

The Brand

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AT WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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From the *Editors*

On behalf of the staff, we want to thank the supporters of West Texas A&M University and the Department of Agricultural Sciences. You are the reason for our continuous success and we would not be able to have such an outstanding program without your encouragement and dedication to our students. We would also like to thank Dr. Tanner Robertson, Dr. Troy Tarpley and Ellis Vidmar for their guidance along with other contributors to make the production of this magazine. The staff have worked diligently and have given endless amounts of effort in creating stories that highlight various aspects of the agricultural industry. We hope you enjoy the work that has been produced by these remarkable students.

Emily Merrill

Co-Editor



Throughout the semester, I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the leadership team, students and professors behind the creation of The Brand. I would like to thank everyone involved for the hard work that was put into this class and magazine.

Dr. Tanner Robertson, Dr. Troy Tarpley, and Ellis Vidmar, we could not have done this without your guidance and support. Thank you for leading us in the right direction and helping us produce another great magazine for the Department of Agricultural Sciences. Additionally, we would like to thank Dr. Lance Kieth, Dr. Kevin Pond and the Agricultural Development Association who make this magazine possible. On behalf of the staff, I hope you enjoy the 2021 edition of The Brand and the thoughtful stories within. Thank you for your continued support.

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Hands of a Workin' Woman

Story By: Ramey Walther
Photos By: Anna Kobza and Ramey Walther

Cracked, calloused and bruised are the hands of a working man. Dawn 'til dusk are the hours behind the hands of a working man. Weary muscles and worn clothing are the results of having the hands of a working man. Accomplishment and gratification are the benefits of possessing the hands of a working man.

When picturing these illustrations, many think of a man with dirt between his nails after work every day. However, "man" can be defined as the human race. Mankind, therefore, can refer to both male and female.

Gender equality in the workplace is a major point of discussion in today's society. Much of this discussion takes place in the media or through protests. Some do not use these platforms to merely voice their upset, they utilize persistence and dedication to step up to the challenges faced within the workforce.

Cassidy Parker, a 2020 West Texas A&M University graduate, has done just that and makes a living for herself as a female in the male-dominated farrier industry.

Parker was raised in western Colorado in the small town of Delta. Parker grew up farming and

ranching with her two younger sisters.

Throughout Parker's childhood, she always had a fascination with horse shoeing. Every six weeks the farrier would come to her family's place. Parker loved to be present for the occasion to watch the hands at work.

"My sisters hated having to be out there to hold horses for the guy, but I loved it because it gave me the opportunity to watch the process," Parker said as she walked over to her anvil.

Parker was 17 years old when her dad made an offer to all three of his daughters; if any of them wanted to help shoe horses around the ranch, he would pay for farrier school. Little did he know this would be the first step in creating a well-respected female farrier in the Panhandle of Texas.

Parker went on to Butler Professional Farrier School in Nebraska for six weeks. Shortly after, she moved down to Canyon, Texas to study animal science at WTAMU. However, she never intended on beginning a career with her newly acquired trait.

"I never thought I was going to do it as a living," Parker said. "I just figured it would be nice to eliminate that extra fee for me and my family."

It was not until she had a "fender bender" accident

with 42-year horse farrier Eric Thomas that she began her journey of creating a name for herself.

Holding back the laughs, Thomas recalls how Parker backed into his truck in the Fat Boys restaurant parking lot in Canyon four years ago. Days before, Thomas and his wife, LeeAnn, had been discussing the thought of hiring an extra set of hands to assist in the overload of work they had been dealt.

“It was definitely a God moment because we hadn’t had time to take a lunch break in months,” Thomas said. “But on that particular day, we had an 11 o’clock cancellation so we ran to town to grab a quick bite to eat.”

Thomas goes on with the story saying that after he and his wife finished with their barbecue, they proceeded to get back in the truck and head to the next set of feet. As he buckled his seat belt, he noticed a woman standing near his truck.

“I could tell she had something to say,” Thomas continued his story while bending down to pick up a gray horse’s foot. “So I rolled my window down and asked her if she needed help with something.”

Parker timidly began to admit she had run into the back corner panel of Thomas’ truck and needed his information so she could pay him for the damages. Thomas was taken by surprise after hearing about his new indentation placed on his truck but showed no anger toward the woman. He went on to introduce himself as a horseshoer and Parker instantly replied that she was one too.

“LeeAnn asked if she wanted a job right then and there with no hesitation and the rest is history,” Thomas said with a soft grin.

Parker was the first woman Thomas ever mentored. While listening to the pulsating sound of a hammer against a horseshoe in the background, Thomas left little question about whether or not he thought being a woman in this line of work is a disadvantage.

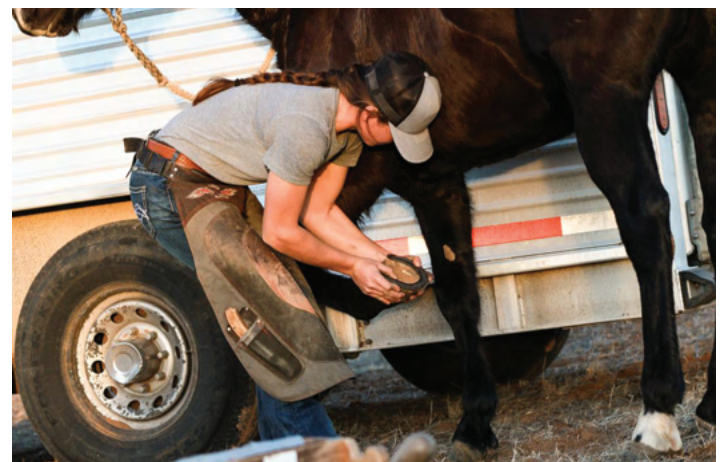
“Never have I seen her gender have an effect on her business. However, in this area especially, customers will avoid calling her out of respect if they have a problem horse. They would rather call the young, brawny guy to stand underneath their untouched three-year-old mare than get a girl hurt,” Thomas said as he chuckled.

Expecting a different viewpoint from Parker, her response was just as lighthearted.

“No, I don’t think it’s a disadvantage at all! If anything, the guys get the short end of the stick with having to deal with the crap horses,” Parker giggled as she shaped the horseshoe in her hand. “I wouldn’t doubt that there might have been times where people did not call me once they found out I was a girl, but I’ve never been told ‘no’ to my face,” she said.

As Thomas continued to carefully beat the nails into the horse’s foot, he described some qualities a farrier should possess in order to become successful. Straightening his back and pointing with his hammer he said, “You have to be dumb,” Thomas said with a burst of laughter, “tenacity,” as Thomas corrected himself. “You have to be able to work hard and be persistent, but you also have to be patient with the horses and customers at hand.”

Thomas went on to explain that the horseshoer is





the “grunt” in this business.

He then said something that most horse owners, have never thought about. Farriers are the middleman between the customer and the veterinarian a majority of the time. The veterinarian has one idea, but the horse owner has another, creating a cluster of information the shoer is given without being asked their own professional opinion.

“In order to really know what the horse needs, you need to be underneath them and have that natural feel,” Thomas said. “I’ve seen guys that give it their all trying to become the best, studying it, practicing it, asking for help and yet they still are not great farriers,” Thomas continued. “Cassidy has that natural feel and tenacity, which is why, with her experience, she is the best.”

Maggie Murphy, a doctoral student at WTAMU, has been one of Parker’s closest friends for four years and has seen first-hand Parker grow and develop her business and skills.

“Cassidy is a great farrier because she watches how the horse walks first, then decides what is best for the horse at stake,” Murphy said. “Many shoers immediately pick a foot up and begin the process, but Cass goes above and beyond when it comes to this job.”

Parker’s punctuality was the main topic of discussion in the informal conversations with her clients. Some laughed about how they hate when she beats them to their barn because they are never ready for her early arrival. Not once did any client say anything about her being late to an appointment. Thomas overheard our conversation and chimed in.

“In the three years of her working for me, she was late one time, and I will never forget it!” Lowering the horse’s leg, Thomas stopped everything he was doing to tell the comical story of her one-time tardiness. “She was always on time to work every morning, if not early, but one morning she came in on two wheels about 10 minutes after 8:00 a.m. Her hair was still down, puffy as could be, no cap, and she was running 9-0.”

He continued that she got out of her truck so fast he hardly saw her put it in park. She immediately began flinging her tools in his truck bed as quickly as possible trying her hardest to make up for the lost time. Laughs filled the farrier’s shop as Thomas continued on with the story.

“When she finally stopped to take a breath, I looked over to her and said, ‘I’m never in that big of a hurry, Cassidy.’”

Holding his guts from the pain of the laughter, you could see the love of the memory on Thomas’ face.

In the short visit, Thomas and his wife could not express enough how great of a farrier and a person that Parker is. Parker is now self-employed and making a name for herself but still comes to Thomas for questions when at a crossroads. Although he misses having her dexterous hands around, he knows that she is far too gifted to not be on her own.

Toward the end of the visit, I asked if he would ever hire on another woman to work for him and with little hesitance he responded, “I hope so. If they’re all as efficient, precise and have the work ethic that Cassidy has, then I’d hire 10,” Thomas muttered as he picked up the last foot of his client’s horse.

Looking back before Parker’s interview, I remembered a few months ago when I had gone to dinner with her. We had been friends for a while by this point, but I had yet to take the time to understand her love for shoeing.

As I started to show interest in the subject, she



soon began to open up and was expressing passion in every word she spoke. It was near impossible to not smile while listening to her speak. It was the first time I had ever heard a farrier talk positively and passionately about their job.

Growing up, I have always listened to the grumbles of the male farriers complaining about their backs being in constant pain or how their bodies are giving out day by day and that the job is not worth it. Being a farrier sounded like the most miserable occupation a person could have. So, one can only imagine how baffled I was listening to Parker speak about her love for the trade.

At the time, she may have been oblivious to the unplanned interrogation, but I can still remember her response as to why she loved her job.

"I'm not quite sure," pausing as she contemplated the question as if she had not been asked before. "I

really love working with horses, but I also love that feeling of complete exhaustion at the end of a long, hard day of shoeing.



I do not know if that makes sense but being worn out makes me feel like I have accomplished something," she said as she fidgeted with her copper bracelet inscribed with the phrase, "Follow your fire."

Cracked, calloused and bruised skin is painful. Early mornings and late nights are challenging. Weary muscles and worn clothing can be bothersome.

However, these all lead to the two goals that everyone seeks in life: accomplishment and gratification.

Parker follows her fire toward these two characteristics daily and does not let her gender hinder that process. She is one of many females who possess the hands of a workin' woman.

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Canyon Spotlight: Bar Z Winery

Story By: Lacy Petty

Photos By: Aubry Heinrich



At an age when most kids were playing hopscotch and jumping rope, Monty Dixon, founder of Bar Z Winery, was learning to make alcoholic beverages. His fourth grade science teacher in the small town of Morse, Texas taught the whole class how to make beer and wine. With his interest peaked, Dixon ordered a book in the scholastic book fair called “The Making of Wines” and soon began trying his own winemaking experiments at home.

“100% Texas wine is all we make or serve.”

Dixon laughed recalling the memory of using low-quality native grapes along the Canadian river saying, “It tasted awful. We added sugar at the end.”

Although his ability to make wine at such a young age may not have made him popular with the neighborhood mothers, it was the beginning of a lifelong passion for making wine and these days he is a little more discriminating on the quality of grapes he uses.

It’s something that we are loud and proud about: and very passionate about.

Today, armed with a vast knowledge of grape types and winemaking experience spanning decades, Dixon’s wine has improved enough from those early days to win awards competing against some of the best French wines. Though he does not grow his own grapes, as a proud Texan, he only uses Texas-grown grapes. Specifically, Bar Z Wines are made entirely with grapes grown in the Texas High Plains American Viticultural Area.

“It’s something that we are loud and proud about: and very passionate about: 100% Texas wine is all we make or serve,” said operation manager Starmie Bennett ’19.

Many of Bar Z wines are award-winning, even when competing with wines produced from grapes

grown in more traditionally robust wine-producing areas such as California or France.

“We try to make the best damn wine we can from the grapes that the growers on the High Plains grow to show the world that by god we can make some kick-ass wine in Texas,” Dixon said. “And we can,” he adds as he points to a bottle behind the bar draped in more medals and awards than Michael Phelps on a Wheaties box.



The staff at Bar Z Winery are all proud of the unique Texan flavor that Bar Z brings to the wine industry. From its name and logo named after Dixon’s family’s cattle ranch, to Texas-grown grapes patiently coaxed into award-winning wines.

