

2025 Rooted in the Mountains

Symposium Speakers



Roseanna Belt

Roseanna Belt, M. Ed, is an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. She is the retired Director of WCU's Cherokee Center and former Cherokee Central Schools counselor. Roseanna graduated from Harvard University and the University of Colorado - Boulder. Roseanna serves on the Mothers Council and The Center for Native Health board of directors. She also serves on the EBCI Cultural IRB.

Dr. Thomas Belt

Dr. Thomas N. Belt is the retired coordinator of Western Carolina University's program in Cherokee language and is a Cherokee first language speaker. Tom is a nationally recognized scholar regarding Cherokee language, health, and culture. He is a consulting scholar for the American Philosophical Society's Center for American Indian Research in Philadelphia and a consultant to the Center for Native Health in North Carolina. Tom received the Community Leadership Individual Award presented by the Cherokee Nation, given to recognize citizens who have tirelessly given, without hesitation, their time to make their communities more vibrant livable places. He has co-authored many articles and book chapters and has presented at many universities across the country including Stanford, Yale, Duke, and Purdue. Tom is co-founder of WCU's annual Rooted in the Mountains Symposium. He is also a member of the Elohi Dinigatiyi (Earth Keepers) an EBCI consulting group of Elders and Speakers for the Tribal Natural Resources Department. Tom most recently has co-authored two books, *Sounds of Tohi: Cherokee Health and Well-Being in Southern Appalachia* with Lisa J. Lefler (2022) Univ. of Alabama Press, and *The New Voice of God* with Margaret Bender (2025) Univ. of Oklahoma Press. Tom sits on several boards as a cultural advisor. He resides in Cherokee, NC with his wife Roseanna Belt and stays busy with his children and grandchildren.





Bernice Calhoun Bottchenbaugh

Bernice Calhoun Bottchenbaugh is a Cherokee clan mother of the Bird Clan. The daughter of the late Walker Calhoun and Evelyn Hornbuckle Calhoun, she was raised deeply rooted in the traditions, language, and culture of her Cherokee people—values she continues to uphold and pass on to new generations.

A devoted mother of three, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Bernice has dedicated her life to cultural preservation and community service. She actively teaches and shares Cherokee traditions with her family, local programs, broader communities, and through the cultural summer school at Cherokee Central Schools.

Bernice spent her professional career working for the Cherokee tribe, ultimately retiring from her role as Court Counselor for Juveniles. In that position, she also oversaw a juvenile diversion program, helping guide youth with compassion and cultural grounding.

She continues her service as a member of the Mother's Council for the newly formed Center for Native Health Doula Project, lending her wisdom and guidance to support birthing families in culturally significant ways.

Savannah Brigman

Savannah Brigman (Enrolled EBCI member / Deer Clan) is born and raised just outside the Qualla Boundary and still locally reside is a Wife, Mother of 4. With extensive dedication to her local birth community she holds certifications in Indigenous childbirth education & Holistic Midwifery, Indigenous herbalism and classical homeopathy, Peer Lactation Consulting, Required life saving trainings and specialty skills relating to maternity & newborn care, and also on her local midwifery council for her community. She is passionate about reviving traditional indigenous birth and natural health practices to her fellow Tsalagi community and beyond. While acknowledging and educated in the modern practices that can further give more community safe access to native center maternity care and support. Working in the local birth and natural health community for over 8 years while contributing to traditional midwifery (with indigenous practices weaved in) access in the rural area's of the Appalachia.



Onita Bush

Onita Bush (EBCI) is a Traditional Snowbird (Tutiyi) Knowledge Keeper, Herbalist, and Cultural Bearer as well as a citizen and first language speaker of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Onita is a clan mother and a first-class storyteller of her own origins and lifeways. She has received numerous awards that recognize her abilities around earth keeping and earth skills. Onita routinely speaks to earth-based groups and students about western herbology and herbalism and advises them on how important it is to adhere to protocols of her traditional knowledge. She is a member of the Elohi Dinigatiyi (Earth Keepers), a group of elder Kituwah speakers and expert practitioners that advise the EBCI Natural Resources Department on strategic stewardship issues. Onita also serves on the Mothers Council and The Center for Native Health board of directors. Onita Bush is a living legend and treasure!





