THE RED DIRT JOURNAL

July 23, 2004 • Oklahoma Institute for Diversity in Journalism • University of Central Oklahoma

Photo illustration by C. J. Macklin

Shadows of themselves

One out of every five U.S. students needs help with mental health issues; only five out of 100 are getting it. In Oklahoma, everyone can play a part for those left behind.

Jessica Walker
Red Dirt Journal Staff

"The secret sauce was that she cared."

So says a former East Los Angeles teenage drug dealer who is now an intern minister at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City.

Manuel "Manny" Scott, now in his 20s, credits his high school teacher with lifting him off the streets and setting him on the road to college.

Scott's childhood left him involved in drug dealing and crime, while effortlessly maintaining a 0.6 grade point average. He said he reached an all-time emotional low. School simply wasn't a priority for Scott or his peers.

They didn't want that kind of an education. They had their own degree.

"We had a Ph.D. of the streets," Scott said.

School administrators agree that emotional problems are prevalent in schools across the nation and here in Oklahoma. Untreated, these issues can escalate into mental illness, said Joyce Lowery, psychology supervisor for Oklahoma City Public Schools.

On the national level, one out of every five students needs help with mental health issues, Lowery said. Only five out of 100 students are getting it.

Everyone needs to be involved in helping students, including teachers, parents and counselors, said

Health Page 2

Roby

Manny Scott, a former drug dealer, now is intern minister for St. Luke's United Methodist Church.

A crisis in mental health

Health Continued from page 1

Jackie Shipp, of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Erin Gruwell walked into Scott's junior year as a first-year teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School, sporting a black and white polka-dotted dress and pearls, intending to teach Shakespeare and the classics.

Her difficult students promptly threw their wadded-up copies of her syllabus back to her, vehemently refusing to study the works of "dead white guys in tights."

Immediately, she knew she had to meet them on their level.

Realizing her students were living in an inner-city war-zone, she began to teach them literature that would connect to their own situations, such as "The Diary of Anne Frank." Her original syllabus in the garbage, Gruwell now required her students to keep a weekly journal and slowly they began to open up.

The journals were the precursor to what would later become the "Freedom Writers," a published compilation of her students' works. With individualized comments on each entry, Gruwell forged personal relationships that changed students' lives.

"She had a passion to reach us," Scott said. "She cared."

Gruwell's ability to reach out to the students kept them from engaging in harmful activities conducive to poor mental health. They had someone they could turn to, Scott said.

There is a direct correlation between one's mental health and one's social environment, according to a study by Carol S. Aneshensel from the University of California-Los Angeles and Clea Sucoff McNeely from the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

"Nowhere is this truth more apparent than with regard to the mental health of children and adolescents," Aneshensel and McNeely said.

Eighty to 90 percent of adolescents who attempt suicide have a mental illness, said James Allen, adolescent health coordinator at the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

In Oklahoma, 80 to 85 deaths per year of young people are attributed to suicide. Another 627 suicides were attempted in 2002; and on average, two young people make the attempt daily.

In 2003, 15 percent of Oklahoma high school students seriously considered suicide, Allen said.

School administration officials point to a number of programs offered to students needing psychiatric care, ranging from prevention to intensive help.

Programs include the Columbia TeenScreen, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training and Safe Schools/Healthy Students. Schools also provide counseling through school psychologists, counselors and classroom teachers.

Unfortunately, only a handful of schools have implemented programs, Allen said; and be Oklahoma has 541 school dis Shipp said, starting them is dif

However, Greg Howse, p director for Safe Schools/ H Students at Durant Public Sc thinks that schools are imp their mental health care progr

Lowery said the Oklahom Public School District has 90 s and 25 alternative centers wi 23 school psychologists to 40,000 students.

High schools and middle s are fortunate to have a counse site every day of the week, wh ementary schools have a cou only one or two days of the Lowery said. None has a ful on-site psychologist.

And what about the stu who fall through the cracks ones who've dropped out and exposed to the available h school?

"Those are the ones you about in the paper," Lowery sa

The Oklahoma Departm Mental Health and Substance Services has a responsibility to up on these students, Shipp sa

Programs like the Partn for Children's Behavior Health out to those students not expo school-based programs.

School administrators school psychologists agree changes need to be made bef system is perfect, but they that progress is being made.

Love in black and white

Black women set trend in interracial dating, marriage across country

Crystal Mason
Red Dirt Journal Staff

Everywhere you go, you see couples — white men and women, black men and women, black men and white women, but rarely black women and white men.

Interracial marriage between blacks and whites is on the rise, but it is more common for black men to date and marry outside their race than for black women, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Black men are 2.8 times more likely to marry outside their race, than black women are to marry outside their race, according to the 2000 Census.

That, however, may be changing.

In 2000, there were 363,000 black/white interracial couples. In 2002, that number increased to 395,000, an increase of nearly 9 percent.

Within this group, the number rose by 4 percent for black husband/white wife marriages and 22 percent for white husband/black wife marriages.

Although the percentage increased much more for black women marrying white men, black men are still more likely to marry outside their race.

C.J. Macklin

Entwined hands of different colors are becoming more common across the country, with the number of white husbands and black wives growing at the fastest rate.

Dealing with reality

Edmond psychologist Stewart Beasley said several cultural reasons exist to explain why more black men date and marry outside their race than do black women.

"The pressure is on black women to keep the household together," Beasley said. "Black men tend to go out more than black women. When black women do go out, they tend to not look at other races."

Latisha McElroy, 20, a black University of Oklahoma student engaged to a white man, said she understands why many black women don't look at men of other races.

"I think that it's more OK for a man to do a lot of things than for a woman to do them," McElroy said.

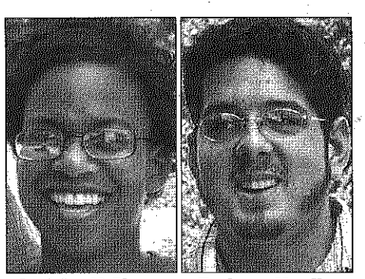
"Black culture says you need a black man to love you and understand your blackness: your hair, your nose and your lips." McElroy said. "Some black women don't think a white man can take care of them like a black man can because a black man knows what you need and what your ancestors have been through."

Linda, 30, a black woman who asked that her last name not be used, said that black women tend not to date outside their race for one simple reason.

"Some black women feel that they'll be selling out," she said.

Black men and women also have to deal with the reality that interracial couples tend to get "the look" from people of both races.

"One time while at Quail Springs Mall, a black man stopped and just stared at us like, 'Why is that black woman with this white guy?'" McElroy said.



Latisha McElroy Zachary Mueller

Asking 'the question'

Jessica Golden, 21, a senior at the University of Central Oklahoma, is a black woman dating a white man. Golden said that her friends tend to criticize other black women when they see them with a white man, forgetting that she is in the same kind of interracial relationship.

Golden also said that when she has a new boyfriend, her friends, regardless of race, ask her "the question" about his ethnicity.

In addition to the attention interracial couples attract, another challenge is trying to explain cultural customs to each other.

"The white guys I dated I had to teach more," McElroy said. "With black men, they know certain things about you."

Many black women dating white men say that cultural origins are less important than who they are as individuals.

Ja'Rena "Re Re" Smith, a reporter at The Oklahoman newspaper, is in her first relationship with a white man. She said that their individual differences outweigh their cultural differences.

"I'm more social, talkative, et cetera," Smith said. "He's quiet, more laid back."

McElroy agreed, citing the differences she and her boyfriend have in several areas, including music.

"He likes loud, screaming rock music like Screecher," she said. "I like Juvenile's songs. He doesn't."

Audrey Whatley of Del City is engaged to Junior Moore. Whatley is black and Junior, who lives in Moore, is white.

Neither Whatley nor her family has any problems with black women dating white men, although black men dating white women does bother them, she said.

McElroy said that in the black community, friends' and families' opinions are highly regarded, so their disapproval might hinder a woman's decision to date outside her race.

Intraracial pressure

Aside from friends and relatives, society at large can put pressure on black women who want to date white men. That's why Jacque Marion, a black woman who has a daughter at UCO, said that it is easier when a person stays within his or her own race.

"You don't have to worry about society's comments," Marion said.

In his book, "Why Black Women Date Interracially Less Often Than Black Men," Adam White says social and psychological pressures directed at black women are the primary reasons they stay out of interracial relationships.

Smith said stereotypes such as "white men can't dance" might stop black women from interracial dating. McElroy and Golden agreed, saying that "white men aren't aggressive enough" is another stereotype. Whatley added "sexual limitations" as another preconceived notion some black women have about white men.

Pressures from family and friends, cultural differences and stereotypes aside, the relationships of McElroy, Whatley and Smith suggest that black women are becoming more willing to date white men.

Casting a net for young voters

The New York Times, colleges look to engage students in civic affairs

Angela Jefferson
Red Dirt Journal Staff

The American Democracy Project provides college students with free copies of The New York Times.

Nancy

Only 32.3 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds voted in the 2000 presidential election, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, but a new initiative is working to improve youth participation in civic life.

The American Democracy Project, a year-old effort of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and The New York Times, wants to help colleges and universities convey to students the importance of civic involvement so that more young people will actually vote.

"Two of my five friends will probably vote this election, and one will know how because he reads and pays attention," said Nick Kidd, a 22-year-old University of Central Oklahoma student. "If they don't know, they don't vote."

While MTV's Rock the Vote programming tries to engage young people politically by getting famous people to encourage voting, the AASCU is taking a less flashy approach to getting young people involved in the lives of their communities and nation.

The partnership provides free copies of The Times to the 191 colleges and universities that now participate in the program. The project is also working to encourage volunteerism within the community and to incorporate civic education into university classes.

Oklahoma doing OK

Five of the 10 Oklahoma schools that are members of AASCU participate in the democracy project. Northeastern State University, the University of Central Oklahoma, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Northwestern Oklahoma State University and East Central University all have committed to encouraging their students to become better citizens.

"Oklahoma is doing OK compared to other states," said George Mehaffy, AASCU's vice president of Academic Leadership and Change and one of the creators of ADP. "There are some states that have more participation, but some have less participation than Oklahoma."

People need to communicate with one another to help democracy flourish, said John Garic, associate dean of the college of graduate studies and research at UCO.

"Democratic institutions depend upon social capital," said Garic, who serves on the UCO committee for ADP.

"We can't hide from the fact that we're social beings. A child can't be born and raise itself. People are better off if they find a way to come together for a common goal."

Mehaffy said his research showed him someone had to do something to get young people civically aware, involved and active.

"I saw the statistics and noticed that the 18- to 25-year-olds had the lowest level in participation in voting and civic education," he said. "The statistics made me wonder what is the role of higher education because it intervenes with younger people."

Mehaffy said most college students say they go to college to get an education for a job. He said the ADP wanted to help them realize they needed to get more than that from their college experience.

"Who helps students think about getting a role in democracy?" he asked rhetorically. "Now that they are an adult, they need to know what obligations they have to the state, nation, et cetera."

Those young people who accept that obligation realize that voting helps fulfill it.

"It matters whether you vote," said Isaiah Powers, a 20-year-old UCO student. "The U.S. is set up for voting. If you don't think your vote matters, it won't matter. Together our votes make a difference."

Kim Swetland, an 18-year-old UCO student, said young people are obligated to help decide the direction of their communities and the nation.

"Even if you're not passionate, at least cast a vote," she said.

Democracy taken for granted

David Holt, a 25-year-old coordinator for the 2004 Bush/Cheney Campaign in Oklahoma, went to school in Washington and has always been politically involved. He said young people don't think about the threat that freedom could be taken away and that the more undergraduates become apathetic, the more democracy declines.

"People are blessed to live in a democracy, and people take it for granted," Holt said. "The root is apathy, lack of interest and complacency."

Kidd works at an IHOP near UCO. He said he has benefited from the American Democracy Project's free distribution of The New York Times on the UCO campus.

"Lots of people come in with The New York Times," Kidd said. "I hope people leave their paper on the table [because] I'll pick it up and read it."

He said many international students go to IHOP and talk about the news.

"It's like reading a Middle Eastern newspaper when you hear their conversations," Kidd said. "They all vote when they can. They don't take it for granted. Americans take it for granted

ADP organizers said newspapers an important source of knowledge.

"The newspaper is a handbook democracy," said Felice Nudelm college marketing manager of The N York Times. "It inspires thought a critical thinking."

In addition to providing newspapers, the project has several ot programs, including national meetin events and contests. In February, edit of the college newspapers invol with ADP went to New York to visit Times.

Each university decides how it incorporate the value of involvem in community life and politics into campus life.

