JANUARY 2026 | No. 49

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE *of the* POARCH CREEK INDIANS

creek corner

Echoes of Atasi

THE LEGACY OF MARY AND THE POARCH CREEK JOURNEY

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Staff Contributor

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

MEGAN ZAMORA
Editor, Creek Corner

January always feels like a pause and a beginning all at once—a month of resolutions, promises we make to ourselves, goals whispered quietly or declared boldly, and all the good intentions that come with a fresh start. It's a reset button we're all given at the exact same time, whether we're ready for it or not.

This year, I'm entering my fourth decade of life, and I can honestly say life has never been better. Not because everything is perfect, but because I'm learning to appreciate the small, unrepeatable moments that make up a life. Recently, my husband, my children, and I had a day at home that was wonderfully uneventful—lounging, laughing, talking, just being together. Nothing iconic happened, yet it was one of those days wrapped in warm, fuzzy stillness, the kind of day that makes you think, I hope this never ends.

As we welcome 2026, I want to share a few hopes for the new year—ones I'm carrying with me, and ones I'm sending your way as well:

1. May your year be filled with countless perfectly imperfect days—the kind so wonderful you find yourself wishing they would never end.
2. May you experience the financial freedom to pursue your happiness without hesitation.
3. May joyful moments—small and grand—find you often.
4. May you enjoy at least one good belly laugh every week.
5. May you feel deep contentment knowing your contributions are meaningful, unique, and needed in this world.
6. May you give love freely and receive it in abundance.
7. May peace settle gently into your life in ways you can feel.
8. And may your health sustain you for every beautiful thing you're destined to do this year.

"May your year be filled with countless perfectly imperfect days—the kind so wonderful you find yourself wishing they would never end.

And because I'm also a pragmatist at heart: when life inevitably happens—the flat tire, the missed flight, the flu, or whatever unexpected curveball disrupts your plans—may you have the resilience to stand back up, the perseverance to keep moving forward, and the clarity to remember that one hard moment does not define your path.

As Mvskoke Creek people living in the 21st century, we carry one foot firmly in the present and the other in our culture and traditions. While January brings the world's "new year," we know our Creek New Year comes in the summer with the Green Corn Ceremony. And in that way, we're blessed with something special—two opportunities each year to reset, reflect, and begin again.

As we honor January's beginning and look ahead to our Creek New Year this summer, may we carry the best of both traditions with us. Two moments to reset. Two moments to reflect. And countless opportunities in between to show up for our lives—through the joy, the challenge, and all the perfectly imperfect days ahead. I'm grateful to walk into 2026 with you.

TRIBAL LEADERS

The mission of the Poarch Creek Indians is to protect our inherent rights as a sovereign American Indian Tribe, promote our culture and beliefs, to help our Tribal Citizens achieve their highest potential, maintain good relations with other Indian tribes and units of government, acquire, develop and conserve resources to achieve economic and social self-sufficiency, and ensure that our people live in peace and harmony among themselves and with others.

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Charlotte Meckel, *Secretary*
Amy Gantt, *Treasurer*

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Christina Flint-Lowe
Sandy Hollinger
Keith Martin
Arthur Mothershed
Justin Stabler

POARCH CREEK INDIANS'

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

By Sharon Delmar

The Poarch Creek Indians' Tribal Government is structured to uphold our sovereignty, support the well-being of our citizens, and guide the long-term vision of our community. The organizational chart on this and the next few pages highlights the leadership, departments, and interconnected roles that work together to preserve our cultural heritage, strengthen essential services, and ensure responsible stewardship of our resources. By providing a clear view of how our government functions, we aim to promote transparency, understanding, and pride in the continued growth of our Tribal Nation.

...continued on next page

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CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Suresh Geer

DEPUTY CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Vacant

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- LEGAL
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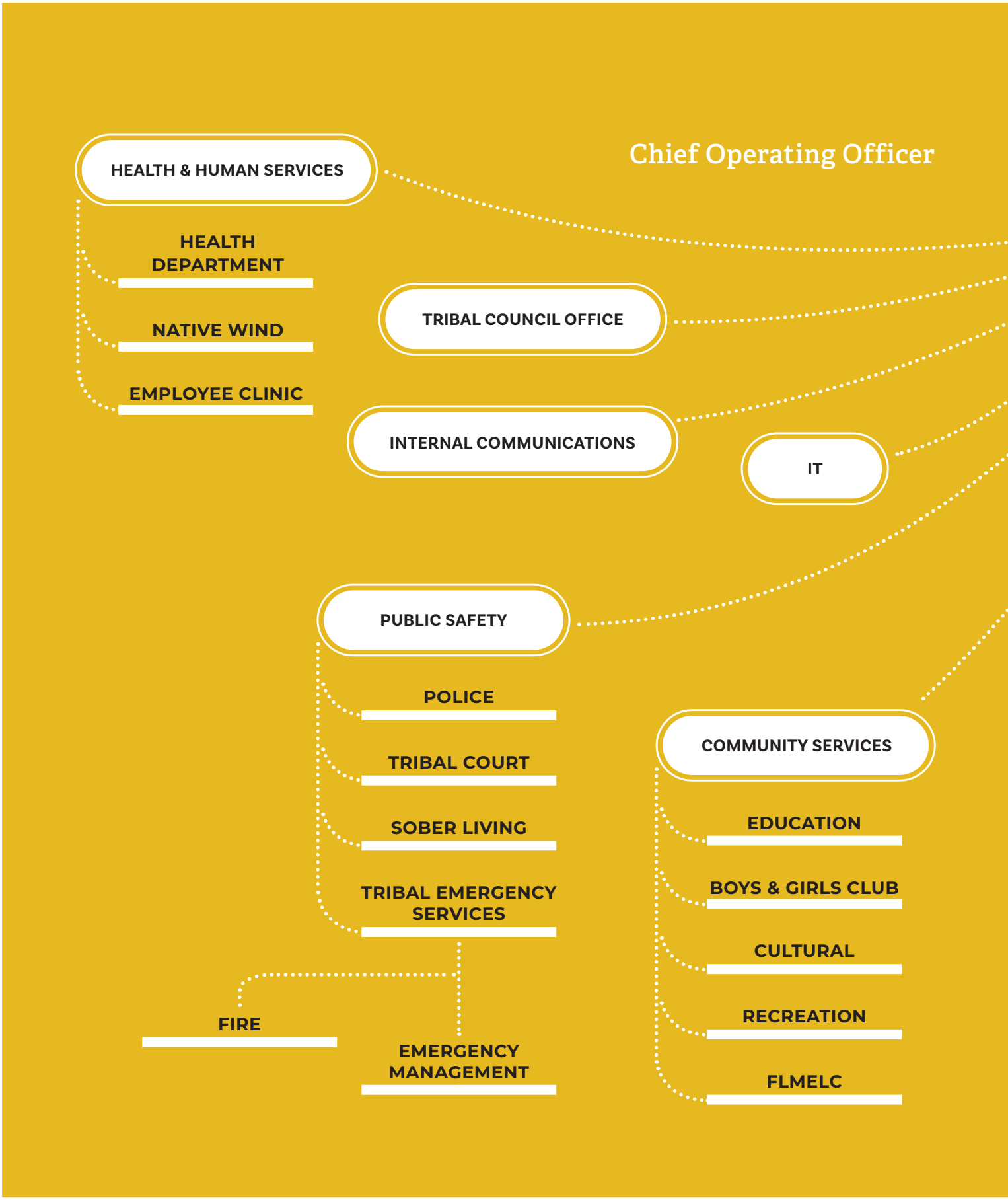
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  - ADULT SERVICES

PICTURED A bronze sculpture of Standing Bear by Benjamin Victor in the National Statuary Hall Collection in Washington, D.C.

