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# Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program celebrates 20 years of impact

Rosemary Stephens, Editor-in-Chief

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes marked a major milestone on June 5 as the Recreation, Exercise, Sports for the Elders and Children of the Tribes (R.E.Sp.E.C.T.) Program celebrated its 20th anniversary, honoring two decades of promoting health, wellness, and opportunity for tribal citizens, young and old.

Originally established to encourage youth and Elders to stay active and healthy, the R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program has grown far beyond its original mission. Over the past 20 years, the program has become a cornerstone of the Cheyenne and Arapaho community, helping shape the lives of countless tribal athletes and young people through financial assistance, mentorship and access to opportunities that might otherwise have been out of reach.

Tribal leaders and community members reflected on the program's lasting influence during the anniversary celebration, recognizing the many youth who have advanced in athletics, education, and personal development with support from R.E.Sp.E.C.T. The program's commitment to mentoring young people has helped many participants reach new levels of

R.E.S.P.E.C.T. pg. 5



Pictured: Former R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program directors Carrie Whitlow, Parry Roman Nose and Eddie Hamilton with current R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program Director Jessi James. (Courtesy photo)

# Special Session called by Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Governor

**Resolution to appropriate funds for development of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Oklahoma City building into an Outpatient Treatment, Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP), Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP), Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), and Specialty Pharmacy Facility Passes**

Latoya Lonelodge, Senior Reporter

(CONCHO, Okla.) On May 28 a special session of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes' 11<sup>th</sup> Legislature was called by Gov. Reggie Wassana in Concho, Okla.

The public hearing was called to order at 10:09 a.m., with invocation given by Milan Roman Nose. Present at roll call was A1 Pamela Sutton, A2 Kendrick Sleeper, A3 Travis Ruiz, A4 Rector Candy, C2 Milan Roman Nose Jr., C3 Thomas Trout, with C1 Bruce Whiteman and C4 Mariah Youngbull present via phone.

On the agenda, six items were discussed and voted on:

A resolution to approve and support the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Engagement with the nature conservancy and its efforts to establish a tribal entity and co-management agreement with New Mexico.

The Nature Conservancy, a District of Columbia non-profit corporation, had acquired approximately 50,000-acre property in northeastern New Mexico, which is part of the ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes.

Gov. Wassana said the state of New Mexico wanted to enter into a co-management agreement with 38,000 acres owned by the state. Of that acreage, 12,000 is what the Nature Conservancy wanted to give to a coalition of tribes, which included the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes.

"The nature conservancy wanted to give to a coalition of tribes, not just one tribe, and outside of the state of New Mexico, us, the Kiowas, the Comanches, we'll all be part of this, being in the area, hunting, passing through or whatever the purpose may be ... they've included us in that agreement," Gov. Wassana said.

Wassana stated the Nature Conservancy wanted the land to serve as a purpose of education, learning and teaching the youth outdoor experiences.

"Getting some kids away from technology, get back to the earth in a way, they connect to their surroundings, the atmosphere, kind of like our forefathers connected with the land and nature, the animals, there's a lot of Elk there, there's bear, all kinds of nature," Wassana said.

Wassana said the tribes have the option to opt out at



Rendition of what Living Circle Healing Sanctuary, an outpatient treatment center located within the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes' Oklahoma City building, could look like.

any time and wouldn't cost the tribes any money.

"For six years they're going to guarantee that whatever is needed for the property, fencing, personnel, they would budget for the coalition to actually use to keep the property safe," Wassana said.

With no expense to the tribes, Wassana said the property would be reloked at after six years to see if the tribes could manage the land.

"The Nature Conservancy just wants to say can the



# A name restored, Richard Pewo identified after 27 years as John Doe

(OKLAHOMA CITY) Richard Vaughn Pewo disappeared from Elk City, Okla., on Jan. 1, 1996. He was 38 years old at the time. Few details about the circumstances of his disappearance were publicly released, and over the years his case received little attention outside of his family and community. As the years passed with no answers, Richard remained listed as a missing person while his loved ones continued searching for information about what had happened to him.

Richard was born in Clinton, Okla., on Sept. 26, 1957, to Edwin Pewo and Irene Goose. He spent his early years in the Hammon area before moving to California to live with his mother as a teenager. After approximately three years, he returned to Oklahoma and continued his education.

As an adult, Richard married Samie Curtis in 1982. The couple remained together throughout his

life and raised their family together. Richard was the father of Della Jolene and helped raise Shannon Curtis, Virgil Curtis, Augustine Curtis, and Elaine Curtis. Friends and family remembered him as a gifted artist who enjoyed tattooing, camping, fishing, traveling, taking long drives, listening to music, and cheering for the Los Angeles Lakers.

More than two years after Richard disappeared, partial human remains were discovered on Jan. 11, 1998, in a wooded area near Triple X Road and Southeast Fifth Street in Choctaw, Oklahoma. Investigators determined the remains belonged to an adult Native American male between the ages of 30 and 55. The decedent was found wearing a black T-shirt with the words "Cheyenne-Arapaho Summer Festival Aug. 2-4, 1991," along with Levi 501-style jeans and hiking boots.

Despite forensic examina-

# Connecting community with tradition: Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes EPA program builds Medicine Wheel Garden for tribal community led project

Latoya Lonelodge, Senior Reporter

Leading a community driven project with a goal of reconnecting the people with the traditional uses of the land and bringing together tribal citizens, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Environmental Protectional Agency (EPA) brings traditional plants in the form of a medicine wheel garden to Concho, Okla.

The EPA program received funding from AGU Thriving Earth Exchange for the garden in 2024. The garden would help identify traditional plants that are used within the Cheyenne tribe and the Arapaho tribe and would also incorporate language with individual plant descriptions once they are planted.

“The medicine wheel garden is a garden that we are going to plant with our Cheyenne and Arapaho traditional medicines,” Chieko Buffalo, EPA director said.

