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Weatherford Sisters Take Trick-Riding Show to Rodeo's Biggest Stage



Provided

The Navarre family at the National Finals Rodeo held at the Thomas and Mack Arena in Las Vegas. Pictured (from left): Shyla, Clara, Melissa, Layna, and Corey Navarre.

The Navarre sisters of Weatherford, Oklahoma are no strangers to the limelight. Styling themselves as the Flying Arena Stars, Shyla, Layna, and Clara Navarre have taken their rodeo trick-riding act across the country performing in front of countless spectators whose jaws regularly drop at their death-defying acrobatics. But some stages are definitely bigger than others.

This year the Flying Arena Stars were invited to perform at the National Final's Rodeo in Las Vegas Nevada, the culminating event of the year's rodeo season which showcases the finest cowboys and cowgirls in America. And while the Thomas and Mack Arena at UNLV, which hosts the event, might be smaller than your average rodeo arena, the atmosphere is second to none.

"I mean the main difference is the crowd itself," said Melissa Navarre, The trio's mom and manager. "When you go to a rodeo you never know, they may have really good crowds. They may not have great crowds... but at the National Final's Rodeo you know that there's not going to be an empty seat. It doesn't matter if you go on a Monday or if you go on a Saturday night, it's going to be full and they expect to be entertained and so the energy is just unbelievable."

The Flying Arena Stars spent two weeks in Las Vegas for the event, but before making the trip to Vegas they prepared by duplicating the dimensions of the Thomas and Mack arena at their home practice arena and creating tight 90-second performances that would fit during the commercial breaks for the Cowboy Channel's live broadcast of the National Final's Rodeo. It was a challenge, but the Navarre sisters were well prepared for the task. Shyla Navarre, the oldest of the sisters, had performed at the National Finals Rodeo before but was eager to perform there again. "This is the biggest experience we've all been around, so I think just coming back and seeing the big lights and the crowd... There's no words to express how much I would love to come back and see everything I've experienced again," said Shyla.

Layna Navarre, the middle sister of the group, commented on her favorite trick she performed during the event. "Probably the one-foot stand. You stand on one foot and you have to balance and it's really hard in this arena because it's small... and just seeing the crowd... I didn't know how big the crowd was" said Layna Navarre.

Clara Navarre, the youngest sister of the group also enjoyed her time in the spotlight as she recalled a cute moment with her older sister Layna. "Um, I got really mad at my sister [Layna] and I pushed her in my horse's water tub," said Clara Navarre. When asked why Clara would do such a thing, she responded, "Because Layna was laughing at me." Horse tank dunkings aside, The Navarre Sisters' acts were a wonderful success in Las Vegas and while their performances will forever live on in their memories they're excited to come back home and show off their athletic prowess in another venue; the basketball gym. All of the sisters are members of their respective grades' basketball teams and they're ready to get back onto the court. "It's really hard to watch my team without me, and I'm ready to get back on the floor and get back with them," said Shyla Navarre.

You can find out more about The Flying Arena Stars' exploits by visiting their website at www.navarretrickriders.com.

Christmas

Sunday, December 24th
9:00am 10:30am
12:00pm 1:30pm

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Obituary Correction

The Staff of the WestOK Weekly would like to apologize to the families and friends of Velma Heinrichs and Jeanette Peters. We mistakenly published Mrs. Heinrich's photo in place of Mrs. Peters's photo in the obituary section of last week's print edition of the WestOk Weekly.

We humbly ask forgiveness for this error and any confusion or harm it may have caused and we extend our condolences to the family and friends of both parties in this time of mourning.

Pat Souther

Patricia June "Pat" (Plummer) Souther was born on April 6, 1969, in Thomas, OK, to William "Bill" and Peggy Sue "Sue" (McCrary) Plummer and passed away on Friday, December 8, 2023, at OKC OU Medical Center having reached the age of 54 years, 8 months and 2 days.



Pat was raised southwest of Watonga and attended school in Greenfield, Oklahoma, finishing her senior year in Watonga, graduating with the Class of 1987. On August 8, 1987, she married her high school sweetheart, Trent Lee Souther, in Watonga, Oklahoma.

They made their home in Thomas where she worked as an in-home caregiver for the elderly as well as the Watonga and Thomas nursing homes. Pat enjoyed crafting, decorating, and most of all taking care of her grandchildren.

Pat is survived by her son, Travis Souther of San Antonio, TX; daughters, Allisa Floyd and husband, Adam, of Custer City, OK, and Taylor Souther of Thomas, OK; two brothers, Donald Plummer, David Plummer and wife, Shawnda all of Watonga, OK; two sisters, Deann Kelly and husband, Robert of Humboldt, KS and Debbie Plummer of Watonga, OK;

Pat is also survived by six grandchildren: Alayna, Alex and Axton Floyd, Jase, Grayson and Nora Greening.

