

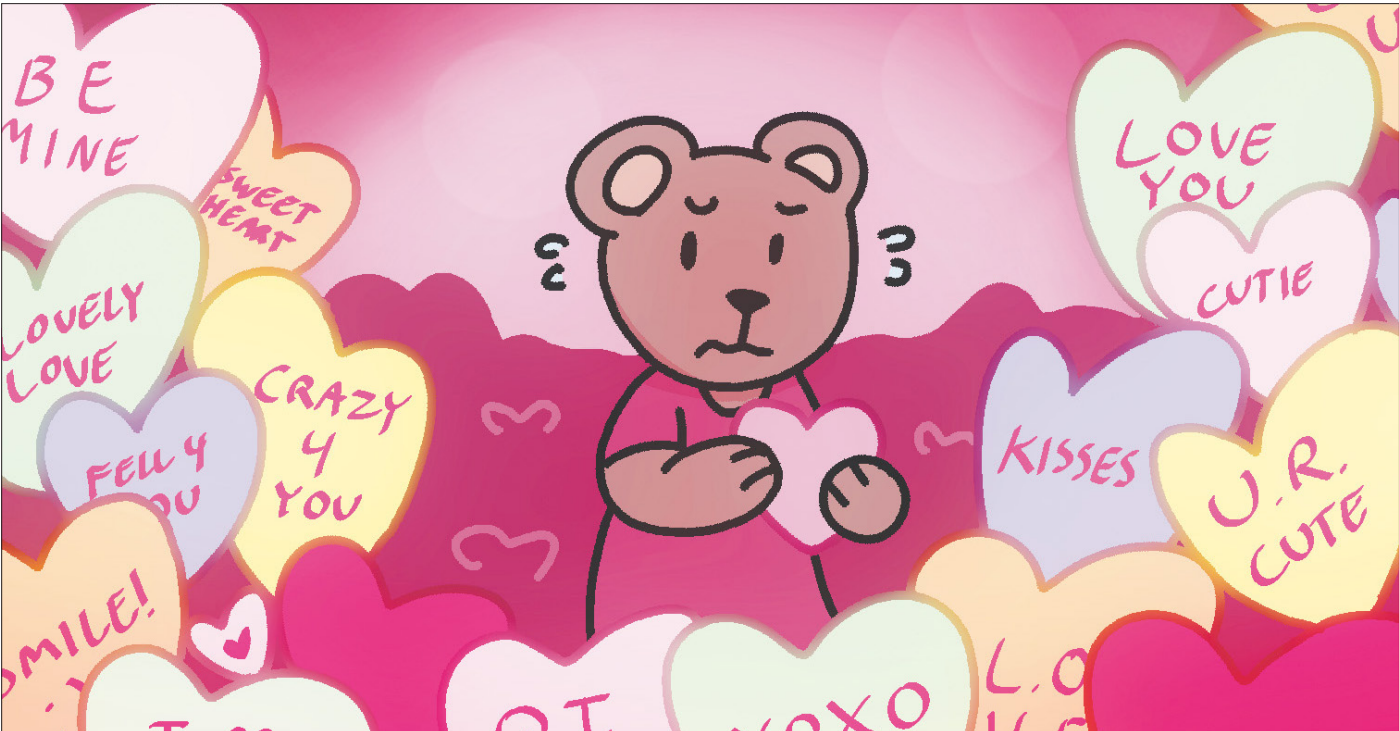




GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

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EDITORIAL



James Ellis | Cartoonist

# The price of Valentine’s is too high

As the calendar counts down to Feb. 14 and love is in the air, conflicting thoughts mix in. Some wait in anticipation of being lavished with gifts and cards, while others dread the credit card bill that follows.

Wherever you stand, this year might be the time to re-evaluate. Though often well-intentioned, the overwhelming commercialization of the day of love has shrouded its true meaning behind candy hearts, red roses and teddy bears.

Despite its national recognition, Valentine’s Day has a somewhat vague history. According to NPR, the holiday originated with a pagan holiday in Ancient Rome involving goat sacrifices and a matchmaking lottery. OK — rocky start. But the story gets better ... well, slightly.

The Roman holiday was likely paired with the celebration of St. Valentine, a Roman priest. As the story goes, Emperor

Claudius II outlawed marriage because “unmarried men make better soldiers,” according to National Geographic. Valentine, the romantic he was, spent his nights secretly marrying young couples — until he was caught and executed on Feb. 14. But in his last days before death, he allegedly fell in love with a jailer’s daughter and wrote her a “valentine” before his execution.

So naturally, now we all wear pink and buy each other silly gifts on Valentine’s Day to celebrate. Despite its rocky past, Americans are all in for the holiday now.

This year, the National Retail Foundation anticipates Americans spending a record-breaking \$29.1 billion on Valentine’s Day plans. The last record, \$27.5 billion, was surpassed last year, with each shopper averaging about \$188.81 on various Valentine’s-themed purchases. What can we attribute the drastic increase in spending to? Do Americans simply have

more love to express this year than they did last year? We’re guessing not.

We would argue that the egregious spending is not the result of increased love this year — it’s a crutch. It’s less effort (though not for your wallet) to lavish someone with gifts to make up for where you’ve fallen short than to simply change your behavior. But, as many a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband and wife will learn come Feb. 14, conversation hearts don’t equate to real conversations, and a dozen roses still come with thorns.

Now this isn’t always the case. Many people in relationships celebrate Valentine’s Day with exactly the right intentions. But for many, the joy of the holiday has been replaced with an obligation to drop a pretty penny on the perfect gift. But the holiday isn’t about spending — it’s about love, and love can’t be measured by dollar amount.

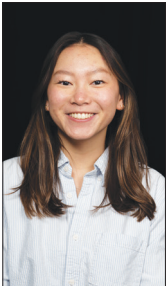
We can guarantee that your significant other doesn’t need you to break your bank for them to feel loved. And if they do, well, when is a better time to reevaluate your relationship? Love isn’t about materials; it’s about intentionality. Showing your significant other love doesn’t require a Michelin-star dinner and new diamond earrings. Maybe your perfect Valentine’s Day is ordering in and watching your favorite movie together in your pajamas.

