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# CONNECTION



Connors Community Steps Up Against Domestic Violence at Annual WISH Walk



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## CONNORS STATE COLLEGE

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WARNER, OK 74469

### THREE RIVERS PORT CAMPUS

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## ***Federal Funding Cuts Threaten Student Support Services at Connors State***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Connors State College faces a significant financial challenge following the federal government's decision to eliminate funding for the Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions program, a move that will directly impact student success initiatives, campus infrastructure, and support services across both the Warner and Muskogee campuses.

In September 2025, the U.S. Department of Education announced it would withhold approximately \$350 million in discretionary grant funding for minority-serving institutions nationwide, including the NASNTI program. The decision affects over 800 colleges and universities across the country that serve approximately 5 million students.

For Connors State, the consequences are far-reaching. The college's collaborative NASNTI grant with Eastern Oklahoma State College, totaling nearly \$4 million over five years and awarded in 2023, has been terminated. As a

result, the Guided Pathways Project – a comprehensive initiative designed to help students choose career paths, develop structured academic plans, and receive ongoing support throughout their college journey – has been cancelled. This program was specifically created to address Connors State's fall-to-fall persistence rate of less than 50% and three-year graduation rate of approximately 30%. The funding loss will significantly impact student outcomes at a critical time. Research shows that structured advising and clear academic pathways directly correlate with improved retention and graduation rates. Without the Guided Pathways Project, students may struggle more with course selection, career exploration, and staying on track toward degree completion.

First-generation college students and those from low-income backgrounds – populations that Connors State serves in significant numbers – are particularly vulnerable to these



# FEATURE

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setbacks. Mental health support services face especially severe consequences. The NASNTI grant had provided essential funding for counseling services, addressing the growing mental health needs among college students. Recognizing the urgent need to minimize disruption to current students, Green Country Behavioral Health has stepped forward as a valued partner, working closely with Connors State to help bridge the gap and maintain continuity of care during this transition. Their collaboration has been instrumental in ensuring students continue to have access to critical mental health resources during this challenging period.

The funding cuts also halt planned renovations and infrastructure upgrades across campus. NASNTI grants have historically supported the purchase of educational and laboratory equipment, improvements to classrooms and facilities, technology implementation, and expansion of tutoring and advising spaces. These planned enhancements, which would have directly improved the learning environment for all students, are now on indefinite hold.

Nearly one-third of Connors State's student population identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native, and the college serves a region that includes seven counties in Eastern Oklahoma and multiple tribal nations. Advocates for minority-serving institutions argue that NASNTI grants help fulfill federal trust responsibilities to Native American communities while benefiting all students through improved facilities, expanded programs, and enhanced services.

Oklahoma Senators James Lankford and Markwayne Mullin have advocated on behalf of Oklahoma colleges affected by these cuts recognizing the vital role these institutions play in serving rural and Native American

communities. Despite these efforts, the Department of Education has moved forward with reprogramming the funds to what Secretary Linda McMahon described as "programs that advance Administration priorities."

As Connors State navigates this funding crisis, college leadership faces difficult decisions about maintaining quality student services, supporting current initiatives, and preserving staff positions while addressing a multi-million dollar budget shortfall. The college is actively exploring alternative funding sources and partnerships to sustain critical programs, but the loss of NASNTI funding represents a significant setback for the institution's mission to serve Native American students and the broader Eastern Oklahoma community.

The impact of these cuts will be measured not just in dollars, but in the educational opportunities and support services that students will no longer receive – factors that research has proven essential to college completion and long-term success.







## ***Connors Community Steps Up Against Domestic Violence at Annual WISH Walk***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

October brought the Muskogee community together once again for the "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" event, a powerful demonstration of solidarity in the fight against domestic violence. Organized by WISH (Women in Safe Homes), this year's march filled downtown streets with participants committed to raising awareness and supporting survivors.

The symbolic act of walking in high heels served as a small but meaningful reminder of the discomfort and challenges that domestic violence survivors endure daily. What began as an uncomfortable experience for many participants became a profound lesson in empathy and understanding.

