



# MVSKOKE NEWS

PRODUCED BY MVSKOKEMEDIA

## THREE PONDS AND SIX YEARS LATER, AKHVSE TUTCENEN IS OPEN

THE THREE PONDS ELDER COMMUNITY ADDITION WILL NOW REVIEW TENANT APPLICATIONS AFTER SITTING IN ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

BY **BRADEN HARPER**  
MANAGING EDITOR

OKMULGEE - A big snip from a pair of oversized scissors cutting a black Muscogee (Creek) Nation ribbon at the Three Ponds Elderly Center finally marked the end of a six-year arrested development saga. The Nation officially held a ribbon cutting ceremony at Akhvse Tutcenen, or Three Ponds Elderly Housing Addition on Tuesday, Dec. 2. The \$13M project sits on 36 acres of land and contains 72 cottage-style single unit homes, a central elders center, and a walking trail. MCN Tribal leadership gathered to tour the facilities after years of setbacks and hangups.

The plans for the development were designed by New Fire Native Design Group. Each 990 square foot unit includes one bedroom, one bathroom, a fully furnished kitchen, a covered driveway, a safe room as well as a washer and dryer. According to New Fire's website, the small pitched-roofed units resemble homes occupied by elders in the southeastern homelands. The units are arranged in small clusters that



MCN Principal Chief David Hill, Secretary of Housing Little Snow Fields, Second Chief Del Beaver with Tribal leadership at the ribbon cutting ceremony on Dec 2. (Braden Harper/MM)

**THREE PONDS**  
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## BLUE MORPHO, CALIGO AND PAPER KITES

TROPICAL BUTTERFLY SPECIES LAND ON THE MVSKOKE RESERVATION

BY **BRADEN HARPER**  
MANAGING EDITOR

BIXBY - The Euchee Butterfly Farm has their indoor aviary thermostat temperature set higher than usual these days. That is because the farm is hosting three tropical butterfly species not found in North America: Blue Morphos, Caligos and Paper Kite. The tropical butterflies made their debut at the farm in November. The farm is currently the only place these species can be viewed in Oklahoma.

Blue morphos, commonly called the emperor, have a vibrant blue color and can contain wing spans up to four inches. Two different types of Caligos flutter in the aviary: Caligo memnon and Caligo atreus. Both have bright purple and yellow colors and can measure up to six inches. These species are found in Central America. Paper Kite, or Idea leuconoe, have translucent white wings that have a wing span of six inches. Paper Kites originate from Southeast Asia.

Commonly found in rainfor-

ests, these species require warm, humid environments to thrive in.

The butterflies were transported to the farm in their chrysalis stage, or pupa form when they are transforming from a larva into an adult. At this stage the pupa is digesting its body from the inside. This is when the butterfly's initial form, a caterpillar, reorganizes its internal organs and grows a pair of wings. After a period of five to 21 days, the pupa emerges from its chrysalis into an adult butterfly.

Euchee Butterfly Farm Director Jane Breckinridge (Euchee/Mvskoke) said the farm is the only facility in the state of Oklahoma that is licensed to import and house these species. According to Breckinridge, the permits were difficult to obtain, however the obstacles were worth it because the butterflies are so unique.

"It's going to be a unique experience people have not had," Breckinridge said. "Myself and my staff members, we'll go into the aviary and we'll find ourselves in a trance because there is just something so soothing about them and the way these big blue butterflies fly."



Euchee Butterfly Farm Director Jane Breckinridge shares a bench with a Blue Morpho butterfly from Costa Rica. (Braden Harper/MM)

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## PRINCIPAL CHIEF CALLS FOR A SPECIAL ELECTION

BY **JERRAD MOORE**  
ASSIGNMENT EDITOR

MVSKOKE RESERVATION - Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill issued a proclamation on Nov. 25 calling for a special election to be conducted on May 30, 2026. The election will be held so that citizens can vote on two amendments to the MCN constitution.

The MCN National Council passed legislation for the amendments at the Oct 25 quarterly session. NCA 25-105 proposes amending the constitution to limit MCNNC representatives to a total of three terms of office, whether they are consecutive or not. NCA 25-109 proposes an amendment removing the word "Muscogee" from the constitution and replacing it with the traditional "Mvskoke" as well as deleting the word "Creek" throughout the constitution.

The National Council also passed NCA 25-107 at the same quarterly session. This legislation appropriated \$345,943 to the MCN Election Board to conduct the special election. Citizens can vote on the amendments May 30, 2026

## LEGAL CONFLICT CONTINUES BETWEEN STITT AND DRUMMOND AS TRIBES FILE FEDERAL SUIT

BY **THOMAS JACKSON**  
REPORTER

MVSKOKE RESERVATION - The conflict between Governor Kevin Stitt and Attorney General Gentner Drummond has continued as Stitt responded to Drummond's refusal to prosecute Indigenous people hunting and fishing on Tribal land without a state-approved license, choosing to attack Drummond for his decision to abide by Tribal law.

In a press release sent out on Nov. 13, titled "Governor Stitt Defends Equal Enforcement of State Hunting Laws, Appoints Special Prosecutor," Stitt attacked Drummond for his refusal to prosecute Indigenous people.

"The State of Oklahoma can prosecute Indians who commit non-major crimes in our state. I will not stand by and allow lawless Drummond to undermine district attorneys who are prosecuting crimes and keeping Oklahomans safe," Stitt said.

Gov. Stitt then announced he appointed Russ Cochran, former Assistant District Attorney for both Lincoln and Pottawatomie Counties, as a special prosecutor. Cochran, a former Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics General Counsel, will be tasked with prosecuting Indigenous

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surround common areas. The 3,300 square foot elder's center in the middle of the development resembles a council house that was found at the center of every Muscogee village.

The initial groundbreaking ceremony for the development took place during the Floyd Administration on March 28, 2019. Since then the project has weathered one global pandemic and six Department of Housing secretaries.

MCN Secretary of Housing L S Fields remarked that this day symbolizes a new start for the tribe's elders. Soon elders within the community will have a new place to call home.

"This is a great day for Muscogee (Creek) Nation. This is a great day for Three Ponds. Most importantly it is a great day for the elders that will be living here and calling this place home," Fields said.

Tenant applicants like Judy McKee (Mvskoke) have been on the list for a housing unit for four and a half years. McKee is 83 years old and enjoys crafting. Now she is one step closer to living among fellow Mvskoke citizens. She currently lives in Okmulgee, but said she has been anxious to move into the Three Ponds Community because she believes it will provide a safer environment for elders like her.

"Although I live in a good part of town, there was a shooting I witnessed," McKee said. "I have homeless people knocking on my door, trying to get in. I'm anxious to get out here where I feel safe."

**A Long Time Coming**

MCN Principal Chief David Hill said that the project could not have been completed without help across several different departments.

"This is a special day for everyone, especially for our elders," Chief Hill said. "We couldn't have done this if it weren't for everyone involved."

When the location was under consideration for purchase, MCN Second Chief Del Beaver was the environmentalist specialist who conducted the inspection in 2010. He remarked that from start to finish this project has spanned several administrations.

"I just had a small part of clearing this property," Chief Beaver said. "Then when I was on the National Council I can remember we needed more money for this project. The National Council had to approve more money for this project. Now here we are ready to cut the ribbon. This didn't just start with the previous administration, or the administration before that. Three administrations ago is when this thing started."

Three Ponds' units will also help accommodate McKee's limited mobility needs. McKee said she is most looking forward to spending time with others in the community.

"I feel isolated a lot, I live in the middle of Okmulgee," McKee said. "I'm anxious to be around people that have the same interests as I do. We're all older, but we still have a lot to look forward to. I think it's so exciting for the Tribe, for the town, even for the county to show what Creek Nation is doing for their people."



ABOVE: The community features cottage-style housing with side walks and safe lighting. BELOW: The centrally-located community center has game tables and recreational spaces. (Braden Harper/MM)



**"It feels like I have a home again. I've lived in the duplex I've lived in for 18 years. As I've gotten older I can't get in and out of the facility. I'll be able to have my own driveway. I won't have any steps to get up. It's beautiful, they've made room for us and our storage here. It's beyond my dreams."**  
**Judy McKee**



ABOVE: Judy McKee toured the new facility. McKee is looking forward to living among community at the housing complex. BELOW: A unit shown during the tour was decorated for the holidays. (Braden Harper/MM)



**TRIBAL SUIT**

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people hunting and fishing without a state-approved license.

Drummond responded in a Nov. 20 press release, directly calling out Stitt for repeatedly spreading misinformation in regards to tribal sovereignty, and specifically calling out recent statements the governor made suggesting that Drummond believes Tribal citizens are allowed to hunt on private land without permission.

"Gov. Stitt has made a habit of spreading misinformation, especially when it comes to the sovereignty of the tribal nations of Oklahoma. He knows full well that the tribes in Oklahoma do not authorize their citizens to enter private property to hunt or fish without the landowner's consent. Their tribal codes prohibit it, Oklahoma law prohibits it, and I have never suggested otherwise," Drummond said in his press release.

Drummond then reaffirmed his commitment to upholding the law. "The constant lies and corruption [by Gov. Stitt] must stop. The law has not changed and neither has my commitment to it. Oklahomans deserve truth and integrity. Enough is enough," he said.

Drummond's statements come as multiple Tribal Nations, including the Choctaw Nation, the Chickasaw Nation, and the Cherokee Nation, have filed a federal lawsuit with the United States District Court for Northern Oklahoma against Gov. Stitt, Cochran, and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

According to a Nov. 18 release from the Choctaw Nation, the lawsuit argues that Gov. Stitt and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation have violated Tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction by continuing to prosecute Indigenous hunters and fishermen on Tribal land. It also argues Gov. Stitt lacks authority to appoint a special prosecutor to prosecute wildlife crimes that occur on Tribal land.

