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DECEMBER 2017

Joy, Love and Peace

At Home With Jodie Whaley

2017 Holiday Shopping Guide

Storybook Wonderland

Toni Simmons makes
The Polar Express come alive

Hidden Talent

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Visit www.DeSotoISD.org to explore the many pathways and programs available to students in DeSoto ISD and find the pathway that aligns with your student's goals and interests today!

DeSoto ISD Announces 2018 Pre-K Round Up

DeSoto ISD gives its youngest scholars the advantage of pre-school educational opportunities through our early childhood education programs supporting three- and four-year-old students. Though these programs are largely qualification-based, the district has designated allotments for tuition-based spots at \$5,600 per year or \$560 per month.

Interested in taking advantage of DeSoto ISD's early childhood education programs? Begin the enrollment process online at www.DeSotoISD.org, then attend the Jan. 20 Pre-K enrollment event from 8 am to noon at Amber Terrace Discovery and Design Early Childhood Academy. Parents or guardians will need to bring a parent/guardian photo ID and proof of residency, along with student social security card/ tax ID number, birth certificate and shot record.

For more information about early childhood education opportunities in DeSoto ISD, contact DeSoto ISD Early Childhood Director Myla Wilson at 469.297.4556.

CALENDAR

- **11/7-12/8:** DeSoto ISD Blanket Donation Drive-Elementary Campuses & Admin. Bldg.
- **11/20-11/24:** Thanksgiving Break
- **12/1:** DeSoto ISD Parents Night Out
- **12/4-8:** STAAR Testing
- **12/7:** Social Studies and Fine Arts Showcase
- **12/22:** Early Release
- **12/25-1/5:** Winter Break

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ON THE COVER



Nutcrackers feed childhood fantasies at Jodie Whaley's home.

Photo by Shane Kirkpatrick.

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Editor's Note

The end is only the beginning ...

December wraps up another year. Christmas and Hanukkah both lighten the dark days of winter and remind us that hope is always new. This year is ending in just a few days. But a new one is starting in those same few days. One thing ends. Another starts. It's the rhythm of life — beginnings and endings twine together. Plants bloom, fruit, seed and die, but from the seed comes new life. However good or bad your last year has been, the new one promises

change and both new gifts and new challenges. Enjoy the transition, as the ever-shortening days of winter give way to the lengthening days of spring.

Meanwhile, I'll be in my closet digging out the sweaters. I hope to have a few days that are cold enough to really enjoy wearing them!

Let it snow!

Adam

Adam Walker
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P.S. The publisher and staff of NOW Magazines wish you and your family a very merry Christmas and the happiest of holiday seasons!



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Sto



rybook Wonderland

— By Adam Walker

*When Christmas comes to Cedar Hill, Toni Simmons is Santa's chief elf. Back in 2009, she was the children's librarian, and the book *The Polar Express* was at the height of its popularity. Toni was a traditional storyteller and was always on the lookout for ways to make literature come to life for young, budding readers. She got the idea to make this children's favorite really come to life. From that desire sprang a community tradition.*

“This is a way to bring the story to life, to get the kids to experience the book.”





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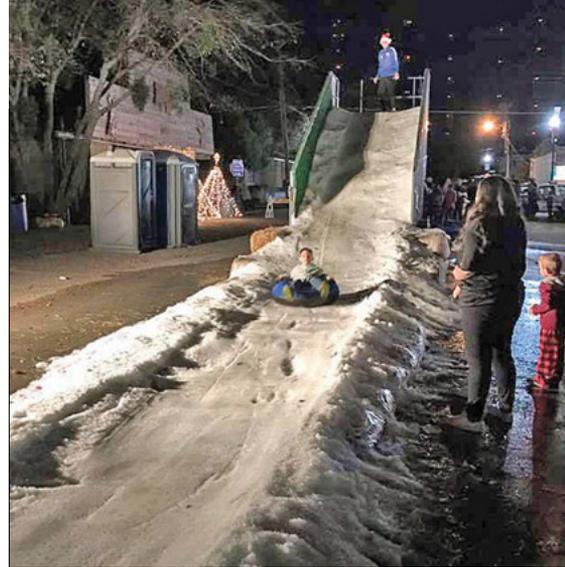
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"Traphene Hickman was the library director at that time," Toni explained. "She and I were both storytellers. Lots of schools were having *Polar Express* events with Macy's-style displays. I wanted to do something different." Toni found plenty of support for her idea, and soon the library was hosting a minor event with train rides in the parking lot and live storytelling of the book. "We had Phil Edwards as our conductor. The kids came in their pajamas. We gave out hot cocoa and bells with the word *Believe* on them, just like in the book. I couldn't believe the number of kids who showed up!" The event was a major hit, and a tradition was born.

