



GUIDE

BEST OF OKLAHOMA
MARCH 2024
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— AROUND — OKLAHOMA IN 14 STOPS



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GRAD & GRAMS

CELEBRATE YOUR GRADUATE!

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College of Architecture

are so proud of you,
with You have come such a
way! Design has always
been your true passion, and we
are excited to see where life
takes you next. We love you.
- Mom and Dad

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Congratulations! We are so
proud of your. Would not
express the pride and joy we
feel. You deserve the best life
and we are excited to see what
the future brings for you. We
will be behind you all the way.
- Mom, Dad, Aunt Polly

Anthony Smith
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You have always been a
person with business interests for
all since you were little. You are
a team leader, and we are so
proud of your success. We can't
wait to see where this journey
takes you. Congrat
- Mom and Dad

Brandi Waters
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Congratulations, Brandi! You
did it! We are so very proud of
you! A toast to the past, a toast
to the future. Wishing you
success. We love you!
- Lovell, Waters Family

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For you, we wish that this life
becomes all that you want
it to be. May your dreams be
and your wishes be small.
While you're enjoying your
new life, remember always that
much you are loved and that
we are proud of you.
- Love, Mom, Dad, Jerry

YOUR GRAD GRAM HERE!

Kassandra Roche
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You are the strongest and most
hard-working person we know.
You have accomplished so
much in these last few years,
and we look forward to watch
you grow and succeed
- You beyond graduation. You are
beyond grateful for the great things
done, Mom and Dad

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You inspire us, and we wish for
you is that you also become all
that you want it to be. Happy
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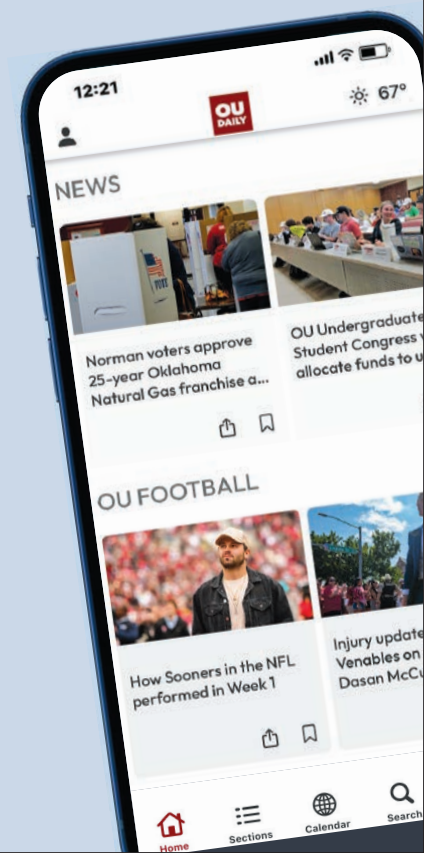
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FROM THE EDITOR



OLIVIA LAUTER/OU DAILY

The Oklahoma City skyline from Scissortail Park.

Beyond tourism: A state made for locals

Since the early planning stages of Best of Oklahoma, my goal has been to highlight the creativity and innovation that I believe puts Oklahoma at the cutting edge of the arts and entertainment, food and beverage and travel industries.

Ballet has been a central part of my life since I was 3. I grew up in Wichita, Kansas, and moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to attend a pre-professional ballet school when I was 16. Like many dancers, I didn't plan on going to college.

I later changed my mind and decided to attend OU because of the reputation of its performing arts. OU was the only place I ever applied.

My understanding of Oklahoma arts far preceded my move to the state. Oklahoma City Ballet and Tulsa Ballet are highly renowned and pull in artists from all over the world. They have been on my radar for as long as I can remember.

As I wrestled with how I wanted to introduce this publication, something I knew I wanted to communicate is that quality is not dependent upon scope. Arts, entertainment and food may not be leading industries in Oklahoma, but the size does not negate the excellence.

During my time in Norman, I have worked as a bartender and server, and have often been asked where I am from and what brought me here. More often than not, people are surprised to hear that I moved to Norman to continue my dance training, which tells me that even within the state, arts and entertainment scenes are underestimated.

Since moving to Norman, my belief in the strength of Oklahoma arts and culture has only been affirmed. Within Norman alone, we have the Norman Music Festival and Second Friday Art Walk. Oklahoma's two metropolises are growing, and continue to develop a rich restaurant culture.

This is the OU Daily's second edition of Best of Oklahoma. The publication draws inspiration in part from The New York Times' "36 Hours," a series that gives an agenda for what to do

in 36 hours while visiting cities worldwide. Most, if not all, of these are tourist destinations, driven by the desire for world-class experiences in arts, entertainment and food.

I have thought a lot about what it means to create a guide for a place that does not have a large tourist industry. Here in Oklahoma, the tourism we have is typically sports-based and seasonal.

The common thread that I see in this publication's stories is a focus on community. Oklahomans are not building an economy supported by visitors who arrive with their wallets ready. Rather, they are looking around to see what will be beneficial to their area.

We live in an individualistic society, with competition driving industry. One of the beauties of living in a state not powered by tourism is the ability to look inward, which I believe helps the authenticity of Oklahoma stay at the surface very naturally.

Oklahoma is not fueled by fame, it's fueled by community.

This publication touches on restaurants and cafes; performing, visual and tactile arts; state parks and travel; and the leaders, entrepreneurs and artists that are telling stories shaped by the people around them. The points of pride are not fame or prestige, but rather the successful investment in the community and its future.



Emma Blakley
Culture editor
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PHOTO PROVIDED

Oklahoma City-based indie punk band Bee and the Hive performs at Resonant Head. The band signed with Catapult Recordings in October 2022.

FROM TEEN PASSION TO PROFESSIONAL LABEL

Catapult Recordings celebrates five years serving young musicians

BY SHELBY EMERY • SHELBY.E.EMERY-1@OU.EDU

Oklahoma City-based record label Catapult Recordings celebrated five years of business this February.

Catapult Recordings began in February 2019 when 14-year-old Cooper Anderson started helping his friends upload their music to streaming services.

"I was around a bunch of people who were making really cool music," Anderson said. "I decided at that point, 'Well, why don't we just put that stuff out?'"

Anderson is a commercial music business freshman at the University of Central Oklahoma. Having started the label at a young age, Anderson said that he knows how to market to a younger generation.

"I think having the first four years that I was in high school where I had — especially during the pandemic — so much free time really gave us a leg up on kind of jumpstarting the whole project," Anderson said.

While starting the label, Anderson said he received guidance from Scott Booker, manager of triple Grammy Award-winning band The Flaming Lips and CEO of UCO's Academy of Contemporary Music.

"He was a very helpful individual in getting us cemented in the local scene and just there as a guide for pointers," Anderson said.

Since its inception, Catapult Recordings has signed 12 artists and bands, eight of which are based in Oklahoma. Anderson said the label doesn't seek out a specific genre and its artists come from a variety of music styles, including jazz, punk and traditional folk.

"The music that I sign just comes across my desk," Anderson said. "It's just up to chance of what I find first."

Oklahoma-based indie punk band Bee and the Hive signed with Catapult Recordings in October 2022. OU biomedical engineering senior Noah Roberts, the band's guitarist, said that signing with the label helped establish the band professionally.

"It became a little bit more real," Roberts said. "Before Cooper came along, we hadn't really released any music or anything like that."

Catapult Recordings values authenticity and transparency, which Anderson said involves upfront communication about royalties and providing artists with short, easy-to-understand contracts.

"He was very upfront," Roberts said. "We still have complete creative control, then Cooper handles all the behind-the-scenes releases on streaming services, physical releases and stuff like that."

