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AUGUST 2023



2023 Summer Savings  
Shopping Guide

Also inside:

Scavenger Hunt

Crossword

Featured Business:  
Mechanical Comfort Systems

## Not Your Grandma's Picture Book

AI puts a new spin  
on an old art

In the Kitchen With  
Jocelyn Medlock-Price

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## ON THE COVER



Al draws author Kei S  
Edwards and her programmer  
husband, Aaron.

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

*Mary, Mary, quite contrary ...*

My garden is unimpressive. I got it started too late, and the weather has been uncooperative. At least the bell pepper plant was looking good. Bright, healthy green leaves, and one small but promising fruit. It was just starting to turn red. It looked like it would soon be ready to toss in a salad or add an extra something to a soup or stew. I had such plans for that one little red bell pepper.

Then, this morning, I went out to water the garden and check to see how everything was coming along. I noticed a huge hole in the bell pepper. Something had eaten through the side and left a shriveled husk. You could see half the seeds just exposed to the world. I felt like that one episode of *Seinfeld*, "No soup for you!" At least the vermin got a good meal.

I still have hope for some of the stuff that grows under the dirt — the potatoes, turnips, carrots and daikon radish. And maybe the bugs will stay away from the herbs long enough to season a few dishes. Who knows what will become of the bok choy? Maybe next year I'll try growing more Chinese greens. Perhaps the local bugs won't know how to destroy them quite so efficiently. Do ants like *ku cai*? Do beetles feast on *kongxin cai*? I don't know, but I guess I'll find out. Maybe I'd do better with some chili peppers from the hot end of the Scoville scale. That'll teach the vermin!

*How does your garden grow?*



*Adam*

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Keisha Edwards is a creative soul. Her husband, Aaron, is a high-tech wizard. Their professional worlds don't often intersect. "We're both musicians and world travelers," Keisha explained. "But I'm a writer, speaker and dancer. He's a software developer." That might not sound like fertile ground for collaborations, but enter AI, and that picture changes.

"Keisha was always making up stories and poems and songs for our kids. I told her, 'You need to write these down for the kids.'"

Keisha smiled. "Writing a children's book was a lifelong dream for me. I care about inspiring young people and literacy and sparking imagination. I wrote this book all in rhyme. I'm really proud of that." The book is all about the real, and fanciful, job choices open to children. Scientist, astronaut, ballerina and doctor are joined by more fanciful career options like princess, prince and superhero.

"The book is called *Wild Dream Adventure* and personalized with your child's name in the title." So a finished book would be *Mary's Wild Dream Adventure* or *Paul's Wild Dream Adventure* (or Rashonda's or Oluwole's or Svetlana's or Mei Chien's). "I'm a wordsmith. Illustration is not in my wheelhouse. So we used new AI technology and Photoshop to design the backgrounds for each of the possible careers. It allows whatever is in your mind's eye to end up on the page. AI allows us to insert your child into the illustrations. It literally gives your child the opportunity to imagine themselves in different careers and develop a sense of ambition."

The custom images were where Aaron's skill with AI came in. "I'm a software developer. I've worked from home for the last 13 years, and more recently, I have started coding, building and



# Not Your Grandma's PICTURES





# THE BOOK

— By Adam Walker



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launching AI-centered products. For the book, we used AI to design the background illustrations. People think AI does all of the work for you, but it's really just a tool more like Photoshop. It takes guidance and a lot of work to generate good images. Using text to generate images is really impressive at first, but AI lacks creativity. It's missing the human element." That's the part Aaron had to work hard to supply.

"When we generate the images of your child in the different careers, to insert them in the pages, the quality somewhat depends on the photos the customer supplies. They send us 20 to 30 images of their child, and I use those to train the AI. It takes about an hour to train the AI to recognize that child's face. Then it takes about half an hour to generate 200 images of the child."

"Then I choose the 30 best images," Keisha explained. "I have to be careful not to choose weird ones, because AI does strange things sometimes. Getting good images for the dancer is very difficult, because AI is not good with hands and legs."

"With the other careers, some creative cropping can get rid of any oddities, but you have to have a whole body that turns out good for the dancer," Aaron agreed. AI is currently notorious for placing arms and legs in impossible positions and for adding or subtracting fingers and other appendages. It's powerful, but there are a lot of simple things it still doesn't understand. So generating the images is only a first step before weeding out useless images and fixing the rest.

