

OPA invites members to Capitol for Legislative Summit

The annual Oklahoma Press Association Legislative Summit will be held February 19 at the State Capitol in Oklahoma City.

The summit begins at 9:30 a.m. with a short group meeting where OPA Executive Vice President Mark Thomas will discuss legislative issues affecting news organizations. Attendees will then have an opportunity to meet with their legislators. If you plan to meet with your legislator, contact them in advance to schedule a meeting between 10:00 and 11:30 a.m.

A free BBQ lunch will be served at 11:30 a.m. with the afternoon scheduled to hear from state leaders.

The meeting is free but registration is required. To register, go to okpress.com/legislative-summit.

Visiting legislators at their Capitol offices makes an impact. Legislators listen to peo-



The rotunda at the Oklahoma State Capitol is a hub where legislators and visitors can relax and enjoy the historical building.

ple that come to the Capitol to express their concerns.

Every organization, including those that oppose our interests, go to the capitol to demonstrate commitment to their legislative goals and desires.

“Legislators notice when folks from back home come to the Capitol even if they don’t get much time to spend with you,” said OPA Executive Vice President Mark Thomas.

“Your presence sets the

stage for future conversations back home. It lets legislators know that you intend to be legislatively active on issues important to the news media industry.”

Feb. 9 deadline set for newspaper contest, award entries

The Oklahoma Press Association is now accepting entries for its annual Better Newspaper Contest, which recognizes outstanding journalism and advertising work produced during 2025.

One publication in each division will receive the

contest’s highest honor, the Sequoyah Award. Individual staff members may also compete in categories including writing, photography, layout, advertising design and online projects.

The Better Newspaper Contest is open to current OPA

Legal Newspapers, General News Media members, and college news media organizations. The deadline to submit entries is February 9. Complete contest rules and entry information are available at okpress.com/contest.

ADDITIONAL AWARDS AND HONORS

In addition to the Better Newspaper Contest, OPA members may submit nominations and entries for several other awards:

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From the President

By Suzie Campbell

Publisher of the Countywide & Sun • OPA President 2025-2026



New year, same resolution

It is a new year with new goals and possibilities.

Have you made New Year's resolutions?

Mine is always the same. I will be more organized and focused.

Most years, that flies right out the window before the end of the first month. But after the chaos of 2025, both personally and at the office, I am more determined this year to reach that goal.

It is amazing how the two of those – organized and focused – go hand in hand.

My ADHD tendencies require constant reminders to focus on the current task before moving to the next. Then there are those times when I become hyper-focused on a single task. This is not always a good thing, but sometimes the focus is on a productive task.

Recently, that hyper-focus showed up in an unexpected way.

Late Friday evening, I became obsessed with putting together a schedule of sales for the next couple of months. At 4 a.m. Saturday, the schedule was complete for the entire year, and it included story ideas to go with some

of the bigger ad campaigns. By Sunday afternoon, there was not only the schedule, but also flyers and ads had been included, questionnaires were created to gather quotes for the stories and emails had been scheduled to be sent to prospective clients.

Hopefully, this means 2026 is my year to keep those New Year's resolutions.

Now to get all of this added to my calendar. If it isn't on the calendar with a minimum of two reminders, it will be forgotten.

As for 2025, I am glad to let it go. It was a hard year, especially on the home front. I know that is something we all struggle with, the balance between home and work. The guilt of devoting too much time to one or the other. I will confess that I am a workaholic.

But 2025 made me stop and focus more on my family, my home and myself.

It began in March with wildfires in multiple communities covered by the paper. Then there were the flooding rains. While dealing with these, my mom had a stroke, a sibling began cancer treat-

ments and I ended up in the hospital for a week.

Never say, "I can't take any more."

Then one of our communities had a bus accident, a school shooter threat, a teacher suicide and a stand-off, all within a week. Whew!

Mentally, I was done. But news never stops. Just days before Christmas, the news of the day involved my home.

One of the things I strive for is to never be the news of the day. But, three days before Christmas, a neighbor decided to burn some things in his burn pit. That little fire got out of hand and immediately spread to my property.

I learned of the fire when another neighbor came knocking on the front door, setting off a motion camera. When I pulled up the camera (from work), I saw the neighbor walking away and smoke flowing from the side of the house.

Four fire departments converged on our property. They got it under control and saved my home. As I walked the property taking photos, one of the firemen asked if it was for

the paper. At that particular moment, the paper was not on my mind. I was focused on all the damage to the property.

Again, I am so glad to say goodbye to 2025 and ready to welcome 2026. It will be a better year.

CONTEST DEADLINE NEARS

On another note, it is time to submit those contest entries. February 9 is the deadline.

Are you one who tracks your submissions throughout the year, so this is an easy project?

As I sort through all 52 editions of the paper, I tell myself once again that I will do better this year. But even with the regular reminders from our OPA staff, I manage to make it through the year without actually adding anything to the list.

And, of course, while sorting through the stacks of newspapers, I think of one of my neighboring newspaper gurus and wait for the annual call to let me know he has his entries completed. His goal is to be the first to complete his entries. I will tell him, again this year, that he is an overachiever.

In reality, he is organized, and I am jealous of how easy he makes it look to be that way. It is a moment-by-moment, hour-by-hour, day-by-day struggle for me.

But 2026 will be the year that I get closer to achieving those New Year's resolutions.

Happy New Year!

