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Groundbreaking Held for New Choctaw Central Campus

CHOCTAW, Miss. – The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians held a groundbreaking for the new Choctaw Central Middle/High School campus on Monday, December 18, 2023. The new campus will be located on a 35-acre site of Tribal land near South Oswald Road and Highway 16 West in Choctaw, Miss.

Tribal and school officials, as well as project partners and community members, were in attendance to celebrate this new beginning.

“The need for a new campus for our middle and high schools has been discussed

for two decades,” said Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben. “In that time the Justice Complex was built in 2007, and a new Choctaw Health Center in 2015, both built to accommodate our growing population. Now, it is great to finally meet the educational needs of our Choctaw Tribal Schools, Choctaw Central High and Middle School students.

Today, we celebrate the build of this state-of-the-art campus for our students to learn and grow in the safest and best possible environment.”

“It is my honor and privilege to have the opportunity to work with Chief Ben and

his administration, Choctaw Tribal Council, and our very own hardworking and dedicated Choctaw Tribal Schools personnel to ensure the needs of our students are met,” said MBCI Director of Schools Mrs. Delnita Jones. “I am excited to stand side by side with Tribal and CTS leadership and break ground for the new high school and middle school campus.”

The new campus can accommodate up to 1200 students and will include a two-story building that will house the middle and

see **NEW CAMPUS**, pg. 3



Local, state, & governmental leaders & representatives joined MBCI Tribal Leadership, Choctaw Tribal Schools & Tribal officials as they

officially broke ground for the new Choctaw Central Middle/High School campus on Monday, December 18, 2023, in Choctaw.

Tribe Hosts Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

Hundreds gathered on the grounds of the Choctaw Tribal Office complex in Choctaw to witness the annual Tribal Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony on Tuesday evening, December 5, officially marking the start of the 2023 holiday season on the Choctaw Reservation.

The festivities, hosted by Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, featured Christmas carols sung by music students from Conehatta Elementary School, special presentations, refreshments, and a special visitor from the North Pole. Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson served as

mistress of ceremonies.

“What a great time to come together and celebrate. We are exactly 20 days away from Christmas Day, and this lighting of the tree event adds to the anticipation of commemorating the light and birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,” said Princess Thompson. “There will surely be many family gatherings, holiday festivities, sounds of the season, and all the special moments Christmas brings.”

Chief Ben added that through Jesus, we are afforded
see **TREE LIGHTING**, pg 4



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & his family had the honor of lighting this year's Tribal Christmas Tree, set adjacent to the Tribal Administration complex parking lot.



FROM THE OFFICE OF TRIBAL CHIEF CYRUS BEN

Halito!

As we celebrated the holiday season and saw the beginning of a new year, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the support, encouraging words, and prayers you have offered to my family and myself. I am very humbled and honored to be your Tribal Chief, and it is a job I do not take lightly. Being able to serve my people and work together with many of you to bring about success for our Tribe is the greatest reward and outweighs the challenges.


To my family, I cannot thank you enough for your love and support as I carry out my duties every day. TaRita, Brodie, Eden and Selah, you are my motivation to keep moving forward when the days are long. I love you.

My fellow Tribal Members, I hope you all had a very Merry Christmas, and may the New Year be filled with lots of love, good health, great joy, and much success. I offer my sincere prayers to families throughout our Tribal lands who may be experiencing sorrow over the loss of their loved ones this past year. May God bring comfort to your soul and may the memories of loved ones no longer with you bring you some joy and peace.

In terms of progress, 2023 was a great year for our Tribe. We've had groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings for Tribal housing units and subdivisions, broke ground for the new travel plaza in Louisville, cut the ribbon for Tribal member owned businesses Kuntry Boy Designs in Bogue Chitto and Pinkyy Pearl Nutrition in Pearl River. And just recently, we broke ground for the new Choctaw Central Middle/High School campus.

We are making great strides in increasing our housing inventory, building upon the success of our Pearl River Resort, applauding the successes of Tribal entrepreneurs, and addressing the long-standing need of a new campus for our youth. We do not plan to take our foot off the accelerator; we look forward to beginning and finishing up more projects in 2024.

I hope you enjoyed rest and relaxation during the holidays and returned to work refreshed and recharged. To you all, have a Happy New Year!

Chi Yakokilih,

 Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief



NEW CAMPUS continued from page one

high school. Security features include door card readers, cameras, security guard station, and a fence.

The campus will have a middle school staff office, high school staff office, principals' offices, counselors' offices, a band hall, cafeteria, dormitory, library, ADA bathrooms, elevators, and a two-level arena, among others.

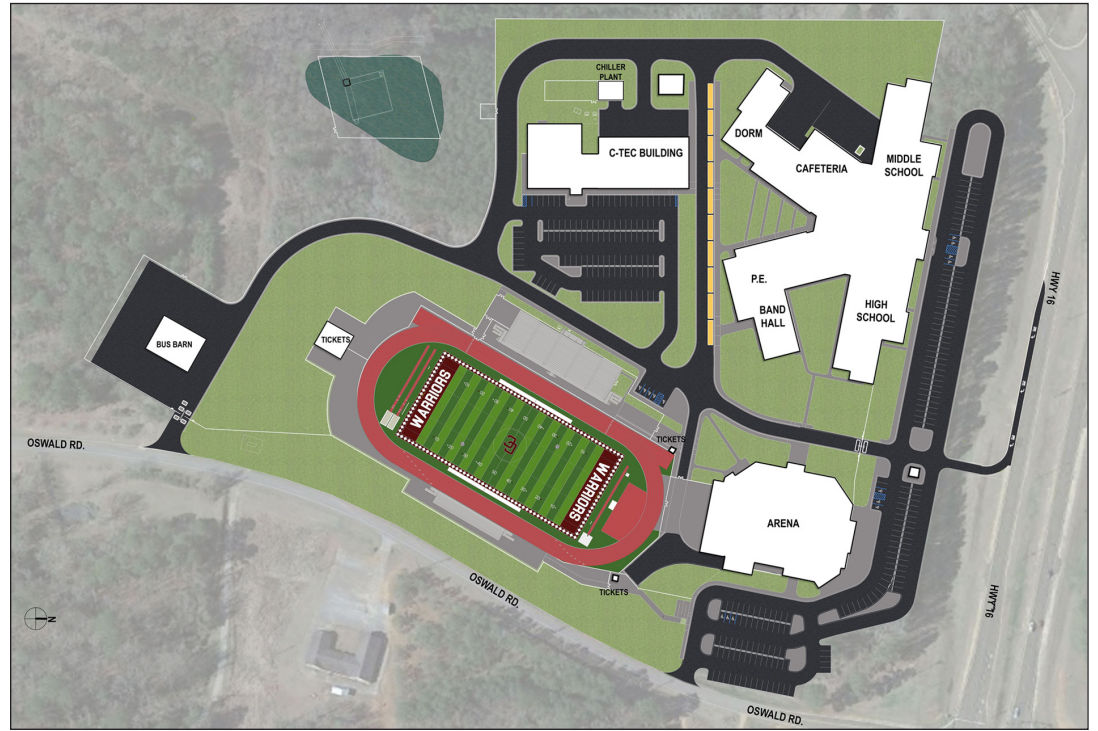
The square footages of the campus facilities are: Academic Building – 106,006 (1st floor) and 66,754 (2nd floor); C-TEC Building – 29,401; Arena – 36,631 (concourse) and 39,536 (event); Bus Barn – 2,688; Guard Shack – 300; Chiller Plant – 1,656; Stadium Locker – 1,680; and Concession – 2,603.

There will be 72 classroom spaces, and available parking spaces will include: 86 (4 ADA) for the academic building; 127 (6 ADA) for the arena; and 129 (5 ADA) for C-TEC.

The campus will have Choctaw-themed symbols and artwork incorporated into its overall design. PryorMorrow is the architect for the project, and the construction

manager is Yates Construction. Willis Engineering serves as the site engineer, and McGee Construction is in charge of the groundwork.

The project is expected to be completed in the 2026-2027 school year. This project is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).



Pictured above is a rendering of the overall site plan for the new CCMS/HS campus.



Renditions of the academic building entrance, the academic atrium, and academic courtyard.



Renditions of the C-TEC entrance, the bus barn, and the entrance to the arena.



Renditions of the interior of the arena bowl, weight room, and overhead ariel view of the football field.

TREE LIGHTING continued from page one

countless blessings that we enjoy today. He also reminded the audience that we should also remember those we have lost and cherish their memories as he asked for a moment of silence in their honor.

Earlier in the day, Chief Ben and Princess Thompson participated in an elementary school presentation in Starkville, along with country music artist Steve Azar of Greenville, Miss., as he was promoting his book *One Mississippi*.

“We talked about *One Mississippi* of one people that lived before on this land. That flag that flies above now includes a gold star that represents our ancestors and the native territories in which all of Mississippi was before it was a Mississippi. We are one Tribe, one people. We are blessings and lives given by one God that give us that opportunity to be here and be upon on this land,” said Chief Ben.

After reciting some scripture quotes, he added that we should help others and be a light in our communities.

“I pray that the Lord’s spirit be with each and everyone of you and gives you strength through the ups and the downs of life and let us ring in this new year,” he said, “always with joy and prosperity as we come from a lineage of those who were resilient for many years, that our ancestors paid the price. Many worked, shed blood, tears, and many sacrifices for us to be this great Tribe, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.”

A presentation was made to the Choctaw Bible Translation Committee as they were presented a \$25,000 donation from the Tribe to assist with their ongoing efforts in translating the Bible into the Choctaw language. The committee

members then presented a copy of the recently printed Choctaw translated hymnal book to Chief Ben as a token of their appreciation for the continued support of their cause.

Prior to the donation presentation to the area Tribal churches, Chief Ben said he and his wife, TaRita, decided in 2019 that if he was to get elected as Tribal Chief, their family would personally match a donation from the Tribe to assist all the churches for their work they do in the communities.

“Throughout all of our communities, the churches provide leadership and guidance that is needed for us everyday of our lives. That was a commitment I made and through the Tribe, we’re giving \$500, and TaRita and I are also giving \$500 for a total of \$1000 to every church on our Choctaw Tribal lands. I hope this small token to the churches is a seed they can plant and grow that will help us sow in each of our communities. To all the churches, thank you for what you do,” said Chief Ben.

The moment had arrived as the excited audience counted down with Princess Thompson as Chief Ben and his family made their way to the light switch and officially lit the Tribal Christmas tree to sounds of applause.

The Choctaw Fire Department had the honor of bringing in the special visitor from the North Pole, Santa Claus, with the sound of “Here Comes Santa Claus” playing in the air. The children were excited to interact with Santa as they gave him their wish list and posed for pictures in front of the tree.