"This project was a great way to combine our gifts," Aaron confided. "I

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did the technical work to write the code to transform the child into images for the book. She did the writing. People are always asking if AI created the whole thing. No. Keisha wrote it, and it was a lot of work. We didn't sleep for weeks! Actually, it's still a lot of work, since each book is custom made for each child."

"We've been married for 21 years, and this was our first time to combine our skill sets like this," Keisha emphasized. "Each book is unique to the individual child. It's really validating. There is no more literal way for a child to see themselves in various careers, because the images are literally them. They can expand their ambition to pursue a career. We didn't have anything like this when I was a child. When I was a kid, I could never find my name on knickknacks or souvenirs, so my mom would special order stationery and name plaques for me. This is the ultimate in representation. It's not just a child who is *like* you. It is you. The reaction videos that some parents and grandparents have sent us of kids opening these books are incredible. And it's cool that we're using AI. There's been a lot of negative press about AI, but we use it to make a child the star of their own book." **NOW**

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# BusinessNOW

# Mechanical Comfort Systems

— By Adam Walker

## Mechanical Comfort Systems

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Roel Rojas started Mechanical Comfort Systems in 2001. “We started with just myself and one guy. Before that, I started as an A/C tech at an apartment complex and simultaneously worked for a friend’s A/C company for



a while in the evenings. I quickly grew a passion for this industry and helping customers. It brings me joy to know just how grateful people are for the work we do. So I decided to start my own company, and we’ve been going for over 20 years now. We started at my kitchen table. Now we own this building, and we want to build a bigger one.”

Mechanical Comfort Systems services and installs both residential and commercial HVAC units. “We service all brands, but we are a Goodman, Rheem and Carrier dealer. We provide service, repair and installations for everything from small residential units to large commercial units for apartment complexes. We do duct replacement and sanitation. We work on existing homes and new builds for several construction companies. Another service we offer is plumbing for both residential and commercial, as well as complimentary estimates where applicable.

Mechanical Comfort Systems is a family-owned and -operated business. Some employees have been with the company for several years, and they’re like family. We have over 30 employees now, and our senior project manager is



working on growing the commercial side of the business. We work as a team and leave the company in God's hands. God has a purpose for us all. We're in the business of service. That's our main goal — good quality service. There are a lot of new contractors in this field. Anyone can sell a unit. However, we want to offer the best service possible. I pray about how God wants me to run this company, just like I pray about my household. I try to use this company to do good. We have donated A/C units and repairs to families in need, and helped with rent and utilities when possible. People ask, 'How can you grow your business that way?' My response is, 'God provides.' If you have been blessed, you should share the blessings. We previously worked with the city to hold a giveaway event to provide window units and box fans for people who need help during the summer."

**“IT BRINGS ME JOY  
TO KNOW JUST HOW  
GRATEFUL PEOPLE ARE  
FOR THE WORK WE DO.”**

Roel also believes in paying it forward to the next generation. “I’m really pleased that the high school offers HVAC and electrical classes. I want to develop a program to teach this trade. During the pandemic, we were essential workers. It reflects the importance of this industry. We have several interns now, and want to bring partners to teach marketing, accounting and business operations. I want to help our younger generation learn the trade skills and have the same opportunity we have, if not more.”

Roel emphasized the goals of Mechanical Comfort Systems. “Keeping America Cool is our motto, because that’s what we’re trying to do. We aim to provide the best quality service to our customers, thus bringing comfort to them in their home or place of work. We work after hours, take emergency calls and are working toward being a truly 24/7 run business. We greatly value our customers, and teach our employees to take pride in their work.” **NOW**

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State Representative Yvonne Davis honors Dr. Usamah Rodgers, DeSoto ISD superintendent.

## Zoomed In: Dan Jespersen

By Adam Walker

Dan Jespersen and his wife, Janice, have been fixtures of the Duncanville life for decades. Dan's family has owned Ben Franklin Apothecary since 1964. "I started working here when I was 13 or 14. I got my driver's license at 14, so I could do deliveries. Then I graduated from pharmacy school in 1973 and bought the business from my parents in 1990. My wife and I decided it was time to retire and be grandparents. We've missed too many birthdays, sports games and parties. Grandkids are God's compensation for getting older."