And Valentine’s Day isn’t just for people in a relationship. It’s for all kinds of love. If you find yourself single and without plans this Valentine’s, be sure to pay attention to the people you love. Call your parents, hang out with your friends and send a text to your siblings. It’s easy to mope as a single on the day of love. But as the great Hugh Grant once said, “If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaky feeling you’ll find that love actually is all around.”

# 4 things to do in your 20s

ALYSSA MEYERS  
Photographer

It seems these days that whenever you open Instagram, you can find someone running a marathon, playing pickleball or taking a trip to Japan. So why have everyone in their 20s decided to run to cope during their quarter-life crisis? Personally, I couldn’t tell you because you could not pay me to run that long, not to mention that you also have to pay an entry fee to run. You’re probably wondering what you can do besides these performative activities, and I am here to give you some other ideas.



## TAKE A ROAD TRIP

There is no better time in your life to take a weekend trip with your friends than in college. Waco is a central location to some pretty awesome places that cater to all different lifestyles. For the outdoorsy people, the greater Austin area has great trails and natural springs. Going farther west, you hit the Texas Hill Country, with pretty scenic views and some great antiquing if that’s your vibe. If you’re feeling really adventurous, you can attempt a weekend Big Bend National Park trip where you can truly disconnect from school and society. Other fun day trips to Dallas and Fort Worth are great for getting in your big city shopping and exploring new food options.

## PICK UP A CRAFT

Even though you may not be the most creative person, picking up a craft like needlepointing, crocheting or even journaling is a great way to learn something new and get off your screen. I think that there is a lot to say about making something yourself.

## HOST A NIGHT IN

The idea of dinner parties and game nights seems so millennial; however, I think these events are a great way to gather with friends. There are so many fun and unique “board night” ideas or monthly dinner party ideas on social media. Hosting is a daunting task, so potlucks are another option. Game nights are also a fun option to be with friends and even show off your competitive side.

## READ A BOOK

Hot take: Reading can actually be fun. I know that reading outside of school can be a lot, but if you find a genre you truly enjoy, reading can be great for decompressing. There are also various benefits to reading, like improving attention span, expanding your vocabulary and continual lifelong learning.

At the end of the day, there is no right way to handle a quarter-life crisis, and it certainly doesn’t require a race bib or a passport stamp. Sometimes coping looks a lot quieter — a long drive with friends, a half-finished craft, a crowded dinner table or a book you can’t put down. Maybe the real goal isn’t to prove you’re thriving, but to find small moments that make this strange in-between phase feel a little better.

# Believe her — only if she did everything right

JOANA KAROSHI  
Staff Writer

No other crime is treated like sexual assault. It is the only crime in which victims are judged by their actions and the victim must perform “perfectly” to be taken seriously. It is the only crime where victims must extensively prove they endured pain. It is the only crime deemed as temtable.

In sexual assault, society does not recognize a clear victim and a clear aggressor, instead the lines are blurred. The victim takes on the shades of a temptress, and the aggressor becomes more and more helpless. Or at the very least, she was complicit in the act. She went back again, didn’t report on time or wasn’t smart enough. Her actions are scrutinized until his violence feels justified.

This logic does not exist elsewhere. When someone reports a burglary, we don’t ask whether the door was locked. When someone is mugged, we don’t analyze their innocence. But when someone reports sexual assault, belief comes with conditions.

Pretending that this attitude is not rooted



in archaic beliefs about women’s sexuality is dishonest. The belief that women’s bodies are inherently sexual and that men can’t help but behave carnally is instilled in society. Women are expected to be perfect around men who are allowed to be animals.

And you may think you could never hold such an old-fashioned idea, but it is ingrained in our culture. The way we portray women in movies and pop culture, and how the media and the government respond to victims makes this image increasingly more evident.

In light of the Epstein files, we have understood that, still, after the #MeToo movement, women are often treated as objects of pleasure. That misogyny is alive and working overtime. The fact that headlines are constantly filled with government leaders committing the most gruesome crimes against women is terrifying. And after many years, with many testimonies of women tearing their hearts out, women are still ignored.

The psychology of trauma is complex and nonlinear, yet victims are punished for responding imperfectly. We judge them for not reporting. We judge them for reporting too late. We judge them for going back. We judge them for who they were before it happened. And we comfort ourselves by insisting we would never do those things — we would never wear that, go there, be those kinds of girls.

If you are raped, make sure you have no sexual past.

Don’t drink. Don’t party. Don’t put yourself in “compromising situations.”

Make sure you wear nothing that could be labeled revealing.

Make sure you report immediately. But give yourself time to be sure your story is right.

Make sure there is nothing — nothing — that could suggest you wanted it; that you teased him, that you tempted him.

And make sure he is not a powerful individual. You may not get justice.

As these troubling events continue to unfold, it’s worth remembering what actually matters. This situation is not about online outrage, political agendas or conspiracies; it is about women and girls who were abused.

This time is not a moment for jokes or irony. Minimizing survivors’ pain only protects abusers and silences victims. If someone you know has experienced sexual abuse, stand by them. Listen. Believe them.

And if you are a survivor, know this: what happened to you does not define your character or your worth. It speaks only to the actions of the person who harmed you.

*Letter from the editors: If you are a victim of sexual assault, Baylor has resources available. Anonymous reports can be made through the Title IX website.*

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### Opinion

\* Asterisks indicate members of The Editorial Board



# Moody to Waco hospitals

Community donates life-saving blood amid shortage

JOANA KAROSHI  
Staff Writer

Parked outside Moody Library, a bus stamped with the words “Carter BloodCare: Be a Lifeline for Your Community” drew students, some checking in as walk-ins and others arriving with appointments booked online.

Amid a nationwide blood donation shortage, Baylor Health Services partnered with Carter BloodCare to host blood drives from Feb. 9–12 outside Moody Library. The drives run from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and Baylor Health Services promoted the event on Instagram, offering free dinner to students who donate.

The American Red Cross declared a severe blood shortage in January after the national blood supply dropped below 35%, a situation worsened in some areas by winter weather that disrupted donations.

Raleigh, N.C., senior Scott Leblanc said he learned about the shortage through Carter BloodCare and felt compelled to contribute.

