



Rick Carpenter | Altus Times

Four generations of David Green's family came back to Altus to open his 392nd store on April 2.

EDC effort shifts leader's focus from retail to manufacturing industry

BY RICK CARPENTER
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In the last year, the Altus/Southwest Economic Development Corporation scored major achievements with bringing in major retail stores and has shifted its focus to the manufacturing industry.

The crown jewel of its accomplishments in the last year was luring a Hobby Lobby to Altus. Hobby Lobby was founded by David Green who graduated from Altus High School in 1959. But until he opened his 792nd store in Altus on April 2, the largest privately owned arts and crafts retail company didn't have a presence here.

But the Altus EDC helped reopen a closed building on Main Street and bring in the Hobby Lobby at the same time. The company's average store generates about \$7 million in sales each year which translates into about \$262,500 in sales tax that will benefit the city.

What sparked the effort to get a Hobby Lobby in Altus was the closing of several local businesses including J.C. Penney Co., Payless Shoes, Rue 21 and Factory Connection. Although the closures were due to the companies' national trends and the way they ran their businesses, city leaders thought the closures might make some people think the economy in Altus couldn't sustain the stores.

Brian Bush, president and CEO of the Altus/Southwest Economic Development Corporation, said he began meeting with Hobby Lobby officials to see if they would open a store here. "We were looking for retail stores that drew people from a long way away that would help generate sales tax," Bush said.

But the Hobby Lobby officials said they needed the entire building that was partially used by Locke Supply. By working with the owners of Locke Supply to build a new store adjacent to Hobby Lobby, that piece of the puzzle was solved. The EDC then offered Hobby



Hobby Lobby founder David Green, left, visits with former Altus High School classmates following a ribbon cutting ceremony at the grand opening of the store in Altus on April 2.

Lobby \$250,000 to offset the cost of renovating the former Hastings store. That was the only incentive Hobby Lobby received, Bush said, and the city should receive more than \$250,000 a year in sales tax from the store.

Save-A-Lot grocery stores showed an interest in opening a store in Altus. The military veteran-owned company saw the strength of the Altus market and opened in February, Bush said. Shoe Sensation is scheduled to open by the time this article appears on May 5.

Now that several of the empty buildings have been filled with retail stores, the EDC has turned the retail recruitment over to outside recruiters who are telling the EDC that Altus is still "under retailled." Bush said evidence of that is because Altus, a city of about 20,000 residents, swells to 47,000 during the daytime as out-of-town workers come to

jobs here.

The EDC has asked Bush to shift his focus now to recruiting industrial and manufacturing companies that will bring hundreds of jobs instead of 10 companies that add maybe 25 or 30 jobs. Part of that move is to hang onto local talent because if they don't see opportunities here, they won't come back after they've gone to college.

Bush knows that issue well. He left town and was a well-paid attorney living in Edmond before moving back and taking the reins of both the Altus Chamber of Commerce and the EDC. He said he has rediscovered that Altus is a wonderful place to raise children.

"Our children are doing well in school," he said. "We have not seen a drop off from the Edmond schools in how well students are prepared for college."

Chamber adapts to needs of young professionals

BY RICK CARPENTER
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The Altus Chamber of Commerce has grown its membership during the last year by launching a young professionals group and providing leadership training to a younger generation of leaders.

Chamber President and CEO Brian Bush said by launching Southwest Young Professionals, a group geared toward the 21- to 45-year-old age group, it lays the groundwork for the community's future leaders.

At the same time, a revival of the Leadership Altus program will help future leaders learn about all aspects of the community and help the younger generation put their dreams of what the community could become into action. Leadership Altus explores all aspects of the community from parks and recreation to the legal and prison systems and government operations. By gaining a grasp on those aspects, future leaders can see what pieces of the puzzle are missing and fill in the gaps.

Bush said one of the goals of the Chamber that fits into those dreams is to build Altus into a weekend destination. And part of that is to create an environment that draws people to the area. The City of Altus is currently exploring ideas to improve the Altus Reservoir to make it a destination by improving park facilities, building a bike and walking trail to the reservoir from Altus Air Force Base and creating recreational opportunities.

The Chamber is also working with the city to upgrade Missile Park to make it more attractive and upgrade the facilities there.

At the same time, Bush said most of the ideas are in the beginning stages, but the Chamber has started with a hospitality committee to share information with visitors and welcome them to the community.

As far as activities, he said wants to build events that fill the hotel rooms.

He points out that Rock and Rumble, the annual car show that will be held today in Altus, fills hotels rooms with wholesome family fun.

This year, the Chamber will partner with the City of Altus Parks and Recreation Department to host the American Spirit Festival the weekend before July 4 that will feature a fireworks display and will include a Sprint Triathlon.

"Hotel managers tell us that every time we do local tournaments, they fill up," Bush said. "So, the Chamber will look at fielding more tournaments by helping upgrade the city's facilities."

Bush credits city leaders with making changes to the city's water infrastructure after a severe drought hit the area in 2014. During the drought, water provided by the City of Altus to Altus Air Force Base tested poorly. The city has since reopened some water wells in Texas and built redundancy systems from Tom Steed Lake that have drastically improved the quality of the water.

As part of solving that water problem, the city has begun to build a system that will drastically improve the water quality of the Altus Reservoir. That may be key to the city's dream of making the reservoir a destination and something that adds to the quality of life of the community.

Discount grocery, shoe store added to Altus retailers

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
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Beside the opening of Hobby Lobby, two new stores have made Altus their home in 2018 — Save-A-Lot, a discount grocery store, and Shoe Sensation, a footwear retailer.

Save-A-Lot opened Feb. 26 and held a ribbon cutting Feb. 28 after two delays to their opening.

Save-A-Lot offered deals for the first six weeks after opening. While they offer national brands, Save-A-Lot also offers exclusive brands

J. Higgs, Coburn Farms and Wylwood at discounted prices from other non-exclusive brands. The discount grocery store also offers fresh meat cut in-store daily and fresh produce.

The original date was scheduled for Dec. 31, 2017, but changes in contractors and the installation of new electrical wiring in the building caused the delay.

Save-A-Lot in Altus is not corporately owned but is a licensee-owned store. Honor Capital is a veteran-run building company in Tulsa that

owns the Altus Save-A-Lot location. Honor Capital has put in 10 Save-A-Lot stores across Oklahoma and Kansas since May 2015.

The building company chooses to own and operate food stores in underserved communities where affordable food may not be as readily available to all residents due to lack of transportation to another store farther away with more variety.

Honor Capital representative Matthew Eisenbach said the opening date was pushed back

due to construction delays, but the turnout in the first two days exceeded their expectations.

Shoe Sensation held a job fair on April 4th and 5th from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Days Inn of Altus, 2804 N. Main St.

Shoe Sensation offers sports, special occasion and slip-resistant shoes which includes name-brand such as Adidas, Converse, Puma, Nike, Dockers, Sketchers and Under Armour.

The corporately-owned shoe retailer is set to open a location in Altus in May at 1470 N. Main St.

in the Bunker Hill Shopping Center. The grand opening date is scheduled for Thursday, May 10 at 9 a.m., according to Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Brian Bush.

Bush is also the director of the Altus/Southwest Area Economic Development Corporation.

He said both businesses have been looking at the Altus market for a while.

The continued market growth was incentive enough to bring both companies to Altus.

"Altus is considered a

food desert, so we heard a lot of requests for more grocery options and we were glad to get Save-A-Lot here," Bush said. "And with Payless closing, Shoe Sensation approached us knowing there is a need to replace that retailer. Both companies were really excited to come to Altus and have been wonderful to work with."

For more information about Save-A-Lot, visit www.stores.save-a-lot.com/altus-ok. For more information about Shoe Sensation, visit www.shoesensation.com.

Air Force represents largest Altus employer

BY RICK CARPENTER
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There’s no doubt that the City of Altus depends on Altus Air Force Base as a major employer. With 3,004 active duty and civilian employees and another 2,051 military students passing through the city annually, the base provides more than six times the number of jobs the second largest employer, Jackson County Memorial Hospital.

For a real economic impact, consider that the payroll for active military and guard/reserves total \$101 million and the total civilian pay tops \$81 million a year. The Air Force estimates that the \$182 million impact along with \$92 million in expenditures creates an estimated 1,345 local jobs in the community separate from the military. The Air Force estimates those jobs command an average of \$38,272 or an additional \$51.5 million.

The Air Force estimates that the total economic impact with jobs created, expenditures and total military and civilian payroll

amount to a \$327 million economic impact on Altus.

The city also boasts 993 military retirees in the community, mostly from the Air Force (879 retirees).

Other top 10 employers and the number of employees include (source: Altus/Southwest Economic Development Corporation):

- Jackson County Memorial Hospital, 756 full- and part-time employees;
- Bar-S Foods, 640 full- and part-time employees;
- Altus Public Schools, 425 employees, not counting substitutes;
- Walmart Super Center, 300 employees;
- City of Altus, 272 employees, 216 full-time and 56 part-time;
- Western Oklahoma State College, 236 employees, 92 full-time and 144 part-time or adjunct;
- Southwest Technology Center, 44 full-time employees;
- Western Equipment, 43 employees;
- United Supermarket, 40 employees; and
- Hobby Lobby, 40 full- and part-time employees.



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From the boom of a KC-135, the boom operator makes contact for air refueling with a C-17 over southwest Oklahoma. The 97th Air Mobility Wing at Altus AFB specializes in training pilots in both aircraft.

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How your local pawn shop works

BY RICK CARPENTER
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You shouldn't call the television show "Pawn Stars" a "reality" show, say local pawn shop owners.

In fact, the dickering they do over the price or value of something isn't as negotiable as they imply.

And while many people think the majority of their businesses focus on buying and selling merchandise, in reality they are more like the banking industry than a retail store.

Dwayne Martin, owner of Action Pawn at 315 S. Main, said 95 percent of his business involves loaning people money by holding their collateral, or a pawn, for that loan. His numerous safes and vaults contain that collateral until they can repay the short-term loans.



Dwayne Martin, owner of Action Pawn, stands in a vault with hundreds of firearms that are collateral for loans.

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Martin said most people seeking pawns are either "unbanked or underbanked," meaning they either don't have money in a bank or don't have enough money in a bank to qualify for a loan. They also might just need a short-term loan that doesn't involve going through a credit check or

legal process.

However, Martin said, if someone pawns a firearm, they go through a background check when he or she submits the pawn and when he or she pays off the loan and receives the firearm back.

SEE PAWN, PAGE 4

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Brian Davis cuts the hair of Tech. Sgt. Nick Marrow, an airman from Charlotte, North Carolina, who was in town for classes at Altus Air Force Base and took in the celebration on April 25.

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Barbershop celebrates 51 years of service in Altus

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
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Razor’s Edge Barbershop was filled with the sounds of a barbershop quartet, the smell of brisket and the chatter of long-time customers on April 25 as they celebrated their 51st Anniversary Pow Wow. Razor’s Edge has been a family business for five decades, run by Curtis Davis and his son, Brian Davis. The little barbershop even houses an antique cash register reminiscent of its early beginnings along with all the trappings of a typical barbershop, including the famous red, white and blue striped pole on their sign.