Since signing with Catapult Recordings, Bee and the Hive has released its debut EP, "Flamingo Dancing," as well as two singles.

While the label does not exclusively sign Oklahoma artists, Catapult Recordings aims to connect to its local community through meet-and-greets and charity events.

In 2023, Catapult Recordings partnered with nonprofit RestoreOKC to hold the "Help Oklahoma Teachers" concert, a benefit event raising funds for Restore Schools. The concert featured 19 Oklahoma bands, and all proceeds went directly to the charity.

Songs performed at the show were unreleased. Now, the only way to listen to them is on CDs, cassettes and by streaming a collaborative album made for the event.

Catapult Recordings uses in-house CD and cassette pressing equipment, so the label has complete control over the creation process of albums.

"We can really control literally everything about how the album is made and distributed and put out," Anderson said.

Physical copies of music released by Catapult Recordings can be found at the Norman and Oklahoma City-based record store Guestroom Records, and releases can be purchased on Catapult Recording's website.



JENNA BURRESS/OU DAILY

Prairie Surf Studios' facility holds five soundstages, a commercial-grade kitchen and a mill space for carpentry and welding.

CAMERAS ON OKLAHOMA

Prairie Surf Studios offers center stage to the state's film industry

BY SHELBY EMERY • SHELBY.E.EMERY-1@OU.EDU

Prairie Surf Studios has brought major contributions to the Oklahoma film industry since opening in 2021.

Prior to launching the studio, sitcom actress Rachel Cannon was living in Los Angeles and acting in shows such as "Fresh Off the Boat" and "Two and a Half Men." With the intention of traveling for work, she moved back to her home state of Oklahoma.

Cannon graduated from OU in 2000 with a degree in critical analysis of film and television and production. With 20 years of Hollywood acting roles under her belt, she returned to Oklahoma in 2020, where she noticed a growing film industry.

"I found an opportunity to contribute to that (growth) by helping to add the infrastructure that was missing to really anchor television here," Cannon told the OU Daily.

Prairie Surf Studios is currently in the 1.3 million square foot space in downtown Oklahoma City that once housed the Cox Convention Center. The facility holds five soundstages, ranging from 24,500 to 32,000 square feet in size, and features a 5,500-square-foot commercial-grade kitchen for catering and a 10,000-square-foot mill space for carpentry and welding.

Cannon said that her goal is to ensure crew members and their families enter a hospitable environment when working on a production at Prairie Surf. Being a mother to a 7-year-old, she

said she would send lists of activities that she enjoys with her own family, and in 2023 held a Thanksgiving dinner for crew members who were away from home.

"I want them to know that this is a special place that they come and get to be a part of because I'm really proud to be an Oklahoman," Cannon said. "I want them to see why."

Prairie Surf Studios has been used for the filming of "American Underdog" and the first season of the Sylvester Stallone drama series, "Tulsa King." The studio wrapped filming in December for the upcoming Universal Pictures film "Twisters," featuring Glen Powell, Kiernan Shipka and Daisy Edgar-Jones.

Prairie Surf Studios Director of Operations Hagan Hunter said that he hopes Prairie Surf can continue to bring large productions to Oklahoma to create jobs and economic growth for the state.

"What I would love to see is the ability to have multiple large productions in the state overlapping so that we continue to have high-paying jobs for Oklahomans," Hunter said. "And we continue to increase others' awareness of Oklahoma as a film-friendly state."

Hunter didn't originally come from a film background. He

spent seven years in the U.S. Marine Corps before studying petroleum geology at OU. After almost three years working as an engineer in Saudi Arabia, Hunter returned to Oklahoma and explored his interest in film.

Hunter said that the best part of working at a studio that contributes to large productions like "Twisters" and "Tulsa King" is seeing how it helps the state of Oklahoma and provides job opportunities in and out of the studio.

"They can immediately step into these high-paying jobs which don't require a degree (and don't) require a diploma, for that matter," Hunter said.

For the production of "Twisters," nearly 2,300 metro area residents were hired and 10 Oklahoma City hotels were used for lodging.

"You have all these different things that play in that aren't just on the day-to-day set life," Hunter said. "It's a lot of opportunities."

Prairie Surf Studios is located at 1 Myriad Gardens in Oklahoma City. The studio's most recent project, "Twisters" will premier in theaters July 19.



PHOTOS BY CASSIDY MARTIN/OU DAILY

Factory Obscura's art displays are immersive pieces. "Mix-Tape," the organization's permanent exhibit, is open to the public every day except Tuesday.

ART YOU CAN SEE, HEAR, FEEL

Factory Obscura exhibits other-worldly installations accessible to all

BY CASSIDY MARTIN • CASSIDY.J.MARTIN-1@OU.EDU

Factory Obscura is an Oklahoma City arts organization that creates immersive and accessible art experiences for all ages.

The organization began in 2017 when five artists combined their expertise to produce a mentally and physically interactive exhibit called "Shift," an adult playground examining the idea of human consciousness.

A free exhibit created as proof of concept for immersive art, "Shift" was expected to bring in 5,000 visitors within three months, but instead reached 20,000.

Visitors waited outdoors in the cold, some arriving hours early, and others joining the line out of curiosity. Co-founder and director of logistical creativity Kelsey Karper credits the popularity of the exhibit to word-of-mouth.

"It's always really great to turn to the person who's working with you and acknowledge that we are actually creating something," staff artist Emma Difani said.

The team collaborates in the creation of new installations at Factory Obscura, all of which are wheelchair accessible and intentionally designed to offer a meaningful experience for those with vision and hearing impairments.

Factory Obscura's name is inspired by the obscure camera,

which projects photographed objects upside down and backward, paired with the concept of uniformity that is often associated with factories.

"Factory Obscura is about finding ways to support artists in ways that allow them to take leaps in their creative practice and careers," Karper said.

While Factory Obscura designs many temporary exhibits, the company is known for its permanent exhibit "Mix-Tape." The 6,000-square-foot experience provides visitors with a tactile journey through various themed rooms such as a heart-shaped illuminated hallway and a colorful sea-themed wonderland.

Factory Obscura strives to impact the community in more ways than entertainment. Its for-profit business model supports arts education in Oklahoma.

Factory Obscura surpassed profit goals for the first time in 2023, allowing the organization to offer grants for art education, Karper explained. The program will be released later this year and educators and organizations will be eligible to apply. Applications will be reviewed by the team at Factory Obscura. Karper said the team believes that arts education has different

meanings to everyone and doesn't fit into a specific box.

"The huge leaps (artists) can make with just a little bit of support is really inspiring and can have ripple effects across the community," Karper said.

The organization also has plans to expand Mix-Tape to allow more opportunities to house additional events and exhibits. Mix-Tape currently has a merchandise shop named Bonus Track, full of Mix-Tape-inspired gifts designed by local artists.

Mix-Tape includes an unoccupied section of the building called East Bay, where performances, parties and garage sales are held. The team at Factory Obscura believes in creating events where people can come together regardless of age and background. Karper said that some of their most beloved parties, such as the winter solstice party, take place during the changing of seasons because every culture and religion can universally celebrate the passing of time.

"We carry our light into the community on the darkest night of the year," Karper said.

Mix-Tape is open every day except Tuesday. General admission is \$22 and includes all-day admission. Discounted admission rates are available for children 12 and under.

MURDER, MYSTERY, MEALS

The Dinner Detective pairs interactive theater with fine dining

BY CASSIDY MARTIN •
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An eccentric and interactive experience in downtown Oklahoma City, The Dinner Detective intertwines murder mystery theater with a multi-course meal.

