

MAY 2026

THE SHAWNEE JOURNAL

HOTEHIMINIISFWA
"strawberry month"



YA'SASILAWIIYAKWE

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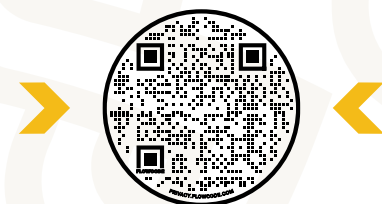
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TO VIEW ALL UPCOMING EVENTS, OFFICE CLOSURES, AND MORE, VISIT [SHAWNEE-NSN.GOV/CALENDAR](http://shawnee-nsn.gov/calendar) ONLINE OR SCAN HERE WITH YOUR PHONE:



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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

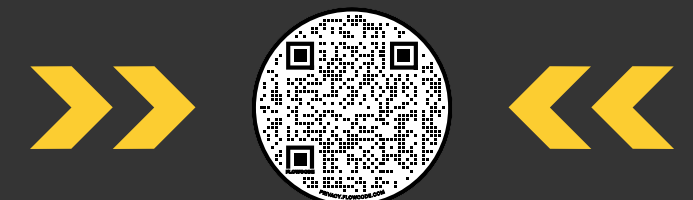
Recognizing that digital communications via social media and the Internet are not necessarily preferred by or accessible to every tribal citizen, the Communications & Media Department will always strive to introduce new citizens services & programs through this publication or other direct mailings to all Shawnee households before they are broadcast online. Many opportunities for tribal citizens may arise between publications, however, particularly those coordinated with other tribes and third-party organizations. Those who can are encouraged to follow the tribe's digital channels for the most up-to-date information—primarily the tribal website (shawnee-nsn.gov) and monthly e-mail newsletter, "piyeetaacimooweneefa."

KNOW ANY SHAWNEES WHO'VE MOVED RECENTLY?

Let them know to update their mailing address with the Citizen Enrollment Department to ensure they continue receiving tribal news!

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE PIYEETAACIMOOWENEEFA "LITTLE NEWS MESSAGES"

Get Shawnee Tribe news updates on the first Friday of every month. Subscribe to the e-newsletter at shawnee-nsn.gov/subscribe or scan this code with your smartphone's camera.



KIWIITAMAAKONAAKI HOKIMAAKI

MESSAGES FROM THE CHIEFS



**CHIEF
BEN BARNES**

hato ni'kaanaki (greetings, my friends)

As the Easter season approaches, the Shawnee Tribe is deeply engaged in events that resonate with our cultural and historical significance. Recently, the Shawnee Language team hosted an egg hunt, marking more than just a playful event for children; it was an opportunity for cultural immersion. Michelle Sears, our "Early Childhood Apprentice," provided a Shawnee language lesson, reinforcing the importance of language preservation among the younger generation.

In a significant move towards reclaiming our ancestral lands, the Tribe has successfully acquired two of three properties within our sacred Shawnee "Homelands." The first is property that is adjacent to a tract held by the Tribe in southern Indiana. This area, enveloped by the Hoosier National Forest, represents a profound connection to our past. The original tract was generously donated by two individuals who now serve as caretakers, ensuring its preservation for future generations.

The second of the properties borders the Serpent Mound in Peebles, Ohio. It is rural as well and the adjacency to Serpent Mound helps to protect this special and sacred site for future generations. It is the Tribe's hope that we will be able to achieve a "World Heritage Status" for the Serpent Mound in coming years.

We are also in the process of acquiring a third property, which is geographically closer than those in Ohio or Indiana. The Business Council will have a tour of these properties and discuss preservation projects with our state and federal partners when we visit Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio later this spring.

For our respected Shawnee Elders, we invite you to attend the Elders' luncheon on May 12. We will be serving lunch from 11 AM to 2 PM. This gathering is more than a meal; it is a celebration of wisdom and community. We hope for a vibrant turnout, reminiscent of our last Elders Banquet.

Lastly, on June 27th, we will honor Shawnee graduates with an "Honor's Banquet." This event is a tribute to their achievements and dedication. More details can be found on the Shawnee Tribe's social media platforms, in the newsletter, or on our website at www.shawnee-tribe.com.

**Ben Barnes
Chief**



**SECOND CHIEF
ROY
BALDRIDGE**

hato caakiwiyeefa (Greetings, everyone)–

In submitting this report, I am happy to say that our citizenship number has passed 5,000. I am excited, remembering that in the year 2001, in separation from the Cherokee Nation, we had a population of between 1,300 to 1,700. We are growing our population, economic potential and assorted programs to aid all of us in one form or another.

I believe that there are several reasons for our growth. Currently our tribe has a Business Council led by capable leader, Chief Ben Barnes and supported by councilors who ask questions and make informed decisions, understanding that we each share the responsibility to our citizens, friends and families.

