



February 2025 Issue

As of December 2024, there were over 300 Choctaw children in the custody of the state of Oklahoma. At the same time, only 42 Choctaw Nation foster homes were available for these children to stay in.

Choctaw Nation Foster Care asks tribal members to open their hearts and homes

By Chris Jennings

A sad fact of the world is that sometimes children are separated from their birth parents. These separations can happen due to a variety of reasons, such as neglect, witnessing domestic violence, living in unsafe conditions, or being exposed to active drug use.

When a referral is made, the case is investigated to see if the allegations are true, whether the concerns can be remedied with resources, and if it is necessary to remove the child from the situation.

Robert Whitfield, a foster care recruiter with the Choctaw Nation, said, "When it is necessary to remove a child from their home, we always first try to place them with a safe family member."

One of the primary goals of the foster program is to support reunification with biological families whenever it is possible and safe.

Sometimes, that takes time as that parent works through the process of getting their children back. Foster families fill that gap until everybody is certain the children are returning to a safe environment.

"These foster homes keep these children temporarily as we work with the family to make efforts towards reunification," said Whitfield.

According to an Oklahoma Department of Health Services report released in 2020, of the 7,452 children in state custody, 2,567 were Native American. Across the nation, Native American children remain disproportionately affected. When compared to non-Natives, tribal children are four times more likely to come into custody. Additionally, many are separated from their culture as they are placed in non-tribal homes.

The Choctaw Nation prides itself on taking care of its own, as evidenced by the vast number of services it provides its citizens. Yet, when it comes to the citizens taking care of their own in the form of foster care, that isn't always the case.

According to Whitfield, as of December 2024, only 42 Choctaw families had stepped up to be foster homes. The number of children needing a temporary home greatly outweighs the number of homes available.

December numbers showed that nearly 700 Choctaw children were in the foster system nationwide.

Eighty-two of those children are in the custody of the Choctaw Nation, while over 300 Choctaw children are in the custody of the state of Oklahoma alone.

Unfortunately, not every Choctaw child in the state's custody is placed with a family member or in a Choctaw home. Many of our children still need Choctaw families to care for them.

Whitfield said that many people think of foster care in a traditional sense. "Traditional foster care is where an individual doesn't know the child, and they're willing to open their home and their lives, to let the child in and keep them temporarily."

However, Whitfield explained that there are other types of foster care.

Kinship foster care is where there's a pre-existing relationship, such as a relative who knows the child or a family friend who has a substantial relationship with the family.

Emergency foster care is unplanned, typically late at night or on weekends.

Whitfield said, "Emergency foster care is often used when we're trying to get a family member approved for kinship care, but we're not able to get them through fast enough for that child to go there right then and there."

Those emergency homes typically step up and take that child for the length of time it takes to get the family member approved.

The shortest type of foster care is respite care.

Homes that offer respite care are primarily focused on sharing their homes for brief periods. This can be when other homes need breaks or when something occurs that would require them to be away for a short period of time.

Part of the process of being approved to be a part of the foster care program is a home study.

This is where each family's strengths and preferences are reviewed and discussed.

Kat Vorhees, a foster specialist with the Choctaw Nation, said, "That's the beautiful thing about our program; you get to have that conversation about what you as a parent are the most comfortable with."

Approval to be a foster family usually takes a minimum of 90 days.

There's training for prospective foster families, a background check, and in-home inspections.

"Our families that foster have a variety of different backgrounds, life experiences, and household compositions," said Whitfield. "We work to ensure that all have safe backgrounds and a willingness to care for our children."

According to Vorhees, if you feel a calling to foster a child but think you or your family won't qualify, the best thing to do is contact the foster care office and talk with them.

Fostering is a strong calling for many people.

According to Olivia Hensley, fostering children was something her family prayed about for a long time.

"The Nation has done a lot for me throughout my life, so it [fostering] is a way to give back to the Nation," said Hensley. "We enjoy interacting with our church kids and getting to influence them and be part of their lives. So, we decided this is a larger extension of that, being able to be part of kids' lives for the long term, short term or whatever they need."

Hensley's extended family had a say in the fostering idea before they even started the process.

"My parents and my husband's parents, we're close with all of them. They all live literally down the road, both ways. We also checked with my grandparents, my siblings, my husband's siblings because we wanted them to understand they're going to be part of our home and our family," said Hensley.

Bringing children into a strange home is never going to be easy, both for the adults and the children.

The training offered by the Choctaw Nation helped Hensley and her family to prepare, but she says it was still somewhat of a shock the first time.

"We were sitting on our floor. It was pouring rain. It was nine o'clock at night, and they had brought us two little girls, both under the age of two; one of them was just a few months old," said Hensley. "They were shell shocked, and we were shell shocked."

However, it didn't take long for the Hensleys to start

treating them as they would their own kids: get them fed, bathed and put to bed.

Hensley said her foster kids usually sleep well at first, "These foster kids sleep really well, especially when they first get here. They're shocked and sleep because I know they're exhausted."

That first placement with the Hensleys lasted four nights. During that time, Hensley says they definitely got attached to the girls, and it was emotional letting go when they were placed in a kinship foster.

Vorhees says one reason she often hears that someone doesn't want to get involved with fostering is that they don't want to get attached. That's exactly what makes a great foster family, though.

"If something were to happen with your family or your home and your children needed to go stay somewhere else for a little bit, wouldn't you want the people that are going to go stay with to be attached? To make sure that they're fed, get to school on time, feel safe, and feel loved. And then, as soon as your home is rebuilt, or you're better, you'd want your children to come home to you," said Vorhees. "We want more foster families to support that. And when people tell me I don't want to get attached, I think to myself, good, I need you to get attached."

Hensley says that as mature adults, we should be able to do that for the sake of children.

"We can deal with the loss of a kid being in our home, loving them and then having to give them up. These kids don't have other options. They're not there by choice. They're there because they're told to be; they have to be," said Hensley.

That attachment, love and care can lead to a life-long impact.

Cheri Battle started fostering because she wanted to impact kids' lives. She wants them to know that their experiences don't define them.

"Your trauma doesn't define you," said Battle. "You can change your narrative."

Battle, just like Hensley and Vorhees, says it's okay to get attached.

"I form a bond, but I keep in mind that they will leave one day, depending on how their case goes," Battle said. "So, I try to keep that in my mind."

Battle has lost contact with only a few of her foster kids. She says they'll sometimes call or video chat with her to see how she is.

"I'll always ask them one question," said Battle. "How are your grades? They know I'm big on education, making good grades and following the rules."

Battle and other foster families bring structure and care to these children's lives, which can truly make a difference. Seeing that has made all the struggles worth it to Battle.

Foster parents are never without help. Resources are available to help foster families through the Choctaw Nation and the state of Oklahoma. Vorhees says one of the biggest "myths" she hears is that you must be wealthy to foster.

According to Vorhees, that's not true.

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Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

Looking Ahead at 2025

Halito and welcome to 2025!

Each new year offers a fresh, clean slate that we can sketch our great plans for the Choctaw Nation and this year is no different as we have bold plans and new ideas to implement for our tribal members and associates throughout 2025.

I would like to extend a big Yakoke! to everyone who participated in our surveys this year and who offers me their feedback when we meet face to face. The feedback that we receive are a large part of why we create programs, services and create new initiatives to the services we currently provide.

We have bold plans for housing within the reservation. Healthcare, housing and employment are the main areas of concern for our tribal members, and we are listening to those concerns for 2025 with:

- Housing – 384 homes
- Affordable Rental Homes: 170 homes
- LEAP homes: 154 homes
- Independent Elderly: 60 homes

Hugo will also have a new government services building and Roots Café in 2025 to service the needs of tribal members in the Hugo area.

Two large projects that we are working on to bring in new streams of income to the tribe include a development on Lake Texoma we are partnering with and a new movie that will be filmed entirely on the Choctaw Nation reservation.

There is also a new slate of projects that have been approved for the new year and they include:

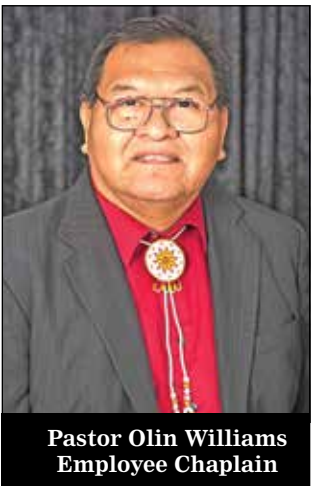
- Durant multi-family open for leasing (The Haven; 216 Total Units)
- UAS Ops Center
- Boswell Country Market Fuel Expansion
- McAlester Child Care Center
- Choctaw Data Center
- Broken Bow Walking Trails
- Talihina Dietary Remodel
- Talihina Wellness Center
- Broken Bow Wellness Center Expansion
- McAlester Wellness Center Expansion
- Broken Bow Health Clinic Expansion
- McAlester Clinic Expansion

The Preston Harbor Development is also coming along. Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and Craig International announced the closing of 3,114 acres for the \$6 billion Preston Harbor project, which will include approximately 7,500 homes, including luxury single-family, active adult, and multifamily, retail, restaurants, an upscale marina, and a Margaritaville resort on Lake Texoma in Denison. When all is said and done, our partners and the Choctaw Nation believe this will have a big impact on Denison's population and prove to be a big economic boost for both the Choctaw Nation and the entire region. Groundbreaking on the Preston Harbor project is targeted for late 2025.

Also, Choctaw Nation is opening its doors to an independent film that will be filmed on the Choctaw Nation reservation. The movie, "Brave" will be the first-ever film to be shot on Choctaw land, and the tribe has been closely involved in developing and pre-production. The dramatic feature will begin shooting in the summer of 2025 on the Choctaw Nation Reservation.

As you can see, we are not resting on our 2024 successes and our plans are big and bold for 2025. We strive to keep the Choctaw Nation at the front in services and technology and these plans will help maintain that. It is my hope that you will follow along with our progress, and we will reconvene in December 2025 to let you know how we did!

Yakoke and God Bless!



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Love and the bible

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." 1 John 4:7.

Valentine's Day is known for symbolizing love and romance. It is also known as St. Valentine's Day. It originated as a Christian feast day honoring a martyr named Valentine.

Through later traditions, it has become a cultural and commercial celebration of romance and love.

The Apostle Paul writes a statement on love in First Corinthians, chapter 13. Verses 4-8 is a listing of the characteristics of love.

First, it is long-suffering. This refers to a quality that does not seek revenge but suffers wrong to act redemptively.

Second, love is kind. This could mean gracious, virtuous, manageable, pleasant, and benevolent. It is the opposite of harsh, bitter, or sharp.

Third, love is not envious. It does not jealously desire what it does not possess.

Fourth, love does not promote itself. Love is not puffed up. In humility, it considers others more important than self.

Fifth, love does not behave itself in an unbecoming fashion. Believers are to avoid the appearance of evil.

Sixth, love does not seek its own things. Love seeks the interest of others.

Seventh, love is not easily provoked. Love is not irritated, exasperated, or made angry.

Eighth, love thinketh no evil. Love thinks the best in people and does not keep a record of the wrongs of others. This is agape love, the kind of love only of God. One has to be born of God, and knoweth God to have this kind of love. The natural man does not possess this. The natural love of man is conditional and can only function according to stimulus.



PRINCESS PAGEANT

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT
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Choctaw Nation Princess and Royalty Program



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Give Some Love to Your Heart this Valentine's Day

Give Some Love to Your Heart this Valentine's Day

February is usually the month that conjures up images of Valentine's Day greetings, cupids, heart-shaped boxes of chocolates, and the exchange of messages of love with your sweetheart.

While you're writing out those Valentine's Day messages, why not also take some time to share a little more of that love for what keeps you going – your heart? The heart is a time-honored symbol of Valentine's Day. It represents where all that love comes from and what keeps your life ticking every day. Give your heart some love this Valentine's Day by sticking to a heart-healthy lifestyle that will ensure that your beat goes on for a long time.

The Choctaw Nation offers a lot of help and guidance when it comes to a healthy heart. For instance, the Choctaw Nation Cardiology Department specializes in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of heart and blood vessel diseases, including comprehensive care for various cardiovascular conditions. For more information on Choctaw health services, check out www.choctawnation.com/about/health/.

Here are the eligibility requirements for Choctaw comprehensive care:

- CNHSA Eligibility Guidelines
- Must reside within the Choctaw Nation service area for any referral services
- CDIB, letter of descentance or tribal membership card from a federally recognized tribe (except Chickasaw)
- Patients must be 18 years of age or older

To apply for Choctaw comprehensive care, it requires a referral from a primary care provider. Additional information to qualify for services include:

- Exercise Stress Tests
- Echocardiogram
- Holter Monitoring
- Arrhythmia Management
- Blood Pressure Management
- Pre-operative Clearance
- Post-operative Cardiac Procedures Management
- Heart Failure Management
- Case Management/Coordination with outside Cardiologists

The Choctaw Nation will also be participating in the Go Red for Women Day initiative on Feb. 7, and we urge all Choctaw associates to wear red day that day in a show of support.

Since 2004, the American Heart Association's signature women's initiative, Go Red for Women, has addressed the awareness and clinical care gaps of women's greatest health threat, cardiovascular disease. On their website (www.goredforwomen.org), the American Heart Association offers some staggering statistics concerning heart disease among women, including:

Nearly 45% of women ages 20+ are living with some form of cardiovascular disease.

Less than half of women entering pregnancy in the U.S. have optimal cardiovascular health.

Women experience unique life stages, such as pregnancy and menopause, that can put them at an increased risk for CVD.

Heart disease tragedies have touched families across the Choctaw reservation and the world. Just a few lifestyle adjustments can help you ensure that you will share many more Valentine's Days with your loved ones and ensure that your beat goes on as you embrace a heart-healthy lifestyle. For more information on what you can do to improve your cardiovascular health, check out heart.org to help create a healthier Choctaw reservation.



