

the echo

Texas Prison News

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July 2026



Stitches With Love



+ Words Matter / Lee College's 60-Year Anniversary / Lace Up

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Dear Darby

Letters
to the
Darbster

Dear Darby,

Hey ol' thing, I would like to see opportunities for marriage counseling when both spouses are in prison. My wife is assigned to the Hobby Unit. Do you have any suggestions?

Kenneth Hernandez
Clements Unit

Dear Kenny,

Hmmmm. I gotta' tell ya', that's a new one! If I were you, I'd start out by askin' your unit's chaplain for suggestions — for separate counseling or studies to strengthen your bond with each other long distance. Check the library, too, and educational offerins' that involve marriage, family or long-distance committed-type relationships. Congrats on reachin' for the gold ring despite boundaries. Compassion and commitment are on your side. Good luck to both you and the missus!

Letters
to
D-Best

Dear
Darla



Dear Darla,

What movies and TV shows do you wish Securus would make available on our tablets?

Matthew Turner
Stiles Unit

Dear Matthew,

As a woman with a wide range of perspectives and aspirations, I want my entertainment options to be just like how I like my ice cream choices – UNLIMITED! Action, adventure, even a zombie apocalypse if I'm in the mood. Who says I must be typecast to a certain genre? Variety is the spice of life!

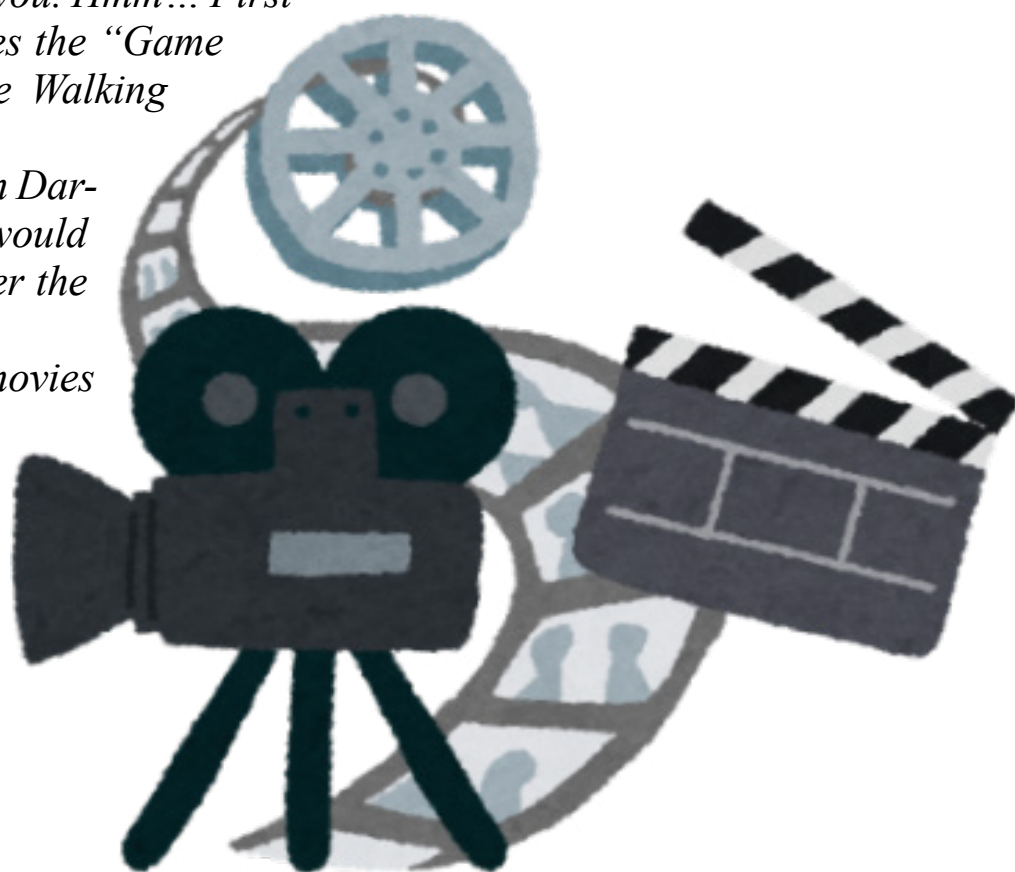
Don't worry, though, I'll think of some specifics for you. Hmm... First off, where are the dragons? Show of hands who loves the "Game of Thrones?" Or a good zombie apocalypse, "The Walking Dead," anyone?

I remember growing up watching horror movies with Darby, who would close his eyes as soon as the music would get intense and then sleep with his flashlight on under the covers just to hide from the monsters.

On the bright side, there are plenty of superhero movies to choose from. However, I'm more of an antihero kinda' gal – so what about "Deadpool?"

Anyway, those are my ramblings of some TV shows and movies, but I'll stop while I'm ahead 'cause I definitely could keep going! Thank you so much for asking me this question! It's clear you know who has D-Best opinion. (Too on the nose?)

Sincerely,
D-Best Cousin Ever, Darla ☺





Quincy Patterson Joins *The ECHO*

By Quincy Patterson
ECHO Staff

The ECHO welcomes new writer and long-time unit reporter Quincy Patterson to its team this issue. Patterson shares the educational journey that brought him from struggling student to a staff writer at this newspaper. Welcome aboard, Mr. Patterson!

I struggled with spelling, reading and writing when I entered the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Mentally, I refused to think past the next suggestion my peers offered. I was a follower of both the times and desires of others. In other words, my real self was buried under a façade. It was not until I began to think, read and eventually earned my high school equivalency (HSE), that I began to perceive a bigger picture of reality. While marching to the “Pomp and Circumstance” graduation song, I realized that it is more than just a song of victory; it’s also a song of becoming (more). It’s a salute and rite of passage into the many doors that have opened because of a previous accomplishment. That insight motivated me to continue to move forward.

The open door I entered was Trinity Valley Community College (TVCC). During that time, I also went through Kairos and completed the Bridges to Life program. Those two programs became the ultimate transitional stage of my life. Combined with the academic and spiritual insight, this Trinity Valley Cardinal took flight. For instance, after library sessions I would help clean and straighten up, so the library assistant asked, “Mr. Patterson, would you like to work here?” Because of my transition and character, I was hired. While working in the Beto campus library, I wrote inspirational quotes of the week on the board, and some of those quotes were my own. I was also asked to give motivational speeches in life skills classes. In 2015, I became the Beto unit reporter for *The ECHO* and had many articles published.

After earning an associate degree, the next academic door I entered was the University of Houston Clear Lake (UHCL) at the Ramsey campus. At Ramsey, I also served as a teacher’s aide. While pursuing a bachelor of arts, I joined Toastmasters International, which prepared me to speak professionally. As a UHCL Hawk, my perception and vision became acute, broader and focused. That is when I realized I was no longer serving time; time was serving me. Time was not against me as I once thought; it was intimately at my side, fulfilling a servant’s place. Time was my stepping stone to climb to the next level: from illiterate to an HSE certificate, to an associate degree, a bachelor’s degree, and now,

beyond. When the UHCL’s director handed me my degree and said congratulations, she gave me passage to soar into tomorrow and pour out my torrent of inspiration. That tomorrow has arrived as I join the team at *The ECHO*.

When I entered TDCJ, I would not dare imagine writing for this publication. Therefore, if a formerly illiterate and closed-minded individual can soar mentally and inspire thousands on a professional platform, anyone who allows time to serve them can use it to attain unimaginable goals. €



NATIONAL Wellness MONTH

MOVE MORE. FEEL BETTER. LIVE WELL.

Wellness is more than fitness—it's a way of life. This August, let's celebrate healthy habits that strengthen our bodies and our minds.

5 COMPONENTS OF WELLNESS

- CARDIOVASCULAR ENDURANCE**
The ability of your heart, lungs, and blood vessels to deliver oxygen during sustained physical activity. It improves stamina, supports heart health, and boosts overall energy.
- MUSCULAR ENDURANCE**
The ability of your muscles to perform repeated contractions over time without getting tired. It helps you power through daily tasks and stay active longer.
- MUSCULAR STRENGTH**
The maximum amount of force your muscles can exert in a single effort. Strong muscles support your joints, improve posture, and help prevent injury.
- FLEXIBILITY**
The ability of your joints to move through their full range of motion. Good flexibility improves movement, reduces muscle tension, and helps prevent injuries.
- BODY COMPOSITION**
The proportion of fat, muscle, bone, and other tissue in your body. A healthy body composition can improve your health, performance, and overall well-being.

 NUTRITION EDUCATION
  STAY HYDRATED
  GET ENOUGH SLEEP
  MANAGE STRESS
  USE YOUR RESOURCES

HEALTHY HABITS. STRONGER FUTURES.

Indigent Fan Program

The Indigent Fan Program will supply indigent TDCJ residents with a Registered Property fan for **FREE** from the commissary. The program runs from January 1 to August 31 each year, and you must submit your request within this time period.

To qualify for a **FREE** fan from this program, you must meet **ALL** eligibility requirements listed below:

- 1. Have less than a \$5 balance in your Trust Fund account.
- 2. Be classified with an indigent status for more than 180 days.
- 3. Have never received a fan through the TDCJ Indigent Fan Program.

Requests should include the following information:

I would like to request a fan from the Indigent Fan Program.

Name: _____

TDCJ # _____

Unit: _____

You must submit requests through truck mail or regular mail to:

Commissary & Trust Fund/
Indigent Fan Program
P.O. Box 629
Huntsville, TX 77342



Missing Person



Rachel Cooke



Photo taken in 2002



Photo taken in 2002

Rachel Cooke is a white female, blonde hair, 5 feet 3 inches tall, blue/hazel eyes, 115 pounds, with two heart-shaped cherries tattooed on her left shoulder and a black star tattooed on her left foot near her pinky toe. She also has multiple ear piercings and a naval piercing. Rachel was visiting her parents' home in Georgetown, Texas, on winter vacation from her school, San Diego Mesa College in San Diego, California. She was last seen by her family in the early morning hours of Jan. 10, 2002, when her mother left for work. It is believed Rachel departed her family's residence at approximately 9:30 a.m. for her daily four-mile run. Rachel was last seen approximately 200 yards away from her residence, walking towards her residence. She was wearing a gray running outfit, a green sports bra and Asics running shoes. She was also wearing a yellow Wal-kman on her arm, with sports-style headphones.

If you have any information on this missing person, please contact the TDCJ Crime Stoppers Office at P.O. Box 1855, Huntsville, TX 77342. TDCJ Crime Stoppers will pay \$50 up to \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest, filing of charges or indictment of person or persons that committed a felony crime or is a wanted fugitive. Crime Stoppers guarantees your anonymity.



By Ashley Morrison and Kelly Roddy | ECHO Staff

Eric Genuis and company performed a Concert of Hope at the Murray Unit. Genuis, along with violinist John Fawcett, cellist Nathaniel Hoyt and vocalist Tiffany Ho, shared a collaboration of symphony pieces with residents who attended the performance.

Genuis has over 20 years of musical experience. He has composed numerous pieces and produced six albums. Amongst the original pieces the group played were: “Rebellion,” “Promise,” “Redemption” and “Here I Am.”

Genuis shared the depth of his knowledge in music and wisdom from his own life experiences, making it known that he hasn’t lived a life of convenience. He openly shared his experiences with his children – a 22-year-old daughter who lives with Down syndrome, and his son Gabriel, who Genuis said took his own life after suffering from Asperger’s syndrome for 25 years. Even through his challenges, Genuis said he made a choice to choose joy, sharing the gift of music while still grieving the loss of his son.

“I can choose joy and still grieve Gabriel without tarnishing the memory of him,” Genuis said.

Genuis explained why he has traveled all over the country playing in over 1,500 prisons, rehabilitation centers and retirement homes.

“I do it because there is meaning; I believe in you,” Genuis said.

Genuis expressed personal experiences with his daughter’s disabilities and challenged labels that he said may make people feel like they’ll never be able to achieve anything meaningful in this world.

