

# NATIVE

## *Oklahoma*

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A POWWOW  
THIS YEAR?**



**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:** SOCIAL DISTANCE POWWOW DURING THE PANDEMIC • MCGIRT V. OKLAHOMA

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### NATIVE OKLAHOMA • MAY 2020

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# Native Owned Laboratory Announces COVID-19 Testing

By Rosemary Stephens

**T**ribal Diagnostics, a Native owned and operated laboratory based out of Oklahoma City begins COVID-19 testing. As CEO Cory Littlepage, a citizen of Chickasaw Nation, puts it, “we have a unique opportunity to provide testing solutions during this pandemic and I am really proud that the Tribal Diagnostics team is rising up to the challenge.”

Tribal Diagnostics will be rolling out COVID-19 testing in two phases, with phase one being antibody testing and phase two testing being molecular tests, which will show if a person has the virus. “The first phase is going to include an antibody type of test, so when you think about when a virus enters the body we have antibodies that will build up and attack the virus,” Littlepage said.

There has been a shortage of testing options, not only in Oklahoma, but also across the country. It is predicted there are thousands of people in Oklahoma who may have had COVID-19 and just didn't know it because they were either a) asymptomatic, or b) couldn't get access to the test.

“We will have antibody testing so we will know if a person was previously infected and if someone has had the virus and has developed some level of immunity to it,” Littlepage said.

The data from antibody testing will help to provide context on who has developed some immunity and protection from COVID-19, which in turn will be data that can be used in deciding when a person can safely return to work.

As governors across the country are considering easing social distancing restrictions and looking to reopen businesses, researchers at Harvard University are suggesting states may not reopen safely unless they conduct more than three times the number of coronavirus tests currently being administered over the next month.

According to the COVID Tracking Project, an average of 146,000 people per

day have been tested for the coronavirus nationally as of April 17. To reopen the economy in the United States by mid-May, Harvard researchers say the number of daily tests should be somewhere between 500,000 to 700,000 tests per day.

There is a variation in the rate of testing and positive results among individual states, however Harvard researchers say most states need to administer more tests to get to a minimum of approximately 152 tests per 100,000 people per day.

Tribal Diagnostics will have the ability to conduct 100 antibody tests per hour with a 24-hour result turn around time. “Depending on how many hours we work in a day, we can scale up testing pretty quickly,” Littlepage said.

Littlepage acknowledged there is a lot the scientific community does not know about COVID-19 and are learning each day, and making the antibody tests available will provide more data to use towards getting out vaccinations, different immunities and how it impacts different patient populations.



“I don't want to sit here and say I have all the answers, but if we could start getting more and more samples to run additional tests we will start getting closer to those answers, than the world becomes a better place and in Oklahoma, and Indian Country,” Littlepage said. Phase two testing will be molecular testing, meaning testing for those who actually have the virus now.

“That's what is being done now in the drive-thru testing sites with the nasal swab test, so we will be able to test about 200 specimens per day and we are anticipating phase two to begin in early May,” Littlepage said.

Tribal Diagnostics will be coordinating with tribes and health boards across Oklahoma, and across the country to offer their facility as a hub for the nasal specimens to be delivered to their facility in Oklahoma City for testing.

“Even though our headquarters are in Oklahoma City, we support providers and tribes in Seattle, Michigan, Maine and Washington, D.C., and that's the good thing about modern logistics, the specimens can get to us the next morning and we can conduct high volume tests on our equipment,” Littlepage said.

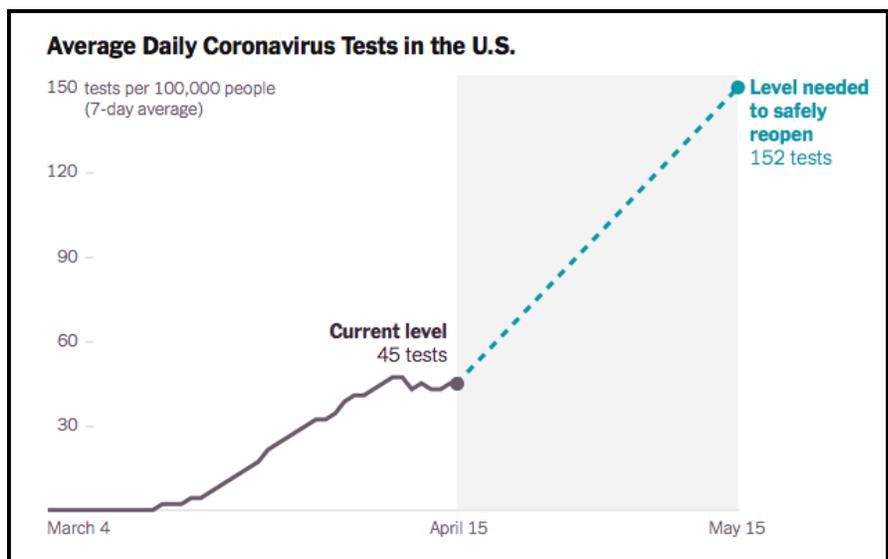
According to a press release, which states, “Tribal Diagnostics' services are available to serve all healthcare providers, they are working hard to ensure Tribally-operated hospitals and clinics are receiving focused care and analysis as the American Indian demographic is a vulnerable population according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Tribal Diagnostics is proud to use our experience during these challenging and unprecedented times. We have now conducted over one million laboratory tests and feel uniquely positioned to join the fight to control the COVID-19 outbreak across the country and especially within our Tribal communities, by doing what we do best ... providing comprehensive lab analysis as quickly as possible,”

Littlepage stated in a press release. Tribal Diagnostics first opened their doors in 2015 with a focus on targeting substance abuse tests, specifically opioids. They have evolved over the past few years into a full service laboratory offering hundreds of different tests related to diabetes, heart disease, infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV, and other disease states. Their headquarters are based out of Oklahoma City, however they have employees in 10 different states with 30% of their employees being Native American.

