

communityprofile



PHOTOS BY HOWARD ROBSON

Tulsa's skyline still flaunts the art deco style of the 1920s and '30s. Far right is the Boston Avenue United Methodist Church, built in 1929. The 225-foot pleated tower is described as 'an elegant Art Deco finger pointing toward heaven.'

Just to the left, in the foreground, is the Philtower, once known as the queen of the Tulsa skyline.

Well Endowed Built with oil wealth on Native American roots, Tulsa, Oklahoma today exudes the vitality of a high-tech city with abundant activities and gracious people.

BY PAMELA M. PRESCOTT

WHEN TULSANS MARKED THEIR CITY'S centennial anniversary last year, they celebrated the rich saga of a truly American city. Remembrances of the bitter struggles of Native Americans, tales of the rugged determination shown by westward-pushing pioneers and enviable stories about the sheer luck of early wildcat oilmen all intertwine to create the fascinating anthology of Tulsa's first century.

Tulsans today are working on Volume

2 of that anthology, building on a dream-come-true, thoroughly modern city. Jobs are plentiful. Transportation is easy. And there's plenty to satisfy healthy appetites for the arts and sports. It's all in Tulsa, under a big blue sky where people have never been able to settle soon enough.

Internist Jeff Galles, DO, is one of those folks who came to Tulsa and decided to make it home. The Iowa native came to Tulsa for medical school at the Oklahoma State College of Osteopathic Medicine. Even after returning to his

home state for residency, Tulsa lured him back. With extended family scattered from Texas to Iowa, Tulsa made geographic sense.

Galles likes the cultural and ethnic blend of Tulsa. "There are a lot of people from other metropolitan areas of the Midwest, like Chicago and St. Louis, and there are people from the rural areas of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri who have come to Tulsa, so it's a real nice mixture of people."

Continued

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Continued from previous page

With such variety, there is still a distinct feel to Tulsa, which Galles attributes to history and location. “Because of Tulsa’s oil history, it has all the cultural benefits that came from that wealth. Then, of course, there’s the Native American influence. And we’re far enough southwest, that you get that flavor too,” Galles says.

The “Land of Red People”

The Native American influence resonates in the names of many Oklahoma counties—Pontotoc, Pushmataha, Nowata, Washita, Sequoyah, Okfuskee, Creek—poetic offerings to the state’s origins. In the language of the Choctaw, *okla* means “people” and *humma* means “red.” Oklahoma is the land of the red people—Indian Territory.

The earliest traces of Native Americans in Oklahoma date more than 20,000 years ago, when hunting bands armed with nothing but flint-pointed spears pursued giant Columbian mammoths. From A.D. 850 to 1450 a group called the Spiro People built mounds, established networks of towns and made carvings from rock crystals in settlements along the Arkansas River. Mounds and artifacts from these settlements are preserved at the Spiro Mounds Archaeological State Park near the Arkansas border.

In the mid 1600s, groups such as the Wichita and Caddo set up trading posts and intermarried with French fur trappers, who left names like Verdigris River and Sans Bois Mountains on the landscape.

By the early 1800s, Oklahoma seemed to be following the frontier state paradigm; permanent settlers followed the fur traders and built cabins, planted crops, and brought in livestock.

But in 1825, the federal government made a remarkable declaration: Oklahoma would be barred from white settlement. Instead, it would become official Indian Territory, a place where the



ABOVE, The 28-story Philtower, built by oil baron Waite Phillips, is a cherished example of Tulsa’s Art Deco architecture. RIGHT, Natural gas, captured from Oklahoma’s oil wells, is stored in tanks, awaiting distribution.



POPULATION

Tulsa: 382,488

MSA (five-county area):
773,310

CLIMATE

Annual rainfall: 40.59 in.

Annual snowfall: 9.1 in.

Average High/Low
Temperatures:

January - 46°/25°, July -
94°/73°

Days of Sunshine: 227

TRANSPORTATION:

Airports - Tulsa

International Airport, served by 11 major carriers, is 10 minutes northeast of downtown Tulsa.

R.L. Jones Jr. Airport general aviation facility, southwest of the city, serves private and corporate aviation.

Interstates - Interstate 44 leads northeast to St. Louis (386 miles) and southwest to Oklahoma City (105 miles), while U.S. 75 goes south to Dallas (263 miles) and north to Topeka (217 miles).