Genuis believes in the gifts of his musicians and in the impact of music.

Genuis paraphrased a well-known quote by Confucius: “If you want to know the morality of a nation, let me hear the music.”

Genuis’ piece, “Redemption,” shared the struggle of redemption versus the glory that is realized through suffering.

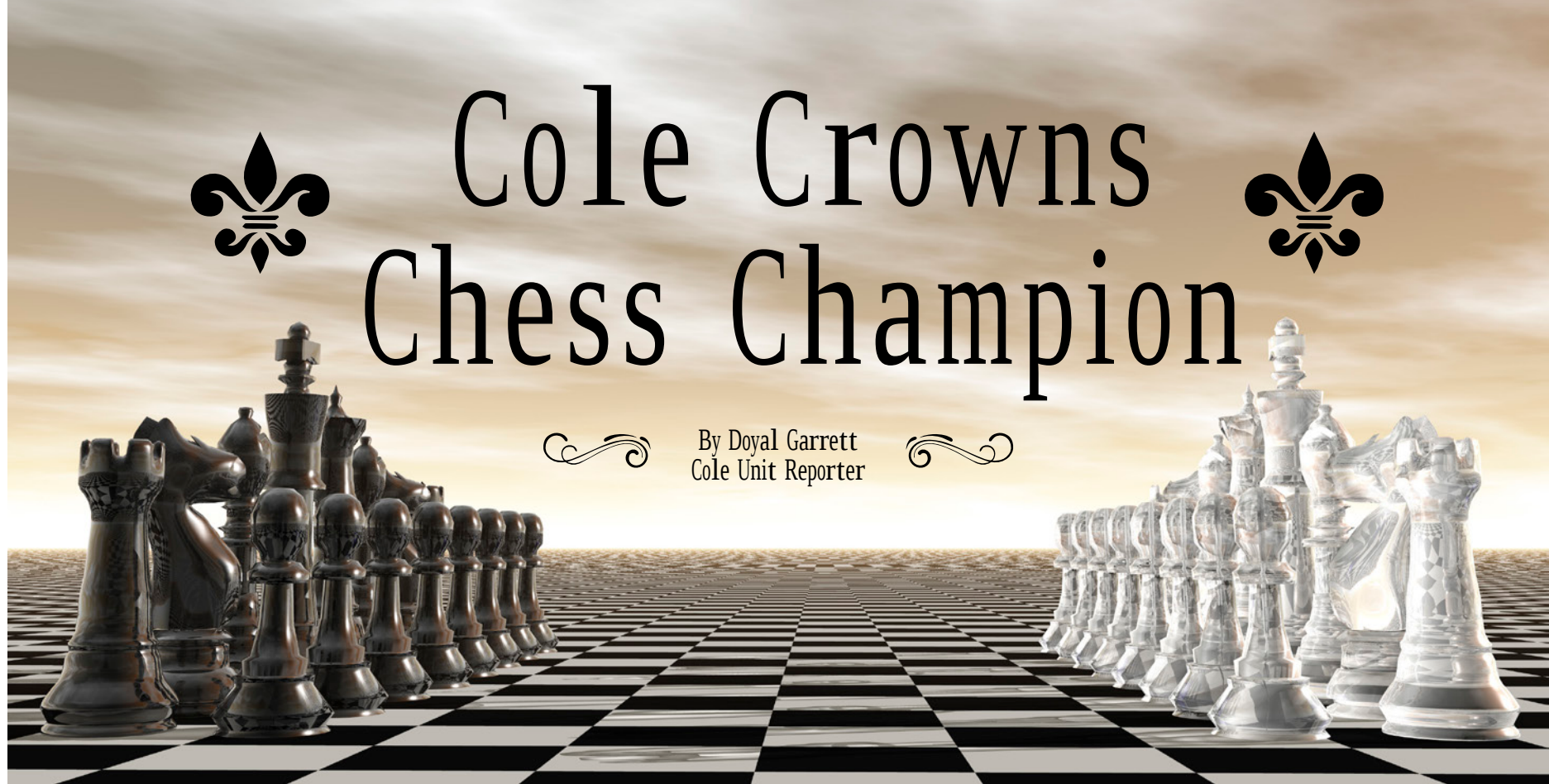
“Suffering is a brutal, relentless and merciless teacher,” Genuis said.

The deep and powerful impact of music affects each listener in unique ways. Genuis strives to share this gift of beauty with those who would not normally have access to it.

“When exposed to the beauty of music, it bypasses the brain and drives straight to the core of our humanity,” Genuis said.

The concert concluded with a final song, “Here I Am,” dedicated to Genuis’ daughter when she was in emergency surgery for heart failure at only 3 months old.

“We all instinctively crave to love and be loved,” Genuis said. “You don’t have to be perfect to show charity [to one another]; we are all broken. If you can’t show charity, then who is really the disabled one?” €



The Cole Unit chess tournament began with 14 players challenging each other in a double elimination format. Cole’s own Church of Growth Pastor E. Crain participated along with residents as the first rounds concluded and the victor’s brackets swiftly filled.

Player Joquin Greene emerged with three early wins and distinguished himself as the man to beat. His early play earned him the first bye and seemed to place him firmly in the driver’s seat of the tournament. But as the saying goes, “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.”

With one win each, players Christopher Young and Dwayne Knight squared off with a chance to play the final match against Greene on the line. Young would clinch the game by taking Knight’s Knight and pressed the material advantage, leaving the vanquished with the third place ribbon.

In a match of old school versus new school, elder Young would

have to beat the younger Greene twice to claim first place. Greene, with his three earlier wins and no defeats, needed only one win to be crowned the Cole Chess Champion.

Greene and Young sat across from one another surrounded by Crain and the eliminated players. It seemed Greene could easily put the match away, but Young remained undaunted by his opponent’s undefeated tournament record. With a few skillful and gritty moves, Young pulled off the first win.

In the sudden-death elimination match, Young and Greene would lock horns again. Greene still needed only this win, but this tournament went in a different direction. In a flash Young would say what every chess player hates to hear from his opponent: “Check!” The game was over moments later, and the Cole Unit recognized a new chess champion: Christopher Young. ♣

Tips for prevention and recognition of heat illness

Due to the high temperature, residents and staff are encouraged to be aware of the types of heat illnesses.

Higher risk conditions for heat illness include:

- ✿ Being newly assigned to a job outside
- ✿ Receiving psychiatric medications or certain other medications, or having certain medical conditions
- ✿ Being elderly
- ✿ High temperatures and humidity
- ✿ No significant breeze

Prevention of heat illness includes:

- ✿ Increasing frequency of fluid intake when working in hot environments
- ✿ Taking advantage of the supplemental water provided
- ✿ Taking a break every 30-60 minutes
- ✿ Decreasing intensity of work under extreme conditions
- ✿ Access to cold water showers
- ✿ Access to respite areas
- ✿ Allowed fans for all residents
- ✿ Following preventive measures on heat posters

Types of heat illness:

Heat Cramps: Can be painful and intermittent, involving involuntary muscle spasms following hard physical work or exercise in a hot environment. Cramps usually occur after heavy perspiration and typically occur in the abdomen, arms and legs. The cause is inadequate replacement of electrolytes (sodium and potassium).

Heat Exhaustion: The most common form of heat illness is caused by depletion of water and salt. Symptoms include weakness, anxiety, fatigue, dizziness, headache and nausea. Signs include profuse perspiration and rapid pulse and breathing. Confusion or loss of coordination may also be present. Heat exhaustion, if not treated, may lead to heat stroke.

Heat Stroke: While it may be preceded by signs of heat exhaustion, the onset of heat stroke is often sudden. Symptoms include diminished or absent perspiration, and hot, dry and flushed skin. Other conditions that may be present include increased body temperatures, delirium, convulsions, seizures,

rapid pulse, weakness, headache, mental confusion, dizziness, extreme fatigue, nausea/vomiting and incoherent speech progressing to coma. Medical care is urgently needed. Death may result if left untreated.

Treatment: Seek medical attention as soon as possible. Move the person out of direct sunlight into an air conditioned environment if possible, remove clothing while maintaining modesty and provide water to drink if conscious. Liberally apply cold water on them, and if possible, fan them if there is no breeze.

Access to Respite Areas: During times of extreme temperatures, offenders must be allowed access to respite areas. Employees and offenders will be trained to be compliant with heat precaution procedures including knowledge of respite area locations and resident access. The location of each respite area is also posted in resident housing areas and other common areas on the unit. Please consult unit staff regarding directions to the respite areas if needed.

Report all incidents of heat-related illness to a staff member immediately! ★



Goree Trusty Camp Hosts Pickleball Clinic, Tournament

The Goree Unit Trusty Camp recently hosted a successful pickleball clinic, giving participants the chance to learn new skills, engage in healthy competition and build positive social connections. It was led by Chaplain M. LeBlanc.

Approximately 50 players took part in the event, which began with instructional sessions focused on the fundamentals of pickleball. This hands-on clinic allowed participants to practice serving, volleying, positioning and using game strategy before beginning a lively doubles tournament where they put their new abilities to the test.



Pickleball contestants from Goree Unit's trusty camp (top and above) gather for tournament.

The event was made possible through generous support from JOOLA — a leading name in the sport often referred to as the “Nike” of pickleball. JOOLA is also the sponsor of the world’s No. 1 men’s pickleball player, Ben Johns. JOOLA partnered with LeBlanc to provide a generous amount of equipment. The gear travels with LeBlanc to each unit he visits, where he spends roughly six hours conducting a two-hour

“How-to-Play” clinic, followed by a four-hour doubles tournament organized with assistance from resident volunteers. The Goree Unit marks the ninth Texas Department of Criminal Justice facility to host one of his clinics.

LeBlanc emphasized the mission behind the program is to support wellness, recreation and positive programming across units. Throughout the day, participants showed enthusiasm as they learned proper techniques, practiced gameplay and displayed teamwork during tournament matches.

“The goal of this event was to provide a positive recreational opportunity that promotes fitness, teamwork and good sportsmanship,” LeBlanc said. “The response from the participants was outstanding, and we appreciate the support from our sponsor and staff that helped make the day a success.”

Many participants expressed appreciation for having an organized athletic event that promoted physical fitness while fostering constructive, pro-social interaction.

The day concluded with recognition of the tournament winners and individuals who demonstrated exceptional sportsmanship. Staff, volunteers and JOOLA were also thanked for their dedication and contributions, which helped make the event a memorable and impactful experience for participants.

Editor's note: The fast-growing paddle sport of pickleball combines elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis. It is played on a smaller 20 by 44-foot court and singles or doubles teams use a solid paddle to hit a perforated, hollow plastic ball over a net. Pickleball was created in 1965. €

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Another Secret to Happiness

By Restin Burk
Contributing Writer
Lynaugh Unit



Have you ever wanted to be happy so badly that you were willing to try anything? The good news is you don't need to change your personality, your tastes, the clothes you wear or anything else to be happy. You're perfect just the way you are, and there is no better you.

It's a fact that has been proven so many times, and it's finally making its way into your life right this second. You can prove its powerful effectiveness yourself. Then, when you come to your conclusion, you get to share and help others find what you have found. You get to be part of the solution.

Are you ready for another secret to happiness? Okay. Here it is: you will always find happiness when you put your focus on helping others. Does that sound simple? Well, it is. Does that sound too good to be true? Actually, it's not. Something almost magical happens when you make a habit of reaching beyond yourself to positively impact other people, animals and even the environment. Happiness requires a purpose beyond yourself.

"You will always find happiness when you put your focus on helping others. Does that sound simple? Well, it is. Does that sound too good to be true? Actually, it's not."

Did you know that your life will become greater as you increase the greatness of your cause? I want you to pause for a second and try to remember one of your most fulfilling moments. The kind that gives you a good feeling every time you think of it. Was it making a positive difference in the life of someone or something else? Yes? Good. Do more of that, and you will continue to build those types of memories. Life can feel utterly sad if all or most of our memories are regretful.

