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JULY/AUGUST 2025

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50 | BURGER TIME

We visit 11 local restaurants and one food truck to curate every category in your burger bucket list.

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SPICY HAWAIIAN
BURGER FROM
TANYA'S BURGERS

PHOTO BY SHANNON RICHARDSON



ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY SHANNON RICHARDSON

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AMARILLO'S PREMIER
LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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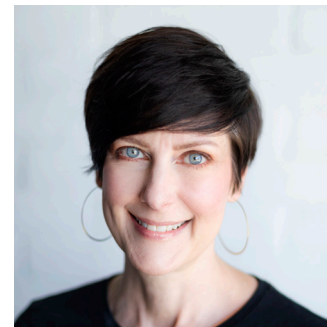


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I won't attempt to give an opinion about the burgers we feature in this month's issue. I'll leave that to my co-publisher Jason, the meat-eater in our partnership.



But I do have quite a bit to share about our tour of the new facilities at Transformation Park. Executive Director Mark Zimmerman hosted our team on a beautiful Friday morning, and the experience filled me with hope. The place just overflows with it: You see it in the eyes of the park's residents; you hear it in Mark's gentle voice; you see it in the way he interacts with each person and as you watch them care for one another.

We spent about two hours walking through the facility, and by the time we wrapped up our photo shoot/interview, we were teary-eyed with emotion. It's a moving experience to see some of the city's most downcast residents treated with love and respect. I recommend a visit—volunteer, serve a meal, take a moment to get to know the people there. It will change your life.

Our late summer issue is filled with suggestions for connecting with other residents, be it at a homeless shelter, a locally owned burger joint or hiking through the area to enjoy the current burst of wildflowers after a spring filled with rain.

We love producing *Brick & Elm* and hope it is an encouragement to you. Get to know our city just a little better with every issue.

Michele

In early June, our team attended the City and Regional Magazine Association's annual conference in Denver. It was our first time at this event, and we were overwhelmed (in a good way) with ideas from other successful lifestyle magazines.



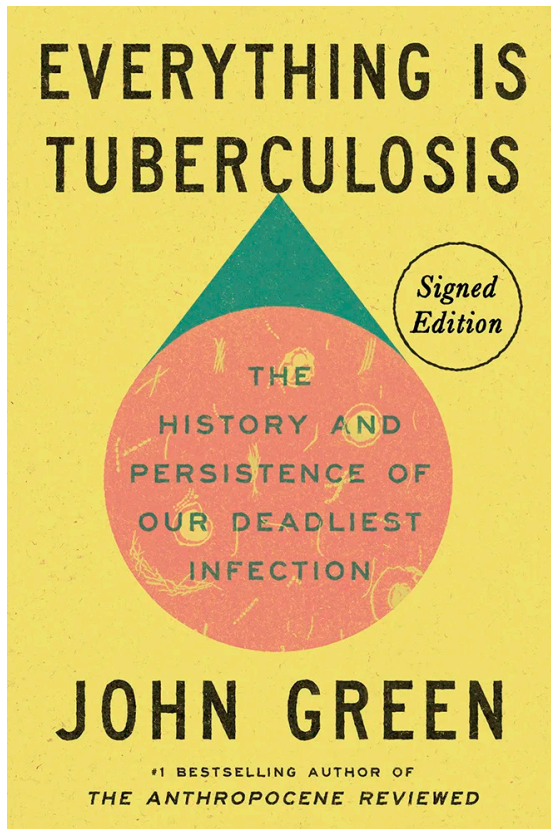
Having just finished a week of photographing and sampling burgers for our cover story, I ducked into a CRMA workshop about food writing. An early piece of advice caught me off-guard: "Never use the word *delicious* in a food review," a veteran restaurant critic said. "It doesn't mean anything." Uh-oh. I took a lot of notes during that week in Denver—I've always been a good student and a rule-follower—so I'm pretty sure you won't find the word "delicious" in our Best Burgers feature. That's because I went back into the document and edited them out.

But let me tell you this, here at the front of the magazine, where I've decided the rule doesn't count: I ate a lot of delicious burgers in the making of this feature. If it's wrong to eat a delicious cheeseburger from Golden Light while driving to photograph a delicious cheeseburger from Burger Barn, then I don't want to be right. (One burger I can't authentically call "delicious" was the Hot Ass Burger from Charlie's Burgers and Brews, which is straight-up the spiciest thing I have ever put in my mouth. Its dominant flavor was molten lava. Charlie tried to warn me!)

Beyond the burgers, I was left—as always—with such appreciation for Amarillo's restaurateurs, who greeted us with excitement and kindness, let us peek into their kitchens, and served up incredible hospitality. The best food writing isn't only about flavor, I learned at CRMA. It's about people. I hope that's reflected in this issue.

Jason

Burrowing Owl RECOMMENDS



EVERYTHING IS TUBERCULOSIS, **BY JOHN GREEN**

Tuberculosis has been entwined with humanity for millennia. Once romanticized as a malady of poets, today tuberculosis is a disease of poverty that walks the trails of injustice and inequity we blazed for it.

In 2019, John Green met Henry, a young tuberculosis patient at Lakka Government Hospital in Sierra Leone while traveling with Partners in Health. John became fast friends with Henry, a boy with spindly legs and a big, goofy smile. In the years since that first visit to Lakka, Green has become a vocal and dynamic advocate for increased access to treatment and wider awareness of the health care inequities that allow this curable, treatable infectious disease to also be the deadliest, killing 1.5 million people every year.

In *Everything is Tuberculosis*, John tells Henry's story, woven through with the scientific and social histories of how tuberculosis has shaped our world and how our choices will shape the future of tuberculosis.

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**KAYLA MORRIS**

Kayla has been designing professionally for 15 years. She was raised in the Panhandle and graduated with a design degree from West Texas A&M University.

**SHANNON RICHARDSON**

Shannon has been a commercial/advertising photographer for more than 35 years. His work can be seen at shannonrichardson.com.

**PRESLIE BENTLEY**

Preslie was raised in Amarillo and is a journalism major at Texas A&M University. She has been working on features, photography and socials as our summer intern.

**NICK GERLICH**

Nick is the Hickman Professor of Marketing at West Texas A&M University, where he has taught since 1989. In his spare time, he travels around the country, including his beloved Route 66, in search of vintage signage and other outdoor advertising. He can be found on Instagram @nickgerlich.

**WES REEVES**

Wes was raised in Wellington and has lived in Amarillo since the early '90s. He serves as chairman of the Potter County Historical Commission and as a member of the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission board of directors.

**JAMIE FLECK**

Jamie is a professional photographer and author of the bestselling books, *Best Lake Hikes Texas* and *Hiking Oklahoma*. She also owns a cottage food bakery in Amarillo called Flecks of Love. Learn more about her at flecksoflove.com.

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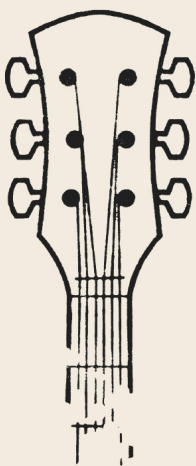
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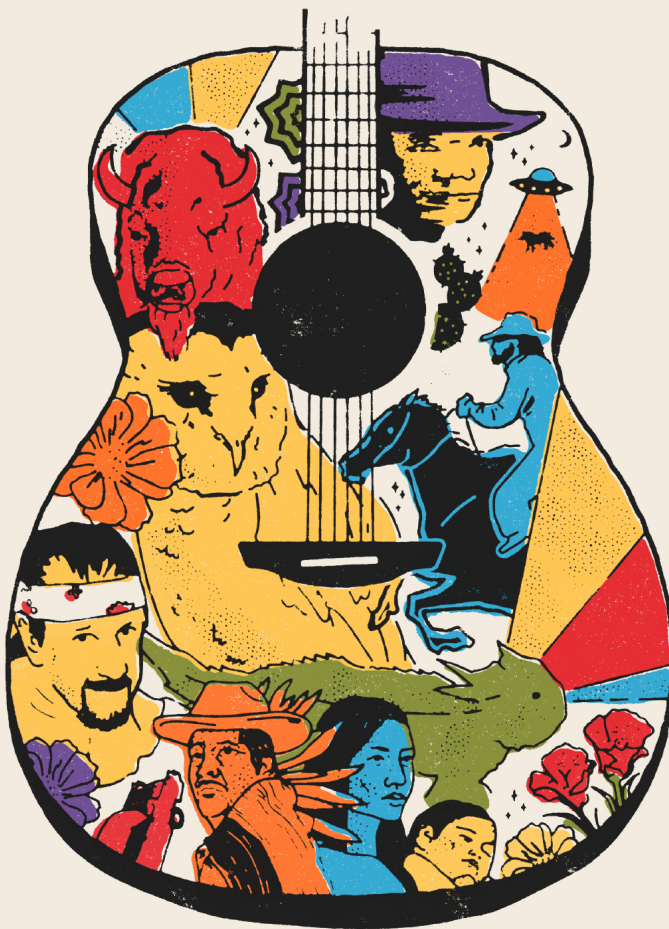
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MURAL FESTIVAL



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The summer fun is as hot as the temperatures, with tons of options heading your way in July and August. Mark your calendars now for these can't-miss entertainment options, including the height of outdoor concert season, community events, film options and much more. Plus, don't forget to subscribe to the free *Brickly* and *Flavorillo* newsletters for my weekly entertainment picks all summer long.

July

Fourth of July: You'll find explosive fun all over the Texas Panhandle, with community celebrations from Canadian to Plainview, Dumas to Childress. Highlights include the Canyon Fourth of July Celebration in downtown Canyon, billed as one of the state's largest Independence Day celebrations, as well as Amarillo's Independence Day +1 party on July 5 in John Stiff Park, 45th Avenue and Bell Street. Other events to watch for include the Will Rogers Range Riders Rodeo from July 4 to 6 at the Range Riders Arena, 8829 Farm-to-Market Road 1541; Sunset Marketown on Saturdays beginning July 5 at Arts in the Sunset, 3701 Plains Blvd.; Nazareth German Fest on July 12 in Nazareth; the Koben Puckett Professional Bull Riding competition on July 12 at the Amarillo National Center on the Tri-State Fairgrounds, 3301 SE 10th Ave.; Sodtown Fest, a music festival benefiting Family Support Services of Amarillo, from July 18 to 20 at Hodgetown, 715 S. Buchanan St.; and the 30th annual Original Harley Party on July 26 at the Amarillo National Center. Plus, don't miss Amarillo Sod Poodles action against the Frisco RoughRiders from July 8 to 13 and the Wichita Windsurge from July 29 to Aug. 3, all at Hodgetown.

Texas: The outdoor musical continues its 59th season with performances Tuesdays through Sundays through Aug. 9 in Pioneer Amphitheatre in Palo Duro Canyon State Park. The cast and crew also will stage *The Taming of the Shrew* in its "Shakespeare in the Canyon" performances July 14 and 21, also in Pioneer Amphitheatre. Other arts highlights will include the monthly First Friday Art Walk on July 4 at Arts in the Sunset; Amarillo Little Theatre Academy's *Something Rotten*, a musical parody of Shakespearean-era England, from July 10 to 13 in ALT's Allen Shankles MainStage, 2019 Civic Circle; and West Texas Drums, a Drum Corps International competition, on July 16 at Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium at West Texas A&M University.

Outdoor concerts: July is the height of Amarillo's *al fresco* concert season, with Starlight Theater on Tuesdays in Sam Houston Park, Line Avenue and Western Street; High Noon on the Square at the old Potter County Courthouse, 501 S. Fillmore St., and Music at Wellington Square Courtyard, 1601 S. Kentucky St., both on Wednesdays; and Music in the Gardens on Thursdays at Amarillo Botanical Gardens, 1400 Streit Drive. Other music offerings will include 49 Winchester on July 3 at The Lumberyard, 850 N. 23rd St. in Canyon; the Get Loud TX Block Party with Waka Flocka Flame and Bart Crow on July 4 at 10th Avenue and Madison Street; indie-rock band Brightwire on July 11 at The 806 Coffee + Lounge, 2814 SW Sixth Ave.; country singers Ava Connell on July 11 and Clay Gibson on July 12 at Hoot's Pub, 2424 Hobbs Road; metal bands ABSU and The Black Moriah on July 14 at Rockwell Event Center, 16301 Interstate 27 in Canyon; Britney Spears tribute act Toxic on

July 19 at Shark Beach Burgers, 1505 E. Farm-to-Market Road 1151; Pecos & The Rooftops on July 19 at Azteca Music Hall, 500 N. Farm-to-Market Road 1912; metal bands Gravehuffer, Grindscape and more July 25 at Sunset Underground at Arts in the Sunset; and Evan Boyer at Golden Light Cantina, 2906 SW Sixth Ave.

Superman: The Man of Steel flies back onto the big screen July 11 in this highly buzzed-about reboot from director James Gunn (the *Guardians of the Galaxy* trilogy). Also scheduled to open this month are *Jurassic World: Rebirth* on July 2; horror film *Skillhouse* on July 11; horror legacyquel *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, a rebooted *Smurfs* and Ari Aster's contemporary *Western Eddington* on July 18; and *The Fantastic Four: First Steps* and horror flick *House on Eden* on July 25. Special presentations will include 41st-anniversary screenings of *This Is Spinal Tap* from July 5 to 7; 50th-anniversary screenings of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* on July 13 and 16; and Studio Ghibli Fest screenings of *My Neighbor Totoro* from July 19 to 23.

August

Midland: The chart-topping country act teams with Lubbock's Josh Abbott Band for an Aug. 2 show at The Lumberyard in Canyon. Other must-see concerts include indie singer Bryan Bielanski on Aug. 1 at The 806 Coffee + Lounge; '70s rockers Bachman-Turner Overdrive and The Marshall Tucker Band on Aug. 3 in the Amarillo Civic Center Complex Auditorium, 401 S. Buchanan St.; The Ty Blackburn Band on Aug. 9 at Hoot's Pub; KISS tribute band Rock and Roll Over on Aug. 9 at Shark Beach Burgers; singer-songwriter Luke Bulla on Aug. 10 at Chalice Abbey, 2717 Stanley St.; Dallas country singer Cory Cross on Aug. 14 at The Lumberyard; metal band HED PE and others on Aug. 15 at Rockwell Event Center; Americana singer-songwriter Adam Hood on Aug. 16 at The Western Horseman Club, 2501 E. Interstate 40; the Let the Good Times Rock Tour with Warrant, Lita Ford and Firehouse on Aug. 23 in the Civic Center Complex Auditorium; brother act The Deltaz on Aug. 23 at Golden Light Cantina; George Thorogood & The Destroyers with Loverboy on Aug. 24 at The Lumberyard; Texas country singer Josh Weathers on Aug. 27 at The Western Horseman Club; and indie rock faves The Toadies with Vandoliers on Aug. 28 at The Lumberyard. Plus, the outdoor concert season will continue with Starlight Theater on Tuesdays through Aug. 12 in Sam Houston Park and Music in the Gardens on Thursdays through Aug. 28 at Amarillo Botanical Gardens.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Amarillo Little Theatre kicks off the fall arts season with a stage adaptation of the searing Ken Kesey novel, with performances Aug. 14 to 24 in the ALT Adventure Space, 2751 Civic Circle. Other arts events to enjoy will

include the season-ending performances of *Texas* through Aug. 9 in Pioneer Amphitheatre and First Friday Art Walk on Aug. 1 at Arts in the Sunset.

Ama-Con: Amarillo Public Library's annual celebration of all things pop culture will return Aug. 2 and 3 in the Amarillo Civic Center Complex. Other events to watch for include the 2025 Summer Melt Car Show at Contagion Athletics, 8210 W. Amarillo Blvd., followed by the Polk Street Cruise; Lavender Fest on Aug. 16 at Creek House Honey Farm, 5005 Fourth Ave. in Canyon; and the Amarillo Crime Stoppers Car Show on Aug. 30 in the Civic Center Complex. Plus, Sod Poodles action continues with games against the Corpus Christi Hooks from Aug. 12 to 17 and the Northwest Arkansas Naturals from Aug. 16 to 31.

Freakier Friday: Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan reteam Aug. 8 for another legacy-quel, this time for the beloved Disney comedy. Also opening this month are a new version of *The Naked Gun* and animated sequel *The Bad Guys 2* on Aug. 1; a re-release of *Shin Godzilla* on Aug. 14; musical drama *Clika* and action sequel *Nobody 2* on Aug. 15; black comedy *Honey Don't* on Aug. 22; divorce comedy *The Roses*, comedy-thriller *Caught Stealing* and horror reboot *The Toxic Avenger* on Aug. 29. Special engagements will include 75th-anniversary screenings of *Sunset Boulevard* on Aug. 3 and 4; Studio Ghibli Fest screenings of *Grave of the Fireflies* from Aug. 10 to 12; RiffTrax Live screenings of *Timecop* on Aug. 14 and 19; and Studio Ghibli Fest screenings of *Ponyo* from Aug. 23 to 27. ☺

Brickly

Visit brickandelm.com for Chip's expanded event coverage. Better yet, subscribe to our email newsletters for breaking entertainment news every week!



CHIP CHANDLER

Chip is the city's arts and entertainment expert, having covered area events since 1998. Stay up to date on local happenings with Chip's *Can't Miss* picks in every issue.



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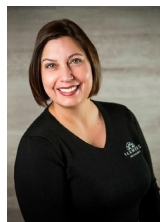


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2025 CINCO DE MAYO FAJITA FESTIVAL

The Amarillo Hispanic Chamber of Commerce celebrated its annual Cinco de Mayo Fajita Festival on May 3 at Hodgetown Stadium. This year's event featured a VIP area, live music, all-you-could-eat fajitas and family-friendly activities. (Provided Photos)



CHEERS! TO MARIPOSA

Wildcat Bluff Nature Center celebrated the opening of the Mariposa Trails on May 10. Guests enjoyed a full day of nature, live music and food trucks, along with a butterfly release. (Provided Photos)



PATIO VISTA AT THE BARFIELD

The Barfield Hotel celebrated the opening of its new Patio Vista rooftop bar on May 12 with a VIP event featuring signature cocktails and small bites. The patio is open weekly on Wednesday through Saturday evenings. (Provided Photos)



BUSINESS CONNECTION 2025

Brick & Elm Magazine was one of many exhibitors at the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce's 32nd annual Business Connection tradeshow on May 15. The annual event is the area's largest business-to-business networking opportunity. (Provided Photos)





BAD MAGIK MUSIK FEST

The Bad Magik Musik Fest kicked off summer at Sam Houston Park on May 24. The all-day festival featured more than 20 vendors, live music, food trucks, and after parties on historic Sixth Street. (Provided Photos)



WELCOME TO SUMMER PARTY

Palace Coffee Co. kicked off summer Texas style June 7 with an event at its Wolflin Square location. The summer bash included bar demos, local vendors, an art show with Stoex Design Gallery, food trucks and a latte art throwdown. (Provided Photos)

TEXAS ROUTE 66 FESTIVAL FINALE

The grand finale of this year's Texas Route 66 Festival was held June 14 along historic Route 66. Thousands of people traversed Sixth Street to enjoy live music, food trucks, a car show, local vendors and more. (Photos by Jason Boyett)





Welcome to The Dirt. In every issue, our anonymous writer gives you the dirt on your burning questions about the Amarillo area. Got something you're just dying to know? Drop us a line at info@brickandelm.com, and our intrepid writer will dig up the answer.

Why hasn't anything happened yet with the historic Liberty Theater on Fourth Avenue? Why isn't there a landmark, historical marker or renovations?

The Liberty Theater at 317 SE Fourth Ave. stands among the lesser-known and technically unofficial historic landmarks in downtown Amarillo. In 1921, Russian Jewish immigrants opened the theater as the first in town to sell tickets to Black and Hispanic residents.

While the theater segregated audiences between the main floor and balcony seating, the Liberty remained one of the only local theaters to allow nonwhite customers until its closure in 1957. Today, it remains a reminder of local Black history, a stepping stone on the long road toward building a city that could be a better home to everyone.

Today, it's owned by the City of Amarillo. With this community significance, the Liberty is an obvious contender for a historical marker. There might be a few reasons why this hasn't happened: The building was deemed structurally sound in 2015, when the city considered making it into a new performance center, but its roof has since collapsed. Not having been consistently maintained or renovated since it was abandoned in 1957, reworking the building could be a lot more expensive than the city initially hoped

more than a decade ago.

It likely qualifies for either a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark or State Antiquities Landmark designation, but neither the city nor the Potter County Historical Commission have submitted an application. However, that might change with enough public interest or solid plans for renovations.



PHOTOS BY PRESLEY BENTLEY

What's up with that building shaped like a barrel on Plains Boulevard?

What a great question to accompany our burger feature! The beloved Beef Burger Barrel is not only home to an active restaurant but an eye-catching piece of local history. It was originally an A&W Root Beer barrel constructed around 1937, by a company that sculpted and delivered highly themed custom buildings for businesses across the country.

Architecture has gotten a lot less whimsical since then, leaving the barrel as a standalone relic of a more entertaining time for neighborhood aesthetics. Back in 1981, an architectural survey suggested the barrel's age and design may one day qualify it for a proper historical marker. (We're still waiting.) ☹️



The anonymous writer behind 'The Dirt' is a sharp observer of the Amarillo-Canyon metropolitan area. If they don't know the answer, they know where to get it and who to ask.



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EVERYONE



“How afraid you are determines how brave you are.”—Rita Moreno

What a beautiful thought. One person’s mundane task might be another person’s mountain to climb. Courage is not reserved for history books or monumental accomplishments. Courage is what happens any time we do something that scares us. I get scared of all sorts of things, big and small. I am scared of things that might seem mundane to someone else. I’m scared of failure, and I’m scared of not being perfect. I’m scared of saying the wrong thing.

Sometimes, I’m scared of things that aren’t even real. Hypotheticals. What ifs. Worst-case scenarios that only exist in my brain. Unsurprisingly, the outcome I am afraid of—the story of failure, judgment and rejection I have written in my head—almost never happens. The 16th-century French essayist Michel de Montaigne wrote, “He who fears he will suffer is already suffering from what he fears.” Yikes. So true.

After more than a decade in the service industry and after singing and playing in various bands, I knew I was ready for a change. I felt moved to become a music teacher. I wanted it badly, but I was afraid, and it was a complete shock to my system. For months, I thought, *Why are they letting me do this? I’m just a singer who got a degree, and now I’m pretending to be a teacher.* I thought surely someday soon, somebody was going to figure out that I wasn’t actually good enough at this to keep doing it. At the time, I had no idea it was normal to be overwhelmed in the first year. I just kept showing up and doing it, even though I was afraid.

Some combination of previously untapped bravery, my absorption of everything I could from teachers around me, and good old-fashioned fake-it-till-you-make-it has now taken me to year seven of my career, with many more years ahead. I was scared, but I did it anyway, and I’m so thankful. Teaching is not easy, but it brings me so much joy and fulfillment.

I am scared to go to the gym. There, I said it. All those heavy machines and weights, people way cooler and more fit than I will probably ever be, the living nightmare of ending up in the background of someone’s influencer video, the fear of not keeping up during a class, or fainting because I didn’t eat the right thing before going, and on and on and on. I told you, I’m good at making things up to be scared of. I haven’t been to the gym yet, but I’m working on it. If you see me at the gym, you’ll know I’m being especially brave.

When I was first approached about writing this column for *Brick & Elm*, I was honored and excited. I have a deep love of writing, and imagined doing it for many years before this opportunity came along. I didn’t do it earlier in life for one reason: I was afraid. Michele

and I had a lovely chat over coffee, we agreed that this was a good idea, and I felt fantastic. And then, just like anxiety magic, the very first instant I got in my car, the fear set in. *Am I really qualified to share thoughts about life? Who am I to be putting pen to paper?* As you all know, I did it anyway. I am genuinely proud of my writings here thus far, and immeasurably grateful for the kind feedback I have received from so many of you.

And still, there is that pesky internal voice asking whether or not I can pull it off this time. *What if I’m out of good ideas? What if I’m not smart or thoughtful enough to keep this up?* It has now been a full year since that cup of coffee, and I am so thankful to be here with you all. Even when I’m scared to write, I’m going to keep doing it anyway.

