



ALICIA STOVER

# From dust to pay dirt

*Agricultural economics freshman still plows his family's Oklahoma Land Run soil*

On April 22, 1889, men and women gathered at the Texas and Arkansas borders preparing to start a new life in a new territory called Oklahoma. A cloud of dust created by dancing feet rose in the air, as to signify the anticipation in the crowd. When the shot rang out to announce the beginning of the Oklahoma Land Run, no person was stationary, rather running forward, eager to settle and build a home.

One family chose to head toward the center of the new territory. There, they found a place to stake their claim, a place to call home, where waving wheat not only smelled sweet but also became a lifestyle practiced today, four generations later.

Now, 120 years after that historical day, members of that family plow the same land spoken for by their ancestors.

This in itself is not unusual. What is unique, however, is finding a young member of the family as eager to continue the family business of raising and selling wheat as agricultural economics freshman Robert Parrish.

"My family has been doing it for so long that it just seems natural to keep doing it," he said.

Parrish was raised on his family's farming operation in Hunter, Okla., and has been a dedicated member of the business since he was a toddler.

"We used to let Robert play in the yard when he was little," said Raymond Parrish, Robert's father. "We would turn our backs for just a second, and he would be gone. His great-uncle Virgel would pick him up and take him to feed the cows or check the fields."

This early involvement led Robert Parrish to showing the wheat he raised on his family's farm.

"My mom and dad would go to Okeene to some wheat shows to see how the wheat they were growing stacked up against other farmers from the area," Parrish said. "They started it off, and then I watched my sister participate in the shows. Once it got to be my turn, I started, too."

The jump on the competition and the resulting experience catapulted Parrish to the top in this year's Oklahoma Wheat Show, which agricultural economics professor Kim Anderson said is a prestigious show coordinated and sponsored in part by Oklahoma State University and judged by OSU faculty.

"The goal of the wheat show is to teach agriculture youth the value of producing high milling-quality wheat," Anderson said. "It is invigorating to see good, solid farm people rise to success."

Parrish is thankful for his accomplishments.

"I've been doing this since I was about 9 years old," he said. "When I heard my name called, all I could think was this had been a long time coming, and I was excited to finally come out on top."

Parrish also was excited about the awards he received.

"I got two trophies and \$2,000 in scholarship money, which I added to the \$4,000 I had already won," he said. "I also received a loaf of bread baked from flour made out of my winning wheat, which is pretty cool."

Though he is glad to finally get a win, it has been a long road for Parrish. He said some of his favorite memories come from being able to compete against his sister, Jennifer, an agricultural economics alumna.

"I was lucky enough to win the 4-H competition three years and be the overall grand champion two years," she said. "Since we do everything as a family, it has been a running joke that our seed would get switched and he should have been the one to win."

The Parrish family is proud to have accomplished so much with such a small team.

"We're just a one-horse operation around here,"

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*Robert Parrish farms the land his family acquired 120 years ago during the Oklahoma Land Run.*

Raymond Parrish said. “No hired hands, everybody just pitches in when we need them.”

Still, it is no accident the Parrish siblings have shown their product successfully.

“We plant all certified wheat,” said Robert’s mother, Peggy Parrish. “When you start out with the best seed, you have a better chance of ending up with the best product.”

Parrish agreed with his mom.

“I couldn’t have really done anything different to make my product any better,” he said. “We planted quality seed, and I did the best I could to prepare my wheat. The only thing I had to worry about was the weather.”

Parrish said he appreciates what his family’s operation has allowed him to accomplish and credits the business with other successes.

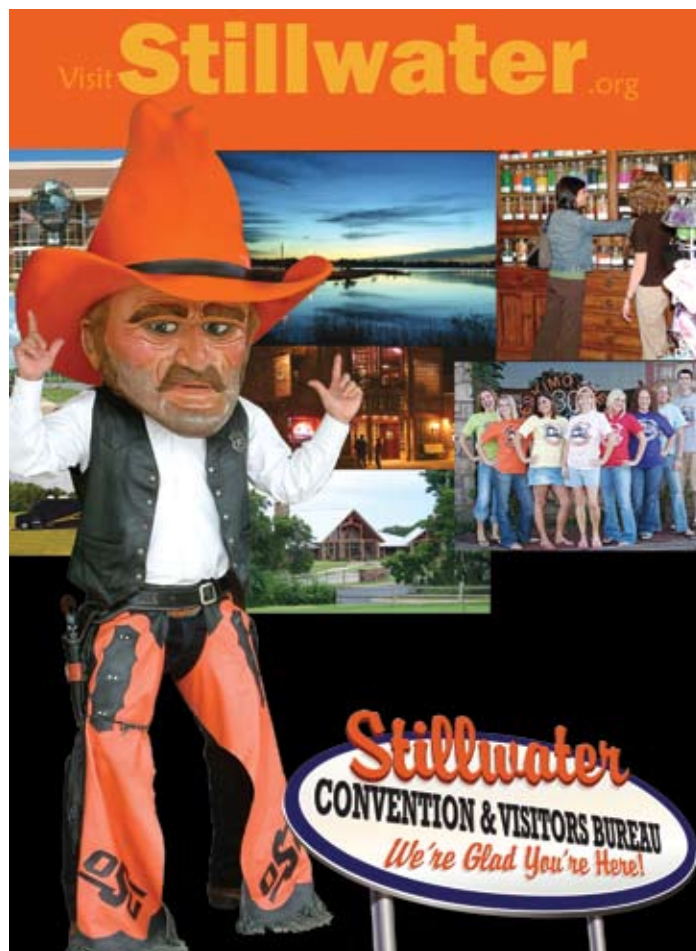
“I won the national grain entrepreneurship proficiency in FFA when I was a junior in high school,” he said. “It was based on my wheat and running a production business. I also won a trip to Houston and Galveston, and I have gotten to meet many different people and win scholarships.”

But, he said, the lessons learned are what make his experiences valuable to him as he prepares for a career.

“I’ve learned that patience is key,” he said. “I never won until my last year so patience definitely pays off.”

Patience and years of experience, backed by generations of farmers, has allowed Parrish to find his niche.

“I want to find a job in an agriculture-related business,” he said. “I want to keep farming with my dad. I know I’ll be back here someday.” • *By Alicia Stover, Binger, Okla.*



# FARMHOUSE

BUILDER OF MEN



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2008 Thomas Keys Most Outstanding Pledge Class 22 of the last 27 years

2008 Darrel “Dean” Troxel Outstanding Fraternity 34 of the last 40 years

Seven of the Top Fifteen Homecoming Royalty Candidates for 2008

Four of the Top Ten Freshmen Men for 2008

2008 Outstanding Campus Involvement

2008 Outstanding Community Service

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