

The Conquistador

Spring 2026

THE MAGAZINE OF DODGE CITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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**Record-Breaking
Season for Softball**

Spring Fling '26

***The Tradition
Continues!***

DC3 STUDENTS MAKE A
COLORFUL DISPLAY DURING
THE SPRING FLING "WHITE
OUT FESTIVAL" ON APRIL 13.



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The Conquistador

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DC3 BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL ENROLLMENT

1,581

AVERAGE CLASS SIZE

10

STUDENTS FROM

39 STATES/TERRITORIES

26 COUNTRIES

ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

17

STUDENT GENDER

50% FEMALE

50% MALE

Welcome Back!



Welcome to the spring issue of the Conquistador magazine! As always, you'll find positive, uplifting stories that reflect the unconquerable spirit, enthusiasm and culture of Dodge City Community College (DC3).

Like past issues, this edition is filled with stories highlighting student initiatives and achievements, athletic excellence, and updates from our alumni. You'll also find plenty of photos from annual events such as Spring Fling, the Honors Banquet, Nursing Pinning, and Commencement. Reflecting on this past school year — our 90th — it has been a busy and productive one.

Speaking of student success, our student-athletes have accomplished some remarkable things this spring. In April, our cheer team captured its fourth consecutive national championship, while our softball team claimed the Region 6 title in May. These accomplishments represent just a few of the many ways our students continue to excel both on and off the field.

I often say that our job is to recruit, retain, educate, and graduate students. The stories in this magazine demonstrate our commitment to those goals and the positive impact they have on the lives of our students.

Thank you for being a part of Conq Nation. Enjoy the magazine!

All the best,

Harold Nolte
Harold Nolte, Ed.D.
President

Conq Corral

Conqs on campus and around our community.



Music filled the stage at the Little Theatre on March 12, as students from the DC3 music program delivered an energetic showcase of talent. Performers took the spotlight in solos, duets, and larger ensembles, bringing Broadway classics and popular hits to life for the audience. Throughout the evening, the singers were supported by skilled piano accompaniment from Kerry J. Kuplic, Professor of Vocal Music, and Gloria Morford, DC3 Part-Time Accompanist, helping create a lively night of student music and performance.

ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ



LANCE ZIESCH

On Jan. 31, the DC3 Rodeo Team participated in the second annual Winter Expo Rodeo Showcase at the Western State Bank Expo Center. The event featured a meet-and-greet with rodeo student-athletes and six timed events: barrel racing, goat tying, breakaway roping, team roping, tie-down roping, and steer wrestling. Above, Cody Vance, a sophomore from Scott City, Kan., stands with his horse, Peaches, during the meet-and-greet.



LANCE ZIESCH

More than 207 supporters gathered on Feb. 28 at the Hoover Pavilion in Wright Park for the fourth annual Dodge City Community College Rodeo Live and Silent Auction. Pictured (front row, left to right) are Riley Cundiff, freshman, Dodge City; Abigail Zabel, sophomore, Satanta, Kan.; Clarysa Webber, sophomore, Sublette, Kan.; Skylar Courtney, sophomore, Bucklin, Kan.; Keelin Faulkner, freshman, Chama, N.M.; Gracy Downare, sophomore, Hartsel, Colo.; Peyton Banister, freshman, Arkansas City, Kan.; (back row) Jacob Perkey, Head Rodeo Coach; Leland Kooper Wright, sophomore, Scott City, Kan.; Conner Nelson, sophomore, Nora Springs, Iowa; Jackson Wykert, sophomore, Grant, Neb.; Chestin Smith-Rohman, sophomore, Bailey, Colo.; Easton Rohr, sophomore, Dodge City; Pancho Wiebe, freshman, Cimarron, Kan.; De'oderick Fitzgerald, freshman, Eagle Lake, Texas; Cody Vance, sophomore, Scott City, Kan.; Bryce Jackson, sophomore, Rifle, Colo.; Jake Voss, sophomore, Concordia, Kan.; and Colton Valenta, Assistant Rodeo Coach.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

The DC3 Athletic Band brought energy and excitement to Dodge City Middle School (DCMS) on March 25, showcasing their versatility and talent. The group played popular hits, including “Kashmir” by Led Zeppelin and “Low Rider” by War, while showing how they can perform on a wide range of instruments, from trumpets to trash cans, and as a full drumline. They also took time to answer questions and connect with students, even dancing along and creating a fun, interactive experience.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

The DC3 Art Department welcomed guests to an opening reception on April 24, for its Spring Student Art Show at the DC3 Little Theatre, celebrating student creativity with an evening of recognition, awards, and scholarships.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

On April 15, DC3 celebrated the anniversaries of its employees, at Boot Hill Museum during its annual Employee Recognition Banquet. Employees celebrating milestones in the 10-, 15-, and 20-year categories included, (left to right) Dr. Harold Nolte, President (10 years); Heather Smith, Director of Wellness Center/Athletics Administrative Assistant (10 years); Jennifer Nolan, Professor of Art (20 years); Stephanie Gruver, Professor of Mathematics (10 years); Patrick Shiew, Professor of Building/Construction Technology (15 years); and Tina Briseno, Professor of Cosmetology (10 years). Not pictured are Kamilla Blackwell, Maintenance and Facilities Administrative Assistant (10 years); Dr. Adam John, Provost (Arizona) (10 years); Maria Lopez, Residence Life Custodian (10 years); and Jared Stevens, Director of Facilities & Operations (10 years).



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

Employees recognized for reaching five years of service at the college's Employee Recognition Banquet on April 15 included (front row, left to right) Chelsea Konrade, Professor of Paraprofessional Nursing; Olivia De La Torre, Advising Specialist; Holly Mercer, Library Director; Tammi Fischer, Dual Credit Coordinator; (back row) Jeff Cermin, Vice President of Administration and Finance/CFO; and Eric Mercer, Associate Professor of Psychology. Not pictured are: Renee Allen, Executive Assistant to the President; Jason Lutz, Associate Professor of Electrical Technology; Dr. Jodi Rust, Assistant Vice President of Online; and Landon Steele, Head Women's Basketball Coach. In addition, Tammi Fischer also was honored as Conq of the Year.

Conq Corral

Conqs on campus and around our community.



DC3-ARIZONA

A total of 33 students, faculty, and staff from the DC3-Arizona flight instructor program participated in their second-annual Community Service Day on April 2. The group gathered at the Midwest Food Bank in Gilbert, Ariz., where volunteers received free T-shirts, enjoyed purple donuts, and learned about the day's service project. Working together, the DC3-Arizona volunteers filled an incredible 8,000 bags of crackers for individuals and families in need. The event provided an opportunity to give back to the community while demonstrating the teamwork and service-minded spirit of the DC3-Arizona program.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORITZ

On April 21, the Kappa Psi Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) inducted 15 new members during a ceremony in the DC3 Board Room. Pictured (front row, left to right) are Zhana Navato, sophomore, Toronto, Canada; Lillian Littlewood, Minneola High School, Minneola, Kan.; Cherlyn De La Cruz, sophomore, Dodge City; April Hermosillo, sophomore, Dodge City; Elise Ritchie, freshman, Minneola, Kan.; Chantel Hernandez, freshman, Cimarron, Kan.; Aum Sharm, Dodge City Middle School, Dodge City; Alissa Weece, sophomore, Wright, Kan.; (back row) Dr. Harold Nolte, DC3 President; Tara Knego, sophomore, Ljubljana, Slovenia; Riley Moore, sophomore, Woodward, Okla.; Jordyn Boxberger, Hoisington, Kan.; Cinthya Garcia Alvarado, freshman, Plains, Kan.; Kara Haselhorst, sophomore, Dodge City; Noah Illk, sophomore, Dodge City; Harlee Tilley, sophomore, Bucklin, Kan.; and Renee Allen, PTK Advisor and Executive Assistant to the President.



