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MVSKOKENEWS

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Principal Chief Hill gave the 2026 State of the Nation Address on July 25 in the Mound Building. (Image: MCN Communication Facebook)

2026 STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

BY PRINCIPAL CHIEF DAVID HILL

Second Chief Beaver, Speaker Hicks, representatives of the National Council, honorable tribal Judges, church and ceremonial leaders, dignitaries and friends, and most especially, fellow Muscogee Creek citizens.

Today, I stand before you with gratitude, humility, and a deep sense of responsibility. This is my second-to-last State of the Nation Address that I will deliver as Principal Chief, so I can't help but reflect on all we have done in this administration, while thinking of the time we have left to do all we can to finish what we started.

From Day One, we have committed to leave a legacy of progress and prosperity for our Nation. I'm proud that we've been able to keep so many of the promises we made. We wanted to be the administration that didn't just have a vision, but one that turned our Nation's wildest dreams into reality.

I'm honored and pleased to say that in many ways, we have accomplished this goal.

If you visited the Muscogee Reservation 5-10 years ago, you wouldn't recognize it today. We are Changing The Landscape...and because of that, it is my great privilege to inform you this morning

that the State of our Nation is as strong as it's ever been, and getting stronger every day!

At the Muscogee Nation, we believe in the power of prayer, of a spiritual help in the time of need. However, or to whomever you pray, we feel it's important to call on a higher power to help guide us as leaders in our public service decisions. Second Chief and I and the Cabinet, we all feel the support and prayers from the citizens, thank you for that, and keep them coming!

STATE OF THE NATION
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TWO TRIBES SUE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION OVER FEDERAL ROLLBACKS ON HABITAT RESTRICTIONS

THE SWINOMISH INDIAN TRIBAL COMMUNITY AND THE SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBE SEEK TO MAINTAIN PROTECTIONS FOR THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

BY BRADEN HARPER

LA CONNER, Wash. – The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and the Squaxin Island Tribe are suing the Trump Administration over the rescission of the term “harm” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) announced on Friday, July 10. The change removes the term “habitat destruction” from the law’s protections for threatened and endangered wildlife. According to a press statement released on Tuesday, July 14, the Tribes are seeking to protect the Chinook Salmon and the Southern Resident Killer Whale, species that hold cultural significance.

The Trump Administration ordered the rescission of the definition of “harm” in March 2025. In response, the Swinomish Tribe submitted a 20,000-page report detailing how habitat degradation and destruction are the leading causes of species loss. That report cited 318 peer-reviewed studies. Tandy Wilbur serves on the Swinomish Senate and works as a Fisheries Manager. He believes the changes will have devastating cultural impacts on the

Tribe.

“We submitted thousands of pages of best science that show how unjustified it is to suddenly remove key regulations that protect the habitats that ESA-listed salmon need to recover. This rule will worsen salmon habitat conditions and without question that will reduce salmon stocks. Because salmon is both food and spiritual nourishment for Swinomish Community members, I fear for the health of our people and our cultural lifeways,” Wilbur said.

ESA has been law since its passage in 1973. It provides a program for threatened and endangered plants and animals, as well as the habitats where they are found. The act requires federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to ensure that no actions jeopardize endangered species. It is illegal to import or export endangered species.

Preventing “harm” to endangered species means preventing the destruction or degradation of their habitat. Including the loss of wetlands, grasslands, and other natural areas necessary to survive. This was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in

the 1995 case, Babbitt v. Sweet Home Chapter of Communities for a Great Oregon. That decision stated that it is unlawful for a citizen to “take.” The legal term “take” is defined as harassing, harming, pursuing, or killing endangered or threatened species.

Joe Peters (Squaxin Island Tribe) serves as a Squaxin Island Tribe Senior Natural Resources Policy Representative and a Harvest Manager. Peters explained that protecting culture and habitats go hand in hand.

“As descendants of the maritime people who have fished along the shores of the southern inlets of the Salish Sea for thousands of years, the Squaxin people know that habitat protection and restoration is essential to species recovery,” Peters said.

“We are invested in consistent and robust enforcement of the Endangered Species Act, which must include protection of habitat in order to effectively safeguard Treaty resources such as salmon, instream flows, and water quality.”

ESA ROLLBACKS
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GRAYSON AND KENNEDY FILE IN FEDERAL COURT

BY JERRAD MOORE

OKLAHOMA CITY – Rhonda Grayson and Jeffery Kennedy filed a civil suit in the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma on July, 23. The suit seeks injunctive relief against Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill and members of the MCN Citizenship Board.

In addition, the suit asks the federal court to recognize the MCN Supreme Court decision in Citizenship Board v. Grayson and to issue a declaratory judgment affirming that the Treaty of 1866 grants all MCN citizenship rights to Grayson and Kennedy.

The complaint points out that two elections have been held since the 2025 Citizenship Board v. Grayson decision granted Mvskoke Freedmen descendants Tribal citizenship. The most recent May 2026 MCN Special Election amended the Nation’s constitution, allowing the Principal Chief and the MCN National Council to appoint justices to the high court when a justice has recused. The complaint alleges that holding elections before Freedmen were issued citizenship cards infringed on their right to vote in Tribal elections.

2026 TEACHER GRANTS:
Grant applications are now open for Mvskoke teachers.

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A personal look at Native sterilization policies, a series from The Imprint

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Chief Hill spills the tea on his trip to Windsor

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TIGER EYES:
Mvskoke photographer Victoria Tiger shares life notes and her eye for cultural photography.

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COUNCIL BEAT:
Coverage of the July Quaterly Session.

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Grants support Mvskoke teachers on the rez. (Shutterstock)

BY KATY LEARD

OKMULGEE – Muscogee (Creek) Nation educators will soon have another opportunity to receive funding for classroom supplies as applications open Aug. 15 for the Nation’s teacher grant program.

The program awards eligible educators up to \$500 to purchase materials that enhance classroom learning, helping offset expenses many teachers often pay out of their own pockets. Applications will be accepted through Sept. 15.

Now entering its second year, the teacher grant program was established through legislation approved by the MCN National Council. Representative Dode Barnett and Second Speaker Thomasene Osborn said the program was created to help ease the financial burden many teachers face when purchasing classroom supplies.

“We felt very strongly that that money had to go to the classroom,” Rep. Barnett said.

Rep. Barnett said lawmakers frequently saw requests from schools for projects such as scoreboards or athletic tournaments. While those

requests were worthwhile, she said the Council wanted to create a program that directly supports teachers and students by placing resources where they are needed most.

She said many educators, particularly those in rural and Title I schools, often purchase classroom supplies themselves because school budgets cannot cover every need.

“There’s a lot of times just not enough money for really simple things,” Rep. Barnett said, pointing to everyday classroom necessities such as paper and storage, as well as classroom activities.

Rep. Osborn said her experience representing rural communities helped shape the legislation. While working alongside Rep. Barnett and other council members, she discussed the different challenges educators face across the reservation.

“We thought this would be a good way to give back to our teachers,” Rep. Osborn said.

Applications are available through the National Council’s website. Educators are asked to submit a description of how the funds will be used, and members of the Health Education and Welfare Committee review

each application individually.

Rep. Osborn encouraged applicants to provide a complete list of the classroom needs so they can receive the full \$500 award.

Last year, the committee awarded grants to 107 educators, distributing more than \$36,000 to classrooms across the reservation. Rep. Osborn said additional funding remains available, and lawmakers hope even more eligible teachers will apply this year.

“We want to do a better job about marketing this program,” Rep. Osborn said. “There’s more money.”

The grant program has already evolved since its first year. Lawmakers expanded eligibility to include pre-kindergarten teachers, Muscogee language teachers, and educators with alternative certifications after receiving feedback from applicants. They also adjusted this year’s application timeline to better accommodate teachers whose certifications are finalized closer to the start of the school year.

Both representatives said the program will continue to grow as they receive additional feedback from educators.

“We’re learning as we go,” Rep. Osborn said. “We appreciate and encourage feedback.”

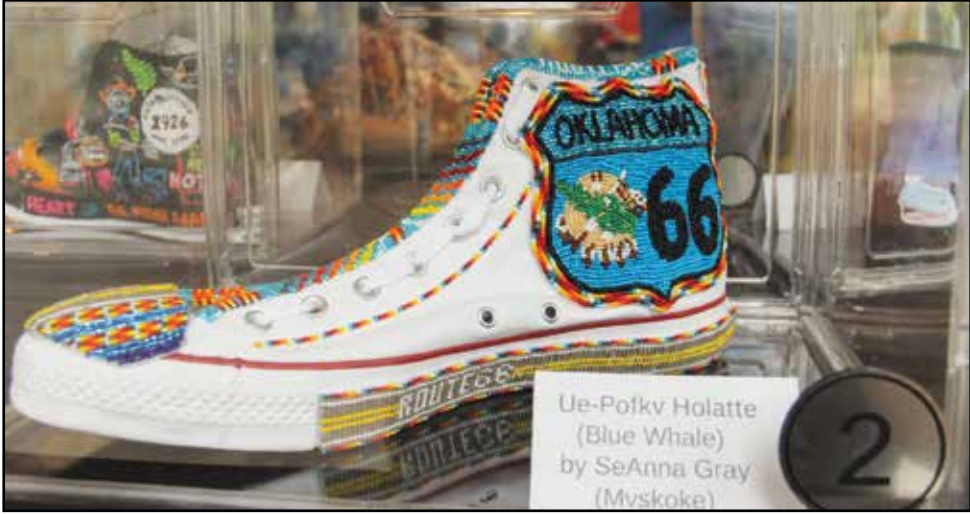
Rep. Barnett said one challenge lawmakers continue to face is determining exactly how many Muscogee educators are eligible for the program because no agency maintains a comprehensive count. Even so, she hopes the grants send a clear message that the Nation values its educators and recognizes the work they do every day.

“I hope educators remember that the Mvskoke Nation showed up for them,” Barnett said. “I hope they feel supported.”

Applications for the 2026 teacher grant program will be accepted Aug. 15 through Sept. 15. Mvskoke citizens teaching K-12 in the MCN Reservation may apply for up to \$500 in classroom funding by completing the application available on the Muscogee (Creek) Nation National Council website. Lawmakers encourage educators across the reservation to apply and share feedback as the program continues to grow and evolve. To view the application, go to www.mcnncc.com/grant-applications/



Muscogee artist SeAnna Gray’s hand-beaded shoe, “Ue-Pofkv Holatte” (Blue Whale), celebrates Muscogee culture by blending the iconic Route 66 landmark with traditional symbolism and colors representing strength and resilience. (Photos:SeAnna Grey)



MORE THAN BEADWORK

SEANNA GRAY TRANSFORMED A FAMILIAR OKLAHOMA LANDMARK INTO A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND IDENTITY

BY KATY LEARD

TULSA – For Mvskoke artist SeAnna Gray, beadwork is more than an art form – it’s a way to both honor her ancestors and inspire the next generation.

The 23-year-old’s design caught the attention of judges and visitors alike, earning her the Most Creative award in Gathering Place’s Route 66-themed shoe art competition.

Gray’s winning design, “Ue-Pofkv Holatte” (Blue Whale), blended one of Oklahoma’s most recognizable Route 66 landmarks, the Blue Whale of Catoosa, with Muscogee symbolism, creating a piece that celebrates local history and Indigenous identity.

“I knew I wanted to incorporate Native culture,” Gray said. “I wanted to represent the people that were here even before Route 66.”

