

# THE POINT

GREATER  
OKLAHOMA CITY  
CHAMBER



June 2019

[www.okcchamber.com](http://www.okcchamber.com)

## Chamber government relations team wraps up another successful legislative session

The 2019 Legislative Session began with a bang, with the Legislature immediately focusing its attention on passing legislation to authorize the carrying of firearms (open and concealed) without a permit in the Oklahoma. In 2018, similar legislation was passed by the Legislature, but vetoed by Gov. Fallin. With the election of Gov. Kevin Stitt (who campaigned in support of permitless carry), the Chamber worked to improve and expand the protections afforded business, event hosts, college campuses, as well as public parks and zoos to prohibit firearms and other weapons. That proved to be a successful strategy as permitless carry legislation was overwhelmingly passed by

the House and Senate and, on Feb. 27, became the first bill signed into law by Gov. Stitt.

Compared to previous years, the 2019 session was less dramatic and more orderly. Much of that can be attributed to the optimism surrounding the election of a new governor and a surplus of money to spend. The \$8.1 billion FY 2020 budget, a state record, was approximately \$600 million more than the FY 2019 budget and addressed a number of important needs, including teacher pay raises, increased funding for the classroom, full funding for ODOT's eight-year work

*Continued on page 2*

## Chamber-led delegation heads to Philadelphia to sell Oklahoma's Bioscience sector



Scientists, business leaders, educators and economic development officers from across the state of Oklahoma will take the best of Oklahoma bioscience to Philadelphia in order to garner interest in one of Oklahoma's fastest-growing economic powerhouses at the 2019 BIO International Convention, June 3-6. The delegation will promote the accomplishments of the Oklahoma bioscience sector and meet with potential business partners.

"Oklahoma is fast-becoming a breeding ground for the bioscience industry," said Roy H. Williams, CCE, president and CEO of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber. "There is groundbreaking research being conducted in Oklahoma City and, alongside the opportunities for collaboration and investment, our

*Continued on page 8*

# Legislative Wrap-Up (cont'd from page 1)

plan, increased funding for higher education, increased funding for criminal justice reform and a \$19 million appropriation into the Governor's Quick Action Closing Fund – all Chamber priorities.

For the year, the Chamber was successful in achieving its legislative priorities, including the enactment of a new economic development incentive to address a severe statewide shortage of software/cyber security engineers. Two exceptions to that success are likely headed to the courts to face constitutional challenges: 1) the enactment of pharmacy benefit manager legislation which appears to be preempted by federal law (ERISA); and, 2) legislation changing the state's liquor distribution laws, which appears to violate the state Constitution, as amended by the voters in 2016 under SQ 792.

Specific bills the Chamber advocated include:

## **Legislation to incentivize development of software/cyber engineers**

The Chamber initiated legislation to address an extensive statewide shortage of qualified software and cyber-security engineers. HB 2759 was signed by Gov. Stitt on May 28. HB 2759 will provide a tax credit up to \$2,200 annually for qualifying employees who have received a bachelor's degree (or higher) from an accredited institution, or \$1,800 annually for qualifying employees who have been awarded a certificate from a technology center. To receive the credit, employees must meet strict educational requirements and obtain employment in a qualified industry for a qualified employer. The credit could be claimed no more than seven years and could not be claimed simultaneously by an individual claiming the tax credit for aerospace engineers.

## **Chamber-led "Oklahomans for Business and Property Owners Rights" obtains favorable amendments to permitless carry legislation**

For the third consecutive year, the Chamber led a broad coalition of approximately 50 businesses, associations, law enforcement groups and educational institutions to oppose or amend gun legislation which would: 1) negate the rights of business/property owners to prohibit weapons; 2) jeopardize the rights of event

hosts to ban weapons at high-economic-impact events; 3) eliminate or reduce the ability of colleges and universities to regulate weapons on campus; or 4) lessen the ability of law enforcement to protect the public's safety.

The session began with 46 bills to expand gun rights in Oklahoma, including HB 2597, legislation to authorize carrying a firearm in Oklahoma without a permit. Realizing there was overwhelming support among the Legislature and by the governor to enact this legislation, Oklahomans for Business and Property Owners Rights focused on amending the bill to improve and expand the protections for those business and property owners, event hosts, college campuses, public parks and zoos wanting to prohibit/control firearms. The coalition's efforts were successful.