LANCIE ZIESCH

The DC3 Board of Trustees honored the four-time national champion DC3 cheer team at a banquet on the evening of April 22, at the Dodge City Country Club, recognizing the team's first-place finish in Daytona Beach, Fla.



JORGE H. GARCIA

The Dodge City Community Symphony joined DC3 staff and administration for "Melodies in Motion: A Collaborative Spring Pops Event" concert on April 23 at the DC3 Little Theatre, featuring guest conductors and a program spanning marches to cinematic scores.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

On April 30, DC3 Building Construction Technology students hosted an open house at the newest CHAD home in partnership with the Community Housing Association of Dodge City (CHAD) and local supporters. Pictured (left to right, front row) are Mariah Mckillop, sophomore, Centennial, Colo.; Adrik Perez, sophomore, Dodge City; Gracie Beierle, sophomore, Centennial, Colo.; Ed Solis, sophomore, Dodge City; Josue Fernandez, sophomore, Dodge City; Alexis Vega, sophomore, Dodge City; Alan Lopez, sophomore, Dodge City; Mario Lux Jose, freshman, Dodge City; Wilmer Hernandez, sophomore, Dodge City; Loren Coval, DC3 Construction Site Coordinator; Javier Hipolito, sophomore, Dodge City; Manny Batz, Dodge City High School; (back row) Jake Voss, sophomore, Concordia, Kan.; Patrick Shiew, DC3 Professor of Building/Construction Technology; Erik Sanchez, Weller Construction; Luis Velasquez, Dodge City High School; Kevin Navarrete, sophomore, Dodge City; and Kyle Weller, CHAD Housing Contractor/Weller Construction.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

On April 26, DC3 music students showcased their talent in a dynamic, collaborative spring concert at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Windthorst, Kan., featuring DC3 choristers, band and drumline, along with guest artist Dr. Luke Helker, Assistant Professor of Percussion, Fort Hays State University; and cellist Kimberly Benson, Comanche Middle School (CMS) Orchestra Teacher.



MAIT TOWERS

On April 29, DC3 Athletics recognized student-athletes, coaches, staff, and more at the fifth-annual CONQY Awards in the Little Theatre. Above, Wesly Rosa, sophomore, Cape Verde, West Africa, receives the Performance of the Year Award. Also pictured is Chris Woodruff, DC3 Assistant Athletic Director.



On March 30, Kansas Rep. Jason Goetz spoke to students in the Service Learning class at Dodge City Community College about how their proposed animal abuse offender registry bill would move through the legislative process.

Class Turns Ideas Into Legislation

By Alba Gutierrez-Ortiz

Kansas Rep. Jason Goetz brought the legislative process into focus for students at Dodge City Community College (DC3), offering a real world look at how ideas become law and reinforcing lessons already taking shape in the classroom.

Goetz visited DC3's Service-Learning class on March 30, where students

are developing their own proposed legislation. Walking them through each stage, from drafting and committee review to debate, amendments and final approval, he emphasized the complexity behind every bill and the collaboration required to move it forward.

For many students, the visit reshaped their understanding of government.

Francesco Pennacchio, freshman, Orbassano, Italy, said, "One thing that really surprised me from Rep. Goetz's visit was how much talking and compromise actually goes into making laws. I always thought people mostly just stuck to their own opinions, but it sounds like there's a lot more discussion and working together than I expected."

Pennacchio also said working on the bill made him realize that making laws is a lot more complicated than he expected.

"It's not just coming up with an idea," he said. "It takes a lot of research, careful wording, and thinking about how it would work in real life. I didn't realize how important small details are or how much teamwork is involved in the process."

Focusing their efforts on a proposed animal abuse offender registry in Kansas, the service-learning students are being challenged to think critically about public safety and accountability.

"The most challenging part for me has been turning my idea into something realistic that could actually work as a law," Pennacchio said. "I also had to think more about real world impacts, which made the process more difficult but also more interesting."

Oscar Leal, freshman, Donna, Texas, echoed that sentiment, pointing to the realities of collaboration.

"Rep. Goetz's visit surprised me because I didn't realize how much people have to work together to get anything done. I always thought it was more simple, but there's a lot of discussion and compromise," Leal said.

The class, led by Jay Gooldy, Assistant Professor of English, centers on hands-on civic engagement and teaches his students that although lawmaking is complex and collaborative, it is also within reach.

"I hope students understand that they can make a difference. It's not always easy, but good things can happen if you are on the right side of an issue," he said. "Students have found the personal interests of other non-invested parties can often get in the way of things that are an overall good for society."

As the project moves forward, students will spend the summer and fall semesters actively promoting their proposed legislation, reaching out to candidates, allied groups, organizations and current lawmakers across Kansas to build support.

By the start of the next legislative session in January, those efforts will culminate at the state Capitol, where students will travel to Topeka and step into a leading role as the public face of the bill, advocating for the policy they have worked to research, develop and refine. ■



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

DC3 Tech revved up its classroom on Feb. 21 and Feb. 28 with a hands-on Automotive Basics course led by Seth Chandler, DC3 Instructor of Automotive Technology.

DC3 Offers Non-Credit Auto Basics Course

by Lance Ziesch

Dodge City Community College (DC3) Tech offered a new short-term training opportunity this winter for community members looking to develop practical vehicle care skills.

Called Automotive Basics, the two-session, non-credit course was offered Saturday, Feb. 21, and Saturday, Feb. 28, from 10 a.m. to noon at the DC3 Automotive Technology Center, for a total cost of \$30.

Designed for beginners and for those seeking a refresher, Automotive Basics focused on building strong fundamentals in core vehicle maintenance through practical, hands-on experience.

"By the end of the two sessions, participants will be prepared to perform basic maintenance services on their own vehicles," Dr. Clayton Tatro, DC3 Vice President for Workforce Development, said. "They will also learn how to identify potential issues before they result in costly repairs."

Topics covered during the course included personal protective equipment

(PPE) and its importance in maintaining a safe work environment, as well as the proper use of lifts, hoists, and jacks. Participants also became familiar with common automotive tools, learning how to identify them and use them correctly for various tasks.

In addition, the course covered automotive fluids and lubrication systems, including oil change procedures and maintenance light resets. Tire-related topics included tire sizing, rotation patterns, and wheel safety.

Participants also learned how to identify steering and suspension wear indicators, how to inspect and replace filters, belts, and hoses, how to perform battery service and basic electrical maintenance, and how to conduct multi-point inspections.

Due to the popularity of the auto course, the college is considering additional non-credit weekend classes for the future. ■



JORGE H. GARCIA

Approximately 310 students, of the 512 who applied for graduation, walked across the stage to receive degrees and/or certificates at the 2026 ceremony. Above, students turn their tassels.

DC3 Celebrates Its 90th Graduating Class

by Lance Ziesch

The Dodge City Community College (DC3) graduation weekend began with the college's sixth-annual Honors Banquet, on Friday, May 1, at the Boot Hill Casino and Resort Conference Center.

Featuring remarks from Distinguished Alumnus **James "Jamie" LeMon**, the evening included a special recognition ceremony for the college's High Honors, Honors, and Certificate Honors graduates.

On Saturday, May 2, the college hosted its annual graduation ceremonies at the United Wireless Arena. Up first was the Nursing Pinning Ceremony at 10 a.m., which was followed by Commencement at 3 p.m.

At Commencement, **Adiana Telles**, a freshman from Las Cruces, N.M., gave the invocation, and **Amery Macias**, a sophomore from Dodge City, gave the student leader remarks. In addition, LeMon also gave a second address as the 2026 Distinguished Alumnus.

Of the 2,300 people who attended the 2026 Commencement ceremony, approximately 310 were DC3 students receiving degrees and/or certificates. ■

- CONTINUED





ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

Christina Haselhorst, Director of Financial Aid, performs "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Commencement.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

DC3 President, Dr. Harold Nolte (right), presents commencement speaker James "Jamie" LeMon with the 2026 Distinguished Alumnus Citation award.



