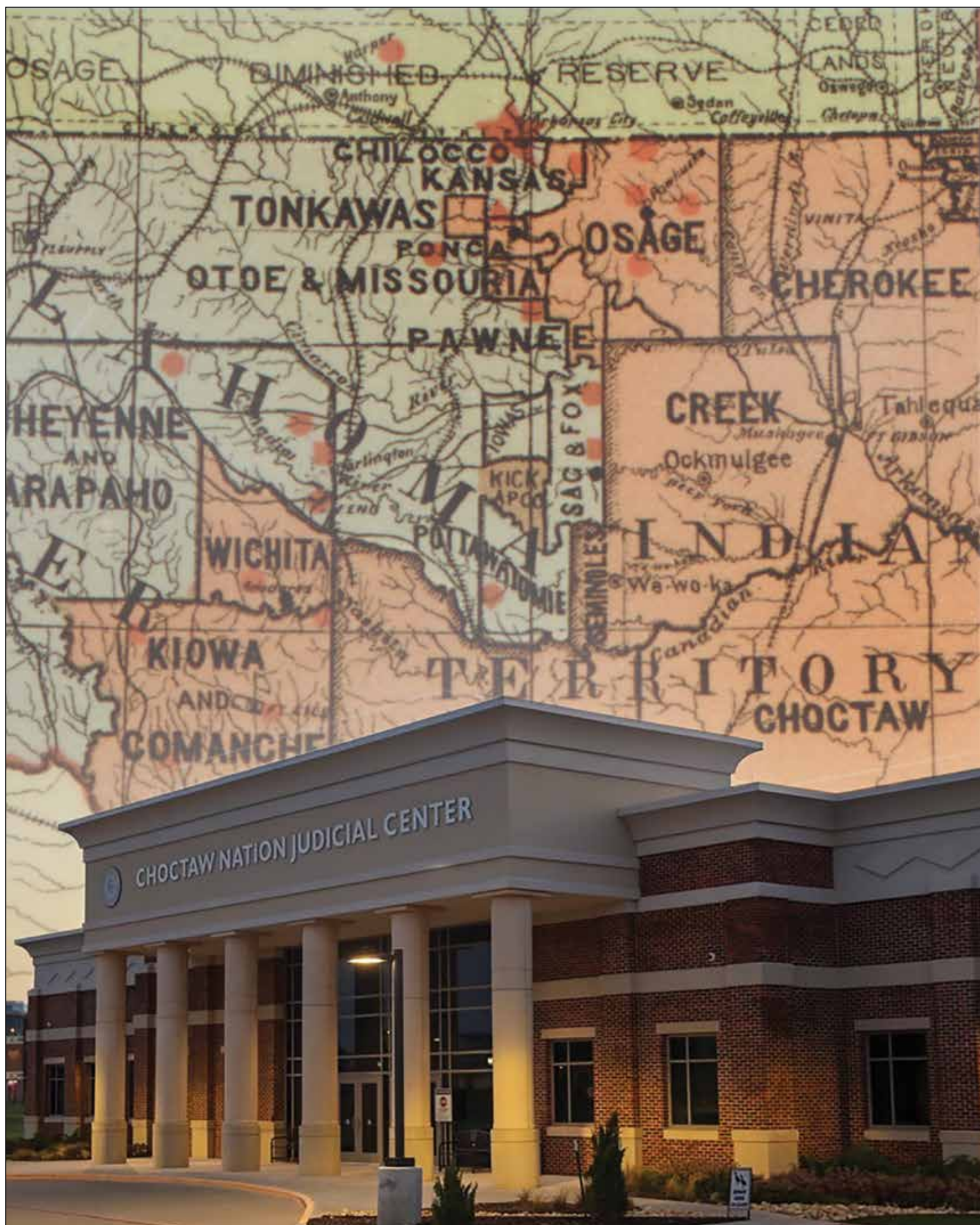




May 2021 Issue



Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals rules that Supreme Court ruling applies to all Five Tribes

By Kendra Germany-Wall

On April 1, 2021, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals issued a ruling in *Sizemore v. Oklahoma*, declaring that the Choctaw Nation reservation was never disestablished.

This decision was long-awaited after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling in the *McGirt v. Oklahoma* case, which was decided in July 2020.

The *McGirt* ruling determined that Congress never disestablished the Muscogee (Creek) reservation when Oklahoma became a state in 1907 and that Jimcy McGirt, a felon convicted by the state, should have been prosecuted in federal court.

This argument is based on the 1885 Major Crimes Act, a federal law dictating that major crimes involving Native Americans in Indian Country be prosecuted in federal or tribal court.

Title 18 Section 1153 of the United States Code, known as the Major Crimes Act, grants tribes and the federal government exclusive jurisdiction to prosecute certain enumerated offenses committed by Indians within Indian Country. It reads in relevant part as follows:

"Any Indian who commits against the person or property of another Indian or other person any of the following offenses, namely, murder, manslaughter, kidnapping, maiming, a felony under chapter 109A, incest, a felony assault under section 113, an assault against an individual who has not attained the age of 16 years, felony child abuse or neglect, arson, burglary, robbery, and a felony under section 661 of this title within the Indian country, shall be subject to the same law and penalties as all other persons committing any of the above offenses, within the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States."

The federal General Crime Act gives the government criminal jurisdiction over non-Native Americans who commit most crimes against Native American victims. The federal government also shares jurisdiction with tribal courts to prosecute crime against Native Ameri-

cans committing crimes against non-Native Americans.

The Supreme Court ruling in *McGirt* initially only applied to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. However, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals has since applied the rule of law from the *McGirt* case to the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole reservations. In doing so, the Court found that the reservation boundaries of those tribes are still intact today.

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals announced on Apr. 1, 2021, that the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* applies to the Choctaw Nation.

The ruling came following deliberation over a Pittsburg County man's conviction.

Devin Sizemore, 26, of Krebs, was convicted and sentenced to life in prison without parole by a Pittsburg County jury in 2018 for first-degree murder in the 2016 death of his 21-month-old daughter, Emily. He was also convicted on a second felony charge of assault and battery on a police officer.

The court's order stated that the mandate would go into effect 20 days after the ruling. A federal charge had not been filed at the time of publication of this article, on April 22, 2021.

In his opinion, Vice-Presiding Judge Scott Rowland stated, "This appeal turns on whether Appellant Devin Warren Sizemore is an Indian as defined by federal law, and whether he committed murder and assault and battery upon a police officer within Indian country as that term is defined by federal law. Because the answer to both questions is yes, federal law grants exclusive criminal jurisdiction to the federal government on the murder charge at the very least and possibly the assault charge as well. Regardless, the State of Oklahoma was without jurisdiction to prosecute him."

In a press release on March 26, Acting United States Attorney Christopher J. Wilson said, "Our goal has been and will continue to be protecting the people of the Eastern District of Oklahoma by focusing all of our available resources on ensuring that violent offenders are transitioned from state custody to federal custody to

be tried for the violent crimes they have been charged with committing."

Immediately following the ruling, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma announced that it was prepared to file more than 125 cases in the District Court of the Choctaw Nation. In a historic move, the Choctaw Nation filed all 125 cases the same day to prevent any criminals from being released from custody.

"The Choctaw Nation has been preparing for the shift in criminal case jurisdiction for well over two years. I am grateful for the work of our Public Safety Department, Tribal Prosecutor's Office, our Judicial branch, and the Sovereignty for Strong Communities Commission to protect public safety and to offer individuals a fair and efficient trial," said Chief Gary Batton.

In anticipation of the change in jurisdiction, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Prosecutor's Office has met with all District Attorney Offices within the Choctaw Nation reservation boundaries.

To date, the Choctaw Nation has reviewed more than 500 cases involving self-identified Native American defendants from the State of Oklahoma, with a focus on incarcerated defendants. Those cases have been provided to the Choctaw Nation Department of Public Safety (DPS) for investigation.

This coordination has allowed the Choctaw Nation to identify the cases impacted, gather information to charge individuals in the District Court of the Choctaw Nation, and will help maintain public safety.

"Our coordination with the State of Oklahoma, District Attorney Offices within our reservation, and our Choctaw Nation Department of Public Safety should prevent any currently incarcerated individual from being released based solely on a *McGirt* jurisdictional claim," said Kara Bacon, Tribal Prosecutor for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Continued on page 12

Criminal Issues After the Sizemore Decision FAQ

What is the Sizemore decision? It is a ruling from Oklahoma's highest criminal appeals court, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals (OCCA) that the Choctaw Nation's 1866 reservation boundaries were never changed, meaning land within those boundaries constitutes a reservation and is Indian Country. Therefore, Indians who commit crimes on the reservation must be tried in either federal court or Choctaw Nation court and not state court. Non-Indians who commit certain crimes against Indians on the reservation may also be tried in federal court or in Choctaw Nation court.

Will defendants face new charges if their cases are dismissed in state court? The Choctaw Nation prosecutor's office has been working closely with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Oklahoma for months to determine which cases affected by the Sizemore decision will be filed in federal court and which cases will be filed in Choctaw Nation District Court. New charges will be filed in federal or Choctaw Nation District Court immediately. Once new charges are filed, the criminal

process will begin in either federal court in Muskogee, Oklahoma, or Choctaw Nation District Court in Durant, Oklahoma, similar to the process in the state (bond, initial appearance, arraignment, trial, etc.)

What happens to existing state criminal charges? If the state lacks the jurisdiction to charge a defendant after the Sizemore decision, the state district court where the charges are filed should dismiss the charges. The District Attorney may withdraw the charges or it may be necessary for a defendant's attorney or the defendant to file a motion to dismiss the charges for lack of jurisdiction.

Will the Nation provide a criminal defendant in state court with an attorney? The Choctaw Nation does not currently provide or pay for legal representation for Choctaw members facing criminal charges in state court or seeking to appeal their state criminal conviction. Other resources may be available such as the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System or the defendant may represent themselves (which is known as acting pro se).

Will currently incarcerated defendants whose cases are affected by the Sizemore decision remain in jail/prison? Yes, if a person has been convicted of a crime, there is clear law that establishes the process by

which defendants can challenge their conviction. The Sizemore decision will give some defendants a new ground to challenge their convictions, but they will still have to go through the established legal process to obtain post-conviction relief and be released from prison. If a person has not yet been convicted and the Choctaw Nation or the federal government files new charges against them, they may still be incarcerated if they cannot bond out.

Is a defendant required to obtain their own attorney in Choctaw Nation or federal court? If they are able, an individual charged with a crime in Choctaw Nation District Court or federal court should retain their own attorney who is licensed to practice in either federal or Choctaw Nation courts to represent them in their new criminal case.

Will a defendant who cannot afford an attorney be provided one in federal or Choctaw Nation District Court? The Choctaw Nation District Court may provide an attorney for a criminal defendant who is unable to pay for one. During an initial appearance the judge will inquire as to a defendant's ability to obtain their own legal counsel or their need to be assigned counsel by the court. This same process will also occur in federal court.

Faith, Family, Culture



Chief Gary Batton

Sovereignty following the Sizemore ruling

On April 1, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals ruled in the Sizemore decision that the Choctaw Nation's 1866 reservation boundaries were never changed, and our reservation remains intact today.

This decision was long-awaited after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling in the McGirt v. Oklahoma case, which was decided in July 2020. McGirt initially only applied to the Creek Nation's criminal jurisdiction, but we have been prepared for the ruling to be extended to the Choctaw Nation as well.

As you may know, the McGirt ruling determined that Congress never disestablished the Creek reservation when Oklahoma became a state in 1907 and

that Jimcy McGirt, a felon convicted by the state, should actually have been prosecuted in federal court. This argument is based on the 1885 Major Crimes Act, a federal law dictates that major crimes involving Native Americans in Indian Country be prosecuted in federal or tribal court.

In anticipation of the Sizemore decision, the Choctaw Nation prepared more than 125 cases to be filed in the District Court of the Choctaw Nation as soon as the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals ruled in the Sizemore case. In a historic move, the Choctaw Nation filed 125 cases the same day to prevent any criminals from being released from custody.

We have been preparing for the shift in criminal case jurisdiction for well over two years. I am grateful for the work of our Public Safety Department, Tribal Prosecutor's Office, our Judicial branch, court clerks and the Sovereignty for Strong Communities Commission to protect public safety and to offer individuals a fair and efficient trial.

In anticipation of the change in jurisdiction, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Prosecutor's Office has met with all District Attorney Offices within the Choctaw Nation reservation boundaries.

To date, the Choctaw Nation has reviewed more than 500 cases involving self-identified Native American defendants from the State of Oklahoma, with a focus on incarcerated defendants. Those cases have been provided to the Choctaw Nation Department of Public Safety (DPS) for investigation.

This coordination has allowed the Choctaw Nation to identify the cases impacted, gather information to charge individuals in the District Court of the Choctaw Nation, and will help maintain public safety.

The Choctaw Nation is and always has been a reservation since the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek between the Choctaws and the U.S. Government.

We, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, strive to be good neighbors. Our goal is not only to take care of our people, but our communities as well. It's about working together to protect the health and safety of every person living within the Choctaw Nation. That will never change.

There will be many updates and news to share with you regarding this ruling. To stay up to date on all things related to our tribal sovereignty, visit www.choctawnation.com/sovereignty.

Assistant Chief named March Texoma Hero

By Charles Clark

Assistant Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Jack Austin Jr., was named the March Texoma Hero on March 26, in recognition of his service in the United States military.

"I am deeply humbled and honored with this recognition," said Assistant Chief Austin. "I don't consider myself a hero at all, but for me, those who paid the ultimate price are the heroes."

In the ceremony, Assistant Chief Austin's named was added to a list of 76 local veterans honored since the recognition began in 2015.

Billy Teague, co-founder of the Texoma Hero, noted that the ceremony was to "sincerely thank the new Hero for selfless service, not only to our nation, but for community contributions after leaving the military."

Chief Gary Batton nominated his Assistant Chief and read his military biography.

While serving in the U.S. Army from 1987 to 1991, Jack Austin Jr. was stationed in Germany as a Field Artilleryman. His distinguished career included being awarded the National Defense Service Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, Army Meritorious Unit Commendation Ribbon, and Expert Badges for rifle, grenade, machine gun and Air Assault, among other commendations.

"He has served with honor and integrity and still does that today in his role as Assistant Chief," said Chief Batton.