**LAWSUIT BETWEEN MCN, ROSS GROUP ENTERS SETTLEMENT PHASE**

BY **THOMAS JACKSON**  
 REPORTER

OKMULGEE – A lawsuit between the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and Ross Group Construction Corporation, a construction firm out of Tulsa, may soon be settled in MCN District Court through mediation which began on Dec. 4. The lawsuit relates to the construction of the Eufaula Indian Health Center, which is operated by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Department of Health.

The bill that approved the move to mediation was sponsored by Representative Dode Barnett and was initially passed by a joint BFJ/HEW committee on Nov. 12 by a unanimous 6-0 vote.

Adopted by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's National Council during the Regular Session on Nov. 15, the resolution, TR 25-117, allows the Principal Chief, or someone he appoints, to begin the process of settling the case between the MCN and Ross Group, referred to in court documents as "Ross Group Design-Build, LLC," on behalf of MCN's Department of Health.

Other defendants listed in court records include ONE Architecture, LLC, Environmental Specialists, LLC, HP Engineering, LLC, Bernhard TME, LLC, Valent Air Management Systems, Trane U.S. Inc., FRE Mechanical, LLC, Dry Coolers, Inc., Action, Inc., and Empirical Energy Solutions, LLC.

According to the first amended petition submitted by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation on Mar. 23, 2021, Ross Group and other entities enlisted the assistance of subcontractors or consultants for the building of the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system at the health center, and assumed responsibility for those subcontractors and consultants. However, the complaint alleges this HVAC system was defective.

According to the filing defects included, but were not limited to: failure to provide a fully-functional and complete mechanical system, defective AC and heating/cooling system designs, failure to abide by industry-standard procedures in terms of proper oversight, failure to provide methods to monitor and fix issues with the systems (i.e. building automation systems or maintenance access areas), and failure to properly install hardware & software for the building's cooling systems.

The complaint also alleged that the design and construction of the clinic's Procedure Room were also defective, with HVAC failures and improper ventilation being two key issues.

This lawsuit with the Nation is not the first time that Ross Group Construction has found itself on the receiving end of a lawsuit. As covered by The Frontier in June of 2020, the construction company settled a lawsuit, which alleged that the company used a series of shell companies to illegally obtain work contracts and money from the federal government which were set aside for small businesses. The federal lawsuit was settled for \$2.8 million and was settled without an admission of wrongdoing by Ross Group Construction.

According to the National Council legislation, Ross Group and other defendants have expressed interest in settling the lawsuit between the two parties, and Muscogee (Creek) Nation aims to receive a settlement worth no less than \$1.5 million.

The next hearing for the case is scheduled for Jan. 30, 2026, while a potential jury trial is scheduled for June 15, 2026.

Mvskoke Media will continue to monitor this situation and provide updates as it develops.



Angel Ellis, Director | [aellis@mvsokemedia.com](mailto:aellis@mvsokemedia.com)

Braden Harper, Managing Editor | [bharper@mvsokemedia.com](mailto:bharper@mvsokemedia.com)

Jerrad Moore, Assignment Editor | [jmoore@mvsokemedia.com](mailto:jmoore@mvsokemedia.com)

ShayIn Proctor, Reporter | [sproctor@mvsokemedia.com](mailto:sproctor@mvsokemedia.com)

Meredith Johnson, Reporter | [mjohnson@mvsokemedia.com](mailto:mjohnson@mvsokemedia.com)

Thomas Jackson, Reporter | [tjackson@mvsokemedia.com](mailto:tjackson@mvsokemedia.com)



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## SCULPTURE IN NEW PARK HONORS INDIGENOUS HERITAGE, RECONCILIATION

BY MICHAEL W. PANNELL  
THE MACON MELODY

The following article was originally published on November 20, 2025 in *The Macon Melody*, part of *The Georgia Trust for Local News*.

Kenneth Johnson's work — creations both large and small, from fractions of an ounce to multiple tons — are made with meticulous care and craftsmanship, while also infused with meaning.

Johnson is an award-winning, internationally recognized Muscogee (Creek)/Seminole jewelry designer, metalsmith and sculptor. He was raised in the present home of the Muscogee Nation in Oklahoma and now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

His massive sculpture, "ECKE — Mother Ground," is featured in Bicentennial Park at 239 Clinton St., just west of Ocmulgee National Historical Park in East Macon.

The site is the ancestral home of the Muscogee (Creek) before their forced and illegal removal from Georgia, when lands, homes, businesses and heritage roots were taken as they were driven off on their own Trail of Tears to Oklahoma.

A ribbon-cutting took place on Nov. 13 to commemorate the opening of the park, created by Macon200 and related government agencies in celebration of Macon-Bibb's 200th anniversary in 2023.

The park serves as a symbolic reflection of modern-day steps toward welcoming back and re-forging ties between Macon and the Native American community that once called the area home.

Macon-Bibb Mayor Lester Miller said the park "stands at the crossroads of our past and our future on land rich with Indigenous history, Black heritage and the industrious spirit that built this community." He called it "a place for reflection and reconciliation where we can honor the stories that shaped us and look toward the future with hope and unity."

The efforts of local, state and national leaders alongside Muscogee leaders to make Ocmulgee National Historical Park Georgia's first full-fledged national park, co-managed by the Muscogee Nation, have become a unifying cause.

Johnson spoke of his sculpture — significantly placed to face west toward Oklahoma—to those gathered at the ribbon-cutting.

I had the chance to talk further with Johnson about his thoughts on the sculpture, his work and his traditional Georgia homeland:

"The piece in Bicentennial Park is 7.5 tons, 12 feet tall and made from Georgia white marble," he said. "It's one of my largest works to date and it's important because of where it sits and what it represents. The life-size figure of a traditional stickball player will be placed in front of the sculpture. I like to do things that have some importance. With its scale, it denotes a gravity of place and the many people who lived here before Macon was a town — people who were already here with community, families and everyday life with government, structure and culture.

"The woman's face alludes to our mother ground here, and the flames on its base represent the fires that went out from here and people who still exist today, alive and vibrant with a sense of fire burning within us. The white color of the Georgia marble is meant to be a healing color — that's important. It facing west is important because the Bicentennial Park is about reconciliation. It's about looking forward. Our goal is to have another sculpture, a sister piece in Oklahoma, facing east to mirror the one in Macon. It hasn't been funded, but we've got to feed the vision for it."

The idea of heritage and ongoing life — "we are still here" — is an important theme in Johnson's work. An example, in addition to "ECKE — Mother Ground," is something he calls the Muscogee knot, or life knot, which shows up in numerous jewelry pieces created by him.

Johnson wore such a ring at the event, and a similar necklace was worn by Tracie Revis of the Ocmulgee National Park & Preserve Initiative, the organization working toward seeing the Ocmulgee park become a national park as well as preserving lands around the Ocmulgee River.

"The knot represents two interacting segments," he said. "I'm assigning to it the meaning of life based on my own understanding because I think these

symbols have importance. You can see them visually, but some of the stories and history connected to them have been lost to us, so I'm looking at these symbols with my intuition and with my heart as an artist.

"When I look at that life knot, the Muscogee knot, it means that you're connected in time and in space to a place or to a person. When you're in that moment, you're alive, you're connected. I distinguish that I don't speak for the tribe and I can't define what it means to everyone, but I know what it means to me. That's part of being an artist — you create out of your own vision and skill and then put it out there for others to see, hopefully be moved and informed by it, and to bring to it what they see."

While Johnson may become best known in Macon for the Bicentennial Park sculpture, jewelry design and metalsmithing represent the bulk of his career.

Johnson designed and created the silver crescent, necklace-like gorgets worn by Muscogee Principal Chief David Hill, Second Chief Del Beaver and others. His work has graced multiple entertainment red carpets, including an iconic silver woodpecker gorget worn by "Reservation Dogs" creator and director Sterlin Harjo.

He has created custom, commissioned jewelry for U.S. Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor, as well as for a Canadian chief justice and a member of the British House of Lords.

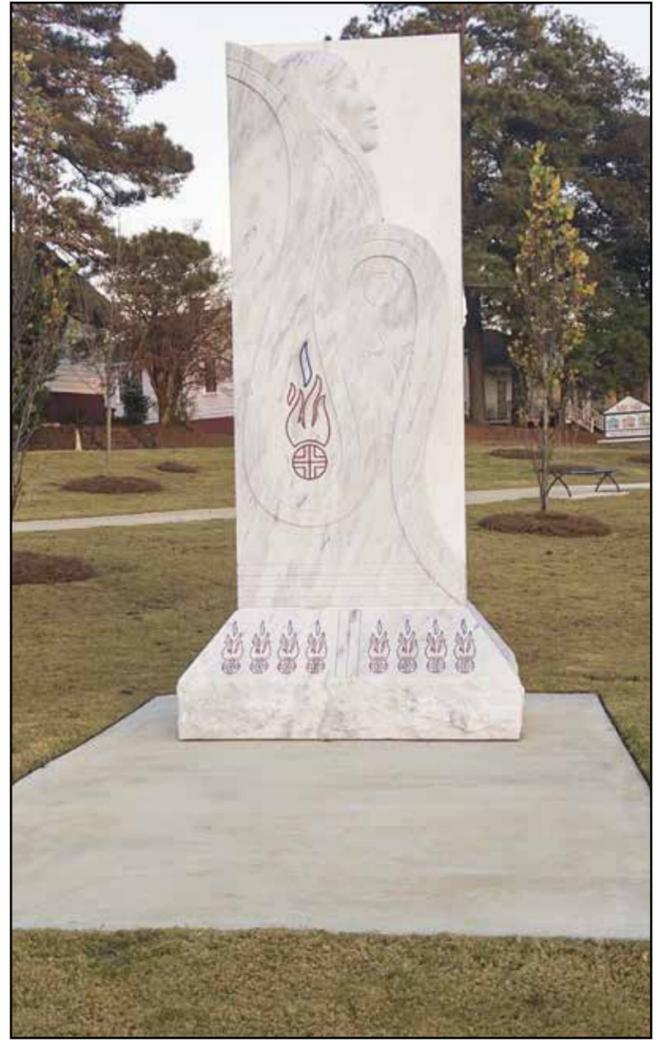
Johnson's jewelry has appeared in countless magazines, including *French Vogue*.