JORGE H. GARCIA

Adiana Telles, freshman, Las Cruces, N.M., gives the invocation at the 2026 graduation ceremony. Also pictured is Dr. Jay Kinzer, Vice President of Student Services.



JORGE H. GARCIA

DC3 President, Dr. Harold Nolte, addresses the crowd at graduation on May 2.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

Student Government Association President, Amery Macias, delivers the student leader remarks during the 2026 graduation ceremony.

GRADUATION CONTINUED -



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

Members of the Air Force Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (AFJROTC) Color Guard at Dodge City High School present the flag at the 2026 graduation ceremony.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

Members of Dodge City Community College's 90th graduating class toss their caps in the air on May 2, at the United Wireless Arena.



LANCIE ZIESCH

Nursing Pinning guest speaker, Sonia Reyes, R.N., addresses the Class of 2026.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

The nursing program's Class of 2026 includes sophomores (from left to right, back row) Monica Equihua, Dodge City; Maria "Janet" Rocha, Dodge City; Emily Estevane Moran, Dodge City; Ashley Juarez Alarcon, Dodge City; Megan Bennett, Minneola, Kan.; Ryan Jensen, Minneola, Kan.; Victoria Johnson, Wright, Kan.; (front row) Genesis Alvarado, Dodge City; Josselyne Cruz, Dodge City; Eryn Gross, Dodge City; Amber Ellis, Ashland, Kan.; Alyson Dreiling, Minneola, Kan.; and Sarae Ricke, Spearville, Kan.



JORGE H. GARCIA



JORGE H. GARCIA



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORITZ



JORGE H. GARCIA

LeMon Named Distinguished Alumnus

by Lance Ziesch

James “Jamie” LeMon, of Ellicott City, Md., was tapped as the 2026 Dodge City Community College (DC3) Distinguished Alumnus for the college’s May graduation activities.

LeMon, a native of Washington, Pa., graduated from DC3 with an Associate of Arts degree in 1986.

At Washington High School just outside Pittsburgh, LeMon was a standout wide receiver, and his athletic ability began catching the attention of major Division I programs, including Virginia Tech and the University of Tennessee. Both programs expressed interest in offering him a full scholarship—if he could improve his grades.

“I always had potential. That was never an issue,” he said. “I just needed encouragement. I never took books home until I was in the 11th grade. It wasn’t like I was studying and wasn’t getting it. I just wasn’t doing it.”

Recognizing the opportunity in front of him, LeMon made an effort to improve his grades during his senior year. While he showed some progress, it was not enough. He graduated with a 1.4 GPA, effectively closing the door on Division I opportunities and leaving him uncertain about his future.

With no scholarships in sight after graduation, LeMon decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and get a job working in a nearby steel mill. After just eight days, he realized it was not the path he wanted, so he reached out to his high school coach about playing ball at a junior college. After a few phone calls, LeMon was on his way to Dodge City for his first college recruiting visit.

“On my birthday, June 16, I flew out to Dodge City,” he said. “And the bottom line is, I’d never been really anywhere outside of Pennsylvania. But people were really nice.”

Based on his favorable impression of Head Coach Jerry Cullen and the DC3 football program, LeMon decided to nix his other two recruiting visits.

Being the youngest of six and the only boy, LeMon said his family didn’t have a lot of resources. Over the summer, he worked and saved; however, when the time came, he still didn’t have enough money to buy a bus ticket from Pittsburgh.

“My brother-in-law was going to Cincinnati,” he said. “So he dropped me off in Cincinnati at the bus station, and I caught the bus.”

As it turns out, it was a 36-hour bus ride to Kansas, with an eight-hour layover in Chicago.

“I cried the whole time,” he said. “I’m not ashamed to say it. I just cried. I was sick. I had never left home before.”

Thinking back on it now, LeMon said that more than anything, when he arrived, he was just angry.

“The first few weeks, I just wouldn’t talk to a lot of people,” he said. “I was just a little frustrated. I was wanting to go home, but my mom said, ‘Please stay.’”

So, he stayed, due to the support of his football coaches, Head Coach Jerry Cullen and Assistant Coach Tim Beck, as well as campus legend Jo Weinmeister, who was the college’s registrar at the time.

However, unknown to LeMon, making the team would be no easy task. He discovered he wasn’t guaranteed a spot due to the rules of the era, which only allowed 10 of the 30–35 out-of-state students on the football roster.

Ultimately, LeMon rose to the challenge and secured his place on the team, becoming a first-team all-conference wide receiver during his freshman season. However, during his sophomore year,



Recognized for achievement in education, James “Jamie” LeMon, addresses graduates at the sixth-annual Honors Banquet on May 1, as the college’s 2026 Distinguished Alumnus. LeMon is the 65th individual to be honored by the program since it began in 1963.

he suffered a season-ending knee injury. Once again, he faced a difficult decision: return home or stay and continue his education.

Following his mother’s advice, he chose to remain at DC3 and focus on his academics.

“Football was only going to take me so far,” he said. “When I left here, I realized the academic piece had been my focus.”

Due to his success at DC3, LeMon earned a full scholarship to West Virginia University, where he continued his football career as a Mountaineer and competed in major bowl games, including the Sun Bowl and Fiesta Bowl national championship.

After completing his undergraduate studies, LeMon continued to build on his academic achievements. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Physical Education in 1989 and a Master of Science in Physical Education/Teacher Education in 1993 from West Virginia University. He later obtained a Master of Science in Community Health Promotion from the West Virginia University School of Medicine, a Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Maryland, and a Certification in Administration and Supervision from Johns Hopkins University.

For more than two decades, LeMon has dedicated his career to education and student success. He began as a high school teacher and head track coach before advancing into leadership roles, including assistant principal and high school principal.

“I have shared my personal journey with thousands of students,” LeMon said. “One thing I try to tell the kids is it’s not where you start. It’s where you finish. And it’s the people who help you along the way. It’s really the people who help you along the way.”

Today, LeMon oversees the Howard County (Maryland) Public School System Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships, a role he assumed in 2024 after serving seven years as the district’s Executive Director of Community, Parent, and School Outreach.

Howard County operates 78 schools serving more than 57,000 students, representing 187 home languages and 147 home countries, and is consistently ranked the No. 1 school system in the state of Maryland.

LeMon and his wife, Erica, have three sons, Gerik, Xavier, and Shane. ■



Spring Fling '26

Monday, April 13 - Friday, April 17

Spring Fling returned to the Dodge City Community College (DC3) campus for another week of food, games, and fun, from Monday, April 13, through Friday, April 17, courtesy of DC3 Student Activities.

The week kicked off with a **"White Out Festival"** on Monday with a cookout in the quad, featuring hamburgers grilled by Black Hills Energy and served by Great Western Dining, followed by a color powder toss.

Tuesday brought food-eating challenges in the cafeteria and a dodgeball tournament in the Auxiliary Gym, under the name of **"Feast and Compete."**

On Wednesday, the Skinner Student Activity Center transformed into a casino-style **"High Roller Night."**

Thursday evening, students gathered in the quad between the Humanities Building and the Library to enjoy snacks, ice cream, and the movie *"Black Panther"* on the big screen, as part of **"Movie Under the Stars."**

The week wrapped up with **"Final Splash Friday,"** as students took on a soccer slip-and-slide inflatable on the practice football field. ■



JORGE H. GARCIA

Spring Fling 2026 kicked off with a free cookout on the college quad as part of Monday's **"White Out Festival."** Like in past years, Black Hills Energy grilled hamburgers, while Great Western Dining Inc. served the food.



JORGE H. GARCIA

Troy Lerner, sophomore, Colorado Springs, Colo., takes aim during a dodgeball game in the Auxiliary Gym, which was a part of **"Feast and Compete"** day on Tuesday, April 14.



JORGE H. GARCIA

One of the highlights of each year's Spring Fling is the dunk tank! Above, Dr. Jodi Rust, Assistant Vice President of Online, takes her turn in the hot seat. The dunk tank, along with the free hamburger feed, were part of Spring Fling's **"White Out Festival"** on Monday, April 13.



