

VISIONS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

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SPRING 2025



Director's Report

By Ken Forman

In high school, I was one of the theater kids, and really involved in the sciences. The school was new - mine was the very first graduating class - and I spent a lot of my time helping found new clubs and after-school activities. I suspect my story isn't unique, or even unusual, when compared to any number of other interpreters.

All of that is to explain why I was excited and eagerly looking forward to a trip Karen and I planned to celebrate my recent retirement.

Last August we spent almost a full week in midtown Manhattan, just a block off Times Square. The theater part of my mind was ready to see as many shows as reasonable, and the science part practically drooled at the possibilities of museums and libraries. I learned several culturally-significant things like why it's called Times Square, the actual difference between uptown, midtown, and downtown, the patchwork pattern of litter cleanup, and the difference between Broadway and Off Broadway shows. I also learned of the pervasiveness of bottled water in our culture.

Checking in at the hotel, the concierge offered us bottled water. I asked, "Isn't New

York City known for having delicious tap water? Hasn't it won many taste testing contests with bottled water?" He beamed and assured me that was all true. But I couldn't help it. I had to ask that one more questions, "Isn't it a dis on New York water by offering visitors bottled water?" His crest fell and he admitted that so many people expect bottled water that the hotel is compelled to provide it, even through the tap water is better. Needless to say, Karen and I travel with refillable bottles and we enjoyed the delicious water all week. We got to see last year's Tony Award winner for best play: Stereophonic. The play is about a rock group in the late '60s and follow their career from the perspective of sound booth engineers. A line (and catchphrase) in the *(cont. on next page)*

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(“Report” cont. from previous page) show is:

- Show Up
- Pay Attention
- Tell the Truth
- Deal with the Consequences

Things are rapidly changing in our world. The field of interpretation is being challenged like never before. I don’t know where this will all lead, and I don’t know how long before things get better.

What I **do** know is that I intend to show up by supporting my colleagues still working to do the important work we know needs to be done. And I will pay attention to events as they occur so I may be better prepared to respond to those events. I will tell the truth in all things interpretive, for I know that only by revealing the true stories and histories can we begin to know how to move forward. Lastly, I will deal with the consequences of these choices. What are your plans?



Ken Foreman and the other thespians



South Central Regional Amarillo Conference 2025 Recap

By Angel Ray, Deputy Director

This year's South Central Regional Conference took the theme, Celebrating Resilience in Interpretation, to a whole new level.

But what else would you expect from Texas? Or Casey Watson, our Committee Chair. We had quite a lineup ranging from Cowboy Poetry, to improv, field trips, and relevant sessions. NAI members were fully immersed into a sense of place while making connections with interpreters from across the region.

The conference was kicked off with laughter provided by a local Southwest Cowboy Poets Association reciting rhymes that spanned the open range to a range of hat "measurements." The next morning followed with even more laughs from Keynote Speaker, Heather Barnes, who had the whole room a chatter with newly acquired engagement techniques, including flipping the script on negative storytelling. We ended with an epic showdown of Rock, Paper, Scissors.

Following such a strong opening, our plenary sessions did not disappoint. One of the outstanding sessions I had the privilege of attending was Gaynell Brady's "Roots of Inspiration." Her genealogical research, passion, and findings in her personal lineage were both fascinating and tear inducing. The inspiration to reach deep for answers below the surface was reignited in me.

Along with the sessions, hospitality room minglings (singing, games, stamping, and banjo picking), the field trips are always a fun addition to any conference. Yet, Amarillo is not for the faint of heart! Think resilience, my friends! We started out sunny in the 60s only to dip below

zero with snow flurries on our field trip day. Despite this, many brave souls climbed into vehicles and saw the highlights of the canyon and other spectacular museum sites throughout the Amarillo area. My field trip to the Alibates Flint Quarry National Monument, did suffer cancellation, but was quickly substituted. Rusty Scarborough and Neil Garrison to the rescue! They offered a demonstration of flint knapping, both modern and historic. We watched in awe as an Elk femur bone created precise cracks in kiln fired stone, Neil transforming it before our eyes while telling of the Native American methods of harvesting the stone...and proving why eye protection is necessary when demonstrating.

It was hard to leave Amarillo when I was in want of more of the interpretive community it offered...knowing the intentionality of those who made the journey hundreds of miles in some cases. I was grateful to have been inspired, connected and reconnected with colleagues in the interpretation field, and to depart with ideas aplenty to place into my future programming.





