



June 2020 Issue



Photo by Christian Toews

The first colors of sunrise on the horizon meet the night sky just outside of Nashoba, Okla. Dark skies provide unique opportunity in Southeastern Okla.

Starlight, star bright: Choctaw Nation skies Delight

Nation features darkest skies for hundreds of miles

By Christian Toews

When was the last time you looked up at the stars? Not just a glance up to remember they exist, but when you paused and had a long, contemplative look at the stars? For most people it has probably been a while. With the speed of our lives these days, we barely have time to pause and eat, much less be introspective. For our ancestors, stargazing was a regular occurrence. Early texts from around the world reveal that people spent a lot of time searching the stars for meaning, inspiration, comfort and beauty. The Bible even tells the story of shepherds following a star to the location where they found Jesus.

Our modern relationship with the night sky is a bit less dramatic. Many of us have seen the stars, but perhaps not to the extent our forefathers saw them. With the invention of the lightbulb, our relationship with the night sky became, well, dim. Sure, we are more productive because we have been able to work later into the night. We’ve had more fun because we no longer have to rely on daylight to play sports and games. But has all of this convenience come at a cost to our relationship with nature?

Oklahoma might be the last place on your mind when you think of stargazing. In Texas they sing, “The stars at night are big and bright,” and in Oklahoma we sing, “Where the wind comes sweeping down the plain.” But there is much more to Oklahoma than plains and wind.



Photo by Christian Toews

The Milky Way can be seen in the sky over Nashoba in this photo looking south. The area between Nashoba and Smithville has some of the darkest sky you can find for hundreds of miles.

Within the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma lie some of the best dark skies in the eastern half of the United States. Between Nashoba and Smithville there is a stretch of Oklahoma that is almost untouched by light pollution.

John Bortle worked to develop a way to map and classify how well the sky can be seen on a clear moonless night. The Bortle scale ranges from 1 (pristine, dark skies with less than 1% of the brightness of the sky

coming from the ground) to 9 (more than 2700% of the sky’s total brightness coming from the ground). According to skyandtelescope.com, where the Bortle scale was first published, the most heavily light-polluted areas like New York, Rome, Paris and Chicago might reduce what you can see to only the brightest 10-or-20 stars, even on a pristine, clear night. The area in Oklahoma including Nashoba and Smithville is classified as level 2 skies on the Bortle scale. That means, on a clear and moonless night, the summer Milky Way is highly structured to the unaided eye.

Light pollution doesn’t only make stargazing difficult. It also has an impact on the ecosystems around us. According to the International Dark Sky Association, a natural night sky signals when to eat, sleep, hunt, migrate and even when to reproduce for many animals. It is estimated that half of all life on earth start their “daily” activities at sundown.

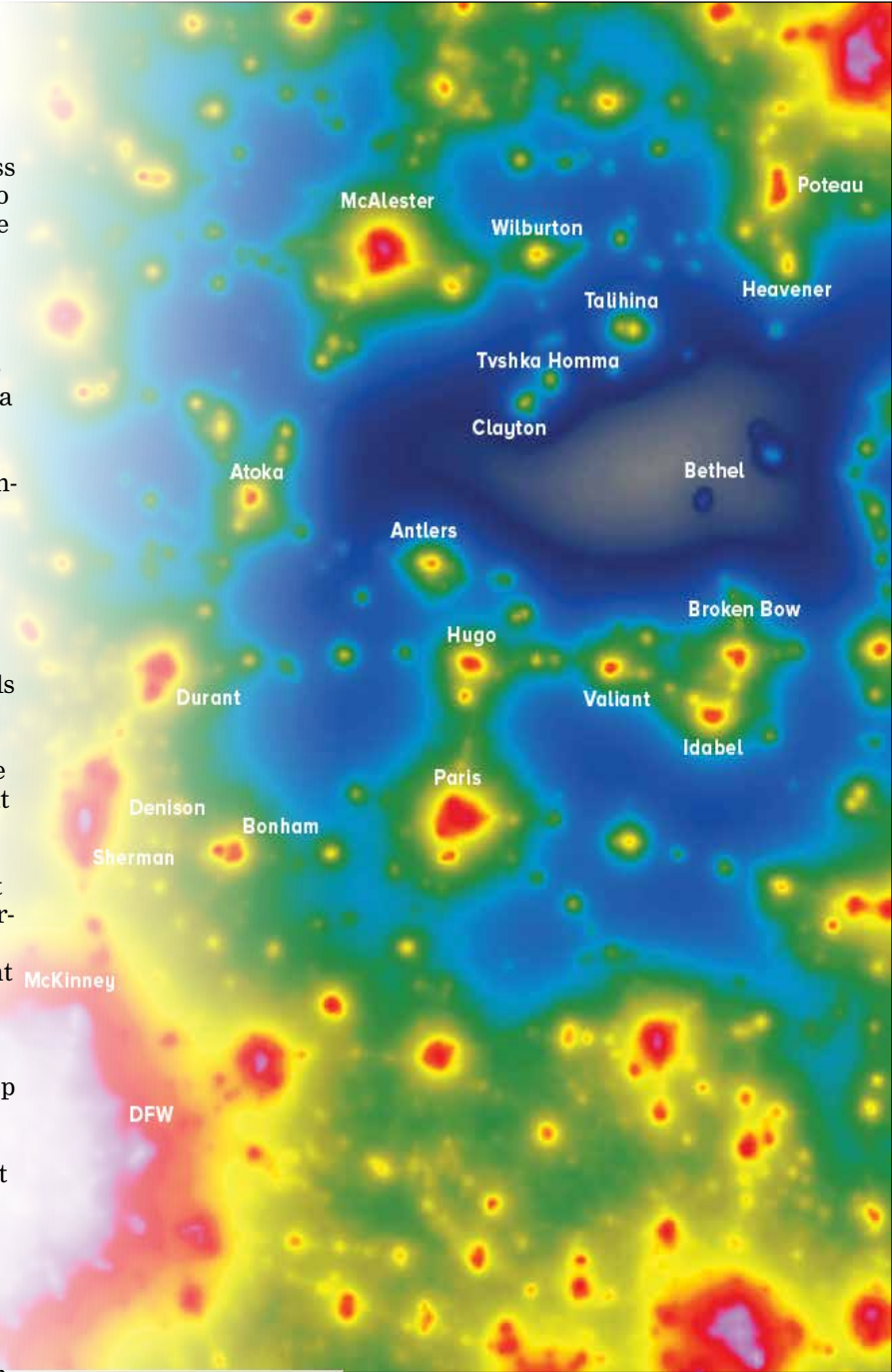
Humans are also affected by light pollution. In a recent Harvard study, it was noted that even dim light can interfere with a person’s circadian rhythm and melatonin secretion. “A mere eight lux—a level of brightness exceeded by most table lamps and about twice that of a night light—has an effect,” noted Stephen Lockley, a Harvard sleep researcher.

According to the International Dark Sky Association, exposure to blue light at night is particularly harmful, and more lights are trending toward blue. Most LEDs used for outdoor lighting, as well as computer screens, TVs and other electronic displays create abundant blue light.

As the natural day and night rhythm continues to be interrupted by artificial light, one of the most unfortunate effects of this interruption is that there are so many people who have never seen certain stars, constellations or even the Milky Way, our own galaxy.

A New York Times article described a 1994 earthquake that shook the Los Angeles area around 4:30 in the morning. The quake was very strong and knocked out the power to the area. Naturally, people gathered outside their homes during the quake and residents reportedly called various emergency centers to report a mysterious cloud overhead. The cloud was the Milky Way galaxy which had been obscured from view by the artificial lights.

While we cannot shut off the city lights across the country, we can escape to areas with less light pollution to show ourselves and our children the beauty above us.



Light pollution data courtesy of Earth Observation Group, NOAA National Geophysical Data Center

Light pollution can be seen to drastically drop off the farther away you get from major metropolitan locations.

Babak Tafreshi is an astrophotographer and science journalist whose work has been featured in National Geographic as well as many other publications. When talking about light pollution, he offered some hope, saying, “Truly dark skies are possible to experience thanks to a growing number of preserved dark sky places and a rising branch of ecotourism called astrotourism, which is emerging in areas with existing ecotourism infrastructure, with natural dark skies, that are far from cities and major light pollution sources.”

Faith, Family, Culture



Chief Gary Batton

Nation announces recovery plan

Halito. I hope you all are doing well and staying healthy. My thoughts and prayers are still with anyone who has been directly affected by this pandemic.

The past few months have been a time of learning, reflection and preparation for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. We announced our COVID-19 Recovery Plan on May 5. The health and safety of our tribal members, associates, vendors, entertainment partners, guests and communities have been our top priorities throughout this process. We have continuously monitored the situation by staying up to date on the latest information provided to us by local, state and federal health officials. This is why we decided to take a public health-focused and data-driven approach as we reactivate our operations in phases. CNO's health and emergency management professionals have designated trigger points for key indicators that CNO will use as a base standard to either move into a new phase or stay in the current one. The key indicators are based on hospital and ICU bed utilization in the 10.5 counties and the states of Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas. We will continue to review medical data and key indicators rigorously, and we will only move to the next phase if the data suggests it is safe to do so.

We began Phase 1 on May 15. In alignment with our priority of health and safety, we implemented enhanced safety protocols and other guidelines at CNO operations and facilities. Approximately 25% of the CNO workforce returned to their onsite workstations. During Phase I, several health functions began to reopen with limited services at the Talihina Hospital and CNO medical clinics. Wellness centers and CNO Chili's dine-in reopened with limited capacity, enhanced sanitation protocols and social distancing considerations. Phase 2 is set to begin on June 1. As I stated earlier, we will continue to monitor the key indicators and prioritize health and safety. Social distancing will continue to be encouraged to protect our associates and guests. Our target date for reopening all Choctaw Casino operations is June 1. We have developed a comprehensive plan for reopening. Operations and amenities will be limited at first. We are optimistic but cautious about reopening. We have implemented numerous safety protocols and measures to help protect our associates and visitors. Once we have determined that everything is going to plan and that the key indicators suggest it is safe to do so, we will move into Phase 3. During Phase 3, all operations will return to working order.

COVID-19 and the situation surrounding it is ever-evolving. By the time this information reaches you, there will most likely be additional updates, information and changes. To stay up to date on all CNO operations and recovery information, please follow us on social media or visit choctawnation.com/covid-19.

I wish everyone health and safety during this time. God bless you all.



Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr.

Family more important than ever

Living out the Chahta spirit of faith, family and culture. That is the vision of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. You've heard us say it many times. We are strong in our faith and proud of our culture. But there is a reason family is in the middle of our vision. It is the glue that keeps everything together. Family is the foundation of everything we do as a nation. Without family, there would be no one to pass down our faith or culture. Even when we migrate from one place to another, we carry on our family traditions with us.

In times like this, family is essential. It is the central axis of all we do. Our families keep us grounded and pick us up when we're down. Social distancing can make feelings of isolation even stronger. Leaning on our families for help and keeping each other company is so important for our mental health. Due to the pandemic, many families have had extra time to spend with each other. Hopefully, you've gotten to slow down and make memories to cherish forever. It was so awesome to get to walk with my family in honor of our ancestors who walked the Trail of Tears. COVID-19 might have prevented us from gathering in a large group to walk in our annual Trail of Tears Walk, but it didn't stop families and individuals from honoring their ancestors. It was so great to see the pictures many of you sent to us on social media for the Virtual Trail of Tears Walk. No matter what is happening around us, we are still Chahta strong.

Family is often defined as all of the descendants of a common ancestor. We, as members of the Choctaw Nation, are connected by the Chahta blood running through our veins.

