

# CHOCTAW COMMUNITY NEWS

VOL. LIII, NO. 3

CHOCTAW, MISSISSIPPI 39350

MAY-JUNE 2023



www.choctaw.org

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ TRIBAL PUBLICATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

## Ben Wins Second Term as Tribal Chief

CHOCTAW, Miss. - The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians held an election for Tribal Chief and eight Tribal Council positions in seven of the eight Tribal communities. On Tuesday, June 6, 2023, an estimated

3,000 registered voters went to the polls to cast their vote.

For the first time in Tribal history, an electronic voting system was used to tally votes. The Tribal Election Committee opened absentee ballots on

Wednesday, June 7, then distributed the Official Election Results on Thursday, June 8.

Incumbent Cyrus Ben won re-election with 1997 or 61.6% of the vote. A percentage majority, 50% plus 1, is required for the Tribal Chief seat. Phyliss Anderson, who held the position of Tribal Chief from 2011 until 2019, came in second with 1096 votes. Tarina K. Anderson received 149 votes.

"I am humbled by the overwhelming support from the Tribal voters," said Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben. "I love my Tribe. From day one my main promise was to work hard moving our Tribe in the right direction.



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben

I have fulfilled this promise and will continue to do so. Martin Luther King, Jr., stated, "The true measure of a man is not how he behaves in moments of

see ELECTION, pg. 4

	2023 Tribal Election Official TEC Results										TRIBAL CHIEF	
	Bosque Cimino	BC-Hawking	Bosque Homa	COMBATTA	Crystal Ridge	PAULI RILEY	Rip Winter	Standing Pine	TUCKER	TOTAL	%	
PHYLISS J. ANDERSON	86	1	28	188	25	314	181	102	98	1096	33.8	
ABSENTEE	6	0	1	9	1	28	16	8	4			
TARINA K. ANDERSON	21	1	7	48	3	35	5	9	12	149	4.6	
ABSENTEE	2	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	1			
CYRUS BEN *	273	48	104	255	38	627	109	183	235	1997	61.6	
ABSENTEE	14	4	3	9	5	50	9	10	21			

## MBCI Boys & Girls Club Cuts Ribbon For Standing Pine Facility

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Boys & Girls Club held a ribbon cutting and open house for the new Boys & Girls Club Tiak Hikiya Unit in the Standing Pine Community (Leake County) on Friday, May 26, 2023. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, members of the Choctaw Tribal Council, MBCI Boys & Girls Club officials, and community members were present to celebrate the opening.

"I appreciate the hard work and efforts of our Boys & Girls Club leadership and staff who have greatly expanded the reach of the Club across our Tribal communities," said Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben. "After multiple years of being open only during the summers, the Tiak Hikiya Unit will now be open the full year. This is a great thing for the community and program. The Boys & Girls Club help to promote and inspire our

youth to be responsible and engaged citizens of our Tribe and our world."

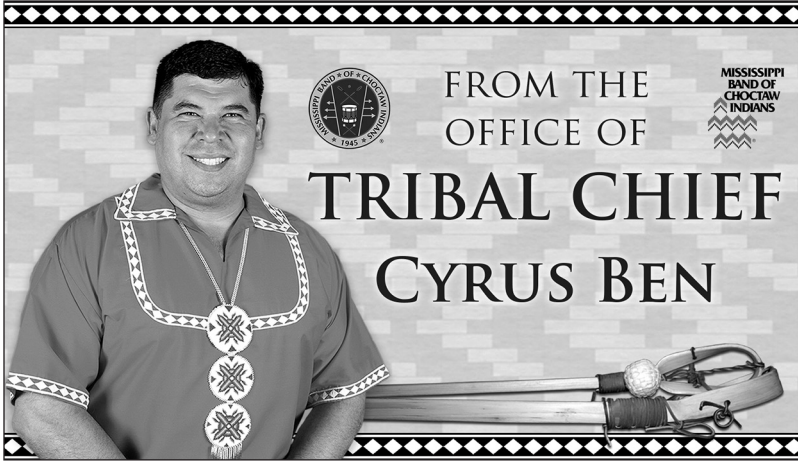
The opening of this facility is a great milestone for Standing Pine. The new facility is a renovated building that formerly housed the community's Early Childhood program. After 101 youth signed up during a membership drive in March 2018, the Boys & Girls Club created a pilot program in the summers of 2018 and 2019. Both summer pilot programs were a great success. So along came the idea for the Tiak

see TIAK HIKIYA CLUB, pg. 8



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben (left of center, in suit & tie) stands with Tribal officials, MBCI Boys & Girls Club staff & members, project partners

& community members as the ribbon is cut for the new Boys & Girls Club Tiak Hikiya Unit facility in the Standing Pine Community.



Halito!

We are at the end of another school year, and summer break has begun. I am proud of the achievements of our students throughout the year, whether they were in academics, athletics, or in the visual and performing arts. I am also proud of our graduates, from those transitioning from early childhood to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to college.

Thank you to our district office staff, principals, teachers, assistant teachers, counselors, secretaries, nurses, librarians, coaches, custodians, cafeteria workers, maintenance crews, bus drivers, and all other school personnel for everything you did every day to ensure our students were learning in the safest and most nurturing environment possible.

To our students, every step forward you take on your educational journey is one to be proud of. Our ancestors, and even our parents and grandparents, dreamed of a better life and better opportunities for advancement for future generations. Let those thoughts be your guide and motivation to reach even greater levels of

success. To our high school graduates, keep up the effort and good work in college, the military or the workforce. And to our college graduates, I offer my congratulations and best wishes as you begin to seek out career opportunities.

Everyone is excited about our upcoming Choctaw Indian Fair. Stickball teams are now practicing more often, our Princess Pageant contestants are beginning their practices, and our fairgrounds are getting spruced up. I thank each and every individual who is currently very busy making sure this year's Fair is the best one yet.

Our first taste of stickball will come June 7-10, at Choctaw Central Warrior Stadium, as our youth ages 9 to 12 will have the opportunity to showcase their skills on the field during the State Games of Mississippi Youth Stickball Tournament. I can't wait to see them out there, playing with the same passion and heart of stickball players generations past. I am proud of our youth players and wish them the best of luck at the State Games and also during the Fair.

Bracket Selection Night will be held on June 12 at the

Pearl River Amphitheater, and our stickball teams are eagerly awaiting to see who they will have to play against and defeat to win the coveted title of World Series Stickball Champion!

Our annual Unity Walk will be held on Saturday, June 24. I love watching all of the stickball teams walk from their respective practice fields and meet up at the Choctaw Central softball field parking lot and then walk as one group in unity to the Pearl River Amphitheater. Seeing all the players in their team jerseys, supporting each other and walking to the beat of the drum united against diabetes is an experience like no other.

Although we have recently held ribbon cuttings and open houses for the new Personal Vocational Adjustment Training facility with the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, Tiak Hikiya Boys and Girls Club Unit facility, and the Boys and Girls Club Teen Center, and celebrated a kickoff for the expansion of Choctaw Fresh Produce, there are still more projects that are currently starting or ongoing.

We are going through the

## CHOCTAW COMMUNITY NEWS

The Choctaw Community News is available at no charge upon request. Donations to help cover the cost of printing, mailing are welcomed. Correspondence should be addressed to:  
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Items of interest to the local & Native American community are welcomed. Letters to the editor should be signed; we reserve the right to edit material.



*On Thursday, May 18, 2023, Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben signed a proclamation declaring May as Older Americans Month on Choctaw Tribal lands. The event was held at the Choctaw Elderly Activity Center in Choctaw as several Tribal Elders wit-*

*nessed the signing & enjoyed a reception afterwards. Chief Ben expressed his appreciation & care for the Elders. Let us cherish our Elders as they have given so much for us & created the path on which we travel towards the future.*



## Boys & Girls Club Teen Center Opens

The Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony and open house for its new Teen Center facility on Thursday, June 1, 2023. Special guests included Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, Choctaw Tribal Council members Vice-Chief Ronnie Henry, Sr., Kent Wesley, Loriann Ahshapanek, Wilma Simpson-McMillan, Angela Hundley, Kendall Wallace, Demando Mingo, Christopher Eaves and Timothy Thomas, Sr., 2022-2023 Choctaw Indian Princess Cadence Raine Nickey, project partners and Brandee Paisano from the Boys & Girls Club of America Native Services. Former Club member Annalise Bell served as emcee as members of the Conehatta Unit sang the National Anthem in

the Choctaw language. Speakers included Chief Ben, MBCI Boys & Girls Club Director Glen Billie, Teen Center Director Gail Lilly, former Club member & success story Kidd Samuel & Ms. Paisano. Philanthropist MacKenzie Scott was thanked for her generous donation which helped make the construction of the Teen Center a reality. Following the speeches, the Boys & Girls Club dancers performed the Jump Dance, Stealing Partners Dance and the Walk Dance. Tribal officials, Club members and staff and community members gathered around to witness the ribbon being cut! Attendees took part in self-guided tours of the facility and enjoyed refreshments. Thank you to the Boys & Girls Club staff for everything you do to mentor & guide our Tribal youth!

communities and repaving roads through our Community Paving Project. Housing subdivisions are being built in Bogue

Chitto, Pearl River and Tucker. The site of the Louisville Travel Plaza is being prepared for construction. I appreciate my

staff, the Development Division leadership and staff, the Office of Construction Management, and our project part-

ners, for all that they have done and continue to do to keep these projects moving forward. I also appreciate the support that the Choctaw Tribal Council has given by voting to advance these projects from the drawing board to reality.

Thank you as always to everyone who comes up to me with encouraging words, and also to those who remember me in their prayers. I am honored by your support and care. I hope you will take some time this summer to rest and recharge and spend time with your family. We have much to be proud of and much to look forward to in the coming months. I am always excited to witness the beginning of new chapters in the history of our Tribe, and there are plenty of new chapters coming soon!



## Lil' Squirts Opens at Geyser Falls

On Wednesday, June 7, 2023, Geyser Falls Water Theme Park in Choctaw held an official opening and ribbon cutting for the newly-renovated Lil' Squirts area, which features custom tribal-inspired designs including 8-point stars representing the 8 Tribal communities of the Mississippi Band

of Choctaw Indians. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, Choctaw Tribal Council members Angela Hundley & Demando Mingo, & 2022-2023 Choctaw Indian Princess Cadence Raine Nickey were on hand to celebrate this special event with the Geyser Falls Water Theme Park team.

Chi Yakokilih,

Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief



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## OFFICIAL ELECTION RESULTS

June 6, 2023

### Tribal Council Election

Bogue Chitto - Three (3) Candidates - One Position				(733 registered voters @ BC and 85 @ Henning, TN)				
	BC+TN+Abs	Total		BC+TN+Abs	Total		BC+TN+Abs	Total
Henry, Sr., Ronnie **	279+19+18	316	John, Natasha	67+20+6	93	McClelland, Davita	34+11+1	46

Bogue Homa - Four (4) Candidates - One Position				(211 registered voters)				
	Abs	Total		Abs	Total		Abs	Total
Briscoe, Michael	54	1 55	Nickey, Vernandall	27	0 27			
McCombs, Kimo	4	0 4	Steve, Berdie M. **	55	3 58			

Conehatta - Nine (9) Candidates - One Position				(744 registered voters)				
	Abs	Total		Abs	Total		Abs	Total
Anderson, Rodgrick	105	3 108	Isom, Rocky	50	0 50	Thomas, Jesse	20	1 21
Billy, Sr., Eric	11	0 11	Nickey, Roddy	104	9 113	Thomas, Sr., Timothy **	111	4 115
Chickaway, Troy	37	3 40	Shumake, Sr., Henry L.	4	0 4	Williamson, Jr., Wilburn	49	2 51

Pearl River - Twenty (20) Candidates - One Position				(1,899 registered voters)				
	Abs	Total		Abs	Total		Abs	Total
Bacon, Norma	17	2 19	Isaac, William Daniel	54	2 56	Tubby, Austin	7	2 9
Ben, Melinda M.	83	5 88	Jim, Jimmy	11	2 13	Wallace, Lakeishia C.	84	4 88
Ben, Robert D.	45	4 49	Jimmie, Alan	18	2 20	Wesley, Barbara	26	0 26
Briscoe, Kevin	38	1 39	John, Kyle	16	3 19	Willis, Christopher Lee	9	1 10
Conrad, Oretta	49	4 53	Johnson, James R.	17	6 23	Willis, Joshua T.	16	1 17
Garcia, Jr., Robert	26	0 26	Martin, Robert Dean	50	2 52	Willis, Jr., Raymond	79	5 84
Gibson, Nigel **	211	18 229	Parkerson, Lola McMillan	120	13 133			

Red Water - Eleven (11) Candidates - Two Positions				(466 registered voters)				
	Abs	Total		Abs	Total		Abs	Total
Anderson, Sr., Ricky L. **	128	11 139	Isaac, Richard T.	100	4 104	Sutton, Valerie Lynn	7	1 8
Anderson, Teri	15	0 15	John, Samuel **	102	11 113	Wesley, Jeremy	20	1 21
Edwards, Darian Blake	21	1 22	Shumake, Randall Shane	56	11 67	Willis, Michael A.	29	4 33
Grisham, Tia	72	5 77	Steve, Jr., Anthony	39	0 39			

Standing Pine - Five (5) Candidates - One Position				(493 registered voters)				
	Abs	Total		Abs	Total		Abs	Total
Anderson, Sr., Jaric	39	0 39	Farve, Benjamin	73	2 75	Sockey, Richard **	130	13 143
Denson, Jonathan	27	3 30	Primer, Ashley	23	0 23			

Tucker - Six (6) Candidates - One Position				(599 registered voters)				
	Abs	Total		Abs	Total		Abs	Total
Davis, Brian	34	1 35	Taylor, Sr., Kevin	46	0 46	Willis, Ashland Nicole	24	1 25
Simpson-McMillan, Wilma	110	12 122	Taylor, Layla Terese	19	0 19	Wilson, Dorothy Bell **	112	12 124

### Tribal Chief

Candidates	Bogue Chitto		BC Henning		Bogue Homa		Conehatta		Crystal Ridge		Pearl River		Red Water		Standing Pine		Tucker		Total
	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	Abs	Total	
Anderson, Phylliss J.	86	6 1 0	28	1 188	9	25 1	314	28 1	181	16 102	8	98 4	98	4 1096					
Anderson, Tarina Kay	21	2 1 0	7	0 48	3	3 0	35	2 5	5	0 9	0	12 1	12	1 149					
Ben, Cyrus L.**	273	14 48 4	104	3 255	9	38 5	627	50 109	9	183 10	235	21 1997							

3242

Berdie John, TEC-Chairperson

Amy Pauls, TEC-Member

Wonda McMillan, TEC-Member

Posted June 8, 2023

## ELECTION ..... continued from page one

comfort and convenience but how he stands at times of controversy and challenges.'

