

the WEST TEXAN

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Executive Committee

PRESIDENT Trevor Barnes '06 **PRESIDENT-ELECT** Kerry Thomas '82
SECRETARY Caryn Crutchfield '94 **PAST PRESIDENT** Debbie Farnum '71, '94

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Board of Directors

Tim Bynum '05 • Milton Guerrero '16 • J Rhett Parker '96
Col. Dewey "Buddy" Wheat '74 • J'Lynn Wheeler '80 • Dr. Judy Williams '75
Richard Wygle '87

The West Texan is the official publication of the WT Alumni Association. The West Texas A&M University Alumni Association is a nonprofit corporation organized for the benefit of WT, a member of The Texas A&M University System. The WT Alumni Association is located in Buffalo Courts on the WT campus in Canyon, Texas.

Postage is paid at Amarillo, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to The West Texan, WT Alumni Association, WTAMU Box 60753, Canyon, Texas 79016 or visit BuffAlum.com to update contact information.

The West Texan and all related trademarks, logos, and content are the property of West Texas A&M University. No part may be reproduced, distributed, or adapted in any form without express written permission from the University's Office of Communication and Marketing. All rights reserved under U.S. and Texas intellectual property laws.

WRITE TO US // We welcome your letters. The editor reserves the right to determine the suitability of letters for publication and to edit them for accuracy and length. Letters should refer to material published in the magazine and include the writer's full name, address and telephone number. If an alum, please include degree and year of degree.

EDITORIAL TEAM // *Assistant Vice President for Alumni Relations* Ronnie Hall *Editor* Chip Chandler *Publisher* Dr. De'Arno De'Armond *Art Director* Michelle Martinez de la Torre *Writers* Chip Chandler, Brad Newman *Photographers* Darcy Lively, Christian Guerrero, Jordan Conde Trenton Kelly

WEBSITE // buffalum.com

EMAIL // alumni@wtamu.edu

TO SUPPORT WT // wtamu.edu/giving

CLASS NOTES // alumni@wtamu.edu

TO ADVERTISE IN THE WEST TEXAN // alumni@wtamu.edu

TO UPDATE YOUR RECORDS // alumni@wtamu.edu

features



8

8 | WILDLIFE BIOLOGY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

A golden anniversary for wildlife scientists



10

10 | HOMECOMING 2025

Bufs came from far and wide for a wild celebration

14 | DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

Exceptional Bufs honored

COVER STORY

16 | BUFFS IN THAILAND

Study Abroad trip has real-world impact



14



16

articles

4 Alumni Spotlight

6 Alumni Spotlight

20 Study Abroad

22 Athletics

28 Campus Updates

32 Class Notes

EXECUTIVE TEAM LETTER



Ronnie Hall '95, '00 has had the opportunity to meet thousands of students and alumni in his 30 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 '17, '19 worked for the University throughout college 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 adventure of serving the alumni. From connecting with alumni in local chapters and networks to engaging with WT alumni who own a business or helping a WT student find the perfect class ring, she has loved the opportunity to build meaningful relationships and celebrate the traditions that make WT such a special place.

Dear Buffs,

Over the numerous generations of WT grads, a piece of the University has stayed within each alum, carried through careers, over state lines, in the way a family is led, and in making a difference in the community.

As an alum, you represent the West Texas grit and strong values that WT instilled within you. From the local business owner meeting a need to the musician filling the air with beautiful notes. From the nurse providing needed care to others to the engineer providing structurally sound bridges. From the farmer tilling the soil for the next harvest to the educator enlightening the next generation.

We love sharing all these stories of the difference being made in your communities.

This serves as a reminder of the profound impact that WT has on its students and the students on the world. Your story can make a difference. If you or a fellow Buff have a story that needs to be shared, we hope you will reach out. You never know the impact your journey may have on someone else.

In the following pages, you will see the encouragement, success and philanthropy of our students, alumni and friends, which we know you will enjoy.

Have a blessed day & Go Buffs!

Ronnie Hall *Abby Waters*



Activate your
Alumni Association membership
online at BuffAlum.com.

Follow us:



@WTAlumni



WT Alumni Association

Fall Enrollment Up

WT saw a significant increase in enrollment for the fall 2025 semester.

Overall enrollment was up more than 2 percent for the new semester, including a 3.29 percent increase in undergraduates.

The 12th class day, which fell on Sept. 10, is when Texas' public universities traditionally report enrollment in the fall and spring semesters.

WT's overall enrollment is 9,257, up from 9,055 in fall 2024.

"This welcome increase in our enrollment is the result of the dedicated work of everyone on campus, not just in our enrollment management offices but among every faculty and staff member," said WT President Walter V. Wendler. "We are constantly striving for excellence in everything we do, and this significant increase in students shows that our efforts are paying off. We continue to be dedicated to making sure students—both now and in the future—have the resources necessary to get the education they want."

WT Childcare Center Has New Name, Endowment

WT took a significant step forward this summer in its efforts to provide nurturing care for children.

The WT Child Development Center, formerly known as Kids Kollege, provides quality care and educational experiences for children of the WT community and beyond.

"This new name more accurately conveys our comprehensive approach to nurturing children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth, and highlights our connection to the vibrant West Texas region," said Dr. Shawn Fouts, senior director of campus community. "It also better aligns with contemporary standards and best practices in early childhood education."

The center also recently received word that it won a \$108,000 grant from the Stella Kemble Trust, establishing a new endowment that will provide perpetual support for the program.

"The endowment, set up by the estate of a longstanding contributor to the childcare center, will provide us with additional funding to support our center through supplemental assistance," said Dr. Chris Thomas, vice president for student affairs. "It also demonstrates the perceived value of the Center and is an invaluable starting investment fund as we work to increase our endowment."

The endowment fund, for which additional donations will be accepted, will provide funding for students who cannot afford the full cost of childcare.

WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

faculty and staff accomplishments

Six faculty members and eight alumni from WT's Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing were honored Nov. 6 as 2025 Panhandle Great 25 Nurses. Additionally, a faculty member received Panhandle Great 25 scholarships.

The list was chosen by the Panhandle Great 25 Nurses committee. Criteria include leadership qualities, service to the community, compassionate caregiving and significant contributions to the profession of nursing.

Faculty members on the Panhandle Great 25 list are **Azra Barakovic '17, '22**, the Mary Wendler Professor of Nursing; **Dr. Priscella Correa '12**, the Baptist Community Services Professor of Nursing; **Dr. Alea Friemel '12, '14, '19, '20**, the High Plains Christian Ministry Professor of Nursing Leadership; Carole Harkins, instructor of nursing; **Michelle Smith '91, '19**, instructor of nursing; and **Austin Wiseman '13, '17**, the Eunice King Professor of Nursing.

Ryann Thompson, instructor of nursing, was awarded the Dr. Valerie Kiper Doctoral Leadership Scholarship, which will assist her in completing her pursuit of a Doctor of Nursing Practice in executive leadership at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.

Alumni recognized were **Camille Graves '19; Luann Meyer '01; Amaka Nwokedi '10; Brenna Payne '08; Sarah Riley '05, '10; Elisha Rosier '07; Michelle Switzer '05; and Emily Vallejo '18.**

.....

Faculty members from WT's Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing were named to five professorships beginning with the Fall 2025 semester.

