
Winter 2023

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Southwestern Oklahoma State University Office of Institutional Advancement and Alumni

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Vol. 94: Issue 1

WINTER 2023

ECHOES

FROM THE HILL

The Chemistry Behind His Music:
BRYCE CONWAY



The Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU™) Alumni & Friends Magazine Since 1965

From the PRESIDENT

Dear Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) alumni, emeriti, & friends –

I hope that this issue of *Echoes From The Hill* finds you and yours well. Here on the SWOSU Hilltop we are reflecting on a year of enrollment growth and significant accomplishments. We are looking forward to reaching new heights in the year ahead.

In these pages you will be able to learn about many great things happening here at SWOSU! This past summer we broke ground on the Jerry & Margaret Hodge Center for Pharmacy & Rural Health. This was the first groundbreaking for an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) project in the entire state of Oklahoma. Hodge Center will enable SWOSU's healthcare programs in Nursing and Allied Health to substantially increase capacity while significantly enhancing the university's pharmacy doctoral program. Additionally, Hodge Center will also expand the community health services of the SWOSU Center for Rural Health which benefits communities and businesses throughout our state.

You will also read about the newest inductees into the SWOSU Athletic Hall of Fame as well as updates on the many exciting things our graduates are doing in the workplace and in their communities. Truly, it is always a great day to be a SWOSU Bulldog.

For your investment, your involvement, and your input – we thank you. Keep close, keep in touch, and GO DAWGS!

In SWOSU,



Diana R. "Diane" Lovell, PhD
President, Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU™)



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Echoes from the Hill is produced by the staff of Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) office of Institutional Advancement (OIA).

Home of the:
SWOSU Foundation, Inc.
SWOSU Alumni Association
SWOSU Athletic Association

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foundation@SWOSU.edu
www.SWOSUAlumni.com



Foundation, Alumni and Athletic Association

2023 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

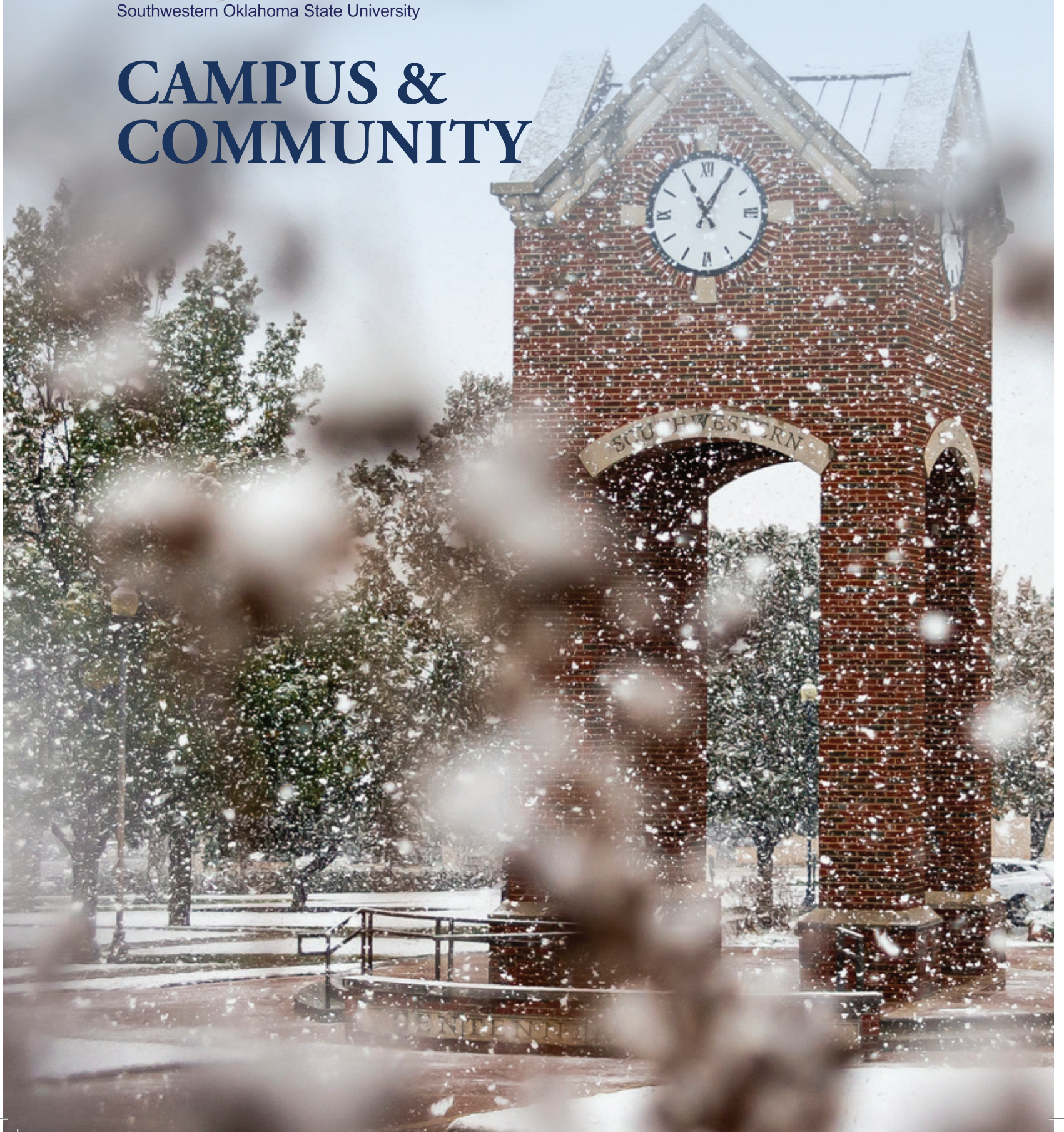
FEB 09	February 9-10 53rd Annual SWOSU Jazz Festival www.SWOSUJazz.com	APR 01	Football Legacy Golf Tournament www.SWOSUFootballLegacyGolf.com
FEB 25	Women's Basketball 40th Anniversary of 1983 National Championship	APR 13	April 13-15 SWOSU College Rodeo
MAR 09	March 9-10 Dianne Hunter Lecture in Psychology - <i>SWOSU Yukon</i>	APR 17	Everett Dobson Golf Classic <i>Oak Tree National</i> www.SWOSUDobsonClassic.com
MAR 13	March 13-17 Spring Break	MAY 06	SWOSU Convocation and Distinguished Alumni Luncheon
MAR 24	North Family Endowed Lecture at Crowder Lake	JUN 16	SWOSU Summer Picnic
MAR 25	Crowder Lake Opening Day www.FriendsofSWOSUCrowderLake.com	OCT 14	SWOSU Homecoming www.SWOSUHomecoming.com
MAR 31	Football Spring Game and Football Reunion		



For more information about any of our events, follow us on social media or visit SWOSUFoundation.com.

