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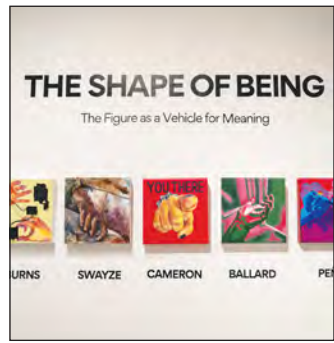
LARIAT LETTER:

I founded TPUSA at Baylor. If I were still involved, I would have walked away.

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MEN'S BASKETBALL:

Breaking down the Bears' new-look 2026-27 roster after missing postseason



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STUDENT EXHIBIT:

Student art to explore 'The Shape of Being' at Washington Gallery

Students, admin respond to 'insults' at TPUSA event

MACKENZIE GRIZZARD
Assistant News Editor

Statements made at Turning Point USA's "This is the Turning Point" event last week have ignited controversy among students and faculty in the aftermath of national attention over Baylor's decision to allow the group on campus.

Political commentator Benny

Johnson, one of the headliners at the TPUSA event, made several comments during his speeches that attendees raised concerns about.

In response to an audience member saying they raised cows and pigs, Johnson made a joke that because of that experience, he was "familiar with dealing with liberal women."

Ellensburg, Wash., second-year

Master's of Divinity student Kyle Perry said he attended the TPUSA event because he said he was curious about how "TPUSA's values intersected with Baylor's values."

After Johnson's comment referring to liberal women as pigs, Perry said he asked Johnson directly to give a biblical account for the words he said.

"He gave an answer," Perry said.

"It was just an answer you would expect from somebody who's not a Christian."

In Johnson's response to Perry, he also asserted that liberal men didn't have testosterone, citing that birth rates are going up because conservative women are attractive and look like women, while

TPUSA REACTION >> A7

Penland trio dedicates decades of service

JOSH SIATKOWSKI
Staff Writer

With nearly 120 years of combined experience in Penland Dining Hall, Elaine Battle, Linda Benson and Donna Majors have served thousands — maybe even millions — of meals to the Baylor community. But the three are known for far more than flipping omelettes or making pizzas. Their careers are marked by countless relationships and acts of service that go beyond the women's job descriptions.

Battle, Benson and Majors have served for four decades each in Penland. Benson will hit 41 years in September, Battle was recently honored for her 40th anniversary, and Majors is right behind

at 38. But all of their journeys to Baylor were surprisingly incidental. Battle needed a job in Waco while her husband, a military veteran, was stationed in Germany. Benson was looking for a new position when a nearby turkey plant announced layoffs. For Majors, it was as simple as walking into the building.

"I just came over and applied and put the application in," Majors said. "And [in] the next couple days, [the manager] called me for the job."

What's kept them around is simple: a love that has extended to students, coworkers and every corner of campus.

"It definitely has to be love for me because I don't think I could be at another

job this long," Battle said.

SOMEONE TO LEAN ON

Battle and Benson have worked together at the omelette station and salad bar for years, with Majors remaining nearby at the pizza station. While the three have built friendships over time, food service laws require physical barriers between them and the people they serve. But those barriers are figuratively — and sometimes literally — broken by the three every day.

Like thousands of Baylor alumni, 2019 graduate Erica Franklin often started her day with

PENLAND >> A7



Josh Siatkowski | Staff Writer

MAKING A DIFFERENCE Linda Benson (left), Donna Majors (center) and Elaine Battle (right) have nearly 120 years of combined service in Penland Dining Hall.

'She didn't let cancer hold her back'

College of Arts & Sciences Advisement employee dies at 38

HANNAH WEBB
Opinion Editor

Laura McNutt, assistant director of advising in Baylor's College of Arts and Sciences, died April 17 at her home in Waco after a three-year battle with colon cancer. She was 38.

McNutt, a Baylor alumna who joined the advising office in 2019, is remembered by colleagues and family as a source of steady joy, sharp intellect and unwavering commitment to both her students and her faith.

"She was a light in this office and as a friend, such a caring soul," said Jolinda Whitney, assistant director of advising in the College of Arts and Sciences. "We all have our own individual experiences with her, but we all love her."

According to an extended obituary posted by her brother David Mark, McNutt was born in Houston and raised in a close-knit Christian home, where her faith took root early. That faith remained central throughout her life, shaping both her relationships and her response to illness.

After being diagnosed with stage four colon cancer in April 2023 and given only months to live, McNutt outlived her prognosis by nearly three years.

"I was praying for a miracle every day since she got the diagnosis," Whitney said. "But then I've said more recently, I think we got our miracle by her living three years and us getting to experience three years with her."

During that time, McNutt adopted a phrase that would come to define

her approach to life: "We're here to live."

Colleagues said she repeated it often, not as a denial of her condition, but as a deliberate orientation toward joy.

"She made the most of every moment," Whitney said. "It reminds us none of us are guaranteed tomorrow."

McNutt continued working full-time throughout much of her treatment, traveling regularly to Houston for chemotherapy while maintaining her role advising students. Brett Gibson, associate director of advising for the College of Arts and Sciences, said her dedication never wavered.

"She regularly would tell us, 'It's how I want to work. It's an important part of my life. It's something I care about,'" Gibson said. "Work was a place that was a bit of a respite from that. She could focus on her students."

In the office, McNutt served not only as an assistant director but also as an informal mentor and leader. She worked closely with departments including psychology, physics and museum studies, and was known for her ability to translate complex academic requirements into clear guidance for students.

"She was a very good adviser," Gibson said. "Very quick, very able to bring a lot of information together and present it in a way for students that made sense."

Her colleagues also emphasized her willingness to challenge ideas and improve systems.

"She was always willing to say, 'I think there could be a better way to



Photo courtesy of Linda Mark Terrell

BAYLOR BUILT Laura McNutt, a Baylor alumna, shared the Baylor love with her husband, Dr. Ryan McNutt, daughter Mary Allyson and son William.

do this," said Jason Bushnell, director of advising in the College of Arts and Sciences. "And usually she was right. She was one of the best question-askers we've ever had."

Beyond her formal responsibilities, McNutt helped shape the advising office's culture. She organized social events, built connections across departments and created opportunities for staff to engage with one another.

As a student, McNutt was a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma, where she formed lifelong friendships and remained actively involved with the sorority as an alumna and adviser.

"She loved people," Gibson said. "That wasn't in her job description, but it made our office better."

Her sense of humor remained intact even in the face of illness. Bushnell recalled a moment when McNutt jokingly asked if his decision to attend a campus event was "because I have cancer," a comment that left both of them laughing.

"She could take something horrible and use it for a light moment," Bushnell said.

For her family, that joy was not confined to her workplace. Her sister, Linda Mark Terrell, described McNutt as both a best friend and a

constant source of energy.

"She's always so fun, always up for throwing a party or going and doing something fun, saying yes to adventures," Terrell said. "She's just so kind and always willing to help, always being there."

Terrell said the loss has been deeply felt within their family.

"A big part of us is now missing," she said. "We have to figure out how to move forward in all of this."

Even as she underwent treatment, McNutt remained deeply engaged with her family, her church and her

LAURA MCNUTT >> A7

NOTES TO NAILED IT



GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

We want to hear it. Send us your thoughts: Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu

Lariat Letter: I founded TPUSA at Baylor

If I were still involved, I would have walked away

OLLIE MINTZ
Guest Contributor

I founded the TPUSA chapter at Baylor during my freshman year. There was no chapter and no infrastructure. I spent three years fighting through charter denials before receiving recognition on August 22, 2021. Within weeks, I hosted Charlie Kirk at the Waco Convention Center. Charlie was admitted to Baylor before founding TPUSA. He met with President Ken Starr, who told him to pursue his passion instead.



That meeting helped launch the organization. Baylor is part of the origin story. The room was packed, open to the public and the press was welcome. I have no current ties to TPUSA. I graduated and I'm now a law student at Creighton. But when I saw the April 22 tour stop approaching, I reached out to Peter Fernandez, the current chapter president. He never responded. Fernandez told KWTX the event was "two years in the making." It wasn't. He became president around fall 2024. By his own words in this newspaper in October 2025, the chapter was "almost dead" when he took over. The revival came from Charlie Kirk's assassination in September 2025, generating over 200

“
You don't honor Charlie Kirk's legacy mocking fellow students in a half-empty room.