When I asked what wines they recommend, Bennett chimed in, “We like to target the person specifically on what they like and what they drink, so we don’t usually recommend the same thing to everyone. It’s usually a personalized experience,” she added. “Wine is an experience, that’s why the color, the way it tastes and the way it smells are all important.”

But the wine is not the only part of the experience at Bar Z Winery. The scenery is also one-of-a-kind. Perched overlooking Palo Duro Canyon, it is safe to



say Bar Z Winery enjoys some of the most beautiful sunsets and scenery the Panhandle has to offer. Its location makes it a choice venue for weddings, corporate events or parties. Like many small businesses, COVID-19 put a damper on some of their operations. They are now reopened to the public.

Its vicinity to West Texas A&M University has also made it a popular destination for WTAMU students and faculty. Though Dixon says he attended, “MVU, Monty’s Vinicultural University,” he is proud of his staff filled with WTAMU graduates.

“Yeah, since we started that it’s been great” Dixon recalled former employee, Lauren Bessent ’15, who visited the winery on tour for an agricultural



business class.

“She came on a tour and she actually had questions and was curious about the process. Before I knew it, I had gone through the whole winemaking process. I told her she couldn’t work here until she turned 21 and as soon as she did, she started here.”

Communications coordinator Abby Morris ’20, is also a WTAMU graduate currently pursuing her master’s degree.

“We found her through WT as well,” Bennet added.

Bar Z Winery’s beautiful location, the Texas pride of its staff and their dedication

to producing quality wine makes Bar Z Winery a true Texas Panhandle experience.



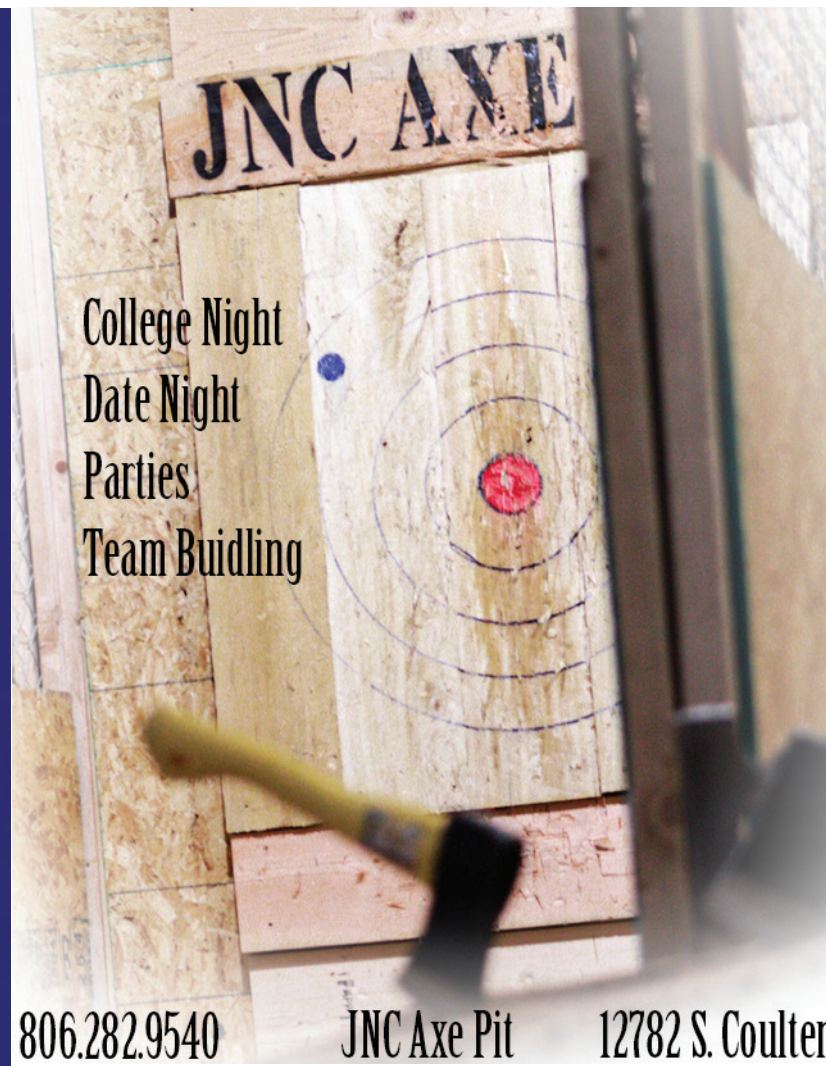
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TALENT *to* TROPHIES

Story and Photos By: Baylee Etheridge

Year after year, the accumulation of trophies, ribbons and titles are brought back home to West Texas A&M University. WTAMU's Horse Judging Team has proven themselves to be the most successful and talented in the country, no matter the circumstance. With over 100 champion titles, these students have worked to create a legacy that is sure to live on for many years to come.

The students made an impact, the common denominator behind it all is Dr. John Pipkin, professor of animal science and head coach of the horse judging team, who has been at WTAMU since 1992. Pipkin has blazed a trail of success since he began and has molded and changed the lives of students along the way. One of those students is Mollie Green, a 2020 horse judging team member.

"Dr. Pipkin has done more for me than he will ever know. He's helped me find my confidence and he will forever have an impact on my life and the person I am today," Green said.

Green is an animal science major from Broadview Heights, Ohio. Green has seen success time and time again along with her teammates in a year that was full of unexpected turns. The American Quarter Horse Association World Show was where she acquired her first-place winnings in halter and reasons.

Green had many favorite memories, but the one that stuck with her the most was the summer workout before the season started, where everyone bonded and she could tell how talented the team was.

"I knew we were going to be special. The most winningest judging team in the country," Green said.

The WTAMU Horse Judging Team had an exceptional run in 2020. They brought home hardware labeled World Champions from the American Paint Horse Association World Show; National Champions from the National Reining Horse Association Futurity and Reserve World Champions from the American Quarter Horse Association World Show.

Winning is the primary goal, but just like with any judging team, the long practices, hundreds of classes and sets of reasons pay off in a way that does not come in prizes or ribbons. It comes with friends, jobs and connections that will last students a lifetime.

"Horse judging opens doors within the industry but also improves your skill set for any other career endeavors," said Quinn Dunham, 2021 horse judging team member. "In the end, it's all about how much you want it and how much you are willing to work to get there."

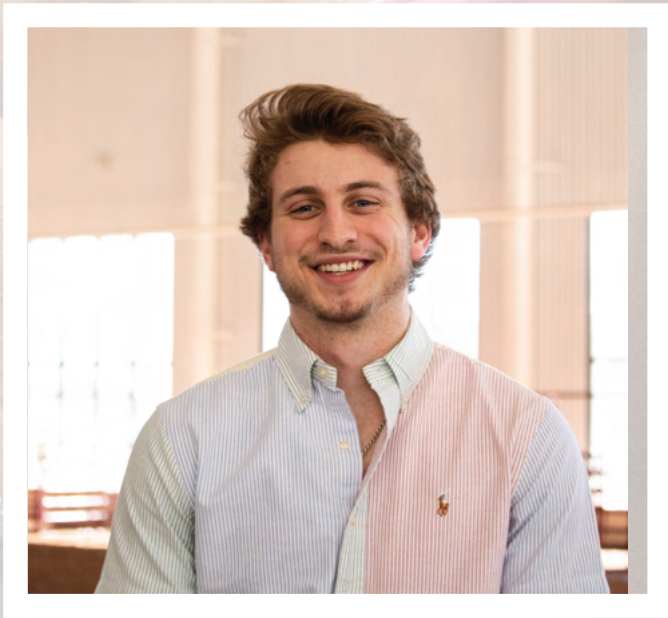


Students step out of the white passenger van at 5:00 a.m. White frocks are flooding the coolers and it is completely silent. Standing in that cooler is where you will find the meat judging team who have spent countless early mornings and long nights preparing to create a legacy of their own. Under careful guidance of new coach Dr. Loni Lucherk and assistant coach Travis Tilton, WTAMU's meat judging team has excelled so far this season with big wins being brought home to the school.

Intercollegiate meats judging is not for the faint of heart. It takes skill and determination. In this contest,

colleges attend contests to compete against each other in attempt to be the best at beef, pork and lamb evaluation, value-based pricing, as well as cut class evaluation for beef ribs, short loins, full loins, rounds, pork hams and center cut pork loins.

Lucherk came to WTAMU last year as an assistant professor of animal science and the new full-time meats judging coach. Lucherk attended Texas Tech University where she obtained her Ph. D. and worked extensively with many champion teams in Lubbock. A brand new meats facility and her specific knowledge, has given a reboot to the meats judging program. One of her first wins as a head coach at WTAMU was the Meat Science Quiz Bowl.



“Dr. Lucherk has had a tremendous impact on me and my life. She pushes me to be the best I can day in and out and has given me the opportunity to succeed in a contest I love. I want to thank her for all the time and effort she has put into us to get us where we are today,” said Will Boyd, an animal science major from Joshua, Texas. Boyd transferred from Clarendon College where he originally judged livestock.

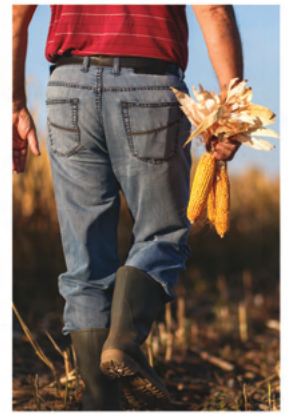
“After seeing the potential, I knew I wanted to make the switch to be a part of this team,” Boyd said.

The Mountain West contest was his first and favorite contest because he was named high individual overall and the team took home the reserve champion title.

The WTAMU Meat Judging Team has finished in the top of two contests thus far ranking No. 2 at the Mountain West and No. 3 at the Southwestern.

The meats team is ready and prepared to put all their hard work to action against the rest of the colleges in the country.

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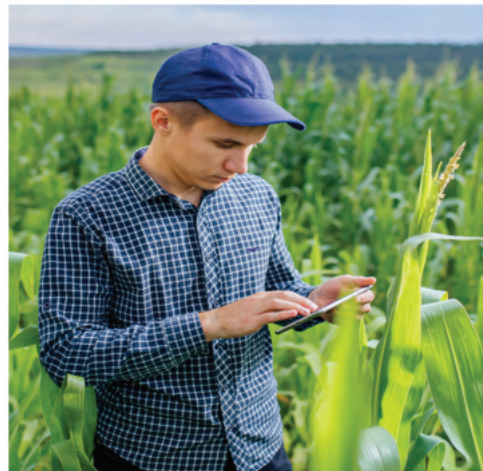
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THE FUTURE OF VERO

Story By: Blaze Taylor

Photos By: Darcy Lively and Lindsey Sawin



The newest addition to the West Texas A&M University campus is the Veterinary Education, Research and Outreach (VERO) program, a partnership with the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine. With this program, comes great professors who are excited to share their knowledge and experience with students.

Dr. Benjamin Newcomer may be new to Texas, but he is familiar with the agriculture industry, more specifically dairy science and production.

Dr. Newcomer's passion for dairy farming began at young age. Both his uncle and grandfather are dairy farmers and his father was a high school agriculture teacher.

"I knew I wanted to be a [veterinarian] from a young age," Dr. Newcomer said.

Dr. Newcomer attended veterinarian school at the University of Florida. Post graduation, he took a job at a dairy practice that had about 250,000 head of cattle. While he was there, he realized how much he enjoyed the teaching aspect and that has led him to now be a part of the VERO

team at WTAMU.

Dr. Newcomer's goal for the program is to help get fourth year veterinarian students on farms and working with veterinarians in the Panhandle area. He is passionate about what he does and helping others prepare for their future.

"My purpose is to assist students," Dr. Newcomer said. "I want them to be confident going into the job field after they graduate. I also want students at [WTAMU] to realize all the opportunities right here in the Panhandle."

Along with Dr. Newcomer, VERO has added more experience and knowledge to the program with Dr. Jenna Funk.

Dr. Funk grew up in a small town in Illinois, although she was never involved in 4-H or FFA, she has always wanted to be a veterinarian. She was slightly

involved in agriculture growing up around her grandparents dairy farm, but she did not find her passion for it until she was working on her animal science degree at the University of Illinois. Dr. Funk started working at the university dairy farm where



she realized she loved cattle, but not specifically dairy cattle.

Shortly after, she switched to beef cattle, and she immediately fell in love. Dr. Funk attended veterinarian school at Iowa State University and began a feedlot internship in Nebraska post graduation.

