



# MVSKOKE NEWS

PRODUCED BY MVSKOKEMEDIA

## MCN FESTIVAL SOFTBALL REUNION REKINDLED LIFELONG MEMORIES

FORMER PRINCIPAL CHIEF GEORGE TIGER REFLECTS ON THE AFTERNOON OF STORIES, SMILES, AND SOFTBALL THAT BROUGHT GENERATIONS OF FORMER PLAYERS TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE A SHARED LEGACY

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

MVSKOKE RESERVATION – The annual Legends Softball Reunion has brought former players together for the past several years. This year’s reunion was held on June 27 at the MCN Safe Space Building in Okmulgee, followed by a softball game at the MCN softball fields. During the reunion, women’s and men’s softball players and coaches gathered to share memories of their time on the fields and enjoy a meal together.

MCN Former Chief George Tiger (Mvskoke) has over 25 years of experience in Indian softball and spoke about this year’s reunion, softball tournaments, and his time playing ball.

Tiger helped Anita Beaver Daney (Mvskoke) coordinate the reunion, something he has been doing for the past four years. Beaver Daney, a former softball player herself, helped initiate the event to provide something for former players to do after mingling.

Fellowship on the field, across time

During the reunion, everyone got a free t-shirt to remember the day, and they ate and reminisced about the good old days.

Beaver Daney enjoys figuring



Players hit the field at the Legends Reunion. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

out who attends and sees interest in coming grow, but those who have gone to reunions tend to bring up memories of them, too.

“I did a reunion four years ago for the team I played for, and then the

Chief said that it was a good idea. So he asked me if I would help Anita. Anita and I started working together. It’s grown from the first one that she did,” Tiger said.

“It was a record number of former

players coming together and sharing stories with a lot of emotion and laughter, so I have a long history of softball here at Creek Nation, and in particular, festivals. I was honored that they asked me to help coordinate it.”

Tiger mentions that during the reunion, some of the players spoke about when they played ball- he noticed that most of the younger generation refers to it as ‘back in the day’.

For Tiger and the other players, it was a period of what they were doing at that moment.

“It’s kind of emotional, some of the stories are about some of the players that are no longer here, and we carry on our tradition with the stories that we share, and each year since I’ve been helping with the reunion, there’s less and less because they pass away. Even though some of those people that we don’t see next year, the stories that they shared with us are etched in our minds, and we carry those stories on,” Tiger said.

Tiger is currently writing a book about fast-pitch softball, in part to document those stories.

Tiger was also encouraged by

### SOFTBALL

CONTINUES ON PAGE 6

## SECTION 106 FACES THREATS OF DIMINISHED PROTECTIONS

TRIBES COULD SEE REDUCED MANDATED INVOLVEMENT

BY BRADEN HARPER

MVSKOKE RESERVATION – Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) faces threats of diminished legal protections for Tribal cultural sites. Changes proposed by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) on Friday, July 24, seek to make Tribal consultation optional and reduce Tribal Nations’ overall involvement in projects. The proposed changes were not developed in consultation with Tribes.

For fifty years, Section 106 has required a formalized evaluation process in which Tribal governments are consulted regarding project impacts on cultural properties. Its purpose is to mitigate harm to places with cultural or historical significance to Tribes. Section 106 does not guarantee the veto power over projects, but mandates that Tribes are meaningfully consulted first.

If the proposed regulatory revisions become law, they would narrow the instances in which Section 106 protections apply. Tribal consultation would become optional. The definition of “historic” would also be narrowed, limiting the Tribal property sites eligible for Section 106 consultations.

Muscogee (Creek) Nation Secretary of Culture and Humanities Raelynn Butler said her department is aware of the proposed changes to rulemaking. She said the Nation is drafting a letter in response to the changes.

“The proposed changes are very concerning. We have been actively reviewing and preparing a letter for the proposed rule-making,” Butler said.

According to Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Dr. Savannah Waters, the proposed changes would weaken the role of THPO and Tribal Nations in preserving the Mvskoke homelands. She said that agencies would be able to make unilateral decisions on Traditional cultural sites without taking Indigenous knowledge into consideration.

“These proposed changes portray Native nations as

### SECTION 106

CONTINUES ON PAGE 3



Tribal leadership and dignitaries stand in front of the new Citizens Services Building. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

## THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE ARE IN FOCUS AT MCN'S NEW CITIZEN SERVICES BUILDING

THE NEW, FOUR-STORY BUILDING GIVES CITIZENS EASIER ACCESS TO TRIBAL SERVICES

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

OKMULGEE – On August 28, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation held a ribbon-cutting for the newly constructed MCN Citizens Services Building. The 167,000-square-foot, 4-story building will house 25 programs in one location, giving citizens easier access to Tribal services.

The building was designed to tell the Mvskoke story- bridging the past,

present, and future of the Nation through the architecture, interior design, and landscape.

Attendees included the MCN Executive Branch and leadership, MCNNC Representatives, former Principal Chief Bill Fife, former Principal Chief George Tiger, former Principal Chief James Floyd, MCN Princesses, MCN Ambassador Jonodev Chaudhuri, President of the University

of Tulsa Stacy Leeds, the Okmulgee Fire Department, many MCN employees, citizens, and community members.

During the ceremony, Pastor Paul Fixico gave the invocation, and MCN Second Chief Del Beaver, MCN Speaker Randall Hicks, and MCN Chief David Hill spoke.

### BUILDING

CONTINUES ON PAGE 2

**MUSCOGEE MUSINGS:**  
A letter from Principal Chief Hill

**COUNCIL OAK CLEAN-UP:**  
Volunteers across the Rez step in and lend a hand

**MVSKOKE SOLUTIONS:**  
Continued stories from our newsroom on Rez climate solutions

**VOC REHAB:**  
Breaking down barriers to employment

**WHAT'S GOING ON?**  
Check out the community calendar for the latest happenings



BUILDING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Second Chief Beaver remarked that the day would mean something different to everybody. He said that everyone will walk away from today with either a feeling or a memory and that they will carry that moment for the rest of their life.



“We’re building upon the foundation that other administrations have built, and so it’s good to see Chief Fife, Chief Floyd, and Chief Tiger here, and that we can just build upon the foundation that ya’ll set before us,” Second Chief Beaver said. “This is really a testament to the Nation as a whole, and so as we move forward throughout this day, as we move forward as a Nation, this really is a metric; a starting point.”

Second Chief included that the Nation is not limited but is everywhere. “We are a growing Nation, we’re a big Nation, and we’re a strong Nation,” hed said.

MCNNC Speaker Randall Hicks views the opening as a celebration of progress, prosperity, and the continued strength of the Mvskoke people. “When we look at a building like this, it can be easy to see only the stones, the walls, the offices, the services that will be provided here. But I believe we should see something much greater. We should see the works of generations. Our ancestors endured hardships that many of us can only imagine. The Mvskoke people face removal from our homelands, loss, uncertainty, and tremendous challenges as we work to preserve who we are as a people,” Speaker Hicks said.

“Yet through all of those struggles, we remained, we held onto our language, we held onto our culture, we held onto our families, our communities, and our identity. Most importantly, we never stopped believing in the future for the Mvskoke people.”



For Speaker Hicks, the building will be a place for citizens to come for services, assistance, answers, and support. He hopes that the future generations will see it as more than an administrative building.

“I hope they see it as a symbol of a Nation that refused to stand still. A Nation that chose to invest in its people, a Nation that understood that true prosperity is not simply measured by buildings, businesses, or financial success,” Speaker Hicks said. “True prosperity is measured by whether our citizens have opportunities, whether our families are strong, whether our communities are healthy, and whether our children have reason to believe that their future can be better than their past.”

MCN Principal Chief David Hill spoke about the large number of people who attended this historical event. “It’s a historical day for the Muscogee Creek Nation, welcome to a new day at the Muscogee Nation, welcome to the promise of progress and welcome to the future,” Principal Chief Hill said.

Principal Chief Hill emphasized that this building is a tribute to service, saying, “This grand structure will always remind us that our first priority is to be in the service to our citizens.”

Principal Chief Hill remembered the early days of the comprehensive plan and those who took part. He remembered the 1979 plan, in which MCN’s former Principal Chief Fife and Ed Mouss envisioned growing the Nation, including the college.

“I think of the Indian Action Plan team who saw the bare fields of the grass, dirt, and envisioned that it could be the Solomon McCombs Building, that it could be the site of a Tribal Department of Education, or that it could someday be a Mound Building Auditorium for the legislature meeting. Some of you may remember those days, and some of those early trips to the complex,” MCN Chief Hill said.



“I look out today, and I see young people, and I ask that you take this moment in and remember that we are here, that we were here, and how truly historic this occasion is.”

The Mvskoke story

For Principal Chief Hill, the building is also a storyteller sharing the Mvskoke story through art, history, culture, and land. He remarked that the outside area will include saplings from the Council Oak Tree in Tulsa. “That signifies our new home at the far end of the Trail of Tears,” Chief Hill said.

The saplings have been cared for and provided by the College of the Muscogee Nation. “I’m so glad to have these examples of our history on display for future generations,” he said.

Throughout the building, contemporary Mvskoke art hangs on the walls, and the building itself incorporates the Mvskoke story through its design, decoration, and details. Cultural symbols are found throughout the lobby, including iconography related to the Nation’s clans. The sculptural central lighting represents the sacred fire.