Our ancestors were strong and determined when they were forced to leave their homelands and were exposed to disease and suffering. However, they never lost sight of the future. They kept their faith and took care of their families. They knew that one day things would be better and that there was hope in the future. Thanks to their perseverance and determination, we are who we are today.

I know during this pandemic it has been difficult to stay positive but I hope you can take comfort in knowing that our ancestors were strong, and have passed on that same strength so we can overcome adversity in times like this. Lean on your family, slow down, enjoy this time together and eventually, things will go back to normal and we will go back to our busy lives.



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Topping off ceremony

Photo by Christian Toews

Chief Gary Batton, Janie Dillard and Assistant Chief Jack Austin Jr. watch as the top beam of the newly constructed "Sky Tower" is lifted into place during the topping off ceremony in May. A topping off ceremony is when the last beam is placed atop a structure during its construction.



Pastor Olin Williams
Employee Chaplain

Make the home great again

There is a slogan in the presidential race which sounds out the idea of making America great again. We may consider making the home great again to reach that state of greatness that is implied. We understand that in the order of creation, God established the home first. God's intention was that the home should be a blessing and joy, a refuge of peace and happiness, a haven from trouble, strife and sorrow. The home is to be filled with God's word. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them up for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6: 6-9). The promise God made to Israel is as pertinent to us as well. In the Book of Galatians, Paul was inspired to write, "So, then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham; and if you be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." It is true that the Old Testament contains not only the moral law but also the ceremonial law, and the ceremonial laws are fulfilled and are not required of us. But God's eternal principle is the same. Those who teach diligently the Word of God have a right to these promises. Godly minds create good citizens. And it begins in the home when the family is surrounded with the Word of God. There was a time when family altar was a common practice. At selected times during the day, the whole family would read the scriptures and pray together. During this pandemic, many families got closer together and realized that the home is really the strength of our democracy and the base foundation of core values which makes a nation great. What a difference it would be if families would begin the old-fashioned family altar and make the home great again.

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Cultural Services staff members remain culture bearers through pandemic

By Shelia Kirven

(Part 3 in a 3-part series on Choctaw culture bearers, this month we look at the Cultural Services Division.)

Culture bearer: any individual, especially a migrant, who carries, and thus diffuses, cultural values and traits between societies. The role of culture bearers is particularly important within those cultures undergoing transition or experiencing threat from outside the culture. (Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 3rd ed. 2000).

The Choctaw Nation Cultural Services Division preserves and shares the Chahta story through diverse means of activities, classes, programs and projects. Program staff serve as mentors to others by teaching the culture, both past and present.

Some of the ways the division mentors others are by teaching social dancing, through princess pageants and sewing classes. The game of stickball is also taught to anyone who wants to learn. For those who want to play or just to watch, the games and tournaments bring excitement to young and old alike. A variety of classes in many areas are shared at Heritage Days at the Tribal Headquarters in Durant and several other locations throughout the service area as well.



Photo by Chris Jennings
J.J. Jacob demonstrates Choctaw bead work during a heritage day at the Choctaw Nation headquarters.

The division’s beading classes, which have been taught in the service area and at community meetings throughout the country for several years, are how many beadwork artists got their start. Several have become proficient in the art, selling their pieces as well as teaching the craft to others. Choctaw registered beadwork and pottery artist, Mary Frazier, teaches beading classes in Antlers. She says, “Everything I know, I learned from the Cultural Services classes, except for my beading from my mom at age 16. I started back when Cultural Services started the classes. I learned a lot more with them.”

Tribal members attending events even share their knowledge and help with teaching. At the annual Bakersfield Choctaw Days, there are demonstrations of various activities such as flint knapping, beading and bow making. Tribal members share with others what they have learned and the culture that was passed down in their families.

Labor Day brings another chance to teach Choctaw culture. By visiting the Choctaw Village, located on the grounds of the Choctaw capitol at Tvshka Homma, festival goers learn stories, dances, stickball, beadwork, basket making and Choctaw hymns from staff, tribal member volunteers and tribal elders. Traditional foods can be sampled, and an example of a Choctaw chukka is built, showing how our ancestors lived in the past.

Technology plays a large part in research and in teaching through YouTube and social media. Snapchat was used during the 2019 Choctaw Nation Pow Wow. Kerry Steve, Pow Wow coordinator said, “This was the first year we had a Snapchat filter. It was used over 530 times during the weekend. It did geo-mapping and anytime anyone was in that area and used the map, that filter popped up.” This type of technology helps in getting the culture out to the people.

Dr. Ian Thompson, Senior Director of Historic Preservation, explained some of the ways that the Historic Preservation Department staff serve as culture bearers and mentors. “The Historic Preservation Department works to protect Choctaw historic sites and to support the community in the revitalization of Choctaw traditional culture and knowledge. Within it, the Compliance Review Program consults on around 3,000 federally funded projects within a 9-state area each year to ensure that they do not disturb Choctaw cemeteries, historic

sites, or sacred places here or in our homeland. The Archaeology Program helps Choctaw Nation to stay compliant with federal preservation law by making sure that our own projects do not impact historic sites.” Thompson continued, “The NAGPRA Program works to return and respectfully rebury the remains of Choctaw ancestors, funerary objects, sacred objects and items of cultural patrimony that are held in federal collections. The Cemetery Program helps families to restore and fence abandoned Choctaw cemeteries within the Choctaw Nation. The GIS Program creates and maintains databases and maps that show Choctaw history and culture on the land. The Outreach Program does presentations and classes in the community, including traditional pottery classes, Indigenous foods classes, and the Choctaw Textiles Group.”

Several students who have participated in the pottery classes now assist the department by going out into the communities and teaching others.

Wheelock Academy Historic Site and the Capitol Museum at Tvshka Homma, both under the direction of the Cultural Services division, offer tours, presentations and exhibits as well as gift shops.

Historic Preservation staff also research and write a popular monthly article for the Biskinik newspaper entitled Iti Fabvssa.

Additionally, Growing Hope is a program in the division that works to save the seeds of Choctaw crop varieties, sharing them with the community and educating about traditional agriculture and traditional food with the goal of empowering community members to improve their health through their own culture.

Staff members write curriculum for all classes in order to record historically correct facts for teaching. Before curriculum can be written, research must be documented and proven. Resources are found through interviews with Choctaw elders and their families and documented historical accounts. All accounts are validated and approved through the Historic Preservation Department.

Even though the pandemic has forced cancellations and closings, the Cultural Services Division has continued working at full speed. Sue Folsom, Executive Director, said, “We are not scheduling any activities at this time until further notice. Staff is working remotely on projects and planning future programs.” She continued, “We are anticipating this crisis not going away anytime soon and we will work as planned to meet the needs of the public minus the classes until further notice as we are clear to return to work; then we will start going out and serving the public. We can’t predict what the future holds, but we can be flexible as we move forward.”

Audrey Jacob, Director of Museum Cultural Events Special Projects for the division, said of the pandemic, “It has moved us forward into utilizing technology more and reaffirmed one of our greatest strengths as a people – adaptability. Using technology as a means of reaching out to our citizens outside of our 10.5 county service area is part of our strategic goal. Something that was a vision for two to three years from now has become a reality in the present.”

Dr. Thompson said,” With coronavirus, all of these entities are working remotely, or out in the field. To engage with the community on preservation while people are remote, the Historic Preservation Department has initiated the Chahta Tosholi speakers’ series online and is working with the community to encourage the recording of oral history. Both museums are closed. The Capi-



Photo by Christian Toews
Kids play stickball at the 2019 Labor Day festival. Cultural Services often teaches the game of stickball to anyone who wants to learn.

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Choctaw Nation Department of Education



Photo by Chris Jennings
Jose Gonzalez teaches a group of school kids some social dances during a tour at the Choctaw Nation headquarters.

tol Museum is working on a new exhibit about Choctaw life in Indian Territory for when it reopens. Growing Hope is working remotely, planting seeds for this year’s harvest and sending seeds to tribal growers. Some staff have been assisting with the creation of exhibits for the Cultural Center.”

The Artist Registry Program continues to add new artists who sign up. The Cultural Arts and Education department is also increasing their inventory of beadwork to be given away at future Heritage Day events as well.

One highly anticipated annual event, the Choctaw Nation Princess Pageant has not been cancelled, according to Folsom, but only postponed. Sue Folsom explained, “We are still working on the details of how the pageant will proceed with the expected changes to occur. We are working on dates and locations at this time should a decision be made to move forward or other options to consider.”

Moving into the new Cultural Center is a high priority in next steps for the division. Though the pandemic has canceled many events, upcoming activities for the Cultural Center are still being planned and developed. Countless opportunities to learn and be involved will be available.

To find out more about the Cultural Services Division and opportunities within the division, go to <https://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture> or call 800-522-6170.



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District 11

Halito, Chihowa vt Achuckma!

I hope everyone is safe and healthy. Just as our ancestors survived hardships, today we have it in our DNA to overcome this COVID-19 crisis. The Choctaw Nation will learn from this unprecedented time and come out better, stronger and more effective than before. We’ve had to make some difficult decisions; however, because of Chief Batton, Asst. Chief Austin, the administration and the Council, we’ve also had the opportunity to come up with some creative, long-lasting and beneficial changes.

I would like to say “yakoke chito” to all our employees who continued to work while keeping the rest of us safe at home. Your courage and dedication are much appreciated. I am also proud of our tribe for keeping our other employees’ paycheck and benefits in place while off work, and we all look forward to returning to normal operations soon.

It has been lonely on Wednesdays. We miss the fellowship with our Dist. 11 seniors who come to eat lunch, but we still have drive-thru and delivery for those who would like a meal. We can’t wait to see everyone back and would like to invite all Choctaw seniors 55 or over and their spouses to start coming to the community center every Wednesday from 11-12. There are big plans for the rest of the year, so come enjoy lunch and be a part of the Dist.11 Choctaw Seniors Group!

Congratulations to all our Choctaw Dist. 11 students this year who graduated or were promoted to the next grade, even though it was a unique ending to the school year because of the COVID-19 virus. It was an honor to call the Chahta Foundation Tribal District 11 Scholarship winners to congratulate them on an astounding high school career and wish them well in their college plans. I am so glad we can support our future leaders with this \$1,000 scholarship and help them continue to be successful in their endeavors.

The Choctaw Princess pageant has been rescheduled for July. If you are interested or know someone who is, please let us know so we can share with you information and an application.

Please stay safe, and hopefully, we will see you soon. Contact me if I can help you in any way. I will be opening a new Facebook page soon to keep you updated on Dist. 11 and the Choctaw Nation happenings. It will be called Robert Karr Choctaw Tribal Council Dist. 11.

Yakoke, Chi Pisa la Chike
Robert Karr
580-579-2680 or rkarr@choctawnation.com

District 10

Halito Chim achukma,

I hope everyone has endured the isolation and the social distancing required over the last couple of months. This has been an unprecedented time in my life that I could not have imagined. I believe we will have a new normal to get used to in the coming days and weeks. I know everyone’s experience of the stay-at-home mandate was different. I have heard of many who got to reset and do more immediate family activities than ever before. I know the advantages of country living allowed many options for a variety of different activities as well. I personally got my garden off to a good start! My sweet corn, tomatoes, kale, squash, purple hull peas and peppers are looking good.

I want to give a big shout out to ALL essential workers (healthcare, grocery stores, gas stations, emergency management, etc.) who keep working and doing their vital jobs during this trying time with a lot of unknowns and still many to be resolved. To the community-based social workers, community health representatives, nutrition staff and volunteers who keep our curbside meals going for our elders every Wednesday and collecting all the data associated with that, THANK YOU for your service!