Whatever the medium, his work carries forward ancient, traditional designs based on pottery and patchwork familiar to him since his youth.

He said that in the work of his ancestors, he sees a flow — the same flow Johnson sees in his own work. It's part of the story of his people, whether in tragedy and sorrow or resilience and triumph.

"It ties into things like the river and even the mounds," he said. "The river goes beyond where we see it. Those mounds live beyond us, but we get to benefit from them and contribute in our own way."

I asked Johnson if he felt the ongoing story of his people and



Kenneth Johnson's sculpture "ECKE — Mother Ground," sits in Macon's new Bicentennial Park at 239 Clinton St. Johnson is internationally known for his large-scale sculpture, which carries traditional Muscogee (Creek) designs into modern-day works. (Michael W. Pannell/Macon Melody)

heritage was being well told, past and present.

"No, it hasn't been told well," he said. "In fact, for so long it's been covered up. Most people in Macon don't know who built those mounds or lived here. They talk about it archaeologically, anthropologically, but don't understand that the people who built them have descendants walking around, driving around, flying here and there, working jobs, creating culture and are alive and thriving. So, it's not just the Indian mounds over there, it's about people.

"I think there can be a better job in acknowledging the Muscogee people, telling our story, and it needs Indigenous voices telling it. We want more and more partners in the community who want that kind of inclusion, who want a full story and perspective."

As a child in Oklahoma, Johnson recalled being curious about his cultural ancestry

but struggling to find answers. Roughly 50 years later, he noted there is a greater sense of understanding.

"There's been a shift and we're seeing that there is a welcome and a return. Now, instead of saying you can't go back, it's that we should go back and engage in a good way," he said. "I think the importance of having ambassadors for the nation, such as Tracie Revis, is paramount to that engagement. Seeing a cultural center opened here is such a great idea. I know what it is to grow up in Oklahoma and now have the privilege to visit here and engage, not as a tourist, but as someone who is invested here."

Johnson and his art can be explored further at [kenneth-johnson.com](http://kenneth-johnson.com) and through his social media.

Contact writer Michael W. Pannell at [mwpannell@gmail.com](mailto:mwpannell@gmail.com). Find him on Instagram at [michael\\_w\\_pannell](https://www.instagram.com/michael_w_pannell).

### BUTTERFLIES

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A *Calligo atreus*, also known as the Yellow-edged Giant Owl, takes a break and rests in the butterfly aviary at the Euchee Butterfly Farm. (Braden Harper/MM)

The Costa Rican butterflies were provided by the El Bosque Nuevo Butterfly Farm, a program that promotes conservation by raising pollinators like butterflies. Profits from the program are used to plant trees and vegetation in areas that have experienced deforestation.

In order to prepare for the tropical butterflies' arrival, the farm's indoor aviary was modified. The indoor aviary was outfitted with a new water pipe system for a garden display that

continuously runs water for the butterflies to enjoy. Additionally, the aviary is kept at a warm temperature and has high windows that allow the butterflies to receive natural sunlight.

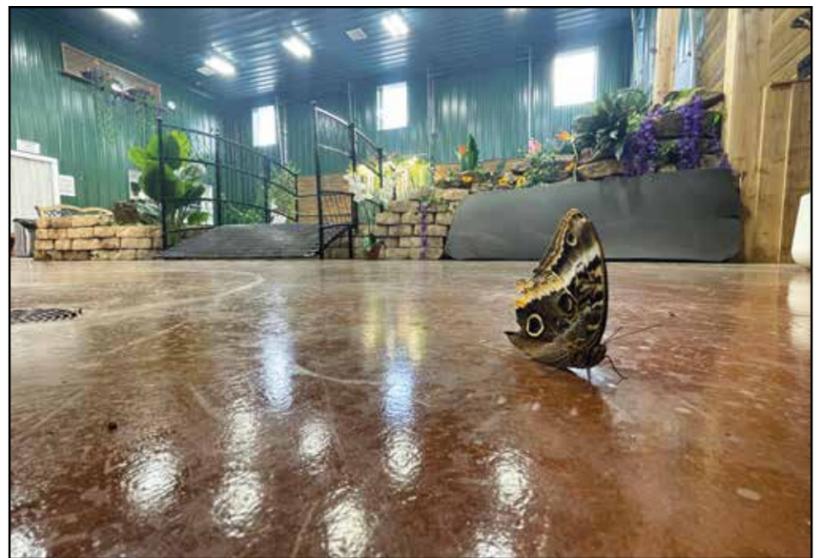
***"It's like a Disney movie come to life. They're just gliding around and it's really special."***

Pollinator stations are abundant in the facility containing the tropical butterflies' favorite meal:

rotting fruit. Breckinridge said the butterflies enjoy rotting fruit because of the sugars that break down within them.

The arrival and housing of the tropical butterflies is a symbol of

the Euchee Butterfly Farm's collaboration with international conservation groups. Accord-



The indoor aviary at the butterfly farm supplies sources of nectar and water, hosts plants for caterpillars, a warm climate, and plenty of room to fly and perch. (Braden Harper/MM)

ing to Breckinridge, conservation efforts are important to her everywhere, not just at home.

"I'm going to do whatever it takes, whether it's in trying to support people trying to restore tropical rainforests, or restoring habitats right here in Oklahoma on the Mvskoke Nation Reservation because it's too precious to lose," Breckinridge said.

Breckinridge said the tropical butterflies can be seen year round inside the farm's indoor aviary. The farm is prospectively looking

at adding more species to add to their aviaries in the future.

The Euchee Butterfly Farm is currently offering a \$5 discount to Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tribal citizens. To apply the discount, visit the farm's online booking portal and type in the coupon code "TRIBAL" in the coupon box. To schedule a tour visit <https://www.nativebutterflies.org/tours>. Citizens can also either contact [angela@nativebutterflies.org](mailto:angela@nativebutterflies.org), or 918-364-9103 and request the Tribal citizen discount.

# PITCH, HIT, RUN!

## ANNA KELLY'S SKILLS TAKE HER TO THE WORLD SERIES

By SHAYLN PROCTOR  
REPORTER



Anna Kelly shows her trophy from the Pitch, Hit and Run 2025 competition. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

TORONTO – Mvskoke citizen Anna Kelly participated in the Major League Baseball Pitch, Hit, and Run finals at the World Series in October. The Okmulgee fifth grader and her mom, Jennifer Kelly (Mvskoke), boarded their first flight to travel to Toronto for the skill-based competition.

The co-ed event for ages 7-14 tests competitors' skills at pitching accuracy, hitting distance, and sprinting speed. Competitions begin at the local level and move to team competitions and then finals. A competitor's scores stay with them as they move up in competition.

The Okmulgee fifth grader

first started playing when she was 7 years old, that's when she started to have a passion for softball and started to enjoy pitching.

During the local competitions, Anna tried her hardest but didn't pay attention to her scores until the end—she was happy with how she did.

"For the try out, they had to do 3 different categories. They had to do the pitching, the hitting and the running. It was actually a competition for each division so hers was a 9-10U division. They hosted at Bricktown Ballpark in Oklahoma City," Jennifer Kelly said. "So she won her division there and then we had to travel to Arlington, Texas. She had to compete against I think 5 other girls, so she won her region there for her scores and she got selected."

Jennifer Kelly explained that Anna then went on to the National level competition and met girls from across the country that share her interest.

While being on a team, Anna has learned that each member brings an energy and spark to the team. "That goes through the whole team and it just really gets the mood up. Once you start getting that mood up, everything is good. Like everybody starts feeling better, hitting better just basically cheering each other on," Anna said.

"Teamwork is what I like most about the sport, because we have

people helping, such as cheering on the pitcher while they're pitching."

Although Anna's team didn't win, Jennifer Kelly shared that Anna did win the regional championship to get to the World Series.

"So the accomplishment was really a big accomplishment for her to make it to the top 3 in the country in the age category. So, she did really well," Jennifer said.

When entering the World Series, Anna was nervous but when she got on the field that nervousness turned into excitement. Her favorite part of the competition was batting, but she enjoyed meeting and becoming friends with her team mates and with girls in the upper division.

"She connected with the older girls that were like 12 and 14, just because she's getting older and so she made a couple of friends that were older than her but just seeing those older girls there I think motivates the younger girls to want to do better," Jennifer explained.

Anna has been able to share her journey in interviews, including on television. Jennifer Kelly wanted to show that other Native girls in all age categories can try out to compete in this competition so that it can open doors for them as well. Even though Anna is from Okmulgee, Jennifer and Anna wanted to let them know that you can do anything you put

your heart in.

"I didn't get to experience these things at a young age but to be able to experience that at 10 years old and to be in the top 3 in the country at that age, means that's an amazing accomplishment at that age. So I couldn't be any prouder of her than we are," Jennifer Kelly shared.

"We practice all the time. I think that hopefully next year other Mvskoke Creek girls will go and compete in all categories for that competition. There are a lot of very talented young athletes that could have made it, so hopefully next year other girls will go out and give it a shot and try their best to get there."

Jennifer Kelly knows that representation matters, and from her perspective as a mother she feels her daughter Anna represented herself and her tribe well.

"I think she represented our tribe well. She was very friendly, kind and had good manners. She was really respectable to all the people that put on the pitch, hit and run competition. One of the ladies that does run the pitch, hit and run is Native American," Jennifer Kelly said.