The Dinner Detective was founded in 2004 by Kelly and Scott O'Brien who debuted the concept in Los Angeles. Today, there are 91 locations nationally and a recently opened location in Toronto, Canada.

The cast of The Dinner Detective is composed of local artists from a variety of backgrounds. Some performers are traditional and improvisational actors, others are musicians or sociable people looking for a unique work environment.

The casts are ever-changing and auditions are held every few months to replace cast members who may take breaks for other projects. According to co-executive producer and performer Stephen Wilder, some performers have gone from The Dinner Detective to major motion pictures like "Jurassic World" and "Orange Is the New Black."

Each cast member is provided with an outline for the show, which changes approximately every three months. The majority of the show is improvisation, influenced by audience engagement. The cast members evoke conversation and encourage role play from audience members, creating a unique experience every night.

The magic comes from the cast's ability to connect with the audience and provide an interactive experience to everyone, regardless of where they are seated. Wilder described the environment as less of a theater show and more of a party.

"You're not just watching the action, you become a part of it," Wilder said.

Wilder said the cast is professionally trained to navigate the interactive theater setting and will never make guests feel uncomfortable. The audience can choose to sit and observe or to interact with the detectives and other guests.

Regardless of the script, each show follows a structure: Audience members are invited to an upscale dinner party at which a crime occurs, guests collaborate to solve the mystery and the rest of the narrative is completely up to the people in the room.

The cast members perform and interact with the audience throughout the entire night and a few are even disguised as guests seated at the tables. The audience member who can solve the crime with the most detail receives a prize at the end of the night.



The cast of The Dinner Detective includes local artists, actors, musicians and individuals looking for a unique work environment.

The Dinner Detective takes place at the Skirvin Hilton, built in downtown Oklahoma City by oil and real estate millionaire Bill Skirvin in 1911. The hotel is said to be haunted by the ghost of a maid named Effie. Legend says Skirvin locked her in a room on the 10th floor upon discovering she was pregnant with their illegitimate child. After giving birth, she jumped from the window. Hotel guests claim that the ghost still roams the hallways.

When entering the Skirvin, The Dinner Detective cast members encourage the audience to create a persona for the evening.

"We've had Barbie, Bugs Bunny and Tony Stark join us for dinner," Oklahoma City associate producer Derek Miller said.

Audience members are then directed into a ballroom where rows of round banquet tables are set. The show's two intermissions correspond with the courses of the meal. During this time, audience members can discuss clues, eat, drink and socialize.

The Dinner Detective partners with the Skirvin to serve guests a multi-course meal at each show. Guests can select one of three entrees, including potato-crust chicken, roasted

salmon with lemon cream sauce or eggplant with balsamic glaze.

Before the show begins, audience members are offered an appetizer in addition to a seasonal green salad. Enough time is provided to ensure that everyone can visit the full-service bar, which is not included in the ticket price.

During the first intermission, audience members are served their selected entree and have plenty of time to discuss the first set of clues. Once the second act ends, the Skirvin team arrives with creme brulee for dessert.

In addition to public shows, The Dinner Detective hosts private events such as company functions, wedding receptions, family reunions and more.

General admission is \$78.95 and includes the multi-course meal, wait staff gratuity and admission. Public shows starting at 6 p.m. are available three times a month at the Skirvin. Audience members are expected to arrive by 5:45 p.m. in business casual attire. Tickets can be found on The Dinner Detective website.



PHOTOS BY RACHEL NICHOLS/OU DAILY

Café Kacao offers fresh coffee made with beans shipped from Guatemala within 48 hours of being roasted.

FAMILY RECIPES MEET FUSION FLAVORS

Café Kacao combines global cuisines for a new spin on brunch

BY MADELINE HOFFMANN • MADELINE.G.HOFFMANN-1@OU.EDU

After opening in 2011, Café Kacao established itself as a popular Guatemalan and Latin fusion brunch spot in Oklahoma City.

Veronica Zelada, founder and chef of Café Kacao, emigrated from Guatemala with her three children. She and her family first came to California, briefly returned to Guatemala and finally settled in Oklahoma City.

"The outlook didn't look too bright," Luidgi Del Cid, co-owner of Café Kacao and Zelada's son, said. "(Zelada) became an entrepreneur and went through the journey of saving money to take her children back to the U.S. alone."

She opened her first restaurant, Café Antigua, in 2004 where she served Guatemalan recipes passed down from her family. After three years, Zelada sold the restaurant and began working two jobs as a cook for both Olive Garden and The Cheesecake Factory.

"Those five years I stopped to think about my menu and kept doing better in my recipes and flavor," Zelada said.

"I went checking for brunch in Oklahoma and I saw a need." After Zelada gained more experience as a cook, she and Del Cid took a chance on Café Kacao. The two combined their knowledge from the service industry to determine the approach for their new restaurant.

Café Kacao's menu began mainly with Guatemalan fam-

ily recipes but adapted to fuse the meals with other global cuisines. Often, they pick popular regional dishes of Latin American countries and blend the components together.

"You'll see different items (on the menu) like 'vaca frita pupusas,' which has Salvadorian, Cuban and French techniques. It's four different countries in one plate," Del Cid said. "Just like a mixologist blends different beverages, it's the same with us."

The menu is divided into brunch and lunch. The brunch menu features a selection of appetizers, omelets, specials and "recetas de mama," or family recipes, whereas the lunch menu features entrees like smothered burritos and carne asada as well as sides and desserts.

Café Kacao also offers a variety of coffee, cocktails and mocktails. The restaurant's current featured cocktail is the "Fernando," also known as "Fernet con Coca," which consists of Coca-Cola and Fernet-Branca, an Italian herbal liqueur.

Café Kacao sources its coffee from the Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala, which ships its coffee beans to the restaurant within 48 hours of being roasted. In addition to serving conventional coffee, such as lattes and cold brew, the restaurant has its own unique takes.

"We started our coffee program very basic but then our horchata latte (became) the number one selling drink on

the menu," Del Cid said. "We started putting our own spin on all these classic beverages using Latin American-inspired recipes."

Coffee is important to Café Kacao, which is reflected in the restaurant's name. Zelada and Del Cid said they wanted to represent their culture as a whole, so they chose to reference cacao beans, which is central not only to Guatemala's economy, but all of Central and South America's.

A focus of Café Kacao's is giving back to the community and aiming to follow in the footsteps of other Latin American organizations. In the meantime, the restaurant continues to offer unique Latin American cuisine difficult to find elsewhere.

The northern exterior wall of Café Kacao features a freshly painted mural of a quetzal, the national bird and symbol of Guatemala, by artist Carlos Barboza. The colorful bird is at the center of the country's flag and the name of Guatemala's currency.

"When you come to eat here at Café Kacao, you kind of step away from Oklahoma City and you're in this little bubble somewhere in Central America," Del Cid said.

Café Kacao, at 3325 N. Classen Blvd., is open from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. weekdays and from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday. Sunday brunch is offered from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.



EÔTÉ Coffee is known for its slow bar which serves drinks made using more time-intensive techniques like the pour over and French press.

COFFEE WITH A CAUSE

With quality and consistency, EÔTÉ serves fresh roasts and fosters community

BY MADELINE HOFFMANN • MADELINE.G.HOFFMANN-1@OU.EDU

Established in 2012, Ends of the Earth Coffee, also known as EÔTÉ, is a uniquely located standout coffee shop and craft roaster focused on quality and giving back to the Oklahoma City community.

EÔTÉ began in a garage at founding partner Todd Vinson's camp, Willow Springs Boys Ranch in Chandler. In 2019, the company opened a physical shop where they roast and serve coffee.

