chris; grandchildren Heather Willis, Darci Merritt and spouse Heath, and Bo Jones and spouse Haley; great-granddaughters Rylee Willis and Avery Merritt; companion Eleanor Jessee; and numerous nieces, nephews, and friends.



Jack Gary Nowlin

Jack Gary Nowlin, 81, passed away March 25, 2026. Jack was born Oct. 1, 1944, in Okla. City, Okla., to Jack and Mary (Hess) Nowlin. He was preceded in death by his parents; and bother-in-law Edward Tull. Jack is survived by his wife Andy; children Annisa Chesnut (Sam) and JJ Nowlin (Sheryl); grandchildren Carson Chesnut, Evan Chesnut, Karly Nowlin, and Jenna Nowlin; sister Sherri Tull; sister Carol Tarkington and spouse Gary Tarkington; as well as many cousins, nieces and nephews.



Joanne Wilson Lindahl

Joanne Wilson Lindahl, 76, passed away June 8, 2026. Joanne was born April 23, 1950, in Minneapolis, Minn., to John and Winnidell Wilson. She was preceded in death by her parents. Joanne is survived by her husband Duane Lindahl; sons Rick Smith and Duane Lindahl; daughter Kelly Priest; brothers Murray and Rebecca Wilson, and Ross Wilson and spouse Margo Squire; grandchildren Andrew, Isabelle, Rachel, Tyler, and Autumn; and great- granddaughter Kimber.



Charles Lindsey

Charles “Deryal” Lindsey, 93, passed away June 26, 2026. Deryal was born Dec. 18, 1932, in Wilson, Okla., to Russell Albert Lindsey and Gladys Aribell Gardner. He was preceded in death by his parents; grandparents; brothers R.A., Dwain, and Bill Lindsey; and sisters Mariquinn Cole and Joyce Cooper. Deryal is survived by daughter Deralynn D. Brown; sons Russell D. Lindsey and M. Scott Lindsey; grandchildren Austin R. Dempsey, Kristen N. Brown, C. Dalton Lindsey, and Colby D. Lindsey; great-grandchildren Kash R. Dempsey and Blakely A. Dempsey; and his sweetheart Wanda Hawkins.



Vanessa Jo Wilmond

Vanessa Jo Wilmond, 41, passed away July 17, 2026. Vanessa was born Feb. 15, 1985, in Ada, Okla., to Marcus Ike Wilmond and Marcella Sue Taylor. She was preceded in death by her parents; grandparents Kelsey and Ella Mae Willmond, and Pauline and John Taylor; uncles, Ray Willmond, Ronald Willmond, Larry Shoemaker, Austin Ray Taylor, Leo Taylor and Leonard Taylor; and aunts Marquetta Gratner, Lomedia Ash, Mary Ann Melton, and Louise Bird Taylor. Vanessa is survived by her brothers Dustin Wilmond and fiancé Yanasa Charcoal, Tyler Wilmond, and Todd Wilmond; nephews and niece Jeramiah Wilmond, Emkv Wilmond, and Tyus Wilmond; and aunts Melissa Mose, Terrie Sampson and spouse Ronnie, Myrna Boston, Do-reen Martinez, and Tammie Stiles.



Zandra Joyce Schooler

Zandra Joyce Schooler, 77, passed away May 6, 2026. Zandra was born June 14, 1948, in Talihina, Okla., to Paul and Charlene Tidwell. She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers Charles “Smokey” Tidwell and Roger Tidwell. Zandra is survived by her son Devon Lambert and spouse Amy; brothers Anthony and Max Tidwell; sisters Anna Tidwell, Paula (Joe) Morris, Cathy (Kenneth) Ferguson, Stephanie Tidwell, and Shannon Tidwell; many cousins; numerous nieces, great-nieces, nephews, and great-nephews; and aunts Jane “Sis” Mintz and Gloria Tidwell.



Brendon Thomas Lee Collins

Brendon Thomas Lee Collins, 29, passed away June 28, 2026. Brendon was born Oct. 9, 1996, to T.C. Collins Sr. and Kelli Collins. He was preceded in death by his mother; granny Mary Sue Wilson; aunt Gail Joplin; uncle Brian Joplin; and grandparents Larry and Cheri Joplin. Brendon is survived by his son Zane Gene Lee Collins; daughter Journi Victoria Collins; father T.C. Collins Sr.; brother Taylor Collins Jr. and his family Jasper and Kendra; sister Stormi Brown and her family Brilyn, U’Neig, and Joel; sister Krissy Collins and her family Brian, Aleigha, and Anna; and many other relatives and friends.



Gregory Brent Church

Gregory Brent Church, 68, passed away July 7, 2026. Brent was born April 23, 1958, to Riley and Jimmie Lee (Smith) Church on April 23,1958. He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Debbie Church; and sisters Valerie Church and Shan-non Church.

Brent is survived by his sister Jayme Busby and Harold Scherman; niece Lora Busby; nephew Brad Busby; great-niece Peyton Barlow; sisters-in-law Kari Elsing and Robin Texiera; brother-in-law Larry Elsing and spouse Geri; as well as other nieces, nephews and extended family members and friends.



