

TRIBAL PROFILE



Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
Office of the Tribal Chief

P.O. Box 6010
Choctaw, Mississippi 39350
Telephone (601) 656-5251



CENTER OF IT ALL

Stay, Play, Relax, Dine and Win!

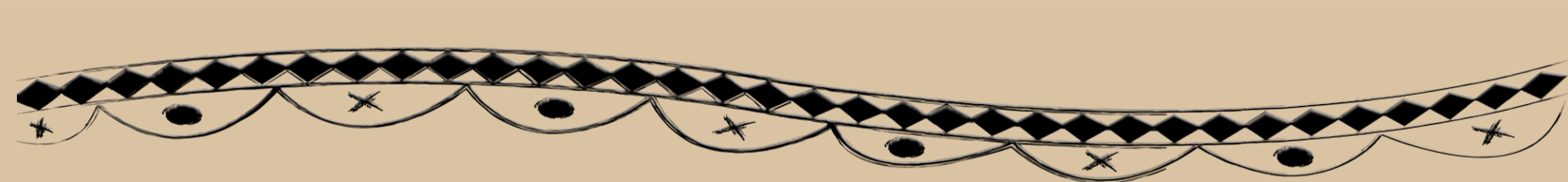
SILVERSTAR
CASINO

GOLDEN MOON
CASINO

Pearl River Resort Properties



Follow Us!



Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
Office of the Tribal Chief

101 Industrial Road Choctaw, MS 39350
601.656.5251 www.choctaw.org



Halito!

Thank you for the interest you have shown in our Tribe.

We, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, are a proud and resilient sovereign nation. Our history is one of poverty, struggle and adversity. However, as a native people, we have overcome many of these historical challenges. Through self-determination and strong leadership, we rose above those issues that plagued our people and have become one of the largest employers in the state of Mississippi.

Enclosed in this Tribal Profile, you will find information on the history, culture, economic development and current organizational structure of the Tribe, as well as an overview of our Pearl River Resort. Our economic success has allowed us to create an infrastructure to have the capability to develop and fund programs to help provide essential services, education and healthcare to our Tribal members. It is our goal, as a people, to help keep our rich culture thriving while continuing to develop our economy to assure a better quality of life for our Tribal members.

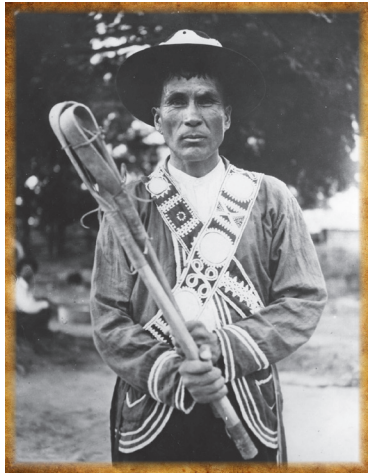
Along with the information contained in this profile, I encourage you to take the time and visit our reservation and make a stop at our Chahta Immi Cultural Center. For more information on the tribe or to get information on tours, please visit our official website at www.choctaw.org. You may also contact the Office of Public Information (OPI) at 601.650.1587, send an e-mail to info@choctaw.org or write to OPI at 101 Industrial Road, Choctaw, MS 39350.

Yakoki,

Chief Cyrus Ben



A HISTORY (PRE-1945)



The Choctaw, and their ancestors, have called the region now known as the Southeast home for centuries. The proof of this is in the art, stories and legends of the Choctaw. There are three eras in which the Choctaw are known to have existed: Paleo-Indian Stage (18,000 – 8,000 B.C.), Archaic Stage (8,000-1,000 B.C.) and Prehistory (1,000 B.C. — 1540 A.D.). Prehistory is defined as the time prior to sustained European contact.

The first mention of the Choctaw name in modern history was recorded in 1675 by a Spanish priest in Florida. He warned early settlers against traveling too far to the west lest they meet the fearsome “Chahta”. This name is still what the Choctaw call themselves today.

The Choctaw's first sustained contact with Europeans was French explorer D'Iberville in 1699. The two sides became allies for the following 65 years with the Tribe supporting the fledgling colony with both food and in wars against the English and Indians who supported the English. The alliance also provided the Choctaw with French firearms to fight other tribes that had been raiding the Choctaw for slaves since the early 1680s.

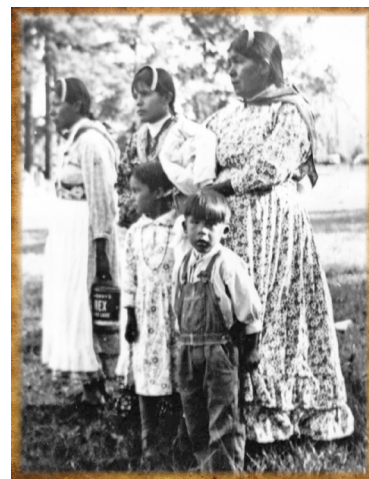
The end of the French and Indian War in 1763 put the Choctaw in a precarious situation. All lands east of the Mississippi River were transferred from the French to the English while French land to the west of the river went to the Spanish. That arrangement did not last long with the outcome of the Revolutionary War establishing the United States.

The United States and the Choctaw signed a number of treaties through the years that laid the course for the Choctaw's future. The first, in 1786, reaffirmed the boundaries of Tribal land and reaffirmed Choctaw sovereignty. However, from 1801 to 1830, the Choctaw signed a series of treaties with the United States, which eventually led to the loss of all territory east of the Mississippi, some 32 million acres of land, and a move to present-day Oklahoma. Fortunately for the Choctaw, the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek allowed Choctaw who did not want to go to the new territory to stay. Those who remained became U.S. citizens and were awarded land grants based on the size of each family. Some 4,000 Choctaw chose not to leave, despite a great deal of coercion.

By 1850, virtually none of the Choctaw who had received land in Mississippi still retained it. They were either scammed out of their land or forced away by white settlers. As a result, many more Choctaw left for Oklahoma. Those who remained in Mississippi survived the rest of the 19th century by living off the land or becoming tenant farmers and sharecroppers on land that had once been theirs.

In the early 20th century, the poor conditions the Choctaw were living in brought the attention of the federal government. It stepped in to assist the Tribe when the 1918 influenza epidemic/pandemic killed more than 25 percent of the Mississippi Choctaw. During the 1920s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established elementary schools in the main Choctaw communities as well as the Choctaw Agency and a hospital in Philadelphia, MS.

Using procedures authorized under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Constitution was ratified in 1945 and officially recognized by the federal government. The first Tribal Council was little more than an advisory committee, set up to approve BIA decisions. As time went on, the council gained more authority and expertise, and eventually took over the direct administration of the Choctaw Reservation and its many programs.



THE TRIBE

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) is the state's only federally recognized Indian Tribe. Today, enrolled membership in the Tribe exceeds 11,000 individuals, all of whom have at least a 50 percent degree of Mississippi Choctaw blood. Two-thirds of the Tribal population is under the age of 25.

Tribal lands contain a diversified portfolio of manufacturing, service, retail, hospitality and construction enterprises. Each provides employment opportunities for Tribal members and area residents, as well as tax-equivalent revenue to provide Tribal government services. Those services include:

- Health center and clinics
- Public safety
- Education
- Land management and environmental resources protection
- Road and infrastructure improvements
- Youth recreation
- Employment opportunities

The revenues fund construction of new schools, strengthen educational programs and post-secondary scholarships for Tribal members.

The success of Choctaw businesses and enterprises enables the Tribe to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient, while making a significant and favorable economic impact on the surrounding non-Choctaw communities. The Tribe is now among Mississippi's top five largest private employers, with more than 5,750 employees.



TREATIES

Treaties between the Choctaw and national governments date back to the early 1700s. The earliest ones dealt with trade and alliances with Great Britain, France and Spain. The nine major treaties with the United States (U.S.) are as follows:

- **Treaty of Hopewell (1786):** The Tribe traded 69,120 acres in exchange for protection by the newly formed U.S. government.
- **Treaty of Fort Adams (1801):** Expanded the amount of Choctaw land ceded to the United States – 2,641,920 acres – in exchange for monetary value of \$2,000 and blacksmith tools. A regional famine earlier in the year decimated the Choctaw’s food supply.
- **Treaty of Fort Confederation (1802):** The Tribe lost another 50,000 acres – with no compensation – after the U.S. claimed that the Choctaw boundaries from previous treaties were never clarified.
- **Treaty of Hoe Buckintoopa (1803):** The Choctaw ceded more than 853,760 additional acres to the U.S. in exchange for forgiveness of Tribal debt to a U.S. trading company. Chiefs also received a variety of goods.
- **Treaty of Mount Dexter (1805):** The Tribe ceded 4,142,720 acres to the U.S. In return, the U.S. established an annuity of \$48,000 per year to the Tribe to pay debts to traders and merchants.
- **Treaty of Fort Stephens (1816):** The Choctaw traded 10,000 acres for a 20-year annual payment of \$6,000 to aid in establishing tribal schools. The Tribe also received \$10,000 worth of merchandise.



