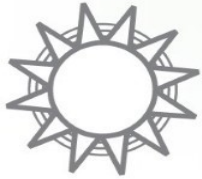




The Voice of ISD

A publication for, about, and by the employees of the Information Services Division



EMPLOYEE Spotlight by Anita Wood



Beckie Rhoades

Criminal History Management Unit
Administrative Assistant I

Rebecca “Beckie” Rhodes is from Tulsa. At her last job, where, while she was still working on her degree, she ran into a couple of OSBI agents who apparently made quite an impact on her because that chance meeting was the reason she decided to change the focus of her job hunt and career to law enforcement. Beckie began working at the OSBI in the summer of 2019. Although Beckie is a new employee at OSBI herself, her advice for new employees is, “... to give it 150%.



Beckie and her brother Michael at her graduation

Crime never stops so there will always be something to do here (at the OSBI), and to be honest, honorable, and dependable.”

Beckie is one of two Administrative Assistants in the Criminal History Management Unit (CHMU) who handle the exception processing tasks that are by definition problematic.

Beckie thinks people would be surprised to know she is a domestic violence and child sexual abuse survivor, but she still believes “there are positive things, good people, and happy moments in the world.” Beckie believes “in love, kindness and respect.” Her biggest pet peeve is “a lack of consideration.”



Beckie’s children (L-R)
Makiyah, DeAnte, Maliq, Maleigha

Beckie is a busy mother of four children. Her oldest son is 25, her youngest son is 10 and her daughters are four and three. She and her kids enjoy spending time together doing anything. They bring her so much joy and are the motivation for a lot of what she does. She loves spending time with her family and her dad is her hero, she looks up to him because she wants to be like him when she grows up!

Beckie sees herself as goofy, trustworthy and loyal. She thinks those who know her would be surprised that she is extremely shy around people she does not know and in crowds.

Welcome Beckie, we are so glad you are here!

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2021 Highlights¹

- SDA received 4,012 initial and 16,563 renewal applications.
- 88% of all fingerprint submissions were received electronically, 95% of criminal submissions were received electronically.
- 82% of SDA applications were automatically approved by the SDA program.
- BFSU conducted a combined total of 408 Livescan and ink site audits.
- 107,840 name-based criminal history record checks were conducted.
- CHMU closed 3,008 expunge-ments.
- % of SIBRS Population Coverage is 96.99%.
- FSU verified 189,061 SIBRS re-ports.
- There are 48,056 users and 149 companies on CHIRP.

¹Through November 2021



OKLAHOMA STATE
BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION





Reduce Workplace Stress¹

How Can you Manage Stress At Work?

So, what can you do? One way to reduce stress is to remove the stressor. However, for most of us, we need to work to eat, so we can't just leave our jobs most of the time. So, what can we do? If you can't leave your job, you can't afford to let stress harm your health, then you'll need to find ways to reduce this job-related stress.

How Do You Know If You Are Being Affected By Workplace Stress?

Numerous studies have shown that for the majority of American adults, they identify the workplace as the number one source of stress. How do you know if workplace stress is affecting you?

Well, you may experience anxiety and depression while at work, or even when you think about work. You may also have difficulty sleeping or insomnia. You may have a constant fear of losing your job or a fear of not meeting your job's demands. And you may even have some of the physical signs and symptoms, such as fatigue, headache, hypertension, and chest pain. You may even be more prone to infections.

“Stress can cause anger, sadness, and irritability, but can stress actually affect your physical health? Absolutely, YES!”

Strategies for Reducing Stress

1. Organize your work day. Use good time management.
2. Exercise at least 30 minutes most days.
3. Eat healthy foods. Cut out high-fat, high-sugar foods.
4. Sleep! Get adequate sleep.
5. Avoid being a perfectionist. Don't dwell on the negative and things you cannot control, let them go.
6. Positive self-reflection. Focus on what went well that day.
7. Learn to say NO! Don't set unrealistic expectations and only take on what you can. Ask for help if needed.
8. Meditate. Even if it's just for a few minutes. Slow down.
9. Learn to identify the contributing factors and try to remove them.

The key is that life is going to present stress. We just cannot avoid that. But it is essential to remember that you are important. It's critical to understand that if you are stressed out, and if you affect your health, you really can't be helpful to others.

Review your life, identify things that are stressing you, and do everything you can to exercise, meditate, identify the stressors, and learn how to say no sometimes.

How Stress Affects Your Health¹

We all experience stress, and we know that stress is an emotional or mental strain caused by demanding activities or even adverse events. We know that stress can cause anger, sadness, and irritability, but can stress actually affect your physical health? Absolutely, yes.