This pandemic has shown that the forethought of the late Chief Pyle and the Council for the creation of the permanent fund money reserve some years back proved to be very beneficial. During this time, Chief Batton and Council have transformed our communication capabilities to receive daily operational reports via e-mail, and we have also held Webex and/or conference calls twice a week to discuss and inform of local happenings. We held our regular legislative monthly tribal council meetings via Webex to ensure tribal members’ needs are being met the best we can under these circumstances. Big shout out and thank you to the executive branch for their leadership and commitment during this time.

This global shutdown has revealed several vulnerabilities that the Choctaw Nation and United States has. So much of our country’s dependence on China and foreign trade being one of them. From the shortages of hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and pharmaceuticals, it’s shown a lack of preparedness, which I suspect in return will make us all be much better prepared for in the future. As it relates to the Choctaw Nation, those very same shortages that affected the country affected us the very same way. As I write this article the price of beef in the grocery stores has doubled from two months ago, and the price of cattle is lower than two months ago. We should encourage local production of meats and vegetables for local consumption and supply from our local farmer’s markets. Some of the other needs are quality broadband internet for our area to handle work-at-home requirements and to the schools needing distance learning opportunities.

Finally, we still have time to get our Census forms filled out and submitted. It is so important that we get our Choctaw Nation numbers recorded as this helps fund many of our tribal programs. Some of the funding we received from the pandemic was based on last census numbers which were drastically shorted from the last census.



Robert Karr

District 9

Halito District 9,

I hope everyone has been staying safe as we look forward to getting back to all daily operations of the tribe and some semblance of normalcy in our personal lives. During our time of social distancing, we had many conference calls with Chief, SEOs, and as Tribal Council. These meetings helped us make informed decisions that we believe were in the best of our tribal members and associates. I would like to thank all the frontline associates who continued to work to serve our tribal members and guests during this time. You all made us very proud!

We have continued to serve our elders by meeting their nutritional needs with drive-thru meals and home deliveries since the middle of March. Over 1,500 meals have been served during this time, and that would not have been possible without our volunteers and staff. Our social workers and CHRs have also been serving our tribal members during this time to ensure their wellbeing.

I would like to congratulate all our high school graduates, and I’m proud to announce the Chahta Foundation was able to award 21 \$1,000 scholarships this year. We were able to do this by raising money with fundraising efforts and private donations. Our District 9 seniors are very proud of our students and all their accomplishments.

Our tribe’s construction projects are going very well. We look forward to opening another childcare center soon and the Cultural Center will be open later this fall. As for the casino expansion? That will be completed early next summer and promises to be an amazing addition to our family of casinos. We also have another 30 LEAP homes under construction and a lot of excited tribal members looking forward to moving into a new home very soon.

I also encourage all tribal members to send in their 2020 Census. It is very important to the Choctaw Nation, as this helps us when seeking grant funding.

I wish everyone the best, and we are very blessed to have a strong Choctaw Nation.



James Dry

Census funding is not free

By Bradley Gernand

An often-repeated truism in life is “money does not grow on trees.” Federal funding provides the Choctaw Nation with roughly one-quarter of its operating budget. But nothing about it is free, and a great deal of work goes into obtaining it.

Federal and state governments provide money to tribal and local governments to accomplish specific objectives. The Choctaw Nation has built a very effective Grants Department and its mission is to research and apply for this money.

Crucial to obtaining grants is writing an effective application. Each application must set forth a good business case, describing the activities to be funded, the means of measuring success, and the anticipated outcome. The key is proving to the government that taxpayer-provided funds are being deployed effectively and as planned.

With 226,000 members, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma uses grants to fund and accomplish many objectives. These range widely and are applied to perform a variety of missions. Infrastructure, such as roads and highways, education, social services, and justice initiatives are often funded by grant monies obtained from federal agencies.

During his State of the Nation address at Labor Day, Chief Gary Batton noted with pride that the tribe earns fully three-quarters of its \$1.2 billion dollar budget. He also noted that the tribe receives a quarter of its budget from the state and federal governments via grants and gets bang for every buck.

Ethan Shuth, water resources manager for the Choctaw Nation, is the recipient of a recent grant designed to impact all of southeastern Oklahoma by helping local communities stabilize and strengthen their public water treatment plants. “Quite a few communities are falling outside of environmental regulations and are cited frequently as violators,” Shuth says. The Choctaw Nation believes the issue may worsen before it gets better, possibly causing the region to be viewed less favorably as a destination for business or pleasure.

A particularly successful, grant-funded program is that of the Choctaw Nation’s Reintegration Program, which assists adult tribal members who have been convicted of felonies to become productive citizens. It offers treatment planning, case management, mental health, occupational consultation, and referrals. Only 2.1% of program participants reoffend within one year after release from incarceration. Nationally, 45% of ex-offenders do. While certain aspects of this success pertain to Choctaw culture and tradition, some of the “lessons learned” may apply to programs across the United States.

While the Choctaw Nation has become increasingly adept at applying for and administering the grants it receives, it finds itself operating under artificial constraints dating from 2010, the date of the most recent United States Census. In 2010 many Choctaw tribal members were not counted, artificially lowering the tribal count reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.

“We had approximately 199,000 tribal members at the time of the last U.S. Census in 2010,” says Dr. Delene Rawls, Director of Grants for the Choctaw Nation. “Unfortunately, only 24,000 of those tribal members indicated they are members of the Choctaw Nation, and so 24,000 is the figure most government agencies use.”

Although almost 160,000 additional tribal members wrote in the word, “Choctaw,” the Census Bureau did not consider this specific enough, Rawls notes. “There are three federally recognized Choctaw Indian tribes,” she says. “And using the word, ‘Choctaw,’ could apply to members of the Jena Band of Choctaws, or the Mississippi Band of Choctaws, or to members of the Choctaw Nation.” The Jena Band is headquartered in Louisiana. The Mississippi Band resides in Mississippi.

Rawls serves on what the U.S. Census Bureau calls a Complete Count Committee, formed by Choctaw Chief Gary Batton to formulate and guide the tribe’s response to the issue. “We’re making real headway,” Rawls reports. “We’ve identified the problem arising from the 2010 U.S. Census and know what we need to do to keep it from happening again.” The 2020 Census is now underway. For tips on how to fill it out appropriately, consult the Choctaw Nation’s website at www.choctawnation.com/2020Census.

Rawls notes that the issue applies whether the grants are awarded competitively or not. Many grants, she explained, are formula grants—awards based on a predetermined formula. These grants sometimes support state- or tribally-administered programs. Regardless, she says, “The severe undercount of our tribal members by the 2010 U.S. Census has formed a cloud under which we’ve worked for the past ten years.”

In May, the Choctaw Nation received money from the federal government as part of its emergency economic stimulus program. The money was welcome and provided an important stopgap in tribal operations, but Choctaw Nation officials realized the amount received would have been larger had the 2010 Census count been more accurate. As a result, the tribe is expanding its advertising and marketing campaign, airing more Census-related ads on TV and radio and placing more billboards across the 10.5 counties.

Chief Batton believes a successful 2020 U.S. Census is “mission critical” for the tribe, because of the additional federal aid it will enable. Most of this will be received via the grants process, although—as in the case of the recent federal emergency stimulus package disbursed as a result of the pandemic—it will be received directly.

Despite the interruptions caused by the pandemic, Dr. Rawls said her department continues working from home to keep the grants process flowing. To some degree, she says, it’s actually easier to do certain things from home. Grant preparation requires a good deal of thought and planning. “You have to be a good communicator and a logical thinker,” Dr. Rawls says. Organizing thoughts is sometimes easier at home than at the office, she noted. “But we’ll be happy to get back to the office,” she said. “We work so well together as a team.”

The Grants staff currently numbers six researchers. Most have academic degrees in various aspects of research. “It’s never too late to consider this as a career field,” she said. “We go home every night knowing what we did will impact lives. It just doesn’t get any better than that.”



Billboards are going up across the Choctaw Nation, reminding tribal members to fill out the 2020 U.S. Census, part of an effort launched by Chief Gary Batton to enable a more accurate Census count—and the additional federal aid that comes with it.

Are Virtual Medical Visits for you?

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

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

Eligibility

To qualify for a virtual medical visit, patient must:

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

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

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

HOURS OF OPERATION

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please call (580) 916-9231 or visit us online at www.choctawnation.com/virtualvisits

Choctaw Nation Health Services

Living out the Chahta Spirit FAITH • FAMILY • CULTURE

NOTES AND EVENTS

Noel and Roxie (Loman) Baker Family Reunion

June 27, 2020 (previously scheduled for June 2)

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

For questions, please contact Lillie Dusenberry at 580-320-1039.

Unclaimed funds

The Accounting Department of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is trying to contact the individuals listed below. Choctaw Nation is in possession of unclaimed funds (uncashed payroll checks) that may be due to these individuals. If you are an employee or former employee of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and your name is listed below, please contact:

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
P.O. Box 1210
Durant, OK 74702
Attn: Jeryn Hart, Payroll Accountant
Or Phone 580-924-8280 ext. 4323

ERIC JAMES THOMAS
SAMANTHA JILL RICH
JULIA MORGAN TURNER
TOSHA ANN GONZALEZ
LEAH D BUTTS
CHELSIE RAYANN HEAD

NEED TO CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS?

Contact the Choctaw Nation
Circulation Department

580.924.8280 x4028

Read the Biskinik online at
CHOCTAWNATION.COM/NEWS



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

Call 800-658-1497 for more information.

Veterans Association Members Needed

Choctaw Veterans Association is searching for new members. Most of our members are Vietnam Vets.

We need young Choctaw military men and women, active or retired. Members of different tribes are welcome as well. Veterans Association paperwork is needed.

Meetings are 8 a.m. on the second Saturday of each month at the Spiro Choctaw Community Center. Members attend funerals, and Disabled American Veterans and Marine Corp League. For information call:

Ed Hendricks, Recruiter 918-962-5524
Paul Perry, Commander 479-353-2709

Send us your stories!

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

Please send your submissions to us at
biskinik@choctawnation.com

Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna

April Language Lesson

Covid-19 Nan Isht Ahah Ahni
Covid 19 Safety Precautions

Chibbak a isht achifa micha oka isht achefa.

Wash your hands with soap and water.

Chitakha micha chibishakni ya natvnna isht ish ompohomokma.

Cover your mouth and nose with a covering.

Chi nashuka ish potoli nna.

Do not touch your face.

Kvna inla ish i mishema chike.

Keep your distance from others.

Chi chukka ish antta chike.

Stay home.

www.choctawschool.com

44th Annual Livingston Buck and Angeline Mitchell White Reunion

June 27, 2020 at the
Dale Cox Community Center, in Poteau.
Begins at 10:00 a.m.

Come early and visit. We will eat at noon. Bring a covered dish and/or dessert, maybe even a liter of pop, tea or lemonade.

Also bring your old pictures or your genealogy!! For more information, contact Traci Cox at 918-677-2235 or Kim White-Robertson at 918-647-6153. Or look us up on the family Facebook page

Veteran Lunches

Please call ahead to ensure the lunch is still scheduled.

June 3

- Hugo Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Stigler Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Crowder Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Wilburton Community Center – Noon
- Smithville Community Center – Noon

June 10

- Coalgate Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Antlers Community Center – Noon
- Spiro Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Bethel Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Durant Community Center – 11:30 a.m.
- Poteau Community Center – Noon
- Idabel Community Center – 11:00 a.m.
- Atoka Community Center – 11:30 a.m.

June 17

- Wright City Community Center – Noon
- Broken Bow Community Center – Noon

June 18

- McAlester Community Center – 11:30 a.m.

June 19

- Talihina Community Center – 11:30 a.m.

Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation

Evaluations and Assesments - Counseling and Guidance - Referral Services - On-the-job Training - Physical and Mental Restoration

June 2	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
June 2	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 3	Antlers	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 3	Coalgate	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 5	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 9	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 9	Idabel	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 10	Atoka	11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 10	McAlester	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 12	Crowder	By appointment
June 16	Broken Bow	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 16	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 17	McAlester	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 17	Stigler	By appointment
June 19	Coalgate	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 19	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 23	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
June 24	Atoka	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
June 26	Antlers	10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

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

Tribal Council holds May session

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA REGULAR SESSION
May 9, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
3. ROLL CALL
4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Regular Session April 11, 2020
5. WELCOME GUESTS/RECOGNIZE VETERAN OF THE MONTH
Robert Karr recognized the District 11 veteran of the month, Walter Amos, (not present) a 94-year-old World War II veteran. Speaker Williston commented, “We express to him our deepest thanks for his service to the Choctaw Nation and the United States of America.”
6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
7. NEW BUSINESS
 - a. Letter of Judicial Appointments for Richard Branam and Rebecca Cryer to the Choctaw Nation District Court Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - b. Approve Application and Budget for Continuation of Choctaw Nation Early Head Start—Child Care Program for FY 2019-2020 Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - c. Approve Application to Request Funds from HHS for a Cost of Living Adjustment and Quality Funds for FY 2021 for the Choctaw Nation Early Head Start Program Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - d. Approve Application for the Economic Development Administration Disaster Supplemental Grant Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - e. Approve the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan of 2020 Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - f. Approve a Service Line Agreement in favor of Public Service Company of Oklahoma on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Pushmataha County, Oklahoma Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - g. Approve a Road and Utility Easement in Favor of the City of Idabel, Oklahoma on Choctaw Nation Fee Land in McCurtain County, Oklahoma Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
 - h. Approve Application to the US Department of Agriculture for Funding to Improve Tribal Food Distribution Centers within the Nation in Response to the Global Pandemic. Vote Counts: YEAs- Unanimous; Vote Result: Bill passed
8. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
 - o No new business
9. OLD BUSINESS
No old business
10. ADJOURNMENT
11. CLOSING PRAYER

All council members were present. Speaker Thomas Williston, Secretary Ron Perry and Chaplain Jennifer Woods were present in Council House and all others by phone.

Biskinik

Announcement Guidelines

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

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

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

We welcome all letters from Choctaw tribal members. However, because of the volume of mail, it isn't possible to publish all letters our readers send. Letters chosen for publication must be under 150 words. We require full contact information. Only the writer's full name and city will be published.

All events sent to the Biskinik will run the month of the event or the month prior to the event if the event falls on the first of the month.

Mail to: Biskinik

P.O. Box 1210

Durant, OK 74702

or email: biskinik@choctawnation.com

Gary Batton
Chief

Jack Austin Jr.
Assistant Chief

The Official
Monthly Publication
of the
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Dara McCoy, Executive Director
Mary Ann Strombitski, Senior Director
Kellie Matherly, Managing Editor
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 type-written and double-spaced. You must include an address and phone number where you may be reached. Due to space limitations and the quantity of article submissions, we are unable to include everything we receive. Items are printed in the order received. Faxed photos will not be accepted.

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

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

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

ITI FABVSSA

Guide to using time at home to record oral family histories



An example of how you can organize materials for your own oral histories. Photo and information accompanying a recording from the Doris Duke Collection of American Indian Oral Histories, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

Oral histories, or histories that are told through people’s memories and life stories, have long been a part of Choctaw life. Before we developed a written version of our Choctaw language, we used oral histories to teach younger generations about our ancestors, philosophies of life, and values as Choctaw people. Oral histories told throughout the 1800s and 1900s that were written down have become valuable resources for learning about our past and how Choctaws experienced important moments in history. Since many people are spending more time at home, this is a great opportunity to record and write down your own family histories and stories.

This is a guide for conducting your own oral histories with members of your immediate household. This can be the start of a family project that you pass on to others in your family. To abide by social distancing guidelines, you can also use this guide to talk to people over the phone. Once everything is over, you can also use this guide with anyone. Kids can ask grandparents or grandparents can interview kids, whatever you want. Our ancestors knew that everyone has knowledge, so you don’t have to limit who you ask. Children and younger generations also have knowledge to share.

If you’d like to save your interview, you can use a voice recording app on your phone. Just open the app and tap record. When you’re done, tap the record button again. By recording your interview, you can go back and replay it for family members who were not there. After you are done, you can also use the recording to transcribe your interview as a document, print out the transcript and save it in a binder for your family to have. You would also have the file to share via email with other family members! Please make sure to ask the person you interviewed for their permission to share their interview with anyone.

Word processing document programs: Google Docs (free, need Gmail account), Microsoft Word, Office 365.

ENVISION CENTER

GET YOUR TAXES PREPARED

DEADLINE EXTENDED TO JULY 15, 2020

FOR APPOINTMENTS CALL OR TEXT

918-647-3665 OR 580-380-9370

Choctaw Nation Housing Authority



NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

FOR CHILDREN WHO WILL BE 3 OR 4 YEARS OLD BY SEPTEMBER 1

Providing educational, health and family services for eligible children and families, including children with special needs.

Available to all children.

FOR AN APPLICATION, CONTACT

800-522-6170 EXT 2219

Choctaw Nation Head Start

- INTERVIEWER TIPS:
- Use these questions as guide, you don’t need to ask every single question
 - Skip around with the questions. Ask the questions that you know the person you’re interviewing can answer
 - Treat this as a conversation. You can ask these questions while baking cookies or gardening in your yard together if you want.
 - Add your own questions; ask follow-up questions
 - Take breaks, conduct multiple sessions
 - It’s okay if people don’t have answers for a question. Sometimes people need time to think. You can always come back to the topic at a later time.
 - Ask your interviewee if they have old photographs or keepsakes somewhere in the house that they want to tell you about. These items can help start a conversation or jog some memories. After the interview, you can store these pictures or items together with the copies of the interview after you transcribe and print them out.
 - Have fun!
 - If you have any questions or would like to share your interviews and have them archived with Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation, please contact meganb@choctawnation.com.

BACKGROUND

When and where were you born?

Who are your parents?

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Did anyone else live with you growing up?

Do you have any nicknames? How did you get it?

CHILDHOOD

What was your family like?

Who was an older person that you liked to spend time with when you were a kid? What made them special to you? Can you share some of your favorite memories?

What was an important teacher for you when you were growing up? (This can be an actual teacher, an elder, a neighbor, a parent or sibling – whoever you can consider someone who taught you a lot during your childhood.)

What kind of activities or chores did you do when you were growing up?

How would you describe yourself as a child?

What are some of your favorite memories from your childhood? Who did you spend time with when you were growing up?

Who were some of your childhood friends?

Who were some elders that you knew growing up?

What were some stories that elders shared when you were younger?

What were some of your favorite foods growing up? Who cooked it?

Can you describe your childhood home? Did you live in more than one place?

Who were your neighbors? What did they do?

Where did you go to high school? What are some of your favorite high school memories?

Who were some of your friends in high school? What are some of your favorite stories with them?

ADULTHOOD

What was your first job?

Of all the jobs you’ve had, which one was your favorite and why?

What do you do for a living now?

What are some things you’ve learned from working?

What are the places that you’ve lived over the course of your life? Which place was your favorite and why?

[If married] How did you meet your partner? What are some of your favorite stories involving them?

[If they have children] How has being a parent changed you? What are some of your favorite stories with your children?

[If living in 10½ counties] What changes have you seen in Choctaw Nation over the years?

What are some of your favorite family memories?

What did you want to be when you grew up and how was that journey?

CHOCTAW CULTURE

What are some events in Choctaw Nation history that you have lived through?

Are you involved with any Choctaw cultural activities now? If yes, what made you interested in doing that?

How did you learn to [Choctaw language/art/craft that someone does here]? Who taught you?

What are some of the hardest things about doing [Choctaw language/art/craft that someone does.].?

What are some Choctaw traditions that you have passed down or encouraged others to do in your family?

What does being Choctaw mean to you?

CAMP CHAHTA

FAMILY NIGHT AND MOVE-IN

What to expect from Camp Chahta:

- Move in early
- Experience cultural events
- Develop new friendships
- Access campus communications
- Earn orientation credit
- Resolve any enrollment and financial aid issues



AUGUST 3-6

Move in & Family Night

August 3



AUGUST 6-7

Move in & Family Night

August 6



AUGUST 10-11

Move in & Family Night

August 10

MOVE-IN TIME TO BE DETERMINED BY CAMPUS | FAMILY NIGHT BEGINS AT 6:00 PM

CONTACT

800-522-6170 EXT 2292 | COLLEGEFYI@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation

College Freshman Year Initiative

Stay Connected

CHOCTAWNATION.COM



Caldwell turns 99

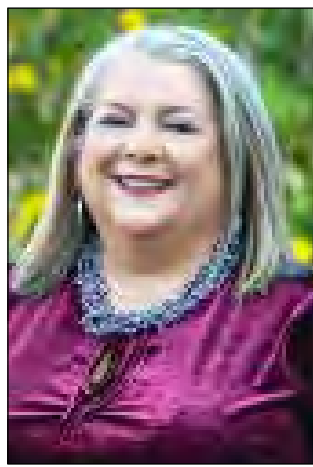
Happy 99th Birthday to our loving mother Alyce Caldwell! Born April 29, 1921. Love from Deen and Lisa Manis.



Solomon receives UA Distinguished Outreach Faculty award

Teshia G. Arambula Solomon, PhD was inducted on January 13, 2020 by the Arizona Board of Regents as the recipient of the University of Arizona Distinguished Outreach Faculty Award.

Dr. Solomon focuses on addressing complex social issues in Native American communities. She is an associate professor in the University of Arizona Department of Family and Community Medicine and Co-Director of the American Indian Research Center for Health. Solomon's research and professional career have been dedicated to improving health equity for Native Americans. She has done significant work in pushing for national public health policy that is culturally competent and honors the sovereignty of tribes in research.



Smith turns 15

Marijha Monique Smith turned 15 years old on April 28.

Marijha is the daughter of Keith and Michelle Smith, and granddaughter of F. Mack Thomas and Florine Flores.

She wants to study law and loves animals. She is also learning the Choctaw language. Her best friend is her cousin Jordan.

Hester graduates from SOSU



Katelynn R. Hester of Broken Bow, Oklahoma will graduate in May 2020 from Southeastern Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor of Arts in History.

She is a Parsons Scholar and will graduate magna cum laude. Honors and activities include: Top Ten Freshman, Spirit of Southeastern Color Guard

Captain, Kappa Kappa Psi, Alpha Chi, Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society, and Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society. She is also a Leadership Alliance Mellon Initiative Fellow.

She is a proud member of the Choctaw Nation and would like to thank all those who helped her throughout her college years.

She will begin her graduate studies at the University of Oklahoma in Fall 2020.

CNO residents graduate

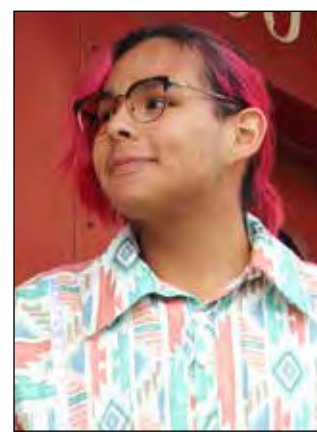
Choctaw Nation Family Medicine Residency is proud to announce the upcoming graduation of two family medicine physicians, Tammy Tandberg-Willcox, D.O. and Hao Yang, D.O. After successfully completing 3 years of residency training, these physicians will be eligible for board certification in family medicine.