We have done a great deal of work over the past four years, through the Pandemic and multiple states of emergencies, and I am honored the voters saw that and chose to allow me to stay in this position. For as long as the people see fit, and even after, I will work tirelessly for this Tribe. I've never hit the brakes since I took oath in 2019 and have no plan to slow down. There is more for us to do. Again, I thank all those that supported me. It's time to come together as a Tribe and keep moving forward in the right direction."

Tribal Council positions are won by a majority count, even if the winner does not receive more than half of the votes cast, and an individual can win by just one vote. After absentee ballots were counted, the Tribal Council outcomes are as follows:

- In Bogue Chitto (Neshoba/Kemper Counties, Henning, Tenn.) incumbent Ronnie Henry, Sr. won his seat with 316 out of a total 455 votes.

- In Bogue Homa (Jones County) challenger Berdie M. Steve unseated incumbent Michael Briscoe by just three votes, 58 to 55.

- In Conehatta (Newton County) incumbent Timothy Thomas, Sr. retained his seat with a final count of 115 votes.

- In Pearl River (Neshoba County) 20 candidates vied for one seat with incumbent Nigel Gibson winning with 229 votes.

- In Red Water (Leake County) two seats were up for grabs amongst 11 candidates. Ricky Anderson, Sr. and Samuel John

continued next page



Chief Ben's campaign held an election results rally on Tuesday evening, June 6, 2023, at the Neshoba Coliseum in Philadelphia as hundreds of supporters witnessed Ben being re-elected to a second term as Tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Supporters gathered outside on the coliseum grounds for a celebratory fireworks show after the results were announced.

won with 139 and 113, respectively.

- In Standing Pine (Leake County) incumbent Richard Sockey won his race with 143 votes.
- In Tucker (Neshoba County) challenger Dorothy Bell Wilson won with

124 votes against incumbent Wilma Simpson-McMillan (122 votes).

The next Tribal Election will be the "mid-terms" in June 2025 where the other nine Tribal Council positions will be up for election.



## Kickoff for Expansion Project at Choctaw Fresh Produce

Choctaw Fresh Produce (CFP), one of the outstanding businesses owned and operated by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, held a kickoff celebration for its expansion project on Wednesday, May 17, 2023.

CFP is expanding its business in order to help provide more organic fresh produce to the Tribe which received a \$1.8 million grant award from the USDA – Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program. The funds will support the purchase of local food for distribution to all Tribal members. The Tribe will utilize the grant funds to purchase and distribute local foods, procure vehicles, including a refrigerated truck, to distribute

food items to the communities, and to cover employee wages and other operating expenses.

“I am always grateful whenever any of our businesses not only succeed, but expand their footprint,” said Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben. “I am thankful to the staff of Choctaw Fresh Produce, as well as the Office of Economic Development, for their hard work and dedication in creating this opportunity for expansion.”

This project is expected to provide several thousand pounds of food to Tribal members and create four new positions: Distribution Coordina-



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben (far right), MBCI Director of Economic Development John Hendrix (far left), & MBCI Director of Administration Jason Grisham (second from left) with members of the farming & distribution crews of Choctaw Fresh Produce (CFP) as they celebrate the kickoff of their expansion. CFP is expanding its business in order to help provide more organic fresh produce to the Tribe.

tor, Harvest Supervisor, Mobile Market Operator, and Mobile Market Technician. The project will last at least through De-

cember 2024, but the Tribe has already applied for the LFPA Plus grant program that would add another year, if awarded.



# CHOCTAW TRIBAL COUNCIL RESOLUTION REVIEW

**SPECIAL CALL MEETING  
MAY 11, 2023**

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-080**, authorizing execution of a First Amendment to the November 23, 2021 amended & restated credit agreement of the Choctaw Resort Development Enterprise and Tribe with KeyBank National Association, as administrative agent & the lenders party thereto to convert to a Secured Overnight Financing Rate (“SOFR”) to replace the current LIBOR Rate which will no longer be

available, was ADOPTED - 9 YES (*M. Briscoe, N. Gibson, R. Henry, Sr., R. Isaac, H. Nick-ey, G. Shoemake, R. Sockey, T. Thomas, Sr., & K. Wallace*); 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN (*C. Eaves*); 7 ABSENT (*L. Ahshapanek, A. Hundley, S. Johnson, D. Martin, W. McMillan, D. Mingo, K. Wesley*).

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution authorizes the Choctaw Resort Development Enterprise Board of Directors (“the Enterprise”), pursuant to Ordinance 56, Section 11(g)(2) the power to operate & make policies for the En-*

*terprise, may borrow money & enter other financing & credit arrangements for enterprise purposes, subject to approval of the Tribal Council. Pursuant to Resolution CRDE 22-001 & MBCI Resolution CHO 22-011 the Enterprise Board & the Tribal Council approved a senior secured credit facility of up to \$50,000,000 to refinance the Enterprises existing credit facility & provide working capital funds to the Enterprise & on November 23, 2021 the Enterprise & Tribe entered into an Amended & Restated Credit Agreement with Key-Bank National Association, as Administrative Agent, Swing-line Lender & L/C Lender (the “Administrative Agent”) & the lenders party thereto from time to time (the “Lenders”) to evidence the credit facility approved by the Enterprise Board & Tribal Council (the “Credit Agreement”) & together with the other loan documents executed in connection therewith*

*the “Loan Documents”). Pursuant to Enterprise Resolution CRDE 23-006, the Enterprise Board found that the amendments as provided in the First Amendment which are required to replace the LIBOR Rate with Daily Simple SOFR or adjusted Term SOFR Rate as the benchmark rate under the Credit Agreement & Loan Documents is in the best interest of the Enterprise & the Tribe to approve the First Amendment to the Credit Agreement. The Tribal Chief & the Secretary-Treasurer are directed to report back to the Tribal Council when the First Amendment to the Credit Agreement has been executed. For more information, please contact Pearl River Resort.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-081**, approving the 2023 Choctaw Community Fund Budget, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution approves the 2023*  
**continued next page**



## Tribe Holds Wreath Laying Ceremony

*The Laying of the Memorial Wreath Ceremony, in observance of the Memorial Day Holiday, was held at the Choctaw Veterans Memorial in Choctaw on Friday, May 26, 2023. Reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Cadence Nickey served as emcee as the Choctaw Veterans Color Guard presented the colors. Bro. Gerald Willis, Sr. of Choctaw Missionary Baptist Church offered a brief devotional & gave the invocation. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben offered brief remarks & thanked the Veterans for their service. Nana Frazier, who sang the National Anthem in the Choctaw language earlier in the program, gave an inspirational speech regarding the military service of Native Americans throughout the history of our country, both men, & then women, as they were allowed to serve. Following Ms. Frazier's remarks, Chief Ben, Princess Nickey, Choctaw Veterans Affairs Director Sammie Wilson, & the Veterans Color Guard ceremonially placed the wreath at the center of the Veterans Memorial. MBCI Protective Services then presented the 21-gun salute, followed by TAPS & a Memorial Song played on the flute by James Willis. Veterans Affairs Director Wilson concluded the program by thanking everyone for attending.*



## Honoring Fallen Tribal Veterans

*In observance of honoring fallen Tribal Veterans, members of the MBCI Choctaw Veterans Committee, along with Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Cadence Nickey, & members of the Tribal Council, visited community cemeteries to honor all Tribal Veterans by placing flags at their gravesites. They did this in honor of these Veterans during the Memorial Day Holiday. Family members of Veterans were invited to participate in these visits. Thank you to everyone who took the time to honor our Tribal Veterans!*

*Choctaw Community Fund Budget in the amount of \$61,230. For more information, please contact the Development Division.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-082**, authorizing disposal of surplus Tribal motor vehicles, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to Resolution CHO 22-069, Section XIII of the Revised Procurement Policies provides that a Tribal Council Resolution is required to dispose of Tribal property that is no longer needed by MBCI Tribal Government programs. The Tribal Council authorizes the Tribal Chief or his designee to dispose of the motor vehicles that are not donated to a religious organization on MBCI Reservation lands or sold to Tribal members by sealed bid by any means that the Tribal Chief determines is most economically beneficial to the Tribe, provided that title to each of those motor vehicles must be either conveyed to the recipient or retired before any of those motor vehicles are released. For more information, please contact the Procurement Office.

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-083**, approving a Commercial Land Assignment between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians d/b/a Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise & Living Water Pentecostal Church, Non-Profit Organization, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** The Resolution approves a commercial land assignment between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians d/b/a Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise and Living Water Pentecostal Church, Non-Profit Organization for two years, with the option to review the agreement for an additional two years. The commercial land assign-

ment will allow Living Water Pentecostal Church to operate its business as a Non-Profit Organization-Church located within the Tucker Community, situated in Neshoba County, Miss. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Shopping Center.

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-084**, approving a Commercial Land Assignment between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians d/b/a Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise & Mahlih Bowden & Cecilia Ketcher d/b/a Pinky Pearl Nutrition, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** The Resolution approves a commercial land assignment between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians d/b/a Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise and Pinky Pearl Nutrition for one year, with the option to review the agreement for an additional one year. The commercial land assignment will allow Mahlih Bowden & Cecilia Ketcher d/b/a Pinky Pearl Nutrition to operate its business to provide a healthy drink option from loaded teas to blended shakes located in the Pearl River Community, situated in Neshoba County, Miss.. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Shopping Center.

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-085**, approving a Commercial Land Assignment between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians d/b/a Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise & Roy White d/b/a Fluff & Fold, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** The Resolution approves a commercial land assignment between the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians d/b/a Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise & Fluff & Fold for one year, with the option to review the agreement for an additional three years.

The commercial land assignment will allow Roy White d/b/a Fluff & Fold to operate its business to provide a self-coin operated laundry in the Bogue Chitto Community, situated in Neshoba County, Miss. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Shopping Center.

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-086**, amending the list of persons eligible for appointment to serve as Choctaw Supreme Court Justices Pro-Tem & to appoint a Chief Justice to hear cases appealed from the Criminal Division of the Choctaw Tribal Court, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** The Resolution approves the list of persons eligible for appointments to serve as the Choctaw Supreme Court Justices Pro-Tem. The Tribal Council Enacted Ordinance No.16-TTT for the Choctaw Tribal Code by establishing a procedure for the appointment

of alternate Choctaw Supreme Court justices to serve in the event that a regularly appointed Choctaw Supreme Court Justice cannot hear a case. Section §7-1-13 of the Choctaw Tribal Code provides that the Tribal Council provides must certify a list of persons eligible for appointment to serve as Choctaw Supreme Court justices pro-tem on an annual basis. On April 11, 2023, the Tribal Council adopted Resolutions CHO 23-074 & 23-079, which certified the annual list of persons eligible for appointment to serve as Choctaw Supreme Court justices pro-tem & appointed a judge from the Criminal Division of the Choctaw Tribal Court to serve as interim Chief Justice. The Tribal Council deems it necessary to appoint a Chief Justice pro-tem to hear cases tried by the Criminal Division of the Choctaw Tribal Court since the interim

see RESOLUTIONS, pg. 8

## Tribe receives HUD Grant

On Monday, May 22, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded \$95 million to 55 communities through the Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) Program. Grant funds may be used for infrastructure, community facilities, housing rehabilitation, economic development, and more to support Native American and Alaskan Native families on Indian reservations and in other Indian areas.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians were awarded \$688,559 to rehabilitate 30 homes to address overcrowding and housing shortages for low- and-mod-

erate income Tribal families.

"The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to sharing resources with Tribal communities so they can meet their own unique needs," said HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge. "The funding announced today will help make Tribal communities safer, healthier, and help families thrive."

The ICDBG program is a competitive grant that provides a range of eligible activities on reservations and related areas. Eligible activities include housing rehabilitation, land acquisition, roads, water and sewer facilities, and single or multipurpose community buildings.

**RESOLUTIONS ..... continued from page seven**

Chief Justice is prohibited from hearing cases appealed from that division. The Tribal Council does hereby amend the list of persons eligible to serve as Choctaw Supreme Court justices pro-tem by certifying Holly Peters to serve as a Choctaw Supreme Court justice pro-tem & to serve as Chief Justice pro-tem in all cases appealed from the Criminal Division of the Choctaw Tribal Court until a regularly appointed Chief Justice takes office. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Tribal Courts.