Connors State College once again demonstrated exceptional commitment to the cause. Cross-country runners and baseball players continued their tradition of completing a grueling 25-mile relay run from Warner to Muskogee, representing the difficult journey many survivors must navigate. The college's participation was outstanding, with 120 members of the CSC community joining the event – earning recognition for the largest group attendance.

The event drew participants from across the community spectrum. Students from Warner High School marched alongside college students, while local law enforcement leaders, including the County Sheriff and Muskogee Police Chief, showed their support by walking with community members.

Representatives from WISH took the opportunity to remind attendees of the vital services they provide, including round-the-clock shelter access for those in need. Local law enforcement officials also reinforced their commitment to supporting victims, making it clear that assistance is always available to those who need it.

This year's walk was more than an awareness event—it was a powerful statement of community unity. Participants left with strengthened resolve to support prevention efforts, assist survivors, and advocate for lasting change in the ongoing battle against domestic violence.





## ***Connors State Volunteers Help Bring Western Heritage to Life for OSB Students***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Each September, students from the Oklahoma School for the Blind experience the spirit of Oklahoma's western heritage in a truly unique way. Western Heritage Day at the Silver Spur Western Lodge in Haskell provides approximately 80 OSB students with an immersive, sensory-focused celebration that creates lasting memories and builds valuable life skills.

Made possible through the partnership between the Oklahoma Quarter Horse Association and lodge owners Roy and Rose Anna Webb, the event offers students experiences they might not otherwise have access to. The day features an impressive variety of activities designed to engage students through touch, sound, and movement—from horseback riding and fishing to hay wagon tours and lariat roping. Students can feel animal pelts and examine skulls, test their courage on rock climbing walls, and even try mechanical bull riding.

The success of Western Heritage Day relies heavily on dedicated volunteers, with Connors State's Ag Division students playing a particularly vital role. Each OSB student is paired with a volunteer who guides them through the day's activities, ensuring both

safety and maximum enjoyment.

According to Shawna Coplen, OSB Elementary Principal, the event provides invaluable learning opportunities: "This day is absolutely fabulous. It stimulates the students' senses and teaches them how wonderful these animals are."

The benefits extend well beyond entertainment. Students develop greater confidence and independence while gaining hands-on knowledge of western culture and animal care. Meanwhile, volunteers and organizers gain deeper insights into the remarkable abilities of visually impaired students.

Melinda Fruendt, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, emphasizes the event's lasting impact: "Western Heritage Day experiences are lifelong. It teaches students to get out of their comfort zones and try something new."

Through this annual tradition, students discover new capabilities, volunteers develop greater understanding, and everyone involved witnesses the power of inclusive, experiential education.



## ***Cowboys & Caviar: A New Tradition of Giving***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Connors State College introduces a new signature fundraising event this November, bringing together community members, alumni, and supporters for an evening that blends western heritage with philanthropic purpose. Cowboys & Caviar, the inaugural gala benefiting the Connors State College Foundation, will take place on November 8, 2025, at Cedar Creek Ranch in Eufaula.

The event represents an investment in the future of Connors State students. Cowboys & Caviar aims to raise vital funds for student scholarships, academic programs, and educational opportunities that make a real difference in students' lives.

This signature event will bring together friends and supporters of the college for an evening of western elegance. The gala will feature fine dining, entertainment, and opportunities to connect with fellow supporters who share a commitment to CSC's mission.

Scholarship funding can mean the difference between a student completing their degree or having to leave school due to financial constraints. For many Connors State students – particularly first-generation college students and those from low-income backgrounds – private scholarships and foundation support are crucial resources that help them achieve their educational goals.

The Connors State College Foundation has long been a critical partner in supporting student success, and this new fundraising initiative aims to strengthen that mission.

By establishing Cowboys & Caviar as an annual tradition, the college hopes to build a

sustainable source of support for scholarships and programs that serve the diverse communities of Eastern Oklahoma.

The evening promises to capture the spirit of the region – combining the elegance of a formal gala with the authentic western character that defines Connors State and its community. Cedar Creek Ranch in Eufaula provides the perfect setting for this blend of sophistication and Oklahoma heritage.

Private philanthropy plays an essential role in ensuring students have access to transformative educational experiences. Cowboys & Caviar represents the college's commitment to building strong community partnerships that support student success and create opportunities for the next generation.

