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# GIDUWA CHEROKEE NEWS

YSG GWY AWP Official News Publication of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma April 2025

## UKB'S first of many Veteran's Committee Meeting

For exclusive UKB Veterans, these meetings will bring support and services to those who have served.



Sequoyah District Rep and Veteran Sammy Allen signing in as he attended the first Veteran's Committee Meeting.

By LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- On March 8, 2025, a veteran's committee meeting took place at United Keetoowah Band Speedway under Coordinator Ahnee Christie-Vangen.

Vangen is one of the members for the UKB Honor Guard, she served in the U.S. Army during the Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraq and Afghanistan era. One of her main focuses for these meetings is not only helping the elder veterans but the younger ones in her generation who have served.

"This was our very first veterans committee meeting, but I think it went great," Vangen said. "Since a lot of the veterans are elder and heard about this meeting through word of mouth, I have to find a good communication form to bring in more veterans."

Since this was the first meeting, it was more informal for Vangen so in the future she can bring in sources for what has been requested. She was able to refer a veteran to get in contact with Caleen Bolin at the new PRC Program.

She said the meetings should make the veterans comfortable to be able to speak on what they need assistance with, or even talk about what is on their mind. Vangen wants

to get them to where they can feel comfortable with talking to native people and non-natives in a public setting.

Other services that she will be bringing to next meetings will be someone from the Veteran's Affairs to help with filing claims, because most of them have trouble with their disability claims. She said at April's meeting, she is bringing in a counselor who works at the Veteran's Affairs. She is also planning to invite a couple of service officers from the state.

"There is so much going on and things to be planned for our upcoming meetings," Vangen said. "Hominy is trying to recruit more honor guard members for us, as we want to build the number of members up to 10 because right now there is only three of us."

As of right now, the meetings will be held at the Speedway in Tahlequah, but she is hoping to branch out and host meetings in each district for those who are unable to drive to Tahlequah.

"I wanted to thank Betty Holcomb and her daughter for cooking our meal for us," Vangen said. "We will have another meal at our next meeting, I think it's great we have a big support from our community."

The next UKB Veteran's Committee Meeting will be on April 19th, at 5p.m. at the Speedway, 15882 Old US Hwy 62, Tahlequah, OK. These meetings are held for Exclusive UKB Veterans only. If you have any questions contact, Ahnee Christie-Vangen at 539-777-3270.



Betty Holcomb and her daughter served a meal of chili, frybread and desserts.

## March Monthly Council Meeting Recap



Ryan Harp addresses the UKB Council at March Meeting (courtesy photo).

By Troy Littledeer | UKB Media Director

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians Chief Jeff Wacoche presented his monthly address to council report that touched on a House Appropriations hearing.

"On Feb. 25, I had the honor and privilege to testify with the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Indian Affairs," Wacoche said during the UKB Tribal Council meeting March 1.

Wacoche said that during the hearing, "once again, a certain tribal official testified opposing the UKB receiving funding from Indian Health Services."

"They called it redundant and wasteful," Wacoche said.

Wacoche said the IHS is the principal federal health care provider and health advocate for Indian people and combines a comprehensive health service delivery system for American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

"The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, also known as Public Law 93-638, authorizes Indian tribes and tribal organizations to contract for the administration and operation of certain federal programs which provide services to Indian tribes and their members," Wacoche said.

Under ISDEAA, Wacoche said, tribes have the option to either administer programs and services the IHS provides, referred to as Title I

Self-Determination Contracting, or they can assume control over health care programs and services the IHS would otherwise provide, referred to as Title V Self-Governance Contracting.

On Thursday, Feb. 27, tribal leaders met with Tulsa County Sheriff Vic Regalado and his staff. Wacoche said it "seemed to be very productive," and he looks forward to working with them in the future.

Wacoche on Feb. 3 attended the tribal leaders' roundtable discussion regarding the federal funding freeze and related issues.

"We continue to monitor the situation, and we will keep the tribal members updated as we move forward," Wacoche said.

The National Congress of American Indian Executive Council was Feb. 10-13 in Washington, D.C., and Wacoche, Assistant Chief Amos Ketcher, and Flint District Representative Frankie Still attended.

"I was asked to the stage to address a standing-room-only crowd regarding the M-37084 opinion and the historical significance of this new stance by the federal government," Wacoche said. "I received a standing ovation after delivering my address and fielding questions."

The M-37084 addressed the authority of the Secretary of U.S. Department of the Interior to take land into trust for the UKB in Oklahoma for gaming purposes within the Cherokee reservation.

See COUNCIL MEETING, Page 2

## UKB ICW recognizes Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month

The department continues to shed light on the month of April and works diligently with Keetoowah families and children

By: LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians and the UKB Indian Child Welfare recognizes the month of April as Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month.

As former UKB ICW Director, Roxana Wilden brought up the resolution to Council it was mainly to remind everyone that they are here and do have an Indian Child Welfare Department that is looking out for our children. The legislation to support the cause was passed by UKB Tribal Council in April 2021, allowing the department to hold its first Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Day.

Four years later, UKB ICW has continued to work with Keetoowah children and their families in cases involving abuse, neglect and adoption. The department voices support for the National Indian Child Welfare Act.

The ICWA is a federal law enacted in 1978 that works to protect tribal children in custody cases from being separated from their families and tribal communities and placed into non-Native homes. It also sets

