

DEC. 04, 2024

OCCC STUDENT VOICE SINCE 1978

PIONEER

Veteran Luncheon
Highlights
Healthcare for Heroes

Interview with
CELEBRITY CHEF
Angelo Cipollone

ALUMNI HALL OF FAME
Class of 2024

"NO EXIT"

BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

OCCC Play Deserves a Standing Ovation

Student performers Bailey Satterlee (left) and Olivia Reed (right) practice for showtime ahead of OCCC's standout production of "No Exit."
Photo by Don Russell



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Volume 54, No. 17

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Pioneer Word Search #5

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SAFARILIGHTS
PUMPKINSPICE
NOEXITPLAY
MEDIACONTEST
MOANA TWO
CITYJERSEYS
WICKED
FLEAMARKET
AUXILIARY
CASINONIGHT
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From **BATTLEFIELD** to Bedside, OCCC's Veterans Luncheon Highlights Healthcare for Heroes



Keynote speaker Johnnie Brooks urges veterans in the audience to seek care at the VA and utilize veterans' benefits.

By Ariel Harry

For those of us who have traded uniforms for textbooks and early-morning musters for early-morning classes, OCCC's Second Annual Veteran's Luncheon was more than a celebratory gathering; it was a reminder of all our resilience, shared experiences and the challenges that student veterans face.

Hosted by the OCCC Veterans Office, the luncheon highlighted veterans' journeys from military service to academic life and addressed the resources available to ease that transition. Keynote speaker Johnnie Brooks, an Army veteran and orthopedic physician assistant, shared insights from his path to a medical career and urged veterans to take advantage of their benefits. Faculty member Karl Greene and student veterans Derek Hall and Jonathan Engle contributed their personal stories, illustrating the strength and sense of purpose veterans bring to campus.

As an Army veteran and dedicated medical professional, Brooks brought the event's focus to the importance of veterans caring for their bodies and using the benefits that they've earned. Drawing from his memories of growing up in Magnolia, Miss., Brooks recounted the challenges of limited opportunities that he had faced as a young Black man. Though he initially felt "tricked" into joining the Army, Brooks went on to build a distinguished 24-year career in orthopedic care, serving at renowned institutions like Walter Reed Army Medical Center and VA centers across the country. His speech encouraged veterans to seek medical care early, particularly for issues like knee pain, which can impact quality of life after service.

A fellow veteran who now works as a TRIO transition coach at OCCC, Greene shared his journey from the military to academia, noting that he began college at the age of 59 after struggling with homelessness and addiction for over 20 years. Greene, who served as a cook in the Army, found camaraderie and connection with people from all walks of life through his service. Now, he channels this spirit of support and mentorship into his work with OCCC's SCMS (Students Connecting with Mentors for Success) program, helping students navigate their own challenges.

"I love helping my people," Greene said warmly, reflecting the compassion that defines his role as both a mentor and a faculty member.

As student veterans, Hall and Engle shared similar experiences of camaraderie while also highlighting the challenges of navigating college life. Hall, a recently married former Army infantryman, has his sights set on becoming a park ranger. Engle, who served as a military working-dog handler in the Air Force, noted that starting school came with its own obstacles, especially when it came to understanding the benefits veterans are eligible for. Both agreed that programs such as the Veteran Readiness and Employment program, a relatively unknown resource offering generous assistance to former soldiers with service-related disabilities, can provide critical support to veterans on campus.

The pair's military experiences taught them to work with people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a deep bond with fellow veterans who share similar memories.

"In the military," Hall noted, "people from all walks of life come together to work toward a common goal."

Civilian life, however, can present some unique challenges. The structured discipline of the military, where accountability is enforced for everyone, contrasts with the greater freedom and flexibility of civilian life, which can feel disorienting for some former soldiers.

The OCCC Veterans Office organized the event, working hard to ensure veterans have access to the resources and support they need. The Santa Fe South Pathways Middle College Band performed at the ceremony, bringing a celebratory atmosphere to the luncheon and honoring veterans' continued dedication to their community.

The special luncheon was a celebration of both the past and present contributions of OCCC's veteran community. For those of us in attendance, it was a reminder that, though our paths have shifted from service to scholarship, we carry forward a shared commitment and connection that extends well beyond our time in uniform.

Celebrity Chef Brings World of New Flavors to OCCC

By Trey Brite



Angelo Cipollone (wearing white) volunteers his time helping out a team from OCCC during an event organized by the Latino Community Development Agency.