Since becoming Assistant Chief in 2014, he has advocated for veterans by establish-

ing designated parking spaces at all CNO facilities, established the laying of wreaths with Choctaw youth at the Veterans Cemetery, providing paid leave for associates who are soldiers serving on active duty. He helps with the Veterans Advocacy Program getting them all the benefits possible, supports the Veterans' Airlift Command, and much more.

"For me, serving my country was never to gain the awards or accomplishments that were read in my bio earlier, but to simply serve," said Assistant Chief Austin.

"I was blessed to serve with so many great people during my short term in the service and I can still remember that day, before I got out of the Army, praying and asking the Lord to place me in a position to continue service, but this time to serve the Choctaw people So, I am equally blessed today," he said.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. was named the March 2021 Texoma Hero. Pictured are Billy Teague, co-founder of the Texoma Hero, Assistant Chief Jack Austin, Jr. and Chief Gary Batton.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Preparing for severe weather season

In Oklahoma, we know that severe weather can happen at any time, especially in the spring and summer months. From April through June, lightning, large hail and damaging winds are all dangerous possibilities. It's important to have a plan in place for keeping your loved ones and friends safe. Living in what's known as Tornado Alley, preparedness is key for severe weather when it strikes.

The National Weather Service has a few tips to help prepare for severe weather.

Be weather-ready. Severe weather can change in an instant. Check your local forecast regularly to see if you are at risk for tornadoes in your area. Listen to your local news or a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio to stay informed about thunder-

storm and tornado watches and warnings in your area. Sign up for notifications. Knowing how your community sends weather warnings is essential, especially if outdoor sirens aren't available. Many in rural areas cannot depend on local news, however, thanks to the technology of smartphones, residents can be alerted of severe storms capable of producing damaging wind, hail and tornadoes. Choctaw Nation's Emergency Management sends notifications when severe weather is expected on their Facebook page. These notifications proved to be very helpful during the recent severe winter weather we experienced. Follow them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ChoctawNationofOklahomaEmergencyManagement>.

Create a communication plan. It is always good to have a family communication plan that includes an emergency meeting place and related information that could help protect your family. If you live in a mobile home or a home without a basement, identify a nearby safe building that you can get to quickly, such as a church or a family member's home. However, you will not always have time to find a safer structure. In this case, it is recommended to pick a safe room in your home, such as a basement, storm shelter or an interior room on the lowest floor with no windows.

Make sure all members of your family know where to go when a tornado warning is issued. Don't forget your pets if time allows. Also, encourage your family, loved ones and neighbors to prepare for the possibility of tornadoes. Visit <https://www.ready.gov/severe-weather> for more tips on how to stay safe in severe weather.

If you are preparing your home by having a safe room reinforced, you can find plans for reinforcement for interior rooms to provide better protection on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's website.

The Choctaw Nation Housing Authority also offers a storm shelter program that provides a grant for storm shelters to Choctaw tribal members who live in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas, which are states with a high risk of tornadoes. Applicants must be 45 years old or older to receive the full grant amount of \$2,500. Applicants under 45, who meet all other requirements, will receive a grant for \$1,250. To qualify for the \$4,200 grant for an above-ground shelter, the applicant must have a documented ambulatory disability. For a complete list of requirements, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/tribal-services/housing/storm-shelters>. You can now apply for this program on the Chahta Achvfla Member Portal. For more information or assistance with completing the application, please contact the Housing Authority at (800) 235-3087 ext. 6306.

My article may seem a little different but with spring storm season upon us, I wanted to provide awareness to help us all be better prepared. After all, our family, friends, and communities are worthy of protecting no matter the season. God bless each of you.

Earth in darkness

The Book of Job is considered to be the oldest book of the Bible. It addresses the age-old question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" This book describes Job's questioning of God in the aftermath of several tragedies in his life.

We shall look into verse 9 of chapter 38. God is answering Job with prophetic statements. God says, "When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it."

God prepared the earth so that it is covered in clouds, and thick darkness is the swaddling band for it. God intended man to live by faith and not by sight.

Hebrew 10:38 tells us, "The just shall live by faith." When man sinned against God, God promised a savior through the seed of a woman. God said by grace are ye saved through faith. Man is to spend his lifetime on earth walking by faith and not by sight. Man cannot see God, so he has to believe by faith. But one day, God is going to remove that swaddling band of darkness.

He said in 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." What will that noise be? This is the noise of the swaddling darkness being ripped off the face of the earth.

Then the wicked unbelievers will see God sitting on His throne. The Book of Revelation chapter 6 and verses 14 thru 17 describes this event. "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men and every bondmen, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

Oh yes, where will the righteous be during this suffering? They will be in heaven enjoying the riches of His Grace and everlasting life in Glory.



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Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

School of Language to conduct important count of Choctaw first speakers

By Shelia Kirven

The Choctaw Nation School of Language will conduct a vital survey beginning in May of tribal members who are fluent first speakers of the Choctaw language. The survey will remain open through the end of June.

All Choctaw tribal members who are first speakers are asked to complete the short survey. A first language speaker is someone who grew up in a home where Choctaw was spoken.

The survey asks for name, contact information, age range and how many people in the home speak the Choctaw language. It asks the person taking the survey to describe themselves as a first speaker, as someone who grew up hearing the language; can understand it but cannot respond; or as someone who grew up hearing the language, understands it, and can engage in limited small talk. Personal information will not be shared with anyone outside the Choctaw Language Program.

Participants will also be asked if they would like to improve their speaking skills. Additionally, names of other fluent speakers are asked for in the survey as well.

Teresa Billy, Assistant Director of the Choctaw School of Language, said it is imperative to see how many first speakers are in the tribe.

Billy stated that the department wants to know the people who grew up in the culture, grew up in the home speaking Choctaw and understood all the culture's nuances.

She spoke of the toll that the recent Covid pandemic has taken on tribal speakers in the Choctaw Nation. "We know we've lost at least 40-50 people due to Covid, or during this time of Covid." She went on to say, "That number could be higher."

A second survey will follow later in the year, which will capture information about those who have learned or are learning the language as a second language speaker and their speaking level.

Billy commented, "We are not leaving the second speakers out. We want to know how many are also actively learning the language and teaching it to their children."

"Your language is tied to your culture. With our original speakers, every day that we lose some, we lose those people who know those traditional hymn songs we sing, they know older tunes, they can start them, they can sing them. But as we move along at this time, even at funerals,

people are looking for someone to come and sing these traditional hymns at these services, and it's harder and harder to find people because the original people are passing away," Billy stressed.

She went on to say about the language, "It is connected and tied to our sovereignty. Within your sovereignty, it is required that you must have a distinct language associated with your tribe. That distinct character is our language."

With extreme importance of why the surveys are being done and why the Choctaw language cannot become extinct comes the need for everyone to work together to make sure that people learn the language and use it so that it does not die.

"As a tribal member dies, we lose bits of culture. That is why it is so important to learn the language. We are very grateful for all those new learners who are putting forth the effort and initiative to learn the language," Billy went on to say.

The heart of the Choctaw Nation rests in its people, culture and Chahta anumpa, Choctaw language. Identifying language speakers is vital to tribal sovereignty. Chief Batton believes, "We must continue to nurture support for our traditions and celebrate our uniqueness as Chahta people."

The Choctaw Nation School of Language was started in 1996 and has been fully funded by the tribe for its existence.

"What has been wonderful for us and the tribe is that the Chief and Tribal Council have totally supported us. We have never been limited on anything that was needed. That is why we have been able to do what we have done for so long. We are 100% tribally funded," Billy said.

Since that time, the program has grown by leaps and bounds, publishing a new Choctaw dictionary, teaching in Head Starts, high schools and universities, online and in communities. Jones Academy in Hartshorne also has first through fifth-grade lessons in the Choctaw language class each year.

Though the Covid pandemic has canceled in-person community language classes for the time, the School of Language's Facebook page has been busier than ever with almost 2,500 followers, as has the department's website.

Online classes for high schools, colleges, universities, and communities are still being taught, as are Jones Academy and Head Start instruction.

When asked what readers can do at home and with their families to preserve the language and the culture, Billy recommended sharing lessons that appear on the Choctaw School of Language's

CHOCTAW LANGUAGE SPEAKERS SURVEY

PLEASE CONSIDER TAKING THIS SHORT SURVEY IF YOU SPEAK OR UNDERSTAND CHOCTAW.

If you know others who may need assistance in completing the survey, your assistance to them is greatly appreciated. It is very important that we document our speakers of the Choctaw language.

Use your smartphone camera to scan this code and take the survey.

bit.ly/language-speakers-survey

QUESTIONS OR FEEDBACK MAY BE EMAILED TO TBILLY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation School of Choctaw Language



Facebook page with children and family and speaking the language at family gatherings. She also stressed the importance of teaching Choctaw phrases. "Get a notebook and pick up four or five phrases, and practice those over and over until your family knows them, and then go back and pick up more sentences. Do a little bit at a time but stick with it and make it part of your daily routine."

She also highly recommends recording family elders and, in the community, speaking the language.

Billy said it is also important to make sure that when one is learning and speaking the language, they also learn and share the culture – such as cooking. Choctaw foods, learning the names and how they are prepared, asking elders how it was cooked in the old days, and the background information is very important.

The School of Language must doc-

ument our speakers of the Choctaw language in this vital count. If you know of someone who may need assistance in completing the survey, please reach out and assist them or contact the Choctaw School of Language so that they may help.

The survey can be found at <http://bit.ly/language-speakers-survey>. Please take the survey only one time per person.

If you are interested in learning more about the survey or the program's mission, contact the Choctaw School of Language at Tbilly@choctawnation.com.

Visit the Choctaw School of Language's FaceBook page at <https://www.facebook.com/SchoolofChoctawLanguage> or their webpage at <https://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture/language>.

Choctaw dictionaries and hymn books are also available for purchase at <https://www.choctawstore.com>.

FEMA to help pay funeral costs for COVID-19-related deaths

WASHINGTON – In early April, FEMA will begin providing financial assistance for funeral expenses incurred after Jan. 20, 2020 for deaths related to coronavirus (COVID-19) to help ease some of the financial stress and burden caused by the pandemic. The policy was finalized today, and FEMA is now moving rapidly to implement this funeral assistance program nationwide.

"At FEMA, our mission is to help people before, during and after disasters," said Acting FEMA Administrator Bob Fenton. "The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense grief for so many people. Although we cannot change what has happened, we affirm our commitment to help with funeral and burial expenses that many families did not anticipate."

To be eligible for COVID-19 funeral assistance, the policy states:

- The applicant must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien who incurred funeral expenses after Jan. 20, 2020 for a death attributed to COVID-19.
- If multiple individuals contributed toward funeral expenses, they should apply under a single application as applicant and co-applicant. FEMA will also consider documentation from other individuals not listed as the applicant and co-applicant who may have incurred funeral expenses as part of the registration for the deceased individual.
- An applicant may apply for multiple deceased individuals.
- The COVID-19-related death must have occurred in the United States, including the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.
- This assistance is limited to a maximum financial amount of \$9,000 per funeral and a maximum of \$35,500 per application.
- Funeral assistance is intended to assist with expenses for funeral services and interment or cremation.
- In the coming weeks, a dedicated 800 number will be established to help individuals who apply. In the meantime, potential applicants are encouraged to start gathering the following documentation:
- An official death certificate that attributes the death to COVID-19 and shows that the death occurred in the United States. The death certificate must indicate the death "may have been caused by" or "was likely the result of" COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms. Similar phrases that indicate a high likelihood of COVID-19 are considered sufficient attribution.
- Funeral expense documents (receipts, funeral home contract, etc.) that include the applicant's name, the deceased individual's name, the amount of funeral expenses and dates the funeral expenses were incurred.
- Proof of funds received from other sources specifically for use toward funeral costs. Funeral assistance may not duplicate benefits received from burial or funeral insurance, financial assistance received from voluntary agencies, federal/state/local/tribal/territorial government programs or agencies, or other sources.

For more information about this assistance, visit www.fema.gov. COVID-19 Funeral Assistance | FEMA.gov.

CONGRATULATIONS 2021 ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATES

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma would like to congratulate the 49 graduates of the 2021 adult education program.

These graduates will be honored in a virtual ceremony on May 7. You can join in the celebration by visiting choctawnation.com/virtual-graduation-adult-education.

Stormi Arnold Brayden Billy Jeremiah Billy Amanda Bolic Michelle Cameron Sharon Cameron LaRia Carshall Michelle Castleberry Alfred Clingerman Michael Condi Skyla Coulter Dakota Cummins Melissa Cummins Matrix Dewbery-Jaynes Gia Elfers Jessica Elliott Thelma Gantt Brittney Giacomo Richard Gomez Katrina Greene Paxton Hall Cyndi Howard Eddy Hudson Elizabeth James Karen Janes Randi Johnson-Dao Joseph Kemp Kimberly King Amanda Kramarz J'sa Lambert Matthew Lewis Anjelica Logue Christina Lohman Caleb Miller Jedediah Mitchell Jeremy Morrison Rebecca Mullican Teresa Pace Luke Pistelli Kyndra Raymond Christan Robinson Cody Seabolt Lauren Sellers Dakota Shriver Josheb Shuman Adrianna Thomas Fabien Vercher Ashley Vines Latosha Walley Candace Whitlock Shannon Wigginton Alexis Wilson Rachel Wood Brycin Venable/Winningham Blake Michael Anthony Dean, III	Sherburne, NY Poteau, OK Norman, OK Ada, OK Haworth, OK Haworth, OK McAlester, OK Durant, OK West Covina, CA Quinton, OK Durant, OK Arlington, TX Denison, TX Wapanucka, OK McAlester, OK Poteau, OK Enid, OK McAlester, OK Krebs, OK Lehigh, OK Quinton, OK Antlers, OK Newkirk, OK McAlester, OK Poteau, OK Oklahoma City, OK Fort Towson, OK Durant, OK Marble Falls, TX Albion, OK Wheatland, OK Atoka, OK Virginia Beach, VA Caney, OK Durant, OK Heavener, OK Durant, OK Poteau, OK Lake Mary, FL Flower Mound, TX Wilburton, OK Perry, OK Soper, OK Lake Mary, FL McAlester, OK Bethel, OK Haworth, OK Colbert, OK Durant, OK Clayton, OK Duncan, OK McAlester, OK Mead, OK Francis, OK Keota, OK
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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority



Jennifer Woods

District 6

Halito! The last three months have flown by, and we at the District 6 Community Center have remained busy serving our tribal members.