Door prizes for children and adults were awarded throughout the event. Refreshments of Christmas cocoa and cookies were provided by Pearl Riv-



Conehatta Elementary School music students performed several Christmas carols for the audience's enjoyment.



Chief Ben, on behalf of the Tribe, presented a \$25,000 check to the Choctaw Bible Translation Program to assist with their projects throughout the year.



Santa Claus made an appearance at the tree lighting event as he was transported by the Choctaw Fire Department. Santa took the time to have pictures taken with all the good boys & girls in attendance.

er Resort under the breeze- Office of Tribal Chief Ben. way next to the Tribal Council Chambers, compliments of the

Bok Homa Casino celebrates 13th anniversary, expansion

Bok Homa Casino marked a momentous milestone on Wednesday, December 20, 2023, as officials & patrons gathered in Sandersville, Miss., to celebrate the casino's 13th anniversary & ribbon cutting ceremony opening expansions of amenities within the facility. With an additional 7,000 square feet of gaming, dining, and entertainment space, patrons can now experience sports betting in a spacious setting in the expanded Sportsbook (pictured below, left), dining in the new 60-seat Red Creek restaurant (pictured below, right), or enjoying live music on a new entertainment stage. Officials in attendance included Tribal Chief & Choctaw Resort Development Enterprise Chairman Cyrus Ben, Tribal Council members Berdie



Steve, Richard Sockey, Kent Wesley, Sam John, & Loriann Ahshap- anek, Pearl River Resort & Bok Homa Casino officials, & the 2023-2024 Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson. Afterwards, attendees enjoyed hors d'oeuvres & anniversary cakes, with the first 500 guests receiving commemorative anniversary t-shirts.



Tribe holds 'Country Christmas' employee luncheon

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' annual Tribal Government Christmas Luncheon, hosted by Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, was held on Tuesday, December 19, 2023, at the Silver Star Convention Center in Choctaw. This year's luncheon had a "Country Christmas" theme as most Tribal employees were dressed in their favorite country western wear as everybody enjoyed a western BBQ feast.

Reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson and former Choctaw Indian Princess Alice Keats served as co-emcees. Chief Ben offered his appreciation to the employees for their dedication towards the Tribe's accomplishments throughout the year.

"Many accomplishments have been made over the past year, and I want to thank each and everyone of you in the workforce, and I also acknowledge our Tribal leadership. It's about us as a workforce and us as a Tribe. I keep stressing us

see LUNCHEON, pg. 6



ABOVE, Tribal employees enjoyed the BBQ luncheon provided by the Pearl River Resort. RIGHT, Riders had a fun time during the Reindeer Rodeo contest in the Silver Star Convention Center.



LUNCHEON continued from page five



Reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson & Tribal Chief Ben pose with winners of the Reindeer Rodeo. **LEFT**, Women's division (3rd) Cami Hickman, (1st) Jessica Martinez, & (2nd) Tia Grisham; **RIGHT**, Men's division (2nd) Brett Shoemake, (1st) Peyton Bell, & (3rd) Marco Patrick.

because it takes all of us to be successful as we continue to progress for the future," said Chief Ben.

A highlight video of the Tribe's accomplishments in 2023 and holiday greetings from various Tribal programs and departments were presented by Choctaw Video.

One of the fun attractions of this year's luncheon was the Reindeer Rodeo (mechanical bull riding) contest as riders competed for cash prizes and a rodeo buckle to the top winners. Winners in the following divisions were: (WOMEN) 1st place, Jessica Martinez, \$300 and rodeo buckle; 2nd place, Tia Grisham, \$200; 3rd place, Cami Hickman, \$100; (MEN) 1st place, Peyton Bell, \$300 and rodeo buckle; 2nd place, Brett Shoemake, \$200; 3rd place, Marco Patrick, \$100.

continued next page



From left to right, Christmas Decoration Contest winners receiving their awards from Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson were Louis & Kim Ferris (1st place), Holly Sam (honorable mention), Maria Farmer (3rd place), Brandie & Randy Tangle (honorable mention), Crystal Watkins, Annalise Bell, & Hannah Bell (honorable mention), & Chief Ben. Not pictured were Liasha & Diana Alex (2nd place) & honorable mentions Ramona Pitts, Christon Flores, Dakota Willis, & Renada Lilly.



Overall winner - Kim Ferris, Pearl River



Honorable Mention - Ramona Pitts, Bogue Homa



2nd place - Liasha & Diana Alex, Standing Pine



Honorable Mention - Christon Flores, Conehatta



3rd place - Barbara Farmer, Pearl River



Honorable Mention - Holly Sam, Crystal Ridge

Winners of the 22nd Annual Reservation-Wide Christmas Decoration Contest were announced. Kim Ferris of Pearl River was the overall winner as she received a monetary prize of \$1000. Liasha & Diana Alex of Standing Pine placed 2nd and received \$750. Maria Farmer of Pearl River placed third and received \$600.



Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson & Tribal Chief Ben presented employee honors to: (left) 2023 MBCI Employee of the Year to Brian Parkman, Conehatta Elementary School Principal; (center) Honorable Mention to Angela Gordon, Early Intervention Coordinator for Special Education; & (right) Honorable Mention to Michelle Atkinson, Red Water Clinic Nurse Practitioner.

Contestants receiving Honorable Mention from each community received \$250. They included: Ramona Pitts, Bogue Homa; Christon Flores, Conehatta; Holly Sam, Crystal Ridge Dakota Willis, Henning, TN; Renada Lilly, Pearl River;

Brandie Tangle, Red Water; and Crystal Watkins, Tucker. Conehatta Elementary School Principal Brian Park-

man was recognized as the 2023 MBCI Employee of the Year. Honorable Mentions were Angela Gordon, Early In-

tervention Coordinator for Special Education, and Michelle Atkinson, Red Water Clinic Nurse Practitioner.



Honorable Mention - Dakota Willis, Henning, TN



Honorable Mention - Renada Lilly, Pearl River



Honorable Mention - Brandie Tangle, Red Water



Honorable Mention - Crystal Watkins, Tucker



Christmas Visit to CRC

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, along with several members of the Tribal Administration, helped spread some holiday cheer to the residents of the Choctaw Residential Center on Tuesday, December 19, 2023. Playing the role of Santa, Chief Ben presented holiday gift bags to the happy residents as they all enjoyed the time of festive fellowship.



Elderly Center hosts Christmas luncheon

Tribal elders enjoyed the holiday spirit of food, fellowship, and fun during the annual Christmas luncheon held at the Choctaw Elderly Activity Center in Choctaw on Friday, December 15, 2023. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, along with several members of the Tribal Administration and Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson, were joined by Santa and members of the Youth Opportunity Program as they

assisted with the activities for the elders. Following the luncheon, several rounds of Bingo were played to everybody's enjoyment. During the event, elders were also offered vaccinations protecting them from the flu, COVID-19, and RSV, compliments of the Choctaw Health Center's Public Health Services. At the conclusion of the activities, the elders were presented holiday gift bags, compliments of Chief Ben and the Elderly Activity Center.

Tribe welcomes new tenant AgLine

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) welcomed a new tenant to their industrial park in Carthage as a ribbon cutting ceremony was held on Tuesday, December 5, 2023, for AgLine Distributing & Equipment.

AgLine is a producer and distributor of farm machinery implements such as hay rakes, tillers, spreaders, and disc mowers. Some products will be sourced from other manufacturers, and some will be produced in the Carthage facility. The company's focus will be hay tool segments.

AgLine leased one of three buildings on site (Building 2), located on 1600 North Pearl Street in Carthage.



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, several members of the Choctaw Tribal Council, & reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson joined officials from Agline, City of Carthage & Leake County, representatives from the Main Street Chamber of Leake County, & Mississippi Agriculture Commissioner Andy Gipson during the ribbon cutting ceremony at Building 2 in the Tribe's industrial park in Carthage.

community in the late 1980's, the 120,000 square foot facility - comprised of three 40,000 square foot buildings - once housed the Tribe's automotive wire harness business. Due to the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, wire harness contracts moved offshore, leaving the business to close and the buildings vacant. In 2022, with hopes of bring-

ing industry back, the Tribe initiated updating the buildings' infrastructure by investing in new roofs, HVAC upgrades, energy efficient lighting, and paved roads and parking lots.

With most states and communities offering incentives to recruit new companies to their communities, the Tribe adopted a new Employment Incentive Policy in April 2023 that allows commercial tenants to re-

ceive a discount on their rent if they employ at least five Tribal members. The Tribe's Office of Economic Development is marketing this new incentive through digital marketing channels to recruit new industries to Tribal lands.

AgLine is already reporting positive growth and intends to expand its manufacturing operations in the coming year.

Ribbon cutting held for Sunset Ridge



In attendance for the ribbon cutting ceremony were Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, 2023-2024 Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson, Tribal Council Representatives Kendall Wallace, Sam John, Vice Chief Ronnie Henry, Sr., Kent Wesley, Loriann Ahshapanek, & Richard Sockey, Director of Administration Jason Grisham, Tribal Development Division Director Sarah Medlock, Choctaw Housing & Loan Program officials Darlene Willis & Nana Frazier, project partners & several new homeowners were present to cut the ribbon and celebrate this great new chapter of Tribal development & progress.

A ribbon cutting ceremony was held for the new Sunset Ridge housing subdivision, located on Road 604 in the Pearl River community on Thursday, November 16, 2023. In attendance were Tribal officials, several new homeowners, & project partners.

The homes are 1,280 sq. ft., gable style design featuring three bedrooms, two full-size baths, central heating & cooling, & a refrigerator & stove.

The Choctaw Housing & Loan Program worked with applicants to be pre-approved for a lease-to-purchase opportunity. The American Rescue Plan allowed an appropriation of funds to develop & build the 30-home development project.

Contractors included Willis Engineering, Yates Construction (bid contract winner), & Morton Construction (Yates subcontractor). An additional 17 housing units will be built at the subdivision in the future.

Groundbreaking in Conehatta

Ground was broken for four housing units in the Conehatta community on Tuesday, December 12, 2023. The Choctaw Housing Authority (CHA), along with project partners, are constructing two houses on Hoye Pace extension (three-bedroom/two-baths) & two houses on Mills Cove (two-bedroom/two baths). All houses will have ample living spaces with a modern interior featuring user-friendly appliances, like a stove/oven combos & refrigerators, & updated HVAC heat pump systems.



In attendance for the groundbreaking were Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Council Representatives Loriann Ahshapanek, Hilda Nickey, Timothy Thomas, Sr., Gregory Shoemake, Ricky Anderson, Sr., Sam

John, Kendall Wallace, & Kent Wesley, Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson, & CHA officials.