Robin Callahan

Robin Callahan is honored to serve as the Program Director for the Nurse Family Partnership Program and Cherokee Choices, a Chronic Disease Prevention Program for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. She is a Registered Dietitian with a Master of Health Sciences from Western Carolina University, with almost 20 years of experience in chronic disease prevention. Certifications include ACE personal training, the ADA certificates in adult and pediatric weight management, Mindful Eating Certification, Resources for Resilience Apprenticeship program, and a 300 hour yoga certification from Asheville Yoga Center.

Robin believes in the power of prevention and has seen the positive impact it can make on the community. Integrating evidence based practices with the Cherokee culture is at the core of programming. She lives the beautiful Smoky mountains in Franklin, NC with her husband, 2 children, and 2 labs.

Beverly Kiohawiton Cook

Beverly Kiohawiton Cook is recently concluded her 4th term as an elected Chief on the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council. Beverly is a Family Nurse Practitioner, is a prominent voice in the mind-body medicine approach to restoring wellness, reproductive health and environmental justice for Mohawk people. She has presented her signature lecture, "Resilience from our Roots: You are Creation," to hundreds of community members as well as national and international audiences. The lecture weaves together Haudenosaunee traditions and beliefs with basic reproductive physiology, encouraging understanding of the responsibilities of men and women and an appreciation for the transmission of historical trauma through the generations.

In her previous role as Clinic Coordinator, Chief Cook led the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's Health Services systems redesign. Her innovative approach, including patient-centered care, aligned with a national trend to address trauma as a root cause of adult illness. Her efforts resulted in the successful implementation of symptom reduction services and the introduction of Adverse Childhood Experiences (or "ACE") awareness into the Tribe's organization.

During the 12 years she served on Tribal Council, she also served on the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) Board of Directors and was selected to represent the Nashville Area on the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services Administration Technical Tribal Advisory Committee (SAMHSA TTAC).

At home, she championed the Akwesasne Child Advocacy Center that provides victim-centered care for abused children. Beverly has been a valuable supporter of the Tribe's Trauma Informed System's Change efforts focusing on establishing tools and resources that support trauma-informed and resilience building practices within tribal programs and in the workplace.

Beverly is active in ancient Indigenous practices and circles in her community of Akwesasne, where she lives on her ancestral home along the St. Lawrence River. She cherishes the time she can now spend with her friends and family, including three daughters, a son, five grandchildren and one great grandson.





Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook

Afraid Of Bear - American Horse Tiospaye is engaging our youth (both male and female) from their "toddler" days to take part in our traditional ways of teaching life lessons and preparing them for future leadership. Of course with their parents and tiwahe (siblings and relatives) participating in full cooperation. Strengthening and rebuilding family value foundations are our Ceremonial themes.

As their grandmothers-grandfathers we have found it is Spiritually, Physically, Mentally and Emotionally fulfilling for us to teach our young grandchildren. We've also realized it is much easier to teach our little people than to repair Adults. There's still Hope for our people no matter our tribal affiliations but it requires we all start the processes of working with our families before "conception" takes place among our young. Living happy, healthy lives is a total commitment from start to finish. Our prayers are sent out into the Universe on behalf of our next 7 Generations. Let it be so.

Dr. Terri Durbin

Terrica "Terri" Durbin earned her BSN from Lewis-Clark State College in 1999, followed by a Master's degree in Nurse Anesthesia from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2009, a Doctor of Nursing Practice in Acute Care Nursing from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in 2013, and a PhD in Education from the University of Tennessee in 2020. Dr. Durbin currently serves as the Director of the School of Nursing at Western Carolina University.



