CHOCTAW
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS
Fall 2026
Newsletter

## Retirement Celebration Held for John Hendrix

In September, the Tribe held a celebration to honor the longtime service of John Hendrix, who had served as the Tribe's Director of Economic Development since 2005. Hendrix has retired from his position with the Tribe and is moving on to pursue a new business venture with his son.

"John has devoted 32 years of his career to serving the Tribe and working to advance opportunities for our people," said Dr. Sarah Medlock, Development Division Director. "I appreciate his commitment and the contributions he has made to the Tribe. We thank John for his years of service and wish him well in his future endeavors."

Some of Hendrix's contributions include:

- Securing $6 million in grant funding to develop a new state-of-the-art Advanced Workforce Training Center that will build Tribal member capacity in vocational/technical, healthcare, digital fabrication, and computer/IT skills to support the community's economic future.
- Leading the development of a new carbon credit project that is expected to generate millions of dollars in sustainable Tribal revenue for the next 20 years.
- Coordinating efforts to secure funding to extend high-speed broadband services to every home on Tribal lands, ensuring digital equity and enabling access to telehealth, remote education, and economic opportunities for all Tribal members on the reservation.
- Securing more than $20 million in grant funding from 12 different public and private funders including EDA, BIA, ANA, USDA, NCAT, WK Kellogg, First Nations Development Institute, and Rural-LISC.
- Leading the effort for MBCI to become the first community in Mississippi to achieve TVA's Rural Certified Community status demonstrating the professionalism of the Tribe's economic development team.



Most recently, Hendrix helped facilitate a $12 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to develop a new business park to attract industrial tenants to MBCI Tribal lands. In 2025, he was awarded the Chris Thompson Economic Development Professional Excellence Award by the United South & Eastern Tribes, a prestigious award is given to a Tribal economic development professional, recognizing innovation, dedication, and contributions to the economic development success of a Tribal nation community.

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# Infrastructure




## EDA Grant Will Fund Industrial Park

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians recently was awarded $10.7 million in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to support the development of a new business park for industrial tenants on MBCI Tribal lands.

The grant will specifically fund roadway, water, sewer and stormwater construction to support the new industrial site and foster business creation in the region. The planned industrial site will be more than 200 acres of shovel-ready land that can be developed to suit a variety of tenants. Plans are to hold a groundbreaking on the site in 2027.

"This grant represents another step forward in creating opportunities for our people. We have run out of industrial property, and this investment gives us the infrastructure to bring industry to Choctaw lands and create jobs for our community," said Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben. "With our recently opened education facilities and ongoing job training programs, we are putting the pieces together to fulfill our goal of self-determination. We appreciate the U.S. Economic Development Administration continuing to have confidence in the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians."

# Workforce Development

## MBCI Receives Grant to Fund Completion of Workforce Training Center

The Tribe was recently awarded a $1.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to support the completion of the Tribe's Workforce Training Center, which is currently under construction. These funds will ensure that the Tribe is able to offer a comprehensive facility with vocational training equipment, including specialized equipment for HVACR, electrical, welding, and industrial controls — the trades most in demand by industrial employers.



The Workforce Training Center will include more than 37,000 square feet of space for vocational and technical job training. It will also include a small business development center with a Maker Space and Incubator.

"The Economic Development Administration is proud to support workforce development, infrastructure improvement, and other projects designed to revitalize and rebuild local economies," said Deputy Assistant Secretary and Chief Operating Officer Ben Page. "These awards will help fuel business expansion, create jobs, and attract private investment across the American Southeast."



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## Small Business

# Office of Economic Development Holds Maker Faire







In September 2026, local community members gathered at the Chahta Immi Annex for a Maker Faire celebrating creativity, learning, and local talent. Visitors explored maker booths featuring beading, sewing, Maker Space tools and skills, and information about small business and Maker Space programs. Families also enjoyed a children's coloring station, food and snack vendors, and STEM prize drawings focused on robotics, assembly, art, and sewing. The event provided opportunities for hands-on learning, one-on-one conversations with Makers, and a chance to learn more about programs offered through the OED Maker Space.

## Financial Diversification

# Real-Time Laboratories: 20 Years of Partnership, Growth and Innovation at MBCI

Real-Time Laboratories' growth is reflected in its financial performance, with a clear upward trajectory from 2023 through 2027. Company revenue increased from approximately $26.4 million in 2023 to $42 million in 2025, with 2026 revenue forecast at approximately $43 million. The company's 2027 budget projects revenue of approximately $45 million.

Taken together, these figures represent approximately 70 percent growth from 2023 to the 2027 budget projection, underscoring the company's expanding role in the defense manufacturing industry and the growing importance of the Choctaw operation.

RTL's performance as a supplier to BAE Systems has also been recognized through supplier awards, including Silver Supplier recognition in 2023, Gold Supplier recognition in 2024, and Bronze Supplier recognition in 2025.

The Choctaw facility is positioned to play an increasingly important role in RTL's future. Anticipated growth associated with major defense programs—including the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, HIMARS, AMPV, and ACV—is expected to create additional opportunities for the facility.

RTL also values its longstanding relationship with the MBCI Office of Economic Development. The company describes the relationship as open and responsive to expansion needs and credits the stability of the MBCI operating environment as an important factor in maintaining its presence for two decades.

*This is the second article in a two-part series on the Real-Time Labs partnership with MBCI.*



*Daniel Hannis, RTL Operations Manager*

## OED Employees Receive Drone Certification



Office of Economic Development staff members Anna Denson and Hayden Nickey recently received their FAA Part 107 certification, which allows individuals to legally operate drones for commercial use. This training will strengthen the department's ability to conduct in-house site assessments, capture high-quality aerial imagery, and support mapping and planning efforts. By incorporating drone technology into daily operations, staff will be able to collect data more efficiently, enhance marketing materials for prospective businesses and partners, and reduce reliance on contracted services.

## MBCI Recognized for AEDO Certification at National Conference

Hayden Nickey attended the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Conference in October to represent the Tribe as it was formally recognized as an Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO). This achievement is particularly significant, as MBCI became only the second Tribal organization and the only organization in Mississippi to earn this designation, which is given to organizations that have undergone a rigorous accreditation process to demonstrate their commitment to excellence in the field of economic development.




Held in New Orleans, the Conference gave Hayden the opportunity to attend educational sessions focused on workforce development, infrastructure, housing, community development, and emerging trends in economic development. The Conference also provided opportunities to connect with economic development professionals from around the world and learn innovative approaches that can help strengthen economic opportunities for the Tribe.

## Choctaw Business Advantages

### Access to Infrastructure Grants

Several federal agencies like EDA, USDA, and DOT offer significant infrastructure grants for businesses operating on Tribal lands.



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