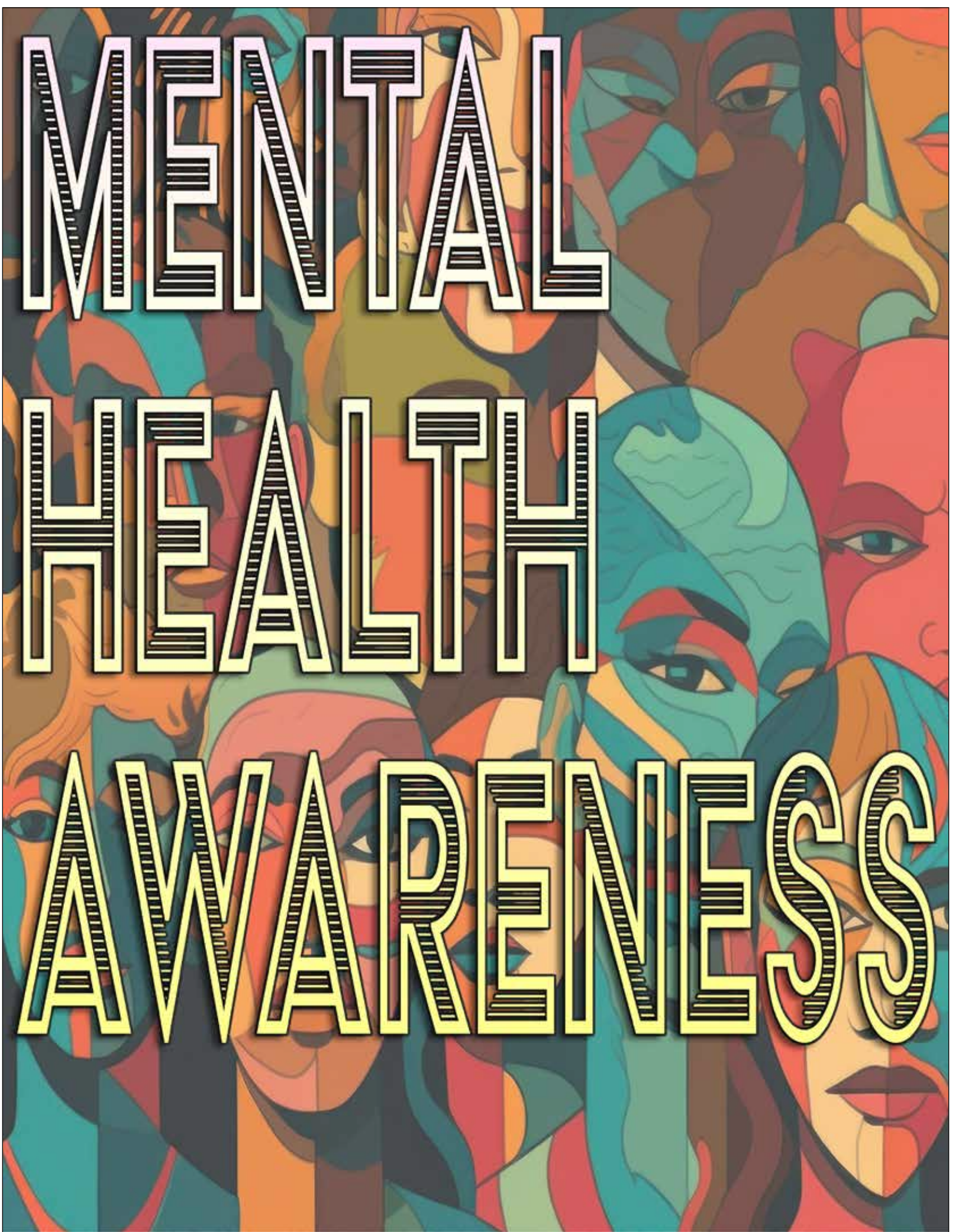




# FOX NEWS

May 2024 Issue



## Mental health continues to be a top priority for Choctaw Nation

By Chris Jennings

Studies show that Native Americans have a higher rate of mental health problems, resulting in psychological distress at rates 2.5 times higher than the general population.

The disproportionately higher mental health disorders such as suicide, violence, and behavior-related morbidity and mortality in American Indian and Alaska Native communities continue to be an important issue for many tribes.

The Choctaw Nation is no exception. The Nation offers several different ways to help with mental health, including counseling for both individuals and families, case management services, substance abuse counseling, child or partner abuse counseling, psychiatric medication (evaluation and management), crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Even with all these programs, getting the ball rolling with care can be hard.

According to Shauna Humphreys, the Director of Behavioral Health for the Choctaw Nation, the stigma of talking about mental health issues is one of the biggest struggles to overcome.

"When it comes to mental health, a lot of people think that it's a sign of weakness if you're struggling or have to reach out for help, but really, it's a sign of wisdom, knowing when you need help," said Humphreys.

A person's mental health is a state of balance that can change under times of stress. Sometimes, though, such as with a mental illness, it's a diagnosable condition caused by a biological disruption.

"Mental health is something everyone has and is always there. It can be positive or negative, just like everyone has physical health and different degrees of it," said Humphreys. "However, mental illness comes into play when it truly affects a person's ability to function over a long period of time."

Humphreys says it's important to know the difference between feeling sad or stressed and having biological imbalances in the brain, and that's why seeking professional help is important.

"They [mental health and mental illness] are often used incorrectly or used interchangeably. It's important to know the difference to reduce stigma and seek help when needed," Humphreys said.

Before feeling stressed or having a bad day, Humphreys suggests having coping strategies or getting support from others. "When we notice we're not feeling well, and it affects our functioning, we seek help. We wouldn't ignore our mental health just as we wouldn't ignore our physical health," said Humphreys. "It's all connected—culturally,

the mind, body and soul are connected. If your body or your soul doesn't feel good, it can affect your mind."

Children and young adults are not immune to mental health issues. According to the 2022 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report, mental health challenges were the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The report showed that up to 20% of children ages 3 to 17 in the United States have a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder.

Another alarming statistic from the report is that from 2009 to 2019, the share of high school students who reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased from 26% to 37%.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and brought youth mental health into a brighter light, the statistics show that it was a developing problem before that.

Several things could cause mental health issues in youth and adolescents. Abuse, trauma and neglect are just a few.

Social media can be another source of mental health issues for young people.

According to a Surgeons General report, up to 95% of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media "almost constantly."

The report ultimately says that more research is needed to understand social media's impact fully; however, the current body of evidence seems to show that while social media may have benefits for some children and adolescents, there are several signs that it can also harm their mental health and well-being.

The report also shows several positive effects of social media. For example, the ability to form and maintain friendships online and develop social connections through social media can be beneficial for youth.

These relationships present opportunities for positive interactions with more diverse peer groups than are available to them offline, providing them with important social support.

This social support from peers can be especially important for youth who are often marginalized, including racial, ethnic, sexual and gender minorities. Seven out of ten adolescent girls of color report encountering positive or identity-affirming content related to race across social media platforms.

For all the positives, there are also downsides, and studies show that limiting social media access can have positive effects as well.

It's important to monitor your child's social media usage and how it may affect their mental health.

Humphreys says parents can watch out for several

things. "If you see your kid struggling or their regular patterns changing, whether they're eating more or less, or they may not be sleeping as much as normal, whether they're just not being their normal selves, or whether they're not really motivated or want to participate in things that they used to participate in, please reach out, and we can help answer any questions," Humphreys said.

Parents can limit the dangers inherent in social media by creating a family media plan, creating tech-free zones, modeling responsible social media behavior, teaching kids about technology and encouraging them to report cyberbullying.

If things ever get to a point where you think help is needed, either for yourself or a loved one, regardless of their age, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is there for you.

The 988 Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week, anywhere in the United States.

Due to a partnership with the agency that runs the 988 program in Oklahoma, when a tribal member calls 988 from Oklahoma and tells them they're Choctaw, the Nation can follow up with them to make sure they get the care they need.

Humphreys says listening is an important tool when talking to someone about their mental health struggles. There are some things that you shouldn't say, like, "I understand." Even though that sounds like an innocent thing to say, depending on what they're going through, unless you've been in those exact shoes, you really don't understand," Humphreys said.

Another mistake is telling people to pull themselves out of it or toughen up. "We wouldn't tell someone who needed insulin to toughen up or to pull yourself up by your bootstraps; we would direct them to the doctor to get help," Humphreys said.

Native Americans are at a higher risk for mental health and substance abuse. Many things could be the root cause for that, the highest being generational trauma.

Humphreys sees the work they're doing now as a way to turn that around.

"I'm ready for the day when we can flip that script [so that] Native Americans are no longer the highest for mental health or substance use issues," Humphreys said.

Taking care of yourself and your loved ones is important, though.

Humphreys added, "We try to exercise, eat right and get plenty of rest to prevent any major physical illnesses or conditions...Just like physical health, everyone should be looking after their mental health."

The Choctaw Nation has several different ways for you to get the mental health help you need. The following is just a brief list of some of the available services.

### Behavioral Health

580-920-2100

Providing a variety of mental health services for adults, adolescents, and children.

- Individual counseling

- Family Counseling
- Case Management Services
- Substance Abuse Counseling
- Child/Partner Abuse Counseling
- Psychiatric Medication (Evaluation/ Management)
- Crisis Intervention
- Suicide Prevention
- Several grant assisted programs

### Warrior Wellness

McAlester - 918-302-0052

### Durant - 580-916-9238

Provides a variety of programs and events for Native American veterans to enhance their mental health in partnership with the U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs through the SSG Fox Suicide Prevention grant.

- Weekend family retreats
- Animal-assisted services
- Equine services
- Trail riding
- Hiking and Fishing

- Ropes course
- Gardening
- Family enrichment
- Cultural enrichment
- Income support assistance
- Peer support

### Chi Hullo Li

918-567-2905

A residential treatment facility in Talihiina that offers a long-term, comprehensive and culturally sensitive program for

Native American women with or without children.

### Men's Recovery Center

918-567-2389

A 60-day residential substance use disorder treatment facility with licensed and certified staff dedicated to providing quality substance use disorder treatment services.

## Faith, Family, Culture

Na Yimmi, Chukka Achvffa, Im Aivlhpesa



Chief Gary Batton

### Mulberry Month signals spring in the Choctaw Nation

Mulberry month, or Bihi Hvshi, signifies the month of May, but it is the height of the ancestral Choctaw spring activities.

Choctaw ancestors were treated to sweet berries and other wild grown vegetation that comes with the warmer spring-time months. Mulberries and strawberries were among the earliest fruits to ripen so those berries were the first to be harvested by early Chahta. Later, into the spring, other berries such as blackberries, blueberries, and wild plums were plentiful to the Tribe and were used to make sweet treats.

The berries were so important to the early Chahta that planned fruit orchards were planted next to the main tribal area. The fresh berries were a welcome addition to the Chahta household as it was a break from the dried foods that sustained the Tribe through winter months. Mulberry tree bark

was also used to produce thread for making textiles for the Tribe.

Spring was also a time for the harvesting of bison fur to use in making clothing or bags. The bison would shed their winter coat to prepare for the warmer months. Spring also signals a time for the Tribe to plant their largest field of corn to be grown for food and basket weaving. Many of these “community fields” were planted around the tribal areas so there was easy access to food for the Tribe. These “community fields” were usually planted during this time so the animals would eat the other vegetation and berries before turning to corn for sustenance.

Tanchi Tohbi, white corn, was used in making bread. Tanchi Bokanli, breaking open corn, was a popcorn, used to entertain visitors. Because corn is wind pollinated, Chahta farmers of later years grew different varieties in fields located in different places.

Choctaw farmers in the pre-Removal era, also planted patches of winter squash, pumpkin, and African melon. Older women sat on platforms during the day, working on artwork and scaring away birds, animals, or hungry boys who tried to enter the melon patch.

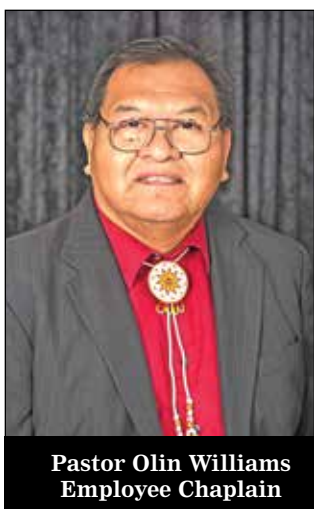
By late May, the corn in the communal fields would be about one foot tall and ready for the first hoeing. Fieldwork would continue through the growing season.

Today in the Choctaw Nation, we also rely on our tribal members to help grow and maintain a healthy tribe. We rely on each other to push forward the Chahta spirit of faith, family and culture. Although the needs of the Tribe have changed, the Choctaw Nation is a strong and healthy tribe due to the decisions made by our leadership, tribal council, and the goodwill of the Chahta people.

The Choctaw Nation is a beautiful place filled with hard-working, self-empowered Chahta who take pride in their labors to forge a better life for their families. The Tribe is here to maintain our sovereign way of life and to ensure that our community is here for each other, much in the same way that our Chahta ancestors helped their neighbors in the planting and harvesting of crops from the “community fields.”

I challenge you to take time and remember the way of the Chahta people, whose independent spirit forged a prosperous path for generations to come. Ask yourself, what you can do to help grow and maintain our tribe not only for your family and neighbors today but future generations of Chahta. And take a moment to enjoy springtime greenery and scenery across our beautiful reservation.

I also challenge you to learn more about Choctaw Culture by visiting the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant. The center is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.



Pastor Olin Williams  
Employee Chaplain

### Anxiety

Originally Published February 1, 2022

Anxiety is reaching a high level in our society today. With the global outbreak of viruses and political demonstrations of different views, society is facing a period of apprehension and fear. What does the word anxiety actually mean?

The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” The term, “be careful for nothing,” is the closest biblical meaning to the word anxiety. The root meaning is, “to draw in different directions or distract”; that is to have distracting care or anxiety.

Apostle Paul’s command to “be careful for nothing,” does not suggest carelessness, but to refrain from being

troubled with cares or carrying unnecessary burdens. Jesus uses the term, “take no thought,” in Matthew chapter 6. This does not mean thoughtlessness, but rather anxiousness or undue thought. The dictionary defines anxious as “trouble in the mind respecting some uncertain matter.” Apprehensive and fearful would be synonyms.

Worry means to be “uneasy in the mind; to feel anxiety about something, to fret.” The old Anglo-Saxon root idea for anxiety is to “strangle or choke,” describing its destructive force. The Apostle Paul himself personally experienced the destructive force of anxiety. Therefore he is warning the Philippian church of this danger.

In 2 Corinthians 11:28, the Apostle Paul writes, “Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” He is saying besides being beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, etc. for his beliefs, he has to be concerned about the spiritual needs of the churches. Therefore he is recommending by prayer and supplication, we should make our requests be made known unto God.

Besides the task of making a living, we are facing social dilemma of extreme proportions today. Let us heed the words of Apostle Paul and turn to prayer to God. In 1 Peter 5:7, we read, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

## Choctaw Landing is open and accepting bookings

**HOCHATOWN, Okla.** – Choctaw Landing, the Choctaw Nation’s newest 100-bed luxury resort and casino, located in Hochatown, Oklahoma, is open and accepting bookings. The resort opened its doors Wednesday, April 3, leading into its official grand opening on May 23, 2024.

Resort services, including conference services, pool opening, concert and cultural entertainment will start later this spring.

“There has been so much excitement around Choctaw Landing, and we are thrilled to be open to guests who are planning to stay at the resort and to those who are just interested in visiting our casino and mercantile,” said Amy Davis, Choctaw Landing general manager. “Choctaw Landing is located about an hour north of the Oklahoma/Texas border and we are the perfect place to getaway and unwind.”

The resort includes:

- 100 guest rooms with 15 suites
- Three conference rooms and more than 4,300 square feet of meeting space
- One hotel restaurant and three outdoor dining/bar options

- Resort fitness center
- Pool area with nine cabanas, two hot tubs and three fire pits
- Outdoor amphitheater with seating for 125
- Casino with 600 slot machines and eight table games including roulette, blackjack, and poker
- Mercantile with gifts, groceries, a deli, a Starbucks and a 24-pump fuel station

Incorporating the Choctaw culture throughout, Choctaw Landing has worked with more than 20 Choctaw artists from around the country to create original artwork for the resort. There are 40 pieces of artwork in public spaces, two large exterior sculptures and 600 pieces of artwork throughout guest rooms.

Choctaw Artist Gene Smith has designed an interactive circular steel sculpture for the entrance of Choctaw Landing that will showcase Choctaw Social Dancers. The sculpture will feature an opening for guests to “join the dance,” interact with the dancers, and delve into the rich history woven into each character around the circle.

## Choctaw Nation offers help for sexual assault victims

April 2024 marked the official 23rd anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month — and the Choctaw Nation participated in the annual awareness campaign.

