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Weatherford Chamber to Host 37th Annual Wellness Expo August 9



The Health and Wellness Expo is coming to the Mike Brown Event Center in Rader Park on Saturday, August 9th from 8am to noon, and this year's expo promises to be bigger and better than ever before. Presented annually by the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce, the Health and Wellness Expo brings a host of health service professionals into one space to inform and educate local community members about the services they provide while providing activities and events that the whole family can enjoy.

"We have 42 vendors signed up right now," said Chantelle McCraw, co-chair of the Health Education Committee who's responsible for hosting the event "We're gonna have a lot of resources out there this year and I think it just gives an opportunity for people in Western Oklahoma to know what's out there all in one place," McCraw added.

Attendees will also get to speak face to face with the multitude of vendors at the event, so they'll be able to ask specific questions that are relevant to their needs. Along with the vendors at the show there will also be entertainment provided by the Not Just Country Line Dancers and the Chris Pollman Karate Academy as well as a photo booth, face painting, a bounce house, food trucks, and Touch a Truck which invites children to explore real working first-responder vehicles and farm vehicles.

"We're going to have the Air-Evac helicopter, barring any emergencies, and they're actually going to be landing their helicopter in the soccer field, so all the kids will be able to enjoy that." Said McCraw, "And they can go through fire trucks, an ambulance, police car and we're going to have a few tractors out there as well"

This will also be the first year that the Expo will be hosting a 5K race and Fun Run. The races will begin at 8am before the vendor portion of the expo opens. Participants will be awarded a medal upon completion of their race.

It costs \$20 to register for the 5K race and \$15 to register for the fun run. Interested participants will be able to register for the race until 7am on the day of the event. You can also find more information and updates about the event by visiting the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce Facebook page where you can also find a link to the online registration form.

For more information about the event you can follow the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce on Facebook. To sign up for the event online, visit form.jotform.com/251485600986061 or scan the QR Code above.

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Vickie Baxter

Vickie Ann (Baumgartner) Baxter, aged 66, of Arapaho, Oklahoma, peacefully passed away on July 21, 2025, at Integris Baptist Hospital in Oklahoma City.



Born on February 24, 1959, in Clinton, OK,

to Edward and Helen (Fawver) Baumgartner, Vickie's life was a tapestry of dedication, love, and commitment to family. After graduating from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in 1980, she married her beloved husband Dennis Baxter on December 20, 1980, in Arapaho, OK. Vickie's academic journey saw her earn two master's degrees in education and science, showcasing her passion for learning and teaching.

With an impressive teaching career spanning 33 years, Vickie dedicated herself to teaching at Gracemont, Anadarko, Butler, Arapaho and then Arapaho-Butler Public Schools, leaving a lasting impact on countless students.

Her heart overflowed with love for her grandchildren and family, and she embraced every moment spent with them. Vickie dearly loved her grandchildren and attended every sporting event she was able, including basketball, baseball, track, cross country, and wrestling events.

The companionship of her beloved Shih Tzu, Sasha was cherished. She loved nature, flowers, and travel, and was an active member of the Western Okie Ramblers, exploring the beauty of Oklahoma and Texas.

Her faith was paramount; she actively participated in church activities, including the women's group, Vacation Bible School, and the Backpack program. Vickie also had a fond affection for group excursions, including memorable bus trips to Branson, Missouri, and other senior citizens and teacher tours. Among her treasured places was Fun Valley, CO, where she vacationed with the entire Baxter family over two decades.

Vickie leaves behind her devoted husband, Dennis; beloved daughters Lacee Martin and her husband, Scott, of Clinton, and Ashley Arres and her husband, Aaron, of Oklahoma City. She is also survived by her sister, Cathy Harrelson and her husband, Brian, of El Reno; her cherished grandchildren, Acelyn and Aden Arres; her adored Shih Tzu, Sasha; and her honorary daughter, Jeri (Kirk) Gray.

Preceding her in death were her parents, Edward and Helen Baumgartner, and in laws, Howard and Ruby Baxter.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly requests donations be made in Vickie's name to the Arapaho Public Schools, Special Education Program, PO Box 160, Arapaho, OK 73620.









Joann Epperly

Clara Joann (Burrahm) Epperly, 90, was born on July 3, 1935 in Weatherford, OK to Clinton and Allie (Ellithorp) Burrahm and passed away on July 19, 2025 at Maple Lawn Manor in Hydro, OK.



Joann was born and raised in Weatherford, OK, where she also attended school. Over the years she worked as a cook in the schools and nursing homes in the community. Joann raised three children Barry, Cheryl and Bobbie and later spent her days spoiling her grandchildren. She was a loving caregiver to her mother and all other family members. Joann's hobbies included spending time outdoors, camping, swimming and fishing. She will be remembered as a very giving and caring person that was dedicated to her family and those she loved.

