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TULSA WORLD

Berry Tramel believes it's time for college football to abolish spring football **SPORTS, PAGE B1**

Kale Charboneau player diary: They're building something there at NSU **SPORTS, PAGE B3**



12 places to get your chicken wing fix for Super Bowl Sunday

WEEKEND, PAGE D1

New initiative launched in Greenwood as mayor cites 'open wounds' from Tulsa Race Massacre **METRO & REGION, PAGE A7**

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

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Fatal police chase ended innocent Army vet's dream



DANIEL SHULAR, TULSA WORLD

Jasmine Harrel, left, sits with her mother, Kim Guthrie-Harrel, as Kim speaks about her daughter Logan Harrel during a Jan. 17 interview. Logan Harrel was killed in a high-speed car chase over what was broadcast as a suicidal juvenile runaway in a stolen vehicle in Rogers County.

Other agencies had called off pursuit of juvenile crime spree

COREY JONES
Public Service Journalism Team

VINITA — Kim Guthrie-Harrel noticed police lights flashing from a cross street in the late morning hours while driving Route 66 near Foyil, Oklahoma.

"Highway rules," Kim thought, as she began to slow and move over. Suddenly she saw a truck speeding over railroad tracks in front of the police lights and directly for her vehicle.

She reached to shield her 23-year-old daughter, Logan, from the passenger-side impact. Airbags blasted out and glass showered.

Someone put Kim in a neck brace while she pleaded for them to help Logan, not herself.

"I knew at that time she was partially ejected out the backseat door," Kim recalled. "She was still buckled in and everything, so the impact actually moved the seat."

Logan Dawn Harrel, a vibrant and witty Army veteran and freshman college student, was dead. She was killed by a high-speed police chase over what was broadcast as a suicidal juvenile runaway in a stolen vehicle on Oct. 20 in Rogers County.

"There's days that we're good



COURTESY

Logan Harrel

and we can share memories and laugh and go on and have our normal days," Kim said three months later in an interview with the Tulsa World and Lee Enterprises' Public Service Journalism Team. "And then there's days that we'll just be sitting in the living room and a commercial will come on and we start bawling."

Prior to the fatal wreck, Vinita police had stopped chasing Anthony Giancola, 17, because they thought the teen was attempting suicide-by-cop. Those officers deemed it not worth the high-speed pursuit's grave dangers as

police already were able to electronically track the stolen car's location.

However, the Rogers County Sheriff's Office soon found and pursued Giancola after he wrecked that vehicle in a ditch and stole a nearby pickup to continue fleeing. An Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper assisted with the chase.

Sheriff Scott Walton said a "prolonged and potentially violent spree" could have unfolded if Rogers County deputies hadn't

Please see **HARREL**, Page A4

China counters Trump tariffs

KEN MORITSUGU AND HUIZHONG WU
Associated Press

BEIJING — China announced retaliatory tariffs on select American imports and an antitrust investigation into Google on Tuesday, just minutes after a sweeping levy on Chinese products imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump took effect.

American tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico were also scheduled to go into effect Tuesday before Trump agreed to a 30-day pause, as the two countries acted to address his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the coming days.

"It is being scheduled and will happen very soon," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Tuesday.

This isn't the first round of tit-for-tat actions between the two countries. China and the U.S. engaged in an escalating trade war in 2018, when Trump repeatedly raised tariffs on Chinese goods and China responded each time.

Please see **TARIFFS**, Page A3

REP. RONALD STEWART ON TULSA'S FUTURE

Entrepreneurship, strong families pave future path

Editor's note: In February, the Tulsa World is sharing a series of thoughts from Black Tulsans about the future of Tulsa and what role they are playing to make it happen.

As a native Black Tulsan, I am committed to shaping a future that provides economic opportunity, stability and generational wealth for my community. Through targeted legislation and advocacy, I am working to address key areas

that will uplift families and businesses while strengthening the foundation of our city.

One of my top priorities is affordable housing legislation designed to create pathways to generational wealth. Homeownership is one of the most effective ways to build financial



REP. RONALD STEWART

Please see **STEWART**, Page A3



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Inside
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Class/Leu C1 Kenken D8 Sports TV B2
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Harrel

From A1

intervened.

Logan's tragic killing occurred in a state with the eighth-highest rate of police vehicle-pursuit deaths per 100,000 residents from 2016-2022, according to a World and Lee Public Service Journalism Team investigation.

About one of every four people killed in Oklahoma vehicle chases during that time were innocent bystanders who hadn't been directly part of the pursuits. And traffic violations or property crimes prompted the vast majority of the deadly chases — factors that leading experts say should negate high-speed pursuits.

Giancola survived his violent crash into the Harrel family's SUV. The 17-year-old is charged as an adult with first-degree murder in Logan's death in Rogers County.

He also is charged with endangering others while attempting to elude, causing great bodily injury while attempting to elude, larceny of a vehicle, possession of a stolen vehicle and a pattern of criminal offenses.

For Kim and her family, they are "learning a new normal."

Logan had just returned home to start her first semester at Rogers State University in Claremore. She was to study elementary education after four years of Army service, including a stint in Kuwait as a JAG Corps paralegal. The 2019 graduate of Vinita High School aspired to become a math teacher.

Her mother recalled Logan's free spirit. She would dress for school as a youngster in polka dots and stripes because she was comfortable — no matter if others might tease her for it.

Logan advocated for herself and others from an early age.

"She was a defender of everyone. She hated bullies," Kim said. "She would defend the littlest people, even if she was the only person standing up for them. She was very vocal like that."

Jasmine, one of four close siblings, described herself and Logan as inseparable.

The two hung out on lunch breaks. They Facetimed every day — even if just to have their phones sitting next to each other while watching TV.