The idea behind the garden came to mind, Buffalo said because for years it’s been hard for ceremonial people to find certain medicines for ceremonies. And a lot of times, it is due to climate change in the weather.

When the program received the funding, the funding was to go towards specific projects and as the EPA went over several ideas, the medicine wheel garden project stuck out the most to Buffalo.

“I believe this popped up to me as, it could educate our tribal citizens that are not familiar with medicinal plants, it’s to also educate those that are looking for what do our tribal citizens do, what are

our ceremonies about, because not all families are ceremonial, we live in a more modern time now and so it’s to help teach everybody that comes out to our garden, what plants were useful to us, both in the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes,” Buffalo said.

Partnering with Thriving Earth Exchange as a project officer to help guide the project and EPA as a fellow, Buffalo said they had to create a budget, a design, and work as a partnership.

Organizations supporting the project also include Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Diabetes Wellness, Oklahoma State University Extensions Master Gardeners Program and Collaborative Earth, as well ceremonial blessings provided by Cheyenne Chief Gordon Yellowman. The Tribes held a land blessing ceremony on September 19, 2025 led by Yellowman, where tribal programs and collaborative organizations gathered to witness the ceremony.

“Once we got all of our documentation required for this garden, we knew that we needed to bless it, so we did have a blessing ceremony, Gordon did go out there and bless it, our EPA program, the fellow couldn’t come because she lives in Washington, but EPA, Diabetes Wellness, and our other project officers from KTAB Kansas State that’s involved with our project, a couple of them but they were all there and involved with the blessing of the grounds,” Buffalo said.

Once winter passed in February, the program got



The medicine wheel garden begins to progress with tilling and landscaping done by EPA and volunteer work as a community led project. Pictured l-r: Kendrick Sweezy, with Circles of Care, Chieko Buffalo, EPA director, Cheyenne Galvan, EPA admin assistant, and Andrew Sonnier, EPA water coordinator. (Photo submitted by Chieko Buffalo)

started marking the grounds and had began tilling as they had to wait for the weather to get warm for the grass to start growing.

Tilling and getting the landscaping going as well as the pathway is a start for the garden, while getting the medicine wheel in place before placing the plants, Buffalo said, as the program plans to have an upcoming event later in June for community participation.

“It’s definitely community driven, I know we’re like the leadership of the project but we want the community to be involved because it’s going to be for them, it’s for our tribe, we can have for our future, we would like for others, if there’s others that are non-tribal we would like them too, if they’re interested in knowing our tribe and

our medicines we would like them to share that,” Buffalo said.

Since only having two outreach events so far, Buffalo said they’ve had help to prep the garden, which required digging the dirt out of the wheel and doing the landscaping part of it.

“We’ve gotten it pretty tilled, but grass grows pretty fast and that is a task that we’re having to work through right now, but we definitely want them to help out with the landscaping part, to take part of it, they’ll love it, they’ll know they had this part in it, this really beautiful garden, it’s going to grow and I hope it grows for years to come and people take pride in that and care for it,” Buffalo said.

GARDEN pg. 6



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## National Native American Hall of Fame opens permanent home in Oklahoma City

Rosemary Stephens, Editor-in-Chief

A vision that began in a modest room above a Montana drop-in center has found a permanent home in the heart of Oklahoma City.

The National Native American Hall of Fame officially opened its new headquarters June 8 at the historic Sundial Mansion, marking a significant milestone for an organization dedicated to honoring the achievements and contributions of Indigenous leaders throughout North America.

More than 100 guests gathered on the grounds of the century-old mansion at 4000 N. Kelley Ave. to celebrate the occasion. The event featured traditional drum music, remarks from tribal and community leaders, and recognition of the many supporters whose efforts helped transform the historic property into a center for Native history, education and inspiration.

"This is the home of the people who made it happen in Indian Country," said James Parker Shield, founder and chief executive officer of the National Native American Hall of Fame. "This is the place where the stories of our heroes will be preserved and shared."

For Shield, the opening represents the culmination

of a journey that began with a simple but ambitious idea: creating a national institution dedicated to recognizing Native excellence.

When the Hall of Fame was first established in 2016, it operated from a donated 200-square-foot office space in Montana. Shield recalled that one of the greatest challenges in those early years was convincing people that a national Native American Hall of Fame was both necessary and achievable.

"I don't think any right-thinking Indian would say no to a Hall of Fame for Indians," Shield said. "It's something that has been needed for a very long time."

Today, the organization's ambitions extend far beyond its museum exhibits. Shield said future plans include developing educational curriculum for schools, producing media features on Hall of Fame inductees during National Native American Heritage Month, and creating monuments honoring Native leaders in their home communities.

"We're a national organization," he said. "Everything we do is intended to reach Native people and communities across the country."

Board President Frances Alvarez reflected on the Hall



James Parker Shield, founder and CEO of the National Native American Hall of Fame cuts the red ribbon signifying the grand opening at the Sundial Mansion in Oklahoma City. (Photo / LaRenda Morgan)

of Fame's growth during remarks to attendees, describing the move into the Sundial Mansion as another chapter in an extraordinary journey.

The organization previously operated exhibit space inside the First Americans Museum before securing its own permanent home. While fundraising remains an ongoing effort, Alvarez said the Hall of Fame has built something equally valuable through partnerships and community support.

"We may not be rich financially," Alvarez said, "but we are rich in friendships, rich in support, rich in pride and rich in what we've accomplished together."

Alvarez also drew connections between the Hall of Fame's story and that of the mansion itself.

Constructed between 1915 and 1919 by Greek immigrant brothers, including John Sinopoulo, the Sundial Mansion was built as a family home and later earned a place on the National Register of Historic Places. Alvarez said its history reflects a familiar theme found in many Native traditions — building something lasting through community, culture and determination.

"Like many of our creation stories, they took their culture and their community and built something greater from it," she said.