We have continued the Wednesday drive-thru and homebound delivered lunches. We are still serving over 250 meals each Wednesday. During our lunches, we celebrated Valentine's Day with a drive-thru steak dinner and gave out boxes of chocolates to some of our seniors. We also had our Easter celebration lunch for our seniors and even had the Easter Bunny show up. We passed out Easter eggs, chocolate bunnies, Easter baskets filled with goodies and our new District 6 masks. We also had an Easter egg hunt with our employees, which had a prize egg with \$100 in it.

We had another check presentation through our Choctaw Nation Development Program. We were able to present to the Choctaw Community Partnership funds, with Latimer County receiving \$13,700 and the City of Wilburton receiving \$10,300 to be used as the community needs.

I have been blessed to present checks to several of our local churches, including South Rock Creek, Cedar Baptist Church, Thessalonian Baptist Church, Christ Recovery Center, Boiling Springs Church, Pine Grove Church and New Life Church, through our donations program.

Through the month of April, the center was decorated for Child Abuse Awareness Month. We wore our t-shirts that state that "It shouldn't hurt to be a child" every Wednesday as a reminder that our precious children are a gift and are not to be abused. District 6 and our local law enforcement stand together in stopping Child Abuse in 2021.

I also had the honor of presenting a check to the new reading center for the town of Red Oak in the amount of \$99,200 from the Choctaw Nation Development Fund. It was a bittersweet moment as we did the presentation without our dear friend Jodie White, who was the one who worked so tirelessly on the project for the town of Red Oak, as well as many other projects for the town, but we know that she was with us in spirit. Anyone who knew her knows how persistent she was and that she never gave up. Jodie's dream is coming true for her beloved town.

We have been continuing our Kids Meal Program, a drive-thru pickup at the District 6 Community Center in Wilburton. We also have pick-up locations in Red Oak on Tuesdays and Buffalo Valley on Saturdays. Each child is provided with seven meals and seven snacks, which greatly help the families in our communities. Also, we want to remind people that we have a WIC representative in our Community Center on Mondays and Wednesdays of each week. This program is not just for tribal members but also non-tribal members.

The Councilmembers have been meeting and working hard on the McGirt/ Sizemore case. The Choctaw Nation is prepared to file more than 125 cases in the Court of the Choctaw Nation. In a recent meeting, top prosecutor Kara Bacon was present to answer questions concerning the McGirt/ Sizemore case. We were also very pleased to have Latimer County Sheriff Adam Woodruff, City of Wilburton Chief of Police Robert Bias, our Tribal police officers and State Representative Jim Grego attending the meeting.

We are very proud of two of our tribal members who were recently recognized. Clare Harvey was recognized as Veteran of the Month. She served in the U.S. Army from 1972 to 1975, where she achieved the rank of Specialist. She was stationed at Ft. Lawton, Ft. Hood and Frankfurt, Germany, and received the National Defense Service Medal and Good Conduct Medal. Also, Brayden Allen was awarded through the Sponsorship Program of the Choctaw Nation Career Development Program for his studies at OSU-IT in Okmulgee for his HVAC training. Congratulations to both of you!

We want to remind our tribal members about the new Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) that assists our tribal members with rent and utility bill payments. The program is available only to renters and provides assistance for three months. After the three-month period, you may reapply for further assistance for up to one year.

Council members recently approved the building of fifteen more Affordable Rental and five more Independent Elder homes in Latimer County to be built in the near future. Please do not prejudge your credit and not submit your applications. We are taking applications at this time, so please get your applications in quickly. You may pick up applications at the District 6 Community Center located at 1056 NW 1003rd Avenue, Wilburton, Oklahoma.

Thank you for the privilege of serving you, our District 6 tribal members. It is my privilege to serve as District 6 Tribal Councilwoman. My door is always open, or you may call and leave me a message. It takes a great team to work together, and I am very thankful for my District 6 Community Center team members. We are here to serve. Yakoke and God Bless.

Choctaw Community Partner Fund Awards More Than \$34,000 to the cities of Broken Bow, Idabel, Garvin and McCurtain County

The Choctaw Nation awarded the city of Broken Bow \$12,400, Idabel \$7,200, Garvin \$2,000 and McCurtain County \$12,600 from the Choctaw Community Partner Fund to continue to help strengthen and develop the local area.

The Choctaw Community Partner Fund contributions continue on a quarterly basis to cities and counties that host non-gaming businesses throughout the Nation's territories. The expectation is for each local government to apply the Choctaw Community Partner Fund contribution toward supporting and developing the communities that serve tribal and non-tribal citizens.

This is the ninth voluntary contribution from the Choctaw Nation, for a combined total of \$299,500 to the cities of Idabel, Garvin, Broken Bow and McCurtain County.

Over the past two years, funds for the cities of Idabel, Garvin and Broken Bow have been banked for future economic development projects. McCurtain County has purchased a patch truck and an awning to be installed on their Highway Department Building.

The Choctaw Community Partner Fund began in 2019 and has put back more than \$3 million into southeastern Oklahoma communities.

Choctaw Nation Community Partner Fund Awards More Than \$67,000 to the cities of Hugo, Boswell and Choctaw County

The Choctaw Nation awarded the city of Hugo \$30,800, Boswell \$11,400 and Choctaw County \$25,200 from the Choctaw Community Partner Fund to continue to help strengthen and develop the local area.

The Choctaw Community Partner Fund contributions continue on a quarterly basis to cities and counties that host non-gaming businesses throughout the Nation's territories. The expectation is for each local government to apply the Choctaw Community Partner Fund contribution toward supporting and developing the communities that serve tribal and non-tribal citizens.

This is the ninth voluntary contribution from the Choctaw Nation, for a combined total of \$511,350 to the cities of Hugo, Boswell and Choctaw County.

Over the past two years, funds for the city of Hugo were used to repair seven blocks of 10th street. Both the city of Boswell and Choctaw County are saving its funds for a larger project.

Choctaw Nation Community Partner Fund Awards More Than \$11,500 to the City of Stigler and Haskell County

The Choctaw Nation awarded the city of Stigler \$8,200 and Haskell County \$4,700 from the Choctaw Community Partner Fund to continue to help strengthen and develop the local area.

The Choctaw Community Partner Fund contributions continue on a quarterly basis to cities and counties that host non-gaming businesses throughout the Nation's territories. The expectation is for each local government to apply the Choctaw Community Partner Fund contribution toward supporting and developing the communities that serve tribal and non-tribal citizens.

This is the ninth voluntary contribution from the Choctaw Nation, for a combined total of \$103,950 to the city of Stigler and Haskell County.

Over the past two years, the city of Stigler saved the funds for a larger capital project. Haskell County used its funds to update the courthouse lighting, replace the third-floor windows and purchased COVID-19 protector screens.

Choctaw Nation Community Partner Fund Awards More Than \$11,500 to the City of Stigler and Haskell County

The Choctaw Nation awarded the city of Pocola \$9,600, Poteau \$28,300, Heavener \$14,700 and Leflore County \$32,100 from the Choctaw Community Partner Fund to continue to help strengthen and develop the local area.

The Choctaw Community Partner Fund contributions continue on a quarterly basis to cities and counties that host non-gaming businesses throughout the Nation's territories. The expectation is for each local government to apply the Choctaw Community Partner Fund contribution toward supporting and developing the communities that serve tribal and non-tribal citizens.

This is the ninth voluntary contribution from the Choctaw Nation, for a combined total of \$583,650 to the cities of Pocola, Poteau, Heavener and Leflore County.

Over the past two years, funds were put to great use for the cities in Leflore County. Both Poteau and Pocola were able to make recreational upgrades and Heavener was able to invest in public safety and purchase wild land firefighting equipment. Leflore County is saving its funds for a future project.

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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

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

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Biskinik Announcement Guidelines

We accept milestone birthday greetings for ages 1, 5, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 30, 40, 50, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80 and above. Couples may send announcements of silver wedding anniversary at 25 years of marriage, golden anniversary at 50 years, or 60+ anniversaries. We do not post wedding announcements. News from graduates of higher education only and sports submissions will be accepted as space allows. We welcome all letters from Choctaw tribal members. However, because of the volume of mail, it isn't possible to publish all letters our readers send. Letters chosen for publication must be under 150 words. We require full contact information. Only the writer's full name and city will be published. All events sent to the Biskinik will run the month of the event or the month prior to the event if the event falls on the first of the month.

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

Gary Batton
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.
Assistant Chief

The Official
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Dara McCoy, Executive Director
Kellie Matherly, Content Development Director
Kendra Wall, Content Development Manager
Chris Jennings, News Reporter
Christian Toews, News Reporter

P.O. Box 1210
Durant, OK 74702
580-924-8280 • 800-522-6170
www.ChoctawNation.com
email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

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.

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

April 10, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. Regular Session March 13, 2021
5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
 - a. Veteran of the Month—Hershal Wall, District #7
6. PUBLIC COMMENTS
 - a. Taloa Gibson – Group Speaker – Federal Guidelines on Heirship as Pertaining to Stigler Act
7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
8. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Letter of Consideration for Appointment of Dempsey Wayne Tipps to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Election Board Letter.
 - b. Approve Capital Contribution of \$3,000,000 to Choctaw Global, LLC for Investment in Uptown at Plum Creek Multi-Family Development. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-47-21
 - c. Approve Application for the Smart Prosecution – Innovative Prosecution Solutions Program. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-48-21
 - d. Approve Grazing Lease No. 4200246638 (G09-1985) in Favor of Allen Williams on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in Pushmataha County, Oklahoma. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-49-21
 - e. Approve a Service Line Agreement in Favor of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Bryan County, Oklahoma (Large Casino Skid Meter). Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-50-21
 - f. Approve a Service Line Agreement in Favor of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Bryan County, Oklahoma (Pool Meter). Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-51-21
 - g. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-52-21
 - h. Approve Application for the Head Start Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Funds for FY 2022. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-53-21
 - i. Approve Application for the Early Head Start Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Funds for FY 2022. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-54-21
 - j. Amend the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Code of Ethics. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-55-21
 - k. Approve Funding for the construction of 120 Lease Purchase Homes, 110 Affordable Rental Housing Homes, and 10 Independent Elder Homes. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed - CB-56-21
9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Make today Katie Baker Remembrance Day
10. OLD BUSINESS
11. ADJOURNMENT
12. CLOSING PRAYER

All Council Members present with the exception of Perry Thompson.

SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA

April 16, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Amend the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Public Health and Safety Code. Vote Counts: YEAs- Four; Nays-Four; Abstains- Three; Vote Result; Bill did not pass -
 - b. Approve Allocation of Funds for the Repair and Remediation Costs of the Geothermal Defects at the Durant Regional Medical Clinic. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed -
5. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
6. OLD BUSINESS
7. ADJOURNMENT
8. CLOSING PRAYER

All Council Members present with the exception of Delton Cox.

SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA

April 20, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Amend the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Public Health and Safety Code. Vote Counts: YEA's- 11 (Thomas Williston, Tony Ward, Eddie Bohanan, Delton Cox, Ronald Perry, Jennifer Woods, Perry Thompson, James Dry, Anthony Dillard, Robert Karr and James Frazier) NAY's- 1 (Jack Austin Sr.) ABSTAIN's- 0 Vote Result: Bill Passed
5. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
6. OLD BUSINESS
7. ADJOURNMENT
8. CLOSING PRAYER

All Council members were present.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

May 4	Idabel	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
May 5	Coalgate	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
May 7	Atoka	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
May 11	Wright Center	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
May 12	Antlers	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
May 14	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
May 18	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
May 19	McAlester	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
May 19	Stigler	By Appointment
May 21	Crowder	By Appointment
May 25	Broken Bow	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
May 26	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Durant: Monday, Wednesday and Friday
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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:

Broken Bow Community Center
May 14, 2021
9:00 – 11:00



Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna May Language Lesson

Indefinite Pronoun – Kvna

Definite Pronoun – 'Kvta' - 'Who' The question word is in reference to a specific person.

Indefinite Pronoun – 'Kvna – someone or anyone' is not clear or specific.

Example sentences:

Kvta hosh ia tuk?	Who went?
Kvna yvt ia tuk o?	Did anyone go?
1. Kvna hvt vla tuk.	Someone came.
2. Kvna hvt iklo tuk.	No one came.
3. Kvna kia vla tuk o?	Did anyone come?
4. Kvna kia iklo tuk o?	Didn't anyone come?
5. Kvna kia iklo tuk.	No one came.
6. Kvna hokvto vla tuk.	Someone (or other) came.

vla- come; or to arrive iklo – to not come; or did not arrive

Note- The use of 'no one' is used when the ('ik-o' verb wrap-around) is in the sentence to show negation.

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Angus Ray Williston

Angus Ray Williston, 76, passed away Jan. 8, 2021.

Angus was born Feb. 7, 1944, in Idabel, Okla., to Tobias and Rosa Williston.

He was preceded in death by his parents; children Lance Williston, Sharon Willis-Bridges, and Ray Van Williston; brothers John, Silas, LeRoy, Kenneth, James, and William; and sisters Aline and Estherleene.

Angus is survived by his wife Beatrice (has since deceased); son Lance Williston II; daughters Diana Williston and Tiffaney Williston; brother Ben Williston; sisters Stella Williston, Martha Williston, Effie Harley, and Virginia Franklin; grandchildren Bradyn Batson, Blaze Batson, Kylee Williston, Emilee Williston, Khanor Williston, Milo Williston, Angus Williston II, Logun Williston, Grant Rethman, Tyler Bridges, and Dustin Willis; three great-grandchildren; numerous nieces and nephews; and other relatives and friends.

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

**Edgar Taylor Sr.**

Edgar Taylor Sr., 86, passed away Feb. 28, 2021.

Edgar was born Sept. 13, 1934, in Oleta, Okla., to John and Ida (Wesley) Taylor.

He was preceded in death by his parents; daughter Linda Taylor Clay; grandson Clifton Clay; brother Wilson Taylor; and sisters Jeffie Thomas and Ruby Billy.