COST OF LIVING:

Tulsa: Indexed at 92.3
(100 is average)

Average Home Price:
\$82,242

Median Adjusted Gross
Family Income:

Tulsa MSA, 1996: \$58,438

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Continued from previous page



ABOVE, Waite Phillip's Italian style home, the Villa Philbrook, is now a museum housing collections of art from North America, Europe, Africa, and the Orient. RIGHT, Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses race in Tulsa at Fair Meadows Racetrack. BELOW, A sailboarder on Grand Lake, just north of Tulsa.



government could relocate Native Americans who were impeding settlement east of the Mississippi River.

The Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and some of the Florida Seminole—known as the Five Civilized Tribes—were the first to be relocated to Oklahoma, a tragic journey the Indians called the Trail of Tears. Despite the hardship of their trek, the tribes re-established themselves and, for more than 50 years, held most of Oklahoma's land in common and governed themselves.

By the 1870s, however, Indians were being overrun by white men who were pouring into the region to build railroads, work in the coal seams, and cut down eastern forests for the lumber industry. In 1889 the U.S. government authorized the first of several land runs in Oklahoma that allowed home-

Continued

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Continued from previous page

steads into western Oklahoma. This was accomplished through the Dawes Allotment Act, which took away land the Indians had held in common and replaced it with a 160-acre allotment to each Indian. The "surplus" lands then became available for white settlement. The "Sooner State" takes its nickname from the many homesteaders who staked out their land claims before the legally organized land runs were to begin.

Indian leaders met to resist being annexed to the progressively white Oklahoma territory, and even wrote a constitution for their new state of Sequoyah. Their efforts were ignored by Congress, which passed legislation enabling a unified state of Oklahoma in 1906.

Growing on oil

The city of Tulsa began when members of the Lochapoka band of the Creek Indians stopped on a hill overlooking the Arkansas River, weary from their journey along the Trail of Tears. Under the branches of an oak tree, they lit their council fire from the embers they'd carried with them from their Alabama ancestral home. They pronounced their new village Tallahassee, or Tulsī. The year was 1836, and the Council Tree still stands at 18th Street and Cheyenne Avenue near downtown Tulsa.

The small settlement became a convenient watering place for cattlemen to rest and fatten their animals on the long trail drive north from Texas to the slaughter houses in Kansas City. The Frisco Railroad reached Tulsa in 1882, sparking growth of the town. Soon, it had a general store and hotel. When Tulsa was incorporated as a city in 1898, it had just over 200 people.

It was the discovery of oil that ignited the monumental growth that would define Tulsa's skyline even today.

As early as 1859, a Cherokee drilling a water well accidentally struck oil, which flowed for a year until the gas pressure

gave out. In 1897 the first commercial oil well gushed in Bartlesville, 47 miles north of Tulsa, but it was capped until 1899, when the Santa Fe Railroad arrived and provided a way to get the oil to market. The "Nellie Johnstone Number 1" produced more than 100,000 barrels of oil and launched the state's petroleum industry. An exact replica of the well stands in Johnstone Park in Bartlesville.

Just west of Tulsa, the Red Fork field was hit in 1901. Four years later, Thomas Gilcrease of Tulsa, a former school teacher and part Creek who had received a 160-acre allotment when he was nine years old, discovered the fabulous Glenn Pool south of town. Tulsa became known as the "Oil Capital of the World," and by the time Oklahoma elected its first governor in 1907, about 40 million gallons of oil were being pumped out of the new state each year. By 1920, the Oil Rush had expanded Tulsa's population to 72,000. Oil barons such as J. Paul Getty, Harry Sinclair, William Skelly, and Waite Phillips built their fortunes with Tulsa oil.

The prosperity of oil left its mark on Tulsa's skyline in the form of remarkable Art Deco style buildings, popular in the 1920s and early '30s. One example is the Boston Avenue United Methodist Church, built in 1929, which has a 225-foot pleated tower described as "an elegant Art Deco finger pointing toward heaven."

Of special note are the Philcade and the Philtower, both constructed by oilman Waite Phillips. The 28-story Philtower was once known as the queen of the Tulsa skyline.

