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TABLE OF CONTENTS

05 KATIE RICHARDS' JOURNEY IN
THE OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU
AND AGRICULTURE ADVOCACY

07 OPSU ADVOCATES FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION AT STATE CAPITOL

08 PANHANDLE STATE LAUNCHES
COLLEGE ADVISORY BOARDS

13 ANNUAL PAUL FARRELL
MEMORIAL ART AUCTION

14 THE SUCCESS STORY OF
THE OPSU EQUESTRIAN
TEAM



KATIE

RICHARDS

JOURNEY IN THE OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU AND AGRICULTURE ADVOCACY

The Oklahoma Panhandle has always been home to Senior Katie Richards and her family, who have been involved with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau for over 30 years. Katie serves as the Texas County Board President and District 1 Representative on the Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee (YF&R) Committee, ranging from the Panhandle to Woodward. “Agriculture is a very important industry in Oklahoma, especially in the Panhandle,” stated Katie. “By combining the voices and efforts of agriculturists across all 77 counties, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau gives members a platform to be heard by lawmakers who are often removed from the issues facing agriculture.”

Katie recently attended the 2024 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Leadership Conference that kicked off the legislative session in Oklahoma City. While there, members heard an update from The Secretary of Agriculture, Blayne Arthur. As well as programs on how to successfully talk to legislators at the capitol.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is a grassroots organization dedicated to advocating for agriculture around the state and at the State Capitol to achieve educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement and, thereby, to promote national well-being. The YF&R and Collegiate Farm Bureau programs engage young agriculturists and give them a voice in the organization.

“Katie Richards is a prime example of the leadership and dedication that defines our university. She lives the values we hold and sets the bar high for her fellow students,” remarked University President Dr. Julie Dinger. “We see those values across our state’s agricultural community, especially from Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur. I’m thankful for her positive influence in Oklahoma agriculture and especially for serving as a role model for our students.”

Growing up in the small town of Adams, Oklahoma, Katie knew from an early age that agriculture would always be a part of her. This stands true as she will graduate in May with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Business with a minor in Animal Science. Katie is also a member of the Crops Judging Team at OPSU. After graduation, she plans to assist with her family farm and ranch operations and start a cow/calf operation later this year. Her journey is not just about personal achievement but also about carrying forward a legacy of farming and ranching that has been

ingrained in her family for generations, specifically through their work with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau.

For Katie, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau is more than just an organization; it’s a lifeline connecting her to the heartbeat of rural communities and the corridors of power in the state capitol. With her father serving on the Texas County Board and her mother chairing the Women’s Leadership Committee, Katie’s commitment to agricultural advocacy runs in her blood. Her involvement in the Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee amplifies her voice and empowers a new generation of agriculturists to make their mark on the industry.

Thad Doye, Executive Director for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau, stated, “Katie is a great volunteer for Oklahoma Farm Bureau and agriculture. Katie is always ready to tell her agriculture story not only at Farm Bureau events but also at the Capitol. The Richards family does a great job for the industry.”

Department Head of Animal Science, Dr. Crystal Tolle, commented, “Katie is an exceptional student with roots in the Panhandle and a strong family background in agriculture that will cultivate not just crops/livestock, but a profound understanding and passion for the agricultural industry, a reverence for hard work, and the seeds of success deeply embedded in her soul. I am very proud of Katie, and I know she will succeed in her future endeavors.”

At the core of Katie’s journey lies a deep-seated belief in the power of education and community. Choosing OPSU wasn’t just about academics for her; it was about finding a home that mirrored her values. “OPSU fulfilled that with the small class sizes and instructors who take an interest in every individual student,” she stated. As she prepares to graduate and embark on the next chapter, her story inspires the next generation of agriculturalists. **P**

“Katie is a great volunteer for Oklahoma Farm Bureau and agriculture. Katie is always ready to tell her agriculture story not only at Farm Bureau events but also at the Capitol.”

