



## Chamber News      January 2025

### **“Vinita Working As A Team”**

#### **2024 Chamber Banquet**

The 2024 Chamber Banquet was held January 30, 2025 at the Craig County Fairgrounds in Vinita with over 170 people in attendance. The Keynote speaker was Houston Brittain of Brittain Risk Management Services, Brittain Farms, and the current President of the Pryor Chamber of Commerce. Houston delivered a message of the importance of citizens and businesses working as a team to improve the community and opportunities for consumers.

The MC for the evening was the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce President, Bruce Sooter. Sooter shared the chamber’s successes from 2024 and expectations of the 2025 for the board and community. The Chamber is excited to continue to grow and offer opportunities for local businesses through education, meet and greets, and events.



#### **Business of the Year**

#### **Reliant Gaming Specialist**

This business has been located in Vinita for the past 8 years. It started as a family venture on South Scaper Street and grew into its 95,000 square foot facility in North Vinita with 25 employees. The Owner of this business worked in the gaming industry for over 20 years. She ultimately found a niche in the industry that no one had filled. It’s said, “that if you want a successful business to find a need and fill it.” And that she did!

She was employed by Gasser Chair Company and sold 16,000 chairs to the Chickasaw Nation. Subsequently, she offered to maintain the chairs by reupholstering them as needed. Thus, in return saving the Chickasaws piles of money. The Tribe took her up on the offer and she has not looked back!

This Vinita-based company offers a hand-up rather than a hand-out to all those who are endeavoring to return to being productive members of society and are seeking employment. This local business has made, and continues to daily make, a positive impact on our city through their standards of hire, financial and voluntary contributions to the City, the Will Rogers Memorial Rodeo, Harvesting Hope, and the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce just to name a few of the many supported.

Congratulations to Shannon Bassett and her employees at **Reliant Gaming Specialists** – Business of the Year!



### **Citizen of the Year**

#### **Beth Hilburn**

This person's engagement in growing our community and maintaining our historic integrity speaks volumes. She is chairperson for Vinita Main Street, an organization which does just that. With her leadership, Vinita Main Street was introduced in late spring of 2024. She and her husband, Alan, are members of the Jefferson Highway Project. Last year one of their businesses became an Official Visitors Center for the Jefferson Highway Project, bringing touring visitors through Vinita. After serving as a board member this past year with the Oklahoma Route 66 Association, she recently was elected as the Eastern Vice President on the Association board. This past year she has been a vigorous promoter of Vinita. She is passionate about getting young people involved in our community and its history. She has worked tirelessly throughout 2024 to bring improvements to Vinita and the surrounding area with a vision of drawing new businesses and interest to our community.

Please help us to congratulate the Citizen of the Year, **Beth Hilburn!**



### **Civic Organization of the Year**

#### **Neighbors Helping Neighbors**

Craig County Neighbors Helping Neighbors were established as Craig County Neighbors Helping Neighbors in 2018.

Before that they had been affiliated with Salvation Army, but due to changes that were being made by Salvation Army in the manner they were to conduct the local organization, the decision was made to sever ties with the Salvation Army and to establish a 501-3C Organization that could meet the needs of the area better by having a local board to establish the guidelines. Their overhead expense is very low because all of the workers are strictly on a volunteer basis.

They assist with food one time a month, clothing, small household items, prescriptions, and gasoline for doctor visits that are out of Vinita. The backpack program for food items for school children that either a teacher or counselor has deemed as needing after school food. All donations that are received are used to assist Craig County residents.

Hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 10:00 A.M. to 2: 00 P.M.

## Hall of Fame

### Kathleen Duchamp

This evening we'll be presenting a Hall of Fame award to someone who has been instrumental in leading the preservation of Vinita's rich history.

The recipient took on the job of "reimagining" a crown jewel of our community. Over many years she led a complete renovation of the Eastern Trails Museum. She created a beautiful approach of displaying Vinita's history in a way that honors our pioneer spirit and diverse culture. With ongoing updated displays of local history and people. By virtue of her wonderful personality, she recruited docents who guided visitors from around the USA and yes, even from around the world. And lest we forget, she also recruited the amazing artistic talent of and input from her husband Frank. She shared her wit and personal insights into our local history with her weekly column in the Vinita Daily Journal. The recipient of this year's Hall of Fame Award also established the annual Cherokee Day at the Museum. A fitting tribute celebrating how the Cherokee Nation has contributed to our local history and culture. She organized a team that led a year's long celebration of our town's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Over the years she has worked tirelessly with many donors and contributors including the Cresap Family Foundation, Oklahoma Historical Society and Cherokee Nation to secure funding for museum improvements, the murals we see around town, and most recently equipment to fully digitize museum historical records.