In the end, all we have are the memories we've chosen to create. That is where your power lies. You have the power to create the memories you want. Memories of regret aren't erased, but they are buried in a sea of new memories of doing things that make you proud. Regret and a sense of pride can't exist in the same place at the same time. It's impossible. Happiness is one decision away. Make that choice today and don't ever look back. **€**

LEARNING PERSEVERANCE

By Ashley Morrison
Staff Writer

“‘I can’t’ is like giving up without even trying.” These are words my dad instilled in me as a child. I started racing bicycles in Bicycle Motocross (BMX) at four years old, and at that age I said, “I can’t” a lot. Every time I said this, my dad came back with that first statement, which became part of my foundation. Without this sport and what I was taught, I wouldn’t be who I am today.

My dad said he got me involved in BMX to “toughen me up.” I was a quiet and shy kid. There was a time when I was biking that I also began crying. Even though I don’t recall the details leading up to me crying, I do remember my dad getting down to my level. He grabbed my handlebars and looked me in the eyes while I sobbed out, “I can’t!” He told me, in all seriousness, “‘I can’t’ is giving up without trying. Are you giving up?” I answered no, and he sent me back to the racetrack, my tears dried.

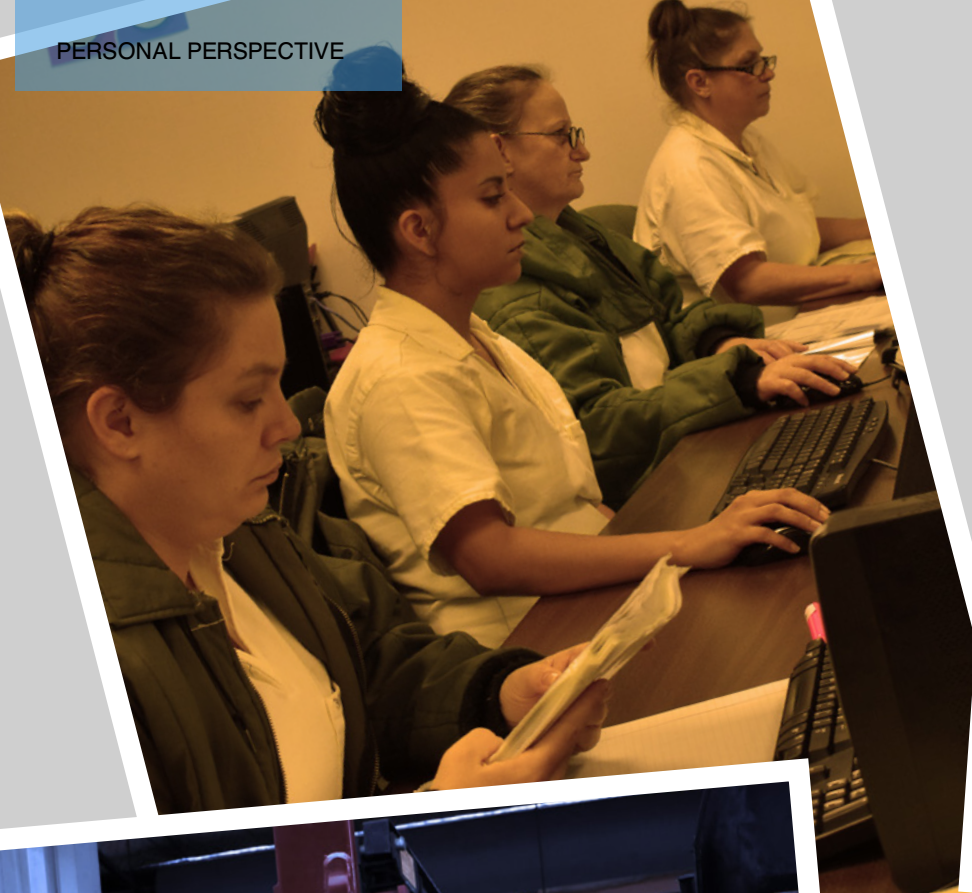
Racing BMX meant getting up at five in the morning to train and still be ready for school on time. It meant the weekends were spent at the local racetrack, and sometimes I had to bring homework with me to nationals around the country. I loved every minute of it. My mom made sure my schoolwork was taken care of and bandaged me up after hard crashes. These moments are some of my fondest memories of both of my parents, who taught me core values like self-discipline, problem solving, a good work ethic and responsibility.

When my family and I moved to Texas, I had to let go of racing BMX. It was a heartbreaking moment, but I used those earlier life lessons in everything I did. Those foundational moments allowed me to continue growing and problem solving.

After my incarceration began, I remember again saying “I can’t,” like my four-year-old self. Even then, my dad didn’t let me give up hope or lose sight of myself. With his support and love, I was able to stand on the pillars of strength he had instilled in me from a young age. This enabled me to remain positive and persevere through most circumstances. Now, it is second nature to look at obstacles and say, “I’m capable; I can do this.”

I want to encourage others to believe you are capable, even when something seems too hard or you feel like a problem may be unsolvable. If I had stuck to the mentality of “I can’t,” or chose to give up rather than find a solution to the problems of life, I wouldn’t be who I am today. Problem solving starts with believing in yourself. Know and love yourself. Begin saying, “I can,” and you will. €





BE GRITTY

By Savannah Taylor
Murray Unit

I watched a fascinating TED Talk given by teacher and psychologist Angela Lee Duckworth. She outlined what distinguishes a successful student who reaches their goals from one who struggles to achieve their full potential.

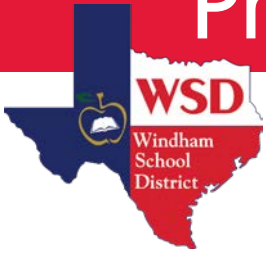
Studies have proven it isn't IQ, family income, home situation, race or gender that makes the difference. It all comes down to one little quality called grit. Students with grit are determined to achieve, and so they do. It's the same thing with people in corporate jobs, pilots in training and athletes. No matter what we set out to do, if we have a decent amount of grit, then we are more likely to reach our goals. Grit is stickability or pressing on when the going gets

tough and everyone else has gone. It's the determination to keep on track and reach the outcome you want to achieve.

If you think about grit in a material sense, it is a roughness. It has character. You can't wash it away and smooth it over without effort. It's taking and not budging. Grit doesn't just show up in your life. You've got to build it in daily by proving to yourself that you do have the will power to make things happen and stay true to your decisions.

Start with small things. Keep those little promises to yourself, and don't quit before the job is done. Eventually, you'll become a person with grit. You'll increase your own chances of success, no matter what it is you put your mind to. Be gritty. €

Windham Alumna Marie Horton Provides Perspective for Success



Story courtesy of Windham Annual Performance Report 2024 - 2025



"Success for me is my competition with myself to be better than I was yesterday."

- Marie Horton
Windham Alumna

By changing her mindset and overcoming the emotions she felt upon entering incarceration, Marie Horton was able to grow and diversify her skills, finding success while in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

"When I came to prison, I didn't have that mindset that I was going to go any further. I was content with where I was," Horton said. "There was a lot of anger. Now, I have this mindset that is contradictory to [having] this barrier that holds us back [because we have] a criminal background. Instead, I want to see how far I can go."

To transform her perspective, Horton immersed herself in a variety of classes and programs. Among the most impactful were Windham School District's Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP), Parenting and the Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) life skills programs. She also participated in TDCJ's Faith-Based Dorm, Restaurant Operations Management through Central Texas College and the Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment (STRIVE) program, a collaborative effort between Windham and TDCJ.

Of all these experiences, Horton credits CIP as the most impactful, providing the foundation for her success after reentry.

"Cognitive Intervention with Mr. Williams was probably one of the most transformative things I've ever done in my entire life," Horton said. "It changed my perception of how I interact with other people, how I process those interactions and not react to them immediately, how to make wise choices."

After her reentry in April 2023, Horton began

her journey as an assistant general manager at MOD Pizza. Drawing on the skills she had developed, she earned a promotion to general manager in March 2024. In her leadership role, Horton continued to apply lessons from her time in Windham's Parenting course, strengthening her ability to guide and support her team.

"It's almost as though Parenting is really more of a leadership class than it is just parenting," Horton said. "I have multiple people that work for me. I have to direct, redirect and teach, and that was an extremely helpful class to take."

Embracing her success, Horton continued to push forward and earned another promotion, this time to facility manager. For Horton, success means constantly improving and challenging herself. By staying committed to growth, she said she has surpassed even the goals she once set for herself.

"Success for me looks like growing and diversifying my skill," Horton said. "It is growing them to the best of my abilities. Success for me is my competition with myself to be better than I was yesterday. I never in a million years thought that I would be in this position."

Horton hopes to inspire current students and residents to see themselves in a new light. She encourages them to ask for help and take advantage of the programs available to them. Grateful for those who supported her journey, Horton continues to pay it forward by sharing her testimony, showing that those who embrace opportunity can achieve success of their own.

"Keep your chin up," Horton said. "It happens at the right time, and you can't even fathom how good it will be as long as you stay on the right track." €

William Isaac Chavez: Windham Alumnus Shares Journey to Reentry



Story courtesy of Windham Annual Performance Report 2024 - 2025

Upon entering the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the future appeared bleak from William Chavez's perspective; however, today he is a successful businessman, supporting his family and giving back to others through volunteer service.

"My mindset was that I would do my entire 20-year sentence, and I was not planning to make parole," Chavez said. "Entering TDCJ at the age of 22, I was not even interested in taking classes."

That all changed about five years into his time in TDCJ. Chavez said he took stock of his surroundings and decided he wanted a better life.

"I was seeing things I didn't want to be a part of. I began to look for change and a way to be the person I was supposed to be," Chavez said.

Raised by his grandfather, Chavez was also a father to a young daughter. They mattered to him, and he said he wanted to find something to make his family proud. He began searching for a way to unlock his potential, and he found Windham School District.

Chavez recalled that as he journeyed toward a hope-filled future, he completed Windham's Cognitive Intervention, CHANGES and Prospect and Solutions programs. Then he set his sights on career and technical education training.

"Initially, I took Mill and Cabinet Making," Chavez said. "The class's instructor made it worth the effort. He helped facilitate my desire and a belief that I could one day have a career in cabinetry. I'll never forget Travis Smith."

Chavez said Smith was attentive and knowledgeable, and he enriched the curriculum with life lessons. Smith's students knew he wanted to help them. This left an indelible mark on

Chavez and his fellow students, and Chavez was inspired to pursue his future work.

"I could see myself doing this type of work when I returned home," Chavez said. "I knew you have to have a desire in your heart and mind in order to learn and change. You have to want it for yourself."

Upon reentering his community, Chavez also had experience in painting, drawing and other artistic talents, so he decided to first open an air brush and painting shop.

Today, Chavez has successfully completed parole and is the owner of the part time painting company, which includes work on local murals and automotive painting. He also went on to earn his commercial driver's license, and can often be found driving delivery trucks. He remains enthusiastic about the variety of employment skills he has acquired through his experience with Windham.

Chavez acknowledges that the process of change began with his inner desire to grow and improve his life. He connects his continued success and ability to support himself to the impact of Windham.

"I wish I had taken even more classes, because they really help," Chavez said. "All the programs I took led me to this moment of growth. What made it all the better for me is the instructors; they change the world."

Chavez is also an approved TDCJ volunteer, serving as inspiration to the residents he speaks with. His message to those living in TDCJ is based on experience.

"Windham and TDCJ offer a lot of programs that can help you," Chavez said. "But you must have a desire in your heart to change. It's all about growth. Remain focused and positive, because all growth begins within you. €



"I was seeing things I didn't want to be a part of. I began to look for change and a way to be the person I was supposed to be."

- William Isaac Chavez
Windham Alumnus

Residents Stitch With Love

By Kelly Roddy | ECHO Staff

To give back to the community and prepare Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) residents for successful reentry, the Hobby and Bartlett units have introduced quilting programs that increase skill development and creativity.

Through structured instruction and hands-on learning, the programs equip participants with marketable employment skills. They also foster an awareness of civic duty by donating the quilts they make.

