

June 2016

If you like buffets, you will hopefully enjoy this month's column and surely everyone will find something worthwhile! This month will signal the fourth year my family has called Guthrie our home. There have been some mighty challenges and sometimes the best learning comes from failures where you get back up, dust yourself off, and go again. We have learned a lot about our community and their willingness to support the future.

Just over a year ago, our school district passed a historic bond issue and later this fall the first phase will be completed. The bids on all of the projects in the first phase have been accepted and the projects are under budget at this time. The roofs were replaced at three elementary schools in the fall of 2015. Over the summer, Central Elementary will receive repair to the brick exterior and classrooms in the oldest part of the building will get new heating/air conditioning units. Finally, this fall, the windows will be replaced which will make the building more energy efficient. The windows selected will transform the exterior to a more historically accurate appearance.

I hope you've been following the state budget crisis as it affects every Oklahoman. Our state continues to search for the sweet spot between what our citizens expect of government and how we pay for those services. Kansas, our northern neighbor, has also been through these struggles and their difficulty has been chronicled nationally similar to Oklahoma. A stark difference exists between the two states. Despite all of the tax cuts both states so proudly herald, Oklahoma would need to spend \$2.1 billion more on education to reach what Kansas spends per student (of course this was before mid-year cuts in 2015-16). The legislature adjourned with a budget that once again relies on one-time money and lacks recurring funding streams to sustain the long term financial health our state so desperately needs. While common education was not impacted as much as some agencies, schools were definitely not 'held harmless' as some have said. Sadly, we have placed our most vulnerable Oklahomans, its youngest and oldest citizens, at the greatest risk of loss of services.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention a heartfelt farewell to my favorite "gumshoe reporter" Mike Monahan. He was the sports and school reporter for the Guthrie News Leader since my arrival in 2012. He also would give me a "gentle nudge" when reminding me I was overdue for a column. Good newspaper reporters are a vanishing breed and I would include Mike in that category. They develop relationships with those they cover but never forget that someday they might have to ask tough questions. Mike was always fair and when he asked the tough questions, I always gave him what information I could legally. I will always admire how Mike found a way to get the job done even after being confined to a wheelchair.

Finally, I want to congratulate the Guthrie High School Class of 2016 for a job well done. Graduation at Guthrie is truly a special event. There are more people at "The Rock" on that night than you will see at a Carl Albert football game. I have the honor of shaking the hands of roughly 200 ecstatic graduates who know little about what lies ahead but the "conquer the world" attitude they take forward

is truly inspiring. Think about when you didn't know you couldn't do something and refused to be told "no" by those older than you. The possibilities continue to be endless. And once again, I can hear Alice Cooper's "Schools Out For Summer" in the background.