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Third Annual Tamale Taste Off Poised to Take Over Eakly on May 2nd



So, Veronica and her husband Clint, who also happens to be the Mayor of Eakly, decided to tackle the issue head on. They attended mayoral events with other mayors from small communities around they state and they began asking questions about how they could secure grants to invest in their community.

“The first question that anyone that's willing to invest in a grant or in helping towns is what have you done for your town?” said Veronica, “and at that point, Clint and I started talking: What do we do? How do we prove we're trying to do something for our town?”

Veronica and Clint saw inspiration in the chili cook-offs and the burger burns other small communities were hosting and they wanted to recreate something like that, but specific to Eakly. “Eakly is a highly Hispanic community,” said Veronica, “so it only made sense to embrace the culture that we live in and something that means something to our community...we weren't doing a chili cook-off. Let's do a Tamale Taste Off.” And so, Eakly's Tamale Taste Off was born.

And while there were initially plans to eventually build a community center to host the event, members from the community have asked for the event to stay on Main Street indefinitely.

“We have about 350 Eakly residents, and when you walk down Main Street, and there's more people on Main Street for the tamale festival than what actually live here. It makes your heart so happy to see...It's not just bringing a festival and spend your money kind of thing. It's truly asking the people that are here to do something that they put their heart into,” said Veronica.

If you're interested in competing in the Tamale Taste Off, entrants will be accepted until the day of the event.

The Taste Off will be judged by four unbiased judges who don't reside within Eakly. Cash prizes, as well as plaques, will be awarded to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place tamales.

For more information about the Tamale Taste Off you can visit their facebook page by searching Eakly Tamale Taste Off.

The 3rd Annual Tamale Taste Off is taking over downtown Eakly this upcoming Saturday, May 2nd. From 12pm to 6pm, Main Street in Eakly will be completely shut down to host vendors, food trucks, bounce houses, live music and, of course, the best tamales in Western Oklahoma.

The Tamale Taste Off began as a way to address an issue many small towns across the country face when their school is consolidated: “when you lose your school, you start seeing towns kind of, fade,” said Veronica Rhodes, chairperson of the Tamale Taste Off.



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Margie Spear-Smith

Margie Mae Haas Spear Smith, 102, of Hinton, Oklahoma, was born March 21, 1924, in Sickles, Oklahoma, to Albert Haas and Icy Cox. Margie peacefully entered her eternal home in heaven on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at her residence in Hinton, with loving family members by her side.



Margie grew up in Sickles and attended Sickles High School. On August 20, 1942, she married Kenneth Owen Spear, also of Sickles, in Lookeba, Oklahoma. Together, they farmed for several years before moving to the Altus area, where Kenneth served in law enforcement as Jackson County Sheriff and later with the Altus Police Department, retiring in 1987.

Margie worked as an engineer at Kellwood Manufacturing until her retirement in 1984. She was well known for her baking abilities, especially her cherry pies, and she was an avid reader with a deep love for the Bible.

Margie and Kenneth enjoyed many happy years at their lake cabin at Quartz Mountain State Park, where they spent time boating, skiing, and making cherished memories with family and friends.

Some of the family's most treasured memories were made at Red Rock Canyon in Hinton, where Margie and Kenneth hosted camping trips and Spear family reunions. Grandchildren climbed the rocks and explored the trails, and evenings were filled with campfires, games, and shared stories.

Following Kenneth's retirement, he and Margie enjoyed a brief but cherished time traveling with his brother Bob and his wife, Imogene, before Kenneth's passing in 1988.

On February 14, 1998, Margie married Wayne Smith of Hinton in a small ceremony in Altus, and the two made their home in Hinton. They shared 19 wonderful, love-filled years together, attending military reunions, taking family vacations, and faithfully worshipping together at First United Methodist Church. Margie taught Sunday school for many years. Wayne passed away on April 17, 2017, in Oklahoma City at the age of 95. In her final years, Margie found her church home at Faith Church in Hinton, Oklahoma.

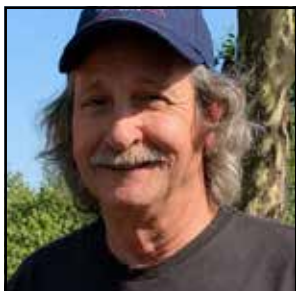
Margie was preceded in death by her husbands, Kenneth Spear and Wayne Smith; her sons, Tommy Spear and infant Michael Spear; and very recently, her beloved daughter-in-law, Sylvia Spear.

Margie is survived by her sons: Andy Spear of Altus; and Nicky Spear and his wife, Sherry, of Norman; her daughter-in-law, Janie Spear, of Sedona, Arizona; her stepsons, Dale Smith and his wife, Colleen, of Oklahoma City, and Dean Smith and his wife, Shelly, of Hinton; and her grandchildren: Vanessa and her husband, Clay Bryant; Todd Newton and his wife, Marlee Newton; Rachel Kruse; Holly Millar and her husband, John; Andrew Spear and his wife, Amy; Wade Spear and his wife, Amy; Michael Spear; and Tommy Shawn Spear.

She is also survived by her step-grandchildren: Laura Rose and her husband, Jordan; Lynnae Dougherty and her husband, Peter; Paul Smith and his wife, Laura; and Michael Smith, along with nine great-grandchildren and eleven step-great-grandchildren.