Joann is survived by her son, Barry Dean Strong of Hydro, OK; daughter, Bobbie Jo Mackey of Hydro, OK; brother, Richard Dean Burrahm of Centerville, UT; grandchildren, Russell Lee Strong, Robbie Pigg, Carolynn Clark, Byran Yeager, and Gary Yeager; and great-grandchildren, William, Dillion, Jonathan and Dakota Pigg. She was preceded in death by her parents; daughter, Cheryl Ann Strong; and siblings, Tolbert Bonnie Burrahm, Quentin L. "Hoot" Burrahm, Maxine Dorothy Ramsdal, George Clinton Burrahm, Ruth Mary Burrahm, Walter Grey Burrahm and Argie "Duchess" Lewis.

Darla Upchurch

Darla Jean Upchurch was born November 25, 1932, in Leedey, to Carl Thomas and Edna Othel (Clark) Holcomb and passed away Monday, July 21, 2025, at Weatherford Regional Hospital.



Darla was raised and attended school in Leedey, Oklahoma where she graduated with the Class of 1950. She was saved in 1943, as a young child. After graduating high school, her family moved to Clinton, OK. As a young lady, she worked for Southwestern Bell as a telephone operator. She soon met Vernon Lewis Upchurch and they were married on August 9, 1952 at her parent's house. Darla and Vernon made their home in Clinton where together they raised their three children—Mike, Verna, and Robin. After raising her children to school age, she began working at Kellwood Co. as a payroll clerk and later at Albar Fabric in Clinton.

Darla loved to travel and, together with her husband, worked in South Fork, Colorado at Fun Valley Resort during peak season in May to October.

During the winter they loved traveling to south Texas with their travel trailer. After 47 years of marriage, Vernon passed away in 1999. Darla was an exceptional craftsperson and loved sewing--making both of her daughter's wedding dresses, quilts for the kids and grandchildren and doing alterations. She also enjoyed reading, volunteering at Clinton Hospital, and teaching children's church at Broadway Heights Baptist Church in Clinton. In 2015, Darla moved to Weatherford to be closer to family. She was a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church at the time of her death.

Darla is preceded in death by her parents, Carl and Edna Holcomb; husband, Vernon Upchurch; and one brother, Carl Holcomb; and a special friend, Jason Kormanik.

She is survived by her three children, Michael Upchurch, Verna Donoho and husband, Jim, and Robin Snider and husband, Tim; her sister, Carlene Smith; four grandchildren; Memory and Ty Curry, Justin and McKenzi Snider, Jacob and Nicole Donoho, and Joshua and Ashley Donoho; eleven great-grandchildren, Breanna and husband Malachi Grames, Matthew and wife, Taegen Curry, Sarah Curry, Payton Curry, Emma Snider, Kamdyn Snider, James Snider, Elijah Donoho, Josiah Donoho, Soloman Donoho, and Eleanor Donoho; one great-great-granddaughter, Paisley; and two sisters-in-law, Pat Felton and Louise Fields. She is also survived by special friends, Carla and Joe Kormanik, Amber and Jason Jones, Ben and Brier Kormanik and their families.

Memorials may be made to Emmanuel Baptist Church in Weatherford.

nurch in Weatherford.



Jackie Nutry

Jacquelyn "Jackie" Marie Nutry, 76, of Weatherford, OK, was born on December 18, 1948, in Hackensack, NJ, to Walter John "Jack" and Elsie Charlotte (Scales) Nutry. She passed away on Monday, July 21, 2025, at her home in Weatherford.



Jackie graduated from Paramus High School in 1965, and attended SWOSU, receiving her Bachelors of Education degree and teaching certificate in 1972. Jackie started her teaching career in 1974 at Paramus Country Day School until accepting a position teaching first grade at Canton Public school system in 1980. She retired and spent her retirement years doing what she loved - gardening. While teaching was her passion, she enjoyed arts and crafts, and volunteering her time at The Pioneer Center in Weatherford, OK.

Jackie is survived by her sister, Patricia LoVecchio, and brother John Nutry, both from Weatherford, and three nieces, one nephew, two great-nieces, and several wonderful cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents, Jack and Charlotte and her sister, Charlotte Bekas of Hackensack, NJ.

Frances Reuber

In loving memory of Frances Ruth Reuber, who departed this life on July 15, 2025, at the Weatherford Assisted Living Center in Weatherford, OK. Frances's journey began on a magical Christmas Day in 1949, in the heart



of Clinton, OK, where she was welcomed into the world by August and Edna (Kirschner) Reuber. Her early years were filled with lively pursuits, including her time on the women's basketball team at Cordell High School, where her vibrant spirit shone brightly.