CNO government associates wore their blue jeans to participate in the Denim Day campaign on April 24 as a visible means of protest of the misconceptions that surround sexual violence.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, one in three Native American women who live off or on Native American reservations report being raped during their lifetime. By comparison, nationally, about one in six women report being raped in their lifetime.

Native Americans are roughly 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual assault compared to all other races. On average, Native Americans ages 12 and older experience 5,900 sexual assaults per year.

If you are a survivor from an Indigenous community or have a loved one from an Indigenous community who needs support and resources, consider reaching out to the following organizations:

The Choctaw Nation has a program for tribal victim assistance. The program provides comprehensive services to victims of crime. Services include emergency food, clothing, shelter, safety planning, goal planning, counseling, court system advocacy and other victim advocacy services. Simply call (877) 285-6893 or go to the Choctaw Nation website at <https://www.choctawnation.com/services/victim-assistance>.

National Sexual Assault Hotline: Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network’s (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline provides free, confidential, and anonymous 24/7 support by phone at 800.656.HOPE (4673) in both English and Spanish or online in English at [online.RAINN.org](https://www.rainn.org) and in Spanish at [RAINN.org/es](https://www.rainn.org/es).

National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center: An organization dedicated to ending violence against Native women and children through policy advocacy and direct service provision. The NIWRC operates the Strong Hearts Native Helpline, which supports Native survivors of violence in crisis, and facilitates local resource connection. You can connect to this hotline by calling 844.762.8483.

The nature of the Choctaw Nation is we take care of our tribal members and anyone who needs help. It has been proven through generations of the good deeds of the Chahta people. It is ingrained in this tribe to help people who are suffering and in need. The Chahta Spirit of Faith, Family and Culture will not allow this Nation to do anything less. If you are a sexual assault victim, please seek help and get assistance, there are people in your corner that are willing to help and offer you the guidance you need to help you reclaim your life.

### Early art designs featured in new Choctaw Cultural Center exhibit

**DURANT, Okla.** – The Choctaw Cultural Center’s newest exhibit “Bolukta: Mississippian Designs, Medallions, and Modern Choctaw Art” features recent works by Jane Semple Umsted.

This exhibit allows for a closer study of the artist’s skill at creating traditional designs in the mediums of acrylics and batiks.

The exhibit will open on April 16, 2024, and run through October 19, 2024, on the center’s Exhibit Wall.

Semple Umsted’s works in this exhibit show a common theme of circles and circular motifs, as referenced in the Choctaw word bolukta.

Through decades of practice, she has created her own style of doing batiks, an ancient art form of dripping hot wax on cloth, then applying dye to the material to create patterns and images. While care and planning are paramount, the dyeing process of batiks can sometimes yield unexpected results.

Most batiks feature abstract designs, but Semple Umsted captures figures and even portraits on her canvas in this difficult medium.

Semple Umsted is a Durant native and Choctaw artist who works in oils, acrylics, watercolor, sculpture, and batik.

She is the curator of the Semple Family Museum of Native American Art at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and serves on the Board of Trustees of the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Hours at the Choctaw Cultural Center, 1919 Hina Hanta Way in Durant, are 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and closed Sunday and Monday. Regular admission prices apply, including complimentary admission for Choctaw tribal members and cultural center members. In addition, the Hvshi Gift Store and Champuli Café will be open.



Photo Provided

Semple Umsted is a Durant native and Choctaw artist who works in oils, acrylics, watercolor, sculpture and batik.



Choctaw Nation Photo

Choctaw Nation’s newest 100-bed luxury resort and casino, located in Hochatown, Oklahoma is now open.

The opening of the \$238 million Choctaw Landing resort created more than 400 jobs in southeast Oklahoma and will have an estimated \$95 million economic impact on the region. To learn more about the resort, please check out [choctawlanding.com](https://choctawlanding.com).

**CHOCTAW TRAIL OF TEARS**  
MEMORIAL WALK

MAY 18, 2024  
TVSHKA HOMMA CAPITOL GROUNDS

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

CEREMONY BEGINS AT 10:00 AM

Remembering our ancestors  
and embracing our culture!

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

**I AM CHOCTAW PROUD**

TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

**CHOCTAW LABOR DAY FESTIVAL**

**FOOD VENDOR APPLICATION NOW ONLINE**

Sign up now to register as a food vendor at the 2024 Choctaw Labor Day Festival.

The deadline for applications is May 31, 2024.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
CALL 580.740.0826  
EMAIL [TRIBALEVENTS@CHOCTAWNATION.COM](mailto:TRIBALEVENTS@CHOCTAWNATION.COM)

SCAN QR CODE TO APPLY

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

# The Journey to Natural Healing

By Christian Chaney

Dr. Carmen Jones is a naturopathic doctor and a member of the Choctaw tribe from Atoka, Oklahoma.

She is passionate about using natural remedies to heal the body.

She graduated from the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and Health Sciences in Tempe, Arizona, one of the five accredited schools for naturopathic medicine.

Her primary practice is located in Ada, Oklahoma, but she travels across southeastern Oklahoma to share information and teach about natural medicine.

As a young girl, her interest in plants was sparked by her grandmother, who would brew herbal teas for her when she was sick.

Her dream was always to return to the Choctaw Nation and provide support to the people living in rural communities.

She began her journey in conventional medical school until she got sick and was not given many options by doctors.

She refused to accept the idea of taking medication for the rest of her life.

At this point, she discovered naturopathic medicine and felt it was her calling.

She was passionate about using nature and God's gifts to help the body heal itself.

This discovery changed the course of her life and gave her a new purpose.

"I whole-heartedly believe as we move towards being in a more balanced state, as we move towards being more in nature and finding ways to stimulate our body's ability to heal itself and addressing that root cause, we have a higher quality of life, but we also have the opportunity to answer the calling that we may have. The calling is to serve our families, communities and even the Choctaw Nation at large."

Naturopathic medicine is the healing power of nature.

Dr. Jones practices Nature Cure and Vitalism, which involves looking at what we eat and drink and how it affects our overall health.

Plants and herbal medicine can correct nutrient deficiencies and support changes in the body. "Every time we eat or drink something is a chance to nourish our bodies," says Jones.

She offers numerous therapies, like flower essence and acupuncture, and depending on the patient's goals or lifestyle, will suggest the appropriate treatment to get the body into a healing state.

"What's really exciting to me, not just natural medicine, but plants, is that they work on the whole body instead of just one organ system or something specific."

Dr. Jones is passionate about sharing information about natural medicine.

Her goal is to help people in Oklahoma by practicing and sharing information to heal and transform their bodies naturally.

"We know the body can heal itself. For example, you can get a cut or an abrasion on your arm or even a burn; your body can heal itself without a Band-Aid or Neosporin if you are healthy. Our body wants to be in that healing and repairing state. When someone has symptoms or a diagnosis, we work to address the root cause to figure out what has gone awry from keeping the body from that healing and repairing state."

The causes can range from diet or inflammation to genetics.

Dr. Jones and her patients explore these possible causes to determine what could be causing the body not to enter the natural healing process and move forward.

According to Dr. Jones, nettles are one of the most beneficial herbs due to their high levels of vitamins and minerals.

Oklahoma is home to two varieties of nettles: stinging and dog nettles.

Nettles are a great way to familiarize oneself with natural medicine since they are rich in potassium, magnesium, vitamin A, vitamin C and amino acids.

Nettles can help reduce stress and allergies while increasing the mineral content in our diet.

Dr. Jones had a patient who visited her with concerns about anxiety and high blood pressure, which were suspected to be caused by Covid-19.

The plan was to address the patient's inflammation and anxiety issues initially.

Dr. Jones and her patient went through the patient's lifestyle, diet, and potential causes of chronic inflammation to develop a solution.

Dr. Jones recommended a plant-based therapy for the patient.

At the three-month checkup, the patient's blood pressure was stable, and she had not experienced any panic attacks in two months.

The patient also shared that she had seen her optometrist and ophthalmologist the previous year, who had diagnosed her with onset macular degeneration and worsening cataracts and recommended surgery.

After following Dr. Jones' plant therapy, the patient went back to her eye doctor to schedule her surgeries.

They told her that she was no longer qualified as they did not see any signs of macular degeneration, and her cataracts were stable enough that she was not a candidate for surgery at that point.

In addition to the herbs recommended by Dr. Jones, the patient's lifestyle changes helped her experience a significant decrease in inflammation, lowered her blood pressure, and brought about positive health changes that she had not even discussed with Dr. Jones.

Dr. Jones always encourages people to listen to their bodies and ask questions until they get an explanation or a response that makes sense, and with the proper guidance, she believes it is possible to achieve optimal health naturally.

If you want to improve your health, Dr. Jones suggests starting by addressing your diet. Inflammation is often the root cause of many health problems.

Foods that are high in sugar and dairy are known to be inflammatory.

Therefore, reducing the consumption of such foods is a great starting point for those who want to improve their health.

These are inexpensive and achievable first steps to take when starting your health journey.

Dr. Jones has observed that stress and inflammation are often the two biggest root causes of chronic illnesses in her patients.

These two factors can lead to blood pressure problems, diabetes, arthritis, and other conditions.

While managing stress is not always easy, certain herbs and foods can help.

Dr. Jones also recommends grounding as a technique to manage stress.

Grounding exercises involve standing or walking barefoot on grass or dirt or pressing your bare feet into the ground.

Some people use this technique to connect their bodies to the Earth's electrical energy. Benefits of grounding include improved mood, better blood flow, better sleep quality, improved immune system function and more.

In addition to grounding techniques, Dr. Jones suggests incorporating deep breathing exercises into our daily routine.

These exercises can help reset our parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for promoting relaxation and reducing stress.

By taking deep breaths consciously, we send signals to our body that it is safe to relax, and in turn, the body leaves the chronic stress state.

This habit can be very beneficial for our overall well-being and can help reduce physiological and psychological symptoms of stress.

Dr. Jones has partnered with Choctaw Nation's Behavioral Health and the Tribal Opioid Response Team (TORT) to organize classes and share her knowledge.

She has two classes in May at the Choctaw Cultural Center:

## Spring Tonic Make and Take Workshop

Date: May 11, 2024  
10:00 a.m. – noon and 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

"Spring tonics are nutritive and building for the body. After the stillness, cool, and calming winter, we explore spring plants and watch their lifecycle as they emerge and become green. These first plants in the spring are very high in nutrients and minerals. As we learn and create a relationship with our spring plant relatives, we can experience the nurturing and nourishment they offer in the form of creating a spring tonic!"

## "Spill the Tea"

Date: May 21, 2024  
3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

"Dr. Carmen Jones will discuss the benefits of tea and reconnecting with



Photo Submitted

Dr. Carmen Jones teaches a class in Atoka, Oklahoma.

our plant relatives. She will provide tea to samples and a discussion about their benefits, highlighting blends to support immunity, reduce pain and address allergies."

## Beyond Coping: How to be Empowered Through Stress

"Stress is everywhere and we cannot escape it, but we can understand how it changes our body's physiology. It is estimated that 60%-80% of primary care doctor visits are related to stress. Learning to recognize changes that occur in our body due to stress can help us address stress better. We will discover ways to increase your stress resilience and how to move out of survival mode and become empowered in your life."

McAlester Windhorse 604 S 2nd St  
May 13, 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Durant Windhorse 816 W Evergreen St  
May 13, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Talihina Community Center  
May 24, 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Broken Bow Community Center  
May 24, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

## Top Down and Bottom Up Approaches: Trying Different Tangible Ways to Support the Stress Response

"Ever wonder why something that is anxiety provoking for you doesn't create stress for someone else? We will explore different mindsets around stress and learn a model to help break the stress cycle for you. We will explore new tools and skills to build your toolbox for stress resilience."

McAlester Windhorse 604 S 2nd St  
June 3, 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Durant Windhorse 816 W Evergreen St  
June 3rd 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Talihina Community Center  
June 28, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Broken Bow Community Center  
June 28, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

## Love Yourself through Transformation (Love yourself, heal your life)

"The natural world all around is changing all the time from our seasons to our plants and animal relatives and even the rocks. Change can sometimes be uncomfortable, but when we learn to love ourselves unconditionally and learn to be the role model/parent/support that we need, change can be encouraging. Self-care is essential in our journey to balanced health. We will make lip balms together with local plants!"

McAlester Windhorse 604 S 2nd St July 10, 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Durant Windhorse 816 W Evergreen St July 10, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Talihina Community Center July 26, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Broken Bow Community Center July 26, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Each class is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the benefits of naturopathic medicine and even the chance to discover medicine in your own backyard!

To learn more from Dr. Carmen, visit her Facebook page at Transform Your Health Naturally with Dr. Carmen Jones or listen to her podcast, Thrive and Aligned Healing.

To RSVP for a free, upcoming class email lsjames@cnhsa.com

## What is a Naturopathic Doctor?

Naturopathic doctors are educated and trained in accredited naturopathic medical colleges. They diagnose, prevent, and treat acute and chronic illness to restore and establish optimal health by supporting the person's inherent self-healing process. Rather than just suppressing symptoms, naturopathic doctors work to identify underlying causes of illness, and develop personalized treatment plans to address them. Their Therapeutic Order™, identifies the natural order in which all therapies should be applied to provide the greatest benefit with the least potential for damage.

### 1. Remove Obstacles to Health.

The first step in returning to health is to remove the entities that disturb health such as: poor diet, digestive disturbances, inappropriate and chronic stress levels, and individual disharmony.

### 2. Stimulate the Self-Healing Mechanisms.

ND's use therapies to stimulate and strengthen the body's innate self-healing and curative abilities.

### 3. Strengthen Weakened Systems.

Systems that need repair are addressed at this level of healing.

### 4. Correct Structural Integrity.

Physical modalities such as spinal manipulation, massage therapy, and craniosacral therapy are used to improve and maintain skeletal and musculature integrity.

### 5. Use Natural Substances to Restore and Regenerate.

Naturopathic medicine's primary objective is to restore health, not to treat pathology.

### 6. Use Pharmacologic Substances to Halt Progressive Pathology.

If their state license permits, ND's can prescribe pharmaceutical drugs themselves or if not, refer to a conventional medical colleague.

### 7. Use High Force, Invasive Modalities: Surgery, Radiation, Chemotherapy.

When life, limb, or function must be preserved, NDs refer patients to MDs who are expertly trained in these arenas.

Source: American Association of Naturopathic Physicians

**THIS BUTTON COULD HELP SAVE YOUR LIFE**

CONTINUE LIVING INDEPENDENTLY WITH A MEDICAL ALERT SERVICE

If help is needed, simply press the button and trained care specialist will respond immediately. Operators available anytime, anywhere 24/7/365.

**REQUIREMENTS**

- 65 years of age or older
- A member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- Reside within the Choctaw Reservation
- Live alone and homebound
- Have a doctor's prescription (your doctor will assess a few other criteria)
- Home assessment by Healthy Aging to determine eligibility

TO ENROLL, OR FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL: **CHOCTAW NATION PATIENT RELATIONS**  
539.316.6697

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HOW HEALTH AND HOME CONNECT

Choctaw Nation Health Services

**BOLUKTA**

MISSISSIPPIAN DESIGNS, MEDALLIONS, AND MODERN CHOCTAW ART

**NEW EXHIBIT**  
APRIL 16 - OCTOBER 19

CHOCTAW CULTURAL CENTER

**SUCCESS THROUGH PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY**

Our mission is to assist Choctaw tribal members who have felony offenses in becoming productive citizens.

The program's purpose is to assist in removing barriers preventing our members from reintegrating into the communities in which they live.

**SERVICES**

- Treatment planning
- Case management
- Referral assistance
- Mental health consultation and referral
- Emergency clothing and food
- Assistance with transitional housing
- Occupational consultation and referral

Please contact our office for prescreening to determine eligibility for services.

For more information, call **800.522.6170** or **580.642.8538** email us at [Reintegration@choctawnation.com](mailto:Reintegration@choctawnation.com), or visit our [website at choctawnation.com/ services/reintegration/](http://website.at.choctawnation.com/services/reintegration/)

P.O. Box 1210 | 1802 Chukka Hina Durant, OK 74701

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



Jennifer Woods

## District 6

Halito to all our tribal members from District 6, The Heart of the Nation! I would like to start off by saying “congratulations” to all our high school seniors on their graduations that will be taking place throughout the month of May. There are so many opportunities for each of these students, and I encourage them to utilize Choctaw Nation High School Services, Higher Education and Career Development programs. We look forward to seeing the great things that you accomplish in your lives, as you all are our future.

I was honored to be a guest speaker at the Eastern Oklahoma State College Sapphire Ball in April, where I received a Distinguished Alumni award. I was a first-generation high school graduate, and then me and my sister Marty Lalonde attended Eastern. The encouragement I received from my teachers and counselors at Jones Academy to attend Eastern, and the wonderful professors at the college who pushed me into stepping out and overcoming fears and insecurities that I had have helped to shape my life into who I am today. It was an emotional evening that I felt honored to be a part of.

