



BUSINESS

Let there be light

Linemen from Oklahoma help Guatemalan villagers get electricity.

Page 1C



SUNDAY LIFE

Out with the old

Opening Night in Oklahoma City is ready to ring in the new year.

Page 7C

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And the Tide rolls

Regional universities are ladders to success



Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray walks off the field Saturday after his helmet came off on a play during the second half of the Orange Bowl in Miami Gardens, Fla. [AP PHOTO]

Alabama tops OU in Orange Bowl

The University of Oklahoma Sooners with their Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Kyler Murray had high hopes Saturday entering the Orange Bowl for their game against the Alabama Crimson Tide. After Alabama rushed to a 28-0 start, the Sooners continued to battle back, but the SEC champs racked up the points for a win, 45-34. Alabama will face their longtime rivals, the Clemson Tigers, in the College Football Championship on Jan. 7. See complete game coverage in SPORTS.

BY K.S. MCNUTT

Staff Writer
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Oklahoma's public regional universities are outperforming the national average of upward social mobility by 38 percent, according to two national studies.

Researcher Raj Chetty tracked 30 million students from freshman year to about age 32 to discover how colleges improved the economic fortunes of students from families at the lowest income level.

A perfect mobility rate for those students who rise from the bottom to the top tier of wealth would be 4 percent. The study found the average mobility rate in the U.S. is 1.7 percent.

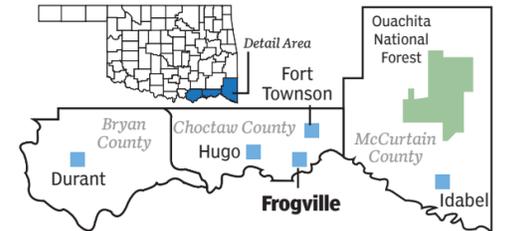
The Regional University System of Oklahoma — made up of six four-year institutions across the state — is well above that at 2.37 percent.

"We've created opportunities for people to move up they would not have had otherwise," said Mark Kinders, vice president for public affairs at the University of Central Oklahoma. "Financially, they are exceeding where their parents were at the time those students started school."

What's the secret, or as Kinders calls it "the special sauce"?

UCO and the other five RUSO institutions emphasize building strong personal relationships with their students to help the learning process, he said.

SEE REGIONAL, 2A



Katherine Rutan tells her side of the story

BY JOSH DULANEY

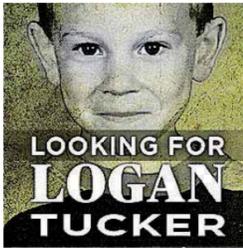
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Editor's Note: This is Part Five of a six-part series.

The prisoner sounded like she was just striking up a conversation at the local watering hole.

Katherine's voice lilted over the phone. She laughed easily, which was unexpected coming from an inmate serving life without parole.

Against the clank and clatter of the prison, and other inmates chatting around her, Katherine, 43, talked at length about her sons.



LOOKING FOR LOGAN TUCKER

Justin, the younger. "Very quiet," Katherine said. "Loving also. He was 3, well, 4. I would say loving. Gentle, I guess is the word I'm looking for. He's very gentle, or was gentle as a child."

Logan, the older. "Oh my gosh," Katherine said. "Very intelligent.

Wednesday: Is Logan OK?
Thursday: Meet Monty Clem
Friday: Wildflowers
Saturday: Trials and Tribulations

Today: Call Me Katie

Monday: Dreams

Fun. Energetic. Inquisitive. Very sweet. He was a very loving boy."

Logan and Justin together.

"Logan is more of a hands-on and Justin was more 'let me watch' type," she said. "They loved each other a lot. A lot. They loved to ride bikes, and



Katherine Rutan, through the years.

they rode bikes and my dad gave them a little red wagon. They loved their little red wagon. And they loved playing, well, back then, this sounds so funny now, but back then it was Nintendo. They loved playing Nintendo. Mario Kart, to be exact."