SWOSU
Southwestern Oklahoma State University

**CAMPUS &
COMMUNITY**



SWOSU™ BREAKS GROUND

on Hodge Center for Pharmacy & Rural Health

History was made on Friday, June 17, 2022 with a groundbreaking ceremony for the Jerry and Margaret Hodge Center for Pharmacy & Rural Health on the SWOSU Weatherford campus. A large crowd gathered with Jerry and Margaret Hodge to mark the occasion with local and state dignitaries on hand, including Oklahoma House Speaker Pro Tempore Kyle Hilbert, Senator Darcy Jech, Representative Anthony Moore, SWOSU President Dr. Diana “Diane” Lovell, members of the Regional University System of Oklahoma Board of Regents and Weatherford Mayor Mike Brown.

The Hodge Center project will allow SWOSU to substantially increase Nursing and Allied Health capacity while enhancing



Margaret and Jerry Hodge break ground for the Pharmacy and Rural Health Center in June 2022.

the university’s pharmacy doctoral program. The building will also expand community health services offered by SWOSU’s Center for Rural Health.

SWOSU will combine \$10 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 funding authorized by the Oklahoma Legislature with \$5 million in

private support received from SWOSU alumnus Jerry Hodge and his wife, Margaret, of Amarillo, Texas. The Hodges’ contribution, announced in 2021, represents the largest charitable gift in SWOSU history. An additional \$7 million in support for the Hodge Center will be provided via the “Yes! Weatherford” economic development sales tax extension initiative, approved by Weatherford voters in 2020.

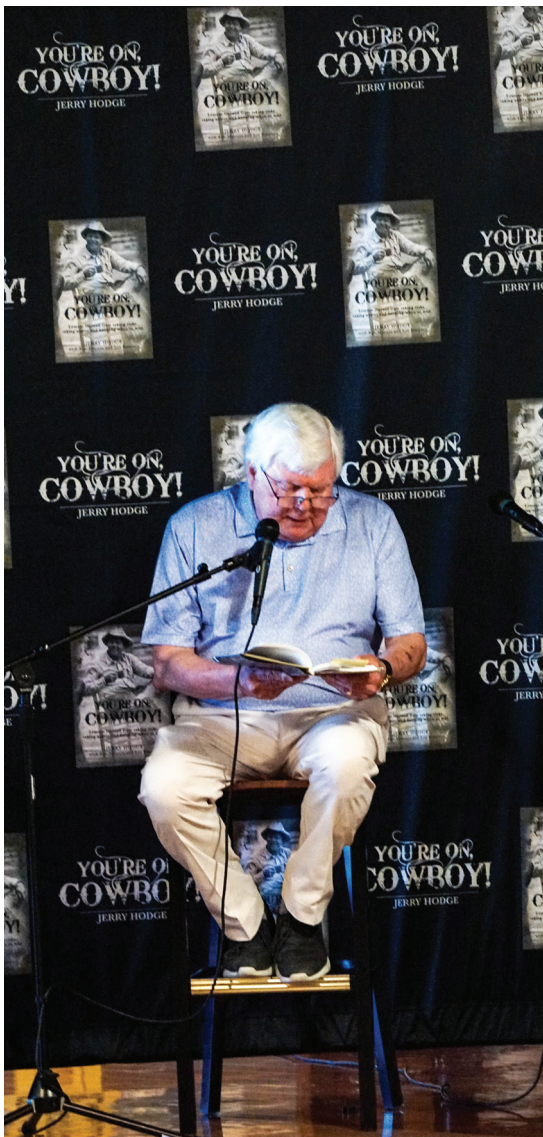
“The Hodge Center is the first ARPA project in the state to break ground,” said SWOSU President, Dr. Diana Lovell. “The Center is the direct result of private and public partnerships working together for the benefit the people of Oklahoma.”

Construction is expected to begin in 2023. 🐾



SUMMER PICNIC

The SWOSU Summer Picnic was an extra special event in 2022. The Picnic was held in conjunction with a book signing by SWOSU alumnus and benefactor, Jerry Hodge. Hodge spoke about his memoir, *You're On Cowboy!* and signed copies for the crowd. The picnic is an annual event held in June that welcomes families to campus for an evening of food, fun, and games. 🐾



Make plans to join fellow bulldogs on the Hilltop for the next summer picnic on June 16, 2023.

SWOSU™ CHARITABLE HUNT

\$67,000 raised for Parks and Recreation

The 3rd Annual SWOSU Charitable Hunt was held on September 16 at Black Oak Farms in Devol, Oklahoma. The Hunt raised over \$67,000 for the benefit of the SWOSU Department of Parks and Recreation Management. Proceeds from the Hunt are allocated to the Dr. Ken Rose Memorial Fund, which exists to help SWOSU produce the next generation of conservationists, wildlife law enforcement officials, park rangers and other outdoor and wildlife career professionals.

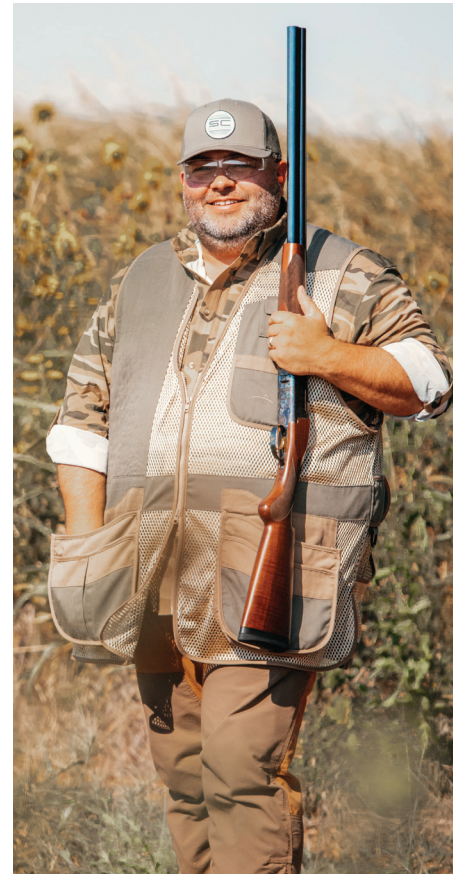
“This event is so distinctive and allows alumni and friends to gather for a worthy cause—our Parks & Recreation Management program,” said SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell. “We are so very grateful to all who participated, donated and bid to make SWOSU’s third annual

Charitable Hunt a resounding success!”