OLLIE MINTZ
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

membership requests overnight. His window of leading an active chapter was roughly seven months. The execution collapsed. Over 4,500 registered after the event was marketed publicly. Hours before doors opened, tickets were voided. TPUSA blamed Baylor. Baylor said the students-only policy was communicated from the start. Trump Jr. was swapped for Ken Paxton the day before. The chapter president declined calls from this newspaper. TPUSA denied media credentials to every outlet, including The Lariat. Four hundred thirty-eight students checked in to a room that seats 2,200. Black drape hid the empty back half. The balcony sat dark. Supporters who drove

hours were turned away while seats sat vacant. Leaked audio showed the chapter president mocking fellow Baylor students at the counter-event as "the ops." I built something real at this university. If I were still carrying a TPUSA title, what happened on April 22 would have been enough for me to walk away. You don't fight for free speech by banning student journalists. You don't build a movement by turning away supporters who drove hours to be there. And you don't honor Charlie Kirk's legacy mocking fellow students in a half-empty room. *Ollie Mintz, Class of 2022, is a Baylor alum and the founder of TPUSA at Baylor.*

EDITORIAL



James Ellis | Cartoonist

Baylor University, students need to do more for homeless population

Just blocks from campus, Wacoans live without a place to stay, asking for money on the corner of every popular grease pit location. All the while, one of the state's largest universities hasn't done much to drive change.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 22.9% of Wacoans fall below the poverty line, a large jump from the 13.4% state average from the 2024 American Community Survey. That population has fluctuated over the past 10 years, with a high of 27.5% in 2018 and a low of 20.4% in 2021. In the most recent survey, 33.7% of the impoverished community consisted of children under the age of 18.

With a surplus of intelligent students, gifted professors and university resources, Baylor has a chance to make an impact on this community, especially with a noticeable number of homeless individuals close to campus under I-35.

Baylor's mission is, "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community." Through the Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences, the university has created a Public Health Fair and locals host Church Under the Bridge, which was highlighted in a Baylor study, "Belonging Under the Bridge," to support the local homeless community.

There are clear efforts to bridge the gap, but we can't help but feel there is more the Baylor community can do.

The University of Texas has set an example of service through its Hearts for the Homeless initiative, benefiting the homeless population in Austin. The group allows students to volunteer to help people without housing, primarily by providing free blood pressure screenings.

While Baylor has a philanthropy and public service program and several missions, service and public life groups, there isn't a large one centered on assisting the local homeless community. Baylor's Hearts for the Homeless chapter is relatively small and can only do so much with limited bodies. However, with so many groups on campus, a program that could blend student organizations and clubs into a year-round public service rotation would quickly make a difference.

Think about it: with over 400 student groups on campus, if a handful came together weekly and worked on team-building through volunteer service, the local homeless population would have more support to move forward. Eventually, with a university-wide all-hands-on-deck initiative, there could be real changes.

All of it already follows Baylor's current mission. Empowering students to lead a life of servanthood should remain a priority for any Christian university. Serving those in our communities is not just another time commitment, line on a resume or something to stand out, but as an expectation. Living in the image of Jesus, one must embody service, and assisting the local homeless community encapsulates that.

Mark 10:45 reminds us that "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The people under the bridge and those asking for help when you walk into Chipotle are not the only people in our community who need help, but it's a good place to start, since they interact with Baylor daily due to proximity.

Service work isn't always easy, but it can provide you with the opportunity to make a life-changing difference. And at the end of the day, that's what will make your experience at Baylor better, and it's at the core of the university's mission.

No one eulogizes the things you almost did

HANNAH WEBB
Opinion Editor

We carry a quiet, persistent tension between the lives we imagine and the lives we actually choose, measured in missed calls, unmet words and doors left open just long enough to close. It is a weight that does not crash like failure but settles slowly and stays; it's the ache of almost.



Most friendships that faded into the abyss of "we should catch up sometime." Most love stories that never got the chance to breathe past a first date. Most reconciliations where the apology sat unmet in drafts or the number hovered on the screen but never dialed.

Most callings — the books we almost wrote, the dreams we almost lived, the prayers we almost prayed, the "yes" we almost said — now gathering dust, heavy as stone in the back of our minds.

The ache of almost is seldom loud, but it presses down. It haunts us not like failure, but like opportunity abandoned.

Failure, at least, has finality. It is an ending you can mourn, reminisce, grieve, perhaps even learn from. But almost is a ghost that trails you. It whispers, "You could have, you should have, you didn't, you still might."

Almost suggests the door was wide open and we simply refused to walk through it.

History is full of people who brushed against greatness and then turned away. The rich young ruler met Jesus face-to-face and walked away, sad, because the cost was too great. King Agrippa listened to Paul's testimony and said, "Almost you persuade me to become a Christian."

Almost persuaded, almost transformed, almost free.

What is unsettling about almost is that it feels alive. It sits between reality and fantasy, both possible and lost at once. We replay it in our minds not as something over but as something

suspended and frozen, waiting for us to admit we let it slip.

But life is not as patient as we pretend. The scaffolding of moments collapses without warning and we are left clutching a list of could-haves that no one will remember. Nobody writes stories of your almos. At the end, all that counts is what was done.

The danger is that we've built a culture that worships almost. We romanticize potential more than persistence and talent more than faithfulness. We hand out compliments for promises, but promises are cheap. Potential never fed the hungry, nor did it ever reconcile families. Potential never changed the world. Only action does that.

And yet, the ache of almost doesn't have to be wasted. It can be a teacher if we let it. That sting in your chest when you remember what you didn't do — that's not meant to chain you to regret, but to propel you forward.

It's a reminder that breath still sits in your lungs, that time still bends toward possibility, that the door isn't shut yet unless you choose to shut it yourself. The prodigal son almost starved in the pigpen, but he rose and went home, and mercy met him not with scorn but with celebration.

The ache of almost should not paralyze us; it should propel us.

But here is the truth: no one will eulogize your almos. No one will remember the apology you almost made or the courage you almost showed. Nobody will stand at your funeral and praise the things you almost did. History remembers what was done, not what was deferred. Heaven honors obedience, not intention.

And so the call is this: stop living in almost. Stop pretending tomorrow will wait for you. Stop hardening your heart every time you feel that tug inside you.

Make the phone call, send the apology, offer the kindness. Write the book, step into the vocation, live the life that you're halfway holding at arm's length.

Almost is the language of regret; today is the language of courage. Choose today.

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Contact Us

General Questions:
Lariat@baylor.edu
254-710-1712

Sports:
LariatSports@baylor.edu

Arts:
LariatArts@baylor.edu

Opinion:
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Are course evaluations effective?

Faculty, administrators break down process for improving classroom experience

JOANA KAROSHI
Staff Writer

As May approaches, students are met with the familiar pop-up request when they open Canvas — course evaluations.

Behind those evaluations, administrators and faculty describe a system that uses student feedback as one piece of a broader process, not a standalone measure of teaching quality.

Dr. Toby Brooks, director of the Academy for Teaching and Learning, said faculty development opportunities exist to help improve teaching, but participation is optional.

Brooks said the way course evaluations are used and implemented changes across faculty.

“Using course evaluations and the training a faculty member might have received regarding them will vary tremendously from faculty member to faculty member,” he said.

He emphasized that evaluations are not interpreted in isolation.

“Student course evaluations are an important piece, but not the only piece we should be relying on,” Brooks said. “And one outlier in either direction is not really what supervisors are trained to look for. It’s themes or trends.”

