

O K L A H O M A C O N S E R V A T I O N C O N V E R S A T I O N

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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Jack Penner, 1920-2012

Jack Penner, Murray County Conservation District director since 1968 and Oklahoma Conservation Commission Area II member 1993-2002, passed away of natural causes on Jan. 21, 2012. He also served as Area II director for the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts 1986-1989. He was preceded in death by his wife Mardelle in December 2009.

Penner's great-grandfather, Cyus Harris, came to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears and served five terms as governor of the Chickasaw Tribe. He started a gin and a mill where Mill Creek is today, providing the town with its name. Penner's paternal grandfather, Felix Penner, was a German immigrant who came from Texas to Oklahoma and started the first Angus cattle herd in the state.

After studying animal science for four years at Oklahoma State University, Jack served with the Eighth and Ninth Air Force in Europe during World War Two. After the war he returned to Mill Creek and the Penner Angus Ranch.

Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, credits Penner as one of his mentors.

"Jack would never want too much fuss made over him, but a few thoughts of tribute are in order. Jack was already serving as Area II Commissioner when I arrived. Serving on the Murray County Conservation District Board since 1968 and always the perfect gentleman rancher, he took an inexperienced director under his wing and taught him a great deal about being genuine and caring that the job was done right."

Mike Sharp Named as First State Geographic Information Coordinator

Dr. Mike Sharp of Edmond has been named as the first State Geographic Information Coordinator. Sharp has worked for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission for more than 20 years and has been a state employee for more than 30 years.

The state Legislature created the Office of Geographic Information within the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) in 2004 and gave OCC's executive director authority, in consultation with the State Geographic Information Council, to appoint a State Geographic Information Coordinator to manage the office.

The purpose of the office is to provide staff support and technical assistance to the Geographic Information Council and to coordinate geographic information-related activities for the state. Additionally, the office is to provide geographic information services to agencies and to develop and maintain geographic information standards to be approved by the council as well as address other geographic information needs and issues.

However, neither the law that created the office nor any subsequent legislation provided any funding to operate the office or pay the salary of the coordinator. Sharp took on the role of acting State Geographic Information coordinator in addition to his dual roles as director of OCC's Information Technology division and assistant director of the agency's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program.

House Bill 1086, passed in the 2011 session of the state Legislature, established the Oklahoma State Government Geographic Information One-Stop Initiative. The law instructed the State Geographic Information *First State GIS Coordinator*, continued on page two



Jack Penner



Mike Sharp

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OK GO! Oklahoma Get Outside



Going Green?

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Our vision:

Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources.

Our mission:

To conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma's natural resources, working in collaboration with the conservation districts and other partners, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.

www.conservation.ok.gov

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on
"Calendar of Events" at
<http://conservation.ok.gov>

Oklahoma 2012 Environmental Expo,
Feb. 3, Oklahoma City

**Oklahoma Conservation Commission
Meeting, Feb. 6, Oklahoma City**

Conservation Tillage Workshop 2012,
Feb. 8, Enid

Mammals "From Head to Toe" Workshop,
Feb. 9, Edmond

Mardi Gras Muskogee,
Feb. 9, Muskogee

Water Appreciation Day at the Capitol,
Feb. 13, Oklahoma City

**North Canadian River 319 Project
Outreach, Feb. 16, El Reno**

Leopold Education Project Workshop,
Feb. 17, Tahlequah

Presidents' Day Holiday, Feb. 20

No-Till Oklahoma 2012,
Feb. 21-22, Norman

OACD State Meeting
Feb. 26-28, Oklahoma City

**Oklahoma Carbon Program Verifier
Training, Feb. 28, Oklahoma City**

In our thoughts...

Latimer County CD board member Jim Enis, lost his father Dec. 8.

Cleveland County CD education coordinator Chris Ward's husband Mark lost his mother on Dec. 12.

The new grandson of Coleta Bratten, Dewey County CD secretary, Landry Ives, experienced health issues following his birth on Dec. 16, but is now doing well.

Harper County Conservation District Director, Bret Cosby, lost his mother Jan. 2.

Recent NRCS retirees Terri Daniel and Steve Tully lost their house in a fire Jan. 13. Contact April Burns at the NRCS state office to contribute to a fund for their benefit.

Garvin CD secretary Cindy Ward's daughter Brandi Harris experienced difficulties in pregnancy. Makena June Harris was born on Jan. 26, 12 weeks premature and did not survive.

Congratulations!

Darlene Pigg, Johnston County CD, has a new granddaughter, Naomi Joy Pigg, born Dec. 8.

Chris Best, NRCS soil conservationist at Major County CD, and wife Carmell have a new baby girl, Carlee Michelle Best, born Jan. 11.

Chuck Smith retired from the Harper County CD on Jan. 18 after 39 years of service on the board of directors.

