

The Oaks Arrow



Two boys, two cottages, two tribes, two grades, though one and the same story when it comes to what is happening in their young lives here at the Oaks Indian Mission. Excited about that story as we are, it is our feature this issue of the OAKS ARROW. We believe, of course, that God's hand is clearly at work here and this is our way of proclaiming that news this Epiphany, soon to be Lenten, Season.

John, member of the Ponca Nation, is a freshman this school year and has already caught the attention of many with his thirst for knowledge about things, particularly matters related to science and technology. He has taken to the game of chess since being at the Mission. And his acuity when it comes to various games and such is rather impressive, as well.

But, as intelligent as John is, he has struggled to finish his school work, because of sheer boredom, we suspect. So the Mission has provided over the course of these past few years special tutors for John and a couple of other kids to try to stimulate their interests and focus their attention on academic pursuits. Drs. Ed & Cynthia Gustavson, for instance, good friends of the Oaks from Tulsa, were coming to campus on a weekly basis until the pandemic hit,

spending afternoons with a handful of kids, challenging them with current events and historical vignettes.

This past month of December and continuing now in the new year, as the school has gone increasingly virtual, we have been using a couple of younger tutors who are just finishing up their college degrees. John has begun now to respond very positively to his regular class studies, finishing last semester with very good grades, grades, finally, that complement his academic gifts. Needless to say, the staff here is elated, seeing it as a huge breakthrough in what is perceived to be John's unlimited future.



The story continues then with Darnell, member of the Cherokee Nation, a Junior this year, who is, like John, now embracing what the Mission is attempting to affect in his young life. Again, one could point to any number of different reasons behind this. But, whatever the cause, we celebrate the Lord's Spirit working behind the scenes, as it were, and give thanks.

Both John and Darnell were blessed this Christmas Season by special gifts from the Warren family of Colorado. They gifted John with items related to his tribe—books on history & culture—and his scientific proclivities, including a telescope. Darnell, who has a penchant for art, received a deluxe

art kit that he fast put to use. He also appreciates the written word, so he was the recipient of a collection of his favorite poet's collected works.

One can't help but think the attention given to these two young and promising lives was a big part of their celebrated move down the good red road. That's why we here at the Mission will continue to provide the one-on-one focus that we do, concerned with the quality of care provided each and every child who steps onto campus, rather than simply increasing the number of kids we serve, kids who then may not receive the attention they deserve, attention that can make all the difference in the world.



WELCOME TO TEAM MINISTRY

Hello, my name is Brandon Barnes, and I am from Wagoner, Oklahoma. I have three children of my own: Mekko, Eva and Kaesyn. Having been born in Oklahoma, and being a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, I have felt that I should do my part to ensure that Native American children are successful in life.

I did not take the normal path that most children do when they graduate from school. Instead, I chose to search out life a bit until I turned 30 years old. At which point I enrolled into Tulsa Community College on more or less a whim. I graduated from Tulsa Community College with an Associates of Science in Business Management in 2012. On another whim I decided to apply to the University of Oklahoma. I graduated from OU with a Bachelors of Arts in Administrative Leadership in 2014 and a Masters of Arts in Administrative Leadership. During my time at the University of Oklahoma the majority of my research pertained to poverty and its effects on learning. It was during this period that I discovered a passion for seeing other people succeed. I went on to study for a semester at the University of Tulsa Law School and planned on getting a second Masters in Indian Law, but opted out as it was just not for me. I worked for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services as a Children's Protective Services worker from 2017 to 2020. During my time with OKDHS I investigated some of the worst crimes imaginable. My colleagues and I were instrumental in putting several people in jail for hurting children. Like most investigators with OKDHS I got burned out on the job and decided to resign.