Beginning Nov. 1, if an individual carrying a firearm is asked to leave a business or event with a firearm and refuses, he/she can be charged with a misdemeanor, fined up to \$500 and serve up to six months in jail.

## **Businesses' ability to maintain/enforce drug-free workplace protected in medical marijuana "unity bill"**

A top Chamber priority was to obtain employer protections related to the passage of SQ 788, which legalized medical marijuana in Oklahoma. HB 2612, often called the "unity bill," authored by House Majority Floor Leader Jon Echols (R-OKC) and Sen. Greg McCortney (R-Ada), contains those protections and was signed into law on by Gov. Stitt on March 14.

HB 2612 creates a legal and regulatory framework for the state's emerging medical marijuana industry. Under the new law, businesses will continue to maintain and enforce a drug-free workplace. Although medical marijuana is now legal in Oklahoma, a business can still: 1) discharge an employee (or not consider a job applicant) if they test positive for marijuana and don't have a medical marijuana license; 2) take action against an employee for possessing or consuming medical marijuana while at work or while fulfilling employment obligations; and, 3) take action against an employee who tests positive for marijuana and works in a safety-sensitive position (heavy equipment operator, school bus operator, etc.).

*Continued on page 9*

# Leadership Notes

## *OKC's air service is really taking off*

With the recent American Airlines announcement that non-stop service to Miami from OKC begins later this year, 24 destination cities now have such flights. Non-stop markets are important to businesses and open the gates for new business opportunities.

The announcement is the result of hard work by the leadership at Will Rogers World Airport and builds on their great success in acquiring non-stop service to “target” markets. These are cities that are most in demand by our travelers, provide increased connectivity in the U.S. and abroad, and are sustainable with passenger traffic. Just five years ago WRWA was pursuing six target markets. With the announcement of American’s Miami service, we are left with one – New York LaGuardia.

Our airport has been successful attracting nonstop service to other target markets: Seattle, Philadelphia, Charlotte, Ronald Reagan Washington National (DCA) and now Miami.

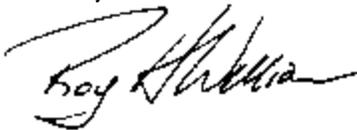
The effort to improve service remains a priority for WRWA and the Chamber. We are always talking with airlines about new non-stops, greater frequency of service and/or larger aircraft to certain markets. As OKC business continues to thrive and the passenger base continues to grow, more target markets will be identified.

When choosing target cities, the traveler demand for a city is evaluated. Business connections that will support the route are taken into account. In the end, a good business case must be made to the airline.

Once a new route is announced the Chamber works in close partnership with the airport to market this new service and ensure its success. The best way for our city to secure more non-stop flights is to fly the routes we have whenever possible – and if your company or industry has a high demand for a certain market, be sure to let us know.

OKC’s growing airport and ever-improving air service are important components of our success. Congratulations to our partners at Will Rogers World Airport!

Sincerely,



Roy H. Williams, CCE  
Chamber President & CEO



Roy H. Williams, CCE  
President & CEO

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President & CEO

## THE POINT!

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## CONTENTS

**4** June Forum focuses on  
quality of life for our youth

**6** Flashback/Fast Forward – OKC's Red  
Earth Festival

**10** Play Ball! It's NCAA  
Women's College World  
Series time in OKC

**11** Oklahoma City ranked #2 Large City  
to Start a Business

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## CALENDAR

### June 11

#### Member Orientation

Time: 3:30 to 5 p.m.  
Location:  
Greater Oklahoma City  
Chamber  
123 Park Ave.  
okcchamber.com/  
orientation

### June 18

#### Sunset Reception

Time: 4 to 6 p.m.  
Location:  
Wyndham Hotel  
2945 N.W. Expressway  
okcchamber.com/  
sunset2019

### June 19

#### Chamber Forum

Time: 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Location:  
Vast  
333 W. Sheridan Ave.  
okcchamber.com/  
juneforum

