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Weatherford Rotary Club's 4th of July Celebrated 250 Years of America



Provided
Various America-themed memorabilia was given away in Rader Park, including stickers, bandanas, and trifolds containing the Declaration of Independence.



Provided
Weatherford Rotary Club members, whose contributions towards this annual Fourth of July festival made this year's proceedings possible.



Provided
Rotary President Briley Baca checks in with various guests and rotarians throughout the Weatherford Rotary Club's 4th of July celebration.



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Kathy Neufeld

Kathy Ann Neufeld was born on April 4, 1953, in El Paso, Texas, to Richard Wayne Butler and Mary Etta (Frazier) Statser. She passed away alongside her beloved husband, Rodney Ray Neufeld, north of Arapaho, Oklahoma, on June 25, 2026.



Kathy spent her early childhood in Sentinel, OK, where she created many treasured memories. She looked forward to Christmases spent with her cousins, learned to ride a bicycle, and enjoyed countless summer days at the Sentinel swimming pool. With the guidance of her mother, she learned to sew, making many of her own clothes, and she cherished attending Butler family reunions. Later, her family moved to Weatherford. During her high school years, Kathy was honored as Football Homecoming Queen in 1969 and graduated from Weatherford High School with the Class of 1971.

Kathy made her home in Weatherford, where she raised her two children, Elizabeth and Joshua. The family attended Trinity Baptist Church. The couple was married on October 24, 1981, in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. They blended their families, and Kathy lovingly welcomed Rodney's daughters, Jennifer and Leslie. Together they built a life filled with love and shared adventures. Over the years, they made their home in Scottsbluff, Nebraska; Wichita Falls, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and, in 1994, returned to Oklahoma, living in Cordell and Weatherford before settling in Custer City.

Kathy enjoyed quilting, sewing, fishing, cooking, and caring for her flowers. She was proud of her family and especially enjoyed spending time with her children and grandchildren. Her years as secretary of the First Christian Church in Clinton and her involvement in Trinity Baptist Church were an important part of her life.

Kathy and Rodney passed away together after sharing over 44 wonderful years of marriage. She was preceded in death by her parents and grand-daughter, Demi Sikes.

She is survived by daughter, Elizabeth Sikes (Janel Rippetoe) of Elk City; son, Joshua Sikes of Elk City; daughter, Jennifer Chansler (Patrick) of Weatherford; daughter, Leslie Doshier of Cordell; step-father, Wes Statser; sisters, Sandra Teasley (Calvin) of Weatherford, Janalyn Taylor of Clinton, Susan Rollins (Ricky) of Austin, Texas, Rex Statser (Debbie) of Yukon; grandchildren, Kendall Sikes (Haylee), Kylee Sikes (Matt Puttkammer), Taylor Elkins, Austin Chansler (Kenzie), Carli Doshier, Dalton Doshier and Rylee Price; 13 great-grandchildren; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Memorial Donations may be made in their name to the Trinity Baptist Church Building Fund at PO Box 67, Weatherford, OK 73096 or the Custer City Senior Citizens Center at PO Box 349, Custer City, OK 73639.

Rodney Neufeld

Rodney Ray Neufeld was born in Weatherford, Oklahoma on September 8, 1950, to Clarence Virgil and Fleda Arlene (Cartwright) Neufeld. He passed away alongside his wife, Kathy Ann (Butler) Neufeld, north of Arapaho, on June 25, 2026, at the age of 75.



Rodney was raised in Weatherford, Oklahoma, where he graduated with the Class of 1969. During his high school years, he was active in both football and track. Following graduation, Rodney attended Southwestern Oklahoma State University, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech in 1974. Feeling called to ministry, Rodney continued his education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He later returned to Weatherford to serve as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church from 1975 to 1979. The church had long been an important part of his family's life, as his parents were charter members.

