

The Community Magazine Serving Red Oak and the Surrounding Area

Red Oak NOW

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October 2008

Free Throwin'

Haunted History

Jumpin' for Joy

An Eye for Detail

At Home With

Gary and Tammy Ashford

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Red Oak Independent School District Tax Rate Rollback Election

This document is not intended to advocate that you vote for or against the rollback election, but instead to inform you of facts about the issue that you may find useful in making your own decision.

Benefits of a Tax Rate Rollback

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\$1.1 million—increase base pay for teachers and staff

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\$0.5 million—add to general fund balance

	\$1.50 total	
Rate w/o rollback	M & O \$1.04	I & S \$0.46
Rate after rollback	M & O \$1.17	I & S \$0.33

Early Voting Locations

Any precinct can vote at any location

Red Oak ISD Admin. Building 156 Louise Ritter Blvd.	Sept. 24- Oct. 7	7:00am-7:00pm (Monday-Friday)
RO Intermediate 401 E. Ovilla Rd.	Oct. 2	6:30pm-8:30pm
RO Junior High 200 Live Oak St.	Oct. 2	6:30pm-8:30pm
Wooden Elem. 200 Louise Ritter Blvd.	Oct. 7	6:30pm-8:30pm

Election Day Voting Locations

Saturday, October 11 7:00 am -7:00 pm

Shields Elem. 205 W. Ovilla Rd.	Precincts no. 103, 109, 137, 138
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BEFORE AND AFTER PICTURES OF ACTUAL PATIENTS



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at Reindeer Manor.

Photo by Terri Ozymy.

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Serving Red Oak and
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MAGAZINE

Editor's Note

Dear neighbors,

As we slowly meander into the fall season, I am excited to start pulling out the sweaters and enjoying all of the fun this time of the year has to offer. No matter what season your life is in, we hope this issue will add a ton of fun to your October!

Please enjoy as you travel through the pages. Stop by the Bettik family kitchen and grab a few homemade jams. Join in some seasonal celebrations with a visit to Tammy and Gary Ashford's home. Have a "hooping" good time with free-throw champ Cole Harris and enjoy the artwork of equestrian artist Louis Grinage. Lastly, get scared silly as you learn about the history and lore of our local haunt, Reindeer Manor.

Diana Merrill Claussen

Red OakNOW Editor

P.S. Please submit your feature ideas to dclaussen.nowmag@sbcglobal.net.



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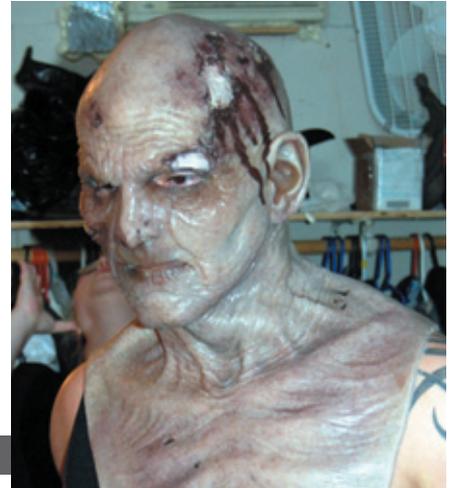
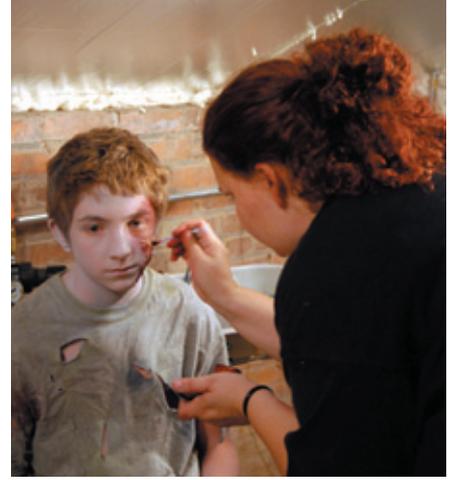
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— By Diana Merrill Claussen



In Red Oak, there is a little-known property with a history that is not as bright as the rest of our area. In fact, its saga has been infused with bits of evil and many chilling unpleasanties. Located off of Houston School Road, Reindeer Manor's history begins in the early 1900s, when the property was bought by oil and water well driller James Sharp.

In 1914, Sharp lived at his city home in Oak Cliff, while construction on his Red Oak country home began. At the time, the only thing on the property was a little wooden home. That year, the property and home were both destroyed during an early morning storm. "The house was hit by lightning and [it] killed the entire family of Swedish sharecroppers who lived in it," Reindeer Manor's public relations director, Richard Kinney, said.

