

# 2022



THE CHICKASAW NATION

# VETERANS

## SERVICES

NEWSLETTER



# CHOKMA!

The Chickasaw Nation is dedicated to serving and celebrating our veterans. We honor the sacrifices of Chickasaw servicemen and women by providing a range of quality programs, services and opportunities designed to support the specific needs of our modern Chickasaw warriors.

In the following pages, we are pleased to share information about some of the resources available to Chickasaw veterans and highlight stories of the determined spirit, bravery and perseverance of our people.

Thank you for your service and inspiring example of selflessness.

Sincerely,

*Bill Anoatubby*

Bill Anoatubby, Governor  
The Chickasaw Nation



Chris Anoatubby, Lt. Governor



# CHICKASAW VETERANS CONFERENCE

## RETURNS WITH A 2023 GATHERING IN THACKERVILLE, OKLAHOMA



Above: Chickasaw veteran James Sweetman visits with Chickasaw Nation Long Term Care Director Shelly McClendon, receiving information about health care programs and services.



Above: Warrior Society member and Chickasaw veteran Kenneth Horton at the annual Chickasaw Veterans Conference in Thackerville, Oklahoma.

# CHICKASAW VETERANS WALL



The virtual Chickasaw Veterans Wall honors the lives of Chickasaw veterans and pays tribute to their military service. Chickasaw veterans and their families are invited to submit information to be included in the virtual wall. The virtual wall features a veteran's photo, military branch and dates of service for both past and living veterans.

For more information or to complete a form online, visit

[CHICKASAW.NET/VETERANSWALL](http://CHICKASAW.NET/VETERANSWALL)



The 2023 Chickasaw Veterans Conference will take place Wednesday, June 14, at the WinStar World Casino and Resort Convention Center in Thackerville, Oklahoma.

This will be the first official, in-person gathering for Chickasaw veterans since 2019. Mark your calendars for this event, which will include guest speakers and sessions on resources, programs and services for veterans. A highlight is meeting other Chickasaw veterans, fellowship and camaraderie.

U.S. Navy veteran Richard (R.D.) Dickens, from Oklahoma City, sees the conference as a way to make important connections, whether to services or fellow veterans.

"The conference helps out. It gives an opportunity to bridge the gap. The more we find out about what is available to us, what is offered, things the tribe can help with, the more people can get involved. When we find out what is available to us, we can get out there and participate," he said.

He is especially a proponent of veterans meeting up and supporting each other.

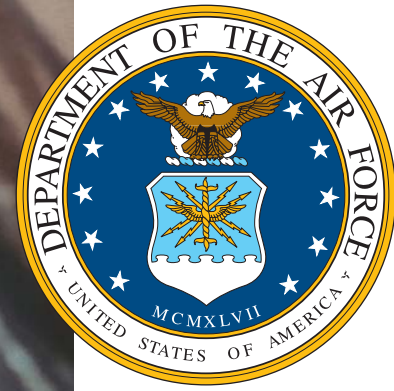
"It's good to talk with other vets and be around other vets. We don't really want to boast about ourselves. We've got a job to do, and we just go do it. So, having people out there pushing us and encouraging us, helping us understand — that has always been helpful," Dickens said.

"What's going on? How do you get involved? How can I help? I know vets, we are always thinking, how can I help somebody else? So having an avenue to get in and be a part of something like that is very valuable," he said.

Christy Dunning, Army veteran from Blanchard, Oklahoma, attended a conference and enjoyed the company.

"Just to be in the room with other veterans — I always thought it was an honor to be in the room with World War II veterans, and how they were honored. I went in 2019 and it was really special," she said.

For more information, visit [Chickasaw.net/VetConf](http://Chickasaw.net/VetConf), email [Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net](mailto:Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net) or call (580) 272-2550.



## ANGELIA PICKENS GRIFFIN

### CHICKASAW WOMAN SEES THE WORLD THROUGH MILITARY SERVICE

Born in Michigan, Angelia Pickens Griffin spent most of her childhood in east St. Louis. She enjoyed many summers in Oklahoma visiting family and graduated from Lincoln Senior High School in 1973.

