



# Oklahoma *Update*

## National Parks in Oklahoma

National park areas are more than just pretty places, they are reflections of America as a whole, with a wide range of stories, experiences, and opportunities.

For more information or to plan a trip, please visit our official park websites at [www.nps.gov/chic](http://www.nps.gov/chic), [www.nps.gov/okci](http://www.nps.gov/okci), and [www.nps.gov/waba](http://www.nps.gov/waba)

## Chickasaw National Recreation Area

Oklahoma's oldest national park unit, Chickasaw National Recreation Area has been a refuge for outdoor traditions for over a century. Springs, streams, and lakes attract visitors to the park, named for the Indian nation from whom the United States purchased the land for the park in 1902.

For more stories and information about Chickasaw National Recreation Area, please turn to pages 2-3.

## Oklahoma City National Memorial

The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, killed 168 people, and injured more than 650. The Memorial is a public/private partnership established to honor the memory of the victims, their families, the survivors, and their rescuers.

For more stories and information about the Oklahoma City National Memorial, please turn to pages 4-6.

## Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

The park preserves the site of the November 27, 1868, battle where the 7th U.S. Cavalry under Lt. Col. George A. Custer destroyed Peace Chief Black Kettle's Cheyenne village. Black Kettle and more than 100 Cheyenne were killed or captured. The controversial attack has been described as both a battle and a massacre.

For more stories and information about Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, please turn to pages 7-9.

## Chickasaw National Recreation Area Hosts Trash Cleanup

Dan Winings, Park Ranger



**Park Ranger Melanie Sander picking up trash during the cleanup**

Chickasaw National Recreation Area hosted two park clean ups in April. The first was April 12 and was hosted by the Friends of Chickasaw NRA and was conducted in the Platt National Park Historic District. The Friends group and volunteers removed over 50 pounds of trash from the Park. Included in the trash was a large construction barrel removed from Rock Creek.

On April 24, 36 employees of Chickasaw NRA gathered at the Buckhorn picnic pavilion and collected trash from the Buckhorn and the Point areas of the park. Employees collected 25 bags

of trash and 7 bags of aluminum cans, which will be recycled.

After the cleanup, workers enjoyed a cookout lunch of hotdogs, hamburgers and sausages, provided by the CNRA Employee's Association. Attending employees also provided potluck items for everybody to enjoy. Even though lunch was a challenge due to high wind conditions blowing paper plates, napkins and even potato chips around the pavilion, fun was had by all.

These cleanup projects are an annual event at Chickasaw NRA during April due to generally good weather and an absence of tall weeds, making it easier to find trash.

Some of the more unusual finds - a swim fin, goggles, a crossbow bolt, and an intact picnic table - were given awards. Chief of Interpretation, Ron Parker said, "People comment about how this is a beautiful park. It is a beautiful landscape. We are just trying to get those loose pieces that are out there so we can get set up for the beginning of summer."

# Chickasaw National Recreation Area

## Chickasaw Introduces New Night Sky Program

Don Yates, Park Guide

Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CNRA) is introducing a new program this year on Thursday nights. Beginning at 8:30 pm, Park Rangers will set up one or more telescopes at the Veterans Lake Dam for viewing the planets, the moon and other astronomical objects. There will be other activities for overcast nights.

This program is in support of the National Park Service's Night Sky Program. The Park Service has determined that its mission to conserve the scenic and natural places in America includes the night skies or, in Park Service terms, the "natural lightscape." The preservation of these natural lightscapes are important not only to viewing night time scenery but also to maintain the natural environment of nocturnal wildlife.

The encroachment of human development on natural areas includes what is commonly termed "light pollution." In fact, artificial lighting's effect often extends many miles beyond the intended area. National Parks are one of the few places where natural lightscapes can be enjoyed, and park management policies are designed to protect these areas.