According to a jury of her peers, Katherine

broke their brotherly bond forever on June 23, 2002, in a house at 510 Texas Ave. in Woodward.

Logan was never seen alive again.

On Aug. 31, 2007, the jury convicted Katherine of first-degree murder. On Oct. 30, 2007, Katherine walked into Mabel

Bassett Correctional Center in McCloud.

'A blessed life'

Katherine answers letters promptly. In black, hot pink or teal ink, her print tilts leftward on the lined page.

SEE LOGAN, 3A

TODAY'S PRAYER

O God, You are the light of the world, the beacon of hope that guides our daily lives. Amen.

Business	1C	Opinion	14A
Classified	1D	Puzzles in Comics	
Deaths	12A	Sports	1B
Life	7C	Stocks	5C

Weather, 16A

CLOUDS H: 44 L: 32

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REGIONAL

CONTINUED FROM 1A

RUSO schools have a diverse population that includes students who are first-generation, economically disadvantaged, academically underprepared and adults who have been out of school for a long time.

"We have a lot of students coming from different places with a lot of different backgrounds," Kinders said. "We recognize where our students are at and we meet them there."

Help is available in a number of ways including continual counseling, advising and tutoring services, as well as faculty intervention to encourage students to take advantage of that help, he said.

In June, the RUSO Board of Regents adopted 27 benchmarks to track the effectiveness of its universities in areas of access, progress and graduation, measured across equity, efficiency and effectiveness.

"In the corporate world there are only two measurements — did you turn a profit and are shareholders happy with that profit? We have 27," Kinders said.

Case in point

Sharla Frost epitomizes RUSO's upward social mobility success.

Frost, 57, is a litigator and partner at a national law firm in Houston. She graduated with honors in 1984 from Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and today serves on the Southeastern Foundation Board of Trustees.

"Sharla Frost is one of the very top trial lawyers in America," said Joe Morford, managing partner at Tucker Ellis LLP. "She wins very difficult cases in some of the most dangerous jurisdictions."

Giant pharmaceutical companies and major manufacturers hire her because "with her charm and work ethic she can go anywhere and win people over," Morford said.

"Juries trust and respect her, judges have faith in her."

Frost grew up in Frogville, an unincorporated community just north of the Red River in Choctaw County, and went to school in Fort Towson. Of the 80 students in her eighth-grade class, 37 graduated from high school. About half of those graduates got a college degree.

"A lot of kids started school. They just didn't make it. There are so many roadblocks," Frost said.

Her parents worked hard for a living. Neither had the chance to go to college, but they insisted their two daughters go.

Frost went to Southeastern as an honor student on a Parsons Scholarship.

"It paid for tuition, fees,



Parson's Scholars Earn Top Marks in School

Students selected as Parson's Scholars are among the top high schools from across Oklahoma. The scholarship was established from the estate of the late Chuck Parson, a retired oilman, pharmacist and a graduate of Southeastern.

Officers (l) for the Parson's Scholars include Rob Strick, president; Cyl Metz, reporter; Dana Harvey, vice president; Troy Phelan, treasurer; and Sharla Frost, secretary. Parson's Scholars (l) are (front) Sharon James, Donna Lester, Shelia Frost, Berna Probst, Cyl Metz, (second row) Terri Barton, Troy Galen, Michael Rose, Dana Harvey, Mike McDaniel, Kelly Sims, (third row) Beverly McFarland, George Harshb, Steve Thomas, Lewis Robinson, Bob Seely, Kevin Wilson, Chris Murray, Regina Ritz, (back) Greg Jackson, Stewart Jicks, Clay Barrow, Jim Galtz, Brad Purdie, Tyler Cobb and Eddie Barlow.



Sharla Frost attended Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant from 1980 to 1984 on a full academic scholarship. As a member of the debate club, she gained skills that launched her career as a top trial lawyer. Frost says many of the scholars pictured here have had successful careers. [PHOTO PROVIDED]



Sharla Frost

books, food. It paid everything," she said. "It took away any concern about having to work to pay for school."