HUMANITY IS OUR GREATEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

By Kitcki Carroll with special acknowledgment to Jackie Smith for her contributions, Via Native News Online

As the vestigial frost from a northern-plains winter gave way to a new spring, a father and his family were forcibly removed from their home. While it may be assumed this removal was for something resembling property foreclosure, it was not. Rather, it was one of many forced removals and relocations of Native Americans by the U.S. that utilized cruel displacement from known and familiar lifeways, killing many through sickness and exertion.

The father was Chief Standing Bear, a respected leader of his Ponca people, and the year was 1877. The removal of the Ponca from their ancestral homelands to the Oklahoma Territory has policy origins in the eastern U.S. This story is one of many Trail-of-Tears-tragedies initiated by the 1830 Indian Removal Act, and one of many such removal, termination, and assimilation policies designed by the U.S. to provide itself with the legal basis to support its unjust actions against Native Americans. These policies have spanned centuries and exemplify the plague of greed, rooted in a self-proclaimed divine entitlement, manifest destiny, and dehumanization.

Hundreds of Ponca became ill and/or died along the journey, including Chief Standing Bear's son Bear Shield. To fulfill his son's dying wish to be buried on his ancestral homelands, Chief Standing Bear attempted to return his remains, only to be arrested in Nebraska for defying federal orders to stay within newly established reservation boundaries. In pursuit of the justice he had been denied, he and his supporters argued that he had been unlawfully detained and filed a writ of habeas corpus.

In 1879, the court issued its decision in *Standing Bear v. Crook.* For the first time in the history of the U.S. legal system, the court affirmed that Native Americans were in fact "persons" under the law who could petition the court. Ultimately, he was granted the freedom, and associated humanity, previously denied. It was a significant legal moment in Native American-U.S. relations, and the decision provided Chief Standing Bear with the ability to fulfill his son's wish. Although the fight to undo past wrongs continues, and the protection and promotion of our inherent sovereign rights is ongoing, this moment provided the legal foundation for Native Americans to access U.S. courts in the pursuit of justice.

This landmark decision validated that we were human in two ways, by providing the first instance of legal opinion that a Native was a "person," and by backing it up that with the granting of a freedom equal to that of other "persons" under the law – a moment of equality in a marred history, but that nonetheless moved us closer to the U.S. Declaration of Independence's self-evident truth that all men are created equal with unalienable rights endowed by our Creator.

I have long posited that the Native American-U.S. relationship offers a unique perspective on the broader national challenges of today. As a nation, we continue to declare these principles even though they have not been equally applied to all throughout our history, and they were not the operating assumption of those who arrested Chief Standing Bear. History teaches us here that equal treatment is an acknowledgement of our humanity, and it is the responsibility of the government to uphold this equality and associated humanity through just execution of the law.

If we allow the memories from our collective history to fade into obscurity, the potential for our shortcomings to repeat themselves become likely, allowing the stench of these moments to linger across time. Unfortunately, in these challenging times, we appear to be ignoring that which we should have already learned. We must ask ourselves hard questions. How have images and acts of dehumanization re-emerged and been normalized in the modern day? Is our current discord really the intention of our Creator, or friction manufactured by our own frailty? How have we become so lost?

The ability to draw upon common sense to address the issues dividing us is disappearing. We have lost the ability to be thoughtful and empathetic with one another. Toxic partisanship has infested our discourse. External power has become an accepted principle and preferred measure of strength. Zero-sum thinking has become a limiting solution to problems. Faux patriotism is now an acceptable measure of our fealty. Extreme fringe thinking now dominates the places of influence. Instead of understanding history and valuing truths and facts, we blindly capitulate to confirmation bias via reinforced echo chambers and manipulative talking heads. Each of these things moves us further away from each other, and from a common ground center where compromise, and thus solutions, exist.

"Instead of understanding history and valuing truths and facts, we blindly capitulate to confirmation bias via reinforced echo chambers and manipulative talking heads. Each of these things moves us further away from each other, and from a common ground center where compromise, and thus solutions, exist.

To correct, we must stop actions that interfere with any human's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of our own individual beliefs. We must restore an appreciation that we are all in this together and rediscover a center rooted in sensibility, practicability, mutual respect, and stop the "othering" that results from ignorance and misplaced anger and fear. It is time to acknowledge that no one group decides the meaning and definition of love, family, faith, or patriotism, nor monopolize ownership over them. If humanity is our greatest common denominator, equality will follow, including equality under the law. If we commit to this moment as an opportunity for a reset, redeclare our commitment to each other, the middle ground re-emerges, and polarizing politics soften.

As the *Standing Bear v. Crook* trial came to its conclusion, Chief Standing Bear extended his hand out and said, "That hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours. I am a man. The same God made us both." When in the Course of Human Events, when We the People become so lost that we fail to recognize the damage we are inflicting upon ourselves, may we all appreciate the wisdom of this sentiment, not just during Native American Heritage Month, but always.

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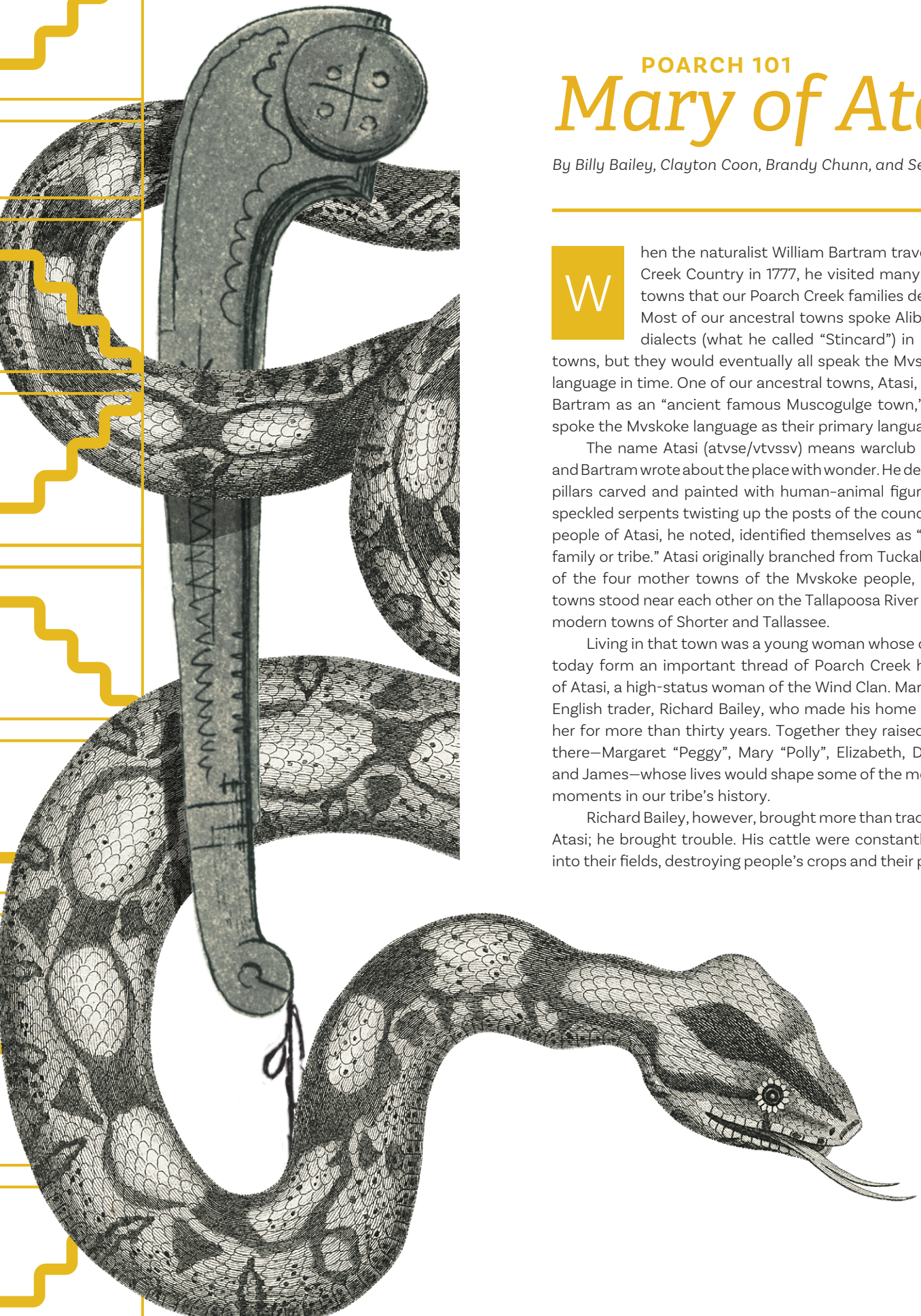


