

Sharpe shares Native heritage, legal experience in FDCC New Member Spotlight

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New Member Spotlight – [G. Calvin Sharpe](#)

The high caliber of new members being nominated, vetted and admitted to the [Federation](#) continue to deepen the broad diversity of our membership and enhance our brand. In this issue, we profile one of those who define our standard of being “above and beyond” in their personal life and in their profession. Please join us in welcoming and learning a bit more about one of our newest members; G. Calvin Sharpe, a Director with Phillips Murrah in Oklahoma City, OK. Contact “G. Calvin” at gcsarpe@phillipsmurrah.com.

Q: *G. Calvin, welcome as one of the FDCC’s newest members. Can you share a little with us about your educational and professional background?*

A: I am a life-long Sooner, having graduated from The University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor of Business

Administration degree in 1982 and from The University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1985. I joined Phillips Murrah in 2009 and am now a Director of the firm. For many years, I have been very involved in the Oklahoma Association of Defense Counsel and the Oklahoma County Bar Association, among other organizations. In 2005, I was honored to be admitted to the American Board of Trial Advocates, an invitation-only organization that, at the time, required members to have tried at least 20 civil jury trials as lead counsel. Throughout my career, I have tried 30+ jury cases.

***Q:** What got you interested to specialize in medical malpractice, environmental and products liability defense work?*

***A:** I was always focused on a career in litigation and gravitated to the defense side early on. With a retired doctor as my father-in-law and many doctor friends, medical malpractice defense became an easy choice. Defense work is particularly enjoyable, as each matter is unique and interesting. I like focusing on the technical manufacturing details and medical aspects of products liability and medical malpractice cases. Over the years, I have learned much about the practice of medicine, including watching an open-heart bypass surgery in person, but some other interesting things as well, including how to make my own Taco Bell chicken quesadilla (when representing them in a products liability and negligence case brought against them) and how a paper mill works (when representing a paper products company in a negligence case brought against them).*

***Q:** When your Nomination Form came in, we noticed you are also admitted to practice in the Seminole Nation and Cherokee Nation Tribal Courts, as well as the Supreme Court of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Chickasaw Nation Tribal Court, and Osage Nation Tribal Court. Can you give us some insight into how you developed an interest and specialty in Tribal Laws?*

A: I have always been very proud of my Native roots. My great grandfather was a famous Seminole Indian. My father is a full-blood Seminole who did not even speak English until grade school when he was sent to boarding school. He grew up very poor but after joining the military, was able to put himself through college and law school. For many years, he held various positions within the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and often represented the tribe as its counsel.

Through my dad and my relatives, I learned much about my Native heritage. To get more involved with the Native community, I served on the board of Red Earth for many years, including as President and Past-President. Red Earth, Inc., a non-profit, is a multi-cultural organization that promotes the understanding and continuation of traditional and contemporary Native culture and art. Each year, it holds a juried-art competition and festival that is attended by many tribes from around the country.

Through Red Earth, I made many contacts with Native businesses and tribal leaders. When Oklahoma's many tribes became more affluent in recent years and began pursuing many more economic development projects than they had in the past, I was able to secure many opportunities to represent Native businesses, tribes, and tribal members, as well as non-native businesses wanting to do business with them.

Q: *We also understand that you trace your own ancestral lineage to the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma through your great grandfather, "Chili Fish," who was – and I hope we have this correct – one of the first Light Horsemen, which was the first law enforcement unit in Indian Territory, and also a Chief of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma What can you share with us about your family's history?*



Chili Fish, Chief of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma in 1935-1936 and Director G. Calvin Sharpe's great grandfather

A: Yes, my great grandfather was a very famous Seminole leader. He served as Chief of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma in 1935-1936 and, as you mention, was one of the first Light Horsemen, who served as law enforcement in early Indian Territory-law enforcement which then consisted of hanging for serious offenses and public whipping for lesser offenses. The old "Whipping Tree" still stands in Wewoka, OK today.

Although he did not speak English, he was instrumental in helping his people address the serious deficiencies in federal administration of Indian affairs in the 1930s, including the exclusion of Indians in managing their own affairs and the poor quality of public services they received. In early 1932, he and a delegation of Seminole members visited Washington regarding the Mekusukey Mission school that the Department of Interior had promised to fund but had closed without warning, leasing the land on which the school sat to an oil company. As a result, Congress soon thereafter passed the Act of April 27,

1934 which made all sales and leases of tribal lands subject to the Seminole General Counsel's approval.

In 1931, Chili Fish helped bring together the Seminoles with many other tribes to celebrate their own cultures and traditions in a large festival-an event that is still held today, known as "Seminole Nation Days:' While in high school, my daughter rode in the Seminole Nation Days parade as First Runner-Up in the Miss Seminole pageant, a contest that allows young Seminole women to display their talents and knowledge of their Seminole culture.

