

**Americana from the days of Western expansion.** The Short family visits one of the largest private collections of antique windmills in the United States. Jennifer Short and her husband, Staff Sgt. Daniel Short, 27th Fighter Wing Public Affairs, Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., homeschool their children. The visit to the Bill Dalley windmill collection in Portales N.M., is part of their summertime educational plan.



# CANNON BLAST

*Being assigned to this southeastern New Mexico base puts you in one of the most diverse regions of 'The Land of Enchantment'*

by Master Sgt. Tim Barela  
photos by Tech. Sgt. Mike Featherston

It's not a resort town.

It's definitely not the big city.

It's not co-located with a beach or mountains. No, the area around Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., isn't the kind of place where you're going to "raise a lot of hell." It's more suitable to raising cattle, crops and kids ... not to mention some of the world's fiercest fighter pilots.

When selling New Mexico as "The Land of Enchantment," Cannon and the nearby cities of Clovis and Portales probably aren't going to headline the marketing campaign. Situated in the high plains of eastern New Mexico near the Texas panhandle, these flatlands are devoid of the lush forests and beautiful mountains that cover much of the state.

But don't be fooled by first appearances.

Cannon and the nearby cities offer their own allure for those willing to give them a chance.

## **Raising a family**

"It's a small community, a friendly town," said Master Sgt. Teresa Gillooly, noncommissioned officer in charge of customer service for the military person-

nel flight, about Clovis, population nearly 33,000 strong. "It's been great on our family life."

She and her husband, retired Master Sgt. Patrick Gillooly, as well as their sons, 17-year-old Christopher and 11-year-old Zachary, moved to Cannon nearly six years ago. They fell in love with the community and have since decided to make it their retirement home.

"We purchased a house [in Clovis] — a beautiful brand new home for very little [money]," Teresa said. According to the latest community census, the average house in Clovis goes for \$65,000, a paltry sum for a home in this day and age.

And, no, there are no big city lights in Curry County where Clovis and Cannon are situated, but there are also no traffic, traffic jams or smog, according to Teresa. Additionally, she points out that the climate is rather nice. The summers don't get too hot, and the winters don't get too cold.

Clovis has a mild daytime climate and low humidity that make for year-round comfort. It has an average of 335 days of sunshine and 18 inches of rainfall annually. Its altitude is 4,260 feet, making the climate hard to beat with no floods, hurricanes, forest fires, landslides, earthquakes, hurricanes or volcanoes. Plus, you're not faced with the higher crime

rate of a booming metropolis, or fear your children will get mixed up with gangs. For the Gillooly children, it's been just the opposite.

"My children have excelled in their education," Teresa said. "The school system has been good to us. The kids are doing better here than at other locations where we've been stationed. Both boys were on the honor roll last year."

### Speaking of education

Being stationed at Cannon isn't just a good educational opportunity for the kids. It's also an excellent opportunity for adult military members to advance their education.

Many college courses are held right at Cannon. But maybe the biggest benefit is that people assigned to Cannon pay in-state tuition for school. Throw in tuition assistance, and getting a degree while stationed at Cannon might not cost you one red cent.

One of the people taking advantage of this opportunity is Staff Sgt. Nate Howell, the wing historian. He's been at Cannon for two years and recently finished his bachelor's degree in professional aeronautics through Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He's already pursuing his master's degree in aeronautical science.

"I only had 12 credit hours of college when I joined the Air Force," said Howell, who is married and has two children. "The educational opportunities here are great. I can't understand why more people don't take advantage of them. It amazes me. It's so cheap. You're not going to get a degree for less money."

There are several avenues to pursue an education as well, from local community colleges to universities. Howell chose Embry-Riddle because he saw an opportunity to get a direct commission as an officer if he went through the university's aeronautical engineering degree program.

"Plus, Embry-Riddle really caters to military members," Howell said.

Howell adds that there's another not-so-obvious benefit to taking advantage of the educational opportunities.

"A lot of young airmen choose to spend their extra time at bars trying to meet people," he said. "Trust me, college is a much better meeting place than bars. You meet people who are doing something meaningful with their lives. It's just a great place to meet people and improve yourself at the same time."

### Where to unwind

While a small "cow town" and Air Force base may not seem to offer much in the way of entertainment, the southeastern region of New Mexico, where Cannon is located, is one of the most diverse regions in the state.

With a little time behind the steering wheel, you can find ancient symbols at Three Rivers Petroglyph National Recreation Site and skiing in Ruidoso. Southeast New Mexico is also home to White Sands National Monument near Alamogordo.

In a day's time and basically on the same route, for example, you can leave Cannon and see where Billy the Kid was buried at Fort Sumner, then visit the Blackwater Draw anthropology site where the city's history includes "Clovis Man," an archeological site and early man culture that dates to 12,500 years ago. Then you can continue to Roswell, the city

best known for its "alien encounters." And move on from there to Carlsbad Caverns, one of the natural wonders of the world with miles of underground caves and spectacular formations.

If sightseeing isn't exactly your cup of tea, then you might want to delve into New Mexico's landscape. The state is an outdoorsman's dream.

"Clovis and Cannon aren't necessarily the garden spots of New Mexico, but they're a gateway to see 'The Land of Enchantment,'" said Chad Lydick of the Clovis Committee of 50, a local group dedicated to base-community relations. "There are millions and millions of public acres in New Mexico for camping, hunting, fishing or hiking."