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-087**, authorizing a special recall election for Tribal Council Member Christopher Eaves in the Crystal Ridge Community, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution authorizes a special election on the question of recall in the Crystal Ridge Community for Council Member Christopher Eaves to be held on June 13, 2023, & to be conducted by the Tribal Election Com-*

*mittee in accordance with the Tribal Election Code. Pursuant to, Section 7 of Article VI of the Revised Constitution & Bylaws of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians & Section §33-3-3 of Title XXXIII (Choctaw Tribal Election Code) of the Tribal Code establishes the procedures for Community members to petition for the recall of a Tribal Council member elected by a Community to the Tribal Council. Should the recall be approved by the voters, Article VI, Sections 1 & 2, above, shall apply. For more information, please contact the Tribal Election Office.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-088 (B)**, rescinding Resolution CHO 21-106(B) & to designate sites in the Tucker Community for the development, maintenance, & administration of single-family housing units by Choctaw Housing Authority, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution allows to rescind Resolution CHO 21-106(B), which des-*

*ignated a one-acre site in the Tucker Community for the development, maintenance, & administration of a single-family housing unit by Choctaw Housing Authority, in which Choctaw Housing Authority now plans to develop, maintain & administer more than one-family housing unit on the initial one-acre site. The additional acre is needed to accommodate a wastewater treatment system that will adequately serve the proposed single-family housing units. For more information, please contact the Realty Program or the Choctaw Housing Authority.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-089**, confirming the judicial appointment of Anthony Drew Taylor as Criminal Court Judge to the Choctaw Tribal Courts, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution approves the confirmation of the Judicial Appointment of Anthony Drew Taylor, Criminal Court Judge, to fulfill a four-year term ending on the date of the Regular Call Tribal Council meeting on July 13, 2027, or until a successor has been duly nominated & confirmed for a subsequent term. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Tribal Courts.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-090**, confirming the Judicial Appointment of Peggy Gibson as Criminal Court Judge to the Choctaw Tribal Courts, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution approves the confirmation of the Judicial Appointment of Peggy Gibson, Criminal Court Judge, to fulfill a four-year term ending on the date of the Regular Call Tribal Council meeting on July 13, 2027, or until a successor has been duly nominated & confirmed for a*

*subsequent term. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Tribal Courts.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-091**, confirming the Judicial Appointment of Holly Peters as Youth Court Judge to the Choctaw Tribal Courts, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution approves the confirmation of the Judicial Appointment of Holly Peters, Youth Court Judge, to fulfill a four-year term ending on the date of the Regular Call Tribal Council meeting on July 13, 2027, or until a successor has been duly nominated & confirmed for a subsequent term. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Tribal Courts.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-092**, confirming the Judicial Appointment of Bradley Alex as Peacemaker Court Judge to the Choctaw Tribal Courts, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution approves the confirmation of the Judicial Appointment of Bradley Alex, Peacemaker Court Judge, to fulfill a four-year term ending on the date of the Regular Call Tribal Council meeting on July 13, 2027, or until a successor has been duly nominated & confirmed for a subsequent term. For more information, please contact the Choctaw Tribal Courts.*

**RESOLUTION CHO 23-093**, authorizing Travis Hedrick of Trident University International to conduct doctoral research on “The Perception of Tribal Leaders on the Impact of Education on Tribal Sovereignty and Governance”, was ADOPTED - 9 YES; 0 NO; 1 ABSTAIN; 7 ABSENT.

**SUMMARY:** *The Resolution*

**continued next page**

**TIAK HIKIYA CLUB ..... continued from page one**

Hikiya Unit to have their own permanent facility.

Renovations to the newly-opened Boys & Girls Club facility include new roofing and a fresh coat of paint, funded entirely with Tribal

funds. In addition, a new basketball court and volleyball court was built, funded by a \$15,000 donation from HUD/Choctaw Housing Authority funds and MBCI Tribal Community Project Fund.



*Standing Pine community members had a chance to tour the renovated facility & see all of the amenities the club has to offer.*



# Ribbon Cutting, Open House for New MBCI Vocational Rehabilitation Building



*Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben (standing third from left behind the ribbon), members of the Choctaw Tribal Council, 2022-2023 Choctaw Indian Princess Cadence Raine Nickey, Choctaw Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program staff & program recipients, & project partners, witnessed the cutting of the ribbon to officially open the new Personal & Vocational Adjustment Center Office building.*

CHOCTAW, Miss. – The Department of Workforce Development for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians hosted a ribbon cutting and open house for its new Personal and Vocational Adjustment Training Center Office building on Wednesday, May 3, 2023.

Tribal officials, including Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Council members, MBCI Workforce Development Director Terry Ben, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) Program Director Mary Lundy Meruvia, program staff and program service recipients, as well as project partners, were on hand to celebrate this new and much-needed facility to the Workforce Development program.

Personal and Vocational Adjustment Training prepares Tribal members who experi-

ence physical or mental conditions for competitive and integrated long-term employment. Real work contracts are used to train job seekers in real world employment expectations.

“This new facility will continue to advance the work that the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program does to serve Tribal members who utilize this program for specialized job training,” said Chief Ben. “The more resources we are able to provide to our training programs, the more opportunities our Tribal members will have to succeed by their own learned skills and talents – a true example of Choctaw Self-Determi-

nation.”

“The new Personal & Vocational Adjustment Training Office has been much needed for a long time for the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program,” said Workforce Development Director Terry Ben. “The previous doublewide trailer was old and unsafe for trainees and staff to use. We are thankful that the trainees and staff will have a new building to train and work out of. Furthermore, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the following persons and organizations for their part in the building of this new office: Chief Cyrus Ben, Members of the Choctaw Tribal Council, Office of Construction Management, IKBI, Mary Meruvia and others. Thank you!”

“The program staff and I were thrilled to have been able to play a part in the planning of this new office space funded by the Tribal Administration,” said VRS Program Director Mary Meruvia. “We believe this building will benefit and will be enjoyed by staff and clients who receive services from Vocational Rehabilitation for decades to come.”

The new addition is 1,590 square-feet of inside office

space (53’x30’) and includes a classroom/breakroom, four offices, a blueberry packing space, a restroom, one shower with laundry space for pesticide applicators, janitorial supply closet, and IT equipment storage closet. The facility is accessible to people with disabilities. There are three entrance/exit doors with porch, and an automatic door at the front entrance.

Construction on the new facility began in June 2022 and was completed in March of 2023. The architect on the project was William Crenshaw, and final inspection was performed by Brian Willis, both under the direction of Director Eddie Sam of Choctaw Construction Management.

Construction was by IKBI, Inc. The total cost of the project was \$349,356.84 – which was 100 percent provided by Tribal funds. The Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program is cooperatively funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education (Grant # H250M190002) and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

*authorizes Travis K Hedrick, a doctoral candidate at Trident University International to fulfill graduation requirements to conduct research titled “The Perception of Tribal Leaders on the Impact of Education on Tribal Sovereignty & Governance”. The results of this study shall be presented to the Tribal Chief & the Tribal Council & said research shall not be published or otherwise revealed without the permission of the Tribal Chief & Tribal Council. For more information, please*

*contact the Policy & Legislative Office.*

To request a copy of the Resolution and/or attachment, please fill out a request for a Resolution/Ordinance form available at [www.choctaw.org](http://www.choctaw.org) and submit it to the Policy & Legislative Office at [krystina.thompson@choctaw.org](mailto:krystina.thompson@choctaw.org) or [cheriena.ben@choctaw.org](mailto:cheriena.ben@choctaw.org).

Requests for attachments to Tribal Enrollment Resolutions will not be honored due to confidentiality rules.



### CHC Celebrates National Hospital Week

In celebration of National Hospital Week, the Choctaw Health Center held an appreciation luncheon & activities on Thursday, May 11, 2023. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & Tribal Council members Richard Sockey & Timothy Thomas, Sr. visited the staff & offered their appreciation for their hard work & dedication in their duties & compassionate care for the patients. Staff members had the option of lunch catered by Mando's, Pam Bam or a traditional Choctaw food stand. National Hospital Week is an opportunity to highlight hospitals, health systems & health care workers & the innovative ways they are supporting the needs of their community members.



### "Cultivating Kindness" at CRC

National Skilled Nursing Care Week was observed from May 14-20, 2023, as the Choctaw Residential Center (CRC) staff & residents celebrated with various activities throughout the week. This year's theme was "Cultivating Kindness" as the annual observance celebrates the essential role that skilled nursing care centers serve in providing safe & effective 24-hour nursing care to millions of individuals each year. The CRC staff & residents enjoyed a grill-out luncheon on Friday, May 19, & Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben made a stop to express his appreciation to the CRC staff & spent some time with the residents.

## SDPI Hosts 2 Mile Walk/Run

The 18th Annual Spring Into Fitness 2-Mile Fun Walk/Run was held on Saturday, March 18, 2023, at the parking lot of Geyser Falls Water Theme Park and on Blackjack Road in the Pearl River Community. This annual event was hosted by the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI).

Overall winners were Gavine Frazier (male) & Kylie Truss (female). Listed below is the overall winners and 1st & 2nd place finishers in each age category.

In the 7-Under Division - (male) 1st, Blake Billie; 2nd, Steven Bell; (female) 1st, Tayzlynn Hickman; 2nd, Teialyly Smith.

In the 8-12 Division - (male) 1st, Wyatt Chickaway; 2nd, Kazden Ben; (female) 1st, Arianna Charlie; 2nd, Aubery Wilson.

In the 13-18 Division - (male) 1st, Roman Charlie; 2nd, Kenzariah Chickaway; (female) 1st, Lakaylee Martin; 2nd, Elektra Tubby.

In the 19-29 Division -

(male) 1st, Dregan Joe; 2nd, Zach Tubby; (female) 1st, Jayna Ben; 2nd, Mariel Sam.

In the 30-39 Division - (male) 1st, Todd Stephens; 2nd, Nehemiah Lewis; (female) 1st, Ashley Edwards; 2nd, Belinda Cruz.

In the 40-49 Division - (male) 1st, Randy Tangle; 2nd, Bruce Jim; (female) 1st, April Allen; 2nd, Laura Dees.

In the 50-59 Division - (male) 1st, Nickey Charlie; 2nd, Gaylon Williams; (female) 1st, Melissa Charlie; 2nd, Gloria Willis.

In the 60-Over Division - (male) 1st, Kelly Miller; 2nd, Leonard Jimmie; (female) 1st, Cheryl Denson; 2nd, Ruthie Bell.




Overall winners, Gavine Frazier (left) & Kylie Truss.



## COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY ENDED ON MAY 11, 2023

The ending of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) allows us to celebrate and be optimistic that we are turning the corner from such a challenging time for our tribal communities.




### What will change at CHC?

- Decrease in data reporting starting May 19, 2023
- MBCI COVID-19 dashboard will report on a weekly basis
- COVID-19 Dashboard will transition to monthly reporting at a later date to be determined
- Data will continue to be tracked daily for COVID-19 trends
- CHC COVID-19 Hotline: Available Monday-Friday 8:00am-4:30pm. The weekend hotline service is discontinued
- \*CHC COVID-19 Hotline: 601-389-4109

### What will not change at CHC?

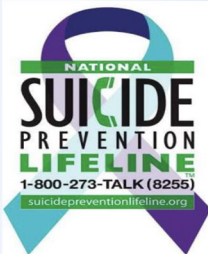

- Ending of PHE doesn't affect access to testing, vaccines, and COVID-19 treatments

Monitoring COVID-19 impact on our communities remains a priority. If needed, a rise in COVID-19 positivity will increase dashboard reporting. For more information on supplies and services still available at CHC, please scan the QR code.



# Covid->Meth->Suicide: The Cause and Effect

Crystal Meth use has sadly risen in many local areas. Meth use has numerous dangers and health risks. Not only to just one's physical body, but also to the mind and emotions. Drug use is a huge risk factor for suicide, and using meth specifically has been a contributing factor in the cause of suicide. Below, are a few more details of this cause and effect and how to reach out if anyone needs help in these areas. Please take care of your health, it is important!!

**Text HELLO to 741741**  
Free, 24/7, Confidential

A "Crisis" doesn't just mean suicide... it's any painful emotion for which you need support:  
Bullying • School Stress • Depression • Anxiety • Suicide Relationships • Friendships • Family Problems • Self-Harm

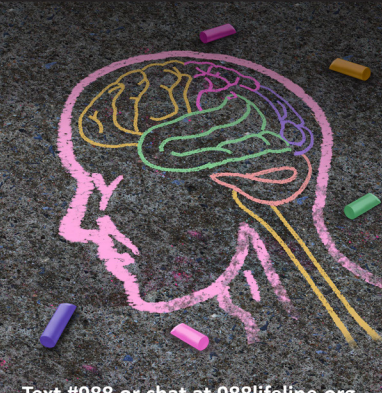
## Suicide Crisis Lifeline- (Text or Call) 988

- **Covid Affects:** Anxiety, depression, loneliness, sadness, substance abuse
- **Meth Risks:** dangers to your physical health, depression, hallucinations, hearing voices, paranoia that someone is trying to harm you
- **Suicide Risk:** harming yourself before someone can harm you, hopelessness

**COVID Hotline # 601-389-4075**

**COVID -19 Support Group: Thursday's 12:00-1:00, CHC Healing Grounds or Choctaw Behavioral Health Conference Room.**

Choctaw Youth Resilience Initiative (CYRI) from Behavioral Health Dept.  
210 Hospital Circle  
Choctaw, MS 39350  
Main Office: 601-389-4150  
Fax: 601-389-4152  
Hours: 8:00-4:30  
After hours: 601-389-4400



## Covid-19 no longer a Public Health Emergency— But we're still here!

Although Covid-19 is no longer a health emergency, lingering behavioral health symptoms can still be a concern. Choctaw Behavioral Health is here to offer mental health support when needed.