"Although we are unique because we are tribally owned and operated, we understand the delivery system of IHS, electronic health records and the importance of data and reports for advocating federal funding, so I anticipate us being a valuable partner to tribal communities because we can help tribes with their data as it relates to COVID-19," Littlepage said.

Tribal Diagnostics will be reporting daily how many tests they run, the positives, the negatives and what their capacity is and what equipment they have to the Oklahoma State Dept. of Health. Littlepage said everyone is competing for the same resources with the nasal swabs and other materials and feels it is important to be transparent and proactive



with the state in letting them know Tribal Diagnostics have the testing. With all of the data and experts emphasizing the need for more testing in order to open the states' economies back up, having another avenue of antibody testing through Tribal Diagnostics will play an important role in Oklahoma's path to opening up businesses again. "To begin to get back a semblance of our lives, I believe you have to talk about it ... we're humans, and I think you have to have a plan for reopening the economy,"

Littlepage said when asked his opinion on reopening Oklahoma's economy. "You have to help people get back to some sort of life, and you have to take care of safety first, but not to talk about how we can start getting back the economy would be negligent, in my personal opinion." To learn more about Tribal Diagnostics visit [www.tribaldiagnosics.com](http://www.tribaldiagnosics.com) or follow on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/TribalDiagnostics](https://www.facebook.com/TribalDiagnostics) or on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/Triballab](https://www.twitter.com/Triballab)

## CULTURAL

# McGirt v. Oklahoma

Indian Country may finally get an answer whether eastern Oklahoma is part of a reservation.

On April 13, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it would hear oral arguments via telephone in 10 cases left on its spring docket and among the ones getting a phone call is *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. A citizen of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and of Creek descent, Jimcy McGirt was convicted in 1997 in Wagoner County District Court of first degree rape, sodomy and lewd molestation of his wife's underage granddaughter.

Citing a 10th Circuit Court ruling in a related case that the U.S. Congress never formally disestablished the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's reservation, McGirt argued in his appeal that since the crime happened within the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's boundaries, the state

would not have jurisdiction. Instead, that authority would fall to either the federal government or the tribal judicial system, depending on the nature of the crime in question.

If the 10th Circuit Court's decision is allowed to stand, it could potentially alter which court systems have authority to prosecute what cases moving forward within the 11 counties at least partially within the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's re-affirmed reservation. Three of Oklahoma's largest cities – Tulsa, Broken Arrow and Muskogee – are either partially or wholly within those boundaries.

The case has a similar fact pattern to another case that was referred to the U.S. Supreme Court. In June, the justices announced it would re-hear arguments in *Murphy v. Carpenter*, a case involving a Muscogee (Creek) citizen accused of

slaying and castrating another Muscogee (Creek) citizen in rural McIntosh County. However, that date has never been announced.

Due to the spread of the novel coronavirus, the court had originally said it would handle its remaining spring term cases by either issuing opinions based on attorneys' briefings or delay oral arguments until the October term.

No date has been set yet for oral arguments in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. However, in the initial announcement, the court indicated that all cases getting a telephone hearing would be heard within the first two weeks of May. Since the courtroom is closed to the public and all justices are hearing cases remotely, a live audio feed will be provided.

# Social Distance Powwow Becomes Popular Social Media Page During Pandemic

Latoya Lonelodge

For many tribal citizens throughout the country, March and April mark the beginning of powwow season with annual big powwow events such as the Denver March Powwow in Denver, Colo., and Gathering of Nations in Albuquerque, N.M.

That is until the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic spread across the U.S. in a matter of weeks, bringing with it the cancellation of powwows, art markets, and thousands of other planned events indefinitely.

For many Native American communities, powwows mean more than a way of life. Powwow events and gatherings in the United States provided the opportunity to showcase diverse cultural backgrounds of Native Americans, whether that was through dancing in full regalia or vendors selling artwork, jewelry and handmade regalia. With the spread of COVID-19, dancers, singers and vendors were forced to follow social distancing guidelines, with many unaware of what the future will hold.

However, through technology and social media, powwows and social distancing have gone viral online. A Facebook page called Social Distance Powwow quickly gained popularity through its name, content, and has now spread worldwide with Native Americans sharing videos and stories from the comfort and safety of their own homes.

Dan Simonds, with the Pequot Tribe, was the original founder of the Social Distance Powwow page, along with co-founders Whitney Rencountre, Crow Creek Sioux, and Stephanie Hebert, Mi'kmaq.

Through the Social Distance Powwow page, Simonds said he reclaimed the social distancing that is shown through media. Simonds said himself, along with fellow vendors and artists have had shows cancelled due to the social distancing order. Simonds specializes in wampum, a type of traditional jewelry from his tribe in the east coast, and also owns a business called Wampum Wear.