“The people in the industry solidified my want to work with large animals and the experience in the university feed yard drove my want to work with beef cattle,” Dr. Funk said.

Dr. Funk enjoys problem solving in the feedlot.

“I love that side of things, Dr. Funk said. “The feedlot is a massive ecosystem within one farm so you have to understand all the moving parts in it.”

Dr. Funk knows what it is like to come into the agricultural industry without having a background in it. When speaking about her vision for the VERO



program Dr. Funk smiled. Dr. Funk wants to be a mentor to those who do not have experience but have the want and drive to learn and find out what they love.

“My advice to those who want to get involved but have no background would be to find a good mentor, someone who will help you find those opportunities and get involved,” said Dr. Funk.

WTAMU continues to offer students the best experiences and the VERO program is just more proof of that. Professors like Dr. Newcomer and Dr. Funk

provide students with more opportunities and help to ensure success in their fields of study. WTAMU is excited to see what all the VERO program will accomplish.



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PARABLE

Story and Photos By: Mallory Schilling

“Well I was born in a small town - And I live in a small town - Probably die in a small town - Oh, those small communities”

- John Mellencamp.

This song is the anthem - and truthfully, the ultimate fear for many kids who grow up in low population communities. These are the students who play every sport in high school because their class is not big enough to have the luxury of choice. These are the kids who know there is no such thing as a “personal life” because word travels at a shocking rate when the population is just over 1,000. Maybe these kids are called by their older siblings’ names because their teachers have been around two decades and confuse the two because they, “just look so much alike!”

Yes, these are the small towns that many high school-aged students crave to run away from. They likely say, “when I graduate, I am leaving and never coming back to this place,” and when they say it, they often mean it. But time and experience has a way of catapulting us into a brand new perspective - one that may make our younger selves as equally as baffled as they are proud.

This was how Olivia Myers felt as an adolescent in Farwell, Texas, a rural community on the New Mexico border with a

OF A SMALL TOWN KID

population of 1,300. She was what you would imagine a Panhandle farmer's daughter would be - humble and friendly with a wit as sharp as a tack. She had a striking beauty about her, but a beauty that was graceful and kind. She got along with every clique and did exceedingly well in school. Although she seemed content on the outside, she secretly longed for the day she could vanish and start a new life in a bigger city - a place that actually mattered.

See, Olivia had musical skill that could only be described as God given. As she would play her Kimball piano in her childhood bedroom, her strawberry blonde locks would fall into her face, her brow would furrow and she would fall into a rhythm that seemed to take her into a space only she - and her fellow listeners could go. After waking up from her musical coma, she would find herself back in her room surrounded by bulletin boards covered in academic achievements and varsity cheerleading posters. When people would say "Olivia could do anything" they were right. With a musical talent like hers and an ACT score of 30, any opportunity belonged to her. Left brained, or right brained; Olivia was both - and this led to an internal battle



of creativity versus textbook intelligence. This intellectual tug of war would continue for years.

After graduating top of her class, Olivia went to college for finance and accounting at West Texas A&M University and was a student of the South Plains College music program. During her time in the Lubbock area, she became well known in the music community as the "badass chick with the piano," because most musicians toted a guitar instead of 88 black and ivory keys. Heads would turn as she entered the Blue Light Live with her leather pants and fringed cowboy boots. Her big smile and Panhandle charm made her a beloved member of the Lubbock music scene. Olivia was

not sure where her music career would take her, but she knew she would, "never go back home to Farwell, Texas."

Olivia went back to WTAMU after finishing up her commercial music program at SPC, and she began working in banking during the day, and playing music at night. As she began to get older, she began to see things from a different perspective. Going to bed at five o'clock in the morning with eyes stinging from second-hand smoke and waking up to work only two hours later was starting to get old. While she loved playing music, grinding and working her way to the top, she also admired a successful work-life balance. Olivia had an appreciation for stability

and a strong moral compass so she continued to live her double life as a financial expert/musical artist.

In July of 2016, Olivia ran into another small-town kid from across the railroad tracks in Texico, New Mexico, who also wanted to leave home. His name was John Myers. This boy had plans of moving down south and working border patrol, and he admired Olivia's depth and craving for a fuller life. The pair had much in common; they both would belly laugh while exchanging embarrassing moments. They held a good work ethic in high regard, viewed spirituality as a priority, and could not wait to blossom in a new city far, far away.

After living four years worth of adventures together, the couple decided to sign some papers and date each other for the rest of their lives. Time and experience has led the newly-wed couple to a place most unexpected - Farwell, the very place they were raised and wanted to leave behind.

The Myers did not end up back home due to a lack of options. In fact, their location was very much a choice. For it was not a lack of courage, talent nor opportunity, but a moment of divine clarity that led John and Olivia Myers back to the place that cultivated their most admirable parts.

As the couple got older and wiser, they came to realize their small towns were full of humble and hard working people who actually care about one another. In Farwell, Olivia was not just another Edward Jones financial advisor; she was Todd Schilling's daughter, John Myers' wife, a talented musician, and so much more. These people accepted and

loved her for all of her dimensions, whereas in some larger places, they would have only recognized one.

It is admirable and respectable to leave home, learn, grow yourself



and come back and invest in your community.

According to Keith Brown, a major gift officer for WTAMU, WTAMU is a regional institution whose aim is to serve the people in its region with towns just like Farwell.

"Regional institutions were founded to provide higher education for residents who live in that region," Brown said. "That should always be our first priority."

One way that WTAMU seeks to serve the people in its region is through WT 125. WT 125 is a comprehensive plan that sets goals for 2035 on WTAMU's 125th anniversary. The plan emphasizes the university's unique relationship with communities and people in its region.

"WT 125 ensures that we will continue to focus on those regional students," Brown said.

WTAMU is a place where students from rural communities can live and study before returning to and enriching their communities.

"WTAMU can become

a transformation leader in regional higher education by implementing the tenants of [WT 125]," Brown said.

Contrary to popular belief, living in a small town does not make someone "stuck" - adding value to small towns is crucial if we want to ensure their existence in the future. The wholesome background and upbringing John and Olivia Myers had where they could ride bikes to friends' houses, drink from water hoses, know everyone in their graduating class, be seen, known and feel safe to dream is exactly what they want for their

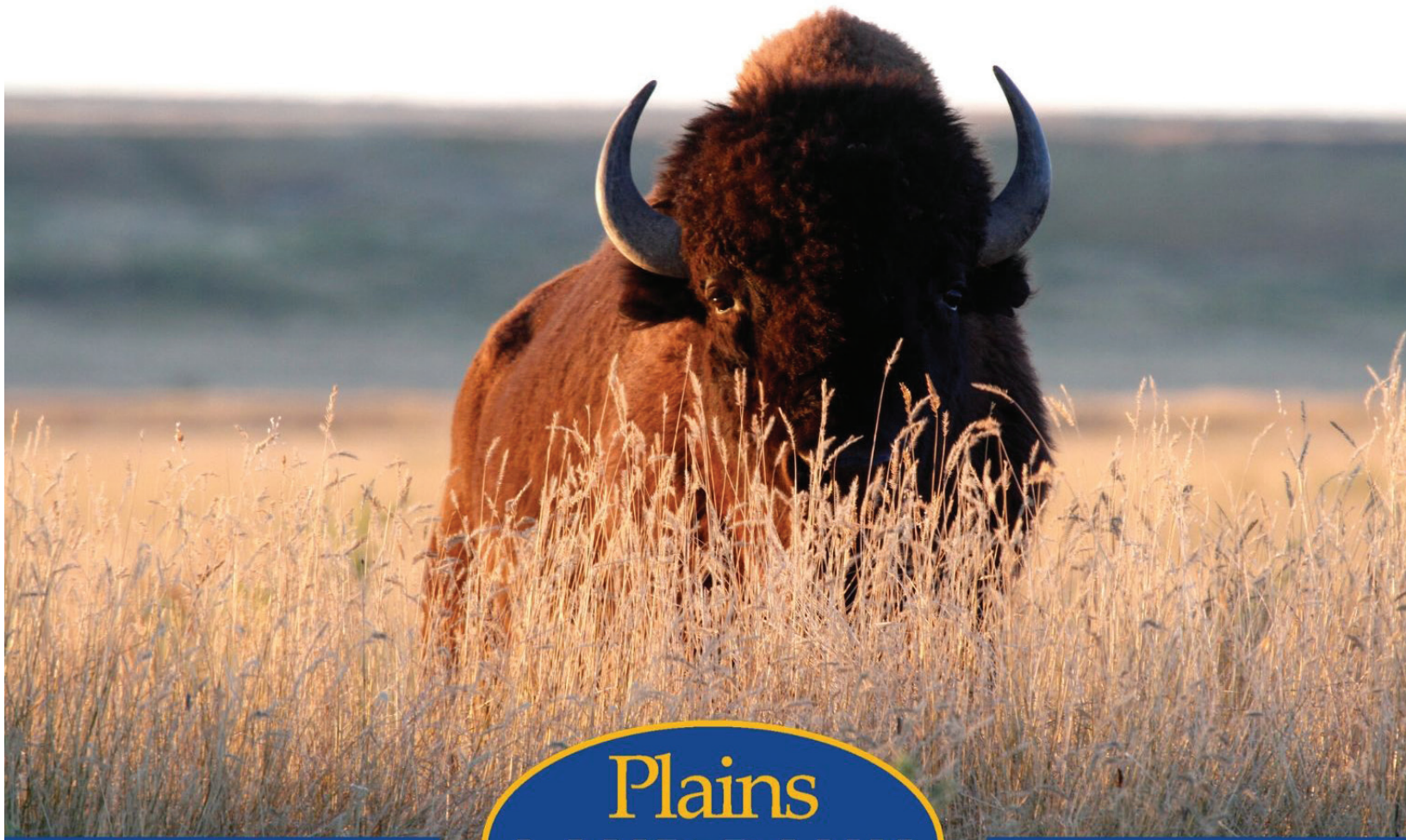
own children - and this lifestyle is at stake unless more people begin to come back and invest in small towns.

Olivia is still writing and playing music from her home in Farwell, while she also helps people "make their money work for them" as a financial advisor. She is even providing financial services to those in the entertainment industry including music, rodeo and others. While no one on this earth has ever achieved perfection, the Myers certainly have achieved one thing; as they drink their morning coffee on their front porch looking at family farmland, they know they are exactly where God intends them to be in this moment.

"Got nothing against a big town; Still hayseed enough to say; Look who's in the big town; But my bed is in a small town; Oh, and that's good enough for me."

- John Mellencamp

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Why West Texas A&M University?

Story and Photo By: Trace Dodd

Each semester, transfer students from all over the country ask themselves a number of questions. Regardless if they are coming from Northeastern Junior College or Ranger College, like myself, transfer students find themselves seeking answers to similar questions.

Why West Texas A&M University? Will I fit in? Can I adapt to the professors' teaching styles? How will this university help me reach my goals?

As a transfer student, there is one question unique to them.

"Why didn't you come to WTAMU first?"

Often this question comes from students who started at WTAMU as freshmen sometimes referred to as native students. These are students who have settled into campus life, made friends and cannot imagine being anywhere else.

In the fall of 2020, WTAMU's total student enrollment was 10,169 students. Fourteen percent were new transfer students and of those 1,442 transfers, 215 enrolled in The Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences.

All students in the Department of Agricultural Sciences take a leadership and professional development course. New transfer students have a section of the course designed to help meet their specific needs. This class is a great way to meet other transfers and is a useful introduction to the university, campus resources and professors in the department.

Cody Couch is a transfer student from South Plains College majoring in agricultural sciences with a teacher certification. Zaida Espinoza is another transfer student from Clarendon College majoring in agricultural business and economics.

Q: Why did you choose WTAMU over other four-year universities?

Cody: The current students took me in like family, I soon felt like I was home. Also, the ag department is second to none.

Zaida: I liked the fact it was a smaller campus, and I did not want to leave the Panhandle.

Q: What professor helped you the most during your transition?

Tess Gore is a transfer student from Laramie County Community College majoring in agricultural media and communication. Payton Havens is another transfer student from Clarendon College majoring in animal science. Lawton Berry is an agriculture major who transferred from South Plains College.

Tess: Dr. Kevin Pond, I had him as my leadership and development instructor. Without him I would not have the friends I have today.

Payton: Preston Lawrence [the livestock judging coach] has been a great help to me. He has taken an interest, making sure I stay on track with my studies and responsibilities.

Lawton: Dr. Nate Wolf was my move-in advisor. He took the time to get me started with the right classes.