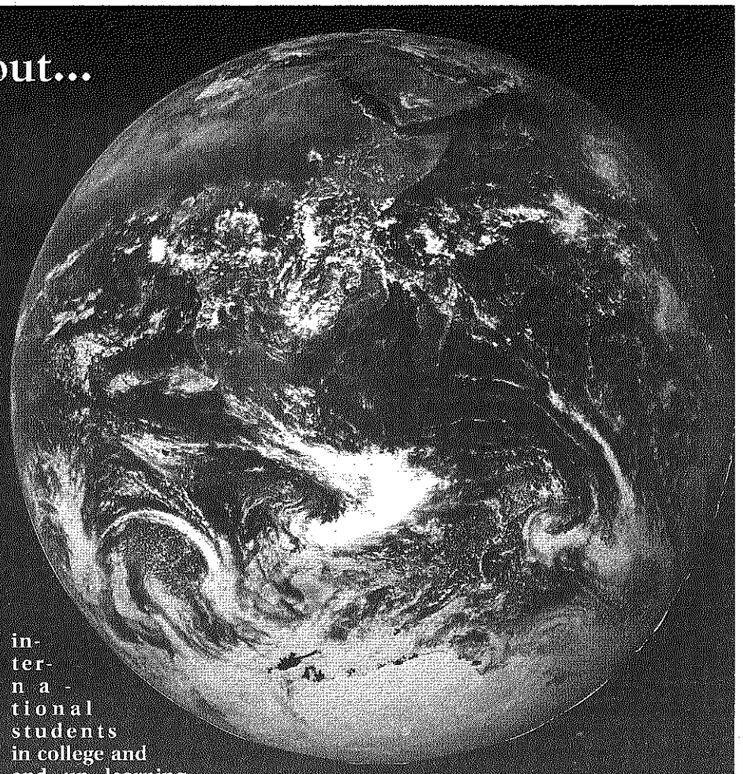
UCO has sponsored several eve including a screening of the civil rig documentary, "A Southern Tov a display of an original copy of Declaration of Independence, an student-organized Poverty Awaren Week.

"There were 21 handwritten co of the Declaration of Independen said Joanne Necco, UCO professor professional teacher education and A chairman.

"Only five remain, and the origin she said. "One came through Edm and was on stage for the commu and university to see. The mayor al with others read from the document were in period costumes."

Students' apathy sparks debate about...

Who knows world events



Peju Faboro
Red Dirt Journal Staff

"If it doesn't affect the student, they don't care."

University of Central Oklahoma freshman Amber Balch's assessment of many students' lack of interest in current events crosses all cultures and all countries.

Still, evidence suggests that knowledge of world events and issues is weaker in America than in other countries, and that has some people concerned.

The ABC network found knowledge of world issues and politics among Americans ages 18-25 so low that "World News Tonight" reassigned veteran news anchor Carole Simpson to travel throughout the nation to schools as a "news ambassador" to challenge students about the importance of being informed citizens.

"I loved that I knew stuff before anyone, and I got to pick and choose what was important," the journalist told students in a college speech in 2000.

Having covered stories in 27 countries, 48 states and five continents, Simpson now tells stories to young Americans, showing them that current events and issues are worth knowing and can be fun.

Further evidence of student disconnect from world events and issues can be found in their voting records. The 2000 U.S. Census indicated that 45 percent of young Americans had registered to vote, but only 15 percent of them actually had cast ballots.

In contrast, foreign students often appear more involved and more engaged in current events.

Lane Community College in Oregon has even responded to international students' desire to vote by telling them how to do so on Web sites and handouts, said Colby Sheldon, Lane's International Student Community coordinator.

And according to a 2002 National Geographic survey of more than 3,000 college- age students, foreign students also understand more than just current events; they know more about the world in general.

The survey showed that young people in other countries were able to identify the U.S. population better than many young U.S. citizens. The United States only scored higher than Mexico in the survey. Young people in Sweden scored the highest.

"International students ... have more of an understanding (of world events)," said Curt Dewbre, a new UCO student.

But Ronald Paddock, director of international affairs at UCO, said he isn't so sure.

It's not so much that the students from other countries know more about current events and the American government than American students, Paddack said. It's the fact that these issues and government policies affect some of their countries, and what affects their countries affects them. So, he said, they pay attention to what Americans do.

"They're (foreign students) going to know more about their country than ours because their homeland is more important," he said.

Paddack said that after Sept. 11, 2001, American and international students both began to pay more attention to current events because the news started to affect their day-to-day life.

However, the effects of 9/11 may eventually wear off.

"I became more aware because it's in the news, not because I was interested," said Daresa Poe, a UCO student.

Paddack said he thinks just having international students on campus may do more to spark interest.

"Students from small town America tend to rub shoulders with international students in college and end up learning more," Paddack said. International students, he said, also learn from American students.

"The more they interact, the more these students are learning in and out of the classrooms," he said.

In spring semester 2004, 1,490 international students from 101 different countries enrolled at the University of Central Oklahoma, according to the UCO Web site.

Some schools are trying to encourage student involvement in American government and civic projects by joining the American Democracy Project.

ADP is a program that helps colleges promote civic discussion and participation among their students. One tactic to help keep students informed is to provide them with free copies of The New York Times.

"Colleges did a good job after the fact; they fixed the roof after the leak instead of just building a good roof," said Jarrett Jobe, president of Greek Affairs at UCO.

Nevertheless, Paddack said these awareness efforts on campuses encourage American students to stay in touch with the world.

Behind the bylines

Jennifer Adamson

Jennifer Michelle Adamson, 17, is a senior at Northwest Classen High in Oklahoma City in the same neighborhood she was born and raised in.

Her parents are Debra and Mark Adamson, and she has a 16-year-old brother, Christopher.

Jennifer has a cat named Milo and a dog, Lady.

Journalism interests her because she loves to write and meet new people. With journalism, she gets to do both.

Her junior year, Jennifer participated in Newsroom 101 at The Oklahoman.

Jennifer wants to attend New York University next fall.

She likes to read, hang out with her friends, and play sports outside of school.

Jennifer is a member of a bowling league for high school students in her area called "Two Guys and a Girl."

Jennifer enjoys listening to music. She said that hip-hop and R&B are her favorites because "you can dance to the beat."

"You can get up and dance to it," she said. "I like to dance, just not in front of people."

She also likes to sing. Jennifer is a member of her school's choir.

Shaking the money tree

Poor economy, rising tuition, fewer grants force students to dig deep

Chase Hopkins Wilson
Red Dirt Journal Staff

College students are falling deeper into debt each year, experts contend, because of a decline in grant funds, an increase in tuition and fees and student ignorance about available scholarships.

The average Oklahoma student loan debt for a four-year degree is $15,394, which is below the national average at $18,900, said Mary Mowdy, executive director of the Oklahoma Guaranteed Student Loan Program.

"In the '70s and '80s, Pell Grants were the cornerstone for financial aid because they had a higher buying power than they do today," Mowdy added.

Pell grants are federal grants that do not have to be repaid. They are generally awarded to undergraduate students.

Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program, a program set up by the Oklahoma Legislature for eighth, ninth, and 10th graders with family incomes of $50,000 or less, also provides funds for college if the student continues to make good grades and stays out of trouble, Mowdy said.

Pell grants have been losing their grip on loans because of a lack of funding from the federal government, and OHLAP has been losing its funds from the state Legislature because of a weak economy, Mowdy said.

"It also costs more today to run institutions, and state appropriations are not able to fund institutions at the same level that the institutions need," Mowdy said.

A student taking 30 credit hours at the University of Oklahoma in the year 2002-2003 had to pay $ 2,859.60 in tuition and mandatory fees, which grew 28 percent to $3,660 for 2003-2004.

For the upcoming 2004-2005 school year, a 30-credit-hour year at OU will cost students about $4,140.

In the past three years, Oklahoma State University, the University of Central Oklahoma, and Northeastern State University have also experienced dramatic tuition increases, university officials said.

But the most avoidable cause of student debt might be ignorance about scholarships.

UCO night school student Kristie Thompson took out a $3,500 unsubsidized student loan her freshman year in college because she said she wasn't told much about scholarships in high school or early in her college career.

Adam Johnson, assistant director of Prospective Student Services/ Scholarships at the University of Central Oklahoma, said he believes high school students should start looking into scholarships their junior year.

Thompson said she had to take out a substantial amount of money in student loans.

"I'll figure it (loan repayment) when I get done with school," Thomp said. "There is no need for me to w about it now."

Most students who need money to the financial aid office for help, Angie Rice, student loan coordinato Student Financial Aid Service Cent the University of Central Oklahoma

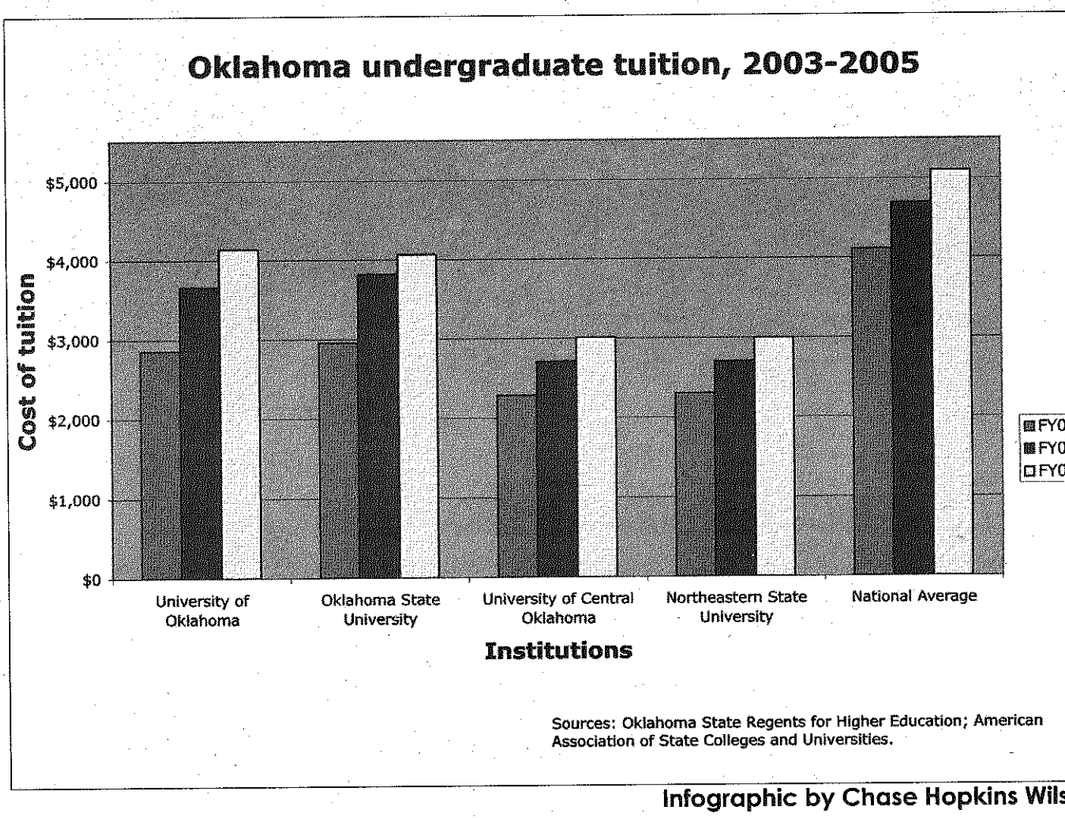
"When students rely on student lo it is because it is their only resourc funds," Rice said.

Still, Mowdy said Oklahoma stud do not have to pay as much as stud in other states. Even OSU and OU lower tuition than most of the c schools within the Big 12 confere she said.

Seventy percent of undergrad students said college was worth the c according to a report by the Oklah Guaranteed Student Loan Program.

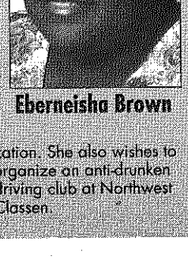
Students should take responsil for their own financial aid, Mowdy and not rely solely on their parents.

"You're only going to learn if navigate yourself," she said. "It beefs up your own life skills."



Infographic by Chase Hopkins Wils

Behind the bylines



Eberneisha Brown

Eberneisha Shenell Brown, 17, is a senior at Northwest Classen High School.

Her accomplishments include maintaining a 3.9 GPA and being on the Principal's Honor Roll. She also is on the writing staff of her school newspaper.

Eberneisha, or Ebony, as her friends call her, is active in many school clubs.

She is in the College Club, and is a member of both the advanced choir and the SWAT anti-tobacco organization. She also wishes to organize an anti-drunken driving club at Northwest Classen.

Ebony has wide and varied interests.

She is an avid reader of realistic fiction, and her favorite author is Beatrice Sparks. She also played golf for two years.

In her spare time, Ebony surfs the net, hangs out with friends, and listens to R&B music. Her favorite R&B artists are Usher, Aaliyah, Ludacris, and Chingy.

Ebony would like to attend either Columbia University or New York University, and plans on majoring in journalism, psychology or law.

"I like to write and I want to express my views to others," Ebony said.

Culture war: Marriage rights

Gays caught in crossfire

Oklahoma activists say Bush is trying to make them 2nd class citizens

By C.J. Macklin
Red Dirt Journal Staff

Some gay activists think a culture war over gay rights is brewing in Washington just in time for the fall election.

Despite the U.S. Senate's defeat of the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would have banned gay marriage, some gay activist groups fear the Bush administration will continue to do everything it can to curtail their right to marry.

"It's a religious war motivated by fundamentalist Christians," said Bill Rogers of the Cimarron Alliance Foundation, a gay political group that fights for gay rights. "President Bush feels very deeply that gays are immoral."

Terry Gatewood, chairman of the Cimarron Equality Oklahoma, another gay political organization that fights for gay rights, said the issue is a war of values, and that Bush is giving people a green light to discriminate against a class of taxpayers.

"He's (Bush) rating the gay community as second-class citizens," he said, noting that such political activity disenfranchises a large segment of society.