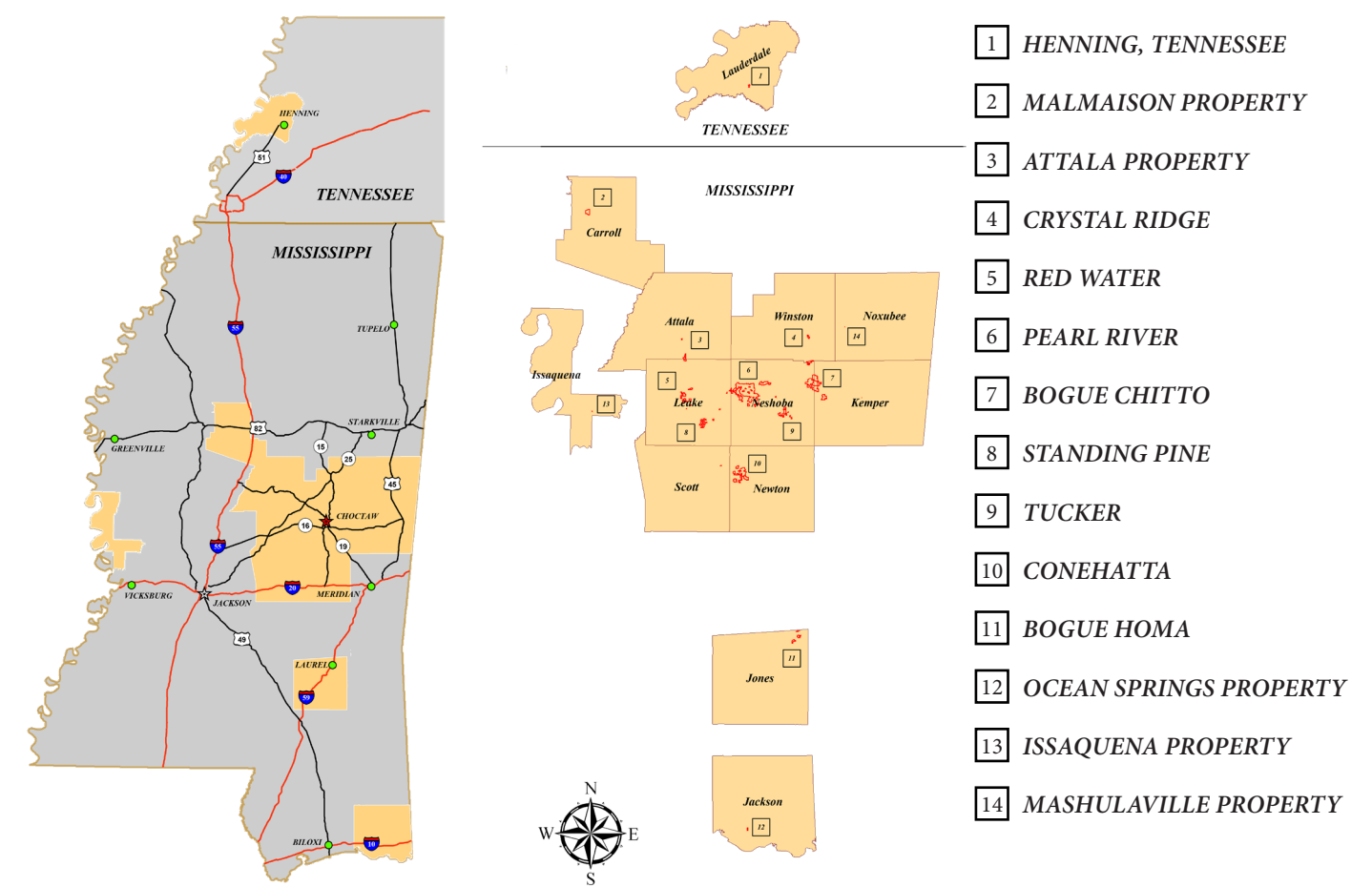
- **Treaty of Doak’s Stand (1820):** The Tribe traded lands in Mississippi for land west of the Mississippi River that later became the state of Arkansas.
- **Treaty of Washington City (1825):** The Tribe sought to correct the Treaty of Doak’s Stand because the land in Arkansas, designated for the Choctaw, was previously settled by white people. The treaty resulted in two million additional acres being ceded to the U.S.
- **Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek (1830):** The U.S. sought to remove the Choctaw from Mississippi under authority of the Indian Removal Act and move them westward to Oklahoma. Under terms of the treaty, the Tribe ceded their remaining 11 million acres in Mississippi. Only approximately 4,000 Choctaw remained in Mississippi, and under treaty terms were granted U.S. citizenship. The descendants of those who remained are now the members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

* To see a complete listing of agreements and treaties of the Choctaw, please visit the choctaw.org website or Choctaw Archives at the Chahta Immi Cultural Center.

THE LAND

The Choctaw Indian Reservation contains more than 33,000 acres situated throughout 10 counties in east central Mississippi and one in Tennessee. Most of this land is held in trust for the Tribe by the federal government.

The Tribe has eight officially recognized Choctaw Indian communities (Bogue Chitto, Bogue Homa, Conehatta, Crystal Ridge, Pearl River, Red Water, Standing Pine and Tucker) and trust land in Henning, TN. Pearl River, located in Neshoba County, is the largest Choctaw Indian community and the site of Tribal government headquarters.



MORE THAN JUST A NAME

The eight Choctaw communities have names that represent significant features of the Tribe – landmarks, prominent wildlife and other facets:

Bogue Chitto – Bók Chito – “Big Creek”	Pearl River – Bihhi Áyásha – “The Place Where Mulberries Are”
Bogue Homa – Bók Homma – “Red Creek”	Red Water – Oka Homma – “Red Water”
Conehatta – Koni Hata – “Gray or Silver Skunk”	Standing Pine – Tíak Hikiya – “Standing Pine”
Crystal Ridge – Bahcha Maláta – “Crystal Ridge”	Tucker – Fani Lakna – “Yellow Squirrel”

THE GOVERNMENT



The Choctaw Tribal government operates under the auspices of the Tribe's constitution. Ratified in 1945, the Constitution authorized the Tribe's separation from the state of Mississippi. It also established a democratic form of Tribal government with representation from each of the Choctaw communities. The Constitution was revised in 1975, and amended in 2006 and 2013. The most recent amendments to the Tribal Constitution included updated eligibility requirements for Tribal government election candidates and increase criminal sentencing authority in Tribal Courts.

Prior to 1975, a Tribal Council Chairman – elected by the Tribal Council – led the Tribe. The constitutional revision of 1975 authorized the election of a democratically-elected Tribal Chief every four years with no term limits. The Chief's primary role is chief executive of the Tribe, he or she implements Tribal law and policy, along with management of Tribal business. Since 1975, there have been five Chiefs elected: Calvin J. Isaac (1975-1979), Phillip Martin (1979-2007), Beasley Denson (2007-2011), Phyliss J. Anderson (2011-2019), and most recently Cyrus Ben in July 2019.

TRIBAL CHAIRMEN

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1945-1949 • Joe Chitto | 1966 • Robert Benn |
| 1949-1953 • Emmett York | 1966-1967 • Clay Gibson |
| 1953-1955 • Joe Chitto | 1967-1971 • Emmett York |
| 1955-1959 • Emmett York | 1971-1975 • Phillip Martin |
| 1959-1965 • Phillip Martin | |

TRIBAL CHIEFS



1975-1979
Chief Calvin J. Isaac



1979-2007
Chief Phillip Martin



2007-2011
Chief Beasley Denson



2011-2019
Chief Phyliss J. Anderson



Chief Cyrus Ben
Sworn in July 2019

GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS

The strong working relationship between the Tribal government and local, state and federal governments is long-standing and strong. A 1997 Executive Accord between the Tribe and State of Mississippi formally recognized the sovereignty and rights of the other and established a common bond between the two governments. It set in motion cooperation for mutually beneficial goals and delivery of certain services between the two governments.



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben meets with then-New Mexico Congresswoman, now U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland. Chief Ben welcomes Mississippi Congressman Michael Guest to the Pearl River Reservation in August 2019. Tribal Chief Ben and Choctaw Indian Princess Elisah Jimmie with MS State Senator Jenifer Branning and MS State Representative Scott Bounds.

THE TRIBE AS A GOOD NEIGHBOR

The Choctaw Tribal government has consistently shown itself to be a good and helpful neighbor. Recent history is filled with examples of the Tribe's spirit of cooperation in assisting area governments either through cooperation, donations or direct financial assistance. Some include funding local law enforcement agencies, donating police cars and emergency equipment to area emergency services, and funding economic development and regional tourism. The Tribe has partnered with national organizations in times of emergency or disaster to provide relief services to others such as providing space, free-of-charge, to the American Red Cross to serve as a regional distribution center. Taking all these into consideration, it is easy to see the commitment the Tribe has to working with its neighbors.