Philip Payne

Philip Ray Payne, 69 of Burns Flat, Oklahoma was born on December 17, 1956, in Gainesville, Texas to Gilbert Lee and Patsy Ruth (Standridge) Payne. Philip looked upon the face of his Lord and Savior on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at Great Plains Regional Medical Center, Elk City, Oklahoma, surrounded by his loving family.



Philip found great joy in restoring anything with a motor like old cars, model airplanes, go karts and boats, making them useable once again. He enjoyed watching Fox News and loved politics. Philip treasured spending time with his family and friends, and being involved in their lives.

His love for life and the people in it will be deeply missed, but the memories he created will continue to provide comfort and joy to those he leaves behind. Philip's legacy is one of love and friendship, and he will live on in the hearts of everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

Cherishing Philip's memory is his three brothers, Joe Payne; Robert Payne and his wife, Sandra of Minneapolis, Minnesota, Raymond Payne and his wife, Donna of Ardmore, Oklahoma; four nieces, Jennifer Martin, Kristin Martin, Ashley Flitter, Elizabeth Robertson; five nephews, Richie Payne, Jason Payne, Mark Payne, Michael Payne, and Zachary Payne; and many other relatives and friends.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Gilbert Lee and Patsy Ruth Payne; two brothers, Gilbert Payne and Steven Payne; and one sister-in-law, Tammy Payne.

Leona Bohanon

Leona Bohanon, 83 of Elk City, Oklahoma, was born on August 25, 1942, in Booneville, Arkansas to Roy Lee and Ruby Pairthina (Dees) Cloud. Leona looked upon the face of her Lord and Savior on Monday, April 20, 2026, at Mercy Hospital, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, surrounded by her loving family.



Leona married Johnnie Ralph Sottile on July 7, 1976 at Clark County, Nevada. He preceded her in death on September 25, 1985. Later she married, James Clayburn Bohanon, Jr. on September 23, 1999 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Their marriage was a true partnership filled with love and devotion. Together, they blended their family, building a life rich with memories, laughter, and love. James preceded her in death on June 29, 2020.

Leona was a graduate of Elk City High School, Elk City, Oklahoma.

Leona was a loving daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and friend. She was very talented and enjoyed sewing, painting, and watching British TV. Leona found great joy in traveling, going on trips embracing each new place and the adventures it brought. She treasured spending time with her family and grandchildren and was a true friend. Leona's memory lives on in the hearts of those who knew and loved her.

Leona attended Eastside Baptist Church, Elk City, Oklahoma, where she enjoyed the fellowship of her church family.

Leona is survived by one son, Dillon Sottile and wife, Cassy of Elk City, Oklahoma; two daughters, Denetha Haas of Elk City, Oklahoma, Season Mayfield and husband Bobby of Elk City, Oklahoma; one daughter-in-law, Rebecca Campbell of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; six grandchildren, Danni Sottile of Elk City, Oklahoma, Ella Sottile of Elk City, Oklahoma, Justin Campbell and wife, Michelle of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Shi'Linn Truman and husband, Mike of Arkansas City, Kansas, Preston Campbell and wife Maddie of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Ashley Haas of Elk City, Oklahoma; ten great grandchildren; two brothers, Jimmy Cloud of Elk City, Oklahoma, Robert Cloud and wife, Karen of Elk City, Oklahoma; two sisters, Lucille Clark and husband, Kenneth of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Diana Langley and husband, Ronnie of Elk City, Oklahoma; one sister-in-law, Pauletta Cloud of Elk City, Oklahoma; one brother-in-law, Billy Book of Seminole, Oklahoma; and numerous nieces and nephews; and many other relatives and friends.

Leona was preceded in death by both her husbands, Johnnie Ralph Sottile, and James Clayburn Bohanon, Jr.; her parents, Roy Lee and Ruby Pairthina Cloud; one son, Randy Campbell; one daughter, Dana Day; four brothers, Willard Smith, Johnny Cloud, Larry Cloud and Jerry Cloud; six sisters, Joy Carter, Nadine Moore, Meddie Jose, Mary Ellen Cloud, Sharon Book and Tammy Cloud.

Memorials can be made to the Meals On Wheels or Elk City Education Foundation, Elk City, Oklahoma in care of Martin-Dugger Funeral Home and Cremation Services, P.O. Box 707, Elk City, Oklahoma 73648.

Roberta Browning

Roberta L. Browning, age 78, of Clinton, OK, passed away April 15, 2026, in OKC. She was born June 14, 1947, in Clinton, to Robert and Bessie (Morgan) Raimer.



Roberta had a gift for creating beauty wherever she went. She tended her flower garden with care, finding joy in every bloom. Inside her home, she was an immaculate decorator, especially at Christmastime, when she transformed each room into something magical.

She was an exceptional cook, known best for her beloved banana split cake—a family favorite that will be remembered and missed. Above all, Roberta cherished her family. They were the center of her world, and she poured her heart into every moment spent with them.

Roberta enjoyed art and especially loved drawing. She also had a deep affection for animals. Her dog, Rex, held a special place in her heart; he was her "big baby," and she adored him. Roberta's warmth, creativity, and devotion to those she loved leaves a lasting legacy. She will be deeply missed and forever remembered.