Download New Guidelines for Public Notices

On November 1, 2025, new rates for legal notices and important reforms to improve accessibility and readability of notices went into effect. Download new guidelines at

okpress.com/public-notice-training

Entries open for contest, awards

Continued from Page 1

- A-Mark Prize for Investigative Reporting** recognizes excellence in investigative journalism by Oklahoma print and digital media. Funded by the A-Mark Foundation, the award includes cash prizes of \$5,000 for first place, \$3,000 for second place and \$2,000 for third place, with additional funds awarded to the winning news outlets.
 - Ray Lokey Memorial Award for Excellence in Reporting** is open to weekly and semi-weekly legal newspapers. The award includes a \$500 prize and a plaque and honors the legacy of former Johnston County Capital-Democrat Publisher Ray Lokey.
 - ONF Joseph H. Edwards Outdoor Writer of the Year Award** honors a writer whose published work reflects a passion for the outdoors. The winner receives \$500 and a plaque. The award commemorates Joe Edwards, former publisher of the Bartlesville Examiner-Enterprise.
 - OPA Magazine Contest** is open to OPA Legal Newspaper and General News Media members.
 - ONF Beachy Musselman Award** recognizes a journalist for significant contributions to printed journalism or related fields. The award is named for Norman Beachy Musselman, former editor and general manager of the Shawnee News-Star.
 - OPA Quarter Century Club or Half Century Club:** Journalists with 25 or 50 years of service in the industry may be nominated for induction into the Quarter Century Club or Half Century Club.
 - Deadline:** The deadline for all contest entries and award nominations is February 9. Awards will be presented June 5–6 during the OPA Annual Convention at the Embassy Suites Hotel & Conference Center in Norman.
- For more information, visit okpress.com/contest.

OPA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For more information on upcoming events visit okpress.com/events

JANUARY 22, 2026

1:00 – 2:00 PM

OMC WEBINAR: CREATING SIGNIFICANT NEW OBITUARY REVENUE

Find out the secrets to improving your obituaries, selling more of them and increasing both this vital revenue as well as a major readership feature.

FEBRUARY 9, 2026

OPA CONTEST & AWARDS DEADLINE

All entries and/or nominations must be uploaded or postmarked by Monday, February 9.

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

OPA LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

Join us at the State Capitol for the annual Legislative Summit.

JUNE 5 & 6, 2026

OPA ANNUAL CONVENTION

Mark your calendar and make plans to attend the annual convention at the Norman Embassy Suites Hotel & Conference Center.

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You've Got Questions!

- Can I photograph minors without consent?
- Can police deny access to records by issuing a press release?
- Should I alter my archives when a person demands it?
- Can I report inaccurate testimony given in open court?
- What are the laws about liquor advertising?

These are questions answered by the attorneys for the OPA Legal Services Plan members in recent months. OPA members always need timely legal advice on issues related to publishing.

You should join OPA's LEGAL SERVICES PLAN!

See www.OkPress.com/LSP or contact Mark Thomas at (405) 499-0033 or toll-free in Oklahoma 1-888-815-2672 today!



Oklahoma Supreme Court invalidates 2025 Social Studies Standards over Open Meeting Act violation

The Oklahoma Supreme Court invalidated the state's 2025 Academic Standards for Social Studies, ruling that the Oklahoma State Board of Education violated the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act during the adoption process.

In its decision, the Court granted declaratory relief, holding that the 2025 standards were adopted using a procedure that failed to comply with state law. As a result, the standards are unlawful and unenforceable, the court concluded.

However, this opinion, Case Number 123237, has not been released for publication and until released is subject to revision or withdrawal. (*See case at tinyurl.com/2w55da98.*)

The ruling stems from a

challenge brought by petitioners who argued that the Board did not properly notify the public before adopting a version of the standards that differed from the one posted ahead of its February 27, 2025, meeting. The Court agreed, finding that the Board violated 25 O.S. 2021 §311(A) (9) of the Open Meeting Act.

"The Board's notice of the agenda was not sufficient to apprise the public of the substantive standards being considered for adoption," the Supreme Court opinion stated, concluding that the Board improperly used its agenda to adopt different substantive standards not disclosed in advance.

Although petitioners also challenged the content of the standards, the Court based its

ruling solely on procedural grounds. The Court emphasized that it did not assume original jurisdiction merely because an Open Meeting Act claim was presented, but rather to determine whether a violation occurred and whether that violation warranted invalidation of the standards.

As part of its order, the Court barred enforcement of the 2025 Social Studies standards and reinstated the 2019 Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies. Those standards will remain in effect until the State Board of Education properly adopts new social studies standards and completes the required legislative review process.

The Court also dissolved its prior temporary stay that had halted enforcement of the

2025 standards while the case was pending and declined to issue a writ of mandamus.

Concurring with Justice James E. Edmondson's opinion were Justices James R. Winchester, Douglas L. Combs, Noma Gurich and Richard Darby.

Chief Justice Dustin P. Rowe and Justice M. John Kane dissented.

Vice Chief Justice Dana Kuehn and Justice Travis Jett recused.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of 33 Oklahoma plaintiffs, including parents, teachers and faith leaders. Attorneys from the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice and Americans United for Separation of Church and State represented them.

Woodward County Commissioners decline to certify election due to lack of proper legal notice publication

The Woodward County Board of County Commissioners voted not to certify the results of the CAPS (County Area Projects) election held on Nov. 18 after determining that a required legal notice was not published in compliance with state law.

"As County Commissioners, we take seriously the trust placed in us by the voters of Woodward County," the board stated. "Ensuring that every election is conducted properly, transparently, and in full compliance with the law is our responsibility."

According to county officials, the board was notified on Nov. 20 that the legal publication required under Oklahoma Statutes Title 19 §383 had not been advertised for the mandated four consecutive weeks

prior to the election. Commissioners tabled certification of the election during their Nov. 24 meeting and then met in executive session with legal counsel on Dec. 1, 2025, to further review the publication issue and assess the election's legal standing. After that review, commissioners concluded that the election could not be certified.

Section 4 of the resolution calling for the election directed that the legal notices be published by the County Clerk or Deputy Clerk. Commissioners noted that in previous countywide elections of this type, the county's bond attorney had handled publication of the notices, and the county relied on that same process in this instance.

Although full ballot lan-

guage was published once in The Mooreland Leader and appeared twice on the Woodward News online platform, state law requires the notice to be published in a newspaper of general circulation for four consecutive weeks. With that requirement not met, the board determined the election was legally unenforceable.

