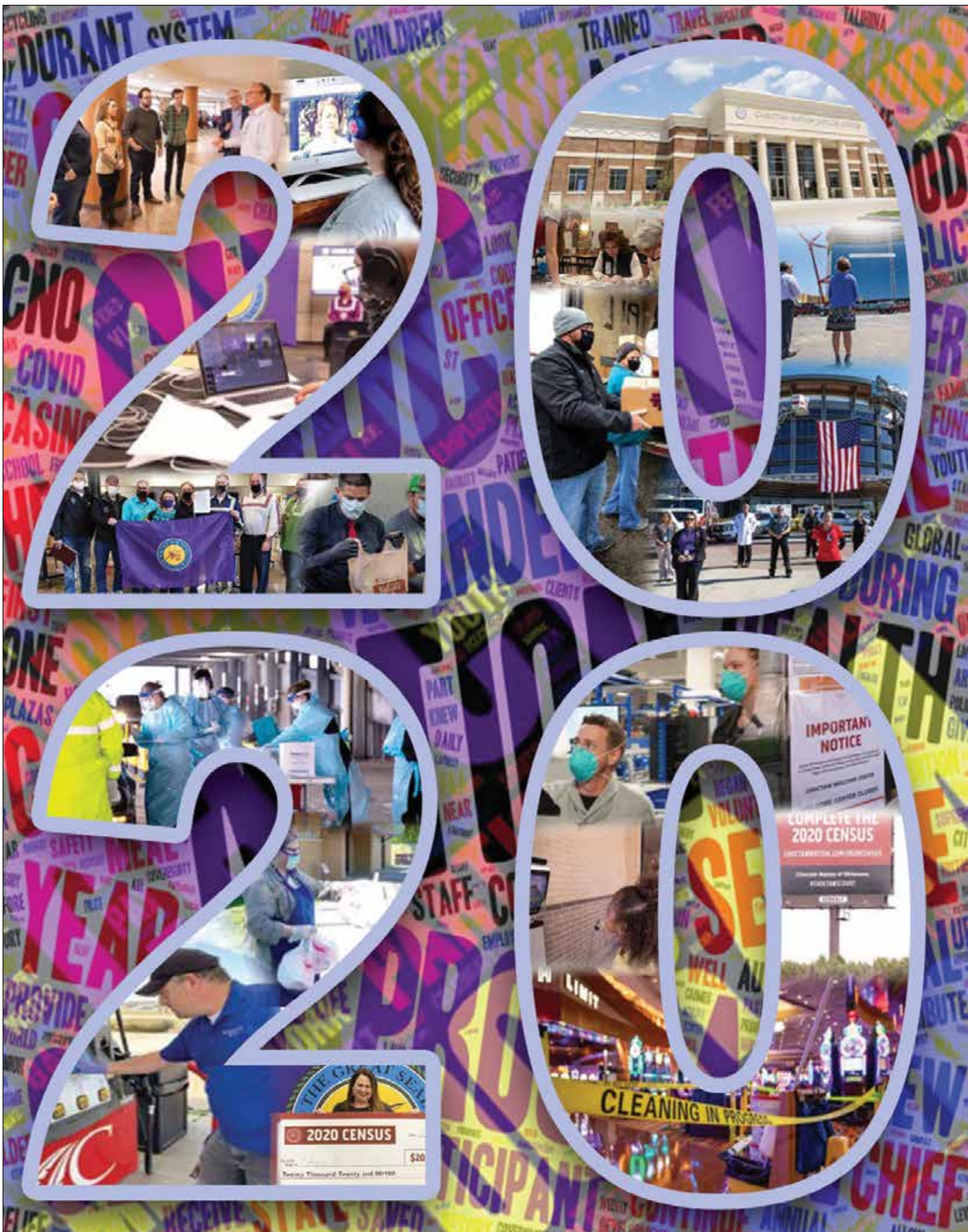




January 2021 Issue



Graphic by Chris Jennings

# 2020, A look back at a year like no other

By Shelia Kirven

We will never forget the year 2020. Surely, it will be recorded in the history books from this day forward as a time the modern world struggled daily to navigate life through a global pandemic, one that we never thought we would have to endure. Like our Choctaw ancestors, who knew how to adapt and be resilient during even the worst of times, our Chahta spirit and commitment to serving others has given us the ability to continue our mission and goals.

## JANUARY

- Former Choctaw Chief Allen Wright was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.
- The Choctaw Nation continued its 2020 Census campaign.
- New construction projects continue, with the largest being the 19-story Sky Tower at the Durant Casino and Resort and the new childcare center in Durant.
- The Choctaw Nation and Bell Textron Inc. announced an agreement to add Bell to the CNO UASIPP team and begin testing Bell innovations and systems on CNO-owned property as part of the Federal Aviation Administration Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration Pilot Program. The Choctaw Nation became the first tribal government to be recognized by the FFA as a public aircraft operator and was selected to be a lead participant in the BEYOND project.
- The Choctaw Recycling Program celebrated ten years of operation, processing a total of 25 million pounds of recyclable materials through centers located in Durant and Poteau.

## FEBRUARY

- The Hunting and Fishing Compact was extended through Dec. 31, 2020.

## MARCH

- Choctaw Casino and Resorts temporarily suspend operations to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Soon after, wellness centers, community centers and administrative offices closed. All employees received pay and benefits during the temporary closure.
- Choctaw Nation frontline employees worked hard to ensure essential services and that the Nation could still operate during the pandemic. Several programs continued to provide vital services to tribal members. Travel plazas, country markets, community centers, food distribution centers, clinics and the Poteau Prescription Refill Center all remained open with associate volunteers' support. A total of 716 staff members volunteered 5,498 hours during the COVID-19 pandemic response.
- Health Care Services began seeing patients through telehealth visits and administered COVID testing at health care locations.
- Choctaw Casino & Resort in Pocola donated more than \$4,800 worth of fresh food to local schools in partnership with Keystone Food Services.

## APRIL

- The Geographic Information Systems team created an online map to help Choctaw Nation author-

ities determine the potential success of the 2020 U.S. Census through daily updates on response rates for every city and county within the Choctaw Nation. The team also created a map to help track the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic within the Nation's boundaries and throughout Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas.

- Over \$5,000 in perishable foods were donated by Choctaw Casino & Resort in Durant to a nearby shelter, helping more than 250 families.
- Walmart partnered with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to provide thousands of fresh fruits and vegetables to CDIB cardholders throughout southeastern Oklahoma. Southeastern Ice Company used its trucks to deliver food to areas throughout the Nation's jurisdiction. Over 100 CNO staff members volunteered to help.
- Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA) opened COVID-19 testing to the general public at its McAlester clinic to help individuals and health systems better combat the spread.
- Choctaw Nation announced associate blood donations since 2004 totaled 18,423 whole blood units, saving up to 55,289 lives. In addition, 2071 red blood cell units saved 12,426 lives for a combined total of up to 67,695 lives saved from 2004 through February 2020.

## MAY

- The Choctaw Nation announced a recovery plan and enhanced safety protocols and other guidelines for all CNO operations and facilities. Phase 1 began on May 15, with approximately 25% of the CNO workforce returning to onsite workstations.

## JUNE

- Phase 2 of the recovery plan began as Choctaw casino operations, and Casino Too locations in travel plazas reopen with increased health and safety measures.
- The Tribe received relief dollars from Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. CARES funding programs began to be administered for tribal members.

## JULY

- The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case of McGirt v. Oklahoma – a historic win for American Indian rights at the Supreme Court – prompting changes to the role the state government plays in the lives of many Oklahomans.
- The 73rd annual Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Summer Youth Employment Program went virtual in order to allow participants the chance to still participate in the annual program, the first time in its history.
- The First modern-day jury trial was held at Choctaw Nation Judicial Center in Durant.
- Tribes' gaming compacts with the state automatically renewed for an additional 15-year term beginning on Jan. 1, 2020.

## AUGUST

- Choctaw Nation Tribal Police officer, Matt Barre-

## SEPTEMBER

- Choctaw Travel Plazas introduced the new Chahta Rewards app. The first-ever loyalty program for the Choctaw Travel Plazas.
- The first-ever virtual State of the Nation Address was delivered to the Choctaw people by Chief Gary Batton via a video message.
- Choctaw Nation associates from January 2020 to September 2020, donated over 2,300 units of blood, potentially saving 7,000 lives.
- The State-of-the-art 101,000 square foot Cultural Center in Durant nears completion with an opening date of early 2021.
- The Choctaw Nation Forestry Department fire-fighters flew to California to help fight wildfires.
- Choctaw Judge Rebecca A. Cryer passed away, leaving a legacy for generations to come.
- Chief Batton announced the formation of the Sovereignty for Strong Communities Commission in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark McGirt ruling, establishing an initial \$2 million budget to uphold law and order on reservation.

## OCTOBER

- The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority gave flu shots at no cost to the public in southeastern Oklahoma.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs presented 19 tribal police officers Special Law Enforcement commissions, giving them federal authority, above their tribal authority, when working major Crimes in the jurisdiction of the Choctaw Nation.
- A new childcare center in Poteau opened to serve 60 children and create 20 new jobs.
- The Choctaw Nation Tribal Council enacted new codes designed to strengthen and increase tribal sovereignty. In addition to jury selection guidelines and the establishment of a Public Defender's Office, Council amended the criminal code, allowing the Nation to prosecute offenses listed in the federal Major Crimes Act and allow for broader sentencing options when defendants are found guilty in Choctaw Nation District Court.
- Choctaw veteran and World War I code talker, PFC Joseph Oklahombi, US Army, was chosen by the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame to be one of its 2020 inductees.

## NOVEMBER

- The annual Veterans Ceremony was held virtually, with an online message from Chief Batton.
- Choctaw Tribal Council established an annual Choctaw Nation Flag Day.
- Irish donors gave over \$800,000 to the Navajo and Hopi relief fund to pay forward the Choctaw people's kind gesture.
- Choctaw Community Centers distributed Thanksgiving meals curbside to Choctaws seniors weekly.

## DECEMBER

- CNO Community centers gave out Christmas gifts to Choctaw children curbside in place of annual community Christmas parties.



## Faith, Family, Culture



Chief Gary Batton

## Seeing the blessings in a difficult year

I hope you all had a safe holiday season and a happy New Year. Last year was one for the books. No one could have prepared us for what 2020 brought us. When I first took the oath of office in 2014, I said that there is nothing that will hold us back if we stand together. I still believe that today. Our ancestors knew how important it was to stick together, and that's what helped them survive the Trail of Tears and prosper in their new home. There's no doubt this year has been challenging. We've battled for our sovereignty over our gaming rights, we've mourned the loss of our family and friends due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But every time we've faced a difficult situation, we've worked together to do what's right for Choctaws and our communities. I'm so proud of the relationships we've built and continued over this past year. Though times were rough, God has still blessed us.

I'm proud to say that we experienced no gaps in services to our tribal members throughout the global pandemic. The Choctaw Nation was able to continue operations without laying off or furloughing associates. Choctaw Nation frontline employees worked hard to ensure essential services and that the Nation could still operate during the shutdown. Our travel plazas, country markets, community centers, food distribution centers, clinics and the Poteau Prescription Refill Center all remained open with associate volunteers' support. A total of 716 staff members volunteered 5,498 hours during the pandemic response. We are truly blessed to have such caring and loving people working for the Choctaw Nation. I am so proud and thankful to our associates for showing the true meaning of the Chahta spirit this past year.

Our goal was to help as many Choctaws as possible with our CARES Act funding during the pandemic. All CARES programs closed Nov. 30. Choctaw Nation received 141,785 total applications for \$70 million in funds. Of that funding, 29% went to food programs, 24% for student assistance, 20% for student technology, 13% for employment income support, 8% for childcare support, and the remainder went to small business and housing support.

We also accomplished another mission to keep providing essential food services.

Our Food Distribution Program staff created a drive-thru curbside service for the safety of clients, staff and volunteers. Volunteers also provided food delivery services to tribal elders by helping package groceries or delivering food to elders waiting in their cars. Through these services, a total of 2395 households were served per month; 7854 family members were served per month; and the total food value per month was \$296,649. Also, the Summer Food Service Program distributed 71,000 meals. Our Senior Nutrition Program provided Native American elders aged 55 and older a weekly meal, except for Talihina, which serves five meals per week. Getting food to our members wasn't our only concern in 2020, however. We wanted to help those living in our surrounding communities as well. We partnered with Walmart to provide thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to CDIB cardholders throughout southeastern Oklahoma.

