

# Jonesboro OCCASIONS

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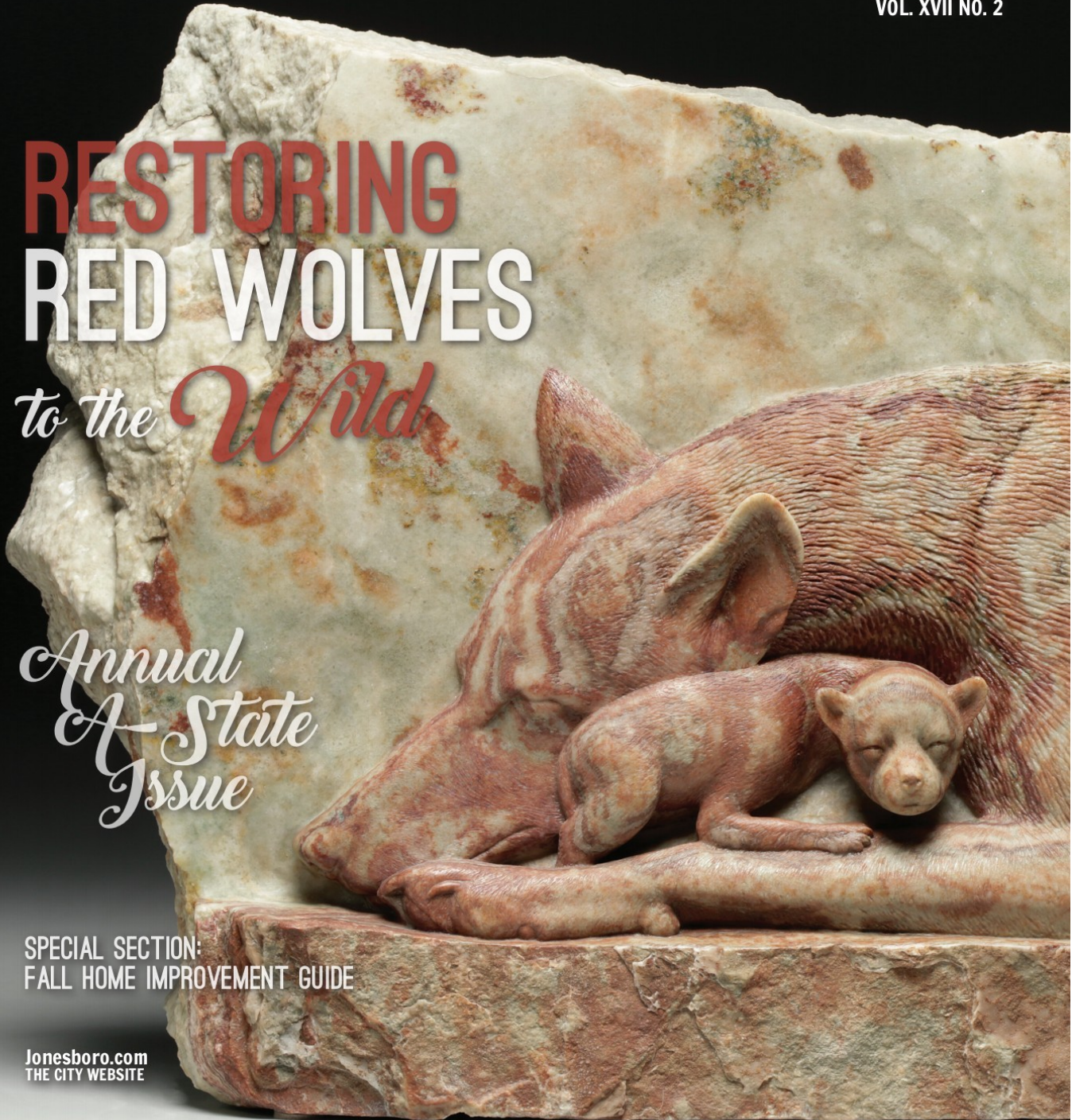
## RESTORING RED WOLVES

*to the Wild*

*Annual  
A State  
Issue*

SPECIAL SECTION:  
FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

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**IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE**

