

# THE ECHO

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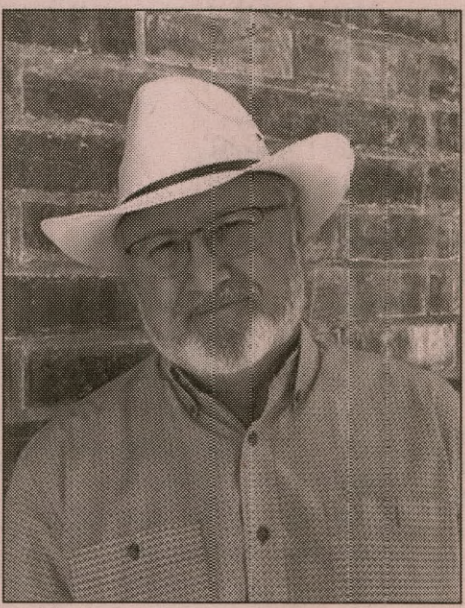
## Windham teacher receives highest honor during pandemic

*John Walter Flagg — ECHO Staff*

“ONE OF THE MOST touching moments of my career was when a former student’s parents called me. Their son had just made parole and gotten a job in the construction trade—and was doing well. The changes in their son made a huge difference in their lives,” says Windham School District (WSD) teacher Jerry Riley. “That simple phone call made such a difference in my own life—it brought deeper meaning into what I am doing here as a teacher at Windham.”

Riley is the recipient of the 2020 Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching (LMET) award—a point of professional achievement for Windham School District (WSD) educators. The honor was bestowed upon Jerry Riley of the Neal Unit in Amarillo earlier this year—even as the district rolled its pro-

gramming into a positive pandemic response with distance learning. “This is the greatest award of my career and I am very appreciative. It is truly an honor,” he says. Riley’s personal and professional integrity makes him a role model for students and peers at Windham. For the past 28 years, Riley has taught courses for Windham’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming. He has taught Building Trades II and Construction Carpentry Level 1 since 1998.

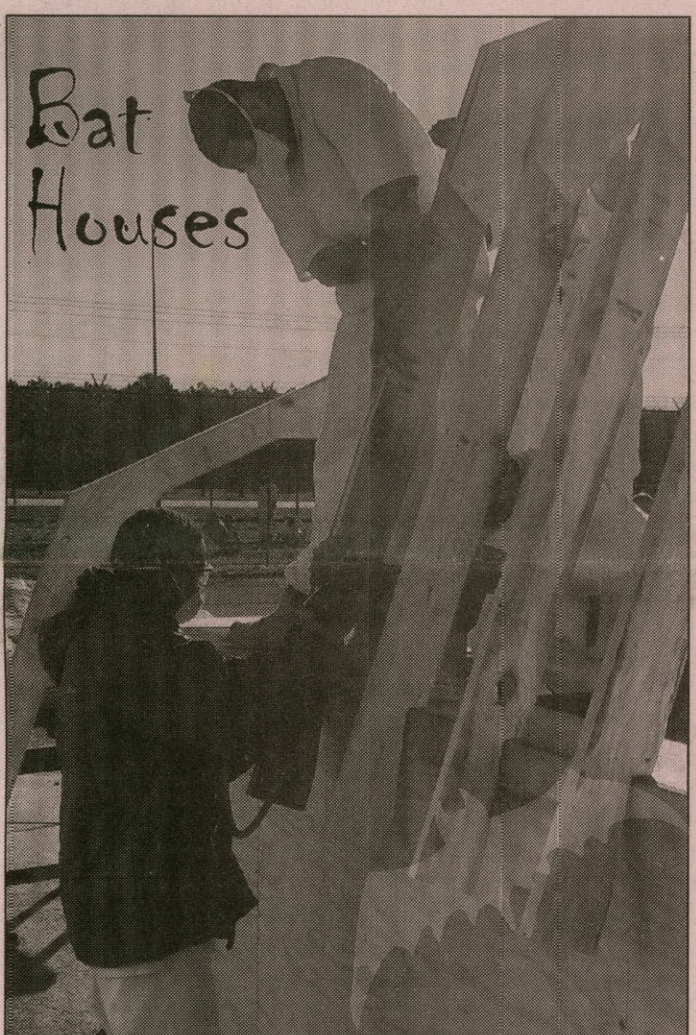


Jerry Riley

His classes offer students the opportunity to earn industry-recognized certifications, including the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) and Occupational, Safety, Health and Administration (OSHA). NCCER certification is a nationally-recognized certification that has a registry database. Once a student has completed the career and technical education trade, they can go to any NCCER employer and present their registered number, which communicates their training and skill

level to the employer. This prerequisite comes with construction fundamentals. “I am really proud of the CTE curriculum that Windham is offering. It is recognized nationwide,” relates Riley. “When the students get out of prison they will have a construction fundamentals certificate, NCCER credentials and an OSHA card—valuable tools that will enable them to get a job.” For Riley, construction was his passion from very early on. Raised in a construction-oriented family, Riley grew up learning how to frame and remodel homes, and also building custom homes from start to finish. “By the eighth grade I was already working on a construction crew, and I am grateful for that early exposure to the industry. It has complemented my teaching ability, because I have so much more to bring to the classroom,” he says.

RILEY continued on pg. 6▶



A large Texas colony of approximately 750,000 Mexican free-tail bats in Huntsville has more housing options, thanks to the hands-on work of Windham School District students. These Finished Carpentry students at the Lewis Unit are building two more houses to provide roosts for the bats, which tend to live in large numbers. The bats can be seen flying out at dusk to consume tons of mosquitoes, moths and other insects, and then returning at dawn to roost near the Huntsville “Walls” Unit.

## Wenoca Stewart forecasts new future in logistics

*William Hill — ECHO Staff*

LEE COLLEGE



“I DID IT!” WENOCA STEWART enthusiastically proclaims during a recent phone interview with *The ECHO*. “No one did it for me, I did it and I am very proud of myself,” she says, explaining how she continued and used training in logistics to land employment soon after her 2020 release from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Stewart had attained a GED from Windham School District (WSD) during a previous stint in TDCJ and had vowed that she was never coming back to prison again. However, circumstances resulted in being sent to Plane State Jail where she once again sought to further her education. She completed a Construction Fundamentals course offered by WSD and received OSHA certification. Stewart is a member of the first graduating class of Lee College’s new Logistics class

at the Plane State Jail in Dayton, offered in partnership with TDCJ. Stewart earned two employment-boosting certificates in the course: Logistics and Supply Chain Management and Logistics and Operations Management. Since her release from prison, she parlayed the training she received to find employment with a company called Instagram Logistics. In her current job, Stewart is part of a logistical team ensuring that products shipped from various companies arrive at their intended destinations around the country and around the globe. The skills she learned in prison have enabled her to step in and become a productive member of the company. To many people, the terms logistics and logistician are familiar, yet the meaning of them may be unclear. Logistics, in its most basic

element, is the management of supply chains for a business or organization.

STEWART continued on pg. 6▶



Wenoca Stewart

## TDCJ closes three more facilities as 2020 ends

THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is permanently closing one of its prison sites and shuttering two more at least temporarily. The Scott Unit in Brazoria County closed Dec. 15, and the Gurney Unit in Palestine and the Neal Unit in Amarillo are being emptied and temporarily closed by the end of 2020. Residents and staff at these units are being transferred to other TDCJ facilities. TDCJ closed three units in September, including Garza East in Beeville and Jester I in Sugar Land. The Bradshaw State Jail in Henderson was temporarily idled. The current TDCJ resident population is 122,000, a reduction from previous years and called “the lowest prison population for TDCJ since 1995,” in the Texas Tribune (Dec. 1, 2020). All of the shuttered TDCJ units housed men. ★

## Holiday Blues

*A reflection by William Hill, ECHO Staff*

THE HOLIDAYS ARE SUCH A joyful time. Inspiring music, nostalgic movies and festive gatherings with family and friends produce a general feeling of bonhomie that makes one wish to return to yesteryear—when everything was better. That is, except for those instances when the so-called “good ol’ days”—weren’t. For a long time, while everyone else was celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas, I simply endured them. The week before Thanksgiving 1974, my parents received a phone call from MeMaw, my maternal grandmother, telling them that they needed to get to Dallas as soon as possible. Pawpaw had been admitted to Parkland Memorial Hospital several weeks prior and now the doctors were telling her that there was nothing else they could do for him; they did not hold out much hope for him to make it through the weekend. At the time, my parents told us kids only that we were going to go visit Pawpaw. I remember being excited about going on the road trip to the big city because to me, going up and down over the tall bridges was almost as fun as riding a roller coaster.

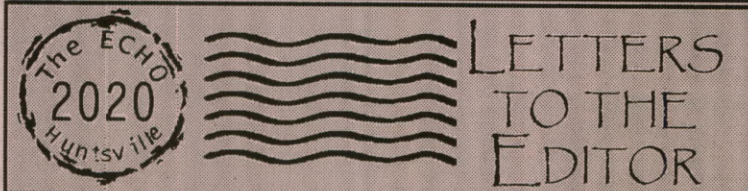
There were three of us kids still living at home at that time: my sister Pam, my brother Nolan and me. Since I was the youngest, I automatically got relegated to the middle of the back seat of the family car. On long road trips, I either leaned over the back of the front seat or sat wedged between my siblings. Guess which I preferred? Back then child safety seats were a foreign concept, so there is only one reason I am alive today to write this story: God’s grace. If Dad had ever slammed on his brakes or, heaven forbid, actually had a wreck, Lil’ Will would have been transformed into a 60-pound human projectile. It seemed like in no time at all, we were at the hospital. While I loved traveling to and from Dallas, I hated going into the hospital because everyone in there was sick. I couldn’t figure out how the doctors and nurses avoided catching every illness known to man as much as they were around sick people. Even worse, for whatever reason, I was not allowed to go inside Pawpaw’s room to visit him.

HOLIDAY continued on pg. 11▶

### Message of encouragement

## TDCJ’s Volunteer Services:

Do you find yourself frustrated? Are you currently looking for guidance? Do you find yourself asking if there is a better way? Or what we—or you—can do to help? During these unprecedented times we understand that there are a lot of uncertainties. Life as we currently know it is far from normal. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Volunteer Services team is here to help. We are actively doing our part, reaching out to different communities, organizations, churches, and sponsors to coordinate support. We have spread the word and are pleased to hear so many people excited to assist us during this time. Their positive attitudes, new interest in volunteering, and creative ideas are nothing short of great news—and all coming your way. With COVID-19 restrictions currently in place, we have strongly encouraged volunteers to incorporate new correspondence programs and revamp current ones, hoping to refresh and enlighten you. We plan to expand these programs across the agency. This should help us share a newfound sense of normalcy, while continuing to see growth as one big community of volunteers. Individually, remember to stay positive, encouraged and hopeful. Keeping a strong mindset is vital during this time, and we are excited to share this message with you. We are stronger together! **Editor’s Note:** In a recent issue of the Rehabilitation Programs Division Volunteer Services Newsletter, TDCJ Volunteer Services reports Certified Volunteer Chaplains’ Assistants have continued to support TDCJ staff and residents during the pandemic. They fill in during the absence of a chaplain, make official phone calls to loved ones that ease the mind of the residents and their families during facility lockdowns, and help with other official duties. The article said volunteers and organizations continue to support residents of TDCJ throughout the pandemic using outside ministries and efforts. Those mentioned include Jubilee, KAIROS, Universal Beyond Bars, Kolbe Ministries, Gateway Prison Ministry, New Heart Living, Voices of the Streets Ministry, Rescued Not Arrested Ministry, Volunteer Organizations 27seventeen Ministries, CrossWalk, and others. Watch for more details of Volunteer Service efforts in future issues of *The ECHO*. ★



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### To the editor,

I'm interested in earning a vocational degree from the Windham School District or a community college. I've been out of school for 20 years, though. I need information on how to get started!

### Thanks for your help, Kenneth Woods Leblanc Unit

### To the reader,

Residents interested in academic or Career and Technical Educational (CTE) programs should send an I-60 to the education department on their unit of assignment. The WSD counselor will explain what is available to you. Good luck on your educational journey!

### To the editor,

I was incarcerated on the Murray Unit from 2005-2012. I even had a story published in '08 on daydreaming about snow. I wish I could say "Hi!" to the girls I did my time with, but I don't know if y'all would publish a letter from one of us who is now out. I want y'all to know I'm in the

land of the free and doing well—the things I learned in TDCJ have really helped me out here! Don't lose hope, my friends. There IS life beyond the fence.

### Jaime Bradley Colorado

### To the reader,

Thank you for sharing your words—both in '08 and now. There are many activities and programs offered in TDCJ and the Windham School District that provide growth and benefits for residents on BOTH sides of the fence. You confirm the benefits of learning and training for a successful life after release.

### To the editor,

I am writing to see if it is possible to send me the photo of the welders from the Murray Unit—I believe it's in the August issue. I would really appreciate it.

### Yours Truly, Maria Gomez Murray Unit

### To the reader,

Unfortunately, we are unable

to send copies of photos printed in The ECHO. WSD students may contact their education department about getting a copy of their graduation photo.

### To the editor,

I would be very happy if you included my dessert recipe in the Chowhound section. I really enjoy making different desserts and other foods. This is the first time I have sent one of my creations to you. I thought I'd share one of my favorites with everyone.

Also, I am curious—when I get released, is there a way that I can still get The ECHO?

### Thank You, Cristof L. Harris Hamilton Unit

### To the reader,

Thank you for sharing your recipe, printed on page 9. We encourage all aspiring culinary artists to share their recipes with the readers of The ECHO. As far as subscribing, anyone interested in a year's subscription of 10 issues can send a money order for \$12 to:

The ECHO  
PO Box 40  
Huntsville, TX 77342-0040.