Named to the endowed professorships are **Azra Barakovic '17, '22**, the Mary Wendler Professor of Nursing; **Sherri Drinnon '92, '00**, the High Plains Christian Ministry Rural Professor of Nursing; **Dr. Alea Friemel '12, '14, '19, '20**, the High Plains Christian Ministry Professor of Nursing Leadership; **Laura Reyher '78, '16**, the Laura and Joe Street Professor of Nursing; and **Austin Wiseman '13, '17**, the Eunice King Professor of Nursing.

The College has 11 professorships, eight of which have been established since 2021.

.....

A pair of WT alums were named to endowed professorships in the WT College of Engineering: **Dr. Benton Allen '15, '19, '24** is the new Bell Professor of Engineering, and **Dr. Audrey Meador '05, '10** is the new Clair Mayes Professor of Mathematics.

The WT College of Engineering offers programs in mechanical, civil, electrical, and environmental engineering as well as engineering technology, mathematics and computer science. It was elevated from a school to a college in 2020, making it WT's sixth college. It currently employs 43 faculty members and, between 2021 and 2024, has seen a 21 percent increase in enrollment.

Allen's research focuses on the commercialization of innovative materials, with expertise spanning mechanical engineering, materials science, and biological materials. His work includes the development of antimicrobial coatings and nanostructured systems with applications in agriculture, corrosion protection and more.

Meador's research interests include recruitment and retention of students to the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, minority populations in STEM education, instructional theories in mathematics, assistive technology in mathematics education and pre-service teacher knowledge in mathematics.

A professor in the “upper echelon” of faculty members and an administrator with a golden touch were honored at a ceremony commemorating the start of WT’s academic year.

During an Aug. 18 faculty and staff convocation ceremony, Dr. Leslie Ramos Salazar, the Abdullat Professor of Business Communication and Decision Management, was named Magister Optimus, the highest honor for a WT faculty member.

Pam Young, assistant vice president for human resources, was given the Clarence E. Thompson Staff Excellence Award, the University’s highest staff honor.

Assistant Chief Kyle Hawbaker of the University Police Department, and **Gregg Lawler ‘02, ‘06**, assistant director of academic success, also won staff excellence awards.

•••••

Jon Revett ‘02, ‘04, a 12-year veteran of the WT faculty, was named the new head of the Department of Art, Theatre and Dance in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities.

“It is an honor to serve as the chair of our department,” Revett said. “We play a vital role in the arts in our region, and I am excited to be at the helm of such a great group of humans.”

Revett has taught at the collegiate level since 2004, has organized several galleries and has hung countless art shows. He also is a prolific artist, having participated in multiple solo and juried art shows and also curating group exhibitions.

•••••

Dr. Shawn Fouts is the new faculty director of WT’s Rogers LEAD Program.

Fouts will continue as WT’s senior director of campus community and director of residential living.

“I can’t wait to really form relationships with these outstanding WT students,” Fouts said. “Seeing what they already bring to our campus community and where they can go is something special.”

The Dyke and Terry Rogers Leadership Education and Development Program was created in 2012 to challenge high-achieving students to further develop their leadership potential.

As faculty director, Fouts will play a central role in shaping both the academic and personal leadership development of the scholars.

•••••

Dr. Elizabeth Morrow Clark, professor of history, is one of six from around the country who won a 2025 Excellence in Advising Award from the Mortar Board National College Honor Society.

Mortar Board, which includes 235 chapters across the U.S., is the nation’s premiere honor society recognizing college juniors and seniors for their achievements in scholarship, leadership and service.

Clark recently was featured in the national Mortar Board Forum magazine and served on the organization’s national planning committee for its virtual conference.

Clark, a Polish historian by training, joined WT in 2000 after earning degrees from the University of Richmond and the University of Kansas. She teaches topics from Napoleon to nationalism.

•••••

Kenneth Starcher ‘80, ‘95, a retired WT engineering instructor, and Dr. Vaughn C. Nelson, a retired WT physics professor and former dean, recently completed the third edition of their “Introduction to Renewable Energy” textbook through CRC Press.

The revised edition includes new data and discoveries since the last revision in 2015, as well as 96 color images, a first in CRC Press’s Renewable Energy series.

Starcher and Nelson co-founded WT’s Alternative Energy Institute. Nelson, who served as dean of the Graduate School, Research and Information Technology until 2001, was named a professor emeritus in 2005.

Rogers LEAD WT Honored

The Dyke and Terry Rogers Leadership Education and Development Program, or Rogers LEAD WT, was one of nine honorees recognized Nov. 20 at the Texas Plains Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals’ 33rd-annual National Philanthropy Day Awards.

Rogers LEAD WT was created in 2012 to challenge high-achieving students to further develop their leadership potential. The program’s students were nominated as Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy by Kids, Inc.

Service projects are the foundation of the Rogers LEAD WT program, said **Kimberly Cornelsen ‘06**, executive director.

Ty Cranmer ‘97, who volunteers as auctioneer for WT’s successful Ag Day fundraiser and other University-affiliated events, was named Outstanding Volunteer Fundraiser. He was nominated by WT and Heal the City.

WT Student Leaders Installed Over Summer

Three new student leaders began work over the summer as the new leadership team for Student Government Association following a campus-wide election.

Mary Vivian Ivey, a junior agricultural media and communication major from Fort Smith, Arkansas, was elected president. Boone Begert, a junior agriculture major from Allison, was chosen vice president, and Hunter Heady, a senior mechanical engineering major from Roscoe, was named chief justice.

Classes for the fall 2025 semester began Aug. 25.

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 Accredited for Continuing Nursing Education Hours

Nurses in the Texas Panhandle and beyond now can earn continuing education hours through WT’s Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing.

The Street School of Nursing in its College of Nursing and Health Sciences recently earned accreditation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

“The ability to provide continuing education opportunities for nurses everywhere is just another way our WT nursing community is leading the way in nursing throughout the Panhandle and across our great state,” said **Dr. Holly Jeffreys ‘97, ‘02**, dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences and the Ware University Distinguished Professor.

WT will primarily provide up-to-date research and best practices for nurses who live and work in rural areas. Continuing education credits will be accessible to practicing registered nurses and nurse practitioners throughout the country.

Alumni family bring awareness to rarely diagnosed medical condition

Two West Texas A&M University alumni have turned into advocates for kids with an often-overlooked medical condition.

By Brad Newman

Since 2022, **Shalako '08** and **Blake '11 Law** have navigated the often bewildering, challenging, faith-growing process of understanding symptoms, pursuing treatment, and educating others about PANDAS (Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections).

“

If this is our road to walk, we don't want it to be wasted, and we don't want others to walk it alone.

-Shalako Law

”



Blake, Emerson, Halle, and Shalako Law in their Amarillo home.

That's when their own daughter, 11-year-old Halle, was diagnosed with the autoimmune condition.

"There have been some incredibly difficult seasons," said Shalako Law. "But it's opened my eyes and increased my compassion to areas of struggling families that I could never have imagined before."

Halle's symptoms first appeared on the first day of her second-grade year.

"The changes were immediate and drastic and hard to process or understand," said Shalako, a digital learning specialist for Amarillo Independent School District.

The condition causes the body's immune system — after a simple strep infection — to mistakenly turn on the brain instead of the bacteria.

