

Leading with Heart: Rochel Martin

Reflecting on 20 Years of Service

Rochel's 20-year journey working for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians has been more than just a job—it's been a life's calling filled with purpose, people, and perseverance. Her unwavering dedication to the Tribe is evident to all who know her. She began working as a bookkeeper in 2005 for the Best Western, which later would be rebranded as the Muskogee Inn. Within a few short years, she rose through the ranks, becoming General Manager in 2009—right as a brand-new hotel was preparing to open. "I was literally out of town when I got the call asking if I could step into the position. So, I came back, filled in, and never left," she recalls with a laugh.

Rochel's leadership was tested early, including surviving a heart attack in 2007. But still, she never stopped thinking about her team. Even in the hospital, her top concern was completing payroll on time. She recalls, "Laying out was never an option for me." This unwavering dedication and resilience in the face of adversity are genuinely inspiring.

Through the years, Rochel became the steady hand behind many transitions, from closing operations at Muskogee Inn to weathering hurricanes and even chasing snakes off the property. Through it all, her focus always remained on the people—both guests and staff. Her commitment to her team's well-being and safety is a testament to the value she places on each of her team members.

"The people are what keep me here.

They're family. Sometimes, I catch myself saying, "I'm going home," when I actually mean, "I'm going to work," she says. "That's just the kind of place this is."

Her legacy is that of a servant leader. She works in the trenches with her team, never asking them to do anything she wouldn't do herself. "I've cleaned rooms, done laundry, worked breakfast—because when you understand your team's work, you truly appreciate their value."

Cody Williamson, CEO of Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority (CIEDA), speaks highly of Rochel's impact. "Rochel represents the heart and soul of our hospitality mission. Her leadership, compassion, and unwavering dedication have created a culture where team members feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow. She embodies the values of the Tribe in everything she does."

Thankfully, Rochel is not yet ready to hang up her hotel keys. "I talk about retiring, but I don't think I'll ever really do it," Rochel laughs. "I just want to help grow the next generation of leaders and make sure they believe in themselves like someone once believed in me."

Rochel lives in Atmore with her husband, Keith Martin, Poarch Creek Indians Tribal Council Member. Together, they have four daughters and eight darling grandchildren.

