

TAHLEQUAH  
*Grapevine*

**TURNING A  
HOUSE INTO  
A HOME**

Newcomers  
draw attention  
to Mid-Century  
Modern trends,  
pg. 6

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**DAILY  
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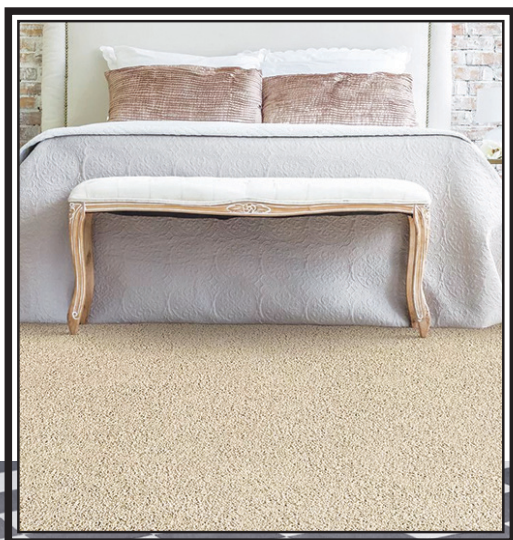
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This edition of Tahlequah Grapevine comes during the spooky season!

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Well, autumn has arrived — more or less. I put it that way because, in Oklahoma, you never know. Even as you peruse these pages — sometime between Sept. 30 and mid-October — we could be suffering through another spate of sweltering heat.

But as far as the traditional autumn is concerned in this neck of the woods, the leaves along Highway 10 transform into a pallet of hues, ranging from deep gold to bright red. The days and nights turn cooler, ushering in a crispness in the air I like to call “football weather.” In tandem with that, friends and family begin squaring off in anticipation of what we Okies refer to as “Bedlam.” Either you support the University of Oklahoma Sooners, or the Oklahoma State University Cowboys. There is no in between, and there is no compromise. Even listing the Sooners first in this paragraph will raise the ire of diehard Pokes fans.

And fall is also the spooky season, when witches, ghouls and goblins shamble out of covens and closets, giving us the thrills and chills of Halloween. Following on its heels is Thanksgiving, when we share our bounty with others. And Christmas isn't far behind.

Autumn is my favorite season, and Halloween, my favorite holiday. And for this third edition of the reformulated Grapevine magazine, we have an appropriate — if somewhat tongue-in-cheek — “ghost story” by Layce Gardner. This is Layce's first foray into our magazine, which features the work of the very best writers that have ever been employed by the Tahlequah Daily Press. Also contributing for the first time is John Hoover, a former sports editor who is now at the top of his game. Then we have work by several writers who have already been featured in the first two editions.

We hope you will be enjoying cooler weather by the time you get your copy of the magazine, whether it be digital or in print. We know you will be enjoying the stories within.

- Kim Poindexter, Executive Editor



### Meet the Editor

**Kim Poindexter** has been a member of the TDP news team since 1985 and the top editor since 1987. She is in the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame and was the 2022 Oklahoma Press Association Beachy Musselman Award winner. She has won more than 200 journalism awards during her career, both individually and as part of the TDP team, which has been named Best Newspaper of the Year the past four years by CNHI. She and her husband, Chris, have an adult son, Cole, and a new daughter-in-law, Dani.

# Turning a house into a home

## Newcomers draw attention to Mid-Century Modern trends

By Pam Moore

For its size, Tahlequah has more than its fair share of historic homes and sites, usually 19th century styles such as the Thompson House, the French House, and Hunter's Home.

These homes, often Victorians listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are evidentiary of Tahlequah's founders. More recent history takes the town through the many fine examples of the Mid-Century Modern style buildings.

It all began with the 1939 World's Fair in New York City, which brought the Bauhaus and Danish Moderne movements to the forefront of American style, setting the stage for the futuristic design work of the MCM.

The MCM style is now enjoying a newfound respect for its connection with nature and the outdoors. It's known for its large expanses of glass, flat roofs, multilevels, and clerestory windows creating abundant interior light, and open-area floor plans. Pops of bright color, organic shapes, glass tabletops, and lighter wood colors were hallmarks of MCM interior furnishings.

The Boomer generation will at once recognize the style, since many of us spent our childhoods in MCM homes with MCM furnishings—think Sputnik, aluminum Christmas trees, Danish Moderne furniture, and Jetson's style light fixtures.

So, if you're a Boomer, brace your-



The Melles-Shelburnes show off their remodelled home. From left are: Dr. Audell Shelburne, Bryden Shelburne, Dr. Beth Melles, and Auggie Shelburne.

self: There is a revival of interest in the MCM style, and while it's certainly collectible, it's also historical. Yes, historical — as in old. Really old.

One such house, known to locals as “Bennett's old house” — as in Bennett Guthrie — is now home to Dr. Beth Melles and Dr. Audell Shelburne, both professors at Northeastern State University.

In 2014, the Melles-Shelburnes' Pleasant View apartment caught fire and was a total loss. While it was a rocky start for the newcomers, the fire made their search for a permanent home crucial.

After touring four properties, they were shown the house on Redbud Lane. They knew at once it had potential and were excited by their find. They took possession in 2015 and began freshening the walls with paint and making minor repairs.

Once the Melles-Shelburnes were settled in, the family doubled with the births of son Bryden, 5,

and daughter Auggie, 4, making the Melles-Shelburnes busy lifestyle even busier — happier, but busier. Beth and Audell work as a team, juggling childcare, full-time jobs, and performing home renovations.

Beth, British-born and schooled in France, is an accomplished woodworker who designed, built, and installed parts of the home's MCM style trim and furniture. Audell, just as skilled, did the interior and exterior painting. Their plan is to renovate the home using the MCM era as the guiding principle for the finished project.

First on the list was to address the instability of the stairway and some of the open design features that weren't child friendly. The search began to find an architect who could work in tandem with the couple's skills to renovate for safety, while bringing back the MCM style of the house.

Beth targeted regional architects

familiar with modern style and experience with MCM buildings. Beth discovered DEMX Architecture, of Fayetteville, Arkansas, owned by Tim Maddox, an American Institute of Architects member and principal. Maddox also serves as president of Preserve Arkansas, an Arkansas nonprofit working to preserve MCM historical sites.

