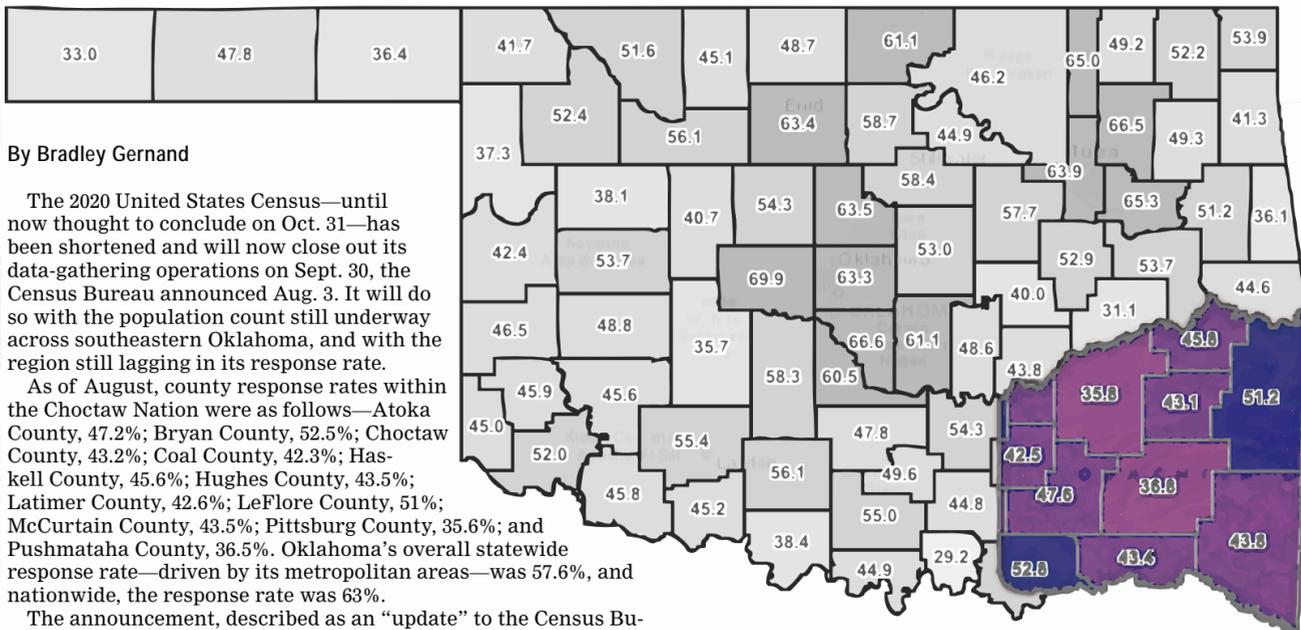




September 2020 Issue

# Census to end month early, aid threatened



By Bradley Gernand

The 2020 United States Census—until now thought to conclude on Oct. 31—has been shortened and will now close out its data-gathering operations on Sept. 30, the Census Bureau announced Aug. 3. It will do so with the population count still underway across southeastern Oklahoma, and with the region still lagging in its response rate.

As of August, county response rates within the Choctaw Nation were as follows—Atoka County, 47.2%; Bryan County, 52.5%; Choctaw County, 43.2%; Coal County, 42.3%; Haskell County, 45.6%; Hughes County, 43.5%; Latimer County, 42.6%; LeFlore County, 51%; McCurtain County, 43.5%; Pittsburg County, 35.6%; and Pushmataha County, 36.5%. Oklahoma’s overall statewide response rate—driven by its metropolitan areas—was 57.6%, and nationwide, the response rate was 63%.

The announcement, described as an “update” to the Census Bureau’s plan, said all data-gathering, including the ability of the public to respond to the Census, will cease at the end of September. The bureau did not say how it intends to ensure a full and accurate count on the shorter timeline.

Census officials initially intended to conclude the Census on July 24. Closures and delays associated with the COVID-19 pandemic stalled Census operations significantly, causing the bureau to extend this year’s once-in-a-decade Census until Oct. 31. That date has now been pushed forward to Sept. 30.

“I’m disappointed by the administration’s decision to truncate the 2020 U.S. Census a month early,” said Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton. “Tribal, state and local governments receive federal aid to assist with infrastructure, social services, healthcare, and education, among other important things. The aid we receive is, in general, based on the population count of the most recent Census. A successful 2020 Census is mission-critical for both our people and our region. This will now be more difficult to attain.”

“It’s like the rug was pulled from under our feet,” said Melissa Landers, coordinator of the tribe’s Census preparation effort. “We can’t just turn on a dime—the government said the Census was ending on Oct. 31, and we planned our outreach campaign around that date.” Billboards have been booked, airtime for TV and radio commercials have been scheduled, and the tribe’s Public Events staff has kicked off a series of public engagements at Travel Plazas, health clinics and other locations.

These events have been successful, and Choctaw Nation staff have assisted many tribal members in completing their Census forms. “The trouble is, we can’t compress two months of effort into just one and ensure we’ve done all we can to achieve the highest possible count of Choctaw tribal members,” Landers said.

A tribe-wide survey initiated by the Choctaw government was designed to provide real-time data to Tribal Headquarters providing the number of tribal members who have filled out the Census, and the areas in which they live. The results were intended to allow a focused marketing campaign to target the lowest-response areas, using direct mail, visits by tribal staff to members’ homes, and social media. This will no longer be possible, Landers

The response rate by county to the 2020 census can be seen in this map. Southeastern Oklahoma lags behind the rest of the state, and the country, in responding to the 2020 U.S. Census. The full map, developed by the Choctaw Nation’s Geographic Information Systems department, is available at <https://bit.ly/census-response>.

notes—there won’t be enough time between the end of the survey and Sept. 30.

Indian rights advocates across the United States have protested the government’s move to shorten the Census, saying indigenous peoples are hard to count. The Census Bureau, in its statement, said a full and proper count would be achieved, although it offered no details on how to meet this goal.

Trump administration officials say politics is not the cause of the move. By cutting off the count on Sept. 30, they say, the results will be tallied and tabulated in time to inform congressional redistricting efforts in the spring. But a senior Census Bureau official told a public gathering that it is already too late for that.

The Choctaw government has missed out on a lot of federal aid dollars due to the regional and tribal undercount in the most recent Census, in 2010, Chief Batton said. This year alone, it missed out on over \$100 million in CARES Act emergency funding due, in part, to the low Census count in 2010.

Cities and counties across southeastern Oklahoma also missed out on important funding, Choctaw officials say, pointing out that every county within the Choctaw Nation lost out on millions of federal dollars during the past decade. For McCurtain County alone, the cost was \$26 million. For economically strapped Pushmataha County, it was \$9 million. At least \$3,900 in federal aid per year is received as a direct result of each person counted in the Census. The money goes toward roads, schools, healthcare, and other important aspects.

It is not too late to respond to the U.S. Census! Every home should have received a printed form. The Census is also available online at [2020Census.gov](https://2020Census.gov) or by calling 844-330-2020.

Results of the 2020 U.S. Census will be announced in December.

# First modern-day Choctaw jury trial ends in conviction

By Shelia Kirven

On July 20, 2020, the first modern-day jury trial was held at the Choctaw Nation Judicial Center in Durant. A 39-year-old Choctaw citizen was tried for grand larceny for the theft of a semi-truck full of lumber from the Grant, Oklahoma Travel Plaza on Nov. 3, 2016.

According to the affidavit filed in the case, the semi-truck was stolen from another Choctaw tribal member who was using the vehicle for employment. Grant Travel Plaza contacted Tribal Police, who spoke with the owner of the truck who used GPS and was able to tell the officer in which direction it was traveling. The defendant had driven the semi-truck from Grant to Bennington, Oklahoma, and attempted to get into another semi-truck and was caught by the driver, who was asleep in the back. Bennington law enforcement was called and realized that a truck that was parked nearby was the one that had been stolen from the Grant Travel Plaza. After being questioned and giving several different stories, the defendant realized he was going to be detained by law enforcement, after making incriminating statements.

The defendant exercised his constitutional right of self-representation and waived his right to assistance of counsel. At the conclusion of the one-day trial, the defendant was found guilty by the six-person jury, receiving a recommendation for a two-year sentence and a \$2,000 fine. The defendant will serve sentenced time in a local county facility within the territorial jurisdiction of the Choctaw Nation.

Kara Bacon, Prosecuting Attorney for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, said, “I think this case we just tried is a good example of how city and state law enforcement can work effectively with tribal law enforcement.”

The Act Establishing A Court of General Jurisdiction for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CB-65-2009) created the current Judicial Branch with a District Court which has general criminal and civil jurisdiction over all tribal Indian Country. This system replaced the CFR Court of Indian Offenses and modernized the Choctaw Nation Judicial Branch to more adequately serve the need for the Judicial Administration of Justice for the Choctaw Nation.

Also, with the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA), signed into legislation by President Obama, the tribe has the expanded ability from only trying misdemeanor acts. Under TLOA, the Choctaw Nation can prosecute felony convictions up to three years per count, or nine years total running consecutively, which previously only allowed prosecution of felonies with limited jurisdiction up to a year in county jail. All misdemeanor crimes typically carry up to a year. Murder and other major crimes fall under federal jurisdiction because of the Major Crimes Act and would be prosecuted federally. Any tribal member committing crimes on trust land will be prosecuted either federally or through tribal court. Domestic violence crimes in the Choctaw Nation are under expanded jurisdiction under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), also signed by President Obama. It was proven that there was a gap that negatively affected Native American victims in Indian Country. The tribe has the ability to prosecute non-Indian offenders, that being the reason for a special juror code that allows non-citizens to participate in the Choctaw Nation jury process, giving non-Indian offenders jury representation and also giving them ability to request a writ to be tried federally.

Cory Ortega, Choctaw Nation’s Assistant Prosecution Attorney, served as the prosecutor for the first jury trial

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Can Choctaw tribal members be called for jury duty at the Choctaw Judicial Center?

Yes. According to the Choctaw Juror Code, Choctaw tribal members can be asked to volunteer for Choctaw jury duty if they live in the Choctaw Nation’s 10.5 county jurisdiction and have a Choctaw car tag. Non-tribal spouses of tribal tag holders may also be asked if they would like to volunteer for Choctaw jury duty.

### Why would a non-tribal member be chosen to sit on a Choctaw jury?

Under the Violence Against Women Act, the Choctaw Nation is required to have a cross-section of the community, including non-tribal members on a jury.

### If chosen, is it mandatory that I serve on a jury with Choctaw Nation?

Currently, jury duty is a volunteer service. Those who are asked can elect not to participate by responding in writing to the request received, declining service. They can also request not to be in the selection process. However, if no volunteers are available later, mandated jury duty could be considered, as full juries must be present at jury trials to eliminate the risk of constitutional error.

### Can a tribal member who doesn’t have a Choctaw car tag volunteer serve on a Choctaw jury if living within the tribal boundaries?

Yes. The Choctaw Juror Code allows a tribal member living within the 10.5 county tribal jurisdiction the choice to send in a written request to be part of the electronic jury selection process.

### Are there any exclusions to serving on a Choctaw jury?

Yes. To qualify, potential jurors cannot work for the Choctaw Nation Judicial Center, be judges, attorneys, or peacemakers; they cannot have a felony and must live within the territorial jurisdiction.

### Do Choctaw jurors get mileage or payment?

Yes. Those who serve on a tribal jury are entitled to mileage plus payment of \$100/day.

case. Ortega serves a dual role for the Choctaw Nation, also being a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Oklahoma in Muskogee, the first from the Choctaw Nation to be granted this dual position. If there are federal

offenses that occur on Choctaw Nation property, Ortega has the ability to participate in the prosecution of those offenses in federal court. Ortega benefits the Choctaw Nation by giving the tribe a voice directly at the table on federal prosecutions. Before his appointment, the Choctaw Nation had a tribal liaison at the U.S. Attorney’s office but did not have a Choctaw Nation employee in the office. Ortega also works with the Choctaw Nation Tribal Police as a liaison to ensure that cases are in order for submission to the U.S. Attorney’s office.

Bacon said, “I was a prosecutor for 10 years, and I’ve conducted numerous jury trials in state court. Mr. Ortega was a prosecutor and a defense attorney for a number of years, so we have both seen a number of jury trials in the state system and participated in those, and this trial ran very smoothly. Our Choctaw Nation Presiding District Judge, Judge Branam, was an accomplished state court District Judge with unmatched courtroom experience, having tried numerous jury trials. With the level of experience, the system ran very smoothly.”

She went on to say, “It was an honor as a tribal member myself to get to participate in this trial in this new courthouse and under the new system. We were really surprised by the excitement of the jurors to be able to participate. They were engaged the entire time. I think they took their responsibility very seriously, and I’ve had panels before in state court where they were working their best to try to get out of service. The jurors who showed up were really excited about their service, and they were really happy to participate, even in the midst of a pandemic, so we would really like to thank them for their service.”