POARCH 101

Mary of Atasi

By Billy Bailey, Clayton Coon, Brandy Chunn, and Sehoy Barnett

When the naturalist William Bartram traveled through Creek Country in 1777, he visited many of the tribal towns that our Poarch Creek families descend from. Most of our ancestral towns spoke Alibamu-related dialects (what he called "Stincard") in Upper Creek towns, but they would eventually all speak the Mvskoke (Creek) language in time. One of our ancestral towns, Atasi, stood out to Bartram as an "ancient famous Muscogulge town," where they spoke the Mvskoke language as their primary language.

The name Atasi (atvse/vtvssv) means warclub or war-knife, and Bartram wrote about the place with wonder. He described great pillars carved and painted with human-animal figures and giant speckled serpents twisting up the posts of the council house. The people of Atasi, he noted, identified themselves as "of the snake family or tribe." Atasi originally branched from Tuckabatchee, one of the four mother towns of the Mvskoke people, and the two towns stood near each other on the Tallapoosa River between the modern towns of Shorter and Tallassee.

Living in that town was a young woman whose descendants today form an important thread of Poarch Creek history: Mary of Atasi, a high-status woman of the Wind Clan. Mary married an English trader, Richard Bailey, who made his home in Atasi with her for more than thirty years. Together they raised six children there—Margaret "Peggy", Mary "Polly", Elizabeth, Dixon, Daniel, and James—whose lives would shape some of the most dramatic moments in our tribe's history.

Richard Bailey, however, brought more than trade goods into Atasi; he brought trouble. His cattle were constantly wandering into their fields, destroying people's crops and their patience too.

Eventually Mary and Richard moved their herds way down the Alabama River, where there was more space for cattle to roam. For three years they stayed there, until the town later asked them to return to Atasi so they could have a resident trader again. This time, Mary insisted on fences for the crops to keep relations peaceful.

When Federal Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins visited Atasi after their return, he was impressed by Mary and her daughters. He described Mary as "neat, cleanly, provident, and economical…kind to everybody, yet firm," and noted that the whole family had a reputation for health and discipline. Every morning, no matter the season, they immersed themselves in water, continuing the practice of daily cleansing for both hygiene and spiritual purposes. Hawkins was impressed by the ritual, especially witnessing it mid-December on the icy Tallapoosa River.

But Richard Bailey and his cattle continued to clash with Atasi leaders. In 1798, the Creek National Council at Tuckabatchee finally voted to expel him for treating townspeople "with contempt." He was allowed to return a few months later but died soon afterward from a fall off his horse. Sometime after 1802, Mary and her children decided to leave Atasi and move permanently back down the Alabama River among Creek families who were living near the mouth of Little River.

Most families who moved that far downstream the Alabama River did so through family ties to the Sehoy lineage, but the Baileys were first pushed there by Richard's cattle controversies. In this twist of fate, a Wind Clan family from Mvskoke-speaking Atasi became entwined with these heavily Alibamu-descended communities and decided to stay there for good, a decision that would shape who we are today.

By the early 1800s, the lower stretch of the Alabama River (near Little River) had become a booming place for these Creek families, many of them prosperous, increasingly English-speaking, and deeply connected through trade near the Tensaw settlements. And as prosperity rose, so did resentment.

A BREWING STORM

Upper Creek towns at the Coosa-Tallapoosa confluence had long supplied Mobile with produce. But their profits shrank as Creek families in the Little River region gained faster, untaxed access to American and Spanish markets. When U.S. officials at Fort Stoddert tried imposing taxes on canoes coming from Upper Creek Nation, tempers flared. Captain Sam Isaacs of Coosada (married to Alexander McGillivray's daughter) threatened war but then ultimately took out his frustrations on competing families down the river.

By 1809, Isaacs and a group of Alibamu-Coosada (Koasati) warriors traveled downriver to collect payments themselves, insisting the Tensaw families owed taxes to their hometowns (tvlwvs), treating Tensaw like a subordinate settlement. Isaacs demanded $100 from Mary's son Dixon Bailey as "rent" for operating his ferry, near modern-day Eureka Landing on the Alabama River. Dixon refused.

Isaacs responded with threats to cut up the ferryboat, and stormed off down the river to demand payments from other families, threatening to drive off all their cattle. When he returned to the Bailey landing, he confronted Lynn McGhee, who was working as the ferry operator. Lynn calmly told him, "Bailey did not intend to pay him a cent."

Isaacs flew into a rage. His men beat Lynn nearly to death and began hacking the ferry apart. Dixon ran to help and charged at Isaacs with a handspike. Dixon was said to have been a large man, and he knocked Isaacs down and fought off the warriors who closed in, until one hit Dixon with a tomahawk.

That's when Dixon's sixty-year-old mother, Mary of Atasi, rushed to the scene. She seized the warrior who had struck her son and hurled him into the river. Mary held him down to drown him, and they grappled in the water, each trying to drown the other. Between her ferocity and Dixon's relentless counterattack, Isaacs and his men gave up and went home. It was a moment that showed Mary's strength, but also the deeper clash that was growing between ancient town (tvlwv) authority and a rising class of Creek families near Tensaw carving out their own place in a rapidly changing world.

Among those who deeply opposed the new lifestyle downriver was William Weatherford, despite having close family in that community. In many ways, William and Dixon Bailey shared similar backgrounds: both were mixed-bloods, both were born to respected Wind Clan mothers (Sehoy of Hickory Ground and Mary of Atasi), and both had very controversial traders for fathers.

Dixon, dark-complexioned but shaped by educational experiences outside of Creek society, carried a conflicted sense of identity. He valued independence at the fringe of the Creek Nation, embracing prosperity and adaptation to expanding American economic systems, for better or worse. Many Redstick leaders were themselves half-Creek like Dixon, yet their new vision suddenly rejected all American influence. They were determined to violently resist settler encroachment, following a new, fervent religious movement whose fiery prophets pushed for purification and war. They became so radical that even the Creek National Council and many traditional mekkos viewed them with deep concern and, in time, fought against them, especially at Tuckabatchee.

We may never fully grasp why Dixon Bailey became the Redsticks' most bitter enemy, but the answer seems rooted in what they saw as betrayal and sacrilege, as he was one of their own people standing fiercely against their cause. On July 27, 1813, along the Wolf Trail—the old trading path that ran from the Upper Creek Nation to Pensacola—Dixon and his militia struck the Redsticks as they returned with ammunition bought from the Spanish. That sudden clash, later remembered as the Battle of Burnt Corn Creek, transformed old tensions into open, violent rupture. Fearing a wider war, families across the region crowded into Fort Mims, seeking safety behind its walls and behind the forces of the American military and Dixon's Creek militia.