Following her graduation, Frannie, as she was lovingly called by her family, pursued her dreams at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, earning a bachelor's degree in biology. Frances dedicated her life to the medical field, first serving as a laboratory technician at Presbyterian Hospital in Oklahoma City, and later as a Merck Pharmaceutical Representative, where her impact reached far and wide through the communities in Oklahoma and Springfield, Virginia. In her heart, family remained paramount, and she returned home in her father's final days, showcasing the depth of her love and devotion.

A lover of life and dogs, Frannie had a penchant for sweets and a soft spot for her beloved lab, Lady. She embraced the beauty of travel, cherishing her adventures, holding dear the moments from a breathtaking journey to Iceland, where nature's splendor left her in awe. Frances found joy in the simple pleasures—a glass of wine at sunset, with a gentle breeze painting the sky in hues of orange and pink from her balcony. In her final days at Homestead Assisted Living, Frances found herself surrounded by a compassionate team who reflected the warmth and kindness she effortlessly shared with everyone she encountered. Frances will be remembered not only for her accomplishments but also for the love she spread.

Frannie is survived by her brother, Stanley "Stan" Reuber and wife, JoAnn of Yukon, OK; nieces, Marisha and Erin, as well as a host of other nieces, nephews and cousins.

Gayla McHenry

Gayla Mae McHenry was born April 10, 1954, in Carnegie, OK, to J.B. Harris and Bessie Dell (Marshall) Gregg and passed away, Monday, July 21, 2025, at her home in Weatherford.



Gayla was raised and attended school in

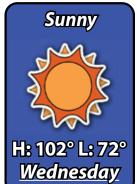
Hydro. She worked at the Mark Restaurant where she made many friends. Gayla also was a cashier at SWOSU for many years.

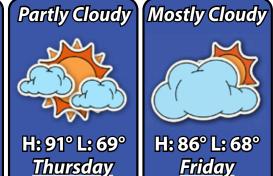
Gayla always had a smile on her face and enjoyed making people happy. She loved spending time with her grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and with family and friends.

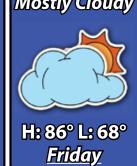
A come and go visitation for Gayla was held on Thursday, July 24, 2025, from 5:00 to 6:00 P.M. in The Chapel of Lockstone Funeral Home in Weatherford.

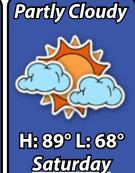
Gayla is survived by one son, Toby McHenry and wife, Shauna; one daughter, Tanja Cole and husband, James; two sisters; two brothers; seven grandchildren; eleven great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents and one brother.

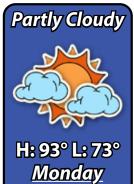


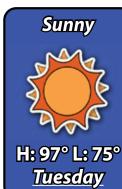














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Clinton's REDS 365 After School & Summer **Program to Return After Brief Funding Hold**



Provided by Austin History Center

Students in the "REDS 365" After School Program on their end-of-year field trip to the Oklahoma Science Museum.

Alexander Shook

Clinton Public Schools have confirmed their

REDS 365 after-school and summer program will be returning for the 2025-26 school year. This announcement was made two weeks after a federal funding delay put the program on hold. Assistant Superintendent Melissa Knabe revealed the district is ready to move forward with offering this vital service to students and families this school year.

"[The program offers] extended learning for our students," explained Knabe. "We have math and reading every day. Then, there are some enrichment activities, usually [either] STEM [related activities], outdoor activities, arts, and programming."

The REDS 365 after-school program will start Monday, August 25 for students in Pre-K through 5th grade. Sign-up forms will go home with students on Monday, August 11 and must be returned by Monday, August 18.

"[The REDS 365 program] provides a safe place for our students to be after school until between 5:30 and 5:45," said Knabe. "Our students get some things that they need, and some things that they enjoy with this program."

More information regarding the program can be found through their Facebook page by visiting www.facebook.com/REDSthreesixtyfive or by scanning the QR Code above.







Our Approachable God



An old country song included the phrase, "I'm so lonesome I could die." One of the terrible results of losing a life-long partner is the awful sense of loneliness. But even in the depths of grief, for the believer, there is the rocksolid belief that God is there and he cares. Healing will come. Life will get better because God has

not abandoned him.

The Psalter says of those who do not seek Him, "in all his thoughts there is no room for God."(Psalm 10:4). Many religions see God as so high and transcendent that he could not care about their pain. To them, God is unapproachable.

