

# *the* WEST TEXAN

A Publication of the West Texas A&M University Alumni Association // Summer 2025



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# the WEST TEXAN

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# EXECUTIVE TEAM LETTER



**Ronnie Hall '95, '00** has had the opportunity to meet thousands of students and alumni in his 30 years of employment at West Texas A&M University. Ronnie is living his dream job of working with people who believe in the vision and mission of an incredible university. He began his career with WT in 1995, and through the years, he has been fortunate to meet faculty and staff who modeled servant leadership, creating in him a desire to do the same for students and alumni.

**Abby Waters '17, '19** worked for the University throughout college and, upon graduating, continued in a full-time capacity. In her various roles, she continually felt called to serve the students of WT and has loved the new adventure of serving the alumni. She is eager to continue finding ways to connect and engage alumni and find new and exciting ways to involve them in the ever-growing Buff family.

Dear Buffs,

It's an exciting time at West Texas A&M University. As fall approaches, so does one of our most beloved traditions—Homecoming. It's more than just a week of events; it's a celebration of Buff pride that connects students, alumni, faculty and the community when school spirit and pride are at an all-time high.

This year, we invite you to return to Canyon for Homecoming on Oct. 4, when WT's spirit is on full display. From the distinguished alumni honored at The Phoenix, to the spirited tradition of Pigskin Revue, the various alumni gatherings across campus, and the celebration of excellence in the WT Hall of Champions—Homecoming weekend offers countless ways to reconnect.

One of the most cherished traditions, the Homecoming Parade, will bring Russell Long Boulevard to life under the theme "Wild West Texas," a nod to the pride, grit, and legacy that define both our University and the region we call home. That evening, the energy shifts to Bain-Schaeffer Buffalo Stadium, where fans will gather under the lights to cheer on the Buffs at the Homecoming football game—the centerpiece of Homecoming weekend and a display of WT spirit.

As you reflect on your days as a student—remembering late nights building parade floats, the sound of the Fight Song echoing across campus, or the simple joy of walking through campus with friends—we hope those memories inspire you to return.

If you haven't returned to campus in a while, Homecoming is a great time to come see the growth. Our campus continues to evolve with beautiful renovations, new facilities, and meaningful progress—all grounded in the same strong traditions that shaped your WT experience. Year-in and year-out, Homecoming week is a truly special time of year for alumni, students, faculty, staff and the Buff community. We can't wait to welcome you home.

*Ronnie Hall*      *Abby Waters*



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## WT Social Work Student Wins Prestigious Scholarship

**Sherika Scotland**, a graduate student in social work from the U.S. Virgin Islands, recently was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health to continue her work in spreading awareness of mental health issues.

The Hogg Foundation, established in 1940 and based at the University of Texas at Austin, works to transform mental health in Texas by advancing equity, supporting community-led initiatives, and addressing the social determinants of mental well-being. Through grants, scholarships, and programs, the foundation supports future mental health professionals who are committed to improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities across the state.

In addition to being a fulltime student and a mother to a toddler, Scotland is an intern at NWTX Behavioral Health and a success coach and instructor at Amarillo College.

## WT Woman, Man of the Year Honored

**Peyton Hastings '25**, a musical theatre graduate from Sundown, was named Woman of the Year and **William Blackmon**, a junior electrical engineering major from Hereford, was named Man of the Year at the University Honors Ceremony on April 25.

Hastings was president of Alpha Psi Omega, the honors theatre fraternity in the Department of Art, Theatre and Dance in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, and acted in several WT Theatre productions. She also represented the Harrington College with the Student Government Association, serving as parliamentarian and president pro tempore.

Blackmon, a WT Rogers LEAD Scholar, is president of the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics and a community service officer in F1RSTGEN, the student organization for first-generation college students. He also serves as an associate justice and a College of Engineering representative with the Student Government Association, and has conducted research into battery models and robotics.

## Top 2024-2025 WT Student Employees Honored

More than 70 WT student workers were honored in April.

**Kayden Burgess**, a senior computer science major from Pampa, was recognized as the undergraduate student employee of the year, and **Mariam Adegbandin**, a graduate student in computer information systems and business analytics from Lagos, Nigeria, was honored as graduate assistant of the year.

Burgess also won a special leadership award, and five other students were recognized with special awards: **Clayton Stevenson**, senior animal science major from Earth; Avery Feldman, senior agricultural media and communication major from Raton, New Mexico; Celina Pinela, senior mechanical engineering major from Bovina; Sydnee Hendrick, senior graphic design major from White Deer; and Paityn Nicholson, junior agricultural media and communication major from Melrose, New Mexico.

Winners were chosen by a selection committee representing the Office of Career and Professional Development, recruitment, staff and faculty.

# WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

## faculty and staff accomplishments

## Jeffreys Named WT's First Ware University Distinguished Professor

**Dr. Holly Jeffreys '97, '02**, dean of West Texas A&M University's College of Nursing and Health Sciences, has been named to a prestigious new University position.

Jeffreys is the University's first Ware University Distinguished Professor, the only University-level faculty endowment at WT. She will maintain her position as dean. The Ware professorship was established in 2023 when Amarillo National Bank made a \$3 million gift to name the Amarillo National Bank School of Accounting, Economics and Finance in the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business. The Ware University Distinguished Professor may be filled by an instructor from any discipline across campus.

As the Ware University Distinguished Professor, Jeffreys will research areas of free-market economies that are related to rural family businesses and rural family entrepreneurship; the role of rural families in the American economy; and/or how rural family industries support a free-market economy and society.

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## WT's Hunt Named to National Engineering Research Board

**Dr. Emily Hunt**, dean of WT's College of Engineering, has been elected to the board of the national Engineering Research Council.

"This opportunity is deeply meaningful—not just to me personally, but to West Texas A&M University and the broader community we serve," Hunt said. "As dean of a college rooted in a rural region, I see this role as a chance to bring forward the voices, challenges, and innovations that too often go unheard in national research conversations."

The American Society for Engineering Education's ERC is composed of representatives from engineering college, industrial and government fields to provide a forum for discussion about research activities of ASEE members, and to improve the effectiveness of research operations at ERC institutions, among other objectives.

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## WT Professors Publish New Books

Five West Texas A&M University faculty members were celebrated this spring for the publication of books they authored or edited.

The newly published faculty members were **Dr. Daniel Bloom**, associate professor of philosophy, co-editor of "Knowing and Being in Ancient Philosophy"; **Dr. Min Wha Han**, assistant professor of communication studies, co-editor of "Displacement, Mobility and Diversity in Korea"; **Dr. Kimberly Beck Hieb**, associate professor of musicology, author of "The Amarillo Symphony: The First 100 Years"; **Dr. Brian M. Ingrassia**, associate professor of history, author of "Speed Capital: Indianapolis Auto Racing and the Making of Modern America,"; and **Dr. Amy Von Lintel**, professor of art history, author of "Art at the Crossroads: The Surprising Aesthetics of the Texas Panhandle."

"In the humanities, writing books is often the apex of scholarly achievement," said **Dr. Bonnie Roos**, professor of English and the College's research director.

"We are privileged here in WT's College of Fine Arts and Humanities to be able to work with so many accomplished colleagues."



## WT Honors Top Faculty, Staff in Year-End Ceremony

Top faculty and staff members were recognized at a May 8 celebration marking the end of the spring 2025 semester.

Winners represent each of WT’s six Colleges. Each year faculty members also are recognized in the six academic colleges for accomplishments in the core areas of teaching, research and service.

University-wide recognition demonstrates one of the highest levels of respect a faculty member can achieve.

Honorees included **Dr. Kristina Drumheller**, professor of communication studies and associate dean for communication, art, theatre and dance; **Gilbert Antunez ’97 ’08**, associate director of educator preparation and director of placement for the Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences; **Tamara Castagnetta ’14**, associate director of scholarships for the Office of Student Financial Services; **Dr. Alea Friemel ’12 ’20**, the Northwest Texas Healthcare System / Eunice King Professor of Nursing in the Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing in WT’s College of Nursing and Health Sciences; **Anna Lemnitzer**, assistant professor of art and design in the Department of Art, Theatre and Dance in WT’s Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities; **Dr. Erick Butler**, associate professor of environmental engineering in WT’s College of Engineering; **Dr. Leigh Green**, associate professor of school counseling and the counseling program director in the Department of Education in the Rogers College; **Dr. Bin Shao**, the Drs. Neil and Anne Terry Professor of Business in the Department of Computer Information and Decision Management in WT’s Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business; and **Dr. Bridget Guerrero ’02 ’03**, the Paul Engler Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Agricultural Sciences in WT’s Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences. Awardees were given \$3,000 honorariums.

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## Bingham Named WT’s Loomis Professor of Education

**Dr. Teri Bingham**, who joined WT in 1993, is WT’s new Doug Loomis Professor of Education, a position established by a \$125,000 gift from an anonymous donor.

“This professorship is a tremendous gift, an incredible opportunity, and one I humbly accept with a strong sense of responsibility,” Bingham said.

