

# THE JAMES HENRY RUSSELL STEM COMPLEX OPENS AT TEXARKANA COLLEGE

BY MADELEINE RUSSELL



photo by Matt Cornelius

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A true holiday favorite, this beloved comedy classic features renowned composer John Williams' charming and delightful score performed live to picture by the Texarkana Symphony Orchestra. Macaulay Culkin stars as Kevin McCallister, an 8-year-old boy who's accidentally left behind when his family leaves for Christmas vacation, and who must defend his home against two bungling thieves. Hilarious and heart-warming, *Home Alone* is holiday fun for the entire family!

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On October 10, 2023, Texarkana College (TC) held the grand opening of the Dr. James Henry Russell STEM Complex. The naming of the complex is a well-deserved honor, as James Henry Russell (JHR) has spent his life endeavoring to make Texarkana the best place to live, work, and raise a family. It was a day full of celebrating Texarkana College's beautiful state-of-the-art complex and the amazing opportunities available for TC students.

After graduating from Texas A&M University-College Station, JHR turned down a job offer in New York State and returned to Texarkana. After earning his Certified Public Accounting (CPA) license while working at Thomas & Thomas, CPAs, he started a career focused on public education. JHR served over 25 years in education, including 19 years at Texarkana Independent School District (TISD) and six years as president of Texarkana College.

JHR is a role model who does not ask anyone to do something he would not do himself. During his first day at TISD in 1994 as food service comptroller, he found himself wearing a hairnet and working in the school cafeteria because the district had just started a new electronic lunch pay system. He experienced firsthand the importance of the food service workers and all employees who make sure children are ready to learn. JHR has the gift of leadership, making sure everyone knows his appreciation for the important jobs they do.

During the grand opening of the James Henry Russell Stem Complex, George Moore, Vice-President of the Texarkana College Board of Trustees, spoke about the character and integrity he has witnessed in JHR since he was a young boy in his middle school biology class. "James Henry is the exact same person who sat in my classroom," he said, "as the person he is today. He was always hardworking and had that integrity and character that very few people have today. I want to thank him because that means so much."

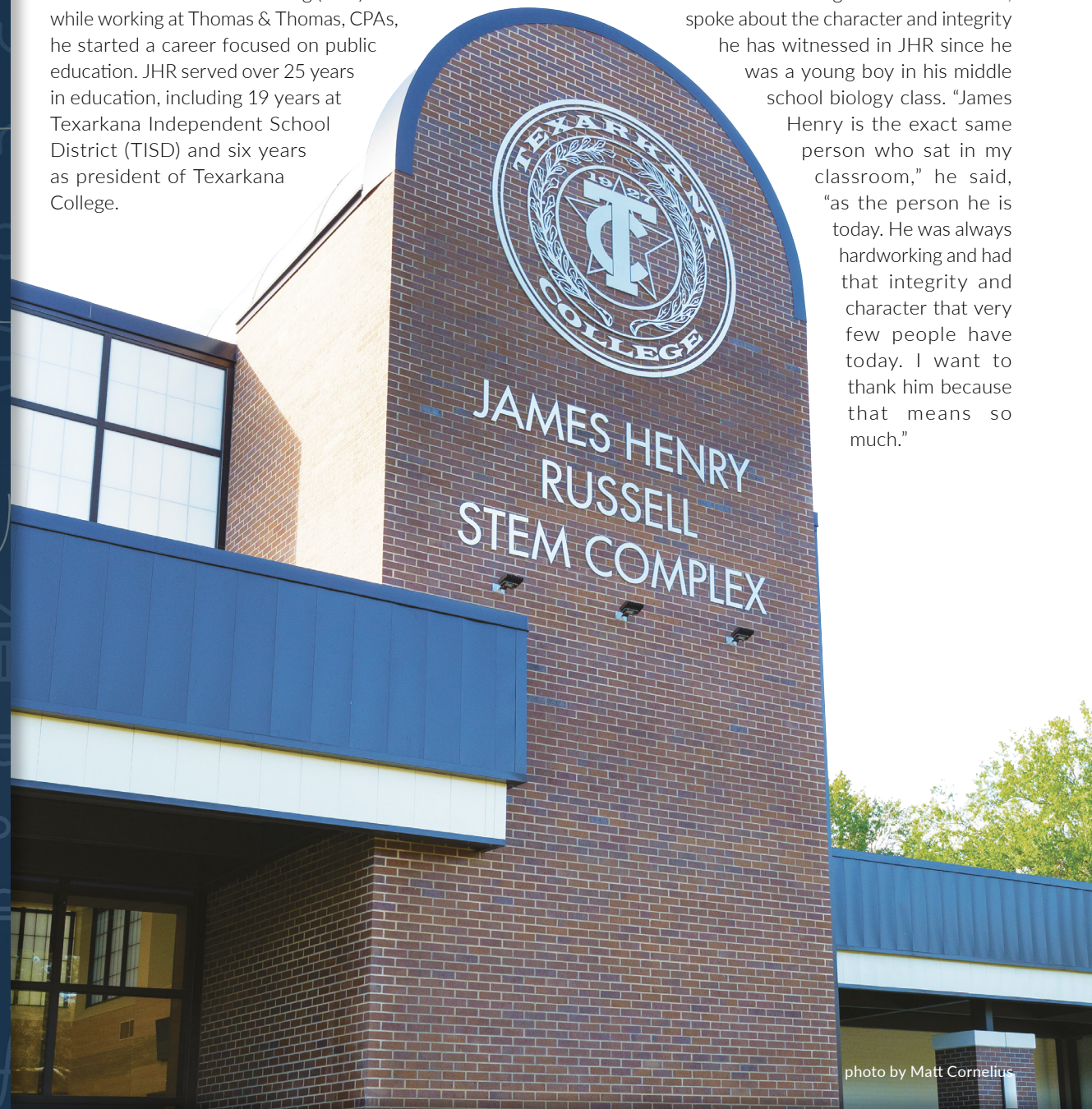
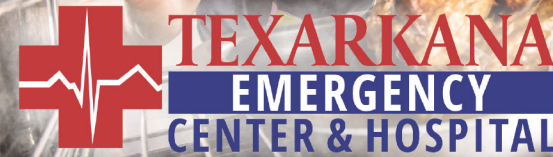