I'm so grateful that God so loved us that he chose to dwell among us in the flesh, so that we could know that he understands our pain. The writer of Hebrews comforts us in this way. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb. 4:15,16)

Taking a positive approach, we have a God who understands completely what we are going through because he has been there. He invites us to come, literally delights in our approaching him in our brokenness. It is there that we can find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

The mercy and grace of our Heavenly Father is different from that which we receive from our earthly friends. His mercy is pure and everlasting. Many times our earthly friends, while well-meaning, soon get busy with their own concerns and forget that our grief is still sharp and keen. His grace, the unmerited favor of God, continues the healing process when others forget.

The Apostle Paul follows a similar theme in Eph. 3:12. "In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." Note that it is through faith in Him that we have the freedom to approach with confidence. The unbeliever who has lived his life in reckless abandonment of God, has no such confidence. He has lived his life sowing wild oats and now hopes for a crop failure. His only hope is repentance and submission to the Lordship of Christ.

In both passages of Scripture there is the idea of coming to God with confidence. One translation even says to come with boldness. Later in chapter three of Ephesians, Paul speaks of God as one who is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

What a wonderful promise. What a wonderful God who sees us in all our sin and yet wants to spend time with us, hearing our complaints and cries for mercy. He welcomes us and invites us. To Him be the glory.

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SWOSU Renews Mexican Consulate Partnership



SWOSU and the Consulate of Mexico in Oklahoma City formalized their 2025 IME Becas scholarship partnership with a check presentation during the signing ceremony. Pictured, from left: SWOSU Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Science Dr. Ed Klein; Consul Edurne Pineda; and SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell.

The partnership between SWOSU and the Consulate of Mexico in Oklahoma City is providing \$8,000 in scholarship support for SWOSU students of Mexican origin. The funding comes through the Mexican government's Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) Becas program, with \$4,000 awarded by the Consulate and matched by the SWOSU Foundation.

SWOSU was selected again this year to participate in the IME Becas program, which is designed to help students of Mexican heritage overcome financial barriers to higher education. The scholarship funds benefit current students working toward degrees in a wide range of academic areas. Dr. Veronica Aguiñaga, who authored this year's grant application, serves as the university's scholarship program advisor and helps coordinate student involvement with the program.

The partnership was formally renewed during a signing ceremony on July 16 at the Mexican Consulate in Oklahoma City. SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell and Consul Edurne Pineda signed the Memorandum of Understanding, joined by Dr. Ed Klein, SWOSU Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Science. A check presentation followed the signing, continuing a growing collaboration between the university and the Consulate. This year's IME Becas scholarship recipients are Rosa Maria Alanis, Sergio Gustavo Natera Ramirez, Hidekel Torres Solorio, Liliana Diaz, Aline Jordan Camarena, Alondra Itzel Alvarado, Amy Morales, Ameyali Garcia Solano, and Aquetzalli Yamileth Herrera.

Several students said the scholarship has provided meaningful encouragement and made it easier to stay focused on their academic goals. Herrera, who is pursuing a dual degree, said the funding removes a significant financial burden and allows her to concentrate on both her education and future career. "This scholarship will serve as both financial support and motivation to continue working hard and striving for excellence in school," she said.

Garcia Solano, a student in the university's Doctor of Pharmacy program, said the award acknowledges her efforts and strengthens her sense of purpose. "Personally, receiving this scholarship validates the dedication and effort I've invested in my journey, while also honoring my cultural identity," she said. "It inspires me to give back to my community and serve as a role model for other students from similar backgrounds."

Torres Solorio also emphasized the impact of the scholarship. "It will help me pursue a career that serves my community, especially in areas like technology, education and Spanish interpretation," she said. "It eases the financial stress and helps me stay focused on what I want to achieve."

The IME Becas program continues to be an important source of financial support for SWOSU students and reflects the university's broader efforts to expand access to higher education. Support like this strengthens SWOSU's ability to serve students from all backgrounds and ensure they have the tools to thrive. For more information on SWOSU's academic programs and student resources, visit www.swosu.edu.

WEATHERFORD / ROUTE 66 - The Oklahoma Route 66 Association has announced a series of events to commemorate the highway's centennial next year. The association says the first event of the year will be the Route 66 Big Band Hangar Dance on April 25, 2026, at the Stafford Air & Space Museum in Weatherford.

CLINTON / OPEN HOUSE - The countdown is on for back to school. Clinton Public Schools has planned a district open house and "Meet the Teachers" night on August 1 from 5pm - 7pm. Students at Nance, Southwest, and Washington Elementary can meet teachers, drop off supplies, and explore classrooms. Middle school students along with high school sophomores, juniors and seniors can pick up schedules, meet teachers, and get a sneak peek at classroom locations. High school freshmen will meet in the Tornado Dome at 5:00 for freshman orientation, pick up schedules and take a tour of the high school. The first day of classes for Clinton Public Schools is August 5th.