Both Jennifer Kelly and Anna are especially grateful to the Okmulgee Indian Community which donated funds to help with the trip.

# GOOD MEDICINE FESTIVAL UNITES INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND MUSIC TRADITIONS IN HISTORIC HOUSTON EVENT

By ARYN WARD  
SUBMISSION

HOUSTON — The inaugural Good Medicine Indigenous Music Festival, held on Nov. 14-15, brought together Indigenous musicians, composers, and families for two evenings of remarkable performances across classical, operatic, traditional, contemporary, improvisational, and experimental genres. The festival delivered a moment many attendees described as "historic," "sacred," and "a healing experience."

Despite a busy weekend in the city, the festival saw strong attendance, with 60-80 people on Friday and 100-120 on Saturday, demonstrating growing community support for Indigenous-led arts in Houston.

Before each concert began, I offered greetings in Mvskoke and Yuchi. On Saturday the audience was invited into a shared breath as a grounding moment that set the tone for a weekend centered

in language, identity, and connection.

Friday's concert at The Church at 1548 Heights was dedicated to Indigenous language, bringing Mvskoke, Yuchi, Choctaw, and Cherokee songs into one shared space. For many attendees, hearing these four languages sung in the same venue made for an emotional, first-of-its-kind experience. Featured performers of the evening Aryn Ward with children Jaycie, Jaxton, Joshua, and Journey (Mvskoke/Yuchi); Dr. Kirsten C. Kunkle & her daughter Stephanie (Mvskoke); Mark Billy (Choctaw); and Kiegan Ryan (Cherokee Nation). Accompanists included were Gabrielle Tyler, mezzo-soprano, and Dr. Sookin Park, on piano. Friday's intimate, family oriented environment showcased the powerful continuity of Indigenous languages and the vibrancy of new Indigenous compositions.

My children and I opened the evening with the Yuchi song Yudjeha aKáyòya and continued with traditional Mvskoke hymns. We

were deeply supported by Halay Turning Heart, Project Administrator for the Yuchi Language Project, whose guidance helped ensure that our Yuchi offerings were prepared and shared with cultural accuracy and respect.

Dr. Kunkle and her daughter Stephanie added to the intergenerational atmosphere with a traditional Mvskoke lullaby that brought tears to audience members' eyes. Mark Billy uplifted the Choctaw language through the Choctaw Hymn 112 arranged by Charles Shadle. Kiegan Ryan contributed Cherokee representation through his original compositions written with intense passion that was heard in each note.

Saturday's concert at Trinity Episcopal was a multi-genre Indigenous showcase. The evening expanded into opera, chamber music, improvisation, contemporary classical works, and avant-garde electronics, performed by nationally acclaimed Indigenous artists.

### A Calling, a Community, and a Future

In closing remarks, I shared that this festival felt like a spiritual calling: "A path I didn't choose, but one that was chosen for me." I reflected on the support received throughout the process:

"The Creator doesn't give a calling without also sending helpers... people to walk the road with you."

A big "Mvto & s@nla K'ayasOTa" was offered to all performers, accompanists, volunteers, and partners. The festival received support from the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, Midtown Houston, Trinity Episcopal, The Church at 1548 Heights, and Nameless Sound.

As the concert concluded inside Trinity Episcopal's historic sanctuary, I told the audience that these walls have never seen or heard anything like this... until now. The audience erupted in applause, recognizing the significance of Indigenous classi-

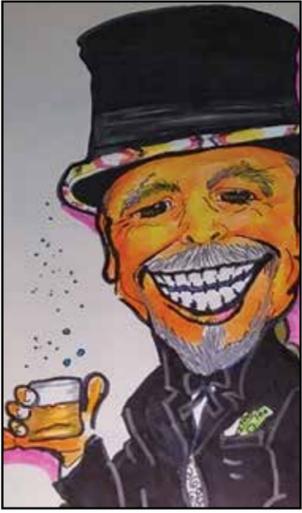
cal and experimental works resonating through a space that had never hosted such performances before.

### A Cultural Milestone for Houston

Good Medicine's debut year surpassed expectations in attendance, artistry, and community impact. By foregrounding Mvskoke, Yuchi, Choctaw, and Cherokee languages and uplifting intergenerational and multidisciplinary Indigenous voices, the festival demonstrated that Indigenous music is not a single category. It is a powerful, living element. Music is much more than just sound—it is connection, it is healing, it is life.

This inaugural year marks the start of a growing movement in Indigenous-led performance, creation, and community-rooted artistry. My hope is that this Good Medicine will continue traveling beyond Houston, across Turtle Island, and into the heart of the Mvskoke Nation.





**SOUR SOFKEE**

By **FUS YVHIKV**  
COLUMNIST

The Oorang Indians. Stuffing a bartender into a telephone booth? Picking up a trolley and turning it 180 degrees to return to the team hotel? First ever half time shows? Bear wrestling at halftime? Tomahawk and knife throwing demos? Jim Thorpe drop kicking field goals from the 50-yard line? The team owner who only wanted to sell Airedale Terriers? This was the first and only NFL franchise comprised entirely of Native Americans, the Oorang Indians.

The Oorang Indians were an

NFL team established in 1922 by Walter Lingo in tiny LaRue, OH. With a population of only 795 people in 1920, LaRue remains, by far, the smallest city ever to host an NFL franchise. The city was so small that it didn't even have a football stadium. The Oorang Indians were forced to play their "home" games fifteen miles away in Marion, OH.

With the team being in a tiny town without a football stadium underscores that the franchise was all about promotion! Mr. Lingo clearly had other goals in mind beyond fielding a winning football team. Indeed, he owned a large dog kennel that bred and sold Airedale Terriers. He used his NFL team to promote and sell his Airedales.

Fielding a team made up entirely of Native American players, and coached by the great Jim Thorpe, whetted the public's appetite to buy tickets. The Oorang Indians created the NFL's first pre-game and half-time shows. These shows made extensive use of the Airedales doing tricks. Of course, having Native Americans also performing only added to the curiosity, intrigue, and most importantly, ticket sales.

Sadly for Mr. Lingo, owning an NFL franchise meant having to play football games. Lingo showed little interest in winning. The Oorang Indians existed only for the 1922 and 1923 seasons.

The 1922 team finished at 5-8. The Indians started the 1923 season by losing their first nine games and being outscored 235-12. The team finished the year with a 2-10 record.

The players knew they were mere circus attractions. Their primary role was to show dogs and play to Indian stereotypes. But curiosity about the Indians was robust. Therefore, the players would perform half-time tricks. These included the ever-popular faux Indian dances, archery, tomahawk, and knife throwing exhibitions. The "Indian dances" were not authentic but played to the Hollywood images expected by the crowd. The joke was on the fans.

With little effort made to win games, or even practice, the Indians had a lot of free time on their hands. Not surprisingly, they spent a great deal of time partying and drinking. Their spirited times were the stuff of legend.

In 1922, the night before a game with the Chicago Bears, the Indians were partying at a bar called Everyman's Saloon. The bartender stopped serving the team members at 2am. Upset at being cutoff, the Indians stuffed and locked the bartender into a telephone booth. The Indians staggered back to their hotel in the wee hours of the morning. Just hours later,

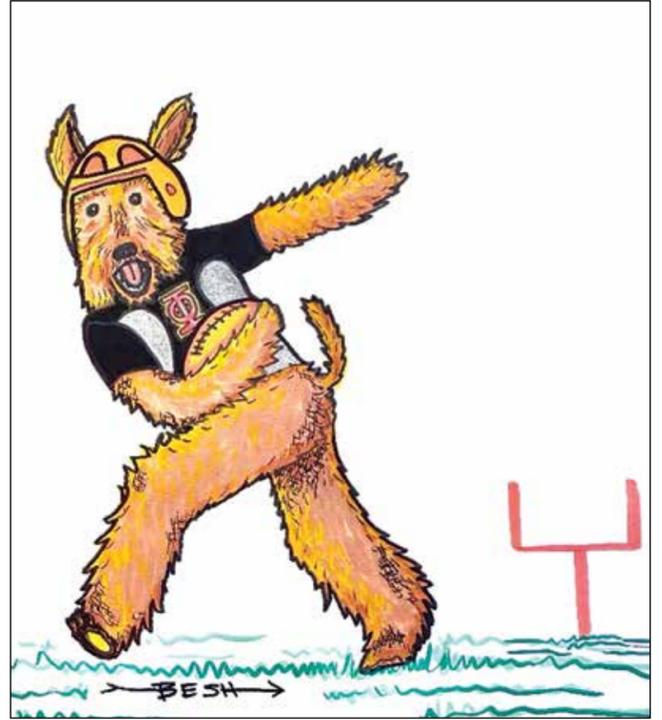
the Bears trounced them 33-6.

During the 1923 season the Indians were in St. Louis for a game against All-Stars. Again, the team partied into the wee hours of the game day morning. They boarded a trolley to return to the team hotel. However, the trolley was headed in the opposite direction. The Indians solved the problem by picking up the trolley and turning it 180 degrees. They made it back to their hotel for a couple of hours of sleep before

traveling to the stadium.

By 1924 the novelty had worn off. Fans had already seen the dancing Indians and the tricks of the Airedales. Mr. Lingo did not renew the franchise fee and thus the team folded. The team did produce two future NFL Hall of Famers in Jim Thorpe (Sac and Fox), inducted in 1963, and Joe Guyon (White Earth Chippewa), inducted in 1963. Go Indians!

-Okis ci, Fus.