**ON THE COVER:** "Just Settling In," Dale Weiler, 2018, alabaster  
photography submitted

# Jonesboro OCCASIONS

September 2019 Vol. XVII No. 2



- 6** EDITOR'S LETTER
- 8** COVER FEATURE  
*Advocating for Red Wolf Recovery at A-State*
- 12** SIGNATURE STYLE  
*Clear Bags for A-State Season*
- 14** DEDICATED  
*Rockabilly in Northeast Arkansas*
- 18** BEYOND BUSINESS  
*Embassy Suites by Hilton Jonesboro*
- 22** LOCAL FLAVOR  
*Acansa Dining Hall*
- 24** BRIEFLY IN THE NEWS  
*A-State News at a Glance*
- 26** THAT ONE THING  
*Remembering 1975*
- 27** OCCASIONS EVENT SPOTLIGHT  
*Photos from Jonesboro's Top Events*
- 67** SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION  
*Fall Home Improvement Guide*
- 78** FROM THE CARDIOLOGIST'S WIFE  
*Climate Change and Your Health*
- 80** WEIGHT MATTERS  
*Why Do I Always Regain After I Lose Weight?*
- 82** OCCASIONS DATEBOOK  
*September Calendar of Events*
- 84** DINING GUIDE  
*Jonesboro Restaurants*
- 86** THE OCCASIONS LADY AND...  
*The Fainting Goat*

## EDITOR'S LETTER

# 'Just Settling In' at A-State



Each September, *Occasions* publishes its A-State issue, which focuses on the many positive changes taking place on campus and in the community through the efforts of faculty, staff, alumni and students.

Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to witness the unveiling of a new sculpture at Bradbury Art Museum and to meet the artist who created it. Featured on this month's cover, "Just Settling In" was created by North Carolina sculptor Dale Weiler to raise awareness about the critically endangered American red wolf. Carved from a 200-pound alabaster stone, the sculpture features a red wolf and her pup and is part of a collection created and owned by Weiler Woods for Wildlife. The sculpture will initially be displayed at BAM and will be on loan to the university for the next two years. Its permanent home will be at the North Carolina Zoo, and A-State will then display a casting of the original sculpture.

Weiler and his wife, Loti Woods, use his wildlife sculptures to raise awareness and funding for endangered animals through the world. A-State Chancellor Dr. Kelly Dampousse and university officials used the unveiling as an opportunity to announce A-State's vision for an education, research and breeding facility at Craighead Forest Park to assist in national recovery efforts of the American red wolf.

My former partner and *Jonesboro Occasions* co-founder, Jeff Hankins, is among the leadership at A-State working to bring raise awareness about the endangered red wolf and bring a sanctuary to Jonesboro. Read Audrey Hanes' story to find out more about the entities working together to preserve and protect red wolves and how A-State's participation can enhance the conservation effort and bring additional opportunities for learning to A-State students.

Also in this issue, get an inside look at A-State's new Acansa Dining Hall; find out what game day accessory you may need to update before heading to the football stadium; get an inside look at the progress of the new Embassy Suites and Red Wolf Convention Center under construction on the A-State campus; and learn about a new ASU Museum exhibit that features the unique history of rockabilly music in Northeast Arkansas.

Exciting things are taking place on the campus of A-State, and we hope our annual A-State issue will help you take advantage of all that it offers.

Audrey Lott Poff, Publisher & Editor  
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COVER FEATURE

# Advocating for Red Wolf Recovery

## AT ARKANSAS STATE

BY AUDREY HANES  
PHOTOS SUBMITTED

**A**rkansas State University unveiled the Red Wolves as the school's new mascot in 2008, opening the door for an opportunity to learn about and help conserve the American red wolf. Nearly a decade later, A-State is teaming up with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Little Rock Zoo, the American Red Wolf Species Survival Plan and the Endangered Wolf Center in Eureka, Mo., in an effort to raise awareness about the endangered red wolf and bring a sanctuary to Jonesboro.

Leading the conservation cause on behalf of A-State are Jeff Hankins, vice president for strategic communications and economic development with the Arkansas State University System, and Dr. Tom Risch, vice provost for research and technology transfer, executive director of the Arkansas Biosciences Institute and a professor of animal ecology, all at A-State.

"In 2014, the Endangered Wolf Center approached us about partnering and leveraging our resources to bring awareness to the endangered red wolf," said Hankins. "There had been a couple of efforts early on when A-State became the Red Wolves. For athletics, it wasn't a great fit, so it didn't go anywhere. It wasn't until the Endangered Wolf Center came to the system office with a big opportunity and Risch and his department really embraced it."