One day (on yet another whim) I was looking through the newspaper and found the ad for this job with Oaks Indian Mission and composed an email. I was invited to come tour the campus and speak with the faculty. After meeting everyone and walking away with a good feeling about the position I decided to accept the offer of employment. I enjoy working with the children and attempting to motivate them to do something that will change the world for the better. Success is measured differently by different people. However, I measure success by how I am going to be remembered when I die. I cannot think of a better way of being remembered than being remembered as someone who helped others succeed.

It's always good to hear news concerning Mission alums, what interesting things they are about. Or how they are impacting the present life of the Mission. For instance, another alum, a graduate from more than a decade ago, Erica Vesco, has returned to the campus to serve as a cottage-parent, part time, as well as the tribal liaison working closely with tribal leaders, as well as Indian Child Welfare.

Erica earned her Bachelor's Degree in Business & Tribal Management from Haskell Indian Nations University and is currently enrolled in an on-line Masters program through Baker University. Her position as cottage-parent will be more in the role of parent/mentor, involving a handful of girls who will be preparing for college. We're calling it, Scholars House, after the tradition of those original Moravian missionaries who always referred to the residents of the Mission as scholars. Erica will focus on helping the girls in her charge to excel, academically, as well as helping them develop necessary life skills, so that, once on their own, they can concentrate on their studies.

We also received news recently that Simeon Gipson, an alum you perhaps recall reading about in these pages, has been informed that he will be featured in April's issue of "Men's Health," under the title, "Fit At Any Age." Simeon's cycling story, including competition in recent Senior Olympics while in his mid-Seventies, has inspired us all around here, kids and staff, alike.



We are delighted to have Dan Cooper back on staff. Previously, our Campus Director, Dan returns on a part time basis, focusing on two crucial areas here: the future of academics on this campus and how best to use our existing facilities and grounds so that we might ever be improving the quality of our childcare. Welcome back, Dan. We look forward to your expertise and your passion for moving this Mission forward.



The kids at the Oaks Indian Mission have been blessed with two excellent tutors these past few months— Julia, who is beginning work on her Doctorate Degree in Psychology, and Justice, who is finishing up her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. They have done wonders in keeping our kids engaged with their studies.

~ Campus Life ~



The exterior of the new cottage is complete, but still awaiting necessary work inside, which was put on hold for a few months, anticipating the official inspection of the fire suppression system. We expect an opening sometime in May.

We have converted our two bunkhouses, which had been used to house visiting servant project groups, into personal apartments for various purposes. One possibility would be as the residence for our two seniors, Jordan and Kiowa, who turn eighteen in April and June, respectively. This will afford them the opportunity to live somewhat independently for a few months before they begin college this coming Fall. We'd also use the time to help them practice some life skills in anticipation of life beyond the Mission.



As the Epiphany Season winds down, Ash Wednesday around the corner, here at the Oaks Indian Mission we're still giving thanks for the wonderful outpouring of gifts during that sacred Season celebrating Christ's birth, It is always a special time for the kids here and this most recent one certainly being no different. Thanks especially to Salem LC, Stillwater, OK / Dr. William & Barbara Hiatt / Billie Lindburg / Mary Andersen / Lord of Life LC, Edmond, OK / St. Peter's LC, Churchville, VA / Rev. Dawn Enderwood / Biff & Susan Warren / Michael & Carrie Warren / Katie & Diane Warren / Randi & Dave Willemson / Glenda Griffith.



The Cherokee Nation Housing Authority constructed this house in Tahlequah and moved it onto the Oaks Indian Mission campus, next to New Springplace Chapel, for the purpose of

housing an employee who will serve as a liaison between the tribe and the community of Oaks. We are delighted to be able to host this program and participate in the on-going discussions concerning a partnership that could offer great benefits for our care of Native children.

Growing out of a feud between Josh and Jordan concerning who was the better speller on campus, the staff held a Spelling Bee to settle the matter—and the winner is Jordan, and Darnell a close second. Prizes were handed out and the post Spelling Bee party began! Next week, the big Bible Quiz, cottage versus cottage, and the week after that, the History Bowl.



Photos by Darnell, "Artist in Residence"