What Happens To The Body When You Experience Stress?

When you experience stress, it causes a physiologic reaction. It causes stress hormones to rise. Your heart rate increases. It causes certain muscles to contract. It causes blood vessels to tighten. Stress can definitely have very negative effects on your health. Now, the health problems stress can cause are numerous, but here are just five ways that stress can negatively affect your physical health, and ways to reduce that stress and to increase your health.

Stress and Hypertension

Stress can cause hypertension, which is a leading cause of heart disease, stroke, and even kidney failure. When you experience stress, it causes your stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, to rise. When these stress hormones surge, it causes your blood vessels to tighten. When the blood vessels tighten, that causes an elevated pressure against those blood vessels, high blood pressure, and hypertension. So you can imagine, if you are a person who experiences stress several times a day, you may be causing your blood pressure to rise several times a day. So, if you allow yourself to be stressed by that road raged person who cut you off this morning, and also called you a profane name, then your stress may be causing hypertension.

Stress Headaches and Anxiety

Stress can cause headaches. When you experience stress, it can cause contraction of the muscles in your scalp, the back of your neck, and your upper back. These contracted muscles can cause or worsen tension headaches. Now, most of our lives are driven by how productive we are, and if you are a person who is stressed and experiencing chronic or recurrent headaches, how productive can you really be? So, when people like that petty person at work, who is always trying to one-up you or to threaten your job security cause you stress, that stress can be causing headaches.

Weight Gain from Stress

Number three, weight gain or obesity. When some people are stressed, they tend to eat more, and the foods they tend to eat are comfort foods, which tend to be high in fat and sugar. So when you're stressed, and you're already eating those comfort foods, the stress hormones that you release, like cortisol, will actually cause you to store or hold on to that fat more aggressively. The stress hormones will cause you to store that fat in places like your abdomen, the back of your neck, your upper back, your face, and your chin. So if you, for example, are being stressed by a toxic relationship with someone who does not wish you well, who does not encourage you, who does not add to your life, that stress can be promoting weight gain or obesity. The obesity, of course, puts you at risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, and hypertension. Stress can lead to weight gain.

Chest Pain Caused by Stress

Stress can cause chest pain or worsen cardiovascular disease. When you are stressed and those stress hormones surge, they can cause a tightening of your coronary arteries or those heart vessels. Now, imagine if you already have a blockage in one of your heart vessels or a plaque. If you develop stress and those heart vessels tighten around that plaque, you can get chest pain or even suffer from a myocardial infarction, a heart attack. Stress can cause chest pain and worsen cardiovascular disease.

Stress and Immune System

Number five, weak immune system. Stress can cause a weak immune system. When you are stressed out, and those stress hormones, like cortisol, are on the rise, they can cause a decrease, or suppression, in your immune system. They can decrease your white blood cells, your lymphocytes, and cause you to be prone to infection. Stress can also cause poor wound healing. So if you, for example, are asked an unreasonable favor by a friend, and you say yes because you want to be nice and you don't want to rock the boat, even though you know you should say no. If this causes you stress, that stress can be decreasing your immune system.

¹ <https://www.midtownnephrology.com/5-ways-stress-affects-your-body-and-how-to-reduce-stress/>; <https://www.midtownnephrology.com/7-strategies-for-managing-stress-in-the-workplace/>



Why take a Lunch Break?

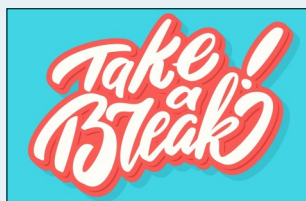
Forget being “too busy” to take a lunch break. Studies show that taking a lunch break allows your mind to rest, recharge and refocus, which can directly improve your productivity for the rest of the day. Taking time out during the day – even if you choose to have multiple, short breaks – this gives your brain a chance to recuperate.

Not taking a lunch break can leave you feeling more tired and stressed, less focused and in a worse mood by the time the day ends. It can also reduce your ability to be creative! Even if you just take 15-20 minutes, this is a proven way to keep your levels of concentration and energy up during your day.

If you work at a computer, letting your eyes have a rest from the screen is important and, if you sit down for the majority of the day, getting up and walking around frequently can prevent your body becoming stiff. On the flip side, if you have a manual job, it’s important to take regular breaks throughout the day to let your body rest, relax and prevent injury or repetitive strain.

Why take breaks at all?