New houses in Bogue Chitto, Tucker

The Choctaw Housing Authority (CHA) held ribbon cutting ceremonies for new housing units in the Bogue Chitto & Tucker communities on Friday, November 3, 2023. Celebrating with the new homeowners were Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Council Representatives Kendall Wallace of Bogue Chitto, Loriann Ahshapanek of Standing

Pine, Kent Wesley of Pearl River, Sam John of Red Water, & Dorothy Wilson of Tucker, Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson, CHA Executive Director Gary Ben, along with other officials with CHA & IKBI, Inc. Project contractor was IKBI, Inc., with site work done by Morton Construction. Willis Engineering served as engineer & Johnny Wynne & Associates, P.A. was project architect.

NEH Chair Lowe visits DCI

Officials with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and Department of Chahta Immi (DCI) hosted a delegation visit headed by National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Chair Shelly C. Lowe on Wednesday, November 1, 2023.

Lowe, a citizen of the Navajo Nation, is the 12th chair of the NEH and the first Native American to lead the federal agency. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in February 2022.

The NEH, created as an independent agency in 1965, awards grants to support humanities research, education and public programs, such as lectures and exhibitions, at libraries, museums, archives and colleges and universities around the country.

A presentation and reception was held in the media room at Chahta Immi's Cultural Center,



LEFT, NEH Chair Shelly Lowe is presented a Choctaw basket during a reception at the Department of Chahta Immi Cultural Center at the Choctaw Town Center in Choctaw. **RIGHT**, Delegates included, from left to right, Anthony Mitchell, Vice Chair of the NEH; John Spann, Program & Outreach Director of the Mississippi Humanities Council (MHC); Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Executive Director of the MHC; reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson; Shelly Lowe, Chair of the NEH; Jay Wesley, Director of the Department of Chahta Immi; MBCI Vice Chief Ronnie Henry, Sr.; & Kyle Jordan, Deputy District Director for U.S. Congressman Michael Guest.



located in the Choctaw Town Center in Choctaw. Department of Chahta Immi Director Jay Wesley welcomed the delegation, followed by remarks and

opening prayer by Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson.

Choctaw Central Middle School American Indian Day Princess Karsyn Wallace sang the National Anthem in the Choctaw language, followed by remarks by MBCI Vice Chief Ronnie Henry, Sr. as he offered a welcome on behalf of the Office of Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben.

The delegation, which included officials from the Mississippi Humanities Council and a representative from the office of U.S. Congressman Michael Guest, were presented an overview of the work being done by the DCI staff to retain the Choctaw language.

DeLaura Saunders, Director of the Tribal Language Program, offered insight on the ongoing progress of the Chahta Dictionary Project. Excerpts of videos on their website highlighting Tribal members conversating in the Choctaw language with staff members were also shown with sentences transcribed in both the Choctaw and English languages.

A reception was held afterwards as members of the dele-

gation received gifts in appreciation for their visit.

Lowe grew up on the Navajo Reservation in Ganado, Ariz. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, a Master of Arts in American Indian Studies, and has completed doctoral coursework in Higher Education from the University of Arizona.

President Barack Obama appointed her to the National Council on the Humanities, the panel that advises the endowment, in 2015. She has been a member of the boards of the National Indian Education Association and the National Museum of the American Indian.

Lowe's career in higher education has included roles as Executive Director of the Harvard University Native American Program, Assistant Dean in the Yale College Dean's Office, and Director of the Native American Cultural Center at Yale University. Prior to these positions, she spent six years as the Graduate Education Program Facilitator for the American Indian Studies Programs at the University of Arizona.



USDA officials tour the Tribe

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians hosted a delegation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Monday, December 18, 2023. The group met with Tribal officials, including Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben and members of the Tribal Administration, and directors of several Tribal departments and programs that have a partnership with USDA. They also met Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson and embarked on a tour of the Pearl River community. They visited the Farmers Market at Natural Resources, saw the greenhouses of Choctaw Fresh Produce and Choctaw Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, and visited the Choctaw Food Distribution Program. To conclude their tour, they attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Choctaw Central campus on the corner of Highway 16 and Oswald Road.

Pinky Pearl Nutrition opens at Choctaw Town Center

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians held a ribbon cutting ceremony on Thursday, November 30, 2023, for the latest Tribal member owned business, Pinky Pearl Nutrition, located at the Choctaw Town Center, Suite 108.

Tribal officials congratulated business co-owners Mahlih Bowden and Cecelia Ketcher and offered well wishes on their new venture as they will be specializing in meal replacement shakes and energy boosting teas.

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben thanked those in attendance for their support of the new business and lauded the owners for utilizing the entrepreneurial program through the Tribe.

"This is a product that many people consume and enjoy. Hopefully the community will enjoy and also be productive for the owners in their venture. Mahlih participated in the Fast Start Program and was one of our winners. Congratulations to her and Cecelia, and I wish them best of luck. I'm thankful y'all are bringing another product back to the community and hope for many prosperous years," said Chief Ben.

The MBCI Office of Economic Development's Small Business Program conducts Fast Start Program sessions throughout the year and offers aspiring Tribal member entrepreneurs valuable information and assistance in starting a new business. Classes



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, with Tribal Council Members Nigel Gibson, Loriann Ahshapanek, Sam John, Kent Wesley, Dorothy Wilson, Angela Hundley, & Deborah Martin, MBCI Small Business Coordinator DeeSandra Ben, & reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Luz-Maria Thompson, joined business co-owners Mahlih Bowden & Cecelia Ketcher, along with their families & friends, as they officially opened Pinky Pearl Nutrition on Nov. 30 at the Choctaw Town Center in Choctaw.

meet once a week for six weeks as they develop a detailed business plan. At the end of the session, a business plan competition is held with the winner receiving \$1,000 towards their venture start-up.

"The Fast Start Program was really insightful, especially if you have no experience with business but have interest in it. It helped open the door even more," said Bowden. "It's been a long seven months and everybody was asking, 'When are y'all gonna open?' Well, we are here to officially open our doors!"

Ketcher thanked those who generously offered their assistance and encouragement in making the opening a success.

"We hope to bring something great to the community with our business, strive for the best, and bring the community together," Ketcher added.

Pinky Pearl Nutrition's business hours are Monday-Friday, 6:30 a.m.-5 p.m., and Saturday-Sunday, 12 p.m.-4 p.m. Their phone number is (601) 389-8091, or follow them on their Facebook page for updated information.

Creative Christmas Draws Shoppers

Creative Christmas, a holiday staple for local arts & crafts vendors, was held on December 8-9, 2023, at the former Dollar General location in the Choctaw Town Center in Choctaw. Since its inception in 1999, Creative Christmas, coordinated by the MBCI Department of Natural Resources, allows individuals to showcase their creative talents in producing unique and beautiful arts & crafts, handmade items, beaded jewelry & other beaded products, just in time for the holiday shopping season. Baked goods & lunch items were also on sale for those looking for a sweet treat or a hearty lunch plate.



Chief Ben attends Tribal Nations Summit

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the 2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit, held at the Department of the Interior on December 6 and 7. The Summit provides an opportunity for the Biden-Harris Administration and Tribal leaders from the 574 federally recognized Tribes to discuss ways the federal government can invest in and strengthen nation-to-nation relationships as well as ensure that progress in Indian Country endures for years to come.



LEFT, Chief Ben (second from right) poses with several Tribal leaders on the steps of the Department of the Interior building.

RIGHT, Chief Ben visited the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) at the Smithsonian, where they now have a display of the flag of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. The Tribe has supported NMAI from its beginnings in 2004, yet, the MBCI flag has not always flown in the museum. Through Chief Ben's efforts, the Tribe is now honored alongside other tribes' flags at a nationally-recognized museum dedicated to Native Americans.



TRIBE PARTICIPATES IN NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH ACTIVITIES

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians received requests from various schools, hospitals, clubs, businesses and other organizations to offer presentations on the Tribe, its history, current status and culture. The following are from several of the visits made by Tribal officials and program representatives.



Presentation at UMMC

Fred Willis & MeShay Jimmie, from the Tribe's Office of Public Information, visited the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) School of Medicine in Jackson on Wednesday, November 15, 2023. Mr. Willis talked about the history & current status of the Tribe, while Ms. Jimmie gave a brief overview on the Choctaw Tribal healthcare system. In addition to UMMC staff & students, Choctaw Central High School's Future Health Professionals (formerly known as HOSA) students were in attendance. The students were at UMMC to learn more about the healthcare field.



Cultural presentation at NCES

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben visited Neshoba Central Elementary School on Wednesday, November 15, 2023, & gave a presentation to students alongside his daughter Selah. Chief Ben gave a historical overview on the Tribe, then he talked about the culture. Students were especially excited when Chief Ben brought out stickball sticks for the stickball demonstration & allowed them to practice throwing the ball. At the conclusion of his presentation, cultural booklets were distributed to all of the students in attendance.



MSU hosts events celebrating NA/AI History Month

Mississippi State University observed Native American/American Indian (NA/AI) History Month with events hosted by university groups. On Thursday, Nov. 9, 2023, a beading circle event was held in the Old Main Academic Center, sponsored by the Indigenous Students & Allies Association (ISAA). The signature event, "Life As: Fostering Identity Through Academic Achievement," featured a keynote speech from Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben on Wednesday, Nov. 15, at Fowlkes Auditorium in the Colvard Student Union. Sponsored by the Office of Academic Access & Support in the Division of Access, Diversity & Inclusion, the event showcased Indigenous culture from the ISAA & a panel featuring members of the student organization. Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani Thompson was in attendance & CCMS American Indian Day Princess Karsyn Wallace sang the National Anthem in Choctaw. Preceding the event, the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center presented "Cultural Exhibit" celebrating the traditions, art & flavors of the culture. MSU continued the month's celebration with the Division of Access, Diversity & Inclusion-sponsored NA/AI History Month Mixer for faculty, staff & students on Nov. 21 at the Butler Guest House. **RIGHT**, Tribal Chief Ben with MSU President Dr. Mark E. Keenum.



MC hosts "Choctaw Expressions"

"Choctaw Expressions," an educational presentation of the Choctaw people's customs and traditions, was held on the campus of Mississippi College (MC) in Clinton on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023. Sponsored by MC's Multicultural Student Association and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Cultural Affairs Program, the event was held to commemorate Native American Heritage Month. The Quad at MC was transformed into an authentic Choctaw festival with all of the sights, sounds, and scents of traditional tribal celebrations. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson were in attendance to welcome the public. The Boys & Girls Club Social Dancers performed several traditional social dances, followed by a storytelling session hosted by the Choctaw Tribal Language Program. Demonstrations included the traditional game of Choctaw stickball by Sequita Phillips and Abigail Jefferson, Choctaw basket weaving by Eleanor Chickaway, Choctaw beaded jewelry making by Shaya Hicks, and outdoor cooking of Choctaw dishes, which included the making of delicious Indian tacos.