The second year, Toni, her boss and the library staff decided to go even

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bigger. “We included the gold tickets, and we got the youth to be helpers and dress up as elves. We needed more space for everything. We added caroling for the kids who were waiting for rides on the train, and there were hundreds!” The event kept growing and adding more crafts and activities, requiring more volunteers and more space as word got out, and the crowds of kids wanting their turn to ride the *Polar Express* kept growing!

And now as library director, Toni has inherited full responsibility for her brainchild. “The last year we did this as a solo event was 2015. That year, we had 1,200 kids show up. We had an inflatable movie screen to show the film. The event had grown so big we needed two trains, and more community groups had gotten involved. We had crafts in the meeting room, balloon animals, Santa with live reindeer. In fact, there were so many kids lined up before the event that the conductor decided to start the train rides early, just to be sure everyone got a turn!”

Last year, the Zula B. Wylie staff combined their efforts with the longstanding city event, Holiday on the Hill, which just meant it got even bigger! “We had over 5,000 in attendance. The trains blocked off the whole downtown! And this year, we’ll have *three* trains!” Toni exclaimed. “Mrs. Claus joined Santa and his reindeer. We still had the crafts,





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but now we had *four* hot cocoa stations offering chocolate milk and cookies. Five school groups from Cedar Hill ISD performed as part of the Holiday on the Hill and Stacia's School of Dance brought six or seven age groups of dancers, who performed on stage. There was a snow hill and bounce houses and the traditional tree lighting with the mayor."

To bring about this combined Holiday on the Hill featuring *The Polar Express*, the library collaborates with the Parks and Recreation Department. "We were already partnering on other events, so when someone suggested combining these two, everyone said, 'Why not?'" But Toni has worked hard to ensure the combined event retains that *Polar Express* magic, which made the original library event such a success to begin with. "We still have the cocoa, bells, crafts and rides — all at no charge," Toni explained. "The whole library staff is involved, either holding down the fort here at the library, or manning the event downtown. The Sit and Sew group put the ribbons on the bells. The Senior Center helped with the letters to Santa. Last year, we added a model train display. And this year, we are adding life-size scenes from the book."

The planning starts in the spring, when the committee gets together for their first monthly meeting. There are performers

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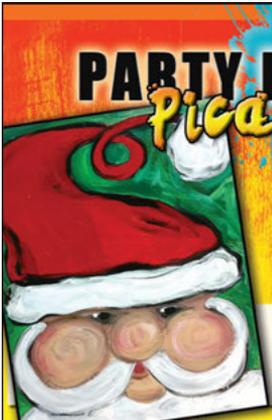
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to contact, before they get another offer. And trains to book. And stilt-walking toy soldiers to invite. And the schools have to plan their participation in time to teach their students their roles. Then, in September, they start meeting every other week. The committee includes five to six people from the Parks and Recreation Department and another five or six from the library. That all leads up to the big night, when it's all hands on deck. That night more than 20 people from Parks and Recreation and seven or eight from the library, plus 20-30 volunteers from the community are there making sure everything runs smoothly. Other city departments also send volunteers, and the Tourism Department pitches in. Of course, the mayor and others from city government are there for the tree lighting and to enjoy the festivities.

So why is a grown woman with several degrees and a professional job so passionate about bringing a children's book to life? Toni doesn't have to think for even a moment to answer that question. "If you could see the excitement on the kids' faces — their eyes light up when they see Santa and the *Believe* bells. They think it's all magic." And Toni likes a bit of drama. She majored in theater in college, then did her graduate work in library science and started storytelling, which she now does at some of the big storytelling festivals. "This is a way to bring the story to life, to get the kids to experience the book. When I tell stories, kids light up. It's another way of interacting with books. It helps develop their imaginations. My ultimate desire is to increase the kids' desire to read. This is a way to develop literacy by exposing kids to a fun story and getting them excited about books and reading. And every time they read *The Polar Express*, for the rest of their lives, these memories will come back." **NOW**



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HIDDEN

Talent

— By Adam Walker



Tom Fields had a bit of a career change a few years back. Carpentry and climbing around on roofs had been his gig, but life took a sudden turn. “I had to have a quintuple bypass, followed by a year of recuperation to let everything heal,” he said. “After that I couldn’t do carpentry anymore. One day during that time, my wife wanted me to go with Mom to Hobby Lobby to get art supplies. I went and bought some stuff. I tried a couple of paintings, but when I tried sculpting, I just loved it.”

