



Making a BIG Difference in Others Lives



Mary Miller, MSN, RN is the Director of Clinical Operations at Variety Care. Mary works closely with the site managers to help trouble shoot clinical issues and provide the support the clinical team needs to provide the highest quality care.

by Vickie Jenkins, Staff Writer

Variety Care has sixteen health care centers in Oklahoma, nine in the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area, one in Yukon, and three in Southwest Oklahoma. The number of employees varies greatly depending on the size of the location and the services offered at the site. The smallest site has one medical provider and one full time LPN, the largest site, the Straka Terrace location has approximately

eighty-five members on the clinical support staff team.

Meet Mary Miller, MSN, RN Director of Clinical Operations. "I've been with Variety Care for three years this December," Mary said. "I graduated from nursing school in 2006. So, now, I am headed into my fifteenth

See MILLER Page 2

A special calling *Hospice nurse grateful to help COVID-19 patients*



Candy O'Neal, RN, has a deepened sense of life as she provides palliative care to hospice patients with COVID-19.

Story and photo by James Coburn, Staff Writer

Candy O'Neal's biggest challenge in today's nursing environment of COVID-19 has been the transition of caring for home-bound patients to those living out their final days in a nursing home, she said. She had to give up her previous patients up to another nurse to only work in one facility.

But O'Neal is used to being flexible in her career with a history in medical surgical care, emergency room care, and clinical nursing. Hospice is all about comfort and quality of life.

"Right now to me, this COVID stuff has kind of put people into a depression," said O'Neal,

See CALLING Page 3

MILLER

Continued from Page 1

year as a registered nurse."

"I grew up in Chandler, Oklahoma. My family moved there from Ponca City when Farm Fresh, now Highland Dairy, bought a plant in Chandler. Both of my parents worked for Farm Fresh so my family relocated when the company moved operations to Chandler. Chandler is a small town full of heart and tradition. My husband and I currently live there with our three boys. I love raising my children in my hometown," Mary commented.

"When I was a little girl, I wanted to be the voice of animated characters for Disney. I planned to major in music my first semester of college, but quickly decided the path did not align with my career goals."

"I began my career as a nurse because of the diversity a career in nursing offered. Nursing is a career that grows with you and it offers a flexibility that allows for sustainable professional growth throughout the many stages of life. I have continued my career in nursing because each stage of my career has allowed me to serve my community in unique and

creative ways."

"My first job as a nurse was on the Labor and Delivery Unit at Moore Medical Center. I had the honor of working in the original facility with a team of talented and passionate nurses that instilled in me a lifelong passion for women's health," Mary said.

"I began my nursing journey in the Associate degree program at Rose State College. I completed my BSN at Northwestern Oklahoma State University and earned my MSN degree from Western Governors University. I am currently in the final eight weeks of my DNP program at Grand Canyon University with an expected graduation date of February 2021," Mary added.

Asking Mary what qualities make a good nurse, she replied, "A good nurse is ambitious, level headed in high stress situations, flexible, optimistic, bold and has an empathetic heart hanging from their sleeve."

"At this point in my career, my biggest reward is leading the next generation of nurses. I love witnessing the curiosity and passion of nurses entering the profession and having the opportunity to teach support and invest in their growth,"

Mary said.

Leader or follower? Mary says that she strives to be equal parts, leader and follower. "Variety Care staff members are some of the most talented and unique health care professionals in the state. I would miss out on incredible opportunities for growth if I focused entirely on my role as a leader. However, my husband might argue that I am more of a leader than follower," she replied with a smile.

If Mary were to give advice to someone entering the medical field, she would tell them to be prepared for a career that will be a challenge in a way never imagined. Never quit! "There is nothing more fulfilling than a life lived in the service of others," Mary added.

What is Mary's life like when she is not at Variety Care? Mary loves her job as a nurse. In 2010, Mary was named Nurse of the Year at Integris Baptist Medical Center. She has been blessed with her husband,



Adam, for thirteen years. She enjoys spending time with her family; Adam and three sons; Weston, Colton and Wyatt. They live on a farm north of Chandler and they own, horses, chickens, rabbits, cows, and last but not least, two dogs. Mary enjoys all kinds of water sports and loves to ski, wakeboard, knee board, and tube with her boys.

Nurses are big. They take big risks, tackle the big challenges, make the big sacrifices and if they do it right, they make a big difference!