### To the editor,

In the past The ECHO

printed the automatic deposit (ACH) forms. I haven't seen this printed for some time, and I need one. How can I get a copy of an ACH form? Thanks for your time and help!

### Alfred Aishman Allred Unit

### To the reader,

Thank you for bringing up an important topic. Any questions or requests concerning the ACH form or the deposit process should be directed to TDCJ Commissary & Trust Department/ITE. You can truck mail an I-60 or send a stamped letter. This department will send you the necessary form(s) and instructions. Be sure to mark your correspondence: "ATTN: ACH Form." The USPS mailing address is:

TDCJ Inmate Trust Fund (ITF)  
ATTN: ACH Forms.  
P.O. Box 60  
Huntsville, TX 77342-0060.

### To the editor,

In past issues I've seen The ECHO print "top 10" lists. I'd like to submit a top 10 list with a positive spin:

### Ten Commandments of Human Relations

1. **Speak to people.** There is nothing as nice as a cheerful word of greeting.

2. **Smile at people.** It's easier than frowning and makes both of you feel better.
3. **Call people by name.** The sweetest music to many ears is the sound of one's name.
4. **Be friendly and helpful.** If you want friends, be friendly!
5. **Be cordial.** Speak and act as though everything you do is pleasurable.
6. **Have a genuine interest in people.** People like to be noticed and appreciated.
7. **Be generous with praise, but cautious with criticism.** Overcome them with goodness.
8. **Be considerate of the feelings of others.** Try walking in their shoes.
9. **Be thoughtful of the opinions of others.** Respect their viewpoints.
10. **Be observant to give service.** What counts most in life is what we do for others.

Give these a try and see how it works for you!

### Bill Sheckells Clements Unit

### To the reader,

Your list makes sense to us and works inside or outside the walls. Thank you for writing and sharing with our readers!

**TEXAS PRISON NEWS**

**THE ECHO**

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### Dear Darby,

Hey, ol' thang! I don't understand why everyone is so upset about having to wear a mask when they are in the dayroom or going about their daily activities. Everybody I talk to says that I look better with a mask on. I'm not sure what they mean by that, I guess the white brings out the color of my eyes or something.

### The Masked (Up) Man Stiles Unit

### Dear Masked Up,

Trust me... you really DO look better in a mask — the thicker, the better! Cover the mouth, cover the nose — c'mon, you know how it goes! Your mask protects me from you, and you from me. We'll both stay healthy; you'll see! Soon we'll have the vaccine and the masks will go away, and maybe you will too. As for me, I'll stay! Meanwhile, keep it lookin' good at Stiles!

### Dear Darby,

I love reading all your comebacks! You should have your own radio show. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know, thanks for all the positive vibes and please let the other residents know to keep six feet apart, wear those masks and keep washing their hands! It's all common sense. If we do what we gotta' do, then we'll make it through. I've been making masks for the population at the Hilltop Unit Garment Factory, so I'm doing my part to keep the population safe—beyond just doing safe practices. I've also enclosed some recipes to keep y'all cookin' over the holidays!

### Thanks, God Bless, Yessi Ramos Hilltop Unit

### Dear Yessi,

Yesssssss, Ma'am! You've got it right on the safe practices thing. We've ALL got to do our part until we're past this mess. I've even read that we may have to keep wearing masks for a while after we're vaccinated, so keep crankin' 'em out in the garment factory. Thank you to you and all the other workers doin' their part to keep us safe and healthy. 2020 is almost behind us—2021 will be a much better year! So Happy New Year! And thanks for the recipes, too. Several looked tasty, and I look forward to tryin' them after my block makes it to the store!

### Dear Darby,

I have a couple of questions. First, how do you stay so positive and full of witty remarks and comments in such a negative time? I laughed so hard at your pancake comments that a person a few cells down asked what was wrong with me! Secondly, how are thermals a "non-emergency" commissary item during winter, when shorts and cooling shirts are emergency items year round? That makes no sense to me. Lastly, I got some info on exercising and it says adults are supposed to do aerobic exercise 3-5 times a week. What are some examples of aerobic exercises? I know walking

and jogging are some, but I want more! Thank you beforehand for your advice!

### God Bless, Trinity Hughes Crain Unit

### Dear Trinity,

First off, I appreciate your comments, but I'm not always positive. When they came and did the COVID test, I was negative. That, in itself is positive, but negative none the less! I try to keep a positive mind-set, even in a negative place experiencing COVID craziness, because thoughts lead to feelings that lead to behavior—at least that's what the Cognitive Psychologists say. You often can't change your circumstances, but you CAN change your viewpoint and attitude! As far as the thermals in commissary, why not send them an I-60? They probably haven't thought about the need for thermals to be emergency items. It doesn't mean that they'll change their policy, but they might. Lastly, on the exercise thing, we are planning an article to come out soon discussing High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), describing different exercises and workouts you can do in the limited space of your living area, as well as the rec yard. Meanwhile, you can always do a little dance—it's aerobic—and can lead to some positive health and joy as well!

### Dear Darby,

Y'all made two mistakes in your October issue on the Apple Cinnamon Roll recipe: you forgot to put cream cheese in the ingredient section; the instructions say six spoonsful of water should make the dough the right consistency—it took a little over half a cup! They were good to eat, though.

### Sincerely, Tired At Estelle

### Dear Tired,

Talking about tired, I'm tired of y'all whining about a little innocent typo. So yes, there should have been cream cheese listed with the ingredients. Our bad; we apologize! The amount of water used to make the dough is a guideline—"add more water if needed" was included, which you did. You said they tasted great, so really, what's your complaint?! And all this talk about typos and cinnamon rolls is making me hungry — or maybe hangry!

### Dear Darby,

I was pleasantly surprised when I was called down to the commissary to find out that they were rewarding me for voluntarily taking the flu shot this year. It is well known in psychology that rewarding good behavior is more effective than punishing bad behavior, so it is great to see TDCJ do something like this. The top of my receipt for my free cashews shows that this was part of the "offender incentive program." I don't know who started this program or what else they have planned, but I would like to thank you, whoever you are.

### Michael Day Pack Unit

### Dear Mikey,

Don't get all technical and psychological on me! The free vittles for gettin' a flu shot was a way to convince the resident population that the flu vaccine might be a good idea in the age of COVID-19. COVID is no joke, and the idea of having a large flu

outbreak while we're all still dealing with the other virus is just too much. Ol' Darb hasn't been able to find out who came up with the program, but I agree with you — it was a great idea! Get vaccinated, keep doing safe practices (Wear the mask! Keep some distance! Wash your hands!) and we'll hope for a better 2021.

### Dear Darby,

I would like to thank you for all the hard work y'all do for this publication. I always read your column first, followed by looking at new recipes and then looking at the group photos, seeing if there's anyone in them that I know. I enjoy all the motivational stories and articles—all the information that is provided to help us. That said, I would love to have my recipe printed in The ECHO! Can you help me get published, Darb?

### Sincerely, Frank Zavala Jr. Dominguez State Jail

### Dear Frank,

Just shooting me a kite, giving me props and asking me to get your recipe in the issue are NOT necessary to get published, but thank you! I looked at your recipe, saw that it was something completely new and sent it over to the Chow Hound, and he agreed. Look for your recipe, along with many other creative culinary delights provided by folks across the agency on page 9.

### Dear Darby,

I want to wish all the staff at the informative and fabulous ECHO a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! It has been a difficult year for all of us, and we appreciate your selfless acts of kindness by still making The ECHO and getting it to all of us across the system. So many of us look forward to reading it, and when we get a fresh copy during the pandemic, it's like a slice of comfort and normalcy. I am also enclosing a few holiday recipes that should bring a smile to the face of many!

### Thank You, Lily Archuleta Murray Unit

### Dear Lily,

Thanks for the holiday wishes and recipes, and congratulations on becoming an ECHO writing contest finalist for your submission, "The Other Chain Gang!" It HAS been a rough year, both inside and out in the freeworld, but we've made it through the night and the dawn of a better year is coming. Keep up the safe practices though, 'cause we're not over it yet, and keep sending the awesome recipes!

### Dear Darby,

I will not be writing any more articles to your paper anymore.

### Anthony Hall Beaumont, TX

### Dear Tony,

Hmmmm. After doing a little research, we can't determine that you EVER sent us anything. Did you send in submissions earlier, are you experiencing writer's block, or does this mean you're getting out? Maybe you are just frustrated with us or life in general. At least you sent us this letter—hope gettin' published makes you feel better!

Each month, *The ECHO* features articles from contributing writers within TDCJ, as well as from those who have been released and want to send hope and insight back inside. This page features a variety of columnists. Enjoy!

## You know what they say...hindsight is 2020

John Pippen — ECHO Staff

Here **Forward**

**G**REETINGS MY FRIENDS! It has been an unprecedented year. You know what else has been unprecedented, the use of the word "unprecedented." That, along with the word "historical." I'm worn out on both.

It has been quite the year of change here in our world and in the freeworld as well. Now, not all change is bad, at least that's what I keep telling myself. You can move me three cells down the run and I can't sleep for a week. Change affects us all in different ways, but it does affect us.

I'd like to take this space to recognize those of us who didn't make it to see this "unprecedented / historical" year's end. Condolences to every resident who lost a

loved one, a friend, a neighbor, or a cellie. This isn't meant to bring you down — just a moment to think and reflect. It's a strange life we live, you and I, but we've made the choice and now we live with it...or die with it. No one wants to think about it, but it is a fact of our existence in this place.

Nobody saw this chain of events coming for 2020, but everyone will be glad to see it leave. I can't help but wonder what changes over the last year will now become permanent — the "new normal" as everyone is so fond of saying. I can certainly see some good things that have come out of this so far. Some things that were slow to change got fast-tracked, and some just got eliminated altogether. For those of us who live here, I feel there is still more change to come.

Usually I like to make some sort of predictions for the coming New Year, but where do I start? Well, here goes one, anyway: we move on. The story continues, and we keep moving forward. I always look ahead to the New Year because it brings me closer to freedom, but at the same time; closer to the end.

So 2021, who are you? What surprises do you have in store? I think we're all ready to put this one behind us, and get on with the adventure. The final days of this year are in motion. We are masked up, six feet apart, and looking forward.

So this is a final farewell to those of us who didn't make it. If you know someone of whom I speak, raise your cup. We all die someday — but not all today. Today we live! See ya in 2021.★

## Be all that you can be

**W**HEN I WAS SERVING LIFE ON THE STILES UNIT, there was an Army Ranger who gave me some great advice about doing time. I once asked him how he stayed so calm in the chaotic world of prison. He told me he always lived in the here and now, in the moment. That sounded kind of vague, so I asked him to elaborate.

"The people who are always stressed out, easily agitated and seem to have chaos around them at all times are the ones who are thinking about the freeworld and things that have not even happened yet in the future," he said. "They're not in the present moment."

I listened closer; the person he was describing was I. I, too, spent a lot of time in "the world," daydreaming and stressing about a life that I once had and desperately wanted to get back to.

"The trick is to live in the moment, the here and now," he revealed. "I learned in Ranger School to think only about whatever it is that I'm doing at the time. For example, when I wake up in my cell each morning, the only thing on my mind is breakfast. When I'm done with chow, my mind is on whatever I do next — then lunch, then rec, then last chow, dayroom, etc. At no point do I allow myself to live outside the moment."

He continued, "If you do not live in the moment, you'll miss both *obstacles* and *opportunities*. The obstacles are usually something you can go around if you see them when they first appear. It's the opportunities which are the most important to be present for, however, because they may never appear again."

From then on, I tried to live with the mental mindset that the Army Ranger gave me that day: living in the moment. Honestly, some days it worked; other days,

it did not. But, and this may be one of the greatest takeaways from doing time, I had the power to start my day over anytime I chose. Having a bad day was a choice. Also, having a bad day usually meant that my mind was not in the moment.

With the coffee bean lesson from Mr. Jackson in Dallas County Jail and the Army Ranger's incredible tip on mindset, I was able to find opportunities in adversity, avoid obstacles and turn the pot of boiling water called prison — into a pot of coffee.

Three weeks ago, I had the opportunity to return that Ranger's mindset message to its home. The United



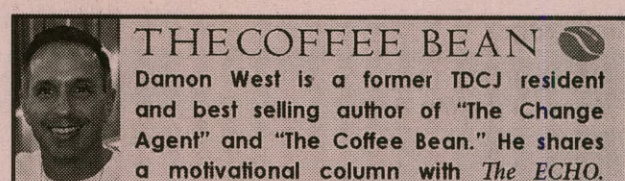
West prepares for bootcamp workouts

States Army brought me into Fort Sill, Okla. for an entire week to train troops on resiliency and mindset.

Read that sentence again. Five years ago, I was sitting where you're sitting, reading *The ECHO* inside the Stiles Unit. If I would have read something like that, about a formerly incarcerated man training the United States military troops, I would have put the paper down, called my cellie over and said, "Hey! You gotta' read this."

Here's how it all happened. One of the colonels on the base read my book, "The Coffee Bean," and reached out to me on social media to tell me how valuable he thought the lesson in the book was. I messaged him back and asked him if he would read my other book, "The Change Agent." Then, I explained to him about the way I did my time in prison, the way I developed a mindset to always find opportunities in adversity, and how I only try to control the controllable. In short, I said, "If you liked 'The Coffee Bean,' you will love 'The Change Agent.'" Moreover, the mindset training I learned in prison would transfer over well to the military." I even told him about my Ranger buddy.