That allowed her to be on the debate squad, and debate is what led to a full scholarship to law school at Baylor University.

"It's the one thing I use every day," Frost said.

"A regional university gives you those kind of opportunities. They encourage and help people explore what those possibilities are," she said. "They get overlooked for the type of graduates they are turning out. It's a really great group of people."

Southeastern has the highest mobility rate among the RUSO schools at 3.24 percent.

Ladders, labs, laggards

The Brookings Institution took Chetty's data and looked at 342 four-year public universities to see how well they were doing at providing upward social mobility.

The study, Ladders, labs, or laggards? Which universities contribute most, notes: "Universities act as ladders for social mobility, which makes for a more dynamic and fairer society. They are also laboratories for research, expanding our knowledge in directions that can improve the welfare of the broader population."

Institutions that are neither mobility-boosters or knowledge-creators, Brookings labeled "laggards."

The study found five of the RUSO schools are ladders to success for their students. East Central

RUSO Institutions

As the largest four-year university system in the state, the Regional University System of Oklahoma governs six public universities. These institutions have enrolled more than 40,000 students this year.

- University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond
- East Central University, Ada
- Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Durant
- Northeastern State University, Tahlequah
- Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Alva
- Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford

SOURCE: Regional University System of Oklahoma

University didn't make this list because Chetty only found half the data needed, Kinders said. "But it's just as good as others, also a ladder," he said.

The data show 13.4 percent of RUSO enrollment comes from the lowest quintile of income, which means more than 5,000 students start at the bottom of the ladder.

Cameron University and Oklahoma Panhandle State University also made the Brookings' list of ladders, while the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University were listed as labs. No state institutions were on the laggards list.

Brookings argues public money should go to school that are succeeding as ladders and labs, but suggests laggards don't deserve it.

"Institutions like ours (RUSO) are a pretty good investment and should have resources coming to them because we're successful at what we're doing," Kinders said.

"We know why we come

Marijuana buzz builds in 2018

Legal pot industry celebrates a banner year

BY GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

The last year was a 12-month Champagne toast for the legal marijuana industry as the global market exploded and cannabis pushed its way further into the financial and cultural mainstream.

Liberal California became the largest legal U.S. marketplace, conservative Utah and Oklahoma embraced medical marijuana, and the U.S. East Coast got its first commercial pot shops. Canada ushered in broad legalization, and Mexico's Supreme Court set the stage for that country to follow.

U.S. drug regulators approved the first marijuana-based pharmaceutical to treat kids with a form of epilepsy, and billions of investment dollars poured into cannabis companies. Even main street brands like Coca-Cola said they are considering joining the party.

"I have been working on this for decades, and this was the year that the movement crested," said U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, an Oregon Democrat working to overturn the federal ban on pot. "It's clear that this is all coming to a head."

With buzz building across the globe, the momentum will continue into 2019.

Luxembourg is poised to become the first European country to legalize recreational marijuana, and South Africa is moving in that direction. Israel's Parliament approved a law allowing exports of medical marijuana. Thailand legalized medicinal use of marijuana, and other Southeastern Asian countries may follow South Korea's lead in legalizing cannabidiol, or CBD. It's a non-psychoactive compound found in marijuana and hemp plants and used for treatment of certain medical problems.

"It's not just the U.S. now. It's spreading," said Ben Curren, CEO of Green Bits, a San Jose, California, company that develops software for marijuana retailers and businesses.

Curren's firm is one of many that blossomed as the industry grew. He started the company in 2014 with two friends. Now, he has 85 employees, and the company's software processes \$2.5 billion in sales transactions a year for more than 1,000 U.S. retail stores and dispensaries.

Green Bits raised \$17 million in April, pulling in



Medical marijuana supporters hold signs July 10 outside of an Oklahoma Board of Health meeting in Oklahoma City that had so many attendees there was an overflow room. [AP FILE PHOTO]

money from investment firms including Snoop Dogg's Casa Verde Capital. Curren hopes to expand internationally by 2020.

