

WINDS OF CHANGE

A tornado 25 years ago brought a new look to Morris. **Local A17**



HE HEARS YOU

Documentary of a formerly deaf man. **Scene D1**



MOTOR CITY MAN

The Detroit Lions pick OSU's Brandon Pettigrew in the first round of the NFL draft. **Sports B1**

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Mexican cartels already in state

They are the "No. 1 threat" to Oklahoma, a narcotics official says.

BY RON JACKSON
The Oklahoman

Crossing a Mexican drug cartel usually comes with a price — death.

On the U.S.-Mexico border, that price is being paid daily with an endless stream of execution-style slayings in a war to control drug routes to the north.

Editor's Note:

This article sheds light on the violent and shadowy underworld of the Mexican drug cartels in Oklahoma. In order to tell the most accurate story, The Oklahoman has relied on a variety of state and federal court records as well as the eyewitness accounts of two undercover agents with the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Control. The identities of the two agents have been withheld for their safety.

As Mexican officials crack down on these cartels, violence spreads. Lives are merely the cost of doing business, and since 2007 the international press has documented more than 7,400 drug war-related murders on the border.

Police are gunned down in public squares. Failed drug smugglers are tortured to death and bound from head to toe in duct tape. Enemies are beheaded.

U.S. authorities fear the violence is creeping across the border. Yet the truth is that Mexican drug cartels are already entrenched in Oklahoma, casting an ominous shadow on the future of our cities and rural communities.

"Oklahoma's No. 1 threat is the Mexican drug cartels," said Darrell

SEE CARTEL A4

Amputee to receive \$2.7 million

A two-week jail confinement led to the loss of both legs.

BY DAVID HARPER
World Staff Writer

Who wants to be a millionaire, if it means losing your legs in the process?

That is what is happening to Sapulpan Russell "Rusty" Mounger.

Mounger has reached a \$2.7 million settlement in a federal lawsuit he filed in February 2008 connected to his 2007 stay in the Creek County Jail. The two-week jail stint ended up costing him both of his legs when an infection caused by blood clots progressed to the point that doctors had no choice but to amputate.

Know this up front: Mounger was no angel. He was being held on charges of manufacturing and possessing drugs. He also was charged with assault and battery on a police

SEE LEGS A10

State's wildfire season busy

Traditionally, it should end soon, but some fire officials say conditions could keep it going longer.

BY GAVIN OFF
World Data Editor

As Oklahoma's wildfire season winds down, central and western portions of the state continue to feel the effects of a busy season and several recent large-scale blazes.

Eastern Oklahoma, on the other hand, escaped with an average season, said Mark Goeller, the as-

sistant director of the Oklahoma Division of Forestry.

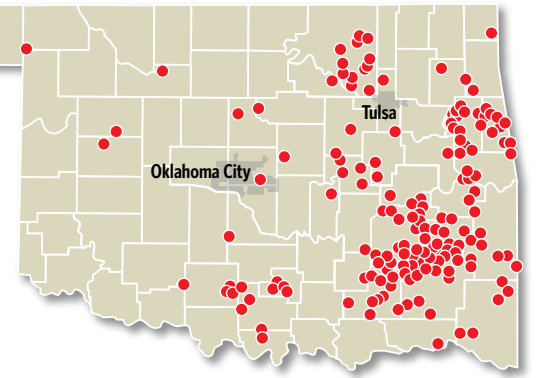
Although Oklahoma's wildfire season typically begins with the first freeze and ends when trees and pastures turn green, officials said drought and high winds could keep much of the state on alert.

