

Panthers come up short against Coyotes

INSIDE 6A

Van Alstyne Leader

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Extension agent talks AgriLife activities

By Jerrie Whiteley
Van Alstyne Leader

Grayson County's AgriLife Family and Community Health Agent Joyce White gave county leaders and update on some of the agency's activities for the year last week.

White said AgriLife volunteers had provided 21,225 volunteer hours in the county in 2022. Those hours came from 383 volunteers and was worth an estimated $635,688 to local organizations.

She told commissioners that a number of educational meetings conducted by the AgriLife office were well attended during the year. Information White provided after the meeting show that the annual North Texas Pest Management Conference held in January 2022 had around 55 people participate. Those who participated received continuing education credits. In addition, White provided information that showed there were 22 participants in the Wheat Field Day in Howe in 2022. There were 15 participants in the fall/winter Tree Health Clinic in Sherman and 50 participants in the Native Plant Society meeting. Also, she noted that 88 Master Gardener volunteers conducted gardening programs throughout the county.

White said Grayson County's residents are ranked in the higher middle range (between 50 to 70 percent) in health outcomes and health factors.

"In our latest State of Health Report," the information said, "21 percent of residents report being in fair or poor health. 36 percent of adults are obese and 28 percent of adults are physically inactive. Grayson County also has 50.1 cardiovascular deaths per 10,000 population as compared to the Texas average of 43.4 deaths per 10,000 population."

The information White provided said the agency's eight week Walk Across Texas program had 365 adults participate who reported walking a combined mileage of over 68,500 miles.

"This includes worksites such as Tyson Foods, Grayson County employees and various ISD employees," the information said. More than 150 youth and teachers participated in the program and walked a combined 21,400 miles.

Additionally, the information showed that 44 6th grade students participated in a four-week series called "Choose Healthy" learning about choosing healthy drinks, avoiding sugar sweetened foods, choosing snacks wisely, getting enough sleep, limiting screen time and staying physically active.

In partnership with the 4-H agent, Financial Management was taught to 15 to 25 youngsters at the Boys and Girls Club of Sherman.

Some of the other things shared with the commissioners showed that 13 youngsters participated in the Texas A&M Horsemanship camp at Loy Park. The local 4-H group office also hosted two robotics camps in the summer and that led to the formation of eight teams from Whitesboro and three in Van Alstyne. "At the Agribotics Challenge at the State Fair of Texas, Junior teams (from Grayson County) placed 1st. 2nd, and 4th out of 26 teams."



Grayson County Commissioners this week heard a report about the AgriLife activities in the county in 2022. Jerrie Whiteley/ Van Alstyne Leader

Commercial truck driving training returns to Grayson College

Grayson College

Beginning in February, the Grayson College Center for Workplace Learning (CWL) will again offer non-credit, commercial truck driving training classes. In addition to the courses that prepare individuals to drive tractor-trailer rigs, Grayson College is also offering Hazmat, Permit Review and Refresher courses for professional truck drivers.

Classes will be offered monthly, and scholarships valued up to $2,350 are available for Texas residents to attend and certify in Permit Exam Preparation and Professional Truck Driving courses.

"Tractor-trailer truck drivers are a high-demand occupation in Texoma with over 800 job postings for trained drivers in Texoma in the last year," said Dr. Djuna Forrester, CWL Executive Director. "Thanks to the scholarship funding from Texas's Coordinating Board for Higher Education's TRUE grant and community support, we are thrilled to return truck driver training to Grayson College."

"At Grayson College we are committed to offering programs that meet employers' needs and provide opportunities for our students to launch their careers locally," explained Dr. Jeremy McMillen, President. "Tractor-trailer drivers are vital to sustaining and growing the economy of the Texoma region and the state. Grayson College is proud to bring back its Commercial Truck Driving program and provide a pathway to success for even more students."

The Truck Driving Certification program prepares graduates to drive tractor-trailer rigs, take the Commercial Driver's Licensing Exam and gain employment as a commercial truck driver. Tractor-trailer drivers typically earn wages between $14 and $30 per hour in Texoma. The four-week program meets from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Classes start monthly. Generous $2,350 scholarships are currently available. Scholarship recipients will be responsible for $2,450.

Individuals interested in the Truck Driving Certification program can find more information at grayson.edu/cwl or by contacting Grayson College's Center for Workplace Learning at 903-463-8765.



GC's truck driving simulators, purchased with funding from THECB to supplement classroom and on-the-road instruction. Courtesy of Grayson College. courtesy photo

TCC art contest accepting applicants

Staff reports

The Texoma Community Center's mental health awareness art contest is back. The contest began Monday and the site will be accepting submissions until March 31.

This year's theme is, "Dimensions of Wellness."

"The contest aims to raise awareness of mental health experiences and seeks to challenge mental health stigma by facilitating open discussion," a news release about the contest said. "Participants may enter by submitting original, creative works of art, that draws on the contest theme. The contest is open to residents of Texas and Oklahoma of all ages and is judged in two categories, Youth and Adult. Last year the contest received over 60 submissions and touched the lives of many people. For many participants, the art contest is an opportunity to express complex emotions through creative outlets. This contest may offer a chance for youth and adult alike to reflect on their own experiences, share challenges they face, and to inspire others. Please visit our website at www.texomacc.org for more information."

Entry Guidelines:

All entries must be from residents of the State of Texas and Oklahoma.

Must be an original artwork that combines drawing, pictures (and words if you wish) to express the contest theme.

Materials used may include pencil, ink, charcoal, crayon, markers, pastel, paint, mixed media, collage, graphic design, or similar 2D media.

Scanning your physical artwork (a painting, drawing, etc.) will give us the best image quality. If you don't have access to a scanner, it's okay to take a picture of it (just make sure the room is well lit and the photo is not blurry).

Please include a description with your artwork.

Artwork cannot show depictions of nudity, blood, or violence.

If an artist is under the age of 18, a parent or guardian must sign a consent form prior to the entry being considered, displayed or published. (Form available on entry website.)

Entries, once submitted, become property of TCC to utilize for the purpose of promoting awareness of mental health.

Judging will be based on originality, creativity and how well your entry expresses the contest theme.

One (1) winner will be selected from both the Youth and Adult group of entries.

5 things commissioners court did this week



County leaders met this week in their regular meeting room at the Grayson County Courthouse in Sherman. Jerrie Whiteley/ Herald Democrat

By Jerrie Whiteley
Van Alstyne Leader

Grayson County commissioners had a laundry list of things to address at their meeting this week. Many of the routine items deal with the county's budget or with steps required for the various departments and agencies within the county to do business on a daily basis.

Here are five things the court did this week.

See COMMISSIONERS, Page 2A

News

Sherman man faces 28 counts of child sexual abuse; other indictments. **2A**

Entertainment

Sundance celebrates the 'magic' of being back in-person. **4A**

Weather

High 58° | Low 42°
Mostly Clear

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HRSA Awards Nearly $7.5 Million to Help Texas Health Care Workforce Meet Families' Mental Health Needs

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Funding Will Support Training Primary Care Providers to Address Mental Health

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded nearly $7.5 million across three grantees in Texas through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to help primary care physicians meet families' mental health needs. These grants will support making mental health part of the training of primary care clinicians, with a specific focus on the mental health needs of children and adolescents. The Texas awards are part of a total $60 million nationwide investment in this initiative.

"Often the first person you turn to when you or your kids need mental health support is your trusted primary care provider—yet for too long, we haven't given those primary care providers the mental health training they need to help. With funding from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the Health Resources and Services Administration is investing in making mental health a part of primary care training so that there is no wrong door when your family needs support," said Carole Johnson, Administrator of HRSA.

In Texas, three grantees will receive about $2.5 million each over 5 years to support integrating mental health into the training of primary care residents, including family physicians, pediatricians and others with a specific focus on treating children, adolescents and young adults. Programs will work with schools, community-based organizations, and other youth settings. The Texas awardees are:

• McLennan County Medical Education and Research Foundation, Waco

• Tarrant County Hospital District, Fort Worth

• The Texas A&M University System, College Station

Addressing the mental health crisis is a top priority of the Biden-Harris Administration, as part of President Biden's Unity Agenda. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, signed into law by President Biden in June, provided HHS with vital resources to help children and families across the country.

"HRSA investments help train and prepare a health workforce to meet the most urgent needs of the nation's families and communities," said Luis Padilla, M. D., HRSA's associate administrator for health workforce. "Programs like these expand access to critical mental health services for Texas youth and help children and families get the support they need in their community."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

It is a great honor to serve Van Alstyne as your Postmaster. In my years with the United States Postal Service, I have seen firsthand the role the Postal Service plays connecting neighbors and our community to the nation. Our Post Offices also serve as a lifeline for our small businesses to reach customers no matter where they are.

About two years ago, the United States Postal Service published an ambitious but achievable 10-year strategic plan, Delivering for America. The plan established a path to building a Postal Service that is financially strong and consistently delivers on-time for the American public.

In the short time since the launch of our 10-year plan, and under the leadership of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, we are making great progress on its four key pillars: Investing in our people, modernizing our network, providing service excellence, and creating financial sustainability.

Our actions are leading to concrete results. We had exceptionally positive holiday seasons in 2021 and 2022. We successfully delivered more than 680 million COVID-19 Test Kits to the American public during the past two winters. In the 2022 midterm elections, we delivered 54.4 million ballots from voters to election officials in an average of under two days. And USPS installed a total of 249 new processing machines as part of a $40 billion investment in the postal network. With these new machines, we can now process 60 million packages every day. Additionally, we are focused on making USPS a great place to work, creating career pathways and opportunities for our employees. All of this in service of delivering mail and packages to more than 161 million addresses across our nation every day.

On behalf of the 650,000 women and men of the U.S. Postal Service, I thank you for continuing to support the Postal Service. Providing reliable mail delivery while strengthening the future of this treasured institution is our commitment to you.

Sincerely,

Charles Hollingsworth



Sherman man faces 28 counts of child sexual abuse; other indictments



Indictments are formal charges and are not an indication of guilt.
Van Alstyne Leader

Staff reports

A Sherman man was indicted this week on 28 counts of child sexual abuse. The indictments are formal charges and not an indication of guilt.

Richard Wayne Stephens, 61, of Sherman was indicted on one count of continuous sexual assault of a victim under 14, four counts of indecency with a child sexual contact, 9 counts of indecency with a child exposure and 14 counts of aggravated sexual assault (rape) of a child.