Treasurer's Report

By Cathy Combs

National Association for Interpretation Region 6 - South Central

12/31/2024

	JULY-SEPT 2024	OCT-DEC 2024	JAN-MAR 2025	APR-JUNE 2025	FISCAL YEAR 2025
REVENUE					
4100 Workshop Revenue	\$ -	\$ 17,485.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 17,485.00
4200 Member Networking Revenue	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
4300 Fundraising Revenue		\$ 30.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 30.00
4400 Miscellaneous Revenue	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
EXPENSES					
5100 Workshop Expenses				\$ -	\$ -
5200 Member Networking Expenses	\$ (70.50)	\$ (2,748.00)		\$ -	\$ (2,818.50)
5300 Administrative Expenses	\$ (70.50)	\$ (754.03)			\$ (824.53)
5400 Fundraising/Scholarship Expenses	\$ (1,400.00)	\$ (1,280.00)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (2,680.00)
5500 Miscellaneous Expenses	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
NET PROFIT/LOSS	\$ (1,541.00)	\$ 12,732.97	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 11,191.97
ENDING ACCOUNT BALANCE	\$ 38,103.48	\$ 50,836.45	\$ 50,836.45	\$ 50,836.45	

Editor's Note: If you missed it last time, we're excited to announce that Kate Huffman, CIG, will be taking on Jerrel Geisler's role doing the layout of the Visions newsletter. Kate is a historic interpretive guide at the Historic Daniel Boone Home and St. Charles County Heritage Museum in Missouri.

Thank you, Jerrel, for all the work you've done over the years!

Interpretive Students Have a Bright Future

By Jeanne Spencer, Scholarship Chair

The South Central Scholarship and Professional Development Committee is pleased to announce Bola Ojo and Lacey Parker were awarded scholarships to attend the 2025 South Central Conference in Amarillo, TX.



The goal of the South Central Region **Connie Elpers-Leger Scholarship** is to support students who have demonstrated academic and professional success and have the potential to make an outstanding contribution to the field of interpretation. We are excited to foster their growth as interpreters.

Introducing Bola Ojo: What We've Heard

Bola Ojo (she/her) is goal-driven, enthusiastic, engaging, and collaborative with her team and a graduate degree in Natural Resources/Conservation at the University of Missouri-Columbia and worked as a seasonal interpreter at Van Meter state Park. Bola connects with people naturally, which makes difficult information interesting and approachable. She is highly motivated to overcome challenges, such as being away from home and adjusting to living in a different culture while following her passions.

Passion for Programs

Previous experiences as a tour guide at Lekki Conservation Center (a wildlife preserve near Lagos) provided her with invaluable skills and insight into the delicate balance that exists between visitors and natural resources. Bola's popular program, "Bison Parts, Pieces, and Poops" engages a wide range of audiences



while touching on significant cultural and environmental topics. She also showcases the rich heritage of the Missouri Native Indians through immersive, hands-on programs, showcasing her enthusiasm, knowledge, and communication skills.

Interpretive Inspiration

Bola was introduced to interpretation during seasonal training and her "eyes were opened to the hidden art of communication

through this experience. One of the most exciting aspects is adapting communication to engage diverse audiences." Her work at Van Meter State Park confirmed her passion for interpretation and a desire to push the boundaries of traditional methods to deeply engage visitors.

Bragging Rights

Best Graduate Student in Rangeland Management, December 2019

Dean's Academic Award of Excellence

Deaton Scholar Program, August 2023

MPRA Trust Scholarship, March 2024

2024 Association of Missouri Interpreters Scholarship, August 2024



Introducing Lacey Parker: What We've Heard

Lacey Parker (she/her) exemplifies the qualities of a future leader in both environmental education and interpretation. She is pursuing a Master's degree in Aquatic Biology at Texas State University. With her skill set, passion, and experience, her professors and supervisors believe Lacey will make significant contributions to the field of interpretation and inspire countless individuals to connect with nature. She consistently goes above and beyond for her students and visitors and Lacey's involvement in social media outreach, program planning, and community events has increased engagement and strengthened ties between community and Texas State Parks.

Passion for Programs

Lacey played a key role in organizing and facilitating Texas Outdoor Family workshops, guiding families - many of whom are first-time campers - through activities that foster both safety and enjoyment in natural spaces. Through an Aquatic Education Internship, Lacey deepened her expertise in outdoor education by leading events focused on fish habitats, water conservation, and sustainable fishing practices.

Interpretive Inspiration

On a visit to Blanco State Park, Lacey was drawn to the river. "Watching these organisms swim about and shine their iridescence in the sunlight, I felt an incredible wave of peace wash over me. I was in awe of how beautiful these creatures were and how lucky I was to admire them. Drawing the inspiring scene before me to the best of my abilities, I realized two things: one, my favorite fish is now the green sunfish and, two, I need to find a way for my office to be outside."