…continued on next page

FORT MIMS: A TRAGEDY THAT SHAPED A NATION

On August 13, 1813, the Redsticks got their revenge by attacking Fort Mims, located in the Tensaw Delta, a short mile walk from the southwest border of the Creek Nation. They rushed in through the open gate of Fort Mims, catching the careless American Major Beasley off guard. This same man who was immediately killed with a warclub was whipping a slave a few hours prior, all because the slave had honestly reported seeing Redsticks in the woods, but was cruelly punished for promoting fear.

One survivor heard William Weatherford shout, "Dixon Bailey, today one or both of us must die." Many American officers were killed quickly, but the Creek militia members like Dixon quickly moved into action. Dixon quickly shot one of the leading prophets, and his brothers Daniel and James climbed onto the tallest structure, tore off shingles to create portholes, and began firing on the attackers with deadly accuracy.

Three of the four Redstick prophets were shot early in the battle, a blow to Redstick morale because those men were supposed to be spiritually protected. Yet Prophet Paddy Walsh stood firm, ordering his warriors to throw aside their guns and enter the fort with traditional war clubs and knives only. Mvskoke-speaking Creek militia men shouted at them from within the fort, saying, I wish that you would.

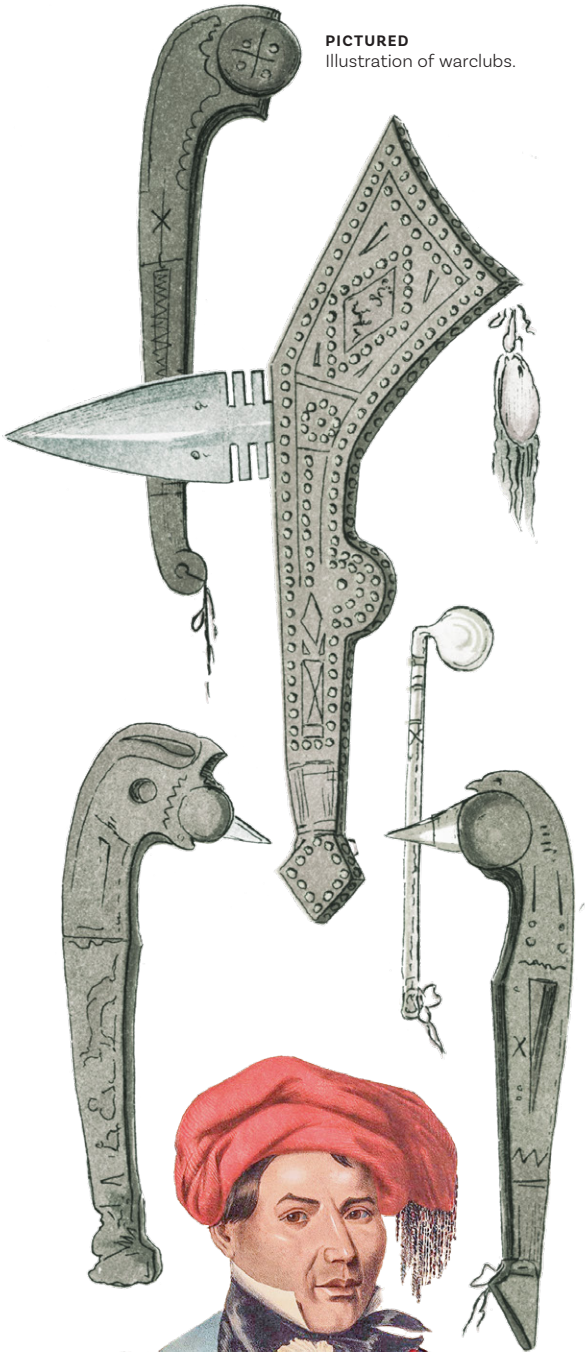
By early afternoon the fort defenders still held strong, and Weatherford briefly pulled his men back, saying they had done enough to humble the people inside. For more than an hour the Redsticks debated their next move in a nearby location.

Despite William Weatherford's pleas, the group decided to attack the fort again because the Creek militia under Dixon Bailey were still alive and relatively unharmed compared to the American forces that suffered already. These were the Creek people who stood against them at Burnt Corn, who embraced American ways, who rejected the prophets' warnings. A debt, they believed, still had to be paid.

Some African fighters among the Redsticks wanted total destruction, likely influenced by their own tragic experiences under slavery. Once the decision was made, Weatherford quietly left. He later told his sister-in-law he could not stand to witness the slaughter he knew was coming.

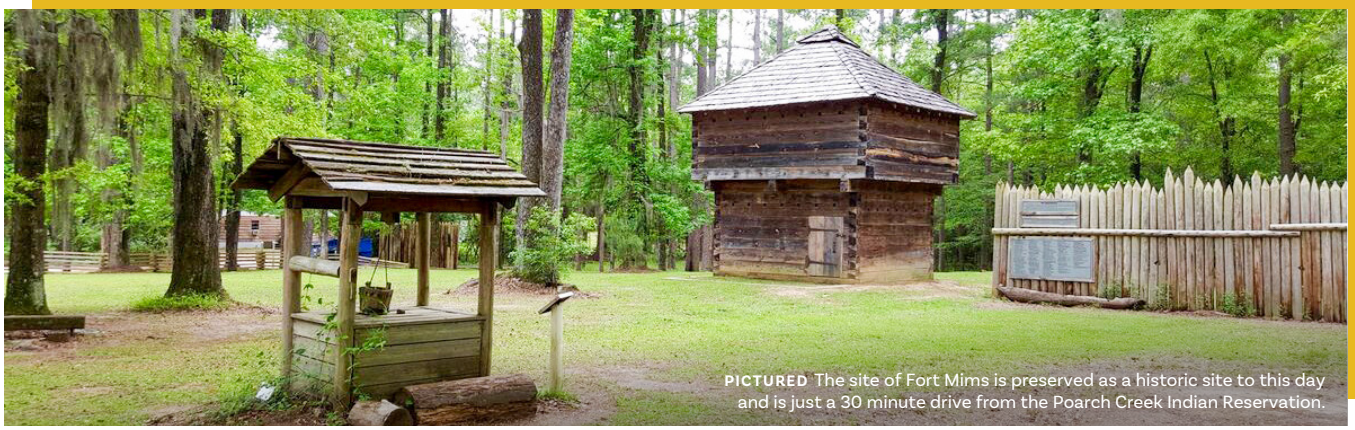
What followed was horrific. The Redsticks set the buildings ablaze, killing many in the flames. Survivors recalled that dark-skinned people inside the fort were questioned about their families to determine whether they would be spared or killed. One enslaved survivor recounted, "Dixon Bailey's sister [Elizabeth] was asked what family she was of. She answered pointing to her brother [James], I am the sister of that great man you have murdered there, upon which they knocked her down, cut her open, strewed her entrails around."

During the attack, Daniel Bailey's wife fought bravely, repeatedly urging Sergeant Mathews to rise and defend himself as he lay frozen in fear. In her desperation to spur him into action, she stabbed him in the rear end to jolt him to his feet, but he remained motionless until he later slipped away from the fort. After escaping, he fled to General Claiborne and falsely claimed to have killed twenty Redsticks, a boast that nearly earned him a promotion. His story unraveled when Dr. Thomas Holmes, a survivor confronted him and revealed the marks on his rear.