This year's Hall of Fame recipient is truly an unsung hero, as she quietly went about accomplishing things to make our town of Vinita shine. Please join me in congratulating a recipient of the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce's Hall of Fame award: **Kathleen Duchamp**.



## Hall of Fame

### John Link

The Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce Hall of Fame Inductee is a person or couple who have had an impact on the community over several years. It could be through their community service and contributions through business or leadership over several years.

The Hall of Fame Inductee can also be inducted posthumously as a remembrance of someone who passed away and to honor them for their contributions to the community.

This year's Hall of Fame inductee is the late Vinita Daily Journal General Manager John Link.

John was a longtime supporter of the Vinita community and the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce for almost three decades. His contributions over that span helped build our community into what it is today.

John left this world too soon in 2021 after a short illness and a bout with Covid. But, he left behind a legacy of leadership and community teamwork. John was a strong advocate of the small business owner, which makes up the backbone of most Oklahoma communities today.

His legacy includes almost three decades overseeing the operations of the Journal as well as several weekly newspapers including: The Nowata Star, The Afton American, and The Grand Laker. John also managed the Vinita Printing Company during those years.

Mr. Link joined the Vinita Daily Journal as manager on Feb. 3, 1992, welcomed by longtime newspaper publishers Phillip and Jeanne Ann Reid. Link, along with his wife Janet, who has been instrumental as the Journal's longtime advertising manager and current General Manager, helped forge the Journal as an important media icon in Vinita and Craig County. A continuing tradition in solid newspaper journalism that local readers have grown to expect and support.

Before joining the Journal, John Link had an extensive two-decade career in newspaper advertising and served as the National Sales Manager for American Publishing Company for three years. John's leadership style spoke for itself, as most of the staff today have been with the Journal for two or three decades. He believed in encouraging those who came to work for the Journal by giving them a chance to work autonomously with little intervention, giving support, guidance, and sound advice where needed. One of his most endearing qualities as a general manager was that those who worked for him could trust him and knew he had their backs during challenging times.

John's boisterous laugh and friendly personality made everyone feel welcome, and he always had an open-door policy willing to talk and listen to anyone.

John believed in the importance of local community spirit as well as preparing for the future by supporting education and youth organizations. He also believed in the importance of quality journalism and integrity in dealing with the public. For John, newspaper and community leadership went hand-in-hand, and over the years, the Journal was recognized for its quality product, stories, and advertising, receiving several awards from the Oklahoma Press Association.

As a family man, John Link also continued the tradition of keeping the Journal a family-friendly publication, making sure that local news was top priority, accurately informing the public on current affairs, and making the Journal a viable source of advertising for local businesses.

John was a leader who learned that with changing times comes flexibility in learning how to navigate how the community consumes its news, and how businesses could flourish by supporting each other.

He was actively involved for several years as a Vinita Rotarian, a founding member of Vinita Unlimited, and a board member of the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce.

John loved getting the Journal involved in Chamber and citywide events, and participated in many Calf Fry Festivals with the Journal's cooking team clinching the Good Ol' Boy award more than once. He was a big supporter of Grand Lake and its important connection to all of Craig County, and he was involved with several organizations around the lake area.