Throughout the year, the Choctaw Nation won several prestigious awards. The Choctaw Nation Recycling Center was awarded Level I, Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher Award, the highest-level recognition a community can receive under the Oklahoma Clean Community Program. The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority Talihina Hospital was awarded a five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. This award placed the hospital in the top 8% of the nation's major health care programs, based on a patient satisfaction survey called the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems given to all patients during the 2019 calendar year. CNHSA also received two Outstanding Service Awards during the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) Heroes in Health Awards Gala recently. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Division of Strategic Development received four awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). Our yearlong U.S. Census campaign was awarded the top prize for community relations by the Public Relations Society of America, Dallas Chapter. These are just a few examples of recognition that the Choctaw Nation and our programs received this year. I am so proud of the hard work and determination our associates put in year after year.

I was only able to mention a few of the great things we were able to achieve in 2020, but there are many more. You can find more highlights of the past year on page one of this month's issue of the Biskinik.

## Choctaw Employee Food Drive Helps Feed Thousands of Oklahomans

**DURANT, OKLA. (December 2, 2020)** –The Choctaw Nation recently completed a food drive where associates donated thousands of non-perishable food items to food pantries across southeastern Oklahoma.

“This is a great way to collect a large amount of food that will help a lot of people during this especially difficult time,” shared Choctaw Nation Director of Tribal Events Jonathan James, who assisted with collection and distribution of the donated goods.

First Baptist Church of McAlester shared appreciation for the donations, “This is such a blessing to us! We have really been hit hard this year and were almost out of food.”

The number of people being served

by food pantries in 2020 has increased dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With some federal food assistance programs set to expire in the coming weeks, that number is projected to grow.

Employees donated at 61 different Choctaw Nation collection sites, raising nearly 6,000 food items for donation to 44 food banks that assist families in need. Additionally, nearly 1,500 whole hams were donated by the Nation to assist families.

With the success of the effort, plans are to make the employee food drive an annual event to assist communities across the Choctaw Nation.



The Living Water Food Pantry in Clayton, Okla. receives items from the Choctaw Nation Employee Food Drive.

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Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

## Hunting and Fishing Compact Extended

Happy New Year, everyone! I hope you all had a wonderful and safe Christmas. As I reflect on 2020, I realize that despite many challenges, one thing remained true: we remained resilient. Though the year kept throwing us curveballs, we as Choctaws remained resilient and determined. Like our ancestors before us, we persevered through difficult times, looking toward the future with hope. Remembering our ancestors' approach to challenges, I pray to our Creator for our Choctaw people and all mankind.

A recent announcement for 2021 is that the Choctaw Nation and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation signed an extension to the Hunting and Fishing Compact, effective through December 31, 2021.

This agreement is a win for both the Choctaw Nation and the State of Oklahoma. It provides an opportunity for our tribal members in Oklahoma to enjoy the outdoors through hunting and fishing that are part of our rich cultural traditions.

Choctaw tribal members who held a Choctaw Hunting and Fishing license in 2020 and still meet the compact requirements will have their license automatically renewed for 2021. The State Department of Wildlife Conservation will begin processing these auto-renewals and any new tribal member applications received for 2021.

Choctaw tribal members who are 16 and older and interested in a 2021 state hunting and fishing license, but who did not have a license in 2020, are encouraged to apply via the online member portal, Chahta Achvffa at <https://chahtaachvffa.choctawnation.com/>.

Choctaw Hunting and Fishing Licenses will be available on the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife website, [license.goooutdoorsoklahoma.com](https://license.goooutdoorsoklahoma.com), to be printed or downloaded as needed. For added convenience, there is now an app - Go Outdoors Oklahoma - for your iOS or Android device. To get the app, go to your device's App Store and search Go Outdoors Oklahoma. For further assistance, please call 800-522-6170 ext. 4030 or email [huntingandfishing@choctawnation.com](mailto:huntingandfishing@choctawnation.com).



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

## The Word of God

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; where unto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophesy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophesy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." - I Peter 1: 19-21.

The Word of God (Bible) is unknown, unread and not understood by many people in our society. The Bible is always fresh, and offers the wonder of redemption. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” (Psalms 19:7) Redemption plan was made simple for sinners to claim. The redemption plan is: (1) “For there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:22,23) This means everybody is a sinner. (2) “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

This means that redemption plan was prepared by God before we knew we were sinners. (3) Romans 10:13 says “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This is saying that the moment you trust Christ for dying on the cross for you, you will be saved.

This wonder book has transforming power. This biblical conversion transformed a drinking, slave trading John Newton into writing the hymn “Amazing Grace.” It transformed an alcoholic Mel Trotter, who would steal the shoes off his dead baby's body to buy booze, into the founder of a chain of rescue missions. Cursing John Bunyan was transformed into the author of “Pilgrims Progress.” It is more than a mere book. It is the living Word of God.

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# More than just “Something Else”

By Kendra Germany-Wall

On election night, CNN released an exit poll depicting ethnicities who participated in the election. Among ethnicities listed were white, Black, Latino, Asian and something else. This didn't sit well with Indigenous people across the country, who have been lumped into and often times classified as “other” in datasets for centuries.

The Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) demanded an apology from CNN, saying, “Being Native American is a political classification — not merely a racial background. Native nations have had a government-to-government relationship with the United States since the country’s earliest days. To refer to Indigenous voters as ‘something else’ fails to recognize the sovereignty and political classification of Native voters.”

CNN’s gaffe subsequently happened on the third day of Native American Heritage Month and has created a nationwide conversation about how Indigenous people are referenced and understood in this country.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has said there is a critical need for accurate, meaningful, and timely data collection in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. The NCAI also stated that accurate data collection and community-based planning capture true needs, thus driving larger programmatic funding resulting in cost-effective use of federal resources.

Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, sent a letter to CNN CEO Jeff Zucker, expressing his profound disappointment with CNN saying,

*“Dear Mr. Zucker, On behalf of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (Choctaw Nation), I am writing to express my profound disappointment with CNN’s lack of respect and dignity provided to Native American voters during the 2020 election.*

*As CNN reported exit polls on election night, Native Americans across the Nation were shocked and deeply offended to see the reporting of critical Native American voters being referred to as “something else.”*

*Native Americans play a critical role in the elections of this great country. Yet for centuries, we have had to continually fight for the right to vote. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granted citizenship to all Native Americans. However, it was not until 1957 through the advocacy of our ancestors before state governments that all Native Americans were allowed to vote throughout the country. Today, we continue to fight against voter discrimination.*

*Despite these challenges, we have continually turned out in unprecedented numbers and have proven that we can influence elections. To ensure our voices are heard, Native Americans have proudly spent countless hours canvassing, phone banking, registering our members to vote, volunteering on campaigns and lifting our voices up to be heard. We have spent many dollars to increase voter turnout in our communities and are proud of the progress that we have made. From Maine to Florida, across the great plains to the southwestern deserts, into the tundra of Alaska and the islands of Hawaii, we continue to come out to vote.*

*We have fought long and hard to maintain our place and existence in this world. Yet, CNN’s complete disregard of the contributions of Native American voters as demonstrated by its offensive reporting only perpetuates the continued marginalization of our communities and creates a snowball effect that rolls downhill into federal, state and local governments and neighboring communities that Native American people are not here.*

*The Choctaw Nation Tribal Council hopes CNN will reconcile its inappropriate and offensive actions by properly recognizing the power and influence of the Native American vote and discontinuing its use of “something else” in future reporting. Yakoke (thank you) for considering the views and concerns of the Choctaw Nation regarding this matter.”*

Native Americans have fought for years and continue to fight for their right to vote. They have been and continue to play a key role in U.S. elections. This was very apparent in the 2020 election.

According to the NCIA, the 2020 election saw record voter turnout across the country and a pivotal turnout from Native voters in the decisive states of Wisconsin, Michigan and Arizona, among others.

In Wisconsin, where Native Americans compose 1.5% of the voting population, the Associated Press declared that President-Elect Joe Biden won the state’s vote by



CNN recently defined Native voters as “Something Else” on an election night exit poll. This prompted Native Americans and Native American organizations across the country to inform others of the impact Native voters have on American elections.

about 20,500 votes. That margin equals roughly 1% of the state’s registered voters—proving that those small margins pay off in the long run.

In Arizona, Coconino County, home to the Navajo, Hopi, Hualapai Kaibab-Paiute and Havasupai tribes; Apache County, home to the Navajo, Zuni and White Mountain Apache tribes; and Pima County, home to the Tohono O’odham and Pascua Yaqui tribes, all voted overwhelmingly for Biden. Native Americans compose 5.6% of eligible voters in the state.

Native Americans not only played a pivotal role by voting, they made history by running for political office at the local, state and national levels.

The 2020 general election saw a record-breaking number of candidates of Native American heritage win their congressional races for seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Indian Country Today reported six Native American House candidates won their respective races, meaning the 117th Congress will have more Native Americans than any previous Congress.

Indian Country Today also reported that 50 Indigenous candidates ran for State House, 23 ran for State Senate, 13 ran for U.S. House, nine ran for local seats, eight ran for other state positions, six ran for judicial seats, and one ran for the U.S. Senate.

Of the fourteen candidates running at the national level for seats in the House of Representatives and Senate, six Native Americans were elected. While two of the candidates were newly elected, four are returning members to Congress.

As of publication of this article, eyes were on President-Elect Joe Biden to appoint a member of the Indigenous community to his cabinet—specifically the Department of Interior. This department oversees the responsible development of conventional and renewable energy supplies on public lands and waters, is the largest supplier and manager of water in the 17 Western states, and upholds trust responsibilities to the 574 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives.

Rep. Deb Haaland (Laguna and Jemez Pueblo), who was just elected to her second term in the House, is a top contender for the post of Interior secretary along with retiring Senator Tom Udall. Both are Democrats from New Mexico.

Regardless of the 2020 election outcome, Native Americans proved that they are a force to be reckoned with and will continue to be more than just “Something Else.”

# Series of U.S. House votes aim to help Native American veterans

By Chris Jennings

A trio of House votes in November could have an enormous impact on Native veterans, as well as other veterans across the country.

The first bill, the Proper and Reimbursed Care for Native Veterans Act (H.R. 6237), will clarify the requirement of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to reimburse the Indian Health Service for certain health care services.

These services are currently only reimbursed when VA services are provided at a VA facility.

H.R. 6237, introduced by Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), clarifies that the VHA is responsible for reimbursing not only direct



Photo by Chris Jennings

The Choctaw Nation Color Guard stand at attention in front of The Wall The Heals traveling exhibit in May 2019. A trio of recent house votes has put forth bills that could improve Native and non-Native veterans’ lives.

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care to Native veterans provided by a tribe or IHS but specialty and contract care provided through a tribe or IHS.

“Our nation’s Native American veterans deserve access to quality, affordable health care and this bill helps deliver on that promise,” Mullin said.

H.R. 6237 will serve to help the already underfunded IHS and tribal-run health facilities. These facilities are often the only realistic option for Native veterans with VA options, sometimes a day or more away.

Mullin followed up, saying, “I am glad this bill passed the House and I urge the Senate to act quickly so our Native veterans get the care they need.”

Talking about the bill, Chief Gary Batton said, “We appreciate Congressman Mullin’s leadership to get this bill passed by the House, which will greatly assist us in delivering high-quality health care to our Native Veterans.”

With the long history of Choctaws serving in the military, defending this land for centuries, the care of its veterans is essential.

“This bill would clarify that the VA must reimburse IHS and tribal health systems who are serving veterans, even when they are referred out for specialty

care. By passing this bill out of the House, we are one step closer to reducing the red tape that our veterans currently endure by allowing our native veterans the ability to continue to choose us as their health care system, even if they need specialty services,” said Batton.

Two other bills passed the House on Nov. 16, which could improve Native and non-Native veterans’ quality of life.

The Wounded Veterans Recreation Act (S. 327), sponsored by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., to provide a lifetime National Recreational Pass to federal lands for all veterans who have disabilities stemming from their military service. A supporter, Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., said providing free passes would both recognize the sacrifices of disabled veterans and give them access to “the healing and restorative powers of our public lands.”

The House also has passed the Improving Safety and Security for Veterans Act (S. 3147), sponsored by Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., to require the Veterans Affairs Department to submit to Congress reports on patient safety and the quality of care at the agency’s medical centers.