Summing up Mary's life in three words? "I am blessed, challenged and content," she replied.

OU Health Physicians Gains National Recognition in Patient Experience

OU Health Physicians, the physician network within the OU Health enterprise, recently received results from the annual survey conducted by Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) for Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS). In 10 key domains of patient care experience, the practice not only achieved higher positive ratings over its 2018 scores, but also scored consistently higher than the average for other systems in the survey.

Holly Adams, FACHE, FACMPE, executive director of Clinical Operations for the physician practice, said, "Our providers and staff are fully committed to excellent patient care. While the survey is a useful tool that gives voice to the patient perspective, we are well-attuned and highly responsive to patients' needs. We're proud of this level of national recognition, one of many validations of the exceptional care we deliver, every patient, every time."

Of patients surveyed, 91% rated their OU Health Physicians provider a nine or 10, the highest possible score, significantly above the national average rating of 82%. OU Health Physicians also posted scores well above the national average in the nine other key domains of patient experience measured by the survey.

"We strive to comfort, care, listen and convey genuine concern in every patient and family interaction at OU Health Physicians," Adams said. "We are excited to share these survey findings with our community and celebrate this accomplishment with our compassionate providers and healthcare team members. More than clinicians, our providers are agents of healing fulfilling their calling to care."

The CAHPS for MIPS Survey includes the core questions established in earlier versions plus additional questions that measure key domains of patients' experiences of care. The current survey, revised in 2018, measures responses in these specific areas of patient experience:

Timeliness of care - appointments and information, Provider communication, Patient's rating of provider, Access to specialists, Health promotion and education, Shared decision making, Health and functional status, Courteous - helpful office staff, Coordination of care and Best use of patient resources

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CALLING

Continued from Page 1

RN case manager at Companion Hospice in Guthrie.

O'Neal understands the need to quarantine COVID patients to a room. But it has caused them more weight loss and cognitive changes.

"It's not getting out in the dining areas — not getting to have activities — not seeing their loved ones. Having a parent or a child come visit through a window that you can't open is not the same. They're lacking that though, and so that's been pretty hard on them."

O'Neal wouldn't change being a nurse. She knows that she is making a difference in life the best she can. Helping families cope with their loved ones facing a terminal illness is heartfelt for O'Neal.

"This team here works well together. We all get along — all of us. And that's hard to find," said O'Neal, who has worked as Companion hospice nurse for nearly three years.

A friend of hers who is now a nurse practitioner had been trying

to recruit O'Neal to Companion for a couple of years before she accepted an interview. At first she was hesitant to accept being a hospice nurse who answers families' hard questions about an impending death. After three weeks she accepted her new journey in life.

"Something just told me to do it," she said. "And so I did, and honestly this has been the best decision I've made. It changed my outlook on life. I feel like I'm the one that feels rewarded from this. It kind of makes me emotional. I feel like we both end up at peace if that makes sense."

Oftentimes people ask O'Neal how she endures being a hospice nurse every day. She is helping people make a transition in life during a profound time of need in their lives.

"I'm helping them comfortably pass over. But you not only care for the patient — you care for the families a lot," she explained. "We do a lot of close interaction with the families."

Helping families brings a continuity of care that O'Neal cherishes. She learns so much about

their lives and what brought them to their present point in life, she said.

Hospice care does not focus on waiting for a family member to pass on. It's more of a celebration of life and what life has meant. The nurses meet their patients in whatever state of mind they are experiencing in life.

There are some patients that she has had a few years. They are re-certified for hospice as long as they continue to decline, she said.

"I get really attached to my patients. It's hard not to," O'Neal said. "But it's almost like losing a family member. You get close to them when you see them two or three times a week, and then as the disease progresses you may see them every day."

Her endurance in being a nurse stems from when she decided to become a nurse during her early twenties. She was studying to become a veterinarian when her grandparents became sick. She was told her grandfather was dying of cancer.

"I thought I already like doing it for animals. I think I want to do it for people," she said.

O'Neal was auditing courses in nursing school when her grandfather passed away. She took a break from her nursing studies after he died and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in veterinary school. She had a baby. Her family needed her, so she shifted her career to work as a medical assistant in the office of Dr. Todd Krehbiel, who persuaded her to go back to school to earn a nursing degree. She went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing at Langston University.

During the holiday season, O'Neal says she is thankful for life itself and that her family and friends are all healthy during a time of uncertainty.