The event kicked off with a skeet shooting competition and was followed by a late afternoon dove hunt. After hunting, participants and guests were treated to a cocktail reception and dinner. Dinner was followed by a fundraising auction and a concert from No Justice lead vocalist Steve Rice and keyboard player Bryce Conway.

“This is my favorite event of the year,” said Clarke Hale, Associate Director for Development and Engagement of SWOSU’s Office for Institutional Advancement. “I’m proud to say you won’t find a fundraising event like this at most universities. It is distinctly SWOSU.”

The 2023 Charitable Hunt will be held September 16. For more information visit www.HuntwithSWOSU.com 🐾



Brian Lux with SportChassis, LLC was one of dozens of participants at the 2022 Charitable Hunt at BlackOak Farms.

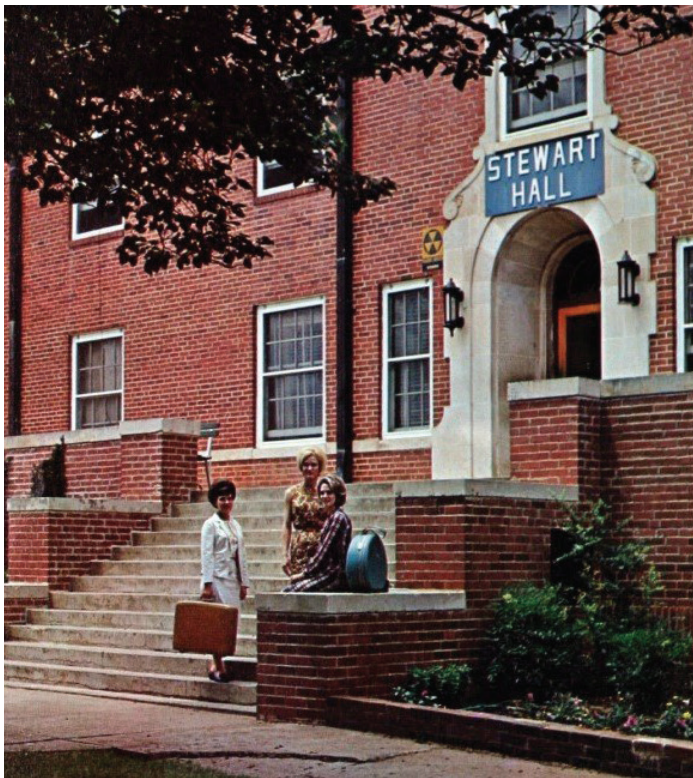


CAMPUS *Flashback*

Our campus has changed over the years.
Can you remember any of these moments?



The Old Science Building and Tennis Courts in 1964



Stewart Hall in Fall 1966 during student move-in



MR. and MISS S. J. C.
Gary Kirk and Sue Robson

Mr. and Miss SJC (Sayre Junior College) 1968, Gary Kirk of Merritt and Sue Robson (Poole) of Elk City



The 1943 Student Council of Southwestern Institute of Technology

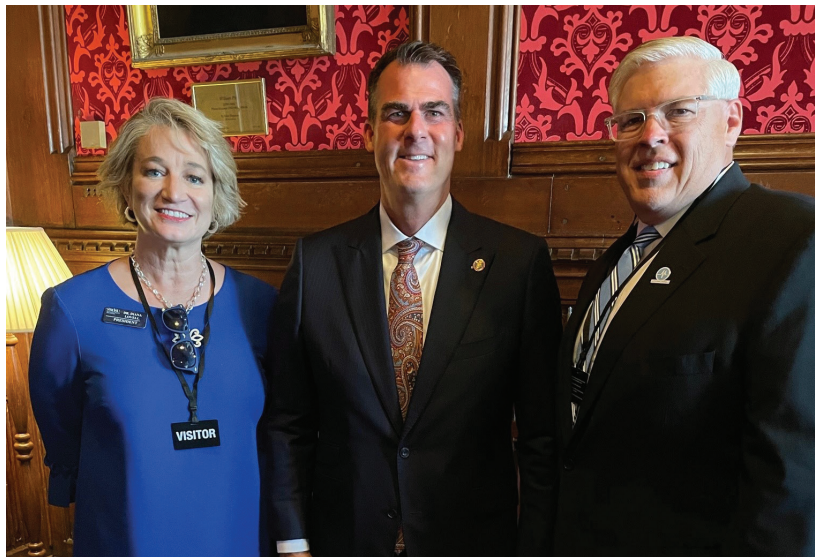


A new project of the Alumni Association is proudly displayed in 1982

SWOSU™ AEROSPACE PROGRAMS

Connect with International Industry Leaders

Over the summer, SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell, joined Governor Kevin Stitt and Regent Christopher Van Denhende, CFO of Mint Turbines, LLC at the Farnborough International Air Show in the United Kingdom. SWOSU is an important part of the international conversation regarding Oklahoma's strength in aviation education and contributions to workforce growth. Lovell and Stitt were two of a group of representatives visiting the UK with the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. 🐾



CHANGE THE WAY WE PLAY

THE SWOSU PIANO CAMPAIGN

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WWW.SWOSUPIANOS.COM

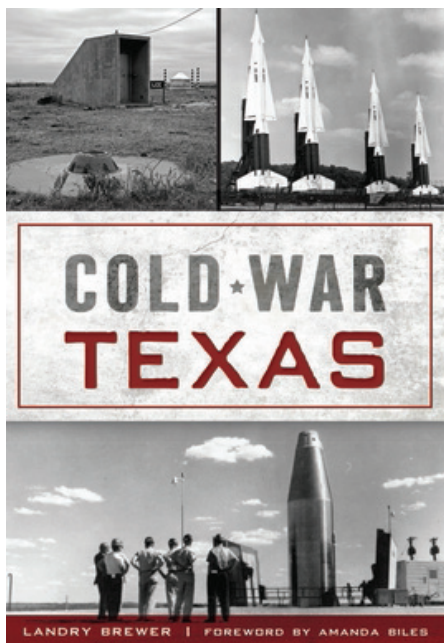
SWOSU
DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC



SWOSU™ PROFESSOR PUBLISHES

Third in a Trilogy of Cold War Books

SWOSU History instructor and Bernhardt Scholar Landry Brewer's new book, *Cold War Texas*, hit shelves August 1, 2022. In the book, Brewer argues that the Lone Star State played a significant role within American Cold War national security policy, when civilization's survival hung in



the balance.