Listen to your heart this American Heart Month

February is American Heart Month, a time when all people—especially women—are encouraged to focus on their cardiovascular health. Here are some facts and resources from the Centers for Disease Control that anyone can use to raise awareness about the risks of heart disease and the importance of identifying and managing heart-related health conditions.

Quick Facts

- **Heart disease is very common.** In the United States, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups. In 2022, 1 in every 5 deaths in the United States was caused by heart disease.
- **High blood pressure is a leading cause of heart disease.** Nearly half of U.S. adults have high blood pressure, which puts them at risk for heart disease and stroke. And just 1 in 4 people with high blood pressure has it under control.
- **Heart disease is costly.** The cost of health care services, medications, and lost productivity from heart disease amounted to \$252.2 billion between 2019 and 2020.

The ABCS of Heart Health

Every year, Americans suffer more than 1.5 million heart attacks and strokes. The good news is that you can help reduce your risk and improve your heart health by following the ABCS.

- **A: Take aspirin as directed by your health care professional.**
Ask your health care professional if aspirin can reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Be sure to tell your health care professional if you have a family history of heart disease or stroke, and mention your own medical history.
- **B: Control your blood pressure.**
Blood pressure measures the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. If your blood pressure stays high for a long time, you may suffer from high blood pressure (also called hypertension).
High blood pressure increases your risk for heart attack or stroke more than any other risk factor. Find out what your blood pressure numbers are, and ask your health care professional what those numbers mean for your health. If you have high blood pressure, work with your health care professional to lower it.
- **C: Manage your cholesterol.**
Cholesterol is a waxy substance produced by the liver and found in certain foods. Your body needs cholesterol, but when you have too much, it can build up in your arteries and cause heart disease.
There are different types of cholesterol: One type is "good" and can protect you from heart disease, but another type is "bad" and can increase your risk. Talk to your health care professional about cholesterol and how to lower your bad cholesterol if it's too high.
- **S: Don't smoke.**
Smoking raises your blood pressure, which increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. If you smoke, quit. Talk with your health care professional about ways to help you stick with your decision. It's never too late to quit smoking. Visit smokefree.gov or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW today.

For more information on heart health, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/>.

Assistance with eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids is available to tribal members nationwide

By Shelia Kirven

Eyeglasses, dentures and hearing aids can be financially straining for millions of people in the U.S. who use them. Fortunately for Choctaw tribal members, there is a program aimed at easing that burden.

The Eyeglasses, Dentures and Hearing Aid Program (EDH) was established by the Choctaw Nation and was historically open only to tribal members who lived within the Choctaw Nation Reservation. In 2005, however, the program was expanded to tribal members living nationwide.

Kayla Williams, director of the Patient Relations program, said the program began being administered through the Tribe's Health Services division in 2011 and became a component of its Patient Relations Program.

Before 2016, program participants needed to be 55 or older to receive eyeglasses, dentures or hearing aids. However, the age limit was dropped, and now, tribal members of all ages are welcome to apply for services.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, the EDH portion of the program assisted 15,681 tribal members. In FY23, a total of 15,546 tribal members were assisted, and 17,016 tribal members were assisted with glasses. Of that number, 9,071 members received glasses through the Choctaw Nation's optometry clinics. Choctaw Nation Health Care Authority (CNHSA) has optometry clinics in Durant, Hugo, Idabel, McAlester, Poteau, Stigler and Talihina.

Through the program, eligible tribal members can receive one pair of prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses every two years. Participants with diabetes may be eligible to receive eyeglasses once a year if their prescription changes and they are actively being treated for the disease (a note from the primary doctor must be on file).

Choctaw Nation health clinics do not make dentures or partials, so an outside provider can be used for those services.

Many tribal clinics throughout the country provide optometry and audiology services, and participants outside the reservation area may use those facilities if desired. The tribal member decides on the provider they choose. If the provider is willing to provide a W-9 form and will invoice and accept payment from Choctaw Nation, the provider will be approved.

Payment for services is made directly to the provider and cannot be made to the tribal member, as reimbursements are not allowed.

The program leaves it up to the tribal member to determine whether the facility is willing to work with and accept payment from the Choctaw Nation. The program does not make provider recommendations but will explain the amounts paid for each service and advise the member to shop for the best pricing. If a balance is owed to the chosen provider after what Choctaw Nation pays, the tribal member is responsible for payment.

The EDH/Patient Relations Program is staffed with caring individuals who strive to strengthen, personalize, and enhance relationships among patients and Choctaw Nation Health Services staff. Patient Relations may also be able to assist with limited financial assistance to eligible Choctaw tribal members when denied through contract health for medical/dental bills (extractions, root canals, crowns, etc.) and durable medical equipment for eligible participants.



Stock Image

The Eyeglasses, Dentures and Hearing Aid Program (EDH) assists eligible Choctaw tribal members nationwide.

The program pays after insurance for those with coverage. Patient Relations is the payer of last resort.

For assistance with eyeglasses, staff will verify tribal membership and determine eligibility in the Patient Relations database, looking at last paid invoice, if any, for the patient and verifying that it has been two years since the previous date of service.

When visiting a Choctaw Nation optometry or audiology clinic for eyeglasses and hearing aids, the clinic will submit the EDH application on the tribal member's behalf.

Since Choctaw Nation clinics do not make dentures or partials, the tribal member must call us to complete the application process.

The Patient Relations Department has offices located in Durant, McAlester, and Talihina.

To apply for the EDH program, please call one of the locations listed below.

Choctaw Nation Regional Medical Clinic

1801 Chukka Hina
Durant OK 74701
580-924-9704

McAlester Patient Relations

1414 E. Wade Watts Blvd.
McAlester OK 74501
918-426-4125

Talihina Health Care Center

One Choctaw Way
918-567-7000

Choctaw Nation EDH Program

Eyeglasses

- The participant is eligible for one pair of eyeglasses every two years unless the patient has diabetes and the prescription has changed
- \$180.00 assistance at a Tribal Indian Health Care (IHS) facility—eye exams are free at Indian Health Services (IHS) facilities. They don't have a price markup on glasses like private or corporate-owned facilities
- \$250.00 assistance to a non-IHS Facility
- The program does not pay for exams, sunglasses, or sports goggles

Dentures/Partials

- The participant is eligible every five years from the last date of service for upper or lower hardware (please call the EDH/Patient Relations office for complete eligibility criteria and process)

Dentures

- \$700.00 assistance per plate (\$1400.00 assistance for a complete set)

Partials

- \$900.00 for upper, \$900.00 for lower or \$1800.00 for upper and lower

Hearing Aids

- Every three years for one pair (does not cover accessories) – hearing exams are free at IHS facilities.
- \$1,000 assistance to cover a pair of hearing aids, basically at cost, from an IHS facility (privately owned hearing aid facilities typically charge \$3,000 and above)

CNO recognizes the 50th anniversary of the Indian Self-Determination Act

DURANT, Okla. (January 7, 2025) – On Jan. 4, 1975, U.S. President Gerald Ford signed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (ISDEAA).

The law gave tribal governments the right to administer and oversee the implementation of their federal programs, encouraging self-determination and self-governance. Jan. 4, 2025, marks the 50th anniversary of this historic act.

“ISDEAA is one of the most critical pieces of legislation ever enacted, because it confirms the federal government's realization that Tribes have the right to govern ourselves, and it expanded our ability to govern ourselves,” said Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton. “Because of this legislation, the Choctaw Nation developed its constitution, which was ratified in 1983 and still governs our Tribe today.”

Tribes initially hesitated to take advantage of the opportunities the ISDEAA provided.

In Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence, Dr. Valerie Lambert notes that it wasn't until eight years after the ISDEAAs signing that Choctaw Nation used the funding to



Photo Courtesy of Gerald R. Ford Library
President Gerald R. Ford visits Oklahoma during Native American Awareness Week, Lawton, Oklahoma, 1976. Ford mentions the Indian Self-Determination and Assistance Act he signed into law in early 1975, following the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon.

start programs including food distribution, a vocational development program, Head Start and housing. ISDEAA also enabled the Choctaw Nation to become the first tribe to contract complete hospital administration with the Talihina Hospital.

To acknowledge the instrumental impact the law had on self-governance, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council passed a resolution celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ISDEAA.

“The ISDEAA has been instrumental for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to become the great Nation that it is today,” Batton said.

For more information on the Self-Determination Act, visit <https://www.bia.gov/regional-offices/great-plains/self-determination>.

CNO Judicial Branch extends operating hours to establish “Night Court”

By Tabatha Keton

The Choctaw Nation District Court has extended its hours into the evening to accommodate individuals unable to attend court during standard business hours. Hosted the first Thursday of every month, Night Court allows individuals with non-violent warrants to appear after-hours and clear warrants and pay their fines. The event provides tribal members a unique opportunity to address their legal matters without the fear of added fines or arrest.

“Night Court provides a great benefit to our community,” stated Judge Amy Pierce, Presiding District Judge for the Choctaw Nation District Court. “It helps people who may not be able to miss work to attend court and it provides extended hours for those individuals who may be driving long distances to appear. It also provides members with an opportunity to consult with court staff and attorneys on resolving their legal matters.”

During Night Court, tribal members can consult with legal professionals, including attorneys and court officials, who can provide guidance and assistance in resolving their outstanding warrants or fines. Night Court emphasizes the importance of open communi-



cation and collaboration between tribal members and the justice system. By removing the barriers of fear and financial burden, individuals can take proactive steps toward resolving their legal matters and moving forward with their lives.

Night Court will be held on February 6 and March 6 at the Choctaw Judicial Center at 2250 Chukka Hina Drive, Durant, OK and the Courthouse will stay open until 7:30 p.m.

Individuals should bring the following court:

- Photo ID
- Relevant documents to your case
- Credit Card or Money Order to make payments

Only individuals who have outstanding warrants for non-violent crimes may appear to have their warrants cleared. If you have questions about whether you are eligible to attend, please contact the Choctaw Nation Public Defenders Office at 580-634-0678. To inquire about costs and fees you may owe, contact the Court Clerk's Office at 580-920-7027.

To stay updated on when Night Court will be in session, visit <https://chocta.ws/night-court>.

From the CNO Family Residency Program:

Thank You to Our Amazing Residents

In a close-knit rural community, the Family Medicine residents are more than just doctors in training—they are neighbors, friends, and integral members of our healthcare family. On this Thank a Resident Day (February 28) and the entire month of February, we want to honor these dedicated individuals who play such a vital role in keeping our community healthy and cared for.

From newborn checkups to caring for our elders, these residents embrace the full

spectrum of family medicine with compassion and skill. Their ability to connect with patients on a personal level and their commitment to learning and serving shine brightly in our small town.

We encourage our community to join us in recognizing the hard work of these healthcare heroes. Whether it's a kind word, a note of appreciation, or simply a heartfelt “thank you,” let's make sure our residents know how much they are valued.

Your commitment doesn't go unnoticed, and we are deeply grateful for all that you do.



Photo Courtesy of the BIA

President Richard Nixon meets with several tribal leaders.

THE JOURNEY OF OUR ANCESTORS

Our ancestors' journeys paved the way for tribal sovereignty that empowers us to define our own tribal membership today.

This month, we invite you to view the timeline of Choctaw history, emphasizing our ancestors' journey and how their resilience guides our efforts.

TIMELINE:
Pre-treaties → treaties → Trail of Tears → The Termination Act and its 1970s repeal → 1983 Constitution → today and the future

To read about the events leading up to removal and after, click here.
www.choctawnation.com/about/history/historical-documents/

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Choctaw Nation

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Jennifer Woods

District 6

Halito from District 6, The Heart of the Nation! We are excited for 2025 and all that it will bring.

February, the Month of Love, is going to be a busy month. We will start off with our Heritage Day on Wednesday, February 5 with a traditional lunch and a cultural event put on by the Choctaw Nation Cultural Department. We will be holding quarterly Heritage Day events, so make plans to join us. The following week, our seniors will be selecting their King and Queen at our Valentine's lunch on February 12.

February is also when the Choctaw Nation Livestock Show is held. This event is held on Saturday, February 1 and Sunday, February 2. The FFA students, teachers and families work hard with the animals, and it teaches them so many great values, mainly responsibility. We encourage you to come out and support these students. We will also be hosting the 'Princess in Training' event at the Community Center on February 15 from 10:00 to 2:00. Please share this information with any Choctaw girls who would like to represent District 6 as a princess.

District 6 is continuing to grow, and we would like to build more LEAP homes as well as Affordable Rentals and Independent Elderly homes, but in order to do so, we have to show the need and have ten approved applications before land can be bought and homes built. We are so grateful to have safe and energy efficient homes for our tribal members to live in. Please do not pre-judge your credit. Get your applications in.

We honor our veterans and appreciate the many sacrifices they have made for our freedom. We have many programs to assist our veterans, such as the Veterans Advocacy Program, Warrior Wellness and VASH, which helps with housing. The District 6 Community Center also hosts the Tvshka Warrior Coffee meeting that is held on the third Thursday of the month at 11:00 a.m. It is a time for veterans to gather and support each other, sharing stories and or needs they may have. It's a great time to meet with other veterans for coffee and conversation. Please mark your calendars for this monthly event and let other veterans know as well.

The District 6 seniors are very active and are always participating in chair volleyball, shopping trips, Indian Taco Sales, cultural activity, day trips as well as longer trips. We have a monthly calendar that gives you a list of all the activities for the month so that you can sign up for any event you are interested in participating in. March and April will be upon us in no time, bring St. Patrick's Day, Easter and Spring. We look forward to all that each month will bring and will have events to celebrate each holiday. If you are 55 or older, please come join us and enjoy the activities. It is an honor to serve our Tribal Members. We look forward to seeing you all at the Center.

Yakoke!



Want to learn more about Choctaw history?