He cares! He is the best advisor I've had.

Another transfer student at WTAMU is Ambri Harrigal, an animal science major who transferred from Midwestern State University. Pearl Jones is a transfer student from Kirkwood Community College majoring in animal science.

Q: What is the first thing you would show a student on a tour of the departments?

Ambri: I would show them the people and environment of the [department], show them how it is the faculties' goal is to help you succeed.

Pearl: Show others the design and function of the [Happy State Bank Academic and Research] building. Start at the bottom and see so much by looking up at everything.

Tess: The agriculture building. It is a "one-of-a-kind," "state-of-the-art" building right here in the Panhandle. Professors here care, they are more willing to talk to the students.

Mary Bush came to WTAMU after transferring from Tarrant County Community College and is majoring in animal science.

Q: What would you tell a future transfer or traditional student about WTAMU?

Mary: Get involved! There's so much to do! Go to

club meetings and put yourself out there.

Tess: [Do not] be afraid to talk to the professors; these relationships are essential for success. Also, step out and join a club; do not let yourself think you won't fit in because that is where you meet people.

Payton: Don't be afraid to get out and talk to people. All these professors are great, they will help you out no matter what, whether you're in their class or not, just ask for help.

Cody: If you're wanting a home away from home, a good college, and an all-around good place to be, this place is second to none, not only the [department] but the entire campus.

West Texas A&M University has become the destination for students perusing an agricultural degree in Texas and the surrounding states. WTAMU provides a modern beautiful campus with "state-of-the-art" facilities.

Professors who put students first and are eager to help them succeed and make your dreams a reality is what attract transfer students. WTAMU is a place where one can receive a quality education that prepares you for what is next. The faculty show a genuine interest in their students and always express a willingness to help make transferring seamless.



Past the Sash

pastthesash.com

HATLEY



FARMS

So, God Made A Farmer...



Story and Photos By: Aubry Heinrich

“And on the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, ‘I need a caretaker.’ So, God made a farmer.”

When Dr. Craig Bednarz was scanning through ‘The Agronomy Newsletter,’ the last thing he thought he would find was a job description for a position perfect for him.

“It just happened to be on a Sunday morning, and I told my wife ‘wow that would be a perfect position for me,’ he said. “My heart is in it because I am from this area.”

Dr. Bednarz is not a traditional farmer. While he was raised in the middle of a cotton farm, he has chosen to focus on research, education and helping those who are in the fields daily. At the time, Dr. Bednarz was a cotton seed breeder for a seed company located in Lubbock, Texas. His specialty was creating new varieties of cotton that are drought tolerant and thrive in the semi-arid West Texas climate.

Dr. Bednarz grew up on a cotton farm just east of Lubbock, in the small town of Idalou, Texas. He is a son of a second-generation cotton farmer and was raised working on the land, side by side with his father. Dr. Bednarz attended Texas Tech University for his B.S. in agricultural education, and a M.S. in agronomy and crop science. He then moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas to obtain a Ph. D. in agronomy and crop science from Arkansas State University.

He taught for 10 years at the University of Georgia before moving back home to teach at his alma mater, Texas Tech University. In 2010, Bednarz moved out of the world of education and into cotton breeding. As a cotton geneticist, he worked to improve the varieties

of cotton seed to grow in the desert of West Texas. In 2020 he got the call back to education, and to join the WTAMU herd.

Explaining his passion and love for agriculture, he said, “To see the water resources decline and that way of living be threatened, it means something to me. I would like to see that way of life continue.”

“God Said, ‘...I need somebody who can shape an axe handle from a persimmon sprout, shoe a horse with a hunk of car tire, who can make harness out of hay wire, feed sacks and shoe scraps. And who, planting time and harvest season, will finish his 40-hour week by Tuesday noon, then, pain’n from ‘tractor back,’ put in another 72 hours.” So, God made a farmer.”

Bednarz and the Semi-Arid Agricultural Systems Institute have a tough row to hoe. According to Bednarz, for an area to be considered “semi-arid,” it must receive less than 20 inches of moisture each year. The Texas Panhandle receives a minimum amount of rainfall each year, making it burdensome to raise bountiful crops in the area. The land certainly earns the title of “semi-arid.”

“We get about 18 inches of precipitation annually,” Bednarz explained. “Most of our crops require much more water than that to produce.”

“God had to have somebody willing to ride the ruts at double speed to get the hay in ahead of the rain clouds and yet stop in mid-field and race to help when he sees the first smoke from a neighbor’s place. So, God made a farmer.”

In previous years, the Semi-Arid Agricultural Systems Institute at WTAMU focused on helping

the neighbors of the United States. Students studied under the direction of Dr. Bob Stewart. These students focused their studies in other countries with drought issues and water issues.

Dr. Bednarz would like to bring the research and focus of the institution back home to the Texas Panhandle. His goal is to help the farmers in the area with managing the declining water available to be used on their crops.

“I’m going to be focusing on regional solution specifically for Panhandle growers,” said Bednarz.

In south Lubbock and Lynn counties, farmers have already started to face the challenges Bednarz is hoping to prepare the farmers in the top side of the Panhandle for. The Panhandle and South Plains are fed by the Ogallala Aquifer.

Unfortunately, the aquifer has been steadily declining for the past couple of decades.

“The water table is declining... We are going back to dry land farming,” Dr. Bednarz said. “Basically, that is what the institute is about, researching sustainable dryland agriculture systems for the future.”

With the water from the aquifer used for crop irrigation, farmers in the area are having to adapt and adjust to a declining level. Bednarz’s goal for the institution and his teaching at WTAMU is to help educate farmers and students how to conserve the water for farming practices and sustain the current levels of yield and production.

Bednarz is also going to be focusing his teaching on helping students learn to use farm water efficiently. This will benefit the Plant, Soil and Environmental Sciences program by teaching the students in the program another dimension of farming.

The Department of Agricultural Sciences is no stranger to students who want to receive their undergraduate degree and go home to help on the family farm. The lessons that Dr. Bednarz brings to these students will help to better prepare them to farm in the area. Not only will they become better farmers from learning from his teaching and experience, Dr. Bednarz’s goal is for students to

be able to better help their neighbors adapt and overcome the struggles of farming in the area.

“I hope that students feel like when they leave the university, they can always see me as a colleague to approach for assistance or advice,” explained Bednarz. “I’m your professor while you are here, but when you leave, I’m your colleague.”

“It had to be somebody who’d plow deep and straight and not cut corners. Somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk and replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week’s work with a five-mile drive to church.”

Since campus is located in the heart of cattle country, it is easy for one to assume that cattle and meat science are the focus of the agriculture department. However, the Plant, Soil and Environmental Sciences program at WTAMU has grown tremendously in the past couple of years. The addition of several new faculty members, including Bednarz, is an attempt to reach out to those perspective students wanting to



go into the field.

“Somebody who’d bale a family together with the soft strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh and then sigh, and then reply, with smiling eyes, when his son says he wants to spend his life ‘doing what dad does.’” So, God made a farmer.”

So, God made lots of farmers and he carefully placed them in the heart of the Panhandle. He gave them flat, open land to tend, so they could see across their acres for miles and miles. He knew they would be hard working and diligent in their day-to-day tasks.

Farmers through the years have become more innovative and have fought for success in their industry. Rather than competing with each other, they compete with the challenges the land has to offer. They research and share their knowledge. Rather than becoming frustrated with the challenges ahead, they persevere. Farmers create programs and educate the young. They dare to be the people God intended them to be, hardworking, and selfless caretakers of the land, educating others to help overcome the challenges the land has to offer.



The Art in

Story By: Alaina Africano

Photos By Alaina Africano, Ellis Vidmar, and Glenn Lyles



THE SCIENCE

It is 1867. You are in the field, and you look up at your brand new Eclipse Windmill, slowly turning as the sun comes over the horizon, beginning another day in the heart of the Panhandle. Little do you know students with a passion for agriculture will do the same thing over 100 years later, but instead of pulling water into the stock tank, the windmill hangs high on a wall, telling its story.

Art tells the story of history. From cave paintings to bizarre sculptures, art is the product of its time, environment and most importantly, people. The importance of art is easy to skim over in agriculture.

After all, agriculture is a science; the science that keeps the whole world fed, clothed and mobile.

When one looks at the

definition of agriculture, however, they find “the science and the art of cultivating plants and livestock.” The definition of agriculture itself pushes one to think beyond the traditional, scientific limits of the industry and dive into the culture. Without art, the rich history of those who came before would be lost.

This is evident in the halls of the Happy State Bank Academic and Research Building, with art, old and new, lining the halls with the history of the Panhandle. These pieces of culture define the spirit of West Texas and share their stories with students every day. Two of these pieces, the Eclipse Windmill from days long gone and the newly installed painting “On the Rita Blanca,” have particularly special stories to tell; their own and the stories of three West Texas A&M University alumni.

History in the Making

Patented in 1876 by Wisconsin native Reverend L. H. Wheeler, the Eclipse Windmill has a long, somewhat patchy, but storied history. This windmill now hangs high on the walls of the agricultural complex, and has been passed down to owners as varied as Panhandle weather, oil and railroad companies, Sid Richardson, Hal Smith, Ginger Currie and even Charles Goodnight. Its most recent home was Salt Fork Ranch, tucked away in the rafters of the barn.

Gary and J’Melle Fletcher have a connection with Salt Fork Ranch almost as long and storied as that of the Eclipse Windmill. After leasing the ranch for a few years, the owner offered for Gary Fletcher, and his brother, Alan Fletcher, to purchase the land. What happened next some people would chock up to coincidence, but Gary and J’Melle Fletcher knew it was a God thing.

“The banking holding company we had a small investment in was sold,” J’Melle Fletcher reminisced. “Our stock was the exact amount we needed to purchase the ranch. We both felt like that was our sign from God.”

Over the next 47 years, Alan and Tonya Fletcher managed Salt Fork Ranch, and Gary Fletcher helped keep the place running smoothly. When Alan Fletcher found the Eclipse Windmill stashed away in the rafters of the barn, he knew he wanted to find it the right home.

Before his passing, Gary Fletcher was diligent in uncovering the lineage of the windmill in hopes of preserving its heritage. His search for history came



with many barriers, and the few people who did know about the windmills did not get back in touch. Despite these struggles, one decision did come easily; the choice to donate the windmill to WTAMU.

“We didn’t want it left in the rafters,” explained J’Melle Fletcher. “Gary also wanted to preserve the history of these old windmills from the 1800s, and he suggested to his brother that the wood sails could be better displayed at WT.”

Both J’Melle Fletcher and her husband are WTAMU alumni. They have a passion for the university and were involved as alumni for years. After the couple met former Dean of the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, Dean Hawkins, and university president, Walter Wendler, their passion and excitement for the university only grew.

“We were both so impressed with Dean Hawkins,” J’Melle Fletcher said. “And then Gary met Dr. Wendler, and when he came home, he was just ecstatic,” she tenderly recalled. “We had stepped back our involvement with the university for a few years, but after meeting those two we couldn’t hold back our excitement.”

The donation of the windmill was their way back to the university they both called home years ago, and is now a connection that will live long into the future. While donating the windmill started as simple gift, it turned into what J’Melle Fletcher and her late husband know will be a way to “preserve heritage, and preserve our love of WT, Dr. Hawkins, and Dr. Wendler.”

Coming Full Circle

J’Melle and Gary Fletcher are not the only alumni who maintain their connection to the university through art. Glenn Lyles, a gifted artist and former student of the Department of Agricultural Sciences, recently donated an original work.

Lyles graduated from West Texas State University

in 1973 with a degree in animal science and was a dedicated member of the livestock judging team for three years. Even though artistic ability runs in his family, Lyles always intended to be a rancher and for his painting to remain a hobby. This plan worked for a while, with Lyles ranching until he turned 40. After he took a step back from ranching, he “just decided to give painting a whirl, and it worked.”

Lyles’ art career is nothing short of impressive, with his work appearing in galleries across Texas and in art shows from Houston to Flagstaff and even Kansas City. Lyles is not only a great artist, but also a great art teacher. He has taught students of all ages and in a variety of classrooms, ranging from outdoor workshops in Kansas to a lecture hall at Texas A&M University.

Lyles has painted more than 800 original works in his 25 years as an artist, ranging from portraits to iconic West Texas landscapes. One of his most recent paintings titled “On the Rita Blanca” now hangs prominently in the halls of the agricultural complex, showcasing a classic summer afternoon in the Panhandle. Although this painting was just recently donated to the university, it has been in the making since 1976 when Lyles stumbled upon a herd of Hereford cattle.