We are looking forward to the Trail of Tears Walk that will be held in Tuskahoma on Saturday, May 18. This is an emotional walk as we give honor to all who walked the trail, and many who lost their lives and family members. May we never forget where we came from and who we are. We are a resilient people!

We are very thankful for our new homes that were built in Red Oak and Wilburton. These homes are providing a safe place for our tribal members to live as well as being beautiful and energy efficient. We want to build more homes, but we must have ten approved applications in order for housing to buy land and build in the area that has the numbers to document the need. Buffalo Valley and Yanush area, we need your applications. Please apply if you even think you might be interested.

We are continuing to put people to work through our Job For The Day program and Employment Training Services program. We also have the Reintegration Program that assists tribal members who have been convicted of felony crimes. The program seeks to remove barriers for those who are transitioning back into their communities. The Prevention Services program also helps to assist tribal members who have lost their driver's license through their Driver's License Restoration Program, so put in your applications and let us help you get to work.

We invite our District 6 seniors to come to lunch every Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. and to get involved with other seniors for activities and events that we will be attending. We will be having a Foster Care Awareness Event on Saturday, May 4 at 9:30 a.m. at the Gary Rosebure Park in Wilburton for anyone who would like to join us to bring awareness for our need of foster care families in our area, and we will be holding our District 6 Community Meeting Dinner on May 9 at 5:30 p.m. at our new center. We will be taking our buses to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Walk that will be held in Hugo on May 10, the Elder Appreciation Day on May 22 that is held in Durant and Outreach At The Beach in Sardis on May 29. We also have a guest speaker every week to educate our tribal members on the services that are available to them. OILS (Oklahoma Indian Legal Services) will be joining us on Wednesday, June 5, so you have time to make an appointment if you need legal aide. We have a lot of activities and don't want anyone to miss out on events, so please come, enjoy lunch and get a calendar of upcoming events.

Yakoke District 6 for allowing me to serve you. My door is always open to you. Yakoke!



Photo Provided

Jennifer Woods pose with other Sapphire Award honorees during the Eastern Oklahoma State College Sapphire Ball on April 6.

## Stroud is First Language Speaker of the Month

Sandra Stroud of District #7 is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month.

Stroud was born in Talihina, Oklahoma, and raised in Antlers and Finley. She graduated from Antlers High School and Northeastern State University, then joined the US Navy in 1988, where she served until 1996. A tomboy at heart, Stroud said she grew up hearing stories of military men in her family and of family members who attended boarding school. She wanted to prove herself capable, and military life became a natural for her.

She demonstrated exceptional professionalism and commitment from her days of Basic Training in Orlando, Florida, and assignments in locations such as Memphis NAS, Millington, Tennessee, Moffett Field, California, NAS Barbers Point, Hawaii and NAS North Island. She served with distinction as an avionics Electronics Technician. Through deployments to NAS ADAK Alaska and Diego Garcia B.I.O.T., Stroud showcased unwavering commitment to duty and was marked with accolades and awards, including Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation, Navy Unit Commendation, Navy "E" Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbons, Southwest Asia Service Medals, Kuwait Liberation Medals, and Good Conduct Awards. Her favorite duty station was NAS North Island.

Stroud continued to service her community with distinction, dedicating 25 years to Community Based Research for Choctaw Nation, where her commitments made a lasting impact on our community. She has one son, Malichi Stroud.

The Choctaw Nation holds our veterans in the highest esteem and appreciates their sacrifices and contributions to preserve our freedoms and the way of life we hold dear.



## Drew Robinson shares his story of survival

*“Strength isn't always physical...the hardest thing I've ever done in my life is be vulnerable.” – Former MLB Player Drew Robinson.*

Drew Robinson shared the story of his decline in mental health and his attempted suicide with attendees of the Annual Navigating Mental Health and Substance Misuse Conference hosted by the Choctaw Nation in March. However, instead of a story of tragedy, he shared a story of hope.

The decision that was supposed to be the end of Robinson's life gave birth to a new passion for spreading awareness about mental health and suicide prevention.

The former Major League Baseball player has shared his story with the world since his suicide attempt in 2020. He has been featured on ESPN, USA Today and other significant outlets.

Although Robinson was a successful baseball player and had many things that most only dream of, he said that he was struggling with his mental health like everyone can. When the pandemic forced him to spend time alone, he was confronted with the reality of his mental health.

“I knew where I was, and I knew how unwilling I was to admit it because I was terrified of being judged by some hypothetical person,” he said. “I was so afraid of being judged or misunderstood, really, of how could someone who is living the life I'm living be feeling this way.”

Robinson emphasized one of the most challenging parts of mental health treatment. Many people struggle with thoughts of self-harm but don't talk to anyone.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2021, an estimated 12.3 million American adults seriously thought about suicide.

Robinson drove this point home when he spoke about how he was seeing a therapist but not being completely honest with them. He encourages everyone to be honest with their mental health and not wait to seek help.

“No matter how irrational it sounds, dramatic it sounds, extreme it sounds, unrealistic, just say it. I regret that more than my actual attempt,” he pleaded. “My attempt wouldn't have happened, I strongly believe, if I would have been honest in those therapy sessions.”

Robinson's story highlights the importance of accessible mental health programs and treatment. Within the Choctaw Nation, steps are being made to offer programs that address mental health in practical ways and prevent suicide.

American Indians and Alaska Natives face disproportional rates of mental health disorders, including suicide, according to the CDC.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) is doing everything possible to provide Choctaws with adequate resources and care. By partnering with state and local programs and facilities, Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health Services offers preventative care and treats tribal members in crisis.

There are many behavioral health services offered through CNO's programs, including individual and family counseling, substance abuse counseling, child/partner abuse counseling, psychiatric medication (evaluation/ management), crisis intervention, suicide prevention and more.

One of the partnerships is with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. 988 is a resource for individuals who are feeling depressed, anxious, overwhelmed, suicidal, or struggling with a substance use issue. Mental health professionals will listen to you and assist in getting you the help you need



Photo by Christian Toews

Former Major League Baseball player, Drew Robbins, shares his story during the Annual Mental Health and Substance Misuse Conference hosted by the Choctaw Nation.

for yourself or a loved one. They will also assist with connecting you to available resources in your area.

“Many people don't know where to turn when they are in crisis,” says Andrea Holley, Project manager for CNO's 988 tribal response and expansion grant.

“The purpose of these grants is to focus on community outreach and what to expect when you call 988,” she said. “We provided tribal members coming out of inpatient with follow-up services and brief therapy until they could get in to see our traditional counselors.”

Historically, following up with people who have called 988 for assistance has been challenging. After someone is treated, they can be discharged and forgotten. This has been particularly difficult with tribal members because many don't want to seek treatment outside of the reservation, according to Holley.

“This grant also allows us to not lose connection with our tribal members. We are going to know when they are discharged,” said Holley. “We are going to make sure we get an appointment made with them, and we are going to make sure that they are ok and get the help they need afterward to keep them out of crisis,” said Holley.

Holley said that since she became the project manager in 2023, she has seen the grant streamline the process, where there used to be a lot of barriers to getting tribal members the higher care they needed. She said some notable partnerships developed are with Lighthouse Behavioral Wellness Center and Carl Albert Mental Health. These partnerships provide services that were previously unavailable to tribal members.

Getting help before reaching the point of suicidal thoughts is very important,” said Holley.

According to Holley, many people underestimate the severity of a mental health crisis.

“If we really understood what a mental health crisis was, we have all been there at some point. Don't wait until you are suicidal,” said Holley. “There are so many mental health crises that lead to that point. Call when you need the help, and you know you need the help.”

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, 988 is a resource that could save a life. If you would like more information on 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, you can visit their website at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org).

If you would like more information and resources that the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers, visit this summary of available options: [www.choctawnation.com/news/posts/mental-health-rocks/](http://www.choctawnation.com/news/posts/mental-health-rocks/) or visit our behavioral health page at [www.choctawnation.com/services/behavioral-health/](http://www.choctawnation.com/services/behavioral-health/).

**WAR 1950 - 1955**

**CHOCTAW VETERAN ADVOCACY PROGRAM**

Are You a Choctaw Veteran?

Let us help guide you to the benefits and services that you have earned.

580-642-8451 | [BIT.LY/CNO-VETERANS-ADVOCACY](http://BIT.LY/CNO-VETERANS-ADVOCACY)

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

TOGETHER WE'RE MORE

**JONES ACADEMY MEDICAL SUPPORT**

Did you know Jones Academy offers full medical support, including transportation and medication administration by a full-time nurse and medical coordinator? The on-campus Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health Counseling Center provides confidential outpatient counseling services, and educational group sessions assist students in adjusting to life at Jones Academy.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JONES ACADEMY, PLEASE VISIT: [JONESACADEMY.ORG](http://JONESACADEMY.ORG)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

**EMPLOYMENT TRAINING SERVICES**

Do you need assistance finding a job or paying for job training?

The 477 Employment Training Services aim to help people succeed in the workforce by providing opportunities for employment, education and training.

Services are available within **Choctaw Nation Reservation.**

Scan to learn more and to apply!

**Choctaw Nation 477 Program**

NOTES & EVENTS

In search of relatives

Hello, I am in search of relatives of Bess Mae Eller and Ace Robert Sam, who were my grandparents. My mother was Mary Lahoma (Sam) Galloway. Her sibling are Maude E Sam, James Doyle Sam, Wallace E Sam, Annie Marie Sam, Frances L Sam and Ace Junior Sam.

My name is Frank, I will be attending the Choctaw Labor Day Celebration this year (2024), while there I would like to meet up with some of my relatives if possible. Larinda, my wife will also post on the Facebook Choctaw Page.

Education goals achieved

I'm Jenny Ross and I'm a proud Choctaw. I would have never achieved my dreams without the support of the Choctaw Nation. In my 30's I have decided to return to the education world and attend Sosu. When making the decision of returning to school so late in life I was nervous and scared, I reached out to the higher education department and career development were they have been so helpful and have held my hand through the entire process. I am a paraprofessional at Valliant Public School and work in the special education department. When I graduate from college I will continue teaching at Valliant.

I would have never been able to afford college or even know what resources would help me without the hands of the nation. Each day the Choctaw Nation is helping students make their dreams become reality no matter the age of the student, and for that I will be forever grateful.

Did you know?

Did you know before Oklahoma was admitted to the union as a state in 1907, the Choctaw Nation was divided into three districts: Apukshunnubbee, Moshulatubbee, and Pushmataha?

Each district had its own chief from 1834 to 1857; afterward, the three districts were put under the jurisdiction of one chief. Pictured is Moshulatubbee.



EOSC Native Americans Who Code Summer Camp

For incoming 8th-12th grade students June 10-13, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. at Eastern Oklahoma State College 1301 West Main Street | Wilburton, OK 74578.

The camp is open to both beginner and experienced coders Learn Web Design or Drone Technology with Python. There is no cost to attend and space is limited. Register online by June 7 by scanning the QR code.

Questions? Contact Brenda Strange | bstrange@eosc.edu or Kellje Semeski | ksemeski@eosc.edu.



HONOR GUARD — POSITIONS AVAILABLE —

APPLY BY CONTACTING: 580-642-8451

VETERANSADVOCACY@CHOCTAWNATION.COM

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma — TOGETHER WE'RE MORE —

CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA TRIBAL COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

April 13, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER
  2. OPENING PRAYER/FLAG SALUTE
  3. ROLL CALL
  4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
    - a. Regular Session March 9, 2024
  5. WELCOME GUESTS/SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS
    - a. Veteran of the Month, District #7 – Sandra Stroud
    - b. First Language Speaker of the Month, District #7 – Rosa Baker
  6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - None
  7. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES
  8. NEW BUSINESS
    - a. Approve Cookson Hills Connect, LLC to Deploy Broadband Services in Haskell County, Oklahoma with the Choctaw Nation Reservation
    - b. Approve Application to the Tribal Solar Accelerator Fund Facility – Residential Grant
    - c. Approve Application to the United States Department of Energy for the Home Electrification and Appliance Rebate (HEAR) Program
    - d. Council Bill Enacting the Choctaw Nation Trust and Restricted Land Leasing Act
    - e. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Vehicles
    - f. Approve the Disposal of Surplus Capital Assets – Equipment
    - g. Approve Business Lease No. 4200435590 (G09-2076) in Favor of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Environmental Protection Services, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma
    - h. Approve Oil and Gas Lease No. 4200426280 in Favor of Arkoma Resources, LLC, on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Haskell County, Oklahoma
    - i. Approve an Electric Line Easement in Favor of Choctaw Electric Cooperative, Inc., on Land Held by the USA in Trust for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in McCurtain County, Oklahoma
    - j. Approve the Purchase of Reintegration Duplexes in Bryan County, Oklahoma
    - k. Approve the Purchase of Approximately 20 Acres of Land at Daisy Ranch in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma
    - l. Approve the Purchase of a Facilities Maintenance Warehouse in the City of Poteau, LeFlore County, Oklahoma
    - m. Amend CB-33-24 Pertaining to Approval of Funds and Budget for FY23 ICDB Grant
  9. OTHER NEW BUSINESS
  10. OLD BUSINESS
  11. ADJOURNMENT
  12. CLOSING PRAYER
- All votes passed unanimously

Chahta Anumpa Aikhvna Me Language Lesson

Kuchi / Kucha

kuchi – take out of something, ex. purse, pocket. To remove something/someone

Isht tiwa ya kuchi li tuk I took out the keys.

Vm iskvli kuchi la chi. I'm taking out my money

Ofi ya kuchi. Let the dog out.

Chishno akosh pishokchi ish kuchi tuk o? Are you the one who took the milk out

Ohoyo ma okla kuchi bvna tuk. They wanted to remove that woman

Im ohoyo ya kuchi tuk. He kicked his wife out. Or He removed his wife.

kucha – change 'i' to 'a' for future tense.

Ampo aiachefa ya isht impa ish kucha chike. You take the spoons out of the dishwasher.

Vlla yvt i bahta ma im isht washoha kucha chi. The child will take his toys out of his bag.

Ilefoka shila ya ashilili ma ish kuchi hinla ho? Would you take the dry clothes out of the dryer?

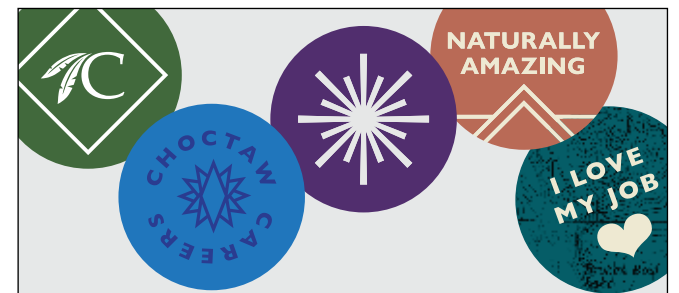
Iskvli katohmi ish kucha chi? How much money will you take out?

Alikchi yvt sv noti bash-lit kucha chi. The doctor will extract my tooth.

Pronunciation: kuchi - koht-chi - The 't' is slightly pronounced very quickly.

Pronunciation: kucha – koht-cha - The 't' is slightly pronounced very quickly.

www.choctawschool.com



Choctaw Landing is now hiring.

There's something for you here.



Visit one of our upcoming job fairs. For more information about job fairs, open positions or to apply today, scan the QR code or visit [Careers.Choctawnation.com](https://careers.choctawnation.com).

Choctaw CAREERS

JUROR SUMMONS

Choctaw Nation tribal members, spouses of tribal members, and any Choctaw Nation associate residing within Choctaw Nation territory may be summoned to jury duty with the Choctaw Nation court system.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma



BE AN ACTIVE PART OF THE CHOCTAW JOURNEY!

The Choctaw Cultural Center is looking for volunteers to help share our culture with guests. Volunteer benefits include:

Opportunities for personal and community enrichment, Ongoing training and learning opportunities related to Oklahoma history, Free or reduced admission to training activities, lectures, and workshops and much more!



SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT [CHOCTAWCULTURALCENTER.COM](https://choctawculturalcenter.com) FOR MORE INFORMATION



LEADERSHIP TRAINING INTERNSHIP CAMP

4-WEEK PAID INTERNSHIP FOCUSING ON:
 

- Teambuilding
- Leadership Development Skills
- Cultural Activities
- Financial Management
- Elder Mentorship

Working as a team to create a unique community-based project for a chance to earn an additional \$500 scholarship.

Ages 14 - 24 | Bartlett | Wright City

FOR MORE INFORMATION, EMAIL [HWOOD@CHOCTAWNATION.COM](mailto:HWOOD@CHOCTAWNATION.COM) 580.642.6073

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

**THE BEST WEEK OF YOUR LIFE**  
**BERTRAM BOBB**  
**BIBLE CAMP**  
**KIDS AND TEEN SUMMER CAMP**

For more information, visit <https://bbbcamp.org>, email [jerry@bbbcamp.org](mailto:jerry@bbbcamp.org) or scan the QR code.