THE OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENT

During the past four decades, the Tribe has experienced an outstanding social, economic and educational rebirth. A strong and stable Tribal government continues to make extraordinary differences in the lives of its Choctaw citizens.

Since 1979, with the first stages of economic development being established, the Tribal government has grown into a large and complex organization. The Tribe is well known and highly respected for its successful exercise of Choctaw Self-Determination and its serious-minded approach to good government and good business.

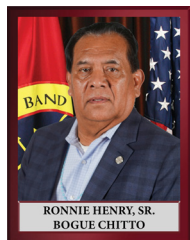
The Tribe, particularly the Choctaw Tribal government, has long enjoyed wide recognition as an industrious, progressive and fair business partner. The Tribe continues to achieve outstanding progress.



THE TRIBAL COUNCIL

The Tribal Council established 15 committees to focus on specific areas of the Choctaw government. Each committee is made up of and chaired by council members. The chairs of these committees are selected during the same meeting the officers are elected. Each member may chair only one committee at a time, and the Vice Chief sits on every committee:

- Budget & Finance
- Children & Youth
- Education
- Culture
- Economic Development
- Health
- Congressional & Governmental Affairs
- Judicial Affairs and Law & Order
- Public Works, Fire & Construction
- Natural Resources
- Community and Family Services & Veteran Affairs
- Lobbyist, Public Relations & Politics
- Human Resources
- Housing
- Recreation



RONNIE HENRY, SR.
BOGUE CHITTO



ANGELA HUNDLEY
BOGUE CHITTO



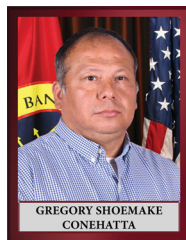
KENDALL WALLACE
BOGUE CHITTO



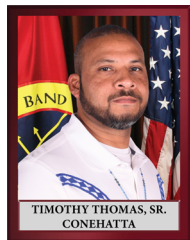
BERDIE STEVE
BOGUE HOMA



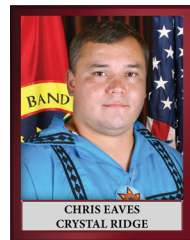
HILDA NICKY
CONEHATTA



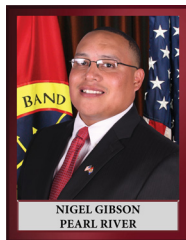
GREGORY SHOEMAKE
CONEHATTA



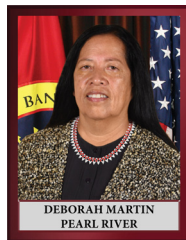
TIMOTHY THOMAS, SR.
CONEHATTA



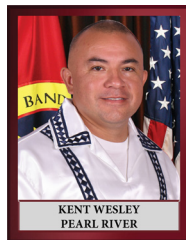
CHRIS EAVES
CRYSTAL RIDGE



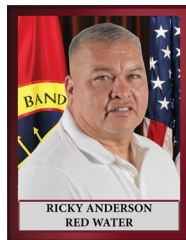
NIGEL GIBSON
PEARL RIVER



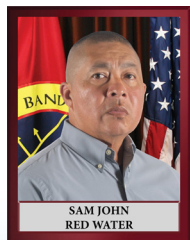
DEBORAH MARTIN
PEARL RIVER



KENT WESLEY
PEARL RIVER



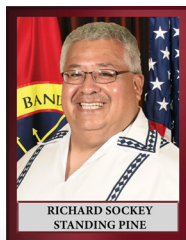
RICKY ANDERSON
RED WATER



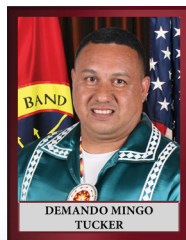
SAM JOHN
RED WATER



LORIANN AHSHAPANEK
STANDING PINE



RICHARD SOCKEY
STANDING PINE



DEMANDO MINGO
TUCKER



DOROTHY WILSON
TUCKER

JUDICIAL

In 1981, the Tribe legislatively created a sophisticated Tribal Court System, which was comprised of four lower courts and the Choctaw Supreme Court. The Tribal Court System has expanded over the years to meet growing legal needs and now includes five distinct lower courts. There are four traditional trial courts: Criminal Court; Civil Court; Domestic Violence Court and Youth Court. The Itti-kāna-ikbi, or Peacemaker Court, was established to address limited matters in a traditional and holistic manner. The Supreme Court provides a forum for all parties to pursue their right to appeal an adverse judgement entered by a trial court. The judicial system exercises subject-matter jurisdiction over criminal and civil matters. Additionally, the federal government has jurisdiction over felonies that occur on the Reservation that involve a Native American or property of the Tribe. Matters involving criminal offenses by non-members on reservation lands may also be handled by the federal or the state court system, depending upon the status of the victim. The Tribe also has a Legal Defense program for the purpose of providing effective and efficient legal representation in certain substantive legal matters to Tribal members in Choctaw Tribal courts, Mississippi state courts and federal courts.



Smith John Justice Complex

The Smith John Justice Complex was officially opened in April 2007 and is home to the Department of Public Safety and the judicial system. The building was named for Smith John, the key figure in the U.S. Supreme Court case *United States v. John*. The Supreme Court held that lands designated as a reservation in Mississippi are "Indian country" as defined by statute, and under the Major Crimes Act, the State of Mississippi had no jurisdiction to try an Indian for crimes covered by that act.

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General's Office provides legal services to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and its departments, agencies and enterprises, with the exception of the Choctaw Resort Development Enterprise.



Additionally, the office prosecutes all criminal cases on the Reservation; is the primary liaison between the Tribe, and local, state and federal governments; drafts proposed legislation; collects "bad checks" passed at Tribal departments; advises the Tribe in contractual matters; provides written opinions on matters of Tribal law; provides in-service legal training to all Tribal entities; represents the Tribe in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases and represents the Tribe and its entities in litigation. The criminal division is housed in the Smith John Justice Complex and the civil division is housed at 354 Industrial Road, Choctaw, MS. The office may be reached at 601.656.4507.

PUBLIC SAFETY

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY



The Tribe has operated its own police force for many years, but in 2002, The Department of Public Safety (DPS) was created and operates to provide comprehensive public safety services to Tribal members and the Choctaw Indian community. The service area for DPS includes the eight Choctaw communities in Mississippi and a community in Henning, TN. Law enforcement is a portion of the overall responsibility to Tribal members and thousands of visitors who pass through the various Choctaw communities daily.

DPS maintains a skilled workforce and employs approximately 140 employees which includes: 33 uniform patrol officers (Security); 47 police officers, including five investigators, three captains, two deputy directors and one director; 28 adult detention officers; 17 youth detention officers. The remaining workforce is comprised of administrative and support services staff. Patrol officers are either trained at MLEOTA (Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers Training Academy) in Pearl, MS or are graduates of the Indian Police Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, NM. The department has a Training Officer on duty to conduct on-going training for officers. Ninety-eight percent of the DPS staff are Tribal members that are trained and mentored to provide the best public safety services to Tribal members and the Choctaw community.



CHOCTAW WILDLIFE & PARKS

Choctaw Wildlife and Parks (CWP) is responsible for enforcing the regulations as it relates to outdoor recreational activities, natural resources protection, and Choctaw Wildlife, Environmental and Animal Control Codes. The Choctaw Animal Control Program is a branch under the Choctaw Wildlife and Parks Department.



Wildlife rangers are responsible for enforcing hunting and fishing regulations; management of wildlife, fishery and natural resources; the control of nuisance species throughout Tribal lands; and lastly, the promotion of natural resources conservation and outdoor safety through educational programs and outdoor recreational activities. Animal Control officers are responsible for the enforcement of the Tribal Animal Control Code; control of domestic species throughout Tribal lands; and promotion of responsible pet ownership through educational programs and various sponsored pet health clinics when available.



With this in mind, the Wildlife & Parks department is committed to providing management and conservation efforts Tribal members in order to ensure the sustainability of benefits for all recreational resources for future generations to appreciate and continue the ceremonial, cultural, and economic values of our Tribal natural resources, as well as protection of pets, livestock, and human health and safety.

CHOCTAW FIRE DEPARTMENT



Established in 1991, the Choctaw Fire Department (CFD) has two stations: Station 1 located in the Pearl River Community; and Station 2 located in the Bogue Chitto community. The Choctaw Fire Department's Mission Statement is committed to preventing the loss of life and property of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians by safely and efficiently responding to emergencies. CFD provides fire suppression, technical rescue, emergency medical services, fire prevention, and preparedness through training and public education.