- ▶ Increases creativity and productivity
- ▶ Refreshes your concentration
- ▶ Makes you healthier
- ▶ Improves office collaboration
- ▶ Lowers your stress



Inexpensive Places to Eat around the Office

Here are a few fairly inexpensive locations to eat around the office. The majority of them can usually be done within a lunch hour and they all have take out options. If anyone has other suggestions, or a review of any of these, please email them to julie.kelly@osbi.ok.gov.

Restaurant & Location	Type	\$\$\$\$	Online Rating (out of 5)
Yo Pablo Tacos & Tequila 6728 N. Olie Ave <i>Taco Tuesday special with \$1.50 tacos</i>	Mexican	\$ - \$\$	4.2
Big Truck Tacos 530 NW 23rd	Mexican	\$	4.5
Hideaway Pizza 5022 N. Western Avenue	Pizza	\$	4.5
Sheesh Mahal 4621 N. May Avenue	Indian, Pakistani	\$	4.5
Cous Cous Café 6165 N. May Avenue	Moroccan, Mediterranean	\$	4
Tucker's Onion Burgers 5740 N. Classen Blvd, Ste 3	Burgers	\$	4
Mediterranean Imports & Deli 5620 N. May Avenue	Grocery, Deli, Mediterranean	\$	4
Cousins Bar & Grill 6509 N. May Avenue	American (Traditional), Burgers	\$	4
Harvey House/Shirley's Café 201 NW 63rd, Ste 140	Daily Specials	\$	4.8

Please submit any restaurant recommendations here: julie.kelly@osbi.ok.gov

Maximize your Lunch Break

How can you maximize your lunch break? And what are the benefits of doing so?

- **Have a real break**

Avoid eating at your desk or in your work area. Taking a step away from the office, workspace, showroom etc. will help you to relax and clear your mind as you won't be trying to rest in a place you associate with work. It's also important to allow yourself some proper respite – try to limit or avoid checking work emails or organizing 'to do' lists. If you continue to work in your lunch break then you won't reap the benefits that a bit of respite can bring.

- **Connect with colleagues**

We all spend a lot of time with work colleagues, so connecting with them can help build a stronger team. Talking with colleagues over lunch can be a good way to let off steam, problem solve a task and unwind before tackling the afternoon. Let's remember that work can be a great place to meet friends and develop a social group, which is good for your social and mental health and wellbeing. Having a support network of people at work can be really helpful when going through any of life's challenges.

- **Have a hearty lunch**

Eating three proper meals a day, or regular smaller meals, is crucial to keeping your energy and concentration levels up. Skipping meals can reduce your productivity throughout the day – as well as impacting on your metabolism. Foods such as fish, seeds, nuts, blueberries and wholegrains are particularly good for keeping your brain healthy, while glucose levels can have an effect on productivity. If you're looking to go out for a healthy lunch somewhere close to the office, there's an app for that! [Healthy Out](#) helps you find local restaurants and snack bars with healthy options.

- **Mindful eating**

There are many health benefits associated with being mindful (present) whilst eating. A study by Harvard found that people who ate while distracted actually ate more food, whereas 'mindful eating' has been linked to eating less. Another side effect of distracted eating can be snacking later on in the day – particularly junk food. So it's a good idea to eat away from your desk as it not only means you'll be present whilst eating, are less likely to over-eat but it also helps aid digestion.

- **Get some exercise**

Even if you just take a walk around your building and get some fresh air, this will help you de-stress and your body relax. Alternatively, you could use your lunch break to do a proper work out – and the best news is you don't have to be near a gym to do this. You could go for a run or find somewhere to do some exercises – Buzzfeed has put together some total body work outs that you don't need equipment for. Exercise has lots of benefits, including reducing stress, improving mood and increasing confidence and self-esteem. Additionally, another study showed that exercising can make you feel better about your body, even when you don't see any physical changes.

Name	Unit	Years of Service
January 2022		
Nicholas Massey	SAC	1
Jackie Cruise	FSU	9
Collin Woodruff	FSU	1
Stephanie Burton	ID	23
Andrew Cisper	SDA	2
February 2022		
Jim Ely	FSU	3 (+21 previous)
Annie Gilbreath	FSU	6
Ginger Casler	SDA	19
Kim Stiles	SDA	4
Sheri Kahne	CHMU	1
Lorna Beckloff	OVDRS	10
Lesley Chu	ID	6
Kali Leon	SDA	2 (3+ with previous)
Betty Stickley	CHMU	2
March 2022		
Lisa Merka	BFSU	20
Micah Dye	ID	2
Casey McCarty	ID	12
Dave Wood	BFSU	9



Red Feathers



Birthday's



January

- Stephanie Burton—1st
- Jennifer Gouge - 19th
- Kelsey Backry - 25th
- Kara Miller - 29th