"It's hard just having to realize — like every day — something else that she's missed out on. Or something that's going to happen in everyone else's future but it's not going to happen in hers," Jasmine said. "It feels crazy saying that I feel like I think about it every day, every minute. But I do."

Jasmine said she and her family are reserving comments about the police chase itself because the investigation and case are ongoing.

'Waves of processing grief'

Kim was driving Logan to buy a wet hair brush and shop around in Claremore. Later that day, Kyle — her son and Logan's brother — would hold a gender reveal party for his first child.

The violent passenger-side impact sent Kim Guthrie-Harrel's SUV and life into a spin.

After the impact, her Chevrolet Trailblazer rotated to rest in the grassy median on Route 66 at East 410 Road near Foyil — about 10 minutes northeast of Claremore. The fleeing Chevrolet Duramax rolled over in a cloud of dust and debris.

A person who witnessed the crash compressed a bleeding wound on Kim. As Logan's death dawned on her, the man helping Kim talked to calm her — "I am eternally grateful for that" — be-



Hailey Bump, from left, Jazlyn French, Mackenzie Harms, Amber Smith, Jasmine Harrel and Lindsay Leach look at photos and mementos of Jasmine's sister Logan Harrel.



A Will Rogers Elementary School diploma stands with other mementos from Logan Harrel as friends and family members joined to remember her.



Logan Harrel's father Deric Harrel, left, sister Jasmine Harrel and mother Kim Guthrie-Harrel have avoided comments on the car chase that killed Logan while the investigation is ongoing.

fore she was placed in a medical helicopter and flown to a Tulsa hospital.

She had a fractured sternum and several broken ribs. She has shoulder issues now, too.

"It's not fun being an old person trying to heal," Kim said. "In this cold weather, it doesn't feel really good?"

Shopping was a hobby — or habit — for Logan. So, too, were Crocs, which she wore with her prom dress and graduation gown — or really with any outfit, given her stockpile.

Logan also collected several Army commendation medals. Perhaps as gratifying were the QuikTrip taquitos with family in Tulsa for her first meal off the plane from Kuwait.

"One day Jasmine came in, and she was just mad for no reason. She was just mad," Kim said. "She was crying because she was mad she didn't get to share an experience with her sister. So we ride those waves of processing grief."

Logan played the flute and tuba in band. She ran hurdles in track.

late and "appeared to be of sound mind," speaking in a "deliberate manner."

Giancola wrote an apology letter to Kim in which he said he wanted the death penalty for himself, Marcotte wrote.

"Giancola stated that he knew right from wrong and appeared to be well aware of the consequences of his actions," the deputy added. Giancola reportedly told Marcotte that on Oct. 16 — a few days before the deadly pursuit — he had stopped taking his medications, including mood stabilizers.

He had begun hearing a voice in his head. He was terminated from his job on Oct. 18. The voice told him to travel from Missouri through Texas to California.

After his truck's fuel ran empty Oct. 19, Giancola reportedly stole a Chevrolet Impala from a residence in Missouri. Police contacted him later as he slept in the Impala.

"(He) fled from this encounter, which initiated a brief vehicle pursuit," Marcotte wrote. "Giancola evaded law enforcement by admittedly traveling at a high rate of speed while traveling into oncoming traffic."

The voice in Giancola's head reportedly told him to visit the home of a former mentor and steal his vehicle to abandon the Impala. He entered through an unlocked door while he heard the man snoring.

Marcotte wrote that Giancola described planning to "murder everyone in that house" — but instead left in the stolen Impala because the key fob he took didn't unlock any vehicles.

The teenager allegedly then stole an unlocked Subaru Forester, which he drove into Oklahoma.

Vinita police call off chase

The Vinita Police Department recently reported unsuccessfully trying to burglarize vehicles in a church parking lot about 9:53 a.m. Oct. 20.

Nearly an hour earlier, VPD had been notified by a Missouri police agency that they were electronically tracking a Forester stolen by a suicidal juvenile runaway with a knife who was headed toward Vinita.

Remembering Logan Harrel

"Logan could change your life in a second, just with her spontaneity and her humor. Her quick wit — always had a comeback for something, no matter how unhelpful it was. She was just living. Incredible. Truthfully, an awesome kid."

— **Lindsay Leach**, friend, on Logan's impact on people in her life

"I was brand new to Vinita; knew nobody; didn't have any friends. The very first day, probably not even 10 minutes after we got there, Logan was talking to me. She made a point to welcome me, because I was so new. And pretty much from that moment on, I was like, 'This girl is my best friend.'"

— **Hailey Bump**, friend, on how they met during their freshman year of high school

"I've never met anybody else like Logan, and I don't think I ever will. She was that unique."

— **Mackenzie Harms**, cousin, on Logan's one-of-a-kind nature

"I think she started wearing crocs in high school. In a couple of years she had everyone in the family wearing them."

— **Deric Harrel**, father, on Logan's strong influence

"She took my tiny humans as her own, as if they were her own nieces — not second cousins. She didn't care. Those were her babies."

— **Amber Smith**, cousin, on how great Logan was with kids

"She made it a point to make sure that everybody around her felt included, and that's what I needed in a friend. I needed somebody who made sure that I was a part of things, and she made sure everybody was, no matter where you were."

— **Jazlyn French**, friend, on how Logan loved bringing together people and communities

An officer soon saw a Forester matching the description and tried to pull it over. Giancola sped off.

Vinita Police Chief Mark Johnson said that after about three minutes his lieutenant called off the chase because of the driver's behavior and information from Missouri.

Johnson said the lieutenant realized that the teen wanted to die, perhaps "by cop" or otherwise.