— Thad Doye, Executive Director, Oklahoma Farm Bureau



Photographed left to right: Dean Laura Hutchinson, Omar Lira, Lesley Carillo, Regina Medina, Alan Anchando, Austin Jacobs, Leslie de la Fuentes, Stephanie Awadje, Alsya Tim-Oseghe, and Dr. Dinger

OPSU

ADVOCATES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE OKLAHOMA CAPITOL



Photographed left to right: Regina Medina, Lesley Carillo, and Alan Anchando

Students and staff members from Oklahoma Panhandle State University

recently attended Higher Education Day at the Oklahoma State Capitol, a significant event dedicated to advocating for the importance of higher education in the state. This event provided an essential platform for OPSU representatives to articulate their perspectives, showcase the university's accomplishments, and seek support from policymakers

At Higher Education Day, representatives from OPSU, including students, staff, and administrators, joined counterparts from various institutions across the state to engage with legislators and address key issues affecting higher education in Oklahoma. Topics of discussion ranged from funding challenges to workforce development initiatives aimed at enhancing the state's higher education landscape.

Dean of Student Affairs Laura Hutchinson remarked on how beneficial events like this are for students. "It was a pleasure to take a diverse group of student leaders to Higher Ed Day. They were engaged by our state representatives and senators and learned about the process of how decisions get made in our state form of government. They were able to hear from several speakers, including the governor and our Chancellor of Higher Education, about the future of education in Oklahoma. I know the students found that inspiring."

OPSU student Stephanie Awadje remarked on how the event inspired her to strive for excellence and never settle for mediocrity. "One of my takeaways from Higher Ed Day was the impactful message shared by Dante Specht, one of the college student speakers. He said, 'If you don't like how the table is set, turn over the table.' He also reminded us that 'the tassel is worth the hassle.'"

A central focus of OPSU's advocacy efforts was the crucial need for adequate funding for public universities like OPSU. Sufficient funding enables institutions to invest in academic programs, facilities, and student services. OPSU representatives emphasized the necessity of sustained and predictable funding to ensure the university's ability to provide affordable and accessible education to students in the Panhandle region.

Furthermore, OPSU identified its pivotal role in workforce development and preparing students for success in today's competitive job market. Through innovative programs, experiential learning opportunities, and partnerships with industry leaders, OPSU equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in their chosen fields. By prioritizing higher education funding, policymakers can help bridge the skills gap and foster economic growth in Oklahoma.

OPSU's presence at Higher Education Day exemplified the University's dedication to advocating for policies supporting students, faculty, and the broader higher education community in Oklahoma. As Oklahoma continues to navigate the evolving landscape of higher education, events like Higher Education Day serve as critical platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and advocacy. Through continued engagement and support, stakeholders can work together to ensure that higher education remains accessible, affordable, and impactful for students and communities across the state.

University President Dr. Jule Dinger expressed her pride and appreciation for the students' active involvement in advocating for higher education. "It was a great day for OPSU at the Capitol," Dr. Dinger remarked, "I was so proud of our students stepping up as advocates for higher education." **P**



PANHANDLE STATE

LAUNCHES COLLEGE ADVISORY BOARDS TO ADVANCE WORKFORCE READINESS



To promote workforce readiness for Oklahoma Panhandle State University graduates, the University announces the introduction of three College Advisory Boards as part of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and its strategic initiative, Blueprint 2030, which aims to produce workforce-ready graduates. In each of the three OPSU colleges, these advisory boards are comprised of employers and professionals working in the areas the colleges serve.

With Blueprint 2030 in mind, the advisory boards directly pinpoint the need to produce workforce-ready graduates by developing communication between the University and employers. As stated in the Blueprint 2030 Strategic Plan document, “Require every academic division to develop and meet with an external advisory council.”

These advisory boards will align academic programs with regional workforce needs. “I’m thankful for the forward-thinking of our Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in crafting Blueprint 2030. These advisory boards will provide an intentional space for us to collaborate to improve student outcomes and strengthen our relationships with area

workforce leaders,” stated Dr. Julie Dinger, University President.

The College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing, the College of Arts and Education, and the College of Business and Technology have sought members from all facets and industries in the area to join these advisory boards. By connecting industry leaders, faculty, and students, OPSU aims to deliver impactful education.

Tracy Kincannon, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing, hosted over 20 local community and business leaders at their advisory council meeting on February 20th. “Attendees heard about the current state of the educational programs in COASN. The educational leaders at OPSU shared what skills they are instilling in graduates and community leaders shared what programs and skills they see as most promising for the future growth of our area,” Kincannon stated.