Stitches of Love

Stitches of Love, led by Sergeant T. Spears, is a rehabilitative quilting initiative designed to teach women at the Hobby Unit the practical and creative skills of quilting while giving back to society.

The 12 women utilize sewing machines and a longarm to create their quilts.

“It is important to know I am someone who is giving back,” quilter Claudette Kibble said. “I’m here doing something good, not just for the unit, but for my community, also.”

All supplies and materials are donated and undergo proper administrative approval to ensure materials comply with safety standards and institutional regulations.

The program has produced and donated over 100 quilts to children in the foster care system and those within local nursing homes, providing warmth and care through their craft.

“We pray over the quilts before we give them out and while we are making them,” Kibble said. “We know that they will bring joy and comfort to the person who receives it.”

Quilters said they have seen an increase in morale, creativity and discipline among themselves.

“I’m naturally an introverted person, and the program has pulled me out of my comfort zone,” Jessica Carson said. “It builds leadership skills by teaching us how to work together while giving and receiving constructive criticism.”

The ability to make a positive impact is a tangible benefit to the participants, providing a greater sense of purpose.



Jessica Carson measures and cuts fabric for quilts at the Hobby Unit.



Priscilla Hernandez works to produce quilts for donation at the Hobby Unit.

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Quilters in the Quilting for Hope program pose together with one of their completed creations at the Bartlett Unit.

“A lot of people didn’t know who they were when they came to prison,” Carson said. “I’m learning different interests and dislikes and learning how to engage with people while building different skills to become a productive member of [society].”

Quilting with Hope

Quilting with Hope is led by Sergeant U. Hernandez and began at the Bartlett Unit in November 2025. Currently, seven residents spend their time measuring and cutting fabric to bring it back together in colorful creations.

Though the program is relatively new, the participants began with little to no quilting experience and picked up the skills quickly.

“We can do something for the community to show we’re changing,” quilter John Rickerson said. “It gives you a sense of accomplishment and lets us know we are valued.”

Rickerson, who has a background in auto upholstery, chose to participate to learn new creative skills and make an impact.

“Using the sewing machine is the same, but putting everything together and creating designs is totally different,” Rickerson said. “[My favorite part] is the creativeness of it, creating a pattern and a design out of different materials.”

The men have donated the quilts they’ve completed to a children’s home and hospital and local churches.

“I take pride in being able to do something for others,” quilter Donald Stevenson said. “Being able to give to churches and hospitals for kids is great.”

The program provides a greater sense of purpose



Jeremy Hartman and Jeremy Nesbit measure fabric at the Bartlett Unit.



Brian Estes cuts fabric into pieces for a quilt at the Bartlett Unit.

and community commitment by encouraging residents to get involved.

“It gives me joy to be able to help someone and to do my time for a cause,” Stevenson said.

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John Rickerson works on a quilt on a longarm at the Bartlett Unit.

Learned Skills

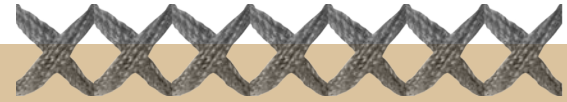
The technical skills learned help prepare residents for employment opportunities upon reentry, but the soft skills developed are also important to the job market. Patience, attention to detail, problem solving and perseverance with complex projects while working both independently and as part of a team, provide participants with the skills to be reliable at work and at home.

“Quilting is not just for old people or older women,”

Kibble said. “A lot of us are young, and we enjoy learning something new each day. Not only does our instructor teach us new things, but we learn from each other as well.”

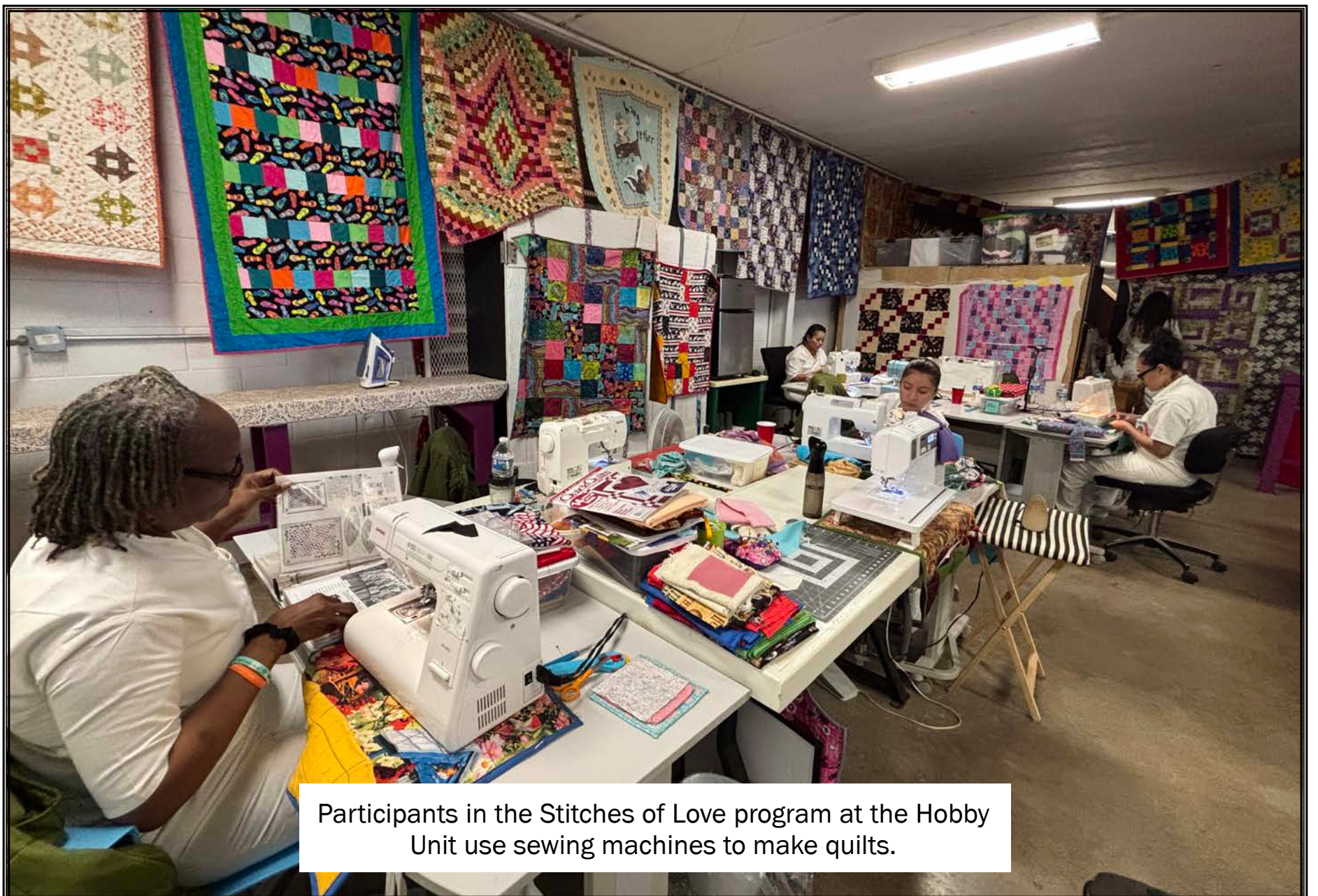
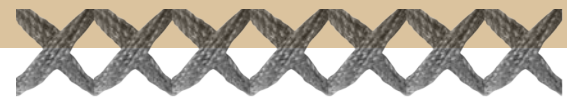
Kibble offered words of encouragement to those who are apprehensive about trying something new.

“If something positive is going on in your unit, be a part of it, make a change,” Kibble said. “Don’t just be there, but actually make a change on your unit.” €



“If something positive is going on in your unit, be a part of it, make a change.”

-Claudette Kibble



Participants in the Stitches of Love program at the Hobby Unit use sewing machines to make quilts.

EVERY STORY MATTERS

Let's Talk About Stress

By Kelly Roddy / ECHO Staff

Stress is a natural part of life, and I feel genuinely safe saying most of us have experienced it at some point in our lives. It can create a feeling of imbalance, which when experienced for long periods of time, can take a toll on you physically, mentally and spiritually.

This is where stress management tools and self-care practices become a vital part of our daily regimen. Whether stress comes from your job, family,

people around you or your own health and wellness journey, building a toolkit of skills to help you cope with stress is essential.

Identify the Source of Stress

In times of stress, it can be difficult to take a moment to step back and really examine what is going on. We may feel the need to just keep going, adjusting and just get through the day. Revisiting the urge to let your survival mode kick in and take a step back can allow us the opportunity to reframe our thoughts and reshape the narrative of what is really going on. Give yourself time to recalibrate.

Identify Personal Triggers

Knowing your red flags can allow you to avoid triggers that may kick-start stress in your life. Journaling serves as a way to self-examine moments of stress and work backwards to identify common situations contributing to your levels of stress. Over time, you can even challenge your thinking patterns with healthier and more constructive outcomes.

Identify Your Healthy Coping Skills

Premptively investing in a balanced lifestyle can lead to a reduced level of anxiety and stress. Having a good self-care regimen, including health and wellness, creative learning, spiritual development and community involvement, activates improved mental health and emotional regulation. This doesn't make us selfish, but instead allows us to authentically care for ourselves in a way that can benefit others as well.

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Identify Your Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

It is equally important to have a handle on your maladaptive coping skills. In times of stress, it can be tempting to return to familiar habits that may feel good in the moment but are ultimately at odds with the life we want to build. Naming your unhealthy coping skills will keep you accountable to your goals and remind you of your boundaries as well as your non-negotiables.

Identify Your Sources of Support

I realize asking for help can be difficult, but there is no reward for toughing it out on your own. Whether your source of support is a coach, mentor, workout partner or even a motivational podcast, identify a support system and activate it when needed. Utilize the tools that are available and make the investment into your wellbeing. **E**

Look for the POSITIVE

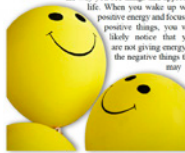
By Gabriel Balon / Wynne Unit

Looking for the positive things that surround you in life can change what you experience throughout your day. What do I mean by this? If you wake up and expect only to find the things that could go wrong, nothing but the negatives, what do you think you are going to find?

I want to introduce you to a method of transforming the way you see things and approach life. When you wake up with positive energy and focus on positive things, you will likely notice that you are not giving energy to the negative things that may be happening.

Think in a positive way and see the best in each situation. There are people around you who are worse off than you. There are people in the world who are in tougher situations. When you look at things in a positive light and begin to consistently see the good around you, you can shift your mindset. Speak positive things into existence — even if only in your mind — and you will feel better about your day and about yourself.

When all you are looking for is the negative, that is likely all you are going to find. However, when you focus on what is going right and on the things that are good and positive, you will begin to see more of them. Why focus on everything going wrong and continue to give it power? It is up to you — so why not look for the positive in your life? **E**



Whether stress comes from your job, family, people around you or your own health and wellness journey, building a toolkit of skills to help you cope with stress is essential.



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LEE COLLEGE CELEBRATES 60-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By Robert L. Gonzales | ECHO Staff

Lee College Huntsville Center (LCHC) is celebrating a successful 60-year partnership with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). In 1966, LCHC's Dean Walter Rundell and the then-Texas Department of Corrections (TDC) Director George Beto began serving residents through the transformative power of education. Since that time, LCHC's enrollment has grown from 182 initial students to more than 2,023 during the Fall 2025 semester. Appointed in May 2026, President Jacob Atkin is the newest member of LCHC administration.

During the Spring 2026 LCHC graduation at the Wynne campus, Atkin opened the ceremony. He introduced attending members of the LCHC Board of Regents and members of LCHC's leadership team. Next, he introduced LCHC Academic Division Chair and Business Instructor Paul Allen and LCHC Executive Director Donna Zuniga. However, Atkin's highest accolades were reserved for the nearly 100 graduates.