A few days later, he got back to me, said he indeed



**THE COFFEE BEAN**  
Damon West is a former TDCJ resident and best selling author of "The Change Agent" and "The Coffee Bean." He shares a motivational column with *The ECHO*.

loved "The Change Agent," and then we began planning a week of training for as many troops as possible at Fort Sill over a five day span. I asked him if it would be possible for me to go through basic training and workouts (boot camp and PT) with the troops every morning. He assured me I didn't have to do that. I told him I wanted to do it so I could earn the respect of the men and women with whom I was going to be speaking.

"Think about it. If I'm willing to do what they do every day, they will be more likely to do what I do every day. A perfect opportunity to get on their level," I said.

The mission was a huge success. After the first day speaking, base commanders were calling the headquarters to see if I could train their platoons and divisions. In all, I trained over 3,000 men and women that week, went through basic training and was able to help turn Fort Sill into a giant pot of coffee. It was such a productive week that the Two Star General in command of the entire base, General Kamper, invited me back to train in December. He told me one of the best things I did was making myself vulnerable by getting into the PT drills each morning.

"The troops loved that you were willing to walk in their boots," he said.

I told General Kamper that, as physically demanding as it was for a 45 year old to get out there with all of those 17-20 year olds, it was easy compared to going out on the rec yard those first few months of prison to earn respect on the basketball court.

You see, it was prison that trained me for everything I'm doing in life now. If you choose to allow it, prison can be the training ground for you as well. It all starts with changing your mindset, from looking at prison as a punishment to looking at prison as an opportunity.

What will you do with your opportunity today?

**Be a coffee bean!**

**Writing Me**

I love receiving your letters, so keep them coming. Please use my P.O. Box below to write me. The only rules with letters are *no legal requests, no favors and no harm*. Remember, I am on parole the rest of my life. As such, I follow *all* rules in society. What this means is do not send me something that puts you, someone else or me in any danger or threat of freedoms. What I'm saying is that you cannot expect confidentiality when you write me. ★

**Damon West**  
P.O. Box 1451  
Nederland, TX 77627



West visits with General Kamper.

## Exercise creates a natural high

Deidre McDonald  
ECHO Contributor — Released

**M**OST OF US CAN AGREE THAT THE REASON MANY OF us aren't still trapped in the web of drug and alcohol addiction is because we have been removed from it and placed in a sanctuary of sorts (TDCJ) where it can't be obtained. Going back to the first days of my incarceration, I clearly remember the withdrawal, increased appetite ("Are you going to eat the rest of your tray?"), sleeping like the dead ("What day is it? Or is it night time?"), lethargy ("Can I bum a cup of coffee?"), and of course, the all-too-familiar feelings of shame and regret.

A couple of weeks later I still maintained that addictive cycle on a daily basis, the up-and-down cycle of "Is chow time almost here?", "Where will I get my next cup of coffee?", and then making a commissary list over and over. It kept me in a state of hypervigilance — except this time with food and caffeine.

Most can also agree that addiction is a neurological disease rather than a moral failing of willpower. Scientists point to an imbalance of dopamine, the "feel good" chemical in the brain. When an addict takes their first dose (drugs, alcohol, sugar, caffeine, etc.), it is the dopamine we are craving. Dopamine flows down the "reward pathway" when we engage in "feel-good" behaviors. The good times are then encoded in regions that control memory and motivation, ensuring that we continue to engage in these activities. We are then self-taught to repeat

these behaviors.

After three months in jail, I was many pounds heavier and realized the need for balance. At first, the motivation behind my decision to exercise was just to lose weight, but looking back at it now, there was so much more to the depth of that realization for a need for balance than I knew.

After my first session, I recognized a very familiar feeling of euphoria — almost as if I were high.



However, thanks to natural healthy exercise, I was happy, I could think clearly, and what is best, I had a new sense of motivation to do something productive. I couldn't possibly imagine wanting to dig around in my lockbox for something to eat, get wired on coffee or even think about drugs. I had discovered a new, healthier high.

When you're exercising, you immediately get a boost of dopamine, noradrenaline, and serotonin. Your brain also starts to build additional connections to help break the craving of the animalistic "reactive reward system" in the brain. This system operates from an instinctual, short-term, "got-to-get-it-now!" position. This makes way for use of the "reflective reward system," which delays gratification, helps you

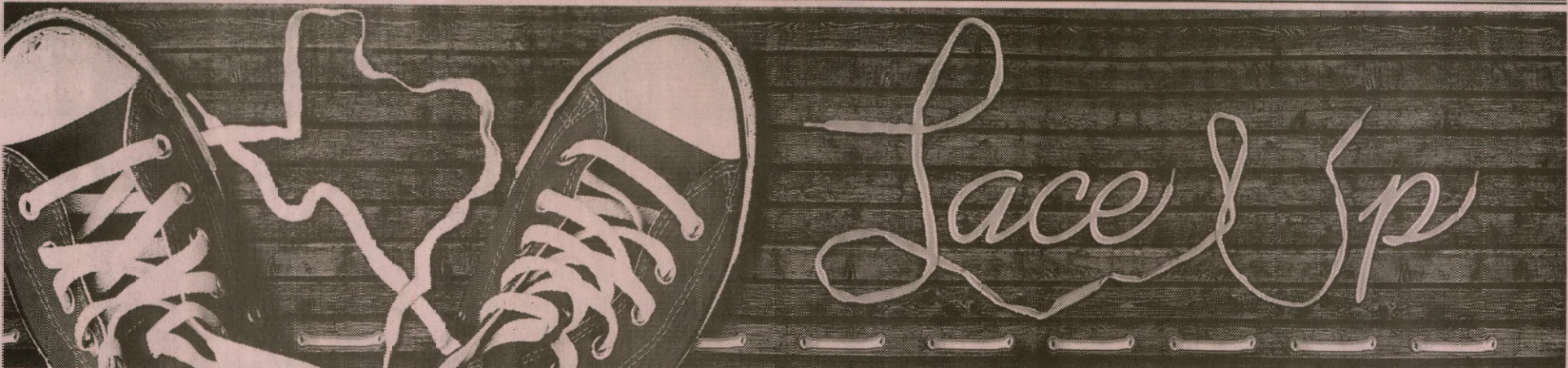
make considered decisions, and think in the long term — all behaviors that enhance your motivation to help you achieve your goals.

Exercise acts like a drug on the brain chemicals, yet it's a good reaction because it enhances systems that are in deficit. It re-regulates brain functions that would have otherwise been stuck in the "reactive" crave mode. When you start to produce your own levels of dopamine, rather than depending on external sources, you are able to pay more attention to other issues like, "Which productive task can I do today that will contribute to my well-being?" or "What can I do with this time in prison that will help me to better myself once I am released?"

Some might say I take my exercising too serious. Well, I took my addiction to drugs and food seriously — and all it ever produced were harmful effects. Not only is exercise a positive activity, but it has changed my brain chemistry so now I am much less responsive to stressors — something life is full of. It takes a lot more to stress me out today than it did before exercise came into my life — thanks to the self-production of dopamine.

Some might even say I have traded one addiction for another. I beg to differ. Exercise does not make me lie, steal, or print counterfeit money to buy it — or eat my entire lockbox. It has never made me feel sick, depressed or insecure. It doesn't fill me with shame or regrets, nor do I need more of it to get the same effect. Exercise calms my nerves, opens my mind to new possibilities, gives me a sense of well-being, and challenges me to reach new heights — not highs. ★

Source info: "The Runner's High," by Wendy Lynch, Ph.D.; *Runner's World Magazine* (April 2007).



★★ Editor's Note ★★

*This month's Lace Up highlights include happenings from the past few months. Publication of some of this information has been delayed due to COVID-19 challenges, but the accomplishments remain significant.*

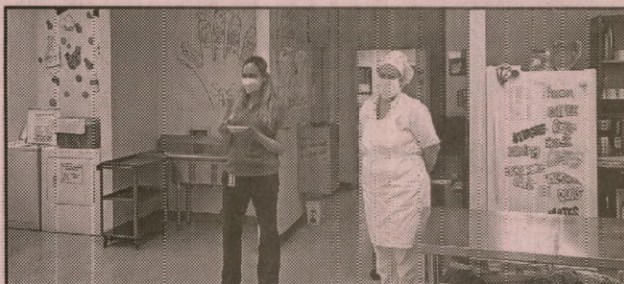
**BETO UNIT**



Beto Unit welding students successfully applied their skills to a project requiring various types of welding techniques, and they created a professional-looking platform with a staircase and leg extensions. Welding instructor T. Stewart said the product was firm, stable and well put together: "The students who are near completion of the class for their NCCER are eligible to work on projects to gain on the job training and real world work experience." The recent WSD Beto Unit welding graduates are shown with the platform project: A. Fisher, A. Alvarez, C. Santillano, and T. Robinson.

Submitted by Unit Reporter Quincy Patterson

**CRAIN UNIT**



Windham Culinary Arts students welcome WSD superintendent Kristina Hartman to their classroom at the Crain Unit. On her visit she spoke to several classes about educational opportunities, addressed student concerns and questions, and sampled the dessert of the day.

**FORMBY STATE JAIL AND WHEELER UNIT**

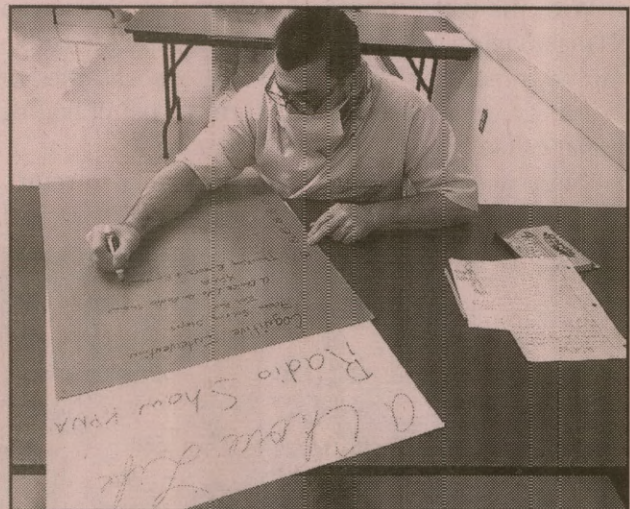


Fall Festival decorations and special class projects by students and staff filled the WSD classrooms and halls of Formby and Wheeler as the schools celebrated cultural diversity in the fall. The crafted décor energized the schools and made classes appealing despite pandemic challenges.

**FT. STOCKTON UNIT**

Ft. Stockton Unit's CHANGES classes had "Going Home" on their minds during a recent Non-Traditional School Day of special projects. Students who were planning on starting a business made business cards, along with those who would be returning to a business they had once started. Students who would be joining the labor force upon release also made business cards promoting their skills in hopes of being hired. Students shared their future plans and were encouraged by classmates.

Ft. Stockton's Cognitive Intervention Program 2 class then created a Radio Talk Show on Non-Traditional School Day. The Talk Show Host made a microphone and stepped into his roll by introducing a "panel of experts" consisting of students portraying doctors who were experts in their field. The host would call upon the "experts" to explain to the radio audience about Thinking Errors, the Criminal Addictive Cycle, Self-Control Model, Thinking Reports, Stress and Anger Management, Goal Setting, Problem Solving, and the Relapse Prevention Plan. "It was amazing to watch and listen to the students as they stepped into a professional role," Principal Darlyn Cassity said. "Their words and the tone of their voices changed as they participated in the Talk Show. If you would have closed your eyes and just listened, you would have thought you were listening to the radio!"



Students in Ft. Stockton's Literacy I, II & III class were instructed to use their imagination to draw pictures using angles, and they then enjoyed presenting their creative drawings, a staffer said. This activity was part of Non-Traditional Day events, and it was followed by a Multiplication Bingo review game that required students to remember math facts.

**LYNAUGH UNIT**

Lynaugh's special Non-Traditional School Day started at 5 a.m. in the Plumbing classroom as students experienced the steps of planning a plumbing business upon release. Not all will become business owners, but each gained knowledge of what must be considered when operating a business. Students were enthusiastic about applying what they were learning and related it to their own lives. This included focusing on the hidden details of running a business, such as labor costs, payroll taxes and benefits, overhead costs, billable hours, profit margin, insurance, bidding, materials, and more. Each student calculated what he would need to operate a plumbing business in the freeworld. The instructor then gave real work-related experiences as challenges to resolve.



**LYNAUGH UNIT**

During the fall WSD Non-Traditional School Day, students in WSD's CIP2 learned how the subconscious mind works during a special autumn activity. They also learned to use the ELMO equipment to present their individual sections of information. Following the presentations, each student created a piece of foldable art to help him review the lesson's main points.

**PLANE STATE JAIL/ HENLEY UNIT**

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the Plane State Jail and Henley Unit held a February 2020 graduation in the chapel at the Plane State Jail. Graduates included academic students who received their High School Equivalency certificates, along with special recognition of students with the highest and second highest cumulative scores as the valedictorian and salutatorian of their respective classes. Career and Technology Education students who completed the coursework for BCIS and Telecommunications Connectivity were also recognized. The graduates of BCIS completed coursework in Microsoft Office, specifically Word, Excel, Outlook, and Access. The Telecommunications Connectivity graduates completed coursework in Telecommunications, Copper Cabling, Fiber Optics, and Energy Management. The Plane and Henley fac-

ulty and staff were happy to recognize the efforts of their students and share these successes with family members who were in attendance.

