Choctaw Nation brought more than $3.2 billion impact to Oklahoma in 2021

(DURANT, Okla. – March 14, 2024) — The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma announced today that the tribe had a significant $3,227,364,212 impact on the State of Oklahoma in 2021. Tribal officials made the announcement during an economic impact press conference for several tribal, state, county, and local officials.

The economic impact report, prepared by Dr. Kyle Dean, economist for the Center for Native American Studies at Oklahoma City University, shows the Choctaw Nation is a driving force in Southeastern Oklahoma, as well as the overall state. In 2021, the Tribe reported 20,142 Oklahoma jobs supported, representing $1 billion in wages and benefits paid to Oklahomans.

“With its remarkable $3.2 billion impact, the Choctaw Nation is one of the most significant contributors to economic prosperity in Oklahoma. Through innovative enterprises and steadfast commitment to community, the Nation not only fulfills its own future but also significantly contributes to the economic future of communities across the region,” said Dr. Dean.

“Continued partnerships between the Choctaw Nation and local communities are crucial for the survival and prosperity of rural areas in southeastern Oklahoma. Economic development is a cornerstone for sustainable development and mutual growth in the region,” said Chief Gary Batton, Chief of the Choctaw Nation. “We are proud the Choctaw Nation is able to help fuel Oklahoma’s growth and economic prosperity.”

Education

The Choctaw Nation has paid more than $335 million in exclusivity fees to the State according to the Gaming compact, including $34.2 million in 2021. These funds go directly to support public education statewide. The Choctaw Nation funded over 500 scholarships in the fiscal year 2021. In addition to state education support, the Choctaw Nation funded 3,400 college education scholarships to the tune of $10.8 million, provided nutritious school lunches to 117 tribal and non-tribal students in 87 schools, and paid for 358 elementary-age children to attend Choctaw Head Start and Choctaw Early Childhood programs.

Housing

The Choctaw Nation is building a pathway to safe and affordable housing. In 2021, the Choctaw Nation invested $14.2 million to build 82 new homes across the reservation as part of the Lease-to-Purchase (LEAP) homeownership program, independent elder, and affordable rental programs. A total of 481 storm shelters were installed in 2021 to protect the lives of tribal members.

Healthcare

Providing access to quality healthcare to tribal members is a primary focus for the Choctaw Nation which operates a full-service hospital in Talihina, Okla., eight health clinics, three behavioral health clinics, five specialty clinics and 14 wellness centers. In 2021, the Choctaw Nation spent $282 million on new homes for tribal members, $14.2 million on new homes for tribal members, $34.2 million paid in 2021 to support education, $282 million, $1,073 million in wages and benefits paid to Oklahomans, $335 million invested in Oklahoma highways and roads.

Community

Through the Choctaw Community Partnership Fund and Choctaw Development Fund, the Choctaw Nation has provided $3.25 billion in contributions and community grants to cities, towns and counties to support economic development, infrastructure and sustainability.

April 2024 Issue

Dr. Dean began consulting in 2005, and his client list includes some of Oklahoma’s most influential businesses and trade associations, such as the Oklahoma Independent Producers Association (OIPA), the Oklahoma Bankers Association (OBA), the Oklahoma Telephone Association (OTA) and many others. He is best known for his comprehensive work with Oklahoma tribes, having completed the first ever estimate of the combined economic impacts from Oklahoma tribal activities, along with many other studies for the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association and many of Oklahoma’s 38 federally recognized tribes. He currently serves as a featured panelist at the international G2E Summit in Las Vegas and is regularly called upon to speak to Native American groups and serve on panels regarding Native American issues. Dr. Dean received his Ph.D. in Economics from Oklahoma State University.

He is a member of the American Economic Association and the National Association of Business Economists. He currently serves as the Associate Director for the Steven C. Agee Economic Research and Policy Institute and as the Director of the Center for Native American and Urban Studies at Oklahoma City University.
Your Chahta tribe has to be maintained to prosper

What does tribe truly mean to you?

Tribe is defined as “a social group composed chiefly of families, clans, or generations having a shared ancestry and language.” The Choctaw Nation tribe is one of resilience, generosity, self-endowment, sovereignty, commerce, technical prowess, faith, family, and culture.

What does being a part of a tribe mean to you?