Gray’s shoe was one of the featured pieces in Gathering Place’s shoe art competition, part of the park’s TULSA: Heart of the Mother Road exhibition, celebrating the 100th anniversary of Route 66. The exhibition highlighted the work of local artists and encouraged visitors to engage with the artwork and Oklahoma’s Route 66 history.

Laura Clark (Mvskoke), Curator of Public Art at Gathering Place, said Gray’s mixed-media design stood apart from many of the painted

entries because of its craftsmanship and thoughtful use of Indigenous artistry.

“SeAnna’s beadwork transcended both beauty and skill, employing the Route 66 historical context with a robust Indigenous Oklahoma vibe,” Clark said.

Inspired by the Blue Whale of Catoosa, Gray incorporated a beaded Route 66 shield, elements inspired by the original Oklahoma Route 66 sign, and traditional Mvskoke design throughout the shoe. She also chose the colors of fire – maroon, red, orange, and yellow – to symbolize the strength and perseverance of the Mvskoke people.

“Fire represents strength from our ancestors keeping that fire alive through genocides, removals, and all the bad things people wanted to conquer over us,” she said. “We still keep

those fires alive today.”

Although the competition provided a new platform for her work, Gray’s journey as an artist began years earlier. She started beading at 17 after spending much of her childhood admiring jewelry her father collected while traveling across the country. Each piece came with a story, introducing her to different Indigenous art styles and sparking a curiosity that eventually led her to pick up a needle and thread herself.

What began with earrings, bracelets, and lanyards eventually expanded to hand-beaded shoes, now one of her signature creations. Through her business, Indigenous Divinity, Gray has shipped her artwork across the United States and internationally.

BEADWORK

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STATE OF THE NATION
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Leading this Nation is not without challenges. Sometimes, we disagree. Sometimes we fail in our objectives, and we realize that while perfection is a noble goal, it is an impossibility. But it’s also important to remember that our differences are not as important as what unites us and what we have in common. We are all MUSCOGEE, and we are FAMILY.

To our National Council, I want to thank you again for the opportunity and the platform to give this address. Together, I am proud of the many accomplishments and wonderful achievements that we have produced for this Nation in our time working together. Thank you for your leadership and public service.

Together, we have ushered in the greatest era of growth in the modern history of the Muscogee Creek Nation!

Before we look ahead, I wanted to re-visit some of our brightest moments from the past year and recognize the work of so many.

We cannot be a prosperous Nation and have a future, if we’re not prioritizing the Health of our people. At Muscogee Nation Health, we continue to stake our claim as the best tribal health system in the country.

Last year, I talked about how we made a greater commitment to patient experience and service. Reducing wait times at clinics, offering new treatments at our facilities, and celebrating the amazing expansion of our emergency services. This year it’s all about growth.

The National Council approved a \$185 million financing package to support the construction of two transformational health facilities — a new comprehensive clinic in Holdenville and an expanded replacement clinic in Sapulpa. This investment underscores the Nation’s long-term commitment to accessible, high-quality, and culturally competent healthcare. Our people deserve the very best healthcare we can provide — in settings that reflect our values and meet their needs. The Holdenville campus will span more than 67,000 square feet across 40 acres, designed not only as a healthcare facility but as a collective hub for prevention, wellness, and community health. The clinic will offer a full range of services—including primary care, dental, and optometry—while integrating outdoor wellness spaces that encourage long-term healthy living. In Sapulpa, the current clinic will be replaced with a two-story, 148,000-square-foot facility, more than ten times the size of the existing center. This modern clinic will bring a host of services under one roof, including primary care, pediatrics, women’s health, pharmacy, dental, optometry, and a range of specialty clinics. The Sapulpa facility is also designed to foster collaboration among healthcare professionals, strengthening care coordination, improving patient outcomes, and enhancing the overall patient experience. The financing package — led by BOK Financial — represents one of the largest health-related investments in the Nation’s history. BOK Financial will lead the syndication process, incorporating a network of local lending institutions to ensure the economic benefits of the project extend throughout the region. Together, these projects mark a new chapter in the Nation’s healthcare journey — one that blends cutting-edge medical services with cultural, community-centered design to serve future generations of Muscogee citizens.

We have made a greater commitment to mental health and have opened the new Muscogee Nation Healing and Recovery Center that will allow us to better serve the needs of citizens at the root of their issues, with rehabilitation. We believe in restoration and not just restitution. This center sits on 27 acres, with 34 thousand square feet of residential and treatment space. Residents will participate in individual and group therapy, and have access to things like exercise equipment, gardening spaces, Muscogee artwork, and a pond for fishing. The center represents a nearly \$27 million dollar investment from the Nation and will offer a generational shift in our care system.

Perhaps what I’m most proud of is our latest project in Health, which is something that citizens have expressed interest in for years and years: an assisted living facility for our elders. Well, we are finally delivering. We are in contractual agreement and are now in design phase for the Nation’s first facility of this kind.

On top of that, our Health system continues to stand alone as fiscally self-sufficient, returning gaming distributions back to the Nation for over 5 years now.

If you work for our Health system and are here today, mvto for your dedication and advancing the health outcomes for our people. Please stand and be recognized.

Our capital city of Okmulgee is looking a little different these days!

We are putting the finishing touches on a plan that has been discussed for years, with the completion of our 4 story \$88 million dollar Citizens Services Building. Not only will this structure serve as a new tribal headquarters, but will meet our need to consolidate our programs into a more accessible site visit for citizens who need services.

We are just months away from the opening of our new Muscogee Nation Justice Headquarters and Court Facility. The building will be over 52,000 sq. ft and will house both the Muscogee (Creek) District Court and Supreme Court. This larger space and upgraded infrastructure will create a

more adequate and streamlined process that will help support the needs of our judicial system as we continue meeting the demands of our expanded jurisdictional responsibilities.

Driving into Okmulgee off 75 Highway, I hope you’ve noticed the rapid construction of our new Welcome and Heritage Center. This center will serve as a gateway for visitors traveling along Highway 75, giving them an opportunity to learn about who we are, our Mvskoke culture, our art, and the history of our capital city, Okmulgee. Our story reaches back long before statehood, and through this center, we will be able to share that story in a powerful way with all who visit. The Welcome Center will also be more than a stop along the way, it will be a place of learning. Classrooms here will nurture knowledge, creativity, and the next generation of artists and storytellers who will help carry our traditions forward.

One of the most meaningful features of this center will be the collection space. I think back to 2013, when Pete Beaver and I helped the Cultural Center and Archives staff unload the Council House collection at a storage facility in Jenks. They had just driven through the night from Ohio after rescuing the collection from being sold at auction. For years, that collection has been safely cared for, waiting for a permanent home. We are one step closer to providing that home. Soon, citizens will be able to reconnect with the items in that collection and have access to the history they hold. This center will ensure that our heritage is not only protected, but celebrated.

Economically, we’re thriving. Currently, our permanent fund sits at \$723 Million 831,494 dollars, an increase of over \$60 million from the last quarter. We opened two new gaming facilities with hotels this year in Koweta and Eufaula, with both reporting some of our top-performing distributions since their opening.

In January, the Muscogee Nation and Muscogee Nation Gaming Enterprises announced the launch of a Class II mobile gaming application, allowing eligible players to participate in electronic bingo-style games from any location within the boundaries of the Muscogee Nation Reservation. This mobile Class II gaming app marks a new era of access, innovation and technology for the Nation and sets a precedent for mobile gaming across Indian Country. It represents a major step forward for the Muscogee Nation. We are investing in technology that strengthens sovereignty and expands opportunity for our citizens. Leading the nation with the first reservation-wide Class II mobile gaming platform reflects our commitment to innovation and responsible governance.

In Commerce, we have dedicated analysts working on devising and identifying economic revenue streams through business development projects that the Nation has outsourced and spent capital on in the past. By taking these projects on and developing them, we can offer services that will generate revenue while also giving us more autonomy over tribal monies.

We realize that there are many opportunities for us here in Indian Country. But we also cannot prioritize development and business projects at the expense of our most precious resources; our air, land and water.

We have heard your concerns over the development of Data Centers and AI.

So, we have passed a bill establishing a Tribal Digital Infrastructure and Data Sovereignty Task Force. This will provide for coordinated development of Tribal digital infrastructure initiatives on the reservation. According to the legislation, the task force will include one representative from the Attorney General’s office, one representative from the National Council, the principal chief, the chairman of the BFJ committee, the Speaker of the National Council, and one representative from the Tribal Utility Authority. It’s time that we remove misinformation and add transparency to this debate and really study what the advantages and concerns are for these projects, and the best way to move forward.

Our culture and humanities department continues to advance some of our most important initiatives in language, protecting what’s sacred and what makes us Muscogee.

We traveled to Scotland this year and, together with the University of Edinburgh, completed the first international repatriation in our history. Remains from 6 Muscogee and Yuchi ancestors were returned home and buried in our homelands. We are eternally grateful to the University of Edinburgh and our friends in the Anatomy Department for their care of these remains and willingness to do what’s right by them. I said it before, and I’ll say it again, it’s a sobering reminder that we had to travel that far to receive the respect we still can’t get here for our ancestors of Hickory Ground. But we won’t give up until like these, they’re made whole.

We also rekindled a connection to the UK Parliament through a project from Baroness Emma Nicholson of the House of Lords. The Baroness and her staff commissioned a Book that outlines the relationships, correspondence, contracts, treaties, maps, letters, and legal instruments drawn for the national archives in the British Library. It reveals the first hundred years of diplomacy, trade, and law between the British crown and the Iroquois confederacy, Chickasaw, Muskogee, and Cherokee nations in the years preceding American independence in 1776. We each received a copy for our Nations and presented a copy to King Charles III. What an experience and a historic moment for our Nation that I was so humbled to take part in.

Our Mvskoke Opunvkv Liaison Program held the 2nd Annual Speakers Symposium, which this year, was the largest modern gathering of first language Muscogee speakers we’ve ever had. Also, we have begun discussions on the development of an immersion program for Muscogee babies, to be brought up in the Language. We continue to expand our language classes both in our public schools and at the College of the Muscogee Nation. For too long, we’ve heard talks of our language dying. It’s up to us to keep it alive, and we are making great strides.

We celebrated 5 years of the Mvskoke Art Market this year, with our largest gathering of artists to date, with 105 artists participating. We continue to see an aggressive growth of this Market and it’s quickly becoming one of the staple events for Indigenous artists every year. We’re looking to continue to build it bigger and better for next year. And this will be our second year as a presenting sponsor of Indian Market at Santa Fe, placing our Nation in a highly visible spot and amplifying our voice in bringing important issues to a national platform.

Our agri-business continues to be an excellent asset for us and revenue stream for the Nation. This quarter alone, we brought in nearly \$1 million dollars in combined retail sales from Looped Square Meat Co. and through our livestock sales.

We opened two new Child Development Centers, one in Wetumka and one in Okemah, fulfilling our promise to grow the Nation throughout every county and to invest in our most precious resource, our children who are our future.

We just finished off our 50th annual Festival, and it was one for the books. We’re proud of the spectacle our Festival month has become and how many visitors we attract every year to the Okmulgee area. Visitors who stay in local hotels, eat at local restaurants, and shop at local retailers while they’re here. We understand that impact and the quality product that we must put forth to meet the expectations from the public. If you’re here today and you volunteered, coordinated, kept people safe, kept people from emergency, or made sure our events ran smoothly, I’d like you to please stand so we can all give you a round of applause. You are who makes the Festival so special and enjoyable for our guests and citizens!