**SAYLE UNIT**

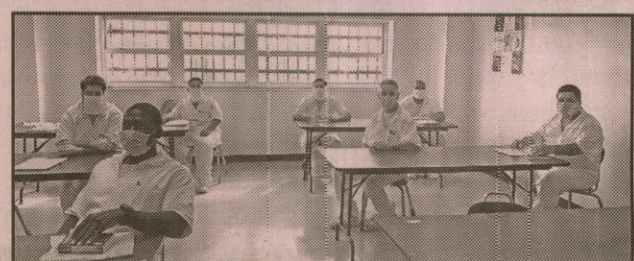
Even during difficult times in 2020, students at the Sayle Unit made time to learn about Veterans Day in November. Teachers read and discussed the background and history of Veterans Day and were then allowed to demonstrate artistic abilities by creating bookmarks or drawings honoring Veterans. The message they shared: "Thank you to those who have served or are currently serving. We appreciate you and thank you for your service!"

**STEVENSON UNIT**

WSD's Construction Fundamentals program at the Stevenson Unit completes its studies, working through class curriculum during COVID-19.



**STEVENSON UNIT**

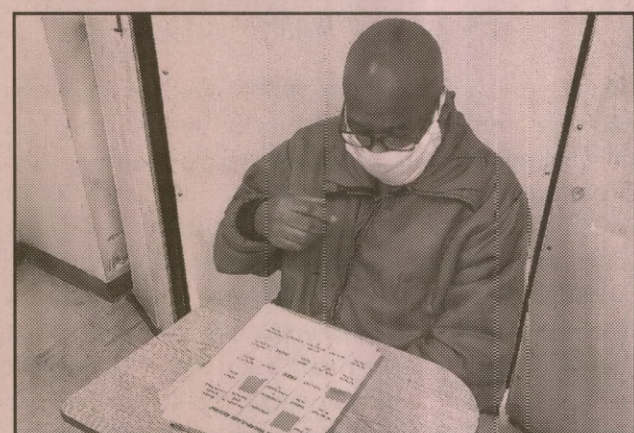
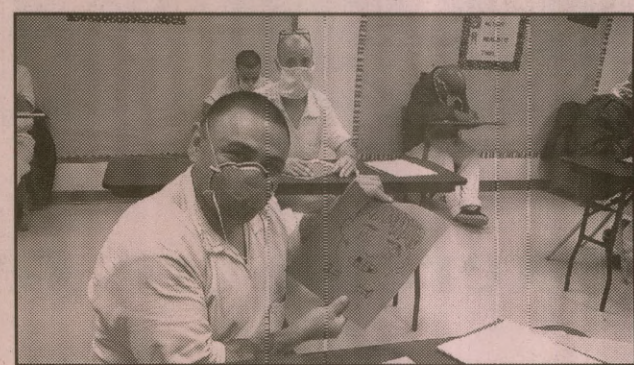


As Cognitive Intervention Program graduates celebrated their course completion in a socially distant manner, WSD instructor L. Storbeck reminded them that "The most powerful tool behind the driving force of being successful is ... a positive attitude." She challenged them to dive into themselves to find "that spark of courage to believe that you are worthy of love and kindness."

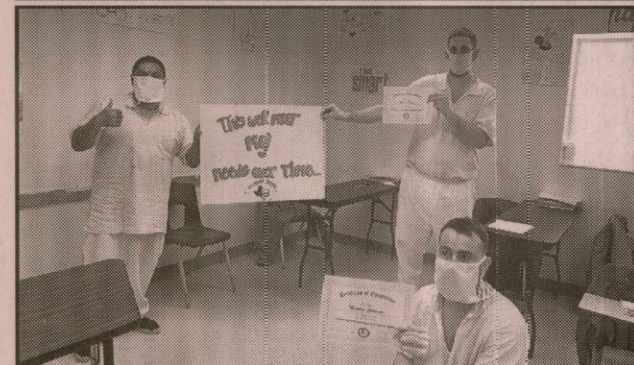
Submitted by Unit Reporter Landon Brook

**RUDD UNIT**

Using fiction's "Frankenstein" as a symbol of extreme cognitive behavioral restructuring, Windham CIP2 students at the Rudd Unit crafted posters in October depicting this Halloween and literary character. These activities were part of a special non-traditional day of instruction. Students also played Cognitive bingo using class terms from the Franklin Reality Model, competed in a version of Jeopardy to review class concepts, and learned about personality types, including their own.



**RUDD UNIT**



Overcoming all obstacles presented by the 2020 pandemic, CIP2 graduates at Rudd use improved thinking to complete their program and receive certificates of recognition. ★

**Message of hope and purpose:**

*Landon Brook — Stevenson Unit Reporter*

"THOUGH THIS MAY SEEM LIKE A VERY SOLEMN TIME FOR THOSE WHO ARE DEALING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY DUE TO THE DISEASE OF FEAR AND DEATH, YOU CAN CREATE PURPOSE THROUGH HOPE. HOPE IS VERY POWERFUL, AND IT IS DRIVEN BY PURPOSE. NO PURPOSE IS TOO SMALL OR TOO BIG IF IT KEEPS YOU GOING. ... OUR SPIRIT IS THE BINDING GLUE OF SELF-LOVE. PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AND NURTURE THIS PART WITH WHATEVER BRINGS YOU EVEN A SMALL MEASURE OF PEACE, LOVE OR JOY. HAVING PURPOSE IN YOUR LIFE IS A POWERFUL WAY TO PROTECT THE SELF FROM DESPAIR. WHEN THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE. WHEN THERE IS HOPE, THERE IS JOY."



**The Skin I'm In**

*Tira English — Crain Unit*

WHAT DO YOU SEE  
WHEN YOU LOOK AT ME?  
THE PERFECT ME  
I PORTRAY TO BE?  
OR DO YOU SEE  
THE JUNKIE  
I CAN'T STAND TO BE,  
THAT I'M TRYIN' HARD  
NOT TO BE?  
DO YOU SEE  
A PERFECT FAMILY TREE  
OR ADDICTIONS  
PASSED DOWN ONTO ME?  
HOW ABOUT THE HAPPY GIRL  
IN THE PICTURES!  
THERE'S NO WAY  
SHE COULD BE HURT.  
NOW LOOK AT YOURSELF  
IN THE MIRROR  
IS YOUR PERCEPTION  
GETTING ANY CLEARER?  
SO BEFORE YOU START  
THROWING STONES,  
WHY DON'T YOU LOOK  
AT THE REFLECTION  
OF YOUR OWN?

**Christmas Meal**

**Prayer**

*William Hill — ECHO Staff*

GIVE ME THIS DAY A  
TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY MEAL,  
LET ME EAT AND EAT MY FILL.  
  
A MEAT TRAY LOADED WITH  
TURKEY AND HAM, AND OH, SO  
MUCH MORE,  
AND A DESSERT TRAY LADEN  
WITH CAKES, PIES AND  
BROOKIES GALORE.  
  
DRESSING, GRAVY AND ALL OF  
THE TRIMMINGS, OH MY,  
THE SIGHT OF ALL THIS FOOD IS  
ENOUGH TO MAKE  
THIS INMATE SIGH.  
  
LEAD ME NOT INTO TEMP-  
TATION WITH THOUGHTS OF  
TAKING SOME BACK,  
ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE NICE  
TO HAVE A MIDNIGHT SNACK.  
  
SO, AS THIS CRAZY YEAR  
COMES FINALLY TO AN END,  
I WISH EVERYONE A MERRY  
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY  
NEW YEAR. AMEN!

**To The End**

*Raymond Lee Cavitt  
Jester III Unit*

FRIENDS OFTEN COME AND GO  
AND IT'S OFTEN HARD  
FOR YOU TO KNOW  
IF YOU HAVE FOUND A FRIEND  
WHO WILL STAY WITH YOU  
'TIL THE END.  
I DO NOT POSSESS  
A CRYSTAL BALL  
SO THE FUTURE I CAN'T TELL  
YOU AT ALL.  
I DON'T KNOW WHAT  
TOMORROW WILL BRING  
BUT I CAN TELL YOU  
ONE THING.  
I'LL CARE ABOUT YOU,  
AND BE YOUR FRIEND, TOO,  
FOR AS LONG  
AS YOU WANT ME TO.  
I'LL DO MY BEST  
TO CARE AND SUPPORT YOU  
NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO.  
I WILL NEVER INTENTIONALLY  
DISRESPECT YOU,  
NOR SAY THINGS  
TO MAKE YOU BLUE.  
I WILL TRY MY BEST TO BE TRUE  
WHILE STANDING  
BY YOU THROUGH  
ALL THE SEASONS,  
GOOD AND BAD.  
I'LL LOOK FOR NO REASONS,  
WHENEVER I'M MAD  
TO STOP CARING ABOUT YOU  
AND STOP  
BEING YOUR FRIEND, TOO.  
I'LL ALWAYS TRY TO BE  
A LOYAL FRIEND —  
ON THAT YOU CAN DEPEND.  
SO PLEASE BELIEVE IT IS TRUE  
WHEN I SAY  
I'LL CARE ABOUT YOU  
AND BE YOUR FRIEND  
ALL THE WAY TO THE END.

**Pretty Mask**

*Cassandra Lopez — Murray Unit*

THERE'S MORE TO ME  
THAN WHAT YOU SEE  
ALTHOUGH YOU  
COULD NEVER TELL  
THAT MY LIFE WAS FILLED  
WITH TRAGEDY  
HURT, AND PAINFUL TALES  
I WEAR A PRETTY MASK  
FOR YOU;  
I HIDE AWAY MY SECRETS  
BUT IF I TOOK OFF  
MY PRETTY MASK  
WOULD I STILL BE YOUR MISS  
PERFECT?  
WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO LOVE  
THE REAL ME,  
OR WOULD YOU LET ME GO?  
THIS PRETTY MASK  
IS FADING FAST  
SO I REALLY NEED TO KNOW  
IF YOU MEAN ALL YOU SAY  
AND ACCEPT ME AS I AM  
I WEAR A PRETTY MASK  
FOR YOU  
IT WILL SOON WASH AWAY  
DO YOU ACCEPT ME  
WHERE I STAND?  
DO YOU ACCEPT ALL  
MY LITTLE IMPERFECTIONS  
AND ALL  
MY LITTLE FLAWS?  
THIS PRETTY MASK  
HIDES ALL MY EDGES  
BUT I WANT YOU TO SEE MY ALL  
CAN I UNCOVER MY REALITY  
WITHOUT YOU RUNNING AWAY?  
CAN I UNMASK  
ALL MY FRAGILITY  
AND KNOW THAT  
IT WOULD BE OKAY?  
THIS PRETTY MASK  
HIDES A MYSTERY  
I WANT YOU TO UNRAVEL  
THIS PRETTY MASK  
COVERS UP MY HISTORY  
I WANT YOU TO SLOWLY TRAVEL  
SO COULD YOU LOVE  
THE REAL ME  
OR WOULD YOU LET ME GO?  
THIS PRETTY MASK  
IS FADING FAST  
SO I REALLY NEED TO KNOW  
I WEAR A PRETTY MASK  
FOR YOU



Heard any good rumors lately?

**Things We Took For Granted  
When We Were Free**

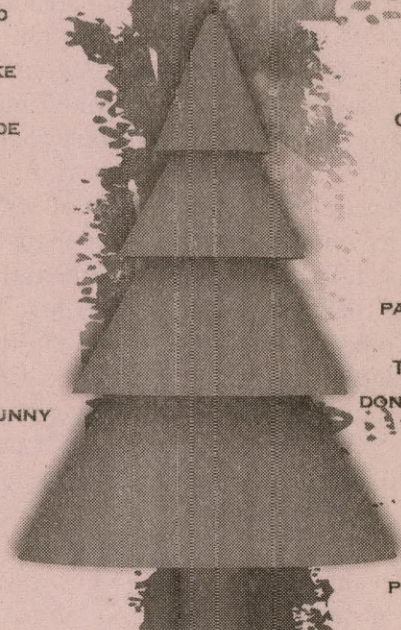
*Larry A. Harris — Lynaugh Unit*

- A PHONE THAT RINGS — PRETTY BIRDS THAT SING
- FOOD THAT TASTES GOOD — DOING THINGS WE SHOULD
- MOWING THE GRASS — PUMPING OUR GAS
- SLEEPING IN A SOFT BED — PETTING OUR DOG ON THE HEAD
- GOING FISHING AT THE LAKE — PUTTING CANDLES ON A CAKE
- A CUPBOARD FULL OF FOOD — NEIGHBORS THAT AREN'T RUDE
- DOGS THAT BARK — A BEDROOM THAT'S DARK
- A KISS FROM MY WIFE — CUTTING TURKEY WITH A KNIFE
- PLAYING WITH MY SON — WITH MY DAUGHTER HAVING FUN
- GOING TO THE ZOO — HEARING A COW GO MOO
- HAVING OUR OWN MONEY — GOING TO THE BEACH WHEN IT'S SUNNY
- PRIVACY IN OUR HOME — NOT BEING ALONE
- DAYS THAT ARE FUN — BURGERS ON A BUN
- A FUTURE I CAN SEE — JUST BEING FREE

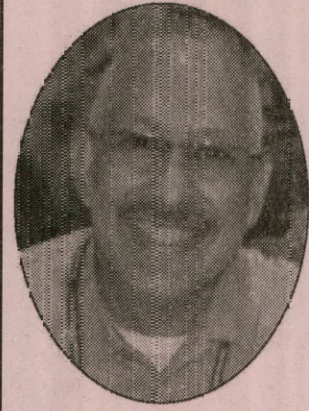
**The Magic Gym**

*Albert Casarez — Clements Unit*

- OVERWEIGHT? SOFT? FLABBY? TRY THIS REJUVENATING SPELL:  
ABRACADABRA, HOCUS FOCUS, MINE BODY GET WELL.
- CATCH YOUR RACK, LOOSEN UP, DO SOME LIGHT STRETCHIN'  
FIX YOUR FACE WITH A SERICUS EXPRESSION.
- TIME TO GET CRUNK: HEADPHONES ON, THAT'S THE JAM  
BRUNO MARS, SHANIA TWAIN, OR... UM... WHAM!
- YOGA? PILATES? HOGWASH! SIMPLY PUT IN SOME WORK  
PERHAPS MIME MILEY CYRUS GIVING RISE TO THE TWERK.
- START BY TWITCHING, WRIGGLING, FLAILING AND FLAPPING  
PRESTO! VIBRANT MOTION, LIVELY HANDS CLAPPING.
- KEEP IT BASIC AND PLAIN — USE YOUR BODY FOR WEIGHT  
GONNA' LOOK GOOD ON YOUR PROJECTED-RELEASE DATE.
- PUSH-UPS, SIT-UPS, HIT THE FLOOR AND GET BUSY  
SLOW DOWN OR STOP IF YOU START FEELING DIZZY.
- WOBBLY LEGS UP NEXT: LUNGES, SQUATS, TOE-RAISES  
PAIN, SWEAT, FATIGUE: JUST YOUR RUN-OF-THE-MILL PHASES.
- TAKE IT SLOWLY, STAY FOCUSED, DRINK PLENTY OF WATER  
DON'T LET THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS BE YOUR ALMA MATER.
- FANCY DIETS? PHOOEY! JUST WATCH HOW YOU EAT  
MIRACULOUS TRANSITION ALMOST COMPLETE.
- THIRTY MINUTES A DAY, FIVE OR SIX DAYS A WEEK  
POOF! TA-DA! FROM A COUCH POTATO TO A HEALTH FREAK!



