

Guymon Mourns Hometown Hero

An Air Force mechanic from Oklahoma, who once appeared on national television as a champion bubble gum blower, was killed in the crash of his pickup truck this morning on the way to work at the McGuire AFB. New Jersey State Police identified the victim of the single-vehicle crash as 21-year-old Codi Rocha, an Air Force airman who lived in Lumberton. The crash occurred just after 6 a.m. on ice-slickened Kings Highway, Burlington County Route 537, near Arney's Mount Road. State Police spokesman Sgt. Stephen Jones said Rocha was in uniform and on his way to work on the airbase. It appears, Jones said, that Rocha's 2001 Chevy Silverado attempted to pass a car in front of him. Jones said Rocha lost control of the vehicle, which ran off the roadway, struck a guardrail and a tree. Jones said Rocha, who was wearing his seatbelt at the time of the crash, was pronounced dead at the scene. According to Rocha's facebook page, he was originally from Oklahoma, and he graduated from Guymon High School there in 2007. He joined the Air Force immediately after. In the online archives of the Amarillo Globe-News, there's story from 2002 on Rocha winning a regional bubble-blowing contest sponsored by the bubble gum maker. Rocha was one of six winners from across the nation who won an all-expenses-paid trip to New York City to appear on the Today Show to show off his bubble blowing prowess. "I blow really slow for about four seconds, then breathe through my nose, then blow again really slow," Rocha told the Amarillo newspaper before heading off to New York for the television program. "I keep doing that until it pops. I wear Chapstick, and put baby oil on my eyebrows so the gum doesn't get stuck. I also take off my glasses." Earlier that year, Rocha started his move toward the national spotlight when he saw bubble blowing preliminary contest under way at his local Wal-Mart. "I just seen the contest and entered," he said. "I thought it was a fun thing to do." Competing against a "whole bunch" of people, Rocha participated in one of many local contests sponsored across the country. He blew his bubble like a professional, and it reached 21 inches around. His bubble measurement was recorded, and two days later the store manager called to tell him he won the local contest. Rocha received a hat and a certificate from Dubble Bubble, and that was that, until the next day. "They (Dubble Bubble officials) called and told him he won," said Rocha's mother, Denise Rocha-Groves. "The lady from Dubble Bubble said he was one of six finalists in the U.S. I was in disbelief. They said they'd be sending a package. I said, 'Thank you,' and then asked, 'He won what?' I didn't know if I should laugh or cry." "My mom didn't believe her," Rocha said. "She was going to hang up. When I heard I won a trip to New York, I started laughing. The farthest I've been is Dallas, Texas." Rocha-Groves said her travels have taken her a little farther, but not much. "The furthest east I've been is Tulsa, and the farthest I've flown is Dallas. This is going to be an adventure for all of us. They're going to keep us busy." While in New York, Rocha and the other contestants visited the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, went to a Yankees game and visit the FAO Schwartz toy store.

ByThe Trentonian