Choctaw Behavioral Health is open Monday through Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm, and our phone number is (601)389-4150. If a crisis arises after these hours or on a holiday, go to CHC ER and ask to speak with the Behavioral Health On-Call worker.

Text #988 or chat at 988lifeline.org



## Mental Health Wellness

This time of year, gardens are blooming. Plants need certain things- like water, sunlight, and nutrients- in order to stay healthy. Our minds also need to be nurtured in order to stay healthy.

Mental health is one of your greatest assets. It helps you focus, overcome obstacles, and have a good relationship with the people around you.

Here are 10 proven tools that can help you feel stronger and more hopeful:

- Connect with others
- Stay positive
- Get physically active
- Help others
- Get enough sleep
- Create joy and satisfaction
- Eat well
- Take care of your spirit

Deal better with hard times (journal, shift your thinking)

- Get professional help if you need it – Call Choctaw Behavioral Health at (601)389-4150, Monday-Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm

**Your mind is a garden your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers or you can grow weeds**




## Mental Health Awareness

Take a look at these Self-Care Tips!



1. Deep Breaths in and out 3-5 times when you feel upset or anxious.
2. Try to eat healthy and drink water avoiding alcohol or drugs (Substances can only ultimately make you feel worse).
3. Make sure you are getting good sleep and rest, a warm bath before bed can aid in feeling relaxed at night.
4. Practice good hygiene and take extra care of your body. Confidence can help. "When you look good, you feel good"
5. Go for a walk for 30 minutes a day (or some physical activity) - stretch before and after.
6. If you are feeling stressed, have a quiet time to pray, meditate, read, or write down your thoughts in a journal.
7. Contact Behavioral Health for support or professional help. Find helpful sermons, videos, messages, or podcasts to listen to. You are not alone. Even if you feel like no one understands, be brave and reach out for help. There are safe ways to feel better.
8. Try not to feel guilty about how you are feeling. Taking time to care for yourself is important so you can feel your best and be your best for those around you. You have a purpose in this life and there are people rooting for you. Never give up.
9. Talk to a supportive family member, or a friend that you trust, about your life and how you are feeling. We are all human.
10. Remember to rest in the fact that there is always hope. Never forget there is always someone who loves and cares for you

## Let's Talk About Opioids

### What are opioids?

Opioids are a type of drug mostly used to reduce pain, including chronic headaches, backaches, post- surgery, or other injury.


### There are two main kinds of opioids...

#### Prescription opioids


Are effective for managing pain. They also may have serious risks and side effects if misused, including anxiety, depression, addiction, and overdose. Common ones include oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, methadone, codeine, and fentanyl.

#### Illegal opioids

Include heroin and diverted fentanyl, which have increased in use across the U.S. among most age groups. Continued use can lead to addiction, overdose, and increased risks for HIV and hepatitis B and C. Traces of fentanyl have been found in other substances. Opioid overdose can occur if people use other drugs.



**For more information:**  
Contact Behavioral Health  
@ 601-389-4150



## CCHS Hosts 2023 Graduation Ceremony

Choctaw Central High School (CCHS) hosted graduation ceremonies honoring 108 members of the Class of 2023 on Tuesday, May 16, at the Silver Star Convention Center in Choctaw. CCHS Principal Alaric Keams welcomed the audience as he said the occasion was about celebrating the seniors and their milestones.

“When I look at our graduating class, I see our future doctors, future educators, & future leaders of the Tribe,” said Keams. “I hate to see our seniors leave CCHS, but I’m excited about what the future holds for them.”

Senior Kaydee Taylor presented the invocation as Conehatta Elementary School students Namiayah Tubby and Zoe Chick-away performed the National Anthem in Choctaw.

In his remarks to the graduates, Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben told them to embrace this moment because they earned it.

“I know this year has flown by, but I’m going to tell you, the rest of life can fly by within a blink of an eye. As it has been stated many times, the challenges that we

faced, you seniors had four years of the most unique high school career anyone had ever had.”

Recalling how COVID-19 had affected life worldwide, CCHS students overcame great challenges to continue to pursue their educational goals. Chief Ben then read a quote by the late Helen Keller, “*Optimism is a fate that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.*”

“As I look at the senior class, I saw that hope and confidence as you went through these four years. Tonight, we celebrate you. We know the next chapter of your life will come with many successes,” said Chief Ben.

Salutatorian Jaeon Johnson, 18-year-old son of Jeron and Latricia Johnson of the Conehatta Community, thanked everyone for supporting the graduates as they now venture into new journeys.

“As we say goodbye to this institution, we reminisce on the memories we created here. For all of us, this departure is a reminder that time doesn’t stop for anyone,” said Johnson.



Class of 2023 Salutatorian Jaeon Johnson (left) & Valedictorian Kaisen Edwards.

“We faced an unexpected pandemic that impacted everyone and our high school years, yet we persevered. That determination is what I admire about my people. We continue to move forward despite our difficulties.”

Among Johnson’s accolades are the ACT Award, December 2022 Rotary Student of the Month, and WTOK-TV’s All Scholastic Sports Team. He was a member of the Warriors football, soccer, baseball and golf

see GRADUATION, pg. 17

## Choctaw tribal members hope to inspire next generation

MERIDIAN, Miss.—Two outstanding graduates at Mississippi State University hope their stories of perseverance & resilience inspire others who live on the eight reservations of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

Jade Willis of Bogue Chitto & Edward Routh of Choctaw recently were honored as the spring semester’s outstanding undergraduate student & outstanding graduate student, respectively, for MSU-Meridian’s Division of Education.

Despite losing several family members over the past few years, Willis has been determined to rise above her circumstances & complete her elementary education degree. She becomes one of a handful of Native American educators on the Bogue Chitto reservation.

For the past two decades, Routh has used his influence as assistant football coach at Choctaw Central High School to encourage players to go to college & better themselves.



Jade Willis (left) was named Outstanding Undergraduate Student for the Division of Education. Edward Routh (right) was named Outstanding Graduate Student for the Division of Education.

(Photos courtesy of Lisa Sollie, MSU-Meridian)

get a degree, but in the back of my mind I kept thinking how hypocritical I sounded,” said Routh, who withdrew from East Central Community College in 2001 to join the Army.

“Alaric Keams, principal of Choctaw Central High School, is one of those young men I invested in,” Routh added. “He’s now my boss & is one of the driving forces

behind my push to finish. He said to me, ‘you told me to do it—now you need to step up.’”

Routh spent seven years serving his country & several more in law enforcement on the reservation before he returned to ECCC in 2018 to complete his associate degree. Eager to finish strong, he transferred to MSU-Meridian where he earned an undergraduate degree in interdisciplinary studies, & last month the 53-year-old veteran completed a Master of Arts in Teaching Secondary Education. He also was promoted to head football coach—& this fall will be a physical education teacher at his alma mater as well.

“It’s no longer just words, you know; I can tell those young men, without hesitation, they need to pursue their dreams & it will happen if they educate themselves,” he said. “With many Native Americans on the reservation, college was never even discussed—you were expected to work or

see MSU GRADUATES, pg. 17

# Congratulations!

# Class of 2023



**LaShawn Amos**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



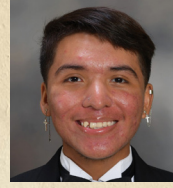
**Amzie Anderson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**BreeAnna Anderson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Haygen Anderson**  
Choctaw Central High School



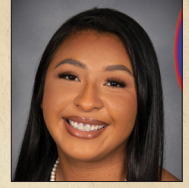
**Kaiden Anderson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Layjah Anderson**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Natayah Anderson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Nautica Bacon**  
Neshoba Central High School



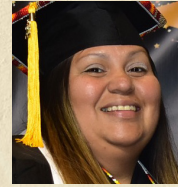
**Barbara Bell**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Braylen Bell**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Cayari Bell**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Constance Bell**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Jakiah Bell**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Rachel Bell**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Shelbi Bell**  
East Central Community College



**Tushka Bell**  
Choctaw Central High School



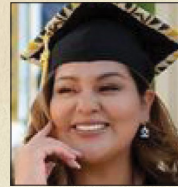
**Elliana Ben**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Grant Ben**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Kyzer Ben**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Lauren Ben**  
Mississippi College



**Sabian Ben**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



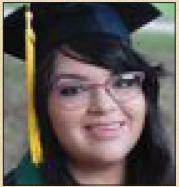
**Thomas Ben**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Zander Ben**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Audrianna Billy**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Cheyenne Billy**  
Baylor University



**Tyra Billy**  
Choctaw Central High School



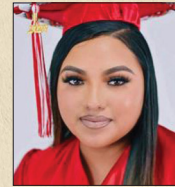
**Landon Bounds**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Jathan Briscoe**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Ayers Chickaway**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Jasanel Chickaway**  
Riverside Indian School



**Regina Chickaway**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Zachariah Chickaway**  
Choctaw Central High School



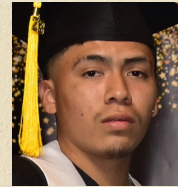
**Angel Clemmons**  
Nanah Waiya Attendance Center



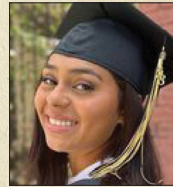
**Caleb Clemons**  
Choctaw Central High School



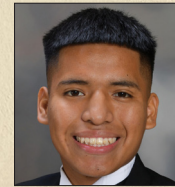
**Lauren Clemons**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Skydon Comby**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Sierra Cook**  
Salmen High School



**Abram Cotton**  
Choctaw Central High School



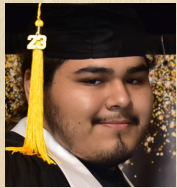
**Iyanna Cotton**  
Riverdale High School



**Delycia Cunningham**  
Choctaw Central High School



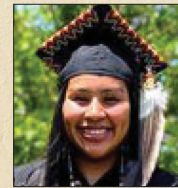
**Tinsley Dan**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Manuel Davila**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



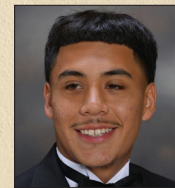
**Melody Denson-Steve**  
Mississippi State University



**Kaedre Denson**  
East Central Community College



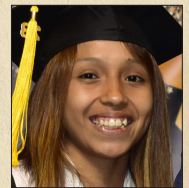
**Olivia Denson**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



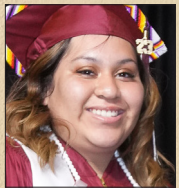
**Reilly Denson**  
Choctaw Central High School



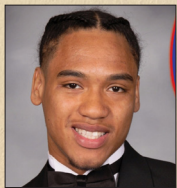
**Colen Dixon**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Dallaray Dixon**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Haven Dixon**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Isaiah Dixon**  
Neshoba Central High School



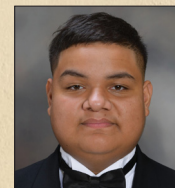
**Mataeya Dixon**  
Neshoba Central High School



**William Dreifuss**  
Neshoba Central High School



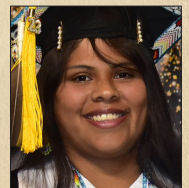
**Kaisen Edwards**  
Choctaw Central High School



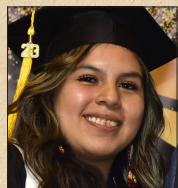
**Johann Espinosa**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Nickolas Farmer**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Shatina Farmer**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Bridgette Farve**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



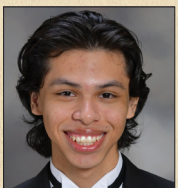
**Hunter Farve**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Arral Frazier**  
Choctaw Central High School



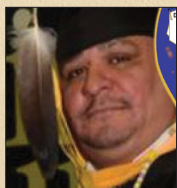
**Bishop Frazier**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Jacob Frazier**  
Choctaw Central High School



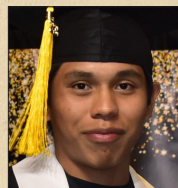
**Trevor Frazier**  
Choctaw Central High School



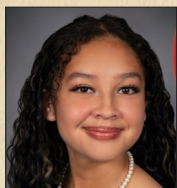
**Robert Garcia, Jr.**  
Mississippi College



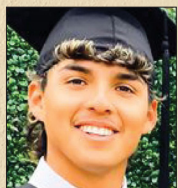
**Saylor Gibson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Cory Hall, Jr.**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



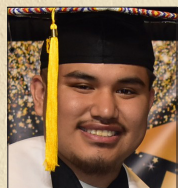
**Tamaya Hampton**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Ramie Harrison**  
East Central Community College



**Erin Henry**  
Neshoba Central High School



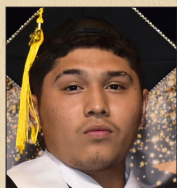
**Milton Henry, Jr.**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



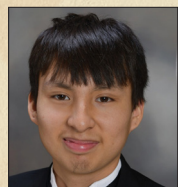
**Bonifacio Hernandez**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Destini Hernandez**  
Fort Lewis College



**Leighton Hernandez**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Christian Hickman**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Terrca Hickman**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Shaylynn Hunter**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Breanna Isaac**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Jordan Isaac**  
Mississippi College



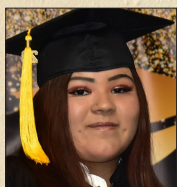
**Mylena Isaac**  
Neshoba Central High School