She is survived by her son, Jimmy Dolphis Browning II and Heather Rowe, of Colorado Springs, CO; daughters, Elizabeth Stephenson and husband Scott, of Cordell, OK and Amanda Ann Browning of Cordell, OK; sister, Joyce McReynolds of Oklahoma City, OK; grandchildren, Jeremiah, Ethan, Josh, Jacob, Zoe, Levi, Marc, Trevin; great grandson, Grayson.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Robert and Bessie Raimer; husband, Jim D Browning; son, Marc Ellis Browning; sisters, Wanda Travis and Martha Jean Raimer.

Sylvia Esjornson

Sylvia Martha Veronica Esjornson was born on October 30, 1958, in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, to John and JoAnne (Iwanowski) Rygiel and entered her heavenly home on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, in Weatherford, Oklahoma.



Sylvia was born and raised in Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania, graduating from Wyoming High School with the class of 1976, where she was voted the "Most Individual" in the yearbook.

She pursued her passion for learning, earning an Associate Degree in Photography from the Rochester Institute of Technology. She continued her education at the University of Scranton, where she earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in 1982. Her academic journey would lead her to Purdue University, where she would earn her Ph.D. in Chemistry in 1989. It is also where she would meet the love of her life, David Esjornson. The two were married on May 19, 1984. Together, David and Sylvia would raise 3 children—Walter, Lou, and Elaine.

In 1995, Sylvia continued her teaching career at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, where she dedicated herself to educating and mentoring students until her retirement in 2024. Sylvia was a known researcher. She contributed to international chemical education initiatives and presented her work at meetings. She was an author for lecture presentations and Dynamic Study Modules for Introductory and General Chemistry textbooks. She was also a director of the Summer Science Academy for Future Math and Science Teachers, and an instructor for math science partnerships Grass Roots Science and Prairie and Ponds.

Sylvia was involved in many activities around the community, including SWOSU Community Band and Community Chorus, coach, referee, and officer of the Weatherford Soccer Club and Great Plains Soccer District. She was a past choir director at the Federated Church, and a cantor at St. Eugene Catholic Church. She was a prolific reader and hobby geologist.

Sylvia will be remembered for her beautiful singing voice that brought joy and much comfort to those around her.

She is preceded in death by her father, her husband, and one sister, Rosanne.

Sylvia is survived by her three children, Walter Esjornson, Lou Esjornson, and Elaine Fangman and her wife, Cara; her mother, JoAnne Rygiel; one brother, John Rygiel II and his wife, Lisa; one sister, Patricia Rygiel Bartlett and her husband Dave, and one grandchild, Floyd Roger Fangman.

Randy Blood

Randy Allen Blood was born December 3, 1970, in Weatherford, OK, to Carroll Edward Blood and Beverly Jean (Elliott) Blood. He passed away Friday, April 17, 2026, at Integris Southwest Medical Center in Oklahoma City, OK, at the age of 55.



Randy was raised in the Sickles area and attended Lookeba-Sickles Public Schools, where he graduated. He continued his education at Redlands Community College in El Reno before earning a degree in General Agriculture from Oklahoma State University in December of 1995.

On June 21, 1997, Randy married Martina Miner, and to this union two daughters were born, Cassidy and Taylor, whom he loved dearly. Randy spent his life working in agriculture. He worked for the Eakly Co-op, Agri-Plus, then later worked as a crop consultant for Helena Chemical Company, where he was currently employed.

He was dedicated to his work and well-respected by those he served. Randy also served his community as a member of the Lookeba-Sickles School Board for several years. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, golfing, singing karaoke, and was an avid fan of college football, especially Oklahoma State University athletics, as well as the Oklahoma City Thunder. Randy was known as a friend to all and will be remembered as a loving father, son, brother, and companion. Randy loved the Lord and was saved and baptized as a child at the Sickles Community Church in Sickles, Oklahoma.

He is survived by his two daughters, Cassidy Blood and Taylor Blood, both of Oklahoma City; his mother, Beverly Jackson of Lookeba; two brothers, Todd Blood of Hinton and Jason Robinett of Broken Arrow; his fiancée, Brenda Ryzner of Yukon; stepbrothers and stepsisters, Tina Cornell, Holly Hopkins, Paige Wrede-Nelson, Chad Jackson, and Bill Robinett; and his faithful companion, Tucker.

He was preceded in death by his father, Carroll Blood; his grandparents, Hugh and Bertha Elliott and Walter and Hazel Blood; and his stepfathers, Larry Robinett and Bob Jackson.

The family would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Integris Southwest Medical Center for the care and compassion shown to Randy.

History Special: Project Mercury, the First U.S. Spaceflight Program



Chase Wright
Staff Writer

With Artemis II's successful launch of the first crewed flight of the Artemis campaign on April 1st, it seems only fitting to go back to where it all started, Project Mercury. The program was the first human spaceflight program for the United States, and it was run by a new and little known civilian space agency created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA. The agency was created after the successful Soviet launch of their satellite Sputnik 1, putting the United States far behind in the Space Race in 1957. Taking over from the US Air Force, NASA was focused on one thing, to put a man into Earth orbit before the Soviet Union.

For the next two years, NASA pushed themselves and the boundaries of the atmosphere as teams of companies, contractors, and scientists came together to test heatshields, design a crew compartment, fit a retro-pack with posigrade rockets, and other necessities like the landing skirt and pressure suits. Before its first test flight, the Mercury spacecraft was adjusted three times and ultimately modified a final time with configuration "D" due to another failure on its first test launch.