Ray Sanders, spokesman for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, said Christians should not alienate gays; they should care for them and help them overcome their "shortcomings."

But he said allowing gay marriage would break down both the moral and legal fiber of our society.

"We all struggle with sin and need God's help," he said.

The 2000 Census indicated 658,000 U.S. households and 6,300 Oklahoma households with same-sex couples.

Issue of geography

So far, Gatewood said most of the legislation that would prevent gay couples from marrying has come from the South, and other areas such as Oklahoma. California and Massachusetts have already enacted laws giving gays the right to marry. More tolerance, he said, exists in some of the coastal states.

Conservative Oklahoma politicians have passed anti-gay legislation, including a recent law preventing same-sex couples from adopting children. The Oklahoma Legislature also put a state question on the November ballot that would ban gay marriage. Conservative politicians say marriage must be between only a man and a woman.

But Eric Thurstin, a gay University of Oklahoma student, said a law banning gay marriage could open up a "Pandora's Box" of discrimination issues.

"Where's it going to end?" he asked, noting that if the government is allowed to take away one group's rights, it won't be long before the government takes away another group's rights.

Tolerance is key

David Steriti, a 21-year-old gay student at the University of Oklahoma, said tolerance is key to living together peacefully.

"We've definitely become more tolerant, and tolerance is perfectly fine in my opinion," said Steriti. "If you have tolerance, you get rid of a lot of the hate crimes."

Jason Rider, another gay student from Norman, said that homosexuals are born homosexual and it's as natural as heterosexuality.

"The easiest way to understand homosexuals is to understand your own heterosexuality," Rider said.

Sanders, of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, disagreed, saying no scientific evidence exists that indicates a person is born gay.

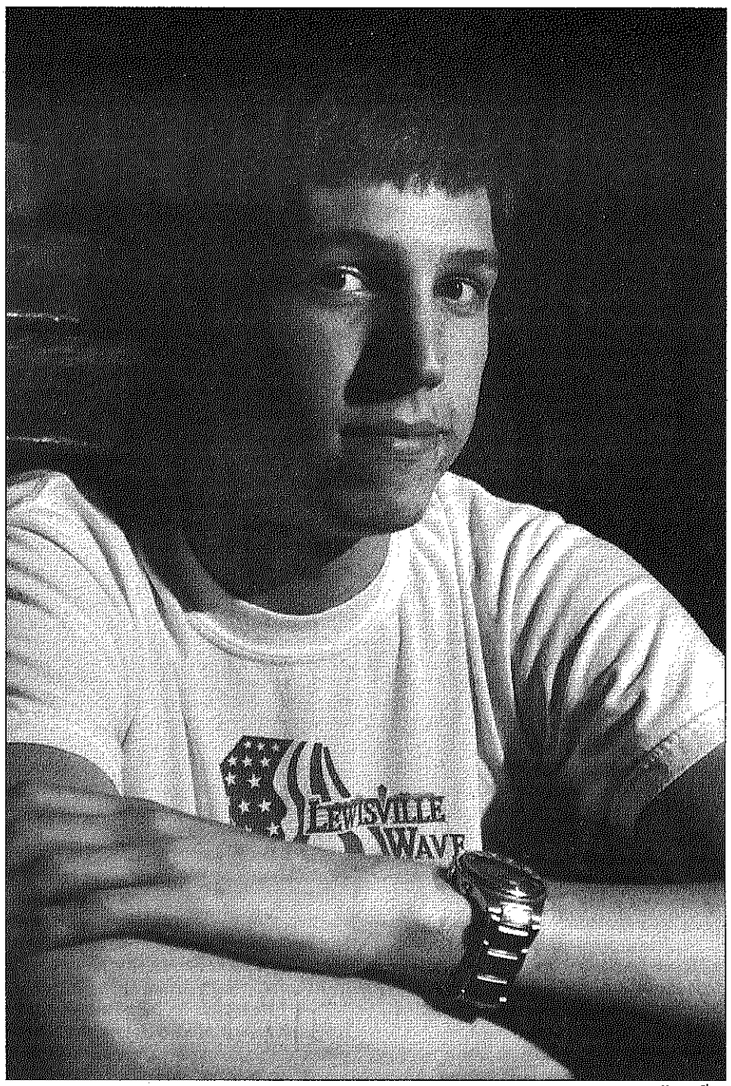
"I think in their mind they totally believe that, but just because gays think that doesn't mean they really are born gay," Sanders said.

But Gatewood said no evidence exists that proves a person is not born gay.

Whatever the outcome of the gay marriage debate, Gatewood said gays should not wait to make other legal arrangements with their partners. He said they should continue to draft wills and plan healthcare.

In the meantime, with the future of homosexual rights unclear, Rogers said he thinks homosexuals should fight legislation banning gay marriage in the courts.

"We need to educate people that we are not monsters."



Nancy Chen

Eric Thurstin, a University of Oklahoma student, says he believes a law banning gay marriage could open up a "Pandora's Box" of discrimination issues.

Behind the bylines

With her Harry Potter book sitting on her desk, Nancy Chen reminisces about meeting the author in London.

She describes her favorite parts of the books, and we're all reminded of her saying "It's all real in my mind."

Nancy Chen, a 15-year-old student from Tulsa, has written several articles for the Satellite section in the Tulsa World.

She was born in Arlington, Texas, but moved to Oklahoma when she was two. She lives with her parents Leo and Shu, and her parakeets, fish and her dove.

Nancy Chen

Nancy stays busy running Cross Country, hanging with friends, shopping and, of course, watching TV.

She's a member of the National Honor Society, Student Council, and was the reporter for the Business Professionals of America.

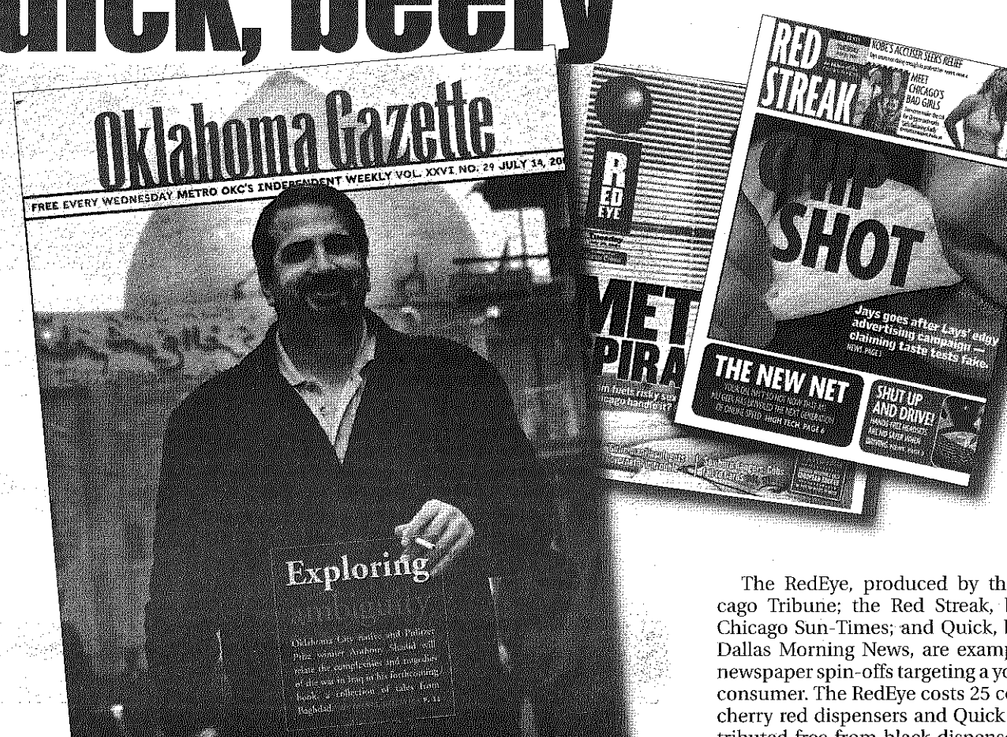
Nancy is a volunteer at St. Francis Hospital and many other organizations.

She will soon be attending the boarding school, Oklahoma School of Science and Mathematics, and plans to attend Columbia University and someday have a job dealing with international business or working in the White House.

Cool, quick, beefy

Newspapers reaching for lost generation of young readers

Carin Yeh
Red Dirt Journal Staff



Like many of her peers, Rachel Fowler, a 19-year-old University of Central Oklahoma student, does not read the newspaper.

However, the newspapers are reading her.

Catering to younger readers, traditional print is opting to publish more pop culture stories if not using alternative news outlets altogether. As a member of the 18 to 34 age range, she is a target for newspaper marketing that attempts to stem declining young audiences.

"To be honest," Fowler said, "I hardly ever pick up the newspaper."

Instead, Fowler turns to television programs like "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" for information about current events. That's what has traditional newspapers scrambling to recover dwindling readership.

The Readership Institute, based at Northwestern University's Media Management Center, tests methods to attract and measure newspaper readers. In February 2004, the institute published a report with disheartening information for newspaper companies. In a survey of reading habits, the youngest age group, 18-24, decreased in readership while the oldest, 65+, increased.

This is the problem for modern newspapers. "Young people" between the ages of 18 and 30 do not read the newspaper often. Furthermore, the television and Internet compete with newspapers for the attention of a younger demographic. Low interest and broadening choices of media cause them to turn away from traditional print journalism.

The dilemma has led newspapers to creative, sometimes dramatic, approaches to luring young readers.

"Write a song," suggests Peter Gade of the University of Oklahoma's Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication.

After three decades of teaching and observing students, Gade insists young people learn too little from current events and too much from pop culture.

He said students don't see the close connection between their lives and the news. Referencing the information being presented in entertainment venues such as "The Daily Show" and "MTV," his fingers form quotation marks in the air around the word "news."

Clay Webber, 21, offers insight as to why young audiences choose television as a dominant source of information.

"With music, you can bring an emotional reality," the UCO student says. Politically aware punk rock groups piqued his interest in politics. Later disillusioned by the lack of activism, he says it was politics that got him out of punk rock music.

What newspapers are bringing, however, are non-traditional solutions to keep it "real." In order to attract young audiences, alternatives to traditional newspapers such as weekly papers, free tabloids and articles on the Internet have become more prevalent.

The Oklahoma Gazette is published and distributed free every Wednesday by an independent company.

Editor Rob Collins says an alternative weekly such as The Gazette allows for greater flexibility in writing.

The RedEye, produced by th
cago Tribune; the Red Streak,
Chicago Sun-Times; and Quick,
Dallas Morning News, are exam
newspaper spin-offs targeting a yo
consumer. The RedEye costs 25 c
cherry red dispensers and Quick
tributed free from black dispens
cented with a green circle.

The Web site for the The
reads, "Cooler, Closer, Beefier,
er, Wilder." While the under-30
may consider themselves "beef
"wilder" as they read The RedE
goal of news producers is to eve
cultivate an older, albeit less "cool
sumer base.

Newspapers across the natio
also changed their content to at
younger audience. At times, what
sidered "hard news" has been rel
from the front page to one less
nent in favor of more interesting
As a result, readership rises, but
ness of current events may not.

George Kennedy of the Uni
of Missouri-Columbia says this
could also be considered a "reas
adjustment."

Still, this may not be enoug
advantage of a television report
timeliness. Both students, Fowl
Webber, turned to television af
Oklahoma City bombing for in
tion.

For newspapers, the Internet
fastest way to publish informatio
jor newspapers such as The Ne
Times and The Washington Post
articles on the web to be viewed
charge. To subscribe to this servi
New York Times asks for gender, a
occupation. This helps the news
identify their audience's demogra

Behind the bylines

Peju Faboro

She may be a native Oklahoman but at heart her homeland is Nigeria. Adepeju Faboro, meaning "the crown has been completed," 18, has a smile that extends to all. Known as Peju, she is one great ball of fire.

She is enrolled at the University of Oklahoma and will major in broadcast journalism. She recognizes that her mother, Shade, plays an enormous role in her success.

Peju embraces her unique background by sharing her experience visiting her roots in Nigeria.

"It was beautiful to see where my parents came from."

At Norman High School, she was involved in everything from playing basketball to leading her peers as school president.

Peju may be her name, but goofing around is her game.

She refuses to be bogged down by the negative with a carefree attitude that fuels her passion for the business in broadcast journalism.