Abilene's Dyess Air Force Base operated 12 Atlas F intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launch sites in the early 1960s that were identical to those operated near Oklahoma's Altus Air Force Base at the same time. In fact, one of those Altus-area missile sites was located just south of the Red River near Fargo, Texas.

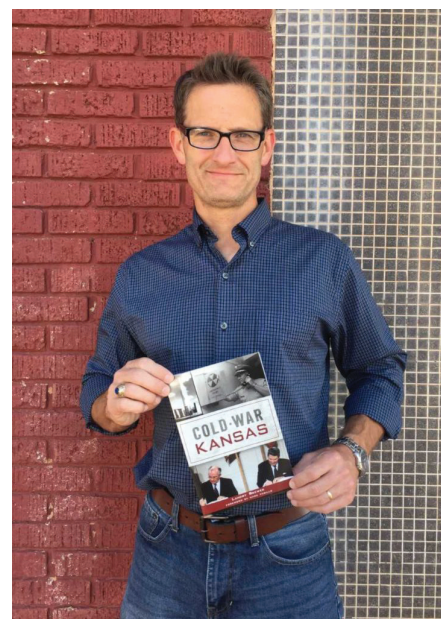
"Had these 13 ICBMs been fired,

they would have reached their Soviet targets in less than 45 minutes, each delivering a nuclear bomb more than 250 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, at the end of World War II," Brewer said.

Those missile launch sites cost millions of dollars to build, and five lives were lost in the process. Nuclear-capable Nike Hercules surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles protected Austin and the Dallas Metroplex from a Soviet bomber attack. An American pilot stationed at Laughlin Air Force Base near Del Rio was the only fatality of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Amarillo's Pantex plant, where three employees died in a 1977 explosion, maintains the security and reliability of the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal.

Abilene Christian University History professor Amanda Biles offered this praise in the book's foreword:

"Professor Brewer's research takes his readers through the entire Texas Cold War experience, from origins to early nuclear build-up, then through civil defense and even espionage. He tells of universities, schools, and civic organizations banding together to provide shelter from possible fallout...He provides needed insight on the relationship between cities and their nuclear neighbors. These efforts left a lasting impact on Texas



communities. Her citizens knew they would likely be caught in the crosshairs of any Soviet attack, and they responded to this danger with Texas-sized resolve. Their stories are all chronicled here, in another excellent installment of our nation's Cold War history."

Brewer is also the author of *Cold War Oklahoma* and *Cold War Kansas*. "This book completes the trilogy," Brewer said. *Cold War Texas* is available from Arcadia Publishing/The History Press and may be ordered from Amazon, Barnes & Noble and several other booksellers. Brewer is an Assistant Professor of History on the SWOSU Sayre campus. He was the 2018 recipient of the Bernhardt Academic Excellence Award. 🐾



SWOSU

ATHLETICS



Bay, Zak and Hale Inducted into **SWOSU™ ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME**

Mark Bay, Carly Zak and Clark Hale became the newest recipients to receive the distinct honor of SWOSU Athletic Hall of Fame on August 19, 2022. The dinner, sponsored by Pioneer, was held to honor the former athletes the evening before the annual athletic auction.

Mark Bay patrolled the gridiron for SWOSU at linebacker from 1987-90, culminated by his dominant senior season that earned him First Team NAIA All-American honors and the Defensive Player of the Year for District IX. He ended his career with 308 total tackles, a number that would lead SWOSU's NCAA Division II era today. When asked about a favorite memory he has from his playing days, Bay said accidentally entering the wrong huddle during the annual Blue & White Scrimmage Spring Game after getting a concussion. Bay played under former head coach and 2016 SWOSU Athletics Hall of Fame inductee Paul Sharp, and gives thanks to another Bulldog coach, Rocky Powell, who he says helped mentor and teach him. He is a proud SWOSU Football alumni who still totes the bulldog blue. Bay went on to graduate from SWOSU with a degree in Physical Education and has been self-employed as the owner of Bay Metal Design and



Mark Bay, Carly Zak and Clarke Hale display their Hall of Fame awards at the induction ceremony held August 19, 2022 on the Weatherford Campus.

Powder Coating. He met his wife Kerie, who graduated from SWOSU with a pharmacy degree, on a blind date while in Weatherford and went on to have four kids – Jake, John, Jena, and Josh.

Carly Zak came to SWOSU volleyball as a freshman and spent all four years of her collegiate career dominating for the Bulldogs. As a member of the Great American Conference 2010 & All-Decade team, her impact on the SWOSU volleyball program was obvious. She was part of many SWOSU program 'firsts'; including being the first four-time All-GAC selection, the first All-Region selection, and a member of the first SWOSU volleyball team to compete in the NCAA Tournament. Zak still

holds SWOSU's career record for kills and, while competing, also held the career record for the conference. She earned conference or region awards in every season she played, beginning with being named the GAC Freshman of the Year in 2013. Following a pair of Second Team All-GAC selections as an underclassman, she upgraded to First Team All-GAC honors as an upperclassman which included a unanimous first team nod as a senior. She was a 2015 Second Team D2CCA All-Central Region selection and improved her region status to First Team in 2016. Within SWOSU Athletics, Zak received back-to-back Female Athlete of the Year honors that coincided with her success during the '15' and



'16' seasons. She also garnered All-GAC Tournament Team accolades twice in her career and was named the Oklahoma Volleyball Player of the Year by OklahomaSports.net in 2016. After graduating from SWOSU in 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Management, she moved to Tennessee to begin a career in events and marketing which she continues to do to this day. When reminiscing on her career, Zak says she's proud of her personal accomplishments, but the 2015 GAC Tournament Championship is her favorite memory as a Bulldog. She is now the first volleyball player to be inducted into the SWOSU Athletics Hall of Fame.

