



(l-r) Principal Chief Chad Smith, Bobbie Gail Smith, Sylvia Soap, Deputy Chief candidate Chris Soap

JUNE 25
RE-ELECT
PRINCIPAL CHIEF
Chad
SMITH

ELECT FOR
DEPUTY CHIEF
Chris
SOAP

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Guided by ga-du-gi

Quiet Cherokee Nation leader works for the greater good

BY D. RAY TUTTLE
 THE JOURNAL RECORD

TAHLEQUAH – During the ice storms of 2007, a Cherokee Nation volunteer delivered water to a rural Delaware County fire station isolated by the storm. With no fanfare, the volunteer made the delivery and left. No one was aware that it was Principal Chief Chad Smith. The anecdote is typical of the softspoken Smith, who makes it a point to quietly serve and do good without drawing attention to himself.

“He cares about the individual,” said Todd Enlow, Cherokee Nation Leadership group leader, describing the anecdote. “He knew people were in need or hurting during the ice storms and he got involved. He did not take the leadership role. It was just, ‘tell me what to do and I’ll do it.’”

Smith was simply practicing

ga-du-gi, which in the Cherokee language refers to the mentality of seeing a need and spontaneously jumping in to help an individual. In a larger sense, the word is used to describe community spirit and coming together to work for the greater good.

There are plenty of similar stories about Smith, who was elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1999 and re-elected twice. In a way, the Cherokee Nation has experienced ga-du-gi at an unprecedented rate, with the nation seeing an expansion in economic growth and prosperity over the past decade under Smith’s leadership.

The Cherokee Nation has experienced steady economic growth over the past decade. During Smith’s tenure, growth in education, health care, business and real estate occurred.

The Cherokee Nation owns Cherokee Nation Entertainment, a gaming and hospitality company with several thousand employees in northeastern Oklahoma, as well as Cherokee Nation Industries, a defense contractor.

Despite some struggles in the last

half of the 1990s, the Cherokee Nation tribal government has grown remarkably since the late 1960s, Smith said. Forty years ago, the tribal government had a budget of \$10,000 and three employees.

“Today, the Cherokee Nation’s government budget is more than \$600 million and there are more than 3,400 employees,” Smith said.

In addition, the budget of the nation’s tribal businesses is more than \$600 million. They employ more than 5,000 people.

Leading by example

Much of Smith’s leadership is by example, said those who work with the principal chief. Smith is a hardworking visionary who sacrifices for others, said Cherokee Nation Secretary of State Melanie Knight.

His days typically start at about 7 a.m. and often do not end until 9 p.m. Smith is found at tribal offices during nights, weekends and holidays, Knight said.



Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chad Smith.
 PHOTO BY RIP STELL

“He’s one of the hardest-working people I’ve seen,” Knight said. “He works hard and expects us to work just as hard as he does.”

At tribal headquarters, Smith does not have an office, but works in the middle of his staff in an open area without walls.

“He makes himself accessible to the staff and for the citizens,” Knight said. “He will drop whatever he’s doing and make time for you. He chooses to work like that.”

Smith calls each of the nation’s 3,400 employees on their birthday. The chief is comfortable with corporate or political leaders, and can swing a hammer in the construction of a community center, Enlow said.

“He has the ability to go toe to toe with a CEO of a Fortune 500 company or talk to a U.S. senator, then go out that afternoon and work with a construction crew and volunteers putting shingles on a roof,” Enlow said.

Melissa Gower, the group leader of Cherokee Nation Health Services and Government Relations, said Smith’s openness goes beyond the way the office is laid out.

“He encourages people to speak their opinion. He is very open to ideas and if you disagree, he’s open and wants you to tell him that and why,” Gower said. “He’s a consensus builder.”

Knight agreed. “He’s comfortable with people in the community, chatting with someone over a cup of coffee, or with powerful, influential people – he’s comfortable in all kinds of environments,” Knight said.

As an elected official, Smith merely sees himself as a politician. “By definition,” Smith said.

“Webster’s Dictionary defines a ‘politician’ as versed in the art or science of policymaking. What a good politician does is take conflicting interests, reconciles those interests and brings order and productivity to society.”

There is a difference between a leader and manager, Gower said. “Chief Smith is a leader with great vision,” Gower said.

“It is something unique with him in that he has the ability to implement that vision. He does it a lot better than most.”

He does not waver from a course, Gower said. “He makes sure the vision becomes sets of actions that are implemented,” Gower said.

“I’ve had lots of people tell me they have worked in other organizations and this was the first where there was a vision, things were planned and then those plans were actually put into action and not just left on a shelf.”

Smith allows people around him to have the freedom to work with little supervision, Gower said. “He is not a micromanager,” Gower said. “Once he’s approved a plan, he sits back, leaves you alone and lets you move forward. You do not have to check in with him. He trusts you. It is a good environment to work in,” Gower said.