There are also plenty of lakes and rivers for water skiing, boating and rafting.



**Habitat for Humanity construction** is a weekend interest of Staff Sgt. Billie Frantz (foreground), 27th Logistics Readiness Squadron and Tech. Sgt. Daniel Gould, Det. 9, 372nd Training Squadron.

"Ninety percent of the land in New Mexico is state or federally owned," said Randy Harris, also on the Committee of 50. "That means you don't need permission to see it or backpack through it. It's some of the most beautiful country in the world."

If you're looking for big-city lights, you might be a little disappointed. Lubbock, Texas, is the closest city of significant size but still with less than 200,000 people and more than 100 miles away. Amarillo, Texas, is bigger than Lubbock, but it's about a 110-mile drive. Then again, if you're willing to log the miles, there's always Santa Fe and Albuquerque. For most military members who are well-traveled road warriors, weekend trips to such locations are easy.

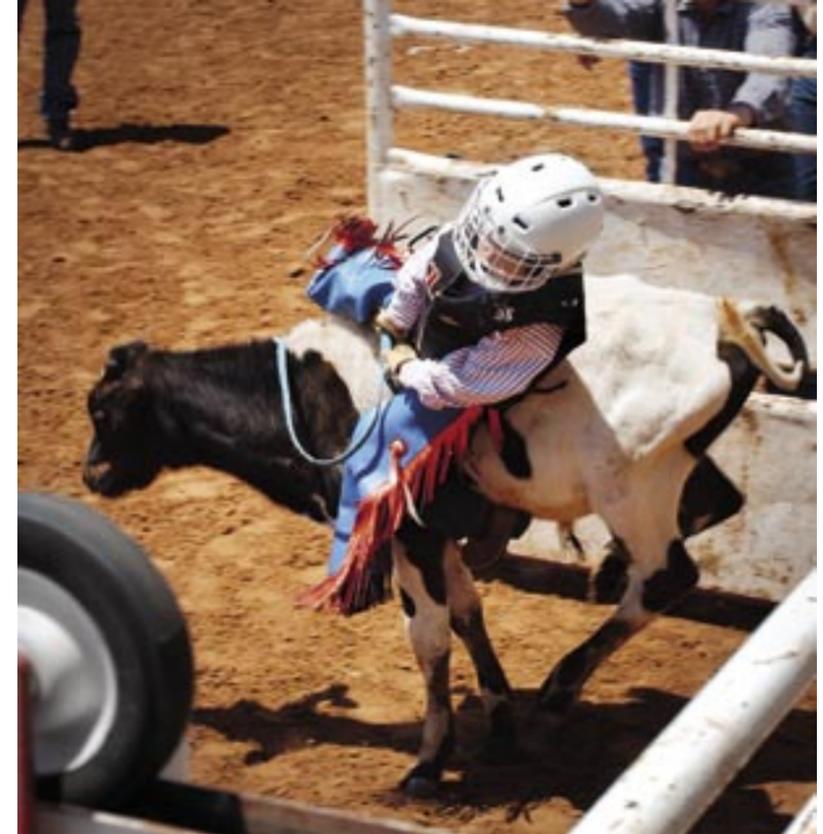
Of course, you can't live in a "cow town" without having rodeos, and Clovis has plenty of them. The rodeo season wraps up with the Professional Armed Forces Cowboys Association Rodeo. In September, people can enjoy two days of military rodeo with contestants competing from all over the country and all branches of service. The annual event is held at the Curry County Mounted Patrol Arena and is hosted by Clovis' local military Burning Sands Rodeo Team.

### Home is where you hang your hat

"Generally, I've found that some people don't want to come here because they don't know what's available — it's a lack of knowledge," said Col. Robert Yates, 27th Fighter Wing commander. "There's a strong community support here. I've been in the Air Force 22 years and been to a lot of places during that time, but I've never been to a base that enjoyed such great community support."

That support starts with the Clovis Committee of 50. It's made up of business people in the community who volunteer their time, money and effort for the betterment of Cannon and its people. The group's focus is one thing: Cannon.

With some 900 people deployed at the height of operations — nearly a quarter of the base population — to support contingencies such as Operation Iraqi Freedom and the war on terrorism in Afghanistan,



**Shawn Burke tries to hang on to his mount** for eight seconds during the Junior California riding event at the Clovis Pioneer Days Rodeo. Shawn's father is Master Sgt. David Burke from the 27th Transportation Squadron.

that kind of community support is vital.

"Our mission is to fly, fight and win," Yates said. "And we're doing that. [Our F-16 crews] dropped almost a million pounds of ordnance in Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Yates says there's a lot to do and see in New Mexico when not deployed, and Cannon has the means to get you there with one of the best outdoor recreation programs in the Air Force and the best small services squadron in Air Combat Command.

He also touts base facilities such as the Cyber Café with a new internet video room, one of the finest base libraries he's ever seen and a golf course that's the best within 100 miles.

"The availability of military family housing here is also a big selling point," Yates said. "A two-striper can get housing here with almost no wait, and the housing is very good. We're even in the process of having privatized housing on base."

But for Yates, the key to a successful assignment at Cannon or anywhere else for that matter is attitude.

"My philosophy is you need to blossom where you are planted," the colonel said. "Choose to be happy." ☘

[For more on Cannon and its mission, go to [www.af.mil/news/airman/1103/cannon.](http://www.af.mil/news/airman/1103/cannon.)]