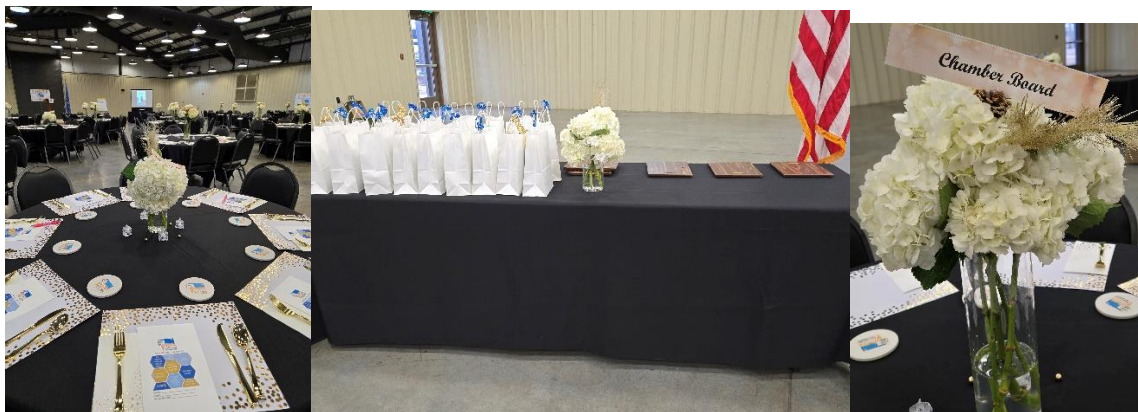
John had a great love for OU and Denver Bronco sports. He looked forward each year to traveling to Kansas City with many Vinita business leaders to attend the Big 12 basketball conference games. The trips were always eventful and many great memories were made.

Wife Janet and he worked closely with the Reid family organization to help keep newspaper journalism alive and well, even in the midst of a pandemic. For many who worked for John over the years, they would say, "that he was the person who gave them their first opportunity to start a long and meaningful career." For countless others, he gave them a second chance at life through employment and expecting their best.

Whether it was through promoting a fundraiser for a local cancer patient; helping organize the annual Christmas parade with Jack Luginbuel; supporting the latest school bond issue; or urging citizens to shop locally and support the local economy John Link's heart was in the right place when it came to helping make Vinita and Craig County a thriving place in Oklahoma.

Tonight we honor John Link as the newest inductee into the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce's Vinita Hall of Fame.

Accepting the award on his behalf is wife, Janet Link.



### **New Member**

Crosscountry Kennels a sporting dog experience. Crosscountry specializes in development, training, and campaigning of class all-age field trial pointers and setters. They are the winner of the 2014 Purina Top Field Trial Bird Dog Award. Contact 918-323-1324 or [randy@junct.com](mailto:randy@junct.com)

### **How You Can Become Involved In The Chamber**

The Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce Board is made of all local businessmen and women who are volunteering their time to the Chamber. The Board is currently looking for members to volunteer for the following committees:

Membership Committee: Promoting Chamber functions and activities, promoting membership to the Chamber

Events: Promotion of civic and community organization events, recruit and coordinate resources to help with event projects

### **Opportunities for Businesses**

The Oklahoma SBDC provides confidential, high quality, no cost entrepreneurial and small business management advising in order to help Oklahomans start and grow businesses. We are committed to growing Oklahoma's economy one small business at a time. Oklahoma SBDC business advisors assist business owners and entrepreneurs in many areas relevant to starting and expanding their businesses including:

**Agri-business**

**Obtaining business financing**

**Business startup**

**Cybersecurity**

**Government contracting**

**E-commerce**

**Human Resources**

**Market and industry research**

**Technology commercialization**

**Business disruption management**

**Business training**

**Buying or selling a business**

**Expansion and growth**

**Financial analysis and cash flow management**

**International trade**

**Marketing and sales**

**Strategic planning**

Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SE), in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), established the Oklahoma Small Business Development Center Network (Oklahoma SBDC) in 1984. SE continues to serve as the lead university in a statewide consortium of private and public partners including the SBA, tribal nations, as well as many other entities and organizations including, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations and Main Street programs. Banks and commercial lenders across the state are also key supporters of Oklahoma SBDC.

Oklahoma SBDC is one of 62 SBDC programs existing in every state in the nation as well as in many U.S. territories. Similar entrepreneurial development programs in other countries have been modeled after the SBDC program in the United States.

Contact: 580-745-2877; 301 West University Blvd, Durant, Ok 74701; <https://www.oksbdc.org>

Sign up for workshops on line:

