

The Mabel Bassett Balance

SPEAK THE TRUTH. ELEVATE THE COMMUNITY. SHIFT THE VIEW.

Vol. 2 | Issue 2 | December 2025

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Photo by Lance West



Painting by Jax

The Mabel Bassett Balance

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Vision statement: Speak the truth. Elevate the community. Shift the view.
Mission: Our mission is to inspire hope and advocacy within our community.

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Ideas? Feedback? Concerns? We’d love to hear from you!

We are always looking to uphold a standard of excellence. Our aim is that every member of the broader community at Mabel Bassett feels their perspective and voice are welcome in this publication. To submit story ideas or provide feedback, contact:
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Staff photo. Front, from left: Melissa Antonucci, The Balance co-advisor, Crystal Avilla, Michelle Walker, Victoria Hooper, guest contributor Rachel Rivera, Jax, Sharee Asberry, Lindsey Smith, Tabitha “Angelica” Mattison, and Erica “E” Bonner. Not pictured: Dusti Rickert and Heather Barbee, and co-advisors Clytie Bunyan and Lenora LaVictoire. (Photo by Kimberly Wenthold)

FROM THE EDITORS

Happy Holidays MBCC

We are so proud to present our second holiday issue of The Mabel Bassett Balance. It seems like only yesterday we were sitting around a table tapping our pencils, struggling to come up with story ideas for our brand-new newspaper. Now, we are on our fifth issue. Time sure flies when you are having fun.

We have some fantastic news we would like to share with you, our community.

First, a Balance submission box has been placed in the gym if you would like to submit story ideas, recipes, book reviews, etc. You can also submit letters to the editors, and if yours is chosen, an excerpt may appear

in a future issue of The Balance.

Second, The Mabel Bassett Balance won first place for “Best Debut” paper and second place for “Best Overall” in the 2025 American Penal Press Contest. The national competition received 179 submissions from 21 prison publications across nine states, and they chose us. We want to thank all of you. Our success could not have happened without your support and encouragement. To the residents who eagerly await the next issue and the staff who make sure we are able to distribute it to everybody, thank you.

Wishing you love, peace and cheer,

*Sharee Asberry
Crystal Avilla
Jax*



An exercise in accountability

Crystal Avilla | Editor

Some think of incarceration as a time out from real life. A time to eat, sleep, and have fun with friends. It is easy to forget that no matter how much we hate being here, this time still counts for us just as much as it counts for our family beyond the razor wire. For the time being, we are part of a different kind of community. The people around us—the elderly ladies with walkers, the frenzied workline population rushing to work in the morning, the women throwing bread to the birds or setting out bowls of food for the cats, the twenty-somethings laughing loudly at some inside joke—they are our community, and not one of us are greater than the other.

Living in such close quarters can be hard under the best of circumstances, but the lack of privacy, constant bombardment of noise and the chaos of prison, combined with the traumas we have each experienced in our lives can develop into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is exposure to a traumatic event that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. PTSD does not have to occur from one major event but can develop from repeated exposure to low-level stressors over an extended period and can affect prison residents as well as employees.

By our words and actions, we may inadvertently be hurting the people around us without realizing it. PTSD affects people in a variety of ways, manifesting as physical symptoms such as high blood pressure or panic attacks, among other things. Some may shut down, isolating themselves by putting up a mental wall to shield themselves from further trauma. These survivors are often referred to as being 'resilient' because they outwardly seem unaffected but often suffer silently and alone. Others may lash out verbally or physically or engage in behaviors they know will irritate others as a way of gaining control over the overwhelming emotions they feel.

Because we are so interconnected, everything we do matters to another person, whether good or bad. Even if they do not acknowledge it—or even notice it—it matters. This holiday season, make a resolution to be more aware of every person around you. Resolve to be kinder, more patient and respectful. Over time, the effects of that resolution will ripple outward to the entire community, resulting in a more peaceful environment for everyone.

If you are unsure how to begin, here are some suggestions:

- If you see a piece of trash, pick it up. It does not have to be a bagful. Every candy wrapper or piece of paper helps.
- Dump your own tray in the kitchen. This is respectful to the kitchen workers and the people behind you who need a place to sit.
- Do not cut in line. The line goes much faster when people do not go straight to the front. Plus, when you cut in line you are telling every person behind you that they do not matter.
- Clean up after yourself. This includes stacking your chair, wiping the microwave out when you are done, and not leaving trash in the shower. Not only does it signal to someone else that you are done and they can use it, but it saves someone else from having to clean up after you.
- Say please and thank you. Everybody likes to be appreciated, and a smile goes a long way to making the people around you feel seen.

If you find it hard to let go of anger or resentment holding you back from changing, ask yourself how you would act if those around you were your mother, your grandmother, or your children. How would you expect them to be treated? Though we may not have chosen this community, we all belong to it. This holiday season, let us commit to making life better for those around us.

Una practica en responsabilidad

Crystal Avilla | Directora

Traducido por **Rachel Rivera** | colaboradora invitada

Unos piensan que estando encarcelada solamente es un descanso de la vida real. Un tiempo para comer, y divertirse con amigos. Es fácil de olvidar lo tanto que odiamos estar aquí, que es tiempo es un peso tanto para nuestras familias como a nosotros. Por el momento que estamos aquí, somos parte de una comunidad diferente. La gente que nos rodea - los ancianos, mujeres en andadores, la población frenética de trabajadores que van de prisa por la mañana, las mujeres dándole pan para comer a los pájaros, una olla de comida a los gatos, las veinte tantos riéndose de los chistes - ellas son nuestra comunidad, y ninguna de nosotros somos mayor que la otra.

Viviendo tan cercas una a la otra puede ser difícil aun estando en las mejores circunstancias, pero sin privacidad, el constante ruido, combinado con los traumas que hemos experimentado se puede convertir en Trastorno de Estrés Posttraumático (TEPT), lo cual es exponerse a un evento traumático que puede agobiar la habilidad de una persona arreglárselas. TEPT no tiene que ocurrir de solo un mayor evento, puede desarrollarse de la exposición que se repite sobre bajos niveles de estresantes durante un periodo y eso puede afectar tanto los residentes encarcelados como a los empleados.

Con nuestras palabras y acciones, puede ser que estamos haciéndoles daño a las personas que nos rodean sin querer. TEPT afecta la gente de diferentes maneras, manifestándose en síntomas físicos como la alta presión, ataques de pánico, o cosas. Otros pueden cerrarse, aislándose de alguna manera cerrando su mente para protegerse de más trauma. Estos sobrevivientes son conocidos como 'resistente,' porque por fuera no se ven afectados, pero por dentro sufren en silencio y solos. Otras atacan verbal-

mente o físicamente o se comportan de alguna manera irritante para otros para tomar en control de sus emociones.

Porque cada quien somos conectados, todo lo que hacemos cuenta bueno o malo aunque no le des importancia - o lo reconoces - importa. Estos días de fiesta has una decisión para ser más amable, más paciente y respetuosa. Con tiempo, los efectos de esa resolución afectara la comunidad, resultando en un ambiente de paz.

Si no estas seguro en como empezar, aquí hay algunas recomendaciones:

- Si vez un pedazo de basura, levántalo. No tiene que ser una bolsa llena. Cada pedazo de papel ayuda.
- Vacía tu plato en la basura cuando estés en la cocina. Esto es ser respetuosa con las trabajadoras de la cocina y con la gente que se sientan a comer después de ti.
- Limpia tu espacio. Esto incluye recogiendo la sía, limpiando el microondas cuando termines, y no dejes tu basura en la ducha. No tan solo es una señal que ya terminaste y lo pueden usar, pero también hace que otros no tengan que limpiar detrás de ti.
- Di por favor y gracias. Todos decíamos ser agradecidos, y una sonrisa va a allá dejando les saber que no son olvidadas.

Si se te hace difícil soltar el enojo o el resentimiento que detiene el poder de ser ese cambio, pregúntate en como actuarías si los que te rodean fuera tu madre, tu abuela o tus hijos. ¿Como esperes que alguien se comporte con ellos? Aunque no hemos escocado esta comunidad, todos pertenecemos a ella. Estos días festivos vamos hacer un pacto para que las vidas de los demás sea mejor.

THANKS

A note of thanks from The Balance co-advisors Melissa Antonucci and Clytie Bunyan. You might remember seeing them in August when we hand delivered your newspapers.



Melissa Antonucci
MBB Co-Advisor

Thank you for letting me into your spaces. I have been a regular visitor to MBCC for almost three years. I have seen where you worship, where you learn, where you train your dogs, where you socialize. But I had never seen the places where you carve out what little space you can for yourselves. Prison and privacy are seemingly foreign to one another, but even as you live your lives in the open, you have found ways to bring your personalities into existence.

I have witnessed the joy and frustrations that exist in long-term relationships. I have watched as new bonds of friendship developed, and I have seen the unfortunate demise of friendships. Through it all, though, you remain a community. The Mabel Bassett Balance exists for you—for this community. Part of our mission includes sharing your experiences with those beyond the razor wire. They need to remember you, and they need to hear you. But our primary focus will always be you.