Angelo Cipollone, Executive Director of Auxiliary Services

For 10 months, OCCC has experienced some dietary changes that have left people craving more food from the dining hall. Serving as the executive director of auxiliary services, Angelo Cipollone acts as a dynamo decision-maker concerning culinary operations within the college. Catering and cafeteria changes were inspired by his 25-plus years of culinary experience feeding celebrity guests at resorts, cruise ships and hotels; he even found his way to serving a few United States presidents.

Guaranteeing his vision of the meal, from style to technique, Cipollone has applied his teachings to the chefs serving food behind the counter. Every cook has been trained on each station within the dining hall to ensure the most efficient process from the grill to the plate. Not only is the food cooked quickly, but it's all fresh – never frozen – and prepared on a day-to-day basis.

"Before you know it, we've got a great menu, a lot of fun, and it's all cooked from scratch – no frozen food. I've begun to notice that even the high school students are eating more in our restaurant than their own food that's free!" Cipollone remarked.

Festivals from around the world have their place here on campus, Cipollone believes. Going forward, he looks forward to filling the cafeteria with the smells of spices and herbs during an OCCC version

of the famous San Gennaro festival at the beginning of the fall 2025 semester.

"Kings, queens, princes, presidents, they all go to the San Gennaro festival," Cipollone explained. "About a million people a day go through this event in New York City. I want to do it for a week here with all the Italian foods, with different recipes every day. Have the music, have the games, the sound, the smell – just something to shake things up a little bit."

Not only does Cipollone want to share Italian cuisine, but he's also interested in introducing students to food from other cultures as well. He is planning to serve meals from all over the world over the course of the next school year.

"I want to help students learn about different cultures and cuisines from around the world," Cipollone said. "We can do a festival during Hispanic Heritage Month or Asian-American and Pacific Islander Month, show them something educational and fun. It may be a little weird for some, but these are changes I want to bring real soon."

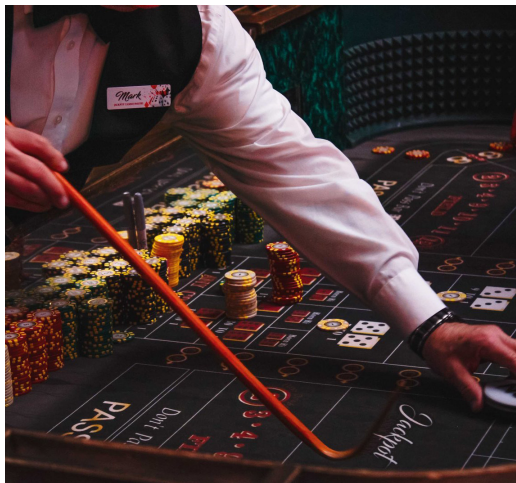
Fresh and clean food are staples of Cipollone's palate, something that OCCC has come to enjoy for a little under a year now. From new festivals to newer plates of delicious food, the dining hall continues to shake things up in tantalizing ways.

Students Hit the **JACKPOT** with Free Games and Prizes at OCCC **Casino** Night

Photos by Trey Brite



A dealer smiles at OCCC students as they place their bets at her card table.

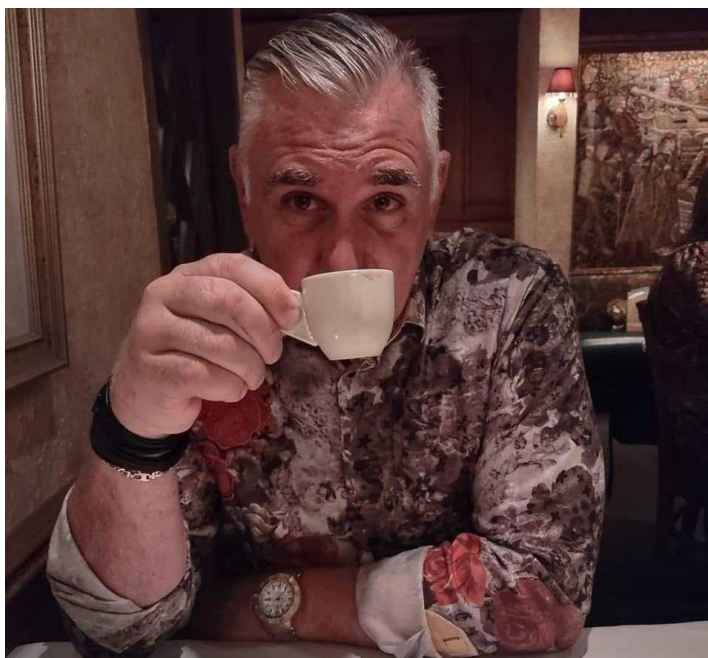


An attendant readies the table for the next round of bets.