CFD maintains a modern and effective fire company, focusing on operational readiness, department unity, and professionalism. They strive to ensure the safety of our tribal citizens, employees, and guests. CFD honors our families and brothers /sisters in public safety and will act with respect and integrity in all situations. CFD is honored and takes pride in representing the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

CFD members are trained in all areas of fire and rescue including fire suppression and prevention, technical rescue and emergency medical response and safety. Training is provided in CPR, fire safety and fire extinguishing.

Choctaw Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) is housed at the EOC Logistics Building at Station 1. CEMA constantly monitors upcoming weather and other possibly hazardous situations, maintains and updates emergency management and hazard mitigation plans and works closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, American Red Cross and other neighboring emergency management agencies.

The Choctaw Fire Department is a participating member of Mississippi TaskForce 2 (Mississippi Statewide Technical Advanced Rescue) of the Mississippi Department of Homeland Security, Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. The team is designed to respond to a variety of disasters, including earthquakes, hurricanes, storms and tornadoes, floods, dam failures, technological accidents, terrorist activities and hazardous materials releases where victims may be trapped, lost, or injured. Within a short period of notification, CFD can have a team of highly trained personnel en route to assist in a variety of skilled disciplines.

Eight members of Choctaw Fire Department are part of the MS-Task Force program and continue to train at the local, state and federal level to better serve the Tribal communities and the general public. The MS-Task Force members range from line firefighters to supervisory administrators as well as management positions in the Incident Command System.

Fifteen members of Choctaw Fire Department are part of the MS-Task Force program and continue to train at the local, state and federal level to better serve the Tribal communities and the general public. The MS-Task Force members range from line firefighters to supervisory administrators.



EDUCATION

The Division of Education (DOE) is committed to lifelong learning as a means of assuring informed Tribal citizens and the enhancement of Choctaw culture and language. Choctaw education is a critical element on the Reservation, serving to support a successful Tribal government, economic growth and individual self-efficacy.

EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL



Early Learning: The Department of Early Childhood Education (DOECE) is focused on more than academic achievement; it includes the intellectual, democratic, moral, personal, physical and social development of our children. Beginning in a child's first year, DOECE works with the children's most important teachers, their parents. Tribal Early Childhood serves children from 8 weeks to 5 years old: Daycare (8 weeks to 5 years); Early Head Start (8 weeks to 3 years); and Head Start (3 to 5 years). The Tribe's Division of Education operates Early Childhood Education Centers in six of the eight communities. Each Center is certified by the

National Head Start Office. More than 400 Choctaw preschoolers are enrolled annually.

TRIBAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Choctaw Tribal School System is fully accredited by the Mississippi Department of Education and by AdvancED. The system believes in the pursuit of excellence and their motto is Alla Momat Ikkaná Chih ("All Children Can Learn"). Choctaw Tribal Schools strive to be exemplary and exceptional schools that inspire, challenge and empower students to succeed in a globally competitive society. The Tribal School System is the largest Tribally-controlled, consolidated school system in the country with over 2,200 students in grades Pre-K to 12. The Tribe exercises direct oversight of the schools and curriculum. The Tribe operates six elementary schools, one middle school, one vocational school, a virtual learning center and one high school with a dormitory to house residential students. Choctaw Central High School is famous for its Solar Car ("Tushka Hashi") program that has competed in the World Solar Car Challenge in Australia. The Choctaw Virtual Learning Center (CVLC) uses technology to make it possible for Choctaw students who have for whatever reason dropped out of high school to drop back in and receive their high school diploma. In only a few years of existence, several dozen students have completed their coursework and graduated with a high school diploma. The high school is also renowned for championship athletic teams. The Career and Technical Education Center offers activities to identify the academic and vocational potential of students. Parental involvement is key to ensuring that our students are college and career ready.

Choctaw students, whose native language is Choctaw, are identified as English learners. MBCI's goal is to develop both English and Choctaw language proficiencies among Choctaw students, while enabling them to achieve the same challenging Mississippi state academic content and achievement standards for all students. Choctaw language on the Reservation is a medium of instruction that ensures the survival of the Choctaw language and culture and promotes educational opportunity for all Choctaw students.



The Tribe provides extracurricular programs designed for youth. One such program is the Boys and Girls Club, which has seven locations on the Reservation. The club provides a safe place to learn and grow. The core programs of the club are character development, education and career development, and health and life skills. The mission of the Boys and Girls Club is to enable all the Tribe's young people, especially those in need, to reach their full potential as productive, caring and responsible citizens.

TRIBAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Tribal Scholarship Program has funded over 2,000 Choctaw students, 35% of whom have received at least one degree. Scholarship assistance is available at the associate, bachelor, master and doctorate levels, as well as technical degrees and a limited number of vocational programs of study. The program provides guidance to high school seniors in selecting colleges and majors and completing applications. It also provides tutors and facilitates visits to Mississippi colleges and universities to help educate students. Recently, a new program was established within Tribal Scholarship, the Choctaw Teachers Initiative. It recognizes that Choctaw children benefit best by having Tribal members who are certified, licensed teachers teach them. The Tribe is committed, through this program, to increasing the number of Tribal-member educators employed in all sectors of Choctaw education.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Workforce Development Department has several projects that focus on providing services to adult learners for educational advancement, job training and employment placement.

The Adult Basic Education Program provides instruction, tutoring and counseling to students leading to graduation with a GED. The program strives to improve the quality of life in each community through excellence in teaching, diverse learning opportunities and services and visionary leadership. The program helps adults to learn accountability for their own behavior and achieve their full potential. The Tribe's Day Training Program provides daily on-the-job training for Tribal members in each community. The Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program provides services to eligible Choctaw Tribal members, residing on or near the Reservation, who experience physical or mental disabilities and are willing to work. Individualized services are provided so that job seekers will have the support needed to be self-supporting financially through competitive, integrated employment. The primary goal of the Choctaw



Vocational Education Program is to support Choctaw economic development initiatives through developing the Reservation labor force. Tribal members are taught to be successful in fields requiring higher technology skills, knowledge and performance. The Employment & Training Program focuses on the development of Tribal members to find productive employment by providing activities that improve employment retention and earnings and increase occupational skill levels of participants. It provides counseling, on-the-job training and a Summer Youth job project.

CHOCTAW HEALTH CENTER

Local healthcare has been a service provided to the Mississippi Choctaw since 1920, when a shift in policy allowed the federal government to take the necessary steps to provide a hospital to the Choctaw. In 1926, a hospital was opened in the city limits of Philadelphia. However, the distance was inconvenient to most Choctaw living on the Reservation. In 1976, a facility was opened in the Pearl River Community. Over the next 40 years, this 58,000 square-foot building served as the heart of the Tribal healthcare system. This facility, like the hospital in Philadelphia, was controlled and managed by the Indian Health Service (IHS). In 1983, the Tribe contracted with IHS for direct management of the Choctaw Health Center. It was not until 1994 that the Choctaw Health Center became fully operated by the Tribe, to fulfill Chief Phillip Martin’s vision of Choctaw Self-Determination.



In 2014, Chief Martin’s vision of a new Tribal healthcare facility was realized. This new 180,000-square-foot state-of-the-art Choctaw Health Center opened March 9, 2015, to provide quality medical care for the Tribal population, offering more in-house specialized services than ever before.

The new Choctaw Health Center houses 43 total departments and the campus includes a helipad and a 0.8 mile figure-eight walking trail.

- **Ambulatory Services** (Dental, Diabetes Care Clinic, Emergency Department, Emergency Medical Services, Primary Care, Women’s Wellness Center and Women, Infants and Children [WIC])
- **Ancillary Services** (Laboratory, Media Imaging, Pharmacy, Rehabilitation Services and Respiratory Therapy)
- **Behavioral Health Services**
- **Inpatient / Admissions** (Acute Care)
- **Prevention Health** (Environmental Health Services and Public Health Services)
- **Support Services** (Business Office, Coding, Dietary & Nutrition, Environmental Services, Managed Care, Procurement, Purchased/ Referred Care)
- **Facility Support** (Plant Operations & General Maintenance and Security)
- **Administration** (Administration Office, Finance, Health Information Management, Human Resources and Information Technology)



This new health center is built to accommodate an ever-growing Choctaw population. Should the need arise, the facility has expansion capabilities, without the necessity for major construction work. Ensuring quality healthcare for all members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is a priority and the Tribal leadership is committed to provide the resources for a 21st century Tribal healthcare system.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC IMPACT TODAY



The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians are often considered a model for successful economic development in Indian Country. Beginning with the creation of a small construction company in 1969, Tribal economic development assets now include five separate industrial parks, a regional destination-resort, and more than 800,000 square-feet of commercial real estate. The Tribe operates a diverse portfolio with 19 business operations under 5 tribally-owned parent companies. Tribal operations provide more than 6,000 jobs making Mississippi Choctaw the largest employer in the region and among the Top 5 private employers in the state of Mississippi. The keys to the Tribe’s economic success has been consistent and focused

investment in new opportunities combined with decisive Tribal leadership.