"A lot of powwow folks, even dancers and drummers, have been affected by what's going on, there wasn't any kind of group, to the level that I envisioned on any kind of social media platforms, so I wanted to make a group that could embrace the drums, the dancers, the singers, the artists,

the vendors and our whole community so that we had a place we could go to be seen and heard," Simonds said.

Simonds said there's not many Indigenous outlets for media and the page shows how important it is to have a nationwide media presence for native people.

"There's not one that really exists, on a good level, we really don't have our own

like the Social Distance Powwow page, Simonds said he wants to see more pages growing on Facebook.

"It's kind of interesting this is a bad time for everyone in the world but bad times often force us Indigenous folks to think outside the box and be resilient in a lot of ways and this is kind of a way of being resilient, and in dark times, bringing some



Founding members of the new Social Media page, "Social Distance Powwow." The page was created on March 17, 2020 and now has over 152K followers. From l-r: Dan Simonds, Stephanie Hebert and Whitney Rencountre. (Courtesy photos)

stations on TV, Netflix is starting to pick up some things but it's not enough, often our voices are silenced so this kind of shows how necessary it is for our voices to be heard and how much people want their voices to be heard," Simonds said.

Since the creation of the page on March 16, more than 140,00 Facebook users have joined the Social Distance Powwow page, with users openly sharing videos of dancing in regalia, artwork and songs.

Gaining momentum in popularity, Simonds said he had no idea but the cause was needed.

"We needed more of our own platforms, since I started this page there's been another one that popped up and a few others, another big one I noticed growing is the Quarantine Dance Specials page, that came after we did, so they've been doing a lot of specials and hosting live videos and they've been getting sponsors for dances so people are competing for that prize money, that's been cool to see that emerge and grow along with our platform," Simonds said.

With the need for a social media platform

light to everyone that needs it," Simonds said.

With the Social Distance Powwow becoming a movement worldwide, Simonds said they were focused on the Indigenous peoples of North America, but has gained recognition in other countries such as Canada and Europe.

"We are in our early stages in our organization so we're still trying to figure out do we want to go the non-profit route and how and when do we want to do that, with everything that's going on in the world, we're kind of taking everything slow because we never know what tomorrow will bring," Simonds said.

Through live streaming, video submissions and content posted to the Social Distance Powwow page, a clash of diverse cultural backgrounds can be seen from around the world.

"We have a lot of topics ... one I like is called 'Our Story,' all too often our stories are silenced and not really shared publicly in a lot of ways, some of that's traditional we keep things to ourselves but there's times when things and stories need to be

shared, I think this is one of those times. We found a lot of traditional storytellers that are up on the page,” Simonds said.

“Speaking and telling their stories, it’s been great to hear these stories and we also have a lot of Native musicians, and that’s under the performers section, they’ve been going live throughout the page, there’s also something new, artists are doing art studio talks and art tours and some people can kind of enter their space during this time when we can’t be together,” Simonds said.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when businesses, organizations and social events were being shut down, conversations began between Simonds and Rencountre, co-founder, over the cancellations of powwows.

“As we spoke, we shared how the COVID-19 pandemic has led us to losing our opportunities, Dan as a powwow vendor, and myself as a powwow emcee. We lost several opportunities due to the pandemic and wanted to work together with Stephanie to help encourage people to continue to support one another,” Rencountre said.

Rencountre said the page has held live Social Distance Powwows for the past three weekends.

“At first we had no idea how the Social Distance Powwow would work, or if people would even enjoy it. However, the excitement of acknowledging people online, even if it’s virtually, validates the importance of having a place for people to gather online, this helps us feel like we are actually together sharing space, the participation is great and continues to grow,” Rencountre said.

During the social distancing order, Rencountre said this time is important.

“Indigenous beliefs and traditions have always been around, however, western philosophy dominates school education, entertainment and media. Now that all of that is taken away, Indigenous values and customs now have a platform because people have open minds and hearts during this time,” Rencountre said.

Fellow Co-Founder Stephanie Hebert said Simonds and herself have known each other for years as artists.

“I reached out to him to ask if he wanted or needed any assistance with the group. At that time it had 150 people, little did we realize how quickly the movement would gain momentum, and the magnitude of support it would provide to the people,” Hebert said. Hebert said the experience has been humbling.

“There are so many people who have suited up to dance for others, as well as support each other in these difficult times.

I am honored to be part of this wonderful movement and to be working alongside Dan and Whitney in this endeavor,” Hebert said.

Hebert said she’s proud of the positivity the Social Distance Powwow has brought to people across the globe.

“It has also become a platform for artists, storytellers and dancers to share their prayers with others,” Hebert said.

For Hebert, she said powwows are more than just fun on the weekends.

“There is a lifestyle and relationships that are built on the trail that really affect peoples’ day-to-day lives,” Hebert said. Hebert said native culture values relationships with family members and friends.

“Powwows are one major way these relationships are strengthened and maintained. Today, we are being told to socially distance ourselves, which is completely contradictory to most people’s values. At the SDP, we are providing a space for those relationships to continue in a safe way, as well as widening the social circles in the powwow community,” Hebert said.

Through the page, Hebert said they also strive to create a space for others to escape the negatives aspects in the world.

