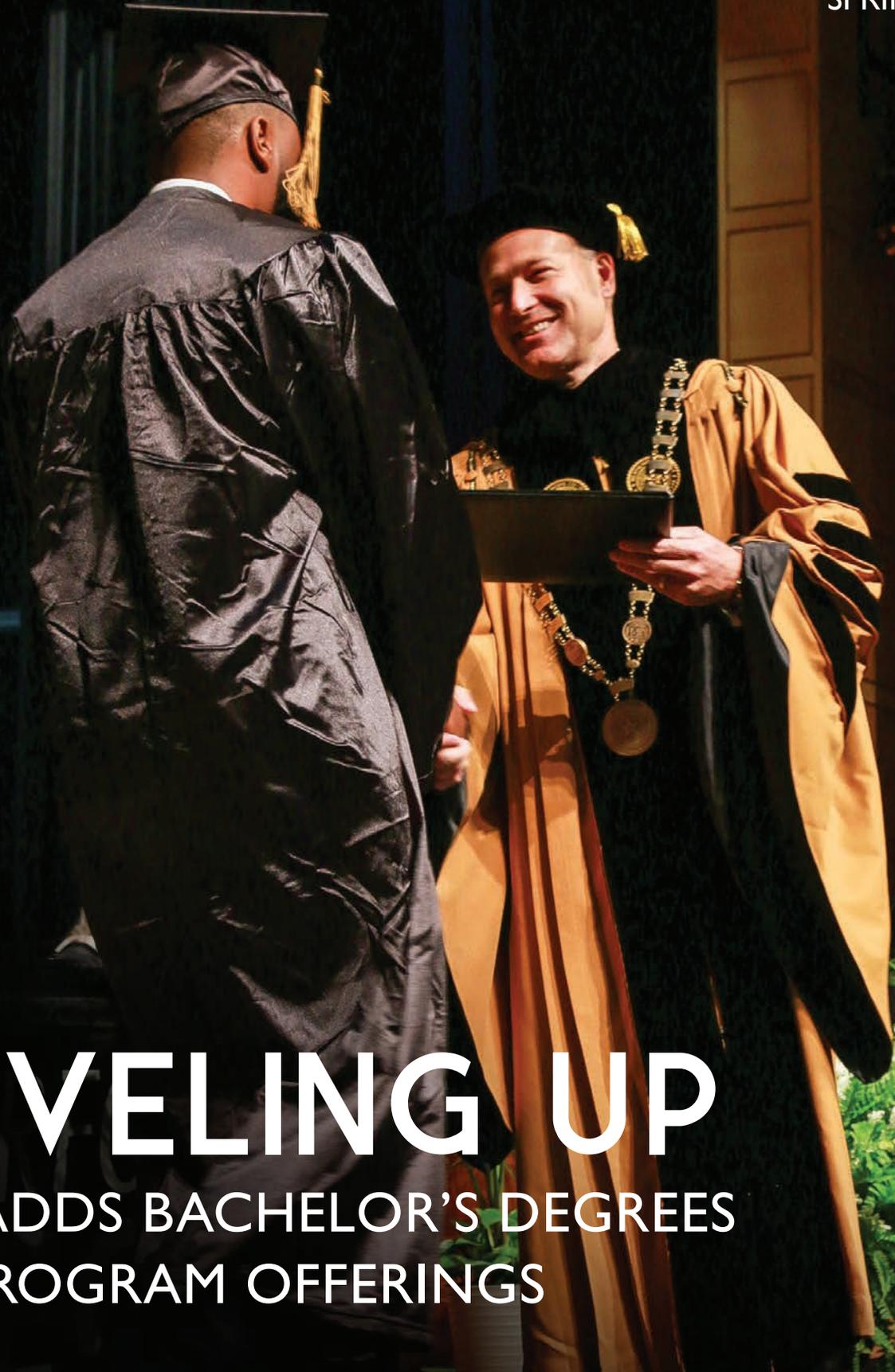


THE HILLTOP

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF WEATHERFORD COLLEGE

Volume XX : Issue I

SPRING 2020



LEVELING UP

WC ADDS BACHELOR'S DEGREES
TO PROGRAM OFFERINGS

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thank you to everyone who made our sesquicentennial year such a huge success! Dozens of community events throughout the year appropriately celebrated our distinguished institutional past. From the amazing success of the Bell Ringers' Ball to the incredible fundraising efforts of the Weatherford College Foundation, it was a truly historic year.

Now that we have appropriately celebrated our institutional past, it is time to look forward... and what a bright future awaits Weatherford College! We will begin offering our Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program this August. Additional bachelor's degrees in organizational leadership and technology are in the planning and approval stages. Our award-winning academic programs are expanding at a rapid pace.