ECONOMIC STARTING POINT

In 1945, at the time of Federal Recognition, the Mississippi Choctaw had an estimated unemployment rate of 80%. Tribal members had the shortest life expectancy and worst infant mortality rates due to lack of adequate access to health care. They were also denied access to public education beyond the 8th grade due to Mississippi’s racial segregation policies. The lack of access to health care and education, combined with racist policies, created a vicious chronic poverty cycle that was further reflected by the substandard housing conditions that existed on the reservation.

EARLY FOCUS ON JOB CREATION

In order to begin to address some of these challenges, Mississippi Choctaw began to seek opportunities to create jobs. The first such opportunity was created with funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), a federal agency that was providing grant funding to build low-income housing. Rather than spending these funds with non-Indian contractors, the Mississippi Choctaws decided to form a tribally-owned construction company in order to employ some Tribal members. In 1969, the Tribe opened Choctaw Development, which marked the starting point of the Tribe’s economic development journey in creating more job opportunities on Tribal lands.

During the 1970s, the Tribe began to explore manufacturing opportunities. During this time period, it was an emerging national trend that the low-wage, low-skilled jobs that were prevalent in the northern states were moving to southern states in order to benefit from lower wages. In 1971, Choctaw Development built the Tribe’s first industrial park on 30-acres of land with infrastructure to support light manufacturing operations. It took several years, but the Tribe was able to recruit Packard Electric as the first tenant in 1979. Packard opened an automotive wire harness facility which marked the beginning of the Tribe’s Industrial Revolution.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Packard Electric operation led to the establishment of Chahta Enterprise, the first Choctaw-owned manufacturing operation. Then, in 1981, American Greetings Corporation signed a lease agreement with the Tribe for a new 120,000 square foot manufacturing facility in the Choctaw Industrial Park. In 1985, Oxford Speaker Company, a Chicago-based automotive speaker manufacturer, sought to open a high-quality, low-cost speaker assembly business on the reservation. This led to the creation of the first Choctaw joint venture with a non-Indian company – Choctaw Electronics Enterprise.

The Choctaw Industrial Revolution continued throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. There were several expansions of Chahta Enterprise that created manufacturing opportunities in 4 of the Tribe's 8 communities. In 1991, the Tribe purchased a non-Indian printing and direct mail business located in Ocean Springs, Mississippi that became known as First American Printing & Direct Mail. In 1994, the Tribe formed another joint venture to establish a plastic injection molding company. The Choctaw Industrial Revolution occurred throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s and provided employment for approximately 2,000 workers.

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

During this time, the Tribe became a supplier to Fortune 500 Companies including: McDonald's, Ford Motor Company, Panasonic, Pepsi-Co, Chrysler, Caterpillar, John Deere, Club Car, and Sylvania, among many others. Tribal companies consistently achieved the highest quality ratings and won several quality awards from their customers including Ford's Q1 Award and the Gold Pentastar Award from Chrysler. The Tribe was also able to establish a solid business reputation within the commercial banking community which was important to fund future growth. The Choctaw Industrial Revolution allowed the Tribe to prove itself to be a capable and trustworthy business partner.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

As the number of jobs on the Reservation continued to grow throughout the 1980s, the Tribe expanded its focus to include economic development projects that would improve the quality of life on the Reservation. In 1986, the Tribe built a 120-bed nursing home to provide skilled nursing services to Tribal elders as well as non-Indian patients. This facility – Choctaw Residential Center – also created 125 additional, full-time jobs in the healthcare sector.

In 1988, the Tribe constructed a 30,000 square foot community retail center at the exit to the Choctaw Industrial Park. It brought everyday conveniences to Tribal residents, such as a grocery store, bank branch, post office and restaurant. It also created additional jobs in the retail sector and began to generate retail sales tax revenues for the Tribal Government.

In less than a decade, the Tribe had established its reputation as a highly respected business partner. It also grew to be one of the largest employers in east central Mississippi, and the quality of life on the Reservation significantly improved.

INCREASING BUSINESS REVENUES WITH GAMING

The next wave of economic development on the Choctaw Reservation resulted from a change in Federal and State law. In 1988, U.S. Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act ("IGRA") to authorize tribes, located in states with legalized gaming, the right to offer gaming on tribal lands. When the state of Mississippi legalized "dockside/riverboat" gaming in 1991, it opened up a new economic opportunity for the Tribe.

The Tribe negotiated a management agreement with Boyd Gaming Corporation, a Las Vegas-based company with decades of experience in managing casinos. Boyd provided the initial funds to build and operate a new casino in exchange for a management fee. In July 1994, Silver Star Hotel and Casino opened on the Reservation, which significantly increased Tribal business revenues.



During the next 10 years, the Tribe reinvested a significant portion of its gaming revenues to expand its resort amenities. The Silver Star was expanded five times within five years. The Tribe opened Dancing Rabbit Golf Club in 1997 and expanded with an additional 18-hole course in 1999. In 2002, the Tribe opened Geyser Falls Water Theme Park and built a 300-acre recreational lake – Lake Pushmataha – in an effort to attract family-oriented tourists. Also, in 2002, the Tribe doubled its gaming and hotel facilities with the opening of Golden Moon Hotel & Casino. These gaming and tourist amenities became collectively known as Pearl River Resort, which directly employs 2,100 workers.

In 2010, the Tribe further expanded gaming operations by building a third casino in the Bogue Homa community in Jones County, Mississippi, approximately 90 miles south of Pearl River Resort. This provided an additional source of business revenues and created an additional 230 jobs.

IMPACT OF GLOBAL COMPETITION

The tourism and gaming industries could not have come at a better time for tribal employment. During the mid-1990s, the Tribe's manufacturing businesses faced significant new competition from the increase in global competition. Many American manufacturers were relocating their operations and jobs to Mexico, South America, and Asia in order to lower their costs. This ultimately led to the closure of American Greetings and Choctaw Electronics. However, it was not all bad news for the business-savvy Choctaws.

In 1996, Ford Motor Company, the largest customer of Chahta Enterprise, decided to purchase its wire harnesses from Mexico. The Tribe responded proactively by deciding to become an international business and relocate most of its wire harness assembly operations (and almost 1,200 jobs) to Mexico. Chahta profitably managed these manufacturing operations in Mexico for more than a decade. In 2006, just before the downturn in the automotive market, Chahta decided to sell its Mexico operations to another wire harness manufacturer. Fortunately, the loss in manufacturing jobs was offset by the growth in tourism and gaming jobs.

COMPETING IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

Successful economic development requires continuous innovation and focused reinvestment to adapt as the global economy continues to evolve. The U.S. Federal Government is one of the largest "customers" in the world, and has established purchasing policies to support U.S.-based suppliers, particularly suppliers located in economically-depressed communities.

Starting in 2004, the Tribe began to form new companies to pursue federal contracting opportunities such as construction, manufacturing, security guard services, and IT-related services, among others. To pursue federal contracting work, the Tribe formed a parent company, Chahta Holding Group, to operate a diversified portfolio of entities including: Applied Geo Technologies, Choctaw Ikhana, IKBI and Choctaw Electrical. It is common for Tribal businesses to incorporate the Choctaw language into their names. For example, "Ikhana" translates to "knowledge" and IKBI means to "build" or "make."

In 2012, the Tribe decided to return to its cultural roots with the launch of Choctaw Fresh Produce, a USDA certified organic fresh produce farm. This new business supplies Tribal restaurants, food programs, as well as individual Tribal members.

REINVESTMENT OF EARNED INCOME

The Tribe does not assess property taxes on its lands or income taxes on its citizens. Instead, it seeks to earn business revenues in order to help fund traditional government services. The Tribe’s business revenues are reinvested in the community in a variety of ways:

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Public Roads
- Water and Sewer Systems
- Natural Gas Service
- Broadband and Telecom

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- Healthcare
- Education
- Housing
- Recreation

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

- Public Safety
- Social Services
- Legal Defense
- Public Transportation

Tribal Government Complex



Fire & Rescue Truck



Red Water Clinic



Elderly Center



Standing Pine Early Childhood



Pearl River Upper Elementary



Choctaw Sportsplex



Red Water Elementary



PEARL RIVER RESORT

Owned and operated by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Pearl River Resort is the South’s premier resort destination. Its main attractions are Silver Star and Golden Moon – two exciting hotel/casinos with a variety of gaming options, a bingo room, hotel rooms, a full service spa, dining options, retail offerings and live entertainment. Also featured are Dancing Rabbit Golf Club, Dancing Rabbit Inn and Geyser Falls Water Theme Park.



A crown jewel of Pearl River Resort, Dancing Rabbit Golf Club offers all the charm and sophistication of a world-class golf destination. Dancing Rabbit features two 18-hole championship golf courses, The Azaleas and The Oaks. Both courses were designed by renowned designer Tom Fazio and PGA Tour great Jerry Pate. Dancing Rabbit is listed among Golf Magazine’s “Top 100 Courses You Can Play” and Golf Digest’s “Top 100 Public Golf Courses in America.”