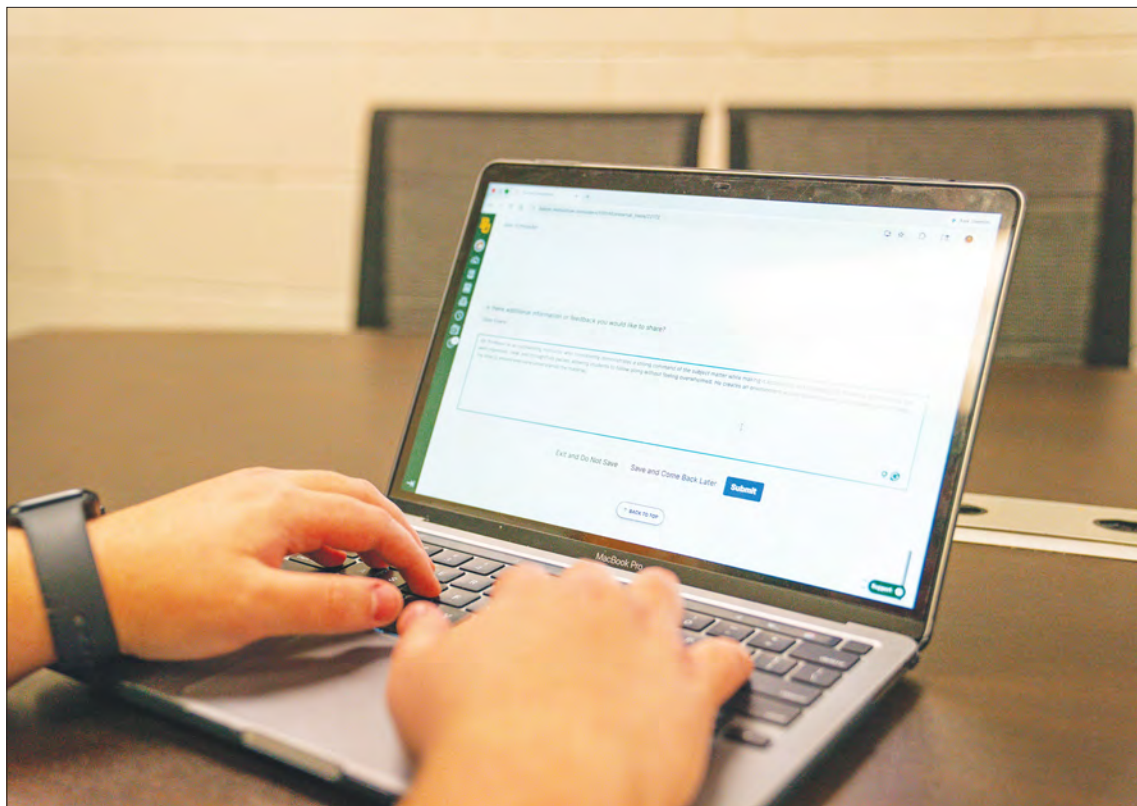
Evaluators look for patterns over time rather than single extreme responses when navigating course evaluations and actions to take.

Brooks said faculty often engage deeply with negative feedback in particular.

“I keep all my evaluations,” he said. “I might have 100 that were glowing and one that just leveled me. I don’t spend as much time processing the good ones. I pore over a bad one to try and figure out where it went wrong.”

For Brooks, evaluations aren’t just suggestions, but have led to direct changes in his teaching.

“I’ve completely revamped or



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

SEMESTER EVALS At the end of each semester, students are met with the familiar pop-up when they open their Canvas, a request to complete course evaluations.

scrapped projects from courses based on student feedback,” Brooks said. “I have shuffled the schedule in the syllabus. I have added or minimized the number of tests and assignments.”

At the same time, he said student perceptions during a course do not always match long-term outcomes.

“I taught a strength and conditioning and therapeutic exercise course at a prior institution for more than a decade,” he said. “Students frequently called one assignment ‘busywork’ in the course evals.”

Brooks said the gap between short-term perception and long-term usefulness is a recurring challenge.

“You might not see the value in something during the moment,” he said. “But I’m doing my best to stretch you and form you.”

He also said interpreting feedback has become more difficult due to tone. He recalled examples of extreme comments, including, “You’re an okay person, but you suck as a teacher. Go do something else.” He said anonymity protects students, but also removes accountability for tone.

But he also warned that students should remember their words are read by faculty.

“Consider how you would feel if the words you wrote were meant for and ultimately landed on your computer screen about you,” he said.

Brooks added that course evaluations are widely circulated within academic structures.

“I still have anonymous course evaluation data from students from two decades ago,” he said. “My

program director at the time read it. My department chair at the time read it. My dean at the time read it.”

He also said faculty across departments may sometimes have access to aggregated feedback. Brooks said evaluations can also carry consequences beyond classroom reflection, and students don’t always realize the weight their evaluations carry.

“Actions like scoring a professor low for a decision a student made to take an online section can have consequences that students might not fully appreciate,” Brooks said.

Dr. William Sterrett, professor and chair of Educational Leadership, said the average course evaluation response rate has remained steady at 67% for

several years.

For faculty evaluation, Sterrett said course feedback is only one component of a larger review system.

“I review course evaluations every year for both full-time and part-time faculty,” Sterrett said. “It is an important piece, though not a complete whole, of how we look at our teaching.”

He said faculty evaluation includes multiple sources of evidence.

“In my own teaching, I look at both quantitative data and qualitative comments,” Sterrett said. “I encourage faculty to consider student perspective and peer feedback.”

Dr. Kathleen Morley, assistant vice provost for institutional research, said course evaluations are integrated into faculty review, promotion and tenure processes, but are never used alone.

“Faculty share their student course evaluations as one piece of their overall picture of teaching effectiveness,” Morley said. “Other pieces include syllabi, peer reviews of teaching from other faculty, course enrollment numbers, and a personal report by the faculty of their own continuing development.”

She said faculty reflection and mid-semester feedback are also sometimes included.

Dr. DeAnna Toten Beard, vice provost for faculty affairs, said teaching evaluation is a holistic process.

“Those evaluating the faculty member for review, promotion or tenure look at his or her teaching holistically using several pieces of evidence,” she said.

She added that consistent low evaluations are taken seriously but not in isolation.

“Consistent low course evaluations are one sign — but not the only one — that more attention in the area of teaching is needed,” she said. “The chair or dean may recommend teaching development or peer mentorship.”

Interprofessional Events series emphasizes holistic healthcare

AARAH SARDESAI
Intern

For many Baylor students on the pre-health track, imagining their future means picturing a single physician performing a surgery or a lone physical therapist guiding a patient through recovery. What many don’t realize is how deeply collaborative and multifaceted real patient care is.

That gap in understanding of the collaboration of patient care is what San Jose, Calif., sophomore Ananya Bharathapudi and Tulsa, Okla., junior Enzo Henry hope to address. Baylor’s Interprofessional Events,

a series created in partnership with the Prehealth Office, aims to help students see healthcare as a team-based, interconnected field.

Henry said the purpose of the events is to broaden students’ thinking about healthcare. Bharathapudi said the events emphasize something students often don’t learn until much later.

“We think healthcare is holistic,” Bharathapudi said. “To be a healthcare

provider is to work with people from other careers. To be successful, you have to work together.”

Unlike many pre-health opportunities that focus on medical school preparation, Interprofessional Events zoom out. They highlight teamwork, communication and the different factors that shape patient outcomes.

Both student leaders said their motivation comes from wanting to give back.

Henry, who had no healthcare background when he arrived at Baylor, said mentors played a major role in his journey.

“As a freshman, I didn’t know anyone in healthcare,” he said. “My mentors helped me so much, and now as a TA, I get to help students across all pre-health tracks learn more about the field.”

For many students, the events are their first chance to interact with professionals outside the classroom. Bharathapudi said the variety of formats keeps students engaged.

“Students come in and learn from diverse speakers who are professionals in their fields,” she said. “We’ve had live actors simulate a sports

injury, and we’ve had teams walk students through a day in their lives. If students are passionate, they can ask questions and really deepen their understanding.”

One event that stuck with Bharathapudi focused on maternal health. A social worker explained how something as simple as a patient living on the second floor can change the entire care plan after childbirth.

“It opened my eyes to how all-encompassing healthcare is,” Bharathapudi said. “You have to think about a patient’s life outside the clinic.”

Henry said students also gain confidence speaking with professionals.

Both leaders said the events have shaped their own paths. For Henry, hearing professionals’ discussions of the nuances of healthcare strengthened his interest in the field.

“It’s really cool hearing them talk about things you don’t learn in class,” he said.

For Bharathapudi, the events changed how she thinks about patient care.