Bragging Rights

Instructional Assistant, Functional Biology

Aquatic Education Intern, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Texas State Park Ambassador

Aquatic Biology, B.S. and Business Administration, B.A., Texas State University

Student Scholarships are OPEN!



The National Association for Interpretation offers scholarships for college and university students pursuing careers in natural, historical, or cultural interpretation. Open to both undergraduate and graduate students, these scholarships help cover conference registration, travel, lodging, and other expenses. Apply by April 18, 2025, for a chance to be recognized for your potential to make an outstanding contribution to the field.

[Learn more and apply today!](#)

<https://shorturl.at/6mAKPt>

2025 South Central Region Awards

By Victoria Wright, Awards Chair

We awarded 9 awards to professionals throughout our region during the 2025 regional conference! Special thanks to everyone who took the time to nominate their peers in our region. Start getting ready for next year!



THIS YEAR'S AWARDS:

Brian Barnette All-American Interpreter's Quiz:

A 100 question quiz written by Jerrel Geisler about a myriad of natural, cultural, and interpretive subjects

John Miller from Missouri (**highest score**)

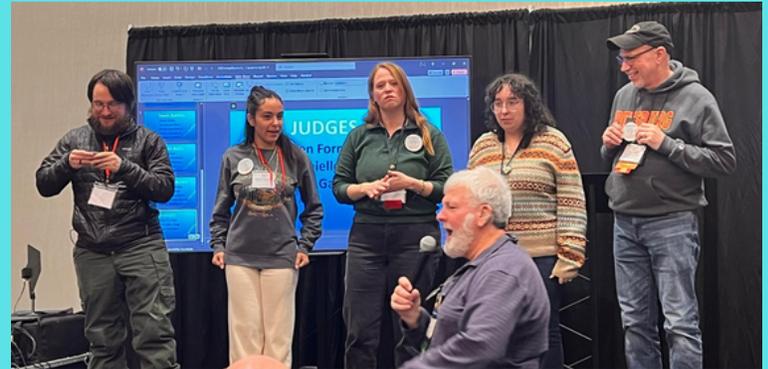
Ken Forman from Arkansas

Pat Silovsky from Kansas

Hannah Shulze from Texas

Amy Stephens from Oklahoma

Rusty Scarborough from Louisiana



Silver Medal, Team Bugs

Victoria Wright, Cathy Combs, Michelle Hernandez, Chris Pistole, Will (Thomas) McDaniel

InterpOlympics:



Gold Medal, Team Battles

Noah Duke, Raymona Nye, Frank Barrientez, Lauren Marshall, Antonio Coffee

See their performance at:
https://youtu.be/01zq_-3FQ1w



Bronze Medal, Team Balls

Hulya Onel, Kennie Merback, Emily Dickerson, Judy Sneed, Lorissa Digiacoimo

See their performance at:
<https://youtu.be/5J6BW36P0xg>



**Best South Central Conference
Presentation Award**

Voted by conference attendees once all
sessions concluded

Ken Forman with Frog Philharmonic



**Outstanding Interpretive Written Article
Award**

Izzy Mabry of Texas State Parks with her
article about taking her daughter to enjoy
nature at a park for the first time

te Park
Event



Outstanding Interpretive Special Event Award

Inks Lake State Park and their event “Fun for All” which utilizes adaptive technology to provide a new sense of belonging outdoors for their differently-abled guests

INKS LAKE STATE PARK
FUN FOR ALL!
SATURDAY APRIL 27TH, 10AM-3PM
Join us for a day of activities adapted to suit a range of abilities including;

- **Kayaking:** Use our new ADA Transfer Bench! Additional Equipment and assistance provided by Camacho Activity Center.
- **Fishing:** TPWD Derby Pond stocked with catfish and all fishing equipment provided. Please bring a cooler and ice, or buy ice from the Park Store, if you want to keep your catches; limit TBD.
- **Archery:** Wheel-chair accessible shooting area with adaptive equipment and coaching from the Lonestar Paralysis Foundation
- **GRIT Chairs** available for off pavement trial AND a challenge course for some extra fun!

VALID DAY-USE PASS REQUIRED For more information: 



**Outstanding Interpretive Program Award
Night Sky Training with Texas State Parks**

helps their interpretive staff build a good foundation about the night sky with practical training



**Outstanding Interpretive Volunteer Award
David Heinicke at Brazos Bend State Park
with 2,373 volunteer hours across the last 5 years**



Excellence in Interpretive Support Award
Andrew Barnebey at Devil's Sinkhole in Texas for his staunch support of one of his community's prized resources and thousands of hours of volunteer support



Master & Distinguished Professional Interpreter Award
Tara Humphreys with Texas State Parks for her work as a mentor, leader, innovator, and expert interpreter. She has been a staunch advocate for interpretation in her career and her influence is felt across countless professionals



South Central Fellow & Lifetime Achievement Award

Ken Forman for his work in the many roles within and outside of our region as a professional and volunteer for many years. His dedication to the field of interpretation and the NAI community is admirable.