“I heard that the weather may make the blood shortage worse in the area, so I thought I should do my part and donate,” Leblanc said. “I’m not from Texas, but I really like the community here, so I want to make sure that I can help out when I can.”

Carter BloodCare spokesperson James Black said donations are critical as the organization recovers from recent weather-related disruptions.

“Donating blood is a positive way to have a powerful effect on someone in Waco and Central Texas who needs our help,” Black said. “When you donate blood with Carter BloodCare, you help children who are fighting cancer, organ transplant recipients, people hurt in serious car wrecks, patients being treated after mass casualty incidents, new mothers and so many others.”

As shortages continue, campus blood drives have become an essential pipeline for maintaining the region’s blood supply.

“In fact, 25% of the blood supply is collected through campus blood drives,” Black said.

Not all students arrived aware of the national shortage. Riverside, Calif.,



**B-POSITIVE** President Linda Livingstone smiles as she donates blood at the Carter BloodCare bus outside Moody Memorial Library on Tuesday morning.

sophomore Emi Tavares said she learned about it only after being asked about it. Despite that, she said donating felt like an easy decision.

“It just seemed like the right thing to do,” she said.

Mondekhuu Turmunkh, a second-year international student from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, said he decided to donate after walking past the Carter BloodCare bus. Though he was unaware of the national shortage, Turmunkh said his decision was influenced by his doctor’s advice back home.

“My doctor suggested I give blood,” Turmunkh said. “I didn’t get a chance back home, so I decided I might as well donate here.”

Turmunkh said he would encourage other students to consider donating.

“I would encourage them to give blood,” he said. “It helps people and can save lives.”

For some students, the main barrier to

donating is time. Leblanc said the process can take close to 40 minutes, which can be difficult to fit between classes.

However, Long Island, N.Y., freshman Ace Kerrigan said the process was quicker than expected.

“It’s really not that much time,” Kerrigan said. “I was in and out in like 30 minutes, and then I could go about my day.”

Kerrigan said he learned about the drive through a friend who received an email and by seeing the Carter BloodCare bus parked outside the Moody Library for a couple of days.

Despite the time commitment, Leblanc encouraged other Baylor students to consider donating as the shortage continues.

“It’s one of the few chances you have to actually help save lives, especially now when there’s a shortage,” Leblanc said. “It’s such a little thing to do, but it can make a big difference.”

Keston Collection highlights religious propaganda, totalitarianism



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

**HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS** Baylor’s Keston Collection is home to several pieces of propaganda, including posters and various artifacts.

READ MORE HERE!



# BAYLOR SENIORS

TAKE YOUR PORTRAITS

CHECK YOUR BAYLOR EMAIL TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

ROUNDUP  
YEARBOOK  
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

SPRING SESSION DATES  
February 9th-27th





Photo courtesy of the Harlem Globetrotters

Roundup file photos

# On top of the world

## Inside a former Baylor guard’s journey to international stardom

JACKSON POSEY  
Sports Editor

Aundre Branch’s bag is still packed. The black traveling case has been sitting in the garage for 15 years, underneath a pile of other suitcases, covered in dust and filled with memories. It’s a final testimony to the sport that saved him.

“When I say it saved my life, that was my safe haven,” Branch said. “I was always with a basketball at all times because that was the only way I felt safe.”

Branch, a Baylor Athletics Hall-of-Famer and former Harlem Globetrotter, eventually set several 3-point shooting records and became one of the most prolific scorers in Baylor history. It was a meteoric rise for a kid from inner-city Houston who just wanted to make it out.

“If it wasn’t for basketball, if it wasn’t for my supporting cast around me, if it wasn’t for the experiences that I’ve witnessed with my own two eyes, I probably would’ve fell victim to what was happening in my environment,” Branch said. “I was that close.”

When Branch’s parents divorced, he moved with his mother to Kingwood, a safer area in the suburbs of Houston. He starred for Kingwood High, a team whose duo of 7-footers drew plenty of college scouts and thrice took top-ranked Sugar Land Willowridge to overtime.

Baylor immediately stood out among several Division I offers, partially for the school’s academic reputation and the allure of early playing time. But Branch also loved the Waco of it all. The double appeal of staying close to home and living in a city that was then home to Paul Quinn College, a historically Black institution which has since moved to Dallas, was too much to pass up.

“I was like, man, this is home,” Branch said. “I came home and told my mama, I said, ‘Mama, I’m going to go to Baylor.’”



Lariat file photo  
**FROG OF WAR** Aundre Branch dropped 27 points in a 98-90 win over TCU on Jan. 18, 1995.

Branch immediately turned heads with his shooting ability. By the time he graduated, he’d set Baylor’s single-season and career records in 3-point shooting, as well as in career marks for 3-point percentage and attempts.

“He was an amazing shooter,” said Jerry Hill, a sports writer and assistant sports editor at the Waco Tribune-Herald during Branch’s tenure. “He could knock it down from anywhere, and that was his game.”

Those four years were a whirlwind. Baylor dismissed head coach Gene Iba after Branch’s freshman year, then fired his successor, Darrel Johnson, amid school and federal investigations into potential mail and wire fraud charges. (Johnson was later acquitted on all seven counts, while three assistants were found guilty of conspiracy.)

Branch decided not to transfer after the coaching staff promised the team wouldn’t be put on probation. Reality hit like a ton of bricks.

“I’ll never forget the day when they told us, right before the game, that we are on probation,” Branch said. “I looked at Nelson [Haggerty], I looked at all the coaches. I started getting undressed. I was going to go home. I didn’t want to play the game because I felt like I was betrayed.”

Prayer and tears brought Branch back to the court. Months later, they bookended his senior season. The Bears lost their 1995 finale to Texas A&M at the Ferrell Center, 87-78, ending the sharpshooter’s career with a third consecutive loss.

“Once the game was over, I just sat right there in the middle of the floor,” Branch said. “I went home in my uniform that day. That’s how hurt I was.”

Branch was a bright spot on a team with no hopes of a postseason berth. He earned All-Southwest Conference honors for the second straight season after posting a career-high 21.7 points per game.

“Thirty-plus years later, he’s still one of the best [shooters] the program’s ever had,” Hill said. “I think it helped [the program], just seeing guys like that stick it out and make it four years with three different head coaches.”