Attending the grand opening of the National Native American Hall of Fame were l-r: Victor Morgan, Michael Elizondo, Ruben Littlehead, LaRenda Morgan and Nathan Hart. (Courtesy photo)

Since announcing the mansion as its future home in March, Hall of Fame leadership and volunteers have spent months restoring and renovating the property. Work included roof repairs, concrete restoration and updates to the mansion's verandas. Even the koi pond received attention, with fish brought in from Ada to complete the landscape.

According to Shield, many contractors embraced the project as more than just

another construction job.

"They got caught up in the cause," he said. "They believed in what this place represents and wanted to be part of it."

Inside the mansion, visitors will find exhibits celebrating Native leaders and organizations that have shaped modern Indian Country. One of the most distinctive spaces is the Red Power Coffee Bar, which serves as both a gathering place and

a tribute to Native activism, media and advocacy.

Displays recognize organizations such as the American Indian Movement, the Native American Rights Fund and the National Indian Youth Council. A nearby podcast nook honors pioneering Native radio programs that connected communities across vast distances and provided information about events, culture and issues affecting Indigenous peoples.

NATIVE AMERICAN HALL OF FAME pg. 6



Historic Sundial Mansion located in Oklahoma City is the new permanent home for the National Native American Hall of Fame.

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# Cheyenne and Arapaho Teen Selected for YES Oklahoma Program

## Dezarae Sevenstar joins 12 Indigenous scholars gaining hands-on research experience and college preparation at the University of Oklahoma.

Latoya Lonelodge, Senior Reporter

Giving tribal youth firsthand experience into stem and healthcare related fields, the YES Oklahoma program selects Cheyenne and Arapaho youth Dezarae Sevenstar, 18, as part of the scholar cohort where 12 indigenous scholars across Oklahoma were chosen to experience hands-on laboratory experience and the campus life at the University of Oklahoma (OU) in Norman, Okla.

With dreams of entering the health field and becoming a nurse, Sevenstar first applied for the YES Oklahoma scholarship program not really thinking she would be selected. After seeing a friend she met on a college tour post information about the program, she became immediately interested in applying for it.

"I thought it looked pretty cool and something I'd want to do. I do want to major in nursing, so I clicked the link and I signed up and I didn't really think I was going to get accepted until I got an email and a call from them," Sevenstar said.

With only 12 applicants selected every summer for the program, when Sevenstar received the news she had been chosen, she could hardly contain her excitement.

"I was really ecstatic and happy, when I had seen it, I had ran to my grandpa's room and told him about it, he was really proud of me," Sevenstar said.

The YES Oklahoma program is a National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health (NIH) program called Youths Enjoy Science (YES).

"There are YES's all over the country, but they all are specifically targeting needs in different places," Dr. Cara Monroe, Senior Program manager for Cancer Research Training and Education Coordination Core and Stephenson Cancer Center said.

Monroe said the program originally started at OU and has now been moved to the Stephenson Cancer Center and is funded by the National Cancer Institute.

"Our focus is trying to increase Native American, Indigenous students in Oklahoma to medical career pathways, specifically cancer research, but that doesn't mean our focus is entitling that, we're really looking for the well-being of getting Native students actively involved in medicine," Monroe said.

The program targets K-12 grades and splits into different parts, Monroe said, as they have a summer program which is specifically for rising juniors and seniors, students that are

from federally, enrolled tribes.

Students will take a summer concurrent enrollment class at OU, stay on campus and have enrichment activities in the evenings.

"So we have like game night, we have study night, but we also do college applications and how to do your resume and how to apply for scholarships," Monroe said.

Offering concurrent credit to students for the program, there are two courses offered to rising juniors or seniors that alternative every year between the cancer biology or public health course. One is a gen-ed natural science course, which is a cancer biology class and then the following year, students could take the gen-ed social science requirement, which is more public health. If students are rising juniors, they are eligible to come back for a second year.

With students experiencing the program and are done with classes, they also get to work in a research lab that's on campus.

"So they get this kind of mentorship as far as getting the college credits, what is it like to take a college class and then they actually get research opportunities in the afternoon," Monroe said.

Generally to qualify for the YES Oklahoma program, Monroe said students have to be eligible to be concurrently enrolled at OU.

"So that usually requires a 24 ACT or, 3.0 GPA and the top 3rd of your class or 33% of your class," Monroe said.

Looking forward to the life on the campus, what Sevenstar is most excited about in the YES Oklahoma Program is the lab experience.

"I had seen some of the pictures of my friend whenever he had went, and they got to look at microscopes and I think that'd be pretty fun and cool to look at," Sevenstar said.

Experiencing the college life through the program, Sevenstar said OU has been her dream school and hopes to gain some insight of what it would be like living on campus while being a part of the program.

As a rising senior at El Reno High School in El Reno, Okla., Sevenstar plans to apply to OU and study nursing.

"I think I've always been someone whose been like a caring and empathetic person," Sevenstar said. Sevenstar received her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) from CV Tech school in her junior year of high school. She said she's always



been interested in science and taking care of people.

"Having someone rely on me and taking care of someone is something that always has made me feel fulfilled," Sevenstar said.

Being chosen to be a part of the YES Oklahoma Program, Sevenstar said she hopes the program will give her new connections and experiences, furthering her knowledge on what she wants to do in her future as part of her hopes and ambitions.

"People in my community will see me going after opportunities like this, because this opportunity was open to anyone and anyone could have applied, and even someone

YES PROGRAM pg. 6

## MISSING PERSON CASE

continued from pg. 1

tions, facial reconstruction efforts, and years of investigation, authorities could not determine the man's identity. Investigators estimated he had died sometime between 1993 and 1997. The unidentified decedent eventually became known as Oklahoma County John Doe, and his case remained unsolved for more than two decades.

For years, Richard Pewo's disappearance and Oklahoma County John Doe's unidentified death existed as separate cold cases.