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## District 4 gets into the Christmas spirit



Council Member Delton Cox and District 4's Poteau and Sumerfield Community Center staff and volunteers get into the spirit at their annual kids Christmas parties. This year, districts had to handle their annual Christmas celebrations a little differently by offering drive-thru versions.



## Small Business Development Announces its 2020 Chahtapeneuer Award Winners

**McAlester, Okla.** (November 23, 2020) – Choctaw Nation's Small Business Development Department recently revealed its Chahtapeneuer Award winners. Every year, one Choctaw-owned small business from each district is recognized, and one of those exceptional businesses wins the Chahtapreneur of the Year award, the highest honor.

This year's top honor was awarded to Micky Lloyd, owner of Common Roots Mercantile, located in McAlester. Common Roots Mercantile opened in 2014 and carries a wide variety of unique gifts. It also offers over 30 flavors of ice-cold, glass bottled soda and sweet treats to enjoy while shopping. Lloyd is an active member of the community who has renovated three historic downtown buildings and has played a big part in Choctaw Avenue's new Streetscape design which is currently underway.

"We're incredibly proud of all our Chatapreneuers. Owning a small business takes hard work, determination and consistency," states Gary Johnson, Choctaw Nation Small Business Development Manager. "These awards showcase the achievements of some of the area's best entrepreneurs. It is truly a privilege to serve our Chatapreneuer business owners within their communities."

Award nominations are based on Chahtapreneur business owners' participation with Choctaw Nation Small Business Development Program, community involvement and community impact. This is the fourth year the Choctaw Nation has given the award.

Below is a complete list of the Chahtapreneuer Award winners by district:

- District 1 - Greg Willie: Willie Independent Insurance – Idabel, OK
- District 2 - Aaron Clay: Southern Comfort Heat & Air – Broken Bow, OK
- District 3 - Lynn White: Mimic MFG – Heavener, OK
- District 4 - Matthew Carmack: Carmack's Garage – Poteau, OK
- District 5 - Mike West: West's Tools, LLC – Quinton, OK
- District 6 - Stephen Goldsborough: Fields Hardware & Automotive, LLC – Red Oak, OK
- District 7 - Sequina Hunter: Little Disciples Day Care – Antlers, OK
- District 8 - Josie Rosales: Taco Mamas – Hugo, OK
- District 9 - Leigh Anne Brooks: Texoma Wealth Management – Durant, OK
- District 10 - Vidal Munoz: T & M Mobile Detailing – Atoka, OK
- District 11 - Micky Lloyd: Common Roots Mercantile – McAlester, OK
- District 12 - Paul Watkins: S & T Hauling, LLC (S and T Trash Service) – Indianola, OK

For more information on Choctaw Nation Small Business Development visit, [choctawsmallbusiness.com](http://choctawsmallbusiness.com).



Eddie Bohanan

## District 3

Halito, from District 3,

The primary focus this year was successfully meeting the challenge COVID-19 presented to our tribal members nationally. The year 2020 will always be a synonymous with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Choctaw Nation was able to meet that challenge without cutting services or programs by utilizing the COVID Relief CARES Act. The Choctaw Nation adapted by wearing masks, social distancing, introducing drive-thru events and virtual platforms while adhering to CDC's ever-evolving guidelines.

Tribal members are encouraged to continue to apply for LEAP Homes, Independent Elder and Affordable Rental Homes. New programs implemented include Elder Lawn Care, Child Care Support and Elder Food Security Program. The Choctaw Community Partner Fund continues to strengthen and develop our local communities.

The Talihiina Community Center served 18,918 meals from January through October. In that same time period, the Smithville Community Center served 2,163 meals. Yakoke to the staff at both centers for all their hard work.

This year closes out celebrating Christmas with Santa and holiday drive-thru events. Congratulations to Nathan Watson of District 3, who was honored as Veteran of the Month at December's Council Meeting. It was my privilege to present the declaration and plaque.

On behalf of myself, my family and District 3, I wish you a merry Christmas and a blessed New Year. Yakoke, Eddie Bohanan.

## Nation continues to test drone technology

By Christian Toews

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) continues to be at the forefront of emerging drone technology.

CNO recently announced its selection for participation in the Federal Aviation Administration's Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) BEYOND program. This program is a part of a follow-up effort to the FAA's UAS Integration Pilot Program (IPP). Over the past three years, CNO has accomplished several milestones in the UASIPP, including being the only tribal government designated as a lead participant in the UASIPP, the first tribal government recognized by the FAA as a Public Aircraft Operator (PAO) and the only lead participant to work with the Volpe Center on testing acoustics for UAS.

CNO is looking forward to many more accomplishments in the future as they prepare for the next phase of the FAA's BEYOND program.

"We look forward to participating in the FAA BEYOND program, and helping the U.S. remain globally competitive in emerging aviation technology fields," states James Grimsley, Executive Director of Advanced Technology Initiatives at The Choctaw Nation. "We are excited to promote job growth, economic development, and important educational opportunities for our citizens and our neighbors in southeastern Oklahoma."

BEYOND will address specific challenges remaining at the closure of the UASIPP. The UAS BEYOND program will focus on the steps necessary to facilitate scalable, repeatable and economically feasible Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) operations. It will also focus on collection, measurement and response efforts for community feedback related to UAS operations and the quantification and measurement of the societal and economic impact of various UAS operations.

Chief Gary Batton recently commented on the continued partnership, "The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is very happy with our continued collaboration with the FAA and our partners. We believe this reflects very well on our continued leadership in emerging technologies and our efforts to identify and grow economic opportunities for our region."

The CNO UAS IPP team consisted of a mixture of

industry, non-profit and academic partners such as the Noble Research Institute, Bell Flight, Oklahoma State University, University of Oklahoma, Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO) and AiRXOS (part of GE Aviation).

The CNO team will continue to collaborate with Oklahoma State University to conduct UAS weather research focused on improving the understanding of weather and winds at low altitude. The aim is to enhance the safety of UAS flying in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) operations. The challenges the team is addressing will impact a wide range of aircraft. They will advance the integration of drones and urban air taxis into the national airspace and increasing the safety of air transportation and airport operations for all aircraft, from airliners and general aviation aircraft.

CNO also recently announced an agreement with Bell Textron Inc., a Textron Inc. (NYSE: TXT) company (Bell). Bell will begin testing some of Bell's mobility systems, like the Bell Autonomous Pod Transport and the Bell Nexus on the CNO test site located in rural southeastern Oklahoma.

"The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma continues to work towards being a recognized industry influencer and expanding our involvement in emerging aviation technologies, and we appreciate and value our strong working relationship with Bell," states Dr. Robert Huck, Director of Test Site Operations for Choctaw Nation's Division of Strategic Development.

Bell's Carey Cannon, chief engineer, Innovation, said, "CNO became the obvious choice for flight test activity for Bell because of its proximity to Dallas-Fort Worth and their commitment to building facilities that support requirements necessary for these operations. In return, Bell is providing guidance to CNO on the creation of their Emerging Aviation Technology Test Center in regard to safety and efficient flight operations. We are excited to continue our collaboration with CNO around innovative solutions."



The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma recently announced its selection for participation in the Federal Aviation Administration's Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) BEYOND program.



# WE'VE GOT A DEAL TRIBAL MEMBERS!

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## 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/cdibmembership-information](http://choctawnation.com/contacts-applications/cdibmembership-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

## FREE LEGAL CLINICS

OKLAHOMA INDIAN LEGAL SERVICES (OILS)



EXAMPLES OF LEGAL ADVICE/DOCUMENT PREPARATION INCLUDE

Probates | Will Executions | Cases Involving Expungements  
 Grandparent Adoptions | Guardianships  
 Preparation of Legal Documents Regarding End-of-Life  
 (wills, powers-of-attorney, advance directives, transfer-on-death deeds)

**SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT BY  
CALLING 800-658-1497**

Choctaw Nation Division of Legal & Compliance



## Thank you

I want to thank the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw Nation repaired my home, sends me my prescriptions and I enjoy lunch every Wednesday. The Nation has also helped me with lawn mowing. There are so many good things that they are giving to the members. Our tribal services are committed to helping our people.

Thank you,  
Neil Matthews

To the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma,

I would like to thank the Choctaw Nation and the higher education program for supporting me with funds to help me achieve my goal. I graduated from St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas in December 2019 with a bachelor's degree in Accounting. I also recently started my first job in the accounting field at the University of Texas.

Respectfully,  
Katelyn Marie Burch

As a proud Choctaw, I want to thank my people for all the good things they have done for me and mine. Most recently, I've been helped by the Choctaw elder card related nutrition assistance. It's been very simple to use and much help.

Again, Thanks,  
Greg Maxwell

Dear Chief Batton,

I am so eternally grateful for all the help the elder food program has helped me and many others! It was truly a blessing! This and other programs have helped myself, my children, as well as my grandchildren in achieving their education! Both are on the Deans list and are dedicated to making a career, your program has helped them achieve this! So many thanks from me to you and the Choctaw Nation for their generous help! So proud to be Choctaw!

Linda J. Dean Schales

### 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**

### 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)

Gary Batton  
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.  
Assistant Chief

The Official  
Monthly Publication  
of the  
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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The BISKINIK is printed each month as a service to Tribal members. The BISKINIK reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication shall be printed and reserves the right to edit submitted material which it finds inaccurate, profane, offensive or morally unacceptable. Copy may be edited for space, proper grammar and punctuation. Copy will be accepted in any readable form, but where possible, it is requested that material be typewritten and double-spaced. You must include an address and phone number where you may be reached. Due to space limitations and the quantity of article submissions, we are unable to include everything we receive. Items are printed in the order received. Faxed photos will not be accepted.

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.

I am truly blessed to be Choctaw. And very thankful for all the blessings the Choctaws and God have given me. Thanks to everyone and have a blessed Christmas.  
Joan Abbott

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.

## 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)

## Did You Know?

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, as a memorial to the Five Civilized Tribes. 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. He was successful, and you can see the result. We owe these great Choctaw chiefs a debt of gratitude.



### Tribal Council holds December session

#### CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION AGENDA December, 12 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - a. Regular Session November 14, 2020
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
  - a. Veteran of the Month, District #3 – Nathan Watson
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS
  - a. Lin Ogg – Expression of Gratitude
  - b. Rodney Wright – Court System Cases - Speaker not present
  - c. Taloa Gibson – Tribal Members' Financial Needs/Election Review/McGirt
7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
8. NEW BUSINESS
  - a. **Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets.** Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - b. **Authorize the Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to Place Property in Pittsburg County in Trust Status with the United States of America.** Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - c. **Approve the Purchase of Real Property and Attachments at 1455 Northwest Highway 2, Wilburton, Oklahoma.** Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
  - d. **Approve the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Emergency Medical Leave Act.** Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER

All Council Members present with the exception of Perry Thompson.

### McKinney is November Veteran of the Month

Silas McKinney Jr., Broken Bow, Oklahoma, was the Choctaw Nation's November 2020 Veteran of the Month. McKinney served in the United States Army from 1968 to 1975, achieving the rank of Sergeant. He saw multiple battles in Vietnam. The most significant was the Tet Offensive, one of the largest military campaigns of the Vietnam War. Sergeant McKinney was a member of the 1st Infantry Division nicknamed "The Big Red One". Due to his extraordinary heroism, Sargent McKinney received two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars with Valor, Air Medal and a Combat Infantry Badge.

### Watson is December Veteran of the Month

Nathan Doyle Watson of Watson, Oklahoma, is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month for December 2020. Watson served in the United States Army 669th Transportation Unit from 1968 to 1969, where he achieved the rank of Specialist E-4. Specialist Watson saw multiple combat engagements in Vietnam. Due to his extraordinary heroism, he was awarded the Purple Heart.

### Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

January 5	Idabel	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
January 6	Atoka	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
January 8	Coalgate	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
January 11	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
January 12	Wright City	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
January 13	Crowder	By Appointment
January 15	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
January 18	Durant	8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
January 19	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
January 20	McAlester	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
January 20	Stigler	By Appointment
January 22	Crowder	By Appointment
January 26	Broken Bow	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

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



# Kids Eat Free

ON TUESDAY'S  
WITH PURCHASE OF ANY ENTREE,  
ATOKA AND POTEAU, OKLAHOMA CHILI'S ONLY



### 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:

Smithville Community Center  
January 8, 2021  
10:00 – 12:00




## Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna

### January Language Lesson

# Hvshtula

## Winter



Winter Terms:

**hushi – bird**  
**iti - tree**  
**oktusha - snow**  
**shapo – hat**

**ibbak fokka - gloves**  
**isht atapvchi - button**  
**hvshtula – winter**  
**isht piha - shovel**  
**ikonla inuchi - scarf**

[www.choctawschool.com](http://www.choctawschool.com)



# Make smaller resolutions to have longer lasting results

By Chris Jennings

Some of the most common New Year’s resolutions are exercising more, eating healthier and losing weight. All worthy but vague goals.

