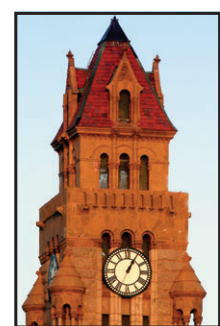




FORCE OF NATURE
Lou Vee Bridges was a big reason Wise County is the 'poster child' nationwide for cooperation on flood control. See page 5A

SHAKY SITUATION
Despite recent rains, low water levels in Lake Bridgeport mean conservation measures will be important this summer. See page 8A

HEADING WEST
Alvord girls hoops coach Rob Schmucker is heading to Panhandle after five stellar years at AHS. See page 1B



WISE COUNTY MESSENGER

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WISE COUNTY

So long, Mr. Clark

Teacher, students grew up together

BY KRISTEN TRIBE
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A boisterous, energetic group of boys invades J.D. Clark's classroom at Bowie High School, lunch bags in hand.

Some begin scarfing down food, while others crack jokes and give their buddies a hard time. Although their enthusiasm is contagious, it's a commotion of energy that's hard to corral.

The door swings wide. "Hey, Clark! Do you know what day it is?" Spenser Meekins shouts as he enters the room.

J.D. is talking with another student and glances in Meekins' direction, grinning. About a minute later he replies.

"No, Spenser. What day is it?" he asks, playing along.

"It's 50-cent corn dog day!" the freshman shouts, shaking a bag of Sonic corn dogs.

The room erupts in laughter.

Lunch with Clark is a "thing" at BHS. Some of these boys have been eating lunch with him every day since they were 12 years old. His classroom has become a safe place for them to ask questions, express themselves or just horse around, but as the school year draws to a close, the boys are left to wonder where they'll eat lunch next year.

Clark is not coming back to BHS.

The teacher, who is also mayor of Chico and the Republican nominee for Wise County judge, said it's a new season in his life. Although it was a difficult decision, he's decided to step away from the classroom to pursue other opportunities, win or lose in November.

"I'm going to miss these guys," he said. "I wish there was a way to do it all, and I just can't."

He's leaving behind more than



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FOND FAREWELL — Bowie High School students give a group hug to teacher J.D. Clark, who will not be returning to BHS next year.

a classroom; he's leaving young men he considers brothers.

'Guy Talk'

Clark, 28, and "the guys" as he calls them, have grown up together.

On Aug. 8, 2008, he graduated from the University of North Texas. Just 10 days later he found himself at the helm of a junior

high classroom.

"I told them the first day, 'You be cool, and I'll be cool,' and we've just kind of stuck with that in every situation," he said.

In his second year at Bowie Junior High, the principal asked teachers to provide an activity for students once a week during the lunch hour, and after some careful consideration and discussions

with administration, Clark decided to start Guy Talk — in addition to interacting with the boys in English, journalism and guitar classes.

Clark said that he felt boys of this age were underserved as far as programs to help them deal with this sometimes tumultuous

See Clark on page 2A

WISE COUNTY

TAPS awarded Medicaid contract

BY BRIAN KNOX
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Medicaid patients who need a ride to their doctor's office could soon see improved service after a local public transportation provider was tentatively awarded a contract by the state.

TAPS (Texoma Area Paratransit System) was recently notified that its application to provide non-emergency medical transportation services was approved by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, pending final contract negotiations.

For local residents, that will mean no longer having to call an out-of-town call center for transportation.

"That is going to be no more," said TAPS CEO Brad Underwood in an informational video published on the TAPS website. "They are going to pick up the phone and they are going to call their local transportation provider, which is TAPS, and we are going to end up scheduling the trip for them, walking them through the eligibility process, determine the best mode of transportation for them and ultimately give them the ride that they need back and forth of the doctor's office."

TAPS has provided Medicaid transport in the past, but this is the first time the service has been directly awarded a Medicaid contract. In previous years, those contracts have gone to private transportation companies, leading to complaints about poor service and

See TAPS on page 9A

WISE COUNTY

Thursday crash injures 1

BY BRIAN KNOX
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A Boyd man was injured in a wreck late Thursday night in south Wise County.