According to MCN, “Ancient mound geometry provides a central inspiration for the exterior architecture, reflecting the Mvskoke people’s connection to nature and their history as descendants of ancient mound-building civilizations.”

Water is also an essential design feature. “These waterways will be through the building floor patterns, colors, feature walls, and other design elements. A custom terrazzo floor evokes water in motion, while features on each floor reference bodies of water associated with the Nation’s history,” stated MCN.



Left: Principal Chief, Second Chief, and Council Speaker make remarks before the opening. MCN citizens, employees, and leaders visited and viewed the building. Art, design, and structure reflect Mvskoke culture and history. (All Photos: Shayln Proctor/MM)

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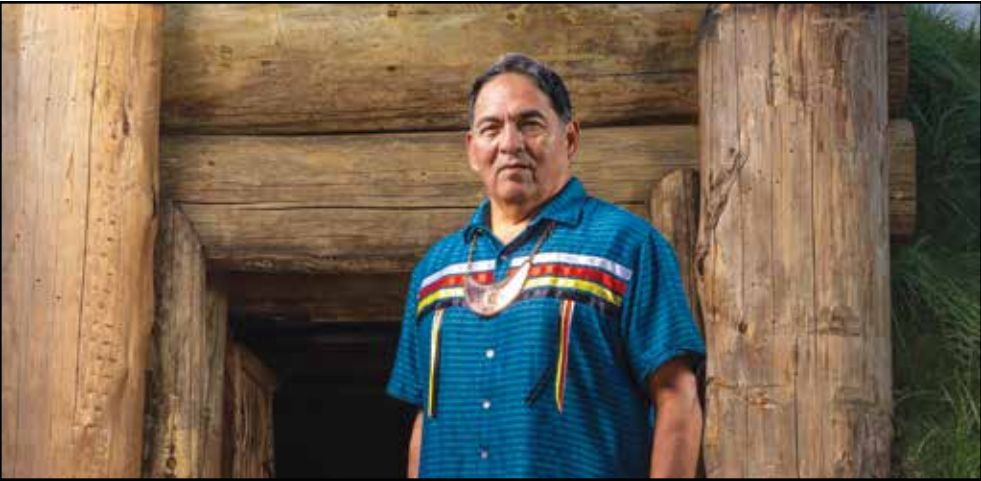
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# MUSCOGEE MUSINGS



by PRINCIPAL CHIEF DAVID HILL

Hesci! Stonkon follakcv?

The dog days of summer are upon us! I hope everyone is staying cool as the temperatures continue to rise. This is a good time to remind everyone that we will take Tribal Energy Program Summer Applications until September 30 on the Camphouse Portal, in-person, or at 918-549-2880.

In the meantime, join us in praying for some much-needed OSKE for our farmers and ranchers and for our lands.

We made history recently, opening the doors to the new four-story Citizen Services Building with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 28. It was amazing to see so many turn out for this momentous occasion as we shared in celebration of the future. Now when you drive into Okmulgee, you can see that we are Changing the Landscape and the vision of a master plan for our headquarters has finally come into view.

I spoke at the ceremony of the past, because I don't think we can ever truly appreciate these moments without remembering all those before us that paved the way.

An Indian Action Plan Team consisting of seven people saw a government. They looked at a piece of land, and saw what would become the Solomon McCombs Building and the Mound Auditorium.

I was humbled to have former Principal Chief Bill Fife on stage with us for the ceremony because he was one of those who saw all

that we could be. I was honored to have former Chiefs James Floyd and George Tiger with us as well, to highlight the work of their administrations to advance us to this day.

I also remarked that it's fitting that it's called the Citizen Services Building, because here at the Nation, we must never forget that our first priority each day is being in the business of serving our citizens. Nothing else matters, if we're not doing all we can to increase the opportunities our people have to thrive.

I encourage everyone when you get the chance, come visit us and see how much care and detail we put into making this building Mvskoke, and making it accessible for you.

Before I end this installment, I want to take a moment to remind our citizens and families how important it is that you are registered and that you VOTE in the upcoming general election in November.

Oklahoma will be electing a new Governor and we all have seen, unfortunately, how this position can negatively impact tribal nations and our progress and ability to work with the state.

I encourage you to study the candidates and watch their campaigns, so that you can make that absolute best choice for Indian Country and for Oklahoma when November comes!

Until next time, take care of yourselves, and each other.

MVTO,  
Chief Hill

SECTION 106  
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

obstacles to growth. When you add this all together, the threat to all of our sacred sites, cultural landscapes, and historic lands, increases exponentially. It opens lands to development to many federal projects and federal funded projects that may focus on energy development and more," Waters said in a statement provided to Mvskoke Media.

Waters further stated that the proposed changes may put ancestral burial sites at risk. As a result, her department is seeking active NAGPRA consultations in the Mvskoke homelands. It would change government-to-government processes in states like Alabama and Georgia.

Director of Historic and Cultural Preservation Robin Soweka Jr. added that in regards to the homelands, mounds and other man-made structures will still be protected. However, mountains, valleys, bodies of water, and landscapes may become harder to protect. His greatest concern is that Tribal consultations will become optional, not mandatory.

"Originally, the ACHP recognized that Tribes have Indigenous knowledge and special expertise that cannot be learned in any type of educational or history books; however, with the proposed changes, this consultation may become optional to the federal agency's own discretion and that the THPO may move from assisting with shaping decisions throughout the process to instead, reviewing a Section 106 report that is prepared by the federal agency. This means that consultation may move from a collaborative planning process with agencies to Tribes reacting to already developed conclusions by the federal agencies," Soweka said in a statement provided to Mvskoke Media.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) livestreamed a webinar on NHPA Section 106 updates on Wednesday, Aug. 19. It outlined what Section 106 is, its importance, and how traditional cultural landscapes could be affected if the proposed changes become law.

In a joint press statement published on Tuesday, Aug. 18, NCAI, the Association on American Indian Affairs, the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund outlined their concerns with the proposed revisions to Section 106. Together, they assert that Section 106 is not a courtesy; it is an obligation:

The Section 106 process reflects Congress's recognition that federal agencies should understand the consequences of their decisions before historic and culturally significant places are damaged or lost. For Tribal Nations, the Section 106 process is inseparable from their inherent sovereignty, the unique legal and political relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States, and the trust and treaty obligations owed to Tribal Nations.

According to American Indian Affairs Cultural Sovereignty Director Dr. Crystal Miller, the proposed ACHP changes could affect traditional sites that are still used for ceremonial purposes. The proposed changes would affect more than just sites used in the past.

"We're talking about living in particular relationships. A spring that is still prayed at. A mountain that is still a reason that ceremony happens and exists today. A valley where people still gather medicine, or maybe they still hunt there, and still bury their dead, and still bring their children there to learn. These are present-tense conversations we are having," Miller said in the webinar.

The NACI is encouraging Tribal nations and Indigenous organizations to contact the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) to discuss the proposed regulatory changes to Section 106. OIRA meetings can be requested, during which agency staff listen to concerns and views on rulemaking. MCN Historic and Cultural Preservation is encouraging Mvskoke citizens to send comments to the OIRA. Virtual meetings can be scheduled at: <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eo/neweomeeting>

# VOLUNTEERS GET THEIR HANDS DIRTY FOR COUNCIL OAK

## TVLSE COUNCIL OAK FOUNDATION AND THE TULSA ROTARY CLUB TEAM UP TO CLEAN UP THE PARKS

by BRADEN HARPER

TULSA – Tulsa Council Oak Park saw volunteers, including Mvskoke citizens and members of the Rotary Club of Tulsa, come out for a community workday on Saturday, Aug. 29. Volunteers pulled weeds and tended flower beds. The park was returned to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's care during the 39th Annual Council Oak Tree Day in 2025.

The Tvlse Council Oak Foundation is a nonprofit that is composed of a 12-member board. Among the board members are MCN Secretary of Culture and Humanities Raelynn Butler and Mvskoke citizen Melissa Welch. The last community work day took place on Saturday, May 16.

Tvlse Council Oak Foundation President and Founder Chris McCabe said when it comes to mobilizing volunteers, every job is important. He described the feeling of seeing volunteers donate their time as "unifying." McCabe explained that the foundation's goal is to share the park's story with others who may not be aware of its historical significance.

"The park is in the hands of the Muscogee Nation. So I think our goals for the park are what the Muscogee Nation's goal is for the park," McCabe said. "Other things are ancillary to that, like promoting the tree, keeping the tree's story and the consciousness of Tulsa's mind, creating educational resources around the tree that we can develop for local elementary kids."

Mvskoke citizen and artist Carly Treece volunteered her time to assist with park cleanup. After learning that the park needed help, Treece felt

called to lend a hand. "I felt it was important to come out here and have a Muscogee presence out here," Treece said. "I just feel it's important for Muscogee citizens to come out here and help."

Treece remarked that she found it therapeutic to be outside in the garden. Nature and the outdoors are important to her and have appeared as themes in her artwork.

Last month, Council Oak Park was dropped as a Mobile Migration garden in this year's Monarchs on the Mountain Festival for neglect and alleged herbicide use. The decision was voted on by the Tulsa Urban Wilderness Coalition during a meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 4. MCN Tribal leaders deny the Nation has ever used herbicides for park upkeep.