While production and designs were underway at Mercury headquarters, a mass search was taking place for the right people who would fly into space. The selection criteria began on December 1st, 1958 along with coming up with a name for the new position. They first called the job "aeronaut" but quickly changed to "astronaut" (star traveler) after its use in earlier science fiction stories.

They narrowed down the search to very specific military service members and still ended up with 508 total candidates. Those were narrowed down to 110 pilots, then split into three groups, where they were then brought to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. They underwent a grueling series of briefings, testings, and several candidates withdrew their names at various points in the process. Eventually, the final team was selected and the United States had their first Astronauts, narrowing it down to just seven.

On April 9, 1959, NASA introduced the Mercury Seven in Washington; they were Navy Lieutenant Scott Carpenter, Marine Lieutenant Colonel John Glenn, Air Force Captain Gus Grissom, Navy Lieutenant Commander Wally Schirra, Navy Lieutenant Commander Alan Shepard, Air Force

Captain Deke Slayton, and, the youngest selected member, Air Force Captain Gordon Cooper, an Oklahoma native from Shawnee.

Long before the Mercury team found him, Gordon Cooper was already a phenomenon in Oklahoma. His love of flying began when his father took him up in a monoplane near Shawnee when he was five, and he recounted that he was flying the family plane by age eight, and full solo flying by age twelve. He worked around the airport to earn flying time, grew up around visiting aviation names such as Amelia Earhart and Wiley Post, served during World War II, transferred to the Air Force, earned an engineering degree, and became a test pilot at Edwards.

That background carried him into one of the most famous press events of the twentieth century. NASA brought its first astronaut class before 200 reporters, in the ballroom of the Dolley Madison House, then the headquarters of the young space agency. The men answered questions, posed for photographs, and, in one famous moment, raised their hands when asked whether they felt confident they would return from space. John Glenn raised both.

See HISTORY, Page 7

"Mission: Junior Astronauts" Happening at the Stafford Museum for National Space Day

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Lauren Faurie
SASM Marketing Manager

The Stafford Air & Space Museum is excited to announce a special week-long event, Mission: Junior Astronauts, in celebration of National Space Day. Taking place April 26th through May 2nd, 2026, this engaging program invites young explorers to step into the role of an astronaut through a fun, interactive museum experience.

Throughout the week, children visiting the museum will have the opportunity to complete the Junior Astronaut Challenge Checklist, a hands-on alternative to the museum's traditional scavenger hunt. As they journey through exhibits, participants will complete challenges designed to spark curiosity about space exploration, science, and aviation.

Once their checklist is complete, participants can return it to the front desk to receive an official Junior Astronaut certificate along with a small prize—celebrating their achievement and encouraging a love of discovery.

Mission: Junior Astronauts offers a fun and educational way for kids to engage with space history and STEM concepts, while inspiring the next generation of explorers through interactive learning and discovery.

The program is included with regular museum admission and is open to children of all ages. Families are encouraged to visit anytime during the week to take part in the experience. For more information, visit StaffordMuseum.org

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LOCAL AND AREA NEWS

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Mike Smith
News Director

Route 66 Native Plant & Pollinator Festival Brings Experts to Elk City



Participants engaging with vendors at an "Okies for Monarchs" regional event in Woodward. *Provided*

Stefanie Leland
OK Monarch Society

An infusion of native wildflower and milkweed know-how is headed to western Oklahoma in May. Oklahoma Monarch Society and Keep Oklahoma Beautiful are teaming up to host the Route 66 Native Plant & Pollinator Festival, 12 p.m. - 4 p.m., May 2 at Arrowhead Community Center, 600 Western Dr., in Elk City. Native plant vendors and experts are heading west to share advice on backyard and out-on-the-ranch habitats and native plantings.

"Over time, we've mapped areas of Oklahoma that lack pollinator habitat and access to native plant vendors,"

said Oklahoma Monarch Society Executive Director Katie Hawk. "Through these regional events, we partner with growers to bring wildflowers and milkweed to underserved communities while increasing awareness about monarchs and other native pollinators."

Hawk said western Oklahoma plays a critical role in the monarch butterfly migration, providing essential habitat for both spring and fall travelers. She added the festival gives residents a rare chance to purchase native plants locally and learn how to create habitat that supports declining pollinator populations.

"Attendees will have the opportunity to learn from experts why creating habitat for monarchs is important and how their actions can help," she said. "We hope these events inspire people across Oklahoma to create pollinator habitats and reduce harm from pesticides and herbicides."

Hawk also emphasized the importance of collaboration: "Keep Oklahoma Beautiful has been a tremendous partner in helping us reach local communities," she said. "Together, we're working to plant a path for pollinators across our state."

Megan Malone, program manager for Keep Oklahoma Beautiful, said the partnership grew from a shared mission. "Our Keep Route 66 Beautiful program brought us together, but what really sealed it was a shared belief that Oklahomans want to care for the place they call home," she said.

"Native plants are low-maintenance, use less water, and create better habitat for birds, butterflies, and bees — a win for both residents and the environment."

The event will include activities, installation of a pollinator habitat demonstration garden and booths from organizations such as the Oklahoma Biological Survey and the North Fork of Red River Conservation District. Attendees can receive expert advice and purchase hard-to-find plants, while the first 100 visitors at the Okies for Monarchs booth will receive a free milkweed plant and wildflower seed packet.

Short educational sessions throughout the afternoon will cover monarch migration, garden planning, community habitat building, and common milkweed myths.