First State GIS Coordinator, continued from page one

Coordinator to set procedures for agencies to submit geographic data, or "geodata," for publication and to develop and maintain an online web presence to allow the public access to geodata. In light of that directive, OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls met with the State Geographic Council stating that he believed it would be appropriate to appoint Sharp officially in the position rather than as acting coordinator. The council concurred and the appointment was made official at council's meeting on Jan. 6.

Sharp came to work for OCC in 1991 as assistant director of the agency's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program. When OCC realigned its agency structure in 2000, Sharp took on the additional role as director of the newly-created Information Technology division. Previous to joining OCC Sharp served as Secretary to the Commissioners of the Land Office from 1987 to 1991. He ran a full time farming operation in Nowata County from 1980 to 1987 during which time he served on the Nowata County Conservation District board from 1984 to 1987 and was president of the Nowata County Farm Bureau during the same four years. He served as Area III director for the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts in 1986 and 1987. He was a member of the first Ag Leadership Class 1982-1984.

Sharp holds a B.S. degree in Animal Science and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Animal Nutrition both from Oklahoma State University. He served as a Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant at OSU 1971-1977 and served as a Research Associate at the University of California at Davis 1977-1979 and at OSU 1979-1980.

Geodata is currently available from the state's geographic information clearinghouse, OKMaps, at <http://ogi.state.ok.us/ogi/default.aspx>.

Communicating with New Producers Workshop

The face of agriculture is changing. Agricultural educators, public agencies, consultants and extension agents are seeing new types of farmers and ranchers needing their services. Some of these producers have been successful in other walks of life and now want to try their hand at farming. Some are retirees looking to start a new life on the land. Others are simply seeking refuge from the pace of the city and desire a quieter rural lifestyle.

Without traditional agricultural backgrounds, these emerging producers face many challenges in learning the skills necessary to successfully manage a modern farming operation. Agents, educators and consultants serving the state's producers, feel a need to change with the times and learn how to reach out to and serve the needs of these new farmers and ranchers.

The Oklahoma Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, with support from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, is hosting a one-day workshop in Oklahoma City, *Communicating with New Producers: How to Reach Them, How to Teach Them*, to address these challenges. The workshop will explore the changing demographics of the Oklahoma farmer and the best methods for engaging those of different age and interest groups. There will also be discussion of the pros and cons of both traditional outreach through flyers and press releases versus new tools such as websites, social media and alternative print products.

The fee for the workshop including lunch is \$35 if registered by March 2 and \$50 after after that date.

For information about the event, contact Stacy at 405-522-4739. For registration information contact Tracy at 580-224-6292. To register online, go to <http://www.noble.org/swcs/>.

Awards & Recognition

Lynn Weldon, OCC/FMHR Human Resources coordinator, was recognized at the January Commission meeting for being named Employee of the Quarter at the December OCC Full Staff Meeting.

Dianne Ireton, OCC/AML systems coordinator, was recognized at the December Commission meeting for 25 years of service to OCC and the state of Oklahoma.

Gina LeVesque, OCC/WQ CREP coordinator, was recognized at the December Commission meeting for five years of service to OCC and the state of Oklahoma.

Keep Oklahoma Beautiful Recognizes Volunteer and University for Blue Thumb Activities

The Keep Oklahoma Beautiful program presented longtime Blue Thumb volunteer Beth Landon and the Biology Department of Oklahoma City University (OCU) with an “Environmental Excellence” award recently. The award was presented for the Collegiate Effort, Institution Driven, category at the program’s 21st Annual Environmental Excellence Celebration on Nov. 10 in Oklahoma City.

Landon and OCU were nominated by Oklahoma Conservation Commission staff members Kim Shaw, Blue Thumb Program education coordinator, and Cheryl Cheadle, Blue Thumb state coordinator.

Landon, a biology laboratory technician at OCU since 2004, has been a Blue Thumb volunteer since 2001. In 2005 she began involving OCU students in Blue Thumb activities, including chemical monitoring, benthic* macroinvertebrate** collections, macroinvertebrate subsampling, fish collections, habitat assessments, and quality assurance sessions. Through OCU’s Service/Learning Program, many students, whether they were science majors or not, got the chance to participate in Blue Thumb.

In addition to stream monitoring, OCU has used the Blue Thumb Program to expand a stewardship ethic to people beyond the students at OCU. A few of the events and activities that have been hatched through the partnership of OCU and Blue Thumb are:

- Sponsorship and hosting of the 2010 Blue Thumb Biennial Volunteer Conference.
- Initiating and hosting PLAYHARD workshops for Blue Thumb high school teachers and students in 2010 and 2011.
- Hosting numerous benthic macroinvertebrate subsampling and quality assurance sessions in central Oklahoma.
- Creating and presenting posters and visual presentations about OCU students and other volunteers engaged in Blue Thumb efforts including Service/Learning, field work, and data interpretation and analysis.