## GET YOUR BUSINESS ON GOOGLE SEARCH AND MAPS

**Wed, Feb 12 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Marketing and Sales

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Feb

**14**

2025

## BUSINESS START UP

**Fri, Feb 14 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Start-up Assistance

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Feb

**18**

2025

## SMALL BUSINESS SOLUTIONS: EMPLOYEE BENEFITS BASICS

**Tue, Feb 18 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Managing Employees

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Feb

**20**

2025

## BUSINESS SMART

**Thu, Feb 20 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Start-up Assistance

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Feb

**26**

2025

## FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS PLAN AND BEYOND

**Wed, Feb 26 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM**

Topic: Cash Flow Management

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Feb

27

2025

## STAYING AHEAD: MONTHLY GOOGLE AND AI DEVELOPMENTS

**Thu, Feb 27 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Marketing and Sales

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

## GRASSROOTS INNOVATION ACCELERATORS: ASK ME ANYTHING

**Tue, Mar 4 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM**

Topic: Technology

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma SBDC Tech Launch Center

Mar

5

2025

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT: HOMEMADE FOOD FREEDOM ACT

**Wed, Mar 5 10:30 AM to 11:30 AM**

Topic: Start-up Assistance

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

5

2025

## LET'S DISCUSS BOI: BENEFICIAL OWNERSHIP INFORMATION

**Wed, Mar 5 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM**

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

6

2025

## READY, SET, RESPOND: A DISASTER PREPAREDNESS WORKSHOP

**Thu, Mar 6 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Disaster Mitigation

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

12

2025



## MAKE YOUR WEBSITE WORK FOR YOU

**Wed, Mar 12 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Marketing and Sales

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

**14**

2025

## BUSINESS START UP

**Fri, Mar 14 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Start-up Assistance

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

**20**

2025

## STAYING AHEAD: MONTHLY GOOGLE AND AI DEVELOPMENTS

**Thu, Mar 20 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Marketing and Sales

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

**26**

2025

## DECODING FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: A PATH TO BETTER DECISIONS

**Wed, Mar 26 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM**

Topic: Business Accounting and Budget

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

Mar

**27**

2025

## BUSINESS SMART

**Thu, Mar 27 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM**

Topic: Start-up Assistance

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma Small Business Development Center

# APRIL

Apr

**1**

2025

# GRASSROOTS INNOVATION ACCELERATORS: ASK ME ANYTHING

**Tue, Apr 1 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM**

Topic: Technology

Online Facilitated by Oklahoma SBDC Tech Launch Center

## **Advertising Through the Chamber**

Business advertising is available through the VACC website: Members of the Chamber are \$50.00 per month and Non-Members are \$75.00 per month.

## **Contact the Chamber**

Chamber mailing address: PO Box 541, Vinita, Ok 74301

You can catch the latest events and news from the Chamber through the Vinita Area Chamber of Commerce Facebook page.

Tag the chamber on Instagram [vinitachamber](#)

Visit the Chamber webpage at [www.vinitachamber.com](http://www.vinitachamber.com)





Contact:  
David Morgan  
dmorgan@YourSummit.com  
(405) 627-9299

## AFFORDABLE SMALL GROUP HEALTH PLANS

ChamberCare, administered by Allied and using the extensive Aetna Signature Administrators network, is here to provide your business cost-saving healthcare plans.

## Expect to save up to 20% or more on your monthly medical spend with ChamberCare\*

\*saving estimates are based on small business groups in states that are enrolled in similar plans. Individual results may vary.

### What Is ChamberCare?

- Affordable and reliable healthcare for small businesses
- A pro-business solution to the rising cost of healthcare

### Our Partners

- Aetna Signature Administrators – ChamberCare’s provider network
- CVS/Caremark – ChamberCare’s pharmacy benefit manager. Variety of pharmacy options available.\*\*
- CirrusMD – ChamberCare’s virtual health services
- Allied – ChamberCare’s third party administrator

### Who Qualifies?

- Oklahoma businesses with 2-50 employees
- Eligible employers must be a member of The State Chamber of Oklahoma or a participating local chamber

### What ChamberCare Provides

- Fixed, predictable monthly payments for employers
- Multiple plan designs to fit your needs and budget
- Competitive, medically underwritten rates

\*\* Caremark’s national network of retail pharmacies listed at [www.okstatechamber.com/chambercare/](http://www.okstatechamber.com/chambercare/) or call your local independent pharmacy directly for questions on network participation.

Businesses across the nation are faced with critical decisions regarding healthcare coverage, service utilization, and personal health management. We understand these challenges can be overwhelming and we are committed to helping.

ChamberCare is here to simplify your healthcare decision, reduce costs, and empower your business to thrive.

FIND OUT MORE AND GET STARTED AT  
[okstatechamber.com/chambercare/](http://okstatechamber.com/chambercare/)