"Right now, it's uncertain even though we wear masks everywhere, you still don't know," she said. "I'd say I'm grateful for holidays but I'm really just thankful for life because right now there's a lot of people that are struggling."



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CAREERS IN NURSING

A CALLING TO BE A NURSE: METABOLIC CARE CENTER

Vickie Jenkins, Staff Writer

Sometimes, a person seems to fit into their profession, as though it was always meant to be. That is the way it was for Brandi Nicolle, LPN. "When I was little, my mom owned a dance studio, so I grew up in the dance world. I just knew that I would be a professional dancer! I was a dance performance major at Oklahoma City University, but, I soon realized there was something missing. I had an overwhelming desire to help people. That's when I decided that I would become a nurse. I attended nursing school at Western Technology Center in Burns Flat, OK."

Growing up in several small towns in Oklahoma; Pawnee, Fair Fax and Burns Flat, Brandi always had a desire and a need

to help others. "I had a love for people and always wanted to advocate for my patients plus have empathy for them," Brandi commented. "Now, I've been a nurse for twenty years and have worked here at OKCIC, The Metabolic Care Center for almost two years. I have worked in Home Health, Long-term Care, Memory Care and Skilled units. I am the nurse for Dr. Kaly in the adult endocrinologist and director of the MCC where we see approximately two hundred patients a month. I have a personal connection with endocrinology because I have a Type 1 diabetic child and working in the MCC gives me a feeling that I have a part in paving the way for what will be available to my child in the future."

Did anyone influence or encourage you to become a nurse? "Actually, it was my oldest daughter that influenced me to go into nursing. I wanted a better life for us and that is when I knew for sure that God had called me into nursing. My first job was for a staffing agency which gave me a wide variety of experience in numerous different settings, allowing me to find my true calling," Brandi said.

"My day usually begins between seven and seven-thirty. I enter the lab orders for the day, prepare check-out sheets for the patients, prepare exam rooms, check messages and return phone calls. I take the patients to the rooms, assist with checking out and scheduling for follow-ups and assist patients to any

other services they may need. I enjoy my job and I still have that desire to help others."

"My biggest reward in nursing is celebrating along with my patients as they reach their goals, along with watching their improvements with each visit. It is such a wonderful feeling knowing that I have helped make their life better. On the other hand, my biggest challenge is when I run into the non-compliant patients that don't follow their regimen and get frustrated when they don't meet their goals," Brandi said. "Thank goodness that doesn't happen too often," she said with a smile.

Asking Brandi if she had any awards or recognitions over the years, she replied,

See NICOLE Page 5

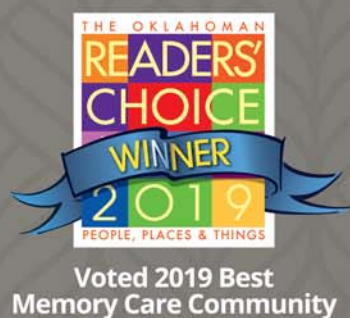


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Brandi Nicolle, LPN works for Dr. Kaly, Endocrinologist at the Metabolic Care Center . Brandi feels a real need and desire to care for others.

NICOLE

Continued from Page 4

Since I grew up in the dance world, I received scholarships to professional dance studios in California. I was crowned Miss Dance of Oklahoma in 1996. I toured with Dance International Australia Tour. I was a member of Oklahoma City University's Dance Company and also a Pep Dancer. I have received Employee of the Month awards at various companies that I have worked for over the years and I received an award from Work Force after graduation from nursing school."

Advice to someone going into the medical field? "Volunteer, get your CNA license, and make sure the medical field is what you want before diving in," Brandi said.

How has the COVID-19

pandemic affected your life? "COVID-19 has definitely changed our work ethic. Here at the clinic, we started rotation and share Virtual visits with our patients, which I know will be beneficial in the long run for many of our elderly patients. We may go weeks without seeing our co-workers which is difficult. Even though things are rough now, we know that there are some positive aspects," Brandi replied.

Brandi is married to a policeman, and has four beautiful children; three girls and one boy. Overall, Brandi says that she is definitely a leader and always has been. Her hobbies include spending time with her family, reading, playing with their spoiled German Shepherd, Athena and of course, going shopping!

Summing up her life in three words, Brandi said, "No dull moments!"