“It also provides a way for dancers and singers to share their prayers and songs with others, which has been lifting the spirits of those watching, and creating a feeling of comrade in these hard times,” Hebert said.

Through the Social Distance Powwow page, a variety of cultural backgrounds from around the world can be seen through dance, regalia, art and storytelling as the page continues to gain followers by the day.

During a recent t-shirt launch for the page, Simonds said there were a lot of questions and conversations regarding the t-shirt design. Simonds said they collaborated with Votan, an artist who is known for his work with t-shirts, for the launch.

“We collaborated with him and we rolled out this shirt and there’s

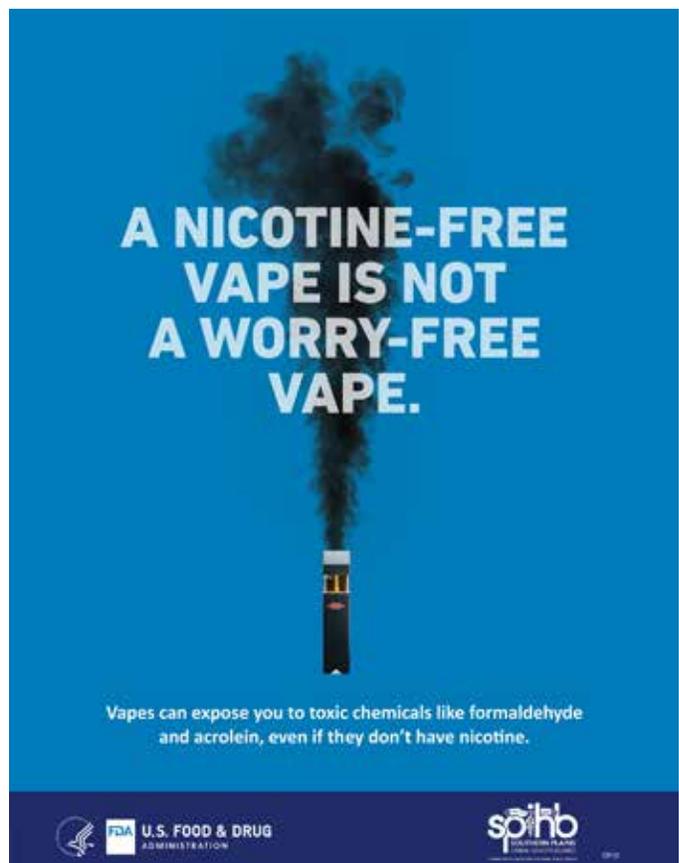
been a lot of questions and conversations because the woman that we featured, she’s got green eyes and a lot of Natives, especially Plains Natives, don’t realize Natives come in all colors, eye colors and shapes, so a lot of Natives that don’t get out of their communities much don’t realize that yeah there are actually Natives with green and blue eyes even prior to contact,” Simonds said.

Simonds said that even as Indigenous people, we bring ourselves down because others don’t realize they haven’t been to every reservation.

“They haven’t gone to every tribe to see that these people with green and blue eyes exist within our own country, it’s kind of sad even within our own country we break each other down, it’s all because of ignorance so this shirt kind of educates in a way that’s simple but people are kind of getting it,” Simonds said.

Simonds said t-shirt profits have gone towards supporting Native businesses. “We just get a small donation of all that back to SDP that we’re holding just to have a fund so we can figure out what we want to do with later, but majority of these sales are going towards those businesses, it’s just dollars that we’re getting,” Simonds said.

For future endeavors with the page, Simonds said he wants to see Social Distance Powwow exist in a real physical space and have a real powwow.



# It Was Hard. It Was Unfair. It Was a Funeral During a Pandemic

By Hogan Gore - Gaylord News

**W**hen my grandmother, Lavon Gore, died in early March, every pew in the local Methodist church was full and many other people, unable to find a seat, congregated along the walls. Just a few weeks later when Granddad died, there were nine of us in the chapel for the service, including two ministers.

It was not as if Alton Gore had not meant as much to our family, or to the community he had been deeply involved in his entire life. Rather, credit a pandemic that had crossed an ocean and finally reached our doorstep in small-town Seiling, Oklahoma.

The funeral directors, dealing with an unprecedented situation without a real play book, tried to adhere to new directives that limited gatherings to 10 people. This meant our family was split. A few of us said goodbye in person, while the rest watched a live stream in another wing of the church.

In this instance my stubbornness came in handy, as I stayed put and simply said no when asked to leave my seat on the second row. I made it understood that I was not going to watch the service on a TV screen.

Selfish? Maybe. But regardless of my presence or lack thereof, there was plenty of room for social distancing. We complied at the beginning of the service, but as the funeral proceeded to a slideshow of our family's favorite memories, the distance between us disappeared, emotionally and sometimes physically.

The service was similar to Grandma's in its message, our family's mourning and the recordings of gospel songs by Willie Nelson and Alan Jackson. But it was so heartbreakingly unfamiliar.

I felt torn that my cousins were having to watch granddad be put to rest remotely, even though they were in the same building. Somehow that thought made it even worse, being so close and feeling so far away.

However, when I glanced behind me as Willie wrapped up his rendition of "I'll Fly Away," I could not help but smile. Several family members had filtered into the back of the room.