### July 9

#### Member Orientation

Time: 8:30 to 10:00 a.m.  
Location:  
Greater Oklahoma City  
Chamber  
123 Park Ave.  
okcchamber.com/  
orientation2

### Jul 17

#### Chamber Forum

Time: 11:30 am - 1 pm  
Location:  
Vast  
333 W. Sheridan Ave.  
okcchamber.com/  
julyforum

### Jul 24

#### MEGALUNCH

Time: 11 am - 2 pm  
Location:  
The Skirvin Hilton  
1 Park Ave.  
okcchamber.com/  
megalunch



## June Forum focuses on quality of life for our youth

At the June Chamber Forum, hear from a panel of speakers about how Oklahoma City is investing in its youth in addition to resources available through the traditional education system. From arts to athletics, hear more from the organizations who are improving quality of life for Oklahoma City's children and learn what more our community can do to help to improve outcomes for Oklahoma City's youngest residents.

### Chamber Forum

Wednesday, June 19 | 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Vast, 50th floor, Devon Tower | 333 W Sheridan Ave.

### Panelists

- **Jillian Coker**  
Director, All Access Arts
- **Peter Evans**  
Executive Director, Oklahoma Police Athletic League
- **Kelly Kay**  
President & CEO, YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City
- **Dot Rhyne**  
Development Officer, Fields and Futures

\$35 Chamber members | \$55 nonmembers  
Register at [okcchamber.com/juneforum](http://okcchamber.com/juneforum).

Special thanks to Signature Series Sponsor Cox Business and Series Corporate Sponsor ADG.

## July Chamber Forum Preview

At the Chamber Forum July 17, hear from organizations addressing homelessness in our community. Attendees will learn the factors that impact those experiencing homelessness in Oklahoma City, the current gaps in services and the ways that our community can collaborate to end long-term homelessness.

# InternOKC – a three-week program to help your interns get the most out of their summer



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## INTERN OKC DATES

- **Session 1** - June 12, 2 to 5 p.m.,  
Cox Convention Center
- **Session 2** - June 26, 2 to 5 p.m.,  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum
- **Session 3** - July 10, 2 to 5 p.m.,  
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

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FLASH BACK

FAST FORWARD

## Flashback/Fast Forward – Red Earth Festival

Following the departure of the National Finals Rodeo for Las Vegas in 1985, a group of influential community and tribal leaders realized that something special needed to be done to continue to draw visitors – and attention- to OKC. That group laid the foundation for the Red Earth Festival, highlighting Native dance and art, showcasing ways that the Native American culture makes Oklahoma unique.

The Red Earth Festival is held each year at the Cox Convention Center in downtown OKC and features what has been referred to as “America’s Most Unique Parade” as hundreds of participants, including tribal leaders, princesses, floats, Veterans Groups, and drum groups, parade through downtown Oklahoma City to celebrate the opening of the festival. Native artists travel from across the country to participate in the prestigious Red Earth Juried Art Market. The Red Earth PowWow draws hundreds of dancers who gather to celebrate their cultures and heritage with the world.

Kathleen Marks, one of the members of that original group and a former director at the Greater OKC Convention & Visitors Bureau, remembers it well.

“It was in a lunch meeting with former Chamber President and chairman Ed Cook, former Chamber Board Member Ken Bonds, Lou Kerr and several others when



the idea came up,” she said. “Then-Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Yvonne Kauger was disappointed that Oklahoma’s Native artists had to leave the state to make a living. So, it was decided to find a way to showcase those artists, while also celebrating American Indian Culture.”

Painter Mike Larson said, at the time, “If you go to all the great art shows throughout the Southwest, the greatest number of good artists are from Oklahoma. Why should we go somewhere else? People are going to have to stop saying that art in Oklahoma is second only to Santa Fe.”

With more than 50,000 attendees and an estimated economic impact of \$4 million, that first Red Earth Festival, held in June 1987, was more successful than anyone in that original group would ever have imagined possible.



“It was just a wild time,” Marks remembered.

In 1986, the Oklahoma Legislature appropriated \$30,000 to start the festival. Additional support came from the state tourism and recreation department, the Center of the American Indian, the State Arts Council and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber.