In children with PANDAS, this confusion leads to swelling in parts of the brain that control emotions, behavior and movement. The result can be sudden, severe changes a child can't control: anxiety, mood swings, tics, or other neuropsychiatric symptoms that seem to appear out of nowhere.

"It takes whatever emotion you have and amps it to 11," said Blake Law, who is the golf course superintendent for the Tascosa Course at Tascosa Golf Club.

PANDAS, Shalako Law said, isn't a rare condition, but it is rarely diagnosed, making the process of finding treatment and care more difficult.

The family credits a compassionate pediatrician with listening well, persisting with tests, and connecting the family with a team of specialists and other providers to help Halle.

"Thankfully there is progress being made in the medical industry, which is so encouraging," Shalako Law said.

The family — which includes Emerson, Halle's 13-year-old sister — seeks to surround Halle with support, learning coping strategies and creating a secure and loving home together.

"I want to make sure we have a stable family unit," said Blake Law. "Even if we're going through the hard parts, we're going through it together."

"When Halle feels like she's alone on an island, let us get on that island with you," he said.

"I know I can just lean on people I love and trust," Halle Law said.

That includes her family, school friends, and church.

The family, who attends Trinity Baptist Church in Amarillo, agreed that their faith sustains them.

"Jesus is where our hope is," Shalako Law said. "I always cling to the fact that God knows and loves our sweet daughter more intimately than we could ever hope or pray to."

Through Halle's experience with PANDAS, the Laws have made an effort to bring awareness about the condition.

AISD invited Shalako Law to share their story and make a presentation about PANDAS to school nurses.

Emerson, a student at Crockett Middle School, organized a weeklong PANDAS awareness week on that campus, with announcements, infographics and a "green-out" dress day on the official awareness day for PANDAS (green is the recognized color for PANDAS awareness).

"If this is our road to walk, we don't want it to be wasted, and we don't want others to walk it alone," Shalako Law said.

Along their journey, the Laws have also met and been able to aid other families experiencing the same condition.

Some families, Shalako Law said, learned about the condition through Halle's story, prompting them to seek further answers for their own children.

"It makes me feel joyful and happy that I can maybe help other people know about PANDAS and get better," Halle said. "I'm thankful for that chance."

Halle continues to struggle with "flares" from the condition, and likely will for many years, Shalako Law said. But the diagnosis has become much more manageable, due to the outpouring of local support.

And Halle's own tenacity.

"Halle is my hero," Shalako Law said. "She has learned, and is still developing, courage, strength, perseverance and faith. It's been amazing to watch her story unfold."

FROM BUFF STUFF
TO GAMEDAY!



OUTFITTING BUFF FANS SINCE 2016

WTFANGEAR.COM

2306 4TH AVE (ACROSS FROM CAMPUS)

Second endowment supports longstanding quartet

BY BRAD NEWMAN

For nearly 75 years, **Don '52** and **Dorothy '70 Patterson** have been enthusiastic supporters of West Texas A&M University.

The two alumni attended WT in the 1950s — Don on a football scholarship, Dorothy studying in the English department — and over the decades have invested in the university through gifts, service and ongoing support.

Now, their latest act of philanthropy aims to build on the legacy of one of WT's most acclaimed fine arts groups, the Harrington String Quartet.

A \$125,000 endowment from the couple establishes the Dorothy and Don Patterson Professor of Violin, a professorship currently held by Dr. Rossitza Goza, who joined the quartet as first violin in 2010.

"It is a tremendous honor to hold this endowed position," Goza said. "It empowers me to dream bigger, collaborate more deeply, and invest in the next generation of artists and educators."

“

I do have such a deep gratitude toward WT, for giving me the opportunity to have such a quality education

- Don Patterson

”

The quartet was established in 1981 by a generous gift from the late Sybil B. Harrington.

It was Harrington herself who first encouraged the Pattersons toward giving to the University.

"We enjoyed her friendship very much," Dorothy Patterson said, referring to Harrington. "She was a great philanthropist who truly loved people."

The Pattersons credit Harrington with being a model and personal inspiration for giving back to a place like WT, which has meant so much to them personally.

"I do have such a deep gratitude toward WT, for giving me the opportunity to have such a quality education," Don Patterson said.

Over the years, the couple have funded academic scholarships, athletic scholarships, and a professorship in WT's Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business.



West Texas A&M University's Harrington String Quartet will perform three concerts in its 2025-2026 season. Members are, from left, Brenton Caldwell, viola; Emmanuel Lopez, cello; Dr. Rossitza Goza, violin 1; and Evgeny Zvonnikov, violin 2.



Amarillo philanthropists and WT alumni Dorothy and Don Patterson recently established a new professorship in violin for the Harrington String Quartet at WT.

"WT is a fine institution," Dorothy Patterson said. "From the quality of our professors to the opportunities for the young people. It's so wonderful to hear the exciting stories coming from our alma mater."

The couple's gift to the quartet represents a continuation of their lifelong commitment to WT, and a meaningful investment in a performing arts group they have enjoyed since its founding. The Pattersons continue to be concert regulars, and in particular have admired Goza's musicianship for many years.

"Rossitza is such a fine musician, a dedicated musician, and a dear sweet person," Dorothy Patterson said.

With the new professorship, Goza now will have additional opportunities to perform, to conduct research and pursue professional development, and to assist in attracting high-quality violin students to WT.

"WT's commitment to quality artistic endeavors is truly extraordinary," she said. "And this region is a thriving hub of creativity. It's a full artistic ecosystem, and I feel right at home and proud to be part of it."

Goza is the second endowed member of the quartet. Cellist and founding member Emmanuel Lopez was named the Periman Distinguished Chair of Cello in 2015.

The quartet also includes Evgeny Zvonnikov, violin 2; and the newest member, violist Brenton Caldwell, who was named to that position in October 2025.

The university's goal is to endow the violin 2 and viola positions as well.

"Professorship and chair endowments are incredible tools for recruiting, retaining and rewarding talented faculty," said Lesly Annen, assistant vice president for leadership gifts and development. "To have the HSQ fully funded through these types of endowments means the purpose of the HSQ would be truly fulfilled."

Gifts like the Pattersons' also underscore and bolster WT's commitment to the arts, Goza said.

"Investment in the arts is essential to a university's mission," she said. "And at WT, the support for artistic exploration goes far beyond performance. It's a place where artistry is nurtured, curiosity is celebrated, and the possibilities are endless."

BUFFS BEYOND CAMPUS



The WT spirit lives in every ECU branch through leadership, service, and connection!

Call or stop by one of our eleven locations to get started!

45th | AmTech | Badger \$mart | Borger | Buff \$mart
Bushland | Canyon | Hillside | I-40 | Plum Creek | Stinnett

Here to serve you in Canyon:

Canyon Branch | 1900 FM 2590, Canyon TX 79015

Buff \$mart Branch | 2100 Fourth Ave, Canyon TX 79015

EducationCU.com

806-358-7777

Federally insured by NCUA



Wildlife biology program marks

50 Years

By Brad Newman



West Texas A&M University's wildlife biology program has welcomed multiple generations of students with a passion for the natural world and a desire to protect the landscapes they love.

In 2025, the program celebrates its 50-year milestone.

"There is a lot to be proud of in the wildlife program here at WT," said Dr. Jason C. Yarbrough, department head and associate professor and Ross Wilson Chair in Chemistry.

"What makes me most proud is how we combine strong science and academics with real, current issues in our region."