When asked about the future of the park's designation as a Mobile Migration Garden, McCabe said the foundation has spoken with the organizers of Monarchs over the Mountain to determine what can be done about it. McCabe said that he was unaware that the park was on the Mobile Migration Garden list. He added that the park was put on the Mobile Migration Garden list before the foundation became involved.

"People are concerned about this place. They hold it dearly in their heart. We need to make sure we are appropriately caring for it in a way that reflects publicly where people know this is a cared-for, loved-for space," McCabe said.

To stay up to date on future Tvlse Council Oak Foundation community workdays, visit their Facebook Page, Tvlse Council Oak Foundation.



Mvskoke citizens and Tulsa residents volunteer at Council Oak Park. (Braden Harper/MM)

*"These kinds of efforts help people become invested in the story of this tree, the history of Tulsa, and the significance of this spot."*  
*- Chris McCabe*

# MVSKOKE 4-H STUDENTS TAKE ROOT IN THE FIGHT FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



Shelby Lofton and Mvskoke 4-H Ocmulgee Club Students stand in front of their newly-planted pecan tree. (Shelby Lofton)

## CULTIVATING PLANT KNOWLEDGE YIELDS FAR-REACHING BENEFITS BY STRENGTHENING THE ENVIRONMENT, IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE, AND BUILDING RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

by **BRADEN HARPER**

*This story is our fourth in a series by the Mvskoke News team focusing on climate solutions on the Mvskoke Reservation. This year, Mvskoke Media has been part of the Climate Beacon Newsroom Initiative, a collaboration between the Indigenous Journalists Association and the Solutions Journalism Network. Solutions journalism rigorously examines evidence-based individual, group, and community responses to social problems. The initiative supported our newsroom’s skills development in story production, specifically stories focused on responses to climate and environmental challenges.*

OKMULGEE – Shelby Lofton has special memories growing up with a native pecan grove on her property. It had many trees, with plenty of pecans to pick and shell. Now an adult, Lofton gets to teach others about planting pecan trees and the importance of self-reliance in growing crops and practicing food sovereignty.

“I was always the kid to go out, collect the pecans, crack them, and help make the homemade pecan pie for Thanksgiving,” Lofton said.

Lofton serves as the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) educator for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, planting seeds of knowledge in others about how to be good stewards of the environment. According to Lofton, she is one of 37 FRTEP educators in the U.S. who work closely with Tribes to promote these values through 4-H agriculture programming.

One of the programs Lofton’s department oversees is the Mvskoke 4-H Ocmulgee Club, a collaborative effort with the College of the Muscogee Nation Extension Program. The group blends Mvskoke culture, language, and traditions with hands-on gardening projects. The projects teach important, tactical lessons on growing food and its role in Tribal food sovereignty.

A project this spring saw Lofton and the Mvskoke 4-H Ocmulgee Club students planting two oce entvkackety, or pecan trees, at MCN Food Distribution.

According to Lofton, MCN Food Distribution is located near a pecan grove and is an area proven to support mature trees. Lofton’s group of students toured the MCN Food Distribution and learned how the department serves citizens. Then came the time to go outside and start digging.

“They were really excited to get their hands in the dirt,” Lofton said. “First, we talked a little bit about the different varieties of pecans that grow. We got the trees out of the containers, untangled the roots, and dug the holes. The kids dove right in.”

Lofton taught students using a board displaying different pecan species. The board illustrated the different shapes of each pecan species.

According to the U.S. National Science Foundation, tree planting can offset emissions that contribute to climate change. In the United States, trees face threats from fire, drought, and insect damage, all exacerbated by climate change. Experts warn these risks will become more widespread by 2099. An interactive map featured on the National Science Foundation’s website illustrates regional risks to trees over the next century.

“Pecan trees are really subject to environmental stress,” Lofton said. “Temperature changes can

stress them out, drought, other things like insects and pests can be real bothersome on pecan trees.”

The goal of the Mvskoke 4-H Ocmulgee Club is to provide enriching programs that teach students to be good stewards of the environment. Students are empowered with skills such as pecan tree planting that help address climate change.

Just like tree saplings, knowledge is spread out in the hope that one day a student will take the initiative to grow and maintain their own pecan tree.

### A native crop

The seeds for the Mvskoke 4-H Ocmulgee Club were provided by Oklahoma State University Senior Extension Specialist Dr. Becky Carroll. Working with pecan growers and Tribes around the state, Carroll conducts master gardening lectures, empowering others to grow their own crops.

In addition to its environmental usefulness, pecans also have tremendous health benefits. According to heart.org, they provide healthy fats, protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. They are a good source of zinc, thiamin, and manganese. Carroll pointed out that pecans have the highest antioxidant levels of any other nuts found in the United States.

“Pecans are actually very, very healthy for people,” Carroll said. “Until just a few years ago, people didn’t understand the health benefits of eating pecans. And so, in the last several years, they’ve actually been able to receive the American Heart Association’s little heart check, their little certified product.”

Pecans are native to Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. For generations, Indigenous people in these areas, including the Mvskokvike, have benefited from pecans.

“They were important for Native American Tribes that were here, those Indigenous people. They use them for trade and also for sustaining health. It’s (pecans) a very good source of energy and protein,” Carroll said.

Carroll affirms that almost anyone with land can grow a pecan tree. Pecan trees need to be planted in pairs to cross-pollinate. One tree acts as an early pollen shed, the other, a light pollen shed. This ensures that the trees receive effective cross-pollination, resulting in robust pecan production.

### MCN Food Distribution

During the 4-H Ocmulgee Club’s field trip to the MCN Food Distribution, students were given a presentation by Farm Manager Melissa Welch (Mvskoke). Her job is to educate students at the College of the Muscogee Nation and Elders about food sovereignty initiatives, such as cultivating plants or starting gardens. Welch’s gardens feature a wide variety of produce, including squash, corn, and tomatoes. Her department provides food packages and recipes for citizens. Welch hopes the packages and recipes will encourage clients to try something new.

Welch provided 4-H students with a trail mix of fresh ingredients like cranberries and peanuts. Her favorite part of homegrown snacks is that they do not contain added chemicals or sugar.

Welch explained that Pecan trees can be planted by anyone, and they are a long-term

investment. Welch said teaching tree planting is important because there is no telling what shape the environment will be in by the time the saplings reach full maturity.

“It’s important to plant those (pecan trees). It’s important for the next generations upcoming to see that because if they don’t start planting now, by the time they’re young adults or even in their 30s, there may not be many pecan trees due to elements of the environment and development,” Welch said.

### Limitations

According to Carroll, pecan trees are difficult to spray for disease and pests because of their large size. Additionally, trees need ample space between them, at least 40 feet apart. If trees have too much shade, they can lose limbs. Carroll discourages homeowners from planting pecan trees close to homes or other buildings.

One of the biggest threats to pecan production is the pecan weevil, a tiny insect that infests crops. Female pecan weevils lay their eggs in pecans once it reaches its early dough formation. Pecan weevil infestations in Oklahoma typically occur after heavy rainfall events in late July, August, and into September. Just like the pecan tree, Carroll shared that pecan weevils are also native to Oklahoma.

“If anyone has ever found a pecan on the ground that has a perfectly circular hole in that shell, that’s showing you where the pecan larva is,” Carroll said. “The egg was laid inside that pecan; it has eaten the kernel, then they chew a perfectly circular hole, squeeze out, go into the ground, and start the whole process over.”

Squirrels and crows can also cause headaches for pecan production. Carroll said just one squirrel can take a pound of pecans a day.

Pecans have a shelf life. If they sit at room temperature for three months, their quality begins to decline. To extend their shelf life, pecans need to be kept in a refrigerator or freezer.

Welch warned that managing pecan trees is hard work. Pruning, trimming back the root system, and watering are necessary for healthy growth. According to Welch, patience is a necessary virtue for pecan tree growers.

“It’s not going to produce a pecan the following year. It takes about six to seven years to be able to produce for any kind of nut or fruit-bearing tree,” Welch said.

Although the pecan tree’s journey from sapling to fully-mature adult is a long one, it is one that can reap benefits for its grower. Pecans can be consumed and prepared in many different ways, including desserts, salads, or fresh out of the shell.

Welch enjoys eating them fresh after they are cracked open. Carroll enjoys baking pecans in a pie or sprinkling them on her oatmeal in the morning. Lofton also enjoys consuming them in dessert form.

“I like them in pies too. Just a regular pecan pie. A traditional pecan pie is my staple. I’ve got special memories attached to pecans,” Lofton said.

By educating students in the 4H program about stewardship and tradition, Mvskoke people continue to fight for food sovereignty and enjoy the benefits of their labor, such as pecans. Some may even aspire to be extension educators, like Lofton, who continue to share their skills and passion with others.

# HOW TO BEAT THE HEAT WITHOUT MISSING THE FUN

## AIR-CONDITIONED COOLING TENTS PROVIDE A COOL REFUGE AND ACCESS TO MEDICAL SUPPORT FOR FESTIVAL GOERS

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

*This story is our fifth in a series by the Mvskoke News team focusing on climate solutions on the Mvskoke Reservation. This year, Mvskoke Media has been part of the Climate Beacon Newsroom Initiative, a collaboration between the Indigenous Journalists Association and the Solutions Journalism Network. Solutions journalism rigorously examines evidence-based individual, group, and community responses to social problems. The initiative supported our newsroom’s skills development in story production, specifically stories focused on responses to climate and environmental challenges.*

OKMULGEE – As temperatures climbed during the festivities and activities of the 50th Annual Muscogee Nation Festival this summer, visitors had easy access to ways to keep cool, stay safe, and stay hydrated. The Nation has offered misting tents and a fully functioning splash pad in the past. Festival goers were also able to step into the air-conditioned Mvskoke Dome to cool off. The MCN Department of Public Safety provided cooling tents to help anyone overheated as temperatures rose during the festival. The tents were easily accessible, located on the east side of the walking entrance, near the food vendors and art and crafts.