February

- Derek Still - 11th
- Kayron White - 11th
- Betty Stickley - 15th
- Kali Leon - 17th
- Alaric Fierro - 25th

March








- Sylvia Coslow - 11th
- Angela Thompson - 15th
- Kourtney Heard - 29th

**HAPPY
BIRTHDAY!**

Awards




January 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1  
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 	18	19 	20	21	22
23	24	25 	26	27	28	29 
30	31					

 **State Holiday's**
 (12/31/21) New Year's Day Observed
 17th - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

 **Special Events**
 None

Other Holiday's
 1st - New Year's Day

 **Birthday's**
[See list here](#)


February 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11 	12 
13	14 	15 	16	17 	18	19
20	21 	22	23	24	25 	26
27	28					

 **State Holiday's**
 21st - Presidents Day

 **Special Events**
 None

Other Holiday's
 2nd - Groundhog Day
 12th - Lincoln's Birthday
 14th - Valentine's Day

 **Birthday's**
[See list here](#)


March 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11 	12
13 	14	15 	16	17 	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29 	30	31		

 **State Holiday's**
 None

 **Special Events**
 None

Other Holiday's
 1st - Mardi Gras Carnival
 13th - Daylight Savings (move forward)
 17th - St. Patrick's Day

 **Birthday's**
[See list here](#)



Wishing a very **Happy Birthday** to all Birthdays! See birthday list [here](#).

Behind the Scenes



The **Identification Unit (ID)** is responsible for the management of the 10-print portion of the Oklahoma Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS). 10-print refers to fingerprints collected from a person, whether for a background check for employment or licensing purposes or to verify their identity during an arrest. This unit performs a forensic analysis of fingerprint impressions through the electronic and manual processing of civilian/criminal fingerprint submissions. This pro-

cess insures the integrity and accuracy of the fingerprint database for the State of Oklahoma. Fingerprint Specialists analyze and perform complex examinations, classifications and identifications of manual and electronic submissions.



Left to right (back): Lesley Chu; Zach Chael; Casey McCarty, Stephanie Burton (front): Kelsey Backry; Angie Avila.

They are also responsible for applying the rules and laws governing this process. In addition to these functions, the ID Unit is also responsible for providing fingerprinting services to civilians that meet eligibility requirements. They also attend 3 to 5 outreach events throughout Oklahoma every year to provide digital child ID's and photo's that promote child safety and depending on the length of the event, they could print 20+ kids.



CHILD FINGERPRINTING

The OSBI's Fingerprint ID Unit provides digital child ID's with photo's at no charge to promote child safety at different events throughout Oklahoma.



Please welcome the newest members to the ISD Team! We are excited for them to join us. We know they are going to be valuable assets to the OSBI and can't wait to see what they accomplish here.

**On behalf of the entire division,
welcome aboard!**



Alexandra D. Wood
Student Temp
CHMU



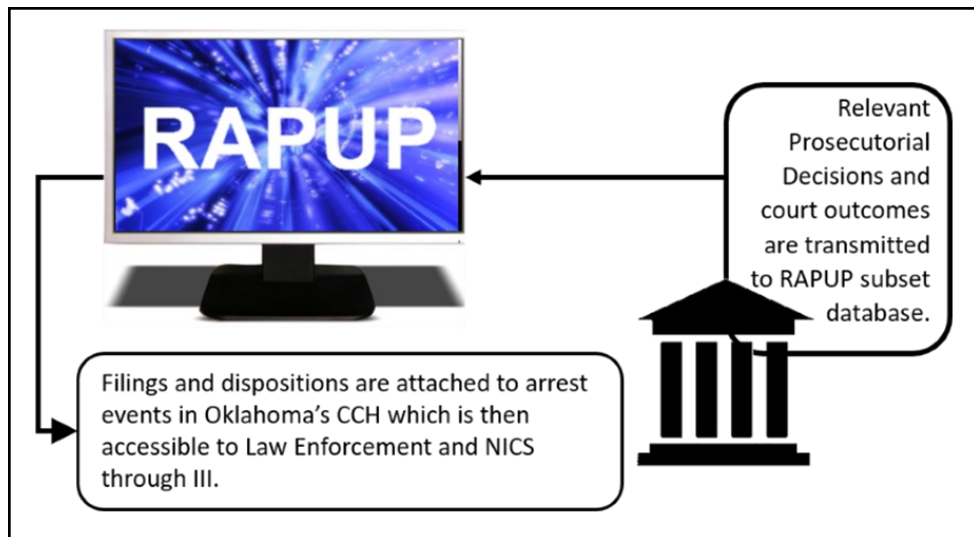
Jennifer Gouge
Crime Reporting Field Rep
FSU



Elizabeth Vernon
Crime Reporting Field Rep
DSU

What does that mean?