In the years following high school, Griffin decided to follow in her father's footsteps and enlist in the United States Air Force. Her father served in the Korean War and was a big inspiration for her to join the service. Her father was very supportive and offered the following advice, "remember to be respectful of others and always treat others the way you want to be treated. With that, you shouldn't have any problems."

"It's all about respect," Griffin said, whose military career spanned from July 1976 to August 1996.

Griffin also recalled important advice from her grandmother, which helped during her 20 years of military service. "She said, 'Make sure that this is something you want to do because many people will be depending on you.'" As time went on, Griffin always remembered what her grandmother told her.

Griffin attended basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. Lackland Air Force Base is the sole location for the United States Air Force enlisted basic military training. At basic training she learned "structure

and discipline," which helped her through the military, as did her family upbringing at home.

After basic training, she completed a nine-week training session at the Gulfport Combat Readiness Training Center in Gulfport, Mississippi. From there, she spent 13 months at Altus Air Force Base in Oklahoma. Following her time in Altus, Griffin was stationed at the Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina and was there until 1980. Eventually, she made her way to Scott Air Force Base in St. Clair County, Illinois, where she later retired.

Griffin's favorite memory was being stationed at Zaragoza Air Base near Zaragoza, Spain, from 1985 to 1992. She loved being in Spain.

"If they had not closed the base, I would still be there. I enjoyed everything about it," Griffin said.

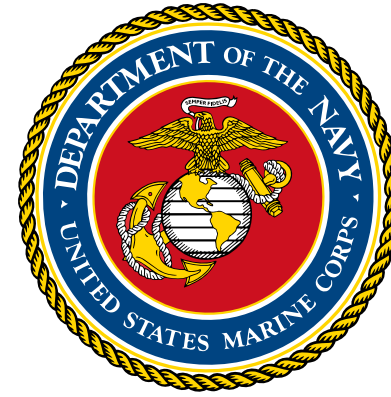
"The people were genuinely friendly, a great experience."

Her first 10 years in the Air Force was spent in personnel, then she became a personnel assistant manager. Another highlight in her career was assisting the Air Force with the implementation of computer technology as part of her role in systems management. She retired as a master sergeant Aug. 1, 1996.

Following her military retirement, she attended Saint Louis University and earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Through her career, Griffin worked as a paralegal and teacher at a Catholic school. She also worked as a principal's secretary at a middle school.

She has been married since 1981 and has seven children. Griffin currently resides in Belleville, Illinois.

**Top Left: Angelia Pickens Griffin first year in Air Force basic training in 1976.**



## MICHAEL VONTUNGELN

### A WELL-TRAVELED MARINE COMES HOME

Michael VonTungeln has spent much of his lifelong career serving others. This includes more than 20 years of dedicated service to the Marine Corps. He lost his father at a young age but was blessed to have a close family friend as a strong role model in his life. This family friend advised him to avoid one thing — do not join the Marine Corps. "That was the one thing he told me never to do, and that's exactly what I did," Michael said.

In 1967, VonTungeln graduated high school and later started college at Oklahoma Panhandle State University in Guymon, Oklahoma. The following year, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. VonTungeln remembers his mother being proud of him because of the sacrifices he made to join the Marine Corps. His late father had also served in the military and was a World War II veteran.

He elected to attend Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia, where he stayed the next six months. Soon after, he spent 14

months at the Fort Sill U.S. Army Field Artillery School in Lawton, Oklahoma. Throughout his time serving, he was stationed in many places, including Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Midwest City, Oklahoma; and Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, where

he spent most of his time. During his service, he learned what it meant to have pride for his fellow Marines who always stood by him.

In 1990, when VonTungeln was stationed in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The Gulf War lasted from 1990-1991. When Iraq led the invasion and annexation of Kuwait, this caused a conflict between Iraq and a gathered force of about 30 nations. He remembers his buddies saying, "We are going to war." VonTungeln's response was "If you think we are going to war over that, you're crazy." Three days later, they were sent back to the mainland. Two days after that, they were in Saudi Arabia.