Located in the basement of the Central Exchange Building in Oklahoma City's historic Automobile Alley district, EÔTÉ's environment is distinct. With sounds of coffee grinding in the background, the atmosphere is dimmer and more industrial compared to other shops.

EÔTÉ features a selection of classic hot and cold coffees as well as drinks from its slow bar, such as coffee made from a French press. Along with beverages, the company sells a wide variety of freshly roasted light and dark roast coffee beans.

"We roast Monday through Friday so you know it's always going to be fresh," assistant manager Anna Smith said.

"We have, on the bar, a variety to choose from. Everyone is different and we have a good selection to cater to everyone."

Smith said the shop is known for drinks that take more time and effort, specifically the pour over. The drink technique involves a barista pouring hot water over coffee grounds by hand. The manual drip method of a pour over allows for a high level of control over the results.

From its menu to its roasting blends, EÔTÉ prioritizes quality and consistency over all. The company roasts only high caliber, recently grown beans to assemble into bags and drinks.

"We always use this year's crop, whereas some other shops or roasters are using lower quality beans for cheaper," said Patrick Will, president and partner of EÔTÉ. "We have always maintained quality."

EÔTÉ's high-quality coffee beans are imported both from farmers across the world and through brokers in Oklahoma City. Some of the company's blends consist of beans from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Brazil.

In addition to quality, EÔTÉ highly values their connection to the Oklahoma City coffee community. They often work with local companies to bring people together and foster business relationships.

Though the deal is currently in process, EÔTÉ intends to open a coffee shop partnered with INTEGRIS Health at a hospital in Oklahoma City.

"We are here for the community and that's why I continue to say I, we, EÔTÉ does not give up," Will said. "It was really important for us, and still is, to be open and available. A place where people can depend on."

EÔTÉ's roasting quality attracts customers from all over the world. On a wall in the shop, customers can place a pin on a corkboard map to mark where they are from.

Located in the basement of 7 NE 6th St., EÔTÉ is open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday.



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Quartz Mountain State Park in Southwestern Oklahoma is known for Lake Altus-Lugert, the lodge, camping areas, hiking and other outdoor activities.

MORE THAN A PRAIRIE

Hike, climb, fish and more at scenic Quartz Mountain State Park

BY MADISSON CAMERON • MADISSON.R.CAMERON-1@OU.EDU

Nestled in the southwestern corner of Oklahoma, the diverse landscape and wildlife of Quartz Mountain State Park is a highlight for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.

The park covers 4,540 acres of Southwest Oklahoma and more than 6,000 surface acres of water. The area was once part of the ancestral lands of Indigenous tribes, including the Kiowa, Osage, Quapaw, Wichita, Comanche, Caddo and Kickapoo nations.

The park is home to diverse wildlife and features Lake Altus-Lugert and the north fork of the Red River. With its flora and fauna, unique topography and rich history, the park is an ideal destination for fishing, hiking, rock climbing and picnicking.

Quartz Mountain State Park was established as one of seven original Oklahoma state parks in 1935 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiative. A mid-century lodge and golf course were built in the 1950s, attracting a new wave of visitors.

In the 1970s, the Oklahoma Arts Institute became a partner

of the park. The development of an outdoor amphitheater, performance hall and various art studios allowed the institute to host visual and performing arts programs geared toward high school students pursuing disciplines from classical ballet to creative writing.

The park has tent campsites, RV hookups and cabins available for overnight stays. The Quartz Mountain State Park Lodge is nestled between the mountains and the waterfront.

"I think it's really cool how the lodge sits down in the mountains," Oklahoma State Parks Director Sterling Zearley said. "It doesn't look like any other place in Oklahoma."

An especially noteworthy feature for climbers, the Baldy Point micro-range stands 300 feet above the prairie. Suitable for rock climbers and rappellers, the area also features a 2 mile in-and-out trail that wraps around the base and leads to the peak.

"There's about 8 miles of hiking trails at the park, and the park is right where the prairie and mountain landscape meet," said Zearley, "There's the swim beach, (all-terrain vehicle) riding on

the north shore, fishing docks, rock climbing, an 18-hole disc golf course and so much more for guests to enjoy."

The park offers a seasonal ATV riding area in the north shore region from April to October. Visitors can ride across approximately 400 acres of land and 2 miles of trails.

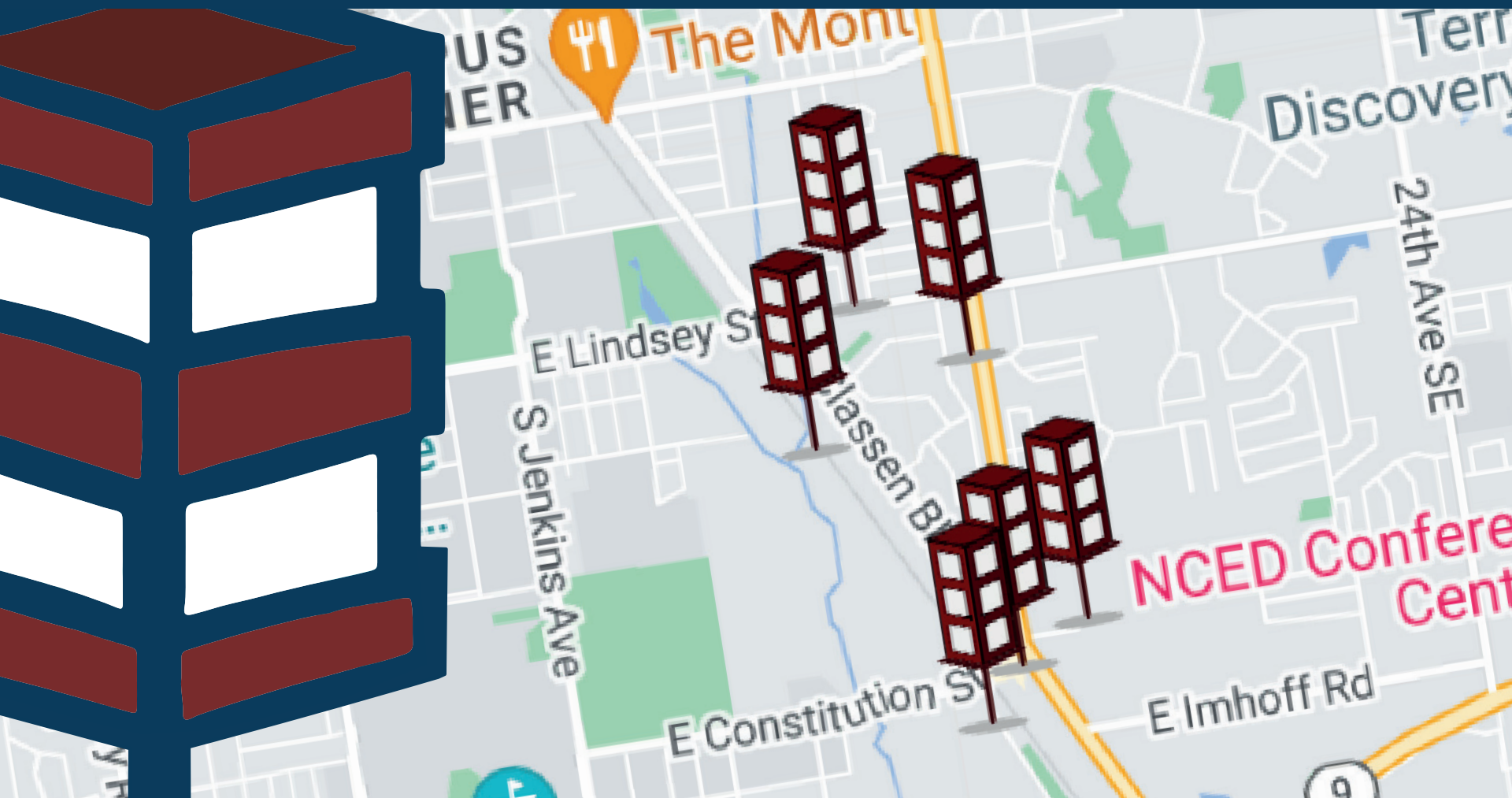
The range of wildlife at Quartz Mountain State Park includes deer, coyotes, beavers, prairie falcons and mountain lions, among others.