Check out past and future Iiti Fabvssas at <https://www.choctawnation.com/biskinik/iti-fabvssa/>.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

Halito! This month I would like to address our Lease/Purchase (LEAP) program that is assisting our tribal members in becoming homeowners.

The LEAP program is designed loosely based on the old Mutual Help program. It is a 25-year program in which the participant leases the home from the Choctaw Nation Housing Authority for the first 15 years and finances it for the last 10 years. The lease portion of the program helps get families ready to become homeowners, while all rent paid goes toward paying the home in full.

During the lease portion of the program, participants will receive homeowner and home buyer education classes from the Service Coordination Department of the Housing Authority. Property Managers will also work hand in hand with participants to meet their needs and help guide the way to homeownership.

We make determinations of where we build on where the approved applicants state they want to live. If you want LEAP homes in your community, please apply and encourage others to apply. There are income limits, both minimum and maximum, with this program based on family size, and since the first 15 years are a lease, those with bad credit are not disqualified. Background checks are completed, however, and at least five years since any criminal charges have been filed need to have passed.

Applications are located at each community center and can be found on the Choctaw Nation website and the Chata Achvffa portal. 586 LEAP homes have been completed with over 150 more planned or under construction. Get your application in now!

COUNCIL MINUTES

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA
TRIBAL COUNCIL
REGULAR SESSION AGENDA
December 14, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session November 9, 2024
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #3 – Maria Waggoner
 - b. First Choctaw Language Speaker, District #3 – Clifford Ludlow
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None
7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
8. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Letter of Appointment for Ms. Micah Knight to the position of Appellate Court Judge for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Judicial Branch
 - b. Approve an Oil and Gas Lease No. 4200462520 in Favor of Ripple Oil and Gas, LLC, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in Carter County,

Oklahoma

- c. Approve a Service Line Agreement in Favor of Kiamichi Electric Cooperative, Inc., on Choctaw Nation Fee Land in Atoka County, Oklahoma
 - d. Approve a Service Line Agreement in Favor of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, a Division of One Gas, Inc., on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Choctaw County, Oklahoma
 - e. Approve a Limited Waiver of Sovereign Immunity in Favor of Spherecommerce and Merrick Bank
 - f. Approve a Limited Waiver of Sovereign Immunity in Favor of Platinum Gaming Ventures, LLC. (Formerly known as GCG Funding, LLC)
 - g. Resolution Acknowledging and Celebrating the 50 Year Anniversary of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER
- All votes passed unanimously

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA
TRIBAL COUNCIL
REGULAR SESSION AGENDA
January 11, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session December 14, 2024
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month, District #4 – Joe Jessie
 - b. First Choctaw Language Speaker, District #4 – James Tom
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS – LaTrista Minor – Individual Speaker – Choctaw Nation Vehicle Auctions
7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
8. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles
 - b. Approve the Disposal of Sur-

plus Capital Assets – Equipment

- c. Approve the Application for the Family Violence Prevention Grant for FY 2026
 - d. Approve Contingency Funding for Certain Construction Projects
 - e. Council Bill Amending the Chief and Tribal Council Election Ordinance
 - f. Approve Application for the FY25 Tribal Management Grant (TMG)
 - g. Council Bill Amending the Legislative Committees Ac
 - h. Proposed Amendments to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Constitution to be Considered for Adoption by a Vote of Qualified Tribal Members
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER
- All votes passed unanimously

WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matt Gamble

Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation Department is looking forward to a new program rolling out this spring. The Deer Herd Enhancement Program (DHEP) will assist landowners looking to improve the management of the deer population on their land. Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma tribal members owning or leasing 640+ acres can now apply for assistance in the management of the deer on their land. Landowners accepted in this program will meet with a CNO biologist and discuss management objectives for their land. Participants are required to complete a series of deer surveys and must comply with the requirements of the program to be eligible for future enrollment.

A CNO biologist will assist in the development of the survey plan and provide habitat recommendations and harvest recommendations based on the management goals and objectives identified by the landowners/lessee. Applicants are responsible for a yearly enrollment fee (\$150 for 640-5,000 acres; \$350 for 5,000 acres +). Participants will also be responsible for collecting data from deer harvested on the property. Biologists will train participants on the data that will be collected and provide the necessary tools and standardized data sheets.

CNO biologists are excited to be able to assist landowners in providing better deer habitat and improving population dynamics. This program will give our staff a great opportunity to interact with landowners and hunters and collect hands-on data from across the Reservation. Whitetail deer are such an important resource from a sustenance, cultural, recreational, and heritage perspective. We welcome the opportunity to add to the overall body of data that we already collect through harvest reporting and surveys on tribal properties.

To apply, go to <https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/DHEP-Application.pdf> or email our department at wildlife@choctawnation.com. Completed applications should be emailed to wildlife@choctawnation.com or mailed to Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Wildlife Conservation Department, PO Box 1210, Durant, OK 74702.

Deadline for applications is May 1, but for this initial year we will extend the deadline for applications to June 1. Our staff will review applications and reach out to accepted applicants by July 1. Our staff is excited for this program and the opportunity to work with tribal members.

Be looking for our annual big game report coming out next month. It will detail harvest statistics and provide insight to this past year's big game seasons. Our biologist will be spending time over the next couple months completing turkey gobbler surveys and preparing upcoming spring turkey season forecasts. Until then, enjoy some quality time in the Choctaw Outdoors!

Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

Stay Connected

CHOCTAWNATION.COM



Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

Upcoming Events

Choctaw Princess in Training (Districts 1, 2, 7 and 8) - February 1 | 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. | Antlers Community Center 302 SW 2nd St Antlers, OK 74523 | Achieve your dream of being a District Princess or Tribal Royalty. Learn what you need to know to compete in Choctaw Nation district princess pageants. Participants may attend any or all training sessions.

The Choctaw Nation Livestock Show - February 1 & 2 | 10 a.m. | Bryan County Fairgrounds and Eastern Oklahoma State College | Join us for a fun day! Check out all the livestock on display and enjoy great events and tasty treats, then stay for the awards!

Choctaw Princess in Training (Districts 3, 4, 5, and 6) - February 15 | 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. | Wilburton Community Center 1455 NW Highway 2 Wilburton, OK 74578 | Achieve your dream of being a District Princess or Tribal Royalty. Learn what you need to know to compete in Choctaw Nation district princess pageants. Participants may attend any or all training sessions.

Presidents Day - February 17 | All Day | All Offices will be closed for a tribal holiday in observance of Presidents Day.

Community Cultural Meeting – Houston - February 20 | 16 p.m. | Houston Marriott North 255 N Sam Houston Pkwy East Houston, TX 77060 | Helping to bring our Chahta family closer together. Attend to meet other Chahtas in the Houston area, visit cultural, artist, and services booths.

Cinema at the Center - February 21 | 7 p.m. | This monthly series features a wide range of films designed around a fun, family-friendly theme. This month, check out Frozen. We'd love to see you for movie night. Visit, bit.ly/ccc-workshop-events for more information.

Community Cultural Meeting – San Antonio - February 22 | 2 p.m. | Marriot San Antonio Airport 77 NE Interstate 410 Loop San Antonio, TX 78216 | Helping to bring our Chahta family closer together. Attend to meet other Chahtas in the San Antonio area, visit cultural, artist, and services booths.

Programs & Services

Jones Academy - Jones Academy will continue to use all available resources to provide an exceptional academic and residential program for the students we serve. In cooperation with the Choctaw Nation and Bureau of Indian Education, we plan to improve facilities and other programs offered. Construction will begin on a new Student Union by the year's end, providing a state-of-the-art space for all student's meals and recreation activities. These improvements will allow students more opportunities and experiences educationally, academically and spiritually. To learn more about Jones Academy, visit jonesacademy.org.

Youth Employment Services - YES is offering exciting paid employment opportunities for youth aged 16-21 in the Choctaw Nation Reservation service area. YES is transitioning from a traditional 5-week summer work experience to a year-round employment opportunity with Project Auatvchi and Project Toksvli, allowing participants to work up to 200 hours at any time of the year. For more information, visit choctawnation.com/services/youth-employment-services.

Food Distribution Increases Amounts and Selections - Choctaw Nation Food Distribution Program participants will see an increase in the following food amounts they receive: Meat/Poultry/Fish (increase from five to six units) Vegetables (increase from 18 to 20 units) New food items will also be available. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Public Health Survey - Take the Choctaw Nation Community Health Survey and give your opinions on the availability and access to various services that provide for the welfare, safety and health of our communities.

Choctaw Connect - Make Chahta Connect your go-to resource for finding Internet Service Providers (ISPs) on the Choctaw reservation in Southeast Oklahoma. Whether you're looking to get connected or upgrade your service, Chahta Connect has you covered. For more information, visit chahtaconnect.com.

Food Distribution Report Household Changes - Food Distribution participants must report household changes. Household changes may affect your eligibility. Please report any household changes immediately to your Food Distribution pickup site. Examples: Change in household size, increase in gross monthly income of more than \$100, change in residence and/or address, household no longer paying for shelter (house payment, rent, etc.), household no longer paying for utilities (electric, gas, water) or change in receipt of child support. Failure to report changes may result in ineligibility and or a claim against your household for over-issued food items. For more information, visit choctawnation.com/food-distribution.

Choctaw Cultural Center Membership - Become a member of the Choctaw Cultural Center today! Your annual membership helps support the preservation of Choctaw culture. Membership benefits include: Complimentary admission to the Cultural Center; advance notice of special events and exhibits, invitations to members only events, discounts at Hvshi Gift Store and much more! Visit choctawculturalcenter.com for more information.

Healthy Aging - Provides wellness, social services, behavioral health services, case management and providers in geriatric-specific care to assist elders achieve a higher quality of life or maintain an optimal level of functioning and wellness. To be eligible, participants must be at least 55 years of age, verified by a tribal membership card and valid CDIB card. Case Management Services are available to non-elder high-risk patients. For more information, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/healthy-aging/>.

NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Spiro Community Center Donates Hams to Bobby Wafford Foundation

The OK Choctaw Tribal Alliance hosted its annual Christmas program on Saturday, December 17, 2024. It was a fun-filled event.



Councilman Karr presented scholarships in honor of Jack Austin and Family to Seth Charboneau and Andrew Windham, Jr.



Special guests Councilman Robert Karr, Brad Joe, MC Harold Marris, and Sherrie Stewart.

CHOCTAW VETERAN ADVOCACY PROGRAM

Are You a Choctaw Veteran?

Let us help guide you to the benefits and services that you have earned.

580-642-8451 | [BIT.LY/CNO-VETERANS-ADVOCACY](http://bit.ly/CNO-VETERANS-ADVOCACY)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

Biskinik Announcement Guidelines

We accept milestone birthday greetings for ages 1, 5, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 30, 40, 50, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80 and above.

Couples may send announcements of silver wedding anniversary at 25 years of marriage, golden anniversary at 50 years, or 60+ anniversaries. We do not post wedding announcements.

News from graduates of higher education only and sports submissions will be accepted as space allows.

We welcome all letters from Choctaw tribal members. However, because of the volume of mail, it isn't possible to publish all letters our readers send. Letters chosen for publication must be under 150 words. We require full contact information. Only the writer's full name and city will be published. All events sent to the Biskinik will run the month of the event or the month prior to the event if the event falls on the first of the month.

Mail to: Biskinik
P.O. Box 1210
Durant, OK 74702
or email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

Gary Batton
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.
Assistant Chief

The Official
Monthly Publication of the
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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The BISKINIK is printed each month as a service to Tribal members. The BISKINIK reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication shall be printed and reserves the right to edit submitted material which it finds inaccurate, profane, offensive or morally unacceptable. Copy may be edited for space, proper grammar and punctuation. Copy will be accepted in any readable form, but where possible, it is requested that material be typewritten and double-spaced. You must include an address and phone number where

you may be reached. Due to space limitations and the quantity of article submissions, we are unable to include everything we receive. Items are printed in the order received. Faxed photos will not be accepted.

The BISKINIK is a nonprofit publication of the Choctaw Nation. Circulation is monthly. Deadline for articles and photographs to be submitted is the first day of each month to run in the following month.

Editor's Note: Views and opinions in reader-submitted articles are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Choctaw Nation.

HONOR GUARD
— POSITIONS AVAILABLE —

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

AKSHISH HLAMPKO

RESILIENT ROOTS: THE UNYIELDING SPIRIT OF THE CHOCTAW WOMAN

October 29th - April 17th

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

Choctaw Nation Election Board

PUBLIC NOTICE OF GENERAL ELECTION CALENDAR 2025

FOR THE Tribal Members of The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 14, 2024

In accordance with the Chief and Tribal Council Election Ordinance, adopted by CR-17-22, notice is hereby given that the Secretary shall provide a notice of this date and election calendar, as well as the location of the Election Board office, to be published in various newspapers inside the boundaries of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, including the tribal newspaper, and to other media outlets.

Notice is Hereby Given, That the Election Board office is primarily maintained by the Director of Voter Registration, serving as Secretary of the Election Board. The office is located at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters, 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701, in the Voter Registration Suite, Office #1253. The office hours shall be Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and will close to observe all holidays recognized by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The election schedule shall follow as:

PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE FILING PERIOD	
Monday, April 22, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
Tuesday, April 23, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
Wednesday, April 24, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
CONTEST OF CANDIDACY PERIOD	
Thursday, April 24, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
Friday, April 25, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES	
Monday, April 28, 2025	7:30 P.M. - 4:00 P.M. Information Session for Prospective Candidates and Campaign Managers (optional attendance)
Tuesday, April 29, 2025	4:00 P.M. Required Appearance for Prospective Candidates: Choctaw Nation Headquarters (1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701)
GENERAL ELECTION	
Saturday, June 21, 2025	Deadline for the total distribution of Ballot in Ballot boxes of currently registered voters. Ballots will continue to be issued through Election Day for use of approval.
Friday, July 18, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
Saturday, July 19, 2025	7:00 A.M. - 7:00 P.M. Voting Location to be announced later.
CONTEST OF RESOLUTIONS, DEATH OF OFFICER PERIOD	
Monday, July 14, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
Tuesday, July 15, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701
Wednesday, July 16, 2025	8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. Location: (Membership Room #1251) at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701

To update your Voter Information, visit www.choctawnation.com/voter in person at a Voter Registration Office and return to the Voter Registration Department. Some provisions are located on the back of the form.