## Clem Rocha made the impossible, possible



The ECHO expresses sincere sympathy to the family, friends, coworkers and students of correctional educator Clemente "Clem" Rocha. This highly esteemed teacher served with Windham School District (WSD) for 25 years, teaching Career and Technical Education classes at the Dominguez State Jail in San Antonio. Many hearts broke when he passed away in November following his fight with COVID-19. He was known for his exceptional teaching style, unfailing dedication, and genuinely kind and positive attitude.

In 2009, Mr. Rocha was honored by WSD as its Teacher of the Year. He was the Lane Murray Excellence in Teaching recipient, representing what was best in correctional educators. "My passion is to make the impossible, possible." He said. "I love the fire inside me that impels me to solve problems and create solutions."

"My choice to work in the correctional setting is simple: education is the last best hope these men and women have to successfully return to society. Working in the correctional setting, I can be part of the solution."

Rocha said society sometimes puts negative labels on incarcerated individuals, but he felt he could help his students overcome the obstacles they face after release from prison.

"We know that these labels can and will destroy a person's life. By choosing to work in the correctional setting, I can remove these labels and help students build a new future—one that is positive and successful," he said.

"I want my students to feel the empowerment that goes along with hard work and dedication. I want them to go forward and share with their loved ones the possibilities of success in education—and in life—and break the cycle of life in prison. I know that if I can reach out and help one, that one will reach out and help many. I believe one person can make a difference."

**"I want to be that person!"**

*\*The ECHO also expresses condolences to those friends and family of TDCJ residents and employees who have been lost during their struggles with COVID-19. We are saddened by the loss of so many family members, friends and associates during this difficult time. We continue to keep them in our thoughts, and we keep their loved ones in our prayers for comfort and strength in the days ahead.*



"And I've only one thing to say about all these complaints I've been hearing...Venison!"

### ► STEWART continued from pg. 1

While the definition of logistics is simple, the job descriptions are not. Experts consider the field one of the fastest growing and most in-demand in the United States today due to the ever-increasing globalization of the marketplace.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation reported that 18.1 billion tons of goods valued about \$19.2 trillion were moved over the nation's transport infrastructure including highways, railways, airways and waterways. By the year 2045, those numbers are expected to balloon to 27 billion tons—worth an estimated \$38 trillion. In order to handle increased demand, experts expect the marketplace to add 270,000 positions annually, making this field an excellent source of employment opportunities for the foreseeable future. This review of the marketplace is relevant to Lee College offerings being provided for eligible residents of TDCJ.

"What we attempt to do [in TDCJ] is to provide vocational courses that make our residents market-ready upon release," says Dr. Michael Rutledge, deputy director of TDCJ's Rehabilitation Programs Division (RPD). "We attempt to look at the projected marketplace five or 10 years in the future so that we can provide vocational courses and certifications for students so they are marketable and employable upon release." Lee College administrators saw logistics as a good fit for job training for residents in a state jail setting.

"Due to the participants only staying at the Plane State Jail facility for two years or less, there isn't enough time for them to earn an Associate of Applied Science degree," explains Donna Zuniga, dean of Lee College Huntsville Center, and a strong supporter of the new logistics program at the Plane State Jail. "The certificates of completion that the course participants earn are the Logistics and Supply Chain Management and Logistics and Operations Management. We are hoping to be able to offer two highly-recognized industry certifications in the near future."

Stewart says she actually signed up for the logistics course out of a sense of boredom more than anything else. However, once she joined the class, she quickly recognized the real opportunity presented to her. She says the hours spent in the classroom became her favorite

time of the day as she and her classmates mentally left the prison environment behind and focused on their new challenges.

"From 11:45 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.—those were the hours that I wasn't [feeling like] an inmate," Stewart says. "Those were the hours that I was working on the computer, and I was in a college classroom with an instructor teaching me things that would benefit me."

Along with a new horticulture program, logistics is the first Lee College offering for the unit's female residents. Many of the online computer skills needed in logistics are restricted by security precautions, so students are able to learn on a secure intranet system. They are instructed by Lee College's J. Grevenberg. Stewart said this instructor helps the class develop a can-do attitude—not only as it relates to the class, but also to life in general.

Learning and honing her computer skills, especially Microsoft Excel, was the part of the class Stewart says she enjoyed the most. She says this software mastery turned out to be the most beneficial to her in the job market.

"In today's job market, the

skills that are most in demand by employers are knowledge of Microsoft Excel, logistics and supervision," she says. "When I showed my employer that I had earned all of these certificates and that I have experience with Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS) and logistics training, it opened up a lot of opportunities for me."

While Stewart is grateful for her current job, she has future goals for employing her skills as a logistician—she plans to open her own restaurant. Until that time, she continues to stay busy working a full time job and attending classes online. She encourages current residents to use education and positive attitude to improve their life situations.

"Stay positive. Just because you are locked up, don't let anybody make you feel like you can't learn," she says. "When you step into any class, put that prison mentality behind you, and if there are concepts that you don't understand, don't be too proud to ask for help. Go in there with the intention of learning and take advantage of every opportunity presented to you." ★

## ★ CAREERS IN LOGISTICS ★

EVER WONDER HOW THAT delicious pint of Blue Bell Mint Chocolate Chip ice cream made it from the company's creamery in Brenham to your TDCJ unit? It does not arrive by magic or even a futuristic, Star Trek-inspired teleportation device, but instead through the work of logisticians.

The field of logistics in an organization or business includes everything from inventory control, manufacturing supervision, materials management, packaging, procurement and purchasing, quality control, strategic sourcing, and warehouse and storage management. There are several factors that make logistics an exciting career option for formerly incarcerated individuals upon their release.

The main attraction of the field is that projections for employment in the field look strong currently and far into the future. The Bureau of Labor predicts that the field will mirror or exceed the national average for growth for at least the next decade. With people increasingly

using technology to purchase items online, companies are in need of employees with the necessary skills to coordinate the shipment of those orders.

Logisticians can work from a variety of locations including in a factory, office or warehouse setting. Due to the myriad possibilities of work sites, it is important to ask potential employers exactly what a particular logistics job entails.

A career in logistics offers ex-felons the possibility of earning a living wage to assist them getting back on their feet. The U.S. News & World Report magazine listed logistician number 18 on its list of Best Business Jobs for 2020. The median wages for people working in the logistics field ranged from \$65,000-\$81,000.

Individuals interested in finding out more about the logistics courses offered in TDCJ should submit a college/vocational interest form to the TDCJ/RPD. ★

**Source:**  
Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook  
U.S. News & World Report, Best Business Jobs 2020.

### ► RILEY continued from p. 1

As a young adult, Riley set out on his own and threw himself into the construction industry, building a lifelong career and becoming a respected professional in the field. He also learned the construction industry is a highly volatile work world, known to pass from one extreme to the next.

"The construction industry is filled with ups-and-downs, and it can be either feast or famine," Riley says.

It was one such "construction famine" in the early 1990s that led Riley to consider alternate career options—and the opportunity of becoming an educator in a prison setting surfaced.

"My father-in-law had a friend who was the principal on the Roach Unit years ago, and a teaching position was available. The topic of employment at Windham was casually brought up, so out of respect for my father-in-law, I went to the interview," Riley says. "I was not entirely sold on the idea at first—but after a series of interviews, I accepted [a teaching position]. I was given an opportunity to have a salaried job with excellent benefits, and also a chance to teach something I was good at."

Riley's relationship with Windham began at the Clements Unit in 1992, where he forged a teaching career based on a dynamic combination of competency-based curriculum, exposure to technical math, trade-related science, safety training and

plenty of hands-on experience. He says interpersonal skills are also an essential element of CTE instruction, grounding students in not only the fundamentals of construction—but also in everyday life.

"At Windham, we do not just teach driving nails and cutting boards. There are life skills involved here as well, such as problem-solving, teamwork, communicating meaningfully with others, and [developing] ethics and morals," Riley says.

Riley has taught CTE construction fundamentals at the Neal Unit since 1998, and to this day, he continues to provide relevant training and the development of essential skills that give students more opportunities for success and a lower likelihood of recidivism.

"I didn't realize the profound importance of correctional teaching until a few years into it, when I started noting the impact I was making in the students' lives," he says.

There are many challenges in correctional education, and according to Riley, they can occur every day.

"Challenges arrive on a daily basis. For example, it may take a little while and loosen up. Some of them enter the class very reluctant to work with the tools, looking at everything with disdain," he says.

Nevertheless, Riley is determined to get students involved with the curriculum and to help them transform obstacles into assets.

"The best part of my job is seeing

the changes come over the students. I take great pride when I see the light bulb turn on, and they smile and begin to talk enthusiastically about their projects," he says. "That makes it all worth it, and that is what really motivates me: to see the dramatic changes in these men."

Engaging students in practical steps to better understand employment challenges is an integral part of the education journey. Teachers strive to provide quality instruction, distinguished certifications and the development of career networks so students can become employable future citizens. Riley also does his utmost to raise students' self-confidence, bringing diligence, renewed focus and the sharing of wisdom gleaned from his nearly 30 years of experience in the construction field.

"I tell all of my students this: come into the classroom and get something out of it. Apply yourself; don't just come in here expecting to frame a house or operate a ShopBot," he says. "Students can get their lives on track for the first time, and the construction industry will hire them simply because they are skilled, focused and reliable. Life is full of second chances, and employers are willing to look at what a person can do—not just at what a person has done."

However, another challenge has emerged for educators in 2020, Riley says, and that is being able to align life skills, CTE training

and academic core curriculum with student needs throughout the current COVID-19 pandemic. Confronted by extended periods of quarantine, Windham educators and TDCJ administrators reached for new techniques. By innovating and adapting to transformative ways of teaching and empowering students through distance learning, educators were still able to anchor the minds of students to reaching education goals.

"When unable to hold regular classes, Windham instructors are sending out remote packages to students, which include course material, OSHA reviews and example projects," he says. They are also combining these efforts with in-person classes and protective health practices throughout the school year. One lesson of the pandemic has been that innovation in teaching excellence is not stopping; it's constantly adapting and improving.

Riley says a teacher's ability to inspire should not be underestimated, and he urges Windham educators to keep students apprised of the ever-changing demands of the world.

"Windham teachers: keep making a difference," he says. "Every time you go into a classroom, you have the potential to change someone's life for the better, so don't ever discount that," he says. "Dig in and try to find ways to reach out to students in a positive way." ★

I KNEW YA'LL WERE OUT THERE! BACK IN THE October issue, I asked you to describe your Work/Life prison experience, and you responded—quite loudly in some cases, and along lines you might expect. For example, not everyone likes their job—which is not that big of a surprise—and folks in the freeworld feel the same. What might come as a surprise to some is that there are many who do like their jobs, and they expressed as much in the letters sent to *The ECHO*. As I said before: responses generally fall into two camps: “Working for the man/ain’t feeling’ it” camp, and the “this is how I do my time/ honing my skills for the world/ don’t feel like sitting around all day doing’ nothing” camp. I’ve held both views at different times. Work is a big part of our lives, and I thought it would be a good subject to address, giving both sides a chance to make a few comments. I’ve read some of the “Camp

# WORKING IN PRISON

Resident readers on this page respond to *The ECHO's* “Working in Prison” feature (October, 2020), which examined the benefits of jobs for residents in TDCJ. The article by writer John Phippen suggested that workers may fall into one of two camps: those who feel they are “working for the man” and those who feel they are diligently working for themselves, building job skills and experience. Readers were then invited to describe their own jobs, work experiences and work-related opinions. Along with a followup message from Phippen, we have published some of the letters and responses. Contributions may have been edited for clarity or brevity.