Christian Smith, 21, was flown to Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital in Fort Worth following a one-car rollover on County Road 4698 about a mile east of Farm Road 51 in southern Wise County.

Department of Public Safety Trooper Carson Be-

ning said Smith was westbound on the narrow county road around 10:30 when he swerved to avoid hitting a deer in the roadway. His vehicle rolled at least once before landing upright.

CareFlite was called to transport Smith to the hospital.

Another accident was reported at nearly the same time on U.S. 81/287 near County Road 4421.

The call originally was reported as a driver of a

passenger car going southbound in the northbound lane of U.S. 81/287. The car driver hit an sports utility vehicle, but the SUV driver was not injured.

The car went off the road and the driver attempted to flee officers on foot, but he was detained by officers and later taken to Wise Regional Health System with minor injuries.

His name and any charges were not available as of press time Friday.



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SPRINGTOWN AREA WRECK — A Boyd man was injured when he crashed his car near Springtown Thursday night.

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Clark: Public service calls teacher from classroom

Continued from page 1A

time in their lives. BHS Principal Kelly Shackelford, who was junior high principal at the time, said the idea took away from Clark's personal time, but it was something he felt strongly about.

"They can ask him anything they want, talk about whatever, or just watch a movie and eat lunch," said Shackelford, whose son, Carter, is one of Clark's students. "They'll ask him all kinds of stuff. They ask him all the questions they won't ask their parents."

Clark said it started out just talking about whatever was on the boys' minds.

"Within reason," he said, "which gets pretty sketchy with seventh-grade boys."

Over time he became a trusted confidante, and the boys would come to him outside of Guy Talk to ask a question, vent frustrations or lament a lost love. They started coming for lunch every day.

"We just clicked," Clark said. "Me and a different group of boys, it might not have worked. I think I was put exactly where I needed to be, and I think I was put where they needed me to be as well."

In the fall of 2012, Clark moved to the high school, along with his boys, and the daily lunch tradition continued.

Junior Cooper Cantwell, who first had Clark in seventh grade, said they think of him as an older brother.

"He's young, so we can relate," he said. "And he actually talked to us, he didn't treat us like we were kids."

Junior Lane Shields said Clark has taught them "a lot of things" and not just about world history and theater arts, the classes he was currently teaching.

"We've had him since seventh grade, and he's really cared for the students," he said. "He's more than a teacher. He's a mentor. He's also taught me a lot about how to be a good person, setting goals and what it takes to achieve them."

Junior Dylan Slade, who takes an interest in world events, said Clark has helped him learn how to think independently and form his own opinions on issues instead of simply accepting what's presented to him.

"He can inspire you pretty good," another boy called out.

"He taught me how to be a good man," said another.

The boys show an uncanny ability, at 15, 16 and 17 years old, to express themselves and talk about their emotions.

But it's not long before they throw in a few wisecracks.

"He's not athletic ... at all!" they said, as Slade recounted a dodgeball game in which Clark did not fare well.

Clark said when they found out he was going to ride a steer at this year's PBR event in Wise County, they were worried.

"You broke two ribs playing donkey basketball," he recalled them saying. "This may not be a good idea!"

He said spending time with these boys is humbling. "They're bluntly honest, and they'll call me out on things," he said. "There's no ego-stroking."

"I never guessed when I was 22 that we'd be sitting here having this conversation, and I'd be so sad about leaving these kids."

Letting go

Clark's students have al-



JUST THE GUYS — A group of Bowie High School boys eat lunch with teacher J.D. Clark every day. Some of them include (from left) Chandler Dean, Lane Shields, Spenser Meekins (in the back), Trace Hardee, Dylan Slade, Cooper Cantwell and Zeke Vaughan. Clark is second from right.

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FOR THE BOYS — J.D. Clark sings "What Makes a Man," a song inspired by his students and their lunchtime conversations. See the lyrics below.

Song for his students

Inspired by his students, J.D. Clark wrote the following song in 2011 as a group of his junior high students prepared to enter high school.

"What Makes a Man"

Verse 1

They have so many questions
So much they want to know
They come to me for answers
To show them where to go
When was your first kiss?
When did you start shaving?
What was your very first car?
Why do bad things
Happen to good people and
Do you still wish on stars?