"In the winter, there are bald eagles and bobcats and different wildlife throughout the year," Zearley said. "The last time I was there, there were porcupines all around the lodge, which isn't something you see every day."

With its breathtaking scenery and a variety of outdoor activities, Quartz Mountain is a unique escape into the natural beauty of Oklahoma.

"The terrain and wildlife is different than anywhere else in Oklahoma," said Zearley, "It's amazing how much the terrain changes just two and a half hours away from Oklahoma City."

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OU
DAILY

the RED CUP Q&A

separating alcohol fact from fiction

Q Is there anything to do on the weekend besides drink?

A **Plenty!** Believe it or not, not all college students drink every weekend. According to the 2022 Natl College Health Assessment, almost half of OU students reported they haven't had a drink within two weeks.

Through the OU Campus Activities Council, you can find plenty of sporting, cultural and artsy events to attend. This is a great way for new students to make like-minded friends.

Below are even more exciting things to do in Oklahoma:

Plan ahead for these events

2nd Friday Art Walk is a free art event in the heart of downtown. Every second Friday at 6pm on Main Street

Norman Farm Market hosts vendors selling locally-sourced food and artisan goods. Every Tues & Sat at The Well

Restaurants

- ① **Victoria's** historic Norman pasta shop
- ② **Tarahumara's** showcases authentic recipes from Chihuahua, Mexico
- ③ **Neighborhood Jam** bustling brunch staple
- ④ **Tatsumaki Ramen** Japanese bistro with a stunning atmosphere
- ⑤ **Kebabish Bites** homey Pakistani cuisine based on family recipes

Cafes & Coffeeshops

- ⑥ **Gray Owl Coffee** worker's co-op with artisan coffee and great study vibes
- ⑦ **The Earth** quaint, hidden gem serving sustainable and plant-based food
- ⑧ **Second Wind** volunteer-led coffee shop with poetry and music nights

Games, Arts & Crafts

- ⑨ **Firehouse Arts Center** art exhibits and alongside art classes for adults
- ⑩ **Commonspace Game Cafe** countless board games for you and your friends
- ⑪ **Fred Jones Art Museum** dazzlingly collections of fine art right on campus
- Heyday** laser tag, arcades, bowling, mini- golf and more!

Parks & Rec

- ⑫ **Get Air** trampolines
- ⑬ **Stratus Climbing** rock-climbing and yoga
- ⑭ **Sutton Wilderness Park** 1.4 mile nature trail
- ⑮ **Oklahoma Axe Factory** axe throwing
- Lake Thunderbird** fishing, boating, picnics, swimming, hiking, bicycling
- Scissortail Park** picnics, events, concerts, canoeing, dog park, strolling
- Myriad Botanical Gardens** flower displays, concerts, movies, festivals
- Wichita Mountains** hiking, climbing, sightseeing, visiting Medicine Park

Helpful links

List of Student Orgs

Search over 600+ student clubs!
ou.campuslabs.com/engage/organizations

Campus Events

Find fairs and social events!
<https://ou.campuslabs.com/engage/events>



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PHOTO PROVIDED

Little Sahara State Park features a unique landscape of sand dunes. Visitors can rent all-terrain vehicles to explore the park.

OKLAHOMA'S OWN DESERT

Ride the dunes and surf the sand at Little Sahara State Park

BY MADISSON CAMERON • MADISSON.R.CAMERON-1@OU.EDU

In the northwest part of the state, Little Sahara State Park is a geographic anomaly.

Named for its resemblance to the North African desert, the Little Sahara dunes were formed over thousands of years as a result of the prehistoric Cimarron River. Due to the popularity of the area, the Oklahoma Legislature purchased land from the Oklahoma State Land Commission and established the area as a state park in 1960.

The fine sand of Little Sahara has been dispersed across fields, roads and homes due to strong Oklahoma winds. In the past 70 years, U.S. Highway 281 has been relocated three times, each new road constructed 25 to 50 yards east of the previous one.

"It's the coolest place," Oklahoma State Parks Director Sterling Zearley said. "It's hard to imagine because when

you think of sand dunes, you don't think of them being in Oklahoma, but when you're there, it looks like you're in the middle of the desert."

The park covers over 1,600 acres of pristine dunes, providing space for activities such as sand boarding, all-terrain vehicle riding, hiking and camping. The park provides rental services for ATVs, making it a convenient option for first-time visitors.

"Getting to experience ATV riding is such a unique opportunity," Zearley said.

The landscape is dotted with unique plant species that have adapted to the harsh desert environment such as sagebrush, sand plums, eastern red cedar and mixed grasses typical to a prairie. The area is also home to a variety of wildlife including lizards, snakes and birds.

"Oklahoma is so unique because you can go from mountains

and fields to sand dunes within a two-hour drive," said Zearley. "Our state parks are very unique, not only because of the activities, but the natural terrain."

With stunning scenery and endless recreation opportunities, Little Sahara State Park gives visitors a unique understanding of the range of Oklahoma's natural beauty.

"More people need to go and explore Oklahoma," said Zearley. "There are so many unique opportunities, parks and areas that I would love for more people to go and visit."

To access the dunes, visitors must pay a daily fee of \$10 for drivers and passengers, but children under 10 can enter for free. Frequent visitors can purchase an annual family pass, which costs \$200 for the first family member and \$125 for each additional family member in the same household.

HEART OF TULSA ARTS

City arts center hosts performances, community programs

BY EMMA BLAKLEY •
EMMA.L.BLAKLEY-1@OU.EDU

A cornerstone of the city's arts scene, the Tulsa Performing Arts Center aims to increase the accessibility of city arts and bring the community together.

The performing arts center is used by many of the city's large performing arts organizations including Tulsa Ballet, Chamber Music Tulsa, American Theatre Company and the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra. The arts center also hosts traveling shows, including productions seen on Broadway.

Until 2019, the Tulsa Performing Arts Center was owned and operated by the city of Tulsa and was part of the city budget. Since then, it has been part of the Tulsa Performing Arts Trust.

Tulsa Performing Arts Center CEO Mark Frie grew up in Tulsa and has performed across North America in musicals, concerts and operas. He returned to Oklahoma in 2008 to open Broken Arrow Performing Arts Center, where he served as executive director for nine years.

"I believe that the arts have a unique way of bringing people from different backgrounds together," Frie said. "The arts can be very healing, and we look around the world and in our country at a lot of negativity and a lot of hate. The arts, I think, can unite and heal."

Named director of the Tulsa Performing Arts Center in 2017 by Mayor G.T. Bynum, Frie recently led a successful campaign for Improve Our Tulsa funding that resulted in Tulsans voting in favor of a \$79.7 million package for improvements to the center.

Frie believes the arts are an important part of life for people on a personal level, but says there is also valuable power in the arts' impact on the city economy.

"The arts are an economic driver in our communities. We create hundreds of jobs, bring millions of dollars in economic impact into the state," Frie said. "That's an important thing to remember as you look at funding and how the arts are being funded or not funded."

Jeremy Stevens, director of community engagement, aims to increase the accessibility of the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, especially now that the center is privately funded. Stevens said part of this involves looking at how art is happening in the larger community.