Edgar is survived by his wife Hazel; sons Edgar Taylor Jr., and Hobie Taylor and spouse Martha; daughters Cinderella Deramus and spouse Ron, Mary Taylor, Rita Austin, Betty Acklin and spouse Glenn, Lisa Donaldson, and Anita Schroyer and spouse Brad; 37 grandchildren; 70 great-grandchildren; 6 great-great-grandchildren; special friends Lena Priddy and Calvin Carrico; along with many other relatives and friends.

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

**Billie Jean Bennett**

Billie Jean Bennett, 93, passed away March 3, 2021.

Billie was born Oct. 15, 1927 to W.B. Bigger and Agnes Cummings Bigger.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband J.W.; two brothers; and four sisters.

Billie is survived by son James William Bennett Jr. and spouse Donna; grandchildren Jennifer Debin Clasby and spouse Aaron, and Scott Aaron Bennett; nephews Walter Bruce Bigger and spouse Lou, and Tony Bigger and spouse Char; nieces Carol Sue Smither and Sharleen Bridgeman and spouse Bobby.

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

**Milton Bowen**

Milton "Sonny" Bowen, 82, passed away Aug. 28, 2020.

Sonny was born Oct. 14, 1937, in Haworth, Okla., to Tux and Viola (Owens) Bowen.

He was preceded in death by infant daughter Connie Sue Bowen; his parents; and sister Reta Powell.

Sonny is survived by his wife Larenda; children and spouses Roger Bowen, Connie and Jeff Brookins, Shelley and Danny Kelley, and Kim and Justin Blasengame; grandchildren and spouses Ryan and Jordan Brookins, Randi Lynn and Chip Carr, and Grant Kelley and Jace Blasengame; brother Joe Bowen and spouse Anita; sister Betty Barnes and spouse Jim; special friends Brad and Christina O'Dell, and Paula Lott; and a countless number of past McAlester students who he loved as his own.

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

**Benjamin Franklin Williston**

Benjamin "Ben" Franklin Williston, 92, passed away Jan. 12, 2021.

Ben was born Nov. 16, 1928 to Tobias and Rosa Williston.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Hazel Williston; sons Michael Williston and Larry Williston; daughters Clisty Turnage and Carolyn Jefferson; granddaughter Jennifer Williston; great-grandson Carter Williams; brothers John, Silas, LeRoy, Kenneth, James, William, and Angus; and sisters Aline and Estherleene.

Ben is survived by sons Ronald Williston, and Don Williston and spouse Rosie; son-in-law Phillip Turnage; sisters Stella Williston, Martha Williston, Effie Harley, and Virginia Franklin; grandchildren Lisa and Jerry Parker, Giorgina Thompson, Wayne and Rena Thompson, Troy Thompson, Steven Silva, Cynthia Mauldin, Tonia Turnage, Brittney Turnage, Angelica Roach, Phil Ray Turnage and Melissa Turnage; numerous other grandchildren; great-grandchildren; great-great-grandchildren; family friend and caretaker Louise Noah; nieces, nephews, and other relatives; and a host of friends.

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

**Linda Gail Edwards**

Linda Gail Edwards, 77, passed away Jan. 11, 2021.

Linda was born Aug. 17, 1943, in Idabel, Okla., to Laverne and Douglas Hoffman.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

Linda is survived by her husband Cliff Edwards; daughter Samantha Bankhead; sons Lance Edwards and spouse Sance; sister Patricia Hays and spouse Irvin; sister Susan Strang; granddaughters Sarah Skolfield and Elaine Truitt; grandson Perry Edwards; and several nieces and nephews.

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

**Reta Jean Powell**

Reta Jean (Bowen) Powell, 77, passed away April 20, 2020.

Reta was born Dec. 1, 1942, in Scipio, Okla., to Clarence Tux and Etta Viola Bowen.

She is survived by her husband Benny; children Jeannie Powell Sherrie Effinger and spouse Bart, and Mickie Foris and spouse Chris; grandchildren Josh Effinger and Amanda, Shiann Johnson and Jake, Tyler Shann and Cherish, Masen Foris, and Dillon Foris; great-grandchildren Bethany Effinger, Addisyn Effinger, Rayleigh Effinger, Samuel Johnson, Mikah Johnson, and Chase Shann; sister Betty Barnes and spouse Jim; and brothers Sonny Bowen and spouse Larenda, and Joe Bowen and spouse Anita.

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

**Cinderella Robinson**

Cinderella "Cindy" Sue Robinson, 62, passed away Feb. 23, 2021.

Cindy was born Oct. 29, 1958, in Boswell, Okla., to Roy and Harding Hattie (Belvin) Robinson.

She was preceded in death by her parents; grandparents John and Susan Belvin, and Sissy Belvin; son Johnny Wilson; sisters Cordelia Frazier and Norma Jean Wilson; brothers Thurman Wayne Belvin and Eli Robinson; and nephew Jeffrey Rice.

Cindy is survived by her daughters Susan Robinson, Tiffany Williams and spouse Cammoran, and Cassandra Robinson; sons John Lee Colecott and Dakota Robinson; grandchildren Jordan, Madalyn, and Emily Pittman, Lindsey, Adrian, Grayson and Tallan Colecott, Jade and Haven Williams, and Aliya and Kayden Robinson; three sisters; five brothers; and numerous extended family and friends.

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

**Willis Fulsom Vandagriff**

Willis Fulsom Vandagriff, 91, passed away Feb. 14, 2021.

Willis was born July 1, 1929, in Galveston, Texas to Mary Elizabeth Burgevin and Carl Raymond Vandagriff.

He was preceded in death by his wife Betty Lou; his parents; granddaughter Rachel Beth Trammel; and brother Charles Edward Vandagriff.

Willis is survived by his sons E.P. Keith Vandagriff and friend Rebecca, and Larry W. Vandagriff and spouse Beverly; daughters M. Annette Trammel and spouse David, Sharon E. Bargman, and Teresa D. Jones and spouse Bob; stepbrother Robert Broom; grandchildren Bradley W. Vandagriff and spouse Silvia, Sabrina A. Duck and spouse Aaron, Rocky A. Jackson and spouse Michelle, Keisha D. Sullins and spouse Jason, Louanne Trammel, Hogan Wyatt and Range Austin, Bronson T. Williams Brooke, and Cameron G. Williams and spouse LeeAnna; along with several great-grandchildren.

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

**Betty Ann Griffith**

Betty Ann Griffith, 85, passed away Feb. 11, 2021.

Betty was born Nov. 28, 1935, in Provenca, Okla., to John B. and Mary E. (Sewell) Wall.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Dorothy Holt; brothers Billy, Leo, and Alan Wall; sons Michael Keith Hammer and Andrew Wallen III; and great-grandchildren Braxton Godwin and Brea Browning.

Betty is survived by her sister Charlea Wall; sons Larry Gene Hammer and spouse Renee, Vernon Glenn Hammer, and John Everett Hammer; daughters Elizabeth Ann Donahie and spouse Paul, Sheila Renee Martin and John Heitman, and Susan Gail Musshafen and spouse John; grandchildren Karen Hammer, Eric Hammer and spouse Alisha, Angela Browning and Brad Goebel, Christina Rackley and spouse Brian, Paul-Michel Donahie, Michael Goforth and spouse Michelle Headlton, Dr. Jon-Andrew Martin and spouse Hannah, Brandon Godwin and spouse Ashley, Garrett Langwell, Gary Caldwell, Terry Caldwell, Rebekka Hammer, and Brenna Hammer; 15 great-grandchildren; and five great-great-grandchildren.

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

**Johnny Edward Jones Jr.**

Johnny Edward Jones Jr., 74, passed away Dec. 17, 2020.

Johnny was born Sept. 6, 1946, in Talihina, Okla., to Johnny Jones Sr. and Mary Jane (Amos) Jones.

He was preceded in death by his wife Ruth; daughter Reno Jones; his parents; sisters Linda Sawyer and Betty Williams; and brothers Leon Jones and David Jones.

Johnny is survived by his daughter Natasha Jones; sisters and brothers Ruth Settlemyre, Daniel Jones and spouse Elaine, Sam Jones and spouse Janet, Helen Guley and spouse Stan, Wanda Garrett and spouse Gary, Elizabeth Banks and spouse Eddie, and Ruby Flax and spouse Randy; sister-in-law Kay Jones; grandchildren Skylar Jones and Peyton Trammell; special nephew Matthew Settlemyre, spouse Tracy and son Greyson; along with many other nieces, nephews, cousins, and other family and friends.

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

**Betty Marshall**

Betty Marshall, 82, passed away Feb. 7, 2021.

Betty was born Jan. 22, 1939, in Lindsay, Okla., to Sylvia Jones and Charles Medell.

She was married to Jack Marshall and together they had five daughters, Sandy Lindig, Pamela Martin, Mildred Haptonstall, Becca Dalton, and Mindy Marshall; eight grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

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

**Virginia Rutledge**

Virginia "Weaver" Rutledge, 84, passed away Feb. 23, 2021.

Weaver was born Feb. 14, 1937, in Boswell, Okla., to Henry Harrison and Sarah Belvin.

She was preceded in death by her husband Cardin Rutledge; her parents; siblings Lavada Duke, Jimmie Lou Hunt, Vernon Belvin, Henry "Puchum" Belvin Jr., Johnny "Big John" Belvin, and Richard Belvin; and her beloved son Roy Rutledge.

Weaver is survived by her sons Cardin "Gene" Rutledge and spouse Sherry, and Randy Rutledge and spouse Debbie; daughters Darla Walls, and Carla Winters and spouse Mike; brothers Virgil "Buddy" Belvin, Dante Belvin and spouse Loretta, and Solomon "Solly" Belvin and spouse Lana; sisters Deborah "Debby" Bacon, and Jerry Paul "Hosie" Belvin; grandchildren Shaun Robert Walls, Jared Mike Walls, Carolee Rollins, Micha Winters, Melanie Rutledge, Christy J. Rutledge, Stephanie Martin, April Martin, Michael Martin, Elizabeth Martin, Precious Nicole Odom, Dustin Lee Rutledge, Somer Leigh Rutledge, Ryan Rutledge, Jenny Horse Chief Bishop; 30 great-grandchildren; 3 great-great-grandchildren and one on the way; along with many loved family and friends.

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

**Tonah Jeanne Eberhart**

Tonah Jeanne Eberhart, 82, passed away Oct. 23, 2020.

Tonah was born June 19, 1938, in Heavener, Okla., to Charles S. Taylor and Roxie P. (Lynch) Taylor.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brother Harold D. Taylor; and sister Lois Taylor Sokolosky.

Tonah is survived by her husband Roger; sons Chris Eberhart and spouse Teresa, and Chad Eberhart; daughter Gina (Eberhart) Lewis and spouse Keith; and grandchildren Dillon Lewis, Darby Lewis, Kate Lewis, Claire Eberhart, and Ashlen Eberhart.

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

**Alexandria Damiano**

Alexandria "Alex" Damiano, 33, passed away Feb. 5, 2021.

Alex was born Oct. 27, 1987, in Van Nuys, Calif. to Eugene Damiano and Kay Hearing.

She was preceded in death by her father; grandfather James Ham; and uncles Jimmy Ham and Will Ham.

Alex is survived by her mother; sisters Misty Dorwart, and Andrea Thomas-Damiano and spouse Loyd; brother Eugene J. "Gino" Joseph Damiano; grandmothers Mara Nell Sheffield and Earla Ham; fiancé Alexander Napack; aunt and uncles Silvia Ham, Pat and Lillie Torbit, Curtis and Patsy Hicks, Travis and Mary Hicks, Geary Hicks, Mary Nell Tucker, Maxine Rodgers, Ann Nicks, Betty Ham, Martha Grant Vasalia, Sam Ham, Sherry Ham, Vince and Carol Damian, Dennis and Bobbie Damiano, and Janice Damiano; nephews and nieces Mateo and Giana Thomas, Hunter Klawitter, Rachel and Lilly Disilvestri, Mikayla Dorwart, and Vanessa Dorwart, along with numerous cousins.

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

**Elisha William Brown**

Elisha William Brown, 99, passed away March 5, 2021.

Elisha was born Jan. 15, 1922, in Quinton, Okla., to Maudie Bell Freeman Brown and William Franklin Brown.

He was preceded in death by his wife Gwendolyn "Gwen"; infant daughter Patricia; son Roy Lee; his parents; brothers Paul Brown, Dewey Brown, Cecil Brown, and Eugene Brown; and sister Regina Dalton.

Elisha is survived by sons William and spouse Vivian, and Donald Ray; brother Jack Brown; sisters Helen James and Virginia Shmallberg; grandchildren Billy Brown and spouse Francesca, Debbie Shelton and spouse Mike, Annette Long and spouse Trent, Wendy Brown and spouse Kelley, and Lori Carter and spouse Terry; 11 great-grandchildren; and five great-great-grandchildren.

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

**James Olen Davis**

James Olen Davis, 64, passed away Aug. 14, 2020.

James was born Oct. 26, 1955, in Dumas, Texas, to Scott and Juliet Davis.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Justin Davis; sister Shari O'Laughlin; and brothers-in-law Gilbert O'Laughlin III and Bruce Witter.

James is survived by wife Heather; son Jason Davis (Zach); daughters Michelle Benham (Brian), Janelle Davis-Moldavskiy (Rus); brothers Richard Davis (Ann-Marie), Phillip Davis and Quinton Davis (Carol); sister Letha Davis-Witter (Bruce); eight grandchildren; and multiple nieces and nephews.

For the full obituary, please visit [Heritage Arrowhead Funeral Center](#).

**Mary Price**

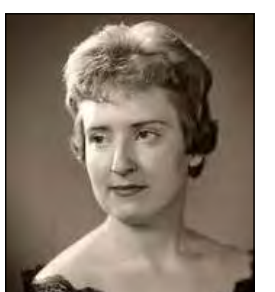
Mary Inez "Myrt" (Fennell) Price, 80, passed away July 18, 2020.

Myrt was born Aug. 27, 1939, in Soper, Okla., to Hubert Wesley "Chunk" Fennell and Cleo Irene "Babe" (Ferguson) Fennell.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and sister Maxine "Rosebud" Fennell-Graham.

Myrt is survived by her daughter Robin Price; grandson Forrest W. Simpson and spouse Mike Mayer; sister Lajoy Thackerson; and numerous nieces, nephews, friends, and loved ones.