It is the pride of our ancestry? Is it the growth and prosperity that we are experiencing as a nation? Is it the gatherings that we have such as the Last Day Festival, Powwow or other cultural events where we congregate and share fellowship?

I choose to believe a tribe is all the above and much more. The Choctaw Nation is a spatial place where you can achieve your dreams, fill your life with great memories, honor your ancestors who made this possible and add something for the next generation to take, run with and make it their own. The Choctaw Nation has a living history that we add to each day through good deeds, hard work, and a servant’s heart.

As I travel around the reservation to milestone events like groundbreakings and facility openings, or to participate in giving the key to a new homeowner or participant, I will always be struck by the pride and love each one of us has for this tribe. And that’s why I challenge all of us as proud Choctaw tribal members to be lifelong learners about our culture and always be on the lookout for opportunities to learn about our Choctaw ancestors. Yakoke for keeping the history of this great tribe alive.

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Grant finds success through truck driving thanks to help from CNO

By Sheila Kirven

According to www.careeronestop.org, to drive a commercial vehicle over 26,000 pounds and/or transporting hazardous materials requires a CDL. There were 2,192,300 drivers in the United States in 2002, and by 2032, there is expected to be a four percent increase with annual projected job openings of 241,200. There were 15,940 vocational and technical schools in the United States range from $7,200 to $7,250 yearly.

Dylan Grant is in his third year of driving in Oklahoma. Oklahoma used the Career Development Program to attend a truck driving school and obtain a CDL.

According to Grant, the program took care of everything for him and helped him find a job in the area. He completed a four-week course, four weeks onsite, five days a week. After course completion, he took Grant approximately 10 days to get a job.

"Part of the reason they had no substantive abilities while we were in the truck driving school with the assumption that we would pass and get our license," said Grant. "Maybe a week after I finished, I got a call back from one of the jobs I had applied for."

He said is thankful that Career Development helped him find the job and complete his course.

"At that time in my life, I didn't really have any plans. College didn't work out for me. They were trying to suggest things they could help me with. I thought truck driving sounded like something I could try and might be good at," said Grant. "I definitely wouldn't have done it if the Career Development had not been able to help me."

After the course completion, he worked as an over-the-road driver and was sent from Southern California to New York during the first few months.

"He worked five days on the road and a home on the weekends. It was a company driver with a truck assigned to him. According to Grant, there are a lot of trucking jobs available in Oklahoma and Arkansas."

Choctaw tribal members wishing to pursue a commercial driver's license (CDL) and receive training to become certified on the road truck drivers may be able to do so through the Choctaw Nation Career Development Program or Employment Training Services Program.

The Career Development program provides career guidance, assistance for quality training, soft skills, and employment services. The Employment Training Services Program provides adults with opportunities for education, training, and related services that lead to industry-recognized certifications needed to enter careers or advance existing careers.

The ETS program provides adults with opportunities for education, training, and related services that lead to industry-recognized certifications needed to enter careers or advance existing careers. It is aimed at students between the ages of 16 and 24.

According to Dry, when he was battling his autoimmune issues, the elders at the community center would gather and pray for him.

According to Dry, "Out of all the schools I looked at, they (Southeastern) have the best business school by far," he said.

"I am a Choctaw tribal member and it means a lot to me that this school is going to be a good avenue even before I saw it in myself," said Dry.

Dry is a Choctaw tribal member and the son of Chahta Achvffa, and information is available by visiting https://www.choc- tawnation.com/chahta/employment/posting/driving-school.html. You can follow the program on Facebook.

Driving long family tradition.

Tucker Dry signs with Southeastern Football, continuing a long family tradition.
Deann Labor-Emmert of District #6 is the Choctaw Nation’s Veteran of the Month.

Gwendolyn Parrish Settle was honored as the March First Language Speaker of the Month during the March 9 Tribal Council Meeting. Parrish Settle worked within her community to spread the Choctaw Language through her work in ministry.

Labor-Emmert is March Veteran of the Month

Deann Labor-Emmert of District #6 is Choctaw Nation’s Veteran of the Month. Labor-Emmert was born on Dec. 14, 1954, in Oklahoma City, Okla., and lived the first five years of her life in Dugans before moving to Shawnee. She graduated from Pawnee High School in 1972 and joined the Army National Guard in 1977 to afford a better life for herself and her family. She was sent to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, for basic training.