CLINTON / HOSPITAL ROOF REPAIRS Despite having to seek bids for roof repair work on the Clinton Regional Hospital building, Mayor David Berrong stated these repairs should not interfere with the ongoing closure on the sale of the hospital for the first week of August.

SWOSU / ROTARY - SWOSU aerospace and defense programs were major topics during the Weatherford Rotary Club's most recent meeting. "We are working on becoming an innovation cell for the National Guard. We [will] serve as a problem-solving source for the National Guard," explained Chad Kinder, VP for Strategic Partnerships and Director of Graduate Programs. "If they have some sort of technological issue that they want help with, they'll be able to contact us and say, "Hey, think about this and help us come up with solutions." Oklahoma General Colby Wyatt visited SWOSU approximately two months ago to set this development into motion. Kinder says some of those programs include chemistry & physics, engineering technology, applied engineering management, and computer science.

PINNELL/AEROSPACE – In a recent interview with Wright Media, Oklahoma's Lieutenant Governor Matt Pinnell outlined the success of Oklahoma's aerospace industry. "Aerospace is...a \$44 billion [industry] in our state today, [with] well over 220,000 jobs for our kids and grandkids," Pinnell outlined. "We have announced a couple of new aerospace businesses, [including] Dawn Aerospace that's going to be operating out at Burns Flat." Pinnell added that nearly every month or so, there's news of another aerospace company either looking to Oklahoma or choosing to set up operation here. He also commented that Oklahoma's oil and gas industry could use support from the aerospace industry.



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Happy Birthday Wishes! July 30 - Tommy Holt, Ruth Mejia, Don Mullennix, Chester Walker; July 31 - Carol Sue Almon, Billy Gentry, Robbie Gilbert, Jerry Hardin, Loyd Lasley, Russell Lee, Sherri Martin, Kassidi Rice, Rosa Sinclair, Eric Stoney, Ray Sutton, Daniel Tallbear, Barbie Trebay, Bryce Waldrop; Aug. 1 - Todd Brunner, Jennifer DeGarmo, Ally Dobbs, McKenna Gentry, Joey Lacy, Beranna Leon, Jamie Moody, Larry Joe Scott, Christian Sharp, Randy Sloan; Aug. 2 - Dena Bass, Cashlyn Hamons, Chance Hanson, Lana Kible, Winona Madison, Bobby Ringler, Darrell Stehr; Aug. 3 - Judy Armstrong, Sammy Dudgeon, Mercedes Estes, Nicole Horn, Lorrie Howry, Koby King, Allen Lackey, David Lasley, Debrah Musick, Doris Payne, Deirik Riley; August 4 - Dustin Devine, Shanda O'Neile, Kim Renison, Jacoby Smith; August 5 - Jim Butcher, Adam Cowan, Lauren Klein, Elizabeth Kliewer, Troy Moorhead, Austin Morrison, Shane Renna, Nicolette Strauch, Kody Marie Thompson, Ginger Sue Thompson, Jesse Wise

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2014 Ford Focus - \$6,500. 580-

4-Michelin used passenger tires - 20 inch. 580-393-1444.

2003 Trailblazer - Good shape. \$3,000, 580-886-2980.

2009 Mercury Grand Marquis LS - \$3,750 OBO. 580-330-3489.

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580-772-3223.

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condition. 580-613-0108. 23 Dinner Plates - 75 cents each.

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580-613-0108.

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97" Projection Television -

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Furniture! 7-Piece Tiger Oak Dinette Pioneer hutch buffet table and 4 chairs. Devilled glass and mirrors fruit motif. \$2,000. Call 580-772-4297.

Microfiber Love Seat - Brown, comes with console and drink holder. 580-330-0225.

Baby Walker - Bounces, comes with mobile and music. \$35. 580-613-0108.

3 Handheld Vacuums - \$30 each. 580-613-0108. Widescreen TV - 93" CRT. Mitsubishi. \$499. 580-772-7997.

Curio Cabinet, Bottom Storage - \$50. Please call 580-774-4000.

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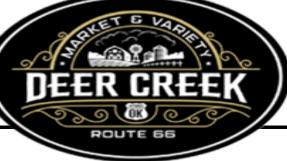
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An Update on Clinton's Glancy Motor Hotel Sign Restoration Project



Mike Smith Plans are currently in the works to do something

special with the neon sign from the historic Glancy Motor Hotel. The historic Glancy Sign is currently being refurbished in Oklahoma City.

"Our local Route 66 Committee in Clinton, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Historical Society, plan to take the Glancy on in the beginning of it, maybe by itself singularly at Neon Park there by the museum," explained Clinton Mayor David Berrong.