Elizabeth Deann Carney

Elizabeth “Lib” Deann Carney, 50, passed away July 9, 2026. Lib was born March 22, 1976, in Pauls Valley, Okla., to Paul L. Carney and Rosie Lee (South) Carney. She was preceded in death by her father; aunt Mary (South) Vermillion; and uncles Junior South, Larry South, Bill Carney Sr., Bill Robertson, and Robert Carney Sr. Lib is survived by her mother; sons Jordaan Carney, and Adam Cooke and Arianna Boone; daughter Ashton Conley and spouse Garrett; granddaughters Serenity, Aria, and Harper Fox; bonus granddaughter Layla; aunts Wanda Robertson, Evelyn Carney, Paula Carney, and Lucy Loud-ermilk; uncles Lonnie Carney and Charles South; brothers Eugene Hobbs and Richard Carney; and work family Billy Lynn and Brenda McClendon, and all of her McClendon Nursery co-workers.



Chunsa Peter Gipson

Chunsa Peter Gipson, 32, passed away July 18, 2026. Chunsa was born May 10, 1994, in Talihina, Okla., to Nehemiah Gipson and Margaret Ann (Scott) Gipson. He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Tunstabi Gipson; cousin Chris Scott; uncles Preston Scott and Samson Scott; maternal grandparents Savannah Scott and Jasper Scott; and paternal grandparents Willie Gipson and Mary Gipson. Chunsa is survived by his brother Steven Gipson and spouse Kayla; aunt Stella Scott; uncles Nathan Scott and spouse Linda, Roger Scott and spouse Rhoda, Ronnie Scott and spouse Marilyn, Martin Scott, and Jimmy Scott and spouse Anna; cousins Thomas Hardy, Joshua Daney, Jenni-fer Daney Gibson, Sarah Hardy-Trusty, Alisha Hardy-Shu-make, Jamie Daney, Mike Scott, Bradley Scott, Ranell Scott-Charpentier, Kacey Carney, Greg Scott, Nita Scott, Yannash Scott, and Angela (Scott) Copeland; and many other extended family members and friends who will miss him dearly.



Nakota Shane Ludlow

Nakota Shane Ludlow, 19, passed away July 16, 2026. Nakota was born Dec. 6, 2006, in Talihina, Okla., to Marvada and Herb Bohanan, and Nakisha Ludlow. He was preceded in death by his great-grandparents J.L. and Betty Sullivan, Robert and Melissia Bo-hanan, Randall and Minnie Ludlow, and Raymond Johnson Sr; and beloved dog Bubba Jo. Nakota is survived by his dog Copper; his parents; grandparents Clifford and Cathy Ludlow; great-grand-mother Thelma Johnson; brother Montana “Pete” Mora; sister and brother-in-law Madisson and R.J. Watson; sister Carmen Garcia; aunts Keosha Ludlow and Angelia Gueli; uncle Jerry Ludlow; niece Amelia Faith Watson who is expected to arrive in Sept.; cousins Jasmine, Josiah, Charleigh, Kyron, Kayden, Landon, Alyson, Athan, L.J., and Wrenley; several great-aunts and great-uncles; special friends Cinch Tonihka and Brexton Ward; JoLynn and Kirk Tonihka; and a host of other relatives and friends.



Thomas Hiram Herndon III

Thomas “Junior” Hiram Hern-don III, 87, passed away July 5, 2026. Junior was born Nov. 17, 1938, in Hugo, Okla., to Thomas H. Herndon Jr. and Edith (Frost) Herndon. He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Martha (Butler) Herndon; and stepmother Vada Herndon.

Junior is survived by his son Thomas H. Herndon IV; daughter Lori Michelle Greer and spouse Brad; grandchild- ren Taylor Brown and spouse Logan, Savannah Emert and spouse Devin, Bradford Greer, and Heather Villar; great-grandchildren Rainie Emert, Cadence Villar and Melody Villar; brothers Wayne Herndon, Thomas Edwin Herndon, and Jimmie Herndon; sister Adelia Hammock; a host of nieces, nephews, and cousins; and numerous other family, friends and loved ones.



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 bi-ographical 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-sub-mission-guidelines | Mail: Biskinik, P.O. Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702

ITI FABVSSA

Brief History of Choctaw Copper Work

By Guest Writer, Colt James

One resource that many people may not know Native American peoples utilized before European contact was copper. Copper had a variety of uses by many tribes on the North American continent. Choctaws were one of these tribes, although it is not natural to us. The deposits in the Lake Superior basin are the largest, richest, and best known, which is where most of the copper came from, along with some smaller deposits in the Appalachian Mountains and in Nova Scotia. Through the extensive trade network, it made its way throughout the North American continent. Items such as knives, arrowheads, spear points and fishing hooks, along with many other tools, were also made with copper and used during this time. Other items, such as jewelry and ceremonial items, were also made and used later on. (Ehrhardt 2009).