I would like to also thank Captain Reed for staying late to escort us as we distributed the fourth installment of The Balance. As well, thank you Acting Warden Brewer for giving us this unique opportunity.

—Melissa Antonucci



Clytie Bunyan
MBB Co-Advisor

For more than a year now, I have had the privilege of serving as an adviser to the women who produce the Mabel Bassett Balance through the Prison Journalism Project. What began as an exercise that models real-world news production has grown into something deeper — a space where writers support one another, exchange ideas and strengthen their community through shared storytelling.

In August, the advisers joined the PJP staff as they distributed the latest issue across the facility. Moving from building to building, we watched as women reached for the paper — some out of curiosity, others with clear anticipation for the voices and stories waiting inside.

Their reactions said everything. The enthusiasm, the gratitude, and the quiet moments of connection underscored the trust these readers place in the work created by their peers. It was a reminder that the Mabel Bassett Balance is not just a publication. It is a bridge — built by incarcerated journalists, carried by community and welcomed with genuine respect.

—Clytie Bunyan

The cost of a lifeline

Lindsey Smith and Michelle Walker | Staff Writers

Krysta Muniz talks to her mom at least twice a day, a consistent routine for over five years. Coming to prison before the age of 22, she had to grow into an adult, not through lunch dates and shopping sprees with mom, but through phone calls.

Phone calls serve as a lifeline for those in ODOC custody, but in some states they come at a hefty price. Earlier this year, phone call costs for those incarcerated in Oklahoma prisons fell from 14 cents to 6 cents, only to return to the original rate a few months later. The spike in prices impacts friends and families of those incarcerated, who are now forced to again bear higher prices.

“I have to hear her voice at night,” said Krysta’s mom, Kim Muniz, a waitress with a teenager still at home. “I need to know she’s okay.” Krysta says her mom will call the prison if she has not heard from her. Averaging two phone calls a day via Securus, the communications provider to Oklahoma prisons, to stay connected, Kim spends almost \$300 a month.

The Martha Wright-Reed Act, signed into law by President Biden in 2023, directed the Federal Communications Commission to issue “just and reasonable” regulations for incarcerated people’s communication services. In compliance with the legislation, the FCC lowered rate caps on phone and video calls and prohibited cash and in-kind commissions, such as services, staff or equipment, from the providers to prisons.

However, on Jun. 30, 2025, the FCC rescinded the rate reduction until Apr. 1, 2027.

Now, friends and loved ones of the incarcerated in Oklahoma are again paying the maximum amount allowed by the federal government.

The high price of phone calls is not inevitable. According to Oklahoma Watch, neighboring states such as Texas, Missouri and Arkansas have held phone calls at five cents to 6 cents per minute instead of mandating the rate cap of 14 cents.

While Krysta and Kim sacrifice financially to stay connected, not all residents have the means to maintain daily contact. Many families live paycheck to paycheck and struggle with any additional



Lifeline. Connections with loved ones make a vital difference to those in prison. (Photo by Freepik)

financial expense.

Research has confirmed that connections with loved ones make a vital difference to those in prison. According to a 2018 R Street Institute article, the actual proven benefits are better behavior while incarcerated and reduced recidivism once released. These connections also improve mental health, preserve support systems and offer a sense of hope to residents and their families.

“They remind me of the light at the end of the tunnel,” Krysta said. “And remind me of who I was before I came to prison.”

The families share the prison experience with their incarcerated loved one, both the emotional and financial hardships. While Krysta is the one serving a sentence, Kim often tells her daughter, “We have four more years.”

Editor’s Note: Since the writing of this article, the FCC voted on Oct. 28, 2025 to cap prison phone calls at 11 cents per minute opposed to the six cents previously agreed to, with an approved inflation rate of 6.7% included in the ruling, phone call rates will likely reach 12 cents a minute. The FCC decided to reinstate the ban on commissions and in-kind payments to the Departments of Correction. Source: Oklahoma Watch

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SEPTEMBER 1, 2025 SECURUS-ODOC CONTRACT:

- Annual fixed-site cash access fee paid by Securus to ODOC increased from \$580,000 to \$3,750,000
- \$2.2 million dollars paid from Securus to ODOC for in-kind security technology such as the digital mail center, body scanners and email readers

Surviving the silly season

Jax | Editor

I open the bag of chips bottom side up so I can more easily get to the salty crumbs stuck to the sides of the bag. Not a bit of these calories are going to waste. This is my self-soothing, feeding my emotional animal needs, and if I am going to blow up my diet and smash out an entire bag of chips in one setting, I plan on getting the most out of it.

The holidays and I do not get along, and occasionally, I devolve into negative coping mechanisms instead of doing the right thing. I have been in prison for almost 30 years. I am tired of spending these family-centered seasons away from home. Like so many of us, I have also experienced tragedies during the holiday season that complicate my grief with loss.

My usual coping mechanism against stress and emotional instability is exercise. I enjoy yoga and can easily find space to workout. I do not need any special equipment to do yoga or make laps on the track, and exercising releases endorphins that elevate my mood.

“Staying active and engaging in physical exercise is the number one treatment for depression,” said Nancy Lucas, Mabel Bassett Mental Health Department’s acting clinical coordinator. “I recommend exercise as the first line of defense against the holiday blues.”

Not everyone enjoys exercise, though, and bad weather forces many of us indoors when we would rather be outside. The following five tips are those I have found helpful in dealing with the stress and nostalgia associated with the end of every year.

Pressure to make the perfect holiday is as real inside prison as outside. We get frustrated when Canteen fails to have the sour cream we need for our perfect mock cheesecake or if we cannot find anything in our property bag that we can use to make a gift to send home to the newest grandbaby, or in my case, great-grandbaby.

The first coping mechanism to get through the holidays is to set real-

istic expectations. Start your plans early, whenever possible. Give yourself enough time to get presents made and shipped. Have a back-up for any meal plans, and a back-up for your back-up. Everyone else is also trying to make a perfect holiday, too, so try to minimize competition for microwaves and space. Make your food in advance, as much as possible, and heat dishes the day of your special meal.

We also need to prioritize self-care. Before the holiday season began, I took a week off from the many activities and jobs I do every day. I knew I needed to emotionally prepare myself for the upcoming events and commitments. Self-care is not only prioritizing down time, though. It includes taking care of yourself physically by eating well, staying hydrated and doing what you need to do to keep your mind straight. Do something for yourself that brings you joy, like playing a video game or sitting in the sunshine on a nice day.

Do not forget to establish boundaries with your friends and loved ones. Sometimes it feels like people are pulling at us from every direction. Giving people are often called upon by others throughout the holidays. Expectations of others can be quite unrealistic. This goes for emotional giving as well as material. Redirect conversations when your friends and loved ones are being too demanding upon you. Set limits and keep them. Understand that “no” is a complete sentence; you do not have to meet everyone else’s needs.

Finally, develop an attitude of mindfulness and gratitude. Often, I keep a gratitude journal this time of year. In it, I write down all the little lovely moments or acts of compassion that bring a smile to my face, even in prison. I try to remember to be grateful for the things from which I no longer suffer or the simple fact that I am still able to celebrate with my friends and loved ones, both those in prison and those so very far away.

Sobreviviendo la temporada tonta

Jax | Directora

Traducido por **Rachel Rivera** |
Colaboradora invitada

A bro la bolsa de papitas por lo debajo para alcanzar migas de sal que están pegadas en a bolsa. Ninguna se estas calorías se echaran a perder. Esta es la manera de calmare, alimentando mis necesidades emocional de animal y si voy a echar perder mi dieta y comer toda la bolsa completa de papitas de una vez, planeo recibir lo máximo de esto.

Los días festivos y yo no nos llevamos bien, y a vez encunado me regreso a resolver cosas de alguna manera negativa en lugar de hacer las cosas bien. Tengo casi 30 anos en la prisión. Estoy cansada de pasar estos días festivos que festejamos en familia lejos de casa. Como varias de nosotros, yo ha experimentado tragedias durante esta temporada festivo que complica mi dolor con la perdida de un ser querido.

La manera usual en la que yo resuelvo el estrés y la inestabilidad de mis emociones es en hacer ejercicios. Me encanta la yoga fácilmente puedo encontrar espacio para eso. No necesito algo especial para hacer yoga o para ir a caminar, y en haciendo ejercicios hay una fuga de algún cierto químico que eleva mi humor.

“El tratamiento numero uno para la depresión es en estar activo y haciendo algo físico,” dice la coordinadora clínico e Estado de Salud de Mabel Bassett. “Recomiendo ser ejercicios como a primera defensa en contra la tristeza.”

No a todos les encanta ser ejercicios, el mal clima hace anos quedarse adentro cuando deseamos estar afuera. Los siguiente cinco consejos encontré útil para el estrés y la nostalgia relacionada con el fin del ano.