JORGE H. GARCIA

The DC3 Athletic Band helped kick off Spring Fling Week with live music in the Quad on Monday, April 13.



ALBA GUTIERREZ-ORTIZ

On Thursday, April 16, students enjoyed an outdoor “Movie Under the Stars” between the Humanities Building and Library. Voted on by DC3 students, the chosen movie was “Black Panther.”



JORGE H. GARCIA

Melanie Smith (far right), Director of Advising, and her husband, Andy, ran the Texas Hold'em table during “High Roller Night” in the Skinner Student Activity Center.



JORGE H. GARCIA

The Monday, April 13, events concluded with a fun color powder toss, where students tossed a variety of colors into the air. Pictured above is Jerry Brand, sophomore, Mobile, Ala.



LANCE ZIESCH

Spring Fling Week wrapped up with “Final Splash Friday,” as students took on a soccer slip-and-slide inflatable on the football practice field. Above, (front row, left to right) are Amery Macias, Dodge City; Cadence Applegate-Brice, sophomore, Norman, Okla.; Abril Hermosillo, Dodge City; Cherlyn De La Cruz Martinez, Dodge City; (back row) Rinka Hayashi, Yokosuka, Japan; Meike Pätzold, Ludwigshafen, Germany; Lauren Hasenbalg, Fountain, Colo.; Lucy Goss, Ermington, Australia; Cassidy Ary, Lewis, Kan.; and Chantel Hernandez, Cimarron, Kan.





THE 2025-26 CONQUISTADOR SOFTBALL TEAM. Above, the Conqs celebrate after going 4-1 at the Region 6 Tournament on May 12 at Dodge City's Legends Park, earning a trip to the NJCAA Division I World Series in Oxford, Ala. Dodge City concluded its season there after suffering a pair of one-run losses on May 25 and 26.

Record-Breaking Season for Softball

by Mike Smith

History was made, and the record books were rewritten for the 2026 season. The Dodge City softball team finished 46-19 to set a new program record for single-season wins while winning the Region 6 and Plains District titles, and making the program's third trip to

the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) World Series.

After battling strong competition early, the Conquistadors settled in throughout the season on their way to a 24-8 record in Kansas Jayhawk Community College (KJCCC) action to finish third in the

conference, the highest finish in the conference since 2005.

At the Region 6 tournament, the Conqs put together a strong performance, going 4-1 to win the first region and district titles since 2002 and earn a trip to the NJCAA DI World

Series. The Conqs opened the region tournament on May 8 with a no-hitter thrown by **Karli George** in an 11-1 five-inning win over Garden City. The Conqs then went on to beat Butler 3-2 on May 8 and Hutchinson 4-0 on May 9 to move one win away from winning the tournament. After a tough 3-2 loss to Butler on May 10, the Conqs responded with a 4-2 win on May 11 to claim the Region 6 and Plains District titles.

George and **Avery McCloskey** both earned Co-MVP honors at the region tournament, and they were both selected to the all-tournament team alongside **Karen Galaviz** and **Kloe Nelson**.

At the NJCAA DI World Series for only the third time in program history, the Conqs competed at a high level, battling adversity in the tournament and pushing their opponents to the limit.

The Conqs fell 4-3 to College of Southern Idaho in the first round on May 25, and their late comeback against Gaston fell just short in a 7-6 loss to end the season on May 26.

Not only did the Conqs set a new record for wins in a season, but the team rewrote the record book, breaking team records in a single season for hits (648), RBIs (388), runs scored (569), walks (250), doubles (161), triples (32), home runs (80), and slugging percentage (.629). While **Riley Moore** etched her name in the record books, breaking the single-season (69) and career record (118) in runs scored, **Cadie McCracken** broke the single-season record for walks (47), and **Avery McCloskey** broke the single-season record for doubles (25).

Conqs earned plenty of postseason recognition, **Head Coach Mike Viramontez** in his third season was selected as the KJCCC DI Coach of the Year, while eight players picked up KJCCC All-conference honors: **Karli George** (First team – pitcher), **Loren Sweat** (First team – outfield), **Karen Galaviz** (Second team – outfield), **Riley Moore** (Second team – infield), **Sophie Faidley** (Second team – catcher), **Avery McCloskey** (Second team – utility), **Harley Shoaf** (Honorable Mention – infield), and **Cadie McCracken** (honorable mention – infield). Shoaf also earned National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) NJCAA DI West All-Region first team honors.

The 2026 season is one to remember for Conq softball, helping set the tone for the program moving forward. ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF NCA CHEER

Cheer Wins Fourth Straight National Title

by Mike Smith

The Gold Standard continued for the Conquistador cheer program as they brought home the National Cheer Association national championship in the Intermediate Small Coed Junior College competition for the fourth straight year.

The Conqs competed at Daytona Beach, Fla., at the NCA competition as they battled back from behind to claim their fourth straight title. After Day One of competition on April 10, the Conqs sat in third place with a performance score of 86.0463, but bounced back on Day Two on April 11, with a stellar performance, recording a score of 93.4167 to earn a combined score of 91.5471 and earn the win by 0.037 points.

The Conqs also won the Region 6 Intermediate Small Coed Region 6 title, while also taking first place at region competition in the All-Girl and Small Coed Group Stunt competitions. The group of **Saylor Rhoden**, **Navie Guerra**, **Mariah Mckillop**, and **Ava Pillay** took first in the All-Girl competition, while the group of **Jon Blakeway**, **Bailey Beveridge**, **California Cedro**, and **Lauren Hasenbalg** earned first in the Small Coed Group Stunt. ■



COLLEGE ARCHIVES/1990 GOLDEN SHIELD

THE 1989-90 CONQUISTADOR MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM. Former DC3 Head Coach, Brad Underwood (front row, fourth from left), led the University of Illinois men's basketball team to the Final Four in 2026.

From JuCo to Final Four

Former Basketball Coach Brad Underwood Leads Illinois to Final Four

By Mike Smith

Opportunities come in many forms, and for one NCAA men's basketball Final Four head coach this year, his opportunity to start his coaching career began at the junior college level, right here in Dodge City, Kan.

McPherson, Kan., native Brad Underwood, in his ninth season as head coach of the University of Illinois men's basketball program, led the Fighting Illini to the Final Four for the first time since 2005.

The Illini beat Penn in the first round of the tournament 105-70, topped VCU in the second round 76-55, then won 65-55 over Houston in the Sweet 16, and beat Iowa 71-59 to earn a spot in the Final Four. Coach Underwood and the Fighting Illini finished the season 28-9 falling in the Final Four to UCONN.

While his coaching journey led him to the Final Four with Illinois, it has been a long journey that has featured many stops, including his first head coaching job in Dodge City. Underwood at the ripe age of 24 took over as head coach for the Conquistadors in 1989 and led the Conqs for four seasons.

"I'm forever grateful," Underwood said. "I got a coaching job at the age of 24 and

didn't know anything. I had to figure it out. It was a lot of trial and error. That's why I've never forgotten it. It's (Dodge City) where I truly learned to coach and where I cut my teeth," Underwood said, in an interview with the Wichita Eagle.

During his four seasons at Dodge City Community College (DC3), Underwood earned 57 wins and had a 20-13 record during the 1991-92 season, which saw the Conqs finish third in the KJCCC West and make the final four of the Region VI tournament.

He coached multiple KJCCC All-Conference honorees during his tenure, with several players moving on to the NCAA DI level. He also coached his brother, TJ Underwood, while at DC3.

Dodge City ultimately served as the launching pad to coach Underwood's career as he went on to be at Illinois for nine seasons, with two other NCAA DI head coaching jobs prior to that at Stephen F. Austin for three seasons, guiding the Lumberjacks to the NCAA Tournament and an 89-14 record during those three seasons, and one season at Oklahoma State.

He also served as an assistant coach at Western Illinois, Kansas State, and South

Carolina, while spending time at Daytona State (2004-06) as head coach once again at the junior college level.