The copper that was found was called native Copper and was up to 99% natural, pure, metallic copper. The copper was exposed to the surface due to erosion from the movement of the glaciers from the last ice age. Two main ways of harvesting would be mining from the ground or collecting float copper. Copper veins embedded in bedrock would be exposed at or near the surface due to glacial movement; the people of the Great Lakes region would mine them, creating deep, oval-shaped pits in the process. They could have also used a method called fire setting, a process where a very hot fire is made on top of the rock and is then quickly quenched with water, which causes the stone to break or crack and become easier to excavate. Float copper is chunks of copper that were moved by the glaciers to a new location on the surface. These nodules can range in a variety of sizes from small nuggets up to large flat boulders that weigh several tons. Float copper is easier to collect and harvest; however, the amount of copper in the area is inconsistent (Peterson, 2025).

The Mississippian Copper Culture refers to the Midcontinent, Eastern and Southeastern tribes that used copper from 1,000 BC until European contact in the 1500s AD (Ehrhardt 2009). Copper began reaching this area by trade; some

of the major Mississippian trade hubs were Cahokia (Illinois), Moundville (Alabama), Etowah (Georgia) and Spiro Mounds (Oklahoma). At this time, the number of people using copper tools decreased significantly as people did not want to wait several months or possibly years for new copper tools to arrive when stone, bone or other materials worked just as well. However, the Mississippian tribes were using copper to create jewelry, ceremonial items and artwork. Copper was not a common resource in this area; because of this, it was mostly reserved for people higher up in society, showing their social status, with some smaller items making their way to people of proven status in the community. Some of these items are earrings, bracelets, arm bands, beads, head pieces, plaques and more. Many of these items were decorated with styles and designs for that person or of that tribe (Ehrhardt 2009).

Copper is a very soft metal compared to others when in its purest form. Because of this, Native American people did not have to resort to smelting to extract copper for use. They would process the raw copper pieces by using cold hammering techniques; through this process, they would hammer the copper while it is at room temperature to form it into sheets or their desired shape. After hammering for some time, the copper will start to work harden and become harder and more brittle. To solve this, they would anneal the copper piece to soften, making it workable again. To do this, they would set the piece into a fire or activated coals for up to several hours until the copper reaches a glowing cherry red. Once this is reached, then the copper can continue to be worked on. To cut the copper, they would hammer a stone blade to create indentations on both sides of the piece they wanted to cut, then wiggle it back and forth until the piece broke off. Another way of cutting is using multiple stone blades, like saws, as well. Sandstone or other rough-grain stones were rubbed on the edge of the piece until it was smooth. Other techniques that would be used to create designs are chasing and repousse to create copper plaques, for example. In this process,



The copper sheet is put into the jeweler's pitch, and an outline of the design is made by tapping dots.



Metal chasing tools are used to indent the copper and detail the design.



The copper piece is removed, annealed to soften, and put back into the jeweler's pitch.

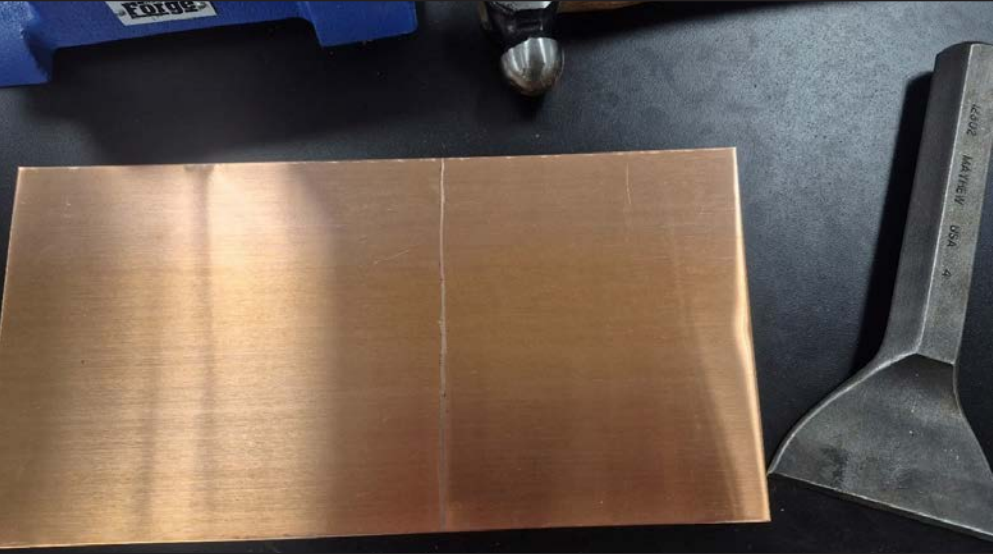


After final repousse and chase work is the finished product from the copper plate.

