



JAY
CRONLEY

Credentials nor brains required for tornado hunt

Over the weekend on television, I saw white tornadoes, bleak tornadoes; skinny tornadoes, massive tornadoes; tornadoes that kicked up dust and grass, and tornadoes that swirled metal and made it look like plastic; tornadoes on the horizon, and one tornado that was kicking stuff right in a camera's lens. The audio for one tornado report featured a guy screaming for his associate with the camera to get back. A vehicle was jammed in reverse and kicked up dirt-road dust in front of the tornado dust.

If you're a storm chaser looking for tornadoes for one of a number of reasons, make sure you're where you said you'd be, and be sure you're in the right company, because there are so many storm chasers out there that storm chasers taking pictures of other storm chasers is a definite possibility.

Not a job. The designation *storm chaser* is not an official title. It can represent anything from a hobby to a dare to a heroic public service.

There's no state-sponsored badge, no credential to get you on private property behind a funnel.

After seeing Gerald's mustache perpendicular to the ground in hurricanes, and after watching Anderson Cooper searching for flying roofs from which to flee, and after watching crimes recorded from a few feet away, it figured to a brief matter of time until storm chasers went at tornadoes with similar desires. Some television stations encourage viewers to send in storm pictures. And be sure not to forget your lightning rod.

And once you have that magical photo, take cover, hear?

These would seem to be chief among the first wave of storm chasers.

1. Scientists and other pros.
2. People looking to sell a picture.
3. People at a frat party.
4. People with a crush on storms.

Sitting at home with glass and teeth rattling, with dogs and wind howling, eyewitness reports of a tornado lacking up a storm are more effective than colors on a map and will put us in the basement — scoot over ducks — in a flash.

Watch out: It can't be easy, chasing storms for a reputable television station.

You can't be loose with a scoop and proclaim a twister to be on the ground if it's only somebody out ploving.

With all the action in the twister field, getting closer than ever to a funnel seems to have become a priority.

To anybody stepping out of his or her element to drive into trouble for fun or profit, it's never too early to say it's undoubtedly been nice for somebody to have known you.

Jay Cronley 581-8362
jay.cronley@tulsaworld.com

HANDS-ON HISTORY: EXPLORING HERITAGE



Photos by JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World

This gallery is part of the \$15 million Oklahoma Heritage Center in Oklahoma City, which will open to the public Saturday.

High-tech heritage center wows its initial visitors

► A group of students is among the first to see the exhibit, which opens to the public Saturday.

By ANGELO RIGGS
World Capitol Bureau

OKLAHOMA CITY — Some Oklahoma City elementary school students, awed at the big-screen televisions and hands-on exhibits, were among the first visitors to the new Oklahoma Heritage Center.

The \$15 million Heritage Center will open to the public Saturday, but on Monday, the students received guided tours through the museum, which uses the latest technology to feature famous Oklahomans and their roles in state history.

"This is an excellent opportunity to really see and read about people who have done something with their life," said Greg Burns, an Oklahoma artist who is featured in the museum.

"I think we are always looking for role models."

Among the museum's permanent exhibits is "Oklahoma Through Its People," which includes five interactive displays on several flat-screen televisions.

Each display uses historic video and still photography to portray past and present Oklahomans who exhibit one of five characteristics:



Students from St. John Christian Heritage Academy in Oklahoma City, including Maya Black, 9 (lower foreground), react to one of the interactive exhibits in the Oklahoma Heritage Center on Monday.

perseverance, pioneer spirit, individualism, generosity and optimism.

"We are going to create generations of leaders through this exhibit," said Shannon Nance, the Oklahoma Heritage Association's president.

She added that one of the museum's goals is to make sure that every visitor can identify with someone who is highlighted in the museum.

"People identify with history

through stories," Nance said.

The students, from St. John Christian Heritage Academy in Oklahoma City, were excited to watch film footage of famous people they learned about while studying Oklahoma history this year.

Teacher Tanna Henderson said the children enjoy seeing different video screens and being able to touch and interact with the exhibits.

SEE HISTORY A-11

Zone defense

The Tulsa Preservation Commission does stir passions about historic preservation zoning, but that's not its intent, its administrator says. Please go to A-11

SIX-HOUR STANDOFF



STEPHEN PINGRY / Tulsa World

Two members of the Tulsa police Special Operations Team work outside a house where an intruder shot a resident Monday.

Man shot in home; attacker escapes

► The victim, who interrupted a burglary, is in serious condition.

By NICOLE MARSHALL
World Staff Writer

A burglar shot a homeowner Monday morning when the man returned to his home and found the thief in his bedroom.