"Triumph in the face of adversity is the most beautiful prize of them all," Atkin said. "What you have achieved is nothing short of extraordinary. You should all be proud of what you have achieved. Know that we are excited to see your lives unfold and look forward to

your many accomplishments ahead."

Atkin noted the reciprocal relationship between LCHC leadership who devote their lives to education and students who have made remarkable progress. Atkin said he has become exceedingly inspired by the achievements of LCHC students, and he chose to attend multiple commencement ceremonies across TDCJ this spring.

"The challenges that residents have overcome and their ability to change in the face of tremendous obstacles is truly inspiring. It changes the way I see the world," Atkin said. "I want to work as hard as [the students] are to make what we're doing successful, and to be great at providing these opportunities."

The transformative power of education envisioned by the pioneers leading TDCJ and LCHC is evident to Atkin, other administrators, educators and students. Atkin directly credits education for a considerably lower recidivism rate of less than 10 percent for Lee College graduates in comparison to those who do not attend college. He said commitment toward expanding post-secondary education improves the quality of life for educated individuals and the community.

"There's no way to overstate the value of education in terms of building communities and fostering self-suffi-

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**Dr. J.
Sanchez**

**Lee College Professor,
Business Communication**

“There is no doubt or surprise that Lee College has celebrated 60 years of success. I have operated in classrooms for over 20 years — in varying higher learning locations. Lee College has been by far the most academic environment, and the students are fantastic. I love going to work every day.”

ciency among students,” Atkin said. “Education is the most effective way to achieve those goals and those ends within a community.”

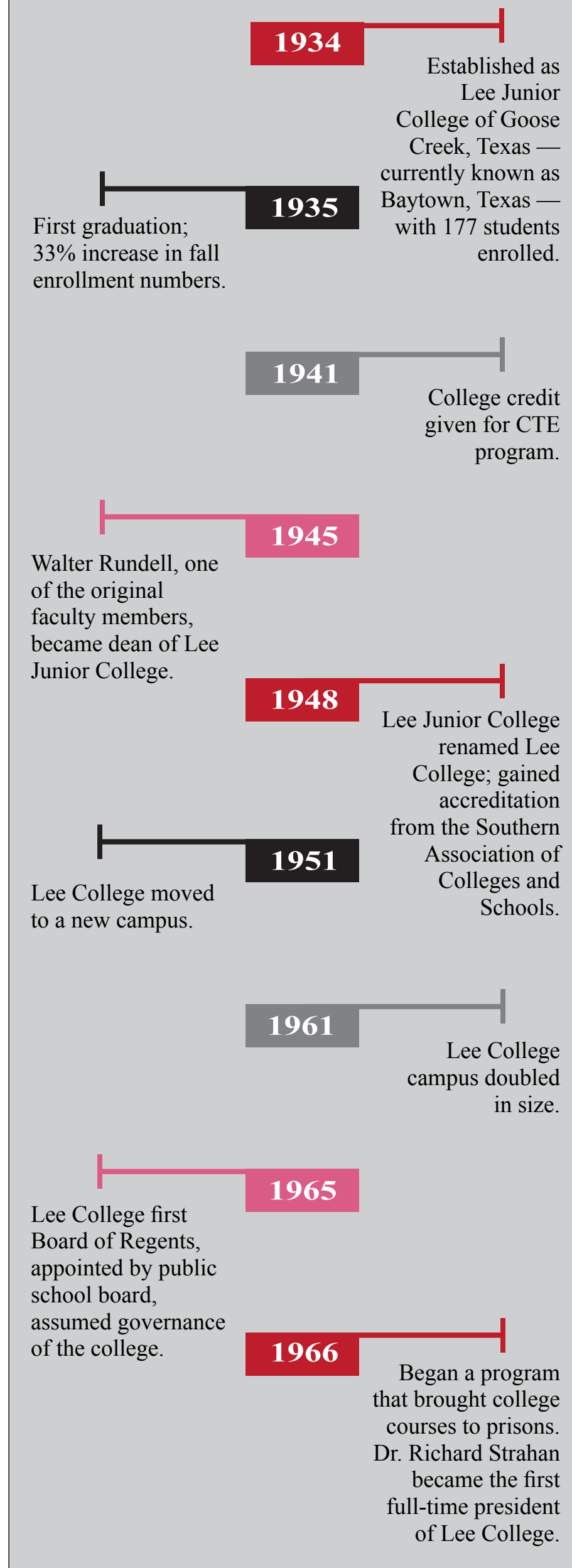
Since 1966, countless individuals have dedicated their time and energy to the development of postsecondary education within TDCJ. However, Atkin gave special praise to the contributions of Paul Allen and Donna Zuniga, recognizing them as pioneers in their respective fields because of their dedication. They have each served LCHC for more than 40 years.

“They have stewarded this program through tremendous difficulties and through periods of great growth,” Atkin said. “They have always been fueled by a passion for the students, for the work and for the difference this makes in your lives and lives in our community.”

Allen initiated his teaching career as an adjunct part-time professor with Sam Houston State University in 1984. He began teaching full-time at LCHC in 1989, and since then, has assumed additional responsibilities as an administrator to develop and promote extensive programming through LCHC.

“I thought this was going to be a career teaching in higher education, but it turned out to be a calling,” Allen said. “I don’t want to do anything else but teach our students what it takes to be successful beyond their wildest imagination. I’m here to facilitate this transformational rehabilitation process.”

Similarly, Zuniga’s extensive career in education progressed from her initial role as a Sam Houston State University graduate assistant, working with infants affected by mobility issues. Along the way to her current position at LCHC, she earned credentials fulfilling re-



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B. Tilley

**Lee College Professor,
Microcomputers**

“I have been teaching for 30 years, and it’s been fantastic. Students who have graduated our programs and returned to their communities have successfully found employment.”

sponsibilities as a speech pathologist and diagnostician, working with students from all grade levels. Zuniga began working as an academic counselor for the Lovelady Independent School District, which helped prepare her to serve students in TDCJ through Windham School District and then through LCHC in 1987.

“I’ve been a counselor, director, assistant dean, dean and associate vice president, and now I’m an executive director,” Zuniga said. “Counselor and dean have been my favorite positions because they’ve kept me really close to the students. I really like where I am now, working with adults, creating pathways for hope and opening avenues for individuals.”

Just as Zuniga’s career path prepared her to serve at LCHC, Allen’s experience provides him appreciation of the team-effort required to create and facilitate opportunities for residents to attain and sustain change through postsecondary education.

“Our graduation each year is a celebration like no other college,” Allen said. “For our size of program to be as successful as it’s been, it’s a testament to leadership, college administration and a very proactive board of regents. Of course, it’s also counselors, office staff and instructors. It’s the whole team and the validity of the process.”

Zuniga has witnessed shifts in the trajectory of the lives of students and their families during the course of their educational journeys and at each graduation ceremony. She underscores the correlation of enrollment in postsecondary education and its relationship to desistance creating lower recidivism rates. Zuniga explains desistance as the long-term process by which individuals voluntarily stop engaging in criminal or antisocial behavior. She said it is viewed as a complex journey involving changes in behavior, self-identity and social relationships, rather than a single event.

1968

The Lee College Foundation established to provide scholarships to deserving Lee College students.

1969

Lee, in cooperation with two Liberty County school districts, began offering courses at Liberty and Dayton.

1972

Lee College begins offering community education courses; establishes program for senior adults.

1986

Lee College establishes the San Jacinto Mall site Hispanic Educational Access Committee, and Black Education Access Committee formed.

1987

The New Small Business Development Center opens. Bachelor of Science Degree in nursing made available.

1988

Construction program initiated, featuring a new science building, a lecture hall, and major renovations to several campus facilities.

2015

Recipient of the American Association of Community Colleges Award of Excellence for Student Success.

2018

Recipient of the American Association of Community Colleges Award of Excellence for Advancing Diversity; the Association of Community College Trustees Regional Equity Award and National Finalist. Record enrollment of 8,234.

2020

Dr. Lynda Villanueva serves as president of Lee College until 2026. Jacob Atkin was appointed as Lee College president in May 2026.

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Dr. R. E. Davis

Lee College Executive Director Industry and Technical Programs

“The mission of Lee College is to allow people to move up economically. Our technical programs such as Welding, Pipefitting and Automotive allow students to go out and get high wage jobs, which helps improve the lives of the students and their families.”

“Education is the best measure to reduce recidivism, but we like to talk more about desistance, which enables residents to assimilate back into [the community],” Zuniga said. “Desistance is about how your life is enhanced by being a part of a community and reaping the benefits.”

Allen agrees with Zuniga and encourages students to persist in moving forward by pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities that ultimately produce extensive benefits.

“Students could do very well for themselves and their families if they took this opportunity to do something special and also something they may never have considered possible beforehand,” Allen said.

Allen and Zuniga have worked together for over four decades. They are guided by a shared realization that the secret to the success of their careers and LCHC reaching its 60-year anniversary is the sincere participation of every person involved in this partnership.

“We’ve prided ourselves on having good programs and good faculty,” Zuniga said. “I would say 99.9% of the faculty are here for the right reason. It’s not an easy job, but we do it because we want to do it. The reward is that we feel like we’re making a difference and we’re helping people.”

Zuniga said her satisfaction is renewed every time each student finds success through education.

“I think taking a student from the very beginning and then one day seeing them walk across the stage and accept a diploma is the full circle in terms of their success story,” Zuniga said. “We’re here to offer opportunities through academic and technical programming to help build job skills and build confidence.”

Windham, which collaborates with LCHC, offers opportunities statewide for students to partake in academic programs, dynamic life skills courses and over 40 career and technical education (CTE) programs. Windham also provides high school diploma pathways with dual credit options through college entities such as LCHC. The district partners with colleges and universities to provide multiple pathways to higher education.

“Postsecondary programs like those offered through LCHC empower our students to reach their full potential, equipping them with the skills necessary to build successful futures,” Windham Superintendent Kristina J. Hartman said. “This collaboration demonstrates that education is not only transformative but essential to creating lasting, positive impact among the students we serve. Windham looks forward to many more years of collaboration with LCHC on its 60-year anniversary.” €



Paul Allen, Jacob Atkin, Donna Zuniga

Presently

Lee College is nationally recognized as one of the top 150 colleges in the United States by the Aspen Institute for five consecutive years, and a final Bellwether Award contender for its Weekend College program. With the main campus and McNair Center located in Baytown, Texas, and the satellite center in nearby Liberty, the college serves a geographic area of more than 220,000 students that continues to expand. Program offerings continue within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Over the last five years, Lee College has conferred just under 12,000 degrees and certificates aimed at preparing its student body for advanced higher education, successful entry into the workforce and a variety of in-demand careers.

Words Matter,

Sometimes More Than We Know

Editor's note: The following information is from the American Correctional Association (ACA), which champions the cause of corrections and correctional effectiveness. ACA is the oldest association developed specifically for practitioners in the correctional profession and has thousands of members from all over the world. It provides a professional organization for all individuals and groups, both public and private, that share a common goal of improving the justice system. The text of this article was edited with the intent to reflect the progress made regarding terminology in corrections since the original publication of these comments. Prior versions of this article have been printed in the Journal of Correctional Education, published by the Correctional Education Association, and the ACA Corrections Today magazine.

By Gary Mohr
106th President of ACA

We often find ourselves in positions of giving remarks to audiences, and if you are like me, often when another speaker cannot be secured. We all have different approaches to public speaking; some prepare and deliver carefully crafted speeches and others like me speak more extemporaneously. Regardless of our approach, we hope someone in the audience is inspired by some of our words as we speak to something that is a priority to us; but we are often never sure.

On a day in New Orleans, during a General Session of the American Correctional Association, I provided remarks that proclaimed my priorities as President of ACA. I challenged those in the audience to consider the terminology we use to describe those individuals under our supervision. "Does it make sense to call someone who has been in our prisons, completed evidence-based programs, is released into the community and on the last day on community supervision to be referred to as an "offender," depicting one of the worst days of that person's life? Or is the



term 'offender' consistent with our efforts toward successful reentry, including promoting those men and women released to prospective employers?" I am sure there were many other comments I made regarding this subject, but speaking from my heart and not my notes, I cannot be sure.