A 2007 study by Richard Wiseman from Bristol University showed that 88% of people who set New Year’s resolutions failed. Vague resolutions without steps to achieve them is a recipe for failure. The Bristol University study showed that smaller resolutions had a much higher rate of success.

“Change is always possible,” says Dr. Linda Nebeling, an expert in behavioral change and nutrition at the National Institutes of Health.

“One challenge with New Year’s resolutions is that people often set unrealistic goals. They can quickly become frustrated and give up. Any resolution to change needs to include small goals that are definable and accompanied by a solid plan on how you’ll get to that goal,” says Nebeling.

Making minor changes over time is much more likely to contribute to success at the end of the year. Instead of just saying you’re going to eat healthier, commit to something more specific, like cutting out sugary drinks.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, people who often drink sugary drinks are more likely to face health problems. These include weight gain, obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney diseases, non-alcoholic liver disease, tooth decay and cavities and gout.

You can make cutting out sugary drinks a more attainable goal by refining it and committing to no sodas after noon. Instead, try replacing that afternoon soda or latte with sparkling water.

Sodas aren’t the only sugar-heavy drinks. Fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks and sweetened waters are all examples of drinks that may contain large amounts of added sugars.

The CDC offers the following tips for reducing sugary drinks:

Drink (12-ounce serving)	Teaspoons of Sugar	Calories
Bottled Water	0 teaspoons	0
Sugar-Free Lemonade	0 teaspoons	0
Unsweetened Tea	0 teaspoons	0
Sports Drink	2 teaspoons	75
Lemonade	6¼ teaspoon	105
Orange Juice	7½ teaspoons	160
Sweet Tea	8½ teaspoons	120
Powdered Drink Mix (with sugar)	9 teaspoons	145
Cola	10¼ teaspoons	150
Fruit Punch	11½ teaspoons	195
Root Beer	11½ teaspoons	170
Grape Juice	12 teaspoons	200
Orange Soda	13 teaspoons	210

Source: CDC

- Need more flavor? Add berries or slices of lime, lemon, or cucumber to water.
- Missing fizzy drinks? Add a splash of 100% juice to plain sparkling water for a refreshing, low-calorie drink.
- Don’t stock up on sugary drinks. Instead, keep a jug or bottles of cold water in the fridge.
- Reach for drinks that contain essential nutrients such as low fat or fat-free milk, fortified milk alternatives or 100% fruit or vegetable juice first.
- Skip the flavored syrups or whipped cream at the coffee shop. Ask for a drink with low fat or fat-free milk, a milk alternative such as soy or almond or get back to basics with black coffee.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label to choose drinks that are low in calories, added sugars and saturated fat.
- Carry a reusable water bottle with you and refill it throughout the day.

Another change you can make while eating is to be more mindful about the entire meal, thinking more about your meal and the actual act of eating.

Registered Dietitian for the Choctaw Nation, Chase Ward, RD, LD, says, “Mindful eating is being conscious about your decisions you’re making with your meal. Some key steps of mindful eating are to slow down, try to eliminate distractions and pay attention to your body.”

“Breathe, it’s not a race. After each bite, set your fork down and take a breath,” says Ward.

Many people will sit down to eat while watching TV or just eat because there’s food nearby. Ward explains, “Think about it. We’ve all done it, get that popcorn or those chips out and start watching a movie. You get into a mindless eating session in front of that show, and all of a sudden, there is nothing left at the bottom of the bowl.”

Creating an environment that makes thinking about what you’re eating is one way to be more mindful. Turning the TV off while you eat and not speaking for the first five minutes of a meal are both ways to be more mindful.

Social support can be a crucial factor in the success of New Year’s resolutions. By recruiting friends and family to join you in your goals, you create an atmosphere of accountability to encourage each other to be successful. See how many you can get to join you in these United States Department of Agriculture suggested tips for healthier eating.

Tips for salt and sodium:

- Many processed foods contain high amounts of sodium. Choose fresh vegetables, meats, poultry, and seafood when possible.
- Using spices or herbs, such as dill, chili powder, paprika, or cumin, and lemon or lime juice can add flavor without adding salt.

Tips for Saturated Fats:

- Keep it lean and flavorful. Try grilling, broiling,

# REAL SOLUTIONS

**1. Start with small changes**

Instead of a diet overhaul, make small changes to what you eat and drink that will work for you now and in the future.

**2. Take one day at a time**

Sometimes things don't go as planned, even with the best of intentions. If you miss one day or one milestone for your goal, don't give up!

**3. Be active your way**

Pick activities you enjoy! If you focus on having fun or learning a new skill that interests you, you will be more likely to stick with it.

**4. Team up**

Find a friend with similar goals—swap healthy recipes and be active together. Staying on track is easier with support and a cheerleader.

**5. Celebrate successes**

Think of each change as a "win" as you build positive habits and find ways to reach your goals. Reward yourself—you've earned it!

December 2016  
For more information go to [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#)  
USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion  
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

- roasting, or baking—they don’t add extra fat.
  - Simple substitutions can help you stay within your saturated fat limit. Try using nonfat yogurt when you make tuna or chicken salad.
- Tips for Added Sugars:
- Split the sweet treats and share with a family member or friend.
  - Cut calories by drinking water or unsweetened beverages. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are a major source of added sugars.

“Maintaining a change requires continued commitment until the change becomes a part of your life, like brushing your teeth or washing your hair,” says Nebeling. “People who can maintain or engage in efforts to change their behavior, and do it for six to eight weeks, are more likely to be able to support that effort longer term.”

When you start with smaller goals, they become more achievable. One goal’s success then leads to other smaller goals being added to your everyday life, snowballing into positive change and a healthier lifestyle.

# Choctaw Member Top Psychiatric Nurse in OK

**DURANT, Okla. November 4, 2020** – When Amanda Harrell was growing up in McAlester, Oklahoma, she was unsure what type of education would be available to her or what her family could afford. That humble upbringing started her on a path that led to her being named 2019-2020 Top Psychiatric Nurse of the Year for Oklahoma.

With four other siblings, she knew she would need help in achieving her dreams of attending college. Thankfully, Mr. Larry Amos visited the schools to educate the senior class on what services and aid the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) provided. Harrell pulled him aside, told him about her dreams, and asked for help. He put her in contact with the Choctaw Nation Career Development Program, which was able to help her graduate from nursing school, almost debt-free.

Harrell was blessed to complete her nursing clinicals at Carl Albert Community Mental Health Hospital. It was there she realized that the path to ultimate health was actually a trifecta, encompassing mind, body, and spirit. “The triangle is the strongest structure,” she explains, “and by getting all three parts of ourselves in alignment, we can heal and grow.” The realization helped her conquer her own depression and anxiety, taking her to a place where she became more calm, caring, and empathetic.

The experience of her clinicals, combined with her personal experiences of helping elderly family members and friends, led her down a path to geriatric care. The approach to geriatric care as this trifecta made her stand apart from her peers. She believes and states that it has become her “mission to love on {the elderly} and give them peace.” She takes them outside to exercise regularly in addition to her nursing duties.

When the Oklahoman Newspaper, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Nurses Association (ONA), put out a public

call for nominations, patients’ family members knew they wanted to nominate her. As part of an anonymous nomination, the family wrote how Harrell “was able to turn mom’s life around and give us back a part of our mom we thought was lost.” After the committee paired the nominations down to the top three nurses in each of the eighteen categories, the general public voted. Over 84,000 votes were cast and selected Amanda Harrell as the Top Psychiatric Nurse.

“The nominations and awards gala are testaments to the appreciation Oklahoma residents have for those in the nursing profession,” said Jane Nelson, chief executive officer at the Oklahoma Nurses Association. “Nurses are the backbone of patient care — they’re ordinary people doing the extraordinary,” Nelson said. “Sometimes they don’t realize the work that they do 24/7 is truly going above and beyond. Being nominated and recognized by their peers for an accolade like this is an affirmation that what they’re doing makes a difference.”

“I’m so humbled...so surprised...and so very thankful,” says Harrell of receiving the top award. Nursing is such a broad-spectrum career. Nurses are there when a newborn baby takes its first breath, and when a loved one takes their last breath. She encourages new nurses to look from different angles and decide what area makes you happy or interests you. “Then go for it – make it your focus,” she says. “Then you go to work and do what you love, you will never work a day in your life.”

Harrell and the top three nominees from each category were celebrated in a virtual gala on October 4, 2020. An-



nually, this gala has celebrated the top nurses from across the state during Nurses’ Week, celebrating the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

Harrell happily helped her cousin, a single mom of three, get in touch with the Choctaw Nation Career Development Program and start her nursing career. She loves that the program plants a seed early and watches it grow.

As life comes full circle, Harrell was able to help Larry Amos’s mother at the end of her life in the intensive care unit (ICU) eleven years after he helped her start her career path. Harrell has found her true calling and, after seven years, has no plans for stopping. She currently works at Lifebridge Geri Psych of McAlester Regional Health Center and plans on continuing her education to learn and grow in her profession.

## SHOULD I BE SCREENED FOR LUNG CANCER?

The more you smoke and the longer you smoke, the higher your risk is for lung cancer.

You should consider being screened using a Low-Dose CT Scan if you have all three of these risk factors:

1. 55 to 80 years old
2. Current smoker or former smoker who quit less than 15 years ago
3. A smoking history of at least 30 pack-years (this means one pack a day for 30 years or two packs a day for 15 years, etc.)

If you are in the high risk category, talk to your physician about whether screening is beneficial for you.

**For more information:**  
**Choctaw Nation Health Services Low-Dose CT Program**  
**(800) 349-7026 ext. 6440**

**Choctaw Nation** Health Services

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. & 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

## CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION

**WAREHOUSES & MARKETS**

Open 8:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday  
Thursday: 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

**January 2021**

All markets open weekdays, January 1-27  
**Closed:** January 1, 28 and 29.  
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation  
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

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

**WIC van travel has been postponed. If you need assistance, please call 580-380-3628 or 580-380-9895 Ext. 83582.**



## Noakes graduates from SWAGU

Brittany Noakes graduated from Southwestern Assemblies of God University, Dec. 4, 2020, with a bachelor's degree in Business Sports Management!

Brittany wants to thank the Choctaw Nation for their support during this time.



## Scott graduates from APU



Haley Alexandra Scott graduated from Azusa Pacific University, Dec. 19, 2020, with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication Studies. She hopes to pursue a career in graphic design and social media management.

Haley would like to thank the Choctaw Nation for supporting her educational endeavors.

## Mulford turns 90

Jackie Dean Mulford turned 90 Nov. 19, 2020.

She is the mother of Linda, Cindy, Danny and Scott, and the grandmother of Kaylan, Dana, Tracy, Stacy, Shane and Melony.

Mulford lives in Pauls Valley, Okla. and enjoys baking, sewing, her OKC Thunder, Kansas City Chiefs, George Strait, Chicago, Chuck Norris and Robert Fuller.



## Bailey Stewart named MVP



Pitt 8 Fastpitch Conference coaches nominated senior Bailey Stewart of Stuart Public Schools, Stuart, Oklahoma Most Valuable Player of 2020 and the OSSAA Fastpitch coaches association named her an All-State recipient as well.

Stewart finished inside the circle with an 18-4 record. She recorded 151 strikeouts, breaking the school strikeout record. She ended her High School Fastpitch career with a

1.067 ERA, while also batting a .410 with an on-base percentage of .500.

Bailey will be continuing her education and softball career at Eastern Oklahoma State in the fall. Bailey's parents Michael and Chrystal Stewart, along with family and friends, are proud of Bailey's accomplishments and can't wait to see what the future holds.

## McGowan ranked number 1

Christian McGowan, Eastern Oklahoma State University, has moved from number 8 in the final Top 100 JUCO Prospects for the 2020 draft and now leads the 2021 class at this point in the evaluation process.

At his best, the 6-foot-2, 200-pound right-hander runs his fastball into the upper 90s, while sitting mostly 93-95 MPH. He backs up his heater with a mid-80s slider and a quality, low-80s changeup.



