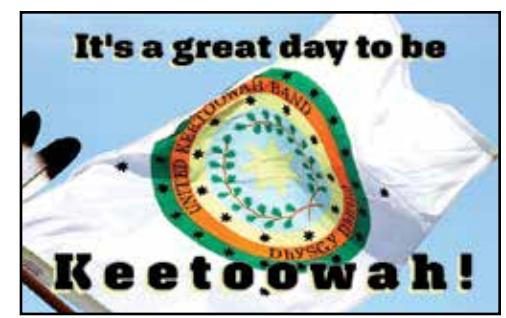




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# GIDUWA CHEROKEE NEWS

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

## UKB Led Tulsa Oilers Hockey Native American Heritage Night

Oilers set aside one night to honor the rich heritage of Native American communities.

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter

TULSA, Okla- The United Keetoowah Band joined the Tulsa Oilers Hockey in the night of sports and culture as they honored the rich heritage of Native American communities.

For the last few years UKB Education Director Dr. Leslie Hannah has built a relationship with those of the Oilers. He's been able to take UKB students from schools to such games, has given UKB tribal members and employees opportunities to experience games.

"This has been the second time UKB has been the host tribe for the Oilers Native American Heritage Night," Hannah said. "It went really well as we had a good audience reaction."

The night showcased a drum group, different styles of powwow dancers, John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum, Echota Behavioral Health and UKB Education Department. This year was the largest it's been since Hannah started participating four years ago.

"I was happy to have a big group of us representing the tribe come out," Hannah said. "It was good to have a few of our tribal services set up, we also had Miss Keetoowah Grayci Spradlin, Chief Jeff Wacoche and UKB Media."

Echota Behavioral Health had a display of stickball and the history of it set up, the museum brought items from the gift shop to sell, according to Hannah this was a good way to get UKB's name out there.

Chief Wacoche and Miss Keetoowah Grayci Spradlin had the honors of dropping the first puck of the night, as the Tulsa Oilers went up against the Tahoe Knight Monsters. The UKB Colors were posted by the

Thomas Edison JROTC. I wanted to thank the Edison JROTC for presenting our colors for us," Hannah said. "I also would like to give recognition to my assistant and right hand Amber Dry, for all the help she does in our department and helping me plan this night out."

The Oilers came out on top scoring, 3-2.



Miss Keetoowah Grayci Spradlin and Chief Jeff Wacoche dropped the first puck for the Tulsa Oilers and Tahoe Knight Monsters game.



The Thomas Edison JROTC posted the UKB Colors for the Native American Heritage Night.



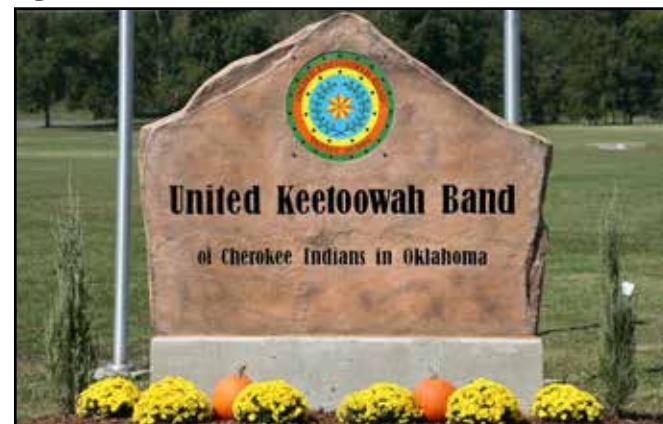
UKB representatives with Sledge the Oilers mascot and a couple of the Oilers ice girls.

## January 17th, 2026: Celebrating the Anniversary of the Department of Interior M-Opinion-37084 – Reaffirming UKB Jurisdiction on the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation

January marks a great month for the United Keetoowah Band. It is a month full of promise for the year ahead. As the Tribe reflects on all 2025 has brought, one important day stands out among many highlights: January 17, 2025. This was the day that the Department of Interior released M-Opinion M-37084, which reaffirmed that the UKB is an equal successor-in-interest to the historic Cherokee Nation. This is critically important, as it clarifies and confirms what we have said all along: the rights over the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation once exercised by the historic Cherokee Nation continue today through both the UKB and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (CNO) equally.

The M-Opinion is a significant milestone for the UKB: it is a critical step in our path to reopen UKB gaming. After years of review, the Department of the Interior reaffirmed the historical truths and supporting facts that the UKB has consistently asserted. The M-Opinion stands as an acknowledgement of the Tribe's inherent sovereignty and its rightful place with shared jurisdiction on the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation.