"I appreciate my officers for making judgment calls," Miller said. "It's hard sometimes when officers get in pursuits for them to be able to back themselves off and realize that it's not necessarily worth it to the public."

"So I appreciate my guys for realizing that and making the right decision."

A dispatcher put that information out on law enforcement airwaves.

"Vinita PD also advised that he's trying to do suicide-by-cop," the dispatcher said.

Two attempts at spike strips

The Rogers County Sheriff's Office initially didn't chase Giancola.

He reportedly sped into small-town Foyil on Route 66 at 124 mph — too fast for a deputy who had to turn around and estimated that the Forester was about a mile ahead of him.

About 15 minutes later, Deputy Marcotte spotted the Forester wrecked in a rural ditch. He encountered a nearby resident who said his Chevrolet Duramax had just been stolen.

Sheriff Walton said that at that point Rogers County had two pieces of documentation: The fleeing man had wrecked a car driving fast, and now he was in another one driving fast.

"He's going to continue to drive fast and recklessly," Walton said. "So we engage him in the second pursuit real quick."

Marcotte found the fleeing Duramax after about three minutes. Nearby, Sgt. Austin Fullerton threw out spike strips in preparation.

A minute later, Fullerton's body-camera footage showed Giancola slow almost to a stop as he went into a ditch to try to maneuver around the spikes. Fullerton ran up to the driver's side with his firearm in hand yelling at Giancola to get out.

But the teen sped off again, and Fullerton went back to his patrol SUV.

The "public narrative" report from the Sheriff's Office claimed that Giancola was "swerving at Deputies" — a claim that was refuted by Fullerton's body-cam and other video footage.

About three minutes later, a Highway Patrol trooper got spike strips in front of the truck again. A "good stick" that time.

The deadly crash occurred only about 20 seconds later.

"Your heart breaks for the innocent victims," Walton said.

"It's a tragedy of big magnitude that two ladies are going down the road, and one of their lives is taken away and the other one loses her daughter and is seriously injured as a result of his poor decisions."

Corey Jones of Tulsa is a member of Lee Enterprises' Public Service Journalism Team. corey.jones@lee.net



Rogers County Sheriff's Office dash-cam video captured the fatal wreck. The Harrel family's SUV spun after a passenger-side impact, while a stolen pickup driven by Anthony Giancola rolled over in a cloud of dust and debris.

TULSA WORLD

Sundance honor 'just the beginning' for Loren Waters, Tulsa-based filmmaker **SCENE, PAGE D1**

Berry Tramel: Meet the Tulsan who made the only basket in a 2-0 game **SPORTS, PAGE B1**



Editorials Editor Ginnie Graham: Finally, board members stand up to state superintendent **OPINION, PAGE E6**

Report: New business startups in Tulsa in 2022 surpassed national average **WORK & MONEY, PAGE E1**

Sunday, March 2, 2025

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

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DEADLY PURSUITS INVESTIGATION

Firearms add to chase safety risk

Records reveal details from cases of shooting guns with innocent people in harm's way

COREY JONES
Public Service Journalism Team

Oklahoma Highway Patrol Trooper Eric Smith fumbled with his handgun and the cord used to deploy a set of spike strips alongside Interstate 40 near McLoud as

an eluding driver approached. His partner trained his rifle on the fleeing SUV in the morning light. It was around 8:50 a.m., and the roadway was active with other motorists. With one hand, Smith tugged the spike strips into the west-

bound lanes in an attempt to puncture the tires of the fleeing vehicle.

Smith then dropped the cord to bring his second hand onto his firearm and shot four times at the Chevrolet Tahoe — with innocent people driving by in the background — as the SUV swerved away from Smith to try to avoid the spikes.

Trooper Matthew Snyder, who

aimed the rifle, didn't fire.

The OHP suspended Smith for one workday without pay, which was the minimum presumptive discipline for his level of conduct, according to the Jan. 8, 2024, disciplinary letter.

The letter broadly called his combined use of spike strips and handgun "fundamentally inconsistent" with training and guidelines but not excessive or unlaw-

ful. It said he violated a firearms safety rule because he "failed to account for oncoming traffic" that would be vulnerable to his gunfire.

A Tulsa World investigation has found at least five instances of troopers shooting guns at vehicles with innocent people in harm's way or cocking rifles in their laps during high-speed pursuits in

Please see **CHASE**, Page A4



DANIEL SHULAR, TULSA WORLD

Interim Oklahoma State University President Jim Hess speaks during an interview at Whitehurst Hall in Stillwater. A colleague gave him a name plate that says "fixer of everything," Hess said. "I've kind of been viewed as a turnaround specialist."

Taking up the mantle

Jim Hess says he owed it to OSU to answer the school's call for an interim president

RANDY KREHBIEL
Tulsa World

Oklahoma State University interim President Jim Hess is not flashy. By his own admission, he's spent most of his 43 years in higher education trying not to be noticed.

But he was noticed. For decades, first at

Rogers State and then at OSU, presidents assigned him their most complicated and onerous chores. Which is why, when OSU needed a president on 24 hours' notice, Jim Hess got the call.

"To be frank, my initial reaction was, 'They probably can do better than me,'" Hess told the Tulsa World during an interview in the president's office on the Stillwater campus. "But I agreed to do it because I love the university. It really changed the trajectory of my life, and I owed it to Oklahoma State University to say yes."

Whether the 67-year-old Hess could someday have the "interim" taken off his

title is unclear.

"I'll tell you what I told our Board of Regents," Hess said. "When someone is appointed to be an interim president or an interim dean, or whatever the job assignment is, there are really only two approaches to take.

"One is to just do the job in front of you every day and make the best decisions you can make that are in the long-term best interest of the institution, regardless of how it affects you.