“I would always go out driving, and I would always have my camera with me,” Lyles said, describing the calm summer afternoon. “I was outside of Dalhart, and there really wasn’t anything going on that day, and then this herd of cattle just grazed past me. I knew what the painting was going to look like, and I wanted it to feel like the cattle were just grazing past.”

Even though Lyles knew exactly what “On the Rita Blanca” was going to look like from the moment he took the picture, it took 25 year before his paintbrush met canvas.

“I took care of my parents for the last seven years,



Glen Lyles and his painting “On the Rita Blanca”

and stopped painting four years ago,” he explained over the phone. “Painting ‘On the Rita Blanca’ was a jumpstart to get me started again. I knew it was going to be a weird size, but I also knew I wanted the painting to go to WT so I could give back to the school where I loved my time.”

After touring the entire complex, Lyles and department staff found the perfect spot for the long, narrow painting. Any student, professor or visitor who walks to a second-floor classroom passes the unique scene, which pops from its frame, purposely picked to blend seamlessly into the wall. It is easy to step into the scene, just as Lyles intended.

Just like J’Melle and Gary Fletcher, Lyles donated this painting for two reasons; to give back and to preserve the heritage of the Panhandle.

“I liked that they were horned Herefords because they were the first improved cattle in the Panhandle. I wanted it to look old

timey in that way,”

Lyles stated.

This is not his only painting that draws on the history and culture of the Panhandle, either. His

painting “Legacy of the Southern Herd” is a homage to Charles Goodnight and his work to save the last of the buffalo, which now live in Caprock Canyon. Lyles was born and raised in the Southern Plains. All of his work, including “On the Rita Blanca,” captures the heritage, culture and Panhandle he loves.

The Eclipse Windmill and “On the Rita Blanca” exemplify the importance art plays in telling the story of those who came before us. Without these pieces and the dozens of other paintings, exhibits and architectural details found in the agriculture complex, it would be easy to focus on what is to come while forgetting our roots.

Preserving History, Engaging Students

Dr. Kevin Pond, Dean of the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, understands the importance art has in sharing the rich history of the Panhandle with students from Texas and across the country.

“In many [agriculture] programs, we move all toward technology and we forget our heritage, and I think it’s important for us to know where we come from,” Pond reflectively remarked.

He also recognizes the value art has in

connecting with all students, not just those majoring in agriculture.

“Even fine arts and humanities can come over here and think ‘maybe these guys have a little more culture than we thought,’” Dr. Pond said with confidence. “We kind of get stereotyped into a bunch of cowboys and horses and rodeo and that’s part of our history but that’s not who we are completely.”

Across campus, Dr. Alex Hunt, an English professor and director of the Center for the Study of the American West, sees the appreciation so many agriculturalists have for preserving history through art.

“It’s not all economics, it’s a culture,” Hunt explained. “I think that people in agriculture seem to have a real appreciation for that heritage and want to commemorate that and tend to show that in part by collecting art.”

“...even as the better things we now enjoy
come to us from the struggles of
former years.”

-The FFA Creed

Leaving a Legacy

Agriculturalists look for improvements, or better days through better ways, like so many of us learned from the FFA

Creed. But, we cannot

forget the second part of that line, “even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us from the struggles of former years.”

With the help of art, WTAMU students of the past, present and future experience the better days through better ways, without ever forgetting the struggles, the toughness, the softness and the work that carried them through. Without the help of J’Melle and Gary Fletcher, Glenn Lyles and other artists who share their heritage and the heritage of agriculture, the very foundation of the “culture” in agriculture would suffer.

As Pond enthusiastically talks about the future, he does not forget to point out the quotes on the wall, the paintings and the architectural details that fill every inch of the agriculture complex, illustrating the story of Panhandle agriculture.

Without hesitation, he said, “why wouldn’t you want to have a building that’s state of the art, but still values our traditions and heritage?”

Agriculture is a science, yes. But, there is more to agriculture than the science. Agriculture is a story. Agriculture is a people. Agriculture is art.

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You Never Know the Worth of Water Until the Well Runs Dry

Story and Photos By: Garyn Bigham

Research helps to overcome drought conditions in the Texas Panhandle.

As the days grow longer in Texas, heavy winds and heat begin to increase. Tumbleweeds blow across the flat grasslands in the Texas Panhandle. The sun scorches down, heat waves are visible to the human eye, and water troughs are evaporating by the second. Farmers and ranchers are doing the most to keep their stock and crops from suffering from dehydration; all the while aquifers continue to deplete and landowners are wondering what to do next.

Water is essential for every form of life.

Agriculture is one of the nation's largest users of surface and ground water and most of agriculture's use for water is irrigation. Living in the Texas Panhandle, it is clear that crop production depends almost entirely on irrigation.

Driving up and down those good, old brown dirt roads, irrigation pivots are visible left and right, as is the dry land. Major droughts in the U. S. have affected agricultural production over the years and are continuing to reduce underground water reserves.

Close to the center of Canyon, Texas, directly behind the local Sonic sits the U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, better known as the USDA-NRCS. They help farmers, ranchers and private land managers conserve the nation's soil, water, air and other natural resources. When working with irrigated cropland farmers the NRCS' primary goal is to help them make their irrigation systems more efficient and use less water. To

achieve these goals, the NRCS assists farmers with the planning, designing and engineering processes necessary to ensure the systems are installed correctly and accomplish the goal of improving irrigation efficiency. The NRCS utilizes the Environmental Quality Incentives Program better known as EQIP to help farmers pay for some of the cost associated with the purchase and installation of irrigation systems.

In addition to EQIP, the NRCS also partners with the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to promote water conservation and improved water quality.

Jeff Lewter is the district conservationist with the USDA-NRCS in Canyon, Texas.

Lewter is one of the people tasked with helping in the conservation of soil and water.

"Along with the programs offered, we also offer free technical advice and assistance to farmers, ranchers and land managers to help achieve the NRCS vision of a world with clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation," Lewter said.

One of the ways the NRCS works to achieve this mission is through public education. Lewter and his staff enjoy the opportunity to present programs to local school children as well as the general public on methods to achieve soil and water conservation at home as well as on the farm.



NRCS also seeks to reduce depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer through outreach to people moving into Randall County.

“Currently in Randall County, there are many new homes being built and a lot of people who are moving are not from this area,” Lewter said. “They do not realize that we do not have a lot of water to spare in our area.”

While the Ogallala Aquifer is not the only source of ground water in the county, other sources pose unique problems.

“In some parts of the county, there is a deeper aquifer called the Santa Rosa Aquifer however, the Santa Rosa water is not always good quality water and in some parts of the country, it is not even consumable,” Lewter said. “Therefore, it is vitally important that we conserve the Ogallala Aquifer as much as possible”. Lewter suggest when building new homes, people should consider either planting native plants or xeriscaping to reduce water requirements.

People are under the idea that production agriculture is solely responsible for depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer but in reality, a large cause of water depletion in the region is also due to the amount of irrigation people use for watering their yards and landscape.

Lewter works to let everyone know how water is limited here, and everyone needs to work together to conserve it for future generations.

Another area organization working to help conserve ground water is the High Plains Underground Water Conservation District.



The people at the HPWD go around the area to various different well locations and put an electronic tape measure down the well, mark it, and bring it back up to record the measurement. This is done several times a year, in the same various locations so a wide variety of measurements can be taken each year.

This serves as a more accurate way of measuring water levels to help track ground water conservation efforts.

West Texas A&M University recently hired Dr. Craig Bednarz. Dr. Bednarz teaches water relations of plants and soils, crop physiology and crop irrigation management in the Department of Agricultural Sciences. Dr. Bednarz says his research interests include crop water use, dryland cropping systems, conservation tillage and mechanisms of drought tolerance. He also holds a joint appointment with Texas A&M AgriLife Research.

In his research with AgriLife, he focuses on sustainable cropping systems; in other words, he is looking for more sustainable methods of growing crops while being more efficient with water use, by trying to maintain yield with less water.

According to Dr. Bednarz, throughout a 12-month period, whether it comes in snowfall or rain, soils will usually hold 6 to 8 inches of water, if it is a full profile, and they try to capture at least a third of it.

Water conservation is of utmost importance for our livelihood. Agricultural producers and stewards of the land and its associated natural resources, must respond to societal changes brought about by issues such as the need for underground water resources to positively impact our future.

Many people in the Texas Panhandle currently have the ability to conserve water, and without a doubt, they are the pioneers who can lead society into saving our aquifers, on this wonderful planet.



WTAMU Launches New Program for Food Animal Production



Story and Photos By: Maesa Eicke

West Texas A&M University has created a new program called the Center for Advancing Food Animal Production in the Panhandle (CAFAP), funded by the state legislature, that is dedicated to providing education and service to the agricultural community, focusing on large animal food production.

This program is a wide umbrella of focus areas that includes all aspects of large animal production, from veterinary practices all the way to consumption of the animal.

According to Dr. Kevin Pond, dean of the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences at WTAMU this program was created to prepare students for jobs in the industry, to increase the workforce, and to increase answers to questions important to the animal and food industries.

In addition to CAFAP, another program on campus is seeking to improve food animal production in the region. The Veterinary Education Research and Outreach (VERO) is a division of the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. The VERO program will host its

first class of 16 Texas A&M vet school students in the fall of 2021.

“These students will be from Texas A&M, but will be here taking classes,” Dr. Pond said, “and they come here to get practical training with large animals such as cattle and horses, since we have so many here in the Panhandle.”

Dr. Lance Kieth, department head of the Department of Agriculture Sciences, said this is all in an effort to gain more large animal veterinarians to the Panhandle area, and this program is important

for the Texas Panhandle to help educate students and provide service to the agriculture community.

“The program is funded by the state of Texas for \$2 million,

which funds hiring new faculty, increasing the number of graduate students we have training in the area, along with equipment needed to be successful,” Dr. Pond said.

Industry leaders helped make this program and funding possible as they worked hard to gain this funding through the state legislature.

“This would not have been possible without our industry leaders such as Texas Cattle Feeders

“It should be a real positive for the region and the state in terms of having students and employees ready-trained to be influential in the industry.”

Association, Texas Pork Producers and the dairy industry and their support,” Dr. Pond said.

The Department of Agricultural Sciences at WTAMU expects nothing but more success from this program, as additional funding is already being requested this year during the Texas congressional meetings.

“We have two new beautiful buildings here on campus including the new agricultural sciences building along with the new facility for VERO,” Dr. Pond said. “We have a feedlot, which is excellent, and will be going through additional renovations, as well.”

WTAMU is also in the process of hiring new faculty members for VERO and other large animal production areas in the department, which they hope will help attract even more students to WTAMU who will be ready to take their place in the industry.

“This will be an increase in the number of faculty, and increase the number of students that come to WT,” Dr. Pond said. “It should be a real positive for the region and the state in terms of having students and employees ready-trained to be influential in the industry.”



A Big “HONK”



On a freezing winter morning, you hear the roaring engine start as you try to warm up. Heading out, your headlights shine on the frost on the brush and the grass. It is time to get to work.

This is the morning of a trucker, someone who works hard in tough conditions to make sure everyone gets what they need in a simple manner. Most people know that food and clothes go from farm, ranch, or feedlot, to grocery or outlet store, but what no one really thinks about is how these items get from one place to another, or who gets them there.

The Schulte family runs Agriplex out of Nazareth, Texas, and have been trucking for three generations. Agriplex hauls feed commodities to local dairies and feed yards and sometimes even across state lines. Ethan Schulte, shop manager of Agriplex, smiled as he explained the history of his family's business.

“Agriplex was founded in 1988. What got it started was my family

starting in the custom harvesting business. We noticed we had a big calling on a lot of our trucks, so it was hard for us to keep our own trucks and also hauling our harvest work. We had to separate the two and grow our trucking side. My grandpa started all the custom harvesting and then my dad and uncle started the trucks,” Schulte said.

Agriplex has grown immensely since its early days. Now, the Schulte's grow their own forage sorghum and haul their own product. The business runs 12 trucks, so the Schulte's love to help their farming community in the ways that they can.

“We're able to haul all of our stuff ourselves, and it's really good. Sometimes we get other guys that need their forage chopped. We have the cutter and we have the trucks, and everybody just works together. We have the ability to help each other on the farm and the road,” Schulte said.

As complex as this process is, there is more than just the hustle

and bustle of the work. In order to make sure that products ship properly, there needs to be effort in the way that everything is handled. What would be the

point in transportation if it caused the ruining of mandatory product?