In addition to the professorship endowment, the donor also established a scholarship fund.

**Loomis ’92**, who earned his master’s in education from WT, announced in October that he would retire effective June 30 after spending more than four decades in the Amarillo Independent School District, making an impact across the district and working in schools in every quadrant and at every level.

In addition to teaching in WT’s educator preparation program, Bingham also is the director for WT’s Master of Arts in Teaching program.

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## WT Faculty Publish Cannabis Research in Prestigious Journal

A research paper written by two WT business faculty members about the implications of cannabis use in the workplace has been published in a top journal.

"Up in Smoke: Reciprocal Effects of Cannabis Use and Job Complexity on Extrinsic Career Outcomes" appeared in "Human Resource Management" in March. The paper, authored by **Dr. Andrew Li**, Williams Professor of Management, and **Dr. Jonathan Shaffer**, associate dean of strategic initiatives and Pickens Professor of Management, is the result of a three-year-long research project.

Li and Shaffer's research findings suggest that employees who use cannabis are more likely to have less complex jobs, but those low-complexity jobs also lead to increased cannabis use.

## WT Opera Announces Endowed Fund

WT Opera announced a new endowed fund that will provide critical program support during its annual gala.

The James and Pamela Beckham Opera Endowment was established following a \$50,000 gift in late 2024, said Sarah Beckham-Turner, WT Opera director and assistant professor of voice.

The gift was made by Beckham-Turner’s father in his and his late wife’s name.

The Beckham endowment will provide program support for WT Opera, including for performances, travel, equipment and graduate assistantships.

The Jan. 24 gala, “Divas and Disguises,” honored **Mila Gibson ’66**, founder of Amarillo Opera and a longtime advocate of the arts in the area, and featured performances by WT Opera students.

## WT Signs Agreement with Daniels Fund to Provide Full-Ride Scholarships

Students from four western states may be eligible for full-ride scholarships to WT thanks to an agreement signed Jan. 23 between the University and charitable foundation The Daniels Fund.

The memorandum of understanding will ensure that eligible students will receive a \$19,000 annual scholarship from the Daniels Fund to attend WT. The University will ensure Daniels Scholars do not incur out-of-pocket expenses for tuition, fees, books, room and board while they obtain their degree, Wendler said.

The Daniels Fund, established by cable television pioneer Bill Daniels, is a private charitable foundation dedicated to making life better for the people of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming through its grants program, scholarship program, and ethics initiative.

## U.S. News: WT Online Programs Rise in National, State Rankings

WT’s online bachelor’s program rose to No. 32 in the nation and ranks No. 4 in Texas, according to U.S. News & World Report.

Additionally, WT’s online bachelor’s programs for veterans also rose significantly, to No. 19 from No. 31. The WT program is the No. 1 such program among Texas schools.

Several undergraduate and graduate programs also rank highly state- and nationwide in the new standings, with 11 total programs earning the magazine’s coveted Best Program status: online bachelor’s programs, online bachelor’s programs for veterans, online undergraduate business programs, online MBA, online MBA for veterans, and graduate programs in computer information technology, criminal justice and public administration, education, engineering, business (non-MBA) and nursing.

## Buffalo Club Relaunches

WT Athletics announced a change in the department's giving model to introduce the department's new holistic approach to giving. The newly reimagined Buffalo Athletic Club is now the official fundraising arm of WT Athletics, supporting all 16 varsity sports and the 400+ student-athletes who proudly represent West Texas A&M on and off the field.

The Buffalo Athletic Club now serves as the overarching umbrella of all areas of athletic annual giving.

Beginning with the 2025–2026 membership year, any individual who has generously given since October 1, 2024, and those who continue or plan to give by September 30, 2025, will be classified as a Buffalo Athletic Club Member.

# Sisters carry skills, passion for WT into local workforce

BY BRAD NEWMAN

If you ask sisters **Paige Nester '98** and **Tracey Ouellette '01** about what makes West Texas A&M University distinct, they both mention the same common quality.

WT is all about local.

The Wellington-native siblings both graduated from WT—and then stayed in the Panhandle region to put their education to use in their communities.

**“WT is a top-notch university with an at-home feel, it's a home away from home.”**

-Tracey Ouellette

Nester owns Creek House Honey Farm in Canyon with her husband, **George '98**. Ouellette is a pharmacist at Childress Regional Medical Center and directs the Wellington WT alumni chapter.

The two are quality examples of WT's emphasis on resourcing local communities with WT expertise.

“WT is a top-notch university with an at-home feel,” Ouellette said. “It's a home away from home, which helps increase success rates for new college students.”

Nester transferred to WT in 1995, earning a degree in education with an emphasis in biology and art.

She taught art, math and science for about 20 years, mostly in Canyon Independent School District, until 2018 when Creek House Honey Farm opened.

Nester and her family, along with about 40 employees, manufacture and sell local honey, about 150 different beeswax skincare products (from lip balm to soap), beeswax candles, and more. Creek House Honey Farm sells products locally, online, and in about 200 stores nationwide.

The business, located minutes east of WT's campus, also now includes a winery and restaurant, classes, and a rentable event center.

But it began as simply a hobby, Nester said.

“At the time, in the early days, it was just for fun,” she said. “But then we started seeing the results from using real, raw beeswax and propolis. It started to help people, and I was hooked.”

Her coursework at WT, along with her experience in the classroom, gave Nester the managerial skills necessary for running the business.

There are other benefits as well.

“Since I am a WT alum, I have connections to professors and administrators at the campus who not only are clients, but also have helped with grants for our business,” Nester said.



Sisters Tracey Ouellette '01, left, and Paige Nester '98 credit WT for much of their success.

“Plus, the community also loves to support WT alumni,” she added.

WT has long been a tradition in Nester's family – one that continues today. Nester said she attended basketball camps as a child at WT and has memories of going to the campus while her mother, **Katy Taylor '86**, studied for her degree. Now, Nester's daughter **Blake '21** is a WT graduate, and her son, Caiden, is a current student.

“WT feels like home to me,” Nester said. “I love walking the campus and remembering all of the good times I had there.”

Like her sister, Ouellette's connection to WT is both personal and professional.

Her studies there—pre-pharmacy, with a bachelor's degree in biology—prepared her for the University of Colorado School of Pharmacy, which she attended while at WT, transferring hours to complete her degree. She has been a pharmacist since 2005.

“WT has such an excellent and rigorous health sciences program that truly prepared me for this career,” she said.

She began her career at Northwest Texas Healthcare System but has worked at CRMC since 2014 after her family relocated to Wellington in 2013.

“I believe that top-notch rural healthcare is important, and I'm proud to work at one of the top 20 rural hospitals in the U.S.,” she said.

Ouellette also helped establish the Wellington WT Alumni Chapter in 2016, an organization that awards \$500 scholarships to selected Wellington High School students who plan to attend WT.

The chapter has awarded 56 scholarships totaling more than \$28,000 since its inception.

“We believe it is important to help kids in our rural community succeed,” Ouellette said.

Again, it's all about “local.”

“WT helps so many local students from small towns earn a degree that catapults them to higher levels in their careers,” Nester agreed.





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# History class launches alumnus to INTERNATIONAL CAREER

BY BRAD NEWMAN

A Borger native, **JD Parker '05, '07** came to West Texas A&M University on a cross-country scholarship, without knowing yet what he might study.

A teammate suggested Parker try a history class.

He did – and enjoyed it. Then a second course captivated Parker's interest in Japanese culture – and redirected the entire trajectory of his life.

Now Parker is a fellow at a high-profile institution in Japan, researching, teaching, and speaking at an international level.

"That class sparked a fascination with Japan that has never left me," Parker said. "It changed everything."

Parker, currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, conducts research at Kyoto University in Japan as a Crown Prince Akihito Fellow.

His journey to East Asia began in Dr. Paul Clark's classroom, though.

Clark, a WT professor of history, not only educated Parker in East Asian history and culture but also taught a Japanese language course upon request.

"That kind of one-on-one commitment from a professor at a regional public university is the kind of thing that sticks with you," Parker said.

After graduating with his history degree in 2005, Parker joined the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, which gave him a yearlong opportunity to experience Japan firsthand.

"Living there started to change my worldview and set me on a path I never could have imagined," he said.



WT alum JD Parker, a Crown Prince Akihito Fellow, third from right, was a featured speaker at the 65th anniversary celebration of the fellowship, named in honor of Japan's Emperor Emeritus. Also pictured are, from left, Masakazu Kubota, vice chair and president of the Japan Business Federation; Masa Iwase, executive officer of Mitsubishi Estate Co.; Ambassador Yoshio Matthew Nakamura; Steve Sombrero, chairman of the Crown Prince Akihito Foundation; Kevin Rickman, Ph.D. student and Crown Prince Akihito Scholar; Reyna Kaneko, president of the Crown Prince Akihito Foundation and president of the Japan-America Society of Hawaii; and Tomoko Hasegawa, managing director of the Japan Business Federation.



