

# Community

## Four years of clean water progress under the Mankiller Soap Water Act

BY CHUCK HOSKIN JR.  
*Principal Chief*

Water is life. No one understood this better than former Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller and Charlie Soap. Together, they devoted themselves to the most essential work of all: connecting Cherokee families to clean, reliable water. Their leadership brought dignity, health, and opportunity to our communities in the 1980s.

To honor their visionary efforts and extend their legacy, we enacted the Wilma P. Mankiller and Charlie Soap Water Act in 2021. Four years later, we are proud of what we have accomplished, but we know there is still much work to do. While water systems can be complicated, the fundamentals of the Mankiller Soap Water Act are simple. Under this law, Cherokee Nation continually gathers feedback from our citizens, maps the water infrastructure of our homes and communities, and invests to close any gaps that we find.

Since the beginning of this effort, Cherokee Nation has surveyed nearly 2,000 citizens and examined 121 public water systems and 53 wastewater systems. So far, we have identified more than 8,000 homes lacking public water access and pinpointed the water and wastewater systems with the most deficiencies.

To date, Cherokee Nation has allocated \$65 million for infrastructure improvements under this act, with \$23.8 million already spent addressing critical projects. One of our proudest achievements is the \$8.38 million invested to date in modernizing the Cherry Tree Water District, which serves communities closest to Chief Mankiller’s historic Bell water

line project. This investment alone is bringing better water access to more than 800 Cherokee homes.

We are committed to investing even more in Cherry Tree. Working alongside the water district board and strong local advocates like Cherokee Council member Josh Sam I know we can fully modernize the district and keep it on sound footing for generations to come.

Our efforts aren’t stopping there. From a new water tower under construction in Nowata to repairs across our reservation’s most underserved areas, the Mankiller Soap Water Act is delivering overdue improvements. Beginning this year, we are increasing funding for the act with an additional \$500,000.

But infrastructure is only one part of the difference the act is making. It also provides direct support to Cherokee families through water utility assistance that has helped more than 500 elders and families avoid difficult choices between water access and other necessities. A \$25,000 fund supports water tap installations in our new home construction program, and we’ve identified 120 households with the most urgent needs, connecting them to safe water access for the very first time.

These changes represent something deeper for us as Cherokee people, as water is more than just a resource. It is a sacred, connecting to our health, our culture and our future.

The Mankiller Soap Water Act is a continuation of our Cherokee values because it honors the principle of gadugi, working together for the common good. It builds on the ethos that Wilma Mankiller and Charlie Soap exemplified so boldly. And it demonstrates that we, as a Nation,

take action to ensure the health and safety of our citizens.

Just as Wilma and Charlie once traveled across our communities to ensure that no Cherokee family was left behind, we continue to gather data through surveys. We learn directly from Cherokees about where water access is lacking. These insights help guide every decision we make.

Looking ahead, the work is far from complete. We have committed \$2 million annually from the general fund to continue the work. Additional investments, including \$500,000 from the Public Health and Wellness Fund, will further expand our ability to reach families in need of safe water.

It is a promise that, no matter how remote or underserved, every Cherokee family matters.

As part of our commitment to transparency and public engagement we have issued our latest biennial report, a requirement of the Mankiller Soap Water Act, on our website [cherokee.org](http://cherokee.org).

The Wilma P. Mankiller and Charlie Soap Water Act has made an impact we can measure in miles of water lines, gallons of clean water, and homes served. But the deeper impact is seen in the faces of families who turn on a faucet and trust what flows, knowing their Nation has invested in them. It is reflected in the smiles of children who can bathe safely and in elders who no longer worry if their utility bills will stretch far enough.

Building on the legacy of Wilma Mankiller and Charlie Soap means more than improving water access, it’s about empowering our people. Water truly is life, and in Cherokee Nation, we will continue to honor that truth for future generations.

## Cherokee Nation invests \$23.8 million into water improvements across Reservation

- April 14 marked the four-year anniversary of the Wilma P. Mankiller and Charlie Soap Water Act

**T**AHLEQUAH, Okla. — The Cherokee Nation is celebrating the four-year anniversary of the Wilma P. Mankiller and Charlie Soap Water Act including spending \$23.8 million so far to date for water investments made in that time to increase water quality access for Cherokee Nation citizens across the reservation.

