

*the*

# WEST TEXAN

A Publication of the West Texas A&M University Alumni Association // Winter 2024



*Redefining*  
**EXCELLENCE**

# the WEST TEXAN

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# EXECUTIVE TEAM LETTER



**Ronnie Hall** has had the opportunity to meet thousands of students and alumni in his 29 years of employment at West Texas A&M University. Ronnie is living his dream job of working with people who believe in the vision and mission of an incredible university. He began his career with WT in 1995, and through the years, he has been fortunate to meet faculty and staff who modeled servant leadership, creating in him a desire to do the same for students and alumni.

**Abby Waters** graduated from WT with her undergraduate degree in 2017 and master's in 2019. Throughout college, she worked for the University and, upon graduating, continued in a full-time capacity. In her various roles, she continually felt called to serve the students of WT and has loved the new adventure of serving the alumni. She is eager to continue finding ways to connect and engage alumni and find new and exciting ways to involve them in the ever-growing Buff family.

Dear Buffs,

At the WT Alumni Association, we are here to help you stay connected through events and opportunities that provide valuable resources to students and fellow alumni. We are currently working on several engaging events for 2025, below are a few of the ways that you can connect and make an impact for your University from anywhere. Visit [Buffalum.com](http://Buffalum.com) to learn more.

- The WT Alumni Association Board of Directors is actively engaged in their initiative to support WT students. "Fuel the Herd" is an effort to provide food resources for The Market on Tierra Blanca, which includes a section set aside for WT students. This food pantry launched in January 2024 and has since served over 300 WT students, in addition to the numerous community members.
- We invite you to join us for Deans' Discussions, an opportunity to connect with deans from WT's Colleges via Zoom. This interactive Q&A session allows you to engage directly with academic leadership.

We also want to remind you that WT offers ongoing career services beyond graduation through the Office of Career and Professional Development. You can take advantage of these resources to advance your career with resume building, career counseling and coaching, job fairs, as well as access to Handshake, the University's virtual job board.

West Texas A&M University builds community leaders. Staying connected to your alma mater allows you to give back and help future Buffs through mentoring, donating to scholarships, and sharing your professional expertise. Many great things are happening with West Texas A&M University and the WT Alumni Association. We are grateful for you! Please feel free to reach out to us for ways to be involved.

Have a blessed day & Go Buffs!

*Ronnie Hall*     *Abby Waters*



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WT Alumni Association

## Kids Kollege Teams with PSP District

A partnership between WT's Kids Kollege, the University's on-campus childcare center, and Plemons-Stinnett-Phillips Consolidated School District is providing a certified teacher for the WT daycare and simultaneously boosting the average daily attendance of students the school district serves.

It's the result of a collaboration between the Texas Education Agency and The Texas A&M University System, first announced in 2023.

Only a certain number of eligible students will be qualified, through income and other factors, for inclusion in PSP's average daily attendance.

The PSP district also will be able to open an early childhood education center in its district because of the additional state funding it will receive by adding to its daily attendance with the Kids Kollege students.

The TAMUS initiative was made possible with a \$2.4 million federal CARES Act grant awarded by the Texas Workforce Commission.

## Six community leaders join WTAMU Foundation Board

Six community leaders have joined the West Texas A&M University Foundation Board of Directors.

Each were formally voted onto the board at its Aug. 20 meeting, joining 36 others.

New members include alumni representative **Debbie Farnum '71 '94**; **Dr. Darryl Flusche '88**, superintendent of Canyon Independent School District; financial adviser **Joseph Peterson Jr. '10**; attorney **Patrick Swindell '77**; Ben Weinheimer, president and CEO of Texas Cattle Feeders Association; and **Lizzie Ware Williams**, director of Community Development at Amarillo National Bank.

The WTAMU Foundation was founded in 1946 to provide student scholarship assistance and to support faculty, staff, and programs. Today, the foundation continues to support the mission of the University and strives to fulfill the vision of WT being a regionally responsive research University.

## Student Government Association leaders elected

A trio of new leaders are running WT's Student Government Association. Kyal Browne, a junior agribusiness major from Waxahachie, was elected president. Lane Golla, a senior animal science major from New Braunfels, was chosen vice president, and David Ortega, a senior political science major from Sunray, was appointed chief justice.

SGA works closely with faculty and staff to ensure an academically challenging University while providing opportunities for fun and community. In addition to the officers, SGA includes student senators elected to represent each of WT's Colleges, Graduate School and the freshman class.

## WT's Soil Judging team qualifies for nationals

WT's Soil Judging team qualified for nationals for a third consecutive year.

The team placed third overall in the Region IV Soil Judging Competition, with four students ranking in the individual Top 15. The WT team also placed second in team pit contest, where the team works together to characterize a soil pit.

The team will compete in nationals in April in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

At the regional competition, the WT team ranked ahead of teams from Texas Tech University, Texas A&M-Kingsville and Oklahoma State University. The top two spots were claimed by Texas A&M University and the University of Arkansas.

## WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY faculty and staff accomplishments

WT faculty and staff members have received awards, published works and been elected to serve in various capacities.

•••••

**Amy Newton**, a five-year WT veteran and senior administrative associate in the Department of Agricultural Sciences in the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, won a cash prize, free parking for a year and more during WT's All-Staff Service Awards, held June 25 in Legacy Hall inside Jack B. Kelley Student Center on the Canyon campus.

Newton was voted Employee of the Year by faculty and fellow staff members amid a field of 11 other employees of the month.

Staff members who retired in 2024 also were recognized: **Carla Banks '04**,

University Police; **Patrick Bolwahn '90**, Buff Gold Card; **Brandi Clark '00 '24**, Registrar's office; **Teresa Clemons '96 '05**, Sponsored Research; **Kristine Combs '95**, International Students; **Pam Denney**, Bookstore; **Darla Jenkins**, Kids Kollege; **Herschel Neal '96 '01**, Advising Services; and **Gonda Stayton '94**, Cornette Library.

•••••

**Dr. Sang Hwang** is now the Lanna and Bob Hatton Professor of Education, and **Dr. Michelle Simmons** is the Bill Piehl Professor of Education and Social Sciences. Both are faculty members in the Department of Education.

"Drs. Hwang and Simmons are most deserving of these professorships," said Dr. Gary Bigham, dean. "Dr. Hwang is a valued member of the reading education faculty. She has an impressive record of ongoing and collaborative research with her colleagues. Dr. Simmons is an equally valued member of the special education faculty, teaching courses to prepare undergraduate students for teaching positions and graduate students as educational diagnosticians. Dr. Simmons also exhibits collegiality in her research endeavors."

Hwang will use the professorship to advance her research in educating the parents of second-generation refugee students in the Texas Panhandle. Simmons will use the professorship to advance her research in learning differences.

A WT team—led by Dr. Nathan Howell, WT's Bell Professor of Engineering—won the \$37,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Research Initiative.

Now, the team is seeking input from those interested in growing strawberries in the area. Those interested can fill out a survey here:

[forms.office.com/r/PNJHZM3X4e](https://forms.office.com/r/PNJHZM3X4e).

Howell's team will gather information at several events for strawberry growers over the next year to determine the farmers' needs, learn about any possible barriers and interrogate the farmers' attitudes about producing strawberries in controlled environmental settings.

Potentially, the research could find ways to grow strawberries using far less water than is traditionally used with row crops, Howell said.

Howell's cross-disciplinary team includes representatives from WT's College of Engineering and the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences:

**Dr. Behnam Askarian**, assistant professor of electrical engineering; **Dr. Fatemeh "Azi" Tabei**, assistant professor of electrical engineering and computer science; **Dr. Bridget Guerrero '02 '03**, the Paul Engler Professor of Agriculture; and **Dr. Colton Atkins**, assistant professor of engineering / agriculture technology.

Three professors at West Texas A&M University have been appointed to positions under the aegis of the University's Hill Institute.

**Dr. Maxine De Butte** is now the Dyke Rogers Professor of Psychology, **Dr. Jenifer Kunz** is the Dyke Rogers Professor of Sociology, and **Dr. Judy Williams '77 '05** is the Dyke Rogers Professor of Education (Science of Teaching Reading). In their positions, the three will serve as professors within WT's Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences and as scholars for the Hill Institute.

The Hill Institute, an interdisciplinary academy of researchers, teachers and students funded via private donations, was formally announced following a \$20 million gift from **Cheryl '85 and Alex '84 Fairly** in October 2023. To date, theirs is the largest family gift to WT's One West comprehensive fundraising campaign and in University history.

Other donations may support the work of the Hill Institute, as was a portion of the \$5 million gift by Dyke Rogers announced in 2022 to name the Rogers College.

•••••

**Dr. Leslie Ramos Salazar, Dr. Jillian Williamson Yarbrough and Dr. Elaina Cantrell Robinson**, all faculty members in WT's Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business, won an Engler Societal Impact Research Grant for "Her Business Story: Narratives of Women Business Leaders of the Texas Panhandle." at noon Oct. 2 and 8:30 a.m. Oct. 23 at the WT Enterprise Center, 2300 N. Western St. in Amarillo.