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



Vikki Miller

Vikki Ann (Smith) Miller, 75, passed away Feb. 22, 2021. Vikki was born Sept. 3, 1945, in Durant, Okla., to Mary Smith. She was preceded in death by her mother; siblings Terry and Don; and daughter Nikki. Vikki is survived by siblings John and Betty; daughter Dominique; and grandchildren Kayla, Ashley, and Isis. For the full obituary, please visit [Biskinik](#).



Jason Lee Williams

Jason Lee Williams, 41, passed away March 9, 2021. Jason was born Feb. 27, 1980, in Oklahoma City, Okla., to Jimmie Williams. He was preceded in death by his paternal grandparents Joe and Cecilia (Baker) Williams; and uncle Jerry Don Williams. Jason is survived by his daughter Sysen Williams; father Jimmie Williams and Cathy Foster; brother James Williams; nephews and nieces Jimmie Bryant Williams, Eryan Williams, Nathan Williams, Gabriyal Williams, Jasmine Raney, and Riley Williams; uncles Joe Williams and David Williams; aunt Josephine Williams and her children; cousins Kristina Jo Martin and spouse Joe, Cari Lynn Crose and spouse Rick, and Bradley Williams; along with other family and a host of friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Jones Harkins Funeral Home](#).



Floyd James Peters

Floyd James Peters, 76, passed away March 14, 2021. Floyd was born Jan. 11, 1945, in Atoka, Okla., to Joseph Peters and Alice (Betsy) Peters. He was preceded in death by his parents; grandchildren Alex Battiest, Stormi Gayle Battiest, and Baby Sullivan; and siblings Billy Peters and Jean DiNardo. Floyd is survived by wife Nancy; daughters Kimberly Battiest and spouse Kenneth, Lisa Peters, and Lorelei Scott and spouse Matthew Sullivan; brother Marvin Peters; sisters Janice Kupiec, Roberta Williams, Margaret Greenlee, Rhonda Juarez, and Barbara Cates; grandchildren Victoria Battiest, Autumn Battiest, Kalli Battiest, Lucas Battiest, Caleb Sullivan, Austin Sullivan, Logan Sullivan, Nova Littrel, Taylor Hadley, Jordan Scott, Alanna Scott, and Timothy Scott; great-grandchildren Brodee Currence, Nataleigh Story, Baby Seth Scott, Kaizleyn Hadley, Jaihlee Hadley, and Bella Hadley. For the full obituary, please visit [Serenity Funeral Home](#).



James Robert Fobb

James Robert “Bob” Fobb, 52, passed away March 14, 2021. He was born July 21, 1968, in Talihina, Okla., to Judy C. (Bohannon) Petree. He was preceded in death by his maternal grandparents Lorena and Andrew Bohanon. Bob is survived by his parents Judy Petree and Norman R. Petree; brothers Norman Ray Petree Jr., and Stephen L. Petree and fiancé Dawn Wallace; sister Leslie D. Whitman; nieces Alyssa Neese and Summer Whitman; nephew Stephen L. Petree; many cousins; and his cherished and dearly loved dog. For the full obituary, please visit [Serenity Funeral Service](#).



Patrick O’Keefe

Patrick O’Keefe, 94, passed away March 9, 2021. Patrick was born Sept. 17, 1926, in Grand Forks, N.D., to Cyril and Manie (Hickman) O’Keefe. He was preceded in death by his wife Suzanne; son Baby Boy; his parents; brother Henry; and sister Madelyn. Patrick is survived by his brother Eugene; children Diane, Kerry Mason and spouse Dan, Kevin and spouse Melody, Joseph and spouse Beverly, Marianne Hutson and spouse David, Patrick and spouse Valerie, Matthew and spouse Tori, and Thomas and spouse Cindy; numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews, and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Palm Boulder Highway Mortuary & Cemetery](#).



Welch Edward Henderson Jr.

Welch Edward “Ed” Henderson Jr., 82, passed away March 15, 2021. Ed was born Oct. 9, 1938, in Ardmore, Okla., to Welch Edward Henderson Sr. and Marjorie Lynn Henderson. He was preceded in death by his parents; and son Mark Edward Henderson. Ed is survived by his wife Sylvia; children Matt David Henderson and spouse Joy, Lisa Lynn Henderson, Michelle Leigh Orahoad and spouse Chris, Michelle Sanna and spouse Kevin, Christopher Burt and spouse Becca. For the full obituary, please visit [Watts Funeral Home](#).



Patricia Ann Rose

Patricia “Pat” Ann Rose, 77, passed away March 3, 2021. Pat was born Feb. 11, 1944, in Hugo, Okla., to Norman and Beatrice Ringwald (Roebuck). She was preceded in death by her parents; daughter Lecretia; and sister Norma Jean Anderson. Pat is survived by her husband Joe Bev; daughter Kimberly Davis and spouse Terry; granddaughter Courtney Baker and spouse Justin; brother-in-law Hubert Anderson; his daughter Tonja Smalling and spouse Mike; and their children Lauren and spouse Ashley Hotella and Weston Smalling. For the full obituary, please visit [McCarn Funeral Service](#).



Mary Louise Kyle

Mary Louise Kyle, 91, passed away Jan. 17, 2021. Mary was born June 27, 1929, in Caney, Okla., to Oscar and Blanche (Ballard) Folsom. She was preceded in death by her husband Ted; her parents; brothers and their spouses Oscar Folsom, Bill and Nan Folsom, and James and Stella Folsom; sisters-in-law Marge Folsom and Mary Shore; and nephew Jim Folsom. Mary is survived by daughters Karla Wilson and spouse Ron, Jamie Ruble and spouse Spence, Sherry Good and spouse Greg; grandchildren Kyle and Afton Wilson, Jacob Ruble, Megan Good and fiancé Bryson Sechrist, Kylea and Jeremy Cartwright, Rachel Beck, Kayla and Kevin Finnegan, Hannah and Jake Cowan, and Garrett Good; great-grandchildren Holly, Bryson, Brianna, Jaylee, Lane, Luke, Levi, and three on the way; brothers JB Folsom, Hagen Folsom and spouse Ruth Ann; sister-in-law Laura Folsom; and other relatives and many friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Billings Funeral Home](#).



Carolyn Michelle Joiner

Carolyn Michelle Joiner, 58, passed away March 15, 2021. Carolyn was born March 6, 1963, in Biloxi, Miss., to Jack Dwain Joiner and Margaret Tidwell. She was preceded in death by her father. Carolyn is survived by her mother; daughter Megan Lopez and spouse Frankie; brothers Jeff Joiner and Craig Joiner; grandson Gabriel Joel Lopez; granddaughter Ariana Elena Lopez; cousins Pamela Johns and spouse Ricky, Kimberly Nanyes and spouse Robert, and Penny Brister and spouse David. For the full obituary, please visit [Brown’s Funeral Service](#).



Billy Wayne Thompson

Billy Wayne Thompson, 68, passed away Jan. 23, 2021. Billy was born Jan. 18, 1953, in Honobia, Okla., to Betty Mae (Jones) and Homer Thompson. He was preceded in death by his parents; sister Faye Watson; nephew Richard Burgin; and brothers-in-law Waylon Watson, Larry Coley, and Jimmy Miller. Billy is survived by nephew John Thompson and spouse Toni; great-niece Madison Thompson; great-nephew Conner Thompson; brother David Thompson; sisters Sissie Coley and Sonyea Miller; brothers Sweeney Thompson, and William Thompson and spouse Penny; nieces and nephews Starla, Cindy, Richard, Waylon, Presley, Jackie, Rosie, Christian, Ajee, Tim, Dave, Crystal, Melvin, Dustin, Shane, Chebon, Stephanie, April, Tiffany, Melissa, David, Claudia, Candice, Makyla, and McKinney; as well as many great-nieces, great-nephews, cousins, and a host of friends. For the full obituary, please visit [McCarn Funeral Service](#).



Crawford John Bryan

Crawford “CJ” John Bryan, 85, passed away March 13, 2021. CJ was born June 13, 1935, in Talihina, Okla., to Dick and Bernice “Sissie” (Pitchlynn) Bryan. He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Marian; and brothers Richard, George, and Billy Joe. CJ is survived by children Melissa Miller, Laurinda Bryan, Rebecca Crook, Summer Bryan, Peter Bryan, Debe Boston, and Michael Bryan; brother James Bryan; nine grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. For the full obituary, please visit [Loveland Funeral Chapel](#).



Floyd JC Roebuck

Floyd JC Roebuck, 86, passed away March 8, 2021. Floyd was born April 25, 1934, in Boswell, Okla., to Ulysses Roebuck and Minnie (Fennell) Roebuck. He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Pete Roebuck; sisters Vivian Dean, Joyce Bearden, Pearley Lou Wortham, Gwendolyn Baker, and Fern Baker. Floyd is survived by his wife Loraine; sons Jay Roebuck and spouse Sharon, Tony Roebuck and spouse Joan, and Mark Roebuck and spouse Lori; brother Joe Roebuck; and grandchildren Floyd J. Roebuck and Dalton Roebuck. For the full obituary, please visit [Miller & Miller Funeral Home](#).



Paul Oakes Sr.

Paul Oakes Sr., 81, passed away March 16, 2021. Paul was born April 27, 1939, in Hugo, Okla., to Henry Frank and Ella Richards Oakes. He was preceded in death by his parents; grandson Craig Adam Taylor; brothers Homer, Mann, Judge, and Tommy; sisters Corine Spring, Bealy Green, Florence Higgins, Frankie Yelley, Juanita Oakes, and Janette James. Paul is survived by wife Julie; children Paul Oakes Jr., Gail Allen, Cindy Merriman, and Michael Oakes; beloved in-law children Diana Oakes, Shane Allen, and Steve Merriman; grandchildren Tyler Oakes and spouse Tammy, Trey Oakes and spouse Ashlee, Kolton Oakes, Shane Taylor, Brant Allen and spouse Brandi, Aubrey Maynard and spouse Tony, Kent Carter and spouse Bobbye, Kurt Carter and LaKayn, Candace Hull and spouse JT, Stevie Merriman and spouse Tara, and Robbi Merriman and spouse Melanie; 19 great-grandchildren; and sister Maudine Johnson. For the full obituary, please visit [Miller and Miller Funeral Home](#).



Gail Bryant Sanner

Gail Bryant Sanner, 85, passed away Dec. 8, 2020. Gail was born June 13, 1935, in Duncan, Okla., to William Ira and Bonnie Nell Daniels Sanner. He was preceded in death by his wife Gayle “Blondie”; his parents; and brother Burnis Sanner. Gail is survived by son Jeff Sanner and spouse Debbie; daughter Brenda Sanner; devoted companion and beloved friend Ruby McCowan; sisters Freda Templin and spouse Glyn, and Eva Nan Speaks and spouse Roye; sister-in-law Pat Lansford Lowe and spouse Jerry; grandchildren Michael Sanner, Rana Sanner Rochell and spouse Blake, and Robyn Sanner McDonald and spouse Mark; great-grandchildren Julie and Loren Sanner, and Rhett and Landry Rochell; great-great-granddaughter Haizel Miller; and numerous nieces and nephews. For the full obituary, please visit [Biskinik](#).



Mamie Lou Ashby

Mamie Lou Ashby, 67, passed away March 20, 2021. Mamie was born Jan. 6, 1954, in Ardmore, Okla., to Edmond Davis Sr. and Lula (Lewis) Davis. She was preceded in death by her parents; first husband Dennis Baptiste; and brothers Ricky Davis and Randy Davis. Mamie is survived by husband Neal; daughters Emily Morgan, Jolene Morgan, and Jackie Morgan; sons Spencer Davis and spouse Stefani, Ricky Davis, and Jerome Morgan and spouse Denise; 14 grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren; brothers Edmond Davis Jr., Claude Davis, Mond Davis and spouse Kathy, and Glen Davis and spouse Lois; and a host of nieces, nephews, and family. For the full obituary, please visit [Griffin Hillcrest Funeral Home](#).



Dora Watkins

Dora Bea (Neal) Watkins, 79, passed away Jan. 13, 2021. Dora was born May 16, 1941 in Sulphur, Okla., to Lester Lee and Thelma Lorene (Payne) Neal. She was preceded in death by her parents; brother Lester Neal Jr.; husband Donald; and granddaughter Kalie Sierra Watkins. Dora is survived by her children Donnie and Sandra Watkins, Keith and Patricia Watkins, and Lisa Waid; sister Ramona Warden; and grandchildren Renae, Braden, Seth and Chris. For the full obituary, please visit [Hart-Wyatt Funeral Home](#).



Benny Ray Tushka

Benny Ray Tushka, 74, passed away March 15, 2021. Benny was born Oct. 3, 1946, in Sacaton, Arizona to Benson and Sweese Jones Tushka. He was preceded in death by his parents; brother Barrentine Tushka; and sister Elencie Jessie. Benny is survived by his wife Sarah Ludlow; brother Odies Tushka; sister Lwezie Colonahaski; special nieces Ma’Shayla Colbert, Lavona Hauray and Regina Simpson; special nephews Kaleb Ray Colbert and Farlin Jessie; special friend Stanley Shomo; and a host of other relatives and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Brumley Funeral Home](#).



Martha Mae Battiest

Martha Mae Battiest, 66, passed away Jan. 23, 2021. Martha was born Oct. 5, 1954, in Talihina, Okla., to Raymond Mackey Sr. and Frances (Sam) Mackey. She was preceded in death by her parents; and siblings Ruth Carshall, Sue Adams, Arthur Mackey, Raymond Mackey Jr., and Talton Mackey. Martha is survived by her husband Jearl Watson; children Stephanie Battice and spouse Stephen, Bruce Battiest, Christina Battiest and spouse Michael, and Jimmy Battiest and spouse Tracy; grandchildren Mariah, Scottie, Dakotha, Amber, Michael, Shalyn, Chakotay, Dustin, Bruce Jr., Brandon, Brianna, Kolby, Emma, Raben, and Tomi; great-grandchildren Braxton, Cora, Claire, Aubrie, Greyson, and Emmarie; sisters Mary Coley and spouse Joe, and Rotha Adams; step-children Darneal Watson and spouse Karen, and Crystal Pilkington and spouse Shawn; step-grandchildren Cheyenne, Ty, and Emmanuel; numerous nieces, nephews, and other family and friends. For the full obituary, please visit [Jones-Harkins Funeral Home](#).



