

# Turf Trouble

## Mayor speaks on recent gang violence

**Morgan Taylor-Thomas**  
Staff Writer

Longview Mayor Andy Mack is searching for a way to give gang members a way out while Longview continues to gossip about gangs and gang-related criminal activity.

Mack posted a link to a two-part questionnaire on Facebook for the residents. The first question related to the subject, asking respondents whether they would support finding a way to help gang members out and into a new community if it were an available option. The other question asked who they favored to win the Super Bowl. (GO BRONCOS!)

"This week's survey is kind of interesting, and it's going to spur some discussion. I'm excited to see what happens," Mack said during a speech for the Longview Rotary Club on Tuesday, according to the

Longview News-Journal. "If possible, would you support a program that gave gang members the option to turn their lives around if they wanted it? Would you support that? I would. In a heartbeat."

There are many recreational, educational, and after-school programs that exist to help persuade youth from joining gangs, however, there are none within our area that help escape this lifestyle, Mack said.

"They're lost," he said. "Once they're in, they're done, and it's because of them we are having issues. However, I believe that not every one of them want to stay in, but they have no option out."

Gang members often lack jobs, money, or family support, all factors that attract them to gangs and leave them with

few options if they desired to distance from the gang, Mack said.

Mack has been posting non-scientific surveys every week since June.

"There is not a simple solution that makes (all crimes) go away," Mack said in his speech Tuesday. "It's a multifactorial puzzle that has many pieces, and if we continue to put them together, eventually our pieces will be greater than (offenders) pieces and we will succeed."

Seventeen people commented on the mayor's post and eleven people shared it within an hour after posting.

"I believe that there's a chance for this community to come together and help the youth that are stuck find a way out of a lifestyle they no longer want to live," Mack said.

# DIVING INTO A DREAM

Make-A-Wish Foundation sends second-grader to Florida to swim with dolphins

**Mackenzie Brown**  
Staff Writer

As soon as she steps into the small room, her nerves take over. The room is full of cameras pointing her direction, but it is also full of familiar faces. Someone tells her that this is not a birthday party. No, this is a gathering to thank her for being an inspiration.

Her nervousness shifts to shock, and then to pure joy. She races around the room, hugging her friends, her relatives, and everyone else who is there to support her.

On November 10, Jaidan Johnson was taken to Air U and told that the Make-A-Wish Foundation would be sending her to Florida's SeaWorld and Dolphin Cove, where she would swim with dolphins.

"It was cool, cause I was the only one who trick-rod and I was the youngest one there," Jaidan said. "I was supposed to hold the fins. Both of them. But I slipped off, and then I was trick-riding!"

Jaidan was diagnosed with Alpha 1 Antitrypsin, a condition related to the liver, at only 7 weeks old. She was added to the transplant list at nine months old.

"Before her transplant, she couldn't walk because her belly



Holding onto her new marine friend, second-grader Jaidan Johnson smiles for the camera. Jaidan traveled to Florida to swim with dolphins thanks to the help of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. "We [pretended to] pull the fishing pole and then the dolphin made a sound like a reel," Jaidan said. "Usually in the wild, dolphins only live to be about fifteen years, but some of these were fifty!"

was the size of a basketball due to ascites, which is fluid buildup," Jaidan's mother Jaime Steele said. "To everyone's amazement, she walked for the

first time one day after her life-saving liver transplant."

After Jaidan was told about her upcoming trip at Air U, she got to sign the Pink Heals pink

fire truck outside of the building.

"The moment she realized that the whole group was there for her was wonderful. She just stood there and looked around

in shock," event coordinator for Pink Heals Tammy Denfeld said. "She was very moved by signing the truck. She is a survivor."

Jaidan left for Florida on November 12 with her mother and her grandparents, where she swam with dolphins at Dolphin Cove.

"There was a dolphin that pushed me by the foot. Two couldn't push me cause I was so tiny, and they were too close together," Jaidan said. "Dixie was the one that pushed me. She was so fast. I loved it."

Jaidan's grandparents joined her and her mother for the trip to Florida. They went with Jaidan to Dolphin Cove to share the experience with her.

"As I watched Jaidan all I could think of was in that moment, she was experiencing pure joy," Jaidan's grandmother Sandy Steele said. "It was the happiest I had ever seen her."

While she was in Florida, Jaidan also visited SeaWorld.

"At SeaWorld, we went to the orca show," Jaidan said. "We got so wet my mom had to buy me a new shirt."

Jaidan and her family returned from Florida on November 17, but Jaidan will likely remember this trip with her family for the rest of her life.

"I am very proud of Jaidan, her heart, and her love for others," Jaime Steele said. "Throughout this journey, she has been extremely brave and taught me not to be afraid."



# Winners in the Water

Swim Team advances to Regionals

**Layton Anderson**  
Contributing Writer

The four man White Oak swim team competed in the District 15 meet in Texarkana, Texas on Jan. 23. The team, consisting of Michael (12) and Zach (10) Maly, Jarrod Lowman (12), and Layton Anderson (10), is sending all four swimmers to regionals on February 5 in Lewisville, Texas.