The Engler grant funds projects that fulfill a significant need in the Texas Panhandle region. The research also was made possible through a partnership with America's Small Business Development Center at WT and the WT Enterprise Center.

The research team interviewed women leaders to learn their unique stories about their identities and challenges of leading or owning a company or organization. Women also shared the various resources and skills that they need to be successful in rural communities such as the Texas Panhandle.

Findings of this study will be used to mentor and inspire upcoming women in the Texas Panhandle region to lead or own their own business of their choice.

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**Dr. Trish McCormick '07 '24**, associate registrar, was named the recipient of the Clarence E. Thompson Staff Excellence Award, the University's highest staff honor, during the August convocation.

Also honored with staff excellence awards were University Police Chief **Shawn Burns '93 '17** and **Shannon Ham**, director of payroll services.

The Thompson Award is named for a former mayor of Canyon who worked at WT for decades, ultimately serving as vice president for business and finance. McCormick joined WT in 2002 in Advising Services, then moved to the Registrar's Office in 2023.

McCormick graduated in December from WT with a doctoral degree in educational leadership.

Burns, who joined the UPD in 1995 and was promoted to chief in 2003, was praised for regularly sacrificing personal time to ensure WT is safe and secure.

Ham, who joined WT in 2012 at the University Bookstore before moving to Human Resources, was described as an invaluable resource.

•••••

**Dr. Li Chen**, associate professor of media communication in WT's Department of Communication, earned the Best Reviewer Award from Communication and the Public, an international peer-reviewed open access journal that publishes articles in the intersections of communication and the public.

Chen has been an active reviewer of the journal for several years. In 2023, she reviewed two articles for their special issue, "The Platform and Transformation of the Digital Public Sphere."

*Continued on page 31*

## Cornette Library and the Center for the Study of the American West expand archive

**Cornette Library** and the **Center for the Study of the American West** are working together to flesh out the library's digital archive with photos, oral histories, maps and other articles that help tell the story of the region.

CSAW interns—funded through grants by such entities as Xcel Energy and the National Endowment of the Humanities—are cataloging items for preservation. Among them are oral histories for CSAW's ongoing Forgotten Frontera project; histories of Barrel and Indian Creek Ranch and Buffalo Lake; and snapshots of the life of Montie Ritchie, the grandson of pivotal area pioneer Cornelia Adair.

The digital archive also includes the map collection of area history teacher J. Michael Harter—colorful, hand-drawn renderings of the history and geography of the Llano Estacado.

Also preserved is the Texas Panhandle Curriculum Initiative, which provides educators with lesson plans about regional topics that meet Texas Education Agency's Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills requirements.

Also being digitized are dozens of boxes of newsletters and photographs chronicling the history of Southwest Public Service.

Cornette's institutional repository has been in place since 2014 and is an easily accessible repository of the vast array of WT's contributions as a regional research university. It can be visited at [wtamu-ir.tdl.org/home](http://wtamu-ir.tdl.org/home).

## WT joins state digital network

West Texas A&M University officially has joined a statewide internet network that will significantly boost the University's research and academic capabilities.

Over the summer, digital infrastructure upgrades were completed that tie WT into the **Trans-Texas Digital Network**, a data and interactive communications network that's an integral part of The Texas A&M University System.

The high-speed fiberoptic data network will provide WT users with access to Internet2, a national computing network consortium that provides a secure high-speed network, cloud solutions, support and educational services.

This will significantly boost the University's research and academic capabilities, as well as ensure that users will not be limited by bandwidth and will not experience bottlenecks in internet speed, said James Webb, vice president for information technology and chief information officer.

"We are truly facilitating WT's vision of connecting the Panhandle to the world," WT President Walter V. Wendler said. "This partnership exemplifies the implementation of quality and excellence in digital standards at WT." The TTDN connection is essential for managing large-scale data, conducting complex computations and fostering collaboration with leading research institutions globally.

Improved cybersecurity options also will provide additional layers of protection for digital assets and personal information.

## WT Family of the Year

Elna Thinakone, a senior marketing major from Amarillo, nominated what she termed her "village"—her husband and children, her parents, and her sister, brother-in-law and niece—for WT Family of the Year.

The entire clan was honored Oct. 26 during Family Weekend.

Thinakone, who will graduate in December, and her family embody the WT spirit, said Amanda Laswon, senior director of orientation and academic success.

Thinakone originally enrolled at WT in 2002, then left school 2007 to raise her family. She returned in 2022.

In addition to her studies, Thinakone is heavily involved in WT's Asian Pacific Islander Association, the National Society of Leadership and Success, Society for Human Resource Management and the American Marketing Association. She also has been named to the President and Dean's Lists.

*Continued on page 32*

# DISTRICT LIBRARY DIRECTOR ENJOYS LONG LEGACY

WITH WTAMU

By Brad Newman

**P**am Barrett's family history with West Texas A&M University stretches back almost to the school's founding.

Her grandparents attended in the 1920s and 1930s, when it was West Texas State Teachers College. Her parents followed, graduating in the 1960s. And her father worked for the University as director of career planning and placement beginning in 1974.

"We were so proud to be in Canyon with this University," said **Barrett '87**, who continued the generational legacy. "I grew up attending sporting events and theater productions. I loved my sorority life and am still an active alumni member."

Though Barrett spent her first semester of college at another school, she returned to WT to remain close to her family and the campus she had come to enjoy so well.

Especially the library.

"That was my favorite place on the campus," Barrett said.

Reading and learning have been lifelong passions for Barrett, and at WT, she majored both in English and business communication—the ideal combination for what would become a longtime career as a librarian in area schools.

**I have used my English degree every day of my career.**

—Pam Barrett

Barrett now serves as the director of library and information resources for the Amarillo Independent School District.

"I have used my English degree every day of my career," she said. "And my business courses prepared me for all my years of using and teaching technology in the classroom and the library.

"It has been such a great career choice."

After graduating, Barrett taught technology to junior high students in the Pampa Independent School District. She then transitioned to librarian roles in AISD.

"Pam knows how to bring the magic to the art of teaching and inspiring others to promote the love of learning and reading," said Bowie Middle School librarian Amy Pairis.

Pairis has known Barrett for 28 years, since Barrett mentored Pairis during her first year in the school district.

"WT helped to create a visionary leader in our community."

Barrett spent 22 years as the Caprock High School librarian, where she regularly shared her love of WT with her students, taking prospective students on campus tours, assisting with scholarship applications, and helping them build class schedules.

"WT allows kids from this region to step out and attend a quality university, but still remain close to home," she said. "That's such a benefit."

Barrett was named to her current position five years ago. As director, Barrett coordinates with all the district librarians, overseeing budgets, ordering and organizing inventory, and providing creative and innovative ideas.

"I am impressed with Pam's ability to always be available to help all the librarians in whatever way that they need," said Sharon Elam, who retired as librarian of Eastridge Elementary School in May. "She is always so willing to go above and beyond."

In her role, Barrett also has collaborated with WT for presentations and trainings in the Department of Education in the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences.

"WT has been a huge influence in Pam's life," Pairis said. "Lifelong learning has always been a driving force in Pam's development. She challenges herself to stay aware of current trends, and she has the distinct motivation to gain understanding about a diverse array of topics."

Barrett and her husband **Jay '85 '93** have ensured that their family's connection to the University continues.

Their oldest son, Parker, is a 2013 alumni, and his wife, Kendra, is a current student. Daughter-in-law **Makenna '24** also is an alumna.

"WT is such a special place," Pam Barrett said. "It's been a huge part of our lives."

# FROM GAMEDAY TO GRADUATION DAY

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ALUM CREATES NEW SPACES FOR

# FOOD, MUSIC, FUN

IN CANYON

By Brad Newman

Danny Byrd's first-ever concert was a Dr. Hook show – a night of funky rock 'n' roll – in The Fieldhouse (aka The Box) at West Texas A&M University in the 1970s. Byrd was about 10 years old.

"My parents took me because I hounded them so much," Byrd said. That concert, along with others on campus at WT, including a ZZ Top performance in the Virgil Henson Activities Center, sparked a lifelong passion for live music.

Now **Byrd '00** has a venue of his own where he will share that passion with new generations of WT students and area residents.

Byrd owns The Lumberyard, a restaurant and bar, outdoor concert arena and indoor event center in Canyon.

Located on 45 acres at 850 N. 23rd St., The Lumberyard hosted its first outdoor concerts in the summer of 2024, featuring acts like Third Eye Blind, Stoney LaRue, and Pat Green.

"Danny loves music and loves everyone to have a good time," said Joe Marion, who has worked with Byrd since 2003. "This is what we are doing here at The Lumberyard – bringing the city of Canyon a place to have a good time and a great place to hang out."

Byrd, a Canyon native, is himself a local rock star of sorts. One of his first ventures, Feldman's Wrong-Way Diner, has become a landmark family eatery in Canyon since opening more than 20 years ago.

"This is where we are from, and it's where we decided to stay and make something happen," Byrd said.

Byrd, who has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, began work on The Lumberyard project with his wife, **Rachel '89**, in 2023. The outdoor concert arena opened first, drawing an estimated 3,000 attendees per show.