After the yearlong war, VonTungeln returned home and retired from the Marine Corps. He continued his education at Hawaii Pacific University from



**Above: Michael VonTungeln with his wife Connie.**  
**Top Right: VonTungeln on tour during the Gulf War.**



1991-1994, where he obtained his master's in information systems. He went on to serve as a senior computer operations coordinator for Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center for six years. VonTungeln spent his final working years at Dynamics Research as a network administrator, retiring after 20 years.

VonTungeln now resides in Ardmore, Oklahoma with his wife of 52 years, Connie. They have two children together, John and Amy.

## COMMUNITY DINNERS

We are grateful to our Chickasaw veterans for their service. At each Chickasaw Nation community dinner and gathering, we acknowledge and show our gratitude to those who bravely defended our country for their courage and sacrifice. To learn more about upcoming community events in your area, please visit [Chickasaw.net/CommunityGathering](http://Chickasaw.net/CommunityGathering).





**DONALD YEGGE**



## DONALD YEGGE AND KRISTOPHER YEGGE

### MILITARY FAMILY TRADITION

Donald Yegge and Kristopher Yegge are both proud members of the Chickasaw Warrior Society. While the father and son served at different times, their dedication and commitment to serving our country remained the same.

Donald Yegge served in Vietnam in the Navy from 1965 to 1969. Kristopher Yegge retired from the Washington Air National Guard April 30, 2022, after more than 20 years of service.

Born in 1946, Donald Yegge spent much of his childhood in Los Angeles. When he was 17, he went to live with his aunt and uncle in northern California, close to the Nevada border. He graduated from Downieville High School, a small community where he was one of seven seniors in his graduating class. After high school, he worked for the U.S. Forest Service as a fire control aid and a smokejumper, a firefighter who provides the initial response to area wildfires.

Originally, he planned to join the Air Force because he had experience with jumping out of helicopters as a smokejumper. The recruiter told him, "How would you like to fly helicopters instead of jumping out of them?" and explained to him about a new flight program the Army was offering. By the time he had his mind made up, the program was no longer available.

After speaking with his father about his decisions, his father told him if he wanted to see more of the world, he should join the Navy. Donald Yegge's father had been in the Navy and served on the USS San Diego.

After enlisting, he was sent to basic training at Naval Training Center San Diego. After completing basic training, he did two tours of Vietnam and was on board the USS Frank Knox DDR-742 from 1967 to 1969. Named after the Secretary of the Navy, the ship Frank Knox was a Gearing-class destroyer that was active from 1944 to 1971. While onboard, he got to see vast areas of the Pacific Ocean. New Zealand and Australia were among his favorite places to visit. He remembers a good experience and meeting great people.

While in the Navy, he served as a gunner's mate who specialized in small arms, torpedoes, vertical launching systems and gun mount systems.

In 1969, after returning from Vietnam, Donald Yegge moved back home to Sierra County, California, to take care of his father. He later began working with veterans, assisting them with benefits and other resources as a veteran services officer, fulfilling a role his county did not offer at the time. He was a facilitator for the Sierra County Youth Programs and Drug

and Alcohol prevention programs for 20 years. "I really enjoyed working with the kids from all over the county," he said.

Donald Yegge learned of his Chickasaw heritage at a late age, but it is something he has been proud to share with his family. He married in 1974 and two of his sons followed him into the military. His oldest son, Robert Yegge, served in the Army Rangers during the Bosnian War. Robert is now retired and lives in Hawaii. His youngest son, Kristopher Yegge, recently retired from the Washington Air National Guard.

Donald Yegge still has strong ties to the Navy, as he is on the USS Frank Knox Reunion Association and participates in the annual meetings. He is also responsible for starting a veteran's group for the Chickasaw Nation in northern California to keep others informed of updates from the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CALVET) and other veteran organizations. Donald Yegge lives in Loyalton, California, where he raised his family with his wife Rebecca, and where he has spent most of his retirement.