A search of Grayson County judicial records showed that Stephens does not have an attorney of record as of Thursday afternoon.

Also indicted this week was Thomas Charles Brannum, 49, of Sherman on five counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Previously released police reports said on Nov. 6, 2022, Sherman police were called to the 1000 block of East Lake Avenue and witnesses said that Brannum fired at five people. None of the people were injured.

The following people were also indicted this week according to a list provided by the Grayson County District Attorney's Office:

Kevin Alexander Lewis, 29, of Denton — three counts of aggravated sexual assault (rape) of a child, two counts of indecency with a child sexual contact and one count of indecency with a child exposure;

Dylan Jake Freeman, 29, of Whitewright — DWID 3rd or more;

Dustin Lane Redfearn, 41, of Gainesville — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Shane Michael Allen, 37, of Whitewright — theft of property and unauthorized use of a motor vehicle;

Robert Lee Stanley, 40, of Sherman — DWI 3rd or more, tampering with evidence and evading arrest;

Michelle Antoinette Coulson, 33, of Denton — possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver (meth);

Shannen Shawn Dent, 51, of Denton — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Victoria Ann Hernandez, 35, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Christian Ronald Frey, 31, of Sherman — bail jumping and failure to appear;

Jonathon Michael Burney, 26, of Denison — bail jumping and failure to appear;

Jeremy Scott McCartney, 47, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Ransom Luther Staten, 38, of Denison — burglary of a habitation and theft of a firearm;

Ashley Leann McMillan, 39, of Denison — burglary of a habitation, theft of a firearm, possession of a controlled substance (meth) and prohibited substance in a correctional facility;

Joseph Paul Schofield Jr., 42, of Denison — theft of a firearm, burglary of a building, and unlawful possession of a firearm by a felon;

Victoria Louise Strachan, 38, of Denison — burglary of a building and theft of a firearm;

Anderuw Jaysun Chapa, 23, of Whitesboro — credit or debit card abuse;

Raymond Bernard Boswell, 41, of Broken Bow Oklahoma — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

David Lynn Lattimore, 60, of Denison — forgery of a financial instrument;

Sherry Diane Latty, 49, of Bonham — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Richard Reunard, 38, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Jaime Martin Castillo, 59, of Denison — burglary of a building;

Russell Carter Yarnall, 66, of Denison — burglary of a building;

Johanna Gibson, 47, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Mary Heath Biggers, 64, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Karen Marie Knott, 52, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver (meth) and possession of marijuana;

Michael Ray Myers, 33, of Denison — evading arrest with a vehicle or watercraft;

Sherrie Lou Wells, 36, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Delos Eugene Byrd, 44, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

John Edwards Rodgers, 48, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Bryan Anthony Jacobs, 28, of Denison — burglary of a habitation;

Theodore Lawrence Jr., 53, of Sherman — burglary of a habitation;

Jason Herbert English, 20, of Sherman — evading arrest or detention with a vehicle or watercraft;

Jack Anthony Hamilton, 31, of Odessa — possession of a controlled substance in a drug free zone (fentanyl);

Jessica Ann Babineau, 33, of Denison — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Marquinez Chantu Coleman, 31, of Sherman — credit or debit card abuse;

Ezquiel Lorenzo Carrasco, 19, of Sherman — tamper with evidence with intent to impair;

Leonardo Carpio, 23, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (cocaine);

Tina Simone Jones, 45, of Denison — theft of property with previous convictions;

Quincy Wayne Murphy, 37, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth) and obstruction or retaliation;

Donald Owen Scott, 52, of Sherman — DWI 3rd or more;

Alejandro Navarro Hernandez, 47, of Sherman — evading arrest with previous convictions;

Tamara Lynn Baker, 41, of Sherman — possession of a controlled substance (meth);

Freedom Chistopher Demoure, 21, of Sherman — theft of a firearm and unlawful possession of a firearm by a felon.

Commissioners

Continued from Page A1

1. County leaders paid some bills

They unanimously approved payments of $50,660 to Tyler Technologies for the Public Safety Suite software and maintenance. They also approved paying $69,925 to SHI Government Solutions for Dell unity servers for virtual environment storage for the county's Information Technology department. Commissioners approved payment of $263,126 to Brinkley Sargent Wigington Architectes for professional services for October 2022 for the Grayson County Jail expansion project.

2. Commissioners approved contracts for the county's Juvenile Services Office

Commissioners approved software housing contracts with Noble Software Group. The cost of the contract is stated in the contract at $1,725. It is a one-time fee. That fee is expected to be covered by a grant. The software the contract purchases is a screening tool called "The Craft" that looks at the needs of youth entering the program with regard to substance use.

They also approved a contract for polygraph services with Wood Polygraph. That contract allows Wood Polygraph to conduct polygraph examinations of those involved in the agency's sex offender treatment program. The contract calls for test results to be sent to Juvenile Services no later than ten days after the examination. Wood Polygraph will be paid $250 per examination under the contract.

3. Commissioners approved some items for the Purchasing Agent

Commissioners approved the purchase of a durapatcher from Texas Patcher as a sole source vendor for Precinct 2. The refurnished machine will cost the precinct $83,700 and a new one would have cost well over $100,000 according to County Purchasing Agent Jodi Platt.

County leaders also approved a list of items to be declared surplus and sold by auction. It includes various vehicles from the Sheriff's Office and other items.

A list of the items to be sold will be available on the county's website before the auction which is set to conducted within the next few weeks.

4. The county approved some plats

They approved a short plat for the Stracener Addition in Precinct 1. This involves a 6.45-acre lot on the North side of Gant Road that will be divided into two lots.

They approved the short plat for Sky Angel Estates in Precinct 3. This involves a 18.774-acre tract of land that the property owner wants to divide into nine lots. The land is east of Old Sandboard Road.

5. The court made changes to the person designated to sign off on grants for the county.

As part of the change over from former Grayson County Judge Bill Magers to current Judge Bruce Dawsey, the court officially approved a request to remove Magers and add Dawsey to as the person authorized to sign off on grants for the county from the office of the state governor.

The approval extends to other granting institutions as well and was unanimously approved by the court.

Today in History: JAN 27, Auschwitz and Birkenau liberated

Associated Press

Today is Friday, Jan. 27, the 27th day of 2022. There are 338 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 27, 1967, astronauts Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White and Roger B. Chaffee died in a flash fire during a test aboard their Apollo spacecraft.

On this date:

In 1756, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria.

In 1880, Thomas Edison received a patent for his electric incandescent lamp.

In 1888, the National Geographic Society was incorporated in Washington, D.C.

In 1944, during World War II, the Soviet Union announced the complete end of the deadly German siege of Leningrad, which had lasted for more than two years.

In 1945, during World War II, Soviet troops liberated the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland.

In 1973, the Vietnam peace accords were signed in Paris.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan and his wife, Nancy, greeted at the White House the 52 former American hostages released by Iran.

In 1984, singer Michael Jackson suffered serious burns to his scalp when pyrotechnics set his hair on fire during the filming of a Pepsi-Cola TV commercial at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

In 2006, Western Union delivered its last telegram.

In 2010, Apple CEO Steve Jobs unveiled the iPad tablet computer during a presentation in San Francisco. J.D. Salinger, the reclusive author of "The Catcher in the Rye," died in Cornish, New Hampshire, at age 91.

In 2013, Flames raced through a crowded nightclub in southern Brazil, killing 242 people.

In 2017, President Donald Trump barred all refugees from entering the United States for four months — and those from war-ravaged Syria indefinitely — declaring the ban necessary to prevent "radical Islamic terrorists" from entering the nation.

In 2020, China confirmed more than 2,700 cases of the new coronavirus with more than 80 deaths in that country; authorities postponed the end of the Lunar New Year holiday to keep the public at home. U.S. health officials said they believed the risk to Americans remained low and that they had no evidence that the new virus was spreading in the United States; they advised Americans to avoid non-essential travel to any part of China.

Ten years ago: Flames raced through a crowded nightclub in southern Brazil, killing 242 people. Novak Djokovic beat Andy Murray 6-7 (2), 7-6 (3), 6-3, 6-2 to become the first man in the Open era to win three consecutive Australian Open titles. The CIA thriller "Argo" won top honor for overall cast performance at the Screen Actors Guild Awards; Jennifer Lawrence won leading actress for "Silver Linings Playbook" while Daniel Day-Lewis won leading actor for "Lincoln."

Five years ago: A suicide bombing in the Afghan capital of Kabul killed more than 100 people; the attacker was driving an ambulance full of explosives and raced through a security checkpoint after saying he was transferring a patient to a hospital. Comic strip artist Mort Walker, a World War II veteran who satirized the Army with the antics of the lazy private "Beetle Bailey," died in Connecticut at the age of 94. Caroline Wozniacki won the women's final at the Australian Open, her first victory in a Grand Slam tournament after 43 tries, beating top-seeded Simona Halep.

One year ago: Liberal Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer confirmed that he would step down from the court later in the year. President Joe Biden strongly affirmed that he would nominate the first Black woman to the Supreme Court to replace Breyer, declaring that such historic representation is "long overdue." (Biden's nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson, would be confirmed in April.) Millions of health care workers across the country were required to be vaccinated against COVID-19, as a mandate from the Biden administration took effect in about half the states. Longtime Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger announced his retirement after 18 seasons and two Super Bowl wins.