"We commend the commissioners for their transparency and the accountability all parties have shown during this process," said Sheila Gay, Woodward News publisher.

"It is of absolute importance that public notices are published according to statutes put in place to protect our communities, so that they have the knowledge they need during the voting process."

On Dec. 10, commissioners

approved a resolution to re-run the special election and asked if notice would be taken care of. Attorney David Floyd with Floyd & Drive from Norman responded that the board will publish six times in public newspapers in the county.

"The requirement is four. We are going to go ahead and do six," Floyd said.

In a 2024 decision, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that failure to strictly follow statutory publication requirements invalidates elections. "The Legislature has mandated what constitutes notice by publication. Here, the statutorily required notice was not given. Anything less than strict compliance requires us to invalidate the election," Justice Yvonne Kauger wrote in that decision.

Correction department refuses to release body camera footage

BY KEATON ROSS
Oklahoma Watch

(This is a condensed version of the article. To read the full version visit oklahomawatch.org)

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections has spent millions on body cameras with the stated goal of increasing transparency, but the agency is refusing to release recordings to the public.

The agency's general counsel maintains that releasing body camera footage could compromise security by

showing a facility's layout and sensitive areas, spokeswoman Kay Thompson said. Prison reform advocates argue the decision to withhold recordings undermines public trust and allows bad actors to skirt accountability.

State statute stipulates that audio and video recordings from equipment attached to a law enforcement officer shall be available for public inspection, with limited exceptions.

In February 2024, the agency enacted a policy stipulating that recordings may only be

shared with prosecutors, law enforcement or pursuant to a court-ordered subpoena.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections is not clearly defined as a law enforcement agency under state law, though the agency began conducting CLEET academy training courses in February 2024.

Numerous other public safety agencies that use body cameras, including police departments, sheriff's offices and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, routinely release body camera

recordings as mandated in the Oklahoma Open Records Act.

The Department of Corrections has also refused to release incident reports for prisoner deaths and violent incidents. A lawsuit challenging that decision, filed by The Frontier in coordination with the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, is pending in Oklahoma County District Court.

Incident reports are also designated as public documents under the Open Records Act.

Audit finds Bradley officials violated open meeting laws

A recent state forensic audit found that officials in the Oklahoma town of Bradley repeatedly violated open-government laws and mishandled public funds between July 2018 and December 2020.

Bradley, located in Grady County, was audited after citizens filed a petition requesting

an investigation by State Auditor and Inspector Cindy Byrd.

The findings have been referred to the Grady County District Attorney's Office, according to a news release.

The town routinely failed to comply with multiple aspects of the Open Meeting Act, the audit found.

Agendas and minutes were

missing for eight meetings, while numerous others lacked critical information such as posting times, board member attendance, recorded actions and individual votes.

"These deficiencies undermine transparency, public trust and the board's ability to demonstrate that Town busi-

ness was properly conducted," Byrd wrote in the report.

The audit also found that the town violated the Open Records Act by not responding to requests in a timely manner.

The audit also found improper financial practices.

(To read the full report, see <https://tinyurl.com/56336h7c>)



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Recap of OPA Board of Directors meeting

The Oklahoma Press Association Board of Directors met by video conference call on December 11, 2025.

Officers attending were President Suzie Campbell, Countywide & Sun, and Treasurer Brian Blansett, The Lincoln County News.

Directors attending were Shauna Belyeu, Past President, The Eufaula Indian Journal; Brett Wesner, Wesner Publications; Connor Choate, Marietta Monitor; and Katherine Miller, The Norman Transcript.

Also attending were Mark Thomas, OPA Executive Vice President/Secretary, and Lisa Sutliff, CAE, OPA Assistant Executive Director.

Vice President Erin Dyer Thompson, El Reno Tribune, and directors Ed Choate, Shaun Witt from Oklahoma Watch, and Jason Collington were unable to attend.

President Campbell called the meeting to order and asked board members to review minutes of the October 2, 2025, meeting. Minutes were approved as presented.

Moving on to financials, the board reviewed and approved as presented the OPA and LSP

financial statements ending October 31, 2025.

The board also acknowledged receipt of the OPA federal and state tax returns, filed on Nov. 17, 2025, for the period ending June 30, 2025.

MEMBERSHIP APPROVED

Freelance columnist Dr. Ty B. Kerley was approved for an Individual Professional Membership. Kerley is based in Ardmore, and his columns appear in many Oklahoma newspapers.

Thomas said several membership applications were recently submitted and could be available for review during the board's next meeting.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee activity reports were presented by board members.

Connor Choate said the **Awards Committee** had four recommendations for the board as follows:

Better Newspaper Contest recommendations

1. Advertising Category:

The committee decided that if the majority of an issue's content and ads matches

a sale promotion topic (such as a Progress edition, graduation, most powerful Oklahomans, etc.), that issue should not be eligible in the Advertising category. The committee recommended the following language be added to the category description: "This category recognizes a staff's overall advertising efforts in a regular issue. Issues in which the majority of content and ads follow a specific sales promotion theme should not be entered in this category as they are eligible in the Sales Promotion category."

2. Feature Photograph Category: The committee recommends that the language "Sports action photos are not eligible" be added to the Feature Photograph category description.

3. Award Recognition: As the cost for engraved plaques has substantially increased in recent years, the committee recommends that 7"x9" certificate plaques be awarded to first place winners beginning with the 2025 contest with

awards to be presented in June 2026. Certificate plaques are a more affordable option and would allow for full color on the award.

4. Effort to Increase Number of Contest Participants: The committee recommends offering one free entry to member publications that did not participate in the contest last year.

The four recommendations were approved by the board.