Kristopher Yegge grew up in the Sierra Nevada in the small town of Loyalton where he graduated high school. "Being from a small town, I was ready to go out and see the world," he said.

While attending Chico State University, he met his wife, Johanna. It was around this time he became interested in flying. He started working his summers at the local airport, refueling vessels and learning more about aviation. He ended up using his student loans to pay for flying lessons. "I fell in love with

flying," he remembers. The airport manager gave him information about the Air Force.

He later visited the Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington, to see if he liked the location. Kristopher Yegge liked the area and decided it was where he wanted to raise his family. After moving to Spokane, he enlisted in the Air National Guard.

Kristopher Yegge attended basic training in 2002 at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. He wanted to make the pilot slot, so he made it to the rank of an E4 and was selected. He went to officers training and came back as a second lieutenant. Pilot training led him to Enid, Oklahoma, at Vance Air Force Base. He remembers pilot training being "the most difficult year and a half of my life." He said his wife and teammates were big motivators in helping him finish.

He made deployments to both Afghanistan and Iraq. Kristopher Yegge got to see Germany, England and other eastern European countries.

He served for 20 years at Fairchild Air Force Base, where he flew the KC-135 air refueling tanker before cross training into the field of logistics. His family was supportive while he was in the military. He remembers hearing stories from his father Donald Yegge about his service and experiences in the Navy. "It's a real sense of pride in my family about serving," Kristopher Yegge said. "I have a ton of respect for anyone that puts on that uniform and serves this country."

Kristopher Yegge credits astronaut John Herrington as a big inspiration and has seen him speak at a book signing. "It's powerful to see someone who represents your people, doing well," he said.

In 2015, Kristopher Yegge earned his degree at Washington State University with a master's in primary education and a teaching certificate.

His favorite memory was his retirement ceremony March 2022. A local First American teenager in Spokane sang the national anthem in her traditional Salish language. "It was a memory that I wanted to end my service on, a beautiful moment for me and my family," he said. His father traveled to the ceremony and



**Above: Kristopher Yegge is presented with his Chickasaw Warrior Society Vest by father and Navy veteran Don Yegge.**



**KRISTOPHER YEGGE**

presented Kristopher Yegge with his Chickasaw Warrior Society vest.

He is currently a math teacher at Glover Middle School in Spokane and has been teaching more than 10 years. "Teaching is a way for me to serve my local community, also. I love it," he said.

He said being Chickasaw "has been a huge sense of pride for my family." He is thankful that his children are able to embrace this part of their lives.

Kristopher Yegge, his wife, Johanna, and their two sons, Forrest and Elliot, reside in Spokane, Washington.

# CHICKASAW NATION ASSISTS VETERANS

## AND ACTIVE-DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS THROUGH A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS

Throughout history, Chickasaw warriors have fought to preserve the freedoms of our tribe and country. When we needed you, you were there for us. To return this unwavering support to our brave men and women, the Chickasaw Nation offers a growing number of programs and services meant to fulfill the needs of Chickasaw veterans and active service members.

### VETERANS SERVICES

Through the Chickasaw Nation Veterans Services program, you and your family can find assistance in receiving benefits and information. The program offers outreach services, acquisition of veterans' benefits and information from U.S. Veterans Affairs and other veteran organizations.



Above: Chickasaw Veterans Ronald Burris and David Burris, son and father both proud members of the Chickasaw Warrior Society.

Chickasaw Nation Director of Veterans Services Ray Orphan explained how his team fulfills the mission of the Chickasaw Nation, "by advocating for our Chickasaw veterans and their families. This is done by providing services that honor them for their service and assisting them in obtaining benefits or services when needed."

Employees with Chickasaw Nation Veterans Services will assist you in participating in veterans' programs to take advantage of veterans' benefits offered by the U.S. government. Whether you need aid in the areas of health care, education, disability or records, Chickasaw Nation Veterans Services is there to help.

Richard (R.D.) Dickens, U.S. Navy veteran from Oklahoma City, turned to veterans services when needing a copy of his military service records.