As for the hotel itself, a groundbreaking ceremony is being planned for the new Oklahoma Highway Patrol (OHP) headquarters next month in Clinton The new headquarters will be located at the former Glancy Motor Hotel site.

"It's going to be a great landmark in Clinton," explained Berrong. "As we understand, they're on a 300-day schedule, start to finish, and we should have a great new law enforcement center right there on Route 66."



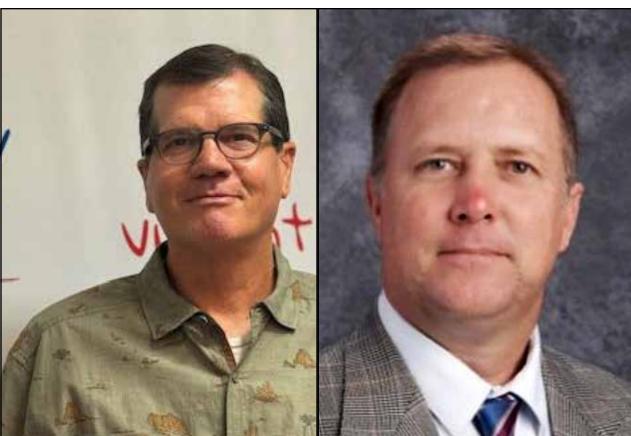


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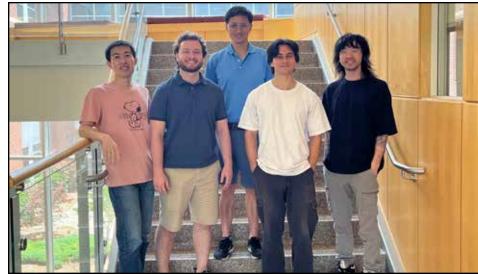


Oklahoma History: A New Medical Frontier in the Making at OU



Provided by the University of Oklahoma (OU)

Dr. Rakhi Rajan (right) examines structural CRISPR data with a graduate student in her University of Oklahoma laboratory.



Provided by the University of Oklahoma (OU)

Yihan Shao (back row), an Associate Professor of Chemistry with OU, alongside his gene editing and bioimaging research team.

Chase Wright
Staff Writer
Rajan and her students are pushing the boundaries of a technology that has already revolutionized biology. Just over a decade since CRISPR emerged as a genome-editing tool, scientists in Oklahoma are ensuring the state plays a pivotal role in writing the next chapter of this global scientific story.

CRISPR – short for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats – was first developed as a gene-editing method in 2012, adapted from a peculiar antiviral trick used by bacteria. Pioneering scientists Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier realized this could be turned into an editable tool for any DNA sequence, unleashing a revolution in genetics. When they published their landmark findings, Doudna recalls feeling "like firing the starting gun at a race". Indeed, that race was on – laboratories worldwide rapidly adopted CRISPR to modify genes in cells, animals, and plants with unprecedented ease.

In 2020, Doudna and Charpentier received the Nobel Prize for their CRISPR breakthrough, underscoring how transformative the technology had become. In the years since, CRISPR-based science has advanced at breakneck speed. Researchers have invented refined versions of the molecular "scissors" – like base editors that can change a single DNA letter without cutting the double helix – to address limitations and expand the technique's capabilities. What began as a clever bacterial immunity mechanism is now a cornerstone of biological research across the globe.

Importantly, CRISPR has begun moving from lab bench to bedside. A host of experimental therapies using CRISPR are in clinical trials, tackling conditions ranging from rare genetic disorders such as beta thalassemia and inherited blindness to more common diseases like sickle cell anemia. Doctors are even testing CRISPRengineered treatments for certain cancers, HIV, and other infections. This new therapeutic frontier brings hope of curing diseases once deemed incurable, but it also sharpens the focus on a critical challenge: precision. For gene editing to safely fulfill its medical promise, scientists must ensure the molecular scissors cut only the intended target gene – nothing more, nothing less. Preventing dangerous off-target edits has become a global quest, and it's here that Oklahoma's researchers have stepped to the forefront.

A Pioneer in Norman

In Norman, Oklahoma, Dr. Rakhi Rajan has emerged as a leading figure in the effort to enhance CRISPR's precision. An associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry at the University of Oklahoma (OU), Rajan heads a lab devoted to unravelling how CRISPR proteins find and cut their DNA targets. Her group's primary focus is understanding the intimate protein—DNA—RNA interactions that drive CRISPR, with the ultimate aim of engineering more reliable guide RNAs and Cas proteins for gene editing.