Clarke Hale was a standout on the men's basketball team in the late 2000s and a two-time team captain for the Bulldogs. He played three years of his eligibility in a SWOSU uniform after transferring from Louisiana Tech and made the All-Lone Star Conference (North Division Team) in all three seasons

– first as an honorable mention followed by back-to-back second team honors. Hale held SWOSU's all-time scoring title in the NCAA Division II era for over a decade, until it was recently overtaken just this past season in 2022. During his senior campaign in 2009, he was named to the All-Tournament Team following the Lone Star Conference Tournament and was also the team's most valuable player. Perhaps his most memorable moment sporting the Bulldog blue was knocking down a buzzer-beating shot to defeat rival Central Oklahoma (UCO) in the semifinals of the conference tournament that allowed SWOSU to advance to the championship game. By the time his career was over, Hale's name rested atop the SWOSU record book in many statistical categories during the NCAA era including points scored, three-pointers made, free throw percentage, games started, minutes played, and games won. As a student, Hale also

was responsible for rechartering the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) fraternity and becoming president of that student organization. He graduated from SWOSU with a degree in Business Management and went on to obtain a master's degree in Sports Business. Before returning to work at SWOSU, Hale owned and operated a Farms Insurance agency in Dallas, Texas for seven years. Hale is currently the Associate Director of Institutional Advancement for the university and lives in Oklahoma City with his wife Kayla, a SWOSU alumna, and two sons, Holt and Slate.

The SWOSU Athletic Association has honored outstanding athletes since 1963. A comprehensive list of all Athletic Hall of Fame members and information about the nomination process can be found at www.SWOSUAthletics.com. 🐾

Wouldn't it be great to see your business HERE?

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CONTACT: ERIN ADAMS
580.774.3156
ERIN.ADAMS@SWOSU.EDU

16th Annual Athletic Auction **RAISES OVER \$150,000**

The 16th annual SWOSU Athletic Live Auction & Dinner, hosted August 20, 2022 in the Pioneer Cellular Event Center, raised over \$150,000 in support of the university's student athlete scholarships and athletic recruiting. The event was held by the SWOSU Athletic Association with an underwriting sponsorship by Pioneer.

The spirited event treated over 250 guests to a cocktail hour, dinner and live auction facilitated by SWOSU alumnus Corky Heard of United Country Heard Auction & Real Estate. Jaylen Dorsey, AKA DJ Lite Brite, also a SWOSU alumnus, served as emcee for the auction. The gathering is SWOSU's largest on-campus fundraising event each year.

SWOSU alumni, emeriti and friends generously donated dozens of auction items for the fundraiser. Some of these items were auctioned prior to the August 20 event via an online auction format. The online auction has gained popularity in recent years allowing donors, regardless of location, to bid and support SWOSU athletes. The 2022 online auction saw 168 bidders from 13 different states place 1,457 bids. The live auction featured 18 different donated packages and



experiences ranging from a Mexico golf trip, to an Oklahoma City progressive dining experience, to a VIP visit to a Chicago Bulls game.

Jett Distributing Company and Ben E. Keith Company served as hospitality sponsors for the event. Wright Wradio Network and United Country Heard Auction served as the event's presenting sponsors.

"The SWOSU Athletic Auction is a great example of the charitable community that surrounds our university," said President Dr. Diana Lovell. "We are truly grateful to all those who donated items, placed bids, and attended the event. Your support is so important to the success of our student athletes and programs."

The 17th Annual SWOSU

Athletic Auction will be held August 19. Look for registration and sponsorship information in early summer at www.SWOSUAthleticAuction.com.



COACH JEFF ZINN

A Century-Long Basketball Family Legacy Continues

Coach Jeff Zinn, the new Head Women's Basketball Coach, brings 28 years of successful Oklahoma high school head coaching experience to SWOSU and holds a 563-247 overall record. He spent last season at NCAA Division I Oral Roberts University as an assistant women's coach in his first year after leaving the high school ranks.

But this passion for the game did not start with him. It seems to be in his DNA.

Zinn's grandmother Frieda Southworth, played basketball at Cordell High School and then went on to attend Southwestern State Teachers College (the name for SWOSU at the time.) Southworth played basketball from 1925-1927 on the Hilltop and was one of the first women on the team to letter in



Coach Jeff Zinn's grandmother, Frieda Southworth in her Southwestern Basketball Uniform circa 1926.



The Zinn family in 2019 after winning the 4A Oklahoma Girls Basketball High School Championship. Left to right: Averil Zinn, Coach Jeff Zinn, Libbi Zinn, Layni Zinn, Jeff's son, Taylor Zinn and his father, Archie Zinn.

the sport. She maintained her love of the game and of her Lady Bulldogs throughout her life.

Southworth passed her love of basketball to her daughter, Gwendolyn Groves Zinn. She too played for Cordell High. In 1958 her team won the state championship, and she was chosen for the All-State team. While Zinn did not play in college, she received several recruiting offers.

During her life, Gwendolyn's love of basketball was noted as an "obsession" by family members. She and her husband, Archie, loved nothing more than watching their son coach, especially when he was able to coach his own daughters,

Averil, Layni, and Libbi Zinn. Unfortunately, Gwendolyn passed away just months before Jeff won a state championship for Anadarko with all three daughters playing on the team.

All together Coach Zinn led the Anadarko girls to two state titles. Additionally, Averil, Layni, and Libbi were each recognized as basketball All-State.

Now Coach Zinn has returned to his grandmother's alma mater as head coach, honoring the family legacy. To knot the Zinn ties to SWOSU even tighter, daughters Averil and Layni now wear a Lady Bulldogs jersey just as their great-grandmother did. Daughter Libbi is playing basketball at Northern Oklahoma College in Enid this season. She has signed with SWOSU and will be joining the Bulldogs for the 2023-2024 season, bringing all three daughters on the court together once again with their father.

When asked about coaching his girls, Zinn kidded, "It stretches the scholarship money for recruiting if I can fill up the bench with my own offspring."

The Lady Bulldogs have started a much-anticipated season under Zinn's leadership. You can follow scores and gametime action for the Lady Bulldogs and all other SWOSU athletics at www.SWOSUAthletics.com. 🐾

April 17, 2023 • Everett Dobson **BULLDOG GOLF CLASSIC**

This spring alumni and friends have an opportunity to tee off where the pros play while benefiting SWOSU Athletics. The Everett Dobson Bulldog Golf Classic is April 17, 2023 at Oak Tree National in Edmond, Oklahoma.

