

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Thralls Family Hosts OCC Full Staff Meeting September 24, Billings, Oklahoma

On Wednesday, Sept. 24, OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls and his family hosted a quarterly full staff meeting in Billings for Oklahoma Conservation Commission employees. Billings is in Noble County in north central Oklahoma about 70 miles north of Oklahoma City and 30 miles from the Kansas border.

The meeting began at 9:30 a.m. at the Antelope Valley Church of the Brethren. Thralls gave an agency update including information about the status of changes to staff office arrangements and about OCC's budget request for the next state legislative session.

Currently OCC staff members in Oklahoma City are housed in two buildings — the Agriculture and Will Rogers buildings. More space is needed for current and anticipated new staff, especially for the Water Quality division. While new laboratory facilities for the Agriculture Department will eventually free up space, completion is still years away. OCC is in the process of securing temporary space to relieve overcrowding.

OCC's budget request priorities for fiscal year 2010 call for reauthorization of the Transfer of Gross Production Tax that established the Conservation Infrastructure Revolving Fund three years ago. The request also asks for additional funds for both OCC and conservation district operations to make up for past budget cuts and increased costs of employee benefits. The agency is also requesting additional funds for new employees and cost of living allowances for OCC and districts.

Assistant Director Ben Pollard outlined the recently-adopted policy for agency-provided mobile telephones. Following guidelines established by the Internal Revenue Service, OCC employees must reimburse the state for personal calls made on state-provided cellular phones.

Shellie Willoughby, Geographic Information specialist, presented the Employee of the Quarter to Tammy Sawatzky, on behalf of OCC's Awards and Recognition Committee. The nomination for Sawatzky cited her as being instrumental in the development of the Locally-Led Cost-Share Program and the Watershed Operation and Maintenance and Rehabilitation Programs. The nomination also commended her for managing those programs with a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness.

Kim Tweed, OCC executive secretary, introduced the State Charitable Campaign for the new year, and two activities in the campaign were included in the day's events — a "kiss the pig" contest and a pie auction.

Staff Meeting, continued on page 2



Mike Thralls holds the microphone as his mother Donna Thralls tells the visiting OCC staff the story of her family coming to America and settling in Oklahoma.



Ben Pollard kisses a baby Yorkshire pig held by Shellie Willoughby. Over 60 OCC staff and guests witnessed the event.

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*"Only he can understand what
a farm is, what a country is,
who shall have sacrificed part of
himself to his farm or country,
fought to save it, struggled to
make it beautiful. Only then will
the love of farm or country fill
his heart."*

Antoine De Saint-Exupery, 1900-1944

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 www.conservation.ok.gov

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

Nov. 3, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

Veterans Day Holiday, Nov. 11

Oklahoma GROW, Nov. 12-13, Skirvin Hotel, Oklahoma City

Oklahoma Farm Bureau State Convention, Nov. 14-16, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City

Tribal Environmental Summit, Nov. 19-21, Crowne Plaza, Tulsa

Thanksgiving Holiday, Nov. 27-28

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

Dec. 1, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

OCC Full Staff Meeting,

Dec. 1, Skirvin Hotel, Oklahoma City

Area Meetings

OACD Area I Meeting,

Oct. 31, Alfalfa County Fairgrounds, Cherokee

OACD Area IV Meeting,

Nov. 5, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford

OACD Area II Meeting,

Nov. 12, Stillwater Public Library, Stillwater

OACD Area III Meeting,

Nov. 13, First United Methodist Church, Wagoner

OACD Area V Meeting,

Nov. 18, Southeast Oklahoma Expo Center, McAlester

Tammy Sawatzky, OCC Conservation Programs deputy director, was recognized at the October meeting of the Conservation Commission for being named Employee of the Quarter.

Lisa Knauf, OCC District Services director, was recognized at the October meeting of the Conservation Commission for completing the Governor's Executive Development Program in August.