This idea of doing something even when you’re afraid goes hand in hand with the concept of neuroplasticity. Simply put, our brains have the ability to create new connections and pathways, and modify existing ones. Neuroplasticity happens every time we learn something new or adapt to a new environment, but we can apply this principle intentionally as well. If you’re scared to do something, and you do it anyway, you are teaching your brain that you are capable of doing difficult things, and the thing isn’t that scary after all. Acts of bravery, no matter how small, literally restructure our brains to be more courageous and more confident. I love that.

What are you afraid of? What would it take for you to just do it anyway? Make the dentist appointment. Learn to swim. Have the conversation. Start the podcast, write the novel, audition for community theater, go to a new exercise class, pick up a paintbrush, sign up for the open mic, try out for the team, post your poetry, call the estranged friend, join the campaign, run for a local office, go back to school, apply for the job, do the thing you’re afraid of. Be scared, but do it anyway.

Change your brain. Friends, let’s be brave. ☺



MAGGIE BURT

Maggie was born into a family heritage of musicians and educators in Amarillo. She spent several years as a performer and songwriter in Amarillo and Austin, before becoming an elementary music teacher in 2019. Maggie’s column draws from her experiences in and out of the classroom.

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PANHANDLE COMMUNITY SERVICES



PROVIDED PHOTOS

BY PRESLEE BENTLEY

The past two years were some of the hardest I've ever faced," says Diana*. A single mother of two—including a child with Down syndrome—her circumstances left her feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to turn. "I had no job, and my home was falling apart. I needed help with utilities, reliable housing and just finding a way forward."

She found hope through the Family Development program at Panhandle Community Services. Through 12 different locations across the top 26 counties, PCS has been serving Amarillo and the Texas Panhandle for 60 years, working to help local people move from poverty to stability.

In 1964, a group of residents concerned about local poverty formed the Potter-Randall Citizens Committee. Not long after, the signing of the Equal Opportunity Act allowed organizations like theirs to receive government funding under specific requirements. The nonprofit officially launched in 1966.

Today, PCS assists low-income families, elderly individuals and disabled clients with issues like transportation, utility bills, housing costs and more. "All of the programs that we have are geared towards bringing stability to people in the Panhandle," says Christy Hilbert, the

organization's regional communications director.

The programs are as diverse as the clientele. "Our programs are really vast, so we're able to help sign people up for health insurance, we're able to help with taxes, and it really is across the board," Hilbert says.

The goal is always to help struggling people find a pathway out of poverty. "We have a family development program that's sole purpose is to get people to the next level so they don't need assistance. We

also serve a large population that are elderly or disabled." For these individuals, making ends meet by adding a part-time job or side hustle isn't always an option. "The vast majority of the people that we serve, they're working, [but] it just isn't enough."

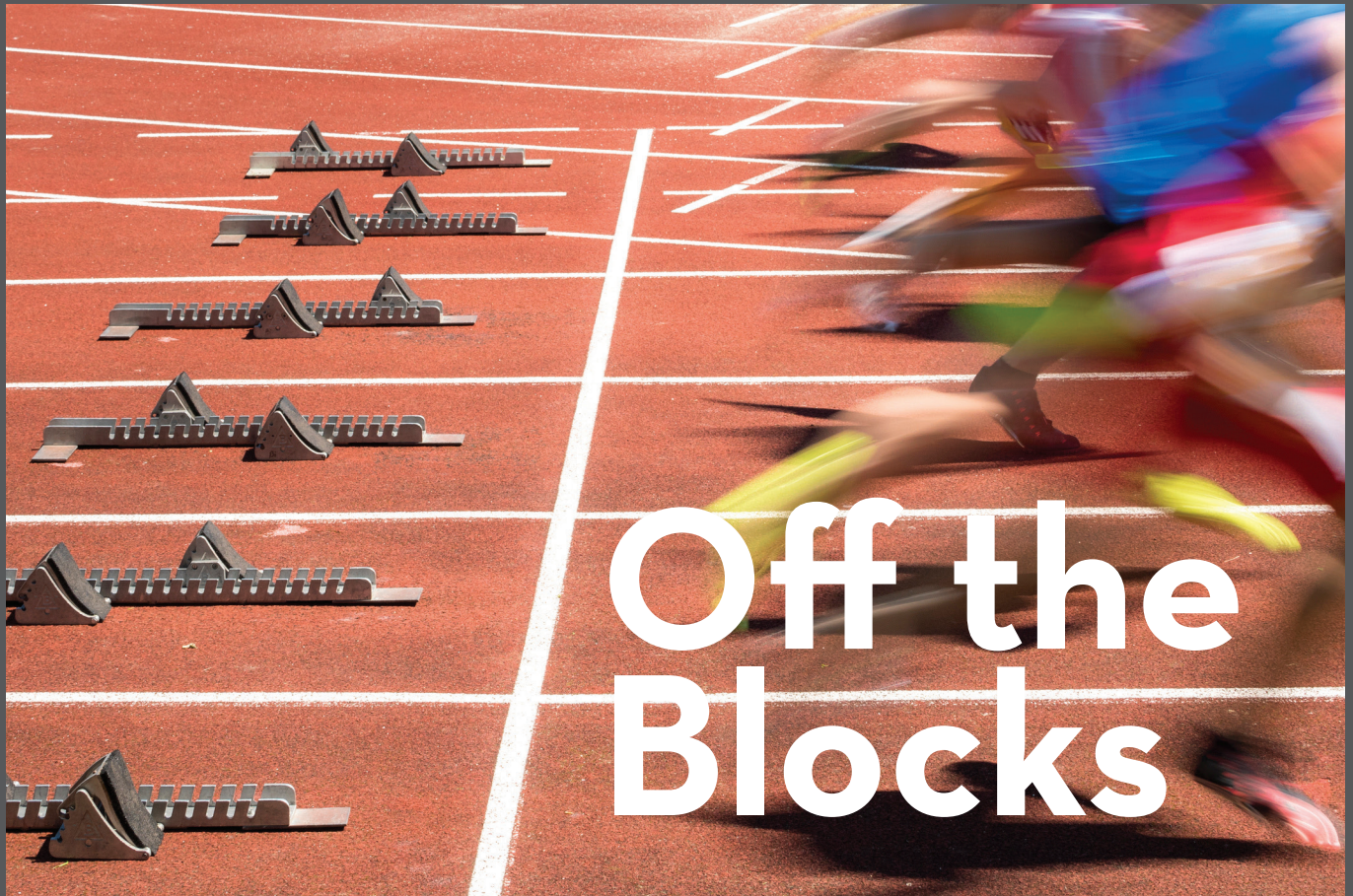
Panhandle residents are able to volunteer or make donations at PCS locations across the Panhandle, and are encouraged to support events like the nonprofit's annual Festival of Trees in November. Volunteer engagement initiatives like Bridge Builders enable conversations with local legislators.

Diana, for her part, just completed a two-year degree in criminal justice. With the help of PCS, she found the stability she sought for her family. "Their kindness changed our lives, and I will always be grateful," she says.

To learn more or get involved, visit pcsvcs.org. ☺



* Name has been changed to protect privacy.



Off the Blocks

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Michael Kitten is the new executive director of the **Canyon Economic Development Corporation**. Kitten most recently served as vice president of the Amarillo Economic Development Corporation.



Lee Erin Koehler is the new **Canyon Chamber of Commerce** executive director.



Dr. Teri Bingham was awarded the **Doug Loomis Professor of Education**, a position established in honor of the retiring superintendent of Amarillo Independent School District. Bingham becomes the 91st endowed professor at WT.



FirstBank Southwest has been named a **2025 Cornerstone Award recipient** by the Texas Bankers Association for its Banking Advisory Council, an initiative for student collaboration and career development.



Physicians Surgical Hospitals has been selected by *Modern Healthcare* as one of the **2025 Best Places to Work in Healthcare**. This award program identifies and recognizes outstanding employers in the healthcare industry nationwide.



Brown & Fortunato announced that **David Freudiger** has joined the firm's Litigation Group, bringing more than 35 years of experience representing businesses in trial, appellate and administrative proceedings.



The Dallas Morning News recently released its latest rankings of golf courses across Texas. In the category of Top 25 Economy Courses \$69 and Under, the **Ross Rogers Golf Complex/Mustang Course** was voted the top golf course in the state. All four City of Amarillo golf courses were ranked in the top 25.



Amarillo College recently honored the memory of fallen Amarillo Police Captain Frank Clements with a \$10,000 gift to the **Texas Panhandle First Responders Memorial**.



NWTHS Wound Care Center and Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy has been awarded the prestigious **Robert A. Warriner III, M.D., Clinical Excellence Award** by Healogics, the nation's largest provider of advanced wound care services.



Teresa Herrera, Amarillo College's assistant director of associate nursing, was awarded the prestigious 2024-2025 **John F. Mead Faculty Excellence Award**.



Rashmi Pillai, AC's program coordinator for business technology, was awarded the prestigious 2024-2025 **John F. Mead Faculty Excellence Award**.



Amarillo ISD **2025 District Secondary Teacher of the Year** was **Jon Dennis**, Travis Sixth Grade Campus.



Amarillo ISD **2025 District Elementary Teacher of the Year** was **Jessica Appel**, Mesa Verde Elementary School.



Bailey Gaddy, a fourth-grade teacher at Spring Canyon Elementary, was named the **Canyon ISD Elementary Teacher of the Year**.



Kaitlyn Wilhelm, reading interventionist at Randall Junior High, was named the **Canyon ISD Secondary Teacher of the Year**.



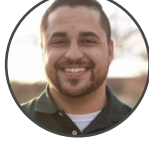
Caylar Harper joined **GriffinWink Advertising** as an account executive.



Michele Agostini started a new position as mediator at **Truce Dispute Resolution Firm**.



Toscana Italian Steakhouse recently announced its new executive chef, **Marcus Snead**.



Brian Enevoldsen has joined **Vitel Communications** as director of construction.



July 17th - 19th, 2025

FREE Event for the Entire Family

The Iron Horse Shoot Out is a motorcycle skills and training challenge for law enforcement motors officers and civilian riders. It provides experienced riders a chance to hone their skills, while giving novice riders an opportunity to learn from the experts.

All proceeds go to benefit our forever-beneficiary, The 100 Club of the Texas Panhandle, which provides assistance to families of certified peace officers and firefighters injured or killed in the line of duty. The 100 Club also provides agencies with life-protecting equipment unable to be secured through budgeted funds.

For detailed information,
visit our website:
<https://www.texaspanhandle100club.org/iron-horse-shoot-out/>

SCAN



Hosted by the Amarillo Police Department
Event Location: Santa Fe Depot

CHARITY SOFTBALL GAME FIREFIGHTERS VS. LAW ENFORCEMENT

A traveling trophy will be awarded to the winning team.



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Tickets will be on sale at all Amarillo, Canyon, and Bushland Pak-A-Sak locations starting August 1st. Tickets will also be available at the gate on the day of the game. Concessions and lounge will be open.



Proceeds to benefit: 100 Club
of the Texas Panhandle and
Coffee Memorial Blood Center





Amarillo College was awarded the **2025 Outstanding Project** from Learning By Design for the nearly 50,000-square-foot FirstBank Southwest Center on AC's Washington Street campus in Amarillo.



Denise Olson, Amarillo ISD Director of Fine Arts, was honored with the **Spirit of VASE Award**, the highest honor at the Visual Art Scholastic Event hosted by the Texas Art Education Association.



Sprouse Shrader Smith PLLC recently announced **Grant Z. Gibson, Sr.** as a new member. Grant is leading the expansion of the firm's personal injury practice across the Texas Panhandle.



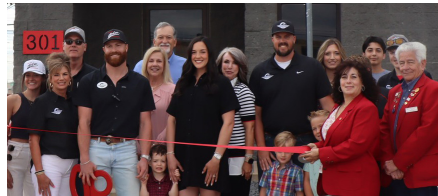
Xcel Energy has named **Todd Hancock** as the senior director of the Harrington and Nichols Generating Stations, following the retirement of Dennis Buchanan.



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ABOUT TIME



Worrying goes against my belief system, even though I am very good at it. When you get to be my age, self-reflection gets a little bonus time almost every day, and with it, the question of, *Did I handle this or that situation well?*

Inevitably, I start to wonder what I would change, if I could change time. So I looked up a few sayings and thoughts about time, including my own thoughts, at no extra charge:

1. **"Time waits for no one."** (Unknown) Verified. It never has waited for me, at least. With the possible exception of algebra class, when it seemed to stand on its head.
2. **"Time is money."** (Benjamin Franklin) I grew up with this quote by a very industrious and honorable American. Sounds good until you get to the next one.
3. **"Time is more valuable than money. You can get more money, but you can't get more time."** (Jim Rohn) The annoying thing about that is, when you have a dearth of money, there seems to be an overwhelming surplus of time.
4. **"Time is on my side."** (Written by Jerry Ragovoy, sung by the Rolling Stones) Must've been broke at the time.
5. **"Lost time is never found again."** (Unknown) With that kind of ominous tone, it's hard not to worry about time.
6. **"A person who has not done one half of his day's work by 10 o'clock runs a chance of leaving the other half undone."** (Emily Bronte) I am not sure if Emily Bronte ever knew an artist of any kind. My day typically STARTS at 10 a.m. and often goes past midnight.
7. **"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."** (Andy Warhol) Speaking of artists, I bet Andy Warhol didn't have half of a soup can finished by 10 a.m.
8. **"Do it right the first time and you won't need a second time."** (Unknown) This one resonates with me. In wood shop, I also learned "measure twice, cut once."
9. **"Time is what we want most, but what we use worst."** (William Penn) Our Founding Fathers certainly had a stern consideration of time, probably because they walked, rode horseback or took month-long journeys by sea to get anywhere.
10. **"You may delay, but time will not."** (Benjamin Franklin) Efficient. That must be what it takes to get your face on a currency note.
11. **"The present is the point at which time touches eternity."** (C.S. Lewis) Notwithstanding the time/space continuum, parallel universes, black holes, and all of the intertwined theories related to them, we still have one truth: We are here, in the present.
12. **"By faithfully working eight hours a day, you may get to be boss, and work 12 hours a day."** (Robert Frost) I was not aware that Robert Frost ever had a corporate job, but it sounds like he got the idea.



Andy Chase Cundiff

13. **"A stitch in time saves nine."** (Early 18th century wisdom) Get it solved now, before it multiplies into an out-of-hand kind of problem later!
14. **"Don't spend your time beating on a wall, hoping to transform it into a door."** (Coco Chanel) This speaks of Coco Chanel's well-known determination, and of the folly of wasted time.
15. **"The trouble is, you think you have time."** (Jack Kornfield) Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. The clock is ticking. Speaking of...
16. **"Don't watch the clock, do what it does. Keep going."** (Sam Levinson) Or as Winston Churchill famously said, "If you are going through hell, keep going."
17. **"Half our time is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save."** (Will Rogers) All these gadgets, electronics, AI platforms and tech advancements are supposed to give me more time. So why do I spend ridiculous amounts of time trying to update all my stuff?
18. **"The ones who make the worst use of their time are the first to complain of its brevity."** (Jean de La Bruyère) Guilty as charged, but Jean de La Bruyère probably didn't have an AI robot dogging him to fill in some questions so AI could pretend to be smarter than humans.

My favorite is still Jesus, who said, "Let tomorrow worry about itself." Gotta go. *Tempus fugit.* ☺



ANDY CHASE CUNDIFF

Andy is an artist, singer-songwriter, music producer and musician. In every issue, his column explores the parts of his life that don't always make it into his songs, accompanied by his own illustration.




UNITED on the GREEN

Get ready to tee off for a cause! United Way of Amarillo & Canyon proudly presents the 3rd Annual United on the Green Golf Tournament—now expanded to include a second tournament in Canyon! Join us for a 4-person scramble filled with friendly competition, community spirit, and a whole lot of fun, all in support of local programs that change lives. Rally your team and help us drive impact—one swing at a time!

Canyon Tournament

Thursday, August 28, 2025
Palo Duro Creek Golf Course
4 person scramble | \$500 per team

Amarillo Tournament

Thursday, September 11, 2025
Ross Rogers Golf Course
4 person scramble | \$500 per team

Other ways to be involved

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Canyon

Why is it that everything has to change? Why does change usually involve something that makes us uncomfortable? Over the course of our lives, we must accept that change is constant. Instead of viewing it as a negative thing, we must begin to look at change as a transition—a transition from one situation to another, from one chapter of life to another, from one level to another.

We often expect transition to be something bad, but change and transition have a purpose in our lives. Change always involves the unknown. It may feel uncomfortable, but discomfort is where growth comes from.

If our ultimate goal in life is growth, the discomfort we feel from change is just part of the journey. We first begin to change at birth. Babies transition into crawling, then walking. They'll fall a lot. Babies might stumble at first, but within weeks they're running. At the same time, they are undergoing physical changes that take them from dependence on their parents for everything to needing and even craving independence.

Each of us has to juggle multiple changes from the beginning.

The old me hated change. How can something that brings such turmoil and pain and confusion now be something that empowers me to want to do more? I have had to deal with a lot of transitions on a daily basis. I've had to change or transition back and forth—and sometimes immediately—as I serve individuals every day. I had to learn that in order for me to help *them* I had to be comfortable with *me*. And if I encouraged them to step out and change, then I had to be ready to do the same.

I know the feelings that change brings. I've been met with the same resistance: *I don't want to fail. I don't want to start over. I don't want to move on, but I don't want to become stagnant either. I don't*

understand what the next step is.

But that unknown—about what comes next—is part of the beauty of transition. There's beauty in change. There's beauty in growth, and beauty in getting to the next level of life. Something feels so right about being able to look back and say, "I made it, I tolerated the change and I'm better for it."

Sit back for a minute and think about the biggest change you had to endure. Maybe you were fired from a job you felt was your calling. Maybe you were floundering because you couldn't find your purpose—and every time you got close, it was taken away. Maybe it was a relationship you hoped would end in marriage and children and a happily ever after, but it didn't go as you planned. What do you do next? You can get up, dust yourself off, and try again, or you can remain stagnant.

Stagnation is dangerous. You can stay the same, but the world will continue to move on. If I stand in the same place for 10 years, my position may be the same. But everything around me will be different, the people around me will be different, and I, too, will be different.

Today, I find myself not knowing exactly what my next step is going to be. I'm continuing to develop where I want to be and what it is going to take to get there. I'm realizing that people who have been in my life for years may not be ready to make that transition with me. Places I thought I belonged may need to be left behind.

So, for this edition of The Call, I ask you to prepare yourself for transition. I wish I could say that change is easy—that it doesn't involve pain or regret—but you will feel all those emotions. Don't lose sight of hope during this process. Change allows you to grow. Your journey may include hurt and hardship, but your resilience has brought you this far, and it's preparing you to flourish. ☺



MELODIE GRAVES

Raised in the North Heights, Melodie is dedicated to service that goes above and beyond her career in higher education. She has worked at Amarillo College since 2010, currently serving as the Associate Director of Academic Advising, Foster Care Liaison and Justice-Involved Advocate. Melodie shares her thoughts about inclusivity, inspiration and answering The Call.

ReRoot

in AMARILLO

Do you know someone who once called Amarillo home and would love a reminder of all the exciting things happening in our community? We'd be delighted to send them a thoughtful gift to reconnect them with the spirit of Amarillo. We'll also include them in our quarterly newsletter filled with local highlights and community updates.

Who knows? With a little Amarillo magic, we might just inspire them to come back! Simply share their information below and we'll take care of the rest!

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Astronomy vs. Astrology



Ever killed time by reading a horoscope, scrolling the column to find the sign with the date range of your birthday? If so, you are more familiar with our night sky than you may have realized.

Our Earth's spin around the sun in its annual orbit gives us a peek into different regions of space around us, giving stars their distinct moment to shine.

This is very much like looking outward while riding a carousel—the scenery changes as you spin, hiding everything that's behind you. Along with our seasons, Earth's orbit and spin changes the stars we can see above.

During our annual orbit, the sun, moon and other planets of our solar system appear to travel an imaginary path across the sky known as the ecliptic. As they travel, they pass through specific constellations along that ecliptic, including the 12 familiar signs of the Zodiac.

Historically, cultures used this predictable and progressive pattern to guide their agricultural practices, travel and even spirituality. As the Renaissance period gave rise to scientific methodologies, the inability to confirm the stars' and planets' influence on personality and one's fate separated these beliefs from observable and measurable facts.

By the 18th century, astrology and astronomy had gone through a stellar divorce. Here's one example of this measurable difference: If you were born sometime between July 23 to Aug. 22, your horoscope may lead you to believe that the sun passes through the constellation of Leo during those dates each year. But in reality the sun passes through Leo at different times, like this year when it transits Leo from Aug. 16 to Sept. 10. This, too, is a daytime event, so when the sun passes through a particular constellation, we can't see that constellation at night. (For what it's worth, Leo—the lion—is best viewed in the spring).

Scorpius is the best ecliptic constellation to view in the early night sky in July and August. Named for its resemblance to a scorpion,

its curvy J shape made of 18 stars is easily spotted in the southern sky. Looking south, you will see a bright red star, Antares, settled in the scorpion's heart. From there you can travel east along its tail, reaching its stinger—which points to the constellation Sagittarius—or travel west to its head and two pinchers. 🦏

While Scorpio is easy to spot with the naked eye, nestled inside it—as with many constellations—are nebulae and galaxies visible only with a telescope. Take the opportunity this summer to visit darker skies in a nearby park and marvel at the universe through a telescope with Amarillo Astronomy Club:

**July 26 and
Aug. 23:**
Copper Breaks
State Park and
3 Rivers Ranch in
Crowell, Texas



ALETTA DAVIS-PITRE

Aletha, an Amarillo native, is a physical therapist by day, and stargazer by night. She found her stargazing kindred in the Amarillo Astronomy Club and now serves as the club's secretary. Founded in 1981, the club helps the public peer into the heavens at public star parties or safely view the sun at daytime events, and provides ongoing education about the night sky.

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SCHOOL

Unfortunately, summer won't last forever. As vacation winds down and August edges in, those long July days give way to back-to-school prep. In Amarillo and Canyon, "school" means a lot of things—tiny preschoolers learning their shapes and colors, kindergarten through 12th-grade students navigating new classrooms and hallways, and college students training to become tomorrow's nurses, techs and community leaders. This special section on education spotlights the institutions critical to that entire journey, from preschool to higher education and beyond.



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Setting the Standard

Over the years, Ascension Academy has launched numerous messaging campaigns that have successfully captured attention and have often been replicated by other schools. As Ascension continues to evolve, the core concepts remain relevant.

MORE (2014-2018)

Ascension Academy used this campaign slogan to highlight the various opportunities available to students. The slogan emphasized MORE chances to explore new activities, MORE academic rigor in classes, MORE diverse academic offerings, MORE innovative athletic programs, and MORE personalized education tailored to each student. Even today, Ascension continues to provide MORE opportunities, including adding a fifth-grade class starting in the 2025-2026 school year.

CHALLENGING MINDS, CREATING OPPORTUNITIES, CHANGING LIVES (2020-2023)

Alumni feedback consistently highlights that we challenge our students' minds by offering a rigorous academic curriculum, a diverse range of elective courses, advanced classes, and various learning opportunities beyond the traditional classrooms in the arts, athletics, and leadership programs.

4 PILLARS: SCHOLARS, ARTISTS, ATHLETES, LEADERS (2018-PRESENT)

Ascension emphasizes the four pillars of its mission and philosophy to encourage and provide opportunities for our students to become well-rounded individuals. These principles play a significant role in our work today. By offering opportunities for our students to engage in academics, fine arts, athletics, and leadership programs, we help them become valuable members of their communities. They contribute meaningfully to their local neighborhoods, the churches they attend, the clubs and organizations they serve, and their families and friendships.