Dr. Ty Lawrence, professor of animal science and director of the Beef Carcass Research Center at West Texas A&M University, explained his concern of what consumers should know about agricultural product transportation.

“It's not just ‘eh, put the cattle on the trailer and put the boxes in here’. Everything is taken into upmost care and most of today's driving fleet, trucker fleet, have been through a Trucker Quality Assurance (TQA) program to certify that they are top notch in their field and have been through

of Agriculture

Story and Photos By: Emily Merrill



adequate training. So, it's not just anybody behind the wheel of a truck," Lawrence said.

Sometimes people do not think of truckers as people who care about what they are hauling or

even about their jobs. We end up thinking about truckers as people who drive too slow, take up too much room on the highway or even as people just trying to make an easy dollar. One thing that is not talked about in this industry are people who live the hard life on the road because they love doing it. Scott and Dexter Martin of Martin and Son's Trucking have a different story.

"We do this because we like driving. I'm happy when I go to work! It's not a job for us," Dexter Martin told me with excitement on his face.

Just like the Schultes, the Martins are a family owned and

run operation in Dimmitt, Texas. Martin and Sons started hauling commodities in the early 1980s. Scott's and Dexter's dad started in one truck in 1983 and ran it until 1998, when he started running another truck with it.

They have since expanded to running liquid fertilizer to farmland, including to the Midwest. Scott and Dexter are both former students of WTAMU, and continued working during their time in college.

"I liked working while I was in school. I would spend four days at WT, not making any money, and then make it all on Friday and that would last me the whole next week," Dexter said as he was working on a truck engine. "I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, but then I started driving and I liked it."

The Martin brothers continued working on the engine together, piecing the huge thing together little by little. Their work was so intricate and time consuming, and I wondered if they ever had

any free time.

"All these people ask me, 'Scott, what're you doing this weekend?'" Scott Martin stops his work to look up. "I got a truck that's like 20 years old with a million and a half miles on it.... It needs work done and I'm busy!" Scott joked.

Products getting from starting point to end point is something that most do not think about on a day-to-day basis. Knowing where food and clothes come from and where we buy them is one thing. But understanding how they get there and the job of the people who transport them is another thing. Without product transportation and the hard-working truckers who wake up and start their roaring engines in the early mornings, it would be a much harder life for all of us today.

50 YEARS, *not a day of work*

Story and Photos By: Hadley White

Dr. Bob Robinson of West Texas A&M University is a name many people know in the Texas A&M University System.

After graduating from West Texas State University in 1970, he has spent the last 50 years serving the Texas A&M University System, 33 of those years with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and 22 years at WTAMU. He is a source of wisdom and leadership that the TAMU system and WTAMU are proud to have.

“What a blessing I have to get up and go to work each day. I have never dreaded going to work,” Robinson said.

Dr. Robinson has been blessed. On July 11th, 1970, he started as an AgriLife Extension assistant county agent for Lubbock County, and continued as a county agent, district director, regional program director, special assistant to the director of Extension and then onto faculty at WTAMU.

The Robinson Pledge

“I made a pledge to Dr. (Charles) Smallwood when I graduated from WT that I’d work for the rest of my life to make WT agriculture better,” Robinson said.

That pledge all those years ago now shows in the hard work he has put into as internship coordinator, delivering more than 100 WTAMU student interns annually.

“We’re pretty renowned for that. We have our students write reports. We mentor them. All of this has opened my eyes. I used to not understand why more students weren’t at campus events, athletic events,” Robinson said. “So many are working 30-40 hours a week that they can’t. They just don’t have time, and their employers love the work our students are doing.”



Praise and Appreciation

It is no surprise that many friends and colleagues have a lot to say about Dr. Robinson.

“The three things that I tell people that Robinson truly cares about [are] Randall County, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and West Texas A&M Department of [Agriculture],” said Dr. Lance Kieth, department head of Agricultural Sciences.

Dr. Keith still remembers when he was working as an assistant county agent in Lubbock County.

“Back to 1989, as a young college student attending the Lubbock County Livestock Show, this big guy walks up and said, are you Lance Keith? And I was like, yes. He said, well, you will go to work in Lubbock County as assistant county agent June 1st. June 1st I started my career in Extension and have not regretted any part of it,” Dr. Keith said.

Dr. Robinson has left a legacy of educators, Extension agents and many others in the field of agriculture behind him.

“He helped me show pigs in the 70s, get a faculty position at Texas Tech in the 80s and another faculty position at [WTAMU] in the 90s,” said Regents Professor of Animal Science Dr. John Pipkin. “Thank you for all your guidance, your mentorship, friendship for nearly 50 years, and for all the support that you’ve provided me.”

The time that Dr. Robinson has spent in service to the TAMU System has developed many leaders in the field of agriculture. His dedication has allowed a generation of leaders to have been touched by his heart of service and commitment.

Frank Craddock worked with Dr. Robinson

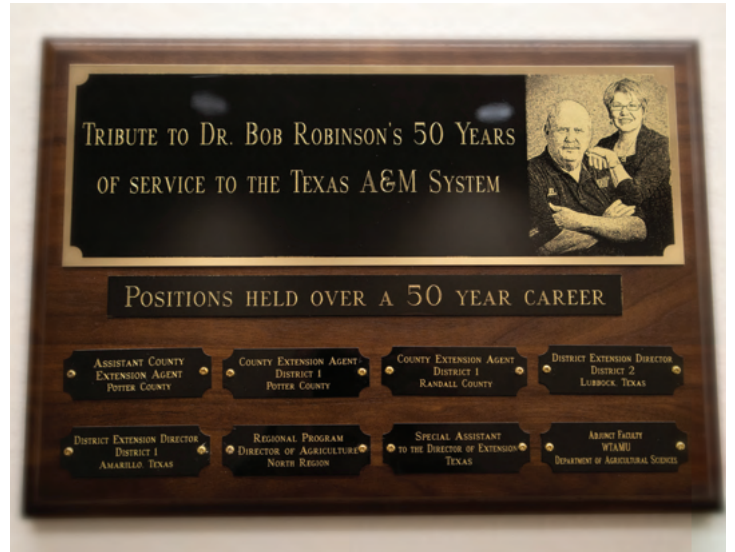


during his 29 years of service as the sheep and goat specialist for AgriLife Extension.

“I love how Dr. Robinson has helped improve the image and status of the Department of Agricultural Sciences at WTAMU and how it has grown,” Frank Craddock said. “He helped bring in Jim Clark, Dean Hawkins, John Pipkin and Don Topliff, as well as taking care of and helping Lance Kieth and David Lust.”

Many more friends, family and colleagues praise Dr. Robinson for his hardworking attitude and dedication to building a future for new students at WTAMU. His time spent with the TAMU System has hardly felt like work.

“Find something you love,” Dr. Robinson said. “If you find something you truly love, then you truly will be blessed with not working a day in your life.”



“If you find something you truly love,
then you truly will be blessed
with not working a day in your life.”

— Dr. Bob Robinson

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Story By: Danielle Williams
Photos By: Monty Lewis and Stran Smith

RODEO LEGACIES OF WT

West Texas A&M University has had several professional rodeo legacies walk its halls. Monty Lewis and Stran Smith are some of the top names on the list of WTAMU alumnus who have made their mark in the professional rodeo industry. On top of their academic achievements, each of these men have earned the highest title in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo.

Monty Lewis of Hereford, Texas, is a fourth generation feed yard operator and the 2004 World Champion Tie-Down Roper. Growing up, Lewis was well versed in the sport.

“My dad grew up on ranches. My grandad [and] great grandad... were all cowboys. And my mom grew up running barrels, so I guess I got it from both sides,” Lewis said.

After graduating from high school, Lewis knew he wanted to stay close to home so he could continue helping at the feedlot. He decided to attend WTAMU to pursue a degree in business finance. While attending WTAMU, he was a member of the West Texas A&M Rodeo Club. Lewis maintained a busy schedule of classes, rodeos and working at the feedlot. In his second year of college he bought his Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Card to compete at the highest level of rodeo.

“I sacrificed some rodeo wins to go to college but it all worked out,” Lewis said. “I went to WT to get a degree. That is what a college education is all about for me, starting something and then finishing it.”

After earning his bachelor’s degree, Lewis went on to fulfill his next goal of winning a world championship in the PRCA. His first year out of college, Lewis qualified for the Wrangler National

Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada.

That year Lewis won the world title in tie-down roping.

“I had every tool that a person needed to succeed, and I was willing to do what it took,” Lewis said. “I’ve just been around it all my life; it is just all I know.”

Another former WTAMU graduate, Stran Smith, is the 2008 World Champion Tie-Down Roper and current owner of STS Ranchwear.

“I am the third generation on the ranch and that is how I kind of got my start in ranching and rodeo,” Smith said.

After graduating high school, Smith needed to decide what he was going to hone-in on.

“When I figured out I was not going to play college basketball, that was the realization that if I was going to go on and compete in something in college it was going to have to be roping,” Smith said. “That is when I chose to go to Vernon Regional Junior



College and then went on to graduate from WT.”

I wanted to get my degree. That was one thing I wanted to have accomplished before I took off and started rodeoing professionally,” Smith said.

Smith attended WTAMU in 1992 to 1995 after earning his associates. Smith majored in general studies.

“WT was the perfect spot for me. I visited a lot of different colleges and WT was hands down the only place for me,” Smith said. “I fell in love with Canyon and with the agriculture department and the teachers. I felt like I could go there. The two years I was there I was really able to sharpen my skill set and accomplish what I have gone on to accomplish in the arena.”

Although Smith enjoyed his time in the arena, he always knew he wanted to make a business out of the sport.

“[WTAMU] opened my eyes to the importance of making a business out of it. It was really instrumental to me when I went to rodeo professionally and I was able to treat it like a business,” Smith said. “I can’t say enough for what WT did for me.”

In his time at WTAMU, Smith grew to appreciate the importance of earning a college degree.

“I’ve always preached that you should stay in

school, and you should get your degree because that is one thing that can never be taken away. You can never guarantee that you are going to have success in rodeo or that you are going to be able to win a world championship,” Smith said.

Both of these WTAMU alumni have taken the skills and knowledge from their classroom experiences and applied it to their passions in the greatest sport on dirt — rodeo.



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Planning Ahead

Story and Photos By: Caitlin Kleman

Before graduating high school, many students create goals for themselves. Whether it is becoming student body president, joining a student organization, or even just passing classes, these students are chasing an achievement. However, students are already planning for the future. These students start small businesses they plan on building on as soon as they graduate.

Clay Cole is a senior majoring in animal science. He chose to attend West Texas A&M University because of the small town environment he felt when on campus. The phenomenal agriculture program also helped make his decision.

"Agriculture is my passion," Cole said. "In order to continue my love for the agriculture industry, I

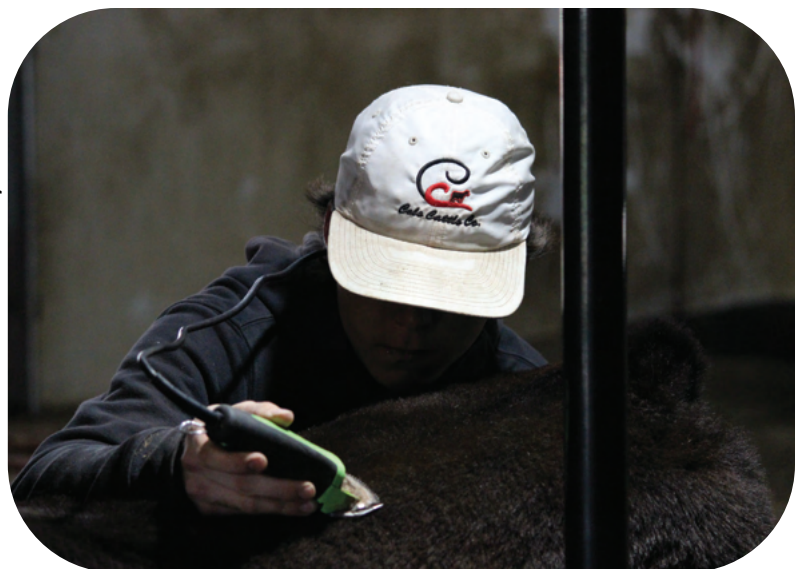
needed to find a great school that would help me."