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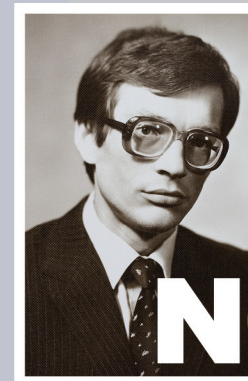
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photo courtesy of Texarkana College

Dr. Donna McDaniel, former Vice President of Instruction at Texarkana College, and current Superintendent of DeKalb Independent School District, said, "When making a big decision, I think to myself, 'What would JHR do?' He is the model of leadership and strives for excellence in every single thing he does."

JHR believes in the power of education to change lives and in ensuring that everyone in our community experiences the highest quality Kindergarten through grade 12 education and goes on after high school to earn a certificate or degree. One of his mantras is "Make it happen," as he personally has devoted his life to making remarkable things happen in Texarkana and the surrounding communities.

In 2011, JHR accepted the position as the eighth president of TC during a time when the historical college needed him most. TC was facing a financial crisis, and without reform, the college would have had to shut its doors. He knew it would take the support of the entire community to save the college. Seeking a mentor to help him guide the institution back to financial solvency, he

reached out to one of TC's most iconic and successful alumnus, Texarkana native H. Ross Perot. During this critical time of institutional transformation, Perot encouraged JHR to launch a community challenge to expand the TC taxing district, which would provide a sustainable source of revenue for years to come. The community rallied in support, responded to the challenge, and voted to annex all of Bowie County into TC's taxing district. Because of these steps and the unwavering dedication of TC's faculty and staff to keep student success their focus, the institution has not only flourished financially, but student completion measures have been at an all-time high, receiving national and state-level recognition.

In 2019, JHR retired from his career in education to begin working in the private sector, currently working as the Senior Vice President and CFO at The Arnold Companies. Although he has taken on new roles, he remains committed to the Texarkana community through his involvement in area organizations, including AR-TX REDI, Boy Scouts of America Caddo Area

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Council, Texarkana College Foundation, Ark-La-Tex 100 Club, and as head usher at Williams Memorial United Methodist Church.