After several years of playing professionally overseas — and, occasionally, pickup ball with Moses Malone, Steve Francis and Sam Cassell at the Fondé Rec Center — Branch went on a tear in the Dominican Republic, winning over a dozen straight games and catching the eye of a Globetrotters coach. After practicing with Shawn Kemp one day, he met with the coach, haggled insurance and a 401(k) into the contract and signed on the dotted line.

For the first time, Aundre Branch was a Globetrotter — at least, on the outside. Inside, he still had the fire of a professional player.

“There’s certain parts in the game where we know that the showman that does all the talking, he’s going to come out and signal, OK, now it’s time to switch over to entertainment,” Branch said. “Well, I’m in the heat of battle. I’m ready to play. You score on me, I’m trying to score back.”

“I’m sitting down on the bench, and one of my best friends, Michael ‘Wild Thing’ Wilson ... said, ‘Branch, man, calm down.’ I said, ‘Nah, I gotta get him! I want to get him!’ He said, ‘Branch, we got about 300 more games, you can get him tomorrow.’ (laughs) And that’s when the lightbulb came on.”

Branch quickly made an impression throughout the organization. He officially earned his nickname by sinking several deep shots in a scrimmage, prompting a coach to proclaim in a sing-song voice, “Oh, Hot Shot Branch.”

“Great guy,” said Zoltan Berencsi, senior producer for the Globetrotters. “He was a great shooter. We utilized him when we first initiated the four-point line, he was hitting fours for us. Just a lot of cool stuff with him.”

Branch went on to become a major PR figure for the Globetrotters, working with Habitat for Humanity after Hurricane Katrina and doing television interviews alongside Paris Hilton and Kevin Bacon. But to him, one story stands out above the others.

During his first year with the Globetrotters, Branch came back to Waco for the first time and spent most of the pregame playing with a young ballboy — dancing, laughing, joking around. After the game, the boy’s mother gave Branch a hug and thanked him. Her son had terminal cancer, she said. All he’d wanted to do was come to a Globetrotters game.

Three days later, Branch learned that the child had passed away.

“I broke down,” Branch said. “That’s what triggered me [to realize], you don’t get this type of interaction [elsewhere]. Don’t get me wrong, the NBA would have been a great thing as far as — of course the money would’ve been great, and you get to play on a high level and things like that, but there’s no higher level than the Globetrotters.”

“I tell everybody, I didn’t get a chance to



Photo by Philip Bible for Lariat  
**Slammin’ and jammin’**  
**LIFE OF A SHOWMAN** Aundre Branch slams home a poster dunk in the 1992 Dr Pepper Invitational.

make a million dollars, but I definitely made a million friends.”

It’s been 15 years since he last put on the uniform. One day, Branch said he’ll open that black traveling case. He’ll go back in time and remember it all. Perhaps it’ll bring some closure. For now, though, he’s still holding out hope. He doesn’t want to let go.

“I still have dreams about still playing,” Branch said. “I still have dreams about when I played with the Globetrotters — I had a basketball and I could hear the Sweet Georgia Brown in my ears, playing. ... I wish I could suit up one more time and shoot me a jump shot in Foster Pavilion one good time.”

There’s a saying among former players: “Once a ‘trotter, always a ‘trotter.” Branch still feels the connection. He’s traveled to 59 countries across six continents, braved war zones and met A-list celebrities, all while playing 300 games per year.

“There’s only one place I ain’t been, and that’s heaven, man,” Branch said. “It’s coming. Probably, when I get to heaven, I’ll get to spin the ball on God’s finger and tell him thank you.”



Roundup file photo  
**AIRTIME** Aundre Branch floats to the ground after a dunk in his prolific 1994-1995 season.





Lariat file photo

**RIVALRY** Senior forward Bella Fontleroy drives through the defense during Baylor women's basketball's 51-48 loss to TCU on March 2, 2025, at the Foster Pavilion.

# No. 12 Baylor WBB to host No. 17 TCU

**MARISSA ESSENBERG**  
Sports Writer

The margin for error has evaporated. With six games remaining in the regular season, all eyes are on No. 12 Baylor women's basketball Thursday, with the Bears set to host No. 17 TCU in a matchup with significant Big 12 implications.

"There's a lot of reasons why, in a close game, and we've played a lot of close games against TCU in the last year, a crowd can take you over the hump," head coach Nicki Colleen said on The Matt Mosley Show. "It starts with our students, and they showed up for our game on Saturday, which was amazing. But I think this is next-level.

"We're now in this race. I'm calling it five games to a championship. And it starts Thursday with TCU. Do I want to win it because of what happened last year? Sure. But every team's different, and I want this team to win it, and I want them to deserve to win it."

After weeks of climbing in tandem at the top of the Big 12 standings, Baylor and TCU now enter Thursday's matchup thinly separated, with Baylor (21-4, 10-2 Big 12) holding sole possession of the No. 1 spot after outlasting Arizona State on Saturday, while TCU (21-4, 9-3 Big 12) slipped to fourth following a one-point loss to Colorado on Sunday.

In college hoops, January teaches and February reveals. But for Baylor, revelations against TCU have been rare. The Bears hold a staggering 47-5 all-time record over the Horned Frogs, a dominance that stretched until Jan. 26, 2025, when the Horned Frogs snapped a 37-game losing streak against Baylor in Fort Worth.

Two years after inheriting a TCU program that finished 8-23, head coach Mark Campbell engineered one of the conference's most dramatic turnarounds, leading the Horned Frogs to a sweep of the Big 12 regular-season and tournament championships and a run to the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament.

The run saw the Horned Frogs edge Baylor twice in the same season for the first time in program history, with the two victories separated by a combined eight points — once in the regular-season finale and again in the Big 12 Tournament championship game.

TCU, like Baylor, enters Thursday's matchup with a retooled roster backed by seasoned veterans. The Horned Frogs bolstered their backcourt with the addition of All-American point guard Olivia Miles, who chose to forego the WNBA Draft and return to college after graduating from Notre Dame, where she set the program record for triple-doubles and earned multiple All-ACC First Team honors.