Sgt. Labor-Emmert helped set up the Thunderbird Youth Academy in 1982 and became a recruiter in 2000 in the McAlester area. She moved to the maintenance shop at Ft. Sill in 2006 before retiring in 2009. She moved to the maintenance shop at Ft. Sill in 2006 before retiring in 2009. She also joined Halito, a local community group that helps support and uplift children.

In a groundbreaking announcement, the construction team and architects showcased the dedication of over 40 participants from District 4, demonstrating the construction team and architects’ commitment to nurturing our children.

Council Day at the Capitol went very well. We met with legislators and had the honor to meet the Lt. Governor and Attorney General. The day at the Capitol gave us the opportunity to network and share ideas for the future of the tribe with Oklahoma government officials. It was a good day.

These past few months, District 3 has recognized many successful tribal members. Congratulations to the recipients of the county Premium Sales and to the students signing up with colleges. I know a lot of hard work has gone into your successes, and I commend and congratulate each of you. Your futures are very bright.

I want to thank the Chief for hosting the Easter Celebration at Tuskahoma. It was a little cool, but we all had a good time. I also want to remind everyone that the grand opening for the Three Rivers Meat Company is scheduled for April 12 at 11:00 a.m. Come out and show your support while picking up some fine cuts of meat for dinner. Hope to see you there.

Yakoke!}

Phoat: Provided

Alexa, Councilman Jess Henry met with some of the youth during the Dale Cox Community Center on Read Across America Day to spread the Choctaw Language through their hard work with a variety of animals. Special thanks to parents and ag teachers for investing in our youth.

Parrish Settle is First Language Speaker of the Month

First Language Speaker of the Month, Gwendolyn Parrish Settle was honored as the March First Language Speaker of the Month during the March 9 Tribal Council Meeting. Settle worked within her community to spread the Choctaw Language through her work in ministry.

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Yakoke!
Blisskan Announcement Guidelines

We accept publication for birthday guidelines for ages 1, 3, 5, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80. Please contact us for a Blisskan announcement. We cannot provide advice for criminal matters involving the Choctaw Nation. Each person has the individual responsibility to determine whether material submitted for publication is suitable or morally unacceptable. Copy may be edited for space, grammar, or typographical errors. The Tribal members. The BISKINIK reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication is suitable or morally unacceptable. The BISKINIK cannot provide advice if you currently have an attorney. Questions? Contact Brenda Strange | bstrange@eosc.ok.gov.

Blisskan Announcements

It's the 1st Birthday Blisskan for Blake courthouse.

NBC News from graduates of higher education only and sports sub-

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Luke Douglass Coffman

Luke Douglass Coffman was born November 22, 2003, in the Choctaw Na-
tion Healthcare center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

He is the son of Melissa and John Coffman III of Haywood, joining his sib-
ings Ava and Noah.

Luke is the grandson of Alberta and Doug Johnson of Haywood, Beckie Coffman of Nashville, and David and Betty Robles of Ada, Oklahoma.

He is the great-grandson of Yvonne Johnson and granddaughter of David and Marinda Johnson and Davina Johnson.

He was born November 22, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee.

He is the son of Melissa Miller and John Coffman.

He is on the powerlifting team and finished in the Top 10 at 120 kilos for his very first world title.

He is a member of the Blue Team of the Sport Warriors Track Club, a program that is designed to encourage and assist Native American post-collegiate runners to continue to compete on a national level on US and international championships. His best achievements include three runners that qualified for the U.S. Olympic Trials. As an athlete of Haskell Indian Junior College, he was a two-time NAIA Regional cross country qualifier and was among the top 10 finishers in the NAIA Regional cross country qualifier.

He was also on the Haskell Indian Junior College's track team.

He is the grandson of Luke Douglass Coffman and grandchildren of David and Marinda Johnson and Davina Johnson.

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Choctaw Oklahoma State Wrestling Champions

By Christian Cheney

During the 2021-2022 wrestling season, several members of the Choctaw Nation achieved remarkable state titles and making history in the process.

The accomplishments of these members are a source of pride for the Choctaw Nation. The State Wrestling Tournaments, which took place at the Oklahoma City State Fairgrounds Arena from February 22 to 24, 2024, witnessed members of the Choctaw Nation display their strength and determination as they battled their opponents on the mat.