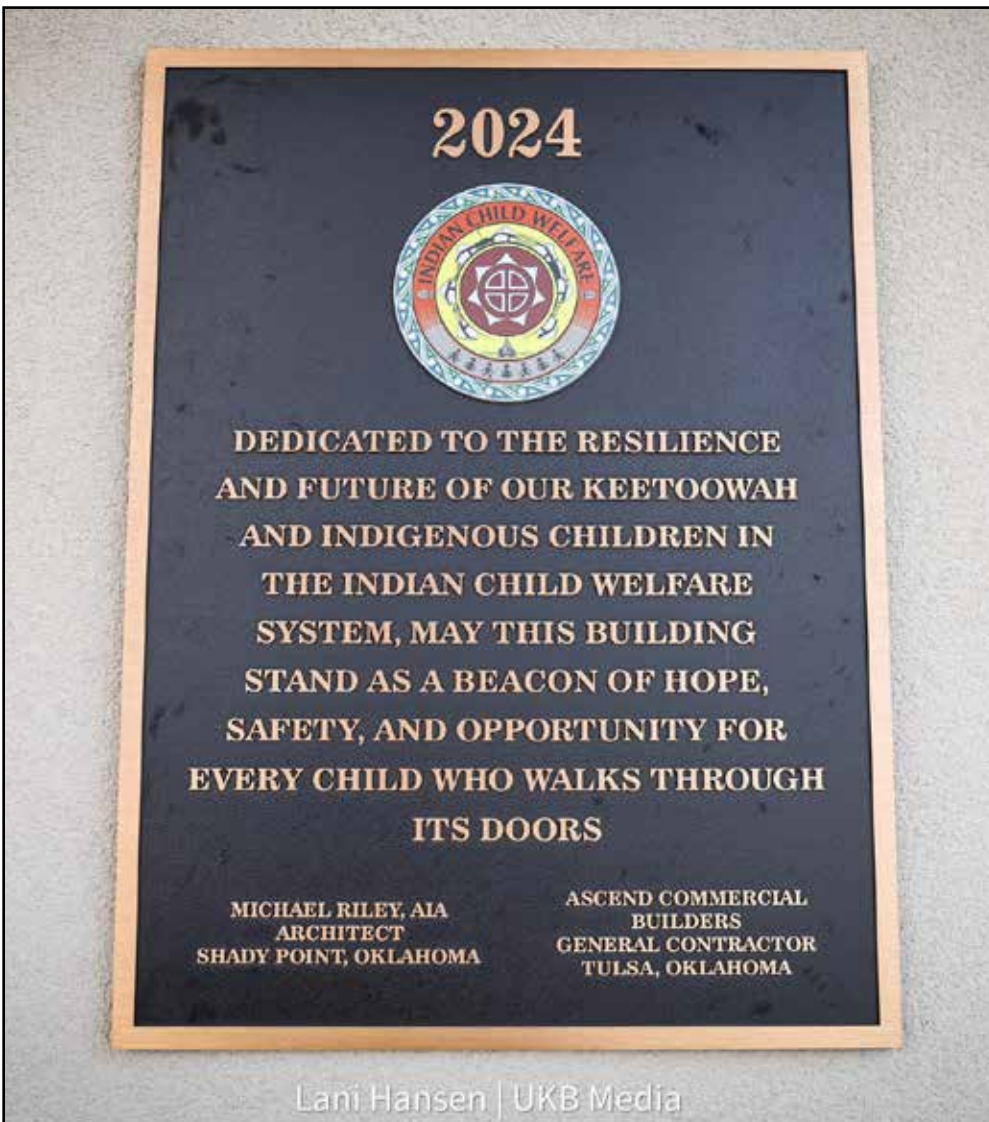
minimum federal standards for child custody cases involving Native children prioritizing their best interests and strengthening family and tribal stability.

According to the reports on Indian Health Services, there are 772,000 children who were victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 13.9 per 1000 for Native American/Alaska Native children setting the second highest rate of victimization.

"We only have four active cases right now, one of them was related to neglect but it wasn't bad," UKB ICW Case Worker Nina Scott said.

The UKB ICW serves the 14 counties and nationwide as their social workers advocate for the children. The main mission of UKB ICW is keeping the children safe whether it is reuniting them with family or finding a healthy Keetoowah foster home and adoptive homes.

The department houses three staff members ICW Clerk Bethany Vance, ICW Case Worker Nina Scott and Ahnee Christie-Vangen who oversees ACES.



Lani Hansen | UKB Media

This plaque was dedicated to the new UKB ICW building to state the services which it provides.



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**Sequoyah Dist.**  
Donald Adair  
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**Tahlequah Dist.**  
Sammy Allen  
918-931-0177

# Keetoowah Resilience Shines Amid Funding Fights

**By: UKB Chief Jeff Wacoche**

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — February was a whirlwind for the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma (UKB), a month packed with advocacy, celebration and push-back against those who'd rather see us sidelined than thriving.

It kicked off Feb. 3 with the Tribal Leaders Roundtable, where we tackled the federal funding freeze head-on. We're eagerly observing that situation as it develops. The next day, Feb. 4, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Muskogee Regional Office rolled in for some much-needed training on funding reporting—dry stuff, but vital.

Things heated up Feb. 10-13 at the National Congress of American Indians Executive Winter Session in Washington, D.C. Alongside our assistant chief and Flint District representative, I took the stage before a standing-room-only crowd to unpack the M-opinion—a game-changer from the feds with deep historical weight. The standing ovation that followed, after I answered a barrage of questions, felt like a nod to our people's grit.

We carried that energy into Feb. 14, celebrating the M-opinion back home with another packed house. It was a hell of an event—huge thanks to everyone who made it happen. A few days later, on Feb. 17, we huddled with the executive director of the UKB Federal Corporation and our Light Horse director for a preplanning ses-



## Chief's Corner

**JEFF WACOCHÉ**  
Principal Chief  
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sion, keeping the momentum rolling.

Feb. 25 was a personal highlight: testifying before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Indian Affairs. It's not every day you get that kind of platform. Then, on Feb. 27, we sat down with Tulsa County Sheriff Regalado and his team—productive talks, and I'm optimistic about what's ahead. Wa-do, Sheriff, for carving out the time.

The month wrapped up Feb. 28 with the Office of Self-Governance onsite for training. Myself, the assistant chief, secretary, treasurer, tribal administrator, deputy comptroller and our financial consultant soaked it in. It was sharp, useful stuff—we'll be passing the slides along to district reps.

Now here's where it gets ugly. During those House hearings, a certain tribal official—nameless here because leadership doesn't stoop to pettiness—took shots at UKB's push for Indian Health Service (IHS) funding, calling it "redundant" and "wasteful." Let's set the record straight.

The IHS is the backbone of federal health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives, tasked with lifting our

physical, mental, social and spiritual health to the highest level. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act—Public Law 93-638—gives tribes like ours the right to contract or compact with IHS to run our own programs. Title I lets us administer services; Title V lets us take full control. It's not charity—it's law.

The IHS Tribal Self-Governance Program, now in 12 regions nationwide, added nine new tribes in 2011 alone. Why? Because it works. Tribes know their people's needs better than any bureaucrat. UKB members have been denied care—the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma knows it, IHS knows it. Now, we're doing what Congress intended: stepping up to deliver for our own.