Sculpture may not have been on Tom’s radar before that day, but it was in his background, hidden in nooks and crannies of his memory. “When I was a kid, my dad was stationed at the naval base in Taipei, Taiwan, for two years. I remember watching a man at the market doing wheat clay sculptures,” he explained. “Maybe that was the beginning of my training, but it took a whole life of building with two-by-fours before I got here. Pouring concrete, roofing, all of that, is a kind of sculpting, too, if you look at it right.”

There are other ways Tom was preparing for his second calling, without ever realizing it. “I loved flying. I



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wanted to get a piloting license, but it was too expensive,” he remembered. “So, I built and flew radio-controlled airplanes, which was a kind of sculpting, too. I remember carving the propellers out of wood. I even challenged myself to build a *Starship Enterprise* that would actually fly.” Earlier, while in high school, Tom took ceramics. “One thing I remember making was an art deco cat. The teacher said it blew up in the kiln, but I always wondered if he just liked it and kept it,” he joked. So, hidden bits and pieces of a construction worker’s life, going back to early childhood, were preparing him for his future as a sculptor.

When Tom found himself sidelined from his previous career as building manager and set builder at the Studios at Las Colinas, recovering from major surgery and suffering from boredom and a need to do something with his hands, sculpting emerged to give him new purpose. “My wife, Rayanna, was leading an after-school program focused on arts for inner city kids. She wanted a sculptor to show the kids another art form, and she asked me to do a live sculpture for one of the assemblies. I had some oil-based Plasticine clay, so I spoke to the class while I sculpted a bust of Jesus. I got the face finished, but I didn’t have time to do the hair.” In that first presentation, Tom discovered that he enjoyed doing his sculpture as a kind of performance art. Much of his



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sculpture is Christian-themed. He has done heads of several of the disciples, Christ on the cross and other such pieces, often sculpted live during church worship sessions, which are sometimes captured on film. He admits that having a cameraman filming close up while he sculpts is sometimes awkward, but the live aspect fuels his creativity. "I don't use models, and I try not to look at the audience while I'm sculpting. It's just me and the clay," he said.



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Tom starts his sculptures with a simple wig head. "I just scrape off all the features, then I apply a patina and go to sculpt." Once he is finished sculpting a piece, his process is only partially done. "As the clay dries, it cracks. I fill the cracks as they form, and then sand it down and apply a sealer. Then I add the finish that makes it look like bronze."



One of Tom's most recent pieces is a commission. It's a close-up of Jesus' hand being nailed to the cross. "I started that as a smaller piece, but the person who commissioned it wanted it bigger, so I made it big!" Tom has done other commissions, including a samurai head for a restaurant in Waxahachie. A local museum asked him to sculpt Adam and Eve. A coffee shop in Midlothian displays a lighthouse he did for them. One of the first pieces he sold was a roaring lion. Tom sculpted it during a seminar, and when he was done, a senior vice president from Merrill Lynch approached him. He told Tom that lions were a theme in his home decor. He asked several times to



buy the piece. Tom wasn't sure how to price his work, since he didn't usually sell his pieces. "I asked him what he thought it was worth. He offered me \$2,000, and I said, 'Sold!'" A giant eagle's head and busts of Wyatt Earp and Chief Black Kettle are among his other work.

Tom teaches classes for budding young sculptors. He proudly shows off some of the pieces the kids have made for assignments. "A teacher is always more proud of his students' work than he is of his own. It's fun to be able to say, 'I have a student who did *this!*'"

Tom has a number of pieces in the works. "I'm doing a bobcat mascot for the school my tephson teaches at. Also, I'm making a matched set of life-size lions out of sculpted concrete for an outdoor garden. For that one, I'm going to have to create some of the tools I'll need." He also has plans for a lion mailbox.

Most of Tom's work to date has consisted of unique projects. "The neat thing is if you buy a piece from me, they're all one-offs. That makes them more valuable — especially if I die!" But Tom does have plans for some more commercial pieces. He's studying how to make plaster molds of his work, so he can produce a run of some items. "And now that we're in the 21st century, I want to get a 3-D printer and a 3-D scanner, so I can print off some of my work."