Just as the pandemic overshadowed most things in our world, my presidential initiative to update terminology we as corrections professionals regularly use, including what we call those under our supervision, stalled. But most importantly, thanks to the heart and effort of certain correctional leaders, it did not go away. I very unexpectedly found a committed leader that caused me to realize that what we say matters even when we are not sure people are paying attention.

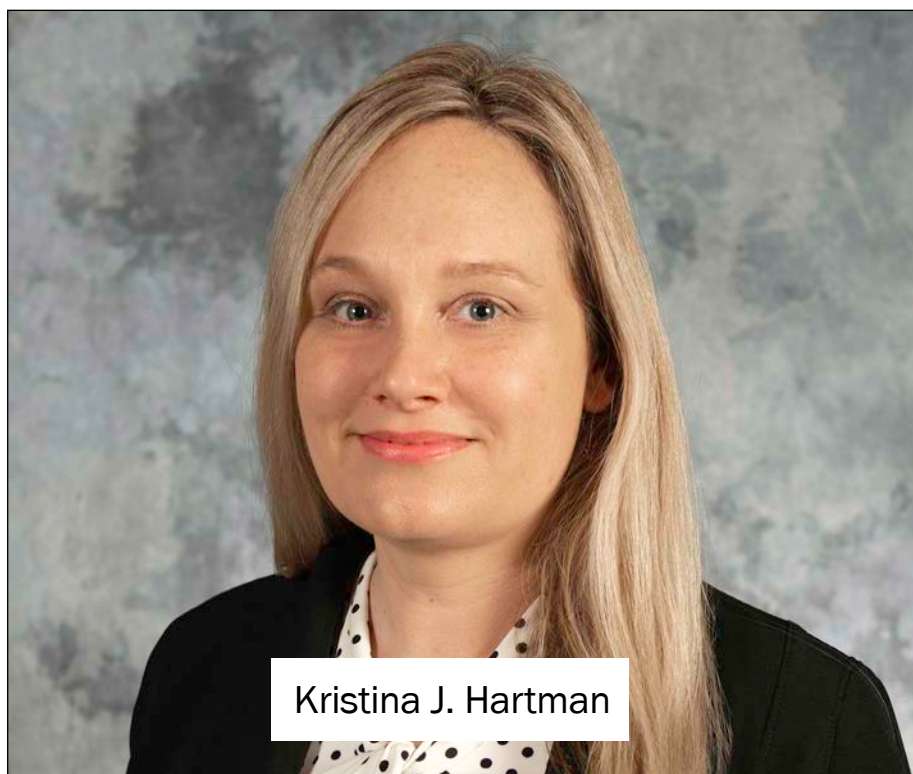
I have had a wonderful opportunity to participate as a faculty member in Executive Leadership Forums for foreign correctional executives. These programs are funded by the U.S. Department of State and delivered through the Correctional Management Institute at Sam Houston State University. As part of this program, we take the class to a Texas prison for a focused site visit to highlight a topic pertinent to the class.

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Recently, we were scheduled to take a class of Mexican criminal justice leaders to visit a Texas prison, the Wynne Unit, with a focus on programming, specifically education. I was greeted at the entry gate by a strong, committed correctional leader, Kristina Hartman, superintendent of Windham School District; a greeting I will not forget.

As I reached out my hand to introduce myself, Kristina said, “I know who you are and want you to know your words inspired me.” She said she was in the audience in New Orleans during a speech I made about “how words matter” in our work. She specifically referred to the use of the term “offender” as it relates to those men and women under our custody. I recall during that speech asking why we would think it was a good idea and aligned with our effort to restore lives to continue to refer to individuals on the worst day of their life. I also indicated it was a disservice to our staff who have provided evidence-based programs including educational, drug treatment, mental health and other cognitive programs to continue to call them offenders. And does the term “offender” inspire potential employers to seek out and hire those returning home after a sentence? I recall saying a great deal during that speech, much from my heart and not my written speech. Quite frankly, I did not experience much impact from my words; that was until my greeting from Kristina Hartman at the front gate of the Wynne Unit.

I found a great and courageous leader in Kristina, superintendent of Windham School District, a recognized school district in the state of Texas. Kristina and her certified staff annually serve approximately 60,000 students that are confined in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). That is a num-



Kristina J. Hartman

ber larger than the entire size of a vast majority of correctional systems.

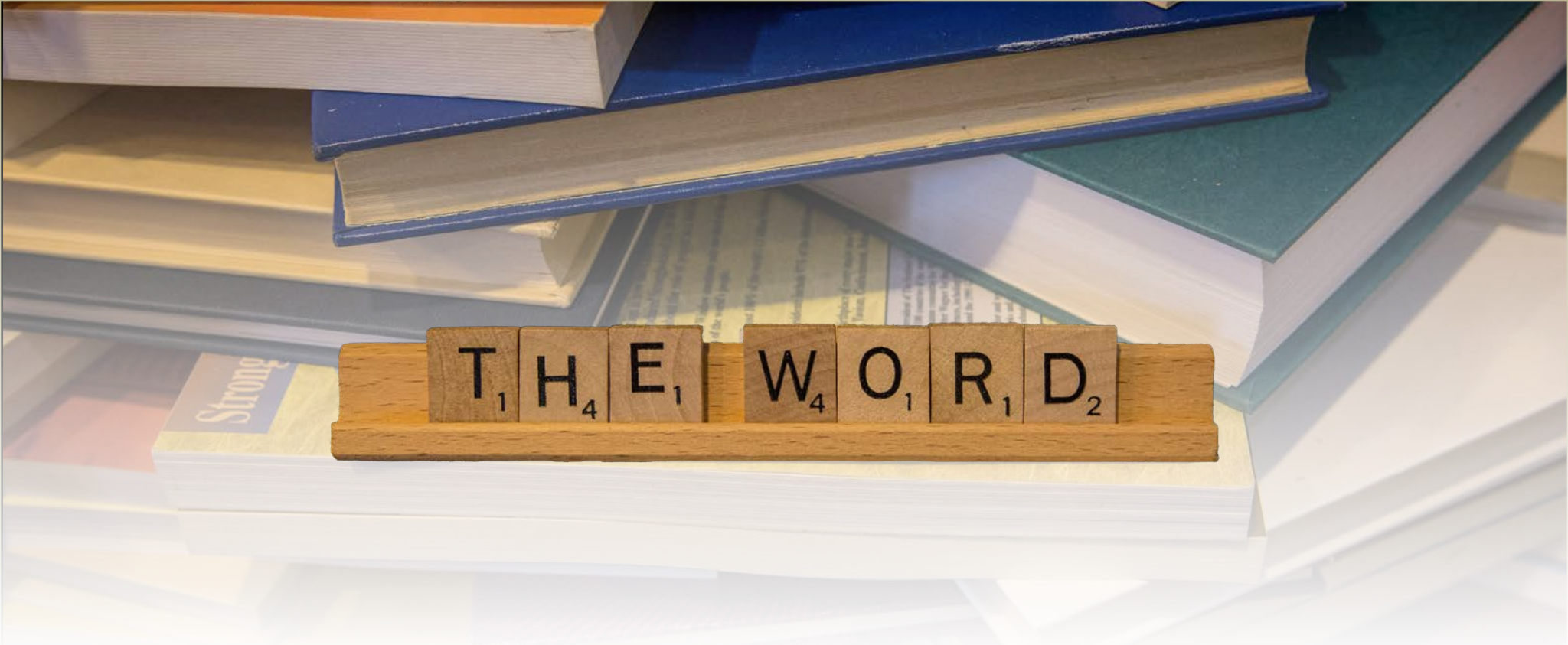
Kristina’s path to this position fully immersed her in correctional work. An English and Political Science graduate from Baylor, she interned in probation in Texas before leaving for Florida. There, she served Florida in numerous capacities including as a teacher, program monitor and education supervisor. She sought to expand her professional experience and had a desire to become a prison warden. Her journey led her to the Florida State Prison, where she initially heard she did not understand security. She would quiet those who questioned her lack of custodial experience by receiving training to become a hostage negotiator and reviewing use-of-force investigations. She gained these experiences, and engaged in other security-related activities, through the assistant warden for Operations at the high security Florida State Prison, Donnie Jackson, who became and remains a mentor to this day. After receiving this training and experience, Kristina quickly promoted to the state correctional system’s Bureau Chief of Programs. In our conversations, she reflected on how important that experience was as she constantly evaluates any action in terms of the influence on prison security.

Using the entirety of her experiences, she returned to Texas and accepted the Director of Instruction position within Windham School District before being promoted to superintendent. She oversees all education programs, the most comprehensive offering of career and technical education programs I have seen, academic classes from literacy to high school equivalency and high school diploma programs and dual credit partnerships with several colleges. She accept-

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There is a growing movement outside of Texas and around the country to reconsider the traditional language used to refer to those men and women in the criminal justice system.”



ed this role with a fundamental focus on reducing recidivism through a meaningful transition from prison to the community using educational programs that enhance the prison environment in Texas.

She embarked on changing terminology for those 60,000 men and women in the school system in a very deliberate, thoughtful manner. Kristina messaged the importance of appropriate terminology reflecting the efforts of individuals engaged in positive activities to change their lives. The messaging included connecting with the Victim Services Division of the TDCJ. This connection led to authoring an article in *The Victim's Informer*, a newsletter to keep victims of crime and their advocates informed about the criminal justice system, detailing the services of Windham School District and reasons for the terminology shift, heavily focused on preventing future offenses and providing the readership with the opportunity to better understand processes and offer feedback.

Texas Board of Criminal Justice member Sydney Zuiker recently emphasized how language affects victims, "The words we choose carry weight, not only for those in our custody, but for the safety and healing of the communities to which they return. When our language reinforces dignity, responsibility and the capacity for change, we strengthen the very goals victims deserve most: accountability and non-recurrence. Thoughtful terminology is not softness; it is strategy. It is a commitment to use every tool available, including language, to reduce future harm."

Additionally, Kristina and her team connected with agencies, employers, legislators and other relevant stakeholders to ensure all had the opportunity to understand the purpose behind the shift, ask questions and offer thoughts.

Because of her leadership, the terminology that is

used by staff and teachers of Windham School District is 1) Students, when men and women are in school, 2) Residents, for those in the prison population and 3) Patrons, for those when in libraries. Kristina was very clear that this terminology does not limit the enforcement of boundaries and regulations.

How did this change in terminology take place? Following the ACA Conference in New Orleans, Kristina returned to Texas and worked with former warden Charles Bell, who served as Department Director of Operational Support and directed security training for all Windham staff. In concert with Kristina, he developed staff training that discussed why changing the terminology and eliminating "offender" was important. The training that was developed emphasized how this change can support the education staffs' impact on the lives of those in their classroom. This training is for all new education staff as well as in the annual in-service training that is part of the requirements for ACA accreditation. Further, Windham is working to update all policies, all written communication and language used in the classroom by Windham School District personnel to reflect the terminology adopted by the district and used in training by Charles. Most recently, during the 89th Texas Legislative Session, the statutory district goals were updated to replace "inmate" with "student." This update recognized the impact of support for increased teacher recruitment and access to grant opportunities, making it more straightforward for applicants and funders to make the connection of the classroom regardless of where instruction occurs.

Kristina was not the only leader in Texas focused on changing terminology. Bryan Collier, then executive director of TDCJ, a well-respected and professional

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correctional leader, was also making changes. TDCJ had used the term “offender” in all of its policies, post orders and written and verbal communication. Bryan understood the challenge and impact of making a change in what those incarcerated men and women were called in the largest, and one of the most historic correctional systems in the country. But being the leader that he is, Bryan recognized that using the term “offender” was referring to an individual, where “inmate” referred to the status of a person. As a result, TDCJ has now eliminated the use of the term “offender,” replacing it with “inmate.”

