



MVSKOKE NEWS

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NATIVE WINGS LIKE AN EAGLE OFFERS ASSISTANCE FOR TRIBAL CITIZENS RELEASED FROM PRISON

FOUNDER MELVIN BATTIEST SHARES THE STORY OF HIS JOURNEY SERVING REFORMED CONVICTS

by **SHAYLN PROCTOR**
REPORTER

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla.- Native Wings Like An Eagle Incorporated is a 501(c) non-profit organization based in Yukon, Oklahoma. It was founded by Melvin (Mvskoke) and his wife Tammeria (Mvskoke) Battiest. The mission of this organization is to reach out and help with reintegration assistance for tribal citizens recently released from prison. Specifically it helps Native Americans who live off of their reservation, but within the state of Oklahoma.

According to Melvin, this organization is a member of the American Indian Chamber of Commerce and Non-profit Organization in Oklahoma City.

"We are focusing on helping Natives because as Native people you have to deal with

them in a whole different way because we are different people then most people. We still have our culture and we are still proud of who we are and we are still here," Melvin said.

Melvin knows that some former convicts may not want to move onto their reservation due to complicated feelings stemming from toxic environments from their past. In order to be successful moving forward after their prison release, these men and women do not want to return to former bad habits or situations.

Native Wings Like An Eagle helps fulfill the needs for recently released convicts who are tribal citizens but do not want to return to their reservation. This provides them with a fresh start. Currently, the organization has an emergency service for reformed convicts who have just been released. This service provides a place to stay,

clothing, food and transportation passes for up to three months.

Melvin wants to reintegrate program participants by changing their way of thinking. When an individual is in prison they are in a much different environment that can alter their mental state. Without proper reintegration, it poses problems for individuals returning to society.

"Our goal is to change their way of thinking and get that prison mentality out of them and give them a new start and a new way of thinking so they can be successful out here," Melvin said.

Melvin's Past

Melvin is from the Wetumka area, and is currently 63 years old. At 23 years old Melvin was convicted of a felony murder charge in 1984,



Founders of The Native Wings Like An Eagle Melvin and Tammeria Battiest pose together for a photo. (Photo Courtesy: Melvin Battiest)

and was incarcerated until the age of 60. He served 37 years and nine months of a life sentence for a crime that he claims he did not commit. Melvin's time in prison was an experience he has embraced because he believes it made him into the person he is today with the purpose of serving others. Growing up Melvin attended

Chilocco Indian Agricultural School and the Eufaula Indian Boarding School. Melvin noted that attending these schools helped prepare him for prison life. In both institutions he was subjected to rigid discipline and stern oversight.

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GARY FIFE, THE VOICE OF MVSKOKE RADIO PASSES AWAY AT AGE 73

MVSKOKE JOURNALIST GARY FIFE LEAVES BEHIND LONG LEGACY SERVING INDIAN COUNTRY



Mvskoke Media Radio Communications Specialist Gary Fife interviews a guest on his radio show hosted on KOKL The Brew. Fife faithfully hosted the Mvskoke Radio hour every Wednesday at 10 a.m. in downtown Okmulgee. (MM File)

by **BRADEN HARPER**
MANAGING EDITOR

OKMULGEE, Okla - On Sunday, Jan. 14 Gary Fife passed away at the age of 73. Fife was an integral member of the Mvskoke Media department who served as the host of the Mvskoke Radio hour on KOKL The Brew, the host of the Youtube Podcast, Emvpanayv (One who Tells the Story) and the contributor behind the now-retired Emvpanayv column found in the the Mvskoke Newspaper. Mvskoke Media extends its condolences to Fife's family, friends and colleagues.

Fife's career in journalism spanned over five decades across many different platforms including radio, print, broadcast and web. Not only did Fife spend his career reporting on Mvskoke and Indigenous affairs, he helped build the national Indigenous news network that covers Indian Country from the perspective of

Native Americans. Fife was also a staunch advocate for free press. Mvskoke Media exists as an independent free press that reports on the Nation and Indian Country thanks in due part to the lifetime efforts of Fife.

From Indian Country, to Muscogee (Creek) Nation to the newsroom, it would be hard to find another journalist as beloved as Fife. Known for his witty humor and honest opinions, Fife was a one-of-a-kind storyteller. He was never afraid to ask political leaders tough questions, his loyalties layed with journalism and the truth.

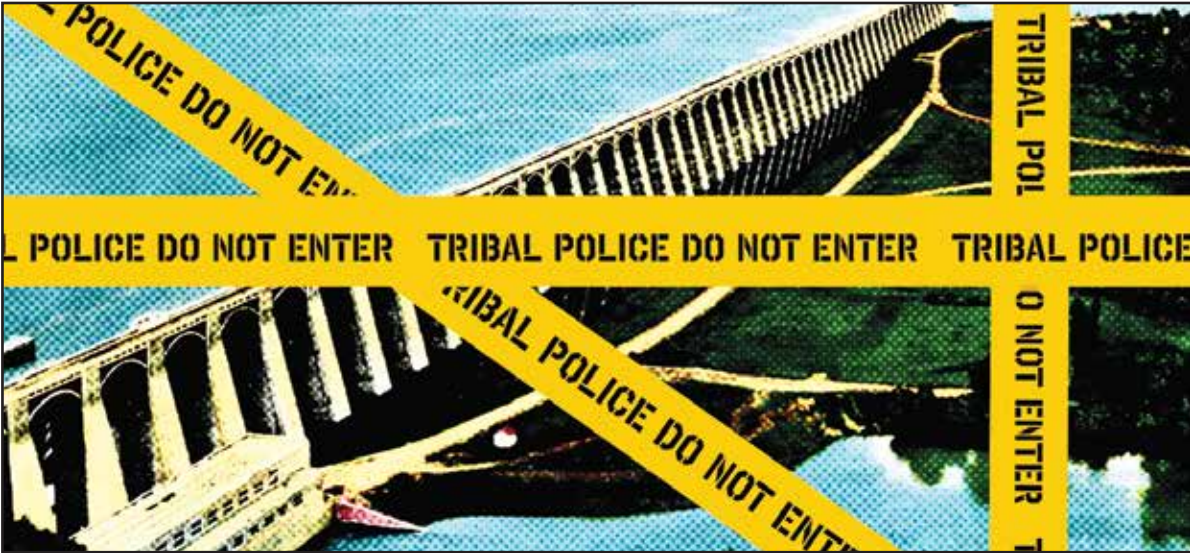
While Indian Country lost a pioneer in the field, Mvskoke Media lost a beloved mentor in the newsroom. Fife was a teacher, a leader, a friend to all and will be missed dearly by his colleagues.

A full obituary detailing Fife's career can be found on page 8.

FIFE'S ACHIEVEMENTS
Found on Page 8

TRIBAL LEADERSHIP RESPONDS TO THE SUSPENSION OF COMMISSIONS BY THE GRAND RIVER DAM AUTHORITY

GRDA SUSPENDS COMMISSIONS, WILL REEVALUATE CROSS-DEPUTIZATION AGREEMENTS



The GRDA suspended MCN LPD cross-commissions on Jan 5. (Meredith Johnson/MM)

by **MEREDITH JOHNSON**
REPORTER

TVLSE, Okla - The Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) suspended the commission of Muscogee (Creek) Nation Lighthorse officers and the Cherokee Nation Marshal Service on Friday, Jan 5. The GRDA stated in a letter to the Cherokee Nation that while it is not taking action to terminate the cross-deputization agreements, it will be suspending the commissions until after recommendations are made from the One Oklahoma Task Force.

GRDA President/Chief Executive Dan Sullivan made the following statement, "In an effort by the Governor to have consistency in statewide cross deputizations, the Grand River Dam Authority is limiting its two-way agreements. GRDA Police has a longstanding record and dedication of working with all law enforcement agencies across northeast Oklahoma to ensure public safety. We will determine the future appropriate action related to law-enforcement commissions issued by GRDA, pending

the results of the One Oklahoma Task Force."

Muscogee (Creek) Nation and Cherokee Nation leadership responds

MCN Principal Chief David Hill responded to the suspension of commissions with the following public statement:

"The suspension of this agreement is not the result of any problem with the cross-deputization agreement. Instead, this is a dangerous political ploy driven by Governor Stitt's desire to undermine tribal jurisdiction at the expense of the most vulnerable Oklahomans.

Our Attorney General met with the Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) officials on December 22, 2023, where they expressed enthusiastic support for the benefits of working together under our cross-deputization agreement. They even began planning training events to make others aware of how well it worked.