The Chamber committed to raising \$25,000 (which they successfully did), and also loaned an employee, Christy Alcox, who is now a co-director of Red Earth.

Southern Cheyenne traditional chief Harvey Pratt is one of the few artists to exhibit at every Red Earth, and he has vivid memories of the first festival, an outdoor event that featured Florida Seminoles who wrestled alligators in a small swimming pool.

“I always remember that probably more than anything,” Pratt said with a chuckle. “Then, they wouldn’t let them come and bring the alligators back. To me, it was entertaining, and they always had a big crowd.”

But the Guthrie resident said part of the reason for Red Earth’s longevity is that its organizers are willing to change with the times.

“That’s what happens when things fail, is they haven’t adapted to the times. I think that’s really important,” he said. “I think that it lasts because of the quality of the artists and the entertainers that show up and the fact that people want to learn. They want to learn about Native Americans.”

“We have so many great new things in Oklahoma City, from the Thunder to the Boathouse District, but Indian identity is something that we have in Oklahoma that can’t escape us,” Citizen Potawatomi painter Brenda Kennedy Grummer said. “I think Red Earth is a vital part, and it’s one of the top tourism events in the United States. It’s listed in every important event guidebook around the country, so I think we would be lost without it.”

“We’re celebrating our 33rd Festival this summer with thousands of people expected to attend,” said Eric Oesch, Red Earth Director. “Of course, our goal is to continue to produce a first-class event that showcases the cultures that make Oklahoma City and our state special. With the tremendous growth we’re experiencing in downtown Oklahoma City, we’re excited to see what our future holds!”

This year’s parade steps off at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 8 followed by the Grand Entry of Dancers at noon. You can find the schedule of activities at [www.redearth.org/red-earth-festival/festival-schedule/](http://www.redearth.org/red-earth-festival/festival-schedule/).



# Oklahoma's Bioscience (cont'd from page 1)

bioscience community stands head and shoulders above many locations across the nation.”

Representatives from Agric-Bioformatics, ARL BioPharma/DNA Solutions, Ascend BioVentures, Biolytx Pharmaceuticals, COARE Biotechnology, Cytovance Biologics, i2E, Kirrhos Pharmaceuticals, Moleculera Labs, Nature Technology Corporation, Norman Economic Development Coalition, OCA Ventures, OCAST, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Oklahoma State University, OneNet, OU Health Sciences Center, Progentec Diagnostics, Tulsa Regional Chamber, and the University of Oklahoma will comprise the OKBio delegation.

The delegation's efforts will be marketed under the banner of the Oklahoma Bioscience Association (OKBio), where they will help staff a 1,200-square-foot Oklahoma Bioscience Pavilion complete with touch-screen monitors showcasing Oklahoma's bioscience companies. The delegation will answer questions from prospective targets that might be interested in doing

business in Oklahoma. Attendees will also attend networking events and set partnering meetings with business contacts who may be interested in their specific endeavors.

Oklahoma's bioscience sector currently contributes more than \$6.7 billion in economic activity and supports more than 51,000 Oklahoma jobs. The sector also produces annual revenues of more than \$4.1 billion. OKBio represents more than 500 bioscience-related businesses and organizations across the state and is the voice for Oklahoma's dynamic and diverse bioscience community. OKBio works with partners statewide to foster productive bioscience partnerships and facilitate access to investment capital.

While in Philadelphia, the OKBio delegation will host an evening reception for potential clients at ONE North Broad on Tuesday, June 4 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The BIO International Convention attracts attendees from across the globe and the Oklahoma delegation typically connects with more than 4,000 of those attendees.



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# Legislative Wrap-Up (cont'd from page 2)

## Important legislation enacted, but more work remains on criminal justice reform

The final bill passed by the Legislature was HB 1269, which will make the provisions of SQ 780 (reclassification of some drug possession and property crimes as misdemeanors) retroactive. It will do so by establishing an expedited commutation process for those serving felony sentences for crimes that are now misdemeanors. Additionally, the bill creates a simplified process for expungement of criminal records for those with old drug possession and low-level property crimes. It is estimated 500-800 low-level, non-violent inmates will be released from jail/prison as a result of this legislation. HB 1269 was signed into law by Gov. Stitt on May 28.