THE ASCENSION DIFFERENCE (2022-2023)

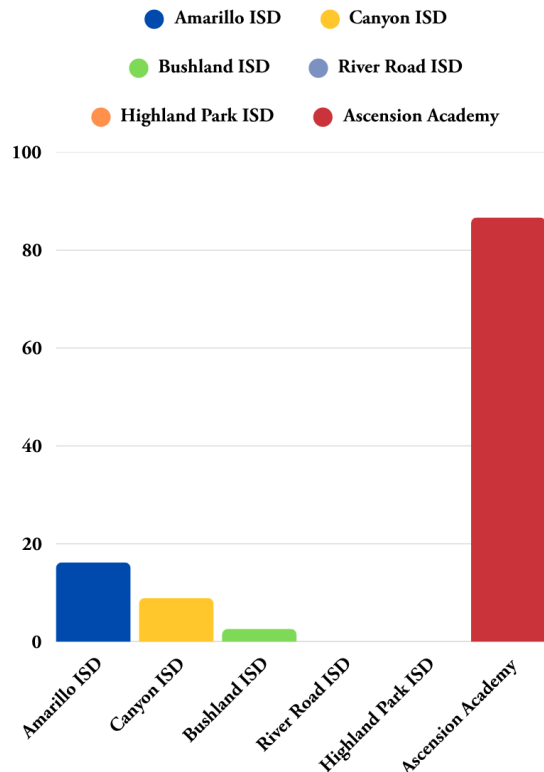
The Ascension Difference means developing confident, independent learners who are successful in college and beyond, especially as they begin careers or advanced degrees. Graduates of Ascension Academy are college students who excel in their fields of study and are often relied upon by their classmates for assistance with advanced math or English paper reviews. They take on leadership roles both on their campuses and in their communities. These graduates carry their knowledge, compassion, and leadership skills wherever they go, having learned and practiced the principles of global citizenship as Cardinals at Ascension Academy. Senior classes at Ascension boast a 100-percent college acceptance rate, with an average of \$1 million to \$2 million awarded in merit-based scholarships. That's the "Ascension Difference."

CHOOSE EXCELLENCE, DON'T SETTLE (2024-PRESENT)

When selecting the best educational path for your child, don't settle; choose excellence. This choice includes excellence across our school community in academics, fine arts, athletics, and leadership opportunities. Ascension's students consistently demonstrate college readiness while excelling in an elevated curriculum compared to local, state, and national schools, evidenced by being 1 of 382 Cum Laude schools globally.

At Ascension Academy, we welcome families from all walks of life. We offer an inclusive environment and customized tuition plans as the solution for many families willing to invest in their student's education, but who also need a personalized tuition level. Ascension will also participate in the School Choice ESA Program, which begins in the 2026-27 academic year. Contact our Director of Admissions to start a conversation at admission@ascensionacademy.org or call 806-382-1200.

2024 College Readiness Index by District



College Readiness Indexes by District-
<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/texas/districts>



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Opportunity Takes A Path Through Amarillo College for Three Texans

RAFAEL AGUIRRE REACHES MILLIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Rafael Aguirre, 83, became a viral sensation when a photo of him graduating from Amarillo College reached more than 500 million people. The attention was unexpected. “I was just doing what is normal to me,” Aguirre says. “But it’s nice so many people saw it as something big.”

Aguirre first earned a degree in mechanical engineering technology from Amarillo College in 1995. Recently, he returned to study HVAC and earned multiple certificates, including HVAC assistant and technician.

“He is the embodiment of the knowledge-hungry, perfect student,” says Joseph Kautchick, Amarillo College HVAC instructor. “He wasn’t just doing this for himself—he was doing it to help his church.” Aguirre volunteers as a greeter, parking host and security officer at his church.

Dr. Jamelle J. Conner, president of Amarillo College, says Aguirre’s journey captures the school’s mission. “It’s evident his story is a powerful reminder that it’s never too late to learn, grow and positively impact others,” she says. “At AC, students can earn meaningful credentials quickly.”

The photo that sparked global admiration was taken by Lily Gamble, an AC graduate and longtime graduation contributor.

At Amarillo College, stories like Aguirre’s show that age is no barrier when curiosity and purpose lead the way. “If I can learn something every day, that’s good,” Aguirre says. “That’s what matters most to me.”

FROM CUSTODIAN TO INSTRUCTOR: LEILA AHWAZ’S AMERICAN DREAM

Leila Daraei Ahwaz’s journey from Iranian immigrant to Amarillo College instructor began with walking to work and learning English at a local church. “I didn’t know how to drive, so I had to walk from our apartment to Walmart, where the bus picked up employees,” she says.

She applied to be a night custodian at Amarillo College and soon found purpose in education. “One of my biggest inspirations in pursuing math was Maria Johnson,” Ahwaz says. “She told me I could do math and inspired me to get my degree.”

Balancing motherhood and work, Ahwaz studied HVAC at AC and overcame her fear of climbing to rooftop units. “When I first walked in, my professor Ed Nolte saw I was scared,” she says. “He told me, ‘Don’t give up. I know you can do this.’ He made me confident.”

After completing the program, she joined AC’s East Campus Success Center and now teaches math and technical courses when needed. “I love my job and the people I work with,” she says. “Everything I’ve done started right here at Amarillo College.”

Now working on her bachelor’s degree, her own story inspires others. “I tell my students all the time: I started with nothing,” she says. “I didn’t speak the language. I didn’t have a degree. I just worked hard and didn’t give up.”

Her children have followed her lead. “I think I set a good example,” she says. Leila hopes to continue to teach and expand support for nontraditional students. “I want them to know success is possible,” she says.

FROM GED TO CLEAR SKIES: JERRAD LORLOVICK’S FORECAST FOR A NEW LIFE

Jerrad Lorlovick always dreamed of becoming a meteorologist. But after being scammed by a fake online diploma, he found himself stuck—until Amarillo College helped him rewrite his story. “They got \$400 out of me,” he shares. “I worked hard for that. It was disappointing.”

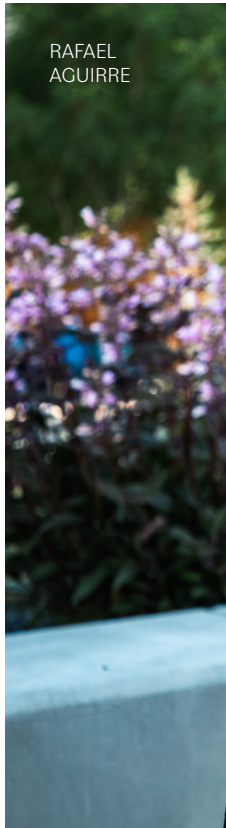
At 35, with a family to support, he quit his job and enrolled in AC’s GED program. “We sold everything except for our daughter’s belongings,” he says. “My wife and I shared one car. I drove Uber and DoorDash while I studied.”

It wasn’t easy. “I failed the math test twice,” he says. “But Amarillo College tutor Chuck Jones helped me get it on the third try.”

Last May, he walked the stage at AC in cap and gown, with his wife and daughter in the audience. “It meant a lot to finally get my education,” he says. Two months later, after months of volunteering to build a reel, he got the call. “NewsChannel 10 offered me a job as a reporter,” he says. “It was just the start I needed.” Now, he covers Panhandle stories, weather and warns residents of incoming storms.

He plans to continue his meteorology studies and hopes to return to AC one day—to give back as a speaker or mentor. “If it wasn’t for Amarillo College allowing me to get my GED and working with me,” he says, “I would not be where I am today.”

RAFAEL
AGUIRRE



LEILA DARAEI
AHWAZ





Amarillo College®



JERRAD
LORLOVICK



BRYSON BROWN



CAMILLE HERNANDEZ



DARLENE NGUYEN

Amarillo ISD Just Has **MORE** to Offer

When we say there's MORE happening in Amarillo ISD, we're talking about more exclusive opportunities and more ways for students to do more, be more, and achieve more. It all adds up to more to celebrate. AISD's Class of 2025 heads into their future with unique skills, professional industry certifications, jobs waiting for them in their chosen career path, and millions of dollars in scholarship offers supported by Amarillo ISD's exclusive educational opportunities.

A happenstance placement in a floral design class changed everything for recent Caprock High School graduate Camille Hernandez.

"My freshman year, I started on the health science pathway, but I figured out really quickly that I did not like it whatsoever," says an emphatic Camille.

The opportunity to make a nuanced switch put Camille on a career path she'd never imagined.

"I ended up changing my endorsement from health science to plant science. I love telling people about it because they're like, 'I have never heard an 18-year-old girl say I want to major in horticulture,'" laughs Camille.

Recent Caprock graduate Darlene Nguyen also chose a niche career path. At AISD's AmTech Career Academy, Darlene learned the defensive side of cybersecurity, which opened the door to exploring the offensive side. That's where Darlene's circuits really started firing. "Good" hackers, also known as white hat hackers or ethical hackers, use their hacking skills to identify vulnerabilities and strengthen digital defenses.

"I've always had an analytical mind, and I like solving puzzles. But I never thought this could actually be a career because of the way they portray hackers in the media as bad people," says Darlene. "Once I found out what cybersecurity was all about, I knew it was my calling."

New Amarillo High grad Bryson Brown is leveling up as a college athlete. He credits the high academic and athletic standards he set for himself and being part of a 5A program with landing him at Colorado Mesa University.

"It's hard to get your name out there and get exposure to recruiters," acknowledges Bryson. "In a bigger school district, we have more resources, more players, better coaching. Our coaches are all about work, and our work ethic and mindset set us apart at Amarillo High."

Take a look at the Class of 2025 by the numbers. What MORE will the Class of 2026 achieve? We can't wait to find out.

- **7,000-plus college credit hours earned**
- **\$47 million in scholarships earned**
- **679 industry-based certifications earned during their high school careers**
- **494 seniors earned more than one certification**

AMAISD.ORG



means more

AISD offers *exclusive opportunities* no one else can, which means our students are doing things no one else is.

DO MORE WITH EXCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES:

- ORCHESTRA BEGINNING IN 5TH GRADE
- DANCE
- SWIM
- JROTC
- AMTECH
- ADVANCED ACADEMICS INCLUDING UT ONRAMPS
- SPECIALIZED DIPLOMAS LIKE IB AND AP CAPSTONE

more
AISD



AMARILLO ISD



Affordable Early Education

Opportunity School has been providing high-quality, early childhood education for local families since 1969. That's more than a half-century of giving at-risk children a solid foundation for learning before they enter the school system. But Executive Director Jill Goodrich still encounters people in the community who are surprised by what the organization offers.

"I'm always struck by people who say, 'I didn't realize all the services provided for young children and their families,'" Goodrich says with a smile. "We are one of the only nationally accredited early childhood education programs in our area and have reached more than 5,000 children since opening in 1969."

The core of what Opportunity School provides is affordable education during the early years of a child's life—from birth to 5—primarily to children from low-income families. But a few of the organization's benefits are less familiar:

Early Intervention: Until children enter the classroom, their families often aren't aware of developmental delays, learning disabilities or medical diagnoses that may be impacting a child's ability to learn. The teachers and staff at Opportunity School are trained to watch for potential issues, under the supervision of a full-time intervention specialist. "Some kiddos struggle with communication or may not be as verbal as they should be for their age," says Goodrich. "A new parent without a support system may not realize their child is delayed in that area, but those are things that can be super-important to address early."

Providing early intervention and supporting families in the process is vital to Opportunity School's work. For instance, the organization partners with the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences at WTAMU to provide speech and language screenings and individualized therapy by the department's interns. There is no additional cost for families to have these services. Opportunity School also helps connect families with occupational therapy and physical therapy services when there is a need. "The more we can do in the early years, then we can set that child and that family up for success in the future."

School-Ready Focus: An evidence-based curriculum designed for the early years helps children develop foundations for reading literacy, math and even how to use the right muscle groups and more. Student assessments help teachers monitor progress and age-related milestones. "We are very intentional about that. Children's brains develop rapidly during these years—80 percent of the brain is 'wired' by the age of 3—so what they learn in preschool impacts them for years to come," explains Goodrich. "We start early so they get on the right pathway. They will be better prepared academically and socially as well."

Professional Development: Many organizations continue to struggle in the current job market, and Goodrich admits it can be

hard to find qualified early childhood educators. But Opportunity School isn't just looking for warm bodies to babysit toddlers. "We are looking for educators who connect with our mission, and if they don't have experience in the field, are willing to learn," she says. "Our professional development program is very specific to this age group and focused on developmentally appropriate practices."

Many staff members at Opportunity School are beginning educational careers and value the training they receive. "Our vision is that all young children receive the best start to their development and education, and we'd love to see a quality focus across the Panhandle for our youngest learners," says Goodrich.

As a nonprofit that depends on donated funds, Opportunity School is always careful with how it spends money. But Goodrich views professional development as one of the most important expenditures in her program's budget. "We are growing, but not at the expense of quality, so professional development throughout our team helps us maintain a high-quality program," she says.

Social & Emotional Problem-Solving: Many parents think the most important things children learn in preschool are basics like shapes, colors, numbers and the alphabet. Those are facts and figures—the so-called "hard skills." But Goodrich says soft skills may be even more important.

"You have to teach social and emotional skills just like you teach a child to tie her shoe or write his name," she says. "We can't just tell kids to 'behave' and expect them to know what that means or how to do it. So we focus on teaching a very broad set of social skills."

For instance, many kids haven't learned how to handle intense emotions like sadness or anger. "Kids need support when they have big feelings, to know they are safe, and that their teachers and parents will help them learn the skills to keep themselves and others safe when they have those big feelings," she says. "That's what gives them the confidence to stand up to a bully in middle school or, in third grade, to tell someone 'I don't like you pulling my hair.' We all need those skills in every walk of life."

Opportunity School has been able to build brains for more than five decades because of generous support from individuals and corporations throughout the community who recognize the difference Opportunity School is making in the lives of local children and their families. "You won't see children using iPads because we know that young children need face-to-face interactions from caring adults to optimize a child's development in the early years," Goodrich says. "We are a high-quality program that prepares young kids for school, while supporting parents who need to be at work."

To learn more or if you would like to make a donation or leave a legacy for generations to come, visit opportunitieschool.com. An investment in our children is an investment in the future of our community.



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The Future of Health Begins in the Texas Panhandle

For more than 50 years, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Amarillo has stood shoulder to shoulder with the people of the Panhandle, driven by grit, determination and compassion. Our roots run deep, and our mission is clear: to provide purpose-driven careers, deliver high-quality patient care and strengthen the local economy. Together, we've built a legacy of service, and our work is far from done.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on a healthier future with access to quality care for every Texan. We uphold an unwavering commitment to the communities we serve.

NURSING THAT MEETS THE MOMENT

The School of Nursing at Amarillo prepares students to lead in today's complex health care landscape. With multiple Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree paths, there's an option for every aspiring nurse, from traditional students to career-changers. Each program is designed to produce confident, compassionate professionals.

A PREMIER PHARMACY EDUCATION

TTUHSC in Amarillo is home to the Jerry H. Hodge School of Pharmacy, one of the nation's most comprehensive Doctor of Pharmacy programs. With nationally recognized training in clinical, rural, community and administrative pharmacy, graduates are ready to step into high-demand roles across the state and beyond.

RESEARCH THAT MOVES THE INDUSTRY

The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences offers master's and doctoral programs in pharmaceutical sciences, preparing students for careers in the pharmaceutical industry, academia and federal regulatory agencies. Through rigorous research and mentorship, students gain the expertise to shape the future of medicine.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS WITH PURPOSE

The School of Health Professions offers focused training for in-demand careers. Amarillo is proud to host the Doctor of Physical Therapy program, consistently ranked among the best in the nation. With hands-on clinical experience and expert faculty, students are equipped to make an immediate impact.

EXCELLENCE IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

At the School of Medicine in Amarillo, medical students and residents train with a strong emphasis on clinical care. Thanks to outstanding bedside teaching, a high faculty-to-student ratio and a diverse range of clinical settings, the program delivers a superior learning experience. In addition to the School of Medicine, TTUHSC in Amarillo offers residency programs in pediatrics, internal medicine, family medicine, obstetrics and gynecology—and beginning in 2026, general surgery.

COLLABORATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

With the Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine located next door and numerous community partnerships, students gain real-world experience that sets them apart. Our tight-knit campus and supportive environment offer an exceptional student experience from day one.

COMPASSIONATE CARE, RIGHT WHERE YOU NEED IT

At Texas Tech Physicians, the clinical arm of TTUHSC, expert care isn't hours away—it's right here in the Texas Panhandle. Our providers serve patients across Amarillo and Canyon with a wide range of specialties, including family medicine, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, psychiatry and surgery.

We're especially proud to offer some of the region's most specialized pediatric care, so families can access high-level expertise without leaving home. From everyday checkups to complex diagnoses, our team ensures children receive the close, convenient and compassionate critical care they need.

Our reach extends beyond our clinics. TTUHSC physicians are trusted partners in top regional hospitals, including BSA Health System, Northwest Texas Healthcare System, Hereford Regional Medical Center and the Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center, bringing academic excellence and clinical precision to every setting.

Founded in 1969 with a bold mission to serve the Texas Panhandle, TTUHSC has grown into a hub of education, care and innovation. And we're just getting started.

More access. More options. More healing. More life.

Together, we are the future of health.

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™

[TTUHSC.EDU/CAMPUS/AMARILLO](https://ttuhsc.edu/campus/amarillo)







WT's Half-Off Enrollment Offer for Region 16 Educators Already a Success

Ashley Grubbs, a paraprofessional at Sunray Independent School District, wasn't sure how she could ever reach her goal of becoming a special education teacher. A single mother of three, Grubbs struggled to find enough financial support. Then, she heard about West Texas A&M University's new WT Educators Excellence Initiative.

As soon as the initiative—which makes educators at all school districts within the Region 16 Education Service Center area eligible for a 50-percent discount on tuition and mandatory fees—was announced June 5, Grubbs jumped. The first to contact WT to sign up for the initiative, Grubbs says the half-off initiative will be a major help. "It's a huge blessing, a huge blessing," says Grubbs. "I honestly wasn't sure I would be able to get enough financial aid to cover the cost. This means a lot because it means I'll be able to afford my education."

The WT Educators Excellence Initiative will allow any full-time teacher, administrator, librarian, nurse, counselor or paraprofessional at Region 16's 60 school districts and three charter schools, as well as Region 16 ESC employees, to pursue a degree at WT for half the cost. The offer will be extended to about 8,700 people throughout the Panhandle.

WT offers 66 undergraduate degrees and 44 graduate degrees, including doctoral degrees in agriculture and education. "WT has been and remains committed to serving locally first, and we know that our region's schools continue to face a shortage of qualified teachers," WT President Walter V. Wendler says. "We are committed to do our part to help ensure high-quality schools throughout the Panhandle."

Students may enroll for the second summer 2025 session or fall 2025 courses in undergraduate courses and through the WT Graduate School. Students interested in pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership can apply to join the January 2026 cohort.

In the first week after the June 5 announcement, about 70 students either enrolled for the first time or, if they were already a current student, sought the discount for themselves. "We've never seen such an immediate response to an enrollment initiative, particularly among adult learners," says Rick Haasl, vice provost for enrollment management. "That speaks to a need in the region. School districts across Region 16 are facing staffing shortages, and we believe the WT Educators Excellence Initiative will be a crucial help in solving that problem."

Cynthia Muñoz, a paraprofessional at City View Elementary in Canyon Independent School District, says she saw the announcement on WT's Facebook page and it was the push she needed. "Education has always been the route I wanted to take. I was a stay-at-home mom and wanted to get my foot in the door, so I started as a

paraprofessional," Muñoz says. "Being a mom of three, this will really help lift the financial burden, so I had to take advantage of it, not only for my future but for my family's future."

Derek West, principal at CISD's Randall Junior High School, had already begun pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership at WT, but says the Educators Excellence Initiative will provide an invaluable assist in completing that degree. "I'm using student loans to pay for my schooling, so being able to reduce that debt burden is huge," West says.

He also sees major benefits for school districts both large and small across Region 16. Already, some of his RJH faculty and staff members have indicated that they're interested in pursuing further education thanks to the initiative. "This will be a huge help with staffing issues," West says. "Even at big districts like Canyon and Amarillo, we're struggling. And this will be an even bigger benefit for rural districts, who are really struggling to recruit and retain people."

Eligible employees from Region 16 schools who are already enrolled will be eligible for half-off tuition and mandatory fees beginning with the second summer 2025 session. The initiative follows in the footsteps of WT's Employee and Family Tuition and Fees Reduction program, which was offered first to full-time University employees beginning in May 2022.

Both the Region 16 and the WT half-off waivers are considered to be among the most generous offered by any state college or university in Texas. Other conditions, including financial aid benefits, may apply to the total cost of tuition.

Region 16 school districts span the Texas Panhandle and have an average daily attendance of almost 80,000 students, ranging from fewer than 30 to more than 29,000 students in individual districts. Total regional school staff numbers more than 11,400, including 6,056 full-time teachers, 1,652 full-time paraprofessionals, 432 full-time administrators, about 60 librarians, about 210 counselors and about 110 nurses. Region 16 employs 196 full-time staff members.

WT opened in 1910 as West Texas State Normal College, a school that trained teachers. Today, about 75 percent of all teachers and administrators throughout the Panhandle region have at least one degree or certificate from WT.

Serving the Texas Panhandle and being responsive to its needs are key maxims of the University's long-range plan, **WT 125: From the Panhandle to the World**. That plan is fueled by the historic One West comprehensive fundraising campaign, which reached its initial \$125 million goal 18 months after publicly launching in September 2021. The campaign's new goal is to reach \$175 million by 2025; currently, it has raised more than \$165 million.



Training Champions Together:

West Texas A&M University and Clarendon College

Partner to Elevate Collegiate Horse Judging

In a bold step to strengthen collegiate horse judging and expand opportunities for young professionals in the equine industry, West Texas A&M University and Clarendon College have launched a new collaborative program. This partnership is designed to give students from both institutions greater access to elite coaching, hands-on experience and a clear pathway to advanced education and career success.

As part of the initiative, Clarendon College students will travel regularly to WT's Canyon campus for judging practices and team development sessions. Some practices will also be held at Clarendon to maintain accessibility and engagement for all students. Rylee McKinney, a graduate student at WT and an accomplished horse judging competitor, will serve as the assistant coach, working alongside Dr. Christy Adams, clinical assistant professor of agricultural business and economics and head coach of WT's nationally recognized horse judging team.

"Our goal is to get these students on the WT campus early and often," says Dr. Adams. "Once they experience what WT has to offer—the coaching, the community and the championship culture—we believe they'll be excited about transferring and continuing their education here."

This collaborative model is not new to Clarendon College. Since 1988, Clarendon has partnered with Texas Tech University to support its meat judging team—a partnership that has led to numerous national championships and a strong transfer pipeline. WT hopes to mirror that success in horse judging.

"For WT, this is a strategic way to reach students earlier in their judging journey," Adams explains. "We get to work with them longer, train them harder and help them reach their full potential. At the same time, we're developing a strong pipeline of future WT students who are already immersed in our program before they officially transfer."

The benefits for Clarendon College are equally significant. By offering a competitive program like horse judging and building direct pathways to a four-year university, Clarendon enhances its student recruitment, retention and career placement outcomes. Participants will graduate with more than an associate degree—they'll have hands-on experience, industry exposure and a competitive edge.

"Clarendon College has always been a strong place to start," Adams adds. "But now, students don't have to choose between competing and transferring—they can do both, and do it at a high level."

A RICH HISTORY IN JUDGING

The roots of horse judging at Clarendon College date back to the mid-1990s, when instructor Jerry Hawkins set out to make Clarendon the only junior college in the country to offer livestock, meats and horse judging teams. From roughly 1996 to 1999, the program followed a graduate student coaching model with support from nearby universities.

From 2000 through 2021, Clarendon transitioned to a faculty-led model, with instructors in the agricultural department also serving as coaches. While some years were impacted by transitions and recruitment challenges, the foundation for excellence remained. Notably, the last time Clarendon's horse judging team won a national championship was in 2001—and with this new partnership, the team is aiming for a strong comeback.

Clarendon has a proud tradition of competitive success across multiple disciplines, including livestock judging, meat judging, ranch horse and rodeo teams. These programs continue to thrive and provide students with hands-on experiences in real-world agricultural and equine settings.