Curtis opened the shop in 1967 and was joined by his sons Robert and Brian, and his daughter, Cathy, who managed the shop. In 1991, Brian took over the family business. The event included a free brisket meal for customers and attendees, a performance by Men 4 Music and Altus High School BluHarmonix choir, along with all the decorations of a typical birthday party. Men 4 Music includes Don Stone, Ken Cox, Ken Ward, Jim Bayers and accompaniment by Nancy Cox. Both Ken and Nancy Cox taught choir at Altus High School bringing the past together with the present with Choir Director Nick Young’s a cappel-

la group from Altus High School. Eric Eastman came by to hear Men 4 Music and have lunch while waiting for a haircut. Eastman has been a customer at Razor’s Edge since he arrived in Altus through Altus Air Force Base a year and a half ago. Life Services at Pathways Director Liz Moon came out to thank Brian and Curtis for their support of the pregnancy resource center at 1721 N. Main in Altus. Moon said they have been helping support Pathways for about 10 years. Brian said all donations given by customers and the cost of haircuts that day would be given to Pathways.

CBD oil shop opens in Altus

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
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Candance Rodriguez has arthritis, but she doesn’t suffer from it. She says her joint pain is relieved with CBD, cannabidiol, an essential oil extracted from industrial hemp. Candance and her husband, Jerry Rodriguez own Simplex Wellness, 207 W. Broadway, which opened at the beginning of April. The couple decided to open their own CBD shop in Altus, with another location set to open in Lawton in May, after learning about the effects of the essential oil. Though CBD oil does come from the hemp plant, it doesn’t contain the mind-altering, psychoactive element, tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, Rodriguez said. Rodriguez sells CBD oil in tinctures, balms, massage oil, gummy candy and even as an additive for vaping liquids. Rodriguez said the thing that makes Simplex Wellness CBD oil special is that it’s all grown in Oklahoma City at Can-Tek Labs and contains no additives like flavoring or dyes. “It surprised me the number of people who have thanked us for bringing this to Altus,” Rodriguez said. “You had to order it online, and who knows what you’re getting when you do that.” According to Can-Tek Labs, CBD oil can potentially reduce inflammation, stimulate appetite, relieve anxiety, reduce blood sugar levels, reduce the risk of artery blockage and promote bone growth. The effects of CBD oil are still being studied. In 2014, the Food and Drug



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Co-owner Candance Rodriguez and husband, Jerry, opened a CBD, cannabidiol, oil shop after experiencing the benefits of the oil extracted from industrial hemp.

Administration granted Fast Track designation to GW Pharmaceuticals to investigate the CBD product, Epidiolex, in the treatment of Dravet syndrome, a treatment-resistant form of childhood epilepsy through clinical trials. CBD oil has not been approved by the FDA to treat, cure or prevent any disease. But for Rodriguez, the effects are clear. “We hear success stories all the time,” she said. “It’s changing people’s lives whether by helping them get off pain medications or helping kick an opioid addiction.” Rodriguez describes one customer who suffered from arthritis to the point that her hands were becoming deformed. “She couldn’t bend her index finger down at all,” Rodriguez said. “After a few weeks taking CBD,

she came in and started flexing her hands in front of me. She said, ‘I haven’t been able to do this in two years,’ and that index finger was bent all the way to her palm.” In 2015, Gov. Mary Fallin signed Katie’s Law allowing the use of cannabidiol to help treat seizures in children. Now, Gov. Fallin has signed House Bill 2913 allowing Oklahoma’s universities and farmers contracting with universities to grow industrial hemp crops for research and development for industrial uses. HB 2913 creates the Oklahoma Industrial Hemp Agriculture Pilot Program. Rodriguez said this could change the CBD oil industry to include even purer forms of the essential oil and create another facet of Oklahoma’s agriculture industry, and most importantly, “Keep the market local.”



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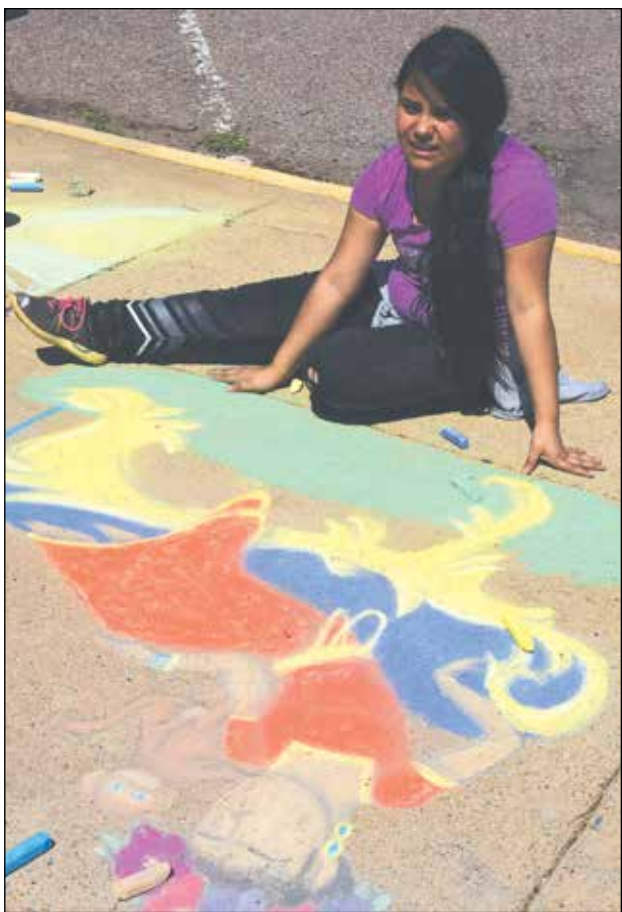
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Kelli Howeth smooths out some chalk while working in the shade during the annual Walkin' on Chalk event in March. The event included physical fitness activities.

Xellynn Caldera works on her award-winning portrait of Frida Kahlo to illustrate women's rights during the Walkin' on Chalk event in March.

Altus reaches Certified Healthy status, now eligible for grants

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
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The City of Altus achieved the Merit level of Oklahoma Certified Healthy Community and Business status in January, a project that began in October when the Altus City Council approved an amendment prohibiting smoking in public places. The recognition is available statewide through the Oklahoma Turning Point Council and the Oklahoma State Department of Health. It recognizes entities that have made changes to make health and wellness a priority.

In order to reach Merit level, the City of Altus implemented an ordinance to the Code of Ordinances in October 2017 that prohibits the use of smoking products on city properties.

The ordinance was just one step toward meeting the requirements to make Altus a Certified Healthy Oklahoma community, which would make the community eligible for as much as \$50,000 in healthy living grant money — money that could be used to fund public health initiatives, programs and services.

"The goal here is for wellness and healthy living," City Manager Janice Cain said. "It's more of a prod and encouragement

tool for public facilities to set that standard, not about penalties or wrong-doings."

The amended city ordinance makes the City of Altus eligible to apply for grants without increasing taxes and puts the community in line for further recognition as a Certified Health Community past the basic eligibility status.

Prerequisites to achieve Excellence status as a Certified Health Community include an ordinance prohibiting the use of tobacco and vapor products, proof of affordable fresh fruits and vegetables available in the community, a walkability assessment, a group of community and municipality members engaged in local strategic planning addressing public health needs, and a provision of safe storage and proper disposal of prescription drugs — all of which, the Jackson County Community Health Action Team or JCCHAT and its subcommittees are currently striving to meet.

Chapter 20, Article IV defines smoking as "the carrying by a person of a lighted cigar, cigarette, pipe or other lighted smoking devices," falling in-line with City Attorney Andrea Chism's statement in the City Council meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2017 that the amendment does not



Altus reach a level of a Certified Healthy Community by enforcing tobacco codes and including active lifestyle activities at events such as Walkin' on Chalk. Here, Andy Cortez, 14, creates a portrait of Libitina at the Walkin' on Chalk event in March. Cortez attended school in Altus before his family moved to Lawton. But he came back for the event to showcase his artistic talent.

include vaping or tobacco-free products as they are not lighted smoking devices. The ordinance also does not include streets or sidewalks, though they are technically city property, but does include places such as public parks, city government buildings and their parking lots.

While city ordinances have long included smoking prohibition at indoor workplaces, child-

care facilities, public places, public transportation vehicles, schools and state- and city-owned vehicles, some may argue that the list of places one can light up is shorter than the list of places one cannot.

Jackson County Health Department TSET (Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust) Healthy Living Coordinator Victoria Cleveland spoke on behalf of the

amendment.

"What we're trying to do is change the culture of our community, not just in Altus but in Jackson County," Cleveland said. "And we're trying to set some high standards and encourage our community to strive for health and wellness. That helps us with our healthcare costs, as

SEE STATUS, PAGE 2

A year later: Senior Center houses meal program

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
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It's been more than a year since ground was broken at Dr. Morris Foster Library for the Altus Senior Citizens Activity Center at 221 N. Park Lane.

Members of the Altus City Council and other city officials held a groundbreaking ceremony for the center in March 2017. Now, the site is home to the Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group (SOCAG) meal program.

Virginia Goskey, program director at SOCAG, said coming into the building brings back a flood of memories. The building still retains its core architecture and unique round shape but now includes a restaurant-quality kitchen and two more sets of bathrooms, one with handicap accessibility. SOCAG has a lease



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The complete Altus Senior Citizens Activity Center boasts a new parking lot, street lights and industrial-grade kitchen, but retains its structural design.

agreement with the City of Altus with rent waived through June 30, 2018. The organization has been serving senior lunch at the Senior Center since January, approximately 200 a day. Sometimes the center is packed and other days

it isn't. It all depends on what is being served.

Goskey said all meal preparation for the senior meal program is happening at the Senior Center for Altus, Hollis, Granite and Mangum, including meals that are delivered

utilizing Southwest Transit.

Though the Altus Senior Citizens Activity Center had a soft opening in January, a grand opening was scheduled for May 4. The event included light refreshments and presen-

tation of a special plaque commemorating the event, with a scheduled appearance by Jan Taylor, former Mayor T.L. Gramling's daughter.

Mayor Jack Smiley said if it weren't for Gramling, the center would not be a reality. He was the person who pushed for a senior center to be included in the Metropolitan Area Projects, or MAPS, tax passed in 2008. Though Gramling passed away in 2016, his legacy lives on in the walls of the center.

In December 2015, a contract with Joe D. Hall General Contractors, LLC was approved by the Altus City Council for design work and construction of the Altus Senior Activity Center. The project utilizes MAPS money collected from a .5 of one cent sales tax voted on by Altus citizens in 2008.

The total contract

amount was \$2,453,501. In February, the council approved the final payment on the contract in the amount of \$170,162.

Smiley said that though there was criticism for not going ahead with this project sooner, the City's choice to wait until all the funds were accumulated will save them tens, if not thousands, of dollars in interest fees that can be better used to add to the improvement of the project.

The building is split into two large rooms intersected by offices, a small kitchenette and storage space. The east side houses the large kitchen and carpeted dining area with plenty of lighting and space. While the focal point of the west side is still a large, decorative fireplace, the room also has wood floors and furnishing from Jackie Witte Interiors.