We continue to show up for our communities. We recently completed the installation of a new water pump station for the community of Dewar. Together, with our state and federal partners, this is part of a 36-project, \$100 million joint venture to replace and update infrastructure across our Reservation. This is a massive need we identified and are taking care of.

Late last year, when the US Government had a lengthy shutdown, affecting families who utilize SNAP benefits, I convened a meeting of our leadership in areas of WIC, Community and Human Services, Social Services, Finance, and Food Distribution, along with members of our Executive team and National Council. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss our options as it pertains to those throughout our Reservation who may be affected by an interruption in services provided by federal monies. The swift action led to a series of food distribution events that allowed us to feed families while flexing food sovereignty from our own cattle and processing operations at the Looped Square Ranch and Meat Company.

Truly, one of the proudest moments for me as Chief was to see so many departments come together so quickly for SNAP families in need. If you are here today from MCN and participated in these distributions, whether it be in the planning or volunteering aspect, please stand up and be recognized.

These are just some examples of the progress we’ve made this year and the hard work and dedication of so many in our Cabinet Secretary divisions and various departments.

Please, I ask that you take the time to view our quarterly reports on the Nation’s website. These reports contain a more intensive breakdown of the data of each program and division and offer a real-time glimpse of how we’re doing throughout the year. Let us know, hold us accountable, and show us where you think we’re getting the job done or where we can improve.

The work continues. There is still so much to accomplish in my next 18 months. A great emphasis will be setting this Nation on a correct path where our growth continues, and we have a solid foundation for the future.

I wish I could say that it’s easy and there won’t be challenging times. It seems like we’ve been handed a lifetime of roadblocks into these six short years.

Our sovereignty is still under attack. Our Constitution is under attack. Our identity is under attack. But will we have the strength to stand? The answer has to be yes, no matter how uncomfortable it becomes. We don’t answer to the outside world. Or the media. Or the naysayers. We answer to our ancestors and this citizenry of Mvskokvke.

Together, we can do anything. And together, we decide who we are and where we’re going.

To the people who have entrusted me with this great honor and responsibility as Principal Chief, I promise that we’ll keep delivering on our mission of prosperity and progress for this great Nation. I am just as excited about this job today as I was on my first day, and we’ll continue, with your support and prayer, to keep striving forward every day towards our brightest future together.

Mvto, God Bless you all, and God Bless the Muscogee Nation!



Shavonne Stevens at her Seneca Nation home in Cattaraugus, New York. (Image: Malik Rainey/The Imprint)

BIRTH JUSTICE: THE FIGHT FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM IN INDIAN COUNTRY

BY SUZETTE BREWER/THE IMPRINT

Editor’s note: This is part two in a two part series originally published by The Imprint, a national nonprofit news outlet covering child welfare and youth justice. It is a project for the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism’s National Fellowship and its Dennis A. Hunt Fund for Health Journalism.

On Thanksgiving Day 2020, Shavonne Stevens and her partner arrived at a hospital in Buffalo, New York, ready to meet their fourth baby — a moment that should have been filled with joy, hope, and the tender magic of new life.

Instead, it felt more like survival.

Shortly after admission, Stevens learned her baby was “sunnyside up” in utero — a face-up position that can make labor longer, more painful, and riskier for both mother and child. She had been laboring on her side, letting her body guide the baby into a safer position.

But when the nurse midwife arrived, the atmosphere in the delivery room shifted — like a freight train rolling in — and the birth that Stevens hoped for began to unravel.

“She took me by the legs and forced me on my back and said, ‘No, you need to push like this,’” Stevens, now 36, recalled.

Time slowed. The baby’s position in the birth canal made each contraction more grueling, sending pressure and pain ripping through her lower back and thighs as the baby’s skull pressed against her tailbone. Heart pounding, Stevens was trapped in a position that defied her natural instincts.

When her daughter, Denver, finally emerged, she was injured from passing face-up under the pelvic bone.

“Her face was swollen, her forehead and nose were black and blue, and she was looking up at the stars,” Stevens said. “She probably wouldn’t have been born like that if they would’ve let me labor how I wanted.”

Adding to the stress, Stevens said the postpartum nurses were rude, and no one came to help her breastfeed: “They basically ignored us and kept trying to push the bottle, which I wasn’t going to do.”

Stevens wanted dignity, care and connection in an environment where she felt respected and safe. But after enduring four hospital births that were marked by disregard and thinly veiled contempt, she vowed never to return to the hospital.

Stevens’s experience is not uncommon among Native women in the United States, who have survived centuries of prejudice, indifference, neglect, and medical abuse by their providers. As a result, they now experience the worst per capita maternal health outcomes in the country during pregnancy, labor, delivery, and postpartum.

Her story reveals the challenges tribal members face giving birth — and also the ways tribal communities are reclaiming maternal health care on their own terms. Stevens and countless other American Indian and Alaska Native women are challenging the status quo, turning their collective anger at these ongoing inequities into a demand for accountability, adequate funding, data visibility, and the right to safe, respectful and culturally informed birth experiences.

Across Indian Country, this growing birth justice movement is driven by a range of Native-led initiatives, involving advocacy organizations, Indigenous midwives and doulas, and grassroots maternal health programs — the Alaska Native Birthworkers Community, Tewa Women United, Changing Woman Initiative and the Indigenous Birth Justice Network, to name a few.

“Midwives are being trained in our communities because of the desperate state of maternal and child

health across the U.S.” said Katsi Cook, a midwife and member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe at Awkwesasne in upstate New York. “The opportunity is for us to realize our own strength and our own power in building something that comes from the inside — not the outside.”

Origins: The birth of a continent



An Indigenous mother and child photographed in the early 1900s when federal officials and government physicians were focused on regulating Indigenous reproduction. (Image: Edward S. Curtis, Library of Congress)

Indigenous women gave birth to an entire hemisphere. For thousands of years, birth was attended by midwives, grandmothers and female relatives with ceremony, prayer and collective support for mother and baby. Though each tribe had its own customs, the arrival of a child was a sacred event that included family and community in an unbroken cycle of life that promised continuity for generations to come.

In many tribal societies, ceremonies for a woman entering puberty were a time of celebration which brought her into the circle of midwives and elder women who would help deliver her children, as well as mentor and guide her throughout her life.

From the Arctic Circle to the tip of southern Chile, midwives used sophisticated knowledge of birth, healing, and traditional medicines that strengthened and sustained their communities for millennia. When Christopher Columbus arrived in the late 15th century, experts estimate that approximately 90 to 112 million people inhabited the Western Hemisphere.

By the early 1600s, however, experts estimate that 95% of the Indigenous population perished due to disease, conflict, and colonial expansion.

Unequal access: The maternal healthcare crisis in Indian Country

Beginning in the early 20th century, as the pseudoscience of eugenics gained influence around the world, Native American women were targeted for sterilizations, and their children were forced into boarding schools and foster care. These policies were intended to suppress and reduce the Native population growth and erase Indigenous cultures.

The impact was immediate and devastating. A sweeping 1928 federal investigation, known as the Meriam Report, found that in Montana alone the infant mortality rate in 1927 among Native Americans was 185.4 per 1,000 births, compared to 69.1 for whites.

Maternal mortality also spiked. By the early 1940s, Navajo mothers, for example, had an estimated mortality rate of approximately 1,000 deaths per 100,000 births. That was nearly four times the U.S. average of 270 per 100,000 at that time, according to a 1990 study published in Medical Anthropology.

Modern barriers have further exacerbated this crisis. Pregnant tribal members face chronic shortages in care, including understaffing, long wait times, limited access

to specialists and emergency obstetric care and fragmented coordination between tribal, state and federal health care systems.

Alaska Native women are routinely forced to travel hundreds of miles by seaplane for prenatal care and childbirth — often alone and without family support. In a state two and a half times larger than Texas, where many communities are accessible only by air or water, weather, geographic isolation and travel delays can quickly become medical emergencies.

These factors have led to a maternal health care crisis in which Native women die of pregnancy-related complications at rates of up to 10 times higher than their white counterparts in some states, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association.

A new generation of midwives

Now, an Indigenous-led grassroots movement is confronting this systemic failure by reclaiming birth sovereignty. The work is led by Native midwives and doulas, lawmakers, clinic directors, activists and researchers in states including Alaska, Washington, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York and others.

Their efforts include building ceremonial birth lodges and tribal birthing centers, facilitating home births and restoring reliance on traditional medicines and birth practices. Services include pre- and postnatal clinical and cultural support, patient advocacy within health systems, mental health services, accompanying mothers to medical appointments, and holding in-person and virtual workshops and sharing circles — community-driven initiatives restoring Indigenous knowledge and practices. Practical needs are also being met by local initiatives, providing basic necessities and postpartum items like diapers, wipes, car seats and breast pumps.

In the face of chronically underfunded federal health systems, geographic isolation and jurisdictional barriers, these caregivers are helping reduce maternal and infant mortality rates and restoring dignity to birth in tribal communities, according to the National Indian Health Board.

Katsi (pronounced Gudji) Cook is a member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe at Akwesasne, New York. She has been at the forefront of restoring Indigenous midwifery nationwide for nearly half a century. A founding member of the National Council of Indigenous Midwives, she began practicing as a midwife and advocating for Indigenous maternal health in the 1970s, shaping policies that bridge traditional birthways with public health research and human rights efforts for American Indian and Alaska Native families.

Cook’s prenatal approach integrates both clinical care and traditional medicine, encouraging her patients to follow the guidance of elders and other mothers.

“Many Indigenous women are alone and disconnected with no mother, father or family to support them,” Cook said. “But if you don’t have a mother, find someone to sit in her place, an auntie or friend — because even if it’s a conversation about ‘How did you do this?’ it can still be so powerful.”

She also encourages Native women to know their health data and be prepared to advocate for themselves at medical appointments.

“They need to show up with knowledge. Every woman should know her hemoglobin, A1c, blood pressure — all of the biomarkers, because that’s what the clinicians are going to look at and judge you by because of the racism that’s inherent in the structure of those systems,” Cook said.

Cook said home births are experiencing a resurgence across Indian Country due largely to the individ-

ualized care and respect provided by “new generations of midwives in our own communities.”

She describes traditional birth as an act of resistance. But that resistance requires more than awareness, she added. It calls for integrating traditional ways of giving birth with practical medical knowledge that preserves community continuity and intergenerational wisdom.

Many Native women, for example, report being subjected to unnecessary interventions — including drugs to induce or speed labor, episiotomies, epidurals and Cesarean sections without clear medical necessity or informed consent.

Cook believes that true empowerment means trusting women to listen to their own bodies, rejecting unnecessary medical procedures and embracing practices rooted in tradition and personal choice. She advocates for the inclusion and active participation of family members in birth spaces, who are often left out and dismissed by Western practitioners.

“What was missing wasn’t culture — it was knowledge of our own bodies, our spirit, our relationship to creation,” Cook said. “We didn’t forget that knowledge. We stopped doing it, and knowledge comes back through the doing.”



In the decades that followed, federal policies shaped by eugenic ideology increasingly targeted Indigenous women’s reproductive lives. (Image: Edward S. Curtis, Library of Congress)

A powerful decision

Struggling postpartum in early 2021, Stevens began searching the Internet to seek help. She stumbled on something called a “postpartum doula,” which was a completely new concept for her.

“I didn’t even know what a doula was, and why had I never heard of this?” Stevens said. “So I looked into it and signed up for a class.”

Discovering the world of Indigenous midwifery, doulas and home birth was a revelation. Having had four hospital births, “I thought I knew everything,” she recalled. “But I didn’t know anything.”