La presión de realizar una perfecta temporada festivo es tan real dentro de la prisión como estando afuera de as rejas. Nos frustramos cuando en la tienda no hay sour cream para hacer nuestra receta perfecta de cheesecake o si no encontramos algo en nuestra propiedad para hacer un regalo y enviárselo a nuestro reciente nieto, o en mi caso, mi bisnieto.

La primera manera de navegar esta

temporada festiva es tener una esperanza realista. Comienza tus planes temprano, cuanto antes posible. Deja suficiente tiempo para recoger regalos y enviarlos a casa. Ten un segundo plan para la comida, y un segundo plan para ese plan. Todos también están intentando hacer perfecto una temporada festivo, intenta reducir la competencia por el microonda y el espacio. Prepara a comida antes de tiempo, lo mas posible, luego todo lo que queda es calentar la comida.

También tienes que hacer prioridad nuestro bien estar. Antes de esta temporada festivo comenzara, toma una semana de todas las actividades y trabajos que hago diario. Sabia que necesitaba prepararme para los eventos que estaban por llegar y los compromisos. Nuestro bien estar no solo es haciendo prioridad nuestro tiempo libre. Esto también incluye comiendo saludable, estar hidratado y haciendo todo lo posible para tener una mente estable. Has algo por ti misma que te trae gozo como jugar un vídeo juego o siéntete afuera en el solazo en un bonito día.

No olvides establecer limites con tus amigos y con nuestros seres queridos. A veces sientes que todos te están estirando a cada lado al mismo tiempo. La gente que siempre esta dispuesto a todo son a los que buscan durante esta temporada para ayudar. Las esperanzas que otros tienen a veces no son realista. Esto también es para los que dan emocionalmente tanto como en lo material. Cambia la conversación cuando tus amigos o tus seres queridos requieren demasiado de ti. Pon un limite y quédate firme en tu decisión. Entiende que “no” es una frase completa; y no tienes que atender las necesidades de todos.

Finalmente, desarrolla una actitud de gratitud y ser atento. A menudo toma un diario durante esta temporada del ano. Escribe todos los momentos lindos o actos de compasión que me traen una sonrisa, aun en la prisión. Intenta de recordar de ser agradecida por las cosas de las que ya no sufro o simplemente que aun puedo segur celebrando con mis amigos y mis seres queridos, los que están en la prisión y a los que están lejos.

On the road to victory

Tiesha “T. I.” Ealey | Guest Contributor

It is all about the rhythm and keeping the beat. Boots stomp. Hands clap and slap on thighs and feet. Straight lines. Stomp, stomp. Crossover. Stomp, stomp. Hollered cadences direct the ladies as they make their way across the yard. Residents of Mabel Bassett Correctional Center cheer and watch the show or shout encouragement as they go about their own activities.

“Parade rest!” Boots crash one last time and the sounds stop as team members place their hands behind their backs. “Parade pretty!” The ladies push out a hip from their resting position and smile sweetly

This is your Mabel Bassett drill team stomping their way toward better lives.

Patricia “T” Rucker started the drill team in the early 2000s and every time the other members and I saw her walk in the door it was important. We knew someone cared about us, and the drills we did made us see a new perspective in life.

The drill team offers participants a different path than one that can lead them

toward potential negative behavior. The program gives them structure and a sense of security and belonging to something bigger than themselves that leads to hope. Through our program, we have built a sisterhood for one another.

The first part of our program is physical. I teach many of the same drills Rucker taught me when I was a member in my 20s. We use dance techniques with the stomping styles, too. We show our emotions through crunking—a type of dance similar to but harder hitting than hip-hop. Dance and coordinated stepping fill a need for self-confidence and joy.

Drill involves marching and stomping, but it is also about structure and teamwork. It encourages participants to make good choices as a group and as individuals. “It has taught me how to stay strong and keep pushing,” said Mariely “Fatty” Lopez. When the ladies do a good job, stomping on the yard in front of our peers is the reward.

Drill Team is not only physical. It is also about personal growth.

We teach self-esteem, self-control and communication classes throughout the day. Most of the teaching materials I use come from Mabel Bassett Correctional Center’s Acting Clinical Coordinator Nancy Lucas. She guides me through the lessons and gives me an understanding of how to teach the material to the members. She has also allowed me to process some of the group

problems and come up with possible solutions for change.

Participants also keep journals to write down their feelings, what their day has been like and whether they were able to walk away from challenges they may have faced. Team member Anastasia “Stasia” Pitts said, “I didn’t know my own strength ‘til it was put to the test, and I didn’t know the power I possessed until I was forced to look in the mirror.”

Our goal is to overcome the prison mentality with victory for ourselves and as a sisterhood—victory to live how we are meant to live and make good decisions that positively impact our futures.

The bonds we are making have brought us closer together. I now know these women much better than before. They have been through a lot, and I never knew how much hardship they suffered. It was different for me, but I understand them all the same. We all need someone to talk to who can relate to our situations and our upbringings.

This is our own prison version of a sorority, dedicated to integrity, honesty and accountability. This may not be what people expect from us in prison, but we found a way to create our own peace. “I’m thankful for the sisterhood we have become,” said Lopez. “We pick each other up when we feel we’re falling.”

We are accepting new members. Those interested in joining can catch



Drill team members stomp the yard in the sunshine while others watch the show. (Photo by Victoria Hooper)

up with us on the yard or send a request to Case Manager Cadence Howard in C-1B.

Special thanks to Acting Clinical Coordinator Nancy Lucas for her guidance with teaching materials.

Case Manager Cadence Howard in C-1B reviews our materials, encourages us and keeps up with our personal lives, including reading journal entries.

Security staff, especially Captains Robert Reed and Juan Sanchez, support us as well. Reed visits during his shifts to cheer us on. Sanchez has provided access to the dining hall and the yard during our teaching and drilling sessions.

We also work in the gym two days a week thanks to accommodations from Coach Jared McCord and James Wall. These dedicated spaces to practice away from the housing unit help us focus on perfecting our routines.

CareerTech graduates celebrate achievements

Victoria Hooper | Staff Writer

Mabel Bassett’s CareerTech graduates, donning caps and gowns, celebrated their graduation in the visitation area on Oct. 15, 2025.

CareerTech is a vocational program that requires 1,050 hours of book work and hands-on training. This program allows Mabel Bassett Correctional Center residents the opportunity to pursue and earn certifications in different trades that can be used during and after incarceration. These trades include HVAC, residential and commercial electrical and plumbing.

“The importance of CareerTech is that it gives an opportunity for someone to earn a living wage,” said Career



CareerTech. Graduates of the MBCC Career Tech program pose with their diplomas in the visitation area on Oct. 15. Two graduates, Patricia Welker and Tye Shafer, received additional journeyman licenses. (Photo by Amanda Purcell)

Tech instructor and supervisor Tony Caskey.

Fourteen graduates walked, shook hands, posed for pictures and enjoyed cake and ice cream.

“Awesome, best prison day ever,” said CareerTech graduate Danielle Dyer. “No matter what job I go to this is gonna be a huge asset,” she stated through a mouth full of ice cream.

Please acknowledge this year CareerTech graduates and their accomplishments.

- Brianna Indiveri – Residential Electrician’s Assistant
- Sheree Brown – Residential Plumbing Technician
- Jessica Vasquez – Residential Plumbing Technician
- Jade Burns – Residential Electrician’s Assistant
- Dalyua Orwig – Residential Electrician’s Assistant

- Leanna Brooks – Residential/Light Commercial HVAC/R Technician
- LaTarsha Grant – Residential/Light Commercial HVAC/R Technician
- Briana Lee – Residential Electrician’s Assistant
- Tina Morgan – Residential Plumbing Technician
- Danielle Dyer – Residential Plumbing Technician
- Amber Metzker – Residential Electrician’s Assistant
- Erica Bonner – Residential/Light Commercial HVAC/R Technician
- Special Congratulations to:
- Patricia Welker – HVAC Journeyman License/Tutor
- Tye Shafer – HVAC Journeyman License



Graduates. MBCC graduates from various education programs pose in their caps and gowns in the education building on Oct. 22. Bottom, from left: Dina Courville, Kimberly Wenthold, Tyalea Britt. Top, from left: Kaleigh Fryer, Krysta Muniz, Victoria Hooper, Ashley Ricks, Delores Roach. (Photo by Lance West)

Pomp and circumstance at Mabel

Michelle Walker | Staff Writer

On Oct. 22, 2025, the annual Mabel Bassett Correctional Center graduation procession made its way past sidewalks of cheering residents and staff holding banners and tossing confetti. It is a sight most never forget, and tears are common.

In the past 12 months, 34 women achieved their high school equivalency diplomas, and eight college students earned degrees from Rose State College and Northwestern Oklahoma State University.

The high school equivalency graduates toiled many hours under the guidance of MBCC teachers and education tutors to earn their high school degrees; however, their biggest obstacle was often learning to trust themselves.