"The other approach is to audition for

Please see **HESS**, Page A5

TPS audit details 'shocked' leaders

Former exec ran personal business on district time, accepted payments from a district vendor

ANDREA EGER
Tulsa World

The long-awaited forensic audit of Tulsa Public Schools contained a few "surprises" for school district officials, State Auditor and Inspector Cindy Byrd said at a Tulsa forum Thursday evening.

Bombshell would be a more precise description for the revelation about longtime TPS executive Chris Hudgins, who had been managing hundreds of millions in voter-approved dollars for capital improvement projects since 2015 and assisting in that work for many years previously.

State examiners found Hudgins to have been running a personal architectural consulting business on district time and computers — and accepting payments of hundreds of thousands of dollars from a Tulsa-based engineering firm that was a TPS vendor.

Here it is, straight from the Feb. 27 state audit report: "FINDING: Chris Hudgins, Executive Director of Bond & Energy Management ... violated policy and possibly statute by performing work through his personally owned company for TPS vendor Al-

Please see **AUDIT**, Page A8

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Inside

ASKING ERIC	D11	MICROSCOPE	D11	OBITUARIES	A14
COMICS	D5-8	LETTERS	E8	SPORTS TV	E2
CROSSWORDS	D10	MUTUAL FUNDS	E5	WHAT TO WATCH	A17

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Chase

From A1

which they weren't being shot at or threatened with firearms — drawing questions about institutional firearm tactics, training and safety.

Angelo Brown, an Arkansas State University criminology researcher and professor, said the cases could be indicators of a systematic problem within the OHP. Perhaps troopers learn “unofficial” practices in the field, lack accountability or are “too ready to use their firearms,” he said.

“Even planning to shoot from a moving vehicle — that’s also not in any training I’ve ever heard of,” Brown said. “It’s dangerous for the officers themselves, and the accuracy of it is just really, really low.”

Brown expressed concern that the Highway Patrol’s one-day suspension of Smith — “very minimal” — doesn’t reflect the seriousness of the situation or serve as a deterrent for troopers.

Brown, who is a member of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, said the chances of an officer accurately shooting a fire or fleeing driver on a highway is slim to none. And succeeding with either could send the vehicle out of control in traffic.

“I don’t think any agency would ever have officers trained with shooting a vehicle like that,” Brown said. “So that seems (to be using) discretion in a very negative way, and that seems extremely inappropriate.”

In an interview with OHP investigators more than two months after the incident, Smith said he decided to shoot at the right rear tire because he was concerned that the westbound fleeing driver might make it to the Oklahoma City metro area and endanger more people.

“I know there was eastbound traffic; I did check,” Smith said. “I don’t remember seeing any at the moment of the shooting.”

Dash-cam video shows Smith mostly looking east toward the approaching suspect’s westbound vehicle. Smith doesn’t appear to look for eastbound motorists who would be driving into his gunfire before he began pulling the trigger.

Not a police standard

The Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training is mandated by Oklahoma law to establish basic peace officer minimum standards and training. CLEET doesn’t have a standard or teach officers to shoot at moving or fleeing vehicles, according to Marcus Williams, deputy director of CLEET.

“The decision to shoot at a vehicle is determined by the policies set by individual law enforcement agencies, taking into consideration the specific circumstances and risks involved,” Williams wrote in response to Tulsa World questions.

The Oklahoma Highway Patrol conducts its own training academies instead of using CLEET.

In the Smith case, the OHP deemed his deploying of spike strips and firing of handgun to be within the level of force permitted by law or OHP policy, according to his disciplinary letter.

It was his use of each in tandem that the OHP registered as “fundamentally inconsistent” with its training and guidelines in “several ways” — all of which were redacted by the agency.

The OHP emphasized that Smith’s gunfire with innocent

people on the other side of the target vehicle was a firearm safety rule violation that created “demonstrable serious risk of harm.”

His minimum unpaid suspension of one workday could have been as high as 30 workdays and/or demotion, according to his disciplinary letter. Smith also was assessed 16 hours of remedial training.

Tulsa World attempts to speak with Department of Public Safety Commissioner Tim Tipton — who oversees the OHP — or have him respond to written questions weren’t responded to by the OHP.

The chase and shooting

On Oct. 9, 2022, officers from the Pottawatomie County Sheriff’s Office reportedly were pursuing an SUV’s driver on suspicion of stealing a firearm from an RV at a campsite that morning.

The chase reached I-40 and headed toward two troopers, Smith and Snyder, who were on an unrelated DUI traffic stop. Smith got ready, holding the spike strips in his off hand and his sidearm in his dominant hand, according to his disciplinary letter.

Smith told OHP investigators that the driver initially moved onto the outside shoulder toward him and Snyder before then maneuvering to the inside shoulder to try to go around the spike strips.

“There was concern for him either striking us or being in a position where he can shoot out his (passenger-side) window at us,” Smith said. “Once he went to the inside, I chose — instead of using force against him — (to use force against his vehicle because he was on the opposite side. The threat (level) went down.”

A pursuing McLoud police officer noted that the Tahoe’s right rear tire did hit the spike strip. The device, called Stop Strip, is designed to modulate the release of air from tires to avoid blowouts.

The officer radioed 80 seconds later that the tire was deflating. It soon left shredded pieces of rubber strewn across the interstate, and the high-speed chase came to an end. The driver fled on foot into a wooded area and was apprehended after a brief search.

The OHP’s Pursuit Reporting Form requires that a supplemental narrative be filed that details events, driving behaviors and actions taken — which the agency said wasn’t done in this case.

‘Alarming’ concerns

Smith’s shooting at a fleeing vehicle despite innocent people in the back ground happened about 14 months after the World published a seven-part series in the summer of 2021 on the OHP’s deadly pursuits and shootings.