Arts benefactors

Before Phillips built his downtown buildings, he built his home, the Villa Philbrook, taking inspiration from country villas in Renaissance Italy. In 1938 he donated the home and 23 acres of gardens to Tulsa as an art museum. Today, the Philbrook Museum of Art houses 26

galleries that showcase its permanent collections of Indian artifacts, Italian Renaissance art, African and Oriental art, and American and European paintings.

Another priceless artistic legacy was given by Thomas Gilcrease, who, from the 1930s until the early 1960s, amassed one of the most comprehensive collections of Native American and Western art in the world. Together, the paintings, artifacts, and documents of the Gilcrease collection tell the story of man in America from ancient times to the present. Albert Bierstadt, George Catlin, Thomas Moran, W.R. Leigh, Frederic Remington, and Charles M. Russell are among the American artists represented.

Tulsa also enjoys the performing arts. Its opera is ranked among the top 10 regional opera companies in the nation, and the Tulsa Philharmonic, formed in 1948, is the largest performing arts organization in Oklahoma. The Tulsa Ballet Theatre, in its 42nd year, offers four major productions annually.

Drama is alive and well in Tulsa, featuring the state's only resident professional theater company. The city also offers community theater, the nation's oldest ongoing Native American theater company, an African-American community theater, and a children's theater. Ten miles west, in Discoveryland, theatergoers can see the official production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* under the stars during summer in the Discoveryland outdoor theater.

The Greenwood Cultural Center, located in the historic Greenwood business district, showcases a collection of memorabilia that tells the story of Greenwood's unique history as the "Black Wall Street" in the first two decades of this century.

In addition, the cultural center is home to the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame, which inducts new members each June during the annual Juneteenth Heritage Festival. Live jazz music sweeps Green-

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Continued from previous page

wood Street again every August during the annual Jazz on Greenwood festival.

The active set

For Galles, with two small children and hankerings for big-city fun and under-the-stars camping, Tulsa beats all contenders.

"It really is the best of both worlds," says Galles, 37.

Performing arts, professional and collegiate sports, and downtown festivals keep his family entertained in town, he says. "There are festivals just about every weekend downtown and they're very accessible, so we load up the kids and go, and just about everybody else does too."

But he's just as likely to pack up his three- and four-year-olds and head out of town. "We like to go camping, and there are man-made lakes and big lakes in the eastern part of the state, within an hour to two hours from Tulsa. We enjoy water-skiing with friends, and there are some nice fishing areas."

Fishing and boating are popular pastimes at the many lakes northeast of Tulsa. Amazingly, Oklahoma has 2,000 more shoreline miles than the Atlantic and Gulf coasts combined.

Large-scale amusements keep the younger set busy, from the Tulsa State Fair each fall, to Bell's Amusement Park, to the Big Splash Water Park. Harmon Science Center is a hands-on learning museum. The Tulsa Zoo, which is undergoing improvements, has more than 1,200 animals in indoor and outdoor exhibits. The Oxley Nature Center next door is a natural wildlife preserve of more than 800 acres with walking trails through forests, fields, and wetlands.

Sports aficionados can keep their leisure time well-occupied in Tulsa.

Baseball fans enjoy the Texas League (AA) Tulsa Drillers, who play in a refurbished 10,000-seat, grass stadium.

Indoors, the Tulsa Ice Oilers hockey team often plays to sold-out home games at the

Tulsa Convention Center.

Tulsa residents also enjoy college basketball from the University of Tulsa and Oral Roberts University's Golden Eagles. And Tulsa is national headquarters to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and its more than 400 member colleges. Each year, the NAIA brings thousands of athletes to compete in national championship tournaments. Its top attraction is the NAIA Men's Basketball Championship each spring.

Tulsa's mild climate encourages year-round golf. Its outstanding private golf clubs have hosted the U.S. Women's Open Championship and the PGA Championship, and they will host the U.S. Men's Open in 2001.

Aviation and telecommunication

Fueling all these leisure activities is an economy that still gets some steam from oil-related industries, with Amoco Production Company, Parker Drilling, the Williams Companies, Citgo Petroleum Corp., and Sun Company, Inc., operating in Tulsa.

But one of Tulsa's largest employers is American Airlines, which operates its Engineering and Maintenance Center and its SABRE Group Reservation Center here. Several other aviation-related operations, such as Boeing North American and Flight Safety Simulation Systems, are also major employers.