JD Parker speaks at the 65th anniversary of the Crown Prince Akihito Fellowship in Japan.

Parker returned to WT to complete a master's degree in educational leadership and administration, then went on to earn another master's in East Asian languages and cultures from the University of Kansas.

Parker studied abroad in Fukuoka, Japan, then returned to the country from 2015 to 2017 to teach in the cities of Himeji and Osaka. During that time, he also played on Japan's national ultimate Frisbee team.

Parker's initial spark of curiosity has since developed into a lifelong interest and passion for Japan's rich history, its unique education system and its distinctive worldview.

His current studies are in human rights education, focused on "interdependence versus individualism," a concept that world systems can best flourish as they listen and learn from each other, based on shared values of human dignity.

"I'm drawn to Japan not just as a place, but as a lens for rethinking how we educate, relate, and care for one another," Parker said.

"My work explores specifically how Japanese schools approach community, empathy, and human rights, to learn what we might understand by looking through another culture's eyes."

Parker's research also has allowed him opportunities to strengthen U.S.-Japan relations through community service projects.

While pursuing his master's degree at WT, for example, Parker conducted a service-learning project at an orphanage in Japan. The project combined his academic work with real-world engagement.

As a Crown Prince Akihito Fellow, Parker earlier this year was invited to speak before distinguished guests at the 65th anniversary of the creation of the Fellowship, which is named in honor of Japan's Emperor Emeritus.

Parker delivered his remarks in Japanese; it was a special moment for the rural West Texan.

"I didn't grow up thinking I would one day speak at an event in honor of the Emperor Emeritus of Japan," he said. "But thanks to the support of public education, international education programming, and the mentorship of some truly generous professors, that's exactly what happened."



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# **WT** EDUCATORS **EXCELLENCE** *Initiative*





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

BY CHIP CHANDLER

A social media post may change the life of Cynthia Muñoz.

Muñoz, a paraprofessional at City View Elementary in Canyon Independent School District, saw the June 5 announcement of the new WT Educators Excellence Initiative on West Texas A&M University's Facebook page.

The initiative 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. It was the push Muñoz needed to continue her education.

"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 said. "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."

Like Muñoz, 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.

As soon as the initiative was announced, Grubbs jumped.

The first to contact WT to sign up for the initiative, Grubbs said the half-off initiative will be a major help.

"It's a huge blessing, a huge blessing," said Grubbs, a single mother of three children. "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.**

- WT President Walter V. Wendler



"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 said. "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," said 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."



**It's a huge blessing, a huge blessing. This means a lot because it means I'll be able to afford my education.**

-Ashley Grubbs, a paraprofessional at Sunray Independent School District



Derek West, principal at CISD's Randall Junior High School, had already begun pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership at WT, but he said 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 said.

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 said. "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 employees 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.



# A Devoted Buff

BY KEITH BROWN

Professor **Emerita Susan Coleman '72, '73** was remembered in her obituary as a "devoted Buff." That description hardly captures the extent of her commitment to her alma mater.

Holding bachelor's and master's degrees from WT, Susan served on the faculty as Director of the Criminal Justice program from 1982 until her retirement in 2015. She was responsible for recognizing donors in her department and connecting them with the students who benefitted from their generosity. She remained engaged in campus activities throughout her life, and she even sent periodic contributions to the Alumni Association to ensure the Eternal Flame on the University's front gate remained burning.

However, it was her support of scholarly endeavors for political science and criminal justice students and faculty that will remain her enduring legacy.

But Susan's greatest impact was her support for students and faculty in political science and criminal justice. She believed deeply in education, which was clear in her own academic journey. After completing her degrees at WT, she earned a law degree from Texas Tech University. She was a member of the State Bar of Texas and pursued additional studies in law at the City of London Polytechnic Institute as well as political science at Texas Tech.

Susan began her philanthropic efforts in 1985 with the Jesse and Grace Osborn Endowment Fund, named for her grandparents. Her grandfather served in the Texas House of Representatives and on the state board of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Over the years, she created several other scholarship funds to honor her parents, relatives, and faculty

colleagues. She contributed to these funds monthly and ensured they grew large enough to provide meaningful support for students every year—forever. She did all this quietly, without seeking personal recognition.

With her passing in March 2025, Susan's lasting legacy will continue with a gift from her estate. The Susan Coleman Faculty and Student Support Fund for Political Science and Criminal Justice will support research, travel, educational enhancement and other needs of the faculty and selected outstanding students in the department.

Susan Coleman's advocacy for academic achievement is an excellent testimony to one alumna's deep support. Her commitment to the perpetuity of that support sets her apart, and her philanthropic legacy ensures this devoted Buff's support lasts forever.

To learn how you can make a similar impact, contact the WT Foundation about the I Am WT Leaving a Legacy program.

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# *Congratulations* CLASS OF 2025







WT awarded 773 baccalaureate degrees, 272 master's degrees and three doctoral degrees to spring graduates at the May 16 and 17 commencement ceremonies, following procedural confirmation from the University's seven deans.

The oldest graduate was 75, and the youngest were 19. The graduating class includes 120 with a perfect 4.0 GPA and 23 veterans; 47.9 percent of the undergraduates are the first in their family to earn a college degree. Students from 38 states in the nation and 21 different countries graduated.

Additionally, 370 potential August graduates walked the stage at the May commencement ceremonies.











CLASS  
OF  
2025





Celebrating the ribbon cutting of a new Pantex research lab on the campus of West Texas A&M University were, from left, Ben Stallwitz, technology development director; Johnnie Guelker, National Nuclear Security Administration site lead for TAMUS at Pantex; Evelyn Mullen, special adviser to senior associate vice chancellor for nuclear security initiatives; Dr. Todd Rasberry, WT vice president for philanthropy and external relations (back); Dr. Angela Spaulding, WT vice president for research and dean of the Graduate School; Tyfani Lanier, engineering director; WT President Walter V. Wendler; and Dr. Kelly Beierschmitt, president and general manager.





# A Panhandle Partnership

## New WT laboratory opens for Pantex research

By Brad Newman

**A**sk any Texas Panhandle resident to name the region's most iconic institutions, and you'll likely hear the same two: West Texas A&M University and Pantex.

WT, which has provided top-quality higher education from its Canyon campus for more than a century, and Pantex, located east of Amarillo and known as the U.S.'s premier nuclear-security facility, are both deeply rooted and widely recognized.

And now, the two powerhouse entities will collaborate in a new venture of scientific discovery and innovation.

The Palo Duro Research Facility opened on WT's campus earlier this year, an exploratory research laboratory where Pantex specialists will work alongside WT faculty and students.

"This project represents an important two-way relationship of regional unity," said WT President Walter V. Wendler. "Both partners want to do everything we can to utilize our expertise in order to better serve this region."

### A Restored Landmark

The Palo Duro Research Facility is the first Pantex laboratory ever embedded on a university campus, linking the Panhandle's two cornerstones of education and national security.

Operating out of the former Palo Duro Hospital, which closed in 1998, the newly remodeled space now belongs to WT and has been transformed to accommodate state-of-the-art laboratories, offices, and collaboration areas.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony in March marked the culmination of a three-year renovation project.

The building dedicates about 7,500 square feet to Pantex, housing about 15 members of Pantex's research and development group in a space that had previously been out of use.

"I'm proud of these changes, because it's good stewardship of our campus," Wendler said. "It's one more way we have found to modernize underutilized, aging buildings and put them to good use."

A near doubling of Pantex's research and development workforce in the past five years, coupled with efforts to expand portions of its laboratory space, led Pantex to consider off-site leasing options in the Amarillo area, said Ben Stallwitz, technology development director for Pantex Engineering.

"But there were a number of benefits where WT provided clear advantages," he said, highlighting the quality of the facility, the proximity to additional laboratory equipment at WT, and access to WT researchers.

WT's University Police Department will move into and operate from an under-construction Public Safety Building on the site, as well. And WT's College of Engineering also uses laboratory space elsewhere in the complex.

"It's a stout, strong building that will yield years of service for us and this project," Wendler said.

## 'Scientific Muscle'

But the new shared physical space is not the first collaboration between WT and Pantex.

The partnership dates to 2007, when the two entities worked together during the formation of WT's engineering programs.

"Those early successes built a foundation of trust and a shared commitment to problem-solving that serves the nation," said Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of WT's College of Engineering.

The opportunity to embed a Pantex laboratory — and Pantex researchers — on WT's campus seemed like a natural and strategic fit for both institutions.

Research conducted at the Palo Duro Research Facility will primarily focus on what Stallwitz described as "lower-maturity projects," which explore fundamental scientific questions in materials science, digital technologies, and advanced manufacturing.

Among the benefits for WT:

- on-campus seminars, lectures, and short courses led by Pantex staff;
- shared equipment and instrumentation students would otherwise have to leave campus to access;
- a natural pipeline from "classroom to careers," Hunt said; and more.

