

BLINN COLLEGE

In the heart
of Brenham,
the largest college within the
Bluebonnet service area is thriving,
thanks to top-notch academics and athletics

By Ed Crowell

BRENHAM – The majestic red brick Old Main building at Blinn College turns 110 this year, standing a stately watch over the community college in the heart of the city.

Blinn's footprint is now so large it spreads miles beyond the field of vision from atop Old Main's distinctive tower.

Enrollment is nearing 20,000 students at the Brenham-based school and its three satellite campuses. The blue-and-white Blinn College flag – with its logo of the 1906 Old Main tower top – also waves in Sealy (32 miles southeast), Bryan (42 miles north) and Schulenburg (55 miles southwest).

The school opened in 1883 and remains the historic heart (and athletics arm) of this city that is the seat of Washington County. In addition to the core language arts, science and math classes,

Blinn's music, theater, agriculture and athletic programs are based here.

The school enjoys an academic transfer rate that is among the highest in the nation, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. More than 39 percent of Blinn students transfer to upper divisions of various four-year colleges and universities.

Athletic teams (the Buccaneers) at Blinn are a popular – and successful – component of the college's presence in Brenham. The football, baseball and basketball games draw many fans. National junior college titles have been won by the football, volleyball and track teams.

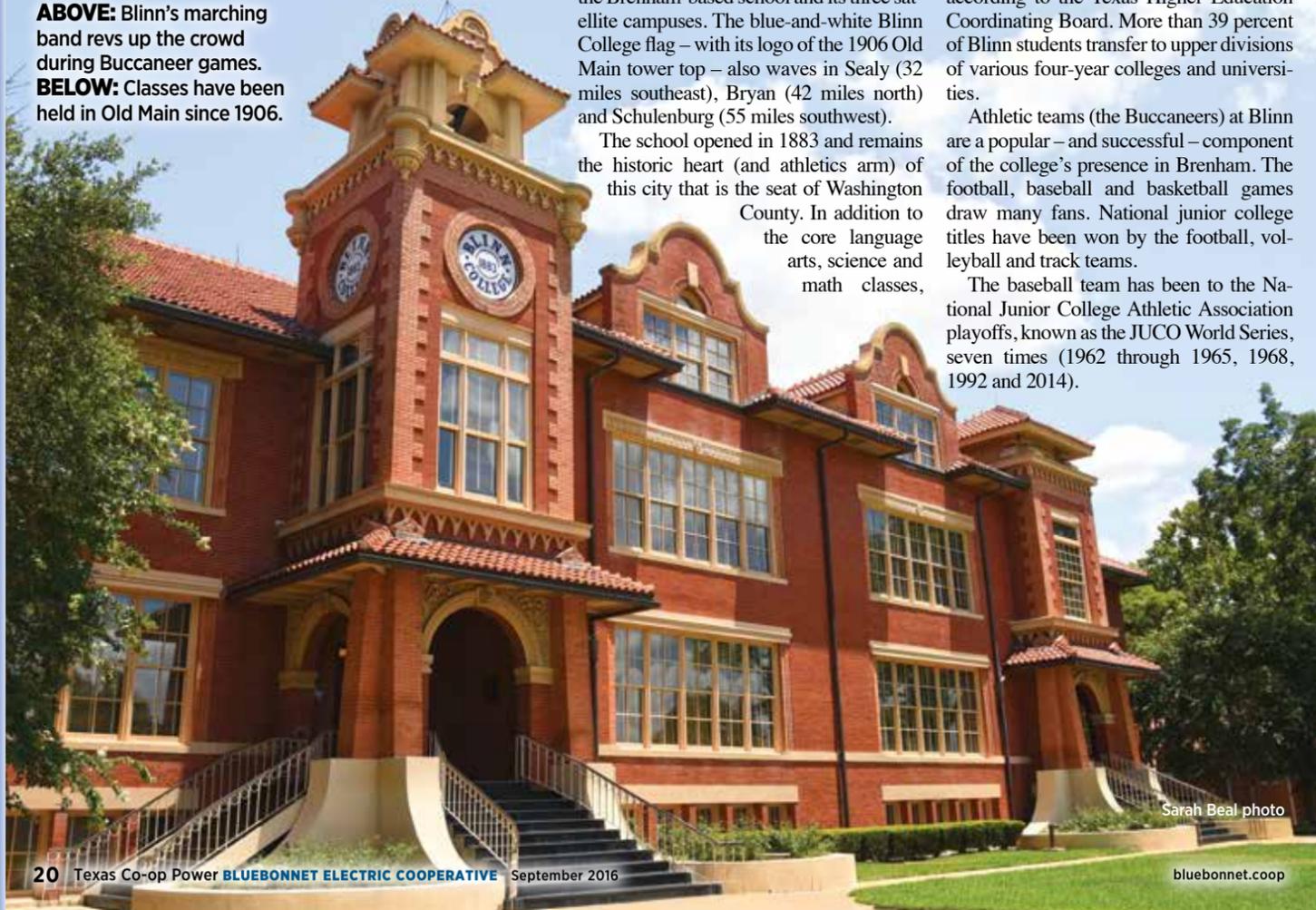
The baseball team has been to the National Junior College Athletic Association playoffs, known as the JUCO World Series, seven times (1962 through 1965, 1968, 1992 and 2014).