The program, established in 1975, now has 103 degree plans, equipping students for a wide range of careers.



Our students don't just read about wildlife management in a textbook, they're out in the field with our faculty, partnering with agencies, collecting data, handling and observing animals, and learning the necessary skills of their science.

- Dr. Jason C. Yarbrough, department head and associate professor



Graduates have been hired by state and federal agencies and private consulting firms; some are working as game wardens and educators at parks, zoos and nature centers; others have become wildlife photographers and videographers.

"WT is training the next generation of wildlife professionals," Yarbrough said. "Scientists, managers, and leaders who understand the land, the animals, and how to manage and preserve the natural ecology."

Benji Brooks '09 works for an environmental consulting company.

He began as a field agent, conducting surveys, scanning for sensitive animal species, and making other observations for clients who needed environmental planning for projects.

"I loved everything about the field," he said. "I was sort of like a paid bird watcher, which was great."

Brooks still works for the company, but now from home, mapping and analyzing data for clients.

He credits WT for not only teaching information related to their studies, but for its robust hands-on approach to training students along the way.

"Our students don't just read about wildlife management in a textbook," Yarbrough said. "They're out in the field with our faculty, partnering with agencies, collecting data, handling and observing animals, and learning the necessary skills of their science."

It's that practical, in-the-field emphasis that sets WT's program apart, said Audrey Adkison, a junior from Mansfield who was named WT's 2025 Intern of the Year.

"I have been on field trips where I learned wildlife management techniques, animal handling skills, data collection skills, and been able to network with wildlife professionals," she said.

Adkison is the current president of WT's Wildlife Society, an on-campus student organization for students interested in wildlife biology.

"My studies in wildlife biology at WT have been nothing short of amazing," Adkison said. "At WT, the classes, workload, professors, and the Wildlife Society – all of it is preparing me for working in this industry."

Of course, during the past 50 years, technology has also transformed the wildlife biology industry, from apps to identify bird songs to global access to lists of animal species.

But a focus strong student-faculty interaction has defined the program throughout its existence.

"Students can expect challenging classes, numerous local and overnight field trips, and a friendly student-focused environment where all your professors know your name," said Dr. Ray Matlack, the James A. "Buddy" Davidson Professorship of Wildlife Biology, who has taught at WT since 2022.

Andrew Carrano '14 said the availability and intentionality of his WT professors put him ahead of graduates from other institutions.

"The amount of opportunities that you're afforded is limitless," said Carrano, who now works in the field for an environmental consulting company. "The facility always had in-the-field research going on, and they opened it up for student volunteers. I could be in the field all the time, getting experience alongside professionals."



Even though the Texas Panhandle seems out of the way, it really holds a lot of value environmentally. It's such an important spot for a university to have a strong wildlife biology presence, there's a wealth of projects for students to do, year-round.

- Andrew Carrano '14



Carrano originally came to WT from the Northeast, where he grew up surrounded by nature and developed a passion for wildlife.

He came to WT without ever having been to the Texas Panhandle, and – arriving upon what looks like only bare, flat, grasslands – wondered if the region would provide ample diversity for studying. He quickly realized the overwhelming possibilities.

"Even though the Texas Panhandle seems out of the way, it really holds a lot of value environmentally. It's such an important spot for a university to have a strong wildlife biology presence," he said. "There's a wealth of projects for students to do, year-round."

Carrano's experience is exactly what WT's wildlife biology program aims for.

"My hope is that our graduates leave WT as capable scientists embarking on productive careers in wildlife," he said. "Most of all, I hope they look back on their time at WT as the place where the door opened, where they realized their passion for wildlife could become a life's work."



WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

HOMECOMING

WILD WEST TEXAS

West Texas A&M University students and alums saddled up for a rip-roarin' Homecoming celebration in 2025.

The "Wild West Texas"-themed celebration culminated in WT's blowout 56-7 victory over Sul Ross State University in Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium.

Morgan Elarton, a senior management major from Canyon, was crowned queen, and Andrew Berngen, a senior agribusiness and economics major from Dalhart, was named king. Both represent Students Assisting in Good Endeavors, or SAGE.

SAGE's float won both the People's Choice award and first place in large floats from the official judges at the Homecoming parade.

SAGE was established in 2000 and is a faith-based community service organization.

Homecoming activities ran Sept. 26 to Oct. 4.









⊖ The 2025 Distinguished Alumni: Judge Elisha Demerson '76, '91, from left, Kody Carson '83 and Sonja Clark '95, '00



Distinguished Alumni

Celebrating the top Buffs

By Chip Chandler

At the Oct. 2 Phoenix, **Kody Carson '83, Sonja Clark '95, '00** and **Judge Elisha Demerson '76, '91** were celebrated during the annual Phoenix event in Legacy Hall inside the Jack B. Kelley Student Center on the Canyon campus.

Though he has spent most of his life working on his Olton farm, his impact stretches around the globe. Carson has served as chairman of the National Sorghum Producers and the sorghum representative to the U.S. Grains Council.

He continues to serve on numerous boards and committees at the local, state and national levels, including the executive boards of Plains Cotton Cooperative Association, Skyland Regional Cooperatives, and the Southwest Council of Agriculture.

Clark, Amarillo site leader at Bell Textron Inc. in Amarillo, earned degrees in nursing before moving into leadership roles at Bell.

In her current position, she provides strategic leadership and accountability for cross-functional teams and site support for all Amarillo activities and operations.

Clark, a Canadian native, is active in the Amarillo community and has served with various organizations, including Amarillo Area Foundation, Texas Association of Community Colleges, WT's Business Advisory Council and College of Nursing and Health Sciences Advisory Board, the WTAMU Foundation, Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health, United Way of Amarillo & Canyon, High Plains Food Bank, Storybridge, Amarillo Chamber of Commerce and Panhandle Workforce Solutions.

Demerson, an Amarillo native, worked for several decades for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration at Pantex. Upon his retirement in 2014, Demerson received the department's career distinguished service award.

In 1978, Demerson was the first Black person elected to the Potter County Commissioners Court, and in 1986, he was elected Potter County Judge, the first Black person elected to a judgeship in Texas. In 2015, he was the first Black official on the Amarillo City Council when he was elected to Place 1.

He has served on the board of directors of many nonprofits and city committees, and currently serves as vice-chair of the St. Anthony's Legacy and Redevelopment Corp. He has served as senior pastor of Emmanuel Temple Church for almost 30 years.

The Distinguished Alumni Award is the highest honor given by the WT Alumni Association and has been given annually since 1970. In that time, 130 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.



Thank You to our 2025 Phoenix Table Sponsors



WT Foundation
WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY™

WT Department of
Agricultural Sciences
WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY™



ENGINEERING STUDENTS MAKE REAL WORLD IMPACT IN THAILAND

BY BRAD NEWMAN

Tayrn Gullick used to think engineering mostly happened in labs – solving equations and crunching data.

But when Gullick, a junior engineering major from Amarillo, traveled to Thailand for a two-week interactive academic trip, her perspective broadened.

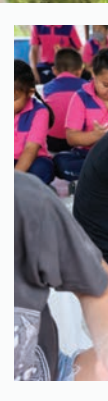
“This experience completely changed how I view engineering and its real-world impact,” she said. “Engineering is so much more about using innovation to improve lives and create sustainable change.”