In Ed Choate's absence, Sutliff reviewed the **Education Committee's** plans for the June 5-6, 2026, convention at the Embassy Suites in Norman. The event will begin on Friday, June 5, with the annual business meeting followed by a session of roundtables on different issues and ideas. The evening's welcome dinner will feature the annual bloopers show followed by a Family Feud-style game. Saturday morning will include the Speed Topics session and a general session on creating and making revenue from podcasts and videos.

As 2026 is a statewide election year and the convention will be just days before the primary election, the committee is planning a candidate forum on Saturday afternoon to promote newspaper and online advertising, as well as provide news coverage opportunities.

Wesner said the **Government Relations Committee** is preparing for the 2026 legislative session, which begins February 2.

Thomas shared a list of important legislation as well as dormant bills of interest that would return in the 2026 session. Dec. 29 is the deadline for bill language to be filed in legislation for the 2026 session.

Continued on Page 7

“ I didn't know you had this! ”





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Complaints of open records violations increased with launch of Oklahoma AG's compliance portal

BY: EMMA MURPHY
OKLAHOMA VOICE
oklahomavoice.com

The Oklahoma Attorney General's Office has received over 220 complaints of open records violations this year, with the numbers increasing since a public complaint form launched, officials said.

Anthony Sykes, the assistant attorney general in the Public Access Counselor unit, said between January and July, 128 complaints were received, or about 18 per month. After the complaint form launched in August after House Bill 2163 became law in May, that number has grown to be about 25 per month.

The law gave the Attorney General's Office the power to enforce violations of the Open Records Act and outlined a review process for denied public records requests through a complaint form monitored by the Public Access Counselor Unit. The agency can seek "legal enforcement" when gov-

ernment entities fail to comply with open records laws.

Filing a complaint for review is prohibited if the person requesting to inspect a public record is doing so for "commercial purposes."

About 42% of the complaints to the form were against a state agency, state records show. A third pertained to a city while nearly a quarter of complaints were about a county. Records show 2% of complaints were about a school board.

Records from the Attorney General's Office show that 70 of the complaints to the portal have been closed. Over 30 of these were deemed "unfounded" complaints while decisions were issued in nine were issued a decision. Records showed another 12 were resolved by the parties involved and 10 considered were "not timely." Some complaints were also closed because they were either withdrawn or for commercial purposes.

Two-thirds of complaint filers were members of the public, 26% were members of the media and the rest were either commercial complaints or classified as "attorney discovery," according to data provided by the Attorney General's Office.

Of the remaining 18 open complaints, 10 have a decision being drafted, three are awaiting a response from an agency and five were incomplete, records showed.

Sykes is the only full-time employee assigned to this unit but he said the agency is working to onboard another employee for administrative support.

"The complaint form has been a great improvement as it details the circumstances and explains that the complaint must be accompanied by the request for records and any response by the public body," Sykes said in a statement. "This allows the complaint

process to begin with a more complete picture."

The agency evaluates a complaint to determine whether further action is needed within seven business days, Sykes said. The time needed to resolve complaints varies "substantially," he said, but all complaints are resolved 60 days after the public body has responded.

The Attorney General's Office issues a decision, or "formal advisement," on a complaint to the public body in question, Sykes said.

The complaints were made by journalists, private citizens and attorneys.

In all of the provided examples, Sykes wrote that the public body either had had a "reasonable" response to the complainant, was justified in denying public records, or had "a good faith legal basis to deny access to the information and records referenced in the Complaint."

BOARD MEETING

Continued from Page 6

Wesner said the committee and staff are planning four briefing documents to explain to legislators the basics of OPA's four main legislative interests: the Open Meeting Act, Open Records Act, public notice and due process, and business issues affecting members.

The board also reviewed a preliminary proposal from the **Legal Services Plan Committee** regarding coverage. Thomas said the committee did not have a quorum for its November meeting, so it has not yet finalized the proposed revisions.

In Collington's absence, the

board reviewed a summary of discussion from the **Revenue and Promotion Committee**.

OTHER BUSINESS

Other business included:

- Review of the Conflict-of-Interest Policy. New board members were asked to sign the policy. All signed copies are retained by the accounting manager for audit purposes.

- Review of the OPA-OSU Endowment Fund Report for the period ending June 30, 2025, as well as a list of eight students who were awarded scholarships for 2024-2025. Thomas said the fund is intended to support juniors or

seniors working at The O'Collegian student newspaper. He plans to meet with OSU leadership to reaffirm the OPA understanding and directive for distribution of funds for school year 2026-2027.

OPS BOARD MEETING

Board members approved minutes of the October 2, 2025, meeting as presented.

The board reviewed the OPS financial statements ending October 31, 2025. Treasurer Blansett said sales commissions are lower than budgeted due to buying changes for OPS's three largest clients. Thomas said advertising

staff are working hard to find replacement clients.

Thomas provided the board with analysis of retained earnings for OPS since 2016. In recent years the OPS board made leaseholder building improvements as a leaseholder from OPA, computer upgrades and expanded business promotion efforts through local newspapers. The Press Service has been able to increase retained earnings in anticipation of difficult financial years and changes in advertising placement.

The board also discussed employment agreements for Thomas and Sutliff, to become effective in 2026.

Comanche Times sells to Tommy and Pattie Wells

The Comanche Times is under new ownership.

Tommy and Pattie Wells purchased the weekly newspaper from Todd and Sarah Brooks, who published the newspaper for the past seven years. The Wells' first edition was published January 8.

Tommy Wells will serve as publisher and editor; Pattie Wells will handle accounting and circulation.

"I look forward to working with everyone in the Comanche area," said Tommy Wells. "My wife and I are looking forward to becoming a part of the community."

The Times was originally established in 1992 by Steve Bolton and has operated continuously since.

"We are thrilled to have this opportunity to acquire the Times," Wells said. "This is a dream come true for my wife and I. We have always dreamed of owning a newspaper in such a beautiful and historic area."