Maddox, along with DEMX Studio Director Seth Spradlin, also an AIA member, viewed the house and consulted with the Melles-Shelburnes. Spradlin served as the primary designer. When Maddox and Spradlin toured the house, they knew at once recognized the work of an MCM-era architect.

When Beth and Audell heard the news about the design origins of the house, they were determined to learn more. Beth's online search led to the OKCMOD.com website, a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation and appreciation of Oklahoma





Photos courtesy DEMX Architecture

MCM buildings. Imagine Beth's astonishment when she came across old pictures of her home on the OKCMOD blog!

Beth dug deeper and discovered that R. Duane Conner was the original designer of home. Conner was grandfather of Lynne Rostochil, whose blog on the OKCMOD website documented his designs, two of which are listed on the National Historic Register.

Conner had designed the Melles-Shelburne house for his youngest sibling, Rosalyn Hicks. Rosalyn was married to Marvin Hicks, of Tahlequah Public Works Authority fame, who commissioned or convinced his brother-in-law, R. Duane Conner, to design and draft plans for his family's home in the 1960s.

In August 2015, Beth contacted Lynne (Hicks) Rostochil to get more information about the home. Rostochil, excited by the interest in her grandfather's work, offered to share

old photos, blueprints, and her knowledge of the home and others he designed. In addition to the Shelburne home, Conner designed the First Presbyterian Church in Tahlequah.

After reviewing Beth's research, DEMX's Maddox and Spradlin set up a meeting with Lynne in Oklahoma City to learn more. They returned to their office with blueprints, drawings, photos, and floor plans of original designer, R. Duane Conner. The team now had the intention and the bones of the project to guide the design process.

Maddox explained their approach to the design update.

"The Melle-Shelburne renovation is not meant to be historically authentic but is informed by MCM design lines which focus on form and function to create living spaces that work," said Maddox.

Spradlin, the project designer, had a definite vision for the renovation

and worked with the Melles-Shelburnes to revive the home, while respecting its MCM roots and historic importance of being designed by architect, R. Duane Conner.

As the DEMX team worked on their part of the renovation, the Melles-Shelburnes pitched in on projects they felt confident tackling. Anyone who has ever taken the do-it-yourself path knows nothing ever happens according to plan. One such project, dubbed the "Canada Wall" by the Shelburnes, is next to the stairwell covered in a heavily textured shingle design made from eucalyptus wood. At the halfway point, they ran out of materials.

The couple searched everywhere for the elusive shingles, to no avail. Finally, they found a Quebec company that could sell them the wood but would not deliver it. The Shelburnes rented a big ol' sedan and headed north, driving straight through.

Beth's fluency in French helped

secure their order and they headed back to Oklahoma. There was a fuss at the Canadian border. A Border Patrol officer didn't quite believe the couple, with out-of-country identification driving a large, dark sedan with tinted windows, was just transporting fancy wood shingles. Beth was able to produce a picture of the unfinished wall and the officer let them pass.

The Melles-Shelburnes completed the "Canada Wall," while DEMX finished the stairs and bookshelves, and the projects were completed just in time for Christmas 2017.

The Melles-Shelburnes' saga of renovation continued with the advent of the pandemic — tangling their schedules, and totally changing their work life. The next challenge arrived in July 2020, when straight line winds hit the Tahlequah area and ripped the metal roof off, flipping it over onto the house.

The damage from the storm forced the family to move most goods to the lower part of the house, where the Shelburnes, now with two children under age 2, and their pets, had to live for a little more than a year. It was cramped, with two parents running online classes and caring for young children, and once again, Beth contacted DEMX to work with the couple to put the house back to rights.

This time, since there was so much storm damage, the project focus was now on kitchen renovation. Storm damage pushed this part of their plan to the forefront. Spradlin drew up the plans and got to work. His attention to detail and excellent design skills presented the Shelburne family with a kitchen that would make any MCM-style homeowner proud.

While the renovation was fraught with challenges and delays, the roof was repaired, the kitchen completed, and the stairs secured, and the Melles-Shelburnes are pleased with the work of their design team and the beauty of their now new — but still old — home and would do it all again. They are no longer newcomers but are inexorably intertwined with the rich history of Tahlequah.



## Meet the Author

**Pamela Moore** served as the first executive director of Help In Crisis Inc. beginning in July 1982, serving nearly a decade to then serve eight years as victim-witness coordinator for the 27th Prosecutorial District. Moore also served as subject matter expert for the Office on Violence Against Women and the Office for Victims of Crime until her retirement in 2016.

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# Treading with 'The Three Eds'

## Trio of advocates takes first steps to saving area waterways

By Nancy M. Garber

In northeast Oklahoma, we often take clean water for granted. But 40 years ago, our primary source of water and recreation was threatened by potential upstream pollution. A trio that became known as "The Three Eds" joined forces with other concerned citizens to protect the Illinois River.

On a spring evening in 1984, local community leaders gathered at the Cherokee Capitol Building to strategize. The city of Fayetteville, Arkansas, planned to request a permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to build a facility that would release half its treated wastewater into the White River, the other half into a tributary of the Illinois River.

"People were getting angry," recalled Ed Brocksmith, then director of public information at Northeastern State University. "Someone suggested Tahlequah needed to 'stir things up.'"

The name "Save the Illinois River" was chosen to fit the acronym and a nonprofit organization was born that remains active today.

Brocksmith departed the meeting with Ed Fite, recently appointed administrator of the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission. Fite had established himself as a watchdog for Oklahoma water quality when he publicly asked Arkansas officials, "If the wastewater is so clean, why not dump it all into the White River?"



Ed Edmondson, Ed Fite and Ed Brocksmith, from left, at a STIR rally on the Illinois River in 1985.

They discussed the newly formed group's need for legal counsel.

Brocksmith contacted Ed Edmondson, former U.S. congressman and practicing attorney in Muskogee. He'd known Edmondson since his days at KRMG Radio, mediating statewide political forums. Edmondson was experienced in Oklahoma water issues: He had helped secure federal funding to establish the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System.