Proud past

If his home were going up in flames, Smith said if he could save one nonliving thing, it would be a picture of his family. Smith is married to Bobbie Gail Scott Smith, a full-blooded Cherokee from the Rocky Mountain community of Adair County. Bobbie Gail, named Miss Cherokee in 1975, is the daughter of the late Lincoln and Martha Scott. She has taken a leadership role in culture and language preservation. The couple have three children: Kiah, Chris and Anaweg.

Chadwick “Cornassel” Smith is the great-grandson of Redbird Smith, a Cherokee Nation senator and a traditionalist who founded the Nighthawk Keetoowah Society, a religious, cultural and political organization dedicated to reviving the Cherokee way of life. Redbird Smith fought the allotment policy under which the U.S. government took more than 7 million acres from the Cherokees.

Rachel Quinton, Chad Smith’s grandmother, was a lifelong advocate for the Cherokee people and the treasurer for the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians. Smith’s Cherokee name, “Ugista,” is derived from the Cherokee word for “Cornassel.”

Bigger challenges

During his tenure, Smith has focused on three initiatives: economic self-reliance for the tribe, Cherokee

language and cultural revitalization and community development in northeastern Oklahoma.

“It is summed up as: ‘Jobs, Language and Community,’ Knight said.

Smith appointed Knight in June 2006. As secretary of state, Knight serves as chief of staff for the government with about 3,400 employees. Prior to that appointment, Knight served as chief of staff for Smith.

“*Jobs* means the economic well being of the nation. *Community* is growing a strong Cherokee community and *Language* refers to the culture, history and the preservation and promotion of our way of life,” Knight said.

In addition, language immersion programs for Cherokee children and youth have been established during Smith’s time in office.

“We have to align our education systems to train people for the kind of economy we want long term,” Smith said.

“We have a public works program for the short term and created an environment for entrepreneurialism.”

Everything revolves around those initiatives, Gower said.

“All plans are designed around the ultimate vision of having a happy and

healthy Cherokee people,” Gower said.

“You understand that everything you do is with those things in mind.”

The message of “community” can be detailed and focused or broad-sweeping, Enlow said.

“It can be as specific as the story of Sequoyah and the Cherokee syllabary depicted in a painting on a high school gym floor, or something as large as a community center and how it is landscaped,” Enlow said.

While the nation’s hotel and casino resort thrives in Catoosa and its business arm shows strong growth, Smith said the Cherokees face external and internal challenges.

“Internally, our challenges are bigger: providing leadership and education,” Smith said.

His vision is what the nation can be in 2111 and he’s focused on developing a process of moving the tribe to that point, he said. That involves looking beyond the Cherokees’ economic sovereignty, which is firmly established. Smith said he’s setting his sights on expanding beyond gaming and resorts.

“We want to grow the sense of community,” Smith said.

Smith ran for principal chief and defeated incumbent Principal Chief Joe Byrd in a runoff election in 1999.



Smith at his office. PHOTO BY RIP STELL



Smith reads to kindergarten students at Hulbert Public Schools. COURTESY PHOTO

Byrd's term, marked with tension and constitutional crisis issues, was a difficult time for the nation as the tribe seemed to take a step back from the progress achieved during Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller's decade in office from 1985 to 1995.

"There was a lot to overcome," Knight said, referring to the period.

"There was a lot of instability and the government, which proved to be inadequate, had to be strengthened in order to move forward."

As a result, creating and promoting the three initiatives were among the first orders of business when Smith came into office in 1999.

Smith, who achieved Eagle Scout status in the Boy Scouts, was re-elected to a second term in 2003 and a third term in June 2007 with 59 percent of the vote. Smith was re-elected with Joe Grayson Jr., a bilingual, full-blood community organizer and veteran, serving as deputy chief.

Smith set out to develop a strategic plan, launching the three initiatives. Everything else is built around the initiatives, Knight said.

At that time Smith also popularized the term *ga-du-gi*, which had not been used for years, Enlow said.

"It had been a Cherokee word for eons and it was used a lot in the 1970s and '80s," Enlow said. "But it had not been used a whole lot in the previous 10 years."

Smith reintroduced the concept early in his first term of "coming together, or working together. His approach was, we will work together to build the nation, individuals and families," Enlow said.

Smith, who is a historian, easily puts current events in context of the last 200 years. And while he looks back and sees mistakes to avoid repeating, Smith is known as a visionary who is looking forward to where the nation will be a century from now.

"He thinks long term," Knight said, "and he's driven, using the three initiatives in order to achieve a 100-year plan."

Controversy

In 2006, dissident members of the tribal council filed a shareholder derivative lawsuit regarding Global Energy Group. Smith said the allegations were politically motivated.

"Just like the robin comes out in spring, this came out at the beginning of the political season," Smith said in a published report at the time. "There's

nothing to it other than a very frail effort at political embarrassment." A federal judge dismissed the case in 90 days, saying the case had a "political genesis."

Smith easily won re-election in June 2007.

He has also been involved in the Cherokee Freedmen controversy. In 2006, the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court ruled that Freedmen, as well as the intermarried whites, should be allowed to join the Cherokee Nation. The federal government intervened, ordering that the Freedman be made part of the tribe.