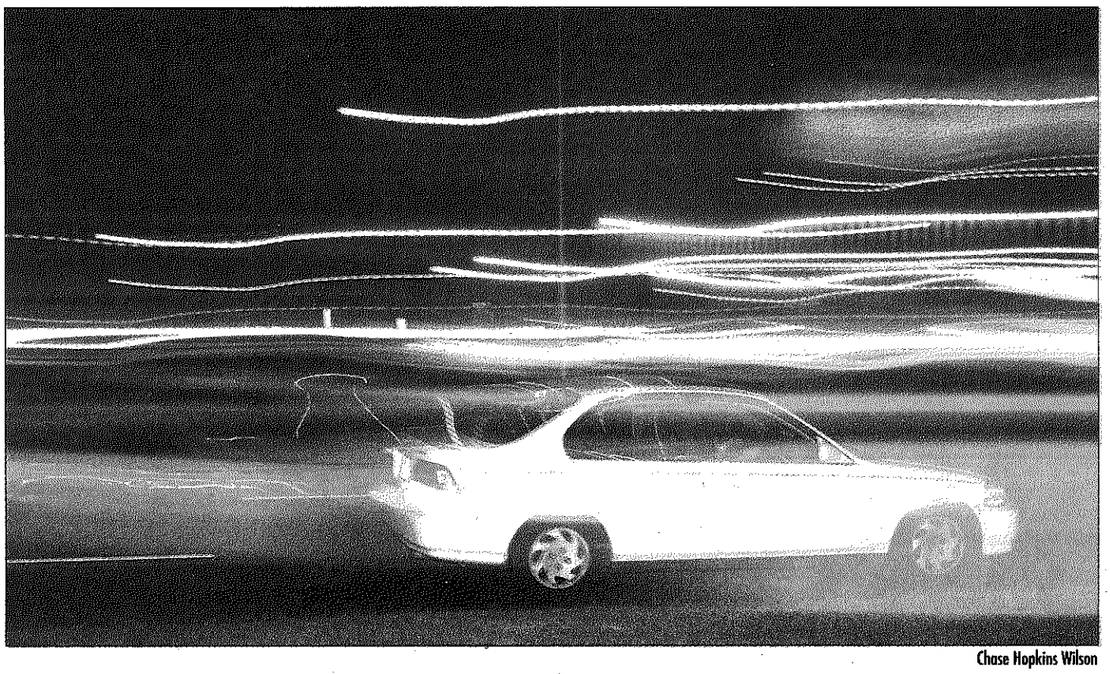
She often says, "You can sleep when you're dead, so might as well live now."

She won't be sleeping through this life, but living with a pen in hand and a passion for journalism to follow.

Rubber meets the road

In Bethany, a racing culture links generations of Central Oklahomans

Carin Yeh
Red Dirt Journal Staff



Chase Hopkins Wilson

Cruisers coast up and down the main drag on 39th Street between Portland Avenue and Rockwell Street in Bethany.

For generations, teenagers have been drag racing cars on 39th Street in Bethany. The term "drag race" originates from the late 1920s when a city's main highway, known as the "drag," was used as a race venue. Along historic Route 66, the racing legends of Bethany are as old as the highway itself.

Unfortunately, teenage drivers are legendary as well for reckless behavior on the road and the police commonly write tickets for speeding and illegal U-turns. On the other hand, local businesses welcome the late-night drivers by making empty parking lots available for teens to display their cars.

With so many young people gathered here, the police are watchful on the weekends. The negative stereotype surrounding drag racing is difficult to dispel, but teens on the drag are making an effort.

When a friend in a red truck with a roaring engine slows to a stop on the street, a volley of protests greets him. Everyone tries to get the truck driver to park legally and thus stay out of trouble. For legal racing, venues such as the Thunder Valley Raceway Park in Noble host drag races.

At times, bias against the teenagers is rooted in an inherent part of the racecar culture. Subwoofers are installed into cars to produce a more powerful bass beat. When a driver wants to show off his new "subs," he turns up his music. The rhythm of a rap song can be heard and felt from 25 feet. While this seems like harmless fun, it also can tempt police to issue a citation.

From a distance, a group of teenagers can be seen loitering in the parking lot of a car dealership. A haze of cigarette smoke clouds the air and hoots of laughter echo. These images bring to mind the rough-and-tumble gang of Grease, and like Danny, Sandy and the gang, they are actually a close-knit group of friends who meet on Friday and Saturday nights.

"We just come to hang out," says Dennis Ogdahl, standing between a Chevy and a Pontiac.

Beyond their friendship, an interest in cars holds these teens together. They work during the day at local garages and retail stores, but after work they come together to build cars.

The "we" refers to a self-titled group called A-spec. Their name was inspired by the video game about cars called Gran Turismo 3: A-spec. A-spec is an abbreviation of the automobile term "American Specifications."

The automobile jargon they use is almost a language of its own. Catrina Santiago, a female member of A-spec, dreams of the number 4-4-2. To her, the sum is not 10, but rather a 1969 Oldsmobile with a 400 big block engine, a 4-barrel carburetor and 2 doors.

Unlike a group of racers who meet farther down the street, A-spec only races for sport and almost always with American cars. This is a tradition carried from generations past. Their forefathers may very well have raced on Route 66 in 1926 after its official completion. More important, their parents raced here as well and have taught them to build and love these cars.

Dillon Thomas, a member of A-spec, is a second-generation drag racer. His father and uncle used to cruise 39th Street in their teenage years. In fact, his late father taught him to build cars when they worked together on a 1971 Chevelle.

"Cars are genetic," says A-spec member James Steury.

With engine oil coursing through their veins, it was natural for the members of A-spec to talk about cars in high school. While they all went to different schools, it was by word of mouth that everyone found this niche on 39th Street.

It is possible that these teenagers will grow up together. After all, they're living out a dream. Now, they work hard during the day and play hard at night. Their ideal job is to own a garage together where they can work on cars all day. The friends joke that they do not even need bedrooms; all they need are bunk beds in a room adjacent to the garage.

It is not hard to believe. A familiar sight on the street is of an elderly man with grey hair driving a souped-up Mazda truck.

The music in the background plays a popular song by Kid Rock. Everyone chants the first line of the chorus: "I'm a cowboy, baby." With a lone ranger's devil-may-care attitude, these teenagers look forward to years of building and racing cars. Perhaps there will even be a fourth generation of high school drag racers on 39th Street.

"This is something we'll be doing for life," says Brock Childs.

Behind the bylines

Mandy Hardin

Mandy Hardin, 18, graduated from Jenks High School and will attend the University of Oklahoma this fall.

She was Technology Editor and wrote a music column for the school's newspaper, the Trojan Torch.

She is a member of the National Honor Society.

Mandy enjoys working with people, which triggered her to pursue a career in public relations.

She is close to her sister, Marci, who goes to Oklahoma State University.

One of her biggest mentors is her grandmother who has been a strong person through adversity.

She views her grandmother as a tower of strength along with her mother and herself.

"I want to be successful at what I do, but maintain my integrity while doing so."

Her desire is to travel to Greece and absorb the Greek mythology in Athens.

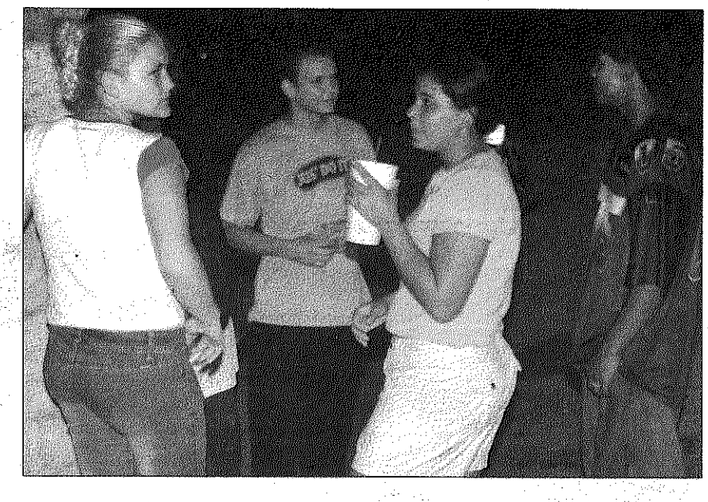
Mandy claims to be a die-hard Beatles fan.

Green is her favorite color.

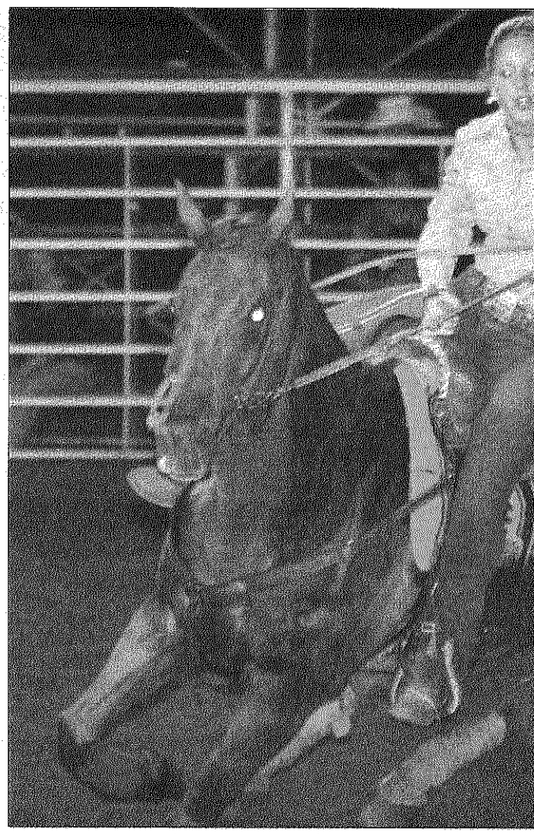
While munching on Chinese food, she loves watching horror films.

Her T-shirt reads: "Redheads have more fun."

Small-



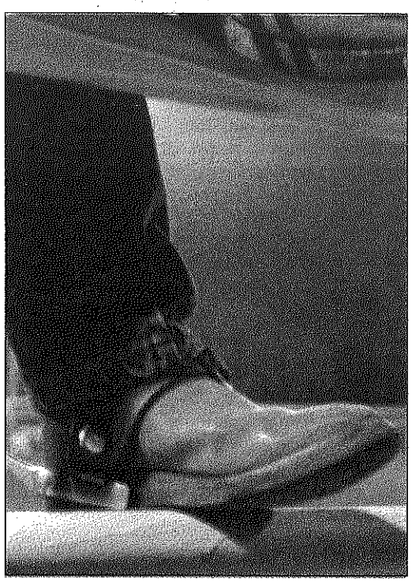
Lacey Mitchell (left), Jeremy Laws, Jessica Ford, and De-shawn Mitchell hang out in front of the bowling alley in Guthrie on Friday night.



Mandi Lankford, a 15-year-old from Earlsboro, competes in barrel racing at the G

A lot goin' on where there's 'nothing to do'

Story by Nancy Chen
Photos by Robyn Kelley



Riley Buton's boot, resting on a rail, symbolizes rodeo and everything country.

GUTHRIE — On Division Street, the warm summer wind carries a deep, friendly voice as it echoes from bullhorn speakers tucked into a grove of shady oak trees. Cicadas chirp loudly, punctuated only by cries, cheers and country music. Red dust hangs in the air. Intense lights illuminate a baseball field that has just finished hosting a state tournament game as Christmas lights blink from the windows of stores lining amber-lit streets.

It's Friday night in Guthrie, the first state capital, and locals are abuzz over the child and teen rodeo in town for its monthly show. Dozens of trucks are parked outside the arena at Owens Field, at least half attached to trailers toting horses. Some horses dawdle and watch as their four-legged comrades are led or ridden by their owners around the parking area, a field full of tall grasses, long weeds and wide patches of baked earth.

The echoing voice from the tinny public address system belongs to announcer Kbar Hopfer, who entertains the crowd before each performance with declarations such as, "You silly goat." At times, he also makes dinner jokes about rodeo animals.

Some children walk around the arena comfortably in cowboy hats, boots and chaps, while others sit nervously on their sheep, ready for the mutton busting competition. Children are thrown off, one after another, with barely a minute between entries. The crowd oohs and aahs appropriately as Hopfer reassures a rider clinging to his father, "You're OK. Shake your hand a little bit. The girls love it."

Behind the chutes that spring the action onto the arena floor, the youngsters nurse their wounds, often in the arms of parents or siblings. Dirt and tears are common; encouragement is a must.

No 'one-trick' town

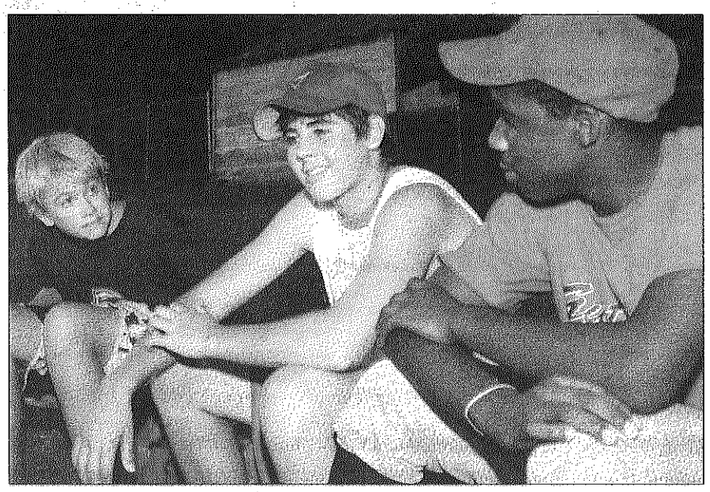
But on this night, Guthrie is no one-trick town. On up Division Street, five teenagers mill in front of the bowling alley, talking and waiting for friends. At least one is not pleased with her options.

"There's nothing to do in Guthrie," Jessica Ford, 15, says before discussing the need for a recreation center with her friends. "It's (the town is) too little."

A few
party at Hi
Park is wh
Friday nig
Rap m
multi-colo
dance floo
as a DJ spi
sweat and
atmosphe
around th
lining the
In dow
declared a
there is a r
Granny Ha
Restauran
teenagers
Saloon Res
which boa

own Friday night

n a recent Friday night. She placed third with a time of 19.11 seconds.