For more information about tribal elections, visit www.choctawnation.com/elections or contact by email at election@choctawnation.com

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.

Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna
Fibuali Language Lesson

Dialogue – Hotilhko Ishko / Cough Syrup

Jim:	Halito, chī kanih-mi akinli?	Hello, are you doing okay?
Nan:	Sv tikambi chiyohmi.	I'm really tired.
Jim:	Katimi ahoba?	What seems to be the matter?
Nan:	Ak ikhano, nan-vbli likma, hottupa chiyohmi.	I don't know, it really hurts when I swallow.
Jim:	Oh miho? Nana kia ish ishi?	Oh really? Have you taken anything?
Nan:	A, Ninakash a kana yvt nan ishko vm ikbi tuk. Ti, lemon, hvpi, tishi homi yohmi ka, ittibanit wahlvllich tuk.	Last night my friend made me a drink. She mixed tea, lemon, salt, hot peppers and boiled it all together.
Jim:	Achukma ha?	Was it good?
Nan:	Fehna kiyo tuk.	Not very much.
Nan:	Ninakash ik sv nuso tuk, nittak o ishko li tukmvt vlhpesa hinla tuk kia.	I didn't sleep last night, if I had drunk it during the day, it might have been better.
Jim:	Ohhh, Aiya!	Oh, my!
Nan:	Unh-huh!	Yeah!
Jim:	Atuko, onnahinlikma, ish ishka chī ho?	So, are you going to drink it in the morning?
Nan:	Keyu, hotiohko ishko vt a talaya mak o ishko la chī.	No, I have some cough syrup, and I will drink that.
Jim:	Mahmakosh champuli kiyo iha hinla.	That probably doesn't taste good either.
Nan:	Mvt ahli!	For real!/That's true!

www.choctawschool.com

Choctaw baritone makes major opera debut

Mark Webster Orin Billy is a Verdi baritone, clarinetist, and Native flutist from Finley, Oklahoma.

Mr. Billy enjoys a multi-faceted career in opera, recitals with piano, concerts with orchestra, and Indigenous classical music education. Mark recently made a major operatic role debut with Canterbury Voices and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic. Mark created the lead baritone role of Inki' in the historic first opera to ever be sung completely in an Indigenous language (Chickasaw)- Loksi' Shaali' "Shell Shaker" written by fellow Oklahoman and Chickasaw composer Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate.

In February of 2025 Mark will join the musicians of Mount Holyoke College in Boston to reprise his role in Loksi' Shaali'. In April 2025 Mr. Billy will join the OKC Philharmonic in the world premiere of Tate's American Indian Symphony.

Mark has collaborated several times with the OKC Philharmonic singing in Choctaw and playing the native flute. Hailed as an authority on the intersection of Indigenous culture and classical music, Mr. Billy has led workshops on Choctaw singing and Indigenous composers. Recently featured in the New York Times the North American Indigenous Songbook. Created by fellow Choctaw musical artist and conductor Timothy Long who grew up in Holdenville, NAIS is an initiative to commission Indigenous composers to create new vocal works to be added to the standard art song repertoire. Mark is a performing artist on the roster of the North American Indigenous Songbook.



Skinner's Ishtia named Best New Restaurant in Houston

Choctaw tribal member David Skinner's restaurant Ishtia was recently named Best New Restaurant in Houston by Eater. Below is what Eater published about Ishtia. To view the full article, visit <https://houston.eater.com>.

"Widely considered a 'Willy Wonka of food,' Choctaw chef David Skinner built a reputation on fantastical presentations of molecular gastronomy at his former restaurant, Eculent. At his new restaurant, Ishtia, whose name means 'to begin,' dishes dig a little deeper. In 20 or more courses, the Indigenous tasting menu restaurant gifts diners with a rare look at Native cuisine in a way that hasn't been done before. Skinner mindfully leads diners with a poetic reading about the Trail of Tears, and then into bowls of Tanchi Labona, a Choctaw soup made up of nixtamalized corn and pork, and tender rabbit assembled atop silky mole — a long-simmering combination of chiles, chocolates, and spices. He has in no way lost his magician-like touch, though: Staff members clear the air with a tableside burning of white sage paired with a smudge stick salad; an iconic rendition of Three Sisters — smoked scallop served on its shell with squash and rich corn butter — involves a dramatic burst of smoked seaweed steam. Corn cake tres leches soaked in corn milk is crowned with fluffy corn husk-infused meringue and served with a scoop of chicha morada sorbet, delivering the significant message that Indigenous foodways are interwoven with some of our favorite memories."

Ishtia is located at 709 Harris Avenue, Kemah, Texas, 77565. To book a dinner, visit <https://www.ishtia.com/>.



Rains earns associates

Kristie Rains, of Stigler Oklahoma, obtained her associates degree as a registered nurse on December 13, 2024.

She plans on working in the emergency department and continuing to further her education, eventually obtaining a license as a Nurse Practitioner.

Her family and friends are extremely proud of her accomplishments and look forward to her future endeavors.



Davis ordained

Kelsey Davis will be ordained to the priesthood in The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina on January 11, 2025.

"Please keep her and her ministry in your prayers," said her family. "Thanks be to God!"



Gaskill graduates from SOSU

Natalie Gaskill, a proud member of Choctaw Nation, has graduated from SOSU with a 4.0 GPA and a degree in Chemistry. Natalie has been accepted to attend the University of North Texas

(UNT) to complete her education in pharmacy. Natalie is a Durant, Oklahoma, Native with a goal to become a pharmacist. Her hard work and dedication earned her a scholarship to complete her degree in pharmacy.

"Mom, Dad and your sister are more than proud of you for dedication and hard work. You have not only proved to yourself that dreams can come true but have become a role model for those who look up to you," said her family. "Keep reaching for your dreams my sweet, smart, brave and happy baby girl."



Lynn graduates from OU

Audrey Lynn has earned her Bachelor of Arts in Health, Society and Medicine from the University of Oklahoma.

She plans to continue her education in nursing and Nurse Anesthesiology. Audrey is the daughter of James and Catherine Lynn, and granddaughter of Donald and JoAnn Lynn. Audrey would like to thank the Choctaw Nation for their generous support.



Duncan writes first book

Ashten Duncan, MD, MPH, CPH, published his first book, *Journey of the Broken Vessels*.

Channeling his experiences as a family physician who recently completed his residency training in New Mexico, this literary fiction novel follows the narrator through tragic losses, trauma, and deteriorating mental health as he and his colleagues fight to serve their community as budding family physicians.

There are nods to the tribe throughout the book, so consider picking up a copy to see the spirit of the Chahta in this work. The book is available on Amazon and Barnes & Nobel.



Hughes publishes new book titled "Redface"

Choctaw tribal member, Bethany Hughes recently published her book, "Redface: Race, Performance, and Indigeneity."

Hughes is Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan in the Department of American Culture and a core faculty member in the Native American Studies Program. An enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, her work can be found in Theatre Journal, Mobilities, Theatre Survey, American Periodicals, and Theatre Topics.

"Redface" unearths the history of the theatrical phenomenon of redface in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.

Like blackface, redface was used to racialize Indigenous peoples and nations, and even more crucially, exclude them from full citizenship in the United States. Arguing that redface is more than just the costumes or makeup an actor wears, Bethany Hughes contends that it is a collaborative, curatorial process through which artists and audiences make certain bodies legible as "Indian." By chronicling how performances and definitions of redface rely upon legibility and delineations of race that are culturally constructed and routinely shifting, this book offers an understanding of how redface works to naturalize a very particular version of history and, in doing so, mask its own performativity.

Tracing the "Stage Indian" from its early nineteenth-century roots to its proliferation across theatrical entertainment forms and turn of the twenty-first century attempts to address its racist legacy, "Redface" uses case studies in law and civic life to understand its offstage impact.

Hughes connects extensive scholarship on the "Indian" in American culture to the theatrical history of racial impersonation and critiques of settler colonialism, demonstrating redface's high stakes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

Revealing the persistence of redface and the challenges of fixing it, "Redface" closes by offering readers an embodied rehearsal of what it would mean to read not for the "Indian" but for Indigenous theater and performance as it has always existed in the US.

"Redface: Race, Performance, and Indigeneity" can be purchased on NYU Press at <https://nyupress.org/9781479829392/redface/>.



Waggoner is Veteran of the Month

Maria Waggoner, District #3, is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Waggoner was born in Talihina, Okla., and attended Cottonwood/Centrahoma, Wheelock Academy (grades 3-5), Talihina Schools, and graduated from Chilocco High School in 1959.

While in high school, a recruiter visited to speak with students. Waggoner was inspired to join the U.S. Navy. In Sept. 1959, Maria boarded her first flight from Okla. City, Okla., to New York to begin her journey.

Waggoner completed Basic Training in Bainbridge, Maryland. Her most significant challenge was swimming the length of the pool, which she accomplished by floating the entire way.

After basic training, she was assigned to Quonset Point, Rhode Island, where she served in Operations, handling office procedures and coordinating flight schedules. She remained in that position until her honorable release in 1961.

Waggoner returned to Oklahoma and attended Business School in Muskogee, Okla., then went to Draughon's Business School in Tulsa, where she received her Secretarial Certification. She then moved back to Talihina and worked for the BIA for 30 years before retiring.

Since retirement, Waggoner worked for the Talihina Indian Hospital for nine years.

Waggoner has one son, Jon, five grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

She is very patriotic and was glad to serve in the U.S. Navy and work for the BIA. She is also very proud of her Native American Heritage, being 3/4 Choctaw.

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



LaMere STEAMrolls the competition

Ariana LaMere is the daughter of Rashay Castillo and the late Jaramyn LaMere. She is the granddaughter of April Hickman and Eugene Castillo, and the great-granddaughter of the late Gaston Hickman and Annabelle Wallace.

Ariana is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation but is also of the Navajo Nation, Chippewa-Cree Tribe and Santo Domingo Pueblo.

She is a seventh-grade student at Dove Science Academy Middle School South in Oklahoma City.

Ariana participated in the school's Science Fair on December 7, 2024. Ariana's science project was over the study of fertilizer and plant growth titled "Fertilizer Feud."

Ariana won first place in the Dove Science Academy MS 2024-2025 for the seventh-grade class and Best Overall in the Science Fair.

"We are very proud of her accomplishments and wish her well at the state competition," said her family.



Sims earns master's from UMiami

Macen R. Sims, son of Lisa Stanberry (Sims) Prieto and grandson of Ronald D. Stanberry, graduated from the University of Miami, Florida, with a 'Master of Finance Degree' on December 12, 2024.

Macen completed his Bachelor's Degree in finance from the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, prior to enrolling at the University of Miami, Florida.

Macen is very appreciative of the numerous academic scholarships he's received throughout his academic endeavors.

Macen looks forward to the many years ahead of him in the field of finance and would like to say "YAKOKE" for all the help afforded him as a member and citizen of the Choctaw Nation.



Johnsons visit Kindred Spirits

In November 2024, tribal members Loy and Barry Johnson, along with their wives Deanie and Robin visited Ireland.

One of the highlights of the trip was visiting the Kindred Spirits monument in Middleton, County Cork.



Deason graduates from TWU

Rachel Deason of Argyle, Texas, graduated from Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas, with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing with honors.

She is the daughter of Michael and Jennifer Deason.

"We are thankful for the support of Choctaw Nation throughout her academic career."



Adams is Veteran of the Month

J.B. Adams, District #4, is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Adams was born in Commerce, Okla., and grew up in the Short Mountain/Tucker area, attending school in Short Mountain. By the fifth grade, he decided to leave school and begin working.

At sixteen, he moved to Arizona and attempted to enlist in the military two days after turning eighteen. He was turned down due to health reasons but was later drafted into the U.S. Army on January 29, 1945.

He completed Basic Training at Camp Roberts, Calif., initially training for combat against German forces.

However, the German surrender coincided with the completion of his training, and he was reassigned to prepare for battle in the Pacific Theater. His service included working in an ordinance center and inspecting and repairing equipment.

He was sent to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, for orders before deploying to the Philippines, where he served for 18 months.

He worked tirelessly seven days a week to locate and remove Japanese soldiers from the mountains. Though the war had been declared over, many Japanese soldiers were unaware that the conflict had ended. At one point, Adams was aboard a ship for 45 consecutive days.

He became stationed in Manila, Philippines, where he enjoyed spending time with friends.

Adams left the service with the rank of T-3. Commendations included the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory Medal, and the Philippine Independence Ribbon.

Upon returning to the U.S., Adams began working for General Motors in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

He married his wife, Ruby, with whom he has shared 74 years of marriage.

They have three children, Brenda, Donald and Cheryl, 12 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren.

When he reflects upon his life, Adams remarked he has endured many challenges but wants everyone to know that he will be in Heaven one day.

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

ITI FABVSSA

Coal in Choctaw Nation, Part II

By Megan Baker, Guest Writer

This month's Iti Fabvssa is Part II of the three-part series, "Coal in Choctaw Nation." This month will focus on Choctaw Nation's involvement in the coal industry and its short- and long-term impact on Choctaws and wider Indian Territory.

As mentioned in Part I, coal companies could not own land in the Choctaw Nation; rather, they leased land from Choctaw citizens to operate coal mines. A Choctaw law stated that any person who discovered coal was entitled to the coal beneath the surface within a one-mile radius. Entrepreneurial Choctaw citizens used this law to claim large tracts of land thought to have coal and then leased those to outside, non-Choctaw companies to excavate and sell the coal. The coal in Choctaw Nation was considered some of the best coal west of the Mississippi River, contributing to outside interest in it. The famed railroad tycoon Jay Gould once owned stock in the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad and later became an investor in some of the coal mines in Indian Territory.