Though Ben Franklin is closing, Dan values his time in Duncanville. "Relationships are important. We've gotten to know so many people in the community. We're looking at the whole month of August as a retirement party!"



Civilian Liaison Nikki Giles connects the public with DeSoto PD.



The people of Duncanville get to Eat Mor Chikin.



Duncanville celebrates Juneteenth.





Benjamin Landrey has a celebration dinner at Campuzano's after graduating from the CHHS special education program.



Arsenio Cardenas and Rosario Caudillo take Cobit to a pop-up veterinary clinic.



Victoria and Jerome Ayo-Olusanya hold a thanksgiving service to celebrate 30 years of marriage, his 60th birthday and their son's graduation from law school.

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CookingNOW

## *In the Kitchen With* JOCELYN MEDLOCK-PRICE

— By Adam Walker



Jocelyn Medlock-Price grew up in a family overflowing with siblings, cousins, love, fun and fellowship. “The centerpiece of our family gatherings was cooking and eating!” Her grandmother, Ceola Waters, introduced her to the kitchen. “Everything she cooked was with warmth and love. I was her official kitchen helper and taster. After she passed away, I never forgot what she taught me.”

Jocelyn likes cooking traditional dishes, and trying to figure out the recipes for foods she eats at restaurants. “Cooking is something I always enjoyed as a hobby. I take dishes and tweak them a little to my own satisfaction. There have been times when I just flat out made my own dish by asking myself, ‘I wonder what this dish would taste like if I did this?’” **NOW**

### **Mexican Casserole With Doritos**

**1 lb. lean ground beef**  
**1 small onion, chopped**  
**1 14-oz. can Ranch Style Beans**  
**1 10-oz. can Ro-Tel**  
**1 1-oz. packet taco seasoning**  
**1 14-oz. can cream of chicken soup**  
**1/2 cup water**

**1 11-oz. bag Doritos**  
**2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded**

1. Preheat the oven to 325 F
2. In a large skillet, brown the ground beef and onions; drain.
3. Stir in the beans, Ro-Tel, taco seasoning, soup and water. Simmer over medium heat until the ingredients are well blended and heated through.
4. In a 9x13-inch casserole dish, crush up

enough Doritos to cover the bottom. Top with half of the meat mixture and half of the cheese. Repeat layers.

5. Bake, covered, for 20-30 minutes.

### **Chicken Pot Pie Casserole**

**1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch pieces**  
**1/4 cup Zesty Italian Reduced Fat Dressing**  
**4 oz. Philadelphia Neufchatel Cheese, cubed**  
**2 Tbsp. flour**  
**1 1/2 cup fat-free, reduced-sodium chicken broth**  
**1 10-oz. pkg. frozen mixed vegetables, thawed**  
**1 refrigerated piecrust**

1. Preheat the oven to 375 F
2. In a large skillet, on medium heat, cook the chicken and Italian dressing for 2 minutes. Add the Neufchatel cheese; cook and stir until melted. Add the flour; mix well. Add the broth and vegetables; simmer 5 minutes.



3. Pour the mixture into a deep-dish, 10-inch pie plate. Arrange the piecrust over the filling; flute the edges. Cut four slits in the crust to allow the steam to escape.
4. Bake 30 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown.

### Corn Bread Hamburger Pie Casserole

- 1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 15.25-oz. can whole kernel corn, drained (or 1 can Ranch Style Beans)
- 1 10.5-oz. can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 10-oz. can Ro-Tel
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 cup white onion, chopped (divided use)
- 1/3 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 box Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix
- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup milk (You may use skim milk.)

1. In a large skillet, cook the beef over medium heat until no longer pink; drain. Stir in the corn or beans, soup, Ro-Tel, water, green bell peppers and 1/2 of the onions. Spoon the meat mixture into a greased 2-qt. baking dish. Sprinkle the cheese over the top of the mixture.
2. Combine the jiffy mix, egg and milk according to the directions on the jiffy mix packaging. Stir the remaining half of the onions into the corn bread mix. Spread over the top of the beef mixture.
3. Bake, uncovered, at 400 F for 20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the corn bread layer comes out clean.