She was preceded in death by her parents.

William Wittmeyer

William Ralph Wittmeyer was born on December 11, 1944, to Ralph and Mary Wittmeyer in Frederick, OK, and passed away on December 8, 2023, at the Integris Hospice House in OKC, at the age of 78 years, 11 months, 28 days.



William was raised and attended school in Frederick, OK, graduating with the class of 1962. On August 17, 1963, he married Glenda Grubbs in Blair, OK. They made their home in Watonga, OK. He worked in numerous services in the oilfield from 1972 until retiring in 2020. William enjoyed hunting quail, striper fishing, riding 4 wheelers, and being with family.

William is survived by his two sons, Timothy Wittmeyer, of Weatherford and Scott Wittmeyer and wife, Tina of Edmond; granddaughter, Alyssa Friesen and husband, Jake; and two great-grandchildren, Leif and Greer Friesen. He was preceded in death by his wife; parents; and sister, Charlotte Ann.

Dean Wheeler

Dean Wheeler started out life as "Mr. Jackson County for 1938", as the first baby born in the new year, January 1, 1938. He was born in Martha, OK, to Clyde and Norene Wheeler and passed away December 10, 2023, at the age of 85 years, 11 months and 9 days.



Dean was raised in Martha and was baptized in the Mountainview Baptist Church, where he won the Bible Drill Contest so frequently that he was able to give away many, many Bibles. After graduating from Martha High School, he headed to Southwestern State College, where he graduated with a B.S. in math, physics, and chemistry in 1960. More importantly, it was there that he and fellow student, Mabel Cason, fell madly in love. They were married in June 1960 and soon after, packed up their first car and headed to the University of Pittsburg to pursue a master's degree in physics. From there, Dean continued his pursuit of excellence at Cornell University with a Master of Science for Teachers in 1966 and then they moved back to Weatherford and Southwestern, Dean teaching in the physics department and, Mabel, first graduating, then working and teaching in the chemistry and math departments. It was here they started their family with son Larry and just before the pursuit of his final degree, they added son Brett. A brilliant scientist with a very clever mind, Dean was sought after and eventually ended up at the University of Illinois where he received a master's in physics in 1971 and in 1976 he received a PhD in High Energy Physics, working alongside some of the most important scientists in the world, and here they completed their family, adding daughter Deanna. They moved from Champaign to Long Island, where Dean worked for the world-renowned Brookhaven National Laboratory before finally coming back home to Weatherford and Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Here he found his true calling of teaching Computer Science, making his mark on the world and earning the respect of so many students, until his retirement in 1998. Here in downtown Weatherford, Dean and Mabel are most notably remembered for starting up Hooked On Books in 1984, where it remains today.

Dean is survived by his wife of 63 years, Mabel, sons Larry, Brett and wife Amy, and Daughter Deanna Dye and husband Roman. He is also survived by his siblings, brother Dale and wife Judy, sisters Doris Baker and husband Clarence, DeLois Chapman and husband Ralph, along with four granddaughters- Taryn, Jayden, Kaymi and Halley, and two grandsons - Dylan and Lennon and one great-grandson Brant. He was preceded in death by his parents.

Calvin Baggett

Calvin Eugene Baggett passed away on December 5, 2023, in Arapaho, OK. He was born on June 8, 1974, to Clifford Wayne Baggett and Betty Jo (Ousley) Murphy in Clinton, OK.



Family will greet guests at the Kiesau-Lee Funeral Home 5:00 PM till 7:00 PM on December 10, 2023.

Calvin was a graduate of the Butler High School Class of 1993. While in high school, he was active in Basketball, baseball, and FFA. Calvin enlisted in the Army National Guard in June 1993, and was a PFC E3 where he served until his discharge in January 2000. While in the Army National Guard he was honored with the Army Service Ribbon, Hand Grenade Sharpshooter Award, Rifle M16 Expert.

In 1997, he became a Volunteer Fireman for the Butler Fire Department from 1997-2007. From 2003 to 2012 he was employed at Sinor Emergency Medical Services in Clinton where he obtained his EMS license. He joined the Clinton Fire Department as a Volunteer Firefighter for a short time before joining as a full-time firefighter. He was employed with the Clinton Fire Department from September 2007 to his retirement in September 2022. While employed with the Clinton Fire Department, he and his crew members were honored with helping save the life of former police officer Mike Murley. He was a member of the Red Knights Motorcycle Club. He was currently a volunteer fireman for the Arapaho Fire Department and working at the Custer County District 3 Yard in Butler, OK.

