

# BUZZ

March 2026



**UNDERWOOD LAW** appointed **STEPHANIE JAMES** as president of the firm, marking a historic milestone as she becomes the first female president in the firm's 114-year history. Stephanie brings extensive experience, strong leadership, and a deep commitment to client service to her new role. Throughout her career at the firm, she has consistently demonstrated

the ability to deliver exceptional results while leading with integrity and purpose. Stephanie James focuses her practice on litigation, including healthcare litigation, nonsubscriber litigation, personal injury litigation, commercial litigation, construction disputes, employment disputes, and general civil litigation. She represents healthcare providers, long-term care and skilled nursing facilities, hospitals and other healthcare-related companies in non-subscriber, employment, contract, and medical negligence disputes. She counsels and defends employers on unemployment, discrimination, retaliation and wrongful termination claims. Stephanie routinely prosecutes and defends businesses in contract, insurance, unfair competition, and numerous other types of commercial litigation. Gavin Gadberry, former President of Underwood Law Firm and attorney in the firm's Amarillo office said, "Stephanie's professional accomplishments are only part of what will make her a great president. She has found balance in both her career and her family, with a cherished husband and two beautiful children. I recently enjoyed hearing her proudly talk about her husband, Ty, who was named Caprock High School Teacher of the Year. Her values make her a truly special person. Stephanie is the full package."

**TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER (TTUHSC)** President **LORI RICE-SPEARMAN, PH.D.**; **BRIAN WEIS, M.D.**, regional dean of the TTUHSC School of Medicine, and **SHANNON HERRICK, M.D.**, regional chair of pediatrics for the TTUHSC School of Medicine, accepted a check from **WILLIAM WARE**, president of **AMARILLO NATIONAL BANK**. The investment will help close critical gaps in specialty care and will allow **TEXAS TECH PHYSICIANS PEDIATRICS** in Amarillo to respond to the evolving needs of families in the region for years to come. The \$1 million gift will support the **TTUHSC PEDIATRIC FUND FOR EXCELLENCE**, a \$10 million fundraising initiative designed to close critical gaps in pediatric specialty care and strengthen services provided by Texas Tech Physicians Pediatrics in Amarillo. "Having a child who needs pediatric specialty care is incredibly stressful for families, especially when that care requires long-distance travel," said Shannon Herrick, M.D., regional chair of pediatrics at TTUHSC. "At Texas Tech Physicians Pediatrics, our goal is to keep families local for their children's health care whenever possible." Texas Tech Physicians Pediatrics plays a vital role in the region's health care landscape. Physicians, mid-level providers, residents and nurses provided more than 36,600 outpatient visits last year. The practice

cared for more than 9,200 general pediatric patients and more than 6,600 specialty clinic patients. Clinic estimates indicate that one in five children in Amarillo receives care through Texas Tech Physicians Pediatrics.



Amanda F. Hobbs



Eric J. Matthews

**BROWN & FORTUNATO** announced the promotion of two attorneys to Shareholder. **AMANDA F. HOBBS** and **ERIC J. MATTHEWS** are Shareholders effective this year. Amanda Hobbs is a member of the Healthcare group at B&F and is based in Dallas. She specializes in healthcare privacy and compliance matters, advising clients on HIPAA, hospital operations, provider and facility licensing, and Stark and Anti-Kickback laws. Amanda has experience in healthcare litigation, defending physicians and other providers in medical malpractice cases. **ERIC MATTHEWS** is based in Amarillo and practices in the firm's Corporate Group. He advises business owners, executives, and investors on mergers and acquisitions, corporate transactions, and real estate deals.

His practice spans multiple industries, with a particular focus on healthcare transactions involving medical practices, pharmacies and other providers.



**FIRSTBANK SOUTHWEST (FBSW)** announced the promotion of **CAYLA MAESTAS, CPA**, to Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President, a strategic leadership move supporting the bank's continued growth and long-term vision. A Texas Panhandle native, Maestas joined FirstBank Southwest in 2018, and was promoted to Controller in 2023. As CFO, she will oversee the bank's financial strategy and stewardship as the organization continues to expand. **ANDY MARSHALL** is FBSW President and Chief Executive Officer. Maestas brings more than 10 years of banking and accounting experience to the position. She began her career in public accounting and holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting and a Master of Science in Accounting from Texas Tech University. She is a Certified Public Accountant and a graduate of the Graduate School of Banking at Colorado (2023). The transition follows decades of financial leadership by **JERRY DON WILLIAMS**, who previously served as Chief Financial Officer and now continues in his role as Chief Operating Officer, as well as Director and Executive Vice President of FirstBank Southwest and its parent company, FirstPerryton Bancorp, Inc.