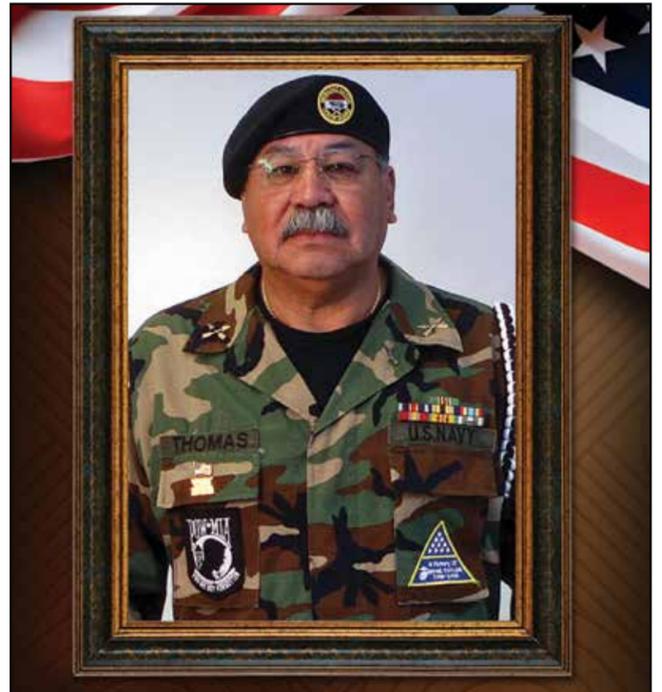


By **MARIAH LEE**  
SUBMISSION

Here are some pictures of our play performed at The Hectorville Morning Star Church! Our children performed perfectly to a packed house on Saturday afternoon! The traditional shirts and skirts were made by Cindy Russell. KoKo Lowe sang our Tribal songs and our Fate Teller, Halle Bucktrot managed the children on stage perfectly! Mvto to all our parents and all who came out to support our Native Children!

**VETERANS SPOTLIGHT**

**LOY THOMAS**



The Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs Services Office is proud to honor tribal veteran Loy D. Thomas for his dedicated service to the U.S. Navy, the United States, Muscogee (Creek) Nation and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Honor Guard. Loy honorably served four years from 1966 to 1969 and is a recipient of several honors: National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with 2 Bronze Stars, Vietnam Campaign Medal with Device. Mvto Mr. Thomas for your selfless service to your country and your community.

**MVTO FOR YOUR SELFLESS SERVICE!**

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Barnett Fisher Cemetery in Okmulgee County is full and no longer has vacancy for new burials.

**COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

**Opunvk Kerreyat Ipunkerrevs**  
"Learn the Language with Us"  
Mvskoke Language Preservation  
Dec. 16  
5 p.m. - 9 p.m.  
1020 N. Brown St. Sapulpa, Okla  
Register at [www.mvskoke-opunvk.com](http://www.mvskoke-opunvk.com)

**Elder's Meeting**  
Okmulgee Elder Nutrition Center  
Jan. 7  
9:30 a.m.  
2900 N. Osage Pl.  
Okmulgee, Okla

**Coffee and Donuts**  
Veterans Affairs Services Office  
Jan. 8  
8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
1006 Bear Ln, Okmulgee, Okla  
For questions, contact 918-732-7739

**Toy Run Donation**  
VASO/Mvskoke Riders  
Toys are still being accepted by Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs.  
For questions, contact 918-732-7739.  
1006 Bear Ln, Okmulgee, Okla

**Health Shelf Donation Drive**  
College of Muscogee Nation Health & Wellness is seeking hygiene products, laundry detergent, and gently used blankets and pillows for students in need. Every five items donated will enter donors into a drawing. Donations can be dropped off at 2170 Raven Circle, Okmulgee, OK.  
For more information, contact 918-549-2800.

**ADVERTISE WITH US.**

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# THE CREEK DRAFT REBELLION OF 1918

## WARTIME HYSTERIA AND INDIAN-BAITING IN WWI OKLAHOMA

BY DR. THOMAS A. BRITTEN, PHD

*The following article was published in Volume 79, Number 2, Summer 2001 of the Chronicles of Oklahoma.*

Just over a year following President Woodrow Wilson's call for a declaration of war against the Central Powers, an agitated and anxiety-ridden American public panicked after reading newspaper headlines that Creek Indians in Oklahoma were "on the warpath." Both the New York Times and the Louisville Herald ran stories that a large force of Creek warriors had armed themselves, murdered three white farmers, and had taken refuge in the hills surrounding the small town of Henryetta, Oklahoma.

The Daily Oklahoman echoed the alarming details, printing a story under the headline "200 Creeks Go on Warpath over Drafting of Youths; Whites Rumored Killed." It also reported the presence of a mysterious Creek woman who apparently masterminded the rebellion. Newspapers linked her involvement to sinister German agents plotting to undermine the American war effort by stirring up Indian discontent.

An examination of the so-called "Creek Draft Rebellion of 1918" is significant for a variety of reasons. First of all, it speaks to the issue of racial stereotypes and demonstrates how damaging those popular misconceptions were to a small and often misunderstood minority. The "draft rebellion" identifies stereotypes frequently associated with Native Americans and their stubborn persistence in the national psyche. Second, the draft rebellion helps reveal the difficult struggle facing many Creeks in the 1910s to adapt to the tremendous changes wrought by forced allotment and the dissolution of the Creek Nation. Third, when placed within the broader context of World War I, the Creek rebellion has much to teach about the wartime hysteria that enveloped the United States and the enduring controversy surrounding freedom of expression and the exercise of civil liberties during a time of national crisis.

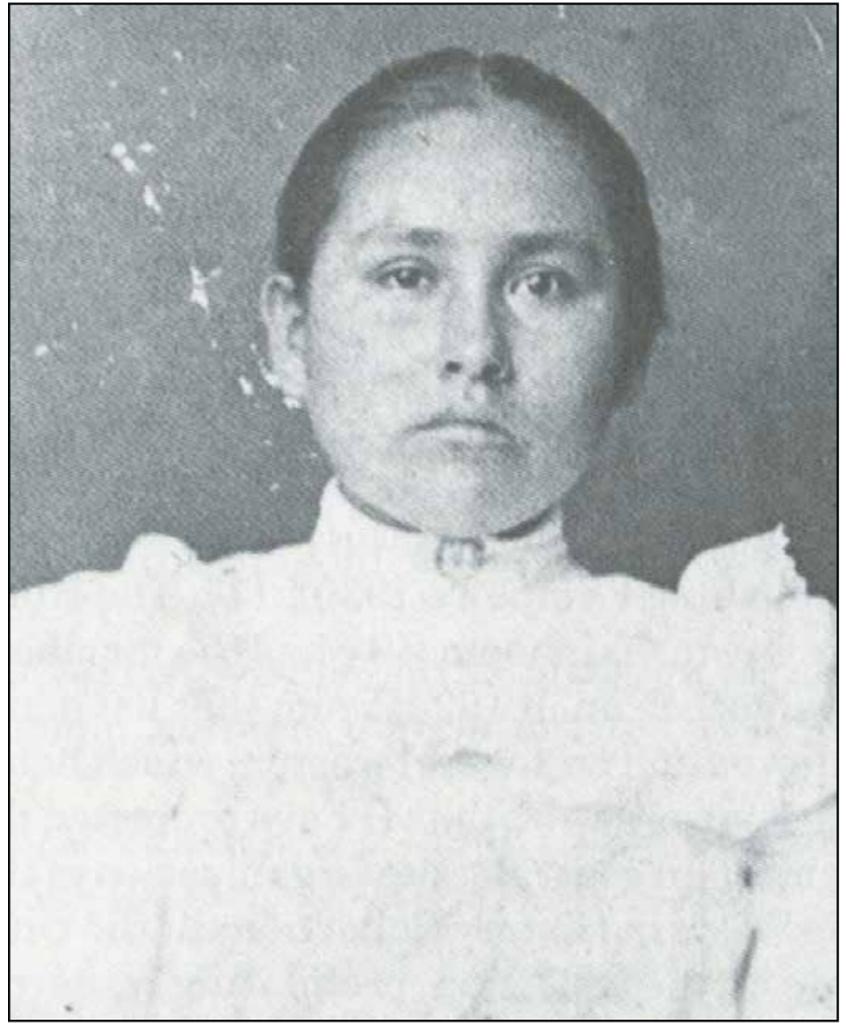
The Creeks, like so many other Indian nations forced to relocate west of the Mississippi River in the 1830s, struggled to adapt to their new environs. Reminiscent of other members of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes, the Creeks split into Union and Confederate factions during the Civil War, providing a convenient justification for the federal government to expropriate the western half of their territory, nearly 3.25 million acres of land.

In 1893 Creek woes continued as Congress passed legislation authorizing the Dawes Commission to begin the allotment of tribally owned lands.

In 1907 Creek leaders signed their allotment contracts, but not without resistance. Led by the eloquent fullblood Chitto Harjo (Crazy Snake) and his small band of traditionalist followers (the Snakes), the small Creek faction led what came to be called the Snake Uprising (or Crazy Snake Uprising). Under Harjo's guidance, the Snakes adopted laws aimed at preventing the partitioning of Creek lands and declared them binding on all tribal members. Creeks who accepted allotments were subject to arrest and corporal punishment. Only after the federal government dispatched marshals and columns of cavalry to the Indian Territory was the rebellion snuffed out and the allotment process implemented.

As was the sad experience of practically all native peoples, allotment eroded the Indian land base, undermined traditional tribal relationships, and wreaked havoc among peoples unaccustomed to an alien value system that emphasized the individual pursuit of property and wealth. For many Creeks, however, visions of Indian sovereignty and self-determination, a legacy of the Snake Uprising, continued to hold strong appeal long after Chitto Harjo's death. As will be seen, a foreign war coupled with mandatory military service and new restrictions on freedom of expression watered the seeds of renewed Creek resistance, seeds that never really reached dormancy after the 1908 insurrection.