Calvin is survived by: Carrie, Taelar, and Rihann Baggett, Jeffery, Darian, and Cherokee Baggett all of Clinton, and Maecy Teeter of Canute, OK, his girlfriend, Leslie Panana and her children Marcella, Lexa, Cayden, and Payson of Clinton, Sisters: Paula (Jimmy) Fieselman of Butler and Teri Collins of Chickasha. Mother-In-Law: Betsy Hernandez of Clinton; Father-In-Law: Jerry (Kathleen) Anthony of Clinton, Grandmother-in-law, Lois Schimmels, Clinton, Sister-In-Law: Amber (Timmy) Lee of Arapaho; Nieces and Nephews: Levi (Kailar) Fieselman of Butler, Alyssa (Ron Baker) of Butler, Kortney (Jared) Deaton of Weatherford, Trey (Jennifer) Shelton of Corn, Jeremy Collins, and Falisha Collins of Chickasha and Daycie, Dalton and Dalaynie Lee of Arapaho.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Clifford Wayne Baggett and Betty Jo Murphy, brother, Harold Baggett, Maternal Grandparents, Ernest and Gervis Ousley, Paternal Grandparents-Clifford and Lolita Baggett, and Great Niece Elyse Shelton and Grandfather in law, Vernon Schimmels.

Sue Godwin

Susan Lue "Sue" Godwin was born December 19, 1954, in Thomas, to Lue Warren "Slick" and Lea Elma (Fry) Slagle and passed away Saturday, December 9, 2023, at St. Anthony Hospital - ICU in Oklahoma City, at the age of 68 years, 11 months and 20 days.



Sue was raised and attended school in Thomas, graduating from Thomas High School in 1973. After high school she attended Southwestern Oklahoma State University for 1 year and later went to Floral Design School in Denver. Sue married Jimmy Godwin on March 2, 1979, in Sayre and made their home in Thomas. In 1982, she went to work for the Russell Funeral Home in Thomas which was later bought by Lockstone Funeral Home. She was still active in the funeral business after 41 years. On October 10, 2008, she married Gary Howard in Thomas. Sue enjoyed shopping with friends, watching her favorite TV shows, but most of all she loved spending time with her grandchildren and going to their school activities. She loved Christmas time because she loved spending time with the immediate and extended family members throughout the holiday season. Memorials may be made to the Kendon Harris Memorial Fund - Class of 2027, First National Bank of Thomas, PO Box 130, Thomas, OK 73669.

Sue is survived by her daughter, Melissa Harris of the home in Thomas; two grandchildren, Kellan Harris and Raylea Medicine Bear; and her sister, Deborah Slagle and Charlie Clark of Thomas. She was preceded in death by her parents; daughter, Jessica Lea Godwin; son, Landon Ray Godwin; and grandson, Kendon Lue Harris.



A Family Christmas Eve Service
Dec 24 5:30pm

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The Ombudsman Program is set up to meet the needs of residents in long-term care and to make sure all residents' rights are protected. Ombudsmen receive complaints from residents or their friends or their relatives and attempts to resolve those complaints within the facility. Ombudsmen have authority to explore and investigate complaints and to recommend corrective action. One of the goals of this program is to have volunteers that can assist with this program.

If you are interested or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Cherrie Nutley, Long-Term Care Ombudsman supervisor of Southwestern OK, at 580-562-5032.

To be a Volunteer in the Ombudsman Program, You must have the following:

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OK Senator Lankford Discusses 2024 Election



Heston Wright / WW

U.S. Senator James Lankford spent Friday in Weatherford and was the keynote speaker at the annual Weatherford Area Economic Development luncheon. Senator Lankford touched on the upcoming races and what he sees next year. Lankford also spoke on the topics of border security and the need to complete national defense authorization legislation.

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HIGHER GROUND

The Day After Christmas



Jim Morrison

It's the day after Christmas and all through the house, not a creature is stirring, it is quiet as a mouse. Just a few hours ago the rafters rang with shrieks of laughter and good fellowship as six teen-agers, three young adults and their parents enjoyed each other in silly games and contests. We wouldn't have it any other way. I even recorded some of the sounds of laughter to play back when it is too quiet. We are so grateful that the weather cooperated and safe travel brought us all together again. We realize that we are beautifully blessed. They all are in fellowship with the Lord with three of them going on mission trips this spring. All this is in such a contrast to delivering forty-eight Christmas gifts to homes that have a member of the family in incarceration. Our church works in cooperation with Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree

ministry. It is a joy to see some smiles and get some hugs from appreciative parents and children. I am grateful for the generosity of members of the church who made the gifts possible. Approximately 175 man/woman hours were involved in the bell-ringing ministry to raise funds for the mission house in Clinton. I am grateful for the many who gave of themselves to stand in sometimes cold weather to give out candy canes and call attention to the ministry. Someone please remind me next September that I must find some way to share some of these responsibilities. This mind is getting too old to take on the stress involved.