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Index to Classifieds

1 0 0	Ambulatory
1 0 8	Administrative
1 1 3	Case Management
1 1 5	Chemical Dependency
1 1 8	Clinical Instructors
1 1 9	Collection
1 2 1	Critical Care
1 2 3	Certified Medical Assistant
1 2 4	Certified Nurses Aide
1 2 7	CRNA
1 2 9	Dental
1 3 0	Dialysis
1 3 1	Dietary
1 3 7	Education
1 4 0	General Nursing
1 4 3	Geriatrics and Long Term Care
1 4 6	HMO
1 4 9	Home Health
1 5 2	Hospice
1 5 4	Housekeeping
1 5 5	Infection Control
1 5 6	Instructor
1 5 8	IV Therapy
1 6 1	Licensed Practical Nurse
1 6 4	Managerial
1 6 5	Massage Therapy
1 6 7	Medical/Surgical
1 7 0	Nurse Practitioner
1 7 3	OB/Gyn
1 7 6	Occupational Health
1 7 9	Office
1 8 2	Oncology
1 8 5	O.R./PACU
1 8 8	Orthopedic
1 9 0	Pediatric
1 9 1	Pharmacist
1 9 2	Physicians Assistant
1 9 7	Public Health
2 0 0	Rehabilitation
2 0 4	Registered Nurse
2 0 7	Research
2 1 0	Sales Representative
2 1 3	Service
2 1 7	School Nurse
2 2 0	Spec Producers
2 2 3	Support Staff
2 2 5	Traveling Nurse
2 2 6	Miscellaneous

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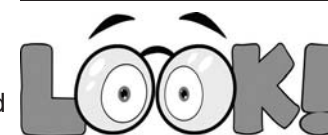
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First OK Children's Hospital Patient Treated With CAR-T Therapy Receives New Hope

This spring, five years after his diagnosis with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, Ryan VanZandt experienced his second relapse, the type of bad news that typically would mean his treatment options had run their course. However, the return of his cancer coincided with the arrival of a new immune therapy at Oklahoma Children's Hospital at OU Health, which is giving new hope to Ryan and patients like him.

This year, Ryan became the first patient at Oklahoma Children's Hospital to receive CAR-T, a new treatment for blood cancers in which a patient's own immune cells are genetically modified to recognize and attack cancer cells. Since receiving CAR-T, Ryan has been in remission and will be able to spend the holidays at home with his family for the first time in years.

"This revolutionary new treatment successfully eliminated Ryan's leukemia, and it did so by attacking only the cancer cells, not the normal cells in his body," said Rikin K. Shah, M.D., interim director of pediatric transplantation and cellular therapy at the Jimmy Everest Center at Oklahoma Children's Hospital. "This treatment is changing the landscape of pediatric cancer treatment because it is giving an opportunity for survival for those patients who had run out of treatment options."

CAR-T stands for Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell therapy. Patients being treated with CAR-T first have their blood collected in a process similar to a typical blood donation. White blood cells (which include T cells) are filtered out and sent to a company that inserts the gene for a chimeric antigen receptor into the T cells, which binds to cancer cells and activates the T cells. This process allows the newly engineered T cells to recognize and attack cancer with remarkable efficiency. Once the CAR-T cells are generated, they are shipped back to the hospital and given to the patient through an IV, much like a



Ryan VanZandt (left) with Rikin K. Shah, M.D experienced his second relapse five years after his diagnosis with acute lymphoblastic leukemiafive years after his diagnosis with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

blood transfusion.

Ryan's long journey with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL, began in August 2015. A typical teenager and a high school athlete in Duncan, Ryan was running on a freshly mowed track during cross-country practice when he became exhausted and couldn't finish his lap. In the days ahead, he became increasingly tired and sleepy and quit hanging out with his friends. He even lost interest in playing games on his Xbox, one of his favorite things to do.

After his diagnosis with ALL, Ryan received chemotherapy at Oklahoma Children's Hospital for nearly three-and-a-half years, a standard length of treatment to ensure the cancer doesn't return. Ryan faced complications during that time, including serious bouts with pancreatitis, but at the end of his chemotherapy, in January 2019, he was declared cancer-free.

"I was feeling pretty good," Ryan said. "I rang the bell at the hospital," a tradition for patients who are free of cancer.