Now in the Big 12, the graduate guard ranks third in the conference in scoring at 19.7 points per game — trailing Baylor's Taliah Scott —

and sits among the conference's top three in assists, minutes and field-goal percentage

Alongside Miles, California transfer forward Marta Suarez anchors the interior with physical finishing and presence on the glass, while Oregon State transfer guard Donovanyn Hunter adds another dynamic perimeter scorer. Together, the trio forms a three-headed attack that can score at all three levels and pressure defenses in space.

"[Miles] is an elite scorer, an elite passer, and I don't think I've ever seen anyone in the women's game put the ball on time and target with her off hand as well as she does," Colleen said. "This is a really talented team. They're elite offensively. [Campbell] does an elite job in the portal, and an elite job of getting a lot out of their best players."

On the other side of the ball, Baylor counters with its own three-headed core in redshirt sophomore and the Big 12's No. 2 leading scorer Taliah Scott and senior forwards Bella Fontleroy and Darianna Littlepage-Buggs, the conference's leading rebounder. Entering the matchup ranked No. 1 in the country in 3-point defense and No. 1 in the Big 12 in blocks per game, defensive discipline has become the foundation of Baylor's identity.

Baylor builds its offense inside-out. The Bears attack the paint off the dribble, crash the offensive glass and live at the free-throw line. When they establish position down low and win second-chance possessions early, the floor opens naturally — kick-outs come in rhythm, spacing feels deliberate and multiple scorers find clean looks without forcing action late in the clock.

The contrast of styles sharpens Thursday's tension.

TCU thrives in space and ball-screen reads. Baylor thrives in structure and physicality. It's a matchup that could tilt on turnover margin, execution in transition and which team asserts its tempo in the final 20 minutes.

When TCU forces pace, the floor opens. When Baylor controls the glass, it tightens.

"Our coaches say every day that we get to write our own destiny, so we're trying to make deposits, be communicative and grow every chance that we get," Fontleroy said. "It's the difference between being conference champions or being up there and still being a high seed with a good opportunity in the conference tournament, but we want to win. At the end of the day, we want to win and be the best versions of ourselves."

Six games out from the conference tournament, the Bears meet a timely test in a TCU team that could reshape the conference race.

The Bears will look for their 22nd win of the season against TCU at 6 p.m. Thursday at Foster Pavilion. The game will be broadcast on ESPN.



Brady Harris | Photographer

**CELEBRATION** Redshirt junior second basemen Travis Sanders joins his team to celebrate after his homer in the Bears' 3-2 win against HCU at Baylor Ballpark on April 1, 2025.

# Baylor baseball builds team with young roster

**JEFFREY COHEN**  
Sports Writer

On a roster of 37 players, nine are going into their first season of college baseball. Baylor expects this young core to lead it back to its past success.

"These are guys that, in the next three or four years, could really write their names on Baylor baseball," head coach Mitch Thompson said.

The Bears are still looking to take the next step in the program's rebuild. Veteran players like senior left-handed pitcher Ethan Calder want to make that final push in their collegiate careers.

"This is my fourth year. I want to see it grow," Calder said. "Starting from where we were freshman year to now, I want to see us make it [to the] regional."

The senior class has seen the team improve every year under Thompson. Baylor finished 20-35 in 2023, Thompson's first season as head coach, and climbed up to 22-31 in 2024 and 33-21 (13-17 Big 12) in 2025.

The Bears were busy this fall with uniting experience with the promise and excitement of the young squad.

"We did a lot in the fall," redshirt junior infielder Travis Sanders said. "We got a lot of new players in, and we had to come behind and mesh together."

While the Bears made it back to the Big 12 tournament for the first time in three years, they now aim to return to the national stage and bring excitement back to Baylor Ballpark.

"I remember going up and coming to games here, that Arkansas Super Regional, I've seen this place packed out," Calder said. "That's something that a lot of people envision."

Baylor's 2012 Super Regional against Arkansas saw crowds of over 5,000 for all three

games, all ranking among the program's 10 most-attended games.

A promising sign for the Bears' success is the pitching staff. They are returning eight pitchers, including multiple key arms, from last year's group that ranked third in the conference in ERA.

"This might be the closest group that we've had since I've been here," Calder said. "I think everyone clicks well."

The pitchers have shown that they are ready to return to dominance. Baylor hopes to see its bullpen trio of fifth-year Caleb Bunch, senior Grayson Murry and redshirt junior Lucas Davenport elevate the incoming arms.

"We had three or four or five pitchers ... that are showing that they're getting ready to go right now," Thompson said. "That added depth on the mound will obviously play a big, big role for us."

The Bears recognize that the organization of the pitching staff is going to look different without closer Gabe Craig, whom the Philadelphia Phillies drafted in the fifth round of the MLB Draft. Craig tallied 51 strikeouts and a 0.56 ERA in 32 innings last season on his way to becoming Baylor's first All-American since 2019.

Those shoes seem almost impossible to fill by one current pitcher, so the Bears will look to utilize multiple relievers in the closing role.

"You're probably not going to find a guy that's going to have a 0.5 ERA and he freaking strikes out the world, right?" Calder said. "It's going to take a couple guys building in or coming into new roles to try to fill those innings."

To pair with one of the best pitching staffs in the Big 12, Baylor will also anchor its lineup with some of its top hitters from last season.

"We returned five guys who have hit over .300 for a complete season of Division I baseball," Thompson said.



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# Wacoan showcases decades-long poster collection

STACIE BOYLS  
Arts & Life Writer

When one walks into an art exhibit, they expect paintings, sculptures and drawings spanning across hundreds of years. Rarely do we consider the artistic value and rich history embedded in something as overlooked as band posters and concert handbills. For avid concertgoer and obsessive poster collector Larry Cartmell, the brilliance of these artistic displays was obvious.

This February, that collection steps out of Cartmell's personal space and onto the walls of Art Center Waco in "If These Walls Could Talk."

Cartmell never set out to build an archive. Over the last 50 years, the instinct to save a poster from a wall, keep a handbill from a show or remember where he was and what he heard slowly became one of the most comprehensive private collections of concert posters in the region.

"They're kind of set up in groups," Cartmell said, gesturing toward the densely packed display. "Stuff that I'm interested in, mostly."