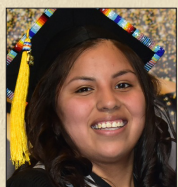
**Xander, Vatinna & John Isaac**  
Tucker Elementary School  
Pre-K & Kindergarten



**Aison Jim**  
Choctaw Central High School



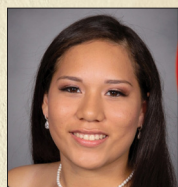
**Aleshanee Jim**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Atlantia Jim**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Catherine Jim**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Claysia Jim**  
Neshoba Central High School



**Mahle Jim**  
Riverside Indian School



**McKinley Jim**  
Neshoba Central High School



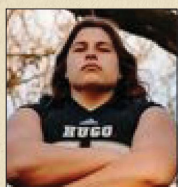
**Channing Jimmie**  
Choctaw Central High School



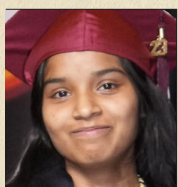
**Jeriah Jimmie**  
Choctaw Central High School



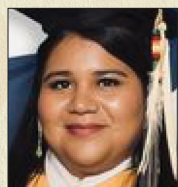
**Caleb Joe**  
Hugo High School



**Noah Joe**  
Hugo High School



**Christy John**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Gabriella John**  
Baylor University



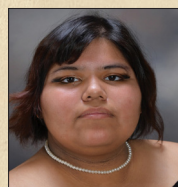
**Myleeyah John**  
Choctaw Central High School



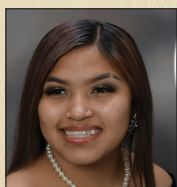
**Addison Johnson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Jaeon Johnson**  
Choctaw Central High School



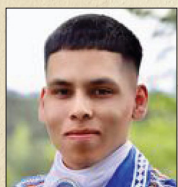
**Kattilyn Johnson**  
Choctaw Central High School



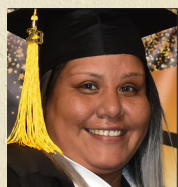
**Kaylynn Johnson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Mathias Johnson**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Zarius Johnson**  
Newton County High School



**DeAnnie King**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Emalayah King**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Leonard Kopaddy**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Gage Lewis**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Ian Lewis**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Kristen Lewis**  
Meridian Community College



**Rayshaun Lewis**  
Choctaw Central High School



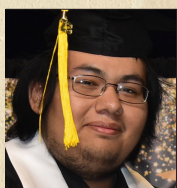
**Ayauna Littlejohn**  
Northwest Rankin High School



**Claire Lopez**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Rella Lopez**  
Choctaw Central High School



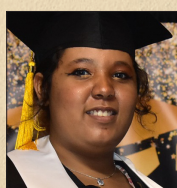
**Deangelo Lovato**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



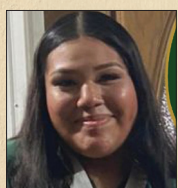
**Lexie Love**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Isabelle Luis**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Kaidence Marshall**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



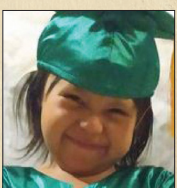
**Juleeanna Mathias**  
West Jones High School



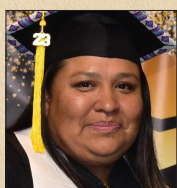
**Odessa McCurley**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



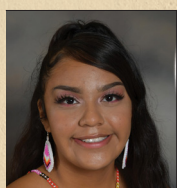
**Cadee McMillan**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Kayelin McMillan**  
Tucker Early Childcare Center



**Marguerita McMillan**  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



**Tysheena McMillan**  
Choctaw Central High School



**Braylon McMillian**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Ruben Mendez**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Jaykwon Miller**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



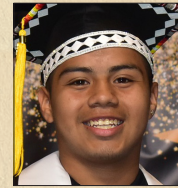
**Caleb Mingo**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



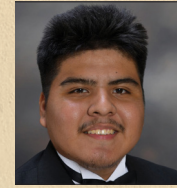
**Demyais Mingo**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



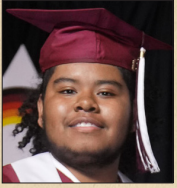
**Destiny Montoya-Hickman**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



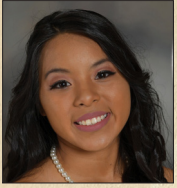
**Silvio Morales**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Brendon Morris**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Emerald Morris**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Malaka Morris**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



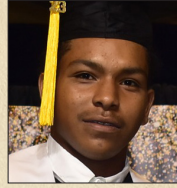
**Ethan Nanaeto**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Haley Nelson**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Taelyn Nickey**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



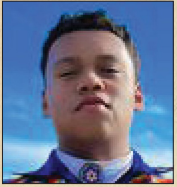
**Daylen Perkins**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Mandy Proctor**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Beautiful Reed**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Delontae Reed**  
Red Water Elementary  
School - 8th Grade



**Lilah Reynolds**  
Cherokee  
High School



**Braxton Roach**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Megan Rocha**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



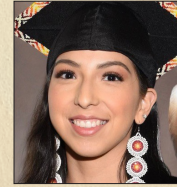
**Frederick Rush**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



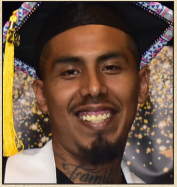
**Trista Sam**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Dorothy Secatero**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



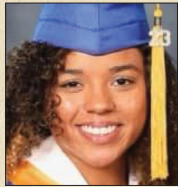
**Katelyn Shoemake**  
Mississippi State  
University



**Brandon Shumake**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Braylon Smith**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Rodezah Smith**  
Kemper County  
High School



**Jaleann Sockey**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Quintin Sockey**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Tyden Sockey**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Elygin Solomon**  
Dobson  
High School



**Tessa Standing Elk**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



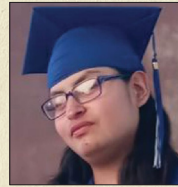
**Hailee Stephens**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Jada Steve**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



**James Steve**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Jassam Steve**  
Maine East  
High School



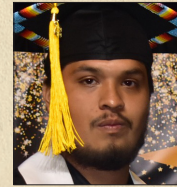
**Demidrea Stokes**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**MaTayah Stokes**  
Tucker Elementary  
School - K



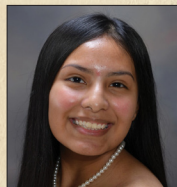
**Taiton Stokes**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



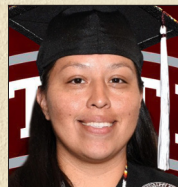
**Malata Stoliby**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Aaliyah Tahawah**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



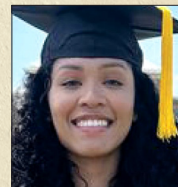
**Kadee Taylor**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Tashina Taylor**  
Mississippi State  
University



**Zachary Taylor**  
Northwest Rankin  
High School



**Meloney Thames**  
Jones  
College



**Alexis Thomas**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



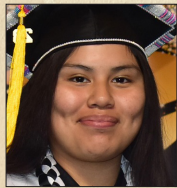
**Isaiah Thomas**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



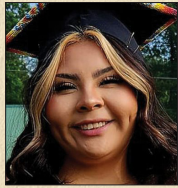
**Kierstyn Thomas**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



**Nazlyn Thomas**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Sharyl Thomas**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



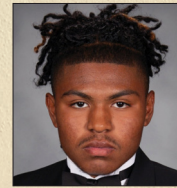
**Tazanna Thomas**  
Northeast Jones  
High School



**Vanessa Thomas**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Kookie Thompson-Steve**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



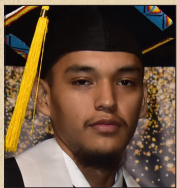
**Keegan Thompson**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



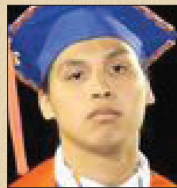
**Spencer Thompson**  
Neshoba Central  
High School



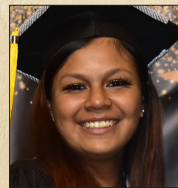
**Sirena Townsend**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Chadwick Tsosie, Jr.**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**Chaz Tubby**  
Newton County  
High School



**Dawnanna Tubby**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



**DeShaylee Tubby**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Elaine Tubby**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Elektra Tubby**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Geyser Tubby**  
Choctaw Central  
High School



**Shelley Tubby**  
Choctaw Virtual  
Learning Center



Synetha Tubby  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Tigel Tubby  
Choctaw Central High School



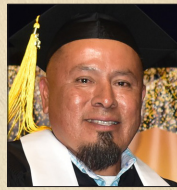
Waniya Tubby  
Choctaw Central High School



Gannon Vaughn  
Choctaw Central High School



Johnny Vaughn II  
Choctaw Central High School



Johnny Vaughn  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Zackariah Waiter  
Neshoba Central High School



Jasmine Wallace  
Choctaw Central High School



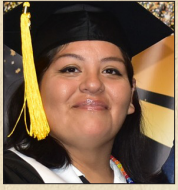
Kacie Wallace  
Choctaw Central High School



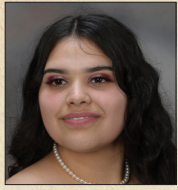
Keshahn Wallace  
Choctaw Central High School



Sean Wallace  
Choctaw Central High School



Shilandrea Wallace  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



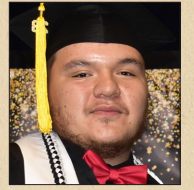
Cheyanne Weeks  
Choctaw Central High School



Brydon Wesley-LaSarge  
Choctaw Central High School



Talia Wesley  
Central High School



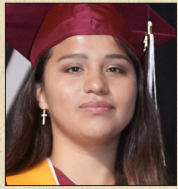
Tristan Whitacre  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Bjorn Williams, Jr.  
Choctaw Central High School



Brendon Williams  
Choctaw Central High School



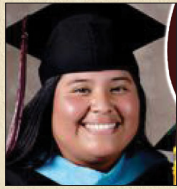
Janina Williams  
Choctaw Central High School



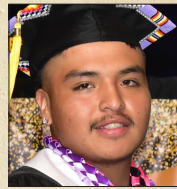
Omar Williams  
Neshoba Central High School



Patsden Williams  
Neshoba Central High School



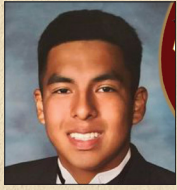
Ashland "Coby" Willis  
Mississippi State University



Azarie Willis  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



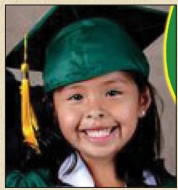
CeAnna Willis  
Riverside Indian School



Coby Willis  
Cherokee High School



Denelle Willis  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Jacaiya Willis  
Tucker Elementary School - Pre-K



Kalen Willis  
Riverside Indian School



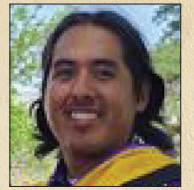
Kobe Willis  
Choctaw Central High School



Ozzie Willis  
University of Southern California



Peyton Willis  
Choctaw Central High School



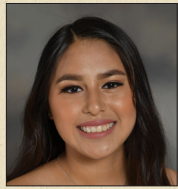
Reyes Willis  
Avila University



Robin Willis III  
Choctaw Central High School



Sally Willis  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Sierra Willis  
Choctaw Central High School



Tanyon Willis  
Choctaw Central High School



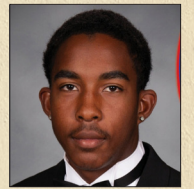
Tariq Willis  
Riverside Indian School



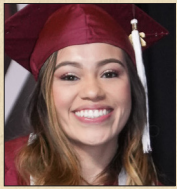
Breely Wilson  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Cali Wilson  
Choctaw Central High School



Dakiren Wilson  
Neshoba Central High School



Kerri Wilson  
Choctaw Central High School



Laken Wilson  
Jones College



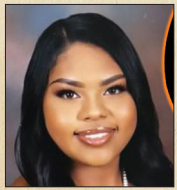
Marissa Wilson  
Choctaw Virtual Learning Center



Phoenix Wilson  
Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science



Tradon Wilson  
Choctaw Central High School



Jamae Wright  
Leake Central High School



Timothy York, Jr.  
Choctaw Central High School

**CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATE!**



*Congratulations to Melody Morgan Denson on receiving your Master's Degree from Mississippi State University on Friday, May 12, 2023. Ceremonies were held at Davis-Wade Stadium in Starkville. Congratulations! From Mom, Hallie, Onna, & your village!*

*Beaded Graduation Cap Display*

*4-H would like to showcase the work of our talented Choctaw Artisans. We will have a display for beaded graduation caps, during the 73rd Choctaw Indian Fair. If you would like to have your cap displayed, please bring it to Ronald Gibson at the Department of Natural Resource Building before July 5, 2023*



**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:  
RONALD GIBSON OR CANDY JIMMIE AT 601-656-2070**



**GRADUATION ..... continued from page twelve**

teams, CCHS Pow Wow Club, Chess Club and the Chahta Alla Youth Council. He plans to attend the University of Mississippi and major in chemistry. He would like to become the first Tribal member to be an orthodontist.

Valedictorian Kaisen Edwards, 18-year-old son of Kevin and Miriam Edwards of the Red Water Community, looked back at his first day at Choctaw Central in 2019 and overcoming the challenges of the pandemic soon after.

“As our school year progressed, we were met with the obstacle of COVID-19. Our school year was halted. The effects of COVID-19 lingered into our sophomore year,” said Edwards. “Today, I look back at our junior and senior years and think about how fast those years flew by. Everybody

says high school years go by in a flash, and while its a cliché, that statement is the truth.”