Jaden Chapell left, Brady Jarngin, and Michael Harmon hang out at the Guthrie baseball field, after being defeated, 11to1, in their season finale.

ı, on Drexel Street, a
ll in the city's Highland
ɔens are spending their

from the speakers as
its shine onto the dark
)f teens bump and grind
is. The pungent smell of
ngs in the ear-deafening
rs talk, laugh and dart
le others sit on seats
s.

uich recently was
istoric monument,
)f stores, ranging from
taurant to China Garden
rdware. About four
talk at the Blue Belle
klahoma's oldest saloon,
x, a silent film star, as a former bartender.

Losing and winning

A few dozen steps away, on Division Street, a baseball game has just finished: the Guthrie Blue Jays versus Edmond North in the state tournament. The scoreboard is still lit: Home—1, Visitors—11. Despite losing in five innings by the 10-run rule, the baseball players and coach are in good spirits.

In fact, Brady Jarnagin, 15, and Michael Harmon, 14, are planning an outing of tubing and fishing on Carl Blackwell Lake. Coach Jon Chappell is talking about taking time off after the tournament moves out of town in a few days.

Empty Coke cans and water bottles litter the dugout as sprinklers drench the historic baseball field, built in 1936. Classic rock plays in the background as several players retake the field, throw around baseballs and play a hybrid form of pepper.

Red dust and rodeo

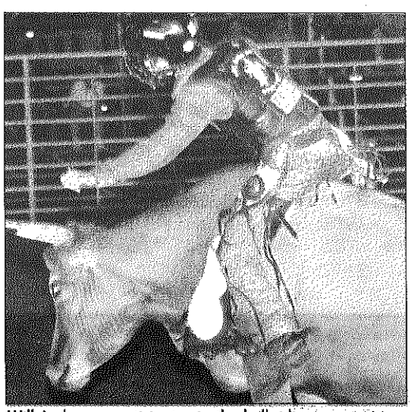
As the coach and players finish up at the ballpark, the older teens are starting up barrel racing in the run-up to the rodeo finale. The red dust is din-like now, settling heavily on feet, clothes and cars.

Around the announcer's booth, located by the goats, bulls and sheep waiting for their turn at the competitions, teenagers have replaced the wounded children from the hours before. Some are here to watch their friends or family compete; others are anxiously waiting their turn at the14-16 age group events starting in a few minutes.

"About every time they (the rodeo) come here…it's the place to go," says 15-year-old Mandi Lankford of Earlsboro. "I usually practice everything: barrel race, pole bend…it's very competitive and I'm a very competitive person. It's not a team sport; it's you and the horse going against the clock."

Indeed, it is. When her event, barrel racing, starts, Lankford's long blonde hair flies as she snaps a rope against her chestnut brown horse, See Jack Run, racing against time, finishing third with a time of 19.11 seconds.

The events happen so fast that they are almost a blur, leaving onlookers feeling dazed.



Will Anderson participates in the bull riding competition at the Guthrie rodeo.

One after another, at least 20 horses are directed around the three barrels. There is only a brief pause as a tractor rakes the arena floor to prepare for the next heart-stopping event: bull riding.

After the angry bulls throw their riders, the 1,200-pound beasts run along the arena railing, forcing onlookers to step back from the white steel fence with foot-long openings between the rails.

With an estimated 9,987 people, Guthrie is classified as a small town and most folks—like baseball player Landrey Chappell—think that's just fine.

"We don't want to attract any more people here," he says. "It's a nice little town."

Mental illness mentality

Stigma still exists for those battling depression or anxiety disorders

Breanca Thomas
Red Dirt Journal Staff

Eleven years ago, Daniel Acevedo, then age 11, was overly pessimistic and slept as often as he could. During school hours, he'd remain in a corner by himself, usually drawing. Small things annoyed him. He felt like an outsider.

"I'd get angry pretty easily," Acevedo said, "to the point where it's not normal."

One day, his parents and guidance counselor had a meeting. They decided Acevedo was clinically depressed. Before long, he was taking an antidepressant.

Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft are becoming as common to today's teens as Tylenol, Advil and Aleve. According to the National Mental Health Association, one in eight teens suffers from depression. A national survey shows that nine out of 10 adolescents said they have experienced feelings of depression or sadness that last at least two weeks.

Although many young people are being treated for this illness, the long-time stigma associated with depression and its treatment still exists to some degree.

"When my son was a teenager, people with depression were called things like 'psycho' or 'nutso'," said Gladys Dronberger, whose son was diagnosed with depression in the 1970s. "People have just always associated illnesses like depression with weakness."

Those who don't have firsthand experience with depression can form opinions about those suffering from the illness based on stereotypes rather than facts.

Jayma Winters, 20, is a student at the University of Central Oklahoma. She said she doesn't have friends who are depressed, but acknowledges the differences between her friends and those who suffer from depression.

"I'm not against hanging out with people like that, but my friends are all really positive, uplifting people," she said.

Acevedo said his friends understood his battle with depression and didn't judge him negatively for it.

"In high school, people didn't really treat me differently," he said. "There were always people who went out of their way to make me happy because they knew I had depression, and my friends used some good-natured kidding."

Dronberger's son, whom she prefers not to name, took no medications and sought no therapy because, she said, "It just wasn't common back then."

Antidepressant drugs and counseling are more common today. But according to the National Institute of Mental Health, 30 percent of depressed teens are treated for the disorder, while 70 percent who are depressed go through life without any professional treatment.

Clinical depression

Certain groups are more likely to develop depression than others. Teens who experience hardships are at higher risk.

"Growing up in abusive homes or being neglected in any way (can cause teens to) suffer from clinical depression," said Ben Brown, Oklahoma deputy commissioner of Substance Abuse Services. Clinical depression is the most severe form of the illness.

Dr. John Pittman, family doctor at Putnam North Medical Center, said clinical depression is a condition in which the person diagnosed has depression so severe that he or she requires medical intervention.

"When they say, 'I can't remember the last time I was happy,' that's when we know it's clinical depression," said Charlotte Lankard, Integris Hospital family and marriage therapist. "That's when we try to find the source."

The source, which varies from person to person, often can be linked to smoking, drugs, alcohol and even sexual activity, Brown said.

Acevedo, now 22, takes Paxil and Anafranil for his depression. But beginning in sixth grade, he controlled his illness with an additional drug: marijuana.

In a study, scientists in Australia found that teens who smoked marijuana at least once a week were twice as likely to suffer depression or anxiety as teens who did not. Similarly, teens who have depression are also more likely to abuse drugs or other substances.

"Experimentation (with drugs, alcohol) was very big in my school," Acevedo said. "I used smoking weed as a means of escape."

Antidepressants are the most common form of professional treatment, because they serve as a "quick fix" to its symptoms.

Jill Copus, clinical pharmacist at Mercy Health Center, said antidepressants, when preseribed correctly, can be effective.

"Drugs like Paxil have lesser side effects because they re-establish the chemical imbalance that depressed people have," she said.

"These kinds of drugs are referred to as selective seratonin (reuptake inhibitors), because seratonin, a chemical found in the brain, is released, making the person feel happier."

Copus said not all antidepressants are safe. A patient's age can make a difference.

"Paxil isn't usually recommended for teens because when the depressed teen stops taking the drug, they are at increased risk for having suicidal feelings," she said.

Professionals recommend therapy a with an antidepressant prescription. In th py sessions, patients discuss events that have triggered the depression as well as v the symptoms of depression first appea Lankard said.

Family affair

Psychiatric nurse Gail Fites said the pressed teenagers she counsels at St. thony Mental Health Hospital in Spence be dealing with neglectful parents. Alth parents can be the cause of depression, not necessarily because of bad parenting pression can be a genetic disorder.

Copus said she has seen parents and children prescribed with the same ar pressant. Both Acevedo's father and br struggle with the difficulties of depres Dronberger suffered with depression b and after her son was diagnosed.

"Everyone in my family, except for m my sister, have depression. I mean, pa grandparents, aunts, uncles, everybody," Jennifer Kinsey, 24, a substance abuse r at the University of Central Oklahoma. mom even tried to get me to use St. J Wort and that other herbal stuff."

As for Acevedo, who worried th would be "seen as weak" for being depre the struggle with the illness is under co

The drug use, stigmas and other de sion-related issues can scar the opinio others, but the changing face of antide sant usage can be attributed to the ope held by today's youth.

"I don't hold it against anyone if they (depression)," Kinsey said.

Robyn

Antidepressants are one of the more popular treatments for depression. In 2002, approximately 10 million teens and children under the age of 18 were taking some form of these drugs.

Behind the bylines

Alicia Hill

Alicia Hill, 16, was born in Germany to Patty, who is Hawaiian, and Gregory Hill, who is African-American.

Her middle name, "Kehaunani" means "beautiful breeze" in Hawaiian.

Her unique ethnicity has helped her appreciate different cultures, evidenced by her relationship with boyfriend Christopher, who is Puerto Rican.

After living in Hawaii for five years, she moved to Lawton. She attends MacArthur High School, and can't wait to graduate.

Aside from maintaining a 4.2 GPA, she is involved in Key Club, National Honor Society, and Who's Who Among American High School Students.

She has been a part of the newspaper staff for a year, and this year she will be editor of the newspaper.

Alicia would like to attend the University of Oklahoma with a major in journalism.

She was inspired to pursue journalism after taking a freshman newspaper course and having a love of writing.

Alicia loves hip-hop and R&B music, reading fantasy novels and playing piano. Alicia admires her older sister, Ebonie, because she is outgoing and confident.

Mental health: Treatable and beatable

When the cure is worse

Oklahoma teens can be treated like criminals in a system losing ground on staff and resources

By Robyn Kelley
Red Dirt Journal Staff

Many Oklahoman teenagers with mental illness have yet to receive the treatment they need, officials say, and some are sent to juvenile detention facilities designed for young lawbreakers.

"Oklahoma has maybe a bit of a lock-em-up-throw-away-the-key mentality," said Ben Brown, deputy commissioner of Substance Abuse Services, referring to juveniles with mental illnesses.

"These are diseases just like diabetes or cancer. They are treatable. And we're not doing nearly enough about it."

Brown said the problem has worsened in recent years.

"We used to have a system of guidance centers in Oklahoma and they were staffed with well-qualified professionals," Brown said. "Their purpose was to deal with family issues.

"Suddenly, we looked up one day and those things had gone away. They didn't exist anymore, so what you had was no place in the state (for adolescents to get mental health care)."

There are only 21 spots for residential treatment of substance abuse in Norman for children 13 through 18, said Wynema Ra, the executive director of the Norman Alcohol and Drug Treatment Center.

The U.S. Surgeon General's 1999 report on mental health states that an estimated one of five Americans between the ages 9 to 17 have a diagnosable mental disorder.

"Oklahoma has a higher than national average rate of mental health disorders," Brown said.

A nationwide survey presented at a U.S. Senate hearing showed that last year 15,000 children with mental illnesses had been sent into juvenile detention centers because no mental health services were available.

Approximately one out of 10 of these children have a mental illness such as depression or anxiety disorders. The National Institute on Mental Health states that fewer than 20 percent of them receive the treatment they need.

More than one of 10 teens had a substance abuse problem along with their mental disorder, the Surgeon General report said.

Alcohol plays a role

About one third of teenagers sent to substance abuse facilities have a diagnosable mental health problem such as depression or anxiety, said L. D. Barney, the director of programs evaluation at the Norman alcohol and drug facility.

This is partly because alcohol and drugs contribute to many disorders such as depression, the Surgeon General report said.

Alcohol and drug use are not the only factors that play a part in mental illness.

"There is a real significant relationship between environment and these issues that we care about," Brown said. "Now that's not the only factor, but it is a significant factor."

He said there is also a relationship between mental illness and physical violence, emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

The use of special education classes as dumping grounds for disturbed children is another reason why the safety net for children with mental disorders often fails.

Fortunately, there are a few programs that might make a difference.

Oklahoma Systems of Care is centered on the child and focuses on the family as a whole. This program is a coordinated network based on mental health and other support services to meet the changing needs of mentally ill children and adolescents and their families.

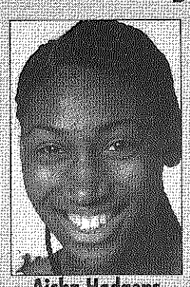
This program for children who are between 6 and 18 gives children a relaxed setting by working with them in their home in their own environment. The members of the family participate in the process.

Another program called MDFT, or Multi-Dimensional Family Therapy, also centers on adolescents and their families.

Programs such as MDFT and Systems of Care aim to address the psychosocial problems of the adolescents as well as their families, said Teresa Capps, director for Mental Health Services for Youth at the Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center.

These are pilot programs that are currently funded by the state government. Although both of these treatment programs are still in their infancy, they have managed to care for many of Oklahoma's children, Capps said.

Behind the bylines



Aisha Hodgens

This August, Aisha Soleil Hodgens, 18, will be a freshman at Eastern State College in Wilburton.

She will attend Wilburton for two years and then will transfer to the University of Oklahoma to pursue her career in journalism.

Cheerleading is her second nature. She has been a cheerleader for four years and plans on continuing in college.

Aisha has three brothers and one sister. Her brothers are John, 16, Wesley, 14, and Ethan, who is almost 2. Her sister Page is 9.