Already, one graduate student studying in the facility was offered and accepted a full-time position at Pantex while completing their thesis work. Faculty at WT have begun co-authoring research proposals with Pantex staff. And one capstone project, led by a team of undergraduate students, is being jointly advised by WT faculty and Pantex professionals.

"These early wins validate the model and show how quickly ideas flow when people share space, students, and equipment," Hunt said.

Pantex, too, stands to benefit from the partnership.

"When we extend our reach into students and professors through these research collaborations, it gives us more scientific muscle," said **Dr. Kelly Beierschmitt '87**, Pantex president and general manager of PanTeXas Deterrence. (See related story, opposite.)

By incorporating cutting-edge academic practices into its existing research efforts, Pantex strengthens its ability to identify and develop real-world solutions.

And by fostering professional relationships with WT students, Pantex can also bolster its own future workforce.

"This facility gives us an excellent opportunity to recruit the future employees here," Beierschmitt said. "We're able to work with them early and keep the best and brightest here in the Panhandle."



Dr. Todd Rasberry, vice president for philanthropy and external relations, welcomes the crowd to a March ribbon cutting announcing a new research partnership between Pantex and WT.



Pantex, located east of Amarillo, is the U.S.'s premiere nuclear-security facility.

## For the Region

For leaders at both institutions, the collaboration represents something more than just shared research — it's a long-term investment in the Texas Panhandle.

Beyond the mutual benefits for WT and Pantex, the Palo Duro Research Facility contributes meaningfully to the area's economy, security and intellectual reputation.

**“Our mission is to serve locally first while addressing problems that matter globally.”**

-Dr. Emily Hunt, dean of WT's College of Engineering

"Pantex and WT are both stakeholders in the success of the region," Stallwitz said. "The Palo Duro Research Facility collaboration gives us tools to be even better at things we already do."

The new partnership not only will provide current WT students with opportunities to be mentored by Pantex experts and have what Hunt called "paid, résumé-defining experiences," but the collaboration ultimately could create entirely new career pathways for graduates across science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.

"We envision that we can spin out technologies that create jobs and diversify the Panhandle economy," Hunt said.

Those jobs, in turn, serve to protect Panhandle residents — and ultimately, to safeguard global security — as the next generation of STEM technicians enter the workforce better trained than ever before.

It's a model that Hunt calls "regional stewardship."

"Our mission is to serve locally first while addressing problems that matter globally."

Hunt, a Panhandle native, said she has personally been impacted by Pantex's longstanding mission and values.

Her father, along with many friends and neighbors, had careers at the plant.

"That shaped my view of what 'engineering that matters' looks like," she said.

The Palo Duro Research Facility marks a significant step forward in continuing that legacy.

"Seeing this project open on our campus joins the region's premier technology center with the Panhandle's university, unlocking new possibilities for discovery, workforce development, and transformational innovation right here at home," Hunt said.



## Pantex president: 'My WT degree meant I could go anywhere'

By Brad Newman

**Dr. Kelly Beierschmitt '87** has directed nuclear security sites throughout the U.S. for more than 40 years.

His experience with the U.S. Department of Energy has spanned National Nuclear Security Administration facilities and laboratories across the country – from Washington state to Tennessee, from the famed Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico to his current role as president and general manager of Pantex in Amarillo.

His career includes credentials as an engineer, certified safety professional, and member of the American Nuclear Society.

But it all started with the work ethic, passion and drive to succeed he acquired at West Texas A&M University.

"Once I completed my degree from WT, I didn't have any insecurities about going on (with my education and career)," Beierschmitt said. "It's all because of the quality education I got there."

Beierschmitt's father, **Frank Beierschmitt '74**, also is a WT alumnus; he earned his degree when Beierschmitt was growing up in Claude.

**WT's professors taught me how to  
be a lifelong learner.**

-Dr. Kelly Beierschmitt '87

"I'd go down to the basement and watch my father study, at nights and during the weekends," he said. "He did that while he was mid-career, and he became the first one on that side of the family to get a degree."

Beierschmitt followed a similar trajectory.

"WT gave me the ability to make a living and go to school at the same time," he said. "I would work a graveyard or swing-shift and then go to class."

That flexibility, combined with WT's rigorous standards, gave Beierschmitt the ability and determination to excel.

"WT's professors taught me how to be a lifelong learner," he said. "It was the quality education at WT that gave me the confidence to apply for a doctoral program at another school in another subject."

Beierschmitt earned his doctoral degree in engineering from Texas Tech University in 1992.

At Pantex, Beierschmitt's official title is Pantex president and general manager of PanTeXas Deterrence, a position to which he was named in 2024.

He described his role as "a complex problem solver and supporter of others."



Dr. Kelly Beierschmitt discusses a new partnership between Pantex and WT at a March event.

Beierschmitt's colleagues praised him as a trusted and principled manager.

"Kelly's honesty, integrity, and values make people gravitate to him," said Colby Yeary, Pantex's Mission Assurance Division Director. "He's the kind of leader you want to follow."

And, Beierschmitt said, the majority of those he now leads at Pantex share his Buffalo background, having also earned degrees from WT. About 20 percent of Pantex employees earned at least one degree at WT; more than 100 employees have multiple degrees from the University.

It's those people who Beierschmitt said make Pantex such an exemplary place.

"There is nothing better than Texas Panhandle work ethic and the patriotism of the people here," he said. "Our mission matters at Pantex, and the people know that."

**There is nothing better than Texas  
Panhandle work ethic and the patriotism  
of the people here.**

-Dr. Kelly Beierschmitt '87

Promoting that mission—to maintain the safety, security, and effectiveness of the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile—and ensuring it is pursued with cutting-edge excellence has been a focus of Beierschmitt's tenure thus far.

"Kelly has brought a 'next level' strategy to Pantex," Yeary said. "His most significant contribution to Pantex is his vision, which includes the belief that nothing should be considered unattainable for Pantex and our community. It's truly inspiring."

Pantex's latest collaboration with WT—the new Palo Duro Research Facility in Canyon—contributes to that strategy. And Beierschmitt's personal pride in WT makes the collaboration even more satisfying.

"My Ph.D. is from Texas Tech, but the class ring I wear is from WT," Beierschmitt noted. "I wasn't sure I was ever going to be able to complete a degree, and so when I did finish my degree at WT, it meant an incredible amount to me. I knew after getting that degree, I could go anywhere."



# Social Work Program Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Year

By Brad Newman

They serve children in need.

They comfort hospice patients.

They bring hope to the homeless.

They advise college students.

Since its founding a half-century ago, West Texas A&M University's social work program has prepared students to do exactly that—and much more.

The program, established and accredited in 1975, has graduated hundreds of professionals who have gone on to make a difference in schools, hospitals, nonprofits, and agencies across the Texas Panhandle and beyond.

**“Our college is honored to have a half-century tradition of developing these truly indispensable professionals.”**

—Dr. Gary Bigham, dean of WT's Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences

“Social work professionals are special,” said Dr. Gary Bigham, dean of WT's Terry B. Rogers College of Education and Social Sciences and Texas A&M University System Regents Professor of Education. “They have a servant's heart; they genuinely care about people. The social worker may be the most uplifting person some people see in a day.

“Our college is honored to have a half-century tradition of developing these truly indispensable professionals,” he said.

WT's social work degree equips students to succeed at licensure examinations and future careers across a wide range of fields, said program director **Ruth DeAnda '05, '11**.

The program begins with an introduction to the vast array of options for students who study social work. Often, the many possibilities are surprising to new students, DeAnda said.

“We aim to educate our students on the wide-ranging roles that social workers have. There are so many areas that students simply aren't aware of,” she said.

A common misconception, DeAnda said, is that social workers simply “take kids from families” through Child Protective Services. But that's an incomplete, limited view of social work, she said.

“Social workers are there to meet people in crisis, and in all types of crisis situations,” DeAnda said. “That means there's a never-ending need for social workers in our communities.”

The program's introductory course features weekly social work guests from agencies throughout the region. And a twice-yearly Social Work Fair also aims to spotlight the many avenues social workers are needed in Panhandle communities.

DeAnda said a hallmark of the social work program is its internship process. Before graduation, students work on-site alongside social work professionals.

“The internships are integrated into local agencies,” she said. “We have such a great relationship with so many good organizations in our community.”





Melissa Wheeler '07 used her social work degree to work with the unhoused population in Austin.

**Veronica Prosser '09, '11** said the real-world emphasis of WT's social work program prepared her for her career in social work.

Prosser has been a pediatric social worker at Northwest Texas Hospital System in Amarillo for more than a decade, working with new mothers, babies, and children.

"I love what I do," she said. "We work together to help families."

As a student, Prosser had opportunities to teach parenting classes to parents with open Child Protective Services cases and chose elective courses that taught more about serving families.

Prosser now returns each semester to WT to share with current students about her experience in the field.

In addition to first-hand training, students also learn skills for critical thinking, problem solving, data analysis, and setting goals throughout the program.

WT also offers a master's degree in social work. The graduate program, now offered fully online, began in 2010.