For Tom Fields, when one career ended, another was just starting. And he's embracing this new direction with as much energy as he did the first. **NOW**

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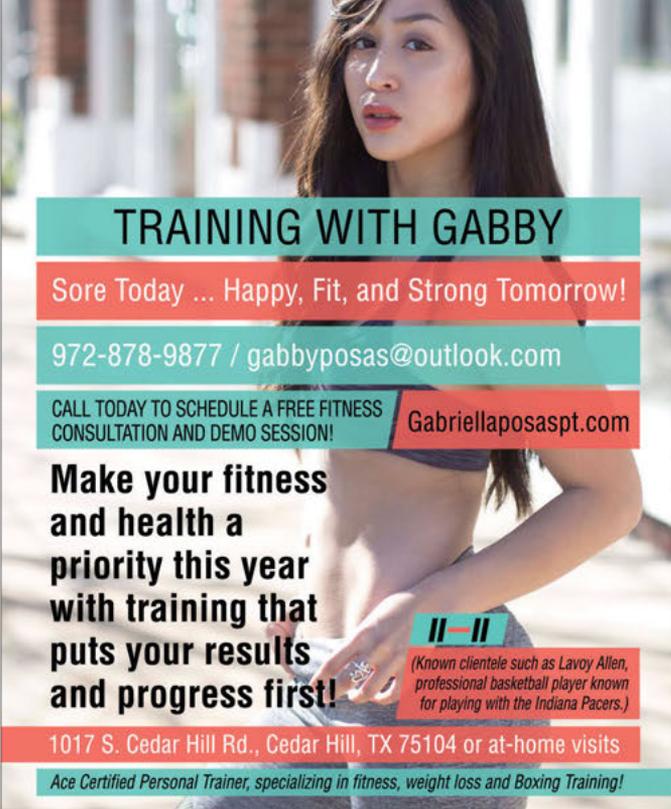
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Much of that joy accompanies her daughter, Vonda Jo Whaley, and granddaughter, Brianna Jo Whaley, who stay with Jodie on Christmas Eve night every year. “We open presents that night, and they always seem surprised and happy with their gifts,” Jodie shared. The next day brings more family and friends. “For Thanksgiving and Christmas, I usually have about 30-40 people in my home. Fortunately, my neighbors



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don't mind the parking problem that creates. I'm the main cook, but everyone brings dishes. We draw names and have a gift for the person we drew."

Jodie purchased her home in 2003, but she has done extensive remodeling and decorating. The open space, which comprises two living areas and a formal dining room that looks out to both enclosed and open patio areas, is perfect for entertaining large gatherings. The cream and gold color scheme creates a background for holiday decorating, and with dining tables in three rooms, Jodie is ready to entertain her holiday crowd.

"When I remodeled and decorated, I wanted to let the light in, since it gives me more energy," she explained. She had beautiful and practical hardwood floors installed throughout the home. "My home had 'good bones,' but I remodeled everything from the roof all the way down to the floor," she added. "I love everything simple and easy to clean."

A wonderland greets guests in this home's living room. Large ornaments gild the ceiling, while a highlighted wreath is hung on the fireplace with care. Santas

and nutcrackers stand and allow elves to sit on the comfortable couches. A Christmas tree, loaded with decorations and presents, is carefully guarded by two nutcracker soldiers. Jodie clears her wall-to-wall, built-in cabinet of its usual beautiful treasures for her display of holiday figurines bordered with garlands of ribbons. Stockings are hung with care on crosses that flank a window dressed in red.

The TV room features comfortable reclining seating that "hooks up to everything." It opens to the living room through the see-through fireplace and to the kitchen through a breakfast bar that Jodie had installed. Elves and stockings decorate this side of the fireplace.

The dining room's chandelier is Christmas ready with its white globes and draping of red with tassels. The centerpiece is a nutcracker ready to drum for everyone's dining pleasure. The seating for six sports Santa-hat chair covers. Above the French doors that lead to the enclosed patio, garlands hang and Christmas-themed figurines top the china cabinet. Jodie's stenciled artwork of



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gold leaves surrounds the French doors year-round. Ceramic holiday trees, Santas and a plaque heralding *Family* decorate a baker's shelf.

A Christmas tree serves as a seasonal reminder to those who are lucky enough to eat in Jodie's kitchen where the true action happens. The large eat-in kitchen has a handy island, and cabinets are topped with Jodie's collection of Santas surrounded by green garlands. The raised ceiling, with its skylights, is festooned with red ribbons. "I love decorating for the holidays!" Jodie exclaimed. Even Jodie is festooned for the occasion in a Santa apron.