The victim, who was identified by friends and neighbors as Ernesto Mondragon, 56, was able to go across the street and call 911 on his cellular phone, police said. He was taken to St. Francis Hospital in serious condition.

Mondragon

Mondragon is active in several community groups and is a past president and current member of the Greater Tulsa Area Hispanic Affairs Commission.

Mondragon didn't see the gunman leave his house in the 10000 block of East Fourth Street, so patrol officers surrounded the home.

Based on the assumption that the shooter was still inside, the Police Department's Special Operations Team was called, Officer Scott Walton said.

SEE SHOOT A-11

SALES-TAX HOLIDAY

Henry gets bill to suspend tax on school gear

By ANGELO RIGGS
World Capitol Bureau

OKLAHOMA CITY — A bill that would suspend sales taxes on certain clothes and shoes during a weekend in August is headed to Gov. Brad Henry.

The "sales-tax holiday" is included in a tax-cut package the Senate approved 33-15 on Monday.

If the bill is signed by the governor, taxes on certain back-to-school items would be lifted for three days beginning the first Friday in August.

Senate Bill 861 by Sen. Don Barrington, R-Lawton, and Rep. Guss Blackwell, R-Goodwell, also includes a tax credit for stay-at-home parents and eliminates the franchise tax for most small businesses.

Henry said in a prepared statement Monday that he doesn't know whether he will sign the bill because budget discussions are ongoing.

It would be "irresponsible to make such a decision without an overall budget framework in place," he said. "I hope we can reach an agreement on major budget issues, particularly the promise we made to raise teacher pay to the regional average, before I am required to act on this legislation."

Senate Co-President Pro Tem Glenn Coffee, R-Oklahoma City, and House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, called on Henry to sign the bill.

Supporters of the sales-tax holiday point out that Missouri and Texas

SEE TAX A-11

Surgery adds flavor to life of Nicaraguan boy

► His first taste of food is made possible by Tulsa surgeons who fashioned an esophagus for him.

By KIM ARCHER
World Staff Writer

Ricardo Hernandez Jimenez took his first sip of apple juice last week. It was the 5-year-old's first drink of anything, ever.

When he tasted the juice, he turned to his mother, Yahoska Jimenez Martinez, and said in Spanish, "Mmm, Mommy, this is good."

It reduced his mother to tears. "I feel like a new mother," Jimenez Martinez said with the help of a translator, Blanca Thames. "To me, this was like it was never going to happen. But thanks to God, this is reality."

After never having the taste of food, the Nicaraguan boy has taken to eating with a vengeance, she said.



Courtesy / St. John Medical Center

Yahoska Jimenez Martinez kisses the cheek of her son Ricardo Hernandez Jimenez, 5, after he enjoyed his first drink of apple juice last week at St. John Medical Center. Two local pediatric surgeons fashioned an esophagus for Ricardo from his colon on April 23.

SEE FOOD A-11

Board aims to preserve harmony

► Its job is to ensure that any construction or remodeling in historic districts fits in with other structures.

By KEVIN CANFIELD
World Staff Writer

Amanda DeCort knows that not everyone will spend May celebrating National Preservation Month.

Ask her to name the primary misconception about the Tulsa Preservation Commission, which she administers, and she smiles and replies, "Which one?"

Then she reels off a short list that includes this observation: "That they're ogres and difficult to work with."

Not so, DeCort insists. But there is no question that the 15-member body assigned to operate the city's historic preservation program sits passionately now and again. It comes with the territory.

The group does more than nominate local historic sites for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

It also helps residents write — and then must enforce — construction and remodeling guidelines for the city's six historic preservation zoning districts.

Historic preservation districts



- 1 - Brady Heights
- 2 - Council Oaks
- 3 - N. Maple Ridge
- 4 - Swan Lake
- 5 - Yorktown
- 6 - Gillette



Tulsa World

Historic preservation zoning is "overlay zoning," which means it supplements, not supersedes, zoning codes. This limits what the commission can control.

For example, a builder recently asked the commission for a certificate of appropriateness before the builder began construction.

Preservation celebration

May is National Preservation Month. As part of the celebration, the Tulsa Preservation Commission is sponsoring the first Citywide Preservation Celebration.

When: noon to 2 p.m. May 19

Where: Centennial Park Center, at Sixth Street and Peoria Avenue.

For more information: 596-2600 or www.tulsapreservation.com or www.nationaltrust.org/preservationmonth

tion of a duplex in the Swan Lake district. The certificates are required before remodeling or construction can start in a historic preservation zoning district. Opponents of the project cried foul.

Eventually, the certificate — with conditions — was granted. "It's not our job to decide if they get to build a duplex there," DeCort said. "It's our job to make sure that the duplex — if they are legally permitted to build it — fits in with the neighborhood context as best as possible."