Regina Mossotti, a carnivore biologist who has been working with red wolves for 15 years, is the director of animal care and conservation at the Endangered Wolf Center (EWC). The center was founded in 1971 by Dr. Marlin Perkins and his wife, Carol, with a goal of facilitating a world where endangered wolves and other wild canids exist and thrive in their native habitats and are recognized and valued for their vital roles as leading members of a healthy ecosystem.

"Our mission is to preserve and protect Mexican wolves, red wolves and other wild canid species, with purpose and passion, through carefully managed breeding, reintroduction, research and inspiring education programs," said Mossotti. "... There are so many ways to coexist with wolves, and one of our goals at the EWC is teach people how we can share the landscape, which will benefit both wolves, humans and tons of other wildlife."

Mossotti has also been on the Red Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) management team for eight years, where she has been serving as the vice coordinator for the past year. The Species Survival Plan is comprised of more than 41 zoological organizations across the country that house more than 255 red wolves in human care.

"We are working together to breed red wolves, to keep the genetics of this critically endangered species healthy and then provide animals that can be released into current and future reintroduction locations across the southeastern U.S. to help restore their population," said Mossotti.

### **BRINGING THE RED WOLF TO JONESBORO**

Risch and Hankins hope that Jonesboro will soon become home to an additional facility that will be able to aid in the wolf's reintroduction. Ten acres of the 692-acre Craighead Forest Park – the current site of the gun range, which will be relocated – will be used for the Arkansas State University Red Wolf Research and Education Center, which is a working name as funds are raised for the facility. The future wolf sanctuary will include six fenced enclosures for red wolf pairs ranging from half an acre to an acre, a picnic and scout camping area and a 4,000-square-foot building.

8 JONESBORO OCCASIONS SEPTEMBER 2019

## COVER FEATURE



“The facility we envision here would include an exhibit that would be visible to the public, with the remaining wolves more secluded, because they need to have very minimal human contact,” said Hankins. “It’s very important to keep the public from them to keep them from being habituated. Our goal is to have a facility where school groups and tourists/visitors could come and there would be educational information about the plight of the American red wolf, including veterinary space for when wolves need cared for medically, food space, etc. We think it will complement the existing Forrest Wood Nature Center; as tourists or school groups come to Jonesboro, they would be able to visit both centers/facilities. (With the) addition of Embassy Suites, as Jonesboro is working to become more of a destination, we think it can be a driver of ecotourism. We also want a camping area for scouts and groups like that, so we are looking at similar facilities.”

Hankins says the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is overseeing the red wolves’ current situation across the country. While there are only about 20-25 red wolves in the wild, there are 255 in captivity. There is only technically space for 240 of those wolves in current facilities, so there is a dire need for new facilities they can relocate wolves to as the population grows.

“Potentially all these animals could be introduced to the wild, so it’s as hands-off as possible,” said Risch. “Fish and Wildlife’s current plan is to double the number of wolves in captivity to increase genetic diversity and have enough for potential reintroductions.”

From watching pups get checks at the EWC to hosting last year’s annual Red Wolf Species Survival Plan meeting along with the Little Rock Zoo and the EWC, Hankins, Risch and their team

are doing their best to learn about the process for when A-State has red wolves of its own.

“We just returned from the 2019 national SSP meeting in Albany, Georgia,” said Hankins. “They are thrilled A-State has taken such a leadership role, from an education, scientific and marketing standpoint. ... We would be the first one that has an educational and conservation component that is tied to a university.

“... The university’s involvement has really energized the SSP in a big way. They’re incredibly motivated by the attention and marketing and education we’re bringing to the red wolf.”

Hankins says that they are currently seeking sponsors and donors who would like to see a facility like this built for the betterment of the state and Northeast Arkansas. Sponsors for naming rights, enclosures, buildings and more are all available. While the university itself will be incredibly supportive of the research and education center, it has to be a privately-funded endeavor. Project leaders estimate it will take \$2 million to get the project started.

“We also have an opportunity here for ecotourism,” said Hankins. “We have to give families a reason to come to Jonesboro to visit. This is going to be one of those reasons – an opportunity to come see such a rare animal – a beautiful, majestic animal. It is going to attract families that otherwise never would have come to Jonesboro.”