Graduate Shirician Thornton said, “My biggest wall was having to believe I could do it.”

Many of the women, such as Patricia Spann, graduate and current college student, came from environments that did not prioritize education. “I’m 52 years old, the first in seven generations to graduate [high school].”

Education provides incarcerated people with not only a firm foundation for future career opportunities, but it also increases the likelihood they will pass on the value of education to future generations.

The eight college graduates invested time, effort, and many thousands of dollars pursuing

their degrees. This year’s graduates obtained a cumulative grade point average exceeding 3.64, well above the national average of 3.15 according to BestColleges. Many of them are role models not only in the education program but on the yard as well.

Kimberly Wenthold never thought she would have a college degree much less a bachelor’s. “Don’t let fear of the unknown hold you back,” she said.

The participating high school equivalency graduates are:

Valedictorian Danielle Dyer, Hannah Birkes, Ahndrea Boyiddle, Rilee Brown, Vicktoria DeFrance, Tabitha Derryberry, Stephanie Duckett, Phasasha Garcia, Sara Garoutte, Jade Harbor, Shanese Henry, Jasmine Hill, Ericka Johnson, Amber Killer, Ashley Lena, Lucia Martinez, Ashley Mayfield, Madison Robinette, Thania Sanchez, Belinda Smith, Patricia Spann, Amanda Stowers, Shanai Thomas, Shirician Thornton, Tabetha Townsend and Fantasee Williams. Those not present were Tina Ainsworth, Stacia Guinn, Amber Henry, Crystal Nichols, Brianna Petty, Lottie Robedeaux and Alawna White.

The Rose State College (RSC) Associates in Arts Liberal Studies graduates are:

Dina Christmas (Courville), Kaleigh Fryer, Victoria Hooper, Krysta Muniz, Ashley Ricks and Delores Roach.

The RSC associate in Applied Science Business Administration graduate is Tyalea Britt.

Awarded her bachelor’s in Business Administration with a minor in marketing from Northwestern Oklahoma State University is Kimberly Wenthold.

Congratulations to all the graduates.

Halloween Showcase scares away the blues

Jax | Editor

Ladies crowded into the gym, met by zombie-painted faces and mummies wrapped in tissue. Mabel Bassett Correctional Center’s Choir, Drama Club, music students and the drill team presented a Halloween Showcase on Oct. 31, 2025.

The choir performed a quick warm-up exercise, then the rhythmic sounds of a dozen pairs of stomping feet and slapping hands rolled down the center aisle in time with a called cadence. The crowd erupted in cheers and applause. As the performances progressed, incarcerated residents and staff joined in a celebration of the varied talents of the MBCC residents.

“The music itself is wonderful, but what music does for the mind and the spirit, how it empowers the individual and elevates the community—that’s what I’m trying to accomplish,” said MBCC resident and choir director Sonia Weidenfelder.

Choir member Allegra Thomas enjoys practice with the group of 20 women. “This is the best part of my day,” she said.

Weidenfelder showcased work by music students currently taking lessons and enlisted help from members of the yard band to accompany the choir with Halloween-themed song selections, culminating in Michael Jackson’s 1982 classic “Thriller,” dancing zombies included.

The drama club presented “The Real Housewives of Transylvania” and a “Sleepy Hollow” skit. Drama director Melissa Clark moderated the club’s offerings.

“Immersing yourself in a character is a powerful way to work through anger, grief and trauma in a safe space,” Clark stated. She said role-playing and the collaborative efforts of group work instills confidence, teaches public speaking skills and reduces feelings of anger and depression.

Club members stepped out in faith to challenge themselves. “I have always wanted to do something like this, so I’m excited to try it,” said Bertha Coffman. “I’m having a lot of fun!”

Tiesha “T. I.” Ealey facilitates the drill team (see related story in this issue). She and the ever-growing ranks of the team worked diligently on their performances. “Even when constructive, criticism from anyone can be hard to hear, yet these ladies take it with a grain of salt,” said Assistant Drill Coach Dusti Rickert. “Their dedication is inspiring.”

Temporary gym supervisor Jason Wall worked with administration staff to coordinate the lunchtime event. Wall and his orderlies ensured smooth operation of the large-scale event.

Contact any of the resident facilitators of the groups represented at the Halloween Showcase to become part of the positivity influencing our community and transforming the hearts and minds of MBCC residents.



Art by Sonia Weidenfelder

RECIPES

If food is your love language

Popcorn
Crackle

Jax | Servings: 6 to 8

INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons butter
2 bags microwave popcorn
2 bags butterscotch candies (approximately 30 pieces)
OPTIONAL: 1 snack-size bag peanuts
OPTIONAL: 1 bag M&M’s candies

NEEDS:

plastic table covering
1 large bowl (microwave-safe)
spoon
plastic canteen bag for storage

DIRECTIONS

1. Prepare work area: place the plastic table covering on a clean, dry surface. In an area about 3 feet by 3 feet, very lightly grease plastic with 1 tablespoon butter.
2. Pop both bags of popcorn according to package instructions and pour out onto prepared surface, removing un-popped kernels. If adding optional items, mix with the popcorn.
3. Remove candies from wrappers and place in bowl with remaining 2 tablespoons of butter. Melt in 30-second increments, stirring between each heating cycle, until the candied mixture reaches a full boil. DO NOT LEAVE SPOON IN BOWL WHILE HEATING.
4. Immediately drizzle butterscotch mix in thin lines over popcorn, quickly emptying entire bowl. DO NOT TOUCH MIXTURE WITH YOUR HANDS until it cools.
5. Once completely cool, put into storage bag(s).

Very large amounts for holiday gatherings or gifting (portion into smaller plastic bags and secure with ribbon or yarn) can be made in batches. DO NOT TRY TO MULTIPLY RECIPE IN A SINGLE GO. There are as many varieties to this recipe as your imagination allows. Try adding honey-coated or caramelized nuts for the plain peanuts or broken up Butterfinger bars in the place of M&M’s candies.

Oh-So-Cheesy
Scalloped Potatoes

Jax | Servings: 6 to 8 (if used as a side dish)

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon butter
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon dried onions
5 small bags kettle chips (sub: 1 full-size bag potato chips)
1 1/2 cups water
1/2 cup powdered milk
2 teaspoons white gravy mix (or other flour, for thickening)
1/4 cup parmesan cheese
4-ounce cheese spread
1/2 cup sour cream or 1/4 cup ranch dressing
salt & pepper

NEEDS:

1 large microwave-safe bowl with tight lid
spoon

DIRECTIONS

1. Place all ingredients except the sour cream (or ranch dressing if using) in bowl and secure lid. Rock closed bowl until all items are fairly well mixed. The butter and cheese will melt just fine.
2. Place in microwave with lid loose but covering for three minutes. Remove lid and stir.
3. Cook uncovered until it reaches a full rolling boil. Remove and stir, then cook an additional two minutes to thicken. Remove and set aside with lid loosely covering for five minutes.
4. Serve individual portions. Top with scoops of sour cream or ranch dressing. Salt and pepper to taste.

This recipe can be used as part of a main dish for two or three people if you make larger portions and add the protein of your choice. It is especially good with barba-coa beef or fried summer sausages.

Vegetarian
Tortilla Soup

Lindsey Smith | Servings: 2 to 4

INGREDIENTS

1 bag of Knorr Teriyaki Rice (Mexican Rice works well too)
spicy refried beans (regular beans will work)
1 bag of corn
1 packet of corn tortillas
provolone cheese - cheapest option (Can use mozzarella cheese or sour cream)
1 beef Ramen Express noodle seasoning packet. (Using the Ramen Express brand keeps it vegetarian opposed to using the other ramen options.)

DIRECTIONS

1. Use half of the provolone block. Cut or crumble into pieces and set aside for topping at the end.
2. Cut or tear corn tortillas into 1-inch or smaller strips. Microwave for 45 seconds at a time until tortilla strips turn crispy like chips. Usually this will take around 5 minutes to crisp, but time varies. Set aside when crisp.
3. Pour bag of teriyaki rice into a bowl and fill with water to half way. Microwave for 4 minutes.
4. Separate contents of bowl into two separate bowls.
5. Add 1/3 cup of refried beans or desired amount to each bowl. (The more you add the thicker the soup will be.)
6. Split the bag of corn, juice and all, between the two bowls.
7. Split the kosher ramen beef seasoning packet between the two bowls. Add garlic seasoning, onion flakes, black pepper if available.
8. Fill both bowls back up with water to at least half way.
9. Stir and put each bowl back into microwave for 2 minutes each.
10. Top with provolone pieces (or sour cream, mozzarella cheese) and the crispy tortilla strips.

Great on cold days and on hungry bellies. Enjoy.