Arkansas hosts Native American Heritage

Appreciation Night

The University of Arkansas Razorbacks women's basketball team hosted Native American Heritage Appreciation Night on Monday, November 20, 2023, as they faced the University of Central Arkansas at Bud Walton Arena in Fayetteville, AR. On the squad for the Razorbacks is standout Mississippi Choctaw youth & Neshoba Central graduate Carly Keats (#23). The contest featured Arkansas wearing special Nike Turquoise N7 uniforms. N7 is Nike's shoe brand collection that honors & embodies the values, stories & diversity of Indigenous traditions & craft. Prior to tip-off, the National Anthem was sung in the



Cherokee language by Ella Mounce & social dancers from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma performed at halftime. MBCI Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben visited the team earlier & offered words of encouragement while giving some cultural & historical aspects of the Tribe. The Razorbacks won the contest 81-67.



ECCC holds Native American Heritage Night

East Central Community College (ECCC) held a Native American Heritage Night recognition activity on Monday, November 27, 2023. Prior to tip-off of the Lady Warriors basketball contest against Southern Arkansas Community College, ECCC recognized Lady Warriors Leilaya McMillan, Kyla Farmer, Shaylynn Hunter, & McKinley Peoples. In attendance were Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson. During halftime, the Chahta Alla Youth Council Social Dancers performed several dances. The Lady Warriors won the contest 91-46.

Glo-Walk for Diabetes Awareness

A "Glo-Walk" was held in the Pearl River community during the early evening hours on Monday, November 13, 2023. The event, sponsored by the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI), was held to promote a healthy lifestyle on the eve of World Diabetes Day, observed on November 14th. Most of the participants wore or carried glow items as they traveled from the Pearl River Recreational Field parking lot, to the Manpower Building, and back. T-shirts were distributed to those that pre-registered and all participants received a sack meal at the conclusion of the walk.

Santa Fun Walk/Run

The Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) sponsored a Santa Fun Walk/Run during the early morning hours of Saturday, December 16, 2023, in the Pearl River community. Participants were encouraged to wear their festive Christmas outfits or holiday colors as they raced the 1.5 mile route from the Choctaw Central High School entrance to the Manpower Building and back. SDPI sponsors events throughout the year to promote healthy lifestyles on the Choctaw Reservation.



CCHS holds Beta Club induction ceremony

The newest members of Choctaw Central High School's Senior Beta Club were inducted during a ceremony on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, at the CCHS Gymnasium.

Beta member Zaiya Bell offered the invocation, followed by a welcome and lighting of the candles by Beta officers, President Kaegan Henry, Vice President Raiyleigh Perry, Secretary Kaniya Frazier, and Reporter Alesia Roa.

The pinning ceremony and senior pledge was conduct-



ed by CCHS Principal Alaric Keams and Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben.

Inductees include Lacy Alex, Shaleah Amos, Alleigh Anderson, Annabelle Anderson, Aiden Bell, Chanelle Bell, J'Kadryn Bell, Kalvenlena Bell, Kaydence Bell, Memorie Bell, Mileena Bell, Meliah Bell, Talon Bell, Mateo Ben, Allison Benally, Miley Billie,

Montraz Billy, Halle Briscoe, Laya Briscoe, Gracie Butler, Nolaysia Chickaway, Natalie Chitto, Aatilya Denson, Brady Farve, Kyleigh Flint, Aiya-na Frazier, Kahxylon Gomez, Candice Hickman, Zayna Hudson, Alessondra Jefferson, Ariela Jefferson, Hailey Jefferson, Naliyah Jim, Aven Joe, Justice Joe, Alyssa John, Mauhree Jones, Natalia Jones.

Taijah Kessinger, Tiarri Kessinger, Angel Killingsworth, Ashlyn Killingsworth, Talayah Kinsolving, Hunter Lewis, Shastyn Lewis, Brodie McMillan, Ethaniel Nick-ey, Kailynn Perry, Araceli Reyes Cruz, Kaleaina Rush, Jake Steve, Malaya Sam, An-slee Shumake, Eric Shumake, William Slocum, Georgianna Sockey, Bonnie Spirey, De-layna Steve, Miles Taylor, Al-excia Townsend, Taelor Tub-by, Traeh Vaughn, Crisayis Wesley, Elias Wesley, Tai'Lyn Wesley, Sydney White, Mal-loy Williams, Sabien Williams, Sebante Williams, Eliza Willis, Jacoby Willis, Nakota Willis, Nalayna Willis, Rozlind Willis, Trelene Willis, Derrant Wilson, Memphis Wilson, and Laylee Wishork.



Completes Training

Members of MBCI's Construction Management recently traveled to Las Vegas, NV, to attend a 2-day training session in Construction Project Management, sponsored by the Falmouth Institute. Successfully completing the training were, from left to right, Kelby Anderson, Terrence Kinsolving, Cameron Jenkins, & Brian Willis. Congratulations on your accomplishments.

Spotlight on DOECE Families



The Department of Early Childhood Education recognizes the importance of families in our program. We selected at random these families in our program and hope to encourage others to enroll with us! We take applications year round and we encourage you to submit your application as soon as possible as there may be wait lists at each center.

Happy Holidays

FROM THE DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS
OF THE
MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS



TRIBAL CHIEF CYRUS BEN • SANTA CLAUS
CHOCTAW PRINCESS NALANI THOMPSON



TRIBAL ADMINISTRATION



FINANCE • RISK MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



CHOCTAW CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL



CTS TRANSPORTATION



STANDING PINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



TRIBAL SCHOLARSHIP



BOYS & GIRLS CLUB STANDING PINE UNIT



DEPARTMENT OF CHAHTA IMMI



NATURAL RESOURCES



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES



CHOCTAW LOAN PROGRAM



CHOCTAW UTILITIES & ENGINEERING



CHOCTAW DETENTION



CHOCTAW TRIBAL COURTS



CHOCTAW FIRE DEPARTMENT



CHOCTAW HEALTH CENTER (CHC) BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



CHC CODING



CHC WIC



CHC DIABETES CLINIC



CHC IT



CHC PUBLIC HEALTH



CHC INFECTION CONTROL



CHC DENTAL



CHC ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



CHC PHARMACY



CHC EMS



CHC MEDICAL STAFF



CHC PRIMARY CARE



CHC EMERGENCY ROOM



CHC PHYSICAL THERAPY



CHC WOMENS WELLNESS



CHC SECURITY



CHC AUDIOLOGY



CHC RESPIRATORY THERAPY

Christmas Parade Fun

Christmas parades bring joy and excitement to all. This holiday season, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians was well represented as reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson, along with Tribal departments, programs, and Choctaw Tribal Schools participated in the festivities. Parades were held in Sandersville on Saturday, Dec. 2, Philadelphia on Monday, Dec. 4, Carthage on Thursday, Dec. 7, and Union on Dec. 16. Congratulations to the following entries who received recognition from parade sponsors: (Philadelphia) Pearl River Resort - Best Overall, & Pearl River Elementary School - Youth Category, 1st place; (Carthage) Red Water Elementary School - Civic Organization, Best in Class; (Union) Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians - Civic Division, 3rd place.



Christmas Roll Out

On Tuesday evening, Dec. 19, 2023, the Choctaw Fire Department, Choctaw Police Department and the Choctaw Health Center EMS conducted a Emergency Services Christmas Roll Out to spread Christmas cheer. Starting at the Choctaw Town Center parking lot, the vehicles traveled throughout Pearl River community playing festive Christmas music with colorful Christmas lights on display.



Tribe hosts Thanksgiving Feast

The annual Tribal-Wide Thanksgiving Feast, hosted by Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, was held in the Silver Star Convention Center in Choctaw on Tuesday evening, November 14, 2023.

Tribal drummers lead a procession into the ballroom, which included Neshoba Central High School's JROTC unit presenting the U.S. and MBCI flags. Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson and Choctaw Central High School Senior Peyton Mingo served as co-emcees.

Several Pearl River Elementary School students sang the National Anthem in Choctaw, followed by an invocation by Vice Chief Ronnie Henry, Sr. of the Bogue Chitto community.

During his remarks, Chief Ben acknowledged blessings of the Tribe in 2023, but also offered sympathy to families who lost loved ones during the year.

"We extend our prayers to those still mourning the loss of loved ones, or those in the hospital or battling illness. We went through the pandemic and saw the challenges that affected our health. I'm thankful we have programs within the Choctaw Health Center that goes out into the communities with health fairs and be accessible to our Tribal members, to give them the resources, education, and proper care that guides them to address their health needs."

Chief Ben recognized members of the Tribal leadership for their work during budget talks which resulted in a pay increase for the workforce and providing for the needs, re-



sources, and tools to carry out services throughout the Tribe and the enterprises.

"I know with our daily lives today, many of us are constantly on the go. But I hope you will reflect, appreciate, and acknowledge the blessings you, your community, and your family has. God has given us breath, strength, wisdom, tools, and many other blessings in our lives to carry out our daily call."

During his recent visits to the Tribal Schools for open houses or read aloud activities, Chief Ben expressed his appreciation to the parents for having their child or children being focused on learning.

"I know we enjoy athletic events, but I first encourage them to succeed academically. We have many bright, young men and women in our schools that will be our leaders of tomorrow. I thank all the parents, guardians, and grandparents that are pushing our young people to excel academically. You are doing your job at home to support and guide our children."

Chief Ben thanked members of his family and

gave special recognition to his mother. With his father being unable to attend, he offered appreciation for his support.

"I mentioned my immediate family, but you, the members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, you are my family. I wake up each morning, hoping that I can serve you

to the best of my ability and we continue to have many more days to be prosperous and successful. I hope you have many blessed days ahead of you."

A State of the Tribe video highlighting the progress and achievements of the Tribe in

continued next page



The Chahta Alla Youth Council Social Dancers entertained the crowd as they performed several traditional social dances. The group was presented a check in the amount of \$2,000 to assist with future projects.



2023 WSS Pushmataha Champion - Beaver Dam

2023 was presented by the Office of Public Information-Choctaw Video.