I look forward to next year's regional conference and who will be nominated for their dedication to the field of interpretation in the next year. Thank you fellow interpreters for all you do in our work.

Fire and Future Growth in Parks

By Patrick T. Hayes, Tulsa County Parks

As you are familiar in the world of interpretation, we have the joyous task to interpret the language of Nature in ways that facilitate learning, respect and appreciation for the environment around us. These efforts we make locally and across our Earth make positive impacts in how we as a human species can conserve and preserve the natural bounty for all future generations of people, plants and animals in reciprocal coexistence.



If we know this to be true, we may recognize that this effort does not reach everyone, where the dark corners of environmental apprehension, neglect and even abuse fester and multiply. Maybe at your park you have seen such examples of human behavior: littering, graffiti, theft and damage of native plants, and even uncontrolled fire like we have. Yet, as interpreters, our task does not stop at the junction of adversity and challenge, rather this is where we begin to stop the burn.

Chandler Park was donated to Tulsa County in the early 1960s by the Chandler family who had used this area as a limestone quarry. Great chasms of rock that were removed from the hillside have left stone hallways and outcrops on our North border, earning the name the “Lost City” by Naturalist Samuel Washington Woodhouse in the 1840s.

This area has been cherished by many in the 100+ years of it being a park. In this appreciation of the land, inappropriate usage and land management caused user groups to degrade the natural spaces with spray paint and glass bottles. Amplified from the severe storms in 2023, Chandler Park lost a great

quantity of trees, splintered onto the forest floor, drying into tinder.

In January 2025, one of our worst fears was realized when we saw that about an acre of forest had burned after a particularly wet month. The smell of leaf-litter ash and water is almost sweet if the sight was not so sour.



Scorched bark extends about the length of your hand, upwards from the thick layer of leaves and detritus. Further investigation revealed that this fire was a “surface-level” burn that did not last very long, though intense in its short duration, evident by the unburned leaves and mosses tucked into the cavities of rocks. *(cont. on next page)*



By listening to the voice of the half-charred acorn I put in my pocket, an imperative to care for our generations as we do our future, continues to germinate. **The task of interpretation remains crucial for bridging the gap between fire and flourishing as the chance to foster environmental education, awareness and appreciation could stop a fire before it started.** Our work as interpreters will reverberate in the branches of resilient forests, whispers of bird-wing and the bright-eyes of our future.

("Fire" cont. from previous page) More grace was given to us when we learned the local fire department was able to extinguish the blaze with little difficulty due to the proximity of a fire hydrant, installed 15 years ago with the notion to preserve the baseball complex, not extinguish a forest fire.

Any nature-lover would recoil at the sight of this, a beloved trailhead interrupted by the pungent ash limbs and leaves. It is easy to curse such negligence. **Yes as interpreters, we can see this as an opportunity to engage with empathy our audiences about the perils of mismanagement and misuse of our natural world.**



Tips and Tricks for Interpreters

Editors Note: This is a new section of the newsletter that we hope will be useful for many of you. Please consider submitting an article for this section in future newsletters!

Color Game for Night Hikes or Owl Prowls

By John Miller, Reeds Spring, Missouri

Here is an easy and inexpensive activity that you can use on a night hike or owl prowl. All you need are 5 to 7 color 3x5 index cards

Materials

Select 5-7 color 3x5-inch index cards, making sure that at least one color is repeated. The best mix is to have at least one white and one yellow card for this to be even more effective. Place the cards in the order you want so that none of the identical cards are side by side. Mix them up so the colors are evenly distributed. Stack them together and place them in a pocket to use during the night hike.

Set Up

-Let your audience know that we will be playing a color game during the hike so that they know that they need to stay together during the hike.

-Near the middle of the hike, gather the group together and ask them to turn off their flashlights and phone lights for 5 minutes. Reassure any audience members that this is a short time and will make the game more fun and amazing. Let them know that turning off the lights will help their eyes adjust to the low light of the night. This will help them to see what some nocturnal animals are seeing as well.

Activity

-After 5 minutes of darkness, pull out the cards and fan them out in your hand, like the image at right. Make sure that at least half of each card is visible.

-Ask the audience to make a circle around you so that you are in the middle and the audience is looking in towards you in the center. *(Activity cont. on next page)*



(“Color Game” cont. from previous page)

-Let the audience know that you will slowly walk around inside of the circle TWICE so that they have plenty of time to see the cards in your hand.