**"If you can just change one person's world, you could make an impact for generations to come."**

-Kristy Bartlett, director of WT's social work graduate program

Kristy Bartlett, director of WT's social work graduate program, said WT's degree plans help shape what she called "the social work heart"—people who are driven, passionate, and want to make a positive difference in another person's life.

"Often, students come into the program with big ideas to change the world. But I remind them, if you can just change one person's world, you could make an impact for generations to come," Bartlett said.

Ultimately, that's the goal of social work, DeAnda agreed.

"Our job is to go into these spaces—where you sometimes see the worst and the best of humanity, and sometimes the systems are so broken—but we go in with hope, to empower people to see their best selves and get to a better place in life," she said.

"We advocate for the vulnerable and protect the unprotected and provide a voice for the voiceless. We give hope."

Social work "is being a helper," said **Melissa Wheeler '07**. "That's one of the things that drew me to social work. There's so many ways to make a difference."

Wheeler's mother worked as a social worker and was her inspiration to enter the field as well.

Specifically, Wheeler has an interest in serving people experiencing homelessness and now provides database software to agencies who are serving people in need in Austin.

Part of her WT internship involved working in a soup kitchen in Amarillo.

"This is something that really ignites my soul," Wheeler said.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the bachelor's degree program, a social hour of celebration and networking is planned on Thursday, Oct. 16, at the Harrington Academic Hall WTAMU Amarillo Center, 720 S. Tyler St. in downtown Amarillo.

The next day, WT will host a Distinguished Lecture Series event on the Canyon campus.

Looking ahead, DeAnda said she hopes WT's social work program can continue and enhance its impact in the region by sending qualified, compassionate, resourceful social workers to serve the Panhandle communities.

"Some of our students have been able to go back into the communities they grew up in and connect people there to resources and real help," DeAnda said. "How do we stay focused on being the heart and hope for people? That's our focus."



JoLina Lopez '24 was nominated as a WT Alumni Scholar, securing her admission to the University.

When **JoLina Lopez '24** graduated from Abernathy High School, WT was one of five colleges she was seriously considering.

But it was an official recommendation from a WT alumna that made her decision clear — WT would be her next step.

"Being admitted into the WT Alumni Scholars Program reinforced that WT was the best place for me," she said. "That nomination changed my life."

The WT Alumni Scholar program, which began in 2021, allows WT alumni to recommend for University admission up to five potential students per admission cycle from any high school or community college.

"We are putting our trust into the hands of alumni and allowing them to vouch for students they know," said **Abby Waters '17, '19**, WT's alumni project manager.

"The goal is to give the power back to those who love and have been so greatly impacted by WT: the graduates themselves."

The program has received a total of 216 recommendations since its establishment.

Lopez was nominated to be a WT Alumni Scholar by her aunt, **Rosi Montoya '93**, a longtime early childhood education teacher. Lopez was in the first cohort to graduate from the program.

"Having someone you know and trust, someone you look up to, tell you about their alma mater and then submit your name to be admitted really makes it more meaningful," Waters said.

Students recommended by alumni have their application fee waived, and admission is fast-tracked, Waters said. In addition, once a student is admitted, they are automatically in consideration for WT scholarships.

"Being an Alumni Scholar made the admission process seamless," Lopez said. "It wasn't so intimidating or daunting."

Once on campus, Lopez said the support she received at WT gave her the confidence to explore new options and excel in extracurricular activities.

# WT Alumni Program Changes Student's life

By Brad Newman

Lopez, coming from a rural hometown, said the intimate atmosphere at WT was especially helpful in adjusting her to college life.

"Students are being invited to a university that genuinely cares about them as a person," Waters said. "This is the kind of personal relationship they will receive at WT."

That was exactly Lopez's experience.

"Every person I talked to wanted to just get to know me more," she said. "I wasn't just another student; people cared."

Originally studying education, Lopez redirected her degree plan to broadcast journalism and digital media.

In addition to her studies, Lopez participated in several student organizations connected to her major. She served as executive director of 1910 PR and as editor-in-chief of The Prairie News. Her involvement, innovation, and passion earned her multiple awards and honors.

"JoLina jumped into WT full-force," Waters said. "She truly invested in the college experience and used every last bit of what her degree had to offer to learn, prepare for the real world, and be a star student."

After graduation, Lopez started pursuing her master's degree from Texas Tech University and recently was hired as a content creator for a healthcare clinic in Lubbock.

"Being a WT Alumni Scholar helped me get to where I am now," said Lopez, who plans to make her own nominations to the program. "If it wasn't for that first push in WT's direction, none of the rest — finding my passion, starting my career — would have happened."

"It makes such a difference to know that someone believes in you," she said.

To nominate students for the Alumni Scholars Program, alumni can complete a WT Alumni Scholars Recommendation Form online at [wtamu.edu/admissions/scholars-programs/alumni-scholars.html](http://wtamu.edu/admissions/scholars-programs/alumni-scholars.html).

"Alumni are, in a sense, our recruitment teams in the areas we may not be able to get to," Waters said. "Having someone you know and trust tell you, 'Hey, you should check out WT,' can be so impactful to encourage new students."





Kyla Kane led the Lady Buffs to the semifinal round of the NCAA South Central Regional Tournament.



Nicholas Jett and the Buffs qualified for their ninth straight NCAA Tournament while holding the highest team GPA in the LSC.

# West Texas A&M Athletics Remains the Best in the West

By Brent Seals

**T**he rich athletic history of West Texas A&M University continued during the 2024-2025 academic year as the Buffs and Lady Buffs won seven Lone Star Conference Championships, placed 18 student-athletes on the league's All-Academic Teams, and earned six LSC Academic Athlete of the Year accolades.

The WT Athletics program has reached cumulative student-athlete GPAs of over 3.00 for eight straight semesters, and the Buffs and Lady Buffs placed 380 student-athletes LSC Commissioner's Honor Roll during the 2024-2025 school year.

The Buffs and Lady Buffs finished third in the Division II Learfield Director's Cup, marking the seventh straight and ninth overall time that WT finished inside the Top 10, and the sixth straight year inside the Top 5. WT once again was the highest-placing LSC institution in the standings.

Since the start of the 2020-2021 campaign, WT has won 37 LSC regular season championships with 32 individual NCAA National Champions along with three Team NCAA National Titles in volleyball (2022), women's indoor track & field (2022) and softball (2021).

Isaac Botsio claimed a pair of national titles during the NCAA Outdoor Championships in May.



Blessing Akintoye became the 10th female athlete in school history to be named an Academic All-American.







Antonella Periotti Omisolo became the sixth West Texas A&M recipient of the prestigious NCAA Elite 90 Award

In 2024-2025, head coach Josh Prock led Lady Buff Basketball to the program's 29th NCAA postseason, finishing 19-13 overall as they advanced to the South Central Regional Semifinals. Kyla Kane, Randi Harding and Claire Graham earned All-Conference recognition with four Lady Buffs honored for their efforts in the classroom as CSC Academic All-District honorees.

Buffalo Basketball continued their success under head coach Tom Brown as the Buffs qualified for their ninth straight and 23rd overall NCAA tournament. WT advanced to the South Central Regional Quarterfinals with five student-athletes earning All-LSC accolades. Narit Chotikavanic was tabbed the LSC Freshman of the Year, while Noah Pagotto was honored for his efforts in the classroom as the league's Academic Player of the Year.

The Indoor Track & Field season saw WT continue its dominance with 17 individual event conference crowns as the program swept the LSC Indoor Track & Field Championships—the fifth straight title for the Buffs and the 12th consecutive title for the Lady Buffs.

Blessing Akintoye and Romet Vahter were named the LSC Indoor Academic Athletes of the Year as WT sent 24 student-athletes to the NCAA Indoor Championships in Indianapolis. Meadow Gallentine won the NCAA Indoor



Emilee Boyer was named the Lone Star Conference Female Athlete of the Year as well as a finalist for the Honda Award

Weight Throw National Championship as both programs claimed a sixth-place team finish. Gallentine and Vahter were named the USTFCCCA South Central Region Field Athlete of the Year for their performances.

Buffalo Baseball reached the 30-win plateau for the 13th time in 2025 under first-year skipper Cory Hall. The Buffs boasted the 13th-highest batting average (.337) in Division II Baseball as they qualified for the program's 15th Lone Star Conference Championship. Kory Schmidt, Kyle Micklus and Dylan Feserman earned All-Region accolades with Schmidt becoming the program's 16th All-American with Third Team honors by the D2CCA. Micklus will continue his career in professional baseball after signing a contract with the Pioneer League in late June.

Meredith Jameson's golf squad continued their run as one of the top programs in the nation, advancing to the NCAA National Championships and medal-match play for the fourth straight campaign. Gam Songprasert and Anna Nomrowski earned WGCA All-American accolades for their efforts on the course while senior Antonella Periotti Omisolo was named the Women's Golf Elite 90 Award Winner for the highest-GPA of student-athletes competing at the NCAA Championships.