Aisha listens to all kinds of music, including rock, R&B, and rap. She also loves to dance and sing.

She is an avid reader. Her favorite books include Stephen King's and the Harry Potter series.

Her inspiration and role model is her mother whom she loves for being there for her.

Her mother is her best friend.

Aisha is boy crazy and thinks most boys are cute.

She loves to eat junk food, especially ice cream, which she knows she is not supposed to eat because she is lactose intolerant.

Angela Jefferson

Angela Marie Jefferson is 18 and lives her life in two spheres, sports and dance. Her activities include softball, track, cheerleading, tap, jazz, ballet and lyrical dance.

She has been in many musicals, including "Guys and Dolls," "West Side Story" and "Pajama Game."

She recently graduated from Muskogee High School as a member of the National Honor Society and plans to attend the University of Oklahoma, where she is considering a major in advertising.

Angela is the youngest of three children. Her two older brothers played an important part in who she is today. Her brother Dan is her greatest mentor.

She believes she has the determination of the Energizer Bunny.

Angela hopes to visit the waterways of Venice, Italy, her dream destination. She also enjoys munching on steamed broccoli while watching "Mona Lisa Smile," her favorite movie because "it's about women finding themselves."

She said her goals can easily be achieved through her motto, "Everything works out in the end."

Teachers: Problems often go unnoticed

Fixing broken lives

Schools often lack expertise, resources to ease students' emotional problems

Cassie Ketrick
Red Dirt Journal Staff

The dirt remains imprinted on the white carpet at the foot of her bed where a stranger broke into Nicole Aubain's window and broke her life apart.

Almost a year later, Aubain shudders at the thought of sleeping in a bed under a window. She suffered a horrific series of traumatizing events after the attempted rape. The high school senior, who was 17 at the time, felt "lost," the one word that summarized her emotional state.

It's nothing new that teenagers have problems. The mental and emotional issues racing around high school, as fast as gossip swirling through hallways, often go unnoticed by educators, even though they may spend more time with the students than students spend with their own parents.

Many public schools lack the expertise to provide their students with help, said Janelle Grellner in the Department of Psychology at the University of Central Oklahoma.

Even so, she said, "Teachers do remarkably well given the resources they have."

Often educators are too focused on academics to see the whole person. Grellner notes American society is "based on achievement (with pressure for) being No. 1."

She believes American culture focuses too little on finding fulfillment in other areas, such as being a "decent human being."

"It's a wonder we don't have more violence than we do," Grellner said.

After a drop in grades and sleep deprivation, Aubain found herself overwhelmed by constant conflict with her mother, her long hours at work, her abusive boyfriend and even a teacher.

Teachers seemed indifferent to her downhill slide, Aubain said. She was frustrated by the fact that some educators with the strongest backgrounds in care giving seemed the most callous. She thought they should have recognized her severe emotional distress.

"I had teachers who knew all the facts (about emotional issues), but chose not to be sensitive about the fact that I had too much going on and I couldn't handle it all,"Aubain said.

At the University of Central Oklahoma, the College of Education requires education majors to complete two courses relating to psychological issues in students. Teachers say coursework is not enough.

"A semester class you take does not prepare you," said Brenda Fienning, an English teacher at Jenks High School. "Many (professors) are so far removed (from the personal aspect), they don't show the reality."

She believes teachers should be trained in a classroom lab setting to recognize signs of emotional problems in students.

A Michigan psychiatrist, Dr. Frank Ochberg, chairman of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, found that "a healthy high school (supports) confrontation" when addressing a problem. "A climate of trustworthy conversation across generations" can be achieved, he said.

The warning signs in students aren't always obvious, said Barbara Green, a professor with special services at the University of Central Oklahoma.

"Teachers have the training," Green said. "Whether or not they apply it is out of our hands."

Almost six months after being attacked in her home, Aubain was approached by her counselor and received the support she needed. Teachers were notified of her emotional distress and worked to make sure Aubain graduated.

Experts acknowledge the need for awareness of emotional problems in students. The lack of funding makes improvement difficult.

"Society will deal with it as it comes," said Tracey Macklin, a teacher at Mariana Bracetti Academy Charter School in Pennsylvania.

Macklin assists disabled children on a day-to-day basis. She sympathizes with the average public school teacher who is trained specifically for education, but is required to manage children with mental and emotional issues.

Ochberg agrees that "there are (some) teachers who are better at hearing the language of kids than others."

"They know how to listen (and) know the limitations," Ochberg said. Green is optimistic about student-teacher relationships.

"There's always room for improvement," she said. With specific treatment strategies in public school districts, students similar to Aubain won't have to hide pain. Instead they will be listened to and directed down the right path, Ochberg said.

Aubain survived financial distress and physical abuse before her relocation to Texas to live with her uncle.

"I honestly think (helping people) has nothing to do with training," Aubain said. "It has everything to do with who you are."

Behind the bylines

Robyn Kelley

In Fairfax, Robyn Kelley slings a bag of feed over her shoulder daily. In addition to working with cattle, the 17-year-old is a multi-faceted rural teenager. She plays piano and presides over two clubs at Woodland High School: The National Future Farmers of America Organization and National Honor Society. She is also the president of her class.

She participates in five sports: golf, track, tae kwan do, cross-country and fast-pitch softball. She also manages the football team. In her spare time, when she has any, she enjoys reading anima and watching Japanese cartoons. Robyn also likes to watch movies, especially science fiction, with her brother Brady, 15.

On Saturdays, she is a hostess at Lazy-S, a family-owned barbeque restaurant in Fairfax. She uses the money that she earns to buy more feed and steers, most weighing over 1000-lbs., which she proudly displays in livestock shows. She also raises pigs, dogs, a cat and a fish named Peter. Robyn aspires to study at the University of Oxford, after graduating next year. She would like to become an archaeologist.

Cassie Ketrick

Cassandra Michelle Ketrick, 18, will be attending the University of Oklahoma in the fall.

There she will major in journalism and work on the student newspaper, The Oklahoma Daily.

She has lived in Jenks all her life with her mother Lisa Ketrick.

Cassie, as she is known, graduated with distinguished honors from Jenks High School and worked on her city's newspaper, The Tulsa World, where she was a part of The Satellite staff.

Cassie also wrote for her high school paper, The Trojan Torch and has worked at Reasor's Pharmacy as a pharmacy tech for three years.

Cassie is pretty open when it comes to music, but she has a love for Tori Amos' music.

One thing that she enjoys doing with her free time is going to the zoo and visiting her favorite animal, the three-toed sloth.

Cassie also loves to munch on her favorite food, Chinese.

She would say that her sensibility to care is one of her greater qualities and her smile can illuminate a room.

Cassie's main goal while writing is challenging readers.

Schooling young moms

Pregnant teens choose between alternative or traditional high schools

Eberneisha Brown and Jennifer Adamson
Red Dirt Journal Staff

Suzanne Bryson, Northwest Classen High School teacher, advises pregnant teens to stay in school.

Photo by Carin Yeh

Jill Pruitt, 19, had a child at 15, but knew that staying at Jenks High School would benefit her in the future.

"I knew I wouldn't take an alternative school seriously," Pruitt said. "My grades were important to me. I graduated with a 3.9 GPA."

One major decision a teen girl must make when she becomes pregnant is whether she will continue to go to her regular high school or go to an alternative school, a separate program established to provide an option for youth whose needs cannot be met in a traditional setting.

Some girls are encouraged to enter alternative schools when pregnancy begins to show, while others choose to stay in their traditional high schools.

Pruitt said her principal called her in to suggest she go to an alternative school, but she stood her ground and decided to stick it out at Jenks.

Some pregnant girls think the academics are better and that colleges look down on alternative schools. Some experts think alternative schools might be a better choice.

"I encourage them to go to an alternative school for childcare services," said James Allen, an adolescent health coordinator for the Oklahoma State Health Department.

Alternative schools such as Emerson in Oklahoma City offer childcare services, transportation and training in life skills -- balancing a checkbook, shopping for their children's groceries, paying their utilities and establishing credit.

Alternative schools also offer daycare services that allow the mother access to her child to breastfeed.

Sam Chaney, crisis counselor at Northwest Classen High School, said pregnant teens should study their options before deciding.

"I never say go anywhere," Chaney said. "I just say this is something you should look into."

But some teachers urge pregnant girls to stay in traditional high schools.

Suzanne Bryson is not just a math teacher at Northwest Classen High School. She is also a respected mentor to teen mothers-to-be.

Last year, seven of her students were pregnant; six stayed in school.

"I'm old and grandmotherly, so they're not afraid to talk to me," said Bryson, who has taught for 34 years, 20 at Northwest Classen.

She advises pregnant teens to stay at Classen during pregnancy and after birth. She believes academics and electives are better at regular schools.

If the teen moms are having pregnancy complications, Bryson said, they should go to an alternative school set up for teen pregnancy.

Other teachers believe alternative schools are usually better for pregnant teens.

"I advise them to go to Emerson," said Lucretia Camacho, an English as a Second Language teacher at Capitol Hill High School, also in the Oklahoma City school district.

"Emerson would be easier for them," Camacho said. "Emerson would be better."

Camacho said students consider an alternative school a stigma and they don't want to be away from friends.

Ciarra Kimble, 20, got pregnant at 17 while attending Midwest City High School. She continued there until she graduated.

"I felt like I could stay there," Kimble said. "I didn't want anything to change because of my pregnancy."

Pruitt stayed at her school for academics and Kimble stayed for a network, but both agreed they could have benefited from the childcare services at an alternative school.

"Having daycare would have been awesome," Pruitt said.

Pruitt said young women underestimate the difficulty of being a mother.

"Most people would think my case was a fairy tale in the way it worked out, but it was hard," Pruitt said, noting that pregnancy dashed her college dreams.

Alternative schools have helped girls cope with early parenthood.

Jessica, a 19 year old who asked her last name be omitted from this story, chose alternative school. When she was 15, she got pregnant and went to Team Alternative School in Moore.

She said she was urged to go to the alternative school by her principal and counselors.

She found alternative school was more flexible than traditional high school because she could work at her own pace. She also thought it was better because she was surrounded by other teen mothers in her same situation.

Team Alternative School offered field trips to Moore Public Library and Norman Regional Hospital. At the hospital, a nurse talked to them about breathing during labor and taking care of their babies.

At the library, they read to their babies and received books to read at home.

Whether a teen mom decides to stay at her current high school for academic reasons and her comfort network or transfers to an alternative school for parenting advantages, all agree it's important she stay in school.

C.J. Macklin

Charles Jorge "C.J." Macklin, 17, from Flower Mound, Texas, will be a freshman at the University of Oklahoma for the fall 2004 semester.

He plans to major in journalism. He graduated in May from Marcus High School.

"I wanted to tie together my joys of traveling, music, and meeting new people," said C.J. about why he chose journalism.

He hopes to be a journalist for a music magazine and looks up to MTV News anchor Gideon Yago.

C.J. likes such bands as Coheed and Cambria and Sublime, and dislikes such things as censorship and soccer moms. C.J. is a Leo.

His favorite color is blue, and his favorite movie is "Fight Club."

C.J.'s most memorable moment was at the 2004 Vans Warped Tour in Dallas.

"I helped my friend Joe sell merchandise for the band Yellowcard," C.J. said. "I got to meet most of the band, and I learned a lot about how the business part of the music industry works."

Behind the bylines

A good home: Quality, not quantity

Growing up with one paren

Mandy Hardin
Red Dirt Journal Staff

Stephen Horn, a University of Central Oklahoma student and child from a single-parent home, says he knows so many single-parent families that he no longer thinks of two-parent families as normal.

"I'm weirded out when I see people with two parents," Horn said.

As more students are being reared in single-parent homes and the two-parent home no longer dominates, the stereotype that students from single-parent homes are at a complete disadvantage emotionally may be fading.

"Children from single-parent homes can do as well as those from a two-parent household," said Judy Parkins, a licensed practitioner from the Mental Health Services in Ada. "As long as there is a healthy single parent, they can do just as well."

She said it is important only that the parent is supportive.

"As long as there is a healthy single parent, they can do just as well."

Judy Parkins
licensed mental health practitioner

More single parents

The number of children reared by a single parent is increasing, nearly doubling in the past 10 years.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported 51,564 single-male households with children in 2000, compared with 19,384 in 1990, and it noted 152,575 single-parent female households with children in 2000, compared with 87,945 in 1990.

Some students from single-parent families claim that they have to grow up faster and accept responsibility sooner. They say they become more independent after high school.

"I think in many ways you are forced to grow up a little bit faster," said Heather Wilk, a recent high school graduate from Tulsa. "Going from home to home forces you to have experiences you wouldn't normally have, like two houses and two families."

But Simon Plohocky, a recent high school graduate from Tulsa and a child raised in a two-parent home, disagreed.

"Too much of it depends on circumstance as to whether or not you can say that the children from single-parent homes have more responsibility," he said.

"I personally feel that I've had to grow up just as fast as a child from a single-parent home."

Some students from two-parent homes said they are on the same maturity level in life as those from single-parent homes. They recognize the responsibilities that most children from single-parent homes have, but some said that many students from two-parent families have the same responsibilities.

"My mom made me go out and look for a job at age 16," said Nicole Daman, another recent graduate from Tulsa and a child from a two-parent home. "I have to come up with the money to pay for my own gas."