Weatherford College is also charting new territory in the fine arts. WC recently became only the sixth community college in Texas to earn the prestigious official designation as an All-Steinway Institution. We beat institutions like Baylor, Texas Tech, and the University of North Texas in the race to become an All-Steinway Institution. Our international piano competition is drawing world-class classical pianists from around the world and raising our institutional image in the process.

And finally, we continue to build on the long tradition of athletic excellence at Weatherford College. As of the time of this writing, our baseball team is ranked first in conference play and our women's basketball team just completed a 22-9 season. We plan to add artificial turf to Roger Williams Ballpark and Stuart Field over the next two summers. Our rodeo team has placed student athletes in the College National Finals Rodeo (CNFR) in Casper, Wyoming, for 13 consecutive years and produced several national champions in the process! As we continue to grow, we have a four-year plan to bring golf and tennis back to WC and to add volleyball for the first time.

Weatherford College is no longer the small, rural college it once was. We are an emerging international college. We currently have students enrolled from 29 different countries from across the world. WC has produced over two dozen Grammy Award winning artists. We have sent several dozen student athletes to the pros. Our academic programs continue to win prestigious awards. Our expectation is to have excellence in academics, excellence in agriculture, excellence in the arts and excellence in athletics. We will have excellence in everything we do!



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COVER STORY LEVELING UP

WC ADDS BACHELOR'S DEGREES TO PROGRAM OFFERINGS

by Crystal Woerly

For most of its 150-year history, Weatherford College has focused on providing a variety of two-year degrees with the anticipation of students entering the workforce upon graduation or transferring to a four-year institution.

That changes this fall with the addition of WC's first bachelor's degree program.

"By now offering bachelor's degrees, Weatherford College is responding to community demand for a high quality education at an affordable price," said Dr. Tod Allen Farmer, WC president. "Bachelor's degrees can now be earned at Weatherford College for a fraction of the price of a university-based education."

In June 2017, Governor Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 2118 granting community colleges the ability to offer bachelor's degrees

in nursing and other specialized areas. A year later, WC administrators took on the task of developing and seeking approval and accreditation for a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing degree.

After a lengthy application process, WC's BSN program is now taking applications for the first 30-student cohort scheduled to start classes in Fall 2020.

"By offering this program we are assisting RNs by increasing opportunities for advancement as well as the ability to work in top-100 hospitals that hire BSNs only," said Kathy Boswell, dean of health and human sciences. "This will provide opportunities for them to move into leadership roles and provide for pay increases. Overall, this will increase the quality of healthcare in our community."

The final step to granting this new degree is accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. College administrators completed the required inquiry to SACSCOC in February and await an answer this June.