WHY HORSE JUDGING MATTERS

Horse judging involves evaluating horses based on conformation, movement and performance in various disciplines. Competitors place classes of horses in logical order and deliver oral reasons to explain their decisions.

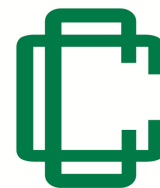
But the benefits go far beyond the show pen. Students in horse judging programs develop essential life and career skills: critical thinking, communication, decision-making and confidence. These attributes translate into success across multiple industries, including veterinary medicine, breed associations, equine training, livestock marketing, pharmaceutical sales, agricultural education and so many more.

"Horse judging teaches students far more than how to place a class," Adams says. "It builds the kind of thinking and speaking skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives—no matter what career path they take."

SERVING A GROWING INDUSTRY

This partnership also supports the growing needs of the equine industry. According to the American Horse Council, the U.S. equine sector produces \$50 billion in goods and services each year and contributes \$38 billion in direct wages and benefits. It supports more than 2.2 million jobs.

With a shared vision, strong leadership and a deep commitment to student success, the WT-Clarendon partnership is laying the groundwork not only for future championships, but also for shaping the next generation of skilled, driven professionals in the equine industry. For both schools and their students, the future is bright—and the champions of tomorrow are already in training.



Clarendon
COLLEGE

CLARENDONCOLLEGE.EDU



What Happens in Austin Impacts Amarillo Students, Teachers and Schools

It's no secret that local public schools have faced challenges over the past few years. Students, teachers, principals, superintendents, locally elected boards of trustees—and you, the taxpayer—see and feel these challenges in classrooms and hallways across our campuses.

There's nothing more important than the future of our state, and that future is being shaped in our public schools, where students are supported by skilled, professional educators. Yet, Texas public schools have faced chronic underfunding since 2011, when lawmakers cut \$5.4 billion from the public education budget. We saw a historic rebound with the passage of House Bill 3 in 2019, which provided significant increases in per-student funding. But the arrival of COVID-19 and ongoing inflation have made it difficult for schools to keep pace with rising costs for salaries, security, building maintenance, transportation, and other essential needs.

Many area school districts have adopted deficit budgets. According to the Texas Education Agency, more than 50 percent of Texas school districts operated deficit budgets in 2024. Without a significant funding increase, that number is expected to grow—placing the system on an unsustainable path.

This spring, Texas lawmakers stepped in to offer some support. The basic allotment, the primary state funding source for public schools, will increase by \$55 per student from \$6,160 to \$6,215. That \$8.5 billion in new school funding for public schools approved by the Legislature this May is a welcome investment, but still falls far short of inflation-adjusted needs.

Lawmakers also invested in teachers and strengthened the pipeline for future educators through new support for teacher preparation programs. Teacher pay raises will vary depending on school district size and teacher experience, with raises ranging from \$2,500 per year to \$8,000 per year. That's a meaningful improvement for our teachers, who, when adjusted for inflation, earned roughly \$5,000 less in

2023 than they did in 2020.

However, schools also face a growing number of state mandates. Thankfully, some, like school safety requirements, came with much-needed funding increases. But not all mandates came with additional funding.

Other reforms of our state's public school accountability system will have to wait, as a major reform measure—House Bill 4—failed

to reach the Governor's desk. We'll keep pressing to *Measure What Matters*, a more holistic look at testing and accountability that truly supports students and accurately reflects the daily work of schools and teachers to prepare them for future success.

Vouchers or Education Savings Accounts loom on the horizon. The program, which could disproportionately affect rural communities, is set to begin in 2026-27. This school year, government agencies in Austin will establish the contracts and processes that will govern the voucher program, which will provide parents with state dollars to use for private or homeschool education. There's concern that the initial \$1 billion in taxpayer dollars allocated for vouchers will balloon to \$6.2 billion by 2028-2029 and \$7.9 billion by 2030-2031.

We saw meaningful

progress this legislative session, but there is still much more work to do. *That's where you come in.*

Panhandle students and teachers need you. Our communities, economy, and civic life depend on how well we prepare students today. Supporting and strengthening our schools takes all of us.

Whether you are ready to get involved or just want to stay in the know on the big issues in public education, join us at Raise Your Hand Texas. Visit go.ryht.org/subscribe for our newsletters or text updates, or you can contact regional advocacy director Skylar Gallop at sgallop@ryht.org.



Source: Charles Butt Foundation 2024 Texas Teacher Poll

RAISE
YOUR HAND TEXAS

Adjusting for inflation,
the median Texas
teacher earned roughly
\$5,000 less
in 2023 than in 2020

Mesalands Community College: The “hidden gem” of New Mexico

Located in Tucumcari, a historic town in eastern New Mexico, Mesalands Community College is a small but special school often recognized as a hidden gem. With its unique programs, hands-on approach and state-of-the-art facilities, the school offers a one-of-a-kind learning experience to its students.

Mesalands Community College provides an unparalleled pathway for both ambitious young minds and adults seeking a unique and impactful career path. You can expect to find degree programs in unique and in-demand fields, such as Wind Energy Technology and Nursing, alongside a commitment to producing highly competent graduates.

Thanks to smaller class sizes, the college’s faculty can focus on the development of each student, addressing pain points when they arise and providing individualized attention. Mesalands promotes experiential learning, ensuring classes incorporate hands-on opportunities beyond textbooks. In **Wind Energy Technology**, for instance, students climb up an impressive 1.5 megawatt wind turbine, working on an actual machine and solving real-world issues. These experiences make Mesalands graduates highly attractive to potential employers in the industry. In **Paleontology**, students go to dig sites, excavating real dinosaur bones and analyzing them in a world-class lab. Their most impressive findings are displayed in the college’s prestigious Dinosaur Museum. The hands-on aspect of this program is unmatched, as students engage in doctoral-level activities, preparing them for success in their subsequent studies.

For those with an appreciation for artistry, the college also understands and embraces the cultural value of the arts, with programs like **Liberal Arts** and **Cowboy Arts**. Unsurprisingly, those programs also immerse students in the heart of their fields in a learn-by-doing environment. The world-class foundry, fully equipped shops and talented faculty all come together to create a space where students can unleash their creativity. Many graduates finish with a large portfolio of jewelry, pottery and even tools that they made during their course.


There are numerous extracurricular activities available for students to engage their minds and bodies. With a variety of student organizations, an e-sports team, a golf team and an impressive rodeo team, there is no shortage of activities on campus. Recognizing the economic realities, the school provides various scholarship options and helps students every step of the way with their FAFSA application. Qualifying New Mexico residents can get the incredible opportunity of attending college tuition-free. If you’re not in New Mexico, don’t worry: The **good neighbor scholarship** automatically qualifies anyone within a 135-mile radius for in-state tuition, and Amarillo lies squarely within that distance. Considering that it is one of New Mexico’s most affordable colleges, this will mean significant savings.

Whether you’re exploring options for high school students, considering a career change or just interested in cultivating a new skillset, Mesalands provides the perfect environment for learning and growth.

Visit mesalands.edu today and join the school’s ranks of highly qualified graduates.

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a Dozen to Devour

BY JASON BOYETT AND
PRESLIE BENTLEY

The Best Burgers in Amarillo & Canyon



If you want to spice up any conversation, ask someone to identify the best burger in Amarillo. It's a fun way to gauge personal character and taste, because burgers level the playing field. You can eat them at humble establishments like the Golden Light or at swanky new spots like Cellar 55. You can top them with nothing but pickles and mayo or you can load up with all manner of toppings, from jalapeños to sausage to shrimp. (Keep reading.)

Some of the city's best burgers come wrapped in paper. Some are served with a cloth napkin.

So we decided to itemize the area's abundance of burger options into a dozen categories to give some structure to our search for some of the best burgers in the area. You won't agree with all our choices, and we expect that. Our goal is to broaden your burger horizons, introduce you to unfamiliar restaurants and flavors, and celebrate this foundational classic of good eating.

Pro Tip: The specialty Chamo Dayva drink, prepared with pineapple Jarritos and chunks of mango, is a fresh, fruity take on the clamato base.

Creative

► No Manches Burger from Dayvasos JN

A vibrant restaurant chain that started in Chihuahua, Mexico, Amarillo's Dayvasos franchise is 1 of only 3 in the United States—and the only one that serves burgers. "They're known for micheladas," says Leimy Perez, who operates the franchise with her parents, Ismeralda and Juan Esparza. Dayvasos rose to prominence after being featured on Netflix's *La Divina Gula* ("Heavenly Bites"), an exploration of Mexican street food and creative drinks like micheladas.

But on Sundays in Texas, bars can only sell alcohol along with food, so the family decided they needed to include something more robust. Enter the burger menu. For our team, the No Manches burger had virtually no other competition when it came to representing creativity. "We wanted to be different, to have something nobody else has," Leimy says.

They succeeded.

A slang term in Spanish, *no manches* means something like "no way" or "are you kidding me?" That's a pretty accurate description of a diner's perspective on being served this burger. It comes stacked high with three hamburger patties, each topped with cheese and a thin slice of grilled ham. The pile also includes several strips of smoked hardwood bacon, a hot dog frank split lengthwise, lettuce, tomato and a delectable blend of sauces. It's topped by a bacon-wrapped jalapeño popper.

"It's like, wow," Leimy says. She's not wrong.

And for what it's worth, the burger comes on a five-inch-diameter homemade bun. The restaurant bakes its buns fresh several days a week.

Dayvasos opened in November and has quickly built a cult following in north Amarillo. And, yes, customers do actually order the No Manches burger. In fact, after opening, the family had to expand its grill. After all, cooking three patties and all that bacon and ham at once—for a single burger order—requires a lot of space.

1104 E. AMARILLO BLVD., 806.632.7243, DAYVASOSJNAMARILLOTX.COM

Don't Skip:

Furrbies (Butter Burger)

210 SW Sixth Ave., 806.220.0841

Pondaseta Pizza Company

(Akaushi Pub Burger)

1001 Second Ave. Depot, Canyon,
806.656.5100, pondaseta.com

Drunken Oyster (Bayou Burger)

7606 SW 45th Ave, Ste 100,
806.418.6668,
drunkenoysteramarillo.com

Girasol Cafe & Bakery

(Girasol Brunch Burger)

3201 S. Coulter St., 806.322.0023,
girasol.cafe

Bang for Your Buck

► Classic Burger from Bears Burgers & Dawgs

Barry “Bear” Tredway takes pricing seriously at Bears Burgers & Dawgs, located behind the United Supermarkets in Canyon. “We just don’t want to gouge anybody,” he says. “I’d rather make a little [money] off a lot of people than a lot of money from a few.”

He served us a double meat cheeseburger with add-ons including bacon and hatch green chiles. But a standard burger at Bears is just \$8.99, and the restaurant’s chili cheese dawgs and popular Frito pies are even less expensive.

“It’s the best burger in town,” Tredway says. The beef is ground chuck, the buns are from the Bread Box Bakery in Amarillo, and the green chiles are spicy Autumn Roast blends. “We hand-cut our fries, too,” he says.

The multi-story restaurant arrangement is unique, too, and the large windows on the upstairs dining area back up to the local railroad tracks with a front-row seat for trainspotting. (Bears regularly opens the space up for private parties and other events.)

In other words, it’s dive-worthy food in a spacious, clean, homey atmosphere. Which is probably why Canyon residents love it so much.

**2001 N. SECOND AVE., 806.452.8033,
FACEBOOK.COM/BEARSBURGERSANDDAWGS**

Don’t Skip:

YOLOS Restaurant (\$8 options)

3221 S. Western St., 806.337.0508, yolosamarillo.com

9th Inning Brews & Bites (BOGO Mondays)

3130 S. Soncy Road, Suite 100, 806.358.2220,
9thinningsportsbar.com

Home Plate Diner (Kids eat free on Saturdays)

5600 Bell St. 806.359.4444

Quattros (As low as \$5)

810 N. Buchanan St., 806.420.0028



Pro Tip: Try the Cherry Lime. Bear tells us a few regulars drive all the way from Amarillo because they prefer it. Growing up in Odessa, he got to have a cherry lime “if I was good for the week,” and he’s spent his restaurant career perfecting that childhood appreciation for the drink.



Upscale

► Wagyu Smash Burger from Cellar 55

“People don’t typically come here for a burger,” Cellar 55’s Chris Hazel explains. The restaurant’s elevated menu includes ribeyes, grouper, seafood and other dishes that get attention. “It tends to get overlooked.”

That’s a shame.

Made with 8 ounces of Wagyu beef from Texas, Nueske’s bacon from Wisconsin, Hatch green chiles from New Mexico, and locally baked buns from The Bread Box, every ingredient is intentional, right down to the cheese. “It’s provolone cheese, which is such a nice melting cheese that pairs really well with hearty meats,” Hazel says.

That hearty meat is seasoned with a secret blend of spices, which the Cellar 55 proprietor refuses to divulge. “They’re secret for a reason,” he insists. Add a little spicy mayo to the dish and you end up with what Hazel calls “the best burger I’ve ever had.”

You’ll have to decide that for yourself, but we agree that there’s something indulgent and fulfilling about biting into a well-considered cheeseburger over a spotless white tablecloth. You’ll be using that cloth napkin for sure.

2800 CIVIC CIRCLE, SUITE 500, 806.322.7655, CELLAR55AMA.COM

Don’t Skip:

OHMS Cafe & Bar (Bar burger)

619 S. Tyler St., 806.373.3233, ohmscafe.com

Public House (Angus Burger)

3333 S. Coulter St., 806.398.7777, publichouseamarillo.com

Crush Wine Bar & Grill (Local 4B meats double smash burger)

627 S. Polk St., 806.418.2011, crushamarillo.com

The Western Horseman Club (Trail Boss)

2501 E. I-40, 806.877.1600, westernhorsemanclub.com



Pro Tip: At Cellar 55, Hazel suggests pairing his burger with any “robust” drink, like a hearty porter or stout beer, a rich malbec or cabernet wine, or a tumbler of good bourbon. (That’s Buffalo Trace in the photo).

The Beef Brief

- ▶ **Texas is the No. 1 cattle-producing state in the U.S.**
- ▶ **The Texas Panhandle feeds more than 3 million heads of cattle every year.**
- ▶ **Texas is one of the top five dairy states in the nation.**
- ▶ **The Panhandle is responsible for 80 percent of the state's dairy operations.**
- ▶ **Hartley, Parmer and Castro counties are the top three milk-producing counties in Texas.**

Cheeseburger

▶ Harry the Horse's Hummer Burger from Hummer's

There are cheeseburgers, and then there's this burger from Hummer's, which has somehow built a passionate game-day crowd of regulars for more than four decades on Olsen Boulevard, and still feels like something of a hidden gem.

Harry the Horse's Hummer Burger has a different kind of cheese for every H in its name: Colby Jack, cheddar and bleu cheese dressing, along with all the fixings. It has, in the words of owner Jimmie Lou Simmans, "all the good stuff on it."

Hummer's feels like a blast from the past because, well, it is. The menu Ted Sanders created when he opened in 1983 has stayed virtually the same. Simmans came around in the late '90s, spending 10 years as a server and bartender and then another decade in management. Then, in 2018, she became the owner. That changed, but not much else.

"People will still come in and not even know that Ted doesn't own it anymore," she says. "I think that's a compliment." Why change a winning recipe?

Along with the menu, Hummers' clientele has also remained steady. "I see my regulars and their kids, their daughters, their friends," Simmans says. She's been around long enough that the kids are "getting old enough to drive themselves here and hang out and I just love it."

Hummers is a major hotspot for game days, especially during football season. "Saturdays, you can't even get in this place," she says.

**2600 PARAMOUNT BLVD., SUITE B2, 806.353.0723,
HUMMERSSPORTSCAFE.COM**

Don't Skip:

Hoffbrau Steak & Grill House (The King)

7203 W. I-40, 806.358.6595, hoffbrausteamandgrill.com

Shelby's Diner (King Air Burger)

4105 Tradewind St, 806.699.1008,
shelbysdineramarillo.com

Buns Over Texas (Large burger with cheese)

6045 SW 34th Ave., 806.358.6808, bunsovertexas.com

Lazy Gator (The All American)

6103 Hillside Road, 806.418.6768,
facebook.com/LazyGatorAmarillo



Pro Tip: If you want to know what to order at a restaurant, ask the owner what she eats. For Simmans, it's the Steak Bites. The 8 ounces of bite-sized steak cubes are cooked to your temperature with a side of cubed jack and cheddar cheeses, plus sliced avocado and jalapeños. There's a reason people have been ordering it for 42 years.

Dive

► Single Cheeseburger from Burger Barn

“You can’t cook in a bad mood,” Jami Meacham says at the Burger Barn. ““It’ll make your food taste bad.” Located on Dumas Drive, north of Cherry Ave., this classic, hut-style drive-up serves River Road, Rolling Hills and a steady stream of TXDOT workers.

And if mood is the secret sauce to good food, Meacham must be pretty happy with her job.

Owned by Bennie Johnson, this humble roadside hut once belonged to his aunt and uncle in the 1990s. Johnson took over in 2016. It’s definitely nostalgic. Customers roll up to the red-roofed structure in the middle of a dirt lot, place an order, then eat in the car or at a shaded picnic table.

Their most popular burger is what Meacham describes as “just a juicy, old-fashioned cheeseburger.” She grew up in the neighborhood and has enjoyed the Burger Barn for most of her life. Meacham says they still use the same recipe as when it first opened, with always-fresh patties and very competitive prices.

“It’s just good, home-cooked food,” Johnson says. He recalls when one customer speculated that Burger Barn must sell “more hamburgers per square foot than anybody in the nation.” Who knows? Maybe it’s true.

8528 DUMAS DRIVE, 806.381.9499, [FACEBOOK.COM/PEOPLE/BURGER-BARN](https://facebook.com/people/burger-barn)

Don’t Skip:

Beef Burger Barrel

3102 Plains Blvd., 806.374.0101

Rockin’ Zebra Soda Shoppe

404 15th St., Canyon, 806.655.3381, facebook.com/rockinzebrasodashoppe

Brunch Truck Cafe

213 SW Seventh Ave., 806.373.4199,
thebrunchtruckamarillo.com

Zombiez Bar & Grill

711 SW 10th Ave., 806.331.7305, facebook.com/ZombieFriendz



Pro Tip: It’s not named “Burrito Barn,” but the breakfast burritos have a solid reputation among River Road school district teachers and employees. Meacham says the enormous three-meat breakfast burrito—sausage, ham and bacon, plus potato, eggs and cheese—is a neighborhood favorite. “They’re really popular,” she says.

Pro Tip: No other restaurant in Amarillo boasts anything like YCSF's legendary Animal Fries, which are crispy, battered, covered in bacon and caramelized onions, then drenched in Scott's kicky remoulade sauce. A half order is the perfect complement to your burger.

Veggie

► House Veggie Burger from YCSF

These days, vegetarians enjoy far more burger options than in the past, but not every veggie-lover appreciates more processed meat alternatives like the Impossible Burger or Beyond Meat patties. That's why local non-meat-eaters love the simplicity of Scott and Rin Buchanan's veggie burgers.

They're made from mixed veggies, including bell peppers, along with rotating base ingredients based on what's available—chickpeas, black beans, quinoa, bulgur or rice—plus a little panko as a binder. The veggie burger's ingredients may shift, but somehow the taste is always amazing. It also includes nut-free vegan cheese and vegan remoulade sauce, along with caramelized onions and fresh greens on a vegan brioche bun.

In a city that prides itself on its beef, this burger tastes almost like the real thing.

Scott Buchanan adds that YCSF's burger offerings—including the actual beef ones—have really taken off over the past year. "They're a big part of our menu," he says.

Part of the appeal was the restaurant's shift from a single large patty to two smashed patties. "Over the last few months, we've converted all our burgers to smashburgers," he says. It's the same amount of meat—Buchanan weighs out 180 grams for each burger—but the thinner 90-gram patties end up with those lacy, crispy edges that patrons love. "They're just massively popular right now," he says.

**2916 WOLFLIN AVE., 806.353.9273,
YELLOWCITYSTREETFOOD.COM**

Don't Skip:

Feed Me (The Boris Attack)

3407 W. Amarillo Blvd., 806.600.0986,
veganrestaurantamarillo.com

Crush (Not-a-Burger)

627 S. Polk St., 806.418.2011, crushamarillo.com

That Weird Place (Breakfast Patty Melt)

4117 Business Park Drive



Drive-Thru/Drive-In

► KN Special from KN Root Beer

We admit that KN is not a drive-thru restaurant, nor is there any literal driving-in. It's more of a drive-up joint where the servers actually come out to take your order at your vehicle's window. That's close enough for our purposes, and KN's legendary local status earns it a little wiggle room anyway.

Now owned by Jim and Candy Dewitz—who also run Big Jim's Pizza Co. and the Tascosa Drive-in Movie Theater—this tiny restaurant has been operating on Olsen since 1968, making it one of the city's oldest, still operational drive-up burger joints.

Big Jim himself put on an apron and cooked us the KN Special. It's made with two patties of Greater Omaha beef—"always fresh, never frozen, smashed to order," Dewitz says—with add-ons including bacon, grilled onions, grilled mushrooms, grilled jalapeños or green chiles. That burger is KN's most popular by far.

Dewitz says its secret is not so secret: "A good burger starts with the right combination of fat to meat," he says. For him, that perfect ratio is 80/20, along with a little butter and a secret combination of spices. (That secret combo is also not especially confidential. "It's the holy trinity of seasonings," he divulges. In other words: salt, pepper and garlic powder.)

What he won't divulge is the 60-year-old recipe behind KN's homemade root beer. Up to three times a week, the restaurant mixes up a 50-gallon batch of it, served up (upon request) in a frosty mug.

3900 OLSEN BLVD., 806.355.4391, KNROOTBEERAMARILLO.COM

Don't Skip:

The Corner Grill

14588 FM 2590, 806.806.0007, thecornergrill0586.s4shops.com

Daniel's Drive In

2911 E. Amarillo Blvd., 806.383.0066

Elmo's Drive Inn

2618 SW Third Ave., 806.374.3566, facebook.com/ElmosDriveIn

Hud's

7311 W. Amarillo Blvd., 806.351.1499

4411 Bell St., 806.331.4837, hudsama.com

Pro Tip: If you have time to eat in your car, go for that frosty mug of root beer. Or level up with a frosty root beer float using vanilla Blue Bell ice cream. The sides at KN are all worthwhile, but for a truly unique experience, try the "Munchers." We haven't found these little fried potato-and-green-chile delights anywhere else in town.



Spicy

► Hot Ass Burger from Charlie's Burgers and Brews

First things first: Coyote Bluff's Burger from Hell is extremely popular and has, at this point, gained an international reputation for being spicy. The internet loves it. We know this and we suspect you know this, too. If you appreciate an unapologetically hot burger and haven't tried it, then by all means, go for it.

But we keep thinking about the other local burgers sizzling in the long shadow of the Burger from Hell. They're just as hot, and maybe hotter. Why not give them some love?

That mindset sent us to the family-owned Charlie's Burgers and Brews. Locals may remember owner Charlie Collins from a previous restaurant, Chubby's, on Historic Sixth Street. After selling Chubby's in 2013 and moving to the Metroplex, he and his wife, Becca, returned to Amarillo two years ago and launched this establishment near 45th and Georgia. "It's American food," he says. "Everybody loves a good burger."

He admits, however, that not everyone loves the Hot Ass Burger. It's ... special. When we mentioned we wanted to try it, the entire staff snapped to attention. Don't let the name fool you: This is a very serious burger. Collins added it to the menu hoping to challenge restaurants like Coyote Bluff. "I thought, 'We can do one better,'" he says.

Drenched in a notorious Carolina Reaper-based condiment known as "Death Sauce," the burger is so unimaginably hot that Collins—or, rather, his attorney—requires diners to sign a waiver before eating it. No joke. The burger is served alongside plastic sanitary gloves so you don't accidentally get the sauce in your eyes. There's no avoiding it anyway. The sauce is mixed into the 81/19 beef as well. "It'll choke you up just cooking it," Collins says.

Don't worry about the grilled jalapeños or habanero cheese that accompany the beef. The heat they produce might as well not exist because the Death Sauce starts screaming from the moment it hits your tongue. This is the kind of cheeseburger that bites you right back, hard, and at the time of our visit in late May, only 11 people had finished it in the restaurant's history.