RECIPES



INGREDIENTS

- 1 bag Sweet & Spicy Doritos
- 1 bag chili (with or without beans)
- 2 Velveeta spicy nacho cheese powder (or 1 bag shredded cheese)
- 1 bag regular refried beans
- 3 little bags Spanish rice
- minced onions
- 1 beef barbacoa or taco meat filling
- 1 meatstick (or summer sausage)

Photo by Unsplash

Chili Cheese Tamales

Crystal Avilla | Servings: 4 to 6

NEEDS

- 1 small trash bag cut into roughly 3 ½-inch by 7-inch rectangles (you may only use 8 or 9 rectangles, but it never hurts to have extra in case you mess up.)
- gloves
- several bowls

DIRECTIONS

- Crush the Doritos in a large bowl just enough so that they all fit. Add water until the chips are wet, then mix more with a gloved hand. When you are done there should be about ½ inch of water visible in the bowl. Put the chips to the side and let them set to soak up the rest of the water. This is your masa. As you are preparing the rest of the food, you will need to repeatedly go back to your masa with a gloved hand, squeezing it until smooth. You can add additional water as needed so it does not become too dry.
- In a separate bowl, empty the refried beans and 1/2 bag of powdered cheese. Add water until mixture is soupy, put aside and let set. You can also add minced onions to the beans if you wish, or rehydrate them in water and put on top when the tamales are done.

- Put the remaining 1 1/2 bags of cheese into a bowl of warm water and stir until smooth.
- Empty chili into bowl.
- In another bowl, empty the 3 bags of rice and fix according to package instructions.
- In yet another bowl, chop meatstick into small chunks and add the beef. Microwave for 1 minute and drain.
- Assembly: Roll masa into balls a little smaller than a golf ball. They can be smaller or larger, depending on the size of tamales you wish to make. Place ball on plastic rectangle and press down with your fingers until the masa is spread thinly down the middle of the plastic. Place a heaping spoon of meat mixture on masa and fold the longest sides together. Use the plastic to roll into a tube and twist the ends to make it stay together. It will take practice to get this perfect, but keep going until all the meat is gone.
- When ready to serve, untwist desired number of tamales onto a plate or into a bowl. Top with chili and cheese sauce, and microwave for 4-5 minutes. Serve with rice and beans on the side. You can top these tamales with anything you like. Enjoy.

CRAFTS

Recycled soap shapes for gifts

Lezlie Chica

SUPPLIES

- Little soap pieces
- Craft bowl (not an eating bowl)
- Spoon
- Water
- Plastic cutter
- Scissors
- Plastic bag
- Ice chest and Ice
- Patience

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cut up little soap pieces into very tiny squares or shavings and place them in a bowl.
- Add a little bit of water to the bowl. The amount of water needed will depend on how much soap you have. For every handful of soap shavings or squares, add around 2 ounces (two little pill line cups) of water.
- Heat in the microwave for 20-second intervals, taking the bowl out of the microwave and stirring with the spoon each time. Stir, stir, stir. Put back into microwave for another 20 seconds. After those 20 seconds are up, take it out again and stir, stir, stir. Repeat until it reaches a thick, paste-like consistency. Make sure it is not runny. If it is, the soap will not solidify.
- After it has been melted into a paste, cover the bowl and put it on ice overnight.
- The next day, once it is hard, use the plastic cutter to make pieces into any shape you can think of, stars, hearts, etc., and wrap them with small squares of cellophane. Decorate with ribbon or yarn.
- Store in a cool, dry place. Enjoy and have fun.

Editor's Note: After test-driving this recipe, we found it was easier to shape recycled soap using molds (cheese cups, etc.) lined in plastic or letting mix air dry and partially set for a couple hours then molding by hand before placing into ice chest to fully set.

Photo by Joseph Stevens



Kitchen makeover continues

Dusti Rickert | Staff Writer

Buffalo chicken, zucchini and grapefruit. Oh my; From fresh produce to fresh paint, Mabel Bassett Correctional Center residents receive unexpected blessings in the dining hall.

In August 2024, The Balance published an article detailing upcoming changes and improvements to a few key areas of the dining hall, including staffing, sanitation, food quality, food preparation and cosmetic changes.

Changes within any area of the facility take substantial time and effort to reach their intended potential, yet residents have seen and experienced some improvements in the dining hall. Last year, the C-2 dining hall received a face lift. Residents painted new murals on the walls and sanded and painted tables. The C-1 dining hall is currently receiving the same update. Fresh paint has been extended inside the kitchen as well, with the added benefit of using “pool paint” to reduce mold, mildew and peeling that excess water and steam create. These cosmetic updates and improvements are meant to create a more positive and welcoming dining experience.

MBCC residents may have noticed an influx of fresh fruits and vegetables lately, which is a direct result of input compiled from survey responses received last year. Captain Juan Sanchez, who has been overseeing not only the day-to-day kitchen operations but the updates as well, said, “More funds have been allocated to continue purchasing fresh fruits, vegetables and quality meats.” Sanchez expressed how important it is to respond to the surveys sent out by the Office of Offender Advocacy. “Your voice matters and can make a difference,” he said.

More cooperation from ODOC staff, kitchen staff and MBCC residents has played a significant part in the improved dining experience. Sanchez feels that by increasing ODOC security staff in the dining hall to regulate wait lines, kitchen staff can focus on providing quality service behind the window. Sanchez often reminds the kitchen staff of his favorite quote: “Meals make memories, and you get to provide that.” Dining hall patrons should continue to see gradual improvements in all areas. Stay tuned.

Tabitha “Angelica” Mattison
| Staff Writer

The weather was ideal for the Breast Cancer and Domestic Violence Awareness 5K Run hosted by The Education and Employment Ministry (TEEM) and Mabel Bassett Correctional Center’s Prison Health Initiative (PHI) program. Excitement was tangible on this Oct. 12, 2025, event held in honor of Sarkeys Scholarship Founder, former Oklahoma First Lady Kim Henry.

Henry, currently battling cancer herself, expressed appreciation for being remembered by the hundreds of residents in attendance. She highlighted the importance of “empowering ourselves to take our health in our own hands while raising awareness of breast cancer and domestic violence.” In addition to other issues, Henry advocates for and takes measures to improve the quality and availability of medical resources for Oklahoma’s incarcerated population.

“We realize what a privilege it is to run for a woman who has dedicated her life to bring awareness of us to others,” said PHI leader Cassandra Bray.

Before “Back in Black,” the popular 1980 hit by AC/DC, blared from speakers, TEEM Executive Director Kris Steele made opening announcements and welcomed participants and guests. TEEM and Sarkeys offer college scholarships and continued support of incarcerated students. “The idea to host the 5K in honor of Kim to demonstrate unity and support came directly from the women who reside at Mabel Bassett, which makes the endeavor all the more special,” said Steele.

Mental Health Administrative Assistant Kaytie Mouse, adorned in a bright pink tutu, and Physician Assistant Corey Green unfurled a run-through banner, created by MBCC Prison Fellowship members and mentors. With determination in the air, MBCC resident Ashley Abbott led the charge as the track transformed into a flood of orange, pink, green and purple. The colors, representing different MBCC programs, moved together like currents in a river.

Great day for a 5K



Former Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry and Former Oklahoma First Lady Kim Henry enjoy a chat with MBCC residents Alysha Anderson, left, and Erica Bonner at the Domestic Violence and Breast Cancer Awareness 5K held at the facility on Oct. 12. (Photo by 1577 Productions, David Tester)

Residents, staff and guests ran, jogged, walked and rolled. Colorful motivational messages were chalked on the asphalt, water dispensers were plentiful, and seating was available along the track for rest as needed. Shalaye Hunter, her sign raised skyward, shouted words of encouragement and support to all passersby.

Captains Robert Reed and Juan Sanchez each took a turn making a lap in Mouse’s durable, one-size-fits-all tutu.

Strategies and preparation for completing the potentially daunting 3.1 miles varied. Some residents, such as Susan Jones and Alexis Carver-Rodriguez, walked the 12 laps slowly and steadily. Inmate Council member Danielle Dyer prepared hard

in the weeks leading up to the event, training for the race every morning, six days a week. “Run, walk, run, walk, with Jesus,” Dyer said. “I ran last weekend to make sure I could still do it,” said Michelle Berry, who participated in last year’s Domestic Violence 5K.

“A strutting brisk walk” was the tactic of former MBCC resident and

TEEM volunteer LaShonda Bishop, M.S, back to show support. “I am amazed at how many came out to support this initiative,” she said.

Henry and her husband, former Governor Brad Henry, watched the run from the sidelines. “This is an incredible honor for Kim, who is currently

battling breast cancer, and urges us to make this a reminder to have yearly mammograms and breast exams in order to detect breast cancer early,” Governor Henry said.

Steele noted that Henry recently received a standing ovation from the 200 attendees at the Sarkeys Leadership Conference after sharing how touched she was by this event. “My hope is women who reside

at Mabel Bassett know just how important and impactful they are to our state,” Steele said.

Everyone at the 5K moved in solidarity for a worthy cause. MBCC resident Tyalea Britt expressed her hope that this event would “set in motion those who lost their voice along the way.”