Dr. Jane Eastman

Dr. Jane Eastman is an Associate Professor in Anthropology at WCU. Dr. Eastman is North Carolina native and was born and raised in Robeson County. She attended UNC-Chapel Hill and received her Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate from the Anthropology Department there. She did archaeological training through the Research Labs of Archaeology and was mentored by Roy S. Dickens, H. Trawick Ward, R.P. Stephen Davis, Jr. and Vincas P. Steponaitis. Dr. Eastman joined WCU's Anthropology and Sociology Department's faculty in August 2001 and lives in Sylva.



Louise Goings

Louise Goings of the Wild Potato Clan is a highly respected basket weaver in the white oak, maple, honeysuckle and rivercane forms. At the age of nine, she watched her mother, the famed weaver Emma Taylor, and quickly learned to master the various weaving forms as well. Goings has demonstrated basketry with her mother at the Festival of American Folk-life at the Smithsonian Institution and at the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian. Goings feels a strong connection between weaving her work and maintaining Cherokee values; therefore, she actively mentors several fledgling weavers in her community. She currently serves on the Mothers Council, helping to guide Dinineladi dinisdelvhido "those who care for the pregnant ones."





Kahlani Jackson

Kahlani Jackson, a proud native of Asheville, NC, is the owner of Asheville Pro Lash and made history as the first African American to be crowned Miss Asheville within the Miss America Pageant system. Following her reign as Queen, Kahlani has dedicated herself to promoting black maternal health through advocacy and education. Currently, she serves as a birthing doula and holds a leadership position at Sistars Caring 4 Sistars. Recently serves as a liaison for Health Connect Ones Train the trainer model. Witnessing the challenges and health disparities faced by mothers in her community fuels Kahlani's passion for enacting change. Her mission is to address the troubling statistics surrounding black maternal health in the United States and to inspire and uplift those around her.

Marie Junaluska

Marie was the first treasurer and currently serves as Secretary of the Cherokee Speakers Council. She served seven terms as the Tribal Council Representative for the Painttown Community and worked as both translator and Indian Clerk for the Tribal Council. Her leadership and linguistic expertise continue to guide tribal governance and community engagement.

For more than 13 years, Marie has been a dedicated member of the Cherokee Language Consortium. She describes the consortium as a powerful force in uniting the United Keetowah Band, Western Band, and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians—bridging historical divides and restoring family connections through the shared language. “The best thing about the Consortium,” she says, “is it is strengthening and empowering the Cherokee language now and more importantly for future generations.”

Marie Junaluska is widely respected as a leader, teacher, and cultural bearer who leads by example, exuding Cherokee values and traditions in her daily life. She currently serves as a member of the Mothers Council.



Amber Ledford

Amber Ledford (EBCI) is the Cultural Outreach Coordinator at the Qualla Boundary Public Library. She previously served as Project Staff Coordinator for the Esther Martinez grant team at the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP) for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. A 2019 graduate of KPEP's Cherokee Language Master-Apprentice Program, Amber is dedicated to continually learning and speaking Cherokee so she can share the language with her children and community. Her work centers on strengthening Indigenous language teaching by researching and applying high-leverage instructional practices and creating opportunities for second-language speakers to thrive through classes, community events, and social gatherings. Amber's current project, Mother's Connection, is a 12-week Cherokee language program designed for mothers with infants not yet in school. She created the program to fill a critical gap in language learning opportunities, bringing together mothers, infants, fluent speakers, and teachers in a supportive, culturally rooted space that promotes language use and a holistic approach to parenting.