Cole started what he thought would just be a hobby during the spring of 2017. It was not until September of 2017, when he was at the West Texas Fair in Abilene, Texas, that he decided selling show cattle was exactly what he wanted as his career. While helping his family prepare for the show, he reached across the aisle to help a stranger clip their first show

calf. After winning their class, the father and son came back to Cole smiling from ear to ear and overwhelmed with joy.

"It was in that moment I knew that all I wanted to do was continue to create those moments for kids and families," Cole said.

Being a student while also



trying to build a business can be challenging at times. There are times when Cole feels as though he should be completing tasks in the barn, but assignments and class takes precedence. Although these tasks are holding him back from growing as much as he would like, Cole claims that his classes have benefited him within his business.

“I have taken several science classes that have helped expand my knowledge with my breeding program,” Cole said.

After graduating in May, Cole moved to his hometown of Hamlin, Texas to continue growing his business. As his business continues to grow, he would like to eventually build his own facility. He says his numbers have gone up each year as he extends his reach and finds new families. Cole has sold just over 30 calves to date, but the upcoming sale season is approaching quickly, and he hopes to double his numbers this year.

Another student who is making waves while still enrolled in classes is Rylee Johnson, a junior majoring in agriculture media and communication. She chose to come to WTAMU because of the community that she felt within the university. Johnson, like Cole, enjoys the small town environment that WTAMU provides.

“It gives me the feeling of being home,” Johnson said. “I grew up in a small town and going to a big D1 school just sounded very overwhelming.”

Johnson’s love for photography began in her high school yearbook class. She started taking pictures of her

friends and family members and expanded to taking pictures at athletic events or local stock shows in order to gain experience. When



classes began her freshman year of college, she placed photography on the back burner so she could focus on her education. During the spring of 2020, she picked up her hobby again and decided to start her own small business when COVID first hit. After doing a few photo shoots and posting them on social media, she quickly gained a big clientele.

“I love to tell stories through the pictures I take,” Johnson said. “It brings me so much joy when I can portray a family’s personality through my photos.”

Not only is Johnson a full-time student and an upcoming photographer, she also has a full-time job as a social media coordinator at Harvest Connexion Church in Amarillo. She puts a lot of time and effort into her academic work and job, which makes it challenging to grow as much as she wants to in her business. Johnson gives credit to some of the courses she has taken at WTAMU.

“[AGBE 3303] has definitely helped me a lot when it comes to making sales calls and running my business. The [AGRI 2300] course also helped me become

more professional as well,” Johnson said.

After graduation in 2022, Johnson plans to spend more

time working on growing her small business. Her short-term goal is to gain enough clients in order to do a certain number of photoshoots in a month. Her long-term goal is to

become a wedding photographer. Johnson will shoot a small wedding in the summer of 2021 and is hoping this will only be the beginning of her wedding shoots.

Hard work and dedication have been put into these small businesses. These students have gone above and beyond not only trying to keep their business going, but also continuing to excel in the classroom. A countless number of hours have been put in by Cole and Johnson in order to accomplish the goals they have set for themselves. They both appreciate the staff and faculty at WTAMU. They are eager to help their students and recognize their efforts.

No matter how big or how small the goals of these students are, WTAMU is the place to achieve these goals. Cole and Johnson are excited for the future of their businesses and are confident they can grow after graduation due to the knowledge and advice given to them by their professors and advisors.

The Perfect Duo



Story By: Sarahbeth Hale
Photos By: Pam K. McNutt

As feedlots and farmlands surround the small community of Hereford, Texas, there is one family who is working hard to ensure they can survive another unpredictable season.

Owner and president of Ag Specialist Insurance Services, Kaeli Hales, began her insurance journey in 2009 after graduating from West Texas A&M University with a degree in agricultural business and economics. In addition to running her business with her mother, Kathy Broman, Kaeli is married to Cody Hales and together they are raising two children in the heart of the Texas Panhandle's leading agriculture production area.

As Kaeli sits in her western-themed office, she reminisces about her start.

"I knew nothing about crop insurance when I first started. In fact, I first started selling John Deere crop insurance out the back of my car because our office was not done yet. Luckily, it was a warm spring," she chuckles at what could have been a chilly beginning.

As Kaeli developed relationships with her clients, she quickly discovered she had a talent for meeting the needs of farmers.

"One time I was filling out a farmer's paperwork, and I made a comment about how long it was taking me," Kaeli recalled. "He looked at me and said, 'No, take your time because that is my livelihood on that piece of paper.'"

Kaeli then realized her job was to protect farmers livelihoods so they can live to work another day.

Kathy Broman, the mother of Kaeli, has always been involved with agriculture. She grew up in Hereford, and to this day she farms with her husband, Randy Broman. Kathy has raised four successful and

hardworking daughters, and she has taught Kaeli about the insurance world and farming policies. Knowing these policies helps the two women communicate with their farmers in the most effective way possible.

Kaeli currently is on the Texas Grain Sorghum Checkoff Board. She has also served on the United Sorghum Checkoff program for a term and the U. S. Grains Council. Serving on these boards has made a huge impact on how the two ladies run their business.

Both women take pride in knowing their business from root to stalk, which gives them an advantage over other crop insurance companies. In an industry run by men, Kaeli has not seen a lot of gender stereotype problems in their industry.

Kaeli believes that "if we know our subject and we know it well, it does not matter what gender we are. I still want to be feminine, but if we are well informed, that is how we gain our clients trust and respect."

Kaeli commented about gender stereotypes and said, "you would be surprised, many crop insurance agents are female. The reason is women are predisposed to more detailed-oriented work, so they make excellent crop agents. I am surrounded by many amazing women and who are all awesome to work with."

The two women also take pride in knowing they have good relationships with their customers, and they will care for them all hours of the day. An example of a good relationship is, Scott Broman (no relation), a customer of Ag Specialist.

Scott is a farmer who has been with the two women since they first started the business. After Scott finished college, he went back to the family farm

to continue the family business. Scott's operations vary between irrigated and drylands, custom farming, cattle calf operations, and he grows sorghum, wheat, corn and cotton.

Since Scott has such a wide variety of operations, he understands the importance of insurance.

"Having a group of people like Kaeli and Kathy that will take some of the burdens off my shoulders, makes my job so much easier," Scott said. "I know I can call them any time of the day and they will help me with a claim, coverage or paperwork."

When it comes to running a business with family, there needs to be communication and patience.

Kaeli agrees there are times when the air needs to be cleared, but "Kaeli gives me [Kathy] all the tools to be able to call the farmers and talk to them so they can make the best-informed decision."

"My mother and I have always been two peas in a pod," Kaeli said. "I learned everything in this business from her and now I have taken what I've learned and formed it into our own system. We have our defined roles, and we are good at sticking to them until one of us needs help."

It is no secret that these two women have built a highly recommended and successful business. In

fact, they recently bought a new office in Stratford, Texas. Kaeli's goal for this new expansion is to "learn the area because farming is different at the top of the Panhandle than it is in Hereford. We want to give the farmers the best package available."

In addition to the new office, Kaeli is most proud of building the business from the ground up.

From a mother's point of view, Kathy is very proud of what Kaeli has accomplished for the company. She has seen the "organic growth over the years" and hopes one day a grandchild will continue the family business.

It is safe to say the farmers and ranchers in the Texas Panhandle will be able to sleep comfortably and know they will be protected for another unpredictable weather season.



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A Silver Lining

Story By: Grace Small
Photos Courtesy of Kay Miller

Tragedy strikes when it's least expected – when it is unimaginable, unfathomable and unfair. With tragedy comes loss. The kind of loss that flips life inside out and upside down. But, sometimes, when the darkness of such a tragedy and loss seem too much to bear, a sliver of light is shed on a silver lining.

This February marked the 25th annual Three Star Memorial Roping, bringing to surface the tragic car crash on Jan. 26, 1996. The accident took the lives of four West Texas A&M University students: C. M. Kuhlman, Jody Hart, Jonathan Neighbors and Todd Fincher. Kuhlman, Hart and Fincher were rodeo athletes and are the “three stars” behind the Three Star Memorial Roping.

The Three Star began in May of 1996 and sought to not only carry on the boys’ legacies and promote rodeo, but also encourage the importance of education.

David Baumann, family friend of the Kuhlman’s and active Three Star committee member, spoke with reverence and passion as he explained the deeper meaning behind the Three Star.

“To Mike and Donna, [C. M. Kuhlman’s parents] what’s really important is not only rodeo but promoting education in hopes of recruiting high achieving kids to WT,” Baumann explained.

Scholarships are awarded to boys and girls invited to rope in the junior invitational breakaway and tie-down roping, and they are also awarded to select members of the WTAMU Rodeo Team.

The boys and girls invited to rope in the junior invitational are chosen much the same way as the



Cayne Blessing completes his run

WTAMU Rodeo Team scholarship recipients. They are selected based on their current rodeo success and experiences, as well as on the values they show both in and out of the arena.

Baumann emphasized that the individuals selected

“It’s amazing how something so tragic can turn into something that helps so many people.”

for these honors are chosen because they exemplify the values the Three Star is built upon; those of hard work, dedication and perseverance.

These very same values also reflect the WTAMU Rodeo Team. Without these shared values, the Three Star would not be the prestigious event that it is.

The WTAMU Rodeo students load all the cattle, sort the calves, help tie all the calves and break the calves in. It is a lot of hard work.

“The Three Star Memorial would not be possible without them,” Baumann said as he expressed his

gratitude. “The kids work the whole thing, outside of the judges, it’s all put on by the students.”

Jordan Fabrizio, assistant rodeo coach at WTAMU and Three Star committee member, expressed her deep appreciation for the Three Star, in much the same manner.

“The Three Star’s contribution allows us to give more scholarships to our kids,” Fabrizio said “[The Three Star] is such an amazing legacy, a legacy that lends to education.”

Over the past 25 years, the Three Star has awarded approximately \$75,000 in scholarship money to WTAMU students for them to pursue a higher education.

“That’s really why we do what we do, at the end of the day, that’s the goal, to create an opportunity for kids to get an education,” Fabrizio said.

The emphasis on and opportunity for education is what led to Mike Kuhlman’s idea of adding the junior invitational events a few years back. Today, the junior invitational is what is dearest to Mike and Donna Kuhlman’s heart.

As Mike Kuhlman shared stories of past junior competitors, his voice warmed and took on an air of zeal.

“Last year the little boy that won came up to my wife and took his hat off to shake her hand and thank her,” Mike Kuhlman said. “Donna will never forget that.”

This display of strong moral character, demonstrated by kids such as the one in Mike Kuhlman’s story, represents the elite individuals invited to participate in the junior invitational.

Cayne Blessing is an 11-year-old tie-down roper who was invited to this year’s junior invitational tie-down roping. Cayne Blessing captured the attention of the spectators by winning both the average and fastest time.

Cayne Blessing’s success carried much more weight than that of a belt buckle; his win carried the legacy of the Three Star.

Cayne Blessing’s father, Jarrett Blessing, was the only survivor of the tragic accident in ‘96 that led to the Three Star’s beginning. He was proud to watch his son win a roping that holds a special place in his heart.

Jarrett Blessing’s excitement for his son was almost palpable as he recounted the day and seeing his son rise to success.

“Seeing Cayne wear his Three Star buckle means more to me than he will ever know,” Jarrett shared.



Mike Kuhlman presents Cayne Blessing’s buckle

“Whatever is horrible today, it won’t stay that way.”

Jarrett Blessing hopes the Three Star, though it was born of loss, will continue to grow and have a positive impact on others.

“It’s amazing how something so tragic can turn into something that helps so many people,” Jarrett Blessing said. “This roping has helped many kids that have a love for rodeo over the last 25 years.”

Just as tragedy and loss strike when they are least expected, a small but beautiful victory makes its way through that darkness. A chance to give back. An opportunity to help others succeed. A silver buckle. A silver lining.

Special thanks to the Three Star Committee Members

*Mike Kuhlman,
Gary Kuhlman,
David Baumann,
Sid and Rozanna Howard,
Randy Thomas,
Kyle Sims,
Clay Cameron,
Raymond Hollabaugh,
and Jordan Fabrizio*



A New Way to Think of Family Farms

Photos and Story By: Kate Mischak

Only a mile apart, two small companies that are based in agriculture and family are beginning in Amarillo, Texas. Although they are different companies, these businesses are both trying to change the stereotype that it is impossible to start a family farm if the business is not passed down.