Ortega agreed, “As Kara said, it was an honor to be a part of the jury trial. The process and procedure of conducting the trial was done in a very efficient manner. The ability of the Choctaw Nation District Court to put on a trial that ran so smoothly, I believe, is a direct testament to the competent professionals that are at the courthouse, the Judge, the court clerk, the court reporter, and the bailiffs from Public Safety. The ability of the Choctaw Nation’s Tribal Court to conduct a jury trial in such an efficient manner will show state and federal authorities as well as Tribal members that we are a legitimate, functioning court. We have competent prosecutors and judicial personnel that are able to handle complex cases efficiently while providing criminal defendants with the due process rights guaranteed not only under the United States Constitution but the Choctaw Nation’s Constitution as well. This has been a big step forward for the Judicial System, for the Tribal Prosecutor’s Office, for our Judicial Branch, and it really is going to help present the Choctaw Nation District Court as a legitimate court system.”

Though no criminal jury trials are scheduled for the immediate future, filings, pleadings and affidavits are typically public record, and future dockets are available through the tribe’s website on the Choctaw Nation’s Judicial Branch’s website. At this time, there are close to 60 current criminal cases and approximately 30 juvenile cases pending in the tribe’s district court.

*The Choctaw Nation District Court focuses on family issues such as divorce, child custody, child support, parental rights, visitation and adoption, civil matters, juvenile matters and guardianship. The Court also presides over criminal matters in accordance to the Tribal Law and Order Act adopted into the Choctaw Nation legislation in 2015. <https://www.choctawnationcourt.com/about-us/our-history/>*

## Faith, Family, Culture



Chief Gary Batton

### Eventful summer

The Supreme Court's decision in the case of *McGirt v. Oklahoma* was truly one for the ages. Now we must figure out exactly what it all means. It's often the case that the court will release a decision, and it then takes years to figure out what it means. Sometimes the lower courts must get involved before we gain any clarity.

We will drive a lot of what happens next, or at least that's my hope and intention. We've identified five broad categories of questions we see arising from *McGirt*: law enforcement, judicial, taxation, regulatory, and Indian child welfare. I've formed a Choctaw Nation *McGirt* Task Force to begin looking at these five categories. Each of the five categories includes lots of questions. At this point, I'm still of the belief that there is no rush to move towards federal legislation. This decision will impact our tribe and its members from now on. I want to make sure we assess every opportunity to maximize our sovereignty and protect

our citizens while being good neighbors.

We now live in a culture where we want and expect answers fast. That's probably not going to happen here. I want to make sure we don't somehow reverse any aspect of tribal sovereignty. Have you seen some of the beautiful quilts and handcrafts on display at *Tvshka Homma* on Labor Day? This situation is like one of those quilts. It takes different threads and colors to assemble a pattern. Pull just one thread, and you unravel the quilt. We'll have to tread carefully.

I also want to give you an update regarding the CARES funds we have received. These dollars came from the federal government for our use in responding to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. We're pulling together data and hope to have it for you soon. As a reminder, we already have existing programs to assist you with your rent or mortgage payment, put food on the table, continue your education and learn more about how to keep your businesses afloat during these challenging times. We're working as fast as we can to get disbursements out. So, apply today!

We were also recently informed that the federal government will close out the 2020 U.S. Census a month early. It was scheduled to end on Oct. 31 but will now conclude on Sept. 30. The Census Bureau says it will still achieve an accurate count, but I'm not sure that's possible. The 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation are considered hard-to-count areas because they are mostly rural. Because the Census Bureau can't tell us the number of Choctaw tribal members who have filled out the Census (we won't be able to find this data until after the Census closes), we're surveying our tribe to see how many people say they have.

As of this week, approximately 33,000 of our tribal members say they've done so. That's out of a total tribal population of over 200,000. Have you filled out your 2020 census yet? Please let your voice be heard by filling out the Census. You can fill it out at [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov) or call 844-330-2020. I encourage everyone to complete their Census as soon as possible, as time is running out!



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

### You're not alone

I hope you are all doing well and staying healthy. It is hard to believe that we are already nine months into 2020. This year has been challenging for many, as COVID-19 has affected all of us in some way. Necessary public health precautions such as social distancing and self-isolation can intensify feelings of loneliness. Fear and anxiety about a new disease and what could happen can be overwhelming for many people. Coping with grief, stress and anxiety is essential to our overall well-being and mental health.

September 10 is World Suicide Prevention Day. Every year, suicide is among the top 20 leading causes of death worldwide. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. was in a suicide crisis. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, more than 48,000 people died by suicide in 2018. In the same year, more than 1.4 million people in America attempted suicide. The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255 (TALK), receives millions of calls per year. Recent reports have started to show an increase in calls as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Estimates show a 300% increase in call volume during mid-2020.

Taking care of our mental health is essential. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only 36.9% of those suffering receive treatment. It's not uncommon for someone with an anxiety disorder to also suffer from depression or vice versa. Nearly one-half of those diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are treatable, and most people with an anxiety disorder can be helped with professional care.

If you are noticing changes to your mental health, or are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please seek help. You are not alone, and your life is essential. Asking for help is nothing to be ashamed of, and talking about our mental health is so important. Talk to your loved ones, ask a medical professional or call a hotline. Take the steps necessary to be the healthiest you. I encourage all of you to check out the story on page 11 of this month's issue of the *Biskinik*. It goes deeper into this subject, and what resources are available to you.

Remember, if you or someone you know are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). You are not alone, and help is available.



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

### Rescue the perishing

There is an old hymn written by Fannie J. Crosby. The title is "Rescue the Perishing." The third verse goes like this, "Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter, feelings lie buried that grace can restore. Touched by a loving heart, awakened by kindness, chords that are broken will vibrate once more."

An auction was held where an old violin was up for bids. It didn't appear to have much worth. It was old and not much shine and seemed like there was not much use left in it. The auctioneer started calling for offers. The bids came in slowly and reluctantly: one dollar, two dollars, three dollars. Then an older gentleman came forward. He picked up the old violin with hands that were aged but filled with care and love. As he gently tuned the old instrument, there came a questioning hush in the auction house. The old man began to play with eyes closed and feeling the music come forth pure and sweet.

After the ending of the music, without a word, the old violin was handed to the auctioneer. It was still old, and on the exterior did not have much appeal. Then the auctioneer held it up for bids. The air was filled with bids coming rapidly: a hundred, a thousand! Then, "Sold to the highest bidder!" What made the difference? It was the Master's touch. The violin was worthless until the Master musician touched it, and it changed its value.

We read Jeremiah 18:1-6. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." (KJV) God can take our broken lives and bring forth the value He sees in us.

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# Supreme Court ruling could rewrite history textbooks

By Bradley Gernand

History changed in a single day with the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling affirming tribal sovereignty in eastern Oklahoma.

In its ruling in the case of *McGirt v. Oklahoma* July 9, the Supreme Court affirmed the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's sovereignty by confirming it still occupies a distinct reservation. The court also confirmed that the state has no role to play in the Muscogee Nation in terms of criminal justice—Muscogee tribal courts or federal courts will handle all such cases.

Legal experts say that while the court's ruling concerned only the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, it may well apply to all Five Civilized Tribes, due to the similarities in their treaties with the U.S. government. The Choctaw Nation's Treaty of 1866 with Washington, as example, closely resembles the Treaty of 1866 signed by the Muscogees.

In issuing its historic ruling, the Supreme Court has rewritten history.

Oklahoma history textbooks used across the state since statehood say the tribal governments and their domains and sovereignty ended Nov. 16, 1907—Oklahoma's Statehood Day. How was such an error made and perpetuated through the years? Rather than being fact, was the end of tribal sovereignty simply widely held conventional wisdom, now disproved?

"It appears that way," says Jim Taylor, the longtime Oklahoma history teacher at Durant High School. "All the textbooks we've used over the years have said, in one form or another, that the tribes lost their sovereignty in 1907. This is the first we've ever heard that the situation might be different."

And indeed it is. But first—how did this come about? Quite simply, Congress was ensnared by its own actions.

## How Did History Get it So Wrong

In passing the Enabling Act of 1906 paving the way for Oklahoma to become a state, Congress did not terminate the tribal governments, even though that was its original intention. It began working toward this goal as early as 1893, when it kicked off a convoluted process by which the Five Civilized Tribes' lands were surveyed, platted, their citizens enrolled in a final roll, and their governments put on a bumpy slide toward termination.

Policy in the American federal government ebbs and flows in two- and four-year cycles, corresponding to elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Presidency. The government's policy toward the Five Civilized Tribes was carried out very unevenly in the years following 1893. Congress initially intended closing out the tribal governments in 1906, prior to statehood, but opted to continue small administrations for the tribes in order for their chiefs—appointed by the President, following statehood—to conclude all remaining tribal business. In the case of the Choctaws, this never took place, and the tribe had an appointed chief until the reestablishment of self-governance in 1983.

Congress—caught up and confused by its own complex web of intrigue—never circled back to formally conclude the tribal governments or their domains.

The history books, however, give a different story. Choctaw tribal member Muriel H. Wright—granddaughter of Principal Chief Allen Wright, who led the Nation following the Civil War—became a respected historian in Oklahoma, and firmly believed the Choctaw Nation and the Five Civilized Tribes had been extinguished. Her seminal Oklahoma history textbook published in 1939, and used across Oklahoma for the next two decades, states that the federal government succeeded in its quest to disestablish the Five Civilized Tribes. Many Indians had opposed statehood but had been unable to stop it, she said, with the former Indian Territory being carved into 40 counties of the new state.

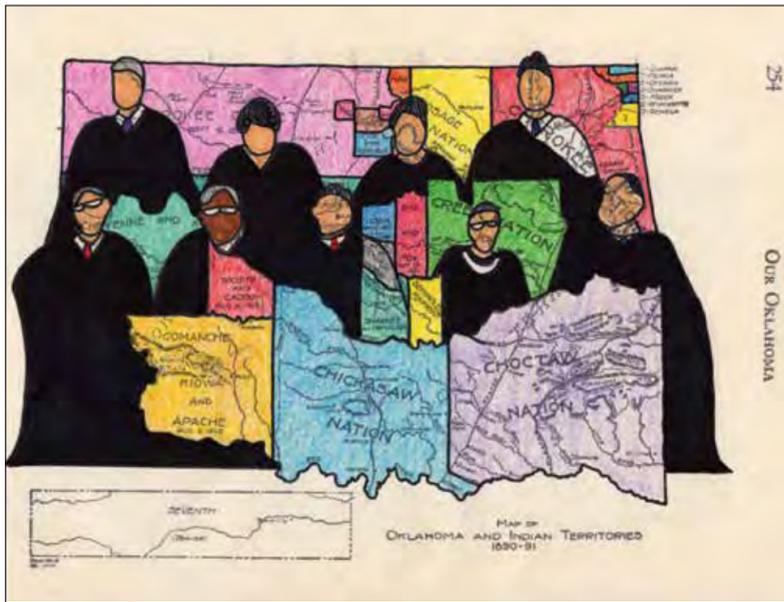
Ms. Wright clearly believed in the version of history she shared. So have other historians before and since.

## What the History Books Say

In Oklahoma, all textbooks used in public schools are vetted and approved by the Oklahoma Textbook Committee. Four Oklahoma history textbooks are currently approved and available for use by schools. All four are sympathetic to the plight of the Five Civilized Tribes. Unfortunately, all say our tribal governments and sovereignty ceased to exist in 1907.

Oklahoma: Land of Opportunity, published in 2013, remains in use but is being replaced by Oklahoma: Our History, Our Home. It closes out its introduction to statehood by saying that, on Statehood Day in 1907, "Some citizens... did not feel jubilant. In fact, many Native Americans in the new state felt betrayed. A letter from Mary L. Herrod, a Creek Indian, appeared in the *Oklahoma Democrat* the day before statehood: 'As Friday the 15th of November will be the last day of the Indian Territory, and after that we will no longer be a nation, some of us feel that it is a very solemn and important crisis in the history of the Indians... Now I've lived to see the last step taken, and the Indian does not count any more even in his own territory... I shall never write another letter. I cannot date my letters 'Indian Territory', and I shall not write.'" (Page 316.)

Oklahoma: The Sooner State was published in 2020. It describes the closing out of the Indian Territory as follows: "With the Curtis Act or the alternative agreements, their tribal governments were finally abolished and their lands reduced to holdings of 160 acres for each person. They were made powerless and subject to laws which many Native people did not understand." (Page 205.) A later reference says, "The allotment of Indian lands, the opening of three million acres of tribal lands to non-Indian settlement, and the elimination of tribal



A recent Supreme Court ruling could potentially make the Oklahoma map look more like the 1890-91 map in some older school textbooks.

governments had left only statehood and citizenship to be completed in the assimilation process. The Hamilton [Statehood] Bill provided the way for those accomplishments." (Page 228.)