One major attraction for the next two years will be a statue by Weiler Woods for Wildlife sculptor Dale Weiler. The sculpture, “Just Settling In,” which depicts a female wolf nuzzling her pup, was completed in February of this year. Weiler spent several months carving the 200 pound bas-relief out of a piece of Utah alabaster, and the result is a meaningful piece of art that will be

SEPTEMBER 2019 JONESBORO OCCASIONS 9

## COVER FEATURE

used to aid the red wolf conservation effort.

“It all started when (my wife) Loti and I visited some red wolf puppies at the North Carolina Zoo and fell in love with them and how beautiful they were,” said Weiler. “We learned more about them, and it all started from there. We use art work to help conservation causes.

“What excited Loti and me is how wonderful is it for this piece to be at an educational facility, where the new torch bearers are picking up the torch to preserve this species. It’s just so fitting. Chris Lasher at the North Carolina Zoo suggested Arkansas State as a temporary home, and it was a perfect fit. We are in awe of how much energy is being unfurled for this. ... Everyone there is walking the talk. They’re doing something about conserving the red wolf.”

Although the statue will eventually be permanently housed in the North Carolina Zoo, Lasher, the zoo’s animal management supervisor who also serves as the American Red Wolf SSP Coordinator, reached out to Hankins and Risch about allowing the original statue to remain in Jonesboro for two years while the zoo finishes construction on a new facility.

“It will initially be on display at the Bradbury Art Museum for the next three months,” said Hankins. “They have made castings of the original, so once it goes back to North Carolina, we will get that and have it displayed at the new facility here in Jonesboro. It’s so generous – the artist and his wife are driving it to us because they want to visit the campus and see our bronze statue here on campus.”

Lasher has been working with the red wolf since 1993 and is responsible for coordinating breeding and transfers of animals between the 41 different partners that have red wolves in their care.

“I am excited to support A-State as they move into a new phase to save the red wolf from extinction,” he said. “... A-State will

contribute to expanding the current population of the red wolf under human care. We know that we need to grow the population of red wolves under human care in order to meet all the goals that the USFWS has for this species. The biggest roadblock in the way of this growth is the amount of space dedicated to maintain a red wolf population. The SSP knows it needs 50 new spaces in the next five to 10 years to be able to meet our goals. A-State stepping up and saying they want to help meet that goal will help us be successful.”

## STUDYING THE WOLF

Another aspect of the partnership and conservation effort was A-State’s new designation as the national curation center for the remains of red wolves. Mossotti says the university has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the SSP to launch this national repository, which will allow scientists to study important questions that come up in the future about genetics, health, reproduction and more.

“We will prepare red wolf remains for curation in scientific museums,” said Risch. “We will also draw blood from all the wolves – databasing it – which is done annually. We become the clearinghouse. The University of New Mexico curates the Mexican wolf, so we are basing it off their model.”

Just in the last year, the Arkansas Center for Biodiversity Collections has curated samples from 13 different institutions, including 13 whole and three partial carcasses, 214 unique blood/serum samples and 34 tissue samples.

The center and all that comes with it will have a profound effect on A-State’s students and faculty, who will be able to study the information collected for the database, as well as the red wolves themselves.

“When we have the center built, we are looking at some



10 JONESBORO OCCASIONS SEPTEMBER 2019

**COVER FEATURE**

curriculum changes to our track in zoology,” said Risch. “A lot of students come here for that track. With this facility, we could really design some hands-on training for these students and have some really great training.”

Hankins says that the opportunity to work with red wolves and all that scientific data is an amazing opportunity as an academic institution for both athletic and academic purposes.

“Today’s generation of youth are very conservation conscious,” said Hankins. “Even beyond recruiting biology students, I think for overall recruitment to Arkansas State to be an institution that takes a major role in helping to save a critically endangered species of this magnitude that is native to the United States and native to the southeastern United States and Arkansas, is really significant.

“... I think our students being able to have this experience makes them more marketable to get jobs at other facilities like it after they graduate.”

**OTHER EFFORTS**

Student and faculty leaders at A-State have also stepped up to develop other ways to help the red wolf conservation effort.

“One of my favorite programs that A-State and the EWC partnered on was the First Year Reader Experience, which created a program for incoming students to read ‘The Secret World of Red Wolves’ by DeLene Beeland, and followed up with a joint outreach program with the Endangered Wolf Center to learn more about red wolves,” said Mossotti. “You could feel the students’ passion, excitement and pride in learning about their mascot, and I was inspired to see so many of them want to take action to help save red wolves.”