We owe appreciation to those who have served on the council in the past, some of which have passed on. Many who served during a time when our tribe was incapable of providing salaries or stipends. Those people volunteered their time because they believed in the future that we are building today.

We owe appreciation to the many tribal Chiefs, Charles Bluejacket, Jonathan Blackfeather, Freddie Halfmoon, Pam Chibitty, Chris White, Don Greenfeather, James Squirrel and Ron Sparkman. There are many more that I have failed to mention and hope to produce a complete list for all to see.

Finally, I would like to say thanks to all of you, the Shawnee Tribal Council, for being engaged and holding us accountable. We, the Business Council, understand our responsibilities and work every day to ensure that our tribal interests are protected now and for future generations.

niyaawe (Thank you),

**Roy D. Baldrige
Second Chief**



THE SHAWNEE TRIBE **BUSINESS COUNCIL**



**SECRETARY
CAROLYN
FOSTER**



**TREASURER
MARK
McDOWELL**



**SEAT 1
JOHN
SPARKMAN**



**SEAT 2
DIANA
McLEAN**



**SEAT 3
DREW
DIXON**



**SEAT 4
COREY
WINESBURG**



**SEAT 5
MONTY
COOMBES**



**SEAT 6
MALACHI
SEARS**



**SEAT 7
KENI
HOOD**



SUMMER RECIPES

KE'LE'FEELOPE:

LET'S COOK

(A REPRINT FROM MAY 2023 SHAWNEE JOURNAL)



"DIP IN POWDERED SUGAR"

FROM STEPHEN C. LOWE (GRAVETTE, AR)

"Here's one from my late Great Grandmother & her daughter, circa mid-late 1800's. Us grandkids (now in our 70's) were Army brats, so the family was stationed worldwide for years at a time. Only every few years did we return to Tulsa to see relatives, and Mom's mother to always make this treat for our first breakfast meet. No forks allowed, nor fighting—who's wants next? It's our Shawnee traditional family gathering event from the Purcell-Johnson family."

INGREDIENTS:

- > Flour
- > Prepared sourdough starter
- > Milk

PREPARATION

In a glass bowl, mix a tablespoon of the precious starter with milk, then add flour to make a thick batter. Cover with cotton cloth & set asides in warm area for 1 hour.

In a cast iron pan or electric fryer, heat about 2" of frying oil until bubbling.

Use fingers or spoon to pinch quarter-size bits of batter & carefully drop in the oil.

Turn batter every couple of seconds until deep brown in color, approx. 15 seconds. Ladle out & place on paper to absorb oil.

While still warm, 'dip' into small dish of power sugar, then enjoy—even if it burns your fingers & mouth!

"CAN CAN CHICKEN"

FROM MARSHA MYER (WICHITA, KS)

"These are old Girl Scouts recipes!"

INGREDIENTS:

- > 1 can of cream of chicken soup
- > 1 canful of Minute rice
- > 1 can of cream of celery soup
- > 1 canful of water
- > 1 can of chicken breast

PREPARATION

Combine ingredients and cook for 7 minutes.

"BROWNIE STEW"

FROM MARSHA MYER (WICHITA, KS)

"These are old Girl Scouts recipes!"

INGREDIENTS:

- > 1 lb. ground beef
- > 1 small can of tomato sauce
- > 4 cans of vegetable soup

PREPARATION

In a large pan, brown the ground beef, then add the vegetable soup and tomato sauce. Cook until heated through.

Need sourdough starter?

Many bakeries and specialty grocers sell ready-to-use starter. Or, you can scan here for a step-by-step guide from King Arthur Flour to get your own going at home!



ONLINE APPLICATIONS TO REQUEST A 2026 ABSENTEE (MAIL-IN) BALLOT ARE NOW OPEN!

APPLY EARLY, DON'T WAIT!



- Citizens who have submitted an Application for an Absentee (Mail-in) Ballot can expect to receive their mail-in ballots beginning in mid-July.
- The deadline to submit an Application for an Absentee (Mail-in) Ballot is August 31, 2026.



Apply online to receive a 2026 Absentee Ballot at shawnee-nsn.gov/elections



Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program



LIHEAP SERVICE WILL BE MOVING UNDER THE NEW HOUSING PERSONNEL & LOCATION BEGINNING MAY 1, 2026!

Shawnee Tribe LIHEAP funds for home heating assistance are available for

Oklahoma residents who meet the income guidelines set forth by the US Department of Health and Human Services (see table below).

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	1-PERSON	2-PERSON	3-PERSON	4-PERSON	5-PERSON	6-PERSON
MAX. INCOME	\$29,308	\$38,326	\$47,344	\$56,362	\$65,379	\$74,397

If your household is larger than 6 people, please contact Tammy Burkybile (918) 542-2441, x 106.

2026 HONOR BANQUET ATTENTION ALL SHAWNEE GRADS!

The April 15 deadline has passed to request regalia for 2026 (Spring/Summer) commencement ceremonies.