MCN Department of Public Safety Commissioner Bobby Howard (Mvskoke) spoke about the importance of staying hydrated and how the tents help keep citizens, visitors, volunteers, and staff safe as temperatures on the reservation soared.

Howard stated that the tents, which are used when someone gets overheated, are not a new addition to the festival but have been used for several years. This enclosed space is where citizens can relax, rest, and get water.

The tents always have medical professionals and the MCN Department of Health nurses on staff to help all visitors. The tents are staffed with medical workers who will ensure body temperatures return to normal.

The air-conditioned tent has an indoor temperature of 68 degrees. Howard compares the cooling tent to a building with cool air and cool water.

“If you get really hot, then we have chances of heat exhaustion, heat stress, stroke, and heat stroke, so the cooling tents are a major part of one of the safety features that we have at the festival,” Howard said.

When entering the cooling tent, nurses will follow a protocol to assess for heat-related illness or other injuries. If the nurses deem it necessary, they will provide transportation to a facility- an ambulance is on site with paramedics.

Howard believes these services are highly impactful and are a major part of what they do to keep everyone safe.

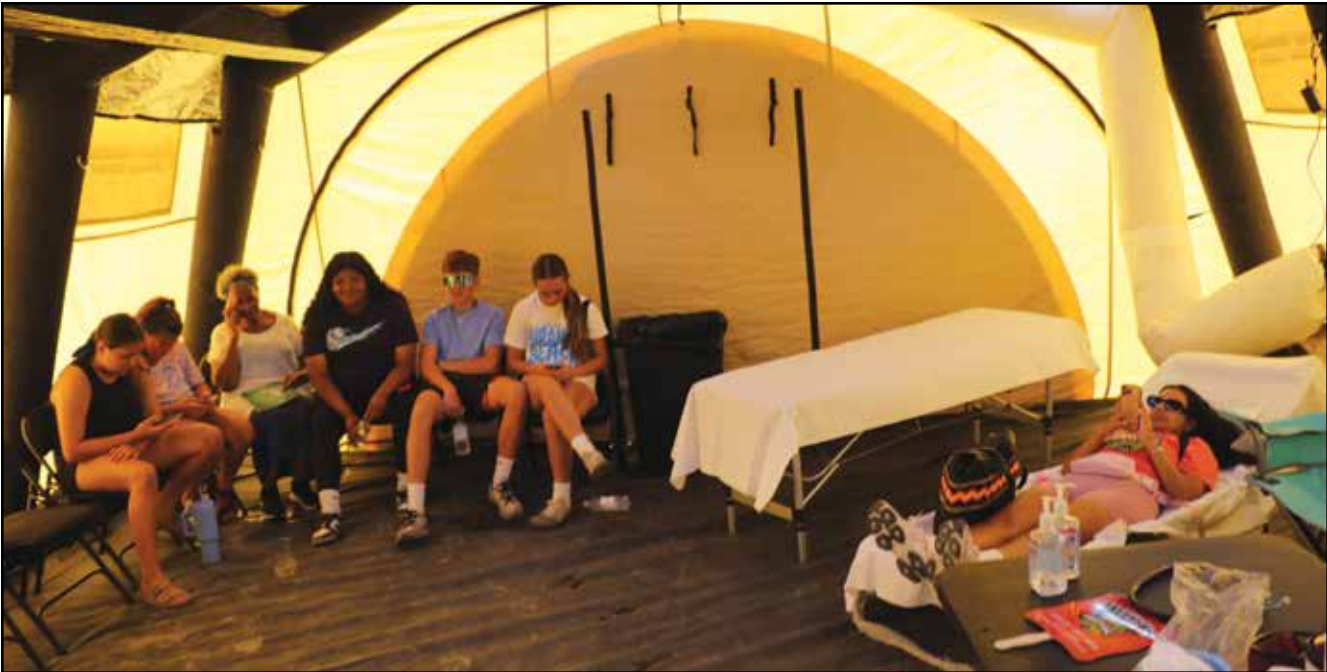
Kevin Kloesel, Ph.D., a retired professor from the University of Oklahoma College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences, is an expert on extreme heat and public safety. Kloesel recommends on-site medical professionals in cooling tents to keep people safe, something the festival offers.

Kloesel also calls for more action on mitigating heat-related illness. In an article on NOAA, Kloesel explained, “We have spent so much time focusing on lightning in our visits with event planners that we are missing the insidious risk that is a daily threat to outdoor activities from late spring through early fall: heat.”

“We must do a better job mitigating heat illness through more cooling areas, more shade, more beneficial hydration options, and partnering with the weather community for detailed forecasting and monitoring.”

### Signs of heat illness

Howard shared the common signs of heat illness to watch for: cramping, clammy skin, headaches, dizziness, and feeling nauseated. All of these signs are heat-related. Howard also shared that the color of your urine can



Festival visitors and volunteers in the MCN cooling tents during the 50th MCN Festival. Cooling tents offer more than just cool respite in the summer months. Tents are a necessary part of outside gatherings during extreme temperatures, offering medically needed cooling for heat-related illness. During extreme temperatures going in to the fall in Oklahoma, be heat-aware and seek cooling tents at football games and other large sporting events. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

indicate how dehydrated you are; darker-than-normal urine can be a sign you’re dehydrated.

Dehydration can develop quickly, so it’s important to recognize the warning signs: thirst, dry mouth, dry skin, fatigue, reduced urination, dizziness, and headache. As Howard emphasized, staying hydrated is the best way to prevent dehydration, and if it does occur, it should be treated promptly.

“You may have eaten something, and you get nauseous, but if you have these other symptoms with it, it’s a clear heat injury. Especially when you know you’re outside in 100-degree weather, and you start feeling this,” Howard says.

“It’s really important to stay hydrated, I can’t say that enough.”

### Prepare and hydrate

Howard explains that when you’re cramping, it means your muscles are telling you you’re lacking fluids. For pre-festival preparation, he wants everyone to start hydrating well in advance because of the hot weather.

“You have to hydrate a week in advance so that your body absorbs that water. If you just try to pour down the day of, you’re not going to be able to replenish your system. Your body can’t absorb it that fast; it just doesn’t. You have to start hydrating ahead of time,” Howard said.

“I can’t say that enough, and I would really hope that the people prepare for the event ahead of time.”

He encourages visitors to go to the cooling tent if they feel uncomfortable at any time during the festival.

“Just stop by and let them give you a look over and make sure everything is good, so that you can enjoy the festival. I mean, our job is to keep them safe during festivals, that’s

what the Department of Public Safety, Emergency Management, MCN Lighthouse, all of our folks there are to keep them safe,” Howards says.

“This is a part of it where we partner with the Department of Health just to make sure that our citizens have a safe and fun time at the festival.”

“The cooling tents that we have, one belongs to the MCN Department of Health, and one is from the Emergency Management. They’re about \$40,000 apiece, but we can use these tents not just as cooling tents; we also use them during disasters for command posts and logistics posts. They’re multi-functional; they can be heated or cooled. They have their own self-contained HVAC systems,” Howard said.

According to Howard, one tent measures up to 400 square feet and can hold up to 30 people, while the other measures up to 800 square feet and can hold up to 60 people.

Cooling tents can be used at any outdoor event during periods of extreme heat with adequate power available.

He knows that other Tribal Nations have provided cooling tents or buildings, as well as misting fans. “There’s a plethora of ways to do it and spread it out. This is just the preferred method for us. It’s very effective, and so that’s why we go with it,” Howard said.

Temperatures haven’t cooled since the middle of summer on the Mvskoke Reservation either, and as school starts, outdoor activities remain a big part of Oklahoma life. It’s important to stay heat-aware, stay hydrated, and use cooling technology when available.

*This article was originally published on MvskokeMedia.com as “How to beat the heat at the festival” and was updated on Sept. 3, 2026.*



There are many ways to beat the heat and stay cool during outside events in extreme temperatures. Staying hydrated and wearing sun-protective clothing like hats and long sleeves with breathable material, or carrying a shading umbrella can help. However, on days of extreme heat offering cooling tents can prevent heat-related illness. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

SOFTBALL  
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

former MCN Chief Bill Fife to write about the Oklahoma City World Series of Indian Fast Pitch Softball.

According to the Oklahoma History Society, the annual Indian Fast Pitch Tournament, held the first weekend after July 4 in Oklahoma City, was a high point of the summer softball season. “Started in 1952, this gathering has attracted more than one hundred men’s teams and is one of the oldest American Indian tournaments in the United States.

Teams have come from all over the nation to compete at Wheeler Park’s Eggeling Stadium, named after former Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Superintendent Alvin Eggeling who, along with the late W. B. Auxier, former ASA state and metro commissioner, played major roles in the development of softball in Oklahoma City and throughout Oklahoma,” states OHS.

