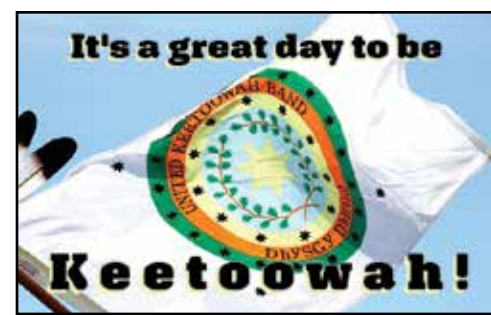




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GIDUWA CHEROKEE NEWS

YSG GWY A&P Official News Publication of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma May 2026

Keetoowah Storytelling Through Art Exhibit Opens at JHCCM

“This collection has been months in the making. It represents a journey through time and shares the stories of our ancestors, our customs, and lifeways. – Chief Jeff Wacoche

Marilyn Craig, Museum Communications Coordinator

The John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum opened the Keetoowah Storytelling Through Art exhibit with a reception on Friday, April 10. There were approximately one hundred guests for this special event in honor of featured Keetoowah artists, the late Ed Rackleff and Roger Loftis. Attendees included many family members, Tradition Keepers, museum staff, and volunteers.

Reverend Cody Robinson served as the Master of Ceremonies for the event. He welcomed everyone and started with a prayer. Then he introduced Chief Jeff Wacoche and Secretary Caleb Grimmet Smith, who both spoke briefly.

Chief Wacoche said, “This collection has been months in the making. It represents a journey through time and shares the stories of our ancestors, our customs, and lifeways. Our goal was to create a space where conversation is sparked by the stroke of a brush or the texture of a sculpture, so I want to thank the museum staff for their dedication in creating cultural experiences that stimulate discovery, enjoyment, and a better understanding of Keetoowah lifeways. Wado to Museum Director Ernestine Berry, Assistant Director

Barbara Foster, Marketing Coordinator Marilyn Craig, and Facebook Gift Shop Cashier Raelie Grayson. I also want to thank our guest curator Kenneth Foster for installing a beautiful art show exhibition. Thank you all for coming,” he concluded.

Rackleff’s sons, Sam and Youngdeer Rackleff talked about their dad and his passion for art. Following their presentation, Roger Loftis’ brother talked about him and his art.

Ed’s family includes his wife of 38 years, Paula Jones Rackleff; children Samuel Gene Rackleff, Brandy Jo Gibson, and Edwin Youngdeer Rackleff; grandchildren Jonathan Caine Gibson, Toney Elise Gibson, Ryder Lyfe Rackleff, Carma Ryann Rackleff, and Layla Ahniwake Rackleff; siblings Verna Rackleff, Nancy Rackleff, Sherry Rackleff, Victor “Buster” Rackleff, and Barney Rackleff.

Roger Loftis could not attend the reception in person, because he was in the hospital. Roger’s brother, Clifford Junior Loftis, spoke about his brother and his art. Also in attendance were Roger’s son, Randall Loftis and his wife Kristina, and granddaughters Ally and Breana. Not being able to attend did not seem to dampen Roger’s spirit, he was all smiles when he was able to talk with museum staff on Facetime.

See ART EXHIBIT, Page 2



Art Show Family- Family members of the late Ed Rackleff taken at the opening reception of Keetoowah Museum’s, “Storytelling Through Art” Exhibit.

UKB Recognizes MMIW Awareness Day on May 5th

Wear Red, May 5th to advocate and show support



Chief Jeff Wacoche declared MMIW Awareness Day on May 5, 2025.

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter/Media Specialist

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- It was one year ago when Chief Jeff Wacoche signed the declaration to observe Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Awareness Day.

Facts and information from the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center:

- **Murder is the third leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls**, according to the Centers for Disease Control.
- American Indian and Alaska Native women experience a murder rate **10 times higher** than the national average.
- **More than four in five** American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3%) have experienced violence in their lifetime.
- **56.1%** have experienced sexual violence, **55.5%** have experienced

physical violence by an intimate partner, and **48.8%** have experienced stalking, according to the National Institute of Justice.

• **64% of trafficking survivors** in Hawaii identified as being part Native Hawaiian, according to Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women reports.

The MMIW Awareness Day is a national day to honor victims, support families and raise awareness about high rates of violence against Native women. This day encourages wearing red and advocating for policy reform to address the crisis.

The UKB is committed to honoring the lives of all its missing and murdered relatives, showing support in raising awareness and supporting effective families by strengthening partnership with local agencies and organizations, advancing solutions with the Lighthouse Law Enforcement officers.



Laroque Wins Debut at Rumble on the Reservation With Perfect Scoring

Phoenix Laroque makes himself known after clenching first boxing belt.

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- UKB member Phoenix Laroque makes his debut worth remembering after coming out on top winning the Rumble on the Reservation event in Tahlequah.

Laroque who is only 15 years old, started boxing with Booyah Boxing Gym just six months ago under Melissa Drywater. Drywater, is a former USA Boxer Competitor, she is licensed with USA Boxing as a silver level coach meaning she can coach at the Olympics. She is also a level two official and an Official in Charge with USA Boxing, both meaning she can referee, judge or time keep, and she is a supervisor. Being supervisor means she can host her own show and supervise all the officials.

Drywater is the founder and program developer who started the program four years ago. She stated it’s a boxing, leadership, character building program. The main objective is to not only train, develop and teach boxing to kids but develop good citizens for the community.

“Our program runs Monday through Thursday after school, prac-

tices are about an hour and a half,” Drywater said. “It’s centered around old school boxing training, strength and conditioning, leadership skills, attributes such as integrity, self-discipline, self-respect, education, development and literacy enhancement.”

