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MUSEUM REQUESTS COMMUNITY INPUT FOR EXHIBIT UPDATE

Listening sessions hosted at community centers through summer

CHEROKEE, NC: The Museum of the Cherokee Indian (MCI) actively seeks input from the community for the update of its main exhibition. In the early phases of reimagining the exhibit, last renovated in 1998, Museum leadership will hold listening sessions at Cherokee's community clubs throughout the summer, encouraging enrolled members of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to share their visions for a community-centered, community-voiced exhibit. The update is part of the Museum's ambitious plans to prioritize self-representation in its exhibits and offerings, create an accessible space for all Cherokee people, and increase the safety of the objects in its care using museum best practices and Cherokee cultural protocols.

"As Cherokee people, we have a history of coming to decision by consensus, which has not been the standard in mainstream museums," says Executive Director Shana Bushyhead Condill (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians). "In terms of exhibition research and design, it is definitely more time consuming of a process, but the result is more impactful. We are forging new paths in museums, and we want MCI to lead the way, with our community's help. We have the power and responsibility in our tribal museum to tell our own story, and the only way we can do that is with our community."

Director of Operations Michael Slee (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) and Director of Education Dakota Brown (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) presented the Museum's plans to solicit community feedback to EBCI Tribal Council on May 3. Listening sessions began at the Steve Youngdeer American Legion Post 143 on May 15, where staff engaged with veterans and chronicled the Cherokee tradition of service. Museum staff will be present at community club meetings on the following dates and locations, with more locations and times to be announced:

Monday, June 5, 5:30pm: Birdtown Community Center

Tuesday, June 6, 6pm: Yellowhill Activity Center

Tuesday, June 13, 6:30pm: Big Y Community Gym

Tuesday, August 1, 6pm: Big Cove Community Building

Tuesday, August 1, 7pm: Jacob Cornsilk Complex, Robbinsville

MCI leadership encourages all EBCI citizens to share the stories they hope to see represented in the exhibition, how the museum can better serve them, and what, in their eyes, would make the museum a welcoming space and source of community pride. Feedback can also be submitted electronically by visiting mci.org/feedback.

“It is our obligation to tell stories that reflect our community, and we can't do that without your input,” says Director of Operations Michael Slee (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians). “MCI belongs to our community, and we are committed to ensuring that our people are reflected in the updated exhibit as well the forthcoming construction projects that MCI is working on.”

As the exhibition renovation progresses, the Museum is simultaneously moving forward with the construction of an off-site collections facility near Kituwah. The EBCI issued a land use permit for the project in August 2022. The facility's construction answers an urgent need to provide safe housing for collections currently in MCI's care, create needed space for EBCI holdings currently housed off the Qualla Boundary, and increase access for tribal citizens. The Museum has entered into a preliminary contract with Cumming Group for the purpose of developing the cost and schedule for the collections facility and to provide substantive feedback for MCI's Board of Directors to help with a decision to renovate or replace the existing public Museum facility.

Future listening session dates will be listed at mci.org/feedback.

About the Museum of the Cherokee Indian

Established in 1948, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian is one of the longest-operating tribal museums in the country. Located in Cherokee, North Carolina on the Qualla Boundary, the sovereign land of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and ancestral homelands of all Cherokees, the Museum shares the history, culture, and stories of the Cherokee people through its exhibitions, collections, and programs. Learn more at mci.org.