"The Story of Oklahoma," published in 2020, provides an extensive write-up. It describes allotment as a "harsh process for dividing the tribes' lands and abolishing their governments without their consent." It noted that each of the Five Civilized Tribes reached separate agreements with the Federal Government, saying, "Details varied from one agreement to another, but all provided essentially the same terms: the allotment of the national lands and the end of the tribal governments." After the land was allotted and citizens enrolled, "the tribal governments would disappear." Central to this arc of history, it says, is this: "Towering above all those complications was one plain truth: Oklahoma's Five Tribes were losing the sovereignty that had been promised to them for as long as the grass grew and the waters ran." (Pages 194-196.)

This is not the first time Oklahoma's history textbooks have fallen short of the task. Many failed to mention the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, in which a state government commission later reported that over 300 blacks were killed, 1,200 homes were destroyed and 200 were looted. An angry white mob torched a hospital, library, school and churches. The African-Americans living in the affected area were descendants of Muscogee (Creek) freedmen. Oklahoma history textbooks generally did not carry accounts of it for many years.

## History Class: Not Just Textbooks

Oklahoma follows a fairly standard model for making textbooks available to public schools. The textbooks are commissioned, produced, and sold by the publishing houses which publish them. The Oklahoma Textbook Committee, which is appointed by the governor and supported administratively by the Oklahoma Department of Education, vets prospective textbooks for their eligibility according to set standards.

Three publishers produce the four Oklahoma history textbooks currently approved for use. Individual school districts select the textbooks they wish to use from the list of approved books and purchase them from the publishers. But these are not your father's textbooks: the schools also purchase online access to a complimentary trove of multimedia content designed to engage students, expand upon the textbooks, and respond to breaking events.

The state textbook committee closed out its most recent six-year approval cycle for history textbooks in November 2019. Having approved the textbooks in use for the next six years, the committee will not review them again for approval or reapproval until November 2025.

The three publishers are aware of the Supreme Court decision and plan on taking different measures to address it. Tom Quaid of the Oklahoma History Press, which publishes two of the four approved books, notes that the state textbook committee's last six-year adoption process concluded only nine months ago, and his publishing house has been selling and promoting its books since the committee's vote. Quaid says his publishing house will add the Supreme Court case to the online version of its book and website, and altered its print run. Quaid publishes the popular Oklahoma: The Sooner State as well as the provocatively and realistically titled book, Oklahoma: Uniquely American.

Tommy Lankford, president of Clairmont Press, which publishes Oklahoma, Land of Opportunity, and the book which is replacing it, Oklahoma: Our History, Our Home, reports, "Our new Oklahoma history textbook has been written and is currently being sold."

Lankford says once it is confirmed that all Five Tribes are affected by the recent Supreme Court decision, "we will make changes to the digital materials to reflect that." (Choctaw tribal leaders believe this may be months or over a year away.) It is too late to alter the text of the newly published book, Lankford says, but "future editions will also reflect the recent change and include all affected tribes."

Dale Bennie, Director of the University of Oklahoma Press, publishes "The Story of Oklahoma." Bennie, like Quaid and Lankford, says updating the online content available to students will be key, in the short- to medium-term, to giving teachers and students new information to work from. His publishing house commissioned a consultant to help them prepare the material.

## What's Next

Jim Taylor of Durant High School, notes that while the textbooks are designed to support a full year of instruction, Oklahoma history classes across southeastern Oklahoma are generally only one semester in length, with the next semester being a different subject.

At his school, Oklahoma history is taught in the fall semester, meaning his students began using the newly out-of-date textbooks in August and are using them now.

Taylor, and others, say it's a relief the publishers are able and willing to correct the historical record being presented to Oklahoma's school students. They also acknowledge the business needs of the publishers involved, noting that existing print runs of thousands of books can't be wished away overnight, nor can new textbooks be commissioned, compiled, produced and approved within any time frame that meets the current need.

The question is, what will carry us from now through the next several months—and particularly the fall semester, which is already underway?

Bennie, of the University of Oklahoma Press, with his consultant's help, updated the online materials available to students using his textbook. The new online passage notes that Congress, in passing the Curtis Act of 1898 to begin the process of dividing and allotting tribal lands, intended dissolving tribal governments and clearing the way for statehood. "But did the reservations in fact end once the land was all allotted? Or, in legal language, were the reservations disestablished by the time Oklahoma became a state?" The new passage answers the question and walks the students through the twists and turns that led to *McGirt v. Oklahoma*—and whatever follows.

Quaid, of Oklahoma History Press, also intends taking quick action and has volunteered to work with the Choctaw Nation to help determine what the new online content might be. The Choctaw government has provided Quaid with historical information and content, fully documented, for his review, in support of his efforts. "I was born in Durant, raised in Wilburton, and taught at Southeastern," he says. "I am very aware of the importance of Choctaw heritage and culture... We want to get this right!"

(Correction: In last month's edition *historian*, Muriel Wright was described as being the wife of Principal Chief Allen Wright. She was his granddaughter; Principal Chief Wright's wife was Harriet Newell Mitchell Wright.)



Submitted photo

Muriel Wright, the granddaughter of Principal Chief Allen Wright, became a renowned historian. Her Oklahoma history textbook, used in schools across the state for over two decades, said tribal sovereignty ceased with statehood in 1907. We now know otherwise—but it took 113 years and a surprising legal argument to reach this point."



## TRIBAL MEMBERSHIP AND COVID-19 GUIDELINES

The Choctaw Nation is taking numerous steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The Tribal Membership Department has released important guidelines that we want all members to be aware of.

The safest option for obtaining a tribal membership application is through our online application access.

Guidance can be found at

[choctawnation.com/contacts-applications/cdbmembership-information](http://choctawnation.com/contacts-applications/cdbmembership-information)

All membership cards are being mailed to recipients until further notice. Unfortunately, this means same-day card obtainment will not be available. Applications, supporting documentation, and photos can be emailed or mailed to us at the address listed below.

800-522-6170 EXT 4030  
CDIB-MEMBERSHIP@CHOCTAWNATION.COM  
CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA | ATTN: TRIBAL MEMBERSHIP  
PO BOX 1210 | DURANT, OK 74702

Choctaw Nation Member Services

## ENVISION CENTER

OFFERING FAMILIES ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES THAT CAN HELP THEM ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CHOCTAWNATION.COM/ENVISIONCENTER  
918-647-3665 | ENVISIONCENTER@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

### Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association & Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund

The Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association offers small business, home, home improvement and agriculture loans. The Choctaw Revolving Loan Program offers micro-loans, available for emergency home improvements and small businesses.

For more information, please contact Susan Edwards at (580) 924-8280 ext. 2161, ext. 2158 or toll-free (800) 522-6170.

Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association Loan

To Be Eligible to Apply:

- Must live within the 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation
- Must possess a CDIB card from a federally recognized tribe

Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund

To Be Eligible to Apply:

- Must live within the 10.5 counties of the Choctaw Nation
- Must possess a CDIB card from the Choctaw Nation

If you are interested in applying for a loan a representative will be available at the:

Antlers Community Center  
September 25, 2020  
9:00 - 11:00



# District 9

I hope everyone has been staying safe as we look forward to getting back to some semblance of normalcy in our personal lives soon. We have been meeting with Chief, SEO's and council on a weekly basis to make sure that our services don't miss a beat and we make the best decisions moving forward. I truly feel like our Tribe is stronger than it's ever been.

Our CARES Act has been going very well with several tribal members receiving relief funds from not only within the 10½ counties but across the United States. Our total relief fund was \$200.8 million, with \$112.8 million going to tribal member relief. An additional \$66.7 million went towards government operations stabilization. This includes \$37.5 million for employment job protection, \$17.4 million for technology, and \$11.8 million for prevention, infrastructure and supplies. The remaining \$21.3 million will be utilized for future response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. If anyone needs assistance, please visit choctawnation.com or call 800-621-5991.

We turned keys over to 20 families that qualified for LEAP homes in District 9 and are currently building 30 more in Calera, which will be completed in late September. I encourage others to come by the community center or go online to fill out an application for this program. The construction for our casino expansion is still on-going and will be complete in the summer of 2021. This will create another 1,000 jobs for the Nation and much needed hotel space for our guests. It's amazing driving by every day and seeing the progress and growth of our expansion. We've come a long way since the bingo days.

Our Community center has provided over 5,000 meals to our elders since we started serving curbside and deliveries. This wouldn't be possible without our many volunteers and staff. I appreciate all of them very much, and it's great to still see our seniors drive through on Wednesdays.

We also received our federal court ruling that our tribal gaming compact automatically renewed for another 15-year term. This is great news for our gaming facilities and security for our Tribe for many years to come.

In closing, I would like to thank all the associates for their dedication and hard work during this pandemic to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our tribal members. We appreciate you very much!



James Dry

# Nation donates more than \$89,000 to Rattan

RATTAN, OKLA. (August 17, 2020) – The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and its division of Strategic Development awarded the town of Rattan \$89,531 that will be used to match a USDA grant to enhance the community and make it a safer, more desirable place to live.

The Choctaw Development Fund is dedicated to stimulating the community and economy to create jobs and promote economic growth within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma territorial boundaries. The goal is to promote successful, productive, and self-sufficient lifestyles of tribal members and their communities.

“Our town facilities such as, the City Hall and Community Center are in dire need of a face lift and we'll finally be able to put in a storm shelter, the first one our town will have,” states Tammy Lawless, Mayor of Rattan. “We're so grateful to the Choctaw Nation and their donation. This will give citizens rejuvenated pride in their community.”

- The town of Rattan will be using their funds for several projects that include:
- Installing a 100-person, handicap, above-ground storm shelter
- Updating the outdated equipment and adding a generator to the community center; which also serves as the Red Cross disaster headquarters for the area
- Installing an ADA compliant parking pad in front of the community center
- Adding concrete parking in front and back of the new City Hall/Police Department
- Completing the remodel and equipping of the new City Hall

Project installation and updates will begin in August 2020 and are expected to be complete by March 2021.



Choctaw Nation photo

Jack Austin Sr., District 7 Councilmember presented Tammy Lawless, Mayor of Rattan a check for \$89,531 which will be used on several projects to enhance the town of Rattan.



Photo by Christian Toews

(from left to right) Danny Robbins, Kason Krob, Justin Huckaby, Sherry Henson, Richard Hathaway, Diana Hathaway, Lance Elliott and Joseph Cook.

By Christian Toews

According to Richard Hathaway, the Choctaw Casino security team saved his life.

On July 26, 2020, Hathaway had a sudden cardiac event while at the Choctaw Nation Casino & Resort in Durant.

Security officers Kason Krob, Lance Elliot, Justin Huckaby and Joseph Cook quickly used their training to begin CPR on Hathaway.

According to Krob, the security team was able to use a combination of CPR and an automated external defibrillator (AED) to revive Hathaway successfully.

“We swapped off on doing chest compressions for about two minutes until the AED arrived,” Krob said.

According to Hathaway's wife Diana, an ambulance arrived shortly and transported Hathaway to Alliance Health Durant. He was then transported to Richardson Methodist Hospital, where a defibrillator was surgically implanted.

Hathaway said he is grateful to the security team for their actions.

“I'm grateful these guys were there and knew exactly what to do. They jumped in and saved my life,” said Hathaway.

# Did you know: Choctaw Council House

The Choctaw Council House at Tvshka Homma was built in 1884. By the 1920s, there were plans to sell the building. For two years, many expected it to be torn down and reassembled in Durant. The Great Depression forced the cancellation of those plans.

In 1933, a movement began to preserve the building in its existing location and establish it as a memorial. By the end of 1937, this was becoming a reality. The property had been deeded back to the tribe by the state, and a crew of 40 men repaired the building and restored it to its former glory. The men were Native Americans themselves, serving in the Indian Division of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The restoration work was completed in May, and the building was dedicated in a grand celebration organized by Chief William A. Durant on June 3-4, 1938. Several hundred Choctaws and Chickasaws attended, and this marked the first of a continuing series of large, yearly celebrations of Choctaw faith, family and culture.

World War II forced a temporary end to the yearly gatherings, which didn't begin again until 1948. Led by Chief Harry J.W. Belvin, the gathering was moved from June to Labor Day. Belvin hoped it would become an annual custom like the earlier meetings were. We owe these great Choctaw chiefs a debt of gratitude. (Biskinik Oct. 2019 pg 2)



# Thrasher awarded First Responder of the Week



Jeff Thrasher

DURANT, OKLA. (Aug. 17, 2020) – Jeff Thrasher is the second member of Choctaw Nation's Department of Public Safety to be an Honored First Responder in as many weeks. Thrasher is a Training and Exercise assistant in the Emergency Management Department of the Choctaw Nation.