In short, the commission is limited to reviewing any exterior changes that would be visible from the street. What the commission is not, DeCort said, is an advocacy group.

"We're relaying information," she said. "It doesn't necessarily do that as well as its members would like, however."

DeCort said the commission hasn't always done a good job of making the design guidelines for building within a historic preservation zone accessible and easy to understand.

"I would really like to have some more examples and to use them more and (provide) more specific guidance," she said.

Then there are those people who don't know that the guidelines aren't exist.

"One of the biggest things that I hear is that people buy houses in these zoning districts and don't know they're in these zoning districts," DeCort said.

That brings up that misconception that the commission is hard to get along with. DeCort's numbers indicate otherwise.

Since 1993, the group has approved more than 91 percent of the roughly 750 applications for certificates of appropriateness, she said. Last year, it gave complete or partial approval to 51 applications, rejecting three.

Kevin Canfield 581-8313
kevin.canfield@tulsaworld.com

FOOD:

Ricardo has liked everything he has eaten so far, except for eggs.

FROM A-9

and arranged for him to get the surgery and medical care in Tulsa at no charge to his family.

Since tasting the apple juice April 30, Ricardo has eaten apple sauce and graduated to baby food and other soft foods.

"Everything that he eats, he likes," Jimenez Martinez said. "The only thing he doesn't like is eggs."

Ranne said Ricardo could be discharged from St. John Medical Center as soon as the middle of this week.

"He's doing great," he said. "Pagel has arranged for Ricardo and his mother to move in with a local Spanish-speaking woman so doctors can continue to monitor the boy's progress over the next four to six weeks."

Ricardo and his mother will be treated to various activities during their stay here. The Tulsa Drillers will host

Food fund set up

St. John Medical Center and the Helping Hands Foundation have set up a "food fund" so that Ricardo will have access to a nutritious diet after he returns to Managua, Nicaragua.

Through a fund overseen by the foundation in Nicaragua, Ricardo's mother would receive a monthly stipend to buy food for her son.

Ricardo's family of six lives on \$175 per month, so the fund would allow him to have meat and other nutritious foods his family otherwise could not afford.

Donations can be sent to: the Helping Hands Foundation, 2950 S. Rockford Road, Tulsa, OK 74114.

"Ricardo Day" on June 3, when the boy will throw out the first pitch at the team's 2:05 p.m. game against the Rockies Roughriders. Ricardo also will get to meet the players.

"I am very grateful to each one of the persons who made this possible," Jimenez Martinez said.

Kim Archer 581-8315
kim.archer@tulsaworld.com



JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

The Oklahoma Heritage Center in Oklahoma City uses the latest technology to feature famous Oklahomans and their roles in history.

Judge closes teens' cases in fatal crash

► Two Jenks football players have completed their probations tied to a paintball-related crash.

By BILL BRAUN
World Staff Writer

A Tulsa County judge on Monday closed the juvenile court cases of two Jenks High School students who successfully completed their probations on charges filed after a crash that claimed a classmate's life.

Special Judge Edward Hicks determined that Mitchell Hill and Brad Regal have no more obligations in his court.

Garrett Bennett, 17, died July

12 when the sport utility vehicle in which he was a passenger swerved out of the eastbound lanes of the Creek Turnpike just west of U.S. 75 and crashed.

Oklahoma Highway Patrol troopers reported that the Jenks football players had just left a team paintball outing in Sapulpa.

Troopers said two SUVs were swerving in and out of traffic and that a paintball fired from one SUV hit the windshield of the one that crashed.

Tulsa County prosecutors charged three Jenks football players in juvenile court.

Hill — now 18, but 17 when the crash happened — was

charged with negligent homicide. He was the driver of the SUV in which Bennett was riding.

Regal, a passenger in the SUV that did not crash, was charged with throwing an object at a moving vehicle. Records state that Regal — now 17, but 16 at the time of the crash — admitted to firing the paintball.

In March, Hicks closed the case and ended the probation of another juvenile, Eric Davis, who was charged with reckless driving. Davis, who turned 18 about two months after the crash, drove the SUV in which Regal was riding, reports show.

Hicks said in March that all three youths had performed

well on probation but that he wanted longer probations for Regal and Hill based on the more serious nature of their charges.

All three teenagers took action in October to resolve their cases without a trial.

Hill and Davis agreed not to contest their charges. Regal "stipulated to the petition" — or essentially admitted the allegation against him.

At a November hearing, Hicks imposed the probation requirements. The Jenks Trojans won the Class 6A football championship in December.

Bill Braun 581-8455
bill.braun@tulsaworld.com

SHOOT:

Three area schools are locked down during the standoff.