In addition, the FY 2020 budget will provide \$20 million to reform funding for district attorneys (to make it less dependent on the fines, fees and costs of offenders), \$10 million for mental health and substance

abuse programs, \$1.5 million for the Women in Recovery diversion program and \$1.7 million to expand drug court options for non-violent offenders.

## Teacher pay raise achieved for second consecutive year

For the second year in a row, the Chamber supported efforts to increase teacher pay. The final budget included \$58.9 million for a \$1,200 teacher pay raise. When coupled with the 2018 pay increase, Oklahoma educators will become the highest paid in the region. The Legislature also provided new funding for other education programs expenses: \$74.4 million in new funding will be provided for the classroom that will be added to the school funding formula, \$18.9 million will be provided for funding teacher health care and \$5.5 million will be provided to increase the focus on reading (Reading Sufficiency Act). In total, there is a \$157.9 million increase in funding for K-12 education, making the FY 2020 budget a successful one for common education.

Check out the full legislative wrap-up online at [velocityokc.com/okleg2019](http://velocityokc.com/okleg2019)

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[YMCAOKC.ORG](http://YMCAOKC.ORG)

# OKC hits it out of the park with Women's College World Series

When the first pitch is thrown on May 30 at this year's NCAA Women's College World Series it will be the 29th time the tournament has been held in Oklahoma City. The week-long event brings 70,000 spectators to OKC each year. As part of an agreement to keep the series at the USA Softball Hall of Fame Complex, the venue had to undergo millions of dollars in renovations. A \$27.5 million bond package passed in 2017 is funding those improvements, but it's money well-spent.

"Teams and fans flood local hotels, restaurants and shops during each tournament and their direct economic impact is more than \$15 million," said Mike Carrier, president of the Oklahoma City Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Every game is broadcast on ESPN and, as a result, Oklahoma City is mentioned multiple times during each game to a national audience, in addition to broadcasting shots of the Adventure District, the downtown skyline, the city's many amenities and other images indicative of OKC's renaissance.

According to Carrier, "You can't buy that kind of positive exposure."

The city of Oklahoma City worked out a long-term agreement with the NCAA Women's College World Series, lasting through 2035.

In exchange for the long-term agreement, the NCAA wanted improvements to the stadium to better accommodate the athletes, media and improve the fan experience.

Additional bathrooms, a new press box and complete demolition of the existing facade are also part of the effort and will be completed just in time for this year's event.

While renovations at Hall of Fame Stadium have been ongoing for several years, those improvements focused on behind-the-scenes player-centric areas. Expanded meeting space. Improved dugouts. Air-conditioned locker rooms.

The NCAA demanded such improvements if Oklahoma City wanted to keep the WCWS long term, but really, such things were desperately needed for an event as big as this.

The changes fans will notice are the most significant outward alterations to USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium thus far.

The old pressbox was bulldozed to make way for a new structure. Now stands a two-story pressbox. The second level is dedicated almost solely to ESPN with a broadcast booth and an area where on-air talent can demonstrate skills in front



of a green screen. Media will also have expanded areas under the stadium, including an interview room and work room.

While the pressbox is bigger, one part of the old structure is noticeably absent. The overhang that used to shade hundreds of seats behind home plate is gone, though more areas of the concourse will be shaded for fans seeking a respite from the sun.

Another big change associated with the new pressbox is the stadium entrance. There are new gates, box offices and landscaping.

Most stadium improvements in this round of renovations focus on the media, but one enhancement fans will notice is an additional big screen. A 17-by-10-foot screen is being added above the seating area on the first-base side, giving fans in the outfield bleachers a view of replays and videos.

Only one phase of the current renovations remains – but it will be the biggest of them all.

An upper deck will be built before the 2020 Women's College World Series, adding 4,000 permanent seats and expanding the capacity to 9,000. With the temporary outfield bleachers brought in for the WCWS, seating for that event will exceed 12,000.

Fans who attend the WCWS this year can get an idea of where the new deck will be. Some of the steel beams that will hold the decks have already been placed near the new pressbox. The beams closer to the field show the slope of the front section of the upper deck, which will be separated from a back section by a walkway. The beams farther back represent the highest point of the new construction.