Two members of our team tried very small bites, and we'll just say this: Holy smokes. The attorney is right to be nervous.

4515 S. GEORGIA ST., 806.678.8647

Don't Skip:

Coyote Bluff (Burger From Hell)

2417 S. Grand St., 806.373.4640, coyotebluffcafe.com

Six Car Pub & Brewery (Climate Change)

625 S. Polk St., 806.576.3396, sixcarpub.com

Buff's (En Fuego)

2201 Fourth Ave., Canyon, 806.655.2833, buffscanyon.com

Dillo's Craft Burgers (The Rattler)

2806 SW Sixth Ave., 806.356.0024



Pro Tip: The burgers are Charlie's contribution, but don't sleep on Becca Collins' talent for dessert. She bakes a dessert daily for the restaurant—it changes constantly and always looks beautiful—and banana pudding is a regular on the menu. In fact, Charlie insists the only antivenom for the heat of the Hot Ass Burger is a serving of banana pudding.



Classic

► Waller Burger from Golden Light Cafe

Can we publish an Amarillo burger feature without mentioning the Golden Light Cafe? Obviously not. If there's a cheeseburger more closely aligned with Amarillo's dining tastes and history, we haven't found one.

The Golden Light dates back to 1946. It is the oldest restaurant in the city and, according to legend, may be the oldest on Route 66 continuously operating in the same location. Now owned by Angela Corpening—a former server and bartender—it remains an iconic stop on Historic Route 66.

Beyond its longevity, Corpening says the secret to a Golden Light burger's flavor is not owing to ingredients but to hardware: "We still use the original grill," she says, explaining that nearly 80 years of seasoning contribute something special to the meat sizzling on top of it. Maybe it's flavor. Maybe it's vibes. "The atmosphere definitely plays a part," Corpening says. In a digital world, the Golden Light remains refreshingly analog, relying on hand-written tickets and true, short-order cooking.

For variety, we chose to feature the Waller Burger, which sandwiches jalapeños between two slices of American cheese, on top of 5.5 ounces of old-fashioned, 80/20 beef. Importantly, the Golden Light's burger is prepared upside-down. The patty sits below the top bun, pressing down on the lettuce, tomato, pickles and onions. "That's just the way it's always been done," Corpening says, with a shrug. That's it. That's the reason.

No argument here. You can add bacon to level up an already legendary burger, but some things you'd better not change.

2908 SW SIXTH AVE., 806.374.9237, GOLDENLIGHTCAFE.COM

Don't Skip:

Youngblood's Cafe

620 SW 16th Ave., 806.342.9411,
youngbloodscafe.com

Red River Steakhouse

4332 SW 45th Ave., 806.316.5082,
redriversteakhouse.net

Malcolm's Eats & Treats

2100 Paramount Blvd., 806.355.3892

Shelby's Diner

4105 Tradewind St., 806.699.1008,
shelbysdineramarillo.com

Pro Tip: Golden Light's cheese fries are almost as iconic as the cheeseburger. They are hand-cut daily, topped with bacon, with just the right amount of decadence when you dip them in ranch. If you're dining with two or three others, just order a large side and divide it out at the table. Trust us: You'll have plenty.



Bacon

► Bacon Green Chile Cheeseburger from Blue Sky

Few meals hit that sensory and savory sweet spot like a bacon cheeseburger. The crunch of a crispy piece of bacon contrasts with the tenderness of the burger patty and the melt of the cheese and it's just the perfect mix of indulgent, salty goodness.

No one does it better than Blue Sky.

Locally owned, with two locations—one on Coulter and the original on Western alongside Interstate 40—Blue Sky has become an Amarillo institution since it opened in 2003. Robert Cady has managed the Western location for more than 20 years.

The burgers use Nolan Ryan beef, peppered with in-house burger seasoning and topped with Wright Brand bacon. “It has the best flavor,” Cady says. The I-40 location alone prepares an astonishing 500 patties a day, with up to 1,200 on weekend days. That kind of weekly volume makes it hard for them to use locally baked buns, so they rely on fresh-baked buns from Harvest Moon Baking Company out of Denver.

But Cady insists the true secret sauce at Blue Sky isn't about what goes on the grill, but the people operating it. “A lot of our consistency starts with our employees,” he says.

4201 W. I-40, 806.355.8100 / 5060 S. COULTER ST., 806.322.3888, BLUESKYTEXAS.COM

Don't Skip:

Smokey Joe's (The Smokey Burger)
2903 SW Sixth Ave., 806.331.6698

Bar 3 (Bison Bacon Burger)
9101 S. Coulter St., 806.353.7003, bar3prestonwest.com

Pan-Handlers Cafe (Justus For All)
410 S. Taylor St., 806.352.2590, thepan-handlers.com

West Texas Sports Grill (West Texas Burger)
1512 Fifth Ave., Canyon, 806.452.7135

Pro Tip: Patrons love the sides at Blue Sky, including the fried mushrooms and onion rings. But for our dollar, nothing compares to the popular Anaheim chile sticks. It's a mild pepper, and sometimes Tex-Mex joints even use Anaheim chiles instead of poblano peppers for chile relleno dishes. Other than burgers, the chile sticks “are probably our top-selling food item,” Cady says.



Pro Tip: Don't miss the sides. Our team loved the cheese curds and tater tots, especially dipped in the housemade Shark Sauce—a delectable combination of mayo and barbecue sauce. Wash it down with a cherry lime. “We use two whole, fresh-squeezed limes in every one,” Bailey reveals. You can tell.





Hidden Gem

► Cheeseburger, Green Chile Bacon Burger and Spicy BBQ Burger from Shark Beach Burgers

“Hidden” is a relative term here, because it’s hard to miss the surfboards, shrimp netting, bikinied mannequins, and photo-opportunity fake wave alongside the Claude Highway near the entrance to Lake Tanglewood. Also the literal truckloads of sand. Just about everything on this 10-acre “beach” stands out because, well, Amarillo is 600 miles from the nearest beach.

Shark Beach is only hidden because it’s outside the city limits, and if you don’t come here on purpose—for one of its nearly 90 concerts this summer, for instance—you might not ever see it.

“Parents come here because their kids can have freedom instead of just sitting in a restaurant environment,” says proprietor Brian Bailey, who operates the restaurant and venue with his wife, Brenda. The family came here from South Padre Island after the death of Brenda’s grandmother, Charlotte Schroeter, who operated Gram’s Burger Farm on the property. They rebranded as Shark Beach in 2020 to meet the takeout food demand early in the pandemic.

And despite going all-in on the beachy vibes, they pay close attention to the edible side of the business. “We care a lot about the food,” Bailey says. The green chile burger includes huge slabs of green chiles, for instance, instead of the usual diced topping. The bacon is cooked fresh. The fresh veggies are prepped every day. The sauces are homemade, including the ranch dip. The beef patties are made by hand and weighed by the gram.

“We want consistency in all our food,” he says, citing the dependability of Chick-fil-A and In-N-Out Burger locations as inspiration. “For us, that’s the key to success. Every time you go here, the burger will be the same.”

The food doesn’t change, but the surrounding experience is always being upgraded. Brian is full of energy and has big ideas, including Amarillo’s ocean-free version of Sandcastle Days coming in September.

**1505 E. FM 1151, 806.335.5644,
SHARKBEACHAMARILLO.COM**

Don’t Skip:

Lone Star Bar & Grill

935 E. FM 1151, 806.622.9827

North Heights Discount & Cafe

1621 NW 18th Ave., 806.418.6751

Pork n Things BBQ

10816 SE Third Ave., 806.699.7675,
facebook.com/PorkNThingsBbq

The Falcon

2300 Wells, Bushland, 806.803.0219, thefalconinbushland.com

Pro Tip: Not in a burger mood?

Tanya also prepares amazing bolas de arroz (rice balls), which combine sushi-grade rice with asada or shrimp—plus dipping sauces—for an incredible sampling of Mexican street-food favorites. Tanya's fries were among the best we sampled on our burger tour.

Food Truck

► Tanya's Burger, from Tanya's Burgers

"Oh, I love them," Tanya Torres says. She's talking about burgers. After years as a stay-at-home mom, she found that what made her happiest was cooking for her family. She considered tacos, but there were plenty of taco trucks on Amarillo Boulevard already, so she decided to focus on something different. "I wanted it to be special," she adds.

Tanya's Burgers is the result. Opened in 2022, it serves a variety of big, flavorful, unique burger combinations at locations and events across town, though most days she sets up the trailer at 1010 N. Fillmore St., between downtown Amarillo and the Boulevard.

The most popular burger on her menu is the one bearing her name. Tanya's Burger is a true fusion of the cheeseburger with Mexican culture, including avocado and beef franks along with the usual fixings. "That's the way I like to eat it," she says, with a smile. "And I don't like to eat small things."

Every burger on the menu is far from small. These are five-inch-diameter, hand-prepared patties, grilled perfectly inside the trailer. Torres insists, however, that the key to an unforgettable burger isn't the beef or fixings, but the passion behind it. "It's just the love," she says, that brings customers back.

Like the regulars who travel from downtown on weekdays, Torres even has patrons who'll drive from Dumas or Canyon to get their fix. 🍔

2200 E. AMARILLO BLVD.,
FACEBOOK.COM/TANYASBURGERS

Don't Skip:

Tank's Burgers

facebook.com/tanksfoodtruck

Brent's Burgers

7150 Bell St., facebook.com/brents.burgers

O'Shay's

806.206.9162, oshaysfoodtruck.com

60 Burgers

3000 W. Farmers Ave., 806.904.9627

An Ode to Whataburger

By PRESLEE BENTLEY

This summer, I've had the amazing opportunity to intern with *Brick & Elm*, and tag along on our burger tour of Amarillo. Despite living here my whole life, I was introduced to a dozen restaurants that were mostly unfamiliar to me but all-around delicious. Being able to interview restaurant owners and photograph the same kind of food 12 different times was surprisingly entertaining. I walked away with a lot more knowledge—not just as a local foodie, but also as a journalist.

But we can't talk about burgers in Amarillo without talking about Whataburger.

For high school and college students, nothing compares to leaving Friday Night Lights or College Gameday and heading straight to sit in line for two hours at the distinct orange-and-white-striped building. The second I could drive, it became a tradition. As a college student now, my traditions and tastes have yet to change.

Even before the football games ended, whispers were already spreading about where everyone would meet after the fourth quarter. If one Whataburger was too busy, then we'd hit the next location—but going to a different restaurant was never an option.

My Whataburger order depends on the time of day. I personally love how thin the patties are, so a cheeseburger is always my go-to during daytime. But considering that I normally eat there late at night after games or house

parties, the Honey Butter Chicken Biscuit is the unofficial fan favorite of my generation. The hype behind this sandwich really does live up to its word. The crispness of the salty chicken pairs perfectly with the creamy “liquid gold” that oozes out of the buttery biscuit.

For me, Whataburger is a constant. It is always the place to stop on road trips because of the familiar menu and a building that is a copy-paste of our hometown locations. Once I was driving home from college in the dark, anxious and lost, winding my way through an unfamiliar city. Then I saw the orange “W,” shining bright. Immediately I pulled over, relieved. I felt safe.

But it's rare that I'm alone at a Whataburger. Friends would pile in my car solely to address a craving. Sometimes we could fill the restaurant at 2 a.m. The loudest laughs I have ever belted out have been in the booths of this fast-food joint. (This is not uncommon with my peers, and thankfully the employees never seem to care.)

From those back seat rides in our parents' cars to those sneaky late-night outings in high school—and even while nursing hangovers after late-night football games—Whataburger will always be there to satisfy the cravings of my generation.

It may not be locally owned, but there's no question it's part of growing up here.



PHOTO BY PRESLEE BENTLEY

More Than Shelter

A Look Inside
Transformation Park

BY JASON BOYETT

66 JULY/AUG 2025

BRICKANDELM.COM



After years of planning, fundraising and construction, Transformation Park finally opened in May. This shelter and pallet home village provides a safe space for Amarillo's homeless community, the result of a unique public/private coalition including the City of Amarillo, Hillside Christian Church, local organizations and generous corporate and individual donors.

Its indoor/outdoor Safe Space has now opened to those needing a place to spend the night. Meanwhile, more than two dozen individuals have moved into its more permanent Cabin Community, finding stability and responsibility as they strive to get back on their feet.

"It's transitional shelter, a mercy shelter," explains Mark Zimmerman, a former Hillside Christian Church pastor who serves as the executive director of Transformation Park. The facility's design and focus came together after Zimmerman and Jason Riddlespurger, director of community development for the City of Amarillo, toured similar facilities across the country. Riddlespurger was central to introducing the idea and bringing the various partnerships to the table.

Trauma on the Street

Amarillo's homelessness crisis has been well-documented. The city's most recent Point in Time Count documented nearly 641 total individuals experiencing homelessness—with 321 unsheltered. That's a significant jump from the 525 people counted in 2024. Amarillo's location on I-40 regularly brings new people into the city.

Beyond the numbers, Zimmerman is far more interested in the personal stories of the men and women who end up at Transformation Park needing help. "These folks have trauma in their lives—probably [from] before they became homeless, but definitely since they became homeless—because there's a lot of trauma that happens on the street," he says.

Zimmerman and his volunteers serve individuals with mental illnesses, addictions and the ongoing desperation of survival. But they're also encountering men and women who love and care for their pets, who want to give back, who simply found themselves on the wrong side of a string of bad luck.

"Our big goal is food, water, shelter, safety. That's what

we offer everybody, no matter whether they're in the Cabin Community or Safe Space. That's the floor we provide," he says.

Low-Barrier, High Opportunity

Importantly, Transformation Park is a low-barrier shelter with few entry requirements. It allows pets and possessions that other shelters might turn away. It recognizes that substance abuse may be a reality for those it serves, but housing and safety are bigger needs. Stabilization, Zimmerman says, only comes after shelter and safety have been established.

"One guy told me in the [entrance] interview, he goes, 'Mark, you close your eyes at night, you wake up dead,'" he says. Zimmerman starts to say something else, then pauses, and nods toward the restroom facility.

"Watch this."

Several feet away, a deeply tan woman in dirty sweatpants, who had been walking away, notices an elderly man in a wheelchair rolling himself toward the facility's door. She stops, spins around, and jogs over to help him to enter.

She smiles as he mumbles his thanks.

Both have experienced homelessness. They don't really know each other. But they recognize each other's humanity. "It's just great to watch that community happen," Zimmerman says. "They've been helping each other out. But they do that on the streets, too."

On a sunny Friday morning in May, just days after Transformation Park's official opening, those residents are just two of several dozen people waking up in a place much safer than the streets.

As Zimmerman guided *Brick & Elm* through the facility that morning, he introduced us to residents, volunteers and several friendly dogs as he shared about the work and mission of Transformation Park.

For safety, the corridors between pallet homes are spacious and well-lit. Residents range from age 21 to 73. Right now, around two-thirds of the 45 homes are occupied. “Our goal is to be at full occupancy,” Zimmerman says, “hopefully by the end of August.”

Homelessness Statistics

January 2025 Data	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Overall	320	321	641
Male	181	223	404
Female	139	89	228
Children (Under18)	32	0	32
Veteran Verified	28	14	42

JANUARY 2025 POINT IN TIME COUNT, CITY OF AMARILLO

Residents like Steve apply for and must be accepted into the tiny house-style Cabin Community, where they live in private, one-room pallet homes. “The cabin’s a step up,” Zimmerman says. “It’s a lot more freedom. It’s also more responsibility.” To live there, residents sign a contract, which requires 20 hours of “giving back” every week at Transformation Park. They may work in the laundry area, perform janitorial services, or do light security while pursuing stability and even outside jobs. “We all pitch in and do our chores. As they become more gainfully employed, we negotiate those hours down—but nothing less than seven [hours],” Zimmerman says. In the process, residents learn interpersonal communication skills and benefit from having a daily purpose.





A large community space within the Cabin Community gives Shirley and other residents a place to socialize and relax. "They all have unique stories and unique journeys, and we keep telling them, 'This is just one stop on your road,'" Zimmerman says. "This is not your final destination." After 30 days living in the Cabin Community, residents sit down with Transformation Park staff to discuss their goals and progress. "We're OK with two steps forward, one step back," he says.



Left to right:
Dale Meixner
Jimmy Brown
Mark Zimmerman
Pennye Fitch
Mo Senteny-Dixon



Drew and his dog, Deuce, have been staying in the Safe Space, which offers shaded outdoor and indoor shelter, with cots for sleeping, bins for individuals' possessions, and even dog crates and a secure turf area for pets. "They can set up the cot wherever they want," Zimmerman says of residents. Some don't like being under a roof. Others prefer the safety of four walls. He lets them choose where they're most comfortable.

While living in the Safe Space, residents can leave bags of dirty clothing for Transformation Park staff and volunteers to launder. They also have access to twice-daily meals and 24-hour restroom facilities. Showers have a 5-minute time limit. There are no time limits for individuals in the Safe Space.

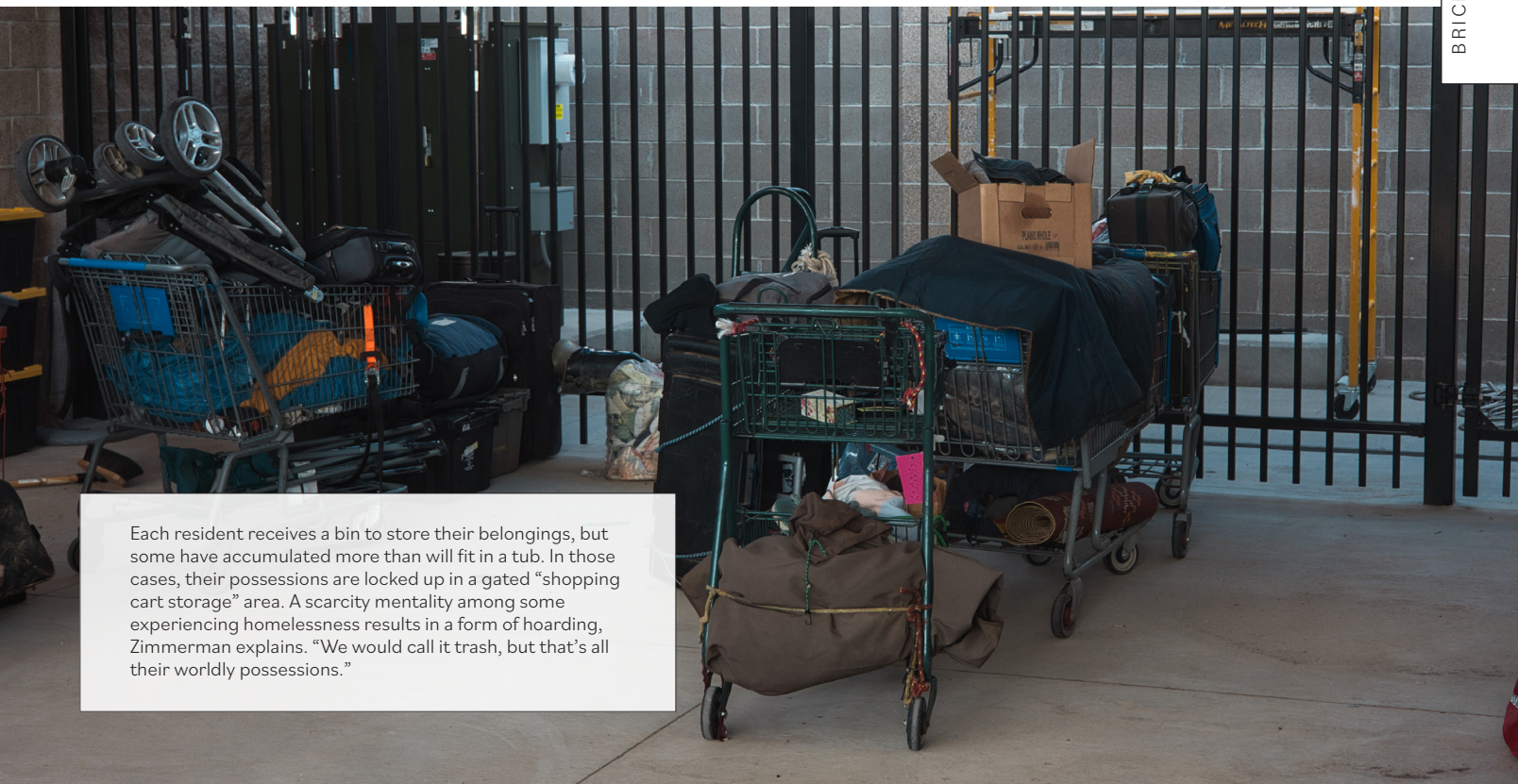
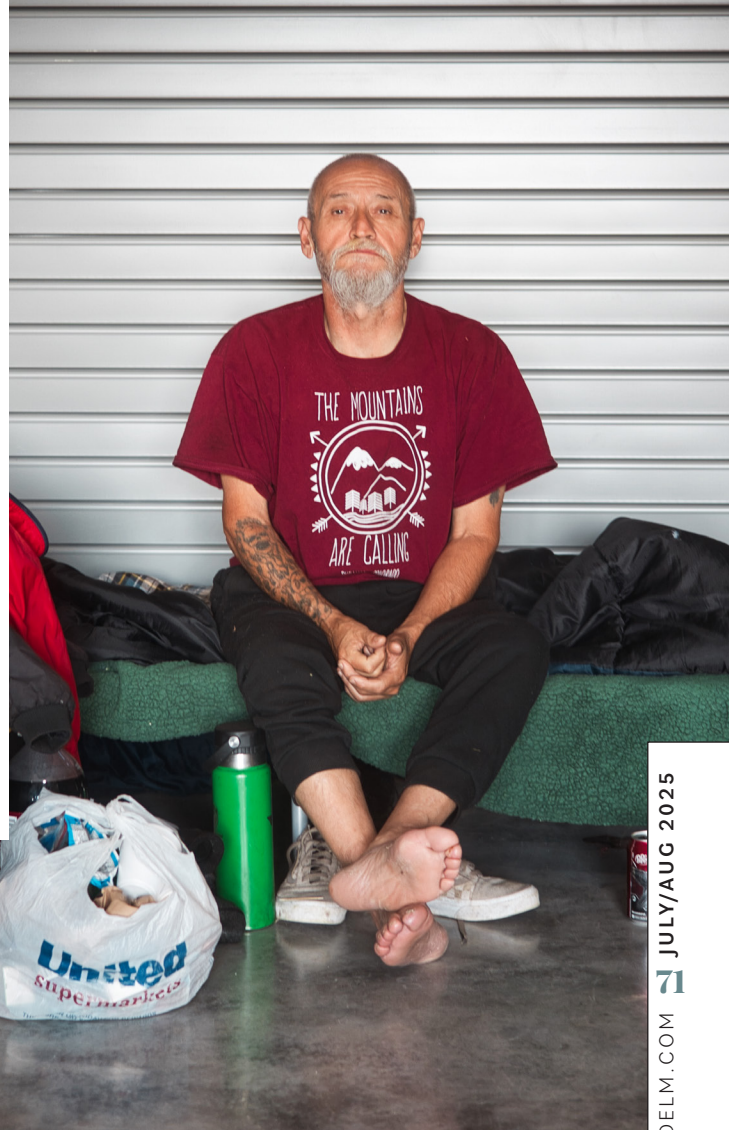


These "amnesty lockers" are set up outside the facility. "You can lock up anything you want there. It's your business, not ours," Zimmerman says. He admits these could contain drugs, alcohol or weapons. Those aren't allowed inside the facility—and people using the shelter must pass through security and a metal detector—but Transformation Park doesn't police the outside lockers. "That way, we gain their trust. We know it's going to take baby steps."





Juan (above) and Larry (right) are both living in the Safe Space. “We try to call them by name as much as we can,” Zimmerman says of residents. “That’s a big thing, because people look past them, or through them. They treat them as everything other than human. We want to restore that humanity.”



Each resident receives a bin to store their belongings, but some have accumulated more than will fit in a tub. In those cases, their possessions are locked up in a gated “shopping cart storage” area. A scarcity mentality among some experiencing homelessness results in a form of hoarding, Zimmerman explains. “We would call it trash, but that’s all their worldly possessions.”