SWTC provides training to meet area employment needs

BY JILL OWENBY
Public Relations Director
Southwest Technology Center

Southwest Technology Center began as a dream for a number of local individuals who believed in the need for an educational institution that would provide technical training. The technical training would be designed to educate individuals for employment opportunities in southwest Oklahoma and provide support services to local business and industry.

Through their tenacious efforts, the Area Vocational-Technical School District No. 27 became a reality in the fall of 1988. First housed in rented facilities on North Spurgeon, the school's name was changed in March, 1989 to Southwest Area Vocational-Technical Center. In October, 2001 the name was officially changed to Southwest Technology Center.

The present 63,000 square foot, \$5 million facility was opened in September 1995. Thanks to both a federal and a state grant, combined with accumulated local revenues, the building was debt free from the first day of occupation. Since its opening, two additional buildings have been constructed



Duke 5th grade student Ellie Johnson, right, watches as Southwest Technology Center bio-med student Baileigh Brewer demonstrates how to combine Borax, glue and water to create slime. While the yucky looking slime might gross out some people, it became pliable and most students put them in plastic bags to take home with them. It was all part of a special program at SWTC in January to familiarize students with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math curriculum and opportunities at the local school.

north of the main building and the 20,000 square feet in hangar 33 at the Altus Municipal Airport to house the aviation and aerospace technology program.

Today, Southwest Technology Center's mission, "Changing lives one career at a time," is carried out through the school's two divisions which include full-time programs, and the Business Development Center. Ten full time training programs, designed for high school students and adults, offer comprehensive career training to students in the communities of Altus, Blair, Duke, Granite, Hollis, Navajo and Olustee-Eldorado. The programs are free of charge to junior and senior students in these high schools and on a tuition basis to adults.

Programs offered include automotive technology; aviation and aerospace technology; biomedical sciences; business and computer; construction trades; cosmetology; health science technology I and II;

metal fabrication (basic welding); teacher preparation and practical nursing.

In May of 2017, 140 graduates completed fulltime programs with certifications ranging from A&P Aircraft Mechanics to Licensed Cosmetologists.

The SWTC Foundation Board along with a group of volunteers held the annual SWTC Foundation Golf Tournament in June of 2017 and raised more than \$15,000 to award as scholarships with David Braddock serving as the SWTC Foundation Chair. A total of \$15,500 in scholarships was awarded during the 2017-18 school year to adults enrolled in full-time training programs. These scholarships often make it possible for these students to complete their career programs and enter the local workforce.

An established portion of the main campus was redesigned and constructed as the new Business Development Center allowing a one-stop-shop for business and industries in the served communities to utilize for various training needs. The SWTC Business Development team was awarded funds through the Oklahoma Lottery to implement the center, with high focus on safety training. Business Development Director Kerry Evans attributes Tim Rabalias,

ers from across the district participated in tours of the facility to gain knowledge about opportunities afforded to them their junior and senior years of high school.

Beginning in August 2018, the new board approved a teacher-preparation program that will be offered to juniors and seniors of partner schools districts. Upon collection of data and in an effort to combat the teacher shortage Oklahoma is currently experiencing, this newly implemented program will allow high school students the opportunity to explore the teaching profession and gain a paraprofessional certification. Carol Walker will teach the program to aspiring young educators.

Pre-enrollment is underway for high school students and adults in all full-time program offerings. "We are enthusiastic about the lives we are changing and impacting at SWTC," stated Director of Student Services Ericka Wiginton. "The new teacher prep program along with our other certification courses, allows us and you many exciting things to look forward to being a part of at SWTC next year." If you are interested in a fulltime program contact Wiginton at 580-477-2250 or ewiginton@swetch.edu.

Railroad signals make busy street safer for traffic

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
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A year-long endeavor to make a railroad crossing on South Navajoe Street a little safer was completed in November 2017.

Two train tracks separate traffic on East Broadway Street and traffic traveling to and from Altus Primary School on Glenda Street and Altus Junior High on South Park Lane, as well as traffic for the City of Altus Park and Recreation facilities and Cole Heights Park on Katy Drive. The northernmost set of tracks has been a blind crossing for many years, according to Altus Street Director Chad Osborne.

Surrounded on both side by houses with no signal lights, the railroad on Navajoe Street is a dangerous spot for drivers, Osborne said. The addition of railroad signals takes care of any near misses. And there have been many instances of near misses, Osborne said.

The average freight train is about 1 to 1.4 miles in length and can take a mile or more to stop after the engineer fully applies an emergency brake.

Osborne said this was one of the first projects he hoped to complete as

street director.

"I sat down and made a list of everyone I thought might be able to help with this project," Osbourne said. "And it took a lot of phone calls to find everyone who would need to be involved."

Representatives from the City of Altus, Oklahoma Department of Transportation Railroad Division and contractors met with the help of Osbourne and Jackson County's State Representative Charles Ortega, R-Altus. Osbourne said the response was unanimous that the intersection was not safe and needed signals.

Osborne said the project couldn't have been completed without the connections he received through Ortega, "that's really when we got the ball rolling."

The Wichita, Tillman and Jackson Railway Company intersects with the BNSF Railway and Farmrail in this area of Altus, originally built by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas branch of the Wichitas Falls and Northwestern Railway between 1906 and 1909. According to WT&J Railway, the Altus line is owned by the State of Oklahoma.

The project cost the Oklahoma Department of

Transportation close to \$200,000 and cost nothing for the City of Altus. But Osbourne said getting that funding and the railroad sign did involve a lengthy application process and then another lengthy approval process.

Traffic coming off of Broadway Street to visit Cole Heights Park where little league baseball and football games are played or the Altus City Gym during city league basketball season uses Navajoe Street as an access roadway.

Cole Heights Park is also where Altus Parks and Recreation and the Altus Skate Park are located as well as where the new Altus SplashPad is planned to be located. This traffic, along with residential traffic, now have an extra safety measure to guard against railroad traffic.

Preliminary statistics from the Federal Railroad Administration show that there were 2,105 vehicle-train collisions; 807 vehicle-train collision injuries; and 274 vehicle-train collision deaths in 2017.

Signal lights warn of an approaching train and gates close the road when the train approaches.

For more information call the Street Department at 580-481-2224.



Katrina Goforth | Altus Times

Construction continued on the south side of Falcon Road through March as seen here from the Community Center.

Falcon Road project expected to be completed this summer

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
katrina@altustimes.com

Construction began in November 2017 on the Falcon Road Improvement Project through the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. ODOT expects the project to take approximately 210 days — about seven months — and covers 0.921 miles of road.

In February 2017, a public meeting was held with City of Altus and ODOT staff to review the plans for the Falcon Road Improvement Project that is planned to extend from Main Street to Park Lane.

Drivers began seeing orange cones placed along Falcon Road in late October 2017.

The plans to widen and resurface the road include three lanes that flow into Main Street and Park Lane with a middle two-lane, left turn lane.

MKEC Engineering Consultants of Oklahoma City Senior Project Manager Greg Sparks said the three-lane design is a safer and more efficient model than a four-lane option that will allow as much commercial traffic to flow without the increased risk of collisions for drivers crossing one lane of traffic instead of two.

Sparks said Falcon Road,

as it has been, only had two to three inches of asphalt that was more than 50 years old — an uncommon occurrence in his experience, he said.

In a release, ODOT Resident Engineer Karl Sirmons said Falcon Road will remain open through the construction project with the addition of a pavement widening detour, with traffic narrowed to one lane each direction with a 10-foot width restriction and reduced speed.

Plans for the project also included re-assessing controlled access points from commercial properties and limiting driveway length to prevent visibility issues that can cause collisions.

In addition to making road improvements, ODOT is adding sidewalks on the south side of Falcon Road to increase pedestrian safety near Altus Intermediate School.

Drivers have had to slow down to 25 miles per hour for the last several months while construction continues on Falcon Road. Construction is projected to continue through mid-summer 2018, weather permitting.

In a statement released by the City of Altus, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation reconstruction project has support from the

City of Altus with \$844,977 in matching funds from the city for the \$2.5 million project that utilizes \$1.7 million in federal funds.

That money is planned to fund not only the three-lane widening, a new concrete surface and sidewalk running along the south side of Falcon Road but also includes road shoulders and LED street lights.

Drivers have experienced heavier traffic and reduced lighting during construction. Many have opted to use headlights or other routes to help prevent congestion and visibility issues.

The City of Altus recommended that local traffic only use Falcon Road if necessary and drivers find alternative routes including Tamarack Road, Broadway and A Street, if possible, though access to businesses on Falcon Road will still be available during construction and while ODOT reassesses controlled access points from commercial properties.

Drivers were still able to access the Altus Reservoir from Spurgeon Street and Forrest Street as well as the entrance off North Main Street.

For more information, contact Public Works Director/City Engineer Johnny Barron at 580-481-3518.

STATUS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

well as our military families, and across the board, we grow as a community."

Chism told the council that any city-owned rental property, including the Altus Community Center and any commercial property, would be included in the prohibition; however, only violators would be cited, and that, after first being asked not to smoke.

Pursuing violations of

the amended ordinance would be akin to pursuing a j-walking violation — time-consuming for officers and considered a misdemeanor not committed in an officer's presence — according to Altus Police Chief Tim Murphy, who stated the ordinance is mainly about education rather than enforcement.

While city officials recognized that the amended ordinance is restrictive, they pointed out that it isn't as restrictive as similar state ordinances, which

provide county and municipal governments the right to designate their properties as entirely nonsmoking.

"We hope this achievement will not only encourage us to be more aware of our overall health," Assistant City Manager Matt Wojnowski said, "but to also take steps to improve our own health and motivate others to be healthy."

"There are other things we want to do in the future," Cleveland said. "But for now, this is basic."

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Programs seek to improve quality of life for Altus animals

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
katrina@altustimes.com

With a \$32,000 grant from PetSmart, Altus Animal Welfare Association (AAWA) has sent 179 animals as of April to OK Humane Place in Oklahoma City to be spayed or neutered through Altus Area Spay/Neuter Incentive Program (AASNIP) at no cost to their owners. AAWA plans to spay/neuter 600 animals by January 2019 with the grant.

Though the rescue rate at Altus Animal Shelter increased from 32 percent in 2016 to 48 percent in 2017, according to the shelter's records, Christi Detwiler, treasurer of AAWA, said an overpopulation problem can't be solved with rescue efforts, it has to be solved with prevention.

"Altus Animal Shelter has done so much to rescue out as many animals as they can," Detwiler said. "But prevention is at the front end of the problem."

AASNIP offers a monthly spay/neuter transport for Jackson County dogs and cats. Each AASNIP trip begins at 6:30 a.m. with pet owners and volunteers loading a van of crated pets and ends with groggy, but safe and altered crated pets unloaded and given back to their owners, and the van fills up quickly.

Alyda Richardson of AAWA said the number of animals that are taken on each trip depends on the number of larger dogs they take. Richardson said there is enough space as many as 45 animals on each trip.

Due to the popularity



Courtesy photo | Alison Templar

AASNIP volunteers unload Altus dogs and cats returning home from the OK Humane Place Spay Neuter Clinic in Oklahoma City.

of the program, AAWA began scheduling two trips in March and April — a first for the program — both were full by March 1. They continue to schedule two trips a month.