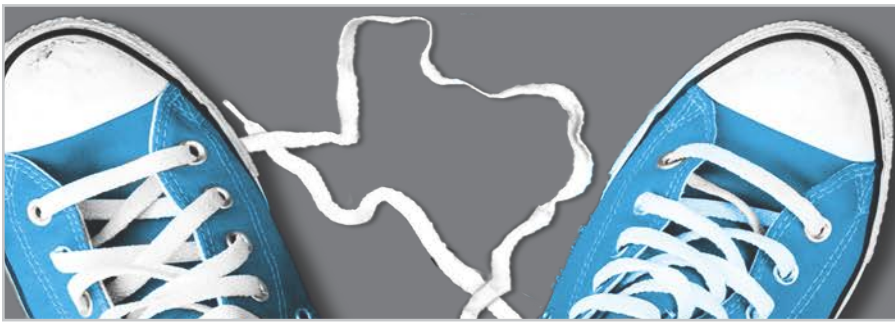
There is a growing movement outside of Texas and around our country to reconsider the traditional language used to refer to those men and women in the criminal justice system. In the state of Iowa, under the leadership of Dr. Beth Skinner, the system has universally adopted the term, “incarcerated individuals.” The legislature in the state of Maine has taken up the issue of the use of language that stigmatizes those in the criminal justice system. A report from the Office of Revisor of Statutes submitted to the Maine Legislative Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, recommends discontinuing the use of “prisoner, inmate or convict” and instead using “resident.”

While at this point in time there is no consensus on language used to refer to men and women in our system, there is a growing number of correctional leaders, and now even legislators, who agree that words matter. Words have an impact on those attempting to turn their lives around and return with dignity to communities and to their loved ones. Leaders and influencers of the criminal justice system have a fundamental responsibility to lead change that supports successful reentry. That is what leaders do.

As I conclude this article, I am not advocating specific language for jails and prisons to utilize when referring

to people under their custody. I do, however, believe that “words matter.” That includes when we speak publicly and even when we are not sure people are listening; Kristina taught me that lesson. I also believe that the more we reduce the barriers between those human beings confined in our jails and prisons and those of us who reside in the free world, the greater impact the good work taking place in jails and prisons will have. The words we use can promote or decrease the dignity the men and women we work with feel. The words we use can also influence how people in our communities feel about the men and women being released from incarceration. As we describe in our vision statements our focus on changing lives, it makes sense to consider how we describe those men and women we have dedicated our professional lives to direct. After all, they are “men and women” experiencing a period of their life on this earth — and this, too, shall pass. Words do matter, whether in a speech, from Kristina in front of the Wynne Unit, or our words we use as we walk through our jails and prisons or as we work with the men and women on our caseloads in the communities. I do believe words matter; how about you? €

“
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ALLRED UNIT

Ben Fuller, Band Reeves Perform The Black Sheep Tour

Ben Fuller, a nationally known gospel singer, and Band Reeves, a Christian Country and Southern Rock duo, shared their powerful testimonies and worship music with residents at the Allred Unit. The local KMOC radio station showed support and broadcasted the performance for the community.



Seminary-Style Leadership Program Celebrates First Graduates

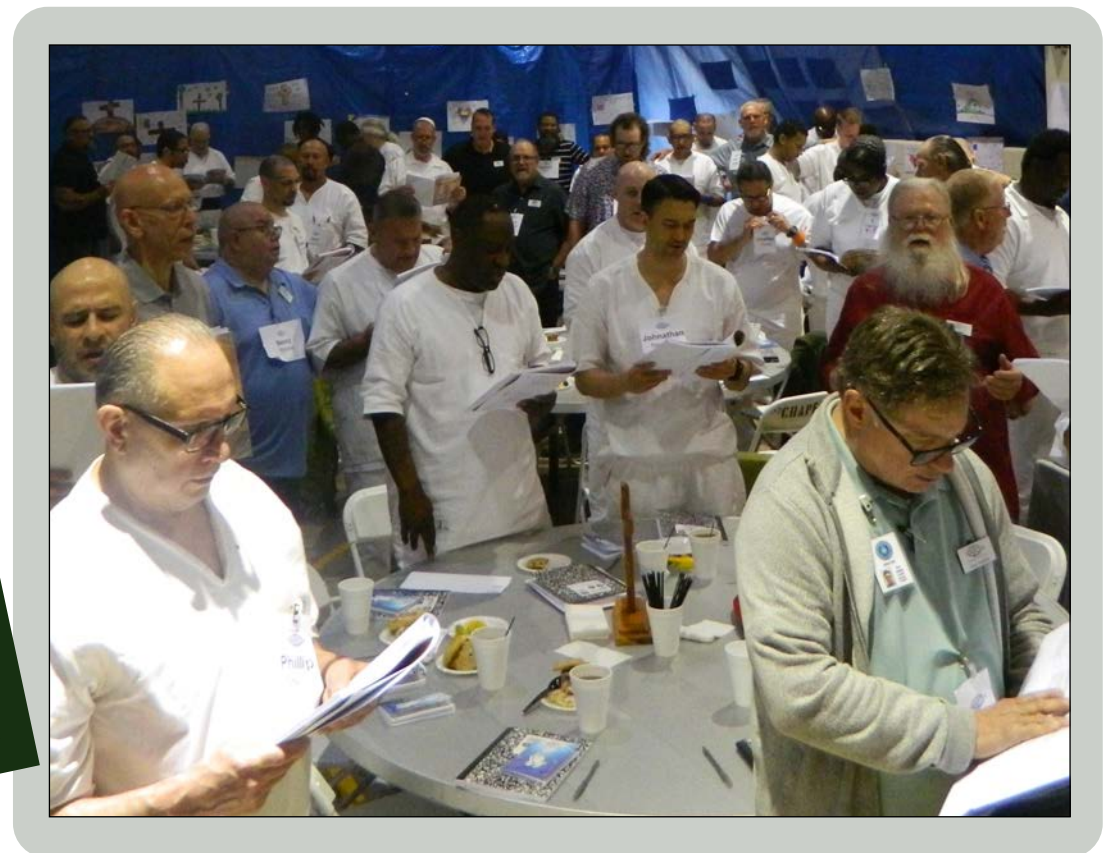
Residents at the Allred Unit celebrated the first graduates of a four-year seminary-style leadership training program sponsored by God Behind Bars and The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI).

The program prepares residents to minister in the community upon reentry and gives participants an opportunity to accumulate college credits that can be put toward a degree.



Kairos Walk Event Brings Spirit to Residents

The Kairos Prison Ministry of Texas brought encouragement and spirit to residents at the Allred Unit. Volunteers and residents spent time discussing faith, sharing testimonies and experiencing fellowship during shared meals.





BETO UNIT

Residents Attend Stop the Drugs Rally

Residents participated in the Beto Unit's first Stop the Drugs Rally. Chaplaincy and Volunteer Services Division Director C. Carter shared a message of encouragement with attendees.

"Change and don't look back," Carter said. "Just keep looking forward. Your lives are very important."



CLEMENTS UNIT

Residents Compete in Basketball Tournament

By Johnny Wooten | Clements Unit

The Clements Unit hosted a basketball tournament in which 34 men competed two-on-two with double elimination. Playing on the 8-building recreation yard, the men were cheered on by Warden G. Rodriguez throughout the tournament.

The men of the Clements Unit wish to thank the warden and Recreation Officer A. Cardenas for providing sports opportunities every weekend.



Residents Participate in Ping-Pong Tournament

By Johnny Wooten | Clements Unit

The Clements Unit recently held a ping-pong tournament with over 50 men participating. First place went to Dalphines Chidiebere, second place went to Joseph Sandoval and third place went to Brett Johnson.



COLEMAN CAMPUS

Students Celebrate Completion of Core Curriculum

Over 100 students at the Coleman campus and staff from the University of Texas at Austin celebrated the end of the semester for the Texas Prison Education Initiative. This was the culmination of core classes that meet the university's standard of core curriculum.

Students took courses in college algebra, reading and writing, psychology, sociology and calculus. The students are looking forward to expanding their post-secondary success in the future.



COTULLA CAMPUS

Campus Celebrates First Apprenticeship Graduate

During a recent ceremony, the Cotulla campus celebrated five high school equivalency (HSE) graduates and the first apprenticeship graduate. Jeffery Hensley completed the Maintenance Repairer, Building apprenticeship.



DANIEL UNIT



Residents Compete in Handball Tournament

The Daniel Unit recently hosted a handball tournament where residents participated in healthy competition. Awards for first, second and third place were given to the winners.

EAST TEXAS TREATMENT FACILITY

Graduates Receive HSE Certificates

Graduates at the East Texas Treatment Facility campus received their HSE certificates in a recent graduation ceremony. Eleven graduates were celebrated by Windham School District (Windham) and Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) staff, as well as family and guests.



Campus Hosts College and Career Day

Students at the Estelle campus recently participated in a College and Career Day event. Multiple guest speakers representing Lee College and Windham's College and Career Readiness, Apprenticeship and On-the-Job Training and Career and Technical Education (CTE) departments discussed topics such as post-secondary pathways, financial aid and apprenticeship opportunities. Windham alumnus Anthony Willis also served as a guest speaker and discussed the impact of district programs and what it is like to achieve personal and professional goals post-reentry.

ESTELLE CAMPUS



HENLEY CAMPUS

Mothers Read to Their Children

Residents at the Henley campus participated in the Women's Storybook Project of Texas, often called "Storybook," after a program hiatus. Storybook allows women in incarceration to choose from a large selection of children's books and record themselves reading it. Their child receives a new copy of the chosen book along with the recording so they can read along with their parent.



MEMORIAL CAMPUS

Attendees Participate in College and Career Day

Students at the Memorial campus recently participated in a College and Career Day event. They listened to guest speakers representing organizations including Texas State Technical College, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Workforce Solutions of Texas and Windham. They discussed topics including the different types of postsecondary education, available financial aid and resources for entering the workforce.



MURRAY UNIT



Faith-Based Dorm Reunites Graduates

Graduates of the Faith-Based Dorm (FBD) reunited for the FBD Grad Night event at the Murray Unit. The FBD provides tools, healing, healthy coping skills and community support to those impacted by incarceration.

Students Conduct 'Toothpickase' Lab

Jovita González de Mireles High School students at the Murray campus conduct an experiment in R. Pritchard's Biology class. Students participated in the "Toothpickase" lab, which simulates enzyme reaction rates.



O'DANIEL CAMPUS

Windham Alumna Speaks During College and Career Day

Students at the O'Daniel campus recently participated in a College and Career Day event, where guest speaker and Windham Cosmetology alumna Jamie Vaughn shared her experience transitioning from incarceration to working in the community as a successful hairstylist.



POLUNSKY CAMPUS

Polunsky Campus Hosts Lamar State College – Orange Showcase

The Polunsky campus recently hosted its inaugural program showcase in partnership with Lamar State College – Orange (LSCO), marking the upcoming August launch of a new Associate of Science (AS) in Business degree program.

The presentation was led by LSCO Enrollment Specialist for Strategic Partnerships, Brooke Witte and Joshua Hayes, LSCO director of TDCJ and Texas Juvenile Justice Department Programs. The event provided attendees with comprehensive insight into the college's offerings and the logistics of pursuing higher education while incarcerated.



STRINGFELLOW CAMPUS

Stringfellow Campus Celebrates Graduates

The Stringfellow campus celebrated 20 graduates in a recent ceremony. HSE and CTE certificates in Electrical Trades and Auto Fundamentals were awarded.



TELFORD CAMPUS

Graduates Earn Certificates

Graduates at the Telford campus celebrated earning their CTE and Apprenticeship certificates in a recent graduation ceremony. Twenty graduates earned their Small Engine Repair certificates, 16 received Construction Technology certificates and four received their Maintenance Repairer, Building Apprenticeship certificates.



RECIPES

ECHO
FAVORITES!