Cartmell's interest spans the full spectrum, from 1960s psychedelic rock to punk, blues, funk and alternative. Posters in the exhibit represent bands such as the Rolling Stones, the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Talking Heads, Ramones, Nine Inch Nails and Pearl Jam, as well as Texas icons like Willie Nelson and the 13th Floor Elevators.

Bella Perez, gallery coordinator at Art Center Waco, said that a collection of this scope has never been publicly displayed in Texas.

"What unites the pieces isn't market value or rarity, it's memory, encapsulated in a rugged poster, first edition sketch or handbill," Cartmell said. "All of it's my personal collection. It just

shows the ephemeral nature of the posters — the venues come and go."

That sense of impermanence is central to Cartmell's collection story, as the posters are high-value memorabilia that were not created to last.

"They just used whatever they had to make the posters," he said.

Printed cheaply and glued to poles or venue walls, most of the posters were torn down or discarded, yet Cartmell kept them.

While the collection reflects a life deeply embedded in music culture, Cartmell's professional life followed a very different path.

He spent decades working as a pathologist, balancing the structure and responsibility of medicine with nights spent at shows, weekends traveling for music festivals and years quietly preserving pieces of visual history.

For Cartmell, collecting became a creative counterweight — a way to stay connected to art, sound and community alongside a demanding medical career.

Some of the most personal pieces trace Cartmell's connection to Texas psychedelic music. Hearing the 13th Floor Elevators for the first time left a lasting impression.

"One night I heard 'You're Gonna Miss Me,'" he said. "It was a revelation."

That revelation stayed with him. Posters from legendary venues such as Armadillo World Headquarters, Vulcan Gas Company, Antone's, the Fillmore East and West and Cain's Ballroom line the exhibit, alongside materials from festivals like Willie Nelson's Fourth of July Picnic and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival — an event Cartmell and his wife have attended nearly every year since the mid-1990s.

For Art Center Waco, the collection represents more than nostalgia. Perez said



Stacie Boyls | Arts & Life Writer

**POSTER PASSION** Dr. Larry Cartmell shows off his posters displayed in the "If These Walls Could Talk" exhibit that premiered Feb. 6, 2026 at Art Center Waco.

the exhibit highlights a form of cultural documentation that is often overlooked.

"These posters were never meant to be archival," Perez said. "They were meant to be hung up, torn down and replaced."

Perez said the show also emphasizes the artistic innovation behind music promotion.

"Poster artists were doing really experimental work," she said. "A lot of it overlaps with what we think of as contemporary art now."

The exhibit is located at 701 S. Eighth St. at Art Center Waco. Throughout February,

Cartmell will also lead interactive thematic discussions on selected posters every Saturday at noon, offering visitors the chance to hear the stories behind the paper.

For Cartmell, those stories are the point. The posters mark where music once lived — in rooms that no longer exist, in scenes that were never expected to be remembered.

"It's like a snapshot of history," he said.

And for five decades, Cartmell has been quietly holding onto those snapshots, one poster, concert or festival at a time.

# Mexican restaurant opening, replacing The Mix Cafe

JOSH SIATKOWSKI  
Staff Writer

Following the January shutdown of The Mix Cafe, a successor restaurant is gearing up to begin operations in the same space as soon as Thursday.

The Trompo King, run by Jorge Alvarado Jr. and his father, will serve a variety of Mexican dishes, but specializes in trompo. "Trompo," which roughly translates to "spinning top," describes al pastor pork roasted on a rotating spit, but it is slightly different from an al pastor taco.

The restaurant aims to hold its soft opening Thursday, which will contain a limited menu, Alvarado said. A grand opening, fit with mariachis or a DJ, is in the works for the coming weeks.

**"Something that Baylor hasn't seen yet"**

Alvarado's new restaurant is a mix of simplicity and speed, contrasted with authentic, high-quality food, he said. On one hand, Trompo King will have all the staples of Latin cuisine.

"We try to keep it simple," Alvarado said. "We're going to have tacos, quesadillas, burritos, tortas, wings, loaded french fries, baked potatoes. We're going to have breakfast tacos ... and breakfast burritos in the mornings."

Conscious of students' busy days and short passing periods, Alvarado also promised fast service, with a five- to eight-minute order fulfillment time.

But on the other hand, Alvarado said he wants students to experience high-quality, authentic Mexican cuisine. Food will be served on custom boards instead of paper products, and in addition to his signature al pastor pork, students will see drink selections that might be new to them — an array

of Mexican fruit waters, or aguas frescas.

"We don't sell sodas," Alvarado said. "What we sell is a 44-ounce cup of fruit water. So you're looking at horchata, Jamaica, limon con pepino, lemonade, cantaloupe and watermelon, and we make it fresh."

Another novelty is Trompo King's expansive hours. While The Mix closed in the late afternoon, Alvarado said for the first month of operating, the restaurant will be open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., and until midnight on weekends. Once customer flow is assessed, the hours will be adjusted, and the restaurant will likely close on Sundays or Mondays.

## GROWING FAST

Trompo, combined with the fruit waters, has been the engine behind the restaurant's growth from a single truck to a



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

**MIXIN' IT UP** After The Mix closed its doors in January, its successor Trompo King is set to open as soon as Thursday.

local chain, Alvarado said.

"In the seven years since we've been born, that's what we're pushing in all of our locations," Alvarado said. "I feel like it's something that a lot of people don't see around the Waco area."

Initially a single food truck in 2018, Alvarado said the restaurant was his father's, who has worked in the food industry for his whole career.

"All his life, he had a vision of opening his own [restaurant]," Alvarado said. "He was there every single day, every single night. He wouldn't move from there."

Surviving the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit restaurants particularly hard, Trompo King emerged stronger. Alvarado and his father opened a second food truck, followed by a physical building in the following years. Now preparing for its fourth location, Alvarado said he's ready for ample business.

"We have been having a lot of students coming in and asking when we're going to open," Alvarado said. "We're very excited to be in the Baylor area for all of the students."

## FRESHLY PAINTED

Perhaps the most memorable component of the new location — before the food has made any impression — is the decoration. A layer of bright orange paint sits behind a hand-painted mural. The color, Alvarado says, is a trade

trick passed down to his father.