The Cherokee Nation Wilma P. Mankiller and Charlie Soap Water Act is a legislative initiative to improve access to clean and safe water signed into law in April 2021 by Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. and Deputy Chief Bry-

an Warner.

It was named to honor the legacy of late former Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller and her husband, Charlie Soap, who were instrumental in water access projects in the 1980s, including the historic Bell water line in Adair County.

Studies indicated the community and water district of Cherry Tree needed \$11 million in repairs and maintenance. Through the act the Cherokee Nation has invested \$8.38 million for systemwide improvements to water lines serving over 800 Cherokee homes. In honor of Chief Mankiller and Charlie Soap’s work on the Bell water line which is part of the Cherry Tree Water District, the act placed a priority on repairing and modernizing that water system.

Cherry Tree Water Dis-

trict is wholly owned and operated by the water district. Cherokee Nation has no ownership or operational control over the system.

“Four years ago, the Cherokee Nation took a significant step forward with the Wilma P. Mankiller and Charlie Soap Water Act, a measure inspired by the enduring legacy of two visionaries who dedicated their lives to uplifting our communities. Today, we reflect on the progress we’ve made and the profound impact this act has had on the lives of our Cherokee citizens,” Chief Hoskin said. “From the \$8.38 million investment in the Cherry Tree community to the construction of a new water tower in Nowata and ensuring access to clean water for 120 citizens identified through our water survey who do not have adequate access to water, these investments represent far more than infrastructure—they represent a commitment to health, safety, and dignity for our people.”

The tribe’s repairs to water line leaks in Cherry Tree helped John McCullough who lives in the community with his wife and young daughter.

“We used to have lots of repair trucks always out here before, but now we have good water pressure and no more issues, so we are incredibly pleased with the tribe’s efforts,” McCullough said.

The act has also utilized half a million to help elders or those low income with water utility bills, and \$25,000 to help put in new water taps for homes under the new home construction program.

A water tower is being built in Nowata, and 120 Cherokee Nation citizens

identified in a water survey last year through the tribe are being individually served with water upgrades.

“This truly is helping families across our reservation with good, safe water, something many of us take for granted but affect so many of our citizens especially in rural communities,” said Deputy Chief Bryan Warner. “The true spirit of this work reflects ‘gadugi’—coming together as one community. The anniversary is a moment to honor not only the legacy of Chief Mankiller and Charlie Soap but also the collective efforts of our communities, departments, and leaders who have worked to achieve this.”

The Cherokee Nation Transportation and Infrastructure Department has also worked with cities, towns and water districts to GPS their water systems so the Cherokee Nation has a digital map to know across the Cherokee Nation where they can tap into water saving time and work efficiency.

“Some city water departments had no maps, or had paper copies, so this is a new tool that can make water access extremely more efficient for everyone,” said Council Speaker Mike Shambaugh.

The Mankiller Soap Water Act allocates a minimum of \$2 million annually, doubling the Cherokee Nation’s general fund spending on water infrastructure projects. It prioritizes addressing deficiencies in water and wastewater systems, particularly in rural and underserved areas within the reservation.

See **CHEROKEE**, page 7



### COMMUNITY CALENDAR

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 26

• 7:00-10:00am, Keystone Masonic Lodge #102 Pancake Feed, 2001 Woodland Ave.

#### SUNDAY, APRIL 27

• 10:30am, Bibles, Bikers and Barbecue, First Assembly of God

#### FRIDAY, MAY 2

• 4:00-9:00pm, CCC 38th Annual Auction, Nellis Gymnasium

#### WEDNESDAY, MAY 7

• 7:30am, Business Over Breakfast, Best Western

## Have a community event?

Email it to [coffeyville1@gmail.com](mailto:coffeyville1@gmail.com).  
It's your community calendar!

### ET CETERA

#### VALLEY OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS LODGE OF PERFECTION

All members of the Valley of Southeast Kansas Lodge of Perfection are asked to attend the Stated Dinner and Meeting on Thursday, May 1, 2025 at the Armstrong Masonic Lodge, located at 3105 North Joplin Street, Pittsburg, Kansas. Social hour begins at 5:30 p.m., dinner will be at 6:30 p.m. and the meeting will start at approximately 7:00 p.m. Reservations are required, so please RSVP by Wednesday, April 30 at [sekscottishrite@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sekscottishrite@sbcglobal.net) or by calling 620-223-1330.