Blinn College photo

ABOVE: Blinn's marching band revs up the crowd during Buccaneer games.

BELOW: Classes have been held in Old Main since 1906.



Sarah Beal photo



Sarah Beal photo

BLINN COLLEGE AT A GLANCE

GROWTH – 37.5 percent enrollment growth since 2006. Projected to approach 25,000 students by 2025.

TRANSFER RATE – 39.5 percent of students move on to four-year colleges and universities, a figure consistently in top 10 of community colleges nationally.

AFFORDABILITY – Tuition and fees for most Blinn students is about \$3,800 less than what they would pay as state residents at the average Texas public university. That figure is for 30 credit hours in an academic year.

EARNINGS POTENTIAL – Graduates earn an average \$9,000 more per year than workers with only a high school diploma.



Blinn College photo

This year Blinn College was part of the national attention surrounding the 2016 NFL Super Bowl because Heisman Trophy winner Cam Newton, quarterback of the Carolina Panthers, played football for Blinn.

The Brenham campus, some 20 square blocks near downtown, is a major driver of Brenham's economy. With 509 full- and part-time faculty and staff, it is the fourth largest employer in the city. A 2013 economic impact study found that Blinn's faculty, staff and students added \$83 million to the Brenham and Washington County economy.

In the Bryan area, where 68 percent of Blinn's students attend classes, the economic impact numbers are highest. The Bryan campus added \$247 million to that area's economy, according to the same study.

The Schulenburg campus, with more than 120 students, added \$11 million to the local economy, and in Sealy, which has more than 110 students, the campus' impact was nearly \$4 million.

About 38 percent of the more than 2,400 students on the Brenham campus moved from another city or state to attend college.

Blinn's academic offerings are as diverse and varied as its students' interests.

In addition to arts and sciences associate degrees, Blinn offers degrees and certificates to students wanting to become nurses, medical technicians, dental hygienists, business and legal administrators, child care and development workers, and

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TOP: Students Brooke Pittman, left, of Brenham and Jordan Blake of Houston test the reaction of metals in their summer chemistry class.

ABOVE: Blinn's Student Center on the Brenham campus provides a place to relax, study and attend student organization meetings.

BELOW: Theater majors entertain students and faculty with live stage productions.