The series revealed reckless trooper actions, shoddy record-keeping, failure to address “alarming” concerns expressed by commanders and the agency’s unwillingness to formally review several fatal chases despite red flags.

One of the World articles exposed in January 2020 OHP memo in which some commanders raised red flags about an “alarming increase” of troopers shooting people and into cars — as well as troopers “needlessly” placing themselves in harm’s way to necessitate a deadly force response.

None of the concerns was addressed two months later in a Chief’s Review Board report, with an agency spokesperson saying the purpose of that board wasn’t to address concerns or recommendations made by the command staff.

Two cases referenced by the memo have been covered by the



Screenshots from provided footage from Oct. 9, 2022, show Oklahoma Highway Patrol Trooper Eric Smith firing gunshots at a fleeing SUV as innocent motorists drive by in his line of sight on Interstate 40 in Pottawatomie County. A tow truck driver watches from behind an OHP patrol car.



A screenshot from provided body-worn camera footage on June 27, 2019, shows Oklahoma Highway Patrol Trooper Brian Costanza after he fatally shot William Aubrey Martin III east of downtown Tulsa when Martin’s pickup truck was high-centered on a fence in a residential neighborhood amid a vehicle pursuit. Costanza, a member of the U.S. Marshals Violent Task Force, said he fired shots because he saw the truck tires suddenly begin spinning in reverse and was fearful it might back over him.

World.

In the first, Trooper James McKee sprayed about 10 one-handed gunshots in a McAlester neighborhood while running behind a slow-rolling SUV on July 17, 2019.

Mark Anson Schoggins, the fleeing driver who had been identified earlier by a local officer, already had been shot in the chest through the windshield by another trooper after a high-speed chase prompted by a stolen bottle of vodka.

McKee’s errant gunfire pierced the window of an occupied home and struck a parked vehicle. His shooting method was described as “not a good tactic” by a Chief’s Review Board that found training issues but no policy violations.

In the second case, Trooper Brian Costanza fired at least 10 gunshots toward the cab of a pickup that was ensnared on a home’s privacy fence east of downtown Tulsa after a vehicle pursuit of William Aubrey Martin III on June 27, 2019.

Only two of the rounds struck and killed Martin in the residential neighborhood. He had been wanted by the U.S. Marshals Service on warrants related to several felony drug and gun charges for which he didn’t appear in court.

Costanza had positioned himself on foot behind the stuck pickup and then fired in the same moments his partner, a Tulsa County sheriff’s deputy, rammed the rear of the truck with their Jeep.

Both say they saw the pickup shift into reverse, according to law enforcement documents. The pair were on a U.S. Marshals Service task force and had spotted Martin at a pawn shop.

Cocked rifles in laps during chases

The World’s investigation later found two separate instances in which dash-cam video recorded troopers putting their rifles in their laps and cocking them during vehicle chases prompted by traffic infractions.

“Neither of these situations had any police being shot at or even threatened with firearms or anything like that,” said Brown, the Arkansas State University criminologist. “So I don’t see why they think it’s so necessary to have their rifles out while driving.”

Trooper Tanner Eads cocked his rifle in his lap during a hill in a chase and kept it there while driving in a pursuit that began with a reportedly stolen license plate in Cleveland County on Jan. 13, 2021,

according to dash-camera video.

Eads’ in-car recording system reportedly malfunctioned about halfway through the pursuit and before he caused the SUV to spin out into a violent rollover at more than 100 mph.

Vinnie Hamlet, the 17-year-old driver who had been “joyriding” in his grandmother’s vehicle, was killed. Two survivors were seriously injured.

In an interview 60 days after the chase, Eads told OHP investigators that he had his rifle “next to me.” Neither investigator pursued questions about the rifle despite having watched Eads’ video.

On Aug. 15, 2022, on Interstate 35 in Norman, Trooper Austin May held a cocked rifle in his lap as a passenger in a high-speed chase that had been prompted by a minor traffic infraction and equipment failure, according to dash-camera video.

The chase ended when a different trooper spun out the fleeing truck into a barrel roll, ultimately killing two passengers in the vehicle — Ethan Mestas, 22, and Mercedes Martinez, 26.

Corey Jones of Tulsa is a member of Lee Enterprises’ Public Service Journalism Team. corey.jones@lee.net

Former public workers to get higher payments

The Social Security Administration said retroactive payments are being processed

FATIMA HUSSEIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 3.2 million Social Security recipients who received pensions from their time as teachers, firefighters, police officers and other public service jobs soon will see a boost in their benefits.

Most people will receive their one-time retroactive payment by the end of March, and new monthly payments will begin in

April, the agency says.

The Social Security Administration announced it would immediately begin processing retroactive payments and will send increased monthly payments to people affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset, which were rescinded in the bipartisan Social Security Fairness Act that President Joe Biden signed last year.

The Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset limited Social Security benefits for recipients if they got retirement payments from other sources, including public retirement programs from a state or local government.

Advocates say the Social Se-

curity Fairness Act rights a decades-old disparity, though it also puts a strain on Social Security Trust Funds, which face a looming insolvency crisis.

The annual Social Security and Medicare trustees report released last May said the program’s trust fund will be unable to pay full benefits beginning in 2035. The new law will hasten the program’s insolvency date by about half a year.

“Social Security’s aggressive schedule to start issuing retroactive payments in February and increase monthly benefit payments beginning in April supports President (Donald) Trump’s priority to implement the Social Security Fairness Act as quickly as possible,” said Lee Dudek, acting com-

missioner of Social Security in a statement. “The American people deserve to get their due benefits as quickly as possible.”

Beneficiaries from the new law include teachers, firefighters and police officers across the country and people whose work was covered by a foreign social security system.