Community members interested in attending can RSVP by contacting Brandy McElyea at (918)- 463-6343 or by emailing her office at [brandy.mcelyea@connorsstate.edu](mailto:brandy.mcelyea@connorsstate.edu). The event begins at 6:00 PM on November 8th.

By joining together for Cowboys & Caviar, attendees become part of something larger than a single evening—they become partners in shaping the next generation of leaders and investing in the future of Eastern Oklahoma.







## ***Late Night Breakfast Brings Campus Together***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Connors State College hosted its annual Late Night Breakfast on October 8th, offering students a break from their studies with pancakes and good company. President Dr. Ron Ramming and Vice President of Student Affairs Jake Lawson joined in by working the griddle and serving meals to students who attended.

The event has become a regular fixture in the

campus calendar, providing students with a late-night meal during the busy fall semester. It's also an opportunity for campus leadership to connect directly with students in an informal setting. The turnout reflected the popularity of the tradition, with students gathering to enjoy breakfast food and spend time with friends before returning to their evening routines.





## ***Student Spotlight: Colton Dunaway (Taylor, Arizona)***

by Jordan Barry (Freshman - Colcord, OK)

Colton Dunaway came to Connors State College from Taylor, Arizona, with a clear goal: to pursue agriculture and compete on a collegiate livestock judging team. A Connors alum and mentor recommended the school, and after attending the livestock judging camp two years in a row, Dunaway found the environment was the right fit.

"Everyone is very polite, and I'm surrounded by people who can help me not only during my time at Connors but also as I pursue future endeavors," Dunaway explains.

As a freshman, Dunaway has already become deeply involved on campus. He's a member of the Livestock Judging Team, Presidents Leadership Class, and Aggie Club, and is very active in the Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM). His agriculture classes have introduced him to

hands-on experiences he never had in high school, including pregnancy-checking cows.

What stands out most to Dunaway about Connors State is the close-knit community. "Connors feels like a small community—you get to know many different people," he says. Looking ahead, Dunaway plans to continue his education after earning his associate degree, pursuing a bachelor's or master's degree in livestock production or a related field while continuing to compete in livestock judging at the senior college level.

His advice to prospective students? "Connors is an amazing place to make lifelong connections, learn, figure out who you are and what you want to do all without going into massive amounts of debt."





## ***Alumni Spotlight: Charlotte Beaver ('08)***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Charlotte Beaver's journey with Connors State College is a testament to the lasting impact of a strong educational foundation. The Checotah native first arrived at CSC in 2002, and her connection to the college has come full circle—she now serves as Assistant Registrar, helping guide the next generation of Cowboys and Cowgirls through their academic journeys. During her time as a student, Beaver was an active member of the CSC speech and debate team while pursuing her Associate of Arts in Pre-Education, which she earned in 2008. She went on to complete her bachelor's degree at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah.

But Beaver's story didn't end there. Her appreciation for Connors State brought her back to Warner, where she reverse-transferred to earn two additional business degrees and a business certificate. "I think Connors is one of the best schools around," Beaver says, a sentiment backed up by her decision to invest in multiple credentials from

the institution.

Reflecting on her student days, Beaver credits her success to dedication and vision. "I worked hard and studied hard because I always knew I wanted to do something great," she explains. But it wasn't all work—she also cherishes the simple moments of college life: "Me and my friends would eat out by the pond on beautiful days," she recalls, remembering the connections and experiences that made her time at CSC memorable.

Now in her role as Assistant Registrar, Beaver uses her extensive experience with the college to help students navigate their own academic paths. Her journey from student to staff member exemplifies the deep roots that Connors State plants in its community.

Catch the full interview with Charlotte as part of the Connors Conversations series on the Connors State YouTube channel.



## ***Cowboys (MBB) Eye Championship Repeat as OCAC Preseason Favorites***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

The Connors State College Cowboys men's basketball team enters the 2024-25 season as the overwhelming favorite to capture the Oklahoma Collegiate Athletic Conference title, receiving eight of nine possible first-place votes in the OCAC Men's Basketball Coaches Preseason Poll announced by the league on Friday.