In order to accomplish this, the National Park Service has been a leader in developing tools to establish baseline levels. One common qualitative measure is the Bortle Scale which rates night skies from Class 1 (Excellent) to Class 9 (Inner City). Some western parks such as Big Bend, Natural Bridges and Death Valley enjoy very high ratings (Classes 1-3). Washita Battlefield NHS meets this standard with a rating of Class 2 (Typical Truly Dark Site).

Chickasaw National Recreation Area is not at that level. Areas of the park such as Veterans Lake Dam are rated at the low end of Class 4 (Rural/suburban transition). However, recent private sector developments have caused some areas of the park to be downgraded to Class 5 (Suburban Sky). The Park Service

website at <http://www.nature.nps.gov/night/yoursky.cfm> contains an informal tool for rating night skies.

Such informal ratings are useful for quick assessment but the National Park Service formed a Night Skies Team to measure and monitor lightscape changes with more rigorous methodologies. This team, which monitors about 100 parks, has found that all parks are impacted by light pollution.

The weekly Star Party activity at CNRA is designed for beginning star gazers. On clear nights, rangers will show visitors the "landmarks" with which to navigate the night skies. This includes asterisms such as the Big Dipper and Summer Triangle. Mnemonics such as the popular "Arc to Arcturus and Speed on to Spica"

are used to help visitors map the stars. Zodiacal constellations are examined using "CAPtain AQUarro PICKs ARTillery TARGETs, GENERAL CANfield LEads VII-lage LIBeration, SCotty SAid," (CAPricorn, AQUarius, PISCES . . .).

On cloudy nights, visitors will experience a prototype scale model of the solar system laid out on the walking trail atop Veterans Lake Dam. The distances to each planet is scaled to a two inch Sun and marked with temporary stakes. Rangers will conduct a walking tour, stopping at each planet and noting interesting facts. Other cloudy night activities include Telescope Basics and Celestial Mythology.



Park Guide Don Yates setting up equipment for the Night Sky program

# From the Oklahoma State Coordinator

Bruce Noble  
Superintendent, Chickasaw National Recreation  
Area & Oklahoma State Coordinator

Recent visitors to Sulphur have no trouble noticing that the community is undergoing a renaissance. There are probably several reasons for the impressive changes in progress, but the Chickasaw Nation is certainly at the center of the action. The Chickasaw Cultural Center and The Artesian have both been catalysts in the effort to bring more visitors to Sulphur. And even the casual viewer will have no problem seeing an increase in out-of-town visitors on the sidewalks and an uptick in the number of businesses and restaurants downtown and throughout the community. These are positive changes for Sulphur and for those of us who live and work here.



**National Park Service**  
U.S. Department of the Interior

A park named to honor the Chickasaw Indian Nation, the partially forested hills of southcentral Oklahoma and its springs, streams, and lakes that provide swimming, boating, fishing, picnicking, camping, hunting, and hiking.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Given all these dynamic developments, it only makes sense that the National Park Service would desire the chance to work more closely with the Chickasaw Nation. At present, an agreement is being developed that will allow exactly that to happen. That agreement includes three primary features:

- Construction of a pedestrian bridge crossing Rock Creek and connecting the Chickasaw Cultural Center with the Forty Foot Hole area of the park. The Chickasaw Nation has graciously agreed to pay for the construction of this bridge. We hope that construction will begin soon.
- National Park Service occupancy of office space in the new Chickasaw Visitor Center located at the 4-Way stop in Sulphur. This will include a shared arrangement for operation of the gift shop in the Chickasaw Visitor Center, although the precise details of that arrangement have not been determined yet. The intention is to move into the Visitor Center office space sometime in the fall of 2014.
- The sharing of interpretive & educational programming between the Cultural Center staff and the park. This will begin as soon as the agreement is signed.

All of these joint endeavors will contribute to an even closer relationship between the National Park Service and the Chickasaw Nation here in Sulphur and will bode well for the future. The park welcomes the opportunity to participate in this sharing of resources which gives every indication of being a “win-win” for both the National Park Service and the Tribe.