1. ORI - Nine character NCIC Originating Agency Identifier number assigned to an agency.
2. Charge - A formal accusation of criminal activity.
3. Counts - Separate offenses of a crime.
4. Disposition - The current status or final outcome of an arrest of prosecution.
5. Sentence - Punishment that was ordered or could be ordered by a trial court in a criminal procedure.
6. OK DOC - Oklahoma Department of Corrections, responsible for the state prison system.
7. SOR / VOR - Sex Offender Registry / Violent Offender Registry
8. NICS - The National Instant Criminal Background Check System.
9. III (Triple I) - Interstate Identification Index maintained by the FBI includes individuals arrested or indicted for a serious crime anywhere in the country.
10. Expungement - The sealing of court or arrest records preventing the public from having access to the information.



Workflow depicting how dispositions arrive at the OSBI Repository utilizing RAPUP



The OSBI is the repository for all fingerprint-based criminal history records for the state of Oklahoma. Oklahoma’s records are a part of the nationwide criminal history record maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It is vital that the records retained by the OSBI be timely, accurate and complete. Title 74 O.S. § 150.12 mandates that arresting agencies submit records of arrest within 72 hours. Prosecutors have 72 hours to report declination of charges presented, otherwise, courts and prosecutors have 30 days to report filing of charges and final dispositions to the OSBI.

Although still in the development stage, the Record of Arrest and Prosecution Update Portal or RAPUP, will allow disposition providers to electronically submit filing and final disposition of charges containing one or more reportable offenses to the repository for real-time updating by the OSBI. Users will be able to log in and see fingerprint-based arrest events submitted by the associated law enforcement agency or agencies within the jurisdiction that require updating of arrest outcomes.

The mandate for law enforcement agencies, D.A.'s and courts to submit records of arrest, prosecution and final disposition is at: 74 O.S. §150.12 - Mandatory Reporting of Fingerprint and Criminal History Information.

Arrest outcomes supplied by the authorized users will be attached to charges listed on fingerprint cards taken by arresting agencies when criminal defendants complete the booking process. Charges and arrest outcomes are then reported by the

OSBI to criminal justice and non-criminal justice agencies when the Oklahoma criminal record repository is queried. OSBI criminal records are queried by law enforcement and civilian authorities for purposes of employment, licensing and other reasons that put individuals in contact with vulnerable populations.

If you'd like to know more about RAPUP, ask one of the team members:

Debbie Repine, Emma Hood, Kourtney Heard, Erin Henry, Nicole Bridgford, Cara James, Jeremy Burgin, and Anup Phutane.

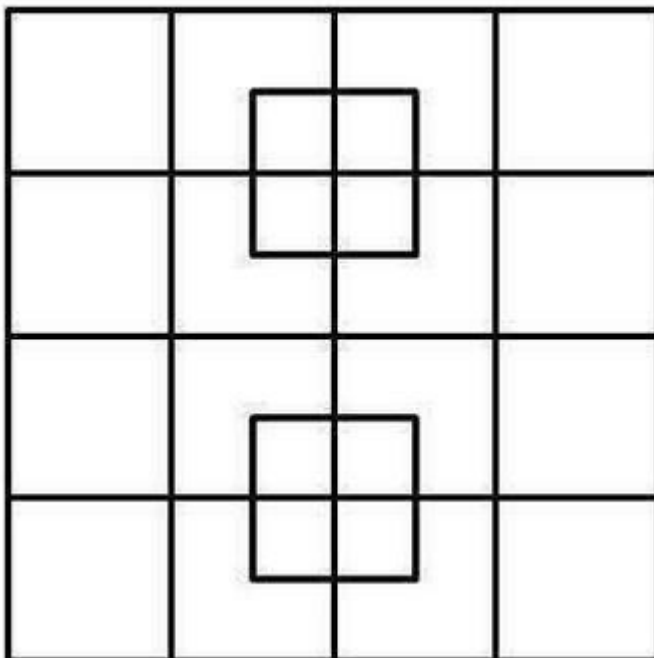


Sudoku is easy to play and the rules are simple. Fill in the blanks so that each row, each column, and each of the nine 3x3 grids contain one instance of each of the numbers 1 through 9.

Sudoku #967 (Medium)

6		1					9	
						6	8	4
		3	4		7			
4					5	8		
	5		7		4			
				1		3		
		6	3					9
		5						
1	2							

How many squares can you count? The first person to [email me](#) the correct answer wins a prize! Must be *exact* # of squares.