## Hawkins publishes poetry

Choctaw poet J. Todd Hawkins is proud to announce the publication of his first full-length collection, This Geography of Thorns: Blues Poetry from the Mississippi Delta & Beyond.

The book was published in July 2020 by the Poetry Society of Texas after winning the PST's 2019

Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Contest. The collection offers a unique perspective on the places, people, and sounds of the American South.

Hawkins lives in Crowley, Texas, with his wife and children. He reads publicly at venues throughout his home state and beyond, sharing his love of poetry. He is a regular visiting poet at a local elementary school, where he leads "shop talks," empowering second-grade students to find their own voices and encouraging them to explore publication opportunities.

This Geography of Thorns was released on Amazon KDP Publishing Platform through the sponsorship of the Poetry Society of Texas. It can be purchased from Amazon, the author, and other outlets. J. Todd Hawkins can be reached for readings, workshops, presentations, and signings at jtoddhawkins@gmail.com or www.jtoddhawkins.com

## Carter competes at Nationals

Davis eighth-grader Dakota Kidd Carter and his fishing partner, Preston Keller of Oklahoma City, represented Oklahoma in the 2020 Mossy Oak Fishing Bassmaster Junior National Championship. The duo placed 7th out of 54 teams that competed in the tournament held at Carrol County Lake in Huntingdon, Tenn. on Oct. 19-20.

The team caught eight fish weighing 10 lbs., 7 oz. The winning team caught 10 fish, weighing 13 lbs., 15 oz.

Carter and Keller qualified for Nationals by placing second in the Oklahoma Junior Bass Nation State Tournament at Lake Murray in June.

Carter also placed first at the Shawnee Twin Lakes tournament and fourth at the Lake Eufaula tournament earlier this season. He is the son of Cody and Jentre Carter. Carter's grandparents are Leon and Judy Rushing, and Mark and Judy Carter, all of Davis and Chris and Mitzi Winters, of Wynnewood.



## Gibson continues softball career in Italian League

Aaliyah Two-Winds Gibson from Houston, Texas, has taken her softball career to the next level over the last two years. The 2018 graduate of the University of Nevada was a three-time All-Mountain West Conference selection and was NCAA All-Region her sophomore year. Gibson batted .400 in conference and season while hitting for a cycle against San Diego State, the only Nevada player to do so.

She was top 3 in Division 1 NCAA in triples and triples per game her sophomore and junior years.

Gibson was drafted by Mobeel USA of the American Softball Association, where she was the 2019 hits leader, selected to All ASBA Team, ASBA All-Star team and helped the team win the ASBA championship.

Gibson signed with the Italian Softball FORLI league in 2020, where she played a short season due to COVID-19. She ended with a three-run home run to finish the 2020 season.

Gibson plans to return to the Italian leagues or play for Athletes Unlimited league in the US for 2021.



## Smith turns 16

Maggie Smith turned 16 Dec 17, 2020. She is the daughter of Kevin and Malinda Smith of Tali hina, Okla. Maggie is the granddaughter of Debra Wyrick of Broken Bow, Okla. and great-granddaughter of the late Virginia Smith of Clayville, Okla.

Maggie attends Tali hina Public School, where she is active in Cheerleading, Band, speech and slowpitch softball.

## James wins NexGen Under 30

Derrick James was named a 2020 Oklahoma NextGen Under 30 winner.

NextGen Under 30 Oklahoma recognizes individuals who demonstrate talent, drive, and service to their communities. More than 300 other Oklahomans, 30 and younger, were also selected this year in several categories.

James is a staff writer at the McAlester News-Capital in McAlester, Okla.

He's contributed to the MN-C winning the Oklahoma Press Association's top award for newspapers in the state each of the past two years.

James has won awards for his coverage of events in southeastern Oklahoma through the Associated Press, Oklahoma Press Association, Society of Professional Journalists, and a Native American Journalists Association member.



## Choctaw students inducted into National Honor Society

Eastern Oklahoma State College has inducted Choctaw students Elizabeth Brewer, Michele Evans, Riley Spears, Shaina Spears, Keeli Tsosie, and Madison Wall into the Phi Theta Kappa national honor society.



## Fuller turns 16

Bianca Genevieve Fuller turned 16 Dec. 17.

We are privileged to raise this beautiful young lady and look forward to the years to come. Happy birthday BB, Love you to the moon and back, Dad and Mom.

## Block accepted into trainee program

Emma Katherine Block was accepted into the Richmond Ballet Trainee Program for the 2020-2021 year.

The Richmond Ballet Trainee Program offers talented, advanced students a transitional experience that bridges the gap between the academic ballet setting and the world of professional dance.

Emma is the daughter of Paul and Sara Block, and is a junior at Lafayette High School in Williamsburg, Virginia.

She has been studying ballet for 12 years at Virginia Regional Ballet and the School of Richmond Ballet. Emma has attended summer programs at Butler University, Richmond Ballet, and Exploring Ballet with Suzanne Farrell.



## TECHNOLOGY ALLOWANCE



- One-time stipend
- Must have earned at least 12 college credit hours overall
- Must be enrolled in at least 6 hours for the current Spring semester
- Must have a college cumulative GPA of at least 2.5

APPLICATIONS START ON JANUARY 18, 2021 | 8:00 AM (CST)

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800-522-6170 EXT 4988 OR 4241

Choctaw Nation Higher Education Program

CHOCTAWNATION.COM



## 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

### HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

### 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



Vera Ann Mackey

Vera Ann Mackey, 67, passed away Jan. 26, 2020.  
Ann was born Aug. 7, 1952, to C.R. Mackey and Lavera Canada Gibson.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brother Ricky Don Mackey; grandchildren Christopher and Cayden Penney; and love of her life, John Edward Penney.

Ann is survived by daughters Latisha Sawyer and spouse Joel, Stormy Knight and spouse Calvin; son John Casey Penny; sons found and adopted three years ago, Johnny Stone and spouse Dee, and Jimmy Ratcliff and spouse Ruth; brothers Calvin “Cowboy” Mackey and spouse Kathy, and Alva Rue Mackey; step-siblings Karen Inselman, Mark Gibson, Larry Gibson, Jeanie Rapier; grandchildren Ladessa Barber, Latristan Barber, Mikalee Sawyer, Jamelle Knight, Quela Knight, Haven Penny, Chloe Penny, Cashlynn Penny, John Penney, Ariaah Penney, and Reyah Penny; great-grandchildren Gavin, Kaison, Adilynn, Ashton, and Nova-Ann; as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

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

Roscoe Jackson

Roscoe “Frank” Jackson, 55, passed away Oct. 25, 2020.

Frank was born Jan. 30, 1965, in Wewoka, Okla., to Anna Loyce (Cline) and Harold Glenn Jackson.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

Frank is survived by his significant other, Susee Nunnelee; brothers Howard Bruce Jackson and spouse Kathy, and Glenn Jackson and spouse Deborah; sister Sandra Nottingham and spouse Gary; numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and a host of friends.

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

Floy J. Vessakosol

Floy J. Vessakosol, 79, passed away June 24, 2020.

Floy was born Oct. 6, 1940, in Gladewater, Texas, to Charles Floyd Meadows Sr. and Willia Mae Ford Meadows.

She was preceded in death by her parents; son and daughter-in-law Anthony “Tony” Victor Vessakosol and Donnessa LeAnn Myers Vessakosol; brother Charles “Junior” Floyd Meadows Jr.; nephews John Wayne Cox Jr. and Charles Bryan Meadows; and brothers-in-law Todd Vessakosol and Dennis Patrick.

Floy is survived by her husband Vic; daughter Krista Simone and spouse Dr. Douglas Hibbs; son Timothy “Timmy” Patrick Vessakosol; sister Mattie Frances and spouse John Cox; sister-in-law Lynda Meadows; granddaughters Helen Hope Hibbs, Halley Ann Vessakosol, and Addison Samorn Vessakosol; nephews Gary Wayne Cox, and Christopher Michael Meadows, and spouse Rebecca and their children Bryan and Lily; numerous beloved cousins and their families; and many extensive family members in Thailand.

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

Viola Ellen Zumwalt

Viola Ellen Zumwalt, 64, passed away Aug. 12, 2020.

Viola was born Jan. 2, 1956, in DeQueen, Ark., to Walter (Ray) and Amanda (Watson) Noah.

She was preceded in death by her sisters Eleonora Que Noah and Charlotte Salinas.

Viola is survived by her husband Meryn Paul Zumwalt, daughter E’Vonne Rae Zumwalt; step-daughter Mervala Zumwalt; grandchildren Paris Jade Burdex and Rome Noah Churchill; brother Leonard Noah and spouse Mary; nieces Carmelita Sanchez, Alejondrina Celeste Sanchez, Laytoya Salinas, and Atalya Noah; nephews Dyani Sanchez, Kyndall Shane Noah, Chadwick Noah, and Landon Noah.

For the full obituary, please visit [Ray & Martha’s Funeral Home](#).

Shirley Lowman

Shirley Lowman, 73, passed away Oct. 23, 2020.

Shirley was born Nov. 30, 1946, in Ludlow, Okla., to Randall Lewis and Minnie (Bond) Ludlow.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sisters Edith Samuels and Juanita Ludlow; and brother Floyd Ludlow.

Shirley is survived by her husband Jerry; children Dewayne Ludlow, and Karen Hackney and spouse Tommy; brothers Clifford Ludlow and spouse Cathy, Kenneth Ludlow and spouse Aileen, Marvin Ludlow and spouse Anita, and Austin Ludlow and spouse Darlene; sisters Wanda Ward, Eula Ludlow, and Carol Burge; numerous nephews and nieces; and many friends, including Alicia Wilson.

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

Rickey Allen Nored

Rickey Allen Nored, 64, passed away Oct. 23, 2020.

Rickey was born Nov. 7, 1955, in Antlers, Okla., to R.W. and Elizabeth “Liz” (Taylor) Nored.

He was preceded in death by his father; father-in-law and mother-in law Billy Jack and Loretta Brown; brother-in-law Charles Brown; and sister-in-law Rose Rhodes.

Rickey is survived by his wife Ruby Nored; daughter Misty Vorpagel and spouse Thomas; son Rickey Nored II; his mother; brothers R.W. Nored Jr. and spouse Alice, and Billy Franklin and spouse Melinda; sisters-in-law Rita Nation and spouse Jerry, and Velma Brown; grandchildren Levi Billy Jack Nored, Teresa Canada, Ryan Canada, and Desta Vorpagel; and two great-grandchildren J.W. Keenan and R.J. Keenan.

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

Rhoda Anderson

Rhoda Anderson, 87, passed away Oct. 12, 2020.

Rhoda was born Oct. 31, 1932, in Caney, Okla., to Sherman Thomas Miller and Eliza Doshie (Wilson) Miller.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Rev. Thomas Anderson; and siblings Mary (Chol) Marjorie Miller, Imageene Swimmer, Nathaniel JoeDean Miller, and Colbert Chief Miller.

Rhoda is survived by sons J. Wayne Anderson and spouse Marsha, and Robert Douglas Anderson; grandchildren Mandy Lawson and spouse Hank, Joshua Anderson, Miko Wildcat, and Mikala Hill and spouse Jayce; great-grandchildren Shane Tisdale, Callie Jo Armstrong, Lily Anderson, and Tana Anderson; sister Linda Addis; brother Sherman Bo Miller; several nieces, nephews, and a host of friends.

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

James L. Vann

James “Jimmy” L. Vann, 74, passed away Oct. 21, 2020.

Jimmy was born Sept. 3, 1946, in Kansas City, Missouri, to Carthel and Ethel Vann.

He was preceded in death by his parents; siblings Carthel Vann Jr., Christine Castaneda, and Joseph Vann.

Jimmy is survived by children Jason Vann, Letitia Marcias and spouse Frank, Cheryl Vann and spouse Jesse Panuco, Cindy Vann and spouse Vince Valdivia, Lisa Zaragoza, and Michael Zaragoza; sister Anella Garcia and spouse Phil; 16 grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and his beloved dog Sonny.

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

Joseph D. Vann Sr.

Joseph D. Vann Sr., 65, passed away Sept. 28, 2020.

Joseph was born Jan. 9, 1955, in Kansas City, Missouri, to Carthel and Ethel Vann.

He was preceded in death by his parents; siblings Christine Castaneda and Carthel Vann Jr.