Several dogs have already become residents of Transformation Park, including Trunks, a puppy belonging to Cabin Community resident Marcus. Students from the Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine help care for these dogs, operating a regular mobile clinic and providing spay-and-neuter services. "It allows their students to get a hands-on experience," Zimmerman says. Dogs must stay on a leash or in their crates.



Want to get involved? Transformation Park is accepting volunteers.

Weekday Volunteer Opportunities

- Sandwich Team (Wed & Fri)
- Dinner Team (Mon-Fri)
- Kitchen Team
- Cooking Team (Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri)
- Prep Team (Mon-Thurs)
- Delivery Team (Mon-Fri)
- Laundry (Daily)
- Cleaning (Daily)
- Resident Services (Daily)
- Logistics Team (Mon-Thurs)

Saturday Volunteer Opportunities

- Dinner Team
- Laundry
- Cleaning
- Resident Services

Sunday Volunteer Opportunities

- Sandwich Team
- Laundry
- Cleaning
- Resident Services

Find Transformation Park's Needs List on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or at mytransformationpark.com.



Residents of the Cabin Community have their own snack room, complete with lockers and refrigerators where they store food and drinks. Two meals are served daily at Transformation Park—breakfast and dinner—but residents also have access to a microwave.



A percentage of cabins are ADA-compliant for residents using wheelchairs. At least one staff member is always on-site, and during the early weeks of operation, Zimmerman and a few others with de-escalation training have been rotating overnights in an empty cabin. “I’d rather be five seconds away than 15 minutes away,” he says.



Funding for each cabin and its furniture has been provided by local businesses and individual donations, with each sponsor indicated in a frame on the door of every home.

The public/private partnerships that made Transformation Park possible include gifts at a variety of levels, which are reflected on a donor wall near the amnesty lockers. The organization’s “20,000 Strong” monthly giving campaign seeks 20,000 individuals who give \$10 a month to the program. These monthly gifts provide recurring support for housing, food, clothing and other services. 🙏



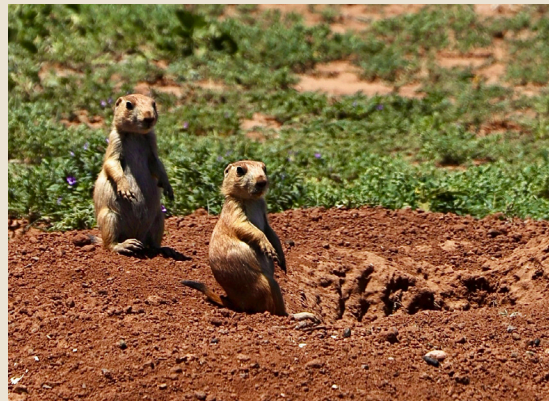
HAPPY TRAILS

BY JAMIE FLECK

A note from Michele and Jason: We have long admired Jamie Fleck for her baking business, Flecks of Love. But what most locals may not know is that she is a talented author and photographer who specializes in hiking guides. Her books include Best Lake Hikes Texas (2025) and Hiking Oklahoma (2021). We asked her to identify for our readers the best hikes within a short drive of Amarillo and Canyon.

The Texas Panhandle offers breathtaking scenery. Prairie grassland intersects with towering, age-old bluffs. Unique geological features add character to the landscape. In the spring and summer, the region is awash with vibrant wildflowers and blooming cacti. Fortunately for locals, all this can be enjoyed at multiple recreational areas nearby.

Prerequisites: Trails in the Texas Panhandle are best hiked in the spring or autumn. If hiking in the summer, begin your hike early in the morning as most trails have minimal to no shade. Make sure to bring at least one liter of water for every hour you will be on the trail. Wear appropriate hiking shoes, long-sleeved shirts and pants. Apply sunscreen and insect repellent frequently. Stay on the designated trails. Be alert for any rattlesnakes and do not venture close to cliff or bluff edges.



HAYNES RIDGE OVERLOOK & UPPER NORTH PRONG TRAILS

Caprock Canyons State Park & Trailway

Trail length: 6.53-mile lollipop (a single-trail “stem” with a loop at the end)
Distance from Amarillo: 87 miles

Fee: \$5 for ages 13 and older; free for Texas State Park Pass holders, discount/free for Texas Parklands Passport holders

At the eastern portion of Palo Duro Canyon lies Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway. It offers unique wildlife sightings for every visitor, with its prairie dog towns and roaming Southern Plains bison. In the spring, the area is lush with sunshine-hued Engelmann daisies and buttercups. Blackfoot daisies, prairie spiderwort, spotted bee balm, and Indian blankets also add splashes of color throughout the landscape.

The Haynes Ridge Overlook Trail, with its rewarding views, is accessible from the North Prong Spur Trailhead. Juniper, scrub oak and prickly pear cacti flourish along the route. As you head north, you will cut through a rocky passageway before you encounter the Haynes Ridge Overlook Trail after half a mile on the route. Bear left (west), taking the loop in a clockwise direction. (While you can continue on the North Prong Spur and take the loop in a counterclockwise direction, you would be leaving the most challenging part of the trail for last.)

The Haynes Ridge Overlook Trail is not for the faint of heart. When the mileage clocks at 0.62 miles, you will ascend more than 600 feet up John Haynes Ridge until the 0.93-mile mark. After this point, the path interchanges between flat surfaces and rocky ascents. Panoramic views of the Caprock Escarpment are available from both sides of the trail. When you reach a vista at 2.45 miles, make sure to take a break and savor the scenery. The painting-worthy outlook from this vantage point at about 3,160 feet in elevation is one of several reasons the climb is worth it. Bluffs and cliffs composed of

layers of rock in a myriad of colors put on a spectacular display of reds, oranges and whites that took more than 250 million years in the making.

At 2.79 miles, you reach the Upper North Prong Trail and Upper South Prong Trail connections. Head slightly right onto the Upper North Prong Trail, toward Fern Cave. When the mileage clocks at 2.88 miles, bear right at the brown Fern Cave sign. There will be a steep and rocky descent of 330 feet from this point until you reach the spur to Fern Cave at 3.14 miles. Maintain a northwest heading and make sure to follow the brown metal markers with red-and-white reflector tape to stay on track, as there will be several offshoots. Take the short spur to see the Ogallala Aquifer-fed Fern Cave. The maidenhair ferns usually bloom after decent rainfall and during the spring. (If you wish to see it in its full emerald glory, make sure to call the park headquarters ahead of time to ask if the ferns are still flourishing.) After basking in the cool air of the overhang, head north on the Upper North Prong Trail.

The trail will continue to descend in an easterly direction until the 3.4-mile mark, where the elevation is 2,695 feet. From here to the Upper North Prong Spur connection, the trail remains flat. The Last Dance, a geological formation reminiscent of a dancing couple, towers to your right (south) at the 4.35-mile mark. You will start to notice shimmering gypsum rock embedded in the red soil around you, all the way to the Upper North Prong Spur connection at 5.20 miles. You will return to the trailhead at 6.53 miles.



MARIPOSA TRAIL SYSTEM

Wildcat Bluff Nature Center

Trail length: 3.43-mile lollipop
Distance from Amarillo: Just northwest of town

Fee: Adults \$7, children \$5; free for Discovery Center Collective and Wildcat Bluff membership holders

For more than 30 years, the Wildcat Bluff Nature Center has been a proponent for nature conservation and education, continuously connecting people to nature with its trails and learning programs. On May 10, it celebrated the addition of the Mariposa Trail system. Situated on 125 acres donated by the Mariposa Eco-Village, the trail system is a combination of the Mariposa Trail and Carol's Loop. Carol's Loop is named after the philanthropist Caroline Bush Emeny, the original donor of the Wildcat Bluff land.

The topography of Wildcat Bluff is characterized by prairie grasses, verdant mesquites and undulating hills. All this natural beauty can be experienced from the Mariposa Trail system. Butterfly signs along the ADA-accessible Libb's Trail outside the headquarters indicate where to connect with the Mariposa Trail system. The paved path ends at about 325 feet, and from there bear right (northwest) onto the dirt trail. At 410 feet, you will reach the connection to Carol's Loop. While this route is optional, it does provide beautiful, panoramic views of the valley and prairie. Carol's Loop borders Soncy Road for a brief period when you head south. When the mileage clocks at 0.45 miles, you will be afforded

pristine, spectacular views. Yuccas are the predominant flowering plant as you circle the grassland, while Hartweg's sundrops, Tahoka daisies, and Plains fleabane make an occasional appearance in the spring and early summer.

At 0.65 miles, bear left (west) when you reconnect with the Mariposa Trail. The Chinampas Garden will be to your left as you head south, shy of a mile on the trail. The garden is a small-scale adaptation of the ancient Latin American agricultural system. It features geometric sections of crops, built on a combination of sediment and organic matter, separated by water. The Chinampas Garden contains plant cuttings (willow, cottonwood, locust, grape), seedlings (black walnut, chokecherry, buffaloberry, pecan), and seeds (corn, squash, beans, peas).

The trail becomes overgrown and less defined after you cross the dirt road at 1.23 miles. Use the pink ties as guidance. The Mariposa Trail becomes hillier before it intersects with the Gnarly Mesquite Trail at 1.93 miles. At this point you can continue on toward the windmill and bluff lookout, or you can turn around and head back toward headquarters.



A dirt trail winds through a lush landscape of green trees and grasses under a clear blue sky. The trail is in the foreground, leading into a dense forest of green trees and shrubs. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is a beautiful natural setting.

“The topography of Wildeat Bluff is characterized by prairie grasses, verdant mesquites and undulating hills. All this natural beauty can be experienced from the Mariposa Trail system.”



CCC TRAIL WITH GOODNIGHT PEAK SCENIC LOOP

Palo Duro Canyon State Park

Trail length: 3.5 miles out and back with optional lollipop
Distance from Amarillo: 20 to 25 miles

Fee: \$8 for ages 13 and older; free for Texas State Park Pass holders; discount/free for Texas Parklands Passport holders



Of course, you know Palo Duro Canyon State Park, home to the second largest canyon in the U.S. and showcasing geological layers more than 250 million years old. Palo Duro Canyon also has a long history with humanity, which includes inhabitation by indigenous people groups, the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon, the settlement of cattle ranchers, and the construction of buildings and pathways by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) for the newly established park when it opened in 1934.

The grandeur of the canyon can be seen from the CCC Trail as it traverses the canyon floor to the canyon rim. This trail was used by the CCC while they were building the main road. Remnants of the CCC's handiwork are denoted by several bridges located throughout the CCC Trail. The trail can be accessed either from the Pioneer Amphitheater parking lot (going up) or the CCC Overlook at the Visitor Center (heading down). This guide begins at the amphitheater. Brown metal stakes serve as markers for this trail. (There are a few areas where there are very narrow footings and sheer drop-offs. Please exercise caution.)

The trailhead at the amphitheater begins at 2,935 feet in elevation. There is a steep, rocky ascent of 285 feet up Goodnight Peak before the path reaches its first plateau at the 0.42-mile mark. In between these two points, several vistas of Brushy Butte and Fortress Cliff will be to the north. After decent rainfall, blossoming Fendler's bladderpod, red dome blanketflower, blackfoot daisies, and silverleaf nightshade congregate among swaths of prickly pear, mesquite, and juniper affixed to the walls of Goodnight Peak.

The entrance to the Goodnight Peak Scenic Loop appears at the half-mile mark to your left (south), indicated by a metal

marker with a yellow tip. The peak is named after Charles Goodnight, one of the first ranchers to bring cattle to the Panhandle area and the resident manager of the JA ranch. A historical marker for the ranch can be found near the park entrance. This scenic trail is optional, but well worth the views. Curve around, heading southeast, up the brief 20-foot ascent. There are several offshoots on the Goodnight Peak Scenic Loop that eventually converge. At the 0.61-mile mark, make sure to take the path that heads south through the mowed prairie area. You will encounter the loop portion of the lollipop route at 0.77 miles. At the midpoint of the loop when the mileage clocks 0.84 miles, you will reach a vista with breathtaking panoramas of the canyon. Take time to marvel at the view before completing the loop and then returning to the CCC Trail.

Bear left (east) when you reconnect with the CCC Trail. At this point, vast scenery can be enjoyed from both sides of the trail. Particularly to the south are the mesas (Timber, Red and Capitol), Capital Peak and the multi-banded Spanish Skirts. Bear left (west) when you reach the Triassic Trail connection at 1.40 miles. There will be several CCC constructed bridges from this point. The most noticeable one will be at the 1.6-mile mark. From there, you will make a 40-foot, rocky ascent until you reach a wooden fence sectioning off another CCC constructed bridge; this one is in disrepair. The ascent continues but is less rocky.

The trail levels out at the CCC Overlook near the visitor center, with the mileage at 2.09 miles. The overlook offers stunning views of the entire park at 3,410 feet in elevation. Feel free to take a break at one of the benches or visit the visitor center before heading back to the amphitheater.

FRITCH FORTRESS TRAIL

Lake Meredith National Recreation Area

Trail length: 8.96 miles out and back
Distance from Amarillo: Around 50 miles

Fee: None

More
about Lake
Meredith's
creation on
p.102

Lake Meredith National Recreation Area has been an oasis to many, from the nomadic hunter-gatherers 13,000 years ago, to present-day recreationalists who have enjoyed the region since Lake Meredith was created in 1965.

The Fritch Fortress Trail courses along the shoreline of Lake Meredith. The views from the trail are never-ending and spectacular—cobalt blue water suffusing through the fiery hued Permian Red Beds, shortgrass prairie blanketing the bluffs, and dolomite boulders intermittently strewn all over the landscape. Flourishing sunflowers, Indian blanket, Tahoka daises, and prickly pear during the spring and summer months provide additional visual impact. Sometimes, a collared lizard or an ornate box turtle might cross the trail. The trail has several switchbacks and steep descents and ascents—if you ever need to stop and turn back around, there are no missed opportunities, as the views are continuous in both directions. The Fritch Fortress Trail begins south of the Fritch Fortress Campground restrooms and heads in a southerly direction for the majority of its route along the lake boundary.

The first descent will occur from the 0.12-mile mark to the 0.14-mile mark and is a 60-foot decline in elevation. A switchback with a descent of 20 feet will occur shortly after, ending at the 0.17-mile mark. A second switchback, this time with a 30-foot descent, spans from the 0.29-mile mark to the 0.37-mile mark. Up until the 1.84-mile mark, non-stop, unobstructed views of Lake Meredith will be especially mesmerizing at sunrise and sunset. Reconnect with the dirt trail when you cross the concrete boat ramp at 2.09 miles. When in season, you may find a couple prominent wildflower areas along the trail before you make a 20-foot ascent from the 2.4-mile mark to the 2.41-mile mark.

The most challenging part of the trail occurs toward its tail end at the 4.44-mile mark. Through a series of switchbacks, you will make a 145-foot ascent, until you reach the Harbor Bay Trail connection at 4.47 miles. The Meredith Way Trailhead and compostable toilet will appear shortly after. At this point, you can turn around and head back to the Fritch Fortress Campground or be picked up if you coordinate for a ride. 🚗



“The views from the trail are never-ending and spectacular—cobalt blue water suffusing through the fiery hued Permian Red Beds, shortgrass prairie blanketing the bluffs, and dolomite boulders intermittently strewn all over the landscape.”





From the High Plains TO HOLLYWOOD

BY RYAN MCSWAIN

Amarillo entrepreneur Kirk Martin found himself in Beverly Hills, standing in the lavish Beverly Estate, the iconic mansion setting from *The Godfather*. It was late 2022. Martin wasn't a guest. He wasn't a tourist.

He was producing a film with *The Godfather*'s Al Pacino. Called *Billy Knight*, the film will soon be seen by audiences around the world. Martin recalls the intensity of watching Pacino film scenes in a location so critical to the actor's breakout film. "There was a feeling," Martin says, "that this is a moment that would be really hard to replicate."

How does a businessman from Amarillo find himself on set with Al Pacino? It's been a wild journey from the High Plains to Hollywood.

From the Small Town to the Big Screen

Martin's Amarillo roots run deep. His father was from Amarillo, having attended the old Amarillo High School at the time it burned down in 1970. Kirk himself was born in Oklahoma while his father was in pharmacy school, and spent much of his childhood in Artesia,



New Mexico. The family moved to Amarillo during his eighth-grade year.

“Coming to Amarillo, it felt like New York City to me,” Martin says. “I was thrown into not knowing anybody.”

But he found his way, attending Bonham Middle School and Amarillo High. One of the first friends he made in Amarillo was Josh Clayton, who would continue to play an important role in Martin’s life. But while Clayton went off to law school, Martin graduated from Amarillo College and worked for a time in nuclear medicine, a branch of radiology.

While working with the Amarillo Heart Group in the early

2000s, he earned business degrees from Wayland Baptist and WTAMU. He then began leading different departments within the practice and eventually served as the chief financial officer.

In 2017, he set out on his own. “I started a company with a couple other people called SnapNurse,” he says. “It was like an Uber for nurses, just a little startup company that started going.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for the company’s services skyrocketed. “We were the fastest-growing company in the country at one time.”

Martin met a prominent screenwriter during that period. Martin and Clayton—not just a longtime friend at that point but also a business partner—saw an opportunity. “How do you put a movie together as an investor?” they asked. “How does it all fit together?”

Intrigued, they started small. Martin and Clayton dipped their toes in the showbiz waters by financing a sitcom that has yet to see the light of day. But through that project they met Alec Roth, son of Eric Roth, the Academy Award-winning screenwriter of *Forrest Gump* and other classic films.

Martin, Clayton and Roth formed a production company, Firebrand Media Group, along with veteran producer Peter Morgan and Dr. Tuan Bui, an orthopedic surgeon from Atlanta.

“Alec had these scripts that he’d been writing his whole life,” Martin says. “We were working with him trying to figure out what to make next, and we really liked one called *Billy Knight*.”

Al Pacino Enters the Frame

Billy Knight tells the story of two aspiring filmmakers, Alex and Emily. After the loss of his father, Alex uncovers a box of unfinished scripts and a handkerchief embroidered with a name: “Billy Knight.”

“It’s about Hollywood,” Martin says, “about chasing your dreams. There’s a love story, too.”

They were excited to sign Charlie Heaton (*Stranger Things*, *As You Are*) as Alex, Diana Silvers (*Booksmart*, *Space Force*) as Emily—and, of course, Al Pacino (*Scarface*, *Scent of a Woman*). Patrick Schwarzenegger, recently of *The White Lotus*, also appears, along with cameos from many other stars

and musicians.

The film has been hailed as a love letter to cinema. With the recent wildfires in California and other troubles in the world, Martin says, “There’s a need for positive stuff out there. It brings together old Hollywood, new Hollywood.”

They completed principal photography in 2022. They were planning their reshoots just as the Writers Guild of America and Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists strikes of 2023 rocked the entertainment world. The demands on the cast following the strikes led to further delays.



“In any business, make sure everyone you can trust in the room is smarter than you. After going out on my own, that’s really how I’ve lived my entire career.”

—Kirk Martin



But they’ve now completed the film, which is well on its way to reaching the big screen. *Billy Knight* has begun screening on the festival circuit, and Martin and his partners are being strategic about approaching distributors. “We’re being real careful how we get *Billy Knight* out there into the world,” Martin says. “We want to place it with the right distributor. It’s all about doing what’s best for the movie.”

Firebrand Media Group didn’t hang up their hats during the delays with *Billy Knight*. They never stopped making films and generating new opportunities.

Learning the Ropes

“Producer” is a broad, ambiguous title, and not always well-understood outside Hollywood. Martin explains that there’s much more to the role than high-level decisions made behind a desk or over the phone. It’s surprisingly hands-on.

“There are so many different types of producers,” Martin says. “On the lead producing team, it’s a little like being a general contractor on a giant project. You’re the problem-solver. You’re organizing everything that has to happen at all times. There’s a lot of fun to it when everything’s going right, but there is always something you have to be working on.”

Small issues can cause big delays if you don’t act fast. “Someone shows up late, the dress doesn’t fit, the microphone’s not working. Dealing with the weather, dealing with holidays, dealing with neighbors who don’t want you shooting in the neighborhood—even though you have a permit.”

During the filming of *Billy Knight*, Martin and his team often oversaw as many as 120 people on set. “You wouldn’t believe the number of trucks, the amount of scaffolding, the wires

everywhere. There’s a lot of moving pieces,” he says. “It’s been a fun little ride learning about all this stuff.”

But there are definitely perks to being on set. “It was really cool driving around Paramount Studios at night on a golf cart. We’re on New York Street [a famous backlot set replicating urban neighborhoods], and you just feel all the stuff that’s happened there. Some of the most amazing moments were just kind of taking it all in.”

Martin especially enjoys working with Clayton, a friend since the eighth grade. “That’s probably one of the coolest parts of it,” Martin says. “And some of the people we’ve met out there, we feel like we’ve known them forever.”

Facing New Challenges

Over the past six years, Martin has had a front-row seat to one of the most tumultuous times in the history of the film industry, including the pandemic

“Post-COVID, everything changed,” he says. “During COVID, everybody streamed everything. It was all you could do. Theaters really suffered and are still suffering. The medium-sized movies either do really well or they really have a struggle making it work.”

When it comes to overcoming these obstacles, Martin draws on his background as a Panhandle businessman. “Every business is about 70, 80 percent the same. But it’s all those little nuances that are the hardest thing to learn.”

That’s when his entrepreneurial mindset kicks in. “The funny thing is, as an entrepreneur, you see a hurdle as something you can make a win off of. You really have to be nimble, be able to turn on a dime,” he adds. “You say, ‘OK, that’s a big hurdle. How do we get around that? And is there a way to take advantage of it from

the business side?” That’s part of the reason we’re looking into creating our own distribution company.”

What’s the secret? According to Martin, “Getting the right people around you. In any business, make sure everyone you can trust in the room is smarter than you. After going out on my own, that’s really how I’ve lived my entire career. Find the best people, the experts, and bring them into the team.”

The other secret is taking the time to properly lay the groundwork. “The preparation you do before you start shooting is like before an NFL player takes the first snap in the real game. They prep and prep and prep and prep. That way, when it’s time to go, you limit the amount of errors that you make,” he says.

The Best of Both Worlds

He may be spending time in Hollywood, but Amarillo is still Martin’s home. “I’ve never left,” he laughs.

“I’m gone once a month, probably. I go out there for about a week at a time. That way I can pack it full of meetings. And of course we Zoom and do stuff all day long, like any company does.” Once filming gets underway, everything changes. “That’s a four- to six-week period. I’ll blast home on the weekends or whatever days we have off. It’s a lot of air time.”

With six children—five daughters and a son—family remains a focus for him. “Three of the girls are in college now. They come out there as much as they can, and they come to the set. It’s a lot of fun, and they seem to enjoy it along with me. It’s tough being gone from them.”

Plenty of jobs require travel from Amarillo, but very few of them require you to split time between Amarillo and a film set on the West Coast. With Firebrand Media, Kirk Martin is making it work. His company just signed someone he’ll only identify as “a big name” for a new project that’s still under wraps. But with *Billy Knight* and a few other projects in the works, Martin is leaving his mark on both the Yellow City and Tinseltown. ☺



COMING ATTRACTIONS FROM FIREBRAND MEDIA

Desert Road

Desert Road tells the story of a woman who crashes her car on a lonely stretch of road. She tries to find help, but no matter how far she walks, she finds herself right back where she started.

Kristine Froseth (*Sharp Stick*, *The Buccaneers*) stars as the nameless lead. The cast also features D.B. Woodside (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Ryan Hurst (*Remember the Titans*), Frances Fisher (*Titanic*), and Beau Bridges (*The Fabulous Baker Boys*).

Shannon Triplett has worked on plenty of blockbusters, but *Desert Road* is the first feature film she has written and directed. It premiered at the South by Southwest Film Festival in 2024.

“Our experience with *Desert Road* at South by Southwest was just amazing,” Martin says. “It was the first film festival I’d been to with our own project, and I wasn’t sure what the reception would be. It turned out to be amazing. We had four showings, and every showing had fifty to a hundred who couldn’t get in.”