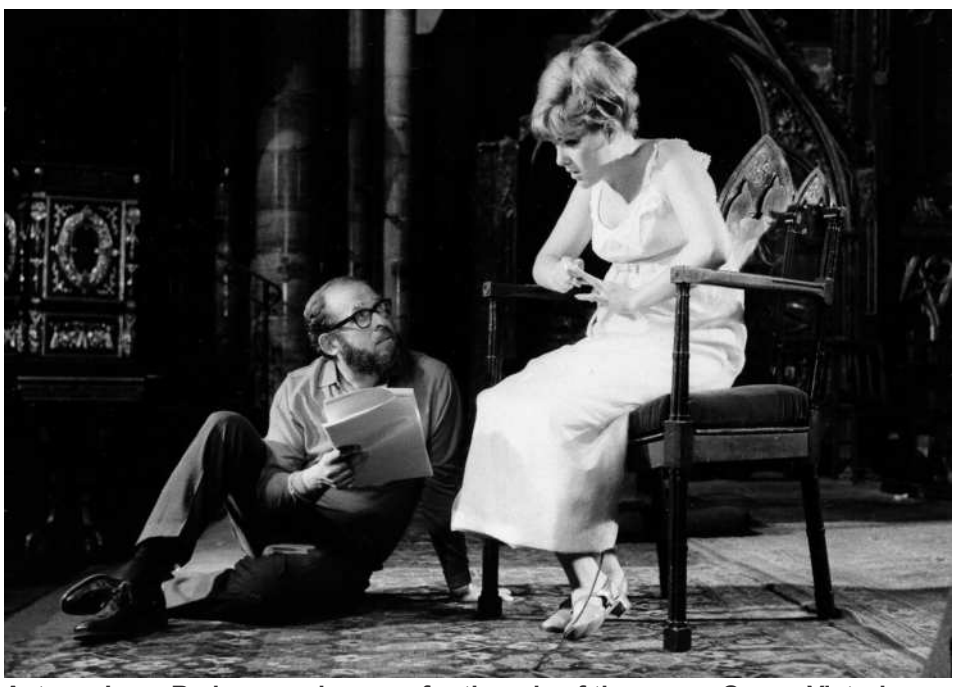
Today's birthdays: Actor James Cromwell is 83. Rock musician Nick Mason (Pink Floyd) is 79. R&B singer Nedra Talley (The Ronettes) is 77. Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov is 75. Latin singer-songwriter Djavan is 74. U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts is 68. Country singer Cheryl White is 68. Country singer-musician Richard Young (The Kentucky Headhunters) is 68. Actor Mimi Rogers is 67. Rock musician Janick Gers (Iron Maiden) is 66. Actor Susanna Thompson is 65. Political and sports commentator Keith Olbermann is 64. Rock singer Margo Timmins (Cowboy Junkies) is 62. Rock musician Gillian Gilbert is 62. Actor Tamlyn Tomita is 60. Actor Bridget Fonda is 59. Actor Alan Cumming is 58. Country singer Tracy Lawrence is 55. Rock singer Mike Patton is 55. Rapper Tricky is 55. Rock musician Michael Kulas (James) is 54. Actor-comedian Patton Oswalt is 54. Actor Josh Randall is 51. Country singer Kevin Denney is 45. Tennis player Marat Safin is 43. Rock musician Matt Sanchez (American Authors) is 37. Actor Braeden Lemasters is 27.



Two soldiers look at an atomic cloud during a nuclear bomb testing in Nevada in this 1952 file photo. Newly declassified Pentagon records show that troop exercises during nuclear bomb tests in the 1950s were designed to pursuade soldiers their fear of radiation was irrational and to give them "an emotional vaccination" to the blasts. It has been widely known for decades that soldiers were deliberately exposed to radiation during exercises starting in 1951 at the Nevada nuclear test range. The newdocuments open a window into the reasoning by military leaders in then-secret discussions aboout how far to go in using GI's in the tests.
(AP Photo/files)



This undated file photo provided by NASA shows the Apollo 1 crew at an undisclosed location. From left: astronauts Virgil "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White II and Roger B. Chaffee. All three perished after a fire broke out inside the Apollo 1 module during a launch rehearsal on Jan. 27, 1967, at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla. (AP Photo/NASA, File)



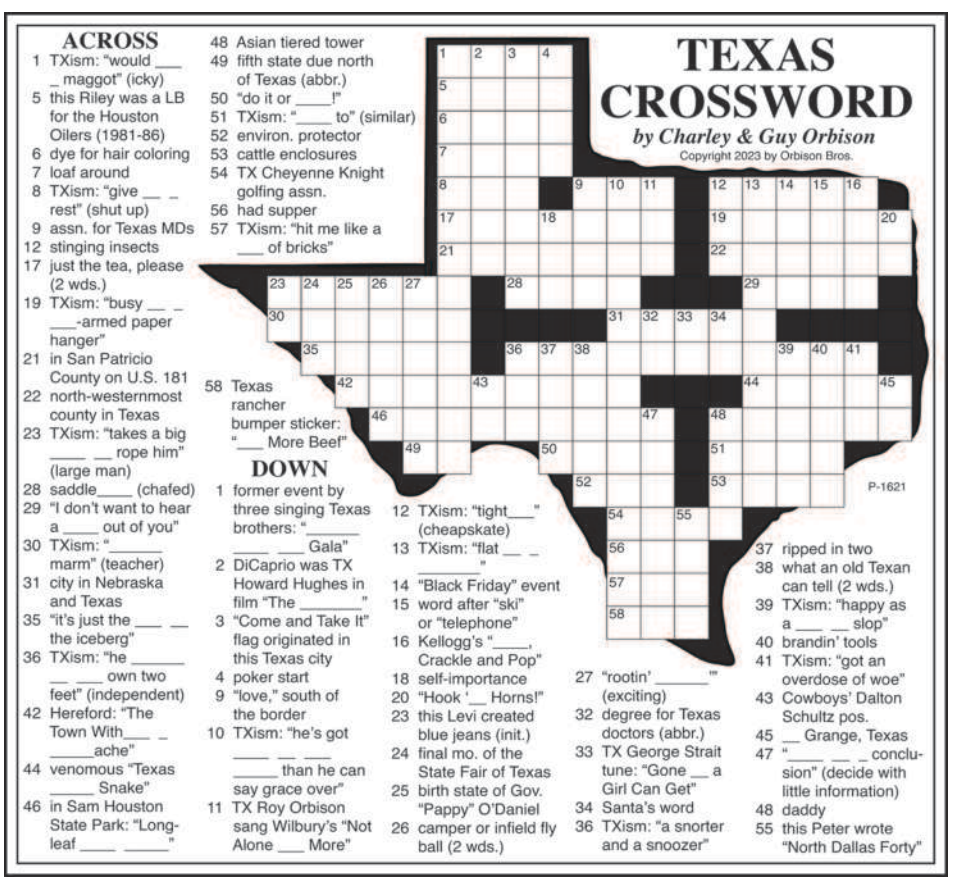
Actress Lynn Redgrave rehearses for the role of the young Queen Victoria, in "The Hall of Kings," Jan. 27, 1967, which will be televised on ABC-TV next month. Listening to Ms. Redgrave is Harry Rasky, writer, producer and director of the show. (AP Photo)



Swedish rally champion Erik Carlsson, right, and his co-driver Gunner Haggbom pose behind their cups on the bonnet of their Saab car in Monte Carlo, on Jan. 27, 1962, after the prize-giving ceremony following the Monte Carlo rally in which they were placed first. (AP Photo)



A young Ukrainian soldier is shown on sentinel duty along the Carpatho-Ukraine border, Jan. 27, 1939.
(AP Photo)



ENTERTAINMENT

At the movies: Some decent chuckles can't erase the major writing problems in You People

By Doug Laman
Special to the VA Leader

Kenya Barris has carved out a TV empire for himself thanks to being the creator of Black-ish and two of its spin-offs as well as an executive producer on a slew of Netflix TV programs. Barris has also had a recurring presence in film as a screenwriter but save for being one of the writers on the 2017 comedy Girls Trip, his writing credits have been for a wave of reboots/sequels from major studios like The Witches, Shaft, and that Disney+ Cheaper by the Dozen remake. Considering that he was one of several writers on all these films, not to mention that these were franchise pictures designed to please audience expectations rather than challenge them, it's fair to say Barris's voice hasn't been especially discernible in feature-length narratives up to this point.

With the Netflix comedy You People, Barris, who directs this movie and wrote the script with Jonah Hill, gets a chance to show off his chops at crafting a film without also having to worry about what audiences and studio executives want out of a project like Coming 2 America. The resulting feature shows a welcome willingness on Barris's part to engage in lofty ideas and put his actors in unique roles. Unfortunately, his skills at merging broad comedy with tearjerker moments (at least in the world of film) are so lacking that You People as a whole ends up floundering.

After an awkward mishap involving an Uber ride, podcaster/broker Ezra Cohen (Jonah Hill) and Amira Mohammed (Lauren London) have hit it off and become a couple. They love doing even the most frivolous things together, like brushing their teeth or watching ridiculous TV shows. What they don't love is how their respective families respond to their relationship, with these tensions flaring up as the duo prepares to get married. For Ezra, his mom, Shelley (Julia Lous-Dreyfus) is a perfect portrait of a clueless Liberal white lady. She's the sort of person who speaks about loving Black people but also sees them as just trophies she can use to prove how progressive she is. Meanwhile, Amira's dad, Akbar Mohammed (Eddie Murphy) has a very specific idea of who his daughter should marry and it isn't Ezra. He hates this guy from the get-go and Akbar is looking for any chance to prove to his daughter that Ezra would make a bad husband.