2026 HONOR BANQUET
SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 2026
SHAWNEE TRIBE COMMUNITY BUILDING
108 S. EIGHT TRIBES TRAIL
MIAMI, OK 74054

Celebrating the achievements of the Class of 2025 (Fall/Winter) and the Class of 2026 (Spring/Summer).

Please RSVP to the Honor Banquet no later than Friday, May 22, 2026.

Questions? Contact Ella Kohler at education@shawnee-tribe.com or (918) 542-2441, ext. 133.



Scan here with your smartphone or visit shawnee-nsn.gov/grads.

MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS PERSON (MMIP) AWARENESS MONTH



May is Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Awareness Month, a time to bring attention to the high rates of violence experienced by Native American and Alaska Native communities. MMIP highlights the urgent need to address the number of Indigenous people who go missing or are murdered each year. Native communities face higher rates of violence than the national average, with Native women and girls especially impacted by sexual violence, gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence. Native men also experience higher rates of violence compared to other groups.

There are ongoing efforts to improve awareness and support for families impacted by MMIP. Communities are working to increase funding for search efforts, provide financial support to families, raise awareness through outreach and public campaigns, and cover costs related to reunification, burial, and counseling services. If you or someone you know needs help or wants to report a missing person, support is available. You can contact the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 800-843-5678, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System at 833-872-5176, the StrongHearts Native Helpline at 844-762-8483, or the BIA Missing and Murdered Unit at 833-560-2065. Raising awareness is an important step toward change, healing, and justice for Indigenous communities.

The statistics are alarming. Homicide is one of the leading causes of death for American Indian and Alaska Native people between the ages of 1-44, ranking 4th for males and 6th for females. About 2 in 5 Native women report being raped in their lifetime, and more than 80% of Native men and women report experiencing some form of violence. Many cases involve intimate partner violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological abuse. Children are also affected, with over 10% of homicides involving victims under 18. Despite these numbers, there is still a lack of complete data, which makes it harder to fully understand and respond to the crisis.



Scan here with your phone to read more on MMIP from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Indian Affairs.

CONGRATULATIONS BRIGADIER GENERAL STEVEN B. RICE!

Shawnee Tribe is thrilled to share the remarkable achievement of Brigadier General Steven B. Rice, a proud member of the Shawnee Tribe, who has been promoted to Brigadier General in the Illinois Air National Guard. This prestigious promotion is a true testament to his dedication and service, marking nearly 40 years since he first enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1986.

Brig. Gen. Rice holds the esteemed position of Assistant Adjutant General - Air for the Illinois Air National Guard, where he oversees the operations and readiness of nearly 3,000 personnel across Illinois. His career is a shining example of commitment, having served in various capacities from a munitions systems specialist to commanding key groups within the Air National Guard.

This achievement is not only a personal milestone but also a proud moment for his family and heritage. Brig. Gen. Rice is the 7x great-grandson of Rev. Charles Bluejacket, a lineage that underscores his long-standing family legacy of leadership and service.

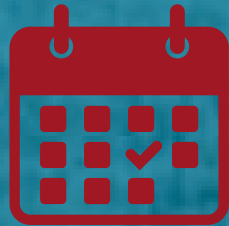
We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Brig. Gen. Rice and his family, including his proud mother, Elizabeth Rice, who shared this wonderful news with us. Join us in celebrating this exceptional achievement and honoring a true leader!





SHAWNEE TRIBE

SCHOOL CLOTHING & EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM



PROGRAM YEAR REQUIREMENT: SEPT 2 - SEPT 1

Each program year runs September 2 - September 1.

One complete application required per year.
Receipts must have purchase dates within the current program year.
Please allow 4-6 weeks for processing.

PROGRAM BENEFITS



SCHOOL CLOTHING & SHOES

UP TO \$800 PER FISCAL YEAR
MAXIMUM 6 REIMBURSEMENT REQUESTS



EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

UP TO \$400 PER FISCAL YEAR
MAXIMUM 3 REIMBURSEMENT REQUESTS

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

- ◆ STUDENT MUST BE AN ENROLLED SHAWNEE TRIBE CITIZEN
- ◆ STUDENT MUST BE ENROLLED IN HEADSTART/PRE-K THROUGH 12TH GRADE
Homeschooled students must provide additional enrollment documents.
- ◆ INCOME, LOCATION, AND DUAL CITIZENSHIP ARE NOT USED TO DETERMINE REIMBURSEMENT ELIGIBILITY
- ◆ INCOME GUIDELINES APPLY ONLY TO THE DIRECT PURCHASE OPTION

Contact our office with any questions!
918-542-2441 ext. 129 or schoolclothing@shawnee-tribe.com