Every bedroom is decorated in red, light blue and white hues for Christmas and boasts a decorated tree. Christine's guest room features a collection of snow globes housed in cabinets. "We've collected those for years, from everywhere we've gone," Jodie explained. Jodie's two other bedrooms, the master bedroom and the "lazy room" have background hues of green and brown. Christine's room and the lazy room (bedroom) are connected by a Jack-and-Jill bath with country-distressed cabinets Jodie created.

The master bath has double his/her dressing areas and vanities. "The man's sink is built higher than the woman's," Jodie pointed out. The step up to the bathtub and surround is decorated with tall candles, a Christmas tree and Christmas figures. A crystal chandelier lights the room.

A handy mother-in-law bedroom suite gives Robbie Gatlin, Jodie's sister, her own private area in the home. The sisters are together most days, since Robbie works for Jodie. They enjoy evenings in the TV room together. A plaque expresses Robbie's philosophy — *Live,*

Laugh, Love. “She’s got the biggest TV and a walk-in closet,” Jodie said.

A native of Avery, Texas, Jodie grew up in Dallas in a large family of six girls and two boys. “Our mom always said we didn’t need friends. We had each other,” she explained. Her family has remained close through the years. Two other sisters, Reba Chandler and Christine Farrar, live nearby. “The four of us do everything together,” Jodie said. “We go on three to four cruises every year and make trips to Bossier City. I love to decorate their homes, too, just for fun.” Their cruises have taken them to Alaska, Belize, Mexico and Key West, all from the ports of Galveston and New Orleans.

With the enclosed patio, Jodie can entertain throughout the year without any weather concerns or unwanted, pesky insects. However, it’s her outdoor patio that she enjoys the most with its old-fashioned swing and statuary in the surrounding gardens. The patio is lit year-round with strings of lights. Since Jodie’s home is a corner lot, she has landscaped with rock paths around the side of her home.



Since 1993, Jodie has owned her own business, the Neon Cowboy. “I’ve been in the club business for 44 years now. I went to Wilmer-Hutchins High School through the 10th grade and then went to work. I learned the old-school way, and in my business, people have taught and helped me on my way to owning my own club,” she explained.

Jodie feels fortunate to live in DeSoto. “I do love DeSoto and my neighborhood. I’m a member of the neighborhood association,” she said. “My neighbors are wonderful. I’m a widow, so they look out for me. I know them all. I’ve loved this neighborhood and home since the day I moved in. I want to wish Merry Christmas to everyone!” **NOW**

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— By Melissa Rawlins



Photo by Anders Bøggild.

Fond memories are easily created in Copenhagen, Denmark. The bronze-and-granite Little Mermaid, inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, still perches on a boulder in the harbor and can never be cliché. One of the most beautiful and enjoyable ways to see this old, maritime city is from a boat sailing down its charming canals. Even if you choose to visit in the winter, ice cannot stop your investigations of the history and beauty tucked throughout the city.





Photo by Anders Bøggild.



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family to yours!*



Photo by Copenhagen Media Center.

Holiday lovers might want to start by booking themselves into the Nimb Hotel, which offers 17 unique and individually decorated rooms — 12 of which are suites. Designed with antiques, linen from Geismar and other details to make you feel at home, almost all the rooms have open fireplaces with birch wood, large bathrooms with luxury bath products and views of the charming Tivoli Gardens, where the Christmas spirit abounds.

Tivoli Gardens amusement park is a must-see for all visitors, young and old. Located just a few minutes' walk from City Hall, with the Copenhagen Central Station as its nearest neighbor, Tivoli Gardens was founded in 1843 and has become a national treasure and an international attraction. The scenery is beautiful with exotic architecture, historic buildings and lush gardens. At night, thousands of colored lights create a fairy tale atmosphere amidst the charmingly themed villages and shops full of tasty



Photo by Jacques Holst.

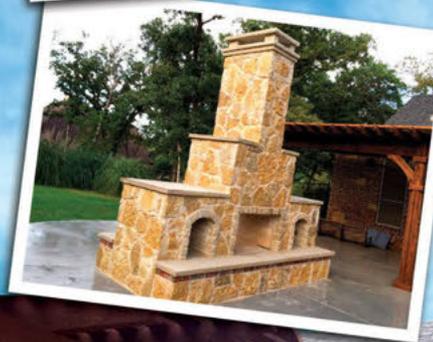
treats and dazzling decorations. Add to that wonderful restaurants and thrilling rides, and you are set for a day's adventure.