But the good news was short-lived. Four months later, in May 2019, Ryan's leukemia returned in his spinal fluid. He started back on chemotherapy, and again the cancer cells were eliminated. He stayed on a chemotherapy regimen, but a year later, in May 2020, he had a second relapse, this time in his bone marrow and his spinal fluid. That's when his doctors decided he was a candidate for the new option of CAR-T.

"The success rate of treating acute lymphoblastic leukemia with chemotherapy in young people is usually very high. The problem is that when patients have a recurrence, the outcomes are dismal," Shah said. "That's why CAR-T is so important – because it allows us to help patients whose cancer would otherwise be deemed incurable. And Ryan was able to have CAR-T therapy in Oklahoma instead of going out of state, which would bring an additional burden of travel and finding housing for a month."

Although CAR-T therapy has



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See CAR-T page 10

(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2020 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

History, future on OBU's side

History. Tradition. And an eye to the future.

All combine at Oklahoma Baptist University.

For 64 consecutive years, OBU nurses have gone on to deliver quality, compassionate care with an education grounded in faith and ethics.

Dr. Robbie Henson was recently appointed as dean of the OBU College of Nursing, having served on its faculty for 29 years. She had served as interim dean since August 2019 and is the Lawrence C. and Marion V. Harris Chair of Nursing. She also teaches in both the undergraduate and graduate programs in the College of Nursing. She has clinical experience in a wide range of specialties including adult medical-surgical, intensive care, home health, psychiatric-mental health, and maternal-newborn nursing. She earned her BSN at OBU and knows firsthand the tremendous education offered in the OBU College of Nursing.

"Our graduates are very much in demand in Oklahoma and all the way down to the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex," Henson said.

RICH HISTORY

The school's baccalaureate program was the first approved in the state, graduating its first class in 1956. For decades, OBU nursing graduates have been in high demand, and that tradition of excellence entered a new era four years ago with the state-of-the-art Stavros Hall, the new home for the College. The 32,000-square-foot facility was designed to provide cutting-edge nursing education for both undergraduate and graduate-level students.

Opened in 2016, it is located on the northeast corner of the OBU campus in Shawnee. The facility features six high-fidelity skills simulation labs, a mid-fidelity skills lab, a health assessment lab, and a home health and bathing training room, totaling 24 beds. The high-tech simulation labs are equipped with the industry's most advanced medical simulation solutions, providing students with realistic training scenarios for their future nursing careers.

"It's a beautiful building with state-of-the-art simulations and skills labs," Henson said of Stavros Hall. It has

been featured on news programs in the Oklahoma City area, as well as statewide.

The acute care setting gives students a hands-on feel of a true hospital unit. With full control of the state-of-the-art human simulators, instructors train future nurses to expect the unexpected and react with life-saving speed to evolving situations in real-time. The building's video technology allows instructors to offer the best possible feedback to students, as they review the scenario together following each simulation.

"We have really wonderful facilities and amazing faculty for both teaching and learning," Henson said.

Class sizes in OBU's College of Nursing tend to be small with only 35 to 45 students in each of the junior and senior classes allowing for hands-on instruction.

"That really says you're going to get to know your faculty and have access to the resources that you need for assistance. You are going to make lifelong friends and mentors too," Henson said. "We know our students well and very intentionally pour into their lives."

OBU is coming off another 100-percent NCLEX pass rate with its most recent graduating class. The University's nursing graduates typically post pass rate percentiles in the upper 90s.

"We have a very strong trend in our pass rates," Henson said.

Another unique feature is the school's ethical focus.

"Has there ever been a more critical time in history when students needed to develop a worldview with faith and justice?" Henson said. "That, I think, is one of the most important things we offer. Having a focus on society's needs, ethics, and faith in today's world is huge."

OBU also offers the RN to BSN degree with the same core focus. This fully-online program can be completed in as little as 12 months.

OBU's master's degree in nursing education can also be completed in 15 months, completely online.



Dr. Robbie Henson is the new dean of OBU's College of Nursing. She has served as interim dean since August 2019 and is the Lawrence C. and Marion V. Harris Chair of Nursing. She is an OBU alumna and joined the nursing faculty in 1991. She is pictured in Stavros Hall, home to the College.

"The OBU College of Nursing has done an outstanding job with our BSN completion and MSN programs, bringing those same core mission

pieces to those who already have their RN and those who are looking for the next step in their nursing career."