Writer's Note: *Studying and researching these items from burials leads me to moral conflict. From my perspective as a Choctaw Artist, I would very much like to learn about the work our ancestors did and the process to keep the art form alive and not forgotten. However, I also believe these funerary items should only be seen and known by the people who made them and the ones they were buried with. I feel that when working with copper in this context, any designs that come from a burial should not be recreated. Inspiration can be taken from these pieces, but a one-to-one copy should never be made out of respect for the original creators and those they were buried with.*

Works Cited:

- (Ehrhardt 2009) Ehrhardt, K. L. (2009). Copper working technologies, contexts of use, and social complexity in the Eastern Woodlands of Native North America. Springer.
- (Peterson, 2025)Ryan Edward Peterson (2025) Miskwabik's Journey Beyond Minong: The Life History of Native Copper Production Among Archaic Hunter-Gatherers in the Northern Lake Superior Basin. Chapter 6, pg. 115 - pg. 13



Photos by Colt James
A metal hammer and chisel are used to cut off part of the copper sheet in preparation.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

The Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers quality, safe, affordable rental units to low-income tribal families, with a preference for our Choctaw families, throughout the Choctaw Nation Reservation. The Affordable Rental Housing program enables tenants to participate in a family-oriented housing community at a rent rate within the family's means.

Currently, the Housing Authority manages 24 Affordable Rental Housing site locations, totaling 666 units, with an additional 270 units in development to meet growing demand. New Affordable Rental Housing units are currently under construction in Pocola and Alderson, further expanding housing opportunities for families across the Reservation.

Each unit is equipped with modern amenities, including a refrigerator, stove, and central heating and air conditioning, ensuring comfort and reliability for tenants.

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 property.

Together, they strive to deliver quality service to our tenants while maintaining compliance with policies and Lease Agreements.

Eligibility requirements for the Affordable Rental Housing program are as follows:

- Applicant must be a member of a federally recognized tribe.
- Applicant household must meet income guidelines.
- Household members age 18 and older must pass a nationwide background check.
- Applicants must have income at the time of application to pay monthly rent and maintain utilities.

Affordable Rental Housing is currently offered at the following locations:

With continued growth and development, the Housing Authority remains dedicated			
Antlers	Clayton	Poteau	Talihina
Atoka	Coalgate	Quinton	Wilburton
Bennington	Crowder	Red Oak	Wright City
Bokoshe	Hugo	Savanna	Battiest
Broken Bow	Idabel	Spiro	Smithville
Calera	Keota	Stigler	
Caney	McAlester	Stuart	

to expanding access to affordable housing for Choctaw families and building strong, supportive communities across the Reservation.

For more information or to apply, visit chahtaachvffa.choctawnation.com or contact the Housing Authority at (580)326-7521.

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna

The School of Choctaw Language

Hvshtulahpi yvt vla!

Fall has arrived!

1. Hvshtulahpikma kucha yvt kapvssachit isht ia.	The weather begins to cool in the Fall.
2. Nittak vt yushkulolit mahaya chĭ.	The days will continue to get shorter.
3. Ninak ato falaya chohma chĭ.	The nights will be somewhat longer.
4. Oppiakma chekusi ho okhlilika chĭ.	In the evenings it will turn dark early.
5. Iti hishi shupha ittimilaiyuka ish pisa hinla.	You can see many different colors of leaves.
6. Hvshtip vt yakni ont poholmo.	The ground is covered with fallen leaves.
7. Hushi kanimi kv̄t oka mahli imma hikvt ilhkola chi.	Some birds will fly south.
8. Nan vlhpoa kanimi kv̄no ĭ hishi yvt sokko micha wonuksha chĭ.	The fur of some animals will get thick and furry.
9. Balafokka falaya fokka pi bv̄nna chĭ.	We will want to wear long pants.
10. Aboha libesha bininli k̄a achukma chĭ.	It will be nice to sit in a warm room.

Choctaw Nation

The School of Choctaw Language

New vending machines offer access to lifesaving naloxone and fentanyl tests

By Chris Jennings

Saving a life could be as easy as buying a soda or a candy bar, thanks to new vending machines at two Choctaw Nation facilities.

The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority has installed free naloxone and fentanyl test strip vending machines at the McAlester and Stigler facilities, giving anyone in the community, regardless of tribal affiliation, 24-hour access to supplies that can stop an opioid overdose before it turns fatal.

Naloxone, the generic name for Narcan, works by blocking opioid receptors in the brain and typically restores normal breathing in two to three minutes. Anyone can carry it and use it, and it will not harm someone who is not experiencing an opioid overdose.

Fentanyl exposure does not always happen the way people expect. According to Shauna Humphreys, CNHSA Behavioral Health Director, one of the most common ways is when fentanyl gets mixed into other drugs or pills without the user knowing.

Because fentanyl cannot be seen or tasted and has no odor, there is often no way to know a substance contains it without testing.

“Currently, Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health has programs that go out into the community to distribute naloxone and fentanyl test strips,” Humphreys said. “When we heard the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services had some vending machines, we thought it was a great idea and began advocating to have one in our area.”

The first machine was placed at the McAlester clinic; the Stigler clinic was next. Both locations were chosen because they offer around-the-clock access, something Humphreys said matters more than almost anything else.

“My only hope is that people take them before they need them,” said Shawna Smith, clinic operations director in Stigler. She said the signs point to just that, with stock obviously being taken from the machines.