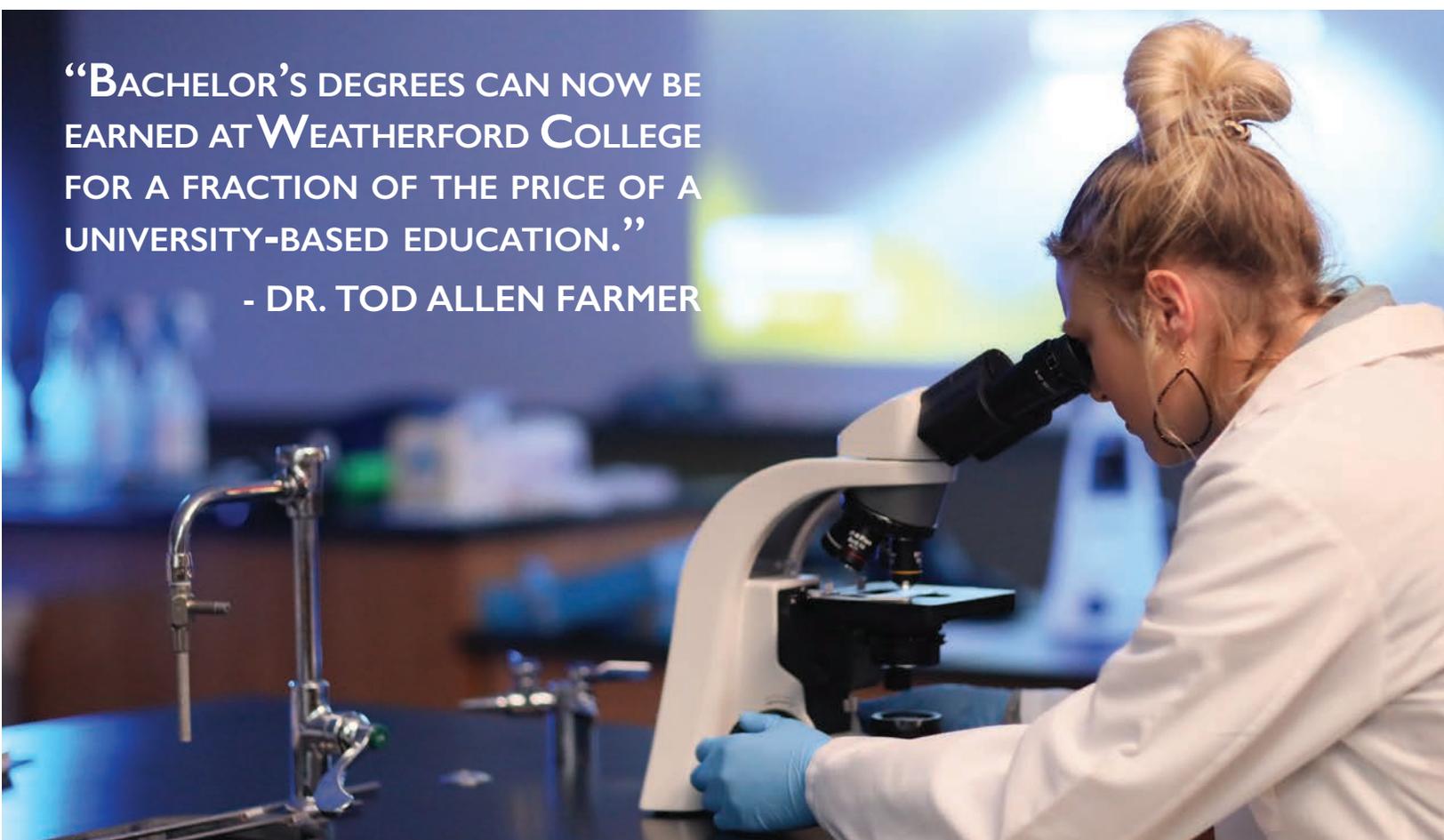
Upon final SACSCOC approval, WC will be the fourth Texas community college with a BSN program and the first approved to offer the courses online. The program consists of nine courses and can be completed in as little as one year.

With the BSN program on track, the WC Board of Trustees then set their sights on a second bachelor's degree in December – a Bachelor's of Applied Arts and Science in Organizational Leadership.

continues with Leveling Up on page 7.

"BACHELOR'S DEGREES CAN NOW BE EARNED AT WEATHERFORD COLLEGE FOR A FRACTION OF THE PRICE OF A UNIVERSITY-BASED EDUCATION."

- DR. TOD ALLEN FARMER





OCTOBER TO DECEMBER SESQUICENTENNIAL EVENTS



Weatherford College concluded its 150th anniversary celebration with events celebrating the college's history, achievements and community.

1 & 2. The WC rodeo and agriculture programs hosted a reunion and rodeo event on Oct. 19 at the Parker County Sheriff's Posse grounds featuring live entertainment by WC rodeo alumni including Chance Danison, Hadley Butler and Rowdy Decker.

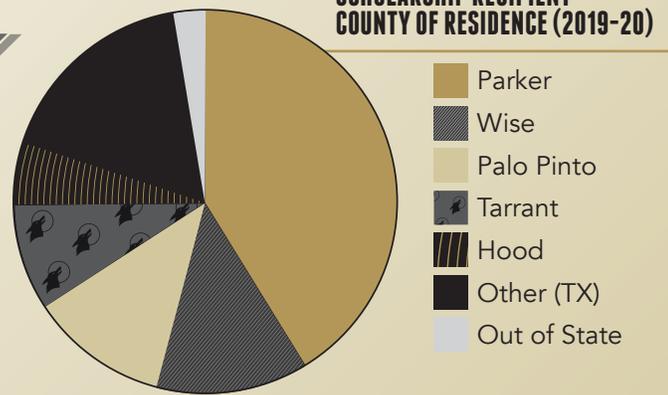
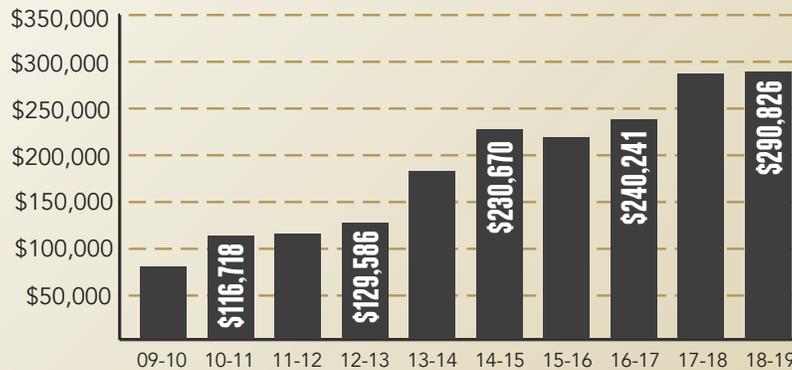
3. On Nov. 3, Jon Vandagriff spoke at First United Methodist Church about the college's history and roots in the Methodist Church. Vandagriff authored the sesquicentennial history book "Weatherford College: The First 150 Years."