Obituary Policy

Obituary submissions are for Choctaw Nation tribal members only and are free of charge. The Biskinik will only accept obituary notices from funeral homes. Family members/individuals may submit funeral notices as long as the notice is from the funeral home or printed in their local newspaper through a funeral home service. Full-length handwritten notices will not be accepted. The Biskinik strives to serve all Choctaws. Therefore, any handwritten notices received will be searched online for official funeral home notices. If none are found, efforts will be made to contact the family and make arrangements for an official notice. Due to space limitations, there is a 150 word limit for obituaries. The online issue of the Biskinik will contain links to the full obituaries. Send official obituary notices to: Biskinik PO Box 1210 Durant OK 74702 or email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

Roger Joines Named CNO Fire Marshal Senior Assistant



The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) recently hired CNO's first-ever fire marshal. Roger Joines is now our Fire Marshal Senior Assistant. Prior to joining CNO, Roger served for the previous 10 years as Fire Chief for the City of Durant as part of his 31-year career with the Durant Fire Department.

"I'm a proud tribal member," Roger says. "Before joining CNO, I watched as a spectator and tribal member the exponential growth of CNO and the positive impact it has made for its people and the community, and I am excited to become a part of this change."

Roger says his focus in this new role at CNO is to ensure that our facilities have all the fire-related safety measures and develop fire prevention programs for all ages. His goal is to prevent fires and prepare those encountering a fire with the knowledge to react and escape safely.

"I see this (role) as another way that CNO is thinking about the future and keeping everyone safe," Roger explains.

The role is also important to our tribal sovereignty in that we no longer rely on state/local fire marshal authorizations on occupancy and codes.

Roger added, "On the topic of tribal sovereignty, I think we will be much better off not having to rely on state/local authorities to make sure all codes are being followed. Many new tribal houses and facilities are being built in areas where inspections do not take place as needed for various reasons. This office will ensure that properties are built to code, ensuring for the safety of all."

Roger, who has also served as Region 5 Advisory Council for Oklahoma Homeland Security and as an ambassador for the Oklahoma State Fire Marshal's Association in Washington, D.C., has been married to his wife, Dana, for 33 years. They are proud parents of Austin, a GIS technician at CNO, and their daughter Aurianna.

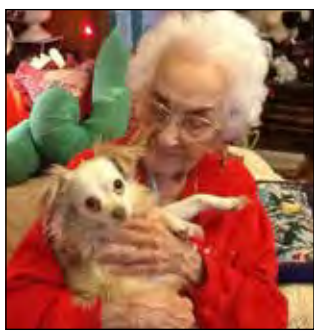
"I am happy to give back to an organization that has helped generations of my family," Roger said. "I look forward to serving the people by using my years of fire service experience to enhance the safety of our Choctaw members, facilities, and those visiting our properties."

Murray celebrates 90 years

Altha Lee Murray, born March 27, 1922, celebrated her 99th birthday with family and friends. She still takes care of herself but is not getting out much these days since Satan's Covid has taken center stage.

She has a smile and giggle for all even when times are tough. She never speaks unkind words of others and has true agape love. She is sunshine to all around her and our gift in this world of troubles.

We love you, Mom, so very much! Love from your entire family.



Marhanka graduates from the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine



Elizabeth C. Marhanka graduates from the Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine on May 7, 2021.

Upon graduation, Liza will be practicing veterinary medicine as an associate veterinarian at Hillside Veterinary Clinic in Dallas, Texas. She plans to practice small animal medicine on both

wellness and emergency cases.

Liza is a graduate of the McNair Scholars Program, Choctaw Nation Higher Education Program, and Choctaw Career Development Program.

Liza would like to thank the Choctaw Nation and her family for their continued support throughout her education. Her grandmother is Deedee Barker Rowe of Broken Arrow, her parents are Ed and Cindy Marhanka of Dallas, and her brother is Anthony (Kristin) Marhanka of Lynnwood, Washington.

Reverend Gossett turns 70

The Rev. Joe Gossett of Seabrook, Texas, completed his 70th trip around the sun on April 26. Gossett is the great-great-great-grandson of Sophia Folsom Pitchlynn—mother-in-law of Chief Samuel Garland, mother of Chief Peter Pitchlynn and mother of Gossett's great-great-great-grandmother, Rhoda Pitchlynn Howell (sister of Peter). Rev. Gossett is a retired Presbyterian pastor who also served Southwest Airlines. He is a proud Choctaw who enjoys staying physically active, reading and traveling with his wife Sandy.



Brown named Business Person of the Year

Beth Brown of Shine Social Co. recently won Edmond's 2021 Alignable Local Business Person of the Year Contest.

Shine Social Co. is a social media management company built by aligned and purpose-driven women who strive to work behind the curtain in excellence and dedication.

Alignable amassed an incredible 86,000+ votes and recommendations about hometown business heroes. This is the third year Alignable has hosted this contest and the participation levels for 2021's competition topped 2020's by a monumental 800%.

During a time where at least two-thirds of small businesses have regularly reported suffering negative effects from COVID issues, it's clear with this outpouring of support just how much small business owners wanted to recognize the extraordinary efforts of their peers.

Talon Wade Ogle



Talon Wade Ogle was born in Ada, Oklahoma at the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center on Feb. 4, 2021.

Talon's parents are Denise Ogle and Aaron Ogle.

Talon's grandparents are Marilyn and Randy Taylor and Donna and Alan Edwards.

Talon doesn't have any human siblings, but does have two cats named CeeDee and Finn.

Parker turns 90

Margaret Anne Long Parker will turn 90 years old on May 20, 2021. Margaret was born in Oklahoma City and now lives in Austin, Texas. She proudly represents her Choctaw and Oklahoma heritage to all of her friends and family. Her Grandmother, Martha Downing Long, was on the original Choctaw rolls. Her grandfather, Dr. LeRoy Long, traveled as a doctor in Oklahoma Choctaw territory and was Dean of the University of Oklahoma Medical School. Her father, Dr. LeRoy Downing Long, was a surgeon in Oklahoma City. Margaret is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma. Margaret's grandsons, Parker Berry and Austin Parker, followed in her footsteps as proud Sooners and Choctaw tribal members.

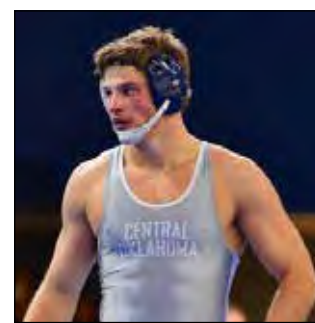


Gray Wins National Championship

Heath Gray is a proud tribal member from Chandler, Oklahoma. Gray is a member of the Division II powerhouse Central Oklahoma University Wrestling Team. Gray capped a sensational season – and maybe career – by capturing the 184-pound national title in the 2021 NCAA Division II Wrestling Championships.

In addition to this year's National Championship, Gray is a three-time All-American, three-time regional champion and was the 2020 Division II National Wrestler of the year. Gray was ranked number one in the nation in 2020. However, he was unable to compete in the national tournament due to cancellation because of the pandemic. Gray is a two-time All-American with one year of eligibility left.

Gray was also named "Wrestler of the Year" in the MIAA conference in 2020. He was the regional champion for two years in a row and was named "Outstanding Wrestler" at the Midwest Classic.



Amos celebrates 94 years

The Amos kids, grandkids and great grandkids wish their grandma Louise Amos a Happy 94th birthday! Amos turns 94 on May 6.

Smalling appointed to OKC Art Commission

Choctaw artist DG Smalling was recently appointed to the Oklahoma City Arts Commission. The commission is comprised of 15 members, appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council.



Carshall wins championship

Congratulations to Bryson Carshall, Senior from Poteau High School, who took first place in the OFBCA state powerlifting championship. He placed first in the 198 weight division, with a total lift weight of 1400 lbs on March 12, 2021. Bryson is proud to be a Chahta athlete.

Dunlap reps SE at the Capitol

Rylee Dunlap represented Southeastern Oklahoma State University at the 26th annual Research Day at the Capitol.

Dunlap was one of 21 students throughout Oklahoma participating in the event. Her research topic was pandemic trends, and her faculty advisor on the project was Dr. Ning Wu, professor of biological sciences.

The virtual poster session was held March 30. Sponsors of the event were Oklahoma Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (OK EPSCoR) and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education.

Dunlap, a senior from Stringtown, Oklahoma, is a double major (psychology and biology) with a chemistry minor.



Hodges opens museum



Bruce Hodges, MD, who received two degrees from Southeastern University, has opened Medicine's Hall of Fame and Museum in Shawnee, Kansas. Doctor Hodges has been collecting medically related artifacts for more than 50 years. His collection includes artifacts from 26 countries and 22 Indian tribes spanning 5 continents.

The mission of the Hall of Fame is to honor physicians, nurses, pharmacists, scientists and paraprofessionals, who have contributed to the advancement of medicine, and to display artifacts relating to their achievements.

Choctaws, plus up to five family members, receive 50% off regular admission price by showing a CDIB card.

Dr. Hodges, 88 years old, maintains a full-time practice as Medical Director of a 160 bed Alzheimer's facility.



John Hancock graduates from TU

John Michael Hancock graduated from the University of Tulsa in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics.

Michael would like to thank the Choctaw Nation for the scholarships he received during his four years at TU and is grateful for their support. He is the son of John and Christine Hancock.

Hershel Wall April Veteran of the Month

Hershel Wall, Antlers, Oklahoma, was named Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month for April.

He served in the United States Army from Oct. 1965 to Aug. 1973, where he achieved the rank of Sergeant.

Sgt. Wall received training at Ft. Polk, LA, Ft. Rucker, Alabama, and Ft. Eustis, Virginia; was stationed at Ft. Benning, Georgia and Ft. Carson, Colorado; served in Vietnam and Germany; and received the Vietnam Campaign with 60 Devices, Vietnam Service Medal with six Bronze Service Stars, Good Conduct Medal, three Overseas Bars, Aircraft Crewman Badge, Meritorious Unit Citation, Sharpshooter Badge (Rifle M-14), and the Expert Badge (Rifle M-16).

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ITI FABVSSA

A New Chahta Homeland: A History by the Decade, 1860-1870

Iti Fabvssa is currently running a series that covers the span of Oklahoma Choctaw history. By examining each decade since the Choctaw government arrived in our new homelands using Choctaw-created documents, we will get a better understanding of Choctaw ancestors' experiences and how they made decisions that have led us into the present. This month, we will be covering 1860-1870 when the Choctaw Nation created the Constitution of 1860, entered the U.S. Civil War and dealt with the consequences for its participation, primarily the Treaty of 1866.

In January 1860, Choctaws came together for another constitution convention. Despite many sources that say otherwise, this 1860 constitution was legally in effect until 1983, when the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma passed our first post-statehood constitution. Major changes in the 1860 constitution included the creation of the office of the "Principal Chief" and the establishment of a fourth district of Hotubbee, which encompassed the lands known as the "Leased District." District Chiefs still existed but much of their authority was transferred to the office of the Principal Chief, and the title became more honorary than practical. Notably, this constitution made no direct reference to slavery even though it was the issue that nearly started a Choctaw civil war just a couple of years prior. This omission was partially because of the growing abolitionist sentiments in the neighboring United States, leading pro-slavery Choctaws to avoid an open debate on the issue. Nevertheless, outside of the constitution, individuals pushed for support for slavery, southern secession, and a Choctaw-Confederate alliance.

Multiple factors contributed to the Choctaw Nation's decision to ally with the Confederacy. Initially, Choctaw leaders understood their nation to be completely separate from the U.S. and so they should not be involved with its issues. Their primary concern was that the U.S. would honor their treaties. Choctaw leaders wanted to be sure that Choctaw lands would remain in Choctaw possession. As the constitutional crisis between the Skullyville and Doakville constitutions had showed, slavery was increasingly an important issue within Choctaw Nation. Individual citizens, often prominent mixed-blood businessmen whose wealth came from plantations run by enslaved Black people, were major proponents of supporting the Confederacy. But before any alliance could be broken and made, it had to be debated.

In June 1861, Chief George Hudson convened a special session of Council at Doakville to decide how Choctaw Nation should respond to the U.S. Civil War. By this time, the U.S. had withdrawn its military forces from Indian Territory, leaving Choctaws vulnerable despite its treaty obligation to protect them. Peter Pitchlynn, who had spent years in Washington D.C. advocating for Choctaws to receive the money secured by treaties via the Net Proceeds case, felt that a neutral position would be best. If Choctaws turned against the U.S., they would not receive the money they were due. But there were also strong advocates for the Confederacy. Robert M. Jones, a prominent Choctaw leader who owned some of the largest plantations in Choctaw Nation, declared that anyone who opposed Southern secession should be hung. Just before this meeting, a group of Texans threatened Pitchlynn and his family's lives if he continued to maintain a pro-Union position. During the multi-day council meeting, white men from Texas and Arkansas interrupted to lobby for a Choctaw alliance with the Confederacy. This pro-southern secessionist climate led leaders like Pitchlynn and Hudson to withhold a prepared speech that called for neutrality. Ultimately,



Peter P. Pitchlynn served as a representative in Washington D.C. and Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation during the 1860-1870 decade. A significant portion of his personal and official correspondence is available for viewing at the Helmerich Center for American Research. Credit: Unknown. Col. Peter Pitchlynn, Ex-Governor of the Choctaw Nation. 4326.3224. Oklahoma Native American Photographs Collection. 1850-1900. Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, <https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/43263224> (12/12/2017).

Council decided on June 10 to send a delegation of Choctaw leaders to negotiate and sign a treaty with Confederate leaders.