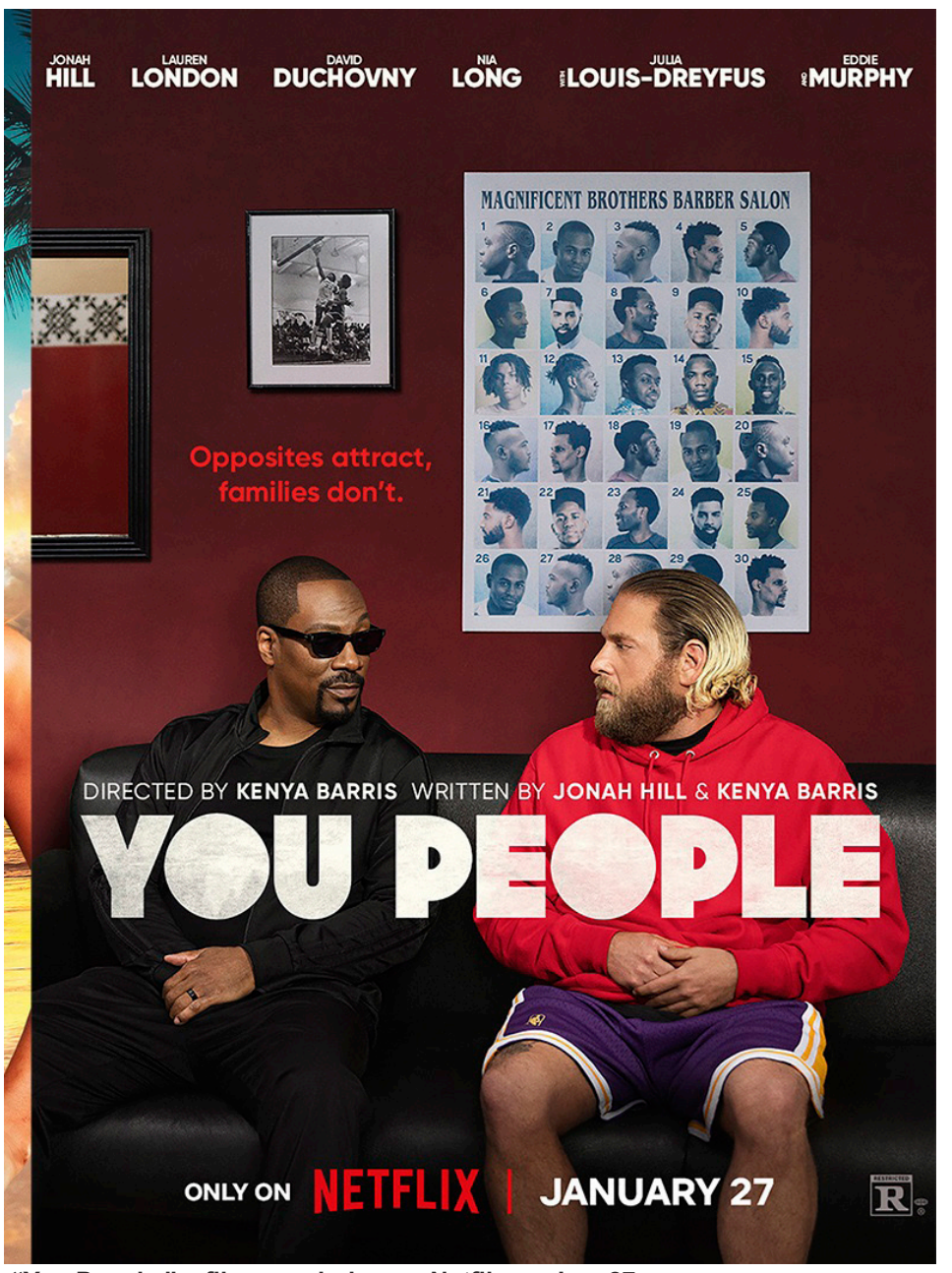
Shortly before my screening of You People started, I realized how long it'd been since I saw a Jonah Hill comedy on the big screen. "I can't wait to see this kind of yukfest theatrically again!" I thought to myself as the lights dimmed. Unfortunately, by the time You People reached its second instance of Hill stretching out an awkward conversation with heavily-improvised dialogue, I realized that I hadn't missed this Judd Apatow-style of comedy as much as I thought I had. From there, You People picks up a bit once Ezra and Amira begin dating and hitting it off. Hill and Barris nicely eschew any post-modernism winks to the camera as these two lovebirds tenderly play footsies on their first date or laugh together in a separate restaurant. The script has enough confidence to realize that committing to romantic sweetness is enough to get the audience on your side. You don't have to earn the trust of moviegoers by poking everybody in the ribs on how common these kinds of montages are.

By playing straight-faced, You People immerses us in its central relationship and allows both Hill and London to flourish as actors by depicting the characters navigating the exciting early days of a budding romance. Just as you need rain to go with the sunshine, so too does You People's script eventually pair this cutesy romance with extended bits of cringe comedy surrounding Ezra's parents socially interacting with Amira. Some of these gags work, especially when they involve David Duchovny playing against type as Ezra's dad who has a deep affection for Xzibit that he'll talk about at the drop of a hat. Still, there's a level of preciseness in timing needed to pull these kinds of sequences off. TV shows like The Rehearsal or The Eric Andre Show are masters at knowing how long cringe-inducing laughs should go on. Cut this type of comedy too short, it never never reach its full potential, but let it go on too long, and you just end up running your gags into the ground.

You People, like so many Netflix original movies, unfortunately, has some major pacing issues that undercut the impact of its multiple stabs at cringe comedy. A sequence at a strip club in the third act involving supporting characters talking about Ezra's past, for instance, goes on forever and ever. I think it's still playing as I type up this review! As You People goes on, it, unfortunately, gets worse, especially in its third act. The last 30-ish minutes of this movie boils down to a series of characters delivering lengthy monologues about their personal feelings. It's a didactic way of communicating information that's never interesting enough in its dialogue to justify why Ezra, Amira, and everyone else in the movie is suddenly turning to the camera to explain the lessons they want audiences to take away from the feature.

The largely unimaginative filmmaking from Barris and cinematographer Mark Doering-Powell is especially apparent in these sequences. If these monologues are going to exist, they should feel momentous, but they're so flatly shot and lit. There's no difference between how Ezra and Amira are filmed pouring their hearts out compared to how they're shot just eating dinner together. Some solid performances and brief glimmers of more interesting examinations of weighty ideas at least keep You People from flaming out entirely. Alas, while it's nice to see Jonah Hill and Eddie Murphy headlining a feature-length comedy in 2023, You People comes up short more often than it proves amusing, especially in its poorly conceived third act. At least it's better than an earlier film penned by Barris, The Witches.

You People starts streaming on Netflix on January 27.



"You People," a film premiering on Netflix on Jan. 27.
(Peacock/Amazon/Netflix via AP)



Nia Long, from left, Lauren London, Eddie Murphy, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and David Duchovny arrive at the premiere of Netflix's "You People" on Tuesday, January 17, 2023, at The Regency Theatre at Westwood Village in Los Angeles.
(Photo by Willy Sanjuan/Invision/AP).

Sundance celebrates the 'magic' of being back in-person

By Lindsey Bahr
AP Film Writer

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — The Sundance Film Festival met the moment by going virtual for the past two years because of the coronavirus pandemic. But on Thursday, there was a palpable sense of relief from the festival's leadership team at being in-person again.

Sundance Institute CEO Joana Vicente, director of programming Kim Yutani, senior programmer John Nein and incoming Sundance Film Festival director Eugene Hernandez gathered Thursday afternoon in Park City, Utah, to discuss what's to come. Just outside, on a snowy Main Street, finishing touches were being put on storefronts and restaurants that sponsors have taken over for the week.

"It feels so good to be back in person," Vicente said. "There's nothing like the magic of being together in Park City."

Yutani also announced the last-minute addition of "Justice," a documentary from filmmaker Doug Liman about allegations against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, that will debut Friday.

"It was a powerful documentary that we felt was important to add," Yutani said. "We saw it, like, yesterday."

Eleven films have their world premieres Thursday night, including the documentary "Little Richard: I Am Everything" and the Frankenstein-inspired psychological horror "birth/rebirth," about a morgue technician who reanimates a little girl. Also on Thursday, "Shayda," about an Iranian mother and her 6-year-old daughter who go to a women's shelter in Australia, "The Longest Goodbye," a documentary about a NASA psychologist preparing Mars-bound astronauts for social isolation, the Daisy Ridley film "Sometimes I Think About Dying" and "Kim's Video," a documentary about a hunt for a lost video collection of 55,000 movies.

Programmers watched 16,000 films to determine this year's slate of 111 films and say that there is something for everyone. Biographical documentaries, films about world issues and diasporic filmmaking are especially popular this year.

Nein said that he expects audiences to be buzzing about the performances of both known stars like Jonathan Majors, in "Magazine Dreams," Cynthia Erivo, in "Drift," and Eugenio Derbez in "Radical" and newcomers like Lío Mehiel in "Mutt" and Priya Kansara in "Polite Society."

The Sundance Institute is also hosting a dinner Thursday night honoring filmmaker Luca Guadagnino, Ryan Coogler, Nikyatu Jusu and W. Kamau Bell. There will also be a fundraising component to support the Institute's work. Vicente said that it has been a challenging few years for the Institute, financially.

Sundance is not just a festival, after all. The non-profit institute, founded by Robert Redford in 1981, provides year-round support to emerging filmmakers with labs, fellowships and mentorship.

"The festival is this amazing platform to celebrate and share with audiences," Vicente said. "But really, as Robert Redford says, the engine, the most important work we do happens year-round."

Filmmaker Sophie Barthes, whose film "The Pod Generation" is among the opening night selections, attributes her career to the Sundance Institute. Her first short film debuted at the festival almost 20 years ago, marking the beginning of a relationship that continues to this day. Over the years, she participated in the director's lab, the composers' lab and the writers' lab. It's also where she debuted her first feature, "Cold Souls," with Paul Giamatti, in 2009.

"I wouldn't be here without Sundance," Barthes said in a recent interview. "They helped my career so much. I had like 50 advisers, the best of the best in the industry. It was like a film school on steroids. For filmmakers it's the best thing that can happen to you because once you enter the family, they help and support you."

Her film "The Pod Generation" is a futuristic satire about a New York couple (played by Emilia Clarke and Chiwetel Ejiofor) who use an "artificial womb" to get pregnant. She wanted to explore not-so-far-off advancements like artificial gestation and AI therapy and poke at ideas like detachment parenting.

"It's a satire about the fact that we've lost so many of our instincts because of this modern life, we're trying to reinvent the wheel and it becomes very comical," Barthes said. "I think it's very funny to explore the psychology of parents, especially in New York."

She hopes the film raises a debate about our relationship to technology. It will also be part of the "beyond film" conversations taking place in Park City outside of the cinemas throughout the week. Subjects range from how to cross-over from television to film, with "Flight Attendant" director Susanna Fogel whose "Cat Person" is premiering at the festival, to representation, with Randall Park and Marlee Matlin. There will be conversations about making your first feature and even burnout, with Majors, food writer Ruth Reichl and graphic novelist Adrian Tomine. Many of the sponsors, from Acura to Adobe, are also hosting timely conversations as well about climate change in movies, reclaiming trans narratives, building inclusive productions and even getting into Sundance.

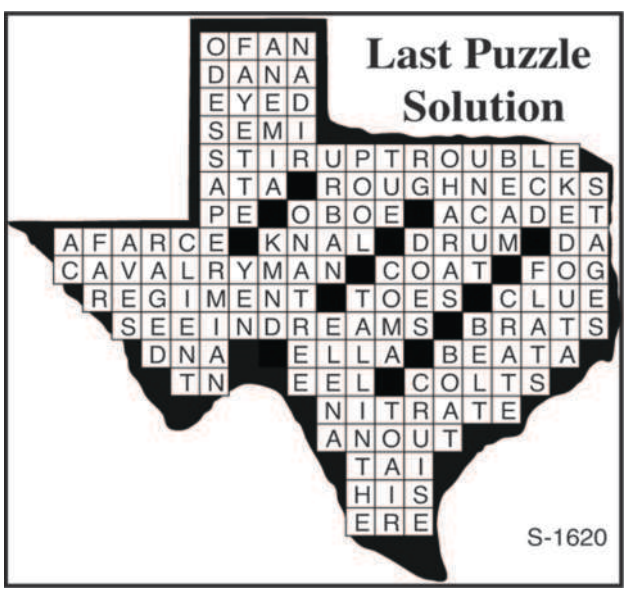
The festival has continued to evolve over the past few years. Though in-person was the priority, they also committed to a hybrid format. This year some 80 films will be available to watch online for ticketholders. The digital package, Vicente said, sold out very quickly.