Mike Karlin, the assistant fire

SEE FIRES A7

Oklahoma wildfires in 2009

Wildfires reported to the National Interagency Fire Center



Source: National Interagency Fire Center

Tulsa World

A GIFT FROM QUIKTRIP: RIVER PARKS PLAZA

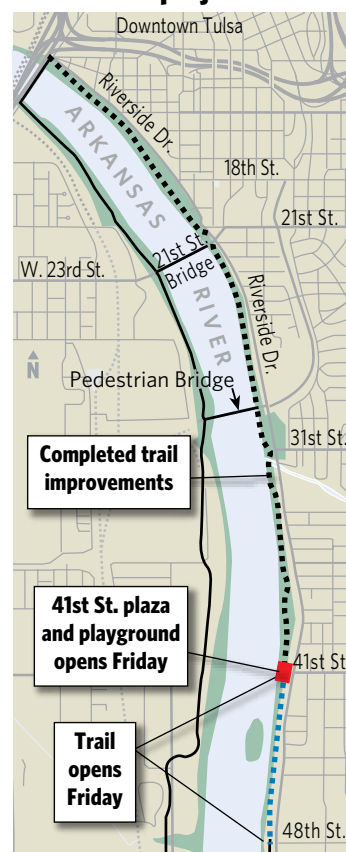
Play as you go



Formal opening

What: New \$2.8 million "gathering spot" paid for by QuikTrip and other donors at 41st Street Plaza in River Parks.
When: 10:30 a.m. Friday
Where: 41st Street and Riverside Drive

River Parks projects done



Tulsa World

Heather Hogan, 4, walks through a fountain at the 41st Street Plaza at River Parks on Saturday. The plaza's formal opening is Friday. Photos by MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World

Innovative family area called 'cutting edge'

BY P.J. LASSEK
World Staff Writer

Another milestone in the transformation of River Parks will be reached Friday with the opening of the park's first new "gathering spot" — the 41st Street Plaza.

The innovative outdoor family area, which replaced an old playground and shelter, is a gift from QuikTrip Corp. to commemorate the company's 50th anniversary, celebrated in September.

"We couldn't think of a better way to give back to the city than through this project for River Parks," said Chet Cadieux, presi-

dent of QuikTrip.

"Tulsa has been our home and has supported our stores for 50 years. It's great that we can return the favor through the new plaza and playground," he said.

The formal opening for the \$2.8 million project is set for 10:30 a.m. Friday, following a dedication ceremony.

Enhancing River Parks has been a Cadieux family passion that began with Chet's father, Chester Cadieux, a former longtime member of River Parks Authority who's been instrumental in the park's growth since 1983. Chet

SEE PLAZA A5



Florencio Salas and Fafael Corral work on the 41st Street Plaza in River Parks on Saturday.

High 78, Low 65

Windy, showers and thunderstorms



Complete weather on D10

Action Line.....E5
Ask Amy.....D7
Books.....G4,5
Celebrations.....D5
Crosswords.....G5
Editorial.....G6
Horoscope.....C11
Movies.....D8
Obituaries.....A18
Outdoors.....B8
Tech.....E4
Travel.....D9



Money maker

The BOK Center's latest financial figures are released.

Tomorrow in News

Sunday - \$2.00



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CARTEL:

Some illegal drugs have been shipped via the mail and FedEx.

FROM A4

issued for 53 defendants in a methamphetamine and marijuana ring connected to Alonzo Esceveda, a known Juarez Cartel member. The warrants named two Mexican nationals as the ring's higher-ranking smugglers: Jesus Manuel Torres and Carlos Roberto Salinas.

Torres and Salinas were later found executed in Ciudad Juarez, their bodies wrapped from head to toe in duct tape. Mexican authorities reported that the two had been tortured.

"Somebody was upset they lost their dope," Agent M.S. said.

In 2006, state agents nabbed Jose Gabriel Armentariz, Daniel Munoz and Juan Castillo as they passed through Oklahoma City with \$1.6 million worth of cocaine. Court records indicate the shipment originated in Mexico, passed through Las Cruces, N.M., and was destined for distribution in Oklahoma City and North Carolina. Armentariz posted bail and is a fugitive.

In 2007, state and federal agents arrested 33 suspects in Pittsburg County in what District Attorney Jim Miller called the largest meth ring he had ever encountered. Investigators learned the drugs were being shipped from "fiesta labs" in Mexico.

Smugglers have been creative. State agents cracked a case in 2005 in which illegal immigrant Edgar Ortega-Zaleta of Heavener had been receiving five-pound packages of methamphetamine via the mail. Suppliers in Mexico crossed the border and used FedEx in McAllen, Texas, to ship the drugs.

Ortega-Zaleta, 37, is serving time in federal prison for his drug-trafficking conviction. His scheduled release date is in 2022.

