

When she was elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1987, Wilma Mankiller took on a huge job. She was used to challenges, though. For example, she had developed many needed projects for Cherokees in rural Oklahoma in 1976. First, she taught people how to build their own homes. Next, she installed new water supply lines. Finally, she started new rural health clinics. Then, she had to overcome serious injuries she suffered in an auto accident in late 1979. While others were impressed with the new chief’s dedication, no one who really knew her well found her leadership ability surprising. Once elected chief, Mankiller continued her work to improve Cherokee communities. She focused on housing and education needs, and she encouraged her people to be proud of their language and culture. After serving two terms as chief, Wilma Mankiller continued to work for the Cherokee Nation by speaking across the country.