#### 12TH ANNUAL LIBERTY COOK-OFF

The 12th Annual Liberty BBQ Cook-Off will take place in Liberty Saturday, April 26 at the Liberty Community Church, located at 4th and Main. There will be outdoor activities available for all attendees during the afternoon beginning at 4:00 p.m., including music, fun and games. Bring your lawn chairs and join in the excitement at this event. At 5:00 p.m., the meat judging will begin and the meal will start at 6:30 p.m. Donations will be accepted and will go toward local outreach programs. Before the meal, there will be a silent auction of delicious desserts and later there will also be a life auction of choice meats. If you are interested in being a cook-off competitor, contact Dean Mitchell at 620-252-0658.

#### HSH PULLED PORK DINNER

HSH Homeless Ministry will be holding their pulled pork dinner fundraiser Saturday, April 26 at the First Baptist Church, located at 220 South Pennsylvania Avenue, Independence, from 5:00-7:00 p.m. Cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12. Dinner is pulled pork sandwiches, coleslaw, baked beans, macaroni and cheese, dessert and iced tea or water to drink.

## • Caney BOE

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the use of AI such as Chat GPT. “The policy is there. We have been working on it,” he stated. “To be honest, this is going to be a learn and grow as we go.” He continued, “AI is not going away. It’s only going to get better and so teaching them how to use it ethically is the game plan.” He added that AI is especially useful when creating resumes.

Traxon explained that they are adding smart watches to their cellular device restriction policy. These devices will go in the lock box in the classrooms during school hours. Exceptions to this policy are made for students who need their phones for medical purposes.

Vargas invited the board to discuss A Bond For Everyone. The bond, which would have provided \$32 million in funding for a lengthy list of upgrades and renovations to the district’s aging buildings and facilities was recently voted down. Twice as many voters turned out for this election than the last bond election. Vargas recommended that an in-depth discussion on the topic be handled in a special meeting which would be scheduled two weeks out in order to engage the community and give time for some additional information to come in. Vargas stated, “To me very clearly in order to move forward we have to know why. I have heard from several of them and none of them have overlapped.” He reported that some voters were deterred by the time frame and others the shock of the sticker price. Some were even deterred by specific items to be addressed by the bond such as the stadium. Board member Jason McVey stated, “My perspective is that if your family can’t afford it, then you vote for your family. I mean that’s how we all are. I don’t have any hard feelings.” Board member Josh Elliott asked if the board could quickly perform a survey to determine why voters voted the way that they did. Vargas agreed that he can get a survey out in the paper and on social media right away. They scheduled the special meeting for May 5 at 6:00 p.m. “I just want to say thank you to the board,” stated Vargas, “What I am most proud of is that as a board you made the decision to be proactive about some of these issues that we see coming versus reactive.”

The district is out to bid the Kansas Educators Insurance Trust. The current provider is Blue Cross Blue Shield. There are three providers available in Kansas. They have received an initial proposal and will receive a second proposal.

Board president, Daniel Owen presented the Tri-County Report. They decided to start the pay for new hires a month earlier to avoid gaps in income.

The board approved the action items which included seeking bids for Drivers Education and Fleet Vehicles, JAG-K, the KASB renewal and the district capacity for the 2025-2026 school year.

The next regular meeting of the Caney Board of Education will be held on May 12 at 6:00 p.m., at the board office at 700 East Bullpup Boulevard. All are welcome and encouraged to attend.

## • Love and warmth

Con't from Page 1

they are given to babies who may need a little extra warmth and care. To date, she has made over 400 blankets on her own—a testament to her commitment and compassion.

But her dedication to children and families started long before that. Sherry is a retired home economics teacher who spent 24 years teaching at the local high school. “I started teaching in 1965,” she recalls with a smile. “I taught everything but clothing—well, just one year at Roosevelt.”

Before her years in the classroom, Sherry also served as the Education Director for Head Start, covering seven counties in southeast Kansas for nearly eight years.

Her legacy is stitched not just into the blankets she makes, but into the lives she’s touched—both in and out of the classroom.

“Thank you, Sherry, for your incredible heart, and for continuing to care for CRMC’s tiniest patients”, said Jennifer Wintjen, RN, Director of Women’s Health Services at CRMC.



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Dr. Andrea Wagner,  
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Friday, April 25, 2025 from 7pm-9pm

**Coffeyville Senior Citizens Activity Center**  
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