4 & 5. The highlight of the 150th celebration was The Bell Ringers' Ball at Ridgela Country Club on Nov. 9. Echoing the first Bell Ringers' Ball held in the same location 25 years earlier, the event was a celebration of the college's history and exciting future.

6. On Dec. 14, a family holiday party was hosted in Texas Hall for college employees and their families. Santa Claus was in attendance and spent one-on-one time with the kids listening to their Christmas wishes and reading to them.

7 & 8. In addition to the college's 150th anniversary, Phi Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa celebrated its 90th anniversary with a combined induction ceremony and reunion. Phi Theta Kappa is the official honor society for two-year colleges.

SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS



46% OF SCHOLARSHIP APPLICANTS RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP.

WC FOUNDATION RAISES \$1 MILLION IN 2019, SURPASSES \$10 MILLION IN NET ASSETS

After a stellar 2019, the Weatherford College Foundation has crossed into uncharted territory. In their meeting in February, the foundation’s board of directors learned that not only had they raised more than \$1 million in the 2019 calendar year, but that the non-profit corporation’s net assets had surpassed \$10 million for the first time in history.

The foundation raised \$1,025,987 in 2019, buoyed by increased awareness from the college’s sesquicentennial, the successful All-Steinway campaign and an influx of new permanent scholarship endowments raised by Bob Glenn, foundation president. In addition to those

factors, the strong financial market helped to grow the WCF’s net assets to more than \$10.3 million as of Dec. 31.

“2019 was a banner year for Weatherford College in fundraising for both scholarships and other campus projects,” Glenn said. “New donor support as well as continued support from established donors resulted in tremendous growth of our resources, and the excitement about the future of our college continues into a new year!”

The foundation awarded more than \$290,000 in student scholarships in the 2018-19 academic year, a record, and is poised to approach \$300,000 in scholarships in the current academic year.

In addition to actively seeking donors for new student scholarships, the foundation will continue to support the college in other ways, including an upcoming campaign to raise funds for artificial turf for Stuart Field and Roger Williams Ballpark, along with other projects that may arise.

“Passing the \$10 million mark in net assets is a historic accomplishment for the foundation,” said Dr. Tod Allen Farmer, college president. “I am so very grateful for the work of foundation president Bob Glenn, for our entire foundation board and for all our generous donors. It is a great time to be a Coyote!”

ALUMNI AWARDS LUNCHEON

FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 11:30 A.M.
Texas Hall, Alkek Fine Arts Center

JOIN US TO RECOGNIZE THE FOLLOWING:

- Dr. Tod Allen Farmer, Alumnus of the Year
- Dr. Jeanine Irby, Distinguished Alumna
- Dr. Thomas MacKenzie, Distinguished Alumnus

Tickets: \$20 in advance, \$25 on event day
Please make a reservation with Evelyn Payne:
817-598-6273 or epayne@wc.edu



WC ALUMNA FIGHTS HUMAN TRAFFICKING

by Rick Mauch

Seven years ago, Clarin Gniffke's eyes were opened to a tragic scenario that changed her life forever.

Now, the former Weatherford College student (2009-11) is a leading advocate to save as many as she can from the terror of human trafficking as she works with the North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NTCAHT) - a group of organizations and individuals that provide health, counseling, legal and case management services in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.

"I attended one of the monthly meetings and met a whole host of people working in a united front to eradicate this issue in North Texas," Gniffke recalled. "I was inspired by the non-profits, law enforcement officers, attorneys and health care providers who wanted to learn from each other, help each other and ultimately create a seamless process to carry survivors from discovery to healing."

She has been a member of NTCAHT for seven years and the Public Awareness Committee co-chair for the past three years.

"Clarin is an integral part of the NTCAHT," said Joy Brooks, NTCAHT awareness co-chair with Gniffke. "Her advocacy efforts have brought awareness to the problem of human trafficking here in Texas. She has fought for policies to change both on a state and federal level."