The couple was married on October 24, 1981, in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. They blended their families, and Rodney lovingly welcomed Kathy's children, Elizabeth and Joshua. Together they built a life filled with love and shared adventures. Over the years, they made their home in Scottsbluff, Nebraska; Wichita Falls, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and, in 1994, returned to Oklahoma, living in Cordell and Weatherford before settling in Custer City.

Rodney worked for HNC over 10 years and then went to ATS for a few years before retirement. He enjoyed playing pool, fishing, working on cars, and mowing for Custer City to keep him occupied. Rodney never knew a stranger and was a loving and kind man that enjoyed spending time with his family. He loved serving the Lord and never missed an opportunity to tell people about Him.

Kathy and Rodney passed away together after sharing over 44 wonderful years of marriage. He was preceded in death by his parents; grand-daughter, Demi Sikes; and brother-in-law, Mark Martin.

Rodney is survived by daughter, Jennifer Chansler (Patrick) of Weatherford; daughter, Leslie Doshier of Cordell; daughter, Elizabeth Sikes (Janel Rippetoe) of Elk City; son, Joshua Sikes of Elk City; brother, Ron Neufeld (Kolleen) of Florida; sister, Janna Martin of Cordell; grandchildren, Kendall Sikes (Haylee), Kylee Sikes (Matt Puttkammer), Taylor Elkins, Austin Chansler (Kenzie), Carli Doshier, Dalton Doshier, Rylee Price; 13 great-grandchildren; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Sara Dyck

Sara Dyck, lovingly known as Mama Sara, Mom, and Grandma, entered into the presence of her Lord and Savior on June 27, 2026, in Corn, Oklahoma, at the age of 74.



Sara was born on December 30, 1951, in Mexico. On September 6, 1970, she married the love of her life, Johan Dyck. Together they built a home centered on faith, hard work, and family, raising five children and creating a legacy that continues through their children and grandchildren.

Anyone who knew Sara, knew she had an incredible work ethic and could make anything sparkle. Whether she was helping on the farm or cleaning the house, she gave every task her very best.

She was never rushed and always believed there was value in taking the time to do things right. Mom faithfully served her family through the countless little things she did each day, often without recognition, and her quiet dedication was a beautiful reflection of the love she had for those around her.

She also had a love for beautiful flowers and never passed up a nice pair of shoes. Those little joys brought a smile to her face and reflected the warmth she carried throughout her life.

More than anything else, Sara loved her Lord. She knew her Savior personally and lived with the confident assurance that one day He would call her home. She treasured the Scriptures, especially the verses that spoke of the assurance of salvation, and found great comfort and joy in singing the old hymns of the faith. Her unwavering trust in Jesus Christ shaped the way she lived and the legacy she leaves behind.

Her greatest joy was her family. She faithfully loved her husband, children, grandchildren, and everyone God placed in her life. Her patience, servant's heart, and steadfast faith will continue to inspire all who knew her.

Though her family grieves her absence, they rejoice knowing she is now in the presence of the Savior she loved so deeply. Her life was a testimony of faithful service, enduring love, and unwavering hope in Christ.

Sara was preceded in death by her grandson, Steven, and her son-in-law, John.

She is survived by her husband, Johan Dyck; her children: John and his wife, Mary; Pete and his wife, Lena; Mary and her husband, Abe; Sara and her husband, Cornelius; and Lena and her husband, Pancho; 24 grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

Catherine Dougherty



Catherine Nash Dougherty was born to Evans and Jean Nash in Oklahoma City on March 9, 1947 and passed at her home in Hinton on June 28, 2026. She spent her childhood exploring the natural beauty of 1950's Nichols Hills with her

sisters Nancy and Patricia.

This idyllic experience fostered a love of nature that she would share with her children and grandchildren and carry into her writing and conservation efforts. Catherine attended several universities eventually landing at OCU where she got her Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Psychology and her Master's in Human Ecology. At OCU she met the love of her life, Michael Dougherty (they were virtually inseparable for almost 55 years).

