

## History of the National Native American Veterans Association

The National Native American Veterans Association (NNAVA) started as an idea that goes back to 2002. A Choctaw Veteran, Thomas Berry, was in a position which required utilizing both, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Department of Veterans Affairs to receive health benefits in a timely manner. Living In Durant, Oklahoma, it was a forty five mile, one way trip to the nearest VA health facility. There was however, an Indian Health Clinic in Durant, so he used the Indian Health Clinic for immediate and urgent health care needs while using the VA facility for long term maintenance health issues. Speaking with other Veterans doing the same thing he realized that an organization was needed to address the different problems of Veterans in dealing with the both the Tribal Leadership and the Department of Veterans Affairs, as both of these organizations had programs which paralleled each other.

Over the next two years, a lot of research into Veterans benefits and speaking with many Native American Veterans only emphasized the need for an organization that would represent the unique needs of Native American Veterans across America. In March of 2004, a chance meeting on line with a Cherokee Veteran, Stephanie McCalister, led to on-line discussions concerning this need. This need became the source from which the National Native American Veterans Association grew.

In May of 2004, an informal group site was established on Yahoo.com as a meeting place for Native American Veterans. This became a place to meet, discuss problems, and offer each other solutions and help and support in dealing with problems facing Native American Veterans in dealing with the VA. As more Native Veterans joined the group site it became apparent that a more formal organization would and could be developed to assist the group members. A committee was formed from the group's members and a formal Constitution, By-Laws, and a Code of Discipline was written. An ad hoc leadership was formed with Thomas Berry, Stephanie McCalister, David Derr, Anthony DeClue, Roger Smith, and Kimberly Combs making up the first Leadership Council, and formally adopting the Constitution on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

Utilizing the newly adopted Constitution, The Articles of Incorporation were drawn up and submitted to the Secretary of State of Oklahoma who approved the submission and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, 2004 the National Native American Veterans Association was born.

Membership has continued to grow since the Articles of Incorporation were approved and the Association now has members in over 20 States, representing more than 15 Federally recognized Tribes or Nations. We continue to grow and as we do, we will be what we originally started out to become, "The Voice of the Native Americana Veteran."