I guess stubbornness runs in the family. It was a somber feeling as we walked beside the casket to the hearse waiting

outside. Not only because it was a last goodbye, but because we were doing it without so many important people.

There were no friends to hug or distant relatives who made the trip, no old classmates to share stories about days gone by and no one from our little town expressing how much Alton Gore had meant to their experiences growing up in a tight-knit community.

*It was hard. It was unfair. It was a funeral during a pandemic.*



As we lingered outside the church before the procession to the cemetery began, there was still a feeling of incompleteness. But as we drove down Main Street and passed by Gore's Phillip's 66 Service Station, which has been in our family since 1939, there was a sense of normalcy.

Cars and trucks stopped along the road, drivers got out of their vehicles and took their hats off to show respect. Some from the community were able to be there for

my family and to wave goodbye. It was a small sense of closure.

There is no doubt it has been a hard year for my family, losing our patriarch and matriarch in addition to my father, Marty Gore, who died in August in a motorcycle accident, and my great-grandmother, Betty Wilson, who died in December. But through it all, and even a pandemic, we have been there for each other and carried on together.

My family has not lost anyone to the coronavirus, but the pandemic definitely altered the way we said our goodbyes to Granddad.

In the days following the funeral we had the collective chore of sifting through our grandparents' home of more than half a century. And believe me, it was all there. This may seem like an unfortunate chore, and it was a daunting task. But we were all there together, rediscovering memories once lost under piles of paper and stacks of boxes.

As we worked throughout the day, a few of my cousins and I would occasionally sneak into the backyard, where Grandma and granddad had once set up our own family sandlot. We played baseball until dusk, like we were kids again, and the only tears came from laughter.



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# NOK IHS Telemed

**W**ith its community health representative program suspended due to COVID-19, several of Oklahoma's Indian Health Services direct care facilities are expanding their use of telehealth.

In late March, IHS issued additional guidance that allowed clinicians to use certain additional, non-public facing audio or video communications technologies to augment all clinical activities related to providing care to patients during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The expansion applies to telehealth provided for any clinical reason, regardless of whether the patient visit is related to the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions related to COVID-19.

"The current COVID-19 pandemic reminds us how important it is to be able to reach your healthcare team," IHS principal deputy director Rear Adm. Michael D. Weahkee said. "Telehealth will further protect our patients and employees by expanding services and increasing access to care, while doing our part to help stop the spread of COVID-19."

Along with three IHS facilities on the Navajo Nation's reservation, Claremore Indian Hospital, Lawton Indian Hospital and the Clinton Service Unit participated in a pilot program in late March and early April to expand telehealth services via an encrypted audio/video system. The Clinton Service Unit also includes clinics in Watonga and El Reno, while Lawton Indian Hospital's service unit includes the clinics in Anadarko and Carnegie.

IHS' expanded telehealth program officially rolled out nationwide on April 8. "We are trying to take care of patients' needs over the phone or via video call whenever possible to allow them to maintain social distancing and to minimize the risk for elders," Clinton Service Unit Clinical Director Dr. Sarah Hartnett said.

At an April 10 telephone town hall meeting hosted by the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Hartnett walked attendees through the process and acknowledged that with limited broadband capabilities in some communities, the process still has some kinks.

When a patient contacts their primary care provider to schedule an appoint-

ment, they will automatically be asked about their phone and internet access to help determine whether a telehealth appointment is feasible. If the patient has reliable access and is not facing a life or death emergency, then efforts will be made to see him or her remotely rather than in-person.

"It is a work in process," Hartnett said. "Sometimes there are still some technical issues."

Cherokee Nation Health Services, the country's largest tribal health system, is also expanding its telehealth programs to include dentistry, podiatry orthopedics, physical therapy, women's health, speech therapy, diabetes education and dietitian services.

Since March, more than 1,000 patients in the Cherokee Nation's health system have used the videoconferencing technology, and that number is expected to grow in the coming months.

"Telemedicine is essential to avoid unintended spread of this easily transmissible virus via patient-to-patient and provider-to-patient contact. Many treatment interactions do not absolutely require physical contact. Telemedicine is the cornerstone for continued care for patients in this unfortunate scenario our world has found itself in," said Dr. Brett Nelson of the Wilma P. Mankiller Health Center in Stilwell. "It cannot completely replace physical interactions, especially related to procedural and critical care,

but it can provide safe care for many issues. From colleagues who have discussed use with me, patients are enjoying the process and are appreciative of us helping to keep them safe."

Demographic data on confirmed Indigenous COVID-19 patients has been scarce, both locally and nationally. According to partial data released on April 17 by the state Department of Health, American Indians and Alaska Natives account for 7.4 percent of Oklahoma's confirmed cases and 5.9 percent of the state's fatalities. However, about 11 percent of the reported cases did not include racial or ethnic information.

That figure represents a jump of more than 0.5 percent in less than two weeks, in part because the state Department of Health began including testing data from IHS facilities on April 17.

Further compounding the problem, Indigenous adults are more likely to independently have several of the risk factors, including diabetes, lung disease and heart disease, thus prompting medical staff to encourage people with pre-existing conditions to keep them in check.

"It is more important than ever that people try to keep their diabetes under control right now," Hartnett said. "Please have your necessary medications on hand, keep your blood sugars under control, get walks in when you can and eat healthy through this."

