**Describing Oklahoma***Prepared by Shannon Warren for a June, 2013 edition of The Journal Record*

Steinbeck’s novel, *The Grapes of Wrath,* used words that shaped Oklahoman’s image for decades. People outside our state pictured dust bowls and substandard existence. Oklahoma was hardly regarded as a progressive trendsetter. However, new words are emerging that describe our state’s true spirit and setting a much-needed, refreshing tone for the entire nation.

The Oklahoma Standard is being acclaimed on a national level as the epitome of great character. Rightly so. Oklahomans have modeled outstanding virtues on countless occasions. It’s just that nobody really noticed till the latest crisis hit. Then, they were amazed.

First, with the terrible Murrah bombing. Then, it happened again – this time as tornadoes annihilated our neighbors’ homes. Instead of running away, Oklahomans ran forward to rescue, reassure and restore. People from all walks of life pooled their energy and resources into incredible acts of kindness.

Once again, our stories are inspiring people on a national scale. Our teachers are admired for the courage they demonstrated, protecting their terrified young students even as walls caved in on them. Countless acts of compassion are being heralded and these are not just limited to helping people. While Bella Foundation reunited lost pets with their owners, Wildlife Cares Foundation in Noble provided a sanctuary for displaced, injured birds, fawns and other animals. No pain is considered insignificant. No need is disregarded.

Courage and compassion are hallmarks of The Heartland, but these words are disappearing from the national vernacular. Citing a study by Pelin and Selin Kesebir, writer Gael O’Brien indicated in an article for *This Week in Ethics* that use of these terms and others such as “patience” and “modestly” have greatly diminished. Words pertaining to appreciation have faded away by 49%. Hardest hit? Use of expressions related to bravery dropped by 66%.

O’Brien goes on to say that words reflect values and community provides the best reinforcement of those values. That’s where Oklahoma shines. Together, we face down adversity and lift up one another. Jessica, a young blogger, said it best: “A community is what stands up when your house no longer does.”

Oklahoma is at the forefront of defining the true meaning of character for our country. When everything else is lost, we have shown what really counts is the strength of our convictions, valor and

kindness.

*Ms. O’Brien’s complete article, including additional information from the Kesebir survey, can be found online at* [*http://theweekinethics.wordpress.com/*](http://theweekinethics.wordpress.com/)