Chorus:

What makes a man who people

will remember?

What makes a man who people
call great?
What makes a man who people
will remember?
What makes a man who people
call great?

Verse 2

I do my best to tell them
The few things I do know
I share my tales of glory
I share mistakes of my own
I watch them grow
Watch them run
Watch them trip and fall
I watch them do the best they
can
Through their struggles,
through their triumphs
They're inspiring me

To try and be a better man

Chorus

Verse 3

Someday they're gonna leave
here
Start journeys of their own
I'll tell them that I love them
And send them down the road
And years from now
They'll be up thinking late at
night
And they'll start to look back
on their youth
I hope they realize not only how
they needed me but
How much I needed them, too

Repeat chorus twice



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WORDS TO LIVE BY — Students marked their favorite Bible verses and gave the book to Clark the night of the March primary election.

ways known he had a passion for public service. In fact, he was first elected mayor during his second year at Bowie ISD, and he said that generated many questions and discussions about people working with-in their communities.

He said as he has campaigned for county judge and become active in other civic groups, he's discussed the process every step of the way.

They've been quick to offer "advice" and have taken a genuine interest in his pursuits.

Slade, Cantwell and a third student, senior Levi Wallace, attended Clark's election watch party the night of the primaries in March. Although it wasn't a typical night out for teens, it was one they wouldn't have missed.

"He's always there for us in everything, so we wanted to do the same for him," Cantwell said.

That night a friend and fellow teacher also presented him with a gift that was to be opened at the end of the evening. To Clark's surprise, it was filled with

heartfelt notes from students and their parents. They shared things they wanted him to know — win or lose.

Also inside the box was a Bible, flagged with dozens of Post-It notes marking students' favorite verses and those they hope he will keep close to his heart.

Although the boys say he teaches them what it means to be a good person and a good citizen, Clark said he feels he became more aware of those qualities by coming to know them.

"I feel like I learned that by working with them," he said. "I'm always trying to be the kind of guy they expect me to be, and they inspire me. They push me, and seeing the world through their eyes and knowing all their situations and about some of their home lives, it's just a constant reminder that we need to do a better job building a better world."

"I'll miss that," he said. "There's a pureness about them about how people should be. Even though they're in high school and make stupid decisions, most of them still think that people should just be good."

Clark said this week was bittersweet.

The students from his first

year of teaching graduated from Bowie High School Friday night. The seniors recognized Clark at an awards ceremony two weeks ago, and Friday morning "the guys" — students from all classifications — presented him with a guitar each of them had signed.

"You were my first kids, and you'll be my last group," he told the seniors at the awards ceremony last week. "You were 12, and I was 22 when we started this, and I think we've all held together pretty well. And we're all better looking, too!" he joked.

"I love you." The junior boys are sad that he'll miss their senior year, but also seem genuinely happy for whatever pursuit he takes on next. "It stinks, but this is his dream," Cantwell said. "This is what he's always wanted to do."

Slade agreed that it would be strange not to have him on campus for their senior year.

"You never know what you have 'til it's gone," he said. "I know that's over-used and cliché, but I think that's how it will feel next year."

Other students had a harder time expressing themselves.

"Ehhh ... he's good to have around," Kevin Stallcup said. In Clark's words, he and Stallcup have butted heads through the years but have a mutual respect for each other and are actually quite close.

Stallcup joked around for a while longer before gathering his backpack to leave. Shortly thereafter, government and economics teacher Candice Mercer popped her head in the room.

"Kevin wanted me to come say nice things about you, J.D.," she said. "He had some nice things ... he just couldn't say them."

Before Clark had even started packing up his classroom, students were laying claim to posters on the wall, books on the shelves and even one-act play props, all seeking a keepsake — a reminder down the road of this teacher, this time in their lives.

This summer, Clark is taking a group of students to Italy, and he and the guys are already planning to meet for lunch once in awhile. Although the boys are left wondering where they'll be without him, Clark is pondering the same thing.

"However our stars lined up, me and that group of guys — I think we were both what the other side needed at that time in our lives," he said. "They've wondered out loud to me what they would be like if we hadn't been together."

"I wonder the same thing about myself."



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