Since that time, the GRDA has moved to suspend this agreement

pending the outcome of Governor Stitt's planned task force. Given the absence of any substantive issues related to the GRDA commission, we are left to conclude that the suspension of this agreement results from pressure from Governor Stitt and his campaign to undermine the sovereignty of tribes and deteriorate public safety.

It is beyond reprehensible for Stitt or any agency to play political games with the safety and well-being of Oklahoma citizens. We believe it is misguided to suspend any commission immediately. Violent criminals and those who harm others will not suspend their criminal activities, and there should be more police on the streets to address them, not less.

Public safety is our priority, and the MCN will continue to respond to all calls for assistance and actively protect the public as consistent with all laws."

Cherokee Nation Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr responded to the sus-

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NATIVE WINGS

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Native Wings Like An Eagle members are seen volunteering at the Oklahoma City Homeless Alliance for Native American Heritage month. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

When the McGirt case reaffirmed the Muscogee (Creek) Nation’s tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction, Melvin filed a petition in the Oklahoma court system for release. This was based on the argument that the state had no jurisdictional authority prosecuting a Native American in Indian Country. As a result Melvin’s state conviction was thrown out and he was indicted.

A decade earlier during Melvin’s sentence he contacted the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Reintegration Department. The department enrolled Melvin into their program and initially told him that they could help him once he was released from prison. When Melvin was eventually released he wanted to live in the Oklahoma City area. However, since Oklahoma City does not reside within the Muscogee (Creek) Nation jurisdiction boundaries, the tribe was initially limited in the assistance they could provide him. Melvin would be granted assistance on the condition that he drive to the reintegration office in person, a trip spanning over 100 miles. Unfortunately for

Oklahoma Native Americans that live off of their reservation like Melvin, they are limited in receiving tribal services as well.

During his 37 years in prison Melvin made special bonds with the people he met there. He now views them as his family. Melvin wants to give them tools for success in society with finances, housing, education, employment, and clothing.

“When I got released I told them that I would not forget them and so my passion is for them to not experience what I experienced. I want to get in front of that so that when they come out they will know without a doubt that if they don’t want to live on their reservation that they will still have help somewhere in Oklahoma living off their reservation,” Melvin said.

Today, Melvin is currently pursuing a degree in sociology and is even receiving help from his tribe for it.

Finding a New Purpose

Melvin described going to prison as similar to going

to war. Without the proper mental health support tools, some reformed convicts may struggle with adapting to live in a society that looks different from the one they left behind. “You are trained mentally to be something that you may not have thought you were before and the whole purpose is surviving the war,” Melvin said.

Additionally Melvin noticed that some families have a hard time being around formerly incarcerated loved ones because they are not the same person as they were before.

For those being held in prison, Melvin believes it is possible for them to lose their Native American culture. In light of this, Melvin has incorporated Native American celebrations and culture in the services he provides. This includes a sweat lodge in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, a prison ministry called Native Americans in Christ, Stomp Dances and powwows. These activities are provided for prisoners serving time, and those transitioning back into society.

“The element of culture is so important in reintegrating Natives back into their Indian communities and so that’s another thing that our organization is going to do. We are going to put culture elements into their reintegration so that they can grab their culture back,” Melvin said.

Melvin has received support from many different tribal leaders including Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. and Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby. So far Melvin has reached out to 30 tribal nations in total and is hoping to reach all 39 in the state. Regardless of the response rate, Melvin is still grateful for the support he

has received.

While some tribes have reintegration programs of their own, Melvin does not view his work as a competing threat. He specifically wants to help those seeking to live outside of their reservation.

Moving Forward

The Native Wings Like An Eagle is a project still in the works. Currently it is still developing its infrastructure, which includes hiring staff and securing funding. Although Native Wings Like An Eagle has not quite fully taken off yet, that has not stopped Melvin from helping others with funds out of his own pocket. Melvin has traveled to different functions to share his testimony and the story of his organization’s mission, all in an effort to gather funding to keep offering services for reformed convicts.

Melvin and Tammeria go back inside different prisons to help those in need of assistance. So far they have been to Great Plains Correctional Facility in Hinton, Lexington Assessment & Reception Center, and the Joseph Harp Correctional Center. The couple is prospectively looking to add Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in McLoud to that list as well.

Melvin views their work as a big responsibility in order

to help those in need and let others know that even though he was in prison for nearly 38 years, he still made a life for himself. In his travels he has seen many other incarcerated men and women he believes can make it in life too, if only they received a second chance.

Native Wings Like an Eagle was asked by the Oklahoma Alliance Organization to help put on a Native American Heritage month event at their facility. It was a full day of celebration. The celebration’s festivities included Indian tacos, drumming, dancing, and singing in the Mvskoke and Kiowa languages. Native actor Chris Hill was also in attendance to tell stories.

Melvin and Tammeria have also been invited to attend the 2024 Presidential Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C. They will meet senators, representatives and possibly the president. Different Native Americans were chosen from around the country to join for community prayer. According to Melvin, this event will not only provide prayers for the nation, it will also provide prayers for other countries around the world.

To keep up to date on the Native Wings Like An Eagle organization’s updates and events, follow their Facebook page, Native Wings Like an Eagle.



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TASK FORCE

Continued from Page 1

pension with the following statement:

“Grand River Dam Authority’s actions today, under pressure from Government Stitt, create barriers where none existed and undermine public safety on some of our major waterways, Grand Lake and Lake Tenkiller, among others. Governor Stitt has spent more than three years pressing phony claims of chaos on tribal reservations to fit his narrative. We had nothing but a positive relationship with the GRDA.”

Cross-commissions and Suspensions

Previous coverage by Mvskoke Media had detailed the intricacies of cross-commissions within Indian Country post-McGirt. Commissions are official authorizations to act in a particular function. Within law enforcement, commissions grant the holder to act in their ability as law enforcement officers.

When officers are cross-commissioned, commission cards are given to the agencies for them to distribute to officers. The cards are

only eligible to those deputies over the age of 21 years old who possess a valid driver’s license, high school diploma or equivalent, no felony charges, provide certification, and qualify with a firearm twice a year.

However in order to have a cross-commission, an agreement of cross-deputization between two groups must be in place. In order for any party to end the cross-deputization agreement, a 60-day notice terminating the relationship must be sent by the terminating agency.

The GRDA statement on the suspension states, “The Grand River Dam Authority Police Department, however, is not taking any action to terminate the cross-deputization agreement.” The GRDA did not give a 60-day notice; instead, they suspended the cross-commissions. This automatically pulls the LPD and CNMS authority to act as GRDA law enforcement officers. Suspending officer commissions is usually done individually when requirements are not met or misconduct has occurred.

The cross-deputization agreement between the MCNLPD and the GRDA was the basis of an arrest made on Dec 18 of a non-tribal citizen. Conflict between

a MCN Lighthouse deputy and Matthew Douglas, an Okmulgee County Jail employee, during the booking procedure has led to a felony assault charge for Douglas. Douglas is scheduled for arraignment in MCN District Court on March 27.

The incident that occurred during the booking procedure was recorded on a body camera worn by one of the MCNLHP officers involved. In the footage released by MCN, LHP officers can be seen engaging in a verbal disagreement with officials from the Okmulgee County Jail. One of the jail officials can be heard repeatedly saying “I am not taking him (the suspect in custody) in.” LHP Officers are then seen attempting to enter the main holding unit before a physical altercation occurred.

The conflict and resulting charge were mentioned specifically by Stitt in Executive Order 2023-32, which created the One Oklahoma Task Force. The task-force is a 13-member panel responsible for making official recommendations addressing “the McGirt decision’s negative effects.”

The first meeting of the Task Force will be no later than 60 days after the EO’s signing, which is on or before Feb. 20.

THE

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The Mvskoke News reserves the right to edit all submissions for space, style and grammar. Receipt of submissions does not obligate The Mvskoke News in any regard. The Mvskoke News is mailed from Stigler, Oklahoma to all enrolled Muscogee (Creek) citizens’ households upon request. Inquiries should be directed to Mvskoke Media.

To submit a change of address or a letter to the editor, call: 918-732-7720 or email: info@mvskokemedia.com.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 51ST ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE



Editor’s Note: The following is an op-ed piece from the office of Julia Lothrop, Acting Regional Director of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, who oversees services in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and 68 federally-recognized tribes.

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court legalized abortion care in their groundbreaking Roe v. Wade decision. That same year, Mattel unveiled a Surgeon Career Barbie.