The Rumble on the Reservation was Laroque’s first boxing match. His opponent was from the Engine Room Boxing Gym out of Tulsa.

“Phoenix scored perfect tens on the judges’ scorecards,” Drywater said. “So, with three judges, he scored a maximum of 30 points each round winning by unanimous decision. So, he won a championship belt.”

The point system in a boxing match is judged by three categories.

1. Number of quality blows in the targeted area which is the head.
 - a. The face such as the temples and side of the jaw.
2. Technique and tactics
 - a. Putting punch combinations together, moving the head off the center line, keeping hands up in correct position and footwork.

3. Competitiveness and sportsmanship

- a. Displaying of being the aggressor and actively engaged every round.
- b. Having a good attitude.

Laroque is a junior welterweight, meaning the weight division is of 138 pounds and being a popular weight class. After his debut match, he was challenged by another 15-year-old that has had five fights with a record 2-3 so he traveled to Trumann, Arkansas. Other matches he went to in April was in Manhattan, Kansas and Miami, Oklahoma.

“Phoenix made history, he was the first ever native and youth/adult in Oklahoma that has grappled and boxed in the same day at the same event,” Drywater said.

He was also invited to Denver, Colorado for a 2-day event called Icon Boxing Tournament in May with Sting being a sponsor.

“The Denver match will be a prestigious belt show,” Drywater said. “You can only get those at nationals, so it will be a big deal.”



Phoenix Laroque after winning debut representing UKB and Booyah Boxing Gym, along with his coach Melissa Drywater.

As his coach, Drywater has high standards for Laroque.

“Phoenix has great potential if he stays interested in boxing,” she said. “He will be coming back to Tahlequah this summer for the Rumble on the River.”

The next local event will be the first Rumble on the River on June 13th at Sparrowhawk Camp.



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May Chief Chat



Chief's Corner

JEFF WACOCHÉ
Chief
jwacoche@ukb-nsn.gov

Siyo,
I want to take a moment to talk to you directly about the five trust land applications we filed in April – what they are, why we filed them, and what they mean for you and your family.

Land is where we come together, celebrate our heritage, pursue prosperity, and exercise our sovereignty. That is true for every tribal nation, and it is especially true for the UKB. These five parcels – 112 acres including additional acreage next to our Tribal Complex, our behavioral health facilities, and Diamondhead Resort – are already places where all of that happens. Trust status makes it permanent.

What does that mean in practice?

Protected land cannot be encroached upon. It opens the door to federal programs and funding that strengthen what we offer Members – better healthcare, stronger elder services, expanded behavioral health care, deeper investment in our culture. And Diamondhead – a growing destination on the Illinois River that the Tribe now owns and operates – stays ours.

The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma spent years in federal court trying to

block us from taking land into trust. We fought back. The Department of Justice fought back. The Tenth Circuit ruled in our favor. The Supreme Court let that stand. These applications move forward on settled ground.

Keetoowah people have always had to fight for what is ours. At the treaty table, in Congress, in courtrooms. That fight is ongoing. And we are making important, lasting progress.

These acres are for you. They are for your children and grandchildren. I am proud to file these applications, and I am grateful every day to serve this Tribe.

Wado.

Chief Jeff Wacoche

UKB Files Five New Land-In-Trust Applications

UKB has submitted five applications to the United States Department of the Interior to take approximately 112 acres of new land into trust for the benefit of the Tribe. When accepted, these applications will increase the Tribe's total trust-lands from 76 acres to 188 acres.

"These are the places where our people govern, serve, heal, and work. These are the places where we gather to honor and pass on Keetoowah traditions. And now, on the banks of the Illinois River with Diamondhead, a place where the Tribe is creating new economic opportunities for our future," said Chief Jeff Wacoche. "We are proud to exercise our treaty-based right to take additional lands into trust for the lasting benefit of current and future UKB Members."

"Across generations, the Keetoowah people have fought for every acre of this land – in treaties, in Congress, and in courtrooms," said Chief Wacoche.

The five parcels

The five applications cover a range of sites that reflect the full breadth of what the UKB does for its Members and community:

- A 40-acre parcel to the south of the current Tribal Complex in Tahlequah
- A 4.26-acre parcel within the current complex, situated between the Elder Nutrition Building and the Wellness Center
- Goingsnake Community Building and Behavioral Health Clinic (4 acres) – a community hub providing direct behavioral health services and programming to UKB Members
- Echota Behavioral Health Administrative Building (0.99 acres) – home to the administrative operations of the Tribe's behavioral health services
- Diamondhead Resort (63.26

acres) – a recently acquired recreational destination on the Illinois River, now owned and operated by the UKB, offering camping, float trips, lodging, live music, and festivals. Diamondhead is a piece of the Tribe's economic development strategy and a demonstration of the UKB's commitment to building sustainable, community-serving enterprises.

Two of the five parcels are contiguous with the existing tribal complex in Tahlequah and will directly expand its footprint from 76 acres to 120 acres. In total, UKB's total trust-land will more than double to 188 acres. None of these five applications are for gaming purposes.

Building on the past – and building for the future

Taking land into trust is one of the most meaningful acts of sovereignty a tribal nation can exercise. Trust status removes land from the property tax rolls, protects it from encroachment in perpetuity, and opens access to federal programs, grants, and resources that strengthen the Tribe's health, education, housing, and cultural preservation efforts.

The benefits are real and immediate. Trust status has already allowed the UKB to invest in expanded Member services, improve infrastructure across the Tribal Complex, and pursue federal funding streams that were previously out of reach. With these five new parcels, those opportunities grow. A larger trust land base means greater capacity to deliver health care, behavioral health services, elder programming, and cultural initiatives – not someday, but now, for the Members we serve today.