In an article in 2024 by Media Specialist Josh DeLozier, Dr. Rajan explained, "CRISPR-Cas is important because it has been approved for gene therapy in a few select diseases. To make a system that can treat many diseases, we need to fully understand how these guide RNAs work and ensure that the DNA is cut at exactly the spot we need it to be cut."

Her words cut to the heart of the issue: while CRISPR can be extraordinarily powerful, its selectivity is not 100%. The tool uses a short RNA molecule – the guide RNA (gRNA) – to lead the Cas enzyme to a matching DNA sequence.

In theory, a perfect match triggers a precise cut. In practice, CRISPR sometimes latches onto DNA that is a close (but not perfect) match, potentially slicing an unintended gene. Such off-target edits could have serious consequences if CRISPR is used in patients. Her lab's mission is to prevent these mistakes by boosting the fidelity of the CRISPR system.

One clue to solving this lies in that tiny structural element Rajan's team has been examining: the bridge helix. This slender helical segment connects two major lobes of Cas9 and related Cas enzymes, effectively acting as a communication link within the protein. "We're focusing on one small region of the Cas protein called a bridge helix," Rajan notes, describing a feature found not only in Cas9 - "the star player of gene editing" - but also in other Cas proteins used in disease diagnostics for cancer and COVID-19. If the bridge helix is the hinge that helps Cas enzymes swing into action, understanding its mechanics could be key to controlling the enzyme's accuracy. "If we can learn how this one helix communicates with different parts of the protein, then we can apply it to other proteins as well," Rajan says, hinting that insights from Cas9 might translate into improved function across the whole CRISPR toolkit.

Backed by a recent \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation, Rajan's team is engineering subtle tweaks to the bridge helix and observing how these changes affect the Cas enzyme's behavior. If successful, future researchers and clinicians could utilize CRISPR proteins "without the fear of harming living beings".

Rajan's lab is training the next generation of geneediting scientists right here in Oklahoma. She mentors a growing team – in a field moving as fast as CRISPR, these young scientists are gaining invaluable experience at the cutting edge. They are also helping put Oklahoma on the map for advanced gene-editing research.

Team Science

One hallmark of Oklahoma's approach to CRISPR research is collaboration across disciplines. At OU, Dr. Rajan's biochemical expertise is complemented by colleagues like Dr. Yihan Shao, a computational chemist working to enhance CRISPR through the power of algorithms. Shao, an associate professor of chemistry, recently secured a prestigious NIH Maximizing Investigators' Research Award. He has teamed up with Rajan to attack the same off-target problem from a theoretical angle.

"For gene editing to work properly, CRISPR-Cas technologies need to cut the DNA that exactly matches the guide RNA," Dr. Shao explains, "[but] the selectivity of this process is not 100%, which means that it will cut some non-matching DNA." Small mismatches between the guide and an off-target gene can sometimes go unnoticed by the Cas enzyme - a scenario Shao and Rajan want to prevent. To improve CRISPR's selectivity, Shao is using machine learning and quantum chemistry models to simulate the cutting mechanism in atomic detail. This kind of synergy between experimental structural biology and computational modeling is a powerful engine for innovation. The collaboration even extends to the medical campus: Dr. Lacey McNally, a researcher in the OU College of Medicine, partners with Shao to apply similar modeling techniques to improve imaging probes for cancer. It's an interdisciplinary environment in which ideas flow freely. And the message from these teams is clear: Oklahoma is intent on solving the CRISPR puzzle from all angles, ensuring that when gene editing hits mainstream medicine, it will be as precise and effective as humanly possible.

Oklahoma's contributions to CRISPR research extend beyond the University of Oklahoma. In Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (OMRF) has become another pillar of gene-editing innovation, complementing OU's work with a focus on disease genetics. At OMRF, Dr. Gaurav Varshney, leads a team that uses CRISPR in a rather unconventional lab organism: the humble zebrafish. These tiny, translucent fish – just the size of a paperclip – share an astonishing 80% of their genes with humans for genes known to be associated with disease. By editing genes in zebrafish, Varshney's lab can observe how each gene influences development and health, thereby shedding light on conditions from hearing loss to neurological disorders in people.

The work done at OMRF has been significant and the international Zebrafish Disease Models Society honored Dr. Varshney with its Junior Faculty Award for Excellence, praising his work as "outstanding". It was a proud moment that highlighted Oklahoma's ability to contribute fundamental knowledge to the global genetics community. The OMRF team's expertise isn't just in applying CRISPR, but also in improving the tools themselves. In fact, an early career scientist in Varshney's lab, Dr. Wei Qin, recently engineered an enhanced version of a CRISPR adenine base editor – a molecular machine that can swap out DNA bases (A to G) without cutting the DNA strand. This advance, published in Nature Communications, allows for high-efficiency "search-and-replace" edits in the zebrafish genome. It's precisely the kind of technical leap that will benefit labs worldwide.