Because Sharp was so terrified after viewing the aftermath of the fire, he insisted on building his estate with concrete and block. "Only the door frames and windowsills are wood," Richard said. Unfortunately, Sharp would never live to see the completion of his fireproof home. Before the house was completed, "Sharp was shot at his home in Oak Cliff and later died from his injuries," Richard revealed. "It was his son, James Sharp Jr., who completed construction on the Houston School Road property."



Around the early 1920s, Sharp Jr. moved his family onto the estate, and they became successful cotton farmers and ranchers. However, the family fell on very hard times during the Great Depression, causing the untimely, murderous deaths of both Sharp Jr. and his wife. "In the 1930s, his wife was found poisoned in the dining room, while Sharp Jr. was found hanging from the cistern," Richard said. Although legend said Sharp Jr. was found in the cistern, Richard has his own insight. "I think he died in the barn because I saw him [his apparition] when I was a kid."

After the Sharps died, many tried to fix up the old property, but none succeeded, until the Gillespie family bought it back in the '60s. In the 1970s, the property owners decided to help raise funds for the community by decorating and opening their property to the public. "The house has now been open to the public as a haunted attraction [during the Halloween season] since 1974," Richard said. "Many charities have helped to run the haunted house, but the Boy Scouts took it over in 1981."

Richard has his own history with the Reindeer Manor estate. He was a member of the Cub Scouts and later the Boy Scouts. "I've been working at Reindeer Manor since I was 10," he shared. Richard was reared by a single mother in Duncanville. "We were poor, and I didn't have much of a



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father figure," he said. Not long after he joined the Scouts, Richard attended a campout with Boy Scouts Troop 1. That is when he decided they were the right group for him. He has been a Troop 1 member ever since and is now an Eagle Scout and an Assistant Scout Master.

Since 1981, Richard's troop has been in charge of maintaining, setting up and running the annual haunted house event which is where Richard has volunteered for over 20 years. "As a kid, I was in love with the haunted house," he said. "A lot of who I am is because of the house."

The idea for running the annual haunted attraction was to raise funds for the troop and other charitable organizations, as well as teach the Scouts necessary life skills. "The best benefit of this is to give the kids a lot of construction skills," property owner Jim Scott said. Jim has been the proprietor of the property since he bought it from the Gillespies in 1992. He is also the troop's head Scoutmaster. Besides learning carpentry and electrical skills, "They also learn concrete, masonry and plumbing," Jim said. "Any skill it takes to build anything happens here at the property."

The planning for the attraction is a year-round task and the Scouts, along with the help of Venture Crew 3 [coed Boy Scouts], start working at the property every weekend during July and do not stop until after the haunting season is over. For every hour they spend tending to the grounds and attractions, each Scout member and his family obtain points that go into his own Scouting fund. This in turn helps to cover equipment and activities. The families have been known to work on the property during the hottest of heat waves.

Their hard work is eventually transformed into one of the spookiest haunts around. As you step onto the property, you must enter through an immense iron gate complete with fire breathing dragons. To access the main house, you have to go to the end of a line, which eerily mazes through a graveyard

complete with many ghoulish surprises.

Once you enter the Main House, there are many rooms filled with terrifying encounters. There is the dining room, where the poisoned Mrs. Sharp was found, a creepy library, swinging bookcases, hidden doors, special affects, a vampire room, a morgue and a mad scientist room complete with a working Tesla Coil. "In the mad scientist room, we have a few Frankenstein-like experiments," Richard said. "We might actually have the largest Tesla Coil in Texas, too."

The special effects crew has created many hauntingly thrilling scenes. Some of those scenes, however, were not man-made. Each volunteer has their own area where they will not venture alone, claiming to have heard footsteps or to have seen apparitions and moving objects in those locations. "Anyone who has worked out here has seen something weird at one time or another," Richard said. "I have worked out here for quite a while and have seen some stuff which has really freaked me out. There are a million stories here at Reindeer Manor."

As you wander the eerie grounds, you can see the haunted pirate ship and gold miner's tent city. Crossing to the other side of the property requires courage to sneak through a paranormal midway, complete with vendors and sinister, non-Disney-like characters like Uncle Stinky, the manor's mascot of sorts. After passing Stinky and the Dungeon of Doom, the next stop is the barn, where Sharp Jr. possibly died. The barn is home to the manor's 13th Street Morgue attraction. There is also the largest, and only, theater in Red Oak, as well as a casket-making room, pauper's graveyard, funeral chapel, crematory, freezer and embalming room.

If curiosity and the horror of Reindeer Manor is not enough to encourage you to visit this local haunt, maybe just knowing your visit will help the Boy Scouts will be enough to partake in a frighteningly fun outing at Reindeer Manor. **NOW**

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At Home With **Gary and Tammy Ashford**

That Hometown *Feeling*

— By Jaime Ruark

The Ashfords' lovely and welcoming 2,800-square-foot home sits back from the road as their verdant lawn rolls up from the street to meet a porch that extends the length of the house. Facing west, the porch is a perfect spot to sip limeade, nibble on a warm brownie during the cool, fall evenings and watch the sun set or pet Duke, the 15-year-old family pet, on his sweet head. With numerous rocking chairs and a hanging swing tucked among hanging baskets and pots of vibrant flowers, it is easy to see why the Ashford family enjoys spending time outdoors.