Dr. Hao Yang's hometown is Tianjin, China. He attended the University of California in San Diego, California for his undergraduate education. He received a Master of Science in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He completed medical school at Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine in Glendale, Arizona. Upon graduation, Dr. Yang will be moving to Seattle Washington with his wife, Lin, and son, Maxwell, to complete a fellowship in advanced hospital medicine.



Dr. Tammy Tandberg-Willcox grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She attended the University of Wisconsin for her undergraduate education. She received a Master of Science in Forensic Science from Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and then completed medical school at The Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine in Spartanburg, South Carolina. During her residency at Choctaw Nation, she was elected chief resident. Upon graduation, Dr. Tandberg will continue to serve Choctaw Nation as a family medicine physician in Hugo, Oklahoma.



Walker turns 18

Talon Frazier-Walker turned 18 on Oct. 31, 2019.

Talon is the son of Semiah and Byron Walker of Norman, Okla. He is the grandson of Janice Deer of Shawnee, Okla. and Timothy and Sylvia Frazier of Hugo, Okla.

Happy belated birthday, Talon.

Amber Sells receives award



Amber Sells received the Excellence in Academics and Leadership Award for distinguished academic achievement; department citizenship; department citizenship and leadership; College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University, and community service; and personal accomplishments during her undergraduate program in the department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University.

Gray named MIAA Wrestler of the Year



Heath Gray, from Chandler Okla., wrestles for Division 2 powerhouse Central Oklahoma University. Heath was All-American last year finishing 3rd at the National Tournament. He was ranked #1 in the nation Division 2 (184lbs) most of the year. Gray was a national qualifier for 2019-20.

Gray was preparing for the NCAA Division II national tournament in Sioux Falls, SD when the NCAA cancelled the championship due to the coronavirus. While a national champion won't be named, the top ten seeds going into the national tournament were all named All-American, which makes Heath a two-time All-American with one year of eligibility left.

He was Regional Champion for the 2nd year in a row and was also named "Outstanding Wrestler" at the Midwest Classic, with his record being 29-1. Gray went 26-1 in this season with a pair of falls, six major decisions, and 12 technical falls. He also boasted a 59-6 advantage in takedowns.

Gray earned MIAA Wrestler of the Week honors earlier this season, was named an MIAA Dual Meet champion, and also took first place in the NCAA Regional Championship.

2020 Oklahoma Native All-State

Boys Cross Country

Quartermain Briggs (Clayton)
Kyle Henry (Shawnee)
Cody Jeanes (Sequoyah Tahlequah)

Boys Basketball

Quartermain Briggs (Clayton)
Cale Eaton (Byng)
Braden Shaw (Moyers)
Kaleb Stephens (Kinta)

Girls Basketball

Mackenzie Cruseo (Choctaw)
Holli Lindley (Hartshorne)
Diana Manning (Prague)
Tanner Moore (Paden)
Shaina Spears (Wilburton)

Softball

Grace Montgomery (Red Oak)
Emily Roden (Comanche)



CHOCTAW HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE

APPLY TODAY TO RECEIVE YOUR 2020 OKLAHOMA HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE

HOW TO APPLY:

- Auto renewal for 2020 at gooutdoorsoklahoma.com (download app and website license)
- To apply for a new license go to chahtaachvffa.choctawnation.com

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

ELDER LAWN CARE

APPLICATION OPENS APRIL 1, 2020

Must be at least 70 years old or have an ambulatory disability

Participants receive 20 vouchers, valued at \$25 each (no cash value), redeemable April 1 - December 31, 2020

Must live in 10 ¼ counties of the CNO

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION

580-522-6170 | CHOCTAWNATION.COM/LAWNCARE

Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

MEMBER SERVICES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



Introducing
Chahta Achvffa
A New Online Member Portal

Keep information and documents up-to-date on individual accounts.
Apply for services as readily available.
Access on any device.

Now Available

800-421-2707 | CHAHTAACHVFFA.CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Douglass Jay Hollingsworth

Douglass Jay Hollingsworth, 62, passed away March 16, 2020.

Douglass was born in Bartlesville, Okla., to D.J. and Peggy (Null) Hollingsworth.

He was preceded in death by his parents and an infant brother.

Douglass is survived by Brenda Copeland and Dennis Hollingsworth; four nieces and one nephew; along with numerous other relatives and friends.

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

Anita Pulliam

Anita Carol “Skeet” Pulliam, 87, passed away April 20, 2020.

Skeet was born Oct. 13, 1932, in Tulsa, Okla., to Harry and Winonda (Wilson) Foley.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sister Gloria Hedges; brother Jack Foley, daughter Cindy Johnson; and granddaughter Carrie Lynne Johnson.

Skeet is survived by daughter Christy Davis and spouse Rick; son Randy Pulliam and spouse Renee, brother Richard “Bo” Foley; grandchildren Trey Patrick, Cody Patrick, Amber Davis, Shelby Pulliam, and Jordan Pulliam; great-grandchildren Caden Patrick, Camden Patrick, Killian Davis, and Kolby Davis; numerous other family members and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mobley-Groesbeck Funeral Service](#).

Carl Todd Bowden Hamilton

Carl “Butch” Todd Bowden Hamilton, 64, passed away March 13, 2020.

Butch was born Jan. 10, 1956, in Gainesville, Texas, to Betty Ruth Birdsall and Robert Bowden.

He was preceded in death by his parents; grandparents R.O. and Annie Bowden, and Carl and Mae Fletcher.

Butch is survived by sisters Peggy Owens, Denise Cardinal, Missy Osborne; brother Jason Hamilton; several aunts, uncles and cousins; and two cats he cherished so much.

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

Lodie Ann Mitchell

Lodie Ann Mitchell, 71, passed away May 1, 2020.

Lodie was born Feb. 23, 1949, in Octavia, Okla., to Emeline and David Bohanon.

She was preceded in death by her parents; son Christopher Mitchell; brothers Clark Bohanon, Esias Bohanon; sister Alicetine Bohanon; parents-in-law Harry and Pleasant Mitchell; sister-in-law Jeannie Mitchell; and brothers-in-law Chip Mitchell, Karl Willis and Pat Wilbanks.

Lodie is survived by husband Stan Mitchell; daughters Gina Simpson and spouse Doug, Amber Norris and spouse Blake; granddaughters Chelsea Crosby and spouse Josh, Christine Hawkins and spouse Tim, Haley Mitchell, Kayla Walter, Emeline “Milly” Norris, and her namesake Ann Sloan Norris; grandsons Dustin Walter, Blake Adam Norris, and Mitchell Norris; great-granddaughters Lana Hawkins, Elena Crosby, Anabelle Willard, and Cheyenne “Nellie” Hawkins; great-grandsons Christian Hawkins and Beau Wayne Crosby; brother Randel Bohanon and spouse Ruthie; sisters Leona Samuels and spouse Richard, Ella Willis, Della Jones, Corene Palmer and spouse Melvin; sisters-in-law Suzanne Nolan and spouse Larkin, and Kim Mitchell; numerous nieces and nephews; and a host of friends.

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

Lloyd Lee Morris

Lloyd Lee Morris, 76, passed away April 27, 2020.

Lloyd was born Aug. 10, 1943, in Lawton, Okla., to Lloyd B. “Dub” Morris and Penny Vaughan.

He was preceded in death by wife Judy K. Morris; his parents; and son Danny Morris.

Lloyd is survived by sons Lloyd “Dubby” Morris, Zachary Morris, Andrew Vaughan and Jesse Ostroski; four stepchildren Connie Dyer, Pam Dyer, Ronnie Hardesty, and Dale Hardesty; sisters Tena Feack and Deedee Francis; brothers Terry Vaughan, Frank Vaughan, and Phillip Morris; his grandchildren; nieces and nephews.

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

Minnie Fay Barnes

Minnie “Fay” Jefferson Barnes, 78, passed away April 24, 2020.

Fay was born March 12, 1942, in Smithville, Okla., to Nellie Carterby Jefferson and Nicholas Jefferson.

She was preceded in death by her parents; sons Dennis Barnes and Duane Barnes; brothers Raphael Jefferson, Lee Jefferson and David Jefferson; sister Minnie Edwards; nieces Lisa Jefferson Cartby and Janie Shell Davis; and sister-in-law Donna Shell.

Fay is survived by husband Jim Barnes; daughters Cheryl Coon, and Julie Barnes Points and spouse Joe; son Randy Barnes and spouse Rhonda; sister Rhoda Sullivan; brother and sisters-in-law Harold and Judy Barnes, Janet and Tom Bolend, Brenda Jennings and John Cookinham, and Wanda and John Stratton; five grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren; 25 nieces and nephews; 43 great nieces and nephews; and many friends.

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

Jacqueline Davis

Jacqueline “Jackie” Davis, 66, passed away March 28, 2020.

Jackie was born Dec. 16, 1953, in Dallas, Texas, to Dennis Williams Jr. and Emma (William) Williams.

She was preceded in death by husband Raymond Davis Sr.; son Raymond Davis Jr.; granddaughter Kimberly Ganeen Noahubi; brother David Williams; sister Olivia Longoria; and special niece Stephanie Noahubi.

Jackie is survived by son Anthony Noahubi and spouse Mariea; daughter Tricia Noahubi; brothers Edson Williams, Greyhawk Williams and spouse Donna, and James Williams and spouse Melissa; sisters Jean Noahubi, Bertha Bason and spouse Johnny; grandchildren Vance Cummings, Anthony John Noahubi III, Regina Noahubi, Rebekah Noahubi, Brandon Moore, Derek Moore, Amanda Moore, and Chelci Moore; great-grandchildren Amilia Cummings, Joseph Noahubi, Jonathan Cummings, and Asher “Billy Goat” Moore; several nieces and nephews; best friends Geneva and June; along with a host of other friends and family.

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

Dorothy Fry

Dorothy Virginia (White) Fry, 95, passed away May 7, 2020.

Dorothy was born Nov. 22, 1924, in the White Community in Heavener, Okla., to Samson Grant and Edith Anne (Johnson) White.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Marion K. Fry; daughters Marilyn Sue Hammer and baby girl Fry; brother Pete White; and sister Lois White Burton.

Dorothy is survived by daughters Virginia Fry, Linda Meeks, and Peggy McAlester and spouse Stanley; sons Jim Fry and spouse Jackie, and Roger Allen Fry and spouse Nina; 14 grandchildren; 29 great-grandchildren; 10 great-great-grandchildren; sister Dora Lee White Thompson; brother Robert Otis “R.O.” White; numerous other relatives and a host of friends.

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

Steven Johnson

Steven “Steve” Johnson, 44, passed away Oct. 16, 2019.

Steve was born Dec. 16, 1974, in Eastland, Texas, to Mary Ann (Clinton) Jasper and Clarence “Gene” Johnson.

He was preceded in death by his father.

Steve is survived by wife Chevelle Johnson; sons Jeret Goad and Dallas Johnson; daughter Lindsey Goad; his mother; stepbrother Gavin Jasper; stepsister Tia Jasper; and several cousins and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Anderson-Upper Cumberland Funeral Home](#).

Madeline Keel Comeaux

Madeline Keel Comeaux, 65, passed away Dec. 7, 2019.

Madeline was born Oct. 8, 1954, in Waco, Texas, to Ernest “Gene” and Ruth (Harkins) Keel.

She was preceded in death by her father and parents-in-law Eugene and Bernice Comeaux.

Madeline is survived by husband Dudley Comeaux; her mother; children Amy Bourque, Patrick Herring and spouse April, Clint Herring and spouse Christina, and Erica Comeaux; brothers Ernie Keel and spouse Debbie, and Karl Keel and spouse Kathy; granddaughters Alexandria, Jasmine, Jennifer, Jalayla, Mackenzie, and Kaylee; many nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends.