**LIFE IS BETTER WITH BLOOD DONORS**

Every two seconds, someone in our community urgently needs blood. This could be a child battling cancer, a trauma victim, a patient undergoing surgery, or someone with a chronic illness.

Imagine the hope, relief and second chance your donation can bring them and their families.

By becoming a blood donor, you can become a lifeline for those who desperately need it.

Join the Annual Blood Drive Challenge and help save a life.

**Biskinik Announcement Guidelines**

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

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

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

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

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

Mail to: Biskinik  
 P.O. Box 1210  
 Durant, OK 74702  
 or email: [biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)

*Gary Batton* Chief  
*Jack Austin Jr.* Assistant Chief

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

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

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

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

Ingram accepted into 2+2 BFA Joint Program

Emily Ingram of Ada, Oklahoma, was recently accepted into the prestigious 2+2 BFA Musical Theater Joint Program. The BFA degree program offers qualified students the opportunity to combine a liberal arts education at Eckerd College with two years of professional conservatory theatre training at Circle in the Square Theatre School, located in the Broadway district of New York City.

Candidates may earn one of two degrees granted by Eckerd College: either a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Theatre or a BFA in Musical Theatre. Only 12 students are accepted into this program each year.



Fobb earns Masters from University College Cork

Kiera Morgan Fobb was conferred an MA in Sociology of Sustainability and Global Challenges with First Honors on March 6, 2024 at the University College Cork, Ireland.

Her Master's thesis, "Indigenous Perspectives for Equitable Climate Action", reflected her research aims to bridge the gap between the understanding that Indigenous peoples are specifically vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and possess vital knowledge on land stewardship and fostering healthy and sustainable relationships with the Earth, and the inaction of international NGOs and governments alike in tackling any meaningful change or provision of power and platforms for Indigenous people to develop and implement climate solutions on their lands. Looking deeper into how these narratives around nature are constructed and the impacts of these cultural narratives on Indigenous sustainability methods. The aim is that this research will serve to better inform climate organizing and discussions on decolonizing sustainability as well as promote centering Indigenous voices in the formulation and management of sustainability initiatives.

Pictured are Kiera M. Fobb, Skylee Glass and Aurianna Jewel Joines.



Brock signs with Murray State

Choctaw tribal member and local cowgirl Pakanli Brock signed her Letter of Intent to Rodeo for Murray State College on Monday, March 4, 2024, at the Choctaw Nation Community Building in Talihina, Oklahoma. Pakanli is a member of Gifted & Talented, The National Society of High School Scholars, a recipient of SEOBDA for four years, and a Principal's Honor Role. Pakanli will be graduating high school, already having earned 21 college credit hours. She played basketball for five years, track for five years, softball for four years, band for four years and cheer for four years. She is a member of The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, The Oklahoma Youth Rodeo Association, Project Rise, Talihina Round-up Club, Talihina FFA and 4H.

After graduation, Pakanli will be joining the Murray State College Rodeo Team where she will be pursuing an associate degree before going to Southwestern Oklahoma State University to earn a bachelor's degree in pre-med. Pakanli is considering Dental or Pharmacology school from there.

She is the daughter of Craig and Kimberly Brock and the granddaughter of Brenda Swafford, the late Ronnie Swafford, the late Tammy and Jack Brock, and the late Lee Bell.



Luke Douglas Coffman

Luke Douglas Coffman was born November 22, 2023, at the Choctaw Health Care Center in Talihina. He weighed 8 lbs., 10 and 1/2 oz. and was 20 and 1/2 inches long.

Luke is the son of Melissa and John Coffman II of Haywood and joins his big sister Ava and big brother Noah.

Luke is the grandson of Althea and Doug Johnson of Haywood, Becky Coffman of Krebs and the late John Coffman. He is the great-grandson of the late Jim and Marie Gibson, Patricia Johnson and the late Grover Johnson, the late Joyce Dorvee and the late Wayne Myers, the late Jimmy and Sadie Coffman and Elizabeth Ann Cook.



Bevel inducted into OK Law Enforcement Hall of Fame

Choctaw Tom Bevel was inducted into the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Museum & Hall of Fame.

The ceremony was held at the Oklahoma History Center on March 9, 2024.

Bevel retired as a Captain from the Oklahoma City Police Department in June 1996.

He was the commander of the Homicide, Robbery, Missing Persons, and Major Unsolved Case Units. During his career, he studied forensic science in London, England, at Hendon Police College, The Met Laboratory, and London Medical Hospital.

He has co-authored five forensic textbooks that are used for certifications in Crime Scene Reconstruction and Bloodstain Pattern Analysis. He has served as a crime scene consultant to nine foreign countries and all U.S. States, except Rhode Island.

He is the President of Bevel, Gardner & Associates (BGA), a forensic consulting group with analysts in Boston, Atlanta, Oklahoma City, Denver and Seattle.



Sisters visit Kindred Spirits

In celebration of Emma Zeigler's graduation from University of Nevada, Las Vegas with a Bachelors Degree in Mechanical Engineering, sisters Katherine and Sarah McCrea with daughters Emma Zeigler and Ann Dameron traveled to Ireland and visited the Kindred Spirits Sculpture in Cork, Ireland (the sister to the Eternal Heart Sculpture at the Choctaw Nation Capitol).

The sculpture is a "tribute to the incredible generosity the Choctaw Nation showed the Irish people during the Great Famine" of 1847. The experience left us feeling gratitude and pride for being members of a community that was so empathetic and generous to another's suffering, only 16 years after their own great suffering on the "Trail of Tears".



Beth Brown honored as Alignable's Local Business Person of the Year

Shine Social Co., a leading force in innovative social media marketing for small businesses, is proud to announce that its founder, Beth Brown, has been named the Alignable Local Business Person of the Year for Edmond, Oklahoma, for an impressive third year in a row. This prestigious award recognizes local business leaders who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to supporting their peers and communities through both challenging times and periods of recovery.

Beth's dedication to her team, encouraging community engagement, and sharing innovative social media strategies has positioned Shine Social Co. as a beacon for small businesses navigating the complexities of today's economic landscape. Her work exemplifies the spirit of collaboration and resilience, earning her recognition among peers and industry experts.

"This honor highlights our commitment to fostering growth and collaboration within the small business community," said Beth. "It's a reflection of our team's passion and the strong support network we've built together."

Shine Social Co. continues to lead in providing social media marketing solutions that empower businesses to thrive.



**LAWN CARE SERVICES FOR TRIBAL MEMBERS**

APPLICATION NOW OPEN

- Must be between 18 and 64 years old with an ambulatory disability or 65 and older at the time the application is submitted
- Must meet income guidelines for the household
- Must be a tribal member residing in the Choctaw Nation's reservation boundaries
- Must be a homeowner or rental tenant, must be responsible for own lawn care
- Other restrictions may apply

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [CHOCTAWNATION.COM/CHAHTAACHVFFA](https://CHOCTAWNATION.COM/CHAHTAACHVFFA)

Choctaw Nation Housing Authority

**LEARNING COMMUNITIES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SERVICES**

High School Student Services is excited to introduce an innovative approach to education through its Learning Communities program! The program offers a collaborative learning environment, interdisciplinary approaches, dedicated mentorship, engaging activities and personal growth opportunities. Students can earn industry-specific certificates, focus on career development, receive recognition and participate in monthly seminars. HSSS Learning Communities blend academics and practical experiences to help students succeed in their chosen fields!

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Choctaw Nation High School Student Services

Valdez turns 18



Siencana May Valdez celebrates her 18th birthday on May 15, 2024 and her graduation, magna cum laude, from Trinity High School in Whitesville, Kentucky on May 17, 2024. Siencana ran JV cross county,

competed in E-sports, rallied with the Spirit Club and was a member of the THS Dance Team.

Outside school Siencana loves riding her dirt bike, spoiling her cats, and creating commissioned digital art. She attended the Commonwealth Honors Academy last summer at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky and will be attending college there starting this fall on a CHA scholarship. She plans to pursue a degree in digital arts and editing.

Jahnna and Jesse Valdez, her parents, and her big sister, Sierra Valdez, wish her an amazing birthday, love, and all the best in the next phase of her life!

Broswell turns 13



The family of Hunter Broswell wishes him the happiest 13th birthday and many, many more to come!

At school, he is learning computer programming and robotics. Hunter also plays trumpet in the band and hopes to be in the drum line next year. He also plays piano, guitar and drums. Hunter is into cross country and loves to run.



Porter graduates from Cameron

Jacob Porter is graduating from Cameron University in May, with a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology.

As a PLUS Scholar, Jacob developed valuable leadership principles from excellent mentors, and also earned a professional certification in Information Systems Analysis. Upon graduation, he will pursue a career in Information Security.

Jacob is grateful for the support of the Choctaw Nation throughout his academic career, and will wear the Choctaw Graduation Stole with honor at his Commencement.



Emert appointed to National Advisory Council

Choctaw Nation tribal member Mason Emert, MPH has been appointed to the National Advisory Council (NAC) for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The council began meeting March 2024 with Emert serving for the next two years.

Emert, epidemiologist for the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA) Public Health Department, is dedicated to understanding communicable diseases and educating the public about prevention and treatment. In his role at CNHSA, he researches the diseases facing the Choctaw Nation Reservation and any disparities as it relates to Native Americans. Throughout these past winter months, he tracked cases of respiratory diseases to keep CNHSA providers aware of spikes in occurrences of each disease.

"Mason is an excellent example of the Nation investing in our tribal members' educational pursuits, and then to leadership roles serving our Nation and all of Indian Country," says Sara Jane Smallwood-Cocke, senior government affairs strategist.

The National Advisory Council (NAC) for Healthcare Research and Quality is a 20-member panel providing advice and recommendations to AHRQ's director and to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on priorities for a national health services research agenda.

"I'm always looking for ways to give back to my tribe and community," says Emert. "Serving on this council will give me the latitude to make tangible progress to obtaining real public health on our Choctaw Nation reservation."

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# More than an outdoorsman

By Kellie Matherly

American poet and essayist Gary Snyder once wrote, “Nature is not a place to visit. It is home.” For many, outdoor life is more than a getaway from the bustle of modern life. It brings a sense of peace and comfort that cannot be replaced or replicated.

Even though he grew up in Oklahoma City, Grant Brittan is one of those people who is most at home in the woods, lakes, and rivers of Southeastern Oklahoma. As a boy, he spent most of his summers with his mother’s family on Lake Eufaula in Pittsburg County.

Grant’s grandmother, Corinne Halfmoon, attended Goodland Academy, a Native American boarding school in Hugo, Oklahoma, and he learned much of what he knows about being Choctaw from her. The family also attended the Labor Day Festival every year and attended a Choctaw church in the area.

Young Grant also learned to love the great outdoors during these summer visits. He spent a lot of time hunting, fishing, and practicing archery with his grandfather.

It was during his time as a film student in New York City that Grant first heard of the Choctaw Nation’s inaugural Wildland Fire Module. The team was established to help with fuels mitigation and wildfire suppression, not just in the Choctaw Nation but anywhere they are called to help. Grant made plans to come home for training in Talihiina that summer.

“It’s great if you really want to get in nature. You stay out for two or three days with bare necessities. Plus, you get to ride in helicopters, which I had never done before,” said Grant.

He ended up returning to work with the Wildland Fire Module for three summers, traveling to Washington, Idaho, Colorado, and several other western states.

“You get to see parts of the country you’ve never seen before,” he said.



Even though he grew up in Oklahoma City, Grant Brittan is one of those people who is most at home in the woods, lakes, and rivers of Southeastern Oklahoma, and the earth.



Choctaw Nation Photos

For Grant Brittan, being Choctaw is all about being connected—with family, community, God, and the earth. Hear more about his life as an outdoorsman.

When he wasn’t fighting wildfires and camping under the stars, Grant was preparing for his career in the entertainment industry. As a budding filmmaker and actor, Grant learned what it takes to tell great stories in front of and behind the camera.

His studies, and perhaps his sense of adventure, eventually led him to work as a stuntman on the set of *Thunderheart*, a feature film starring Val Kilmer as a Native American FBI agent who works to solve a murder on the Sioux reservation.

“All I did was car chases through the Badlands of South Dakota,” he said. Although he is humble about his stunt work, he had to admit, “It was fun.”

Film work is just one facet of Grant’s time in entertainment, however. He served as the assistant stage manager for the American Indian Dance Theatre, a touring troupe of professional performing artists who present the songs and dances of Native Americans and First Nations people throughout the U.S., Canada, and overseas.

After over 20 years in the industry, Grant has recently retired, but he still works on film projects now and again, including some acting roles in commercials. He’s also working on a book he hopes to turn into a screenplay.

No matter how busy he is, however, Grant still makes time to be outside. Training his rescued German shepherd helps, and he loves to visit Broken Bow and the Blue River when he can.

“It’s just time to get away from the phones and the digital barrage that hits people every day,” said Grant. His sixteen-year-old son often accompanies him on these trips.

Grant’s retirement plans are full of outdoor fun and more work in the film industry. He recently bought a van that he is converting into a camper for traveling and being at home anywhere he roams. He also has a role in an upcoming film in Phoenix.

## Supporting the Native Language Fair Honor Fund Honoring the legacy of three Choctaw language teachers

**NORMAN, Okla.** – To help sustain Native languages across the state and the nation, the Sam Noble Museum and the Department of Native American Studies in the Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oklahoma have launched a new Native Language Fair Honor Fund.

Established to honor past Native speakers, ancestors, and relatives of the past, present, and future who have worked closely with the language fair, the goal is to continue their legacy by creating a sustainable future for the fair. This fund contributes toward an endowment for the event that will generate consistent and stable funding, enabling the museum to provide students with a venue to share their Native languages and

support broader language revitalization across Oklahoma.

At least 14 elders who have been longtime supporters of the language fair have passed away in recent years.

Their loss is deeply felt both at the museum and in their communities. The goal is to carry on their legacies and their passion for the preservation of Native cultures and languages through the fair.

To make a contribution to the Native Language Fair Honor Fund, visit <https://samnoblemuseum.ou.edu/honor-fund/>

To honor a specific elder, select “this is an honorary or memorial gift.” Information about the specific individuals honored through the fund will be made available online and at the language fair.

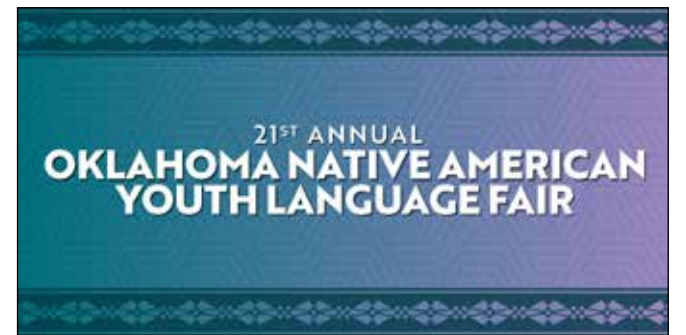


Photo Provided

Brenda Samuels, Curtis Billy and Virginia Espinoza were all apart of the 2024 Native Language Fair Honor Fund honorees list. The three language teachers helped to preserve and teach the Choctaw language for many years, leaving behind a legacy worth honoring.



Brenda Samuels

Brenda Taylor Samuels was Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian and an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She was raised in Bently, Oklahoma by her maternal grandmother, Virgie Peters. This is where she spoke the Chahta language fluently, learning and living the Chahta culture.

In 2001, The Choctaw Nation wanted to preserve the Chahta Language; she and her husband Norris Samuels signed up to become community teachers within the Oklahoma City area. Brenda spoke the Mississippi Chahta dialect. During the summers, she would travel back to the Mississippi reservations to stay immersed in the language and culture. During one of her visits after seeing the youth on the reservations speak fluently and immersed in the Chahta culture, it was laid on her heart to create a separate class for the youth within the Oklahoma City area, so she started Chahta Ulla. She would have her adult and youth language classes involved in local parades such as Red Earth and St. Patrick’s Day due to the relationship of the Chahta People and Ireland during Ireland’s famine. Her Adult language classes would take annual summer trips back to Mississippi Reservations during their Choctaw Festivals. Brenda made sure that Chahta Youth in the Oklahoma City area would be involved when it came to Native recognition, most importantly when it came to Choctaw Nation. The youth language class, Chahta Ulla, would participate in the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair annually, placing in several divisions. They were invited to sing and participate at the groundbreaking of First Americans Museum and would travel to Southeastern Oklahoma to Choctaw Nation for youth award banquets. She started the first summer Youth Immersion Language Camp in the Oklahoma City area. All week, they would learn the language, sing tribal hymns, experience traditional foods, and create beautiful native artwork. The Children’s Immersion Language

Camp was open to any youth who wanted to learn.