FROM A-9

After trying for about six hours to make contact with the burglar, police went in the house and found that he apparently had fled before they arrived.

Walton said the homeowner arrived about 10 a.m. and saw that his front door had been forced open. When he found the burglar in his bedroom, "the victim tried to retreat and was shot," Walton said.

Mondragon was hit in the torso, but it wasn't immediately clear how many times he was shot.

During the standoff, police blocked off streets in the area. Three schools — Kerr Elementary School, Newcomer International School and Lewis and Clark Middle School — were locked down, Tulsa Public Schools spokeswoman Tami Marler said.

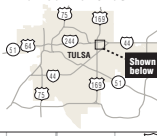
Officers used a loudspeaker to try to talk with the burglar. Once the Special Operations Team arrived, its members continued to try to reach him and used a camera to try to determine whether he was in the house.

SOT officers eventually fired several rounds of tear gas into the house. Officers entered the house about 4:30 p.m., searched it and concluded that the assailant had fled. Only a vague description of the gunman was available Monday.



Police Special Operations Team members use a neighbor's roof to gain perspective on a house where a resident was shot Monday morning.

Homeowner shot



Tulsa Area Hispanic Affairs Commission, said both Mondragon and his wife are very active in community affairs. "They are a very civic-minded family," she said. "You could not ask for better people."

Helton was shocked to hear about what had happened. "You hear it happening in your town, and you see it on the news, but you never expect it to be one of your own," she said.

Terry Wiles, who lives in the area and whose son lives next door to Mondragon, described Mondragon as a good man. "It should not have happened," he said. "You can't predict this. You just can't predict this."

Wiles said his son stayed in contact with Mondragon's family throughout the day. In addition to worrying about Mondragon's condition, he said,

his son and others were upset that a burglar was prowling about their neighborhood.

"People who do this don't care," Wiles said. "They don't care whose house they get into or whose things they take. That is immaterial to them. They are just looking for things to sell."

Kym Clark, who lives several houses west of Mondragon, watched the ambulance speed away, but her first thought was that someone was ill — not that her neighbor had been shot. Then her mother-in-law called to tell her about the police standoff in her neighborhood.

"We know all of our neighbors and try to take our own precautions the best we can," Clark said. "What's scary is that it happened during the day, and I am a stay-at-home mom."

Nicole Marshall 581-8459
nicole.marshall@tulsaworld.com

TAX:

The bill would eliminate city, county and state sales taxes for the specific weekend.

FROM A-9

both have similar events, which draw many Oklahoma shoppers out of state.

The bill would eliminate city, county and state sales taxes for

the given weekend. Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, D-Durant, said the state would reimburse cities and counties for their lost revenue.

"The fact is, in both Texas and Missouri, local revenues held steady or increased because of greater retail activity during the sales-tax holidays," Gumm said, adding that the measure is aimed at middle-class families and small-business owners.

Projections indicate that the entire tax-cut package would reduce state revenue by \$15.3 billion in the fiscal year that begins July 1 and \$74.3 billion

the next year.

The bill was criticized on the Senate floor by lawmakers who say that by providing more tax cuts, the state is setting itself up for an economic bust similar to what occurred in the early 1980s when energy prices plummeted.

The bill also would accelerate last year's income tax-cut plan by one year.

However, Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, said the average Oklahoman would benefit less than \$7 from that measure. Meanwhile, he said, Oklahomans are spending \$700 fixing

their vehicles because the roads and bridges tear their vehicles up."

Corn also discussed the provision for a stay-at-home parent tax provision, saying that for most families in his district, both parents work.

Corn said the provision is really a tax credit for home-schoolers, who haven't been allowed vouchers.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Angel Riggs (405) 528-2465
angel.riggs@tulsaworld.com

HISTORY:

"All of this stuff is pretty cool," 9-year-old Deon Edwards says.

FROM A-9

Arianna Fears, 10, concurred. "You get to learn more about our history and Oklahoma," she said. The museum is "very beautiful and pretty."

"All of this stuff is pretty cool," said Deon Edwards, 9. Tom McDaniel, chairman-elect of the Oklahoma Heritage Association, and president of Oklaho-

ma City University, said the children's enthusiasm is exactly what everyone at the museum had hoped to see.

"We're all really inspired to have the first group of children here," he said. "They're so excited."

The Oklahoma Heritage Center, at 1400 Classen Drive, is in the renovated Mid-Continent Life Insurance Building, which was bought by the Oklahoma Heritage Association in 2005.

The Oklahoma Heritage Association is a nonprofit organization funded by private donations and memberships.

Angel Riggs (405) 528-2465
angel.riggs@tulsaworld.com

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