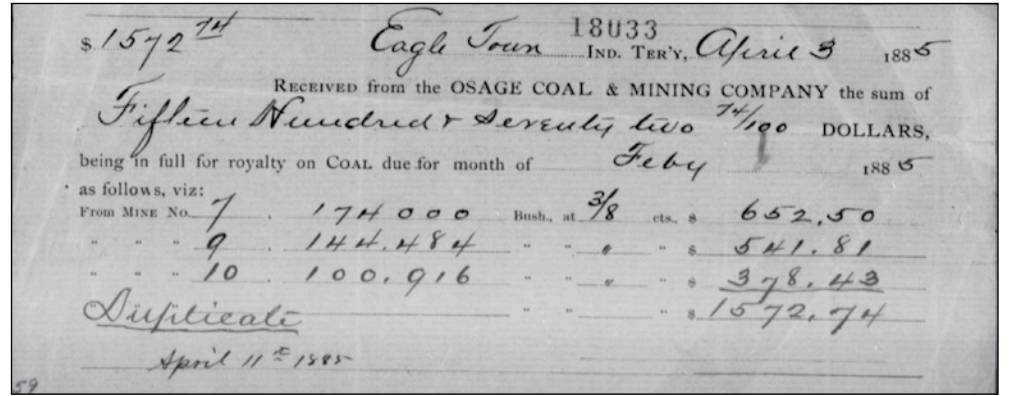
Given the large scale of coal mining, it required many workers. Choctaw people largely did not work in the mines; rather, coal companies brought in experienced workers from outside Choctaw Nation. Many of the coal miners brought into Choctaw Nation were recent immigrants from countries like Italy, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Poland. These skilled miners of numerous ethnic backgrounds created ethnic communities that contributed to the diversity of people living in the Choctaw Nation. Towns in existence today that began as mining camps include Krebs, Lehigh, Hartshorne, Wilburton and Savanna.

While this large workforce was good for the coal companies, these coal companies and imported workers caused major problems for Choctaw Nation. General Council passed its first law preventing non-Choctaws from settling or purchasing land in Choctaw territory in 1836; numerous laws governing non-Choctaws followed. ¹ One individual who lived around Atoka recalled Lighthorsemen riding through the county to collect permit fees from non-Choctaw citizens living and transacting business within Choctaw territory. ² Despite revising this permit system multiple times, the pressure from coal mining remained difficult, especially once the number of outsiders outnumbered Choctaw citizens.

Although the Choctaw government could regulate non-Choctaw citizens by requiring coal companies to get permits for their non-Choctaw workers, they did not have legal jurisdiction over US citizens – only the US government did. This meant that when outsiders committed crimes in Choctaw territory, Choctaw Nation could not prosecute them in tribal courts. They had to wait for US marshals to retrieve accused criminals and take them to the court in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Given the distance between Choctaw Nation and US court, this proved challenging. Outsiders who stopped working in the mines and tried to settle in Choctaw Nation were considered intruders. Intruders created a multitude of problems for Choctaw people. While individual Choctaw citizens became rich from their leases to companies and royalties on the extracted coal, Choctaw Nation had to deal with the issues caused by the coal industry that affected the whole community. Faced with this burden on the government, Choctaw people quickly realized that things needed to change.

In October 1874, Coleman Cole of the Buzzard Party was elected Principal Chief. Since the completion of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad in 1872, it was clear that decisive action was needed to curb the encroachment of industrial capitalism that clashed with Choctaw values and norms. Cole was viewed as a 'traditionalist' who sought to maintain Choctaw traditional governance values like doing things for the benefit of all Choctaw people rather than a select few. While living in the Choctaw homelands in what is now Mississippi until 1845, Cole watched white settlers steal his grandmother's land – despite US treaty promises to protect Choctaws who remained. ³ These lessons stayed with Cole and informed how he understood the coal industry's impact on Choctaw Nation's ability to govern itself.

Chief Cole also inherited other governmental challenges that preceded his election. In 1868, Chief Allen Wright noted that Choctaw Nation was still dealing with the consequences for their alliance with the Confederacy. During the Civil War, unspent money allocated for Choctaw schools was converted into Confederate bonds that became worthless after their surrender.



Royalty payment for the month of February in 1885 from the Osage Coal and Mining Company to Choctaw Nation for \$1,572.74. Today, that amount is equivalent to approximately \$51,153.45. Image courtesy of the Choctaw National Records, American Indian Archives Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

Furthermore, money owed by the US government was tied up in a lawsuit known as the Net Proceeds case – which was also complicated by the Confederate alliance. In this context of great need to fund its governmental operations, particularly schools, Choctaw Nation turned to their natural resources for generating revenue.

In his June 1875 editorial in *The Vindicator*, Chief Cole encouraged General Council to pass legislation to leverage coal to support schools. He wrote, "The time has arrived that the General Council of the Choctaw nation will have to wake up on the subject of education. The General Council should take some active steps toward establishing more boarding schools. The question arises, how can it be done? I will answer, by developing our sure mineral resources."⁴ After an incident with some Choctaw citizens leasing land to coal companies later that year, it was agreed that coal royalties would go to both individuals and Choctaw Nation. While this did not resolve issues regarding intruders and jurisdictional challenges, this was an important step in making the coal industry support Choctaw people.

From 1875 to 1949, Choctaws leased lands with coal to companies and charged royalties on the extracted coal. By 1881, Choctaw Nation had received over \$1,200,000 in royalties, while over \$800,000 had been paid to individual Choctaws who leased their lands to companies. ⁵ Even after Oklahoma statehood, these mines stayed in operation and continued to pay royalties to Choctaw Nation. The Mining Trustee continued to do his job, along with other Choctaw governmental officials like the Chief and National Attorney. Money from leases and royalties went into Choctaw Nation's account managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The sale of the coal and asphalt lands in Choctaw Nation, as we will see in next month's Iti Fabvssa, contributed to the longevity of Choctaw government, even though people and scholars alike claimed that the Choctaw government had been disestablished with Oklahoma statehood.

Coal provided Choctaw Nation a rare opportunity to use its natural resources for economic development. By leasing lands to coal companies and charging royalties on each bushel of coal extracted, Choctaw Nation used those funds for government operations such as courts, schools, and Lighthorsemen. While the money gained from the coal industry was used for the betterment of Choctaw people, it also raised a wide range of unforeseen issues. Part III will discuss the management of the coal lands following Oklahoma statehood and its role in maintaining Choctaw governance.

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- 5 Gene Aldrich, "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907" (Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1952).

BUSINESS

CHAHTAPRENEUR

CHIT ♦ CHAT


Kickstart Your Year: Top Business Tips for Entrepreneurs

By Brittany Rice

Starting a business can be daunting, especially if you're unsure where to begin or what direction to take. That initial step might feel like venturing into the dark, uncertain of how far you'll fall or what lies ahead.

However, strategic planning can serve as a guiding light, illuminating the path forward and helping you see just how far that step is—and whether it's worth taking. By carefully considering the following tips, you can reduce uncertainty, alleviate stress, and move confidently toward your entrepreneurial dreams.

- 1. Define Your Vision and Goals**
A clear vision sets the tone for your business journey. Ask yourself: What problem does my business solve? What is my product or service?
Who is my target market segment? Demographics, Psychographics, Geographics.
What are my short-term and long-term goals? Think SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) and write these down to track progress.
- 2. Conduct Thorough Market Research**
Understanding your market is critical. Research your competitors, identify industry trends, and gather insights about your target market segment. This will help you position your business effectively. Create a SWOT analysis on your competitors, Strengths and Weaknesses (Internally), Opportunities, and Threats (Externally).
- 3. Create a Solid Business Plan**
A business plan is your roadmap. It should comprise the following:
Executive Summary – The most important part of your business plan is written last.
Company Background – Mission/ vision statement, core values, founding story, business structure
Product/ Services – What problem do you solve? What is your (USP) unique selling point?
Marketing Analysis – Who are your competitors? Conduct a SWOT analysis on them.
Trade/ Service Area- Where and how far will we service?
Customer Profile- What are the customers' demographics, psychographics, and geographics?
Market Size – How many people that fit into your target market segment and are inside your service area?
Pricing- How much do your products/ services cost?
Promotion- How will we promote our business? How big is our current footprint?
Marketing Timeline- How often will we market?
Management- Who are the principal owners? What are their roles and responsibilities?
Staffing- Do you plan to hire staff? If so, what positions?
Space and Equipment- Create a list of equipment needed or wanted to run efficiently.
Working Capital Requirement- How much cash is needed for routine expenses?
Labor Force- What do your employees look like? Do they need specific experiences or degrees?
Geographical Location Advantage- What is the benefit of starting a business in your location?



Manufacturing Aspects, Sources of Supplies- What is your supply chain?
Financial Projections- What does your monthly cash flow look like? What are your three-year projections?
Project Implementation and Goals- What are your (SMART) Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound goals? What is the plan to execute those goals?
Risk Mitigation- What steps are we taking to protect us from risk?

4. Manage Finances Wisely
Start with a clear budget and keep track of all expenses. Consider the following:

- Separate personal and business finances.
- Set up a business bank account.
- Monitor cash flow regularly.
- Look for funding options like loans, grants, or investors if needed.

5. Focus on Branding and Marketing
Your brand is how customers perceive you. It is the face and identity of your business. Develop a strong brand identity that includes:

- A memorable logo.
- A professional website.
- Consistent brand messaging.
- Reach your audience using digital marketing strategies, such as social media, email campaigns, and search engine optimization (SEO).

6. Build a Support Network
Surround yourself with mentors, advisors, and like-minded entrepreneurs. Networking can provide guidance, resources, and potential partnerships.

7. Leverage Technology
Adopt tools and software to streamline your operations. Examples include:

- Accounting software for financial management and POS systems.
- Project management tools for team collaboration.
- (CRM) Customer relationship management systems.

8. Stay Adaptable
The business landscape is ever-changing. Be ready to pivot when needed, whether it's adjusting your product offerings, refining your target audience, or exploring new revenue streams.

9. Prioritize Customer Relationships
Happy customers drive success. Focus on delivering value, listening to feedback, and building trust.

10. Take Care of Yourself
Entrepreneurship can be demanding. Prioritize self-care, maintain work-life balance, and celebrate small wins.
Starting a business is an exciting adventure, and by implementing these tips, you'll establish a strong foundation for growth and success in the new year. Remember, you don't have to navigate this journey alone. Choctaw Small Business Development offers experienced advisors ready to assist you in achieving your entrepreneurial goals.
Leverage all available resources to position yourself for success. To learn more, visit www.choctawsmallbusiness.com. If you have questions or would like to explore other topics, feel free to connect with us on Facebook at Choctaw Small Business. We look forward to supporting you on your journey!





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Melba Vaughn

Melba Vaughn, 88, passed away Nov. 26, 2024.

Melba was born Jan. 14, 1936, in Quinton, Okla., to John and Bernice Burris.

She is survived by daughters Sharon Dunseath and spouse Bob, Karen Hillis and spouse Jack, Janece Lawson and spouse Phil, and Trecea Pate; 11 grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; sister Helen Burris Willis; and brothers T.J. "Jack" Burris and James "Blue" Burris.

For the full obituary, please visit [Agent & Mallo-ry-Martin Funeral Home](#).

**Noah Parker Nelson**

Noah Parker Nelson, 20, passed away Dec. 2, 2024.

Noah was born Oct. 27, 2004, in Talihina, Okla., to Michael and Michelle (Cummins) Nelson.

He was preceded in death by his grandmothers Glenda Cummins and Kay Nelson; grandfather Bucky Cummins; aunt Regina Cummins; and cousins Zachary Nelson and Joel Scheidegger.

Noah is survived by his parents; brother Taylor Nelson and spouse Melanie; sister, Maggie Neal and spouse Hayden, nephews Asher and Warren; grandfather Bob Nelson; aunt Raylene Robinson and spouse Robert; uncles Kevin Nelson and spouse Dara, and Bobby Nelson and spouse Su Zan; many cousins; and extended family and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Brown's Funeral Home-Durant](#).

**Titus Carden Cole**

Titus Carden Cole, five months and 21 days old, passed away Dec. 4, 2024.

Titus was born June 13, 2024, in Oklahoma City, Okla., to Trevin Christian and Constance Joeva (Justice) Cole.

He was preceded in death by his unborn twin; great-grandparents Shirley Cole and Jimmy Justice Sr.; great-great-grandparents Rebecca Cole, Johnny Carden "JC" Ward; Waunella Prince, Albert "Doc" Ingram, Herman Justice, and Tom and Joeva Quinton; and great-uncle Zacharias McClain.

Titus is survived by his parents; brother Romulus Cole; grandparents Travis and Katherine Cole, and Bobby and Sarah Justice; great-grandparents Johnny and Debbie Ward, Tresa Quinton and Jo Ann Tiemann; paternal great-great-grandmother Patricia Ingram; aunts and uncles Miguel Cole, Lilyan Cole, Mavryck Cole, Beth Justice, Dewayne Justice, Gerald Justice, Samantha Justice, Eric Justice, Aydan Justice, and Hunter Justice; great-uncles and great-aunts Jamie and Karen Kraakevik, Shane and Rhonda Cole, and Tonya Roberts; along with numerous aunts, uncles and cousins.

For the full obituary, please visit [Brown's Funeral Home-Coalgate](#).

**Darrell Ray Brown**

Darrell Ray Brown, 71, passed away Jan. 3, 2025.

Darrell was born Aug. 24, 1953, to Gordon Brown and Juanita (Peyton) Brown.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Charles Brown; and uncle Charlie Brown.

Darrell is survived by sons Stacy Brown and spouse Jonie, Tracy Brown and spouse Windy, and Zachariah Brown; daughter Carla Miller and spouse Russell; grandchildren Tracy Lee Brown and spouse Hillary, Caleb Brown and spouse Michelle, Blaine Brown and spouse Kaylee, Darin Brown and spouse Jacy, and Jaden Brown; great-grandchildren Jagger, Collins, Cory, Juniper, Brynlee, Kinlee, Blake-lynn, Gracen, Haisen, and Delcee; brother Jerry Lee Brown, sister Sue Betancourt; along with a host of other family friends and loved ones.

For the full obituary, please visit [Miller and Miller Funeral Home](#).

**Larry Thomas Wilson**

Larry Thomas Wilson, 76, passed away July 15, 2024.

Larry was born March 15, 1948, in Augusta, Georgia, to Ava Ray Wilson and Virginia Irene Duncan.

For the full obituary, please visit [Biskinik](#).

**Paula Jean Pierce**

Paula Jean (Finch) Pierce, 65, passed away Dec. 6, 2024.

Paula was born Oct. 20, 1959, in Hugo, Okla., to Bodgie Finch, Sr. and Leola Priscilla (Thorpe) Finch.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers Bodgie Finch, Jr. and Lyndell Finch.

Paula is survived by her husband Ricky; son Josh Williams and spouse Kristan; daughter Nakisha McKee and spouse Tanner; grandchildren Julian Williams, Kazarayne Williams, London Williams, Maco Williams and Ember McKee; a great-grandchild on the way; brothers Larry Finch and spouse Pat, Haskell Finch and spouse Debbie, Robert Finch and spouse Janice, Eddie Finch, and Clifford Finch and spouse Tonya; sisters Gail Thompson and spouse Perry, and Janice Jones and spouse Bruce; sister-in-law Sherry Finch; and a host of friends, family and loved ones.

For the full obituary, please visit [Miller and Miller Funeral Home](#).

**Johnny Mac Coleman**

Johnny "Johnny Red Oak" Mac Coleman, 84, passed away Dec. 7, 2024.

Johnny Red Oak was born June 25, 1940, in Talihina, Okla., to Mable Alice (Bell) Coleman and Raymond Clayton Coleman.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters Billie Sue Coleman and Patsy Lockhart; and brother David A. Coleman.

Johnny is survived by his wife Penny; daughters Vicki Bane and spouse Doug, and Lisa Garvin and spouse Scott; sons John Michael Coleman and Tommy Coleman; grandchildren Grace Ward and spouse Ethan, James Bane and spouse Morgan, Cody Coleman and spouse Brenda Kay, Colton Coleman, Chase Burns, Sarah Jane Coleman, Marcus Garvin, and Jennifer Rogers and spouse Trent; great-grandchildren Paisley Ward, Caleb Coleman, Cade Coleman, Clark Coleman, Brenlee Coleman, Bailey Coleman, Maddy Coleman, Molly Coleman, Jace Garvin, Oliver Rogers, Avery Rogers, and Everett Rogers; numerous relatives and a host of friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Agent & Mallo-ry-Martin Funeral Home](#).

**Douglas Wallace Colbert (Jefferson)**

Douglas Wallace Colbert (Jefferson), 82, passed away Nov. 24, 2024.

Douglas was born June 20, 1942, in Idabel, Okla., to Belinda Colbert.

He was preceded in death by his mother; son Douglas Colbert Jefferson, Jr.; siblings Vivian Nesheim, Mike Van White, Otho Adams Jr., Mary Lou Ballard, and Julia Star; stepchildren Michelle Day and Joel Day; and step grandson Alexander Schoneweis.

Douglas is survived by his wife Frances Day Colbert; daughters Paula Tighe and spouse Phil, and Delinda Colbert; grandson Tyler Reiter; stepchildren Michelle Day, Steve Day, Nick Day and spouse Debbie, Cheryl Schoneweis and spouse Mark, and Joel Day, step grandchildren; step grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

For the full obituary, please visit [Afterall](#).

**Otis Doyle Ritch**

Otis Doyle Ritch, 81, passed away Nov. 27, 2024.

Otis was born May 5, 1942, in Stigler, Okla., to Earl Ritch and Louise Johnson Lafave Ritch.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

Otis is survived by his son Shannon Ritch; daughters Donna Ritch Barnes, Theresa Ritch Martin and spouse Howard, and Christina Ritch Claypool and spouse Darrell; grandsons Zachry Holbrook Ritch, Neil Everett Claypool, Jonathan Alexander Claypool, and Howard Randy Martin; granddaughter Amber Detje Martin; great-granddaughters Dominique Martin and Emily Sloan; great-grandson Ayden Sloan; nieces and nephews; great-nieces and great-nephews; sisters Wanda Ritch Bond, Wynema Trundle Gilbert-Balcom, and Towanna Ritch Kerklun; brother David Ritch

For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home](#).

**Martha Ann Smith**

Martha Ann (Ludlow) Smith, 83, passed away Dec. 8, 2024.

Martha was born Sept. 23, 1941, in Ludlow, Okla., to Thomas Ludlow and Mary Elizabeth (Betty) Davis.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Carl; son Ricky; siblings Rose Lee Senior, Sarah Conley, Zach Williams, Billy Ray Ludlow, Charlie Ludlow, and Steve Ludlow; and niece Sue Brown.

Martha is survived by her children Tamara Spencer and Mark, Marty Smith, Connie Phillips, and Jimmy Williams; siblings, Lee Roy Williams and spouse Connie, Dora Wall, and Judy Steed and spouse Ricky; grandchildren Jennifer Smith, Melody Owens, Twauna Williams, Shauna Williams, Cali Towery, Clancey Williams, Scout Smith, Kimberly Stewart, Chelsea Rodriguez, Brock Marable, Raven Dorton, and Zath Marable; great-grandchildren Keinan Hardaway, Brody Hardaway, Kylie Smith, Jacob Johnston, Jaygan Jacobs, Annalee Owens, Shada Dorsey, Suede Dorsey, Stryder Dorsey, Atticus Towery, and Atlas J Towery; special friends Opal Blake and Charlene Cusher; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Bunch-Singleton Funeral Home](#).

**Jimmy Dale Meashintubby**

Jimmy Dale "Pacman" Meashintubby, 61, passed away Dec. 19, 2024.

Pacman was born April 18, 1963, in Talihina, Okla., to Joseph Meashintubby and Rowena Hardy.

He was preceded in death by his parents; adopted parents Adeline and Wilson Battiest; niece Tara Dawn Meashintubby; sisters Joyce Ann Meashintubby, Mary Louise Battiest-Apodaca, and Florina Fairless; brothers Raymond Baker, Gerald Meashintubby, and Terrance Battiest; and great-nephew Jeremiah Paul Harjo.

Pacman is survived by his brother Daryl Meashintubby; sisters Shirley Blackmon and spouse Darrell, Donna Hardy, Glenda Tiger, Rhonda Churchwell, and Sherry Tiger; special nephew James Eric Battiest; a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, other relatives and many friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [White Family Funeral Home](#).

**Gary Emerson Harley**

Gary Emerson Harley, 73, passed away Dec. 15, 2024.

Gary was born Dec. 14, 1951, in Talihina, Okla., to Alfred and Rosa Lee (Parker) Harley.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Sharon Crank; and grandparents Leo Harley, Lena Battice, Emerson Parker, and Eve (Wilson) Parker.

Gary is survived by daughters Rosa Deanne Harley Rhodd, and Tammy Minks and spouse Tony; grandchildren Bryce, BrieAnna, Malia, Knatiyah, Steven Jr., Nathan, Brayden, and Addison; great-grandchildren Braylon and Milani; siblings Janet Massey, Alfreda Harley, Alfred Harley Jr., Debbie Wesley and spouse Jimmy, Doug Harley and spouse Tammy, and Leslie Harley; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, extended family, and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Jones-Harkins Funeral Home](#).

**Janice Marie Hale**

Janice Marie Hale, 76, passed away Dec. 16, 2024.

Janice was born Nov. 16, 1948, in Duncan, Okla., to Harlon Levon Hale and Margaret "Peggy" Revis.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Diana Hale; and other loved ones.

Janice is survived by her daughter Autumn Weir and spouse Barton; three grandchildren; and brother Jerry Hale and spouse Marilyn.

For the full obituary, please visit [Shaw Funeral Home of VICI](#).

**Hattie Lou Barnes**

Hattie Lou Jones-Barnes, 93, passed away Dec. 12, 2024.

Hattie was born March 23, 1931, in Idabel, Okla., to Robinson Perry Jones and Irene Johnson-Jones.

She was preceded in death by her husband Jack; daughter Vicki Lynn Green; sister Shirley Jones-Evans; brother W.R. Jones; nephew Julius Bowen III; and her parents.

Hattie is survived by her sisters Veralynn Williston and Noakola Shufeldt; nieces Donna Smallwood and spouse Jimmy, and Sabrina Stephens and spouse Jason; nephews Barry McClour, Glenn Evans and spouse Sue, and Mark Johnson and spouse.

For the full obituary, please visit [Prater-Lamp-ton-Mills & Coffey Funeral Home](#).

**Glenda Mae Roberts-Singleton**

Glenda Mae "Gome" Roberts-Singleton, 67, passed away Dec. 26, 2024.

Glenda was born Oct. 17, 1957, in Talihina, Okla., to Gerald Eugene Roberts and Edna Mae Phillips Roberts.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Glenda is survived by her sons Chris Roberts and spouse Iva, Dustin Singleton and spouse Nikki, and Chad Ensey; grandchildren Peyton Roberts, Tyler Hammond, Levi Sanders, Nikolas Singleton, Aaron Singleton, Easton Singleton and Maddux Singleton; great-grandchildren Preston Singleton, Colton Singleton and Taylen Sanders; sisters Joyce Tran and Geraldine Pierce; along with nieces, nephews, cousins, special friends, and a host of other family, friends and loved ones.

For the full obituary, please visit [Miller and Miller Funeral Home](#).

**Melinda Ann Mills**

Melinda Mills, 54, passed away Dec. 9, 2024.

Melinda was born July 3, 1970, in Sallisaw, Okla., to Marlon and Shirley (Green) Evans.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers Kevin Green and Anthony Green.

Melinda is survived by daughter Jessica Evans; sons Rodney Evans and Johnathan Finney; grandchildren Carlos Garcia and Cardai Garcia; sisters Janice Evans and Annette Evans; brothers Michael Evans and Ricky Evans; best friend Alieta Kay Hollaway; and a host of nieces, nephews, other relatives, and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Jones-Harkins Funeral Home](#).

**Obituary Policy**

Obituary submissions are for Choctaw Nation tribal members only and are free of charge.

The Biskinik will only accept obituary notices from funeral homes.

Family members/individuals may submit funeral notices as long as the notice is from the funeral home or printed in their local newspaper through a funeral home service.

Full-length handwritten notices will not be accepted. The Biskinik strives to serve all Choctaws. Therefore, any handwritten notices received will be searched online for official funeral home notices. If none are found, efforts will be made to contact the family and make arrangements for an official notice.

Due to space limitations, there is a 150 word limit for obituaries. The online issue of the Biskinik will contain links to the full obituaries.

Send official obituary notices to:

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With respiratory illnesses on the rise, CNHSA and CDC urge public to take precautions

By Kendra Germany-Wall

After the holidays, respiratory virus season is in full swing in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control, as of January 3, 2025, the amount of acute respiratory illness causing people to seek healthcare is at a high level and continues to increase nationally.

Nationally, emergency department visits for Influenza and RSV were at “very high” levels at the time of reporting and increasing. Each year, respiratory viruses cause millions of illnesses and thousands of hospitalizations and deaths in the United States.

Fortunately, there are steps people can take to protect themselves and others from these health risks.

The CDC suggests the following prevention strategies to help protect from severe respiratory illnesses.

- Stay updated with your immunizations.
- Practice good hygiene by covering your coughs and sneezes, washing or sanitizing your hands frequently, and cleaning commonly touched surfaces regularly.
- Take steps to maintain cleaner air by bringing in fresh outdoor air, using air purifiers indoors, or gathering outside when possible.

According to Choctaw Nation Epidemiologist Mason Emert, immunizations play an important role in protection.

“In terms of protecting yourself this season yourself this season, one of the biggest components is staying up to date on vaccinations, whether it be COVID-19, Influenza, or RSV (for those eligible),” said Emert.

When you may have a respiratory virus:

- To prevent the spread of illness, stay home and avoid others, including those you live with, if you have unexplained respiratory symptoms like fever, cough, or fatigue.
- If you have risk factors for severe illness, seek medical care promptly, as treatment may reduce your risk of complications.

“When sick, of course we recommend staying home and away from others until at least 24 hours after your last fever without taking fever-reducing medications,” said Emert. “These two steps, along with proper hand hygiene, can significantly reduce the risk of catching a respiratory virus or at least developing severe symptoms.”

Additional prevention strategies you can choose to further protect yourself and others include:

Masks-Wearing a mask helps reduce the risk of spreading respiratory viruses. When an infected person wears a mask, it lowers transmission to others and protects the wearer from inhaling infectious particles. Different masks offer varying levels of protection; choose the most protective one that fits well and covers both the nose and mouth comfortably.

Physical distancing-Keeping physical distance from others can help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses, though no specific distance ensures safety as transmission depends on various factors.

Tests-Testing for respiratory viruses is important because it can help you determine the next steps, such as obtaining treatment to reduce your risk of severe illness and taking precautions to prevent spreading the virus to others. There are different types of tests available for respiratory virus infections. Antigen tests, often referred to as “self-tests” or “rapid tests,” generally provide results quickly—usually within about 15 minutes. On the other hand, nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs), which include polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, are typically administered by a healthcare provider. While antigen tests are faster, they are not as reliable as NAATs for detecting viruses. This means that it is possible to receive a negative result from an antigen test while actually being infected with the virus.

All prevention strategies detailed in this guidance can help reduce risk, especially when:

- Respiratory viruses are causing a lot of illness in your community.
 - You or the people around you were recently exposed to a respiratory virus, are sick, or are recovering.
 - You or the people around you have risk factors for severe illness.
- Many factors can make it more likely for someone to become very sick from a respiratory

Respiratory Illnesses

Common Respiratory Viruses

- Flu
- COVID-19
- RSV
- Adenovirus
- Rhinovirus/Enterovirus (common cold)
- Parainfluenza
- Parvovirus B19 (Fifth Disease)

Respiratory Virus Symptoms

Respiratory viruses may cause symptoms in the upper respiratory tract and the lower respiratory tract. Some viruses also affect the nose, throat and lungs and can lead to serious lung infections, such as pneumonia.

Examples:

- Fever
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Sore throat
- Decrease in appetite
- New loss of taste or smell
- Headache or body aches
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Weakness

Treatment

Seek health care right away if you believe you may have a respiratory virus and you have risk factors for severe illness. If you have flu or COVID-19, treatment may be an option to make your symptoms less severe and shorten the time you are sick. Treatment needs to be started within a few days of when your symptoms begin.

More Guidance

For more information regarding respiratory viruses, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/>.

virus. In addition to this guidance, there are several specific considerations for people with certain risk factors for severe illness (young children, older adults, people with weakened immune systems, people who are pregnant, and people with disabilities).

You may not be aware of the things that can make others more vulnerable to serious illness. Using the core prevention strategies will provide a degree of protection regardless. If you are unsure about the health condition or risk status of those around you, the most protective option is choosing to use additional prevention strategies, like masking, physical distancing, and testing.

For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses.DURANT, Okla.>

Choctaw Nation Respiratory Health Hub

(December 17, 2024)–The Choctaw Nation Department of Public Health has launched a Respiratory Health Hub with current viral positivity rates within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Health System (CNHSA).

The site includes weekly trends of influenza, RSV (and COVID-19 positivity rates, which updates each Monday).

Along with the current respiratory virus trends, the Respiratory Health Hub includes resources on proper hand hygiene, preventing

the spread of respiratory viruses, and symptom comparison information.

“This resource will empower those living across the Choctaw Nation reservation with the information needed to protect themselves and others around them this winter season,” says CNO Director of Public Health Rikki LaRoche.

The public is welcomed to access the site at any time.

Lentils: The tiny legumes packed with big health benefits

By Caitlyn Bowman, D.O., CNHSA

Lentils, one of the oldest cultivated crops in human history, have nourished people for thousands of years.

These tiny legumes, first grown in the Fertile Crescent, were revered in ancient times—found in Egyptian tombs and sustaining Roman soldiers.

Today, lentils remain a global staple, cherished for their affordability, versatility, and remarkable health benefits. Whether you’re looking to boost nutrition, maintain a healthy weight, or save on groceries, lentils are a powerful addition to your meals.

Brain and Cancer Protection

Lentils shine when it comes to brain health. Countries like India, with high lentil consumption, report some of the world’s lowest dementia rates.

Packed with antioxidants, polyphenols, and nearly 90% of your daily folate needs in two cups, lentils help protect brain cells and preserve cognitive function.

Lentils are also linked to cancer prevention. Their high fiber content promotes gut health, reducing inflammation and lowering colorectal cancer risk. Polyphenols and antioxidants in lentils combat cell damage linked to breast, prostate, and other cancers, making them a powerful ally in long-term health.

Lentils vs. Meat: A Nutrient Showdown

A common misconception is that red meat is the ultimate source of essential nutrients, particularly iron. However, lentils give red meat serious competition.

Two cups of cooked lentils provide 6.6 milligrams of iron, compared to 5.2 milligrams in the same serving of cooked ground beef.

While the iron in lentils (non-heme iron) isn’t absorbed as efficiently as the iron in red meat (heme iron), pairing lentils with vitamin C-rich foods like tomatoes, citrus, or bell peppers can significantly enhance absorption.

But iron is just the beginning.

Lentils outshine meat in other key micronutrients as well:

- **Folate:** Lentils contain an impressive 730 micrograms per two cups, covering nearly all of the recommended daily intake. Ground beef, by contrast, offers just 45 micrograms, a fraction of what lentils provide. Folate is essential for DNA repair, red blood cell production, and brain health.
- **Magnesium:** Lentils pack 140 milligrams of magnesium per two cups, while ground beef contains a negligible 20 milligrams. Magnesium supports muscle function, nerve health, and energy production.
- **Potassium:** Lentils deliver 1,000 milligrams of potassium per two cups, a critical nutrient for heart health and blood pressure regulation. Ground beef provides only about 600 milligrams in the same serving.
- **Fiber:** Meat contains no fiber, while lentils offer 30 grams per two cups, promoting gut health, blood sugar stability, and weight management.

While meat does provide some nutrients, like vitamin B12, lentils excel in offering a broader spectrum of micronutrients without the saturated fat and cholesterol. Lentils also provide additional antioxidants and polyphenols, which support overall health and help protect against chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease.

An Affordable and Versatile Superfood

Lentils can replace less nutritious ingredients in countless dishes, transforming everyday meals into healthier versions. For instance, lentils can stand in for ground beef in tacos, lasagna, chili, or shepherd’s pie.

While two cups of ground beef cost around \$5 and contain 480 calories, 36 grams of protein, and 32 grams of fat (12 grams saturated), lentils offer the same 36 grams of protein for under \$1, with only 1 gram of fat and 30 grams of fiber.

This simple swap cuts unhealthy fats and cholesterol while

boosting heart-healthy nutrients.

Lentils also make an excellent alternative to mashed potatoes. A serving of mashed potatoes with butter and milk may cost \$1-\$2 and offers about 400 calories, 18 grams of fat (11 grams saturated), and just 4 grams of fiber.

In contrast, two cups of lentils cost under \$0.50, deliver 36 grams of protein, and provide eight times the fiber with virtually no fat. Lentils’ creamy texture and savory flavor make them an ideal side dish for almost any meal.

CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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

February 2025
All markets open weekdays, February 3-26
Closed: February 17, 27 & 28
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 FEBRUARY 6

BROKEN BOW 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842
FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 13

DURANT 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773
FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 20

MCALESTER 3244 Afulota Hina, 918-420-5716
FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 11

POTEAU 106 B St., 918-649-0431
FOOD DEMO FEBRUARY 18

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

February 4	Talihina	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 5	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 7	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 11	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 12	Crowder	By Appointment
February 14	Atoka	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
February 14	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
February 18	Broken Bow	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 19	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 21	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
February 25	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
February 25	Stigler	By Appointment

Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday
Call 580-326-8304 for an Appointment

WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS

LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
Antlers 580.916.5609	Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Atoka 539.316.2050	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Battiest 580.241.5458	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 539.316.2430	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Poteau 539.316.4606	Daily Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
Smithville 580.244.3289	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 580.380.8193	1st Tuesday – Boswell 3rd Tuesday – Coalgate 4th Tuesday - Clayton	9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Choctaw Nation Health Services

Choctaw Nation Foster Care needs your help

Continued from Page 1

“I don’t think people realize that you’re not paying for childcare, you’re not paying for medical care, and you get a monthly reimbursement from the state,” Vorhees said. According to Vorhees, other common misconceptions are that you have to be married or can’t work and foster simultaneously. Vorhees says you absolutely can and that they accept all family types.

Many people don’t know that they have choices when it comes to foster care. “You get to tell us what gender you’re most comfortable with, what age range you’re most comfortable with, the behaviors you will accept, and the behaviors that may be a hard no,” said Vorhees.

When families have that conversation with the foster care program, it gives them a well-rounded understanding of what makes you and your family comfortable. “We know what type of child can be put into your home, and it be successful, which reduces the amount of moves that child needs to make. And that’s just a big win for everybody,” Vorhees said.

With the Choctaw Nation Foster Care program, you have a whole team helping you and the child.

“When you have a child that comes into your home, you have a worker that works with the child; they’re on the child’s team. They’ll go to court. They work with the bio parents. They’re working on this child’s case. But, then, you have a person like me,” said Vorhees. “I’m on the foster parent’s team and working on everything that has to do with that parent.”

While adoptions of foster children do happen, Vorhees says it’s not something that should be a goal if you’re considering being a foster parent. Getting the children back with their birth parents is the ultimate goal.

Vorhees told a success story of a mother who was reunited with her kids. “A mother was involved in a domestic violence situation. Their living conditions were deplorable. We received a call that someone was concerned about two children and their well-being. Our team did an investigation and took custody,” said Vorhees.

The abuser went to jail that night, but the mother was devastated. “Our Family Violence Program stepped in to work with her through court appearances, restraining orders and finding housing. Our tribal CPS team worked with her to ensure she finished her classes and abided by the case plan goal to get her children back,” Vorhees said.

Throughout this, the mother was consistent with visits and communicated well with the foster parents.

“Eventually, she did it. She completed everything our tribal judge required; she maintained housing and a job, and her children were returned home,” said Vorhees.

When you step back and look at it, 42 isn’t a very big number compared to the number of loving Choctaw families on the reservation and across the state.

In a video posted on the Choctaw Nation website, Chief Gary Batton, in a conversation with Vorhees, challenged Choctaw tribal members to step up and participate.

“We take care of our own, and that’s something we need to live up to. Cousins, aunts, uncles, there are plenty of people out there, please, just help us,” said Batton.



Choctaw Nation Photo

The Choctaw Foster Care Program recruits foster care resource homes to provide Choctaw children with safe, stable and nurturing homes that are culturally appropriate when they are removed from their homes.

“I would like nothing more than to have more homes than children that come into custody. I would like to get that complaint that, hey, we haven’t gotten a call from you in a while. I would like to have so many homes that we’re not having to sit up, late at night, making calls to find one bed,” said Vorhees. “At the end of the day these kids just want to feel safe, they want to play, they want to go to school, and they just want to feel loved. That’s what we need, some safe, stable, loving homes that would be willing to open their hearts.”

According to Whitefield, the question to ask is, “If not you, then who?” Many qualified Choctaw homes could take on a little extra, be it for a weekend, a week or something a little longer.

Currently, the Choctaw Nation Foster Care program is able to support homes in Oklahoma and some areas of northern Texas and western Arkansas within 60 miles of the reservation.

“As the need for foster homes is nationwide, families residing outside of these coverage areas are encouraged to contact their local child welfare agencies for more information about fostering in their area,” said Whitfield.

If you’re in an area supported by Choctaw Nation Foster Care and have just a little extra love, go to <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/foster-care/> for more information and to start your application process online.

DID YOU KNOW?



Modern Choctaw regalia for men includes a cotton shirt with either a round neckline or an open collar with applique or ribbonwork. Most are bold colors with contrasting trim representing one of the traditional Choctaw motifs: full or half-diamond.

The shirt is paired with black pants and shoes as well as a wide-brimmed, black felt hat.

Other accessories for men include hat bands made of ribbons or beads, baldrics (a sash made of fabric with beadwork or applique), belts, handkerchiefs, beaded medallions, beaded collars and colored silk ribbons pinned at the waist.

DOI announce \$121 Million to help Tribes build climate resilience

WASHINGTON (January 8, 2025) – The Department of the Interior today announced a \$121 million investment from President Biden’s Investing in America agenda to help Tribal communities prepare for the most severe climate-related environmental threats to their homelands. This is the largest amount of annual funding awarded to Tribes and Tribal organizations in the history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Tribal Community Resilience Annual Awards Program, with 96 Tribes and 10 Tribal organizations receiving funding for 124 projects.



Photo Provided

The U.S. Department of the Interior announces \$121 Million will to help Tribes build climate resilience and preparedness.

This investment from the Inflation Reduction Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and annual appropriations will help Tribes proactively plan for and adapt to climate-related threats and safely relocate critical community infrastructure, where Tribes determine that is necessary.

“Indigenous communities face unique and intensifying climate-related challenges that pose an existential threat to Tribal economies, infrastructure, lives and livelihoods,” said Secretary Deb Haaland. “Through President Biden’s Investing in America agenda, we have made transformational commitments to assist Tribes and Tribal organizations as they plan for and implement climate resilience measures, upholding our trust and treaty responsibilities and safeguarding these places for generations to come.”

“Today, we are not just investing in projects; we are investing in the future of our Tribal communities,” said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland. “The Biden-Harris administration recognizes the vital role that Indigenous knowledge and leadership play.

These awards are a downpayment on a more sustainable and resilient future for Native communities across the country.”

Today’s announcement includes \$17.1 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, \$79.8 million from the Inflation Reduction Act, and \$24.2 million from fiscal year 2024 annual appropriations. This historic funding also advances the Biden-Harris administration’s Justice40 Initiative, which sets the goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by under-

investment and overburdened by pollution. Federally Recognized Tribes, including Alaska Native Villages, are considered disadvantaged communities, whether or not they have land.

The Tribal Climate Resilience Annual Awards Program supports both planning and implementation projects, including for climate adaptation planning, community-led relocation, managed and partial relocation, protect-in-place efforts, ocean and coastal management, and habitat restoration and adaptation. A summary of awards can be found on the Bureau of Indian Affairs website.

Today’s funding announcement is part of a more than \$560 million investment for Tribal climate resilience programs achieved during the Biden-Harris administration. In addition to significantly boosting the BIA’s Tribal Climate Resilience program, the Department launched a first-ever Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation Program with an initial \$135 million commitment to advance relocation and planning efforts for Tribal communities severely impacted by climate-related environmental threats.

This funding is part of more than a collective \$50 billion invested through the President’s Investing in America agenda to advance climate adaptation and resilience across the nation, including in communities that are most vulnerable to climate impacts.

For more information about the awarded projects and how to apply for future funding opportunities, please visit <https://www.bia.gov/service/tcr-annual-awards-program> or email resilience.funding@bia.gov.

Wolf recognized as NAIHC Attorney of the Year

J. Frank Wolf III was recently recognized as Attorney of the Year in Indian Country by the National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) at their Dec. 10, 2024, Legal Symposium in Las Vegas.

Wolf was selected for this national award after being nominated by the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

“We honor and recognize Frank’s remarkable 40-year legacy of service to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Frank’s unwavering commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of Native American communities, particularly within the Choctaw Nation, has been nothing short of transformative. Frank’s passion for serving Tribes and advocating for Tribal programs is both inspiring and impactful.

With an unparalleled dedication to tribal law, Frank has consistently championed the legal rights of the Choctaw Nation and elevated the effectiveness of tribal programs. His work has gone beyond legal counsel, serving as a foundation of support and empowerment for the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation (HACNO). Frank’s guidance has equipped HACNO staff to navigate complex legal challenges, ensuring that tribal voices are not only heard but also respected and upheld across jurisdictions. Frank’s deep understanding of



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Nation’s J. Frank Wolf III was recently honored as the 2024v NAIHC Attorney of the Year in Indian Country.

tribal law and his tireless work on behalf of the Choctaw Nation have made significant differences in the lives of countless individuals and families.

Frank’s career embodies an extraordinary dedication to justice for Native American communities.

His relentless advocacy, deep expertise in tribal law and impactful mentorship with HANCO have profoundly influenced the lives of individuals and families across the Choctaw Nation and Beyond.

In recognition of his outstanding commitment, exemplary service and profound impact on the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and Indian Country, we honor Frank for his enduring commitment to justice, powerful advocacy and his service.”



SUMMER EBT FOR CHILDREN COMING SOON!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL **539.316.3855**

This program is an equal opportunity provider.

Choctaw Nation Summer EBT



YOUTH ARTS SHOW

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION

HIGH SCHOOL CAREER TECH ASSISTANCE

Career Development provides this initiative for high school juniors and seniors who are attending an approved Oklahoma Career Tech Program in person. Eligibility requirements apply.



Scan to submit an application.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL **866.933.2260** OR EMAIL **ACES@CHOCTAWNATION.COM**

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Choctaw Nation is for Lovers: A guide to planning the perfect Valentine’s Day experience

By Christian Toews

Valentine’s Day is the perfect time to celebrate those you love. Whether with a spouse, a significant other, a best friend, or by yourself, you will find the ideal place to celebrate in the Choctaw Nation.

If you want to spend time away from the city’s noise for a quiet getaway or to rev up the celebration of love, southeastern Oklahoma has everything to make your most romantic dreams come true. Grab your planner, pencil in some dates, and make some reservations for your most fun and unique Valentine’s Day yet.

We begin our lovely list by escaping from the hustle and bustle to one of Oklahoma’s most beautiful locations, Beaver’s Bend State Park.

With rolling hills, winding rivers, and tall pine trees, this part of Oklahoma will captivate you. February in Oklahoma can be cold, but don’t worry. There is a warm place to get away from it all.

Located on the border of the State Park, Choctaw Landing is the ultimate escape for those who love the outdoors. Choctaw Landing brings the comforts of a world-class resort experience to the breathtaking Oklahoma wilderness.

There is something for everyone at Choctaw Landing, from restaurants and entertainment to unique events and attractions.



Choctaw Nation Photo

You don’t have to rush to the big city for those perfect Valentine’s Day vibes. From dinner and a movie to a luxurious overnight stay and spa day, there are so many date worthy experiences to explore in the Choctaw Nation.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Landing brings the comforts of an exclusive resort experience to the threshold of the Oklahoma wilderness.

If you feel like venturing out, the surrounding area has plenty of options, from fine dining to quick bites, hiking and biking trails, helicopter rides, and some of the best trout fishing in the country.

Beavers Bend State Park is one location where you can have it all while getting away from it all.

Visit <https://choctawlanding.com/> and book your reservations today.

Is a lakeside escape more of your Valentine’s Day style? If so, Carlton Landing is the place for you.

This beautiful resort-style community is just a short drive from McAlester, Oklahoma, located on the shores of Lake Eufaula.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Tucked away off the beaten path Carlton Landing is a charming lake community situated on Lake Eufaula in Oklahoma.

The getaway destination has everything you need to unwind with your loved one.

Enjoy a handcrafted cocktail by the outdoor fireplace at The Meeting House or cozy up around the fireplace in the backyard of your private vacation rental. Have a delicious slice of wood-fired pizza at Mama Tig’s, or jump in the car for a Romantic evening exploring the fine dining locations in nearby McAlester, Oklahoma.

Visit <https://carltonlanding.com/> to make your reservations today.

Instead of getting away from it all, maybe you want to spend this Valentine’s Day going somewhere that has it all.

The Choctaw Nation’s largest resort and hotel in Durant, Oklahoma, has everything you can dream of in one location.

Choctaw Casino and Resort has an incredible spa, Fine dining, a movie theater, bowling, entertainment and more under one roof.

With this much excitement, it is the perfect place to dress up and treat your love to the time of their life.

To make reservations, visit <https://www.choctawcasinos.com/durant/>.



Choctaw Nation Photo

At Choctaw, the possibilities are endless. Indulge in delicious dining at any of our 20 restaurants and take in the biggest names in entertainment at the Grand Theater and Gilley’s.

A “Different” Dining Experience

What if you prefer a dining experience that isn’t common in southeastern Oklahoma?

There are numerous spots to enjoy a fine dining experience within the Choctaw Nation. Whether you prefer a multicourse specialty menu or want fine dining with a touch of Oklahoma flair, there is a restaurant sure to spark your appetite.

The Ranch Restaurant at Talimichi has been turning heads and exciting tastebuds.

Located on the scenic Kiamichi River near Tuskahoma, Oklahoma, this restaurant offers a dining experience you don’t want to miss.

Owned by veteran chef Weston Corbin, who has a background including an 8-year stint as the Executive Chef at the Oklahoma Governor’s mansion, his unique culinary style has drawn people from all over.

“We are always trying to offer something unique,” said Corbin. “Maybe something you haven’t tried before in a nicer dining environment than you might be used to.”

He said some crowd favorites he has undertaken include chicken-fried elk steak, roasted beef bone marrow, and seafood boils.

Corbin said they pull out all the stops for their Valentine’s Day menu, and you won’t want to miss it. He said there would be a filet or bone-in ribeye, a fresh seafood option, and a pasta dish you might believe is straight from Italy.

Valentine’s Day dining will be by reservation only, so visit their Facebook page at The Ranch Restaurant at Talimichi or call (918) 563-1234 for details on how to make your reservations today.

Another unique restaurant to consider is the Fort Towson Depot Steakhouse. Located in the historic Fort Towson train depo building, this dining experience is one you won’t find anywhere else.

Owners Kathy Kruther and Judy Fuhrhop wanted to bring a fine dining option to the area, and that’s precisely what they did.

The restaurant has become very popular, and Fuhrhop said that the Valentine’s Day menu has been a huge hit.

“Last year was a sell-out, and we expect this one will be as well. We are requiring reservations this year to make sure that our guests have a wonderful, unhurried experience,” she said.

The menu will be posted on their social media platforms, and you can make reservations by calling 580-579-8873. Visit www.forttowsondepot.com for more information on this dining experience.



Photo Provided

Located near the banks of the beautiful Kiamichi River, The Ranch Restaurant is a food destination for all.



Choctaw Nation Photo

When you step into 1832 Steakhouse, be prepared to have your every need catered. From the vast menu of fine wines to our unequalled steak and seafood dishes, you’ll know you’ve entered into something special.

Don't forget these Valentine's date-worthy restaurants.

- ♥ *Reba's Place, Atoka*
- ♥ *Salt & Stone, Durant*
- ♥ *Guy Fieri's American Kitchen + Bar, Durant*
- ♥ *Chop House, Grant*
- ♥ *Tuklo Grill, Hochatown*
- ♥ *Seven Ponies, Pocola*

For more options that might spark your desire this Valentine's Day, visit www.choctawcountry.com.



Photo by Christian Toews

Fort Towson Depot Steakhouse is full service, fine dining experience located in the historic Fort Towson train depo.

INTERNSHIP APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 580.642.7898 OR 580.642.7921
CAREERS.CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Scan to submit application

Choctaw CAREERS

ANUMPULI (TO SPEAK) PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEY

WE NEED YOU TO SPEAK OUT AND GIVE US YOUR OPINION!

What services do you see our reservation having or lacking? For every 100 entries, a prize will be drawn.

By participating in the survey, you are agreeing to provide feedback for the CNO Community Health Assessment.

Scan to complete the survey

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Teri Billy, Language Instructor

By Kellie Matherly

Teri Billy, Assistant Director of the Choctaw Nation Language Department, is a woman whose life is deeply rooted in her Choctaw heritage. Her journey is a testament to the power of resilience, faith, and cultural preservation, shaped by a bilingual and bicultural upbringing that connected her to both the Choctaw and English-speaking worlds.

Raised in Wright City, Teri's childhood revolved around the Choctaw language.

At home, Choctaw was the primary language spoken, while English played a secondary role, primarily outside the household. Her grandmother and two older aunts, who raised her, immersed Teri in Choctaw culture.

These early experiences instilled in her a profound connection to her heritage, which would later define her life's work.

"Just like when you grow up speaking, learning the language in English. That's how it was for me in Choctaw. Everything, from a toddler, was spoken in Choctaw at home and coming to church. All of our activities included being around Choctaw people," Teri said.

Teri's childhood was marked by resilience and faith. Without a car, her family often walked miles to attend church. Her grandmother, a deeply spiritual woman, would prepare food on Saturday nights, and on Sunday mornings, they would begin the 18-mile journey to church. Along the way, someone would invariably offer them a ride, a reflection of the supportive community that surrounded them. This determination and reliance on faith became the bedrock of Teri's values.

Sundays for Teri's family were more than just a day of worship—they were a cultural cornerstone. From Sunday school and services to communal meals and singing, church gatherings were an all-day event. These gatherings, rich in tradition and spiritual significance, were central to the community's life. For the Choctaw people, church was not just a physical space; it was where life's milestones—births, marriages, and funerals—were shared and celebrated together.

"It's the place where we raise our children. It's the life of the community. You don't have to live in the community, but it's the people who go there together and create that body, that little unit. It's just that place that you touch back in. It's home," said Teri.

As Teri grew older and entered school, she began to notice the cultural differences between her upbringing and that of her peers. Teri's world was steeped in Choctaw traditions.

These contrasts highlighted the uniqueness of her upbringing and deepened her appreciation for her cultural heritage.

"When you get to school, you start learning about all these holidays that weren't celebrated at home. When Easter rolled around and everybody was getting an Easter dress, I didn't know what an Easter dress was," she said. "Hearing other students talk about how their lives were, I realized, was very different. And at the same time, I realized they didn't really understand how us Choctaw kids lived."

Navigating both the Choctaw and wider American cultural spheres presented challenges, but it also provided Teri with a sense of adaptability and responsibility. This bicultural experience inspired her to preserve and share her heritage, particularly the Choctaw language, which she views as a vessel of identity and history.

Language, for Teri, is far more than a means of communication. It is a link to her people's past and a key to their future. Growing up, she observed how even non-Choctaw speakers in her community would make efforts to learn a few words, recognizing the language's significance. Today, as Assistant Director of the Choctaw Nation Language Department, Teri is dedicated to ensuring the language thrives for generations to come.

Faith has also been a cornerstone of Teri's life. Her grandmother's deep spirituality profoundly influenced her, teaching her that humans are triune beings—spirit, soul, and body. This belief in nurturing the spirit has guided Teri's life and work. For her, Choctaw hymns and spiritual songs hold transformative power, resonating deeply even with those who do not understand the language. She believes this spiritual connection transcends language, offering strength and sustenance in times of hardship.

"The spirit that lives on the inside of us is what gives us guidance and direction. And that's what connects us with God, our Father in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. I think without realizing it, because of that, there's a transformative power at work within us as we believe God's Word. God's Word is filled with prosperity and power," she said. "I've seen examples of people who were not speakers, who didn't



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw first language speaker Teri Billy grew up rooted in the traditions of her ancestors. Her childhood in a close-knit Chahta community shaped the woman she has become.

understand the language, but because those hymns are spiritual, I've seen them be moved by what they're singing, even though they don't understand the words. So it goes beyond language."

Teri often reflects on the resilience of her ancestors, particularly those who endured the Trail of Tears.

She sees their determination and faith as a sustaining force that continues to inspire the Choctaw people today. This legacy of perseverance drives her commitment to preserving Choctaw traditions and supporting her community.

Community has always been central to Teri's life.

From maintaining church grounds to organizing renovations for fellowship halls, she has worked tirelessly to ensure the continuity of Choctaw traditions. These efforts are not without challenges, but Teri views them as essential for fostering a sense of belonging and connection among Choctaw people, even those who live far from their ancestral homes.

Preserving the Choctaw way of life requires collective effort, and Teri is deeply committed to this mission. Whether it involves finding volunteers to maintain church properties or organizing community events, she sees these tasks as vital to sustaining the spiritual and cultural fabric of her people.

As Teri reflects on her life, she sees her journey as one defined by faith, resilience, and community.

Her work with the Choctaw Nation Language Department is a continuation of the values instilled in her from a young age—values that have shaped her commitment to preserving the Choctaw language and culture.

Teri believes that faith and tradition offer strength and peace in difficult times. She is inspired by the belief that the Choctaw people's shared history and values will continue to guide and sustain future generations. For Teri, preserving these traditions is not just a responsibility—it is a way to honor her ancestors and ensure their legacy lives on.

Philippians 4:13 encapsulates Teri's outlook on life: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This guiding principle reflects her unwavering faith and her belief in the transformative power of community and culture.

Through her dedication and leadership, Teri Billy continues to inspire and empower the Choctaw people, ensuring that their rich heritage remains a source of strength and pride for generations to come.

To learn more about the Chahta Anumpa Aiiikhvna, the Choctaw School of Language, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/about/language/>.



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

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Mail application to:

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