Surgeon Barbie, and her immediate predecessor, Astronaut Barbie (who was unveiled in 1965 – the same year contraception became legal in the United States) stood on the shoulders of Flight Attendant Barbie, Ballerina Barbie, and Registered Nurse Barbie.

While all represent valuable careers, Surgeon Barbie and Astronaut Barbie were particularly significant because they represented a cultural shift.

Amid the women’s movement, and newfound reproductive freedom that enabled women to plan families on their own terms, new doors were opened to education and career choice opportunities that many of their mothers and grandmothers could only dream about.

Thanks largely in part to the bodily autonomy granted by Roe v. Wade, starting in 1973 more women across America

now had a golden ticket to start entering lucrative career fields – including surgery and astrophysics – that were previously dominated almost exclusively by men.

We now know that women who have access to contraception make about \$2,200 more per year than those who do not. Furthermore, access to safe and legal abortion increases a woman’s likelihood of graduating college by 72%, and increases the probability that she will secure a professional role by almost 40%.

Abortion care is an economic justice issue – and when it’s restricted, we all lose.

A year and a half ago, the U.S. Supreme Court took away reproductive rights to abortion care in the Dobbs decision, they forced antiquated restrictions on women across the country.

We have seen many states force their way into medical decisions that should be between a woman and her doctor, including our state of Oklahoma.

We have seen women put in near impossible positions, having to cross state lines to get reproductive health care, putting their own life in danger.

We have seen medical providers close their doors or relocate to another state. Since Dobbs, around 60% of OBGYNs in states with restrictions and bans report concerns about their personal legal risk when making decisions related to abortion care with patients. This has in many cases left rural communities in deep deserts of care.

In addition to being both dangerous and un-American, these restrictions have also already had detrimental effects on our economy.

OPENING ARGUMENTS MADE IN STROBLE V. OKLAHOMA TAX COMMISSION CASE

SUIT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER STATE CAN TAX NATIVE AMERICANS WHO LIVE ON THEIR RESERVATION



Opening arguments were heard by the Oklahoma Supreme Court in a case that will decide whether Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizens who reside within the MCN reservation can legally be taxed by the State of Oklahoma. (Jerrad Moore/Assignment Editor)

by BRADEN HARPER
MANAGING EDITOR

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. - After years of waiting with baited breath, the Oklahoma Supreme Court finally began to hear opening arguments in the Stroble v. Oklahoma Tax Commission case that will determine whether Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizens that live in the MCN jurisdictional boundaries will legally have to pay taxes to the state. Opening arguments began on Wednesday, Jan 17.

The MCN citizen suing the tax commission is Alicia Stroble. In 2022 Stroble was handed a victory when an administrative law judge for the Oklahoma Tax Commission ruled that she was exempt from paying state income taxes. The tax commission rejected this decision, which resulted in Stroble filing an appeal that would gain support from the Five Civilized Tribes.

Not only is Stroble a MCN

citizen who works for her tribe, she also lives within her tribe’s jurisdictional boundary as well. Throughout this case Stroble has worked for her tribe as the Secretary of the MCN National Council. She was recently reelected as the council’s secretary in an emergency session held on Jan. 8.

The Nation was granted permission to participate in opening arguments before the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Principal Chief Hill issued a statement on behalf of the MCN, who filed a joint amicus brief with Seminole Nation in support of Stroble in the case.

“Laws related to taxation of income earned by tribal citizens who both reside and earn that income on a reservation have been settled for decades, but the State of Oklahoma has chosen to ignore those laws. It should concern every resident of Oklahoma that the state feels like it can pick and choose when to follow the law. Today, it’s Alicia Stroble, tomorrow

it will be someone else if the state is not held accountable. The State is not above the law, and it is our hope that this case will ensure the Oklahoma Tax Commission recognizes that,” Principal Chief David Hill said.

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation contends that the state tax commissions’ claim of authority to tax tribal citizens residing and working in Indian Country undermines tribal sovereignty and contradicts decades of established law.

The decision to be handed down in Stroble v. Oklahoma Tax Commission will leave a big impact on tribal sovereignty, federal law and tax obligations on behalf of all federally-recognized tribal citizens who live within their tribe’s jurisdictional boundaries in the state.

Mvskoke Media will continue to follow this story and provide updates on the case as they occur.

INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL OF THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES DECLINES PARTICIPATION IN ONE OKLAHOMA TASK FORCE

MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION RELEASES OFFICIAL REBUKE OF STITT’S TASKFORCE



The Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes have issued a response to Governor’s Stitt’s One Oklahoma Task Force and it’s lack of proper representation. (Meredith Johnson/MM)

by MEREDITH JOHNSON
REPORTER

INDIAN COUNTRY - In a letter to Governor Stitt issued Tuesday, Jan 9, the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes (ITC) voiced their opposition to the Governor’s Executive Order 2023-32 that establishes the One Oklahoma Task Force. The taskforce is a 13-member panel that is responsible for submitting a report addressing “the McGirt decision’s negative effects.”

The letter states, “When we have a willing partner at the State of Oklahoma, we are fully prepared to move forward. We are eager to work with our friends and neighbors to improve coordination in public safety efforts. What we cannot do is participate in an effort that spreads falsehoods about the law, attempts to minimize tribal voices, and engages in political attacks instead of constructive government-to-government dialogue.”

The ITC’s letter specifically detailed that the taskforce will not

adequately serve the public good as written. Per previous reporting, Stitt’s EO claims the McGirt decision, which established tribal jurisdiction for most of eastern Oklahoma, has caused confusion and tension among and between tribal and non-tribal law enforcement. The ITC letter rebuffs this claim, stating, “... the McGirt decision has finally restored legitimate, legal jurisdiction that was restored under clear federal laws and the U.S. Constitution. Unfortunately, rather than focusing on how to incorporate tribal authority to benefit the public, the State has wasted time and energy trying to evade, reject, or delay compliance with the law.”

The letter further clarifies that the disproportionate representation on the taskforce will not reflect respectful government-to-government dialog between tribes and the State. Of the 13-person panel, only two members will specifically represent Oklahoma’s 38 tribal governments. One representing the Five Civilized Tribes and another rep-

resenting the other 33 federally-recognized tribes in Oklahoma.

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation issued an official rejection to participate in the task force on Monday, Jan 8 through the office of Principal Chief David Hill. The statement reads, “As a matter of principle, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation welcomes any opportunity for collaboration to improve the public safety for all Oklahomans. Unfortunately, the Governor’s task force on McGirt is based on a false premise and seeks misguided political objectives through a structure intended to divide rather than unify. This taskforce cannot adequately serve the public good unless these flaws are corrected. We cannot participate in any endeavor aimed at weakening tribal nations and, by extension, harming public safety. At its core, the McGirt decision is a pro-public safety ruling. By restoring tribal jurisdiction that the State had illegally usurped for decades, the decision has meant more police, prosecutors, and courts to enforce the law and deliver justice to vic-

tims. Adding more public safety resources through tribal jurisdiction did not create “uncertainty” or a patchwork solution. The laws on how tribal jurisdiction can work collaboratively with Oklahoma’s other agencies are crystal clear. Unfortunately, rather than focus on how to incorporate tribal authority to benefit the public, the State has wasted far too much time and energy finding ways to evade, reject, or minimize the positive impact of tribal jurisdiction. This taskforce is just the latest example of that.”

The letter comes on the heels of the Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) suspending commission agreements between the GRDA and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the Cherokee Nation on Friday, Jan 5. The GRDA stated in a letter to the Cherokee Nation that while it is not taking action to terminate the cross-deputization agreements, it will be suspend-

ing the Commissions until after the One Oklahoma Task Force recommendations.

The cross-deputization agreement between the MCN Lighthouse PD and the GRDA was the basis of an arrest made on Dec 18 of a non-tribal citizen. Conflict between a MCN Lighthouse deputy and Matthew Douglas, an Okmulgee County Jail employee during the booking procedure has led to a felony assault charge for Douglas. The conflict and resulting charge were mentioned specifically by Stitt in his EO and during statements afterwards.

The ITC is composed of the chiefs and other leaders of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole Nations. The organization lobbies, campaigns, and supports issues affecting tribal citizens’ social and economic lives. It represents more than 815,000 tribal citizens throughout the country.

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WINTER STORMS BLAST THROUGH NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA

MCN DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY



Construction vehicles are used to clear snow and ice off of roadways in areas across the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Reservation. Crews worked tirelessly to make sure drivers were safe during their commutes. (Courtesy: MCN Communications)

by MEREDITH JOHNSON
REPORTER

MVSKOKE RESERVATION - Winter weather blasted through eastern Oklahoma on the evening of Sun, Jan 21. The precipitation mixed with the frigid temperatures led to freezing rain and accumulated ice. The conditions led to school closures and remote work days for many across the MCN reservation.