"He realized the importance of water to eastern Oklahoma, in terms of navigation, recreation, and quality of life," Brocksmith said.

Growing up in Muskogee, Fite had heard stories about Edmondson's support of water projects from a friend of his father. He and Brocksmith met Edmondson at his law office.

"We told him we needed an attorney. He quickly agreed to represent us. It wasn't until later, after we spent some time trying to figure out how we could pay him, that we learned he intended to help us pro bono," Brocksmith said.

Edmondson's counsel was invaluable, Brocksmith noted.

"It would have cost millions for us to hire someone like him to represent STIR," he said.

The three Eds went right to work. In the days before texting and email, Edmondson would frequently call both of the others first thing in the morning and tell them what they needed to do that day to halt the issuance of an EPA permit, Brocksmith recalled.

The trio made public presentations throughout the region and were soon known as "the three Eds."

"Someone would say 'Ed' and get three responses," Brocksmith said.

During a meeting with EPA officials in 1985, Edmondson cited the growing problem of phosphorus and nitrogen reducing water clarity in the Illinois and argued for a long-term plan to protect the river. STIR's statewide petition to stop treated sewage from being released into any scenic river in Oklahoma gathered thousands of signatures, but not enough to call for a vote.

Despite citizen outcry, the EPA issued a permit allowing Fayetteville to begin construction of its proposed facility in November 1985. The Oklahoma attorney general, along with



**During a ceremony in 1987 are, from left: Ed Edmondson, Ed Brocksmith, Attorney General Robert Henry, Sara Drake, Jack Spears and Ed Fite.**

Edmondson representing STIR, requested the EPA reconsider. Public hearings were held during the next two years, but in January 1988, the EPA upheld Fayetteville's right to release half its treated sewage into a tributary of the Illinois.

Oklahoma and STIR filed an appeal with the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. The mood among the Oklahoma delegation was jovial as they boarded the plane bound for the hearing in Denver in March 1990.

"We were singing the old E-D-M-O-N-D-S-O-N campaign song" popularized during J. Howard Edmondson's 1956 gubernatorial race, Brocksmith remembered.

"The 10th circuit judges welcomed Ed Edmondson warmly. They all knew him and had a lot of respect for him," Brocksmith said.

Upon their arrival, the Oklahoma delegation entered the Brown Derby Restaurant in Denver.

"The judges were having breakfast, and they all stopped to visit with

Ed. I knew then we had a pretty good chance of getting a fair hearing," Brocksmith said.

Arguing on behalf of Oklahoma were Robert Henry, Robert Butkin, and Julian Fite. Edmondson was allotted 15 minutes to present on behalf of STIR but was allowed to continue for more than an hour, Fite recalled.

The court favored Oklahoma's cause, overruling the EPA decision to grant Fayetteville a discharge permit. The city was expected to appeal.

In December, Edmondson invited the other two Eds for breakfast at

NSU's University Center basement. Fite recalled vividly,

"Students were milling about, getting ready for finals week. Ed was wearing a nice sport coat with a vest and hat, as he often did," Fite recalled vividly. "He talked about our journey together, from the first day we met at his office and our time in Denver. He told us Fayetteville would appeal the court's decision, and said, 'I doubt I'll be with you when we go to the (U.S.) Supreme Court. If I don't get there...'"

Then he outlined STIR's case before the high court justices.

"It was like he had a premonition," Fite said.

The next day, Saturday, Edmondson went quail hunting in the morning and came home to watch the Army-Navy football game. There he died of a heart attack, at age 71.

Indeed, Oklahoma's case was heard before the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in February 1992 that the appeals court had not been authorized to reverse the EPA ruling. Subsequently, Fayetteville proceeded with plans to build a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant.

"Although technically we lost the appeal, we won a major victory by establishing upstream water quality standards," Brocksmith said.

This is just part of the story. Brocksmith and Fite continue to work on behalf of water quality issues, along with many notable Oklahoma water warriors.

Efforts today include cooperative talks between Oklahoma and Arkansas to develop a Watershed Management Plan for the Illinois River Basin, along with ways to reduce nonpoint source pollution and the impact of rapid urbanization. To learn more, visit [illinoisriver.org](http://illinoisriver.org).

## Meet the Author



**Nancy M. Garber** is a former member of the TDP news and advertising teams and retired director of Communications and Marketing at NSU. She first met Ed Edmondson in 1987, as a news reporter on a trip to Oklahoma City with Ed Brocksmith and Ed Fite to meet with Gov. Henry Bellmon. A longtime supporter of STIR, she has served on the board for the past decade.

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# Chocolate gravy craving

An aficionado delves into the roots of this Southern comfort food

By Eddie Glenn

In the fall 2001 edition of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Joyce and Les Compton argue that food preparation served as an expression of individuality for women in the South as they and their families migrated from their rural Appalachian homes to larger and more prosperous cities and mill towns.

In fact, their argument continues, the preparation of those same – sometimes very unique – meals still serves as an expression of individuality for Southern women, even generations after their families' transformations from rural to more urban or suburban lives.

Preparing particular variations of biscuits, or gravy, or beans, or grits, the Comptons claim, “has been at the heart of an identity intertwined with but beyond that of motherhood and wifehood, beyond the hum of the loom, and even today, beyond the clatter of the keyboard.”

One of the foods the Comptons mention as an example of Southern feminine self-expression – or, as they put it, of “art out of survival” – is chocolate gravy. This syrupy concoction of sugar, cocoa, flour, milk, butter, and vanilla extract has obscure beginnings. Most scholars



Many variations of chocolate gravy can be made.

and chocolate gravy connoisseurs, however, agree that it appears to have emerged from the rural South, possibly during the Great Depression era of the 1920s and '30s.

Mention of chocolate gravy usually evokes one of two reactions – fond memories of home, or sickening disgust. For folks who've never eaten chocolate gravy, it's usually the latter. Just the sound of those two words – “chocolate” and “gravy,” slammed together into one term – doesn't seem logical, let alone palatable, in most parts of the country.

Eastern Oklahoma, however, isn't like most parts of the country. It's one of the few places where the people who are aware of chocolate gravy quite often love it, and speak of it in rapturous tones. That's certainly the case for me, as I grew up eating it, typically on Sunday mornings, and only every couple of months or so.