The Wells family, which includes two daughters and two sons, also owns several other publications including The Carnegie Herald and Mountain View News in Oklahoma, the Colorado City Record, the Clyde Journal in Texas, and the Skagway News in Alaska.

Wells began his newspaper career in high school. He later served as publisher of the Quad City Messenger in Palo Pinto County, Texas, before leaving to serve as editor at daily newspapers in Kansas and North Dakota, and then to Alaska in the late 1990s.

Pattie Wells currently serves as production/officer manager of the couple's newspaper group.

NonDoc Media applies for OPA General News Media membership

The OPA Board of Directors will consider one application for OPA membership during its next meeting.

NonDoc Media, which has been online at nondoc.com since 2015, has applied for General News Media membership. Tres Savage is editor and Tara McMillen Hall serves as the development director. The owner is Sustainable Journalism Foundation (DBA: NonDoc Media), and the business mailing address is P.O. Box 18421, Oklahoma City, OK 73154.

Written protests to the membership application must be received at the OPA by

Feb. 4, 2026. Protests may be emailed to OPA Executive Vice President Mark Thomas at mthomas@okpress.com or mailed to Oklahoma Press Association, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105.

Any current member filing a written protest will be entitled to be heard by the Board of Directors at its next scheduled meeting.

Information and application forms for OPA's membership classifications may be found at okpress.com/join.

Lists of current members may be found at okpress.com/members.



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ONF one of recipients of Inasmuch grants

The Inasmuch Foundation has awarded \$5.79 million to 43 Oklahoma nonprofits this fall.

The grants are distributed across four focus areas – Community Enhancement, Education, Human Services and Journalism – to strengthen access to arts and cultural programming, foster expanded engagement across neighborhoods, and invest in nonprofit

and local journalism that builds informed communities.

These investments reflect founder Edith Kinney Gaylord's commitment to improving the quality of life in Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation was one of the nonprofits that received a grant. Grant money from the foundation will be used to fund seven newspapers or online news organizations to

host a paid intern in Summer 2026. The program promotes the value of working at Oklahoma news organizations and benefits students as they begin their professional careers.

The Inasmuch Foundation was established in 1982 by Edith Kinney Gaylord for charitable, scientific and educational purposes.

Edith Kinney Gaylord was known as Oklahoma's quiet philanthropist. After a life-

time of giving, she formally created two foundations that allowed her contributions to do the most good, for the most people. Recently, these two foundations merged to become one. In doing so, Ms. Gaylord created foundations that would stand the test of time and continue giving long after her death in 2001.

To date, her gift sums to over \$332 million in grants awarded.

Hoffman to be named chairman of Lee Enterprises

Billionaire investor David Hoffman has acquired a controlling stake in Lee Enterprises and will be its chairman.

The \$50 million deal offers debt relief for the chain.

Lee CEO Kevin Mowbray resigned with a \$1.5 million payout. Chief Operating Officer Nathan Bekke will take over as interim CEO.

Berkshire Hathaway, Lee's primary lender, agreed to cut the interest rate for five years on the newspaper chain's debt.

"By strengthening the balance sheet and improving the company's capital structure,

we are putting the company in a better position to execute and create long-term value," said Mary Junck, who for years has been the chair of Lee's board.

Lee Enterprises, based in Davenport, Iowa, owns the Tulsa World and Wagoner County American-Tribune in Oklahoma as well as publications in 70 other markets. The company announced it had reached an agreement with Hoffman and other investors to sell them nearly \$50 million shares.

Hoffman has committed to buying up to \$35 million.

The deal is expected to close in the first quarter.

Hoffman founded the Hoffmann Family of Companies, which owns commercial real estate and businesses, and this month announced the purchase of the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins. In June, it purchased the Washington Missourian newspaper in Franklin County, Hoffman's hometown.

Lee Enterprises has had a rough year following a cyber-attack that disrupted operations and delivery at several

of its newspapers. It deferred several months of interest payments to Berkshire Hathaway to raise enough capital to recover.

Hoffman expressed an interest in Lee following the cyberattack.

"These local newspapers are really important to these communities," Hoffman told the New York Times. "With the digital age and technology, it's changing rapidly. But I think there's room for both, and we'd like to be a part of that."

CNHI papers place focus on local news

Several Oklahoma newspapers owned by CNHI recently informed readers that they will be focusing on providing more local news.

More syndicated, non-local news will be shifted to the newspaper's websites.

With fewer pages in each edition, the newspapers are working to emphasize what readers want most from their local newspaper – local news.

As more readers access content online, the newspapers can include more comics and puzzles than they were able to publish in print.

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Sapulpa Herald returns to downtown Sapulpa



The Sapulpa Herald has officially moved back to Sapulpa, settling in at their new downtown location at 20 E. Lee Ave., part of the LaFevers Building. Pictured above are Sapulpa Herald employees Teresa Cooper McKown, Charles Betzler, Spencer Mayberry, John Tranchina and Derek Sumner. (Not pictured is Went Weston.) The Herald was recently purchased by Scott Wesner and Scott Wood, who made it a priority to return the newspaper to Sapulpa. *(Photo by Sheri Waldrop)*

Lawton names Murray Evans as sports editor

Murray Evans has been named sports editor of The Lawton Constitution.



His journalism career includes three stints at The Oklahoman totaling 15 years, more than eight years with The Associated Press in Kentucky and Oklahoma and 11 years as assistant athletic director for communications at his alma mater, Oklahoma Christian University.

Evans said he left journalism as a full-time profession for 12 years but was lured back to The Oklahoman in 2023 to cover now-former state Superintendent Ryan Walters.

But when The Constitution offered Evans an opportunity to return to his roots and cover sports, he was ready for the change.

Evans will work alongside Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame member Joey Goodman, who began his career at The Lawton Constitution in 1972.

Ballard joins staff at Sapulpa Herald

A new advertising representative has joined the staff of the Sapulpa Herald.

Kella Ballard, 17, is still in her senior year at Beggs High School, but is ready for this new challenge.