Yet some still balk. That's their problem. We'll keep moving forward, the Keetoowah way—integrity first, justice and equality for all. Anyone willing to join us is welcome at the table.

In conclusion, I would like to send a heartfelt congratulations to the Kenwood and Zion girls on winning their respective ORES State Championships and congratulate the Keys Lady Cougars for qualifying for the Class 3A girls state basketball tournament. Also, a huge shout out to the Sequoyah Lady Indians for finishing the season as Class 3A girls state runners-up and bringing home the silver ball!

## Chief Wacoche attends TIBC in DC

**By LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter**

WASHINGTON — Like last year, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma Chief Jeff Wacoche joined tribal delegates from across the United States to advocate for needed federal support in public safety, transportation, and education at the Tribal Interior Budget Council in Washington, D.C., from March 10 through March 18.

"Getting the opportunity to be a part of TIBC is great for the tribe," Chief Jeff Wacoche said. "It's been a good learning experience getting to sit

at the table with all the tribes across the nation working directly with the top officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Justice, and Bureau of Indian Education together for the needs of Indian Country."

The Budget Advisory Council was established in 1999 to facilitate tribal government participation in the planning of the BIA budget and includes two tribal representatives from each of the 12 BIA regions.

The mission of the TIBC is to provide an advisory government-to-government forum and process for tribes and the Department to develop bud-

gets that allow for the fulfillment of tribes' self-determination, self-governance, sovereignty, and treaty rights, as well as sufficient levels of funding to address the needs of tribes and their tribal citizens.

The UKB's presence at TIBC is crucial to demonstrating the needs of the smaller tribes in the U.S. that depend on funding. It ensures that federal budget allocations adequately support the essential services necessary to maintain the sovereignty and well-being of all the nations entitled to the funding.



Chief Jeff Wacoche met acting Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Brian Mercier in Washington, D.C. (courtesy photo).

## Council Meeting

Secretary Caleb Grimm-Smith gave a membership update, reporting five new applications had been received along with one request for relinquishment; the reason was listed as "other."

Deputy Comptroller Ryan Harp reported the Fiscal Year 2022 audit is complete. "The expected window for the Fiscal Year 2023 audit going to the clearinghouse should be in April," Harp said.

A firm has been engaged to do the Fiscal Year 2024 audit, and once 2023 is completed, Harp said, the work on 2024 will begin.

"American Rescue Plan Act funds

have been obligated, and we are in the liquidation process," Harp said.

Executive Director Woody Anderson, UKB Corporate Board, said the OK Station — purchased recently by UKB — is staffed, and a new person in the finance department is a former Love's Country Store manager.

Ben Orwin, who manages the Echota Village RV Park, is spearheading the project involving Diamondhead Resort, which was purchased by the tribe.

"They are doing onsite reservations and getting a lot of reservations," Anderson said.

Anderson said applications are be-

ing taken for employees at the resort. Other news presented involved a leak that caused a loss of 100,000 gallons of water, and it is being repaired. Anderson said advertisements are out for an events coordinator and a general manager.

"We have also been checking on the condition of equipment and setting up with a local business in town to look at our vehicles, get them serviced, and if we need any help in the season, we can take the equipment to them," Anderson said.

The next UKB meeting is Saturday, April 5, at 10 a.m. in the Wellness Center on the UKB complex.

# Title VI Conference Highlights Collaboration and Training in Minneapolis

By Troy Littledeer | UKB Media Director

MINNEAPOLIS — Ronald Holden, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma Title VI kitchen manager, and Rebeca Dreadfulwater, director of United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma Title VI programs, attended the 2025 Title VI Conference in Minneapolis from March 10-13. The event drew a robust crowd, including Title VI directors from across the United States and Hawaii, along with kitchen managers, staff, and representatives from Area Agencies on Aging (AAA).

The conference agenda featured a wide range of topics, including Title VI policy and procedure, fiscal training, caregiving and respite, nutrition, traditional foods, dementia, elder abuse, and a screening of “Touch the Water.” With too many sessions to list comprehensively, the event offered extensive professional development opportunities.

The Title VI Directors Association held a board meeting during the conference, electing two chairpersons—one from New Mexico and one from Oregon—along with a secretary from



Rebeca Dreadfulwater and Ronald Holden (courtesy photo).

Oklahoma. The board already included a vice-chair and treasurer.

Attendees appreciated reconnecting with Title VI staff, including key figures like Cynthia LaCounte, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and director of the Office for American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian Programs. Jasmine Aplin provided updates on remaining funds for Title VI grants, while Heidi Robertson, RDN, LD, MPH, a registered dietitian and public health professional, shared expertise on nutrition and menu planning for Older Americans Act (OAA) Title VI programs. Derek Lee, regional administrator for Title VI programs, also contributed to the discussions.

The conference underscored the importance of collaboration and training in supporting Title VI initiatives nationwide.



Poster from the 2025 Title VI Conference (courtesy photo).

# Tribe Joins USDA Program to Boost Local Food Supply

By Troy Littledeer | UKB Media Director

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma announced it has signed a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agriculture Marketing Service under the new Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program. The initiative, led by Steve Jones, aims to strengthen local food supply chains by funding the purchase of foods grown within the region.

The UKB will use a competitive procurement process to buy local foods from producers, for-profit businesses, and nonprofit groups like food banks and pantries. Jones said the program supports healthy, region-specific foods and beverages unique to Oklahoma, distributing

them to feeding programs that serve communities, including underserved areas.

Part of a broader USDA effort, the LFPA provides non-competitive agreements to state, tribal and territorial governments. The UKB’s participation highlights its role in supporting local and underserved producers while increasing access to fresh food. The program also seeks to create economic opportunities and build a resilient agricultural network, Jones noted.

The program aims to be an innovative way for tribes and states to procure and share foods that reflect our area. Jones has already begun giving food boxes away at district meetings. To see when the next food giveaway is, checkout the UKB Facebook page. All UKB members can reach out to their council representatives for more information.



Steve Jones at a food distribution event (Lani Hansen photo)

# UKB Cane Crew Transplants Rivercane in Conservation Effort

The project’s roots trace back to late 2024, when Curry Blankenship, an environmental specialist with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, approached Cain about sourcing rivercane to stabilize soil near a sewage lagoon by the tribe’s Looped Square Meat Company.