Longfellow's well known poem "I heard the bells on Christmas Day," came out of a time of personal tragedy. In 1861 he lost his devoted wife of 18 years in a tragic fire. In trying to save her he was severely burned. He grew a beard to hide the scars on his face. His oldest son joined the Union army against his father's wishes. In a letter he explained, "I have tried hard to resist the temptation of going without your leave but I cannot any longer. I feel it my first duty to do what I can for my country and I would willingly lay down my life for it if it would do any good." He was severely wounded and missed the Battle of Gettysburg. So, he survived to return to his family

It was on Christmas day in 1863 that Longfellow wrote the poem that was later put to music. He exposes his grief in line three which reads, "And in despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said, 'For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace of peace on earth good will to men.'" But his faith rebounded in line four, "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth good will to men."

I'm afraid the atmosphere of today mirrors the lyrics of line three. Certainly hate is strong and peace is mocked with every newscast of violence and unstrained evil. But we must not live there; for God is not dead nor does he sleep. He is moving in history to accomplish his purposes. We must choose which side we will live on and in the power of His Spirit and with all our resolve give our best efforts to right the wrong. Certainly the lines are sometimes blurred, but the prayers of David in Psalms 25: 4, 5 must be our guide. "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in our truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior and my hope is in you all day long."

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WOCS Names Newest "Students of the Month"



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November Students of the Month at WOCS Clinton Campus are Scarlett Fowble of Thomas (left) and Brynlee Redcay of Corn. Dora Miller, Head of School, made the presentations. Lucille's Roadhouse sponsors these awards.

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November Students of the Month at Western Oklahoma Christian School in Weatherford are Emily Chupp of Thomas (left) and Blakely Daughtery of Hydro. Lucille's Roadhouse sponsors these awards.

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BECKHAM CO / HOWELL - A Sayre man has asked a Beckham County District Court judge to reconsider a motion to quash and request an evidentiary hearing. 53-year-old Michael Scott Howell is charged with an act of terrorism after he allegedly sent threatening messages by email to a Sweetwater School official. One of the messages had a link to a news article in reference to the Nashville, Tennessee School Shooting that occurred in late March 2023. School officials felt the email was a threat toward Sweetwater Schools, staff and students.

WEATHERFORD / AVIATION - Weatherford Public Schools is one of three selected in the state for an after-school aviation program, says Director Of Curriculum Doug Gunselman. The program will run from February through April and will be limited to about 25 students.

WEATHERFORD / SCHOOL LAND - The new industrial north park is complete, says Weatherford Economic Development Director Yolanda Creswell. The park was made possible through a \$2.8 million economic development administration grant to the city of Weatherford and the Weatherford Industrial Trust. It's an effort to boost manufacturing, energy, industrial and commercial development.

WEATHERFORD / CHAMBER NOMINEES - The Weatherford Chamber of Commerce is accepting nomination forms for the roots & wings, hall of fame, young professional and outstanding service awards presented by the chamber. The award winners will be announced at the annual banquet on Thursday, February 8th, at the Pioneer Event Center on the SWOSU campus. Nominations must be submitted by December 20th at 5pm. via email at director@weatherfordchamber.com