Kelcie Avalone, a wrestler from Pawhuska High School, made history at the Oklahoma Class 5A State Wrestling Championship by becoming the first female wrestler from Pawhuska to win a state championship. She took home the title in the 110 lb. division.

Gege Vaughn from Caddo High School is another wrestler who made history during the tournament. She was the State Championship for the 1A 120 lb. division, the first wrestling title in Caddo School's history. This is a significant milestone for Vaughn and the entire Caddo community.

Luke Brooks, a wrestler from Poteau High School, also achieved a remarkable accomplishment by becoming the first wrestler from Poteau to win an individual state wrestling championship since 2012.

He took home the IA State Wrestling Championship in the 190 lb. division.

Brock has signed with Ouachita Baptist University to further his education and wrestling career.

Tyler Tabol from Bokchito High School had a fantastic season, winning the 2021 OSSAA Class 3A 138 lb. State Wrestling Championship.

We would like to congratulate each of the tribal member athletes who competed on representing the Choctaw nation in this great sport.

Each title represents a point for the Choctaw Nation, and each tournament is a testament to those incredible athletes’ hard work and dedication.

Twauna is lead by example and with integrity to make sure all projects are keeping CNO tribal members' best interest at heart. Overall, Twauna's leadership and management continue to raise the bar and set the standard for what can be an innovative professional within the Human Resources function.

Since 2014, this award recognizes Human Resources leaders who contribute to their organization by improving their tribal organization's bottom line, achieving business results, demonstrating leadership, or developing innovative programs. A nominee must be able to demonstrate accomplishments in all four of these focus areas to receive the award.

We would like to congratulate each of the tribal member athletes who competed on representing the Choctaw nation in this great sport.
Debra Karen Gutierrez
Debra Karen Gutierrez, 60, passed away on Jan. 17, 2024. She was born on Jan. 12, 1964, in Tulsa, Okla., to Loyd Ray Hilburn and Mary Louise Mombi. She was preceded in death by her parents; and brother Joseph Mustang. For the full obituary, please visit Biskinik.

Michael Dean Halcomb
Michael “Mike” Dean Halcomb, 40, passed away Feb. 11, 2024. Mike was born Oct. 1, 1983, in Okmulgee, Okla., to Ray Lee Halcomb and Geneva Pauline (Hum- ton) Halcomb. He was preceded in death by his parents; and brother Mitch. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Showntia Lynn Sterett
Showntia Lynn Sterett, 49, passed away Jan. 17, 2024. She was born Feb. 21, 1974, in Talihina, Okla., to O.R. and Debbie Momba. She was preceded in death by her grandparents Sherrill and Rilla Folds; and her aunt, Doris Williston. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Justin Ros
Justin “Bubba” Ros, 36, passed away Feb. 2, 2024. Bubba was born July 18, 1987, at Mena, Ark., to O.L. and Bobbie Sue Wimmer (Wisner) Ros. He was preceded in death by his father; and mother. For the full obituary, please visit Sunset Cemetery Funeral Home.

Kellie Keith Winlock
Kellie Keith Winlock, 56, passed away Jan. 29, 2024. She was born Feb. 5, 1967, in Talihina, Okla., to Myrl and Tony Winlock. She was preceded in death by her sisters, Teresa James, and Johnathan James; and her mother. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Jerome Wesley Patton
Jerome Wesley “Bugs” Patton, 65, passed away Jan. 23, 2024. He was born May 29, 1958, in Cape Girardeau, Mo., to John and Jean Patton. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Lonnie Leo Hilburn
Lonnie Leo Hilburn, 69, passed away Feb. 11, 2024. Lonnie was born Feb. 10, 1955, to Loyd Ray Hilburn and Mary Louise Mombi. He was preceded in death by his parents; and stepfather, Billy. For the full obituary, please visit Serenity Funeral Home.

Billie Sue Huffer Allen
Billie Sue Huffer Allen, 62, passed away Feb. 11, 2024. She was born July 27, 1961, to Mary and Bill Huffer. She was preceded in death by her parents; and brother Mike. For the full obituary, please visit Serenity Funeral Home.

Bible Scott
Bible Scott, 96, passed away Feb. 5, 2024. Bible was born Dec. 28, 1927, in Smithville, Okla., to Dix- on and Stella (Smith) Bible. She was preceded in death by her parents; and siblings. For the full obituary, please visit Viola Smith Mortu- ary.