Gniffke works with the NTCAHT Executive Board to plan canvassing events and an annual press conference during Human Trafficking Awareness month (January) that highlights the work of an exceptional individual or organization. So far, she said the Champion of Freedom Award has honored individuals and groups like Texas Governor Greg Abbott, the Dallas and Fort Worth Police Departments and EarthX, an international nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to educating and inspiring people and organizations to take action towards a more sustainable future worldwide.

"The most rewarding part of the annual press conference is being able to award higher education scholarships to area survivors who are nominated by their case managers to pursue certifications, a GED or attend college," Gniffke said. "NTCAHT has partnered with the Fraternal Order of Eagles and the North Texas Hotel Association to raise funds for these scholarships, and they are truly life-changing for the survivors."

In January, Gniffke was invited to attend the White House Human Trafficking Summit as an area leader for North Texas (as pictured above).

"Not only was it a wonderful honor to be at the White House, I was also incredibly humbled and inspired to hear from two survivors who spoke during the summit," she said. "President Trump also signed an executive order adding additional funding for organizations across the nation that work to combat trafficking in their communities."

"The most meaningful statement of the day came from an incredible survivor, and the newest member of the U.S. Advisory Council on Human trafficking, Bella Hounakey: "To truly be survivor-centered and informed means to not only prioritize survivors' needs or wishes and service delivery, it must also include meaningful collaboration with survivors to inform the design and implementation of the very policies and programs that affect them. No survivors should ever be viewed by their trafficking or lived experiences alone."

Gniffke transferred from WC to Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where she earned her bachelor's degree in communications. She suffered a setback in an automobile accident in which she was simply sitting in her car when another slammed

continues with Gniffke on page 15.

WC BOARD APPROVES ATHLETIC PROGRAM EXPANSION

In three years' time, Weatherford College will double its list of sports teams.

In an effort to boost student opportunities and invigorate campus life, the WC Board of Trustees has approved a timeline to add multiple sports to the WC Athletic Department.

First up will be the reinstatement of women's tennis and men's golf. Coaches for both programs will be hired in the coming months with competition beginning in the Fall 2021 semester.

Next, the college will launch volleyball for the first time in school history with competition beginning in Fall 2022.

Women's golf and men's tennis will make their debuts in Fall 2023.

Longtime athletic director Bob McKinley said the plan provides ample time to hire coaches, recruit athletes and make necessary modifications to the Betty Jo Graber Athletic Center for volleyball.

"We have one of the finest athletic programs in the state of Texas, and we look forward to that continuing," McKinley said. "This can do nothing but give us more visibility in not only in our community but in our state and nation."

In addition to the new sports, WC offers women's and men's basketball, softball, baseball and women's and men's rodeo.



LEVELING UP *from page 3.*

The first step toward adding the BAAS degree was to contact neighboring institutions of higher education and the THECB to inform those bodies of WC's intent to submit an application for approval of the program.

"To date, this office has received only a single inquiry about the program from a nearby four-year institution," said Mike Endy, vice president of instruction and student services. "We have informed them that our intention with the proposed BAAS program is to offer courses locally to serve a growing number of paraprofessionals in our region."

Applications to the THECB and SACSCOC are in progress, and Endy is hopeful to have approvals from those organizations so the program can begin in Fall 2021.

This baccalaureate program will target students who have completed the core curriculum, which equals about 42 hours of general education courses, along with the coursework for their specific applied arts and sciences program paired with upper



Administrators, board members, faculty and students made a strong showing of support for WC's BSN degree program at the October Texas Board of Nursing meeting in Austin.

level courses in organizational leadership, management and planning, Endy said. The program will be a combination of face-to-face classes, online and hybrid courses to serve the local population.

"The impact of bachelor's degrees on Weatherford College will be profound as these offerings will tremendously enhance the institution's ability to provide opportunities for our communities and region while maintaining the integrity of our service mission," Endy said. "For me, the impact of WC is most profound

in the way our college affords individuals opportunities to change their lives. I couldn't be prouder or more pleased with what we are doing."

Farmer anticipates exploring a Bachelor's of Technology degree in 2022 along with other degrees that would complement the college's current program mix.

"Weatherford College students now have more educational opportunity than ever before in the rich history of our noble institution," Farmer said. "It is a great time to be a Coyote!" 🐾

WEATHERFORD COLLEGE AROUND CAMPUS

1.



1. Kay Landrum, associate dean of student success, was announced as the 2019 Staff Member of the Year at the college's annual Employee Awards Dinner in December. She was selected from among eight nominees. The honor includes a \$2,000 prize underwritten by a WC Foundation gift from Texas Health Neighborhood Care and Wellness in Willow Park.

2. The 2019 Veterans Day ceremony was well-attended even though it was moved indoors due to inclement weather. Weatherford College alumnus Col. Thomas MacKenzie, U.S. Army Retired, was the guest speaker.

