

QUAPAW NATION SPOTLIGHT: TEHYA DEARDORFF



How did you get into your field?

I've always been into computers, but I found out I could make a living tinkering with them in my late 'teens. At the recommendation of my freshman science teacher, I enrolled in a PC maintenance class and a programming class at my high school's technical center. I excelled in both classes and, thanks to the mentorship and persistence

of my instructor in those classes (shoutout Mrs. Riley), I chose to continue that education at a collegiate level.

Even though I did take a few computer science classes during my four year university stint, I ended up stumbling out with a half-completed sociology degree, a mostly-complete International Studies degree, a (complete) degree in marketing, and a double-minor in Spanish and multimedia studies. I'm not sure how I had time for all that. After I graduated, I what any recent college graduate worth their salt should do: I threw my degree out the window and landed a job in IT.

Since then, I've held a few different titles in a handful of IT departments. I've honed my specialty in Systems Administration, went full-circle and taught the same college course that got me into the field over a decade ago, and I've expanded my skillset to include front-end web development and digital archiving.

How long have you worked for the Quapaw Nation?

I've worked for the Nation since February of 2024. I was hired on as the Systems Administrator in IT, but I transferred to do R&D for the newly-formed Language department a few months ago. I love my new job and am so honored to help build this department, but I do miss my buddies over in the IT department!

What do you like about working for the Quapaw Nation?

Aside from our incredible HR department and stellar benefits package, I think what I like most about working for the Nation is the pride I feel working for my tribe. As someone who's only worked in a field that is inherently corporate and somewhat isolating by design, it's been extremely fulfilling to be able to relax a little bit and know that I'm surrounded by my own people. It brings me joy to know that each day I am doing my part to make our way of life better for everyone.

What are your favorite Quapaw Nation events or traditions?

This might be a controversial (and telling) answer, but I love going to General Council. There's just something exhilarating about it. It just might be the Buffalo clan in me, though. I love pow-wow too as any good Quapaw should, but I think I'd enjoy it more if we had a dedicated walk-in freezer for those of us who can't handle the 110 degree July heat. We could put an addition on the bathrooms up the hill, just saying..

What are some of your favorite memories with the tribe?

I cherish every experience I have with my tribal family. As a kid, my mom and I lived really far away from our lands, so I didn't attend as many events as I think she wanted me to experience. However, she always

made a point to teach me our ways, and I vividly remember when we did get to go to pow-wow, family gatherings, and other events in those times. It always felt special to me like I'd come home, and everyone was always welcoming no matter how long it'd been since they'd seen us.

What does it mean to you to be a member of the Quapaw Nation?

Being Quapaw, to me, means to be as connected as I can be with everything around me and to act from a place of empathy, kindness, and compassion for others. I try to carry myself in a way that would make my tribal kin proud.

Who are some tribal leaders or elders who have inspired you, and why?

My mom (Teresa) is a constant inspiration to me, as she has always been my strongest model of how a strong, empathetic Native woman should carry herself. I also admire the kindness, wit, and straightforwardness shown to me by my Buffalo family over the years. Additionally, Wena (Supernaw) is an inspiring leader to me. I admire the way she carries herself and says only what needs to be said; I wish there were more leaders who listened to their constituents with laser-focused intent and sincere empathy.

What changes would you like to see in the Quapaw Nation?

I would love to see our people begin to speak our language. Hearing Okáxpá in passing would bring me much joy. Additionally, I would like to see a wider swathe of young people involved in our leadership and committees. I know that's an age-old problem, but I think sometimes our Nation could use direction from young folks, even ones whose beliefs don't align with mine!

What are you passionate about outside of your job?

I am always acquiring new hobbies; I pride myself in being a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. I am a life-long musician; I play a variety of instruments, write/record/produce my own (and others') music, DJ, and I've toured with a number of bands over the years. I make a lot of art (mostly in the form of collage) but I also enjoy 3D modeling, drawing, and making fun assets for my websites. I also collect and archive physical media like old computer games, software, magazines, and tapes so that other people around the world can enjoy them!

I am also super passionate about hanging out with my wife and our three beautiful cats: Tuna, Rita, and Meatball! We love hiking and spending time out in nature, watching as many new movies as possible, and making art together.

What are some of your proudest accomplishments?

I try not to measure my life by accomplishments, but I am proud that I've progressed far enough in my career field to be a trusted voice regarding my various specialties. I am proud of the records I've made with friends, the shows we played together, and all the fun I've had pursuing various avenues of art over the years.

Tell us about yourself! This is your chance to show our readers what makes you your unique self.

A lot of people think I'm an introvert because I don't talk much on-the-clock, but outside of work I can't get myself to shut up. Just ask my wife! In reality, I try to live simply. My only real goals in life are to be happy and to gain as much knowledge as I can, so that I can share that knowledge with others. I am a firm believer that knowledge is power, and that we should always take time to educate others if called upon to do so. I am always reading and learning new things, teaching myself new trades and skills, and passing those things onto other people. I hope that I live a life that exemplifies my passion for knowledge, stoicism, and simplicity in enjoying the beauty of the Ozarks!