Like their Anglo, black, and Hispanic brethren, Native American men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one had to register for the draft during World War I. Draft officials even required non-citizen Indians (approximately one-third of the Native American population in 1917) to register, although only citizens could be called to fight. While the majority of Indians accepted conscription as their duty and served without complaint, many were reluctant to participate in a war taking place half-way around the world. Some argued they were sovereign peoples who were outside the federal government's jurisdiction. Others questioned whether federal authorities had any right to draft their young men into a conflict to "make the world safe for democracy" when they faced discrimination and disenfranchisement at home. That being the case, sporadic episodes of Indian draft resistance arose among the Iroquois of New York, Cherokees in North Carolina, and the Goshutes in Nevada and Utah. The last and perhaps most publicized instance of Indian draft resistance



Ellen Perryman (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society)

Snake rebellion or Perryman's previously unsuccessful efforts at securing a pension, the meeting quickly transformed into an anti-government rally and protest against the draft as participants railed against the Wilson administration's insistence that all eligible men register. When a mob comprised of "patriotic" citizens from Muskogee County broke up the meeting amidst sporadic gunfire and verbal threats later that evening, the Creek Draft Rebellion of 1918 ended and began.

As word of the incident at the Hickory Stomp Ground reached newspaper editors across the nation and headlines such as those published in the New York Times threatened to undermine the government's claims of unanimous national support for the war effort, officials with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., reacted with (at least from the Indian perspective) uncharacteristic haste. On June 10, Commissioner Cato Sells instructed Gabe Parker, superintendent for the Five Civilized Tribes, to launch an immediate investigation of what took place at the stomp ground. A day later Parker reported that the press' accounts were overstated and that Perryman was "apparently demented." He characterized her statements about the draft as "disconnected, visionary, and irresponsible."

Although Parker's initial report and unflattering depiction of Perryman could have easily ended the matter, his letter became the opening salvo in an investigation that would continue for nearly six months. Press reports of "Creeks on the Warpath" were exaggerated and claims that innocent white farmers had been slain false, but the federal government refused to settle for simple explanations. The loyalties of its 250,000 Native American inhabitants could not be taken for granted given their long history of resistance and disinterest in assimilation. Could the BIA, at a time when every government agency was scrambling for federal dollars, sit idle when the very people for whom it was responsible were criticizing the government and its all-important "war to end all wars?" Their answer to those questions was a resounding "NO," and policymakers in Washington ordered Parker to dig deeper.

The superintendent complied by dispatching Harry B. Seddicum, one of his



Ellen Perryman's activities at the Hickory Stomp Ground near Okmulgee sparked a national manhunt in 1918 (Courtesy Creek Council IHouse Museum and Oklahoma Historical Society, No. 2407)

occurred among the Creeks of eastern Oklahoma.

During the first week of June, 1918, a curious meeting took place at the Hickory Stomp Ground southeast of Henryetta, Oklahoma. The stomp ground was an important religious and ceremonial gathering place among Creek fullbloods and had been at the epicenter of the Snake Uprising a decade earlier. In attendance at the meeting were about thirty-five Creek men, women, and children as well as several black Creeks, the descendants of slaves who had accompanied the Creek Nation west during the early nineteenth century.

What made the meeting especially curious was the individual in charge—a short forty-year-old Creek woman named Ellen Perryman, a seemingly harmless spinster from a prominent Creek family who had spent much of her young adulthood caring for her invalid mother. But looks can be deceiving. In June, 1915, Perryman had petitioned the federal government for a pension, claiming that her father, Wright Perryman, had served in the Union army during the Civil War. While awaiting a response, she attempted to organize a Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) post to commemorate the deeds of Loyal Creeks during the war. That effort was bound to sow discontent among people who had split into warring factions when the conflict commenced.

While the June 6, 1918, meeting at the Hickory Stomp Ground was held ostensibly for the purpose of organizing such a post, it soon took on new and-from the federal government's perspective—sinister implications. Drawing on the legacy of the Crazy

field clerks, to conduct a more thorough investigation. After catching a train from Muskogee to Henryetta, Seddicum conducted a series of interviews with various law enforcement officials including a lieutenant in the Oklahoma National Guard who had taken a detachment of troops to the Hickory Stomp Ground the night after the Creek meeting. Witnesses claimed Perryman had indeed seemed "hostile towards the U. S. Government" and that she "spoke disrespectful towards the American Flag." According to Carl J. O'Hornett, a Henryetta realtor, Perryman also had criticized American soldiers and the Red Cross. Echoing Parker's earlier assessment of the Creek woman, O'Hornett believed Perryman was "more of a crazy person than anything else" but warned that "something should be done with her."

Although the second investigation provided little new information, Parker pressed Seddicum to continue his probe, advising his field clerk to question several Creek fullbloods and to find out who attended the meeting, what they talked about, and the attitude of those present. Parker expressed particular interest in finding out who broke up the gathering and if the Creeks had been prevented from meeting in a lawful assemblage.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Sells, apparently dissatisfied with Parker's efforts, dispatched a second investigator to look into the alleged unrest in Creek country. On June 22 Sells ordered H. B. Peairs, the superintendent of the Haskell Indian Institute in Kansas, to head south to Oklahoma and conduct a more thorough investigation. After a meeting with Parker, Peairs toured the Hickory Stomp Ground, and while

he found “no danger of any uprising,” he took affidavits relative to the “very serious charges of disloyalty to the government preferred against Miss Perryman.” In his report to Sells, Peairs described the Creeks as “quiet, peaceful, and as far as I could tell, entirely loyal, unless it be in the case of Ellen Perryman.”

So what exactly did Perryman say or do that could account for the presence of a detachment of Oklahoma National Guardsmen, various local law enforcement officials, and two government investigators at the heretofore anonymous Hickory Stomp Ground? The only available evidence comes from the sworn affidavit of a rather dubious witness, Jack Carter, the reporter who initially broke the “story” of the Creek “rebellion.” Doubtless in search of a follow-up story to justify his earlier exaggerated claims, Carter interviewed Perryman shortly after the meeting at the Hickory Stomp Ground. According to Carter’s sworn affidavit, the Creek woman was under the impression that there was a “movement on among the white people to drive Indians from their native lands.”

Perryman reportedly visited Washington, D.C., where she met with Phylip Enos, the leader of an organization whose purpose was to reclaim Indian lands and which had the protection of an “enemy Government” in carrying on its work. Carter alleged further that Perryman made several scandalous remarks about President Wilson and the American army (calling them “a bunch of Grafters” and “yellow legged S.O.B.s”), and that she complained bitterly about Indian boys “go- ing to the slaughter fields of France.”

If the remarks attributed to Perryman had a factual basis, she was indeed in violation of the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 and 1918 that outlawed criticism of government leaders and their war policies. But did she really say what Carter alleged?

According to Jerry Rand, editor of the Muskogee Phoenix at the time Carter’s article was published, Carter was “very unreliable in his manner of reporting the news.” Soon after the “Creek Rebellion” article hit the presses, he “advised Mr. Carter that [he had] no further use for his services.” Even Peairs described Carter’s testimony as “overdrawn and painted in very glowing colors.” Carter must have “felt it was necessary to make a strong case against her,” Peairs concluded, to bolster “his sensational newspaper reports.”

Nonetheless, on the basis of Carter’s affidavit, the government’s investigation of Perryman intensified. On August 8, W. L. Reed, an investigator working under James C. Davis, the national attorney of the Creek Nation, met with Perryman at Council Hill, Oklahoma. According to Reed, Perryman was working on behalf of a small number of Creek veterans who were trying to get Congress to appropriate money to compensate them for claims originating during the Civil War. He described the woman as “undoubtedly demented” but “perfectly harmless” and noted that “her reputation for morality . . . is good. She has never been known to use vile or pro- fane language.”

Understandably apprehensive, given the substantial number of law enforcement officers and government agents watching her every move, Perryman feared there was a \$2,000 price on her head, and she refused to meet with anyone else unless accompanied by an armed Indian escort. On the basis of Reed’s report, Davis recommended that the matter be dropped. “If she is arrested and confined either in jail or an asylum,” Davis warned, “it is probable that the Indians would greatly resent this action on the part of the government, and it might lead to an uprising among them with more or less serious results.”

Despite the new reports, documents calling into question the reliability of Jack Carter, and recommendations from officers in the field that the matter be dropped, federal officials nonetheless continued the investigation.

In early September Department of Justice officials uncovered letters written and signed by Perryman and some of her fullblood accomplices that advised their fellow Creeks against registering for the draft. A. Bruce Bielaski, chief of the Justice Department’s Bureau of Investigation, responded by issuing warrants for their arrest. On September 12 federal investigators accompanied by three deputy United States marshals and at least a

dozen additional local law enforcement officials from surrounding Oklahoma counties converged on the Hickory Stomp Ground to arrest Perryman, described as five feet, three inches tall, heavily built, and about forty years old. Rumors abounded that the Indians were organizing an uprising and planned to burn houses and barns, tear down fences, and turn out livestock.

Upon their arrival at the Hickory Stomp Ground, however, the lawmen found no uprising being planned, no armed Indians, no draft rebellion, and no Ellen Perryman. After searching a neighboring house thoroughly for any incriminating evidence, the task force returned empty-handed to Muskogee. Perryman’s whereabouts, meanwhile, remained a mystery. An exasperated Parker wrote to Commissioner Sells detailing the government task force’s failure to apprehend the woman and asking for “suggestions and directions” as to what he should do next. Little did Parker know that the drama would drag on for months.

The hunt for Perryman intensified in late September after a BIA field clerk in Wewoka, Oklahoma, reported rumors that Perryman and a few old Snakes had been meeting in Washington, D. C., with a “representative of the German government.” According to the field clerk, the Germans had promised Perryman’s party immunity if they refrained from participating in the war, but if they fought, “they would receive the same treatment that would be given to other citizens of the United States” by a victorious Germany.