Many native people are inherently suspicious of those outside their own tribes. To bring people within the tribe together with those outside the tribe is often not an easy task. Being creative in handling delicate issues has served me well.

Q: *Has there been anything that you have learned or utilized in your practice in representing the Tribal Nations that you have brought with you to your civil practice as well?*

A: Definitely the importance of maintaining creativity of thought. Because each tribe in Oklahoma is a sovereign nation in and to itself and each has its own laws and practices, I have learned that it is critical to remain open to new ideas and being creative in handling issues, especially when tribal laws intertwine with state and federal laws. Many native people are inherently suspicious of those outside their own tribes. To bring people within the tribe together with those outside the tribe is often not an easy task. Being creative in handling delicate issues has served me well. This thought process has helped me in other practices areas of my practice as well.

Q: *For many years, we have taken the heritage and legacy of the Tribal Nations in this country for granted, even though they were here before any of us. If there were 3 things you*

could share with us from your family's history as well as your representation of the Tribal Nations about their story, history and culture, what would they be?



Director G. Calvin Sharpe
and his father in front of a
portrait of Chili Fish

A Three things that are important to my family's history, as well as the history of many Native people, are our Native language, art, and traditions. Each tribe in Oklahoma has its own special language, many of which were waning as the younger generations were taught to speak only English. A resurgence of learning Native languages has been helped by tribal language programs, as well as classes taught at some Oklahoma universities.

Each tribe also has its own style of art, including dress and jewelry. I enjoyed learning beadwork as a young child from my relatives. As to the importance of Native art, I would love to mention that later this year, the First Americans Museum (FAM) will be opening in Oklahoma City. It will be a world-class facility celebrating the 39 tribes of Oklahoma, both as they existed in the past and as they exist today. The museum will house many native artifacts on loan from The Smithsonian Institute. I welcome all FDCC members to visit FAM, a museum and center that will no doubt be a national treasure once it opens.

And each tribe has its own traditions, including family celebrations, special foods, and religious holidays. As I mentioned above, Oklahoma Seminoles still celebrate “Seminole Nation Days” with our traditional stick-ball games (similar to modern-day lacrosse), enjoying homemade sorghum (molasses) and sotkey (a sour drink), and stomp and gourd dance competitions.

I believe it is very important for each tribe, including my own tribe, to educate our young tribal members in each of these areas in order to best preserve the rich culture and heritage of our Native past for the future.

Q: What are some of the issues and cases you have been working on relating to the Tribal Nations?

A: I argued an interesting issue related to separation of governmental powers before the Seminole Nation Supreme Court. There, the tribe’s legislative branch—the Tribal Counsel—was challenged

by the judicial branch. The Tribal Counsel had sought to regulate the Nation’s court system by dictating who could serve as judges and court staff. Representing the judicial side, we were able to successfully assert that such powers must be kept separate in order for the government to properly function.

Just recently, I successfully represented an Osage Nation Congresswoman in proceedings before the Osage Nation in which the tribe had sought to remove her from her position as a congresswoman.

I also represent non-native businesses in negotiations with various tribes in Oklahoma, including representing a non-native medical company in negotiations with the Rosebud Sioux tribe to enter into a teaming agreement for the provision of medical billing services to governmental agencies.

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Q: *What else do you enjoy doing in your spare time?*

A: My wife and I enjoy spending as much time as possible with our grandson, 20-month-old Hudson. We have a house at Lake Eufaula, a two-hour drive from home, and spend about a third of our time there, enjoying boating and just relaxing with our kids. I also enjoy hunting and fishing. My wife is an excellent cook so I probably spend too much time eating and enjoying a good wine as well.

Q: *OK ... time for the lightning round ... Favorite place ever visited?*

A: I can't name just one so here are my top three: Maui, Costa Rica, and Santa Fe. And of course, Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma.

Q: *What's on the bucket list?*

A: I love Formula 1 racing, so a ride and dinner with Lewis Hamilton is a "must" on my list.

Q: *What's something else unique about you?*

A: I am a French Bulldog nut. My wife and I had a Frenchie for almost 16 years who passed away last year, and our daughter and son-in-law have one as well. Soon after our beloved Rocket died, we purchased a blue Frenchie, RJ, and just recently we got a white Frenchie, Windy. I follow many

French Bulldog websites, including French Bulldog Enthusiast. I just can't get enough of them!

Q: *Will we be seeing you in for the 2021 Annual Meeting at The Greenbrier Resort in WV?*

A: Assuming the vaccines are rolled out and the pandemic is under control by then, I definitely plan to attend.