Diamondhead Resort presents significant opportunity. As a tribally owned and operated enterprise on the Illinois River, it is a community destination and an engine of econom-

ic development, generating revenue that better enables UKB programs and services. Placing it into trust protects that investment and ensures that the economic future it represents belongs permanently to the Tribe.

The Legal Foundation Is Settled

In 2000, the UKB purchased 76 acres in Tahlequah to develop community services, an elder center, cultural grounds, and a museum. The Tribe applied in 2004 to have that land taken into trust. The Bureau of Indian Affairs accepted the application in 2011. The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma challenged that decision in federal court, and a district court initially ruled erroneously against the UKB.

The UKB and the Department of Justice appealed, and prevailed.

On September 5, 2019, the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit overturned the lower court's ruling, affirming the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to take land into trust for the UKB and holding that the CNO had no power to veto that decision. The Tenth Circuit recognized the UKB as a federally recognized tribe entitled to the same rights as any other sovereign nation. The CNO petitioned the United States Supreme Court for review. On June 22, 2020, the Supreme Court declined – allowing the Tenth Circuit's ruling to stand. That ruling makes today's five applications possible.

"We anticipate expeditious approval of our applications, as is our sovereign right, affirmed by the Tenth Circuit and left intact by the Supreme Court," said Attorney General Klint Cowan.

"Each acre placed into trust is a tangible expression of our sovereignty. Each acre strengthens the foundation upon which future generations of UKB Members will stand," said Chief Wacoche.

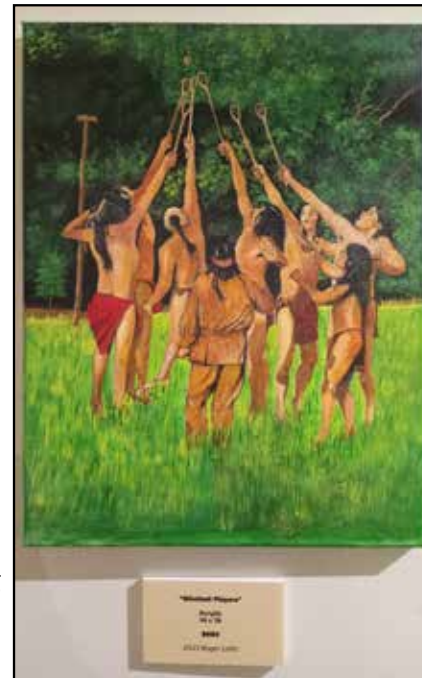
ART EXHIBIT

Although neither artist was in physical attendance, they both spoke volumes with their art pieces. Over eighty paintings, artifacts and sculptures are represented in the exhibit. The gallery beckons you to come in. To see things from an indigenous perspective. To remember the past, childhood, grandparents, and other ancestors and their past-times, and lifeways.

Museum director Ernestine Berry said, "I am so pleased with the "Keetoowah Storytelling through Art" Exhibition! It showcases two world-class Keetoowah artists. The late Ed Rackleff, a brilliant and seasoned artist, experienced with creating works in every medium, including a bronze statue of the Keetoowah/Cherokee syllabary creator, Sequoyah. Ed's drawings, paintings, poems, and sculptures visually convey stories of his life experiences among his Native family in Oklahoma.

We are enthusiastically introducing the lesser known, but superb Keetoowah artist Roger Loftis. Roger includes a bit of visual history along with childhood memories told with pencil and brush. Roger's paintings will seem warmly familiar to many who were fortunate enough to have grown up in Keetoowah communities among their ancestors.

This exhibition will hang through the Keetoowah Celebration. Admission to the museum is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children, which includes the art exhibit. Tribal members are admitted free. For more information, call the Keetoowah museum at (918) 871-2866



Stickball Players by Roger Loftis



Ed's Final Painting by Ed Rackleff



Remembering Your Heritage by Roger Loftis



No Talking Cherokee (Supper time at Oaks Mission 1967) by Ed Rackleff

Keetoowah Historic Preservation Department Committed to Saving Cane

Marilyn Craig, Museum Communications Coordinator

The second session of the Getting Back to Basics Rivercane Technology Class was held on Saturday, March 21. This was the second class in the series and was presented by Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Roger Cain. The class gathered at the John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum and caravanned approximately thirty miles to the Barren Fork Wildlife Management Area. They were there to experience a canebrake, to see where they grow, and observe the habitat. Participants got to walk into the canebrake, and experience how thick it grows and how to get around the culms.

Barren Fork Wildlife Management Area consists of approximately 497 acres along Barren Fork Creek in eastern Adair County and is located about five miles south of Westville, OK. Over a mile of this Ozark stream lies within the boundary of the WMA. The property consists predominately of creek bottom habitat and hay meadows and has small sections of oak-hickory for-



A Canebrake at Barren Fork Wildlife Management Area

est on the rolling, rocky, and relatively steep hills surrounding the creek. The average annual precipitation is about forty-one inches. (Area use regulations can be found in the Oklahoma Hunting Guide.)

(THPO provided this information to participants in a River Cane Technology folder.

The Ecological Importance of River Cane Conservation

The ecosystems that support River Cane are deteriorating, causing canebrakes to become critically endangered ecosystems. As river cane has disappeared across the landscape we have lost many of its natural benefits.

- > **Water Filtration** – The high density of river cane in canebrakes slow runoff and trap sediment, effectively trapping harmful nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous before they reach streams and rivers.

- > **Soil Stabilization** – the root system of river cane holds soil in place during rainfall and flooding events. This helps reduce soil erosion, especially along riverbanks improves soil quality.

- > **Wildlife Habitat** – River cane provides a unique habitat for more than seventy species, including insects such as butterflies and moths, migratory birds, reptiles, and mammals such as deer and black bears.