Magdalene Scott
Magdalene Scott, 96, passed away Feb. 5, 2024. She was born Sept. 9, 1927, in Lazy, Okla., to Reta Davis, Thomas Davis, and Andrew Davis. She was preceded in death by her parents; and siblings. For the full obituary, please visit Viola Smith Mortu- ary.

Jerry Dean Williams
Jerry Dean Williams, 66, passed away Feb. 7, 2024. He was born July 19, 1957, in Armoir, Okla., to Steve and Isabel “Lizzy” (Leffel) Williams. He was preceded in death by his sisters, Joyce Will- iams and Tommy Rose; and his parents. For the full obituary, please visit Sunset Cemetery Funeral Home.

Glen L. Ray Hudson
Glen L. Ray Hudson, 81, passed away Jan. 24, 2024. He was born Nov. 24, 1942, at Comanche, Okla., to Re- ed and Isabel “Izzy” Allene Bigfeather. He was preceded in death by his parents; and siblings. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Mike was born July 5, 1962, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He was preceded in death by his parents; sister, Tia M. Sikes; and niece, Katelynn. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Steven Wayne Biliu
Steven Wayne “Bili” Biliu, 52, passed away Feb. 13, 2024. He was born Sept. 17, 1971, in Oklahoma City, Okla., to Monica and Daniel Biliu. He was preceded in death by his parents; and siblings. For the full obituary, please visit Serenity Funeral Home.

Lennie Hiblurn
Lennie Leo Hiblurn, 89, passed away March 14, 2024. Lennie was born July 1, 1934, in Mea, Ark., to Loyd Ray Hiblurn Sr. and Marie Dean (Bledsoe) Hiblurn. He was preceded in death by his parents; his wife Evelyn; and their children. For the full obituary, please visit Miller and Miller Funeral Home – Bristow.

Linda Sue Joggers
Linda Sue Joggers, 75, passed away Sept. 22, 2023. She was born Dec. 29, 1947, in Comanche, Okla. She was preceded in death by her husband; sons, Todd and T. B. Joggers Sr.; and her sister, Deloris Spectre. For the full obituary, please visit Kimberly.

Mavis Ann Edwards
Mavis Ann Edwards, 68, passed away Feb. 17, 2024. She was born May 25, 1955, in Brownwood, Texas, to Thomas and Helen (Armstrong) Crabtree. For the full obituary, please visit Brownwood-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Services.

Mavis Ann Edwards, 68, passed away Feb. 17, 2024. She was born May 25, 1955, in Brownwood, Texas, to Thomas and Helen (Armstrong) Crabtree. For the full obituary, please visit Brownwood-Winters Funeral Home and Cremation Services.
Nvnih Waiya: Mother of the Choctaw People

You awoke in your home to remember that today your community has a village meeting. You rose with your husband and kids and took them to the spring by your home. It is the place where you crossed the river with your grandmother; your mother, and your sister are already here with their families. After washing up, you take your family to the village meeting, which is held on the edge of your land. It is a place where people come and go, and you sit in the sunshine as you listen to your elders speak about the village’s history and traditions.

Located just a short drive from Choctaw, Mississippi, is the Nvnih Waiya Village Site. The site is located on a large earthwork mound, one of three that were built by the settlement’s early inhabitants. The name Nvnih Waiya translates to “shaping place” in the Choctaw language. Approximately one mile from the Nvnih Waiya village site is a natural hill. Earth mound like this, some Choctaw people knew it as Nan Awaya, meaning “Place of Growth.” Our creation stories explain Choctaw origin traditions and Nvnih Waiya Village Site.

As Choctaw people emerged from Nan Awaya Cave was created and people came out in groups and opened the mound. This account provides Choctaw Historical Society with a beginning, the creative powers of God, and displays our kinship to the eastern tribes. The Choctaw people were the last group to come from the hill and decided to remain at their place of creation. This account provides Choctaw Historical Society with a beginning, the creative powers of God, and displays our kinship to the eastern tribes. The Choctaw people were the last group to come from the hill and decided to remain at their place of creation.

In ancient days, our Choctaw and Chieftain ancestors lived in a far western country, under the rule of two brothers, Chalta and Chikasa. In time, they found it difficult to provide subsistence in that land. Their prophets announced that far to the east was a country of fertile soil where they could live in ease and plenty. The people decided to make a journey to that happy land.