"The community response really validates the need for a spay and neuter program," Detwiler said.

Because AASNIP does not charge Jackson County residents for this service, Detwiler said it could help Altus resi-

dents save money with the City of Altus.

In January, the Altus City Council approved an amendment to the City Code of Ordinances creating a surrender fee for animals brought to Animal Control. Individuals surrendering an animal defined as altered — spayed or neutered — can expect a \$20 fee, while those surrendering an unaltered animal can expect to pay a \$40 fee.

It also created a licens-

ing program for cats and dogs. Altered animals qualify for an "A" license without a fee, but unaltered animals are classified under a "B" license that must be renewed annually for a \$50 fee. The amendment went into effect on Feb. 5. One month later, Assistant City Manager Matt Wojnowski said more than 110 animals were licensed through Animal Control.

Altus Animal Control officials said the fees are meant to encourage responsible pet ownership

and improve conditions at the Animal Control facility, where an abundance of dogs has continued to be a problem.

In 2016, the Altus Animal Shelter took in 848 dogs and another 851 in 2017, according to statistics from the shelter.

Of the 851 dogs at Altus Animal Shelter in 2017, 544 were stray or abandoned, 225 were surrendered by their owners and the remaining 82 were there from other animal welfare calls, all

within Altus.

The licensing program, according to Wojnowski, is meant to help owners find lost pets and prevent rabies outbreaks because all owner's information is kept with the license information with proof of rabies vaccination from a licensed veterinarian.

For more information, call Animal Control at 580-481-2285. To schedule your pet on an AASNIP trip, call or text 580-471-0392.

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Celebrating 21 Years of Service to Our Community

Worbes may have already faced his most difficult challenge

BY RICK CARPENTER
rick@altustimes.com

Just a few months after the Altus Public Schools Board of Education interviewed and named Roe Worbes as the next superintendent beginning July 1, Worbes faced what his predecessor said will likely be his biggest challenge in the position.

Retiring Superintendent Roger Hill told Worbes that he will likely never face a tougher issue than a teacher strike that lasted eight days for Altus students. The Oklahoma Education Association asked teachers across the state to walk off the job on April 2 if higher teacher salaries and more funding for curriculum and school supplies weren't passed by the state Legislature by April 1.

Altus schools were out on April 2 for Easter vacation but teachers walked out on April 3 and were out until April 13. At the March 12 board meeting, as many as 100 parents and taxpayers showed up at the board meeting in a quiet protest to support the teacher strike. None had scheduled to speak at the meeting (a requirement in Oklahoma) but many carried signs supporting teacher raises.

Local parents had received correspondence from other district superintendents explaining that the administration supported the teachers' right to strike and let them know that they would not receive repercussions from walking out. When one didn't like a response she received from Hill, she posted her feelings on social media and like-minded teacher supporters organized the silent protest.

The protest caught Worbes, who has moved into an assistant super-



WORBES

"Parents felt we weren't doing enough to show our support for the teachers," Worbes said. "We needed to clarify that we supported the teachers. I think that's when the tide turned."

The next day, Worbes met with the administrative team and put together a resolution for the board that stated the district supported the teachers, students, support personnel and the community and said that the district would suspend classes until the district determined that the number of teachers and support personnel were back on the job to safely conduct classes.

At the same time, the district offered free breakfast and lunch to all students who wanted to take advantage of the meals.

The quick action by Worbes and the board received a round of applause from about 150 teachers and supporters after the 5-minute board meeting in the high school cafeteria to vote on the proposal.

At the April board meeting, Hill praised Worbes, the administrative staff and the board for how they dealt with the work stoppage. Barring an emergency later in the school year, the district will not have to make up the days missed.

Worbes grew up on a peanut farm in the Warren area of Jackson County. His family history dates back to before statehood. His mom and sister were teachers and his dad had intended

intendent position and taking over many of Hill's duties, and the board off guard.



Parents and taxpayers hold up signs that show support for a teachers' strike.

to be one, until he went through student teaching. He quickly changed focus and worked for the Department of Human Services for 30 years.

He quickly worked his way up through the district from teacher and coach to principal and assistant superintendent. He's now deputy superintendent and will take the reins of superintendent this summer.

Worbes said other than the strike, the job is going as planned.

"I definitely have a new role with the board," he said. "My role is to keep them as informed as much as possible."

One positive change is that as a new superintendent, he will meet with other new superintendents monthly to discuss how each district handles different situations. It also provides him with a network of peers he can go to seek advice, or for others to come to him.



Roe Worbes participates in the Grate Spelling Bee in April.

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Courtesy photo | The Boeing Company

A KC-46A Pegasus takes flight. Altus Air Force Base, Okla. will be the training base for aircrew of the KC-46.

Coming soon to a base near you: KC-46A Pegasus

BY A1C CODY DOWELL
97th AMW Public Affairs

ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla. — Altus Air Force Base’s priority is to train C-17 Globemaster III and KC-135 Stratotanker aircrew to extend global mobility reach for the U.S. Air Force. In the near future, an aircrew for the soon-to be implemented KC-46A Pegasus will be training here.

The KC-46 will broaden the Air Force’s global reach by providing in-flight refueling capabilities. The new aircraft will enhance overall war-fighting capabilities through secondary missions and maximizing it’s advanced systems to ensure mission success for the

Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and allied countries.

“Since the KC-46 is coming to Altus, there has been an increase in manning to prepare the base,” said U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Darin Dial, operation officer assigned to the 56th Air Refueling Squadron. “The 56th ARS was activated August 2016 and we have been preparing for the KC-46 since then. Nothing is being removed from this base with the addition of this aircraft. The KC-46 will be integrated into the flight schedule of the C-17 and KC-135.”

The KC-46 has the ability to both receive and deliver fuel, which enables it to train with both aircraft at Altus AFB. The KC-46 also has secure

communication, defensive systems, tactical situation awareness system, night vision compatibility, digitally-aided augmented reality taskings and fuel consolidation. These improvements were designed to enhance operation and increase mission effectiveness.

The KC-46 is being acquired as a better equipped tanker. The KC-46 will supplement and operate side by side with the KC-135 for many years to come. This is part of the Air Force’s long term plan for improved tankers in the operational field.

“The KC-135 isn’t going to happen any time soon,” said Dial. “The KC-135 is still a capable aircraft with plenty of

personnel who operate within it. The KC-46 has better capabilities like being able to use boom and a centerline drogue system on the same sortie without needing to land to swap them. A drogue can fuel multiple aircraft at once and is used for a wider range of aircraft usually affiliated with the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps and NATO.”

While being used mainly as a tanker, the KC-46 also has the capacity to transport cargo or passengers.

The KC-46 can be arranged into three different variations. The aircraft just supporting personnel can support 58 passengers regularly and 114 passengers during emergency

airlift operations. In its cargo configuration it can carry up to 18 standard cargo pallets which is the same amount as the C-17 and three times the amount for the KC-135. For the aircraft’s aeromedical evacuation configuration it can assist transporting 54 medical patients and has onboard emergency oxygen and electrical power.

Altus AFB has already been training aircrew of the KC-135 and the C-17 for the mobility Air Force. With the addition of the KC-46 to the base, the capability of extending global mobility reach has increased and allows for better air support for the U.S. military and foreign allies.

Quail Breakfast draws military brass, congressional delegation

BY RICK CARPENTER
rick@altustimes.com

One big takeaway from the 56th Annual Quail Breakfast in Washington D.C. this year was that U.S. Air Force and elected officials representing Oklahoma and other states know how the Altus community engages with the federal government to preserve Altus Air Force Base.

Brian Bush, president and CEO of the Altus Chamber of Commerce, said despite heavy snowfall and the closure of some government offices the week of the breakfast, more than 180 people attended, and 60 of them were Altus residents who flew to Washington for the event.

The event started in 1962 with local hunters shooting quail and taking them to Washington for a breakfast to show the appreciation of the Altus community for having the base located here.

It has since grown into a major event with the quail brought in from companies that raise them for poultry. City officials, members of the Military

Affairs Committee and chamber executives arrive on Tuesday to meet with military officials in the Pentagon. On Wednesday, the groups, including Chamber members who go to the event, meet with Oklahoma’s Congressional delegation as well as staff members. And the actual breakfast is held on Thursday.

On Tuesday, Bush said the Altus delegation met with top Air Force officials including undersecretaries. The group learned that the Air Force and the Military Base Realignment and Closure for U.S. military bases, or BRAC, factors in quality of life issues for Airmen and their families when determining whether to maintain, close or expand a base.

Those quality of life issues include the quality of public education, activities such as parks and recreation and a variety of retail stores and restaurants.

One of the items that city officials were able to point out is that it dealt with a severe drought and solved a low quality water issue. The city provides water to the base and dur-

ing the recent drought the water quality became so bad that it became a key contention between the city and the Air Force.

The city built some redundancies and expanded the capabilities of the Tom Steed Reservoir, Altus’ main water source. It also reopened some water wells in Texas that it owns the water rights to. Now the city has the capabilities of funneling water from Tom Steed to the Altus Reservoir in the middle of Altus. It will become a backup water supply for the city during drought conditions.

Bush said when the Altus delegation met with the congressional delegation and their staffs, they’re interested in what’s happening in strong communities. “We don’t ask for help on things,” Bush said. “We want them to know we count on ourselves to solve problems.”

Attendees at the actual breakfast included the chief of staff of the Air Force, the vice chief of staff and the undersecretary of the Air Force as well as the entire Oklahoma Congressional delegation.

75th Anniversary AAFB celebration, parade planned

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
katrina@altustimes.com

In recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Altus Air Force Base, local organizations are teaming together to provide an Armed Forces Day Parade in Altus on May 19.

The flag of the United States will serve as the Grand Marshal and will be the theme for the parade’s art and decorations. Organizations are invited to participate in the patriotic celebration with a parade entry of decorated floats, horses and vehicles.

An Armed Forces Day Parade Committee has been formed and includes representation from the Altus Chamber of Commerce, the City of Altus and Altus Air Force Base.

“While we joyously celebrate our community’s active duty military and veterans, the parade will not be judged,” the com-

mittee wrote in a prepared statement. “It will be a time of reverence and celebration to acknowledge the sacrifices made by men, women and families for our freedom.”

Main Street Altus hopes to help make the streets as patriotic as possible, Director of Main Street Altus Amy Jo Cobb said. The organization that helps take care of the aesthetics of the Downtown Square is selling red, white and blue bunting for \$30 or \$25 for two or more. Cobb said Main Street Altus will use the profits to buy 75th Anniversary banners that they’ll sell at the end of this year as souvenirs. Cobb is encouraging local businesses to think Americana when planting flowers or decorating their storefronts as the parade approaches.

To order a bunting or reserve a free vendor space at the celebration, contact Cobb at (580) 482-

2277.

The parade begins at 10 a.m. on Main Street at Western Oklahoma State College and proceeds south to Cypress Street.

To get a parade entry form, email Deb Davis at ddavis@altusok.gov or contact the Altus Chamber of Commerce, 301 W. Commerce St.