She has previously worked at the Loft Outlet store in Jenks and is currently taking a class at Green Country Technology Center in Okmulgee as she trains to be a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Atoka County Times editor rings in new year with First Day Hike at McGee Creek Lake

To start off the New Year with something new, Miranda Donihoo decided to participate in a First Day Hike at McGee Creek Lake.

Donihoo, editor of the Atoka County Times, invited her sister and nephew, as well as her dog Mouse, who is also the newspaper's office mascot, along for the adventure.

First Day Hikes are part of the America's State Parks First Day Hikes that take place in all 50 states.

Thinking it would be a small event, the group was surprised when Park Rangers distributed 249 commemorative keychain pendants to the crowd.

Donihoo said the Potapo Trail is labeled "moderate," but contains rocky shelves and boulders.

"I'll be honest," Donihoo wrote. "I tripped four times."

Once the group hit the halfway point, the trail smoothed



Mouse, the Atoka County Times' mascot dog, rests on the rocks overlooking McGee Lake during the First Day Hike on January 1.

out, winding down toward the lake where Mouse posed on the boulders.

"By the one-mile mark, the 'new year, new me' energy was being replaced by a very real ache in my hips and back," Donihoo wrote in an article for the Atoka County Times.

But seeing the game wardens along the final leg of the trail gave Donihoo and her group the encouragement they needed.

"The trail leveled out, and we finished the 1.4 miles together as a family," she wrote. "As I hold my first-ever First Day Hike pendant, it feels like a major accomplishment."

And Donihoo has already decided she'll be participating in another First Day Hike in 2027.

Shop dog has ‘pawsitive’ effect on photo

Adding a four-legged friend to the photo brought even bigger smiles to employees of the Hobart Democrat-Chief and the Hobart Tag Agency.

Democrat-Chief Publisher Todd Hancock had just finished snapping a photo of staff members from both offices for a front-page New Year’s greeting when he decided to include shop dog Mia.

“Everyone is smiling just a little bit more with Mia in the pic,” Hancock said.

Mia occasionally accompanies Jenny Mahoney to work and has become a favorite among employees and customers alike.

The Democrat-Chief and Hobart Tag Agency share office space in Hobart.

Ariel Humphrey works in the tag agency after originally being hired at the newspaper, moving to the tag office following a retirement.

Bill Gentry, a local attorney, contributes a weekly column to the newspaper.

Hancock, Mahoney, and



Smiles were a little brighter at the Hobart Democrat-Chief and Hobart Tag Agency as staff members pose for a New Year’s photo with shop dog Mia. Seated are Publisher Todd Hancock, Mia and Pauletta Haworth. Standing are Jenny Mahoney, Bill Gentry and Ariel Humphrey. Humphrey works in the tag agency while the others are Hobart Democrat-Chief staff members. The newspaper and tag agency share office space in Hobart.

Pauletta Haworth are full-time Democrat-Chief employees.

Hancock assumed operation of the Hobart Tag Agency in 2015 after the death of his father, Joe Hancock, who had obtained the agency in 1984.

After being vetted and approved by the Oklahoma

Tax Commission, the office reopened in February 2015, and Hancock has served as tag agent since.

Hancock assists in the tag office when needed, helping cover duties when Humphrey is away.

Editor completes two marathons in one week

Tom Firme, sports and managing editor of the Poteau Daily News, completed an impressive endurance feat in November by running two full marathons in the span of one week.

Firme first competed in the Sportspectrum Logjammer Marathon on Nov. 23 in Shreveport, Louisiana.

He finished the 26.2-mile race in 4 hours, 8 minutes and 10 seconds, placing 30th overall among 101 full-marathon finishers.

Less than a week later, Firme decided to take on another challenge. On Nov. 29, he traveled to Stennis Space Center in Mississippi to run

another full marathon, finishing in 3 hours, 58 minutes and 52 seconds.

His time earned him a 20th-place overall finish out of 57 runners.

The second race marked another milestone in Firme’s long-term running goals. With the two November marathons completed, he has now finished full marathons in 12 different states.

“I have now finished a full marathon in 12 states,” Firme wrote in the Poteau Daily News.

“Maybe in 15 or 20 years I can run one in all 50 states.”



Tom Firme, editor of the Poteau Daily News, displays one of the marathon medals he received in November.

OPA launches email bulletin, *The Nutgraph*

OPA Legal Newspaper and General News Media members may have noticed something new in their inboxes on January 8 — the launch of *Nutgraph*, OPA’s new weekly email bulletin.



The association previously sent several emails each week promoting programs, events and resources.

After reviewing member engagement, OPA decided to consolidate updates into one weekly message to make communication more efficient and help reduce inbox clutter.

“With one email a week, members can quickly review the programs and activities that interest them most,” Sutliff said. “And when time-sensitive items arise, we’ll still send an extra message to ensure important updates aren’t missed.”

The bulletin’s name, *Nutgraph*, comes from the journalism term describing a short paragraph that captures the central theme of an article, which is a fitting description for this concise roundup of OPA news.

Eligible members can watch for *The Nutgraph* in their inboxes every Thursday.

Special needs students in Perry learn skills writing columns for the Perry Daily Journal

The Perry Daily Journal started a program that partners with special needs students in the Perry Public School system, giving them the opportunity to experience journalism firsthand.

Students who participate sign up for the program and receive official Perry Daily Journal Reporter badges. They interview fellow students and teachers, write news stories, and with assistance from their teachers use AI tools to help polish their work for publication. The students are enjoying both the creative process and the excitement of seeing their stories published in the PDJ.

The special column began as an idea from Joshua Battles, son of Lori Battles, general manager of the Perry Daily Journal. Joshua also occasionally works as an inserter for the newspaper. He is a student in the Foundational Learning Program (FLP) at Perry Public Schools, where he is taught by Shellynn Kelly.