Troy Littledeer | UKB Media Director

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. —The United Keetoowah Band Rivercane Conservation Crew completed a transplant project in early February, partnering with local residents and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation’s Office of Environmental Services to advance their mission of preserving natural resources vital to the community and its cultural heritage.

Known as the “Cane Crew” within the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma (UKB), the group operates under the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (UKB-THPO). Their work extends beyond tribal boundaries, serving neighbors through projects like the recent transplant, which moved rivercane from Cherokee County to Okmulgee County after months of planning.

The effort is supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), a nonprofit focused on

conservation through public-private partnerships. “We were always told that it was our unique role as Indian people to be the guardians of the land,” said Roger Cain, UKB-THPO director. He noted that NFWF funding provides jobs well-suited to crew members like Buck Nofire, 38, who grew up working the land alongside Curtis Hummingbird and Todd Downing, 61.

“A job is a job, and if it needs to be done, I will do it,” Nofire said, emphasizing his practical approach over cultural sentiment. Downing, a bilingual Keetoowah from Shady Grove near Hulbert, added a lighthearted memory: “I accidentally stabbed my grandmother in the foot with a cane pole while gigging for crawfish and got a whipping—so I have a real good cultural connection to it!”

The project’s roots trace back to late 2024, when Curry Blankenship, an environmental specialist with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, ap-

proached Cain about sourcing rivercane to stabilize soil near a sewage lagoon by the tribe’s Looped Square Meat Company. Blankenship, a former UKB-THPO colleague, knew the crew tended healthy canebrakes. The cane was harvested from Susan and Loyal Plumb’s riverfront property in Cherokee County, where an abundant canebrake had spread into their yard.

“We were so glad to see those guys pull up,” Loyal Plumb said. “The plants are beautiful, but we had much more than we needed.”

Cain, an ethnobotanist and cultural artist, leads the crew’s broader efforts to map and restore historic canebrakes, calling them “skilled riparian technicians” whose rural upbringing reflects traditional ecological knowledge. Rivercane, a native bamboo, was essential to ancient Cherokee life—used for dwellings, weapons, and baskets—and remains ecologically valuable, stabilizing soil and filtering stream contaminants, as



Cane used at project (courtesy photo).

Blankenship’s project demonstrates.

For more information, contact Cain at rcain@ukb-nsn.gov or 918-871-2826.

**GIDUWA CHEROKEE NEWS**

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*UKB 2025 Graduation*  
**CELEBRATION**

AT THE VENUE, 109 W. WILLIS ROAD, TAHLEQUAH

ALL UKB HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE/VOTECH/ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATES AND THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND

SATURDAY **03** 4:00PM  
**MAY**

GRADUATES WILL BE RECOGNIZED AND CORDS AND STOLES WILL BE GIVEN OUT TO THE GRADUATES.

PLEASE RSVP TO [ADRY@UKB-NSN.GOV](mailto:ADRY@UKB-NSN.GOV) BY APRIL 21

## UKB Tribal Enrollment

18300 W. Keetoowah Circle Tahlequah, OK 74464 Open Monday-Friday | 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

As with other federally recognized tribes, the United Keetoowah Band has its unique process to determine membership. Visit [ukb-nsn.gov/membership](http://ukb-nsn.gov/membership) for Enrollment documents and a brief FAQ section of the most common questions about UKB membership. Find forms for Membership Applications, CDIB Instructions, Update Your Information and UKB Relinquishment.

For additional questions, or if you are a member who has lost your enrollment card, call the UKB Enrollment Office Registrar Amanda Stopp at 918-871-2797. Questions concerning history, cultural practices, clothing, language or ceremonies are better suited for our John Hair Cultural Center and Museum. Visit [ukb-nsn.gov/john-hair-cultural-center-muse-um](http://ukb-nsn.gov/john-hair-cultural-center-muse-um) or call 918-871-2866.

# UKB Treatment Services Ranks Third Among Tulsa Addiction Centers

**Staff Reports**

TULSA, Okla. — Keetoowah Cherokee Treatment Services (KCTS) has earned recognition as the third-best addiction resource center in Tulsa, according to a recent ranking by AddictionResource.net. The accolade highlights KCTS's dedication to delivering comprehensive care for individuals struggling with substance use disorders.

Operated by the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, KCTS provides a multifaceted treatment program designed to meet the unique needs of each client, serving both tribal and non-tribal members. Services include medication-assisted treatment (MAT) with methadone, individual and group therapy, case management, and peer recovery support. This holistic



approach combines medical care with emotional support to guide clients through their recovery. KCTS stands out by weaving traditional Keetoowah Cherokee values into its treatment

methods, enriching the therapeutic experience and fostering a sense of community, especially for Native American clients. This cultural integration strengthens the center's mission to address addiction within the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation Territory.

To enhance accessibility, KCTS offers flexible operating hours: Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., and Saturday from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. Prospective clients and their families can contact the Tulsa facility at 918-262-4550 or toll-free at 888-675-3959 to schedule appointments or seek guidance from staff.

The recognition underscores KCTS's ongoing efforts to tackle the challenges of substance use disorders in the region. For more details on its services, visit [echotabehavioralhealth.com/tulsa/](http://echotabehavioralhealth.com/tulsa/).

## Keetoowah Students Win Art Awards

**"The JHCC&KM Gift Shop prides itself on having a variety of wares made by Keetoowah members. We also are proud of supporting our community—most of our wares were made by generations of Keetoowah families within our fourteen districts," - gift shop manager Raelie Grayson.**

**By MARILYN CRAIG | Museum Marketing Coordinator**

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — A pair of Keetoowah brothers each entered several categories in the Five Civilized Tribes Museum Student Art Show. When the winners were announced, both boys received awards and recognition for several pieces. Both Pettit boys are homeschooled through the Epic Charter school curriculum.

It's no surprise the boys are becoming award winning artists, considering the boys' parents are also traditional native artists. Their dad, the late Tommy Leigh Pettit, was a prolific Keetoowah artist who made carved canes and walking sticks, rock carvings, stickball stick earrings, carved wooden boxes, beadwork and copper jewelry including pendants and bracelets.

Their mom, Waylie Pettit is also an artist who makes jewelry, including earrings made of fish scales (they're beautiful) pine needle baskets, and has her own line of soap, Sassy Pig Soaps. It has 100% all natural ingredients including lard, coconut oil, goat milk, natural mica colors, and lye.