“I’ve learned to consider the different limitations in a person’s life,” she said. “It’s not just their diagnosis — it’s everything that surrounds it.”

But the event-planning doesn’t happen overnight. Henry said it takes months, and one of the biggest challenges is coordinating with busy professionals.

“It’s inspiring how willing they are to speak with undergrads,” he said.

Despite their impact, many students still don’t know the events exist. Henry said that’s a missed opportunity.

“There are students who are 100% interested in healthcare, but they don’t realize how much goes into the other fields that work hand-in-hand with medical professionals,” he said.

Both leaders hope the program continues to grow and reach more students.

Bharathapudi said the value is undeniable. “There’s no reason not to come,” she said. “You get to meet people who are excellent in their field and learn their thought process. If you’re passionate about healthcare, meeting professionals who live it every day will only help you on your journey.”

“To be a healthcare provider is to work with people from other careers. To be successful, you have to work together.”

ANANYA BHARATHAPUDI
SAN JOSE, CALIF., SOPHOMORE

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Beyond the banners

Inside the mind of Baylor's Felecia Mulkey, A&T architect and heart of a dynasty

MARISSA ESSENBURG
Sports Writer

She's not simply the Geno Auriemma or Nick Saban of acrobatics and tumbling. Felecia Mulkey exists in a category all her own: the architect of an entire sport, the only coach to ever win every national championship and perhaps the most decorated coach in collegiate athletics history.

But at Baylor, where 11 straight national titles have only strengthened her legend, the legacy of "Coach Fee" reaches far beyond the trophies.

It lives in what she's built alongside that success. It lives in the way her athletes' voices soften when they talk about her, in the deep respect that fills every corner of her program and in a culture that has never let winning strip away its heart. Mulkey's dynasty may be measured in championships, but its heartbeat has always been people — the ones she pushes, protects and pours into every day.

"She's an incredible human being," redshirt sophomore base Leavy McDonald said. "She pushes us to become the best versions of ourselves, not just as athletes, but as people. I think that's what makes her so special. She truly cares about her athletes and everyone around

her, and I'm going to walk out of this program a much stronger woman than I was when I came in because of the culture she creates."

A mother figure to dozens of student-athletes and a devoted dog mom to three dachshunds — Roxy G, Lily Bug and Felix — Mulkey takes the role of "mom" seriously, carrying it into every piece of who she is.

"My kids are 50 to 55 student-athletes and three wiener dogs at any given time," Mulkey said. "Those are my children, and that's how much I love them."

The foundation of Baylor's dynasty — and the relationships built within it — began long before the NCATA's director of expansion and three-time Coach of the Year ever arrived in Waco.

Before the 11 straight titles, before the 62-meet win streak and before "Coach Fee" became synonymous with Baylor excellence, Mulkey helped turn an idea into reality.

At Oregon, she helped build A&T into the only collegiate sport besides football created at the college level, then spent the next decade and a half making sure no one set its standard higher than she did.

And for Mulkey, the sport's next step is not about Baylor stepping aside. It is about everyone else rising high enough to meet it.

"Is it better for the sport if someone else wins? No," Mulkey said. "If we want the sport to grow, the right team should win. If that team isn't Baylor, I'm OK with that. But we can't give out charity points or trophies. Is it better that Quinnipiac, Oregon and Iona have closed the gap? Yes, 100%. But is it better when someone else wins? Only if they deserve to win."

Across stops at Oregon and Baylor, Mulkey has won all 15 national championships in the sport's history, losing just four meets in her entire coaching career. But even numbers that great only tell part of the story, falling short of explaining what makes her so untouchable.

For senior base and tumbler Meredith Wells, who has never known a collegiate loss, it starts with trust.

"When she brings us in as freshmen, she always tells us exactly what to expect," Wells said. "And I can say she stays true to her word through everything. She always does what's best for Baylor whenever she puts skills or people out on the floor, and she's one of my favorite people. I'm honored to be coached by her."

Less than a week after closing the NCATA era with one final banner, Mulkey's proudest moment wasn't the score sheet, it was how her athletes responded when the moment asked everything of them.

Because championships, especially the kind tied to Baylor A&T's pedigree, are never handed over. They're built under pressure, and if pressure makes diamonds, Mulkey has spent her career making sure her teams are ready to shine under it.

"My team will never doubt or fear. They're going to go into it head-on," Mulkey said. "Going into the second half, I told them, 'You're going to have to take it. This isn't going to be given to you.' Before tumbling, I walked toward the huddle to check their mindset, and saw Payton Washington, Emily Bott and others stepping up. I turned to my staff and said, 'They're fine. We're going to be OK.' I can help get them to that headspace, but they have to be in it."

And maybe that is what separates Mulkey most. Not just that she created a sport, or that she conquered it, but that she continues to demand greatness without ever losing sight of the people inside it.

At Baylor, that's become her true legacy: a culture where excellence is expected, love is unwavering and championships are simply the byproduct of both.

"I can't wait to look back and think, 'Wow, I was part of a team — an athlete coached by the person who created this sport,'" McDonald said. "How cool is that?"

Breaking down Baylor MBB's new-look 2026-27 roster

JACKSON POSEY
Sports Editor

After Baylor men's basketball missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2018, more bad news broke: Cameron Carr and Tounde Yessoufou, the team's top scorers, were declaring for the NBA Draft. (Yessoufou later entered the transfer portal as well.)

Though not unexpected, the decisions echoed a year's worth of frustrations for the program, which famously replaced its entire roster just a year prior. Once Carr declared, the Bears found themselves in a similar spot: barring new eligibility rulings, nine of the Bears' top 10 players are on their way out the door.

This offseason has taken a markedly different tone than 2025. For one, players are returning. Starting guard Isaac Williams IV is back, joined by Juslin Bodo Bodo and Maikcol Perez, both of whom would've likely been rotation players if not for sustaining season-ending injuries in the offseason.

Four other reserves return as well, backstopping the roster with seven returning players, a critical resource for building and preserving culture.

Williams shot a blazing 71.1% at the rim and provided much-needed creation for the Bears. Bodo Bodo won back-to-back Big South Defensive Player of the Year honors at High Point and is a legit defensive anchor. Perez, a former four-star recruit, has a near-7-foot wingspan and starred for the U17 Italian National Team.

With a foundation in place, head coach Scott Drew went big-game hunting and landed multiple impact transfers on the perimeter. Liberty transfer guard Brett Decker Jr. (16.9 points, 47.1% 3PT) led the Flames to a Conference USA regular-season title and finished second nationally in 3-point shooting. Days



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

GREAT SCOTT! Head coach Scott Drew is leading the Bears through another major roster overhaul this offseason.

later, the Bears added Kayden Mingo (13.7 points, 3.5 rebounds, 4.3 assists, 2.1 steals), a combo guard from Penn State.

Mingo, a shifty finisher with a nose for forcing turnovers, led the Nittany Lions in assists and ranked second in the Big Ten in steals. Public speculation that his signing portended another major domino proved correct: five-star recruit Dylan Mingo decommitted from North Carolina to join the Bears.

The Mingo brothers have Baylor ties, having played alongside former Bear VJ Edgcombe during their time together at Long Island (NY) Lutheran High School.

Dylan Mingo's health status is up in the air after reports that

multiple injuries led to North Carolina reconsidering its offer and likely redshirting him for medical reasons. CBS Sports' Matt Norlander reported that he "decommitted as a result" of those conversations.

If the younger Mingo brother is healthy, he could join four-star forward Elijah Williams as the Bears' lone freshmen in the rotation. Williams, a San Antonio product and the No. 35 prospect in the 247Sports Composite, is the son of former NBA player and 2022 NBA Coach of the Year Monty Williams. He's a versatile athlete with scoring potential, though the efficiency is still coming along; he shot just 41% from the floor and 63% from the line in EYBL play.

Back in the portal, Baylor signed transfer forward Isaac Celiscar (13.2 points, 6.3 rebounds, 3.2 assists), who earned Second Team All-Ivy League honors and helped lead the Bulldogs to their seventh straight Ivy League title. He's a physical, multi-level forward who rebounds beyond his height (6-foot-6) and has shown burgeoning shooting ability. He's the early favorite to start at the four.