"A lot of the problem is keeping up with growth," he said.

Legal marijuana was a \$10.4 billion industry in the U.S. in 2018 with a quarter-million jobs devoted just to the handling of marijuana plants, said Beau Whitney, vice president and senior economist at New Frontier Data, a leading cannabis market research and data analysis firm. There are many other jobs that don't involve direct work with the plants, but they are harder to quantify, Whitney said.

Investors poured \$10 billion into cannabis in North America in 2018, twice what was invested in the last three years combined, he said, and the combined North American market is expected to reach more than \$16 billion in 2019.

"Investors are getting much savvier when it comes to this space because even just a couple of years ago, you'd throw money at it and hope that something would stick," he said. "But now investors are much more discerning."

Increasingly, U.S. lawmakers see that success and want it for their states.

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. states now have legalized some form of medical marijuana. Voters in November made Michigan the 10th state — and first in the Midwest — to legalize recreational marijuana. Governors in New York and New Jersey are pushing for a similar law in their states next year, and momentum for broad legalization is building in Pennsylvania and Illinois.

"Let's legalize the adult use of recreational marijuana once and for all," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said last week.

The East Coast's first recreational pot shops opened in November in Massachusetts. State lawmakers in Nebraska just formed a campaign committee to put a medical cannabis initiative to voters in 2020. Nebraska shares a border with Colorado, one of the first two states to legalize recreational marijuana, and Iowa, which recently started a limited medical marijuana program.

"Attitudes have been rapidly evolving and changing. I know that my attitude toward it has also changed," said Nebraska state Sen. Adam Morfeld, a Democrat. "Seeing the medical benefits and seeing other states implement it ... has convinced me that it's not the dangerous drug it's made out to be."

With all its success, the U.S. marijuana industry continues to be undercut by a robust black market and federal law that treats marijuana as a controlled sub-

stance like heroin. Financial institutions are skittish about cannabis businesses, even in U.S. states where they are legal, and investors until recently have been reluctant to put their money behind pot.

Marijuana businesses can't deduct their business expenses on their federal taxes and face huge challenges getting insurance and finding real estate for their brick-and-mortar operations.

"Until you have complete federal legalization, you're going to be living with that structure," said Marc Press, a New Jersey attorney who advises cannabis businesses.

At the start of the year, the industry was chilled when then-U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded a policy shielding state-licensed medical marijuana operators from federal drug prosecutions. Ultimately the move had minimal impact because federal prosecutors showed little interest in going after legal operators.

Sessions, a staunch marijuana opponent, later lost his job while President Donald Trump said he was inclined to support an effort by U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner, a Colorado Republican, to relax the federal prohibition. In November, Democrats won control of the U.S. House and want to use it next year to pass legislation that eases federal restrictions on the legal marijuana industry without removing it from the controlled substances list.

Gardner and Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren have proposed legislation allowing state-approved commercial cannabis activity under federal law. The bill also would let states and Indian tribes determine how best to regulate marijuana commerce within their boundaries without fear of federal intervention.

If those provisions become law, they could open up banking for the marijuana industry nationwide and make it easier for cannabis companies to secure capital. Blumenauer's "blueprint" to legalize marijuana also calls for the federal government to provide medical marijuana for veterans, more equitable taxation for marijuana businesses and rolling back federal prohibitions on marijuana research, among other things.

"We have elected the most pro-cannabis Congress in history and more important, some of the people who were roadblocks to our work ... are gone," Blumenauer said. "If we're able to jump-start it in the House, I think there will be support in the Senate, particularly if we deal with things that are important, like veterans' access and banking."

SETTING IT STRAIGHT

Friday

The photo of Cecil Samara and the Big Red Rocket in Norman was taken in 1980 by Charles B. Duggar, of Duncan. A photo credit on Page 1A was incorrect.

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