One” letters and let me say this: I know...I live here...we agree more than we disagree. That being said, we’re going to try to keep it positive and constructive, though that’s not to say we won’t comment or print letters from “Camp One.” I want to thank everyone who wrote in. If you don’t see your letter in this issue, hang tight; you might see it in the next one. And if you want to write in and comment on your job, somewhere at the top of the letter put “Working in Prison” and tell us what you do. We’d actually like to learn about the skills, requirements, challenge and benefits of your work. ★

*Editor’s Note: Please include your actual names and real unit assignments (no nicknames, false names, or requests for anonymity will be used), keeping this a constructive discussion for ECHO readers. This is an exploration of job experiences, not a criticism of TDCJ workplaces or those involved in the process.*

Feel free to write as much as you want in your letters, but space is limited and we have to edit.



**CHRISTOPHER SOSA**  
WYNNE UNIT

**Camp Two**  
this is how I do my time

I have spent the last five and a half years working for TCI as a Graphics Designer at the Wynne Unit Graphics Facility in Huntsville.

As a graphic designer I honed my skills in the world in the Signs and Graphics industry, working for Fastsigns for more than nine years. Within the first two years of my incarceration, I was shocked and thrilled to learn TCI offered work programs (OJT) in the fields of Graphics Technician and Graphics Artist at the Wynne Unit Graphics Facility. I promptly answered a help wanted ad in *The ECHO* and was selected.

What a great opportunity it has been to go to work daily in a professional environment with relevant software and printing equipment. I’ve been given the opportunity to not only maintain, but to enhance my knowledge, skills and abilities in the Signs and Graphics industry. This opportunity has afforded me the ability to stay relevant in a quickly growing professional field.

I personally could not imagine a better way to do time than to be able to continue to grow and remain relevant in a thriving job field. I would encourage anyone to explore what TCI has to offer and get involved in a job field that will not only keep you busy while incarcerated but prepare you for your transition into gainful employment in the world.

**ECHO:** That’s what I’m talking about! A lot of folks don’t know these types of jobs exist in TDCJ...I didn’t. Of course, all units are different; some have more variety than others. That’s kind of the purpose of this discussion: to recognize and inform. By the way, here’s a pic of the car you recently designed and wrapped for Windham School District to help recruit teachers and reach potential employers. Sweet!



Windham vehicle wrap by C. Sosa



**RONALD GRAHAM**  
LUTHER UNIT

**Camp Two**  
this is how I do my time

I work at the Stainless Steel factory on the Luther Unit.

I’ve worked here for 14 years continuously. I started out welding and fabricating in the special projects department. I was a pipe-fitter/welder prior to my incarceration, and I wanted to keep my skills fresh, and learn everything I could.

Why do I do this? Foremost, TCI projects directly impact society in a positive way, giving me an opportunity to express penance, and begin the reparation process—also, because it’s who I am. I love any challenge. I’ve also developed a great work/life balance while here. I believe I’ve developed a winning combination that will lead me to success upon release.

My mother has stated time and again, “That job has been your saving grace.” That’s a heavy statement but, honestly, I can’t fathom how else I could’ve done this time.

**ECHO:** You and I, it seems, have both had to learn things the hard way. Nonetheless: lessons

learned—now on to your next journey and the things you learned on this one. They are yours to keep. Hope you read this before they kick you out on parole. On second thought, I hope they kick you out tonight! Good luck!



**PENNY FOX**  
HOBBY UNIT

**Camp Two**  
this is how I do my time

I recently read the article about working in prison. I am proud to say that I fall into the second camp [those who enjoy working].

I have worked at the Hobby Print Shop for many years, and I have learned more about the printing business than I ever believed possible. Recently the Hobby Unit experienced its own extended medical lockdown. I was not happy or relieved to be off from work for an extended amount of time. Granted our lockdown was not as long as some other units, but it was too long for me. If I can’t be home, let me work.

“Our jobs are what we make then.” That’s what I say to any newcomer or anyone who asks me why I’ve been in the shop so long. How I spend these years will have a direct impact on how I live my life on the outside of prison.

I am thankful for the opportunity to learn and the willingness of the Print Shop supervisors to teach me the skills I need as long as I’m willing to learn.

**ECHO:** I, too, worked in a TCI print shop for many years before coming to work here. You said it right when you said you learned “more about the print business than ever thought possible.” You ladies do a great job over at the Hobby Print Shop! I especially liked the greeting cards with the old classic cars on them...just throwing that out there.



**J. GRADY**  
TELFORD UNIT

**Camp One**  
ain’t feelin’ it.

Aside from possessing a strong work ethic, personal drive, initiative, and individual ambition on behalf of the worker, where is the incentive from the ones doing the hiring? The general consensus among our population tends to be negative. The inmate population is a source of so much untapped potential. Never before have I seen such a concentration of ingenuity, creativity, and artistry in one place just going to waste.

Then there is the case of the “bad apples.” All it takes is one to screw things up for the many. Perhaps I’m another rambling idealist, or maybe I’m too “freeworld” for the penitentiary, but I can see why there’s an overall dissenting sentiment throughout the population.

**ECHO:** Hey, I apologize for chopping your letter up so much. I did read it (several times), and I have also seen the things you mentioned. We all have. However, the incentive to work does not come from “those who do the hiring.” I don’t want to spout off a bunch of feel good bromides and platitudes, but you create your own incentives. It’s the only way. I read a lot of letters from around the system and I find that most of the “dissenting sentiments” you speak of are not as prevalent as you might think throughout the population, but they do seem to be endemic to certain units. It seems to me those units also tend to be the ones with fewer available jobs, especially industry-type jobs. I do not have a solution for this—it’s just a pattern I see developing as more and more letters come in. You’re not a “rambling idealist”—you’re a representative of a sizable number of our population, and you make some very clear and valid points. I appreciate you writing in to us.



**SABRINA JEFFERSON**  
HILLTOP UNIT

**Camp Two**  
this is how I do my time

I am writing about the topic of Working in Prison that ran in the October issue of *The ECHO*. This article really caught my attention and touched me deeply mainly because I had just gotten off from work, and I feel like I was meant to read your article. I agree with your assessment that not all value is measured in dollars. Prison is actually a new start, a second chance to get myself right and as you said in your article, it is practice.

Since I have been here, I have graduated CHANGES and obtained a High School Equivalence. After those two victories, I felt like I could accomplish anything.

After graduating from those two classes, I was no longer considered a full-time student, so I was assigned to work as a janitor in restrictive housing. I was of the ... “working for the man” camp that you mentioned in your article, and I eventually was assigned to Segregation. When I got out to population I remembered how much I wished that it was cleaner back there, and so I began to clean as if I was still housed back there. Now I am no longer working for the man; I am working for me.

**ECHO:** You make a great point: sometimes it’s all about perspective. I have had jobs here that I thought couldn’t be any worse. Then, my coworkers would tell me how lucky I was, that “This was the best job on the unit.” Can’t say I always agreed with their assessment, but clearly they had their own reasons and perspectives. Where some see “working for the man,” others see salvation.



**JEREMY MARTIN**  
ESTES UNIT

**Camp Two**  
this is how I do my time

After reading the article titled “Working in Prison” I was inspired to write a few lines on the topic. This is actually a topic that has been on my mind quite a lot lately. I actually love to go to work everyday. Those guys who are disgruntled with their assigned duties should focus on obtaining skills that will help them get into a better position.

I obtained my GED and took several courses with Lamar State College, as well as a few trades. I guess that puts me in the “This is how I do my time/work satisfies me/honing my skills for the world” camp.

I plan to start a Paralegal Services Company to assist inmates and their families with their post-conviction-remedies and parole upon my release. I will also be working full time as a legal assistant for a civil-rights attorney to help pay the bills while in school.

I started out with no more than a 10th grade education when I came to prison. All you have to do is put your mind to it [self improvement] and stick to the plan. You can only do as much as you believe in yourself. The habits you form in here are the ones that you will take with you to the freeworld, so make them good habits.

**ECHO:** Your journey since 2008 should be a road map for any of those who find themselves at the beginning of a long sentence. A reality of this life we live in prison is that some of us are not leaving for a long time. This is a private matter that can only be addressed by you alone. If you are someone who is staring down the tunnel of a decade or more in prison, there are some serious questions you might want to ask yourself, such as “How will I spend my time here?” and “How do I want to leave this place?” Mr. Martin, I believe you have provided a perfect example of that. ★

# The giving spirit behind bars

John Walter Flagg — ECHO Staff

**S**ELFLESS GIVING, OR WHAT IS KNOWN AS PHILANTHROPY, IS one of the most enduring human qualities and social pursuits. Each society has redefined its own concept of philanthropy. In ancient Greece and Rome, wealthy citizens provided public amenities such as baths and meeting places that enhanced the quality of community life. During the Middle Ages, religious giving helped to establish hospitals and institutions that cared for the homeless, destitute and diseased. Later, these traditions were carried to America with the first settlers. Leading exponents were prominent colonists Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin, both of whom believed that everyone should play a role in aiding the poor and strengthening the community through the wise investment of time and personal resources.

The list of institutions devoted to philanthropy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is extensive, and includes private foundations, corporate social responsibility entities, private universities, museums and libraries.

*We make a living by what we get; but we make a life by what we give.*

~ Sir Winston Churchill

**W**hat have you given lately?

This tradition carries on among residents in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). From the "donation banks" at one's unit commissary or chapel, to those charitable acts that go unaccounted for system wide. The commitment to the spirit of giving has remained a fundamental hallmark of incarcerated life.

Somehow, somehow, somewhere—we have given. We may have given our time to a friend stymied by a difficult math problem, shared a kind word with a downhearted soul or pointed the way to the benefits of Windham education, training or other programming.

So what have you given? How do you give? And why? Have you received something inspiring or had a life-changing experience due to an act of giving? Share your stories with us here at *The ECHO* because we want to know. When you send your letters in just make a note at the top of page, "the giving spirit." Make sure your contributions are appropriate and adhere to policies and procedures. *The ECHO* looks forward to hearing from you! ★

## Clearing the air

Troy Glover — Estelle Unit

**"T**HANK YOU MY FRIENDS AND fellow fairy-tale readers for allowing me to set right a wrong and to give facts to the fallacies," said Mr. Wolf in his smooth aristocratic-British voice. He stood at the podium before the large crowd that had gathered.

"For many decades you all have been duped into believing that I approached my neighbors Mr. Piggly, Mr. Wiggly and their brother, Mr. Bob," he said acknowledging the three little pigs in the front row of the audience, "with a nefarious agenda. But I say, 'Nay!' And now give to you the truth.

"I was walking along the Yellow Brick Road when I suddenly noticed Mr. Piggly had recently built a house of straw! Now, being a concerned citizen and a member of the Association of Construction Maintenance for the Environment, (A.C.M.E.), I felt it was my civic duty to inform him of his erroneous choice of building material. So I approached Mr. Piggly's home with the utmost concern and hailed him from the walkway He ran inside.

"I was confused by this behavior and called out that he should let me in, so as to discuss the dire situation of his home. But he replied to me with some nonsensical rubbish about 'not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin.' Now you must take into consideration that this was during the peak of humid summer, and we were having an unusually high amount of pollen in the air. And, just as I was poised to ask Mr. Piggly what he was talking about, I sneezed!

"Now as many of you know, I am an accomplished Opera Singer and have been known to hold a High-C for over a full minute, crisp and clear. So it should be of no surprise that when I sneezed, my strong lungs pulled in an enormous amount of air, and on the exhale, I accidentally blew away Mr. Piggly's house of



**I am a victim of circumstance and not the diabolical despot their stories have made me out to be.**

straw. As I've already explained, Mr. Piggly's house was constructed of shabby, sub-par material, but still I was terribly distraught about the incident, and tried to call out my apologies but, Mr. Piggly took across the field. At this, I thought he must be injured, and in my shock of concern, I immediately gave chase.

"Mr. Piggly had run to the home of his brother, Mr. Wiggly, whom I'm sure you're all aware owned a house made of sticks. It was another poorly chosen construction. When I reached the front door of Mr. Wiggly's, I called out to him to let me in so that I might evaluate his brother's condition and give aid. I am also a member of the 'Emergency Advance Team for Environmental Maintenance' (EAT EM). Yet once again I received the cryptic, pig-Latin I believe, 'Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin.'

"I can only deduce, as I'm sure any logical thinker would, that Mr. Piggly's injuries had to be so severe that they had sent Mr. Wiggly into shock as well. It was at that time, my



Troy Glover — 3rd place fiction  
2020 ECHO Writing Contest Winner

accused allergies kicked in again, and, well, I disintegrated Mr. Wiggly's home. Now, none of this would have happened if they'd used the proper building material posted in our extensive Wonder Land City's Ordinance Guide. The same material I commend Mr. Bob for using to building his home.

"So you can see friends, for you are all people of sound mind, logical reasoning, and astute deduction, I am a victim of circumstance and not the diabolical despot their stories have made me out to be. Thank you dear friends, for your kindness in hearing me out." ★

## The blessing of adversity

Jared Anderson  
Coffield Unit

**T**HERE ARE THOSE THAT never seem to have it rough. No flat tires. No overdue bills. No mental breakdowns. No obstacles at all. They just flit through life or Cloud Nine without ever encountering the bumper-to-bumper traffic jams of life. Bless their hearts—they are missing out.