West Texas A&M Softball claimed a share of the 2025 Lone Star Conference Regular Season Championship

Head coach Michael Mook led Lady Buff Softball to another historic season, winning a share of the Lone Star Conference Championship along with hosting duties for the NCAA South Central Regional Tournament. The Lady Buffs advanced to the South Central Super Regionals with an overall record of 56-8, sitting atop of the NFCA Top 25 Poll for a majority of the regular season.

WT's Emilee Boyer was named the NFCA and D2CCA Division II National Player of the Year, the LSC Female Athlete of the Year, and a finalist for the DII Honda Award, leading all of Division II Softball in homeruns (22) and RBI (90). The junior led the Lone Star Conference in strikeouts (236) and victories in the circle (28) while also excelling in the classroom with CSC Academic All-American honors.

Men's Golf registered one of its best seasons in program history in 2024-2025 as the Buffs made a run to their second consecutive and third overall NCAA Division II Championships. WT finished sixth at the West/South Central Regional Championship in Riverside, California, to qualify for nationals in Palm Beach, Florida, finishing 14th overall. Santiago Caride was honored for his efforts on the links as a member of the Lone Star Conference Second Team.



Anna Nomrowski earned Second Team All-American honors after leading the Lady Buffs to the NCAA National Championships

Track & Field finished off the spring with dominant performances, including two conference titles and 21 individual event crowns at the LSC Outdoor Championships in Portales, New Mexico. Luke Holcombe was named the league's Academic Athlete of the Year with Vahter, Aziz Mohammed and Matt Stewart winning specialty awards from the LSC. Head coach Matt Stewart was named the USTFCCA Regional Men's Coach of the Year with Zach Daniel earning the Region's Assistant Coach of the Year honors for both men's and women's teams.

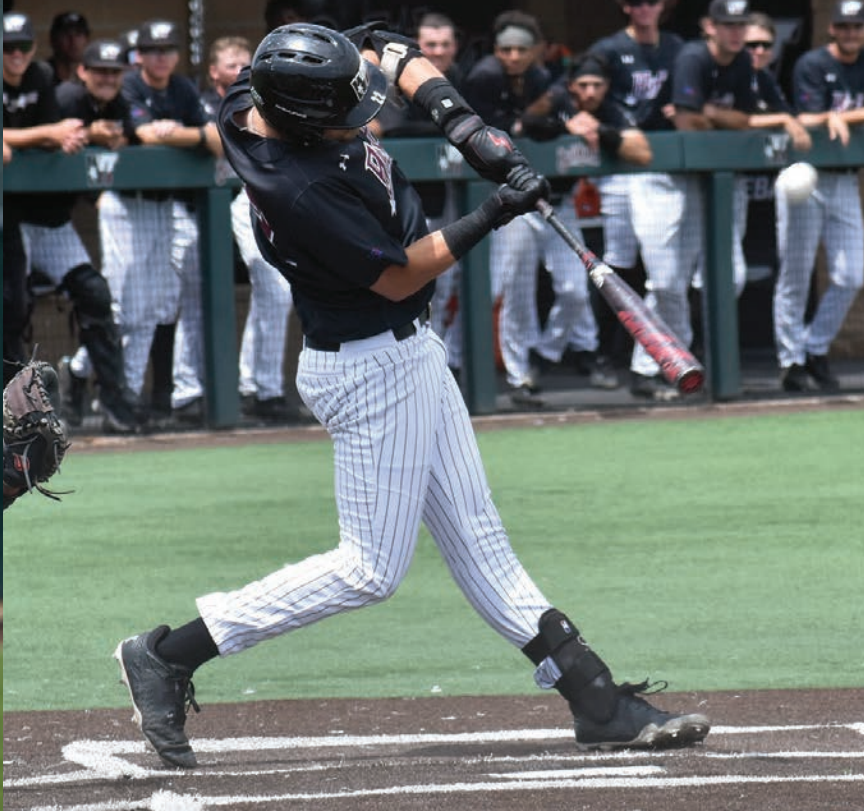
WT sent 30 student-athletes to the NCAA Outdoor Championships in May as the Buffs and Lady Buffs left Pueblo, Colorado, with five event National Championships won by William Amponsah, Isaac Botsio, Abigail Abugire along with the men's 4x100m relay crown. The Lady Buffs claimed a fourth-place team finish while the Buffs were national runners-up for the fifth straight campaign.

Amponsah, an eight-time track All-American who hails from Agona Swedru, Central, Ghana, capped a record-breaking season with two titles at the NCAA DII Outdoor Championships: one in the 5,000 meters and another in the 10,000 meters. Amponsah shattered the NCAA DII record in the men's 10K at the Bryan Clay Invitational as the two-time NCAA Cross Country National Champion cemented himself as one of the top distance runners in Division II history, being named the USTFCCA National Male Outdoor Track Athlete of the Year.





Kyle Micklus powered the Buffs to 31 victories as the All-Region catcher earned a professional contract in the Pioneer League



Kory Schmidt became the 16th All-American in Buffalo Baseball history after a big season at the plate in 2025



Romet Vahter excelled on the track and in the classroom as an Academic All-American honoree



Santiago Caride guided the Buffs to their second straight NCAA Division II Men's Golf National Tournament





## Fallen WT Officer Honored with Street Naming

By Chip Chandler

The only West Texas A&M University police officer to lose his life in the line of duty was honored in July in a joint ceremony between the University and the city of Canyon.

Monty Platt Drive formally was unveiled in a ceremony that included remarks from city and University officials, honoring Cpl. **Monty Platt '92**, who died Aug. 8, 2017. Platt was bitten by a feral cat July 24, 2017, while trying to capture the injured animal on campus.

Platt had served with the University Police Department for almost 17 years and for about 24 years total in law enforcement.

**“He was one of the best this community ever produced.”**  
-UPD Chief Shawn Burns

“His path was clear from the beginning: He wanted to serve, to protect, and to make a difference. And that’s exactly what he did,” UPD Chief Shawn Burns said. “From this day forward, Monty Platt’s name will not only be in our hearts—it will be a part of this campus and city’s map. And as people drive this street, they’ll see his name and ask, ‘Who was Monty Platt?’”

“And we’ll be proud to say: ‘He was one of the best this community ever produced.’”

Platt is survived by wife **RoseAnne '15**, who works as an administrative assistant in WT’s Department of Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences in the Paul Engler College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences; son Thomas, a sophomore animal sciences / pre-vet major; mother **Patricia Platt '66**, a retired WT employee; sister Melissa Mosley and her husband Richard Mosley.

“I’m proud of him, and our son Thomas is over the moon. This is such an honor,” RoseAnne Platt said. “Monty loved being out with students. And he really loved WT.”

In March, the WTAMU Foundation made a \$25,000 donation to the Texas Panhandle First Responders Memorial. A project of the nonprofit Friends of A.J. Swope, the memorial will be built in downtown Amarillo; construction is expected to begin this year.

“To those who knew, loved, and served with Monty, nothing we say or do can change the past,” WT President Walter V. Wendler said. “However, what we do and say today may give us hope, courage, and new meaning for living and for serving others.”

The newly named Monty Platt Drive formerly was named Hospital Drive and runs from Fourth Avenue to Russell Long Boulevard.

The Canyon City Commission approved the name change March 18. Coming soon to Monty Platt Drive will be WT’s new public safety offices, currently being remodeled in the north wing of WT’s Palo Duro Research Facility, formerly the Palo Duro Hospital.

# BUFF OWNED BUFF OPERATED



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# WT Earns Carnegie Recognition as Regional Research University

BY CHIP CHANDLER

This spring, West Texas A&M University reached one of its primary goals of the past decade.

The American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has classified WT as a Research College and University, or RCU, a new designation that identifies research happening at colleges and universities that historically have not been recognized for their research activity.

According to ACE and the Carnegie Foundation, the new designation, which includes 216 institutions across the country, encompasses institutions that spend more than \$2.5 million annually on research, regardless of whether they offer doctoral degrees.

WT spends approximately \$10 million per year on research activities and currently offers two doctoral degrees: one in agriculture and one in educational leadership.

"Acquiring Carnegie ranking as a research university was a goal of the long-range plan **WT 125: From the Panhandle to the World**," WT President Walter V. Wendler said. "But WT is not just a research university, WT is a Regional Research University. The research conducted by our faculty and students focuses on issues, problems and opportunities which are specific to the people, communities, businesses and industries of the Panhandle and West Texas."

The **WT 125** 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 current goal is to reach \$175 million by the end 2025.

"Schools, healthcare, culture, energy, agriculture, and industry in rural areas are different than in urban areas," Wendler continued. "Many universities are conducting research related to urban regions; WT is conducting research related to rural regions, and we are proud to be recognized for our efforts. These findings offer valuable insight for other regions and areas facing similar challenges."

The Carnegie RCU designation is a "significant affirmation of the depth and impact of our research enterprise," said Dr. Angela Spaulding, vice president for research and compliance and dean of the Graduate School.