CHUCK'S CHICKEN CHILI NACHOS

Ingredients:

- 1 or 2 pks. chicken chili
- 1 bag refried beans
- 1 bag Salsa Verde chips, crushed
- 1 bottle squeeze cheese
- 1 bag tortilla chips or corn chips

Directions:

Heat chicken chili pouch(es) in hot pot. In a bowl, prepare refried beans to desired thickness. Pour tortilla chips into separate bowl for bottom layer. Mix in chicken chili and crushed Salsa Verde chips into refried beans, and pour mixture over tortilla chips. Squeeze cheese over bean-chip-chili mixture. Prepare for heartburn. Enjoy!

BENNY'S SPICY TUNA WRAPS

Ingredients:

- 1 pkg. tuna
- 4 tortillas
- jalapeño chips (crushed)
- 2 jalapeño peppers
- ½ pickle
- 1 chili soup
- ¼ bottle Jalapeño cheese

Directions:

Cook soup without seasoning. Drain tuna. Put tuna in a bowl, and break up into small pieces. In a separate bowl cut up the two jalapeño peppers and ½ pickle. Then add cooked noodles, crushed Jalapeño chips, ¼ bottle of jalapeño cheese, and add ½ packet of chili seasoning. Mix well. Add tuna to cheesy mixture and blend. Spoon mixture into four flour tortillas and place in double bagged cooking bags. Heat for 30 minutes and enjoy!

TOTALLY TASTY TACOS

Ingredients:

1 pkg. tortillas
1 beef tips
1 regular bag of plain potato chips
1/4 bag cheese puffs
Jalapeño peppers, to taste (if desired)
queso or gouda cheese, to taste (if desired)

Directions:

Place all dry ingredients in plastic bag. Crush chips. Add water until chips are saturated. Add beef tips to the bag mixture. Place bag with mixture into a hot pot and heat up the mixture while making sure that the gravy juice is always at the top of the mixture. Add water if needed to keep the top of the mixture juicy. Cook up to one hour. Place mixture into each tortilla and top with refried beans. Enjoy!

The ECHO's Chowhound is starving for new, tasty recipes! So give our readers what they're hungry for and send your ideas to:
The ECHO Recipes
c/o Windham School District
P.O. Box 40,
Huntsville, TX 77342- 0040.



WILD BILL'S CHEESE SPREAD

Ingredients:

1 pkg. Duplex cookies
½ pkg. Regal Graham cookies, when available
15 pks. cream cheese
1/3 cup powdered milk
1/3 cup hot chocolate mix
1/3 cup water

Directions:

Split Duplex cookies into halves and set aside in a bowl. In a separate bowl, mix cream cheeses, powdered milk, hot chocolate mix and water, stirring into a smooth batter. Crunch Regal Grahams into little chunks over the batter. Mix thoroughly. You now have Wild Bill's cream cheese spread. To serve, spread ½ spoonfuls onto duplex cookie halves, then munch out! They go great with coffee.

ULTIMATE BURRITOS



Ingredients:

1 pkg tortillas	1 cheese puffs
1 pk. of beans	1/4 bag bagel chips
2 chilis with no beans or 4 luncheon meat	1 squeeze cheese
2 beef tips	3 jalapeño peppers
2 pks. chili soup seasoning (no noodles)	1 V8 juice
2 pork skins	1 jalapeño or Salsa Verde chips

Directions:

First, add the beans to smashed up beef tips and chili (no beans or luncheon meat or both). Add V8 and chili powder and half bottle of cheese. Mix all well with some hot water. Crush up chips of choice and pork skins and add to mix. Keep mixture wet. Add jalapeño pepper and other spices as desired. Crush up cheese puffs and bagel chips. Mix this in to thicken up mixture so when you make burritos they don't ruin in the hot pot. Take tortillas and make burritos. Make them to where they just close and put four to a bag, using multiple bags. Cook in hot pot for four to six hours. Serve and enjoy. One more thing you should do: mix a chili pack (no beans) and cheese (½ bottle) and add for topping. You could also crush up corn chips and use as a topping.

SNICKERS CAKE

Ingredients:

- 4 Snickers®
- 1 pkg. vanilla crème cookies
- 4 pkgs. cream cheese

Directions:

Mix Snickers®, cream cheese and cream from cookies in the insert from a hot pot. Add half cup of water. Place in hot pot; let melt. Crush cookies for crust; add quarter cup of water. Knead into dough and shape in bowl. Pour melted ingredients into crust. Let set, cool and harden. Enjoy!



TOM'S TAMALES

Ingredients:

1 bag corn chips
1 bag pork skins
1 chicken season pack
4 empty soup bags
2 bowls

Directions:

Mix seasonings together. Crush up corn chips and mix in seasoning to taste. Add water to chips to make a dough. Crunch up pork skins, then soften with water. Lay out open soup bags and spread dough out evenly on them. Then, put softened pork skins on the middle of the dough for your fill. With your fill on the dough, roll up soup bag to wrap the dough around the fill. Makes four to five tamales. Place in one bowl, and then place all wraps in second bowl on top of hot water. Now, allow dough to thicken for 10 minutes. Remove bags and enjoy.

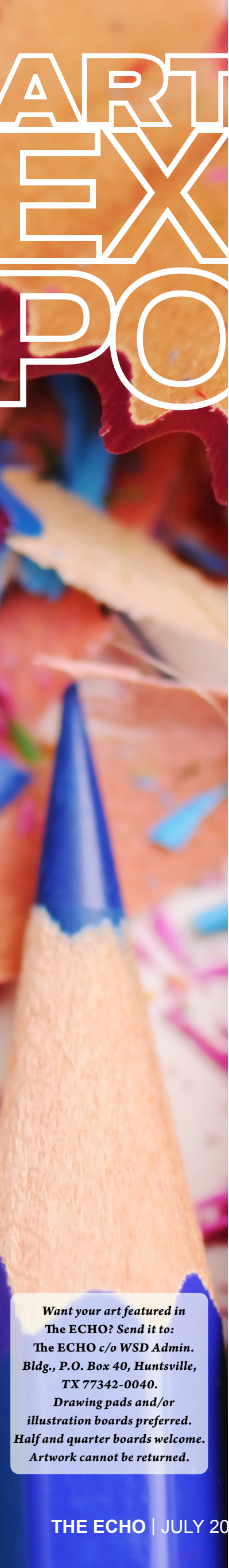
ARMADILLO EGGS

Ingredients:

1/2 cup cocoa
2 scoops peanut butter
7 chocolate chip cookies,
finely crushed
Several spoonfuls of water
Bag of M&M's, finely crushed
5 vanilla wafers, finely crushed

Directions:

Mix all ingredients (except crushed vanilla wafers) together until the mixture no longer sticks to the bowl. Take thick mixture and roll into quarter size balls. Take four or five vanilla wafers finely crunched. Roll ball and wafer dough together. Ta-da! Armadillo eggs.



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Half and quarter boards welcome.
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Santiago Juarez
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Illustration Board

Hulk
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Mixed Media on
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Chucky\Bride
Emmanuel Granados
Graphite on
Illustration Board



Yoda



Stormtrooper

J.P. Schnizer
Colored Pencil on
Bristol Board

SPORTS VIEW

By William Hill
Contributing Writer - Wynne Unit

Kyle Busch

A NASCAR Legend

This sports column represents the viewpoints of sports fan and sportswriter Will Hill, reflecting his opinions and observations. These opinions do not represent official opinions of TDCJ or of *The ECHO*. Enjoy them; respond to them. *The ECHO* welcomes your letters and input!

Racing fans either loved Kyle “Rowdy” Busch or they hated him; there simply was no middle ground when it came to the race-car driver. Busch lived up to his nickname by bowing to the crowd after every win. His aggressive, in-your-face style of racing harkened back to the early days of stock car racing.

Busch, champion stock car racer and car owner, died 19 days after his 41st birthday.

He was hospitalized on May 21, 2026, in Charlotte, North Carolina with what was originally reported as a severe illness. After his death, it was reported that the racer died of a severe case of pneumonia that had progressed to sepsis.

Busch’s career was nothing short of a success. At the time of his death, Busch was ninth on the National Association Stock Car Auto Racing’s (NASCAR) all-time wins list and the career leader in wins across

NASCAR’s top three series: Cup series (63), O’Reilly Auto Parts series (102) and Craftsman Truck series (69). Although he started his career racing for Hendrick Motorsports, Busch’s greatest success was racing the number 18 Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing from 2008 to 2022. During that time, he won two Cup series championships (2015 and 2019). After the 2022 season, Busch joined Richard Childress Racing where he took over the iconic number eight car once made famous by Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Busch was the first Cup series driver to win at every track that hosts a NASCAR

race. He is also the only driver to complete a Triple Threat, which consists of winning a truck series race, an O’Reilly Auto Parts series race and a Cup series race in one same weekend. He accomplished the feat twice. Busch also holds the record for most consecutive seasons with at least one win (19), a streak that was snapped during his winless 2024 season. He broke the record of NASCAR legend Richard Petty, who had 18 consecutive seasons with a win.

Busch also won several prestigious awards including 2004 NASCAR Busch Series Rookie of the Year, 2005 NASCAR Nextel Cup Series Rookie of the Year, 2016 ESPY Awards Best Driver and 2019 ESPY Awards Best Driver. In 2023, NASCAR named him one of the 75 greatest drivers in its history.

After Busch’s death, he was honored by several racing organizations. Before the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series race in Charlotte, North Carolina, both Spire Motorsports and Kaulig Racing added the Kyle Busch Motorsports logo to their trucks. Richard Childress Racing also handed out decals to the entire garage for teams to put on their Cup and O’Reilly Auto Parts Series cars the same weekend. During the 2026 Indianapolis 500, Romain Grosjean’s car featured Busch’s iconic No. 18 font, and the race observed a moment of silence on lap 18 with Busch on the scoring pylon.

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Artwork by Robert Morgan,
The ECHO staff

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During the opening ceremony for the 2026 Coca-Cola 600, Busch's family was honored on the front stretch by NASCAR Chief Executive Officer Steve O'Donnell. During the race weekend, Charlotte Motor Speedway displayed his number eight decal and signature on the front stretch grass. During the race, the cars formed the "missing man formation" during the pace lap, and a moment of silence was observed on lap eight. Former teammate Daniel Suárez won the race and also dedicated it to Busch. Ironically, Suárez was driving the number seven car for Spire Motorsports, which was the car Busch drove for his final NASCAR victory. €



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

MILESTONES

2003- Joined NASCAR Busch Series, driving for Hendricks Motorsports.

2004- Won Busch Series Rookie of the Year honors, tying the record for most wins by a rookie at four.

2005- Won Nextel Cup Series Rookie honors after winning his first two Cup Series races, becoming the youngest winner at the time to do so.

2005- Became the youngest winner at the time in the Craftsman Truck Series, winning three races.

2007- Won four Busch Series races, two Craftsman Truck Series before announcing he would be driving for Joe Gibbs Racing in 2008.

2008- Recorded 10 wins, 20 top 10 finishes and 18 top five finishes in the Nationwide series. Also won three Truck Series races.

2009- Won first NASCAR championship.

2010- Became first NASCAR driver to win all three touring series events in a single weekend (Camping World Truck Series, Nationwide Series and Sprint Cup).

2014- Earned seven Nationwide Series wins and also saw his Kyle Busch Motorsports rack-up the most wins in the Truck Series.

2015- Won first NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Championship, after Kyle Busch Motorsports captured the Camping World Truck Series championship.

2018- Won NASCAR's Regular Season championship and became the only driver in history with 50 plus wins in all three top series.

2019- Achieved his 200th overall win, tying Richard Petty's record and won his second Cup championship.

2021- Tied the record for the most consecutive season with a win at 17.

2022- Joined Richard Childress Racing, driving a Chevrolet for the first time since 2007.

2023-Kyle Busch Motorsports scored its 100th Truck Series win.

2026-May 15th, won his final race, the 2026 Ecosave 200.



“Grit is sticking with your future. Day in, day out. Not just for the week. Not just for the month. But for years. And working really hard to make that future a reality.”

ANGELA DUCKWORTH
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
GRIT: THE POWER OF PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE