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Happy Birthday Wishes for Dec. 20th - Dr. Michael Aaron, Donna Dumell, Edward Engel, Norma Fisher, Melanie Gates, Phyllis Gibson, Larry Howes, Burl Kennedy, Ernie McCoy, Lela Ma McGill, Victoria Rodriguez, Jarde Sister, Laura Toczko, Ruby Wright; **Dec. 21** - Leslie Acuna, Boyce Ashcraft, Sonya Blagg, Jackie Flaming, Wendy Garrison, Nicole Glance, Paul Harner, Damon Kautz, Sandra Kidd, Anna Koop, Lynn Koop, Trapper Roark, Maria Settles, Dalton Sisson, Jeannie Spain, Allen Tipton, James Vanderbroeck, Jylian Voight; **Dec. 22** - John Brown, Kelsie Cardenas, Nicholas Davis, Michelle Dry, Ivan Escobedo, Murlin Henderson, Alisha Henderson, Donald Melton, Dennis Messmer, Deryl Roark, Nova Schafer, Rossalyn Simpson, Phyllis Stevenson, Michelle Stinson, Blake Whitson; **Dec. 23** - C.J. Barnhill, Jared Deaton, Lynn Graham, Jason Hines, Lisa Lee, Jacqueline Parker, Dusty Rhoads, Andy Sister, KeKe Sutton, Anthony Thomas, Larry Waldrup, Bentli Whitson; **Dec. 24** - Marquez Borjas, Patrick Bostwick, Dorothy Burns, Zachery House, Kaitlin Kimble, Lucielle Ralston, David Richmond, Hannah Sperle; **Dec. 25** - Teresa Andrews, Pat Barnett, Steve Bellew, Brady Coffelt, Ronda Harmon, Jake Ivy, David Martin, Michael Mendez, Hank Peter, Linda Pye, Mary Stelting; **Dec. 26** - Kenny Bragg, Nick Davis, Curtis Duff, Ruben Garlin, McKayla Goodwin, Michelle Williams, Carl Wilson.

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Rambler Mobile Home - 33ft. 61k miles, new motor, \$12,000. 405-639-9667.

2003 Chevy Trailblazer - good tires. \$5,750. 580-330-3489

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2020 Flagstaff - Super Light. 5th Wheel Camper. One Owner. Always Shedded. Lightly Used. Two Slide-outs. 32-footer. \$32,000. 405-777-3023.

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Chairs for Sale! Swivel (\$25), Dining, Cusioned, and Patio Chairs. 580-613-0108.

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Coil roofing air nailgun - like new, with 3 boxes of coil nails. \$250. 580-330-1437.

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Baby Grand Piano - 2nd Owner. Vose and Sons. \$900. 580-613-0108

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Chairs for Sale! Swivel, Dining, Rocking, and Patio Chairs. Call 580-613-0108 for details.

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Berry and Grant Claim Final “Bulldogs of the Week” for 2023

Grant Kopycinski Sports Information Graduate Asst. SWOSU Basketball standouts Mark Berry and Hailey Grant have been labeled the final Bulldogs of the Week in 2023.

The weekly SWOSU student-athlete recognition is brought to you by Wright Media, the home of SWOSU Athletics for both livestream and radio broadcasts.

Grant (Claremore, OK) set a new career high in scoring with 17 points against No. 5/11 Southern Nazarene over the weekend. She is now averaging 8.4 points and a team high 5.2 rebounds per game heading into Christmas Break.

Berry (Lawton, OK) averaged a double-double in two games for Men’s Hoops last week. Against Oklahoma Christian, he set a new career high in rebounding with a 12-point, 14-rebound performance. His eight points and seven rebounds against Southern Nazarene helped lift the Dawgs to a second consecutive conference home win.



SOCAG Senior Nutrition Program: Local Seniors Need your Help!

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, Inc.
“Helping People. Changing Lives.”

the SOCAG needs to the most help from local residents.

“They would help deliver the meals. That’s what we need help right now. We’d also like to have some volunteers on hand. You know sometimes we’re short handed. Somebody gets sick and a person can help by just running the dishwasher. You know serve our community. But mainly we need people that can come up here and get those meals delivered to the seniors,” said Jones.

Seniors involved in the program are provided the meals free of charge, but they can also donate to the program. The suggested donation per meal is \$3, but they food they receive is always cooked from scratch and includes some comforting classics like homemade pizza, stews, and of course desserts like cobblers and cookies.

In all there are 3 routes that deliver to around 12-20 seniors per route. Jones says that she needs about volunteers per day in order to effectively serve the seniors on each route. That’s about 1 to 2 drivers per route. And while the service provided to the seniors is mainly about feeding them, it is also an opportunity to forge meaningful social connections for an often forgotten group.

“Yes, they have developed relationships with the volunteers. they’ve gotten very familiar with them. A lot of the volunteers come from local churches and, yes, they have definitely formed relationships and they check up on the seniors. They make sure they’re doing all right and they have what they need,” said Jones about the relationships between the seniors and volunteers.

If you or anyone you know is interested in volunteering to help feed Western Oklahoma senior citizens you can reach out to Emma Jones by calling 580-772-1193.

“One in six Oklahoman adults and seniors are food insecure,” according to a study administered by the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at the Oklahoma State University Extension, but the Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group’s Senior Nutrition Program, otherwise known as SOCAG, is fighting to feed the elderly and they need your help.