Since the U.S. had broken its treaty obligation to the Choctaw Nation by removing federal troops from the region and offered no help, Choctaws found themselves surrounded by the Confederate states. Furthermore, important individual allies who had advised Choctaws in numerous instances joined the Confederacy and encouraged Choctaws to do the same. Under these circumstances, if Choctaws had not joined the Confederacy, it is likely they would have been destroyed. Confederate leaders who negotiated a Choctaw alliance included Albert Pike, an Arkansas lawyer who had worked with Pitchlynn in securing the money from the net proceeds case, and Douglas Cooper, the Choctaw Nation's U.S. Indian Agent before he joined the Confederacy. Both drew on their experience working with Choctaws to offer desirable terms that allowed Choctaw Nation to maintain its sovereignty. Choctaws' alliance with the Confederacy also allowed them to govern their lands more strictly than under their treaty terms with the U.S. government. For instance, U.S. citizens who intruded into Choctaw lands could not be removed by anyone but a U.S. agent, who often failed to follow through with his responsibility. Under the treaty with the Confederacy, Choctaws could expel intruders and enforce their own laws to prevent "lawlessness." Much of the "lawlessness" that federal officials

claimed existed in Indian Territory was a direct product of U.S. failure to follow their own laws and legal agreements with Choctaws. Allying with the Confederacy became an opportunity for Choctaw Nation to govern itself according to its laws.

During the war, Choctaw soldiers primarily fought within the boundaries of Indian Territory. Choctaws, who had the largest number of troops after the Cherokees, joined regiments with other soldiers from the Five Tribes. Even though the Treaty with the Confederacy stipulated that Choctaws would not be called on to fight outside of its borders, Choctaws were still called on to do so and many went to fight. But when it came to the Confederacy honoring the treaty promise to protect Choctaw Nation, they withdrew from the western part of the Choctaw Nation twice when it was invaded and used Choctaw Nation as a buffer. On July 17, 1863, the Battle of Honey Spring, the largest battle in Indian Territory, took place. The Confederate troops lost, resulting in a major loss in supplies. For a more detailed account of the Civil War experiences and battles in Choctaw Nation, see Iti Fabvssa's October 2011 article, "Choctaw Nation and the American Civil War." As it became clear that the Confederacy was losing the war, Choctaw leaders resumed their relationship and treaty negotiations with the U.S. government. Peter Pitchlynn, who was elected Principal Chief in 1864, signed the Choctaw Nation's final surrender on June 19, 1865. This paved the way for general council to appoint a commission of delegates to negotiate a new treaty at Fort Smith.

Known as the Treaty of 1866, this reconstruction treaty became an especially important document in Choctaw history since it continues to guide Choctaw-U.S. relations today. Since the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations were unified by their 1855 Treaty, they signed a treaty with the U.S. together. Both were at a disadvantage for allying with the Confederacy. Choctaws were forced to cede the Leased District for \$300,000. Seeking to induce the Choctaw Nation to adopt their former enslaved people, the U.S. made it so that this payment would only come if Choctaw Nation emancipated and adopted former enslaved people within three years of signing the treaty. Another major term was that the Choctaw Nation would permit the building of one north-south and one east-west railroad through their territories. Other important treaty points included a provision turning Indian Territory into the "Territory of Oklahoma," the name of which was proposed by Allen Wright and was later appropriated by white settlers for a different territory to the west of Choctaw Nation. It also called for the immediate survey and allotment of Choctaw and Chickasaw lands. Any surplus lands would have been allocated with white settlement. These terms regarding Oklahoma territory and allotment and never came to pass in the manner outlined by this treaty. While these parts were not implemented, provisions regarding the railroad that did go forward would have long-lasting consequences.

Additional reading resources on this period 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.

Next month, we will cover the period of 1870-1880 which was marked by the first railroad to cross Choctaw borders and the rapid development of the coal mining industry.

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

The Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation, Home Finance Department, is committed to helping find the right mortgage product for Choctaw Tribal members. We understand that every borrower is different, and a variety of products are offered to meet individual requirements. We make the process of securing a mortgage loan simple and straightforward.

Choctaw tribal members living within the Choctaw Nation Reservation can apply for purchase, refinance, and construction loans. These loans are a fixed market interest rate for up to 30 years.

Down payment assistance loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members nationwide. Borrowers must apply with Choctaw Home Finance and be referred to a participating lender for any loans out of the state of Oklahoma.

Streamline home improvement loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members throughout Oklahoma. The streamline loan is up to \$15,000 and allows for home repairs and small home improvement projects. Appraisal and inspections may be required.

Credit repair loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members in the Choctaw Nation Reservation. This loan is up to \$10,000 and subject to budget/credit counseling requirements.

Loan qualification is based on income and credit history. Let our knowledgeable staff assist you. Call us at 1-800-235-3087 or visit our website for more information <http://www.choctawnation.com/tribal-services/housing/home-finance>.

Choctaw Nation Stay Connected

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Housing Authority Facebook Twitter Instagram YouTube Snapchat

EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ERAP)

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
CHOCTAWNATION.COM/COVIDRELIEF

YOUTH OUTREACH SERVICES

877-285-6893 (TOLL-FREE) OR 580-326-8304
choctawnation.com/tribal-services/member-services/youth-outreach

Making a difference in the lives of Choctaw youth with character building activities designed to establish a sense of independence and appreciation for service within the community.

- Life skills
- Location of resources
- Mentoring
- Safety camp training
- Short-term and long-term goal setting
- College preparation referrals

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- Choctaw tribal member
- Evidence of hardship circumstances
- Pre-kindergarten to high school senior

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We are looking for people who are Choctaw Proud to participate in upcoming commercials, radio spots and video projects.
HAVE QUESTIONS? EMAIL [MULTIMEDIA@CHOCTAWNATION.COM](mailto:multimedia@choctawnation.com)

TO COMPLETE THE CASTING CALL FORM, VISIT WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/CASTING-CALL

National Foster Care Month highlights need for more foster families

By Chris Jennings

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan established May as National Foster Care Month. Since then, the month has traditionally been set aside to acknowledge foster parents, family members, volunteers, and other community members who help foster children.

There are several types of foster care. Emergency homes provide short-term housing for up to a week until family or a traditional foster home can be found. Respite homes offer breaks for other foster families when the need arises. And traditional homes will provide care for extended periods.

As of April 6, 2021, there were 401 Choctaw children in state or tribal custody; only 54 of those children were placed in a Choctaw Nation Resource Home.

A child may find themselves in foster care if they fall victim to abuse or neglect. In those cases, they're placed in temporary foster care until it's safe to be reunified with their parents or caregivers. During these times, it's crucial that the children don't lose contact with their culture.

The Choctaw Nation Foster Care Program's goal is to place Native American children with Native American families while they are in out-of-home care. When children are placed in non-Native foster care, they risk losing that important connection to their family and culture.

Julie McElyea, Foster Care Recruiter with the Choctaw Nation, said, "Native Americans have a very strong sense of family orientation. They risk losing those connections to not only their history, their culture, but to their family as well."

Sarah and Justin Wartick have been a Choctaw Nation foster family through the Choctaw Nation for five years. "We have fostered five different kiddos; we've adopted two children. We really love being a foster family," said Sarah Wartick.

While reunification with family members is the primary goal, the reality is that some Choctaw children who enter foster care can never return home. In those cases, adoption sometimes does occur. However, Children and Family Services do not currently accept adoption-only applications.

In the Warticks' case, Sarah has developed a strong relationship with her two adopted children's birth mother and still passes on pictures and milestones.

The Warticks keep their foster kids connected to their culture through the different events and programs offered through the Nation. Sarah said it has been hard during COVID-19, but they have done things like the Virtual Trail of Tears Walk and participating in the Choctaw Nation's Growing Hope seed sharing program.

"We had them mail us seeds and had our children and our foster kiddos plant the traditional seeds that our ancestors would have planted," she said.

Having a strong connection to culture is not neces-

sarily a requirement to become a Choctaw foster care family. McElyea points out that there are opportunities to learn and strengthen cultural knowledge for foster families together.

"There are tons of resources available through the cultural department. If they don't know anything about their culture, we really try to provide them every opportunity to get to know their culture better," said McElyea. Wartick adds that she sees the interest in learning about their culture in her foster kids.

"It's important to them; they crave to be able to talk to people about that [their culture]," explained Wartick. Chief Gary Batton, who has participated in the foster care program, said, "We need people to step up and be a foster parent."

Wartick also encourages others to participate but has a caveat.

"It's definitely stressful...if God hasn't called you to do it, then you shouldn't, because if God wasn't in it with us, we could not do it," she said.

If you're interested in becoming a foster parent, there are some requirements before being approved.

- **You or your spouse must be an enrolled member of any federally recognized tribe.**
- **You can be single or married.**
- **You must be at least 21 years of age.**
- **You must have the emotional, physical, and financial abilities to provide for a child's needs.**
- **You must submit to a search of all state and national criminal history records.**
- **You must ensure that no household member has a prior conviction of a sexual offense.**
- **You must attend pre-service training.**
- **You must ensure that no household member has confirmed child welfare history.**
- **You must provide information for a family assessment (home study).**

The approval process, including the necessary criminal background and child welfare checks, usually takes about 90-days but could take longer.

It may seem like a lot of steps to go through, but McElyea says the benefits are worth it.

"The benefits far outweigh everything. You get to help another person. That's the big one, keep them connected to their kin to their cultural community. Helping them learn who they are while working with their biological family," explained McElyea.

Even after a child has been reunited with their family, many times, a foster family is still able to see the long-term effects of how their care has helped them to blossom and grow.

Wartick says fostering has had an enormous impact

on their lives.

"It's changed our lives... it's just been very rewarding for us," she said.

Chief Batton encourages everybody to reach out and try to help, whether it's cousins, second cousins or a different family.

"Reach out and try to help a family member, help us to break that generational cycle of poverty and despair... to step up and be a foster parent," he said.

For more information on the Choctaw Nation Foster Care Program, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/fostercare>.

FDA continues nutrition label updates

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has updated the Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods and drinks.

The FDA is requiring changes to the Nutrition Facts label based on updated scientific information, new nutrition research and input from the public. This is the first major update to the label in over 20 years.

The refreshed design and updated information will make it easier for you to make informed food choices that contribute to lifelong healthy eating habits.

The updated label appears on the majority of food packages. Manufacturers with \$10 million or more in annual sales were required to update their labels by January 1, 2020; manufacturers with less than \$10 million in annual food sales were required to update their labels by January 1, 2021.

Manufacturers of most single-ingredient sugars, such as honey and maple syrup, and certain cranberry products have until July 1, 2021 to make the changes. The compliance dates are still in place, but the FDA is working cooperatively with manufacturers to meet the new Nutrition Facts label requirements.

For more information on the new label visit <http://www.fda.gov/NewNutritionFactsLabel>.

Stuffed Pepper Soup

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 2 green peppers (diced)
- 1 onion (diced)
- 4 16 ounce cans diced tomatoes or 6 cups of fresh tomatoes (diced)
- 1 large can tomato juice
- 1 ½ cups cooked rice
- 2 teaspoons tomato, basil and garlic seasoning
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning or basil and/or oregano
- 1 ½ teaspoons dry parsley flakes or fresh parsley
- 1 ¼ teaspoons garlic salt
- Salt to taste

Preparation

1. Brown meat and add peppers and onions.
2. Add tomatoes, tomato juice, all the seasonings listed then add the cooked rice
3. Simmer on low for 3 hours.



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. 6545

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

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WAREHOUSES & MARKETS

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

May 2021
 All markets open weekdays, May 3-26
Closed: May 27-31.
 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

MCALISTER 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716

POTEAU 100 Kerr Ave., 918-649-0431

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

Explore the great outdoors of Choctaw Country this spring

By Christian Toews

The weather is warming up, spring is in the air and there is no better time to enjoy the roads and trails around the Choctaw Nation.

The popularity of outdoor recreation has increased dramatically over the last year. COVID-19 had many adverse effects on our culture, but one of the positives is that many people have begun to take their health more seriously. Many people have picked up outdoor exercise such as cycling and hiking, with gyms closing or limiting access.

According to a New York Times article, the rise in bicycle sales, along with the pandemic, has led to a global shortage of bikes. Many customers are still waiting on bikes they ordered last year.

Thankfully, hiking shoes are plentiful, and bikes have recently become easier to find. While not everything will return to normal, hopefully, many of our good habits will remain.

Cycling or hiking in Choctaw Country is an excellent option for outdoor activities that are fun for the whole family.

Hiking can be a great way to get or stay in shape.

One of the best spots for hiking in southeast Oklahoma is the Winding Stair Mountain National Recreation Area. Located along Oklahoma Hwy. 1 or the Talimena Scenic Drive, this recreation area offers camping, cabins, fishing, horse riding, hunting, picnicking, and hiking.

The Oklahoma portion of the Ouachita trail begins here, and many distance options are available from Winding Stair Mountain National Recreation Area. The Ouachita Trail is a 226.3-mile trail that extends from Talihina, Oklahoma, to near Little Rock, Arkansas.

The trail has smaller sections for people who don't want to hike the entire route. A few loops connect to adjacent fire roads and trails that will lead you back to the trailhead at Winding Stair. A good resource for locating and looking at these trails is www.alltrails.com.

Dusty Hill, a trail runner and hiker from Texas, says his favorite part of the Ouachita trail is the views along the way.

Hill said he would recommend the trail to any level of hiker.

"It's not terribly difficult, though there are some long climbs and some technical areas as far as running the trail. Just bring plenty of water or a way to purify water," said Hill.

A good pair of trainers will work for this hike, but many people prefer hiking boots. Be sure to bring tick repellent and dress for the conditions if you plan to hike in this area.

The Talihina area also has some of the area's best roads for cycling. Cyclists come from all over the country to ride near Talihina because of the challenging elevation and incredible views.

Benjamin Benson, a Choctaw tribal member and cyclist, says he would recommend the area to any cyclist who wants a challenge.

"There are not too many big climbs around Oklahoma, so it's a good place to visit. Plus, the roads through there (the Talimena Drive) are quite smooth," said Benson.

He said that he loves the challenge and the scenery of riding in the Talihina area.

"When you climb to the top of one of the climbs and just stop and look. Kind of makes all the suffering worth it," he said.

Many cyclists choose to ride part of the Talimena scenic drive for the views, but there are also excellent paved and gravel roads around the area to enjoy.

A great resource for discovering routes around this area is the "heatmap" from Strava.com. This tool allows you to see where people ride and helps you plan a cycling route of your own. You can find this tool at www.strava.com/heatmap.

Beavers Bend State Park and the adjacent Hochatown State Park are also popular cycling and hiking locations in Choctaw Country.

This area has a lot to offer. You can hike trails, ride mountain bikes, enjoy road cycling and even ride gravel roads on your gravel bike. Whatever type of cycling or hiking you're into, this area has you covered.