"The last two years have been successful, but there's nothing that can replace the in-person experience of watching films on the big screen," Yutani said.

The Sundance Film Festival runs through Jan. 29.



A pedestrian peers into the ticket booth of the Egyptian Theatre before the start of the 2023 Sundance Film Festival, Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2023, in Park City, Utah. The annual independent film festival runs from Jan. 19-29. (AP Photo/Chris Pizzello)



FEATURES

SGLY: Live out your love



By Tiffany Chartier
Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

I attended a family reunion over the weekend. This gathering was different because what drew us together were the memories former generations shared more than those around the table. I was there with the kids, grandkids, and great grandkids of my paternal grandmother and her siblings. I never met my dad's mom. She was seven months pregnant with her third child when she died at the age of 24 of a brain aneurysm. She and the baby both died. And yet, my daughter's middle name was chosen in honor of this woman: Clemmie.

Clemmie had four brothers, all of whom have since passed. At dinner, I sat beside a grandchild of one of Clemmie's brothers. "No offense," he said, "but I didn't know you existed." I laughed because I thought the same of him and several others at the table. This young man was only 15 years old but had the striking stature of his grandad, whom I remember. I caught myself several times listening to him but thinking about how his size and bone structure were that of the man who connected him to me… to my grandmother. I was glad that this young man had a chance to know his grandfather before his passing, and I wished I could have said the same for my grandmother, with whom I have been told I share her dimples and coloring.

Picture after picture of Clemmie's life and family, special occasions, and everyday living captured in black and white were spread out for viewing. These images embraced a timeless style and sense of adventure. I could not help but be captivated by Clemmie's smile, joy, confident walk, and apparent zest for life. Even though I had never heard her voice, I heard her in my mind as I looked at a picture of her laughing. I did not have to know Clemmie to realize I had met the best of her time after time through her two children: my dad and aunt.

My paternal grandfather was a handsome, strong, funny, and intelligent man — a sailor who came into town with a shipmate who introduced him to his sister, Clemmie. The rest is history. But unlike most history books, the story of my grandfather and Clemmie was much too short; yet, life was lived well in the time they shared. Perhaps that is how love is to be measured, not the number of anniversaries celebrated, but the amount of life one shares and communicates to another — with no agenda other than to love, accept, learn, like, forgive, cherish, encourage, and honor the other. A clock or circumstance does not govern love; instead, love is an internal and intentional decision to daily choose to actively love another regardless of the season of life or circumstance. Even when time stops for one, love remains. Even more, when time stops for both, true love scatters seeds into the world. Perhaps that is where wildflowers come from — what a tender thought.

Looking at my grandfather's and Clemmie's love in black and white, my face flushed. I realized that in every picture I saw of them, one had a hand on the other. They were a team, whether wearing their Sunday best or tilling dirt. I glanced across the room to see two blooms from their marriage, my dad and aunt. The resemblance to their parents is unmistakable. Even more than their appearance is their connection to one another and life. They have been touched by love from birth, and it has not left them, even though their parents are no longer living.

How many couples boast of their years together but cannot speak to the condition, quality, and care of their marriage within those years? We should be tending more to what happens between the celebrations. We can go out to harvest, but if we have not sown the seeds and tended to them, there will be nothing of value to glean. Dry land leads to broken ground.

By the end of the evening of the reunion, hugs were shared, and promises to keep in touch were exchanged. We existed to one another where we hadn't just hours prior. As I went to bed that night, I kept thinking of my grandfather and Clemmie. It was evident that they existed to one another. In their short time together, they taught those who came after them a lesson: live out your love so that your love outlives you.

SGLY, dear reader.

(Smile, God Loves You.)

Tiffany Kaye Chartier is an inspirational author and columnist. To share feedback or request a topic for consideration, visit http://www.tiffanykayechartier. com or email connect@ tiffa- nykayechartier. com. Follow on Facebook: Tiffany Kaye Chartier.

Gardener's mailbag: Is the grass in my backyard dead?

By Neil Sperry
Special to the Van Alstyne Leader

Dear Neil: I'm concerned about my backyard. The photo with the tennis ball is St. Augustine ("carpetgrass"), while the other photo is a mix of St. Augustine and bermuda. Runners of much of the lawn pull up easily. I'm worried that the lawn is dead. I have bluebonnets and other wildflowers in this area, so I'm concerned about bringing sod and topsoil in until we get spring rains.

Lots of thoughts are running through my head. Turfgrass and wildflowers are not compatible. The wildflowers compete for space, to say nothing about water and nutrients, with the lawn grasses. They're especially challenging when new grass is trying to get started. The biggest issue is in leaving the wildflowers unmowed long enough that their seeds can mature in May and June. By then the turfgrass will have grown far too tall and weak. When you finally do mow it, you'll probably kill a good bit of it. Wildflowers need to be grown in dedicated spaces where they won't have to compete.

As for whether the lawn grasses are dead or alive, your photo that includes both types of grass has some living St. Augustine in the lower part of the photograph. You can see its plump, green runners. If runners of either grass are dried and brown, they are dead. However, bermuda (and to a lesser extent St. Augustine) has enough runners and rhizomes that it will green back up again with warmer conditions and spring rains.

Your photo with all the green grass shows a heavy population of annual bluegrass (Poa annua) and probably rescuegrass or other grassy winter weeds. There is no control for those at this point. They will die out as it turns hot in 6-8 weeks. However, you can prevent them, or at least reduce their populations greatly by using pre-emergent weedkiller granules between August 25 and September 5.

Dear Neil: I have a long bed in which I have raised lantanas and rosemary. They have done very well, but I'd like to have a low evergreen shrub to go with them. It must be deer-proof as we have hundreds of them in our area. What would you suggest?

No one can help you better than a veteran gardener of the deer wars. Forrest Appleton retired as a Texas Certified Nursery Professional. As a Bexar County Master Gardener (in one of the centers of the state's deer population) he prepared an outstanding list of the best deer-resistant plants. You can see it at https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/deerbest.html. Some of the more popular evergreen shrubs he includes are Japanese boxwood, yaupon hollies (all types), nandinas (all types) and ceniza, or Texas sage. He also lists rosemary, gray and green santolina, trailing rosemary (where it's winter-hardy) and wedelia. Many other plants are also listed.

Dear Neil: We have about 20 of these primrose jasmine plants (see photo) on our 1.3-acre lot. They're about 20 years old. They've done really well all that time, but since the Christmas cold spell they have turned brown. I don't know if they have died back. What should I do?

I'm surprised they weren't hurt by the cold of February 2021. It was, overall, even worse than the spell this year. It's been a tough run to be sure. Bend a few of the twigs. If they're dry and brittle already, that means that that portion of the plant is dead and could be removed. Keep clipping as far back as you must. They will almost assuredly sprout out again in March and April.

Dear Neil: I've had an ongoing problem with onion grass in my flowerbeds. It smells like onions when I pull it, and it has the little white onions deep in the soil. But pulling it doesn't do much good and mulching barely slows it down. So far, I've used bark mulch and cardboard boxes, but once the cardboard disintegrated the onions came back. What can I do?

Broadleafed weedkiller products containing 2,4-D are usually labeled for control of wild onions. (Note that while the leaves look like grass, the plants are not members of the grass family. Their flowers are not at all the same. Spray carefully so that your herbicide only goes onto the leaves of the wild onions, not saturating the soil and not drifting onto adjacent desirable plants. You may have to spray two or three times, and you always want to do so when the weeds are growing most actively. As for using cardboard, its effectiveness is very vastly overstated. It decays quickly on moist ground and then the weeds come regrowing right through it. Commercial weed-mulching fabrics from a hardware store or nursery would be much better.



Browned primrose jasmine
courtesy photo



St. Augustine is it dead?
courtesy photo

Dear Neil: When and with what should I feed my Nellie R. Stevens hollies to get the quickest possible growth?

Use a high-quality, all-nitrogen lawn food (no weed killer added) that has upwards of half of its nitrogen in slow-release formulation. Apply it as new growth is beginning in March and repeat every 8 or 10 weeks into early fall. Deep waterings on regular intervals is even more important for new plants. Water them deeply by hand with 10 to 20 gallons of water every 2 to 3 days from April through October and as needed thereafter.

Have a question you'd like Neil to consider? Mail it to him in care of this newspaper or e-mail him at mailbag@sperrygardens. com. Neil regrets that he cannot reply to questions individually.



Annual bluegrass
courtesy photo



Part St. Augustine and part bermuda
courtesy photo

SPORTS

Senior Spotlight: Bailey Henderson







By Griff Servati
For the Van Alstyne Leader

Bailey Henderson is one of the Lady Panthers' most decorated basketball players in its history. The four-year varsity player has reached milestones of 1000 career points and 500 rebounds. She has been named First-Team All-District, and All-Texomaland as a Sophomore and Junior year. She has been nominated and earned a weekly honor of Dave Campbell's Miss Texas Basketball. Added to these honors are the numerous All-Tournament team selections over the seasons. More will surely be on the horizon as she is in the middle of her Senior season.

VAHS girls basketball coach Tyler Dyer knows where Bailey's accolades have come from, "Bailey is a great kid who has been a very consistent player for our program for four years now. Her hard work on and off the floor has greatly contributed to her success." Henderson is an inside-out player who can hit a three-pointer if you stay off her too much. After countless hours of shooting baskets in her driveway, she can score with either hand in the lane. These skills make her hard to stop for opposing players and coaches who remind their players by shouting "shooter" whenever she has the ball.

Bailey is a lifelong Panther, growing up playing sports with those who are still her teammates on the hardwood. She played soccer, basketball, softball & volleyball. But she admits, "basketball was and has always been my favorite."

Bailey's support system starts with her involved parents, Dusty and Causby Henderson. Dusty, her father, has been involved throughout her life, coaching her in various sports, and is the group's lead "team mom." Bailey said of her parents' commitment and appreciation of them, "They are always pushing me to do my best, even when I am tired. They also attend every game, no matter how far to cheer me on." Beyond her parents, she recognized her sister Kendall and her grandpa Bill O'Neal as her biggest supporters.