The Bears also inked UAB forward Evan Chatman (8.8 points, 8.8 rebounds), a Harker Heights native who spent two years at McLennan Community College. He's a true power forward, but has the size and rebounding chops to get some small-ball minutes at the five, and could compete with redshirt freshman Mayo Soyoye for center duties when Bodo Bodo is off the floor.

Baylor currently appears to be in a holding pattern while the NCAA considers radical changes to eligibility guidelines. The Bears have two open roster spots remaining, which could go to developmental players or more wing depth. The team has already made major strides in the portal, ranking among the 10 most-improved teams in the nation per EvanMiya, and could continue to build as the offseason progresses.



AP Photo

BRETT DECKER JR. A sharpshooting Liberty guard.



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

KAYDEN MINGO A two-way guard from Penn State.



AP Photo

DYLAN MINGO A five-star wing with sky-high potential.



AP Photo

ISAAC CELISCAR A powerful, versatile forward from Yale.



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

ELIJAH WILLIAMS A four-star athlete from San Antonio.



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

EVAN CHATMAN A big-time rebounder from UAB.

RIGHT AT HOME

Kaygen Marshall's 6-mile journey from Robinson to Baylor

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Intern

It was a brisk February night in San Diego.

The Baylor softball team was set to face San Diego State, a team that had previously won three straight Mountain West Championships. For any freshman, the idea of playing a three-time repeating conference champion might hinder their performance, but for freshman third baseman Kaygen Marshall, it was an opportunity to burst onto the scene.

Marshall led the charge for the Bears, delivering two home runs in an 11-2 victory. It was only a preview of what Bears fans would be seeing all season.

Through the early part of her Baylor career, Marshall has become an essential piece to the Bears' softball team. She has launched a team-high nine home runs along with 23 RBIs, all while still adjusting to the elite level of Big 12 softball.



Touring a bunch of schools, I always had my eyes on Baylor. My parents love to come watch me play, so I want them to have access to come watch me.

**FRESHMAN THIRD BASEMAN
KAYGEN MARSHALL**

But before the home runs, the great plays and the up and downs of freshman year, Marshall was just a kid from Robinson, a town located about six miles south of Baylor.

It was here that Marshall's passion for softball began.

"I started playing when I was six. Of course, T-ball years and then coach pitch," Marshall said. "Then select started, so we just took our little league from Robinson and made it to a select team and just went from there."

But it wasn't until a familiar face talked to Marshall's select coach that she realized what was ahead for her.

"I went to a Baylor team camp, and I was a catcher at the time," Marshall said. "Coach Moore was talking to my coach about the potential he sees in me, and I was like, 'Oh my goodness.' I think that's the time I really was like, 'I can do this.'"

Marshall attended Robinson High School, where her skills would continue to be seen by college scouts from all over. She made the varsity team as a freshman, immediately making an impact that impressed coaches.

"I realized Kaygen would be special her freshman year," Robinson High School softball coach Jimmy Eby said. "When we got her on the softball field, you could just tell she was special."

Marshall's high school success earned her two district MVP honors, along with tying the Central Texas home run record with 22. Marshall capped off her senior year in no better fashion than winning a Class 4A state championship.

"My senior year, we really put it together," Marshall said. "We had one main goal and that was my proudest moment."

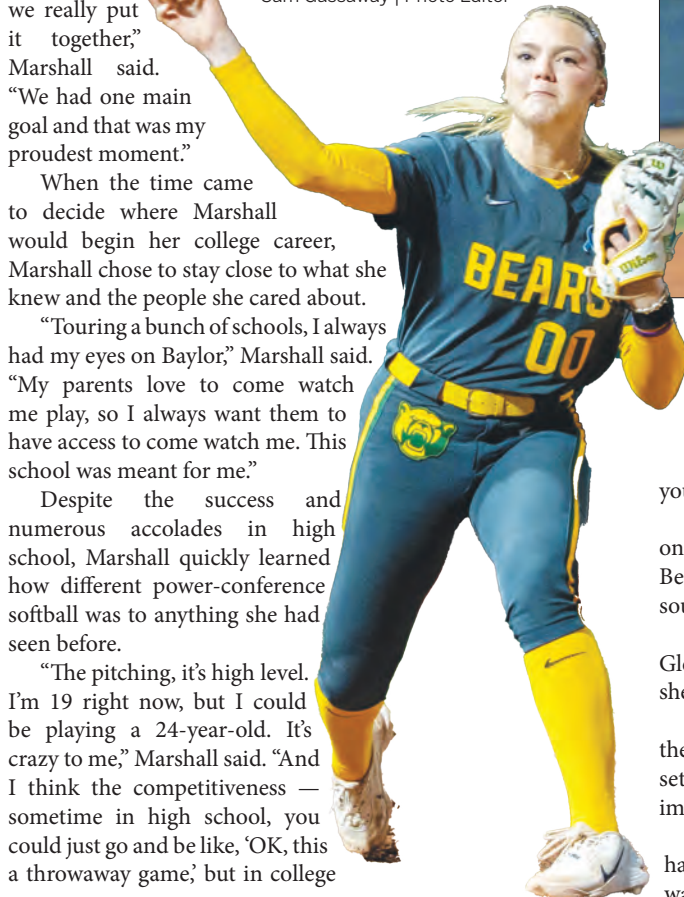
When the time came to decide where Marshall would begin her college career, Marshall chose to stay close to what she knew and the people she cared about.

"Touring a bunch of schools, I always had my eyes on Baylor," Marshall said. "My parents love to come watch me play, so I always want them to have access to come watch me. This school was meant for me."

Despite the success and numerous accolades in high school, Marshall quickly learned how different power-conference softball was to anything she had seen before.

"The pitching, it's high level. I'm 19 right now, but I could be playing a 24-year-old. It's crazy to me," Marshall said. "And I think the competitiveness — sometime in high school, you could just go and be like, 'OK, this a throwaway game,' but in college

Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

FRESHMAN PHENOM Freshman third baseman Kaygen Marshall celebrates with sophomore pitcher Cambree Creager in the Bears' 4-0 win against Stephen F. Austin on March 3.

you have to play your best every single game no matter what."

But even with difficulties of playing at this level, Marshall has only succeeded in her role as a freshman. She currently leads the Bears in home runs and slugging percentage while also playing sound defense at third base.

"She's had a pretty good year for a freshman," head coach Glenn Moore said. "It's only going to get better with her 'cause she's talented."

As the regular season nears the end and the Bears march into the postseason, Marshall still strives to achieve the goals she has set out for herself. Her time at Baylor is just beginning, but the impact she has made on the softball team already runs deep.

"I want to be more successful at the plate and keep working hard and being a leader on this team," Marshall said. "I don't want to be just another name. I want to make a legacy for myself."

Van Schalkwyk embraces new place, friends in freshman season

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Writer

Connor Van Schalkwyk and his family moved multiple times while growing up: first Namibia, then Morocco, now Sweden. Because the family lived in different parts of the world, one of the few constants in his life was his older brother, Codie.

"We've always mostly had each other," Van Schalkwyk said.

Connor and Codie grew up playing doubles together. While some people thought they would argue and fight on the court like many brothers do, they instead clicked.

Codie moved to the U.S. in 2021 to begin his collegiate tennis career with Old Dominion.

"I went to ODU mainly because of my brother," Van Schalkwyk said. "I was a little bit scared before coming to the U.S. I didn't know much about college."

When the brothers reunited at Old Dominion, they did not skip a beat. The pair succeeded as doubles partners, earning First Team All-Sun Belt Conference doubles in 2023. Connor took home the conference's Freshman of the Year honor as well.

Even with all the spring accolades, Connor looks back fondly on their best run in the fall.

"My favorite memory with him playing doubles was my freshman year at ODU, when we played fall nationals and we made it to the final," Van Schalkwyk said. "That was pretty special."

It was time for Codie to move on after his senior season in 2023-24. Connor continued to find success despite parting ways from his brother, earning First Team All-Conference in singles and doubles as well as being ranked No. 77 in the nation.

But Connor knew it was time for a change of scenery.

His collegiate journey started with some familiarity at Old Dominion. That is the same approach he took when looking for a new team.