None of us rejoices in an ominous medical diagnosis. There are no such things as lay-off parties or miscarriage showers. Those hardships are misery. Every. Single. Time. But that doesn't mean we can't get something good from them. A newly-diagnosed diabetic can discover a healthier

lifestyle and actually be given more years to live as a result. The recently-unemployed worker can land a better job than the one she was forced out of. That grieving no-longer-mother-to-be may have a previously unknown medical issue detected as a result of the increased medical scrutiny. Does it always pan out like this? Of course not. But it is not the outcome that determines whether or not the trial is beneficial. Two people can experience the same problem with the same outcome yet have two different results. What separates these people? The goal is not to weather

the storm and react according to the damage. Rather, it is to find peace in the midst of the storm. It may not be over, but if you're still standing, you can come out on top. However,

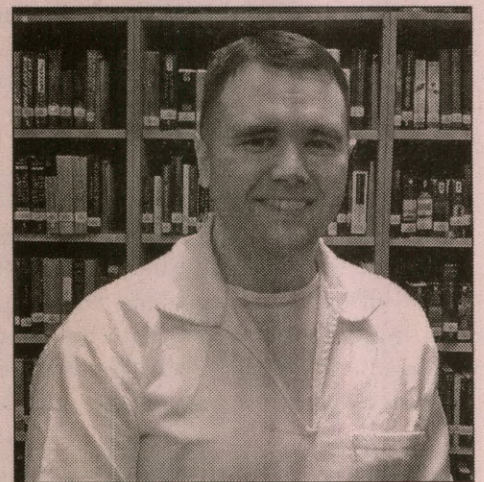
**We can have happiness in the midst of the hardship if the hardship is not our sole focus.**

a category five hurricane is rarely our first encounter. It's usually more like a light rain: inconvenient, not harmful. Once we endure enough of those, they're no longer problematic. We see them as "nothing we can't handle." But then it kicks up a notch. We face the brutal sting of loneliness and crushing sense of loss. Failure and betrayal begin to buffet around us. We taste heartache and hurt increasingly as we get older. Eventually we have enough

scars (visible or not) to serve as a roadmap through life. But like bones that have been broken, we too can mend stronger than we were before. Not only stronger, but more grateful, too.

How much more does a man treasure water after a week in the desert? In fact, how much does a mother understand love after losing her only child? It is true that had she not lost the child she wouldn't have had to feel the pain. But it is also true that she wouldn't have felt the love the child brought with it in the first place.

Without the bitter, we would know no sweet. Without hard, there is no easy. It is only because we've experienced immense blessings that we even recognize our trials. But we do not have to wait for the storm to pass to find the sunshine. We can have happiness in the midst of the hardship if the hardship is not our



Jared Anderson — 3rd place non-fiction  
2020 ECHO Writing Contest Winner

sole focus. We do not shuffle through life staring at our feet for fear of a stumbling block. No, we face forward—our eyes up, not down—and use that stumbling block as a stepping stone.

With each struggle comes strength. The most afflicted among us are also the most able. Does life seem to dole out the difficulties one after another? At times it feels that way. But we're stronger for it and prepared to face what life throws at us next. Some folks just have all the luck. ★

Working on a parole packet?  
CHECK OUT A PROGRAM  
in the  
**Chaplain's Office**  
Time to change your thinking  
try  
**BRIDGES TO LIFE**  
Give some of your old thoughts the slip  
try  
**OVERCOMERS**  
Send 1-60 to the Chaplain's Office!



**One Man's Treasure**  
Clothing that makes a difference

**Are you a male releasing from a state prison to one of these counties?**

Dallas, Collin, Rockwall, Denton, Hunt, Kaufman, Navarro, Ellis, Van Zandt, Henderson, Wood, Smith parts of Gregg and Tarrant Counties.\*

**Do you need clothes?**

We want to help. When released call **1-888-433-9826**

Applications are also available from a TDCJ Reentry Case Manager or chaplain.

Clothing will be delivered to you after your call is received. There is no charge for a set of clothing. (a set of clothing includes 4-5 shirts, 2 pants, shoes, underwear and socks.)

\*Call for specific cities. This list can change depending on availability of volunteers.





## Holiday cheer in a cup

Lily Arehulzta  
Murray Unit

### Ingredients:

1 pecan pie  
4 spoonful creamer  
½ bag powder milk  
4 spoonful of hot cocoa  
10 Maria's cookies

### Directions:

Mix powder milk with ¼ cup of water, fold in creamer, and then add two spoonful water, mixing well. Add in hot cocoa powder mixing until fluffy (cold water works better to fluff mixture). Break cookies into pieces, and then do the same with the pecan pie, mixing the two together. In hot pot insert, begin layering the batter mixture and the pecan pie/cookie mixture in alternating layers. Sprinkle some cocoa powder to each layer. Place insert cup in hot pot and let cook for 45 minutes.

## Wintry apple turnovers

Lily Arehulzta  
Murray Unit

### Ingredients:

1 cream cheese  
2 packs of Maria's cookies  
3 packs of oatmeal  
(apples & cinnamon flavor)  
2 spoonful of milk  
2 spoonful of creamer

### Directions:

Crush Maria's cookies into powder, then moisten slightly and form to make dough. Pour one pack of oatmeal to mix in the dough. Knead well. Form eight dough balls, then set aside. In separate container, mix the two remaining packs of oatmeal into thick consistency. Roll each dough ball into a square flat shape, and fill it with one spoonful of oatmeal. Fold dough shapes until they resemble a turnover. Meanwhile, pour the cream cheese, milk and creamer into a cup and add one spoonful of water. Mix well and use this for the glaze. Yummy! Enjoy!

## Holiday dip

Winter Logan  
Marlin Unit

### Ingredients:

1 pkg. salmon, drained  
½ summer sausage, diced fine  
2 pkgs. cream cheese  
1 spoonful garlic powder

### Directions:

Mix all ingredients well in a white bowl. Serve with pretzels, crackers or chips. Yum!

## Sissy La La's Christmas in a cup

Oscar Castellanos  
Michael Unit

### Ingredients:

2 spoonful dry Columbian coffee  
2 spoonful dry French vanilla cappuccino  
2 spoonful dry hot chocolate  
2 spoonful dry creamer  
3 fireballs  
3 pks. sweetener

### Directions:

Pour all ingredients except fireballs in an empty cup or hotpot insert. Crush fireballs and add to cup. Add hot water; stir well. Makes one awesome cupful — goes great with cake!

## Feliz Navidad cake

Lily Arehulzta  
Murray Unit

### Ingredients:

1 pack powder milk  
1 bag creamer  
2 fireballs  
2 packages of Maria's cookies  
2 packages of strawberry oatmeal

### Directions:

Mix powder milk, creamer and oatmeal together in large white spread bowl. Place two fireballs and ¼ cup of cold water pour into oatmeal mixture when the candies start dissolving. Pull out any undissolved pieces. Mix well for at least 10 minutes until fluffy. Layer whole cookies in separate white spread bowl, pour a little of creamer batter over cookies. Alternate layers until everything is used. Pour remaining batter over top and let sit overnight. Enjoy with a cup of hot coffee.

## Holiday Gumbo

Haitiam Nablisi  
Beto Unit

### Ingredients:

1 summer sausage,  
sliced ½ inch thick  
2 pks. Sriracha mackerel  
1 pk. jalapeno tuna  
1 can V-8 juice  
1 bag pork skins  
5 spoonful kosher chili beans  
Garlic powder, to taste  
Chili soup seasoning, to taste  
Onion powder, to taste  
Black pepper, to taste  
1 bag rice  
1 chicken soup, crushed

### Directions:

Slice sausage into ½ inch rounds. Pour 2 ounces water in hot pot, plug in pot, and add sliced sausage, mackerel, tuna, V-8 juice, and chili beans to heated water inside pot. Let cook for an hour, stir occasionally. Add seasoning, mixing it in; let cook for another 30 minutes. Prepare the rice with one soup, preferably chicken, including the seasoning pack. Be sure not to use too much water. Divide the pork skins into two bowls. Pour half of mixture in each bowl from hot pot. Let sit, covered, for 15 minutes, then top with rice and enjoy. Makes two servings, costs \$7.50.

## Festive sweet and tangy pasta shells

Lily Arehulzta  
Murray Unit

### Ingredients:

1 bag pasta shells  
2 spoonful pickle juice  
1 jalapeno pepper  
2 spoonful habenero sauce  
2 spoonful strawberry preserves  
2 packages of ranch dressing  
1 packet sweetener

### Directions:

Blanch the pasta shells leaving them *al dente* (fully cooked but not overly soft) and set aside for three to four minutes. In a hot pot insert, mix in 2 packages of ranch dressing, pickle juice and strawberry preserves. Mash the jalapeno pepper in its own packaging and then add it to the mixture in the hot pot insert. Mix well. Pour pasta shells in large white spread bowl and drain excess water. Sprinkle the packet of sweetener over the pasta, then pour in the sweet and tangy sauce (ranch mixture in hot pot insert). Fold in the pasta gently to keep the integrity of it. Serve and enjoy as a delicious side dish.

## Cinnamon taffy

Lindsay Vallejo  
Hobby Unit

### Ingredients:

¼ bag creamer  
6 Hot Shot fireballs

### Directions:

Place fireballs in a hotpot insert; add enough water to barely cover the fireballs halfway. Cook in hotpot until melted. Pour creamer into a spread bowl. Slowly add melted fireballs; knead into taffy. If taffy is too watery, add a little more creamer until taffy-like. Makes a palm-sized piece of taffy.

## Hillbilly hot wings

Daniel Huffman Jr.  
Montford Unit

### Ingredients:

1 pkg. chicken chunks  
1 bag Whole Shabang chips,  
crushed fine  
1 sleeve golden round crackers,  
crushed fine  
Hot sauce  
Barbecue sauce

### Directions:

Pour chicken chunks in a spread bowl. Add ½ of the crushed crackers and chips; form into dough and shape into small ovals. Pour remaining crushed crackers into the crushed chip bag and mix. In a separate bowl, mix hot sauce and barbecue sauce; roll "wings" in the hot sauce-barbecue sauce mixture, then put in the bag of crushed chips-crackers and shake to coat. Repeat placing wings in the sauce bowl then chip bag a total of three times. Place prepared wings in a cooking bag and cook in a hotpot for 20-30 minutes. Enjoy! Use ranch (or leftover barbecue sauce mixture) as a dip.

## Snickers cheesecake

Haitiam Nablisi  
Beto Unit

### Ingredients:

2 pk. vanilla cream cookies  
2 pk. cream cheese  
2 pk. powder milk  
1 Snickers candy bar  
4 spoonful water  
for cheesecake filling  
9 spoonful water for cookie crust

### Directions:

Remove cream from cookies, crush cookies very fine, sprinkle nine spoonful water over crushed cookies, mix with spoon, then knead with clean fingers until it comes together. Spread into bowl to create pie shell. In a separate bowl, combine cream from cookies, cream cheese, milk and four spoonful water; then mix with spoon until fully combined and uniform in consistency — be patient! Spoon mixture into pie shell, spread evenly, wetting spoon to keep from sticking. Cut Snickers into eight pieces; push into cream one inch from edge so each slice would have a piece. Let set for three hours, then cut into eight slices and enjoy! Makes eight servings, cost is \$6.

## Chinese razzo dazzo

Andrew Duran  
Willag Statz Jail

### Ingredients:

1 bag Shabang chips, crushed fine  
(sub BBQ, jalapeno chips)  
1 pk. tuna  
1 pk. hot tuna  
1 soup (any flavor), crushed  
1 bag rice  
¼ bag instant chili beans  
(sub refried beans)  
2 orange sports drink  
Garlic powder, to taste (optional)  
Black pepper, to taste (optional)  
¾ green cup instant potatoes  
1 green cup pasta shells  
½ bag pork skins (optional)  
BBQ sauce (if using pork skins)  
Jelly (if using pork skins)

### Directions:

In a white bowl, mix Shabang chips and tuna pouches; knead until well mixed. Form a patty and return to chip bag. Cook in hotpot for 20 minutes. In a separate bowl, mix rice with electrolytes; add enough hot water to barely cover the rice and cook 10 minutes. In another separate bowl, mix crushed soup noodles, pasta shells and any desired seasonings (soup seasoning packs, garlic powder, onion powder, black pepper, no salt seasoning). Drain water when cooked. In a separate bowl, cook instant chili beans to desired consistency. In a different bowl, cook mashed potatoes to desired consistency. If using pork skins, open bag, slightly crush, and add barbecue sauce and jelly; mix well to coat all the pork skins and make them soggy. Heat in hotpot. When everything is hot, take tuna patty and place on soup/shell mixture. Add the other ingredients in layers: rice, beans, mashed potatoes, pork skins (if using), barbecue sauce, cheese and ranch. Enjoy!

## Cristof's strawberry cheesecake cookie

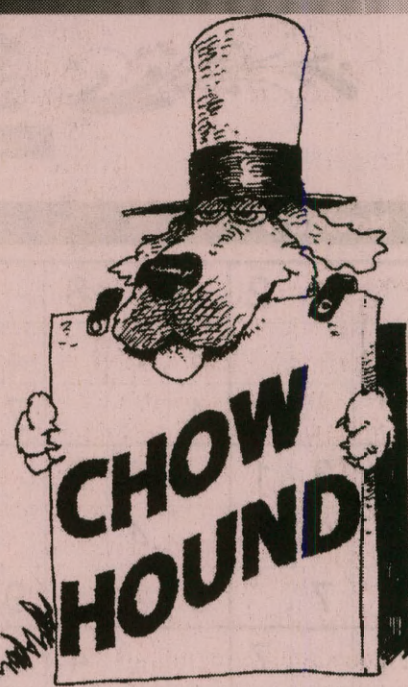
Cristof L. Harris  
Hamilton Unit

### Ingredients:

2 pks. vanilla cookies  
2 pks. cream cheese  
3 pks. strawberry oatmeal  
1 strawberry Chike

### Directions:

Separate cream from cookies; finely crush cookie wafers. Separate fruit from oatmeal, and put fruit in an empty oatmeal pouch, adding two spoonful water to rehydrate. Mix crushed cookies in a bowl, and add 14-16 spoonful water; form mixture into dough. Carefully tear open an empty chip bag; form dough on bag into a cookie that is ¼ to ½ inch thick. Take cream from cookies and whip with cream cheese until all clumps are out. Add ½ the rehydrated fruit to the cream mixture. Mix, add Chike and mix again. Spread Chike mixture on formed cookie; top with remaining rehydrated fruit. Cut into 8 to 10 slices and enjoy!