Dr. Charla Lewis, Dean of the College of Arts and Education, identified how diverse the COAE’s programs are and how their board will reflect that in fields such as educators, attorneys, art gallery managers, social workers, law enforcement officers, and reporters. She stated, “What I foresee as the purpose for

our advisory board is to get guidance on the current skills that employers want from our graduates. We can then make changes to our curriculum based on this guidance. If our students don’t need a skill we’ve been teaching them or need to add something, we will modify our programs to reflect current practices. We’ll make the necessary changes to serve our stakeholders.” The COAE Advisory Board met on February 28th at 6:30PM in Hamilton Hall and also had a virtual option.

Amanda Beasley, Interim Dean of the College of Business and Technology, commented, “I look forward to working with local professionals to ensure that the COBT programs and curriculum are relevant in today’s market. Getting insight from those in positions to hire OPSU graduates will be invaluable.” The COBT Advisory Board met on February 27th at 6PM in Hamilton Hall 127 and with a virtual option. Industry leaders in the fields of management, marketing, information technology, banking, and accounting were all represented on this Advisory Board.

For more information, please contact the specific College Dean. For the College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing, email Tracy Kincannon at tracy.kincannon@opsu.edu. For the College of

Arts and Education, email Dr. Charla Lewis at charla.lewis@opsu.edu. For the College of Business and Technology, email Amanda Beasley at amanda.beasley@opsu.edu. **P**

“I’m thankful for the forward-thinking of our Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in crafting BluePrint 2030. These advisory boards will provide an intentional space for us to collaborate to improve student outcomes and strengthen our relationships with area workforce leaders.”

— Dr. Julie Dinger, University President



OPSU

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND EDUCATION INTRODUCES INNOVATIVE HYFLEX COURSES FOR CONCURRENT STUDENTS

OPSU’S College of Arts and Education is proud to announce the launch of HyFlex Courses, an initiative aimed at providing concurrent students with flexible options to earn college credits without the need to physically attend on campus, while still experiencing real-time instructor and classroom engagement.

HyFlex Courses use a hybrid/flexible course design, offering students the freedom to tailor their participation to their individual needs. The HyFlex Courses will be available during the 2nd 8-weeks of the Spring 2024 semester, starting March 11th. Courses will include Salsa Dancing, taught by Dr. Edwin Aybar and Speech Communications taught by Professor Tony Hardman. Students can choose to attend face-to-face classes on campus or participate in live online synchronous sessions.

This flexible approach empowers concurrent students to enroll in college coursework while seamlessly participating from a distance or on campus, aligning with their unique needs and preferences.

“We understand the diverse needs of our concurrent students, and the HyFlex Courses are designed to provide them with flexibility and accessibility,” said Dr. Charla Lewis, Dean of the College of Arts and Education. “This initiative underscores our commitment to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to pursue higher education in a way that suits their individual circumstances.”

For additional information on the HyFlex Courses for Concurrent students, please email Dean Lewis at charla.lewis@opsu.edu or Associate Dean of COAE, Rebekah Wagenbach at Rebekah.wagenbach@opsu.edu. **P**



OPSU STUDENT

FRANK MUTANDI SERVES AS STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE FOR BECKER

Oklahoma Panhandle State University is committed to empowering tomorrow’s leaders, like student Frank Mutandi, a senior who is now a proud student representative for Becker and their University Partnership program. Becker is a leading provider of CPA exam preparation and continuing professional education. In this role, he serves as a liaison between the university’s accounting department and Becker, facilitating access to valuable resources for accounting students and instructors. “After engaging in discussions with the Becker team and sharing my vision, we reached an agreement for me to represent Becker here at OPSU,” stated Frank.

Originally from Harare, Zimbabwe, Frank has distinguished himself as a standout student leader committed to academic excellence and community engagement. Frank’s academic pursuits center around the Accounting Industry. He stated, “I aspire to secure a position within a reputable accounting firm where I can dedicate myself to obtaining my CPA license while contributing to the organization’s success.” His journey at OPSU began with an interest in soccer, which led to a conversation with the former head coach, Griffin Bailey. This dialogue fueled his athletic ambitions and inspired his academic and leadership endeavors.”

Amanda Beasley, Interim Dean for the College of Business and Technology, stated, “Frank’s personality and dedication were why I nominated him for this role. I am excited to see where Frank takes this

partnership. He already wants to implement some great ideas into the COBT accounting department. I am anxious to see where his leadership takes him after graduation.”