Blinn College photo

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MONTHLY MEETING

Bluebonnet's Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. Sept. 20, at Bluebonnet's Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave. (formerly 650 Texas Hwy. 21 East), Bastrop. Find the agenda and last-minute updates Sept. 16 at bluebonnet.coop. Hover your cursor over 'next board meeting' on our home page.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet's offices will be closed Monday, Sept. 5, in observance of Labor Day.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative produced the blue-bordered pages 20-27 in this issue of the magazine with content that is of specific interest or relevance to Bluebonnet members. The rest of the magazine's content is distributed statewide to any member of an electric cooperative in Texas. For information about the magazine, contact Janet Wilson at 512-750-5483 or email janet.wilson@bluebonnet.coop.





Blinn College photo

ABOVE: Cam Newton, center, was a Blinn star in 2009 and an NFL quarterback in the 2016 Super Bowl. **BELOW:** Outfielder Austen Swift, of Ontario, Canada, takes a turn at bat for the Buccaneers baseball team. The team has gone to the regional playoffs each of the past nine years under head coach Harvey McIntyre.

ATHLETIC SUCCESS

Brenham is sports central for the college. All home games are played there and student athletes practice and train at Brenham facilities.

A winning tradition among the Blinn Buccaneers has been established in football, baseball, volleyball, track and field, and cross country. Since 1987, Blinn teams have won 34 National Junior College Athletic Association championships including four in football, four in volleyball, nine in indoor track and field, nine in outdoor track and field and two in cross country.

When Cam Newton, now the quarterback of the Carolina Panthers, stepped onto the field for the Super Bowl in January, many people with Blinn College ties watched with pride. He arguably is the most famous alumnus of Blinn's sports program, having helped win a national championship for Blinn in 2009 before moving on to Auburn University, where he won the 2010 Heisman Trophy.

The Panthers lost the NFL championship to the Denver Broncos, but Newton likely will be back in title-chasing games.

Blinn baseball turns out pros, too. Over the past 15 seasons, Blinn baseball coach Harvey McIntyre has coached 36 players who later were drafted into professional baseball. Two former players were picked in the 2016 Major League Baseball draft.

Pitcher Holden Cammack, who played at Blinn in 2012 and 2013, was selected by the Chicago Cubs as a player out of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa. Dillon Mazzoccoli pitched at Blinn in 2014 and was selected by the Pittsburgh Pirates from Texas State University in San Marcos.

Other former Blinn athletes who went pro include: Football: Michael Bishop (New England Patriots, Arena Football League and Canadian Football League); Justin Tuggle (Cleveland Browns); and Khiry Robinson (New York Jets).

Basketball: Chris Andersen (Miami Heat, Memphis Grizzlies).



Blinn College photo



Sarah Beal photo

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criminal justice employees.

Blinn is the only community college in Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area except for the Elgin campus of Austin Community College (ACC). About 500 full- and part-time students attend that satellite campus.

Students on Blinn's Bryan campus are just minutes from Texas A&M University in College Station, and that university is by far the top choice of Blinn graduates seeking a higher degree. The Bryan campus has 13,000 students and is growing fast, prompting plans for another Blinn campus there.

John Sharp, chancellor of the Texas A&M University System, recently announced plans to invest \$150 million in a new research and development campus in Bryan that will involve Blinn. The project will help companies move ideas from the laboratory to the marketplace and offer a new path toward a college degree. A Gateway Education Center on the new campus will provide space for A&M and Blinn to offer varied coursework.

"Blinn College's participation is a welcome component to this new,

RIGHT: Longtime chemistry professor Ken French, left, says Blinn is a great place to teach students such as William Stamper, center, a biology major from The Woodlands, and Doran Toussom, right, an engineering major from Brenham.

transformative education model," Sharp said. "We are excited to work with Blinn to ensure that high-achieving students across the state have additional pathways to their educational and career goals."

Students at Blinn already benefit from highly experienced professors.

Ken French, for example, is in his 33rd year teaching chemistry at the Brenham campus. "If you like to teach, this is the place," he said as one of his summer classes began experiments to test the reaction of metals to different elements.