While reviewing unresolved cases, one of our main administrators from Missing & Murdered: Seeking Justice (MMSJ) identified multiple similarities between Richard Pewo and Oklahoma County John Doe. Richard was affiliated with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, a detail that appeared significant given the festival shirt found with the remains. He fit the estimated age range of the decedent and had disappeared during the same general timeframe investigators believed the unidentified man had died. The arch of the eyebrow from the decedent's rendering, along with Richard's distinctive eyebrow arch.

On May 13, 2024, believing the similarities warranted further examination, the MMSJ admin submitted a formal comparison between Richard Pewo's missing person case and Oklahoma County John Doe to the Oklahoma Office of the Chief Medical Examiner through email. Communication followed with agencies involved in both investigations, and efforts were

initiated to obtain the materials needed for a formal comparison. See Me OKC also played a role in helping bring attention to both cases and assisting efforts to move the investigation forward by sharing their own flyers, which we shared here.

In March 2025, both Richard Pewo's missing person profile and the Oklahoma County John Doe profile were removed from NamUs, indicating that an identification may have been made. Days later, officials confirmed that Oklahoma County John Doe had been positively identified as Richard Vaughn Pewo.

The identification ended nearly three decades of uncertainty. For 27 years, Richard's remains had existed in official records as an unidentified decedent while his family continued searching for him elsewhere. Through the comparison submitted by our main admin at MMSJ and the subsequent investigative efforts, the two cases were finally connected and Richard's identity was restored.

Although his name has been returned to him, questions remain about the circumstances of his death. Authorities have not publicly disclosed how Richard died, and the events that led to his death remain unresolved.

For more than 29 years, Richard's family searched for answers about his whereabouts. The confirmation of his identity finally provided certainty, allowing them to begin the process of laying him to rest and mourning a loss that had remained unresolved for decades.

A graveside service for Richard was held on April 4, 2025, at Hammon Mennonite Cemetery in Hammon, Oklahoma. He is remembered as a devoted husband, father, artist, and friend whose absence was felt deeply by those who loved him. Though the mystery of where he was has been solved, the search for answers about how he died continues.

Richard Pewo is no longer a John Doe.

His family finally knows where he is. They can visit his grave, honor his memory, and begin a chapter that many families of the missing never get to experience.

What they still don't know is how he died.

The mystery that began 30 years ago in 1996 has not ended - it has simply entered a new chapter.

If Richard's death was the result of foul play, someone has lived with that secret for nearly 30 years. We believe answers still exist, and we believe someone knows more than they have ever told investigators. Today, we are asking you to help us continue Richard's story.

Please share his case. Talk about it. Keep his name alive. If you know anything about Richard's disappearance, the circumstances surrounding his death, or the people he was associated with before he vanished, please contact the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigations (OSBI) at 1-800-522-8017.

Richard has his name back. Now let's help his family get the answers they have waited decades to hear.



Thursday June 4 the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes' Dept. of Transportation (CADOT) and members of Cheyenne Arapaho MMIP Board and executive office employees met with Dragon Fly Home's CEO Whitney Anderson, the only state certified Human Trafficking Services Non Profit.

The CADOT is seeking input on preventing human trafficking, and exploring developing a Survivor Advisory Committee to assist with the 2026 annual Combat-

ting Human Trafficking in Transportation Impact Award grant.

Today's meeting was to discuss ways to collaborate and support grant application and continued efforts to address human trafficking awareness and resources within the Cheyenne Arapaho communities.

(Pictured are: Joanna Martinez, Raini Howlingwater, Angela Plumley, Whitney Anderson, LaRenda Morgan, Marnita Guerrero.)

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# R.E.Sp.E.C.T.

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achievement while maintaining strong connections to their culture and community.

In addition to supporting youth, the R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program has remained dedicated to the well-being of tribal Elders. Through recreational activities, fitness programs, and community events, the initiative has encouraged active lifestyles and strengthened intergenerational relationships throughout the tribe.

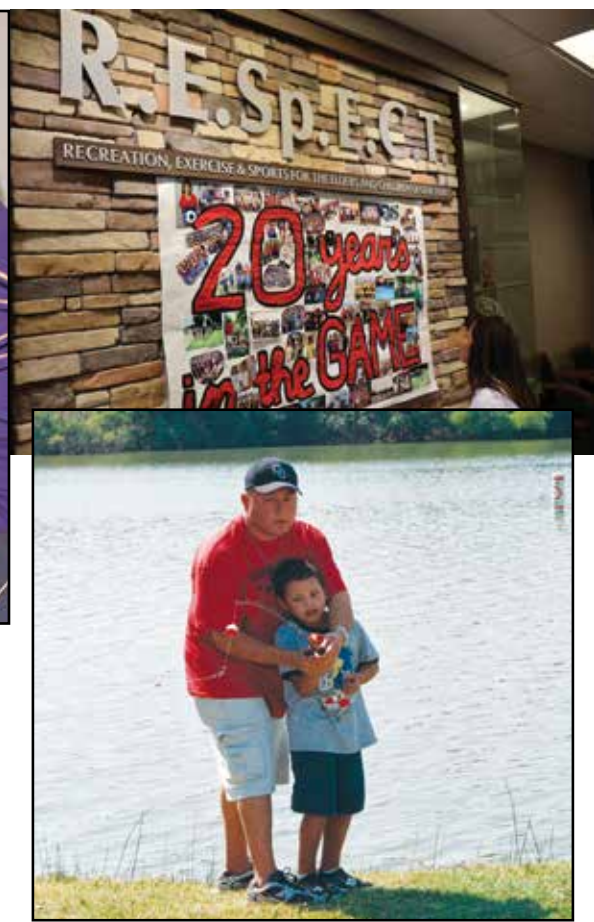
What began as a wellness program has evolved into a model of success that has attracted attention from tribes

across Indian Country. Today, R.E.Sp.E.C.T. is widely recognized as one of the most innovative and unique tribal programs, with many tribal nations looking to it as an example when developing their own health, recreation, and community engagement initiatives.

As the program enters its third decade, tribal officials say its mission remains as important as ever, supporting healthy lifestyles, creating opportunities for youth, honoring Elders, and strengthening the Cheyenne and Arapaho community for future generations.