Altus Air Force Base was originally named Altus Army Airfield when it became operational on Jan. 8, 1943. Initially, it trained new pilots for combat in WWII and the Pacific. Altus has played a significant role in the Strategic Air Command, communications, the C-141 and C-5 airplane fueled by the KC-135 Refueling aircraft. Through seven decades, Altus Air Force Base has remained a stalwart of airlift and air-refueling for the nation’s defense and will soon train pilots for the new KC-46 Pegasus.



Kenneth Scarle | U.S. Air Force
U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jeremy Braswell, 97th Medical Support Squadron commander, pronounces words during the “Grate” Altus Spelling Bee, April 7, 2018, at Western Oklahoma State College, Altus, Okla. The annual event raises awareness and support of literacy in the Jackson County community.

Base helps out as ‘Grate’ Altus Spelling Bee celebrates 20 years

BY KENNETH SCARLE
97th AMW Public Affairs

ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla. — What do the words coulomb, farouche and oligotrophic have in common? They are the words that almost knocked out the two final teams competing in the 20th annual “Grate” Altus Spelling Bee, April 7, 2018. The annual competition held at Western Oklahoma State College supports the Great Plains Literacy Council, a non-profit organization aimed at helping the community in promoting literacy. Two commanders from the 97th Air Mobility Wing took part in this community event. Maj. Nicole Stevens, 97th Contracting Flight commander, served as one of this year’s judges, and Lt. Col. Jeremy Braswell, 97th Medical Support Squadron commander was the pronouncer for the day. Colonel Braswell said he enjoyed the experience, although it wasn’t easy trying to communicate some of those six-syllable words.

“I honestly have to say it was a little nerve-wrack-

ing,” said Braswell. “They are listening to your voice; they’re hearing what your enunciation is. And obviously, we all come from different regions of the United States. As a Southern person, I tried to take down my twang a little bit to make sure I pronounced the words to be recognized as easily as possible.” In the end, Annie Targos, whose husband is a boom operator with the 54th Air Refueling Squadron, helped her team to the win. “I think there was a lot of pressure on us,” said Targos, “mainly because one of my other teammates and I both have Bachelor’s degrees in English.” Their final word for the win was “Baccalaureate.”

10 teams of three took turns attempting to spell words like sclerosis, mitochondria and bantamweight. The participants were sponsored by local organizations whose entrance fees go towards free weekly tutoring for adult learners in reading, writing or speaking English, basic literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) training and materi-

als for volunteer tutors to use. “It is just a phenomenal group whose endeavors in advocating literacy are incredible,” said Braswell. “You know when you look at what they do with adult literacy, and the support to those whose language isn’t primarily English, it’s really [an example of] service before self.” The teams competed at spelling progressively harder words, until it came to the final round with the “Spell Casters,” Targos’ team who were dressed as characters from the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, taking the final word to victory. Everyone showed enthusiasm for the event – from the participants dressing in costume to the crowd cheering them along. “I love that,” Targos said. “I love that I’m able to participate in something I care about. Having my bachelor’s degree in English, obviously literacy is important to me. I know not everyone is afforded the privileges I have had, so I’m happy we could contribute to something that will help others.”



The final product of a cotton gin is a compressed bale of cotton weighing 480 pounds. One 480-pound bale of cotton can produce 217 pairs of jeans or 1,217 men’s T-shirts.

Bumper cotton crop could produce more than 1 million bales

BY RICK CARPENTER
rick@altustimes.com

The executive director of the Oklahoma Cotton Council predicts the state’s cotton crop will surpass the 1 million bale mark by the end of the ginning season on May 10. Harvey Shroeder, executive director of the Oklahoma Cotton Council, said this season’s cotton crop will be the highest in the state since 1933. He credits the additional rainfall with creating a higher yield this year and he predicted farmers will increase the number of acres used for cotton for the 2018 crop. Oklahoma cotton growers are mainly in the southwestern part of the state, roughly from south of Interstate 40 to the state line and west of Interstate 35. Jackson County ranks as the highest cotton producing county in the state, he said. “The two biggest income generators in Jackson County are the Air Force Base and cotton producers,” he said. Shroeder said 580,000 acres will produce the 1 million bales in the 2017 harvest. He predicts farmers will plant between 700,000

and 800,000 acres of cotton in 2018. Farmers plant in May and begin harvesting in October. Cotton gins in the area have been running 24-hours a day since October. He compared this year’s bumper crop with those during the recent drought. He said during the drought, as many as 85 percent of farmers abandoned their crops because of weather conditions. Shroeder said the last time Oklahoma produced more than 1 million bales of cotton, farmers were planting between two and six million acres. What’s changed? Technology, irrigation, fertilizers and improvements to seed capabilities, he said. A check of local cotton gins illustrates this year’s crop numbers. Barney Trammell, manager of the Farmers Coops in Eldorado and Martha, said this year’s crop should produce 108,000 bales compared to 76,000 last year, a 42 percent increase. At the Cotton Growers Coop in Altus, Kenneth Helton reports the gin will process about 200,000 bales of cotton this year, 45,000 more than the coop has ever

produced. He estimated on April 26th that the gin will be running through the middle of May. Helton said many farmers in western Oklahoma are shifting from wheat to cotton because the price of wheat is so low. He said last summer’s rains helped dry-land cotton farmers get a better yield than normal. And as of April 26th, the Humphreys Coop had ginned 112,756 bales of cotton compared to 93,500 last year and the gin still had 349 modules to process. All four gins reported record production this year, which should be a boom for area retailers. Cotton was selling for roughly 80 cents a pound on April 26th. A normal bale of cotton weighs about 480 pounds. The quality of each bale of cotton varies, but doing the math, an average bale at 480 pounds priced at 80 cents per pound would bring a cotton grower about \$384 per bale. If the 1 million bale estimate becomes a reality, that’ll put \$384 million into the Oklahoma economy. The gins in the Altus area, just including the four mentioned above, total more than 421,000 bales worth close to \$162 million.

Workshop to focus on food insecurity in Oklahoma

BY TRISHA GEDON
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Despite living in one of the richest countries in the world, about 15 percent of the population in the United States deals with food insecurity on a regular basis. Unfortunately, one in four Oklahoma children do not have enough food to eat and are routinely hungry. To help bring light to this situation, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension and OSU’s Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture are presenting Hunger and Horticulture in the U.S. This informative workshop is slated May 22 at the Robert M. Kerr Food and Agricultural Products Center on the OSU campus, 12:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. Mike Schnelle, OSU Cooperative Extension specialist, said the workshop will focus on a variety of topics designed to address this issue. “There are more than 6 million households that need assistance from a food pantry one or more times per year. In the Oklahoma City Public Schools, more than 84 percent of children receive free or reduced cost school meals,” Schnelle said. “It will take people from all walks of life to solve this dilemma. This workshop is bring-



Courtesy photo | Scott Warman
Oklahoma currently ranks 10th in difficulty accessing affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.

ing together industry and university specialists who will focus on horticultural yields, as well as how fresh produce and dietary practices can improve the quality of life for our state’s residents.” It is not simply a matter of not having enough healthy food to eat. Hunger issues in the U.S. also lead to associations with diabetes, depression, heart disease, obesity and pregnancy complications. Oklahoma currently ranks 10th in difficulty accessing affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. The informative workshop will cover topics including youth hunger and what we can do about it, the role of the federal nutrition programs and local efforts in creating food access, hunger relief gardening, Plant a Row for the Hungry, how being over-

fed and undernourished contributes to the obesity epidemic, Oklahoma orchards, increasing access to healthy foods and a review of specific populations and their struggle with hunger. “We are a nation ripe with knowledge on food production and we need to put this information to better use to better meet the needs of our population,” Schnelle said. “Because hunger affects all of society, either directly or indirectly, this workshop will be informative for anyone interested in this topic.” Workshop registration is \$30 by May 11. No late registrations or walk-ins can be accepted so early registration is encouraged. For additional information, please contact Stephanie Larimer at 405-744-5404 or visit www.hortla.okstate.edu/events.



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Oklahoma Market Garden School helping fruit and vegetable producers bloom

BY LEILANA MCKINDRA
leilana.mckindra@okstate.edu

The Oklahoma Market Garden School isn't exactly a secret. It's been around for 10 years. But for growers interested in the latest and greatest inside scoop on the management, production and marketing of fruit and vegetable crops, the school just might provide a few secrets to success.

Targeting both new and experienced growers, the curriculum focuses on a wide range of topics such as getting organized, soils and fertilizer management, crop establishment and irrigation, production guidelines for fruit and vegetable crops, season extension, pest management, food safety and marketing.

This year, specialists and experts from Oklahoma State University, Langston University, Noble Research Institute and the Oklahoma Wheat Commission shared their knowledge with participants.

The chance to learn something new is what attracted Ben Coffin of Guthrie to the course.

"It's always good to learn some new things from different people," said Coffin, who has fruit trees and grows numerous vegetable crops, which he has been selling at farmer's markets in Guthrie and Edmond for the past 5 years. He also uses what he produces in his catering business.

"I've already picked up a few ideas of different ways, some of the information around soils and the different methods of how to build up your soil organically," he said.

Micah Anderson, Langston Extension horticulture educator and a course presenter, said even experienced growers will discover new techniques, strategies and knowledge through the class.

"Even though they have experience, they can understand more about what they're doing and get a better handle on what they're doing," Anderson said.



Courtesy photo
Micah Anderson, a horticulture Extension educator at Langston, demonstrates a planting technique during a session of the Oklahoma Market Garden School.

Experienced or not, the school has something for everyone.

Backyard gardener Nichelle Tipton of Oklahoma City, who was attending the course with her mother, also was drawn to the course for the knowledge she could gain.

"Anytime they're doing anything on any type of vegetable, we go to that. We always learn something new," said Tipton, who pointed out she'd recently picked up a tip from another course participant about growing potatoes. "We'd been wanting to try growing potatoes in

something other than just digging them up and destroying your potatoes. I'd seen what she talked about on Pinterest, so it's just getting ideas on how to grow things differently."

Meanwhile, Langston junior agricultural business major Alisa Sims said when she heard about the class and learned she could take it for free, she jumped at the opportunity.

"Growing up, my mother basically was always outside gardening and I was never interested in gardening until now," she said.

Though she doesn't yet have

space to apply all she's learned through the course, Sims has been helping Anderson with some cabbage trials ongoing at Langston and this summer she will be participating in horticulture research on plasticulture at OSU.

Beyond doing a deep dive into successfully growing vegetables and fruits, the school also does some important work on broader levels.

"One thing I get excited about is the thought that people can basically become independent small business people based on what they learn in this school. That could be in an urban environment or it could be in a rural environment," said Lynn Brandenberger, OSU Cooperative Extension horticulture food crops specialist. "There's a tremendous amount of potential there, particularly for young people. In this part of the food business, we can start out really small and then grow."

Brandenberger, who is one of the specialists leading the course at Langston, partnered with Steve Upson, former OSU Cooperative Extension horticulture specialist and current senior consultant with the Noble Research Institute, to develop the school a decade ago.

He explained while agronomic crops like corn, wheat and soybeans, require major investments in equipment and lots of acreage to be profitable, raising vegetables and fruits is very doable with less equipment and land.

