

MOUNTAINS

WORD FROM THE SMOKIES



A traditional Cherokee firepot holds a flame in front of what is now the newly rebranded Museum of the Cherokee People in Cherokee. Museum exhibitions present both new works by contemporary artists and cultural objects that date back thousands of years. PROVIDED BY THE MUSEUM OF THE CHEROKEE PEOPLE

Cherokee museum rebrands for a more inclusive future

Tyra Maney
WORD FROM THE SMOKIES

Nestled within the Smokies is one of the country’s oldest tribal museums. Located on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee, the tribal museum of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has a new, vibrant look. While this fresh branding may feel ultra-modern, its inspiration is anything but. These colors have existed in flora and fauna used by Cherokee people for thousands of years here among these mountains.

As the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, we are fortunate to be on our ancestral homelands, and the museum is centrally located within the Great Smoky Mountains. For a lot of Cherokee people, sense of place and connection to the land is important because we’re from this area — we’ve lived here for thousands of years, lived off this land, and came from it. We have a special connection to this place. There is something that I enjoy from each time of year here: the magenta of the rhododendron, fall when the leaves are changing, seeing snow and the evergreen trees in wintertime.

I have worked at the museum for 10 years in various positions. It was exciting when Shana Bushyhead Condill (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), the museum’s executive director, announced that the museum was creating a designer position. I went to school for graphic communications, and I was already helping with photography and design work for two exhibitions, “Many Faces: A Cherokee Mask Exhibit” and “A Living Language: Cherokee Syllabary in Contemporary Art.”

I got into design because I never felt accurately represented. There wasn’t a lot of design, or even art, about Native life — or if there was, it was usually very stereotypical or outdated. There are so many elements of our culture, and of this place, that I thought could translate into design that could be a modern representation of Cherokee people.

When I applied and got the job as the Museum of the Cherokee Indian’s designer in October 2021, Shana shared the museum’s plans to update the main exhibit. This plan included a new name that better reflects its commitment to our tribal community: the Museum of the Cherokee People. In changing the name by adding a more encompassing and inclusionary word, we are honoring the museum’s 75-year legacy — it’s right there in our mission, “to preserve and perpetuate the history, culture, and stories of the Cherokee people.” “People” connects the past, present, and future.

We envisioned a museum that shares the story of a living people and serves as a resource and place of inspiration for our tribal community. We started talking about a rebrand, and this inspired me to create the initial design concept over a couple of weeks. In the beginning, I imagined red and blue hues since historically red and blue were two of the most common colors Cherokee people traded for and used. My mind started jumping around, and I thought about how, before — and even after — trade we were dyeing things with natural colors and pigments.

I started to think about “natural,” and what that word means in the context of color palettes. When you look at design work about or for Native people, the



Museum of the Cherokee People Designer Tyra Maney (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Diné), photographed during her reign as Miss Cherokee 2021–22. Maney ran on a platform of cultural revitalization, an interest that carries over into her design work. PROVIDED BY KARA PERRY

“natural” color palette is usually very muddy and boring: terra cotta, orange, turquoise, beige, brown, murky greens, and yellow. For me, the flora and fauna I see here in the Great Smoky Mountains are vibrant pink, red, yellow, and green. The Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountains are known for having a blue hue. This new palette represents a different way to portray earth tones that is an actual representation of this area and makes them look more contemporary.

The museum’s logo has been a direct copy of a shell gorget carving from the Mississippian period. With the rebrand in mind, I knew I wanted to honor the water spider and where it came from but in a contemporary way. I took inspiration from real water spiders that I always saw growing up in the river that flows through the Qualla Boundary. I was inspired by a mountain peak design I saw on an 18th century Cherokee bandolier bag, and this was the inspiration for the feelers on the water spider’s legs. Traditionally, bandolier bags were used to represent status and keep important items within reach. I knew this was the visual representation the museum needed to reflect our dedication to protecting our tribe’s cultural objects.

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When temps drop in Asheville, where are shelter beds?

Sarah Honosky
Asheville Citizen Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE – Code Purple season begins Oct. 15, a longstanding community initiative that activates emergency shelter beds when temperatures drop below freezing.

This year features three key improvements, said Emily Ball, the city’s Homeless Strategy Division manager: additional beds, expanded criteria and a dedicated phone line, which will confirm if Code Purple is operational on any given night and provide information about shelter locations.

“Overall, I think we’ve got a really great plan,” Ball said during the Oct. 12 Homeless Initiative Advisory Committee meeting. “We’ve got a lot of capacity, we’ve got really great partners in Code Purple this year, and we are just three days away from Code Purple being available.”

Ball said the city is heading into this winter with more available beds than years before. Between ABCCM and Salvation Army, 91 shelter beds will be activated when Code Purple is called, with additional flex capacity during “very extreme weather” or emergency situations.

Unlike years prior, the process no longer only triggers when temperatures fall below 32 degrees, but will also be available when temps measure at 33-40 degrees with precipitation. The season will last through April 30.

What do you need to know about Code Purple?

Background: Code Purple began in 2009 to provide overflow emergency shelter with fewer requirements during extremely cold weather.

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An encampment at Haywood Street Congregation Oct. 3, 2022. ANGELA WILHELM/ASHEVILLE CITIZEN TIMES

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Museum

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The final product is a clean, sleek, and contemporary brand that showcases the museum's direction and future.

"I am so excited to finally be able to reveal the new branding Tyra designed to the world," Condill says. "It beautifully illustrates what we do, who we serve, and our aspirations for the future. It is intentional. It is impactful. And it reflects both our mission and who we are as Eastern Band people connected to this place."

The Museum of the Cherokee People wants to be an example and a leader, not only among tribal museums, but in the museum world as a whole. We want to redefine what people think of when they think of museums and reestablish what a museum can be. We want the Museum of the Cherokee People to be a place for a community and a place where visitors can come in and hear our story from Cherokee voices.

For visitors to Cherokee and the Great Smoky Mountains, I hope these new colors catch their eyes and they see a contemporary, living, current museum. I want them to see and understand that, as Cherokee people, we are still here. We're still honoring the past while creating a new future for us — our culture is ever-evolving.

I hope our tribal citizens are excited and proud of this new era as we celebrate our 75th anniversary. I hope that the meaning and thought process behind the updated spider and color palette are things they can appreciate as Cherokee people: it reflects our mission, vision, values, and new direction. I hope, seven generations from now, they can see what we're doing now at the museum, take the work we've done, and make it better.

Tyra Maney (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Diné) is a designer at the Museum of the Cherokee People in Cherokee, North Carolina. She served as Miss Cherokee from 2021 to 2022 running on a platform of cultural revitalization. This guest column is supported by Great Smoky Mountains Association; learn more at SmokiesInformation.org. Reach the author at tyra.maney@mci.org.



A Museum of the Cherokee People rebranding meeting includes, from left, Manager of External Affairs and Communications Anna Chandler, Director of Education Dakota Brown (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), artist and founder of Buffalotown Clothing Luke Swimmer (EBCI), and Designer Tyra Maney (EBCI, Diné). PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE MUSEUM OF THE CHEROKEE PEOPLE



Museum Director of Education Dakota Brown (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) and artist Luke Swimmer (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) consider the museum's previous sign.

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