

Blackwell student named to ACU Dean's Honor Roll

Jason Campbell of Blackwell was named to the Abilene Christian University Spring 2023 Dean's Honor Roll. Campbell is a junior majoring in Bible and Ministry. Campbell was among more

than 1,200 students named to the Spring 2023 Dean's Honor Roll. To qualify for the Dean's Honor Roll, students must be registered for 12 or more credit hours and earn a GPA of 3.6 or higher.

through education before I returned, but for others, it is permanent.

My friend Seth Wieck is a talented author of prose and poetry. He hails from Umbarger but lives in the Umbarger suburb of Amarillo. Recently, he penned an open letter to the newly-elected mayor of Amarillo. It is kind and thoughtful, the sort of thing written by a person who truly cares for a place and its leaders. I am the mayor of Stamford, not Amarillo, but Seth's words stirred my own heart as if they were addressed only to me. In his letter, he recounted the desire of Caesar August to create a mythology to inspire and unify the Roman people. This ultimately led to the poet Virgil responding to the call and penning "The Aenid." Seth wrote this and I have been thinking about it ever since:

But he also understood the Romans needed to want to be Romans. They needed to be proud of their history and where they came from. They also needed to have an idea about who they were as a people. What were the virtues that made them Roman? This wasn't something that could be forced upon citizens. This needed to be given as a gift, something in which they could take pride, and something they found beautiful.

Which brings me back to high school graduation. As our graduates step off into the future, do they want to be from here? Wherever "here" is for

you, dear reader, are your high school graduates proud of where they come from? Are they proud of the virtues that are associated with their nativity to that place?

Over the decades, we have made it very hard for our young people to answer these questions in the affirmative. The winds of agricultural mechanization and general suburbanization have left fewer of us able to say we are "from" small places. The noxious "get big or get out" push in American agriculture policy ensured that fewer families had a farm to pass on. Other families intentionally chose not to pass on the legacy or they encouraged their children to seek a life apart from what was becoming an increasingly difficult business. Not every family in a town like Stamford was a farm family, but many families were and as the farms declined, so did the fortunes of the storekeepers, office workers, retailers, teachers, and many others whose livelihoods were indirectly tied to a strong farm economy, whether they realized it or not. As their children finished school, many of them started families elsewhere. Their own children had family roots "back home," but it was never home to them. Their home was somewhere else altogether.

This is a two-week essay because I couldn't remotely fit all my thoughts into my weekly word count. Next week: what does it mean to WANT to be from a place? Caesar Augustus and Virgil offer an insight that rural America desperately needs to consider.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to West of 98 wherever podcasts are found.

Milking robots are revolutionizing Texas dairy farms

By Shelby Shank
TFB Field Editor

On Scott Vieth's dairy farm in Windthorst, technology is key.

His cows are milked by a robot, ushering in a new era for dairy production for this third-generation dairy farmer.

Vieth made the decision in 2022 to switch to robotic milkers. His dairy is one of only six robotic dairies in the state, and most of them can be found in the Windthorst area.

"I started using the robots because my old parlor was getting old and outdated. I wanted to become more innovated and use the technology being used in the dairy industry," Vieth said. "Genetics are a big thing for me, and I wanted to get the full genetic potential out of my cows. The robots give me the best option for that."

In his old parlor, Vieth was reaching 80 pounds of energy-corrected milk, and since his switch to the robotic milkers, Vieth's cows are now averaging 95 pounds of energy-corrected milk a day.

Vieth installed nine Lely A5 robots underneath a climate controlled 100,000 square-foot tunnel vent barn. The climate-controlled barn creates a cooler environment for the cows during the hot Texas summers.

The robots also capture data through rumination collars the cows wear daily. The collars are essential for the robotic milkers because they communicate with the robot about the cow being milked. Like a FitBit, the robot reads the cow's collar and provides the farmer with information about the cow, such as heat detection, animal health and how much milk the cow is producing.

"The robotic milker reads the collars as the cows come in to be milked, and if a cow has been in there in less than four hours, it automatically kicks them out because it is too soon for the cow to be milked again," Vieth said. "What drives the cows to the robots are feed pellets I call cow candy. Depending on how much milk the cow produces, the robot determines the amount of pellets the cow is allowed to have. The cows love being in the robot for this reason."

The robotic milkers work 24 hours a day, allowing the cows to come in as they please and as often as they want. Every cow gets milked at least twice a day and sometimes up to five times a day if the cow prefers.

Each robot can handle 60 cows and has allowed Vieth to grow his farm from 450 cows to 550 with one less employee.

The technology and willingness to adapt has allowed Vieth to maximize the efficiency of his farm.

"I think people hear machines or robots and they think there is a disconnect between the person and the animal. There isn't. It's taking on the best care for the animals," Vieth said. "The cows really like the robots because they're never stressed with their milk. If they're coming in three or four times a day, then their bags are not stressed out like they normally would if you're milking twice a day in a traditional parlor."

The milking process begins when the cow enters the robotic milker, and their collar is read.

The robot drops the amount of feed the cow is allotted. The cow's teats are cleaned with a brush and disinfectant before being milked.

A laser reads the cow's teat placement before the robot connects to the cow's teats and



Needing to Want to be From Here

By James M. Decker

We are wrapping up high school graduation season in America. Across the land, thousands of students will say goodbye to 12 years of education and move into their next phase of life.

In the past, I have written that in small towns, the "new year" cycle revolves around a school calendar more than the Gregorian calendar. Sure, the year changes on January 1, but not much else does. A community experiences real change as a school year commences. New faces move to town. Old faces move away. New friendships and relationships are built, while others change forever. Classmates move away, friends transition from one school building to another, and teachers retire. For some high school graduates, their time as a resident of a community comes to an end. For some like myself, it was only a temporary sojourn

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2019 Year in Review Issue

By Melissa McCab... school activities... We are entering a new year... We wish you a very Merry Christmas and Happy & Prosperous New Year!

WEEK AT A GLANCE

Friday, December 21	High School Basketball
Saturday, December 22	Robert Lee City Hall
Sunday, December 23	Robert Lee City Hall

Saluting the Robert Lee High School Class of 2020



Saluting the Robert Lee High School Class of 2020



Robert Lee Junior High School Class of 2020



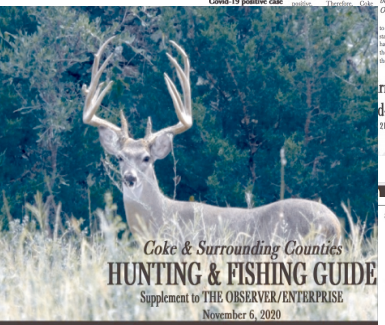
Blackwell High School Class of 2020



Blackwell Junior High School Class of 2020



Blackwell Senior High School Class of 2020



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