"Dodge City is where I learned to coach," Underwood said. "It was such high-level basketball back then. The players were incredible. The coaching was incredible. I was making \$25,000, and you could have added two zeroes to that, and I was still going to do whatever it was going to take to be successful. Pretty inspiring times. To be honest, I've never forgot it. I believe part of the reason for the success I've had comes from learning how to do it in the JuCo ranks," Underwood said, in an interview with the Wichita Eagle.

Underwood, during his time at Illinois, has made six straight trips to the NCAA tournament, won the Big 10 regular season title in 2022, and won a pair of Big 10 tournament titles. Amassing 193 wins with the Illini and over 300 career wins at the NCAA DI level.

From the floor of the Dodge City Civic Center to the floor at Lucas Oil Stadium for the Final Four, Underwood used his time as a Conquistador to launch his successful coaching career. ■

DC3 Adds Three to Athletics Hall of Fame

By Mike Smith

The Dodge City Community College (DC3) Athletics Department welcomed three new members into the DC3 Athletics Hall of Fame on the evening of April 25, at the Depot Theater in Dodge City.

The Class of 2026 includes Nathan Leeper, Benny Moore, and Merle Kaufman.

NATHAN LEEPER (Track & Field - 1997)

The Protection, Kan., native is a two-time NJCAA National Champion in the high jump as a Conquistador. Leeper, in 1997, won both the indoor and outdoor national titles in the high jump and holds the school record at 7'03.75" indoors and 7'03" outdoors.

His national titles earned him NJCAA first-team All-American honors, and his indoor performance was the NJCAA record at the time.

He went on to compete at Kansas State University, where he was a two-time NCAA All-American and won the 1998 NCAA DI Outdoor Track & Field National title in the high jump (7'05.75"). He went on to compete across the world, including in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, where he placed 11th (7'04.5").

He also won the 2002 US National Track and Field Championship and placed fourth at the 2001 World Indoor Championships in the high jump.

BENNY MOORE (Men's Basketball - 1982-84)

The Fort Wayne, Ind., native suited up for Dodge City men's basketball for two seasons, helping the team go 48-10. Moore was a two-time All-KJCCC first-team selection, a two-time first-team All-Region VI selection, and a second-team NJCAA All-American in 1984.

He averaged 15.6 points per game in his freshman season (1982-83) and 19.5 points per game in his sophomore season (1983-84), helping the team win the KJCCC West Division title.

He went on to finish his college basketball career at Marquette University (1984-86), where he played for the famed Rick Majerus and played in 58 games over two seasons, averaging 9.8 points per game.

Moore went on to play basketball again in Dodge City for the Dodge City Legend as part of the United States Basketball League (USBL), helping the team win the 2000 USBL championship and finish as runner-up in 2001. He got into coaching

as he was an assistant at DC3 for one season, then went on to be an assistant at Dodge City High School before being the head coach for the girls. He also coached at Center High School and is currently an assistant coach at Grandview High School in Missouri.

MERLE KAUFMAN (Contributor)

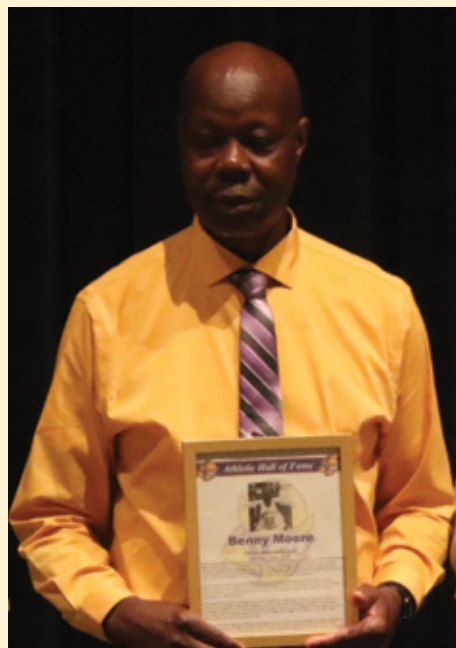
A lifelong Dodge City resident and former owner of Lee's TV, Kaufman was instrumental in merging the Dodge City Community College Alumni Association and the Dodge City Community College Athletic Booster Club into the Dodge City Alumni-Athletic Booster Association.

He helped oversee the Booster Association for several years, including helping start an annual scholarship auction, raising money for student and athletic scholarships. Kaufman has dedicated more than 25 years of helping Dodge City Community College raise money and more for athletics and the student-athletes.

He also has been heavily involved in the AMBUCS organization in Dodge City for several years, including serving as president for multiple years. ■



Nathan Leeper



Benny Moore



Merle Kaufman



ROSE GARDEN ON MAY 25, 2024.

After nearly 40 years, the Dodge City Area Women's Chamber of Commerce has requested the demolition of its Rose Garden on the DC3 campus.

Women's Chamber Votes to Dismantle Rose Garden

by Lance Ziesch

After nearly 40 years, the Dodge City Area Women's Chamber of Commerce has decided to retire its memorial Rose Garden on the southeast corner of the Dodge City Community College (DC3) campus.

Due to an aging membership, Kathy Ramsour, Women's Chamber member and DC3 Board of Trustees vice chair, said the

group could no longer adequately care for the garden.

"We had a few women who worked tirelessly, deadheading, weeding, fertilizing and, yes, killing ants and bugs, which were devastating to the roses. However, I was not one of those people who cared for the rose garden," she said. "I believe there is a

special place for gardeners in heaven, but that is not my forte. Although I did have a rose planted in memory of my daughter."

Before making the difficult decision to remove the Rose Garden, the Women's Chamber reached out to various clubs and organizations in search of volunteers willing to help maintain it. Despite their efforts, no group was found to take on the responsibility. The Women's Chamber Board of Directors then called for a vote of its membership to decide the garden's ultimate fate.

"We decided, since many roses and, yes, us, were getting older, it was time to let the garden go," Ramsour said. "But we needed a plan to make sure our roses — the healthy younger ones — were taken care of. Our Beautification Committee met with the college to come up with ideas. Thank heavens DC3 had many exciting ideas for us to discuss."

Jared Stevens, DC3 Director of Facilities and Operations, said the decision to remove the garden was not taken lightly.

"It was after many meetings and a lot of thought that it was ultimately decided



LANCE ZIESCH

to remove the garden,” he said. “We knew that some of the roses meant a great deal to people in the community, so we treated everything within the confines of the garden as respectfully as possible.”

The Rose Garden, officially known as the Dodge City Area Women’s Chamber of Commerce, Inc. Memorial and Commemorative Rose Garden, was created by the Women’s Chamber Beautification Committee as a place of reflection and remembrance on the DC3 campus. After years of research, planning, and fundraising, the first roses were planted in spring 1987, and the garden was formally dedicated on July 16, 1987.

According to a Women’s Chamber brochure, the garden was created as a place where visitors could sit, relax, meditate, and simply take time to “smell the roses.” The group also hoped it would serve as a welcoming stop for tourists seeking a peaceful place to spend a morning or afternoon.

The garden consisted of several raised planting beds connected by brick pathways. Each bed accommodated five to 10 rosebushes, with plaques identifying memorial and commemorative plantings. A drip irrigation system provided efficient watering, while a large sign at the entrance recognized those honored throughout the garden.

Before demolition work began on April 2, Stevens and Women’s Chamber members identified several features that could be preserved elsewhere on campus. Plans included relocating the gazebo to the southeast side of Lake Charles, salvaging bricks for future paving projects, moving the James Mooney Ranch marker, and transplanting several rosebushes and other plants.

Stevens said that after posting on social media that much of the remaining garden was available for repurposing, community members “came out in droves.”

“Everyone seemed very excited to help repurpose anything they could from the garden,” he said. “The community really cleaned out about 80% of the garden, from the plants and cedar fence to the paving bricks. The demolition was complete by April 22.”