"I met [Baylor head coach Michael Woodson] pretty early, before going to college, and I felt like it would be the best environment for me," Van Schalkwyk said. "I like being close to home, and I felt like this would be the closest I would get, just having these people from my own culture and own country around me."

Connor found that familiarity with junior Devin Badenhorst and senior Luc Koenig, both of whom are also from Africa.

"I knew the people I'm going to have around me," Van Schalkwyk said. "I've known Devin since a very young age. I've known Luc and the coaches, too."

Connor competed more against Badenhorst than Koenig. The two played against each other enough times to form a bond and eventually start traveling to tournaments together.

The transition from Old Dominion to Baylor weighed on Connor. He was used to dominating the Sun Belt and competing to be the best in the conference, but Baylor's expectations proved to be another beast.

"I felt a little bit of pressure coming into a bigger school, playing for bigger things than at ODU," Van Schalkwyk said. "At ODU, you play for conference titles, but when it comes to, like, NCAAs, it's hard to believe that you can make a run and beat these top-10 teams."

Connor has lived up to Baylor's goals. He has showcased his talents on Court 3 singles and Court 2 doubles throughout his first year at Baylor.

He settled in as a key piece for the Bears despite having to find his rhythm and manage his time early in the season.

"He's a really, really good player, and he's a fantastic competitor," Woodson said. "You're seeing that come out, and he's a lot to handle, and he can beat you a lot of different ways."

He has embraced his teammates off the court, including the freshmen. Connor competed with freshman Blake Anderson in doubles in early spring. He has helped guide Anderson as a tennis player, student and friend.

"I have a good partner in Connor, one of my best friends," Anderson said. "It's so awesome to go on the court as a freshman with him ... He's been a good role model to me and I'm excited to be able to play doubles with him."

Connor and his teammates have formed a special bond in his first year in Waco. While laughing, cracking jokes and enjoying the player-compiled playlist, the Bears still recognize at they need to keep their sights set on competing at their best.

"Everyone is always laughing, making jokes," Van Schalkwyk said. "But also at the same time, when it's time to be serious, we are serious."

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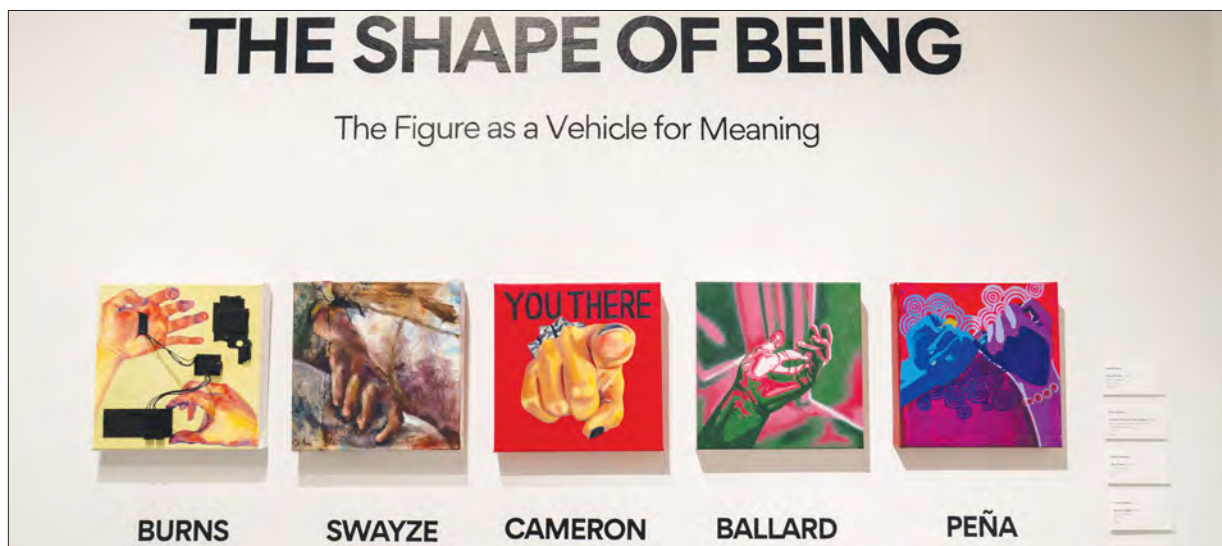
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Student-curated exhibition to explore ‘The Shape of Being’



CURATED CREATIVITY Opening Friday, “The Shape of Being” is a new student-curated art exhibition at the Washington Gallery, featuring a collection of student artists using the figure as a vehicle for meaning.

STACIE BOYLS
Arts & Life Writer

A new student-curated exhibition at Washington Gallery invites viewers to reimagine the human figure through the lens of contemporary art.

Opening Friday, “The Shape of Being” features work from five Baylor student artists, each contributing three pieces alongside a collaborative installation. The gallery is located at 715 Washington Ave.

The show, organized by Waco senior Aleah Burns, was inspired during her internship at the gallery. Burns elaborated that the desire to connect student artists with the broader Waco arts community and professional gallery experiences was also a priority for the show.

“I learned that the space really supports community shows,” Burns said. “It felt like a good opportunity for Baylor students to branch out beyond campus and start engaging with the art world in a more public way.”

Despite each artist’s distinctive styles and mediums, they found common ground in figurative painting.

The exhibition’s title, developed collaboratively, reflects that shared focus while leaving room for interpretation.

“We were all using the figure in such different ways,” Burns said. “It was hard to find a title that was specific enough but also broad enough to encompass everyone’s work.”

The result is a show that emphasizes both unity and contrast. Vibrant color palettes, varied materials and differing scales create a dynamic viewing experience, while each piece offers a distinct perspective on identity, memory and human connection.

Dallas senior Kate Swayze, who previously exhibited at the gallery, said the opportunity to show work at an off-campus location shaped her approach to selecting pieces.

“I wanted to put my newest work out there, like the kind of work I’ll continue making after graduation,” Swayze said.

Her featured piece, “Left Unsaid,” explores absence and memory through layered materials, including reused painting rags that serve as what she calls “abstract documents” of her artistic process.

Swayze’s work reflects on family relationships, particularly those defined by distance or silence.

Burns’ own piece, “Unstable Connection,” examines human interaction in a digital age, depicting fragmented figures embracing through screens. The painting raises questions about what is gained — and lost — in technology-mediated relationships.

In addition to individual works, the exhibition includes a collaborative series centered on the motif of hands. Each artist created a 10-by-10-inch piece depicting hands in their own style, forming a collective exploration of gesture, identity and expression.

“It’s a representation of the artists themselves,” Burns said. “Five different interpretations coming together as one.”

Beyond its visual variety, the exhibition also highlights the perspectives of pieces all created by women artists. While not an explicit theme, Burns noted that shared experiences inevitably influence the work.

Burns elaborated that the group hopes the exhibition will encourage viewers to slow down and engage more intentionally with art amidst a digitally saturated world.

“We’re constantly inundated with visual information,” Burns said. “Just being in a room and taking the time to really look at something physical, that’s valuable in itself.”

Swayze added that the show reflects broader themes of how the human figure is represented in contemporary art.

“Historically, the figure has been depicted in very similar ways,” she said. “Now there are so many different approaches happening at once. Even if someone doesn’t know art history, they can see that diversity and start to wonder what else is possible.”

The exhibition opens with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday at Washington Gallery and will remain on view through May 30. The event is free and open to the public, with artists present throughout the evening for informal conversation.

For Swayze, one of the most anticipated aspects of the show is seeing how audiences respond.

As students, we’re used to showing work to professors or other artists,” Burns said. “It’s different when it’s the general public. You get to see what resonates.”

Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor



Jake Schroeder | Photographer

ECLECTIC EATS Michelle Lawrence and Abigail Alvarez, daughters of the late owner and the restaurant’s new namesake, Rosa Rodriguez, now run Antojitos Centroamericanos, an authentic Honduran restaurant and Spanish Christian bookstore.

Rosita’s brings Honduran food to community

CAMILLE KELLY
Reporter

The legacy of the blue-and-white building on 25th Street, the authentic Honduran restaurant Antojitos Centroamericanos, continues, now reopened as Rosita’s. The restaurant is renamed in honor of the late owner, Rosa Rodriguez, and her impact on her family and community.