Frank has ambitions to create an Accounting Club at OPSU. “My goal for the accounting club is to create a lively community where students can do well and learn about all the different jobs in accounting. I want to make a place where students can do their best in school, learn how to grow professionally, and meet new people,” he stated. “I plan to arrange fun events, workshops, and talks by experts to get students excited about careers in accounting. I hope to motivate more students to consider accounting a great career choice and help them learn what they need to succeed.”

As Frank prepares to transition into the workforce, his contributions to OPSU exemplify the university’s commitment to fostering student leadership and academic excellence. His dedication to professional development and community engagement is a model for his peers and future generations of students. **P**



DOMINATED AT THE SHOOTING SPORTS SHOOTOUT HOSTED BY OSU

The OPSU Shooting Sports Team represented the University at the recent Oklahoma State University Shootout in Stillwater, Oklahoma, held on March 2 and 3. Sophomore and Nationally ranked team member, Emily Robertson placed High Overall in the Women's Division, 1st in Women's Skeet, and 1st in Double Trap. Emily stated, "Going into Nationals, there are always some pre-shoot jitters, but I know the boys and I will be hitting the range for a lot of extra practice before we leave, and we can work on mechanics and our game."

Also at the OSU match, Junior Trent Downey earned 3rd place overall for the competition. Downey's skill and dedication were evident throughout the event, contributing significantly to the team. Downey stated, "Now we must prepare and get ready to shoot in the biggest shoot of the year, and I am very excited to see what we will accomplish as a team."

Coach Tell Dixon stated, "I am incredibly proud of the work the Shooting Sports Team has put in this season and as we get ready for Nationals. This has been a good season with a few challenges, but overall, the team has worked hard to overcome and keep improving." With the OSU Shootout in the books, the team looks forward to upcoming events and opportunities to represent Oklahoma Panhandle State University nationally. **P**



Photographed: Emily Robertson



A TIME TO CELEBRATE ART AND COMMUNITY AND THE ANNUAL PAUL FARRELL MEMORIAL ART AUCTION

The OPSU Art Department hosted the Annual Paul Farrell Memorial Art Auction on Friday, March 1, 2024, at 6 PM at the Pickle Creek Event Center in Guymon. For years, the Paul Farrell Memorial Art Auction has been a cornerstone event for OPSU, bringing together artists, alums, students, and art enthusiasts from across the region. Named in honor of the esteemed artist and educator Paul Farrell, this Auction is a tribute to his passion for art and dedication to nurturing artistic talent.

Paul Farrell was a local artist who had been painting, sculpting, and woodworking before being diagnosed with melanoma in one of his eyes. He lost an eye, and his wife encouraged him to take courses at OPSU to regain depth perception, a vital tool for artists. Paul began taking classes and, in his quiet way, would impart wisdom to the students he was around. When he passed, a group of students organized the Auction in his memory.

At its heart, the Annual Paul Farrell Memorial Art Auction is an opportunity to showcase exceptional artwork and a means of giving back to the students. With 50 percent of the proceeds going directly to the participating artists, the Auction provides a platform for local talent to gain recognition and support for their craft. The remaining 50 percent of the proceeds are allocated towards scholarships, awards, and departmental equipment expenses within the OPSU Art Department.

Dr. Ryan Blanton, Vice President for Advancement, stated, "We are so thankful for our community and sponsors for showing continued support for our University and the arts in our region. Our new art department leadership brought new ideas to this long-standing Art Auction in the Oklahoma Panhandle, and we look forward to its continued growth and success."

This investment in the future of art education ensures aspiring artists have access to resources and opportunities that will enable their professional growth and development. **P**



EQUESTRIAN

TEAM SUCCESS STORY AT OPSU

The OPSU Equestrian Team has made waves in the collegiate equestrian world. Under the guidance of Coach Kacey Ward, the team has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from a modest group of riders to a formidable force in just two short years.

Coach Kacey Ward inherited a team with only one returning member in 2022. However, her dedication and expertise cultivated an environment that attracted new talent and nurtured existing riders. The team has flourished, growing from an average of four students to an impressive cohort of fifteen dedicated riders.

Tracy Kincannon, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing, stated, “Kacey’s dedication and passion to the Equestrian Team shows throughout all she does, tirelessly devoting herself to the team’s success. Her commitment shines through in the countless hours she invests, ensuring the program grows. Kacey has undeniably earned her place as a leader in not only collegiate equestrian but also under the College of Agriculture, Science, and Nursing, setting a standard of excellence that inspires all who have the privilege of working with her.”