Above: Elders Day Out August 2008 - Basketweaving



Right: Eddie Hamilton teaches Jared how to fish during R.E.Sp.E.C.T. Program's fishing derby September 2008 in Canton, Okla. (Photos / Rosemary Stephens)

# Warriors of the West

## El Reno's Native All-State Standouts Lead 14-0 Shutout

By Glen Miller, El Reno Tribune

Choosing from 8-man through Class 6A, only 74 players were chosen to take part in next month's Oklahoma Coaches Association's All-State Football Game.

Given the fact that more than 320 schools compete in the aforementioned divisions, it's easy to say that players, good ones, are overlooked for the honor.

It's one of the reasons why El Reno High School football coach Russell Cook helped champion the rekindling of the Oklahoma Native All-State Football Game.

"The more kids that we can recognize in the sport and athletics, the better it is. It's all about kids and it's all about letting kids get to play one final time and letting kids showcase their abilities and represent their tribe

school," said Cook.

The event kicked off for a third straight year at El Reno's Memorial Stadium Friday, June 5.

"It's a great event and a good thing to put on here in El Reno," said Cook.

It's also another opportunity for players to get in front of college scouts.

"Every year we have a few colleges that actually come and watch and sometimes a kid gets an opportunity that they didn't have based on this event. It's all about the kids," said Cook.

The game has more players selected than the OCA outing, with 88 selected for the honor. Cook said 23 different tribes will be represented. Players are chosen following coaches nominations and a criteria scanning



El Reno High School had six players selected for the game, front row from left, Jaron Youngbear and Rustyn Cook; back row from left, Jerin Sandoval, Vicente Baxcajay, Avery Mouse and Omar Tristan. (Photo / Glen Miller)



process by the Oklahoma Native All-State Association selection committee.

"It's big for our community and it's great recognition for our school. We put on a great event and it's growing bigger and bigger every year," said Cook.

El Reno will be represented by Rustyn Cook, Pawnee/Cherokee, Jaron Youngbear, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Avery Mouse, Cheyenne, Arapaho Tribes, Vicente Baxcajay, Cheyenne, Arapaho and Jerin Sandoval, Apache.

"That's the most we have

ever had," said Cook.

Players had a week full of events ahead of the game including swimming, bowling, a buffalo tour at Concho and a Gourd dance at Jenks Simmons Field House.

El Reno's entries should play a key role for the West squad, led by Cook, who played a major role on both sides of the ball his senior year, starting all 10 games at quarterback.

He posted 744 rushing yards off 147 carries for a 5.1 yards per carry average - all career-high marks. He

logged five rushing touchdowns and one 2-point conversion to close with 32 points, which was second on the team in scoring. Those were also career-high marks.

Cook more than tripled his passing numbers from 2024 en route to setting career best marks in passing yards (412), touchdowns (6), completions (30), attempts (75) and completion percentage (40).


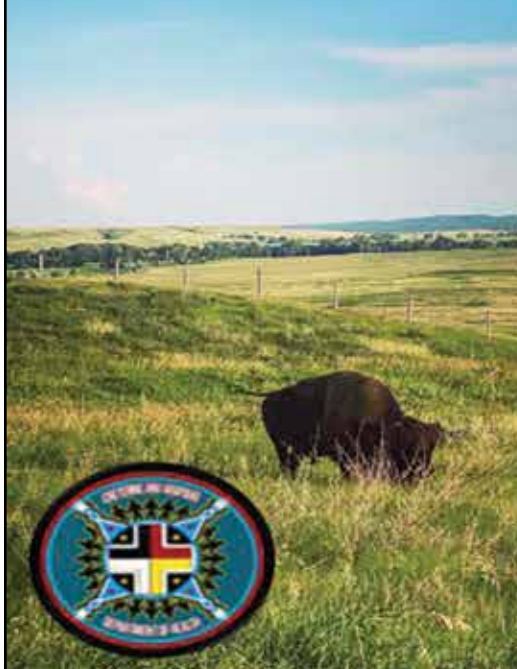

He led the team in total tackles with 88 stops and posted a team-high 41 solo

stops. Cook added two broken-up passes, an interception, one sack and a forced fumble.

Mouse had his hands involved on both sides of the ball, snagging three passes for 26 yards and a touchdown. He carried the ball five times for 2 yards and logged a pair of 2-point conversion runs, which do not count in season rushing totals.

He logged 55 tackles, 27 of which were solo, and had one of the team's three pick-

FOOTBALL pg. 7

# PRAIRIE SAGE

## Váno'éstse, Nookhoose

CHEYENNE

ARAPAHO

For both Cheyenne and Arapahos, Sage is one of our traditional medicines that we use in our ceremonies, such as sweats, Sun dances, and Native American Church.

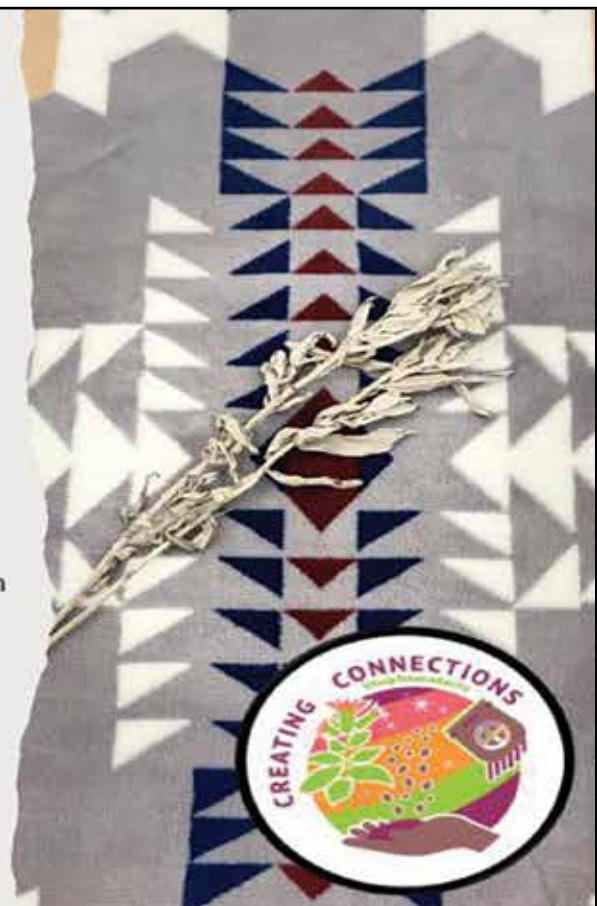

We use it to brush off any negative 'things' that may be on our bodies. Helping by cleansing our mind and bodies, before our ceremonies begin.