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

Jack Miller

Jack Miller, 89, passed away April 21, 2020.

Jack was born Aug. 28, 1930, in Dallas, Texas, to Ira and Maude Mae Traylor Miller.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers Glenn and Everett; and sisters Lucille Bryant and Kathleen Upchesaw.

Jack is survived by daughters Cheryl Rutledge and spouse Randy, Kim Page and spouse Steve, and Tracy Miller; grandchildren Cameron Hudson, Clark Hudson, Cara Hudson, Miller Page and spouse Janie, Kelly Page and fiance’ Chancy Duncan, and Parker Page; great-grandchildren Selah and Fisher Page; sister Virginia McLeod; and brother Bud Miller.

For the full obituary, please visit New Hope Funeral Home.

Rebecca Nix

Rebecca May Nix, 62, passed away April 13, 2020.

Rebecca was born June 11, 1957, in Bailey, to Elton and Blanche Beatrice (Davis) Whitehead.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Don Nix; brothers Elton “Jiggs” Lee Whitehead and Clinton “Slick” Franklin Whitehead; and sister Claudine “Tootsie” Odessa Manning.

Rebecca is survived by daughters Michelle Mosley and spouse Paul, and Amy Midkiff; grandchildren Hillary Conway, Tyler Nix, Becca Midkiff, and Kayden Nix; great-grandchildren Jared, Kinley, Memphis, and Caleb; brother Roger Whitehead; sisters Wanda Morrison and Linda Peddycoart; and numerous nieces and nephews.

For the full obituary, please visit [Callaway-Smith-Cobb Funeral Home](#).

Doris Box

Doris Box, 85, passed away March 24, 2020.

Doris was born Aug. 15, 1934, in Bentley, Okla., to William Turner and Mary Caroline (Syler) Beal.

She was preceded in death by her siblings Alfred Beal, Andy Beal, Print Smith Beal, Easter Gammon, Martha Gammon, Louise Cook; spouses Max V. Melton and Ewell Dean Box; and son Richard V. Melton.

Doris is survived by sister Inez Cowling; her children Kathryn Suarez and spouse Lou, Barbara Matthews and spouse Randy, Donna Melton Perry, and Joe Bob Melton; 9 grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews.

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

Ronnie Ranea Fitzpatrick

Ronnie Ranea Fitzpatrick, 48, passed away May 7, 2020.

Ronnie was born April 9, 1972, in Duluth, GA., to Jack and Kay Rosenthal.

She was preceded in death by her parents and husband Jeffrey Dale Fitzpatrick.

Ronnie is survived by son Jeffrey Dale Fitzpatrick II and spouse Stephany; daughter Rylee Kay Tollett and husband Colton; grandson Jeffrey Dale Fitzpatrick III; sisters Robyn Morgan Bowden and spouse Sean, and Rikki Rosenthal; brother Jack “JJ” Rosenthal Jr.; numerous nieces and nephews; other family members and friends.

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

Jim McCurtain

Jim McCurtain, 89, passed away May 9, 2020

Jim was born June 13, 1930, in Poteau, Okla., to Jackson Haskell and Ernestine McCurtain.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and sons Leslie and Jay Tee McCurtain.

Jim is survived by his wife Lazell McCurtain; sons Gary McCurtain and spouse Kat, and Wesley McCurtain; daughters Sheila Shanks and spouse Larry, and Sheryl McCurtain; stepsons Bobby Joe Osburn and spouse Liz, and Billy Wayne and spouse Dianna; brother Jackson McCurtain Jr.; many grandchildren and great-grandchildren; nieces, sisters, brothers-in-law, cousins and many friends.

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

John Randall Johnston

John Randall Johnston, 57, passed away May 4, 2020.

John was born July 3, 1962, in Gainesville, Texas, to Bo and Janice Johnston.

He was preceded in death by his father.

John is survived by his children Taylor, Jacob, Dillon and Jonathan; his mother; brother Ron Johnston and spouse Samantha; nephews Drew and Will; aunt Joyce McPherson and spouse Wayne; and many cousins.

For the full obituary, please visit Kiesau Lee Funeral Home.

Virginia Ruth Gomez

Virginia Ruth Gomez, 83, passed away Nov. 2, 2019.

Virginia was born Nov. 1, 1936, in Jenny Lind, Ark., to Cleo (Dolph) and Howard Guy.

She was preceded in death by son David Tice, and daughter Mary Ann Miller.

Virginia is survived by husband Samuel L. Gomez; daughter Joye Tice Morrison; son Bryan Gomez; grandchildren Rodney Rodriguez, Gary Daniel Duran, Chris Tice, Regina Tice-Van Sickle, Candace Miller, Debbie Miller and Brandon Miller, as well as several great-grandchildren.

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

Take a stroll through Broken Bow, Robbers Cave, and more.

CHOCTAWCOUNTRY.COM

Choctaw Nation Adult Education continues to evolve

By Shelia Kirven

The Choctaw Nation Adult Education Program has held high school equivalency (HSE) classes since 1993. What started out as one class offered twice a week has turned into a full-scale education department that has seen 2,082 students receive their General Equivalency Diplomas.

Through traditional community classes and an online academy for adult Choctaw members to continue their high school education, the program offers personal instruction geared toward the GED and HiSET test. Upon finishing the program, participants can receive their diplomas, get better jobs, receive higher wages and have opportunities to continue their education.

The Adult Education Program is directed by Lisa Bebout, a veteran teacher with 20 years’ experience in public school classrooms and who has worked for the Choctaw Nation for six years. She manages the six-member team of instructors and test examiners as well as the HiSET and Pearson Vue Testing Labs located at the Tribal Headquarters in Durant. Bebout said, “I consider it an honor to help students visualize and work toward their futures each day when I go to work.”

The average annual number of graduates each year is 74. Students take classes twice weekly for twelve weeks or attend the Online Computer Academy. Online Computer Academy classes are self-paced, and students can pick the location where they want to work on their studies using Wi-Fi on a smartphone, iPad, laptop or computer. Many students utilize their local public library’s computer center to work on their online lessons.

Bebout explained, “Once we receive a student’s completed application, we start them in traditional classes in the Choctaw Nation area or in the Online Computer Academy. All students are given a pretest in each subject when they start classes. Once a student shows readiness in a single subject or the full battery of subjects, we then schedule students to test, and we pay their fees.” All prospective students must provide a copy of their CDIB or membership card, a valid driver’s license or state ID and a social security card to enroll. All Choctaw members within the United States regardless of location are eligible to be students in the Online Computer Academy.

Most students achieve their high school equivalency in 12 weeks. Program staff members work with each student to help them achieve their goals, whatever that timeline might look like. Tutoring is also available per the student’s individual needs.

There is no cost for Adult Education classes. All books and fees are provided once a student completes an Adult Education application. Testing fees are provided once a student shows readiness to test. If a student lives out of state, staff find a testing center located in the student’s area. After students have obtained their high school equivalency, Adult Education will also reimburse them for one ACT registration fee. Additionally, a one-time \$250 incentive award is given to students enrolled in either traditional classes or Online Computer Academy upon completion of the program. After graduation, students are matched with a Career Development Counselor to help them on their next steps towards a career or further education. Students also receive referrals to other services as needed.

Bebout said, “We are here as part of the Choctaw Nation Education Department to provide a door to each student’s next step—whether that be a job, a career, a license or to further their education in some way. We also can help students find other services available to them within Choctaw Nation as needed.”

Team members of the Adult Education Program are certified teachers and all hold master’s degrees. The three Adult Education instructors are Charles Thompson, Elizabeth (Beth) Lawless, and Mary Gray. Test examiners are Vicky Alford, Christi Weger, and Ashley Sledd.

Charles Thompson has been with the program for 24 years and was one of the original instructors when the program started. He spent over 30 years in public schools prior to coming to Choctaw Nation as a teacher, coach, principal and superintendent. Thompson believes “that every student has the ability to learn and succeed.”

Vicky Alford, Chief Test Examiner, has been with Choctaw Nation 10 years. Her specialty is Math. She taught public school for 33 years before coming to Choctaw Nation. Alford says her favorite thing about being an AE examiner is, “being a part of the student’s plan for achieving a better way of life. Getting a high school diploma helps the students’ self-esteem besides helping to meet financial goals.”

Instructor Beth Lawless has been with Choctaw Nation for 8 years. She has 29 years in public education experience. Her specialty is Math and providing leadership to students in the Online Computer Academy. Lawless says, “It is most rewarding to see students overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to earn their HSE diploma.” She feels her job, “allows her to assist Native American students who were not able to stay in the school system to earn their HSE diploma.” Lawless is also grateful that she has opportunities to share her faith in God along this journey with her students.

Ashley Sledd, Test Examiner, has been with Choctaw Nation five years working part-time during night testing dates. She currently teaches English I and Honors English I at Durant High School. She has been a public-school teacher for 11 years and has also taught English II and been a Cheerleading Coach. Sledd enjoys “seeing our students walk across the stage at graduation and witnessing everyone celebrate their success. I enjoy talking with the family members and loved ones who come to support their graduates. Their stories and obstacles they have overcome are truly inspirational.”

Test Examiner Christi Weger has been with Choctaw Nation for almost four years after teaching in the public school system for 31 years. She says she likes “meeting



Photo by Chris Jennings

From left, Christi Weger, Lisa Bebout, Ashley Sledd and Vicky Alford, sit in the new Pearson Vue 8-seat computer testing lab at the Choctaw Nation headquarters.

all of the test candidates and working with such an outstanding team. I hope and try to help ease the tester’s anxiety about testing and I also try to reassure testers’ confidence in themselves.”

Mary Gray, a 2-year instructor, previously taught public school for 30 years. Specializing in Math and providing leadership in the Online Computer Academy, Gray helps tribal members by “aiding them in acquiring educational accomplishments, giving them the credentials and confidence to succeed in their life’s goals of furthering their education and bettering their career opportunities.”

The Adult Education Program has many success stories. Amanda Johnson, a tribal member who now is the Head Start and Child Care Director for Choctaw Nation has worked with the tribe since 2005, starting at the Grant casino as a closeout clerk. She is one of those success stories. Johnson went through the Adult Education Program in 2002 when she was 22 years old. After completing the program, she attended SOSU. She was a single mother for many years while working on her degree.

Johnson said, “Some semesters I carried a full load while others I went part-time. There were many stops and starts in my

college journey, but I always knew I wanted to graduate college and worked hard to make it happen. Raising the bar for my family has always been my driving force that pushed me to carry on during the hard times. I am a first-generation college graduate.”

Johnson completed her Bachelor of Science Degree in 2014 and went on to complete a master’s degree in Native American Leadership in 2017. “I am the first person in my family to obtain a master’s degree,” said Johnson. She now oversees 13 Head Start centers, one Chahta Preschool, and seven childcare centers with approximately 640 children.

“Obtaining my High School Equivalency Diploma changed the direction of my life. It was the stepping stone to furthering my education which later led to many career opportunities.” Johnson credits her GED Instructor, Charles Thompson, for being a mentor and one of her biggest cheerleaders along the way. Johnson had a message for Thompson, saying, “Thank you for providing one of the most important stepping stones in helping me become the person I am today. You not only helped me prepare for the GED test, but you helped me prepare for life. You believed in me and encouraged me to do more than I thought possible and for that, I am forever grateful. I recall you repeatedly explaining algebra equations in the most patient, kind and caring way until I fully understood. Obtaining my GED gave me the confidence I needed to further my education which opened many doors of opportunities. Thank you for believing in me. I wouldn’t have it made it this far without you laying the foundation.”