The people marched in divisions a day’s journey apart. A great prophet named Nvnih Waiya was the leader of the Chikasa party. He announced that the earth at the close of each day. Every morning the pole was seen leaning in the direction of the sun. Chikasa’s party moved to the Tombigbee and became a separate nationality. In this way, the Choctaw and Chikas settled in the area, forming several nations.

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The following oral history is adapted from Rev. Peter Folsom recorded in 1894:

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CNO welcomes newest appellate judge

DURANT, Okla. (February 25, 2024) – The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) Advanced Technology Initiative (ATI) announced today that the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) to research advanced technologies and improve rural communities. The MOU enables OU and CNO to partner to research advanced technologies and improve rural communities.

The MOU enables CNO and OU to share resources and connect stakeholders to find solutions for challenges facing rural and tribal communities, improving the safety and quality of life in rural Oklahoma. The MOU enables CNO and OU to share resources and connect stakeholders to find solutions for challenges facing rural and tribal communities, improving the safety and quality of life in rural Oklahoma.

CNO and OU partner to research advanced technologies and improve rural communities

DURANT, Okla. (February 21, 2024) - The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) Advanced Technology Initiative (ATI) announced today that the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) to research advanced technologies and improve rural communities. The MOU enables OU and CNO to partner to research advanced technologies and improve rural communities.

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Healthy nutrition habits set kids up for success
By Chris Jennings

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), obesity affects 22 million children between 2-18 years old. Obesity in a young body mass index (BMI) at or above the 95th percentile for the CDC’s age and sex BMI growth charts.

Just as adults, obesity in children increases their risk of obesity-related conditions, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, breathing problems such as asthma and sleep apnea, and joint problems. The key to solving these problems gets started at an early age.

Robin Linam, with Choctaw Nation Child Nutrition, says that the USDA’s MyPlate is a good tool for meal planning in general.

“Children do not need to be CDIB cardholders to qualify for these nutrition education programs. If you live in a area that don’t have access to the recommended foods, or your child needs help, you can contact their local tribal health program for help.”

By Appointment

Cardinal Health
5500 E 10th Ave
580-792-7030

Dietary Guidelines.

Sodium intake for children ages 2-18 far exceeds the recommended limits. Linam says Speer’s“Flour Power” Diet, or the first 100 grams or 2 ½ cups of vegetables and frozen vegetables instead of canned vegetables and vegetable snacks all instead make a difference for your family’s overall health.

A recent study by the Native American Agriculture Fund demonstrated that many children in the Choctaw Nation do not have access to the recommended foods.

Another way the Nation is helping to alleviate food insecurity is by providing free meals to any child who needs one regardless of economic status. The Nation has taken steps to combat these food deserts and make fresh and healthy foods more accessible to those food recommendations either. If you live in a remote area, you have little access to healthy foods, you can contact your tribal health program for help.

Highly nutritious and important are regional fruits and vegetables that you eat in season and meals that your kids need your child needs depends on their age and activity level.

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Choctaw-Irish Friendship Fest

On March 16, 2024, the Choctaw Cultural Center celebrated the bond between the two nations. Visitors were able to participate in activities for the whole family, including an art market, special presentations, Choctaw and Irish cultural demonstrations, children’s activities and much more.

The audience watches a special presentation during the Choctaw-Irish Friendship Fest.

Choctaw-Ireland Scholars graduate from University College Cork

The scholarships foster and deepen the ties between Ireland and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The scholarships recognize the set of generations and humanitar- ianism shown by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma towards the people of Ireland during the Great Famine of the mid-Nineteenth century.

The Choctaw-Ireland Scholarship recognizes the set of generations and humanitar- ianism shown by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma towards the people of Ireland during the Great Famine of the mid-Nineteenth century. It aims to foster and deepen the ties between the two nations today.

Skylee Glass, from Verden in Southwest Oklahoma, was conferred with a Masters in Applied Psychology. Her master’s thesis explored education, intercultural and community work. During her time at UCC, Skylee engaged in important events including the Rainbow Club, an organization that provides support for children with autism and their families.