Danish weather can be tricky. But there are plenty of things to do in Copenhagen even on a rainy day, such as visiting a museum or enjoying a shopping excursion. For the price of a normal bus ticket, you can get from the Royal Library at one end of the harbor to The Little Mermaid at the other end, passing the idyllic district: Christianshavn, Nyhavn and the Royal Opera House. And if you've planned smartly, you'll have purchased a Copenhagen Card online so that you — and two children under 10 — can use public transportation and visit, free of charge, more than 70 museums and attractions in the entire region.

There is no better way to get a realistic perspective of Copenhagen than a trip to its highest tower. The property of the Danish Parliament, whose members took the initiative to open it to the public at no charge every day except Mondays, the tower of Christiansborg Palace offers views unique and magnificent. The minute the sun comes out, you can watch as the vast area around the lakes fills up with strolling couples, panting joggers, brunch devotees, kids feeding the ducks and best friends sipping thermos-hot coffee as they take in the best views of the city. If you wish to join them, you too can take an early morning, 6-K jog on the paths surrounding the lakes, or head for one of the fine cafés: Kaffesalonen at 6, Peblinge Dosserring; Café Front Page at 21, Sortedam Dosserring; and Den

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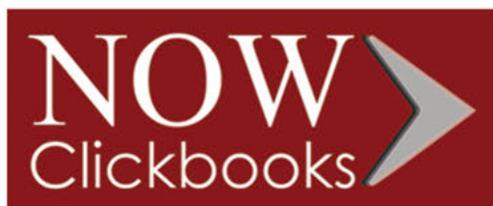
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Photo by Ty Strange.

Franske Café, 101, Sortedam Dosserring. If you prefer enjoying the view from the tower, you can also give yourself a culinary experience in Restaurant Tårnet, run by the recognized restaurateur Rasmus Bo Bojesen.

Foodies always make a trip to eat Danish *smørrebrød* (open-faced sandwiches) and traditional Christmas food at the cozy restaurant Kronborg, in the center of Copenhagen. All dishes are freshly made in-house, and the waiters take pride in matching tasty beers and aquavits with the different dishes. The regular menu features classics, such as homemade curry herring with boiled eggs, onions and capers, smoked eel with scrambled eggs and Danish meatballs with red cabbage. Visitors relish their classic Danish Christmas lunch, following the traditional four "rounds" of fish, meat, cheese and traditional Danish rice pudding with almonds.

Fashion lovers find their way during the holidays to the Royal Copenhagen flagship store in the center of Copenhagen, on Amagertorv, where international designers have set tables honoring the dream of Christmas. To further tempt your inner shopaholic, make a side trip to Copenhagen's fashion street, Kronprinsensgade, halfway down Købmagergade. Many fashion designers have chosen this location, like Bruuns Bazaar, Flying A and Stig P, whose impressive international reputations may raise your American eyebrows.

Nature lovers astound themselves on every tour of the Botanical Gardens,



Photo by Jacob Jensen & Simon Lau.

located in the center of Copenhagen and open for the public 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m., October through March. The garden contains more than 13,000 species arranged in different sections. Of its 27 historical glasshouses, the most notable is the old Palm House, circa 1874, which is 16 meters tall and has narrow, cast-iron spiral stairs leading to a passageway at the top.

Traditionalists will want to stay through the New Year to watch the Queen's New Year's speech on television at 18:00, before going out for a great New Year's feast. At midnight, listen to the City Hall clock strike 12, then sing along to the national anthem and have a piece of the traditional marzipan cake, *kransekage*, along with a glass of champagne. While the fireworks roar, you'll celebrate New Year's like a true Dane and give yourself memories to last a lifetime. **NOW**

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Dr. Martin goes full-out to make kids comfortable at the dentist office.



Caring for Smiles

*Dr. Ashla Martin makes kids feel at home.
— By Adam Walker*

Dr. Ashla Martin shadowed her dentist one summer, due to her love of science, and immediately wanted to pursue a career in dentistry. She graduated from Xavier University in her native state of Louisiana and The University of Tennessee College of Dentistry. After practicing general dentistry for several years, her passion for kids led her to complete three more years of specialty training at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center to attain IV sedation certification and to become a pediatric dentist. Now this proud Texas transplant is board certified, the highest recognition that a pediatric dentist can attain.