"The M-Opinion stands as a victory for right-



teousness and justice," said Chief Jeff Wacoche. "For too long the UKB has been sidelined, but we continue to fight for our rights. And the M-Opinion reaffirming UKB treaty rights is a fruit of that labor."

While all M-Opinions are currently being reviewed by the Administration, the UKB remains confident as history and the facts only arrive at one conclusion. Chief Jeff Wacoche stated "The Keetoowahs have consistently been on the right side of history. I am confident that the Administration will

uphold the M-Opinion."

Select excerpts from the conclusion of the M-Opinion:

- "The Cherokee Reservation is UKB's reservation"
- "This conclusion is based on my findings that (1) UKB has an ownership interest in the Cherokee Reservation as a successor in interest to the Tribal signatory of the Treaty of 1846; and (2) Congress intended for UKB to possess governmental jurisdiction over the Cherokee Reservation when it enacted the Keetoowah Recognition Act."
- "Lands taken into trust for UKB for gaming purposes within the Cherokee Reservation qualify as "Indian lands" under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and are therefore eligible for gaming."

The UKB enters a new year with a renewed commitment to defend and protect the treaty rights of the Tribe. As the Tribe continues to defend and assert its sovereignty, the legacy of our ancestors carries us forward.

To learn more about the M-Opinion and to access the full document, <https://www.ukb-nsn.gov/m-opinion>.



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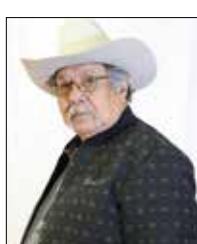
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Sequoyah Dist.  
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Tahlequah Dist.  
Sammy Allen  
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## Chief Chat – One Year Since the M-Opinion



### Chief's Corner

JEFF WACOCHE  
Chief  
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One year ago this month, the U.S. Department of the Interior issued a formal legal opinion that marked another historic turning point for the United Keetoowah Band. On January 17, 2025, Interior's top lawyer released Memorandum Opinion M-37084 – commonly referred to as 'the M-Opinion' – formally reaffirming what the Keetoowah people have long known to be true and have worked tirelessly to defend: that the UKB is a successor in interest to the historic Cherokee Nation, with inherent sovereignty and jurisdictional authority rooted in Cherokee treaty rights.

The M-Opinion was not symbolic, and its conclusions were crystal clear. It concluded that the UKB holds an ownership interest in the Cherokee Reservation under the Treaty of 1846, that Congress intended the UKB to exercise governmental jurisdiction when it enacted the Keetoowah Recognition Act, and that the UKB has exclusive tribal jurisdiction over its trust lands. Importantly, it confirmed that lands taken into trust for the UKB within the Cherokee Reservation qualify as Indian lands under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and can host gaming. These definitive conclusions formally debunk decades of manufactured confusion about the rights and history of the UKB.

Clarity matters because sovereignty is not abstract – it is the foundation upon which communities are able to govern, protect their people, and build sustainable futures. For the UKB, the M-Opinion represents a critical step on the path toward reopening gaming and restoring an essential engine of economic development that was wrongly taken from our people. Gaming is not an end in itself. It is a tool – one that enables job creation, generates revenue for essential services, and allows tribes to reinvest in their communities on their own terms.

For too long, the Keetoowah people have been forced to fight to exercise our rights. The M-Opinion did not grant the UKB new authority – it reaffirmed existing rights that had been repeatedly obstructed by the CNO and surrogates who purposefully sow misinformation and act out of willful blindness or deep ignorance.

Over the past year, the UKB has worked deliberately and responsibly to turn this reaffirmation into progress. The ability to reopen gaming

is central to that effort, as it creates opportunities to strengthen our Tribe's capacity to invest in priorities that directly affect the lives of our Members. Economic development allows us to enhance public safety, expand access to healthcare, support education and workforce development, and provide services that promote stability and opportunity for Keetoowah families.

The work ahead is not without challenge. Opposition has not disappeared, and the Keetoowah people continue to be asked to defend rights that have already been reaffirmed by the federal government and upheld in the courts. Still, the M-Opinion will change the terrain. The Keetoowahs will move forward with reaffirmation of our rights, and with a renewed sense of purpose about what is possible when sovereignty is reaffirmed rather than denied.

As we reflect on this anniversary, we do so with resolve. The fight for our rights did not begin with the M-Opinion, and it will not end there. But one year ago, the truth was put into writing, and that truth continues to guide our work as we build a stronger, more secure future for the UKB, our Members, and for generations to come.