Schools around the MCN reservation either had a snow day or distance learning. Tulsa Public Schools students had a day off school, as did Jenks, Union, Broken Arrow, Morris, and Preston. Bixby, Okmulgee and others had distance learning days.

The tribal complex in Okmulgee was initially scheduled for a late opening at noon but due to road conditions remained closed with employees checking in remotely. The College of the Muscogee Nation in Okmulgee sent

out a Raven Alert, announcing students and staff would be doing virtual work.

January’s Winter Storms

Sunday night’s storm was a milder repeat of the storms that came through the weekend before. Rolling in late Sunday, Jan 14 the ice and snow led to dangerous commutes for many on the Mvskoke reservation. As temperatures dipped to near zero degrees, snow and ice made driving conditions nearly impossible by Monday.

Schools not closed for the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday on Monday, Jan 15 were out for snow days or distance learning. Online class work continued Tuesday, Jan 16 for most as snow accumulated and temperatures continued to hover in the single digits.

The winter weather warmed slightly by Wednesday, Jan 17 with temperatures hovering above 32 degrees for most of the area. However, most schools remained remote because low temperatures in the morning made bus travel in neighborhoods unsafe, ice patches remained in school parking lots, and some area schools suffered burst water pipes.

In Okmulgee, the MCN Tribal Complex was closed Monday and Tuesday, Jan 15-16, other area offices either closed for the day or opened late.

The office of MCN Princi-

pal David Hill declared a state of emergency beginning Sunday, Jan 14 and is still in effect. The first executive order of the new year, EO 24-01 engaged the MCN’s disaster mitigation plan.

As previously covered by Mvskoke Media, the MCN Emergency Management Department receives updated information directly from the National Weather Service. MCN Emergency Management Director Bobby Howard explained, “During a disaster a lot of contract requirements are relaxed... and it (state of emergency) allows us to get stuff really fast,”

It also allows the department the freedom to serve people in need quicker and faster and in areas where the counties are responsible as well. For example, Howard shared that the department was able to take water to Crowmwell recently because of the storm. In the past the department has provided water to counties and municipalities all over the MCN through the disaster mitigation plan. Howard concluded, “It allows us the freedom of movement to support the nation. Without the emergency declaration, I’m not supposed to do those things... We support all of our tribal citizens, but we support all within the nation’s boundaries. If you live in the nation, we’re going to take care of you if you need us.”

For tips on staying prepared for winter weather, see our story on helpful tips to stay warm.



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HELPFUL TIPS TO STAY WARM AND SAFE THROUGHOUT THE COLD WEATHER SEASON

MCN AND CDC PROVIDE TIPS TO COMBAT AGAINST FREEZING TEMPERATURES



Tribal workers clear fallen tree limbs off the road. (Courtesy: MCN Communications)

by SHAYLN PROCTOR
REPORTER

OKMULGEE, Okla. - It’s becoming more kvsvppe (cold) with the winter season now in full swing. After a mix of snow-fall made its way across the Mvskoke Reservation on Sunday, Jan 14., residents got a taste of what mother nature was capable of producing this winter season. As a result the reservation experienced subfreezing temperatures and some even experienced power outages in areas like Broken Arrow. Whether on the road or at home, precautions must be taken during cold snaps like these that present life-threatening conditions. Winter weather conditions can pose risks to those outdoors and indoors.

According to the Center for

Disease Control and Prevention, “Winter storms are dangerous. They can bring cold temperatures, power failures, loss of communication services, and icy roads. This can make being outside dangerous, so you should limit your time outside. Although staying indoors as much as possible can help reduce the risk of car crashes and falls on the ice, you may also face hazards inside your home.”

Before a winter storm hits, always make sure vehicles are up to date on maintenance. Keep a watchful eye out on weather forecasts before going out, and make sure proper food and supplies are handy at home and on the road.

Pets should be brought indoors if possible. If this is not a pragmatic option, it is important to make sure they have a warm shelter and water that is unfrozen.

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation’s

Facebook page posted helpful tips on staying safe inside during the winter months. For those using heat at home, it is important to keep flammable objects at least three feet away from heat sources like fireplaces and wood stoves. Heating equipment like chimneys can be maintained through professional inspections every year. Do not use gas stoves or ovens to heat a house. Freezers and refrigerators need to remain closed, and power generators need to be kept outside.

There are many signs to recognize different winter hazards and dangerous cold exposures. It is always a good idea to prepare for the worst winter weather situations possible, given the unpredictable nature of weather conditions in Oklahoma during this time of the year.

Home and Vehicle Preparation

The CDC recommends weather proofing homes by repairing roof leaks, cutting tree branches that can potentially fall after a storm, and installing both a smoke detector and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector.

For senior citizens it is recommended that they own an easy-to-read thermometer. Elders are more susceptible to becoming cold faster than younger individuals. It is also recommended that elders have updated contact information to stay in touch with their support network. Adequate, bright lighting around the home is important to prevent falls. When there is ice or snow on the ground outside, proper fitting shoes with a sturdy underneath grip are important for traversing slick areas. For those using wheelchairs or walkers for mobility, it is recommended that the equipment is properly dried off after entering a home to prevent slips.

MCN’s Facebook page also provided low-cost tips for those who do not own a HVAC system. Closing the doors and vents in rooms that are not in use can pre-



Construction vehicles are seen being used to clear roadways after snowstorms blow through the area. (MCN Communications)

serve heat. Weather stripping, caulking or window insulation kits can help prevent heat from escaping through windows.

Power outages are a possibility during winter storms and can prevent homeowners from using electronic devices and appliances. In the event of a power outage throw away perishable food items that have been sitting for two or more hours in a refrigerator or freezer that is 40 degrees fahrenheit or above. For those that have refrigerated medications, it is important to have a back up plan to keep medicine at just the right temperature.

Drivers are advised to not travel through winter storms. However, if there are no other options, drivers are advised to keep an emergency kit handy in their vehicle in case they break down on the side of the road. Kits need to be inspected to make sure they do not contain expired items. A well-rounded emergency kit can

include a flashlight, extra batteries, a portable smart device charger, tow chains or rope, warm clothing, water and snacks. It is also a good idea to keep a vehicle’s gas tank full or near full.

Cold exposures such as hyperthermia and frostbite pose a threat to those outdoors. Signs of hypothermia in adults include exhaustion, shivering and slurred speech. Signs of hypothermia in babies include bright red, cold skin and low energy.

To view more information about weather tips and cold exposure signs, follow the MCN Facebook page, The Muscogee Nation. To learn more information about weather preparation for this season, it can be found on the CDC’s website under natural disasters and severe weather.

For contact information on disaster and emergency situations, call 539-244-2775. For firewood and elderly services, call 918-732-7699.



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MCNNC SUBCOMMITTEES

MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION
NATIONAL COUNCIL BEGINS
LEGISLATIVE YEAR WITH AN
EMERGENCY SESSION

MEETING TO APPROVE YEARLY SESSION SCHEDULE
AND COMMITTEE OFFICERS

OKMULGEE, Okla. - On Jan 8, the MCN National Council held a live emergency session at 6:00 p.m. at the Mound Building. The business session set the MCNNC and committee meeting schedules for the year, and set committee leadership positions.

The MCNNC approved the session meeting schedule for 2024. The council approved Alicia Stoble as National Council Secretary with a vote of 10-5.

BF&J

For the Business, Finance and

Justice committee Representative Robert Hufft will serve as the chair and Representative Sandra Golden will serve as the vice-chair. Committee meetings will occur at 5 p.m. before the last Tuesday of the month.

HEW

For the Health, Education, and Welfare committee Representative Joyce Deer will serve as the chair and Representative Mary Crawford will serve as the vice-chair. Committee meetings will occur at 2 p.m. on the second Tuesday of

by MEREDITH JOHNSON
REPORTER

the month.

LNC

For the Land, Natural Resources and Cultural Preservation committee Representative Darrell Proctor will serve as the chair and Representative Charles McHenry will serve as vice-chair. Committee meetings will occur at 6:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month.

Fact Finding & Internal Affairs

The following MCNNC representatives will serve on the Fact Finding and Investigation Committee: Rep. Proctor, Representative Dode Barnett, Rep. Crawford, Representative Ran-



The MCNNC held a live emergency session on Jan 8. (MM File)

dall Hicks, Representative Robyn Whitecloud, Representative Anna Marshall, Representative Leonard Gouge, and Rep. Charles McHenry.