“This is an incredible honor for Kim, who is currently battling breast cancer, and urges us to make this a reminder to have yearly mammograms and breast exams in order to detect breast cancer early.”

Governor Brad Henry



Chapel events support MBCC community

Sharee Asberry | Editor

The Chapel community would like to share several acknowledgements:

- In August 2025, the Global Leadership Summit was the first to kick off a series of summer events, revivals, food and fun.
- The Kairos four-day retreat in October had an immense spiritual impact for not only the participants, but for all those involved as well. If you have never experienced Kairos, do not miss out during spring sign-ups.
- Congratulations to all those who received their high school diploma, as well as the CareerTech and college graduates. Through it all, these women have become examples of perseverance and what determina-

tion can accomplish. We would also like to acknowledge one of our very own in the chapel, Pastor Tyalea Britt, a college grad, chapel worker and an extraordinary woman of God.

- The Fall Harvest in November, sponsored by TEEM (The Education and Employment Ministry) and Life Church, provided worship music, the word of God, prayer, testimonies, games and Chick-fil-A for the entire yard.
- Volunteers are working hard to express the love of Christ to the ladies here at Mabel Bassett as the holidays approach. Knowing that this season may be challenging for many, we can find comfort in those who go out of their way to support us.

- Also, we want to give a big thanks to our Regional Chaplain Ilinda Jackson for working tirelessly through paperwork approvals, while training MBCC's new chaplain Cynthia Sickler.
- In addition, the chapel would like to thank everyone for their patience and cooperation with the chaplain, chapel workers and volunteers. Our mission is for healing, and transformation.
- Submit an Inmate Request to the chapel regarding available credit and non-credit classes. Check for lists, posts and sign-up sheets for events. There is a movement toward positive change at MBCC, and we want you to be a part of it.

LATIDO DE LA CAPIA Eventos de la capia apoyando la comunidad de MBCC

Sharee Asberry | Directora
Traducido por Rachel Rivera
Colaboradora

Nuestra comunidad de la capia nos gustaría compartí varios reconocimientos.

- En Agosto 2025, el Leadership Summit (Cumbre Mundial de Líderes) fue lo primero de una serie de eventos, campañas, comida y diversión.
- En Octubre, el evento do los cuatro días de Kairos tuvo un inmenso impactó espiritual no solo para los participantes, pero para todos los que ayudaron. Si nunca has experimentado a Kairos, no pierdas la oportunidad

para apuntarte esta primavera.

- Felicidades a todas las que recibieron sus diplomas de la escuela secundaria, y a las de Carecer Tech, y a las del colegio. Sobre todo estas mujeres han sido ejemplos de la perseverancia y a lo que la determinación puede cumplir. También nos gustaría reconocer alguna de nosotras, Pastora Tyalea Britt una de las que graduó del colegio, trabajadora de la capia, y una extraordinaria mujer del Señor.
- En Noviembre, la Cosecha de Otoño patrocinado por TEEM (El Ministerio de la Educación y Empleo) y Life Church proveyeron música de alabanza, una palabra del Señor, oraciones, testimonios, juegos y Chick-fil-A para todos aquí.
- Los voluntarios están trabajando profundamente para mostrarles el amor de Cristo a las mujeres en Mabel Bassett ya que se acercan los días de fiesta. Sabiendo que esta temporada

- del año puede ser difícil para muchas, podemos encontrar el consuelo en las personas que nos apoyan.
- También les queremos dar las gracias a nuestra Capellán Regional Ilinda Jackson por trabajando sin parar sobre las aprobaciones de los papeles mientras entrena la nueva capellán Ms. Sickler de MBCC. Además la capia le gustaría darles las gracias a todos por su paciencia y cooperación con la capellán, y los voluntarios. La misión es para sanar y la transformación. Llena y entrega a la capia un Inmate Request sobre los clases que ofrecen con créditos y los que no. Debes estar atenta para cuando pongan los papeles en los patios sobre los eventos. Hay un movimiento positivo para el cambio en Mabel Bassett y queremos que seas parte de esto.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tune in and listen up

Eavesdrop on "Ear Hustle Live" with Earlonne Woods, Nigel Poor and Antwan Williams during their in-person visit to MBCC this summer. The podcast addresses issues of incarceration from little daily joys to profound challenges. Recent podcasts are available on the Securus tablet through the podcast app under the category Personal Development. The Edovo app also carries archived seasons. Drop in and listen.

Grads rock the yard

The RISE Program Beauty School celebrated Class 7 in September. The cosmetology component graduated 16 students, and the barber crossover class had three completions. Program Director Christie Luther also announced three graduates' release from prison with marketable skills and the chance for a new life. Interested in learning a new trade and opening up possibilities for future, contact RISE directly in B Building for an application.

Cookies from Veterans

Victory for Veterans group passed out cookies to all residents on Monday, Nov. 10, as a "Veteran's Day give-back" to the yard. TEEM and Inmate Council offered their support and time. Victory for Veterans is for former service members of all branches of the military currently residing at MBCC. The group meets the second and fourth Mondays of each month from 1-3p.m. in the Chapel. See Patricia Welker in C-1A or Dusti Rickert in D-3 for more information.

Meet Mabel's new Education Principal

Congratulations to teacher Charilyn Milburn, the new principal of the MBCC education department. Under her guidance, the tradition of positivity, growth and learning continues.

...more BRIEFS on page 16

The Fall Festival

Lindsey Smith | Staff Writer

Nothing paints a better picture of fall in Oklahoma than a sky of light cloud coverage, a soft breeze and 55-degree weather. The morning of Saturday, Nov. 1, 2025, started off like any other weekend morning at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center. The yard was quiet as women enjoyed the opportunity to sleep in after a long week of work. The tranquil landscape would soon change as a crowd of volunteers entered through the gates with games, live music and Chick-fil-A sandwiches.

A collaboration between Life Church locations in Shawnee and Oklahoma City, and TEEM (The Education and Employment Ministry), the Fall Festival provided MBCC residents and volunteers a day of community and cheer.

"Making connections with people is what it's about," Pastor Trevor Williams of the Shawnee Life Church said. "Relationships are the most important."

The festival kicked off shortly after 11 a.m. as the live band started its set to



In a friendly game of cornhole, an MBCC resident aims for the win during the Fall Festival sponsored by TEEM and LifeChurch on Nov. 1. (Photo by Lance West)

the 1980s song "Black Velvet" by Alanah Myles before transitioning into a live prayer and worship concert.

Sprawled out across the normally bare lawn were games of frisbee-golf, Jenga, pumpkin painting and sack races. On the softball field, MBCC residents and volunteers played kickball.

"I liked the kickball. It took me out of my comfort zone," said MBCC resident Ashley Ricks as she tossed a small bean-bag into a net at one of the games.

The Fall Festival not only offered a day of celebration and a break from the



"You're out!" Dori Seals is victorious in kickball. (Photo by Lance West)

mundane routine of the facility, it gave four residents the opportunity to share testimonies.

"I knew I had a choice to make," Cassandra Bray, MBCC resident, said of her testimony after arriving at the prison almost two years prior. "I could let prison destroy me or I could let God rebuild me."

Residents Amber Andrew, Lenora Scott and Tyesha Long echoed statements of overcoming adversity in life and prison despite sorrow, labels and isolation.

"My journey is proof that change is not only possible, it is happening right now, within these walls," Long said.

As the event came to a close, each of the 1,200 women received a bag containing a Chick-fil-A sandwich, cookie, chips, candy and holiday-scented lotion.

There could not have been a better time to celebrate fall in Oklahoma than on a breezy, sunny day. Without the razor wire, the scene of people playing, laughing and connecting could easily be set in any location, in any city.



WORKSITE SPOTLIGHT

Maintenance

Michelle Walker | Staff Writer

Say hello to the MBCC Maintenance department—the glue that keeps it all together. Not all maintenance workers were present for the photo. (Photo by Staff Writer Victoria Hooper)

Glue holds things together. At Mabel Bassett Correctional Center, maintenance is the glue.

With constant repairs, outdated equipment and general upkeep, maintenance is a never-ending job at any correctional facility. The MBCC maintenance crew consists of six staff members: Evan Stiles, Shane Goodrum, Charles Armstrong, James Wall, Cecil Donnahue, William Meissner, and 23 residents. Many of these workers are skilled plumbers, electricians, HVAC specialists, construction workers and general handywomen. Others clear trash, mow, shovel snow, paint, distribute supplies, work in the warehouse and wade through the slew of other unnamed duties required to operate the facility.

Every morning, work orders are distributed to the staff and workers. They are ranked according to priority and completed if time allows and the necessary parts are available. Ashley Brown, a maintenance worker, said "A lot of the time

when things haven't been fixed, we are waiting on parts." Every part has to be approved by administration. Due to money allocations or back orders, there can be delays.