On another subject, the park kicked off the summer season with a fascinating archeological project. Many students of

local history know that the town of Sulphur had to be moved twice in the early 1900’s to make way for what was then known as Platt National Park. Archeologists from the National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center have uncovered interesting vestiges of both original townsites within the boundaries of the park. This knowledge will help to further illuminate the history shared by the park and the City of Sulphur.

Part of the archeological project involved giving the archeologists access to the bison pasture. This was a tricky undertaking that required temporarily containing the bison in a small corral to allow the archeologists to conduct their work safely. Having completed that work, we now have better knowledge about the location of archeological sites within the bison pasture that will allow us to move forward with some efforts to improve the grazing potential within that pasture.

All of this also provides me with an opportunity to point out that the Archeological Resources Protection Act makes it a crime to collect archeological artifacts on federal lands such as Chickasaw National Recreation Area and Washita Battlefield. We want to keep all of our historical and natural resources intact for the enjoyment of future generations!

So summer is off to a great start. We have been fortunate to receive some much needed rain lately that we hope will boost the levels of our springs, streams, and lakes. Please add the park to your travel itinerary for this summer and join the growing number of people who are coming to enjoy the renewed vitality of Sulphur, Oklahoma!

# Oklahoma City National Memorial

## Oklahoma City National Memorial Welcomes New Supervisory Park Ranger

Paul Wenzl, Park Guide

From the Oklahoma City National Park Service Staff – Welcome Aboard! We are pleased to welcome Frank Torres as the new Supervisory Park Ranger for the Oklahoma City National Memorial. Frank’s presence brings new found energy with his sense of direction for the Oklahoma City Memorial.

Frank hails from Las Vegas, NM. His educational degrees include concentrations in Tourism & Leisure Services and Business Administration, both acquired while attending New Mexico Highlands University.

His National Park Service (NPS) experience started at Ft. Union National Monument from 1990-1997, as an Interpretive Park Ranger. Following that, he went on to serve at Petroglyph National Monument from 1997-2001, where he was recognized for his positive relationship building skills while working with the City of Albuquerque Open Space Division. From there he transferred to Coronado National Memorial in southeast Arizona on the U.S.-Mexico border to serve as Chief of Interpretation from 2001-2006. As division chief he successfully orchestrated the volunteer program consisting of over 25 volunteers. Frank returned for a second stint at Fort Union, NM from 2006-2010, where he served as Chief of Interpretation & Resources Management. While at Fort Union, one of his key responsibilities was managing a successful living history interpretation program. In 2010, he received an offer to work at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, in Cheyenne, Okla., where



Frank Torres, Supervisory Park Ranger

he served as Chief of Interpretation and Operations. While serving at Washita, at the beginning of fiscal year 2014, he was appointed to a Supervisory Park Ranger detail assignment at the Oklahoma City National Memorial. While serving six months on detail at OKCI, he was permanently assigned the position.

Since Frank’s arrival, he’s been very proactive in learning the bond between the NPS and the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum. As a staff, we see Frank’s ability in his proven track record of collaboration and coordination with tribes, counties, federal, state/local agencies and the public. Frank plays a key role in the NPS and Memorial Foundation partnership, and welcomes the challenges set before him.

Torres states, “I am blessed with a rewarding career thus far; I look forward to new beginnings and feel very fortunate to be working with a great staff at the Oklahoma City National Memorial.”

# We Come Here to Remember

Michael Washington, Park Guide



Memorial Ceremony, April 19, 2014

On Saturday, April 19, 2014, the Oklahoma City National Memorial observed the 19th anniversary of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building. It was a beautiful day, and the ceremony was attended by over 1,700 family members, survivors, rescue workers, state and local officials, memorial staff, board members and visitors along with several other groups of people who came to the site to remember that somber day on April 19th, 1995. Watching the Sea Cadets standing with military precision along the east end of the reflecting pool, then posting the colors reminded me of my days in the military and the respect that is held for ceremonies. For me, one of the most meaningful parts of any ceremony is the playing of taps or the pipe and drum corps, and the taps played for the Memorial ceremony was no different. There has always been something in that music that stirs up feelings of patriotism, respect, honor and several other emotions.