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CAR-T

Continued from Page 8

cleared his body of cancerous cells, Ryan's treatment for ALL is not quite over. Next year, he will have a bone marrow transplant from his sister Savannah, who is a perfect match for the donation of a brand-new immune system. However, the transplant would not be possible without Ryan first receiving CAR-T.

"Patients are not eligible for bone marrow transplants when they still have leukemia cells, and because Ryan had relapsed, he still had cancerous cells," Shah said. "CAR-T therapy allowed us to put his leukemia into remission so that he will be able to have the transplant."

As CAR-T continues to be studied, it will likely help patients at several different stages of their treatment, Shah said. For some patients, it will serve as the final treatment and the CAR-T cells will stay vigilant in the body in an effort to eliminate any new cancerous cells. It also may move up earlier in the treatment process, or be used to treat patients whose bone marrow transplants fail.

"This type of immune therapy is going to change the way we treat cancer in the next five years because

we are harnessing the patient's own immune cells to fight cancer," Shah said.

Ryan's mother, Blynn VanZandt, read online about CAR-T before it was approved for use in the United States. Like any mother, she was nervous about her son receiving a new treatment, she said, but the timing was a godsend.

"We were down to some of the last options, so we decided to do it," she said. "It was clear that it would make the transplant possible for him."

Ryan's five years with leukemia have not been easy, his mother said, but their faith, family, friends and church family have supported them in numerous ways. Ryan graduated from Durant High School and has taken classes at Southeastern Oklahoma State University as his health has allowed; he is majoring in business and envisions a career in banking.

"It's definitely been a long journey," Ryan said. "All my friends and family have kept my spirits up. I do my best to look on the brighter side of things. This has given me a new perspective on life, especially to value the people who have cared for and supported me."

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Oklahoma's Nursing Times



We could have lost Claire to bone cancer. Surgery and chemotherapy saved Claire's life. An organ and tissue donor saved Claire's leg. A piece of bone donated by a 33-year-old woman replaced the cancerous part of her femur. In time, they have grown together to form a new bone. We are so grateful that someone, in the midst of a tragic loss, made a generous decision to become an organ and tissue donor. We often think of her and what a wonderful gift she gave our family.

Organ, eye and tissue donation saves lives. Please make your decision to donate life and tell your family. Register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor on your Oklahoma driver's license or state ID card or register online at www.LifeShareRegistry.org. You may also call 800-826-LIFE (5433) and request a donor registration card.

Claire

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"I've always felt good to be able to take care of them. I know how sick they are. I have a commitment to take care of them."



Mondaie Streber, RN

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SITUATION UPDATE: COVID-19

COVID-19 Oklahoma Test Results

Cases	197,745
*Total Cumulative Negative Specimens to Date (As of 11/25/20)	1,873,468
*Total Cumulative Number of Specimens to Date (As of 11/25/20)	2,071,937
Total Cumulative Hospitalizations	12,258
Total Cumulative Deaths	1,743

- As of this advisory, there are 197,745 cases of COVID-19 in Oklahoma.
- There are 7 additional deaths identified to report.
- * One in Creek County, one male in the 65 or older age group.
- * One in Oklahoma County, one male in the 65 or older age group.
- * One in Okmulgee County, one female in the 65 or older age group.
- * One in Pawnee County, one female in the 65 or older age group.
- * One in Rogers County, one male in the 65 or older age group.
- * One in Stephens County, one female in the 65 or older age group.
- * One in Tulsa County, one male in the 65 or older age group.
- There are 1,743 total deaths in the state.
- Additional hospitalization data can be found in the Hospital Tiers report, published evenings Monday through Friday.
- For more information, visit coronavirus.health.ok.gov.

*The total includes laboratory information provided to OSDH at the time of the report. Total counts may not reflect unique individuals.

***The purpose of publishing aggregated statistical COVID-19 data through the OSDH Dashboard, the Executive Order Report, and the Weekly Epidemiology and Surveillance Report is to support the needs of the general public in receiving important and necessary information regarding the state of the health and safety of the citizens of Oklahoma. These resources may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be used in any way that would determine the identity of any reported cases.

Data Source: Acute Disease Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. *As of 2020-11-30 at 7:00 a.m.

OMRF scientists transform ice storm wreckage into art

When Mary Schneeberger's 100-year-old pecan tree snapped during October's ice storm, part of her heart broke right along with it.