- > **Enhanced Air Quality** – River cane is evergreen, allowing it to provide fresh air year-round. It also created an important atmospheric carbon sink and nutrient source for the soil.

Canebrakes Are Critically Endangered Ecosystems

River cane grows in tall, dense



Class participants waiting to go into the Canebrake.



Roger Cain leads a group into the Canebrake

patches called canebrakes. These areas are often made up almost entirely of can and can cover large spaces. River cane is very adaptable and can grow in many different kinds of environments, including riverbanks, flood plains, sandy hills rocky cliffs, and a variety of forest types.

Today, river cane still grows across much of its historic range in twenty-two central and southeastern states. However, there is much less of it than there used to be. It is estimated that less than 2% of river cane's original habitat remains, a 98% decline. The growth of agriculture and land development in the southeastern United States has significantly diminished river cane populations.


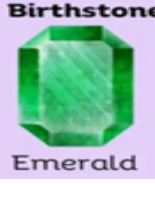







Historically, canebrakes were so dense that they were nearly impenetrable, and travelers would have to go around them. In parts of Al-

abama, historical accounts report river cane growing "as high as a man on horseback could reach with an umbrella." Today, canebrakes of this size are much rarer. Currently, river cane tends to flourish only in narrow bands along waterways, surrounded by roads, railroads, or mowed landscapes, with minimal spread into upland forests or other ecosystems. Due to its dramatic loss, canebrakes are now considered as critically endangered ecosystems.

If you find a cleared area where river cane is still present on the edges of the field, it is quite likely that the entire field was once a canebrake. If you are interested in canebrake restoration or would like to learn how to weave with river cane, contact Roger Cain at the Tribal Historic Preservation Department at 918-871-2826.

LUNCH SERVED MONDAY - THURSDAY 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM, ALL MEALS TO GO MUST BE PICKED UP BY 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM
 BREAKFAST SERVED FRIDAY 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM, ALL MEALS TO GO MUST BE PICKED UP BY 10:00 AM – 10:30 AM
 All meals subject to change without notice *



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Jim Proctor Elder Community Center 918-871-2747 918-871-2861	TORNADO WARNING OR WATCH: PLEASE BE AWARE. Stay home, Take Precautions UKB Shelter-Lighthouse	PLEASE CHECK ON YOUR ELDERS AND NEIGHBORS WA-DO	 LILY OF THE VALEY	 Birthstone Emerald	1 May Day Biscuits & Gravy Scrambled Eggs Bacon, Hashbrowns Fruit, Juice	2 Herb Day UKB REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING 10 AM WELLNESS CENTER
3 Nat. Lemonade Day 	4 Star Wars Day Sloppy Joe's Tator Tots Pasta Salad Pickle, Fruit	5 Cinco De Mayo Soft Beef Taco's Refried Bean Mex Corn, Bread Pudding w/Fruit	6 Nat. Nurses Day COOKS CHOICE	7 Day Of Prayer Chicken Wings Chicken Fried Rice Fr. Zucchini, Egg Roll Jello w/Fruit	8 No Socks Day Pancakes Sausage Scrambled Eggs Juice, Fruit Mix	9 Archery Day "Strawberry Festival"  Stilwell Oklahoma
10 Mother's Day 	11 Twilight Zone Day Ham/Cheese Sandwich, Potato Chips, Coleslaw Tropical Fruit	12 Limerick Day Steak Fajitas Spanish Rice Refried Beans Fruit Salad	13 Frog Jumping Day Meatloaf Mashed Potato's Vegetables, Salad, Hot Roll, Fruit Salad	14 Nat. Decency Day Catfish/Tartar Sauce Brown Beans Fried Potatoes Hush Puppies, Fruit	15 NASCAR Day "18 YEARS Title VI" Waffles w/ Strawberry Bacon, Eggs, Toast Cinamon Roll,	16 Nat. BBQ Day 
17 Nat. Walnut Day 	18 No Dirty Dishes Lasagna Italian Green Beans Carrots, Garlic Toast Fresh Fruit	19 May Ray Day Baked Ham/Yams Green Beans w/ Potato, Roll Strawberry Shortcake	20 Blue Jeans Day Chicken Salad on Croissant, Potato Chip Coleslaw Fruit Salad	21 Nat. Memo Day TITLE VI NUTRITION CENTER CLOSED	22 Don't Fry Friday TRIBAL OFFICES CLOSED EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION	23 Lucky Penny Day 
24 Brothers Day "Brother's" 31 Nat. Smile Day 	25 UKB Offices Closed Memorial Day 	26 Sally Ride Day Hamburger Stew Hominy Commodity Cheese Cornbread, Fruit	27 Joe Cool Day Bologna/Cheese Sandwich, Chips Pickle, Salad, Fruit Rice Krispy Treat	28 Hamburger Day "May Birthday" Cheeseburger's Tatar Tots, Bk. Beans Cake/Ice Cream	29 Oak Apple Day KITCHEN CLOSED CLEANING DAY	30 Mint Julep Day 

Protect yourself! Please wear a mask, stay 6 feet away, wash your hands, stay home if you feel sick! Title VI Staff
 MAY IS OLDER AMERICAN MONTH 2026 – "CHAMPION YOUR HEALTH"

Happy Mother's Day to All you Beautiful "Mothers"
 There will be 2 Full Moons in May: "Flower Moon" May 1 at 1:23 pm EST & "Blue Moom" May 31 at 4:45 am EST
 "Clothes washed for the first time in the Full Moon will not last long" "Marry in May, you'll rue the day!"
 Wash a blanket in May, you'll wash a dear one away! Among the changing months, May stands the sweetest, and in fairest colors dressed!
 In May, enjoy new life by attracting hummingbirds and butterflies to your garden.
 "Tis the season of fresh spring vegetable ingrediants on your plate, from your own garden"

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 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 en-rollment card, call the UKB Enrollment Office Registrar Amanda Stopp at 918-871-2797. Questions concerning history, cultural practices, cloth-ing, language or ceremonies are better suited for our John Hair Cultural Center and Museum. Visit ukb-nsn.gov/john-hair-cultural-center-muse-um or call 918-871-2866.

