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# How D-FW high schools host commercials for major brands, from Subway to State Farm

Ford, 7-Eleven and other companies have also rented North Texas athletic facilities to use as shooting locations.



The Melissa Championship Center and other district facilities have become prime filming locations for many commercials since being renovated over the last few years, including State Farm's "Jazz Bath" spot featuring Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes. The \$21.3 million, 134,200-square-foot indoor facility opened in 2021 and is believed to be the biggest sports facility of its kind in Texas. (Liesbeth Powers / Staff Photographer)

By [Lia Assimakopoulos](#)

5:00 AM on Nov 9, 2023



When Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD athletic director Renee Putter saw the field at Standridge Stadium begin to burn, she couldn't help but wonder if she made a terrible mistake.

In Putter's 19 years with the district, she's overseen all sorts of events at her facilities, from movie shoots to music videos. But a commercial shoot she hosted six years ago for a bank and car company advertisement was unlike any other she had witnessed.

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The companies — which Putter would not name directly — approached her with a unique request. They said the commercial was meant to mark the kickoff to football season with an extravagant tailgate atmosphere, so they wanted to bring a baton twirler to the field.

She didn't think twice about it until they showed up, and the baton was lit on fire.

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“I go, ‘What? On the turf?’ ” Putter said. “They said, ‘Don’t worry. She’s an expert. She never drops it.’ ”

But on that day, she did. Putter saw the turf at her beloved stadium get torched. The companies had to pay to replace it.

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That commercial was one of dozens CFBISD has hosted in recent years. The district is one of a handful in the Dallas area to offer its state-of-the-art athletic facilities as filming sites for major productions.

Subway and Robert Griffin III, [State Farm and Patrick Mahomes](#), 7-Eleven and Dak Prescott and Bose and Aaron Rodgers are a few of the celebrities and major corporations to capitalize on [the grandeur of North Texas high school football stadiums](#) and indoor training facilities.

With some of the best and most accessible facilities in the nation, it's no surprise that North Texas high schools have caught the eye of some of the country's largest companies. Some districts have turned the commercial opportunities into a side gig and an extra stream of income — many that are comfortably in the five-figure range. For others, they've provided extra exposure for their booming high schools and towns.

“It's a nice little added bonus of money coming into the school district,” Putter said. “It's kind of, what do you want to take on, and how much time do you want to spend on it? And you pray that everything goes well.”

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## A perfect fit

State Farm's popular ["Jazz Bath" commercial](#) never would've happened if it weren't for Melissa ISD.

[Head football coach and athletic director Matt Nally](#) said State Farm renting out the district's facilities in July 2022 to shoot a handful of commercials with Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Mahomes was one of the most unique days of his tenure.

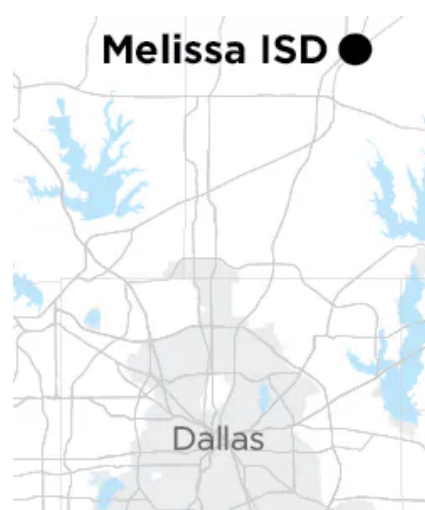
"I had never been a part of a commercial production before. It was like trying to get into the White House," Nally said. "They wouldn't even let me get into my office. It was nuts."

Nally wanted to catch a glimpse of the production and the NFL star, so he snuck into his office for about 10 minutes. At the time, Nally said State Farm was using Melissa's athletic training room but struggling to execute the commercial they had in mind.

They saw Nally enter and asked for his help.

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(Michael Hogue)

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"They were like, 'Hey do you have a saxophone?'" Nally said. "My band director went and got one, and the Jazz Bath was born."

The final commercial shows Patrick Mahomes preparing to take a bath with bath bombs in Melissa's facility. Jake from State Farm, played by actor Kevin Miles, calls him out for getting too personal. Then Jeff, the equipment manager, played by actor Mark Sipka, enters with Melissa's saxophone and asks, "Who's ready for their jazz bath?"

## Who's Ready For Their Jazz Bath? | State Farm



Melissa has become a prime filming location for many commercials since renovating its facilities over the last few years. The district [opened a \\$21.3 million, 134,200-square-foot indoor facility in 2021](#), which is believed to be the biggest sports facility of its kind in Texas — even bigger than those at Texas A&M, Texas or the Ford Center at The Star. This fall, it also unveiled [its new \\$35 million Coach Kenny Deel Stadium](#).

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Nally said State Farm chose Melissa for convenience after knowing it wanted to shoot in Texas. The insurer was choosing between Melissa, Prosper and SMU and ruled out Prosper because it wanted a red backdrop to match the company's colors. Melissa ultimately got the gig.

Putter of CFBISD said things such as color scheme or the absence of logos can be the determining factors when companies choose which facilities to book.

“I think they like ours because we do not have any logos on our football field,” she said. “Any time we get our field redone, we purposely do that because we know that we’re kind of centrally located in D-FW, and if any casting people are looking for a place, they look up stadiums and then they happen to see, ‘Hey, this stadium has a huge seating capacity, but it has no logo,’ so they don’t have to blur anything.”