SHAWNEE TRIBE

SCHOOL CLOTHING & EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

SCECARP - HOW TO APPLY

COMPLETE AN APPLICATION

FILL OUT, DATE AND SIGN ONE APPLICATION PACKET FOR EACH STUDENT:

- ◆ SCECARP REIMBURSEMENT APPLICATION PACKET
- ◆ DIRECT PURCHASE APPLICATION PACKET

INCLUDE REQUIRED SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- ◆ COPY OF TRIBAL ENROLLMENT CARD FOR EACH STUDENT
- ◆ EXTRACURRICULAR ENROLLMENT VERIFICATION - IF APPLICABLE
This may be an extracurricular enrollment form or registration/sign-up document that includes student name, activity, and date.
- ◆ MOST RECENT MONTH'S PAYSTUBS - DIRECT PURCHASE APPLICANTS ONLY

SUBMIT REQUESTS

- ◆ SUBMIT ITEMIZED RECEIPTS SHOWING PURCHASE DATE, STORE/VENDOR NAME, AND TOTAL PURCHASE PRICE
- ◆ ORIGINAL PAPER RECEIPTS FROM IN-STORE PURCHASES MUST BE SUBMITTED IN PERSON OR BY MAIL
- ◆ RECEIPTS FROM ONLINE PURCHASES MUST INCLUDE DELIVERY CONFIRMATIONS
- ◆ ITEMS FOR MULTIPLE CHILDREN MAY APPEAR ON ONE RECEIPT, BUT THE APPLICANT MUST CLEARLY INDICATE WHICH ITEMS BELONG TO EACH CHILD

All requests must be submitted on or before the program deadline of **September 1**.

Receipts can be mailed to
Shawnee Tribe attn: SCECARP
PO Box 189
Miami, OK 74355

2026 TRIBAL ELECTIONS

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INFORMATION FOR VOTERS



AN ELECTION SHALL BE HELD ON SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2026, FOR THE FOLLOWING ELECTIVE OFFICES:

TREASURER

4-YEAR TERM

CURRENTLY HELD BY MARK MCDOWELL

BUSINESS COUNCIL SEAT 7

4-YEAR TERM

CURRENTLY HELD BY KENI HOOD.

THE CANDIDATE FILING PERIOD RUNS FROM MONDAY, MAY 4, 2026, THROUGH MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2026.

- ▶ MONDAY, AUGUST 31 — DEADLINE TO REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT.
- ▶ THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 5:00 PM — DEADLINE TO RETURN VOTED ABSENTEE BALLOTS.
- ▶ FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2:00 PM — 7:00 PM — POLLS OPEN (EARLY IN-PERSON VOTING).
- ▶ SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 8:00 — 11:00 AM — POLLS OPEN (ELECTION DAY).

ABSENTEE VOTING (MAIL-IN VOTING):

*In an effort to increase voter turnout, the Elections Committee want to encourage eligible citizens, especially those that do not attend the annual meeting to use the absentee ballot option to cast their vote for their tribal leadership.

ANY ELIGIBLE VOTER MAY SUBMIT A REQUEST TO BE ADDED TO THE EARLY VOTING BY ABSENTEE BALLOT LIST OF VOTERS FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR'S UPCOMING ELECTION(S). ABSENTEE VOTERS ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO CAST A BALLOT IN PERSON AT THE POLLING PLACE. TO REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT FOR THE SEPTEMBER 2026 ELECTION, VOTERS MUST COMPLETE & SUBMIT AN ONLINE OR HARD COPY APPLICATION FOR ABSENTEE BALLOT BY MAIL FORM BY MONDAY, AUGUST 31.

Whether requesting an absentee ballot online or via hard copy application, voters will receive an email confirmation that the Committee has received their request at the email address provided by the voter on the application form.

Hard copy requests for absentee ballot should be mailed or hand-delivered during business hours (M-F, 8:30-4:30) to the following address:
Shawnee Tribe Election Committee
32 A Street SE, Suite 200
Miami, OK 74354



To apply for an absentee (mail-in) ballot, scan here with your phone.

IN-PERSON VOTING:

IN-PERSON VOTING AND THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE TRIBAL COUNCIL WILL TAKE PLACE SEPTEMBER 18 & 19 AT THE CRAIG COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS AND COMMUNITY CENTER IN VINITA, OK.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

FILING FEES:

- TREASURER — \$200
- BUSINESS COUNCIL MEMBERS AT LARGE — \$150

IMPORTANT DATES:

- MONDAY, JUNE 22 — FILING PERIOD CLOSES. NO HAND-DELIVERED OR MAILED FILINGS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER CLOSE OF BUSINESS ON THE FILING DEADLINE.

Questions? Contact the Election Committee at elections@shawnee-tribe.com or (918) 325 - 6341.