According to Mason Emert, Choctaw Nation tribal public health epidemiologist, the tribe has logged 474 suspected overdoses in the ODMap reporting system since 2021. Naloxone was administered in 270 cases.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 80,000 of the 105,007 drug overdose deaths in 2023 involved an opioid.

CDC data show that a potential bystander was present in nearly 43 percent of those cases. With tools like naloxone, those bystanders could have prevented some of those deaths.

The current trend is heading in the right direction, according to Humphreys.

“We have actually seen the numbers decrease or get better,” Humphreys said. “I believe that is due to a collaborative effort from all our programs coming together to enhance education and prevention efforts.”

Using the machines is simple. Community members enter a ZIP code and can take both naloxone and fentanyl test strips at no cost, regardless of tribal affiliation. The state supplied the first machines and will provide one refill; after that, CNHSA plans to use behavioral health grant funds to keep them stocked.

According to James Haley, Pharm.D., McAlester clinic operations director, not everyone reacted well when the machines were first announced.

“When we first announced the vending machine, some of the online reaction suggested we were con-

doning illegal drug use,” Haley said. “Fortunately, those comments were quickly outweighed by community members who understood the purpose.”

Haley said he wants people to think of naloxone the same way they think of an automated external defibrillator or a fire extinguisher.

“We don’t install an AED because we expect someone to have a cardiac arrest, and we don’t put up fire extinguishers because we expect fires to happen every day,” Haley said. “We make those tools available because emergencies are unpredictable, and having the right equipment nearby can save a life.”

Haley pointed out that opioid danger is not limited to illicit drug use. Prescription opioids given after surgeries and injuries carry overdose risk, too, and fentanyl is increasingly turning up in counterfeit pills without users’ knowledge.

“The Oklahoma Department of Health reports that fentanyl is now involved in the vast majority of opioid overdose deaths in our state,” Haley said.

The fentanyl test strips can return results in about five minutes, but Humphreys cautioned that a negative result does not guarantee the item being tested is safe. Fentanyl is often mixed unevenly into powders or pressed pills, so a sample tested from one part of a batch might test clean while a lethal amount may still be in the same bag.

A discarded or loose prescription fentanyl patch tossed in the trash or left in a living area can expose a family member. First responders are at risk, too. Police, emergency medical technicians and hazardous cleanup crews sometimes come into contact with fentanyl during their work.

Many people also have parents or grandparents who forget if they took their medication. Doubling up on high-dose prescriptions can lead to an overdose.

That is one way naloxone can be used to potentially save a life.

For Humphreys, the work is personal, as she has family members who have struggled with addiction, and she said that struggle does not define a person. “That doesn’t make them all bad people,” said Humphreys. “You still want that hope for them.”

Several of Humphreys’ family members are now in recovery, thanks to hope, help and resources provided to the community.

“To have that hope and keep that door open for recovery is just so important,” Humphreys said. “No matter what your drug of choice is.”

According to Humphreys, these tools are not just for people battling addiction.

Parents, teachers, security guards, cleaning crews, transit workers, and anyone worried about accidental exposure have reason to keep naloxone or test strips on hand.

“Providing harm reduction tools does not encourage drug use any more than providing seat belts encourages reckless driving,” Humphreys said. “The real question is whether we want people to be alive tomorrow and still have the opportunity to enter recovery.”

For more information on naloxone, visit dea.gov/onepill/save-lives.

Substance Abuse Resources for Tribal Members:

- choctawnation.com/services
- cnhsa.com/services
- samhsa.gov/find-help



Choctaw Nation Photo

The Choctaw Nation Health Clinic in McAlester now offers 24/7 access to naloxone and fentanyl test strips through a vending machine located just to the left of the clinic entrance.

WHAT IS NALOXONE?

Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids—including fentanyl, heroin, and prescription opioid medications—when given in time.

Naloxone is easy to use and small to carry. There are two forms of naloxone that anyone can use without medical training or authorization: prefilled nasal spray and injectable.

The decision on which form of naloxone to use or carry can depend on many factors such as cost, availability, and comfort level. Both are safe, effective, and can help save a life.



NASAL SPRAY:

Prefilled devices that spray naloxone into the nose.

INJECTABLE:

Medication given by injection into a muscle or under the skin.



Naloxone quickly reverses an overdose by blocking the effects of opioids. It can restore normal breathing within 2 to 3 minutes in a person whose breath has slowed, or even stopped, as a result of opioid overdose. More than one dose of naloxone may be required when stronger opioids like fentanyl are involved.

Naloxone won't harm someone if they're overdosing on drugs other than opioids, so it's always best to use it if you think someone is overdosing.

If you give someone naloxone, stay with them until emergency help arrives or for at least four hours to make sure their breathing returns to normal.

For more info, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/stop-overdose/about/index.html>

PEDIATRIC CARE NOW EXPANDED IN McALESTER

YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH STARTS WITH ACCESS TO TRUSTED CARE.

The Choctaw Nation McAlester Health Clinic has expanded pediatric services by adding more providers and increasing appointment availability for families. From routine checkups to ongoing care, your child can receive care in a space designed for comfort and safety.