"It lost a major portion of its trunk and its future is in jeopardy," said Schneeberger, who lives in Oklahoma City's Mesta Park neighborhood. "It's just a beautiful tree that adds so much to the house and the property. I was devastated."

But her boyfriend, Adam Cohen,



A bowl made from a sweetgum tree by Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation scientist Mike McDaniel. McDaniel's work was on display at The Art Hall in Oklahoma City.

offered up a silver lining thanks to coworkers at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. Cohen, OMRF's senior vice president and general counsel, knew that foundation scientists Patrick Gaffney, M.D., and Michael McDaniel had decades of experience as woodworkers.

"I called Pat and Mike and they hurried over to look at the tree," said Cohen. "They each told Mary they thought they'd be able to make her keepsakes from the wood."

Gaffney said he thought he could fashion some tables, while McDaniel would aim for a selection of salad bowls and vases. "We're very excited, because we've seen their work, and they're both incredibly talented craftsmen," said Cohen.

But Schneeberger's silver lining will take time. Like science, woodworking has its roots in patience.

Gaffney and McDaniel recently wrapped two years of work on nearly 30 original tables, bowls and vases from an ailing sweetgum tree. The diseased tree belonged to Gaffney's senior lab manager, Kiely Grundahl.

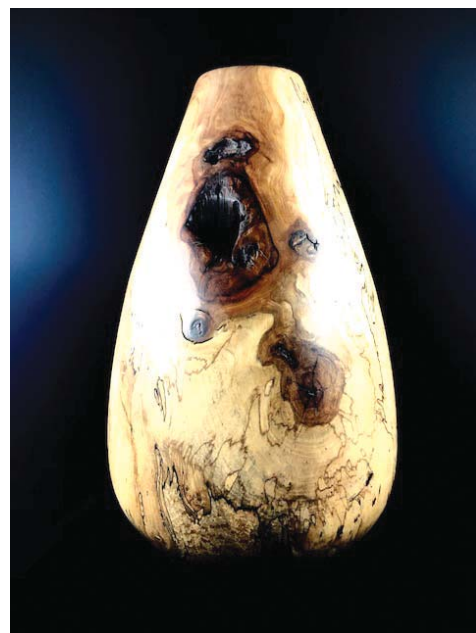
"Sweetgum is a challenging, unpredictable wood to work with,"

said McDaniel, whose work from the tree is on display at The Art Hall in Oklahoma City through Nov. 30. "But once I saw it had a fungus, all kinds of possibilities and options started racing through my head."

Under the right conditions, fungal growth in wood results in a sought-after feature called "spalting." The natural decaying process develops unique coloration, dark lines and patterns in lumber. Art, meet science.

Divided between the artisans, the wood from Grundahl's tree was stored for a year to allow spalting to continue and for the lumber to dry. For Gaffney and McDaniel, the wood proved a boon for all the extra time spent around the house in 2020.

Like most of OMRF's workforce, Gaffney spent the early days of the pandemic working from home. If he got stuck on a research problem, he'd



A vase made from a sweetgum tree by Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation scientist Mike McDaniel. McDaniel's work was on display at The Art Hall in Oklahoma City.

head out to the small woodshop in his garage to do some thinking while sanding slabs or treating the wood from Grundahl's sweetgum. "I think it even made me more productive with my science. It was the perfect place to think," he said.

McDaniel also finds respite in the craft. A self-taught woodworker, he fell in love with the hobby when a storm knocked down several Kentucky



OMRF scientists Dr. Patrick Gaffney (left) and Mike McDaniel (right) in front of Mesta Park resident Mary Schneeberger's home. The pair will make keepsakes from Schneeberger's 100-year-old pecan tree that was damaged in the October 2020 ice storm.

coffeetrees on his property.

"Every step is rewarding and peaceful in its own way. It's honestly not too complicated, just time-consuming and requires creativity when things don't go as planned. Part of the fun is finding the beauty in the chaos," McDaniel said.

Gaffney and McDaniel's garages are now full of future projects. Oklahoma City officials estimate the recent ice storm generated 100,000

tons of debris, and the pair got plenty of calls.

OMRF's Cohen said he knows it may be years before he and Mary see what beauty can be found in the storm's damage, but it will be well worth the wait.

"If Pat and Mike are able to take a moment of loss and transform it into something beautiful Mary can treasure," he said, "that will make her immensely happy."

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