3. In November, the City of Weatherford joined WC for a ribbon cutting for the new roundabout as well as an unveiling ceremony for the coyote statues in the landscaped center of the traffic-control feature. Jerry and Vickie Durant donated the funds for the statues, designed and created by WC alumnus Kelly Graham, and Clark Gardens provided landscaping.

2.



3.



4. WC's Talent Search launched a robotics program in January for middle school students who participate in the federal TRIO program. Students will meet on the WC campus once a month where they will be able to access the newly created robotics lab located in the Jim and Velda Boyd Building.

5. With Coutts Hall soon to be demolished, WC and the city partnered together to allow the Weatherford Fire Department to conduct training inside and around the building including cutting holes into the roof and walls, simulating fire with smoke machines and carrying "victims" down ladders.

6. Weatherford College choir students MiMi Farr, Jimmy Gray and Keegan Odell-Yanez were selected for the Texas Two-Year College All-State Choir. Under the direction of Dr. Eugene Rogers of Michigan University they performed renaissance, aleatoric and gospel choral masterworks at the Texas Music Educators Association convention in San Antonio in February.



7. Coyote basketball fans came out in force to support Dee McKinley in February for a special Dee-Up night. McKinley, wife of Lady Coyotes coach Bob McKinley, is battling Multiple Myeloma, a cancer of plasma cells. The illness is keeping her from attending the basketball games she loves and where she is known to bring a fierce competitive spirit.

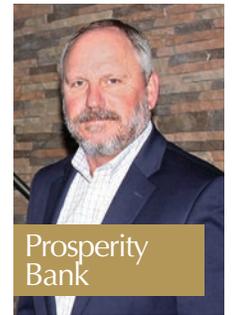
8. WC's Corporate College was one of 17 colleges and universities in the country recognized with a 2019 Exemplary Program Award from the National Council of Continuing Education and Training. Corporate College is designed to provide training to local businesses of all sizes. With grants available through a partnership with Workforce Solutions of North Central Texas, much of the training is available at little or no cost to employers.

9. The 26th annual Coyote Chase Race brought out hundreds of runners of all ages to the WC campus in November. Following the 1-mile and 5K run, families were invited to stay and participate in a carnival with bounce houses, games and a magician.

10. The second annual Interdisciplinary Academic Conference was held at the end of February. Hundreds of students, employees and local residents attended the two-day event that included lectures and panels on women's suffrage, time travel, communication, the changing role of libraries, nuclear weapons, zombies and much more.

GIFTS

FOUNDATION WELCOMES 11 NEW SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENTS



Bob Glenn and the Weatherford College Foundation have been busy raising funds for student scholarships. Since the last issue of *The Hilltop*, donors have given and pledged more than \$125,000 in new endowed scholarships. The new scholarships include:

- The Weatherford Noon Lions Club Scholarship
- The Lucky and Janet Drew Scholarship
- The Pat and Sharon Hamilton Scholarship
- The E.A. and Brenda Connel Scholarship
- The Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo Scholarship
- The New Hope Baptist Church in honor of Pastor Curtis Jefferson, Jr. Scholarship
- The Texas Bank Financial Scholarship
- The Mike and Debbie Martin Scholarship
- The Paul and Courtney Paschall Scholarship
- The Vic Verstraete Scholarship
- The Prosperity Bank Scholarship



COLLEGE ATTAINS ALL-STEINWAY STATUS

Less than one year after launching a fundraising campaign for new pianos, Weatherford College officially became an All-Steinway Institution in November.

Dr. Tod Allen Farmer, Weatherford College president, announced the college's attainment of All-Steinway Institution status at the Bell Ringers' Ball, the sesquicentennial gala at Ridgela Country Club in Fort Worth.

Through generous donations to the WC Foundation from community members, faculty and staff, WC acquired nine new Steinway & Sons-designed instruments ranging from Boston uprights to Steinway grand pianos.

In his remarks at the gala, Farmer first recognized Nancy and Richard Stuart for their donation of a 7-foot Steinway B grand that arrived on campus in October. He then made the surprise announcement that a 9-foot Steinway D grand in front of the Ridgela stage that evening was donated

to the college from Jerry and Vickie Durant.

The piano was delivered from Steinway & Sons in Dallas to Ridgela for the special event, then transported to WC's Alkek Fine Arts Center that same evening.

"We are the first higher education institution in the state of Texas to own such a high tech piano," Farmer said. "Through the Internet-based Spirio technology we can access the greatest instructors and performances anywhere in the world. We are now positioned to catapult our fine arts programs forward."