"How do we build that bridge to recognize and celebrate the artistic work being done in communities with the same vim and vigor that we do the forming things that happen in the building?" Stevens said.

Though audiences continue to grow post-pandemic, attendance remains less than it once was. Stevens takes account of showtimes, name recognition of a production and the target



The Tulsa Performing Arts Center hosts many types of performances including ballet, orchestra and theater.

audience when reviewing ticket sales. Name recognition of a show continues to sell tickets, but Stevens said he has seen a recent spike in young audiences' interest in theater, rather than "theater for theater sake," which Stevens credits to the educational aspect of the shows.

"It also has to do with, 'Is the material accessible and understandable?'" Stephens said. "Because it has to be grades K through eight, it presents itself in a way that is fully relational, through all spectrums and demographics."

The Tulsa Performing Arts Center is widely known and used as a venue, but Stevens wants the center to also be viewed as an entity and for its outreach.

The center has multiple outreach programs geared toward bringing the arts to its community. The center's Any Given Child program provides a free theatrical performance for kindergarteners in Tulsa Public Schools. The center also hosts the

Arts In the Air music festival, which pays local artists while providing a weekend of live performances.

Though the nature of the performing arts leads to a focus on the audience's experience, Frie said Oklahoma audiences have an attitude and engagement that is especially rewarding to performers. Frie said touring performers often express to him that they especially enjoy performing for Oklahomans.

"There really is something about Oklahoma audiences in terms of how they respond and still have that great, wholesome, never-met-a-stranger feel that translates back to the actor or performer on stage," Frie said. "I hear all the time that our audiences are some of the warmest audiences that people perform in front of throughout the country."

The Tulsa Performing Arts Center is found at 110 E. 2nd St. Details on performances and outreach programs are available on its website.

SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

'IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO DANCE'

Temple of Dance offers classes for adults at any level of experience

BY EMMA BLAKLEY •
EMMA.L.BLAKLEY-1@OU.EDU

Born of inspiration during the uncertainty of the pandemic, adult studio Temple of Dance is home to a vibrant community of dancers from beginner to professional.

In October 2020, Carrie Holmes was the lead of hip-hop group Gather Round Crew. When the troupe was cut due to the financial strain of the pandemic, Holmes went from her dream job to working at a smoothie shop and selling goods on eBay.

"I was kind of lost," Holmes said, explaining that after 20-odd years of teaching in and managing children's dance studios, she was burnt out.

"I met a lady through Facebook Marketplace, she was selling a bookcase for \$20," Holmes said. "(We) ended up having a long conversation and she suggested the concept of an adult dance studio."

While many children's dance studios offer a limited selection of adult classes, studios designed strictly for adults are rare. The idea resonated with Holmes, who said she struggled as a professional dancer to find adult classes that would help her grow in her craft.

With a vision but no startup funds, Holmes began crowdfunding. She raised enough to secure her building and used her stimulus check on mirrors and floors, which volunteers helped install. The studio opened its doors in March 2021.

Due to the general lack of adult dance studios, Holmes was unsure if Temple of Dance would succeed. However, Holmes said the studio has been highly sought-after since its inception.

"The community's response from day one has been great because we haven't had this," Holmes said. "It's interesting, because there's not a lot of market research out there about how many adult dancers there are."

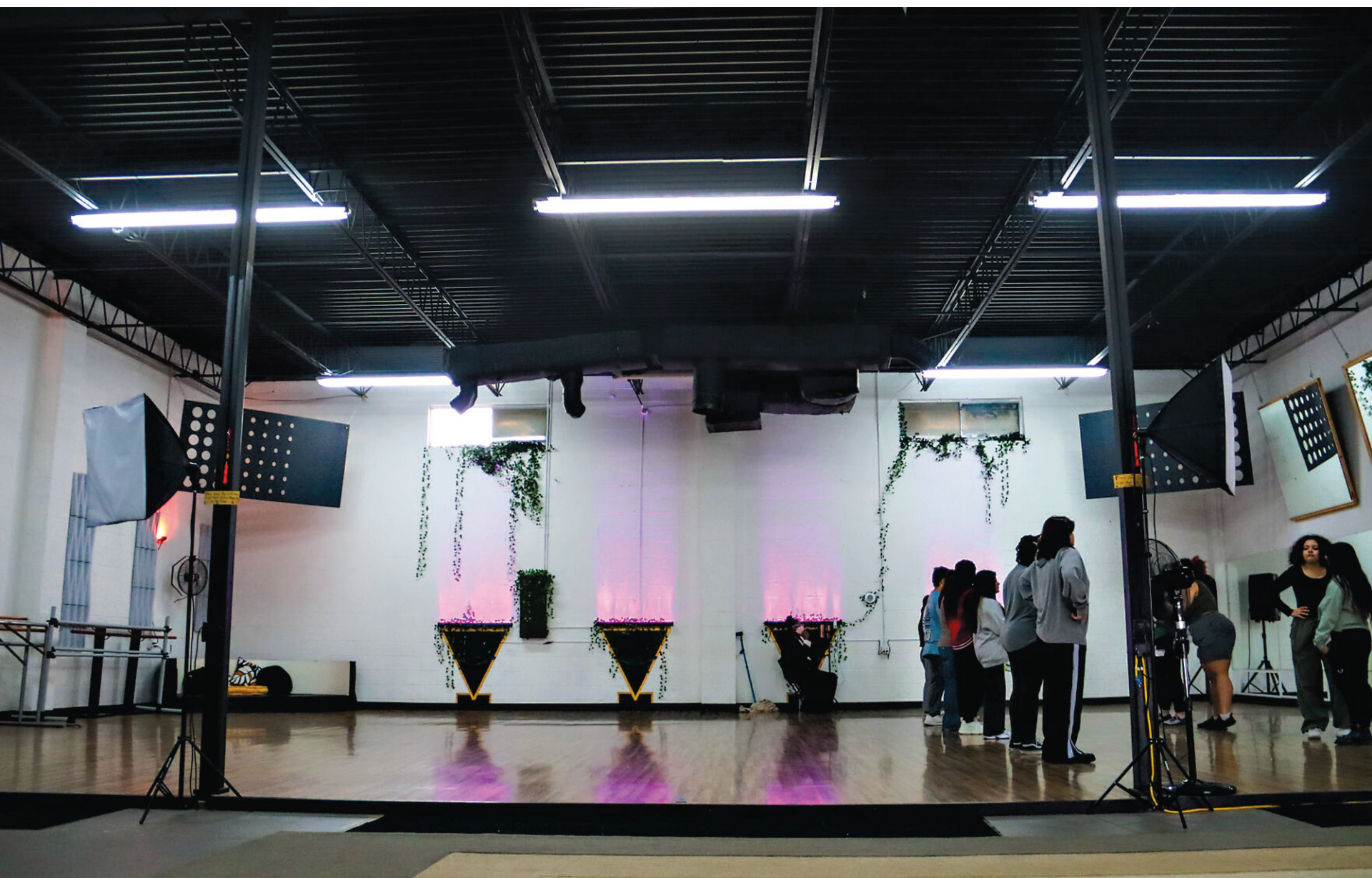
Temple of Dance offers beginner, intermediate and advanced classes in a variety of styles, the most popular being heels, hip-hop and contemporary. Holmes said she struggled as an adult dancer to find classes that were anything but recreational and emphasized the importance of providing a variety of levels.

"Adults actually have a broader (age) range than kids," Holmes said. "We go from 18 to 100-something, and there are all sorts of different dancers at different levels looking for different things."