"This color orange is supposed to make people want to eat more," Alvarado said. "That's what my dad was taught."

The mural atop the base layer is a mix of Mexican culture and Baylor community. On one wall, a Baylor Bear is painted with a green sweater. On another wall is Waco's ALICO building. And toward the back is a Day of the Dead-inspired section.

Aside from increasing appetites, Alvarado also said he hopes customers will appreciate the custom artwork, even offering it as a photo backdrop.

## SUCCEEDING A CAMPUS STAPLE

As it aims for a soft opening on Thursday, Trompo King has quickly retooled and renovated the former location of The Mix Cafe. The Mix, known for its salads and sandwiches, opened in 2015 at 5th St. and Bagby Ave.

While the owner could not be contacted to comment on the reason for closure, the restaurant closed part of its dining area in the fall. And last month, a law firm posted a sign on The Mix's door stating that the tenants owed \$13,000 in rent, according to KWTX.

Perhaps one of the most closely affected individuals of the recent closure is accounting professor Don Carpenter. Carpenter, an affable former

waste management executive, ate lunch there almost every day with students for the past eight years through his "You Book, I Buy" program.

"In class, you only know people based on what they do in class," Carpenter said. "Some people never choose to speak, but even if they do, it's always in the context of accounting, and everybody's story is a lot bigger than whatever subject you're teaching."

The scale of his operation is massive, with Carpenter estimating that he's met with over 3,000 students since starting. This semester alone, he's booked for months.

"This semester, I'm booked until early April," Carpenter said. "I've had high school kids email me and say, 'I'm coming in the fall, and I want to get on your calendar before it fills up.'"

Carpenter, calling himself the "anchor" of the recently-closed restaurant, said almost every single lunch was at The Mix. While he's recently been holding most meetings at the Baylor Sciences Building cafeteria, Carpenter said he's excited to try out the new Trompo King. Alvarado shared a similar sentiment.

"We're happy to take him in and all of the students, and we'll give our best," Alvarado said.

And thankfully for Carpenter, who routinely ordered the salads, Alvarado said the menu will include salads and vegan options by the time of the grand opening.



Josh Siatkowski | Staff Writer

**DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE** A nearly-finished Baylor Bear painting covers the front wall of the new Trompo King restaurant.



Arts & Life

# Grass roots and great food

Waco’s Hispanic, Latino presence strengthens campus life

ADDISON GERNENZ  
Intern

From El Charro Tapatio to Las Trancas Taco Stand, Waco has a multitude of grassroots businesses that run deep with Latino and Hispanic culture, as well as the city.

Waco is heavily founded on the Latino community, and the large Hispanic presence is still evident as roughly 30% of the Waco population is made up by Hispanic and Latino citizens, according to the United States Census Bureau.

St. Louis freshman Analucia Romero is part Mexican, part Columbian, and born in the U.S. She said that she grew up in a very culturally aware household.

“I learned how to speak Spanish before English,” Romero said. “We speak Spanglish at home. We eat Hispanic food, but we’ve always lived in areas that are not as diverse.”

El Charro Tapatio, located at 1615 W. Waco Drive, is a restaurant that specifically connects Romero to her culture and family back home. She praised the restaurant for its authentic Mexican food and art.

“I love it there,” Romero said with a smile. “The chairs and the tables are painted with beautiful little murals. It reminds me of how my house is decorated.”

Colorado Springs, Colo., junior Josiah Lockette said going to different restaurants around Waco makes him feel connected to his family, despite the 12-hour time difference.

Lockette is both Puerto Rican and African American, and his family has been in the U.S. for as long as their history can be traced back. Lockette said that being

Brady Harris | Photographer



Brady Harris | Photographer

**DELICIOUS EATS** El Charro Tapatio, located off Waco Drive, is a homey Mexican restaurant that cooks up a delicious spread of Mexican Food.

Latino is a huge part of his identity and the way that he sees himself.

“When people see me, they see the Black half of me, but they might not know off the bat that I’m Puerto Rican,” Lockette said. “It’s a big part of how I see myself and how I shape my worldview.”

Growing up in Colorado Springs, Lockette said there was not strong diversity around him.

“I had to do some searching, like reading books or listening to music, to try to find the bits and pieces that connect to my culture,” Lockette said.

Lockette’s favorite spot in town for Hispanic food is the taco truck Las Trancas, located at 400 N. 25th St. He appreciates how they stay true to their Hispanic roots, through customers having the option to order in Spanish and the menu largely being in Spanish.

“It’s clearly a family business,” Lockette said. “There’s a guy on the side who doesn’t make tacos, but he helps make flan, conchas and other cakes. He seals them on the side, and they work

together to run the truck smoothly.”

Las Trancas is an authentic Mexican food truck that opened their first location in Waco in 2007, after seven years of the Gonzalez family working in taquerias and learning the ins and outs of business and Mexican street food.

Baylor also reflects the history of Waco through organizations such as the Hispanic Student Organization and events like their annual Fiesta.

Romero said she appreciates the organizations that Baylor works with to help the local Waco community, specifically the immigrant communities and the Hispanic community. La Puerta, located at 500 Clay Ave., is one of these initiatives.

La Puerta is a faith-based ministry in Waco that was founded in order to support the Latino American community. La Puerta was founded in Waco by Dr. Israel Loachamin and Emily Morrow-Loachamin while they were students at Baylor.

La Puerta focuses on providing support to the Spanish-speaking community in

Waco through education, counseling and community engagement.

Romero commends the organization for their initiative and recognizing the responsibility that Christians have to reach their immediate community. She urges people to acknowledge what Jesus means when He says love your neighbor.

“I think it is so important to recognize this need in our immediate community and that immigrants, especially right now with the current political situation, are in a lot of fear and could use some help,” Romero said.

Lockette said that the friends he has met at Baylor have helped him become more connected to his culture.

“This community makes me feel welcome,” Lockette said. “I’ve met a lot of friends who are really open-minded and willing to learn about the Hispanic community. For those people there are resources at Baylor and around Waco, and I really appreciate that.”