The concept restaurant and bar, set to open in late 2024, will continue the music theme, with music memorabilia on the walls, neon lights, and a mural of famous musicians.

The Lumberyard, located on 45 acres on the north edge of Canyon.



The unique menu will include what Rachel Byrd called "heavy bar food"—like Philly cheesesteak egg rolls, flat nachos, and double-patty smashed hamburgers.

The restaurant also will include a self-pour, pay-by-the-ounce "beer wall" both inside and on the outdoor patio, offering patrons with proper ID access to 40 different beers on tap.

The patio—a sprawling 36,000 square-foot space—also includes a stage for local bands to perform.

"This is going to be a poppin', happening place," said Kelby Hartman, Byrd's son-in-law, who is working on The Lumberyard project. "It's one of a kind."

Beyond his entrepreneurial ventures, Byrd has been an active supporter of numerous philanthropic efforts in Canyon.



Danny Byrd, owner of The Lumberyard, inside the restaurant.

"Danny is continually doing for others," Marion said, citing Byrd's donation of the notable Tex Randall statue to the City of Canyon, holiday dinners to families in need, support for Canyon Independent School District sports programs, and discounts for first responders and military members.

"Danny is a visionary and a great leader," Marion added. "He is always forward thinking, with a great innovative mindset."

Byrd, with a lifelong affection for WT, envisions The Lumberyard as an added perk for the university and its students.

The alum said The Lumberyard would be the perfect place for WT students to go for food and fun on weekends, without having to drive out of Canyon. He also said he is working with the University to offer student discounts and partnering with WT to potentially host their concerts at The Lumberyard, too.

"WT has been part of my entire life," Byrd said. "My parents were big supporters. Lots of my professors were people who I had known growing up. We've done concessions at WT football games. It's a great place."



# BETTER TOGETHER



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## Phoenix Honors

# 3 Buff Luminaries


By Chip Chandler

**D**r. James L. Cornette '55, Brenda Schroer '98 and Clay Stribling '88 were honored during the annual Phoenix event in Legacy Hall inside the Jack B. Kelley Student Center on the Canyon campus.

"Tonight, we will single out three graduates who are excellent examples of both the mission and vision of WT through their achievements," said Dr. Todd Rasberry, vice president for philanthropy and external relations, at the Oct. 10 event. "These Buffs bring honor to the University through meritorious public service and teaching, business development, and philanthropic and community leadership."

The Distinguished Alumni Award is the highest honor given by the WT Alumni Association and has been given annually since 1970. In that time, 127 alumni have been honored, including this year's inductees. Each has gained distinction through their professional achievements in career or military service, leadership and impact in their communities, and support to WT.

Cornette, son of former WT President James P. Cornette, earned master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Texas before embarking on a long career as a faculty member in Iowa State University's mathematics department. There, his research involved applying mathematics to molecular biology to develop models that benefitted the scientific community's knowledge and treatment of AIDS and COVID. He holds three patents and published 21 research articles, all in conjunction with the National Institutes of Health.

The Phoenix event on Oct. 10 celebrated West Texas A&M University's 2024 Distinguished Alumni, Dr. James L. Cornette, Brenda Schroer and Clay Stribling.   
Picured from left to right are Dr. James L. Cornette, Brenda Schroer and Clay Stribling.





In 1991, Cornette found a fossilized tooth of a phytosaur on his wife's family ranch near Palo Duro Canyon. That inspired him, after retiring from ISU in 2000, to pursue a master's degree in geology from the University of Kansas, which he earned two years later. Since 2003, he has been a frequent volunteer at both the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon. He also frequently takes part in fossil digs in Wyoming with representatives from the Museum of Nature and Science in Washington, D.C.

Cornette is a member of the Texas Poets' Corner advisory board and a member of the Friends of the Cornette Library, which was named for his father and mother, Mary Elizabeth. He served a pivotal role in the founding of the library's Poets' Garden and the installation of a statue of poet Robert Frost.

**"I am very happy to tell people what I did. It was sort of a revelation for me to write down a history of my life."**  
-Dr. James L. Cornette

"I am very excited about this award," Cornette said. "I am very happy to tell people what I did. It was sort of a revelation for me to write down a history of my life, entitled 'I Am Lucky.' That really is the case. I really am."

Schroer, who grew up in Dumas and Longview, earned her bachelor of business administration in accounting at WT, then a master's in accounting at Texas A&M University. She began her accounting career at Ernst & Young, spending more than a decade in the firm's offices in Dallas, London and New York, focusing on the oil and gas industry.

She was recruited to work at the Fortune 500-company Concho Resources in 2013, returning her to Texas to work in its Midland offices. Within six years, she ascended to the company's senior vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer, leading its 250-person finance organization in multi-billion-dollar acquisitions and divestitures before the company was acquired in 2021 by ConocoPhillips. She then led Aris Water Solutions through an IPO in 2021 and its transition to a public company in 2022, then joined Endeavor Energy Resources as its CFO and board manager.

**"There are so many fantastic folks who have come out of West Texas and made such large impacts on the community."**  
-Brenda Schroer

While at Concho, Schroer was named one of the 25 Influential Women in Energy in 2020.

"I am so humbled and feel so undeserving. There are so many fantastic folks who have come out of West Texas and made such large impacts on the community," Schroer said. "I was shocked and super excited about this award, and I hope to live up to the award as I move forward with my career."

Stribling, who earned his bachelor's degree in general studies in 1988, is a Hereford native who began his career as a lawyer in the Dallas-Fort Worth area before returning to Amarillo, where he practiced healthcare law at local firm Brown & Fortunato.

Stribling died December 17 following a brief battle with cancer.

In 2011, he was named the executive director of the Amarillo Area Foundation; he recently was named executive adviser.

**"It's so rewarding to be able to use your talents to feel like you're making a difference in the world."**  
-Clay Stribling

As AAF's president and CEO, Stribling played a central role in the establishment of Harrington Academic Hall WTAMU Amarillo Center in downtown Amarillo; secured support and funding for Amarillo Independent School District's THRIVE scholarship program; and was at the helm when AAF launched The Panhandle Gives, the most successful ongoing fundraising efforts in the region's history, among many other initiatives.

"It's so rewarding to be able to use your talents to feel like you're making a difference in the world," Stribling said. "This award means a lot to me. I loved my time at WT, and I love the institution. It is as important an institution in the Texas Panhandle as any other we have, maybe more so in a lot of ways."

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# Homecoming 2024

✦ OUT OF THIS WORLD ✦

West Texas A&M University alumni and students had a celestially good time at Homecoming 2024.

The "Out of This World" Homecoming Week ran Oct. 4 to 11, attracting hundreds of Buffs and community supporters to campus for a galaxy full of activities.

Among the highlights were the Phoenix (see story, page 8), the unveiling of a bronze statue of the late Dr. Paul Engler, the parade down Russell Long Boulevard, and the Buffs' victory over Western New Mexico University in Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium.

Yadhira "Yaya" Avalos, a senior biology / pre-med major from Hereford, representing the Student Government Association and F1RSTGEN, was crowned queen, and Caden Bonilla, a senior biology / pre-dental major from Amarillo, representing Students Assisting in Good Endeavors, was named king.

Relive the fun of Homecoming '24 with this photo gallery.









WT strives to  
**‘Redefine  
Excellence’**

By Brad Newman

**I**t’s more than a new slogan. Excellence — and the drive to continuously elevate it — has been a foundational value of education at West Texas A&M University since its inception.

But a new campaign — “Excellence Redefined” — aims to further highlight WT’s commitment to rugged determination, entrepreneurial fervor, and a devotion to serving others.







Left to right, Chancellor John Sharp, WTAMU President Dr. Walter V. Wendler, Student Body President Kyal Browne.

**We will not compromise excellence. Being excellent is something we think about every day in everything we do.**

Dr. Todd W. Rasberry, WT's vice president for philanthropy and external relations

"WT has a bold vision," said Dr. Todd W. Rasberry, WT's vice president for philanthropy and external relations and executive director for the WTAMU Foundation.

"We will not compromise excellence. Being excellent is something we think about every day in everything we do."

Part of being an excellent educational institution for WT means adhering to the university's longstanding regional values.

"We look at what makes WT distinctive, those Panhandle ideals that are inherently excellent," said President Walter V. Wendler. "Values like passion and hard work."

From WT's hands-on agricultural offerings to its robust, rural-focused nursing program to its online doctoral education degree, WT infuses a certain "West Texan tenacity" into each endeavor.

"We take the work ethic that is inherent to this region and transfer it into the workforce," Wendler said. "The people here have a certain grit that would be an asset anywhere."

WT's Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences prides itself on promoting a culture of hard work.

"Excellence starts with setting expectations, and we have set high standards throughout the department," said Dr. Lance Kieth, associate dean of external relations and recruiting. "We emphasize preparation and dedication and learning even in defeat."

Kieth noted that some of his students will be feeding cattle even during holiday breaks—a level of real-life commitment that sets them apart.