PHOTOS BY SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

Temple of Dance offers beginner, intermediate and advanced classes in styles ranging from heels to hip-hop.



Temple of Dance hosts classes seven days a week for adults of any age.

The majority of the classes offered at Temple of Dance are at a beginner level, but the studio offers classes for professional dancers as well. The studio's motto is "It's never too late to dance," which Holmes said is a push against the idea that dancers have to start at a young age to be successful.

"There is definitely this unspoken belief that if you didn't start dance in your high school years, it's too late for you," Holmes said. "Nobody outwardly says it, but that's the belief that so many of us carry, so that is one of the primary reasons we are here."

When he moved to Tulsa, Carson Edmonds had only been dancing for a couple of years.

When the societal disruption of the pandemic inspired him to try something new, Edmonds decided to take dance classes for the first time.

"I've always enjoyed dancing, but I didn't consider it something I should do until the pandemic came around and

everyone was reevaluating their life choices really hard," Edmonds said. "I started and just was like, 'I've got to do this now.' It just feels good."

Edmonds found Temple of Dance while searching the internet for adult dance classes in the area. Two years later, Edmonds said that the culture built by Temple of Dance instructors and fellow classmates is what has kept him around.

"The common theme echoed through all of the instructors I've had is that you're supposed to make mistakes and look goofy," Edmonds said. "It's a place to explore, so there's very much this sort of chill, forgiving vibe built into the school."

Temple of Dance offers classes seven days a week and has become a center of collaboration. On Fridays, a Latin dance night is hosted by a group of local Latin dancers. This January, Red Bull reached out to Holmes to make Temple of Dance their Oklahoma stop for Red Bull's Dance Your Style program.

For those who decide to try dance classes for the first time,

Holmes recognizes the weight of the decision and emphasizes that the studio is a designated safe space. Holmes said she discusses the dance goals of each new student and shares those goals with each of the student's instructors to help them find a route to personal success.

"I try to acknowledge that it is literally sometimes five to 10 years of thinking about it before they get the guts to walk into the studio and, on a personal level, that is huge," Holmes said. "Once you're here, you'll see that we're very nice, we're a very safe space, but to make that leap of walking in the door is humongous."

Temple of Dance is at 8224 E. 41st St. in Tulsa. The studio offers new students a trial offer of two weeks of classes for \$40. The weekly class schedule can be found on the studio's website and social media.



PHOTOS BY SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

The Vault resides in the historic First National Auto Bank. Built between 1958-60, it was the world's largest autobank at the time.

FRESH FLAVORS MADE FROM SCRATCH

The Vault provides space to connect through private dining, cocktail classes

BY MAVI COLE • MAVICOLE@OU.EDU

Inside the historic First National Auto Bank, The Vault serves traditional American cuisine and specialty craft cocktails.

Owner Libby Billings opened her first restaurant, Elote Cafe & Catering, in 2008 in the East Village District of downtown Tulsa. In 2012, Billings opened The Vault under half a mile away to help boost the district's popularity.

Billings has worked in the restaurant industry since she was 16 and attended culinary school at Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology. After graduating, she worked at several restaurants throughout Tulsa, then had a brief internship in Chicago before returning to Tulsa and opening her restaurants.

"(The Vault is) a very unique restaurant," said private event manager Valerie Richardson. "I think a lot of it has to do with Libby and how she runs the place. She's super inclusive, super welcoming to everybody. Every walk of life is welcome here."

The First National Auto Bank opened in 1959. On the hunt for a new restaurant site, Billings struggled to find high-rise owners willing to let her renovate only one of their multiple stories. As the only two-story building vacant at the time, the bank was her most viable option.

Billings kept the building's 1960s features and used them to

inspire the restaurant's menu and style.

"The menu and the drinks and everything kind of came from the architecture," Billings said.

Richardson said that the building alone has one of the most unique atmospheres she's ever seen.

"A lot of our interior is original," Richardson said. "It's gorgeous. There's windows everywhere. Pictures are awesome here. People come downtown to our parking lot in our building to take pictures all the time, so that alone is pretty cool."

The Vault offers classes where customers can learn to make cocktails while drinking them. The restaurant also offers private dining, where customers can have private parties for graduations, baby showers and everything in between. Billings said these offerings have been beneficial as she thinks people are more selective with how they spend their time following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They want to have more than dinner," Billings said. "They want dinner and a show, like a cocktail class, or they want to gather all their friends together for a special occasion. They're more willing to spend a little bit more money and be more thoughtful about that."

The Vault offers gluten-free options such as potato-crustured salmon and vegan options such as Korean barbeque tofu in addition to classics such as steak frites and their "Top Shelf Burger." Their craft cocktails, such as the "Pain Killer" and "Diablo," include homemade syrups and juice squeezed in-house.

"We really just try to cater to the very diverse audience that dines downtown while making everything from scratch and putting an emphasis on fresh flavors," Billings said.

After growing up in Tulsa, Billings said she enjoys her ability to make an impact on the city. Billings said Oklahoma provides a lot of opportunities for entrepreneurial growth because people want to see new ideas.

"I really think that has been a real benefit for me, especially as a woman in the restaurant industry," Billings said. "Just being able to make that impact and having so many opportunities."

The Vault is at 620 S. Cincinnati Ave. It is open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for brunch and 4 to 10 p.m. for dinner on Saturday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for brunch on Sunday. To learn more, visit their website or Instagram page.



Nola's Creole & Cocktails on Cherry Street, the Tulsa business district with the highest number of locally owned businesses.

SPICE UP YOUR PALATE

Nola's Creole & Cocktails brings a taste of New Orleans to Tulsa

BY MAVI COLE • MAVICOLE@OU.EDU

A nod to traditional New Orleans-style cooking, Nola's Creole & Cocktails lies at the heart of Tulsa's bustling business district, Cherry Street.

The restaurant is found in an old elementary school basement and is designed to mimic 1920s-30s New Orleans. There are five dining areas, including an enclosed patio that is available year-round.

"It's Cajun Creole cuisine on steroids," manager Jay Howell said. "If I had an elevator pitch, I'd say we are Oklahoma's finest Cajun experience."

Originating in 18th century New Orleans, Creole cuisine was influenced by French, Spanish, Italian, Caribbean, West African, Native American and Mexican cuisines, and typically features seafood, tomatoes and rich sauces. In a different part of Louisiana, Cajun cuisine was developed around the same time with French, African American, German, Italian and Spanish influence. Seafood is central to the spicy cuisine, along with the "holy trinity" of Cajun food: celery, onion and green bell peppers.

The driving force behind Nola's, both cuisines remain a staple in New Orleans and other parts of Louisiana.

Howell was hired at Nola's before it opened in 2018, working alongside owner Brett Rehorn to give Oklahoma an authentic

Cajun and Creole experience. Rehorn's love of the cuisines led him to create Nola's. Rehorn also owns Kilkenny's Irish Pub and The Hemingway.

"He designed the concept and really did a fantastic job of bringing elements from other famous sites within New Orleans to sort of homogenize a New Orleans feel for us," Howell said.

Howell has visited New Orleans many times, and wants customers to be able to have a dining experience that feels like they're actually in the city.

"Part of the reason why I think Nola's is near and dear to my heart is that I have done the best that I could trying to bring elements from the actual main staples of New Orleans to our building," Howell said.

Howell grew up in Tulsa and referred to the city as a vibrant place that displays entrepreneurial experience. He believes Nola's brings an element of education to the table.

"Nola's works because there is a need to bring cultural education and food savviness to a sophisticated audience," Howell said.