"I sat down with Ray Orphan; he got the information he needed from me. He did all the work, sent it in, several months later I got the DD-214 like I needed. That was a big help, because when you try to do it yourself online, it's a little bit difficult to figure out," Dickens explained.

Veterans can qualify for this assistance during peacetime or wartime. Your military health records are not needed to file claims. This service is available both inside and outside of the Chickasaw Nation. For more information, call (580) 272-2550 or visit [Chickasaw.net/Veterans](http://Chickasaw.net/Veterans)

### VETERANS LODGE

The Chickasaw Nation Veterans lodge is a place where you can comfortably gather, relax and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow veterans and brothers or sisters in arms. It is a place to serve as a reminder that the Chickasaw Nation honors and appreciates all who have served this country and our people.

Greg Roller, who served in the U.S. Army and Coast Guard, recently visited the lodge for the first time and shared his excitement on the facility.



Above: Veteran and Warrior Society member Sharon Cole.

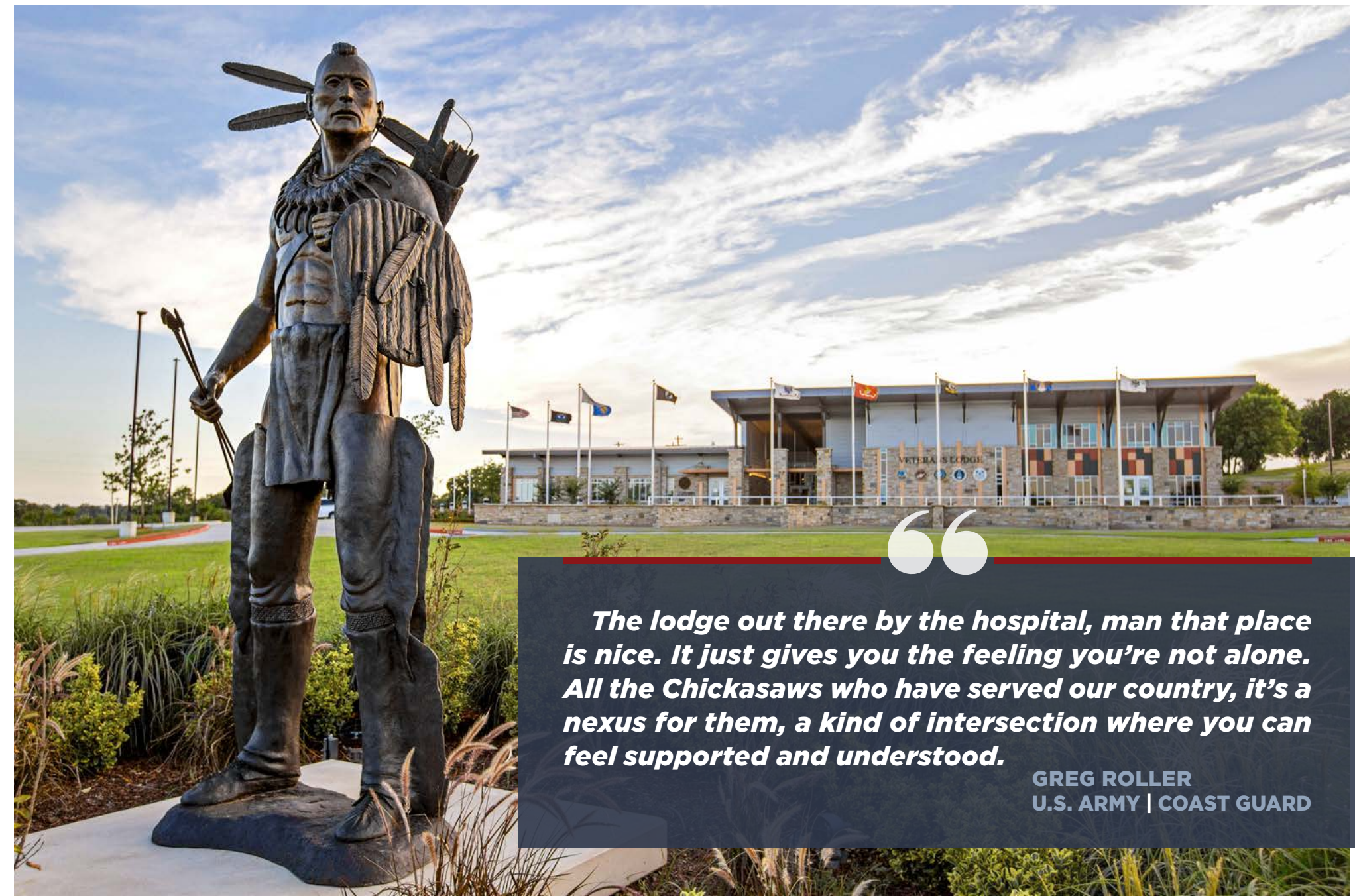
"The lodge out there by the hospital, man that place is nice. It just gives you the feeling you're not alone. All the Chickasaws who have served our country, it's a nexus for them, a kind of intersection where you can feel supported and understood," he said.