ELDER ASSISTANCE REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

- ★ Program Year runs October 1, 2025 - September 30, 2026.
- ★ All Shawnee citizens 65+ are eligible to apply for and receive reimbursement for eligible purchases (up to \$1,000).
- ★ Income, residency, and dual citizenship are not used to determine eligibility.
- ★ Applications are available on the Shawnee Tribe website, at the Tribal headquarters, or can be mailed by calling (918) 542-2441, ext. #106 or by email socialservices@shawnee-tribe.com.
- ★ Please note: If you applied after October 2025, you will have to wait until October 1st, 2026 to re-apply.

FIRE PREVENTION SAFETY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Test all fire alarms & check batteries.
- ✓ Test all carbon monoxide detectors & check batteries.
- ✓ Test all fire extinguishers & verify expiration dates.
- ✓ Create a Family Escape Plan.
- ✓ Test and clean space heaters as needed.
- ✓ Clean fireplace & chimney.
- ✓ Check electrical connections and wiring—avoid overloading circuits.
- ✓ Ensure electrical items not in use are unplugged from the outlet.
- ✓ Never leave burning candles unattended!

IF YOU ARE A SHAWNEE TRIBAL CITIZEN AND HAVE NOT APPLIED FOR NEW SMOKE ALARMS, DETECTORS, AND EXTINGUISHERS, COMPLETE AN APPLICATION ONLINE TODAY!



Scan here to begin application, or visit shawnee-nsn.gov



HOME RAMP & HANDICAP ACCESSIBILITY

IS YOUR HOME HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE?

WHEELCHAIR RAMPS OR OTHER HOME IMPROVEMENTS TO ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY ARE AVAILABLE ENROLLED CITIZENS.

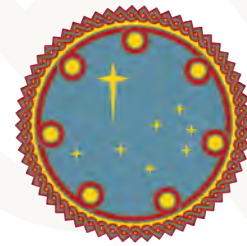
Email housing@shawnee-tribe.com for info.

STORM SHELTER INSTALLATION

DO YOU HAVE A STORM SAFETY PLAN?

APPLY NOW FOR A STORM SHELTER INSTALLATION, ENSURING YOUR SAFETY DURING SEVERE WEATHER. BE READY. BE SAFE. BE PREPARED.

Email housing@shawnee-tribe.com for info. or visit our website to apply →



saawanwaatoweewe
kitakwitcheepe

2026 SHAWNEE LANGUAGE FAIR

Shawnee language learners of all ages and abilities are invited to join the Shawnee Language Immersion Program for the 2026 Language Fair, Dinner and Stomp Dance on Saturday, July 25 in Miami, OK. Citizens of all three Shawnee nations are eligible to participate. Over \$6,000 in prizes will be awarded to the top three winners in each category—see below for important deadlines.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS & CONTEST CATEGORIES

All final entries must primarily consist of written and spoken Shawnee, a written or spoken English translation, and accompanying image(s). Shawnee text must be written using either the Shawnee Tribe orthography or bibabebo. Project drafts should be submitted with both the written Shawnee and written English. Final projects must use visuals to accompany the Shawnee and be submitted as a JPG or PDF. Examples of project types are as follows: comic strip, poster, zine, video, slideshow, children's book. Final presentations should be submitted as a video format no more than four minutes in length—assistance creating the final video presentation will be available for any contestants who need it.

CATEGORY	WRITTEN LENGTH
KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2	1-3 WORDS OR PHRASES
GRADES 3 – 5	4-10 SENTENCES
GRADES 6 – 8	6-16 SENTENCES
GRADES 9 – 12	10-20 SENTENCES
ADULT STUDENTS – SLIP LEVELS 1-3	10-20 SENTENCES
ADULT STUDENTS – SLIP MAYAANI, MIINA, WAAPIKO, M' SKOCI' FAKI	10-20 SENTENCES
ADULT CLPS, APPRENTICES, MASTERS	10-20 SENTENCES



DEADLINE OVERVIEW:

- Wednesday, April 15 – Registration Deadline
- Friday, May 1 – First Draft Deadline
- Monday, June 1 – Grammar & Spell Check Deadline
- Monday, July 6 – Final Project & Presentation Deadline
- Saturday, July 25 – Language Fair, Dinner & Stomp Dance

Ready to register now? Email shawneelanguage@shawnee-tribe.com with your full name, tribal ID, category, and project concept. Find information on entry requirements, contest categories and more at shawnee-nsn.gov/slipa.