Although the DC3 maintenance team still has some rosebushes potted at its shop awaiting new homes, several have already been transplanted around campus, including near the Skinner Student Activity Center. The gazebo was reinstalled at Lake Charles on April 30.

“We do plan on making some repairs to the gazebo, including on the roof,” Stevens

said. “This fall, we are also planning on giving the gazebo a fresh coat of stain and sealant.”

Although the Women’s Chamber no longer cares for the Rose Garden, Ramsour said the Beautification Committee remains active throughout the community.

“We clean the stretch of road between Wyatt Earp Boulevard and the golf course, work with the city to help them in the park, and we support the college in the care of its grounds,” she said.

Ramsour said retiring the Rose Garden was one of the group’s most difficult decisions.

“The decision to put our Rose Garden to bed for good was a very hard one,” she said. “There were lots of meetings, self-reflections, and we knew the minute [demolition] work began, lots of comments [from the public] would follow. But we felt good about our decision to turn it over to DC3.”

With the gazebo now overlooking Lake Charles, Ramsour said she hopes visitors will enjoy what she calls the “reimagined Rose Garden.”

After church one Sunday, she and her granddaughter drove to Lake Charles and spent time talking by the water. During their visit, her granddaughter recalled fishing there when she was in the third grade.

“It dawned on me that I didn’t need a rose garden to remember that beauty is in the view, the calmness of the water, and the laughter of students,” Ramsour said. “So, in the future, when people are sitting there by the lake or in the gazebo, I hope they will close their eyes and just smell the roses.” ■

Editor’s Note: For more information on the James Mooney Ranch marker, please see Page 22.

ROSE GARDEN GAZEBO. On April 30, during the demolition of the Women’s Chamber Rose Garden, the gazebo located on its southwestern side was relocated to the southeastern shore of Lake Charles.



LANCE ZIESCH



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MOONEY FAMILY

(LEFT) On April 24, members of the James Mooney family returned to campus to celebrate the reinstallation of the Mooney Ranch marker, which was previously located at the entrance of the Women's Chamber Rose Garden. Pictured (left to right) are Marcia (Mooney) Mandrell; Mike Mooney; Marla (Mooney) Gerber; (seated) Pat Mooney; and Dr. Harold Nolte, DC3 President. (RIGHT) James and Pat Mooney, circa 1966.

Remembering Mooney Ranch

DC3 Relocates Marker from Former Rose Garden Site

by Lance Ziesch

In addition to roses, the Dodge City Area Women's Chamber of Commerce Rose Garden was also home to a historical marker recognizing the former James Mooney Ranch. Placed by the City of Dodge City near the garden's entrance, the sign read: "Former Site of the James Mooney Ranch, 1948-1967."

The marker commemorates an earlier chapter in the history of Dodge City Community College (DC3). Twenty years before the Rose Garden was established, James "Jim" and Pat Mooney and their family owned the property that was acquired through eminent domain in 1967 for the college's third and current location.

According to a Feb. 10, 1967, *Conquistador* newspaper front-page article, "The [DC3] Trustees deposited a check for \$148,000 with the Ford County District Court, Monday, Feb. 6, as payment for the 143.20 acres of land northwest of the city."

Jim and Pat Mooney's daughter, Marla (Mooney) Gerber, said she has fond memories of living on the ranch as a young girl. If memory serves her correctly, the family home once stood near the present-day location of the Skinner Student Activity Center and the campus entrance drive.

"We loved our time in Dodge City on our family farm on 14th Avenue," Gerber said. "We also made new friendships at Ingalls and had many opportunities at our new home near Charleston. So, in the end, it was a good move for us."

After moving to the Ingalls area, Gerber said the family became involved in numerous church and school activities, and her father was able to expand the family farm and ranch operation. He later served on the Ingalls school board.

"We kids enjoyed the smaller class sizes at Ingalls and more one-on-one time with our teachers," she said. "With the smaller school, we were involved in a lot more clubs and activities than we probably would have been in Dodge City. Also, I met my future classmate and husband, Brent Gerber."

On April 24, members of the Mooney family gathered on campus to recognize the reinstallation of the James Mooney Ranch marker, which now stands to the left of the campus directory sign at the top of the staircase leading down to the quad.

Present for the private April 24 ceremony were Pat Mooney and the three surviving Mooney children: Mike Mooney,

Marcia (Mooney) Mandrell, and Marla (Mooney) Gerber. (James Mooney and daughter Melody passed away in 1987 and 1977, respectively.)

"It makes us very happy to know Dodge City Community College respects and honors our family's heritage," she said. "We are extremely pleased with the location selected for our plaque and know our dad would be very proud."

Gerber also noted that the Mooney family has maintained a strong connection to the college through the years.

"My mother Pat, my brother Mike, my sister Marcia, and I, along with most of our children, attended DC3 for classes either in person or online for high school and college dual credit," she said.

Dr. Harold Nolte, DC3 president, said, "We are honored to have members of the Mooney family here today to unveil the new location of their family's historical plaque. Because of their sacrifices on behalf of Dodge City Community College, I cannot think of a more fitting place to display this marker than here by the college's main staircase. The Mooney family was, and always will be, an essential part of our history." ■

Former Conqs Reunite at Inaugural Alumni Event

by Alba Guiterrez-Ortiz

On Feb. 21, the Dodge City Community College (DC3) Foundation hosted its inaugural Conq Reunion Night at Cowboy Capital Saloon and Grill, welcoming former teammates back to Dodge City to reconnect and relive their days as DC3 student-athletes.

The afternoon celebrated the shared legacy and lasting impact of DC3 athletics, honoring the bonds and memories that endure long after the final whistle.

The idea for the event originated with alumnus Dave Albers, who envisioned

bringing his former football teammates together to commemorate their 50th anniversary. That vision expanded into a broader celebration of DC3 athletics, drawing alumni from multiple eras and sports. ■



ALBA GUITERREZ-ORTIZ

CONQ REUNION NIGHT. Pictured are DC3 student-athlete alumni who attended the inaugural Conq Reunion Night, hosted by the DC3 Foundation on Saturday, Feb. 21 at Cowboy Capital Saloon and Grill. Seated in the front row, from left to right, are Rick Evans (1974-75), Mickey Ann Scheneman (2016-18), Raquel Valdez Mercado (2016-18), Kathy Ramsour (1968-70), Courtney Huff (2018-20), Alexis Perez (2018-19), Lucy Hampton (2000-02), and Craig Kroeker (1971-73). Standing in the middle row, from left to right, are Craig Brattin (1974-75), Paul Haas (1973), Bob Logerman (1974-75), Mike Lee (1974-76), Bubs Simon (1973), Vernon Lloyd (1973-74), Pat Mages (1971-73), Dave Albers (1972-73), and Gary Campas (1973-74). Standing in the back row, from left to right, are Sherry Rogers (1988-91), Wade Russell (1971-73), Bruce Gatterman (1971-73), Sam Seybold (1971-73), Van Hampton (1973-74), J.R. Riegel (1972), Ken Thomas (1972-73), Randy Leis (1972-73), and Terry Housman (1974).

Dawn Springer

Volunteer of the Year



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUSHING CACTUS PHOTOGRAPHY/MAKE-A-WISH COLORADO

Make-A-Wish America Honors DC3 Alumna

by Lance Ziesch

Dawn (Dunn) Springer, a former Dodge City Community College (DC3) student whose volunteer work has touched the lives of countless families, was recently honored for her decades of service with Make-A-Wish Colorado.

Springer attended DC3 during the 1968-69 academic year—when the college was located at 1000 N. Second Ave.—a time she credits with helping shape her personal and academic foundation. After completing her first year at DC3, she transferred to Fort Hays State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1972.

While at DC3, Springer was an active presence on campus. She attended sporting events and performed as a member of the Conq-Ette Line, the college's precision dance team at the time, under the direction of Coach Donniss Schmitt.