Dr. Martin specializes in providing care to children from birth to 18 years old, but extends that to age 21 for special

needs patients. “I’ve always loved working with kids. I enjoyed going to my pediatric dentist as a child, and I want to ensure that same experience for others. Kids oftentimes require more TLC, and pediatric dentists are trained to provide that extra attention. Everyone in my family is a teacher, except me,” Dr. Martin confessed, “but I consider myself a teacher of dental education!”

Dr. Martin stated, “We provide a wide range of dental services with the latest technology, including, zero-radiation cavity detection, digital X-rays, preventative BPA-free sealants, tooth-colored crowns, pediatric nerve treatments, extractions, space maintainers and emergency dental care.” If your child

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The Kids@Heart waiting room welcomes children with toy-filled vending machines, kid-friendly movies and a sticker and balloon station. In addition, there are monthly raffles for spin brushes and dental-themed toys. In order to comfort kids, Dr. Martin often dresses up as Doc McStuffins to check their teeth! "I am a kid at heart, hence the office name!" Dr. Martin confessed. "We like to make kids feel welcome and want you to see that we take care of your kids like they are our own!"

When Dr. Martin is away from her office in Cedar Hill, you may find her doing dental missionary work in underdeveloped countries, such as Nicaragua and Ethiopia. Furthermore, she is very involved at Word of Truth Family Church and is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Dr. Martin and her team would like to show you their heart and let you know that your child's smile is their top priority. Their goal is to tailor a favorable experience for your child. Kids@Heart Pediatric Dentistry accepts all PPOs, Medicaid and CHIP. The office has discount plans for patients without insurance and accepts Care Credit.

A pediatric dentist is like a pediatrician for your kid's teeth! Pediatric dentists complete six-seven years of dental training vs. general/family dentists who complete four years. The training focuses on dental care for infants, children, adolescents, special needs, growth, development, behavior management and sedation. According to Kaiser, there are 146,526 practicing family dentists in the United States vs. 4,672 pediatric dentists. Therefore, there are fewer pediatric dental offices. Please feel free to contact Dr. Martin, who is a board-certified pediatric dentist at Kids@Heart Pediatric Dentistry via e-mail at info@kidsatheartdentist.com with any questions! **NOW**



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Sheryl Sandling helps customers at Hobby Lobby.



Ellen Phelps and Zuleth Castro hang out on Babe's firetruck at Country Days on the Hill.



Crystal Eason makes chocolate meringue pies at Kitchens Deli.



Colt and his human friend, Damian Cruz, show off the work of Tri-Cities Animal Shelter.



Panelists take a photo break at the BSW Healthcare Committee Forum on Mental Health.



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December 1

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Duncan Whoville: 7:00 p.m., Main St. and Wheatland Rd., Duncanville. Christmas parade, tree lighting and Santa. Call (972) 780-5070 for more information.

December 1 — 13

Help to Heal Gifts for Seniors: Bring gift cards, throw blankets, stuffed animals for dementia sufferers, gripper socks, etc. Show senior citizens they are not alone or forgotten at the holidays. Donations distributed through Meals on Wheels, assisted living centers, memory care facilities and hospice groups. Contact Linda Dean Miley at ldean@helptohealthx.org for details and drop-off locations.

December 5

Elf Academy: 10:00 a.m.-noon, Hillside Village, 305 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. Free. Kids pre-K-6th grade learn holiday crafts. (Also on the 12th and 19th.)

December 7

Mayor's Prayer Breakfast: 7:30-8:30 a.m., Alan

B. Sims Cedar Hill Recreation Center, 310 E. Parkerville Blvd., Cedar Hill. Free.

Holiday on the Hill Featuring *The Polar Express*: 6:00-8:00 p.m., Historic Downtown Cedar Hill. Free. Train rides, crafts, Santa, tree lighting and much more.

December 9

Manga Toshokan: 2:00 p.m., Duncanville Public Library, 201 James Collins Blvd. Free. Watch anime. Ages 13+. For more information, call (972) 780-5044.

December 10

Native American Arts & Crafts Show: 5:00-11:00 p.m., Midlothian Civic Center, 224 S. 11th St., Midlothian. Music, jewelry, books and Native American arts and crafts. For information, call Toni Bowers at (903) 744-0305 or Alicia Alvarado at (214) 926-3995.