In 2002, The University of Oklahoma had a position open for a Choctaw Language Instructor. Henry Willis along with Leroy Sealy, approached Brenda to recruit her for the instructor teaching position. She started teaching at the University of Oklahoma that May. She made teaching the language enjoyable, often introducing these college students to a native culture they had never been introduced before. It was not only about learning the language, but it also included the history of the Chahta people and introduction to traditional tribal foods.



Curtis “Tody” Billy

Curtis “Tody” Billy (1951-2023) was a lifelong educator, fluent Choctaw speaker, culture carrier, artist, church elder, and youth mentor. His bachelor’s degree and master’s degrees were earned from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, Oklahoma. He was blessed to be able to spend his career serving his community in Broken Bow, OK and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in Durant.

Curtis served on the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair board for 18 years and took a group of students to the first language fair in 2003 in his role as Indian Education Coordinator and Guidance Counselor for Broken Bow Public Schools. He was passionate about preserving the Choctaw language and culture. He also taught language classes at Southeastern Oklahoma State University through the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma School of Choctaw Language until his passing.

His legacy lives on through many televised and print interviews. The Curtis “Tody” Billy stickball field in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, was named in his honor. Regarding language and culture, he was quoted as saying “knowing the history and the culture are good, but the language is something that defines us as a people.” He was a firm believer in the language being used to pass on traditions and stories. He never hesitated to impart cultural or spiritual knowledge to others.

Family and friends will forever cherish the many memories of his wisdom, wit, knowledge, and spirituality.



Virginia Espinoza

Dr. Rev. Virginia Espinoza was an accomplished and much beloved Choctaw language teacher and pastor.

She grew up in Boswell, Oklahoma and attended Boswell School. She earned a degree in teaching from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and soon began working for the Choctaw Nation’s Head Start program in Harmony and Durant.

From 2001 onward, she taught the Choctaw language at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters. She considered it a privilege to teach the language. She brought her students to the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair for many years, and also participated in the Fair as a judge.

Virginia was also known for her service to the Presbyterian Church. She earned a doctorate in theology from Memphis Theological Seminary in 1998. She went on to pastor at many churches throughout Southeastern Oklahoma to the time of her passing. She also served on many Presbyterian Church committees.

Virginia is remembered by those who knew her for her dedication to her faith and teaching the Choctaw language.

Visit <https://samnoblemuseum.ou.edu/honor-fund> for more information.



**Oliver James Forwoodson**

Oliver James Forwoodson passed away March 14, 2024.

Oliver was born Jan. 25, 2024, in Talihina, Okla., to Ethan Forwoodson and Amber White.

He is survived by his parents; brother Harvey Forwoodson; grandparents Louise Varela, Steven Forwoodson, Kathy White, and Jim and Shannon White; along with a host of other family members.

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

**Henrietta G. Cheshier**

Henrietta G. "Shem" Cheshier, 86, passed away Jan. 17, 2024.

Shem was born Feb. 18, 1937, in Boswell, Okla., to Dee Pierce and Lillie (Belvin) Pierce.

She was preceded in death by daughter Lillian Walls; a brother; and her parents.

Shem is survived by son Floyd Dee Halderman; daughter Carmen Loftin; son-in-law David Walls; sister Maxine McCoy; six grandchildren; numerous great-grandchildren; and many other family and friends.

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

**Kenneth Lee Kirkwood**

Kenneth Lee Kirkwood, 75, passed away March 7, 2024.

Kenneth was born Oct. 27, 1948, in California, to Chester and Pauline (Furlong) Kirkwood.

He is survived by his wife Jean Kirkwood; children Kenneth Kirkwood II, Jonathan Kirkwood, and Molly Gunning; grandchildren Kenneth Kirkwood III, Nathan Kirkwood, Jonathan Kirkwood, Jolee Kirkwood, Emma Gunning, Claire Gunning and Madeleine Gunning.

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

**Elizabeth Mae Abel**

Elizabeth Mae Hampton Abel, 84, passed away March 8, 2024.

Elizabeth was born Sept. 5, 1939, in Wilburton, Okla., to Charlie Chun and Vineria Hampton.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Alvin; son Robert; brother Vernon; sister Dianne; grandson Duane Yandell; and great-grandchildren Emily Alvarez, and Teigan and Austin Close.

Elizabeth is survived by her children Jerry Abel, Katherine Abel, Wendell Abel, Alana Yandell and spouse David, and William Abel; sisters Joann Fink and Wanda Elliot; 13 grandchildren; 27 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

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

**Charles Floyd Bunch**

Charles Floyd Bunch, 84, passed away Dec. 22, 2023.

Charles was born Sept. 28, 1939, in Centrahoma, Okla., to Floyd and Ether Bunch.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Karen Bunch; and grandson Jack Hasse Duran.

Charles is survived by his children Melissa Bunch, Chris Hasse, and Scott (Bethany Flammia) Hasse; daughter-in-law Candace Hasse; grandchildren Ariel (Adam) Hasse-Zamudio and Kyle Hasse; his sweetie Florence Carroll and her children Kyle (Moon) McMillan and Carrie (Paul) Meredith; sisters Theda (Spike) Mitchell, Ruby (Bunky) Larive, Judy Vail, and Imajean McCarter.

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

**Wanda Ludlow Ward**

Wanda Ludlow Ward, 75, passed away March 23, 2024.

Wanda was born April 2, 1948, in Ludlow, Okla., to Randell Lewis and Minnie Bond Ludlow.

She was preceded in death by her parents; daughter Dorothy Ludlow; granddaughter Morgan Ward; brothers Floyd Ludlow and Kenneth Ludlow; and sisters Edith Samuels, Juanita Ludlow, and Shirley Lowman.

Wanda is survived by sons Randy Ludlow and Ramsey Ward; brothers Clifford Ludlow, Austin Ludlow, and Marvin Ludlow; sisters Eula Johnson and Carol Burge of; seven grandchildren; several great-grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

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

**Jerome Loren Dixon**

Jerome Loren Dixon, 51, passed away March 25, 2024.

Jerome was born Nov. 21, 1972, in Stigler, Okla., to Jerry and Sandra (Belt) Dixon.

He was preceded in death by his nephew Tristen Dixon; grandparents Fred Dixon, Denver and Faye Carey, and Charles and Margie Belt; and uncle, Rick Belt.

Jerome is survived by his wife Tara Dixon; daughters Jordan Saldaña and spouse Joseph, and Ashley Ellison and partner Toby; sons Jacob Dixon and spouse Debra, Justin Dixon and partner Josi, Dalton Ellison and grand dog Pete; grandmother Pat Dixon; his mother; his father and spouse Gale; brother Shane Dixon; sister Nikki Dixon; grandchildren Gentry, Shmitt, Zakari, Jacob, Christine, Silas, Phyl, Carrie, and Tiffany; niece Alex Dixon and partner Hunter; nephews Stephen Dixon, Hunter Perkins, and Craig Hart.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home and Crematory](#).

**Kenneth Ray Swink**

Kenneth Ray Swink, 87, passed away March 15, 2024.

Kenneth was born Aug. 22, 1936, in Swink, Okla., to Jourdan W. Swink and Sally Austin (Powers) Swink.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife Mary Louise (Benefield) Swink; brothers Albert Swink and David Swink; and sisters Dorah Jean Swink and Retha Swink.

Kenneth is survived by sons Steven Swink and spouse Allison, and Ben Swink and spouse Lisa; grandchildren Joshua Swink, Tyler Swink, and Kylee Swink; and brothers J.W. Swink and Bill Swink.

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

**William Austin Graves**

William "W.A." "Bill" Austin Graves, 87, passed away March 10, 2024.

Bill was born Oct. 8, 1936, in Alex, Okla., to William Austin Graves and Addie Bell (Airington) Graves.

He was preceded in death by his parents, wife Shirley Ann Dale Graves, and siblings Bonnie Hamilton, Leroy Graves, and Maynard Graves.

Bill is survived by his children Renee Townzen and spouse Doug, Greg Graves and spouse Leigh, and Stacey Hood; sister Wanda Scribner; grandchildren and spouses Dionne and Michael Rainey, David Townzen, Denae and Josh Haney, Kaycee Graves, Kyle and Keely Graves, Bron Deal, Kristi and Bryan Hilderbrand, and Kiara Deal; great-grandchildren Desiree, Milo, Piper, Owen, Elliott, Mozzie, Jordan, Evan, Rhyann, Daethan, and Hunter; great-great-granddaughter Lilah; and other extended family and friends.

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

**Lola Mae Wesley**

Lola Mae Wesley, 59, passed away March 28, 2024.

Lola was born April 18, 1964, in Dequeen, Ark., to Williamson Willis and Lydia Ann Jessie Wesley.

She was preceded in death by her parents; son Jade Wesley; sisters Clea Wesley and Rozella Wesley Putnel; and niece Christina Willis.

Lola is survived by her brother Willis Wesley; sisters Joy Recendiz, Gwen Wesley and spouse Mark Pond, and Wilma Wesley; nieces and nephews Kim Tims, Kris Tisho, Mark Allen Wesley, William Pond, Megan Noah, and Cody Noah; and a host of other relatives and friends.

For the full obituary, please visit [Bowser Family Funeral Home - Broken Bow](#).

**Mary Ann Spradling**

Mary Ann Spradling, 89, passed away March 28, 2024.

Mary Ann was born Sept. 23, 1934, in Broken Okla., to Russell Oren McCoy and Alice (Boyd) McCoy.

She was preceded in death by her father; dad and mother George and Alice Cooper; and brothers Ben McCoy and T.J. McCoy.

Mary Ann is survived by her husband Jack; daughter Marilyn Presley and spouse Danny; stepson Jackie Spradling; grandchildren Jared Roll, Adam Roll and spouse Gailyn; Zach Roll and fiancée Sydney, Montana Farmer and spouse C.J., Honey Ray Schaumburg and spouse Shawn, and Chris Spradling and spouse Cassie; great-grandchildren Eli, Nova, McCree, Maverick, Ryker, and Emmi; brother Irman Gray and spouse Judy; Mike McCoy; sister-in-law Sandy McCoy; and special caregiver now family Taylor Bolster.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home and Crematory](#).

**Dixie Ellen Findley**

Dixie Ellen Findley, 85, passed away March 31, 2024.

Dixie was born March 4, 1939, in Purcell, Okla., to Everett and Elsie (Jacoway) Miller.

She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers Charles Miller and Raymond Miller; and sisters Margaret Smith, Velma Brewer, and Cleo Burton.

Dixie is survived by her partner Leon Knighten; son Donald Findley and spouse Susan; daughters Brenda Gower, Darlene Findley, and Cheryl Ann Mainka; grandchildren Christopher Findley, Jessie Findley, Kylie Graham, Katie Cooper, Josh Gower, Jake Gower, Brandi Burton, and Dakota Gibson; great-grandchildren Makenna Cooper, Lincoln Cooper, Caroline Gower, Sydney Mainka, and Zane Mainka.

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

**Billy Blaylock**

Billy Blaylock, 86, passed away April 5, 2024.

Billy was born Jan. 3, 1938, in Rosedale, Okla., to Willis Henry and Pearl Lee (Rogers) Blaylock.

He was preceded in death by his wife Helen; his parents; brothers Jim, Joe, and Doyle Blaylock; sister Dixie Coffey; daughter-in-law Tracey (Gass) Blaylock; and granddaughter Grace Blaylock.

Billy is survived by his son Douglas; daughter Rhonda Hurst and spouse Roger; stepdaughter Angela Welton; stepson Joel "Buddy" Hughes; bonus son Bobby Reynolds; grandchildren Karry Christy and spouse Stephen, Kyle Hurst and spouse Melissa, Audra Cox and spouse Brent, Michael Blaylock, Joshua Hurst, Spencer Bennett, Jacey Mounger and spouse Thomas, Caleb Hurst and spouse Kelsey, and Shakota Yearly; and 29 great-grandchildren.

For the full obituary, please visit [Mallory-Martin Funeral Home and Crematory](#).

**Anna Marie Hibma**

Anna Marie Hibma, 72, passed away March 26th, 2024.

Anna was born March 17, 1951, in Rock Rapids, Iowa, to Max Cheshier and Gwendolyn (McCarty) Cheshier.

She was preceded in death by her parents; uncle Leroy "Jud" Cheshier; and nephew Michael Eachen.

Anna is survived by her husband Raymond; son Erin Hibma and spouse Heather; daughter Stacey Pletcher and spouse JB; grandchildren Joie, Caelun, Gwen, Hannah, Ethan, Gabrielle, and Tory; sister Mary Eachen and spouse Charles.

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

**Patrick David McCain**

Patrick David McCain, 57, passed away April 2, 2024.

Patrick was born May 25, 1966, in Oklahoma City, Okla., to Wayne McCain and Peggy Doty.

He was preceded in death by his birth parents; brother Eddy McCain; sister Connie Doty; nephew Shane McCain; and son Jeremy McCain.

Patrick is survived by his father Conrad Doty; sons Daniel McCain and spouse Jody, and Dallas McCain and spouse Danielle; six grandchildren; sister Cheryl Drake and spouse James; brother Darrell McCain and spouse Teresa; sisters Sheila Westphal, Rhonda McCain, and Starlene White; brothers Stacy McCain and Jay Doty and spouse Andrina; numerous nieces and nephews; and many other family and friends.

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

**Howard Dean Sumner**

Howard Dean Sumner, 87, passed away Feb. 28, 2024.

Howard was born July 30, 1936, in Non, Okla., to Lois Tollett and Sandford Sumner.

He was preceded in death by his wife Sarah Merline "Merl" (Lane) Sumner; daughter Ronda Lee (Craig) Davila; son Edward Ray Craig; grandson Wayne Howard Gillespie; and grandson David Eugene Craig.

Howard is survived by his daughter Katherine Craig; granddaughter Allison (Davila) Johnson and spouse Clinton; grandson Aaron Craig and spouse Nikole; grandson Bruce Johnston; great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces, nephews, family and friends.

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

**Richard Lester Woolsey**

Richard Lester Woolsey, 80, passed away March 1, 2024.

Richard was born Aug. 29, 1943, in Sanger, Calif., to James W. Woolsey and Willie Juanita Woolsey.

He is survived by his wife Ruth; daughters Amy and Jill; brothers Bill and John; sisters Jimmie Lou and Christine; and grandchildren Chloe, Mason, Ruben, Hanna, and Owen.

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

**Dolly Dale Orr**

Dolly Dale Orr, 82, passed away Jan. 20, 2024.

Dale was born March 6, 1941, in Miller, Okla., to Lester and Opal Oldham.

She was preceded in death by her husband Daniel Orr; daughter Truby Roxanne Weaver; her parents; and brothers Billy Harold, Troy Lee, and Carl Albert Oldham.

Dale is survived by daughter Deidra Orr; seven grandchildren; and 18 great-grandchildren.

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

**Anita Louise Tisho**

Anita Louise Tisho, 69, passed away March 17, 2024.

Anita was born March 17, 1955, in Talihina, Okla., to Joseph Tonihka and Elouise Faye Tisho.

She was preceded in death by her parents; and brother Morris Tisho.

Anita is survived by brothers and sister-in-law Samuel Tisho, and Franklin Tonihka and Janelle Wesley; sister Tammy McCarrell; several nieces and nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.

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

**Obituary Policy**

Obituary submissions are for Choctaw Nation tribal members only and are free of charge.

The Biskinik will only accept obituary notices from funeral homes.

Family members/individuals may submit funeral notices as long as the notice is from the funeral home or printed in their local newspaper through a funeral home service.

Full-length handwritten notices will not be accepted. The Biskinik strives to serve all Choctaws. Therefore, any handwritten notices received will be searched online for official funeral home notices. If none are found, efforts will be made to contact the family and make arrangements for an official notice.

Due to space limitations, there is a 150 word limit for obituaries. The online issue of the Biskinik will contain links to the full obituaries.

Send official obituary notices to:

Biskinik  
PO Box 1210  
Durant OK 74702  
or email: [biskinik@choctawnation.com](mailto:biskinik@choctawnation.com)



ITI FABVSSA

# “Pimple Mounds,” “Mima Mounds,” “Prairie Mounds,” oh my!

Mysterious mounds in the prairies of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

By Guest Contributor, J. Grant Stauffer, Ph.D.

This month, Iti Fabvssa would like to examine a common landform that still captures the imagination of many who live in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Have you noticed the round mounds in the fields as you are entering the Choctaw Cultural Center? Some people call these “tipi” mounds, but as you will see in this article, they are commonly called Pimple Mounds. Across the open fields between and around the ridges of the Ouachita Mountains, these “Pimple,” “Mima,” or “Prairie” mounds dot the landscape of Southeastern Oklahoma. While there are many technical terms for these landforms, we have referred to them as Pimple Mounds like many of our local communities do.