"Our competitive advantage against other institutions is that, at WT, we can put a ready-to-go-to-work graduate into the field, with higher work ethic, more experience, and professionalism," he said. "Industries are seeing the value of WT graduates. They're excellent."

Other Panhandle values—trust, loyalty, faith—also produce a unique excellence among WT's students, faculty, and staff.

"We're going to fix our focus on seeing to it that the Texas Panhandle becomes everything it can be to the people who live and work here," Wendler said. "And we think that by excelling in these values, WT appeals to people from all over the world."

Excellence redefined also demands a "high tolerance for risk," Rasberry said.

"It's about cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit. We see challenges and opportunities, and ask, how can we lead in that?"

The buffalo, WT's mascot, is a fitting symbol for this aspect of excellence, Rasberry said.

When a storm approaches, the buffalo (unlike some other animals) will charge directly toward it, to endure the oncoming tempest. The buffalo's instinct to face storms head-on reflects WT's resilience and drive toward excellence, Rasberry said.

"Bring on the challenges. We're going to run straight toward them and move through them."

Rasberry referenced WT's ambitious One West campaign, an effort to raise \$175 million by 2025 (and which already has exceeded \$150 million); its emphasis on faculty-generated research funding; and its initiatives to strengthen student success as examples of that "cutting edge" excellence.

"Higher education is transforming quickly, and the challenges are plethora," he said. "But at WT, we want to be aggressive in shaping what excellent higher education can be. We don't want to just conform."

**WT ensures it remains a competitive, impactful institution that drives progress and economic growth in the Texas Panhandle and beyond.**

Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of the College of Engineering

Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of the College of Engineering, highlighted that college's \$7.5 million in research funding between 2019 and 2024. The funds supported state-of-the-art facility upgrades, expert faculty training, and additional hands-on experience for students.

WT also has implemented innovative enrollment programs to engage high school students, and collaborative programs with other universities to provide streamlined pathways for transfer students.

"Striving for excellence allows WT to meet the evolving demands of industry and academia," Hunt said. "By prioritizing excellence, WT attracts top-tier students and faculty, secures substantial research funding, and develops programs that address regional and national needs.

"In doing so, WT ensures it remains a competitive, impactful institution that drives progress and economic growth in the Texas Panhandle and beyond."

Excellence isn't solely about reaching ambitious, new goals, however. It's also about engaging in the community with a heart of service.



**Dr. Holly Jeffreys '97 '02 '22**, dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, said the University puts a concerted focus on selfless compassion for others.

"We believe that the needs of others come first," she said. "We want our students to graduate from WT and begin creating their own lasting impact in the lives of others across the nation and the world."

Shaping well-rounded graduates –citizens that exhibit qualities of excellence in every aspect of life –makes WT a compelling institution among so many higher education choices.

"When a student graduates from WT, we're confident they not only have the academic skills they need, but they carry values that make them excellent employees and citizens," Rasberry said. "The excellence we provide here is an excellence they carry with them."

## WT alumni reflect on the excellence of WT



"WT was a safe community with solid academics. I met my husband the first day of our freshman year... WT prepared us well to follow our dreams, raise our family, and enjoy many memories of our Panhandle days."

– **Carol Baker '69**, Georgetown



"WT was a great choice for me because I am originally from a small town, so the population of WT was comfortable for me. I was able to get involved with a few organizations, travel for a leadership conference, and make some lifelong friendships. The educational experience was tremendous."

– **Trent Lankford '97**, Gruver



"I am thankful for the preparation which I received at WT. The University remains true to its calling to provide quality education relevant to the surrounding region."

– **Don Boedeker '73**, Lubbock



"The combination of my theatrical and business studies at WT really set me up for any field I chose to move forward in. Not only did I learn to communicate, negotiate, and relate with all walks of life, I also learned to think on my feet and be a genuine human being. The WT campus was really a family, we all had each other's back and wanted to see everyone succeed."

– **Emma Russell '15**, Houston



"One point of excellence for WT is that small school atmosphere. It is a huge positive factor. I have been glad to see the school grow in its infrastructure, but to continue to have the spirit of a close-knit community. In addition, I found the rigors of study and education to be solid. I guarantee WT prepared me well for the rigors of professional school and becoming a physical therapist."

– **Barry Morgan '84**, San Antonio



"The professors, instructors, and administration at WT invest in the students. They personalize the experience by making time when a student needs assistance, sometimes just to listen. WT prepared me by showing me that I can be successful if I'm willing to put my mind to it and be open to others opinions and ideas."

– **Becky Lopez '93**, Canyon



"WT provided me with a quality education, opportunities to hone leadership skills, and lifelong friends. I stayed for two degrees and then worked there for almost 10 years. It was absolutely the perfect place for me."

– **Dr. Keri Rogers Mize '88, '90**, Huntsville



"WT's environment supported the values I had grown up with and allowed me to maintain those core values through the transformative transitional period into adulthood. At the same time, at WT, concepts of learning were instilled in the courses as professors challenged my thinking and encouraged me to see from other perspectives."

– **Shannon Gillespie '85**, Dumas



"Part of what makes WT excellent is that it is mission focused. The university understands its role in the region and focuses on making the Panhandle an excellent place to live, study, and work. Also, my dean of students was exceptional and excellent at developing talent in students. She saw qualities in me and pushed me to reach for more. Her belief in students and excellence in developing their talents has shaped much of who I am today as a professional in higher education."

– **Rosalind Alderman '91**, Kingsville



"WT was an excellent place for me because it is a large-scale university with a small-town feel. Any graduate coming from a small town like me might be intimidated by a large university. WT provides a top-notch university with an at-home feel. It's a home away from home. Plus, the academics at WT prepared me for the rigorous classes I would have to endure during pharmacy school."

– **Tracey Ouellette '01**, Wellington



"WT was an absolutely excellent choice for me and gave me an educational foundation that has helped me succeed in every stop of my career. In particular, the personal attention I received from my professors helped me in my own career as a professor. At WT, I had excellent role models who taught me that knowing my students was just as important as what I taught them."

– **Melanie White '94**, Long Island, N.Y.



"For me, WT was exceptional because it provided a high-quality education while accommodating my need to work full-time while going to school. Also, WT's diverse course offerings and real-world learning opportunities support career growth and were a game changer for me when I stepped out into the marketing industry."

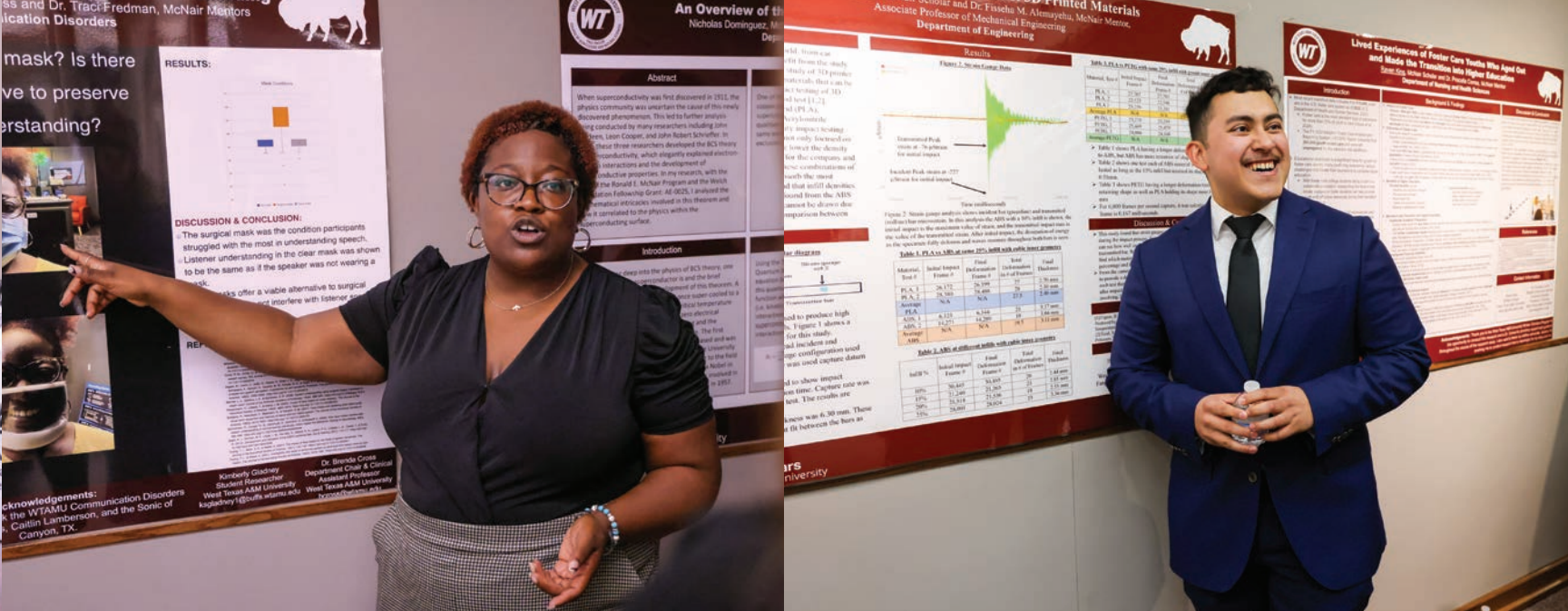
– **Tiffany Sharpsteen '14**, Amarillo



# WT's McNair Scholars Celebrates 25 Years

By Chip Chandler





**Audrey Meador '05, '10** didn't think the program was for her. Not at first, at least.

Then Meador looked deeper at the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program.