After a brief courtship the couple married in 1971 before joining the back-to-earth movement that lead them to Western Oklahoma where they raised their eight children on a small farm in Hinton. Catherine took great pride in her children and worked tirelessly for them. From cloth diapers, fresh canned foods and milking goats for lactose-intolerant twins and homeschooling, she dedicated her life to raising the "next generation" of healthy, conscientious adults.

Catherine was a lifelong activist who championed causes for human equality and cultural sensitivity. Known under the moniker of "PoisonPen," she wrote many letters and articles for women's rights and responsible stewardship reflecting her dedication to natural conservation. This passion translated into, among other things, a riding stable on the family's woodland property as well as a wild animal sanctuary; both nurtured her love of the outdoors, those feathered and furry friends that inhabited it, and the flowers and vegetation that inspired her beautiful writing.

Catherine was a prolific writer with a weekly newspaper column titled "In the Garden". These articles included a unique blend of Catherine's sharp wit, colloquial tidbits, fascinating facts and her own personal perspective on life and gardening. Her articles were published in the El Reno Tribune, Hinton Record, and The Country Connection for over a decade.

Her work is also featured on Facebook and her website www.gardening4us.com, where her writings can still be found. She was featured in multiple publications including The Sooner Catholic, Oklahoma Living, and on KOCO TV's "Someone You Should Know."

Catherine was preceded in death by her parents, Evans and Jean Nash and in-laws Dr. Raymond and Eileen Dougherty and her sister Nancy Nash. She leaves behind a loving husband of almost 55 years (virtually inseparable from him since the time they meet), Michael and children Webster and wife Rebecca, Dolan and wife Tara, Marshall and wife Andrea, Patrick, John and wife Nikki, Peter and wife Lynnae, Andrew and wife Kylie, and Elizabeth and husband Alex. She also leaves behind grandchildren Zoe, Ella, Julia, Evans, Nash, Pierce, Fiona, Nova, Ada, Dillon, Everett, Porter, Ruth, Lilian, Kate and Isaac.

Jim Thompson



Jimmie Carrol Thompson was born on August 30, 1933, to Albert and Pearl McQuilliams Thompson in Greenfield, OK. He passed away on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Okeene Hospital in Okeene, OK, at the age of 92.

Jim graduated from Greenfield High School in 1953. During high school, he was active in both football and basketball and was a member of the Greenfield football team that finished as state runner-up.

After graduation, he continued playing basketball with the Watonga Town Team. Following high school, Jim proudly served his country in the United States Marine Corps. On April 28, 1957, he married Betty Marie Landreth. They made their home for a short time in Kansas, where Jim worked for an aircraft company, before returning to the Watonga area.

Betty preceded him in death in 2005. After returning to Oklahoma, Jim worked for the Barrett Ranch, in Southard for U.S. Gypsum, and later for the City of Watonga as an electrician in the Water and Light Department, retiring in 1992.

Even after retirement, Jim continued doing electrical work on the side and enjoyed helping his father-in-law on the family farm.

Jim was known for his generous heart and willingness to help anyone in need. He never had a bad word to say about anyone and was respected for his kindness, humility, and servant's spirit. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, gardening, yard work, and building projects out of wood. Jim was a member of the Watonga American Legion, was active in the Watonga Volunteer Fire Department, and faithfully cared for several area cemeteries. He and Betty especially enjoyed square dancing and were very active in the local square dance community.

Jim was a faithful member of Trinity Baptist Church in Watonga, where he served as both a deacon and trustee. He was also active in the Watonga Ministerial Alliance. On September 25, 2009, Jim married Mae McBride in Watonga, Oklahoma. Together they shared many wonderful years.

He is survived by his wife, Mae Thompson, of the home in Watonga; two children, John Thompson and wife Miranda of Watonga, and Brenda Roof of Glendale, Arizona; seven grandchildren: Matthew Thompson and wife Kayce of Eagle City, Oklahoma; Zachary Brack and wife Rexanne of Watonga, Oklahoma; Eric Thompson and Adam Thompson, both of Watonga , Oklahoma; Brian Roof and wife Tina of Glendale, Arizona; Derik Roof and wife Corrine Maier of Phoenix, Arizona; and Nicole Roof and husband Sean Lowery of Glendale, Arizona.