PICTURED
Illustration of warclubs.

PICTURED
Tustenuggee Emathla, also known as Jim Boy, was a Redstick leader from Atassi present at the Battle of Burnt Corn Creek and Fort Mims.



PICTURED The site of Fort Mims is preserved as a historic site to this day and is just a 30 minute drive from the Poarch Creek Indian Reservation.

Inside the inferno, survivors tore weapons from the hands of the dead and threw them into the flames to keep them from the attackers. Dr. Holmes furiously chopped a hole through the pickets so remaining survivors could run into the swamp. Dixon and his slave Tom fled through this opening, with Tom carrying Dixon's disabled young son Ralph. As they ran, Dixon and Dr. Holmes fired back at the Redsticks who were closing in to cut off their escape. Dixon had boiled his bullets in oil so he could load on the run, and he kept turning to fire until, deep in the woods, he was finally struck down and killed.

Tom fled with Ralph Bailey in his arms, carrying the child far from danger, but then he hesitated. This might be his one chance to beg the Redsticks for his freedom, a moment that might never come again. Still carrying Ralph, he decided to walk back to the fort. Tom did not know what would happen next. The Redsticks immediately killed Dixon's disabled son with a warclub. They spared Tom's life, but he always regretted his decision to turn back.

WHAT CAME AFTER

The massacre at Fort Mimms gave the United States the justification it needed to wage full war against the Creeks. Just three months later, Mary's own town of Atasi was attacked by American troops and Lower Creek allies. Men, women, and children were massacred, and the elaborate town was burned to ashes. Survivors fled to Florida and later regrouped in a new Upper Creek town called Thlopthlocco.

By the end of the conflict, much of Mary of Atasi's family line was lost. Dixon, Daniel, and James—one daughter, Elizabeth, and an unknown number of grandchildren including Ralph, died at Fort Mims. Most of her remaining relations died in the massacre of Atasi. Only two daughters survived: Peggy and Polly

These daughters were remembered as fierce, athletic, and highly skilled—capable of riding horses and shooting as well as any man, and above all, they were excellent swimmers. Their survival, however, was largely due to luck. Polly, one of the daughters, operated the family's Sizemore Ferry Service at Eureka Landing with her husband, Arthur Sizemore, who was a mixed-blood Creek.

Peggy, ironically, was supposed to be safer by staying at Fort Mims. But on the morning of the attack, she and a group of women and children left the fort to walk near Boatyard Landing. Peggy's swimming skills would go on to make her a hero that day. Her grandson Dixon Bailey Reed recalled the story:

"My grandmother Peggy Bailey, was out of the fort at the time, picking blackberries, and learning that the Indians were coming, she found 30 or 40 women across the River from the fort without protection. She swam the River, got a flat boat and took it across, and the women got upon it, and floated down to Mobile. For this act of heroism, she was given a large tract of land on the Alabama River in Monroe Co., called Bailey's Bluff."

In 1815, after the war, Sophia McGillivray's son Lachlan Durant pleaded with President Madison, describing how settlers were forcing Creek families off their own homelands, even those who had fought alongside the Americans. His words capture the grief of that time:

"Not one of us but who lost relatives both near and dear to us on that memorable day that Fort Mimms was taken… by the dreadful massacre that the Hostile Indians made there…They [new white settlers] have taken forcible possession of our fields and houses and ordered us off at the risk of our lives. They have reproached us with our origins, insulted us with the most abusive language, and not content with that they have even proceeded to blows and committed private injury on our Stocks and property."

Federal authorities showed little willingness to hold back the growing wave of hostile white settlers. Throughout the Creek War, American leaders had been eager to use the whole conflict as a way to seize Creek lands. In this sense, the tragedy at Fort Mims became the catalyst they needed to justify a full-scale military campaign. Its aftermath paved the way for the sweeping land cessions through the Treaty of Fort Jackson in 1814 at the end of the war. This treaty, which gave away so much land ancestral to Poarch Creeks, was not signed by any of the ancestors of today's Poarch Creek people. And notably, every major Creek town except Atasi ultimately appeared on that treaty, as well.

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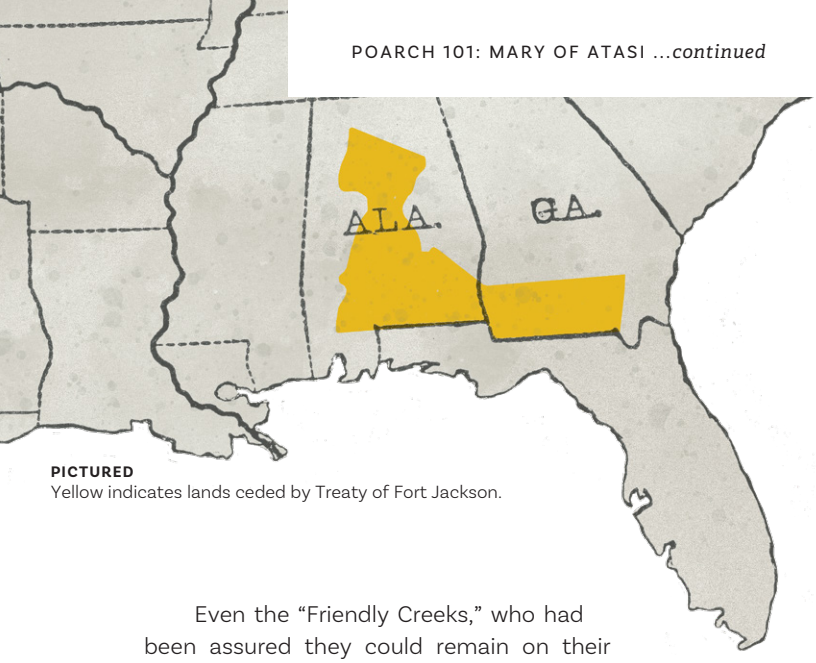


PICTURED
Yellow indicates lands ceded by Treaty of Fort Jackson.

Even the "Friendly Creeks," who had been assured they could remain on their lands as part of a clause in the Fort Jackson Treaty, dealt with overwhelming pressure and land theft from incoming settlers. Within only a few years of Lachlan Durant's appeals, he and other families connected to today's Poarch community—including Mary and Arthur Sizemore—were forced eastward into the longleaf pine interior, away from their river homelands. Some family lines later migrated to Oklahoma, while others eventually returned and rejoined relatives who secured land claims in the region. Their perseverance sustained Creek identity and community within a small portion of their original homeland, east of Little River, and these families would later become the present-day Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

Mary and Arthur Sizemore had a daughter, Celia "Cealy" Sizemore, who married William Colbert. Cealy and William later had a daughter, Mary Matilda Colbert, who in turn was the mother of Rhoda "Posie" Taylor. By this point after the Civil War, many intermarried Indian families were living in several clusters like Jeddo (Cvto), Red Hill (Huxford), Eliska (Vleskv) before they were pushed further inward to the Headapadea, Poarch Switch, Hog Fork, and Bell Creek communities which formed the modern reservation.

In the 1880 census, the Red Hill (Huxford) area had many notable Creek families, including the Rolin/Coon households. That year, Rhoda "Posie" Taylor appeared in the census married to John Rolin/Coon. Listed nearby was John's sister, Frances, and their mother, Polly Moniac Coon, who was married to their father Jack Coon. Jack Coon originally adopted the surname "Coon" to reflect his Raccoon Clan (Wotkvlke) lineage, though he later transitioned the name to Roland/Rolin. Rhoda's husband John and all his brothers ultimately carried forward the Rolin surname through their sons, one of the major Poarch Creek family names today.