"At that point, I had aspirations to get my master's degree, but I didn't know how or even what that looked like," Meador said. "I was first-generation, and my parents didn't even know what graduate school was, so I thought that maybe this program would help me achieve that goal.

"It did, and then some," Meador said. "It really did set me up for success."

Better known as McNair Scholars, the program prepares underrepresented, low-income and first-generation undergraduate students for doctoral study through research and other scholarly activities. Students conduct and present undergraduate research guided by a faculty mentor.

"This experience elevates students' options for graduate school, and most of our students are fully funded in graduate programs here and across the country," Director **Victoria Salas '94, '96** said. "For first-generation students, this is life-changing; increasing their level of education changes their lives both economically and intellectually."

That was certainly true for **Melodie Graves '01**.

"I had never been a researcher," Graves said. "McNair gave me the opportunity to hone in on that skill. ... I was a first-generation student, and figuring out my path through higher education was something I really had to find my own way through.

"McNair gave me the opportunity to go to different campuses and present research, and just to see what academic scholarship could lead to," said Graves, who now is considering pursuing a Ph.D. while working as the associate director of advising at Amarillo College.

For her part, Meador did take that step and earned a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction at Texas Tech University. Today, Meador is an award-winning assistant professor of mathematics in WT's College of Engineering.

"My faculty mentor took me to a math-specific conference," Meador recalled. "At the time, I thought it wasn't a big deal, but then when I went and saw the people who were there, oh my gosh. I was presenting with some really important people."

Offering that exposure to research and the world of academia at large was the hope when the program was founded in 1999, said former director Mike Cook.

“**Knowledge is power, and the ability to become a scholar is often something we don't see in our culture.**”

-Melodie Graves

"We had quality students who I knew should be applying and going to graduate school," said Cook, who learned about McNair Scholars while working in WT's Student Support Services. "I did some research myself and really thought WT would be an excellent institution to host this program."

WT's McNair Scholars program now serves 30 students per year, who receive the guidance of a mentor overseeing the research project; seminars on graduate school admission process, research methods and financial aid; a \$2,800 research stipend; a \$300 research supply allowance; tutoring, academic counseling and intense GRE preparation; admission and financial aid assistance; preparation for research conference preparations; fee waivers for graduate applications; and paid conference travel.

In 2022, the program won a \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, providing \$275,000 in annual funding for five years. The program marked its 25th anniversary in October at the annual McNair Scholars Research Showcase.

Since its founding in 1999, 261 McNair Scholars have earned their bachelor's degrees, and another 154 have earned graduate or professional degrees.

"Knowledge is power, and the ability to become a scholar is often something we don't see in our culture," Graves said. "The importance of me participating in this program is that I can be a role model for other kids who think researching is not for them. Being exposed to research early in your academic career can inform you on what you can do in your academic career. Done correctly, it's an amazing outcome."

Meador agreed.

"When I was going through my master's program, I was one of very few people of color and definitely one of very few POC women in the program," Meador said. "We need representation in all disciplines, in all levels."

## ALUMS DONATE EXPANSIVE

## ATHLETICS COLLECTION

By Keith Brown

**Mary and Bob '78 Stewart** are seen far and wide supporting WT student-athletes. Whether in The Box, the Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium, or the First United Bank Center, or at opposing sites ranging from Tampa to Seattle to North Dakota, the Stewarts can be found cheering on the Buffs and Lady Buffs.

That visible support isn't the only way Mary and Bob display their passion for WT. A recent contribution to Cornette Library's University Archives is another example of their passion.

This summer, the Stewarts donated a collection of memorabilia totaling more than 4,000 items to the archives. The oldest item in the collection is a photo of the original Old Main building dated 1913, and the collection contains everything from promotional trinkets to the most extensive

collection of WT media guides available anywhere. According to the Stewarts, they began collecting items in the 1990s, and Bob continues to scour the internet and antique shops for items to add to the collection.

The Stewarts are no strangers to supporting WT and its athletic programs. Longtime members of the Alumni Association and Buffalo Club, Bob received his bachelor's of business arts degree in accounting. The couple has made regular donations to the University for more than 50 years. In 2016, the Stewarts established the Bob and Mary Stewart Athletics Scholarship Endowment with a commitment of \$1 million. On an annual basis, a portion of the endowment's earnings supports the scholarship package of every student-athlete at WT.



West Texas A&M University began in 1910 as West Texas State Normal, and the entirety of the campus was housed in this one building. The inscription on this photo of the original Administration Building states "W.T.S.N. Canyon, Texas Feb. 7, 1913," which was a little more than a year before the building burned to the ground. The 9 1/2-inch X 22 1/2-inch framed photo is one of the oldest items in the Bob and Mary Stewart Collection that was donated to the Cornette Library in the summer of 2024.



Many of the items donated help tell the story of the university's men's basketball program, including Game Day Programs, Media Guides, 8X10 black-and-white photos, and even trading cards.



The collection includes football helmets, softball batting helmets, volleyballs, basketballs, flags, towels, and buffaloes of all shapes and sizes. The football helmet on the left is signed by Chaun Thompson, who played linebacker for WT in the late 1990s and early 2000s and in the National Football League for seven years with the Cleveland Browns and Houston Texans.



Kara Townsend and Jana Skelton '98 were two of the stars of WT's women's basketball team in 1996-97 that played in the NCAA Division II Elite Eight. It was one of seven teams in the Lady Buffs' storied hoops history that advanced so close to winning the national title.







# New Era for West Texas A&M Athletics

By Brent Seals

**W**est Texas A&M Athletics entered a new era at the start of the fall semester as Doug Lipinski was named the University's Vice President of Athletics on July 10, 2024. Lipinski came to Canyon following 22 years at Grand Valley State University, a 16-time LEARFIELD Director's Cup champion, where he served as the deputy athletic director for external relations.

During that time, Lipinski and his staff won more than 100 National Association of College Marketing Administrators awards as he led the university in finalizing the largest sponsorship deals in its history.

The fall semester saw the Maroon & White win Lone Star Conference Championships in volleyball, men's cross country and women's cross country while continuing the national notoriety of the entire athletics program.





Buffalo Football registered five victories under second-year head coach Josh Lynn in 2024. The Buffaloes reclaimed the historic Wagon Wheel from rival Eastern New Mexico University in a 42-24 victory in Portales, New Mexico, along with a big 42-17 win over Western New Mexico during Homecoming Weekend.

Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium will be under the national spotlight Dec. 18 as WT serves as the host site for the 2024 National Junior College Athletic Association Division I Football National Championship game to be broadcast on ESPNU.

Lady Buff Volleyball continued its dominance of the Lone Star Conference as the team won the program's 22nd LSC Championship with an unbeaten 16-0 record. It marked the 18th time in school history that the Lady Buffs finished the league schedule without a loss.

Hereford product Taytum Stow was tabbed the LSC Defensive Player of the Year for the second time, while Kaycee Cavanaugh (Co-Freshman of the Year) and Brittany Harry (Coach of the Year) also earned specialty awards from the league. Emma Becker, Bryli Contreras, Currie Marusak, Ainsley Malis, Angelina Oliver and Camy Jones earned All-LSC accolades.

WT women's soccer claimed six victories during the 2024 campaign Madison Stokes earned All-Lone Star Conference honors for their efforts on the pitch. In the classroom, Avery Putnam was named to the LSC All-Academic Team.

Lady Buff Cross Country put together the best season in program history in 2024 as head coach Zach Daniel led the program to their fourth Lone Star Conference Championship with six runners finishing inside of the Top 10. WT earned an at-large bid in the NCAA National Championships following a fifth-place finish at the South Central Regional meet.

The Lady Buffs didn't disappoint on the sport's biggest stage as they registered 127 total points on their way to a second-place finish, the best performance in school history. Julie Lafare, Naomi Addo, Kalkidan Vincendeau and Eliette Chaput earned All-American honors for the Lady Buffs.

Butch Lauffer led the Buffaloes to the Lone Star Conference Quarterfinals in his 34th season at the helm of the men's soccer program. Daniel Burton, Matteo Landais, Sharif Mohammed, and Gabriel Nevarez all earned All-LSC recognition while Landais was also named to the D2CCA All-Region Second Team.

Men's cross country proved why they are one of the top programs in all of NCAA Division II as they claimed the program's 12th consecutive Lone Star Conference Championship as the first five runners to cross the finish line were wearing Maroon & White. William Amponsah won his second straight LSC Individual Championship, becoming the ninth runner in LSC history to win multiple races.

The Buffs impressed during the South Central Regional Championships in Denver as they placed third to earn an automatic bid into the NCAA National Championships. The Buffaloes claimed a fourth-place finish for the second straight season as they had three runners inside of the Top 10 with the lowest point total in program history at the NCAA Championships. Amponsah, Harry Louradour and Adrian Legarreta earned All-American honors for their efforts on the course.