During her doula training, Stevens found a home among other Native birth workers who center pregnancy in their communities by including elders, friends and family, preparing and using traditional plant medicines, and observing cultural protocols during gestation and birth.

Midwives and doulas from the Six Nations Birthing Centre in Ontario, Canada, and Akwesasne, New York, took her under their wing, teaching her the traditional practices for childbirth that guided the women of the powerful Iroquois Confederacy — known collectively as the Haudenosaunee in their language — for thousands of years.

These birth workers are restoring traditional knowledge, strengthening community bonds and returning agency to Native women.

Learning from these women, Stevens said, felt transformative — acts of ancestral remembrance that made her feel empowered.

“These women talked very positively about their home births, which I had never heard before,” Stevens said. “As I was learning from them about birth and postpartum, which they taught from a traditional perspective, it all made sense.”

The Native birth justice movement had finally found her, awakening a fierce determination to reclaim traditional Haudenosaunee birth practices — not only for herself, but also for her community.

Building a policy road map for Native maternal health reform

Across Indian Country — from tribal lands to urban centers — community-based leaders are at the forefront

of a nationwide effort advocating for legislation and policies that expand access to care and confront persistent disparities in Native maternal health.

Nicolle Arthun is the founder of Changing Woman Initiative, a nonprofit serving Indigenous women in Albuquerque, New Mexico. An internationally recognized certified nurse-midwife, she has spent decades advocating for tribal maternal health by working to reclaim traditional birth practices and restore Indigenous midwifery rights.

As one of the preeminent voices in maternal health-care reform for American Indian and Alaska Native women, Arthun established Changing Woman in 2015 after getting her masters in nurse-midwifery at the University of New Mexico. Her motivation was driven in part by her own birth experiences, and by observing the mistreatment of Native American women and their families by other medical professionals when she was a young nurse at the Santa Fe Indian Hospital.

“Women in labor were shamed for asking for epidurals, or told to ‘shut up’ by their nurses if they cried too loud,” Arthun said. “I would overhear the non-Native staff make negative comments about these women and saw how they treated them with disrespect, which is one of the big reasons I felt I had to do something.”

Arthun said she was alarmed by the way Native women are treated in health care settings.

“They don’t know what their rights or options are or what they can say yes or no to,” Arthun said, “because providers expect them to do what they are told.”

As a 2024 fellow with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Fellowship, she’s been working with New Mexico U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján to develop a national strategy for improving maternal health outcomes for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian women.

This landmark effort is the first of its type in nearly 250 years of federal Indian policy, and centers on five comprehensive policy briefs which outline solutions to maternal mortality, workforce equity, access to health care services, Indigenous data sovereignty, and funding inequities. The policies were developed by tribal members and 55 maternal health experts. They provide a devastating picture of the maternal health crisis in Indian Country — and solutions for addressing it.

Released by Luján’s office last December, the reports are intended to guide legislation that will improve maternal health outcomes in Indian Country.

“For far too long, Native families have had to be subjected to a maternal health system that was never built for them. These reports offer a roadmap that is based on data sovereignty, community-led care, and sustained federal investment and support,” Sen. Luján said in an emailed statement.

“I look forward to seeing many of these solutions put to work and to making things better for Native mothers and care facilities.”

But efforts to secure additional funding to address the Native maternal health crisis are now under threat due to the ongoing budget conflicts in Congress — which led to the longest government shutdown in U.S. history last fall.

In January, legislators passed a bipartisan, bicameral “minibus” appropriations package to avert another government shutdown by providing full-year funding for several federal agencies and programs.

For Indian Country, this funding includes Indian Health Service and other maternal, behavioral health and community-based services that many Native families rely on as their primary — and often only — source of care. But Arthun and other advocates argue that funding levels and sustained investment in maternal and infant care still fall far short of what is needed to adequately address persistent disparities, workforce shortages, and the unique geographic and jurisdictional barriers facing tribal communities.

“The maternal health crisis in Indian Country is an invisible issue that can no longer be overlooked,” Arthun said. “We’re done waiting for change and we are prioritizing our women and children through engaging with Congress for long-term solutions, policies and funding that are strategic to advancing our continued survival as tribal nations.”

For Native women, the challenge goes beyond availability of care, she added. Without targeted investment and ongoing, consistent support, “future generations will feel the outcomes of the decisions made today —

which will have long-term impacts.”



Stevens after giving birth at home to her daughter, Baela. (Photo: Kaylei Miller Photography)

A new beginning and a farewell

Back home on Seneca territory in Cattaraugus, New York, Stevens is now the mother of six — four girls and two boys. Her last two children were delivered at home. Stevens says her home births were a healing contrast to her hospital deliveries, defined by love, ceremony and community support in a way that reflected her family’s traditional Seneca beliefs.

Her sixth child, a daughter named Baela, was delivered with her partner by her side in January 2025. Her birth plan included three traditional Seneca doulas and a midwife.

“I needed all the support I could get with five other kids in the house,” she said. “I needed a doula for me, a doula for the kids and someone who was praying over me and thinking good thoughts.”

“It was the old way and it was so calm and beautiful — every birth should be like that.” – Shavonne Stevens

It was a traditional Haudenosaunee birth. “I breathed her out and held her close and it was important to me for her to hear only Seneca when she came out,” Stevens said. “In our culture, no one speaks until we speak first, so I announced that it’s a girl — Godóni’a:h — in Seneca.”

A short time later, the doula came in, greeting the baby in Seneca before offering the welcoming speech and singing the traditional “Baby Song” to Baela.

“It was so emotional,” Stevens said. From these deeply personal birth experiences at home, Stevens’ work has blossomed into a commitment to supporting mothers and nurturing newborns in her community.

Now a certified doula and lactation consultant, Stevens said she has lost count of the number of Seneca women whom she has attended during birth or helped with breastfeeding. She is on a mission to help train more Indigenous doulas while continuing to restore traditional Haudenosaunee birth practices to their rightful place.

But one sacred task remained — a final act that brought her birth journey full circle.

“They say to plant your placenta with the cord down, which tells the connection with the Earth that you’re done having children,” Stevens said. “If you plant it cord up, then that tells the Earth that you want more.”

In July 2025, Stevens held a traditional placenta ceremony near her home in Cattaraugus. Surrounded by her six children, they found a spot in the woods where they smudged and dug a small hole.

Taking Baela’s placenta in her hands, Stevens placed it, cord down, along with the placenta cords of her other five children. She covered them with dirt, as her children laid flowers, prayed and gave thanks to the Creator. Like hundreds of her grandmothers before her, she returned them to the Earth.

Wiping tears, she felt relief in reclaiming her traditional birth ways and finding her calling along the way — and a gentle ache knowing that Baela would be her last. In a moment filled with love and tenderness, she had passed down this ancient ceremony to her children.

Quietly, they gathered for a hug and slipped away to gather wild strawberries, carrying the ceremony and its lessons with them into the forest.

Suzette Brewer is a journalist specializing in federal Indian law and social justice, with a focus on issues affecting Native women and children. Her work has appeared in Scientific American, National Geographic, ICT (Indian Country Today), The Dallas Morning News, The Denver Post, and many others. She is a member of the Cherokee Nation and is from Stilwell, Oklahoma.



Shavonne Stevens, seen here at home, says learning from Indigenous birth workers was transformative and made her feel empowered. (Image: Malik Rainey/The Imprint)

GROWING POWER AG EXPO PLANTS SEEDS FOR COLLABORATION

THE FIRST-YEAR EVENT BRINGS TOGETHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PRODUCERS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS TO SHARE RESOURCES AND EDUCATION

BY KATY LEARD

OKMULGEE – Farmers, ranchers, and agricultural educators gathered at the first annual Growing Power Ag Expo on July 18-19 with one goal in mind: building and strengthening connections for the future of agriculture across Okmulgee County.

The expo was designed to connect producers and community members with agricultural organizations and experts through education and networking, bringing together and creating opportunities for producers of all backgrounds to build lasting connections.

In the spirit of collaboration, event organizers envisioned the expo as more than just a weekend of vendor booths.

“One of the things we focus on in extension is to promote our ag producers,” Chris Azbell (Mvskoke), CMN Extension Coordinator for Okmulgee County, said. “So we had this idea to do an ag expo just to highlight all things ag.”

This idea manifested as a weekend full of networking and hands-on experiences designed specifically with producers in mind.

Guest speakers discussed topics like hemp farming, data centers, and the Homemade Food Freedom Act. Vendors and agricultural organizations networked with attendees, while food trucks and live music created a welcoming atmosphere for all.

Among those attending was Al Roberts, a livestock producer in Seminole County. When asked what drew him to the expo, Roberts said it was the education.

“Just coming here to just get educated a little bit more,” Roberts said. “You can never learn too much.”



Attendees visit with vegetable vendors during the Growing Power Ag Expo. (Katy Leard/MM)

“You can never learn too much.” - Al Roberts

One of the greatest benefits of the expo was, to Roberts, the opportunity to hear from experts and trade ideas with his fellow producers. He said that with the constant shifting nature of agriculture, it’s imperative for farmers and ranchers to stay informed and continue making connections with others in their industry.

Guest speaker and founder of the National Black Farmers Association, John Boyd, echoed the value of education but emphasized that the strength of expos like Growing Power is the people it brings together.

“I think this particular expo brings together different bodies of cultures that don’t historically meet in a venue like this,” Boyd said. “Some of the events are just Native American. Some of the events are

just Black. What I’ve seen so far is a mixture of the different populations, which I think is a good thing.”

With the rise of input costs and shrinking profit margins, Boyd said those connections are more important today than they’ve ever been.

“Farming in this country has become more difficult,” he said. “We’re going to have to get creative and find each other and find ways to cut some of this cost.”

As the inaugural event closed, Azbell said that the true measure of the expo’s success was the connections made and the information that attendees took home. He hopes the relationships fostered and knowledge shared will continue to grow in the years to come.

“If we educate one person, it’s going to be a success,” Azbell said.

ESA ROLLBACKS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ESA impacts on Oklahoma

The changes are also affecting endangered species in Oklahoma, such as the whooping crane. According to the National Crane Foundation, ESA is credited with saving the whooping crane population, which had an estimated 50 birds in 1973. That population now has over 500 birds in the wild. According to International Crane Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Rich Beilfuss, removing federal protections will undo decades of progress in helping vulnerable avian populations.

“We are deeply concerned that this rule strips away a tool that has been essential not only to the Whooping Crane’s recovery, but to the recovery of hundreds of other species across the country,” Beilfuss said. “The International Crane Foundation will continue to stand with the scientific and conservation community in defense of the habitat protections that make species recovery possible, and we urge decision-makers to reconsider a rule that threatens fifty years of hard-won progress.”

The U.S. Department of the Interior described the revisions as “necessary” to strengthen energy independence. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum argued that the change in the law will not affect the species listed as endangered or threatened.

“For too long, the Endangered Species Act has been weaponized to stop almost any new project in America, driving up costs for families, weakening our competitiveness, and undermining our national security,” Burgum said. “At the same time, results have fallen short. Nearly 97 percent of species ever placed on the list remain there today. Success should be measured by species recovery and delisting, not by adding more species to the list.”