# Surviving COVID the Native Way

The church bells hang in a solemn and eerie silence. There are no services at Big Cussetah, Choska, Concharty, Haikey, Thlopthlocco or dozens of other churches. No fourth Sundays. The shells aren't shaking at Hickory Ground, Greenleaf, Arbeka, Duck Creek and at other ceremonial grounds throughout Oklahoma. The COVID-19 virus has laid low normal life.

Tribes in the U.S. have a long and tragic history dealing with viruses and infectious diseases. The much-celebrated explorers, such as De Soto and Hernandez, brought with them numerous pigs. These explorers knew, from their prior experiences in South America, that the native population did not possess immunity to certain infectious diseases. Pigs were woefully effective at passing disease to a large and diverse group of trusting and unsuspecting tribes.

Thus the explorers let loose the deadly pigs upon the native population in their singular objective to conquer and subjugate the indigenous inhabitants. Smallpox was particularly deadly. Reliable estimates put the death toll of native people at over 100 million during the 16th and 17th centuries. Some 90% of the native population was decimated in the face of this intentional genocide.

From these dreadful experiences, Native peoples have proven to be remarkably resilient and adaptable. I am increasingly persuaded that this horrific history, an intergenerational trauma, has engendered and manifested a cohesion that has knitted and woven together native peoples.

For better or worse it is part and parcel of our identity. Survival in the face of great odds of extermination. An adept ability to adapt to cataclysmic events and circumstances. After nearly 500 years of attempted genocide, extermination, assimilation and conquest, survival, adaptability, strength and resilience are baked into our DNA.

At the center of these virtues, at the core of our strength as native peoples, is our spirituality. We honor Creator. Many prefer the term God. Traditionally the Creeks would say Hesaketvmese. Whatever the preferred term, we as native peoples honor The One Above. It

is a truth universally acknowledged.

Through the generations we have passed down and practiced this honoring through dancing, songs, hymns, shell shaking and drumming. There is great power and Good Medicine in these ceremonies and songs. They have seen our people through ineffable calamity and devastation. I am possessed of splendid expectations that these traditional practices will see us through the crucible of the COVID pandemic. We cannot currently come together as native communities to physically share these sacred and traditional ceremonies and forms of worship. We are, however, linked into a web of social distancing interconnectedness.

What I mean about this web of interconnectedness is shared ritual. For example, each morning I begin my day agreeably employed in singing a Mvskoke hymn. In this I am not isolated. Indeed, I know that there are Creeks throughout Oklahoma and tribal peoples across the nation who also greet the rising sun in their own way. In shared ritual we are tightly connected.

One of my favorite Creek hymns is *Estvmvn Estomen Fullatskis*. It begins with the chorus: "*Estvmvn estomen fullatskis, vm emekusapatsken, vneucem emekusvpare*". This chorus is generally translated as "*wherever, however, you are, pray for me, I will pray for you too*". This sentiment is as beautiful as it is comforting. It underscores that in honoring The One Above we simultane-

ously honor, uplift and love one another. Even from a distance. We are all in this together.

So during this pandemic, let us endeavor to pray for one another, let us comfort and help one another. Let us be especially sure to take care of our elders. Let us lean on our traditions and ceremonial ways through praying, dancing, drumming and singing. We will thus never be alone even while isolated from one another, from family, friends and our community.

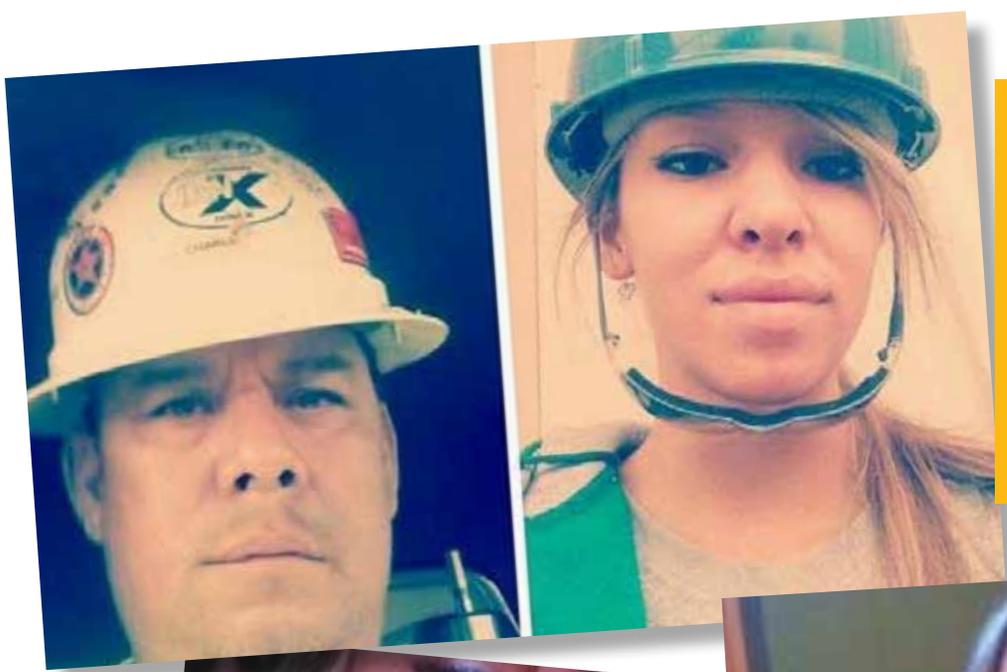
Let us redouble our efforts during this pandemic crucible to be cloaked in the mantle of love, concern and service to our fellow brothers and sisters, winning what success our oftentimes feeble efforts might otherwise achieve. In so doing, I am convinced that we will merit the approbation of our departed ancestors who have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of our collective destiny and wellbeing.