For over a century, people have looked upon these mounds and wondered whether they were made by human beings in the deep past or by hard-to-detect forces of nature. Within the Choctaw Nation, Pimple Mounds are typically circular to elliptical shaped domes on unplowed prairies. Most often, Pimple Mounds in Oklahoma are between 50-100 feet in diameter, 3-5 feet in height, and resemble a stretched circle when seen from above (Seifert et al. 2009:333, Figure 3; Thoburn 1931:60-62) (Figure 1). Although Pimple Mounds are found all around us, the way they came to be is still a mystery.

There are many examples of Pimple Mounds from prairies, semi-arid deserts, and river valleys around the world (Seifert et al. 2009:329-330). Even in North America we can see different types of Pimple Mounds. Archaeologist and soil scientist, Roger Saucier (1991:284), says that “geologists jokingly(?) believe that there are nearly as many ideas about the origin of pimple mounds as there are mounds themselves...but no single theory is compatible with all their observable characteristics.” In fact, investigators often examine landforms resembling Pimple Mounds all over the world to explain how the ones in Choctaw Nation came to exist.

Although it is now known that Pimple Mounds are not man-made, Oklahoma historian, Joseph Thoburn (1931:62), and archaeologist, Warren K. Moorehead (1931), once argued that Pimple Mounds were made by the “Pawnee or Arikara,” as house foundations that “would make just such a pile of earth or low circular mound.” Today, much of what we know about Pimple Mounds comes from their studies. However, they were not soil experts and misunderstood that the Pimple Mounds were indeed a natural phenomenon. While their research did not reach the correct conclusions, it did pave the way for future investigations in the understanding of these landforms. At the same time, their work promoted the idea that Pimple Mounds are “tipi” mounds; a story that would be retold across the southeast for generations.

Over the years there have been other theories on the creation of Pimple Mounds. In addition to Thoburn and Moorehead’s ideas about Pimple Mounds being Native American made, other scholars have proposed ideas for their origins that include the following: soil shrinking and swelling during dramatic temperature swings that accompanied climate changes (Knechtel 1952), ground shaking by seismic activity (i.e. earthquakes) (Berg 1990), upward ground movement through pocket gopher burrows by various animals (Horwath and Johnson 2006), sediment and rock piling from melting glaciers (Collins 1975; Mollard 2000), and as many as 20 other hypotheses (Collins 1975:209).



Figure 1. General shots of pimple mounds. (Above) Geologists core into a pimple mound in Independence County, Arkansas (Seifert et al. 2009:Figure 4). (Bottom) Pasture full of pimple mounds in Cameron Parish, Louisiana (Credit Jacob James; Copyright EcoGENESIS 2024)1.

While the origins of Pimple Mounds have been hotly debated by soil scientists and archaeologists, a more recent scientific study has offered strong evidence to support a new theory on how these natural landforms were made. This study includes Pimple Mounds found in the prominent river valleys and prairies of eastern Oklahoma, eastern Texas, Arkansas, northern Louisiana, and southwestern Missouri.

After inspecting 250 mound fields across the midcontinent, Christopher Seifert and colleagues (2009:337) concluded that Pimple Mounds were likely formed by winds—including large cyclones—that transported silt soil across the continent during extremely dry conditions between 900 and 750 years ago in Oklahoma and Texas; when the climate was undergoing drier conditions. The oldest Pimple Mounds in their study were in the Ozark Plateau of Arkansas and Missouri. Alongside this warming period were other periods of massive droughts that occurred between 7,000 and 4,000 years ago and between 2,000 and 900 years ago. They compared their field results to climate records created from fossilized plants and animals and even mineralized chemicals found in caves’ stalactites and stalagmites. Although not decisively ending the “pimple mound debate” across the century, their study enriches our understanding of the climate conditions our ancestors survived in, and perhaps even thrived in.

Why is it important to understand the origin of Pimple Mounds? Pursuing a solid explanation for their origins reveals important details about past lifeways and experiences of Native American communities. As a case in point, this study vividly illustrates what experiences were like in the deep past for our ancestors, in ways that human-made artifacts often cannot fully reveal to us. This helps explain that Native peoples living during the creation of Pimple Mounds experienced a much different climate than we have today. They experienced weather that moved soil and brought about unprecedented changes that people of the past adapted to. As shown above, there have been over 20 known explanations for the origins of Pimple Mounds—many of which have clearly been disproven. Perhaps more detailed information about these past life experiences will be revealed as more research is uncovered about the origins of Pimple Mounds. The involvement of Native American communities in this research process of understanding will be vital to its future success.

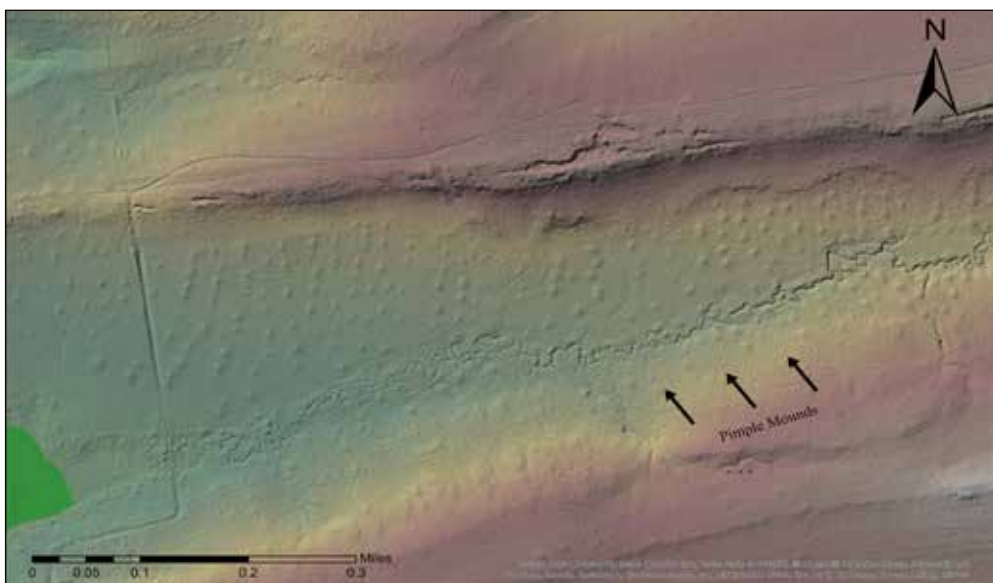


Figure 2. Bird’s eye perspective of “Pimple Mound” clusters on the Lower Canadian Hills in Pittsburg County. Bare-earth map with linear clusters of numerous “pimple mounds.” Map Courtesy of Choctaw Nation Natural Resources Dept.

**Correction Regarding Last Month’s Iti Fabvssa**

The Nvnih Waiya site can be visited only through the permission of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Tribal Government. To schedule a visit, please contact the MBCI Office of Public Information at 601-663-7532.

The special day that the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians celebrates is Nanih Waiya Day, spelled with an “a”. This is also how the MBCI spells the name of the mound.

## Housing Headlines

By Bobby Yandell

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

Choctaw tribal members living within the Choctaw Nation Reservation can apply for purchase, refinance, and construction loans. These loans have 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 and/or outside of the reservation.

Streamline home improvement loans are offered to Choctaw tribal members throughout Oklahoma. The streamline loan is up to \$20,000.00 and allows for home repairs and small home improvement projects. Appraisal and inspections may be required.

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

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

## WILDLIFE & OUTDOORS

By Matt Gamble

May is the beginning of a hunting season that many hunters hold near and dear to their hearts. It was one of the first seasons that I remember participating in as a kid and one that taught me a lot about woodsmanship. This season also provides some fine meat for dumpings and gravy. Have you guessed this season yet? Squirrel! Fox and Gray Squirrels are abundant in the Choctaw Reservation and much of our public lands hold great opportunities.

Squirrel season runs from May 15 through February 28, 2025. The daily limit is 25 Fox and Gray Squirrels combined per day. If you really want to have fun, you can combine a squirrel hunt and a day of fishing. Slowly easing down a stream, creek, or river is a great way to experience both activities at the same time. A light .22 rifle or .410 shotgun carried with a light action spinning reel will give you the best of both worlds. Squirrels often congregate on riparian areas, often ones that contain excellent stream fishing for bass and sunfish.

Turkey season will wrap up on May 16. As I am writing this article, we just finished the youth season and are seeing harvest numbers come in. Our biologists are seeing an increase in jake (first-year adult males) numbers in the population, which indicates there was reproduction last year. As we move forward, we will continue to work with turkey biologists from all over the state to analyze harvest and survey data. Remember, it is critical that we receive that harvest data. Biologists use trends in harvest data to look at recruitment in the population. By reporting your harvest in the Chahta Achvffa membership portal, you are ensuring that biologists have the best information available to make informed decisions regarding turkey management. Turkey seasons and the sound of a gobble resonating throughout the woods is one of my favorite things in the outdoors. Let’s do all that we can to make sure that future generations can enjoy that as well.

Our latest edition of the Choctaw Nation Big Game Harvest Report is available online. Go to <https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2023-24big-game-harvest-report.pdf> to read it. You may request a written copy from our department at [wildlife@choctawnation.com](mailto:wildlife@choctawnation.com). We have a limited supply so hurry to get yours today.

Remember to take a kid hunting and fishing and make memories that will last a lifetime.

Choctaw Nation

Housing Authority

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Choctaw Nation Wildlife Conservation

# Treat Yourself: Self Care is Essential to Mental Health

By Kendra Germany-Wall

When it comes to mental health, how you treat yourself is essential. Experts agree that self-care promotes wellbeing, prevents disease, and improves health outcomes.

Self-care can take on many forms, from taking the time to do things you enjoy or vacations to simply taking the time to breathe or meditate. Even the most minor acts of self-care can greatly impact your mental health and wellbeing.

Here are some self-care tips from the National Institute of Mental Health:

## Eat Healthy, Regular Meals and Stay Hydrated

A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus throughout the day. Pay attention to your intake of caffeine and alcohol and how they affect your mood and wellbeing—for some, decreasing caffeine and alcohol consumption can be helpful.

The Choctaw Nation offers several nutritional programs to help its members.

**Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program** - Eligible seniors in the Choctaw Nation service area can receive \$50 in benefits that can be exchanged for fresh fruits and vegetables from authorized area farmers.

**Children's Nutrition Programs** - Provides a bag of shelf-stable meals to children who are in need at the Grab and Go locations, as well as our approved feeding site that children attend.

**Senior Nutrition** - Provides meals, information, referral, transportation, wellness activities and arts and crafts to Native American elders.

**WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program** - A USDA-funded program that provides local, fresh fruits and vegetables to WIC participants.

**Nutrition Services** - Helping navigate healthy eating practices to improve overall health and help in fighting disease.

**Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)** - A federally funded supplemental nutrition program that contributes to healthy pregnancies, healthy babies and healthy children.

**Healthy Lifestyles** - Promotes and hosts community events and advocates for policy changes that focus on physical activity, nutrition, tobacco prevention and overall healthy lifestyles.

**Healthy Aging** - Provides wellness, social services, behavioral health services, case management and providers in geriatric-specific care to assist elders achieve a higher quality of life or maintain an optimal level of functioning and wellness.

**Food Distribution Program** - Provides healthy, nutritious foods to income-eligible households.

**Summer Food Service Program** - Nutritious meals offered at various locations for all children under the age of 18.

**CDC National Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP)** - A lifestyle change program to help participants prevent type 2 diabetes.

**Diabetes Wellness Center** - Designed to treat diabetic patients for symptoms arising from their disease in a safe, comfortable environment with certified diabetes educators throughout the reservation.

**Masali Program** - The Masali Program was created by Wellness Center, doctors and clinic administrators to help lead patients to a healthy, more productive life. This program is designed to promote mobility, improved glucose levels, improved weight management, improved flexibility, improved fitness levels, and improved diet and lifestyle.

When it comes to eating healthy and staying hydrated, several apps help track and maintain goals.

Apps like NOOM and Weight Watchers offer paid plans, but there are also free options like MyFitnessPal and Fooducate to help track and maintain food and nutrition goals.

As for hydration, according to the Centers for Disease Control, getting enough water every day is essential for your health. Drinking water can prevent dehydration, a condition that can cause unclear thinking, result in mood change, cause your body to overheat, and lead to constipation and kidney stones.

Sugary drinks like soda and sports and energy drinks are the leading sources of added sugars in the American diet.

According to the National Library of Medicine, intake of sweet food, beverages and added sugars has been linked with depressive symptoms in several populations.

Water is proven to help keep a normal temperature, lubricate and cushion joints, protect the spinal cord and other sensitive tissues, and get rid of wastes through urination, perspiration and bowel movements.

For those who struggle with water intake, apps like WaterMinder are an excellent way to help stay on track. Or even a bottle with goal marks written on it can help keep those hydration goals moving.

## Get Regular Exercise

Just 30 minutes of walking every day can boost your mood and improve your health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so don't be discouraged if you can't do 30 minutes at one time.

The Choctaw Nation Wellness Centers offer a wide range of services to communities throughout the Choctaw Nation.

Each facility offers top-of-the-line fitness equipment and a wide variety of fitness classes. The Wellness Center also conducts comprehensive fitness assessments and challenges to incentivize healthy lifestyles.

Group classes such as CrossFit, yoga and spin are available, as well as one-on-one training with a certified trainer. The Wellness Centers are designed to help members reach their goals however they feel comfortable reaching them.



Stock Photo

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, self-care can play a role in maintaining your mental health and help support your treatment and recovery if you have a mental illness.

For those who are just starting their wellness journey and might be a little nervous, Autumn Benson, Masali Program Coordinator at the Durant Wellness Center, has some words of encouragement.

"We all have been there. For anyone who is just starting to exercise for the first time, going to the gym can be intimidating. Everyone comes in with the assumption that 'everyone is looking at me. I'm freaking out. They're judging me.' Usually, that's not the case. Most people are thinking the same thing and stressing about it themselves or they are just focusing on what they're doing. They're not even paying attention," explained Benson. "It's just encouraging to see more people come in, and you get to build that community."

Benson also suggests determining your big "why" is essential to getting your journey started. "Why do you want to start exercising and focusing on how you want to feel," said Benson. "How you want to show up in your life and the lives of your friends and family is more important than focusing just purely on things like weight loss and what your body will look like."

For those who are considering being more active, but have reservations about starting that journey, Benson's suggestion is to just start with moving.

"You are never too old, too big, too busy, too anything to start moving. Even just 20 minutes a day, a couple times a week, even if it's just walking—moving can make a big difference."

There are 14 locations throughout the Choctaw Nation, and hours of operation vary. To obtain a membership, visit the location nearest you. There is a one-time \$10 fee for an access card and a \$10 fee for any future card replacements.

The eligibility requirements are as follows:

- Choctaw Nation tribal members, their spouses and dependents up to age 26
- Choctaw Nation associates, their spouses and dependents up to age 26
- CDIB cardholders of a federally recognized tribe, their spouses and dependents up to age 26
- Military service members, their spouses and dependents up to age 26
- LEO, FIRE, EMT, their spouses and dependents up to age 26

For those who are older or have preexisting conditions, it is a good idea to check with your doctor before starting your journey with the wellness center. If you are a patient within the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority, your doctor can work with Wellness Center staff to make sure you are getting an exercise program that is right for you.

## Make Sleep a Priority

Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure from your phone or computer before bedtime.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, more than 50 million people in the United States have a sleep disorder. In addition, more than 100 million Americans of all ages report that they don't get an adequate amount of sleep.

The Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority offers a sleep lab at the Talihina Clinic, which provides a comfortable place for patients to sleep overnight to study their sleep disorders.

Schedule an appointment with a Choctaw Nation Family Practice doctor to determine if a sleep study is needed. Please call 918-567-7000 or 800-349-7026 for additional information.

Eligibility requirements:

- Must reside within the Choctaw Nation Service Area
- Must be at least 15 years old or 10 years old if diabetic
- Must have a medical chart with a CNHSA health facility or:
- CDIB, letter of descendancy, or tribal membership card from a federally recognized tribe
- Social security card
- Photo identification card (driver's license)
- Current insurance information such as Medicare, Medicaid, or Private Insurance

For children under 19 years of age, the following documents are required:

- Child's CDIB or a copy of either parent's CDIB
- State-issued birth certificate or hospital birth record issued by an Indian Health Service or tribal facility

## Try a Relaxing Activity

Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy, such as listening to music, reading, spending time in nature, and engaging in low-stress hobbies.

Apps like Calm and InsightTimer are designed to help users reach their inner peace through guided meditation, breathwork, sleep sounds and other relaxation tools.

According to Mindful.com. In mindfulness meditation, we're learning how to pay attention to the breath as it goes in and out and notice when the mind wanders from this task. Returning to the breath builds the muscles of attention and mindfulness. Visit <https://www.mindful.org/how-to-meditate/> for more information on how to meditate.