Rhoda, however, passed down something different from a surname. Through her, and through her aunts and sisters, the Wind Clan (Hotvlkvlke) maternal line continued unbroken. From Mary of Atasi and onward through generations of daughters and granddaughters, that Wind Clan matrilineage remains firmly rooted in the Poarch Creek community to this day.

How the Gaming Economy Helps Tribes Navigate Shifting Policies

By Shaun Griswold, Via Native News Online

California's first governor, Peter Hardeman Burnett, swore that the racist campaign he championed would not end "until the Indian race becomes extinct." His two years in office brought malnutrition, homicide and forced migration, decimating California's Native populations by nearly 90% between 1848 and 1900.

But Burnett died, his campaign ended, and ultimately, California's Indigenous people survived.

Then, in 1905, the United States publicly disclosed the unratified treaties it had made with 18 California tribes. The tribes responded by building a legal and economic framework for tribal sovereignty. In 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was enacted, and small casinos sprouted on reservations in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Southern California. Similar resorts sprang up across the country, and the economic benefits have helped fuel the struggle for tribal sovereignty.

A recent study from the Harvard Kennedy School Project on Indigenous Governance and Development shows how gaming has helped tribes acquire economic and political capital. The report was written by three Indigenous researchers: Randall Akee (Native Hawaiian), Elijah Moreno (Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation) and Amy Besaw Medford (Brothertown).

"In reality, nearly every tribe is impacted by gaming in some capacity, whether directly or indirectly," the authors wrote. "Past studies on American Indian gaming likely understate its impact, as nearly every tribe in the US may be exposed to various aspects of the industry whether they directly operate a casino themselves or not."

The $43.9 billion tribes reported to the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC) last year accounts for nearly 40% of the nation's $115 billion in gaming revenue, according to the American Gaming Association. And tribes are using that money to fund health care, education, small business, philanthropy and other much-needed programs.

Tribal gaming has long faced criticism, including for the negative social impacts of gambling; the Harvard study offers a different perspective on the controversial industry, examining gaming economies and their impact on tribal investments, both in Indigenous economies and the overall U.S. economy. Researchers looked at 14 indicators, including population, income, poverty, labor, housing and education, for reservation communities in the Lower 48 states between 1990 and 2020. (Due to its population, the Navajo Nation was studied separately.) The writers concluded that gaming has been central to tribal economies that have successfully leveraged revenue for political capital, funding groups that lobby for tribal sovereignty, the largest and most prominent being the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI).

In September, just a week before his sudden death on Sept. 26, Indian Gaming Association Chairman Ernie Stevens Jr. (Oneida Nation) joined the Native-run lobby in Washington, D.C., meeting with NCAI leaders from the Ponca Tribes of Nebraska, Pechanga, Cherokee and Muscogee Creek Nations. The nation's largest gaming tribes had come together to remind Congress of Indian Country's economic contributions.

"In the Indian gaming world, we're responsible for 700,000 jobs," Stevens said. "We continue to help this world turn, and we don't do it by asking for help. We do it to help. Ask people to understand what we do is for our communities, for our generation and generations to come."

Stevens said that gaming revenue had returned to "pre-COVID levels." The revenue came from gaming as well as related amenities — entertainment options, conferences, food and lodging.

Stevens said his mentors — Rick Hill, Gay Kingman and Tim Wapato — not only implemented tribal gaming laws, they also built a relationship with Congress to lobby for tribal sovereignty.

"They came to Washington to establish the presence of gaming and help folks understand why it's not just about economic development, it's about tribal sovereignty, our governments, how we interact in today's world, and to defend every aspect of tribal sovereignty," Stevens said.

Under Stevens' leadership, the NIGC used treaty laws to expand tribal gaming, increasing revenues by more than $20 billion and enabling tribes to fund essential services like housing, education and health care, as well as finance other capital projects. When the federal government shut down, the NCAI lobby credited its September meetings with Congress with helping tribes protect the Indian Health Service and Bureau of Indian Education from furloughs and funding cuts.

Tribes with substantial gaming revenue were able to assist their citizens along with others whose tribes lacked casino reserves, providing food aid and paying tribal government employees while their federal counterparts were furloughed during the shutdown. However, the tribes' financial reserves dwindled as the shutdown dragged on, reducing their capacity to help.

On Oct. 29, as the shutdown neared a month long, Ben Mallott, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, told the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs that Alaska's Indigenous people were being forced to choose between "food or fuel." So when the remnants of Typhoon Halong ravaged the western Alaska coast in October, the NCAI and gaming tribes jumped in to help with donations.

"As Cherokees, we have long-settled traditions of coming together and helping others, but especially in times of tragedy or catastrophes such as this," said Cherokee Nation Deputy Principal Chief Bryan Warner. "Our word for it is Gadugi, which at its core is all of us working together and supporting one another."

> *"In the Indian gaming world, we're responsible for 700,000 jobs. We continue to help this world turn, and we don't do it by asking for help. We do it to help.*
>
> **THE LATE INDIAN GAMING ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN ERNIE STEVENS JR. (ONEIDA NATION)**

According to the Harvard report, "tribes with successful casinos also often play a significant role in funding community development, benefiting both tribal and non-tribal communities. The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, for example, has used its substantial success in the gaming industry to invest in community projects and support other tribes across Minnesota."

Back in 1906, a year after California tribes obtained their treaty rights, a Bureau of Indian Affairs employee named C.E. Kelsey successfully petitioned the federal government to purchase an additional 235 acres of land to be added to the Pechanga's land in Riverside County. When Mark Macarro became chairman of the Pechanga Band of Indians in 1995, the tribe had just opened its first tiny casino. State law had yet to catch up, but in 1998, California voters approved Proposition 5, which allowed tribal gaming. Throughout that campaign, Macarro reminded people that Prop. 5 would prove a boon for tribal sovereignty. In 2002, the tribe opened a 200,000-square-foot casino and resort in Temecula, California, on the Kelsey Tract. The casino, which is currently one of the county's largest overall employers, has both Native and non-Native workers.

In 2004, Katherine Spilde, chair of the Sycuan Institute on Tribal Gaming at San Diego State University, looked at the tribe for a different Harvard study on casino gambling's impact on overall economic well-being. Spilde is not Indigenous, but her parents were schoolteachers on the White Earth Nation in Minnesota, where she was raised, and she is an expert on tribal gaming.

"Pechanga government's gaming and resort revenues have allowed the Tribe to effectively eliminate its reliance on other governments and to create opportunities that benefit the entire region," Spilde wrote in 2004. "The results are a sense of independence and self-determination among Pechanga citizens, and productive and mutually supportive relations with the surrounding communities where once there was very little positive interaction between the Tribe and its neighbors."

In September, before the shutdown, Macarro said that both Congress and administration officials were coming to understand that tribal self-determination works. "We have much more work to do, but we leave this week with momentum, with allies on both sides of the aisle, and with a shared understanding that when tribal nations thrive America thrives."

Tribal sovereignty endures under long-standing legal frameworks that are strengthened by healthy economies. Ensuring that the U.S. continues to meet its trust and treaty obligations requires ever-evolving negotiations with the federal government. Right now, the U.S. government is shifting radically, in unexpected ways. The NCAI wants the federal government to realize that economically healthy tribes are in a good place to help the U.S. economy.

Cherokee Nation Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. acknowledges that some tribes face serious budget problems, worsened by recent cuts from the federal government. This is why, he said, the NCAI's lobbying efforts are vital to protect projects that are threatened by shifting federal priorities.

"We're pointing out where the Congress can do better, where the agencies can do better; we're pointing out that self-determination is the law of the land, and it's not only the law of the land, it is a prescription that works," Hoskin said. "While we may be able to absorb some of the damage done by cuts, there are tribes for which this is absolutely consequential in terms of stopping services. We're using our resources to do it and asking that the United States ought to step up and help us do it."