Many aspiring farmers are discouraged by this thought process and decide to go away from their passions. Thankfully, one business owner did not. West Texas A&M University alum, Justin and Whitney Trammell, are the owners of Tir Bluen and founded their company only six years ago with 11 acres. Trammell is running a sustainable farm growing common crops and raising turkeys, chickens, pigs and lambs and partners with his father raising cattle. Tir Bluen prides itself on producing locally grown crops and livestock, which are sold at local farmers markets and online. Trammell always wanted to have his own family farm and to start his own business. After many years of hard work, he managed to break the stereotype of having to be born into an already established business.

Trammell wanted to start his small family farm and stay in agriculture because of the diversity and the freedom that comes with it. Trammell grew up working with his dad on a ranch and his grandfather at the Amarillo Auction House.

Working on the ranch, Justin said he, “learned a ton of problem-solving skills where you had to think outside the box and figure things out.”

Along with technology such as basic electrical, construction, plumbing and anything else that needed to be done on the farm, Justin wanted to continue that with his own business so his 18-month-old son, Heston, can have similar memories and skills.

Another main reason for the desire for this business is so that Trammell can spend time with his kid.

“He can do a lot of things for a 1-year-old that you wouldn’t expect, and I think a good part of it is because he has been out with me working on the farm since he was 2 months old,” Trammell said.

Trammell is really changing the mindset of having to have hundreds of acres to make a career in farming and ranching. He also is an example to many in the community who want to start their own farm or ranch who may not have the start up. Trammell shares his story with our community through social media and in person at farmers markets to hopefully change the stereotype for even more young agriculturists.

Farm to Market Brewing is an upcoming business that will be open for sales in two to three years when Dennis Burton retires. Farm to Market Brewing will be selling craft beer brewed by Burton along with selling pecans, lavender and honey products that are also produced on the company’s 14 acres.

Burton started drinking craft beer and found a passion for it back in 2005 and then started brewing beer in 2013. Over the years, he has produced stouts, ales and porters and decided this is how he desired to

spend his retirement. He then purchased the 14 acres in 2016 with the intention of building a home and a small business on the property. He built a 40-foot x 80-foot barn with two sections, the larger side being the kitchen and the area when the beer is produced. The other side will be the tasting room with a beer garden attached.

Neither Burton, or his wife Kelly, grew up in the agriculture industry, but they used other resources to gain knowledge to start other operations on the property such as pecans, lavender and honey bees. They have converted the additional land that was not currently being used for their home or the brewery into a pecan orchard and lavender field. They now have 185 pecan trees and are currently in an experimental stage of lavender, determining which strains thrive in our climate.

The family helps with the planting of lavender and pecans and in the future will be incorporated into the brewery as well. This will be done with Kelly as the CEO operating the financial side of the company along with event planning. Dennis will be working in the kitchen and the field to supply the beer along with the homegrown products. Their children will assist customers and help maintain the colorful and relaxing feel of the beer garden.

The whole family is extremely excited for their vision to unfold after all of these years of planning and preparation. They are excited to see the pecan trees grow, the lavender bloom and of course the beer to sell. This company will definitely be a new take on farming and a new type of recreation for the



Amarillo area.

These are two examples from opposite sides of the agriculture spectrum, but they are both changing the way many think of family agriculture. Both companies have come to fruition in less than 10 years. They are making a change and bringing something new and exciting to the Canyon-Amarillo area.

These two companies will hopefully continue to grow and encourage other young agriculturalists to find their own niche in the agriculture industry.



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An Alumni Advocates in

Austin

Photo By: Alexandria Harris

Story By: Alexandria Harris & Aubry Heinrich

A West Texas farmer and rancher wakes up before the sunrises. He wipes his tired eyes and creeps out of bed. His body hurts from the long day of hard work the day before. This soreness is familiar, yet he passes by the thought of staying in bed. There is work do be done, land to be tilled and animals to be tended to. He shuffles to get ready and beats the sun to start his day. He does this same routine every day.

A West Texas farmer works tirelessly and endlessly. He does not rest on any day to live the lifestyle he loves. There are risks and fears that are unique to the life of a farmer and rancher. However, they can rest easy knowing that one of their own is representing them in legislation.

Kody Bessent is the newly appointed chief executive officer of Plains Cotton Growers and chair of The Texas Agriculture Council. He grew up farming alongside his father just outside the small town of Acuff, Texas.

Bessent attended Idalou High School and decided to further his education by attending West Texas A&M University. At WTAMU, Bessent took advantage of the opportunities the university had to offer. He was involved in many extracurricular activities, held several titles, received honors and graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2007 with a degree in agricultural education. In 2009, he earned his master's in agriculture sciences, also from WTAMU. The proud alumni attributes the finding of his passion to an internship that was afforded him while at the

university.

"I really did not know that this is what I wanted to do until I gave it a shot and took an internship in D.C. with Congressman Mac Thornberry in 2005," Bessent said.

Bessent spent five months in Washington, D.C. working with Thornberry. It was there he found his passion for representing the West Texas farmers and ranchers. He reflected on his internship as he explained the impact that time in Washington had on his life.

"It's addictive being a part, knowing what's going on and influencing that," Bessent said.

In his line of business and amongst his colleagues, Bessent said he hears the phrase, "They don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care," consistently exemplified. He recognizes it from his time at WTAMU. With his thoughts on what shaped his present, Bessent recounted the time he spent at the university.

"WT was a unique place for me... it was about the size and opportunity," Bessent said. "What was of value to me, was the atmosphere that fostered relationship building skills."

An important part of what Bessent does is develop and maintain relationships. It is through maintaining these important relationships that Bessent is better able to

represent the lifestyle he came from.

"The big thing to keep in mind is, regardless of the leadership, it's about who we get the opportunity to work with. We need to help frame the discussion of how policy should be developed for the betterment of the people that it will be impacting," Bessent explained .

A West Texas farmer and rancher can count on Bessent to be there for them and represent them in legislation. The values and experiences he gained during his time at WTAMU are still prevalent in his work. As a WTAMU alumni, he works to build and maintain relationships to save the livelihood of West Texas farmers and ranchers.

So, while farmers and ranchers get up before sunrise and work tirelessly every day, the risks and fears of their lifestyles can be put at ease. A farmer, WTAMU alumni and agriculture advocate is doing his best to represent them.





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THIS BEGINS WITH YOU

The Helping Hands of the Happy Toymaker

Story and Photos By: Sadie Bow



A few miles north of Happy, Texas, also known as “the town without a frown,” sits the homestead of the Sims family. A man who lives up to the meaning of the town creates various working farm and ranch toys made from metal. Employees who help craft these products become additional family members to the Sims’ in the process.

What started as a simple toy creation for his two boys in 2000 soon turned into a family business. Jerry Sims, better known as The Happy Toy Maker, decided to start selling his products to the public around 2006. Since then, the business has seen a steady increase and has turned into a well-known name around the state and country.

Jerry and his crew make a variety of 38 metal toys, including trucks, pickups, trailers, cattle chute and everything in between.

“Last year there was somewhere around 750 little pickups [that] went out of here,” Jerry explained.

Over 1,500 orders were placed last year, showing the success of the business.

These toys stand out since they are actual pieces of equipment and vehicles used in the agricultural industry, just on a smaller scale. A working snake and chute allow kids to run cattle through and even load them on a cattle truck. Each toy has a variety of pieces that move around and function just as it does in the real world.

With these experiences, kids learn about farming and ranching simply by playing and moving the toys around. Jerry understands that the future of the agriculture industry is in the kids, and he has found

a way to give them the opportunity to play with toys that can be used in a future career. Teaching and showing kids how equipment in agriculture works is something Jerry places extreme importance.

Jerry also travels to a variety of trade shows, sells his toys on his website, www.thehappytoymaker.com, and takes orders over the phone. Horse and livestock shows additionally conducts sales online and over the phone. He sends toys across the U. S., Canada and Australia.

From cutting out metal and making sure parts are built to shipping the final product, he has perfected the entire operation. Jerry has a part in every step of the toy-making process. He has even created his own way of making toy hay bales out of real wood that fits on the back of a flatbed with hay spikes that come on every pickup. On top of his business, Jerry also serves on the Happy Volunteer Fire Department.

“I have been on that for 37 years and been the chief for around 22,” Jerry said.

Giving back and serving the community is a point of pride for Jerry. When he gets the call, he drops what he is doing and heads to those in need. Community values and serving others are core values of not only his life, but his business. His hired hands have learned directly from him and lay the foundation for his business that continues to serve as a work environment unlike many, one that is based around family.

With a large number of orders, products to make and unknown fire calls, it takes multiple hands to keep the business going, including a couple of close

family members. Jerry's wife, Patrice, helps lend a hand by making toy animals that can be used as an accessory to the metal creations. Jerry's mom, Pat, also helps by painting the toys and with any additional tasks that need to get done.

Pat Sims, the former city secretary of Happy, Texas, decided to retire after 31 years and in her words, "got a real job." She has been helping and working with her son since 2007. When describing what it has been like working with Jerry, she explained that, "we have a lot of fun and work pretty hard a lot of times."

On top of helping with toys, Pat also feeds the workers who help build and weld the toys every day. Creating this experience with their employees gives everyone time to fellowship with one another. This everyday element that has been created at the shop is something Pat and Jerry both expressed priority and importance in.

Pat is a hard worker, willing to lend a helping hand wherever it is needed. Pat is a smiling face that welcomes visitors who want to see the shop and how everything works.

Each toy that leaves the building has a special touch of color and meaning, thanks to her painting skills. Additionally, she continues to contribute to the family aspect of the building by serving others not only dinner and lunch, but as a role model and leader of the Sims family.

Jerry explained the importance of having a family workplace environment, where everyone can not only



work together, but also spend time together. Even over the Christmas break, the Sims family works together to take on the large number of orders, including his two sons.

Simply put, Jerry said, "doing things with family you just can't replace it, money can't replace it."

The family work environment Jerry and his family members have created has led to a successful business and crew. Through this, workers become more

than just helpful hands, but also family.

Thayne Slater became a well-known family member during his time at the shop.

Slater started working for Jerry when he was 15 years old. He helped

Jerry build presses that remain crucial elements to the production of the metal toys to this day. Jerry has 31 presses in total with one containing eight cylinders. Thayne could operate them all, even the one with 14 attachments.

Jerry explained that Thayne "is the only one who has been here that has made all 38 toys."

Jerry explained the importance that Thayne placed on his work and his ability to help and teach others. When new people joined Jerry's crew, Thayne had no problem stepping in

and lending a helping hand. This remained a lasting impression on Jerry and something that everyone took notice in.



While reflecting on what it was like working with Slater, Pat said, “it’s a different kind of life without him.”

Pat gave a lot of credit to him for his involvement and interest in the projects taking place in the shop. She explained that he “grew up with us since he was in high school when he came here and went all through college.”

Both Pat and Jerry were able to watch Slater grow in his work and life, which led to a strong connection and bond between them. Slater created these connections with most that crossed his path.

A professor who had Slater for multiple classes at West Texas A&M University and even traveled to Australia together, said Slater was one of the most moral young persons he has met and been around.

Dr. Tim Steffens, a professor at WTAMU, said Slater “was always honest and really quiet, but you could always count on him if you needed him.”

While in Australia together, Slater explained his battle with brain cancer to Dr. Steffens. Steffens remembered a lasting impression and amazing attitude from Slater when he said, “I just live everyday thinking I am thankful I am here.”

Slater also worked with Dr. Steffens and helped a graduate student with a project out at the Nance



Ranch. Summing up the relationship between the professor and student, Steffens said “You just felt good to be around him.” Slater represented his college well while at WTAMU and served as a great example and role model.

Jerry, Pat and Tim shared the impact Slater had on their lives through his hard work and humble personality. His ability to teach others and serve has left a lasting impression on their lives and work ethics, striving to share and teach others what they have learned from Slater. His legacy remains as a great reminder to live each day to the best of your ability.

Jerry and his crew have proven the importance of a family based business. Each person who lends a hand teaches a new life lesson daily. Their success can be shown in the multitude of toys distributed throughout the state and even parts of the world.

This success can also be portrayed in the form of stories and memories that come from building the toys. From family memories at Christmas, to everyday workers who leave a lasting impression, there is always a good story to be told at the shop.

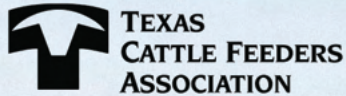
From the help of Pat painting toys and feeding the crew to the legacy of Slater, there is more going on in Jerry’s shop than just the production of toys.

Great things are taking place in a shop located just outside of Happy, Texas. The legacy of hard work and the ability to help others will continue to live on in memory of Thayne Slater. Every helper, from welders to painters, have a special hand in not only Jerry’s shop and the toys made, but his heart.



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