Joseph is survived by his children Vanessa Manis and spouse Casey, Joseph Vann Jr., Anthony Vann, James Vann and spouse Penny, Jeffrey Vann and spouse Alesia, Raymond Vann and spouse Stephanie, and Johnny Vann; siblings Anella Garcia and spouse Phil, and Jimmy Vann; 13 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

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

Jasney Wade

Jasney Wade, 74, passed away Oct. 31, 2020.

Jasney was born April 18, 1946, to Ed and Melcie Peters and was a lifelong resident of McCurtain County.

She was preceded in death by her husband Benjamin Wade; her parents; companion Lloyd Bond; sister Effie Shomo; grandson Douglas Bohanan; great-grandson Ryland James; and son-in-law David Jefferson.

Jasney is survived by sons Billy Wade and Bruce Bond; daughters Cindy Bohanan and spouse Richard, and Annette Jefferson; brother Samuel Peters; sisters Virginia Jefferson, Francine Howell, and Melissa Bohanan; special niece Patricia Shomo; 11 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren; and a host of extended family and friends.

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

James Lee Ireland

James “Jim” Lee Ireland, 72, passed away March 29, 2020.

Jim was born Dec. 4, 1947, in Lawton, Okla., to Hayden C. Ireland Sr. and Frances McPhail Ireland.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

Jim is survived by his brother Hayden Ireland Jr. and spouse Sharon; a nephew and niece; great-nephews and great-nieces; and numerous cousins.

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

Barbara Grant

Barbara “Milner” Grant, 78, passed away Oct. 30, 2020.

Barbara was born Oct. 11, 1942, in Greenville, Miss., to James Elmer and Lucy Bluebell (Milner) Barnett.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and her husband Bill Grant.

Barbara is survived by son Russ Earnhart and spouse Monica; daughter Amy Patrick and spouse Harry; grandsons Gavin and Evan Patrick; and granddaughter AnnaBeth Rose Patrick.

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

Gwenda Leflore

Gwenda Joy Leflore, 59, passed away Nov. 5, 2020.

Gwenda was born Feb. 8, 1961, in Talihina, Okla., to Robert Leflore and Betty (Baker) Leflore.

She was preceded in death by her father; and granddaughter Hailey Rudder.

Gwenda is survived by sons Jerald Rudder and spouse Michelle, and Weldon Rudder and spouse Nikki; her mother; sisters Donna Baze and spouse Johnny, and Sherry Smith and spouse Grig; grandchildren Megan Rudder, Riley Rudder, and Clara Rudders; special friend Trent Perry; and lifelong friend Margaret Wright.

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

Lena Roberts

Lena Roberts, 66, passed away Oct. 20, 2020.

Lena was born March 3, 1954, in Talihina, Okla., to Pete and Rena (McKinney) Noah.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sisters Mary La-jean Thorne, Gladys Wood, and Deborah Osage; brothers William “Bill” Winship, and Pete Noah Jr.; nephews Teddy Navarro, and Jay Bowen; niece Natalie Wood; uncle Teddy Ward; and niece-in-law Kim Schmitz Osage.

Lena is survived by her husband Daniel Barboza; son Joe Noah Sr.; daughter Samantha Noah; sister Noakola Bowen; daughter-in-law Sharon Noah; grandchildren Tyler Noah, Peter Noah, Timothy Noah, Jeremiah Noah, Noah Thomas, Sky Thomas; nieces Angel Frazier, Debbie Raper, Robin Taylor, Sabrina Stephens, Dorothy Wood-Potter, Jerry Ng, and Julia Wood; nephews Paul Navarro, Daniel Osage, and Alberto Rodriguez.

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

Jack Griffith

Jack Griffith, 83, passed away Oct. 21, 2016.

Jack was born Jan. 14, 1933, in Antlers, Okla., to Haskell and Hattie Bell Griffith.

He was preceded in death by his wife Wanda; son Jack; two grandchildren; his parents; and two brothers.

Jack is survived by sons James and spouse Eileen, and Haskell and spouse June; three daughters Kathryn, Pamela, and Tina and spouse Tony; many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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

Marie Evelyn Hammontree

Marie Evelyn Hammontree, 100, passed away Sept. 30, 2020.

Marie was born Aug. 10, 1920, in Quinton, Okla., to William and Mary Barker.

She was preceded in death by her husband Raymon Hammontree.

Marie is survived by daughters Rose Mary Dockins; Nancy Rice; and Sally Parker and spouse Gary; son B.W. and Barbara Hammontree; and six grandchildren.

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

Margie Nell Williams

Margie Nell (Spring) Williams, 88, passed away Oct. 7, 2020.

Margie was born Dec. 13, 1931, in Horton, Texas, to John “Dutch” Spring Jr. and Ruth Nevada Cooper Spring.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Wesley Williams; daughter Joan Weslea; three brothers; and four sisters.

Margie is survived by sister Faye Ingram; children David Williams and spouse Cherie, Janey Brown and spouse Rick, John Williams and spouse Marie, Diana Holland, and Mike Williams; grandchildren Randy Williams, Brenda McKinley, John Wesley Williams III, Damon Holland, Glenda Mize, Sherry Sanchez, Sheila Keenan, Linda Guiette, Mike Williams, Laura Jane Hamilton, Jerry Williams, Wendy Lay, Candi Martin, Missy Hurtt, and Jason Brown; 34 great-grandchildren; and 31 great-great-grandchildren.

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

Dawson Conover

Dawson Eugene Conover, 16, passed away Aug 21, 2020.

Dawson was born Nov. 7, 2003, in Garland, Texas, to David and Crystal Conover.

He is survived by his parents; grandmothers Nancy Conover and Nita Reynolds; siblings Micheal Balsley, Trevor Balsley, Devon Conover, Raven Conover, and Lacie Conover; uncles Nick Ardese, Darryl Conover and spouse Jennifer, and Dale Conover; aunt Channa Boatman and spouse Cody; and a multitude of loving cousins, friends, and teammates.

For the full obituary, please visit [Allen Funeral home](#).

Stacie Jane Smith

Stacie Jane Smith, 92, passed away Oct. 26, 2020.

Stacie was born Aug. 26, 1928, in Finley, Okla., to Buford and Zelma (Shilling) Smith.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brother Buford Smith; sister Betty Wilkerson; and nephew Ronny Wilkerson.

Stacie is survived by siblings Patricia May and spouse Dale, Syble Weathers, Linda Battles and spouse Doyle, Jerry Smith, and Mike Smith; along with many nieces and nephews.

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

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)





ITI FABVSSA

# A New Chahta Homeland: A History by the Decade

Over the next year and a half, Iti Fabvssa will be running a new series on Choctaw history that will cover each decade from 1830-2000. Since the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, many Choctaws have lived in what is now known as Oklahoma, the overlapping homelands of Caddo and other Indigenous nations. Choctaws were removed here to establish a new home where we would govern ourselves alone and eventually consolidated as the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Although our current territory is not where we came from or where hundreds of generations of our ancestors have been laid to rest, we have transformed it into our new home filled with important histories, ideas, and relations. Over the past 190 years, Choctaws have accomplished much by creating a new society. In Indian Territory/Oklahoma, we have experimented and innovated with new forms of government and laws in ways that align with the values and traditions of our ancestors. It is a rich history that we wish to explore in-depth with our readers here.

Over the course of this series, we hope to clear up some common misconceptions about Choctaw history and provide better context. For instance, some think that when Choctaws arrived in Indian Territory, we were poor and had nothing when we arrived. While the immediate time after removal was difficult, Choctaws drew on collective knowledge to create a new society in a new homeland. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, Choctaws shared knowledge with Europeans to adapt to social changes. Choctaw leaders used missionaries to teach their children English and sent them to boarding schools so they could learn how to deal with Euro-American society. With a Euro-American education, people like Peter Pitchlynn and Allen Wright became scholars, diplomats, and lawyers who helped Choctaws navigate a tumultuous period of rapid change. After removal, Choctaws quickly established a new government, constitution, set of laws and the largest school system west of the Mississippi River. As Choctaw became a written language, local newspapers increasingly published in multiple languages. Choctaw elders have referred to the 1830-1906 period of Choctaw history as a “golden era” because of all the innovations and dynamic history. Nevertheless, many people do not know this history.

Indigenous history is integral to Oklahoma and U.S. history, so we want to take the opportunity to share our unique Choctaw history in greater detail. This will not be the entire history because that could fill numerous books. Instead, the series will focus on key historical events, laws, and social movements – all explained through a Choctaw worldview grounded in the values of our ancestors. In telling our history, this is not only an opportunity to reflect on our ancestors’ legacy but also to show how Choctaws have been important actors in shaping contemporary Oklahoma, United States, and world history. Choctaws came up with ideas that other governments have since copied or learned from. In this series, we will cover the various changes to Choctaw government, how Choctaws developed a new economy (particularly around coal mining), interactions with the U.S. government and American settlers encroaching on Choctaw lands and sovereignty, allotment, Oklahoma statehood, and how Choctaws have lived up through the year 2000. We will provide snapshots of each decade so we can better understand what life was like for our Choctaw ancestors.

Our status as a sovereign nation is especially important to remember because some federal Indian

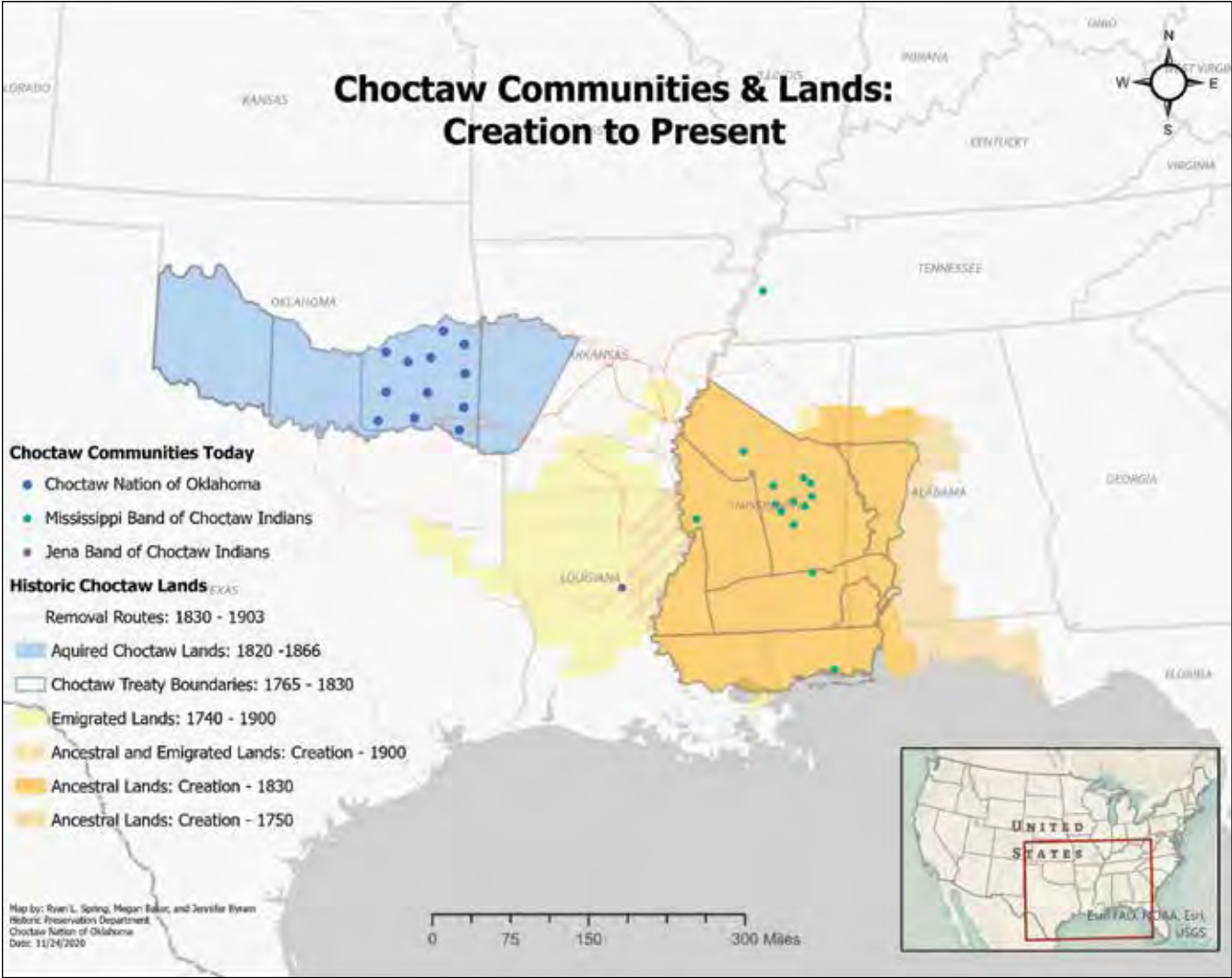


Photo Provided

This map details the lands where Choctaws have lived throughout history, including the homes of contemporary communities. Map courtesy of Historic Preservation.

laws did not apply to Choctaws living in Indian Territory. While we share a lot of history and experiences with other American Indians (and the Five Tribes especially), Choctaws have a distinct history and relationship with the U.S. government. For instance, Choctaws were not included in the 1887 Dawes Act that allotted Choctaw lands. Choctaw allotment did not begin until after 1898 with the Curtis Act and this had important legal implications. Choctaws who took allotments were also granted U.S. citizenship in 1901 – before Oklahoma statehood and long before the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act , which gave the majority of American Indians citizenship. Because of removal, the Five Tribes have comparatively stronger treaties than the nations that made treaties with the US government after them. This is important because it has helped us protect our sovereignty today. We have a different worldview than other Indian nations, which inform our leaders’ decisions. To really understand our history, we have to pay close attention to our cultural, political and legal uniqueness as Choctaw people.