“In the men’s alone in 1973, the year that I played and the team I was with, we won. There were 106 teams, just men’s teams, in Oklahoma City at Wheeler Park. I write a lot about that tournament because you hear so much about that tournament, people don’t realize that our Indian people had a big impact in Oklahoma City with the tournament that we had,” Tiger said.

Tiger sees the reunion as an opportunity for players to share stories, laugh, and eat together. Tiger believes this brings back many memories for them, and he hopes it continues to do so.



such as this.”

Tiger said they were blessed to have many talented athletes. He recalled that when he played, several softball players also competed at the NCAA Division I level in football and basketball.

“One of the guys I played with, he was a descendant of Jim Thorpe’s family, who was a great athlete, I mean, he could play,” Tiger expressed.

Tiger said he was fortunate to play on teams filled with outstanding athletes. Tiger played with Haskell, the Junior College faculty, staff, and student team. He mostly pitched in his career.

“We were blessed to have a really good team, we won the Oklahoma City tournament twice, we came in the top 5 almost every year that we played,” Tiger said.

One of Tiger’s greatest memories was when his team wasn’t able to play in that tournament because their coach forgot to get the entry fee, so they ended up playing as the “Florida Seminoles” because their catcher was Seminole from Florida. The catcher found out that the “Florida Seminoles” only had three players, so the Haskell teammates hopped onto that team. Tiger said the “Florida Seminoles” were a fan favorite because they traveled so far.

He said during their first game on Friday night, they played against a team that MCN Secretary of Veteran Affairs Grover Wind coached, and Wind’s team beat Tiger’s team 2-1. This left Tiger’s team in the losers’ bracket.

They were pushing through on Saturday when Tiger’s team had only two pitchers: himself and another pitcher. He said that his pitcher was a good



One of her favorite memories was seeing everyone plan the Creek Festival Softball Tournament and the Indian Fastpitch Softball Tournament, which were the highlights of her summers.

Beaver Daney said softball plays a big role at the festival and that it started when she was in high school. She knows it was the former chief himself who created this movement.

**Reflections on a life in softball**

“I started Creek Nation’s festival softball tournament back in 1974. I started with eight teams. We had it at what is called Hawthorn Park now. It went really good, I was working for Chief Cox at the time, we had a really good crowd Friday, Saturday night, and Sunday,” Tiger said.

This tournament moved from Hawthorn Park to Henryetta Nichols Park because of the growth. Later on, they bought and built fields where the MCN Claude Cox Omniplex is currently located.

According to Tiger, MCN Former Chief Claude Cox told him that he was the reason why they had to build those fields.

Tiger built momentum by getting teams from the west side because he was acquainted with several teams there. At one time, there were over 100 teams, and the tournament ended on Monday morning.

“In the 1950s until I’m gonna say late 80s, fast pitch softball was one of the most popular sports in Indian Country. It’s actually part of our culture as Indian people,” Tiger said.

One of Tiger’s biggest life lessons is that throw-



TOP ROW, L to R: A still of Tiger in 1985 at the MCN Softball Field dedication on June 14 (MM/From the Vault) Tiger shares historic images from the Indian Softball Championship on his personal Facebook page. He explains, “Before there was “tailgating” teams would send someone to OKC to find a good camping spot at Wheeler Park. During the Indian tournaments was the only time the OKC Parks and Recreation Department would allow camping.” Creek Nation’s sponsored team in the 80’s. (Photos Courtesy: MCN Former Chief Tiger) BOTTOM ROW, L to R: Attendees at this year’s reunion look at newspaper clippings and other personal photographs. Attendees share memories with the group during the meal. (Shayln Proctor/MM)

Beaver Daney agrees with Tiger that socializing brings back memories for them, and she said they try to collect pictures from everybody, which can be hard because people didn’t take pictures as they do now, or even had a camera.

“The pictures we get, we try to post those so everybody can look at those pictures that they had way back then. They all seem to enjoy the time together,” Beaver said.

For Tiger, the players become family. He shared, “One of the players got up, and he said, ‘Hey, I just want you guys to know, whether I played with you, played against you, or we had some real titanic battles on the field, I love all you guys.’ Because when we played, yeah, we were always competitive, but in the end we became family,” Tiger said.

“We all played, whether it was men or women. During that time, it was really popular. We were all family regardless of whether we were blood or not,” Tiger said.

The reunion culminated in a return to the diamond, with players back on the field.

“I knew every one of those people that played because I watched them play when I played. I knew about them, and I remember some of the teams that they played with. The ones that played it’s kind of like, ‘I wanna do it one more time,’” Tiger said.

Tiger said participation has declined over the past four years due to the passing of many former players, but seeing those who are still able to come out and play is truly special.

“Even the young ones today, they love watching them play. There’ll be games on the other fields, they’ll stop to come over and watch the seniors or legends play, which is neat. If a mistake is made, or if one of the seniors or legends ball player misses a ball or strikes out, there’s no laughter. They don’t laugh at them, they just acknowledge and clap their hands,” Tiger said.

“Because they’re just happy to see these guys that really set the foundation for your generation, so that they will be able to have an opportunity

football coach at Haskell and a good athlete, and had also been drafted by the New York Jets as a defensive back.

During the afternoon, the pitcher broke his finger. Tiger said that there was a line drive, and instead of using the glove, the pitcher used his finger. Then that led to Tiger pitching for the remainder of the time.

He said that they played 13 games after getting in the loser’s bracket, he pitched eight games on Sunday, and then another three more games because it went to 21 innings, and they were beaten. Tiger said that he didn’t think he could pitch anymore if they had won. It was a five-hour game-they started at 7:15 and didn’t end until 12:15.

“We came all the way back through the loser’s bracket and got back in the finals, and we played 21 innings in the finals, and we got beat by 2-1 by Sapulpa Bucks. That game is still talked about. Those guys that were on the Sapulpa Bucks team and us, we all became really close friends,” Tiger said.

He said that the stadium at Wheeler Park was full and that there were some outstanding plays during that time. That was a highlight for Tiger.

“I remember some of the outstanding teams of the past that include: Sapulpa Bucks, Turkey Springs, Concho 49ers, Caddo All Stars, Red Race, Hatchville, Aces All Stars, Sequoyah Mills of Anadarko, Little Axe, Cherokee Hose & Supply, Haskell, Ken’s Plumbing of Dallas, Nadako, Jamco, OK-KS All Stars, Kansas Indians, Shawnee Braves, Oklahoma Scramblers, and Dukes of Anadarko, to name a few,” Tiger shared on his Facebook page.

Beaver Daney played in the 1970s and had five sisters on their team. She was coached by her dad, Oscar Beaver, and their team was called Red Feathers.

She mainly played second base, but her dad taught them all how to play each position just in case somebody got hurt. Four of them played infield mostly, and another sister played outfield.

ing a softball opened up doors for him. He met many people who ended up in the business and tribal government arenas. Playing softball laid a foundation that helped with Tiger’s future career.

He worked alongside great tribal leaders as Chief. He also worked in Indian Country, away from Tribal government, within sports-oriented national organizations.

He helped put on national softball and basketball tournaments as well.

Tiger’s background was in journalism across print and electronic media. According to Tiger, he was able to push former Chief Cox to provide print media and electronic media, including radio, television, and video productions.

Tiger worked in a number of productions and was an executive producer, a member of the Haskell Indian Nations University Board of Regents, and in sports broadcasting.

Tiger says this all happened because he played softball and got to meet other people.

“I got to see firsthand our Indian student athletes excel on the basketball court, on the football fields, and softball fields,” Tiger said. “To see them start out and now today, they’re contributing to society, is a great feeling just to watch that,” Tiger said.

Throughout his sports broadcasting career, Tiger thinks he has influenced some of the people that he sees today. For example, when he went to Oklahoma City for the state basketball tournaments, he was approached by parents asking for insight that might help their child’s career.

“Because of softball and sports and being involved in our Tribal governments, there’s a young person out there that we know is a part of our tribal governments, that maybe I helped in some small manner influence in some way,” Tiger said.

For information about the reunion contact Beaver Daney at [adaney@muscogeenation.com](mailto:adaney@muscogeenation.com) or Mark Abbott at [mabbott@muscogeenation.com](mailto:mabbott@muscogeenation.com).



LEFT and CENTER: Players practice before taking the field at the softball reunion game. RIGHT: Laughter was even present at the coin toss. (Shayln Proctor/MM)



# HOMEBUYER EDUCATION CLASS STARTS UP AGAIN

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

OKMULGEE – The Muscogee (Creek) Nation Department of Housing is hosting a First-time Homebuyer Education Class on Sep. 19. The course is part of its Mortgage Down Payment and Closing Cost Program. The class is being offered again due to strong interest from citizens. The class is open to all MCN employees and Mvskoke citizens, and the Mortgage Down Payment and Closing Cost Program is specifically for Mvskoke citizens. While the upcoming class filled quickly, the department is exploring opportunities to offer additional classes.

The topics will cover whether homeownership is right for you, budgeting/taking control of your money, the loan process, environmental issues, from contract to closing, and life as a homeowner.

This also features guest speakers with expertise in buying a home, credit, loans, finding the right house, and finalizing the deal.

According to the program, “Many Native American families find it difficult or overwhelming to purchase their first home, which will help prepare our Native American families for the road to homeownership.”