Spirio R technology is capable of live performance capture and playback, allowing students and faculty to record their playing and then immediately play back their pieces to view their work.



"To reach this level in the matter of nine months is just incredible," said Brent Baker, WC Foundation executive director. "Students in piano, choir, opera, musical theatre, jazz band and other areas will benefit from this generosity. Thank you to all of the donors who made this possible."

Pictured: Richard and Nancy Stuart, Dr. Hyeyoung Song, and Vickie and Jerry Durant at the Bell Ringers' Ball in November.



The Parker County Historical Commission has donated funds to the WC Foundation for a scholarship named after the late Raymond George, an accomplished musician and civic leader who taught guitar at the college.



Texas Book Company recently presented Weatherford College with a \$50,000 donation. Texas Book Company has partnered with WC to provide the college's on-campus bookstores since 2011.



The Weatherford Music Teachers Association, through its students' annual fundraising piano performances, donated funds to the WC Foundation for the college's All-Steinway campaign.

GLENN HONORED WITH CARLOS HARTNETT AWARD

From Carlos Hartnett to Bob Glenn, Weatherford College has been blessed with incredible volunteers over the years.

Glenn, the current WC Foundation president, was surprised with the 2019 Carlos Hartnett Award at the Bell Ringers' Ball in November.

Since retiring from PlainsCapital Bank last year, Glenn has dedicated much of his new-found free time to fundraising for the foundation. He has secured more than \$250,000 in endowed scholarships since May, working for the foundation on a volunteer basis.

Glenn recognized Dr. Mike White, the 2018 recipient of the award, during the gala with a custom-fitted blazer lined with fabric sporting the WC logo before Brent Baker, WC Foundation executive director, surprised Glenn with the 2019 award.

The Carlos Hartnett Award is named for WC's first development officer and is awarded to individuals who encourage others to give from their abundance to benefit the college and its students. It is the most prestigious honor given by the WC Foundation.

"Carlos Hartnett was a successful businessman who retired and then spent much of his free time volunteering for the WC Foundation," Baker said. "Bob Glenn is the modern-day version of Carlos Hartnett. Bob's work will be changing lives for decades to come at Weatherford College. What he is doing for this institution is just incredible."

Originally established in 1978, the Weatherford College Foundation is dedicated to raising funds to benefit WC and its students.



CARLOS HARTNETT AWARD PREVIOUS WINNERS

Mark Littleton - 1997

I.B. Hand - 1998

Jack Borden - 1999

Roy Grogan - 2000

Jerry Durant - 2001

Dorothy Doss - 2002

Dr. Jim Boyd - 2003

Joe Tison - 2004-05

Jean Bryan - 2006-07

Eddie Kidd - 2007-08

Marjorie Dome - 2009

Roy Eaton - 2012

Dr. Mike White - 2018

CLASS NOTES

Dr. Barbara and Jim McGregor celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in January. Barbara, a Piper Professor honoree, retired from WC in 2001 after 26 years of service.

Keith Conlon ('04) has been promoted to president of sales for Allie Beth Allman & Associates, a luxury residential brokerage based in Dallas. Keith was a member of the 2004 conference championship Coyote baseball team.

Clay Doyle ('05) and **Jacklyn Jones** were married on Sept. 28. Clay works for a bank in Granbury and Jacklyn is a county extension agent. The couple now lives in Lipan.

Debra Gass ('17), AAS, HSP/SAC, now conducts membership development for the Weatherford Chamber of Commerce and is a prevention specialist with Recovery Resource Council.

Rhett McNair won an event championship at the January Jam 2020 radio-controlled car racing meet in Flowood, Mississippi. McNair won the Four Wheel Drive Modified Buggy title and is preparing for nationals later this year.

Donna Stutts ('11), LCDC, AAS, HSP/SAC, is staff counselor at NTACE in Weatherford.

Benefactors (\$10,000 and above)

Ezelle Ashworth Trust, Mary Brinkley Estate, E.A. and Brenda Connel, Coyote Cares, Marjorie Kimbrough Dome, Lucky and Janet Drew, Jerry and Vickie Durant, Herbert G. Feldman Charitable Foundation, Dr. Sumant and Sheela A. Kumar, Mike and Debbie Martin, Parker County Retired School Personnel, Plains Capital Bank, The Priddy Foundation, Steve and Jerry Reid, John and Ida Shires, Richard and Nancy Stuart, Texas Bank Financial, Vic Verstraete, Ronald Walker, Robert and Sammie Gay Williams

Patrons (\$2,500 to \$9,999)