Amponsah remained atop of the Division II cross country mountain as the senior claimed his second straight NCAA Division II Cross Country National Championship in Sacramento on Nov. 23. The Ghana product became the 14th runner in DII history to win multiple individual crowns.





# STUDY ABROAD TRIP

Proves Life Changing for WT Students

When he's not in class or on the gridiron, senior engineering major JT Cavender's mind is a half a world away.

Cavender, a Midlothian native who's a linebacker and team captain for the Buffs football team, spent several days this summer in Kenya as part of a Study Abroad trip for WT's College of Engineering.

Cavender and seven other WT students worked to provide quality water at the Plateau Girls' Boarding School outside of Eldoret, Kenya. The students traveled with faculty members Dr. Nathan Howell, the Bell Helicopter Professor of Engineering, and Dr. Fisseha Alemayehu, associate professor of mechanical engineering, in cooperation with Christian Relief Fund of Amarillo and Hope Water Africa in Eldoret.



**“ Studying abroad allows students to experience new places and cultures, make friends worldwide and gain a global perspective while earning credits towards their degree. ”**

-Pilar Hunt, coordinator of WT's Study Abroad and Nationally Competitive Scholarship office

“This was a completely new kind of project for CRF, combining its interest in service and international development with a Study Abroad experience, and we are grateful that they provided \$25,000 in funding for materials and labor,” Howell said.

“It is quite rare in the field of engineering development that students can complete all three phases of a project—meeting a community and gathering requirements, performing engineering design calculations, and then implementing a project directly,” Howell continued. “In addition to the satisfaction students had in seeing their designs move from the grid paper to construction site, they also got to view active groundwater drilling in remote areas and see the human impact of the opening of water well in a small village.”

The students represented each of the majors in the College — civil, mechanical, environmental and electrical. Working together, they gained a better understanding of water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as designing and implementing an engineering solution to the Kenya school's struggles with maintaining a high-quality source of water.

“The school is near a river, but it frequently goes dry and can suffer from contamination from a nearby flower bouquet production facility,” Alemayehu said. “To combat these issues, students constructed a rainwater harvest system that will collect, store and clean much of the 43 inches of rain that falls annually in Eldoret.”

The system features 500 meters of gutters and first-flush tanks that allow the rainwater to be exceedingly clean, Howell said. Remote devices were installed to allow WT's engineering faculty and students to continue to monitor the tanks, which can store 100,000 liters of rainwater.

Even months after returning stateside, Kenya's never far from Cavender's mind.

“I do keep eyes on the sensors and there have been some errors in the data but overall, the sensors seem to be working as of now,” Cavender said in November. “They are in the dry season right now, so the tanks are currently sitting at about 20 percent capacity.”

The trip “most definitely” affected him.

“I still receive questions about it usually once a week. I have also been able to convince a few people to go on a Study Abroad trip themselves,” Cavender said. “But another way it has affected me is by analyzing the data from the Mobe water sensors for my thesis that I will be starting next semester. This has allowed me to take an in-depth look at how efficient our systems are and how well the school's water demand is being met. It's quite interesting.”

WT students also led hygiene and STEM training for more than 600 girls at the school. They also toured the Great Rift Valley, participated in a rural water well drilling project, and took part in an animal viewing safari in Amboseli National Park.

“Studying abroad allows students to experience new places and cultures, make friends worldwide and gain a global perspective while earning credits towards their degree,” said Pilar Hunt, coordinator of WT's Study Abroad and Nationally Competitive Scholarship office. “It enables students to develop highly valued skills such as intercultural communication, foreign languages, adaptability, problem-solving, and much more.”

In addition to Cavender, participating WT students included Daniel Arnold, a junior mechanical engineering major from Hurst; Kassidy Galassini, a junior mechanical engineering major from Portales, New Mexico; Reagan Heelan, a graduate student in environmental engineering from Kearney, Nebraska; Yadhira Marrufo-Canas, a May graduate in civil engineering from Amarillo; Aleza Phothisene, a senior environmental engineering major from Dumas; Tori Ruiz, a senior civil engineering major from Amarillo; and Garrett Scardino, a senior electrical engineering major from Amarillo.

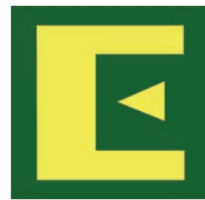
Representing West Texas A&M University's College of Engineering on a Study Abroad trip to Eldoret, Kenya, were Vicky Buckelew, from left, administrative associate; Dr. Nathan Howell, Daniel Arnold, Reagan Heelan, Garrett Scardino, Aleza Phothisene, J.T. Cavender, Yadhira Marrufo-Canas, Kassidy Galassini, Tori Ruiz and Dr. Fisseha Alemayehu.



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*Texas Poets' Corner*

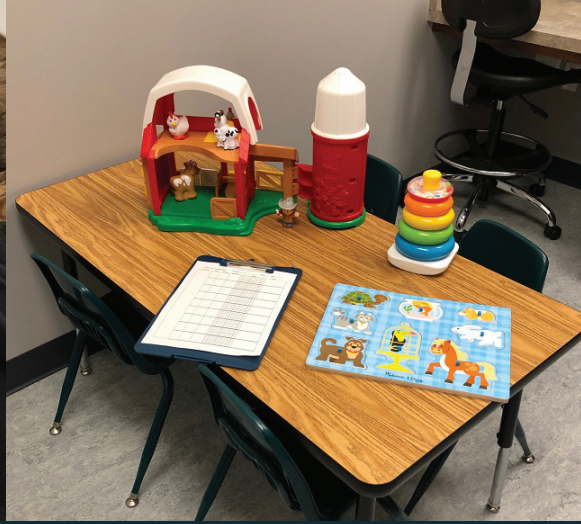


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WTAMU Speech and Hearing Clinic, located at 720 S. Tyler Suite 123  
Amarillo, Texas 79101

# Clinic Serves 'any communication need'

BY CHIP CHANDLER

"Every time she does something new, I almost cry."

Heather Ferrell's daughter, Mya, is autistic with severe speech delays. Currently nonverbal, the 4 year old is now learning to communicate thanks to the West Texas A&M University Speech and Hearing Clinic.

"Mya had been in speech therapy through her school district, but she wasn't making a whole lot of improvements," said **Ferrell '11, '18**, an instructor of sports and exercise science in WT's College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

"But we've been going to the clinic since January of this year, and it's helped out a lot."

Mya was given an augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC, device over the summer by her new therapist, **Landon Brown '14 '16**, an instructor of speech and hearing sciences at WT and clinician at the Speech and Hearing Clinic.

"She picks up very quickly with the way he works with her, which is amazing to see," Ferrell said. "She's improved vastly. We didn't know if she'd ever be able to communicate effectively. ... We're even seeing her try to vocalize more, which she wasn't even trying before. It's a complete 180."

The outpatient clinic, housed in the Harrington Academic Hall WTAMU Amarillo Center, 720 S. Tyler St., serves the Panhandle via graduate student clinicians and WT faculty, who are certified speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

The clinic opened about 20 years ago, but started to take off when Dr. Brenda Cross, director of clinical operations, was hired in 2012 and when it moved into the Amarillo center in 2019.

"The clinic is a facility that serves all ages with any communication need," Cross said.

"We work with anyone from someone who cannot communicate at all to someone who is struggling with using the correct grammar," Brown said, "up to adults who had a stroke and lost some of their language, all the way up to dementia patients who are losing their independence and communication abilities due to memory loss."

Though the clinic has been recognized with several Best of Amarillo awards, including many for Cross specifically as Best Audiologist, it's something of a hidden gem.

The WT clinic offers a full range of assistance for children and adults, including hearing and vestibular services, speech and language services, voice and swallowing services, and cognitive services.

In the past three years, it has served nearly 600 patients, from children with autism or cerebral palsy to elderly patients with Parkinson's or dementia.

Graduate students rotate through different placements, including the clinic, to get a diverse array of experiences, said **Dr. Zeth Collom '15**, interim department chair and assistant professor of speech and hearing sciences.

"We offer a range of services, but all some people think is that we play on the floor," Cross laughed.

Danita Roming Low '81 had never heard of the clinic when her ear, nose and throat doctor referred her there. By that point, Low had been to several allergists, her ENT and a gastroenterologist—all in a futile quest to recover her voice, which she would lose for months at a time thanks to severe allergies.

"It's really difficult," Low said. "You just don't realize what you have until you don't have it."

At first, Low and husband Brant questioned why they would be sent to a speech pathologist.

"I didn't realize what all they did," Low said. "The first visit, Zeth did tests and recorded what there was of my voice. ... I think we were there for almost two hours, and by the time we left, I had a partial voice for the first time in six months.

"I was just floored. I had no idea that you could do this." In the year since, Low has lost her voice a few more times, but never again for the length of time as before.

"When I'm losing it, I try to relax so I don't tighten up the chords, do the breathing exercises and do the (tracheal) massages, and it comes back really quick or I don't even lose it at all," Low said. "Now I know what to do and not to do, thanks to Zeth.