The tournament was established in 2015 by Everett Dobson (Class of 1981) of Edmond in partnership with the SWOSU Athletic Association. Dobson was inducted into the SWOSU Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame in 1999. He has endowed

the Everett Dobson Chairs in Business, Marketing, Management and Finance in the Everett Dobson School of Business & Technology at SWOSU and provided the private investment necessary to construct the Everett Dobson Golf Training Facility on SWOSU's Weatherford campus. In 2015, Dobson was inducted into the SWOSU Presidential Order of Merit in recognition of his 25 years of service on the SWOSU Foundation, Inc. Board of Trustees where he served as Investment Committee chair.

The Everett Dobson Bulldog Golf Classic not only benefits the SWOSU golf team but provides funds for recruiting and scholarships for all SWOSU Athletic programs. Sponsorships and team registration are now available. For more information or to register visit www.SWOSUDobsonClassic.com or contact Clarke Hale at clarke.hale@swosu.edu. The 2023 event is generously underwritten by Dobson Fiber. 🐾



JOIN US IN EDMOND, OK AT OAK TREE NATIONAL

MONDAY, APRIL 17, 2023

- SCRAMBLE FORMAT
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COACH JOHN LOFTIN ENDOWMENT

to Benefit Women's Basketball

John Loftin had an amazing run of success as Head Women's Basketball Coach – amassing 861 wins in a career that spanned 38 seasons, including 19 at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Loftin's impact at SWOSU was spectacular and instant. His first team rolled to an unbeaten 34-0 season which included capturing the NAIA National Championship in 1982. NAIA titles followed in 1983, 1985, 1987 and 1990. All total, SWOSU made 14 appearances in the NAIA Tournament, including 10 Final Four Appearances, and one national runner-up in 1992 under Loftin's leadership.

The new Coach John Loftin Endowment will provide financial



The 1982 undefeated Lady Bulldogs Nation Championship team.



Coach Loftin with his team in 1985.

support to SWOSU Women's Basketball and honor Coach Loftin's legacy. Donations can be made to the Loftin Endowment for Women's Basketball at www.SWOSULoftinBasketball.com.

A 40th anniversary reunion is planned for February 23, 2023 to celebrate the 1983 championship team. The team will be recognized during the basketball game that evening. For more information about the 1983 women's basketball team reunion event, or the Loftin Endowment, contact Allie Hoang, Allison.hoang@swosu.edu, (580) 774-6330. 🐾

DOC MITCHELL IS SWOSU™ RODEO

The SWOSU Rodeo Team held their third annual fundraiser event on November 5, 2022 at JC Cowboys in Weatherford. The evening featured an auction, dinner, and live music from Dean Jackson Band. Rodeo team members, their families, rodeo alumni and fans from across the country gathered to celebrate the championship SWOSU Rodeo Team. Among those who attended were the legendary Dr. Donald “Doc” Mitchell.

Doc began teaching at his alma mater, SWOSU, and coaching the newly formed Rodeo team in late 1967, holding that position until his retirement in 2000. He led SWOSU rodeo teams to six national team



In attendance at the Live the Legacy event were SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell, the legendary father of SWOSU Rodeo Doc Mitchell, Head Rodeo Coach Michael Visnieski, and SWOSU Athletics Director Todd Helton.

titles and 30 Central Plains Regional titles training in the arena that now bears his name. He became chair of the school’s Technology Department in 1980 and served in that capacity until 2000. SWOSU won men’s team titles in 1985, 1992, 1993, 1999 and women’s team titles in 1988 and 1994. Many SWOSU rodeo athletes went on to successful professional careers as rodeo competitors, judges or coaches.

In 2003 Doc Mitchell was inducted into the SWOSU Athletic Hall of Fame. In 2018 he was added to the Oklahoma Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum Rodeo Hall of Fame. 🐾



Dr. Donald Mitchell and J.D. Droz in the practice pen, 1983.

Endowment Funds provide new opportunities FOR DONORS AND ATHLETIC TEAMS

In addition to the Loftin Endowment for Women's Basketball, the SWOSU Foundation, Inc. announces the creation of athletic endowment funds for baseball, softball and volleyball in 2022. Endowment funds support the growth of the programs and secure future success. Gifts to an endowment will be used for scholarships, recruitment and other team needs.

"These endowment funds are a great benefit to our athletics programs," said SWOSU Athletic Director Todd Helton. "We have some great alumni and fans who will most certainly want to take advantage of this opportunity and watch our programs advance." 🐾

To learn more or make a charitable contribution to the baseball, softball or volleyball endowments, visit:

www.GivetoSWOSUBaseball.com

www.GivetoSWOSUSoftball.com

www.GivetoSWOSUVolleyball.com



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SWOSU[™]
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

ALUMNI NEWS



The Chemistry Behind His Music: **BRYCE CONWAY '95**

It's a warm fall evening in 1980 and Friday night lights are glowing across south Texas. At Natalia High School, a short distance south of San Antonio, the marching band is playing in the stands as the Natalia Mustangs take the field. In the percussion section, one tiny drummer can be seen playing – it's 10-year-old Bryce Conway.

Now more than forty years later, Conway is still playing music but on stages across the country in front of thousands of fans. Music is certainly not the only pursuit where he has experienced success. Conway's savvy in both science and business is a

“Music and science are very interrelated.”

combination that has allowed him to build his company, Flex-Chem, into a growing industry leader.

Conway comes from humble South Texas beginnings in a family that placed a high value on education and family. Both of his parents earned doctoral degrees during his childhood. Conway started piano

lessons in the first grade. Both of his parents were teachers and his father, Gene, was the Natalia High School band director. Because of this, Conway was often allowed access to the band hall after hours. He started playing percussion in fifth grade and by sixth grade was spending hours unsupervised in the band hall, learning to play pop songs.

In 1982, Bryce moved with his parents Gene and Judy and sister Janet to Brownsville, Texas. While in high school in Brownsville, Conway continued piano lessons and played synthesizer in his first rock band, Allied Forces. The young group



Bryce Conway performing with The Great Divide at Billy Bob's Texas in Fort Worth.



The Washita River Boys band played across Oklahoma in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The band was made up of all SWOSU students. Left to right are Kevin Miller, Shawn Gwartney, Bryce Conway, Dean Carter, Keith Miller, Seth Grabeal.

wrote their own songs. Conway says he grew as an artist spending his teen years with these talented musicians.