-You are asking them to quietly count the number of DIFFERENT color cards that they see IN THE DARK. Remind them to keep the flashlights off during this game. Asking them to be quiet keeps someone from voicing a number that might taint the rest of the audience. Hold the cards about chest high and walk within 1 foot of each audience member so that they get a good look at the cards.

-Go around the second time and remind them to count only the different number of colors they see.

-Once the second round is completed, continue to hold the cards and move around the circle and begin a countdown of how many colors they saw. For example, if you have 7 cards, ask, “Did anyone count 7 colors?” Tell them that one color was repeated and card counting did not give the correct answer. Keep counting down until you have gotten down to 2 fewer numbers than the correct answer. For example, if there were 6 different colors, count down to 4 (did they only see 4 colors?).

The Reveal

-Tell the audience that you will now turn on your light on the cards to reveal the colors. This prepares them for a bright light coming on.

-Turn on the light on the cards and ask 2 different audience members to count the colors they see now. Show that two cards were exactly the same. Show that the yellow and white cards were very difficult to determine their colors.

-Ask if anyone got the number correct. Let them note that the number of people who got it right is proof that we as humans were at a disadvantage in this game.



Interpretation

-Here is where you can insert interpretive messages. You may have more interpretive concepts than expressed here, so feel free to add any that are appropriate.

- Two types of general light receptors in the vertebrate eye: rods and cones.
- Cone light receptors (name comes from their cone-like shape) gives animals the ability to perceive color. A good way to reinforce that cones are used for color is recognizing that the words Color and Cones BOTH begin with the letters CO.

(cont. on next page)

("Color Game" cont. from previous page)

- Rods are light receptors in the eye that give animals the ability to perceive high degrees of dark and light, but not color.
- The disadvantage (that we found tonight) is that cones do not work well in low light. We need ample light to fully determine color differences. You might ask them to visit a paint or hardware store and take note of the bright light above the color chips.
- You might think that humans, being mostly day-time active (diurnal), would have more cones than rods, or at the very least, equal numbers of cones to rods. But humans have an average of 91 million rods and roughly 4.5 million cones (Reference: <https://shorturl.at/SCsA1>)

[This may be an entirely different presentation, but the rods and cones are not evenly distributed across the human eye. The fovea, a small focal point near the center of the macula is virtually rod-free. See above reference for details]

- Nocturnal vertebrates like owls have more rods than cones than humans. Humans have 20 rods per every cone; owls have 30 rods per every cone. (Reference: <https://tinyurl.com/57zpwzhx>)
- Color vision is not as important at night. Many nocturnal animals have relatively muted or camouflage coloration. Breeding of many nocturnal animals (such as owls) is more associated with sounds and posture rather than coloration or elaborate displays.
- More rods allows for better nocturnal vision, or the ability to see in low light or darkness, provides several advantages, including enhanced visibility, increased safety and security, and the ability to observe nocturnal creatures without disturbing them.
- Several nocturnal animals tend to have larger eyes to utilize the low light conditions of the night.



Can you find more interpretive messages regarding color vs. black/white vision?

STATE NEWS

Arkansas

Compiled By
Chris Pistole

Hobbs State Park Conservation Area reopened most of their trails just in time for Arkansas spring break week, the last week of March. Many trails had been closed since the 2 tornadoes ripped through the park on May 26, 2024. The reopening includes the 8-mile Karst Loop Trail, part of the very popular Monument Trail System. The Karst Loop Trail was voted by the public as the 2nd most popular mountain biking trail in Arkansas!

Hobbs was the first AR State Park to have Monument Trails, which are a collection of world-class, mountain biking destinations within Arkansas State Parks. These shared-use trails are professionally crafted by some of the world's best trail builders to showcase natural iconic beauty through innovative and sustainable design and build.

The reopening also includes 11 primitive camp sites you can hike to - six of which are on the Karst Loop and you can do backpacking to those sites.

Inspired by the success of First Day Hikes on January 1st, Hobbs began the Hobbs Hiking Club for Adults which meets to go on a 1-4 mile hike on the first Saturday of each month. February and March had great turnouts. What makes this event a bit different is that the focus is not as heavy on interpretation - although some is included - but rather on building social connections with like-minded folks who enjoy a leisurely hike on one of the

many trails at Hobbs. Prior to or following the hike, the park provides drinks and a snack and time to just visit with everyone. So far this has been very popular with senior citizens. None of the hikes are strenuous and we go at a fairly slow pace specifically for this demographic. Dogs on leash are of course a welcome addition!

With the rising epidemic in loneliness, especially among seniors, this event offers a way to make new friends and to get out and be active! It's been incredible hearing from folks who can't wait for the next one! The hope is that they will make plans to go hiking anywhere with their new friends.