MCN Department of Housing Mortgage/Down Payment Specialist LaDonna Northcross (Cherokee) spoke with Mvskoke Media about the class and their goals for Tribal citizens.

### Course Topics

Northcross educates Mvskoke citizens in the mortgage down payment program. Her program starts with a pre-application, covers the requirements, and answers questions.

During the class, Northcross will speak about budgeting, the closing contract, and life as a homeowner. The guest speakers include AMC Mortgage, Larry Miller, and James Williams, the MCN Director of Environmental Services.

Northcross says that budgeting is a big key when purchasing. “We will do a budget regarding what your payment is now, and then you’re going to budget for that big house payment coming, so that way they can see if they can afford to budget, or can they afford to buy a home? Is renting still what they need to be doing, or are they ready for homeownership? So that’s a big, important part of the process, budget-

ing, and I cannot speak enough on that,” Northcross said.

The class also covers the loan application process, what happens during closing, and what citizens need to bring.

Williams will discuss lead-based paint and what to look for in older homes. Northcross said they prefer that citizens purchase homes built after 1978, not before, because homes built before then often contain lead-based paint. This topic can help citizens have more information on older homes.

The class will conclude with life as a homeowner, and Northcross said the discussions will be about what you will do once you’re in the house.

“Now you’re a homeowner, and when something breaks or needs fixing, you can’t call the landlord because you are that person now. So we talk about that, what to expect when paying your house payment, and still, budgeting comes into play with that. We will talk a little bit more about budgeting once you become a homeowner and just regular maintenance on your house,” Northcross said.

Towards the end, the citizens will receive a certificate for the Homebuyer Education Class. She said some of those attending are required to receive the certificate, but overall, Northcross said it will be beneficial.

Northcross has led the First-time Homebuyer Education Class before, years ago. At that time, she noticed that citizens needed to purchase homes. When she returned to the MCN Department of Housing, she still saw a need, even years later. Northcross took her observation to the MCN Secretary Department of Housing, who was on board, and the class started again.

The program finds that many Native American families find purchasing their first home difficult and overwhelming. Northcross believes that when realtors speak to citizens who have never purchased a home, there is some lingo they use that citizens need to know and watch out for.

“If they’ve never purchased a home, they have no clue what they’re being asked or what to ask the lender. This will help guide them through the home-buying process. We’ll be looking at budgeting, we’ll be looking at closing, and what you need to do when you’re starting that process of buying a home,” Northcross said.

Northcross saw the over-

whelm on citizens’ faces during in-office orientations, when she tried to fit 8 hours of information into a 45-minute conversation.

The department’s goal is to educate citizens about the home-buying process and to help them set a budget for their home. Northcross said they support citizens and that she can help with anything and answer any questions they may have. Northcross tries to be available 24/7, either by email or phone call, and if it goes to voicemail, she said she will call back as soon as possible.

“I try to get back to them because when they’re buying homes, and they’re out looking, it’s usually on weekends. So I want them to know that we’re there for them through this whole process of owning a home, as in, ‘Are they ready to be homeowners?’ Because a lot of times they’ll get to this class and I remember this before, they realize, ‘Oh, maybe we’re not ready, maybe we need to save more, have more in our savings,’” Northcross said.

Mvskoke Nation can also help with the funds they can provide, but there are also expenses that citizens will pay for on their own, such as home inspections and appraisals.

Northcross said that if the citizens weren’t able to sign up while seats were available, they

would offer online homebuyers education through Fannie Mae. While the MCN Department of Housing doesn’t promote the online course, Northcross has done it herself, and the department was using it before creating the in-person classes.

Northcross suggests reviewing that and completing the modules. She clarified that, in her opinion, it isn’t as effective as a class setting, but the website does provide a lot of useful information in certain areas.

Northcross is open to offering this class more than once; the need was evident in the response they received and how quickly the class filled up. She’s also up to expanding the class if they need a bigger space in the future.

“I think the people want this education, whether they’re doing the program or they’re looking at buying a home and not eligible for the program. They still need the education for it, and it was a big response, I had to stop it because I still need room for the people that are on the waitlist for this program to attend,” Northcross said.

For information on possible future classes or the Mortgage Down Payment and Closing Cost Program, contact Northcross at 918-549-2529 and her email is lnorthcross@MuscogeeNation.com



An MCN citizen, Amanda, with her family, who was helped in the home buying process by the department. (Photo Courtesy: Ladonna Northcross)

# EYG ELEVATES THE GAME

ELEVATE YOUR GAME BRINGS STUDENT-ATHLETES TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES NATIONWIDE

BY SHAYLN PROCTOR

MVSKOKE RESERVATION – Elevate Your Game (EYG) is an all-Native AAU Program, founded in 2016, that helps basketball athletes improve their skills, provides 1-on-1 training, and connects them with colleges to help them earn basketball scholarships. The program began with 10 kids and has since worked with over 800 in Indian Country.

“Skill development camps teach fundamentals, advanced moves, and game IQ in a challenging environment,” stated EYG. “We host tournaments for players to showcase their talent, while our competitive traveling teams provide top-level competition, exposure, and growth on and off the court. In addition, we provide customized sports apparel and more to support athletes and teams.”

President of EYG, Randy July Jr. (Mvskoke), started the program as an intern at Haskell Indian Nations University

(HINU) during his senior year. He had the opportunity to intern at the University of Kansas, Baker University, and other universities in the Lawrence area within their basketball programs. However, July’s heart was set on being around Native Americans and trying to help mold them into basketball players, develop their skill sets, and use basketball as a tool to get where they wanted to go.

“My internship was a basketball camp, and then I ended up trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I loved helping people, and I loved basketball, so my senior year, I put on a basketball clinic at HINU. It went really well. I think we had about 55 kids come out, which I was pretty shocked, then it took off from there,” July said.

The program started with 1-on-1 training for youth, then group training. When they began posting more on social media,



One of July’s athlete’s taking a shot. (Photo Courtesy: EYG)

# 'THIS JOURNEY BEGINS' HELPS CMN STUDENTS FIND COMMUNITY, BUILD CONNECTIONS

A WEEK-LONG NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM, 'THIS JOURNEY BEGINS', HELPS TRANSITION STUDENTS TO COLLEGIATE LIFE AND CREATE COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS



New students smile widely outside Council House. (Photo Courtesy: Kim Morrison)

by **BRADEN HARPER**

OKMULGEE – New students enrolling at the College of the Muscogee Nation participated in “This Journey Begins”, a week-long program of activities designed to help students build community and learn about what to expect during their first college semester. The orientation ran from Sunday, Aug. 16, through Friday, Aug. 21.

The newly expanded program has connected students with advisors for the past four years. Previously called Raven Ready, the orientation lasted only half a day—it has now been expanded to a full week. Another program, Bridge Camp, previously prepared remedial students for college-level courses. Orientation provides students with opportunities to build relationships with peers and campus staff.

Each day of orientation has a different theme. Among the activities students participated in were vision board planning, writing letters, hymn singing,

and introductions to campus services. Students learned about behavioral health resources, library resources, and Mvskoke Nation Youth Services. They were also given a tour of Okmulgee, specifically to see key locations like the Okmulgee Indian Health Center, Council House, and the YMCA.

According to an article published by the Journal of Developmental Education, obstacles for Native American/Alaskan Native college student retention include feelings of academic inadequacy, isolation, and marginalization. Native American/Alaska Native students have among the lowest college enrollment and graduation rates of any student cohort at U.S. mainstream colleges. However, the article cites significant improvements in enrollment and graduation rates over the past 40 years. These improvements have been made with the help of the Tribal college system, like CMN.

The article suggests three strategies for successfully

retaining Native American/Alaska Native students. The strategies include maintaining connections to family and the Tribal Community, addressing single-parent students and students with family issues, and providing academic assistance through peer mentoring. It concludes that state officials, administrators, faculty, staff, community leaders, and parents need to play a role in the development of Native American/Alaska Native students.

### First step in a larger world

Students and their parents enjoyed a meal catered by Looped Square Meat Company. Parents wrote letters that will be given to students later in the fall term, containing words of encouragement. Parents were also given a crash course on navigating financial aid.

CMN Director of Enrollment Management Lacey Azbell (Cherokee) said the idea of providing activities for parents is to get them involved. It informs them on how to offer support for students moving out and living on their own for the first time.

“We tried to focus on building relationships with students over the last few years with the activities students have done. I think this builds on that,” Azbell said. “Part of that is bridging the parents into it. That’s why we brought them in, it gives them an opportunity to see us as staff, ask questions.”

‘This Journey Begins’ featured former Chicago Bears player Levi Horn (North-

ern Cheyenne) as a speaker. Now retired from the NFL, Horn visits Native communities across the country and shares his life story on how he became a football player.

Returning students are involved as mentors. Dean of Academic Affairs Mekko Tyner (Mvskoke) said staff was pleased with the leadership roles students took on.

“We had five student mentors,” Tyner said. “They did an excellent job. They were returning students. They had a group assigned to them, and they mentored the students and were with them the whole camp.”

According to Tyner, students typically face personal obstacles, such as imposter syndrome and being first-generation students. He remarked that one of the hardest first-day chal-

lenges for students is reading a class schedule. By participating in new student orientation, students familiarize themselves with each campus building. If they still have trouble navigating campus, familiar faces from orientation can guide them to their destination.