Soon the church bells will ring again and the shells will shake. Life will resume to some normal. As we collectively sally forth into the fog and haze of an inchoate new normal, I entreat you to take solace and comfort in the words of the great Shawnee/Creek leader Tecumseh. He said, "*When you rise in the morning, give thanks for the light, for your life, for your strength. Give thanks for your food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason to give thanks, the fault lies in yourself*".



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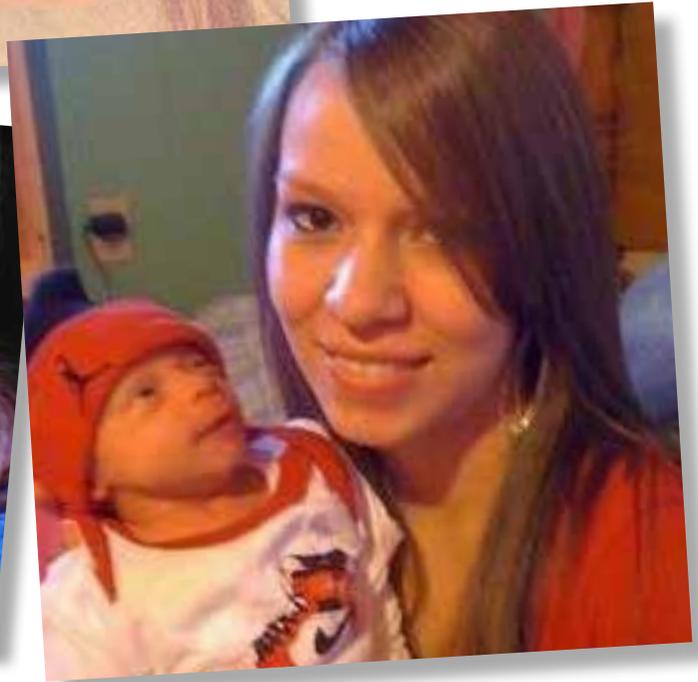
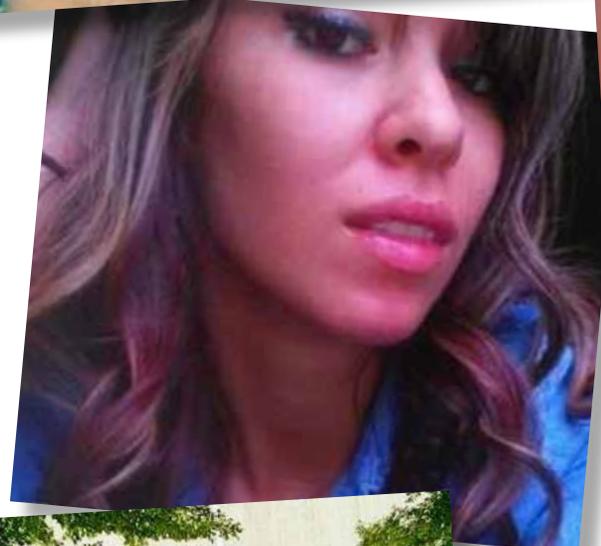
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# Disciplines to Practice During a Pandemic

A time of uncertainty is upon us. The word Pandemic is not a familiar word with this generation. This has been a difficult time for all. I have wondered if God, the master of the universe is using this to get our attention. When I turned my life over to God years ago, I knew it was a time to get serious about my relationship with Him!

Here are some disciplines to encourage you to a closer walk with God. He deserves our complete attention!

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." — Mark 12:30

**Journaling** is a discipline of reflection. It is a way to write down your thoughts and feelings during your time with the Lord. I also write down prayers to God and see how He answers those prayers. Writing down favorite scriptures and how God has spoke to your heart during the times you have spend with Him.

**Waiting** is a discipline of trusting God in the midst of uncertainty, when you have limited control or no control. The COVID-19 outbreak is a reminder that in this life there are some things we do not have control over.

"Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before Him. God is our refuge. Selah" —Psalms 62:8

**Devotion Reading**-pick and choose devotions that you are interested in. Use the internet to pick some devotionals that will help you in reading God's Word.

**5 Steps to Devotional Reading:**

- Pray-Pray and allow God to take all of your concerns! Invite the Holy Spirit to join you as you engage with God's Word.
- Read-Slowly read the passage out loud and list to the text. When a word or phrase stands out to you, linger over it. Don't over think it, just listen and consider what the Lord may be saying to you in that moment.
- Meditate-Read the passage out loud again and think about the passage all day long.
- Respond-Read the passage again prayerfully. As you talk with God about the passage, let God know what your are thinking and how this passage is speaking to you!
- Contemplate-Take some time to let the passage sink in. Jot down what stood out to you from God's word.