Most people will receive their one-time retroactive payment by the end of March, and new monthly payments will begin in April, which will be deposited into their bank account on record with Social Security, according to a statement from the Social Security Administration.

The Congressional Research Service estimated that in December 2023, there were 745,679 peo-

ple, about 1% of all Social Security beneficiaries, who had their benefits reduced by the Government Pension Offset. About 2.1 million people, or about 3% of all beneficiaries, were affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision.

SSA asks beneficiaries to wait until April to inquire about the status of their retroactive payment, since some payments will process incrementally into March.

The future of Social Security is a top political issue and was a major point of contention in the 2024 election.

About 72.5 million people, including retirees, disabled people and children, receive Social Security benefits.

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OPINION, E5

Sunday, June 29, 2025

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

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Body cam raises questions about chase

Investigation shows
Mannford police officers
mised colleagues

COREY JONES
Public Service Journalism Team

BRISTOW — Two Mannford police officers misled colleagues by falsely alleging a driver had tried to run over them when she fled a traffic stop for a paper tag issue, a Tulsa World investigation shows.

An Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper ended the 36-minute pursuit with a maneuver that crashed the woman's car into a tree the night of Nov. 25 in rural Creek County. Crystal Marie Price — a 36-year-old Bristow mother of three boys — and her passenger, Dario Hendrix, 43, were

both killed.

Mannford police had Price's information from the get-go and could have opted to seek an arrest warrant to pick her up. Instead, police pursued her for an extended time at high speeds.

After that night, the officers' false claims about Price grew when put to paper.

Tristan Stacks and Connor Harrison each wrote in their reports that Price swerved at officers and struck Stacks with the side of her car. However, on the night of the chase, neither officer voiced that Stacks supposedly had been hit.

Their allegations are disproven by body-cam video reviewed by the Tulsa World and Lee Enterprises' Public Service Journalism team. Both officers were off to the



SCREENSHOT

An Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper looks in a creek bed after he intentionally hit Crystal Marie Price's car the night of Nov. 25, 2024, wrecking and killing Price and her passenger, Dario Hendrix, in a chase in Creek County that began because of a paper license plate issue.

Please see **CHASE**, Page A12

'IT'S BEEN GREAT. IT'S BEEN HUGE.'



JIMMY DO, OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER

Part of the championship parade route put the buses escorting Oklahoma City Thunder players in front of the Oklahoma City National Memorial in a photograph widely circulated across the country.

A win for the masses

Thunder belongs to the entire state, which is relishing in NBA championship



BERRY TRAMEL

OKLAHOMA CITY — Alene Bottom has lived most of her life on a farm outside Hammon, in Oklahoma's Roger Mills County, hard by the Texas Panhandle. Hammon is 118 miles from downtown Oklahoma City.

Bottom missed a Thunder game this season. But only one, and that was due to a snowstorm. She's 88 years old and uses a wheelchair, but Bottom was in the Paycom Center on Sunday night

when the Thunder brought an NBA championship to Oklahoma. "I love this team," Bottom said. "They are fantastic. Every one of them. All of them. They stick together like glue."

In Bottom's social circles, which consist primarily of folks from Hammon and Elk City, 18 miles to the south, everyone is a Thunder fan. Oh, maybe not everyone. Bottom estimated eight or nine out of 10, then recalled

and said nine is more likely than eight.

"It is very important," Bottom said. "Everybody watches, whether they want to or not. I walk in; they'll say, 'They didn't do so and so, they did so and so.' Everybody knows that I go."

The importance of the Thunder to Oklahoma City has been well-documented. A basketball

Please see **THUNDER**, Page A4

OPINION

Trump not only chief executive to curse

President Ronald Reagan was not known to curse. But a heated exchange at a 1983 summit in London with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau over easing Cold War tensions had him pounding his fist on a table and yelling, "God dammit, Pierre."

In 1980, Sen. Ted Kennedy was considering a challenge to President Jimmy Carter in his re-election bid, to which Carter told some congressional members he'd "whip his a--." President George W. Bush didn't know the microphone was on during a 2000 campaign stop when

describing a New York Times reporter as a "major league a--hole."

Similarly, President Joe Biden got caught on a hot mic calling Fox News reporter Peter Doocy a "stupid son of a bitch." President Harry S. Truman called Gen. Douglas MacArthur a "dumb son of a bitch," which is how President John F. Kennedy referred to Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. Upset at U.S. steel raising prices, Kennedy called businessmen "sons of bitches," showing off that Ivy League education with a grammatically correct plural to the expletive.

That female-dog inspired phrase was a favorite of President Richard Nixon, who used it when referencing reporters, university presidents, professional football players and



GINNIE GRAHAM

Please see **GRAHAM**, Page A14



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Crosswords	D10	Obituaries	A16	What to Watch	A19

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Chase

From A1

left side of Price's car when she drove off — neither officer in her path — and her wheels stayed straight.

The footage also indicates that Highway Patrol Trooper Robert Darnell didn't seem to know there was a passenger in the car when Darnell intentionally hit it on Oklahoma 16 just east of Bristow. Price's family members say they are devastated and without answers as they struggle to come to terms with her death.

KayCee Ragland, one of Price's two younger sisters, said neither the Highway Patrol nor Mannford police were forthcoming with information. And Ragland recalled how awful social media comments were from the public.

"They think they know the story, but people who know her know she's not some criminal," Ragland said of Price. "We promise you, this is a normal mom, and we don't understand how it even got to that point."

Mannford Deputy Chief Brett Gipson said there were no disciplinary findings or actions taken with Stacks and Harrison. Gipson and Police Chief Jerry Ridley didn't respond to specific questions about the chase.