Perhaps as a distant prelude to the writing of this story, the topic of conversation over the Glenn family breakfast table on those rare chocolate gravy mornings tended to be, of course, chocolate gravy itself – how it had been prepared by family members in the past, how it came to be, and why something so obviously unhealthy would be consumed for breakfast.

My dad was full of all sorts of hypotheses about chocolate gravy. But, as I've done more research over the years, I've learned that his hypotheses weren't all that different from those proposed by scholars who have attempted to study the slippery, sumptuous subject of chocolate gravy.

Dad's primary hypothesis about the origins of chocolate gravy goes something like this: People during the Great Depression didn't have a lot of luxuries. They were dirt-poor,



**Jennifer Stevens stirs a pot of chocolate gravy made from a recipe available online, with a few personalized modifications added.**

literally, as many of them lived in houses that had dirt floors. There wasn't much joy in their lives, so any meal that contained cocoa and vanilla extract was a rare treat.

People couldn't always afford even those basic ingredients, but when they could, they mixed them with some other very basic ingredients that would've been available in any rural household; poured the concoction over biscuits so it at least appeared to be a healthier meal than it was; and blissfully enjoyed their rare culinary extravagance.

This hypothesis is similar to that offered by Fred Sauceman, associate professor of Appalachian studies at East Tennessee State University, who in 2010 offered a possible creation story for chocolate gravy to the Springfield, Illinois newspaper, the *State Journal Register*.

As presented by Sharon Thompson, food writer for the paper, "Sauceman's theory on chocolate gravy is that when Hershey's cocoa first appeared on shelves of country

stores, cooks devised ways to make meals, not just desserts, using the precious powder in the brown, silver-topped can."

According to Hershey's corporate website, that would've been in the 1890s, which predates the Great Depression, but not necessarily hard times in the rural South.

Regardless of its origins, the Comptons' claim that chocolate gravy represented individual expression for rural Southern women — who rarely had the opportunity for such artistic exhibition — certainly rings true to me.

Dad had stories about the ways his two grandmothers each concocted their chocolate gravies, and how — even though he may have loved both of his grandmothers — the same was not the case for their chocolate gravies. One used butter, as listed above in the common ingredients of chocolate gravy. Dad really liked that grandmother's chocolate gravy. The other grandmother, however, used lard instead of butter. I've never personally tasted chocolate gravy made of lard, but according to Dad, the consistency was not unlike axle grease. I can only take his word for it.

Today, recipes for chocolate gravy can be found on numerous websites dedicated to Southern cuisine. So, even though its beginnings may be murky, chocolate gravy is enjoying at least a bit of internet virality, as recipes are shared around the world.

Jennifer Stevens of Tahlequah recently prepared a pot of chocolate gravy, even though she's the offspring of a Rhode Islander and a Chicagoan, and therefore, not much of a Southerner, even by

Oklahoma standards. The recipe she used came from the aforementioned food article written by Sharon Thompson in the April 7, 2010, edition of the *State Journal Register*. But, just like the Southern women discussed in the Comptons' 2001 *Journal of Appalachian Studies* article, Stevens took the opportunity to modify the recipe to suit her own tastes.

"I replaced about half the amount of sugar in the recipe with brown sugar," she said. "And, I added a bit of salt. Let's call it a dash of salt."

Stevens wasn't forthcoming about how much salt constitutes a "dash" of salt, but then, that's what makes her chocolate gravy hers — it's an expression of her individual culinary artistry, as the Comptons might put it.

So, even though its beginnings may be uncertain, it appears that the internet is keeping chocolate gravy on breakfast tables far beyond the American South. It's certainly possible that chocolate gravy is more popular now than it has ever been, given the almost universal availability of recipe websites, along with the geographic limitations of the popularity of 20th century chocolate gravy consumption.

Still, given how integral chocolate gravy is to my own southeastern Oklahoma upbringing, I will continue to research the topic. If you have a chocolate gravy story, especially one about where or when your own recipe, or one in your family, may have emerged, send me a message at [chocolate-gravystories@gmail.com](mailto:chocolate-gravystories@gmail.com), because as much as I like chocolate gravy, I like writing about chocolate gravy even more.



## Meet the Author

**R.E. "Eddie" Glenn** was TDP's last "official" photographer and was on the news team 14 years. He is a writer and independent scholar living in Tahlequah. His book, *"Bigfoot Comes to Town: Theory Myth and Alleged Truths about Eastern Oklahoma's Most Wanted,"* is available on Amazon.com and at *Too Fond of Books* in downtown Tahlequah.

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# Opening new chapters in life

## Help In Crisis offers hope for domestic violence victims

By Betty Ridge

For many years, domestic violence victims in Cherokee and surrounding counties had nowhere to turn.

Many citizens regarded abuse inside the home as something that happened to someone else — people of a different class, or with other societal problems. No one wanted to admit it happened behind the doors of the suburban houses across the street, that their neighbors could be the perpetrator and victim.

More than four decades ago, a group of people in Cherokee and adjacent counties decided that was no longer acceptable. They organized and worked for funding to establish the organization today known as Help In Crisis. The agency provides a refuge for those who have experienced violence at home, as well as counseling and support groups. Over the years, thousands of people have benefitted from these services.

“Domestic violence in Oklahoma is an epidemic,” HIC Executive Director Laura Kuester said. “We are having domestic violence-related homicides in Oklahoma, it seems like every other day. The number of women killed by men in Oklahoma is second in the nation.”

Pam Moore, first director for HIC, came to Tahlequah to escape an abusive ex-husband. She was running a small gift shop when she became acquainted with the people



**Laura Kuester, HIC executive director, promotes Walk A Mile in Her Shoes, a key fundraiser for the agency wherein men don high heels to get an idea of what it's like to be a woman.**

who were the genesis of HIC.

Linda Axley was wanting to start a crisis line at the guidance center, and they “just hit it off,” Moore said. Through Axley, she met Greg and Alicia Combs, also supporters of the project. They wrote grants and advertised for a director. Moore was pasting up newspaper ads for a predecessor of the Tahlequah Daily Press when one of them sought a director for the new agency. She applied and was hired.