Students take part in karaoke while enjoying one another's company during Casino Night.

An Interview with Angelo Cipollone, Executive Director of Auxiliary Services



OCCC Executive Director of Auxiliary Services
Angelo Cipollone takes a well-deserved coffee break.

By Trey Brite

Armed with more than 25 years of culinary expertise, Executive Director of Auxiliary Services Angelo Cipollone has begun changing palates all over OCCC by bringing his craftsmanship to campus and special events. Born in New York with an Italian appetite, Cipollone especially loves the cuisine from the region of Tuscany. He boasts a record of cooking for chief executives, governors, presidents and even popes! He recently sat down with the Pioneer to discuss some of the improvements that he has brought to the dining hall and share some highlights from his illustrious career.

What was the process like for altering the cafeteria?

I saw the need. First, I saw how old and dusty the engagement factor was. In the culinary world, we call that putting lipstick on a pig. We changed up the restaurant appeal upon entrance and made it a whole lot better. Second was food: What are we going to offer? I saw what they were doing in the past, and I took a look at our demographic, looking just at the students, and wondered what we're going to serve. Fortunately, I have a few hungry students of my own, so I know what they like! After coming up with some options, I made room for the gluten-free, diabetic, vegan, vegetarian – so many dietary needs have been accounted for. I put together a plan, based on my 25-plus years of culinary experience, that included the grill and some underutilized parts of the kitchen. Where the taqueria is now used to just be broken equipment!

Where do you get the recipes served to students and faculty?

My thoughts all come from my background in hotels, resorts and cruise ships. I took these ideas while I was wanting to upgrade the kitchen, making things more modern. Make it clean, make it neat, and let the students get the best meal possible. My whole background is really all about clean and healthy food.

What kind of events do you think need more catering?

We should really include the restaurant in more events. For example, when shows happen in the Visual and Performing Arts Center, we should offer dinner. Dinner and a show, you can't beat that! The same could be done with the art gallery and so much more around campus. I taught some cooking classes for some schools, and something I would always tell them is that food is entertainment; teach someone something when they eat it.

What is a technique you've found serves you well in catering?

Once, I remember asking myself, "Why do I have to put it on a chafer dish when I can put it on a cutting board with a heat lamp, where it looks so fresh and clean?" They said, "We don't do that here," and I said, "I do!" Guess what everybody started doing then? That!

How did you become a "celebrity chef?"

Big companies like Microsoft or a pro golf association will bring a million people in for a conference. The city of Orlando does not have enough managers or chefs to do this work, so they'll go to their meeting then head over to Disney World for food and beverages. The companies will buy out the park for \$10 million and have someone like Elton John performing. Disney started a list for "celebrity chefs" to manage around 50 cooks when these big parties come through. They asked if I'd like to be on it, and I said, "Sure, put me on the list."

How did this lead to you cooking for U.S. presidents?

One night, the company Enterprise bought out the place and wanted my company of 300,000 people to make one really good dessert for their event. I asked what they were craving, and their theme was banana. The recipe for bananas Foster came to mind, but I knew I had to give my own twist on it. In this three-night event, by the second night, they weren't even going for the food. They were just coming for the dessert. All the chefs helping me prepare the bananas Foster were in culinary school and totaled 20 people. I needed 100 to keep track of the line we made! They gave me the "dessert of the year" award and called me back to celebrate the beginning of the new millennia. That's how we eventually got involved with the presidents, popes and all that crazy stuff.

What brought you to Oklahoma?

When I did a few tastings for the president of the United States, I ended up traveling to Oklahoma. I was sent out to Enid, where I led a group of 20 cooks to serve in the governor of Oklahoma's inauguration. I still have my honorary plate in my office!

Q&A with OCCC Journalism & Broadcast Director David Zeoli



David Zeoli
Coordinator of Broadcasting
Contact Info
david.a.zeoli@occc.edu
Office Location: AH 1F2

Your department recently launched a contest for students interested in creating short-form media such as the videos that regularly appear on TikTok. Why did you decide to sponsor this sort of competition?