"It was an excellent group of girls, and we had fun performing," Springer said. She also spent time with friends in the Conq Corral, the college's snack bar. "I enjoyed meeting friends there to catch up or play cards."

After graduation, Springer began a career in education as a second-grade teacher in Longmont, Colo. While teaching there, she encountered an experience that would profoundly shape her future path when one of her students' younger brothers was diagnosed with cancer.

"I went through the year trying to be there for him and his whole family, always wishing there would be something special that I could do for all of them," Springer said. "I wasn't successful, but because of this family, I didn't lose my desire to find an organization where I could help others."

That desire stayed with Springer through years of family moves alongside her husband, Richard, and their children, Matthew and Kelsey—from Houston, Texas, in 1981 to Seattle, Wash., in 1988, and back to Colorado in 1989.

In 1996, the family settled near the Make-A-Wish Colorado office in Greenwood Village, Colo. In 1998, when her own children were older, Springer applied to become a Wish Granter. She was accepted and began volunteering while continuing to teach full-time.

"At that time, I was still teaching and granting wishes whenever I could, especially during the summer," Springer said. "Once I retired, I began volunteering full-time, and I have no plans of stopping."

Her dedication was recently recognized when she received the prestigious Suzie Allen Volunteer of the Year Award at the Make-A-Wish Global Conference in November 2025 at Walt Disney World. Springer, who now lives in Castle Rock, Colo., said the honor carried special meaning because she was nominated by the organization's staff.

"It meant the world to me," Springer said. "The employees are the ones who truly make the wishes come true, and for them to nominate a volunteer was incredibly meaningful."

She later learned that out of approximately 27,000 Make-A-Wish volunteers worldwide, only 270 were nominated for the award.

"I feel so honored to have been chosen," she said. ■

(LEFT) Dawn Springer receives the Suzie Allen Volunteer of the Year Award at the Make-A-Wish Global Conference in November 2025. Pictured are John Allen, son of Suzie Allen; Leslie Motter, Make-A-Wish America President & CEO; Springer; and Scott Dishong, Make-A-Wish Colorado President & CEO.

(RIGHT) The 1968-69 Conq-Ette Line: Pictured, left to right (on stagecoach) are Cheryl Miller, Sue Harper, (standing) Connie Ardery, Janet Council, Sherry Kenton, Jacque Brown, Suzanne Heft, Loraine Barricklow, Glenda Zachman, Janet Deighton, Brenda Ross, Kathy Wheaton, Dawn Dunn, Carol McConnell, Pat Dome, Sherrill Coffin, Becky Hampton, Judy Wells, and Linda Pedigo.



COLLEGE ARCHIVES/1969 GOLDEN SHIELD



The Don Skinner Legacy

by Alba Gutierrez-Ortiz

Donald Lee Skinner built his legacy the same way he built his farming operation in southwest Kansas, through discipline, long-term thinking and a belief in investing in the future.

Today, that legacy lives on at Dodge City Community College (DC3), where the Skinner Student Activity Center stands as one of the most visible reminders of his commitment to education, philanthropy and community development.

The facility, built in 2016, is commonly known on campus as the Dome, and it serves as a center for athletics, recreation, student activities and community events. For students walking through its doors each day, the building represents more than campus life. It reflects the lasting impact one person can have on a rural community through charitable giving.

Born Sept. 8, 1925, in Stevens County, Kan., Skinner grew up during the Great Depression as the oldest child of Troy and Hazel Skinner. Farming shaped much of his early life. By age 10, he had learned to drive a tractor while working alongside his father, developing an interest in agriculture and machinery that later defined his career.

At 19, Skinner's life was interrupted by World War II. In 1944, he was inducted into the U.S. Army and completed training

assignments in Texas, Maryland and Washington before deploying to Germany later that year.

He served during the Battle of the Bulge, Rhineland and Central Europe campaigns, earning three bronze stars before being honorably discharged in 1946.

After the war, Skinner briefly attended Wichita State University with plans to pursue electrical engineering. But despite his academic interests, he soon realized agriculture remained his true passion.

On June 9, 1951, he married Shirley Shannon in Clayton, N.M. The couple established a farming and ranching operation near Montezuma, Kan., and then later moved to Dodge City in 1977 where they raised their two sons, Larry and Greg.

Education became a lasting part of the Skinner family legacy. Skinner attended DC3 classes himself, while his son Larry later attended the college. In addition, Larry's son, Jason Skinner, also graduated from DC3, making three generations of the Skinner family connected to the college.

Jason Skinner said his grandfather's work ethic left a lasting impression on him growing up around the family farm.

"He was a hard worker," Jason Skinner said. "I witnessed his work ethic on the farm."

"My family and I have always supported Dodge City Community College. I've taken classes there that have been very beneficial for me. I've been very fortunate to have found success living and farming in the area, and I've made this donation because I believe it's important to give back to your community and make it a better place."

—Don Skinner, April 3, 2015

As Skinner's success grew, so did his commitment to philanthropy. He supported veterans' groups, the Shrine, the Community Foundation of Southwest Kansas and DC3, believing local organizations could strengthen communities and create opportunities for future generations.

Margaret Hamilton, executor of Skinner's estate, said she first met Skinner through Sunflower Bank after he transferred his accounts from his bank



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SKINNER FAMILY

Don Skinner

in Cimarron. Although Skinner had accumulated significant wealth, Hamilton said he had little experience with charitable giving or long-term estate planning.

“He was a very focused person,” Hamilton said. “He didn’t want to have people tell him what to do with his money.”

Over time, Hamilton and Skinner began discussing how his estate could continue benefiting the community long after his lifetime. Hamilton said she encouraged him to think about the causes most important to him.

She asked him what he was passionate about or what he found important. Hamilton said, “He said, ‘Well, I’m always interested in education.’”

That conversation eventually helped shape the future of one of DC3’s most recognizable campus facilities.

Hamilton said the original discussions centered on support connected to Skinner Drive before expanding into the Student Activity Center project. Renamed the Skinner Student Activity Center in January 2025, the name change was officially commemorated during the college’s 90th anniversary celebration on Sept. 24, 2025.

“The donation started with Skinner Drive,” Hamilton said. “Then we talked more. They were in the process of making the dome the central focus.”

Hamilton said Skinner eventually embraced charitable giving as a central part of his legacy planning. Following years of work together, approximately 90%

of his estate was designated for charitable causes, while 10% was left to his sons.

Additional funds were later placed into an endowment through the Community Foundation of Southwest Kansas to ensure support for education would continue into the future.

“That fund distributes money every year,” Hamilton said. “The endowment funds live in perpetuity.”

Hamilton said Skinner’s gifts to DC3 are expected to exceed one million dollars over time, ensuring his support for the college will continue benefiting students for generations.

Skinner viewed education as an investment in the future of southwest Kansas. Like many rural community colleges, DC3 provides affordable higher education, workforce training and transfer opportunities for students who often remain in the region after graduation.

The college trains nurses, teachers, technicians and other professionals who later contribute to local schools, businesses, healthcare systems and public services throughout southwest Kansas.

“My family and I have always supported Dodge City Community College,” Skinner said in 2015. “I’ve taken classes there that have been very beneficial to me. I’ve been very fortunate to have found success living and farming in the area. I’ve made this donation because I believe it’s important to give back to your community and make it a better place.”

That philosophy aligns with the work of the DC3 Foundation, which supports scholarships, campus projects and student

programs through private donations and fundraising efforts.