An on-campus effort called Red Wolves for Red Wolves was also formed by the biology department in 2017 as a way for students

to get involved and lead initiatives. The group’s goal is to conserve and protect the endangered American red wolf through outreach, curation and scholarly research. Those involved hope it is a way for A-State students and faculty to aid the conservation effort.

More recently, in 2018, the ASU system took an active role in addressing dramatic red wolves language in the 2018 congressional budget bill. After traveling to Washington to educate key members of congressional staff, the language in the bill was changed, resulting in a study that confirmed that the red wolf is an ancient species that is native to America.

A partnership with the National Wildlife Federation for a red wolf awareness social media campaign has been successful, as well. After kicking off in November 2018, a significant editorial was published in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* that focused on A-State’s conservation effort and how a breeding facility in Jonesboro would benefit the entire state and country.

“The SSP is happy with A-State’s outreach in general,” said Risch. “From the book to having red wolf professionals on campus each semester for educational opportunities, we have been very involved with getting the information out there locally.”

Hankins says that it’s rare to have a project that has benefits for so many different entities.

“Being able to see such a rare mammal and the ecotourism impact – there are so many benefits up and down the line,” said Hankins. “It’s amazing to be able to play such a substantial role in educating this country about the American red wolf and its place in the ecosystem. It’s such a great project for us to be involved with.”

For more information about the A-State’s red wolves or to help fund the new facility, contact Jeff Hankins at [jhankins@asusystem.edu](mailto:jhankins@asusystem.edu) or call (501) 660-1004.



**“IT’S AMAZING TO BE ABLE TO PLAY SUCH A SUBSTANTIAL ROLE IN EDUCATING THIS COUNTRY ABOUT THE AMERICAN RED WOLF AND ITS PLACE IN THE ECOSYSTEM.”**

— *Jeff Hankins, vice president for strategic communications and economic development, Arkansas State University System*



*photo by Cody Moore*

# OCCASIONS

## EVENT SPOTLIGHT

- 28 : RED DRESS GALA AT THE PONDEROSA
- 36 : FOUNDATION OF ARTS PRESENTS "DOUBT: A PARABLE"
- 40 : TEAM JONESBORO SUNDAY FUNDAY
- 43 : CONGRESSIONAL CHATS
- 46 : RED WOLF SCULPTURE UNVEILING
- 52 : RUNNING THREADS SORORITY EVENT
- 56 : SARA HOWELL SUMMER ART SHOW
- 58 : PHI MU FASHION SHOW
- 62 : AN EVENING OF HOPE

*For more event photos, visit [Jonesboro.com](http://Jonesboro.com) and click on Event Galleries.*



EVENT SPOTLIGHT

# A-STATE HOSTS UNVEILING EVENT

North Carolina sculptor Dale Weiler unveiled his latest sculpture, "Just Settling In," at the Bradbury Art Museum (BAM) on the Arkansas State University campus on Aug. 27. The sculpture, made out of a 200-pound alabaster stone, is of a red wolf and her newborn pup. The sculpture will be displayed on the A-State campus and remain in Jonesboro for the next two years before being replaced with a cast. Weiler decided to exhibit his sculpture on A-State's campus in order to raise awareness about the critically endangered American red wolf. *For more event photos, visit [Jonesboro.com](http://Jonesboro.com) and click on Event Galleries.*



- 1. Dale Weiler, Dr. Kelly Damphousse
- 2. "Just Settling In"
- 3. Chris Lasher, Loti Woods, Dale Weiler, Dr. Tom Risch



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### EVENT SPOTLIGHT

## RED WOLF (CONTINUED)

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1. Jeff Hankins
2. Dale Weiler
3. Chris Lasher



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48 JONESBORO OCCASIONS SEPTEMBER 2019



## Save the Date

Join  ARcare for the 5th Annual Grill and Chill benefiting the Arkansas Family Health Foundation and supporting the endowment of a pre-med scholarship for the Arkansas State University.

Thursday, October 24th, 2019  
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
The Silos | 1743 Co Rd 380 | Bono, AR

Dinner, cocktails and live music  
by Lauren Richmond  
50/50 Raffle to be held at the event.

\$75 per ticket | \$500 for a table of 8  
For sponsorship information or to reserve your tickets, please call Tracy at 501.322.1712 or Kristy at 870.919.2922



### EVENT SPOTLIGHT

## RED WOLF (CONTINUED)

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