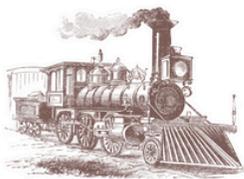
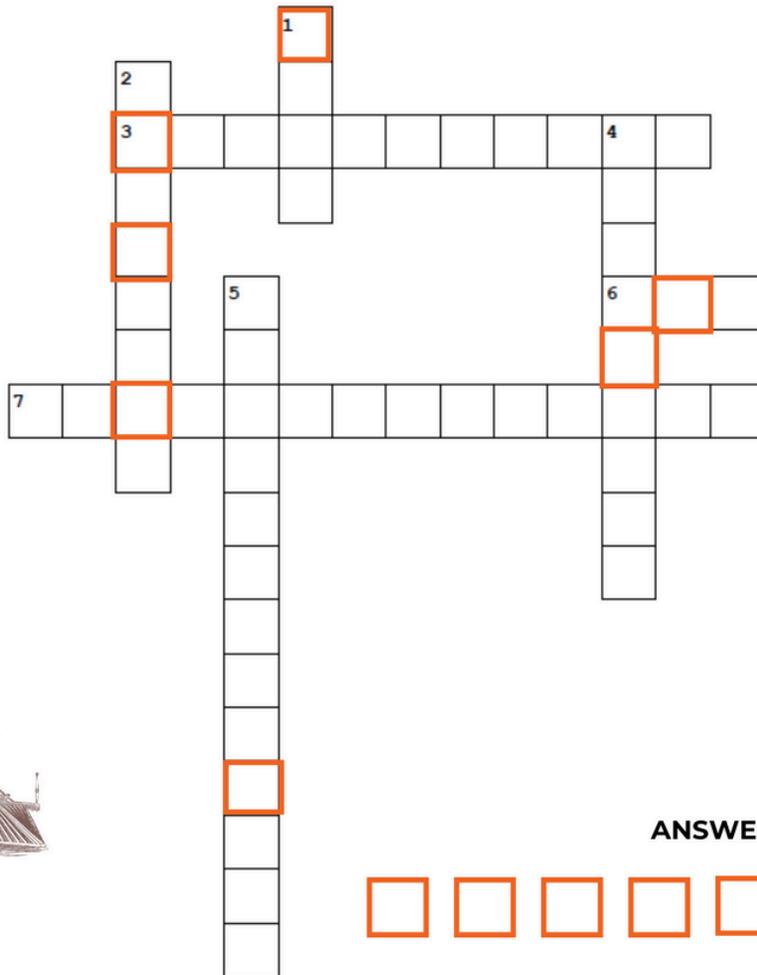


Kansas

Compiled By
Lindsay Evans

The 2026 South Central Region Conference will be in Kansas! To find out what city will be the host, see if you can complete this crossword puzzle! Stay tuned for more details about the conference, including the dates, in the next newsletter.

Where in Kansas will the 2026 SCR Conference meet?



ANSWER



ACROSS

Down

- 3) Insect order meaning scaled wing
- 6) A sacred Red Rock was returned to this Nation
- 7) Poet who wrote, "I, Too Sing America"

- 1) What Quantrill's Gang did
- 2) A period in the late 1850's with intense violence over entry into the Union as a Free State, _____ Kansas
- 4) Chant about limestone
- 5) Center of town named after ties to this Free State



No report submitted



Cape Girardeau Nature Center celebrates 20th Anniversary

Laci Prucinsky (Cape Girardeau) reports that the Cape Girardeau Nature Center is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. They will celebrate their anniversary with a party Saturday, May 3rd. In addition, they will announce their two-headed snake (who's also 20) will be retiring from display as well as one or two community science timelapse stations, as they look ahead to the next 20 years.



MO DNR will conduct the 2025 George Kastler Training School this spring

Alison Dubbert (Jefferson City) reports that the MO Department of Natural Resources will host their 86th annual George Kastler School of Interpretation at Crowder State Park May 18-21, 2025. In addition to learning new interpretive skills for new seasonal and volunteers, they will conduct a CIG class during the training. If you know of someone who needs their CIG or would like to take part in this Award-winning training, contact Alison Dubbert at alison.dubbert@dnr.mo.gov.

