



The Cherokee Youth Center in Cherokee, North Carolina was chartered in 1998. The Club was created after organizers found out what children wanted. They received lots of input and the consensus was clear. They wanted something to do, somewhere to go, and a place to call their own. Upon receiving start-up funds from Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the Tribal Council approved the renovation of the 25,000-square-foot formal tribal casino where the Club is housed today. With additional funds from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the State, and Health and Human Services, the Club was established. According to Executive Director Denise Ballard, the Club provides kids with “so much more opportunity than they would normally have.”

The Eastern Band of Cherokee has 10,000 people living on the 56,000-acre reservation in the scenic Smoky Mountains in western North Carolina. The reservation is home to the outdoor drama, “Unto These Hills,” which depicts the “Trail of Tears,” the time when Indians were forcibly moved to Oklahoma in the 1800’s. They also have a working Cherokee Village from the 1700’s amid the lush green landscape of the reservation. Partnering with local colleges, archaeological studies are conducted with students. The community is working hard to encourage young people to continue their education.

Of the Club’s 600 members, 97 percent are Native American. Members are offered such cultural programs as traditional Cherokee basket weaving and pottery-making. Additionally, Cherokee Elders teach both traditional and pow-wow dancing, as well as blow-gun making. According to the Cherokee Language Project Coordinator, Eddie Bushyhead, the Club has a Cherokee language program that focuses on the importance of maintaining the language. The Club offers aerobics and classes on diabetes and obesity prevention. The Club’s computer lab has 10 computers and is very popular with the members. The kids use the computers for homework, research on the Internet, and games. Denise says, “Mastering computers, whether it’s playing games or learning phonics, gives the kids confidence.” If they don’t know how to do something, there is always someone available to help.

The Club allows tribal employees use of the Club’s weight room in exchange for volunteer hours. Denise said it is a good method to get volunteers and serves as a great way to expose the Club to people who might not have a reason to ever come inside. Denise is dedicated to her job and says, “Kids are what it’s all about. They are our future.” The Club collaborates with the Qualla Housing Authority and shares in the Public and Indian Housing Drug Elimination grant funds. Denise said the cooperation between the Club and the Housing Authority is vital. Focused on recruiting more teens and attracting them to a safe and positive place, HUD funds helped purchase items that are appealing to teenagers, such as a big screen TV, stereos, pool tables and foosball. The Drug Elimination Program also helps with drug prevention and education programs.

The Club also offers SMART Moves and Power Hour. Denise cited Power Hour as a very successful program because it gets kids involved in doing and finishing their homework. She says parents often call the Club to discuss a specific subject with which their child is having a problem in school. Working closely with the schools, the staff and child focus on the problem in a targeted and productive way.

“IF WE DID NOT HAVE
OUR BOYS & GIRLS CLUB,
A LOT OF OUR KIDS
WOULD BE LOST—IT’S
A GOOD PROGRAM.”



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