Sheryl Gibson, OCC Financial Management and Human Resources grants accountant, was recognized at the October meeting of the Conservation Commission for completing the Certified Public Manager program.

In our thoughts...

Carolyn Wilson, wife Bill Wilson, Haskell CCD director, lost her sister on Sept. 29.

One week prior to the staff meeting jars labeled with one of the names of Mike Thralls, executive director; Ben Pollard, assistant director; and six division directors, Dan Butler, Steve Coffman, Mike Kastl, Lisa Knauf, Mike Sharp and Robert Toole were placed in the OCC office for the "kiss the pig" contest. Staff members made donations to the jar of their choice with the money going to charity. The person whose jar had the smallest amount at the end of the day before the staff meeting was the one selected to kiss a pig transported to the event by Jason Skaggs, Garfield County Conservation District manager. Pollard "won" the honor of kissing the baby Yorkshire pig.

Skaggs also led the pie auction with staff bidding on two coconut cream pies donated by Mike Thralls' wife Donna. Auction of the two pies yielded \$635, which combined with \$445 from the pig contest totaled \$1,080 for charity. The money raised by the two events is going to the Daily Living Centers, Inc., which provides adult day health care seven days per week in therapeutic programs for individuals with chronic physical and mental impairments such as post-stroke conditions, arthritis, cardiovascular conditions, depression, social isolation, dementia Alzheimer's. The goal of Daily Living Centers is to help affected individuals remain in their own home for as long as possible.

Following a luncheon at the church, OCC staff spent the afternoon at the Oklahoma Centennial Farm of Mike Thralls' maternal grandfather, the late Raymond Pfrimmer. Thralls' mother Donna spoke to the approximately 60 staff members along with Commissioners Virginia Kidd and Mike Rooker and a few guests who sat on straw bales, blankets and folding chairs in the sunny, 80 degree



OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls (left) and Area II Commissioner Mike Rooker standing in a no-till field abandoned Mine Land Reclamation farmed by the Thralls family.

weather. She told the story of their family coming to America, settling in Oklahoma and how Raymond Pfrimmer's father hauled lumber used at the St. Louis World's Fair by horse and wagon to Billings and hand-built the family farm house that still stands — and is lived in — today. Mrs. Thralls welcomed the visitors to tour the two-story house.

Gene Bollinger, engineer for OCC's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation division and retired assistant state engineer for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, once served as district conservationist at the NRCS field office in Perry, serving Noble County Conservation District. Bollinger provided an overview of the history of agriculture in the area. Rusty Peterson, current district conservationist, explained no-till agriculture and the reasons for its increased use. Thralls and Mike Meeker of Johnston's Enterprises demonstrated operation of no-till equipment. Jim Henley, a soil scientist from the NRCS state office, discussed the native grasses and soils in field that has never been cultivated and contains an undisturbed "buffalo wallow" used by native bison in previous centuries.

The staff meeting adjourned at about 3:30 for the drive back to Oklahoma City and other office locations around the state. The next OCC staff meeting will be held Dec. 1 following the monthly Commission meeting in Oklahoma City.



OCC staff at the Pfrimmer farm house.

Richard and Bonnie Geer Nature Reserve

Muskogee County Conservation District

Muskogee County Conservation District (MCCD) hosted a reception and luncheon on Oct. 7 to show off the land where a nature reserve will be developed nine miles west of Muskogee.

In March Bonnie Geer donated 152 acres to the district for the Richard and Bonnie Geer Nature Reserve named for her and her late husband Richard. State Sen. Earl Garrison and Reps. Jerry McPeak and Ed Cannady were among about 50 people who attended the reception. Originally planned as a tour of the site of the future reserve, cold and damp weather led to most of the day's events being conducted in a metal building on the donated land. Photographs of the land including aerial photos substituted for the tour.