Upon receiving the report, Parker turned the tables on Sells by proposing that Sells conduct an investigation while Perryman and her followers were still in the capital. Sells wasted no time. During the first week of October, the commissioner referred Parker’s report to Bureau of Investigation chief Bielaski. Meanwhile, the United States Post Office and the Secret Service became involved in the investigation. In a letter dated October 18, 1918, Postmaster Willis W. Christopher alerted the Secret Service that Perryman and some other Creek fullbloods were corresponding and sending money to “unknown parties” located at 468 Pennsylvania Ave. NW in Washington, D. C.”

For the next two months, the search for Perryman continued. Government officials were stumped, believing their suspect to be in hiding either in Washington, D. C., or in the hills of eastern Oklahoma. Finally, in early December, United States marshals caught up with her in Oklahoma, placed her under arrest for violation of the Espionage Act, and detained her in Muskogee.

On December 12 Creek national attorney Davis wrote Sells requesting guidance on how to proceed with the case and if he should even defend her.

On December 18, 1918, nearly six months after the “Creek rebellion” at the Hickory Stomp Ground, authorities held a hearing in Muskogee to determine Perryman’s fate. Present at the proceedings were a representative from the United States attorney’s office, a representative from Gabe Parker’s office, a deputy United States marshal, James C. Davis, and Ellen Perryman.

Heeding Davis’s counsel (the same counsel, incidentally, he had given months earlier), the participants agreed to postpone the case indefinitely and release Perryman with the understanding that she behave herself and keep quiet. Should “her future conduct require it,” they warned, “the case would be reset and Ellen again directed to appear before the Commissioner.”

Thus ended the “Creek Draft Rebellion of 1918” after six months of investigation that included a detachment of the Oklahoma National Guard, dozens of state and local law enforcement officials, the United States Department of Justice, the United States Post Office, the Secret Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. While no estimate has ever been recorded, the cost to the American taxpayer no doubt ran into tens of thousands of dollars. How is it that such a seemingly harmless demonstration by a forty-year-old Creek woman and a few old Creek fullbloods could stir up the anxieties of a democratic republic with arguably the strongest military power on earth? Why did Perryman protest against the registration and draft of Indian men when the majority of Native Americans served faithfully and without argument? Why did the national press initiate the “crisis” by publishing such an exaggerated and wildly misleading story?

In order to address and perhaps better understand the motivations of the various participants, one must place the Creek “draft rebellion” within the context of the times. The United States in 1918 was a nation embroiled in one of the most momentous and

bloodiest conflicts in world history. The nation’s war aims, as articulated by President Wilson, were equally momentous- America was fighting to “make the world safe for democracy.” Should the Allied armies secure victory and his fourteen-point peace plan be implemented, Wilson promised, the conflict could usher in a new world order based upon justice and peace.

But an allied victory abroad required certain sacrifices at home. While the federal government (through such channels at the Committee on Public Information) encouraged Americans to voluntarily plant “victory gardens,” purchase liberty bonds, and establish Red Cross chapters, it simultaneously required them to stifle criticisms of their leaders and the war effort. During World War I, the federal government prosecuted more than 1,500 “radicals” for violation of the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 and 1918, resulting in 1,000 convictions. At the state and local, levels, meanwhile, so-called Councils of Defense sprang up across the nation. Buttressing the CPI propaganda machine by distributing pamphlets and organizing lectures, Council of Defense members occasionally overstepped their mandates by serving as self-appointed vigilantes. Nowhere was that more evident than in war-time Oklahoma.

In November, 1917, the Tulsa chapter (Knights of Liberty) seized seventeen members of the radical labor organization Industrial Workers of the World, tarred and feathered them, and drove them from town. Six months later, Muskogee’s Council of Defense seized Charles Wagoner, a local miner who had unwisely questioned America’s part in the war, painted him red with roofing paint, gave him fifty lashes, and left him bleeding and bruised, chained to a pole.

According to O. A. Hilton in his study of World War I Oklahoma, the state Council of Defense became convinced in the spring of 1918 that a widespread, well-organized, and flagrant campaign of German propaganda was being promoted in the state. It is little wonder that Oklahomans saw dangerous intrigue and German spies behind Ellen Perryman’s protest at the Hickory Stomp Ground.

While Oklahoma Councils of Defense labored to ensure their constituents were supporting the war effort (in deed, if not in thought), the remnants of the Creek Nation had immediate and more pressing problems with which to contend. For many, the distant war had little relevance in their lives. Of greater concern to Creeks was coming to terms with the abrogation of their tribal government and the involuntary allotment of their lands. Government policymakers exacerbated matters by undervaluing Indian property, a measure that delighted wealthy white land speculators (boosters) who quickly gobbled up huge chunks of formerly Indian-owned land. Although, as historian Donald Parman has written, the boosters claimed to be motivated by a desire to develop Oklahoma and improve living conditions for all its residents, they “held few qualms about leaving Indians landless and impoverished or imposing harsh adjustments upon the full bloods.”

The adjustments were harsh indeed, and while Chitto Harjo’s 1908 Snake Uprising succeeded in giving the Creeks a brief respite from the momentous changes swirling around them, it ultimately failed in its efforts to restore Creek lands, nationhood, and sovereignty. Lacking the leadership skills and charisma that Harjo had enjoyed, Ellen Perryman’s stand at the Hickory Stomp Ground nonetheless tapped into the very same source of resentment and frustration that had launched the earlier Snake Uprising.

One of her “co-conspirators,” in fact, was Nocus Fixico, a Creek fullblood who assumed leadership of the Snake band after Chitto Harjo’s death.

By placing the Hickory Stomp Ground meeting of June, 1918, within the context of allotment-era Creek history, Ellen Perryman’s demeanor and actions are readily understandable, even admirable, a far cry from the government’s depiction of her as “demented,” “mentally unbalanced,” and “insane.”

Finally, how does one account for the behavior of the press regarding its handling of the “Creek Uprising”? Certainly Jack Carter’s blind ambition and/or greed to make headlines by publishing a story full of lies and half-truths bears a good share of the responsibility for the witch-hunt that ensued. But why was it so easy for him to get the story published in the first place? How was it that news- paper editors (at least one of whom was aware of Carter’s reputation for shoddy reporting) willingly ran a story without factual basis or corroborating evidence? In short, why did they support him?

John M. Coward’s excellent study, “The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820-1890” provides important clues that go a long way in fostering an understanding of the press’s recurrent role in popularizing stereotypes of native peoples. The author examines the pre-Columbian roots of European ethnocentrism and how such notions contributed to the evolution of an Indian “double-vision” that endured for centuries. In particular, he demonstrates the press’s role in perpetuating unfair and often unflattering stereotypes.

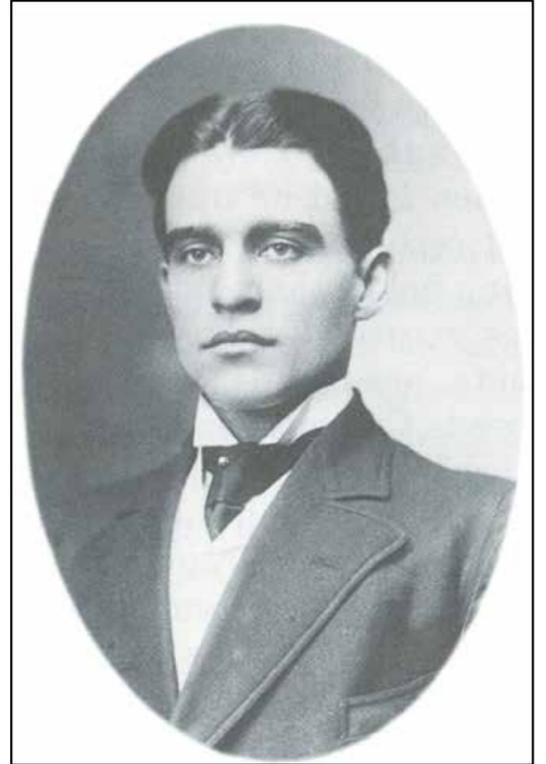
On the one hand, papers occasionally carried stories stressing romanticized, noble, “child of the forest” themes. More often, however, particularly during periods of national crisis, newspapers scapegoated Indians as “ruthless, subhuman savages, resistant to progress and incapable of civilization.” Violent encounters between “evil Indians and innocent whites” consequently made compelling page-one stories; “peaceful relations and gentle Indians did not.”

Judging from its coverage of the Creeks during World War I, the press’s role in perpetuating popular misconceptions about Native Americans remained solidly intact during the first decades of the twentieth century and the practice apparently continued to sell papers. Headlines of the day played upon those misconceptions repeatedly, using buzzwords such as “Indian Uprising” and “Indian Rebellion” that might just have easily been employed a century earlier. Reports of white farmers being murdered and hundreds of “armed Indians encamped in the surrounding hills,” meanwhile, conjured up images of the Indian wars of the late nineteenth century.

A public brought up reading the one-sided yellow journalism of the late nineteenth century reacted predictably to press reports in 1918 that Native Americans were staging yet another “uprising.” Deep-seated suspicions that had long been part of the national psyche were simply set in motion.

As for Ellen Perryman, her notoriety faded after the federal government’s case against her was “indefinitely postponed” and as thousands of white, black, and Indian doughboys returned home as conquering heroes. In the postwar era, she married a Chickasaw man named Edmond Colbert and in 1922 gave birth to a daughter (Mary Colbert Gooden) who currently resides near the Creek Nation’s tribal headquarters in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Ellen Perryman died in 1937, nearly two decades after she sparked a national outcry at the Hickory Stomp Ground and just four years before the nation found itself embroiled in a second world war that would once again require Creeks to send their men to distant battlefields.