The aromatic leaves can also be boiled to make a tea to ease digestion issues, colds, fevers, and infections.

Circle of Cultures Program

CHEYENNE and ARAPAHO TRIBES DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

A: 1950 S. Shepard Ave., El Reno, OK | T: (405) 295-1756 | E: Prevention@cheyenneandarapaho-nsn.gov

# NATIVE AMERICAN HALL OF FAME

continued from pg. 3

“Those programs impacted generations of Native people,” Shield said. “They helped keep communities informed and connected.”

The mansion’s exhibits are designed not simply to preserve history, but to inspire future generations. Shield said he hopes visitors will leave with a deeper appreciation for the Native leaders whose accomplishments helped shape opportunities available today.

“It’s not about the building itself,” he said. “It’s about the people and the stories inside.”

That message resonated throughout the day’s program. Among the featured speakers was Robert Doore of the Blackfeet Nation, former director of guest experience for the Washington Commanders and one of the highest-ranking Native Americans in professional football leadership in modern times.

Doore spoke about the importance of role models and the power of Native achievement.

“People like Jim Thorpe showed me that I belonged in places that once seemed impossible,” Doore said. “They made dreams real.”

He encouraged attendees to continue sharing Native stories and experiences with future generations.

“The Hall of Fame is more than plaques and awards,” he said. “It’s our stories. There is power in our stories and power in our experiences.”

The celebration drew Native leaders, families and supporters from across the region. Relatives of legendary athlete and Hall of Fame inductee Jim Thorpe attended the event, while Madison Woodward, Miss Indian Oklahoma City 2026 and a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, joined Michaela Yellowfish Elizondo, Jr. Miss Indian Oklahoma City and a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, and Angelica Papiakitah, Little Miss Indian Oklahoma City and a citizen of the Kickapoo Tribe, in distributing commemorative coins featuring the mansion.

The Anquoe family, renowned Kiowa drum leaders, performed the National Native American Hall of Fame song during the ceremony.



Hall of Fame leadership also recognized key partners, including Sovereign Bank, for helping secure financing for the project.

Sequoyah Simermeyer, vice president of FanDuel and a member of the Hall of Fame’s board of directors, said the opening represents years of dedication and collaboration.

“It’s exciting to see what all of the hard work has created,” Simermeyer said. “This place will serve future generations and help new people learn these stories.”

Although the building is now open to visitors, Shield described the event as more of a soft opening than a finished product.

Future plans include converting the mansion’s former swimming pool area into a theater for educational films, presentations and guest speakers. An architectural concept for additional exhibit galleries is already on display, offering a glimpse of the Hall of Fame’s long-term vision.

Support for the project has also extended into the surrounding neighborhood. Shield said local leaders, including Oklahoma City Ward 7 Councilmember Camal Pennington, have expressed enthusiasm for the Hall of Fame’s presence in the community.

As the ceremony concluded, Shield reminded attendees that the institution belongs to Native people and future generations.

“This is something you’ll be able to tell your children and grandchildren about,” he said. “This place is for all of us. It’s here to honor those who came before us and inspire those who will come after.”

# GARDEN

continued from pg. 2



The list of plants that have been identified for the garden, with the help of Yellowman who played a big role in helping identify traditional plants, include sweetgrass, white sage, ceremonial tobacco, skunkbush, peppermint and curlycup gumweed. They will also be planting willow trees, dogwood trees, chokecherry, Indian tea and then eventually planting buffalo grass and milkweed.

Choosing a quiet desolate space for the garden, the medicine wheel garden location was chosen to be planted near the cabin area in Concho. Buffalo said the particular place for the garden is perfect because the medicine wheel and the plants and trees that they’re plantings is for ceremonial uses, which is spiritual and the area where the cabin is located is very quiet.

“It’s away from any kind of traffic, it’s away from any kind of major noise, it doesn’t have too much noise

pollution in the area so I believe that place is the perfect spot for this garden, because there are other areas here at the tribes that we have looked at for this garden but none of them really kind of fit and I’m a very spiritual person so praying about it was a big part for this,” Buffalo said.

Overall, Buffalo said the long-term goal with the medicine wheel garden is that she hopes it continues to stay active for community and tribal citizens to utilize for its traditional uses.

“I hope the garden will be used, I hope it continues to thrive, I hope people will be a part of it, will take pride in it and be appreciative of this beautiful project that we have put together for our traditional medicines, for education, for community involvement and to also help with the language part, because our language is part of it and our language is important,” Buffalo said.

# YES PROGRAM

continued from pg. 4

like me who’s native can do these kind of things and not have to go into like addiction or drugs or anything, that there’s more to life,” Sevenstar said.

Selecting Sevenstar out of the pool of applicants, Monroe said Sevenstar was chosen because she came across as curious, sincere, and genuinely excited to try something new.

“Those qualities matter to us because YES OK asks students to step into new spaces, meet new people, and be open to learning things they may not have had the chance to experience before. We also felt Dezarar would bring an important perspective to the 2026 YES cohort as a student from the El Reno community and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes,” Monroe said.

In YES, Monroe said students not only learn from the course, mentors, and lab experiences, they also learn from each other.