The Foundational Learning Program focuses on real-world math, reading, life skills and social development. Its goal

is to prepare students for life beyond school by building practical, transferable skills.

“Joshua had expressed interest several times in interviewing individuals within the school district and writing articles about them,” said Lori Battles. “After discussing the idea with his teacher, Joshua’s idea quickly grew into a collaborative project involving all five FLP students.”

As part of the project, students take turns interviewing school personnel. Working as a team, they develop interview questions, assist with proofreading and support one another throughout the process. The student conducting the interview wears a special press pass provided by the Perry Daily Journal, asks the questions, records responses, writes the article and takes a photo with the interview subject.

The program teaches valuable skills, including writing, proofreading, appropriate use of AI tools and professional communication.

“It also encourages them to step outside their comfort



Special needs students in the Perry Public School system are learning journalism skills by writing for the Perry Daily Journal. Pictured are Pax Monarch-McWhinney, Paraprofessional Kim Spillman, Noah Bray, Bo Butler, Joshua Battles, Special Education teacher Shellynn Kelly, Lily Harrell, and Poteau Daily News General Manager Lori Battles.

zones and introduces concepts related to responsibility and workplace expectations,” said Lori.

Articles written by the students are published weekly when school is in session. The first article, written by Joshua Battles, featured his agricultur-

al teacher and was published on September 27.

“This partnership provides a meaningful opportunity for students to strengthen communication skills while building positive connections within the school district and the Perry community,” said Lori.

Got News?

Share news about your publication with other OPA members! If you have a new hire, sales promotion, contest, or have received an award or honor, tell us about it so we can put it in The Oklahoma Publisher.

Send your news or story ideas to

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Guardian system functional again

The Oklahoma Ethics Commission’s Guardian system has been restored after being unavailable for months.

The online portal, guardian.ok.gov, provides the public with access to campaign finance reports and other data, offering insight into political activity and elections in Oklahoma.

Last month, commission members terminated a contract with RFD and Associates and reinstated the previous

Guardian system operated by Civix. The commission also agreed to terminate its contract with RFD.

After the Guardian system was restored, the Ethics Commission said in an email, “The Guardian system is available immediately, allowing filers to submit reports and the public to access campaign-finance information without delay.”

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond said he will work to hold RFD and

Associates accountable to the law.

“It is critical that citizens have access to campaign finance reports and that online filing is fully functional,” Drummond told the Tulsa World.

“I appreciate the quick work of the Ethics Commission to ensure transparency as we enter into an election year.”

Affinity by Canva bundles vector, pixel, layout for free



Computer Notes

from the road
by Wilma Newby
wnewby@okpress.com

Some papers have been asking about the new, free Affinity software.

Serif, the company that created Affinity Publisher, Affinity Photo and Affinity Designer, was purchased by Canva on March 25, 2024.

Canva took the three programs and bundled them into one “free forever” program, Affinity by Canva, in late October 2025.

All three programs open in three tabs – Vector (for graphics), Pixel (for photos) and Layout. All you need to access it is a free Canva account. You can download this software at affinity.studio/download.

The software resides on your computer as a program file and works on Mac or Windows.

I’ve been using the new version for a few months now. While at first it didn’t seem to have all the features I was familiar with, after digging around and looking under all the flyout menus that they apparently had to consolidate, I’ve now found everything that was offered in the older Affinity.

The interface is somewhat confusing at first because tabs come up right on top of each other. Knowing where you’re at demands close attention to see which tab is highlighted.

Affinity Pixel has macros for batching photos; this feature is often missing in Photoshop “wannabe” software. It also has a camera RAW interface, somewhat like Photoshop’s, and many of the keyboard commands are the same as in Adobe software programs.

In fact, heavy keyboard

command users will find it easier to adapt to the new program because they’re almost the same. Look up the Photoshop keyboard commands and try it in Pixel to see if the right box comes up.

The menus take a while to memorize. If you’re using other software, changing to a complete setup for desktop publishing using Affinity will require a learning curve and all those habits your hands know by heart will take some retraining.

The Affinity Publisher (now called Layout) is on par with InDesign, Microsoft Publisher and QuarkXpress. In some ways it’s a blend of all three. Both InDesign and Quark have been around for decades and most of the bugs have been worked out. Affinity’s workflow is different but if someone were very committed to learning the new program, it can save money.

Microsoft is dropping Microsoft Publisher support in October 2026 (for more info see tinyurl.com/nhk34u2z) and the new Affinity would make a great replacement for it. The boxes and handles around the text and photos remind me of Publisher. If you’re still using Publisher, save your files as PDFs now so they’ll still be available to use going forward.

If you’re paying for several users to have the entire Adobe Creative Suite, you might cut costs by using Affinity Pixel

for users who only need photo editing software. With Pixel, photos can be set to CMYK or converted to CMYK later in the process. You’ll find this feature under **Document > Setup > Convert Format/ ICC Profile... Choose US Newsprint (SNAP 20020)** and click Convert. This changes how the file looks on screen, just like in Photoshop.

When using Affinity Layout to export a newspaper page to a PDF, there’s a place to choose CMYK, the ICC profile and the resolution for down-sampling, is similar to InDesign’s PDF export setting.

InDesign is still the winner for newspapers to create beautiful layouts, with QuarkXpress running a close second. However, with Affinity’s free price, it’s knocking at Quark’s door.

Affinity is worth taking a close look at in case management decides to use it at your office.

It’s bound to improve as it merges with Canva’s online software. But free forever? We have been down that road before.

You’re probably wondering about Acrobat since I didn’t mention it. Canva’s web-based program can open PDFs in an editable form allowing you to copy text to use elsewhere. It works, but it’s more cumbersome than Adobe Acrobat. If I had to compare it to something

else, I’d say it opens PDFs more like Google Docs.

Affinity also has an AI software, but it’s not fully developed yet. And to access many of its AI features you’re going to have to pay for an account with Canva, such as the Pro Account for \$120 per year. We can’t seem to get away from those subscriptions no matter how hard we try.