### Scallop Stir Fry

- 6 oz. uncooked Ramen noodles or vermicelli
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 lb. asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 red bell pepper, cut into thin rings
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 1 lb. sea scallops, halved crosswise
- 2 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 tsp. hot pepper sauce
- 1 tsp. sesame oil
- Juice of 1/2 lime

1. Cook the noodles in lightly salted water according to package directions.
2. Heat the olive oil in a wok or large skillet over high heat. Add the asparagus, red bell peppers, onions and garlic. Stir-fry for 2 minutes.
3. Add the scallops; stir-fry until they turn opaque. Stir in the remaining ingredients.
4. Add the noodles; heat thoroughly, stirring occasionally.



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Corn Bread Hamburger Pie Casserole

- 2 cups cooked noodles
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup processed cheese, shredded
- 1 10.5-oz. can cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Arrange the layers of spinach, noodles, onions, garlic and 3/4 cup cheese in a 1.5-qt. baking or casserole dish.
3. Blend the soup with the milk and nutmeg; pour over the casserole; top with remaining the cheese. Bake 30 minutes.

## Hamburger Potato Casserole

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 1 10.5-oz. can cream of mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup onion, chopped
- 3/4 cup milk
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 3 cups potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. In a medium skillet over medium heat, brown the ground beef; drain.

3. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the cream of mushroom soup, onions, milk, salt and pepper.

4. In an 11x17-inch (2-qt.) baking dish, layer the potatoes, soup mixture and meat. Bake for 1 to 1 1/2 hours, or until the potatoes are tender. Top with cheese; continue baking until the cheese is melted.

## Spinach Mushroom Pasta Casserole

- 2 10-oz. pkgs. frozen spinach, cooked and drained

To search for more great recipes from any of the 9 NOW Magazines publications, visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).

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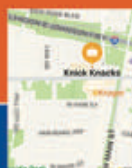
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# Cultural Con

*The contrast between the Amish countryside surrounding the small borough of Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, and an hour drive southeast to Hershey is striking, but you would not want to miss either stop on a visit to this state that was one of the original 13 colonies. Pennsylvania has a lot to offer, and while many might seek the colonial sites, a tour would not be complete without finding out why it is also known as The Chocolate State.*

About 24 percent of the United States Amish population resides in Pennsylvania. Mifflintown, a small community with fewer than 1,000 residents, borders the meandering Juniata River. While the area was originally settled in the 1770s, the village was not incorporated as a borough until 1933.

One of the more striking features of Mifflintown and other small communities in the area is the proximity of the homes and many retail shops to the narrow streets and roads. It seems as if one could step directly from their front stoop into the street. It is generally accepted that since the homes were built at a time when walking or horse-drawn carriage were the primary modes of transportation, there wasn't as much danger stepping out onto the road as there is today. Deliveries

of coal might have been easier to make, and since these have long been agrarian economies, having a front yard was not as important as the farm property behind the homestead.

Horse-drawn carriages abound in the Amish country because the families eschew many modern conveniences that most take for granted, such as engines powered by gasoline or electricity. Expect to slow your own vehicle down to a crawl as you get behind an Amish buggy. Your delay will not be prolonged because the locals will soon politely pull along the side of the road and let you pass.

Handmade Amish furniture, quilts, toys, soaps, baked goods, leatherwork and other items are available throughout the area at local stores and markets. A 20-mile drive from Mifflintown to Belleville on most Wednesdays will place you at a large market with just about anything Amish your heart desires. Peight's Country Store is open six days a week and is filled with wonderful treasures and delicious food.

When you are ready to move back into the current century, don't miss the chance to visit Hershey. Part of the drive from Mifflintown to Hershey is adjacent to the Susquehanna River. If you look closely, you will see a small copy of the Statue of Liberty on a pedestal in the middle of the river. The people of Dauphin Township placed the current sturdier version of the statue there in 1997, after the one built as a prank several years earlier was destroyed by the wind.

Hershey is all things chocolate and is called *Hershey The Sweetest Place on Earth*® for good reason. The streetlamps are shaped like HERSHEY'S KISSES, and the history includes Milton S. Hershey building his famous chocolate company







— By Bill Smith

# trast

there in 1905. Attractions include Hersheypark, Hersheypark Arena and The Hotel Hershey ... you get the idea. If it says *Hershey*, it's probably a place you want to visit.

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Sources:

1. [www.history.com](http://www.history.com).
2. [www.atlasobscura.com/places/mini-statue-of-liberty-harrisburg](http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/mini-statue-of-liberty-harrisburg).
3. [www.hersheypa.com](http://www.hersheypa.com).
4. [www.chocolateworld.com](http://www.chocolateworld.com).