Skylee said: “The Choctaw-Ireland scholarship has maintained the bond between two cultures who underwent similar experiences. It has allowed me to expand my worldview and meet the best people by attending UCC. I was challenged, encour-aged, and empowered while obtaining my degree. I plan to continue my education and pursue a PhD to hope one day open my own mental health care organization that serves underprivileged individuals because mental health care is not a privilege, it is a basic human right.”

Congratulations Skylee, Dr Sharon Lam-bert, Senior Lecturer in Applied Psychology, said: “Skylee has made outstanding contributions to UCC and Ireland during her time here. In addition to her studies, Skylee engaged in important events includ-ing the Traveller Wellness Group's Traveller Pride event, a celebration of Traveller history and culture. Skylee met with Traveller women and discussed the similarities in their communities and the shared traditions associated with indigenous nomadic cultures, and the impact on health and well-being of forced assimilation of these cultures.”

Aurianna said: “The Choctaw-Ireland Scholarship is no small gift. This scholar- ship encourages both personal and profes-sional growth, traveling and being em-ersed in culture, and being transformed in your way of thinking. I was challenged but encouraged through my work at UCC and my time there was a gift that I will reflect on throughout my life. I have since started my own design business, Prism Design, where I create brands and multimedia for small businesses, many of which are a part of the Choctaw tribal nation. The Choctaw-Ireland Scholarship encourages both personal and professional growth.”

Aurianna Jewell Joines was conferred with a Masters in Digital Arts and Humanities. Her ambitious thesis explored the relationship between the Choctaw and how that tradition of the Choctaw and how that tradition might be evidenced in digital multimedia environments.

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Choctaw-Ireland Scholar Skylee Glass and Aurianna Jewell Jones graduated from UCC on the first day of the university’s spring con- ferencing ceremonies.

Left and Above: Chef Tanja helps visitors make special green friedyard for an added bit of luck during the Choctaw Irish Friendship Fest.

Leslie Stahl Widter shows off her latest children's book, Kindred Spirits (Shilombish Hibibchoofa).
Choctaw Cultural Center hosts Spring Equinox Celebration

Christian Toews

The spring equinox has always been an exciting time for the Choctaw people. It is a time of change, warmer weather, and new growth. While the modern spring celebrations have evolved, the Choctaw people still welcome and celebrate the earth’s renewal after the cold winter months.

On March 15, 2024, the Choctaw Cultural Center hosted its first Spring Equinox Celebration at the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant, Oklahoma. Visitors had the opportunity to learn more about Choctaw culture and how the changing of the seasons historically impacted Choctaw people.

During the day, Dr. Jan Thompson led a tour and presentation of the Living Village, where she answered questions and spoke about historic events. Other presenters and workshops explored women’s roles in Choctaw society and how native flora impacts local ecosystems.

This event highlighted how vital conservation and education have been in preserving the Choctaw culture.

One of the main presentations was from the Choctaw Nation’s Growing Hope program and the Public Programs department. Together, they hosted Okchahli in the Cultural Center’s Living Village garden. Attendees were offered the opportunity to plant some Choctaw heirloom corn seeds as part of the workshop. The Growing Hope seed bank, curated by the Choctaw Nation’s Historical Preservation team, allows tribal members to participate in preserving and reviving time-honored Choctaw foods. By preserving and distributing heirloom seeds for traditional Choctaw crops, this program offers a unique look into the past.

“Here are some seeds that were actually sewn into the hems of our ancestor’s garments and dresses. These are seeds that they were afraid the soldiers would take, so they took such care to sew them and hide them,” said Jacqueline Putman, the Program Coordinator of Growing Hope.

She said it was remarkable that when these early Choctaws were displaced from their homes, they considered the need for seeds to grow crops.

“They knew when they left from Mississippi on that long walk that they would have to have food to start over. It was about sustainability,” said Putman. “That way, we weren’t reliant on the government the way they wanted us to be.”

Samples of other seeds that the Growing Hope program preserved were distributed to interested visitors just in time to plant them in their spring garden. Growing Hope was able to share their ongoing efforts to preserve Choctaw culture and food and give visitors a better idea of how they can participate in this preservation.

Putman said that they recently opened their seed program to everyone.

“That’s anywhere through the United States, we have sent seeds to Alaska, Hawaii and so forth,” she said. “So, we are really excited about getting our seeds out to everyone.”

Putman said she enjoys her job and seeing how people get excited about receiving seeds and growing Choctaw heirloom food.