While attendees enjoyed their Thanksgiving meal, entertainment was provided by the Chahta Alla Youth Council Social Dancers as they performed several traditional social dances. Chahta Alla, sponsored by the Youth Opportunity Program, is comprised of aspiring Choctaw youth from across the reservation who gather for community service activities, sharing Choctaw culture, peer support, & more. Chief Ben and Princess Thompson presented the group with a check for \$2,000 to assist with future community service projects.

Champions from the 2023 World Series Stickball (WSS) divisions were honored as they received championship banners from Chief Ben, Princess Thompson, and WSS Commissioner Thomas Ben. Champions honored included: Beaver Dam, Pushmataha Division (10-13); Bok Cito, Tulli Okchi Ishko Division (14-17); Koni Hata Ohoyo, Women's Division; Beaver Dam, Men's 35-Over Division; and Koni Hata, Men's Division.



2023 WSS Tulli Okchi Ishko Champion - Bok Cito



2023 WSS Women's Champion - Koni Hata Ohoyo



2023 WSS Men's 35 & Over Champion - Beaver Dam



2023 WSS Men's Champion - Koni Hata

Thanksgiving feast held in Henning

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians hosted the 2023 Henning Community Thanksgiving Feast at the Henning Multi-Purpose Building on Saturday, November 11. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson, Bogue Chitto-Henning Tribal Council Representative Kendall Wallace, & other Tribal officials gathered with community members to give thanks for the year's many blessings. Attendees enjoyed a day of fellowship, a delicious meal, and door prize drawings.



Tribe holds Veterans Day parade in Choctaw

Members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians gathered in Choctaw to honor U.S. military veterans and their services during the annual Veterans Day Parade on Thursday, November 9, 2023.

This year's parade theme was "My Veteran Served," as nearly two dozen entries started the parade route at the Choctaw Sportsplex parking lot, traveling south on Black Jack Road and ending at the Choctaw Veterans Memorial Wall, located on the south parking lot of Geyser Falls Water Theme Park.

At the conclusion of the parade, a ceremony was held as

reigning Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson served as mistress of ceremony. After the posting of the American and Tribal flags, Nana Frazier performed the National Anthem in Choctaw as Princess Thompson offered the invocation.

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben recognized all the organizations that sponsored a parade entry in support of the veterans and also acknowledged veterans in attendance as he led the public in a round of applause.

"We also acknowledge those men and women that are serving on active duty overseas or wherever they may be. We



From left to right are Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson, guest speaker Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major (Ret.) Barry Parker, parade grand marshals Army Specialist (Ret.) Mary Helen Umholtz, Marine Corps Staff Sgt. (Ret.) Benny Thompson, & Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben.

honor them and our prayers are with them as they are sacrificing their time away from home.

We are very grateful for all the

continued next page



Veterans Day Brunch

A Veterans Day Brunch honoring all who served was held on Thursday, November 9, 2023, at the Silver Star Convention Center. The brunch was open to all MBCI Tribal Veterans registered with the Choctaw Veterans Committee, along with a guest. Hosted by Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & coordinated by the Choctaw Veterans Planning Committee, the buffet-style meal was provided by Pearl River Resort. Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson served as mistress of ceremonies and the Neshoba Central JROTC presented the

colors. Brother Shelly Peoples of Faith Missionary Baptist Church offered the invocation, followed by remarks from Chief Ben & Red Water Tribal Council Representative Ricky Anderson, Sr., Chair of the Tribal Council Committee on Veterans Affairs. After the meal, Veterans Day Parade grand marshals Benny Thompson (Marines) & Mary Helen Umholtz (Army) were recognized. After closing remarks, veterans in attendance took photos & were presented complimentary jackets emblazoned with the Choctaw Veterans Affairs logo.

sacrifices made by them as they continue to do so,” said Chief Ben.

With a great percentile of Native Americans serving in the armed forces, including the Mississippi Choctaw, Chief Ben offered his appreciation on behalf of the Tribe and Tribal leadership.

“We’ve had numerous Tribal Council members that are veterans. We, as Tribal members, have family members or friends that served this great country. Obviously, you served with great pride. To all of you Tushka (warrior) and Tushka Ohoyo (lady warrior), I thank you and God Bless you.”

Mississippi Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major (Ret.) Barry Parker served as guest speaker as he complimented the Tribe on hosting one of the better Veterans Day program he has participated in.

“No doubt, y’all know how to honor veterans. Several of my comrades are here today

and I tell you, there is no greater soldier than the Choctaw soldier. I tell everybody they were the hardest working soldiers in our battalion. I want to thank them for their service and the encouragement they received to serve,” said Parker.

“I want to recognize all members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, & Marines. It takes everybody when it comes to serving this country. We live in the greatest country in the world, no doubt, and we have freedoms that no other country has. The reason we have that is because the men and women wearing the uniform is brave enough to go into battle and put their lives on the line for their families, their country, and all that they be-

lieve in.”

Parker, with 37 years of service, retired from active duty in April 2023. He was recently elected to his first term as District 5 Supervisor of Lee County and also serves as Constituent Liaison for Veteran Affairs in North Mississippi for U.S. Senator Roger Wicker’s office.

“One of the biggest things veterans are not aware of is all the benefits that are available to them. I love helping veterans. I have served and I take advantage of the same benefits you would. I’m really excited about coming back and helping all the veterans.”

Parker recounted his first tour of Iraq

in 2005 and how war can take a toll on a veteran’s physical and mental state.

“It’s hard to believe the effects of war. We go fight overseas and there are some that had something physically happen to them, but there are a lot that come back with mental issues. I work with veterans everyday and, as a veteran with 3 deployments, you don’t come back the same person because you bring the war back home with

see PARADE, pg. 26

Parade entry division winners included, pictured left, (Vehicle) Choctaw Central Middle School Brave Ansen McMillan & Princess Karsyn Wallace; bottom left, (Walking) MBCI Youth Opportunity Program; bottom right, (Float) Choctaw Fire Department.



Chief Ben & Princess Thompson with poster contest winners, from left to right, (1st place) Elliana Tubby, (2nd place) Esmaralda Min-

go, (not pictured, 3rd place) Summer Lewis, & (4th place) Samari Jefferson. Congratulations to all the winners.

PARADE continued from page twenty-five

you and you fight it everyday in your mind. It's a serious issue among veterans today because we had 22 a day to take their own lives. If you have a battle buddy out there or you know someone coming back from deployment, check on them. PTSD is a real world issue. I stress that we watch out for these veterans and make sure they don't do the unthinkable. Once you do the unthinkable, all we have left is memories. We need to make sure they get

the right treatment if needed.” This year's parade grand marshals, selected by the Choctaw Veterans Committee, were U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. (Ret.) Benny Thompson and U.S. Army Specialist (Ret.) Mary Helen Umholtz. This year's poster contest winners and awards were announced. First place (\$100) - Elliana Tubby, 6th grade, Tucker Elementary School; 2nd place (\$75) - Esmaralda Mingo, 6th grade, Tucker Element-

tary School; 3rd place (\$50) - Summer Lewis, 7th grade, Red Water Elementary School; and 4th place (\$25) - Samari Jefferson, 6th grade, Tucker Elementary School. In the parade entry contest, the MBCI Youth Opportunity Program won the walking division, Choctaw Central Middle School Princess Karsyn Wallace and Brave Ansen McMillan and won the vehicle division, and the Choctaw Fire Department won the float divi-

sion. Serving as judges were: (poster) Robin Routh, Robert Ben, and Marie Wilson; (parade) Nana Frazier, Dana Johnson, and Perry Eaves. The MBCI Protective Services Unit conducted a 21-gun salute, followed by the playing of Taps. Veterans in attendance had their photo taken in front of the Veterans Memorial with Chief Ben and Princess Thompson to conclude the ceremony.



Veterans in attendance pose for a group photo in front of the Choctaw Veterans Memorial with Chief Ben & Princess Thompson.

AWYSE football championships held at ECCC

The Area Wide Youth Sports Elite (AWYSE) held their 6th Annual Super Bowl on Saturday, November 18, 2023, at Warrior Field on the campus of East Central Community College in Decatur, Miss. The Neshoba County Youth Football teams played in championships games in the Tini-mites, Rookies, Midgets, & Pee-wees divisions. Participating in the coin toss were Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & Choctaw Indian Princess Nalani LuzMaria Thompson. The Neshoba County Rockets made a remarkable run & showed great team effort but were defeated in their contests. Union won 20-18 in the Tinimites division; Sebastopol won 20-18 in the Rookies division; Winston County won 22-16 in the Midgets division; & Heidelberg won 12-6 in the Pee-wees division. During intermission, the 2023 AWYSE basketball champions were honored, which included the BC Elite 13-15 girls team.



Receives volleyball championship banner

Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben & the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians hosted a dinner honoring the Newton County High School Lady Cougars on Wednesday, November 29, 2023, at the Golden Moon VIP Room in Choctaw. The Lady Cougars recently won the MHSAA Class 4A State Volleyball Championship & a special championship banner was presented to them, courtesy of Chief Ben & the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Congratulations Lady Cougars!



Tribal seniors play in Indigenous Bowl

Mississippi Choctaw student-athletes Andrew Cotton & Richie Shoemake (Choctaw Central High School) & Brodie Ben (Neshoba Central High School) participated in the 6th Annual Indigenous Bowl, held at The Oaks on the Soboba Indian Reservation in San Jacinto, CA, on Thursday, December 21, 2023. The game, sponsored by the 7G Foundation, offers selected Native American graduating high school senior football players from federally recognized tribes across the U.S. the opportunity to further develop & showcase their talents that might otherwise escape the notice of college recruiters. Cotton & Ben were on the Frybread Bandits team



as they defeated Shoemake & the Headhunters team 48-14. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben was in attendance to cheer on our Tribal athletes, especially his son Brodie. He also assisted with the coin toss before kick-off. Also on the sidelines was Choctaw Central graduate Kiezer Johnson as he served as an assistant coach. Kiezer was the foundation's first ever intern & during the post-game ceremony, 7G announced the establishment of The Kiezer Johnson Award, which will be presented during the

7th Annual Indigenous Bowl in 2024. Kiezer was honored for being a role model of perseverance, strength & leadership. Pictured above, from left to right, are Kiezer Johnson, Andrew Cotton, Brodie Ben, Richie Shoemake, & Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben.



CCHS plays in Sequoyah Invitational

The Choctaw Central High School Lady Warriors & Warriors traveled to Tahlequah, Okla., to participate in the Sequoyah Invitational Basketball Tournament December 7-9, 2023. Both teams made it to the championship games. In the girls final, the Lady Warriors were defeated by the Riverside Lady Braves 56-54 in OT. In the boys final, the Warriors claimed the title with a 58-50 win over the Alma (AR) Airedales. **RIGHT**, from left to right, Lady Warriors Raiyleigh Perry & Kylinn Bell were named to the All-Tournament Team, Warriors Koie Williams was named MVP & Alan John, Jr. was named to the All-Tournament Team.