Click [here](#) for the all puzzle and riddle solutions



Some of the Most Mispronounced Words

- Açai - *ah-sigh-ee*
- Camaraderie - *kaam-ra-der-ee*
- Colonel - *'ker-n'*
- Conch - *\kahnk*
- Cupboard - *'kə-bərd*
- Dachshund - *'däks-hünd*
- Epitome - *i-'pi-tə-mē*
- Especially - *i-'spesh-lē*
- Jewelry - *'jül-rē*
- Quinoa - *keen-wah*

What Song?

A man is sitting in a bar feeling rather poor. He sees the man next to him pull a wad of \$50 bills out of his wallet.

He turns to the rich man and says to him, "I have an amazing talent; I know almost every song that has ever existed."

The rich man laughs.

The poor man says, "I am willing to bet you all the money you have in your wallet that I can sing a genuine song with a lady's name of your choice in it."

The rich man laughs again and says, "OK, how about my daughter's name, Joanna Armstrong-Miller?"

The rich man goes home poor. The poor man goes home rich.

What song did he sing?

IN CASE YOU HAVE NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY INFORMED, PLEASE CONSIDER THIS OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION THAT YOU ARE AWESOME.



Praline Crunch

Submitted by: Julie Kelly



Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 250 F.
2. In a large bowl, combine cereal and pecans.
3. In a large saucepan over medium high heat, combine brown sugar, corn syrup and butter. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla and baking soda. Pour over cereal mixture, tossing to coat evenly.
4. Pour cereal mixture into a 9 x 13-inch pan. Bake for one (1) hour, stirring every 20 minutes.
5. Pour onto wax or parchment paper to cool. Break into pieces.

Ingredients

- 8 cups Crispix cereal
- 2 cups pecan halves (salted)
- 1/2 cup brown sugar, packed
- 1/2 cup corn syrup
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp baking soda

- **Notes:** Use a large saucepan when making the brown sugar/corn syrup mixture. The mixture will bubble up when you add the baking soda.
- Can substitute any type of Chex cereal for Crispix. Can also mix types.
- Calls for salted pecan halves but you can substitute unsalted if you prefer.

King Ranch Chicken Casserole

Submitted by: Lisa Merka

Ingredients

- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 cups cooked chicken, chopped
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 can diced tomatoes and green chiles
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 2 pinches garlic powder
- 2 pinches pepper
- 12 corn tortillas, torn into 1-in pieces
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, grated

Instructions

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, sauté bell pepper and onion 5 minutes or until tender. Stir in chicken and next 7 ingredients; remove from heat.
 2. Layer one-third of torn tortillas in bottom of a lightly greased 13- x 9-inch baking dish. Top with one-third of chicken mixture and 2/3 cup cheese. Repeat layers twice.
 3. Bake at 350° for 30 to 35 minutes. (I heat & mix all ingredients in a large bowl folding in the torn corn tortillas, add all to casserole dish then top with cheese & bake until brown)
- You can freeze the casserole up to one month if desired. Thaw in refrigerator overnight and bake as directed.



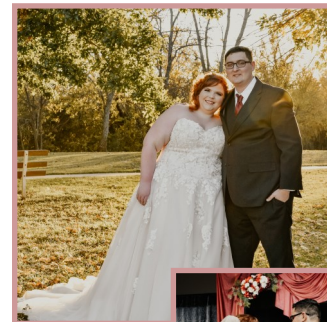


OUR WEDDING DAY

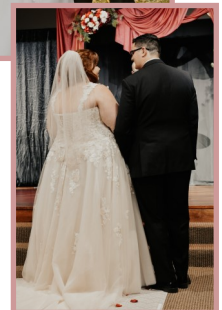
Hannah Boswell (CHMU) and Trevor Javenkoski were married at 4 p.m. on October 16, 2021 in Newalla, Oklahoma. A reception was held afterward with delicious Indian Tacos made by Trevor’s Mom. Presiding over the ceremony was Trevor’s Uncle Mike. Attending the small ceremony and reception were Hannah and Trevor’s closest friends and family. Their first song was *Harvest Moon* by Neil Young. We wish you all the love and happiness! Congratulations Hannah and Trevor! And we can’t forget Olive and Kiwi the couples adopted beagle furbabies!



L-R: Hannah’s dad Vincent, mom Sheila, brother Brody, sister Hazel, sisters Dovie and Lola, Hannah, Trevor, Trevor’s sister Jennifer, sister Kirstyn, mom Neva, dad Kirk.