The students, wearing protective goggles, eagerly immersed themselves in the hands-on laboratory work. French, who has a doctorate in organic chemistry, said he likes guiding students without the requisite demands of grant writing and research projects at larger institutions.

Agricultural sciences is another popular hands-on program at Blinn.

Bryn Behnke grew up on a hog farm in the Round Top area before attending Blinn. Now he is the assistant dean of agricultural sciences af-



Sarah Beal photo

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ABOVE: Bryn Behnke, assistant dean of agricultural sciences, shows off the ag campus, which includes a demonstration crop field. **LEFT:** High school students attend a summer camp to learn about livestock production before deciding on agricultural studies and careers.



Joelynn Rathmann photography

ter earning degrees at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville.

On a recent hot day, he proudly showed off the W.J. (Bill) Rankin Agriculture Complex on the edge of the Brenham campus. One of the first stops: A large hallway case filled with first-place trophies for the college's livestock judging teams,

which began competing in 2002.

The judging teams travel throughout Texas and the Midwest to pit their knowledge of animal development against other college teams.

Livestock judging is so popular at Blinn that some students, including 19-year-old Samantha Reese of Tennessee, are recruited from out of state.

"When I came down here to interview I was impressed with the ag programs and how very friendly everyone was," said Reese, who was on a judging team when she was a high school senior. "I intend to major in ag communications and probably will go to A&M."

The ag program "is a lot like athletics," Behnke said. "It's competitive and students come for the facilities and the teachers."

In addition to a lecture hall with a sawdust-floored livestock pen up front, the ag complex features an outdoor pavilion for judging practice

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Samantha Reese



Blinn College photos

ABOVE: One of the first classes to graduate from Blinn included these Methodist ministry students. **BELOW:** Classes were held in Blinn Memorial Building in 1887 and two years later the college's name was changed from the Mission Institute to Blinn Memorial College. **BOTTOM:** A look back at the science lab in Old Main, circa 1920s.

MAKING HISTORY

The face of Blinn College's roots is Old Main, a grand 1906 red-brick building fronted by a tower and twin staircases. This building today hosts many of the college's government, history and sociology classes on the Brenham campus.

The college's origin dates to 1883 when it was formed as the Mission Institute to educate German-speaking Methodist ministers who were part of an influx of German immigrants.

The name was changed in 1889 to Blinn Memorial College to honor the Rev. Christian Blinn of New York, who had given large sums for construction of the first major campus building. New York philanthropist Andrew Carnegie donated half the money to build what is now known as Old Main, according to the Texas State Historical Association. (Carnegie's 19th century largess was grand and he helped build libraries across the nation, including 32 in Texas.)

In 1934, Blinn's relationship with the Methodist Church ended. Three years later Blinn became the first county-funded junior college in the state after Washington County voters approved a tax district for the school.

By the early 1950s enrollment had surged to 1,100 students, with World War II veterans taking many night courses. In the 1970s the college began extending its programs with classes in Brazos, Grimes and Bastrop counties. Today the college has three satellite campuses in Bryan, Schulenburg and Sealy.



1887 BLINN MEMORIAL BLDG.



FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

The Blinn College Foundation keeps the wheels of the two-year college turning toward the future by generating private and corporate gifts. The money raised supports scholarships, academic programs, student activities and campus building projects.

More than 200 scholarships are awarded by the foundation each year, many to students who otherwise would not be able to attend the college. More than \$6 million in endowments have been raised by the foundation for scholarships.

Other ongoing endowments are set aside for specific campuses to be used by faculty, staff and student organizations there for projects not covered by their regular budgets.

The Blinn foundation recently was instrumental in raising money for the Kruse Center, a 36,000-square-foot student recreation and activities facility on the Brenham campus that will provide space for fitness, yoga and kinesiology classes. The \$11.4 million project also includes a gymnasium for the basketball and volleyball teams, two of the major sports for which players sport Blinn Buccaneer uniforms.