The oldest brother, Levi Thomas-Edward Pettit, a sophomore, won the Florence Hart McIntuff award for "Connection", the deer bone ring set. This was the highest level of the show ...this award/grant only goes to the best in show of traditional pieces only.

Levi also got second place in sculpture/woodworking for "Little Turtle", a clay figure. In addition, he received an honorable mention for "Earthen Journey" for his clay necklace. He also received honorable mention for cultural arts division for "connection" the ring set.

Younger brother Ely Sequoyah-Charlie Pettit, a freshman, won the Frances Rosser Brown award, the second highest overall of the show for "Daksi, Time to Dance" traditional turtle shell dance rattle. He also got second place in his grade category in cultural arts for "Daksi Daksi, Time to Dance". Ely also received an Honorable mention in painting/drawings category for "No Going Back". All their stuff is for sale at the Five

Civilized Tribes Museum in Muskogee, OK until March 31.

You don't have to travel to Muskogee to purchase the Pettit family's art. The Keetoowah Museum gift shop has many of their items for sale. "The JHCC&KM Gift Shop prides itself on having a variety of wares made by Keetoowah members. We also are proud of supporting our community—most of our wares were made by generations of Keetoowah families within our fourteen districts," said gift shop manager Raelie Grayson.

The gift shop is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. and Saturdays by appointment. For more information, visit the JHCC&KM Facebook page, tribal website, or call 918-871-2866



On the left of Ely Pettit are both of his drawings, "No Going Back" and "The Hunt." "No Going Back," was an honorable mention.



Levi Pettit stands next to his clay, bone, glass bead necklace. It is the first one he's done like this. It did get honorable mention in his grade category.



**We Are HIRING**

Please visit our UKB website at: [www.ukb-nsn.gov](http://www.ukb-nsn.gov) for all opening positions!

**Apply Now**

Applications can be found at [www.ukb-nsn.gov/employment](http://www.ukb-nsn.gov/employment)

Send your applications to:  
 UKB Federal Programs Building at 18300 W. Keetoowah Circle, Tahlequah, OK, 74464. If mailing please address your envelope with ATTN: Human Resources. Completed and scanned applications will be accepted.



**WE ARE HIRING!**

**Summer 2025 Indian Youth and Young Adults Service Corp**

Application Deadline: April 4th

Apply on our website: [www.ukb-nsn.gov/employment](http://www.ukb-nsn.gov/employment)

Or email for an application: [amccullough@ukb-nsn.gov](mailto:amccullough@ukb-nsn.gov)

Shawnee National Forest	Cherokee National Forest
Harrisburg, IL May 27 - June 18	Cleveland, TN July 7 - Aug 1
Young adults will be selected to spend four weeks in the Cherokee and/or Shawnee National Forests conducting conservation and environmental projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$15 per hour for crew members</li> <li>\$19 per hour for assistant crew leader</li> <li>\$22 per hour for crew leader</li> <li>Room and board provided while on job site</li> <li>Ages 18-30, up to 35 if a Veteran</li> </ul>
Participants will gain knowledge and skills in forest management techniques, reforestation, and cultural resource management	

For more information, contact Andie McCullough at UKB Historic Preservation  
[amccullough@ukb-nsn.gov](mailto:amccullough@ukb-nsn.gov) 918.871.2825

# Volunteers Make a Difference at Keetoowah Museum

**“I needed something to keep my mind sharp and to stay connected with the outside world. I like visiting and learning new things from the people I’m around. Another benefit is the friendships we have developed as we all work together as one.” – Carolyn Swimmer**

**By MARILYN CRAIG | Museum Marketing Coordinator**

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. —April 2025 marks the first full year for the volunteer program at the John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum. While people volunteered sporadically in the past, Museum Assistant Director Barbara Girty Foster created a formal volunteer program, making the results measurable and even more impressive.

“Volunteers have assisted us with everything from cooking lunch for our language instructors’ meetings to decorating the gift shop and museum for holidays and the Keetoowah Christmas Art Show and Sale, assisting with hosting special events, and putting together craft kits, as well as setting up and cleaning up,” Girty Foster said.

“Our Christmas Native Arts Show and Sale is made much more beautiful due to the work of the volunteers. They decked the halls, trimmed the trees, decorated Christmas cookies, and helped host the receptions. They also work for the museum during the Celebration, either at the gift shop or

at the Tradition Keepers area,” she added.

“We were fortunate that the Cherokee County Health Services Council was launching their Senior 918 program, which pays volunteers for up to 35 hours per month. We were able to get three of our volunteers on the program, as well as secure volunteers for our nutrition program and historic preservation department,” she continued.

When asked why she volunteers, Norma Jimerson said, “After retiring, I decided I had the time to volunteer and stay active. Plus, I enjoy meeting people. My favorite task is learning from others about the language and our history and helping with the activities the museum puts on.”

Volunteer Carolyn Swimmer said, “I needed something to keep my mind sharp and to stay connected with the outside world. I like visiting and learning new things from the people I’m around. Another benefit is the friendships we have developed as we all work together as one.”

Dama Still said, “My husband is Keetoowah, and I have been around

the Keetoowah people most of my life. I know the culture and the crafts, and my favorite task is doing the crafts.”

Current museum volunteers include Betty Holcomb, Norma Jimerson, Herman Jimerson, Dama Still, Carolyn Swimmer, and Luanna Taylor. If you are interested in volunteering at the museum, contact Barbara Girty Foster at 918-871-2794.



**Museum Volunteers Dama Still and Carolyn Swimmer put together reed kits for flat reed mats.**



**Volunteers decorating the museum classroom for the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce December Monthly Mingle and Native Christmas Art Sale and Show. (L to R) Dama Still, Herman Jimerson and Norma Jimerson.**



**Museum Volunteers Norma Jimerson and Carolyn Swimmer sew on a quilt that will be raffled off at the Keetoowah Celebration in October.**

# Museum’s Back to Basics Kicks Off the Gathering and Harvesting Series

**“The class itself was so fun. It was so nice to reconnect with our culture with my elders.” – Pretty-Sky Walden**

**By MARILYN CRAIG | Museum Marketing Coordinator**

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — After participating in the “Back to Basics” buckbrush gathering and harvesting class on Saturday, March 8, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., it’s safe to say that everyone in the class gained a whole new appreciation for baskets made from natural materials. Tradition Keeper Cindy Hair taught the class.