“Right now we’re at about 100 [seniors in the nutrition program], but we are fastly growing. We’ve got a very high demand right now,” said Emma Jones, Weatherford’s Nutrition Site Manager, who coordinates feeding disadvantaged seniors in the Weatherford area.

“I’m getting several calls a day of people in need and that’s where the volunteers come in, so we can expand and get food out to the people that need it.”

SOCAG in Weatherford is based out of the Pioneer Center located at 1000 Gartrell Place. That’s where volunteers gather to cook and deliver daily fresh meals to seniors who may not have the funds or the ability to cook for themselves. Some seniors gather at the Pioneer Center for these daily meals provided Monday through Friday, but other seniors don’t have the ability or means to meet at the Pioneer Center every weekday afternoon. Delivering meals to Seniors who are homebound is where

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Oklahoma History: CHRISTMAS IN THE TERRITORY



Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society

Photos of Christmas decorations and celebrations in Oklahoma City. These photos were taken circa 1936 (top) and 1962 (bottom).

Chase Wright
Staff Writer

The late 19th century brought about a unique and challenging period for settlers in the Oklahoma Territory. As families sought to establish their homes and communities in this rugged and untamed land, the spirit of Christmas persevered, weaving a tapestry of warmth and joy amidst the harsh conditions.

Many of the people who migrated to the frontier brought along their cultural traditions but found that the new landscape required them to create some new customs or tweak their old ones. For example, the standard Christmas tree was traditionally a pine tree. However, within the new territory, a substitute was required and picked as the native oak or blackjack tree.

These Christmas trees, if available, were small and adorned with candles, paper ornaments, and whatever shiny trinkets the settlers could fashion. Early Christmas celebrations in the Oklahoma Territory were marked by simplicity and resourcefulness. Families adorned their humble homes with handmade decorations crafted from natural materials like pinecones, twigs, and dried berries.

With familial connections to the East limited, communities began to host Christmas celebrations together in a local church or school. Some early influencers of Oklahoma's style of Christmas before statehood were immigrants from Czechoslovakia and members of the Five Civilized Tribes.

Churches, often the heart of these budding communities, organized special Christmas services that provided a respite from the challenges of

frontier life. Christmas dinners featured buffalo tongue, goose, wild turkey, sauerkraut, and bread dumplings. With limited access to stores, families exchanged handmade gifts, such as knitted scarves, embroidered handkerchiefs, and crafted toys. Despite the hardships, the pioneers of the Oklahoma Territory infused Christmas with a spirit of resilience and hope.

In 1832, missionary Henry Wilson from the Presbyterian Missionary Board visited Dwight Mission in Indian Territory (near Marble City, Oklahoma) and recorded his experience in his journal.

He lamented about the mission bells he heard ringing, guiding him to the Christmas celebration. Along the way he noted the bells calling others to the church, Cherokee citizens.

"When I entered the mission church, they were singing hymns in the Cherokee language. Never before did music appear half so sweet to me; the language is music itself".

That day, Wilson spent the Christmas with almost 100 families and wrote, "This was the happiest Christmas I ever spent, though far from home and friends and destitute of the luxuries and comforts to which I have become accustomed."

The holiday season became a time to reflect on the challenges faced throughout the year, express gratitude for the small victories, and look forward to a brighter future. Today, as we look back at these humble beginnings, we can appreciate the tenacity and determination that laid the foundation for the festive spirit that continues to flourish in the state of Oklahoma.

Andrew Rice is Named Newest Head Football Coach at SWOSU



Southwestern Oklahoma State University Athletic Director Todd Helton has announced Andrew Rice has been hired to become the 25th head coach in SWOSU Football history.

Rice has spent the past two years as a successful Offensive Coordinator at Southern Arkansas University but has a decade of coaching experience throughout Oklahoma's high school and collegiate landscapes as an Oklahoma native himself. He replaces Ruzell McCoy who served as SWOSU's interim coach for the 2023 season.

Rice began his coaching career climbing through the high school ranks with positions at Bixby, Charles Page, and Bartlesville before earning a head coaching role at Miami (OK) High School. He then transitioned to the college game where he has remained for the past six years. Rice coached for Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College (NEO) before moving on to the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) and finally Southern Arkansas.

"After an extensive national search, it became evident that Coach Rice was the right man to lead our football

program," said Helton. "We had a very specific list of qualities we were looking for and Coach Rice checked all the boxes. His experience and success at multiple levels along with his vast knowledge of recruiting in the state of Oklahoma and region stood out."