Wado.

Chief Jeff Wacoche

## UKB STILWELL SUB-OFFICE



STILWELL OFFICE HOURS  
MON-FRI: 8:00-11:00  
MON-THURS  
AFTERNOON HOURS: 2:00-5:00  
**CLOSED AT 11:00 ON FRIDAY**  
PHONE: 918-696-871-2814  
EMAIL: MBALLARD@UKB-NSN.GOV  
FLINT DISTRICT  
REP. FRANKIE STILL  
918-507-1822  
GOINGSNAKE DISTRICT  
REP. WILLIE CHRISTIE  
918-822-3803



## Goingsnake District Sub-office

HOURS: MON-THUR, 8:30-12:30

1:00-4:00

FRI. 8:30-12:30

UKB KANSAS COMMUNITY BUILDING

280 S HWY 10, KANSAS, OK

CONTACT:

TERRIE TURTLE, 918-871-5038



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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.

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  
 \$1.00 FOR EACH TO GO MEAL...ALL MEALS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE\*



JANUARY



JANUARY 2026 "NATIONAL SOUP MONTH" - UKB TITLE VI - JIM PROCTOR ELDER NUTRITION CENTER MENU  
 UKB 55+, SPOUSES - FREE, CDIB 55+ & SPOUSE MUST CONTRIBUTE TO COST OF MEAL \$1.00 EACH MEAL, GUEST \$5.00/Child 0-12 \$3.00

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Jim Proctor Elder Community Center 918-871-2747 918-871-2861	GARNETT/CARNATIONS 	Inclement Weather: If Tahlequah Schools are closed, we are also closed	Inclement weather: We will not deliver to home bound for safety of driver.	1 New Year's Day Tribal Offices Closed Holiday	2 Nutrition Center Closed Cleaning Day 	3 Women Rock! Day Council Meeting 10 AM Wellness Center
4 Tom Thumb Day 	5 <u>National Bird Day</u> Chicken Noodle Soup w/Vegetables Corn on Cob Biscuit, Fruit	6 <u>Three Kings Day</u> "Chef's Choice"	7 <u>Old Rock Day</u> Lasagna Cauliflower/Broccoli Ceasar Salad, Garlic Bread, Dessert	8 <u>Argyle Day</u> Ham N Beans Hominy Coleslaw Cornbread, Dessert	9 <u>Quitters Day</u> Biscuits/Gravy Eggs, Bacon Hash Browns Yogurt, Juice	10 <u>Save the Eagles</u> 
11 <u>Sunday Supper Day</u> 	12 <u>Kiss a Ginger Day</u> Vegetable Soup Ham/Chez Sandwich Pasta Salad, Fruit	13 <u>Rubber Ducky Day</u> Quesadilla w/Pico de Gallo, Mex Rice Mex Corn, Fruit	14 <u>World Logic Day</u> Meatloaf, Carrots Mashed Potato's Hot Roll, Fruit	15 <u>Pothole Day</u> Chicken/Dumplings Green Beans, Corn Hot Roll, Dessert	16 <u>Nat. Nothing Day</u> Pancakes/Blueberry Eggs, Sausage Hashbrowns, Juice	17 <u>Popeye Day</u> 
18 <u>World Snow Day</u> 	19 <u>Nat. Popcorn Day</u> Martin Luther King Jr. Day Tribal Offices Closed	20 <u>Walk Outside Day</u> BBQ Beef Sandwich Potato Chips Baked Beans, Fruit	21 <u>Hug A Puppy Day</u> Chicken Alfredo Carrots, Ceaser Salad Garlic Roll, Dessert	22 <u>Hot Sauce Day</u> Frito Chili Pie Tater Kegs Tomato Salad, Fruit	23 <u>National Pie Day</u> Scrambled Omelet Sausage, Hashbrown Juice, Fruit	24 <u>Beer Can Day</u> 
25 <u>Bible Sunday</u> 	26 <u>Nat. Spouses Day</u> Hamburger Stew Hominy Commodity Cheese Cornbread, Fruit	27 <u>Punch the Clock</u> Chicken Tortilla Soup/Tortilla Chips Refried Beans Mexican Rice, Fruit	28 <u>Nat. Daisy Day</u> Spiral Pasta w/Meat Sauce, Garlic Toast Italian Green Beans Ceasar Salad, Fruit	29 <u>Freethinkers Day</u> January Birthdays Hamburger w/Fixin's French Fries Cake & Ice Cream	30 <u>Big Wig Day</u> Nutrition Center Closed Cleaning Day 	31 <u>Hell is Freezing Over Day</u> 

Protect yourself! Stay home if you feel sick! Thank you for your patience and understanding - Title VI Staff - 2% Milk, bread & fruit served daily

The name January derived ancient Roman "Janus", an image of 2 faces, we cast out the old and welcome the new!