He is also survived by two stepchildren: Rick Doss of Sedalia, Missouri; and Karen Anstead and her husband Phill of Enid, Oklahoma; four step-grandchildren: Aspen Doss, Steven Doss, Laura Ingle, Jesse Reeb, and Sierra Bancroft; 13 great-grandchildren: Braxton, Hayden, Emberly, Lynlee, Hannah, Malachi, Ezekiel, Zoe, Vincent, Lily, Valour, Bella, and Isaac; four step-great-grandchildren, Wayleigh, Brigitte, Donovan, and Dorian; two brothers, Loyd Thompson of Cambridge, Nebraska, and Melvin Thompson and wife Barbara of Midwest City, Oklahoma; one sister, Louise Schultz of Okeene; the Landreth family; as well as many nieces, nephews, other relatives, and friends.

Jim was preceded in death by his parents, Albert and Pearl Thompson, and his first wife, Betty Thompson.

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H: 101° L: 76°
Wednesday

Partly Cloudy

H: 100° L: 74°
Thursday

Partly Cloudy

H: 95° L: 73°
Friday

Stormy

H: 95° L: 72°
Saturday

Partly Cloudy

H: 96° L: 72°
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H: 95° L: 72°
Monday

Mostly Sunny

H: 98° L: 73°
Tuesday

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The Weatherford Regional Hospital facility in Weatherford, where the proposed Walking Track will be located.

Weatherford Regional Hospital Announcing TSET Walking Track

Kyra Huckabay
WOK News Team

Weatherford Regional Hospital is currently in the planning stage of a walking track project designed to promote physical activity. It will be located in front of their Weatherford facility.

“We'd [like to] have a nice, probably 5-foot-wide, concrete level walking track so that people in town that want a little safer, flat surface to walk on could do that here possibly,” Chief Executive Officer Darin Farrell shared about the project during a recent Board of Trustees meeting.

Weatherford Regional Hospital has received \$29,000 of grant funding from Oklahoma’s Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) for the planning phase of the project. However, Farrell explained that a separate grant application is required for the construction phase of the project.

“This particular set of grants from the TSET is for physical activity,” Chief Executive Officer Darin Farrell shared about the project during a recent Board of Trustees meeting. “We'd like to have it a little bit beautified out front. Our tentative design would also have some seating areas.”

Optometrist Dr. Nguyen Joins TrueVision Team

DR. LAN NGUYEN
TRUEVISION OPTOMETRIST

TrueVision Optometric Group, with locations in Weatherford and Clinton, has announced a new optometrist, Dr. Lan Nguyen, will be joining their staff.

Dr. Nguyen is a primary care optometrist dedicated to providing comprehensive, patient-centered eye care for patients of all ages. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Science from the University of Central Oklahoma, eventually receiving her Doctor of Optometry degree from Northeastern Oklahoma State University’s College of Optometry in May of 2026.

Dr. Lan Nguyen is passionate about community service and advancing eye care. She has volunteered her time providing eye care for underserved populations through diabetic eye clinics in Oklahoma,

“Giving Sight Day,” and an international mission trip to Roatan, Honduras. She is also bilingual in English and Vietnamese.

For her services, Dr. Nguyen received the 2025 “Vision Practice Excellence Award,” jointly presented by Vision Service Plan (VSP) and the American Academy of Optometry Foundation (AAOP).

Dr. Nguyen is also a recipient of the “Michael G. Harris Community Service Excellence Award,” presented through the American Academy of Optometry.

Outside the office, enjoys cooking, spending time with family and friends, and exploring new places with her fiancée, Edward, and their cat, Zod.