"They can start with a shovel, rake and hoe and get going," he said. "They're not going to make their living the first year like that, but they could actually start that small, learn how to do it and then grow. So, I think this has tremendous potential for small business growth, I really do."

Anderson also sees the school as a good way of breaking down cultural barriers.

"Everybody's got to eat," he said. "It doesn't matter what col-

or people are or what nationality, they can all relate to a garden and agriculture. There's no barriers when you're talking about farming and gardening."

Langston's focus on horticulture is new – Anderson has been in his present position since November – and this is the first time the Historically Black College/University has hosted the course.

He provided shuttle service from the university's Oklahoma City campus hoping to entice a different audience to the course.

"With Langston being involved, we're able to bring in another group of people that normally hadn't been coming," Anderson said. "Running a bus down to Langston's Oklahoma City campus means we're able to bring in some people in the inner-city and urban gardeners who normally probably wouldn't have come to a regular session they've had in the past."

Ultimately, Brandenberger believes the school is crucial to enterprising fruit and vegetable growers, but has plenty of implications for nongrowers as well, given the strong emphasis on eating healthier. Initiatives like this course also help inject diversity into the food production system.

"It's a key aspect of producing food locally for people to have it available for them locally," he said. "We need to be a more diversified system where we've got things being produced all across the country. Weather events and other events could happen and really interrupt the production of food in specific areas of the country. If it's much more diverse, the system is a lot more robust and can handle things that might come up."

The Oklahoma Market Garden School has been offered at least once a year since 2008. Plans are underway to develop an electronic version of the course.

For more information about the school, contact the nearest local county OSU Extension office.

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U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds perform in Altus

The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds performed at the Altus Air Force Base on Sept. 9, 2017. The demonstration team performed a series of maneuvers during the one-hour display of the capabilities of the F-16 Fighting Falcon. Thousands of people flooded the base to see the show. The Thunderbirds appear in Altus for a show ever three to five years. Residents were able to watch much of the show during the days leading up to the big show as the pilots practiced maneuvers.



BASH team works to minimize bird damage to Air Force aircraft

BY RICK CARPENTER
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As spring approaches and birds begin to migrate north, a unique crew at Altus Air Force Base monitors their movements to minimize damage to aircraft and build safety for airmen and the community through a program known as Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard or BASH.

Drought damages local crops but also minimizes bird habitats. Fewer bird habitats can help reduce the risk of airplanes striking birds.

If you saw the movie “Sully” with Tom Hanks portraying Capt. Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, you saw that birds sucked into jet engines can damage or even destroy engines. On US Airways flight 1549 on Jan. 15, 2009, Sully had to act quickly when a flock of geese destroyed both engines of his aircraft and he had to use gliding techniques to land the airplane on the Hudson River in what has been named “the miracle on the Hudson.”

Since the Air Force began keeping track of wildlife and airplane mishaps in 1993, there have been 38 Class A mishaps that have destroyed 16 aircraft and killed 29 airmen. A Class A mishap involves doing at least \$2 million in damage to an aircraft and/or causing loss of life. And in a 21-year study from fiscal year 1995 through fiscal year 2016, there were 91,060 wildlife strikes causing \$600 million in damage. Most of the strikes were from birds.

In the same study, Canadian geese, black vultures and American white pelicans caused the most dam-



KOHLER

Canadian geese spend their winters in the area, according to Adam Kohler, a wildlife biologist who provides animal and plant health inspection services for the United States Department of Agriculture to Altus Air Force Base.

“Their size/flock tendency makes them one of the most dangerous species as large birds in large numbers presents the highest potential for catastrophic damage,” said Kohler, who heads the BASH team at the base.

Kohler said the Air Force depends on him to determine the threat of wildlife species to aircraft at the base and to implement programs to minimize the chance of having wildlife strikes. He monitors wildlife migration from sunup to sundown, with the beginning and ending of the sunlight providing the most active times of wildlife movement, he said.

As a USDA employee, he works with three areas of the Air Force on base: the 97th Mobility Wing Safety Office, the 97th Air Mobility Wing Medical Operations Squadron’s Bio-environmental Engineering Flight and the 97th Air Mobility Wing Civil Engineering Squadron’s Test Management Flight which provides entomological, or insect, expertise on base.

When he sees a need that fits in one of the areas, he taps the leader of that group to help with the is-

age. Geese migrate through the Altus area mainly in the fall and spring but many



Courtesy of 97th AMW Wing Safety Division
This illustrates the damage a bird can cause on the wing of an airplane.

sue.

Kohler said he looks at what attracts birds or other wildlife to an area and through BASH efforts, the team uses habitat modification as the best way to minimize their interest in migrating through the base. The team helps eliminate standing water, controls grass height and removes food-bearing plant species such as fruit trees. It also uses sprays to eliminate bugs and plants that might attract birds and other animals.

The team even installs anti-perching devices, such as bird spikes on poles, to dissuade birds from landing near the base in another passive way of keeping birds out of the area.

In a more active approach, the team uses pyrotechnics, propane noise canons and, in some cases, traps to relocate birds, particularly raptors such as hawks and falcons, which

prey on smaller birds and animals.

“The most important method (to preventing wildlife encounters) lies in making the base as inhospitable and unattractive to wildlife as possible,” Kohler said.

He said hazards range from as large as a deer to as small as starlings which could potentially cause a problem with a large flock. By fencing Air Force bases, it minimizes the chance of having deer or other large animals on the runways.

Kohler, who took over responsibilities at Altus Air Force Base two months ago after spending two years working at JFK airport in Queens, New York, said in those two plus years, he’s only recorded four animal strikes, none classified as catastrophic.

And he points out strikes don’t just cause problems to jet engines, with the speed the jets fly even small

birds can cause window, instrument, wing and fuselage damage to aircraft.

Dr. Joe Leverett, an Altus medical doctor who also serves on the Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission, said the biggest bird problems in Altus have to do with geese and pigeons. He said birds caused an estimated \$1.4 million in damage to aircraft at Altus Air Force Base last year.

He said he’s seen photos of pigeon feces covering a blue tarp draped over an aircraft in an aircraft maintenance hangar at the base. And, he said geese wintering at the Altus Reservoir have raised the E. coli level in the reservoir to a point that the city needs to address it as a health issue.

City and base officials hope to meet with Kohler and possibly other USDA officials to determine how the three groups can work

together to relocate the geese and reduce the number of pigeons in the area.

Since the majority of strikes occur during sunrise and sunset and at less than 500-feet elevation, Leverett said bird migration affects the local mission at the base. Since the majority of bird strikes occur during takeoff and landing, he said during peak migration periods of spring and fall, pilots don’t fly at Altus Air Force Base for an hour near sunrise and sunset.

In case you think birds are only a problem at low elevations, the Air Force has documented pilots striking birds as high as 15,000-feet.

The Air Force may use current bird strike statistics to determine where to locate future bases. Leverett and Kohler said the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission probably doesn’t use wildlife strike statistics in its decision to close bases because of the immense cost of the infrastructure in place at existing facilities.

Since most airfields, such as Altus Air Force Base, pre-date the research, the USDA utilizes the Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard team to minimize the chances of avian bird strikes.

“The BASH program at Altus is important for the safety of our aircrews, our community, Air Force assets and preventing the additional use of taxpayer dollars to cover the costs of damage,” said 2nd Lt. Stuart Thrift, a public affairs officer with the 97th Air Mobility Wing at Altus Air Force Base.

(This story originally ran in The Altus Times on March 17, 2018.)

National swim group honors Wiginton for outstanding service

BY RYAN LEWIS
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When it comes to high school swimming in Oklahoma, there are few names as recognized as the long-tenured head coach of the Altus High School swimming teams.

The National Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association Awards Committee took notice and recently, Linda Wiginton was selected to receive the 2019 NISCA Outstanding Service Award.

Wiginton's career has spanned 37 years and has featured three state championship titles in boys swimming. All three of those titles have come since 2010, the first year the Bulldogs were not required to swim against much larger schools.

Wiginton said classifying the teams helped Altus a great deal.

"From 1981 to 2009, we had no classes in Oklahoma high school swimming," Wiginton said. "Still, we always qualified individuals and relays for State in a field of 45 teams."

In 2009, the Bulldogs finished



Linda Wiginton

fifth, but with the new system in place just one year later, the team won it all. Since then, the Bulldogs have won it two additional times with back-to-back titles in 2015 and 2016. The Bulldogs also finished runners-up in 2011 and 2014, placed third in 2012 and 2013, fifth in 2018 and seventh in 2017.

The journey for the Lady Bulldogs has been a bit different.

Although Wiginton has had a number of talented Lady Bulldog swimmers, a state champi-

onship has always been just out of reach for the team. The closest the Lady Bulldogs have come to a state title was when they finished runners-up in 2011. The Lady Bulldogs have since gone on to finish fifth in 2016 and 2018, sixth in 2017, eighth in 2013 and 2015 and 18th in 2014.

Even without a state title to their name, the Lady Bulldogs have been in the hunt almost every year since 2009.

There's something to be said for the amount of success Wiginton has had since developing the swimming program in 1981. She has compiled a 649-110-4 record as the boys' coach and a 610-176-2 record as the girls' coach and continues to lead one of the most consistent programs in Oklahoma.

In 2014, the Oklahoma Secondary Schools Activities Association adopted the regional format. The Bulldogs won three consecutive Regional championships from 2014 to 2016, finished fourth in 2017 and third this year. Additionally, in 33 years, the Bulldogs have won 30 conference titles.

The Lady Bulldogs have ex-

perienced similar success, finishing fifth at Regionals in 2014 and second every year since. The Lady Bulldogs have won 10 invitationals and have won 28 conference titles in the past 33 years.

For her efforts, Wiginton has been recognized both locally and nationally as a top coach in high school swimming. In April 2016, the Altus City Pool's name was changed to the Linda Wiginton Aquatic Center, further cementing her legacy in Altus.

Her prestigious career has earned her many top honors. In 2003, Wiginton was a top eight finalist in Las Vegas for the National High School Athletic Coaches Association's Oklahoma female Coach of the Year. Just three years later, in 2006, she won the award.

In 2014, she was the National Federation of State High School Association's Southwest Sectional Oklahoma boys Coach of the Year award winner. In 2015, she was recognized as the NFHS National Boys Coach of the Year.

In 2016, she was named the Oklahoma Coaches Associa-

tion's Coach of the Year and was a top eight finalist for the National High School Athletic Coaches Association's Coach of the Year award.

Wiginton is not one to boast about the honors she has received and said that more than anything, she does it for the children.

"I am truly blessed," Wiginton said. "Throughout my career, I have tried to inspire my athletes to develop the swimming skills necessary to compete successfully while encouraging them to become moral and productive citizens for the future. I try to model exemplary behavior for them by not cheating, leading by example, being self-disciplined and truly caring for them as individuals."

Wiginton will be presented with the award at the 2019 Women's Swimming and Diving Championships which will be held in Austin, Texas, in March of next year.

Her name will also be displayed at the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.



Courtesy photo

A rendering of the City of Altus Splashpad. The major difference between the photo and the actual splash pad are three pavilions, two on either side and one centered in the middle.