Students will have to navigate a campus partially under construction. Current projects in development on campus include an archery field, a stickball field, and the clock tower in the central plaza. Tyner said more programs will be able to use the outdoor facilities once construction is complete.

When asked what the most important piece of advice is for incoming students, Azbell says effort and communication. Tyner believes it’s joining a student organization. Tyner and Azbell both attribute the orientation’s success to the staff committee that organized it.

“With ‘This Journey Begins’ Program, even today at lunch, there’s these



A craft activity at the Council House. (Photo Courtesy: Kim Morrison)

groups of students hanging out, eating lunch together. Some of them are out in the lobby between classes. You see them building their own community.”

## BACK-TO-SCHOOL EVENTS PROVIDE SUPPLIES, SUPPORT TO MCN STUDENTS

COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AHEAD OF THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

by **SHAYLN PROCTOR**

MVSKOKE RESERVATION – July and August brought Back-to-School bashes across the Mvskoke Reservation. Events were sponsored by community organizations and Muscogee (Creek) Nation departments, such as the Dewar Indian Community Center, MCN Recreation, and the MCN Department of Education and Training. The events were aimed at helping students before they start their school year.

The Dewar Indian Community Center held its Back to School Bash on Aug. 9 for Mvskoke children living within the Dewar Boundaries, from pre-k to high school. They went to Okmulgee’s Shoe Sensation, where they purchased shoes, socks, and backpacks.

The Dewar Indian Community Center Chairperson, Jennifer Jones (Mvskoke), spoke about the great turnout and said she saw many of their community members happy with what their center provided. They had around 45 applicants, and Jones said their community got everything they wanted.

“They told us they couldn’t thank us enough for what we are doing for them,” Jones said.

Jones said that pro-



MCN Recreation’s back to school event at the Mvskoke Dome and provided supplies, backpacks, and haircuts. (Photo Courtesy: MCN Recreation)

viding this bash brought smiles to the kids, and they wanted to show that the Dewar Indian Community Center cares for its people, especially the parents.

This was their first time choosing Shoe Sensation as the venue for their Back-to-School Bash. Jones said that she shops there herself and always sees sales such as buy one, get one half off. She thought this could help parents, since they could get more at Shoe Sensation, where some of those items were half off.

“I like seeing everyone happy, and I like helping. That’s how my family is. My dad always said, ‘You help somebody, somebody will help you.’ That’s what I enjoy doing, and it makes my heart happy,”

Jones said.

On Aug.11, two events were happening within the MCN: MCN Recreation held its back-to-school event at the Mvskoke Dome, where they offered free school supplies, haircuts, backpacks for kids, and free eye screenings and hearing tests. They even included the adults for eye screening for diabetic neuropathy and glaucoma testing.

The second event was the back-to-school supplies giveaway hosted by the MCN Department of Education and Training. This event was open to all and was on a first-come, first-served basis. The items that were distributed were Clorox wipes, Kleenex, pink erasers, pencils, colored

pencils, crayons, markers, 2-prong folders, glue sticks, spiral notebooks, composition notebooks, scissors, pencil boxes, and headphones.

The MCN Secretary of Education and Training, Dr. Kaila Harjo (Mvskoke), expressed appreciation to Alston Construction, a national general contracting company, for its donation supporting its students and families in the communities.

Harjo shared that the department doesn’t do many school supply events since other organizations already provide them, so they felt those resources could be directed to other forms of direct assistance. They were approached by the construction company,

which donated thousands of dollars’ worth of school supplies for the youth.

When it comes to private donations, Harjo said their department makes decisions based on the donor’s recommendations. Alston Construction asked that donations be made available to any Native students.

“We were very thankful that not only do we help our Mvskoke youth, but our other tribal relatives as well,” Harjo said.

Their department decided it would be best for citizens to come by their location. She said this also allowed everyone to know where they were located, so they could provide information about the programs within their Department of Education.

They also wanted to make sure that all the students were able to return to school with quality items needed for the start of the school year.

“It’s always nice to see other students from different communities come in, but I think the biggest piece was just knowing that our students went to school with what they needed to be successful. For some of our parents, times are hard, even in a two-income household,”

**SCHOOL**  
CONTINUES ON PAGE 12

ELEVATE  
CONTINUED FROM 8

Tribes started reaching out to July, asking him to attend a 2- or 3-day camp.

The program name, Elevate Your Game, came from one of his college mentors, Pete King.

“I was kind of known for jumping and dunking, so he was just like ‘Hey, why don’t you put Elevate Your Game? You jump high, so why don’t you just try to incorporate something that’s unique to you, but try to put it into your own organization,’ I was like ‘Oh dang, that’s a really good name,’” July said.

Since 2016, they have hosted 32 camps across 16 different reservations. Since then, the camps have grown into teams.

“Right now, we have 14 teams that we have through our organization, boys and girls, that go and compete on Prep Hoops and other circuits, trying to get college coaches to be looking at us. So far, we’ve sent 71 kids to college on basketball scholarships that have come to our program,” July said.



(Photo Courtesy: EYG)

Trying new things, making mistakes

July likes to get the whole team involved and tries not to hold any kid back. He mentioned that sometimes coaches hold players back, for example they won’t encourage players to shoot three-pointers or dribble. With EYG, they focus on letting players do what they want.

“Obviously, we’re not trying to go over the top, but we’re not limited with EYG. So if we’ve got a big guy and he’s told not to shoot threes, we want to try to get him to shoot threes. We know the game is changing and that big guys aren’t just big and they just sit down low in the post. We try to pull them out, we try to get them shooting, we try to get them dribbling so they can be seen. Just game changing,” July said.

For EYG, when teaching a basketball skill, what July enjoys most is going in depth and teaching how to make the right plays. But he said that if you’re coming into EYG, you don’t have to be good- it’s his job to make you better.



(Photo Courtesy: EYG)

He wants to teach, show, and educate athletes on the simple fundamentals of basketball without overcomplicating it.

“There are some kids that we’ve taken in that didn’t even think they were going to play school ball or high school basketball, and we changed the whole narrative for them. Even like high school kids, they didn’t think that college was an option for them, and we’ve opened up doors for them. They’ve walked straight through it and tried to become somebody,” July said.

July shared that their program encourages young players to try new things.

“You’re supposed to mess up, so you can learn. I think that the biggest thing is we just give these kids confidence. We give them great coaching. We make sure that we hold them accountable. We are also hard on them, but we also know that they’re trying to learn and they’re trying to grow,” July said.

“So the mistakes are going to happen, but you have to be coachable and learn from those mistakes.”

For basketball athletes who feel they are struggling or feel like they want to quit because they can’t get the skill down, July shared, “We all started somewhere. LeBron James and Michael Jordan, they didn’t wake up and be that great. We all struggled, but it’s how you bounce back from your mistakes and turn it around and try to be better.”

July knows that messing up can be frustrating, but EYG says it’s all about learning and growing from mistakes.

“Grow from that, elevate from that.”

July understands it’s a hard lesson.

Helping every kid

EYG’s basketball team has played in Prep Hoops and AAU Circuit and, since starting a team, has played in 200 tournaments across all grades.

When the team wins a tournament, they receive a trophy, but they don’t keep it. The team gives that trophy to whoever played best on the EYG team in that tournament.

“We give it to whoever plays the best, and we don’t keep the trophies. We obviously want to win, but we want to play for something that we’re getting better every single weekend. We want to play teams that are better than us, quicker, faster, stronger. We play in high-level tournaments, and the biggest thing is just making sure that we’re growing, we’re really elevating our game,” July said.

For July, it’s not about winning and losing; it’s about EYG helping every young kid who crosses their path- whether it is education, basketball, or mental health issues.

One of July’s favorite things is when athletes reach out, even after camps and tournaments are over.

“They reach out and say, ‘Hey, can you help us with our jump shot? Can you help us with this? Hey, I’m struggling with this.’ I’m glad that we’re able to still reach out to kids even in Utah, Washington, Florida, New York, like these places that we’ve done camps at. I’m glad that we can still reach out or they can reach out to us and we can still help them along the way,” July said.

“I think that’s what I’m most proud of through our organization, that we’re just willing to help every kid that crosses, it doesn’t matter what it is. Basketball is just something to get kids interested, but it’s the life lessons that we teach outside of that,” July said.

EYG has seen their players go to Haskell Indian Nations University, Hesston College, and to colleges and universities in Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

EYG has sent an athlete to almost every level of college basketball- Air Force, Division 1 and 2, National Collegiate Athletic Association, Division 2, Coastal Athletic Association, Junior College, and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics.

EYG tries to ensure that they can continue their education while doing something they love.

“71 have graduated from college, they went and impacted society on their rez, or they went and did great things,” July said.

July is grateful to watch his son’s basketball journey and to see how much effort he puts in, part of this movement, but his son, Jakovy, is also on the EYG team and training. Jakovy has watched his father’s basketball journey.

“When he was about 4 or 5 years old, he got to watch me play at Haskell. When he was 6, he was in the locker room with us, in the weight room with us, got to see me work out, train hard, and ever since then, it’s just like this is all he wanted to do. We tried other sports, but it just didn’t work out. He just loved basketball,” July said.



(Photo Courtesy: EYG)

on and off the court.

“I’ve still yet to see a kid work that hard. He trained 4 hours a day, and it was never enough. We would go train for 4 hours, come back home, and he said, ‘Dad, do you want to go back to the gym?’ and I’m just ‘Yeah, let’s go do it,’” July said.