“I put cards and letters from people all the time,” she said. Putman read just a few of the letters.

“Thank you for all your efforts and diligence in teaching our children a deeper understanding of the earth,” the letter read.

Putman said that the Okchahli event was about unity and realizing that we are all stewards of the earth. She said it was remarkable that when these early Choctaws were displaced from their homes, they considered the need for seeds to grow crops.

“Their perspective was about not only preserving the land and the earth, but also about preserving their way of life,” she said.

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Chief Batton’s Easter Celebration

On your mark, get set, go! Some young egg hunters take part in the annual egg hunt. On March 15, 2024, the Choctaw Cultural Center hosted its first Spring Equinox Celebration.

In the Living Village, people of all ages gathered in anticipation of the egg hunt. The Easter egg hunts aren’t just for the young ones. Elders take part in the Easter festivities too.

On your mark, get set, go! Some young egg hunters take part in the annual egg hunt. On March 15, 2024, the Choctaw Cultural Center hosted its first Spring Equinox Celebration.
Choctaw veterans’ women’s group, Tvshka Ohoyo Alliance unveiled
By Chris Jennings

According to the May 2013BtnthSaw, in 2041, during a battle between the ancestors of today’s Choctaw people and an army of Spanish Conquistadores led by Hernando de Soto, the women picked up their fallen husbands’ and fathers’ weapons after most of the Choctaw wayfarers had fallen. They fought the Spanish to the death rather than give up their liberty and home. To this day, the Choctaw war dance, unlike those of many other tribes, involves women as well as men.

Choctaw women (ohoyo) have a long history of serving their family and tribe in whatever way they’re called to. For many, that way has been through military service. These ohoyo veterans made many of the same sacrifices and had to face much of the same trauma as male veterans, but are not always looked upon as the same.

The Choctaw Warrior Wellness program recognizes that these ohoyo veterans needed their place to be together. To address this need, several ohoyo veterans have gotten together to create the Tvshka Ohoyo (Women Warrior) Alliance.

Courtney Trent. With the Warrior Wellness Program, said, “Tvshka Ohoyo Alliance is a remarkable experience of women coming together to create a safe place of healing. The creation of this sisterhood of women speaks to the heart of what it means to be a Choctaw and ohoyo.”

Monica Stroud, a member of the Tvshka Ohoyo Alliance, said, “When we separate from the military, sometimes it seems like it’s hard to find your group again. When you’re on activity or in boot camp, you find people you mesh well with, but when you get out, you sometimes feel lost because you’ve lost those connections. So, this improves our mental health, builds camaraderie, brings us closer to our culture, and creates a great sense of self."

Another member of the alliance, Sandra Stroud, said, “Whenever we come together, there’s laughter, and in laughter, there’s healing in sharing stories, whether they’re good stories or bad stories.”

If you were to stand outside of a Tvshka Ohoyo Alliance meeting and hear the laughing and joking, you might not even realize the healing from some of those bad stories that are taking place. Sharing those stories with peers is just one step in beginning to heal.

Veteran distress increased from fall 2019 to fall 2020, with evidence of the highest increases in distress among veterans aged 30 to 44 years old and among women veterans.

Mental health, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is an ongoing struggle for many. There are several causes of PTSD among veterans: combat, losing others, training, and Military Sexual Trauma (MST) are just a few.

There are treatment options available to those who suffer from PTSD. A significant contributor to this is MST, with 1 in 1 female service members reporting these experiences during their military service.

“Part of our task that we’ve charged for this grant is reducing suicide rates. We know that 11.3% of the Native American veteran population is made up of ohoyo. So, a big part of our efforts is about suicide prevention and provide support for our native ohoyo veterans,” said Trent.

The camaraderie and friendship that the members of the Tvshka Ohoyo Alliance gain are just one step in improving the mental health of its members.

According to Stroud, seeing all these ohoyo at the unveiling of the alliance means a lot to her. “If we come together to heal, share, love, and grow,” said Stroud. “We’re still serving, we’re still doing our best to ensure that our community is healthy.”

Brooks was proud of the moment, being led in by a drum and the ohoyo’s stickball team. “I was emotional from the moment I walked in the door; there’s been so much love and healing in this. Ohoyo has been an incredible honor. And the tribe and the program have been so good to us. Anytime we’re together, it’s a huge blessing,” said Brooks.

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