MO DNR Celebrates 2024 Interpretation Awards

Alison Dubbert (Jefferson City) reports that MO Department of Natural Resources handed out several awards to deserving interpreters/interpretation projects from 2024 (*cont. on next page*)



2024 Outstanding Program to Attract Underserved Audiences

Winner:

Yvonne Bobbitt, Dillard Mill SHS (free local community days)

Other Nominees:

Breanne Dodge, Onondaga Cave SP (tour brochure for hard of hearing guests)

Sarah S. Jones, Missouri State Museum (Urban 1st Day Hike)

2024 Outstanding Special Event

Winner:

Lauren Akin, Roaring River SP (School House Opening event)

Other Nominees:

Dairan Elam-Pyles, Johnson' Shut-Ins SP (JSI Eclipse event)

Terri Gardner, Watkins Woolen Mill SP/SHS (My Doll and Me Victorian Tea Party)

Anna Skalicky, Roaring River SP (Throwback Films and Storytelling)

Whitney Tucker, Felix Valle SHS (Rural Heritage 2024)

2024 Outstanding Program or Media

Winner:

Cecelia Brueggemann, Grants, Recreation and Interpretation Program (MO Virtual Heritage Project)

Other Nominees:

Breanne Dodge, Onondaga Cave SP (hearing-impaired cave tour)

Jesze Doleh, Thousand Hills SP (storywalk and book, In Search of Home)

Tasha Gabel, Onondaga Cave SP (Wild Wednesday)

Terri Gardner, Watkins Woolen Mill SP/SHS (My Doll and Me Victorian Tea Party)

Sarah S. Jones, Missouri State Museum (Urban 1st Day Hike)

Emily Lange, Mastodon SHS (Homeschool Hour)

Erik Otto, Don Robinson SP (resource management and natural history of Don Robinson SP)

Nathan Todt, Big Oak Tree SP (interpretive Facebook posts)

2024 Mentor of the Year

Winner:

Steve Sitton, Thomas Hart Benton Home and Studio SHS

Other Nominees:

Alison Dubbert, Grants, Recreation and Interpretation Program

Tasha Gabel, Onondaga Cave SP

Kaylee Holt, Grants, Recreation and Interpretation Program

Erik Otto, Don Robinson SP

(cont. on next page)



Chris Edmondson reports the following:



2024 Interpreter of the Year

Winner:

Jesze Doleh, Thousand Hills SP



I am now the Outdoor Recreation Section Chief in the Grants, Recreation, and Interpretation Program in Central Office with Missouri State Parks. In this position I will oversee and direct the goals for all Missouri State Parks volunteers, trails, special events, and recreation programs across the state. In this position, I hope to bring my passion in encouraging people from all backgrounds to enjoy and participate in Missouri State Parks. I want to show all people that they are welcome, wanted, and we have opportunities for them to enjoy the outdoors. Though in the past, this position has not been traditionally influenced by or included in interpretation, interpretation was added to the job description and is expected to be included in all aspects and duties. I value interpretation and know it has a place in all forms of outdoor activities and recreation. After spending more than 7 years as the senior Naturalist/Resource Interpreter for Knob Noster State Park, I am excited to embark on this new adventure and look forward to the progress I can push from my new position.

Other Nominees:

Mary Crowell, St. Francois SP

Breanne Dodge, Onondaga Cave SP

Chris Edmondson, Knob Noster SO

Dairan Elam-Pyles

Sarah Jones, Missouri State Museum

Emily Lange, Mastodon SHS

Erik Otto, Don Robinson SP

Rebecca Thompson, Washington SP

Whitney Tucker, Felix Valle House SHS

Congratulations to all these amazing State Park interpreters!



Christmas in July at Annie and Abel Van Meter State Park

By John Hagerman

'Tis the season...kind of, anyway. For those of you who love the holiday season but don't like the cold weather, come join the crew at Annie and Abel Van Meter State Park to celebrate Christmas in July.

Event Schedule

Friday, July 18

Bring your Christmas decorations and transform your site into a Christmas village for a chance to win a fun prize. Check-in starts at 2 p.m.

Saturday, July 19

- 10 a.m.: Ugly sweater fashion show. Stop in the park's cultural center and show us your ugliest Christmas sweater or other Christmas apparel
- Noon: Campsite judging. Park staff members will anonymously go through the campground and cast votes for the campsite decorating contest. In the evening, park visitors will also have a chance to vote for their favorite site. Prizes will be awarded for the top two sites.
- 6:30 p.m.: Come listen to a storyteller weave Native American Christmas tales in the day-use area.
- 9 p.m.: Lighting of the tree. Watch as the Van Meter staff lights the park Christmas tree in the campground.
- 9-10 p.m.: Drive through the Christmas town. Visitors will be encouraged to drive through the campground loop to see the decorated campsites.

Sunday, July 20

Campsite decorating contest winners announced. Contest winners will be informed in person at their campsites before 10 a.m. Pack up Christmas decorations and return to the real world. Check out by 10 a.m.

Regular camping fees apply, and guests are encouraged to reserve a site in advance. However, the event itself is free and does not require registration. For more information, call the park office at 660-886-7537.