Worldwide Candle Lighting: 6:45 p.m., First United Methodist Church, Adlersgate Hall, 427 W. Avenue C., Duncanville. Public event for families who have lost a child of any age to any cause. Call (469) 554-9474 for information.

December 16

Winter Bird Count: 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center, 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. Join the world's longest-running citizen science project.

December 18

Dining for Dollars Fundraiser for Friends of the Library: 5:00-10:00 p.m., McAlister's Deli, 379 E. FM 1382, Ste. 130, Cedar Hill. Call (972) 291-READ for information.

December 22

Cowboy Christmas Dance: 5:00-9:00 p.m., D.L. Hopkins Jr. Senior Center, 206 James Collins Blvd., Duncanville. \$10. Live music by Sundance Band. Refreshments provided. Call (972) 780-5073 for information.

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to adam.walker@nowmagazines.com.



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In the Kitchen With Charlotte Simms

— *By Adam Walker*

Charlotte Simms was about 13 when she started baking cookies with her mother. “Baking was a way for me to connect with my mom,” Charlotte explained. “I’ve grown so close to her through our love of cookies. I love seeing my mom smile, and making cookies makes her smile. She’s 81 years old, and we’re still at it 40 years later.”

Baking is a skill passed down through the generations in Charlotte’s family. But when she was first learning, getting the temperature just right was tricky. “I would give all the burnt cookies to my neighbor. He would eat them and come back the next day for more! Still, today, when I see him, he always asks me if I have any burnt up cookies!” **NOW**

Christmas Snowballs

- 2 cups all-purpose flour**
- 2 cups pecans, chopped**
- 1/4 cup sugar**
- 1 cup sweet cream butter**
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 1 1-lb. bag powdered sugar**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 325 F
- 2.** Add all ingredients, except powdered sugar, to a large bowl; mix well.
- 3.** Roll dough into 1-inch balls; place on a greased cookie sheet. Bake at 325 F for 5-10 minutes, until edges are lightly brown. Remove from oven. Roll in powdered sugar. Place on a plate.

Momma’s Favorite Sugar Cookies

- 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar**

- 1 cup butter**
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 1 tsp. almond extract**
- 1 egg**
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- 1 tsp. cream of tartar**
- 1 cup nuts, chopped (optional)**

- 1.** In a large bowl, beat powdered sugar and butter until nice and creamy.
- 2.** Add extracts and egg; mix well. Add flour, baking soda and cream of tartar; blend together. Add nuts.
- 3.** Roll on waxed paper; refrigerate for 3 hours.
- 4.** Preheat oven to 375 F. Cut into 1/2-inch slices. Bake for 8-10 minutes.

Chocolate S’mores

- 3/4 cup butter**
- 1 cup dark brown sugar**

- 1/2 cup granulated sugar**
- 2 large eggs**
- 1 Tbsp. vanilla extract**
- 2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 Tbsp. baking soda**
- 1/2 tsp. salt**
- 1 12-oz. bag semi-sweet chocolate chips (divided use)**
- 1 bag bite-size HERSHEY’S chocolate bars**
- 1 bag large marshmallows**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 375 F. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper.
- 2.** Beat together butter, brown sugar and granulated sugar until creamy, about 2-3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing after each. Add vanilla extract.
- 3.** In another bowl, combine flour, baking soda and salt; mix well. Add chocolate chips. Add to wet ingredients; mix well.
- 4.** Using a cookie scoop, roll into balls and place on cookie sheet, 3 inches apart. Bake until edges are golden, but middles still look doughy, about 11-12 minutes.
- 5.** While cookies are still hot, add a HERSHEY bar and a marshmallow; top with another cookie.
- 6.** Bake for an additional 3 minutes, giving the chocolate in the middle a chance to melt.

Old-fashioned Tea Cakes

- 1 cup vegetable oil**
- 1 cup butter**
- 1 cup powdered sugar**
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 2 eggs, beaten**
- 4 cups flour**
- 1 tsp. salt**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- 1 cup granulated sugar**

- 1.** Cream first 4 ingredients; add eggs. Stir in flour, salt and baking soda; mix well.
- 2.** Chill dough. Roll dough into small balls (6 dozen).
- 3.** Coat the bottom of a smooth, glass plate with vegetable oil. Dip each ball in granulated sugar. Press against oiled plate to flatten; repeat with each cookie.
- 4.** Bake 10 minutes at 350 F. Cool on a wire rack.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit www.nowmagazines.com.

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& Happy New Year!*

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