"I am incredibly excited for the opportunity Dr. Lovell, Coach Helton, and the rest of the hiring committee have given to me to return home to Oklahoma and lead the SWOSU football program," said Rice. "I cannot wait to meet our guys and start building lifelong relationships while enjoying success together on and off the field. There are a lot of people that have poured into me to get me to this point, and I cannot wait to share that with the SWOSU and Weatherford communities."

Rice had the Mulerider offense operating on a national level while at Southern Arkansas. SAU was third in NCAA Division II in rushing and fifth in total offense in 2023 after ranking sixth nationally in both rushing and third down conversion percentage a year prior.

The Muleriders finished 10-2 this season, earning the first postseason win in the program's D2 era with a 43-27

victory over Missouri Western in the Live United Bowl. It was SAU's first double-digit win total in over 70 years, thanks in large part to an offense averaging over 38.5 points and 477 yards per game.

"I would like to thank the players, administrators, and coaching staff at SAU for their belief and investment in me during my time there."

Prior to Southern Arkansas, Rice was at UCO as the Passing Game Coordinator and Wide Receivers Coach where he headed the recruitment for the OKC/Tulsa area.

He began his collegiate coaching career as the Offensive Coordinator at NEO. Rice guided a Norseman offense that finished third in the country in total offense and featured the conference's offensive MVP. NEO finished 8-3, reaching the SWJFC championship game while also making an appearance in the 2019 Midwest Classic Bowl.

"SWOSU is pleased to have Coach Andrew Rice leading our Bulldog Football Team and we look forward to welcoming him to the SWOSU Hilltop in the very near future," said SWOSU President Dr. Lovell. "He has a proven record of success, and his motivational and team-building qualities are why our Search Committee, made up of several SWOSU football alumni and members of our Athletic Department, chose Coach Rice out of a pool of over 100 applications as part of a national search."

Originally from Owasso, Oklahoma, Rice obtained a Bachelor of Science in Health & Physical Education from Northeastern State University in 2012 following a playing career with the RiverHawks where he was a member of NSU's Lone Star Conference North Division Championship team.

"I would like to thank Dr. Lovell for her leadership during this process," Helton added when reflecting on the hiring process. "I would also like to thank the search committee and Mammoth consultants for an outstanding job working through an impressive candidate pool. We want to welcome Coach Rice into the Bulldog family and are excited to see him implement his vision of success for SWOSU Football!"

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Oklahoma consistently ranks as one of the hungriest states in the nation. This holiday season, donations to fight hunger in Oklahoma are doubled in impact thanks to the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma's Holiday Match. Through Jan. 15, all donations will be matched, up to \$450,000, thanks to APMEX, the Cresap Family Foundation and other generous donors.

"As we approach the festive season, our community faces unprecedented challenges, and the need for support has never been more critical," said John Cresap, president of the Cresap Family Foundation. "Supporting the Regional Food Bank allows us to join together as a community and make a meaningful impact on the lives of our fellow Oklahomans. Together, we can bring warmth, nourishment and hope to our neighbors who need it most."

Typically, the Regional Food Bank is able to provide four meals for every \$1 donated. During the match, every dollar will help provide eight meals to Oklahomans living with hunger.

"As we near the end of the year, we urge everyone to use this time to make a tax-deductible donation to help provide much needed meals and nutrition to Oklahoma families," said Stacy Dykstra, chief executive officer of the Regional Food Bank.

Help deliver hope this holiday season by making a donation at rfbo.org/give or by calling 405-600-3161.

Donations may also be mailed to:

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 Oklahoma City, OK, 73137-0968

An automatic \$10 donation can also be made by texting the word "Food" to 501-501.

About the Cresap Family Foundation

Denny, Gail and John Cresap established the foundation following the sale of the family's business, Premium Beers of Oklahoma, one of the largest Anheuser-Busch distributorships in the country.

A desire to give back to the communities that had supported Premium Beers of Oklahoma for 44 years resulted in the foundation's creation.

Including its 2023 grant-making activities, the Cresap Family Foundation has given over \$13 million to Oklahoma nonprofits since its founding in 2012. Learn more at cresapfoundation.org.

About the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma is leading the fight against hunger in 53 counties in central and western Oklahoma and envisions a state where no one goes hungry.

Founded in 1980, the Regional Food Bank is the state's largest domestic hunger-relief 501(c)(3) nonprofit that distributes food through a network of community-based partner agencies and schools.

The majority of people served by the Regional Food Bank are chronically hungry children, seniors living on fixed incomes and hardworking families struggling to make ends meet.

The Regional Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, the nation's network of food banks. To join the fight to end hunger, visit rfbo.org.

A Christmas Memory Maxine McCullough



Maxine McCullough

I was a "Great Depression" child, so Christmas was not such a big deal back then—more specifically, it wasn't expected. We all shared the same life.