Spradlin shares the significance of being a Keetoowah Graduate

Miss Keetoowah Grayci Spradlin, one of many to wear Keetoowah cord and stole.

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter/Media Specialist

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- Every year the United Keetoowah Band Education Department present a cord and stole to Keetoowah members for them to wear for graduation.

The cord and stole are a representation of success in the tribe. The colors of the cord which are orange, yellow and green represent the UKB tribal seal. The stole has the word "Keetoowah" on one side and "Anigiduwa" which is our original name given by the Creator on the other side.

A senior out of Tahlequah High School, Grayci Spradlin daughter of Krissy and JB Spradlin has the honor and privilege to wear the Keetoowah cord and stole at her graduation ceremony.

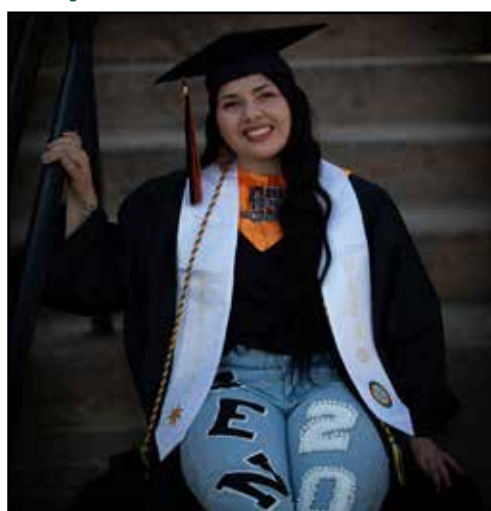
"It's an accomplishment, because I get to wear it as Miss Keetoowah and for my family, especially my

grandma since she was Keetoowah, my tribe and youth," Spradlin said. "It's really an honor for me since a lot of people don't know about Keetoowah's and I'll probably be one of the few wearing them at a big school, so I'm going to wear them proudly."

Spradlin will not only be graduating from Tahlequah but Indian Capital Technology Center as well. She will be graduating ICTC as a Certified Medical Assistant, along with her certification in phlebotomy. She's also graduating THS as a National Honor Society member.

During her senior year, Spradlin was balancing her life outside of school as Miss Keetoowah and later a member of the UKB Tribal Youth Council.

Her schedule being busy enough, she was involved with HOSA serving as the activity chair. She was part of the National Honor Society and got the chance to play powder puff.



Grayci Spradlin, Tahlequah Senior and Keetoowah Graduate



Keetoowah Cord and Stole worn by Keetoowah graduates.

Spradlin is proud to be a Keetoowah who is graduating from high school. She didn't achieve this accomplishment by herself, as she thanked her papa Willard and late grandma Naomi for motivating and pushing her to do her best.

"This accomplishment is not just

big deal to me, but for the entire tribe," she said. "Because of how excluded we are and how small our tribe is that people don't know about us. So, wearing this stole will hopefully define more of Keetoowah."

Graduation for Tahlequah High School will be May 17th, 2026

Ramsey named 8th Grade Co-Valedictorian at Maryetta School

Jr. Miss Keetoowah J'Leeanna Ramsey shines in 8th grade year.

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter/Media Specialist

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- Jr. Miss Keetoowah J'Leeanna Ramsey, has been selected as one of three co-valedictorians for Maryetta Public School.

When asked about this recognition she said, "I am happy, I've been working towards this since 6th grade. I am also proud of my other co-valedictorians as well because all year long I've been working alongside them."

Ramsey, is the daughter of Jerrad and Tyscilla Ramsey. She currently serves as the 2025-2027 Jr. Miss Keetoowah and is on the 2026-2027 UKB Tribal Youth Council.

During her 8th grade year, Ramsey was involved with the Academic Bowl Team and she continuously stayed involved with Service and Leadership and Gifted and Talented since 6th grade.

She also stayed busy with sports such as basketball, softball, volleyball, soccer, archery, track and cross country. Her involvement in sports was recognized in softball and basketball, which she was selected and played in the Muscogee Nation's Intertribal Rising Stars Games. Her mom stated she is the only 14-year-old on a national competitive 16u softball team. She also plays AAU basketball



J'Leeanna Ramsey, UKB 8th Grade Graduate Maryetta School

during the summer.

Recently, Ramsey's leadership has been noticed by Muscogee Nation and the Tribe of Gad. This

ministry has been traveling to Arizona since 2022 to compete in the Arizona Diamondbacks, Intertribal Baseball and Softball tournament. The goal of this ministry is to share the love of God and to show tribal students a world of talents and abilities that God has blessed them with and can take them anywhere in the world. She will get a chance to travel to Arizona in June for this tournament.

With a full schedule in sports and involvement outside of school, Ramsey maintained a discipline schedule of her own as she stayed focused on her studies. Other than her 8th grade classes, she was taking advanced classes such algebra, ELA, science and history.

"If she passes her 8th grade classes and the advanced classes, those will be credited to her freshman classes and won't have to take them," her mom Tyscilla said. "Her dad and I are very proud of her though, with everything going on inside and outside of school she puts her studies first."

As far as her plans for high school, Ramsey is deciding between Ft. Gibson and Sequoyah.

Her dad added, "She's worked really hard, none of these achievements was given to her, she's earned all of it."

Kenwood 8th Grade receives support from UKB Education

Trivia Night raises funds for class and teaches students the importance of working together.