"Finding Zeth and the clinic just changed my life."

# CAMPUS UPDATES

West Texas A&M University continues to grow all across campus with remodeling and additions taking place. Take a look at the latest updates:



## EAST DINING HALL

Over the 2024 summer break, the East Dining Hall received new carpet flooring and new seating, including multiple large community tables, banquettes, round and square four-top tables, and high-top tables and stools. Additionally, new HVAC units were installed, and electrical upgrades were performed. In all, more than \$4.7 million in improvements have been made.

In Phase II, architects are working on renovations to the serving lines and considering loft dining, individual rooms and a sports-themed activity area. Phase II is expected to be completed in January 2026. Phase III may include outdoor dining and an elevator.

## GENEVA SCHAEFFER EDUCATION BUILDING

Renovations continue in the massive project that is bringing this historic building back to life.

Demolition and structural reinforcement of the building's core is nearing completion. New windows are being installed. Contractors are adding new walls for office and classroom spaces. New installation of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing are following closely behind. A new foundation and slabs rest on the east end of the building awaiting the arrival of steel for the new addition. Project is on course for completion in the later part of 2025.



## TEXAS A&M AGRI-LIFE FACILITY

In an estimated \$30 million project, a new building on the WT campus is being constructed to house Texas A&M AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension agencies. The multi-purpose facility will provide office space for faculty and staff, training space to support educational outreach to the greater community, and research lab spaces to support faculty through open lab space and appropriate lab support. The new Agri-Life building will be located to the east of the Veterinary Education, Research, and Outreach and Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory buildings along Russell Long Boulevard. Estimated project cost is \$30 million, and completion is expected by the end of 2025.

## PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

Work has begun on renovating the north wing of the Palo Duro Research Facility. Interior walls have been removed and first steps have been taken to renovate the area for new office, meeting rooms and a command center for the University Police Department. The space also will house Fire and Life Safety and the Lock Shop. Construction is expected to be completed in early 2026. Total estimated project cost is \$9,975,000.



*Faculty and Staff Accomplishments  
continued from pg. 3*

**Annalisa Mayhew '19** began Aug. 1 as head coach of the WT Spirit Teams. "I'm so excited to be back at the University that shaped me into who I am today," Mayhew said. "I know there are a lot of people who come to the University, like I did, to take part in programs that they love, and I am excited to help build the spirit program as a way of giving back to the community."

After cheering at Canyon High and WT, Mayhew was hired by the Universal Cheerleaders Association, the global home of cheer competitions, cheer camps and more. For the past seven years, Mayhew has worked at cheer camps around the region, teaching students how to cheer safely and effectively.

WT Spirit was launched in 2021 under the umbrella of the Office for Student Engagement and Leadership.

Currently, WT Spirit performs at volleyball, football and basketball games and makes special appearances at New Student Orientation, Buff Branding, Start Strong Week and Family Weekend, among other events.

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Donors may contribute to a scholarship fund established in honor of a West Texas A&M University athlete and coach turned administrator.

An anonymous donor has challenged donors to endow the Coach **Kimberly Dudley '94 '96** Cross-Country Scholarship, offering to match contributions one-for-one up to \$25,000. If the match is met in full, the endowment will provide \$2,000 annually in perpetuity to assist members of the Lady Buff Cross-Country team.

During her 20-plus year career, Dudley led her athletes to four NCAA Division II national appearances and was named Lone Star Conference Coach of the Year in 2005, 2012 and 2014. Prior to coaching the team, she ran cross-country while pursuing her bachelor's degree.

She currently coordinates the Buffalo Club, which raises funds for WT Athletics, advises the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, chairs the WT Hall of Champions committee and is the WT UIL Athletic Event Director.

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**Dr. Joshua Brown**, assistant professor of biology in the Department of Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences in WT's Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, is actively seeking area landowners to participate in a study of ring-necked pheasants in the High Plains.

The grant comes from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which has monitored the birds' population since 1976 and have noticed a decline for decades. The department will use funds from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which provides resources for state wildlife conservation agencies.

Brown's study will examine the birds' nesting habits, movements and population genetics to see if any new conservation strategies might be devised.

Brown has already reached out to conservation group Pheasants Forever to help find landowners willing to let the research team do field work on their property. Others interested in taking part may contact Brown at 806-651-5217 or [jbrown@wtamu.edu](mailto:jbrown@wtamu.edu).

**Dr. Elizabeth Rogers '07** and **Dr. Brigette Whaley**, both part of the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences, have been named winners of the Liz and John Mozola Faculty Excellence Award.

The award was established in 2018 to recognize teacher educators, those who prepare future instructors and train them to provide exemplary education in their eventual classrooms.

Rogers is an assistant professor of counseling, a licensed professional counselor and certified school counselor in Texas.

She teaches career counseling, counseling theory and techniques, crisis counseling, intro to school counseling, and school counseling practicum.

Her research interests are focused around implanting the appropriate role of the school counselor.

Whaley, an associate professor of education, joined WT in 2016 after working in the public school system for 18 years. She earned a bachelor's degree at Oklahoma State University and a master's and Ph.D. from the University of Texas–Arlington.

Whaley teaches undergraduate and graduate-level courses including educational methods, strategic operations and curriculum theory and analysis.

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**Rik Andersen '89**, who served as the University photographer for more than 30 years, was inducted into the Communication Hall of Fame.

Andersen earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from WT and, as a student, worked as a photographer for The Prairie. In addition to shooting photos for the University since 1992, he has taught photography courses. In 2023, Rik and his wife, Dr. Amy Andersen, established the Mr. Louis F. and Dr. Amy Andersen Media Communication Scholarship to support future communication students.

•••••

**Shelly McCune '90 '97 '05** is now Assistant Vice President for Business and Finance.

McCune, previously budget director, has worked for WT for nearly 30 years. In her new role, she will continue to oversee the University's budgets, will assist departments in managing their budgets, and will provide assistance with revenue projections and strategic planning.

McCune earned a Bachelor of Science in agricultural business and economics, a Master of Science in agriculture and an MBA in management, all at WT.

•••••

**Dr. Emily Kinsky**, WT's Jenny Lind Professor of Communication in the Department of Communication, presented research this summer at the 13th International History of Public Relations Conference at Bournemouth University in Bournemouth, England.

Kinsky presented research on Caroline Hood, who worked for Rockefeller Center in New York City for 39 years, working her way from the basement gift shop to a position as vice president over public relations, the first female vice president at Rockefeller.

Kinsky's co-author was Dr. Karen Miller Russell of the University of Georgia.

Kinsky also recently was named interim director of WT's Department of English, Philosophy and Modern Languages in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities.

## Grant Proposals Increase

WT faculty submitted 46 percent more grant proposals, amounting to an 84 percent increase in requested dollars, in a year-over-year comparison, new figures show.

Faculty members across WT's six Colleges submitted 121 grants in fiscal year 2024, requesting \$39.5 million from federal, state and private funders.

The time between submission and awarding of a grant can stretch from six to 16 months, but among the already-awarded grants of the FY24 cycle include those to modernize labs, secure new instrumentation, fund student-support initiatives and mentorship programs, expand research capabilities, foster regional and national collaboration, and translate advanced technology into practical applications.

## WT improves in U.S. News & World Report

West Texas A&M University saw a significant improvement in its standing among other schools in the West, according to newly released rankings from **U.S. News & World Report**.

WT ranked at No. 5 among Best Value Schools among schools in the West, up from No. 20 in 2022-2023. The University rose to No. 47 in the magazine's Regional Universities (West) list, up from No. 56 the previous year. WT also placed No. 24, up three spots, in the list of Top Public Universities in the West.

WT also placed No. 25 for Best Colleges for Veterans, and the University earned rankings in Top Performers on Social Mobility, Best Undergraduate Engineering Programs and Best Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program.

U.S. News' Best Colleges rankings provide data-driven information and guidance to help prospective students and their families understand their higher education options.

## Top supporters honored

**Dr. Terry Caviness and sons Trevor and Regan** were presented the Pinnacle Award during WT's Celebration of Donors, and **Four Price**, former state legislator, was named the recipient of the President's

Panhandle Pioneer Award by WT President Walter V. Wendler.

The Pinnacle Award recognizes donors who have made a significant impact in funding the University's strategic initiatives.

Caviness Beef Packers was founded in 1962 and is currently led by second- and third-generation family members. The Caviness family has given almost \$3.5 million to WT over the last decade.

The President's Panhandle Pioneer Award recognizes those who have provided substantial volunteer service to WT and the region.

Price represented Texas House District 87 from 2010 to 2024. Price was a leader in securing significant state funding for WT.

Also recognized during the evening were other top donors in the University's Old Main Society.

## College of Engineering

Professors from West Texas A&M University's College of Engineering will use a recently awarded federal grant to catalyze new industrial and governmental partnerships.