To view a full list of endangered or threatened species in Oklahoma, including the Ozark big-eared bat, the Oklahoma Cave Crawfish, and the American Burying Beetle, go to: wildlifedepartment.com

TRIBAL LEADERS FORMALLY WELCOMED BY THE ROYAL FAMILY IN WINDSOR

MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION PRINCIPAL CHIEF DAVID HILL AND GOVERNOR CHRIS ANOATUBBY PRESENT KING CHARLES III WITH A COPY OF “AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP”

BY BRADEN HARPER

WINDSOR, England – Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill and Chickasaw Governor Chris Anoatubby were received by King Charles III and Baroness Nicholson at Windsor Castle on Wednesday, July 15. Both Tribal leaders and Nicholson presented Charles with the book, “An Enduring Relationship.” The bound collection of historic papers, maps, and treaties now sits in the royal archives at Windsor.

Principal Chief Hill and Governor Anoatubby also presented Charles with handmade items, including a Muscogee insignia, plates, and Chickasaw leather pendants.

“An Enduring Relationship” details the first one hundred years of diplomacy, trade, and law between the British Crown and the Cherokee Nation, the Chickasaw Nation, the Choctaw Nation, the Iroquois Confederacy, and the MCN. The book contains scanned correspondence, contracts, treaty maps, letters and legal instruments from the British Library, the Middle Temple, and Lambeth Palace.

The research was initiated by Nicholson and former Oklahoma Supreme Court Chief Justice Yvonne Kauger. In a press statement, Nicholson shared that the book will allow readers to examine the relationship between Britain and the Tribes in the years leading up to American independence in 1776.

“The Enduring Relationship Project underlines the importance of finding lost information about our shared history,” Nicholson said. “It is enabling the nations to restore their identity and culture and, by this

wonderful meeting with The King, has allowed us all to recognise the historic relationship that was established 400 years ago between the British Crown and the American and Canadian tribal nations.”

In a statement provided to Mvskoke Media, Principal Chief Hill shared what the meeting means for the MCN and its diplomatic ties with the United Kingdom.

“I think our project with Baroness Nicholson, the ‘Enduring Relationship,’ being presented to the King in this meeting only strengthens and amplifies our work in the UK even more,” Principal Chief Hill said.

“The more visibility and awareness we have of it, the better, and it doesn’t get much more visible than a ceremonial exchange with the King at Windsor Castle. To me, that’s the best part, that so many eyes will be drawn to this collection of diplomacy that have never seen it or been aware of it before. And we look to capture the moment and expand on the ties to our history there even more.”

This is not Principal Chief Hill’s first international trip this year. In January, Principal Chief Hill and Tribal leaders visited the University of Edinburgh in Scotland for an international repatriation. The remains of six ancestors were returned to the Nation from the university.

According to the Enduring Relationship Initiative website, the initiative will continue to identify and source original documents from over 50 Tribes who engaged in trade with Britain during the same time period.

TOP RIGHT: Baroness Nicholson presents “An Enduring Relationship” to King Charles III at Windsor Castle. BOTTOM RIGHT: Principal Chief Hill, Baroness Nicholson, and Governor Anoatubby. (Image Credit: Baroness Nicholson)



“This was an extremely humbling and honorable experience for myself, and also for the Nation, to have an audience with His Majesty King Charles III. To my knowledge, it’s the first and only time a Muscogee Principal Chief has ever met with the Crown, so it was a historic moment I’ll never forget,”
- Principal Chief David Hill



BEHIND VICTORIA TIGER'S LENS

TIGER REFLECTS ON THE VALUE OF EACH MOMENT AFTER HER SISTER'S PASSING

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

MVSKOKE RESERVATION – Many Indigenous photographers have taken photos of Indigenous people, but each has a similar meaning behind their photos, and each photographer brings a different eye to the vision. For the owner, Victoria Tiger (Mvskoke/Euchee), she has taken various visual shots throughout her life, and she is starting to lean more towards a cultural angle in her photos. This is her story.

Tiger is Bird Clan, she attends both Concharty Church, and the Duck Creek Ceremonial Grounds. Her husband is Aaron Tiger, and they have two children, Avery and Sequoyah.

She has always loved photography, but it wasn't until 2015, after her daughter was born, that she started to pick up the camera. She enjoyed capturing moments of emotion, and when Tiger first started photographing families, she later wanted to represent the tribe through her photography.

Her business, "Victoria Tiger Photography," started in 2016. Throughout her years as a photographer, Tiger has evolved in many ways, but one thing that has remained the same is her desire to photograph human connection.

"It wasn't until 2020, when my little sister, Cheyanne, passed away, that I truly understood the value and fragility of life. As difficult as that loss was, it changed the way I see the world and the way I create. It pushed me to photograph from a deeper place, one rooted in emotion, memory, and appreciation for the moments we are given. It taught me that even after immense sadness, there is still beauty when the sun comes out again," Tiger said.

Her husband is in the military, so Tiger has traveled a lot outside of Oklahoma. This has given her a broad perspective on different cultures, and she wanted to give her own people a voice and a space to create art.

Tiger stated, "In today's world, with the constant fight to be seen and to remind people that Native people are still here, and always will be, I feel a strong pull to photograph different forms of art. My goal has always been to capture emotion and tell meaningful stories through my work."

Back in March, Tiger did a photoshoot with Ariana, and they both traveled to the Marland Mansion in Ponca City to bring her vision to life. Tiger stated that she wanted to show that Native people are capable of becoming anything they aspire to be. She believes it is important to incorporate elements of cultural representation while allowing the beauty and elegance of ballet to shine through.

"The ribbons were especially meaningful. My inspiration came from Ribbon Dance, a traditional dance held at many ceremonial grounds throughout the Muscogee Reservation. It is a dance that honors and shows appreciation for women," Tiger said.

"I wanted to bring a small piece of that significance into this session, blending cultural elements with artistic expression in a way that felt authentic and respectful."

With each creative session like this, she tries to tie together both a piece of who Indigenous people are and



Duck Creek Ceremonial Ground Mekko, the late Simon Harry. (Photo Courtesy: Victoria Tiger)

"I went through a journey of being able to photograph our people in a more artistic way, an emotive way. By being more intentional with each shot, I find myself back here having a gravitational pull to photograph our people in a storytelling way."



Tiger's little sister, Cheyanne, that Tiger had captured. (Photo Courtesy: Victoria Tiger)

the traditions that have shaped them into who they are. Doing this work makes it more personal and meaningful for Tiger. Creating this, it also shows representation, storytelling, and connection for her.

"For me, each session is about celebrating identity, culture, strength, resilience, and the many paths Native people continue to walk," Tiger said.

"Going back to the ballet shoot, for instance. My goal behind that one was to show that Native people are capable of becoming anything and anything they want.

That was what was important to me behind that one is to incorporate a little bit of cultural representation but in a more tasteful way."

One of her favorite cultural pieces that she has taken features her Mekko from the Duck Creek Ceremonial Ground, Simon Harry. Six or seven years ago, her past Mekko was 98 years old. She had photographed Harry at the ceremonial ground after their season was over.

Looking back at these photos, she notices a lot of black and white images, "I'm like 'Oh man, I could have changed this, or I could have photographed it this way or that way,' but looking at those images now, 5- 7 years later, my goal was always still there. When I approached that session, I wanted to feel something years later," Tiger said.

"Now looking back, I still can feel his presence and his stories, his teachings, to not only myself but to my other ground members."

One of her biggest life lessons, Tiger learned through photography, was to cherish every moment, especially memories of her sister, Cheyanne.

"I lost my younger sister, and going back to my why and why I love to photograph the things that I do. Life is precious, there's all kinds of stages of life, and one of the first things we look for when somebody passes is pictures and to show their life. I think that's what's important to me, being able to capture those memories for happy times, unfortunately, the sad times too. But really just capturing life and just trying to dig deep into each session and bringing that to life," Tiger said.

Tiger's advice to emerging Indigenous photographers who want to document a cultural vision is to stay true to who you are, and that what we are taught will always lead you far in life.

"If I could offer any advice to young Indigenous artists, it would be to stay true to who you are and to the teachings that have guided you. Never let anyone tell you that your voice, your story, or your art does not matter. Do not take no for an answer, and never stop creating from your heart," Tiger said.

"Our stories deserve to be told, our cultures deserve to be celebrated, and your unique perspective is some-

thing the world needs to see."

To follow her journey through her photography, you can follow Tiger's Photography on Facebook at Victoria Tiger Photography.



Tiger blending cultural elements with artistic expression. (Photo Courtesy: Victoria Tiger)

FOUNDED BY MVSKOKE PEOPLE, SACRED BUILDS LASTING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



A busy, full kitchen at one of SACRED's in-person cultural cooking classes. (Photo Courtesy: Mackenzie Roberts)

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

MVSKOKE RESERVATION – SACRED Inc. is an organization founded by Mvskoke citizens to help understand the community needs in the Southern Region of the Mvskoke Reservation and beyond. It stands for Support Action, Community Response, Education Discussions, and was cofounded by Mvskoke citizen Mackenzie Roberts. The aim of SACRED Inc. is to engage on the community level and reconnect people to each other, culture, and land and food practices, whether you live on or off the reservation.

During a 2024 Native Organizers Alliance Training in Seattle that focused on Native and community organizing, mobilization, and election mobilization, Roberts' community-building spark ignited.

"That is where I kind of got a little bit of a taste of community organizing, mobilization, and campaign building," Roberts said. That is also when she told her friends they needed to learn how to organize in the community.

Then, in 2025, Roberts and her friend Jordan Harmon (Mvskoke) worked on a community campaign opposing data centers on the reservation. The idea for SACRED began to take shape as citizens sought guidance on how to engage in community action. Specifically, citizens needed direction on how to make public comments at meetings and on where to start when navigating channels to get things done.

Additionally, Roberts friends who are off the reservation and also Mvskoke citizens who wanted to feel connected with the Mvskoke community. "Whenever I left my community to go to college, I was also really disconnected from the community, our culture, and everything else. It was really hard on me, and now a lot of my friends are in California," Roberts said.

SACRED hosts in-person classes and also uses virtual meetings to connect. "On Zoom, we can come together for like, a cooking class or just a talking circle," Roberts said.

"One of our very first events was a collaborative cvto hakv and ghost bread-making class with CMN extension and Wetumka Indian community. It was at the Wetumka Indian community center on February 22nd 2025. I think we had about 35 participants there," Roberts said.

SACRED hosted a vpvtvk (cowboy bread) virtual class and posted it on the

Muscogee Facebook groups. They had about 160 people register instantly, and that is when they noticed the need, Roberts added. SACRED is open to any Mvskoke citizen who wants to join, and it is also meant to help other Mvskoke citizens.

For meetings and activities, they have started biweekly steering committee meetings to keep the organization running. They are hoping to do a second vpvtvk class or a grape dumping class- depending on funding, they hope to host quarterly activities.

The grassroots organization has 7 board members: TCFO, Co-Founder Summer Chupco-Boyajian (Mvskoke), Sgt. of Arms Hunter Dodson (Cherokee), Board of Secretary Heather Fry (Mvskoke), Board Vice Chair Jordan Harmon (Mvskoke), Steering Committee Chair Madison Matney (Mvskoke), Treasurer Kenna Najera (Mvskoke), Board Chair Cassandra Thompson (Mvskoke), and herself. During each session, board members give an introduction of themselves so everyone knows who is serving them.

Currently, they are working on becoming an official nonprofit organization. When they become a nonprofit, Roberts shared, they can do more. They have met people who want to help fund their projects.

"This past year has been absolutely nuts, and so we've gotten to meet with a bunch of different people that are really enthusiastic and supportive of SACRED, so that's one of the reasons why we wanted to hurry up to have our nonprofit status," Roberts said. "We're meeting a lot more often, so we're hoping that we can match the rate that we're expanding."