The Cherokee Nation appealed, citing sovereign immunity, and the appeals court ruled that the Cherokee Nation could not be sued, but that officers of the Cherokee Nation, including Smith, could be sued for allegations of working outside the boundaries of their office and violating the treaty of 1866 and the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. A federal judge last July refused to hear a lawsuit regarding Freedmen citizenship, saying that the case should be transferred to Washington, D.C., where a similar case has been since 2003. The case is ongoing.

Dreaming big

Before his election, Smith served under two Cherokee Nation chiefs as director of tribal planning, legal historian, attorney, Cherokee Nation prosecutor, director of justice and adviser to the tribal tax commission. Smith also worked as a lawyer in private practice. He taught Indian law at Northeastern State University, Rogers State University and Dartmouth College.

Smith earned a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Georgia in 1973, a master's in public administration from the University of Wisconsin in 1975, a juris doctorate from the University of Tulsa in 1980 and a master's of business administration in hospitality management from UNLV, Nevada in 2000.

From 1979 to 1980, Smith served as a consultant in Indian law and tribal management to the Cherokee Nation's Tribal Operations. He then served as assistant district attorney in

Creek County. Smith served as the estate tax attorney of the U.S. Department of Treasury, from 1980 to 1982 and from 1987 to 1989.

From 1989 to 1995 and from 1997 to 1999, he operated a private law practice out of Tulsa, representing clients in civil rights litigation and appeals, criminal defense, and general civil litigation, with a focus on Indian law.

Smith served as an assistant public defender and served as counsel to economically deprived defendants in the District Court of Tulsa County.

Smith is running for re-election this year and if he wins it will be his fourth consecutive term in office. It will be his last, as he will be term-limited.

Amended in 2007, the Cherokee Constitution added a two-term limit on the office of principal chief. Regardless, Smith sees himself operating a small to midsize business once he leaves political office. But that day is a ways off in the future.



During the winter storm, Smith, above helps an elderly lady get to dialysis. COURTESY PHOTO



Smith, left, helps the Kenwood community with remodeling and replacing the roof on their community center. COURTESY PHOTO

Today, Smith is focused on challenging the nation to dream big.

“Deputy Chief Joe Grayson said the Cherokees could put a man on the moon if they set their mind to it,” Smith said.

Closer to home, the Cherokees could create a university and field a football team to rival Notre Dame, Smith said. Regardless of the goal, it is put in the context of looking 100 years down the road, Enlow said.

“We are trying to have an impact over the 25, 50 or 100 years,” Enlow said, referring to developing leadership and the Cherokee culture.

“And it is not just doing things that get you re-elected, but it is doing good for us as a people and make an impact for the next several generations,” Enlow said.

“You may not get to see the effect in a year or in five years – but those decisions make us a better nation in the end.”

They come from a soft-spoken historian who is capable of looking into the future and making it happen.

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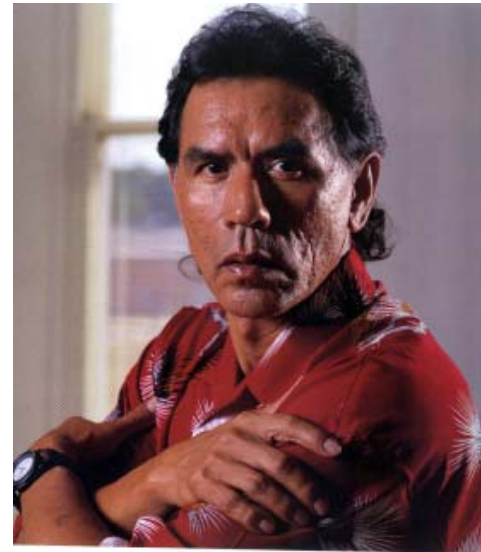
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The Cherokee people are stronger than ever...



Chad has always worked side by side with our people out in the communities to create a Nation where all can feel secure, our children are cared for, and Cherokees are raised believing that each Cherokee is necessary to make our tribal Nation work. He truly cares about people. I support Chief Smith's re-election and Chris Soap for Deputy Chief.

Lizzie Whitekiller



Chief Chad Smith's visionary leadership asks us to meet our challenges with good mind, heart and spirit — the challenge of giving of ourselves, giving to our Nation and working together. Let's keep traditional Cherokee values strong. Re-elect Chief Smith and elect Chris Soap for Deputy.

Wes Studi



Chris and Chad have a great track record of working in Cherokee communities, and serving the Cherokee people. I've been with Chad eight years and I'm proud of what we've accomplished in that time. I look forward to being a part of what he and Chris do in the coming years. Let's keep moving in the right direction.

Joe Grayson, Jr.

- Preserving Our Cherokee Culture / Language for our future
- Creating Jobs so we can support ourselves
- Organizing Communities to help each other

...moving in the Right Direction



**RE-ELECT
CHEROKEE NATION
PRINCIPAL CHIEF**

**Chad "Corntassel"
SMITH**



**ELECT FOR
CHEROKEE NATION
DEPUTY CHIEF**

**Chris
SOAP**



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