WARRIOR OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Warrior Outreach Program serves our relatives who are currently incarcerated or in rehabilitation centers by providing cultural, educational materials, resources and encouragement. We are committed to supporting your journey through connection to your Indigenous identity, healing, and or community reintegration.

If you know someone who meets these qualifications who would like to participate, please contact Rhea DeVilbiss at 251.281.8775.

PROGRAM QUALIFICATIONS

To participate in the Warrior Outreach Program, individuals must meet the following criteria:

TRIBAL AFFILIATION:

- **Be a PCI (Poarch Creek Indians) tribal citizen.**
- **Be a first-generation descendant of a PCI tribal citizen.**

INCARCERATION/TREATMENT STATUS

Currently serving a sentence in an incarceration facility or enrolled in a substance abuse rehabilitation program with a duration of a year or more.

LOCATION

Incarcerated or in treatment anywhere on Turtle Island, provided the facility has the ability to receive mail and correspondence programs.

PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

Participation is completely voluntary.
Must complete and return the program application, granting permission for correspondence with the Warrior Outreach Program. The Warrior Outreach Program does not offer legal advice.

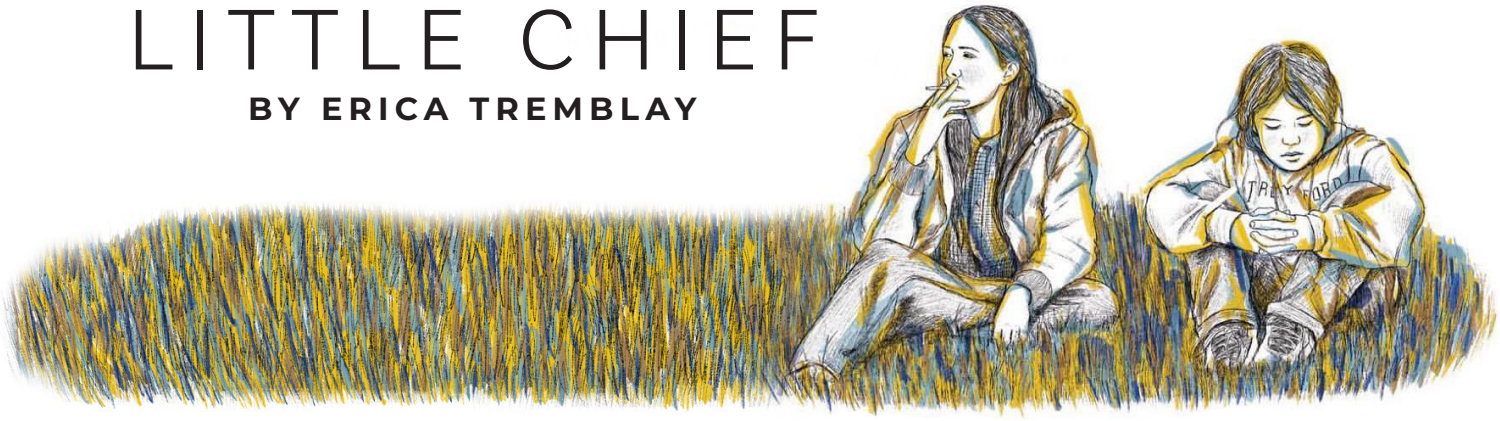
Still Standing Because I Am a WARRIOR

EMPOWER. EDUCATE. SUPPORT.

Still Standing Because I Am a Warrior is dedicated to raising awareness about opioid and substance abuse. Understanding what opioids are and the risks they pose is crucial in combating this epidemic.

LITTLE CHIEF

BY ERICA TREMBLAY



By Sharon Delmar

In *Little Chief*, a winter dawn cracks over a reservation in rural Oklahoma. A teacher named Sharon—tired, uncelebrated, carrying invisible burdens—rises early, steels herself against cold and hardship, and steps into a day defined by quiet struggle and small, necessary kindnesses. As she moves through the morning—her routine heavy with fatigue and unacknowledged sacrifice—the world around her feels pared down, brimming with absence and longing.

Then she sees a boy: Bear, walking alone without a coat, his breath hanging in the freezing air. With gentle decisiveness, Sharon stops, offers him a ride, and drapes a warm hoodie across his thin shoulders. The moment is simple. Unremarkable — except it isn't. In that gesture lies recognition, compassion, and dignity: a lifeline thrown across isolation. For Bear, it's warmth. For Sharon, it's another small act in a life where care is constant but rarely seen.

Inside the classroom, silence becomes a language of its own. Sharon and Bear do not exchange grand speeches or emotional revelations, yet their connection deepens in the quiet, steady way Indigenous communities have always communicated resilience — through presence, attentiveness, and the unspoken offering of safety. The film honors these subtle exchanges, suggesting that strength in their world is not loud, but lived.

Little Chief does not mistake kindness for a cure, nor does it offer systems-level solutions wrapped in hope. Instead, it shows us something more honest: that in lives shaped by generational hardship and frayed institutions, small acts of care still matter. They don't erase struggle, but they sustain people through it. These moments — the pause on a cold roadway, the silent understanding in a classroom — become evidence of community endurance and the quiet ways people keep each other going.

In these unadorned gestures, the film reveals that dignity exists even in the starkest conditions. Identity is lived rather than announced. And hope — fragile but persistent — takes shape in the simple act of showing up for one another.

CREDITS

Little Chief is written and directed by **Erica Tremblay** (Seneca-Cayuga Nation) and stars **Lily Gladstone** as Sharon, a weary but devoted schoolteacher, alongside **Julian Ballantyne** as Bear. Produced by **Deidra P. Begay**, the film was supported by the **Sundance Institute Indigenous Program** and premiered at the **2020 Sundance Film Festival**. Rooted in the everyday realities of reservation life in Oklahoma, *Little Chief* brings together Indigenous cast and crew to tell a story of quiet resilience, cultural continuity, and the small acts of care that strengthen community.

LITTLE CHIEF IS FREE TO WATCH ON YOUTUBE

Scan the QR code to watch now.

The Tribe is committed to doing its part to further Native arts through books, media, movies, fashion, and similar artistic outlets.

Share your recommendation *with Sharon Delmar at sdelmar@pci-nsn.gov.*

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OWA PARKS & RESORT WINS

PRESTIGIOUS WORLD WATERPARK ASSOCIATION WAVE REVIEW AWARD FOR PRINT ADVERTISING

By Lauren Giddeons & Karen Rodriguez

> *"This award is a true testament to the passion and hard work our team pours into sharing the magic of OWA."*
>
> **KEN LEONE, OWA PARKS & RESORT PROPERTY MANAGER**

OWA Parks & Resort is proud to announce its recent recognition at the World Waterpark Association Wave Review Awards, earning top honors in the Print Advertising category for the full-page ad "Unleash Tropical Fun." The award-winning piece was developed by ad agency Davis, South, Barnette & Patrick, to promote Tropic Falls at OWA during the Summer 2025 season.

The Wave Review Awards celebrate creative excellence in destination marketing and advertising, and received more than 300 entries across 11 competitive categories this year. OWA's recognition in the Print Media – Print Advertising category highlights the creativity, strategy, and teamwork behind its marketing efforts and reflects the resort's ongoing commitment to inspiring unforgettable guest experiences through bold, engaging storytelling.

Tropic Falls at OWA brings together a tropical-themed indoor/outdoor waterpark, thrilling rides, shopping, dining, and family-friendly entertainment, all in one vibrant destination. The award-winning campaign showcased these unique offerings through vibrant photography and a playful headline that captured the excitement and all-in-one appeal of the Tropic Falls experience.