The Content Creator Search has been introduced to support our students' creativity and talent through media that is most relevant to them. Changes in media over the last 20 years have transformed how we all consume information and entertainment, but a new generation of media users has made short-form video the most utilized media available today. Many of the skills required to create these videos are now relevant to the workplace. As a response to the changing landscape of new media, Journalism and Broadcasting has incorporated short-form and digital media into its programs and courses. The Content Creator Search provides the means for all OCCC students to engage in this experience and participate.

As this issue of the newspaper was going to press, you were preparing to lead a training workshop for students seeking assistance with the creation of short-form media. To help out those unable to attend the training session, can you briefly discuss a few of the most valuable tips that you intended to share?

In the Dec. 4 workshop (sponsored by the World Languages and Cultures Center), we will be looking at the important decisions that content creators need to answer when they develop an idea: identifying an audience, concept development and video format. Being intentional about a desired audience and determining whether you create in vertical or wide (orientation) can influence what and how you will create. We will also support new content creators by developing techniques for composition, improving audio and using available lighting. The emphasis will be on how to create content with little or no money and what inexpensive tools improve the media. There will be a hands-on portion of the workshop where attendees can utilize their iPhones to create a short video using these techniques. Finally, we will discuss how to share media across a variety of platforms.

In your expert opinion, what are the key differences between routine videos and the magical ones that ultimately go viral?

Some characteristics that viral videos share is that their purpose is immediately recognizable to the viewer and the subject matter appeals to a wide audience. Videos that go viral also often aim to produce a strong reaction of some kind from their viewers, which compels them to share it with others. To promote the viral effect, the media should be easy to share and posted across social platforms with the strategic use of hashtags and titles to trigger views and likes. Put plainly, who will watch this video, and how do we give them an opportunity to view and share it?

Why do you think that short-form media has become so popular in recent years?

A technical development that accelerated the viral video was the rise of the smartphone and social media platforms, which allowed for quick access to video – in your hand – whenever you want it. Our media was already more truncated through use of email and texts. This trajectory was continued by late millennials and Gen Z, who applied the trend video. Short-form media provides us all with the ability to share experiences, create community and explore a new way to communicate.

What are some of the steps that your department is taking in response to dramatic shifts in the media landscape?

Journalism and Broadcasting has added a new media and short-form media focus to its courses. Whether it's video for journalists, brand marketing for public relations or utilizing vertical formats in video production, we have done our best to be relevant to both our students and the current and future media job market. We incorporated iPhone capability to our production flow in 2022, launched a new podcast facility in 2023, and we are excited to complete our UCast digital streaming studio in 2025. We will continue to seek out methods that best enable students to create, work and succeed.

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"No Exit"

BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

OCCC Play Deserves a Standing Ovation



Review by Khi Davis and photos by Hao Mai

Last month, OCCC Theatre Arts showcased its own rendition of Jean-Paul Sartre's "No Exit," with Theatre Coordinator Don Russell expertly serving as the director and four OCCC students doing an outstanding job in the starring roles.

Running for about 80 minutes with no intermission, "No Exit" is a one-act existentialist play focused on three dead people who live together in a room located in hell, with all of them facing the guilt and shame caused by the actions from their previous lives. As the program for the play noted, Sartre's work "resonates with an even more horrifying reality today," as "individual desires and prejudices" are made a priority "over treating others with dignity and respect." The theme of the play is captured by the phrase "Hell is other people."

On opening night, I could tell that a lot of preparation had gone into all aspects of the play. Each element, from the aesthetics to the audio, seemed to fulfill a very intentional purpose, starting with the way that the audience was seated right on the stage where the actors were performing. This arrangement allowed the crowd to symbolize the eyes of judgment, creating another sense of connection for the audience, especially during the moments that involved breaking the fourth wall.

When it came to execution, everyone was committed, not only those involved in the actual performance but also those focused on the production side as well. Props to Sam Binkley for great work on the lighting and excellent collaboration with Colleen Callahan on the soundboard operation. Their cues gave the play its dramatically dreadful and suspenseful edge, which helped advance the progress of each character's story. I also admired the way that the lights were used to express the characters' states of mind. Plus, I felt that Rebecca Fisher did an excellent job with the costume design.

The stage was full of personalities. Joseph Dunn (as Valet) captured his role by adopting an "I'm-just-the-messenger" persona. The deliveries by Ethan Dwyer (as Joseph Garcin), Bailey Satterlee (as Inez Serrano) and Olivia Reed (as Estelle Rigault) all displayed a lot of emotion. There was a mix of eeriness, suspense, lust and confusion, combined with an overall intensity, that kept the performance engaging.