Lillian Baker (CHRU) and Brandon Dufner were married on November 12, 2021, in Del City, OK in a Winter Wonderland themed wedding. Lily says they both love Christmas time and were engaged on December 26, 2020 while looking at Christmas lights in Tulsa. There were s’mores bars and a hot chocolate bar at the wedding where guests were given snow globe ornaments to take home. Lily and Brandon met online in 2019. He waited patiently for her to finish school for them to get married. They have been together a little over two years. They made it through school, quarantine, losses and celebrations together. Lily says they are best friends and are excited to start this new journey together. So are we Lily and Brandon! Congratulations to you both!



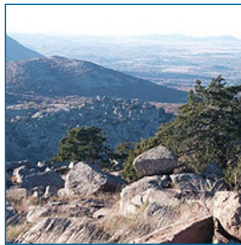


Ten Most Beautiful Places in Oklahoma

If you're looking for places to visit in our great state, explore these natural beauties and discover the diversity of Oklahoma's gorgeous scenery and inspirational places. Admire a beautiful waterfall, trek along a scenic byway overlooking forested hills or hike among ancient mountains - and that's just the beginning. Trying to select the Top 10 most beautiful places to visit in Oklahoma is a daunting task. Mother Nature has provided plenty of awe-inspiring locales all over Oklahoma and with 11 distinct eco-regions the variety of stunning scenery is incredible.

#1 - Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

With over 59,000 acres of ancient mountains dotting a sea of prairie, the [Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge](#) in [Lawton](#) is home to free-range American bison herds, prairie dogs, Texas Longhorn cattle, bobcats and coyotes. The crowning jewel of the park is [Mount Scott](#). From the top you can marvel at the patchwork of lakes, stunning rock formations and miles of picturesque hiking trails.



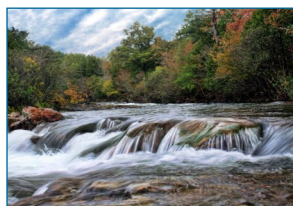
#2 - Quartz Mountain State Park

Nestled between the shores of [Lake Altus-Lugert](#) and the Wichita Mountains, [Quartz Mountain State Park](#) is the ideal setting for quiet reflection and solitude, family fun or a romantic retreat. The lake glimmers in the sun and moonlight and the stars shine as brightly as any place in Oklahoma. With the park's authentic lodge furnishings and delectable restaurant menu, guests can snuggle in for a memorable stay.

#3 - Chickasaw National Recreation Area

One hundred years ago, American Indians called it the "Peaceful Valley of Rippling Waters" and the [Chickasaw National Recreation Area](#) in [Sulphur](#) continues to offer precious serenity to visitors. Travertine Creek meanders throughout much of the park and the babbling water is the perfect soundtrack for recreation. From hiking to swimming, camping to picnicking or fishing to wildlife viewing, you are sure to find what best feeds your soul.

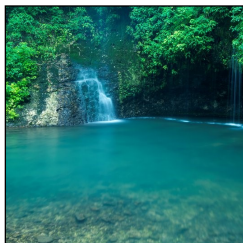
#4 - Beavers Bend State Park



Imagine mountains of fragrant pine forests intermingled with colorful hardwood trees and you've found [Beavers Bend State Park](#) near [Broken Bow](#). The [Mountain Fork River](#) provides clear, cool waters for excellent fishing year-round. A dream-like mist rising from [Broken Bow Lake](#) is the perfect vista while enjoying a morning cup of coffee at [Lakeview Lodge](#).

#5 - Natural Falls State Park

Beauty often makes you quickly draw in your breath in wonder and [Natural Falls State Park](#) is no also provides its visitors this quiet oasis in north-foot waterfall invites the rugged trails to an pool. Seventeen different of the falls, you can drink little valley and surround flowering trees like the nous dogwood. Camping popular forms of activity in the park but a book read at the base of the falls on a sunny, summer afternoon could be the most soothing.



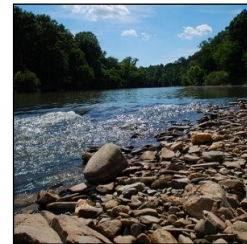
#6 - Talimena National Scenic Byway

The [Ouachita National Forest](#) in southeast Oklahoma loves to show off its colors. The [Talimena National Scenic Byway](#) has become one of the most popular destinations for fall foliage tours in the region. At each scenic turnout along the way, the vibrant colors on the mountainsides are breathtaking and almost unbelievable in their brilliance.