“Beth and OCU have played a large role in opening students’ eyes to biology, ecology, and stewardship,” Cheadle said.

“Beth has created a Blue Thumb Service/Learning course at OCU in which biology majors and non-majors have gotten involved,” said Shaw, who is also serves as Blue Thumb volunteer coordinator for central Oklahoma. “This Service/Learning course has taken people out into the creeks who might not have otherwise gotten out there.” Shaw added that Landon is a dedicated volunteer who has worked on five different streams in the Oklahoma City area.

“Beth took the Blue Thumb Program and made science exciting and approachable,” Cheadle said. “Beth takes more of a leadership role with students than probably any other volunteer we work with.”

*Benthic: Relating to the bottom of a sea or lake or to the organisms that live there.

**Macroinvertebrate: A small invertebrate animal (animal without a backbone) large enough to be seen without magnification.

Agreement Creates Four New 15-Month Technician Positions

An agreement between the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has made possible four new soil conservation technician positions within OCC’s District Services division. The duty stations of the technicians are at four conservation district offices. They are jointly supervised by Lisa Knauf Owen, OCC/DS director, and the NRCS district conservationist at each location. The positions are funded for a 15-month period ending Dec. 31, 2012.

The increased funding for conservation programs over the last several years has been accompanied by a reduction of NRCS personnel to service those programs. The primary purpose of the new technicians will be to assist with program implementation. The job descriptions call for the employees to meet the same qualifications required of NRCS GS-4 Soil Conservation Technicians.

The new OCC employees and their assignments are Cameron Standing, Lincoln County Conservation District; Chad Miller, Jackson County CD; Josh McNeff, East Canadian County CD; and Matt Irby, Hughes County CD.

Some of the tasks the technicians will perform include assisting with land surveys and staking sites, gathering farm data for conservation plans, providing information to landowners or contractors on methods of installing conservation practices, taking applications for Farm Bill programs and following up with landowners on progress of implementation.

“With NRCS under pressure to reduce personnel and keep hiring at a minimum, this is an opportunity to try to get some new folks trained to help put conservation practices on the ground,” said Lisa Knauf Owen, OCC/DS director. “We will stay optimistic that when the time period for this funding ends, some opportunity to keep these people active and involved will present itself,” she added.



Beth Landon, Oklahoma City University laboratory technician (left), and Kim Shaw, Blue Thumb education coordinator, prepare to lead a youth activity at a Blue Thumb workshop for high school students. Beth’s success in incorporating OCC’s Blue Thumb Program into OCU Biology Lab activities with students resulted in an Environmental Excellence award from Keep Oklahoma Beautiful.



Mike Thralls, OCC executive director; Lisa Knauf Owen, OCC District Services director; and Kevin Varner, OCC/DS district liaison, welcomed the four new soil conservation technicians at the OCC Full Staff Meeting on Dec. 5, 2011. From left are Mike Thralls, Cameron Standing, Kevin Varner, Chad Miller, Lisa Knauf Owen, Josh McNeff, and Matt Irby.

OK GO! Oklahoma Get Outside

2012 Environmental Education Expo

Remember when summer break was made up of days playing outside until mom called you in for dinner? Today's kids probably won't. In the last two decades, childhood has moved indoors. The average American child spends more than seven hours a day in front of an electronic screen. This shift inside profoundly impacts the wellness of the nation's children. They are out of shape, tuned out and stressed out, because they're missing something essential to their health and development: connection to the natural world.

Outdoor learning programs and outdoor playtime can help students become high-performance learners with skill sets that will be with them throughout their lives. Outdoor education and play time also helps students perform better on standardized tests.

Teachers, students and retirees are invited to the 2012 Oklahoma Environmental Education Expo (EE Expo) to learn new strategies for engaging children in outdoor learning. Break-out sessions in three tracks – Exploring Nature with Fundanas, Treasure Hunting Outdoors, and Hiking in Nature – will allow participants to choose a track focused on appropriate activities for Early Childhood, Elementary School or Middle/High School students. The Expo will be held in the Rosser Conservation Education Center at the Oklahoma City Zoo on Friday, Feb. 3, 2012, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Keynote speaker for this year's Oklahoma EE Expo is Jennifer Reynolds, host of the *Discover Oklahoma* television series. Reynolds will be sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm for a wealth of places in our state where Oklahoma can Get Outside!

Registration fees are \$40 for teachers, and \$20 for students and retirees. That includes lunch and a backpack loaded with outdoor learning "tools" valued at \$50.

For more information, complete schedule and session descriptions and directions, go to <http://oklahomaenvironmentaleducationexpo.com>.



Workshops & Trunks

Project WET Workshops
Karla Beatty, 405.521.2384

Project Learning Tree
Workshops or Trunks
Christina Stallings, 405.521-3864

Project WILD Workshops
Lisa Anderson, 405.990.1292

Oklahoma Conservation Conversation

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