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LOCAL AND AREA NEWS



Mike Smith
News Director

Renovations on Burns Flat’s “Infinity One OK Spaceport” Underway



Mike Smith
News Director

A lot of progress is being made at the Oklahoma Spaceport in Burns Flat, now known as the “Infinity One Oklahoma Spaceport,” with various local leaders weighing in on its development.

When it comes to potential development at the Infinity One Oklahoma Spaceport in Burns Flat, Cordell Mayor Phil Kliever says cities and towns similar to Cordell can benefit from that development.

“If [the spaceport] ever develops—it has the potential to develop and the whole state’s got their eyes on it, even renaming it—we are proba-bly going to have to support a lot of their housing opportunities, hopefully a little bit of retail, although that’s hard in any little town,” Kliever expressed. “Area towns have to be ready for that. Re-tail is drifting away in towns the size of Cordell. We need to do a lot to foster that, but there’s certain things you just can’t control much.”

Senator Darcy Jech revealed that many tenants are relocating to the site. “There’s a new tenant called HOP Aero, and that’s a startup rocket company,” said Jech. “They’ve done several successful test fires with one of his rocket motors. They’re working with SWOSU on some team opportunities, and they even hired a SWOSU grad [from Corn] to be on their team.”

Jech also shared that the activity at the spaceport is good for rural Oklahoma. “Another company called Firewall Forward leased one of the buildings there, and they’re moving their entire airplane piston motor operation from Colorado to the spaceport,” Jech explained. “They’re going to have approximately 10 to 15 full-time equivalents, so there’s [going to be] a lot of activity going on at that Spaceport.”

New developments continue to occur at the spaceport in Burns Flat, with additional developments possible in the future.



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CORDELL / NEW HOUSING - Cordell Mayor Phil Kliever is hopeful that additional housing is on the horizon for the city of Cordell. “I’ve talked to some people that actually presented plans to us for not just one or two, like 15 to 30, and I’ve got to believe they know something that’s going on in the area,” expressed Kliever. “I wish Cordell could support that on its own, but I’m not so sure about that. But Burns Flat activity, and all of that, is certainly in the cards.”

CUSTER CO / ILLEGAL FISHING - Custer County Sheriff Dan Day would like to remind residents to refrain from fishing off of county bridges. “It’s a liability. There’s not enough room on [the bridge] for two vehicles to pass with somebody to be standing fishing.” Day added that the Custer County Sheriff’s Department will work with game rangers, responsible for enforcing Oklahoma’s Wildlife Conservation codes, on the matter and tickets will be issued if needed. “The Game Rangers’ tickets [will cost roughly] \$700.”

CLINTON / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – Fayne Sawatzky has been named the Community Economic Development Director for the city of Clinton. “I’m excited to be here and I’m excited to be doing this...new position [in] community and economic development,” Sawatzky shared about this new opportunity. “I’m going to be working with a lot of different people, a lot of different organizations and other department heads to kind of develop some stuff. I Look forward to learning a lot of new stuff and working with a lot of new people and hopefully I can make some improvement with Clinton.” Sawatzky said he is invested in the growth of Clinton and plans to develop current Clinton businesses, as well as attract new ones.

WEATHERFORD / CORNERSTONE CENTER Cornerstone Early Childhood Development Center in Weatherford is now under new ownership, said former owner Venessa Rogers. Effective as of June 29, ownership of the center has transitioned to Chris Isbell and Leapfrog Learning Center, with Rylan Klassen serving as the Site Director. Rogers says the teachers, daily schedules, and the core curriculum at the Center will remain the same. water needs and the main focus for Weatherford would be to expand water treatment capacity.