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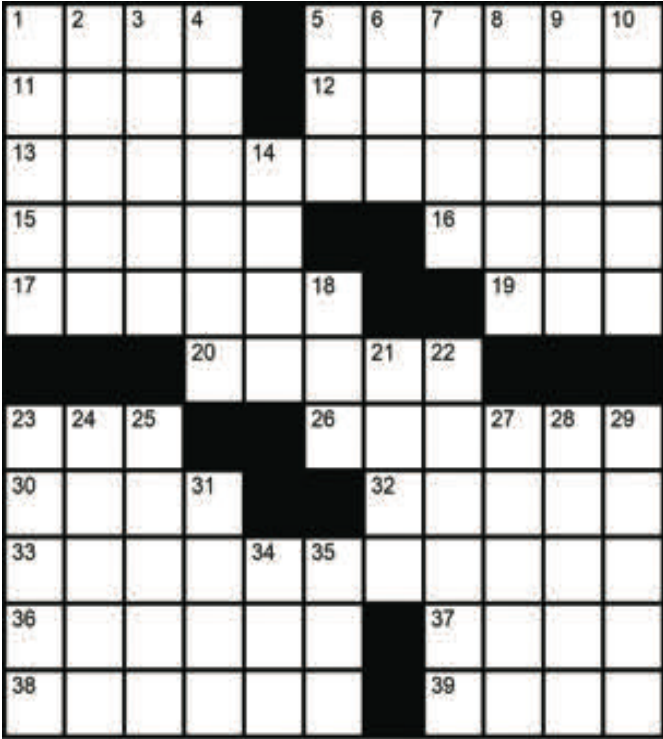
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# Crossword Puzzle



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## Across

- 1 Preceded by E, it can cause illness
- 5 Wields the gavel
- 11 Undoing
- 12 Elton's collaborator
- 13 Currently
- 15 Lieu
- 16 Drop the ball
- 17 Early screen Jean
- 19 Salt Lake City letters
- 20 Soft tissue
- 23 Old Ford model
- 26 Shakes led Sue astray
- 30 "Bearded" bloom
- 32 Overhead
- 33 Its occupants look for a catch

- 36 Site of a famous "galloping" bridge
- 37 Bring to naught
- 38 Mushy
- 39 Complaint

## Down

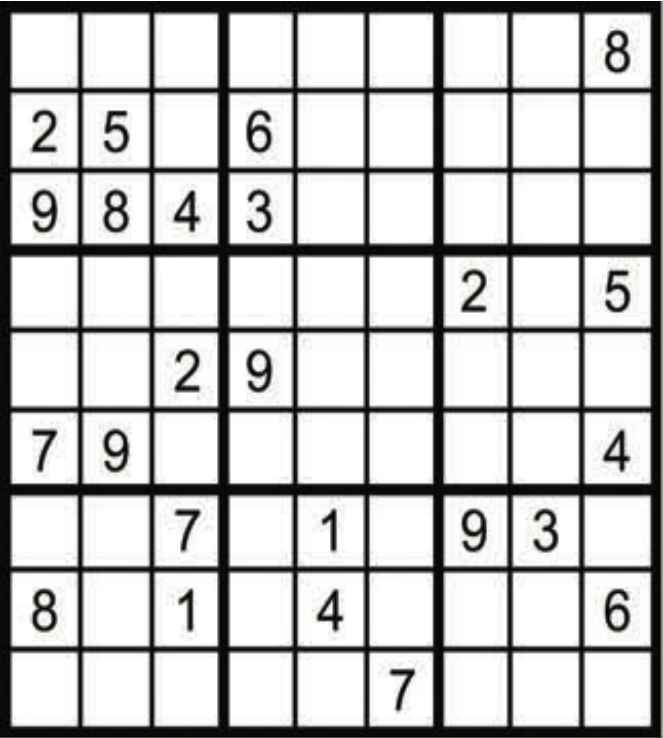
- 1 Collide
- 2 "I Think I'm --- Here" (Carroll O'Connor, autobiography)
- 3 A quart, and then some
- 4 Right down the middle
- 5 It owns Simon and Schuster
- 6 "--- So Fine" (The Chiffons' hit)
- 7 Skills
- 8 As a whole