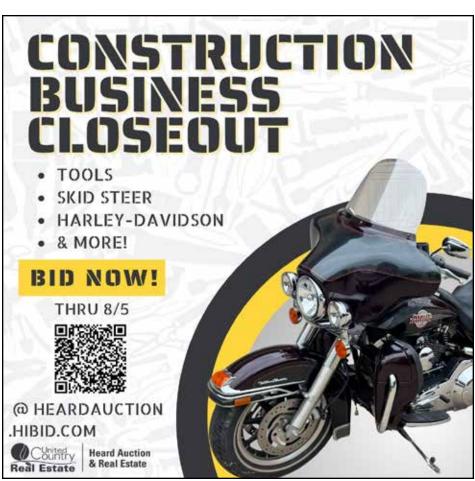
Oklahoma's CRISPR community is still expanding. Both OU and OMRF have built an ecosystem that attracts talent. The state's scientists are also engaging in national collaborations — Rajan's NSF-funded project includes a partnership with Dr. Jin Liu at the University of North Texas Health Science Center, while OMRF's researchers frequently collaborate with colleagues at NIH and elsewhere. Such partnerships ensure that Oklahoma remains plugged into the broader network of CRISPR innovation.

The Future

To summarize, what might surprise outsiders is now clear to anyone following the field: Oklahoma has quietly become a hub for CRISPR research. From Norman to Oklahoma City, laboratories are not only using this Nobel-winning technology but improving it – whether by tweaking protein helices for better accuracy, building computational models to predict enzyme behavior, or inventing faster ways to find disease genes. The contributions of Oklahoma institutions stand alongside those of more traditional biotech centers, positioning the state as an emerging leader in this scientific frontier. These gene editing therapies are already showing promise – for example, a CRISPR-based treatment has effectively cured patients with sickle cell disease in clinical trials, and others are in development for conditions like muscular dystrophy and certain forms of blindness. In the coming years, we could see CRISPR therapies for common illnesses such as heart disease or diabetes, where multiple genes play a role, or even for viral diseases like HIV.

That's why Oklahoma's work to enhance CRISPR's precision is so vital for the future of therapies. The teams are building the safety features for tomorrow's genetic cures.





Presented by: HELIES Bulldogs Earn 2025 AVCA Team Academic Award & Honor Roll Status



Jon Chidester

team has earned the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA)

The SWOSU volleyball Team Academic Award for the second consecutive year, recently announced by the AVCA.

In addition to the team academic award, the

Bulldogs also secured a spot on the AVCA Team Academic Honor Roll, ranking them among the top 20% of NCAA Division II teams in terms of GPA.

The AVCA Team Academic Award recognizes collegiate and high school volleyball teams that maintain a year-long grade-point average of 3.30 or higher on a 4.0 scale. The SWOSU Volleyball team exceeded this standard with a 3.81 team GPA for the 2024-25 academic year, surpassing their 3.64 GPA from the previous year.

"Earning both the team academic award and a spot on the honor roll list for a second consecutive year speaks volumes about this group's commitment to excellence both on the court and in the classroom," said head volleyball coach Josh Collins.

The association's mission is to advance the sport of volleyball with AVCA coaches at the epicenter of leadership, advocacy, and professional development. The membership includes more than 9,500 collegiate, professional, high school, club, and youth volleyball coaches—primarily in the United States. The AVCA represents women's volleyball, men's volleyball, and beach volleyball coaches, and works to increase exposure and recognition for the sport of volleyball.

SWOSU Volleyball Earns Fifth Straight GAC Sportsmanship Award

Jon Chidester

SWOSU Volleyball has been awarded the Great

American Conference Sportsmanship Award for a fifth consecutive season, announced this week by the league office. It's the program's sixth sportsmanship award since competing in the GAC. Winners for each sport are determined based on a points system following a vote from league head coaches.

"These awards emphasize the NCAA Division II focus on sportsmanship and game environment," GAC Commissioner Will Prewitt said. "We could not be prouder of what these programs have put forth on the field and in ways that aren't necessarily reflected in the outcome."

In 2012, The GAC's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee initiated a sportsmanship award to be presented for all team sports. The winning school will receive a banner similar to the one presented to GAC tournament championship winners. The goal of the program is for member institutions to promote good sportsmanship among its teams, fans, and all involved with the events.







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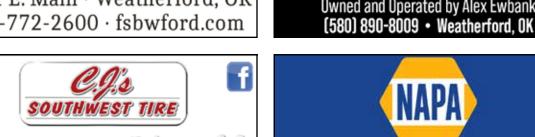
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