Gullick joined 11 other undergraduate engineering and computer science students for the trip in July 2025.

Students traveled to Krabi and Chiang Mai, Thailand, to study and help implement agricultural solutions for rural communities.

The team partnered with the Asia Impact Center of Educational Concerns for Haiti Organization, or ECHO. The Center includes a small-farm resource center and seed bank.

“The program was designed to broaden students’ global perspective on engineering, agriculture, and innovation while connecting WT to international partners who share our mission of serving rural regions,” said Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of WT’s College of Engineering, who led the trip.





Dr. Benton Allen '15, '19, '24, assistant professor of systems engineering, also participated in the trip.

The primary projects included developing, installing, and updating irrigation systems that impact local farmers.

Ultimately, the efforts will ease workloads, improve crop production, and provide both environmental sustainability and economic development.

"Seeing how our work could directly help a community made me more passionate about pursuing a career that combines technology with purpose," Gullick said.

The students integrated projects they had worked on in classrooms in Canyon into tropical farmland nearly 9,000 miles away.

"This experience helped me see how applicable the things I learn in class are to the real world and how engineering can make a meaningful difference beyond labs and textbooks," Gullick said.

The cohort also visited a school that supports refugees and stateless children.

WT's students volunteered with the children, engaging them with STEM-focused activities.

Despite the language barrier, WT students connected through a translator, hand motions, and "lots of laughter," Gullick said.

"Seeing the students' excitement as they built and learned was one of the most rewarding parts of the entire experience for me," she said.

The school visit also provided WT's group with opportunities to learn about the hardships and strength of people in vulnerable communities.

CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

KRABI, THAILAND



“ THIS EXPERIENCE HELPED ME SEE HOW APPLICABLE THE THINGS I LEARN IN CLASS ARE TO THE REAL WORLD AND HOW ENGINEERING CAN MAKE A MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE BEYOND LABS AND TEXTBOOKS. ”

-Tayrn Gullick



"It was a profound reminder of the responsibility engineers carry to improve quality of life," Hunt said.

Garrett Scardino '25, an engineering graduate student, has traveled abroad twice now with WT's engineering program.

He previously traveled with WT to Kenya to help provide quality water for a girls' school.

Both opportunities helped to redirect Scardino's study emphasis, from mechanical engineering to environmental engineering.

"I fell in love with the possibility of being able to help others with resources that are needed in the world," he said.

Scardino's experience in Thailand underscored his understanding that engineering is not just "theory and math," he said. The hands-on experience allowed him and his teammates to connect his academic studies with creating solutions in real life.

"Trips like these are such great resources to show you that once you graduate, there are so many opportunities to make a difference," he said.

That's one of many reasons why study abroad trips matter for students, and why WT's College of Engineering continues to foster international connections, Hunt said.

"Study abroad opportunities like this one are transformative," she said. "They challenge students to think beyond the classroom, build confidence, and understand how their skills apply globally."

The trip also included intentional sightseeing.

"We immersed ourselves in Thai culture, from traditional food and language to visiting national heritage sites," Hunt said.

Students sampled new foods, navigated bustling night markets, and learned basic Thai greetings, experiences that deepened their understanding of the country's culture and strengthened team bonds.

The group visited historic temples, local markets, and museums, all aimed at instilling in students a global awareness, grounded in service, she said.

"These excursions helped students develop cultural intelligence, global awareness, and a respect for international collaboration," Hunt said.

"This trip completely changed the way I view my education at WT," Gullick said. "It gave me a deeper sense of purpose and showed me that the skills I'm developing can have a global impact when used with creativity and compassion."



STUDY ABROAD OPPORTUNITIES LIKE THIS ONE ARE TRANSFORMATIVE, THEY CHALLENGE STUDENTS TO THINK BEYOND THE CLASSROOM, BUILD CONFIDENCE, AND UNDERSTAND HOW THEIR SKILLS APPLY GLOBALLY.

-Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of WT's College of Engineering



From Canyon to Cape Town WT Students Create Change Abroad

By 1910 PR



Sixteen WT students took part in a Study Abroad trip with Dr. Enyonam Osei-Hwere, associate professor of media communication in the Department of Communication in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, and Dr. Brock Blaser, WT's Vernon Harman Professor of Dryland Farming and assistant dean of academic programs for the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences.

While in South Africa, the students planted fruits and vegetables in a new community garden that they built in Simondium. They also took part in more than 15 cultural tours, some in collaboration with Stellenbosch University. During these tours, they visited the Welgevallen Citrus Orchards, the HortiDemoCentre at the Welgevallen Experimental Farm, and the university's cellar, where grapes are stored and wine is made.

The group took 900 children's books filled with messages of hope to give to in-need children at six primary schools in marginalized communities. Most of these books were purchased by Osei-Hwere, and some were donated by The Leaders Readers Network.

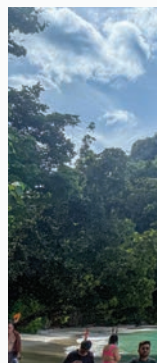
On each of the five study abroad programs Osei-Hwere has led to South Africa, she has included a literacy component. In addition to the benefit of increasing literacy, Osei-Hwere pointed to the importance of the stories they told and the characters included.

The trip took place between Sept. 21 and Oct. 5. Osei-Hwere first led a service-based study abroad program to South Africa in 2018.

"The last school we stopped at was a part of a women's shelter, and it definitely encouraged me to want to volunteer at our local women's shelter," said Jolie Bond, a master's student in agriculture from Rocky Ford, Colorado. "I'm on the hunt to do something similar down here, but that mission put a lot into perspective."



“ THIS TRIP COMPLETELY CHANGED THE WAY I VIEW MY EDUCATION AT WT, IT GAVE ME A DEEPER SENSE OF PURPOSE AND SHOWED ME THAT THE SKILLS I'M DEVELOPING CAN HAVE A GLOBAL IMPACT WHEN USED WITH CREATIVITY AND COMPASSION. ”
-Tayrn Gullick



WT Students Explore New Cultures on Study Abroad Trip to Peru

By Chip Chandler



Six WT students spent part of the summer in an unfamiliar culture thanks to a Study Abroad trip to Peru.

The students, all of whom are Spanish majors or minors, spent June traveling throughout the South American country, including living for three weeks with host families in Lima.

"They got close contact with Peruvian culture daily," said Dr. Eduardo Huaytán-Martínez, assistant professor of Spanish and director of the Spanish program in the Department of English, Philosophy and Modern Languages in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities. "They shared time with their families, and they adapted very well to the culture."

Students earned six college credits in Spanish language and culture classes during the trip, but some rewards may have been even more valuable.

"It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Ubaldo Campa, a senior political science major and Spanish minor from Amarillo. "I've lived in Amarillo my whole life and every summer it's been pretty much the same thing, so I wanted to do something different."

Huaytán-Martínez, a Peruvian native himself, said students were able to learn about the country's history from the precolonial period to contemporary times. They spent time in Lima, Miraflores, Cusco and Ica, and visited such cultural landmarks as the Machu Picchu ruins and the Larco Museum.





Head coach Josh Lynn led West Texas A&M Football to a thrilling 28-27 victory over Arkansas Tech in the 2025 Heritage Bowl



GO B
GO BUFFS
GO BUFFS

Senior quarterback RJ Martinez was named the Most Valuable Player of the Heritage Bowl Powered by RIOT

SUCCESS

Continues

FOR WEST TEXAS A&M ATHLETICS

By Brent Seals



Both the men's, top, and women's cross country teams claimed Lone Star Conference championships.