WEATHERFORD / WATER IMPROVEMENTS The Weatherford City Commission recently agreed to move forward with a program agreement for water system improvements with Myers Engineering. This was initially a loan program that was started in the last three or four years,” Bill Myers of Myers Engineering said about the program. “For towns over 10,000 [population], you could get up to \$1 million if you would spend over \$3 million. Sometimes you could borrow over 3 million, so it was 25-75. But this year, they changed the rules to where it’s a 50-50; if you have a project, if you borrow \$1 million from them, they’re going to give you \$1 million through principal forgiveness.” Myers added that terms for the loan can be set by city officials. The program is intended to address

WEATHERFORD / DR ALLARD - The Weatherford Regional Hospital Board of Trustees voted to accept the nomination of Dr. Tyson Allard (TrueVision Optometric Group) to the board. “I come from the Tulsa Air Nation Guard,” Dr. Allard shared about himself during the Hospital Board meeting. “I’m very familiar with a lot of things presented in this [industry] because we have to run a facility as well in the military.” Dr. Allard succeeds former Board Member Andy Carruth, who officially stepped down last month.

WEATHERFORD / POLICE ACCREDITATION Weatherford Police Department has earned accreditation from the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Accreditation Program, which is through the Oklahoma Association of Chiefs of Police. “The Accreditation Program provides Oklahoma law enforcement agencies with an avenue to demonstrate that they meet commonly accepted standards and best practices for efficient and effective operations,” explained Kevin McCullough, who serves on the Accreditation Commission. “Law enforcement executives who seek accreditation under our program have had their written policies, their procedures, and their operation evaluated to ensure that they meet all statutory requirements and also national best practices for policing.” Weatherford is only one of ten departments who have gone through the accreditation process for smaller agencies.



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Happy Birthday Wishes for July 8th – Jeanine Berrong, Bradley Blackwell, Lou Hamilton, Jr., Billy Karlin, Robin Karlin, Terry MaGill, David Miller, Jim Rodemeyer, Terry Thomson, Julie Tisdal; **July 9th** – Carolyn Dibler, Jerry Hill, Frank Johnson, Glenda Jordan, Mark Lantz, Frances Moore, Caitlin Russel, Sheila Settles, Michael Webb; **July 10th** – Les Crall, Carolyn Curell, Leshia Jackson, Connie Lopez, Bobby Marsee, Rachel Smith, James Taylore II; **July 11th** – Hessie Atteberry, Rebecca Blake, Paula Blake, Delores Davidson, David Matz, Lori Stewart, Sue Vermillion; **July 12th** – Atly Buckner, Jonathan Wesley Dale Hawthorn, Kelvin Hart, Saska Koch, Glenn Morris, Ray Murray, Kyla Scales, Emma Loe Shoonmaker, Rev. Earl Stephenson, Liam Turney; **July 13th** – Cezanne Barrios, Damon Basler, Sami Grove, Charlene Haronema, Jennifer Jacks, Deanna LeGrand, Danny Moore, Kelsey Nonast, Matthew Perez, Raegan Roof, Norma Thurman; **July 14th** – Caitlen Coxwell, Willie Galindo, Carissa Hewitt, Frieda Beck, Jamie Patton, Pauline Pennington, Debbie Smith; **July 15th** – Vanessa Baileys, Chris Guthrie, Alecia Lay, Layla Lowrance, Aleesha Lustfield, Shaylee Maddox, Jade Mahan, Lee Miller, David Morris, Alison Page Bieberich, Jason Rivera, Jessie Silver, Jessica Spencer, Carl Spradlin, Betty Sturn, Addison Weaver, Jami Weaver.

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The Cloud Chief Fire Department of Cordell, OK has received a donation of emergency drinking water from Anheuser-Busch to help keep its firefighters hydrated during wildfire response efforts. The donation, made in partnership with the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), will provide critical hydration to first responders working long hours in extreme conditions.

On July 1, 2026 2,300+ cans of water were delivered by Anheuser-Busch, LLC Anheuser-Busch’s local wholesaler partner. The donation will help ensure firefighters have access to clean, safe drinking water while responding to wildfires and other emergencies where proper hydration is essential for safety and performance.

The Cloud Chief Fire Department covers 100 square miles of rural Washita County, OK. With an annual call volume of 40- 60 calls, the majority of which are wildland fires.