Andy Qualls, MCCD equipment manager, explained that the district's goal is to use the Rogers State University Conservation Education Reserve at Claremore as a model. He further explained that the new reserve near Muskogee would not be in competition with the one managed by the Rogers County Conservation District, but complementary. "Theirs is mostly hardwood and wetlands while ours will be tallgrass prairie, wetland and riparian in nature," Qualls said. "Two separate reserves with common objectives

but vastly different landscapes and habitat," he said.

Joe Harrington, executive director of the Eastern Oklahoma Development District, presented MCCD with a check for \$23,000 to help develop the reserve and on-site educational facilities.

During the reception the district presented its Conservationist of the Year award to local producer Danny Williams for conservation work he has done on his land in southern Muskogee County, including work to stop erosion along the Canadian River.



From left are Rodney Farris, MCCD director; Rep. Ed Cannady; Ken Silver, MCCD director; Bonnie Geer, land donor; Andy Qualls, MCCD equipment manager; Robert Ross and Audrey Adney, MCCD directors; Mike Thralls, OCC executive director; Butch Garner, MCCD director; Joe Harrington, EODD director; Trish Kloecker, MCCD secretary; and state Rep. Jerry McPeak.



Joe Harrington, executive director of the Eastern Oklahoma Development District, presented MCCD with a check for \$23,000 to help develop the reserve



Site of the future nature reserve.

Engineering Training for FFA Cimarron County Conservation District

Cimarron County Conservation District (CCCD) and Boise City Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office personnel recently provided engineering training to the Boise City Chapter of Future Farmers of America.

The chapter's present farm site has been acquired by the State Highway Department for incorporation in the new "Ports to Plains" highway system, therefore the farm will be relocated. Troy Mayfield, the chapter's instructor, is using the event as an opportunity to involve students in the actual planning of the new farm and introduce them to new career opportunities. He called on NRCS and district staff to provide the needed training expertise and exercises.

On Sept. 9, 29 students from four classes practiced using the levels, recording shots and reading topographic maps. Later in the week the classes set stakes for taking the actual shots.

On Sept. 17 Cherrie Brown, NRCS district conservationist, and Jim Belford, CCCD manager, were joined by Bruce Meyer, NRCS range management specialist from Guymon, and Dennis Stipe, NRCS civil engineering technician from the Woodward NRCS Technical Service Office. They showed the students how to use the level to record shots and enter them on the design sheet. Instructor Mayfield will have each student plan for placement of a flight pen, greenhouse, grass identification plots, subsurface drip irrigation plot and an aquaculture pond.



Members of the Boise City Chapter FFA practice their engineering skills under the supervision of instructor Troy Mayfield.

Water Festival at Deer Creek Elementary

Oklahoma County Conservation District

Oklahoma County Conservation District held a Water Festival for Deer Creek Elementary School fourth-graders on Oct. 6. Don Bartolina, district manager, said the district has sponsored Natural Resource Days for students for years, but this is its first event focused solely on water. He also said that with the high price of gasoline, it makes more sense to take the event to the school grounds instead of busing the students to another location like an area lake.

Students rotated through four activities. Three of the activities are from Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) and the fourth is from the WOW (Wonders of Wetlands) curriculum. Students spent 30 minutes at each station. "Macroinvertebrate Mayhem," a game of tag geared to demonstrate the effects of environmental stress on macroinvertebrate populations, was led by the Deer Creek High School Envirothon team.

Debbie Straughn, acting principal at the school, stated that hands-on activities are a valuable learning experience for elementary school students. Straughn is also a member of the Oklahoma County Conservation District board of directors.



Mailing Tab Area

In the photo at left students learn about water cohesion and adhesion in a Project WET activity. Each student starts with a cup filled to the brim with water. As they add pennies to the cup, the surface tension characteristic of the water allows it to rise above the rim, up to a limit, before spilling down the side of the cup. Becky Inmon, Oklahoma County CD secretary (at right), facilitated the activity.

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, 405.521-3857

Oklahoma Conservation Conversation

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