Everyone did an amazing job playing their roles as they worked every inch of the stage. I was struck the most by Satterlee's performance as Ms. Serrano. The way that she conveyed a strong yet cruel personality allowed her to really sell the character. I also enjoyed the energy that the performances by Reed and Dwyer brought to the table. Their presentations of going from denial to acceptance of their hellishness gave the play a nice amount of edge. The level of commitment that everyone brought to the show was quite admirable, especially with the play being well over one hour long.

Another thing that intrigued me about the play were these little moments of pure silence. When the characters would agree to stop talking after scenes involving intense arguments, these pockets of empty sound would follow, allowing the moment to sink in as the characters worked to accept their insanity and own their cruelty.

Overall, OCCC's production of "No Exit" was very engaging. I would enjoy seeing the play again, especially if all of the same students remained involved with the show. In all honesty, I would also enjoy seeing the same actors performing in a totally different production. In the meantime, I am happy to announce that OCCC will stage a production of John Ciarani's "Almost Maine" from April 16 to April 19 in the Bruce Owen Theater. Stay tuned for additional details!



HEAD OF THE CLASS

OCCC WELCOMES EIGHT NEW MEMBERS TO ALUMNI HALL OF FAME



A welcome sign greets the crowd at a recent luncheon held in honor of the OCCC Alumni Hall of Fame Class of 2024.

Oklahoma City Community College recently inducted eight new members into its Alumni Hall of Fame, including a government official, a district judge and several highly accomplished members of the OCCC community.

“Oklahoma City Community College’s Alumni Hall of Fame Class of 2024 represents eight outstanding individuals who have made significant contributions to our community,” said OCCC President Mautra Staley Jones. “We are proud to honor their accomplishments ... and recognize them as very special members of our OCCC family.”

New inductees include the following:

- **Chris Anoatubby**, lieutenant governor of the Chickasaw Nation
- **Jason Gwynn**, independent filmmaker/editor and film instructor at OCCC
- **Saidy Herrera**, multicultural officer at the Oklahoma Historical Society
- **Natalie Mai**, district judge for Oklahoma County
- **Yovana Lopez Medina**, immigration litigation associate at Rivas Associates
- **Anand “Happy” Patel**, entrepreneur (recognized posthumously)
- **Stephanie Wallace**, nursing clinical and lab director at OCCC
- **Ed Williams**, personal and academic advisor at OCCC

“Anyone who has taken a class at OCCC is considered an alum and invited to join the OCCC Alumni Association,” said OCCC Director of Alumni Affairs Lora J. Malone. “Our goal is to unite former students and help them stay connected with the college and our extensive alumni network.”

Following are more detailed bios of each new inductee.

Chris Anoatubby

A 2011 graduate of OCCC, Anoatubby began his long and successful career at the Chickasaw Nation as a staff pharmacist before quickly rising to become inpatient pharmacy supervisor and later taking over as chief of pharmacy services. While serving in the latter role, he was recognized by the Oklahoma City Indian Health Service as the Outstanding Young Pharmacist of the Year. He later went on to become chief medical solutions officer for the Chickasaw Nation, as well as president of the tribe’s Sovereign Medical Solutions. He has served as lieutenant governor of the Chickasaw Nation since 2019.

Jason Gwynn

A decorated filmmaker, Gwynn began his career as a student worker in the film and video production department at OCCC, assisting his fellow students with their labs and coursework and ultimately guiding many of them toward successful careers in the film industry. As one of his final projects at OCCC, he completed a short documentary film called “Going Dark,” which focused on the closing of the last theater still using film projectors amidst an industrywide conversion to digital formats. That documentary went on to win a National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Regional Emmy for Best Short Format Program. Gwynn later returned to OCCC as an adjunct instructor in the newly renamed digital cinema department, where he taught cinematography courses, before leaving to start his own production company. He has since resumed his post as an adjunct at OCCC, providing the college with valuable expertise as it seeks to revamp and expand its coursework in film editing and digital effects.

Saidy Herrera

A Guatemalan born and raised in a fusion of Spanish, Mayan, Mexican and Afro-Caribbean cultures, Herrera currently serves as the multicultural officer at the Oklahoma Historical Society, where she develops program and outreach initiatives focused on Oklahoma’s diverse heritage and historically underrepresented communities. She previously served as Mrs. Guatemala for Oklahoma in 2021-2022 before going to become one of the top Hispanic leaders nationwide selected to serve as a delegate to the United Nations in 2022-2023 and earning recognition as a member of the inaugural Top 40 Hispanic Leadership class just last year.