"We are proud to be recognized for our efforts. These findings offer valuable insight for other regions and areas facing similar challenges."

-WT President Walter V. Wendler

"It reflects the exceptional scholarly contributions of our faculty, students and staff, and recognizes that meaningful, transformative research is taking place at regional institutions like ours," Spaulding said. "As a university firmly committed to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the Texas Panhandle and beyond, we will continue to advance research that is both locally relevant and globally informed."

Carnegie Foundation recognition was previously limited to Research 1: Very High Spending and Doctorate Production, which now includes institutions spending \$50 million or more in research and offering 70 research doctorates annually; and Research 2: High Spending and Doctorate Production, which includes \$5 million in research spending and 20 research doctorates annually.

The Carnegie Classifications were updated this year to expand the recognition of the range of ways colleges and universities engage in research and development, officials said.





# CAMPUS UPDATES

West Texas A&M University continues to grow all across campus with remodeling and additions taking place. Take a look at the latest updates.

## University Dining Hall

As the spring 2025 semester ended, Phase II of the University Dining Hall renovation began moving forward. Demolition work has removed the old serving line, equipment, flooring and a majority of the wall finishes. In Phase II, a \$3.1 million project, the dining hall will receive new serving lines, equipment and finishes. This fall, students will have a new look and layout with six entrée stations. A new food lab area will allow chefs to do culinary demonstrations and learn new skills. Phase II is schedule to open for service in fall 2025.

## Cross Hall

Modernized elevators are coming to Cross Hall. The project will include new motors, controllers, LED operating panel and cab interior finishes. This work will be completed by end of summer break in time for students to move back in. The project will cost an approximate \$774,000.

## Jones Hall

Upgrades to Jones Hall rooms have begun with the removal of built-in furniture to install new vinyl flooring, painting of walls, replacement of electrical receptacles with AFCI receptacles, and new furniture. Project work will encompass all residential and study rooms on all seven floors. Construction cost is approximately \$1.4 million.

## Buffalo Sports Park

Artificial turf was replaced in May on the southeast intramural field and in the outfield of Schaeffer Park Softball Field in Buffalo Sports Park. This will provide safer playing conditions for WT Softball and intramural softball, flag football and other team activities. The project was expected to be completed in June at an estimated cost of \$859,400.

## Shirley Hall

A recent flood in a mechanical space in Shirley Hall provided an opportune moment to perform some repairs and renovations. Over the summer, the residence hall received electrical repairs, new lighting in the lobby and around the exterior, painting of rooms and halls, new blinds in the lobby, new water fountains, and replacement exterior tile work around windows. Work was expected to be completed by the end of July at an estimated cost of \$432,600.



## WT's Second Powell Fellow Named; Will Continue Research into Cyst Treatment

A WT engineering professor is the University's second Twanna M. Powell Fellow, receiving \$50,000 to further his research into materials that may help advance treatment options for cysts and seromas in humans and some animals.

**Dr. Vinu Unnikrishnan**, associate professor of civil engineering in the College of Engineering, was announced as a Powell Fellow during the first of the University's May 16 commencement ceremonies.

The Twanna M. Powell Fellows Program supports, recognizes and advances research excellence at WT.

Unnikrishnan and co-inventors first patented biofidelic materials in 2018, and his research since that point has won him three additional patents.

"Biofidelic material" behaves biomechanically like human tissue but does not contain any biological material or attribute.

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## Three Promoted in WT Business Office

**Warren Pitt**, previously the assistant vice president for human resources, is the new assistant vice president for budget. Stepping into his role in HR is **Pam Young**, who previously served as director of human resources and Equal Employment Opportunity officer.

**Pitt '95, '05**, who earned bachelor's degrees in management and accounting from WT, began his career at WT in January 2022 after a career spent in auditing and human resources.

Pitt stepped into a position previously held by **Shelly McCune '97, '05**, who will retire after working at WT for about 30 years.

Young, who joined WT in December 2022, has worked for years in human resources and risk management.

Additionally, **Paige Nelms** has been promoted to manager of the University Bookstore effective May 1 following the retirement of longtime manager Terry Nepper after more than 20 years.

Nelms joined the bookstore in May 2024 as the manager for general merchandise.

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## Former Art Program Director Honored with Endowed Professorship

**Misty Gamble**, who joined WT in June 2020, is the first Steven Mayes Professor of Visual Arts.

The professorship in the Department of Art, Theatre and Dance in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities was established through a gift from Mayes' wife Pamela, and their two children, Erin Mayes and **Dr. Eric Mayes**, to honor his 11 years as department head and 30-year career.

Mayes was a printmaker who utilized photo etching and serigraphy, or silkscreen printing, in his work. He pioneered the use of digital imaging into printmaking in the 1980s.

Also in the Department of Art, Theatre and Dance, Anna Lemnitzer has been named the Doris Alexander Distinguished Professor of Fine Arts.

The Alexander distinguished professorship was established in 2013 to honor the longtime arts advocate, who served a six-year tenure on the Texas Commission on the Arts and was an active philanthropist in the Amarillo area.

## WT Faculty Earn Professional Development Grants

Eight WT faculty members earned more than more than \$25,000 in grants through the University's Division of Academic Affairs.

The development grants will finance travel and professional development for the faculty members beginning this summer.

Faculty members earning grants include **Dr. Joshua Brown**, assistant professor of biology; **Derek Kennedy**, instructor of sports and exercise science; **Dr. Nicole Kraus**, assistant professor of sociology; **Dr. Lydia Miller**, assistant professor of social work; Dr. Keshav Shrestha, assistant professor of physics; **Echo Sibley**, assistant professor of theatre; **Edward Truitt**, professor of dance; and **Dr. Jillian Yarbrough**, clinical assistant professor of management.

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## Haasl Named WT's New Vice Provost for Enrollment Management

**Dr. Rick Haasl**, a 20-year WT veteran, is the University's new vice provost for enrollment management.

Haasl, previously the associate dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences and an assistant professor of sports and exercise science, will work under the umbrella of WT's Division of Academic Affairs to more closely align enrollment and admissions with the University's academic programs.

Haasl's team will include the recently promoted **Sedrick Knowlton '09** as executive director of recruitment and external relations, as well as **Christina Cahillane '09 '10**, executive director of marketing; **Dana Melcher '01 '13**, executive director of student financial services; and **Virginia Leathers**, executive director of admissions.

*class notes*  
**Bufs!**

**Let the rest of the  
herd know what  
you're up to!**

**Submit updates for Class Notes  
to [alumni@wtamu.edu](mailto:alumni@wtamu.edu)**

## Inaugural Board Members of WT's Hill Institute Unveiled

The seven inaugural members of The Hill Institute's advisory board of directors were announced in May.

The Institute was founded in October 2023 following a historic \$20 million gift from **Cheryl '84** and **Alex Fairly '85**, currently the largest family gift for WT's One West comprehensive fundraising campaign.

The Institute is an interdisciplinary academy of researchers, teachers and students. Named for Joseph A. Hill, the second president of WT and its longest-serving leader, the Institute centers on 10 values: trust, family life, hard work, regard for others, personal responsibility, compatriotism and patriotism, virtue, faith, personal and civic loyalty, and rugged individualism.

Inaugural board members include Dr. Ben Carson, a neurosurgeon and former secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development; Kriss Cloninger III, the former president of AFLAC Inc.; Lee Crisp, former president of Pepsi MidAmerica, one of the largest privately held Pepsi franchises in the nation; Alex Fairly, chairman of The OccuNet Company; Tim Lambert, president of the Texas Home School Coalition; Dr. Kevin D. Roberts, president of The Heritage Foundation and Heritage Action for America; and Dr. Walter V. Wendler, WT president.

The Institute is funded through philanthropic dollars rather than government funding.

## WT Ranch Horse Team Nabs First National Championship

The WT Ranch Horse team won its first national Division I championship at the National Intercollegiate Ranch & Stock Horse Association's Collegiate National Championship Show in April in Amarillo.

Additionally, **Cutter McLaughlin**, a junior agribusiness major from Amarillo, was named national champion rider in the nonprofessional division and was voted the Top Hand Award winner, chosen by the judges from champions in each of three divisions. As the award winner, he won a handmade custom saddle from nationally regarded Oliver Saddle Shop in Amarillo.

**Haylee Triplitt**, a junior agricultural business and economics major from Gouldbusk, was named reserve champion in the limited nonprofessional division.

## WT Print Shop Wins National Award

The WT Print Shop recently won a top award against national competition.

The mailer for The Arts at WT: A Subscription Series, advertising a series of events for the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities, won a gold In-Print Award in the Small Shop-Brochures category in a competition co-sponsored by the In-Plant Printing & Mailing Association and In-Plant Impressions.

The contest is the only one in the country exclusively for in-plant printers from all industry segments, said Meghan Watts, manager of University print services.

Judges examined each piece based on the quality of the printing process.