When asked what teacher had the most impact in her years at VAISD, she didn't hesitate to share, "My second and third-grade teacher, Mrs. Lisa Morris, was one of my favorite teachers because she always made learning fun and she took the time to get to know her students by coming to support me at my games." When asked what coach had made a difference in her life and how, she responded, "Coach Roberson taught me to always believe in myself."

Teachers like Mrs. Morris, Coach Roberson, and her mother have impacted her life so much that she plans to make a career in education. She shared her plans, "I will be attending Grayson College to obtain my Associate of Arts in Teaching Early Childhood & then transfer to Texas A&M @ Commerce to get my Elementary Education degree."

As the Lady Panthers are at the start of the district schedule, Bailey and her teammates are hunting for a district championship. She shared how she has approached this season as a senior leader, "I am one of the team captains this year, and since I have been on varsity for four years, I have the experience with different situations to help lead the team. I will do this by encouraging and holding people accountable."

Bailey is thankful for her time as a Lady Panther, "I would like to thank all of my family members, past and present coaches, and all of my teachers for being so uplifting and helpful throughout my time as a Lady Panther."

Panthers come up short against Coyotes



Van Alstyne's Carson Brown, who scored 29 points, goes up between a pair of Anna defenders in an 11-4A match-up.
Griff Servati / For The Van Alstyne Leader

By Jason Della Rosa
Van Alstyne Leader

VAN ALSTYNE — The Panthers looked at the first half and saw the blueprint for a victory against a ranked opponent.

Fast start at home in front a strong crowd mixed with a defensive effort that kept scoring at a minimum.

"Tempo was much more to our liking in the first half," VA head coach Russell Best said. "They came out and made shots third quarter, turned us over a little bit."

After the opening 16 minutes belonged to Van Alstyne, the Anna Coyotes took control after the break — particularly in the third quarter — on the way to a 67-58 victory over the Panthers in District 11-4A action.

"Just being consistent throughout an entire game, that's something we continue to talk about and work on," Best said.

Carson Brown scored 29 points, Riley Dancer added 12 points and Brady Skipworth and Kade Ramer chipped in six points each for Van Alstyne (13-13, 1-2), which hosts Celina on Tuesday night.

The Panthers are in a three-way tie for third with Celina and Frisco Panther Creek.

Charles Johnson scored 16 points, Jacob Emmers and Jonathan Brown each finished with 14 points and Reece Snodgrass and Jadun Mason-Davis totaled 10 points apiece for Anna (14-7, 3-0), which stayed tied with Aubrey atop the standings.

A 13-point advantage just under a minute into the fourth quarter matched the Coyotes' largest margin but Van Alstyne kept Anna from pulling away. The Panthers held the Coyotes scoreless for a three-minute stretch starting in the middle of the quarter and allowed them to chip away at the deficit.

Dancer and Brown had back-to-back drives and then Brown's free throw with 2:58 remaining made it an eight-point contest.

Van Alstyne had a couple of chances to get closer and twice more down the stretch it was a three-possession game but Anna held off any potential comeback.

"Few possessions there we couldn't convert that could have changed things for us," Best said.

The game turned in Anna's favor for good in the third quarter — an eight-minute stretch where the Coyotes scored more points (27) than they did in the entire first half.

The surge to take a 53-41 advantage into the fourth quarter was on the strength of Anna's long-distance shooting.

There were nine baskets in the frame by the Coyotes and seven of them were three-pointers.

A 10-0 run in the first two minutes of the second half included three of them — two by Snodgrass — and Emmers had three of his own, the last with 49 seconds to provide the 12-point margin at the end of the frame.

Ramer stopped the run with a layin but Van Alstyne couldn't keep up with Anna's torrid pace. The only Panthers points in the final five minutes of the third were a pair of three-point plays from Brown and a Dancer free throw.

The Coyotes had also opened the second quarter on a 9-0 run, capped by consecutive layups from Johnson, to tie the score at 18.

Zach Thomas finally put the Panthers on the board when he converted a three-point play with 5:24 showing until the break and Dancer followed with a three-pointer.

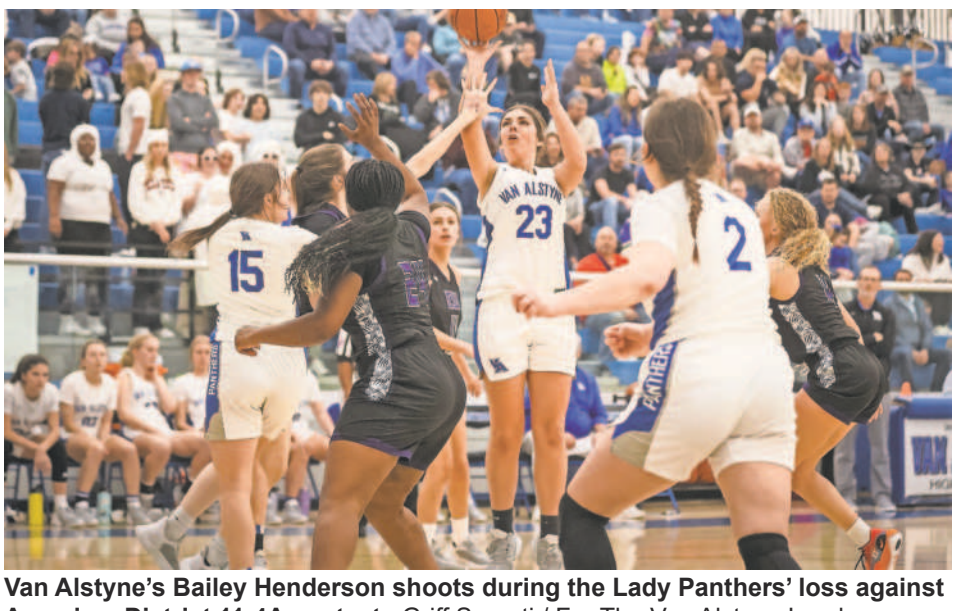
Van Alstyne maintained the lead into the locker room at 30-26.

Johnson and Brown kept Anna within striking distance and it would have been closer if not for Skipworth's layup in the final seconds of the half.

Van Alstyne led 18-9 after the first quarter behind Brown, who made four shots, and a pair of buckets from Skipworth.

Anna had trouble piecing much offense together beyond Brown, who scored five points in the frame.

Rally capped



Van Alstyne's Bailey Henderson shoots during the Lady Panthers' loss against Anna in a District 11-4A contest. Griff Servati / For The Van Alstyne Leader

By Jason Della Rosa
Van Alstyne Leader

VAN ALSTYNE — It was defense which had sent the Lady Panthers to the top of the standings and if Van Alstyne was going to end the first half of district play alone in first it would need some offense to save them.

The track meet involving a combined 23 three-pointers was nearing its conclusion and VA had battled back from multiple double-digit deficits. If there had been a couple more possessions or an extra handful of seconds then the Lady Panthers' rally wouldn't have fallen short in an 80-76 loss to the Anna Lady Coyotes in 11-4A action.

"It's a game of runs, especially when you play them," VA head coach Tyler Dyer said. "They're going to hit some shots. We're going to hit shots. We ran out of time."

Kaelyn Miller hit six three-pointers and finished with 21 points, Ryleigh Miller also scored 21 points, Lacey Thorpe added 12 points and Bailey Henderson totaled 12 points and seven rebounds for Van Alstyne (17-8, 4-1), which hosts Celina on Tuesday.

The Lady Panthers start the second half tied with Frisco Panther Creek atop the standings. They hadn't allowed more than 45 points to the other four teams in the district.

"We're still in first place. We're still in the driver's seat," Dyer said. "We've got to take care of business which I feel like we are capable of."

Katie Johnson made six threes on the way to 28 points, IV Jackson added 14 points and Regan Wright chipped in 13 points for Anna (20-7, 3-2), which gained sole possession of third place.

Despite being down by 12 and 2:04 left on the clock, the Lady Panthers almost made the game come down to the final possession.

Thorpe's putback was followed by Ryleigh Miller's three-point play with barely a minute remaining.

Valajah Jackson made just one free throw for Anna. Ryleigh Miller connected on a three-pointer and it was 78-73 with 48 seconds left.

Anna turned it over the next two possessions, the latter with eight seconds to go. Thorpe's three trimmed the deficit to just two with 4.6 seconds left.

The Lady Coyotes almost had another turnover when Johnson's long inbounds pass over the top to Valajah Jackson went untouched and almost out of bounds but Jackson ran it down right before it reached the baseline. She was fouled and made both free throws to seal the victory.

Ryleigh Miller opened the fourth quarter with a three-pointer to tie the score and even though the Lady Coyotes went right back in front, Anna couldn't build more than a seven-point advantage across the next four minutes. Johnson finished off a four-point play and IV Jackson's bucket made it 69-62.

The Lady Panthers didn't make a shot for nearly five minutes and the deficit got to 12 with just over two minutes left.

Early in the third quarter the Lady Panthers were down 14 points but would put together a 13-0 run that tied the score at 46 with 3:38 left in the period.

Lanie Thorpe started it with a three, Kaelyn Miller capped it from deep and in between Ryleigh Miller added another as well.

Wright stopped the momentum with a three but only briefly as Henderson converted a three-point play and VA had its first lead since 13-10 at 50-49.

The advantage was short-lived before Elaina Flores tied the game at 53 on a three and then Kaelyn Miller's three-pointer put the Lady Panthers back ahead with just under a minute to go in the third.

Van Alstyne was unable to get to the final eight minutes in front. Johnson made a three and Valajah Jackson converted a three-point play to give the Lady Coyotes the 59-53 lead after three frames.

Both teams had matching 9-0 runs in the second quarter but little else. Van Alstyne's burst opened the stanza on buckets from Ryleigh Miller, Jaidan Servati and Lacey Thorpe while Kaelyn Miller connected on a three to pull the Lady Panthers within a point at 29-28 by the middle of the quarter.

Anna responded with two baskets by IV Jackson, Wright made two free throws and Johnson had a three and it was back to a 10-point margin barely two minutes later.

Van Alstyne managed just three points in the final four minutes of the half and was down 43-31 at the break.

Johnson and Ryleigh Miller matched threes to open the game and Van Alstyne was able to hold a 13-8 advantage after Kaelyn Miller's three with the five-minute mark approaching.