Pearl River Resort’s sister property, Bok Homa Casino, is located near Laurel in Sandersville, Mississippi. Bok Homa offers slot action, entertainment and an exclusive high limit room. The impressive 27,000-square-foot facility features over 700 slot machines, table games, a fabulous quick serve eatery called Lucky’s, and an event center for promotions and special events.

Pearl River Resort’s popular family destination is “The Beach Within Reach,” Geyser Falls Water Theme Park, one of the most modern waterpark facilities of its kind in the world. It covers 15 acres and features 13 waterslides, including a six-story free fall speed slide, gigantic wave pool, exotic lazy river and a four-lane racing slide. Michael Lee Design of Utah, which has been responsible for numerous first-rate facilities, including Disney’s Typhoon Lagoon and Epcot Center, was the principal designer of the park. Geyser Falls is also one of the largest water theme parks in the Southeast.



Not only does Pearl River Resort offer a premier resort experience for gamers and vacationers, Pearl River Resort is a great venue for individuals to host business meetings, weddings and special events. The Resort offers 40,000 square feet of combined meeting space, including an expansive ballroom, meeting rooms and an executive boardroom. When it comes to accommodating small groups or large conventions for every occasion, Pearl River Resort provides a comprehensive range of facilities with an experienced and attentive staff, reflective of the Resort’s comfortable Southern setting.



Pearl River Resort is also the go-to venue for high-caliber live entertainment. At the Silver Star Convention Center, guests can experience amazing performances by legendary artists and top headliners. Guests can also enjoy the sounds of talented local and regional bands every weekend in the Starlight Lounge at Silver Star and a variety of music at the Center Bar at Golden Moon.

CURRENT ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

Today, with more than 6,000 employees, the Tribe is ranked as the largest employer in the region and one of the Top 5 Private Employers in the state of Mississippi. The Tribe has diversified into several sectors including:

- General contracting
- Electrical subcontracting
- Skilled nursing
- Security guard services
- IT and telecommunications
- Organic vegetable farming
- Calibration and metrology
- Commercial laundry
- Gaming & Hospitality
- Commercial Real Estate
- Retail
- Digital Printing

The Tribe’s current business portfolio now includes:



- **Choctaw Residential Center** (1986): Nursing home
- **Choctaw Shopping Center Enterprise** (1988): Commercial real estate development & operations
- **Silver Star Hotel & Casino** (1994): Casino and hotel
- **Dancing Rabbit Golf Club** (1997): Two 18-hole championship golf courses
- **Chahta Commercial Laundry** (2001): Commercial laundry
- **Geyser Falls Water Theme Park** (2002): Water park
- **Golden Moon Hotel & Casino** (2002): Casino & hotel
- **IKBI** (2004): General contractor
- **Choctaw-Ikhana** (2008): Calibration services, security guard services, IT/telecom
- **Choctaw Electrical** (2010): Electrical subcontractor
- **Bok Homa Casino** (2010): Casino
- **Dancing Rabbit Inn** (2011): 140-room hotel
- **Choctaw Fresh Produce** (2012): Organic fresh produce
- **Pearl River Graphics** (2016): Full-service commercial printing and marketing operation

The Tribe has also created a wide range of job and career opportunities for tribal members:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Computer Engineer | Medical Doctor |
| Marketing & Public Relations | Attorney |
| | Judge |
| Casino Manager | Policeman |
| | Fireman |
| Welder | Nurse |
| Mechanical Engineer | Teacher |
| Forester | Social Worker |
| Chef | Golf Pro |
| Organic Farmer | Facility Maintenance |
| Accountant | Entrepreneur |
| Restaurant Manager | Insurance |
| Biologist | Hotel Manager |
| GIS Technician | Real Estate Developer |
| Wildlife Officer | Elected Official |



FUTURE GROWTH

The global economy continues to evolve, creating new competitive challenges, as well as, opportunities to grow. The Tribe’s Office of Economic Development is constantly seeking new opportunities to create business revenues and career opportunities for Tribal members. For more information, please visit www.choctawbusiness.com, or call 601.650.1605.

CULTURE

Tradition is a living thing, weaving its way through the lives of people like the pattern in a basket or the steps of a dance.

No matter how much change comes to the Reservation, one constant remains – the traditional culture of the Choctaw people. The type of appliqué or number of ruffles on a Choctaw dress may change. Hominy might be cooked in a Crock-Pot instead of outdoors. Basket makers might use commercial dyes instead of the natural process of using berries, flowers, roots or bark to color the cane, providing a wider range of colors. Beadwork designs from other tribes and new personal creations from today's technological or societal influences may become a part of traditional Choctaw dress.

Still, Choctaw traditions belong to the Choctaw people. Traditional recipes are shared, dance steps are taught, advice about life is given and Tribal members communicate with each other in the Choctaw language. At gatherings, people often enjoy a traditional meal of hominy, fried chicken and frybread. The skills of Choctaw dressmakers, beadwork makers and basket makers are evident each year at Tribal school spring festivals and the Choctaw Indian Fair and can be seen at the Choctaw Indian Princess Pageant and dance grounds.

Every Choctaw who moves through the steps of a social dance, beads accessories, sews together a shirt or dress, cuts, dyes and weaves cane into a basket, cooks traditional foods or tosses a handmade stickball down the field, is taking up a legacy from his or her ancestors and leaving a legacy for the Choctaw of the future. Each generation forms a link between those who have come before them and those who are yet to come.

NANIH WAIYA MOUND

Perhaps the most important landmark to the Tribe is the Nanih Waiya Mound – a massive earthen mound and cave that has a significant role in the Choctaw culture. History suggests the mound formation dates back more than 2,000 years. Its name means “slanted hill” in Choctaw. According to Tribal tradition, the Nanih Waiya site marks the birthplace of the Choctaw Tribe. That is where differing beliefs begin, however.

One version holds that the Tribe emerged from the cave. The second says that the Nanih Waiya area was where the Tribe settled after a long journey from the west. Regardless, all Choctaw recognize Nanih Waiya as the heart of the Tribe and refer to it as the Mother Mound.

Although Choctaw history is irrevocably intertwined with Nanih Waiya, ownership of the cave and mound only recently returned to the Tribe. In 1830, the Choctaw ceded 11 million acres of land – including Nanih



Waiya – to the United States as part of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. In the years that followed, the state of Mississippi maintained Nanih Waiya as a state park, and the U.S. government formally recognized its significance when it placed the mound on the National Register of Historic Places. On August 8, 2008, the state of Mississippi returned the Nanih Waiya Mound to the Choctaw people. As a result, the Tribe celebrates Nanih Waiya Day on the second Friday of every August. At the same time, the Choctaw pledged to keep the Mother Mound under Tribal control forever.

CHAHTA ANNOPA (LANGUAGE)



From the past to the present, language is an important element of the Choctaw culture. Since its beginning, the Choctaw's spoken language has passed on oral histories, legacies and cultural knowledge from one generation to another. The written Tribal language finds its roots in the 19th century during the period of the federal government's forced “civilization policy”.

With tradition and identity being important aspects of Choctaw life, it is easy to see why language plays such a key role. The Choctaw language offers a link from the modern Tribe back to its forebearers through a common vocabulary. In fact, many of today's Choctaw adults and elders are native speakers of their original Choctaw

language; many of them only learned to speak English later due to English-language prominence in the non-Indian communities near the Reservation and the Choctaw's need to interact with those English-speaking neighbors.

As part of daily life on the Reservation, the Choctaw language can be heard in administrative offices and is taught in the Tribal schools by certified language instructors. It is in the Choctaw communities and homes, though, where the language is most deeply rooted. While they encourage their children to hone their communications skills in English, most Choctaw parents also make sure that their sons and daughters speak Choctaw as well.

The modern Choctaw alphabet is a variant of the original created by Cyrus Byington – whose alphabet shares the same name. The Choctaw did not have a written language until Byington, a Christian missionary from Massachusetts, started to develop a system in the early 19th century. Following 50 years of comprehensive research, his efforts led to the Choctaw Definer (1852), Grammar of the Choctaw Language (1870), and a Choctaw Dictionary (1912). His work is considered one of the most thorough and complete lexicons for an American Indian language.

Choctaw words can be found throughout the state of Mississippi. Many towns, creeks and rivers are mispronunciations of Choctaw words that have led to current spellings far from its original Choctaw roots. Others are clearly Choctaw words that were changed to its phonic spelling, such as Bogue Chitto, taken from bók, meaning “creek,” and chito, meaning “big.” Our very own Neshoba County is actually the Choctaw word nashoba, meaning “wolf.” The next two are most likely misheard Choctaw words...Copiah Creek (also a county) is from kowi, meaning “panther,” and payah, meaning “to call,” and Tombigbee River is from itobi, meaning “box” or “coffin,” and ikbi “maker.”