“The job paid \$12,000. I thought I’d hit the jackpot,” Moore said. “I learned a lot fast. I had to learn quickly on my feet. In those days, there were no rules. The work was not yet defined and we still didn’t know we were being advocates.”

At first, the agency’s conditions were pretty primitive.

“The phone was at the fire department, where we had to go and call forward it twice a day,” Moore said. “Then Linda Axley had the first crisis line in her home for a long time.”

Women sought protection for themselves and their children, even their dogs.

Much of the work consisted of seeking grants for all the services the agency would provide. They learned as they worked.

During that first year, Moore met Deana Franke, an early HIC volunteer. At the time, Franke’s daughter was just a week old, but she still found the cause important and wanted to contribute what she could. Franke later succeeded Moore as director of HIC.

Moore still thought domestic violence was a rare occurrence when she joined HIC, but soon learned otherwise, as the number of requests for help was overwhelming.

In spring 1983, Moore met Diane Barker, who supported HIC strongly. She worked with HIC beginning that fall, speaking in court for agency clients. Later, as district



**HIC Director Laura Kuester, left, and Pam Moore, first HIC director, talk to a crowd.**

attorney, Barker continued her support for domestic violence victims and had several victim advocates on her staff.

Dr. Sara Brown was establishing the social work program at Northeastern State University and also made many contributions to the fledgling agency.

“The rules weren’t written yet. We didn’t know we were creating a whole new discipline,” Moore said.

As more volunteers joined the effort and grants started coming in, the program began to take shape. They started a shelter — first in a small house near the campus, later in a big old Victorian house purchased for \$85,000. It could accommodate 10 to 15 women and children.

“In those days, every stick of furniture wound up being used as a bed,” Moore said.

They also worked with the Cherokee Nation for support in combating domestic abuse.

Progress continued as the agency transitioned from Moore’s leader-

ship to Franke’s. At the time she began volunteering, Franke had two small children at home.

“I went and took the training and then was there for 33 years,” Franke said.

She volunteered for 2-1/2 or three years. Then she went to work as volunteer, coordinator, then shelter coordinator, and finally director.

What kept her involved?

“It was the injustice of the situation. It just dug at me. I could not believe that this was the way things were and it was all right,” she said.

Police would be called to a domestic dispute, and they might arrest the man. He’d go to jail, go to court, get released, and the cycle would continue. There seemed to be no way to intervene or stop it.

“Those of us who were crazy, like me, took those women home to our houses because we didn’t have a shelter,” Franke said.

Even after a small house, then a larger one, was acquired, the capacity did not meet the demand.

During Franke’s tenure, the current shelter was built. It was something else people told her couldn’t be done, that she’d need to find a donor who’d come up with \$250,000. Franke knew that was highly unlikely. So the HIC people

**“The rules weren’t written yet. We didn’t know we were creating a whole new discipline.”**

*- Pam Moore,  
Former HIC Director*



**Deana Franke, left, HIC's second director, introduced the agency's first year of participation in the Walk A Mile In Her Shoes fundraiser. Center left is Jyme Lowe, who was HIC prevention coordinator and on the planning team in 2011. At right are volunteers Susan Risley and Rahel Wappler.**

went about it differently.

"We found 250 people who paid us \$1,000 over a one- or two-year period. That's how we got that shelter built," she said.

The shelter has housed anywhere from a dozen women and children to more than 40.

Franke thinks there will always be a need for HIC and its services, although women are becoming more savvy about options if a partner becomes violent.

"I think women know there are options. I think they don't come and go as much," she said. "I've always thought prevention is the only true answer to doing something about it. We've come a long way with talking about relationships, gender, and how to cultivate a good relationship."

People still have unrealistic expectations about what constitutes a marriage or relationship, though, she said. That's exemplified by the continued need for agency services in the same families.

"When I left, we already had three generations — a grandma, a mama and a daughter — who all came to the shelter," she said. "It just sets the generations up for more of the same."

Change is slow, and society is more violent today, Franke believes.

HIC has raised awareness about domestic violence and has helped many area residents, but Kuester still faces many challenges. Chief among them is funding.

"Oklahoma hasn't made the domestic violence problem a priority," she said. "There's not much money that comes from state appropriations."

Most of it comes from federal agencies. As an agency in a small rural community such as Tahlequah, HIC doesn't have access to the large corporations and foundations like its counterparts in large cities.

Kuester is grateful for the amount of money hardworking local people continue to contribute annually.

The shelter is almost always full, and the agency's various programs

help as many as 6,000 people annually in Cherokee, Wagoner, Adair and Sequoyah counties.

HIC is seeing more male victims these days, Kuester said. Some men are coming out and admitting they have been subject to violence in their homes. Wagoner County has a support group for male victims, and the shelter has housed a couple of men.

Almost all of the people the agency sees are those who thought this would never happen to them, that they'd never be victims.

It's a difficult job, but Kuester wouldn't trade it for her former role running a store.

"I honestly have loved every minute of it. I feel very honored to be carrying our torch," she said. "We have a strong team and we're providing services that are saving people's lives every single day."

### Upcoming event:

Help In Crisis is preparing to host a masquerade ball on Oct. 13 at the Chota Center.

The event will start at 6 p.m., which will be a celebration of resilience and strength, showcasing the unwavering spirit of survivors and their journey to healing.

Guests will be treated to several performances, such as an illusionist, fire breathers, stilt walkers, aerial acrobats, and music by DJ Shawn Solo.

As attendees don their masks, they will symbolize the transformation during survivors' healing journeys.

Tickets to the masquerade ball are available for purchase, and all proceeds will go directly to Help In Crisis.

For more information, visit [helpincrisisinc.org](http://helpincrisisinc.org).



## Meet the Author

**Betty Ridge** was a member of the TDP news team for about 10 years, and still writes for special projects. She is retired and lives with her three cats in Springfield, where she is working on her next book. "Deadlines" can be purchased at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



# *Christmas Sale*

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# *A horse is a horse, of course*

## Is the 'real' talking horse, Mister Ed, buried in Tahlequah, or is it a stunt double?

By Dana Eversole

For more than 30 years, a grave marking the final resting place of America's favorite talking horse, Mister Ed, has brought thousands of visitors to Cherokee County, and now, the iconic equine has become an international celebrity.