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter/Media Specialist

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- The United Keetoowah Band Education Department partnered with Kenwood Public Schools for a night of trivia questions brought from the 8th grade class and John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum.

Trivia Night brought the Kenwood community together to help raise funds for the 8th grade class trip. When UKB Education Department initially reached out to Kenwood School, they started planning to know they could use the help to make this trip happen.

The fundraiser event started with an Indian Taco dinner where the 8th graders helped with serving. The trivia games followed the dinner, where there were 12 teams participating. There was a total of 10 rounds, with rounds 5 and 10 as wager. In the end, there was a tiebreaker round for teams who tied for first and second.

"It was a great success, we had an outpour of compliments online and around the community saying how fun it was, and hope there is more to come," Kenwood 8th grade Sponsor Anna Newton said.

Kenwood 8th grade sponsors include Newton, Nedra Dry and Zac Kingfisher. All together they have 13 students in the 8th grade class.

The class will be taking their trip to Branson spending time at Silver Dollar City and Dixie Stampede.

"We just want to thank the UKB for proposing the idea and helping us get it started, and we look forward to doing more collaborations with them," Newton said.



Judges at the score table some of Kenwood 8th grade students with assistance from Kenwood Superintendent Jerod Phillips.



UKB Education Director, Dr. Leslie Hannah shared the rules of the competition.



Trivia Night Champions



Trivia Night Second Place winners



Trivia Night Third Place winners

Stronger Together brought connection, culture and wellness

Echota Prevention Team keeps youth involved in UKB culture

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter/Media Specialist

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- During spring break, youth ages from 8 on up attended the Echota Behavioral Health Stronger Together Event at the UKB Venue.

Stronger Together is a day focused on connection, culture, wellness and fun for the community hosted by the Echota Prevention Team. This event was about bringing our youth, families and community together in a positive, substance-free environment that celebrates who we are and the strength we share.

At the event there was basketball, football, softball, impairment challenge course, fishing, stickball, stompdance and cultural crafts.

This year the team welcomed some well-known leaders and athletes to teach some of the breakout sessions. Angel Goodrich led out the basketball session, she's a North American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame inductee and former WNBA player. Football was led by Christian Littlehead, former Oklahoma State University Defensive Tackle and Big 12 Champion. Softball was led by Delia Smith, former NSU RiverHawks athlete, Sequoyah

Alumni, and former Miss Keetoowah & Junior Miss Keetoowah title holder.

The impairment challenge was led by the UKB Tribal Lighthorse. Sammy Still, 2010 UKB Tradition Keeper taught students the game of marbles. Keetoowah Strong which is through UKB Housing Department set up fishing for the kids to do.

It was a day filled with smiles, laughter and fun.

EBH thanks the UKB Departments, Tahlequah Fire Department and everyone who helped make the day happen.



Chief Jeff Wacoche and Tribal Secretary Caleb Smith-Grimmett with two firefighters of the Tahlequah Fire Department.



Angel Goodrich taught basketball drills to the youth.



The youth learned about ceremony dances.

PRC Spotlight

It has been a pleasure serving our UKB members for a year now! We appreciate everyone's patience while we navigate this new service to our people. Some reminders from our PRC staff are:

- You have 72 hours to report any emergency room services.
- If you get a denial letter, don't be discouraged, please appeal and submit your records.
- If you have issues with getting records, pres-

ent to our office and sign a Release of Information (ROI) and let us work with you to get what you need.

If you get any medical bills that you have a referral for, Bring them in immediately or email to ukbprc@ukb-nsn.gov.

Please update address, phone number and insurance information with Jennifer Vann, 918-871-2833, j.vann@ukb-nsn.gov

For dentures and hearing aids, please visit

the Tribal Human Services office at the complex.

All referrals are good for one visit only and must come from any IHS or tribal health clinic,

Thank you for allowing us to serve your healthcare needs,

PRC team contact details

Ukbprc@ukb-nsn.gov

918-871-2833

Caleen Bolin, PRC manager

Cbolin@ukb-nsn.gov



Mother's Day

BOGO Sale

Buy One, Get One 50% off

select beadwork through month of May!



For more information, call the John Hair Cultural Center & Keetoowah Museum at (918) 871-2866

Getting Back to Basics Series

Traditional Foods (JUN 27, JUL 25, AUG 29, 2026)

Preserving traditional food is more than culinary art, it's a lifelong skill that has been passed on through many generations of Keetoowah families. Learn the process of preserving fresh vegetables while learning how to cook traditional foods such as wild onions, grape dumplings, and kanuchi. \$75.00 for all 3 sessions

- Jun 27:** wild onions, bean ball, poke salad, fried mushrooms or potatoes
- JUL 25:** hog meat, beans, grape dumplings, hot water cornbread, & water cress
- AUG 29:** neckbone & hominy soup, kanuchi, mustard or turnip greens, and fry bread (not traditional).

Each class will be held in Tahlequah at the Speedway on listed Saturdays from 10 am to 2pm. Cost is \$75 for the series. For more information, contact Barbara Foster at the Keetoowah Museum at 918-871-2794.



We Are HIRING

Please visit our UKB website at: www.ukb-nsn.gov for all opening positions!

Apply Now

Applications can be found at 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.

Luella Vann Thornton



Luella Vann Thornton, a resident of Banning, California, lovingly known as Kalina, passed away peacefully on November 23, 2025 at age 88 years, surrounded by her seven children and husband of almost 70 years, Oliver (Bud) Thornton Sr.

Kalina (Luella) was born on May 24, 1937 in the hills of Chewy, Oklahoma to Lucinda (Vann-Robbins) and Michael Vann. Kalina was the eldest of eight children, and learned to lead at an early age, helping her Mother Lucinda (Cindy) with her younger four brothers and three sisters.