Don't have a bike? Not a problem when you visit Hochatown. Sabra Blankenship



Photos by Christian Toews

Bethany Mitchell pauses to take in the view on the popular "Cedar Bluff Trail" in Beavers Bend State Park. For more information on hiking within the Choctaw Nation, visit www.choctawcountry.com

is the owner of Flawless Wellness Spa, which offers mountain bike rentals.

According to Blankenship, her 16-year-old son, Kylan Myers, used his savings to purchase 16 mountain bikes and launched a mountain bike rental business last year. Kylan takes care of all the maintenance on the bikes himself.

"We started this business because we want people to be able to take care of themselves and stay active. We strive to help people reach the goal of wellness," she said.

They now have adult and children's bikes available for rent.

Blankenship said that business has steadily increased, and they hope to purchase more bikes soon to serve even more customers.

You can find more information about the spa and mountain bike rentals at

flawlesswellnessspa.com.

The hiking in Beavers Bend State Park and the surrounding areas will not disappoint.

There are multiple trail options for every level of hiker. One of the most popular hikes is called the "Skyline Trail" that begins inside Beavers Bend State Park. Nearly eight miles long, this trail has challenging terrain and incredible views. You can find all of the trails in this area at www.alltrails.com.

If you want to get out and do some new roads or trails on a bike, or if you're going to take a family hike, Choctaw Country has an option for you. If you would like to go more in-depth on some of these areas and what they have to offer, visit www.choctawcountry.com to see more information on outdoor activities within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Choctaw tribal member among three to graduate from Family Medicine Residency Program

By Shelia Kirven

The Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program will graduate three family medicine physicians in June, Joshua Lowe, D.O., Mitchell Sanford, D.O., and Lena "Nikki" Eagle Road, D.O.

After three years of successful residency training and graduation, they will officially become eligible for board certification.

Dr. Lowe, of Bristow, Okla., graduated from Rogers State University in 2009, majoring in Medical/Molecular Biology. He went on to the Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine (OSU-COM), where he graduated in 2018. Dr. Lowe plans to return to his hometown to become a primary care physician.

Dr. Sanford's hometown is Okmulgee, Okla. A 2015 graduate of Oklahoma State University (OSU) with a chemistry degree, he continued at OSU-COM in Tulsa, graduating in 2018. Upon graduation from the Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program, he plans to become board certified as a family physician and will continue working for Choctaw Nation as a hospitalist.

Dr. Eagle Road is a Choctaw tribal member from Talihina, Okla. She graduated from the University of Oklahoma (OU) in 2012 with degrees in Microbiology and Native American Studies. She attended medical school at OSU-COM, graduating as a Doctor of Osteopathy in 2018. She will pursue her board certification in family medicine and become the first Choctaw tribal member to graduate from the Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program. She has chosen to stay on with Choctaw Nation at the Durant Regional Medical Family Practice Clinic in Durant, where she will begin working in September.

The Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program is a three-year post-graduate medical training program designed to focus on providing comprehensive medical training to family medicine physicians. According to program information, successful completion of a three-year family medicine residency program, in addition to four years of medical school, is a requirement to practice independently as a board-certified family medicine physician. The ACGME accredited program is committed to training competent and compassionate family medicine physicians. The program's philosophy is that family medicine is the cornerstone of medical practice. The residency program is broad in scope and designed to develop a family physician who can care for the whole person and their family.

Dr. Robert King, a Choctaw tribal member and the program's director, said, "The Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program started in 2012 to try to correct the rural physician shortages in our state. We have been wildly successful on that front. About 80% of our graduates practice in rural and underserved areas. About 70% of our graduates actually stay with the Choctaw Nation and continue to practice."

To get into the program, Dr. King said, "Typically students will come and do rotations with us, and part of their medical school training is practicing and learning from our residents and our faculty. When they are in their last year of medical school, a lot of them will come back and audition with us and spend one more month showing us what they can do. We go through an interview process where we receive over 1,000 applications per year, and we choose four per year based on exam scores and GPA, extracurricular activities, and most importantly, we just want good human beings." He continued, "We're always recruiting good young Native American applicants. We visit with their interest groups and their medical schools, and we try to foster relationships with them when they're in medical school so that when it comes times for them to choose their career, hopefully, they choose family medicine, and they choose to come train with us."

Dr. King explained that those who enter the program have completed college and medical school and are doctors but are required three more years of apprenticeship-type

training before they can become board certified and practice independently. "They practice under the faculty who are more seasoned physicians until those three years are up, they've passed all the exams and performed satisfactorily in the program, and then we graduate them into independent practice."

Dr. King, a family medicine physician, said he grew up in the Choctaw Nation. "My dedication runs deep in this program. It means a lot to me." After medical school at OU, Dr. King came back to the Choctaw Nation for his residency and to do his service obligation as an IHS scholar. He said he felt so rewarded with the experience, he stayed. When talking about the program's newest tribal member graduate, he commented, "I couldn't be prouder of Dr. Eagle Road. We're excited to be able to keep her here."

Dr. King also stated that there will be another Choctaw tribal member coming into the program this summer.

Daniel Stacy, D.O., will begin the 36-month program for Family Medicine specialty beginning in July. He is moving from Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine in Ft. Smith, Ark.

When asked what advice she would give to Choctaw youth who may be thinking of going into the medical field, Dr. Eagle Road said, "Shadowing will play a big part in giving them an idea of what to expect if that's something they're really wanting to do. It is going to be a long, tough road, and it's ok if they fail. I have failed more than once on this career path and have gotten back on my feet. Having a good support, especially family, is going to be a big part of it. I would not have made it without my family. And just looking at the resources our tribe has, Choctaw Nation has more to offer than they did even when I started and have fortunately grown in that aspect. I've seen them being able to give more support to those who are pursuing careers in the science field."

Dr. Eagle Road also grew up in the Choctaw Nation and is Choctaw and Lakota. Her parents are Billy and Teresa Eagle Road, who both have worked for the Choctaw Nation for many years at the Talihina hospital and Recovery Center. She has two brothers, Billy and Jordan. She is the granddaughter of the late Velma Angel and Celestine Eagle Road.

Dr. Eagle Road said she knew she wanted to go into the medical field around junior high or early high school.

"During the summer youth program that the Choctaw Nation has, I was able to actually spend some time working in the pharmacy, and I worked one year in physical therapy. It allowed me to some of the inter-workings here at the hospital, and of course, I would come to the doctor every year for a sports physical, but I would always see someone new or hear from my parents that doctors were constantly coming and going, and no one was staying and that there was a need to have those physicians who would stay instead of just spending a couple of months here and then move on. That got me interested. I was going back and forth between physical therapy and maybe being a doctor at that time. I didn't really come to that decision until I was at OU."

She participated in the summer youth program both at the pharmacy and the physical therapy area at the Talihina hospital and one year at a local school.

Dr. Eagle Road said she appreciates the program for giving her the foundational knowledge and desire to go forward with a medical career. While in college and medical school, Dr. Eagle Road also participated in the Choctaw Nation Career Development Program and was a recipient of the Indian Health Services (IHS) scholarship.

Dr. Eagle Road received many good recommendations from training physicians and said she is happy to be able to accept the position at the Durant clinic.

"My end goal was always to come back and help my people in some way. This has given me the platform to do that," she said.

For more information about the Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency Program, visit the program's Facebook page or <https://www.choctawnation.com/cnhsa-residency-program>.



Dr. Nikki Eagle Road



Dr. Joshua Lowe



Dr. Mitchell Sanford

MEMORIAL DAY VIRTUAL CEREMONY

Memorial Day is a federal holiday, commemorating those who have died in military service to their country.

Join us on CNO Facebook May 31 for a virtual ceremony.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

CNO Tribal Council Holds Special Session to Amend Public Health and Safety Code

DURANT, Okla. April 21, 2021 – The Choctaw Nation Tribal Council held a Special Session on April 20, 2021, and voted to amend its Public Health and Safety Code regarding medical marijuana. The amendment will be automatically repealed on Nov. 13, 2021, and other legislation will be adopted. The amendment passed by an 11-1 vote.

Following the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals ruling in the Sizemore case, applying the McGirt decision to the Choctaw Nation reservation, state-issued medical marijuana cards or business licenses were not recognized by the Choctaw Nation laws. Without an amendment, Native Americans in possession of a valid state medical marijuana license, within the Choctaw Nation reservation, could have been arrested and charged for marijuana-related offenses in tribal court. In November, Tribal Council will pass a new code covering medicinal marijuana or an extension of this temporary measure; otherwise, the permitted use of medicinal marijuana within the Choctaw Reservation will expire.

In a discussion of the amendment, Tribal Council indicated that their intent is to research this issue further and propose better rules and regulations concerning medical marijuana for Native Americans within the Choctaw Nation reservation that minimize misuse of medical marijuana.

For more information on the Choctaw Nation Tribal Council, including the full text of the measures passed in the session, please visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/government/tribal-council/council-meetings-and-bills>.

Choctaw Nation offering COVID-19 vaccines to public

By Chris Jennings

After moving through several phases of the COVID-19 vaccine administration, the Choctaw Nation has begun giving the vaccine to the general public. On the first day, a total of 1,570 shots were provided, said Infection Control Nurse Natasha Hill.

“The goal is to vaccinate as many people as possible to begin to reach the herd immunity that is needed to protect the general public against the COVID-19 virus,” says Todd Hallmark, Executive Officer of Health.

Chief Gary Batton contracted the virus in December 2020, along with his wife and two grandchildren.

“We were quarantined, and I ran a 103-degree temperature and had chills,” he said.

Since then, he has received his COVID-19 vaccine and encourages others to do the same.

“I would encourage everybody to be vaccinated, for themselves and their families,” adding, “That while it’s a personal choice, we know the vaccine reduces your chances of getting COVID, and if you do get it, the severity is far

less,” said Batton.

Several people said the vaccine process through the Choctaw Nation was quick and orderly.

Candace Vaughn, Chief Pharmacist at the Rubin White refill center, said, “I have seen people who barely knew each other come together to build an amazingly efficient process for vaccine distribution.”

Since the Nation has begun offering the vaccine to the public, people have been traveling to get vaccinated. Vaughn said she has seen licenses from Arkansas, Arizona, New Mexico, Kansas, Maryland, Delaware and California.

Vaughn also shared several stories that she has experienced while administering the vaccine.

Stories like that of a young mother who cried tears of joy as she was vaccinated. The time an entire waiting room cheered for a young woman who was terrified of needles yet still chose to get vaccinated. She has listened as a waiting room full of elders that were strangers laughed and talked and enjoyed the company of a peer for the first time in a year.

Of all of Vaughn’s stories, the one that sticks with her most is of the three people that were in quarantine when she called to schedule their appointment.

“They were in quarantine when I called and were going to call me back, but quarantine turned into positive and positive into severe. They eventually lost their fight,” she said.

“I know right now, people think that it’s behind us. I hope that it is, but why not take that extra precaution, just to protect our loved ones, protect our community, protect our nation and just go ahead and get the vaccination,” said Batton.

The Nation is currently offering the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. The minimum age for the Pfizer vaccine, given primarily at the Talihina Clinic, is 16 years old. The Moderna vaccine is given at the other Choctaw Nation clinics, with a minimum age of 18.

To schedule an appointment, call 800.349.7026 ext. 6, and choose your closest clinic. To learn more about available opportunities and eligibility, please visit <http://www.choctawnation.com/covid-19>.



Photo by Chris Jennings

District 9 councilman James Dry gets his first dose of the Moderna vaccine at the Choctaw Nation Regional Health Clinic in Durant.

Supreme Court ruling applies to all Five Tribes

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The Choctaw Nation Tribal Prosecutor’s Office now includes six full-time Assistant Tribal Prosecutor positions and two administrative assistants. These prosecutors will work to make state and federal agencies aware of criminal convictions and current protective orders issued by the Choctaw Nation District Court.

In preparation for the influx of cases, the court system invested in new case management software that interfaces with the Choctaw Nation Tribal Prosecutor’s Office and streamlines the filing process of new criminal cases.

On Jan. 13, 2020, Choctaw Nation Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, Cory Ortega, was appointed to serve as a Special Assistant United States Attorney (SAUSA) for the Eastern District of Oklahoma. The SAUSA appointment aids in the prosecution of criminal offenses occurring within the Choctaw Nation in tribal or federal court systems.

In addition to criminal case identification, the Choctaw Nation Tribal Prosecutor Office has worked with the Department of Public Safety to provide virtual jurisdictional training to tribal, state, and city law enforcement agencies on the impact of the McGirt decision. This training assists the authorities with the identification and verification of appropriate jurisdiction for the cases being investigated.

The Choctaw Nation court website, www.choctawnationcourt.com, includes information on e-filing, case records, and contact information for the Choctaw Nation Judicial Branch and Office of Tribal Prosecutor.

“The Choctaw Nation is and always has been a reservation since the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek between the Choctaws and the U.S. Government,” explained Chief Batton. “We, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, strive to be good neighbors. Our goal is not only to take care of our people, but our communities as well. It’s about working together to protect the health and safety of every person living within the Choctaw Nation. That will never change.”

Information on Tribal Codes can be found at <https://www.choctawnation.com/government/judicial-branch/tribal-codes>.

This is an ongoing story. To stay up to date on all things related to our tribal sovereignty, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com>.

COVID-19 VACCINE NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Appointments for vaccines are now available to the public for ages 18 and older at any CNHSA clinic. Patients ages 16 and older can receive the Pfizer vaccine at the Talihina location. Other locations will primarily be giving the Moderna vaccine.

800-349-7026, EXT. 6

USE YOUR MYCNHSA APP, OR VISIT MY.CNHSA.COM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ◆ TOGETHER WE'RE MORE ◆

May 2021

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Explore the great outdoors of Choctaw Country this spring.

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

Stay Connected to the Nation
CHOCTAWNATION.COM



REMEMBER THE JOURNEY

MAY 15, 2021 | TVSHKA HOMMA CAPITOL GROUNDS

CEREMONY BEGINS AT 10:00AM
CULTURAL DEMONSTRATIONS, LIVE VILLAGE AND VENDOR BOOTHS OPEN AT 9:00AM

The Trail of Tears is a part of our tribal history that will not be forgotten.

Join us in remembering the journey and celebrating our culture.

CHAHTA HVPIA!

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

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