"Last year, a company out of the United Kingdom called me and wanted my permission to put the location of Mister Ed's grave on a board game," said Gena McPhail, director for Tour Tahlequah.

The company Big Potato created the board game, "Zillionaire's Roadtrip USA."

So, the famous horse - allegedly buried just a few miles north of Tahlequah on the spur of State Highway 82 - has visitors throughout the year, and many even leave treats for the talking horse.

"Mister Ed" was a TV sitcom that initially aired in syndication from Jan. 5 to July 2, 1961. It then showed on CBS from Oct. 1, 1961, to Feb. 6, 1966. The eponymous character was a horse that talked to his "human," Wilbur.

The location in Cherokee County is indeed the gravesite of a horse, but there is some controversy on whether the actual horse buried is Bamboo Harvester, who was the star of the show, or if it is Pumpkin, his stunt double.

McPhail said that last fall, Tulsa's OKPOPS Museum

came to Tahlequah with a spiritual medium and animal communicator, Cindy Kay Jones. The group traveled with McPhail and her staff to the gravesite of Mister Ed. She said the museum filmed a medium trying to determine whether it is Mister Ed in the grave or Pumpkin.

"She said she got messages from both horses," said McPhail.

Clay Pendergraft, intern for Tour Tahlequah, said he believes the gravesite is something tourists visit, but not a lot of local individuals.

"I think it is 100% tourists. People look for the odd and eccentric, and that is Mister Ed's grave," he said.

According to former Northeastern State University students, many of them visited the grave, and some even talked about parties at the gravesite.

"Redgie Snodgrass used to throw parties at the Mister Ed house in the late 1990s. I think his mom lived there. It was mostly BCM and CCF kids," said Dr. Amy Alridge Sandford, NSU graduate from Warner.

Mister Ed retired from the TV show when he got too old and was sent to a farm to rest until he died at age 19.

The show was beloved for many years after its cancellation. Mister Ed ended up in Oklahoma after the show ended and his Hollywood career was over. He lived on the



Just a few miles north of Tahlequah on the spur of State Highway 82 is the purported grave of Mister Ed. Visitors are more than welcome to visit the gravesite and leave treats for the talking horse. It is the gravesite of a horse, but there is some controversy on whether the actual horse buried is Bamboo Harvester, who was the star of the show, or if it is Pumpkin, his stunt double. Mister Ed retired from the show when he got too old and was sent to a farm to rest until he died at age 19.

farm in which he was eventually buried on for the rest of his days until he passed away in 1979.

People now travel to see this loving tribute to him and the large stone mural at this grave site. It features the iconic image of Ed's head through the barn door from the show's opening titles, and even makes use of the TV show's logo. The memorial was dedicated on Aug. 26, 1990, and has been on the grounds ever since, although it has occasionally tipped over.

The show's creators said Mister Ed learned to talk by putting a piece of nylon thread in his mouth; others said it was his trainer who taught him to move his lips on cue when the trainer touched his hoof.

Most visitors and locals believe the horse in the grave is Bamboo Harvester, the palomino born in 1949, who played Mister Ed on television, then retired to the Oklahoma farm where the 5-foot granite marker now stands. He reportedly became sick in 1968 and was euthanized before being laid to rest near a cherry tree in 1970.

But there are several other versions to Mister Ed's death. Alan Young, who played Wilbur Post, the only person to whom Mister Ed would speak on the show, said Harvester actually died accidentally following a shot of tranquilizer in California and was cremated, his ashes spread around by his trainer, Lester Hilton. Young says the horse buried in Oklahoma was a different palomino named Pumpkin, who died in 1979. Pumpkin was used for publicity shots for the show and took up the mantle of Mister Ed after Harvester died, but never played the role on television. A third story has Harvester dying in



**Mister Ed, right, is pictured alongside co-stars Connie Hines, left, and Alan Young, center.**

California and being buried in Oklahoma.

Fans are devoted to the marker on the farm in Tahlequah, regardless of which horse is buried there. The gravestone was marked by a simple wooden cross and a horseshoe until 1990, when a special stone was engraved for Mister Ed, complete with the image of his head sticking out through a barn door. There was a ceremony for its arrival that included a color guard and carrot bouquets.

The marker is engraved cautiously: "According to media reports, Mr. Ed moved to Oklahoma in the late 1960s, after a successful Hollywood career. Mr. Ed continued to

entertain and bring joy to many Oklahomans, finally retiring in this very field. May his memory live long."

McPhail said the farm has had a few different owners since Mister Ed's burial, most of whom have been accepting of the tourist traffic their property receives. Currently, the stone is still standing and is well-tended by the owner. Still, this is private property, so guests be sure to get permission from the homeowners before visiting – and be respectful. The property sits right in an awkward curve of S.H. 82 just north of Tahlequah. It is easy to miss if you aren't looking for it. Look for the GPS coordinates on the

map before setting out, and you should have no problems.

The state tourism site, [travelok.com](http://travelok.com), indicates the grave is the genuine resting place of Mister Ed, and that he retired to Tahlequah to live out his days. But it gives the death year of 1979, which suggests the horse under the marker may be Pumpkin, the "shadow Mister Ed." Bamboo Harvester's life span is usually given as 1949-'70.

The Tahlequah grave marker was only a wooden cross and horseshoe until 1990, when it was replaced by an engraved granite memorial. The Tulsa radio station KMYZ raised funds for the gravestone. On rare occasions, it falls over and must be re-erected.

McPhail said 200 visitors attended the dedication of his grave. Every year, visitors pay homage to the late horse.

"We have had some visitors come through to come see the gravesite," she said. "Some of the folklore says there is no horse. Some say it is a body double. The romantic notion of Mister Ed being buried is still very appealing to visitors, and they like to go out there."

Tourists who want to learn more about the mystery of the grave of the celebrity horse can visit the Tahlequah Area Chamber of Commerce, where they will be given information about the site's location and history. The phone number is 918-456-3742.