A New Year's Resolution is a Tradition in which a person resolves to continue good practices & improve their behavior at the beginning of the New Year!

January 3rd is the "Full Wolf Moon" at 5:03 AM

Winter is a time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire, it is the time for home!

Ring out the old, ring in the new. Ring happy bells, across the snow. The year is going, let him go; Ring out the false, ring in the true!

"You can't get too much winter in the winter" Robert Frost

I'm a little snowman, so fat and round. I started as a snowflake, that fell up on the ground. I have two buttons for my eyes, a great big scarf of red, I have a carrot for a nose, a hat up on my head. Watch me as I melt to the ground, the snowman song!

## UKB Housing Department Homes Family before Christmas

**Lucinda Davis and family waited patiently before receiving new home.**

**LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter**

JAY, Okla- The United Keetoowah Band Housing Department are making their way down the list as they have presented another Lease to Purchase program applicant, UKB member Lucinda Davis with keys to her new home.

"We are always happy to help our tribal members achieve the dream of owning their own home," Housing Director Roxana Wilden said. "This one was special as she received her new home right before the holidays."

Davis a resident of Jay, OK has been on the waiting list for this program since 2021, before she received her keys.

"This is her first home, as she lived in some apartments before," Housing Assistant Director Richard Vann said. "We worked hard to get her in before the holidays. She and her family were very thankful they got it."

The Lease to Purchase program helps UKB tribal members become home-owners. Requirements for this program are as follows:

- Must be a UKB member
- Must not be on any public or Indian Housing program
- Never been a homeowner
- Must not be a convicted sex offender or drug offender
- Must not owe any debt
- **MUST SIGN AN AGREEMENT THAT YOU WILL TAKE CARE AND MAINTAIN YOUR PROPERTY**

The program is to help people that can take responsibility of their home, as Housing continues to prioritize families and elders with families. They get many applicants from Delaware, Goingsnake, Flint and Tahlequah districts but have low numbers in other UKB Districts.

If you qualify for this program, put an application in and if you have already done this it needs to be updated every year.

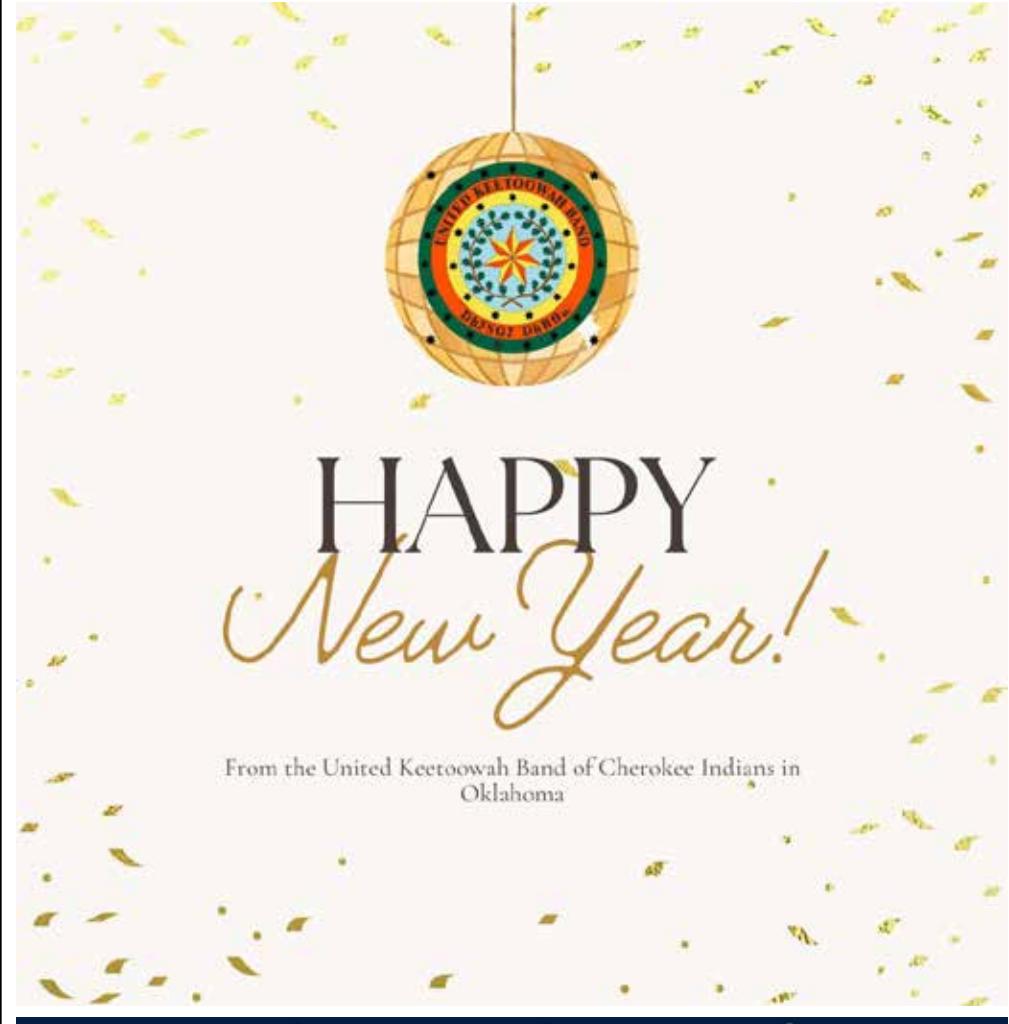
For more information contact UKB Housing at 918-871-2773.