Schedule your child's appointment today. Call 918.423.8440 or use MyChart. [Learn more at CNHSA.com](#)



CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Market Hours

Open: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Thursday: 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Closed: The last two days of each month for inventory.

Nutrition Education & Food Programs are subject to change. Calendars are available upon request at any location.

September 2026

All markets open weekdays, August 1-27
Closed: September 29 & 30
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation. Participants can request a calendar at their location.

ANTLERS 400 S.W. “O” ST., 580-298-6443
FOOD DEMO SEPTEMBER 3

BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842
FOOD DEMO SEPTEMBER 15

DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773
FOOD DEMO SEPTEMBER 17

McALESTER 3244 Afulloṭa Hina, 918-420-5716
FOOD DEMO SEPTEMBER 10

POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431
FOOD DEMO SEPTEMBER 22

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

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

Scan to learn more about the program.



Choctaw Nation Health Services

SAME-DAY CARE NOW OPEN IN McALESTER

SICK OR NEED CARE TODAY?

Get seen today. Call 918.423.8440 or schedule through MyChart.



Learn more at [CNHSA.com](#)



CHOCTAW NATION PUBLIC HEALTH NEEDS YOU!

By reporting ticks, you will help everyone in your community.



Scan the QR code to report ticks.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

September 1 Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
September 2 Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
September 8 Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
September 9 Crowder	By Appointment
September 11 Atoka	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 p.m.
September 11 Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
September 15 Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
September 16 McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
September 22 Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
September 23 Stigler	By Appointment
September 25 Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
September 29 Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

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

Red Earth Festival marks 40 Years of celebrating Indigenous artistry

By Kendra Germany-Wall

Indigenous artists from across the country came together in Oklahoma City Aug. 1-2 at the OKC Convention Center for the 40th annual Red Earth Festival, celebrating four decades of art, culture and tradition.

This year's festival featured the artwork of nearly 150 Indigenous artists, including Choctaw affiliated artists Katherine Ashby, James Beal, Gene Blackwell, Audrey Brokeshoulder, Devin Brokeshoulder, Brent Cherry, Gwen Coleman Lester, Melissa Freeman, Paul Hacker, Georgia Harjo, Colton James, Lauretta Newby-Coker, Nancy Rhoades, Ross Rigdge, Gregg Standridge, Candace Shanholtzer, Gene "Ironman" Smith and Jane Semple Umstead.

Choctaw Artist Jane Semple Umsted was named as the Red Earth 2026 Honored Artist. As the 2026 Honored Artist, Umsted presented at the Red Earth Festival, meeting with festival-goers and sharing insights into her work.

Umsted, a 1969 University of Oklahoma fine arts graduate with a five-decade career, works across many art mediums and styles, often portraying Choctaw stories. Her pieces are held in museums, public spaces and private collections throughout the U.S., including "The Two Brothers," a 1,700-pound sculpture at Southeastern Oklahoma State University depicting the shared history of the Choctaw and Chickasaw peoples.

In May 2025, the Choctaw Nation unveiled

Umsted's bronze sculpture honoring the World War I Choctaw Code Talkers outside the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant.

In addition to her artwork, Umsted serves as an educator, curator and community leader. She helped found the Semple Family Museum of Native American Art and is an Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame inductee and a trustee for the Institute of American Indian Arts.

"Honoring Jane during our 40th year feels especially meaningful," said Chelsey Curry, Red Earth Inc.'s executive director. "Her career reflects the values Red Earth has stood for since the beginning."

The Red Earth Festival began in 1987 when Ken Bonds and Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Yvonne Kauger set out to celebrate the state's Native American roots with a Santa Fe-style art market and dance competition. Backed by local leaders and \$30,000 in funding, the event was born and has grown into one of the country's premier Native art and dance festivals.

Today, the nonprofit Red Earth Inc. manages the festival, which draws thousands of visitors and more than a thousand American Indian artists, storytellers, educators and dancers each year.

The 2027 Red Earth Festival is scheduled for July 31-Aug. 1. Artists can apply for the juried show at redearth.org/pages/festival-artist-booth-application-juried.

The application deadline is Jan. 15, 2027.



Ross Ridge
(Choctaw)



Paul Hacker
(Choctaw)



Colton James
(Choctaw/Kiowa/Potawatomi)



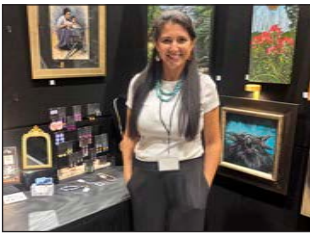
Gene "Ironman" Smith
(Choctaw)



Brent Cherry
(Choctaw)



Loretta Newby-Coker
(Choctaw)



Candace Shanholtzer
(Choctaw)



Gwen Coleman Lester
(Choctaw)



Devin Brokeshoulder
(Choctaw)



Katherine Ashby
(Choctaw)



Gregg Standridge
(Choctaw/Cherokee)



Nancy Rhoades
(Mississippi Choctaw)



James Beal
(Choctaw)