The Oklahoma Highway Patrol wouldn't respond to questions for the article. Unlike Mannford police, OHP hasn't provided any records in response to the open records request from the World and Lee for documents and video.

Department of Public Safety Commissioner Tim Tipton — who was appointed nearly four years ago by Gov. Kevin Stitt — has refused to engage with the World and Lee or answer questions about the Highway Patrol's trend of deadly car chases.

The World's years-long investigation has uncovered reckless OHP trooper actions and false or mislead-



SCREENSHOTS

Crystal Marie Price looks back at Mannford Police Officer Tristan Stacks (not pictured) as she rolls up her window moments before she drives off the night of Nov. 25, 2024, in Creek County. Price didn't voluntarily exit her car, so Stacks had threatened to physically pull her out and put her in jail for an unregistered vehicle and a suspended license. Mannford Police Officer Connor Harrison is partially in the frame.

ing statements, shoddy record-keeping, failure to address "alarming" concerns expressed by commanders, and unwillingness to formally review several fatal pursuits despite red flags.

Families remember the two who died

Meshica Johnson said her biological brother, the passenger who died in Price's car, struggled in life with alcohol addiction and mental health as he tried to "find where he belonged in this world."

Hendrix had been unhoused for some time in Oklahoma after he left California for an attempt at a fresh start.

Johnson said her family wanted to get him into treatment. She said Hendrix aimed to become a better person for himself and his kids — but law enforcement took away that chance.

"Here in California, you get pulled over for an expired tag, they give you a 'fix-it ticket,'" Johnson said. "You go and you take care of it.



Crystal Marie Price handed over her license and paperwork to Mannford Police Officer Tristan Stacks, who had stopped her for a paper tag issue the night of Nov. 25, 2024, in Creek County. The deadly pursuit wasn't necessary, according to Mannford's pursuit policies and best practices touted by the U.S. Department of Justice and Police Executive Research Forum, because Stacks knew her identity and could have requested an arrest warrant to apprehend her later in a less risky manner.

"You don't kill them."

A fix-it ticket in California allows the person to correct the violation and show proof of the correction to a court of law.

The World and Lee spoke with Price's two sisters, her father, mother and stepmother, in a tearful interview recently at BDW Law near downtown Tulsa. Attorneys Derek Ingle and Mike Jones are representing them.

Price was described as the family's glue who lived to take care of her three boys, ages 9, 11 and 15.



Crystal Marie Price drives off from the traffic stop straight ahead, not swerving at or toward Tristan Stacks or Connor Harrison (pictured), which both Mannford police officers wrongly alleged the night of Nov. 25, 2024. Both later wrote falsely in their reports that Price had physically hit Stacks "with the rear quarter panel of the vehicle" when taking off from the traffic stop.

everything and nothing at all.

Her dad, David VanOrsdol, said Price's laugh would fill a room. So could her voice while singing boy band music, such as NSYNC.

He still feels like he sees her once or twice a day when in public.

"Are you doing that?" Bryne asked. "I see her everywhere, (too)."

Leigha VanOrsdol said grief from her older sister's death caused her to pause her fall semester studying computer science at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha.

"I didn't go to classes the rest of the week, and I just, I couldn't study. I couldn't sleep," Leigha said. "I did go back to campus, but it was just every night — the (panic) attacks, the waves. And I couldn't study. I couldn't sit in a room quiet. I couldn't be quiet. I couldn't be around quiet."

As for Hendrix, he had two families, one biological and one adopted. Angela Miller (Zittenfeld), who lives in Sand Springs, became Hendrix's cousin when he was 2 years old. She recalled how much he enjoyed making street tacos, sitting under trees and playing board games.

Hendrix had a good heart, Miller said, adding neither he nor Price deserved to be killed.

"Because of his struggles

he might have made some bad choices, but he wasn't a bad person," Miller said.

His 25-year-old daughter, Tirsia Hendrix, put her father's ashes in an urn of his die-hard favorite team: the Dallas Cowboys.

She knows he is at peace now. But Tirsia said she can't find closure until she knows more about what happened and why.

"I just want the truth to come out," Tirsia said. "These officers, they lied about (Crystal) trying to hit them."

'Fake' paper tag had been 'colored on'

At the outset of the 10-minute traffic stop at dusk on Oklahoma 51, Mannford Police Officer Tristan Stacks accused Crystal Price of having a "fake" paper tag, couldn't sit in a room quiet. I couldn't be quiet. I couldn't be around quiet."

It had been "colored on," Stacks told her, with a date of Sept. 31 — not a real date. Price replied that her tag was real. She suggested her ex-husband might be to blame for the date discrepancy but acknowledged that, regardless, it was expired.

Price already had handed over her license and paperwork. Stacks went to his patrol car to run her information. Officer Connor Harrison later arrived to talk with Stacks.

Eventually, after Stacks

Please see CHASE, Page A13

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Jones earns prestigious journalism award

One of the biggest awards in Oklahoma journalism recognized Tulsa World reporting the Oklahoma Highway Patrol doesn't want to talk about.



JASON COLLINGTON

prises.

Jones joins others from the Tulsa World who have received the award over the years, including former executive editor Joe Worley, former editorial pages



Jones

editor Alex Adwan and former assistant city editor David Fallis, who is now the investigations editor at the Washington Post.

Musselman was the former editor and general manager of the Shawnee News-Star who served as president of the Oklahoma Press Association in 1961.

Jones earned the award for his series about Oklahoma's national ranking for the rate of pursuit-related deaths by law enforcement, driven by the OHP.

discussion with other local journalists about what it took to uncover the findings in this series.

Those findings include:
 ■ 1 in 4 deaths in Oklahoma police car chases are innocent motorists.