UKB Tribal Secretary Caleb Smith-Grimmett and Delaware District Rep Tishaleta Guevara celebrated with Lucinda Davis on the key presentation day.



Housing Director Roxana Wilden present Lucinda Davis with the key to her new home in Jay.



# Keetoowah Museum's "Getting Back to Basics" features River Cane Technology

"An important aspect to this series of Getting Back to Basics is to stress the importance of sustainable harvesting and to be a caretaker to the environment," Roger Cain

## Marilyn Craig

The John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum will feature River Cane Technology classes as part of their "Getting Back to Basics" series in a three, four-hour sessions on Saturday, February 21; Saturday, March 21; and Saturday, April 18. The series will be presented in conjunction with UKB's Historic Preservation Department's Keetoowah Rivercane Conservation program and will feature presentations by UKB Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Roger Cain regarding river cane technology and indigenous knowledge (IK).

"One of the sessions for the classes will include a field trip to a canebrake to learn how to identify cane culms for use in baskets, blowguns and other cultural materials while also learning conservation methods for canebrakes. Participants will learn river cane technology associated with splitting and peeling cane as well as dying the splints for basketry. An important aspect to this series of Getting Back to Basics is to stress the importance of sustainable harvesting and to be a caretaker to the environment," said Cain.

River cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) once dominated the southeastern landscape with reports and mappings indicating these ancient ecosystems stretched miles along water ways providing clean water, shelter and food for the Keetoowah people as well as other southeastern tribes. Unfortunately, these

ecosystems were found to be a superb food source for livestock and rich soil for agricultural expansion throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, setting up the destruction and demise of the expansive bamboo forests that once dominated the southeastern woodland landscape. Today, river cane ecosystems cover less than 2% of the landscape area it once



Museum Volunteers and staff learn about stripping River cane, to help prepare for upcoming classes.

covered before contact.

"We are excited to learn about this plant and how important it has always been to our ancestors and how important it is today," said Barbara Girty Foster, assistant museum director.

For more information or to register for the class, contact Girty Foster at 918-871-2794.



This beautiful weaving is made from River cane.

## Museum's Sewing Series Wraps Up

Marilyn Craig, Museum Marketing Coordinator

The John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum wrapped up the "Getting Back to Basics" Sewing series in November. A dozen women gathered for the three-session class met for four hours on a Saturday in September, October, and November. The women and girls attending ranged in ages from eleven to mid-sixties.

This series focused on machine sewing. Keetoowah Tradition Keeper Betty Holcomb taught the sewing classes. Betty teaches various traditional and cultural classes, including preserving and canning food and making Kanuchi balls, but she says sewing is her favorite thing to do.

Participant Rebecca Dreadfulwater said she learned so much from the very first session. "Now I know how to thread a sewing machine on different machines and how to fix a tension for the thread, what size thread I can use, what size needles and threads to use for fabric and for quilts. Example: Quilt threads are located on top of the spool," she said.

Carolyn Swimmer loved learning to make an apron with pockets the simple way. "I enjoyed all of us working together and having fun learning and helping one another," she said.