In some specific situations, companies seek a more personal connection. Dallas ISD spokesperson Robyn Harris said Ford contacted the district five years ago for a rebranding of the Ford Expedition and asked to use [its facilities and the Townview Big D Band](#). That was the district’s most recent request of that nature, she said.

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Q30 Innovations — a startup based in South Norwalk, Conn., that created the Q-Collar, the only product on the market to help protect the brain from repetitive head impacts — was another that

sought out Melissa's facilities. The company works with [Cowboys running back Tony Pollard](#) and wanted to find a location convenient to him.

At the same time, Melissa ISD is a client of Q30 Innovations, so the relationship had been established. The commercial shoot happened this summer, and [Melissa's logos and facilities can be seen in the spot](#), which features Pollard training at Coach Kenny Deel Stadium while wearing his Q-Collar.

"It was kind of a no-brainer," said Charlie Kunze, the company's senior brand manager and marketing lead. "Melissa's facilities are incredible. When possible, we always want to start with high schools that have adopted our product. It's an easier entry point because they have the Q-Collar and believe in it. It's a more interesting angle for us. It was a great location to give that training feel and a stadium setting that didn't feel totally out of place for someone of Tony's caliber."

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Q-Collar | Tony Pollard: Your Most Important Asset



## **‘Cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching’**

Each district has a different approach for how a formal, or informal, agreement is reached before a commercial can be shot there. Putter said after 19 years of doing so, she’s learned how important a contract can be.

Especially after the baton incident, Putter said she always asks for a detailed storyboard for what the shoot will entail. She and her district have some rules that crews must follow, such as no smoking or drinking on school property and no confetti because of how difficult it can be to clear off of turf.

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The companies often have rules, too. Putter said she's had to sign nondisclosure agreements when celebrity talent is set to be on campus.

Lastly, the contract will spell out the monetary exchanges in the facility use fee.

"The price really varies on what they're asking for and what they're doing," Putter said. "When they're bringing in a flaming baton person I'm thinking, 'Cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching.' I'm thinking, 'What if something really bad happens and their insurance didn't cover it?'"

Putter said CFBISD charges at least \$2,500 to rent Standridge Stadium for a shoot. The most it charged was when the Big 12 rented all of its athletic facilities — from its football field to its natatorium and wrestling facilities — for a four-day promo shoot. Putter said the district charged upwards of \$20,000.

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"I know they've got a lot of money in site fees," she said. "I look at it as, 'Is this worth our time?' Because I've gotta have someone follow them around every inch of this place."

Other school districts would not disclose exact dollar amounts or ballpark figures for their rental fees.

Some districts have strict rules against renting their facilities. Northwest and Garland ISDs both cited security reasons.

"We do not want our facilities being depicted in manners we do not have control over," Northwest ISD said in a prepared statement.

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Other coaches and athletic directors who have coordinated these commercials around D-FW said they take a less formal approach. Bill Elliott, Celina's head football coach and athletic director, welcomed [7-Eleven, Prescott and Juju Smith-Schuster to its indoor facility last fall](#). He said there was no monetary exchange.

Instead, 7-Eleven used the school's kitchen for part of the commercial, which features a game day cook-off, and donated all of the utensils and shelving it brought.

Elliott said [7-Eleven, which is headquartered in Irving](#), also let one of Celina's coaches dress up as its mascot and appear in one of the commercials. Lastly, it allowed Elliott to establish a relationship with Prescott, who now uses the facility to work out in the offseason.

"My whole thing is we want exposure," Elliott said. "I have several NFL athletes and pro athletes come use our facilities and work out, and we want them to do that because we want that exposure and we want them to be around our kids."

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Arlington ISD capitalized on those perks, too. In July 2021, Mahomes, Rodgers and Russell Wilson went to Arlington High School to shoot [a commercial for Bose](#).

Athletic director and head football coach Scott Peach said Wilson wanted to get in a workout during his break, but none of the crew members could catch a ball he threw. Peach's son was a sophomore on the team at the time.

“As I’m watching all these guys drop balls, I just went up to Russell’s main guy and said, ‘Look, would you mind?’ And he said, ‘No, that’d be great,’ so my son was running routes and catching passes from Russell Wilson.”


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Rodgers signed autographs for about 40 players that day, Peach said. Mahomes even returned to Arlington ISD the next summer and shot [another commercial for NFL All Day](#), the league’s partner

for collecting NFTs.


**ARLINGTON FOOTBALL** 


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The NFL held a commercial shoot today at Arlington High School for the 2022 football season. We were honored to host Patrick Mahomes of the Kansas City Chiefs in the MAC Facility.

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Kunze said his company and previous ones he's worked at have filmed frequently at California high schools. He said the process there is much more structured and the fee is less negotiable, given the film culture across the state.

Texas isn't quite there yet, but as the state — and the Dallas area, in particular — continues to expand, more high schools may be targeted as ideal sites for big-time productions. Many districts

*The Dallas Morning News* contacted that haven't hosted a commercial shoot said they would be interested in exploring those opportunities.

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Whether it's for money, exposure or the chance to meet an NFL player, the perks have paid off for the high schools. The biggest reward is seeing their facilities — and the multimillion-dollar investment made into them — on the big screen.

“When you get to watch the commercials and know that was our varsity locker room and our varsity field, that's the fun part,” Peach said.

**On Twitter/X:** [@Lassimak](#)

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