"This award is a true testament to the passion and hard work our team pours into sharing the magic of OWA," said Ken Leone, OWA Parks & Resort Property Manager. "We're thrilled to see our vision for Tropic Falls recognized on a national stage and grateful to our creative partners for helping bring that vision to life."

The Wave Award win not only celebrates OWA's standout creative work but also marks a successful season of growth, engagement, and visibility for Tropic Falls at OWA, solidifying its place as one of the region's premier vacation destinations.

For information on events and attractions at OWA Parks Resort, go to visitowa.com.

SOUTH DISTRICT FFA HOSTS 2025 FALL CONTEST AT PERDIDO RIVER FARMS

FIRST-EVER PERDIDO RIVER FARMS INVITATIONAL LIVESTOCK CONTEST DEBUTS

By Lauren Giddeons & Karen Rodriguez

The South District FFA proudly hosted its annual Fall Contest for Land Evaluation and Forestry at Perdido River Farms, bringing together more than 350 FFA students and advisors from across the region for a full day of competition, agricultural education, and historic milestones.

This year marked an especially significant moment for the district as the event debuted the officially named Perdido River Farms Invitational Livestock Contest, honoring the Poarch Creek Indians and recognizing their continued partnership and support of agricultural education in Alabama. After three consecutive years of strong participation in livestock evaluation, the contest achieved the scale needed to become a formally recognized invitational event.

HONORING EXCELLENCE IN FORESTRY, LAND EVALUATION, AND LIVESTOCK

Students competed across three divisions—Forestry, Land, and Livestock—demonstrating their technical skills, environmental understanding, and agricultural knowledge at one of the district's most anticipated fall gatherings.

A highlight of the day was the newly named Perdido River Farms Invitational, which recognized the impact and heritage of the Poarch Creek Indians and celebrated the growth of livestock evaluation participation in the South District.

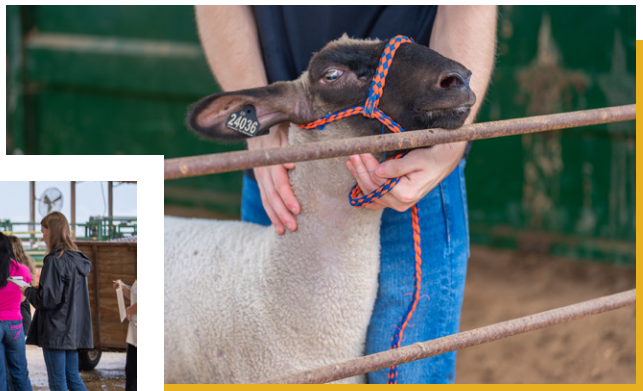
Livestock Results—Perdido River Farms Invitational:

- 1st Place: Robertsdale
- 2nd Place: Hartford
- 3rd Place: Kinston
- 4th Place: Fairhope

A GROWING TRADITION

Event organizers highlighted the importance of the contest's expansion and the new recognition of the livestock event. "This is an exciting milestone for our district," said Rebecca Balkcom, South District Advisor, Alabama State Department of Education. "Having over 350 students and advisors on site shows the strength and passion of agricultural education in our region. The official naming of the Perdido River Farms Invitational reflects both the growth of this competition and our appreciation for the Poarch Creek Indians, whose support helps make events like this possible."

The South District FFA Fall Contest continues to serve as a vital platform for developing the next generation of agricultural leaders through hands-on learning, teamwork, and community partnership.



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SHARING HOLIDAY CHEER ACROSS OUR COMMUNITIES

By Amelia Tognoli

Team Members from Wind Creek Montgomery recently came together to support a regional charitable event known as the Day of Giving, hosted by local news station WSFA 12. As part of this effort, the team spent the day shopping for toys that will be donated to families in need during the holiday season. Their enthusiasm and generosity showcased the true spirit of Wind Creek, serving our communities with kindness and compassion.

TWO TEAM MEMBERS SHARED WHY PARTICIPATING IN THE EVENT WAS SO MEANINGFUL TO THEM:

"I felt so grateful to be part of this special day. Knowing we could bring a smile to a child's face truly touched my heart. I've always believed that giving is one of the simplest and sweetest acts of kindness," said Shonnie Taylor, Benefits Specialist at Wind Creek Montgomery.

Chimere Lambert, Sponsorship and Events Coordinator at Wind Creek Hospitality, echoed that sentiment saying, "This shopping trip turned into a moment of purpose. Each cart we filled represented hope for a family in need and a reminder that small acts of kindness can make a big difference. Wind Creek continues to show who we are as a company and as a culture."

TRIBAL CITIZEN'S SPENDING PLAN 2026

By Bryan Fayard

Happy New Year Everyone! I know you're excited that you'll soon receive your GWA and Per Cap. While a true blessing to receive such a generous amount of money each year, please be cautious and refrain from making emotional financial decisions at this time. Generally, the best financial decisions are made when you're calm and use rational/reasonable thinking. Think about weddings and funerals – these events are emotional, and many are quick to spend significant amounts of money because of their emotions. Many will spend thousands on flowers and food, etc. Think about a dozen roses – they will cost over $100 on Feb. 14th but drop significantly on Feb. 15th. Why is this? The automobile industry spends billions advertising new cars each year to entice us to use our emotions and buy their new car. Typically, we spend more, much more, when making financial decisions with our emotions.

My point is, think through 2026 entirely and develop your spending plan when you are calm and thinking rationally. Imagine you've received your GWA and Per Cap. Consider all the expenses you'll likely incur this year to see where your money might go. You'll have some fixed expenses, i.e., those that recur each month at the same amount, such as your house payment and car payment. You'll have some variable expenses that recur each month but at different amounts such as groceries, gas, etc. Also figure in those one-time expense 'pops' throughout the year such as birthdays, vacations, anniversaries, Christmas, etc.

> *"...think through 2026 entirely and develop your spending plan when you are calm and thinking rationally."*

Here's a sample template for you to fill in your best guesstimates for 2026.
Scan the QR code to download.

Not to dampen anyone's enthusiasm, but if you're realistic you can see that it'll take most of your GWA and Per Cap to make it through 2026 comfortably. Again, don't be too quick to buy that new car or too aggressive paying off existing debt at the beginning of 2026 – remember to keep something to get you through the entire year.

COME BY TO SEE ME, CALL OR EMAIL ME AND LET'S BUILD YOUR CUSTOM SPENDING PLAN FOR 2026.

Bryan Fayard
251-368-9136 ext. 2504
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Internal Communications

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Atmore, AL 36502

CREEK CORNER

JANUARY 2026 **IMPORTANT DATES**

1.1	**SUBMISSION DEADLINE** February Issue	
1.5-6	**MUSEUM GIFT SHOP CLOSED** Inventory	
1.6	**TRIBAL COURT** Tribal Courtroom	
1.9	**FAMILY COURT** Tribal Courtroom	
1.15	**TRIBAL COUNCIL MEETING** TC Chambers	**4:00 PM**
1.20	**TRIBAL COURT** Tribal Courtroom	
1.23	**FAMILY COURT** Tribal Courtroom	

OUR MISSION

Creek Corner is a monthly magazine produced by the Internal Communications Team of the Poarch Creek Indians. Our mission is to celebrate our community by sharing stories of culture, people, and achievements, while also providing meaningful updates for Tribal Citizens.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions for *Creek Corner* may be edited or declined at the discretion of the editorial team. Content is finalized one month prior to publication. The deadline for submissions is the first Monday of the month before the issue date.