A location on the tribe’s 80-acre complex provided the buckbrush, but the plant was hard to gather that day. Runners were found, but they were scarce. The class gathered vines for about an hour, though no one collected enough to make a full basket. The materials were bundled and given to Pretty Sky Wilden and Alice Wilder, who said they would make a basket from them.

Due to the cold and windy weather, class members brought the reed to the museum kitchen and boiled it on the stove. “Last year, we were able to have a fire and boil it outside. This time, with the wind, it wasn’t feasible,” said Assistant Museum Director Barbara Girty Foster.

After gathering the material, the next step was to strip the bark from the runners. They boiled the runners

for a couple of hours, then used a rag, a pot scrubber, a leather glove, or a paring knife to rub up and down and remove the bark.

Of course, anytime you get a group of Keetoowah women together, there is plenty of talking and laughter. After stripping, the branch was clean, and a knife was used to trim any raised spots on the vine until it was perfectly smooth. Then it could be coiled until ready to use.

Keetoowah employee and tribal member Pretty Sky Wilden said, “I learned basket weaving by watching my grandma, Susie Dick. She used to work at the Cherokee Heritage Center. They had commercial reed, so that’s what I learned with and what I’d always used. I’ve never gathered buckbrush before, but now that I have, I know I’ve seen it all over the place, and I’m excited to gather more.”

“The class itself was so fun. It was so nice to reconnect with our culture with my elders. Miss Cindy is a great teacher and a longtime friend of my mom, Roxana Wilden, and it was such an honor to learn from her. I was buzzing with excitement and happiness. We were laughing and sharing knowledge while we gathered—truly a gift. I felt like the trees were happy to see us and hear us talk

and laugh, the Earth was happy to have its back scratched and missed our fingers in the dirt. I saw a freshly hatched copperhead after I scooped up some leaves; it looked scared, so I whispered ‘sorry’ and put a couple of leaves back on top of him. I like to think that’s something my ancestors encountered.”

“I love to learn our traditional ways and get my hands dirty. I really got the hang of it pretty quick, I think! I’d dig around in the leaves like an armadillo, and then I’d hook one with my finger. When I followed the line and pulled, sometimes it would go on forever, and I’d have to navigate through thorns and saplings; sometimes it would only go a few inches. It’s like a treasure hunt. Stripping the buckbrush was so hard! I had to ask Miss Cindy for help a couple of times—she has stronger hands than me,” she said.

The entire class gained a better appreciation for a buckbrush basket after this experience. Due to the time invested in finding, cutting, and stripping materials, baskets made of natural materials will—and should—cost more money (at least double the price of commercial reed).

The next class in the gathering and harvesting series will be picking



**Keetoowah member Alice Wilder uses a knife to strip the buckbrush. Pretty-Sky Wilden examines a buckbrush plant that will be planted on tribal grounds**

wild onions on March 22, followed by a class on how to bait a hook and catch and clean fish on April 26. Although this series is sold out, space remains available for the Canning Series, with classes on June 7, July 12, and August 9. For more information, contact Barbara Girty Foster at 918-871-2794

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# Tribal Nations Sue Over Bureau of Indian Education Cuts

The Pueblo of Isleta in New Mexico, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Kansas, and Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes in Oklahoma initiated the legal action, alleging the lack of consultation violated statutory obligations and infringed on the rights of tribal nations and students, severely affecting those left out of the decision-making process.

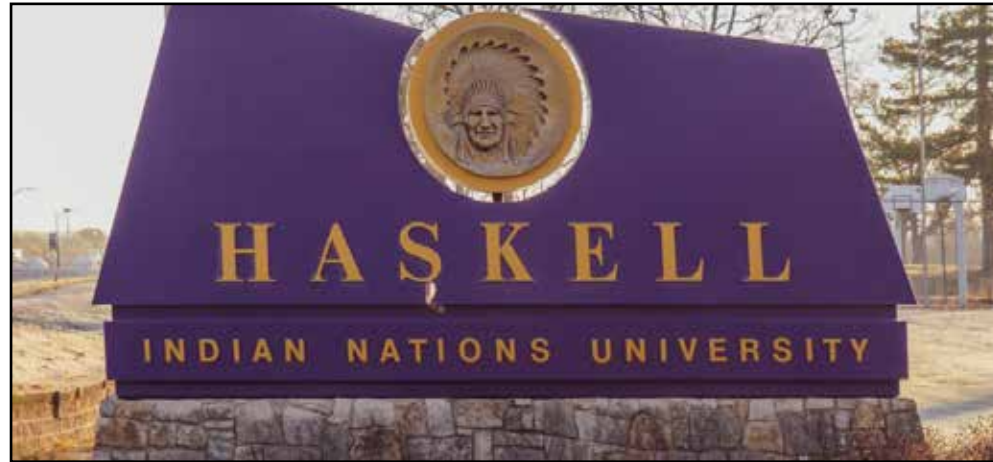
## Staff Reports

**“Everybody needs to come together, literally come together, and fight for the overall rights that the federal government owes to the Indian tribes collectively, whether or not it impacts them directly or not.”**

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Three tribal nations and five affected students have filed a lawsuit against the Secretary of the Interior, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, and the Director of the Bureau of Indian Education, challenging recent cuts to the bureau.

The Pueblo of Isleta in New Mexico, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Kansas, and Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes in Oklahoma initiated the legal action, alleging the federal government failed to consult tribes before reducing Bureau of Indian Education staff. The plaintiffs claim this lack of consultation violated statutory obligations and infringed on the rights of tribal nations and students, severely affecting those left out of the decision-making process.

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes are the only Oklahoma-based tribal



**Tribal Nations Sue Over Bureau of Indian Education Cuts**

nation involved in the lawsuit. Hershel Gorham, lieutenant governor of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, said the tribe joined the effort due to impacts on its citizens attending Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas and Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, Oklahoma.

“A lot of their classes were disturbed because a lot of them had professors [at Haskell] that were terminated,” Gorham said in a phone interview. “And then, because their professors were terminated, their classes were canceled. For some of them, it’s putting them in a bind in a position some of

them are not able to get their financial aid as a result.”

At Haskell University, roughly three dozen employees were laid off during a firing spree by the Department of Government Efficiency. Following significant national attention on the layoffs and their devastating effects on students, about a third of those let go have been asked to return to work.