## Daisy's great pizza

Daisy Flores  
Grain Unit

### Ingredients:

1 can V8 juice  
2 sleeves of saltine crackers  
1 package chili noodles  
1/8 bottle of ketchup  
3 spoonful of strawberry jelly  
2 packages of cream cheese  
2 packages of ranch dressing  
1/5 bottle of squeeze cheese  
1 jalapeno pepper (diced)  
1 package of chicken chunks  
½ bag of turkey bites (diced)  
garlic powder  
onion powder  
Salt  
2 heaping spoonful  
four cheese potatoes

### Directions:

Shake up can of V8 juice very well. Pour ¼ of it into a cup or hot pot insert. Stir in ketchup and add a half spoon of garlic and half spoon of onion powder and stir well. Add three spoonful of strawberry jelly and the two heaping spoonful of potatoes. Mix well, then set aside. For the crust, let your noodles sit in water for a minimum of 15 minutes. Crush up saltine crackers until fine. Add the chili seasoning from the noodles, along with two spoonfuls of salt, one spoonful of garlic powder and a spoonful of onion powder. Drain noodles, then dump into bowl with crackers and begin to knead. Add moderate amounts of water as you knead until a crust like dough forms. Shape into form of your choosing. Finally, pour sauce onto the crust, spreading it evenly over the top. In a separate cup, mix cream cheese, ranch dressing and squeeze cheese together. Carefully drizzle mixture over the top of the pizza. Top with chicken chunks, diced turkey bites and sliced jalapeno peppers. Serve and enjoy!

## Christmas in a cup

Adam Richardson  
Luther Unit

### Ingredients:

1 bag hot chocolate  
4 heaping spoonful creamer  
2 heaping spoonful dry milk  
6 mint sticks, crushed into powder

### Directions:

Mix all ingredients together in a commissary bowl; return to the hot chocolate bag or place in a jar. Use two heaping spoonful of mixture per cupful of hot water for a taste of Christmas awesomeness!

## Stuffed pickle

Haitiam Nablisi  
Beto Unit

### Ingredients:

1 kosher pickle  
1 pk. cream cheese  
1 small potato chips, crushed  
Garlic powder, to taste  
Onion powder, to taste  
Golden round crackers (optional)

### Directions:

Slice pickle in half, length-wise. Scoop seeds and pulp out of each half of pickle (use pulp as you wish). Crush chips as fine as possible, add cream cheese, and stir mixture into doughy consistency to make a filling. Sprinkle desired amount of garlic and onion powder on the fleshy part of pickles. Divide filling and fill each half — like a deviled egg. Slice pickle halves into one-inch pieces. Enjoy them alone or with crackers. Recipe makes two servings and costs \$2 to prepare.





## Making A DENT

Jim Dent, Contributing  
Writer—Polunsky Unit

Sportswriter and author Jim Dent's comments represent his own opinions and not those of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or The ECHO.

WHAT WILL BECOME OF TOM Brady and Drew Brees in 2021 when the crowds return to the National Football League (NFL) and the young quarterbacks continue their push toward the top? Time is no longer on the side of Brady and Brees, and the day will soon come when the game no longer needs them.

If the COVID-19 vaccine works as the scientists expect, and there are no longer 75,000

## Young quarterbacks poised to take over NFL

empty seats in NFL stadiums, the 2021 season could be one for the ages—but no longer one for the aged. Football has always been a young man's game and it doesn't get any better than Trevor Lawrence coming out of Clemson University with his strong right arm and great sense of the game. The only thing that might stop Lawrence is the team that drafts him. The New York Jets are so bad that Lawrence might think about using that final year of college eligibility.

I've often told my fellow residents that if the NFL should ever decide to downsize, the Jets should be the first team to go. In years past the Jets might have ruined the careers of quarterbacks like Joe Montana, Brees and yes, even Brady. Impossible, you say. I disagree.

The hope for Lawrence with the worst team in football would be the relative success of Joe Burrow in Cincinnati. Burrow took his sparkling talents to the awful Bengals and showed in

2020 that attitude does matter.

Lawrence is not the only super quarterback coming into the 2021 draft. Following not too far behind him will be Ohio State's Justin Fields, who is as physically agile as he is accurate in the passing game. I predict that Fields will be to the NFL what Brees was to Brady: a great quarterback just a few steps behind Lawrence.

In the history of the NFL, the league has never been better stocked at quarterback than it will be in 2021. Patrick Mahomes is clearly the most talented, but don't be surprised if Kyler Murray soon challenges him for Most Valuable Player (MVP) honors. I've been watching Murray since he won three straight 6A titles at Allen High School and have been amazed at how he has adjusted and excelled at each new level. No one expected what he accomplished his Heisman season at Oklahoma, or that he would be that much better than Baker Mayfield when he arrived

in the NFL.

Just as I was predicting he would become the next Lamar Jackson, he exceeded that expectation. On the move, Murray is as dangerous as a mobile quarterback in the history of the game, and that includes Roger Staubach and Fran Tarkenton.

Speaking of Jackson, he is beginning to exit that category of "one of the best young quarterbacks in the league." Defenses have adjusted to him, and if opponents continue to take away the middle of the field, Jackson will no longer fit the MVP mold.

These are exciting times for pro football with the likes of Justin Herbert making the Los Angeles Chargers a contender again. Herbert reminds me of Murray in that he knows how to take charge of a game. His strong arm is in a league with John Elway's, and that comparison will become more frequent as time passes.

It is sad what has happened

to Dak Prescott and Deshaun Watson. Both seemed within striking distance of greatness until their teams and their coaches let them down. I still think Prescott will overcome the compound fracture of his ankle and that Watson will win a lot of games with a young coach who has a better understanding of how to speed up the game.

It's only a matter of time before the Cowboys will be looking for a new head coach. I knew the day they hired Mike McCarthy that he was too old school for a game revolutionized by up-tempo offensive minds.

If you are a fan of the Dallas Cowboys, you must hope that aging owner Jerry Jones steps aside from the football operation. A believer in the Houston Texans must pray that another Bill O'Brien is never hired. The Texans and the Cowboys must act fast. Otherwise, they are going to be left even further behind by some of the best young guns the league has ever seen. ★

## Sports View

# SV

Will Hill  
ECHO Staff

The opinions expressed in this column are those of sportswriter and fan Will Hill and do not represent official viewpoints of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or The ECHO.

THEY SAY THAT IT IS THE THOUGHT and not the gift that counts. Good thing, because shopping for a person who has it all can be difficult. I mean, would LeBron James or Drew Brees really be happy with a package of Duplex cookies from the unit's commissary? Probably not. Therefore, in the spirit of the holidays, I have developed a list of gifts that may be more appropriate.

### College Athletics

★To every student athlete across the country: That the National Collegiate Athletics Association will finally recognize you for what they actually are: employees of their college or university, and allow you to be fairly compensated for the work you do. There is something very wrong with an amateur athletic system that allows everyone to profit except the ones who are performing the actual work.

★To every Big 12 football team (I'm looking especially at you, Longhorns): Coaches that recognize that there are three phases of the game:

offense, defense and special teams. Maybe if you held an opponent below 40 points occasionally, you would get an invite to the college football playoffs.

### Golf

★For Phil Mickelson: A win in next season's US Open to complete the career slam. Lefty has been one of the Professional Golf Association (PGA) tour's best players for the better part of three decades and has won five majors, but not the elusive US Open. He has come close to finishing a heartbreaking second several times.

★To Eldrick "Tiger" Woods: A full season of good health. Powerful golf swings generally do not pair well with aging, aching backs and bad knees. There is a reason most professional golfers end up having knee and/or hip replacements soon after they retire.

★To golf fans: Just one more round of championship caliber golf from the sports two aging superstars; Mickelson and Woods, preferably in the final round of one of the tour's four majors.

★To Jordan Spieth: A return to the form that allowed you to rack up wins in majors early in his career. Whether the problem is with the mechanics of your swing or between the ears, you need to correct the problem *pronto* if you are going to live up to the lofty expectations that have been set for your career.

### Major League Baseball (MLB)

★To baseball fans: A full 162-game season in 2021. The interruption of the season during spring training, while frustrating, was understandable in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. What was not understandable was the inability of billionaire owners and millionaire players to curb their raging greed while "real" people were suffering the loss of livelihoods. This was an especially bad optic for the owners and players. If ever there had been a time for management and the players association to each make compromises, this would have been the year.



★For Houston Astros ace Justin Verlander: A complete recovery from Tommy John surgery and a speedy return to the field in 2022. The right-hander only pitched a few games in 2020 before being sidelined with the injury.

★For National League pitchers: A permanent designated hitter rule. Okay, I admit this gift is more for me than the pitchers, but I really don't want to watch them

constantly strikeout or struggle to lay down a simple sacrifice bunt.

### National Football League (NFL)

★To all of the NFL players who suffered a season-ending injury in 2020: A complete and speedy recovery. Especially Dallas Cowboys' quarterback Dak Prescott, who suffered a broken ankle at the most inopportune time—as if there is ever an opportune time to break one's ankle—while playing on the franchise tag.

★Speaking of Dak: A contract commensurate with what he deserves if not with the Cowboys, than certainly with another team that will appreciate his talents.

★For the Cowboys: A defense. Yes, I know there are fans that believe the team already has a good defense. These people are what I like to call wrong; there is a difference between having good defensive players and actually having a sound defensive system.

★Also for the Cowboys: An identity. Are you going to be a power running team or a high octane passing attack? Make up your mind what type of team you are going to be already, get to work, and do it. Do you know what Kansas City, Pittsburgh, New Orleans and Baltimore have that you don't, other than a Super Bowl victory in the last quarter of a century? Well, it's an identity! They know who they are going

to be year in and year out.

★For Houston Texans' quarterback DeShaun Watson: A dynamic offensive-minded head coach that will incorporate Watson's unique skillset into a modern day offense instead of continually forcing a round peg into a square hole. Kansas City Chiefs' offensive coordinator Eric Bienemy would seem to be perfect, especially since Watson has already endorsed him for the job.

★For former Texans' General Manager and Head Coach Bill O'Brien: A portion of the Arizona Cardinals playoff money. Seems only fair since it was O'Brien's trade of DeAndre Hopkins, one of the league's best wide receivers, for an overpaid running back and a second round draft choice.

★For Tampa Bay Buccaneers' quarterback Tom Brady: Nada. Nil. Nothing. Zilch. Not even a lump of the proverbial coal.

★To Kansas City Chiefs' quarterback Patrick Mahomes: A healthy dash of humility. During your first three seasons in the NFL, all you have managed to accomplish is winning the league's Most Valuable Player (MVP) award (2018), and bringing a Super Bowl championship to Kansas City for the first time in 50 years while being named MVP of the big game (2019). Oh by the way, you also signed the richest contract in the history of the NFL during the offseason. ★

### Prison Rape Elimination Act Ombudsman

In 2007, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Ombudsman was established by the 80th Legislature (Texas Government Code §§501.171-.178) and was appointed by the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ). The PREA Ombudsman office was created to provide offenders, family and friends of offenders, and the general public with an independent office to report sexual abuse and sexual harassment occurring in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) correctional facilities. The PREA Ombudsman also provides a confidential avenue for offenders to report sexual abuse and sexual harassment and ensures impartial resolution of complaints and inquiries related to allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The PREA Ombudsman reports directly to the TBCJ Chairman and may be contacted at the following address:

PREA Ombudsman  
P.O. Box 99  
Huntsville, Texas 77342

TDCJ has a "zero tolerance" for all forms of sexual abuse and sexual harassment of offenders. Offenders knowledgeable about offender-on-offender or staff-on-offender sexual abuse or sexual harassment that occurs within a TDCJ correctional facility are encouraged to immediately report the allegation to the facility administration, PREA Ombudsman or the Office of Inspector General. Offenders may remain anonymous upon request.

### Acta de Eliminación de Violación en Prisión Ombudsman

En el 2007, el Acta de Eliminación de Violación en Prisión (PREA) Ombudsman fue establecido por la 80a Legislatura (Código de Gobierno de Texas §§501.171-.178) y fue nombrado por la Junta de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TBCJ). La oficina PREA Ombudsman fue creada para proporcionar a los ofensores, familia y amigos de ofensores, y al público en general con una oficina independiente para reportar el abuso sexual y el acoso sexual que ocurre en los establecimientos correccionales del Departamento de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TDCJ). El PREA Ombudsman también proporciona una vía confidencial para que los ofensores reporten el abuso sexual y acoso sexual y asegura resolución imparcial de las denuncias y consultas relacionadas con las acusaciones de abuso sexual y acoso sexual. El PREA Ombudsman reporta directamente al presidente de TBCJ y puede ser contactado en la siguiente dirección:

PREA Ombudsman  
P.O. Box 99  
Huntsville, Texas 77342

El TDCJ tiene una política de "cero tolerancia" para todas las formas de abuso sexual y acoso sexual de ofensores. Ofensores con conocimiento acerca de un abuso sexual o acoso sexual de un ofensor a otro ofensor, o de un empleado a un ofensor que ocurre dentro de un establecimiento correccional de TDCJ se les recomienda hacer inmediatamente la denuncia a la administración de la unidad, PREA Ombudsman o a la Oficina del Inspector General. Los ofensores pueden permanecer anónimos al solicitarlo.