Relaxing means everything from mindful breathing to taking a vacation. If taking a vacation is more of what you need, visit <https://choctawcountry.com/> for ways to find your escape right here in Choctaw Country.

For more information on self care, visit <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>.

**HEAD START  
NOW ACCEPTING  
APPLICATIONS**

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

Available to all children who will be 3 or 4 years old by September 1, 2024.

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580.924.8280**

Scan to learn more about the program.

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

**APPLICATION NOW OPEN  
HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Higher Education Program application for Summer is now open.  
**Apply now through June 15.**

For more information, visit [choctawnation.com/services/higher-education](https://choctawnation.com/services/higher-education)

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

# Sometimes all it takes is love and caring, a story from Chi Hullo Li

By Chris Jennings

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, nearly 80% of Native Americans 12 and older drank alcohol at some point in their lifetime.

Of those, 21.2% reported binge drinking in the past month, which is defined as consuming five or more drinks on an occasion for men or four or more drinks on an occasion for women.

Since 2020, increases in alcohol use, binge drinking and heavy drinking have been reported across all races.

The statistics pointing to abuse at younger ages paint a stark picture. Choctaw tribal member Brandy Miller relates to that story.

For Miller, it was something of a rite of passage in her family that when you turn 16, you could go to the bar. Miller says she got a head start, though.

"I started drinking at 13 or 14 years old," explained Miller. "By the time I was 16, I had my own bar tab, and I could go in without my parents."

Miller describes herself as a good kid growing up.

"I worked full-time, went to school, and helped my parents pay the bills. I never got in trouble, so they didn't care what I did," said Miller.

Studies show that many people can live as if everything were normal. They can have a good job, pay the bills, and raise kids yet still be a functioning alcoholic. Often, it only takes one thing to send them over the edge.

That's how Miller describes herself.

"I was a functioning alcoholic pretty much my whole life," said Miller. "I went off the deep end a couple of times and tried drugs, you know, meth, cocaine, crack, pills; I tried pretty much everything but heroin."

Walking away from everything but alcohol was no problem for Miller. That's what was the real root of her problem. It was after her parents died that she says she drowned herself in a bottle until there was an intervention.

"I went to rehab, got out, did sober living and was doing great. My job sent me to Omaha, and I relapsed there. And it changed the whole course of my life," said Miller.

After her sisters filed a missing person report with the police, Miller was found having relapsed.

"For them to find out that I was drunk, they pretty much washed their hands of me," said Miller. "One sister convinced the other to give me a shot to come to Chi Hullo Li."

Chi Hullo Li, which translates to "I love you" in Choctaw, is the Choctaw Nation's residential treatment center for women in Tahihina, Oklahoma. The three-month program is open to any Choctaw member regardless of where they live and any CDIB holder that lives in Oklahoma free of charge.

Children up to age 11 can come with a parent. While at Chi Hullo Li, school-age children attend Tahihina schools, and those not in school yet go to Choctaw Nation daycare.

The goal at Chi Hullo Li is not just to treat substance abuse but the whole person. "We consider ourselves a holistic program. So, we're not looking at just substance abuse because we know that their substance abuse touches every area of their lives," said Krista Finch, the Chi Hullo Li director.

Finch says a typical day at Chi Hullo Li covers many different aspects of treatment.

"They're assigned an individual counselor that they'll have the whole time they're here that they'll see twice a week while they're here," said Finch.

Days at Chi Hullo Li are filled with group sessions covering things like relapse prevention, drug education, anxiety and depression, self-esteem, trauma, parenting and domestic violence.

Full case management services are also provided while they're residents to ensure they continue in the right direction when they leave.

"As they get closer to leaving, we're working on case management so that they have an aftercare plan for when they leave. Whether that looks like going to a sober living house after they leave here, going back to family, jobs, employment, school, or whatever they identify as their next step," said Finch. "We work hard to position them in a good place to take their next steps."

Miller, who had been to three different rehab centers in a year, says this aspect of the treatment was unique.

"They sit down with you and do a needs assessment. And then you work with them to figure out your problems like being codependent, or learning to say no, setting those boundaries," said Miller.

Miller discovered and connected with her Choctaw culture early in her stay at Chi Hullo Li. She recognized how important that was for her, so they were able to incorporate that into her treatment plan.

Culture is an integral part of treatment at Chi Hullo Li. Beading, basket making, language, and trips to significant places are all ways culture is taught. It was a trip to Wheelock Academy that was transformational for Miller.

"Three days into my stay at Chi Hullo Li, we went to Wheelock Academy, and I made the decision that I was going to move out here," Miller said.

Miller's mother grew up in Tahihina and said she felt a connection to the area.

"Being in a place where my mother grew up, I felt like I was home," said Miller. "I know it sounds cliché or weird, but I knew I wasn't going to leave."

Feeling that family connection doesn't seem like much of a stretch, given how Miller describes the staff at Chi Hullo Li.

"It's such an amazing group of people. Every single one



of them is caring, but not weak if that makes sense," Miller said. "They praise you for the good, and they're gentle on the bad. They're an amazing group of people."

Miller and Finch both commented on how one of the goals at Chi Hullo Li is showing you that it is possible to have fun being sober.

"They come in thinking that a sober life is going to be a boring life. So we try to show them that you can have a very fulfilling life and a life of sobriety," said Finch.

According to Finch, sometimes, it's a simple trip to the lake with a barbecue, and they identify that this is the first time that they've been to a lake, had the time of their lives with their children and were sober.

Miller says one of the most memorable experiences she had at Chi Hullo Li was something called resentment rocks.

"You write a resentment you've been holding onto on rocks. One of mine was my ex-husband; one of them was my parents. You put them in a backpack and carry these rocks around for a solid week," Miller explained.

After carrying the weight of the rocks for a week, Miller says they took them to Billy Creek and got rid of their resentment.

According to Miller, it was an emotional experience.

"All of us were out there crying, talking about our resentments and realizing that we were holding on to resentments towards people we created," said Miller. "Then we threw them into Billy Creek and walked away; It was intense."

Now, Miller lives in a sober living house in Durant. She's been sober for a year and is now helping others in the same position as she was by working as a Peer Recovery Support Specialist (PRSS) for the Choctaw Nation.

A PRSS is someone who has lived experience of recovery and can then support others in their own recovery process.

**PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEY**

Take the Choctaw Nation Community Health Survey and give your opinions on the availability and access to various services that provide for the welfare, safety and health of our communities.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO TAKE THE SHORT SURVEY

Choctaw Nation Public Health

Miller says she worked in the Job for the Day Program after graduating from Chi Hullo Li, but the PRSS job is what she always wanted. "PRSS' are the ones who helped me get through my darkest times. I knew in my heart that's all I wanted to do. I wanted to do what they did for me, for somebody else."

Miller is just one success story of many to come out of Chi Hullo Li. Finch attributes that to the staff in a field that traditionally sees a high turnover rate, but that is not the case there.

Finch says there's one staff member who's been at Chi Hullo Li since they opened, five of 18 staff members who have been there over 22 years, and at least five more who have been there over 15 years.

Even after being there for so long, Finch says she can't pinpoint any one profound moment. She says every person's struggle is different. "Sometimes it's the client getting their GED when they didn't think it was possible. Sometimes, it's the clients who have given up on getting their children back. But after they've done the hard work of going through our program, they're reunited with their children," Finch said. "Sometimes it's the smallest of moments that make you feel like you're making a difference."

Miller says she's proud to be able to wake up every day and work for the Choctaw Nation. "I can't even describe it. I'm so proud and humble...It makes me super proud to be a part of this, knowing how special that place is and that I'm not just sending someone to some rehab," said Miller.

Finch wants to encourage people who may be struggling.

"Recovery is possible. I think so many women who are struggling with addiction don't think that it's possible for them," said Finch. "I want them to know that they're going to receive the support, care, love and knowledge they need to live a life in recovery."

For more information about getting into Chi Hullo Li, call 918-567-2905. For the Men's Recovery Center, call 918-567-2389.

**SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

**STARTS MAY 13**  
SERVING TIMES WILL BE FROM 10:00 AM TO 1:00 PM, AND WE WILL BE PROVIDING BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND A SNACK!

MONDAY:	TUESDAY:	THURSDAY:	FRIDAY:
• Idabel • Broken Bow • Stigler • Spiro	• Durant • Atoka • Antlers	• Tahihina • Wilburton • McAlester • Calvin	• Poteau

**ALL SITES WILL BE AT THE CHOCTAW NATION COMMUNITY CENTERS EXCEPT:**

- Poteau - Donald Reynolds Community Center
- McAlester - Dream City Church
- Calvin - Old Calvin Store
- Tahihina - Alco Parking Lot
- Durant - Wellness Center

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:  
[CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/SUMMER-FOOD-SERVICE](http://CHOCTAWNATION.COM/SERVICES/SUMMER-FOOD-SERVICE)

Choctaw Nation Health Services

**WIC OFFICE LOCATIONS**

LOCATION	DAYS	HOURS
<b>Antlers</b> 580-916-5609	Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Atoka</b> 580-889-5825	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Battiest</b> 580-241-5458	1st Tuesday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Broken Bow</b> 580-584-2746	Daily   Monday – Friday (Except the 1st Tuesday & 2nd Thursday of the Month)	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Durant</b> 580-916-2100 x83517	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Heavener</b> 918-974-1820	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Hugo</b> 580-326-9707	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Idabel</b> 580-286-2510	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>McAlester</b> 918-423-6335	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Poteau</b> 918-649-1106	Daily   Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Smithville</b> 580-244-3289	1st Thursday of every month	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Spiro</b> 918-962-5134	Wednesday, Thursday & Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Stigler</b> 918-967-4211	Monday & Tuesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Talihina</b> 918-567-7000 x6792	Daily   Monday - Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm
<b>Wilburton</b> 580-642-7588	Wednesday	8:30 am – 4:00 pm
<b>Mobile Van</b> 580-380-8193	1st Tuesday – Boswell 3rd Tuesday – Coalgate 4th Tuesday – Clayton	9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Choctaw Nation Health Services

**CHOCTAW NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION**

**MARKET HOURS**  
Open 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday  
Thursday: 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

*Markets will be closed the last two days of each month for inventory.*

**May 2024**  
All markets open weekdays, April 1-26  
**Closed:** May 27, 30 and 31  
Nutrition Ed & Food Programs subject to cancellation  
Participants can request a calendar at their location.

All food demos have been postponed until further notice.

**ANTLERS** 400 S.W. "O" ST., 580-298-6443

**BROKEN BOW** 109 Chahta Rd., 580-584-2842

**DURANT** 2352 Big Lots Pkwy., 580-924-7773

**MCALESTER** 3244 Afullota Hina, 918-420-5716

**POTEAU** 106 B St., 918-649-0431

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

**Choctaw Nation Vocational Rehabilitation**

May 1	Talihina	10 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 3	Crowder	By Appointment
May 7	Wright City	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 8	Antlers	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 10	Atoka	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
May 10	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
May 14	Broken Bow	10:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 15	McAlester	10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
May 15	Stigler	By Appointment
May 21	Idabel	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 22	Poteau	11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
May 24	Atoka	8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
May 24	Coalgate	12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
April 30	Wilburton	10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

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

# Civic engagement an essential part of tribal sovereignty

By Tabatha Keton

Tribal sovereignty is the right and ability to govern ourselves as a people to support our community and future generations. It empowers us in government-to-government exchange with local, state, and federal agencies. Tribal members play a significant role in this relationship by supporting tribal sovereignty directly in their communities, including engagement with federal and state agencies, involvement in local governments and organizations, and voting in elections.

“Being involved citizens of our communities is extremely important to the Choctaw Nation,” Choctaw Chief Gary Batton said. “To maintain our tribal sovereignty and self-empowerment as a tribal nation, being engaged locally in the civic process of voting and community building only helps the tribe maintain our sovereignty and importance as a nation.”

Choctaw Nation employees represent the Choctaw Nation on many federal agencies’ advisory boards and committees, including but not limited to the Department of Homeland Security Tribal Homeland Security Advisory Council, the U.S. Treasury Tribal Advisory Committee, the Department of Labor Workforce Information Advisory Council, and the HUD Tribal Intergovernmental Advisory Committee.

Jeff Hansen, Senior Director of Community Protection, has served in numerous roles on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) ‘s National Advisory Council (NAC), including as the first Native American to serve as its chair, and on the Department of Homeland Security’s Tribal Homeland Security Council.



Photos Provided

Jeff Hansen (center) is the first ever Native American to serve as the chair of the FEMA National Advisory Council.

“Serving in these capacities has provided an opportunity for the voice of Indian country to be heard. Our recommendations have impacted Federal Indian policy and procedures and changed how the Federal government interacts with tribes during natural disasters. These changes have recognized tribal sovereignty, providing tribes a direct line to the President’s office.”

When asked about his experience serving on these committees as a Choctaw tribal member, Hansen stated, “They were eager to hear from Indian Country. We changed the narrative of how these organizations interact with native communities and developed special working groups that address the unique challenges and needs of Indian Country. They respect our tribal sovereignty and culture; this respect didn’t exist ten years ago.”

Another tribal member serving on a national committee is Mason Emert, MPH, who was appointed to the National Advisory Council (NAC) for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).



Mason Emert has been appointed to the National Advisory Council (NAC) for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Emert, epidemiologist for the Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority (CNHSA) Public Health Department, researches the diseases facing the Choctaw Nation Reservation and any disparities regarding Native Americans. Throughout these past winter months, he tracked cases of respiratory diseases to keep CNHSA providers aware of spikes in occurrences of each disease.

“I’m always looking for ways to give back to my tribe and community,” says Emert. “Serving on this council will give me the latitude to make tangible progress to obtaining real public health on our Choctaw Nation reservation.”

Closer to home on the reservation, Choctaw tribal members serve in numerous city official positions and school boards.

As the Senior Governmental Affairs Strategist, Sara Jane Smallwood-Cocke works with nearly 100 municipal and county governments on the Choctaw Nation’s reservation and recruits and trains fellow Choctaws to run for public office and apply for political appointments.

“It is important for our tribal members to have a seat at the table. One way to do that is to serve at every level of government. Local organizations and municipalities impact our everyday lives, and having members serve on these boards supports tribal sovereignty at every level.”



Sara-Jane Smallwood-Cocke and daughter Jane at her city council seat after swearing in ceremony.

Sara-Jane serves on numerous boards, including as a board member for the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals and Southeast Region Chair; and President of the Board of Trustees for the Eastern Oklahoma State College Foundation. She was also recently elected as the City Councilwoman for Ward 3 in Wilburton, Oklahoma.

Michele Frazier, recently elected to the Hugo School Board, explains how her decision to run for the school board connects to her Choctaw identity.

“Our tribal leaders and culture encourage our role as servant leaders, and for me, that meant getting involved in my local community.”

When asked for her advice to tribal members interested in running for local boards, Michele said that while running for a board position may be intimidating, it is important to step out of your comfort zone and seek out positions in your community that could use your voice.

“There was a time when tribal members didn’t have a voice, and as a people, I think we recognize the importance of being involved and supporting our communities. I was blessed to receive a lot of support from within my community and encouragement from Councilman Perry Thompson and his wife, Gail Thompson, both of whom have been examples of servant leadership in our community for many years. I am a proud Choctaw, but on the school board, I am a voice for all students.”

Public service is not the only way individuals can support tribal sovereignty in their communities. Voting in tribal, local, state, and federal elections can support and uphold tribal sovereignty in our everyday lives.

The presidential election will be held in November 2024, meaning tribal members can vote for the highest office in the United States. For more information on voting in this year’s election, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission recommends contacting your State or local election office at least seven weeks before an election to learn if you are registered to vote and what to do if you are not. For more information on how to prepare to vote in the upcoming federal elections, visit <https://www.eac.gov/voters/voters-guide-to-federal-elections>.

Individual actions like these go a long way toward supporting tribal sovereignty in our communities.

BUSINESS

## CHAHTAPRENEUR

CHIT • CHAT

Elevate Your Business Identity with the Small Business Development Graphic Logo Design Program

By Brittany Rice

Are you a Choctaw tribal member looking to establish a distinct identity for your business? Look no further! The Choctaw Nation Small Business Development Program is here to support you through its innovative Graphic Logo Design Program.

Designed specifically for Choctaw-owned businesses located within the Choctaw Nation Reservation, this program offers invaluable assistance to those looking to create a logo that truly represents their business. Whether you’re just starting out or seeking to refresh your brand image, the Small Business Development Graphic Logo Design Program provides a pathway to a unique and professional logo design at no cost.

Benefits of having a unique logo for your business include:

1. Brand Recognition: A distinctive logo sets you apart from competitors and makes your brand instantly recognizable. With the help of the Graphic Logo Design Program, you can ensure that your business stands out.
2. Professionalism: A well-designed logo communicates professionalism and credibility to your customers.
3. Emotional Connection: A unique logo has the power to evoke emotions and forge a connection with your target audience.
4. Marketing Advantage: Your logo is a key component of your marketing strategy,

appearing on everything from business cards to advertisements. By investing in a high-quality logo design through this program, you gain a powerful marketing asset that effectively promotes your business and products.