Dr. Lisa Lefler

Lisa J. Lefler, Ph.D. (Univ. of Tenn 1996) is a Medical and Applied Anthropologist and Full Teaching Professor at Western Carolina University's College of Health and Human Sciences. She is Director of the Culturally Based Native Health Programs and is the founder and past Executive Director of the Center for Native Health, Inc., a grassroots non-profit in the Cherokee community. She is also a faculty member in the Cherokee Studies Program at WCU, serves on the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' Cultural IRB, and is co-founder of the annual Rooted in the Mountains Symposium (which integrates Traditional Knowledge with health and environmental issues) and the Annual Public Lecture in Native Health at WCU. She initiated the MedCaT (Medical Careers and Technology Pathways program) for Indigenous and Appalachian high school students in 2009, and it continues today with multiple partners. Her most recent publication, co-authored with Cherokee elder and first language speaker, Dr. Tom Belt is entitled *Sounds of Tohi: Cherokee Health and Well Being in Southern Appalachia* (2022) from the University of Alabama Press. She also has several book chapters and journal articles on topics from Cherokee water, Indigenous place and health, Traditional Knowledge and health, Native fatherhood, Indigenous research, and diabetes and social support. She has edited several volumes including: *Anthropology: Weaving Our Discipline with Community* (2020), *Southern Foodways and Culture* (2013), and *Under the Rattlesnake: Cherokee Health and Resiliency* (2009). Her current research focuses on the connection between Cherokee matrilineality and community wellness. She has worked with Indigenous communities for more than 30 years and serves on the advisory committee for the EBCI Elohi Dinigatiyi (Earth Keepers), the Health and Culture Workgroup with the Smithsonian Institution, and was a consulting scholar to the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

Dr. Danielle Dominique Lucero

Danielle D. Lucero is an assistant professor of Native American and Indigenous Studies at Dartmouth College. She is a reproductive justice scholar who focuses on Indigenous feminisms, tribal sovereignty, and Pueblo Indian histories. She is an enrolled member of the Pueblo of Isleta located in central New Mexico as well as Hispano with connections to the northeastern New Mexican town of Santa Rosa. She earned her PhD in Justice and Social Inquiry from Arizona State University. Danielle's current research explores the relationship between tribal sovereignty and reproductive sovereignty. Her work investigates the relationships between tribal enrollment, Pueblo women's experiences with reproductive and social labor, tribal governance/enrollment, and exploring the connections between identity, belonging, place, and gender. She specifically explores the historical and contemporary experiences of Pueblo women in the U.S. Southwest.





Kelly Murphy

Kelly Murphy "OḥᎠᎩᎠᎩ" (EBCI) is a resident of the Wolfetown Community, lives with her fiancé, Eric, and three children, ᎠᎩᎩᎩ, ᎠᎩᎩᎩ, and ᎠᎩᎩᎩ. Employed at New Kituwah Academy, she serves as an Elementary Immersion Instructor, assisting in kindergarten, 5th and 6th grade Cherokee Language Arts. Dedicated to Cherokee language revitalization, Kelly actively pursues fluency as a second language learner.



Dr. Brett Riggs

Distinguished Professor in Anthropology at WCU
Honorary Member of the EBCI



Catcuze Tiger

Catcuze V. Tiger ᎠᎩᎩ M.A. is a citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Catcuze and his wife Katie have two sons and they reside on the 3200 Acre Tract of the Qualla Boundary. Catcuze, for the last decade has taught Cherokee Language and Cherokee History at Cherokee High School. Catcuze is a North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDPI) licensed teacher in Social Studies. Catcuze is very passionate about practicing as well teaching Cherokee language and culture within the EBCI community. Catcuze is a 2011 graduate of the Right Path Adult Leadership program (ᎠᎩᎩᎩ). Catcuze is a school board member at New Kituwah Academy (NKA) in Cherokee, NC. Catcuze and his family are members of AWOᎠ ᎠᎩᎩ (Raven Rock Ceremonial Grounds). Some personal interests are fishing, reading, bee keeping, and caring for his family's chickens.

Dr. Angie Trombley

Dr. Trombley is a native of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England. She graduated from Excelsior College earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2008. She then earned a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Missouri in 2011. She became Board Certified as an Adult Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner in 2011 and then continued nursing studies at the University of Missouri, attaining a Doctor of Nursing Practice in 2013. She has subsequently Board Certified by the American Nursing Credentialing Center as a Family Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, allowing her to care for psychiatric populations across the lifespan.

Area of Expertise: Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Substance Use Disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Health Care Disparities