The **TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER (TTUHSC)** has received Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) approval to launch a **COMPLEX GENERAL SURGICAL ONCOLOGY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM** in collaboration with UMC Health System, making it one of only 43 institutions in the United States and Canada to offer the program. According to a study, "The Education of the Cancer Surgical Workforce: Gaps, Priorities and Strategies," in the Journal of Surgical Oncology, the estimated number of cancer cases requiring surgery will increase by 5 million procedures between 2018 and 2040, representing a 52% increase based on cancer incidence. The study also estimates that 58% of newly diagnosed cancer patients will require surgery during their treatment. TTUHSC is collaborating with **THE JOHN WAYNE CANCER FOUNDATION** and has established **THE BIG**

**CURE ENDOWMENT**, which supports the university's efforts to reduce cancer incidence and increase survivability of people in rural and underserved areas. "Just before my father passed, he asked us to use his name to help fight cancer," said **ETHAN WAYNE**, director of the John Wayne Cancer Foundation. "We're honored to be able to stand up here in partnership with Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center to bring a new standard of care to the men and women of West Texas." One of the first Big Cure initiatives focuses on recruiting surgical oncologists. "By providing critical funding for advanced education, recruitment and research opportunities, these investments help attract talented surgeons to rural regions like those we serve. TTUHSC serves 121 counties in the state where the cancer incidence rate is 8% to 12% higher than the national occurrence for all types of cancer. **TYLER MOUW, M.D.**, will serve as the fellowship program director under the Division of Surgical Oncology. He will work alongside TTUHSC faculty members **KARLA DANIELE, M.D.**, **JOHN KIDWELL, M.D.**, **MOHAMAD SIDANI, M.D.**, and **EDWIN ONKENDI, MB, CHB**, as the Department of Surgery collaborates across specialties to provide comprehensive, patient-centered treatment.



Rafay Nadeem

**BROWN & FORTUNATO** welcomed three new attorneys to the firm. **RAFAY NADEEM** joined the firm's corporate group. Raf represents clients in mergers and acquisitions, entity formations, real estate, and finance, ensuring transactions move forward seamlessly and client goals are achieved. Raf earned his law degree this year from the University of Iowa College of Law, where he served as Articles Editor for the *Journal of Corporation Law* and published a note on cryptocurrency-related bankruptcies. He also worked as a research assistant focusing on



Grace Ansaah

international and comparative law. Raf earned his B.A. from McMaster University in 2022. **GRACE ANSAH** is a member of the firm's corporate group where she advises businesses, investors, and entrepreneurs on a full range of corporate matters, with a focus on domestic and cross-border mergers and acquisitions. Grace provides ongoing counsel on corporate governance, commercial agreements, entity formation, and business planning for companies from early-stage ventures to established enterprises. Grace is admitted to the New York State Bar and in 2017 earned an LL.M (Master of Laws) from Harvard Law School and a QCL (Qualifying Certificate in Law) in 2015 from Ghana School of Law. Grace earned an LL.B (Bachelor of Laws) from KNUST, Ghana in 2012. She is a recipient of the Mensah Sarbah Memorial Prize for Best Student and has been recognized among the National Black Lawyers Top 40 Under 40 in New York. **JACQUELINE NIBA** is a member of B&F's litigation team. Jacqueline brings experience in business, employment, and healthcare litigation, as well as consumer and business debt matters. Her background includes

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Jacqueline Niba

complex litigation involving pharmaceutical patent disputes, DOJ investigations, shareholder disputes, defense contractor relator cases, and oil and gas litigation. Originally from Cameroon, Central Africa, Jacqueline is licensed to practice in Texas and New York. She earned her J.D. from American University Washington College of Law in 2015 and her B.A. in International Relations and Economics, with a minor in French, from the University of Delaware in 2007.



After years of planning, coordinating, and fundraising, the **TEXAS PANHANDLE FIRST RESPONDERS MEMORIAL** reached a major milestone as ground was broken on the panhandle-wide project. Surrounded by donors and elected officials, the Board of Directors and First Responder Advisory Board for the Friends of AJ Swope turned dirt, signifying the beginning of construction. **TODD BECKUM**, former Amarillo Police Officer and Board President for the **FRIENDS OF AJ SWOPE**, said "This groundbreaking symbolizes our community's shared commitment to providing our region's first responders with unwavering support, particularly those who have lost their lives in service to others." The Memorial will honor law enforcement officers, firefighters and emergency medical services personnel from the top 26 counties of the Texas Panhandle who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Friends of AJ Swope, the Texas non-profit spearheading the project, has partnered with Turner LandArchitects, Sims + Architects, and Southwest General Contractors to complete the Memorial, which has an expected completion date of October 2026.

After nearly a decade of time-consuming and in-depth processes, the **CAPROCK STATE PARK** announced that they have earned their prestigious **INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY PARK** certification designating them a Bortle 2 International State Park. The Bortle scale measure light pollution on a scale of one to nine, with one being the darkest, found in pure space and nine being inner city. Becoming an IDSP attracts visitors and astronomers to Caprock Canyons to experience amazing views of faint stars nebulae and the intricate structure of the Milky Way not visible in other areas. *AW*