Learn more about the event by visiting their website: okiesformonarchs.org/events/elkcity-ok/

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HINTON / GREAT PLAINS CC - An assault at Great Plains Correctional Center in Hinton is under investigation by the Office of Inspector General of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. In a statement, Public Relations Chief Kay Thompson says it was an inmate-on-inmate assault. She says one inmate has been transported and treated for injuries received during the assault.

ELK CITY PS / STAFF RECOGNITION - Elk City Public Schools have selected Bridgette Shelton as the 2025-2026 District Teacher of the Year. Shelton teaches English Language Arts at elk city high school. Additionally, Penny Shockey has been named Support Staff of the Year. She holds the title of accounts payable at the board office.

CLINTON / STRUCTURE FIRE - A structure fire in a mobile home, located west of Clinton on 2202 Road, sent Clinton fire crews into action. Interim Fire Chief Mark Switzer said the fire broke out in the kitchen area. "40% of the mobile home [was] damaged, [with] the whole house having heavy smoke damage throughout." Switzer added that the kitchen was well involved with fire when crews arrived on scene.

SWOSU / PROJECTS - The Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO) board recently approved six facility upgrades with one-time deferred maintenance funds. "Those funds were set aside by the legislature and given out to the universities to use towards deferred maintenance," shared Vice President for Administration and Finance Lori Boyd. "[This includes] things that needed to be upgraded or things that needed to be replaced on campuses across the state. Boyd added that one major project is a \$2 million update of heat and air systems. "We have chiller systems and boiler systems on campus that have met and exceeded the life of the equipment. This is allowing us to be able to go in with more efficient equipment and replace that equipment so we're not having to patch things all the time and keep things going. It'll bring in energy savings as well, but it also allows us to be able to automate some things. That way, we can see what's going on with that equipment without having to physically go over to it and be able to control temperatures in buildings." Other projects include roofing replacements, as well as repairs and updates to the Al Harris Library.

WEATHERFORD / BACCALAUREATE - The Baccalaureate for Weatherford High School's senior class of 2026 will be held on May 13th at 6 pm at the First United Methodist Church, located at 817 N 7th Street in Weatherford, OK.

THOMAS / POOL DEFIBRILLATOR - Thomas Mayor Jeff Gose spoke about the addition of an automatic external defibrillator at the public pool, which was recently approved by the city council. "One of our councilmen is on the Fire Department and saw [a defibrillator] as a need, and it certainly was," Gose expressed. "We just hadn't thought of it in the past, but all our lifeguards are trained on those already." Gose believes it will be a great addition for the safety of all individuals who visit the pool.

CLINTON / GRANT SURVEYS - The city of Clinton has received the required 400 survey responses to apply for a community development block grant through the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. The surveys requested information from residents regarding their number of household members and annual income. "[These surveys] could grant us up to \$611,000 to help pay for some of these much-needed wastewater [improvements]," City Manager Robert Johnston shared regarding the grant. "Thanks to everybody that, maybe with some hesitation but nevertheless, responded. We tried to look for alternative funding. [That way], we borrow as little money as we possibly have to." Johnston says survey results have been tabulated, and the application is due by the end of April.

SWOSU / ASSAULT - A Ratliff City man who is facing a charge of aggravated assault & battery from a fight on the SWOSU Campus is also facing an assault charge in Cleveland County as the result of an assault on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. The alleged assault in Cleveland County happened March 1st, where Talon Quick allegedly hit another person multiple times in the face. Earlier this month, Quick and two others were charged in Custer County District Court for an assault on the SWOSU Campus that left a student with fractures to his eye sockets, a broken nose, and partially collapsed lung.

WEATHERFORD / PARK VANDALISM - The city of Weatherford is experiencing ongoing vandalism in restroom facilities at the city's parks. "It's not just something minor; they're tearing the toilets off the wall [and] breaking the glass," provided Mayor Mike Brown. "[We] felt like it might be good just to get the word out and maybe help us find who's doing it. And if we find who's doing it, we'll certainly prosecute." The city encourages anyone who witnesses suspicious activity at the facilities to contact the Weatherford Police Department. "We're going to fix it every time somebody messes something up, but when it's happening as much as it is, it forces us to think about locking the bathroom when it's not during business hours."

WEEKLY SHOUTOUTS!

Happy Birthday Wishes for April 29 - Mack Barnes, Ben Brown, Derek Carroll, Mary Frye, Dana Janning, Trent Koch, Summer Lettkeman, Logan Litke, Bailey Mae Matthews, Bruce McLemore, Michelle Nance, Suzzi Rossiter, Vernon Slagle, Cheryl Thomason, J.R. Ussery; **April 30** - Tanner Holt, Kenny Lehman, Ryan Lehman, Thomas Martin, Kassie Miller, Steve Owens, Mark Ray, Austin Richardson, Lauren Roles, Jack Schwartz; **May 1** - Joseph Barnhill, Izzy Carpenter, Michael Chain, Jake Dewees, Sumer Friesen, Eric Nelson, Lacie Tompkins, Sheri Waldrop, Ashley Weaver; **May 2** - Jason Ewing, Leo Goeringer, Garrison Green, Kenda Green; **May 3** - Megan Biswell, John Lee, Peggy Engelbrecht, Frankie Jameson, Chelsie Mavity, Jamie Nelson, Kim O'Daniel, Jerri Winn; **May 4** - C.R. Christensen, Adrienne Kern, Tasha Marsha, Austin McCullough, Jenny Morley, Preslee O'Connor, Kevin Permenter, Layken Reyes, Peggy Wehba, Ed Weichel; **May 5** - Larissa Adams, Shonda Burton, Kayla Christensen, Jack Crawford, Jesse Fleming, Brandon Grove, Bodhi Hines, Kinzie Kardokus, Kalie Kerth, Alasha Lehman, Jacob Pankratz, Sue Patterson, Ronald Pebley, Nelson Perkins, Whitney Roper, Andrea Stobbe, Sonora White.