The film has appeared at many festivals since. It was nominated for Best Motion Picture and Best Actress at the 2024 Sitges Film Festival in Spain, winning Best Actress. At the 2025 Bilbao Fantasy Film Festival, also in Spain, the film won the award for Best Screenplay.

Watchful Eye

Written and directed by Scottish filmmaker Kris J. Cummins, *Watchful Eye* is a thriller seen through the lenses of a home security system.

A single mom (Malone Thomas) and her daughter (Charlotte Ann Tucker) face a family’s worst nightmare when a stranger hacks into their home network and befriends the daughter through the cameras.

Zero Star: The Cam Ward Story

Another exciting project is *Zero Star: The Cam Ward Story*, about the No. 1 2025 NFL draft pick. A “zero star” is an overlooked player who was never rated by the major recruiting services as a high school student. The series follows Ward as he beats the odds.

Zero Star: The Cam Ward Story captures an intense and personal view of Ward’s journey in a six-part docuseries. Martin explains, “We’ve been following him around with cameras for about a year and a half—into the draft, into the Heisman Trophy ceremony.”

The free streaming service Tubi just announced an exclusive deal to premier *Zero Star: The Cam Ward Story* this September.

Tucumcari, New Mexico:

A Neon-Lit Canvas of History, Heritage, and Art



Tucumcari, New Mexico, is more than just a charming stop along the legendary Route 66—it's a living canvas where Native American heritage, mid-century Americana and modern creativity intersect. Nestled in Quay County, this small town of about 5,000 people is rich in culture, wrapped in colorful murals and illuminated by vintage neon.

Ancient Roots and Native American History

Long before Tucumcari became a Route 66 icon, the land was home to Indigenous peoples, primarily the Apache and Comanche tribes. The nearby Tucumcari Mountain, a prominent landmark, likely gave the town its name—believed to derive from a Comanche term Tucumcari, possibly meaning “ambush” or “lookout point.” This mountain served as a strategic site for native warriors and remains sacred to many in the region.

Artifacts, petroglyphs and ancient tools found in the area tell of centuries-old human settlement. Local legends—passed down through oral traditions—speak of battles, trade and the deep spiritual significance of the land. Today, nearby Mesalands Community College's Dinosaur Museum preserves some of this ancient legacy with fossil exhibits and Native American cultural displays.





A Mural-Lined Storybook

Tucumcari's modern streets are alive with art. Nearly 100 murals decorate its buildings, depicting everything from cowboys and classic cars to Native American dancers and buffalo herds. Much of this work is thanks to artists Doug and Sharon Quarles, who sparked a public art movement that celebrates the town's history and diversity. Walking through Tucumcari is like stepping into a storybook of the American Southwest.

The Glow of Route 66

Few places capture the nostalgia of Route 66 quite like Tucumcari. In its mid-century heyday, the town bustled with motels, diners and gas stations catering to road-weary travelers. Today, neon signs still blaze at iconic locations like the Blue Swallow Motel, Motel Safari and the Palomino Motel—beautifully restored thanks to local preservation efforts.

These glowing signs aren't just decorations—they are time machines, evoking the romance of the American road trip. Tucumcari's dedication to neon preservation has earned it national recognition and made it a must-see for Route 66 enthusiasts.

An Art City with Spirit

Tucumcari may be small, but it pulses with creative energy. Beyond murals and neon, the town hosts local art fairs, supports galleries and attracts photographers and filmmakers from across the country. Its Mesalands Community College is home to one of the few wind-powered bronze foundries in the world, adding another layer to the town's artistic identity.

In 2024, Tucumcari embarked on a transformative journey with the launch of Art City, a 40-acre sculpture park and glamping destination. Founded by Matt McConnell, a former Silicon Valley tech entrepreneur turned artist, Art City aims to revitalize the town by blending large-scale art installations with community engagement.

The project features more than a dozen monumental sculptures, including "Facing the Fear Beast" and "Evolution Field," set amidst the high plains landscape. These installations are complemented by unique accommodations, such as artistically remodeled trailers and camping sites, offering visitors an immersive experience.

Art City serves as a catalyst for cultural tourism, attracting artists, creatives and travelers seeking inspiration and connection. It stands as a testament to the power of art in revitalizing small towns and fostering a vibrant community spirit.

Fame in Music, Film and Culture

Tucumcari has also left its mark in pop culture. It's been mentioned in songs like "Willin'" by Little Feat and appeared in films such as *Hell or High Water* and the classic TV western *Rawhide*. Pixar's *Cars* was heavily inspired by Route 66 landmarks, with the Blue Swallow Motel serving as inspiration for the Cozy Cone Motel.



VISITTUCUMCARINM.COM



TEXAS Outdoor Musical

The Canyon Comes Alive with Story, Song and Texas Spirit

An unforgettable experience for families, locals, and proud Texans—set in the heart of Palo Duro Canyon. A tradition worth passing down.

Why should Texas Panhandle residents visit TEXAS Outdoor Musical?

A tradition for families, locals and proud Texans of all ages.

Every summer, generations of families gather in Palo Duro Canyon to experience something truly special: the TEXAS Outdoor Musical. For nearly 60 years, this beloved production has brought the stories of the Texas Panhandle to life on one of the most stunning stages in the country—right here in our own backyard.

This one-of-a-kind production has been a cherished part of summer in the Texas Panhandle. Set in the 1800s, TEXAS weaves a fictional narrative built on real history—tales of struggle and triumph, of building something from nothing, and of communities shaped by courage, grit and heart.

Whether you've been dozens of times or are planning your first visit, TEXAS never fails to impress. It's more than a musical—it's a tradition that connects generations.

Locals Know: It's More Than a Show—It's an Experience

Tucked inside the second-largest canyon in the U.S., Palo Duro Canyon State Park, the Pioneer Amphitheatre transforms each

summer into a stage like no other. Audiences are impressed by the attention-getting figure marking the beginning of the play: A lone horseman carrying the flag of Texas appears atop a 600-foot cliff. With state-of-the-art lighting, live music, special effects and a massive outdoor setting, the scale and spectacle of TEXAS is something you have to see to believe.

But it's not just about the show—it's about the whole evening. Families often arrive early to enjoy a barbecue dinner, take photos at scenic overlooks, explore Palo Duro Canyon State Park, or take part in a backstage VIP tour. And when the sun dips below the rim of the canyon and the performance begins, something truly magical happens.

Family-Friendly Fun That's Easy on the Budget

This season, TEXAS is making it even easier for families to experience the magic with special promotions designed for local households:

Two-Step Tuesdays: Every Tuesday this summer, kids ages 6 to 12 get in for just \$2.

Pre-Show BBQ Dinner: Available on-site, with family-style seating and hearty Texas favorites.

Each night, the performance concludes with a heartfelt tribute to our nation's Veterans.



Made Right Here. Shared Across the State.

TEXAS is proudly produced by the Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and celebrating the culture, stories and people of our region. The cast and crew include performers from across the country and right here in the Panhandle. From longtime volunteers to summer interns, it's a production powered by local love and community spirit.

Over the years, TEXAS has been featured in major travel publications, on television and in countless family scrapbooks and vacation albums. It's not just a Panhandle treasure—it's a Texas icon.

What's one thing that will surprise visitors? A new feature to the show this summer is *The Taming of the Shrew* for two special performances on July 14 and 21.

The play is a fiery comedy of mistaken identities, spirited courtship and the battle of the sexes. When the strong-willed Katherine becomes the focus of the brash and clever Petruchio, sparks fly in a game of wit and will. Meanwhile, suitors scramble to win the heart of her younger sister, Bianca—setting off a whirlwind of disguises, deception and uproarious antics. Bold, fast-paced and packed with sharp humor, *The Taming of the Shrew* is a timeless tale of love, transformation and the roles we play.

The Taming of the Shrew performances begin at 8 p.m.

Whether you're introducing your kids to the show for the first time, entertaining out-of-town guests or simply enjoying a night under the canyon stars, TEXAS is a summer tradition that brings people together—and it all happens just minutes from home.



Plan Your Canyon Night Out

Location: Pioneer Amphitheatre, Palo Duro Canyon State Park

Season: Now through Aug. 9

Performances: Tuesday through Sunday evenings – TEXAS Outdoor Musical
Shakespeare in the Canyon – Mondays – July 14 and 21

Tickets & Info: texas-show.com

Bring your family. Invite your neighbors. Make a summer memory that will last a lifetime.

GRILL SIMPLE



Grilling in the summer isn't just about the food. It's about easing into the rhythm of longer days, eating outside while there's still a little light left, and letting the grill do the work so the kitchen stays cool. It doesn't have to be a big gathering or a complicated meal. Sometimes it's just about putting a few good things over the fire and calling it dinner.

I'm not a grill-in-the-heat-of-the-day kind of person. When the temperature hovers near triple digits, you won't find me hovering over a flame with the sun on my back. But I do love grilling when the light starts to soften and the heat finally loosens its grip. You know that golden hour when you can breathe a little easier, and everything seems to quiet down? That's my time.

There's something to be said about cooking outdoors, especially in that in-between moment where the day starts to tip toward night. It's less about "entertaining" and more about tending—tending the food, the fire and the people around you. That's the part I love.

And it doesn't have to be complicated. It can be steaks from a local butcher or chicken thighs from the freezer. Some zucchini, peaches and a head of romaine. You can create a complete meal on the grill with minimal effort and without even turning on the stove. And let's be honest, in the heat of an Amarillo summer, that's a gift.

Tips for Better Summer Grilling

- **Let your meat rest before it hits the fire.** Take it out of the fridge 20 to 30 minutes early so it's not ice-cold. It'll cook more evenly and stay juicier.
- **Season well.** Salt matters. Kosher, coarse or flaky—use what you've got, but be generous with it. A good piece of meat, seasoned with nothing more than salt and pepper, can still be something special.
- **Oil your food, not your grill grates.** A little olive oil brushed on vegetables or bread goes a long way toward color and flavor.
- **Use indirect heat when needed.** For thicker cuts or items that require more time, create a cooler zone to prevent burning the outside while the inside catches up.
- **Grill your sides.** A grill isn't just for meat. Charred vegetables, grilled fruit and even bread can complement a meal and make it truly memorable.
- **Skip the pressure.** There's no right way to grill. Use what you have. Cook what sounds good. You don't need a marinade, a sauce and three glazes. Sometimes, just fire and salt are enough.

You Can Grill That?

If you're looking to try something beyond the usual burgers and brats, here are a few out-of-the-ordinary grilling ideas I return to:

- **Grilled sweet potatoes with lime crema:** Slice the potatoes lengthwise, brush with oil, grill until soft with a little char, and top with a quick crema (sour cream, lime juice, salt), cotija cheese and chili powder.
- **Peach and basil chicken skewers:** Marinate chicken chunks in balsamic, garlic and a splash of oil, then thread them with peach slices. Grill until caramelized and serve warm or at room temperature, topped with fresh chopped basil.
- **Sourdough or focaccia toast:** Grill thick slices of bread until crispy on the edges, then top with whipped ricotta, tomatoes or a drizzle of local honey. It's perfect as a starter or a side dish.
- **Pound cake on the grill:** Cut into thick slabs and toast on the grill until golden. Serve with berries and a spoonful of jam or lemon curd.

Whether you're grilling every weekend or just firing it up for a slow and simple Tuesday night, the goal isn't to impress, it's to nourish. With a little flame and a little care, that's more than enough. ☺



RUTHIE LANDELIUS

Ruthie owns Black Fig Catering and is proprietor of a food blog at blackfigfood.com. Learn more about her online classes at blackfigfoodprograms.com.





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Ripe and Ready

Ways to Savor Tomato Season



If it's late summer in the Texas Panhandle, then it's time for tomatoes. They thrive in our climate, and this time of year, these next few weeks of sunshine and heat will accelerate the ripening process.

That means most backyard gardeners are just a few weeks away from an abundant harvest. Tomato plants are known to overproduce, which means getting creative. You can only eat so many summer salads, after all. You need ideas.

That led us to Brian Kelleher, owner of 575 Pizzeria, who shared with us a few of the ways his restaurants put tomatoes to work all year long.

Apart from the pizza sauce, Kelleher's kitchens exclusively use fresh baby heirloom tomatoes—similar to what may grow in a backyard garden—in a variety of dishes, including its caprese salads, bruschetta, and as salad toppings served with the 575 signature sundried tomato balsamic vinaigrette. (That secret vinaigrette recipe goes back to Kelleher's old Basil Doc days, pre-575, and he says customers still regularly buy 11-ounce containers to take home. "People want to have that dressing in their refrigerators," he says.)

To start, Kelleher says you can't beat the miniature burst of summer flavor that comes from a baby tomato. But there are other reasons, too: "The presentation, the flavor profile, the cut, they're easier to prep, all that kind of stuff."

They also tend to work better as a pizza topping. "Before we [switched to] the heirloom tomatoes, we had whole circles of tomatoes on there, and you'd take a bite and the whole tomato would come off," he says, laughing.

Larger tomatoes aren't just harder to bite into. They require more preparation, and the larger slices mean they start to dry out

faster. The smaller, heirloom options are simply quartered—then ready to be used as toppings or included in another preparation.

"A caprese is super-simple to use for a tomato," Kelleher adds. "You get some fresh mozzarella at the grocery store, slice it into thin rounds, and then throw some fresh tomatoes and basil over it. A drizzle of a balsamic vinaigrette brings out great flavor. Add a little coarse sea salt to it and that makes a really flavorful and healthy salad. It's very summery."

The bruschetta serves as another easy way to use up a bounty of tomatoes. Served with a crusty bread, the combined ingredients really shine when using peak-season tomatoes.

"With a bruschetta, your base is tomatoes. We add artichoke hearts and some chopped-up basil, tossed together with our house dressing. It's kind of like an Italian salsa—for lack of a better term. Just chunkier," he adds. "It's very versatile."

Both 575 locations serve the bruschetta and caprese salad as menu items, including at the newly remodeled Civic Circle space. That original 575 location reopened in March with a new addition designed to host events, live music, comedy and other entertainment. "It's been a lot of fun," Kelleher says. "We've got full tables and pinball and old arcade games in there. It's very versatile—we can use it for private parties, holiday parties, graduation parties, rehearsal dinners. It's been a neat space."

The expanded restaurant offered Kelleher the freedom to diversify his menu by experimenting with dishes like fried cheese curds and chicken wings, not just to please patrons but also to take pressure off the busy pizza ovens.

Just don't expect his use of tomatoes to change. "These little heirloom tomatoes just taste amazing," he says.

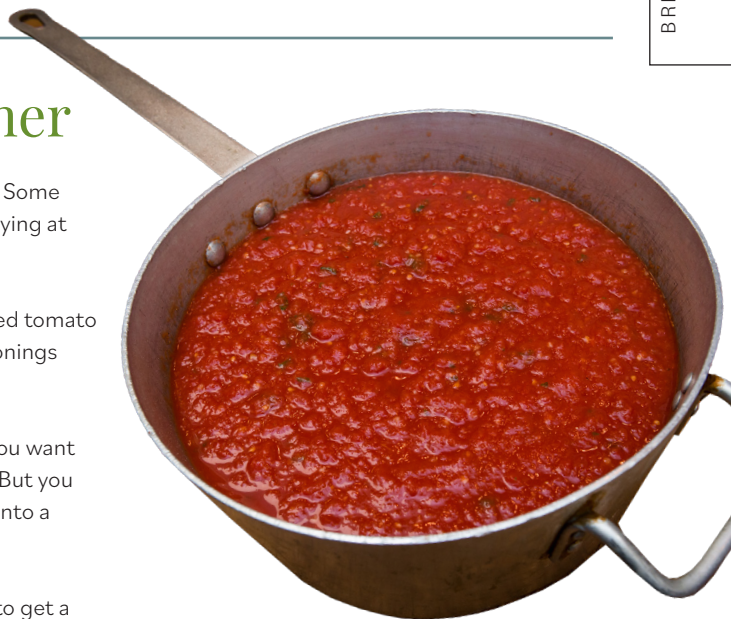
Tomato Tips from Brian Kelleher

Storage: "We refrigerate all our tomatoes," Kelleher says. "Some people don't. Some just leave them on their counters. Everyone has their preferences. When I'm buying at the store, I like to buy them on the vine. They stay fresh longer."

Sauce: "Fresh tomato sauce is amazing, especially compared to Prego or a jarred tomato sauce. I really like just stewing tomatoes in a skillet with some olive oil and seasonings and stuff like that. It doesn't take that long, and it's a way better tomato sauce."

Selection: "I want a firm tomato, but not so firm it doesn't have any give to it. You want a little bit of softness to it, just so you can feel all the juices moving around in it. But you don't want it too soft, so there's no bite to it at all. And then, you know, cutting into a tomato that's overripe is not fun."

Slicing: "Always use a sharpened knife for cutting tomatoes. It has to be sharp to get a good, clean cut. You have a dull knife, [and] it's going to mush it up."



Caprese Salad

2 to 3 large ripe tomatoes, sliced
8 ounces fresh mozzarella, sliced
¼ cup fresh basil leaves
2 to 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 to 2 tablespoons balsamic glaze or reduction
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Arrange tomato and mozzarella slices on a platter, alternating slices. Tuck basil leaves between each slice. Drizzle with olive oil and balsamic glaze and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Serve immediately, or chill slightly before serving.

Makes 3 to 4 servings



Classic Tomato Bruschetta

4 ripe roma or vine tomatoes, diced
1 to 2 cloves garlic, minced
¼ cup fresh basil, chopped
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar (or any balsamic vinaigrette salad dressing), optional
Salt and pepper to taste
1 baguette, sliced and toasted
Grated Parmesan for topping
Diced artichoke hearts, optional

In a bowl, combine diced tomatoes, garlic, basil, olive oil, artichoke hearts (if using) and balsamic vinegar (if using). Season with salt and pepper to taste. Let sit for 10 to 15 minutes. Toast baguette slices until golden. Spoon tomato mixture onto each slice and serve immediately. Sprinkle with Parmesan or drizzle with more olive oil before serving.

Makes 6 servings



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PONDASETA BREWING CO.



After college, when Canyon natives Trevor Martin and Kaleb West returned to the Panhandle hoping to open a brewery in West Texas, they intended to start their empire in Canyon on a property near the Square. That fell through, so the business partners settled on establishing an Amarillo taproom on Southwest 45th Avenue, with a small indie brewery within it.

That business took off, but Canyon kept calling their names.

"Having something in our hometown was always part of our dream," West says. "What that looked like, we wouldn't have been able to say." Then Canyon Commissioner Cody Jones mentioned to them that the Santa Fe train depot on Second Avenue in Canyon might be available. That was late 2020. The city owned this historic facility and used it for storage.

"Everyone in Canyon has driven by this at some point and thought, 'That should be something,'" West says.

As of March, after more than a year of construction and rehabilitation, that "something" became a full pizza restaurant and expanded brewery, the result of a partnership with the City of Canyon and the Canyon Economic Development Corporation.

"Trevor would probably say he never wanted to own a restaurant, but I always thought it would be cool to own a restaurant. I don't know that I ever envisioned that being a reality," West says. The duo had introduced a permanent food truck to the Amarillo location in 2021, which West calls a "stepping stone" that helped them develop a menu and build a food reputation to accompany their burgeoning craft beer empire.

When the Depot gave them the space and flexibility to add a real kitchen, West and Martin decided pizza was the way to go. "We landed on pizza because pizza and beer is such an easy combination," West says. "You can be really creative with pizza."

Beyond standards like pepperoni or meat-lover pizzas, the specialty pizza menu includes an incredible Brussel Balsamic Mozz (with crispy Brussels sprouts on a garlic base) and intense Korean BBQ (with house pulled pork, Korean BBQ sauce and sriracha mayo). Other pub-style options include fish and chips, wings, burgers and a spicy chicken sandwich.

Those options, they say, are for customers who come in more than once a week—and there are plenty—but don't always want to order pizza.

The train depot first opened to the public in 1925, which means Pondaseta breathed new life into the space a century later upon its launch in March 2025. It's a stunning space, with plenty of light, authentic vintage elements, and trains passing right outside the window. Lunch specials attract students and faculty from WT. A \$5 draft beer happy hour from 3 to 6 p.m. has become equally popular. Canyon has responded, and Amarillo fans are already making the drive.

"I mean, since we started talking about it and took over the building, started construction, everyone I talked to [said], 'Canyon needs this. We can't wait for it to come,'" Martin says.

"It feels like we've accomplished the connection-to-our-community piece [of the business model] that we've always wanted to access," West adds.

1001 Second Ave.
806.656.5100
pondaseta.com

THE 806 COFFEE + LOUNGE

Art meets coffee—and a surprisingly delicious vegetarian and vegan menu—at this locally owned, atmospheric shop on Sixth. (The brunch is especially good.) Time it right and you'll catch live music or an art show. If you're ready to ditch the minimalist coffee scene, start here. 2812 SW Sixth Ave., 806.322.1806, the806.com \$

9TH INNING BREWS & BITES

Billing itself as "Amarillo's Newest Sports Bar," this west-side location represents the rebranding of what once was J's Bar & Grill in the Shops at Soncy. It offers 57 TVs, dozens of draft beers on tap, a reliable pub-style menu and a family-friendly environment for watching the game. 3130 S. Soncy Road, Suite 100, 806.358.2220, 9thinningsportsbar.com \$

ASPEN CREEK GRILL

This comfort casual chain has very few locations, but ours on I-40 is constantly busy. The appetizers are great for sharing, and the popular Happy Hour is ridiculously affordable. Each location offers a signature menu. Try a Black Angus steak or pizza. 4110 W. I-40, 806.398.2776, aspen creekgrill.com \$\$

THE BAGEL PLACE

This beloved breakfast and lunch spot introduced bagels to the Panhandle years ago, and locals have been grateful ever since. Grab a fresh bagel to go, and choose from a variety of cream cheese flavors. Or try the oversized homemade sweets. (Look, everything here is delicious.) 3301 Bell St., 806.353.5985, bagelplace.net \$

BANGKOK RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

In a city known for its Thai food, Bangkok is truly authentic—and a legit Amarillo Boulevard dive. Take it from patrons with experience: If they say it's "spicy," they mean it. Get ready, and make sure you've got plenty of water. 5901 E. Amarillo Blvd., 806.383.9008 \$

BELMAR BAKERY & CAFE

The Zaccardo family's beloved bakery has greeted its 60th year of existence with a transition to new ownership. As the community gets accustomed to the change, it's still churning out cookies, custom cakes, pies, breads and other sweet goodies. 3325 Bell St., 806.355.0141, belmarbakery.com \$

CELLAR 55

A splashy new high-end concept from Chris Hazel—who has a well-earned reputation for his wine expertise—Cellar 55 has grabbed residents' attention from its opening. Enjoy a sophisticated interior, indulgent meals and a truly impressive menu of wine and bourbon. A fantastic new entrant to Amarillo's fine-dining scene. 2800 Civic Circle, Suite 500, 806.322.7655, cellar55ama.com \$\$

THE CORNER GRILL

Located in a fast-growing, formerly rural area between Amarillo and Canyon, this family-friendly restaurant features elevated American grill food, like burgers, chicken sandwiches, milkshakes, steaks and salads. There's even a drive-thru coffee shop. Enjoy happy hour specials on weekdays, a sheltered patio and full bar. 14588 FM 2590, 806.806.0007 \$\$

CRUSH WINE BAR & GRILL

A fixture of fine dining downtown, Crush serves great steaks, pasta and shareable appetizers in an upscale, modern environment. We love the bar area downstairs as well as the rooftop bar, which overlooks a busy Polk Street and occasionally hosts live music. On weekends, enjoy a street-side brunch. The service is consistently great and the wine menu extensive. 627 S. Polk St., 806.418.2011, crushamarillo.com \$\$

DOÑA JUANITA RESTAURANT

The Boulevard is home to some of Amarillo's oldest and best little dives, and few are as authentic as this one. The traditional Mexican dishes include homemade corn tortillas and some of the best refried beans in the city. Doña Juanita is family-owned and has been around forever. Try the coffee with cinnamon! 2208 E. Amarillo Blvd., 806.220.2610 \$

EL BURRITO RICO

This little red-and-yellow walk-up hut is one of the true gems in the River Road neighborhood. Located near Pleasant Valley Elementary, it's locally owned and open early for breakfast, serving incredible breakfast burritos and tortas. The well-seasoned lunch and dinner portions are large. 4404 River Road, 806.383.4545 \$

EL CARBONERO RESTAURANTE Y PUPUSERIA

Amarillo isn't exclusively a destination for Tex-Mex food. This joint on the Boulevard offers authentic Salvadoran cuisine, including pupusas, plantains, salvadoran sausage and pan con pollo. If you're into flavorful grilled meats—or Salvadoran beer like Regia Extra—this is the place. 1702 E. Amarillo Blvd., 806.373.1973 \$

FENG CHA BUBBLE TEA

Tea is a big deal in the Panhandle, but this isn't just another place for blueberry green iced tea. Feng Cha offers bubble tea and milk foam teas with decidedly not-quite-Texan flavors like cream cheese, matcha, taro and durian. Add-ins include boba, lychee jelly, grass jelly and more. Enjoy the sleek Instagrammable atmosphere, and try the dessert menu. 5611 Gem Lake Road, 806.437.1556, fengchausa.com \$

This is not a comprehensive list of local restaurants. From issue to issue, we will try to include a wide variety of dining options based on the space available. If you notice an error, please email mm@brickandelm.com.