“Dezarar’s background, interests, and experiences



will add to that shared learning. We believe she will ask questions, work hard, and grow through the experiences YES provides, and we are excited to have her on board this year and be part of our ever expanding student network,” Monroe said.

With the saying, “YES for Life,” Monroe said the program will continue to support students after the program and after students graduate with professional development, letters of recommendation and overall advise as they enter into college or the workforce.



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by krista blackwolf

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**Gabriella Damian**  
Acadiana High School



**Synda Fire**  
AUA+ and Honor Society  
Moore Norman Technology Center



**Jacelynn Lee**  
Beekman Honor Society  
Lake Weir High School

Ancestors Touch Massage Therapy LLC

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Debra Woolworth - LMT

# FOOTBALL

continued from pg. 5

six touchdowns, while adding four broken-up passes.

Youngbear was another lineman in both trenches and closed the year with three solo tackles and 16 total.

Coaches for the West team in the 2026 Oklahoma Native All-State Football Game had several different personnel groupings named by the high schools in which players graduated.

The one grouping called on the most in times of need had a familiar ring.

“El Reno,” said coaches.

A call answered by graduates Omar Tristan, Jaron Youngbear, Vicente Baxcajay, Rustyn Cook and Avery Mouse. Classmate Jerin Sandoval was also rostered in the West’s 14-0 shutout of the East.

“I think that grouping (El Reno) did pretty well, just like it did all year long,” said Cook.

Linemen Baxcajay, Youngbear and Tristan spent time in both trenches. Cook started on defense but had his name called at quarterback in the first West series.

“I didn’t think I was going to get to play quarterback. It was just one of those things that happened. We started moving the ball so we just kept going with it,” said Cook.

After trading possessions, Cook engineered an 11-play, 45-yard West scoring drive behind a line anchored by Tristan and Baxcajay. He carried the ball five times for 16 yards, the last a 2-yard plunge up the middle into the end zone with 2:25 left in the first period.

Cook and Thomas quarterback Tye Littlebird guided the West on their next possession to pay dirt, covering 95 yards and 17 plays. Cook carried the ball five times for 32 yards and two first downs.

Littlebird threw a 5-yard touchdown pass to Woodland’s Lucky Heath as time expired in the half. The West went back to the air for the 2-point conversion as R.J. Perry passed to Chase Bivins for a 14-0 halftime lead.

The West took the ball coming out of the half and went on a 17-play drive down to the East 6-yard line before Littlebird was picked off. Cook logged 14 yards rushing off four attempts and found the end zone from a yard out but the play was wiped out by penalty.

“I thought I had another one,” said Cook.

The West led 14-0 after three periods before the game was called with 6:23 left after a scuffle.

The final numbers were dominated by the West on both sides of the ball. The offense rolled up 232 total yards off 51 plays for an average of 4.54 yards per snap. The team threw for 58 yards and rushed for 174 yards on 38 attempts or a 4.58 yards per carry average.

The West had 15 first downs, 12 of those coming on the ground.

“We ended up with the win in our final high school game and that was much better than a loss. I was glad to be out on the field with my boys and get the win,” said Baxcajay.

Woodland’s Khamdyn Patterson was the West’s top rusher with 91 yards on 19 carries. Cook followed with 62 yards on 13 carries, a 4.76 yard average, with six first-down carries.

Only two of Cook’s rushes were stopped for zero or negative yards.

Littlebird carried two times for 13 yards, followed by Jayvis Holmes of Kellyville with two rushes for 13 yards.

Cook missed his only pass attempt, while Little-



*Cheyenne and Arapaho Lt. Gov. Hershel Gorham visits with some of the Cheyenne and Arapaho football players prior to the start of the game. (Photo / Chris Roman Nose)*



*Madison Switch-Fixico from the Red Horn Legacy Dance Group performs the Hoop Dance during halftime of the 2026 Oklahoma Native All-State Football Game. (Photo / Glen Miller)*



*Courtney Reeder Whiteman is one of the dance performers during half time. (Photo / Glen Miller)*

bird completed 6-of-12 passes with the interception for 58 yards. Heath caught two passes for 25 yards, while Perry snagged four passes for 33 yards.

Mouse spent most of his time in the defensive backfield for the West, closing with a pass break-up. The East logged only four first downs and 129 yards of offense, 118 of that through the air off 8-of-16 passing.

The West defense kept the East rushers

to nine carries for 11 yards, two of those carries going for negative yards. One of those was an 8-yard loss on a fumbled pitch-out that was rushed on a quarterback pressure by Tristan.

Cook added a solo tackle, an assist, two quarterback hurries and a sack on the game’s final drive. Tristian followed with two hurries and a solo tackle. Youngbear closed with a solo tackle.

# SPECIAL SESSION

continued from pg. 1

tribes manage this and if we have more land or we buy more land, can the tribes come and manage those lands, whether they’re in your area, if you have some kind of connection to those areas they are considering, they have land in Colorado, they have land all over the country, they’re asking can the tribes manage this property,” Wassana said.

Item number one passed unanimously with a vote of eight yes.

A resolution to appropriate funds for a vacation buy back.

Ruiz read the resolution, stating the resolution was introduced due to the increase of the cost of living and other financial pressures affecting employees.

“In years past we’ve had vacation buyback done from the midyear, also done in December, so this resolution just entails the ability for our employees to have access to those funds at an earlier date,” Ruiz said.

For the vacation buyback, \$290,000 will be appropriated from Tax Commission funds and any unexpended funds remaining from the appropriation would be returned.

Item number two passed with a vote of 7 and 1 abstaining.

A resolution to approve the submission of the Emergency Management for the total amount of \$60,000 with a 50% cost-match requirement of \$30,000 for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes Emergency Management Program.

Sidney Jackson, grant research specialist for the Planning and Development

program, introduced the resolution, explaining the grant required a 50% cost match with would come from Emergency Management program’s operational budget. The resolution wouldn’t be asking for any appropriation funds, just support as required by the grant as the money will be used toward plans to install two tornado sirens.

