

AREA NEWS

Tulsa Native Grows Music Career

by EMILY RAMSEY
Managing Editor

A budding music producer with as to Tulsa took his very first walk on the red carpet at this year's Grammy Awards on Feb. 2.

Tulsa native Derek Blankenship is the nephew of former University of Tulsa head football coach Bill Blankenship. His parents and grandparents all still reside in the greater Tulsa area.

Derek Blankenship moved to Los Angeles in 2012 and, thanks to a series of "right place at the right time" moments, has worked as a production assistant for the Grammy Awards since 2014.

For the 2017 Grammys, Blankenship walked the red carpet, representing himself as a producer, musician and composer, allying with the likes of John Legend, Ryan Tedder, Carrie Underwood, Lady Gaga, all of whom he spoke to briefly.

"To be walking among those artists, it was a dream come true," says Blankenship.

Blankenship also worked as a stage manager for the show, and made sure to bring up his Tulsa ties to Tedder and Underwood backstage.

Since moving to L.A., Blankenship has been working to build a career as a music producer, operating under the name The Northern Lights.

Blankenship has been playing music since he was six years old when he took up guitar lessons and was in his first band by fourth grade.

After graduating high school, he attended Baylor University, pursuing a film and digital media



GRAMMY APPEARANCE: Derek Blankenship, nephew of former University of Tulsa head football coach Bill Blankenship, stands on the red carpet at the 2017 Grammy Awards, on Feb. 12. Blankenship is making a name for himself as a music producer.

Through some serendipitous situations, Blankenship secured a job with NBC Universal, wearing a number of hats as a tour guide, errand runner, and production assistant on shows such as The Big Bang Theory and The Voice.

"That opportunity allowed me to get my foot in the door, network and meet people that I admired," he says.

All the while, Blankenship still pursued his own music projects by mixing and composing music, selling it online, and gaining a following of more than 40,000 people on SoundCloud.

Many of his albums have received high ratings, including, in 2015, his album Teenage Wasteland, which was named top album of the year by New Retro Wave.

As his exposure rose, he began receiving attention from artists looking to collaborate.

Currently, he is working with Dana Jean Phoenix, a Canadian musician, and with Vasi Hill, a band from Sydney, Australia, creating music for their upcoming albums and spending upwards of 16 hours in the studio each day, he says.

But, as far as he is concerned, there's no where else he would rather be.

"One thing that L.A. has taught me is that I don't want to be an actor," he says. "I love working behind the scenes and working with artists."

As Blankenship continues to advance his dreams, he is eager to encourage others to do the same: "I just want people to know, don't let anyone tell you no; just go for it."

CENTRAL LIBRARY CELEBRATES 100,000TH CHECKOUT



LOYAL CUSTOMER: Michael Mullens, Central Library's 100,000th checkout customer, holds his prize of an Amazon Echo with Buddy Ingalls, Central Library manager.

In February, Tulsa City-County Library's Central Library reached a milestone since its reopening: its 100,000th checkout of printed materials.

Since opening in October 2016, Central Library has seen a daily traffic count of more than 1,500 people and a steady flow of customers exploring new library features including the maker space, digital learning lab and scenic study rooms overlooking downtown Tulsa.

"This is an exciting time as visitors continue to marvel at the beautiful downtown library," said Buddy Ingalls, Central Library manager.

Library customer Michael Mullens was the person check-

ing out the 100,000th item, and he was rewarded with an Amazon Echo.

"I was not expecting this. It was a real shocker to win," said Mullens, who regularly visits Central Library. "As a reader, I appreciate the new library and how easy it is to find the books you like to read."

Now, librarians are preparing for the next milestone: the 1 millionth checkout.

"Even as many readers transition to accessing library materials on tablets, smartphones and other digital devices, there is still a strong demand for a physical copy of a book," said Ingalls. "Our main objective is to connect people with information in a format they prefer."

Rebecca Norton is at Home in Her Greenbelt

by KYLIE McFERRIN
Contributing Writer

Not everyone grows up becoming one with trees, but Rebecca Norton did. It was her escape and seems not much has changed since. As a child, the woods were a friend while living in New England, and now a licensed counselor with degrees from Louisiana State University and umberton University, the trees are still her constant friends as her continuous work in the greenbelt behind her Minshall Park neighborhood home in south Tulsa can attest.

Moving to the neighborhood in 998 with husband, Doug, Norton is drawn to the trees yet again. It felt like home, the home she identifies with. "So, you see, trees and roads have always saved my life. When I saw the woods in the greenbelt, I knew I was home," she says.

Upon exploring the area and noticing the extreme amounts of rreous material dumped among trees, her mission began. Working steadily to begin removing the trash, the momentum kicked up.

Asked why she began her cleanup of the greenbelt, she says, "I would take my dogs for a walk most mornings. I noticed how much trash and dumping that there was in the greenbelt so I began to clean up."

"I found an air conditioning unit, an seat, truck door, shoe, carpet, truck tires, and lots of debris that could be dumped after trees were up near electric lines. Smokers, all kinds of planters, debris that



LADY OF THE WOODS: Minshall Park neighborhood resident Rebecca Norton works hard to keep her nearby greenbelt free of debris from natural and man-made sources.

yard workers would throw there, and of course all kinds of miscellaneous trash. I still continue to find the trash on a regular basis."

Working with Up With Trees via the City of Tulsa foresters helped Norton recognize which vines were hurting the indigenous trees, some of which are red buds as well as ancient oaks. By clearing the vines and other species that have been continuously preventing growth of native trees, Norton's work has ensured that they are stable and flourishing. She certainly doesn't discount help from local neighbors. Many have stepped in to lend a hand to her efforts.

"Some of our neighbors have decided to pitch in and help with some of the projects. I've gotten a chance to get to know more about several of my neighbors, and this has turned out to be a lot of fun," she says.

When it comes to projects beyond her work with the trees and planting of native plants, Norton has constructed "wattle fences" throughout the corridor of her greenbelt section, which hold a dual purpose. Not only do they look nice but they also help with soil erosion.

Although a wattle fence may sound mysterious, it is a medieval fence woven from tree branches, in which neighbors have also learned to craft themselves with her instruction. Some residents are beginning to use them in their own yards after seeing her work. Yet another delight hidden in Norton's greenbelt are handmade wooden tepees, also created with branches. These structures have even taken in a new resident or two.



LADY OF THE WOODS: Minshall Park neighborhood resident Rebecca Norton works hard to keep her nearby greenbelt free of debris from natural and man-made sources.

"One tepee is being occupied by a critter right now and it will be interesting to see if birds take up residence in some of them as well. So, you see the wood structures were a solution to the wood debris problem. One of the best things that came out of this, but I never planned, is that so many people love wood structures. One of the best compliments was from a person who said that it looks like Narnia down there," she says.

Narnia indeed! The extreme time, attention, and utter determination to refurbish a greenbelt in south Tulsa is not lost on many. Norton's work has inspired her neighbors and friends to pitch in to help ensure her vision maintains itself. It isn't just her work, but her passion and creativity that make the greenbelt a magical place.

"For a while I felt like the Lone Ranger down here in the greenbelt, but now I feel like I have a support group with neighbors and the Home Owners Association. Long-term I hope that others will take up my efforts to be good stewards of such a blessing that we have here. Oh, I plan on living until some other nut that likes all the dirty work comes along and takes over for me," she says.

One thing is for certain: Rebecca Norton's time and attention to trees, wildlife, and plants has immigrated not only the greenbelt, but those who love near it. She is indeed a true Lady of the Woods.

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