Debate on effects

Experts disagree on whether the effects of living with one parent have long-term repercussions.

Parkins said she thinks single-parenting has become commonplace and the effects are more short-term. She said one must take into consideration the parent. Whether the parent has a mental health issue or substance abuse problem will determine whether the effects will be long-term or short-term.

Others said that the effects of being raised with one parent are more long-term. Jan Chapel, a certified counselor at the University of Central Oklahoma, cited research on the subject.

Chapel said that in the book "The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce," by Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee, children in single-parent families often struggle with relationships.

Bruce Lochnear, a certified psychologist and director of Student Counseling, Testing and Disability Support Services at the University of Central Oklahoma, said the main factor in determining a child's future is quality not quantity.

That a child is raised in a home with one parent is not the No.1 concern, he said. The issue at hand is how well the person the child is living with provides for basic needs.

Behind the bylines

Crystal Mason, 18, from Muskogee, will be majoring in journalism at the University of Oklahoma in the fall.

She finished with a class rank of 35 in a class of 316. She graduated cum laude with a 3.7 GPA.

Her other honors include being in National Honor Society, Who's Who Among American High School Students, National Honor Roll, being in the United States Achievement Academy and on the A honor roll.

Crystal Mason

She is in journalism to "speak up for those who won't speak up."

In high school, Mason played soccer and varsity lettered three years. She was also involved in choir, science club, ecology club, Business Professionals of America and Film Society, where she held office as vice president.

Mason enjoys listening to R&B music, writing and watching TV.

Her plans include working at The Oklahoma Daily, the OU student newspaper.

Mason says her biggest influences are her family and herself.

She says that she is not afraid to speak up because "there are a lot of issues and problems that need to be addressed."

Behind the bylines

Breanca "Bre" Michelle Thomas, 16, was born in Shreveport, La., to Mike and Yolanda Thomas. She has a younger sibling, Michael "Chip" Thomas II.

She lives in Oklahoma City and will be a Putnam City North senior, where she is publicist of the Organization of Students for Cultural Awareness.

She is a member of National Honor Society, Who's Who Among American High School Students and her school's chapter of Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

She plans on majoring in education or journalism in either Oklahoma or Louisiana.

Breanca Thomas

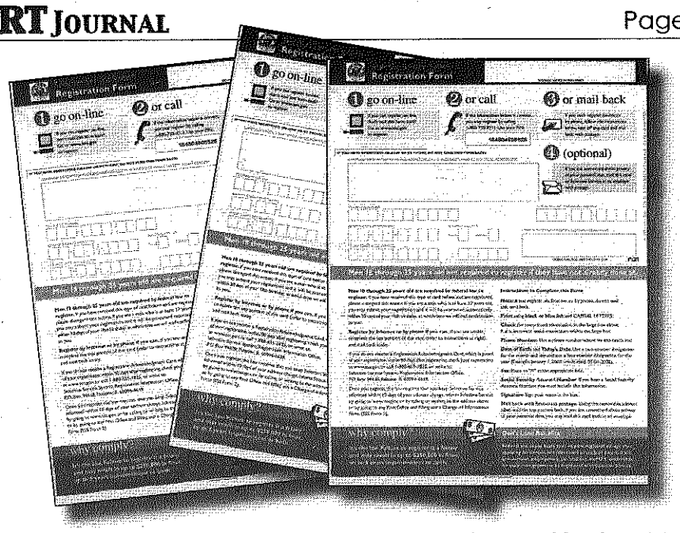
Bre also wants to minor i Spanish.

She dreams of one day going to Puerto Rico whe she can obtain "the full S ish experience." She tak inspiration from her pare her friend Ande, and the Fullers, who are friends o the family.

She loves yellow and enjoys watching basketb though she no longer pa pates in school sports.

Her hobbies include sc booking, shopping, read and exercising. She also enjoys listening to hip ho and R&B music, singing fun as well as in her scho choir, and writing.

War sparks draft debate



Young people are restless as politicians talk about mandatory service

Alicia Hill
Red Dirt Journal Staff

The "Hell no, we won't go" response to the draft during the Vietnam War has become more complicated today, even among the people who think it would be their duty to serve in the military.

U.S. military activity in the Middle East led in January 2003 to bills in the U.S. Senate and the House proposing to reinstate the draft. Although Congress hasn't acted on the bills, rumors have swirled around the idea that young men could once again be drafted into military service, and that this time women might be included, too.

President Franklin Roosevelt created the draft when he signed the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 to establish the Selective Service System.

The draft ended in 1973 with the Vietnam War, and the military became an all-volunteer force once more. Young men had to register with the Selective Service until 1975. In 1980, the government reinstated registration.

Today, the U.S. military consists only of those who want to be in it.

U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., said that a volunteer military is different from a military made up of volunteers and draftees.

"Many tend to make it a career," Cole said. "They sign up knowing the challenges, risks and rewards. With a volunteer army, the people involved are more educated, better motivated. It's better for the morale of the military."

University of Central Oklahoma student Rachel McCombs, 20, agreed that being forced to join could create problems for both those drafted and the volunteers they serve with. She said that her boyfriend had to register, and she would be concerned if he had to go to war.

"I think it's a controversial issue now because the war is controversial," McCombs said.

"If you think the war is wrong in your heart, you wouldn't be as willing to fight in it. That could make the morale of the soldiers go down."

Jeremy Belyeu, 20, another UCO student, has registered with the Selective Service. He said he had mixed feelings about the draft but also thought the volunteer military was the ideal.

"I would be nervous, but then again, I know you have to do what you have to do," he said. "I'd have faith in God. I have trust in the government that they'll do right. The volunteer Army is a better idea. You want well-trained people."

While McCombs and Belyeu had mixed views on the draft, others said that the draft is morally wrong.

UCO student Holly Cureton said government should not put people into the military against their wills, especially if they're going to have to fight in a war.

"I have friends [in the military] who have been sent home on medical leave because they're not right in the mind," she said.

Cureton said that some friends who have gone to Iraq and come back worry that their children might have birth defects because of what soldiers were exposed to there.

While several women said they were worried about their boyfriends and brothers being drafted, they might have to worry about themselves if the draft is ever reinstated.

U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., introduced the reinstate-the-draft bill in the House; U.S. Sen. Ernest Hollings, D-S.C., sponsored it in the Senate. Both bills read the same, and both include women in the draft requirement.

The Seattle-Post Intelligencer reported in May that Selective Service director Lewis Brodsky proposed to senior Pentagon officials before the Iraq War not only to extend the draft registration from age 26 to 34, but also to require women to register.

Cole, who serves on the Armed Services Committee, said that if the draft were to be reinstated, women could be a part of it.

"There's no question that if we ever got to bringing the draft back, women are more than capable of participating in that way," he said.

"I don't know about drafting women, but if they want to be in the military, I think they can," UCO student Belyeu said. "It's more of a typically male role. We learned that fighting is a guy thing."

Cole said that women make up approximately 20 percent of the military.

"They are excellent soldiers," he said. "It's pretty impressive."

Despite the rumors, neither men nor women are likely to be forced into the military any time soon.

"There's almost no chance of the draft," Cole said. "Even the military testified that a draft would not be needed this year."

Cole said, however, that the number of people in the military now — given the Iraq War — might be too low.

"The Army in particular is obviously too small," he said. "Can you increase the size of the military without the draft? There are 1.4 million people in uniform at this time. We do not need the draft. We can get more numbers through regular recruitment.

"I would not support the draft except in a national emergency. It's not something that we need to do."

Behind the bylines

June Torbati

Yeganeh June Torbati will be a junior at Norman North High School this fall. Although she lived in Midwest City for 12 years, and has lived in Norman for only four years, she says she feels more at home in Norman than anywhere else.

Her hobbies include competing on the speech and debate team, working on the staff of the school newspaper, The Timberline, and being in the Norman North Philosophy Club.

Torbati's accomplishments include maintaining a 4.0 grade point average, being in National Honor Society and secretary of the Norman North chapter of the National Forensic League.

In her free time Torbati likes to listen to music and read books. Some of her favorite musicians are XTC, Siouxsie and the Banshees and The Bangles.

Torbati is a Muslim Iranian American and believes that her faith is misunderstood by most of the American public. Her ambitions are to attend an Ivy League school and to be an international reporter like her professional role model, CNN Chief International Correspondent Christiane Amanpour.

Jessica Walker

Jessica Walker, 17, lived in Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Ohio before finally settling down in Tulsa at age 10 with her mother, Janet.

She travels often to spend time with her father, Steve, her stepmother, Tee, and her brothers Adam and Bobby in California.

She looks forward to her senior year at Jenks High School where she will be the president of the French Club and a member of the National Honor Society. Jessica is interested in photography and reading. One of her favorite books is "House Like a Lotus," by Madeleine L'Engle. Her favorite musical artists are Frank Sinatra and Pete Yorn. She also enjoys cooking and baking in her free time.

Her favorite movies are "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and the foreign film "Amélie." While she drives a 1996 Saturn now, she faults karma for her first car, a purple 1986 Chevy Celebrity.

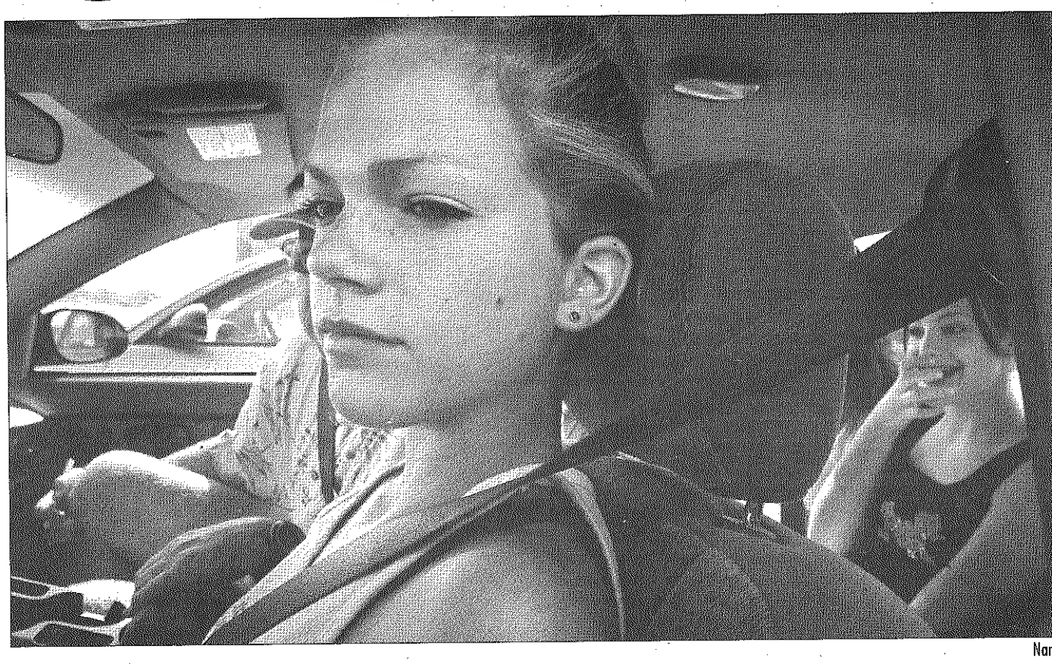
In the near future, she will consider attending either the University of Arizona or the University of Tulsa.

Jessica hopes to work in international affairs and travel extensively.

Waiting longer to drive

Teens must work through a new three-step process to get operator's license

Aisha Hodgens
Red Dirt Journal Staff



Nar

A student prepares to pull out for a driver's education class this week at Edmond North High School.

Oklahoma teenagers younger than 18 will find getting a driver's license more difficult under a new state law.

When the Graduated Licensing System goes into effect on November 1, teens will be required to complete a three-step process before receiving their operator's licenses. It delays full driving privileges 6 months past the period stipulated in current driving laws.

The Oklahoma Department of Public Safety Web site notes that the GLS is designed to protect teenage drivers.

According to DriveHomeSafe.com, 7 percent of licensed drivers in Oklahoma are teenagers, but teen drivers make up 14 percent of traffic-related deaths in the state.

Teenagers have the highest crash rates because of overconfidence and little driving experience, said Chuck Mai, managing director of public and government relations for the American Automobile Association.

"The GLS gives them more time to learn with a low risk of accidents," Mai said.

Under the new system, teens at least 15 1/2 years old can apply for a learner's permit and can drive only with a parent, guardian, or licensed driver older than 21 for at least six months. No other passengers are allowed.

At the end of this period, new drivers can apply for an intermediate driver's license if they have not violated any traffic laws; their parent or guardian confirms that their child has had at least 50 hours of supervised driving experience, including 10 hours of nighttime driving; and the student has completed a driver's education course.

Although the intermediate driver's license is a step up from the learner's permit, there are still restrictions.

During the first six months, the driver cannot have passengers younger than the age of 20 unless they are family members. After the first six months, drivers may have up to three passengers younger than 20 who are not family members.

With certain exceptions, such as school activities, work, or church functions, the new driver still must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or licensed driver older than 21.

At 17, drivers can apply for an operator's license if they have not been involved in any accidents or violated any traffic laws. Otherwise, the restrictions last until they turn 18, at which time they may apply for an operator's license.