Dickens said "It's a place I would love to go and be comfortable. I like the fact they put in the effort to create something nice for the vets and show them a lot of respect."

The Lodge is open and welcoming veterans from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Chickasaw Nation holidays, and is located on the Ada South Campus near the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center. The address is 1909 Warrior Way, Ada, OK 74820. For more information, contact Chickasaw Nation Veterans Services at (580) 272-2550 or [Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net](mailto:Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net).

### CHICKASAW VETERANS JACKETS

The Chickasaw Nation offers our veterans exclusive jackets for those who have served in the military. Jackets are available to first-time recipients. The jackets are also offered to veterans who have any discharge status other than dishonorable and are not serving active duty. Call the Chickasaw Nation Veterans Services office at (580) 272-2550 or email [Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net](mailto:Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net) to apply.



*"The lodge out there by the hospital, man that place is nice. It just gives you the feeling you're not alone. All the Chickasaws who have served our country, it's a nexus for them, a kind of intersection where you can feel supported and understood."*

**GREG ROLLER**  
U.S. ARMY | COAST GUARD

### HIRING PREFERENCE FOR CHICKASAW VETERANS

If you are seeking employment with the Chickasaw Nation or are already employed by the tribe, you will be given higher consideration in the hiring process. To learn more about employment opportunities, contact human resources at (580) 436-7259.

### VIRTUAL VETERANS WALL

The virtual Chickasaw Veterans Wall was created to publicly pay tribute to all Chickasaws who have served in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces. You and/or your family are invited to submit information for you to be included in the virtual wall. The virtual wall features your photo, military branch and dates of service for both past and living veterans. For more information or to complete a form online, visit [Chickasaw.net/VeteransWall](http://Chickasaw.net/VeteransWall).

### VETERANS TAG REIMBURSEMENT

As a veteran, you are eligible to receive up to \$50 for reimbursement for the cost of your U.S. car tag. This special program is available to you for reimbursement on your vehicle tag, including specialty tags. To apply, provide a copy of your citizenship card, verification of military service and a receipt for car tag. Apply online at [Chickasaw.net/VeteransCarTag](http://Chickasaw.net/VeteransCarTag) or email [Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net](mailto:Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net).





# CHICKASAW WARRIOR SOCIETY

## DRAWS NEW MEMBERS BY CARRYING OUT ITS PURPOSE

The Chickasaw people are known for their warrior spirit. Our warrior tradition stretches back to before recorded history, up through the second World War and continuing today with those who serve in all branches of the United States military.

This warrior spirit runs through every member of the Chickasaw Warrior Society, an organization the Chickasaw Nation founded in 2015 to honor all Chickasaws who served in the armed forces. It is a coming together, an opportunity to fellowship with each other and bond through common experiences.

"I decided to join this organization because I felt compelled to support and honor military members within our tribe," said Priscilla Alvarez of the Air Force. "Being a Chickasaw warrior means to persist in the presence of adversity and having the courage to sacrifice for something bigger than ourselves."

Since its inception seven years ago, the Chickasaw Warrior Society has enrolled 1,715 veterans from all over the world.