Natalie Mai

Before attending OCCC in 1996, Mai arrived in the United States at the age of 11 unable to speak a single word of English. Nevertheless, she went on to graduate from Westmoore High School a mere six years later as the valedictorian of her class. She went on to earn an Ivy League degree from Cornell University before returning to Oklahoma so that she could study law at Oklahoma City University and fulfill her dream of becoming an attorney. Less than a decade after earning her law degree, she won a countywide election to become a district judge for Oklahoma County. Four years later, she found herself reelected to that post by the largest margin of any judicial candidate throughout the state. More recently, in 2023, she was appointed by the Oklahoma Supreme Court to serve as the presiding judge over the Oklahoma multi-county grand jury.



Members of the OCCC Alumni Hall of Fame Class of 2024 pose along with OCCC President Mautra Staley Jones (far right).

Yovana Lopez Medina

Another expert in the legal arena, Medina attended OCCC as an undocumented student who was ineligible for financial aid or state-sponsored programs. Instead, she successfully pursued her associate's degree – without any out-of-pocket costs for tuition or fees – by relying on crucial scholarship funding from the Latino Community Development Agency, Women of the South and the OCCC Foundation. After completing undergraduate school and securing a law degree, she passed the bar exam last year on her very first try and has since joined Rivas & Associates as an immigration litigation associate. While her fate now rests with immigration authorities, she can still work in the U.S., thanks to the DACA (or so-called “Dreamers”) program.

Anand “Happy” Patel

After graduating from OCCC with an associate's degree in business, Patel went on to become a successful entrepreneur, co-founding the Happy World Foundation and launching the WhatsHappy clothing line. Over the years, his foundation has established itself as a world-renowned nonprofit organization that specializes in helping startup founders create their own social enterprises at no cost to themselves. Currently, the foundation helps more than 1 million children from around the world connect with people from more than 150 different countries, while its professional development program has trained more than 100,000 educators from across globe in the areas of intercultural and global citizenship. Tragically killed in a plane crash six years ago, Patel has now joined his surviving twin brother Akash Patel as a member of the OCCC Alumni Hall of Fame.

Stephanie Wallace

Since graduating from OCCC in 1996, Wallace has gone on to become a highly valued fixture on campus, serving as a full-time nursing professor charged with overseeing clinical and lab training for hundreds of future nurses who have spent almost two full decades learning from her extensive expertise. Over the years, she has developed an impressive reputation as a talented nurse educator, earning widespread respect from professionals at hospitals throughout the entire Oklahoma City metropolitan area. She has played a critical role in coordinating successful student placements while serving as a trusted mentor to not only those aspiring nurses but also her fellow faculty members as well.

Edward Williams

One of the longest-serving members of the OCCC community, Williams launched his career at OCCC some 45 years ago, when he began working as a lab instructor in the science labs. After spending a decade working in the science arena and securing a master's degree in counseling psychology, he transferred to the Students with Disabilities office, where he worked for two years before assuming a post in the counseling office and ultimately landing in the advising department. Over the years, he has taught a number of classes as an adjunct instructor, worked with various accreditation teams, supervised part-time advising staff and won several awards for his work as a college advisor. He has always taken his greatest pride in seeing OCCC students meet their educational goals, secure their college degrees and go on to become productive members of society.



A large crowd enjoys a nice meal at a recent luncheon held in honor of the newest members of the OCCC Alumni Hall of Fame.

First-Generation Celebration Event

Photos by Ana Arias



John Claybon, dean of business and information technology, speaks to the crowd.



Concurrent OCCC-Southeast High School students pose together with their walking balloon animal prizes at the recent FirstGen celebration.



A table of prizes, sponsored by the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, features walking balloon animals, OCCC T-shirts, OCCC swag bags and a variety of Lego sets.



Panel speakers capture the attention of the audience at a recent event held in recognition of first-generation college students.



Isaac Ruiz, vice president of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society at OCCC, captivates the audience at the FirstGen Celebration.

OKC Thunder: Storming Toward a National Title?