One of JHR's legacies to TC was to encourage continuous improvement of campus operations, facilities, and student success. Dr. Catherine Howard, Dean of STEM at TC, explained that before JHR left as president, he ensured that faculty would be included in the planning and implementation of the STEM building project (which is uncommon at other higher education institutions). In June 2018, the TC STEM faculty was invited to tour various campuses across the state to get ideas, inspiration, and take notes on best practices for this project. They looked for things like microbiology lab vent types, chemistry bench configurations, types of plumbing needed, the safest gas systems to have, shelving for backpacks, chair heights, fume hoods, vented chemical storage, and lab classroom furniture arrangements. Every detail of the STEM complex was personally influenced by TC's STEM division faculty.

The STEM Complex design and construction was challenging because it included remodeling and redesigning four buildings from the 1960s. Architect David Lamb masterfully integrated the needs of students and faculty into a new complex that includes

a biology building, chemistry building, math building, and a beautiful atrium with spacious study areas for students. The STEM Complex has 11 state-of-the-art labs, 12 classrooms, 21 offices, three faculty workrooms, and three student lounge areas, totaling 60,882 square feet. It also includes all brand-new equipment, such as autoclaves, ovens, water baths, models, probes, etc. Beautiful artwork is displayed throughout the complex, representing the unique elements associated with STEM.

On the first day of fall classes, TC students walked through the full complex for the first time with wide eyes focused on the grandeur of the buildings, grinning ear-to-ear at the special details displayed all throughout the complex. Savannah Murphy, TC Student Government Association President, and biology major, said, "As a biology major, I've spent most of my days at TC in the STEM area. I had already fallen in love with the artwork and themes throughout the biology and chemistry buildings, and the atrium connector is stunning to me, different from the rest. The architecture and natural light the ceiling provides is inspiring and motivating. It acts as the perfect resource to supplement my studies and time spent in science at TC." 📌

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The Russell family—Madeleine, Rosemary, James Henry, Colleen and Reed



Photo by Matt Cornelius

**A DAUGHTER'S PERSPECTIVE BY MADELEINE RUSSELL**

When *Texarkana Magazine* asked me if I would write this article, I thought it would be the easiest thing in the world. I could write a book on how my dad, James Henry Russell, has always worked to help others. However, I found myself writing and then rewriting this story multiple times. I have heard throughout my life how amazing my dad is as a friend, mentor, co-worker, boss, and leader. But what I want everyone to know is that none of those accolades compare to the amazing father he is. Colleen, Reed, and I are beyond blessed

to have the parents and family we have. JHR is the kind of dad who, on Father's Day, washes and fills up the gas tanks of everyone else's car. He loads his mower on a trailer and mows his in-law's yard before stopping by Woodlawn Cemetery and checking on the grounds. He sends an email on a random Thursday morning saying how proud he is and how much he loves us. He leads by example and loves the Lord with all his heart. Every day, I try to be half the person he is. I love you, Dad!

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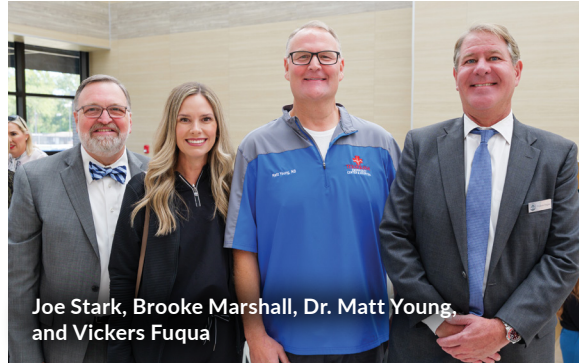




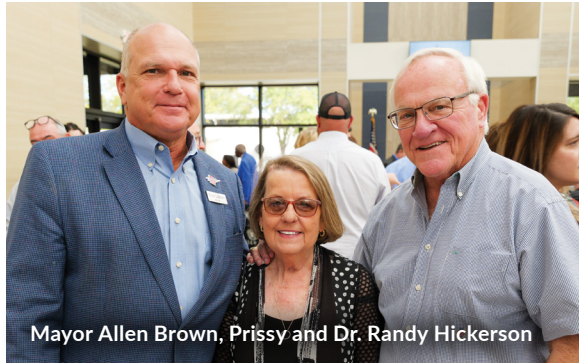
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