Basic IDIQ, Dr. Joe and Evelyn Birmingham, Clark Real Estate, Bettie Cline, Roy and Jeannine Eaton, Dr. Tod Allen and Kathleen Farmer, First National Bank of Weatherford, Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, Wayne and Sharon Garrett, Barbara Gibson, Brent and Meredith Gough, Pat and Sharon Hamilton, Imperial Construction, Derek and Lonna Leach, Lightfoot Mechanical, Inc., Dr. Barbara and Jim McGregor, North Side Baptist Church, Parker County Women's and Newcomers' Club, Pediatric Rehab, RBI Academy LLC, Marilyn E. Reynolds, Schulman Theatres, Southwest Auto Group, Spider Web Energy, LLC, Weatherford Music Teachers Association, Alan and Lee Ann White, Gail Wright

Associates (\$1,000 to \$2,499)

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Partners (\$500 to \$999)

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continues on pg. 14

Affiliates (\$100 to \$499)

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FORMER COLEMAN ART STUDENTS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN EXHIBITION

After 50 years of teaching art at Weatherford College, Myrlan Coleman is entering retirement. But not before she shows off her students' art one more time.

Coleman is asking her former art students to play a part in her retirement reception on April 29 in Texas Hall of the Alkek Fine Arts Center. Former students, from the late 1960s to the 2010s and every year in between, are invited to hang their art in Texas Hall April 21 and 22 in preparation for her reception on the 29th.

Art from all media are accepted and encouraged. For more information, contact Coleman at mcoleman@wc.edu or 817-598-6232.

Myrlan says she'd love to hear from you!

GNIFFKE *from page 6.*

into it. She went through several months of physical therapy.

But Gniffke continued moving forward, studying master's degree courses online at Regent.

Gniffke also spent some time in Quantico, Virginia, undergoing training in intelligence analysis, then moved to Dallas to run a Texas state senator's office. In 2019, she started her own investigation and political consulting business.

"I have enjoyed working with clients in Texas and DC," she said.

When asked if she has any political aspirations of her own, she responded, "My role right now lets me support good candidates who are willing to serve politically. After working in politics for almost a decade, I have seen all the good, bad and ugly, and am not sure I want to sign up for that."

Instead, her major battle is against human trafficking.

"Clarín has a clear understanding of the issue of human trafficking and how to connect that with policy. She has been instrumental in the NTCAHT's public

outreach and is a strong channel to our state and local government leadership," said Chad Frymore, executive director of NTCAHT.

Gniffke understands she and her partners in NTCAHT and across the nation and world are in a tough battle.

"In 2016, there were an estimated 313,000 victims of human trafficking in Texas alone. I would like to think that number has decreased in the last four years, but realistically, it probably hasn't," she said.

She noted that, according to the CNN Freedom Project, after drug trafficking, human trafficking is tied with the illegal arms industry as the second largest criminal industry in the world. It is also considered the fastest growing, taking in over \$30 billion a year.

"With statistics like these, the fight against human trafficking feels overwhelming," she said. "Social media has become a hotbed of activity for traffickers. But at the same time, the anti-trafficking movement has gained steam. There are social media awareness movements, billboards, PSAs, hotlines and posters. The more we can educate the public about what human trafficking looks like and what to do when you think you see it, the more victims can be liberated from slavery."

Gniffke said everyone can join the fight, largely by just being aware. Signs to look for, she said, include paying closer attention to the behavior of those around you everywhere you go. Keep an eye out even at places you feel most comfortable.

Also, look for red flags such as physical abuse signs, including burn marks, bruises or cuts; unexplained absences from class; new tattoos (tattoos are often used by pimps as a way to brand victims-tattoos of a name, symbol of money or barcode could indicate trafficking); older boyfriends or new friends with a different lifestyle. Traffickers often do not allow victims to go into public alone or speak for themselves.

Sex traffickers approach potential victims in a variety of ways, including pretending to be a potential boyfriend or friend, contacting them via social media such as Facebook, posting newspaper or Internet ads for jobs and opportunities or even threatening or kidnapping them.

"If you think you see some of these warning signs, call the police and report as much detail as you can," Gniffke said. "Give law enforcement the opportunity to investigate. You never know, your report could save someone's life." 📧

FRIENDS WE'LL MISS

- Lisa Michelle Justice Bronstad**, 48, passed away in Azle on Jan. 7.
- Jeanne Lynn Graves**, 67, passed away Jan. 18. 1994 graduate.
- Sheila Ann McDermott Johnson**, 72, of Fort Worth, passed away Jan. 2.
- Marcus Dean Turner**, 66, of Aledo passed away Nov. 9.
- Charles Reagan Wiggs (Toddy)**, 62, of Pattison passed away on Jan. 24.



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