- 9 Inflexible
- 10 Oozes
- 14 Image of a deity
- 18 Itsy-bitsy
- 21 Smelting by-product
- 22 Racket
- 23 Boosts
- 24 Experiment
- 25 "Saturday Night Fever" genre
- 27 Blackmore's Lorna
- 28 Dodge
- 29 Play by a different --- rules
- 31 Hit the mall
- 34 Little terror
- 35 Dissenting vote

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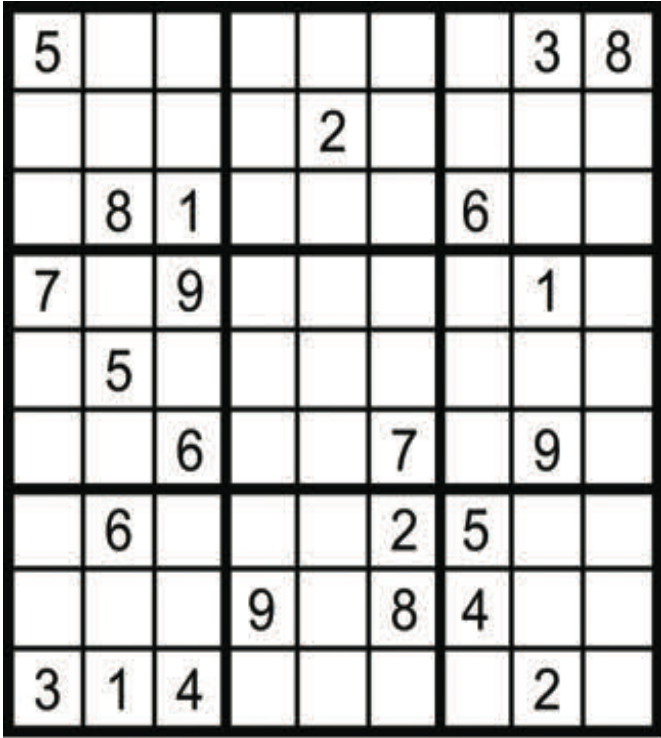
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on pages 6, 7, 16, 17, 24

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# WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL

Some events may have been cancelled or rescheduled while we were at press. Check with individual organizations or your city or Chamber websites to verify dates and times.

# AUGUST

8/3-8/6 and  
8/10-8/12

**Always Patsy Cline:**  
Thursdays-Saturdays: 8:00 p.m.; Sunday: 8/6: 3:00 p.m., Duncanville Community Theatre, 106 S. Main Street, Duncanville. For tickets and more information, visit <https://www.dctheatre.org>.

8/5

**Conservation-in-Action Volunteer Work Day:**  
A morning of dirt therapy and camaraderie awaits. Free. 8:00-11:00 a.m., Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Pkwy., Dallas.

**ISD Back to School Rally:**  
9:00 a.m.-noon, Valley Ridge Park, 2850 Park Ridge Dr., Cedar Hill.

**See & Taste DeSoto:**  
We combined the best of the DeSoto Living Festival and The Taste of DeSoto. Enjoy a fun-filled day of entertainment, great food, friendly competition and more! 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., DeSoto High School, 900 Eagle Way.

**King Shakur Performances:**  
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Public Library,  
211 E. Pleasant Run Rd.

8/10

**Rec in the Park:**  
Come enjoy some fun summer yard games. Free. 10:00-11:00 a.m., Highlands South Park, 225 Cannady Dr., Cedar Hill.

8/13

**Paws in the Pool-ooza:**  
Let your four-legged friend take a swim with his pet companions! This event will feature dog-friendly vendors, prizes and fun! \$5/dog. Benefits the Friends of Tri-City Animal Shelter. 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Crawford Pool, 401 Straus Rd., Cedar Hill.

8/26

**A Night of Smooth Jazz & R&B:**  
Natural Change Band in concert. \$20-\$25. 7:30 p.m., DeSoto Corner Theater, 211 E. Pleasant Run Rd. Desoto. [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).

Third Fridays

**Anime Club:**  
Come watch some favorites with friends. 6:00 p.m., Black and Bitter Coffee, 101 S. Main St., Duncanville.

*Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to [adam.walker@nowmagazines.com](mailto:adam.walker@nowmagazines.com).*

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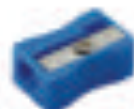
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