WEEMEYAKWE

WHERE WE COME FROM

THE CASE OF THE FIVE BLACK STONE SPHERES

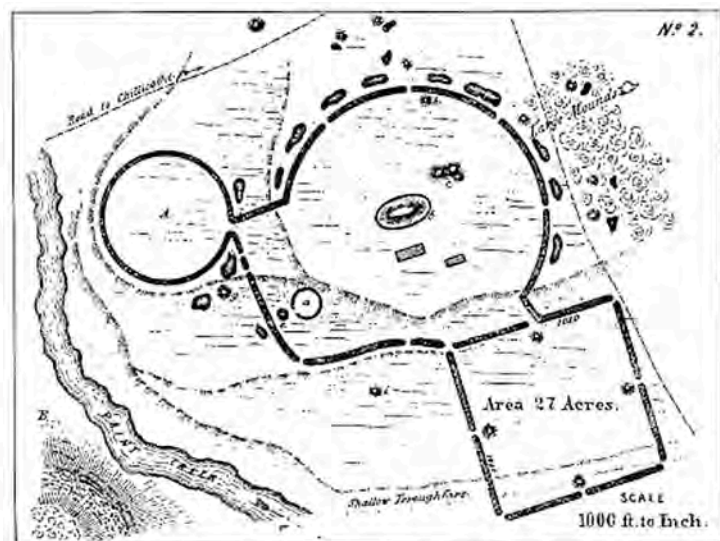
“Two heads are better than one,” the old saying goes. With twice the brainpower and two times the life experiences to draw from, we are twice as likely to solve a puzzle, make sense of an enigma, or figure out a mystery.

The decades-long mystery in this case? The identity of five, marble-sized, black stone spheres discovered during excavations at the 89-acre Seip Earthworks Complex. This complex is an important Hopewell Culture (circa 1 to 400 CE) ceremonial site located next to Paint Creek in Ross County, Ohio.

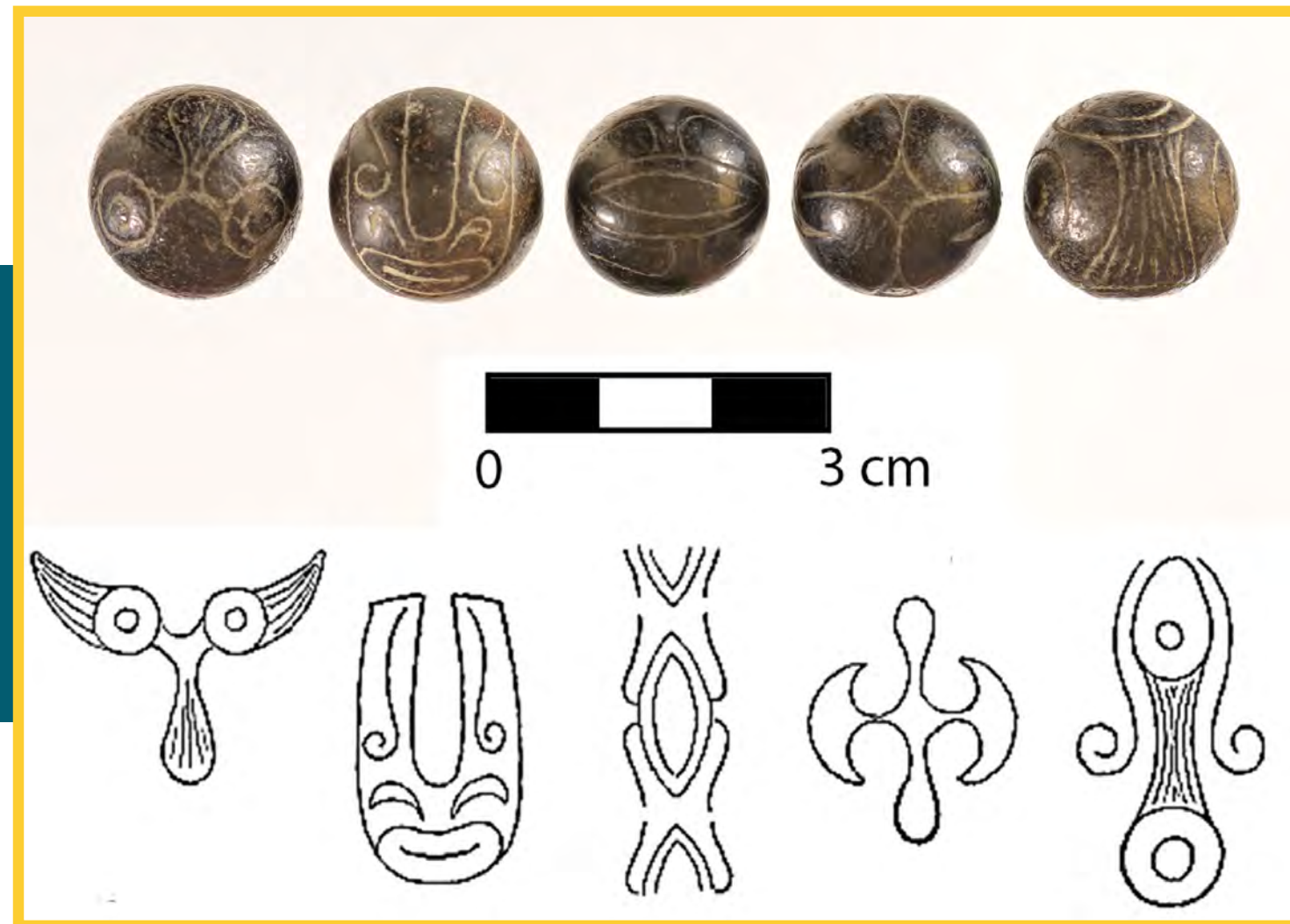
And the two heads? One belongs to a Shawnee man steeped in Shawnee traditions: Chief Ben Barnes of The Shawnee Tribe. The other belongs to Dr. Brad Lepper, an archaeologist steeped in Ohio Valley archaeology who works for the Ohio History Connection.