Once the upper deck is added, it will keep the WCWS in Oklahoma City for years to come.

# ECONOMIC INDICATORS

## Oklahoma City Ranked #2 Large City to Start a Business

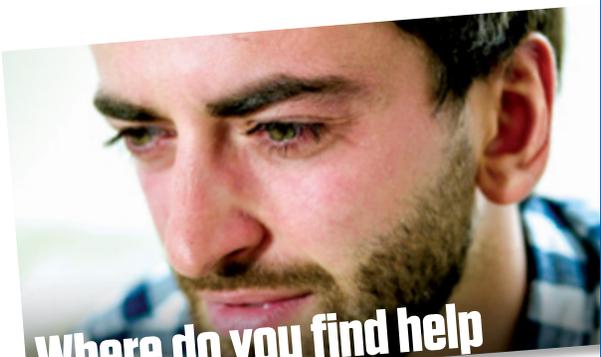
### Best Large Cities to Start a Business

| Rank     | City                     | Total Score  | Business Environment Rank | Access to Resources Rank | Business Cost Rank |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1        | Orlando, FL              | 60.93        | 6                         | 50                       | 17                 |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Oklahoma City, OK</b> | <b>60.73</b> | <b>12</b>                 | <b>40</b>                | <b>10</b>          |
| 3        | Miami, FL                | 60.48        | 2                         | 45                       | 30                 |
| 4        | Austin, TX               | 60.05        | 1                         | 5                        | 83                 |
| 5        | Tampa, FL                | 59.29        | 20                        | 39                       | 16                 |
| 6        | Charlotte, NC            | 59.03        | 18                        | 28                       | 29                 |
| 7        | Durham, NC               | 58.86        | 39                        | 11                       | 18                 |
| 8        | Raleigh, NC              | 58.61        | 40                        | 3                        | 23                 |
| 9        | Atlanta, GA              | 58.13        | 26                        | 19                       | 27                 |
| 10       | Denver, CO               | 58.03        | 14                        | 18                       | 59                 |

Source: WalletHub. A rank of 1 is most favorable.

For comprehensive Economic Indicators and Regional Data, [www.greateroklahomacity.com/economicindicators](http://www.greateroklahomacity.com/economicindicators) or contact Eric Long, Research Economist – 297-8976; [elong@okcchamber.com](mailto:elong@okcchamber.com)

- WalletHub compared 100 of the largest cities in the United States across 19 metrics, including Business Environment, Access to Resources and Business Cost.
- Oklahoma City ranked second in the nation with an index score of 60.73, primarily due to its low business costs and great business environment.
- Oklahoma City was ranked in the top 5 for the fourth year in a row, making it the most consistently listed city in the top five for Best Cities to Start a Business (followed by cities appearing twice in the four-time rankings).



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Businesses who join the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber are part of the largest coalition of businesses in the state and make the Chamber's work in the community possible. Each member level is identified on the listing below.

## EMERGING LEADER

### NextEra Energy Resources

*Renewable Energy*  
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700 Universe Blvd.  
Juno Beach, FL 33408  
www.nexteraenergy.com

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P.O. Box 4999  
Tulsa, OK 74159  
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Oklahoma City, OK 73114



**One Focus Medical**  
3815 S. Boulevard  
Edmond, OK 73013



**Del Taco**  
6629 N.W. Expressway  
Oklahoma City, OK 73132



**Young Life Chiropractic**  
600 NW 23<sup>rd</sup> St., Suite 102  
Oklahoma City, OK 73103



**OSSO Sports & Social /  
Lighthouse Beach Bar**  
3330 NW 112<sup>th</sup> Terrace  
Oklahoma City, OK 73120



**Orthopedic Spine Associates**  
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Oklahoma City, OK 73134



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Oklahoma City, OK 73162



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Oklahoma City, OK 73118



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LOOK INSIDE!

- 4 June Forum focuses on quality of life for our youth
- 6 Flashback/Fast Forward – OKC’s Red Earth Festival
- 10 Play Ball! It’s NCAA Women’s College World Series time in OKC
- 11 Oklahoma City ranked #2 Large City to Start a Business

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