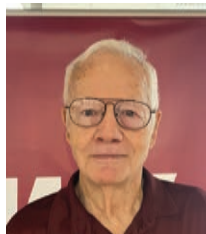
The mailer was designed by **Dwanya James**, University graphic designer.

## '60s



**Myrl Jones '63** was selected as a Who's Who in America. He is well decorated, having received the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People Silver Life Membership, the Radford Chamber of Commerce Education Support Award, Partnership from the Academic develop and African American Faculty Staff Association, and Faculty Achievement Award from the Partnership of Academic Development



**John Morrow '64, '91** coached JV football and all the girls athletic programs with Bob Schneider from 1972-1974 at Canyon High

School. Morrow coached for 31 years, retiring in Hereford in 1995 before coaching a final season in his hometown, Clarendon, in 1998. He proudly remembers graduating from WT in The Box with his undergrad and the Amarillo Civic Center with his masters.

## '70s



**Judy Jackman '73** used her diagnostician skills and experience working in elementary education to develop a class at the community

college level to teach undiagnosed learning-disabled college students. Jackman helped diagnose the students and then assisted in figuring out what classes they could take. Because she went from teaching kindergarten to teaching college, she ended up having two students she taught at both levels.

**Bruce Wyre '76** holds the school record for the longest field goal in WT's history at 58 yards. Hailing from Las Vegas, he jokes that he moved from Sin City to the Bible Belt. During his time at WT, he also was the president of a fraternity. Through this and football, he gained leadership skills, tenacity and the value of winning and losing – all skills that helped him during his careers with various plant start-ups, such as Owens Corning in Amarillo, consulting roles, process manufacturing, and leadership roles, including a liquid packaging company worth \$2 billion.

# class

WHERE THE BU

## '80s



**Gwen Hicks '81, '20** is the founder and served as the executive director of Amarillo Angels for eight years. Amarillo Angels is a

non-profit that walks alongside children, youth, and families in the foster care community. Hicks taught at the elementary level before becoming a school counselor, then was an administrator at Region 16 before retiring from her job but not her passion for helping children. Amarillo Angels was launched by Hicks and was the first pilot project of Austin Angels. Amarillo's chapter serves the top 41 counties of the Texas Panhandle.

**Eric Alexander '86** has provided 35 plus years of financial management leadership to the Panhandle area. After serving as the Chief Financial Officer of Happy State Bank for eight years, he transitioned to a financial consulting avenue with his business, Six Arrows Consulting, where he provides coaching and advisory services for leaders navigating change.

## '90s



**Anupam Johri "AJ" '93** was ranked #78 in the 2025 Barron's Top 1,200 Financial Advisors in the U.S., a list he has been on since 2014. He

and his two partners are now managing \$1.8 billion. He has also been on Forbes' Best in State Wealth Advisors list since its inception in 2018 and was on Financial Times Top 400 Financial Advisors list from 2015-2019. He is the managing director at Morgan Stanley and visits his numerous clients in the Panhandle monthly. In addition to establishing two scholarships in the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business, he often returns to guest lecture in classes and has been a guest on the The Buff Speak podcast. His wife, Karyna Johri, graduated WT in 1996 and is on AJ's Morgan Stanley team.

**Don Bell '98** owns Don Bell Properties and through a friendship with Taylor Sheridan had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Bell facilitated the historic purchase of the Four Sixes Ranch by an investment group led by Taylor Sheridan, producer of "Yellowstone."



# notes

## BUFFALO ROAM



**Mendy Riggins '98** is the owner of Blessed Buffalo Boutique, WTFanGear, SportZone in Canyon and Texas True Threads and Horse Creek

Boutique in Spearman. In addition to being a sales rep to boutique owners, she served as a nurse at Covenant in Lubbock for 17 years. Although she is no longer a practicing nurse, she is a caregiver by heart – stray animals are her specialty. Her “why” centers around building relationships and long-lasting friendships. She is so thankful for the opportunities given to her from WT.

## '00s

**Crystal '04** and **Jake '04 Hettinger** own two successful businesses, Sunfish Pools and First Choice Custom Builders. Jake is now a certified master builder and Crystal designs pools and outdoor spaces with 3D design software. Highlights of their recognition include: International AOE Gold medal for pool design/build, a feature in Aqua Magazine, and numerous pools have received medals in Gold, Silver and Bronze at the Southwest Pool & Spa Show.



**Laura Speight '04** trains and handles Conservation Detection Dogs. Her dogs are trained on various targets, such as

invasive zebra mussels, eastern box turtles, endangered mariposa cactus, sugar cane and western chicken turtles. This work provides valuable data for protection of our natural resources.



**Stran Smith '07** has been named as an inductee to the ProRodeo Hall of Fame Class of 2025. Smith earned a National Finals Rodeo

Average title Tie-Down and 2008 PRCA World Roping Championship. He retired in 2016 and recently co-authored A Colonel & A Cowboy: Strategies of the Elite. Throughout his career, he was known for his unwavering faith and was one of the founders of the longtime NFR church service, Elevation Sunday.

**John Tegmeyer '04** performed in WT's inaugural World Music Festival. Tegmeyer has contributed to a wide array of film and TV soundtracks, such as Crazy Rich Asians and The Morning Show, and performed with many notable artists, including Hans Zimmer, Common, Prince, and Alan Silvestri.

## '10s

**Blake Siebrecht '15**, was recognized as an outstanding community member with the Citizen on the Move award in Amarillo. Siebrecht founded BOOM Adventures and offers outdoor bonding experiences to military veterans and first responders through fishing, hunting, and adventure programs.



**Ben Arbuckle '18** was named the University of Oklahoma's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach following the 2024 football

season. Arbuckle coached at Washington State for two seasons. He was a nominee for the Broyles Award, given to the top assistant coach in college football. He was a quarterback for the WT Football team from the 2016 and 2017 seasons.

## '20s

**Courtney Reed '22**, was recognized as an outstanding community member with the Citizen on the Move award in Amarillo. She balances a career in home health care while volunteering at People Advocating Recovery Communities (PARC), providing medical care and compassionate support to Amarillo's homeless population.



**Ashlyn Williams '23** was crowned Miss Rodeo Texas 2024. She was named Miss Rodeo America 1st Runner Up after winning

the Horsemanship and Photogenic categories and securing the People's Choice Award for her chap designs, which paid homage to the buffalo.

## WT School Psychology Program Earns National Accreditation

WT's school psychology graduate program was granted full accreditation by the National Association of School Psychologists, recognizing that the WT program meets the highest quality of training and promoting national standards of practice.

According to the NASP, school psychologists help children and youth to succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community for all students.

WT's school psychology graduate program provides a high level of student-faculty interaction and support, providing relationships with local schools that allow ongoing real-world training and for students to put research into practice to better help children, families and schools.

## New WT Wool Judging Team Wins First Championship

WT's new wool judging team took home its first championship in only its second-ever competition.

The team, in which students demonstrate the art of evaluating wool to industry standards, took home first place at the National Western Wool Judging contest Jan. 16 at JBS Foods in Denver, winning by 17 points over its nearest competitor, Texas Tech University.

The team also earned first-place showings in grading and placings.

A second WT squad placed fifth.

Competitors evaluate 15 fleeces for spinning count, staple length, yield, character and purity. They also evaluate six breeding and commercial classes to find the highest-quality wool for producers.

## WT Rodeo Inducts First Honorees in Hall of Fame

WT's first-ever national championship rodeo team was inducted into the WT Rodeo Hall of Fame in May.

Inducted as alumni hall of famers were the members of the 2006 team: **Wes Burns '07**, **Zack Cobb '09**, **Marty Eakin '08**, **Ike Hanes**, **Chad Mask '09** and **Jarett Stovall '08**. In 2006, Cobb was the national champion steer wrestler and won the Bill Robinson Timed Event Award, and Eakin won the Walt Garrison Award for loyalty, determination, integrity and leadership.

**Mark Eakin '05**, who was WT Rodeo's coach from 1999 to 2008, was inducted in the Faculty/Staff category, which recognizes current and former employees whose leadership has significantly advanced the growth of WT Rodeo. Eakin, who is now director of rodeo activities and head coach at Tarleton State University, led the WT team to its historic 2006 national championship.

Also inducted as an alumnus was the late **Earl Reynolds '53**, who won WT Rodeo's first championship in 1950 for his efforts in team roping.

## Special Cornette Library Collection Opens

First-generation college students have a major new resource to help them navigate college life thanks to a new collaboration at WT.

Cornette Library opened its new first-generation special collection in April. The collection—which includes books and other resources, as well as study spaces—was made possible through a portion of a \$25,000 grant from Bank of America to WT's first-generation students. The grant was announced in September.

Nearly 50 percent of WT's student population is first-generation.



# **WT** Alumni Association WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY™

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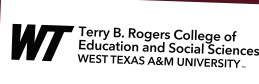
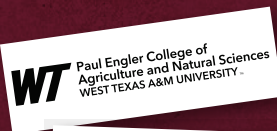
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