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium, which advocates for tribal colleges and universities including Haskell, welcomed the partial reinstatement but said more needs to be done.

“The American Indian Higher Education Consortium is thrilled to hear that 25 positions recently terminated at Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute have been reinstated,” the AIHEC said in a statement. “However, there are nearly 30 positions who serve critical needs at these institutions that still need to be addressed. We urge the Bureau of Indian Education to continue to address the abrupt cuts to funding and support.”

Tribal leaders also voiced concerns about funding reductions at Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, the only bureau-operated school in Oklahoma.

Gorham emphasized the need for tribal unity amid Trump administration layoffs and budget cuts.

“I hope that the rest of the tribes realize this is something that we’re all in together, that is not something that one tribe can fight alone, or in this case — three tribes can fight alone,” Gorham said. “Everybody needs to come together, literally come together, and fight for the overall rights that the federal government owes to the Indian tribes collectively, whether or not it impacts them directly or not.”

# UKB hosts students from Milton Academy

High school students from Milton Academy, a private preparatory school in Milton, Massachusetts learn about the rich Keetoowah Culture.

## Staff Reports

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — Community engagement was the theme of the day for students, elders, tribal leaders, and employees of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma on a Tuesday in March as visitors to the area participated in both service and learning at the John Hair Cultural Center and Museum.

Eleven high school students from Milton Academy, a private preparatory school in Milton, Massachusetts, just south of Boston, were hosted by the UKB on March 18 for a daylong event that began with the students learning about the cultural and historic significance of river cane from UKB Director of Tribal Historic Preservation Roger Cain, then participating in transplanting plants onto the museum grounds for the start of a medicine garden there.

According to UKB Tribal Councilor Janelle Adair, the students were looking for meaningful experiences that involved interaction with tribal people to learn more about the culture. She said the students and their sponsors were eager to do the hard work for the garden and were equally interested in the fun activities provided by the museum.

Barbara Girty, Assistant Director for the Keetoowah Museum, said the tour was organized through an organization known as Network Volunteers based in New Orleans, Louisiana, whose mission is to recruit and manage volunteers and community organizations by con-



**Milton Academy at the garden site with UKB staff.**

necting them with host organizations. Girty said the tribe has hosted groups through Network Volunteers in the past. She knew the kind of experience they were looking for and thought of having the Milton students help with the medicine garden.

“Roger and I had been talking about installing a small garden near the front of the building that would help facilitate group demonstrations about gathering and producing cultural items,” Girty said. But rather than spend the entire day working on the garden, the students also learned about the history of the Keetoowah people.

Cain talked to the students about how river cane was used traditionally and exhibited samples of basketry, then showed cultural masks crafted from a variety of natural materials and discussed social dances of the Keetoowah, inviting three of the students to participate in a “Booger Dance.”

Eli Berk, an 11th grade student

said, “We have learned a lot about Cherokee culture, and I am going to take that home with me. I knew about the Trail of Tears but what was new to me was the three bands of the Cherokees, and I figured it was the one group but never realized there was already earlier western settlers in Oklahoma.”

According to student sponsor Andrea Geyling-Moore, Director of Community and Engagement for Milton Academy, student groups have visited



**Students of Milton doing garden work for the medicinal garden.**

other sites, including Puerto Rico, and they were particularly interested in visiting a Native culture this spring.

“We were able to get some work done at Bacone College, toured some of the Cherokee Nation museums, listened to various speakers,” Geyling-Moore said. “Now we have learned about the history and culture of the Keetoowah tribe.”

Geyling-Moore, who has taught at Milton for 32 years, said volunteering and service is encouraged for all students but is not a required part of the curriculum. She said the goal of the Community Engagement Programs and Partnerships office is to develop a lifelong sense of civic responsibility, and it does so by inviting students to make weekly commitments of service. She said her office coordinates with approximately 20 organizational partners in the Boston area to provide service opportunities for Milton students, including an elder residency program, tutoring, childcare services and more.



**Roger Cain shows students what “Booger Masks” are made from.**

# SWOSU College of Pharmacy graduates UKB member in May

High school students from Milton Academy, a private preparatory school in Milton, Massachusetts learn about the rich Keetoowah Culture.

## By LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — Looking forward to graduation time in May, the United Keetoowah Band Department of Education would like to highlight one of their students who will be completing his Doctor of Pharmacy program.

JT Allen, who is this son of Greg and Polly Allen, will be receiving a Doctor of Pharmacy and Bachelor of Science degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences from Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Allen is from Jay, Oklahoma where he graduated high school from in 2013.

After completing high school, Allen attended Northeastern State University for two semesters in the Fall of 2013 and Spring 2014 and dropped out after the spring semester. He was working at Walmart in Tahlequah at the time and made the transfer to Grove Walmart when he dropped out. There was a position open in the pharmacy, when his supervisor recommended Allen to take it.

“That’s where I was introduced to pharmacy, and after working there for a few years I made the decision to go back to college to become a pharmacist,” Allen said. “So, I went to NEO A&M in the Spring of 2018 to Fall 2019 and graduated with an A.S. in Natural Sciences.”

Allen went back to NSU in Spring 2020 to Spring 2021 to finish his pre-requisite courses, those are the credits which did not transfer when he wanted to go to SWOSU. In the summer of 2021, Allen applied to the SWOSU College of Pharmacy, interviewed in August 2021, got accepted in September 2021 and began classes in Spring 2022.

Three years later, Allen will be graduating in May (due to being a spring admit) and complete his program in December 2025. He will have several honors and awards under his belt such as Rho Chi Pharmacy Honor Society, President’s Honor Roll (Fall 2022, Fall 2023) and Dean’s Honor

Roll (Spring 2022, Spring 2023, Spring 2024 and Fall 2024).

After he finishes school, he plans to work at an Indian Health facility and work part-time with Walmart as he has been with for 12 years, with 10 years in the pharmacy.

“I’d like to thank my amazing wife Susie Allen, my parents, family and friends, and the UKB for the continued support throughout this journey,” Allen said. “Without their support and



**JT Allen will be graduating in May (due to being a spring admit) and complete his program in December 2025.**

encouragement, I would not be where I am today.”