Construction of the center, named after a longtime prominent Brenham family, is under way and scheduled to be completed in fall 2017.

Another new project for the Brenham campus is an \$836,000 athletics training facility funded by Blinn alumnus Doyle Coatney of Louisiana



Blinn College illustration

Construction on the Kruse Center, shown in an architect's rendering, is under way on the Brenham campus. When finished in 2017, it will provide a place for weight and cardio training, fitness classes and Buccaneer basketball and volleyball games.

through a donation secured by the foundation. Coatney, who came to Blinn from Montgomery County, is a former member of Blinn's track, baseball and basketball teams. He was a runner on the track team that won the 1955 junior college state championship. Five years later Coatney founded the Acme Truck Line, a major oilfield services company.

The 11,184-square-foot Doyle Coatney Athletic Training Facility is expected to break ground soon. It will include indoor batting cages for baseball and softball and a weight-training room.

Ben Flencher, chairman of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors, has served on the Blinn College Foundation board for the past six years and is currently vice president. As a young man, he attended Blinn for one semester before enrolling at Texas A&M University.

In recent years, Flencher said the foundation has worked hard to get the donors' gifts and the college's administrators "much more on the same page as to what they want to accomplish. I

really think that is going to make a huge difference in the future."

Students will continue to be assisted by scholarships, Flencher said, "but also we can help teachers with the much-needed funds for special projects.

"The association that Blinn College has been able to develop with Texas A&M is phenomenal," he said.

Kenneth Mutscher, who lives in Brenham, is vice chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors and also serves on the Blinn foundation board. He helped in the planning stages for the Kruse Center project.

Mutscher played baseball for Blinn in 1961 and 1962. He was on the first team to reach the national playoffs. Another link to the college is his wife Sarita, who taught English at Blinn for 18 years.

Susan Myers, executive director of the foundation, said Mutscher plays an instrumental role in the foundation's annual fundraising campaign and "we look to him for leadership on planned giving."

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and recreation, a small crops field for agronomy, and a greenhouse for horticulture classes. Classes explore farming issues such as the use of genetically modified organisms vs. non-GMO crops, and the use of pesticides, Behnke said.

A 14,000-square-foot agriculture mechanics shop is nearby. The well-equipped workrooms provide spaces for students to learn welding, engine repair and wood construction.

"Many four-year colleges with ag programs don't have a shop anything like this," Behnke said.

Although no animals are raised on campus, the seven-acre ag complex will be expanded to allow that, Behnke said. An adjacent 25-acre site has been set aside to raise animals and accommodate additional buildings.

On-campus residence halls and apartments in Brenham provide housing for 1,325 students. There is no student housing on the other three Blinn campuses.

The Brenham campus still feels like home to former students and graduates. Recently, two sisters who are Blinn alumni were tucked into a corner of the Blinn College library to study for important exams. Cynthia Botello, 21, and her sister Jacquelin Botello, 24, grew up in Brenham, completed two years of classes at Blinn and then attended Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.



Cynthia Botello



Blinn College photo

A welding shop, along with mechanics and carpentry shops, gives Blinn agriculture students the training needed to keep a farm or ranch running.

With Blinn as their foundation, they have staked out ambitious career paths.

Cynthia Botello was studying for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). "My dream is to go to New York University School of Law," she said. She'll soon complete her political science studies at Lehigh before tackling law school.

Jacquelin Botello likes science and wants a doctorate to conduct biology and cancer immunology research. She was studying for the Graduate Record Examination. She already has a bachelor's degree from Lehigh and a master's degree

from The Commonwealth Medical College in Pennsylvania.

"Blinn did a good job preparing me for my studies," she said.

The number of Blinn students who are accepted into upper division colleges and universities attests to that. The community college has been turning out students as determined as the Botello sisters for more than a century. Blinn's solid achievements and growth over recent decades have solidified its importance in Texas education for the 21st century, too. ■