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ASPIRING ARTIST

Hailee Toney is taking a big step toward what she hopes will be her career. **CULTURE, 11**



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Tribal Council OKs \$3.4B budget

About \$2.98 billion is allocated for operations and \$418.5 million for capital.

BY CHAD HUNTER
Reporter

TAHLEQUAH – In unanimous votes, Cherokee Nation lawmakers on Sept. 13 approved the fiscal year 2022 capital and operating budgets totaling a record \$3.4 billion.

Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. told the Tribal Council that FY 2022's overall budget will "help us make significant strides on those areas from health care to housing to language preservation to infrastructure, just to name some of the priority areas that I know that you all have and my administration does, as well."

The budgets earmark \$2.98 billion for operations and \$418.52 million for capital. After more than three hours of budget discussions on Sept. 7, the Tribal Council's Executive & Finance Committee supported the propos-

als and pushed them forward for a full Council vote. The budgets allocate funding for the CN's 24 departments to address spending for health care, housing, roads, jobs, education and other tribal services.

"Most of our funding is coming from federal agencies," Treasurer Janees Taylor told councilors at the time. "The highest funding is coming from the Department of Treasury due mainly to the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. They constitute 39.3% of federal funding received. (Indian Health Service) not surprisingly, is the next highest with 26.1%."

From the federal rescue act, the tribe anticipates an additional \$1.1 billion for COVID relief and economic recovery. The budget anticipates a \$49.6 million increase in tribal revenue "based on projected dividends, sales and tobacco tax revenues," Taylor said.

At \$1.5 billion, last year's comprehensive budget was also the tribe's largest to date, cushioned by federal COVID relief funds.

The initial budget has grown over the course of the year to \$3.36 billion-plus through additional federal funding, grants and other resources.

The 2020 budget was a record \$1.2 billion, which included \$500 million in CARES Act funding.

Councilors also passed two measures related to the tribe's ongoing effort to amend and create laws in the wake of the 2020 U.S. Supreme Court's *McGirt v. Oklahoma* ruling.

The first act amends the definition of "drug paraphernalia" within CN code to exclude syringes or needles "issued by a harm reduction program or medical provider for infection control or infection prevention."

The second act establishes the CN Vessel and Motor Registration Act.



CHAD HUNTER/CHEROKEE PHOENIX

Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. introduces Head Start Director Verna Thompson during remarks on a proposed Verna D. Thompson Early Childhood Education Act on Sept. 14 in Tahlequah. The act commits \$40 million to replace current Head Start buildings.

MAJOR INVESTMENT

The tribe unveils a \$40 million plan to replace Head Start facilities.

BY CHAD HUNTER
Reporter

Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. on Sept. 14 announced "a major, historic investment" of \$40 million into early childhood education.

"It commits \$40 million to replacing our Head Start facilities," Hoskin said. "The facilities are full of the best staff around. They administer a curriculum that is first class. The programming is regarded as among the best in the country. What we lack is first-class facilities to provide this instruction in."

Hoskin announced the Verna D. Thompson Early Childhood Education Act of 2021 near current Head Start buildings just west of Sequoyah



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High School. As part of the act, the CN would also review, on a biennial basis, child care and early childhood education efforts.

"We're going to look to the Council to consider this legislation and give us any further feedback," Hoskin said. "We hope to see it approved (in September) at committee and full Council in October, and then we'll get down to the business of designing and constructing the best facilities."

The tribe's seven aging Head Start buildings in Tahlequah are clustered together along a circular street near SHS.

SEE HEAD START, 3

Mask-making facilities give PPE security, employment

The Cherokee Nation spent \$9 million on PPE manufacturing facilities in Hulbert and Stilwell.

BY CHAD HUNTER
Reporter

HULBERT – Cherokee Nation leaders say the tribe's fledgling face mask-making operations in Hulbert and Stilwell not only fill a community demand, but also offer much-needed employment for tribal citizens displaced by the pandemic.

"We want to put the Nation in a position where we have adequate supplies of PPE, specifically masks," Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said. "We are still in the midst of fighting COVID, and we know that masking, in addition to vaccines, is the most important thing that we can do. There is a demand for that. So we have been able to meet the particular demand at the community level. We've seen schools struggling with how to protect kids and wanting to do the right thing. We've provided them with masks. We've done that for other places in the communities – churches, people that need the mask, our workforce."

A year ago, using federal CARES Act funding, the tribe spent \$9 million to build a 4,300-square-foot personal protective equipment, or PPE, facility in Hulbert and renovate a long-vacant Cherokee Nation Businesses building for a larger operation in Stilwell. In addition to PPE security, the sites have created jobs for those displaced by the pandemic or who are recovering from substance addiction, Hoskin said.

"It gives them an opportunity to get some skills and employment and move on to a life where they can be self-sufficient," he said. "It's another win. It's another reason this was a great investment."

Out of work during the pandemic, Dakota Fixin, 29, of Tahlequah, took advantage of a Career Services program that led him back into the workforce as a PPE machine operator.

"I had my own trash business," he said, "and people would rather keep their \$20 a month not knowing if they're going to have a job or not rather than have us pick up their trash, which is fine. But we had to sell the business and I was out of work for about a year."

Fixin now works with a handful of others at the



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Cherokee Phoenix launches mobile app

The newly developed mobile app will make content more readily available.

BY STAFF REPORTS

TAHLEQUAH – The Cherokee Phoenix on Sept. 22 launched a newly developed mobile app to make content more readily available to its audience.



A screenshot of the home screen of the Cherokee Phoenix mobile app that launched on Sept. 22.

"We, at the Cherokee Phoenix, are extremely excited to roll out our new mobile app," Executive Editor Tyler Thomas said. "We are constantly trying to identify ways of making information produced by our news organization the most easily accessible for our citizens. Over the years we have built a strong social media presence and earlier this year we launched a new, more user-friendly website. Developing a mobile app that delivers our content directly to our audiences' mobile devices was the obvious next step. I thank our staff and partners for making such a great product for our people."

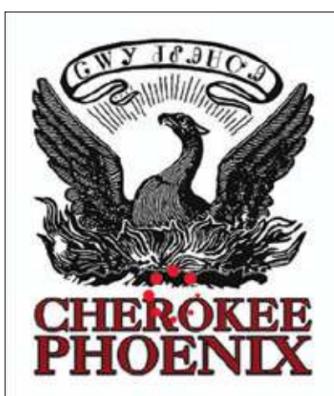
The Cherokee Nation's independent news organization partnered with TownNews, a digital media and online publishing company in Illinois, for the development of the mobile app.

The app coincides with the Cherokee Phoenix's redesigned website that launched in March.

To find the app in the Apple

iTunes and Google Play stores, search for Cherokee Phoenix.

The organization also utilizes social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and sends out a digital email newsletter three days a week.



A screenshot of the landing screen of the new Cherokee Phoenix mobile app.



CHAD HUNTER/CHEROKEE PHOENIX

Machine operator Dakota Fixin inspects masks on Sept. 17 at the Cherokee Nation's PPE manufacturing facility in Hulbert.