## Baylor Theatre to whisk audience in ‘Alice by Heart’

CAMILLE KELLY  
Reporter

Baylor Theatre is transporting audiences into the world of Wonderland in its upcoming production of “Alice by Heart.” The musical is set in World War II and reimagines Lewis Carroll’s “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.”



Photo courtesy of Stacey Schiller

**WONDERLAND REINVENTED** Baylor Theatre Department breaks the mold with an emotional tale of love, grief and war.

A twist on the classic tale with elements of grief, love and imagination, this show is a coming-of-age story running Feb. 18 to March 1 in the Mabee Theatre at the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center.

Killeen senior Analisse Nicholson plays the lead character, Alice, a role that marks her fourth year of acting within the theatre department. Nicholson said that she loves the historical drama aspects of the show. Most of all she loves the music because it’s “not what people would expect.”

“It takes the original story by Lewis Carroll and sets it during World War II, during the

London Blitz, so you have all these characters who double as Wonderland characters,” Nicholson said. “Alice, with her friend Alfred, grew up with the story, and they kind of cling to it during this horrible time. It’s a story of love and growing up, and it all wraps everything together.”

Tickets are on sale now at [baylortheatre.eventue.net](http://baylortheatre.eventue.net), and student tickets can be purchased at the Theatre Box Office for CAE Credit. The show runs just under 2 hours, a block of time for which Nicholson’s character never leaves the stage once.

“I hope that people can see firsthand the hard work that this whole process has been,” Nicholson said. “Just putting on a show like this is a big feat, and everyone’s doing such a great job with the costumes, the tech elements and the lighting and sound.”

Keller sophomore Dan Dunning, who plays the co-lead character, Alfred, said his favorite part of the show is the music. Dunning said that between both the beautiful and upbeat numbers, people won’t want to miss the opportunity to see this show and its “amazing cast.”

“There’s so many different skill sets that everybody has, and it comes together to form things that are really beautiful — some amazing vocals, some gorgeous acting — the whole shebang,” Dunning said.

In recent years, Baylor Theatre has staged well-known musicals, such as “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street” and “Little Women: The Broadway Musical.” This story, however well-known, has something unique to

offer, according to Nicholson.

“I think it’s unexpected, but I think for me, when I go see a show that is something I didn’t really know about, and I’m hit with all this beautiful music and these gorgeous visuals — that just makes it all the more better,” she said. “I think that people should just go see more theatre. Go experience art.”



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DEMOCRATIC BALLOT

from A1

Rising home prices, rent increases and inflation have made it harder for many Texans to afford stable housing.

Dr. Jerry Park, associate professor of sociology, said in an email that this proposition would be most impactful for low-income Texans.

“With little to no changes in minimum wages, and increases in inflation, which affect mortgages and rent as well as food and utilities, those who cannot commit more of their dollars to housing will struggle considerably,” Park said.

As people continue to flock to Texas cities, the suburbs are expanding and bleeding into rural Texan counties, exacerbating the problem by driving

up prices and pushing homebuyers further into the country.

**Proposition 5: Texas should fund all public schools at the same per-pupil rate as the national average.**

Each student in the Texas public school system is worth \$13,189, a number that has stayed steady since 2019.

Funding per student is found by dividing the state’s total education budget by the number of public school students.

Currently, Texas ranks 47th in per-student funding, giving students \$5,664 less than the

national average.

**Proposition 6: Secure online voter registration should be accessible to all eligible Texas residents.**

Presently, Texans must sign a physical voter registration application, and Texas has some of the most restrictive voting laws in the country. Voter turnout is also very low in the Lone Star State.

Online voter registration is considered a convenience that should encourage voter registration, and therefore, voting itself, as suggested by The Texas Tribune.

EPSTEIN FILES

from A1

email reads. “As you know, I believed in you (still do) and your cause. Come see me. Otherwise I’ll try to chase you down. I’ll soon have more time/flexibility.”

That November, Starr was on a Caribbean cruise and reached out to Epstein, planning to visit him in Florida after the cruise ended. In the email thread, Epstein inquired whether Starr’s cruise would stop on St. Thomas of the U.S. Virgin Islands. St. Thomas is less than a mile away from Little St. James — the island owned by Epstein where he trafficked underage girls and boys.

“

It was great having Jeffrey here. He’s a prince. Next time, he is warmly welcome and encouraged to ‘break bread’ with me at the Allbritton House. His menu, my pleasure.

**KEN STARR**  
**FORMER BAYLOR PRESIDENT**

REPUBLICAN BALLOT

from A1

in 2022, the Republican Party decided its stance on future anti-abortion arguments. One goal is to set a stronger definition of when life begins in students’ sex education classes.

Bridge said this proposition is a smart way for the party to gauge how voters feel about abortion, given that it was relatively popular among Texans before Roe v. Wade’s overturning.

“This sounds strange, but Roe was popular in Texas,” Bridge said. “Abortion is a very complex issue; it is not as simple as pro-life, pro-choice. There’s lots of room within both of those maneuvers, and the Texas Republican Party is trying to figure out where they should locate themselves.”

**services in K-12 schools.**

Proposition 5 would remove a range of gender and reproductive health services from Texas public schools, shifting students’ access to care off campus.

In Texas, only about 19% of schools offer a form of sex education, and the teen birth rate is at 19.4 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19.

Dr. Lenore Wright, professor of philosophy, said in an email that she wonders what Proposition 5 would be needed for, considering the passage of Senate Bill 12 last August.

The bill requires parents to give consent for their child to receive instruction on health education, sexual orientation and gender ideology.

**enact term limits on all elected officials.**

Currently, the Texas Constitution does not impose term limits on any elected officials.

Evidence suggests that term limits would encourage more fresh faces to run for office, toppling the empires incumbents build over decades in office. However, there’s also the argument that term limits ignore the value of institutional knowledge that incumbents gain from decades in office, with frequent turnover potentially destabilizing the office.

The Texas Legislature currently has 26 incumbents and three new members in the Senate and 119 incumbents and 31 new members in the House, with the average age of senators being 62.1.

**Proposition 5: Texas should ban gender, sexuality and reproductive clinics and**

**Proposition 6: Texas should**

DEMOCRATIC



Checkout what you need to know about the remaining four Republican and seven Democratic propositions here!

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