The CCFD also responds to surrounding communities for mutual aid and with the Washita County Task Force. “Extended emergency responses, especially during wildfire season, place significant physical demands on our firefighters,” expressed Fire Chief Nocona Cook. “Having access to emergency drinking water helps protect their health, maintain their endurance, and keep them mission-ready when our community needs them most. We’re grateful to Anheuser-Busch and the National Volunteer Fire Council for providing resources that directly support firefighter safety and operational readiness,” said Cook.

Anheuser-Busch has a longstanding tradition of providing support for disaster relief efforts dating back to 1906. Each year, its breweries in Cartersville, Georgia and Fort Collins, Colorado periodically pause beer production to produce emergency drinking water for times of need.

Since 1988, Anheuser-Busch has donated more than 100 million cans of clean, safe drinking water for communities impacted by or preparing for disaster.

With an increased focus on disaster preparedness, Anheuser-Busch partnered with the NVFC in 2019 and, together with its wholesaler partners, has supported volunteer fire departments with nearly 12 million cans of emergency drinking water through over 3,700 deliveries across almost all 50 states.

The NVFC is the leading nonprofit association representing the interests of volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services across the U.S., with a mission to support volunteer responders and the communities they serve.

To learn more about the Emergency Drinking Water for Wildland Firefighters program, please visit www.nvfc.org/water, call 580-515-9359, or email CloudChief_FD@live.com.

THE HINTON JUNCTION

Column by Maxine McCullough



I’m remembering between 1948–1952, my high school days in Binger, OK. The hunt was on. We needed a car for our weekly girls’ trip to Hinton Junction on Rt. 66.

Whose parents would give in to us so we could have our weekly outing? We promise to buy the gas, so we gathered our nickels and dimes.

Gas was 25–30 cents a gallon at that time. There were lots of boys that came to Hinton Junction on a Saturday night. Geary, Hinton, and sometimes Hydro boys. Now that was fun for the “Binger Girls.” We were cute, funny, flirty, and definitely not looking for a serious relationship.

We loved to sing and harmonize. We would sing, “There’s a Long, Long Trail A-Winding” to and from our trip to Hinton Junction on Rt. 66.

Our destination sat a few miles north of Hinton, OK on Rt. 66, a gas station, cafe, and motel. Spending a couple of hours on a Saturday night at Hinton Junction was a highlight for me.

Once we were feeling adventurous, so we drove on east of H.J. across “The Bridge.” Sitting just off the highway was a small bar called Bell Tavern, I believe. As we pulled up, we could see the door was open, and we could see a shuffleboard just inside.

We piled out of the car and headed for the door. A man, probably the owner, stepped to the door, took a long look at us, and held up both hands. “No, no, no, you girls cannot come in here.”

“We just want to play shuffleboard,” we begged. By that time, a group of boys had driven up, undoubtedly had followed us from Hinton Junction.

Another man joined the first. They were amused. “You kids need to go on about your business. You can’t come in here.” We laughed as well and crawled back in our car, drove back across “The Bridge,” where we were accepted.

I’m not sure, but we probably said our goodbyes and headed for home, harmonizing to “There’s a Long, Long Trail A-Winding.” That was such an innocent, pure time. We probably had to be home by 9 or 10 o’clock.

Recently, my friend Machelles took me on a short day trip over to the Hinton Junction area on Rt. 66. It’s in shambles now, of course. I-40 took care of that. Just the sight stirred up a multitude of memories for this old woman. Very good memories, when the “Binger Girls” were expected to show up at Hinton Junction on Rt. 66 on a Saturday night.

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Kooper Slagell Represents Western Oklahoma on Soccer’s Greatest Stage



Whether it’s Norwegians rowing on escalators, Scots putting traffic cones on statues, or the US Men’s National team performing above expectations, the World Cup in North America has truly been a once in a lifetime experience, but have you ever Hi-fived Lionel Messi? One lucky Western Oklahoman did.