From January 2019 through September 2020, more than \$569,000 was donated to the Foundation through scholarships, projects, memorials and fundraising events. More than \$186,000 was raised during part of that period despite the economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

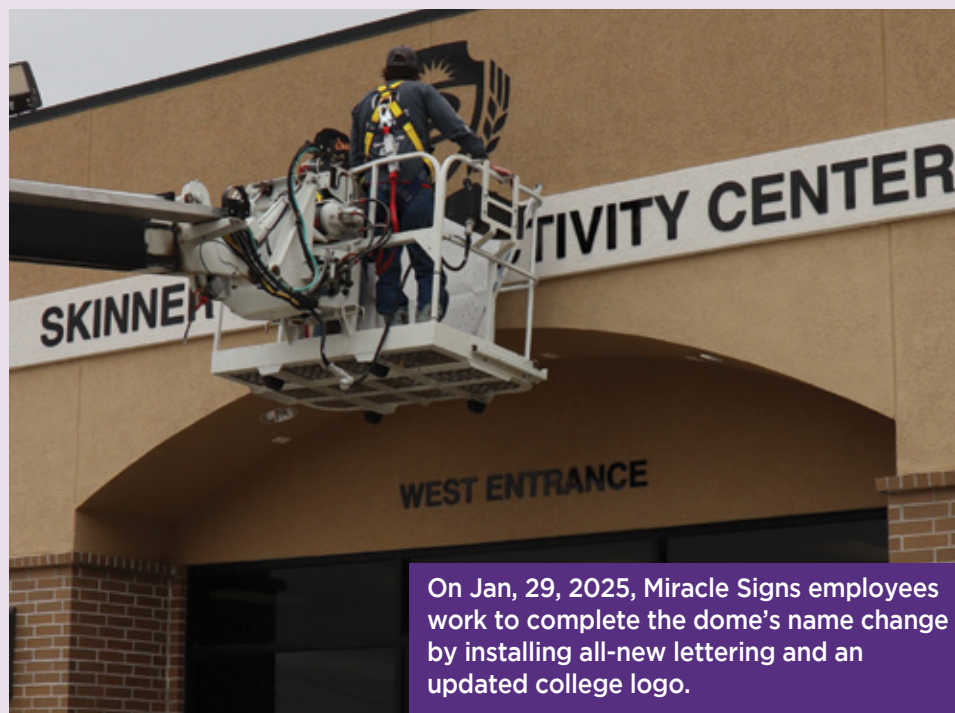
Private philanthropy has become increasingly important for community colleges facing rising operational costs and increased competition for funding. Donations help colleges improve facilities, expand educational access and strengthen student life.

At DC3, the Skinner Student Activity Center remains one of the clearest examples of how philanthropy can shape campus life for generations. Students use the Dome daily for practices, recreation, activities, and campus events, and it has even hosted several graduation ceremonies in the past before the event outgrew the space, extending Skinner’s impact far beyond his lifetime.

For Hamilton, the building reflects the type of legacy Skinner hoped to leave behind — practical, community-focused and lasting.

“He made good decisions and was a man of success,” Hamilton said.

Nearly a decade after his death, Skinner’s legacy remains woven into the fabric of DC3 and southwest Kansas through investments that continue creating opportunities for students, families and the community. ■



LANCE ZIESCH

On Jan. 29, 2025, Miracle Signs employees work to complete the dome’s name change by installing all-new lettering and an updated college logo.

'Apps and Taps' Snaps

On the evening of Nov. 20, the Dodge City Community College (DC3) Foundation hosted Apps and Taps, a relaxed, happy-hour-style fundraiser at the Dodge City Country Club. Community members, alumni, and supporters gathered for a night of gourmet appetizers, refreshments, and live music courtesy of Sterling Ray, with proceeds benefiting DC3 student scholarships, programs, and resources. ■



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DC3 Foundation Donors

Make an Impact in Your Community!

by Tegan Wenzl

The Dodge City Community College (DC3) Foundation would like to thank the following partners for their generous support between Nov. 7, 2025, and June 3, 2026. In total, more than \$194,000 will be used for scholarship support, beautification projects, a public display of local art pieces from the Newby Collection, and various other initiatives at the college and in the community. ■

AJ Construction	Dodge City Country Club	Lil Heartbeats LLC	Ginger Rupp
Renee Allen	Gina Downey	Chelsey Livingston	Dr. Jodi Rust
Astra Bank	Peter Emelianchik	Jennifer Lix	Brad Schneider
Ryan Ausmus	Zachary Esplund	LPL Financial	Christopher Schuetze
Baylee Avila	Jorge Estrella	Ryan Lusby	Sarah Scott
Justin Banning	Roger Ewy	Melissa McCoy	Virgil Scott
Dr. Roger Barnes	Shane Faulkner	Lana McDonnell	William Small
Wendy Barnett	Fairleigh Feed Yard	Michael Marino	Heather Smith
Charla Batman	Maria Ferreiro	Teresa Martin	Jami Sprinkle
Eldon Becker	Randy Flowers	Bill Maskus	Crysta Stella
Blue Cross Blue Shield of KS Foundation	Lorna Ford	Main St Floral Co. LLC	Daniel Stremel
Brak-Hard Concrete	Doris Frick	Medical Heights Dental Center, P.A.	Alan Stukenholtz
Dorothy Briseno-Bremer	Celina Fietze	Douglas Melia	Frank Sumaya
M. Jay Brown	Ann Frigon	Erin Mellinger	Sunflower Bank
Building Solutions	G&R Farms	Toby Mentzer	Uarda Swafford
Nancy Burke	James Geis	Dale Meyers	Dr. Clayton Tatro
Steve Burns	Ryan Gerwitz	Miracle Ear	Joyce Temaat
Mary Burrichter	Brenda Giessel	Mullin Brothers Foundation Inc.	Daren Thomas
Douglas Buxbaum	Jamey Gonzales	David and Judy Naccarato	Robert Trego
C&C Construction	Great Western Tire	Wade Nelson	Mary Trotter
Ethan Cahill	Margaret Hamilton	Dr. Harold Nolte	William Turley
Ainsley Carter	Ron Hamm	Peyton Northcutt	United Wireless Communications
Benevity Causes	Lee Hampton Battite	Barbie Padgett	Gavin Unruh
Jeff Cermin	Cynthia Hasenbalg	Jerry Pegelow	Kimberly Unruh
Paul Chaffee	Dr. Kelly Henrichs	Jacob Perkey	Colton Valenta
Stuart Chance	High Plains Title LLC	Jim Perkey	Harriet Vance
Edward Colombo	HRC Feed Yards	Julia Perry	Mark Vance
CommonSpirit - St. Catherine - Dodge City	Crissy Hollenbeck	Dr. Jammie Phillips	Vander Hamm Cattle
Community Foundation of Southwest Kansas	Amanda Hoskinson	Plains Marketing	Victory Electric
Conant Construction LLC	Austin Hrencher DDS PA	PT Works	Victory Lane Liquor
Kimberly Courtney	Todd Imel	Melissa Ramirez	Eric Voss
Cowboy Dentist Farms LLC	Inszone Insurance	Don and Kathy Ramsour	Clayton Weil
Credit Union of Dodge City	Marsha Johnson	Dan Reichenborn	Alex Welch
Cummings Carousel	KanEquip Inc.	Joel Redman	Marc Wentworth
Amber Cunningham	Lisa Kennedy	Lynette Reeves	Brendan Wenzl
Bill Cunningham	Angela Kerr	Rex Stanley Feed Yard Inc.	Tim Wenzl
DC Central LLC	Lacie Killian	Jacob Ripple	Western State Bank
Gerry Deckman	Dr. Jay Kinzer	Sherry Rogers	Leon Winfrey
Ian Deges	Jerica Kirby	MacKenzie Rohman	Wilson Trailer Sales
Stephen Deges	Lisa Klassen	Brittany Rohr	Winter Livestock
Depot Theater Company	Randi Laverty	Easton Rohr	Christopher Woodruff
Susan Dierksen	Janita Leatherman	Duane Ross	Audree Worth
	Larry Leonard	K.W. and Nona Rowton	Lance Ziesch
	Lewis Automotive Group		Ben Zimmerman III



DODGE CITY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Just One More

On May 28, members of the DC3 Softball Team returned home from the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Division I World Series in Oxford, Ala., after a memorable postseason run. The Comqs fell 4-3 to College of Southern Idaho in the opening round before ending their season with a 7-6 loss to Gaston College in an elimination game.