Her daughters, Michelle Lawrence and Abigail Alvarez, are now running the combination restaurant and Spanish Christian bookstore located at 1409 N. 25th St.

Rodriguez opened the business around 2018. She passed away in October, and in the midst of grieving, the two sisters recruited help from their family to acquire their new LLC and get the health inspections redone so they could officially reopen in March.

“Reopening has, by the grace of God, gone smoother than what I thought it was going to be,” Lawrence said.

Lawrence elaborated that reopening the store while grieving the loss of her mother has brought both healing and a reminder of painful memories.

“Emotionally, it’s been a roller coaster because there are days that it’s good, and then other days where it kind of hits,” Lawrence said. “My mom, literally when we hear the phrase ‘blood, sweat and tears’ — this woman did put her blood, sweat and tears into this place, and so our hope is that we’re able to reach more people than she ever was able to, to fulfill her dream and carry out her legacy.”

According to Lawrence, Rodriguez was the family’s glue. As the owner of the restaurant, she made it a priority to deliver Honduras authenticity and cultural education to patrons.

“She loved celebrating anything and everything,” Lawrence said. “If you had a birthday, and you told her, she’ll say, ‘Come back, I have a cake for you, and then we’ll celebrate here.’ She just loved helping people. Most importantly, she would take advantage of time with people to spread the gospel in here, too.”

As Lawrence has taken over running the front of the business, talking to people like Rodriguez used to, Alvarez has thrived in reviving her mom’s recipes and taking charge of cooking in the kitchen to bring authentic Honduran flavors to Waco.

“Our goal has been to have it open for the community and for them to know our story,” Alvarez said. “My mom worked so hard.”

The legacy of this business started with their grandma, who would always tell Rodriguez about her time selling empanadas in Honduras.

Some of the dishes the sisters most recommend include the enchiladas Hondurenas, the carne asada and the pastelitos de maiz.

When Rodriguez opened her business in Waco, it started as a Christian Spanish gift shop before expanding to the restaurant it is now. According to Alvarez, Rodriguez’s restaurant originally offered three plates.

“She wanted to work for herself,” Lawrence said. “She didn’t want to work for other people. I guess that’s when she was praying and asking the Lord, ‘What do I do?’ And that’s when all this came into play.”

Lawrence explained that her mom’s drive keeps the restaurant alive today.

“She wasn’t the best English speaker,” Lawrence said. “So literally, hats off to her because she was a go-getter. She got it by the grace of God, I’d say, too.”

Lawrence and Alvarez have not only continued and honored their mother’s legacy but also aim to serve the community the way Rodriguez served all who entered her restaurant.

“We encourage people to come out here, just because this is a little taste of Central America here, brought to them,” Alvarez said. “Our recipes are authentic, and they’ve been passed down from our family. We’ve also kept Christianity, too, in how we run this place, because again, it’s by the grace of God that we’re here.”



Photo courtesy of Monica Malas

A CAPPELLA AMAZING Baylor’s a cappella team VirtuOSO traveled to New York City for the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella (ICCA) Finals for the first time in a decade.

Baylor VirtuOSO finds national success for first time in a decade

ISABEL VORST
Intern

After winning the semifinals in March, Baylor’s a cappella team VirtuOSO traveled to New York City for the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella (ICCA) Finals on Saturday. This marks a huge milestone in the team’s journey and paves the way for VirtuOSO’s future in the coming years.

Houston junior Norie Yowell said that growing with the group this year has been a tremendous accomplishment.

“I’m proud that we made it to New York,” Yowell said. “It was an honor to win quarterfinals and an honor to win semifinals. The fact that we went into this competition blind after a decade of sitting out and made it to the top 10 is mind-blowing.”

According to Spring senior Brent Cabote, a certain level of shock remained with the team as they traveled through New York City.

“There was a little bit of imposter syndrome,” Cabote said. “Like, ‘How are we here? Do we deserve to be competing at this level?’ The record shows that we did deserve it. We earned, by God’s grace, our place in the top 10.”

Getting to this level of competition meant going up against some of the best a cappella groups in the country.

“I learned just how high a level we were operating at when I heard our competition,” Cabote said.

Hundreds of hours of hard work and dedication went into the team’s preparation throughout this year’s journey, allowing them to grow together and individually on multiple levels.

East Stroudsburg, Pa., senior Monica Malas said she was proud of the way they came together, “not only as a team, but a family looking out for one another and supporting each other through it all.”

She said she knew they all had high-caliber individual singing, but that this

year, especially, they learned to come together and become one unit.

“More than anything, I loved every time we got to perform at the competitions and hear how the audience reacted to us,” Malas said. “There’s a lot of joy to be found in sharing music.”

Cabote elaborated that the group has impacted everyone on a personal level.

“I’m just so proud of everyone’s commitment and heart,” Cabote said. “This group is like a family to me and has truly changed me. I am so proud of the immense growth that I see in each member. Spiritually, musically, emotionally and relationally — this competition has grown each of us in innumerable ways.”

One of VirtuOSO’s core values is to prioritize faith and spiritual growth.

Cabote said VirtuOSO has reminded him why he sings, and for whom.

“I have been reminded that God delights in the giftings of his children,” Cabote said.



Jake Schroeder | Photographer

SAY CHEESE Among the many different authentic Honduran dishes at the restaurant were the pupusas, made with cornmeal and stuffed with chicken and cheese.



Sam Gassaway | Photo Editor

IN FOR THE LONG HAUL Elaine Battle has worked at Penland dining hall for 40 years, crafting longtime friendships and a fulfilling life.

PENLAND from A1

an omelette from Penland. What made her such a regular was not just the food, but the constant care from Battle and Benson.

“She really cared if I was eating in the morning,” Franklin said of Battle, whom she calls Ms. Elaine. “It made me go regularly.”

Franklin, now an actress, said Battle and Benson were highly attentive to her. From memorizing her omelette order to recognizing that an early breakfast meant an impending exam, she said Battle and Benson’s compassion reminded her of home in St. Louis. So much so that when Franklin’s parents visited campus, she affectionately introduced Benson and Battle to them as her aunts.

But in her own words, Franklin is just “one of many” community members the three have impacted. Majors, Battle and Benson have each formed a repository of interactions with the Baylor community — some humorous, others heavier. But they’ve embraced their collective role as a support system.

“It’s a good experience to deal with the students because they’re away from home and away from their parents, so we’re the next person for them to look up to,” Majors said.

Oftentimes, being someone to look up to has meant more than just offering a smile and small talk in the food line. For Battle, it has meant crossing to the other side of the counter to give a hug and a prayer.

“A student was having problems in his classes and stuff, and he didn’t know how he was going to tell his parents that he wasn’t doing too good in class, and so he started crying,” Battle said. “I came from behind the line, and I prayed for him, and that’s something I had never done. I said, ‘God, give me a word for right now. I’m not a minister, not like that, but give me the word to say to him, to help him.’”

For Majors, it has meant forming long-term relationships with families that come in. One of the most memorable visitors for her is “Miss Maggie,” who frequently brings her husband and children to Penland and prays over the staff.

“She had to leave to go back to China to take care of her mom and dad,” Majors said. “But she finally came back. And when she came back, she brought her mom and dad with her, and she brought them here to meet me, and so now we’re just one big, happy family.”

And for Benson, that commitment to support has even led her to open her own home to a student in need. The student, who Benson said was living in Germany at the time, was unable to return home for the summer due to financial reasons.

“It definitely has to be love for me because I don’t think I could be at another job this long.”

**ELAINE BATTLE
PENLAND EMPLOYEE**

LAURA MCNUTT from A1

community. She co-founded the nonprofit Mahjong with a Mission, traveled extensively and continued investing in the lives around her.

Reflecting on her life, Bushnell said McNutt did more than endure her diagnosis; rather, she

transformed it.

“It’s not only that she didn’t let the cancer hold her back,” he said. “It’s that she almost reclaimed it and used it to make the remainder of her life as joyful as possible.”

McNutt is survived by her husband, Ryan, their two children, Mary Allyson

and William, as well as her parents and siblings.