ANNIE AND ABEL VAN METER STATE PARK IS LOCATED AT:

32146 N. Highway 122, Miami, MO

<https://mostateparks.com/event/108786/christmas-july>

The **Red Ridge Nature Preserve** is 133-acres in the heart of Oklahoma City’s urban area. A new non-profit organization has been established for the future management and administration of the facility. Recent activity has been an effort to suggest a zoning change for the nature preserve (...from “high-intensity use” zoning to “agricultural” zoning...). The proposal has been presented to the OKC Planning Commission.

The Kirkpatrick Family Fund purchased the property in 2023 and then dedicated it to its future use as the Red Ridge Nature Preserve. The purchase price was a little more than \$11M. (Prior to that action, there was serious talk about buying the land as a site for the construction of a new jail for the county, which would have entailed the loss of a lot of forest habitat and its replacement with asphalt and concrete.)

July 12th is the deadline for nominating a person for the **Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award**. It also includes a \$10K award to that successful nominee. The Sand County Foundation and the American Farmland Trust are the sponsors of this prestigious honor. The nomination form may be accessed at www.sandcountyfoundation.org/ApplyLCA

Katie Hawk is the Director of the Oklahoma Monarch Society. She announced the name of a new beer that went on sale in April of last year: Save the Monarchs Pollinator Pilsner. It is an effort to raise both funds and awareness of the butterfly’s plight. Oklahoma City’s **Anthem Brewing Company** is responsible for creating the new beer.

Laura Motley sends this report:
Join us in congratulating **Kari Watkins**, president and CEO of the Oklahoma City



National Memorial & Museum, on being named to the USA TODAY list of Women of the Year honorees. For nearly three decades, she has led with vision, empathy and a deep commitment to honoring those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever.

As the first employee of the Memorial & Museum, Kari helped shape its mission from the ground up. Under her leadership, it has continued to evolve while staying true to its purpose of educating, remembering and helping future generations understand the impact of the bombing. She shares this honor with the staff, Board of Trustees and the community who have helped make the Memorial & Museum what it is today.

Maggie Regan, Oxley Nature Center, reports that the staff at Oxley Nature Center is busy developing projects to restore and enhance its wetlands, forest, and prairie areas. Last month, we hosted volunteer Saturdays where we picked up trash along the lakeshore, removed invasive plants, and planted a few dozen new trees. Our programs and field trips are also going well.

Thanks to our friends at Oklahoma Conservation Commission and other partners, we hosted over 500 fourth graders last week for “H2Oklahoma,” a field trip experience (*cont. on next page*)

(cont. from previous page) centering on water health and conservation.

Something else we are really excited about is the acquisition of two Action Track Chairs, which are all-terrain wheelchairs. Thanks to the generosity of an individual donor and our ONCA Board, anybody with mobility issues can now experience the trails at Oxley!

Oklahoma

Compiled By
Neil Garrison



Texas State Parks had strong representation at the regional awards presented at the recent Amarillo conference, including Distinguished/Master Interpreter awarded to Tara Humphreys, Director of Interpretive Services at TX State Parks. As always, it was wonderful to see recognition given to so many worthy people and programs. No doubt a full list of award recipients is elsewhere in this newsletter. Congratulations to all!

Interpreters, your Texas State Coordinator needs to hear from you! Changes are coming to the way the South Central region newsletter is formatted and delivered, and the Regional Board has requested feedback to inform that process. What would make the newsletter most valuable to you? What information or connections do you hope to find when you open the newsletter file? (You DO read the newsletter, don't you? *(cont. on next page)*)



Thanks to John Miller, here are some links to some videos from the conference in Amarillo:

Cowboy Poet Videos

- https://youtu.be/6btm_HkIRlw
- <https://youtu.be/wnhU2kOMp94>
- <https://youtu.be/wv14SrZAluc>
- <https://youtu.be/h3EK2MYvrSO>

Keynote Heather Barnes Video

- <https://youtu.be/1ruIn-zioTU>

(cont. from previous page) If not...why not?) So far, members have requested:

- Info on upcoming trainings, special events, and nominations for awards
- A column that could highlight parks, nature centers, historic sites, and museums from the perspective of the people who work there
- A section where people could request program outlines or offer up program materials they are no longer using that other interpreters may want

What would you add to this list? Please send suggestions to Lisa.Cole@tpwd.texas.gov by June 1st and I will pass them on to the Board and newsletter editors. Here's your chance to let us know what you think! Please spare a couple of minutes.

Thank you for all that you do!

If you value your newsletter, please help us out by contributing news or articles, accompanied by photos if possible, to your state representative when they reach out to you. We hope that you enjoy reading the newsletter and that it helps to build a sense of community among all of us in the interpretive field in the great South Central Region of NAI.