Edwards told his fellow graduates to cherish not only this moment, but the time they have left.

“Many of our futures include attending colleges, trade school, entering the workforce, or serving our country through the military. Which ever plan you decide on, just know we are all cheering you on,” Edwards said.

Edwards' accolades include being selected as the January 2023 Rotary Club Student of the Month, East Central Community College Dean's List, and 4th Place in Language Arts at the State BETA Convention. In addition to the BETA Club, Kaisen was also a member of the ACT 25+ Club,

Chess Club and the Chahta Alla Youth Council. He will attend East Central Community College in the fall, then attend Mississippi State University. He plans to have a career in education and eventually serve as a school principal.

Rounding out the Top Ten highest academically-ranked seniors were Deshaylee Tubby, Demidrea Stokes, Kaydee Taylor, Thomas Ben, Delycia Cunningham, Haygen Anderson, Landon Bounds, and Elli-ana Ben.

After the presentation of diplomas to the seniors and tokens of appreciation were handed out by the Choctaw Tribal Council, senior class treasurer Natayah Anderson offered the benediction. Principal Keams then announced to the audience the proud graduates of the Class of 2023.

**MSU GRADUATES ..... continued from page twelve**

go into the military. While I've been trying to change that narrative with my players, I've also changed it for my own family. My daughter was recently accepted into dental school at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, & my wife earned her MBA.”

Willis's dream as a young girl was to be a teacher. Her mom encouraged her by printing out worksheets for her teddy bears & helping her “grade” their papers. When her mom died during Willis's senior year of high school, she thought her dream had too.

Instead of pursuing an elementary education degree, Willis began her educational journey as a business major, attending MSU-Meridian to live at home & help her sister care for their grandmother. Then her sister died from COVID, bringing Willis to the realization she truly needed to follow her dream.

“Teaching is my passion. And every time I've walked down the hallways of Bogue Chitto Elementary this past year—first as a teacher assistant through MSU-Meridian's Professional Advancement Network for Teachers & Administrators initiative, & this past semester as a student intern—my mind has been flooded with memories,” said Willis. “This is the school I attended all the way through the eighth grade, & although I had great teachers, I realized I didn't see a lot that looked like me—only teacher assistants.”

Willis wants to change that.

“I'm trying to make these young kids more aware of the value of an education & the importance of their heritage as well. Right now, they may think I'm just another Choctaw kid living on the reservation, but when they see me as an actual teacher in my own classroom this fall, that's huge,” she explained. “I've told my students all year—we can always be more than we think we are. I want their eyes open to the opportunities & possibilities that are out there, & maybe one day they will be inspired to return to the reservation & be an educator too.”

Although the road to success for both Willis & Routh may have been arduous at times, they are grateful for all the help & support they've received along the way.

“My wife & daughter have been great, as well as everyone at Choctaw Central High School, & the G.V. ‘Sonny’ Montgomery Center for America's Veterans at Mississippi State was amazing,” said Routh. “Any time I needed assistance they were there, & the same goes for the faculty & instructors at MSU-Meridian,” he added. “And if that wasn't enough, I didn't incur any debt thanks to the Tribal Scholarship Program & the G.I. Bill. It's truly been an amazing journey.”

After she had already lost, over time, her mother, two uncles & her sister, Willis was broken when her last uncle died during fi-

nals in the summer of 2021.

“It was overwhelming. I had been his sole caretaker as well as my grandmother's, & since he was the last of her children, it was left to me to plan his funeral,” Willis said. “And all while trying to study & prepare for my exams & concerned how my grandmother was holding up—I just couldn't handle it all.”

Her faculty advisor, Ksenia Zhbanova, urged the then 21-year-old not to give up, but encouraged her to sit out the fall semester—using that time to regroup & heal. While doing so, in September 2021, Willis's grandmother also died. But in spring 2022, Willis was readmitted into MSU-Meridian's elementary education program.

“Many of the students I had this past year have life experiences like my own. I understand where they are coming from & what they are going through,” Willis said. “And because I do, I believe that knowledge will help me be more effective in my own classroom. That's why I want to stay with Choctaw Tribal School System for my entire teaching career so I can inspire the next generation & give back to my community. My family always knew I could do it—this diploma is proof they were right.”

For more about MSU-Meridian, visit [www.meridian.msstate.edu](http://www.meridian.msstate.edu).

Mississippi State University is taking care of what matters. Learn more at [www.msstate.edu](http://www.msstate.edu).



## Espinoza Receives Band Honors

*Congratulations to Delvin R. Espinoza as he was honored during Neshoba Central Middle School Band's award banquet night. Among the honors he received included the Director's Cup Award, Platinum Merit Award, Joe Berry Mullins Band Competition - All Superior Award, Scott County Band Award, Queen City Band Award, & the Red Band Award - NCMS. Congratulations Dre! From your family.*

## HINU announces new president

WASHINGTON – Dr. Francis Arpan, a citizen of the Yankton Sioux Tribe, will serve as the new president of Haskell Indian Nations University. Founded in 1884, Haskell is a national center for Indian education, research, & cultural preservation located in Lawrence, Kansas.

“The Haskell National Board of Regents is very excited to welcome Dr. Arpan as our new Haskell Indian Nations University president,” said Brittany Hall, president of the Haskell Indian Nations Board of Regents. “We look forward to seeing him lead Haskell into the next era, build partnerships in Indian Country, & be a role model for our students, staff, & faculty.”

Arpan joined the faculty at Haskell in May 2022 as the vice president of academics. He previously served as the dean of academics at Sisseton Wahpeton College. He also gained professorial experience at the University of South Dakota, South Dakota State University, Aims Community College, & Southern New Hampshire University.

“Dr. Arpan comes to Haskell with a record of success in el-

evating the quality of higher education,” said Tony Dearman, director of the Bureau of Indian Education. “We look forward to Dr. Arpan’s leadership as he champions the university’s future as it shapes the next generation of American Indian leadership.”

Arpan plans to focus his vision for Haskell Indian Nations University on expanding opportunities for Tribal students across the country & creating a student-centered environment where all can develop professionally & personally to bring about an exciting & transformative learning environment.

“My career in higher education is rooted in a foundation of increasing resources & opportunities for all. What excites me the most about the position of president at Haskell Indian Nations University is the opportunity to continue working with Native students as they strive to attain their greatest capabilities & potential,” said Dr. Arpan.

“Higher education & educational attainment directly affect individuals' life opportunities. As an academic & now Haskell president, I am excited to broaden our university’s role in actively working with Indigenous communities,” Arpan added.

## CCHS Hosts Signing Ceremony

On May 5, 2023, several (Mississippi Delta Community College); Taiton Stokes & Brydon Wesley-LaSarge (Millsaps College). Soccer: (Girls) Audrianna Billy (Tougaloo College); (Boys) Aison Jim (East Mississippi Community College). Softball: Tyra Billy (Blue Mountain College). Baseball: Gage Lewis & Braylon McMillian (Southeastern Baptist College).

On May 5, 2023, several CCHS seniors signed letters of intent to continue their educational & athletic careers at their respective colleges. Members of the CCHS coaching staff gave congratulatory speeches on the seniors’ successes & Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben wished them well on their new journeys. Congratulations to the following signees, along with their respective sport & college destination.

Football: Gannon Vaughn

PICTURES NEXT PAGE

## Tribal Athletes Place at State Track Meet



**LEFT**, Congratulations to Choctaw Central's Andrew Cotton as he claimed a state championship in shot put during the MHSAA Class 4A State Track & Field Meet in Pearl. It is the first time ever in school history for 4A boys! **RIGHT**, The 4x800 Warriors relay team, comprised of Brennon Henry, Diontray Tubby, Cali Wilson, & Jayce Sam, earned silver medals while also setting 4A school history at the state track championships.



**LEFT**, Congratulations to Neshoba Central High School Lady Rockets track members Kyli Truss, Natalia Jones, & Katelin Williams as they competed in the MHSAA Class 5A State Track & Field Meet in Pearl. In the 3200 meter run, Kyli placed 2nd & Katelin placed 4th. **RIGHT**, Congratulations to Treylon Ricks of Leake County High School Gators track team as he competed in the MHSAA Class 1A State Track & Field Meet in Pearl. He placed 5th in the 110m hurdles, 2nd in the 4x100 relay, 1st in the 300m hurdles, & 5th in the 4x400 relay.



Mississippi Delta Community College signee Gannon Vaughn & family.



Blue Mountain College signee Tyra Billy & family.



Millsaps College signee Taiton Stokes & family.



Southeastern Baptist College signee Gage Lewis & family.



Millsaps College signee Brydon Wesley-LaSarge & family.



Southeastern Baptist College signee Braylon McMillian & family.



Tougaloo College signee Audrianna Billy & family.



East Mississippi Community College signee Aison Jim & family.

### Jim signs with Blue Mountain College

Congratulations to Choctaw Central High School's Catherine Jim as she recently signed her intent to continue her academic & athletic career with the Blue Mountain College Toppers powerlifting & soccer programs in Blue Mountain, Miss. Best wishes & good luck on your future endeavors.



### Wright signs with Jones College

Congratulations to Jamae Wright of Leake Central High School as she recently committed to continue her academic & athletic career with the Jones College Bobcats basketball program in Ellisville, Miss. Best wishes & good luck on your future endeavors.





**Williams signs with Belhaven University**

*Neshoba Central High School Rocket student athlete Omar Williams signed his intent to continue his academic & athletic career as a member of the Belhaven University Blazer track team next fall. Williams was joined by his family, coaches, officials, & friends during a signing held on Thursday, May 4, 2023. While at Neshoba Central, Omar was a member of the cross-country team, soccer team & the track team. Congratulations & best wishes in your future endeavors!*



**Williams signs with Mississippi College**

*On Thursday, May 17, 2023, Neshoba Central High School Rocket student athlete Patsden Williams signed his intent to continue his academic & athletic career as a member of the Mississippi College Choctaws basketball team next fall. Family, friends, officials, teammates, & coaches joined Patsden as they congratulated him on his achievement. Best of luck in your future endeavors!*



**Willis signs with Phoenix College**

*Congratulations to CeAnna Willis, out of Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Okla., as she signed a letter of intent to continue her academic & athletic career next season as a member of the Phoenix College Bears basketball program in Phoenix, Arizona.*



**Jim signs with Coffeyville CC**

*Congratulations to Mahle Jim, out of Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Okla., as she signed a letter of intent to continue her academic & athletic career next season as a member of the Coffeyville Community College Red Ravens basketball program in Coffeyville, Kansas.*

**Beaulieu signs with Blue Mountain**

*Congratulations to East Central Community College Lady Warriors sophomore softball player Shante Beaulieu as she signed her intent to continue her academic & athletic career with the Blue Mountain College Toppers softball program. This past season, Beaulieu had a .260 hitting average with 34 hits, 5 doubles, a triple, a homerun, 23 RBI, & a stolen base.*



**Farve, Willis named to All-MACCC Team**

*Congratulations to Holmes Community College Lady Bulldogs softball team members Iris Farve & Elleigh Willis as they were named to the All-MACCC (Mississippi Association of Community Colleges Conference) Teams following the 2023 campaign. Farve, sophomore designated player, was named Second Team as she finished the season as the leading hitter with a .427 average with 61 hits, including 15 doubles, nine homeruns, & 46 RBI. Willis, sophomore pitcher, was named Honorable Mention as she was 12-7 on the mound with 78 strikeouts in 127 innings. She also batted .302 with 39 hits, including four doubles, one triple, two home runs, & 29 RBI. All-MACCC Teams were selected following a vote of the league's head coaches.*



Iris Farve (left) & Elleigh Willis.

## Fielder to play in All-Star game

*Congratulations to Hama'ya Fielder as she was one of the top 40 NJCAA players selected to participate in the 15th annual NJCAA Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) All-Star Weekend, July 20-23, at Clayton State University in Morrow, GA. Fielder, a rising sophomore with the Pearl River Community College Lady Wildcats basketball team, is a former standout with the Neshoba Central Lady Rockets basketball team. As a freshman at PRCC, she averaged 8.2 points, 2.5 rebounds, & 1.2 steals per game.*



## ECCC season ends at DII World Series

*The East Central Community College Warriors concluded their extraordinary 2023 baseball season with a heartbreaking loss to the Frederick Community College Cougars, 11-10, at the NJCAA Division II World Series in Enid, Okla., on Sunday, May 28. Despite the loss, the Warriors had a remarkable journey that saw them earn both the MACCC & NJCAA Region 23 championships, finishing the season with 37 wins & 20 losses. Sophomore Ramie Harrison, a former standout with the Neshoba Central Rockets, was honored during the Region 23 Tournament as he was named MVP as he went 9-for-18 (.500 avg) with 4 doubles, 3 runs, 5 RBIs, 3 walks, & a stolen base.*



## Lady Knights win Class 4A Championship

*Congratulations to the West Lauderdale Lady Knights softball team as they defeated North Pike 11-0 to claim the 2023 MHSAA Class 4A State Softball Championship on Thursday, May 18, at the University of Southern Mississippi Softball Complex in Hattiesburg. Congratulations to team member Courtney Lewis, daughter of Shiela Frazier, on her & her team's accomplishments!*

## Lady Wolves Win First Ever National Championship

The Copiah-Lincoln Community College softball team entered the final day of the 2023 season knowing one thing... a familiar foe stood in their way from winning the first national championship in school history as they faced off against Jones College one final time. The Lady Wolves handed the Bobcats just their second shutout of the season winning, 7-0, on Saturday, May 27, in Spartanburg, S.C.