After listening to several different speeches from the guest speakers, visitors were allowed to enter the Field of Empty Chairs to stand or place items

by the victims' chairs. People moved around the field talking with other family members, survivors and rescue workers, reconnecting with them from previous ceremonies and times when they gathered together shortly after the bombing. Memorial staff and Park Rangers aided people by providing plastic ties ensuring that the items placed on the chairs were secure from the winds that are typical in Oklahoma. For me it's an honor to help in even a small way. Looking at the items placed on the chairs was like looking at some of the victims' lives, offering small personal insights to those individuals. I saw a cross on the chair possibly representing that individual's religious beliefs, military coins placed on the chairs of the fallen U.S. Marines, a small token given to military members in recognition for service above and beyond the call of duty and stuffed animals on the children's chairs.

As I walked on the memorial grounds, I talked to several people that I had met in past years: a bombing survivor; rescue worker; some people from New York, one a victim of one of the towers collapsing around him; a couple of family

members (some I never met before); and a rescue worker who came because of the shared experience of the aftermath of a terror attack.

As some people were leaving the field and going their individual ways, visitors were still coming onto the site. Some of them didn't realize the significance of the day until NPS Park Guides explained to them that it was the anniversary of the bombing, emotionally impacting some people, and as they came off the field, many grew very silent in respect.

At approximately 1:00 p.m., I could hear the roar of motorcycles as they approached the site. The NPS office overlooks the Memorial grounds, and from there, I could see a line of motorcycle riders rounding the corners of 5th and Harvey heading north to 6th street then turning east towards Robinson where they started filling up the parking lots. Over 1,000 riders in this 7th Annual *Ride to Remember* came here to pay respect to the victims and place a wreath on the site.

Many people visited the site that day, people from all walks of life. One thing that all these people had in common is that they came here to Remember.

# Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum Enhancement Project

Frank Torres, Supervisory Park Ranger

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum recently completed Phase I of a planned seven phase enhancement project to upgrade the Memorial Museum. The beautiful new Gallery of Honor, honoring the 168 people who were killed during the Oklahoma City Bombing on April 19, 1995, was relocated on the 2nd Floor. Next to the Gallery of Honor is the placement of informational



**Museum Enhancements Underway**



**National Park Service**  
U.S. Department of the Interior

The Oklahoma City National Memorial was created to honor those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever by the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The memorial is a public/private partnership established so that the American public can honor the memory of the victims, their families, the survivors, and their rescuers.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

touch-screen interactive monitors, which offer videos and more in-depth stories of victims, by their family and friends. In addition, Phase I included the opening of new restrooms on floor 2 providing visitors with new family and ADA-accessible facilities.

The opening of the new Gallery of Honor and interactive exhibit was kicked off with a preview for family members, survivors, and rescue workers on April 10. The opening of the new exhibit area has been very well received by the public. According to recorded statistics as of April 10, since January the museum has had over 20,000 visitors from all 50 states and 39 different countries. It is expected that visitation to the site will increase as more new features to the museum are added.

Future additions to the museum enhancement project will include the expansion of the story on impact and healing, investigation, justice, outdoor digital signage, and a glassed-in balcony on the 2nd floor where visitors will have a panoramic view of the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial. The new

construction is projected to be completed in December 2014. The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is an affiliate of the National Park Service and privately owned by the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation.

# Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

## Celebrating Ten Years of Service to Washita

Hallie Milner, Park Guide



Ten year veterans Joel Shockley (left) and Richard Zahm (right)

Ten years ago, the Olympics were once again held in Athens and a tsunami rocked the Indian Ocean. It was also the year that Joel Shockley and Richard Zahm began working at the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site. In an era where the trend is to work a year or two in one location before moving on to another one, Shockley and Zahm decided to stay in one place, and May 30th was the celebration of a decade of service to Washita.