Perhaps most importantly, we will share this history from a Choctaw perspective, as Choctaws have lived and experienced it. Although there are numerous books and articles on Oklahoma Choctaw history, many are largely written by non-Choctaws, and the people that wrote them often do not consider Choctaw-authored accounts of what happened in the past.

Instead, they mostly relied on U.S. government records, which are filled with their own biases that undermined Choctaw nationhood, culture, and our unique perspective. Furthermore, because many Choctaws were educated in the western tradition, there is an enormous collection of documents written and produced by a wide range of Choctaw people that has yet to be fully examined. Such a large archival collection is rare among American Indian communities. There are

still so many untold stories and perspectives hidden in archives that have yet to be interpreted and written about. Many of those stories give us new and important insights that challenge some of the ideas that we believe today. There are also many documents in Choctaw language that have yet to be translated. By writing a history sourced from these underexamined primary sources, we are doing something new both in these articles and in the ongoing work of Cultural Services/Historic Preservation, the Choctaw Language Department, and Choctaw Nation museums with archives and museum collections.

The story of Oklahoma Choctaws is one of renewal and resurgence, adapting and overcoming challenges created by colonialism to establish new relations and paths toward the future. Telling this history requires Choctaws to be our own historians – which we have always been. We know that individuals do not have to have a degree to be a historian. Our grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents are historians. As community members and scholars have long pointed out, telling history is not a neutral project. History has high stakes. Choctaw people have often been excluded from telling our side of history because it would contradict grand narratives about how the United States came into being. We also know there is so much more to American history that has not been fully examined.

While this series will cover some of the major events, this is by no means a comprehensive Oklahoma Choctaw history. Our history in Indian Territory is rich and we want to give it the attention it deserves. Our next Iti Fabvssa article will focus on the years 1830-1840, which covers the first part of removal and the early experiences in the new homeland secured to us by U.S. treaties. We will see how Choctaw Nation was created, how it innovated with its form of government, how it developed a new economy in a different land and interacted with increasing settler encroachment in our new homelands and jurisdiction.

Additional reading resources are available on the Choctaw Nation Cultural Service webpage (<https://choctawnationculture.com/choctaw-culture/additional-resources.aspx>). Follow along with this Iti Fabvssa series in print and online at <https://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture/history/iti-fabvssa>. If you have questions or would like more information on the sources, please contact Megan Baker at [meganb@choctawnation.com](mailto:meganb@choctawnation.com).

# Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

This month, I would like to address our rental assistance service that is assuring our tribal members who reside in rental property outside those owned by Choctaw Nation are in safe and sanitary housing.

Rental assistance is available throughout the territory of the Choctaw Nation. Applicants must submit a completed application along with their tribal membership card and income verification (other documents may be required). Those who are under the income guidelines may then be eligible to receive rental assistance for one year. At that point, applicants must come off the program for one year, allowing the Housing Authority the opportunity to serve as many tribal members as possible with rental assistance. Exceptions to the one-year rule are elders (55 and older), disabled families and college students, who may be served for up to 4 years as long as they are enrolled full-time and maintain at least a 2.50 GPA. Currently, there is no waiting list for rental assistance as the Tribal Council appropriated additional funding this year to alleviate the backlog.

Each rental unit must undergo a Housing Quality Services (HQS) inspection prior to being placed on the program, ensuring the landlord keeps the unit maintained in a safe and sanitary condition. Units will be inspected at least annually.

The Rental Assistance program also administers the Veteran’s Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. VASH is a collaborative effort between two federal entities, HUD and the VA, to provide housing vouchers to Native American tribes to house homeless veterans. Currently, the Choctaw Nation has 20 vouchers.

Applications for all Housing programs are located at each community center and can be found online.

**Choctaw Nation**  
Housing Authority

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**Choctaw Nation** Cultural Services

# INDEPENDENT ELDER HOUSING

**1-800-235-3087 | Application available at your local Community Center**

**Choctaw Nation** Housing Authority

# STUDENT SCHOOL AND ACTIVITY FUND

The Choctaw Nation offers a \$100 grant to Choctaw tribal students who are attending 3-year-old head start through high school. The grant is provided one time each funding year and will be on a Visa card specifically for clothing; it will be declined at ATMs, gas stations, restaurants, movie theaters, etc.

The Student School and Activity Fund Program current funding year is November 1 to May 1.  
Applications can be submitted online.

**APPLICATIONS OPEN NOVEMBER 1, 2020**

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**Choctaw Nation** Student School & Activity Fund



# Hooked on trout fishing in Southeastern Oklahoma

By Christian Toews

If you ask any fisherman, the sport holds more than catching fish. There is something peaceful and refreshing about the entire process. The company or the solitude. Time spent in nature’s glory. The excitement of catching a new personal record fish. Although fishing can seem simple, there are many reasons people get hooked on the sport.

People have enjoyed fishing for centuries. Although there are many ways to catch fish, one of the most challenging and rewarding ways is fly-fishing. This method involves a specific type of lure called a fly. The fly is attached to a very long line and rod. The goal is to impersonate a small insect and trick the fish into biting the fly. The fisherman (also known as an angler) will cast his line over his head in a beautiful rhythmic motion that will imitate an insect flying and landing on the water. Even if you don’t fish, watching someone fly fish is a mesmerizing experience. Watching the fly go back and forth over the angler’s head and then finally rest on the water and flow downstream.



The angler decides what fly to use and how to make his gear mimic an insect. Most anglers will agree, catching a fish is simply a bonus to being on the wa-

ter and practicing your skills.

While you can fly fish on lakes and ponds, most fly-fishing is done in streams and rivers. If you are familiar with fly fishing, your initial thoughts might go toward Montana, Idaho or Alaska. But as many people are discovering, world-class fly fishing is right here in Oklahoma. In the far southeastern corner of the state, just a 30 minute drive from the Arkansas border, sits one of Oklahoma’s hidden fly-fishing gems.

Beavers Bend State Park holds 12 miles of excellent fishing. The Lower Mountain Fork River offers year-round trout fishing in a beautiful location. The river runs through the Ouachita Mountains, and even driving through Beavers Bend State Park to get to the river is gorgeous.

Jeff Preddy is a fly fishing guide on the Lower Mountain Fork River. Fishing is in his blood. Jeff’s father is an outfitter and a guide, and he grew up fishing and hunting. Preddy has guided fishing trips across the country and said the Lower Mountain Fork River is one of his favorite spots to fish because it’s a challenging river.

“I have fished all over the United States, several big saltwater fisheries, and the Lower Mountain Fork is the toughest river I have ever fished. It tests you as an angler,” said Preddy.

Although he has fished with all kinds of equipment, Preddy said that fly fishing is unique and challenging as a sport.

“I feel that it (fly-fishing) really is an art. You have an abnormally long fishing rod; you have a different line setup than any other type of line there is, you have a reel that’s not like any type of convention reel. To learn the cast, it takes an extreme amount of patience. To learn the timing takes an extreme amount of patience. I have been fly-fishing for ten years, and I am still learning how to improve my cast,” he said.

Many people love fly-fishing, not only for the challenge but also for spending time on the river and enjoying nature. Preddy said that this is one of his favorite fishing aspects, and he finds the river to be relaxing.

“You’re standing in the river. Listening to the

sounds of the river, you’re watching nature at its finest,” explained Preddy. “You’ll see deer cross; beavers swim through, ducks; you have a ton of outdoor activity surrounding you. There is nothing more therapeutic to me than standing in a river and listening to nature.”

Maybe you want to fish for trout for the first time, or perhaps you’re a long-time fly-fisherman who wants to try the Lower Mountain Fork. Either way, hiring a guide is a practical way to get familiar with the area and learn a thing or two. Preddy said that hiring a guide is a great idea no matter where you choose to go fish.

“It helps in several ways. A guide already has the proper gear; they are paying attention to the weather, paying attention to the river; they are going to know what flies are in season. A guide is already going to have all that stuff figured out. If you don’t come in with a guide and without doing your homework, you’re guessing. We take the guesswork out of your day,” stated Preddy. “I have been fishing my whole life; if I’m going somewhere I’m not familiar with, I will hire a guide,” he continued.

Fishing might seem like a summer sport, but winter is one of the best times to fish for trout. Preddy explained that during the warmer months, the trout would find the cooler water deeper in the river, but you have a better chance of catching large fish during the winter months.

“You get into your larger fish during the winter months because they will get up in ankle-deep water and hang out and sunbathe,” said Preddy.

Whether you are a beginner, experienced angler, or anything in between, Beavers Bend State Park in Southeastern Oklahoma has something to offer you. If you are looking for beautiful scenery and big trout, now is a great time to visit and try your luck on the water.

If you would like more information about the Lower Mountain Fork River, from water level to regulations, visit [www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/wheretofish/southeast/lower-mountain-fork](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/wheretofish/southeast/lower-mountain-fork). To learn more about Beavers Bend Fly Fishing Guide Service, visit their website at [www.beaversbendfly-fishingguideservice.com](http://www.beaversbendfly-fishingguideservice.com).



Photos by Chjrstan Toews

Above, Jeff Preddy releases a trout back into the Lower Mountain Fork River. Below, Preddy fly fishes in the fog of a cold morning in Beavers Bend State Park. Anglers are traveling to Southeastern Oklahoma to discover the world-class fly fishing that the lakes and rivers of the area have to offer.



## BREAK THE SILENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Choctaw Nation Family Violence Prevention Program wants you to know that you deserve to be safe and free from intimate partner violence in your home, relationships and communities. If someone you love is a victim of abuse or violence, reach out! Let them know they are not alone! There is help for victims through the Choctaw Nation Family Violence Prevention Program. Together we’re more!

Know the signs of domestic violence, get involved. Visit [choctawnation.com/domestic-violence](http://choctawnation.com/domestic-violence) or call 1-800-522-6170 for more information.

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

## LAWN SERVICES

APPLICATION OPENS JANUARY 1, 2021

Must be at least 65 years old or have an ambulatory disability.

Must live in 10% counties of the CNO.

Income requirement: Earn no more than 80% of the national median income as determined by HUD.

Participants receive 20 vouchers, valued at \$25 each (no cash value, redeemable April 1 through December 31, 2021. Vouchers will be issued after April 1. Vouchers will be prorated on May 1 to October 1 for each calendar year.)