The preseason recognition comes on the heels of a remarkable 32-4 campaign last year that saw the Cowboys claim the regular season championship with a 14-2 conference record. The team's success extended well beyond the regular season, as they captured the NJCAA Region 2 Tournament Championship and advanced all the way to the national championship game—marking their second Final Four appearance in as many seasons.

With several key starters returning from last year's national runner-up squad, the Cowboys have both the experience and talent to make another championship push.

The Cowboys will tip off their season on November 3rd inside Melvin Self Field-House. With championship pedigree and high expectations, Connors State looks poised to make another deep postseason run.







## ***Bill Muse Sr. Named Muskogee NAACP Hall of Famer***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Bill Muse Sr., Connors State's men's basketball coach and athletic director, received induction into the Muskogee NAACP Hall of Fame, recognizing his lasting impact on the Eastern Oklahoma community over more than three decades.

Since arriving at Connors State, Muse has built one of the most successful programs in NJCAA basketball. With a career record of over 800 wins spanning over 3 decades at the helm, Muse has led the Cowboys to 10 NJCAA national tournament appearances, including multiple Final Four runs. His teams have captured numerous Oklahoma Collegiate Athletic Conference championships and Region II titles, earning him Region II Coach of the Year honors seven times.

Throughout his career, Muse has been a coach and mentor whose program has become a destination for talented athletes throughout the region. His commitment to recruiting and developing players from diverse backgrounds has helped create pathways to higher education and success. Many of his former players have gone on to Division I basketball and professional careers, while maintaining strong ties to the program that shaped their development.

The Muskogee NAACP Hall of Fame recognition acknowledges both Muse's coaching excellence and his role as a respected figure who has made a meaningful difference in the lives of young athletes in the community.



## ***Perry Keith Inducted Into Pryor HS Athletic Hall of Fame***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Perry Keith, a 1979 graduate of Pryor High School and four-sport letterman, has returned to his alma mater's hall of fame after building one of the most successful coaching careers in NJCAA baseball history. Keith, who received the Tiger Pride Award during his senior year at Pryor, has spent the past 40 years as head baseball coach at Connors State College, compiling an extraordinary record of 1,900 wins and 542 losses.

Keith currently ranks first in wins among active NJCAA baseball coaches and is believed to be the youngest collegiate coach ever to reach 1,000 career wins—achieving the milestone at just 42 years old. A member of the NJCAA Baseball Hall of Fame, Keith has coached 43 NJCAA All-Americans, 95 NJCAA

Academic All-Americans, and one Olympian during his tenure at Connors State.

Perhaps most impressive is Keith's commitment to the complete development of his student-athletes. His program maintains a remarkable 95 percent graduation rate, demonstrating that success on the diamond goes hand-in-hand with success in the classroom. This dedication to both athletics and academics has made Keith's program a model for junior college baseball nationwide.

The Pryor High School Athletic Hall of Fame induction adds to Keith's already impressive list of honors and recognizes the foundation that launched one of junior college baseball's most distinguished careers.





## ***New Softball Parking Lot Enhances Game Day Experience***

by Matthew Harmon, CSC Communications & Marketing

Connors State College has completed construction on a new parking facility adjacent to the softball complex, providing improved access and convenience for fans, players, and visitors. The expanded parking area addresses previous capacity concerns during peak attendance games and tournaments, ensuring a smoother arrival experience for all who come to support the Cowgirls.

The project reflects the college's ongoing commitment to upgrading athletic facilities and enhancing the overall experience for the Connors State community. With easier parking access, fans can now focus on what matters most – cheering on the Cowgirls as they compete throughout the season.

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Photos by Matthew Harmon (CSC Communications & Marketing)



# PHOTOS



Photos by Jordan Barry (Freshman - Colcord, Oklahoma - CSC Communications & Marketing)





Photos by Jordan Barry (Freshman - Colcord, Oklahoma - CSC Communications & Marketing)



# PHOTOS



Photos by Macey McCoy (Sophomore - Beggs, OK - CSC Communications & Marketing)





Photos by Macey McCoy (Sophomore - Beggs, OK - CSC Communications & Marketing)





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CSC's soccer programs are nearing the end of their 3rd season on-campus. The Cowboys are gearing up for the Region 2 playoffs in Enid.