



Rotary

Club of Jackson,
Mississippi



Rotagram

March 24, 2025

The Rotary Club of Jackson welcomed **Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians**. His presentation will be **“Choctaw Vision: Balancing Tradition with Modern Business.”**

Special Guest: 2024-2025 Choctaw Indian Princess Leilani Elyse Allen.

The club members enjoyed the presentation, and at the meeting's conclusion, several attendees posed for photos with Chief Ben and Princess Leilani.



L to R: Richard Wilbourn – Rotary President Elect; Attorney – Richard Wilbourn and Associates, PLLC; Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; President Phillip Carpenter, Rotary President; Owner, Carpenter Properties; and Tina Clay, City of Jackson Ward 2 Council

**President Phillip Carpenter welcomed Rotarians and guests.
He also led the Club in the Four Way Test.**

David Raddin delivered the Invocation.

Bill Moore led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Hap Henley introduced our visitors:

Special Guest – Leilani Elyse Allen, 2024-2025 Choctaw Indian Princess

Kevin Grisham – Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Dalrick Smith – Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Jalen Willis – Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Diana Solomon - Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Neddie Winters' guest - Candie L Simmons, Consultant, CL Simmons Consulting, LLC

Lee Bush's guest – Dr. Marshall Thompson, Psychologist, Marshall Arts Academy, LLC

LeRoy Walker's guest – Socrates Garrett, SGE, Inc.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Matching Paul Harris Point Campaign

- Any individual Rotarian can donate \$100 or more in March.
- All donations will be matched with an equal number of recognition points.
- Give the check to Mark Saxon or James Carter, Club Foundation Chairs, before the end of March.
- Mark or James can help you with your current recognition level and tell you how much it would take to go to the next level with the match.

Mark Saxon
601-832-9393
mtsaxon@gmail.com

James Carter
769-232-4761
jamescarter@bankplus.net

HOW WE WORK THE MAGIC: INSPIRING ACTION

Rotary 6800 & 6820
Multi-District Conference

4.4.25-4.5.25

The Cotton House
Cleveland, MS!

Registration Cost \$50 and includes....

*Friday night party
at the Grammy Museum
with music from
the Stormy Monday Blues Band,
2 drink tickets, horderves*

*Conference at The Cotton House Saturday
breakfast and lunch served*



REGISTER TODAY!



<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/joint-rotary-district-conference-tickets-1250762878439?aff=oddtcreator>
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/joint-rotary-district-conference-tickets-1250762878439?aff=oddtcreator>

BIRTHDAYS:

Tony Webb	March 25
Pelicia Hall	March 30

ROTARY JOIN DATES:

Jamie Himes	03/29/2018	7 Years
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Monday, March 31, 2025 – The Rotary Club of Jackson will welcome Meade Mitchell, President of the Mississippi Bar Association

Richard Wilbourn introduced Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

Having been re-elected to a second term, Chief Cyrus Ben is the fifth elected Tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, a federally recognized tribe of over 11,100 members living on or near 35,000 acres of tribal lands in east central Mississippi. Chief Ben has a 15-year record of public service to the Choctaw Tribal government and Tribal business leadership, including 8 years as the Pearl River community's representative on the Tribal Council before being elected Tribal Chief in July 2019. He served four years as the Tribe's Secretary-Treasurer and three years as the President of Choctaw-Ikhana, a tribally chartered corporation.

A graduate of Mississippi College, Chief Ben earned his bachelor's degree in 2001. He earned an associate's degree from East Central Community College in 1998. Tribal Chief Ben was presented with the 2022 Order of the Golden Arrow award. This award honors Mississippi College graduates who have accomplished outstanding personal and/or professional achievements during their lifetime. Chief Ben was also selected as Alumnus of the Year at East Central Community College.

Chief Ben has also been recognized in Indian Country as an emerging young leader. In 2009, the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development named Chief Ben to the "Native American 40 Under 40" class. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves appointed Chief Ben to the prestigious Mississippi Flag Commission, which oversaw the selection of the new state flag, which now includes a symbol of native territory before statehood. He is a board member of the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service. Locally, he was named Citizen of the Year by the Philadelphia-Neshoba County Community Development Partnership. He also serves as a delegate on the Health Resources and Services Administration Tribal Advisory Council, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Center for Indigenous Innovation and Health Equity Tribal Advisory Committee.

An enrolled member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and a fluent speaker of his native Choctaw language, Chief Ben is a lifelong resident of the Pearl River community, where he resides with his wife, TaRita, and their children, Brodie, Eden, and Selah.

Choctaw history goes back for centuries; however, much of that story has been lost. The history of the Choctaw is full of heartache and triumph. Our story has been one of unyielding determination to survive and succeed in the face of great obstacles, adversity, and near extinction.