At this time, SACRED is raising \$400 in funds and held a bake sale to reach that goal. They plan to put \$200 towards their Zoom license so they can continue their Mvskoke Talking Circles and cultural cooking classes. The other \$200 will be used to register their organization as a non-profit with the state of Oklahoma.

During their next board meeting, they will review community agreements to begin recruiting volunteers for in-person community projects.

One of the first projects SACRED is planning for is a library card drive. Starting in Henryetta, where Roberts resides, they would host a reading by a Mvskoke author at the local library. The idea is to get Mvskoke citizens and their children registered for library cards. Then, wel-

come them back to a local community center for food and fellowship.

"It's not super flashy, but it's still filling a need and doing it in a very grassroots community-focused style. So hopefully very soon in the next month or so, we'll be able to start inviting people to volunteer with us and help us grow," Roberts said.

The organization communicates its progress and decisions to the wider community via email and social media. All of the board members are full-time employees, so each of them has a busy schedule; however, they work things through to get things done.

All of the people who had registered for their virtual vpvtvk class will be on their email list, and then they will start providing newsletters from there.

Roberts feels that being part of this impact, working alongside the Mvskoke people, and helping other Mvskoke citizens is something she was meant to do.

She spoke of how very privileged she was to be in a community all her life. She says she is from the Yardeka Creek Indian Community Center and serves as its Vice Chair. She attends the Yardeka Indian Baptist Church, and her ceremonial ground is Apekv.

"The reason I'm saying all of this is because a lot of people don't understand how blessed and how privileged we are. There are so many people who have to make an entire pilgrimage just to be able to access their people. That sense of belonging that they can't get anywhere else. Because of life outside of the Mvskoke world, they don't

understand being Mvskoke," Roberts said.

Roberts understands the privilege she holds, and she wants to use that to elevate Mvskoke people.

"Every place that I find myself in a higher position, I want to extend the ladder down. I want to leave the door open behind me so they can come up here with me," Roberts said.

It was significant for Roberts to hear how appreciative people were when they attended the vpvtvk class, and to hear Mvskoke citizens say they needed the connection SACRED provides.

Roberts related that some citizens feel they're not Mvskoke or not Mvskoke enough because they live outside the reservation boundaries. She feels fulfilled because SACRED Inc. helps provide a connection.

"It's this notion of remembrance. Sometimes they're like 'we feel forgotten.' With this intent, the message we want to convey is that we remember you, we never forgot you, it might have taken us some time, but we've always thought about you, and that's how I felt. That's how a lot of our board feels," Roberts said.

"We want to connect our community like that, we want to bridge that."

She can't wait to see how far this will grow and how far they can take this. Roberts says it is a lot of hard work; however, none of it is difficult, especially if it's for the Mvskoke people.

One of the biggest things she hopes she can leave behind is empowerment. Roberts says this is small, but intentional things like the library card drive or the community garden

at Yardeka are part of mobilization and community organizing.

"We've just been distributing fresh produce directly to the community members, that's something they can do, and we want to have little toolkits to show people how to get that started. Not just how to get a garden started but how to go about planning work days and what to do about weekly volunteers, quarterly, and so forth," Roberts said.

"I want people to understand that politics and institutional systems aren't something that just have to happen to us. It's something that we are all a part of, and we are all responsible for building a world that we deserve to live in. So I hope that they know that they have the power to build that world that we all deserve," Roberts said.

Roberts is very appreciative of the board and all the hard work they have done for SACRED.

"They're all incredibly supportive, they're all very loving and very committed to each of their respective communities. We're Mvskoke-led, we're primarily Mvskoke femme led, and I just wanted it to be known that this is co-founded, this was created by all of us," Roberts said.

"I know that me and a couple of other people might have had this idea to formally organize, but none of these dreams would have been brought to reality without the people," Roberts said.

Stay up to date on with SACRED through Facebook at Supportive Action Community Response and Educated Discussion. Roberts can be contacted at kenzie@sacredinc.org

S.A.C.R.E.D INC.
NEEDS
ASSESSMENT
SURVEY

HESOI MVSKOKVLKE! WE NEED YOU! SUPPORTIVE ACTION, COMMUNITY RESPONSE, AND EDUCATED DISCUSSIONS, OR S.A.C.R.E.D. INC., IS INVITING YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY. MVSKOKVLKE ALL OVER ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE, YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL, AND WILL ONLY BE USED TO HELP US BETTER SERVE OUR PEOPLE. AS A BIG MVTO FOR YOUR TIME, EVERY 50 PARTICIPANTS UNTIL 200 WILL BE PUT INTO A RAFFLE FOR CUSTOM BEADWORK PIECE. PLEASE SHARE TO YOUR CIRCLES, AND BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR MORE! MVTO CEKICAKES!



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RZFDQCD>

SACRED, Inc. needs assessment survey. (Photo Courtesy: Mackenzie Roberts)

 MVSKOKEMEDIA

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TRIBAL DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED BY COUNCIL

THE ALUMINUM SMELTERS BAN GOES INTO EFFECT

BY BRADEN HARPER

OKMULGEE – The Muscogee (Creek) National Council held a quarterly session via teleconference and in person at the Mound Building on Saturday, July 25.

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

TR 26-040 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to submit a fiscal year 2026 Tribal wildlife grant application to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Representative Cody Phillips sponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the Nation’s Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) needs to properly manage, understand, and better regulate native pasture restoration and quail populations within the Nation’s Reservation. The wildlife grant application will help support DANR achieve these goals. There was no discussion on this legislation.

TR 26-041 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute separate memoranda of agreement with Tulsa, Creek, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Muskogee, McIntosh, and Hughes counties. Bixby and Glenpool cities, and to apply for federal funding through the Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Transportation Facility Bridge Program to fund bridge construction for thirty-five (35) bridge replacement projects. Representative Dode Barnett sponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, project costs will be

paid for with awards from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Nation will advise on construction bids and will acquire all necessary temporary construction easements. There was no discussion on this legislation.

TR 26-042 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 Department of Commerce and the AIM Law, limited partnership. Representative William Lowe sponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, outside legal counsel representing the Nation requires approval by a Tribal resolution. Secretary of Commerce Timothy Harjo explained that outside legal counsel is needed for their expertise on a special project that is currently under consideration in the Principal Chief’s office regarding the regulation of state-chartered Tribal banks.

TR 26-043 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 Department of Commerce and the Jacobson Law Group. Rep. Lowe sponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

The engagement letter is required in order for the MCN Department of Commerce to receive legal services from AIM Law. There was no discussion on this legislation.

TR 26-044 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation approving and authorizing the Muscogee Nation Gaming Enterprises, LLC (“MNGE”)

Board of Directors to execute the third amendment to the Margaritaville Trademark Sub-License Agreement. Representative Robert Hufft sponsored the bill. It was co-sponsored by Representative Lucian Tiger. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, the agreement will extend the Margaritaville operating agreement for five years, ending on Monday, August 25, 2031. There was no discussion on this legislation.

TR 26-045 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation establishing the Tribal Digital Infrastructure and Data Sovereignty Task Force and providing for coordinated development of Tribal Digital Infrastructure Initiatives on the reservation. Representative James Factor sponsored the bill. It was cosponsored by Speaker Randall Hicks and Reps. Phillips and Tiger. It was adopted 12-3. Rep. Barnett, Representatives Thomasene Osborn and Robyn Whitecloud voted against the legislation.

The task force will include one representative from the Attorney General’s office, one representative from the National Council, the Principal Chief, the chairman of the BFJ committee, the Speaker of the National Council, and one representative from the Tribal Utility Authority.

During the discussion, Rep. Barnett asked how the funds would be allocated. Harjo explained this legislation will not appropriate funds.

Representative Sandra Golden asked about the selection process for certain members of the task force. Rep. Factor explained that the established task force

members will choose and add members as needed.

TR 26-046 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the Principal Chief to execute a detention services agreement with the Creek County Juvenile Detention Center. Rep. Barnett sponsored the bill. Rep. Phillips cosponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

The agreement will be governed and constructed according to Oklahoma law and will be exclusive to the state and federal courts located in Creek County. Attorney General Geri Wisner explained that the limited waiver of sovereign immunity will apply to the Creek County jail contracts and all other jail contracts with other Oklahoma counties.

TR 26-047 A tribal resolution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation opposing construction and operation of any aluminum smelter upon the reservation lands of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Representative Anna Marshall sponsored the bill. It was co-sponsored by Representatives Galen Cloud, Mary Crawford, and Darrell Proctor; and Reps. Golden, Lowe, Osborn, Phillips, and Tiger. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, an aluminum smelter is scheduled to be constructed in Inola this year. It claims that the potential pollution generated by the smelter will affect areas of the Mvskoke Reservation, creating “generational environmental trauma.” There was no discussion on this legislation.

NCA 26-105 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of the First Nations Development Grant for the benefit of the Department of Cul-

ture and Humanities. Rep. Barnett sponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, \$45,000 will be used to fund the “Sacred Places 2026: A Night of Music, Storytelling, and Art” event held at the Santa Fe Indian Market. Mvskoke artists from Hickory Ground will host a panel discussion on the significance of sacred places. There was no discussion on this legislation.

NCA 26-106 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation authorizing the expenditure of the National Park Service Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) Grant for the benefit of the Historic and Cultural Preservation Department. Rep. Phillips sponsored the bill. It was adopted 15-0.

According to the legislation, \$94,912 will be used to “ensure the protection and preservation of valued Mvskoke historic and cultural resources, including sacred places, cultural sites, cultural remains, and Mvskoke history for future generations.” There was no discussion on this legislation.

NCA 26-109 A law of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation amending MCNCA Title 37, § 2-203 entitled “Permanent Fund.” Rep. Hufft sponsored the bill. It was cosponsored by Rep. Tiger. It was adopted as amended 15-0.

According to the legislation, it adds language to include an employee raise/initiative fund and a cultural and language fund, both supported by the MCN permanent fund. Rep. Hufft made a motion to amend the funding for the economic development land acquisition from 7% to 7.5%. The employee raise fund will increase from 0.5% to 1%.



LEGALS

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

MICHAEL EDWARD COLE, II,
DISTRICT COURT
CASE NO. CV 2011-177
MCN - 8
103-2-8-487981

PETITIONER,

VS.

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT
EX. REL.,
TRACY CAROL CHANEY now HENSLEY,
RESPONDENT.

TRACY HENSLEY
CUSTODIAN

NOTICE BY PUBLICATION

MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT TO:
TRACY CAROL CHANEY now HENSLEY

TAKE NOTICE that a Motion to Modify Child Support has been filed in the Court listed above. You must appear in the District Court for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation on the 20th day of August, 2026 at 9:00am, or the Motion to Modify Child Support and Reduce Arrears to Judgment will be taken as true and the Court will enter the Order and other relief sought will be granted to the Petitioner.

Given under my hand and seal this 8 day of July, 2026.

(SEAL)

By: *Tracy Cole*
Court Clerk/Deputy

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE MUSCOGEE CREEK NATION

IN THE MATTER OF:
THE GUARDIANSHIP OF:
L.H.,
Minor Child.

DISTRICT COURT
FILED
Case No. GD-2026-53-4 A & 29
JUL 29 2026
CATHY FREEMAN
CLERK

ORDER AND NOTICE OF HEARING PETITION
FOR APPOINTMENT OF GENERAL GUARDIAN

Notice is hereby given that KELLY HARJO has filed in the District Court of the Muscogee Creek Nation, a petition requesting the appointment of a guardian of the person and property of L.H., date of birth March 14, 2016.