Colleagues and family are very passionate that her impact — in classrooms, offices, home and relationships — will endure.

“We’re going to grieve her for a long time,” Gibson said. “She will be missed.”

“When summertime came, she didn’t have nowhere to go, and I invited her to my home,” Benson said.

Benson said she still has contact with the student and receives messages from her, alongside others, at Christmastime.

A WORKING FRIENDSHIP

In addition to their outward commitment to students, Battle, Benson and Majors have formed a friendship with each other. In addition to their 40 years together in Penland, the three are also all from the Waco area. Benson and Battle even attended the same high school.

“I just enjoy working with them,” Majors said. “We all get along every day.”

While the three share a number of memories that make them laugh, one of the first that came to mind for Benson was an incident at the omelette station.

“I tried to flip an egg, and it didn’t go so well,” Benson said, recounting the time she tried to replicate Battle’s omelette flipping skills. The result, Battle said, was a remade omelette and a burnt egg at the bottom of the stove.

“I told her, ‘From now on, you practice at home,’” Battle said as the three laughed.

Perhaps, though, the incident was a well-intended attempt to be more like Battle, whom Majors said many of the employees look up to.

“Miss Elaine [has] been here longer than us, and we follow in her footsteps,” Majors said.

RETURNING THE FAVOR

For as long as they have worked for Baylor, none of the three have any plans to leave. When their managers ask if she’s thinking about retirement, she responds with an emphatic no.

“They say, ‘Ms. Elaine, where are you going to leave?’ And I say, ‘They’re going to have to drag me out of here,’” she said.

It’s not just love for the community they serve that keeps the three around. On the other side of the equation, they said they’ve taken a lot from their jobs, like respect from students and managers and growth in their roles.

In the same way that Benson, Battle and Majors love their community, they have felt that love reciprocated through acts of kindness, like when Benson’s first manager bought shoes for her.

“When I first started, I didn’t have money to get my work shoes,” Benson said. “I had some red Reeboks, and I wore them. And one day I got ready to go home, and [my manager] handed me a box, and it was a pair of work shoes for me.”

More recently, Battle was honored for her 40th year of service with a custom cake and a ceremony in Penland. It’s a celebration that Majors can expect in a couple of years, and one that Benson, nearing her 41st year, is owed.

“I’m grateful for ... the respect that I’ve gotten here, the people that I’ve grown to love,” Battle said. “That’s what really has kept me here — respect [from] the students, the staff here, too. They really treated me with respect.”

RNDF to host first Spring Assembly at Mayborn

JOANA KAROSHI
Staff Writer

The Rare Neurological Disorder Foundation will host its inaugural Spring Assembly, “Meet the Fellows,” at 1 p.m. Friday at the Mayborn Museum Complex, bringing together students, researchers and advocates working in rare neurological disorders.

The event will feature presentations from clinicians and researchers across institutions, including UT Southwestern Medical Center, Baylor College of Medicine and Harvard Medical School. The program will also highlight RNDF’s student fellows and their ongoing projects within the organization’s first year.

Greatness Adewumi, RNDF executive director and Houston senior, said the fellowship is currently focused on building the foundation of the organization while beginning to connect with external partners and advocacy groups.

“Right now, we’re doing a fellowship with 15 students,” Adewumi said. “We’re forming projects that can support specific neurological

communities and beginning to partner with patient advocacy organizations and our advisory board to guide what we’re building.”

Fellow and Temecula, Calif., senior Riley Cachat said the organization’s goal this year is to establish structure before expanding into measurable outcomes.

“The main objective is to create the governance structure and outline for how we want the organization to run,” Cachat said. “That way, when we transition into more formative years, we have a solid foundation to actually produce measurable outcomes aligned with our goals.”

Houston sophomore Nicolas Boza said fellows are also developing individual projects intended to serve as tools for outreach to neurological communities, though the organization is still in its early stages.

“We’re all developing our own projects that will eventually be used as tools for RNDF to reach those [with] neurological disorders,” Boza said.

One of the gaps RNDF fellows aim to address is the lack

of student-led infrastructure in rare neurological disorder advocacy, as well as the need for stronger collaboration with patient communities.

Adewumi said the organization is actively working to avoid making assumptions about patient needs.

“We’re not just guessing what we think would be best,” Adewumi said. “We’re actually hearing directly from patient advocacy groups and organizations about what they feel would be most supportive.”

Cachat, who is pre-law and studying psychology, said her interest in the field comes from both personal experience and the broader gaps she sees in healthcare systems.

“Even if you’re not directly affected by a rare neurological disorder, you’re still affected by the healthcare system,” Cachat said. “Collaboration improves treatment, care quality and puts the patient first instead of treating symptoms in isolation.”

Attendance for the Spring Assembly is limited and requires prior registration. The registration form is available online.

TPUSA REACTION from A1



Brady Harris | Photographer

HOT TOPIC Political Commentator Benny Johnson speaks during Turning Point USA’s “This is the Turning Point” event last week at Waco Hall.

conservative men look like men.

“I think we can make a position based on our religious values without being mean-hearted, mean-spirited or rude about it and degrading people,” Perry said.

Additionally, Johnson’s speeches included narratives on immigration and culture, with an emphasis on “traditional” American history.

“Nine billion people can’t just move to America, and suddenly you’re an American,” Johnson said. “We’re more than just tax cattle for globalists; we’re a people and a culture, and we have a history. And we’re proud of that damn history. And that history is European Christianity. That’s what built this country.”

In a statement sent to The Lariat, Baylor TPUSA’s executive members stood behind Johnson’s comments. TPUSA Vice President and San Antonio senior Jessica Frausto said that she is not against legal immigration, as her great-grandparents immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and Italy.

“I agree with Mr. Johnson when he states that as a country, we do have a culture and certain standards that need to be upheld,” Frausto said via email. “It is my opinion that not all cultures are compatible with Western civilization. It is hard to preserve a specific set of values when you have a mass influx of cultures who refuse to assimilate.”

Frausto also said that while she wasn’t a fan of Johnson’s comment referring to liberal women as “pigs,” she understood it was a joke, and that it “comes down to a preference of comedy,” she said.

“He also was not referring to all liberal women as such and even described his past girlfriends as such,” Frausto said. “I think it is up to the individual whether they want to take offense to the joke or not.”

West Harrison, N.Y., junior and Turning Point USA at Baylor President Peter Fernandez also agreed with Johnson’s statement that moving to America doesn’t necessarily “make you American.”

“As the son of a Cuban immigrant, I agree with Mr. Johnson’s statement,” Fernandez said via email. “Moving here isn’t what makes someone an American. Frankly, even being

born here doesn’t quite cut it, and I say that because there are plenty of U.S.-born citizens who hate this country and want to see it radically changed. Those people are not American either.”

Austin junior and TPUSA Secretary Quinn Bradshaw echoes this sentiment, adding her experience as someone born in China and raised in America.

“I agree with Benny Johnson that just because a person physically moves to America on the map does not mean they can instantly claim American culture,” Bradshaw said via email. “This is because the person has not yet assimilated into our culture/way of life, which is deeply rooted in our history. I would like to add that people who move to America can and are invited to embrace our culture.”

A Baylor spokesperson said the university was unaware Johnson would make those remarks. They also told The Lariat that the administration is “conducting after-action reviews” of both the TPUSA and All Are Neighbors events from last week.

Austin graduate student Tanish Singh, one of the organizers of All Are Neighbors and a representative of the Baylor4Peace organization, said he found Johnson’s comments “morally reprehensible.”

“Even if it was a ‘joke,’ I believe that it was irresponsible, misogynistic and anti-American,” Singh said via email.

Fellow organizer and Houston senior Hanna Al-Hayek echoed this sentiment, contrasting the All Are Neighbors and TPUSA events.

“I think it’s important to note that Turning Point USA claims to be backed up with conservative Christian values, yet they chose to spend their time insulting and discriminating against women and minorities who, alongside each of them, according to Christianity, were made in the image of God,” Al-Hayek said.

Singh emphasized the words of politician Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who said democracy is an “attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.”

“This attitude of respect, in my opinion, was sorely lacking from Mr. Johnson that night, and I hope he will reconsider his words and join us in democracy for all people,” Singh said.

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