There are several goals for the future of the Adult Education Program other than helping students receive their high school equivalency diplomas. Bebout explained, “In the last few years, Adult Education advocates have been pushing a trend in the United States to not only educate students academically, but also educate the whole adult student through family literacy, financial literacy, and health literacy. Family literacy involves home literacy activities that provide opportunities for young children while enhancing literacy skill development in all members of the family. Financial literacy and health literacy are two other topics to focus on in the future for tribal members. Adult Education at Choctaw Nation is here to provide resources to help tribal members with family, financial, and health literacy as well.”

Another way the program assists adult students is by providing testing services through their HiSET and Pearson Vue testing labs located at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters. The HiSET test center is for students who want to take tests to obtain their High School Equivalency Diploma. The Pearson Vue Lab offers Professional Career Certification testing as well as HSE testing. Interested test candidates can register at www.hiset.ets.org or www.pearsonvue.com. The new 8-seat Pearson Vue Computer Testing Lab is open to associates and the general public who want to pass certification or licensure tests, offering testing for teacher candidates, IT personnel, healthcare, childcare and more. Some of the tests offered are Microsoft, CISCO, OGAT and many more.

See Education on page 10



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Choctaw Nation Emergency Management



STORM SHELTERS

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Visit the website for applicant requirements

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Choctaw Nation Housing Authority



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Victim Services Set Aside program funding to provide assistance to qualified adult, youth, and child victims of all types of crime.

Choctaw Nation Victim Services Set-Aside

36 million adults in the U.S. cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third-grade level.

43% of adults with the lowest literacy levels live in poverty.

1 in 6 young adults drop out of high school every year.

Source: ProLiteracy U.S. Adult Literary Facts

normally provides caps, gowns, photos and a family meal to honor graduates. The graduation ceremony is normally held annually to honor graduates for their achievements. Because this year’s ceremony could not take place, Chief Batton filmed a special congratulatory video, which was sent to each of the graduates.

Chief Batton said in his congratulatory video to the 2020 graduates, “As adults, you know how hard it is to make the time and have the energy to finish your education. But you did it!”

He concluded his inspirational message by saying, “Yakohe chito, a big thank you, to you for believing in yourselves. We believe in you, too.”

To find out more about what the Adult Education Program can do for you or your family, visit <https://www.choctawnation.com/adult-education>, call 1-800-522-6170, ext. 2122, or email adulsted@choctawnation.com. Let them help you see what your future can look like!

Hannah Gammon starts Teen CERT program



By Christian Toews

At 16 years old, one Choctaw teen is already making a big impact on her local community. Hannah Gammon is an Atoka native and the co-chair of the Region VI Youth Preparedness Council (YPC). The YPC is a federal initiative through the Federal Emergency Management Agency or FEMA. Since the inception of the council in 2014, federal, state, tribal and local partners have been coming together to put forth the top teenage leaders in Region VI’s respective jurisdictions to lead projects and youth preparedness discussions. Participating states include Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, alongside over 60 tribal nations in Region VI, according to their website.

Gammon said the council’s goal is to help the local communities’ youth prepare for disasters of all kinds. “I didn’t know what to do in a time of

disaster and I think many people don’t know what to do. We want to educate people on how to better serve their community during a disaster situation,” she said.

The Region VI YPC focuses on preparedness for disasters of all kinds. Active shooter events, severe weather, floods and tornadoes are only a few.

Gammon said that she became passionate about helping during times of disaster after she volunteered during a wildfire outbreak in 2014. “We would help hand out equipment, water, set up tents and do damage assessments,” she said.

Her passion for seeing other teens get involved fueled her drive to start a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program at her school. Students at Atoka can take the CERT class as part of the education curriculum.

As a Choctaw tribal member, Gammon wants to see other Choctaw youth get involved in CERT classes. “I think this is very important to the Choctaw Nation. I want to recruit more people and get more schools involved. I want to show kids how important it is to know what to do during a disaster. Know how to do CPR, how to triage, because if something bad was to happen in one of our small communities, no one would know what to do, and if we get there before the fire department and ambulances, we can help,” she said.

Gammon worked with the administration at the Choctaw Nation, FEMA, and Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security (OKOHS) to start a Teen CERT program within the Choctaw Nation as well.

Dempsey Kraft is the Volunteer and Marketing Coordinator for the office of Emergency Management at the Choctaw Nation. He also oversees the Choctaw Nation Teen CERT program.

Kraft said the name of the program for teens is “Tvshka Himitta” which means young warriors. He said that Emergency Management worked closely with the language department of the Choctaw Nation to develop the name. “The idea behind the name is that while everyone else is running away, warriors are running toward the disaster and that’s what this program is all about,” he said.

Gammon said nine other teens from across the Choctaw Nation have completed the CERT training in 2019. She said that they have all been able to volunteer at local disasters and put the skills they learned into practice. She hopes to continue to help her community and continue serving her community by going into the medical field.

If you would like more information on how to get involved with the Tvshka Himitta program, Please contact Dempsey Kraft by email at dkraft@choctawnation.com or by phone (580) 924-8280 ext. 2930.

Education

Continued from page 9

Interested test candidates can view the tests available at the Pearson Vue website listed. If there is a test you would like to see added, please call the Adult Education Office and the program will inquire about ordering it for you or your company. Choctaw Nation associates have started utilizing the testing lab, and it saves them from traveling to other locations, sometimes hours away, and the fees they might incur. The PV testing site offers day and evening testing.

Though the program had to cancel traditional high school equivalency classes for the current session due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they continue to serve the Online Computer Academy students who live in the Choctaw Nation area and all over the United States.

In addition, this is the first year the Adult Education program has not been able to sponsor a graduation ceremony for its students due to the pandemic. The program



Photo by Christian Toews
A tribal vehicle can be seen under a stary sky near Nashoba.

within the Choctaw Nation. McGee Creek State Park and the area surrounding it just outside of Atoka have fantastic night sky viewing. While this area is a level 3 on the Bortle scale, it is shielded from surrounding city light by the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains. This makes the stargazing wonderful.

If you travel around 90 miles northeast of McGee Creek, you’ll find Robbers Cave State Park. This park is famous for the cave that was used as a hideout for outlaws Jesse James and Belle Starr. A level 3 on the Bortle scale, the park is also a great place to see the night sky.

Both McGee Creek State Park and Robbers Cave State Park offer camping and recreational activities. They are great locations to camp, stargaze and connect with our natural world.

Let’s face it--our lives are busy and bright. They are full of screen time at work and at home. It has become easier to be in the same room with someone and not be present. To be in the same city, state, country, world and galaxy and take it all for granted. We are surrounded by a never-ending universe, and we can still catch a glimpse of infinity by looking up at night. So, plan a trip. Whether that trip is to your backyard, down the street, Robbers Cave or across the country. Don’t miss the opportunity to sit on your tailgate, a blanket, or a grassy field and look up at the stars.

If you are interested in seeing where the darkest skies are located in Oklahoma, visit www.lightpollutionmap.info. This allows you to search near your location to see where the best stargazing areas are for you.

Stars

Continued from page 1

As Tafreshi mentioned, ecotourism is a big factor in preserving untouched landscapes around the world, as well as right here in Oklahoma. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education.”

Tourism is a huge industry, and many places in Oklahoma see visitors from around the world. Ecotourism advocates for conscious, sustainable travel to these areas. In other words, to leave them in a similar state to what our ancestors saw. As-trotourism asks us as a society to be conscious of our impact on the night sky. We can preserve areas of the country where people can escape the city lights and see the natural night sky in all its glory. “A truly dark night sky can change someone’s life forever,” said Tafreshi.

The area between Nashoba and Smithville is one of the best places to view the Milky Way, but it’s not the only place to see great views of the night sky



Photo by Christian Toews

A photo illustration showing the estimated view-ability of the night sky using the Bortle Scale. The Bortle scale is a nine-level numeric scale that measures the night sky’s brightness in a particular location. It demonstrates the observability of celestial objects in the sky and the interference caused by light pollution.

ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

JUNE 15, 2020

In recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, we are encouraging everyone to wear purple.

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Choctaw Nation Outreach Services

Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

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

Choctaw tribal members living within the 10½ county service area 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 10½ county service area. 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

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Housing Authority

HOME LOANS AVAILABLE TO TRIBAL MEMBERS THROUGH THE HUD SECTION 184

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

Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

Severe weather still a concern during pandemic

By Chris Jennings

Preparing for severe weather is something that can't be put on hold, even during a global pandemic. Nothing has changed in how weather patterns operate. There will still be severe storms with flash flooding, lightning and potential tornadoes, and having a plan could save lives.

Jeff Hansen, Director of Emergency Management for the Choctaw Nation said, "the big thing that we see is people fail to prepare and fail to plan."

Planning during the current pandemic is even more important, as some resources may have changed. The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management (OEM) and the National Weather Service (NWS) offer guidelines for how to take shelter from severe weather during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need to practice social distancing and prevent the spread of COVID-19 brings added complications to taking shelter from severe weather; however, state and federal officials agree that your top priority should be to protect yourself from severe weather.

Officials recommend sheltering from tornadoes inside your home when possible. If you don't have a below-ground storm shelter, well-constructed homes and buildings provide life-saving protection from 98% of Oklahoma's tornadoes. Take shelter in a closet, bathroom, interior hallway or other interior room with no windows on the lowest level of the house or building.

Hansen recommends knowing where your shelter is and having a plan for when you will leave for that shelter. Planning on leaving well ahead of any threat is key to not getting stuck in severe weather on the way to a shelter. "I've seen video of people getting out of their vehicle to walk into the shelter and a tornado hit. It's about having a plan and taking action well ahead of time," said Hansen.

If your family typically takes refuge in a public storm shelter in your community, first check with your community shelter managers to ensure the shelter will still be open and if there are any special considerations to plan for due to COVID-19.

Now is the time to explore the best options to keep you safer from severe weather as well as limit your exposure to the virus. Don't wait until a tornado warning is issued to make a plan.

Wherever you choose to shelter from a tornado, take as many precautions as possible to inhibit the spread of COVID-19 as best as you can, including Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations to wear a cloth face covering and maintain social distancing.

The best way to prepare for severe weather during a pandemic is to stay informed of the latest weather forecast from the NWS and local media as well as the latest recommendations regarding COVID-19 from the CDC, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and local authorities.

If you are a Choctaw tribal member within the 10½ counties, and the county you live in doesn't offer weather alerts, you can sign up for alerts through the Choctaw Nation at <https://member.everbridge.net/892807736724136/login>.

Hansen also recommends downloading one of the many weather apps for your smartphone. Many of these apps will let you know what the day has in store so you can be better prepared.

The Choctaw Nation Emergency Management Department also helps people prepare for severe weather, including emergency drills at Tribal Headquarters in Durant to help teach kids what to do in the event of severe weather.

"We've done coloring books for kids that talk about how to prepare for disaster. We've partnered with other agencies like the American Red Cross to do what they call the Pillowcase Plan, that's basically a big pillowcase that kids can take home and they can stuff full of things that they would need to prepare for an emergency," said Hansen.

Getting kids prepared by helping them get a go-kit can make a stressful situation just a little easier. In addition, teaching kids the importance of being prepared has a lasting effect into adulthood.

Emergency Management also goes to work after severe weather moves through the area. "When a disaster occurs we're on the ground with resources, helping people...let's say you had a big wind event and a tree has fallen on your roof or even a tree is leaning like it could fall on your roof. We'll come out and have a contractor remove that stuff," said Hansen.

Emergency Management can assist with sheltering after a storm, whether that's a full-blown mass care shelter or putting a family in a hotel for a few days until they figure out what the next step may be. "We just try to make sure that those individuals that have been impacted get in touch with the right departments within the Choctaw Nation. Whether that's housing, emergency services or the health care system...we try to connect the dots between all of the different people that would play a role in the response to a disaster," said Hansen.