And that the 10th day of September 2026 at the hour of 9:00 o'clock, a.m., in courtroom of the Muscogee Creek Nation District Court has been appointed as the time and place for hearing the petition, when and where any persons interested may appear and show cause, if any they have, why such appointment should not be made.

DATED this 4th day of August, 2026.

[Signature]
JUDGE OF THE MUSCOGEE CREEK NATION

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE MUSCOGEE CREEK NATION

IN THE MATTER OF:
THE GUARDIANSHIP OF:
M.A.D., a Minor Child.

DISTRICT COURT
FILED
Case No. GD-2026-52-4 A & 15
JUL 29 2026
CATHY FREEMAN
CLERK

ORDER AND NOTICE OF HEARING PETITION
FOR APPOINTMENT OF GENERAL GUARDIAN

Notice is hereby given that IVAN PARNOSKY has filed in the District Court of the Muscogee Creek Nation, a petition requesting the appointment of a guardian of the person and property of M.A.D., date of birth April 25, 2011.

And that the 10th day of September 2026 at the hour of 9:00 o'clock, a.m., in courtroom of the Muscogee Creek Nation District Court has been appointed as the time and place for hearing the petition, when and where any persons interested may appear and show cause, if any they have, why such appointment should not be made.

DATED this 4th day of August, 2026.

[Signature]
JUDGE OF THE MUSCOGEE CREEK NATION

IN MEMORIAM

Kenneth “Ken” Taryole, 82, passed from this life on July 24, 2026 in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. He was born to Van and Sophia (Coon) Taryole in Okemah on June 29, 1944. He was of the Wind Clan and belonged to the Nuyaka Tribal Town. He would always tell the story of growing up from humble beginnings. Growing up in a 3-room house with an out-house. During the winter, they were able to make jello by sitting it in one of the rooms because it was so cold. As a young boy, he would tell the story of helping his parents pick cotton for money. He knew then that’s not how he wanted to live. It pushed him to pursue an education.

After graduating from Mangum High School, he attended Haskell Junior College. Taryole was drafted into the US Army in 1966. He was stationed with the 1st Armored Division (Old Ironsides), Fort Hood, Texas where he received basic training and Advanced Infantry Training in all areas of the M-48 armored tank. He was assigned overseas duty in the Republic of South Korea. He was stationed with the Eighth Army, HHC/1st BN, 72nd Armor Camp Rose Korea. He participated on various occasions in field exercises on the DMZ as a show of strength and support of US Forces present in the area. Taryole was promoted to the rank of Sergeant (E-5), Tank Commander. He sustained a serviced connected injury and was honorably discharged in January of 1968.

In 1968, he went to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Muskogee, Oklahoma where he retired after 25 years of government service. While working for the BIA, he would occasionally travel to Washington D.C. for work. He was able to bring his family along and show his girls the Statue of Liberty, the White House, Lincoln Memorial and other historical monuments. Ken wanted his girls to do things he never would have been able to do when he was young.

Ken later served as the Manager of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Johnson O’Malley program for six years. He loved working with the students and staff of area schools. Ken always had a strong work ethic and passed it down to his girls. Teaching them to always do what is right, work hard and stand up for what you believe in.

He met his wife Darlene Frank in 1972 and they were married for 53 years. To this union, they had twin daughters, Jennifer and Valerie in 1980. They would take the girls to California, Washington DC, Mexico, and New Mexico traveling in a car or plane.

Ken had a love for everything southwest. From the pottery, adobe houses, the beautiful warm weather and landscape. He would always say that’s where he would live. It’s probably because the locals would mistake him for local news anchor, Conroy Chino. He would also get mistaken for Chief Dan George. We think he liked being a “celebrity.”

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister, Sally Tiger; uncle, Phillip Coon; cousin, Lorena Roberts and sister-in-law, Betsy Taryole.

Survivors include: his wife, Darlene; twin daughters, Jennifer and Valerie; brother, Sonny Taryole; nieces, Melinda Taylor (JR), Kristi Gibson Hooper (Shayne), and Gayle Hill; nephews, Benjamin “Boy” Gibson and Shawn Taryole; grandchildren, Vernon “Mister” Powell, Cyann “Missy” Powell, Preston Powell, and Sophy Powell; one great granddaughter, Leilani Powell.

Pallbearers were Johnathan Bond, Derrek Bond, Robert Coffey, Shayne Hooper, and Jeromie Hammer.

Honorary Pallbearers were Vernon “Mister” Powell, Preston Powell, Shawn Taryole, Sonny Taryole, Mike Coon and Grover Wind.

Interment was at the Ft. Gibson National Cemetery.

Gratitude:

On behalf of the family of Kenneth “Ken” Taryole, we would like to express our gratitude to everyone who said prayers, brought food, sent flowers and offered support to our family during our time of need. Your thoughtfulness, kindness and loving support brought us comfort. We would like to extend a very special “Mvto” to Robert Coffey, Mike and Nancy Coon, Mattie Looney, Barton Looney, Angelita Heneha and the members of Thewarle Indian Baptist Church of Dustin, Ok.; Rita Williams, Rosanna Bear, Lillian Thomas and the ladies of the Mvskoke Lady Legends Organization; Belvin Baptist Church; Muscogee (Creek) Nation Social Services; Grover Wind and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Veterans Affairs Services Office; Muscogee (Creek) Nation Lighthorse; Patriot Riders; Muscogee Riders; Muscogee Nation Honor Guard; New Beginnings Baptist Church in Henryetta, Ok.; Schaudt Funeral Home; and Ft. Gibson National Cemetery.



LYDIA BARNETT TARYOLE

Lydia lived a full and joyful life. She loved playing softball, picking wild onions and blackberries, cheering on the Oklahoma City Thunder and Oklahoma Sooners Football, and most of all, watching her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren compete in their sporting events. Her presence in the stands was a constant source of pride and encouragement for generations of her family. She is survived by four of her children: Barbara West, Natalie Hogner and husband Joe, Norman “Bungie” Taryole and wife Donna, and Newman Taryole and wife Laura; along with 19 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren, and two nephews she loved like sons, Thomas Barnett and Tyrone Barnett. Lydia was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Newman; her daughter, Norma Taryole; granddaughter, Carrie Annie Taryole; grandsons C.J. West and Jason Cook; son-in-law Carl West; niece Thomasena Barnett; four brothers; and one sister. Lydia’s life was defined by devotion — to her family, her community, and the traditions she cherished. She loved to feed everyone who visited her, and if you did something good you earned an apple. Her legacy lives on in the countless memories she created and the love she poured into everyone blessed to know her.



KENNETH TARYOLE

Marcelle Creola Adams “Mickey”, proud member of the Mvskoke Nation, was born on February 26, 1923, in a small town called Beggs, Oklahoma. She was the third child born to Grace McIntosh and Washington Adams, who were born in nearby towns when Oklahoma was still called “Indian Territory”, the region where many Indigenous nations from the Southeast were relocated in the early to mid 1800s. Her older siblings were Leo Howard and Chester Arthur.

A diagnosis of childhood asthma coupled with the dry and dusty environment of Beggs forced her to spend most of her time indoors. She would use that time to read and develop her skills at playing the piano. With the knowledge she gained, she was able to graduate from Phyllis Wheatley High School at the age of 16. Upon graduation, she attended Langston University where she met Warren Hollier Sr. They married and had three children, Brenda Grace, Warren Jr. and Carl Stanley. They resided in California for a few years to seek better job opportunities. When California didn’t work out, she returned to Oklahoma and became a substitute teacher.

When racism prevented her from obtaining better jobs, she followed her brother Chester to Detroit, MI. It was in Detroit where she met and married Irving Douglas. They had three children, Irving Arthur (deceased), and twins Lana Bettina and Gina Damita. Together, they raised six children and spent many summers traveling across the country to visit families and friends throughout Oklahoma, Texas, and California.

Marcelle was bitten by the travel bug. Once invited by her children, she could have her bags packed at the drop of a hat. She traveled, flying or cruising throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, and many Caribbean Islands. Her traveling however, didn’t prevent her from completing her studies. Once all of her children were either out of the nest or away in school, with their urging, at 60 years old, she returned to school and completed her college degree requirements at Wayne State University. She graduated with a BA in 1989. With a degree in hand, she advanced quite quickly from assistant teacher to a Head Administrator in Head Start.

When she wasn’t spending time with her family at home or on the road or in the classroom, Marcelle engaged in her many hobbies and interests. At the top of her list was playing the piano. She played all types of music, jazz, classical, Latin, swing, and Motown. She was playing songs she had long ago memorized at the age of 103. She was also very artistic and creative.

She sewed, crocheted, and knitted many hats, vests, scarves, afghans, doilies, and outfits for her children and grandchildren. Later, she became very skilled at designing and producing traditional Native American jewelry. On occasion, she could be found at a Pow Wow showcasing or selling her unique, one-of-a-kind pieces.

Her Catholic faith was very important to her, for in addition to helping her to endure many hardships, it was a Catholic priest who helped her receive the life-saving care needed when she was very young. She carried that faith with her from Oklahoma to Michigan. Public transportation wasn’t available for her to get to church, but that didn’t stop her. She walked eight blocks in high heels to attend mass at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

When she moved, she would walk in her high heels to attend mass at St. Theresa until she learned how to drive and had access to a car. After the closing of St. Theresa’s, she became a member of Our Lady of the Rosary, where she enjoyed many years of fellowship with the Parishioners.

Her kind, friendly, fun, and funny personality made many people gravitate toward her or adopt her as their mom or grandmother. She was rarely around individuals her own age. If she was, she was usually driving them to senior events.

Marcelle loved and was loved by her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, and grand puppies and grand kittens. They were her pride and joy. In her own way, she instilled in them her faith and wisdom. She enjoyed celebrating with them and in all of their accomplishments. She attended their concerts, recitals, graduations, weddings, birthdays, soccer, basketball, football, volleyball games, swimming and track meets, and regattas.

“Celebrate Everything” was her motto.

Marcelle leaves to cherish her memory and carry on her legacy her children, Brenda (Lafayette-deceased), Warren (Kathy), Carl (Jacqui), Lana (Carl), Gina (Raymond), and daughter-in-law Joan. Her grandchildren, Nicole, Steven, Carl (Marcy), Essi (Nick), Adam (Krystle), Lauren, Melanie, Aaron, Ryan, Robert, and Derek, and her granddaughter-in-law Saran. Her great-grandchildren, Donnie (April), Tyson, Chaela, Cierra, Phoenix, Bianca, Cree, Lani (Myles), Chaese (Sarah), Marcus, Lillian, Adam Jr, Thor, and Artemis. Her great-great grandchildren, Myles Jr., Alani, and Amaya.

Marcelle was a beautiful spirit with a heart of gold who always inspired and encouraged her family. The world was truly blessed by her presence. She put a sparkle in everyone’s eye and a smile on everyone’s face. While we will miss her tremendously, every time an image or an actual butterfly crosses our path, it will remind us that she’ll always be with us.

BEADWORK
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

For Gray, though, success in her career isn’t measured by sales or recognition.

She hopes Native children visiting Gathering Place will see her work and recognize themselves in it.

“I want to represent the youth,” she said. “If a little Native kid sees the artwork, maybe it’ll inspire them to pick a needle and thread or ask their family members about beadwork and culture.”

Clark said visitors frequently paused in front of Gray’s display, pointing out the intricate beadwork and leaning in for a closer look. The piece also generated strong engagement on social media.