Some Oklahoma newspapers are already using Affinity to build full-page ads. It’s doesn’t take a big leap of imagination to see them building the whole newspaper in the program in the not-too-distant future.

Cost of programs per user:

InDesign: Annual plan, prepaid: \$263.88/yr. *The Adobe suite of programs is \$69.99/mo.*

QuarkXpress: \$279.00 for the first year; \$25 per year thereafter or \$629 one-time purchase for a perpetual license (includes one-year of support and upgrades; after that \$339 per year)

Affinity by Canva: FREE to users of the Canva program online. A free account can be used with an email address. The Pro online account is \$120 per year to and includes the AI built into the Desktop version.

OPA Computer Consultant Wilma Newby’s column is brought to you by the Oklahoma Advertising Network (OAN). For more information on the OAN program, contact Oklahoma Press Service at (405) 499-0020.



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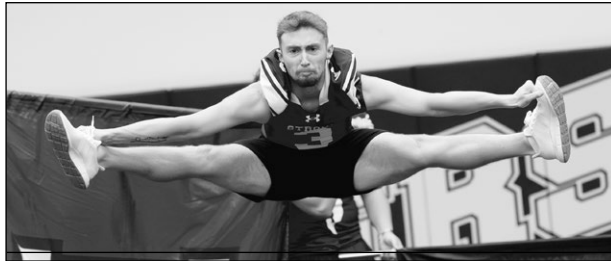
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Weekly Photo Winner:

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The Lincoln County News



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Column Winner:

JEFF MULLIN

Enid News & Eagle

Editorial Winner:

KIM POINDEXTER

Tahlequah Daily Press

Nov. 22, 1963...

just another ordinary day

It was just another ordinary day. All over America that fall morning, moms got kids ready for school as dads prepared to go to work. That's the way it worked in 1963, at any rate.

The morning paper said the president was in Dallas, trying to make nice with Texas Democrats, with an eye on the 1964 election looming on the political horizon.

For one fifth-grader in a small town in central Michigan, that Friday morning was certainly nothing special. Breakfast was on the table by the time he was up and dressed, as it always was. The walk to school was uneventful, as was the rest of the morning.

Early in the afternoon his class was marched off to the gymnasium for physical education. Dodge ball was on the agenda this day. The gym was alive with anticipation and filled with the voices of a couple dozen energetic children, wondering who would win and who would be smacked in the face by a ball and taken to the school nurse with a bloody nose.

All at once the gym door opened and one of the physical education teachers, a young man, stuck his head in and told the children to settle down, line up and sit quietly, their teacher wanted to talk to them.

Drummond needs to go after Walters

When State Superintendent Ryan Walters resigned after snaring a job in Texas, he ended one of the most embarrassing chapters of Oklahoma's history. Reports of his malfeasance and the abuse of his office surfaced in media sources around the world.

But just because he's gone doesn't mean he should be forgotten, nor should he be forgiven – not until he's produced some sort of restitution for the damage he inflicted upon the state's public education.

Walters didn't have the best interests of our children in mind. No rational person keeping up with current events could argue otherwise. He was, and continues to be, as one source in the UK put it, a "nasty piece of work." His foul influence will continue to affect Oklahoma through his new position, which has as its main goal destroying the culture of public educators, particularly their unions.

We can set aside the allegations Oklahoma Board of Education members leveled against him regarding a racy movie playing in the background during a meeting. That's small potatoes compared to his other nefarious activities. He's been accused by reputable sources of grossly abusing taxpayer monies, over-paying certain individuals, failing to maintain vital records, and overstepping his authority in countless cases.

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MONTHLY CONTEST WINNERS



NNA celebrates limits on postage increases

A step forward in the National Newspaper Association's postal policy brought a sigh of relief to an industry that has suffered from declining postal service and escalating prices to mail newspapers. The Postal Regulatory Commission rapped the US Postal Service Board of Governors on the knuckles for its aggressive price increase and limited future hikes to once a year.

The PRC, which has authority from Congress to set out the levels of possible rate increases, took its action after petitions from numerous mailing organizations, including NNA, to rein in aggressive price increases. NNA's leadership has met with PRC numerous times to lay out the details of damaging postage pricing and declining service.

The Commission's order on Jan. 13 expressed its dismay that USPS had so aggressively "exhausted" the limits of postage increase authority provided in 2022 after the PRC changed the boundaries pre-

viously set by inflation-based price caps in 2006.

The new order, however, did not trim the Postal Service's ability to enact sizeable postage increases.

NNA Postal Committee Chair Matt Paxton, publisher of The News-Gazette in Lexington, Virginia, said that not having to adjust postage rates in July and January each year, as USPS has required recently, would help publishers avoid some disruption.

"Unfortunately," Paxton said, "the PRC has not pulled back the amounts USPS can seek from its financially-strapped mailers. Instead of two smaller increases and all of the cost and disruption entailed there, USPS now can do one large increase a year. This may seem like jumping out of the fire into the frying pan. But I think the fact that the PRC is listening to us is an encouraging sign."

The PRC also limited USPS's ability to pass along pricing discounts for work-sharing – like presorting mail

or dropping it at local facilities – that are out of sync with the amount of money actually saved by the system. NNA has pointed out that its mail does not get full credit for all of the work-sharing publishers are doing in today's environment.

"I am gratified that our postal team has scored a victory," said NNA Chair Martha Diaz Aszkenazy, publisher of The San Fernando (California) Valley Sun. "We invest a lot of our members' investments into trying to get fair treatment in the mail. In fact, our delegation was in Washington on the day of this decision working with USPS on improving mail service. The entire postal system is threatened with the financial losses we see today. Finding ways to encourage businesses to bring more mail to USPS rather than driving them away with gargantuan price hikes is a good way to begin. We applaud the PRC's work and pledge that NNA will continue to push for improvements."

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