Enthusiastic OKC Thunder fans crowd into Paycom Center to support their beloved team at a Nov. 17 competition against the Dallas Mavericks, the same team that eliminated the Thunder during last season's Western Conference Semifinals. (Photo by Ana Arias)

By Ana Arias

The Oklahoma City Thunder's season has just begun, but excitement and enthusiasm for the team have been stirring up for not just months but years. Fan membership lasts a lifetime, and Thunder fans have been waiting quite a while for a time like this again. It seems to be that the "Golden Era" is back and – dare we say? – in a way that is better than ever. With that in mind, we recently sat down with a lifelong Thunder fan to hear his thoughts on the team's season thus far and what is yet to come.

Can you give us your name and tell us how long you have been a Thunder fan?

My name is Isaac Ruiz. Ever since I was 7 years old, I have been a diehard Thunder fan; I credit this team for instilling my love for the game of basketball.

What do you think was missing last season? Has it been fixed since? What other details still need to be addressed?

Last season, the Thunder struggled with both defensive and offensive boards. Statistically, the Thunder ranked dead last in offensive rebounds and 27th in defensive rebounds – not a good stat to have for a championship-competing team. Naturally, the team tried to compensate for this statistic by embracing small ball lineups; this allowed them to rank first in field-goal percentage and fourth in three-point percentage across the entire league, solidifying the Thunder as one of the best offensive teams. However, this rebounding deficiency was noticeable in the conference semifinals, where Mavs (Dallas Mavericks) bigs such as Derrick Lively took advantage of this weakness, leading them to eventually win the series. With the acquisition of Isaiah Hartenstein (for an insane \$87 million), it is hoped that he would fix this issue. Due to his recent injury, we haven't been able to see him in action yet, but surprisingly, Chet (Holmgren) has had no problem so far in crashing the glass. I honestly believe that in its current iteration, this Thunder squad is near perfect in the fact that every possible issue, offensively and defensively, has been thoroughly and competently addressed. Add incredible team chemistry alongside that, and you see a team that is going to make some noise here in the next few years.

What do you think about the team's offseason moves, such as the Isaiah Hartenstein deal, the Alex Caruso-Josh Giddey trade and the Aaron Wiggins and Isaiah Joe extensions?

I think that the Thunder's offseason moves were perfect and, by far, the best in the offseason this year. Signing Isaiah Hartenstein perfectly addresses our rebounding issues and strips away a talented big from a contender in the East. Not to mention, offloading Gordan Hayward's salary (and trading some of our bench players to Charlotte last year) allowed us to even sign Hartenstein in the first place. Also, trading away Josh Giddey for one of the best defensive guards in the entire league is just insane. I love Josh Giddey as much as everyone else, but Alex Caruso is an experienced player who adds another defensive punch to an already scary Thunder squad. Extending Isaiah Joe and

Aaron Wiggins, two solid role-players, to multi-year deals was also the proper move.

What are your predictions for this season? How deep is the Thunder's run, do you think?

The OKC Thunder, barring any devastating injuries, will be the number-one seed in the West once again. Out of every other team in the NBA right now, the Thunder feels like the best squad to go toe-to-toe with the NBA champion Boston Celtics, and I can see both teams reaching the NBA Finals and playing through a long-winded series. I also predict Shai Gilgeous-Alexander to win Most Valuable Player and both Chet Holmgren and Jalen Williams to become certified All-Stars. Without a shadow of a doubt, there is truly no other team as deep in the Western Conference as the Oklahoma City Thunder right now!

How many seasons will pass until they get their ring?

I would love for this year to finally be the year we bring a ring to the 405. Taking any unforeseen setbacks out of the equation, our chance is greater now than ever to finally bring a championship home. The Thunder's current collection of talent rivals that magical 2012 squad, which instilled many cherished memories in the hearts of diehard Thunder fans. I am positive that the Thunder's current iteration can finally climb that hard-fought mountain its past iterations could never conquer. If not this year, then Larry O'Brien (the championship trophy) will belong to Oklahoma City within the next decade.

How does it feel to experience the "Golden Era" of the Thunder? (Again.)