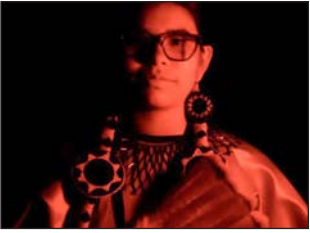
Gene Blackwell
(Choctaw)



Audrey Brokeshoulder
(Diné/Hopi/Absentee Shawnee/Choctaw)



Melissa Freeman
(Chickasaw/Choctaw)



Georgia Harjo
(Creek/Choctaw/Seminole/Cheyenne)
2026 Emerging Artist



Jane Semple Umsted
(Choctaw)
2026 Honored Artist

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE APPRECIATION NIGHT TICKETS OFFER

OCTOBER 31, 2026 GAME



Scan to purchase
discounted tickets!

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL SPECIAL
SESSION AGENDA August 8, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTES
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session July 11, 2026
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #11 – Elgie Hosay
 - b. Choctaw Language Speaker, District #11 – Shelly Westbrook
6. COMMITTEE REPORTS
7. PUBLIC COMMENTS – None
8. NEW BUSINESS

- States Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, OVC FY 2026 Tribal Victim Services Set-Aside Formula Program and to Authorize Implementation of the Proposed Project on Choctaw Nation Tribal Lands
- f. Approve the Application to the Department of Agriculture FY26 Rural Business Development Grant
 - g. Approve the Application to the Department of Agriculture FY26 Rural Utilities Service Community Connect Grant Program
 - h. Approve Application to the Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs FY26 Tribal Energy Development Capacity Grant
 - i. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Equipment
 - j. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles
 - k. Council Bill Expressing Support for the Tribal Data Modernizing Implementation Project through the Tribal Implementation Center Program
 - l. Approve the Application for Head Start Non-Competing Continuation Funds and COLA for FY 2026-2027
 - m. Approve Application to the FY26 Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service Tribal Wildlife Grant (TWG)
 - n. Approve the Sale of Surplus Capital Assets – Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning Equipment
 - o. Council Bill Amending the Choctaw Nation Tribal Guardianship and Conservatorship Act
 - p. Approve the Disposal of Certain Personal Property Acquired in the Purchase of 2306 Enterprise Boulevard, Durant, OK 74701
 - q. Approve Funding for the Strategic Acquisition of Sardis Lake USACE Property in Pushmataha County
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
 10. OLD BUSINESS
 11. ADJOURNMENT
 12. CLOSING PRAYER

BUSINESS CHAHTAPRENEUR CHIT ♦ CHAT

Why Every Business Owner Should Apply for an EIN



By Courtney Wesley

Starting and growing a business requires careful planning, and one of the most important steps a business owner can take is obtaining an Employer Identification Number (EIN). Issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), an EIN serves as a unique identifier for your business, much like a Social Security Number identifies an individual. While not every business is legally required to have one, applying for an EIN offers numerous benefits that can help protect your business, improve professionalism, and support long-term growth.

One of the primary advantages of having an EIN is the ability to separate your personal and business identities. Many sole proprietors initially use their Social Security Number for business-related activities. However, sharing your personal information on business forms, applications, and tax documents can increase the risk of identity theft. An EIN provides a layer of protection by allowing you to conduct business without routinely exposing your Social Security Number.

An EIN is also essential for establishing a separate business banking relationship. Most financial institutions require an EIN to open a business checking or savings account.

Maintaining dedicated business accounts helps keep personal and company finances separate, making bookkeeping easier and reducing confusion during tax season. A separate account also demonstrates professionalism and can make your business appear more credible to customers, vendors, and financial institutions.

Another major benefit is the opportunity to build business credit. An EIN allows lenders, suppliers, and credit reporting agencies to establish a financial profile for your company. Strong business credit can help you qualify for loans, business credit cards, equipment financing, and vendor accounts with favorable payment terms. Over time, this can reduce reliance on personal credit and create additional opportunities for growth and expansion.

If you plan to hire employees, an EIN is generally required. The IRS uses the number for payroll and employment tax reporting purposes. Having an EIN simplifies payroll administration and ensures compliance with federal tax requirements. Even if you are

operating as a sole proprietor today, obtaining an EIN can help you prepare for future growth and make hiring employees easier when the time comes.

An EIN can also improve your business's professional image. Many customers, vendors, and prospective partners view businesses with an EIN as more established and trustworthy. Whether you are applying for licenses, working with suppliers, or pursuing new contracts, having an EIN demonstrates that your business is structured and committed to operating professionally. In competitive industries, small details like this can make a significant difference.

Tax management is another reason every business owner should consider applying for an EIN. The number helps streamline tax filing and reporting by creating a clear distinction between personal and business financial activities. Many business entities, including corporations, partnerships, and certain limited liability companies (LLCs), are required to have an EIN for federal tax purposes. Even when not required, having one can make accounting and recordkeeping more organized.

Perhaps the most appealing benefit is that obtaining an EIN is both free and relatively simple. Business owners can apply directly through the IRS at no cost, and many applicants receive their EIN immediately after completing the online application process. Considering the protection, credibility, and growth opportunities it provides, an EIN offers tremendous value with very little effort.