The following MCNNC representatives will serve on the Internal Affairs Committee: Represen-

tative Patrick Freeman Jr., Rep. Golden, Representative Nelson Harjo Sr., Representative Thomasene Yahola Osborn, Rep. Hufft and Representative Mark Randolph.

To view the full meeting, visit: mcnnc.com.

MOU GRANT WITH MCN AND GREEN COUNTRY
TECHNOLOGY CENTER WILL HELP ASSIST MCN
CITIZENS TO RECEIVE ACCREDITATION AND
CERTIFICATION

GRANT WILL ASSIST TRIBAL CITIZENS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES WHO ARE IN NEED OF ASSESSMENTS

by SHAYLN PROCTOR
REPORTER

OKMULGEE, Okla. - The Muscogee (Creek) Nation National Council held a Health, Education and Welfare committee meeting Jan. 16.

The Council addressed the following legislation, the interpretation of which is attributed to language in the bills:

TR 24-001 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the MCN and Green Country

Technology Center on behalf of the MCN Reintegration Department. Representative Thomasene Yahola Osborn sponsored this legislation, which passed 3-0. This will be presented to the full council at the regular session.

This MOU agreement with Green Country Technology Center and the Reintegration Department is going to provide Fiber Lineman Construction training courses for MCN citizens. This agreement also provides course accreditation and certification towards the students who have completed the Fiber Lineman Construction program through the reintegration

department.

NCA 24-001 A law of the MCN authorizing the expenditure of the Family Voices MCHB Unwinding Project Grant for the benefit of the MCN Department of Community and Human Services. Representative Mary Crawford sponsored this legislation, which passed 3-0. This will be presented to the full council at the regular session.

The Family Voices Grant will go toward Alaskan and Native Americans citizens on the MCN Reservation who are 0-17 years old, and are citizens of a federally-recognized tribe. The grant will assist Natives with develop-



The National Council held a Health, Education and Welfare committee session via teleconference and in person. (MM File)

mental disabilities find different types of assessments for applicable resources.

According to the Family Voices website, their mission statement is “With families at the center of health care, all children and youth reach their full potential and health disparities are elimi-

nated.”. Their values include social justice, authentic family-centered care, effective family/professional partnerships, family engagement, inclusion of underserved families, empowering self advocates, and connecting youth leaders.

For more information visit, www.mcnnc.com.

COMMITTEE PASSES AUTHORIZATION OF FUNDS
AWARDED TO MCN GEOSPATIAL DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT RECEIVED \$300K FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL
INFORMATION EXCHANGE NETWORK GRANT



The Land, Natural Resources and Cultural Preservation subcommittee held a meeting on Jan 16. (MM File)

by MEREDITH JOHNSON
REPORTER

MVSKOKE RESERVATION - On Jan 16, the Land, Natural Resources, and Cultural Preservation Committee held an online meeting. Passed legislation will go on to a full council meeting, unless otherwise noted.

The committee addressed the following legislation, the interpretation of which is attributed to language in the bills:

The committee approved \$7,210 for the First Indian Baptist Church from the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Emergency Assistance Grant.

The funds will go towards a new air conditioning unit.

TR 24-004 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute a temporary operating permit with Warrior Fireworks for the operation of one temporary fireworks sales facility on tribal trust land passed with a vote of 3-1, with Representative Charles McHenry voting no. It was sponsored by Speaker Randall Hicks.

During discussion Speaker Hicks explained that this is a renewal agreement for Michael Grim (Cherokee), the owner of Redtail Fireworks LLC. The stand

is near the MCN Housing Department. Grim stated that he gives MCN employees a discount. The resolution will be in effect for three years.

TR 24-005 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation amending TR 19-076 (a tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation to suspend all special appropriations and donations) as amended by TR 20-150, TR 21-080, TR 22-128, TR 22-143, TR 22-150, TR 22-155, TR 22-170, TR 23-045, TR 23-066 and TR 23-096 passed with a vote of 4-0. It was sponsored by Representative Anna Marshall.

This resolution amends previous legislation, TR 19-076, that suspended special appropriations and donations due to the River Spirit Casino and Resort’s closure in 2020. The resolution will be enacted if NCA 23-008 passes.

NCA 24-002 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds in the amount of \$300,000 awarded from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the benefit of the Geospatial Department passed with a vote of 4-0. It was sponsored by Robyn Whitecloud.

The EPA grant awarded is the Environmental Information Exchange Network Grant, which

will provide \$300,000 to use and support the exchange network. It is a three-year competitive grant that was awarded in 2023. The purpose of the grant is to collaborate with the environmental department on three different projects including recycling, compliance, and data governance. Most of the funding will go towards personnel and contracting. The project runs from October 2023 through September 2026.

NCA 24-003 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) fiscal relief funding in the amount of \$496,330 for improvements to a building on tribal property located in Holdenville, Oklahoma passed with a vote of 4-0. It was sponsored by Representative Galen Cloud.

TR 22-100 authorized the purchase of property in Holdenville for governmental services in the southern regional area. During discussion it was stated the expenditure will benefit a health facility in addition to other governmental facilities and offices. The property is an old DHS building and will become a “mini-complex” according to MCN Tribal Administer Shane Houlubuy.

NCA 24-008 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing a donation in the amount of \$5,000 to Native American Link, INC passed to the BFJ committee with a vote of 4-0. It was sponsored by Rep Marshall.

Native Link, INC is a Baptist ministry whose mission is to help women grow spiritually, and contribute to cultural preservation. They are in need of food and lodging for a nine-day singing tour. Six MCN citizens need assistance to attend. The donation will go towards the six citizens.

To view the full agenda, visit mcnnc.com.

TAX COMMISSION GETS
APPROVAL FROM BFJ TO HIRE
LEGAL SERVICES TO DRAFT
NEW TAX CODES

MCN SECRETARY OF THE NATION
APPROVED TO RECEIVE GRANT FUNDS



The BFJ subcommittee held a meeting at the Mound Building on Jan. 18 in person and via teleconference. (MM File)

by BRADEN HARPER
MANAGING EDITOR

OKMULGEE, Okla. - The Muscogee (Creek) Nation National Council held the monthly Business, Finance and Justice Committee session at the Mound Building on Jan 18.

Passed legislation is subject to full council approval during the regular session.

The committee addressed the following legislation, the interpretation of which is attributed to language in the bills:

TR 24-002 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute an engagement letter for legal services between the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tax Commission and Pipestem Law, P.C. Representative Sandra Golden sponsored the legislation, which passed unanimously 4-0.

NCA 24-004 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of grant funds awarded from the Okla-

homa Native Assets Coalition for the benefit of the Office of the Secretary of the Nation. Rep. Golden sponsored the legislation, which passed unanimously 4-0.

NCA 24-006 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation amending MCNCA Title 50 § 1-107, entitled “Commission Composition”. Rep. Golden sponsored the bill, which passed unanimously to be postponed until the next BFJ committee meeting 4-0.