Kalina (Luella) walked the country roads to a one room school house along with her siblings, speaking fluent Cherokee. Sometimes when the weather was bad, she got to ride her horse, Fleet, along with her little sisters, Christine and Luann. Educators recognized her leadership and intellectual gifts early on, and she completed elementary school at the young age of ten, then transferring to the Sequoyah Boarding School in Tahlequah Oklahoma. Her family moved "into town" and Kalina (Luella) was able to come home on weekends to help her Mother with her younger siblings. Kalina (Luella) loved school and reading like her Father Mike. Until her health didn't allow it, she always had a book, sometimes two, in her hands. Kalina (Luella) was first in her class level every year at Sequoyah, and was chosen to be Valedictorian of her graduating class. At Sequoyah, Kalina was active in student government, basketball and cheerleading. She made many friends and earned the respect of the faculty. Kalina (Luella) soon became interested in the professional field of Nursing. At the young age of sixteen, Kalina was offered a full scholarship to St. Joseph's Nursing School in St. Louis, Missouri. Kalina was valedictorian and the youngest graduate of her class. At seventeen, Kalina moved to St. Louis, Missouri with a nursing scholarship. Kalina had never been out of the state of Oklahoma. The nuns at St. Joseph's bonded quickly with Kalina, impressed by her intelligence and leadership skills. They became very protective of her knowing she was younger and far from home.

In 1955, she met her future husband, Oliver "Bud" Thornton while emptying a bed pan for Bud's younger brother Joe, during her nursing training. Joe was recovering from back surgery and after Bud met Luella, he visited his brother every day! It was love at first sight! Bud would pick Kalina (Luella) up for dates in his convertible at the all-female nursing school and all the students would watch from their windows as Kalina's (Luella's) handsome beau walked her to the car and opened the car door for her. Handsome Bud was the talk of the school, saying he resembled actor Troy Donahue or "Cookie" from the 1950s tv show 77 Sunset Strip!

Luella and Bud were married on March 15, 1956. Luella was the first married student and first time mother to graduate from St. Joseph's Nursing School in June of 1957. She was pregnant with her second child, Cindy as she received her diploma. Married and the mother of two children and

pregnant with her third, Luella started her nursing career at DePaul Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri until she and Bud moved their family to Southern California in 1969.

Luella would continue her California nursing career in Southern California at St. Francis Hospital in Lynwood, Mission Hospital in Huntington Park, Hemet Valley Hospital in Hemet, and finally at San Gregoria Hospital in Banning. As Kalina advanced as a nurse in nursing management, she specialized in Labor and Delivery. She earned her Bachelor's of Science in Nursing at Chapman College, and her Masters degree in Public Health from Loma Linda University. In 1973, she began her service to the native community by contributing her grant writing skills for the first established health clinic in Southern California called the Indian Free Clinic in Huntington Park, California. This very important service provided health care from Obstetrician care to dental care for local natives. She then was appointed as a board member on the Riverside/ San Bernardino County of Indian Health Services. Because of her positive influence

And knowledge, she was recruited as a health liaison as a board member of the Riverside Office on Aging, which she served for fourteen years. Her own health challenges would eventually force her to resign from this position in 2012. Kalina was instrumental in writing a funding grant for a helicopter pad at the San Gregorio Hospital in her local community. She also began a side business called "We Teach" certifying First Responders in CPR. As a Health Educator, Kalina taught parenting classes, and counseling on drug and alcohol addiction.

A true blessing and her biggest supporter, was Kalina's life partner, Bud. At this point in Kalina's (Luella's) career, she and Bud shared seven children. Bud held down the Home Front as Kalina advanced her professional career. He stood by her side through thick and thin. Long after Kalina (Luella) had to end her career due to extreme health issues, Bud would continue renewing her nursing license, knowing how hard they both worked for it.

One of her children's greatest memories for Kalina (Luella) was volunteering, along with her children, at community events, schools and libraries. Kalina (Luella) would present information to non-Native children hoping to erase the stereotypes of Native Americans ("No we don't live in teepees, we have rent and mortgages just like your Mom and Dad"). Kalina was previously a Certified Health Education Specialist, and recipient of the 2011 California Rural Indian Board (CRIB) award for significant contributions to the health care of Native American groups. Kalina (Luella) never stopped advocating for Indian health until her own health did not allow her to continue.

Kalina's youngest daughter Mary Shannon, son Buddy (Oliver III) and her life long Partner Bud, lovingly cared for her needs until the moment she passed. Her other children, Kay, Cindy, Laurie, Don and Kevin Paul provided love and support in various ways throughout her life, and will never forget her.

Kalina's (Luella's) children and grandchildren inherited her spirit of advocacy, leadership, reading, sense of humor, independence, strength and speaking out against injustice. We will continue to carry her legacy with us throughout life, and never forget her.

Kalina (Luella) is survived by her husband of almost 70 years, Oliver J. ("Bud"), and seven children, Kalina Ann "Kay" Marquez (Lewis), Lucinda Marie "Cindy" French (Jerry), Oliver J. III "Buddy" (Dalia), Laurie Catherine Holt (Bernie), Donald Matthew (Kara), Kevin Paul (Sheryl) and Mary Shannon Thornton; twelve grandchildren and seventeen great grandchildren; Sisters Christine Valliere (Jon) Luann Taylor (Ken), Gwendolyn (Clifford) and brother Bill Vann (Evelyn); many nephews and nieces who loved and admired her. Kalina (Luella) was preceded in death by her Mother Lucinda Vann Robbins, Father Michael Vann, brothers Richard Vann (Cora), Thomas Vann (Shelly) and Cecil Robbins (Rita).