"What a day!!! I am so blessed & grateful to be a part of this team & program," stated Co-Lin head coach Meleah Howard. "To be a part of the first

national championship in school history is a memory that will last a lifetime."

The Lady Wolves scored their first two runs in the top of the third as Zykeria Cole (Magee) & Josie Meggs (Kosciusko) hit back-to-back singles to get the offense going. Cole then scored on an RBI single by Madison Moak (Brookhaven) while both Meggs & Moak advanced to third & second respectively. Meggs later scored on a wild pitch making the score, 2-0.



The Lady Wolves then exploded for another five-run inning against the Bobcats, their second in as many games, as Meggs hit a leadoff single then Moak drew a walk. Maddie Weeks (Clinton) drew another walk to load the bases. Then Abby Grace Richardson smashed a grand slam (her 24th home run of the season) to give the Lady Wolves a 6-0 lead.

Belle West (Byram) singled, took second on a wild pitch, advanced to third on a single by Faith Kivett (Tallulah, LA) & scored on a sacrifice bunt by Leia Phillips (Choctaw) making the score, 7-0.

The Bobcats got back-to-back singles in the bottom of the fifth, but a double play

# MUW Softball finishes as USCAA runner-up

In a magical run through the United States Collegiate Athletic Association (USCAA) Softball Small College World Series, the Mississippi University for Women finally ran out of rabbits to pull from its hat versus No. 2-seed Penn State University-Brandywine, 10-9, in the championship game on Thursday, May 18, 2023, in DuBois, Penn.

The No. 9-seeded Owls (26-20) far-and-away exceeded ex-

pectations by the ranking committee, but certainly not of themselves.

The W team quickly won the hearts of fans at Heindl Stadium during the series, thanks to its effort and never being deterred by the situations. Perhaps the most remarkable "hurdle" cleared by MUW was that of having to



play eight games just to reach the title game (conversely, PSUB played four total games to win its first USCAA crown).

"Wow, what a ride," Owls Head Coach Buddy Foster exclaimed afterwards. "This team, their grit and their dedication to one another was impressive to watch. Those student-athletes represented The W very well and we have felt the love from Columbus. We had so many outstanding performances throughout this week. I could go on and on. We walked off that field with our heads held high."

Thursday's finale was typical of Foster's assessment of how the Owls had battled all week. MUW trailed 3-0 after one inning and was down 4-2 through three. A single run in the fifth and two in the sixth put The W ahead, 5-4. But the Lions roared back with four in their half of the sixth to make it 8-5 heading into the final frame.

In the seventh, pinch-hitter Makalyn Cowley worked a leadoff walk, after the count went full. The very next batter, Riley Phillips, crushed her third home run of the year – all in the USCAA tourney – to cut the deficit to 8-7.

With one out, Alysa Newman and Madison Crosby delivered

back-to-back singles, before a fielder's choice ground out by Maiya Joe registered the second out of the inning. Catcher Ashton Farnell slapped an RBI single and went to second on the throw to knot the game at 8-8.

Caledonia High School product Maddy Suggs singled up the middle to plate Joe with the go-ahead run, 9-8. Farnell was out at the plate trying to score on Suggs' slug.

In their half of the seventh, the Lions took advantage of the weary Owls with a single, RBI triple and an RBI single to wrest the USCAA title from MUW's grip in walk-off fashion. Rylie Grisham had her 11th complete game in absorbing the loss.

Crosby finished her final collegiate game with MUW by going 3-for-4, with a double. She also scored twice.

Newman was also 3-for-4, with a run. Phillips' line was 2-for-4 with two RBI, while Joe went 2-for-4 and scored a pair of runs, while driving in another.

MUW not only went to the USCAA championships for the fifth time in as many years in the modern athletics era at The W, but established the school season record for victories at 26.

## CHAMPS ..... continued from page twenty-one

followed by a groundout ended the inning. The Lady Wolves then allowed just one hit over the final two innings securing the 7-0 win & the 2023 NJCAA Division II Softball National Championship.

The Lady Wolves totaled six hits as a team with Josie Meggs, Madison Moak, Abby Grace Richardson, Belle West, Faith Kivett, & Zykeria Cole having a hit each. Richardson led the Lady Wolves in RBIs with four while Moak & Leia Phillips had an RBI each.

Belle West got the start for the Lady Wolves & improved to 11-5 with the complete game shutout allowing just five hits, three walks & two strikeouts.

"This team was just on a whole other level this whole

week. Playing all these games against the best competition in the country & we never backed down," added Howard. "Every single player on our team contributed in a major way all week & I am just so proud of every single one of them. I love them all & I am just so happy to be able to say that we are National Champions!"

Co-Lin finishes the season with a program record for wins at 49-10 overall in addition to winning the first Region 23 Championship since 2008.

The Bobcats (50-10) finished runner-up for the fifth time in school history. It was their eighth trip to the World Series in the last 11 seasons. The Bobcats last won the national championship in 2018.

*This year's NJCAA Division II Softball World Series featured former Choctaw Central Lady Warriors softball standouts facing each other in the championship game. Congratulations to Co-Lin's Leia Phillips (left) & Jones College's Tia'Rain Saunders on their accomplishments at their respective schools.*



*Congratulations to MUW Owls softball team member & former Choctaw Central Lady Warriors softball standout Maiya Joe on her recent achievements at MUW! Joe signed with MUW after two years with the Meridian Community College Lady Eagles softball program.*



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## Alderman awarded 2023 Ferriss Trophy

Catcher/Outfielder Kemp Aldermen of the University of Mississippi won the 2023 Ferriss Trophy. The award, sponsored by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and Pearl River Resort, is given annually to the Most Outstanding College Baseball Player in Mississippi.

Alderman was presented the award at a luncheon held at the Pearl River Resort in Choctaw on Monday, May 22, 2023. He put together a strong season despite his team's struggles. The junior out of Newton County Academy led his team in several offensive categories.

Alderman becomes the 19th Mississippi college player to receive the award named for former Major League star and Delta State coach, Dave "Boo" Ferriss.

The finalists and winner for this prestigious award are selected by a panel of coaches and professional scouts. Other finalists for the honor were Tanner Hall of Southern Miss, Ty Hill of Jackson State, Hunter Hines of Mississippi



Pictured, from left to right are, Margaret Ferriss White (daughter of the late Dave "Boo" Ferriss), award recipient Kemp Aldermen of Ole Miss, & Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben.

State, and Slade Wilks of Southern Miss.

The Ferriss Trophy is a part of the Outstanding Player Awards Series which also recognizes the top college athlete in football with the C Spire Conerly Trophy and the top college men's and women's basketball players with the Howell and Gillom Trophies presented by MBCI and Pearl River Resort.

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Applications & guidelines can be picked up at the Office of Economic Development. If you have any questions, call DeeSandra Ben at 601-650-1612.

## CPD Releases Memorial Day Holiday Numbers

The Choctaw Police Department began the 2023 Memorial Day Holiday Travel Enforcement Period on Friday, May 26, at 12 a.m., & concluded on Monday, May 29, at 11:59 p.m.

Approximately 716 vehicles were checked, with 38 citations being issued - 22 for driver's license required, 11 for driving under suspension, 3 for requirement of child restraint, 1 for registration tag required, 1 for unsafe vehicle, & at least 8 arrests. These numbers are only from the safety checkpoints & not from any other calls for service.

The public is reminded, per the Mississippi Department of Public Safety & Mississippi Driver Service Bureau, the Mobile ID (mID) currently serves as a companion to your physi-

cal ID, rather than a replacement. You can use it in any context you would normally use your driver license or state-issued ID to verify your identity, EXCEPT during traffic stops or boarding a plane. You should still keep your physical ID.

Per Tribal Code section 4-5-2, Driver's License Required: any person who shall drive or operate a motor vehicle upon the public roadways of this jurisdiction shall be required to have in his possession at all times when operating a motor vehicle a driver's license or similar permit valid under the laws of the jurisdiction from which it was issued, and shall display same upon demand by a police officer or a judge of the Tribal Court.

Violation of this section is a Class C offense; however, no person charged with violating this section shall be convicted if he produces in court a driver's license heretofore issued to him, which was valid at the time of his arrest.

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### Appreciation Luncheon held for Dept. of Public Safety

On Thursday, May 18, 2023, an appreciation luncheon was held at the Smith John Justice Complex in Choctaw for our brave men & women at the Department of Public Safety. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben attended the luncheon & expressed his great appreciation for all their hard work & dedication. Thank you to the Department of Public Safety for all that you do for our Tribal members, Tribal employees & guests on Choctaw Tribal lands!



### Department of Public Safety Promotions

Congratulations to members of the MBCI Department of Public Safety who were recently promoted to their new positions. Pictured, from left to right, are: Lou Alex, Lieutenant/Training Officer; Rodgrick Anderson, Operations Captain; Christopher Evans, Sr., Deputy Director; Josh Denson, Corporal; Dwight McMillan, Corporal; DeMarquis Wilson, Corporal; Erwin Thomas, Sergeant, Choctaw Wildlife & Parks/Animal Control; Kevin Solomon, Supervisor, 911 Dispatch Services; & Joanne Hickman, Supervisor, Uniform Patrol (Security). Not pictured is Shaun Jimmie, Corporal.

### New Recruits Answer the Call

Firefighter Brandis T. Johnson of the Choctaw Fire Department is making a difference as he graduated on May 25, 2023, as part of Class 203 of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001 Firefighter I-II course, held at the Mississippi State Fire Academy in Jackson.

This intense seven-week course includes online, classroom, & hands-on instruction in the areas of fire behavior, fire suppression, rescue, incident command, hazardous materials, & other fire related topics. This course meets & exceeds the NFPA for Firefighter Qualifications & the uniform minimum training standards stated in the Mississippi Code section 45-11-7.

The Mississippi State Fire Academy is a

division of the Mississippi Insurance Department. State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney & Academy Executive Director Terry Wages conclude that firefighters, through their newly acquired skills & knowledge, will be an asset to the fire departments they represent.

“We are excited to introduce our newest group of certified MS Firefighters that will be tasked with protecting our communities all across our great state.” said Director Wages.



Firefighter Brandis T. Johnson

## Important Notice about Speed Enforcement

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Department of Public Safety reminds the public about Choctaw Tribal Code, Title IV Traffic Offenses, section 4-4-11, Speed Limits.

Officers of the Choctaw Police Department successfully completed a course of instruction & demonstrated competency in the principles & operation of moving & stationary Doppler Radar to operate in the use of radar to determine velocity of motor vehicles.

Officers have the technology installed in their patrol units & will be capable of enforcing the speed laws of the Tribe. Effective June 1, 2023, officers will issue traffic citations for speeding.

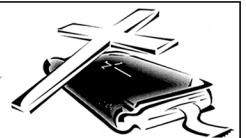


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Pastor: Rev. Samuel Dixon

#### WEDNESDAY SCHEDULE

6:00 p.m. Pray Meeting  
6:30 p.m. Discipleship/  
Family Ministry Class

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."  
John 8:31-32



# IN MEMORIAM

**INFANT KHYREEN DASAN DAVIS**

Funeral service for Khyreen Dasan Davis, 2 month old infant, was held on Saturday, May 6, 2023, at the Pearl River Community Center.



Burial was in Tucker Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Infant Davis passed away on April 21 at the Choctaw Health Center in Choctaw.

Desite his short time on

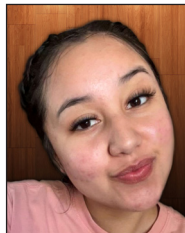
Earth, he was loved & brought immense joy to the family.

He was preceded in death by his aunt, Noranna Davis.

Survivors include his parents, Maria Davis & Courtney Coleman; sister, Sakari Davis; twin brother, Bailey Davis; grandparents, Vivian Ben & James Davis, & Mary Helen Coleman; 3 aunts, 3 uncles, & a host of relatives.

**IYANA KAILAN ANDERSON**

Funeral service for Iyana Kailan Anderson, 19, was held on Friday, May 5, 2023, at the Tucker Community Gymnasium. Minister Curtis Willis, Sr. & Pastor Thomas Ben officiated.



Burial was in Holy Rosary Catholic Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Miss. Anderson passed away on April 24 in Moore Haven, Florida.

She enjoyed texting & talking on her phone, playing sports, being with family & friends, cooking, baking, traveling, & listening to pow wow songs with her family.

She is preceded in death by her aunt, Hailey Willis; & great-grandparents, Roger & Sarina Anderson, Freeman & Elizabeth Allen, Nancy Chick-away Willis & Robert Steve, & Delphia I. Willis & Gordon G. Willis.

Survivors include her parents, Kelly Willis, Jaric & Rakisha Anderson; sisters, Sereney Anderson, Greatone Ben, Zeta

Ben, Jahzara Smith, Kamilla Smith, & Harper Anderson; brothers, Jaric Anderson, Jr., Princeton Anderson, & Kroy Anderson; grandparents, James D. & Dollianne Willis, & Ricky Anderson, Sr., & Trina Jim; & a host of aunts, uncles, relatives, & friends.

**SHIRLEY ANN MARTIN BERG**

Funeral service for Shirley Ann Martin Berg, 65, was held on Saturday, April 29, 2023, at McClain-Hayes Chapel in Philadelphia. Rev. Steven Lockley officiated. McClain-Hays Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.



Mrs. Berg passed away on April 26 at her residence.