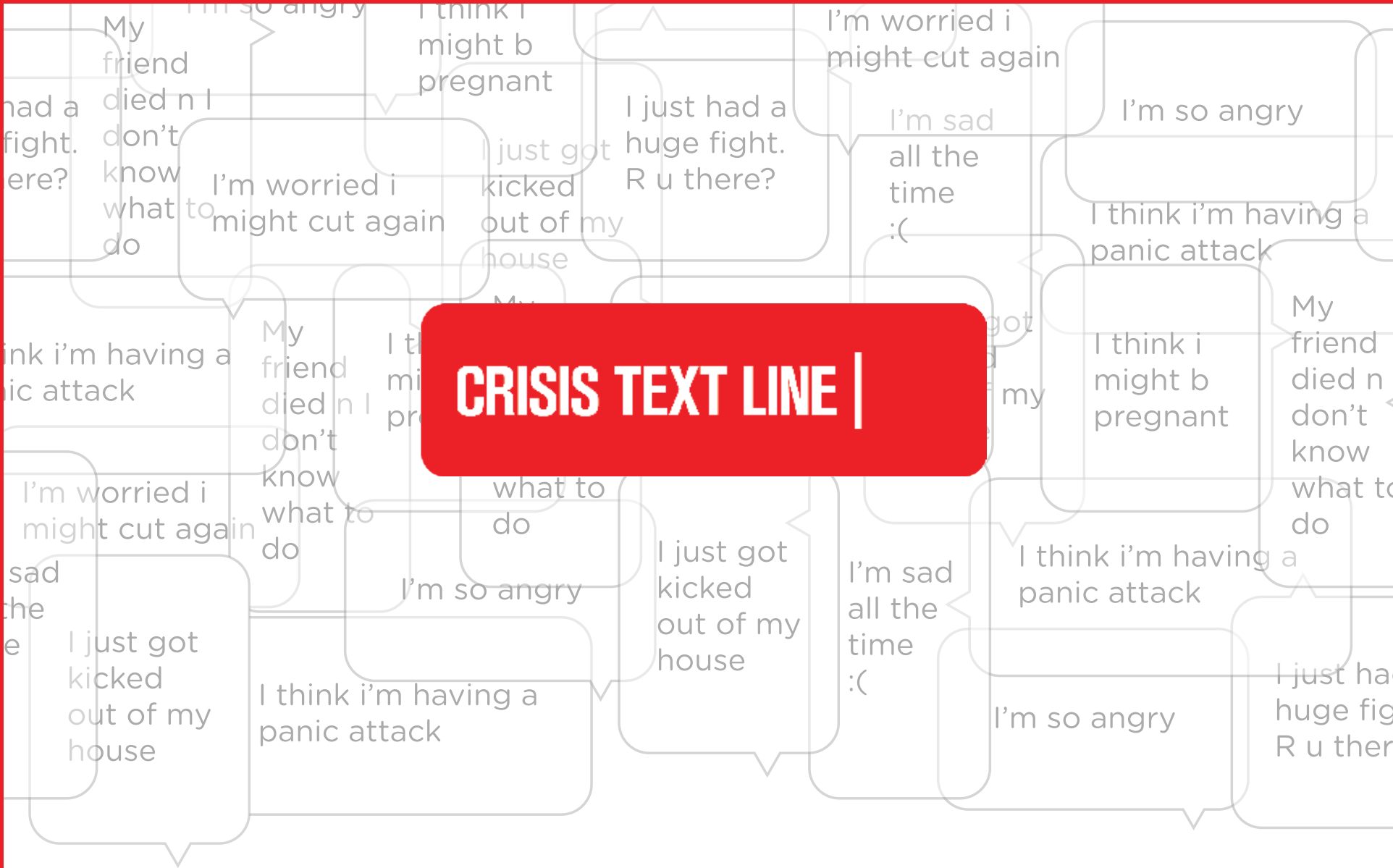
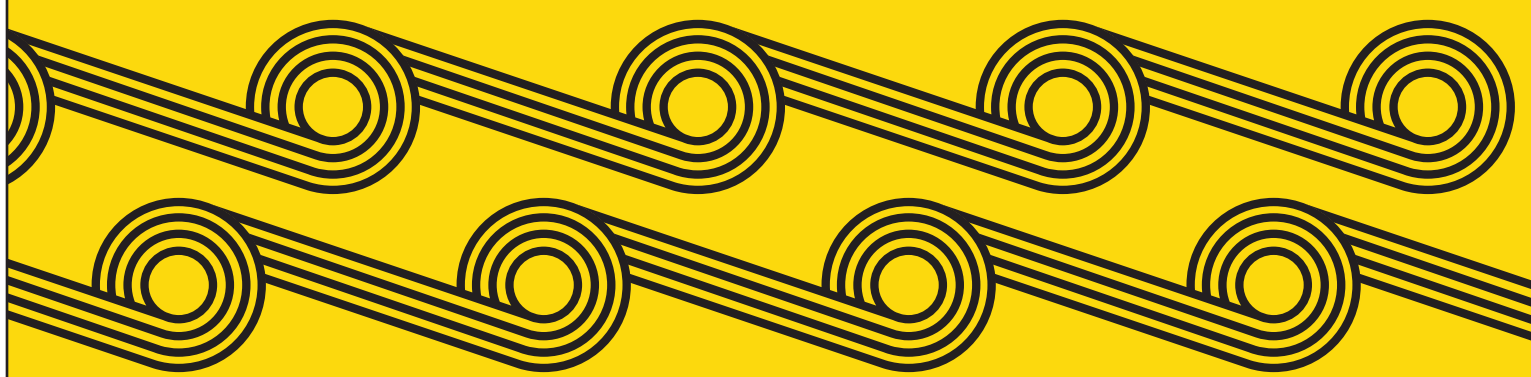
If eventually passed, the bill will create a new commission to oversee a code law publication from 2010 by West Publishing Company.

Other Business:

NCA 24-008 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing a donation to Native American Link, Inc. Representative Anna Marshall sponsored the bill, which was initially passed by a unanimous vote in the Land, and Natural Resources subcommittee in a meeting from Jan. 16. Funding was approved unanimously 4-0.



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IT'S TIME TO "BOOT SCOOTIN BOOGIE": WETUMKA CREEK INDIAN COMMUNITY LAUNCHES THEIR FIRST DANCE CLASS

FIRST DANCE CLASS OFFERS LESSONS, DOOR PRIZES AND A SPECIAL GUEST APPEARANCE



Filmmaker Sterlin Harjo and Wetumka Creek Indian Community members pose for a group photo at dance class. (Photo Courtesy: Wetumka Indian Community)

by SHAYLN PROCTOR
REPORTER

WETUMKA, Okla. - The Wetumka Creek Indian Community recently launched their first dance in December 2023. At that event, members were seen having a great time and were eligible to receive door prizes. A special guest even appeared at the first class, well-known Seminole filmmaker Sterlin Harjo.

The Wetumka Creek Indian Community Chairman Lenora Crump (Mvskoke) has been part of her community's board for six years. She has held her current position for a year, and enjoys utilizing the funds provided by Muscogee (Creek) Nation for various activities for community members.

For events like dance classes, community members usually have to go outside of their city to participate in one. The idea for Wetumka's class came from Crump's sister after she attended the annual Elder's Sweetheart dance hosted by MCN Elder Services. That's when

Crump and her sisters contacted Heather Valenzuela, the owner/dancing instructor of Giddy Up Two Step.

Valenzuela taught the first dance class at the Wetumka Indian Community Center. A few days later she invited the community to join her at Tulsa's Veterans of Foreign Wars Community for another class. According to Crump, community members got their hair done and put on their boots to go dance in Tulsa.

"We do have some good dancers out there and they are breaking out their boots and dusting them off and they are getting with it," Crump said.

These classes are open to anyone over the age of 18 years old. Each participant was entered in a door prize contest, which included a \$200 Western Store gift certificate. Door prize contest age categories included 18-54 years old and elders 55 and over.

These classes typically see between 13-15 participants. "Majority of those were the elders who are still young at

heart," Crump said. The community is not looking for a particular number of participants, they just want to see everyone involved have a good time.

Harjo is friends with Valenzuela and heard about the class from her. According to Crump, Harjo did more than just dance.

"That was a surprise guest appearance but he put us at the top of the communities when he did that but that was all unexpected. It was the highlight," Crump said. "He did a little short video and he was pretty active in dancing with our members, it was fun and of course there were some that enjoyed taking pictures with him."

Crump remarked that she laughed a lot while learning new dance moves. "I have no rhythm, but I do enjoy music. I love listening to music and I feel like it's therapeutic as well. I'm not that good but I'm having fun." Crump said laughingly.

Crump enjoys providing a new physical activity that had not been offered yet for community members. Some of them may not know how to dance or had not danced in quite a while. Crump loves to see each member getting into a groove. She is hoping to start providing dance classes quarterly for the community.

Dance classes will primarily be taught at the Wetumka Indian Community to allow better access for members. The group will also attend classes in Tulsa as well. The community has sent a request to MCN for an activity center building, which will create more space to host bigger events.

"I like to get other communities involved and just secluded from Wetumka. I think it would be good for other communities if they could encourage them to do something like this as well because you will get older and younger participants and good fellowship. I think it will be a good health benefit and to just have a good time and a little exercise there," Crump said.

CMN SET TO HOST FIRST ANNUAL RAVEN CLASSIC MEN'S INTRAMURAL BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

TOURNAMENT WILL FEATURE CMN MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM ALONG WITH OTHER COLLEGIATE TEAMS



The College of the Muscogee Nation Men's basketball team poses for a group photo during the 2023 season. (Courtesy: CMN)

by SHAYLN PROCTOR
REPORTER

OKMULGEE, Okla. - The College of the Muscogee Nation (CMN) is hosting their first annual Raven Classic Men's Intramural Basketball Tournament on Feb. 3 at the Mvskoke Dome. The intramural tournament will consist of different men's college basketball teams competing. There will be prizes for teams finishing in first through third place. Vendors selling T-shirts and food will also be available.