WorldCom and Williams Communications Group, two of the five national fiber-optic networks, operate out of Tulsa, and the city's advanced telecommunications system has attracted several other service providers: First Data Corporation's care services center, Avis Rent A Car's Worldwide Reservation Center, State Farm Insurance's regional customer service and data processing center, Dollar Rent A Car's headquarters and reservation center, and Thrifty Car Rental's headquarters and reservation center.

Health care is equally a part of Tulsa's

thriving economy. Ten hospitals provide a complete array of services to the community and the region. The three major health-care systems in town, St. Francis Health System, Hillcrest Healthcare System, and St. John Health System, have all been positioning themselves in a market where 21 percent of patients fall under managed care.

The 972-bed St. Francis Hospital is the largest in Tulsa. Its heart center performs the only heart transplants in the city and its Warren Cancer Research Foundation receives support from the National Cancer Institute for research, treatment, and education.

St. Francis, established in 1960 by oilman William K. Warren, also owns the 150-physician Warren Clinic, which provides primary care in nine suburban communities and at several Tulsa locations.

St. John Health System, established by the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother in 1926 and part of the national Marion Health System, has been developing a network of facilities and physicians to provide health care for area employers. They've linked with Tulsa's St. Francis Hospital and with St. Anthony Hospital and Mercy Hospital in Oklahoma City to create Community Care Managed Health Care Plans of Oklahoma, the state's first provider-owned health-maintenance organization.

To help create a continuum of care, St. John also has established OMNI Medical Group, with more than 70 primary-care physicians in northeastern Oklahoma who are affiliated with St. John.

Hillcrest, established in 1916, is the largest health-care group in eastern Oklahoma, with 17 acute-care hospitals and 37 corporate entities under its banner. In December, Hillcrest agreed to buy Columbia/HCA HealthCare Pacific Group's interests in the Tulsa market. The acquisition included three hospitals, an ambulatory surgery center, and 46 physician practices. The additional hospitals

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Continued from previous page

are being added to Hillcrest's other Tulsa acute care facilities, Hillcrest Medical Center and Children's Medical Center. In addition, Hillcrest will open SouthCrest Hospital this summer, a 160-bed facility in south Tulsa, according to Lori Maisch, a Hillcrest physician recruiter.

Galles is the internal medicine chief for the Hillcrest Medical Group, which has more than 100 primary-care physicians at 31 locations in eastern Oklahoma. He is excited about the expansion. Besides providing more leverage for Hillcrest in negotiating insurance agreements, Galles says, the expansion opens up more specialists for his group to choose from, and "it gives patients more choices of doctors and locations within our system."

Living comfortably

Even with the keen competition among Tulsa's health-care providers, physicians enjoy a sense of camaraderie and job security, says pulmonologist Andrew Gottehrer, MD.

"I feel like there's more job security here, and not as much competition," he says. He attributes the atmosphere to the kinds of people Tulsa attracts and the basic philosophies of the local health-care organizations. "There are fewer egos here than in the big cities," said the native New Yorker.

Gottehrer is also enamored of his Oklahoma patients. "I get letters from my patients and from the families of patients I've cared for. And people are always bringing me veggies."

Like Galles, Gottehrer appreciates the Native American influence in Tulsa. "I actually have a patient named Lucy Cries For Ribs, and another whose name is Pumpkin Drywater," Gottehrer says. "They're so interesting. They bring a different twist to things."

"People here are very conservative, being in the Bible Belt, but they're also very gracious. Because of their beliefs,

they understand that their life isn't perfect, so if I have to tell someone that they're going to live only a few more months, they say 'I know,' and they thank me. People never react that way on the East Coast," Gottehrer says. "It's very enlightening to me, and very humbling."

Gottehrer, 41, says Tulsa is different in other ways, too.

"People hear 'Tulsa' and they think dirt roads and cowboys," he says, "but when they come here, they're quite surprised. The roads are good, you can get across town in less than 20 minutes, and you can get to the airport in 10. The housing is good. You get a little more for your money. The economy is very good-unemployment is low."

"It's hard enough being a doctor without having to fight traffic and the other hassles of a big city," Gottehrer adds. "You can live very comfortably in Tulsa. It's a great place for a doctor." ■

Pam Prescott is a free-lance writer based in Roscoe, Illinois. This is her fourth Community Profile.