Christian Free Store - Donations of school supplies, clothes, shoes, etc. are needed or if you are in need. Please call (580) 637-2345 or (580) 291-3875. **Alfalfa, OK, Community Center** "Bible Study," Every Monday Night from 7:00 to 8:00 Hwy 58. Five miles South of Hwy 152. For more information contact (405) 643-9211. Free and Open to the Public. **OK Parkinson's Alliance**, monthly support group meeting the second Thursday of each month, excluding December, at 5:30 p.m. at Weatherford's Pioneer Center, 1000 Gartrell Place. Patients, caregivers, family or friends are welcome. Questions? Contact OK Parkinson's Alliance (405) 810-0695 or info@OKpa.org. **Iron Sharpens Iron** is a Christ-centered adult support group every Tuesday night at 7pm. 233 E Main in Hydro, First Christian Church.

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MISC.

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<p><i>Grocery</i></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Crav'n Tortilla Chips, 30oz.</td><td>\$3.98</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Corn-Peas-Green Beans</td><td>\$0.58</td></tr> <tr><td>Maruchan Lunch Cups (All Varieties)</td><td>2 for \$1.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Post Pebbles (All Varieties)</td><td>2 for \$5.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Kraft Velveeta, 2 lb. box (All Varieties)</td><td>\$7.98</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Split Top Wheat Bread</td><td>\$1.58</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Soda, 12 pack cans (All Varieties)</td><td>3 for \$12.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Graham Pie Crust, 9oz.</td><td>2 for \$3.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Jello Cheesecake Mixes (All Varieties)</td><td>\$3.98</td></tr> <tr><td>Ranch Style Beans, 15oz. (All Varieties)</td><td>2 for \$3.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Chicken-Of-The-Sea Tuna, 5oz. (All Varieties)</td><td>\$0.98</td></tr> <tr><td>Duncan Hines Cake Mixes (All Varieties)</td><td>\$2.59</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Dark Chocolate Brownie Mix, 16.3oz.</td><td>2 for \$3.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Hunt's Snack Pack Puddings, 4 count</td><td>\$1.79</td></tr> <tr><td>Claudes Marinades, 16oz. (All Varieties)</td><td>\$3.99</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Pancake Syrup, 24oz. (All Varieties)</td><td>2 for \$4.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Lil Dutch Sandwich Cookies, 32oz. (All Varieties)</td><td>\$2.99</td></tr> <tr><td>Food Club Family Tea Bags, 24 count</td><td>\$1.79</td></tr> <tr><td>Capri Sun Drinks, 10 count (All Varieties)</td><td>\$4.49</td></tr> </table>	Crav'n Tortilla Chips, 30oz.	\$3.98	Food Club Corn-Peas-Green Beans	\$0.58	Maruchan Lunch Cups (All Varieties)	2 for \$1.00	Post Pebbles (All Varieties)	2 for \$5.00	Kraft Velveeta, 2 lb. box (All Varieties)	\$7.98	Food Club Split Top Wheat Bread	\$1.58	Food Club Soda, 12 pack cans (All Varieties)	3 for \$12.00	Food Club Graham Pie Crust, 9oz.	2 for \$3.00	Jello Cheesecake Mixes (All Varieties)	\$3.98	Ranch Style Beans, 15oz. (All Varieties)	2 for \$3.00	Chicken-Of-The-Sea Tuna, 5oz. (All Varieties)	\$0.98	Duncan Hines Cake Mixes (All Varieties)	\$2.59	Food Club Dark Chocolate Brownie Mix, 16.3oz.	2 for \$3.00	Hunt's Snack Pack Puddings, 4 count	\$1.79	Claudes Marinades, 16oz. (All Varieties)	\$3.99	Food Club Pancake Syrup, 24oz. (All Varieties)	2 for \$4.00	Lil Dutch Sandwich Cookies, 32oz. (All Varieties)	\$2.99	Food Club Family Tea Bags, 24 count	\$1.79	Capri Sun Drinks, 10 count (All Varieties)	\$4.49	<p><i>Produce</i></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Hass Avocados</td><td>\$0.99 each</td></tr> <tr><td>U.S. #1 Russet Potatoes, 10 lb. bag</td><td>\$2.99</td></tr> <tr><td>Sugar Bee Apples</td><td>\$1.49 lb.</td></tr> <tr><td>Red-Yellow-Orange Bell Peppers</td><td>2 for \$3.00</td></tr> <tr><td>Dole Shredded Lettuce, 8 oz. bag</td><td>\$0.99</td></tr> <tr><td>Broccoli</td><td>\$1.99 each</td></tr> <tr><td>White Onions</td><td>\$0.69 lb.</td></tr> </table>	Hass Avocados	\$0.99 each	U.S. #1 Russet Potatoes, 10 lb. bag	\$2.99	Sugar Bee Apples	\$1.49 lb.	Red-Yellow-Orange Bell Peppers	2 for \$3.00	Dole Shredded Lettuce, 8 oz. bag	\$0.99	Broccoli	\$1.99 each	White Onions	\$0.69 lb.
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High School and College Graduations in Western OK Hosted May 1-22



Alexander Shook
WOK Contributor

The school year is winding down all around western Oklahoma and schools across the area are getting ready to celebrate the class of 2025 with graduations happening throughout the month of May. Here is a breakdown of some of the graduations in the area, so you can congratulate your loved ones across the region.