Splash pad to make a splash in Altus

BY RYAN LEWIS
ryan@altustimes.com

Once the stifling summer heat moves into Oklahoma, children and adults alike find it nearly impossible to stay cool while doing fun outside activities. The pool at the Linda Wiginton Aquatic Center provides relief from the heat and so does Lake Altus-Lugert. But what is there for those who cannot afford a trip to the pool or lake?

Splash pads have become a big thing in recent years. They're popping up in cities both large and small, but they have been noticeably absent from Altus. After much discussion and planning, Altus Parks and Recreation has added Altus to the growing list of cities with its very own splash pad.

The City of Altus Splashpad, a 3,800-square-foot aquatic play area, will find its home on the west side of the Altus City Gym at 601 E. Katy Dr. sometime this summer, said Altus Parks and Recreation Director Christopher Griffith.

"We looked at several different locations," Griffith said, "everyone wants to see one go in at the reservoir, that's a given, but we're in the process right now with planning at the reservoir and we just wanted to get one built. With the pattern of use that Missile Park has and in addition to serving one of our more underserved areas in the community, we decided that this was a really good fit for the first splash pad."

The decision to bring a

splash pad to Altus was an easy one for all those involved in the process. Griffith said it was a desire to see Altus progress, both from citizens and the city government, that made the \$150,000 project a reality.

"Splash pads are a big trend right now," Griffith said. "The process began with a desire from some citizens and council members to see us have a low-cost aquatic option for all the children in Altus. One of the things that people noticed over time was that Altus was getting left behind and so they wanted to see some of those amenities that were coming to Lawton or Wichita Falls or some surrounding areas. So the city itself, both the citizens and city government, decided it was time

to start catching up and a splash pad seemed like a great place to start."

Ground has been broken at the site of the future splash pad and Griffith said the only thing stalling construction at the moment is a three-week wait for equipment. Once construction begins, the splash pad will be fully functional within a few months.

Griffith also said there is no set season for the opening and closing of a splash pad, especially when Oklahoma weather is considered.

"The nice thing about splash pads," Griffith said, "is that because they don't require staff, like a regular swimming pool, your season can be a lot longer. You can run anywhere from as

soon as it gets warm, like in April, until October. Oklahoma City closes theirs on Halloween."

In addition to the play area, the site will also have three separate shaded pavilions with picnic tables for people to relax as the children have fun in the sun.

The splash pad itself will have 23 ground spray features, 11 above ground features and nine action-reaction which are things like canons, spinning objects or dumping buckets.

As for the water itself, Griffith said there are two types of splash pads, pass-through and recirculating. Altus is opting for the pass-through splash pad as it is more cost efficient since the recirculating option requires chemicals to keep

the water sanitized. "The concern in Altus is the drought," Griffith said, "there was a drought here for 10 years, but this splash pad is very economical in how it uses water. It only sprays what it needs to, it only sprays when it needs to because it's user activated and we also get to set parameters for when the splashpad is open. You can't just walk up to it and activate it at three o'clock in the morning."

As for overcrowding at the hip new splashpad, Griffith said City of Altus staff will monitor the splash pad throughout the day but will mostly allow the crowd to self-regulate. Should any problems arise, however, Griffith said staff will work closely with the Altus Police Department.



Courtesy photo | Amy Cobb

From left, Tabitha Armstrong, Emmy Cobb and Gracee Bates signed on to play basketball for the Western Oklahoma State College Lady Pioneers. The three seniors began their careers at Navajo as freshmen and helped the team to an 8-18 season. They led the Lady Indians to a 24-5 season during their senior years, just falling short of the Class 2A State Championship tournament.

Navajo trio headed to Western

BY RYAN LEWIS
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There was never any denying the talent level of the Navajo High School girls basketball team. The team, led by seniors Emmy Cobb, Tabitha Armstrong and Gracee Bates, finished 24-5 this past season, suffering two of those losses in the Area Championships to end their season.

All eyes were refocused on the team’s three seniors. Each had offers to continue playing basketball or softball at the collegiate level, but what remained a mystery was which college they would choose. In the end, the decision was made by all three to sign on to play basketball at Western Oklahoma State College.

The three standout senior athletes already have something going for them as Lady Pioneers. They have been teammates for years and so the familiarity with each other and the chemistry between the three is something that is already well-established. The transition from high school basketball to college basketball is not an easy one, but by signing locally, Cobb, Armstrong and Bates can either fall

back on each other or their families as they navigate the life of a college student.

Cobb said one of the biggest factors in her decision was location.

“This is home,” Cobb said. “I got a lot of offers but I was kind of just waiting until the Western coach said something to me. I was hoping I could play here. It’s just a good start for me and it feels good knowing that all my hard work doesn’t have to come to an end — that this is just the beginning. It was always a dream of mine but I never knew that I would actually get a chance to play college basketball.”

Cobb wasn’t the only player to feel that way. Armstrong and Bates said that proximity to home was a leading factor in them choosing Western as well.

All three bring an ability to shoot the ball well with each girl shooting over 40 percent during their final season at Navajo. Cobb led the Lady Indians with 15.3 points per game on 42.4 percent shooting. Bates was second with 11.6 points per game on 52.6 percent shooting and Armstrong added 10 points per game on 40.7 percent shooting.

Armstrong also said she

never thought she would get the chance to play college basketball.

“It means the world to me,” Armstrong said. “I’m just so blessed that the coach saw potential in me. To be honest, I didn’t think I’d get to play because I thought, ‘I’m good but I never thought I was that good,’ so it’s a really great feeling to get this opportunity. Not many people get this chance.”

Western basketball coach Eddie Broughton Sr. said all three could contribute to the team immediately and that it’s all about how seriously they take this opportunity.

Playing under the leadership of Broughton is another reason the three chose Western. Broughton has been rebuilding the Lady Pioneers since he took the program over two years ago. Each year, the team has gotten better and the hope is that the team will be better than ever with the help of Cobb, Armstrong and Bates.

Bates said she hopes to learn a lot from Broughton and that she is dedicated to doing whatever it takes to be a contributing member of the team.

“I hope to learn life lessons,” Bates said. “He’s

that type of coach who’s going to push you and wants to see you excel. I plan to work hard, motivate the other girls and stay positive. I want to encourage them and make sure their confidence is up. I want to be a leader in that area.”

Meanwhile, Armstrong said hopes to become more confident as she plays under Broughton, and Cobb said she is an encouraging person who is confident in her shooting and will bring that and good energy to the team. She also said she hopes to take her game to the next level and learn how to work with people she has never worked with before.

All three girls acknowledge that it was coaches David Doss and Terry Gilbert who helped them get to where they are today.

Cobb said Doss was always there to help.

“Coach Doss believes in me,” Cobb said. “I would mess up a lot but he would never bring me down. We’re all really close and I’m going to miss that about Navajo.”

Armstrong echoed Cobb’s sentiments and said that Doss is one of the best coaches anybody could have.

“Let me tell you about

Coach Doss,” Armstrong said. “Coach Doss got me to where I am today. All of his drills, his nagging and his hard-work coaching, if they were to give out a best coach award, he would definitely get it.”

The rebuilding of the Lady Pioneers roster began before last season when Broughton retained only three of his athletes and began recruiting others.

Bates said being a part of that is another thing that drew her to Western.

“I think they have a good program,” Bates said. “It’s being rebuilt and I would really like to be a part of something like that. I didn’t really ever think I’d have a chance until last year. I always just played because I love basketball and now it’s just continuing something that I love to do.”

The good thing about choosing Western is, all three girls will be able to see their former coaches and classmates whenever they want. For the hometown trio, it also means their coaches and classmates will get a chance to continue watching them progress in their careers.

Although Cobb, Armstrong and Bates are ready

for the challenge college basketball presents, they will have to do it without the help of their lucky chicken — the Lady Indians’ unofficial mascot this past season.

“We wanted to decorate the locker room,” Cobb said, “because we wanted to try something different. Coach Doss gave us a limit and so Gracee, Tab, Kalee (Cross), and I went to Walmart and spent \$200 dollars on random things. I was walking by and said, ‘Hey, let’s get this chicken.’ It’s just a decorative chicken and so we got it and brought it with us to our games; it was our good luck charm.”

But the chicken met its end after a loss at the Area tournament.

“The last game we lost,” Cobb said, “Reese said it was time to break the chicken. It was pretty much falling apart anyway and so she threw it against the ground and it shattered all over the place and we each got a piece to take home.”

Now the trio is headed to Western and will do whatever it takes to make the Lady Pioneers a threat in Region II of the National Junior College Athletic Association.

Baseball gets OK Kids treatment

BY RYAN LEWIS
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Last year, the decision was made to transition Altus’ recreational softball league to OK Kids in an effort to entice southwest Oklahoma communities to register their teams in Altus and to keep local girls

playing softball locally.

The result of the transition was a success and this year is shaping up to be even better for city league softball.

Velocity HeadCoach Joey Stengell said OK Kids helped raise the competition level and helped young girls from the area

gain statewide exposure.

“It went well,” Stengell said, “we were able to send five total teams to state tournaments. There was an 8-and-under team, two 10U and two 12U teams. So it went well. They’re learning so they took their lumps, but at least now we’re in that process so

that we can represent Altus.”

The idea behind the transition last year was to help boost the competitiveness of local softball and to help develop average softball players into exceptional softball players. The belief is that the development will help the players as they become junior high and high school athletes, thus making the Altus Public Schools’ softball programs more competitive.

But the transition also helps the local economy as outside teams come to Altus to play and spend money at local eateries.

Altus Parks and Recreation Supervisor Michael Shive said the department has spent a lot of time and effort into making the program appealing for other communities.

“We have been putting a lot of work into our fields here,” Shive said. “We got a very positive response about the softball program going to OK Kids. We really like the idea of OK Kids as it allows us to send teams to represent our community at the state level.”

One of the changes made to the program was raising the registration fee from \$25 to \$50, but in return, the gate entry fee has been eliminated.

All the money made from registration and concessions goes back into the program to help continue building what is quickly becoming a big deal in southwest Oklahoma.

Stengell said it is showing in registrations. He said that teams that typically play elsewhere, mostly due to a program’s affiliation with OK Kids, have now decided to play in Altus. That includes an Elk City team even though Elk City’s recreation league has been affiliated with OK Kids for quite some time.

“Teams that usually go to Elk City are coming here,” Stengell said. “Navajo is coming here, Mangum is thinking about coming here and we may even have a team from Elk City come here. It’s working the way it was designed, to have people who play in other communities come here to play instead. The competitiveness of the league is going to improve, the numbers should improve and it will give more kids in this area a chance to go and represent Altus in state tournaments.”

In preparation for the upcoming season, Shive said the Altus Parks and Recreation staff has been busy repairing approximately 100 sprinklers, setting up new trash cans to

help with the bee problem of recent years and tending to the fields.

Shive said the program will change even more this year with a new addition.

“After the very positive response from softball,” Shive said, “we had several people from the baseball side asking if we would be transitioning to OK Kids for baseball and we are.”

The program will work in the same way the softball program does, where baseball players will have an opportunity to play in a more competitive league and hopefully go on to represent Altus at state tournaments.

Stengell said he has heard word from many players who are excited about the upcoming change.

