



## Notes from the Chief

*What I'm working on for You*

Osiyo -

Cultural tourism is important for Cherokee Nation and all of northeast Oklahoma because, while it showcases and preserves our rich culture and tradition, it also creates jobs and economic opportunities for so many of our citizens. As the global interest in Native culture grows, it is important for tribes to realize the benefits of sharing our unique heritage with travelers from around the world.

Our tribal culture, heritage and history matter and always will. As chief, I have taken an oath of office to preserve and defend those things. It's a responsibility I take very seriously. Preserving those cultural values and traditions connects us to the past, to all our ancestors who went before us, and it is what guides the path toward our collective future. While our heritage is the core of our unique identity as Indian people, we still treasure the language and traditions of our ancestors in the southeast United States, our home before removal.

And we, as Cherokees, have always been eager to share our heritage in an appropriate way.

Across our 14-county jurisdiction, cultural tourism efforts have led to the preservation and restoration of multiple historic buildings. Our home is marked by an abundance of lakes, rivers, state parks and nature trails. Tourism is already part of our way of life. Cherokee Nation has a \$1.5 billion impact on the state, and cultural tourism is an important part of our business portfolio.

Recently, Cherokee Nation led tribal efforts to pass the NATIVE Act that was just signed into law by President Obama. The NATIVE Act, which was authored by Cherokee Congressman Mark Wayne Mullin, will require federal agencies with tourism responsibilities to include tribes and Native organizations in national tourism efforts and strategic planning.

Tourism in the United States and in Indian Country is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the U.S. economy: International tourism to Indian Country grew 181 percent from 2007 to 2015. That resulted in \$8.6 billion in direct spending, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

This is a win for Oklahoma's tribal communities and will benefit the state's 38 federally recognized tribal governments and its citizens. As tribal governments we partner on a multitude of efforts, including tourism. It's important for tribes, like the Cherokee Nation, to be able to tell our story from our own perspective.

Preserving and sharing Cherokee culture is so important to us that we have taken steps to ensure money does not limit our capability to tell our story through museums, art procurement and our TV program, "Osiyo, Voices of the Cherokee People," which runs statewide. The tribe actively partners with renowned institutions, like the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Gilcrease Museum, to preserve and showcase our culture. Additionally, our own world-class museums complement annual events, like Cherokee National Holiday, to offer visitors a unique glimpse of Cherokee culture.

Our stories are both vast and personal – we have a culture like no other. It's critical to knowing who we are today, to know where and what we have been in the past.

I was taught that we honor our ancestors by living quality lives that leave our world better for the next seven generations. Today, we are dedicated more than ever to the betterment of our people and the continuation of our legacy. Our cultural tourism efforts play a vital role in sharing that story around the world.

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