Shockley is a Park Guide, with additional duties such as historian, librarian, archivist and museum technician. When Shockley began his stint at Washita, the park's library was at a bare minimum. Since his time here, he has taken the library to be his special project and has grown it to over 1,000 books, with topics ranging from the Southern Cheyenne to military tactics. The wide

selection of books has made it possible for a greater depth of information to be conveniently accessed.

"My time here has been both enjoyable and a challenge," Shockley said. "I retired from the U.S. Air Force and took this job; it was a dream come true."

Zahm is a Natural Resources Park Ranger. He has spent the last decade dedicated to restoring the battlefield to its 1868 appearance. He has also been in charge of, or involved with, all construction oriented projects on the site, including the new environmentally friendly Visitor Center, which was completed in 2007.

Zahm's newest addition in the conservation area is creating a Native Garden, containing 21 plant and tree species significant to the Cheyenne and Arapaho

for spiritual and practical uses. The majority of his assistants in the garden were Cheyenne and Arapaho students from Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

"I wasn't planning on staying this long, but the people and the story kept me here," Zahm said. "The community and the people here are about as good as they get. Being from a small park, you are able to do a lot more than if you were at a large park."

Washita management and staff are grateful for Shockley and Zahm's devotion to the park and the enthusiasm they have about their jobs.

"We are very fortunate to have these two dedicated employees at Washita Battlefield," Washita Superintendent Tucker Blythe said. "They love the resources, and they love telling this important story. As a new superintendent, I turn to them with questions about the history of the park. I speak for the whole staff when I say, many thanks for the work you do!"

# Blythe Selected as New Superintendent at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

Kathryn Harrison, Park Ranger



Matthew Tucker Blythe, Superintendent

Matthew Tucker Blythe has been named the new superintendent of Washita Battlefield National Historic Site in Cheyenne, Oklahoma. Blythe assumed his new position at Washita Battlefield last October.

Previously, Blythe serves as the supervisory park ranger at the Oklahoma City National Memorial, and he served as acting superintendent at Washita Battlefield from March through July 2013, after previous superintendent Lisa Conard Frost departed to take the reins at Fort Smith National Historic Site in Arkansas.

At the time of his appointment, Deputy Regional Director Laura Joss stated, “Tucker brings to his new assignment a passion for heritage preservation and protection, and a strong commitment to form partnerships with the people of Cheyenne and surrounding communities. He has been directly and personally involved in the management, interpretation and challenges of this important site and will continue to effectively care for, and administer this historic place.”

Blythe has worked for the park service in a variety of positions. He started his career as a seasonal interpretive park ranger at Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial, in Virginia. His NPS assignments have included administrative clerk at the George Washington Memorial Parkway (1989-1990); historian in the Park Historic Architecture Division in Washington D.C. (1990-1994); interpretive park ranger and interpretive specialist at the Natchez Trace Parkway (1994-1998); and park ranger/supervisory park ranger at the Oklahoma City National Memorial (2008-2013).

In addition to his NPS experience, Blythe spent time in the private sector as the co-owner and operator of a State Farm Insurance agency in Kansas, and he served as a part-time adjunct professor at the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University and in the Mass Communication Department at the University of Central Oklahoma.

A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Blythe has a bachelor of arts degree in historic preservation from Mary Washington College (now University of Mary Washington) in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and earned a master of arts degree in communications from Wichita State University. He is also a 2012 graduate of the NPS’s GOAL (Generating Organizational Advancement and Leadership) Academy.

“I am very excited about serving as superintendent at Washita Battlefield,” said Blythe, “I have a great staff with lots of energy. In my first six months, my team and I have been able to expand summer program offerings, obtained a museum loan from the Oklahoma Historical Society and are working with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science to complete our exhibit offerings, and continue to eradicate invasive plant species working toward restoration of the cultural landscape to its 1868 appearance. It’s an exciting time here at Washita. I am thankful to be a part of the work being done here.”



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

The park commemorates the November 27, 1868, attack where the 7th U.S. Cavalry under Lt. Col. George A. Custer destroyed Peace Chief Black Kettle’s Cheyenne village. Black Kettle and over 100 Cheyenne were captured or killed. The controversial attack has been described as both a battle and a massacre.