On Friday, May 1, SWOSU will officially kick off graduation season in Western Oklahoma with the College of Pharmacy's commencement ceremony. It will begin at 7pm at the Fine Arts Center on the SWOSU campus. SWOSU will celebrate all other graduates at the Pioneer Event Center on May 8 at 6pm, followed by two more ceremonies on May 9, with a morning ceremony beginning at 9am and an afternoon ceremony beginning at 12pm.

Corn Bible Academy will host the first high school graduation in the area. The ceremony will be held at 3pm on Sunday, May 10, at the Clinton gymnasium.

Lookeba-Sickles will host their high school graduation on Thursday, May 14, beginning at 7:30pm on their campus in Clinton.

Friday, May 15, will be an exceptionally busy day for high school graduations, with 10 high schools around Western Oklahoma hosting their graduations. The location and time for each are, in alphabetical order:

- Cheyenne**.....On-Campus, 6pm
- Clinton**.....McLain-Rogers Park, 6pm
- Cordell**.....High School Auditorium, 7pm
- Hammon**.....High School Dome, 7pm
- Hinton**.....On-Campus, 7pm
- Hydro-Ealky**.....High School Gym, 7pm
- Merritt**.....MHS Auditorium, 7pm
- Sayre**.....Sayre Auditorium, 7pm
- Thomas-Fay-Custer**.....TFC Auditorium, 7pm
- Weatherford**.....Pioneer Center, 11am

Three ceremonies will be held the next day, on Saturday, May 16: Arapaho-Butler will host their high school graduation beginning at 4pm in their high school gymnasium; Reydon's graduation begins at 6pm on their high school campus; and Watonga's

will be held on the high school football field at 7pm.

On Sunday, May 17, Elk City will host their high school graduation beginning at 4pm at their on-campus Pioneer Center gymnasium.

Mangum will host their high school graduation on Thursday, May 21, in the MHS Auditorium at 7pm.

Finally, on Friday, May 22, Canute will host their high school graduation beginning at 7pm at the school auditorium.

Congratulations to the graduating class of 2026! If you are unable to make it to your loved one's graduation, Wright Media will be livestreaming some of western Oklahoma's ceremonies, available both live and on-demand. The website URLs are listed below:

- Weatherford:** wright.media/one/
- Clinton:** wright.media/two/
- Thomas-Fay-Custer:** wright.media/three/
- Hydro-Ealky:** wright.media/five/
- SWOSU:** wright.media/six/
- Watonga:** wright.media/seven/

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JUNE	Jerry's Diner
JULY	Gersh Detailing
AUGUST	Carter Healthcare
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Sours & Eastep Named Bulldogs of the Week

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Jon Chidester
 SWOSU Media Relations

Emerson Sours (track and field) and Greeley Eastep (women's rodeo) have been named the Bulldogs of the Week, presented by Wright Media—the official partner for SWOSU athletic livestreams and radio broadcasts.

Sours (Corinth, Texas) set a new SWOSU program record in the 400m at the Pitt State Tune Up on

April 19, clocking a 1:01.88 in the final regular season meet.

Eastep (Bainbridge, Ind.) became the third different SWOSU cowgirl to win an event average this season, claiming first place in Goat Tying at the Panhandle State rodeo in Guymon. Her 7.4-second run in the short round secured both the round win and the overall average.

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Courtesy Johnson Space Center / NASA

Circa April 1959 - The Mercury 7 astronauts all raise their hands in reply to a question about whether they felt confident they would return from space. Pictured, from left: Slayton, Shepard, Schirra, Grissom, Glenn, Cooper, and Carpenter.

HISTORY
 Continued from Page 3

The news conference lasted about 90 minutes. During their introduction to the world, these seven men became the front page news story all over the nation, with a Time magazine spread comparing them to other famous flying pioneers. They spoke about God, country, and their families, and they unknowingly set a precedent for the expectation of future astronauts in the public eye, paving the way for the many brave men and women that have come after them. Cooper's NASA biography shows that once the press conference ended, he went straight into training at Langley Research Center, where he specialized in the Redstone rocket, helped develop astronaut survival gear, and chaired work on emergency pad escape procedures. He was an integral part of the engineering brain trust trying to make human spaceflight work. And it definitely worked. The program was a monumental achievement in human history encompassing six crewed missions over five years.

For the final crewed mission of Project Mercury, Gordon Cooper completed 22 orbits around the Earth before splashing down in the Pacific Ocean. The Mercury Seven wrote first-hand accounts of their experience with the selection process, their preparations, and the Mercury missions in a 1962 book *We Seven*. In 1984, they founded the Mercury Seven Foundation which raises college scholarship funds for students heading into science and engineering. It was officially renamed to the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation in 1995.

The group won several awards, received countless accommodations, and received a dedicated monument at Launch Complex 14 in 1964 for their work, as President John F. Kennedy put it, "for pioneering manned space flight in the United States."