Tribal runners compete for state cross country titles

Several Tribal student-athletes recently earned All-State honors at the 2023 Mississippi High School Activities Association's State Cross Country Championships at Choctaw Trails in Clinton, Miss.

Championships were held on Thursday, November 2 for Classes 1A-3A, and Saturday, November 4 for Classes 4A-7A. The top 14 female, male runners in each class to finish the 5000 meter course were named to the All-State team.

continued next page



CCMS wins district tourneys

Congratulations to the Choctaw Central Middle School Lady Warriors & Warriors as they participated in the finals of the 7th & 8th grade Mid-Mississippi District Basketball Tournaments on December 14, 2023, at Louisville High School. The Lady Warriors defeated the Neshoba Central Lady Rockets to win the girls 7th grade champi-

onship. The 7th grade Warriors won their title by defeating the Leake Central Gators. The 8th grade Lady Warriors defeated the Neshoba Central Lady Rockets and the 8th grade Warriors were runner-up in their championship game against the Leake Central Gators. Congratulations CCMS on a great achievement this season!

They each received a medal during the post-race awards ceremony.

In Class 4A, Choctaw Central Lady Warrior sophomore Yazzlyn Alex placed 9th with her time of 21:45.39. For the Warriors, senior Brennan Henry placed 4th with a time of 17:54.58.

In Class 6A, Neshoba Central Lady Rocket sophomore Kylie Truss placed 4th with a time of 21:48.27. For the Rockets, sophomore Emjae Willis placed 11th with a time of 17:56.32, and eighth grader Quinton Dan placed 14th with his time of 18:24.12.

Choctaw Central placed third overall in the team standings in the girls and boys categories.

For the Lady Warriors, senior Mattison Bell placed 15th with a time of 22:48.52; eighth grader Roslyn Bohannon placed 21st with her time of 23:09.57; eighth grader Tia John placed 25th with a time 23:44.02; senior Dalaya Jenkins placed 34th with a time of 24:16.76;



sophomore Caitlyn Bounds placed 48th with her time of 25:42.41; & sophomore Natalia Jones placed 49th with her time of 25:42.53.

Also in Class 4A were Tribal student-athletes representing the Newton County Lady Cougars as sophomore Daz Tubby placed 44th with a time of



25:11.58 and sophomore Shae Jimmie placed 59th with her time of 26:24.44. They placed 12th overall in the team category.

For the Warriors, senior Jayce Sam placed 23rd with his time of 18:44.30; freshman Deondre Clemmons placed 28th with a time of 18:59.71; senior Zylar Thomas placed 39th with a time of 19:30.62; junior Diontray Tubby placed 41st with his time of 19:37.82; freshman Anslee Shumake placed 50th with a time of 19:48.31; & senior Koie Williams placed 55th with his time of 20:00.92.

The Neshoba Central Lady Rockets placed 5th overall while the Rockets took home runner-up honors.

For the Lady Rockets, senior Katelin Williams placed 17th with her time of 23:26.44; eighth grader Taelyn Mingo placed 40th with a time of 25:58.92; senior Kailyn Wil-

lis placed 48th with her time of 27:57.72; seventh grader Amerie Bell placed 52nd with a time of 28:43.94; & sophomore Yazi Williams placed 54th with her time of 29:04.39.

For the Rockets, senior Isaiah Thomas placed 21st with a time of 19:02.21; senior Kameron McMillan placed 32nd with his time of 19:52.21; & senior Christopher Lewis placed 57th with a time of 21:15.34.

Tribal student-athletes also participated in the November 2 championships. In the Class 2A girls race, Lake Lady Hornet junior Alyssa Sockey placed 37th with her time of 26:54.4. Lake finished 7th overall.

In Class 3A, Kemper County senior Danny Ray placed 75th in the boys race with his time of 23:43.3. Kemper County finished 14th overall.



ABOVE, MHSAA All-State honorees included, from left to right, Brennan Henry & Yazzlyn Alex of Choctaw Central, Kylie Truss, Emjae Willis, & Quinton Dan of Neshoba Central.

RIGHT, Tribal student-athletes Shae Jimmie & Daz Tubby of Newton County High School participated in the MHSAA Class 4A championships on Saturday, November 4. Tubby placed 44th & Jimmie placed 59th as the Lady Cougars placed 12th overall in the team category. The runners pose with their goodie bags, compliments of Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben.



Hudson runs in second NYC Marathon

The New Year brings out resolutions and goals for individuals to better themselves for the upcoming year. For one MBCI Tribal member, its just the continuation of what she has been able to accomplish so far by taking it one mile at a time... or 26.2 miles to be exact.

Sissy Sherman Hudson had the honor of participating in one of the premier running events, the New York City (NYC) Marathon, on Sunday, November 5, 2023. Historically considered the largest marathon in the world, it is held annually on the first Sunday in November and features the world's top professional athletes and a vast range of competitive, recreational,

and charity runners.

This was Sissy's second consecutive NYC Marathon as she ran her first one last year.

Sissy lives in Vicksburg with her husband, Clay Hudson, and serves as the Director of Resource Management for the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center. She is the daughter of Thomas and Shirley Stephens Sherman (of the Conehatta community) and has one sibling, Tommy Sherman.

Being athletic all her life, Sissy excelled as a member of Meridian Community College's basketball and softball teams in the late 1980's-early 1990's. She continued playing competitive slowpitch softball as a pitcher with a traveling team from Florida from 2008-2011, then played in a co-ed softball league from 2016-2017. In 2017, she took up competi-



LEFT, Sissy Hudson with her runner's bib. **RIGHT**, Pictured after the 2023 NYC Marathon were, from left to right, nephew John Sherman, father Thomas Sherman, Sissy, her husband Clay Hudson, & mother Shirley Stephens Sherman.

tive running and participated in half-marathons (13.1 miles) in New Orleans, LA, and Biloxi, MS.

"I've been driven to be an athlete. I've enjoyed running and doing the half-marathons. I wanted to shoot for a bigger goal to see if I could do it, to

challenge myself and see how hard it is. It was pretty difficult as they say only 1 percent of the population of the world has ever run a marathon, much less the New York City Marathon."

Although most races require pre-registering and paying an entry fee, the NYC Marathon has a set of qualifications and requirements to enter, one of which is a lottery system.

She submitted her name in February 2017, along with nearly 100,000 runners who entered to be chosen for one of 16,000 guaranteed slots in the race, but was not selected. She tried again in 2018, but no luck. She tried again, and again, and again - still no luck. When the 2022 lottery came up, Sissy entered her name again, and this time was shocked and thrilled to find out she was selected to run in her first NYC Marathon!

Starting in late June-early July, Sissy implemented a 17-week training regiment which included four days of running several miles and one long run day to cap off the week, then taking two days to rest. As for her diet, she tried to eat as much carbs and protein since she was running so much.

Sissy had two goals - finish



CCHS teams honored

Members of the Choctaw Central High School golf & cross country teams were recently honored with a luncheon, hosted by Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben, at the Stats Restaurant in the Silver Star Hotel & Casino in Choctaw. In golf, the Lady Warriors placed 5th & Warriors placed 9th in the 2023 MHSAA Class 4A State Golf Championships. They both won division titles during the season. In cross country, the Lady Warriors & Warriors both placed 3rd overall in the 2023 MHSAA Class 4A State Cross Country Championships. Congratulations to our student-athletes on a job well done!



continued next page

the race, and don't finish last.

The marathon route, spanning through New York City's five boroughs, started on Staten Island at the foot of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, and runs through the neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, before ending in Manhattan at the iconic Central Park finish line.

She ran the 26.5 mile course in 6 hours, 12 minutes and finished 44,000+ out of nearly 50,000 participants.

"I said I would never do it again. That was just too much training, too much work. It was hard and 26.2 miles was tough."

Never say never. By the time February 2023 rolled around, Sissy was optimistic she would be chosen again when she submitted her name into the lottery. This time, with much surprise, good luck was on her side as she was chosen to run again! Her goal this time was to beat her previous time and run under 6 hours.

"I ran almost all of it this time. Last year, I did a lot of walking and running, 3 minutes of running, a minute of walking, just to get through it. This year, I trained a lot harder because I wanted to beat my time from last year. I did a lot more running on the hills. The weird thing is, there are no hills in New York. There were five bridges we had to cross that had an incline and it was ridiculous."

Sissy's time this year was 5

hours, 36 minutes, 48 seconds as she came in 42,614th out of 51,402 total finishers.

Running the marathon was an experience itself, with a huge crowd supporting the runners, cheering them on and encouraging them all the way to the finish line.

"It was amazing, felt like there were millions of people out there! When you start at the starting line and hit the Bronx, there were lines of people, 10-15 people deep on the side of the roads. It was quite an atmosphere with people screaming, bands playing, people singing, like a big block party or a Mardi Gras party the whole way. The people of New York stay out there until the last runner comes through. It's exhilarating running through all that!"

With millions of people cheering the runners on, it was her family and friends that were her primary support system. In 2022, her husband, nephew John Sherman, and three of her friends were there to encourage her. This past November, her parents were in attendance as they joined her husband and nephew as they welcomed her near the finish line.

"That was very emotional to see them before I got to the finish line. There was never a time in either of the races that I wanted to stop. My parents were there waiting, my husband was there waiting. Everything on you hurts, obviously, but I wasn't in pain knowing that someone is at the end wait-

ing for you. That drives you to finish."

With another lottery coming up, Sissy says she will forego submitting her name. Instead, she will be focusing on her third marathon, the Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) on October 27, 2024, in Washington D.C.

Hosted annually in Arlington, VA and the nation's capital, the MCM offers an experience for runners to tour the nation's most recognizable landmarks while being supported by the men and women of the United

States Marine Corps.

Since MCM is not a lottery-based event, she has already pre-registered and will start training this summer.

"It's a historical run that intrigues me and its not as big as NYC, about 22,000 runners in this one. That will probably be my last one. I wanted to try something different and also have a goal for this year. It's important to have something to look forward to and accomplish something at the end of the year."

Choctaw Transit honored at national conference

Representatives of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Community Regional Transportation (CRT)/Choctaw Transit program recently attended the 5th National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC.

The conference was held December 3-6, 2023, at the Marriott Myrtle Beach Resort at Grande Dunes. This year's theme was *Navigating the Tides of Change with Rural & Tribal Transit*.