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# Off the Beaten Path

Joel Shockley, Park Guide

Thanks to a very good website and our new Facebook page, word is getting out about Washita Battlefield National Historic Site. The park staff has met a lot of visitors who have ventured off the beaten path to see our site.

We have seen visitors from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, New York, Maryland, Florida, California, Louisiana and many other states, just since January. But we have also had a lot of folks from as far as the Netherlands, Australia, France,

Canada, England, Switzerland and Germany in recent months. These foreign visitors travel by rented Harley Davidsons, rental cars, rental campers and RVs and buses. Two couples, one from Switzerland, and the other from Germany traveled to our site in their Custom-Built Mercedes-Benz GXV Expedition Vehicles (a very large camper on a big truck frame) shipped to the U.S. from their home countries. These vehicles are definitely traffic stoppers, and have caused much local comment

in Cheyenne. The owners even personalize their campers, for example, the camper from Germany was christened “*Der kleine Staubige*” which is German for “*the Small Dusty One.*”

These GVX and RVs are very roomy, but are truly gas guzzlers, and with the cost of gas (petro) these days it is definitely a good sign for small parks like us to garner such attention from visitors from all over the United States and the rest of the world.



Camper from Germany known as “*Der kleine Staubige*”



Erick and Eslhe’s RV from Switzerland

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## Washita Summer Lecture Series

Kathryn Harrison, Park Ranger

Superintendent Tucker Blythe’s mantra has been, “Let’s try something different!” Heeding this cry, the interpretive staff rose to the challenge and will present the Summer Lecture Series on selected Sundays during the summer months at 2 pm in the park visitor center.

The series will deliver a diverse group of speakers covering a wide range of topics.

Art Peters, curator of the Hinton Museum, will begin the Summer Lecture series on June 22 with a slide presentation “*The California Road.*” This historic trail crisscrossed portions of Roger Mills County.

Other featured speakers will be Cheyenne residents, Loren Smith and Scott Martin, who will recount the story of their journey towards the creation of Washita’s first ever living history group, Troop J, 7th U.S. Cavalry. Their presentation will be held on June 29th.

On July 15th, local rancher Dale Tracy, whose family settled in Roger Mills County in the 1890’s, will present “*Pictures and stories of Old Cheyenne*” and, on July 20th, Melvena Heisch, Oklahoma Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, who grew up in Roger Mills county, will discuss, “*The people who protect our heritage.*”

In addition to the Summer Lecture Series, park rangers will continue giving the popular interpretive talks and walks on Saturday and Sunday at the park overlook.

Another offering on the agenda is “Ranger’s Choice” which will be held weekday mornings at 10 am. Each ranger has prepared a 20 minute talk, on a favorite topic, to give to our visitors.

It is going to be a great summer. Please join us!



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

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### **The Oklahoma Update Volume 5, Number 3**

*The Oklahoma Update* is the official newsletter of the units of the national park system located in the State of Oklahoma.

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### **Friends of Chickasaw NRA**

The purpose of the Friends of Chickasaw National Recreation Area is to promote public appreciation of and support for Chickasaw National Recreation Area. This support includes conducting interpretive programs, increasing public awareness regarding the park and its mission, fundraising, and other volunteer activities. The IRS has certified this group as a private non-profit organization (501c3) and membership fees for joining are tax deductible. Anyone interested in receiving a membership application can send an email to: [chic\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:chic_superintendent@nps.gov), or call 580-622-7220.

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### **Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum**

The Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum is a private non-profit organization, and does not receive any annual operating funds from the federal, state or local government. Museum admissions, store sales, the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, earnings from an endowment and private fundraising allow the Memorial and Museum to be self-sustaining.

Valuable gifts of time, talent and treasure to the Memorial help change lives each and every day. Make your donation to the Memorial and volunteer your time. If you would like to help, write to PO Box 323, Oklahoma City, OK, 73101, or call toll-free at 1-888-542-HOPE.