A lifelong resident of Neshoba County, Miss., she graduated from Philadelphia High School in 1976. She also graduated from East Central Community College, & later Mississippi State University in 2004, where she received her business degree. In her early years, she was an office manager for Choctaw Health Center's Behavioral Health, then later a manager of the Choctaw Federal Credit Union.

"Mama Shirley" was a proud wife & mother, but most of all "Mamo". Her passion included helping others & making this world a better place. The spirit of giving was instilled in her children. She was married to the love of her life for 30 years. She enjoyed being with her family, & when she had the chance, she traveled the world. She supported her favorite high school basketball teams, especially when her great-nieces or nephews were playing.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Edmund & Evelyn Martin; daughter, Yolonda

T. Boler; son, Ian Berg; granddaughter, T'Kendall Boler; & brothers, Edwin Martin, Fred Martin & Jeffery Sockey.

Survivors include her husband, Brian C. Berg; daughters, Jacobi Anne Berg (Harry) & Taloa Grace Berg; sons, Moreno O'Neal Boler (Renee) & James Michael Robinson (Jessica); 6 grandchildren; sisters, Beatrice Carson (Ron) & Diana Ben (Greg); brother, Richard Sockey (Marion); & a host of nieces & nephews.

**GARTH DEWAYNE CHARLIE, JR.**

Funeral service for Garth Dewayne Charlie, Jr., 38, was held on Monday, May 8, 2023,



at Macedonia Baptist Church in Conehatta. Deacon Billy Smith & Rev. Samuel Dixon officiated.

Burial was in the Conehatta Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Charlie passed away on May 2 at Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian.

He resided in the Conehatta community & enjoyed being with family, grilling, fishing, fixing cars, playing washers, & playing with the Koni Hata Stickball team.

He is preceded in death by his father, Garth Dewayne Charlie, Sr.; grandparents, Thomas Ray Charlie & Necie King, Dewey G. Thomas & Georgia L. Thomas; an aunt, 2 uncles, & a nephew.

Survivors include his mother, Dyrana Thomas; daughters, Kanneisha Charlie, Tanneisha Charlie, & Lakeriyah Charlie; sons, Carson Charlie, Casen Charlie, & Deyonta Charlie;

see OBITUARIES, pg. 26

**Welcome To**

**10341 Road 789  
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Sunday Service: 10:00 a.m.

*Come Join Us...*

**Spirit of Life  
CHRISTIAN CENTER**  
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**278 Black Jack Road  
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601-389-5446**  
Pastor Thomas Ben

**OBITUARIES ..... continued from page twenty-five**

sisters, Cassandra Williamson, Dylana Charlie, Gayle Charlie, & Tica Charlie; brother, Gordon Charlie; special companion, Delia Williamson; special friend (brother), John Thomas; 4 aunts, 5 uncles, & a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

**DANITA LEATRICE McMILLAN**

Funeral service for Danita Leatrice McMillan, 42, was held on Thursday, May 11, 2023, at Tucker Community Gymnasium. Deacon Kendall Wallace & Rev. Charles Doby Henry officiated.



Burial was in the Holy Rosary Catholic Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Ms. McMillan passed away on May 6 at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson.

A resident of Tucker community, she was a 1999 Choctaw Central High School graduate. She was employed with the Choctaw Health Center WIC Department & enjoyed attending her children & nieces' athletic & academic events, family trips, & family dinners.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Gregory Dean McMillan & Cynthia Thompson-Wallace; & grandparents, Judie Isaac, Easton Thompson, Sr. & Gladys Steve John.

Survivors include her daughter, Kaedre Denson; sons, Bryceton McMillan & Leim McMillan; sisters, Renita McMillan-Perry (Chris) & Arita McMillan; 5 nieces, & a host of relatives & friends.

**JOHN LEVI BELL, JR.**

Funeral service for John Levi Bell, Jr., 47, was held on Wednesday, May 17, 2023,



at Bogue Chitto Community Gymnasium. Deacon Randy Jim & Rev. Charles Doby Henry officiated.

Burial was in I Sleep Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Bell passed away on May 12 at Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian.

A resident of the Bogue Chitto community, he attended Bogue Chitto Baptist Church. He attained his GED & was employed with Choctaw Transit then with Pearl River Resort in the Receiving Department. He loved being with family, attending Florida State Seminole football games, traditional social dancing, & watching Choctaw stickball games on YouTube.

He is preceded in death by his parents, John Levi Bell, Sr. & Maxine Thompson Bell; sisters, Sally Bell & Elizabeth Allen; & brothers, Bennie Bell & Lawrence Bell.

Survivors include his wife, Glenda Bell; daughter, Tenecia Bell; son, Jaylen Bell; sister, Dorothy Bell Wilson; brother, Ramon Agurrie; & a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, & friends.

**MARCELLA BEN VAUGHN**

Funeral service for Marcella Ben Vaughn, 83, was held on Thursday, May 18, 2023, at Hope Indian Baptist Church in Pearl River. Deacon Williamson Isaac & Rev. Travis Willis officiated.

Burial was in the church cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.



Ms. Vaughn passed away on May 15 at her granddaughter's residence in Pell City, Alabama.

Her roots were embedded in the Pearl River community & later relocated to Carthage, Miss., as she raised two sons, Ollie "Bruce" Vaughn & Kevin Edwards. She was also a foster parent & provided a loving home.

She attended Choctaw Central until the eighth grade then transferred to Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma, where she earned her high school diploma. She obtained a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1971, thus beginning a remarkable 43-year teaching & administrative career serving the Choctaw people through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

She was also a consultant for McGraw-Hill Publishing Company as she had a pivotal role in implementing the English as a Second Language program, which helped tribal children adapt to the English language. She retired in 2008.

She enjoyed cooking, selling traditional crafts at the Choctaw Indian Fair, Sudoku puzzles, beading, sewing, making quilts, & browsing at Thrifty Nickel. She prepared meals for sick relatives & helped those in need within the community.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Mike Ben & Otis Tubby Ben; son, Ollie "Bruce" Vaughn; sister, Sadie Hissong; & brothers, Freeman Ben & David Ben.

Survivors include her son,

Kevin Edwards; sister, Doris Willis; grandchildren, Dana Cook, Joseph Edwards, Kara Edwards; step-grandson, Alaric Keams; 2 great-grandsons, Ryan Edwards & Baylor Keams; & a host of relatives & friends.

**GERALD WAYNE ISOM, SR.**

Funeral service for Gerald Wayne Isom, Sr., 55, was held on Friday, May 19, 2023,



at Macedonia Indian Baptist Church in Conehatta. Deacon Billy Smith & Bro. Brian Parkman officiated.

Burial was in Conehatta Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Isom passed away on May 15 at his residence.

He lived most of his life in Conehatta & attended Choctaw Central High School. He enjoyed being with family & friends, playing washers, telling jokes, working on vehicles, & watching 49ers football games on TV.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Alford Isom & Nellie Jean Shoemake; & sisters, Evelyn Shoemake & Lorianne Shoemake.

Survivors include his wife, Shalisa Isom; daughters, Denisa Isom, Trinesa Isom Barojas, & Sharandon Isom; sons, Rockky Isom, Derald Isom, Gerald Isom, Jr., Billie Isom, & Germaine Isom; step-children, Ariyana Thomas & Aleric Thomas; sister, Barbarella Isom; step-brother, Alvin Isom; special brother, Ray Crimm; 15 grandchildren, & a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

### LINDA CHARLENE MINGO GIBSON

Funeral service for Linda Charlene Mingo Gibson, 59, was held on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at Standing Pine Community Gymnasium. Bro. Joseph Wesley officiated.



Burial was in Standing Pine Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Ms. Gibson passed away on May 20 at Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian.

She attended Choctaw Central High School & worked at various places before becoming a homemaker. She enjoyed being with family & friends, especially with her grandchildren, watching her favorite TV shows, listening to music, doing food sales, & being a Dallas Cowboys fan.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Billy Joe Gibson; parents, Coleman & Dorothy Dixon Mingo; & brothers, Jerry Mingo & Charles Mingo.

Survivors include her sons, Poul Ray Gibson, Joseph Andrew Gibson, & Billy Wayne Gibson; sisters, Marianne Wishork & Bobbie Jean Frazier; a brother, Freeban Mingo; grandchildren, Lynn'Tayshia Marie Gibson & Makayla Shauntaye Gibson; & a host of relatives & friends.

### KEITH DAVION GIBSON

Funeral service for Keith Davion Gibson, 37, was held on Saturday, May 27, 2023, at Bogue Chitto Community Gymnasium. Rev. Robert Patrick officiated.

Burial was in Conehatta Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Ser-

vices was in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Gibson passed away on May 21 at Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian.

A 2003 Choctaw Central High School graduate, he enjoyed hunting, fishing, & being with family & friends. He was employed with the Youth Opportunity Program & was also a basketball referee. He enjoyed telling stories & making people laugh.

He is preceded in death by his grandparents, Patrick & Nuga Gibson Twiss, Roger Dale & Annie Thomas; stepfather, Larin Thomas; a sister, Kenetra Thomas; a brother, Baby Kendrick; 2 aunts & 3 great-aunts.

Survivors include his wife, Mindee Gibson; daughter, Kaymeree Faith Gibson; mother, Priscella Twiss; father, Kenneth Thomas; sisters, LeAnna Charlie, LoriAnna Thomas, Delia Gibson, Lakeisha Thomas, Melanie Willis, Shalisa Isom, Kylin Jim, Christina Kenaye Willis, Ashleigh Thomas, Brooke Thomas, & Alyssa Thomas; brothers, Jordan Jim, Gabriel Thomas, Davion Thomas, Brett Thomas, Kendall Ben, Rogerick Thomas, Kyler Jim, & Kyson Jim; a special niece, Analissa Perez; & a host of aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, family, & friends.

### WYNEMA WILLIAMS-MINGO

Funeral service for Wynema Williams Mingo, 49, was held on Sunday, May 28, 2023, at Macedonia Baptist Church in Conehatta. Deacon Marco Patrick & Rev. Robert Patrick officiated.



Burial was in Conehatta Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Mrs. Mingo passed away on May 25 at her residence.

She was a member of Macedonia Baptist Church & enjoyed being with family & friends, traveling, going to yard sales, & sharing jokes.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Jesse & Winona Farve Williams; sister, Deana Farve Chickaway; brother, Reggie Dwight Williams; 5 aunts & 5 uncles.

Survivors include her husband, Phillip Mingo, Jr.; daughter, Tanya (Akisha) Bell; son, Sherman (Danielle) Bell; sisters, Marjean Williams & Beatrice Sam; brothers, Martin (Jenny) Smith, Armand Williams, & Jessie Williams; 2 grandchildren, A'mare & Jamari Bell; 2 step-grandchildren, Azalea & Jrue Phillips; 4 aunts, 1 uncle, & a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

### HAROLD LEE AMOS

Funeral service for Harold Lee Amos, 66, was held on Thursday, June 1, 2023, at Pearl River Community Center. Rev. Charles Doby Henry officiated.

Burial was in Bogue Chitto Community Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Amos passed away on May 25 at South Central Medical Center in Laurel.

He was a U.S. Marine Corps veteran & was employed with Bok Homa Casino Security. He enjoyed playing stickball with Bok Cito, baseball, watching his favorite TV shows, & lis-



tening to music.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Tom Amos & Maggie Frazier Billie; son, Bruce Cody Thompson; sisters, Glenda Billie & Charlene Amos; & brothers, Wilson Billie, Jr., Jimmy Billie, Leroy Billie, AC Amos, Davis Lee Amos, & Charles Amos.

Survivors include his daughter, Rebecca Blonco; sisters, Patsy Martin, Manzie Billie, Linda Clemmons, & Fannie Amos; 2 grandchildren; & a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

### BOBO THOMPSON, JR.

Funeral service for Bobo Thompson, Jr., 58, was held on Sunday, June 4, 2023, at the Henning, TN Facility Building. Burial was in Henning Community Cemetery.

Mr. Thompson passed away on May 31 at Jackson General Hospital in Jackson, TN.

He was a farm hand for over 30 years & loved being outdoors, doing yard work, fixing things, & being with his grandchildren.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Bobo Thompson, Sr. & Vina Thompson; & a brother, Paul Thompson.

He is survived by his wife, Melissa Thompson; daughter, Kimberly Ray (Wes) of Ripley, TN; sisters, Janie O'Kelley (Neal) of Brighton, TN, Loretta Wilkins (Mike) of Holly Springs, MS, & Nannette Thompson (Micheal) of West Point, KY; a brother, Bobby Willis (Carla) of Ripley, TN; 5 grandchildren; a crazy cat he loved dearly, Bubbles; & a host of nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews, relatives, & friends.



# Beaver Dam Wins State Games Kabotcha Toli Gold

The Beaver Dam youth stickball team (ages 9-12) claimed this year's gold medals in the State Games of Mississippi Kabotcha Toli stickball tournament as they defeated Bok Cito 7-1 on Saturday, June 10, 2023, at Warrior Stadium in Choctaw.

Beaver Dam's Ladinian Isom was named MVP of the tournament.

Bok Cito received silver medals and Koni Osi claimed bronze medals with a 6-0 victory over Itibatoli in the consolation contest.

Nine teams participated in the tournament that ran from June 7-10.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and Pearl River Resort are Gold Sponsors for the State Games of Mississippi, which is in its 32st year.



**CHOCTAW  
COMMUNITY  
NEWS**

**MAY-JUNE 2023**

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**GOLD MEDALISTS - BEAVER DAM**



**SILVER MEDALISTS - BOK CITO**



**BRONZE MEDALISTS - KONI OSI**



*Congratulations to Beaver Dam's Ladinian Isom as he was named MVP!*