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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority





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For questions: [artistregistry@choctawnation.com](mailto:artistregistry@choctawnation.com)







# A year in review

Continued from 1

## 2020 in Numbers

*\*Numbers represent totals for 2020*

- Food Distribution Program staff created a drive-thru curbside service for the safety of clients and staff with 13 staff volunteers. Volunteers provided food delivery to tribal elders, either by helping package groceries or delivering food to elders waiting in their cars.
  - 2395 Total Households Served Per Month**
  - 7854 Family Members Served Per Month**
  - \$296,649 Total Food Value Per Month**
- Choctaw Nation Child Development Centers provided childcare to 320 children and supported jobs for over 100 staff in seven centers. Talihina Child Care Center expanded to serve 20 additional children and create ten additional jobs.
- The Summer Food Service Program distributed 71,000 meals, participating in the USDA Summer Food Program and At-Risk After School Program.
- The Senior Nutrition Program provided Native American elders aged 55 and older a weekly meal, except for Talihina, which serves five meals per week.
  - 27,534 meals served before pandemic**
  - 51,299 meals served curbside pickup during pandemic**
  - 2,871 delivered to homebound member before pandemic**
  - 7,110 meals delivered to homebound members during pandemic**
  - 5,056 average participants in program before pandemic**
  - 8,344 average participants in program during pandemic**
- Emergency Management communicated 130 alerts to 11,000 people.
- The Child Care Assistance Program served 1,508 children.
- Head Start served 310 children through 13 locations.
- Early Head Start served 100 children through four locations.
- High School Student Services served 4,050 student participants.
- The Youth Empowerment and Advisory Board served 400 student participants.
- The Chahta Foundation awarded 262 scholarships totaling \$350,875.
- The Johnson O’Malley program served 13,409 students.
- The Higher Education Program awarded \$7,058,423.27 to 5216 students.
- The Educational Talent Search served 500 students.
- College Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) served 161.
- Adult Education served 55 students.
- Jones Academy had 151 students and ten graduates.
- The STAR Program awarded \$331,960 to 9,406 students.
- The Student School and Activity Fund awarded \$364,681.04 to 3,649 students.
- The Pipeline for Advanced Training Health Sciences Academy (PATHS) awards to 113 students totaled \$485,000.
- This year, the Nation added mental health professionals to the Department of Public Safety; counselors trained in crisis prevention, de-escalation, and trauma response, will be available to assist officers as well as tribal members in high-risk situations.
- The Choctaw Nation Housing Authority assisted more than 6,215 tribal households in the past year through services such as LEAP homes, elder homes, rental units, lawn care vouchers, appliance and air conditioning, home repairs and storm shelters.
- The Choctaw Nation distributed \$200.8 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding. A majority of relief funding went directly to member support programs.
- The Career Development Program served 11,046 participants in the total amount of \$5,311,695.
- Employment Training Services served 1,036 Summer Youth ETS students ages 16-21, 124 Classroom Training participants and 248 Adult Work Participants.
- In the fiscal year 2020, the Nation is projected to have over one million visits to hospitals and wellness centers, over 962,150 prescriptions provided and over 17,776 tribal and non-tribal patients served at the Employee Health Center.
- The Choctaw Small Business Development Department assisted many business owners in 2020.
  - 41 business startups**
  - 27 business expansions**
  - 199 total jobs created**
  - 178 training events**
  - 742 training attendees**
  - 1,297 one-on-one counseling hours**

## 2020 Awards and Honors

- Choctaw Nation Recycling Center was awarded the Level I, Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher Award, the highest-level recognition a community can receive under the Oklahoma Clean Community Program.
- Chief Batton was inducted into Oklahoma Hall of Fame’s 93rd class of outstanding Oklahomans, the state’s highest honor.
- Chief Batton received the Lifetime Achievement Award in Global Citizenship from the Happy World Foundation for fostering a greater sense of community between the Choctaw Nation and the Republic of Ireland, which promotes global citizenship. Chief Batton was nominated for his work in preserving and strengthening Choctaw language and culture.
- Chief Batton was named as one of several recipients of the 2019 Global Citizenship Award.
- Dr. Nikki EagleRoad presented at the Oklahoma Osteopathic Association’s Winter Seminar, a statewide conference for physicians. The project, entitled “Overcoming Barriers to Promote Advance Care Planning Discussions in the Outpatient Setting: Is There a Better Way?” won first place among 30 submissions.
- The Judicial Branch and Government Tribal Services were selected as two out of 33 winners across 16 states to receive the Tyler Public Sector Excellence Award in recognition of significant commitment to public service and striving for greater efficiency and effectiveness in serving communities.
- Jerri Sisk, nationally certified pharmacy technician and senior pharmacy technician at the Choctaw Nation Health Care Center in Talihina, was the recipient of the Sylvia J. Martin Outstanding Pharmacy Technician Award from the Oklahoma Society of Health System Pharmacists (OSHP) and Pharmacy Technician of the Year by the Oklahoma City Area Indian Health Service
- The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority Talihina Hospital was awarded a five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The award placed the hospital in the top 8% of the nation’s major health care programs, based on a patient satisfaction survey called the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems, given to all patients during the 2019 calendar year. Of nearly 3,500 hospitals nationwide that participated in the survey, only 266 received the coveted five-star rating.

## Choctaw Nation to have official Flag Day

By Chris Jennings

At the Nov. 14 Tribal Council session, a resolution was passed with a unanimous vote to set aside Oct. 16, 2021, as the first Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Flag Day. This day will celebrate and reflect on the importance of the flag of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma every year after.

The idea for a national flag day was brought to Councilman Robert Karr by John O’Leary. O’Leary’s family has a deep and impactful history in the Choctaw Nation. He is the great-grandson of Chief Allen Wright, who helped name Oklahoma and his grandfather worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. His mother was the first woman elected to the Choctaw Tribal Council since statehood and His father was responsible for Boggy Depot Memorial Park. O’Leary also followed in his grandfather’s footsteps, working for the BIA.

When asked why he thought it was important that the Choctaw Nation have a Flag Day O’Leary said, “Well, I feel pride in our tribe. I feel pride in our government in the way that it’s running and providing for our people. I feel pride in our history.”

Coming when there is great change for Native tribes across the United States, the idea of a national flag day is important and timely.

“Since the McGirt ruling reaffirmed our CNO boundaries and reservation status, the O’Leary/Wright family and I believe a Choctaw Nation Flag day is very important. It will give our people a special day to proudly display their tribe’s flag,” said Karr.

The Choctaw Nation was the first tribe to adopt a national flag. Before that, during the Civil War, Choctaw warriors carried flags into a battle with many similarities to the current flag.



Pictured above is the first Choctaw flag. The flag we are all familiar with was later adopted in 1860.



At the November 2020 Tribal Council meeting, Tribal Council voted unanimously to name October 16 Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Flag Day.

The three arrows symbolize the three great Choctaw Chiefs – Apuckshunnubbe, Pushmataha, and Moshulatubbee – who signed the Treaty of Doak’s Stand (1820).

There have been changes to the flag over time, culminating in 1940 with a design by Oklahoma City architect Guy C. Reid. Those elements, however, were not entirely accurate of traditional Choctaw bows, arrows and pipe-hatchet. The current seal was updated in 2017 with input from cultural and member service leaders, tribal historians and elders to update those elements to more accurate representations.

Peaceable by nature, the Choctaws smoked their pipe-hatchets (or tomahawks) as they sat in solemn deliberation around council fires.

The three arrows symbolize the three great Choctaw Chiefs – Apuckshunnubbe, Pushmataha, and Moshulatubbee – who signed the Treaty of Doak’s Stand (1820).

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## GROWING HOPE PROGRAM



REVIVING AND SUSTAINING OUR CHOCTAW TRADITIONS AND CULTURE

By revitalizing our traditional crops and sharing related knowledge, the Growing Hope Program helps make it possible to revitalize traditional Choctaw foods. These foods are an important part of Choctaw heritage. Both tasty and healthy, they provide an opportunity to use our own culture to help us live healthier lives today.

To learn more about the Growing Hope Initiative and seed availability, contact Jacqueline Putman at 580-380-9397.

This program is funded in part through the US Department of Agriculture.

**Choctaw Nation** Cultural Services

## STAR PROGRAM

SUCCESS THROUGH ACADEMIC RECOGNITION



To qualify for STAR awards, students must be enrolled in the second - twelfth grades and possess a tribal membership card. Incentives are given twice a year at the end of each semester, for the following academic achievements:

• ALL A'S: \$25 GIFT CARD	• ALL B'S: \$10 GIFT CARD
• ALL A'S & B'S: \$10 GIFT CARD	• PERFECT ATTENDANCE: \$25 GIFT CARD


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 Choctaw Nation STAR Program

## CHAHTA HOMESTEAD PROJECT: 1830-1930



HOMESTEADS | OLD SCHOOLS | CHURCHES  
FAMILY HISTORY | PHOTOGRAPHS

Our project aims to bring together the information we do know with community knowledge to stitch together a map of the Choctaw Nation’s early landscape. This project will help protect historical sites from getting destroyed, preserve family history for future generations and increase our understanding of life after the Removal.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

What are you interested in learning from this project?  
Do you have information to provide?

**Choctaw Nation** Cultural Services



# An update on sovereignty in Oklahoma

By Bradley Gernand

Patience is a virtue, particularly in regard to the status of tribal sovereignty following this summer’s U.S. Supreme Court decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. The decision and a related one, which found the Muscogee (Creek) Nation continues to exist as a reservation, may soon apply to the Choctaw Nation as well.

The court’s ruling in *McGirt*, which was issued in July, was written narrowly to apply solely to the Creeks. Experts say the basis for the ruling—that Congress never acted to terminate their reservation—likely applies to all five tribes. Legal cases now working their way through lower courts may soon determine this.

Chief Gary Batton has established a sovereignty commission consisting of representatives from across the Choctaw Government. Its task is planning for all eventualities, one of which is that Choctaw tribal sovereignty could be reaffirmed by a court very soon. If so, the Choctaw Nation may gain added roles and responsibilities.

As the Creeks are finding, the first impacts of their newly affirmed tribal sovereignty are in matters pertaining to Indian child welfare, justice and law enforcement. Actions already taken by the Choctaw Nation in preparation for this include hiring an additional ten police officers and seven social service workers. It has also deepened its relationship with the U.S. District Court for Eastern Oklahoma, and with law enforcement agencies across southeastern Oklahoma.

In Washington, as Biskinik went to press, Congress was working toward funding, or authorizing, the federal government’s spending for the rest of its fiscal year, which concludes on Sept. 30, 2021. Progress thus far has been rocky, with two options appearing the most likely: either lawmakers authorize spending for the rest of the fiscal year by passing a full budget, or pass another continuing resolution to authorize spending at existing levels, with no increases or decreases. The federal government has been operating on a continuing resolution, rather than a full-year budget, since Sept. 1, 2020.

An in-between hybrid of the two may also present itself: Congress may pass a budget for the rest of the fiscal year for certain programs or agencies, and an extended continuing resolution for all others. Each of these three scenarios present potential opportunities and pitfalls for federal funding in Indian Country.

Certain services provided to Native Americans are paid with federal dollars, and if Choctaw Government agencies will be providing these in the future, rather than the state, it will work with Oklahoma’s congressional delegation to ensure the needed funds will be budgeted and made available. Chief Batton has already kicked off this process.

The timing and scope of what’s next depends on lower courts and Congress.

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In a 5-4 vote, the United States Supreme Court sided with Oklahoma tribes in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* in July, saying much of the eastern half of Oklahoma is still a tribal reservation.

# National Congress of America Indians aims to protect tribal citizenship

By Shelia Kirven

The 77th annual session of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, was held virtually this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic November 8-13. However, not being able to meet in person did not stop the General Assembly from adopting a historic resolution, the first of its kind from the NCAI, to protect tribal citizenship and form a protection task force.

Resolution #PDX-20-001, Tribal Citizenship Policy and Protection Task Force, was created “in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants, the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people.”

The resolution declares that each Indigenous nation in the United States has its own rights to decide who its citizens of that nation are; that each person has the right to belong to such communities and nations, and that no discrimination should be directed to any person due to those rights. Referencing times that the federal government tried to define tribal citizenship, such as treaties, laws, federal



regulations and policies of the past, NCAI affirmed in the resolution that, “since time immemorial, each Tribal Nation retains the inherent sovereign right to determine its own citizenship....”

NCAI further endeavored in its resolution, to establish a Tribal Citizenship Protection Task Force for study, education, and development recommendations about issues of Indigenous tribal citizenship.

Choctaw tribal member and Executive Director for the Association of American Indian Affairs (AAIA), Shannon O’Loughlin, said about the passage of the historic resolution, that it “powerfully affirms both sides of the tribal citizenship coin: The Indigenous human and civil right to belong and the inherent tribal sovereign right to decide who belongs.”

O’Loughlin stated, “It is time that our Nations be the example of what it looks like to the world to protect human rights and cultural sovereignty.”

BISKINIK

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January 2021

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2020

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Natives across the country are more than “something else”.

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World class fly-fishing fishing in southeastern Oklahoma.

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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