**UKB Department of Education Director, Dr. Leslie Hannah presented JT with a UKB Stole and Cord.**

# UKB Federal Corporation Advances Economic Growth and Tribal Digital Sovereignty at 2025 Reservation Economic Summit



From left to right

- Vanessa Fields, Federal Corporation, finance Manager.
- Cliff Wofford, UKB Tribal Council member.
- Carrie Haney, Federal Corporation, Board Chair.
- Jeremy Combs, Federal Corporation, Marketing Manager.
- Heather Wagner, Federal Corporation, Board Member.
- Jeff Nelson, Federal Corporation Board, Member.
- Justin Fuson, Federal Corporation, Chief Financial Officer (courtesy photo).

**By Jeremy Combs | Marketing Manager, UKB Federal Corporation**

Las Vegas — The United Keetoowah Band (UKB) Federal Corporation made a strong showing at the 2025 Reservation Economic Summit (RES) in Las Vegas, Nevada, engaging in key discussions and educational sessions aimed at expanding economic opportunities for UKB members. The summit provided a crucial platform for Federal Corporation members to explore strategies for securing state and federal government contracts, fostering economic growth, and advancing Tribal Digital Sovereignty initiatives.

A central focus for the UKB Federal Corporation at RES 2025 was enhancing its ability to successfully capture government contracts. Corporation members attended multiple breakout sessions dedicated to best practices in researching and securing federal and state procurement opportunities. These sessions emphasized the importance of building a strong track record through subcontracting and forming strategic partnerships with larger tribal enterprises.

One of the most insightful discussions centered around the strategic

acquisition of existing government contractors. Experts detailed how acquiring companies with established government contracts can provide tribes with an immediate foothold in federal contracting, accelerating their growth in the sector. Additional sessions highlighted how UKB Federal Corporation could work with larger tribal entities to fulfill movement contracts, gaining critical experience that would strengthen future proposals submitted through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

A major highlight of the summit was the educational session on Tribal Digital Sovereignty, a rapidly growing priority for the Tribes seeking to reclaim control over their digital infrastructure, data, and policy frameworks. The session featured influential thought leaders, including Geoffrey Blackwell, General Counsel and Chief of Staff at the National Congress of American Indians; Dr. Traci Morris, Executive Director of the American Indian Policy Institute; and Mathew Rantanen, Vice President of Tribal Broadband at Golden State Net.

For the UKB Federal Corporation, the discussion underscored the urgent need to establish a secure digital



Back row, left to right

- Jeff Nelson, Federal Corporation, Board Member.
- Steve Beverley, Echota Billing Solutions, Customer Relationship Manager.
- Jeremy Combs, Federal Corporation, Marketing Manager.
- Justin Fuson, Federal Corporation, Chief Financial Officer (courtesy photo)

infrastructure that supports UKB's sovereignty while also assisting other tribal nations in their efforts to decolonize and reclaim digital assets. The Corporation explored opportunities to expand into IT consulting and data storage as a service, ensuring that tribes can store and manage their data in sovereign, tribally controlled environments rather than relying on external corporate entities.

Beyond learning and networking, the UKB Federal Corporation actively promoted Echota Billing Services (EBS) as a vendor at the event. EBS showcased its comprehensive billing solutions for tribal governments, enterprises, and Native-owned businesses, drawing significant interest from healthcare, governmental, and private-sector organizations. The high level of engagement at RES 2025 led to numerous business leads for EBS, positioning the company for strong growth and expansion in the months ahead.

UKB Tribal Council Member Cliff Wofford attended RES 2025 alongside the Federal Corporation team, participating in key educational sessions and networking opportunities. His presence reinforced UKB's commitment to strengthening tribal

government operations and supporting the economic development efforts of the UKB Federal Corporation. By fostering relationships with business leaders and representatives from other tribal nations, Wofford helped advance UKB's strategic goals and ensure alignment between the tribal government and economic development initiatives.

RES 2025 served as a catalyst for the UKB Federal Corporation's continued pursuit of economic growth, government contracting success, and digital sovereignty initiatives. With a deeper understanding of procurement strategies, strategic acquisitions, and the importance of sovereign digital infrastructure, the Federal Corporation is well-positioned to drive job creation for tribal members, expand tribal enterprises, and enhance economic self-sufficiency for UKB members.

As the UKB Federal Corporation moves forward, the lessons and connections gained at RES 2025 will serve as a platform for growth and success, ensuring that the United Keetoowah Band continues to thrive in both the economic and digital landscapes.

## Delaware District Keetoowah Elder Day

Connecting and engaging with elders, to teach younger generations about the ways communities used to be.

**By LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter**

JAY, Okla- The United Keetoowah Band and Echota Behavioral Health traveled to Jay, Oklahoma in March for their Keetoowah Elder Day.

This gathering is meant to connect and engage with elders, to learn from them. Echota Behavioral Health has been taking "Keetoowah Elder Day" into the different districts, they hope to reach all elders.

It is important to UKB and EBH, to take the wisdom and knowledge of how communities used to be from the elders and teach the current generation how to build that back up.

These gatherings are just as important for the elders of the community as various departments of UKB attended to share information about the services provided. Departments who were there and will be seen at future events are Human Services, Environmental, Housing, Tribal Court, Victim's Services, Indian Child Welfare, Historic Preservation, PRC Program, Local Food Purchase Program and the John Hair Cultural Center and Museum.

Like any other gathering, a meal was provided for those in attendance. The meal was prepared by the UKB Elder Committee. During the afternoon, they got to play bingo and Chief Jeff Wacoche jumped in as their caller.

"The elders were grateful for the Chief's presence and his involvement in the bingo calling, which brought great joy to everyone," UKB Delaware

District Rep Tishaleta Guevara said.

The Jay community is part of Guevara's district, and she expresses her heartfelt gratitude of every helping hand in this elder day. A few members of the Council spent time with the elders and shared the day's activities.

"It was truly uplifting to witness our elders enjoying themselves, and for many it was a reminder that UKB is united in fellowship and cares deeply for its elders," Guevara said. "From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank each and every one who contributed to making this day special."

The next Keetoowah Elder Day will be posted, no dates or place has been announced yet. For more information, contact 918-708-9009.



UKB Housing's Gil Hooper getting the hog ready for lunch.



Prevention Teams Manager Brittany Cheater, doing welcoming at the Keetoowah Elder Day.



Many elders came out to enjoy the fellowship.



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