Charles Black, Emergency Management director said he planned to install the two sirens in Hammon and off the Geary exit.

“I plan on putting one out there by Hammon at the ERC on the northside so that will cover the ERC, the casino, the Sundance and the powwow grounds, it’ll reach all that right there. Since we don’t really have nothing out there for the city of Hammon, that location will be really ideal for us,” Black said.

And then the second one, Black said is going to be at exit 108 at the casino.

Wassana asked who turns the sirens on and when they turn them on, which Black answered it’s handheld pushed, where Black has to actively go to each location himself to push. Black suggested investing in a mobile feature app that would allow him to set all sirens off at once from his phone, without him having to go to each location, however the cost was out of his budget costing him around \$2,000 for the feature.

“Once we get the two additional, we’ll have five all together, so we’ll have the potential of setting them off on our phones, we can go that route I just didn’t really have the funds in my budget

to get those done, I just been going around testing them every month,” Black said.

Sleeper suggested adding additional funds to the resolution to include the app feature for the sirens be installed, to which Black agreed.

Item number three passed unanimously with a vote of eight yes.

A resolution to support the submission of the FY 2025 DHS FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant.

Jackson said the resolution contained outdated information as the grant initially stated \$2 million and the correct amount was \$1 million and they were no longer requiring a cost match be appropriated from the tribes.

“This project will fund a safe room and after sending in a survey Canton was determined the community most in need of one. Charles and I, Hannah, our grant writer, visited the site, or several site locations and determined the patch or area of land between the head start in Canton and the casino to be really perfect,” Jackson said.

Jackson said the parking lot could be used as in-kind resources contributed to their cost match, as they intent on getting the land appraised and using that toward the cost match.

With the safe rooms at the head start and casino not big enough to hold big groups of people, the newly projected safe room is proposed to hold up to 250 people.

Item number four passed unanimously with a vote of eight yes.

A resolution to submit a grant proposal for produce

prescription pilot program by the Indian Health Service, Health and Human Services, HHS-2026-IHS-PPPP-0001.

Marcos Baros, director for the Diabetes Wellness program introduced the resolution stating the resolution was to support a grant they once applied to before in 2023.

“They only awarded five, or they only funded five but were awarded just not funded so we needed a score of 70 to get awarded, so we’re basically just going to use that same application to update our data for what summary we had for our weaknesses,” Baros said.

The Produce Prescription Pilot Program provides funding for produce prescription methods to help reduce food insecurity, increase knowledge via nutrition education and increase access to fresh foods.

“We’re looking at about \$160 worth of produce per month per participant so that would be like \$80 biweekly that they receive in fresh produce,” Baros said.

Baros said clients would have to meet certain criteria, ideally metabolic conditions, such as diabetes, heart cardiovascular, high blood pressure and then also indicate they have food insecurities.

The PG&C Office in conjunction with Dept. of Health and Diabetes Wellness program will submit a grant proposal for \$250,000.

Item number five passed unanimously with a vote of eight yes.

A resolution for the appropriation of funds for the development of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Oklahoma City Building into an Outpa-

tient Treatment, Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP), Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP), Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), and Specialty Pharmacy Facility.

Connor Bushyhead, executive director for the Dept. of Health explained the resolution, stating they are requesting funds to build out the rest of the Oklahoma City facility to turn it into an outpatient, PHP, IOP, pharmacy, specialty pharmacy, Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) services.

Bushyhead said the focus would be on medications that prevent drug cravings and maintain sobriety and decrease relapse and opiate abuse.

“With the specialty pharmacy, we are looking at applying for a 340B specialty pharmacy ... so we can get anywhere up to 89% above the amount on those medications that are retail value,” Bushyhead said.

The purpose, Bushyhead said is to help expand services but to also generate revenue to sustain the area and building, use the additional revenue to build into a larger plan, phase I would include the inpatient rehab facility with sober living.

The estimated timeline of the project would be six months to have it up operational and running. The projected revenue to come in for outpatient alone is estimated to be \$2.3 million and then specialist pharmacy would be estimated to be around \$5.9 million, with a combined revenue of \$7.9 million.

Bushyhead said they have been working with consultants helping develop the plan, as there is an idea and

vision to have something bigger to expand on services.

Tammy Neihart, consultant, said the Oklahoma City facility is a good start and something they can get up and running in six months.

“We can start generating revenue and then the bigger goal is really the ecosystem because the ecosystem is really about becoming self-sustainable and not relying on IHS or the federal government and billing commercial insurance, because that’s what these programs are doing right now we’re sending our people out to other programs, we’re supporting their ecosystems when we can really be doing this on our own, but it’s going to take time to get there,” Neihart said.

Wassana added the project would be the tribe’s entry level into the health care field.

“We offer services but we don’t actually - approach that we’re hands on diagnosing and we refer and if we write prescriptions, this is kind of a level, a small level to say, can we do it ourselves or can we get the people around us to handle or manage it,” Wassana said.

This is our entry level start, Wassana said.

“To say can we start managing our own healthcare in a different way instead of just IHS or just maybe our own health department saying this is how you need to be healthy, we’re actually billing prescriptions, we’re actually diagnosing, we’re actually doing a lot of things in the health field,” Wassana said.

Item number six passed unanimously with a vote of eight yes.





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- ST LOUIS TURN IN 1-1:30PM
- BABY BACK 2-2:30PM
- PEOPLE'S CHOICE BUFFALO 3-4:30PM
- AWARDS 5:00 PM

**Payouts**

RIB EACH ENTRY	BUFFALO ANCILLARY
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2ND \$1,000+ TROPHY	2ND \$350+ TROPHY
3RD \$750+TROPHY	3RD \$200+TROPHY
4TH \$600+TROPHY	4TH \$100+TROPHY
5TH \$450+TROPHY	5TH-10TH CERTIFICATE
6TH \$350	
7TH \$300	KIDS GRILLED CHEESE
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