Buffalo Football made an appearance in the program's seventh bowl game as they defeated Arkansas Tech in the 2025 Heritage Bowl Powered by Riot. WT finished the season riding a four-game win streak with an 8-4 overall record. Josh Lynn guided the Buffs to the most victories in a season since 2021 as well as the most Lone Star Conference wins since 2012.

Senior quarterback RJ Martinez made a mark on the WT record books, leading NCAA Division II Football in total offense to be named a candidate for the Harlon Hill Award. Martinez was named the LSC Offensive Back of the Year with teammate Zach Phipps selected as the LSC Newcomer of the Year. Junior offensive lineman Canyon Ives was honored as an All-Region selection along with Martinez.

West Texas A&M University Athletics continued their storied history of success during the fall 2025 semester with four programs reaching the postseason.

The Maroon & White claimed Lone Star Conference Championships men's cross country and women's cross country while continuing the national notoriety of the entire athletics program.

The 2025 season saw WT continue to dominate the LSC cross country scene as they swept the league crowns for the fourth straight year under Zach Daniel's guidance. The Buffs have now won 13 straight LSC Championships with the Lady Buffs claiming the last five. Daniel claimed LSC Men's and Women's Coach of the Year accolades.

Both teams qualified for the NCAA Championships yet again. The Buffs finished fifth at the South Central Regional Championships in Pueblo with senior Adrian Legarreta claiming a fifth-place individual finish. Legarreta became the highest-finishing men's runner in program history from the Texas Panhandle, crossing the finish line third at the NCAA Championships. The Lady Buffs registered a fifth-place finish at Regionals followed by a ninth-place finish at the NCAA Championships in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The Buffs finished its season strong with an 8-4 record, including a victory over Arkansas Tech in the 2025 Heritage Bowl, top. Quarterback RJ Martinez, bottom center, was the LSC Offensive Back of the Year.





Lady Buff Volleyball appeared in the program's 32nd NCAA Tournament as first-year head coach Terry Gamble led WT to an overall record of 23-8. Gamble becomes the sixth head coach in West Texas A&M history to lead the Lady Buffs to the NCAA Tournament during their inaugural season at the helm.

Hereford product Taytum Stow was tabbed the LSC Defensive Player of the Year for the third time as the senior moved atop of the West Texas A&M career list for total blocks. Stow was named an All-American by the American Volleyball Coaches Association for the fourth time, being joined on the All-American squad by Currie Marusak and Emma Becker.

WT women's soccer made impressive strides under new head coach Turk Ozturk. The Lady Buffs claimed seven victories during the campaign while also scoring 27 total goals during 18 matches, besting the previous two seasons.

Cutline Needed



WT Volleyball advanced to its 32nd NCAA tournament under new head coach Terry Gamble. The team finished its season with a 23-8 record.

The WT Golf programs put together strong fall seasons during the non-championship portion of their schedules as the Lady Buffs took home the team championship at the WT Invitational at La Paloma Golf Course in Amarillo while the Buffs claimed a victory in Mexico at the Shootout at PGA Riviera Maya.



Luis Palomo led the WT Men's Golf program to a successful fall schedule, winning the Shootout at PGA Riviera Maya in September.



The Lady Buffs claimed a team victory at the West Texas A&M Fall Invitational at La Paloma Golf Course in Amarillo.



Men's soccer head coach Butch Lauffer guided the Buffaloes to six victories as Dominic Murphy, D'Jonte Davis and Sharif Mohammed claimed All-Lone Star Conference accolades. Lauffer coached his 900th career match at WT on Oct. 4 in a 2-1 win at UT Tyler.

Lady Buff Basketball opened their 2025-26 campaign with high hopes under fifth year head coach Josh Prock. WT made national news on Oct. 23 as they claimed a 60-57 exhibition victory at the University of Arizona. The Lady Buffs used that momentum for a 9-1 start to the season to be ranked inside the Top 10 of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association Poll.

Tom Brown, now in his 12th season at the helm of the Buffaloes, put together a talented group of student-athletes that started the season with 10 consecutive victories. WT continued its dominance inside of the First United Bank Center with an unbeaten record in Canyon prior to the holiday break. The Lone Star Conference features numerous institutions ranked inside of the Top 25 poll with highly anticipated matchups upcoming for the Buffs and Lady Buffs.

Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium was once again under the national spotlight on Dec. 17 as WT served as the host site for the 2025 National Junior College Athletic Association Division I Football National Championship game broadcast on ESPN2.

Fontaine Williams Jr. leads the way offensively for the Buffs, being named to the Bevo Francis Top 100 Watch List



GO BUFFS
GO BUFFS
GO BUFFS



Men's Soccer head coach Butch Lauffer coached in his 900th career game on October 4th. The Buffs finished the season with six victories and a trip to the Lone Star Conference Tournament.



Lady Buff Basketball senior Kyla Kane earned Lone Star Conference Preseason Player of the Year accolades.

NEED PLANS?

we have you covered.



GOBUFFSTICKETS.COM

WT
ATHLETICS



**YOU CAN
IN
CANYON**

PLAN YOUR WEEKEND GETAWAY *at* VISITCANYON.COM





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:



DINING HALL

A \$3 million upgrade to The Caf features a completely redesigned layout with upgraded equipment, as well as an expanded menu offering personalized options at six entrée stations.

Plans are in the works for a grand reopening celebration in the spring 2026 semester.

The entrée stations each feature state-of-the-art equipment designed to cook in smaller batches, ensuring fresher, higher-quality food. A standalone grill station will allow for shorter wait times, and the True Balance station, which provides meals free from the top nine allergens, is now fully separated to reduce cross-contamination and features house-roasted meats and a dedicated rotisserie.

A new food lab and teaching kitchen allows chefs to offer culinary demonstrations for students, with rotating food concepts each semester, beginning with "Road Trip of America," which showcases regional dishes. The teaching kitchen also will offer an expanded late-night menu.

Signature sandwiches selected by Chef Mike Berry will be available in a deli section, and cooked-to-order foods, including stir-fry entrées, will be available at an international station. Menus also are expanded.

GENEVA SCHAEFFER EDUCATION BUILDING

The Geneva Schaeffer Education Building, long known as "Old Ed," reopened in January after being mothballed in the 1980s. The \$40 million-plus project included internal demolition and structural reinforcement, new windows and entrances, new walls for office and classroom spaces, and new mechanical, electrical and plumbing installations.

The building is the home of the Graduate School, Research, Compliance, Education on Demand, and Information Technology.



TEXAS A&M AGRI-LIFE FACILITY

The Texas A&M AgriLife High Plains Research and Extension Center was scheduled to open Jan. 21 on Russell Long Boulevard on the east end of the WT campus.

The multi-purpose facility provides 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.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. April 7.

PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

Renovation continues on the new home of Public Safety in the north wing of the Palo Duro Research Facility. The nearly \$10 million project—which will house the University Police Department, Fire and Life Safety, and the Lock Shop—should be completed in spring 2026.

CORNETTE LIBRARY

Fire safety renovations are substantially complete at Cornette Library, including the enclosure of the east and west staircases and installation of a fire suppression system. The project cost approximately \$3.1 million.