There is a time capsule with reports, photographs, and a movie buried beneath their monument, set to be open in 2464. For Astronaut Gordon Cooper, he went on to fly Faith 7 in 1963 and Gemini 5 in 1965, logging 222 hours in space.

During Project Gemini, Cooper helped design and begin the NASA tradition of wearing mission insignias with he and his co-pilot's, Pete Conrad, coming up with the idea of a mission patch to commemorate all the people involved, not just the astronauts. The pair also set a space endurance record by traveling over 3.3 million miles in 190 hours and 56 minutes. He retired from the Air Force and NASA in 1970 and wrote an autobiography titled *Leap of Faith*, recounting his experiences. He passed away in 2004 and holds spots in the Oklahoma Aviation and Space Hall of Fame, the International Space Hall of Fame and the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame.

Cooper was featured in several shows and movies, including a depiction in the film *The Right Stuff* in 1983 where actor Dennis Quaid played him. Oklahoma later marked his legacy on Highway 177 north of Shawnee and Tecumseh. It's fitting that now, several decades later, in the same month that the next league of human space travel launched, with Artemis II carrying astronauts around the Moon here in 2026: our next step into space.

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Dawgs Take Finale to Avoid Sweep at NWOSU



Jon Chidester
SWOSU Media Relations

SWOSU Softball fell in a pair of one-run ballgames, but salvaged the series finale against Northwestern with a 7-5 win.

SWOSU will close the regular season next weekend at home, hosting Arkansas Tech for Senior Weekend on Friday and Saturday.

Alexis Taylor delivered a complete-game effort in the circle, striking out four, walking none, and allowing five hits.

The lone run came in the third inning and held up as the difference.

The Bulldogs were limited to three hits, all singles, and were unable to capitalize on late opportunities, stranding runners in both the sixth and seventh innings.

Game One - NWOSU 4, SWOSU 3

SWOSU rallied from an early deficit but fell on a walk-off single in the opener. The Rangers built a 3-0 lead with a three-run third inning before the Bulldogs responded. A two-out error in the fourth allowed SWOSU to plate its first two runs, and Maddie Rahon tied the game at 3-3 with an RBI single in the sixth. In the seventh, a leadoff walk proved costly. Northwestern moved the runner into scoring position with a stolen base before delivering the game-winning RBI single.

Blaire Gentry (L) pitched 6.1 innings, allowing four runs on nine hits while striking out two and walking two. SWOSU totaled seven hits, with Rahon and Landry Bayless each recording two. Bayless also scored twice.

Game Three - NWOSU 7, SWOSU 5

The Bulldogs outhit the Rangers 11-7, led by four players with two hits apiece, including 2-for-4 performances from Kennedi Caine and Emily Wedel. Caine added a double, while Wedel's RBI triple in the fourth gave SWOSU a 3-2 lead at the time.

After Northwestern answered to tie the game at 3-3 in the bottom of the fourth, SWOSU responded with three runs in the fifth to take control for good. The Bulldogs added an insurance run in the sixth to extend the margin.

SWOSU capitalized on four Northwestern errors, scoring five unearned runs in the victory.

Lily Barfield started in the circle and worked the first three innings. Jaycee McKee (W, 3-8) handled the fourth and fifth, while Blaire Gentry recorded the final six outs to earn her fourth save of the season.

Game Two - NWOSU 1, SWOSU 0

The nightcap turned into a pitcher's duel, with Northwestern edging SWOSU behind a single unearned run.

Bulldogs Drop Last Series of 2026 to NWOSU



Jon Chidester
SWOSU Media Relations

SWOSU Baseball dropped all three games in their series to Northwestern, falling 6-2 and 4-0 to close out the 2026 season. Prior to the games, 11 seniors were honored as part of Senior Day. The Bulldogs finish the season with a 23-25 overall record.

Game One - NWOSU 9, SWOSU 1

The Bulldogs struggled to find a rhythm offensively, managing just one run despite staying within reach through much of the game.

SWOSU's lone run came in the fourth inning on a throwing error during a double-play attempt. The Bulldogs trailed throughout but kept the deficit manageable before the game slipped away in the final inning.

Northwestern broke the game open in the ninth, combining five hits with three SWOSU errors to score five runs and extend the margin.

Josh Doelitsch (L) turned in a solid outing, pitching 6.0 innings while allowing four runs (three earned) on seven hits. He struck out four and walked four, keeping SWOSU in the game before handing things over to the bullpen.

Game Two - NWOSU 6, SWOSU 2

A six-run fifth inning proved to be the difference in the opener, as Northwestern used seven hits in the frame to break the game open. A combination of small ball and infield hits set the table before a three-run home run capped the inning.

Trailing 6-0, SWOSU had opportunities late but stranded eight baserunners over the final five innings.

Jose Mendoza led the offense, going 3-for-4 with an RBI single in the fifth. The Bulldogs finished with nine hits in the game.

Garrett Folmar (L) pitched 4.1 innings in the start. Kaegan Baker and Conner Watson combined for 4.2 innings of scoreless relief.

Game Three - NWOSU 4, SWOSU 0

SWOSU was shut out for the second time this season in the finale, as Northwestern plated single runs in the first, second, sixth, and seventh innings.

Jared Adams (L) turned in a solid effort, allowing just three hits over 6.0 innings while striking out three and walking four.

Elijah Long accounted for the Bulldogs' lone extra-base hit with a double.

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