Victim Services

Outreach Services Victims Assistance brought attention to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Week in May. Red ribbons were placed on the trees in front of the Tribal Services building in Hugo, and Choctaw Nation employees wore red on May 5

to raise awareness. In honor of all missing and murdered indigenous women, they would like to share this story from Brandon Wagoner, who lost his sister Michelle tragically in 2005. Please take time to read and share any information you might have to help find answers for this family. For more information on these activities or for assistance contact Victims Services at: 1-877-285-6893.

My big sister, Michelle, was my best friend. She was smart, strong, and brave. She had a beautiful voice, always singing or rapping about something. She made it through LPN school without missing any of my important events. And no matter what I did or how bad I messed up, she would always come to my rescue. She liked working as an LPN at Talihina Nursing Home and taking care of her family and closest friends.

Before her death, she had recently broken up with her boyfriend and had begun fixing her new home that she had rented. On June 22, 2005, she enlisted the help of our brother to lay tile in her new home. Our brother last saw Michelle at our grandmother's home at 2:00 a.m., where she left her car. However, about 4:30 a.m., she was seen walking downtown in her hometown, Talihina, Okla. On June 23, 2005, Michelle's body was found just outside of Talihina, Okla. Her body was so badly decomposed that the state medical examiner ruled the cause of her death as unknown. Her beautiful, long brown hair was cut short and dyed black. Her toxicology tests showed no drugs or alcohol. The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation had few clues to determine if her death was a crime, and with no leads, eventually her case became cold. She was only 25 years old when her life ended, and for a 17-year-old brother, it has been by far the biggest heartache I've ever had to endure.

I have been in contact with the Oklahoma Cold Cases Facebook page, and they've agreed to feature her case. I created a Facebook page, Justice for Michelle Thomas, to bring more awareness and maybe new leads to her case. My family and I have offered a \$10,000 reward for any information or any leads towards an arrest or conviction for the person(s) responsible for her death.

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

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Beef Pot Pie

- 1 bunch greens, such as kale or chard
- Any additional veggies as desired
- 2 cans beef stew
- 1 (8 oz.) can corn, drained
- Biscuits (Made following directions on bakery mix)

Preparation

- Prepare biscuits according to directions on bakery mix.
- While they cook in the oven, chop and steam greens and any other fresh veggies you would like in your pot pie.
- Open stew cans and put stew into a saucepan. Add prepared vegetables. Heat on stove until hot enough to serve.

To serve, place biscuits on top of heated stew. Serves 4.

HOME VISITATION

WHAT WE DO

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

ELIGIBILITY

Required for all Home-Visiting Programs:

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

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

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

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Choctaw Nation Outreach Services

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Choctaw Nation Emergency Management

Tribal members come to the aid of those in need during the pandemic

Helping others in need is something that is rooted deep in Choctaw history. As the global pandemic began to sweep across the nation, tribal members stepped up to continue that tradition. The following are just a few of those stories.

Boots on The Ground

By Shella Kirven

Boots on the Ground, a non-profit outreach group in Durant, was started by Choctaw tribal member Kenny Gardner and his family to provide basic survival items to those in need and to encourage and share scriptures with those living on the street.

What started out as a Choctaw family giving a ride to another Native family, turned into the Gardners’ witnessing the site of a homeless camp in Durant. Gardner said, “It did something to me.” He went home and gathered some supplies and returned them to the camp.

Since that day, he has never stopped checking on those in need on the streets.

“The goal of our group is to encourage, give resources, hope and job searches to those who have fallen on hard times with the hope of self-sustained shelter for those we help. A community wide effort, we have over 2000 supporters in Texas and around Choctaw Nation.” After the first year of being self-funded, Gardner was able to gain the support of many local churches, businesses, organizations and individuals to assist in the efforts. He maintains a Facebook page and coordinates fundraising efforts. To receive services, individuals must be drug free.

Because of the pandemic, Gardner said they were able to extend their services more. “With the support we have received through our fundraiser, it has allowed us to do more, and supply our elderly and disabled with items needed during COVID-19.” The number of homeless camps has been rising since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Gardner said he knows of several camps, but there are also some people sleeping under bridges and behind businesses. He estimates that the number of homeless in Durant is 80 or more on any given day, but the numbers fluctuate often.

Gardner says he has made several referrals to the Choctaw Nation headquarters, as some of his contacts turn out to be Choctaw. He said that many have gotten into housing through tribal services. He referenced a couple who had walked to Durant over 100 miles. “We provided them with a tent, and items needed and gave them leads on jobs as well as resources that Choctaw offers. One of our elderly Choctaw supporters let them camp in his backyard. They both got the job we referred them to, and within a month, were able to find affordable housing. They recently got a vehicle.”

Gardner maintains that anyone who needs assistance can receive it, but it is mostly limited to those on the streets or a family that is hungry. He says he keeps a trunk-full of supplies at all times in his car. He has been able to help individuals get IDs who needed them, and the majority of those who received their IDs got jobs and self-sustained shelter. By learning their story and background, Gardner says he is able to see what resources are needed.

His family often uses their own funds to assist others; however, this year and last winter, they have been funded completely by the community. “We go out and search and receive messages from our supporters of those in need or who have fallen on hard times. During the colder months we get the most support and provide survival blankets, tents, and basic items needed for survival.”

“We operate strictly on Facebook and out of the trunks of our cars. We also know where to find all of those needing assistance and make our rounds nightly,” Gardner says they work closely with the public library, as many individuals they assist use the library’s resources as well.

Gardner’s Facebook page states they are discovering homeless camps, bringing awareness and putting boots on the ground. Their mission is to donate, accept and deliver basic items needed for survival. Items that can be donated to the efforts are jackets, blankets, trash bags, tents, tarps, canned goods such as Vienna sausage, soups and snacks, and hygiene products such as soap, deodorant, toothbrushes and toothpaste. The group will accept donated prepaid fuel cards for travel expenses but will not accept money.

To find out more about Boots on the Ground and how you can help, go to the Boots on the Ground, Durant, OK Facebook page.



Courtesy photo

Kori Gardner gets ready to help her father Kenny with deliveries after restocking supplies.

Frybread Express

By Chris Jennings

Christine and Scott Davison own Frybread Express, a food truck usually found in Calera, Okla. serving an assortment of Native and traditional American foods. As stories of food shortages started to appear on different news sources, the Davisons knew they could do something to help. Christine Davison said, “It’s a good feeling to know that you’re helping somebody else out.”

The Davisons started out offering free Rez Dogs, a hot dog cooked in fry bread batter similar to a corn dog, for kids and free Indian taco meals to the elderly. They’ve also fed homeless people and helped in other places as people have reached out and let them know where help was needed.

Not qualifying for a small business loan offered as part of the government financial aid package hasn’t stopped the Davisons’ efforts. “Whatever extra money we have, then we buy something to pitch in.”

“We’ve got kids and grandkids, and we understand the fear of people not being able to feed their kids at times,” said Christine Davison.

They offer free hot dog combos for kids on Wednesdays and are always ready to help the homeless and elderly when they can. “I’m proud to be Choctaw and glad to be a part of anything that we can help with,” said Christine Davison.



Photo by Chris Jennings

Scott and Christine Davison have used their business, Frybread Express, to help others during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Panola JOM Parent Committee

By Chris Jennings

In 2019, the Panola students participating in the Johnson O’Malley program were able to have a fun day at the Oklahoma Aquarium, Braums and Mazzio’s after a year of hard work in school. In 2020, things were different. With schools closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the JOM students weren’t able to participate in these year-end activities.

The Panola JOM Parent Committee recognized that many students who were stuck at home may still need some critical supplies during the last few weeks of the school year. Acting quickly, and with permission from the Choctaw Nation to divert some funding that would have been used for these activities, the Parent Committee was able to provide some much-needed supplies to them and their families.

Judy Jones, Panola School JOM Coordinator said, “We want to help our families stay intact, and by helping to provide a few essential supplies, we hope we are doing our part in social distancing and having them stay safe and healthy.”

During the final weeks of school, along with their assigned schoolwork packets, students received a separate bag full of personal hygiene products. Among these items were toothpaste, shampoo, antibacterial soap, toilet paper, and tissues.

“Students and parents alike were very appreciative of the school supplies and personal hygiene products sent home to each family. The Chahta Spirit is strong among our JOM participants. Thanks to Choctaw Nation for their support during this unusual situation,” said Jones.



Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma ♦ TOGETHER WE’RE MORE ♦

Choctaw gift from 1800s inspires generosity during global pandemic

By Dara McCoy

In 1847, the people of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma sent \$170 to Ireland in response to suffering caused by the Great Famine of 1845-1852. In 2020, that gift has inspired an act of international philanthropy for Native American tribes during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

“It is incredibly heartwarming that our tribe’s gift helped the people of Ireland more than a century ago and that the legacy of that gift inspires others to share our cultural value of generosity,” said Chief Gary Batton.

On March 15, 2020, an online fundraising campaign was established to assist the Navajo and Hopi tribes, two Native American communities hit hard by the pandemic. The fundraiser gained the attention of the Irish people in May thanks to Twitter posts from a reporter at the Irish Times. The reporter called Ireland to action, referencing the generosity Irish people received more than 170 years ago from the Choctaws, according to a New York Times report.

“Irish people have known hunger. That lived experienced of famine and hardship lives on very strongly in Irish culture today,” said Claire McCarthy, Consul General at the Consulate General of Ireland in Austin, Texas. “The gift from the Choctaw Nation came at a time when Irish people felt abandoned by everyone. It struck really deeply, and that story continues to resonate really deeply.”

The story has since been reported around the world as a shining example of how humanity can rise above difficult times. The widespread news coverage, which includes the New York Times, CNN, the Washington Post, BBC News, NPR, and others spurred further philanthropy. At the time of this publication, the Navajo and Hopi fundraiser had reached more than \$3.8 million in donations. Some donors characterized their gifts as repayment on a long overdue debt, but the Choctaw people view it differently.

“Our ancestors’ gift to the Irish in the 1870s was never considered a debt due to be repaid. Our Choctaw people always give from the heart, so there was never an expectation of receiving something in return,” said Chief Gary Batton. “It is amazing that the gift has inspired the people of Ireland and many others around the world to help other Native American tribes like the Navajo and Hopi.”

The gift was profound to the people of Ireland not only because of their hardship during the famine but also because of the Choctaws’ ability to give out of their own need. The Choctaws sent money to the Irish just 14 years after being forcibly removed from Mississippi to modern-day Oklahoma. Nearly one-quarter of the Choctaws who were removed perished from disease, exposure and neglect along on the Trail of Tears.

“Part of the reason it fascinates Irish people today is that the gift of generosity of the Choctaw Nation came at a time when the Choctaw Nation had experienced extreme hardship and had enough concerns of their own to be dealing with, and yet they saw to share with others at that time. It was an incredible story,” McCarthy said.

The connection between the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and Ireland has been celebrated in recent years with the 2017 unveiling of the Kindred Spirits monument, a sculpture in Midleton, County Cork, Ireland, that commemorates the Choctaw gift. In 2018, Ireland’s prime minister Leo Varadkar visited the Choctaw Nation and announced a new scholarship program for Choctaw students to study abroad in Ireland at the University College Cork.

“There’s the humanity that both nations like to show to other people, and they do that in real terms; they don’t just talk about it, they actually do it,” said McCarthy. “We’re both two cultures that are extremely proud of our culture, proud of who we are and where we come from. Even though we have the historical connection, it’s that modern day realization of our values that ties us all together.”

June 2020

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CNO grants hindered by census undercount.



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Severe weather season is here.

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