“We wanted to see how softball went,” Stengell said, “and if it went well, which I think it did, we were going to do baseball too. The baseball guys are excited. There are some teams that played in the Shortgrass League that are now able to play in Altus instead of their own league.”

For more information on the programs offered by the City of Altus, visit playaltus.com or contact Altus Parks and Recreation at 580-481-2266.



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WICHITA MOUNTAINS WILDLIFE REFUGE



Courtesy Photo
‘Texas longhorn grazing on protected land at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge.

Tours offer environmental learning experience

BY KATRINA GOFORTH
katrina@altustimes.com

East of Altus located near Cache and Lawton, the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is a popular outdoor recreation area in southwest Oklahoma. It spans more than 59,000 acres and is home to free-range buffalo, Texas Longhorn cattle, elk, deer and prairie dogs.

Traveling from Altus on U.S. Highway 62, take Highway 115 (Cache exit) north to the Refuge gate. Once inside the refuge, you can take a quick stop at the Visitor Center and learn about the area before making your way through the refuge.

For those who like to spend a lot of time in nature, the refuge offers

campsites, hiking and biking trails, lakes, fishing, rock climbing and rappelling, and picnic areas for people and pets, open from dawn to dusk.

But if you and your family would like to learn more about the plant and animal life as well as the history of the area, you might want to sign up for one of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge tours.

In May, you can sign up for the Wildflower Walk held on Saturday, May 12, 19 and 26 at 10 a.m. This is a bus tour with a moderate hike.

In June, you can sign up for the Wildlife Tour held on Saturday, June 9 and 23 at 5:30 p.m. and June 16 at 6:30 a.m. This is a bus tour.

All tours leave from

the Visitor Center at Highway 49 and 115 inside the refuge.

The Friends of the Wichitas, a non-profit organization, lead over 50 guided tours each year to promote environmental education. Their tours are limited to six people per reservation and there is no restroom access on the tours. Children must be at least 8 years old and wheelchair access is available if requested at the time of the tour reservation.

To make a reservation or for additional information, visit www.fws.gov/refuge/Wichita_Mountains or call 580-429-3222.

Information provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Travel Oklahoma.

Griffith looking to shake up the status quo

BY RYAN LEWIS
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The City of Altus Parks and Recreation department has made more of an effort in recent years to get involved in activities around the city during the summer months and the biggest proof of that came with the July 4th festival held last summer.

Last year’s inaugural American Spirit Festival and Spirit Sprint Triathlon was a success when 53 participants converged on the Linda Wiginton Aquatic Center to compete in the July 4th weekend event. This year, the city has bigger plans for the event and will also feature a children’s triathlon on June 30 followed by the Spirit Sprint Triathlon on July 1 and a fireworks show at night to cap off the festival.

After the success of last year’s fireworks show, Altus Parks and Recreation Director Christopher Griffith is bringing back Arc Pyrotechnics this year and said he expects the show to be even bigger.

“They’re going to be bigger and better than they were last year,” Griffith said. “Arc Pyrotechnics worked for me in different cities before I came here. They’re the same group that does Lawton’s big fireworks show and they’re world class. They did the fireworks and pyrotechnic work for the movie ‘I Can Only Imagine’ and they do all the fireworks for OSU. They’re a really great company and they’re great to work

with.”

With the festival there will also be live music again and food vendors. The festival coincides with Parks and Recreation month and Griffith said the department will be putting on special events throughout the city to celebrate that as well.

“One of the things we’re really excited about doing is adult game night,” Griffith said. “What that is, is an opportunity to have an adult beverage and play some games like Giant Jenga and Plinko, just something for people to come out and have fun. We might have a movie that night as well and it’ll be out at the golf course.”

In addition, the Parks and Recreation department has taken over the Movies in the Park summertime event which will feature eight movies between April and October. The first movie, Star Wars The Last Jedi, played at Hightower Park at 121 N. Park Lane on April 27. Future listings will be available on the Parks and Recreation Facebook page.

For the new and improved Movies in the Park, the Parks and Recreation department went all out, acquiring a 20-foot movie screen and partnering with Sonic Drive-In to provide a better experience for all those who wish to join in the fun.

Also coming to Altus will be an aviation camp in June. Griffith said the camp will feature lots of stuff for children to do that will be both fun and

educational.

“They’re going to learn about different types of aviation,” Griffith said. “They’re going to get to launch model rockets, do some gliders and get in some simulators and things like that.”

The Parks and Recreation department is also looking into hosting a seasonal run challenge.

“It would be an opportunity for people to do different lengths of runs,” Griffith said. “We’d have a spring run, a summer run, a fall run and a winter run. It’d be a way for people to say they ran a race in each season or even as a prep for the triathlon.”

Of course, there will also be swimming lessons held at the Linda Wiginton Aquatic Center and the pool will be open for public use. Griffith said the slides are in the process of being refinished in preparation for the summer season.

The goal has been for the department to reach out and be more active in the community and Griffith said that has been his approach since he came aboard in 2016.

“We’re really excited,” Griffith said. “Something that was stressed pretty heavily to me when I interviewed was that it’s not just youth sports. Youth sports is very important it’s always going to be a part of the identity of Parks and Recreation here in Altus, but we want to expand that out because Parks and Recreation is about so much more. We want to shake up the status quo.”

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SUMMER EVENTS CALENDAR

The Altus Public Library will host **Story Time for Pre-schoolers** on Wednesdays during the summer from 10:30 - 11 a.m. The event is free. For more information, contact 580-477-2890 or visit www.spls.lib.ok.us/altus.html.

The Altus Public Library will host **Making LEGO Creations** on Saturday, May 12 from 3 - 4 p.m. at the library at 421 Hudson St. The event is free and open to children ages 6 - 10. For more information, contact 580-477-2890 or visit www.spls.lib.ok.us/altus.html.

The **Shortgrass Arts & Humanities Council** is hosting **An Enchanted Evening** in the ballroom of the Days Inn of Altus at 2804 N. Main St. The event is scheduled to begin at 6:30 - 11 p.m. on Friday, May 18. The event will feature performances by Men4Music, Donna Tucker & Just Call Us, soloist Melissa Ward and special guest Bryson Peterson, recent star of Tarzan the Musical and Hello Dolly! For more information, call 580-477-1616 or visit www.facebook.com/ShortgrassAltus.

The Knights of Columbus will host the **Knights of Columbus Charity Golf Tournament** on Saturday, May 19 at 9:30 a.m. at the Quartz Mountain Golf Course at 22469 Lodge Road in Lone Wolf. The event is \$60 per player of \$240 per team and all proceeds will benefit the Center of Family Love and other charitable causes. For more information, contact 316-259-2922 or e-mail pistolerpete@yahoo.com

The Altus Chamber of Commerce will host the **Armed Services Day Parade** on Saturday, May 19 from 10 a.m. - noon in celebration of the 75th anniversary of Altus Air Force Base. The parade is free and open to the public and will begin at Western Oklahoma State College and end at Cypress Street. For more information, contact 580-482-0210 or visit www.altuschamber.com.



This photo from last year’s race shows the starting point of the triathlon. The 2nd annual American Spirit Festival begins on Sunday, July 1 with the triathlon at the Linda Wiginton Aquatic Center.

The Altus Public Library will host **WONDERjam** on Saturday, May 19 from 10:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the library at 421 Hudson St. The event is free and open to all children and will feature hands-on instruments made from found objects with a marble run that the children can build. Some of the pieces of the marble run have musical pieces on them to enhance the musical theme. For more information, contact 580-477-2890 or visit www.spls.lib.ok.us/altus.html.

The **Altus Christian Academy** summer program for children kindergarten through 6th grade (completed) begins June 4 and runs through Aug. 3 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. Monday-Friday. For more information call 580-477-2511 or visit www.altuschristian.org.

The Western Trail Historical Society is hosting **Oklahoma’s Vernacular Architecture from the Easel of John Womack** on Thursday, June 7 at 6:30 - 8 p.m. at

the Museum of the Western Prairie located at 1100 Memorial Drive. The event is free and open to the public and will feature images of vernacular structures from across Oklahoma and pen-and-ink drawings created by Womack from a Route 66 series he created in celebration of Oklahoma’s centennial. For more information, contact 580-482-1044 or visit www.facebook.com/MuseumWesternPrairieAltusOK.

The Altus Public Library will host **Making LEGO Creations** on Saturday, June 16 from 3 - 4 p.m. at the library at 421 Hudson St. The event is free and open to children ages 3 - 7. For more information, contact 580-477-2890 or visit www.spls.lib.ok.us/altus.html.

Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute – June 9-24

The Western Trail Historical Society and the “Good Guys” from the AHS Class of 1977 will host **Concert in the Courtyard** with Rhonda Milton Hampton and

Friends on Wednesday, June 20 from 7 - 9 p.m. at the Museum of the Western Prairie at 1100 Memorial Drive. This event is free and open to the public and is the first in a series of three concert in the courtyard events. Hampton, an Altus native, will be performing music from the 70s. Presently touring with legendary country music artist Ronnie Milsap, Hampton will be joined by Altus friends Clark Huey, Shane Hicks and others to entertain the audience with selections popularized by Linda Ronstadt, Captain and Tennille, Patsy Cline and more. For more information, contact 580-482-1044 or visit www.facebook.com/MuseumWesternPrairieAltusOK.




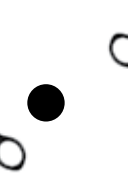







The **2nd annual American Spirit Festival** kicks off with the American Spirit Triathlon on Sunday, July 1 at 7:30 a.m. at the Linda Wiginton Aquatic Center at 121 N. Park Lane. After the race, vendors will be set-up at Hoyt Shadid Park at the reservoir where there will


be fun activities for families, live music and a firework show after dark. For more information, contact the City of Altus Parks and Recreation department at 580-482-2265 or visit www.facebook.com/AltusASF.

The Western Trail Historical Society will host **Concert in the Courtyard with Community Favorites** on Sunday, July 1 from 8 - 10 p.m. at the Museum of the Western Prairie at 1100 Memorial Drive. This event is free and open to the public and is the second in a series of three concert in the courtyard events. Local vocal ensembles including Men4Music, Eine Kleine Girmusik and others will provide a program of patriotic music in anticipation of July 4, ending just as the city’s fireworks display begins. For more information, contact 580-482-1044 or visit www.facebook.com/MuseumWesternPrairieAltusOK.

The Altus Public Library will host **Making LEGO Creations** on Saturday, July 14 from 3 - 4 p.m. at the library at 421 Hudson St. The event is free and open to children ages 9 - 14. For more information, contact 580-477-2890 or visit www.spls.lib.ok.us/altus.html.

The Western Trail Historical Society will host **Concert in the Courtyard with Gary Pratt and the Picketwire Band** on Friday, August 10 from 8 - 10 p.m. at the Museum of the Western Prairie at 1100 Memorial Drive. This event is free and open to the public and is the final in a series of three concert in the courtyard events. Gary Pratt and the Picketwire Band will present a concert of original and traditional cowboy and western music. Pratt is a songwriter, historian, storyteller and accomplished guitarist who draws upon his ranching experience to offer authentically classic performances for audiences of all ages. For more information, contact 580-482-1044 or visit www.facebook.com/MuseumWesternPrairieAltusOK.






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