■ About 2 in 5 pursuit deaths weren't even the drivers trying to elude law enforcement. They were innocent motorists or passengers who were riding inside of fleeing vehicles. One was an Oklahoma Highway Patrol lieutenant who was struck by one of two troopers colliding at their own roadblock.

■ Reckless trooper actions and false or misleading statements, shoddy record-keeping, failure to address "alarming" concerns expressed by commanders and unwillingness to

formally review several fatal chases despite red flags.

The commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, which oversees OHP, hasn't offered a response to our questions since he was appointed by Gov. Kevin Stitt in 2021.

The first story in what became a series started after three trooper chases killed four people in five months, including a retired Tulsa Public Schools teacher and grandmother driving herself to church in Owasso.

When Jones accepted the award, he was nice to thank the editors who have supported his work and the lawyers who have fought in court to obtain public records that agencies refused to hand over.

He also thanked the fami-

lies who spoke to him after the deaths of their loved ones.

"I can't express enough thanks for folks who have been willing to share some of their darkest moments with me and the public," Jones told the OPA members. "It's so important for the public to understand this is real life. It's not a game. It's not a movie. These are the real-life consequences of pursuits, which are inherently dangerous."

I want to thank the subscribers of the Tulsa World who help support local journalists doing local journalism like Jones. We can't do it without you.

Today's latest story and the rest of this series is at go.tulsa-world.com/fatalpursuits.

jason.collington@tulsa-world.com

Chase

From A12

returned to her car, Price wouldn't voluntarily step outside. So he threatened to physically remove her to take her to jail for a suspended driver's license and unregistered car.

Price rolled up her window and drove straight ahead to try to get away — both officers to the left of her car, not in front.

Her front wheels stayed straight when she pressed the gas pedal. Stacks then turned to hurry back to his patrol car.

During the high-speed chase, Stacks falsely claimed to someone on his cellphone that she "almost ran me over." About a minute later he told a dispatcher over the radio that Price had "tried to run over officers."

He repeated the falsehood twice more at the fatality scene.

Stacks never once alleged that Price hit him with her car in the four instances in which he is heard on video telling his story.

Nevertheless, Stacks and Harrison each later wrote falsely in their reports that Price had physically hit Stacks "with the rear quarter

panel of the vehicle."

'There were two in there?'

The mangled 2024 Hyundai Elantra was on its side, wrapped around a tree in a tangle of brush near a creek.

The two Mannford officers, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol trooper and a Creek County sheriff's deputy searched the scene with lights.

It's unclear how much OHP Trooper Robert Darnell knew when choosing to engage in the pursuit and then ending it with an intentional vehicle hit to the car.

But Darnell didn't appear to know there was a passenger at stake, too, according to a verbal exchange on the body-cam video.

Officer Stacks: "I only seen two in the vehicle, initially."

Darnell: "There were two in there?"

Stacks: "Yeah. There was a female and an unknown passenger."

A few minutes later, Stacks told his original false claim to Darnell after Darnell had asked what happened.

"I tell her, 'Get out, or I will get you out,'" Stacks said. "At that point she throws it into drive, she

cuts the wheel all the way right at him (Harrison) and fakes off. And that's when we initiate a pursuit."

Harrison then repeated the false claim, too.

Darnell: "So she took off and it was right at you?"

Harrison: "Yes."

Stacks was hired Nov. 10, 2021,

and Harrison was hired Nov. 19,

2023, according to information

provided by Mannford police.

High-speed chase unnecessary; maneuver dangerous

The pursuit of Price wasn't necessary, according to Mannford's policies and best practices touted by the U.S. Department of Justice and Police Executive Research Forum, a nonprofit organization of policing experts whose guiding principle is the sanctity of human life.

Mannford's policy generally discourages "extended pursuits" of violators for misdemeanors that don't involve violence or weapons "independent of the pursuit." And in deciding whether to discontinue, officers should consider if the suspect's identity is known, as well as whether the chase risks outweigh

the need for "immediate capture."

The 2023 report from DOJ and PERF encourages agencies to direct officers not to chase if the suspect's identity is known, the suspect can be apprehended later and if delayed apprehension doesn't significantly increase the risk to the community.

More broadly, the report recommends law enforcement only engage in car pursuits if an officer knows a violent crime has been committed and if there is an imminent threat to the public based solely on that crime — not the suspect's driving behavior.

Additionally, the report says the "controversial" maneuver to spin out a fleeing vehicle "should be prohibited under all but very narrowly defined circumstances" because of how risky it is, the extensive training necessary to use it and a lack of empirical evidence to show under what conditions it can be performed safely.

However, Oklahoma Highway Patrol extensively uses the maneuver, often called a tactical vehicle intervention (TVI) or pursuit intervention technique (PTI), as Trooper Darnell did to Price and Hendrix.

OHP performs it three times more than all other Oklahoma law

enforcement agencies combined — as reported by the World and Lee in a four-part investigative series.

OHP troopers have intentionally hit or spun out at least six fleeing vehicles and killed nine people since 2016, according to a World database of deadly Oklahoma police car chases.

Four of those nine deaths were passengers in eluding vehicles. None of the chases was prompted by a violent crime.

Service Oklahoma — the repository for all car crash reports filed in the state — doesn't have a collision report from the Highway Patrol to document Darnell's intentional hit of Price and Hendrix.

The World in its series reported that the Department of Public Safety has shut down its uniform collection of "legal intervention" data through standard collision reports across Oklahoma.

OHP also gutted its pursuit policy in March 2024 to remove any policy language that had governed the actions or decisions of troopers who engage in chases, according to previous World and Lee reporting.

Cory Jones of Tulsa is a member of Lee Enterprises' Public Service Journalism Team. coryjones@lee.net



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