He spoke of how it isn’t a surprise to anyone if they’ve seen Jakovy growing up. For July, seeing his son’s work ethic and how much he has accomplished makes him proud as a father. But overall, July is most proud of how Jakovy is as a person.

“Him just being a great guy, great teammate, and great person. He was in Mesa, and he was taking pictures with every kid, like he didn’t tell any kid no. He just always wants to be there

for people,” July said.

**Elevating Native basketball athletes**

Currently, all of their coaches are Native American, and they’ve all graduated from college and played college basketball, giving these young athletes someone to look up to. Because they have seen July play professional basketball before, they can strive to do the same.

He said that alumni who have gone through EYG come back and help with the camps and even coach teams.

“It’s all about giving back. I try to incorporate telling these kids, ‘Hey, you needed somebody that you needed growing up, so come back to EYG, try to help out, do camps, do tournaments, do the 1-on-1’s. You’re giving back and doing what you’re supposed to do,’” July said.

For the other basketball college graduates who are helping coach for EYG, has made an impact within their communities, and their organization tries to show that if they did it, then they can be that way too.

“Native Americans are playing 0.1% in college sports or college basketball. We want to try and change that narrative by teaching these kids, showing these kids that they can do it. They got great coaching, we got a great system that allows them to go and be great, we got college connections,” July said.

He tries to help them in any way he can. They have filmed their young kids to send to recruiters because they want to open up that door for them to give them that opportunity.

“It sucks, but some kids just don’t get that real opportunity, that real chance, because not everybody cares like that. So we’re trying to make sure the doors are open. Now, whether it’s up to them if they’re going to walk through it and keep going, but we want to make sure that we do have that opportunity to show them that, ‘Hey, you can do it, this is for you. Just put your head down, keep working, and keep growing,’” July said.

To follow along with EYG’s journey, follow them on their Facebook at EYG Basketball, or book with them at their website [eygbasketball.org](http://eygbasketball.org)



Office of Environmental Services  
(918) 549-2580

# Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event

September 24, 2026  
10:00 AM – 3:00 PM



✓ Oil-based paint

✓ Cleaning chemicals

✓ Automotive products

✓ Pesticides, and more!

Free Curbside Drop-off

MCN Recycle Center  
12675 Gun Club Road  
Okmulgee, OK 74447



IN MEMORIAM

On the bright summer morning of August 24, 2026, our beloved mother, Shirley Jean Phillips, passed from this earth. In peaceful sleep, she began her trip home. Five months earlier, on April 16th she had celebrated her eighty third birthday in Tennessee. Her willpower and gratitude had remained strong, despite the many physical challenges that she faced every day in the last few years of her life. Dialysis, pain, ailments of the heart, kidney and bones – her body withstood great suffering. Yet the proof of her faith was visible in her luminesce spirit, her smile and the love that she shined upon all of those who knew her.

Shirley was born in Okemah, Oklahoma in 1943, to parents Grant Leroy Neeley and Essie Geneva Fisher. She was preceded in death by her two young sisters, Marjorie, known as “Margie” and Susan Neeley. Her uncle Jimmy Fisher and she were close in age and raised together. “Jimmy was like a brother to me” she would often remark. These loved ones, she kept alive in her heart, throughout her days.

In 1960, she married Murel Dean Phillips in Linden, California. The two met in church and both attended Linden Highschool. Murel, was born in Arkansas and Shirley was born in Oklahoma. They would come to raise a family in Stockton, California. Their sons, Grant-Lee Phillips, being born in 1963 and Gary Dean Phillips in 1971. Murel and Shirley celebrated 53 years of marriage, before Murel’s passing on November 11, 2013. In their years together, they enjoyed family trips, camping, fishing and large family gatherings that very often spanned multiple generations.

Their family tree would grow with the arrival of three beautiful granddaughters. Gary and his wife Stephanie Phillips would welcome Gabriella Phillips and Grace Phillips. She would proudly live to see the marriage of Grace and Jackson Wiesner and the partnership of Gabriella and Teva Dagai. Grant-Lee and his wife Denise Siegel-Phillips would welcome Violet Phillips, Shirley’s youngest granddaughter. Shirley became “Granny” – remembering her own grandmothers and the role that they had played in her upbringing.

Along with Shirley’s love of family, cooking, hosting get-togethers, especially around the holidays, she was a gifted floral designer, working at floral shops in Stockton and independently with Shirley J. Phillips Floral Design. She had an artist eye and a desire to bring beauty into the world. The skillful work of her hands, the flowers she so thoughtfully gathered, was an expression of her creativity. A part of Shirley was there, in the flowers, as wedding vows were spoken, at the bedside of the suffering and at those most solemn passages, to comfort the grieving.

Like her mother, Essie, Shirley was blessed with an incredible singing voice. Her love of music may have been sparked in the church. Singing and prayer were deeply intertwined in her life. When arriving in Nashville, she joined the Christ Church Choir. It was the realization of a dream. With the choir, she recorded a gospel album at Ocean Way Studios in Nashville. She also went on tour with the choir to perform in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. When it became difficult for her to stand for a long period or climb stairs she joined smaller groups for Sunday services, where she forged lasting friendships. She also loved Patsy Cline and Dolly Parton who passed but a day after her. Shirley’s Karaoke performance of “Crazy” absolutely captivated the room, one night in Nolensville, Tennessee.

Shirley was an enrolled citizen of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation. Her mother Essie, along with her Aunt Janelle King and Grandmother Susana Little-Fisher instilled a respect for her Native American heritage. To live a life of honor and to see the hand of the creator in all things. These were the guiding principles of her life.

We ask that you keep our dear mother, Shirley, in your heart. Remember the love and the joy that she has given us all. From her beginnings in Okemah, Oklahoma, Hutchison, Kansas, Stockton, CA to her final years in Nolensville, TN, she touched many a life.

Remember Shirley, as we always will. Her joyous smile, her kindness, her melodious voice and her spirit.



Shirley Jean Phillips

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**Still Sovereign: Land, Law, Memory University of Tulsa**  
Friday, Sept. 4 - Saturday, Nov. 21, Noon - 5 p.m.  
Open Wednesdays - Fridays, admission is free. Exhibition curated by Carly Treece  
101 E. Archer St., Tulsa

**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  
For information, call 918-732-7824

**Operation Reconnect Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs**  
Thursday, Sept. 17, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
The one day event for veterans will offer Tribal, VA and Community Resources  
200 Preston Road, Okmulgee

**Opunvkv Kerreyat Ipunkerrepvs Mvskoke Language Circle Mvskoke Language Revitalization Program**  
Friday, Sept. 18, 12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Second language speakers will practice speaking the language with first language speakers  
Okfuskee Indian Community  
180110 Hwy 48, Castle  
For more info, call 918-304-3362

**Fangs Just Want to Have Fun Blood Drive**  
Sept. 21, 1- 3:30 p.m.  
Muscogee Nation Housing Building  
Conference Room 257

**OKC Outreach Tax Commision**  
Sept. 24, 10:30 a.m.- 2 p.m.  
Muscogee Nation OKC Resource Center  
4111 North Lincoln Blvd, Oklahoma City,

**Hotvle En Pefatkvlke 5k Mvskoke Nation Youth Services**  
Saturday, Sept. 26, 7:30 a.m.  
Registration requires the donation of one new toy valued at \$25 or more. The first 100 participants will receive a T-shirt  
To sign up, contact sarneecher@muscogeenation.com  
Fairgrounds Rd, Okmulgee

**Change Management Workshop CMN Extension**  
Friday, Oct. 2, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Free event will teach on change management using the ADKAR model  
2170 Raven’s Circle, Okmulgee  
For info, call 918-549-2861

**Plant ID Workshop MCN Conservation District**  
Tuesday, Oct. 6, 9 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.  
Free event will provide a hands-on plant identification walk and talk. It is recommended that attendees bring sturdy shoes, a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent and water  
18175 Cherry Road, Henryetta

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

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

VETERANS SPOTLIGHT



The Muscogee Nation Veterans Affairs Services Office is proud to honor Kenneth G. Harjo for his dedicated service to the Muscogee Nation, U.S. Air Force and the United States. Kenneth honorably served four years and is a recipient of the Good Conduct Medal and National Defense Service Medal.

Mvto Kenneth for your selfless service to your country and your community.

MVTO FOR YOUR SELFLESS SERVICE!

ELDERLY NUTRITION PROGRAM STAFF MEMBERS BECOME SERVSAFE CERTIFIED

ServSafe Certification is a training program that demonstrates a thorough understanding of food safety principles and practices. It was developed by the National Restaurant Association (NRA). The certification is designed to ensure that all food service workers understand the issues surrounding food safety and comply with federal and state law.

This program educates food service workers on preventing foodborne illness and food allergies, and on maintaining facilities through cleanliness, sanitizing, and pest control.

Benefits of being certified include:  
Participants are eating in a safe and clean environment  
Setting business apart, not all food establishments are ServSafe certified  
Strong understanding of food safety best practices  
Protecting both employees and participants from being exposed to rotten and contaminated food

We would like to recognize the staff from the Elderly Nutrition Program for passing the ServSafe certification exam!!



Left to Right: Connie George, Rachel Lewis, and Branson Eslick. (Elderly Nutrition Program)