What makes his recognition unique is that he was nominated by David Houser, chief of police for the City of Durant.

Chief Houser said, “Jeff has been an integral partner with the City of Durant in various capacities throughout the years, but most recently has been a valued asset to the police operations in the area of unmanned aerial crafts. He and his team have proved invaluable and the knowledge and resources are phenomenal.”

It is one of many ways the two agencies, the Choctaw Nation Department of Public Safety and the City of Durant Police Department, work together. Assistant City Manager James Dalton is formerly the city's director of Emergency Management. During his time in that position, Dalton built a number of contacts, including working closely with Choctaw Nation Emergency Management.

“Those ties have continued,” said Houser. “In fact, there may not be a closer relationship anywhere in the state than between our two organizations.”

Thrasher added that as he sees it, his nomination from the City of Durant came from his “helping with events and helping them get the correct resources on the ground and responding when needed for other situations.”

In addition to the on-air recognition, a KLBC106.3 radio station representative presented Thrasher with a certificate.

Thrasher has worked for Choctaw Nation for two years and highlights the opportunities available to people interested in joining the nation, whether tribal members or not. The recognition from Durant's KLBC came as a surprise. “I appreciate the award. I enjoy working for the Choctaw Nation and providing services to tribal citizens,” he said. “I live by the Chahta Spirit of faith, family and culture.”

## NATIONAL FLOOD AWARENESS WEEK

**#FLOODSAFETY #CHAHTAPREPARES #TURNAROUNDONTDROWN**

Floods are the most common natural disaster in the United States.

Failing to evacuate flooded areas or entering floodwaters can lead to injury or death.

**READY.GOV/FLOODS**

Choctaw Nation Emergency Management

## 2020 CENSUS SURVEY GIVEAWAY

### WIN UP TO \$20,020!

TAKE THE SURVEY ONLINE TO ENTER:  
**CHOCTAWNATION.COM/2020CENSUS**  
(QR code below gives access to the survey as well)

Enter our cash giveaway to win \$20,020, or be one of ten tribal members who win \$2,020 for completing the 2020 Census!

Submission of this survey is an acknowledgement and agreement to the terms and conditions of the 2020 Census Survey Giveaway. Visit [www.choctawnation.com/2020census](http://www.choctawnation.com/2020census) for 2020 Census Survey Giveaway rules.

## PREPARED, NOT SCARED

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH 2020

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT

**READY.GOV/SEPTEMBER**

Choctaw Nation Emergency Management

## NOTES AND EVENTS

### Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

September 2	Atoka	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 4	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 7	Poteau	1:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 8	Idabel	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 9	Antlers	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 9	Coalgate	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 11	Crowder	By Appointment
September 14	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 15	Wright City	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 16	McAlester	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 16	Stigler	By Appointment
September 17	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 18	Atoka	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 22	Broken Bow	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 22	Antlers	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
September 23	McAlester	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 23	Coalgate	11 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 24	Poteau	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
September 28	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday

Call 580-326-8304 for an appointment

### Noel and Roxie (Loman) Baker Family Reunion

October 24, 2020 (previously scheduled for June 27)

Choctaw Nation Community Center  
2746 Big Lots Parkway, Durant, Okla.  
Potluck lunch begins at 11 a.m.

For questions, check the family facebook or contact Lillie Dusenberry at 580-320-1039.

Oklahoma Indian Legal Services may be able to help tribal members who have received storm damage but can't get assistance due to title problems.

Call 800-658-1497 for more information.

### Wilson Family Reunion

Saturday, September 5 at Smithville Community Center  
Sunday, September 6, with a cookout at the river.

There will be a short business meeting after the potluck lunch Saturday.

Don't forget your items for the auction.

Contact Jody Hendrickson at 918-413-2084.

### Masks for Native students

The Choctaw Nation is providing washable masks for Native American students scheduled to return to school in the Choctaw Nation jurisdiction. The masks will be available to students as they pick up school supplies through their respective school's Johnson O'Malley (JOM) Program Coordinator.

The Choctaw Nation Office of Emergency Management and Education Department are coordinating with JOM programs across the Choctaw Nation to ensure the masks are distributed to students. The masks are designed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

For more information, contact your local school's JOM program. JOM school administrators may contact the Choctaw Nation JOM Office at 1-800-522-6170 extensions 2423 or 2213.

### Tribal Council holds August session

#### CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL

##### REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

August 8, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - a. Regular Session July 11, 2020
5. WELCOME GUESTS
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS
  - a. Faith Parra – Protecting our Choctaw Sovereignty
7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
8. NEW BUSINESS
  - a. Approve Application to the United States Department of Health and Human Services for the Tribal Management Grant Program - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - b. Approve Application for the 2020 Tribal Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Administration – Supportive Housing Grant - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - c. Approve the Funds and Budget for the Year Five Continuation for the Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program – Chahta InChukka - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - d. Approve the Funds and Budget for the Year Three of Five Continuation for Project Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program – Chahta Villa Apela - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - e. Approve the Funds and Budget for the Year Five of Five Native Youth Initiative for Leadership, Empowerment, and Development (I-LEAD) – Chahta Himmak Pila Pehlich (“CHPP” or “Choctaw Future Leaders”) - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - f. Approve the Funds and Budget for the Year Three of Three Continuation for the Social and Economic Development Strategies (SEDS) Grant - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - g. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - h. Approve an Easement for a Booster Pump Station, in Favor of McCurtain County Rural Water District #5, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation in McCurtain County, Oklahoma - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - i. Approve Business Lease No. 4200223246 (G09-1955) in Favor of Vanguard Wireless, LLC on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma - Tabled
  - j. Authorize the Chief to Place Property in Bryan County in Trust Status with the United States of America - Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER

All Council Members were present whether in person or by Webex technology.

## Thank You

I wanted to write this email to my great Choctaw Nation to personally thank them for their support of certifications through their Career Development service. My life has been changed.

I had worked at a local surveying business for 15 plus years and approached the Poteau office of Career Development in 2016 about obtaining my license as a Registered Professional Land Surveyor.

After providing the information about the license, the Choctaw Nation supported me financially every step of the way through nearly two years of specified continuing education, the application process, two 6.5 hour proctored exams, one proctored state exam and a final take home exam to obtain my licensure.

After becoming a licensed land surveyor, I approached the Tribe (through Career Development) about becoming a Certified Federal Surveyor.

This level of professional surveyor requires 160 additional hours of training pertaining to surveying US Government and Tribal Trust lands. They were again very supportive and I have recently earned this title and am so grateful to be Certified Federal Surveyor and Choctaw!

Jason Lloyd

I'm so proud to be a member of the Choctaw Nation. My wife and I are adopting my grandson and toward that end we are often in court. The judge has consistently made sure the Choctaw representative is a participant by telephone, as law allows. This has not always been so.

We live in Kansas and receive Biskinik as our real connection to the Nation. This last edition made so clear the McGirt decision. Another reason to be proud to be Choctaw.

Sincerely, Ron Huggins

I want to express my appreciation for your lead article in the August 2020 issue of Biskinik. As you and Chief Batton (Faith, Family, Culture article in the same issue) know, the McGirt decision is momentous for Indians in America. For the first time in recent times, to my knowledge, judicial elements in the US government are standing up for the rule of law – simply stating that the US government has a moral and legal obligation to follow the terms of treaty obligations.

I know that this issue has been well covered on your website, but many of us mostly get our news the old fashioned way – in the newspaper. So, we are gratified to read about the decision in Biskinik. Your decision to give Bradley Gernand the space to write up the nature of the McGirt V. Oklahoma decision and its contextual background is important not only for Choctaws in Oklahoma but also for Native peoples of all tribes. What was especially noteworthy to me is that the article was so well written and laid out the implication of the decision in such clear and concise terms.

I only regret the limited distribution and readership of Biskinik. “The Rule of Law Holds Strong in McGirt Case” is a piece of journalism that needs to be read by every American. For those who don't subscribe to Biskinik, hopefully, they will find out more about the decision through your website and other internet sources.

Respectfully yours, Jeff Eighmy

### Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna September Language Lesson

#### Himo Adverb – definition: just now

- **Himo e pisa!**  
We are just now looking at it.  
**Pronunciation:** He-moh e pisa
- **Himo haklo li tuk!**  
I just now heard!  
**Pronunciation:** He-moh hak-li li tuk
- **Hattak mvt himo impa cha nusi tuk.**  
That man just now ate and went to sleep.  
**Pronunciation:** Haht-tak maht he-moh ehm-pa cha nosi tuk.
- **Vllosi yvt himo nusit isht ia.**  
The baby is just now going to sleep.  
**Pronunciation:** Ahl-la yaht he-moh nohs-it isht eya.
- **Himo impvt isht ia li.**  
I am just now starting to eat.  
**Pronunciation:** He-moh ehm-paht isht eya li.

www.choctawschool.com



Choctaw Country knows sometimes  
24 hours isn't enough girl time.

CHOCTAWCOUNTRY.COM

### Send us your stories!

The Biskinik is a free service to our tribal members. We want to be an outlet for all members to share their successes with the rest of the tribe.

Please send your submissions to us at [biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)

### NEED TO CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS?

Contact the Choctaw Nation  
Circulation Department

580.924.8280 x4028

Read the Biskinik online at  
[CHOCTAWNATION.COM/NEWS](http://CHOCTAWNATION.COM/NEWS)

### 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](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)

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Chief

Jack Austin Jr.  
Assistant Chief

The Official  
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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.

If you are receiving more than one BISKINIK or your address needs to be changed, our Circulation Department would appreciate hearing from you at ext. 4028.

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.

ITI FABVSSA

# Hushi Isht Vlbi — traditional Choctaw bird trap

This month, Dr. Ian Thompson shares a special opportunity that he was given to learn about traditional Choctaw bird traps from an elder:

Hushi Isht Vlbi - “bird trap” is an entry in the Byington Choctaw Language Dictionary that had always intrigued me. Although giving a little bit different name, Chief Allen Wright mentioned them in his Choctaw Definer too. That both of these Choctaw language sources have a term for “bird trap” seems to indicate that these traps were once important in Choctaw life. It should come as no surprise that our ancestors would have trapped birds for food and feathers, but I often wondered exactly what these traps were like. In years of learning about Choctaw history and Indigenous culture, I had never come across so much as another mention of them.

That unexpectedly changed in the spring of 2020, when Tom Colvin, a good friend and knowledgeable elder stayed in our home through part of the Coronavirus shut-down. After he casually mentioned a Choctaw bird trap, I learned that Mr. Colvin had been taught how to make them by Sanville Johnson of the Bayou Lacombe Choctaw community who had often used them. Mr. Colvin and his older brother grew up making and using these traps to catch birds that his mother then cooked for supper. Mr. Colvin found that other Choctaw communities in Louisiana and Mississippi had used these traps too. Sixty years ago, they were also commonly used by non-Choctaw communities in Louisiana, and many traced their knowledge about them to back to Choctaw people. Mr. Colvin had never mentioned these traditional bird traps to me in our conversations because he had thought that they were just common knowledge for Choctaw people!