The workers dig pungent sewer trenches on 100-degree days and shiver in 40-mile-per-hour winds on snowy rooftops to fix heating systems. Often, they are on-call seven days a week to address emergencies such as plumbing mishaps, broken pipes or gas leaks. Laura (Amy) Hannon said, "We don't work there just for a job. We work at maintenance because we want everyone to be comfortable. We work there because we care."

Maintenance can be a dirty job, but someone has to do it, as the saying goes. Despite the long hours, the grime and the grueling physical labor, maintenance workers and staff show up to keep MBCC in operational order. Thank you, maintenance, for your hard work and dedication to keeping our residents in the best conditions possible.



OBITUARIES

In Memoriam

Serving a purpose-driven life

The Balance staff honors the work and service of Captain Treena Lorentz

Jax | Editor

“We can serve our weakness or our purpose; not both,” said Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini.

Former Mabel Bassett Correctional Center Chief of Security Treena Lorentz embodied this concept of serving our purpose no matter the circumstances we face and worked to teach others to do the same. She passed away Nov. 19 after a long illness.

MBCC resident Laura “Amy” Hannon knew and worked for Lorentz in 1998, when the McLoud prison first opened as the Central Oklahoma Correctional Facility (COCF). Lorentz was a correctional officer at the time. Speaking of Lorentz’s ability to reach out to the incarcerated residents around her, Hannon recalled, “No matter what, I knew somebody cared about me and would help me, even if all I needed was a conversation.”

Accountability is integral to a successfully run facility and even life itself, both for incarcerated residents and staff. “If I was in the right,” Hannon said, “she’d support me all the way, and



Chief Treena Lorentz. In 2017, Chief Treena Lorentz was awarded the Service Member Patriot Award by the Department of Defense Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves. The award recognized her support of active duty and reserve military personnel under her supervision before, during and after deployments, including caring for their families. (Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections)

if I was in the wrong, she’d put a boot up my backside.”

“She was definitely firm, but caring,” stated Social Services Specialist Michelle Brown. “I think she’s been that way all her life.” When Brown was a case manager at MBCC, she worked with Lorentz, who was also a family friend of Brown’s husband since high school.

“[Lorentz] treated inmates as human beings first. She didn’t care what you did before, just who you are now,” said Brown.

When COCF was sold to the state of Oklahoma, Lorentz went to work for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and stayed there nearly 23 years. For much of her career, Lorentz worked

security at MBCC before transferring to Lexington Correctional Center (LCC), where she inspired a new behavior modification program.

The Lorentz Incentive for Excellence (LIFE) program promotes good citizenship and living a community-focused life. Modeled after Lorentz’s example, LIFE “is intended to provide incentives to inmates to move toward inmate council’s goal of ‘community betterment through self-betterment,’” stated LCC Inmate Council.

The program promotes self-discipline, self-control and service to the community. “Having an inmate population that is motivated to better themselves is beneficial from the ground up,” the council wrote.

Ginger Paul, an MBCC resident, recalled that Lorentz inspired her to do good. “She was my best encourager. I’m really sad she didn’t get to see me in my sobriety,” Paul said.

Lorentz knew of the affection many at MBCC felt for her. RISE Director Christie Luther recently delivered her a sculpture made by facility residents complete with hand signed well-wishes.

Admiration for Lorentz was not limited to residents. Sgt. Bruce Terry had a difficult transition to MBCC several years ago, coming from a male yard, and Lorentz helped him through the challenges. “She pulled me aside almost every other day, asking me if I was handling things well,” Terry said.

“People saw her as Chief,” he stated, “but she was more like a mother. If she knew you were messing up, she’d call you into her office, not really from a supervisor standpoint, but from a motherly standpoint.” Terry noted he and other security staff responded well to Lorentz’s approach. “She left a good impression and got to know you as a person, not just an employee,” he said.

Lorentz was actively employed by ODOC until she passed, though she had been looking forward to retirement. No matter what she was doing, though, Lorentz maintained a consistently caring attitude. “She enjoyed interacting with people and seemed to really like her job,” said Integrated Services Discharge Manager Diana Young.

Throughout her medical battle, Lorentz persisted in serving her purpose to ODOC staff and incarcerated residents, offering a model of overcoming the obstacles placed before us all.

INSIDE VOICES

Celebrating the commonalities that unite us

Tabitha “Angelica” Mattison | Staff Writer

We all have stories that have shaped us and deserve to be told. With that in mind, The Balance is launching a new, recurring column. “Inside Voices” will celebrate the commonalities that unite us, as well as the differences that make each of us interesting and unique. Feeling unheard leads to a closed mind and hardens the heart. Connection and understanding foster social harmony and peaceful coexistence.

In the spirit of the season, “Inside Voices” is sharing a few favorite holiday memories from MBCC residents.

Glynda Wesley came to America from Sicily at age 12. Since Thanksgiving is an American holiday, she had never tried traditional Thanksgiving foods such as cornbread dressing or pumpkin pie and to her it was the best thing in the world.

Brittney Orand recalled a treasured family tradition of “turkey hunting with her cousins as a group, and how the men would sit on the porch telling wild stories while the ladies prepared dinner.”

Christmas is Talia Pasley’s favorite holiday. She discussed the pleasure she finds in gift giving. She takes pride in being able to provide for her children and siblings.

“Even though they think it’s Santa,” Pasley said, “it brings me great joy and satisfaction watching them open and enjoy their gifts because their happiness is everything to me.” She acknowledged that such exchanges with her loved ones keep her sane and motivated.

Christmas is also important to Christina “Flawless” Simmons. She reminisced about a Christmas when her parents said they could not afford presents but surprised her with everything they noticed her admiring the entire year. She sees the holiday as an opportunity to pass on the traditions of her family and to teach others about God and the importance of the season.

“It was important to them,” Simmons said, “to be honest and speak in the wisdom of the Lord.”

Memories from inside Mabel Bassett are important, too.

“I like Thanksgiving at Mabel Bassett, because people can enjoy each other’s company completely without gifts or religion,” Wesley said. “All people get to taste something good.”

Orand recounted a Thanksgiving story of a special shared meal and holiday decorations with her coworkers in the gym thanks to the help of Coach Jared McCord.

“We even had room sprays with holidays scents,” she said. “It was nice.”

Sheila Starr said, “I really don’t have a favorite holiday any more. It’s just another day to me.”

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PERSONAL ESSAY

A reason, a season or a lifetime

Michelle Walker | Staff Writer

My heart pounded in my ears and I tried to still my trembling hands and racing mind. The officer had called me early — I arrived at the visitation room before my guests. My best friend, who I have not seen since my 2012 incarceration, was about to come through the door.

As we all know, separation from those we love—whether we are incarcerated or not — causes pain. One of my first experiences with this was as a child when a close friend moved out of town. My grandmother held me and wiped my tears as she explained that there are people in our lives who part ways with us — sometimes through their own choice and sometimes through circumstance — but they always leave something behind.

After I came to prison and experienced the grief and trauma of separation again, I remembered her words: People touch our lives for a reason, a season or a lifetime.

Reason: At the time, this can be the most difficult to understand because the experience may not be pleasant. It may be someone we are forced to endure or someone we learn a lesson from — either about life or about ourselves. Prison is full of these types of people — an unpleasant roommate to those who cut in line at the dining room or in pill line.

But these encounters are short term and full of opportunities to grow. They make us stop, think and reevaluate our purpose and morals. This can be uncomfortable, but if we can learn to appreciate the lessons, even if they are hard to accept, we can grow from each experience.

Season: People come and go throughout our lives. Those who leave us may be someone who was important to us before our incarceration. It can be painful when they disappear, either due to lack of understanding or insufficient relationship maintenance.

I know from experience. After my arrest, my best friend, a woman I had known since kindergarten, withdrew from my life. I never faulted her; I may have reacted the same had our po-

sitions been reversed. For many years I grieved her loss, believing that our friendship was over — just one more seasonal friendship.

Prison is a string of seasonal relationships. In the moment, valued friends and mentors are vital parts of our lives and our community. When a person with whom we share all of our experiences—living space, meals, heartache and holidays—is suddenly gone, the grief is real.

It helps, though, to remember that those who we lost added value to our lives through laughter, tears and shared experience. Mourn your loved one’s absence, and also keep yourself open to new seasonal friends. They will help ease your burdens and increase joy in your life.

Lifetime: Those who stay with us throughout our lives — a parent, child, spouse or very dear friend — are the rarest of all people. They love us despite our mistakes, cheer our victories and work through any pain we cause.

When I saw my best friend come through the visitation door, I met her halfway. We were both sobbing by the time we embraced. The past 13 years melted away, along with both of our nerves. I did not know it at the time, but she had been just as scared as me. We talked for hours, sharing tears and laughter, forgiveness and acceptance.

Sometimes, even when we do something seemingly unforgivable, a strong relationship can be healed. It just takes time and understanding. This was my newest lesson: Never give up on the people who are truly important in life.

Remember to appreciate all these significant people, especially this holiday season. They are our most precious gifts. Before my friend left, she said, “I’m here for you, for life.” This is the best unexpected present I could have ever received.

