

Wichita once had a rooftop farm overlooking downtown. Now, a new one is sprouting

BY DENISE NEIL
dneil@wichitaeagle.com

Until last year, downtown Wichita boasted a semi-secret garden. Built on the rooftop of the Fidelity Bank parking garage at Market and Waterman, Rise Farms functioned as a sky-high, 15,000 square-foot micro-farm that grew herbs, vegetables and flowers that were sold by owner Leah Dannar-Garcia to her customers, including several restaurants around town.

Then, in August, Dannar-Garcia decided to retire, and the secret garden was shuttered.

Now, though, downtown Wichita has another rooftop garden, and it's just a few blocks away.

WSU Tech's culinary school — the National Institute for Culinary and Hospitality Education, or NICHE — recently opened its new rooftop garden, which operates on the top floor of its building, the former Henry's department store spot at 124 S. Broadway. Earlier this month, the school celebrated the launch of its farm with an event attended by Donna Ard, who



WSU Tech's culinary school, called NICHE, now has its own rooftop garden, which overlooks downtown Wichita.

gave money to get the garden growing in honor of her late husband, Bill, a Wichita State University graduate, longtime donor and supporter of NICHE.

The new garden is a bit different from the one at Rise Farms, which featured rows and rows of raised beds filled with

crops. This garden is instead part of the architecture of the 5,500 rooftop terrace attached to Henry's Place, a top-floor event venue at NICHE that, during the three years since the building opened, has been home to many weddings, banquets and special events.

The designer of the terrace — which features panoramic views of downtown Wichita (and at the moment a front-row view of the construction of the Wichita Biomedical Campus —planned for the terrace to be lined along the edges with 19 different 4-foot-by-1-foot planters.

The school recently contracted with Thomas Montiel of Montiel Farms to tend to the planters, whose produce will be used by the school's resident chef instructors and its students as part of their education.

"It's going to reinforce our tenet of sustainability and give students access to food growing and to making that connection of 'Where does our food come from?'" said Lexi Michael, the dean of culinary arts at NICHE.

Montiel, whose south-Wichita farm offers you-pick flowers, willow trees and duck eggs, started planting in March, and now many of the plants are well on their way. Montiel believes in poly-culture gardening, meaning he mixes lots of different plants together in one bed rather than grouping them. Each planter has four square feet of planting space and includes, for example, strawberries growing next to marigolds growing next to lavender growing next to rhubarb growing next to cherry tomatoes.

"It actually allows everything to borrow from each other," he said. "All these root systems, through fungus and bacteria in the ground, they trade nutrients. The more stuff you put in, it kind of creates new avenues to trade. So just kind of like in any type of society, garden beds are the same way: The more diversity you have, the more there is to trade."

Montiel planted the beds using more than 4,000 pounds of worm castings that he transported to the rooftop, one five-gallon bucket at a

time. Now, he's able to visit the farm just once a week to water and check on the plants. Otherwise, it mostly takes care of itself thanks to an ancient growing method he's utilizing. Each bed includes two ollas, which are refillable porous clay pots that are buried in the soil alongside the plants. Montiel keeps each one filled with water, which slowly seeps out into the bed.

"It allows me to really be kind of hands free, for the most part," said Montiel, who also placed 18 pots filled with willow cuttings and flowers around the terrace.

As the plants continue to grow, he said, they'll begin spilling over the planters, which will help give the terrace a landscaped look.

John Michael, the director of NICHE, said that the school has plans for other ways the rooftop garden can be utilized. The school has a partnership with Envision, an organization that serves blind and visually impaired people: Its downstairs Envision Bistro is even named for the organization. Michael said he imagines inviting the group's clients to work with the plants.

Local school children also frequently tour the culinary school, he said, and he has ideas for projects that would allow middle- and high-school-age students get an up-close understanding of the farm-to-table concept.

"So it really serves multiple purposes," John Michael said. "And from an event venue perspective, it definitely beautifies the area."

Xi's threat to Trump cements Taiwan as top risk to ties

BY REBECCA CHOONG WILKINS, COLUM MURPHY AND YIAN LEE
Bloomberg News

After Xi Jinping regaled Donald Trump with goose-stepping soldiers and flag-waving children, the Chinese leader's warning that Taiwan could lead to "clashes" between the superpowers amounted to a thunderclap in the choreographed world of Communist Party politics.