#7 - Grand Lake of the Cherokees

The result of the [Pensacola Dam](#) project completed in 1940, [Grand Lake O' the Cherokees](#) is one of Oklahoma's most popular lake destinations. With 1,300 miles of scenic shoreline, bordered by five state parks, the [Grand Lake Area](#) is an outdoorsman's delight. This serpentine gem glitters and shimmers in the summer sunlight between rolling green hills that beg you to slow down and just enjoy the view.

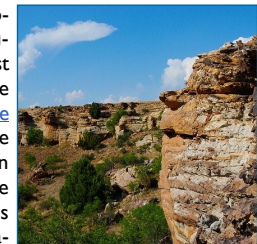


#8 - Glover River

The last major free-flowing river unencumbered by dams or water releases, the [Glover River](#) offers secluded beauty unmatched in the state. Canoeing and small mouth bass fishing are popular on this gorgeous waterway. The fact that the river is still un-commercialized lures the most experienced adventurer to this best kept secret in southeast Oklahoma.

#9 - Black Mesa Area

Located in the farthest northwest corner of Oklahoma, the panhandle area is the epitome of stark beauty. The Black Mesa plateau is Oklahoma's highest point at 4,973 feet and rewards hikers with a rare view of a tri-state area. The nearby [Black Mesa State Park and Nature Preserve](#) feature amazing watchable wildlife including golden eagle, black bear and bighorn sheep. In the amazing solitude of this scenic area, the wide open spaces dotted with blue sage evoke visions of cowboys on horseback and the prehistoric creatures that used to call this area home.



#10 - Robbers Cave State Park



Climb the steep sandstone bluffs and pretend that you're an outlaw on the run with Jesse James at [Robbers Cave State Park](#). The [Belle Starr View Lodge](#) gives each guest a panoramic view of the lakes and forest that lay hundreds of feet below. As a popular destination for equestrians, the best view of all might just come from the top of a horse.



Erin's Corner

"As this year ends, I pray each of you enjoyed the holidays and found meaningful ways to celebrate with those most important to you... No matter what goals you choose, I wish each of you success! Happy New Year!"

As this year ends, I pray each of you enjoyed the holidays and found meaningful ways to celebrate with those most important to you. Now, as we turn to the New Year, I'm reminded of a book my grandmother gave me years ago – *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. While the title sounds obvious, I recognize more and more each year how difficult it is to slow down, assess where I am, and consciously decide where I want or need to go. Whether it involves setting goals for work, family time, spiritual growth, healthy eating/exercise habits, or improving my mental health/wellness, I have definitely reached an age where I realize very little happens without some deliberate planning and commitment on my part.

Although I'm not one to regularly make New Year's Resolutions, I do appreciate the opportunity for a fresh start or to refocus on what matters most. As I prepare for my 2022 reset, I'll be using guidance from two separate books to help.

First Things First, by Stephen Covey, covers a lot of topics, but most importantly for me, this book describes nurturing our independent will by

making and keeping promises to ourselves. Years ago, this helped me inadvertently become a runner as I made a promise to myself to get at least 30 minutes of some type of cardio exercise at least 6 days a week. I promised myself I would get up and at least go for a walk before work. I found that when I got out the door, I didn't feel like walking was doing much to get my heart rate up so I started jogging for short stretches. That eventually led to trying to best my jogging distance each day and before I knew it, I was jogging consistently.

The other book I've found helpful is *Atomic Habits*, by James Clear. This book has some of the most practical advice I've ever read/heard for developing new habits or breaking bad habits. Like Covey, Clear emphasizes setting a goal or making a promise that is easily attainable to build a habit successfully. When I made the commitment to get 30 minutes of cardio activity, I made it easier to keep my promise because I didn't limit my definition of cardio activity. I could walk, skip, jog, swim, bike, or do any multitude of activities and still be proud because I had kept my promise to myself.

Another concept Clear describes is "habit stacking." By introducing a new habit immediately before or after an already existing habit, it can be much easier to get the new habit to stick. For me, stacking a new exercise habit between the existing habits of "get out of bed" and "get to work" helped me succeed. During other resets, I've also used the habit of changing into workout clothes as soon as I get home from work, instead of putting on my comfy lounge clothes, to help ensure I get some activity. I don't know about you, but once I get my comfy clothes on it's hard to get motivated to do anything!!

As most of you know, this year's work goals include developing IPR's or RFP's to start the purchase process for a new CCH and a new AFIS. In addition, completing the functional review and taking steps to improve the career path within ISD are on the top of my list. As I reset this year, I'll be working to refocus my time and ensure I spend time on these important, long-term improvements and not just on the day-to-day urgent tasks that pop up.

No matter what goals you choose, I wish each of you success!

Happy New Year!