Each new member receives a welcome packet upon joining the society. Male veterans receive a Pendleton vest and female veterans may select either the vest or a Pendleton blanket shawl. Both the vest and shawl honor the brave men and women who have defended freedom throughout the history of our nation.

New Chickasaw Warrior Society member Greg Roller of Pauls Valley, Oklahoma — a veteran who served in the U.S. Army and Coast Guard — said he recently received his Chickasaw Warrior Society care package.

"It was so nice. I really appreciate it. It came in a big priority box and had the vest in it, the decals and a coin," he said. "I put



Above: Warrior Society members from the Underwood family, Cecil, Justin and Jared Underwood.

the Chickasaw warrior tag on the front of my pickup. I'm very proud to be a part of it."

Roller joined the warrior society this year. He learned about the organization through his father.

"I knew my dad was a member because at his memorial service I was given his Chickasaw Warrior Society seal."

When becoming a Chickasaw Warrior Society member, Chickasaw veteran Christy Dunning of Blanchard, Oklahoma, said she selected a shawl, which she thought was "absolutely amazing." She expressed appreciation for the reserved parking spaces at places like the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center, particularly for how beneficial the up-front locations are to elder or disabled veterans.

Both Roller and Dunning mentioned the importance of camaraderie when it comes to the Chickasaw Warrior Society.

"I think as veterans, we have a history of being a part of a group and the camaraderie that we have with others. We all share that common

background, whether it was basic training or being a part of a unit or a deployment or just being in the service," Dunning said. "There is a common bond between veterans that we all kind of understand and know."

In a message from the Chickasaw Warrior Society, the organization explains it is just one step in the mission to fully serve our Chickasaw warriors. Chickasaw veterans and active military share a common bond through their experiences, and the Chickasaw Warrior Society aims to foster the relationships they have to each other as well as the tribe.

Richard (R.D.) Dickens, a Chickasaw Warrior Society member and U.S. Navy veteran, said the warrior society made him feel invited, welcomed and acknowledged. He believes the society is meant for every Chickasaw veteran.

"The warrior society is a big step in getting involved, letting veterans know they are important, they are valuable, and hey, we need you. We need your voice. You have value, no matter when you served or what you did when

you served," Dickens said. "It helped me to take advantage [of services] or understand more about what it meant to be a veteran."

Our Chickasaw warriors are deserving of our highest respect. We thank all our servicemen and servicewomen, past and present, for their immense sacrifice and selflessness.

The Chickasaw Warrior Society is an organization that encourages community, establishes and supports camaraderie and personifies the Chickasaw warrior spirit. All Chickasaw warriors are encouraged to join so that we may honor their sacrifices.

To complete an application to join the Chickasaw Warrior Society online, visit [Chickasaw.net/WarriorSociety](http://Chickasaw.net/WarriorSociety).



Above: Nahinli Billy, Warrior Society member, enjoys a game of billiards at the Chickasaw Veterans Lodge in Ada, Oklahoma.

# FEATURED ON THE 2022 COVER



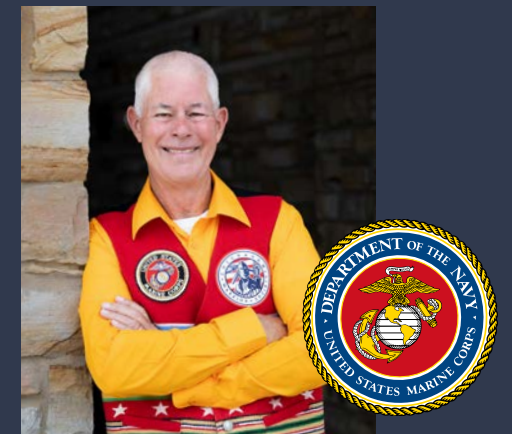
PRISCILLA ALVAREZ



RICHARD DICKENS



CHRISTY DUNNING



MIKE VONTUNGELN



GREG ROLLER



*the*  
**Chickasaw**  
**Nation**

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**VETERANS**

— SERVICES —

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