\$ Most entrees under \$10
\$\$ Most entrees \$11 to \$20
\$\$\$ Most entrees over \$21

GOLDEN WAFFLE COMPANY

This strip-mall spot features sweet and savory waffles with toppings. Its weekend brunch is extremely popular, along with its creative mimosas and micheladas. 6017 Hillside Road, Suite 250, 806.367.8141, goldenwafflecompany.com \$

HOOK & REEL

This Cajun/Creole seafood franchise offers mix-and-match seafood boils, allowing customers to pair a favorite catch (think crab legs, lobster tail or crawfish) with their favorite sauces, spices and add-ons. The breaded-and-fried baskets are also made to please, including fresh flounder, catfish, oysters and more. 5807 SW 45th Ave., Suite 310, 806.803.3133, hookreel.com \$\$

HOUSE OF DONUTS

Amarillo loves its donuts, and this little indie stop on North Grand has a faithful following, served fresh by an always-friendly team. Moms and dads will love the colorful gourmet options kids go crazy for, as well as more grown-up treats like kolaches, breakfast sandwiches and breakfast burritos. 1615 N. Grand St., 806.803.0845 \$

ICHIBAN NOODLE BAR & ASIAN CUISINE

If you want ramen in Amarillo, look no further. Ichiban is so wonderful and ... so rarely open. Watch your food and noodles being prepared thanks to the open kitchen. Stop by for lunch. It shuts down mid-afternoon but re-opens in time for dinner. Most days. Closed on weekends. 3309 Wimberly Road, 806.355.5031 \$

JOE TACO

This Amarillo stand-by has a solid reputation for fast service and great Tex-Mex, with Amarillo and Canyon locations. The bar and outdoor patio at the Wallace location, near the hospitals, are always hopping with live music on weekends. 7312 Wallace Blvd., 806.331.8226 / 5700 S. Georgia St., 806.350.8226, joetaco.net \$\$

KATHY'S KITCHEN

Breakfast is drive-thru only from 5 to 8 a.m., then the dining area opens at 10 a.m. for breakfast and lunch only. The northeast

AC

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Loop location and homestyle food are perfect for drives up to Lake Meredith/Borger or northeast to Pampa. Low prices and generous portions. 4517 Highway 136, 806.268.1465 \$

LITTLE LAOS

The husband-and-wife operators of this Lao stop on Historic Route 66 are passionate about the flavors and freshness of Lao food, which relies on fermented flavors and fresh herbs like dill, mint and lemongrass. That flavor comes through in the popular Green Curry Chicken, or Yum Seen Nam Tok, a beef salad. Be prepared for the spice. The max level, “Lao Spice,” is not for the faint of heart. Cool off with a refreshing Thai Tea. 3811 SW Sixth Ave., 806.803.0373 \$

MAC JOE’S KITCHEN & CELLAR

Always a popular date-night choice, Mac Joe’s is an Amarillo institution known for elegant ambiance and attentive service. The menu relies on Italian dishes but also offers fantastic steaks. 1619 S. Kentucky St., Suite D1500, 806.358.8990, macjoesamarillo.com \$\$-\$\$\$

MARHABA ERITREAN AND ETHIOPIAN CUISINE

With a menu marked by traditional spices and preparation methods, Marhaba introduces locals to authentic East African flavors and preparations—including meat and vegetarian dishes—served on a communal platter of *injera*, a spongy flatbread made from fermented teff flour. After the meal, don’t miss the strong and flavorful coffee service. 2522 Paramount Blvd., 806.367.6077, marhabarestaurant.wordpress.com \$

NOMAD NAPOLETANA

Nomad Napoletana has turned up the temperature on an iconic stretch of Polk Street. Diners can expect East Coast-style pizza in an upscale dining area and bar. Beyond pizza, feast on a complimentary dish of *stecca*, a Sicilian version of the baguette drizzled in olive oil and served with tender, spreadable garlic confit. Don’t miss the scratch-made meatballs, braised all day in California tomatoes and tomato sauce, then served with a dollop of ricotta. 614 S. Polk St., 806.376.4700, nomadnapoletana.com \$-\$\$

OISHII JAPANESE SUSHI & SAKE

Oishii elevates the local sushi experience with creative flavor combinations and presentation. The menu is huge. The seafood is fresh. The dishes are designed to induce gasps as they arrive at the table. All the sauces are made from scratch in-house. If sushi’s not your thing, the traditional Asian staples are just as worthwhile. 2721 Virginia Circle, 806.877.2464 \$\$-\$\$\$

OVR-EZE

The locally owned OVR-EZE began to sizzle immediately after its 2024 opening, and continues to build a delighted clientele with its upscale breakfast and brunch menu. Don’t miss the French Toast Breakfast or Croi-ffle Tennessee Hot Chicken, or the full bar: This is a place that encourages “EZE day-drinking” with on-tap prosecco, spiked coffee, and a variety of cocktails, mimosas and bloody marys. 5700 S. Georgia St., 806.877.7990, ovreze.com \$

PORK N THINGS BBQ

Owner Denny Antel has expanded his successful food truck business into the old Outlaws Supper Club building east of town. Summer visitors to Pork n Things BBQ will enjoy a beer garden, outdoor activities like cornhole, a fantastic open-air patio and a lot of televisions. Patrons rave about Antel’s brisket, Kansas City-style ribs, burnt ends and green chile hominy. Everything on the menu is tender and flavorful thanks to the massive smoker out back. 10816 SE Third Ave., 806.699.7675 \$\$

PUBLIC HOUSE

Known for one of the best brunches in town, this southwest side hangout boasts inventive cuisine and an upscale, service-oriented atmosphere. The Happy Hour menu is extraordinary, as are the whiskey and wine lists. Give one of the daily bar and food specials a try. 3333 S. Coulter St., 806.398.7777, publichouseamarillo.com \$\$

ROCKET BREWS

Seemingly made for Instagram, this Boulevard location quietly built a loyal clientele. Then it got featured in Season 14 of the *Texas Bucket List*. Head there for to-go micheladas and daiquiris with Jalisco-style snack trays and bowls. Locally owned by Palo Duro grads. 1506 E. Amarillo Blvd., 806.350.7830, rocketbrews.com \$

ROOSTERS CAFE

This coffee, breakfast and lunch stop near 34th and Bell is quietly one of the best dessert places in the city. (That apple pie: Whoa.) But the quiche, sandwiches, soups and salads are also worth an order. Be advised: The dining room fills up quickly for lunch, but we love the cute outdoor area. 3440 S. Bell St., Unit 110, 806.353.7309 \$

SAI INDIAN CUISINE

Established in 2024, Sai brought a new Indian lunch buffet option to Amarillo, seven days a week, along with a la carte menu items. The saag paneer and lamb curry are standouts, the hospitality is attentive, and the portions (off the menu) are really generous. 3701 Olsen Blvd., 806.437.1399, saiindiancuisine.com \$\$

SINALOA HOT DOGS AND MEXICAN FOOD

If you’ve never had a Mexican hot dog, then stop reading and head over to the Boulevard right now. This is a small place but the flavor is huge. We also love the fire-grilled chicken, tacos, tortas, carne asada, quesadillas, burritos and mulitas. But that hot dog! (You’ll need napkins.) 2618 E. Amarillo Blvd., 806.367.8935 \$

SUNDAY’S KITCHEN

Everyone loves Chef Ron, but they especially love his West Texas twist on Gulf Coast and Cajun cuisine. This downtown dive is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Friday. It’s closed on Saturdays, but don’t miss the Sunday brunch. Try the Pit Master Mac & Cheese. 112 SW Sixth Ave., 806.418.6477 \$\$

TEDDY JACK'S ARMADILLO GRILL

With a vast, no-frills menu, this regional restaurant concept was created by former NFL safety and Texas Tech standout Curtis Jordan, who turned to the food biz after retiring in the 1980s. The outdoor area is great and so is the brick-oven pizza. A fun place to watch the big game. 5080 S. Coulter St., 806.322.0113, teddyjacks.com \$\$

TEXAS FIREHOUSE SPORTS BAR & GRILL

Maybe it's the abundant TVs. Or the incredible number of beers on tap. But this locally owned sports bar is a lot bigger inside than the exterior would have you believe. It's pub grub all the way—pizza, burgers, paninis, fried pickles—and it's all good. Plus, it's divided up between the family-friendly restaurant side or the noisier bar side. 3333 S. Coulter St., Suite D1, 806.351.1800, txfirehouse.com \$\$

TYLER'S BARBEQUE

Amarillo has no shortage of authentic Texas barbecue, but Tyler's always seems to be residents' first choice. Maybe it's because he's got a reputation all over the Lone Star State. Or maybe it's secretly because of the Frito pie and green chile stew. Plan ahead: Most menu items sell out. 3301 Olsen Blvd., 806.331.2271, tylersbarbeque.com \$\$

WEST TEXAS FRESH

West Texas Fresh is located north of the AISD Rod Schroder Education Support Center, with a drive-thru format serving salads, wraps, smoothies and breakfast burritos. Order ahead using the app, customize your salad or wrap with add-ons, pick it up and go. Menu highlights include the popular PanHandle Salad, Roasted Peach Salad and Super Green smoothie. 7201 W. I-40, 806.463.9014, westtexasfresh.com \$

X- STEAKHOUSE

The name is a play on cattle brands—say "X-Bar"—and this Town Square steakhouse definitely knows beef. It's locally owned, has a full bar, and the prices are extremely reasonable for such a swanky atmosphere. We hear great things about the weekend brunch, too. 9181 Town Square Blvd., Suite 1311, 806.322.4227, xbarsteakhouse.com \$\$-\$\$\$



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PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL MUSEUM

EBB AND FLOW: LAKE MEREDITH AT 60

Drought lurked in the minds of all the grownups where I grew up. Even when it rained and there was plenty of water, the focus would shift to how soon that water would be gone.

After a cloudburst, it was a time-honored ritual for my dad to drive us to the bridge over the Salt Fork of the Red River on Highway 83 in Collingsworth County in hopes the river might be roaring. As we would stand there in awe at the sight of those rusty red rapids, my dad would always turn to us and say, somewhat bleakly, “what a shame—all that water going to Oklahoma.”

It’s quite possible that Albert Sidney “Sid” Stinnett, an early-day Amarillo civic booster and businessman, uttered similar words while watching the Canadian River rage bank-to-bank after a deluge. Like my dad, Stinnett thought it was a shame to be blessed with a good rain only to have points beyond benefit from it. And though Stinnett didn’t live to see it, he dreamed of a day when a dam would halt the Canadian’s flood waters in a vast reservoir, ensuring that Panhandle rainfall would benefit Panhandle people.

Stinnett was mostly fixated on a reservoir for crop irrigation, and determined the best spot for a lake on the Canadian was the area east of where it crossed the Dumas highway north of Amarillo. In 1925, he brought in Gen. George Washington Goethals, who had supervised construction of the Panama Canal, for an expert opinion. Gen. Goethals wasn’t sold on the notion that a reservoir on the Canadian could supply enough water for irrigation, but he still thought Stinnett was on to something.

Stinnett died in 1935. A depression and world war put the idea on hold. By the late 1940s, a new generation of dreamers took up Stinnett’s cause, led by men such as Alson Asa “Double A” Meredith, Borger’s city manager. Their interest was less about irrigation and more about bolstering municipal water supplies. These leaders commissioned formal studies to see how much water would be available to fill a lake, and the conclusion was that an estimated 400,000 acre feet of rainwater flowed out of the Panhandle each year to (sorry, Dad) Oklahoma. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation launched a feasibility study for a dam and reservoir in roughly the same area Stinnett identified. From this effort, the Canadian River Project was born, signed into law by President Harry S. Truman on Dec. 29, 1950.

In 1953, the Texas Legislature created the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority—known as CRMWA—to supply water from the planned lake to almost a dozen Panhandle and South Plains towns through an aqueduct that would stretch 358 miles. The Bureau of Reclamation started construction on a dam near Sanford in 1962, and by early 1965, the pooling water had become a real lake. A.A. Meredith passed away in 1963 and it was decided in 1965 that the new lake should bear his name. Work continued on the dam until later that year, and the project was formally dedicated in 1966. The aqueduct began flowing on April 1, 1968.

Lake Meredith represented fuel for growth in council chambers and corporate boardrooms. For everyone else, the lake was something to behold and enjoy. The National Park Service was

brought in to manage recreation at the lake and its environs, and as early as 1965, several campgrounds were opened and boats were already taking to the water. So in many ways, the summer of 1965 marks the beginning of Lake Meredith as a star attraction.

The July 4, 1965, edition of the *Amarillo Sunday News-Globe* devoted a special section to the new recreational adventures awaiting Panhandle residents. The Amarillo Chamber of Commerce took out a two-page ad splashing every good thing expected from the lake across the pages, punctuating the graphics with a bathing beauty holding a beach ball over her head. Lake Meredith promised the advancement of the good life. Psychologically, we were ascending with the waterline—all the way to a record 101.85 feet by 1973. We had a tangible reserve of water, an assurance we had been sorely lacking.

But over the years, things got complicated. When the waterline started to fall in the first decade of the new century, so did our spirits. Lake levels had always fluctuated, but a string of extremely dry years starting in 2011—the year only seven inches of rain fell in Amarillo—nearly did Lake Meredith in. On Aug. 7, 2013, CRMWA reported that Meredith’s level had fallen to 26.14 feet. Our beautiful lake had dried up over most of its footprint, a depressing turn of events that didn’t bode well for the future of anything in the Texas Panhandle.

We began to pay close attention to weather radar images of rainfall north and west of Amarillo. When we said “we shore needed this” after a solid rain, it became commonplace to add “that oughta help the lake.” Meredith’s declining fortunes kept us in a constant state of water vigilance.

But as Lake Meredith approaches its 60th birthday, things have turned around. A few wet years, combined with careful management by lake authorities, have helped water levels recover. We hit 80 feet in 2023, if I remember right, and we’re getting close to that mark again. It’s not a record, but it’s respectable. Lake Meredith is getting its shine back, and we’re taking notice.

Even at its lowest point, Lake Meredith was still a beautiful sight near the dam Sid Stinnett dreamed about and where “Double A” Meredith gave it his all. We’ll always find any pool of water beautiful around here because water is our life. And Lake Meredith has proven to be life-giving in more ways than one. ☺



LEFT: SID STINETT;
RIGHT: A. A. MEREDITH

EVERYTHING IS OK

I have long said one of the things that makes Amarillo so livable is that it is so leaveable. In a good way, of course, because in roughly four to six hours, we can easily drive to a variety of locales, from Dallas to Colorado Springs, Albuquerque, a slew of mountains, and Oklahoma City. I recall laughing when a realtor told me that in 1988, but now I get it. Distance is relative and a given in these parts.

Known by locals as The 405 or The Big Friendly, OKC is a booming metropolis of 1.4 million residents, and with freeway speeds now at 75 mph in both Texas and Oklahoma, it is easy to safely—and legally—skate into town in less than four hours. It's also one of my favorite weekend getaways, easily scalable from two to four days (depending on holidays and remote working).

I usually stay near Will Rogers International Airport on the city's southwest side, where there are many affordable hotels, as well as easy access to the Oklahoma River Trail that runs alongside the river of the same name. It is possible to run or bike all the way downtown, and the skyline, which includes the majestic 50-story Devon Tower, is inspiring. If you believe the press release last year, one day the proposed 1,907-foot-tall Legends Tower may dwarf everything in the entire U.S. We'll see about that.

If historic hotels are your thing, then I highly recommend

The Skirvin with its fabulous ghost stories—including its famous main ghost, Effie—as well as the Colcord. Both are Hilton properties located squarely downtown. Center City is very walkable.

The area offers easy access to Bricktown, just east of the railroad, which borrows heavily from San Antonio's Riverwalk, including its own water taxi on the Bricktown Canal. Once a warehouse and distribution center, Bricktown is now a dining and entertainment mecca with several hotels, clubs and restaurants. Ditch your car and set out on foot.

Be sure to also bring your reusable grocery bags, because OKC has four chains that Amarilloans crave: Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Sprouts Farmers Market, and Aldi. I always restock the items I can't get back home. While there may not be an HEB nearby, four out of five isn't bad!

Professional sports play a prominent role here, with the Triple-A Oklahoma City Comets—an affiliate of the Los Angeles Dodgers—playing at their flashy stadium in Bricktown. The OKC Thunder, which ran roughshod over the NBA this year, plays at the Paycom Center downtown. (Good luck getting tickets, though. They sell out fast.)

Paycom also hosts concerts by top artists, and is the closest that many performers ever get to Amarillo these days. I have seen the Trans-Siberian Orchestra there multiple times on its annual Christmas tour; the holiday season is a fun time to make that weekend getaway.

Like Amarillo, OKC has a centuries-old legacy as a cattle town,



which means Stockyards City is a must-see. From western apparel to steakhouses, live music and the weekly cattle auctions, this compact district is more like a living museum. Don't miss Cattlemen's Steakhouse, which opened in 1910. It caught the attention of Guy Fieri and was featured on his *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* series.

Sadly, this year OKC marked 30 years since the horrific bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The remains of the structure and adjacent property were turned into a National Memorial and Museum in 2000, and are worth a visit. The reflecting pool and stunning empty chair art installation—one for each of the 168 victims—is a sobering reminder of that sad day. Don't be surprised to find yourself in silent reverence, shedding a tear or two.

Other highlights for me include the amazing array of ethnic and quirky progressive restaurants. There's plenty of fare for vegetarians and vegans, not to mention fans of Vietnamese, African, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine who will find heaping helpings of culture served up in Middle America.

With so much to offer, and an easy trip, you might just find yourself like me and become a repeat offender. I make the trip at least twice a year. (Or whenever I need a Trader Joe's fix, which is reason enough.) ☺



THE HISTORIC SKIRVIN AT NIGHT



Other Things to See and Do:

There are more than **15 breweries** in the OKC Metro, and while I haven't found a bad one yet, my faves are **The Big Friendly** (see above: OKC nicknames), **Skydance Brewing Co.**, and **Roughtail Brewing Co.** Prost, y'all!

OKC has always been a **Route 66** town, and you will see a number of brown street signs denoting the Mother Road along its various alignments through the city. As the population grew, new city bypass routes were created over the years, long before modern freeways. As far as I am concerned, **Northwest 23rd Street** is the best, with shops, restaurants and the epic **Tower Theatre**. For detailed maps, check out JimRoss66.com.

If family-friendly is a requirement, OKC has it in spades. From the **OKC Zoo** to the **Science Museum Oklahoma**, **First Americans Museum**, and **OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark**, there's plenty for moms, dads and the kids to be happy about.

OKC Outlets along West I-40 feature a plethora of name-brand shops offering clothing and accessories at discounted prices. Get there early on the weekend, because the parking lot fills up quickly.

Frontier City and **Hurricane Harbor** offer a big city theme and water-park attractions, but without the long waits. Every September, the **Oklahoma State Fair** attracts up to a million visitors, yet another reason to visit our neighboring state.

As always, check online for days and hours of operation.





PROVIDED PHOTOS

BETO GUILLEN



s a side gig from his work at Bartlett's Lumber in Canadian, Cosme "Beto" Guillen is a wildlife, landscape astrophotographer. From far-away shots of the Milky Way to up-close photos of bald eagles, Guillen has found both passion and a little bit of therapy in epic outdoor photography.

"It's more like a hobby to me since I have anxiety," Guillen says. "When I go out and take pictures I feel like I'm in a different world because I'm seeing what nature is doing on its own hands and I'm just there to witness what they do."

Guillen has been featured in the *High Plains Observer Perryton*, which occasionally publishes his images of various eagles, deer, bobcats, butterflies and more. Wildlife photography is his favorite because he "admires what animals do in their natural habitat."

He loves to set up in places like the Canadian River Historic Wagon Bridge, Lake Marvin and Gene Howe Wildlife Management Area.

When he's not looking at wildlife, he's training his lenses on stars and the night sky. "Astrophotography focuses on what you can see in the night sky when there's no light pollution around," Guillen explains. Most of his photos are taken for his own personal enjoyment, but he's not the only one enjoying it: His photography website has logged views from across the country.

See more of Beto Guillen's work on Instagram at [@betoguillen1010](#) and at [beto-guillen.pixels.com](#). ☺





MARCY MCKAY, Author

The best advice I ever heard is: My mother told me this when I was in eighth grade: “The world is made up of somebodies and nobodies. It’s not right, it’s not fair, but that’s just how it is. What you can do to make a difference is to treat everyone like a somebody, whether they are or not.”

My three most recommended books are: *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey. I reread it every few years when I need to restore my faith in humanity. *The Hours*, by Michael Cunningham. It’s a reimagining of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1999. I got to meet Cunningham in 2001 when he was the keynote speaker at a writing conference in Amarillo. I picked him up at the airport and was his driver for the weekend. It was a life-changing experience and I keep *The Hours* on my desk for inspiration. And my own book, *Pennies from Burger Heaven*. Years ago, I heard a voice in my head while at Llano Cemetery. (Don’t worry, writers hear voices all the time—it’s our magic.) *Pennies* tells the story about a 12-year-old homeless girl who “lives” at the cemetery, then wakes up one morning to find her mama is missing. She must brave the big, bad world alone to discover what happened that fateful night. It’s very much adult fiction, and I love hearing how my book has impacted readers. *Pennies* also sits on my desk for inspiration.

To me, success means: freedom to do what lights me up. Freedom of time, choices and resources.

People who know me might be surprised that I: am deeply introverted. I love being with people and connecting with others, but then I need quiet and solitude on the daily. I’m like a rechargeable flashlight. I shine bright, then grow dim and need to go recharge alone.

My biggest pet peeve is: closed-minded people.

Everyone in Amarillo needs to experience: El Bracero (2116 S. Grand St.). There are several different locations in town, but the one on Grand is my favorite. Great food, wonderful owners. Chips and guacamole make my heart happy.

If I could change any one local thing it would be: Fix. The. Roads.

This city is amazing at: giving. Amarillo is a very generous community.

My favorite place in Amarillo is: every library in the city. That may sound cheesy, but books are our best friends. They inform, educate and entertain. Stories allow us to travel the world and experience countless different lives. Books show us how we’re so much more alike than different. I love the smell of libraries, seeing the rows and rows of books. Libraries are the best and they are FREE!

A local organization I love right now: Leadership Amarillo & Canyon, specifically because of its youth program, Teen Leadership Amarillo & Canyon. I was the nonprofit’s executive director from 1996 to 2002. Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart and I created Teen LAC in 1997 with high schoolers from every school in the Amarillo and Canyon ISDs, plus home-schooled kids, with West Texas A&M University college coaches serving as mentors. At no cost to the students, Teen LAC empowers them to not only be leaders at school and within their personal circles, but also in the wider world. The program is almost 30 years old, and is one of my greatest professional joys. 😊



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and **Canyon**,
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