On Monday, June 22nd when Argentina took the field for their Group J match against Austria, Kooper Slagell, from Hydro, Oklahoma joined them. Escorting Nahuel Molina, the Argentinian born defender who plays for Atletico Madrid in Spain’s La Liga, Kooper was kitted in his World Cup match mascot attire and ready for his moment on televisions across the globe. “Whenever they were doing the national anthem... and then there was this {red-haired} guy. Pop, you can see my eyeballs,” said Kooper while recalling his experience on The Morning Show with Val & Jon.

Kooper’s grandfather and great-uncle are potato growers for Frito-Lay and they were contacted by Frito-Lay’s parent company PepsiCo to inform them that their child relatives were eligible to be selected to be match mascots.

They entered Kooper, he was selected and the rest is history. While being on television may seem glamorous, the process of getting there was definitely less so. Kooper’s dad, Kyle Slagell, dropped him off at PepsiCo’s regional campus in Plano at 4am. From there they bussed Kooper and the other match mascots to Dallas Stadium, as it’s called during the World Cup. Once there, Kooper and his new mascot compatriots got ready in the Dallas Cheerleader’s locker room, an experience Kyle Slagell claimed Kooper would appreciate more when he got older.

Standing among some of the soccer world’s greatest players, including Lionel Messi, who some consider to be the greatest the game has ever seen, Kooper stood with legends and got to represent Western Oklahoma on one of the world’s greatest stages. After the anthems and the ceremonies, Kooper took to the stands and got to watch the game.

Afterwards, Kooper got to keep his mascot kit as well as other swag provided for attending the event, but the memory of being a part of an historic sporting event will last much longer.



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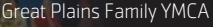
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ATU: Jackson Schwartz Named SWOSU's New Head Cross Country & Track & Field Coach



Jon Chidester
SWOSU Media Relations

Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) Athletics has announced the hiring of Jackson Schwartz as head women's cross country & track & field coach.

Schwartz joins SWOSU after serving as assistant cross country & track & field coach at Arkansas Tech University (ATU) during the 2025-2026 academic year. He succeeds Jennifer Johnson as the 10th head coach in the history of the women's cross country program and the third head coach of the Bulldogs' Division II women's track & field program.

"We're excited to welcome Coach Schwartz to the Bulldog family," said Athletic Director Todd Helton. "His Great American Conference experience, passion for student-athlete development and enthusiasm for SWOSU made him an outstanding fit to lead our women's cross country and track & field program."

At Arkansas Tech, Schwartz helped the Golden Suns capture the 2025 Great American Conference women's cross country championship, the first conference title in program history.

Serving on the staff of 2025 GAC Coach of the Year Gabe Sams, he assisted in developing four women's cross country All-GAC selections and eight track & field All-GAC honorees. Schwartz also coached the 3,000-meter steeplechase and 1,500-meter event groups, helping athletes establish program records in both events.

His athletes also achieved multiple NCAA Division II provisional qualifying marks and numerous personal-best performances. Beyond coaching, Schwartz was actively involved in recruiting, travel coordination, meet operations, compliance and the day-to-day administration of the program.

Prior to joining Arkansas Tech, Schwartz served on the coaching staff at Western Colorado University, where he worked with nationally competitive men's and women's distance programs. There, he contributed to athlete development, recruiting, travel coordination and meet management, including directing operations for the 2024 Mountaineer Invite.

A former cross country and track & field student-athlete at the University of Tulsa, Schwartz earned a Bachelor of Science in sociology in 2021 before completing a Master of Business Studies in rural community health from Western Colorado University in 2025.

"This is a life-changing opportunity for me, and I'm incredibly grateful to Coach Helton and everyone at SWOSU for trusting me to lead this program," Schwartz said. "I'm proud to join the Bulldog family and excited to begin working with our student-athletes this fall. Coach Johnson established a strong foundation, and I'm looking forward to building on that success as we continue developing a program capable of competing for Great American Conference championships."

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