The biggest event was the all-school program. After the program, we all received a sack containing an apple, an orange, a few nuts like pecans or walnuts and hard candy (yes dolly). I always sang in the choir and hung with my friends. This was what a "Merry Christmas" was for a small Oklahoma town high schooler in the early 1950's.

However, a neat thing happened in 1961 at Christmas time. In our small Baptist Church in Binger, OK, the birth of Jesus was being acted out. My son, born November 27, 1961, was nestled in the arms of Mary Lou Opitz, who was playing Mary. My six-year-old daughter was dressed as one of the angels and I was singing in the choir.

On the front pew sat my mother with my four year old son just in case the acting baby Jesus cried. He didn't. I'm 90-years-old now and many wonderful christmases have come and gone, but I choose this one as one of my most memorable.

Merry Christmas 2023, y'all.



Weatherford Holds Ribbon Cutting for Edward Jones Advisor Ashlyn Pugh

Courtney Graybill / WW

Ashlyn Pugh, an financial advisor for Edward Jones in Weatherford, received her official Weatherford Chamber of Commerce Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for her business at 1053 E Washington.

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SPORTS

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SWOSU Men's Basketball Team Tops Southern Nazarene 74-63



Jon Chidester
Sports Asst. AD

SWOSU Men's Basketball won a second consecutive conference game at home after capturing a 74-63 win over Southern Nazarene on Saturday afternoon. The Bulldogs will enter Christmas Break with the taste of victory heading into a nearly two-week hiatus from competition.

The Bulldogs methodically took care of business, outscoring the Crimson Storm in both halves to earn the first double-digit win of the season. SWOSU turned 14 SNU turnovers into 19 points while committing just eight turnovers themselves.

SWOSU saw success all day getting to the foul line. The Dawgs shot 28 attempts from the charity

stripe – just one shy from tying a season high. They finished 24-for-28 to set a new season best free throw percentage at 86%.

Those free throws alongside taking care of the ball allowed the Bulldogs to keep the visitors at bay and avoid any potential comeback attempt. SWOSU led for over 38 minutes of the game and did not trail in the second half. They led by any many as 14 and went on to win by 11.

Both sides shot similar numbers in the game. After shooting 38% in the first half, SWOSU improved that to 48% after halftime to finish at 42% overall. SNU shot 41% in the game and was held to sub-40 in the second half. Both teams made four three-point shots in the game on 25% or less shooting.

Ben Smith led all scorers with 19 points while grabbing seven rebounds.

Jalen Johnson (15) and Denali Alexander (15) combined for another 30 points.

Mark Berry, fresh off a double-double against Oklahoma Christian, added eight points and seven rebounds.

SWOSU (2-7, 2-2 GAC) will be back to action for an exhibition game against Division I Tulsa on December 29 before returning to regular season play after the new year. The Dawgs pick back up with GACtion on January 4 at Southern Arkansas. The next home game comes a week later, January 11, against Henderson State.

The Lady Dawgs Suffer First GAC Loss to Ranked Crimson Storm



Jon Chidester
Sports Asst. AD

SWOSU Women's Basketball fell to No. 5/11 Southern Nazarene 77-56 at home on Saturday to wrap up the fall semester. The Lady Bulldogs trailed the Crimson Storm by eight points at halftime

but a 24% shooting performance from the field in the second half did not allow for the margin get any closer.

It's the first conference loss of the season for SWOSU. They'll enter Christmas Break sporting a

6-4 record and a 3-1 mark in league play. Southern Nazarene remains undefeated at 10-0 and 4-0 in the GAC.

SNU built an eight-point first quarter lead after shooting 63% from the field in the first 10 minutes of action. Both sides played to a tie in the second after the Dawgs warmed up with a 53% second-quarter shooting mark. At halftime, SWOSU trailed 42-34.

Both defenses tightened up in the second half. The Lady Bulldogs limited SNU to 33% after halftime but could not capitalize after struggling to score themselves. The Storm outscored SWOSU in both final quarters to put the game out of reach. Final, 77-56.

74 of the visitor's 77 points came from their starting five with a pair of double-double performances.

SWOSU was led by Hailey Grant with a career high 17 points on 7-of-14 shooting. Averi Zinn added 14 points with five assists.

The Lady Bulldogs won the turnover battle 13-8 but lost on the boards 47-31. SNU finished 20-of-24 from the foul line, while SWOSU was 5-of-7.

SWOSU will break for Christmas and will not play again until January 4 on the road against Southern Arkansas. The next home game comes January 11 against Henderson State.

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