## Meet the Author

**Dr. Dana Eversole** is a professor of Media Studies and chair of the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Northeastern State University, where she begins her 35th year this fall. Eversole worked as news editor for the *Daily Press* for two years before taking the job at NSU. She has been a stringer throughout the years for the *Press*. During her tenure at the *Press*, she won many awards, including a Sweepstakes award for investigative reporting from the Oklahoma Associated Press. She was recently named Oklahoma Outstanding Journalism Educator by the Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists. Eversole is serving her second term on the Tahlequah School Board.

# *Giving it a sporting chance*

## Sportswriter at pinnacle of his career recalls humble beginnings, and sparring with Stoops

By John Hoover

**G**rowing up in a backwater Alaskan village didn't prepare me. Playing football at one of Oklahoma's premier high school programs didn't prepare me.

Four years of college — well, that one's probably debatable.

But 19 months working at the Tahlequah Daily Press in the early 1990s absolutely laid a strong foundation that allowed me to be ready to cover big-time college football for *Sports Illustrated*.

Now in my 40th year as a sports writer — two at Ada High School, where I wrote about my own teammates, and 38 professionally for a half-dozen newspapers, three radio stations and now several websites and magazines — it's more and more apparent that I might honestly be the luckiest person I know.

How else to describe the journey of a skinny little red-headed kid, the youngest of six, who grew up on 5th Street in North Pole, Alaska, who threw a football to himself in the front yard during the day and wrote stories about it in a spiral notebook at night, who became publisher of one of *SI*'s leading college websites?

Pure luck. And good editors.

My current gig, covering OU sports for *SI* and Fan Nation (*AllSooners.com*), is the best I've ever had, and I lucked into it just like I lucked into so many others: the Ada Evening News, the Okmulgee Daily Times, the Tahlequah Daily Press, the Tulsa World (for 24 years), *Sporting News* and now *SI* — the standard for sports writing, the very banner under which I long dreamed of writing.



**Joe Mixon, left, and Samaje Perine flank former OU Sooners head coach Bob Stoops, as John Hoover takes a quick pic, far right.**

Seriously, how the heck did this happen?

It's all culminated in two decades of covering University of Oklahoma football, where I've chased down Heisman winners, tackled Hall of Fame coaches and coaxed university presidents and regents to say more than they ever knew they wanted to.

I spent six years covering the NFL for the World, racing between home games in Dallas and Kansas City (I once covered a Cowboys game at noon and a Chiefs game at 7:30 — in the same day), and it was a wonderfully wild ride. But in 2004, I found my true vibe covering the Oklahoma Sooners, and since then, I haven't wanted to work at anything else.

I cut my journalism teeth covering small school football at East Central and Northeastern State, but I always kept a longing eye on Norman, hoping someday I'd get to attend games at Memorial Stadium — and then

write about them for the next day's paper.

This year's season opener, a 73-0 Sooners victory over Arkansas State, was my 233rd OU game to cover as a beat writer or columnist, my 49th in a row — a paltry streak compared to my run of 107 straight from 2004 to 2012.

I'm one lucky guy, and it's been a memorable if unlikely ride.

I've watched and interviewed and written about the best of the best, from Adrian Peterson to Sam Bradford, from Baker Mayfield to Tyler Murray, from Jalen Hurts to Jackson Arnold. Some I covered as high school recruits, and they still remember that. Some led me to New York City, where they cemented their status among the Heisman legends.

Even though he's been retired for six years now, many OU fans still choose to identify me as the soulless jackal in the front row who never

stopped badgering poor Bob Stoops at his press conferences.

Of course, that's a grossly unfair characterization in my eyes.

I mean, I'm pretty sure I have a soul.

In truth, Bob and I always had a mutual respect in our Q&As. You might remember it differently because I was the one reporter he didn't mind cutting off, and I was the one reporter who wouldn't allow himself to be cut off. That led to some good back-and-forths, a few healthy exchanges, and one or two very pointed discussions.

But away from the microphones, Bob and I get along great. I've always liked Bob. Always loved the way he coached, the way he leads young men with class and integrity and accountability. I tell people all the time he's the kind of coach I wished I could have played for.

When Bob landed a spot in the College Football Hall of Fame in 2021, I flew on my own dime to Las Vegas to cover the event, and he appreciated it enough to stop and answer my questions. Every one. We've engaged in tons of small talk over the years. His wife, Carol, always greets me with a warm smile or a wave.

I do know that Bob Stoops can flat-out coach. I'm certain of this because he and I played a golf scramble together once, and about midway through a particularly lousy day of slicing it all over OU's Jimmie Austin course (I'm no golfer, and I may have verbalized displeasure with my game a time or two), he politely asked if I wanted a quick tip. Exasperated, I looked at him and said, "Please. Anything." He said my lower body was coming through the swing too quickly, that my knees were ahead of my hips and my hips were ahead of my shoulders, and that if I could slow my rotation from the bottom up, I'd hit the ball straighter.

Guess what happened? No more slices.

Honestly, I'm not sure Nick Saban could fix my swing like that.

I've now covered the Bob Stoops, Lincoln Riley and Brent Venables eras at Oklahoma. From the Tulsa



**Former OU Sooners coach Bob Stoops talks to reporters.**

World to KRXO-FM The Franchise to Sporting News and SI/Fan Nation, my duties have evolved (I now have my own podcast and YouTube channel), but my obligations remain: Give readers (and listeners and viewers) the most comprehensive coverage of OU football possible.

Our five-person staff at AllSooners covers every press conference, every practice, every interview and every football game, home and away. I haven't missed an OU bowl game in 20 years. We're traveling to Cincinnati and Provo this year, and we'll be blazing trails in the SEC next year.

Truly, no amount of loving sports as a kid or playing sports in high school or even studying sports writing in college could have prepared me for the level of coverage our staff pours into AllSooners. Game days can stretch to 20 hours. We wake up early, we work late and we stay until the job is done.



**John Hoover** was sports editor for TDP in the early '90s before spending 24 years at the Tulsa World. After a six-year run in radio, he's returned to the written word as publisher of AllSooners, covering OU for Sports Illustrated/Fan Nation. John lives in Broken Arrow with his wife and two kids.