In today's business environment, establishing a solid foundation is critical for success. An EIN helps protect personal information, simplify financial management, build business credit, support hiring efforts, and enhance credibility. Whether you are starting a new venture or looking to strengthen an existing business, applying for an EIN is a smart decision that can provide lasting benefits and position your company for future success.

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 a specific topic, don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to help!

Experience the excitement of the Choctaw Powwow this November

By Shelia Kirven

There is nothing quite like the annual Choctaw Powwow, an event that engages all the senses. This year's event will take place Nov. 6-8, 2026, at the Choctaw Casino & Resort, 3702 Choctaw Road, Durant, Oklahoma. Grand entries are scheduled for 7 p.m. Friday, 12:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Saturday, and 12:30 p.m. Sunday. Dancers range from tiny tots (ages 0-6), junior teens (7-12), teens (13-17), junior adults (18-34), senior adults (35-54), Golden Age (55-69) and Senior Golden Age (70 and older). Fan favorites include the men's fancy dance, Woodlands and the head-to-head drum competition. Members of tribes from across the United States and Canada will compete for cash prizes and the bragging rights of wearing championship jackets. The event draws thousands of attendees each year. Admission to the powwow is free and open to the public. Dozens of food and vendor booths will offer guests a variety of traditional foods and snacks from different tribes, as well as Native-made crafts and souvenirs. Powwow T-shirts will also be available for purchase. Last year, the powwow featured more than 450 dancers

and 10 drum groups competing. The event was livestreamed to more than 110 countries and watched by over 2.9 million viewers. According to the October 2025 Iti Fávvsá, "powwows are not only a celebration of life but a vital form of education. They serve as gathering spaces to celebrate and maintain tradition while inviting visitors to experience Indigeneity firsthand." During powwow weekend, additional events will take place across the highway at the Choctaw Cultural Center. Visitors are encouraged to visit the center, explore its exhibits and participate in planned activities. The gift shop is open, and the Champuli Café offers a dining experience for all tastes. Don't miss the opportunity to gather with members of other tribes and experience the spirit and unity of Choctaw powwow weekend in Durant, Oklahoma. For those unable to attend the powwow, check out the livestream at choctawculturalcenter.com/powwow. For more history on the Choctaw Powwow, visit The Choctaw Powwow, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. For questions or inquiries, contact Kerry Steve, powwow director, at powwow@choctawnation.com.



Choctaw Cultural Center celebrates fifth anniversary

DURANT, Okla. (July 26, 2026)–The Choctaw Cultural Center celebrated its fifth anniversary July 23-25 with a weekend of activities, exhibits, food and community events. The celebration welcomed visitors to commemorate five years of sharing Choctaw history, culture and traditions with guests from across the country and around the world. Throughout the weekend, guests had the opportunity to explore the center's exhibits, participate in activities, shop at the Hvshi Gift Store and dine at Champuli Café. Since opening, the Choctaw Cultural Center has served as a gathering place where visitors can learn about the Choctaw people and experience the Chahta Spirit through exhibits, programs and cultural activities. The anniversary celebration marked five years of the center's work to preserve and share Choctaw culture and traditions with visitors of all ages. The Choctaw Cultural Center expressed appreciation to everyone who attended the anniversary celebration and to those who have supported the center throughout its first five years.



Team FDO wins the men's bracket of the Choctaw Cultral Center Stickball Tournament.



Team Powerpuff Girls wins the women's bracket of the Choctaw Cultral Center Stickball Tournament.



CHOCTAW
LABOR DAY
FESTIVAL

INFORMATION UPDATES

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

Scan QR code for details.

LABOR DAY SCHEDULE & MAP

The 2026 Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival schedule and map are now available online! Visit laborday.choctawnation.com to start planning your festival experience.

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.

FREE PLANT FIELD GUIDE

Pick up your FREE Plant Field Guide at the Environmental Protection Services booth during the Choctaw Labor Day Festival! Available to the first 80 visitors each day. Booth Hours: Friday & Saturday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.

LABOR DAY LEGENDS SOFTBALL GAME

Join the Inaugural Choctaw Nation Legends Coed Slow-Pitch Softball Game at the 2026 Labor Day Festival on Sept. 6 on the Purple Women's Field immediately following the conclusion of the Women's Tournament. Enjoy an afternoon of friendly competition as we honor elder players and make lasting memories. Men and women age 65 or older are encouraged to participate.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ♦ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ♦

September (Siptimba) 2026

In This Issue

2 FFC

3 Council Corner

5 NTN

6 PYK

7 News of the Nation

8 Obits

9 Iti

11 Red Earth Festival

12 Powwow Preview

Page 1

Find information on available Education programs to support you or your student this school year.

Page 4

Choctaw elders find sense of community and competition through chair volleyball.

Page 10

New vending machines bring lifesaving resources to rural Oklahoma communities.

Biskinik

Mission Statement:

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

Stay Connected to the Nation

CHOCTAWNATION.COM