Bogue Chitto vs. Bók Chito



Neshoba vs. Nashoba



Copiah vs. Kowi Payah



Tombigbee vs. Itobi Ikhi



TAPOSHSHIK IMMA (BASKETRY)

Like many facets of Choctaw life, basketry is steeped in Tribal culture. Part of Choctaw life for centuries, it is a practice that blends tradition with innovation. In years gone by, baskets were used in the field and in the home. Modern times see the baskets holding a place in treasured Choctaw collections.

Basketry is an art form that starts with the harvesting of the swamp cane – native to Mississippi creek banks. It has become increasingly difficult to find swamp cane in its original wild setting. However, Tribal programs have and continue to establish swamp cane fields for artisans. It is important to the Choctaw that swamp cane is readily available so the art of Choctaw basketry is preserved.

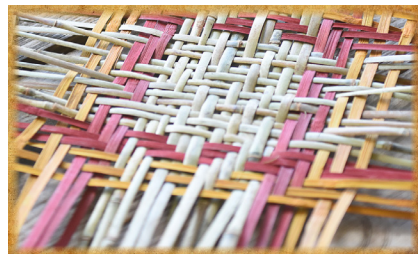
The method of cutting and preparing the cane is the same used by Choctaw for generations. Fall is the ideal time to gather the cane, although it is hardly an easy task, given that wet, swampy areas are its natural habitat. Length of the cane vary, although most basket makers like to work with cane that measures at least six-feet long.

Once the cane is cut, the weaver uses a small, sharp knife to slice the thin top layer into strips. A skilled maker can get four to six strips from one piece of cane, but that is a matter of individual preference.



Dyeing the strips is the next step. For many years, basket makers used natural materials such as berries, flowers, roots or bark to color the cane. Modern times have seen the introduction of commercial dyes due to their durability and wide range of colors available. Basket makers create a variety of patterns by weaving together the colored and natural strips of cane. While traditional forms such as the egg basket and traditional patterns like the diamond design are common, many basket makers like to experiment with color, pattern and shape.

The Choctaw have kept with the times, but still hold strong to their traditions. The makers express themselves the same way other artists do – with technique, imagination and aesthetics.



ILÍFOKKA (CLOTHING)/SHIKALLA ÁTOBA (BEADWORK)

ILÍFOKKA

The colorful Choctaw dresses worn by Tribal women are handmade and likely find their inspiration from a 19th century design. No pattern exists for the dresses, which include a bodice with a fitted waist and a long, full skirt trimmed with ruffles and hand-sewn appliqué. A white apron, trimmed in the color of the dress, completes the woman's traditional outfit.

Shirts for men feature either a round neckline or an open collar and appliqué work on the front and sleeves.

Choctaw dresses usually are trimmed with one of three motifs: full diamond, half diamond, or series of circles and crosses. The last motif may represent stickball and stickball sticks, but it may also have origins in earlier designs. The diamond design, which is often seen on Choctaw baskets as well, is said to represent the eastern diamondback rattlesnake.



Today, most Choctaw wear Choctaw dresses and shirts mainly for special occasions. They are made from cotton fabric and in solid colors with a contrasting trim. Occasionally, women choose silk or velvet fabric for traditional dresses – usually for events such as the Choctaw Indian Princess Pageant.

There are a few elders who still prefer to wear Choctaw dresses for their everyday clothing. Those are made from print fabric and are shorter than dresses worn for dancing. Instead of time-consuming hand appliqué, the traditional dresses are sometimes trimmed with commercial fabric. The apron may be worn with these dresses as well.



SHIKALLA ÁTOBA

Beadwork is a feature often worn with traditional Choctaw clothing for both men and women. A common set for women consists of a belt, medallion, collar necklaces, earrings, ribbon lapel pins and a handkerchief lapel pin. Designs and colors are the artist's preference, and many women also wear round combs in their hair with their Choctaw dresses. Historical drawings and photographs suggest that originally these combs were made from silver or other metal.

Photography from the turn of the 20th century show Choctaw men wearing shirts and ties along with strings of multi-colored beads, but this style eventually gave way to the collar necklaces, hatbands and beaded belts worn by contemporary Choctaw men. Both men and women wear sashes, known as the most traditional accessory, featuring both beadwork and appliqué.



HILHA (DANCING)

In the Choctaw culture, the tradition of dancing has a deep-rooted meaning. Instead of grand performances, dancing is meant for participation. Traditional dance cultivates pride in a Choctaw's heritage. Dance groups represent most of the Choctaw communities, with styles reflecting those communities.

At the annual Choctaw Indian Fair, held every year for four days in mid-July, on the Choctaw Reservation, visitors have excellent opportunities to compare these community variations as they watch the dancers. Sometimes, the difference may be in a dance step; in other times, the chant – and rarely is the actual Choctaw language heard. When it is, the rise and fall of a chanter's voice leads the dancers, and syllables carry a melody. The chanter usually keeps time by striking together a pair of sticks, called striking sticks.

There are three kinds of dance: war, social and animal.

War dances were used by early Choctaw to prepare for battle. They are unique in that the women join the men in dancing. In most other tribes, only men take part in the war dance.



Social dances mark important aspects of life such as friendship, courtship and marriage. They include stealing partners, friendship dance and wedding dance, among others.

Animal dances recognize creatures that were important to the Choctaw people and often mimic the behavior of their namesakes. Dancers dart in and out of the dance circle like playful raccoons in the raccoon dance or form a line that coils and uncoils in the snake dance.

The house dance is evidence of the Choctaw's ability to adapt elements of other cultures to their own. Dancers use steps and movements from Anglo-American square dance and the French quadrille, while the fiddle accompaniment is adapted from Anglo-American tunes. The caller starts the dance and signals the dancers when it is time to move to the next step.



MUSIC

As mentioned previously, dancing and music are not exclusive to each other in the Choctaw culture. In addition to dance, music is and has been a key element in other parts of Choctaw life.

One of the oldest traditional instruments that the Choctaw continue to use is the drum, which today is heard primarily at stickball games. The present-day Choctaw drum is modeled after military drums used by British and American troops in colonial times.

The body of the drum is wood or metal – more often than not the former. The wood used for this is usually sourwood, black gum or tupelo gum; the trees often are hollow by the time they reach a suitable size for drums.

Consider the beat of the drum as the heartbeat of the Choctaw people, and its sound announces an important event in the Tribal culture. It could precede dancers gathering, a game of stickball or a wedding ceremony. Drums can signal the start of each.



In most cases, the only musical instrument that the Mississippi Choctaw use to accompany songs is a pair of striking sticks. Slightly flat on two sides, the sticks have surfaces that are appropriate for hitting together. Dance chanters use them to keep time as they sing. In 1933, ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore visited Philadelphia, MS to record the songs of Choctaw chanters. She noted that striking sticks were used by most of the men who sang for her.

The violin, or fiddle, has also found its way into Choctaw musical traditions. Like many rural southerners, Choctaw turned to the fiddle for entertainment in their homes and communities. Fiddlers playing at house dances usually are accompanied by guitar players who provide a percussive rhythm. In the past, when no guitars were present, the rhythm was supplied by someone "beating straws."

There is not a wealth of information to confirm that flutes, whistles and flageolets were used in Tribal events. But Mississippi Choctaw medicine men played vertical cane flutes on the night before and during stickball games in support of the home team. The flutes were nearly a foot long with a sound hole and two finger holes, and were etched with symbolic designs.



HOPÓNI (COOKING)



As in many other cultures, food is a central part of the Choctaw Tribe. It is difficult to think of an aspect of Tribal life that food does not touch. All significant milestones and ceremonies involve – in one way or another – food and cooking. Celebrations like birthdays and weddings – even wakes – often consist of a meal.

Owing to Tribal history and heritage, a traditional Choctaw meal includes freshly grown vegetables, chicken, pork, frybread, desserts and sweet tea. For many years, the food on the table came straight from the garden and farm. Tribal families grew and harvested fruits and vegetables, raised livestock and hunted and fished to provide meals. While not unusual in rural areas, a pair of traditional Choctaw dishes remain staples of the Tribal diet: hominy

and banaha.

At its core, hominy is a collection of dried corn kernels. After they are removed from the corn husk and cob, the kernels are left to cool and dry in order to kill seed germ inside. Preparers then use a kiti – a hollowed-out wooden log – to smash and pound the kernels into cornmeal used to make foods such as cornbread or grits.

It may sound relatively easy, but the cooking process can take several hours. The hominy must simmer over an open fire in a large cast iron pot filled with water. Once the water starts boiling, the cook adds the dried hominy with a type of meat in order to add flavor – sometimes chicken, other times pork or a combination of the two.