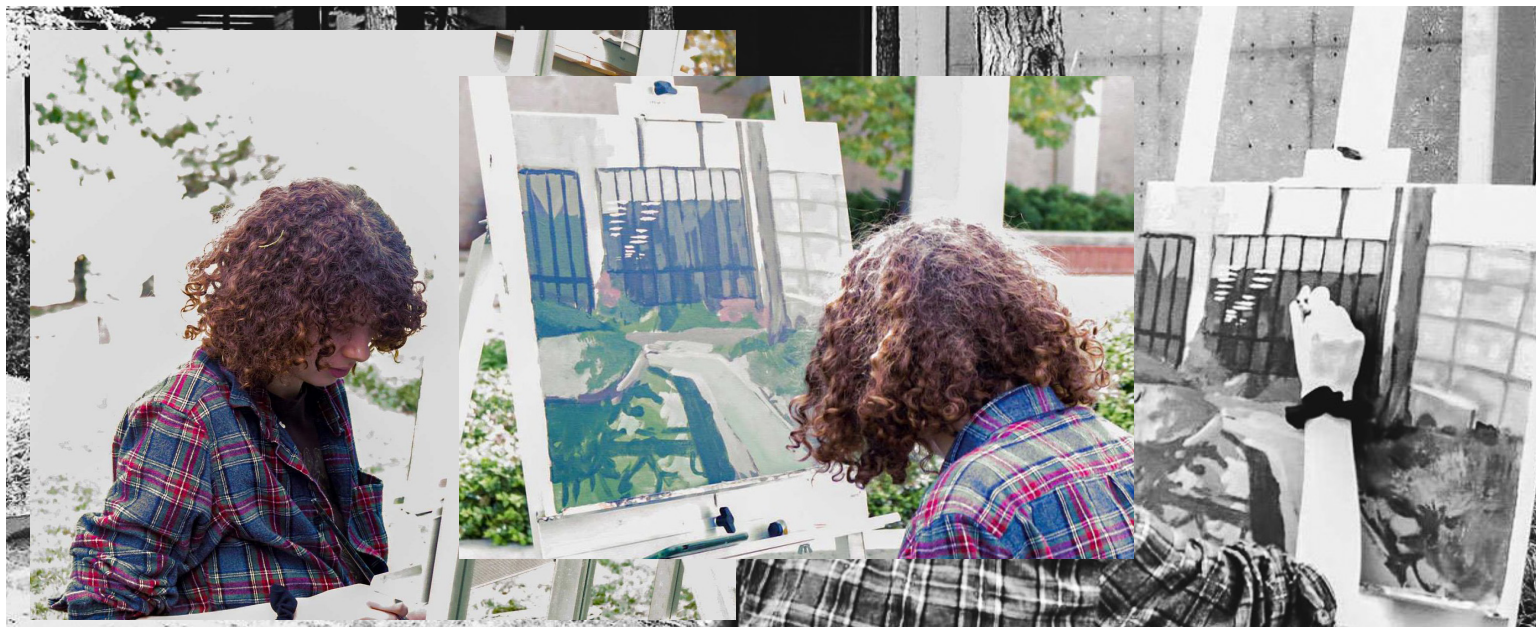
Nostalgic, in a way. It brings back those same feelings I had when I was a kid watching our hometown team dominate other teams with some incredible homegrown talent. Seeing downtown OKC packed with Thunder fans is truly a sight to see, and it really emboldens my love for this city. As a fan, I haven't felt this excited, hopeful and confident about the OKC Thunder since our 2012 championship squad, which consisted of three remarkable future MVPs. I will never, ever take those feelings for granted, as there are many other teams without an ounce of success that spend years in mediocrity. Not to mention, many of these teams lack any semblance of a bright future. (Cough, cough, the LA Clippers.)

Any other final thoughts you would like to share?

I'd just like to say that as Thunder fans, we are truly blessed to have Sam Presti as our general manager. Since trading Paul George away to the Clippers in the fleeting of a lifetime, Presti single-handedly crafted a championship squad in what is probably the quickest rebuild in all of NBA history. Many teams spend years at the bottom of the barrel, making poor draft and salary decisions along the way. Often, incompetent management in the front office derails any forward progression these languishing teams could ever make. Sam Presti, without a question, is the greatest general manager in the entire league.

SNAPSHOT OF CAMPUS LIFE

Photos by Khi Davis



Dex Sisson, a visual arts major at OCCC, takes advantage of the perfect fall weather by enjoying an outdoor painting session.

STUDENTS FLOCK TO FALL JOB FAIR

Photos by Trey Brite



Students seek information from company sponsors during the recent job fair.



An Air Force recruiter carefully explains terms of enlistment.



Students investigate career opportunities at OG&E, one of the many employers that took part in a recent job fair held on the OCCC campus this fall.



Young OCCC-Pathways students, set to complete high school and community college simultaneously, explore job opportunities that will allow them to get a jumpstart on their future careers.