When I saw my best friend come through the visitation door, I met her halfway. We were both sobbing by the time we embraced.



Global Leadership Summit interview with Jeremiah Braudrick

Sharee Asberry | Editor

The Global Leadership Network (GLS) was founded in 1992 and features some of the most developed and successful leaders. Three years later, the organization hosted its first summit, and by 2014, the event had expanded to nine countries and various prisons across the United States. The conference has come to Mabel Bassett Correctional Center, and Jeremiah Braudrick is here to share how the summit made its way to Oklahoma state prisons:

Q: Hey, Jeremiah.

A: “Hey, Sharee.”

Q: I would like to talk to you a little bit about the Global Leadership Summit and your connection with the conference.

A: “When I first attended the Global Leadership Summit, I was a part of Life Church and currently involved in prison ministry. When I changed over to Crossings Community Center, I continued going to the summit, but they had no prison ministry. One day, Pastor Marty Grubbs asked me if I’d consider bringing the GLS Conference to the prisons. Of course, I agreed, and we brought the conference to Joseph Harp Correctional Center (JHCC). Three years later Pastor Marty asked me if I wanted to begin a prison ministry through Crossings. Needless to say, I hired Tammy Baskind and Lindsey Jackson, and we began our journey in prison ministry.”

Q: How long have you been with Crossings?

A: “For about 10 years. Do you want to know how we exploded?”

Q: Sure.

A: “Well, we were only at JHCC when COVID-19 happened. Everything was shut down. No volunteers were able

to come in. One day the Department of Corrections called and asked if we could send our DVDs into all the prisons. Then the chaplain called to ask if we could donate televisions and DVD players. Our Board of Elders met to discuss the amount of money I was asking for and shortly after approved the projector, sound system, speakers and all other equipment needed for 25 facilities in Oklahoma. Once COVID-19 restrictions lifted, we had Crossings services going at several prisons.”

Q: Wow.

A: “As the Missions Team Leader, and the Prison Campus Pastor, I don’t like meeting about the ministry but going out to do ministry.”

Q: So about how long has the GLS Conference been in effect?

A: “We started in 2017 and added a prison every year. This year would make 7 prisons.”

Q: What is your hope by offering this opportunity to the residents?

A: “My hope is to empower our incarcerated family with the tools to implement this empowerment with lasting change.”

Q: Have you noticed a difference of any kind?

A: “JHCC actually asked for the GLS Conference the second time because of what they witnessed on the yard. I was excited because GLS is the largest event we do. We get to spend more time with our incarcerated friends. The Department of Corrections has been great and recognizes the value in this program.”

Q: What would be the one last thing you want your incarcerated family to know at the end of the day?

A: “We don’t bring curriculum into the prisons, but relationship, and that’s what sets us apart from others. We’re not trying to fix everybody, but trying to love everybody until they love themselves and the GLS Conference gives us that great opportunity as we hang out with our friends.”

Q: I sure appreciate you, Jeremiah. Thank you for your time with us. What a great blessing you and the Crossings Ministry are to us.

A: “Absolutely.”

Get with your unit staff or work line supervisor early to sign up for the next conference in August 2026 so you can experience GLS for yourself.



Just say “no”

Victoria Hooper | Staff Writer

Are there days when you feel stretched in every direction? Drained, fatigued or just plumb exhausted? Do you ever feel like you wish there were more of you to go around? Before you consider changing your perspective on the idea of human cloning, read my words of truth: It is absolutely acceptable to say “no” when people ask you to do something. “No” is a complete sentence, meaning an explanation is not always necessary. “No” has one syllable, two letters and is spelled the same in two languages, so why is it so hard to say?

Reasons why we might avoid saying “no”:

- Guilt.
- Fear of rejection.
- Fear of losing friends.
- Fear of losing esteem among peers.
- Experienced resistance before.
- Feeling as if someone depends on you.
- Fear of hurting someone’s feelings.
- Feeling as if no one can do the task like you can.
- You have always said “yes.”
- You were “voluntold.”

These reasons are common and understandable, but life is not supposed to feel like chronic stress. As individuals,

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INSIDE VOICES ...cont. from page 14

Starr has struggled emotionally since losing her nephew. She credits her faith in God and support of her friends for seeing her through the holiday season. “I appreciate my friends very much,” Starr said.

NO ...cont. from page 15

we make mistakes and sometimes we get stuck trying to prove to our inner critic that we are not the same as we once were. It is almost like we set our own bar and raise it once our hand slightly grazes the rung. This is a vicious cycle of discouragement that leaves us feeling like we are never enough. Here are some tips to combat this issue:

- Believe that your past does not define you.
- Know you are more valuable than your actions.
- Realize you do not have to be

The holidays can be difficult, especially in prison. Happiness is not circumstantial. It is a choice. Continuing to wait for the right time or the right place means we can miss opportunities for contentment in the moment. “Don’t give up,” Starr said. “Family is where it’s at.” That includes the families we make in prison.

- involved in every activity.
- Analyze your schedule and needs before you agree to anything.
 - Fear of missing out should not be the mitigating factor in your decision.
 - Strive to find balance every day.
 - Remain persistent when you encounter resistance because you are worth it.
 - Trust your decision when you say “no”.
 - Give yourself grace.
 - Silence your inner critic. You are amazing.

As we ring in the new year, resolve to show up for yourself.

Holiday word search

O	X	Y	L	I	T	G	F	R	U	W	B	D	A	N	C	E	H	Q	C	Z
J	S	I	L	V	E	R	S	Y	C	N	M	R	A	L	P	V	D	K	O	L
B	C	U	B	N	H	C	A	X	O	Y	P	H	S	K	L	U	E	E	L	P
A	A	L	A	Z	S	D	M	D	C	O	N	F	E	T	T	I	B	O	D	G
J	R	A	L	O	I	E	G	B	I	J	Y	I	R	L	A	E	Z	W	V	P
K	F	U	L	L	N	C	I	Z	L	T	M	R	O	C	A	R	D	C	G	E
L	K	G	O	X	G	O	A	O	B	T	I	U	L	B	F	P	V	H	V	K
E	P	H	O	R	N	R	C	N	O	S	N	O	W	M	A	N	Z	I	N	O
Q	U	E	N	P	R	A	T	F	Y	D	L	Y	N	Q	M	J	L	M	A	D
H	I	C	T	G	A	T	H	E	R	I	N	G	R	A	I	E	X	N	P	E
G	F	I	S	I	O	E	D	A	H	F	T	B	E	L	L	K	O	E	N	S
H	A	M	U	F	Y	P	X	S	O	Z	C	P	A	I	Y	R	B	Y	I	S
J	W	E	O	T	I	N	U	T	M	E	G	T	R	X	E	I	L	K	R	E
I	G	L	T	H	X	P	L	I	E	P	Z	T	E	D	K	B	Z	T	Y	R
R	O	T	U	R	K	E	Y	O	X	J	S	C	I	T	O	B	S	G	R	T
A	R	U	I	P	Q	Z	E	L	V	K	L	C	O	P	C	O	C	O	A	A
U	E	W	Q	O	S	J	P	T	R	E	A	T	X	O	Y	N	W	Z	I	P

TRADITION
STAR
CIDER
SNOWMAN
HOLIDAY
FEAST
SCARF
TREAT
HAM

HORN
GATHERING
RIBBON
CONFETTI
DESSERT
GIFT
SING
HOME

LAUGH
BELL
CHIMNEY
FAMILY
TURKEY
DECORATE
CARD
DANCE

COLD
LIVE
LOVE
NUTMEG
SILVER
BALLOON
COCOA
MELT

New year, new home Posters courtesy of Misty McFarland

Hi I'm Bluey!



Bluey is a 10 month old Pitmix that is being trained at Mabel Bassett's Guardian Angel Program and is looking for his forever home. Bluey's trainer says he has tons of energy and is a very loyal companion. He is eager to please and is working hard to learn all of his commands, especially not jumping because he gets super excited to see everyone! You can reach out to Newcastle Animal Shelter @ 405-301-6038 for adoption information.

Hi I'm Luigi!



Luigi is a 1 year old 55 lb Greyhound/Doberman Mix that is being trained at Mabel Bassett's Guardian Angel Program and is looking for his forever home. Luigi is a happy-go-lucky guy who wants to please and learn as much as he can. He is eager to please and loves people. If you are interested in adopting Luigi please contact Newcastle Animal Shelter @ 405-301-6038

NEWS IN BRIEF

NEW ODOC VISITATION UNIT
Oklahoma Department of Corrections has established a dedicated Visitation Unit to process applications and schedule visits with incarcerated residents. Applicants can complete the forms and upload required documentation (such as state ID) online. Goals of this unit include reducing paper usage, expediting the approval process and enhancing efficiency. Paper applications may still be mailed to ODOC at 3400 N. Martin Luther King Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73111. Contact 405-768-3269 or visit oklahoma.gov/doc/facilities/visitation.html for more information.