**Prayer** is simply a time spent talking to God. He doesn't care so much about the words you say, rather the way your heart speaks to God. We can bring our worries, fears, request, praises and thanksgiving to Him!

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." —Philippians 4:4-7

**Solitude** is the discipline of leaving people behind and spending time alone with the Lord. It is easy during this time of isolation to turn to social media to fill our relational needs. Although social media can be a

useful tool for connection, it can give us a false sense of connection. Let's take this time connect to God!

**Fellowship**-we are in a time of social distancing and it is important to keep the togetherness part of the church. We are not "Lone Rangers." We need each other.

**Here are a few suggestions:**

- Call or FaceTime a close friend. Ask how they are doing and share what the Lord is teaching you during this season. End the time with prayer.
- Start an on-line bible study with your teammates and friends
- Read Christian articles with others and start a group text to discuss what you are learning and how God is talking to you.
- Connect through text or call with a person from your work, campus, church, and ask them to share their story. Use this time to get to know others in a deeper, more meaningful way.

We are in a unique and challenging season, but also a season of opportunity to grow in our relationship with God. This is not a huge list, but this will get us headed in the right direction!

**John Morris** is currently serving with Oklahoma Fellowship of Christian Athletes and is supported financially by faith partners. If you are interested in more information on FCA or being a faith partner, John can be contacted through email: [jmgolfer@icloud.com](mailto:jmgolfer@icloud.com) or by cell number (785-760-1627)



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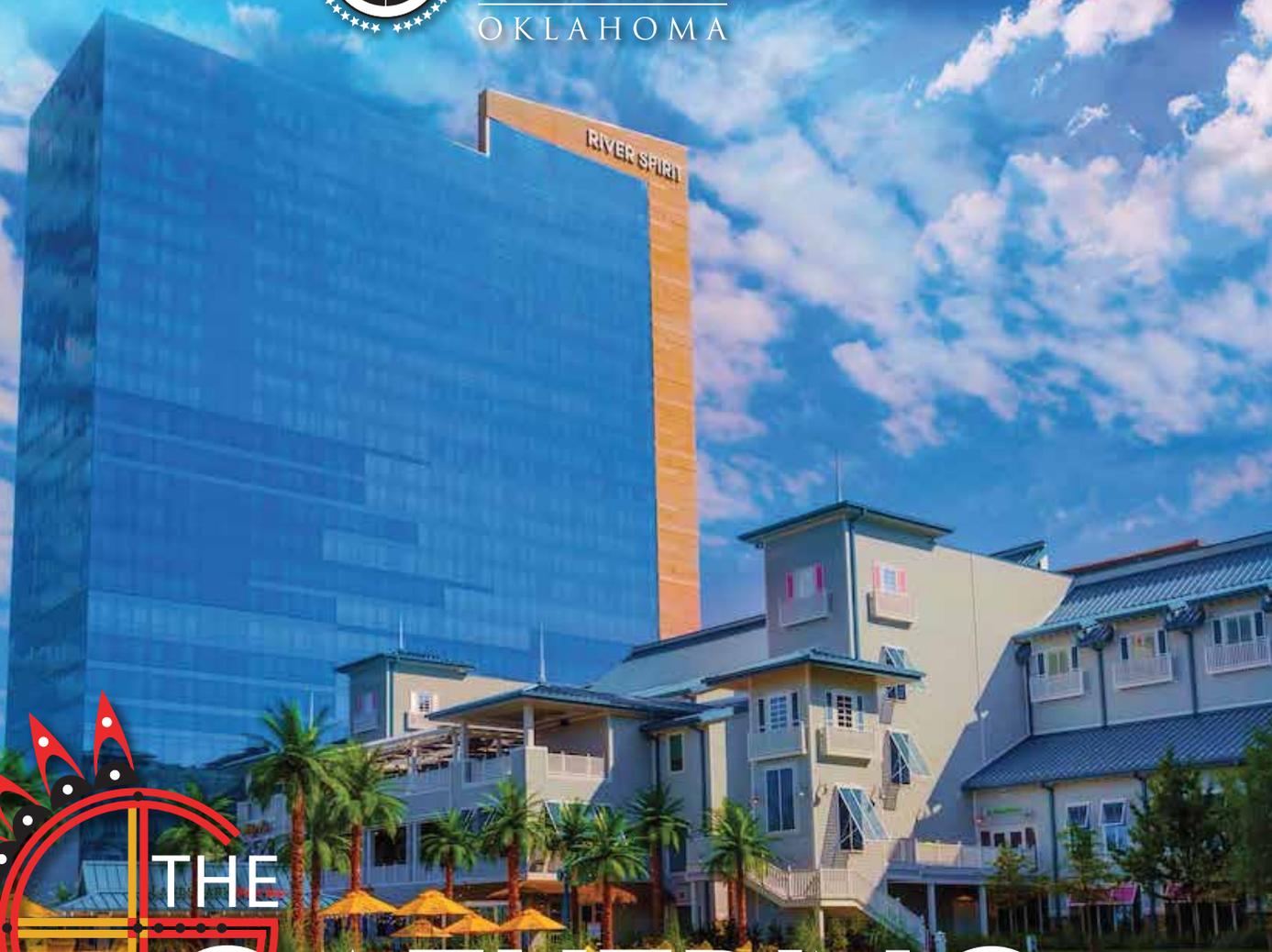
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