Despite numerous challenges, the team has consistently demonstrated its prowess in competitions. They showcased their skills throughout the season at seven shows, consistently placing above 5th overall. Notably, they clinched the 3rd position as a team on three occasions, a testament to their hard work and determination.

As the team reflects on their achievements, they bid farewell to their first graduating seniors in 2024: Matt Tullock, Brett Coffman, and Jayelynn Powell. Powell made history as the team’s inaugural qualifier for the regional championship under Coach Ward’s guidance, securing an impressive 3rd overall position in ranch riding.

“Mrs. Ward has made a tremendous impact as our Equestrian Team Coach. Her commitment and dedication have translated into growth and success for our athletes and the program,” commented Dr. Julie Dinger, University President. “She is committed to our students’ growth and success. Kacey’s leadership has elevated our Equestrian program to new heights, and I am so proud of her.”

Looking towards the future, the OPSU Equestrian Team remains poised for continued success. With three team members on the brink of qualifying for the 2025 regional championship, they are poised to build upon their achievements and set new milestones. Both academically and athletically, they remain steadfast in their pursuit of excellence, maintaining an impressive average GPA of 3.0.

Beyond the arena, the OPSU Equestrian Team exemplifies the spirit of camaraderie and dedication. As they aim towards new horizons, the Oklahoma Panhandle State University Equestrian Team continues to grow and be a shining example of passion, determination, and triumph in collegiate equestrian sports. **P**



BASKETBALL

CONCLUDES THE 2023-2024 SEASON

Under the leadership of Head Coach Charles Belt in his inaugural season at OPSU, the Men’s Basketball team faced challenges but demonstrated promise for the future. While finishing below initial expectations, the team highlighted the remarkable senior, Joe Greaves, who contributed significantly to the Aggies during his three years at OPSU.

In his senior season, Greaves emerged as the team’s leading rebounder and second-highest scorer, averaging an impressive 12.2 points and 6.2 rebounds per game. His accuracy from beyond the arc, shooting 36% from 3pt land, and starting every game this season, made him a key player for the Aggies.

Two standout players from the team, Fred Robinson and Amaree Brown, were named to the All-Sooner Athletic Conference teams. Robinson, a sophomore, earned Honorable Mention, leading the Aggies with 17.3 points per game and showcasing a 41% shooting accuracy from the field. Freshman Amaree Brown made an impactful debut, securing a spot on the All-Freshman team, averaging 11 points, 3.5 rebounds, and 1.7 assists per game.

Reflecting on the season, Head Coach Charles Belt expressed optimism about the team’s future, stating, “This was without a doubt the toughest year for me as a Head Coach. The Sooner Athletic Conference is elite and gave me the opportunity to see how the best of the best build their teams, style of play, and approach each game. As much as it pains me to say... I needed this year as a Head Coach to unlock what it really truly takes to be successful at this high of a level. I look forward to using the lessons learned in such a tough year to develop our current players and properly assemble a team that’s capable of competing in the best NAIA conference in the country. Go Aggies”

The Women’s Basketball team, led by Head Coach Maria Wiltzius, experienced a season of ups and downs. Despite the challenges, the team exhibited resilience, with lone senior Sierra Tate leading in scoring (9.4 points per game) and assists (2.1 per game). Jana Radovanovic, a standout player, was named Honorable Mention in the All-Sooner Athletic Conference. Radovanovic showcased her versatility, averaging 7.8 points, 5.6 rebounds, and ranking 7th in the conference with 23 blocked shots.

Head Coach Maria Wiltzius said she looks forward to getting her team together this summer and rebuilding from where she started, “I came into this year two days before the first conference game, we ended up playing a lot of tough teams, and the girls could not have dealt with everything better than they did. They navigated the transition and came to practice ready to get better every day and played super hard in games. Now I have a good base of a program to build off of. I want to bring some new girls in, and I want to be able to compete to win games next year. I’m already looking forward to our next season, and I want to get this women’s basketball program to be a spot people know about.”

As both teams look toward the future, OPSU anticipates a period of growth, development, and renewed competitiveness in the upcoming seasons. **P**



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READY TO BE
AN AGGIE?



#wearepanhandle