Gray believes opportunities like the competition help remind people that Native communities continue to thrive.

“There’s a lot of people who aren’t educated that Natives are still here,” she said. “It’s good representation not just for myself as an artist, but for the Tribe and other Native artists.”

As she continues to grow her business, Gray plans to expand beyond creating beadwork by teaching classes for children and adults. She hopes to pass along the knowledge she once learned from family and fellow artists.

“Artwork helps tell a story,” she said. “It honors our elders, our ancestors, our ways of life and our traditions.”

Whether through “Ue-Pofkv Holatte” or a classroom filled with future artists, Gray hopes that the story continues for generations to come.



MARCELLE ADAMS

IN MEMORIAM

Merle Louise Bevenue-Wood, known by many as Lousie or “Weasie”, was born January 2, 1947, in Tulsa, OK, to Merrill David Bevenue and Edna Irene (Rude) Phillips.

Louise was a proud member of the Sperry High School class of 1965. Soon after graduating, she chose to raise her family in Sperry and did so for many years. In 1987, after meeting the love of her life, Frank Wood, she moved to Texas and began a new life full of adventures, new experiences and new friendships. Thankfully, they were able to return to this area in 2005 after Frank’s retirement. Since that time, they have continued to build their family, attend Community of Christ church, attend as many Pow Wows as possible, nurture friendships, and create new ones up until her passing.

Louise left this earth on July 3, 2026, in a peaceful setting at home surrounded by members of her family and friends. Her love and gentle spirit will not be forgotten.



MERLE LOUISE BEVENUE-WOOD

She was met in Heaven by her mother, Edna; biological father, Merrill; her father, Johnny; her brother, Johnny, Jr.; her stepsister, Emily; and a host of other friends and family.

She left the love of her life, Frank Wood of Collinsville; her daughters, Robyn Eskridge and husband, Cary of Tulsa, and Michelle Brown and husband, Chester of Sperry; her son, Benjamin Hickman and wife, Niki of Sapulpa; her stepdaughter, Michelle Bear Robe-Benally and husband, Aaron of Fort Collins, CO; stepson, Tobe Wood and wife, Ruby of Halifax, Nova Scotia; nine grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; numerous nieces, nephews and cousins; and many other relatives and friends.

Louise will be missed by all of us and let us not forget her laughter, and kindness she shared with everyone she knew.

Celebration of Life services for Merle Louise “Weasie” Bevenue-Wood, 79, of Collinsville, OK, were held Saturday, July 18, 2026, at Community of Christ Church in Sperry, OK with Elder Phyllis Gaddy officiating. Honorary Casket bearers were Caleb Stout, Nelson Yazzie, Ethan Brown, Anselm Yazzie, Camden Eskridge, and Asa Prairiechief.



RICHARD CHARLES LERBLANCE

Richard Charles Lerblance, 80, of McAlester, passed away Saturday, July 25, 2026, at his home in McAlester, Oklahoma.

His family welcomed friends for visitation on Tuesday, July 28, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Brumley-Mills Funeral Home in McAlester. Funeral services were held on Wednesday, July 29, at 10:00 a.m. at the First United Methodist Church in McAlester, Oklahoma. Burial followed at Elmwood Cemetery in Hartshorne, Oklahoma. Pallbearers are Judge Michael Hogan, Tony Grosfield, Buddy Gaberino, Bob Craig, Darren Tidwell, and Ronnie May. Honorary pallbearers are Laura Wynn, Lee Anderson, Tim Diehl, Larry Cook, Mark Lauerman, and Mike Williams.

Richard Lerblance was born on March 9, 1946, in Oklahoma City to Dr. W. P. and Alyce (Knight) Lerblance. He grew up in Hartshorne

and graduated from Hartshorne High School in 1964. He was involved in the family racehorse business and spent time in Raton, New Mexico, training horses. He earned an Associate degree from Eastern Oklahoma State College in Wilburton, a Bachelor’s degree from Central State University in Edmond, and a Juris Doctorate from Oklahoma City University School of Law. He returned to Hartshorne and opened the Lerblance Law Firm.

Throughout his life, Richard was dedicated to serving his community and helping others. He was a proud Eagle Scout, a 32nd Degree Mason, and a volunteer fireman for over 30 years. Richard was a member of McAlester First United Methodist Church, where he also attended Sunday School and sang beautifully in the choir. For a time, he was an active cattleman and was a member of Latimer County, Pittsburg County, and Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Associations. He was actively involved in civic organizations, including the Rotary Club and the Elks Lodge.

In 2002, Richard was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives, and in 2003, was elected to fill an unexpired term in the Oklahoma Senate. He served as Senator for District 7 for 9 years. While in the Oklahoma Senate, he served as Assistant Majority Floor Leader, and on the Education, Energy and Environment, Judiciary, and Appropriations committees. He also served on the Appropriations subcommittee for Public Safety.

As a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, he proudly served as a Justice on the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Supreme Court for four six-year terms.

Richard had a deep love of travel and adventure. He embraced every opportunity to experience new places and things, alongside his beloved wife, family, and great friends.

He loved spending time on the water. For many years, he owned a cruiser so he could zip across the lake and a houseboat so he could entertain family and friends at the lake. He loved to make pancakes on the deck for his grandkids and their friends.

Richard will be remembered for his unwavering commitment to service, his adventurous spirit, his humor and wit, and the kindness, integrity, and love he shared with everyone who knew him.

Richard is survived by his wife of over 50 years, Frances Lerblance; children, David Lerblance and wife Ashley, and Rich Lerblance and wife Pauline; grandchildren, Lexie Flanagan and husband Mathew, Zach Lerblance and fiancé Jaisen Burrows, and Raven Hernandez-Lerblance; a great-grandson, Jack Francis Flanagan; a sister, Karen Beare; and numerous nieces, nephews, and other relatives.

Richard was preceded in death by his parents, W.P. and Alyce Lerblance; a son, John Lerblance; and a brother, William Penn Lerblance III.

Mvskoke Media provides all Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizens who pass away a free obituary in the Mvskoke News. Familes and funderal providers can send submissions via email to: infor@mvskokemedia.com, subject: obit

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Native State Slow-Pitch Tournament
Muscogee Nation Recreation
Aug. 14- Aug. 16
Men, women, and coed tournament
\$300 entry fee, \$150 deposits due by Monday, Aug. 3. Must provide CDIB card at registration
2950 Warrior Rd, Okmulgee
Info: 918-605-4048

Tax Commission in OKC
MCN OKC Resource Center Aug. 13 & Aug. 27, 10:30a.m.-2:00p.m.
New registration and renewal for car tags
4111 North Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City
Info: 405-724-8323.

Santa Fe Indian Market
Aug. 15-Aug. 16, 8a.m. - 5p.m.
121 Sandoval Street, Santa Fe

Veterans Food Bank
Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs
Wednesday, Aug. 19, 11:00 a.m.
Claude Cox Omniplex
200 Preston Rd, Okmulgee
Info: call 918-732-7739

DATA CENTER Community Townhall
City of Muskogee
Thurs, Aug. 20, 6:30p.m.-8:30p.m.
Townhall will regard a proposed data center in Muskogee
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center
300 W. MLK St., Muskogee

Southern California Outreach Beyond the Reservation
Saturday, Aug. 22, 9a.m. - 3p.m.
Hilton Orange County/Costa Mesa Hotel Ballroom
3050 Bristol Street, Costa Mesa, CA
Info: 918-732-7613

Diabetes Awareness Summit
MCN Health
Thursday, Aug. 27, 9 a.m.
Free health screenings, physical activity breakouts, community health survey and health exhibitors
Riverspirit Casino
8330 Riverside Pkwy, Tulsa
Info: 918-752-7949

Sister’s Retreat/Men’s Singing Snake Creek Baptist Church #2
Sunday, Aug. 30, 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Dinner will be provided afterward.
3 miles east of Little on HWY 99A, ½ mile south on Ns 3590 Road, church sits on the east side, Seminole

Drive-Thru Drug Take-Back Event
MCN Health
Monday, Aug. 31, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
The event will take in unwanted or expired prescription drugs for safe disposal
Council Oak Comprehensive Healthcare
10109 E. 79th St., Tulsa
Info: 918-233-9550

Grandparents’ Day Elders’ Talent Show
Elder Services
Wednesday, Sept. 2, 9a.m
Performances must be preregistered by Wednesday, Aug. 19
must be MCN citizen age 55 years +
2950 Warrior Rd, Okmulgee
Info: 918-732-7765

Elder’s Meeting
Okmulgee Elder Nutrition Center
Wednesday, Sept. 2, 9:30 a.m.
1021 N. Seminole Ave., Okmulgee

Lewis and Mandy Marshall Family Reunion
Sept. 5,11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Lunch provided, family members are encouraged to bring drinks and deserts. There will be a waterslide for children, please bring towels.
Kialegee Life Center
7805 E. 122, Wetumka
Info: 918-623-7998

Coffee and Donuts
Veteran Affairs Services Office
Thursday, Sept. 10, 8 a.m.-12 p.m.
1006 Bear Lane, Okmulgee

Career Resource Fair MCN Employment & Training
Wednesday, Sept. 16, 10 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Event will include resume building assistance, over 30 vendors and drawings
Mvskoke Dome
2950 Warrior Road, Okmulgee
Info: 918-732-7824

Bible Study
Weleetka United Methodist Fellowship
Wednesday Nights at 6 p.m.
Bible study will bring good fellowship and lively discussion with light refreshments
543 7th St., corner of Hwy 75 and 7th, Weleetka

Health Shelf Donation Drive
College of Muscogee Nation
Health & Wellness needs hygiene products, laundry detergent, and gently used blankets and pillows for students in need
Info: 918-549-2800.

VETERANS SPOTLIGHT



The Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs Services Office is proud to honor Kenneth Taryole for his dedicated service to the Muscogee Nation, the U.S. Army, and the United States. Kenneth was a Vietnam Era veteran and honorably served for two years and is a recipient of the National Defense Service Medal, SPS M-14 Badge, MKM .45 Pistol Badge. Mvto Kenneth for your selfless service to your country and your community.

MVTO FOR YOUR SELFLESS SERVICE!

Muscogee (Creek) Nation

CESO

NATIVE OWNED

Business

EXPO

10AM - 3PM

RIVER SPIRIT CASINO RESORT

8330 Riverside Parkway | Tulsa, Oklahoma

03 SEPTEMBER 2026

CONTACT

SONNY BEVENUE

918.549.2962

BAYLEE CARPENTER

918.549.2969

CHELSEA POTTS

918.549.2740

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PREVENT

the SPREAD

of RESPIRATORY VIRUSES

COVER YOUR COUGHS & SNEEZES

WASH HANDS OFTEN

For at least 20 seconds

STAY HOME WHEN SICK

including having a runny nose, sore throat, and/or cough

KEEP AIR CIRCULATING & VENTILATED

STAY UP TO DATE

with your vaccinations, including Flu, RSV & COVID-19

MCNHealth

EXPRESS CARE CLINICS

COUNCIL OAK

10109 E. 79TH ST.

TULSA, OK 74133

918.233.9550

OKMULGEE

1400 S. WOOD DRIVE

OKMULGEE, OK 74447

918.591.5733

HOURS OF OPERATION:

MON-FRI (7AM-7PM)

SAT-SUN (9AM-5PM)

WALK-INS

WELCOME

NO APPOINTMENTS

NECESSARY

SERVING CITIZENS OF

FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES

creekhealth.org

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P.O. BOX 580 – OKMULGEE, OK 74447

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