The Lady Coyotes went on an 18-4 run where they scored the first eight points in that stretch. Karleigh Redwine started it with a runner and a three-pointer before Johnson and Wright drilled threes in the latter stages as Anna turned a five-point deficit into a 26-17 lead.

Flores scored just inside of a minute to go in the first but Johnson got one more three before the buzzer and the Lady Coyotes were up 29-19. Six of their nine baskets were three-pointers.

TEXOMA

Lack of boats make me wonder: where have the fishermen gone?



By JB Webb
Special to the VA Leader

Before I get into my article it's been a sad few days at the Webb house. You all know I comment in most of my articles I have two girls who must be given a morning golf card ride. Our oldest Goldie, Ginger, is now at the Rainbow Bridge waiting for us. She was a 13-year-old daughter and in so much pain Susan and I chose to let her go. We were with her showering her with our tears, talking, petting, hugging and letting her know until she went to sleep that we were there.

As we came out of the room, going to our car I'm not ashamed to tell you there were tears in our eyes as we crossed the waiting room. We already had another rescue doggie, No. 6, that we picked out at the Sherman Animal Shelter and she was at the house. Peaches was down in the dumps until we got another dog her size and it's been something else here since.

Ginger will always be in our hearts but Honey and Peaches ease our pain. It didn't take long before she has become a golf cart girl. Now Susan is having to use the back seat as the two have decided they will ride up front with me.

Fishermen, or lack thereof, is a question I have been asking myself lately. I don't remember when I have seen fewer boats on the lake. Best I can remember past winters when there used to be boats out fishing in the winter even when it was miserable.

In the last four trips I have been out I probably haven't seen more than eight bass boats. Even the striper guides are resting. The funny thing is the weather has been nicer this year than what we have had in the past for fishing.

As I said in my last article Texoma has been good to me fish-wise ever since New Year's. That said I had to work to keep from zeroing Tuesday. Goober backed out on our planned trip so I headed for my first stop.

The lake was smooth. Idling in until I got to my starting smallmouth spot, I started with my usual never failure lures. Well, they failed Tuesday at this stop. Thirty minutes without a bite saw me moving to another spot that had also been hot since the New Year, 30 minutes there without a bite saw me moving again and I don't like to move.

It was getting late and I hadn't had a bite in two stops. I had one more place to try and headed for it. Once again, the fish got the better of me and I was ready to go home, then I remembered where Goober had caught his only fish last week not far from me.

Going back to it, I tied up to a fishing friend's boat stall since he was out chasing stripers. There was no one around. My third or fourth cast I got a light tap, set the hook and was in a line striping fight. I didn't know what I had but it was not giving up easy.

I was thinking catfish but when I got it up to where I could see it, there was a bass and I could have made a fist and got it in his mouth. I lipped it and brought it in the boat.

Remember the scales we lost last week? I re-weighed them, and they went to 6.3 pounds. Actually the scales kept bouncing from 6.3 to 6.7 so I took the low end. Now I stayed in that one spot for about an hour and caught seven fish with none of them under two pounds. I didn't weigh every fish I caught but I'd guess my four bests and the hog would have bumped 15 pounds.

I returned them all to the lake. The fish quit biting about 11:30 a.m. and with the wind getting up I went home. My fish all came on a Blakemore Road Runner 1/4 oz. head with a 3.5 inch YUM Pulse Swimbait using a steady crank.

There are a few tweaks I add to my lures that seem to make them work a little better. After my run of big smallmouth, Tuesday I only caught one smallie among the seven fish.

Looks like it might be Friday before I go again. That's enough time for fish to move. I just hope they stay or don't move too far. Don't let these nice days go when they come up. You just might get you the biggest fish you have ever caught.

Keys to overcoming late-season duck calling challenges

By Lynn Burkhead
Special to the VA Leader

Waterfowlers, don't look now but the final days of the 2022-23 duck season are at hand.

That means that time is short and sweet, leading to one or two last hurrahs before the Quackerville party comes to an end for another year.

Even if the end-of-season ducks are tough and a bit call shy.

But that doesn't mean that end of January mallards and gadwalls are impossible to call in however.

What it does mean is that you have to adjust your calling, opting for the soft sell approach when a flock of Susie's and their greenhead suitors fly over the decoy spread.

How do you do that?

First of all, let the birds tell you what they want to hear on any given day.

"I'll call moderately at first and watch the reaction of the birds," says Jim Lillis, a longtime Sherman-based waterfowler and retired senior regional director for Ducks Unlimited.

"If they respond well to that, then I'll get after them. But if a flock or two peels off and acts call shy, then I'll back off and do a minimal amount of calling."

Another way to adjust your calling is to carry different calls on your lanyard.

I always carry a loud, open-water style acrylic call that lets me crank up the volume and sound off to distant flocks.

But I also carry another acrylic call that is designed for softer, in-close calling while still giving the sharp, clean sounds that the material is known for.

In addition to acrylic calls, there is also always a wooden call on my lanyard, one made of bois d'arc wood or cocobola that allows for mellower, raspier, softer sounds that late season ducks often want to hear.

One call that has an incredible ducky tone — with the right amount of volume — is an updated version of the old Yentzen double-reed.

Made of a polymer material and featuring a screw-in reed insert, the Sure-Shot Game Calls' Yentzen One is still one of the best calls I've ever blown.

How good is it? Charlie Holder's company actually sold out the Yentzen One when they first introduced it a few years ago.

I also like the RNT Mondo from the Rich-n-Tone duck calling crew in Stuttgart, Ark. it's a deep, raspy call that takes a little air to blow, but it's good on feed chuckles, short greeting sequences, and has more than enough power to reach out there too.

Finally, in addition to the above, I'm using my Primos pintail / wigeon /teal whistle more often these days.

Not only do those particular species respond well to such sounds but so do January mallards who have heard every highball, come-back call and feed chuckle that a standard issue duck call can make.

It may be the season's tail-end but that doesn't mean it's time to throw in the towel.

Adjust your calling techniques and a late season limit can still be yours.

Even at the very end of January.

For cold-water bass success, give these baits and techniques a try



By Lynn Burkhead
Special to the VA Leader

For many outdoors enthusiasts across Texomaland, the last couple of weeks in January and the first few days of February often prove to be the most trying days of the year.

Why? Because with the passage of deer season and with the current duck season winding down, most local hunting action is all but over with until the arrival of spring turkey season a few weeks down the road.

Not to mention the fact that the year's first solid wave of good bass fishing action is also a page or two away on the calendar.

Or is it?

According to three Texomaland bass fishing enthusiasts that I've known for a number of years, just because the water is cold right now doesn't mean that there isn't some good bass fishing action waiting to be discovered.

"I have always thought in the past that wintertime bass fishing is difficult and that you just can't catch fish," said Andrew Means of Denison. "(Because of that), I have typically stayed away from fishing during the cold winter season because of the frigid temperatures and the "rumors" that bass just don't feed well."

A canoe and kayak fisherman, Means has also avoided wintertime bass angling because of the techniques that he thought would be in play, fishing deep and very slow to try and catch a cold water bass.

"But I've learned (in recent years) that is not necessarily true," said Means with a smile.

What baits has he relied on?

"I have had a lot of luck catching fish this winter on Chatterbaits — or bladed jigs as some anglers call them — with swimbaits and flukes for trailers," said Means. "And I've also caught fish on spinnerbaits too. With both baits, most of my bites have come in fairly shallow water of three to eight feet."

The key for Means in winter has been where he fishes the Chatterbaits and spinnerbaits — around rocks, timber and grassy points — and the retrieve speed that he uses, generally a slower one.

"Bass still feed in the wintertime and they will still go shallow to find baitfish," he said. "You just have to slow down and sometimes get them to react to a bait by not burning it by them."

If Means has found his bass in shallow water by slowly retrieving a bladed jig or spinnerbait, fellow Denison angler Jason Blankenship, who is an aluminum Jon boat angler, finds his own fishing luck by using a different lure and technique.

"In the winter, I like to use a big swimbait, usually five inches — or possibly even bigger — depending on the size of the shad in the body of water that I am fishing," said Blankenship.

If he's going to err on swimbait size, it will likely be bigger rather than smaller since Blankenship notes that sizable bass don't feed very often in cold water. But when they do, the fish will be looking to maximize their energy expenditure by targeting larger baitfish that offer big protein-packed meals.

"I rig mine with a swimbait jig head, typically 1/2 to 3/4-ounces, depending on the depth that I am targeting," said Blankenship. "And I try to make a very long cast if I believe that the bass are on the bottom, like they often are when the water is really cold."

If the bass are hugging the lake's bottom contours, the Denison angler retrieves the swimbait very slowly to maintain as much bottom contact as possible.

Another bait that Blankenship likes to use in targeting wintertime bass is a jigging spoon, something that he will throw in and around boathouses on area lakes and reservoirs like Lake Texoma.

"You may have to hit a lot of different boathouses to find that one special one that is holding bass though," he said. "But if you can get one bass to bite, then you can usually fire up the (rest of the) school (that is holding there)."

Like the other two anglers referenced above, Denison's Chris Bobo is also an enthusiastic wintertime fisherman.

Especially when he is in his fiberglass bass boat rig and has his favorite wintertime bait tied on.

"One of my favorite choices during the colder months is the Alabama-rig," said Bobo, an enthusiastic regional tournament angler. "The A-Rig can be thrown with a variety of baits and gives you nearly unlimited options during a time (of year) when bass fishing can be slow."

Why does the Alabama-rig, or umbrella-rig as it is also known, work so well right now?

"Bass, being the opportunistic feeders that they are, they see not one but up to five baits swimming by with an A-rig and that can make the opportunity (to feed) irresistible," said Bobo.

"You can also piggy back these rigs, attaching them together to create larger bait (profiles) that mimic a school of baitfish," he added.

While there are several different versions of the A-rig out there on the market, the Denison angler likes to use the Strike King Titanium Umbrella Rig the most.

"This rig is (often a) key to my wintertime bass fishing success, given the added blades and titanium rods for when a fish does strike hard," said Bobo.

"The wires don't bend like others do, giving you an increased amount of casts versus your competition," he added. "That's because they may have to spend extra time fixing or bending the wires back into place on their A-rig after catching a fish."

For the trailer he puts on each hook, Bobo has a preference: "The bait I enjoy using with this rig is the Xcite Baits four-inch Shadnasty Swim Bait," he said.

"As for colors, I choose the color depending on the bait and water color of the reservoir that I'm fishing. Sexy Shad and Smoke Show in the Xcite Baits Shadnasty are my two favorites to throw (right now)."