As a result of the new law, attendance at driver's education schools could increase within the next six months, said Mickey Hart, driving instructor at Edmond Driving Academy in Edmond.

"Kids will start to realize the importance of completing driver's ed," Hart said.

AAA also has a new driver's education program that is becoming more popular, Mai said. The program, Take the Wheel, makes it possible for parents to teach their teens how to drive properly. Take the Wheel is certified by the state. The new driver still gets the same discount on their insurance as teens who take driver's education in high school.

Student reaction to the new law is mixed.

Angelia Thomas, a 15-year-old from Spencer, said she believes that driving under adult supervision for so lo one of the negative aspects.

"You can't ride around like you to," Thomas said.

Chrishana Olds, 14, also from Spe said she thinks she will miss out on like driving alone with friends.

"You gotta have your parents you everywhere now," Olds said.

But not all teenagers agree tha new licensing system will curtail social lives.

Camesha Stevenson, 14, of Mi City, said she doesn't think the ne would greatly affect her. She sai has older siblings who can driv around.

However, Stevenson said eve parents believe the GLS is unfair.

"They don't think it's right," she "They think 16-year-olds shoul their license. They feel I am respo enough."

Other teens say that the GL not affect their social lives eithe they still say there are some ne aspects.

Elena Hight, 15, of Edmond the new law would make her fe a burden to her parents and yo sister.

"I don't like [the GLS]," she "because if I wanted to go some I'd have to go around my sister's practices and my parents' schedu

Behind the bylines

Chase Wilson

Trying to work out details for his new screenplay, Chase Hopkins Wilson, has big goals.

Wanting to be like his grandfather, Jim Hopkins, Chase hopes to, "use my skills to the fullest to create stories and movies to make my mark on the world."

The 19-year-old Tahlequah native recently graduated from Tahlequah High School and plans to attend the University of Oklahoma to become a journalist. He began his journalism career as a senior when he joined his school newspaper. He enjoyed writing for the newspaper, and the more he participated, the more he loved it.

Chase's favorite color is blue because it accentuates his eyes. He favorite quote is, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn," from "Gone With The Wind."

Music is a major part in Chase's life. His most memorable moment came during his road trip to the 2004 Vans Warped Tour in Dallas, Texas, where he saw several bands he likes and experienced them with his closest friends. His favorite band is Weezer, but he currently has Taking Back Sunday in his CD player.

Dude, show me your I.D.

Project Under 21 teams cops, teens to enforce underage drinking law

Nancy Chen
Red Dirt Journal Staff

It is not an uncommon event: an Oklahoma teenager walks into a convenience store, pulls out a wad of cash, perhaps some identification, and buys a case of beer.

In fact, according to Project Under 21, the state's enforcement program to crack down on teen consumption, 47.2 percent of students in the state already use alcohol, and 38 percent of those engage in binge drinking.

It is this type of experience that law enforcement officials want erased from a teenager's agenda. To achieve this goal, the Oklahoma Highway Safety Office has instituted a program designed to help law enforcement and teens work together to combat the problem.

The program, Project Under 21, provides promotional materials and newsletters and offers training for law enforcement on combating underage drinking.

In addition, the statewide organization conducts periodic compliance checks with local teen volunteers in stores where alcohol is sold.

Program operation

The program, funded by a $360,000 statewide grant, has been in operation since 2001. Coby McQuay, a coordinator at Project Under 21, said, the money also helps to pay for overtime for officers for training and conducting compliance checks.

During the three-day training sessions, conducted annually, officers learn how to check identification, do compliance tests at stores, identify fake IDs, and stop teenage drinking parties.

"The whole goal is to educate and discourage underage drinking in Oklahoma," Lt. Tom Custer said, who is in charge of Project Under 21 at the Edmond Police Department.

Edmond teens are recruited from the three local high schools, all of which have active Students Against Drunk Driving organizations. Volunteers are under 18, but rarely under 17.

Project Under 21 has a toll free hotline to report underage drinking: 1-866-STOP-U21. The call center, located in Broken Arrow, receives a wide range of the number of calls every week, said Melissa Gaspelu, a coordinator at the hotline center.

"We'll go for a week without getting one, but then the next week, we'll get 30 (calls)," she said.

After receiving a tip, the agency informs one of the seven jurisdictions in Durant, Lawton, Norman, Stillwater, Tahlequah, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City, where it then can be investigated.

Warning calls

Most of the calls involve teen parties, Custer said. They usually warn the partygoers or call their parents, and then issue a $240 citation to the host of the party.

If officers receive a report that a convenience store is selling alcohol to minors, police will assess if the store is complying with the law.

During the compliance tests, a group of four or five teenagers accompany individual police officers and test about 20 locations over a period of three to four hours.

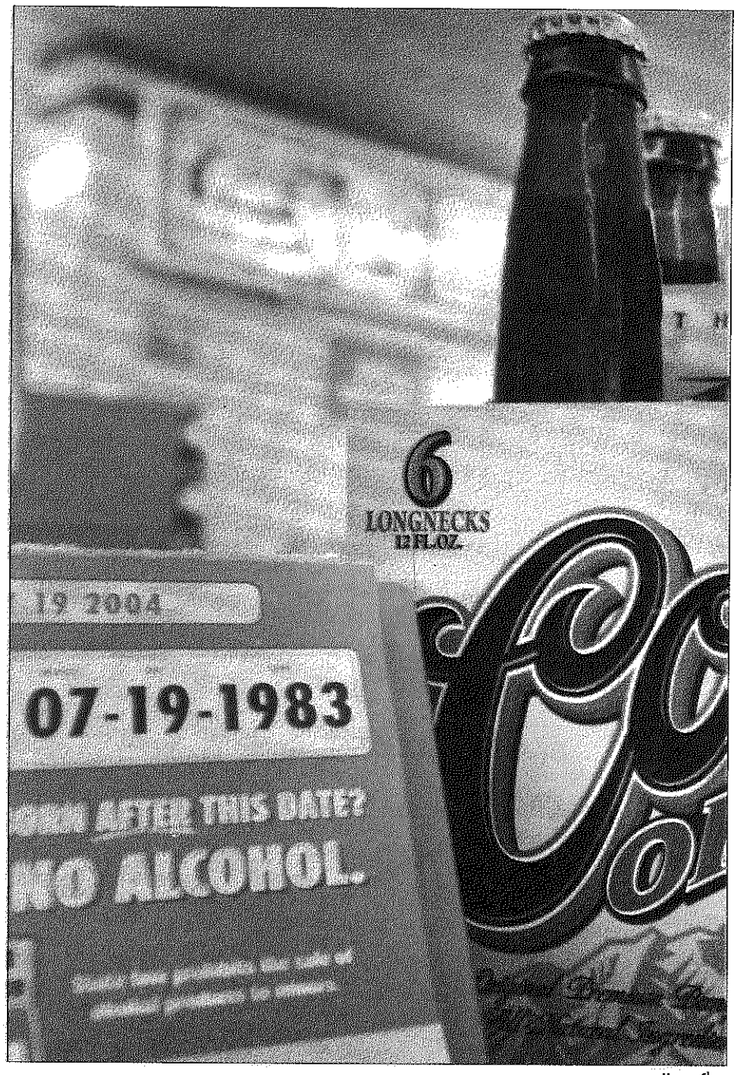
A teen and a plainclothes officer go into a store, where the volunteer attempts to buy alcohol. When asked for identification, the youth will give his real ID, which shows he is under 21.

"Many times, clerks get busy, and they don't pay attention," Custer said.

If the store clerk allows them to buy alcohol, which is usually beer, the teenager leaves and gives it to a uniformed police officer waiting nearby. The officer then returns to the store and issues a citation. The alcohol is collected as evidence, and the clerk's employer is notified.

Custer said 70 percent of the Edmond stores tested have complied with the law, but on occasion, compliance can drop to as low as 50 percent.

"We try to catch people doing the right thing," Custer said. "I'm not going to tell you where the easiest places are (to buy alcohol). But, sooner or later, we're going to get them all."



Nancy Chen

Almost half of Oklahoma teenagers drink alcohol, according to a Project Under 21 survey.

Behind the bylines

Carin Yeh

Carin Yeh, 17, a future English major and self-proclaimed "power fiend," hopes to be employed in some form of speaking after college.

One of the most striking features about Carin is her ability to communicate both orally and through the written word. Involvement in the National Honor Society and speech and debate at Plano City Senior High School prepared her for entrance into the University of Texas in 2004. She has practiced classical piano for eight years and enjoys listening to a variety of musicians such as Frank Sinatra, the BeeGees, and Scottish rock artist Ashley MacIsaac.

She also enjoys traveling and has spent considerable time in Taiwan, Singapore, and Cozumel-a tiny island off the coast of Mexico that has fast become a favorite of hers. Habitual reading has nursed a passion for learning and an unusual fondness for puns, "the lowest form of humor."

Carin has nurtured a "lifelong obsession" working with spackle and enjoys occupying herself caulking various projects around her Texas home, shared by her parents Jason and Wendy, and sister, Emily.

Student journalists: Extra, Extra

(Re)start the presses!

Norman High students revive school paper after six years of silence

Yeganeh June Torbati
Red Dirt Journal Staff

C.J. Mad

Nic Robinson and Jaklyn Garrett will be staff members for the new Norman High School newspaper.

A group of students at Norman High School has completed a yearlong, obstacle-ridden effort to reinstate its school newspaper in online and print editions.

Both the journalists and the newspaper adviser said student discontent and a desire for a student voice drove them to re-establish their school's print journalism program after a six-year hiatus.

Prompted by student requests, school administrators met with students in fall 2003 to gauge interest in a newspaper.

"Dr. (Lynne) Chesley (the NHS principal) was surprised by the amount of people who showed up," said Jaklyn Garrett, a senior who will be on the staff next year. Garrett said a room was nearly filled with students.

Garrett said issues discussed included prerequisites for the newspaper class, which in the past had been Journalism I.

English teacher Marion Ward agreed to teach the class this summer for students who didn't have room in their schedules in the spring.

Chris Goldsberry, another senior on the future staff, didn't think Chesley was too excited initially.

"Chesley was against it at first, and I don't think she thought the paper was necessary," Goldsberry said, adding that he thinks Chesley was influenced to support it by student interest.

Chesley, however, said she has been supportive of the paper all along.

"Obviously, we think the paper is a good idea, or else we wouldn't be working so hard for it," she said, noting that the school supplemented tuition to cover the cost of the summer course for just a few students.

Nic Robinson, another senior who will be on the staff, said a newspaper was so sought after because of students' desires to express themselves.

"We wanted to give the student body a voice," he said, adding that conflicts arose between the student body and the administration last year.

The discontent centered on new security rules requiring students to wear ID tag lanyards, as well as follow other restrictions. Chesley said there was discontent, but said it only involved a few NHS students.

Robinson and Ward believe the dissatisfaction would have been minimized if students had a newspaper in which they could express their views.

Ward said a student-produced paper would serve a sort of "public relations" function, allowing the student body to see the reasons behind administration policies and providing a forum for students to articulate their views.

Ryan Wood, a Norman High senior, hopes the paper achieves that goal.

"Students' opinions are not valued very highly now," he said. "I hope the newspaper changes this. Maybe now, our views can be noticed."

Chesley, however, insists that student opinions are valued at Norman High.

"A school is better when kids have their voice, and feel like it's their school," she said. "Students have a right to voice their opinions."

Gary Copeland, vice-president of the Norman Board of Education, said the administration and school board more easily accepted the idea of a newspaper at Norman High because of the existing newspaper at Norman North High School, NHS's cross-town rival.

Norman High's last newspaper dissolved in 1998, Ward said, because of a lack of serious interest and low enrollment. However, with 19 students on the roll for next year's class, she says there is no immediate danger of the paper following the same path.

Ward said the staff decided to publish an online newspaper three times per month and a once-monthly print edition, culled from the best online articles of that month.

She also said the newspaper plans to partner with NHS broadcast media students on stories.

Despite the administration's initial reluctance, Robinson said the school provided most of the resources.

"They (the school officials) were somewhat supportive," he said, noting the summer school course.

"They bought cameras for us to use, but they haven't given us any additional funding for printing costs."

Those involved, however, have found a way to pay for printing the paper.

David Stringer, publisher of The Norman Transcript, said he has offered to publish the NHS newspaper on the Transcript's press at a substantially reduced price.

By selling advertisements through the NHS marketing class, Ward said the staff is confident it will be able to meet each issue's cost. Stringer estimated the pri at $250 for 1,000 copies of an eight-pa paper with four pages in color.

Although an active television broa cast program exists at Norman Hi School, many involved with the new paper believe print media will be mo useful to students.

"The newspaper will keep everyo informed about opportunities, a what's going on," said Garrett, addi that the school TV broadcasts are ava able only to students with cable tele sion, while the newspaper is available everyone.

"I would hope that the newspap would be more educational (than t television broadcasts),"Goldsberry sai

Garrett expressed some of her wo ries.

"I'm afraid we're going to get turn down (by the principal) on a lot things," Garrett said. "Some articles th we might want to do, like an inform tional column on drug use, or teen pre nancy, might get taken out."

However, Chesley said the only way story would not be printed would be it were disrespectful to any individual group at Norman High School.

"Everyone here is really geared about having the newspaper next yea she said.