THE DISCOVERY

In 1926, the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society investigated the loaf-shaped Seip-Pricker Mound, one element of the Seip Earthworks Complex. This mound, one of the largest Ohio earthen mounds, stands near the center of the complex’s large circular enclosure.



Map of the Seip Earthworks by Ephraim Squire and Edwin Davis in *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, Plate 21, Number 2, 1848. TO VIEW THE IMAGE AT THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, SCAN HERE WITH YOUR PHONE



Spheres (top) and the engraved designs (bottom). Spheres photograph used courtesy of the Ohio History Connection. Line drawing of engraved designs by HRG in H.C. Shetrone and E. Greenman, *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, volume 40, figure 45, page 426, 1931.

At the base of the mound, investigators found a massive, clay-lined oval basin. It measured 30 feet long by 10 feet wide and was nine inches deep. Intense heat had turned the clay lining the color and hardness of soft brick.

This basin was not filled with everyday trash. It held over 5,000 objects of “exceptional artistry.” Thousands of shell beads. Copper breastplates. Bear and mountain lion canine teeth. Alligator and shark teeth. Chipped stone tools. Fragments of ceramic vessels. Fragments of a large wooden bowl or plate. Charred fabric and leather fragments.

These materials likely represent ritual regalia used during a major ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, religious leaders placed these items in the clay-lined basin. And then, they set them on fire. This event likely took place around 300 CE.

THE SPHERES

According to H. C. Shetrone, the archaeologist who directed the site investigations, the most interesting objects recovered from the basin were five engraved black steatite spheres. These spheres are very nearly the same size: about two inches in diameter, only slightly larger than the official size of today’s shooter marble. They weigh around 0.4 ounces each.

Steatite, or soapstone, is a soft, carveable rock made mainly of talc. Indigenous artists were no strangers to this material, for they carved other items, like stone bowls and smoking pipes, out of it. It would have taken serious skill to carve the raw stone in such a way as to be sure that the spheres were the same size. Engraving each with a unique design also took skill. A craftsperson likely used a sharp pointed object harder than the stone – perhaps a chipped stone drill – to do this.



(Pictured left to right) Joel Barnes (Director of Shawnee Language Immersion Program), Brett Barnes (Eastern Shawnee) and Trenton Stand (Shawnee), record a song, using a water drum, in the Shawnee Tribe conference room. Shawnee Tribe 2024.

Steatite outcrops along the eastern edge of the Appalachian Mountains, from northern New England south to eastern Alabama. Local artists would have either traded for the stone or traveled to the ancient steatite quarries to get it. It is also possible that outsiders brought the finished stones to the site as offerings.

PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

In the years since their discovery, archaeologists have offered two different interpretations for these enigmatic stone spheres. The first is that they were marbles or gaming pieces. They certainly do look like marbles, but Native peoples did not play that game in ancient times. Traditional Native gaming pieces are not round, they are two-sided.

The second is that religious leaders used the spheres in divination activities (in other words, to predict the future). But traditional divination objects are usually single pebbles, not sets of carefully rounded marble-sized stones.

A NATIVE-INFORMED INTERPRETATION

Here is where two heads, informed by a Native perspective, come together to offer a third, and entirely different, interpretation. Perhaps the five black steatite spheres from the Seip-Pricer Mound are the non-perishable parts of a water drum!

Spherical black stones measuring .79 inches in diameter are a common component of Shawnee water drums. An odd number of these stones is needed to securely tie a water-soaked, brain-tanned leather hide (the drumhead) to the drum shell (body) with cordage.

DOES THIS NEW INTERPRETATION MAKE SENSE?

Archaeologists are fairly certain that the Ohio Valley's Indigenous peoples used drums, and that they likely used them during ceremonies. But archaeologists have rarely identified ancient Native drums.



A footed Shawnee water drum assembled by Chief Ben Barnes. Notice how the cordage wraps around, above, and below each spherical drum stone placed a few inches below the lip of the drum shell. This creates a circular bulge beneath portions of the leather drumhead that extend down the sides of the drum shell. Photograph courtesy of the Shawnee Tribe Cultural Center.