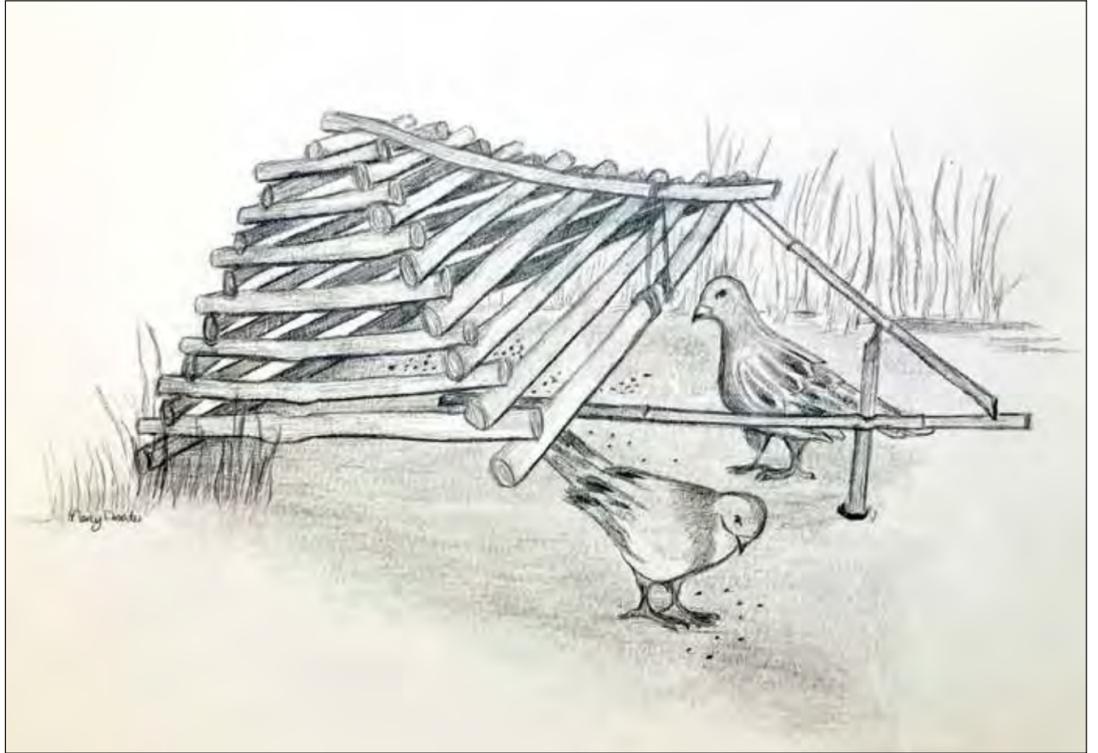
This style of traditional Choctaw bird trap consists of a basket, set up as a deadfall on a “Figure 4” trigger. The basket is made from straight twigs about a finger’s width in diameter. The twigs are cut to length in groups of two. The first two are cut around 16 inches long. The next two about 3/4 of an inch shorter, and so on until the last pair of twigs is about 3 inches long. A short string is tied around the middle of each of the two longest twigs. These two twigs are placed on the ground parallel to each other, and then a notch is cut into both sticks near both ends. The next longest pair of sticks is whittled flat on one side near both ends. These sticks are laid perpendicularly over the first pair to make a square shape, with the flat areas resting in the notches that were cut into the bottom sticks, kind of like a log cabin. Construction proceeds with flattening, notching, and layering progressively shorter pairs of sticks to create a pyramid shape. At the apex of the pyramid, is one three inch long stick, laid parallel to the two sticks at the bottom of the pyramid that have the strings tied to them. A notch is cut into the middle of the 3-inch stick on its top side to accommodate a flexible, but stiff stick laid perpendicularly over it. The ends of this stick are bent downwards with a bit of force and tied to the bottom two sticks via the short strings. Tension holds the basket part of the trap together. The trigger mechanism, carved from three straight, narrow twigs, is shown in the diagram. The construction of this little trap is pretty ingenious. With no nails, glue, and only very limited binding material required, it can easily be made in the field with a small knife or even stone tools.

The trap is set by leaning the basket up on one end and precariously supporting the top side of on the vertical part of the “Figure 4” trigger. Food that will attract the type of bird that you want to trap is placed on the ground leading to the trap. A larger amount is placed inside the trap, and some more is placed onto the end of the horizontal stick in the triggering mechanism. When a bird pecks or bumps the end of it, the “Figure 4” falls apart and the trap is sprung. The bird that triggered the trap, and any others that may have been under the basket when it fell, are caught live.

Today, laws protect robins, blue jays, and other small birds, but our ancestors used them for food. They could be cleaned and roasted on the fire in camp or used as flavoring in dishes like ashela, a cornmeal dish that often includes wild fowl. From sources that know, some of these little birds are fine eating.

One of the beauties of this bird trap is that, rather than requiring someone to sit around with a string all day waiting for a bird to enter the trap, it operates on its own and doesn’t need constant supervision. One person could have easily set a dozen of these traps and gone on to do other activities, coming back to check the traps once a day. Of course, Choctaws are not the only people to have figured out such a clever and efficient means of trapping small birds. Although they usually differ in some of the details, other Southeastern Tribes and people as far away as Europe traditionally made traps that look and function very much like what has just been described. Choctaw men made a second, and different kind of trap for catching turkeys. Mr. Colvin was taught how to make these as well and has graciously shared the knowledge. Stay tuned for a future article.

To date, the Historic Preservation Department hasn’t run across anyone in Oklahoma who grew up using traditional traps. If you did, we’d love to hear from you at 1-800-522-6170 ext 2216 or ithompson@choctawnation.com.



Drawing of a Choctaw bird trap by Choctaw artist Nancy Rhoades.

Submitted photo



Submitted photo

Tom Colvin with a bird trap that he built and shared with Dr. Thompson.

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The Student School and Activity Fund Program funding year is **July 1 - May 1** of the following year. Applications can be submitted online.

CONTACT  
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Choctaw Nation Student School & Activity Fund

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August 3

**AUGUST 6-7**  
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Choctaw Nation Head Start

## 100 years for Choate

Caldonia "Callie" Gibson Choate will turn 100 this month. She was born September 20, 1920, in Flower Mound, Oklahoma, to Winnie Pope and Adam Gibson.

Callie and her husband, Jessie "George" Choate, moved to California in 1939, where she worked as a housewife and also worked and retired as a sales rep for over 10 years at JCPenney.

"We wish you a very Happy Birthday Mom, aka Grandma and Great Grandma. We love you!"



## Mollohon turns 5

Dominic Zayne Mollohon turned 5 on July 21. Dominic is the son of Alyssa Miller, grandson of Faustina Suetopka-Moore.



## Parker McDonald turns 1



Parker Jay McDonald celebrated his 1st birthday on Sunday, July 12, at the Wintersmith Lodge with a baseball theme party.

Parker was born on July 11, 2019, to Jefferson Lee McDonald and Jaycee Owens, both of Ada. His grandparents are Thalia Walton and Jeff McDonald of Ada, and Suzanne Owens of Ada. He is the great-grandson of Nadine McDonald of Sulphur, the late Ervin Walton, JC and Martha Hawkins and Larry McDonald Sr.

The family enjoyed celebrating his rookie year with him. All of his family very much love him.

## 50 years for the Thompsons



Dawn Thompson is proud to announce the 50th wedding anniversary of her parents Henry Thompson Jr. and Frances Thompson, who were married August 11, 1970.

A big party was planned, but due to COVID-19, a small celebration will occur with their son Aaron Thompson, and grandchildren Nickolaus Thompson, Taylor Thompson and Kiley Thompson.

## Ph.D. for Riggan

Brittany Ingram Riggan, Ph.D., received her Doctorate Degree in Counseling Psychology from the University of Oklahoma on May 8, 2020.

Brittany is the daughter of Tammy Ingram, granddaughter of Dean and Karylyn Ingram, and great-granddaughter of Milburn Ingram.

Brittany attended the University of Central Oklahoma, where she earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Psychology and graduated with honors. She is a member of Alpha Lambda Delta, Gamma Beta Phi Honor Societies and received the Oklahoma Psychological Society's Outstanding Scholarship Award.

During her time at OU, she was fortunate to work on a publication regarding mental health treatment among the Native population with a prominent scholar and member of the Choctaw Nation, Dr. Rocky Robbins. She would like to thank him for this opportunity.

Brittany would like to express her sincere gratitude to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma for all their help and support in making this academic endeavor possible.

She will be working in the private sector in Oklahoma City while she completes her Postdoctoral Practice.



## Webb graduates from William and Murray

The family of Melissa Webb is proud to announce her graduation from the College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, in May 2020 with a major in biology and a minor in music amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Her late maternal great grandmother, Eva Southard, would have been pleased with her accomplishment.

Melissa plans to continue her education by pursuing her life-long dream of becoming a medical doctor. She is currently working as a Medical Scribe at Southampton Memorial Hospital, Franklin, Virginia, before attending medical school.



## Mitchell turns 100

Claud Frank Mitchell Sr. turned 100 on August 21, 2020. He was married to Marie Bogart for 61 years before she passed away in 2003.

Claud served in the U.S. Army for three years, participating in four major battles in World War II.

Mitchell had hoped to celebrate his 100th birthday with family and friends. But due to COVID-19, plans had to be put on hold until the family can all be together again.

Mitchell was glad that Chief Gary Batton and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. could visit with him before the lockdown to present him with his Veteran of the Month award.

## Rowland named SE director of Native American Institute



Lauren Rowland is now serving as director of the Native American Institute at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, a position she held previously from 2017 to 2018.

"I am very pleased to have Lauren back on our team," said Dr. Brad Ludrick, associate vice president for tribal relations and academic affairs. "She has tremendous background knowledge and experience in working with the tribes and our students, faculty and staff. Lauren will be instrumental in Native American programming on our campus, including facilitating the launch of the Semple Family Museum of Native American Art, overseeing advisement and retention of our Native American students, and developing strategic partnerships and initiatives with Tribal partners in our service region."

The Native American Institute is under the umbrella of The Center for Student Success, supervised by Dr. Marlin Blankenship, and is the administrative division responsible for undergraduate professional advising and student success at Southeastern. The Center includes the Academic Advising and Outreach Center, the Learning Center, the Online and Distance Advising Center, the Native American Institute, the Native American Excellence in Education grant program, and Freshman Programs.

Rowland holds a master's degree in educational policy and leadership studies from the University of Iowa, and a bachelor's in mathematics education from the University of Oklahoma.

She has nine years of experience in education, serving as a math instructor and professor at the public school and college level. Rowland was also the director of College and Career Resources at the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

In her previous stint at Southeastern, Rowland served as the project director for the \$1.4 million grant for teacher preparation from the U.S. Department of Education. She also was instrumental in securing a portion of a scholarship grant from the O.J. and Mary Christine Harvey Foundation.

Approximately 30 percent of Southeastern's enrollment is composed of Native American students. The Institute serves students in a variety of ways, providing services such as academic programs, tutoring, and cultural events.

## 87 years for Mary John



Happy 87th birthday Mary John. Family members Jessica (35) and Presley (3) celebrated birthdays as well.

## Five generations



Vickie Boyer, the granddaughter of Savannah Josephine Robinson Stultz Whitley and great-granddaughter of Myrtle Wade and Stulger Robison, is pictured with her daughter Karie Boyer, granddaughter Brittney McCullum, great-granddaughter Madison Boepple and great-great-granddaughter Zaylie Roskowske.

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**Choctaw Nation** Housing Authority

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The Choctaw Nation offers High School Equivalency Diploma classes online for all Choctaw members across the United States. Traditional classes, with an instructor, are also offered within the Choctaw Nation area for all federally recognized tribes.

Most students finish within 12 weeks of study. A \$250 incentive is available to students enrolled in the program upon completion. All books, supplies and testing fees are provided.

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Choctaw Nation HQ

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Eastern Oklahoma State College

**CONTACT:**

800-522-6170 EXT 2122 | [ADULTED@CHOCTAWNATION.COM](mailto:ADULTED@CHOCTAWNATION.COM)

**Choctaw Nation** Adult Education

**Nelda C. Graves**

Nelda C. Graves, 79, passed away June 15, 2020.

Nelda was born Feb. 20, 1941, in Hugo, Okla., to Noble C. Stephenson and Rena Louise Page Stephenson.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Frank Graves; brother Noble Calvin Stephenson Jr.; sister Ann Elder; son Michael Elder; niece Pam Hill; and her beloved dogs Tina, Gumper, and Turbo.

Nelda is survived by son James Elder; sisters Peggy Hill and Pat McGee; nephews Ron Hill, Larry Stephenson, and Lance Stephenson; nieces Vickie Wethington, Lana Luke, Lana Lewis, Madeline Howerton, Julie Barnson, Tammy Howerton and Susan Elder; grandsons Zach Elder, James Klugel, Matthew Graves and Zach Cochran; granddaughters Ashley Elder, Mary Ann Graves, Julene Graves and Lacey Smith; great-granddaughter Emma Elder; and numerous other family and friends.

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

**Ezra Dawn Jade Cole**

Ezra Dawn Jade Cole, 4, passed away July 14, 2020.

Ezra was born April 19, 2016, in Durant, Okla., to Joshua Michael Cole and Destiny Kay (Cole) Billy.

She is survived by her parents; sisters Elana White and Adrian Billy; maternal grandparents Margaret and Steven Cole; paternal grandparents Thomas Billy and Lachrisa Beck; cousin Oliver DeYoung; aunt Mikayla Cole; uncles Jeremy DeYoung and Aaron Billy; and numerous extended family.

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

**Benita Erwin**

Benita Erwin, 57, passed away July 5, 2020.

Benita was born May 20, 1963, in Ardmore, Okla., to Stevenson and Betty Hunter Wallace.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and sister Sheila Dewberry.

Benita is survived by husband Rick Erwin; children Nicole Erwin, Hunter Erwin, Jarrod Erwin and Danielle Erwin; siblings Shelly Wallace, Mike Thomas and spouse Tammy, Deena Thomas and spouse David, Jay Wallace and spouse Pamela, and Steven Wallace and spouse Courtney; step-mother Carol Wallace; sisters-in-law Pam Simpson, Lou Graves, Linda Smigelski, and Sharon Cobb.