The Choctaw and their ancestors have called the region known as the Southeast home for centuries. The proof of this is in the art, stories, and legends of the Choctaw. There are three eras in which the Choctaw are known to have existed: Paleo-Indian Stage (18,000 – 8,000 B.C.), Archaic Stage (8,000-1,000 B.C.), and Prehistory (1,000 B.C. — 1540 A.D.). Prehistory is defined as the time before sustained European contact.

The first mention of the Choctaw name in modern history was recorded in 1675 by a Spanish priest in Florida. He warned early settlers against traveling too far to the west lest they meet the fearsome “Chahta.” This name is still what the Choctaw call themselves today.

The Choctaw’s first sustained contact with Europeans was with French explorer D’Iberville in 1699. The two sides became allies for the following 65 years, with the Tribe supporting the fledgling colony with food and in wars against the English and Indians who supported the English. The alliance also provided the Choctaw with French firearms to fight other tribes raiding the Choctaw for slaves since the early 1680s.

The end of the French and Indian War in 1763 put the Choctaw in a precarious situation. All lands east of the Mississippi River were transferred from the French to the English, while French land to the west of the river went to the Spanish. That arrangement did not last long, with the outcome of the Revolutionary War, which established the United States.

The United States and the Choctaw signed a number of treaties through the years that laid the course for the Choctaw’s future. The first, in 1786, reaffirmed the boundaries of Tribal land and Choctaw sovereignty. However, from 1801 to 1830, the Choctaw signed a series of treaties with the United States, eventually losing all territory east of the Mississippi, some 32 million acres of land, and a move to present-day Oklahoma. Fortunately for the Choctaw, the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek allowed Choctaw who did not want to go to the new territory to stay. Those who remained became U.S. citizens and were awarded land grants based on the size of each family. Some 4,000 Choctaw chose not to leave despite a great deal of coercion.

By 1850, virtually none of the Choctaw who had received land in Mississippi still retained it. They were either scammed out of their land or forced away by white settlers. As a result, many left for Oklahoma. Those who remained in Mississippi survived the rest of the 19th century by living off the land or becoming tenant farmers and sharecroppers on land that had once been theirs.

In the early 20th century, the poor conditions in which the Choctaw lived were brought to the attention of the federal government. It stepped in to assist the Tribe when the 1918 influenza epidemic/pandemic killed more than 25 percent of the Mississippi Choctaw. During the 1920s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established elementary

schools in the main Choctaw communities, the Choctaw Agency, and a hospital in Philadelphia, MS.

For many years, the Choctaw living in the region worked tirelessly to gain recognition and establish themselves as a Tribe. Two separate groups worked towards achieving this recognition. It took them many meetings and years, but using procedures authorized under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians' Constitution was ratified in 1945 and officially recognized by the federal government. The first Tribal Council was little more than an advisory committee set up to approve BIA decisions. As time passed, the council gained more authority and expertise, eventually taking over the Choctaw Reservation's direct administration and many programs.

Today, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) is the state's only federally recognized Indian Tribe. Enrolled membership in the Tribe exceeds 11,000 individuals, all of whom have at least a 50 percent degree of Mississippi Choctaw blood. Two-thirds of the Tribal population is under the age of 25.

Tribal lands contain a diversified portfolio of manufacturing, service, retail, hospitality, and construction enterprises. Each provides employment opportunities for Tribal members and area residents and tax-equivalent revenue to provide Tribal government services.

The Mississippi Choctaws now own approximately 34,000 acres.

The revenues fund new school construction, strengthening educational programs, and post-secondary scholarships for Tribal members. The success of Choctaw businesses and enterprises enables the Tribe to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient while making a significant and favorable economic impact on the surrounding non-Choctaw communities. The Tribe is now among Mississippi's top five largest private employers, with over 5,750 employees.

MORE PHOTOS



Chief Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and 2024-2025 Choctaw Indian Princess Leilani Elyse Allen



Chief Cyrus Ben



President Phillip Carpenter



Chief Cyrus Ben, President-elect Richard Wilbourn, and President Phillip Carpenter



Princess Leilani Elyse Allen and Tina Clay



Lee Bush, Princess Leilani Elyse Allen, and Dr. Marshall Thompson



Chief Ben, Princess Leilani Elyse Allen, and Keith Ferguson



Chief Cyrus Ben, Princess Leilani Elyse Allen, and Tamica Jeuitt



Sharon Moman and Chief Cyrus Ben



Chief Cyrus Ben and Tina Clay



Ashby Foote and Princess Leilani Elyse Allen



Leilani Elyse Allen and Selena Swartzfager



Socrates Garrett asked a question



Hap Henley, Selena Swartzfager (asked a question), and Jack Blackburn



Chief Cyrus Ben and President Phillip Carpenter



Past President Selena Swartzfager and Chief Cyrus Ben



Richard Wilbourn and Leilani Elyse Allen



Dianna Solomon and Dean Rosenblatt