To complete the A-rig with its accompanying swimbaits, the Denison angler uses a 1/8-ounce or a 3/16-ounce jighead for each link.

"This bait can be used shallow or deep," said Bobo. "Deep water guys tend to love these rigs due to their quick sinking speeds and the fact that they can cover 10 times more water than using a single bait such as a crankbait."

If there is a key in maximizing bass bites on the A-rig during the winter months, Bobo said that it is the need to fish the lure-contraption on the slower side of the spectrum.

"Use a low gear ratio reel, if needed," he said. "This will create more whip in the paddletail of the swimbait trailers, which will give your bait more action versus dragging them through the water too quickly.

"And use a heavy rod and heavier line than usual since this bait does weigh a lot," he added. "Someone new to this rig may even use braid until they are confident."

But any hassle in fishing the A-rig is quickly forgotten said Bobo.

"Why? Because it is sure to catch fish, even in tough, cold water conditions."

During a time of year when most bass anglers are succumbing to cabin fever, staying in and dreaming of good fishing action that they mistakenly believe to still be several weeks away.

And no matter how you like to fish — in a paddle craft, aboard a flat bottom Jon boat, or on the front deck of a bass boat rig — the wintertime bass fishing action can produce better results than you'd think, as long as you're willing to leave behind the warmth of a crackling fireplace.



When showing up at the Texas Capitol made a difference

By María Méndez
The Texas Tribune



Members of Austin's LGBTQ community gather on the steps of the Capitol to celebrate the anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall riots and protest the "bathroom bill" on June 28, 2017. After hundreds of people lobbied against it, that bill failed. Austin Price for The Texas Tribune

Cody Stephens, a Crosby High School senior, had planned to attend Tarleton State University on a football scholarship when he died of sudden cardiac arrest while asleep on his father's recliner on May 6, 2012.

Months later, when Scott Stephens realized an electrocardiogram — a noninvasive test of electrical activity in the heart — could have saved his son, he made it his mission to get more student-athletes screened.

It would take six years and four regular legislative sessions, but in 2019, the Texas Legislature passed a law that allows parents to opt for their children to get electrocardiograms as part of the physical exams required for student-athletes.

The Legislature moves slowly, and it's much easier for a bill to fail than to pass. But civic engagement and advocacy from members of the public can make all the difference in whether a bill passes.

"You can't just take a bill over there and expect it to pass the first time," said Scott Stephens, a real estate appraiser. "You got to kind of build your case. And you can't quit. It's not a sprint. It's a marathon."

Here are five times public input or attention changed the course of politics in the Texas Legislature.

A father works to detect heart problems among student-athletes

With the help of testifying doctors, coaches and parents, Scott Stephens began advocating for legislation to make heart screenings part of the physical exams required for student-athletes unless parents opted out.

In 2017, after two previous attempts, the legislation died after prolonged debate among state representatives. Former state Rep. Dan Huberty, R-Houston, who had filed the legislation, took to the House floor to make a plea to fellow lawmakers.

"And so tonight as we go home and think about what we've done, I would ask that you pray for the Stephens family and that we adjourn tonight in the memory of Cody Stephens," Huberty said.

After that impassioned speech, Huberty said he gained the support of Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Gov. Greg Abbott in making the legislation a priority for the next regular legislative session.

"That's really what it came down to, being able to explain why it's important," Huberty said. "And legislation like that is meaningful because it impacts lives and impacts kids' lives and impacts your constituents."

In 2019, it was the first bill filed by Huberty. That was also a turning point for Scott Stephens, who agreed that year to tweak the legislation to make heart screenings an opt-in for student-athletes.

Cody's Law passed, helping the Cody Stephens Foundation work with more Texas school districts to provide free or more affordable heart screenings.

"I wasn't gonna quit, and the state Legislature finally figured that out and helped me get it passed," Scott Stephens said.

Conservationists secure stable funding for state parks

In 2019, Texans voted overwhelmingly to enshrine in the Texas Constitution that all revenue from the sporting goods sales tax should fund state parks and historic sites.

It was the culmination of years of advocacy for Texas parks by conservationists like George Bristol.

The idea to fund parks with revenue from sales and use taxes on sporting goods wasn't new. In 1993, the Texas Legislature allowed all of that revenue to go to state parks and historic sites. But the Legislature often used some of those collections to balance the state budget or fund other programs, and state parks had trouble keeping up with maintenance and plans for projects under fluctuating budgets, Bristol said.

Advocates got the Legislature to provide all of the available sporting goods tax revenue to parks in 2015 and most of it in 2017, but they wanted a permanent solution.

So, in 2019, they pushed for a constitutional amendment, which requires two-thirds of votes from each chamber of the Legislature to be put on the ballot for final approval from voters.

By then, more environmental and recreational groups, sporting goods companies, local leaders and Texans had joined the cause.

"There were almost 100 groups that stood by the sporting goods tax legislation in 2019," Bristol recalled.

The advocates wrote letters, showed up to the Texas Capitol and got attention from the news media — all with one message.

"We had very strict orders that everybody would be for the entire bill," Bristol said. "It worked. They all got behind it, stayed behind it."

Former state Rep. John Cyrier, R-Lockhart, who authored the House version of the legislation, began advocating for the bill even before lawmakers gaveled in for the legislative session.

He got some of the most powerful Democrats and Republicans, including the chairs of the House appropriations and calendars committees, to champion the legislation through a compromise allowing the sporting goods revenue to be redirected toward other uses during an emergency if two-thirds of each chamber approved it.

He also convinced all other state representatives to sign on to the legislation. When he couldn't reach a fellow lawmaker, he got advocates and constituents in that person's district to call and draw attention to the legislation, he said.

"It's definitely a success story on how to push big legislation through," he said.

Parents reduce state tests for high school students

In the fall of 2012, Theresa Treviño got a notice about changes to the state's testing program from the principal of the Austin high school her son went to and her daughter was slated to attend.

High school students would soon be required to pass 15 state standardized tests, known as end-of-course exams, to graduate.

Treviño, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, teamed up with a few other moms who had legal experience and began researching how other states carried out state assessments. They found Texas' to be an outlier in the high number of tests it required.

So Treviño and the moms created the nonpartisan group Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment and began traveling across the state to inform parents of the changes and possible repercussions for students who failed tests.

They got a "groundswell" of parents to write to their legislators, Trevino said, and held stakeholder meetings that included educators and businesspeople.

"It just kind of got everyone within their own circles to meet and to talk about what it is that we were doing in our state and how this was affecting our students," Treviño said.

In the 2013 legislative session, the group met with elected officials and worked to find common ground with the chairs of the House and Senate education committees, who then introduced legislation to reduce the number of high-stakes tests and adjust curriculum requirements for graduation.

During hearings, students from across the state spoke before lawmakers. And as lawmakers hashed out differences to finalize the legislation, the group persisted.

"We were calling everybody we could think of," Treviño said. "We were slamming their phones."

In the end, lawmakers and the governor signed off on legislation that required only five end-of-course exams.

"We were amazed that we were able to succeed," Treviño said.

Laredoans create an international university

When Democratic state Sen. Judith Zaffirini first ran for office, one of her main motivations was to create a four-year university for Laredo. After regularly traveling about 240 miles to earn her doctoral degree from the University of Texas at Austin while working in Laredo, she joined many others in advocating for a local university.

"I didn't want Laredoans to have to work that hard to get a Ph.D.," she said. "And I wanted a regional university that would serve the region, but also attract people from other parts of the state and even other countries."

At the time, Laredo State University was deemed an upper-level "center" of education in Texas law. It was allowed to serve only juniors, seniors and master's students and faced budget cuts and rumors that lawmakers were considering closing it, Zaffirini said.

This galvanized hundreds of Laredoans who defended the university in 1986. And when Zaffirini was elected that year, she gave herself 10 years to pass legislation to make it a four-year university.

In 1987, she and other Laredo lawmakers succeeded in removing the term "center" in reference to the university and established it as a more permanent institution under the governance of the Texas Legislature.

But it would take six more years for Zaffirini to pass legislation allowing the university to serve freshmen and sophomores, beginning in 1995. That legislation renamed the campus to Texas A&M International University, opened up more funding opportunities and allowed it to eventually serve doctoral students.

"The people of Laredo and nearby area were very, very organized and very effective in advocating for that bill," Zaffirini said. "Groups went to Austin repeatedly to testify to meet with members. They were informed, they were prepared and they were persuasive."

LGBTQ advocates protest anti-trans "bathroom bill"

In 2017, conservative Texas Republicans, including Patrick, pushed for a "bathroom bill" to regulate which public restrooms transgender people could use.

It wasn't surprising to Lou Weaver and other transgender Texans who had seen voters in Houston in 2015 reject a local anti-discrimination ordinance after its conservative opponents claimed it would have allowed men to enter women's restrooms.

By 2017, Weaver had worked to create a more politically active and visible trans community in Houston and the state with organizations like Equality Texas.

In February of that year, Weaver — then the transgender programs coordinator for Equality Texas — held an event to help trans people and parents of trans people learn how to share their stories with news media and lobby lawmakers.

And as lawmakers began to discuss a bathroom bill, over a hundred people showed up to the Capitol to oppose it during a lobby day. At the next lobby day, hundreds of people joined.

"It just became like a snowball," Weaver said. "And people just kept coming back."

People at the Capitol visited with lawmakers who were willing to talk while Texans elsewhere contacted their local elected officials. Public officials, police chiefs, major corporations and tourism officials also opposed the bill, cautioning that it could distract police from combating violent crime and hurt the Texas economy.

During hearings for the legislation, transgender Texans, families and allies gave hours of emotional testimony, warning that such a bill would endanger already vulnerable Texans.

Rachel Gonzales, one of the parents who had trained with Weaver, waited up to 14 hours with her 6-year-old trans daughter and baby to testify in a hearing and went back several times.

"It was brutal," she said. "It was also one of the most incredible days because it brought so many community members together and really got them invested in the fight."

That determination gave Weaver hope, as did seeing a lawmaker who had been on the fence express support for transgender Texans.

"Knowing that our narratives had been able to change and influence a senator's mind so she had the knowledge to know why it was so important that this bathroom bill didn't pass, it was one of the most amazing moments," he said.

In the House, then-Speaker Joe Straus, R-San Antonio, held steadfast, blocking the legislation from moving forward. And despite a last-ditch attempt to pass the bathroom bill during a special session, the legislation died.

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