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

**Gerald Wayne Gibson**

Gerald Wayne Gibson, 72, passed away July 12, 2020.

Gerald was born May 25, 1948, in Talihina, Okla., to Mary (Edwards) Gibson and Pat Gibson.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and brother Corkey Kennedy.

Gerald is survived by sisters Anita Messerschmidt and Cindy Turner; brother Jeff Gibson; children Laura Hope Caskey and Mary Kathleen Gibson Griffin; grandchildren Harley Elizabeth Ward, Hayden Thomas Gibson White, Magan Quint and Shawna Goetz; numerous nieces and nephews; very special lady Kim Sorrels; and loving dog Ben.

For the full obituary, please visit [McCarn Funeral Services](#).

**Glenna Moriane Creasy**

Glenna Moriane Creasy, 98, passed away July 2, 2020.

Glenna was born Nov. 15, 1921, to William Franklin Horace Ely Logan and Laura Potts Logan, and was raised in Albion, Okla.

She was preceded in death by daughter Diana Parks; son-in-law Bill Parks; and daughter-in-law Kelly Kenney.

She is survived by her husband Frank Ross Creasy Jr.; brother William (Bill) Logan; sister Eva Lanning; daughter Carolyn Trammell; son John Keeney; grandchildren Doris (Dodie) Turnbull and spouse Bill, Pamela Yarnell and spouse Phillip, William (Skip) Parks; great-grandchildren Diana Warren and spouse James, Russell McKenzie and spouse Heather, Christian Garbarino, Matthew Yarnell and spouse Kacie, Zachary Yarnell and spouse Rachel; great-grandchildren Alex McKenzie Drummond, Russell McKenzie Jr., Liam McKenzie, Wyatt Yarnell; and many nieces and nephews.

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

**Diana Parish Larocque**

Diana Parish Larocque, 66, passed away July 14, 2020.

Diana was born July 25, 1953, in Talihina, Okla., to Sampson and Mary (Taylor) Parish.

She was preceded in death by her husband Donald Larocque; her parents; baby sister Cora Parish; and nephew Shawn Barnett.

Diana was survived by daughter Melissa Davis and spouse Matt; siblings Loretta Cooper, Tom Parish, Steve Parish, Linda Parish, Jennifer Barnett, Helen Parish-Wang, Simon Parish, and Samuel Parish; grandson Chase Davis; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, friends and family members.

For the full obituary, please visit [Serenity Funeral Service](#).

**Toneva Ann Brunson**

Toneva Ann Brunson, 75, passed away July 16, 2020.

Toneva was born April 11, 1945, in Talihina, Okla., to Leona (Crites) and Joe McIntosh.

She was preceded in death by her husband Jesse Brunson; daughter Karey Brunson; her parents; brother Anthony McIntosh; and sister Trudy Goodson.

Toneva is survived by son Jessie Brunson and spouse Carolyn; grandchildren Samantha Brunson, Rebecca Brunson, Veronica Brunson and Anthony Brunson; great-granddaughter Lilith Brunson; sisters Dewena Moore and Edna Vannoy; many nieces, nephews, cousins and a host of friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [McCarn Funeral Service](#).

**Harrell Lee Ivey**

Harrell Lee Ivey, 41, passed away June 29, 2020.

Harrell was born Aug. 24, 1978.

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

**Helen Ruth Samuels**

Helen Ruth Samuels, 72, passed away May 23, 2020.

Helen was born April 16, 1948, in Bethel, Okla., to David and Caroline (Johnson) Bond.

She was preceded in death by her parents; stepson Curtis Samuels; step son-in-law Wayne Metcalf; brothers Adam and Earnest Bond; and sisters Ruby Taylor, Rose Rasha, and Lucy McKenny.

Helen is survived by her husband Nelson Samuels; sons Alex Vela Jr., Patrick Vela and spouse Frances, and Valentino Vela; step-daughters Katie Noahubi, Jamie Samuels and fiance' Brandon Tollison, Peggy Samuels, and Cindy Samuels; sister Daisy Watson; ten grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; eleven step-grandchildren; fourteen step-great-grandchildren; as well as many other family and friends.

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

**Ulene Mowdy**

Ulene Mowdy, 79, passed away July 2, 2020.

Ulene was born Feb. 11, 1941, in Oklahoma City, Okla., to Ulyesses and Alyene (Johnston) Tomlinson.

She was preceded in death by her husband Glenn Mowdy; daughter Janet Buchanan; and her parents.

Ulene is survived by daughter Annette Hamm and spouse Jerry; son Tony Mowdy and spouse Buffy; son-in-law Mack Buchanan; sister Lawana Dansby and spouse Ronald; brothers Donald Tomlinson and spouse Nell, and Wayne Tomlinson and spouse Linda; nine grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other family and friends.

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

**Inez Morrison**

Inez Thompson Morrison, 91, passed away July 22, 2020.

Inez was born May 4, 1929, in Pleasant Hill Community of McCurtain County, Oklahoma.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband James Morrison; daughter Patsy Morrison and brother Farris Thompson.

Inez is survived by sons James Michael Morrison, and Jim Heath and spouse Carol; daughter Janell Whiteman and spouse Bill; sister Maurice McLain; grandchildren Molly Wade and spouse Jerry Moore, Jason Stotts and spouse Holly, and Laura Todd and spouse Matthew; great-grandchildren Cody and Kelly Wade, Madison Stotts, and Mattilynn and Makayla Todd.

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

**Amos Wesley**

Amos "Chief" Wesley, 90, passed away July 24, 2020.

Chief was born April 30, 1930, in Rufe, Okla., to Jackson and Clarissa (Caldwell) Wesley.

He was preceded in death by his parents and four siblings.

Chief is survived by his wife Cleidith; sons Kenneth Sam Wesley and spouse Norma, and Richard Amos Wesley and spouse Donna; grandchildren Richard L. Wesley, Holly Bartek, and Summer Wesley; brothers Eugene Wesley and Willis Wesley; seven great-grandchildren; numerous nieces, nephews, family and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mt. Olive Funeral Home](#).

**George Leslie Hulsey**

George Leslie Hulsey, 77, passed away July 7, 2020.

George was born Aug. 21, 1942, in Tamaha, Okla., to Murle and Viola Hulsey.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sisters Murlene Daniel and Glenda Embrey; and daughter Andrea Hulsey.

George is survived by wife LaDeana; daughters Leslie Rowlands and spouse Tom, and Jeanine Kinney and spouse Sean; son Brhett Hulsey and spouse Chrissy; grandsons Drew Rowlands, Scout Skidgel, Tanner Skidgel, Braylen Hulsey, Simon Kinney and Barron Hulsey; granddaughters Alix Lucas, Allie Hutto, and Seah Skidgel; and many nieces and nephews.

For the full obituary, please visit [Floral Haven 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:

**Biskinik**  
PO Box 1210  
Durant OK 74702

or email: [biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)

**Mabel Lee Blake Martin**

Mabel Lee Blake Martin, 79, passed away July 7, 2020.

Mabel was born April 1, 1941, in Watson, Okla., to Herman and Nola Blake.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Joyce Spicer; brothers Almon Blake and Mike Blake; sister-in-law Louise Blake; and brother-in-law Otties Parish.

Mabel is survived by her husband Edward Eugene Martin; daughters DaNita Haile and spouse Ernest, and Melba Clark and spouse Obia; grandchildren Travis Haile and spouse Vicki, Tracy Fall and spouse Franklin, and Terrie Holley and fiance' Devin Avey; great-grandchildren Reese and Merritt Haile, Harper and Hudson Fall, Dakota Meeker, Karter Avey, and Zayleigh Avey; step great-grandsons Devin and Dawson Clark; brothers Tommy and Richard Blake and spouse Karen; sisters May Parish, Lou Phillips and spouse Buck, Edith Sinyard and spouse Gene, Anna Stafford and spouse Roy, Donna Smith and spouse Jimmy, and Francis Hartley and spouse Gary; sister-in-law Opal Blake; and many other extended family members and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Heber Springs Funeral Home](#).

**Eunice Bohanon**

Eunice Bohanon, 64, passed away July 3, 2020.

Eunice was born Aug. 19, 1955, to Robert Ray and Melissa (Peters) Bohanon.

She was preceded in death by her father; husband Kenneth; sisters Linda Jefferson and Margaret Ludlow; and brother Virgil Bohanon.

Eunice is survived by her mother; sons Tyron Bohanon and spouse Wanda, Brent Bohanon, and Trent Bohanon; brother Herb Bohanon and spouse Marvada; sisters Mary Bohanon, Emmy Baker and spouse Andy, Betty Tom and spouse Jimmy, Brenda James and spouse Tony, and Lois Bohanon; grandchildren Keisha, Dixie, and Nia; great-grandchildren King and Kalen; other relatives and many friends.

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

**Jerome Finch**

Jerome Finch, 42, passed away July 6, 2020.

Jerome was born May 18, 1978, in Talihina, Okla., to Eddie and Melani Finch.

He was preceded in death by his mother; maternal grandparents Sam and Joyce Roebuck; paternal grandparents Bodgie and Leola Finch; and two uncles Bodgie Finch Jr. and Lyndell Finch.

Jerome is survived by his wife Brandi Smallwood; sons Kade Briar Finch, Zane Nolan Finch, and Rowdy Finch; daughters Sage Smallwood and Rebeka Finch; his father; sisters Tamara Rice and spouse Stormy, DeAnne Long and spouse Craig; brothers by an unbreakable bond Josh Williams and Luke Seeton; along with many other relatives and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Miller & Miller Funeral Chapel](#).

**John W. Branch Jr.**

John W. Branch Jr., 99, passed away July 11, 2020.

John was born April 20, 1921, in Duncan, Okla., to Cleytus and John W. Branch.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Barbara; three of his siblings; and the majority of his Band of Brothers.

John is survived by his children Judith Ann McKnight, John Dennis Branch, and Jean Rae Ratterman; grandchildren Melissa Warsaw, Amy Evers, Thomas, Patrick and Samuel McKnight, and Chelsea and Ian Ratterman; great-grandchildren Lauryn and Noah Evers, and Ryder, Finley, Caitlyn and Michael McKnight.

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

**Yvonne Louise Starkey**

Yvonne Louise Starkey, 72, passed away March 17, 2020.

Yvonne was born June 17, 1947, to Arnold Benjamin Starkey and Evelyn Dora (Wallen) Starkey.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Joyce Ann Starkey; and brother Frank Starkey.

Yvonne is survived by daughter Whitlea Rose Fixico and spouse Isaac Bowen; grandchildren Aidyn Fixico, Brianna Bell, and Kaden Fixico; sisters Rita Thacker and Linda Starkey; and brother John Starkey.

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





Natalie Delozier



Michael Merrill



Landry Oneal



Trinity Osborn



Madelynn Bryce

## Choctaw Nation students attend the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute

Oklahoma City, OKLA —Several Choctaw Nation students were selected through a competitive audition process to attend the state’s official School for the Arts.

Nearly 270 young artists from across Oklahoma—including six from the Choctaw Nation—spent a week studying with internationally renowned faculty and celebrity guest artists at the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute (OSAI). The attendees were selected from over 1,000 applicants during a competitive state-wide audition process last winter. They studied one of eight artistic disciplines: acting, chorus, creative writing, dance, drawing and painting, film and video, orchestra or photography.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute could not be held at Quartz Mountain in the Wichita Mountains this year. Instead of canceling the program, the organization created robust online programming, called “OSAI at Home.” With even more instructors than usual and nightly presentations from superstars like Misty Copeland of American Ballet Theatre, students convened in the online world for masterclasses with artist-educators in their field, workshopping and critiques, one-on-one lessons, and opportunities to build community with other young artists from across the state.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister commended the Oklahoma Arts Institute’s innovative online program.

“In the face of uncertainty and change, the Oklahoma Arts Institute made a commitment to the state’s most talented students that the show would, indeed, go on—despite the uncertainties created by the COVID-19 pandemic,” Hofmeister said. “OAI’s pivot to an online Summer Arts Institute has proven that where there’s a will, there’s a way. As a result, students across the state were able to learn and create under the tutelage of exceptional instructors and guest artists.”

Students at OSAI at Home received specialized instruction from university professors like award-winning poet Sasha Pimentel of the University of Texas at El Paso and actor-educator Daniel Spector of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. Spector said that he did not give his students the “high school version” of his curriculum, but taught his class at a collegiate level.

Several Choctaw Nation students attended OSAI and had glowing comments on what they learned despite not being able to participate in person.

Trinity Osborn from Norman, Oklahoma said, “One of the most important things that I learned from OSAI At Home was the importance of integrating emotion into my movements when dancing.”

Osborn added, “Dance is beautiful to watch, but when a dancer effectively shows emotion with their body, it creates a deeper and more mesmerizing performance.”

“During OSAI at Home, my instructors taught me to be confident in what I do, and to work hard because life doesn’t last forever and this time will go by quickly,” said Natalie Delozier from Tulsa, Oklahoma. “They taught me new techniques and ways of approaching my playing that brought a new light to the way I practice,” added Delozier.

Michael Merrill from Mounds, Oklahoma said, “My instructors taught me to try to phrase my music better.”

Merrill added, “I can play the notes with good intonation, but I need to develop the music more with phrasing. This will help me leave the listener with a feeling or mood about the music I play.”

“Access to arts education in my town is limited. We have fantastic arts programs but not very many opportunities to play outside of contests and honor bands,” said Landry O’Neal from Marlow, Oklahoma.

“OSAI has given me many opportunities to learn from professionals. You learn so much from them just by asking questions and from the knowledge that they share about the music world,” added O’Neal.

While working from home provided challenges to students and faculty alike, the students and faculty found that the “Quartz Mountain Magic”—the spirit of community and collaboration—could, in fact, exist online.

Participants particularly enjoyed the nightly guest artist lectures and Q&A sessions, where the students had a chance to learn and interact with dancer Misty Copeland and other extraordinary artists, including Tony Award-winner Kelli O’Hara and creator of the “Radiolab” podcast, Jad Abumrad.

Merrill was particularly impressed with Abumrad, saying, “I learned from Jad Abumrad that if you commit to something, it will happen.”

Superintendent Hofmeister applauded the students’ hard work and commitment to their art form.

“I am so proud of these students. The fire inside them burns bright, and their courageous creativity will ensure a brighter future for the state of Oklahoma,” Hofmeister said.

Madelynn Bryce, from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, emphasized the importance

of that courageous creativity, saying, “During my time at OSAI at Home, our orchestra class was replaced with a musicianship class, solely dedicated to building up all of your musical skills excluding our instruments. I didn’t know what to expect, but my participation in this class has taught me so much about myself as a musician, including the importance of habits, mental practice and confidence. These are some of the most important things I know I will learn as a musician and am very grateful for it.”

Through its partnership with the State of Oklahoma and support from numerous private donors, the Arts Institute ensures that every student accepted to OSAI receives a full scholarship to attend. Funding for the students’ scholarships was provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Jasmine Moran Scholarship Fund (Osborn), the Albert and Hete Barthelmes Foundation and H.A. & Mary K. Chapman Foundation (Delozier), the McCasland Foundation Scholars Fund and the Jack and Judy Bryan Scholarship Fund (Hodgson), the George Kaiser Family Foundation (Merrill) the McCasland Foundation Scholars Fund (O’Neal) and the Albert and Hete Barthelmes Foundation and the George and Betty Kaiser Scholarship Fund (Bryce). The Oklahoma Arts Council provided additional program support, the Jerome Westheimer Family Foundation, The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, the Hearst Foundations, the Harris Foundation, the OKC Midtown Rotary Club and the Zarrow Foundations. This project was supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Oklahoma Arts Institute (OAI) is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1977. Its mission is to provide exceptional multidisciplinary arts experiences that develop individual talent and inspire a lifelong passion for the arts. In addition to the Summer Arts Institute, OAI administers a series of continuing education workshops for adults every fall. For more information, visit [oaiquartz.org](http://oaiquartz.org).

## Housing Headlines

By Tabatha Jackson

One of the most successful programs Choctaw Housing now has is our voucher program for home rehabilitation. It allows the homeowner the ability to have repairs made on their home themselves by utilizing a voucher provided by the Tribe.

The Homeowners Rehabilitation Voucher Program through Housing provides assistance to homeowners for home repairs and 504 ADA accessibility items to single-family homes. Eligible repairs are based on a priority list provided through a home inspection conducted by the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation.

Homeowners must meet the eligible priority score of at least 40 based on income, age, and family size. If you are disabled, you will receive disability points. Voucher amounts are up to \$10,000 and up to \$15,000 for disabled persons or veterans. You can apply and qualify for three consecutive years up to \$30,000.

The homeowner receiving the voucher is responsible for contacting contractors for bids and entering into a contract with the contractor for completion of the work according to the priority list. Once the work is complete, the signed approved voucher is submitted for payment and work is confirmed through an inspection. This program is available within the 10 ½ counties of the Choctaw Nation and does require a lien to be filed on your property.

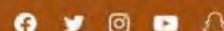
Applications can be obtained online, at community centers or at the Choctaw Housing office. For more information call 800-235-3087.

Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

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## THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS FOOD VOUCHERS

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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

# Get hooked on Southeast Oklahoma fishing

By Christian Toews

The lake gently lapping against the shore in the morning; the plop of a lure hitting a calm pond; the sound of a reel whirling out when you set a hook. Fishing is relaxing and exciting at the same time. No matter what type of fishing you enjoy, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has something to offer. From fly fishing in Broken Bow to bass fishing on a scenic lake, this area will surprise you with its options.

The sport of fishing is very popular, according to the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. In the U.S., 50 million people ages six and up went fishing in 2019. That means 17% of the U.S. population cast a lure at least once. While some of this was saltwater fishing, freshwater fishing was the most popular type across the U.S. at 81%.

Fishing is no longer the boys' club it was once thought to be. Over one-third of participants in 2019 were women, according to the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. The gap between men and women participating in the sport continues to shrink every year.

Even colleges are recognizing the popularity of fishing. Many schools are now offering scholarships for bass fishing. While bass fishing is not currently recognized as an NCAA sport, colleges across the country have teams and compete in multiple tournaments each year.

You would be hard-pressed to find a place that has deeper fishing roots than southeastern Oklahoma. While some might think of Oklahoma as a dusty and dry state, the dust bowl days are a thing of the past.

According to the Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma has nearly 1.2 million acres of impounded water. The state has 23,000 miles of rivers and streams and 73 reservoirs larger than 500 acres, containing a combined total of 660,000 acres. Many of these rivers and lakes are connected to the Ouachita and Ozark mountain ranges of southeastern Oklahoma. These two ranges provide watershed and beauty to the area. You can discover more details about great fishing locations within the Choctaw Nation by visiting the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's website.

Jon James is an angler who grew up in Oklahoma and lives near Atoka. He was involved in the professional fishing industry for 10 years and has fished most of the top spots across the United States. He says there is something special about fishing in southeastern Oklahoma.

"I've fished all over the country, and there is a reason I came back to this area. A lot of it has to do with the lakes here," he said. James said he primarily fishes for bass. He said there is a large array of fish in the lakes in the Choctaw Nation and surrounding area. The variety in fishing options in southeastern Oklahoma is one of the reasons he enjoys fishing there.

"I love the diversity we have here. You have so many lakes, and they all have something unique to offer," said James.



Photos by Christian Toews

Jon James uses his bass boat to fish the best locations on McGee Creek Reservoir in McGee Creek State Park. The Reservoir, located near Atoka, Oklahoma, has 64 miles of shoreline where fishermen will find an abundance of large and smallmouth bass, channel catfish, perch, crappie and sunfish.

Oklahoma has more to offer than fishing lakes and ponds. Broken Bow, Oklahoma, offers world-class fly fishing. Chris Schatte is a guide with Beavers Bend Fly Fishing. He has been fly fishing since he was very young.

"My grandfather bought me a bamboo fly rod for Christmas when I was eight, and I used it for years and years," stated Schatte.

When asked about how fly fishing in Broken Bow compares to other locations across the country, Schatte noted, "The thing about fly fishing here is the river fishes year-round. Our river is very diverse in the way it flows. It is a fast Colorado style river in parts to a wide Virginia style river in others. Ankle deep water to deep pools."

According to Schatte, fly fishing is a unique style of fishing because the angler is actively involved in the process. He says that people new to fly fishing should expect to have a lot of fun while learning and improving in the sport.

In case you need more reasons to go fishing, there are several health benefits to the sport. Fishing can keep you physically fit. While fishing itself isn't necessarily going to burn many calories, often, the best fishing spots take a bit of hiking or paddling to get to.

Fishing has also been associated with lowering stress. Most anglers agree that fishing is very relaxing and a good way to spend time with friends and family. A 2009 Harvard Medical School study conducted by a team of researchers drawn from the University of

Southern Maine, the University of Utah and the Veterans Affairs in Salt Lake City, found that military veterans had significant reductions in stress and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms as well as improvements in sleep quality after participating in a fly-fishing retreat.

Eating fish also has many health benefits.

According to The Mayo Clinic, the omega-3 fatty acids in fish may decrease blood pressure and lower the risk of stroke and heart failure. Enjoying some grilled trout after a long day on the river is an excellent way to end the day.

Whether you want to fish for striper in Lake Texoma near Durant, bass in McGee Creek Lake, trout in Broken Bow, or maybe try your luck at all of it, southeastern Oklahoma is truly a fishing destination.

The next time you are planning a family trip or a weekend getaway with your friends, consider fishing in one of the many rivers, streams, lakes or ponds found within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the surrounding area.



Chris Schatte fly fishes on the lower Mountain Fork River in Beavers Bend State Park.



## HOME LOANS AVAILABLE TO TRIBAL MEMBERS THROUGH THE HUD SECTION 184

- Available to Choctaw Tribal Members
- No maximum income guidelines
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- Apply with Choctaw Home Finance Dept.
- Home site must be in a HUD 184 approved Indian service area
- Fixed current market interest rate up to a 30 year term

**Choctaw Nation** Housing Authority



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### TO PRINT YOUR RENEWAL:

- Auto renewal for 2020 at [gooutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://gooutdoorsoklahoma.com) (download app and website license)

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

# Starting the conversation could be the first step to preventing suicide

By Chris Jennings

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there have been nearly 1 million years of life lost due to suicide before the age of 65.

A disproportionately large percentage of those deaths have been American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN), and it's getting worse. The suicide rate among AI/AN has been increasing since 2003. In 2015, AI/AN suicide rates were 21.5 per 100,000, more than 3.5 times higher than those among racial/ethnic groups with the lowest rates.

Suicide is a complex issue with many contributing risk factors. A history of violence, including sexual abuse, depression and other mental health disorders, substance abuse or a family history of any of those are just some of the risk factors.

Director of Behavioral Health for the Choctaw Nation Shauna Humphreys said, "Several risk factors can contribute to suicidality. Men are more likely to die by suicide than women, but women are more likely to attempt suicide."

According to a National Institute of Justice study, 84% of AI/AN women experience violence in their lifetime, a fact that could contribute to the higher rates of suicide amongst Native women.

Since 1999 the suicide rate across the US has risen 33%. For Native American women, that rate jumps to 139% according to a 2019 CDC report. The rate in the same time frame for native men increased 71%.

One way to help combat suicide is by talking about it. Still, there can be a stigma associated with talking about suicide and other mental health issues.

"Asking someone about suicide is not harmful and is the best way to identify someone at risk. This applies to other mental health issues as well," said Humphreys.

Behavioral Health Public Safety Liaison, Bryan Rowley said, "We need to normalize the discussion and seeking out of mental health. We all have issues that we can improve upon, and wanting to better ourselves, however that looks, should be applauded."

**1. ASK:**  
"Are you thinking about killing yourself?" It's not an easy question but studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.

**2. KEEP THEM SAFE:**  
Reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.

**3. BE THERE:**  
Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Research suggests acknowledging and talking about suicide may in fact reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts.

**4. HELP THEM CONNECT:**  
Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's number in your phone so it's there when you need it: **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. You can also help make a connection with a trusted individual like a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.

**5. STAY CONNECTED:**  
Staying in touch after a crisis or after being discharged from care can make a difference. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

For more information on suicide prevention:  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention)  
[www.bethetto.com](http://www.bethetto.com)

 National Institute of Mental Health  
NIMH Identifier No. OM 18-435  
Revised 2019

Being able to talk about these things in a non-judgmental way can help those who are struggling. "Being willing to talk about the mental health issue, to listen to others, allowing expressions of feelings and showing support of others who are in need...allows others to be more comfortable talking about their struggles and they will know they are not alone," said Humphreys.

Often the negative stigma associated with discussing mental health issues may prevent some people from seeking the help they need. The stereotypes of counseling

being for the weak or feelings of shame for seeking help continue to perpetuate the misconceptions about seeking counseling.

Most people who do seek out mental health services don't have a serious mental illness. Usually, they are just going through a challenging time, but seeking help before stressors begin to pile-up can help before problems get out of hand and become more serious. Choosing to view therapy as a positive, healthy choice can help overcome some of the negative stigmas associated with it.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. However, funding for suicide research lags behind research for other common causes of death.

"It (funding) affects what we have to offer tremendously. More research needs to be done in the area of suicide and suicide prevention; however, with minimal funding, we can't do the research that is needed," said Humphreys.

In the research that has been done, cultural factors have been shown to impact mental health. The CDC reports that the high prevalence of suicide among the AI/AN population and the differences in suicide circumstances among AI/AN descendants illustrate some of the underlying issues these populations face. Focused, yet comprehensive, suicide prevention and intervention efforts are needed that incorporate culturally relevant, evidence-based strategies at the individual, interpersonal and community levels.

While there are several pieces to suicide that need to be addressed, there are two that stand out.

"The prevention piece is critical in recognizing the issue before it becomes a suicide attempt, while the treatment piece is crucial to help those that are experiencing suicidal ideation," said Humphreys. "The main thing that schools, family and friends can do to help is to be aware of the risk factors and warning signs of suicide."

"We can help the people in our lives who may be having emotional issues or even suicidal ideation by being present and aware of what's going on with them. I think for a lot of people, their nature is to hide the things that hurt them, especially from the people we love for a number of reasons," said Rowley.

The stigma associated with talking about suicide and other mental health issues may mean that family members or friends need to start the conversation.

Asking someone if they're thinking about suicide is often the best way to prevent it.

"There is a common misconception that talking about suicide will 'put the idea in someone's head'; however, this is a myth. Asking someone about suicide is not harmful and is the best way to identify someone at risk," said Humphreys.

"Having phone numbers, organizations or names of people that can help is vital in those instances because there is no expectation for you as the friend or family member to take on the role of counselor with them. Offer to walk the path of healing with them," said Rowley.

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, help is available by going to a local mental health clinic or calling the crisis hotline or text line.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255  
**Text Crisis Line:** Text "hello" to 741-741  
**Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health:** 918-567-3065

## Choctaw Nation Employs Behavioral Health Public Safety Liaison



Photo by Kendra Sikes/Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Bryan Rowley, Public Safety Liaison, stands with several of the Public Safety Officers he supports through the Mental Health program. From left to right: Lieutenant Nathan Hill; Lieutenant Brant Henry; Sergeant Mike Johnson; Bryan Rowley; Patrolman Matt Barreras; Investigator Blake Wigington

DURANT, Okla. July 27, 2020 – Mental Health care is at the forefront of the Choctaw Nation's public health initiatives. A Behavioral Health Public Safety Liaison is now at work, assisting law enforcement personnel and the individuals they encounter.

"Sadly, Native Americans are 1.5 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts or die by suicide than other nationalities according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)," notes Bryan Rowley, a Licensed Professional Counselor. "Many programs have been initiated to combat the rate of suicide in the Choctaw Nation communities over time. It is my honor to help support these efforts in new ways."

Rowley, formerly a ropes course facilitator for the Choctaw Nation residential substance abuse treatment programs and former police officer, has a unique skill set. Rowley emphasized, "my heart is in helping people...I'm a mind guy."

Choctaw Nation's Executive Director of Public Safety John Hobbs explained that one reason behind this program was to "change the mindset and reduce the stigma of mental health issues] within public safety."

He expressed that the first goal of the liaison is to aid in the training and decompressing of the officers themselves. "Now is a difficult time to be in law enforcement." Within a few short weeks of the position being in place, officers have already reached out to Rowley for assistance.

Nationally in 2018, 172 police officers died of suicide, increasing to 228 in 2019. Taking care of officers is important to Hobbs, as well as the Choctaw Nation as a whole.

Hobbs said that his officers "never know what they will encounter," and the objective is to provide them access to resources to get help at the root of an issue. Rowley believes in a problem-oriented approach, adding that "many times the individuals in emotionally charged incidents such as domestic disputes and violent episodes have underlying issues, like substance abuse or a history of depression."

With the program in its infancy, future expansion is still being assessed. Nathan Billy, Choctaw Nation Deputy Director of Behavioral Health, said, "they might add another individual to the team, but what that looks like is still undetermined." One scenario is to have one liaison focused on the law enforcement personnel's training and personal health, and another for assisting the officers in dealing with the general public.

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### Southwestern Roasted Corn Salad

- 8 ears fresh corn in husks
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic,

- peeled and minced
- 3 lime limes, juiced
- 1 teaspoon white sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon hot sauce

**Preparation**

1. Place the corn in a large pot with enough water to cover and soak at least 15 minutes.
2. Preheat grill for high heat. Remove silks from corn, but leave the husks.
3. Place corn on the preheated grill. Cook, occasionally turning, 20 minutes, or until tender. Remove from heat, cool slightly, and discard husks.
4. Cut the corn kernels from the cob, and place it in a medium bowl. Mix in the red bell pepper, green bell pepper, and red onion.
5. In a blender or food processor, mix the cilantro, olive oil, garlic, lime juice, sugar, salt, pepper and hot sauce. Blend until smooth, and stir into the corn salad.

## HOME VISITATION

**WHAT WE DO**

- Home Visits: Twice a month, a Home Visitor will meet with you and talk about whatever is on your mind and share information regarding your child's development. We follow an evidence-based curriculum - Parents as Teachers.
- Assessments: A variety of assessments are conducted on schedule to make sure your child is developing on-track, checking for environmental safety hazards, and screening for postpartum depression along with other assessments to ensure complete health and wellness of the family.
- Resources: we are here to support you and your child in all needs. We have a variety of resources available to help meet those needs.
- Monthly Family Group Connections: Once a month, a meeting is hosted in various locations across the service area. Families are encouraged to attend and meet other parents who are expecting and parenting.

**ELIGIBILITY**

Required for all Home Visiting Programs:

- Live within the 10.5 county service area of the Choctaw Nation
- Be expecting or parenting a Native American child under the age of one year

Additional eligibility will be determined upon contacting the Case Manager. Each program is slightly different. These may include:

- Low income
- Parents under the age of 24
- Past or present history of child abuse or neglect
- Past or present history of substance abuse
- Tobacco users
- Low student achievement
- Developmental delays or disabilities
- Military family

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Choctaw Nation Outreach Services

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September 2020

All markets open weekdays, September 1-25  
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Participants can request a calendar at their location.

- ANTLERS** 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443
- BROKEN BOW** 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842
- DURANT** 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773
- MCALESTER** 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716
- POTEAU** 100 Kerr Ave., 918-649-0431

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Women, Infants and Children

Location	Days	Hours
Antlers 580-298-3161	1st & 2nd Tue. Every Month	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Atoka 580-889-5825	Mon., Wed., Thur., & Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Battiest 580-241-5458	1st Tue. of Every Month	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Broken Bow 580-584-2746	Tue. & Thur. (except for Battiest & Smithville days)	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Durant 580-920-2100 x-83582	Daily Mon. - Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Hugo 580-326-9707	Daily Mon. - Fri.	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Idabel 580-286-2600 x-41113	Daily Mon. - Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
McAlester 918-423-6335	Daily Mon. - Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Poteau 918-649-1106	Daily Mon. - Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Smithville 580-244-3289	1st Thur. of Every Month	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Spiro 918-962-5134	Wed., Thur., & Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Stigler 918-867-4211	Mon. & Tue.	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Talihina 918-567-7000 x-6792	Daily Mon. - Fri.	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Wilburton 918-465-5641	Mon. 7 Fri.	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Mobile Clinic	Tues., Wed., & Thurs.	8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Building Healthy Families Through Good Nutrition

## Nation's first Physician Assistant Celebrates 33 Years

DURANT, Okla. August 11, 2020 – Mary Boerner has been a Certified Physician Assistant (PA-C) for 33 years with the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority. Her career has spanned three decades, two hospitals and many babies born within the Choctaw Nation.

Boerner remembers working rotations in 1986 at the old hospital. “The building was old and frequently had power outages,” making caring for the patients challenging. There were seven doctors employed for the entire hospital. Each rotated through the emergency room (ER) at night to ensure the emergencies were taken care of promptly. Through all these challenges, she fell in love with rural medicine and the impact she had on people's lives.

Upon finishing her degree, Boerner decided she wanted to stay with the Choctaw Nation and had to sell the hospital administrators on having physician assistants. The hospital added her and another physician assistant to the staff and immediately scheduled them for rotation through the ER to help the doctors. They worked the night shift in the ER for two weeks, then switched to working days in the clinic for the next two.

The administrators recognized the struggle and dedication this took and approached Boerner after a year and a half to offer tuition help if she stayed for three years. Thinking there was no way she would stay that long, she pressed ahead and thoroughly surpassed the expectations.

After five years, Boerner transferred to Women's Health, where she has been ever since. She loves the patient interaction she gets every day at work and is now seeing babies born from mothers she helped bring into this world. “We practice medicine. It evolves and changes regularly.” If she were to advise someone starting in medicine today, she'd simply say “buckle up.”

If she had to do it all over again, she “wouldn't change a thing.” With the belief and drive that women should take care of each other, she will continue doing just that – taking care of the women who step through her door.



## Travel Plaza discounts with Chahta Rewards app

By Shelia Kirven

Everyone likes to save money. The new CHAHTA REWARDS app can help you do just that when shopping inside the store or purchasing fuel at any of the Choctaw Nation's seventeen travel plazas located throughout the 10.5 counties. The first-ever loyalty program for the Choctaw Travel Plazas, Chahta Rewards is providing a way for customers to earn rewards on everyday purchases.

Icy Conn, the Executive Director of Retail Food and Beverage for the Choctaw Nation's Division of Commerce, said, “The Chahta Rewards program offers our guests an unprecedented opportunity to take advantage of manu-

facturing marketing dollars not previously available. Major companies such as Coca Cola, General Mills and Pepsi are willing to support their brands and provide our guests with great savings on fuel and purchases.”

Travel Plaza customers can earn cents off per gallon of gas or in-store purchases on promotions. Rewards shoppers will use their 10-digit phone number to earn and redeem rewards with the app.

To get the app, download CHAHTA REWARDS to your phone in the App Store or Google Play and start saving today.

To learn more about the Choctaw Travel Plazas, visit <https://choctaw-travelplazas.com>.

## Officer Recognized for Saving Life

DURANT, Okla. August 6, 2020 – What started out like any other hot summer day recently in Bryan County, proved anything but routine for Matt Barreras, a member of the Choctaw Nation Tribal Police. Patrolman Barreras saved the life of a heat stroke victim.



Durant's KLBC 106.3 radio station recognized Patrolman Barreras for his quick-thinking rescue as one of its First Responders of the Week during the month of July.

A member of the Choctaw Nation Public Safety dispatch team wrote and submitted a nomination to the radio station stating, “Matt never brags about the small things he does that are lifesaving. He is always on the ball when it comes to lending a hand to other agencies in need. He was recently out on patrol and radioed that he came across a man lying in the ditch exhausted from the heat... he called for medical assistance and provided the man with water and helped cool him down until EMS was able to arrive.”

In addition to the on-air recognition, Chris Witherspoon, with KLBC, came to the Choctaw Nation Department of Public Safety in Durant to present Barreras with a certificate.

“I love my job and look forward to coming to work every day,” Barreras said. “I consider it a blessing to be able to provide law enforcement services to the people and communities throughout the Choctaw Nation.”

In August, Barreras will mark 11 years with the Choctaw Nation and 10 years with the Choctaw Public Safety Department. He started in law enforcement in 2007 with the Durant Police Department Reserve Program.

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## STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

AVOID CLOSE CONTACT WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE SICK

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AVOID TOUCHING YOUR EYE, NOSE AND MOUTH

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STAY HOME WHEN YOU ARE SICK, EXCEPT TO GET MEDICAL CARE

WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN WITH SOAP AND WATER FOR AT LEAST 20 SECONDS

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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

## Are Virtual Medical Visits for you?

Virtual Medical Visit services enables healthcare access to patients who are not able to travel to the provider for specific, non-life threatening, injuries or illnesses.

The service is a video appointment with a healthcare provider; that is available to patients with specific symptoms. Patients may have 3 virtual visits within a 30 day period, then must physically see a provider.

**Eligibility**  
To qualify for a virtual medical visit, patient must:

- Be a CDIB holder and have a current Consent to Treat on file.
- Live in Oklahoma and be age five (5) years or older.
- Have an active chart at any Choctaw Nation Health Services facility and have been seen within the last 12 months.

**To qualify for Virtual Medical Visits, you must meet eligibility requirements and have one of the approved symptoms:**

- allergies
- poison ivy
- sunburn
- head lice
- pink eye
- insect bite(s)
- cough/cold
- yeast infection
- cold sores
- recurrent genital herpes

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
Please call (580) 916-9231 or visit us online at [www.choctawnation.com/virtualvisits](http://www.choctawnation.com/virtualvisits)

**Choctaw Nation Health Services**

*Living out the Chahta Spirit. FAITH • FAMILY • CULTURE*

# BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

## September 2020

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Supreme Court ruling could rewrite history books.

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Get hooked on Southeast Oklahoma fishing.

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

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