

## *East Texans of the Year:*

# **Alabama-Coushatta Tribe Honored by DETCOG**



The citizens of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas were named the 2025 East Texans of the Year on Thursday, in recognition of almost two centuries of service, friendship, and support to East Texas and the entire State of Texas.

The recognition came during the Deep East Texas Council of Governments and Economic Development District's annual membership and awards luncheon, which also marked the 50th anniversary of the Ralph Steen Memorial East Texan of the Year award. The award was announced by former Steen Award winner, State Representative Trent Ashby.

"This year we are not recognizing a person – we are recognizing a People," said Ashby. "This year's recipient has played a major role in shaping the history of Texas – and they have a rich history right here in Deep East Texas" he added.

The Alabama and Coushatta Tribes migrated across the Sabine River into present-day Texas in the 1780's. Ashby noted that without their contributions, the Republic of Texas might have never been.

"In 1836, Sam Houston met with them before the Texas War of Independence. They gave General Houston their assurance they would not side with Mexico, but would help him and his Texan army. Their support proved to be invaluable – they served as guides, and provided provisions to feed Texas refugees fleeing from Santa Anna's army."

"On behalf of my people that came before all of us, to their resilience as a people to survive and to make East Texas our home, we thank our neighbors," said Chairwoman Cecilia Flores, who spoke on behalf of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe. "We've always been a good neighbor; we continue to be a good neighbor to this day, and I just want to say thank you to DETCOG for recognizing our people."

Rep. Ashby described the honor as richly deserved. He noted that when Hurricane Harvey devastated the counties of East and Southeast Texas, the Alabama-Coushatta were the first people to step forward

help. “They provided funding for immediate emergency assistance for people who were suffering, not just in their community, but throughout our region,” he said. “Their generosity made it possible for people who were suffering to get immediate help while still waiting for federal and state recovery programs to get set up and operate.”

The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe owns more than 11,000 acres of land in Polk County and is a fully functioning sovereign government and a major contributor to the economy of Deep East Texas. They contribute more than \$200 million a year into the regional economy. And they are investing in people – providing scholarships, housing, health care, day care, and many other services that improve the quality of life for their own community and many others in surrounding communities.

Joining Rep. Ashby in making the presentation were Senator Robert Nichols and DETCOG Board President Brandon Prescott. Accepting the award on behalf of the Tribe were Principal Chief Mikko Kanicu Donnis Battise, Second Chief Mikko Maanaatiika Herbert Johnson Jr., Tribal Council Chairwoman Cecilia Flores, Tribal Council Vice Chairman Rick Sylestine, Tribal Councilwoman Nita Battise, Tribal Councilwoman and DETCOG Board Member Tina Battise, and other Tribal staff members.

The East Texan of the Year award was first presented in 1976 to Dr. Ralph W. Steen who was retiring as President of Stephen F. Austin State University. DETCOG named the award in his honor and has presented it annually for the past 50 years.