"We've seen an increase in the amount of trafficking by

the Mexican drug cartels," said Bret Burns, Grady County's district attorney. "We're seeing a lot of mid-level players, and they're reaching out into our rural counties and towns. What's hard for our rural law enforcement is they (the traffickers) speak Spanish, and they run in very close-knit groups that stay to themselves."

Burns encountered such a scenario in January when he charged illegal immigrant Ramon Garcia-Rodriguez with five counts of drug distribution and trafficking. Court records show a confidential informant bought drugs from Garcia-Rodriguez on several occasions at his Chickasha meat market.

"Ramon was running the whole operation out of his meat shop," Burns said. "It's all on video. You can see people standing in line for meat while others are stepping up to buy their drugs. Amazing."

Documents seized at the meat shop show names of alleged cartel members, Burns said. As for Garcia-Rodriguez, he posted \$100,000 bail — much to Burns' dismay — and reportedly fled to Mexico. He, too, remains a fugitive.

Burns said he wonders if the next stage in the war against the Mexican drug cartels is violence on our own streets.

The concern isn't unfounded. Phoenix police documented 368 cartel-related kidnappings last year. In some cases, the kidnapers sent the victim's family a severed finger to expedite a ransom transaction.

"I'm alarmed knowing the Mexican drug cartels are so organized," Burns said. "They also have very few rules they go by regarding law enforcement. Even the Italian Mafia had boundaries: You try your case, but you don't go after police and DAs."

"The Mexican drug cartels have no boundaries, and law enforcement should be concerned."

Agent M.S. is fully aware of the escalating danger in Oklahoma. Yet he is a realist.

"We do what we can do," he said. "I just know one thing: We need more agents."

rjackson@opubco.com

PLAZA:

The area's focal point is the playground featuring Kompan equipment.

FROM A1

Cadieaux currently serves on the authority.

Two years in the making, the signature playground and plaza is designed to be an innovative outdoor environment with unique, flexible space for children to play, special events and gatherings for all ages.

"River Parks is extremely fortunate to have QuikTrip as a partner in improving the quality of life for Tulsa," said Matt Meyer, the River Parks Authority's executive director.

Meyer said QuikTrip also has pledged \$50,000 a year to cover maintenance costs for the plaza area.

Keith Franklin, the president of LandPlan Consultants, which is overseeing the project, said it provides family activities unlike any other park area in the city.

"It's cutting edge and sets the bar high as far as gathering spots," Franklin said.

Private-public partner-



Katelyn Callahan, 7, plays at the 41st Street Plaza at River Parks on Saturday. MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World

ships are talked about a lot, he said, but what makes this one different is that "QuikTrip's creative ideas weren't limited by the ability to provide them, maintain them or deliver them."

The project is expected to be about 98 percent complete by Friday, weather permitting, Franklin said. The fountains, plaza area, playground and landscaping will be ready for public use, he said.

The focal point of the area is the playground featuring Kompan equipment — known for its blend of modern design that excites,

inspires and challenges its users. The playground, divided into age-appropriate equipment, can accommodate up to 118 children.

An interactive children's fountain will spew jets of water to varying heights. Other water features include raised canal play areas with a set of cascading steps, a lazy river, a bubbler table and arched water jets.

Surrounding portions of the playground are pyramid berms covered with synthetic turf that provide not only unusual play areas but casual seating.

The new plaza area has

paved open space, a main fountain accented with special lighting, cafe-style seating with Wi-Fi access, night lights and tree planters. The structures housing an open-sided shelter and rest rooms within the plaza are a craftsman architectural style.

Riverbank stabilization has opened the view to the Arkansas River throughout the area, and an overlook will serve as a stage.

The parking lot also has been improved with new lighting and drainage.

QuikTrip is paying for more than half of the project. The rest of the cost is being covered by other donors including the George Kaiser Foundation. The builder is Crossland Construction.

The foundation also has donated \$12.4 million to River Parks for the trail improvements that began in the fall of 2007. The trail improvements ultimately will enlarge and enhance the trail from 11th to 71st streets along both sides of the river.

The trail between 39th and 48th streets will also open Friday. The completed trail improvements will stretch between 11th and 48th streets.

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