The \$350,000 grant from the National Science Foundation's Enabling Partnerships to Increase Innovation Capacity program will enable WT to find ways to increase its visibility, attract new collaborators and enrich the educational and professional experience, said Dr. Fatemeh "Azi" Tabei, lead researcher and assistant professor of electrical engineering and computer science. Tabei will work with Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of the College of Engineering, and Dr. Vinitha Hannah Subburaj, associate dean.

Industries and such governmental agencies as the Department of Energy, National Institutes of Health and others often look to larger universities first when making partnerships or offering grants, Tabei said. The NSF's EPIIC grants, then, are an attempt to even the playing field for undergraduate institutions like WT.

# class

## WHERE THE BU

### '60s



**Bob Riley '66** served in the Navy prior to completing his doctorate and career in higher education at Sul Ross State University and Howard

College. In 1992, Riley was named as President of East Texas Baptist College and served for 17 years, where he was instrumental in implementing a servant leadership culture into the ETBU community. He and wife Gayle established a scholarship recognizing students with outstanding servant leadership qualities.

**James W. Reid III '68** received a draft notice a month after graduating from WT. After serving two years in the army, he worked at a feed store. He then decided to open his own business and opened Coulter Gardens in 1978, which moved to its current location in 1991 and is still serving the Texas Panhandle community.

### '70s



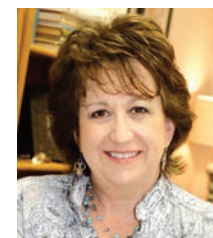
**Leticia Goodrich '71** is a servant leader. She established a Meals on Wheels program in Amarillo and Portales, NM, served as an

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) volunteer, helped found the Senior Ambassadors Coalition, served as the president of the Panhandle chapter of the Alzheimer's Association's board of directors, established and operated Goodcare Health Services, and created the Amarillo Area Breast Health Coalition.

**David Cleveland '75** owns two businesses in Albany, Clear Fork Realty and Subsea Operating Company. He assists with residential, commercial and farm and ranch sales and management, as well as oil exploration and development in Shackelford and Throckmorton Counties.

### '80s

**Jon T. Jones '82** of Floydada is the Secretary/Treasurer of Plains Cotton Growers, Inc. which promotes the cotton industry nation-wide and works to impact legislation at every level. He is a long-time Floyd County cotton grower and is a fourth-generation farmer.



**Natalie Cline Bright '83** was elected to the Western Writers of America Board of Directors. She is the author of 20 books for children and adults, the

majority of which combine her passion for the American West and inspired by the farming community in Dimmitt where she grew up. Bright has won awards for contributions of excellence in western literature and is a recipient of the Lifetime Membership Award from Texas High Plains Writers of Amarillo.



**Teresa '87 and Bryan Schley '87** and children **Matthew '16, Angela '17, Joseph '22, and Tanna '23** own and run Idle Hands, a homemade

peanut and pecan brittle business. Idle Hands came to life in 2017 to give the Schley kids a summer job. Upon retiring from nursing in 2022, Teresa has kept it going for fun and is a regular booth at the Canyon Farmers Market.

### '90s



**Natasha Taylor Stewart '97** is a coach and educator with 27 years of experience at both the high school and collegiate level and has been named the

Director of Athletics for Irving ISD. She is the first female administrator of the Irving ISD Athletics Department. Stewart played basketball for the Lady Buffs and was selected First Team All-American and is the second leading scorer in Lady Buff Basketball history.

# notes

## BUFFALO ROOM



**Kenny Berry '99** is the Executive Director of Education Service Center Region 12 in Waco, which provides professional development and support to

educators and school personnel in 77 school districts. Berry has served in education for over 20 years in several districts, including Canyon ISD.

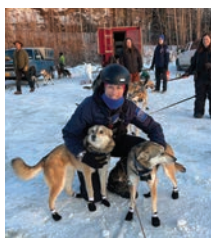
## '00s

**Natalie Jackson '05** writes the "Leading Indicators" column for National Journal. She is currently a vice president at GQR Research Institute. Jackson previously developed surveys at the Public Religion Research Institute, and held senior and management positions at JUST Capital, HuffPost, and the Marist Institute for Public Opinion. She also writes the newsletter "Herding Cats & Polls" at Substack.



**Kim McCuiston '06** is one of the first doctoral graduates of WT and serves as the Associate Vice Chancellor and Director of the Texas A&M University system Fort

Worth research and academic campus. She was named one of the Great Women of Texas by the Fort Worth Business Press and was named one of 400 Most Influential Leaders in Fort Worth by Fort Worth Inc.



**Jennifer Nelson '00, '18** has been in Alaska on and off for the past ten years. She started learning to mush in 2020 and completed the Yukon Quest, an 80-mile trek,

placing 5th, as well as the Susan Butcher Memorial T-Dog run, which was 110 miles. Nelson started her own kennel, Northern Lone Star Mushing, which has 12 dogs. She has taken on the role of President for the Two Rivers Dog Musers association and will help promote the sport locally.

## '10s

**Eva Rogers '11** is in the 2024-25' Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) Lead Class. She serves as a teaching professional at Medinah Country Club. PGA Lead is the association's leadership development program to identify, mentor, and progress PGA of America members. While golfing for WT, Rogers was named National Golf Coaches Association (NGCA) Division II All-American Scholar Team.

**Gavin Nesbitt '17** received an Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Journalism (2024) and a Lone Star Emmy Award (2023) for his work on the story, "One Year In: Uvalde." He also received three Telly awards (2024), a Texas Broadcasting News Award (2024) and a Headliners Foundation Showcase Award for Enterprise and Innovation in Journalism (2024).



**Roman Leal '19** graduated from Yale Law School in 2022. He served as an editor on the Yale Law Journal. Now, Leal is a litigation associate in the San Francisco

office of Munger, Tolles & Olson. Prior to law school, he founded Evocation Coffee Roasters Company and was its CEO for ten years, during which time it was named one of the "25 Best Coffee Roasters in America" by Men's Journal.

## '20s



**SaVantè Wallace '20** has been selected as a National Head Start Fellow and represents the Texas Panhandle in Washington DC. He works closely with senior leadership

and contributes his expertise and insights while also benefiting from professional development, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

**Marcia Tippit '22** came to WT as a non-traditional student, graduating at 64 with her masters of art. Her art career has stemmed through a variety of genres, including acting in movies alongside Kevin Costner, Stanley Tucci, and Kelsey Grammar, teaching language arts, visual arts and performing arts in K-12 in Albuquerque, and most recently, selling artwork to Amarillo National Bank.

## Major teaching grant won

WT is among six new **Raising Texas Teachers** partner universities announced by the Charles Butt Foundation, which will offer thousands in scholarships to future teachers.

WT and its Department of Education in the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences joins over 24 partner teacher preparation programs across the state collaborating with the Foundation to address persistent challenges in teacher preparation through innovative thinking and use of data.

Over the past four years, WT has worked with the Charles Butt Foundation and other stakeholders to scale evidence-based clinical practices, improve coursework and training to include practice-based pedagogies, develop strong district partnerships, and advance the teaching profession by sharing lessons learned.

All Raising Texas Teachers partner universities are eligible to recommend their teacher candidates to receive the Charles Butt Scholarship for Aspiring Teachers, an \$8,000 scholarship that can cover expenses up to the cost of attendance for up to four years.

Recipients of the scholarship are committed to teaching in the Texas public school system in either a Title 1 or majority economically disadvantaged school or in a priority subject area that has historically been hard to staff (math, science, special education, or bilingual).

## Overall increase across the board in undergraduate students

Despite national hurdles for prospective students applying for financial aid, WT saw an overall increase across the board in undergraduate students for the fall 2024 semester, newly released figures showed.

Over the past several months, the federal government rolled out a new way for students to fill out their Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, but a number of technical glitches over the summer caused delays in filing for countless students around the country. FAFSA is required for numerous federal grants and loans, as well as aid and scholarships at state and private institutions.

The overall undergraduate enrollment is up slightly less than 1 percent from fall 2023. Both sophomore and senior enrollment rose more than 1 percent year-over-year, and freshman and junior enrollment also rose by 0.2 percent.

WT's overall enrollment essentially remained steady from fall 2023.

WT officials attributed the rise not only to the University's diligence in helping students fill out their FAFSA in a timely manner, but also to several innovative strategies designed to increase enrollment.

## McMurtry bio wins CSAW award

**Tracy Daugherty's "Larry McMurtry: A Life,"** published in September 2023 by St. Martin's Press, was named the 2024 winner of the Bonney MacDonald Award for Outstanding Western Book from the Center for the Study of the American West.

A Pulitzer Prize-finalist, Daugherty's book examines McMurtry's 60-plus-year career as a novelist and Academy Award-winning screenwriter in the first comprehensive biography of the Texas native. Runner-up was Sarah Keyes' "American Burial Ground: A New History of the Overland Trail," published in October 2023 by University of Pennsylvania Press. The nonfiction book, Keyes' publishing debut, tells of the harrowing journey and thousands of lives lost when easterners crossed the Plains in covered wagons.

Daugherty will accept his award and offer a reading from his book at a later date.

CSAW has given the Bonney McDonald Outstanding Western Book Award annually since 2019.

# **WT** Alumni Association WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY™

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