During a luncheon on Tuesday, December 5, the RTAP presented Tribal Transit Awards (Champions, Agencies, & Capital Project) honoring innovation, efficiency, commitment, & performance in the

tribal transit industry. The three awards recognize challenges overcome & best practices that raise the bar for tribal transit. The recognition distinguishes the award recipients as champions in this industry amongst all Tribal transit agencies in the U.S.

MBCI CRT/Choctaw Transit was named 2nd place recipients of the Tribal Transit Agency Award. Accepting the award on behalf of MBCI CRT/Choctaw Transit were Brant Isaac, Jr., Accountant Manager, & Jessica Martinez, Mobility Manager/I.T. Specialist.

The goals of the RTAP are to promote the safe & effective delivery of public transportation services in rural areas & to facilitate more efficient use of public transportation resources.

To meet those goals, the program focuses on the following objectives:

- Improving the quality of training & technical assistance resources available to the rural transit industry;
- Encouraging & assisting state, local, & peer networks to



Ray honored during Kemper Co. Senior Night

Kemper County High School held Senior Night for soccer on Monday, December 18, 2023, as Wildcat senior student-athlete Danny Ray was honored for his contributions on the soccer field. Danny was joined by his family, friends, coaches, & teammates during the recognition ceremony. Congratulations on your future endeavors!



IN MEMORIAM

HERMAN RAY WILLIS

Funeral services for Herman Ray Willis, 65, was held on Thursday, November 9, 2023,

at John E. Stephens Chapel in Philadelphia. Pastor Thomas Ben officiated.



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

Mr. Willis passed away on

Nov. 2 at the Choctaw Health Center in Choctaw.

He resided in the Pearl River community & was employed with Tribal Maintenance. He graduated from Choctaw Central High School in 1977, earned a carpentry degree in 1985 & graduated from Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, NM in 1989. He was a member of the Beaver Dam stickball team.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Harrison & Ruby Bell Willis; grandparents, Cohen & Molly Sissy Coleman Willis, Nicholas & Cleddie Ben Bell; sons, infant John &

Latham Wayne Jim; a sister, Sandra Renee Willis; brothers, Gary Hayes Willis, Sr., Basil Harris Willis, & Timothy D. Willis; 3 aunts & 6 uncles.

Survivors include his daughter, Raylynn Willis; sister, Lois J. Keats; brother, Jerome W. Willis; a granddaughter, Jasmine Renee Willis; 2 aunts, Bonnie K. Bell Martin & Sally A. Bell Bread ; 4 nieces; 6 nephews; 6 great-nieces; 10 great-nephews; 2 great-great nieces; & a host of relatives & friends.

continued next page

D's NATIVE EDGE Barber Shop

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CHOCTAW, MISSISSIPPI

***** BUSINESS HOURS *****

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday
8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Saturday, 7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Closed Wednesday & Sunday

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Come in for a free quote or call
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300 Choctaw Town Center, Suite 106

HOURS: 10:00 am-5:00 pm
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

TRANSIT continued from page thirty-one

address training & technical assistance needs;

- Promoting the coordination of transportation services;
- Building a national database of information about the rural transit industry.

The National RTAP, since its inception, has contributed to the achievement of these objectives at the national level by developing & distributing training materials, providing technical assistance, creating

web-based applications, producing reports, publishing best practices, conducting research, & offering peer assistance for rural & tribal transit providers & state RTAP programs.

MBCI CRT/Choctaw Transit was also awarded a National RTAP Honoree pin (pictured below) & presented a wool Native design blanket produced by Eighth Generation, a Seattle based company brand owned by the Snoqualmie Tribe. Artist Sarah Agaton Howes (Anishinaabe/Ojibwe) of the Fond du Lac Reservation in Minnesota, inspired the designs & colors of her people's historic beadwork for this blanket design. **RIGHT**, from left to right, are MBCI CRT/Choctaw Transit Accountant Manager Brant Isaac, Jr., RTAP Executive Director Robin Philips, Assistant Director Elizabeth Taylor, & MBCI CRT/Choctaw Transit Mobility Manager/I.T. Specialist Jessica Martinez.



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PAGE MARIE MINGO

Funeral services for Page Marie Mingo, 57, was held on Friday, November 10, 2023, at the Pearl River CERF Building. Rev. Leonard Jimmie, Jr. officiated.



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

Ms. Mingo passed away on Nov. 5 at her residence.

She resided in the Pearl River community & attended St. Therese Catholic Church. A graduate of Choctaw Central High School & East Central Community College, she recently retired from the Tribe's Youth Opportunity Program after 20-plus years of service. She enjoyed beading, traveling, watching Yellowstone & Alabama Crimson Tide football games.

She is preceded in death by her mother, Rita Marie Wishork; father, James Billy; & brother, Raphael Billy, Sr.

Survivors include her daughters, Shelby Mingo, Isley Mingo, & Denaje' Bell; stepdaughters, Sasha Grant & Sharayah Grant; companion, Dianne Grant; sisters, Janice Wishork & Shannon Mingo; brother, Michael Wishork, Sr.; 5 grandchildren; & a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

CECIL DAVIS THOMPSON

Funeral services for Cecil Davis Thompson, 61, was held on Sunday, November 12, 2023, at Bogue Chitto Baptist Church. Rev. Charles Doby



Henry officiated.

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

Mr. Thompson passed away on Nov. 5 at his residence.

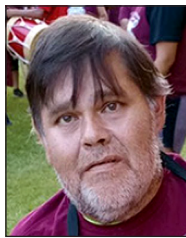
He enjoyed being with family & friends, fishing, being a mechanic, playing football at Choctaw Central & stickball with Bok Cito when he was younger, & cheering for the Oklahoma Sooners.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Steve Irvin Thompson & Oneva Beatrice Thompson; sisters, Brenda Thompson John & Sandra Thompson; brothers, Christopher Thompson, Sr. & Richard Thompson; & a nephew.

Survivors include his daughter, Tiana Thompson; sons, Cassidy Thompson & Jerome Thompson; sisters, Peggy Thompson & Gail Thompson; 1 grandchild; one aunt, Willie Dean Denson; & a host of relatives & friends.

JULIUS WADE BILLY

Funeral services for Julius Wade Billy, 44, was held on Monday, November 13, 2023, at the Pearl River CERF Building. Deacon Don Ahshapanek officiated.



Burial was in the Simon Isaac Cemetery. John E. Stephens Chapel Funeral Services was in charge of arrangements.

Mr. Billy passed away on Nov. 7 at the Mississippi Baptist Medical Center in Jackson.

He lived most of his life in Pearl River but made Standing Pine his home the last several years. He enjoyed family events & sports, especially stickball with the Warriors team, refereeing games, playing football

at Choctaw Central, & being a fan of the Oklahoma Sooners. He was a member of Hopewell Baptist Church & was a drummer for several stickball teams during the Fair.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Joseph Billy & Lillie Mae Isaac; son, Julius Nitak Hiloha Billy; sisters, Oree Bell, Madie Garcia, Mary Frances Billy, Sally Steve, Nancy Farve, & Mattie McMillan; & brothers, Terry Billy & Joseph Billy, Jr.

Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth Ann Billy; daughters, Bria Justyne Billy & Melayney ReShay Billy; stepdaughter, Nina Frazier; sons, Julian Bryce Billy, Julius Wade Billy, Jr., & Kenyon Keshawn Billy; stepson, Alex Frazier; sisters, Dessie Bownas & Lindsey Marie Bell; brothers, Angelo Neal Bell & Winslow Bennie Bell; 2 grandchildren, Trenton Billy & Tritan Willis; 1 great-grandchild, Langston Ben; & a host of relatives & friends.

DEVONTE' DANIEL CRUZ BELL

Funeral services for Devonte' Daniel Cruz Bell, 24, was held on Saturday, November 18, 2023, at the Spirit of Life Christian Center in Pearl River. Pastor Curtis Willis officiated.



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

Mr. Bell passed away on Nov. 8 at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson.

He enjoyed being with family & friends, telling jokes, drawing, playing baseball & stickball with Beaver Dam. He

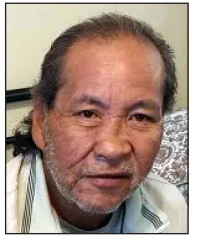
was a fan of Ohio State.

He is preceded in death by his grandparents, Virginia Dale Dixon, Archie & Reece Wallace; stepgrandfather, Harold Carlisle; & stepfather, Timothy York, Sr.

Survivors include his mother, Jeanette Denson; father, Edwin Bell (Jennifer); special friend, Chandalisha Wesley; daughter, Mi'Kylie D'Rose Bell; sons, Ze'Kai Omari Ombachi Wesley & Kayde Nosikah Ninnak Iklanna Reed; stepdaughters, La'Lylah Wesley & Zay'Leyanah Wesley; sisters, Coyo York & Mahala York; brothers, Cody Stoliby, Timothy "Mogie" York, Jr., & Ian Earl Sam Bell; grandparents, Daniel Dixon (Sherry); 8 aunts; 7 uncles; 1 niece; 2 nephews; & a host of family & friends.

VICTOR LEE WILLIS

Funeral services for Victor Lee Willis, 58, was held on Wednesday, November 29, 2023, at the Pearl River CERF Building. Pastor Thomas Ben officiated.



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

Mr. Willis passed away on Nov. 24 at his residence.

He was a laborer & helped out during wakes. He enjoyed being with his grandchildren, fishing, playing stickball with Beaver Dam, & listening to music.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Bronson & Saline Tubby Solomon, Woodrow & Annelle Willis; grandparents, Tom & Marceline Tubby, L.E. & Betty Willis; half-sister, Leigh Jonas Willis; stepsisters, Ange-

OBITUARIES continued from page thirty-three

la Solomon, Yolanda Sockey, Sharon Gibson, & John Sam; & stepsons, Ricardo Lee Wilson & Brennon Wesley.

Survivors include his companion, Sandra Gale Wesley; stepdaughters, Darrion Wesley, Kristen Wesley, Denitra Wilson, Ashley Wesley, & Twyla York; stepsons, Kendrick Wesley, Jamie Wesley, & Ryland Wesley; stepsister, Karen Solomon; stepbrothers, Steven Jim & Jody Solomon, Sr.; a cousin he loved as a brother, Terry Tubby; an aunt, Murlene Jim; & a host of relatives & friends.

GREGORY ELLIOTT MORRIS

Funeral services for Gregory Elliott Morris, 48, was held on Friday, December 1, 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.

Mr. Morris passed away on Nov. 25 at the Choctaw Health Center in Choctaw.

