

**GREAT PLAINS  
AMBUCS  
NEWSLETTER**

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**AMBUNK**

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AMBUNK is a publication of  
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#### THIS WEEK

In observance of Memorial Day we did not have a meeting on May 31.

#### LAST WEEK

The May 24, 2021 club meeting was called to order by Kent Jester. Robert Morales led the group in prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### GUEST SPEAKER

James Taylor, FISTA Executive Director, was our guest speaker. FISTA is short for Fires Innovation Science & Technology Accelerator. James was hired last year. He is a retired Navy officer with 29 years of service. For 6 years James worked in workforce development for the state. He was with GPTC for 18 months. James' mother was a long time member of the Mountain Metro chapter and donated part of her estate to AMBUCS.

The FISTA would not have been possible without key support from the community. Two of our members are on the FISTA Trust Authority board, Barry Ezerski and Phil Kennedy. The board has 7 other members. Clarence Fortney is the board's chairman.

The City of Lawton purchased the Central Mall building 5 months ago. James gave us a progress report on what has been happening since then. The old



Sears building interior is being taken down to *bare metal*. Then it will undergo a full renovation. The same will happen to the Dillard's space. The old IBC Bank branch is being turned into a business integration center. It will be a staging area for businesses that will move into the Sears & Dillard's spaces.

The decision by the City to buy the mall building was controversial, but James said the alternative, letting the mall continue to wither, would carry its own consequences. The previous owner was doing a terrible job managing the mall. In the months since the city took control over \$500,000 in back rent has been collected. The city took a loan to buy the mall building and parking lot. It is not funded by the CIP. 70% of retail spaces in the mall are occupied. Rent is paying that loan *and then some*. There are plans to renovate the interior and exterior of the mall to bring it into the 21st century. A firm in OKC is helping with the retail management side while James' group will manage the defense technology side with FISTA.

Army Futures Command down in Austin oversees 8 cross functional teams in the Army. Fort Sill is home to 2 of those schools, Field Artillery and Air Defense Artillery. Fort Sill has potential for a great deal of expansion. The cost of

doing business here is lower than many other post locations in the nation. The Army is using drones more and doing more to counter them. The joint school for Counter UAS is moving from MCAS Yuma to Fort Sill in a couple years. BRAC has been a big benefit to our city. But we must continue striving to support Fort Sill and its missions. FISTA will aid this process greatly and bring high tech well paying jobs to our city.

James finished by talking a bit about the Association of the US Army and the launch of the Frontier Team, a new version of the CO-OP for units on Fort Sill to partner with local businesses *and even civic clubs*.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

During the last club meeting outgoing President Kent Jester handed out some awards to those who couldn't attend the Awards & Installation banquet. Zeldon Rice received a plaque for being the PR committee chair. Kathleen Martin was given the Rookie of the Year Award. This was a competitive category. Several new members really stepped up during the 2020-21 club year.

Plans are in the works for the 40th Anniversary party for our chapter. The date is penciled in for late July or early August.

#### NEXT MEETING

OK State Representative Daniel Pae will be our guest speaker on June 7.

#### 50/50

Dan Kite drew the King of Clubs. The pot was left standing at \$73.

#### NEWSLETTER

Gordon Shaw had the winning ticket and his copy of *AMBUNK*.

**GUESTS**  
James Taylor  
Guest Speaker