The tournament will have an admission fee, however children under five years of age will be admitted for free. Ticket sales will go toward CMN's basketball teams.

CMN Criminal Justice Program Coordinator Advisor and Instructor Cheryl Najera (Mvskoke) spoke about the men's tournament and what it will hold in the near future for the college. The Raven Classic will help prepare CMN's men's team for the American Indian Higher Consortium Conference (AIHEC) tournament. Although this is an all men's tournament, the college hopes to get the women's team, the Lady Ravens involved someday as well.

"The idea is that when we move to getting an athletic department down the road we are going to make this a staple. This is a vision of Dr. Randall and I, to do an intramural teams and that's

our goal hopefully down the road when we have an athletic conference or part of an athletic conference and we can continue this Raven Classic," Najera said.

The tournament will feature CMN's own men's team, Oklahoma Baptist University and the Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology among others.

Each game in the tournament will use a full court and will follow AIHEC regulations when it comes to rules and time outs.

First through third placing teams will receive a plaque. Winners from each team will also receive an article of clothing with the CMN logo on it. First place winners will receive hoodies, second place winners will receive long sleeve t-shirts and third place winners will receive t-shirts.

CMN Men's Coach Riley Berry (Mvskoke) helped gather different resources to put the tournament together. Berry has experience running events like these and has even played in some around various Indigenous communities.

"We are excited and we have been practicing all this time. We are ready to go out there and represent our tribe, ourselves and the college. We are trying to go out there and win some games. Maybe bring some hardware back and give it all we got and represent," Berry said.

For further information on the tournament, contact Cheryl Najera at 918-210-4794, or by email at cnajera@cmn.edu.

CITIZEN COMPLAINT LEADS TO DIALOGUE WITH TULSA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

SOME ISSUES REMAIN WITH THE OKLAHOMA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



The Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences is an independent charter school that serves a diverse student population including Native Americans. (Jerrad Moore/MM)

by MEREDITH JOHNSON
REPORTER

TVLSE, Okla. - Mvskoke citizen Aaron Griffith filed complaints with the Oklahoma Department of Education this past fall. The formal complaints have led to dialogue with the Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences (TSAS) and the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE), resolving some issues but leaving others open.

Griffith originally filed complaints with the Oklahoma State Department of Education, alleging that TSAS is noncompliant with Title I Parents Right to Know disclosure requirements, Title VI, and Johnson O'Malley (JOM) parental involvement and tribal consultation requirements.

He also filed a noncompliance complaint concerning violations of the prohibition against sectarian affiliations in the provisions and policies of Tulsa Public Schools and the Oklahoma Charter School Act. Griffith specified that a TSAS Governing Board Member, Angela Vivar, works as Director of Hispanic Ministries at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church and this is in violation of the pro-

vision.

Griffith was able to speak with the executive director at TSAS about his grievances and was able to come to an understanding with the school. Griffith stated, "We have discussed things and I'm generally satisfied with the response from TSAS to address my concerns and complaints."

Griffith has told the OSDE he wants more clarity for districts regarding the sectarian affiliation prohibition. In communication with the OSDE investigator on December 21, 2023 Griffith stated, "I want there to be a clear understanding and standard in place for the scope of sectarian prohibitions so it can be better defined and communicated by the OSDE on this matter, leaving districts with less uncertainty about exactly what these compliance obligations that they must meet are in no uncertain terms as a result of this complaint."

On December 29, 2023 Griffith received word from the OSDE's general counsel via OSDE investigator Karrie Bales that his complaint cannot be addressed through further action by the OSDE. In an email to Griffith, the OSDE replied that there is gener-

ally no prohibition on what school board members do for their employment. They wrote, "There might be an issue if the school was doing business with an entity where a school board member works, but I do not understand that to be his complaint. I contacted the school and confirmed that they are not doing any business with the board member in question nor do they believe there is any conflict of interest."

They also noted in the reply to Griffith that issues he has with the TPS charter school policy are matters of local control.

Griffith is also awaiting a reply from the Tulsa County District Attorney regarding an Attorney General opinion request on his behalf. He has also requested opinions from state Representative Melodye Blanchett and Representative Mark McBride. He has been told they are reviewing and researching the facts and circumstances around the complaint before making a final decision.

Griffin is also one of the plaintiffs in a lawsuit against Tulsa Public Schools, the district TSAS operates within. The suit is over how the board handled the selection of their new president in 2023.

OBITUARIES

THOMPSON GEEBON GOUGE JR.



Thompson Geebon Gouge, Jr., lived a life filled with humor, song, and unwavering faith. Born in Lawton, Oklahoma on August 19, 1973 to Lutie Sue (Goombi) Gouge and Thompson Gouge Sr., He passed away on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, surrounded by family in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

A man who found joy in every beat of life, Geebon was a graduate of Weleetka High School. With his heart firmly rooted in his community, he served as a Liaison for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, a role he performed with dedication and pride. As a worship minister, his love for the Lord resonated through every note he played on his keyboard and every song he sang, filling the church with a divine joy that fortified the faith of all who heard him.

Geebon's passion for singing and playing the piano was rivaled only by his love for making people laugh. With an infectious smile and an open heart, he never met

a stranger - each new face was simply a friend he had not yet embraced. A proud descendant of the Muscogee Nation, he wore his heritage with honor and taught his children to do the same.

Family was the cornerstone of Geebon's life. He leaves a legacy of love and laughter to his cherished children Hanna and Tyler George of Bixby, Madeline and Isaiah Hart of Okmulgee, and Lance Gouge of Tulsa. His siblings Cindi and Clyde Fletcher of Okmulgee, Don, and the late Lynn Gouge of Anadarko, will hold onto the memories of a brother who shone with a funny and faith-filled spirit. Geebon's grandchildren - Henleigh, Natalie, Tucker, Isabella, Kastyn, Khalil, Naomi, and Ivy will grow up knowing their grandfather's joy and boundless love.

Geebon Gouge Jr's legacy will resonate through the songs sung, the laughter shared, and the faith that held him steady. A beacon of light has left the world a little brighter because he was here.

A viewing was held on Saturday, January 20, 2024 and on Sunday, January 21, 2024 at Integrity Funeral Service.

Funeral Services were held Monday, January 22, 2024 at the Muscogee Dome in Okmulgee with Rev. Wesley Berry officiating. Interment was held on Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at Rainy Mountain Kiowa Indian Baptist Church Cemetery. Services were under the care and direction of Integrity Funeral Service in Henryetta.

SUBMISSIONS

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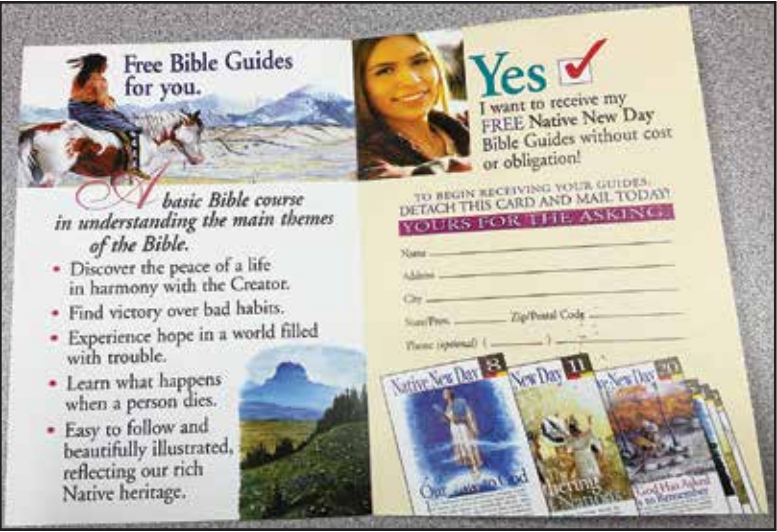
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IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION
OKMULGEE DISTRICT

IN THE MATTER OF THE ADOPTION OF
C.L.Y.,
a minor child.

NOTICE BY PUBLICATION

THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA TO: Unknown Father of C.L.Y.

YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT Timothy Yahola and Brandi Nicole Yahola have filed their Petition for Adoption in the District Court of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, State of Oklahoma, for the adoption of C.L.Y. of which you are alleged to be the biological father, together with his application for an Order of this Court determining the child to be eligible for adoption without your consent. C.L.Y. was born on August 21, 2021. The application alleges that your consent to this adoption is not required by law for the following reasons, to-wit: You have not contributed to the support of the minor child for a period of more than six (6) consecutive months out of the last (14) months, and you have failed to establish and/or maintain a significant relationship with the minor child.