"I'm feeling pretty confident going into regionals, but I'm being cautious," Michael said. "I'm not going to be going showing my full potential at regionals but just enough to hopefully get me to state where if I make it, I'll definitely be giving it my absolute all and giving it my best shot."

Going into regionals, Michael is ranked first in both the 200 free and 500 free. In fact, Michael has a 22 second advantage over the 2 ranked seed, and a 7 second advantage in the 200 free. Michael is also a part of the 200 free relay and the 400 free relay whom are both in contention to win regionals and make state. Swimming alongside his brother, one-

fourth of the defending regional champion relay Zach Maly is planning on making this is last go around and start to focus on football and baseball.

"I'm a little nervous considering that I have been gone from swim and am not at my best speed I could possibly be," Zach said. "I'm preparing the same as all other swimmers, and I'm practicing and working to become better for my best."

Zach will most likely be the 3 leg of the 200 free and the 2 leg behind Lowman, who will lead off hoping to get an early lead against other competitors. Lowman is competing in four events: the 200 IM, 100 breaststroke, and both relays. He is seeded 4 in both individuals, and it is, along with Michael, his final year and final regionals to attend.

"I am looking forward to ending my career on a high note," Lowman said. "I have been blessed with a successful four years and amazing teammates. As we brave our last endeavor together at regionals in hope

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# All About That Bass

**Madison Malone**  
Staff Writer

Bass fishing team reels in big at first two tournaments



With two tournaments down, the White Oak Bass Fishing Team fished for first place. Recruiting sponsors and fishing competitively hasn't slowed them down as they performed well in their latest tournament on Saturday, October 3, at Lake o' the Pines.

A 17.73 pound winning bag of fish caught by freshman Trenton Gross and sophomore Seth Kutch earned the team a scholarship money total of \$730 and Vendetta 7' rod combos. Kutch also brought home Big Bass Honors with his catch of 7.20 pounds and received a certificate for a pair of Costas (up to a \$280 value) for his big fish. Both qualify to fish in the Regional tournament with these honors. White Oak also brought home the team championship with their top 3 weights coming in at 31.43 pounds.

Cowser said. Most of the fishing for fishing is just them. For fishing has since he could

"My dad has the water," (I went with him became a pro)

Weather conditions a place as an anglers over conditions a place as an

"My ideal for fishing cloudy and Mason West Junior Ty stepped up with other the younger has set goal

# SPLASH ATTACK

## Swimmers Compete in Fall Meet

**Layton Anderson**  
*Contributing Writer*

Three swimmers of the four-man swim team competed November 20 and 21 at the Northeast Texas Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association Texarkana meet in Texarkana, Texas. The team consists of two sophomores, Zach Maly and Layton Anderson, and two seniors, Michael Maly and Jarred Lowman.

"As a senior in high school, I was blindsided with how fast time went," Michael Maly said. "It seemed like just yesterday I was a freshman swimming against the top dogs. I was merely a fish with sharks trying to prove myself."

Michael proved himself to be tough competition to the other

swimmers placing first in both the 200 yard freestyle and the 500 yard freestyle. Maly, along with Lowman, is a leader for the this young team being a senior. Maly hopes to pick up from last year, in which he advanced to the state competition in both events.

"I am excited to see how our team will compete and succeed this year," Lowman said. "It has been a long high school career with ups and downs, and I can hardly believe that it is almost done. I know that Michael and I will be able to lead our team to state again in the relay, and possibly in individuals too."

Jarred finished with a silver medal in the 200 yard individual

Medley and a bronze medal in the 100 yard breaststroke. Jarred is the lead off man in the 400 yard freestyle relay, arguably the most important link. Jarred and Michael aid each other in being team leaders of the underclassmen and hope to have a strong finish to their final year.

"Michael and Jarred lead our team in many ways," said Anderson. "Michael leads our lane, pushes us to make interval to get faster, and also motivates us before races. Jarred isn't any different. Our team wouldn't be the same without Jarred's pre-race motivation. It gives me chills every time hearing their 400 freestyle relay pump up

speech."

Anderson and Zach both enjoy the atmosphere that Michael and Lowman bring. Anderson brought home a silver medal in the 100 yard butterfly and a 4th place finish in the 100 yard freestyle behind club teammate Andrew Koudeika, a junior from Gilmer. Even though the team did not get to compete and practice their relay in Texarkana, they have high hopes this year in both relays. However, they are not competing in the same two from the past season. They will race in the 200 yard relay and the 400 yard relay.

"I have now realized that my story is coming to an end," Michael Maly said. "Whether or

not that story comes to a happy ending or sad ending is up to my team and I."

The swim team controls their own destiny. All four swimmers swim for a club team, which means they swim longer and typically have harder practices than an average high school swimmer.

"I never would have believed prior to my high school career that I would ever have the chance to compete with such a strongly bonded and successful swim team," Lowman said. "I know that no matter the outcome this year at regionals and state, I will be able to leave a legacy at White Oak High School that I can smile about."