Cautioning American presidents against interfering with the self-ruled island is standard practice for China. But Xi's assertion that it could trigger a "highly dangerous situation" for the world's biggest economies marked his bluntest language yet on the topic. Beijing's decision to release Xi's remarks before the nearly two-and-a-half hour huddle was even over underscored the gravity of the message.

Trump must now grapple with whether Xi will actually allow Taiwan to derail the broader relationship, particularly with the Chinese leader set to visit the White House in September — the second of four planned meetings this year. Any effort by the Republican leader to quash a planned \$14 billion U.S. arms sale to Taipei would likely unleash a bipartisan backlash in Washington, at a time when he already faces voter unhappiness over

the Iran war. If the deal is approved, Trump will face Beijing's wrath.

"We want President Trump to fully understand the extreme importance of this issue for us," said Wu Xinbo, director at Fudan University's Center for American Studies in Shanghai, who previously advised China's Foreign Ministry. Xi spoke out in such a "strong and direct way" to urge the U.S. to stop arms sales to Taiwan and declare that it opposes independence for the island, Wu added.

Trump was uncharacteristically quiet in the immediate aftermath of the warning. The president didn't brief reporters on the outcome and a U.S. readout hours later made no mention of Taiwan — a chip hub the Communist Party considers its own despite never having ruled it.

Trump cast his interactions with Xi as warm, writing "hopefully our relationship with China will be stronger and better than ever before," in a social media post early Friday morning Beijing time.

A senior administration official said both sides reiterated their long-stated stances on the island's status and everyone understands each other's position. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NBC that American arms sales to Taiwan "did not feature prominently" in

the Trump-Xi talks.

"From our perspective, any forced change in the status quo and the situation that's there now would be bad for both countries," Rubio said. "U.S. policy on the issue of Taiwan is unchanged as of today, and as of the meeting that we had here today."

For the U.S., it shouldn't have come as a surprise. In the weeks before the summit, China dialed up pressure on Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, whose party supports independence. Last month, Xi hosted the chairwoman of the island's Beijing-friendly opposition party, marking the first such meeting in a decade. Weeks later, China blocked Lai's overseas travel by pressuring three African nations to prevent his plane from safely transiting their airspace.

Xi's strong words over Taiwan stood out during an otherwise cordial summit. The two leaders smiled as they toured the Temple of Heaven on Thursday afternoon, and reaffirmed their commitment to stable trade. Trump brought with him a delegation of 30 corporate executives — including well-known figures like Elon Musk, Tim Cook, and Jensen Huang — with the intention of securing greater market access.

Forex investors seemed to relish the overall stability. The offshore yuan

edged up as much as 0.1% to its strongest level in over three years, as the currency extended its gain into an 11th straight session, its longest winning streak since 2017 — the year Trump last visited China.

China came into the summit emboldened after last year exposing U.S. reliance on its rare earths, a move that enabled it to push back against Trump's triple-digit tariffs. Those minerals are critical for everything from medical equipment to airplane parts. Around 4% of US GDP — totaling some \$1.2 trillion — is derived from industries that use rare earths, the vast majority of which come from China.

Xi's hand was strengthened further when the Supreme Court struck down Trump's levies, and the war in Iran has only highlighted U.S. vulnerabilities. The Republican leader landed in Beijing entangled in a conflict that's depleted military stockpiles it could take years to replenish, raising concerns among U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region.

U.S. officials have also repeatedly called on Beijing to help end the war, citing its sway as the biggest buyer of Iranian oil and one of Tehran's closest diplomatic partners on the world stage. So far, China — like other U.S. allies facing similar requests — has sidestepped that issue.

Xi's decision to play his

hand assertively makes more sense against that backdrop, even as China has expressed its irritation over the years with U.S. military assistance to Taiwan, at times cutting off engagement for months. Lai's government also recently passed a special military budget, giving it more space to purchase weapons.

The paused \$14 billion arms sale represents a record, surpassing a missile and artillery deal valued at over \$11 billion approved only last December. Xi registered his displeasure with that package at the time, launching large-scale military drills and weeks later calling Trump directly to complain.

'MAKE OR BREAK'

Any move by Trump to negotiate the transfers with Xi would represent a shift. As part of former President Ronald Reagan's so-called Six Assurances to Taipei in 1982, the U.S. said it hadn't agreed to any prior consultation with Beijing on arms sales to Taiwan, setting a diplomatic tradition that's lasted decades.

Before the summit, Chinese officials renewed a push for the U.S. to change a decades-old phrase describing its stance on Taiwan independence. That would see the Trump administration declare it "opposes" Taiwan independence — stronger wording than the Biden administration's stance that U.S. officials "do not support" it.