## Meet the Author

# Stories for the spooky season

## Local residents recall hair-raising experiences

By Layce Gardner

**B**igfoot. Aliens. Loch Ness Monster. Atlantis. Demons. Guardian angels. Dragons. UFOs. Bermuda Triangle. Ghosts.

Many people don't believe in any of those things. I should know. I'm one of them. Sure, I've sat around the campfire with a flashlight held under my chin and recounted spooky tales. But that's just what they are — tales. Stories that are designed to frighten and entertain.

I have heard of the spooky happenings around Tahlequah. The haunting of Hunter's Home. Ghostly footsteps and unexplainable orbs in Seminary Hall. The antics of the Cherokees' Little People.

I wanted to write about real people and their real experiences with the otherworldly. So, to that end, I put on my reporter hat and set out with my trusty notebook and pen.

My first stop was at the doorstep of Joe.

Joe is not his real name. He wished to remain anonymous. He said people looked at him differently when he told them he believed in ghosts.

So, you do believe in ghosts?

Joe nodded vigorously. "I believe in them, all right. But I've never seen one."

Really? Then how can you be sure they exist?

"Easy," he said. "I've never actually seen a million dollars, but I know it exists."

He had me there.

"One evening, about 35 years ago, I was riding my motorcycle with my girlfriend on back," he began. "We were just joyriding, you know, out on country roads. I rode right by the Ross Cemetery."



**Ross Cemetery is the source of some disconcerting tales.**

Ross Cemetery is where John Ross, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation during the Trail of Tears, is buried.

Joe paused, staring off into the distance like he was reliving the event in his mind.

Go on.

"I parked the bike and we walked in to the cemetery. We were very respectful. Didn't step on any graves, nothing like that." Again, he paused.

Go on.

"We weren't in there but five minutes. We walked back to the bike, but..." he paused for effect, then lowered his voice to a whisper, "It wasn't there."

It disappeared?

"Yep. It was gone. We started to walk back toward town. Had no other choice. And that's when we saw it."

The motorcycle? Where was it?

"It was about 100 yards away, up a hill, hidden in some trees."

How did it get there?

"That's what I'd like to know," Joe said. "It was uphill, on its kickstand, in a thicket of trees. There's no way it could've gotten there on its own. Somebody or something had to move it there."

OK. Is that all?

Joe shook his head and said, "Two days later, I went back out there by my-

self. My girlfriend refused to go with me after last time. Drove my little VW Bug. Same thing happened."

Your car disappeared?

He nodded. "Just like in a David Copperfield show. Here one minute, then Poof!"

Let me guess. You found it in the same spot?

"Nope," Joe said. "I never found it. I never went back out there again, either."

I don't blame you.

My next stop was Sarah's house. She asked me not to use her real name.

Sarah and I sat on her porch steps with a mug of hot apple cider and I asked if she'd ever seen a ghost.

"Sure," she said. "I grew up with a half-ghost."

Oh, that begged so many questions. What do you mean by "grew up with?"

Sarah explained, "She was always there. In the house. Ever since I could remember. She was always in the kitchen, in the corner, ironing. She never looked at you, just kept on ironing. And you know the weird part?"

You mean it gets weirder than an ironing ghost?

"There was only half of her that you could see," she said.

Which half?

"The top half. From the ironing board up. She never talked, but she was a real good listener."

Even after hearing Sarah's story, I still wasn't convinced about the existence of ghosts. I was going to have to find some type of evidence, something more than hearsay. Toward this end, I knocked on the door of one of the oldest houses in the historic part of Tahlequah. A woman answered. I introduced myself and asked if she'd ever had any ghosts in her home.

"How did you know?" she asked in a scared voice. "Who told you?" She looked both ways up and down the street as if she were expecting hordes of ghosts. Or people. Or aliens.

I'll call her Amy. Again, she didn't want me to use her real name.

She invited me in, drew the curtains in her living room, perched on the edge of the sofa, and explained her jitters, "Sorry. I've never told a single soul about any of this."

Any of what?

"I like yard sales," Amy said. "I go to as many as I can. This one time, I found an old phone. You know, those heavy black phones from way back. 1940s or '50s. Rotary dial."

I knew the phones she was talking about. Landline. Pre-cell phones.

"I saw this phone sitting off to the side. I wanted it. But it didn't have a price tag on it. In fact, the woman taking the money had never seen the phone before. She had no idea where it came from. I offered her five dollars and she took it," Amy said.

I nodded. I liked where this story was going.

"I put it on a stand in my sitting room. I thought it was a good, you know, conversation piece." She shook her head. "I had no idea what would happen. No idea."

What? What happened?

"I was asleep in bed that night. The phone rang. At first I thought it was my cell phone. But then I realized it had one of those old rings. Brrrrr," she buzzed, making an old phone ring sound.

"I walked into the sitting room, all groggy from sleep, and it kept ringing. I swear to goodness, it kept ringing."

What did you do?

"I answered it, of course," she said. "That was a big mistake."

By now my eyes were big and I felt a cold shiver run down my spine.



**Some area residents say they've seen ghostly orbs in NSU's Seminary Hall.**

Amy continued her story, "I heard static. Loud static. Then a creepy old woman's voice said, plain as day, "Help me."

Help her with what?

Amy shrugged. "That's all she said, "Help. Me."

What did you do?

"I hung up. I had my husband check the phone the next day. It wasn't hooked up to anything. There was no explanation for the ringing and the voice I heard," Amy said.

"I almost convinced myself that I was dreaming. Or hallucinating. Then it happened again the next night."

"And the next. And the next. Ring. 'Help me.' Ring. 'Help me.' I thought I was losing my mind."

Did you ever get it to stop? Where is the phone?

"I sold it," she said. "Had my own yard sale and sold it for five bucks."

Whew.

I was relieved for a moment, then I realized that out there somewhere is some unsuspecting, sleepless person, who has to hear this woman cry for help each night.

After hearing these stories, I still don't know if I believe in ghosts, but I do know one thing for sure: The three people I talked to definitely believe in ghosts.

But, next time your phone rings in the middle of the night, I bet you'll think about the yard sale phone and the ghostly voice crying for help.

I know I do.



## Meet the Author

**Layce Gardner** graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Theater from Northeastern State University. She is a playwright, screenwriter, novelist, and special writer for the Tahlequah Daily Press.

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