5. Community Support: By participating in this initiative, you not only benefit from professional logo design services but also contribute to the thriving ecosystem of indigenous entrepreneurship within the Choctaw community. It’s a testament to the solidarity and support that defines the Choctaw Nation’s approach to economic development.

The Choctaw Nation Small Business Development Program’s Graphic Logo Design Program offers Choctaw tribal members a unique opportunity to elevate their business identity and unlock the full potential of their entrepreneurial endeavors. Don’t miss out on this chance to stand out, connect with your audience, and propel your business to new heights!



STAY CONNECTED | [CHOCTAWSMALLBUSINESS.COM](http://CHOCTAWSMALLBUSINESS.COM)

**Choctaw Nation** Small Business Development

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SEPTEMBER 9-11, 2024

CHOCTAW CASINO AND RESORT  
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DURANT, OK 74701

TO REGISTER VISIT,  
[WWW.NJOMA.COM](http://WWW.NJOMA.COM)  
The registration deadline is September 1, 2024

Choctaw Nation Johnson-O’Malley Program

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Scan to nominate a nurse today!

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
[WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/THE-DAISY-AWARD/](http://WWW.CHOCTAWNATION.COM/THE-DAISY-AWARD/)

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association & Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund

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

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

Southeastern Oklahoma Indian Credit Association Loan  
To Be Eligible to Apply:

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

Choctaw Revolving Loan Fund  
To Be Eligible to Apply:

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

If you’re interested in applying for a loan, a representative will be at the:  
Stigler Community Center  
May 26, 2024  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.

# Do not be afraid to ask for help

By Shelia Kirven

Life can sometimes become too much, resulting in struggles and anxiety. Talking to someone can usually help, but other times, more support is needed. Recognizing signs and symptoms that may not go away quickly or make daily life possible is important.

Signs that someone may need to reach out for professional help include, but are not limited to:

- Feeling excessively sad or hopeless
- Excessive worrying, fear, or irritability
- Concentration problems
- Extreme changes in mood
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Eating too much or not enough
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Inability to manage stress
- Headaches or stomach pain without cause
- Sudden changes in appearance
- Suicidal thoughts or self-harm

Proper diagnosis and treatment can make all the difference. We don't have to feel alone or isolated. There is hope, and one call can change everything.

According to Jessie Roberts, LPC and Senior Behavioral Health Manager for Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health Wind Horse in Durant, for someone who thinks they are just not being therapy may be the answer.

"It's totally non-judgmental. It's to help the individual work through things." She stressed that if someone has suicidal thoughts, homicidal thoughts, or thoughts of harming others,

that is a serious indicator. "Reach out. Call 988. Call one of our offices. You're not a burden. There is help, and there are answers."

Choctaw Nation Behavioral Health Outpatient Clinics are staffed by professionals who assess each client's needs and develop a comprehensive treatment plan. Clinics are located throughout the Choctaw Nation reservation at Talihina, McAlester, Stigler, Poteau, Atoka, Hugo, Idabel, and Durant.

"As therapists and as health [professionals], we can't force someone to come in, but if they are vocalizing that they want to hurt themselves or hurt others, or that they just notice something about their family member that it detrimental, life or death," said Roberts. "They can do that, and they can always call for a welfare check from our Lighthouse Police."

The Choctaw Lighthouse Police's 24-hour dispatch center can be reached by calling (580) 920-7000.

"Our officers are absolutely service oriented and want to help the public we serve," said Jesse Petty, Chief of Police.

For emergency and crisis assistance, the emergency room at the Choctaw Nation Hospital in Talihina is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Urgent Recovery Centers (URC), mental health 24/7 emergency rooms, and available nationwide Home - Find-Treatment.gov are also available.

URC locations are available within the reservation boundaries.

Individuals can also call or text 988, a direct, three-digit lifeline that connects the caller with a trained behavioral health professional who can assess the situation and arrange for needed resources.

Whether you just need to talk to



someone or need immediate crisis assistance, 988 can help and even send a mobile crisis team to assess and intervene.

Be sure to let the call center know you are a tribal member so that your tribe can follow up with you. Tribal members will then have the choice to be connected to Choctaw Nation mental health professionals who will assist them in meeting their mental health needs, including case management, counseling, and connections to other resources.

According to Roberts, Native men are at the highest risk of dying by suicide.

"Our men and our boys are not coming in for that help. We need them. We have men that can speak with them," said Roberts. "We have women who can speak with them. With our youth, we want to turn that around, and we're building and designing our programs and our services to meet their needs."

There are also special services through the Veterans' Suicide Prevention grant, Warrior Wellness and services available at Jones Academy.

"We need you. We need you alive," Robert said. "We know that they are resilient. We know that they serve a purpose in this world and for our tribe."

"What we're often taught in the native communities is word of mouth, so when we develop that trust with someone, they're more likely to tell someone else and they're going to reach out for that help," she said. "It's the way we operate. So, we want people to reach out for help and ask those things."

Our culture stays alive when you do! Choctaw Nation's Behavioral Health services offer resources and a listening ear. Always get help immediately if there is a threat to you or a loved one.

Choctaw Nation Behavioral and Health Clinics, along with two substance abuse programs, are located throughout the Choctaw Nation Reservation. All are included in the continuum of care, serving Choctaw Nation-eligible patients.

For more information, visit Let's Talk About Mental Health: Resources for Everyday (choctawnation.com).

## Available Clinics and Programs:

**Atoka Health Clinic**  
1585 W. Liberty Rd.  
Atoka, OK 74525  
580-889-1981

**Chi Hullo Li Women's Recovery Center**  
13597 SE 202 Rd.  
Talihina, OK 74571  
918-567-2905

**Durant Regional Medical Center**  
1801 Chukka Hina  
Durant, OK 74701  
580-920-2100

**Behavioral Health Windhorse**  
816 W. Evergreen  
Durant, OK 74701  
580-920-2100, ext. 63351

**Hugo Health Clinic**  
410 N. M Street  
Hugo, OK 74743  
580-326-7561

**Idabel Health Clinic**  
902 E. Lincoln Rd.  
Idabel, OK 74745  
580-286-2600

**Idabel Wind Horse**  
1303 S. Lynn Ln.  
Idabel, OK 74745  
580-286-7025

**McAlester Health Clinic**  
1127 S. George Nigh Expressway  
McAlester, OK 74501  
918-423-8440

**McAlester Wind Horse**  
604 S. 2nd  
McAlester, OK 74501  
918-302-0052

**Rubin White Health Clinic**  
109 Kerr Ave.  
Poteau, OK 74953  
918-649-1100

**Stigler Health Clinic**  
2204 E. Main Street  
Stigler, OK 74462  
918-967-9200

**Talihina Mens Recovery Center**  
13224 SE 202 Rd.  
Talihina, OK 74571  
918-567-2389

**Talihina Health Care Center**  
One Choctaw Way  
Talihina, OK 74571  
918-567-7000

**Talihina Behavioral Health**  
One Choctaw Way  
Talihina, OK 74571  
918-567-3065

**CNO Lighthouse Police's 24-hour dispatch**  
(580) 920-7000

**Mental Health Lifeline**  
Call or text 988

# Total eclipse of the chukvsh

## Eclipse rolls through heart of Choctaw Nation

By Christian Toews

Visitors gathered in the Choctaw Nation to observe a total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. This rare event drew people from all over the country to the path of totality that went through the Choctaw Nation's reservation. The Choctaw Nation hosted viewing events in several locations and invited people to participate in the Choctaw traditional activities surrounding the eclipse.

The Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant, Oklahoma and Wheelock Academy Historic Site in Garvin, Oklahoma, hosted eclipse gatherings, and hundreds of people from across the United States attended. While Garvin, Oklahoma, was in the path of totality, Durant still saw 99.7% totality during the event.

Choctaw people have been deeply connected to the environment and have passed down traditions surrounding different events for generations.

"It [the eclipse] brings us the opportunity to highlight culture in such a unique way by telling our oral stories sharing those sharing how we pass knowledge and stories from generation to generation," said Cheyehoma Dugger, Director of Development and Membership for the Choctaw Cultural Center in an interview with CNN before the eclipse.

"We have a story specific to the solar eclipse, so we are getting to share that within our communities but with people traveling from all over the U.S. and even internationally," said Dugger.

She refers to the story of Fvni Lusa, the black squirrel that eats the sun. Choctaw tradition says that if you make noise by yelling, hitting pots and pans or other means, you can scare away the squirrel, and the light from the sun will return.

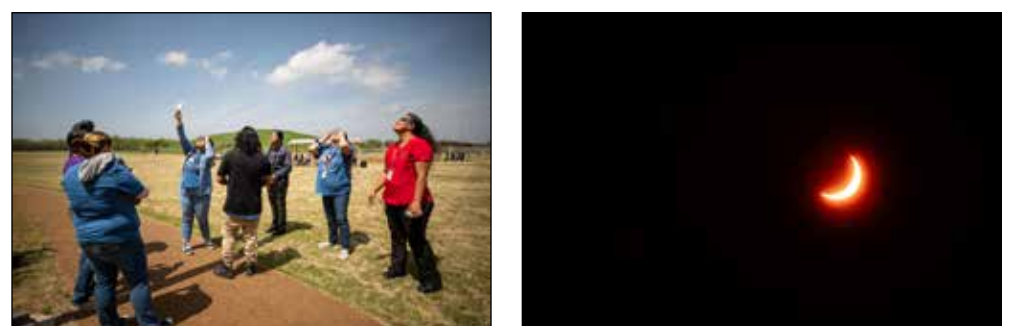
During the events, plastic clappers and special eclipse glasses were handed out so everyone could observe and participate. As soon as the sun was covered, an uproar of yelling and clapping began. A few minutes later, the sun emerged, and Fvni Lusa was scared away until the next eclipse.

Phil and Taimi Clark traveled from Colorado to the Choctaw Cultural Center for the eclipse.

"It was as much fun as I thought it would be," Clark said. "I loved that scaring the squirrel away from the sun; that was really fun."

A total solar eclipse visible in the United States doesn't happen often. The last one was in 2017 when part of the country from Oregon to South Carolina could see totality. Before 2017, the previous total solar eclipse visible in the U.S. was in 1979, when just five states were in the path of totality, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

When will the next total solar eclipse take place? According to NOAA, it will take place on August 12, 2026. This eclipse will be visible from the Arctic, eastern Greenland, northern Spain, and Iceland. If you want to see a total solar eclipse in the United States again, you will have to wait significantly longer. A total solar eclipse won't occur in the contiguous U.S. for another 20 years in August 2044.



Photos by Christian Toews

Crowds of people watch the 2024 eclipse at the Choctaw Nation Cultural Center in Durant. Hundreds of people attended eclipse watch parties across the Choctaw Nation reservation for the rare celestial event.

## Behavioral Health Wind Horse offers services at new Durant location

By Shelia Kirven

Choctaw Nation opened the doors to its Behavioral Health Wind Horse location in Durant in July 2023. Therapists and support staff previously housed at the Choctaw Health Clinic in Durant relocated to the new location.

The Durant health clinic still maintains offices for psychiatry, RNC and integrated case management. Psychiatrists are also located in McAlester, Talihina, and Poteau. Clients in the Durant area are encouraged to contact the Evergreen Street office for therapy needs.

The new Wind Horse facility receives substance abuse and crisis response grants, and staff can potentially get individuals to services such as Chi Hullo Li, Recovery Center, etc. There are therapists and case managers who can help through a tribal opioid response grant, which focuses on individuals who are misusing or have misused stimulants like methamphetamine or opioids.

Individual and family therapy, couples therapy, marriage therapy, work therapy, and patient support are available. Help is also available for substance abuse and mental health, and a therapist is on-site for associates of the Choctaw Nation.

The center provides play therapy for children with special needs, and they also work with parents.

Jessie Roberts, LPC and Senior Behavioral Health Manager at the Durant location said, "It's very stressful anytime you are going through hard things in life or having to adjust to certain situations. The parents need that support as well."

The center works closely with veterans. "We have peer support. It's people with lived experience," said Roberts. "They have the option to talk to somebody who has been through the very same thing they have."

Though there is a waiting list for in-person therapy at the Durant location, Roberts wanted to remind readers not to let that stop them from reaching out. Clients can be connected to a case manager who will call and check on them weekly and offer services. Virtual therapy is available from another location right into the home while clients are on the waiting list if needed.

For those who need someone to talk to but might be afraid to reach out, Roberts gives reassurance. "First of all, their information is protected through our health records. We are completely confidential. No one has access to that. But if they are scared, they are going to be seen at the location or something like that, just let us know," Roberts said. "If a tribal member has a need, reach out, and we will figure out a way to help."

No medications are prescribed from Wind Horse facilities. Clients are referred to a Choctaw Nation Clinic Family Provider for medication or psychiatric needs.

When asked what would happen if someone walked up to the door in an emergency crisis mode, Roberts confirmed, "We would help them. We do it pretty often."

According to Roberts, therapists can even find placement and refer to in-patient care if that's what is best for the individual.



Photo by Shelia Kirven

Left to Right: Choctaw tribal staff members Courtney Garcia, Patient Access Representative, Jessie Roberts, LPC, Senior Manager for Behavioral Health, and Hailey Belvin, Wakaya Program Manager, are three of the staff members at the new Durant location.

"It's a hard decision, and it's hard for the families, but sometimes it's just necessary to help them to feel better," Roberts said.

In cases of immediate crisis, particularly after hours, Roberts said clients can go to the emergency room at the Talihina hospital, where on-call therapists are available.

Individuals can also call 988 by phone and talk with someone immediately through a nationwide service. If the caller cannot leave their home, a mobile crisis response team will visit and get the caller help with placement or a safety plan. Then, the caller will be referred to Choctaw Nation so that we can help them and follow through.

"It's just really important that they let that person know through 988 that they are a tribal member because that's the only way they get referred back to us," Roberts stressed.

She said the Tribe partners heavily with the service. The service is not just for emergency crisis; but anyone can call or text anytime.

Roberts is proud of the staff at Behavioral Health Wind Horse Durant and in all behavioral health facilities of Choctaw Nation.

"Their hard work is appreciated, and their efforts do not go unnoticed," she said. "Our staff and our teams are among the most dedicated and non-judgmental group of people I've ever encountered. They are dedicated to our tribal members. I am very proud to work for them and with them. They go above and beyond."

**Contact Information:**

**Behavioral Health Windhorse**

**816 W. Evergreen**

**Durant, OK 74701**

**580-920-2100, extension 63351**

**Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.**

**For emergency needs, dial 988.**



Photo by Christian Toews

The new Behavioral Health Windhorse building at 816 W. Evergreen Durant, OK 74701, opened in July 2023. Clients in the Durant area are encouraged to contact the Evergreen Street office for therapy needs..

**CHOCTAW LABOR DAY FESTIVAL**

**INFORMATION UPDATES**

**Food Vendor Application Now Online** - Sign up now to register as a food vendor at the 2024 Choctaw Labor Day Festival. The deadline for applications is May 31, 2024. For more information, call 580-740-0826 or email [tribalevents@choctawnation.com](mailto:tribalevents@choctawnation.com).

**Vendor Information Booth Application Now Available** - Festival vendor information booth applications are now open through May 1, 2024. Festival Vendor Information Booth Dates/Times are: Friday, August 30 | 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday, August 31 | 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and Sunday, September 1 | 12pm-6pm.

**Arts & Crafts Vendor Application Now Online** - Sign up now to register as a food vendor at the 2024 Choctaw Labor Day Festival. The deadline for applications is April 30, 2024. For more information, call 580-740-0826 or email [tribalevents@choctawnation.com](mailto:tribalevents@choctawnation.com).

**For more information, visit [laborday.choctawnation.com](http://laborday.choctawnation.com).**

**To stay update to on all Labor Day information, text LABORDAY to 888777.**

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

**TRADITIONAL CHOCTAW SEEDS GROWING HOPE PROGRAM**

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Please check the **three** plants that you would like to receive seed for:

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<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Tobi</b> Smith Peas	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Hakchuma</b> Perique Tobacco	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Hvshi Pakanli</b> Seneca Sunflower
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Isito</b> Choctaw Sweet Potato Squash		

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 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Seeds from the Growing Hope Program are intended for Choctaw People and Community members. They will be given out on a first come, first served basis while supplies last, hard copy mail in application only. **YAKOKE!**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL THE GROWING HOPE PROGRAM MANAGER 918-567-3709 EXT. 1016**

**MAIL THIS FORM TO:**  
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 163665 N 4355 RD  
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# BISKINIK

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma **TOGETHER WE'RE MORE**

**May 2024**

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

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