Per Kalina's (Luella's) wishes, her remains will be buried at the family cemetery, Thompson Cemetery in the hills of NE Oklahoma on May 23, 2026 at 11:00 am. We will gather together to Celebrate the Life of Kalina (Luella) in Tahlequah Oklahoma at the Tahlequah Community Center from 2:00-7:00 pm.

Flowers can be ordered locally and delivered to the burial site from:

Morris-Cragar Flowers
830 S. Muskogee Avenue, #2, Gail (owner) Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 74464
morriscragarflowers@yahoo.com 918-456-2529

Sympathy cards can be mailed to:
Oliver J. Thornton
2200 W. Wilson Drive, Space 41
Banning, Ca. 92220

"For every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven..." Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

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UKB KANSAS COMMUNITY BUILDING


280 S HWY 10, KANSAS, OK

CONTACT:

TERRIE TURTLE, 918-871-5038




Noah Hendricks



Senior 2026
Kansas High School

Noah loves plants and his pet fish, he loves his dog Cookie, and we're so happy for him! I know he'll do great things in life. Never stop chasing your dream son!! Keep the Lord close always and forever!! We love you!!

Charlee Christie



Wolf Clan
Kindergarten 2026
Fort Gibson Public School

Charlee is very smart and reads way above his grade level. He is caring and kind and loves his pet pug Zeke and Betta fish, Bob. In his spare time he loves going on vacations, playing Minecraft, playing drums, accordion, stylophone, piano, dj mixer and glockenspiel. He also is an avid basketball player and practices daily. He is the grandson of Charlie "Chooch" Christie Jr and proud of his name. He comes from a long line of Keetoowahs and proud to be Keetoowah.

Kinley Grace Simon



Kinley will be graduating from Texas High School in Texarkana, Texas, where she has been a dedicated four-year advanced culinary arts student. After graduation she will be attending Stephen F. Austin State University, where she plans to major in Hospitality Management with a focus on Culinary Arts. Kinley hopes to turn her passion into a career, creating meaningful experiences through food. With a strong spirit and big dreams, she is ready to set the world on fire through her talent and determination.

Addyson Nicole Stopp



Woodall Public School
8th Grade

Happy Graduation!

Love- Dad, Mom, Krista and Rance

Kayla Handle



Kayla Handle is a proud graduate of Yakima Valley College, where she has been actively involved in Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, STEM Club, TRIO, and Tiin-Ma Club. Throughout her academic journey, Kayla has demonstrated strong leadership and creativity, earning recognition on both the Dean's Honor List and President's List.

She is deeply connected to her community and values opportunities to stay involved, support others, and celebrate her culture. Through her involvement on campus and beyond, Kayla has built meaningful relationships and contributed to a strong sense of belonging.


Outside the classroom, she enjoys traveling, drawing, hiking, and going to the movies. Kayla plans to continue her education at Central Washington University and is excited to carry her passion for learning and community into the next chapter of her journey.

Grayci Spradlin



My name is Grayci Spradlin, and I am 18 years old from the Tahlequah district. I will be graduating from both Tahlequah High School and Indian Capital Technology Center. I will be graduating from ICTC as a Certified Medical Assistant, along with my certification in phlebotomy through the CMA program.

William Charles Blalock IV



This is William Charles Blalock IV aka Charlie Boy. He is a 2026 Quapaw Headstart graduate. He's the grandson of Howard Mick Hansen Sr and Marcella Diane Rackleff, who both have now passed on. Grandson of Skip & Robin Blalock and Amy & Jay Dejesus. Parents are Sheena and Billy Blalock. Charlie comes from a big loving family and loves his family something fierce. He also loves Mario, Dragon Ball Z and Minecraft. Playing outside and swimming is also his favorite. We are very proud of our Little Choog!! Keep shining bright baby boy!

Raedan Wadlow




Kansas High School & Northeast Tech – Cosmetology

Raedan Wadlow is the daughter of Randy and Alexsa Wadlow. She is graduating from Kansas High School while completing the cosmetology program at Northeast Tech.

Following graduation, Raedan plans to attend the University of Central Oklahoma to study funeral service and forensic science. She looks forward to pursuing a career where she can help others.

We are proud of Raedan and excited to see what her future holds.

J'Leeanna Ramsey



Maryetta Public School
8th Grade

We are so proud of all your hard work and dedication. Continue to keep God first and always wants more/better for yourself!


-Dad, Mom, Jaelon and Jre'Sun

Mackayla Buzzard



Mackayla Buzzard, member of the Cooweescoowee District is graduating from Epic Charter school. Her plans after graduation are going to college and getting a degree in Sonography. She is the daughter of Justin Buzzard and Tish King

Nashoba Willis-Hughes(Teehee)



18 years old

Mother to Kingston Webber


Daughter of Kristina Hughes-Teehee and Rocky Hughes and Keith Williston II born and raised in Tahlequah ok. Member of the united keetoowah band of cherokees. Graduate of Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy in OKC, Ok.

Seffie Hinzo



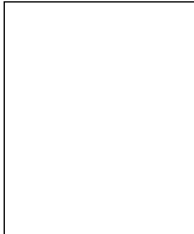
Kenwood Kindergarten
He wants to be a billionaire Cop when he grows up.

Elizabeth Ann Rivas



Kindergarten graduate from Leach School. Daughter to Talika Buzzard and Hector Rivas. She is 5 years old and plans to be Veterinarian when she grows up.

Mackenzie Lynn Buzzard



Mackenzie Lynn Buzzard, is proud to announce her graduation from NEO A&M College with an Associate Degree in General Studies. While a student at NEO, she was honored to be on the Deans Honor Roll. A member of the Cooweescoowee District, her future plans are to continue her education with a Bachelor and Master of Science degree in the field of Kinesiology.





Hart

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