One reason is that, once disassembled into its parts, a drum is not easy to recognize in the archaeological record. For example, at the Seip-Pricer Mound, fragments of a wooden bowl recovered from the clay-lined basin might have been the shell of a water drum. But in the fire, the drum would have fallen apart as the drum shell, the leather drumhead, and the cordage fastening burned. In this way, the stones would have separated from the drum. The same would be true had the drum been a ceramic vessel that was broken when placed in the clay-lined basin. Thus, after centuries, all that was left of the drum were the stones and perhaps fragments of a wooden or ceramic vessel.

Another reason archaeologists rarely identify ancient drums is because most of a water drum is made from perishable

materials: wood, leather, and cordage. Thus, after centuries in most instances, all would have decayed away except the stones.

Barnes and Lepper's interpretation is important. If they are right, the five engraved spheres from the Seip-Pricer Mound are the earliest direct evidence for a drum in eastern North America. This new interpretation also suggests that there is cultural continuity between those who built the mound and tribal peoples of today. Researchers need to re-examine existing site collections to look for small, spherical stones that may once have been part of a water drum.

Two heads are, indeed, better than one. And in this case, they have offered us new insights into the past.



To read Barnes and Lepper's article about their interpretation of the five spheres, scan here with your phone.

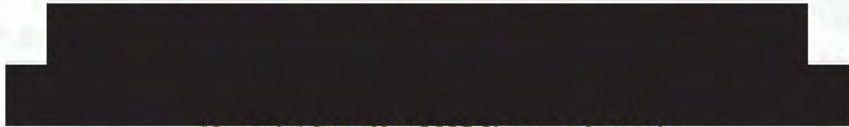


Authors' Biography

A. Gwynn Henderson (Education Director) and David Pollack (Director) work for the Kentucky Archaeological Survey, a program of the Department of Society, Culture, Crime & Justice Studies at Western Kentucky University. They received their PhDs in Anthropology from the University of Kentucky in 1998. One of their ongoing research projects focuses on the lifeways of ancient Native farming cultures of the middle Ohio Valley.

TA'SAAWANWAATOWEEYAKWE:

"WHERE WE SPEAK SHAWNEE"

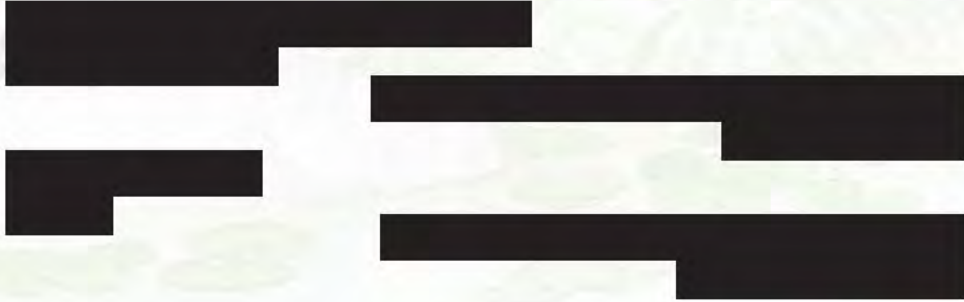


**A reprint from May 2025 Shawnee Journal*

This list will help you learn the Shawnee names for creatures, plants, places, and things you might find on a visit to the woods in springtime, as well as how to talk about seeing them. Use the list and practice saying each item's name as you search for them in the woodland scene illustrated on the next two pages. As you find each wiyehi/wiyeeefa in pages 24-25, check them off your list on page 22.

Get with a partner and take turns asking each other what you see, or practice on your own!

PRACTICE CONVERSATION:



After you've practiced some, take it outside! On your next bike ride, mushroom hunt, or walk through the park, see how many of these names you recall, or go the extra mile and turn the list into a scavenger hunt! More advanced kalawiiwena (phrases) can be found in the conversation below, and you can scan this QR code to log in on SLIPstream and see even more springtime words and phrases.



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT:

SPRING EVENTS



March 29, 2026
SLIP & CCDF'S
EASTER EGG HUNT
Miami, OK



HASENOOKI IN MEMORIAM

THE SHAWNEE TRIBE EXTENDS ITS DEEP CONDOLENCES TO THE SURVIVING FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF CITIZENS WHO HAVE RECENTLY PASSED ON.

CHARLES EDWARD WILSON
MARTHA JEAN TERRY
BUEL DEAN ANGLIN

SHAWNEE TRIBE BURIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Tribal citizens are eligible for up to \$5,000 in assistance covering funeral and burial costs after all other financial and insurance funding has been depleted. Burial assistance is not a reimbursement program; benefits are paid directly to the funeral home. Visit shawnee-nsn.gov/burial for more information.

Please note: Surviving family members of the deceased have reported the names listed here to the Citizen Enrollment Department. For assistance or to notify the tribe of a citizen's passing, visit shawnee-nsn.gov/enrollment or contact enrollment@shawnee-tribe.com.

MAY

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