After graduation, Conway took an unlikely turn, moving 670 miles north to Weatherford, Oklahoma and attending SWOSU to major in chemistry. “Music and science are very interrelated,” said Conway, “I believe it’s important to have a pastime that is equally fulfilling to my career. SWOSU’s reputation of having an excellent science program reached all the way down to Brownsville, and that’s how I ended up in Oklahoma. My career aspirations at the time were pretty wide-open.”

Conway’s music “pastime” was then and is now much more than a hobby. While he was an active member of the Chemistry Club in college during the week (Conway was the first historian ever named

to the SWOSU Chemistry Club,) he was also spending his weekends playing keyboards with the band, The Washita River Boys. The band was entirely comprised of SWOSU students at the time: Keith Miller, Kevin Miller, Dean Carter, Shawn

in 1995, Conway first became a chemist with Halliburton and then accepted a position as a research assistant at OU Health Sciences.

In 2000, Conway branched out on his own and created Flex-Chem. “Flex-Chem has given me a

“SWOSU alumni collectively have an obligation today to help contribute to the success of future SWOSU generations.”

Gwartney, and Seth Grabeal. “The band was a lot of fun and allowed me to explore Oklahoma outside of SWOSU and make a lot of friends,” recalled Conway.

After graduating from SWOSU

platform to be innovative with my chemistry abilities by allowing me to provide solutions in the oil and gas industry,” said Conway. Flex-Chem now holds several U.S. and international patents for oil and

gas stimulation, remediation, and recycling. The intellectual property held by Flex-Chem is a great source of pride for Conway. “A key strategy has always been to drive Flex-Chem forward through technology, research, and innovation,” Conway said proudly.

Always true to his humble roots, Conway worked weekends into the early 2000s as a DJ at JC Cowboys in Weatherford. For years, he was building a global chemical company by day and dishing up dance music to college students at night.

Running a large corporation never kept Conway far from the ivories. In 2011, he joined the successful band, No Justice. Conway’s first SWOSU roommate was Jerry Payne of Okeene, Oklahoma. The two met in Chemistry I class. Payne learned to play guitar while he was Conway’s



Jerry Payne and Bryce Conway of the band, No Justice.

roommate. Payne, a 1994 SWOSU graduate with a degree in Biology, would start the red dirt band, No Justice in 2001. “We would learn songs together in our trailer house at 800 West Davis,” remembers Conway. “I still joke with him that he should have named the band 800 West Davis instead of No Justice.”

“No Justice is technically ‘out of Stillwater’ but Jerry and I both bleed SWOSU blue,” said Conway proudly. He got to experience chart

success with No Justice’s digital platinum album America’s Son. The album entered the Billboard Charts at #14 in 2013.

Conway joined a second band, The Great Divide, in 2019. He plays keyboards and the B3 organ for the well-established Stillwater, Oklahoma band. The Great Divide released a new album, Providence, in 2022 that climbed to #3 on iTunes country charts. Conway and the rest of the band have live performance dates set for 2023 from Colorado to Florida and of course, Oklahoma (See a full concert lineup at www.TGDMusic.com).

Flex-Chem celebrated twenty years of operation in 2020. Flex-Chem has four locations in Weatherford, Ada, and Edmond, Oklahoma, and Pecos, Texas. In 2014, Bryce Conway was honored to return to the Hilltop as the



The Great Divide in 2022.

keynote speaker of his beloved SWOSU Chemistry Club at their annual banquet. “SWOSU was paramount in providing me with excellent chemistry education that allowed me to achieve my goals,” he said.

2021 saw the ascension of Conway to the SWOSU Foundation, Inc., Board of Trustees where he proudly continues to serve.

Conway now lives with his two sons, Kennan (18) and Jett (15) in Edmond, Oklahoma. He is the CEO of a thriving corporation and

a member of a successful band. The question of “What’s next?” seems an obvious one. Conway is quick to answer: give back.

“The best indicator of the future is the present and I feel that SWOSU alumni collectively have an obligation today to help contribute to the success of future SWOSU generations,” he explained. “I am hopeful that by sharing my time and financial resources with SWOSU, current and future students will have the opportunity to obtain the same or even better academic foundation that I was afforded.”

“Faith, Family, Flex-Chem and providing any deserving student the opportunity to attend SWOSU. That’s what’s important to me right now.” 🐾



**Supporting material for this article was provided by Kathleene Runnels, The Devine News.*



Conway tossed the coin at the first game of the 2021 football season. Flex-Chem is a proud sponsor of SWOSU Football.

The High Flying Career of **DR. KATRINA AVERS**

Dr. Katrina Avers' journey to becoming the Flight Deck Human Factors Research Branch Manager for the Federal Aviation Administration is exceptional. This featured alumna is an incredible example of what can be achieved when talent and drive meet opportunity.

Early in her undergraduate days at SWOSU, Avers was steered towards a psychology degree by professors who saw her potential. After being told she could attend graduate school anywhere if she worked hard enough, that's precisely what she did. While at SWOSU, Avers was heavily involved in the psychology department and undergraduate research lab. She received mentorship and development from multiple professors - an opportunity she likely would not have had at larger universities.

"SWOSU prepared me for my Ph.D.," said Avers. "The one-on-one guidance and instruction from engaged professors, the lab work, the presentations, the competitions; all of it prepared me for a career, and I don't think it's something you find at schools with larger class sizes.

"I always felt like I was a person at SWOSU from the moment I enrolled, and I think one of the university's main goals is to build relationships. My educators had

high expectations and made sure I was challenged, but they also communicated ways to grow and opportunities to be involved. These opportunities ultimately led to making personal connections, which helped me earn recommendations and helped me find my pathway in Oklahoma's second largest industry."

After graduating with her Bachelor's in Psychology in 2003, Avers attended the University of Oklahoma, where she earned her Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. While at OU, her work with defense organizations led to an interest in aviation, and as a fifth-generation Oklahoman, she wanted to continue her legacy here.

With a doctorate in psychology and a passion for aerospace and defense, Avers accepted a position at the FAA as an industrial/organizational research psychologist and went right to work on congressional projects impacting national policies and regulations. She now leads a team of researchers, engineers, and analysts considered global leaders in aviation safety, aerospace expansion, and operational efficiency. Her journey might seem unorthodox to some, but that's precisely the type of pathway she's hoping to shine a light on for the next generation of Aerospace and Defense employees.