HAIL DAMAGE

Repairs are ongoing to fix property damage caused by a major summer storm that impacted several roofs, windows, skylights and building sides. Seven roofs will be completely replaced by the time the \$5.6 million project is completed.

THANK YOU HOMECOMING SPONSORS!



GRADUATE. SUCCEED.

WT WEST TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY™

Dickinson Sculpture Unveiled

A new sculpture of poet Emily Dickinson was unveiled during a special October event.

The sculpture by Jane DeDecker from Loveland, Colorado, was revealed Oct. 16 during “Hope is the Thing with Feathers: An Evening of Verse and Sculpture,” held in conjunction with The Arts at WT: A Subscription Series.

The Dickinson sculpture will join one of poet Robert Frost in Cornette Library’s Poets’ Garden once remodeling and landscaping work concludes at the north entrance of the library. Both statues were commissioned by the Texas Poets’ Corner Advisory Board. UPDATE

The Texas Poets’ Corner, which was established in 2003 in WT’s Cornette Library, was bequeathed a \$2.8 million estate gift in 2021 by the late Dr. Jenny Lind Porter Scott, a former Texas Poet Laureate and WT assistant professor of English.

“After we purchased the Frost sculpture, the board decided to add a sculpture of an American poet every three years,” said Shawna Kennedy-Witthar, Cornette Library’s director of information and library resources. “Dr. Porter was fond of Emily Dickinson, which played a part in our decision. Jenny Lind donated some books of her poetry and a pen and ink drawing of Emily Dickinson that are part of the Texas Poets’ Corner collections.”

WT Educators Excellence Initiative Goes Statewide

Thousands more school employees throughout the state are now eligible for 50-percent discounts for continuing their education at WT.

The WT Educators Excellence Initiative launched in June in the Region 16 Education Service Center in the Panhandle, offering half-off tuition and mandatory fees for full-time teachers, administrators, librarians, nurses, counselors or paraprofessionals, as well as employees of the ESC. The initiative expanded in September to Regions 17 and 18, as well as 1A and 2A school across the state.

Then, in November, WT announced that eligible employees of community colleges throughout Texas would be included in the offer.

With its two expansions, the initiative covers tens of thousands of full-time educators in the state, including those at more than 50 community college districts around the state.

“WT is proud of our roots as a normal school fulfilling the indispensable role to prepare educators for teaching excellence,” WT President Walter V. Wendler said. “Texas students from pre-kindergarten to the doctoral level stand to benefit from WT’s investment in schools and colleges. Teacher education is essential, and students in Texas deserve the best from their teachers.”

Follow us on social media!



@WTalumni

in

WT Alumni Association

Associate Degree Program Off to Strong Start at WT

Nearly 1,000 WT students earned a degree during the first year of an innovative new program that helps battle student indebtedness.

In all, 854 students earned embedded associate degrees over the 2024-2025 academic year.

Under a plan adopted by the University and approved by The Texas A&M University System Board of Regents in February 2024, students can automatically earn one of eight associate degrees once they meet academic requirements while on the path to earning their bachelor’s degree.

In the plan’s first semester, during which only an associate degree in mathematics was available, 91 students earned the degree. Seven additional associate degrees were available during the spring 2025 semester, and 763 students earned them by semester’s end.

WT’s launch of embedded associate degrees was the first such program in Texas and one of the first in the nation.

The embedded degrees represent each of WT’s six Colleges.

Record-Breaking Ag Day Held

Ag Day, WT’s celebration of Texas Panhandle agriculture, broke a record Sept. 6, raising \$269,000 for the WT Department of Agricultural Sciences and the Ag Development Association.

The event, held Sept. 6 in the Bain Event Center in WT’s Agricultural Sciences Complex, attracted hundreds of supporters from around the region, who took part in extensive live and silent auctions throughout the day.

Funds raised at Ag Day support recruitment efforts for the ag department, including scholarships, travel and merchandise.

In the past 25 years, ADA has raised more than \$2.2 million for the department. Enrollment has risen from a few hundred students to more than 1,150, with 20 straight years of growth. The previous record of \$268,000 was set in 2021.

class notes
Bufs!

**Let the rest of the herd know
what you’re up to!**

**Submit updates for Class Notes
to alumni@wtamu.edu**

Water Scarcity Book Wins CSAW Award

An examination of the unexpected rebirth of an ecological marvel is the 2025 Bonney MacDonald Award for Outstanding Western Book from WT's Center for the Study of the American West.

Zak Podmore's "Life After Dead Pool: Lake Powell's Last Days and the Rebirth of the Colorado River," published in August 2024 by Torrey House Press, was selected by a CSAW panel for the top prize.

"This is a huge honor," Podmore said. "I was very surprised and flattered when I got the email letting me know that I had won this award. The lessons from Glen Canyon and Lake Powell are applicable in other areas (of the country) ... and I'm honored to be among the previous winners."

Two semi-finalists also were named: "The State of Sequoyah: Indigenous Sovereignty and the Quest for an Indian State" by Donald Fixico, and "Washita Love Child: The Rise of Indigenous Rock Star Jesse Ed Davis" by Douglas K. Miller.

"I am thrilled that the Bonney MacDonald Award committee chose a book that speaks to the most essential issue facing all Westerners—water scarcity," said Dr. Alex Hunt, CSAW director, Regents Professor of English and Vincent-Haley Professor of Western Studies.

WT Intern of the Year Named

An alligator wrangler is West Texas A&M University's Intern of the Year.

Audrey Adkison, a junior wildlife biology major from Mansfield, was honored for her work at the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge at a Nov. 3 reception in the Natural Sciences Building on WT's Canyon campus.

As Intern of the Year, Adkison received a \$1,000 scholarship and was submitted for the national Cooperative Education & Internship Association Academic Intern of the Year award.

Intern of the Year applications are reviewed by a selection committee comprised of faculty and staff representing all six Colleges.

"Audrey Adkison was selected as this year's Intern of the Year because she exemplifies the qualities of dedication, leadership and passion that we hope to see in all our students," said **Shelby Ford '22**, assistant director of the Office for Career and Professional Development.

Adkison worked as a natural resource intern at the refuge, which is home to prairies, thickets and wetlands. In addition to helping remove invasive plant species to restore the habitat to its native vegetation, Adkison also helped collect data on the wild American alligators in the area.

"On my third day, I had to, with help, drag a 9-foot and almost 200-pound angry male alligator out of the swamp and sit on his head while data was collected and an identification chip was inserted into him," Adkison wrote in her application letter.

class

WHERE THE BU

'60s



Jane Henderson '64 retired from teaching in the 1970s to raise her family but then returned to teach at 60 years old in Lefors. She hoped to

teach music but found herself teaching art and home economics, in addition to music. She and her husband of seven years, Max Ray, stay busy with serving the Amarillo community by doing Meals on Wheels, Singing Stars and more.



Roy McDowell '67 is a vintage car collector and restoration expert. He has purchased and restored more than 10 cars, ranging from a 1923 Ford T Bucket to a

1960 Chrysler Crown Imperial, and more. His classic cars have been featured in the WT Homecoming Parade numerous times, and he is an avid Buff supporter with four kids and five grandkids who have graduated from WT.