As the hominy is cooking, it must frequently be stirred in order to prevent it from sticking to the pot or burning. The preparer cannot forget about the fire, either. If available, this duty is typically handled by a male who is known as the firekeeper. This firekeeper's role is extremely important because the fire has to remain at an even temperature throughout the cooking process. From start to finish, cooking hominy harkens back to time-honored traditions of growing and harvesting by Choctaw forebearers. But even in these modern times of electricity, cooking hominy outdoors is the best way to ensure its cooked properly and to the best consistency.



Another traditional dish commonly found at Choctaw tables is banaha – made by mixing field peas with cornmeal. One of the advantages of banaha is that the ingredients are available at a grocery store...or in a garden at home. It is another way for the Choctaw to follow the ways of the ancestors – an important part of Tribal culture.

To produce banaha, cooked field peas are added to cornmeal and stirred into a mush. They are then molded into small rectangles. Next, cornhusks are softened by soaking them in boiling water. Once the husks soften, the field peas/cornmeal rectangles are wrapped inside and tied shut with a strip of cornhusk. The banaha is then dropped into boiling water for 45 minutes to cook before serving.

KABOTCHA TÓLI (STICKBALL)



Imagine an empty field, two groups of warriors on either side with a steady drumbeat filling the air. It is time for a battle. Nope, this is not wartime...but it is close. A Choctaw game of stickball is both physical and intense; no wonder stickball has been called “Little Brother of War.”

Stickball has been a part of Choctaw life for hundreds of years and is among the oldest American field sports. Players use two handcrafted sticks, called kabotcha, carved from hickory and bent at one end to shape the cup of the stick. Leather or deer hide strings are tied to make the cup, in which the players catch and carry the ball. A woven leather ball, called towa, is made from cloth tightly wrapped around a small stone or piece of wood. Once it is wrapped to the desired size, the maker weaves leather strings over the cloth.

The basic concept of stickball is for each team to advance the ball down the field to the opposing team's goalpost using only their sticks, never touching or throwing the ball with their hands. Points are scored when a player hits the goalpost with the ball.

The earliest historical reference to Choctaw stickball was a Jesuit priest's account of a game around 1729. During the period, the Choctaw lived in towns and villages scattered across the area that is now southern Mississippi. When disputes arose between communities, stickball provided a peaceful way to settle the issue. These games were hard-fought contests that could involve as few as 20 or as many as 300 players. For most of the 20th century, players wore handmade uniforms consisting of pants hemmed just below the knee and open-necked, pullover shirts. They were made in the community's colors and decorated with the diamond patterns found on traditional clothing.

Modern stickball has a few more rules than its historical predecessor, but the basics of the game still exist. A stickball game is played in four quarters. Time is dependent on the division: men play 15-minute quarters, women and 35-and-over groups play 10-minute quarters, and youth divisions play eight-minute quarters. Teams are allowed only 30 players on the field, which is now a football field with the goalposts in each end zone. Minor infractions can lead a player to sit out for a quarter, while major infractions can be either for the rest of the game or tournament. In the late 1970s, uniforms turned into gym shorts and jerseys in team colors. To this day, no padding of any kind is allowed on the playing field.

The World Series Stickball championship takes place every year during the annual Choctaw Indian Fair, held the second week in July.



ÁYÓPISAH CHITO (CHOCTAW INDIAN FAIR)



The Choctaw people celebrate the rich traditions and heritage of the Tribe each July during the annual Choctaw Indian Fair. The four-day festival features a variety of activities that bring together Tribal members, non-Tribal neighbors and friends to showcase the Choctaw culture...past and present!

Prior to the first Choctaw Indian Fair in 1949, the Choctaw celebrated the Green Corn Festival. This festival was always the most important social and spiritual celebration for our ancestors each year. This was a time for families and the community to gather, rekindle relations, restore the balance of harmony and rebuild the community for the new year. The

fair's annual date coincides with the ripening of the corn harvest each year.

In addition to crafts and cultural displays, nightly entertainment includes some of country and gospel's biggest names – Blake Shelton, Trace Adkins, Sara Evans, Oak Ridge Boys and Philadelphia, MS native Marty Stuart, among others.

There are three main events that take place during the Fair – World Series Stickball, the Princess Pageant and Choctaw Social Dancing.

WORLD SERIES STICKBALL

As the most popular sporting event among the Choctaw, stickball has a prominent place each year at the Fair. For about two weeks, teams from the Choctaw communities compete in a single-elimination tournament format, with the championship game closing out the Fair at Choctaw Central High School's Warrior Stadium.

The tournament has grown significantly over the years. Instead of one open category, there are now multiple divisions – a men's league for players 18 years and over, a 35-and-over men's league, a women's league and two leagues for youth. Teams come from each of the Tribe's eight communities with many fielding multiple squads. Within the last few years, the tournament has expanded to include teams from other tribes such as the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma.

A recent addition to the World Series Stickball tournament is a unity walk to support the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). Each team walks from their community practice field to the Choctaw Central High School baseball field; from there, all teams walk to the Pearl River amphitheater.

PRINCESS PAGEANT

Started in 1955 – six years after the first Choctaw Indian Fair – the annual Princess Pageant is an important part of not just the Choctaw Indian Fair, but the Tribe itself. Community development clubs in each Choctaw community Reservation-wide, as well as Tribal programs, businesses and families, can sponsor a young woman to compete in the pageant, which fills the Pearl River amphitheater on the opening night of the Fair.

Pageant nominees are judged in multiple areas of competition – media relations, individual personal interview, formal wear, traditional Tribal dress review and on-stage question. The winner receives the crown and title of Princess and serves as an ambassador for the Tribe during the next year. Oftentimes, the Princess travels to non-Tribal events around the country to promote awareness of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.



CHAHTA IMMI CULTURAL CENTER

Located in the Choctaw Town Center, the Chahta Immi Cultural Center opened in 2013. Its goal is to showcase and provide cultural and historical education through exhibits of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. The Cultural Center replaced the Choctaw Museum and provides more than twice the space for exhibits that offer visitors and Tribal members alike a glimpse into Choctaw history and heritage.

The Chahta Immi Cultural Center has long been a vision of Tribal leaders. It was paid for by a mix of Tribal funding, development grants and private donations.



Want to learn more about the Choctaw language and even speak it? The center promotes its use. Other facets of Tribal history and its eight art forms are on display year-round: beading, clothing, cooking, dancing, music, pottery, basketry and stickball. Exhibits highlight the diversity of the Choctaw's culture and traditions.



One of the more prominent displays is a collection of more than 500 Choctaw baskets, some of which date back to the early 1900s. Each basket – like all artifacts in the Cultural Center – is owned by the Tribe, either through purchase or donations from generous members of the Tribe or community.

There is a special exhibit that highlights Nanih Waiya, and the center also has the capacity to offer traveling displays.

The Choctaw Tribe contains hundreds of years of cultural tradition. From art to athletics and cooking to clothing, the Tribe is proud of its achievements and ingenuity over the decades. The traditions that continue on and those that remain in the past are all

part of the Chahta Immi Cultural Center.

The Chahta Immi Cultural Center provides more than exhibits of Choctaw heritage. It also hosts a number of community events in the course of a month – meetings, Mom's Day Out, arts and crafts demonstrations and a variety of educational programs. The center also houses a gift shop that features wares from a number of Tribal artisans. For more information, please contact the Chahta Immi Cultural Center at 601.650.1685.



PLACES TO VISIT



Nanih Waiya, also known as the Mother Mound, is widely considered the origin place of the Choctaw people. Returned to the Choctaw in 2008, it is a sacred site. Tours are available upon request. Please contact the Office of Public Information at 601.663.7532.



Pearl River Resort is a tourist destination site providing world class gaming, lodging and recreation. The golf courses are ranked among the best in the Southeast. The water park provides fun for whole family. For more information visit pearlriver-resort.com or call 601.650.1234.



Lake Pushmataha is a 285-acre man-made lake honoring the greatest Choctaw chief of the 19th century, Pushmataha. Visitors can camp, walk trails, picnic and fish! Contact Choctaw Wildlife & Parks for more information at 601.650.7900.



Built in 2010, the Choctaw Veterans Memorial pays tribute to the Chahta Tushka (Choctaw Warrior). Events are held at this location on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.



Through cultural exhibits, historical collections and an on-site gift shop, the Chahta Immi Cultural Center, located in the Choctaw Town Center, offers visitors a glimpse into the distinct culture and heritage of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.



Tours of the Choctaw Reservation are available throughout the year by appointment. Contact the Office of Public Information (601.663.7532) for more information. You can also visit www.choctaw.org/media for tour and presentation request forms.

BEST TIMES TO VISIT

June – State Games of Mississippi Youth Stickball Tournament

July – Choctaw Indian Fair (2nd Wednesday – Saturday)

August – Nanih Waiya Day (2nd Friday)

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Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians



Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben

Tribal Business Enterprises Division

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Office of the Tribal Chief

P.O. Box 6010 • Choctaw, Mississippi 39350 • Telephone (601)656-5251
www.choctaw.org

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