Still, Chinese officials are likely aware a dramatic reversal in U.S. policy isn't realistic for two reasons: The immediate

backlash Trump would face and because any substantial change risks a quick reversal when his term expires in less than three years.

That doesn't mean Xi won't try for other tangible wins while Beijing enjoys its best leverage over the U.S. in decades — one that may also have an expiration date as America seeks alternative supplies.

"Xi wants to create a lasting and strong impression in Trump's mind that China will be willing to go to any length that's necessary to safeguard its interests over Taiwan," said William Yang, senior analyst for Northeast Asia at the International Crisis Group. "Xi essentially is signaling to Trump that Washington's stance and policy toward Taiwan could be the most important 'make or break' factor in U.S.-China dynamics."

With assistance from Jing Li, Jeff Mason, Skylar Woodhouse and Wenjin Lv.

The latest news in your inbox
Our newsletters have something for everyone.
Scan the code and subscribe.
qr.getne.ws/wic-email

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

See an error or another problem with content in this edition? Report it by calling 1-800-200-8906.

THE WICHITA EAGLE

CUSTOMER SERVICE

24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Contact our customer service center at

1-800-200-8906

or [kansas.com/myaccount](https://www.kansas.com/myaccount).

WEEKLY SUBSCRIPTION PUBLISHED RATES

Wednesday, Friday and Sunday: \$34.99/week*
Sunday: \$34.99/week*
Wednesday/Sunday: \$34.99/week*

Single-copy rates: Daily \$3*/Sunday \$5.99*/
Special Editions \$7.99/\$9.99.

Digital only, including Edition: \$34.99 per week*
*plus applicable sales tax

I understand that consent is a condition of purchase. New subscription offer available only for non-subscribers within the home delivery area. Any past due balance may be deducted prior to the subscription start. If you respond to this offer but do not qualify for introductory pricing, we reserve the right to reject your order or prorate your subscription term to reflect current subscription pricing. For your convenience, your subscription will automatically renew after the initial term at the current rate unless you tell us to cancel. Cancellations take effect at the end of your current subscription term. All subscription account payments are non-refundable and include applicable tax. Our content is delivered to you by various methods and formats. We reserve the right to substitute the delivery and format of your print subscription with an Edition subscription at any time. Notice of rate changes will be mailed or emailed to the subscriber billing/email address at least 30 days in advance of the change. By providing your phone number and email address, you give The Wichita Eagle and its vendors consent to contact you consistent with our Privacy Policy. I hereby consent to receive autodialed and/or pre-recorded calls at the telephone number provided, including my wireless number, if applicable. Payments, credits, debits and price increases can adjust your expiration date. A \$0.59 supply chain charge will be applied weekly. For subscribers that receive a mailed renewal bill, a \$4.99 printed bill fee will apply for each renewal period. All home delivery subscriptions will include delivery of the Thanksgiving Holiday Edition. An additional \$9.99 will be added to all subscriptions for each of these premium editions in 2026: 4/26, 7/26, 9/27, 11/25 and 12/27/26 and 2027: 4/11/27, 7/18/27, 9/19/27, 11/24/27 and 12/12/27. You can cancel at any time by contacting Customer Service at 1-800-200-8906. Your subscription is subject to additional Terms of Service at <https://www.kansas.com/terms-of-service>

ADVERTISE

Retail: 316-268-6371

Place a Classified Ad: 316-268-6000 or online at classifieds.kansas.com

Legals: legals@wichitaeagle.com

Obituaries: 316-268-6508,

obits@wichitaeagle.com

EAGLE EXECUTIVES

Michael Roehman, Executive Editor

316-269-6753, mroehman@wichitaeagle.com

Marcia Werts, Managing Editor

316-268-6216, mwerts@wichitaeagle.com

Dion Lefler, Opinion Editor

316-268-6527, dlefler@wichitaeagle.com

The Wichita Eagle (ISSN 10463127) is published three times a week, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday by Wichita Eagle and McClatchy Co., 301 N. Main, Suite 1550, Wichita, KS 67202-2830 (by appointment only)

Periodicals Postage Paid at Wichita, KS (USPS 12050)

Postmaster: Send all UAA to CFS:

NON-POSTAL & MILITARY FACILITIES:

send address corrections to McClatchy:

1601 Alhambra Blvd Suite 100 Sacramento, CA 95816.

A McClatchy Newspaper

McClatchy