*Editor’s note: Since the original publication of this article, Mary Colbert Gooden passed in 2013.*



Five Tribes superintendent Gabe Parker found himself embroiled in investigating the Creek “draft rebellion” (Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society, No. 5770).

# ELDERS BOOGIE AT ANNUAL ELDER HOLIDAY LUNCHEON

## ANNUAL EVENT BRINGS TOGETHER ELDERS ON AND OFF THE MVSKOKE RESERVATION

BY BRADEN HARPER  
MANAGING EDITOR



Elders cut the rug at the Elders Holiday Luncheon. (Braden Harper/MM)

TULSA - Mvskoke elders and loved ones got up and boogied on the dance floor at the annual Elder's Holiday Luncheon hosted by Muscogee (Creek) Nation Elder Services at the River Spirit Casino on Monday, Dec. 8. Elders from communities on and off the Mvskoke Reservation gathered for fellowship and Christmas fun. Door prizes, including a hand-beaded cane and a hand-sewn skirt were handed out.

MCN Elder Services Office Manager Angela Neumeyer was hard to miss at the holiday luncheon, wearing a silver jacket and a leopard print Santa hat. Neumeyer said her favorite part of the event is seeing people come together.

"I like to interact with the elders," Neumeyer said. "I like putting on events. I like interacting with the elders and seeing them enjoy themselves and each

other." Elders were treated to chicken-fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, salad and desert. According to Neumeyer, the event was able to accommodate nearly twice as many elders as last year's luncheon. This year's event was broken up into two meals, lunch and dinner, due to the high attendance rate: 1,150.

Mvskoke citizens Lillian Thomas and Ken Taryole are cousins. The luncheon is an event they enjoy attending together. Among other Christmas traditions, Thomas sees a Thunder game every year in December with her family. Regardless of the activity, Taryole simply enjoys spending time with his family and friends. He remarked that his favorite part about the gathering are the people.

"For me my favorite part is the fellowship, coming together.

It's a special time of the year and sometimes we don't get to always see our old friends. We also make new friends. I think it's a time of renewal." Taryole said.

"I really appreciate what the tribe does for our people," Thomas said. "They have so many other events throughout the year, I really appreciate what Creek Nation does for us elders."

Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill, Second Chief Del Beaver and members of the cabinet and National Council were present at the luncheon to greet elders and participate in the festivities. Chief Hill remarked that he was impressed with this year's turnout.

"It's always a great time here to share and visit," Chief Hill said. "Everyone have a Merry Christmas and enjoy yourselves. Mvto!"

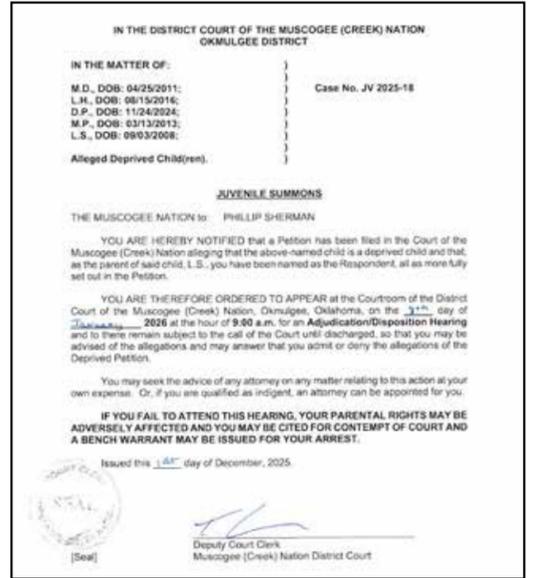
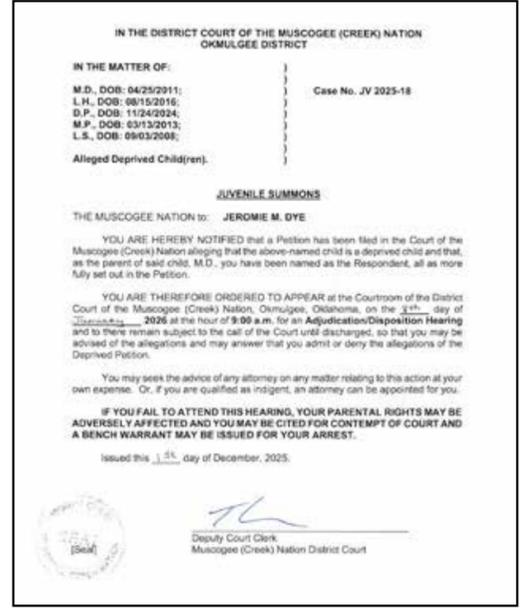
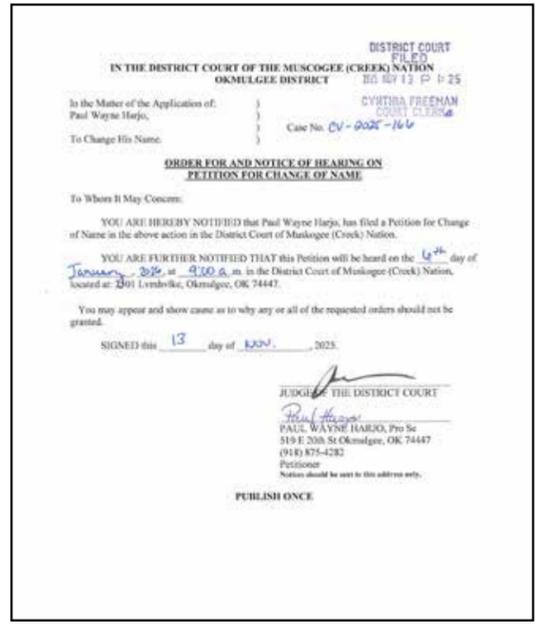


Tina Bowling, Joanna Sullivan and Tammy Taylor enjoy themselves at the Elders Holiday Luncheon. (Braden Harper/MM)



Gary Warrior and Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill grab a quick photo together at the Elder Luncheon. (Braden Harper/MM)

### LEGALS



# RESUME WORKSHOP SEEKS TO EMPOWER JOB SEEKERS

## EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROVIDED TIPS ON HOW TO STAND OUT AS A JOB CANDIDATE IN THE TURBULENT JOB MARKET

BY BRADEN HARPER  
MANAGING EDITOR

OKMULGEE - The Muscogee (Creek) Nation Employment and Training Administration (ETA) hosted a Resume Building Workshop at the MCN Housing Building on Tuesday, Nov. 25. The workshop featured speakers from Work Ready Oklahoma, a non-profit with the mission to help individuals in rural communities find steady jobs.

The bimonthly workshop is open to all Tribal citizens within the Mvskoke jurisdiction currently looking for jobs, or who simply want to polish up their professional resume. ETA Job Placement Specialist Isaiah Jimboy (Mvskoke) said the program is particularly useful for those who have limited education experience.

"Some people we see are high school dropouts, or only received their GED. They don't know how to build a quality resume tailored to the job they're wanting," Jimboy said. "They'll have barriers to employment that we try to remove during the process."

Labor market statistics show Oklahoma's unemployment rate making slow progress, however still below the national average. The average Oklahoma unemployment rate in August

sat at 3.1%, down from 3.3% from August 2024. The August national unemployment rate sat at 4.3%.

### Work Ready Works for You

Work Ready's main services include classes and workshops. The nonprofit covers expenses for job application documents including birth certificates and drivers licenses. Jimboy said drivers license reinstatement fees are the most common obstacle Tribal citizens face when receiving help from ETA. Gas cards are provided for individuals in the program that need rides to the workshops or to job sites for interviews. The nonprofit also assists in purchasing professional clothing needed for job interviews. Even after a program recipient has found a job, the nonprofit covers expenses related to work clothing and equipment. Assistance for rent and utilities is available as well.

Work Ready Consultant Dr. Julia Teska helped expand the nonprofit to Okmulgee. Teska's background in job training has allowed her to build confidence in job seekers at workshops across Oklahoma. According to Teska, the biggest obstacle job seekers face is education.

"Stay in school. Quite frankly the key to success is having enough education so that you have the skills that you need to get a job," Teska said. "A lot of people in our program do not have high school diplomas or GED (General Education Development). It is a severe detriment to their success."

Teska added that college is not a one-size-fits-all experience for adults going into the work force. Work Ready aims to send workers on the right career path based on their aptitude. Sometimes that means a traditional option like college, or a non-traditional option like a vocational or trade school. According to Teska, Okmulgee boasts some of the best vocational schools in the country.

"OSUIT is probably one of the best in the country, not just the state," Teska said. "My family lives in Seattle. Many of them send their children to OSUIT for their post high school training because of the reputation that school has."

Work Ready conducts 90-day followups on program applicants who find a job through the nonprofit. The followup helps Work Ready see how they can improve in their services and if there are still any needs program appli-



From Left: Jo Tiger (Seminole) and Jacqui Knight (Creek) listen and learn resume building skills at the MCN Employment and Training Administration Resume Building workshop. (Braden Harper/MM)

cants may have.

Work Ready has offices in Okmulgee, Tulsa, Eufaula and Muskogee. To stay up to date on the next workshop visit their website, [workreadyoklahoma.com](http://workreadyoklahoma.com), or their facebook page, [muscogeeandtrainingadministration](https://www.facebook.com/muscogeeandtrainingadministration).

Work Ready Okmulgee  
100 West 7th Street 2nd Floor  
Okmulgee, OK 74447  
539-286-6136

Work Ready Tulsa  
2852 Southwest Blvd.  
Tulsa, OK 74107  
918-599-0272

Work Ready Muskogee  
319 Denison St.  
Muskogee, OK 74401  
405-212-8474

Work Ready Eufaula  
25 Hospital Dr.  
Eufaula, OK 74432  
918-201-2705