Your failure to appear shall constitute a denial of interest in the minor child which denial may result, without further notice of this proceeding or any subsequent proceeding, in the termination of your parental rights and the transfer of the care, custody, guardianship or adoption of C.L.Y., minor child. Your duty to support the minor child until a final decree of adoption is entered shall not terminate.

YOU ARE FURTHER NOTIFIED that this Court will hear the evidence in support of and in opposition to the granting of the application and the Petition for Adoption on the 31st day

Page 1

of January, 2024, at the hour of 9:00 o'clock, a.m. in Room 1 of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation District Court in Okmulgee, Okmulgee County, Oklahoma.

If you have any cause to show why the above mentioned application and Petition for Adoption should not be granted by the Court or why the child is not eligible for adoption without your consent, you should appear and present the same at the above stated time and place.

WITNESS my hand and seal of said Court this 9 day of January, 2024.

JUDGE OF THE DISTRICT COURT

HILTON LAW OFFICE

Aubra A. Drybread, OBA #31983, MCNBA #1198
512 West Rogers Blvd.
Slatook, OK 74070
(918) 396-4400
ATTORNEY FOR PETITIONERS

Page 2

OBITUARIES (CONT.)

TISHA ANN FRANKLIN



Tisha Ann Franklin, 50, of Eufaula, Oklahoma passed away Wednesday, January 17, 2024 at the St. Francis Hospital of Tulsa. Tisha was born on March 24, 1973 in Lawton, Oklahoma and is the daughter of Lester Wayne and Suzanna Jo (Watson) Franklin. She attended school at North West Classen in Oklahoma City. Tisha worked as a server in several restaurants. She loved to spend time with her children, grandchildren and cousins.

She is survived by four children, Manuel Reye Franklin and wife Angelina Ibarra of Moore, OK, Rachael Elise Franklin of Eufaula, OK, Sarah Ann Segura and husband Francisco of Oklahoma City, OK, and Maressa Alise Franklin of Oklahoma City, OK, mother Suzanna Franklin of Eufaula, OK, her father Lester Franklin and one brother, Lester Wayne Franklin Jr of Lawton, OK and seven grandchildren.

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GARY DALE

FIFE



Gary Dale Fife, a legendary journalist and cherished soul, departed this world on January 14, 2024, at the age of 73 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was born on September 21, 1950, in Claremore, Oklahoma to his parents, Robert James and Jennie Lee Fife.

Arrangements to honor Gary's life are entrusted to Schaudt's Glenpool-Bixby Funeral Service, located at 1329 East 151st St. Glenpool, OK 74033. Family and friends are invited to share kind words of comfort, special memories, and condolences online at www.schaudtfuneralservice.com.

A celebration of Gary's remarkable life was held on Saturday, January 27, 2024 at the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Complex Mound Building in Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

Gary was a man of diverse passions and interests. He found solace in hunting, was an avid Star Wars fan, and held a deep fascination for anything related to World War II. His love for music, particularly old movies, and a penchant for alien films, Godzilla, and Frankenstein showcased his eclectic tastes.

Gary was a career veteran of journalism, with more than 50 years of experience in print, radio and television. He specialized in national Native and government

tal affairs, spending 11 years in the nation's capital.

More than a hobby, journalism was Gary's lifeblood. He was a trailblazer in the field, reporting on almost every major event in Native American news since the 1970s. His tenure with Mvskoke Media witnessed his commitment to bringing stories of national significance to Indian Country. Gary was a true pioneer of Native Media.

Gary's roots were firmly planted in Tulsa, where he grew up on the north side of the tracks in the post-World War II era. His father worked for the airline, and the family later moved to the Pine and Harvard area. This shift marked Gary's entry into the Tulsa school system, where his early interest in journalism began to blossom.

Education & Career

Gary pursued higher education at Northeastern University in Tahlequah. The pivotal year of 1969 saw the occupation of Alcatraz by Native people, capturing the imagination of Indian youth nationwide.

He got on the school newspaper and realized that he really liked it, and that this was his calling. By his third year of his curriculum at NSC, there came an opportunity to go to Washington DC and intern. Gary, already drawn to journalism, seized the opportunity to intern in Washington DC with an Indian magazine. This experience fueled his passion for presenting a balanced perspective in reporting, showcasing both sides of the story. This was eye opening going to a big city like that coming from the Tulsa and Tahlequah areas. It was a time when major pieces of legislation started moving through congress. They were set up to look at every bill that came through congress to see if they had any implications for Native people. At the

time Native journalism was still in its infancy and just starting. Gary started writing articles showing both sides of the story, not just the Native side and found it very satisfying. At the time there were a lot of people he knew going through college and had more of an interest in worldly affairs and not things that were just happening on the reservation. He realized that there was more to what AIM, or the American Indian Movement was doing. There were people fighting on the legal front and on the social conditions that were confronting his people. Going through this is pretty much how Gary got his own philosophy of the day, making sure that his people got as much of a complete story as possible. This propelled him through 11 years of working in Washington DC into a communications job in Minneapolis, which was first-person radio. This is where he discovered the power in broadcast media, and that a radio show can have such an impact on people. Radio is the perfect medium to translate information. From hearing how words are pronounced, to the intensity of how words are used.

After that, Gary moved to Alaska with only a desk, a phone, and a phone book, for the prospect of founding the Indigenous-focused radio program, and the first Native weekday radio news service, 'National Native News.' At its peak, the program was carried on 181 public radio stations across the country. During Fife's tenure, the service won eight national awards in its first seven years. 'National Native News' began national carriage with National Public Radio and was later switched to American Public Radio.

Gary was just amazed at how he became part of Alaska and how it really grew into his soul, but his concerns for his family grew stronger. After some communications with his brother about their father Robert James Fife, who was getting much older and

had a stroke and was having a difficult time taking care of himself, Gary kicked around the idea with his wife about moving back to help him. This was a difficult decision because they felt like Alaska was a part of them. Gary spent 22 impactful years there, becoming an integral part of the state. However his concern for family, particularly his aging father, prompted a move back to Oklahoma with his wife, Ramona.

Home with His Tribe

Now after moving back, Gary needed to build a new life with his wife in Oklahoma. At this point his father was around 86 and had a hard time getting around and really needed some help. He found a job working for the Cherokee Nation for a while before finding an opening with the Muscogee Creek Media and came in for an interview. Back in the radio program and talking to people and sharing information you really can not get elsewhere, he felt right back at home. A living encyclopedia of Native American history and broadcast, Gary had a unique way of addressing weighty topics, making them accessible to all. He contributed a column to the paper, providing an avenue for self-expression and commentary on societal matters.

During his career, Gary garnered numerous awards in national and state press competitions, three legislative citations from the State of Alaska and the Governor's Community Service Medal. In 1978, he was the first Native American recipient of a Ford Fellowship in Educational Journalism. Fife came back home to work for his tribe's media outlet, Mvskoke Media, in 2011. In 2022, Fife was recognized with the Frank Greer Lifetime Achievement Award from the Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalism.

In September 2015, Gary was

the first to stand and advocate publicly for the Muscogee Nation's first free press law during a Muscogee Nation National Council committee meeting where the bill was introduced. This speech was given with everyone above the department in the chain of command except the chief sitting behind Gary and a few other department employees who showed up to support it.

Throughout the Muscogee Nation's long free-press fight for what would eventually become a constitutional amendment ratified by tribal citizens in September 2021, Gary stood as an example for free press and gave advice to those who continued to lead the cause. Before free press was even on the map, Fife risked asking tough questions of tribal officials with no legal protection for his job, serving as an example and setting the bar for other Mvskoke Media employees. In 2023 Gary was named as a "Living Legend," of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. He reminded them that the citizens are the real bosses.

Gary is preceded in death by his parents, sister Melissa Fife, and brother Gene Cochran.

He is survived by his wife, Ramona, brother Victor and wife Susan, sister-in-law Maureen M. Headbird - brother-in-law Robert A. Headbird, sister-in-law Mary R. Smith, brother-in-law Charles Campbell, sister-in-law Anne M. Smith, brother-in-law Ernest F. Briggs, Sr. III, brother-in-law Samuel K. Smith, brother-in-law Paul R. Smith, along with cousins, nieces, nephews, and friends.

Gary Dale Fife will forever be remembered for his unwavering commitment to truth and storytelling, leaving an indelible mark on Native journalism. His legacy lives on in the hearts of those who were touched by his words and the stories he shared.

May Gary rest in eternal peace, surrounded by the echoes of the narratives he helped bring to light.