Norma Jimerson enjoyed making a pillow. Norma said, "I picked Christmas colors to give away. The design was the old "A Sovereign Nation is Reborn" T-shirt from a past Celebration.

Many of the class participants said they would love to continue learning to sew and would love to learn to make a ribbon skirt. The museum's ribbon skirt classes will begin September 2026. For more information, call 918-871-2794.



Participants of the museum's sewing class watch as Betty Holcomb shows them how to adjust the sewing machine tension.

## UKB PRC Program Reaches 2,000 Patients Served, Marking Another Major Healthcare Milestone



Two thousand patients and counting! The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians is proud to announce that the UKB Purchased and Referred Care Program has now served its 2,000th patient. This is a momentous milestone in Keetoowah healthcare, and a true statement of UKB sovereignty. This achievement comes one year after the program's launch and stands as a clear sign we are achieving our goal of increased access to quality care for UKB Members.

"This is a powerful moment for the UKB," said Chief Jeff Wacoche. "Each patient served represents a Keetoowah life supported, a family helped, and a future strengthened. Our healthcare team is working tirelessly, and this is a major milestone in our Tribe's progress in building a healthcare system that serves our Members."

The PRC program, launched January 1, 2025, has ensured the UKB's ability to connect eligible Members with specialty medical, dental, optometry, and emergency services that fall outside of what IHS or tribally operated clinics can provide. Funded by the Indian Health Service, the PRC program has already proven transformational by addressing long-standing gaps in care and ensuring that UKB Members receive comprehensive, culturally attuned healthcare when they need it most.

Reaching 2,000 patients highlights not only the growing demand for expanded services but also the efficiency, compassion, and steadfast commitment that drive the UKB's approach to healthcare.

"This milestone shows what happens when a Tribe invests in its own well-being," said Jennifer Leep, director of Echota Behavioral Health. "The PRC program is changing lives every day; and with our dedicated staff at Echota Behavioral Health and continued growth in our health services, we are building a stronger, healthier foundation for generations of Keetoowahs."

The PRC program serves exclusive UKB Members who reside within the 14-county Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation. As the payer of last resort, it ensures Members can access specialty care when referred, while also coordinating alternate resources such as Medicaid or private insurance to prevent unnecessary financial hardship.

The United Keetoowah Band celebrates this 2,000-patient milestone as a reminder of what is possible when sovereignty, vision, and community wellbeing come together, and looks forward to continuing this momentum in 2026.

## 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 took Santa's Toy Shop around the tribal communities

Ending 2025 celebrating the holiday cheer with our neighbor towns



Santa's Toy Shop and workers, Tahlequah Christmas Parade 2025



UKB Tribal Lighthouse, Tahlequah Christmas Parade



Chief Jeff Wacoche, Miss Keetoowah Grayci Spradlin and Jr. Miss Keetoowah J'Leeanna Ramsey at the Tahlequah Christmas Parade.



Chief Jeff Wacoche with Michelle Downing, Shirley Sam and "Mr. Potato Head" in the Hulbert Christmas Parade



Miss Keetoowah Grayci Spradlin at the Jay Christmas Parade

## Fourth Annual Keetoowah Christmas Arts and Crafts Show

Tradition Keepers keep the annual Christmas arts and crafts show alive

LANI HANSEN, Senior Reporter

TAHLEQUAH, Okla- The John Hair Cultural Center and Keetoowah Museum hosted its fourth annual Keetoowah Christmas Arts and Crafts Show in December.

Handmade Keetoowah Original's were sold by the UKB Tradition Keepers who were invited to set up a booth. Bead work, ribbon skirts, ribbon shirts, craft kits, quilts stickball sticks, baskets, paintings and prints, artwork and jewelry were seen throughout the show.

Customers came through to shop and buy Christmas gifts for loved ones.

UKB Tradition Keepers are members who are chosen each year. They are preserving our culture through making their art into something that can be shared and passed down to future generations.

UKB Tradition Keepers are chosen from among a group of outstanding artists, artisans, linguists, historians, and other traditional culture keepers. The Tradition Keepers not only practice their arts and crafts, but also share their knowledge through teaching others.

They look forward to the arts and crafts show every year. Thank you to all who came by whether to shop or visit.



Tradition Keepers sell their wares at the Keetoowah Christmas Arts and Crafts show at the John Hair Cultural Center and Museum.



Customers shopping for Christmas gifts found beautiful Keetoowah originals at the museum.

# Happy New Year



# 2026



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