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Choctaws Dedicate Elementary School

At Jones Academy - \$10 Million State-of-the-Art Facility

At the foot of Pocahontas Mountain a few miles northeast of Hartshorne, tucked into a peaceful country backdrop of mountain and forest in southeast Oklahoma's Ouachita range, a special event will occur at 10 a.m. September 4th for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma that also benefits all Native Americans.

The place is Jones Academy and the event is the dedication of the Academy's new \$10 million Elementary Academic Building. The event is special because of Jones Academy's purpose and history in Native American education. Jones Academy is a center for elementary and secondary school age Indian children whose circumstances in life require more than education. They also receive 24/7 residential care.

After many years and the generosity of numerous donors and friends of Jones Academy, Jones Academy will dedicate its new Elementary Academic Building in a ceremony that begins at 10 a.m. September 4th on the Academy grounds (2.3 miles northeast of Hartshorne, Oklahoma on highway 270). The public is welcome and invited to attend.

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The Jones Academy Elementary Academic building is a new state-of-the-art facility to house the academic program for students in grades 1-6. (Students in grades 7-12 will continue to attend classes at Hartshorne Public Schools). The cost of the new facility is significant. In addition to the \$10 million investment in the building, the Choctaw Nation provides \$250,000 per year toward its operating expenses.

“The Choctaw Nation has heavily invested in the development of a well-designed facility and academic program so that each Indian child at Jones Academy will have the opportunity to grow and develop academically, socially, morally and physically,” stated Gregory E. Pyle, Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. “We want to ensure that American Indian students have the opportunity to learn in a safe and supportive environment which adequately prepares them to pursue a college degree or enter the world prepared to work after graduation,” Pyle added.

A State-Of-The-Art Education Facility

Much thought and planning went into the design of the 40,273 sq. ft. facility, according to Academy Director, Brad Spears. The plan easily allows expansion for future growth, he says.

To conserve energy the building will be heated and cooled by a highly efficient geothermal HVAC system which takes maximum advantage of the earth’s stable ground temperature. To protect occupants against Oklahoma’s severe weather, the building was designed with strategically located safe rooms capable of accommodating the entire building population.

Esthetic and cultural issues were included in the design. The building’s curved corridor represents the circle of education. According to Native tradition, elders pass their wisdom to younger generations, who will, in turn, pass this wisdom on to future generations. The location of grades within the building wings is symbolic of the sun. The youngest grades are in the east wing, closest to the rising sun. Older grades are located progressively to the west representing the movement of the sun as it grows “older” in the sky during the day.

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Classroom and facility design features are impressive:

- Bathrooms inside the classrooms
- A lighting system proven to help children do better in school
- Lights that sense when the room is empty and turn off automatically
- Independent temperature controls in each classroom
- A library with large windows, a story-telling room, and an outdoor reading porch with a view of the wooded hillside.
- Access to outdoor classroom and garden areas where teachers will be able to incorporate nature into the curriculum
- Wireless technology provisions
- A half-gym accessible from indoors

The need for this level of commitment to younger Indian education is urgent according to Academy Director, Brad Spears. “National statistics report that American Indian students now hold one of the highest secondary school dropout rates and lowest post-secondary graduation rates of any ethnic group in the United States. We hope to ensure that Jones Academy students do not become part of these dismal statistics,” Spears says.

Jones Academy – An Historic Role in Indian Education

Founded in 1891 by the Choctaw Nation as a school for Indian boys, the academy was named after Wilson N. Jones, a Choctaw Chief born in Mississippi who traveled with his family to Oklahoma over The Trail of Tears. For the next six decades Jones Academy was both home and school for Indian boys. In 1955 Jones became a coed facility when Wheelock Academy a Choctaw facility for girls was closed and its 55 female students transferred to Jones.

In 1952 the federal government removed all academic and vocational activities from Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funded schools in an attempt to better expose Indian students to the broader American culture. The move sent a wave through Native American education causing a great many Indian schools to permanently close. Jones Academy, however, remained open. Its

students were sent to local schools while Jones served as their home.

It would be more than 30 years, two public laws (Public Law 93-638, PL 100-297) and the Tribally Controlled Schools Grant Act before Indian tribes would once again be allowed to operate their own schools – and the Choctaws moved quickly to do so. In 1985 the Choctaws contracted the boarding school operation from BIA. In 1988, under the Tribally Controlled Schools Grant Act, the Choctaws became the first American Indian tribe in the United States to once again operate their own school. Jones Academy was returned to its original purpose – a residential school where Indian children of special circumstances could both live and learn.

To Learn More or Help Jones Academy

To learn more about Jones Academy – or to help or donate – please contact Joy Culbreath, Choctaw Nation Executive Education Director, toll-free at (800) 522-6170 Extension 2308 or email kathyc@choctawnation.com Jones Academy Foundation, a 501c(3) non-profit corporation, provides interested donors a variety of ways to help Jones Academy. Donations to the endowment fund are matched 100% and all donations go to Jones. Jones Academy also seeks funds for Evening Enrichment Programs as well as for supplies such as musical instruments, arts and crafts supplies and fine arts supplies.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS



The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has dedicated a \$10 million state-of-the-art Elementary Academic Facility at Jones Academy. Jones Academy is a residential school for Native American children located near Hartshorne, Oklahoma



Students celebrate the first day of class at the Choctaw's new \$10 million Elementary School at Jones Academy. Jones Academy is a residential school for Native American children located in Hartshorne, Oklahoma