Menu items include classics like "Ya Mama's Gumbo" and "Ju Ju Jambalaya" as well as specialties such as "Bourbon Street Baby Backs" and the popular "Voodoo Chicken." They also serve a variety of cocktails, such as the New Orleans-inspired

"Milk Punch," signature "Good Omen" and classic "House Old Fashioned."

General manager Jason Ashing, who has worked at Nola's since May 2021, said that he believes the restaurant industry in Tulsa is underappreciated until people see it for themselves. He said he's met people from across the country who are pleased by Tulsa's food and the inviting atmosphere of the city.

Cherry Street features the highest number of locally owned businesses in Tulsa, including shops, art galleries and over 20 restaurants. Ashing said the Nola's team gets along well with their neighbors and they all work together with the Cherry Street Association.

Along with the culture built by the restaurants in the area, Ashing said he especially enjoys working at Nola's because of the clientele and their response to the restaurant's atmosphere.

"I just love being a part of that," Ashing said. "I'm very proud to work here because I think it's a very unique restaurant in Oklahoma. I don't think there's really anything else like it."

Nola's can be found at 1334 E. 15th St. The restaurant is open from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. To learn more, visit their website or Instagram page.



SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

Wanda J's first opened in 1974 and has served Tulsa's community through name, location and generational changes.

A LEGACY SPANNING GENERATIONS

Wanda J's enriches Tulsa with good food and a family atmosphere

BY SHELBY EMERY • SHELBY.E.EMERY-1@OU.EDU

Wanda J's Next Generation is a southern-style restaurant in Tulsa born from the 50-year family legacy of its namesake restaurant.

The first Wanda J's was opened in 1974 by Wanda J. Armstrong, and enriched the Tulsa community with its warm, family-like charm. In 2005, Armstrong opened Evelyn's, a second southern-style eatery named after her mother.

Wanda J's Next Generation was opened in 2016 in the Historic Greenwood District by Wanda J's son, Ty Walker with his six daughters in mind. His daughter Glory Walker-Wells is the restaurant's current manager.

Walker-Wells said that Wanda J's has been a part of her and her sisters' lives since childhood. She began working at Wanda J's at 8, and said some of her fondest memories are from working at the restaurant with her sisters, who still work and help run Wanda J's Next Generation alongside other family and close friends.

"We all share one common thing that brings us together, and that's the restaurant," Walker-Wells said.

In September, after outgrowing the Greenwood location, Wanda J's Next Generation moved into the space previously known as Evelyn's. Walker-Wells attributes the growth of the

restaurant both to the history of Wanda J's and the location itself.

Wanda J's Next Generation's first location was on Greenwood Avenue, in an area that was known as Black Wall Street. During the early 20th century, Tulsa's economy was growing, and a prosperous community of African American residents established businesses in the Greenwood district.

"Us being there, we were able to tell our story," Walker-Wells said. "Since our restaurant was founded on the entrepreneur spirit, it kind of fit hand in hand with the history of Black Wall Street."



PHOTO PROVIDED

Wanda J's Next Generation serves a range of dishes for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as daily specials, 17 side options and peach cobbler or ice cream for dessert.

The staff of Wanda J's Next Generation consists mostly of family and friends, which Walker-Wells said creates a family-oriented atmosphere that extends to its customers, whether they are regulars or new faces.

"We have a closeness and we kind of try to share the love with our guests too," Walker-Wells said.

Michael Manning has been attending Wanda J's Next Generation since it first opened. Manning said he noticed the new business while on the search for soul food, and that discovering the family-like environment of the restaurant was like coming home.

"I began to know the staff as if they were part of my extended family," Manning said. "During my time eating with them, babies have been born, weddings have happened, there (have) been deaths in their family and in mine, and so we shared all those happy times and sad times."

Manning visits Wanda J's Next Generation almost every day for breakfast before work. He said that eating at the restaurant is like being at a dinner table where everyone is involved in the same conversation.

"It's a microcosm of Tulsa," Manning said. "If you ever go in there right before lunch, you're going to see just a diverse group of individuals chatting it up and having a great time."

Wanda J's Next Generation is known for having the best fried chicken in town, but the menu also offers a range of dishes for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as daily specials, 17 side options and peach cobbler or ice cream for dessert. Manning said he visits the restaurant every Friday for the special of the day: turkey and dressing.

Walker-Wells said she recommends the fried chicken with a side of greens and candied yams, but that customers should always choose what they initially came in for.

Walker-Wells said the personal flair of Wanda J's Next Generation makes it stand out from other restaurants, as its employees make it a goal to create a comforting environment for guests.

"We really care about making sure the experience is a good experience for them," Walker-Wells said. "(Customers know) if there's something that they don't like or something that could have been better, that we just like their feedback to be able to move forward on it and just ask them to give us the chance to try to do something to make it right."

Wanda J's Next Generation is open 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday and breakfast is served until 11 a.m. The restaurant is at 3014 N. 74th E. Ave. in Tulsa. More information about Wanda J's Next Generation can be found on the restaurant's website.



SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

The Mayo Hotel was first built in 1925. It was the tallest building in Oklahoma at the time and saw many celebrity guests through its doors.

CHECK IN AT THE MAYO HOTEL

From renovation project to modern luxury, learn about Tulsa's historic hotel

BY EMMA BLAKLEY • EMMA.L.BLAKLEY-1@OU.EDU

Fusing Roaring '20s glamor with modern comfort, The Mayo Hotel in downtown Tulsa offers a luxury experience in a historic site.

When The Mayo Hotel was built in 1925, it was the tallest building in Oklahoma. As an art deco-style building with 600 rooms, ceiling fans in every room and running ice water, the hotel was the pinnacle of luxury. Fueled by Tulsa's booming oil economy, the Mayo quickly rose in popularity within high society.

The hotel became a celebrity hotspot, with visits from Marilyn Monroe, President John F. Kennedy, Lucille Ball, Elvis Presley, Charlie Chaplin and many others.

With the crash of Tulsa's oil economy in the early 1980s, the Mayo closed its doors. While changing ownership over the years, the building was emptied out and sank into disrepair.

In 2001, John Snyder learned that the owners of The Mayo Hotel were planning to demolish the building. Fairly new to

the city, Snyder was unaware of the extent of the Mayo's significance, but was drawn to the building by his love of history.

The owners offered to sell Snyder The Mayo Hotel for \$1 and the parking lot behind it for \$250,000, Snyder's daughter Macy Snyder-Amatucci told OU Daily.

"We didn't know what we were going to do with it. Downtown Tulsa was dead," Snyder-Amatucci said. "People thought that we were absolutely crazy because at that time, even though it was \$1, it was still not a good investment in most people's minds."

Starting in 2007, The Mayo Hotel became the first project of historic restoration and management company Brickhugger LLC. Snyder-Amatucci is the current vice president of the company, which still owns and operates The Mayo Hotel.

As a historic tax credit project, the renovation had to mimic The Mayo Hotel's original design. The grand staircase was built to mimic the original marble and Snyder-Amatucci said the

lobby's floor is the same marble from 1925.

The Mayo Hotel officially reopened in September 2009 for Britney Spears's concert at the Bank of Oklahoma Center, a quick turnaround that Snyder-Amatucci credits to her father's construction experience.

"The Mayo was the building that kick-started the entire renovation of downtown Tulsa," Snyder-Amatucci said.

The Mayo also has 76 private apartments, and it was the first company to bring the concept of apartment hotels to Oklahoma, according to Snyder-Amatucci. Residents have the benefit of residing in a historical luxury building and sharing the Mayo's amenities, including parking, dry-cleaning, house-keeping and in-room dining.

The Mayo has 102 hotel rooms, over 20,000 square feet of event space and features a rooftop bar and coffee shop. Booking details and information about event space can be found on its website.

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