A U.S. Army Veteran, he was a member of Hope Indian Baptist Church & lived in the Pearl River community. He graduated from Choctaw Central High School & attended Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, NM. He then enlisted in the Army. After, he was employed as security for MBCI then Pearl River Resort. He was a member of the Bok Cito social dance group & played stickball with Bok Cito when he was younger. He enjoyed going to concerts, especially for his favorite band KISS, & collecting memorabil-

ia. He is preceded in death by his parents, Olen & Caroline Willis Morris; grandparents, Joe & Winnie Thompson Morris, Claude & Gladys Tubby Willis; 4 aunts; 5 uncles; & a brother-in-law.

Survivors include his partner, Jill VanEtten; stepchildren, Melissa Boatman & Tyler VanEtten; 5 step-grandchildren; sisters, Rae Nell Vaughn & Christina Isaac (Victor); brother, Billie Hockett, Jr. (Sharon); 6 nieces; 1 nephew; 5 great-nephews; 6 great-nieces; & a host of relatives & friends.

MAE INA ANDERSON BELL

Funeral services for Mae Ina Anderson Bell, 71, was held on Sunday, December 10, 2023, at Bogue Chitto Baptist Church. Rev. Charles Doby Henry & Bro. Eddie Johnson officiated.



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

Ms. Bell passed away on Dec. 5 at the Choctaw Health Center in Choctaw.

Born in Heidelberg, she was raised in the Tucker community. After marrying Truman Bell in 1975, they moved to Ripley, Tenn. She received her Bachelor's of Arts degree in 1996 from the University of Memphis. They moved back to Tucker in 1997. She was employed with the Department of Family & Community Services for almost 26 years & most recently served as deputy director. She was a member of Grace Fellowship Baptist Church & enjoyed reading the Bible. She

took in many foster children & saw them as her own children. In her younger years, she enjoyed playing tennis, bowling, & attending sporting events. She was a mentor for Project Smoke Signal & taught Choctaw culture to Choctaw youth in Tenn. She enjoyed visiting family members, visiting lighthouses, being with her granddaughters & attending their sporting events.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Truman Bell; son, Eric Shane Bell; parents, Ike & Louvenia King Anderson; sisters, Rita Vee Allen, Susan Irene Fraizer, Mabel Gibson, & Elizabeth Solomon Shoemake; & brothers, Chancellor Solomon, Huddleston Solomon, Bronson Solomon, & Armon Solomon.

Survivors include her daughter, Robin Tiffany Bell; sons, Jeremy Craig Bell & Michael Ashley Bell; foster son, Shawn Michael Shoemake; sisters, Anita Kay Johnson (Eddie), Ina Mae Solomon, & Tanya Reed; a brother, Johnny Smith; 2 grandchildren; & a host of relatives & friends.

WILLIE HICKMAN, JR.

Funeral services for Willie Hickman, Jr., 61, was held on Saturday, December 16, 2023, at Bogue Chitto Baptist Church. Deacon Kendall Wallace & Rev. Charles Doby Henry officiated.



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

Mr. Hickman passed away on Dec. 9 at his residence.

He was a U.S. Navy Veteran

& enjoyed playing his guitar. He played football at Choctaw Central High School & enjoyed playing baseball, softball, & stickball with Bok Cito & Nanih Waiya, fishing, & being a fan of the Alabama Crimson Tide & Pittsburgh Steelers.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Willie Hickman, Sr. & Gloria Mingo Hickman Cotton; sisters, Laura Ann Lewis, Debra Thames, Nancy Clemmons, Barbara Hickman, & Pollyanna Jones Hickman.

Survivors include companion, Rowena Willis; daughters, Gretchen Hickman & Rheannon Whitham; son, William Whitham; sisters, Louis Hickman, Melissa Bell, Teresa Anderson; brothers, Carl Hickman, Eric Hickman, David Hickman; 3 grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

ERICK WAYNE SAM

Funeral services for Erick Wayne Sam, 57, was held on Saturday, December 23, 2023, at the Red Water Community Gynasium. Deacon Ricky Edwards & Rev. Carl Wilson officiated.



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

Mr. Sam passed away on Dec. 19 at his residence.

A 1984 graduate of Carthage High School, he worked in construction before being employed at Choctaw Manufacturing Enterprise for over 30 years. He was a housekeeper at Choctaw Health Center before his retirement. He attended the

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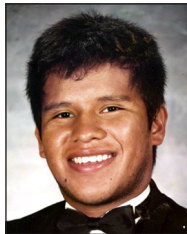
Holy Ghost Church & enjoyed listening to music, watching basketball & stickball, fishing, sightseeing, giving people rides, & being with his family.

He is preceded in death by his parents, R.B. & Mary Sam; a sister, Patricia Gayle Sam; & brothers, Davis Ray Wilson & Bobby Dean Sam.

Survivors include his brother, Mark Sam; a niece, Ariel Sam; nephews, Garrick Sam & Corey Sam; & a host of relatives & friends.

PENNINGTON RAY JOHNSON, JR.

Funeral services for Pennington Ray Johnson, Jr., 53, was held on Sunday, December 24, 2023, at the Pearl River CERF Building. Bishop Carl Overstreet officiated.



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

Mr. Johnson passed away on Dec. 20 at his residence.

He lived in the Pearl River community & enjoyed attending church, fishing with his wife, attending his grandkids' events, & dining out. He retired from Chahta Enterprise after 30 years, but went back. He loved his family.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Pennington Ray Johnson Sr. & Clara J. Dan; grandmothers, Irene Dan Phillips & Hattie Johnson; & a great-grandmother, Lele Jimmie.

Survivors include his wife, Mary Johnson; stepdaughters, Deanna Robinson, Krystal Robinson & Amelia Wallace; stepsons, Melton Robinson, Jr. & Jeremiah Robinson; sister, Jennifer Willis (Monty); brothers, Lamo Johnson (Modina) & Kenny Johnson (Kelly); 12

grandchildren; & a host aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, relatives & friends.

LORETTA JANE BELL YORK

Funeral services for Loretta Jane Bell York, 56, was held on Friday, December 29, 2023, at the Bogue Chitto Community Gymnasium. Rev. Shelly Peoples officiated.



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

Ms. York passed away on Dec. 24 at Anderson Regional Medical Center in Meridian.

She was a member of the Mississippi State Guard & attended Hopewell Baptist Church. A graduate of Neshoba Central High School, she served as a special education classroom assistant, secretary for the MBCI Youth Court & Tribal Enrollment Office, & security for MBCI & Pearl River Resort. She enjoyed going to thrift stores, watching Family Feud, talking on the phone, & being with her grandkids. She was a social dance coordinator for Chata Alla Himithowa Hicha Chiponta Althea & was a fan of the New Orleans Saints, Beaver Dam men's stickball & Bihhi Ayasha women's stickball teams.

She is preceded in death by

her husband, Danny York; father, Grady Bell, Sr.; brothers, Gerald Bell, Grady Bell, Jr., Gabriel Bell, & Oliver Bell; & a nephew, Ryan Bell.

Survivors include her mother, Jannie Lewis Dixon; daughters, Elisa York, Hestina York, Destini York, & Rebecca York; sisters, Victoria Lewis, Lou-Wanda Bell, Tanya Dixon, & Leona Bell; brothers, Aaron Bell, Orlando Bell, Johnny Bell, Edwin Willis, Larry Davis, Jr., James Henry, & Roger Mayfield; 7 grandchildren; & a hosts of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

CYNTHIA SMITH DIXON

Funeral services for Cynthia Renee Smith Dixon, 51, was held on Saturday, December 30, 2023, at the Pearl River CERF Building. Rev. Mark Patrick officiated.



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

Ms. Dixon passed away on

Dec. 25 at her residence.

She resided in the Pearl River community & enjoyed being with family & friends, cooking, beading, shopping, & going to concerts.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Frank Dixon, Jr.; parents, Bob Lee Smith & Norma Sue Briscoe Steve; brothers, Charles Briscoe, Herman Neal Smith & John Paul Smith; grandparents, Steve & Maggie Gibson Briscoe, Clement & Mallie Solomon; a nephew, Tashka Smith; great-nephew, Blake Wallace; 3 aunts & 6 uncles.

Survivors include her daughters, Brandi Bell, Chelsey Bell & Taylor Dixon; son, Quinton Dixon; sister, Sharlene Vasquez; 3 grandchildren; & a host of nieces, nephews, relatives, & friends.

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SUNDAY SCHEDULE

10:00 a.m. Sunday School
11:00 a.m. Worship Service
5:00 p.m. Evening Service

1st Sunday Service 4:00 p.m.
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



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*We invite you and your family
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**SUNDAY SERVICES - 2:00 pm
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4 The Love of the Game champions

*Congratulations to the following teams who won 4 The Love of the Game tournament championships held in Henryetta, Okla. **TOP**, Running Rebels won the co-ed 5-6 age division. Team members included Savvy Yazzie, Ian Willis, Koi Bell, Dennis Dixon, Owen Tubby, Tritan Willis, Majesty Isaac, Jay'Kamry Evans, Jaychel'le Evans, & Kroy Anderson. **BOTTOM**, MBCI Elite won the girls 11-12 age division. Team members were Karsyn Wallace, Ashna Wilson, Reagen Willis, TT Shoemake, Kalyana Allen, Emmy Cotton, Falcia Ben, Kylie Martin, & Ele Smith.*

CHOCTAW COMMUNITY NEWS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

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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:
COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM
P.O. BOX 6010
CHOCTAW, MS 39350
TELEPHONE: 601-663-7736

- Brian C. Willis
Communications Manager
- Melford Farve
Communications Writer
- Darron Tubby
Communications Photographer
- Diana Solomon
Communications Photographer
- Deon Denson
Communications Photographer

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.



Lady Rockets sign letters of intent

On Friday, November 10, 2023, Neshoba Central High School Lady Rocket senior student-athletes Mya Willis (left) & Sana'ya Jackson (right) signed their letters of intent to continue their softball careers at the collegiate level. Mya plans to join the Union University Lady Bulldogs in Jackson, Tenn.,

while Sana'ya plans to join the Copiah-Lincoln Community College Lady Wolves in Wesson, Miss. Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben was in attendance with teammates, coaches, family members & supporters to offer their congratulations & best wishes to Mya & Sana'ya on their future endeavors!

Ben commits to PRCC

Newton County High School senior student-athlete Maeli Ben signed a letter of intent to continue her academic & athletic career as a member of the Pearl River Community College's Wildcat softball program in Poplarville, Miss. As a third base player at Newton County, Maeli had a .333 batting average with 7 doubles, 2 triples, 4 homeruns, & 21 RBIs. At a signing ceremony on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, Maeli was congratulated by her family, coaches, teammates, & supporters as they wished her well on her future endeavours.