"I want those just starting their careers to realize how many opportunities are available within aerospace and defense. I grew up 12 miles from the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center, and I had no idea it existed. The Aeronautical Center is a national and international hub for aviation. It is one of the few places in the United States with a microcosm of almost 95% of the National Aerospace System. Every air traffic controller and aviation safety inspector in the country are trained in Oklahoma, every pilot certification is processed in Oklahoma, and every aviation medical certificate is approved in Oklahoma. There are so many aerospace-related jobs that are great for SWOSU students that want to stay in Oklahoma or those that want to start their careers and soar to new opportunities." 🐾

SWOSU™ NEAR YOU

Toasting the Hilltop in Your Hometown

In 2022 SWOSU Near You Alumni and Friends events returned. The SWOSU Alumni Association traveled to Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Okarche and Clinton to host these social events for alumni and friends.

While the refreshments were quite different in each location – smoked salmon and cocktails at Cedar Ridge Country Club in Tulsa and fried chicken and beer at the famous Eischen’s in Okarche – the Bulldog pride was present in guests of all ages at every event.

Many more SWOSU Near You Happy Hours are planned for 2023 including Amarillo, Enid, and Oklahoma City. The Alumni Association is always looking for input on future alumni and friends gatherings. If you have a suggestion for a host city, or would like to sponsor a SWOSU Near You, contact Taylor Adler, taylor.adler@swosu.edu. SWOSU may come to your hometown next! 🐾



SWOSU Near You in Broken Arrow at Cedar Ridge Country Club, June 2022.



SWOSU Near You at Eischen’s Bar in Okarche, OK in August 2022.



SWOSU Near You at the Beany Bar in Clinton, October 2022.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS



Dr. Cammi Valdez '08, has been awarded \$350,000 in grant funding to support her diabetic retinopathy research. She is an assistant professor of chemistry at Northeastern State University and has been named the 2022 winner of the Genentech Career Development Award for Underrepresented Minority Emerging Vision Scientists by the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO). The award provides research funding to early-career underrepresented minority investigators who have received their initial faculty appointment and are working to establish an independent vision research program. Valez is also a graduate of Harvard University and serves on the SWOSU Foundation, Inc. Board of Trustees.



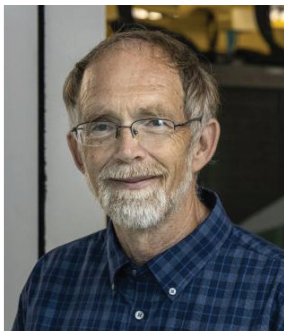
Philip Busey, Jr. '04, Executive Vice-President of Delaware Resource Group (DRG), continues to tout the growing aerospace industry in Oklahoma. Busey was featured in an OKC Channel 4 news story in September 2022 about the number two industry in the state. Philip Busey and his brother Brian Busey '05, President and COO of DRG, partnered with SWOSU on a new Aerospace defense Workforce Development initiative.



Meridith Smith '01 and Jason Smith '03, have fully restored a century old church in Clinton and transformed it into an event venue, The Social. The Social features indoor and unique outdoor spaces for private gatherings, concerts, and events. The Smiths have done much of the restoration and renovations themselves through their partnership business, West OK Coop.



Dr. Wendy Borlabi '94, was a speaker at the 2022 Forbes Power Women's Summit in New York City. Borlabi is director of performance and mental health for the Chicago Bulls as well as operating her own sports psychology consulting firm. She is also writing a book about why women are underpaid, and missing lucrative opportunities in the workplace that is planned for release in early 2023. Borlabi is a SWOSU Distinguished Alumnae and a SWOSU Presidential Order of Merit honoree.



Bobby Sumpter '83, has been named a fellow of two scientific professional societies: the Institute of Physics and the International Association of Advanced Materials. Sumpter has been a researcher for Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) in Oak Ridge, Tennessee for more than thirty years. ORNL delivers scientific discoveries and technical breakthroughs needed to realize solutions in energy and national security and provide economic benefit to the nation. They partner with other US Department of Energy laboratories and programs, and universities.



Cody Parker '07, was named the new Market President of Great Plains National Bank in Weatherford, Oklahoma. Parker, a native of Thomas, Oklahoma, has over 18 years of banking experience including a background in commercial banking.



Jalen Dorsey '06, AKA DJ Lite Brite, is an entrepreneur who continues to expand his brand. In addition to DJ-ing on major stages across the country, Dorsey has an exclusive line of logo apparel and owns Cruise on Fuel infused sodas. In October 2022, Dorsey opened for Ice Cube in front of a sold-out crowd at Lucky Star Casino. Dorsey played basketball for the bulldogs while a student at SWOSU.



Hailey Tucker '19, is a news anchor for CBS affiliate KWCH 12 in Wichita, Kansas. While at SWOSU, she was a three-time All-American basketball player. Tucker set many university and conference all-time records as well as playing in the NCAA Division II National Championship her senior year. At SWOSU, she helped implement a multimedia broadcasting program while sideline reporting for SWOSU Athletics and the Great American Conference.



Jeremy Pittman '97, has accepted a position as Director of Software Engineering with The Home Depot Corporation. Pittman, of Bentonville, Arkansas, worked for the past 25 years for Walmart, most recently as Senior Director with Walmart Global Technologies.

Blankenship Scholarship Created for **TEACHER EDUCATION**

William “Bill” Blankenship of Blue Hill, Nebraska has provided a generous gift to the SWOSU Department of Education. Blankenship, himself a 1970 SWOSU Department of Education graduate, has endowed the William P. Blankenship Scholarship to assist SWOSU students who will pursue a career in education.

Blankenship came to SWOSU from his hometown of Upper Sandusky, Ohio. After graduating, he moved with his late wife, Connie, to Smith Center, Kansas. In Smith Center he was a classroom teacher

for 5 ½ years and finished his career as a high school counselor for 26 years.

“I think education is the backbone of our country. It is a noble profession,” said Blankenship when asked about his scholarship gift. “Now there is a shortage of teachers. People who become teachers don’t do it for the money but for the children. Students are our greatest resource.”

The William P. Blankenship Scholarship Fund is stewarded by the SWOSU Foundation, Inc. The Foundation was established in 1977 to promote philanthropy,



award scholarships, and distribute funds to support the activities and programs of SWOSU. 🐾

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The five most recent SWOSU Foundation, Inc. Board Chairs gathered for a Trustee dinner in November. Pictured from left to right are: SWOSU President Dr. Diana Lovell, Carl Hook, George Cohlma, Dianne Hunter, Jim Mogg, current Board Chairman Bryan Evans and SWOSU Foundation, Inc. Executive Director Garrett King.

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