'70s



Nancy Teague '77 is recently retired from Los Alamos National Laboratory. She was part of the team that put the Curiosity rover on Mars. The

team made the heat sources for the thermoelectric generator that runs the Rover. She also started the digitization of all the film from the Trinity Test forward at the laboratory.

Bruce Collins '78 has been inducted into the Texas Bandmasters Association Hall of Fame. This prestigious event recognizes outstanding contributions to band music education across Texas, and Collins' dedication, leadership, and passion have truly made a lasting impact on students and fellow educators alike.

'80s



Thomas Musser '80 has held season tickets to WT Buff Football since 1980, Lady Buff Volleyball since 1987, and prior to graduating with his WT

degree, joined the WT Alumni Association. He is one of the most tenured donors to the University, with a 45-year history of consecutive giving. Musser also is a well-versed historian of WT alumni, often providing updates on alumni from the military, sports and more.



Rebecca McCain '83 has served as the Chief Executive Officer of Electra Hospital District for the past 11 years. Prior to that,

she was the Chief Financial Officer. She recently completed her term on Texas Health and Human Services Commission's Hospital Payment Advisory Committee after 12 years and chaired its Rural Hospital Advisory Committee. She is the vice-chair of the Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals and serves on various local boards and committees. The Electra Hospital is a National Rural Health Association top 20 critical access hospital and won the 2025 Performance Leadership Award for the fourth consecutive year for excellent patient perspective.

'90s

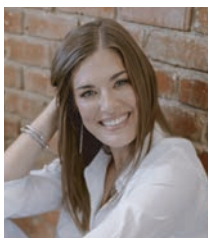


JaKenya "T" Shaw '95 is currently working as a patient service manager for food and nutrition for Seton Hospital in Austin. She has been

working with Seton Hospital for nine years and has completed the Harvard Management certification. During her time at WT, Shaw was honored as WT's first Black homecoming queen in 1992.

Jason Boyett '97 is a local author, journalist and publisher and has written more than a dozen books and contributed to articles from The Washington Post to Texas Highways. He's also the creator of the Hey Amarillo podcast, which launched in 2017. He is co-founder and co-publisher of the award-winning magazine Brick & Elm. Recently, Boyett helped organize the nonprofit Amarillo Tribune as a founding board member for this independent, community-supported digital news outlet.

'00s



Lindsay Gomez '06 is celebrating 20 years as owner and creative director of 41 Productions Creative Studio in Amarillo. She feels she is one

of the lucky few who fell right into her calling, especially after having a video camera in her hands all her life. Her technical background and formal education are one of the pillars that have helped her to be so successful.

Kurt Ashmore '06, superintendent of Wellington Independent School District, was named the 2025 Region 16 Superintendent of the Year. He was also named to the Texas Association of School Boards 2025 top five finalist for the Texas Superintendent of the Year. He provides unwavering dedication, innovative spirit, and deep commitment to student success



Megan Szydloski Reed '09 was named as Beta Sigma Phi Woman of the Year for 2025. Szydloski Reed is the Manager of Communications and Public

Affairs at Bell Textron's Amarillo Assembly Center. Prior to Bell, she worked in the same capacity at Pantex and Make-A-Wish Amarillo and North Texas.

Matt Stork '03, '10 was recently named Energy Transfer's head of technical services. Stork joined Energy Transfer in 2010 and has made his mark as a trusted and high potential leader with numerous achievements in a short period of time.

'10s



Ana Ramirez '12 is the executive director of the Amarillo Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. For 15 years, she consulted business

owners and taught classes for entrepreneurs in all areas of business from start-up to exit planning at America's SBDC at WTAMU. She launched a series called Pasos al Exito for Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs.



Arash Ghahari Kermani '17 is a Ph.D. candidate, visual artist and educator whose work has been exhibited internationally. Drawing from

popular culture, art history and the grotesque, Ghahari Kermani reimagines the human condition through a critical grotesque lens. His dissertation at the University of Texas-Dallas investigates grotesque aesthetics in Iranian and Western visual art to examine how monstrous depictions reveal the paradoxes of modern life.

'20s



Filiberto Ávila '24 served as a Fulbright grant recipient in Madrid, Spain, where he taught as an adjunct professor at IE University in Madrid and

Segovia and guest lectured at the Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Valdezarza. During his Fulbright year, he also worked as a social media strategist for iHeartMedia. Ávila now teaches secondary English Language Arts & Reading at Spearman ISD and serves on the advisory board of the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities. He is the founder and executive director of the Spearman Catholic Scholarship Committee, established in 2021 to support local students pursuing higher education.

WT Wins Statewide Veterans Award

WT earned a prestigious statewide recognition for its work with veterans and the military community.

The Texas Veterans Commission has awarded WT's Office of Military and Veteran Services a gold Veterans Education Excellence Recognition Award, recognizing the University's commitment toward ensuring the academic success of veterans and the military community.

The state legislature established the VEERA program in 2013 to recognize public colleges and universities; awards have been presented since 2021.

The award was accepted in October at the Texas A&M University System Military-Affiliated Student Symposium by **Amy Criss '21**, director of military and veteran services.

Veterans and military-affiliated students make up more than 6 percent of WT's student population.

Carson Delivers Inaugural Hill Institute Lecture

A packed house greeted conservative author, medical doctor and former Cabinet secretary Ben Carson at the inaugural lecture for The Hill Institute in October.

Carson, one of the institute's original board members, spoke Oct. 27 in the First United Bank Center.

His lecture focused on the role and importance of the family in American democracy.

Named for Joseph A. Hill, the second president of WT and its longest-serving leader, the Hill Institute centers on 10 values: trust, family life, hard work, regard for others, personal responsibility, compatriotism and patriotism, virtue, faith, personal and civic loyalty, and rugged individualism.

Mother with Long WT Ties Wins Family of Year

Carrie Padgett was selected the top winner for WT's annual Family Weekend following a nomination by her son, Phillip Urquidez, a sophomore mechanical engineering major from Fowler, Kansas.

"It's exciting because we have a huge family history here," Padgett said.

Padgett helped her son find WT scholarship opportunities and continues to call and text frequently with news of University activities, Urquidez said.

"From my freshman move-in day, she has only encouraged me to be as proud of the University as she is," Urquidez wrote in his nomination form.

Urquidez comes from a long line of Buffs: Great-grandmother **Ila Slack Jennings '31**; grandfather **Doyle Eugene Isaacs '59, '62**; grandmother **Sally Jennings '65**; brother **Riley Law '17**; and sister-in-law **Jordan Schulte Law '18**.

"Phillip's family embodies what it means to be Buffs across generations," said Amanda Lawson, senior director of orientation and academic success.

WT Alumni Association WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY™

WT Box 60753 Canyon, TX 79016

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

806-651-2311 ALUMNI@WTAMU.EDU

BUFFALUM.COM

ONCE A BUFF
Always a Buff

TRADITIONAL MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:

- All member benefits*
- WT Spirit items
- Special membership benefits

COLLEGE LOYALTY BENEFITS:

- Membership to your college-specific network*
- College-specific sticker
- Half of your membership goes back to the college of your choice

BENEFITS, PERKS AND IMPACT:

- Student Alumni Scholarships
- Connect with other WT Alumni
- Engage with the campus community
- Student-alumni mentorship
- Alumni-led professional development
- Community service events
- Alumni Scholars Program

*visit buffalum.com to see the WT Spirit Items for each membership level