Four years ago, Gary and Tammy Ashford moved into their three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath home with the upstairs game room, because as Tammy said, "I had to have a room for my boys!" Sitting on five-and-a-half acres of land, the 5-year-old house was exactly what the family was looking for. Soon after moving in, the couple put fencing up and had

their pool installed, making their large backyard an oasis, as well as a party place for their two boys, Nick, who is 20 and a sophomore at Southwestern University in Georgetown, and Jake, who is 16 and a junior at Red Oak High School. Both boys play baseball, are active in their youth group and have inherited the confident and clear-gazing, bright eyes of their parents. Gary and Tammy have spent many nights entertaining groups of their sons' local, teenaged friends. "We try to have an open door to our kids' friends. I want everybody to feel welcome and warm when they walk in the door," Tammy said. "I want the kids to feel like they're one of our own children, and I think they do. When they're here, they're [our] children."

The couple laughed as they reminisced, with Tammy almost daring Gary to share where the two met. In fact, a local George Strait concert brought the two together, but it took some coercion to get the couple to reveal the concert's location — Billy Bob's restaurant/bar in Fort Worth. "My friends had bailed out on me, but I was determined to see George Strait, so I went anyway. Gary was there with some friends. We met and started dancing," Tammy shared. Clearly, that first dance has led to many more throughout their 23-year marriage.

Clean white walls are a perfect backdrop for Tammy's favored Southwestern-meets-American-Indian theme. Deep browns and maroons are featured prominently throughout the home, with Aztec-style blankets and cowhides hanging on walls. "I favor earth tones," Tammy explained, "and I love those Indian-style, darker colors. My great-grandmother was half Cherokee." Wrought-iron crosses and stars are placed throughout the home. A high ceiling in the living room, the



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Gary, born and reared in Mansfield, has passed down a rodeo legacy to his boys. His father, age 72, was part of the Senior Professional League, and still participates in the sport today. "I grew up 'rodeoing.' I roped calves and



steers. My father still does it, and the boys would probably still be roping, too, but they started concentrating more on baseball," Gary said. "Both of my boys have learned how to rope through Gary's dad, and how to take care of horses. He has been a great influence on my kids. He's shared that talent and love with them," Tammy added with family pride.

Tammy, a Tennessee native, attended college at the University of Tennessee and earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Texas at Austin. She completed her post-graduate studies in

social work at University of Texas at Arlington. Tammy's pride in her schools is easily found throughout her home in decorating touches, from the UT plate showcased on the mantle over the stone fireplace in the living room, to the upstairs game room, where the two schools' orange team color is splashed about on stools, wall hangings and throw pillows. "I stayed orange; I just burned it a little bit," she joked about her move to Texas.

Tammy has a knack for lighting, as evidenced in the living room and the master bedroom. "I love twinkle lights," she smiled. "I have them in just about every room. I love twinkle lights, little lamps and candles." Lit by the natural light of a window in the master bedroom is one of Tammy's prized possessions. "This hope chest was my grandmother's. We cleaned it up and redid it after she passed away. My grandmother was very, very special to me. She devoted her life to helping other people. She was the epitome of

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strength, and she was a huge influence on me, so this is very special.”

Tammy loves decorating her house for the holidays, and October lets her incorporate her favorite color in her decorations — orange. “I love Halloween. Even as a child, I loved Halloween — the pumpkins and jack-o’-lanterns, and dressing up. In fact, Gary’s and my first Halloween together after we were married, we dressed up as the Marx brothers. I was Harpo,” Tammy laughed.

Fall is also a favorite because the whole family loves college football. “We’re big University of Texas fans, and, of course, Tennessee fans as well, so we watch a lot of football,” Tammy shared. “We play baseball during the fall too. So we’re always either watching games on TV or attending games.” The wall leading up to the boys’ game room is a veritable hall of fame, showing off yearly framed pictures of Nick and Jake’s sports teams, as well as plaques and awards won by the athletic brothers.



Tammy now wears many hats as an employee of DeSoto Private School. She is a teacher for the fifth and sixth grade, principal for the third through sixth grade and the chairperson of the executive board. Gary has been a successful semi truck salesman for 20 years, as well as the president of the Red Oak High School Booster Club. “Even when the boys were younger, we’ve just always felt it was important to be involved in youth activities and youth sports,” he expressed.

In fact, the Ashfords feel like community involvement takes second



place only to God and family, which is why they love living in Red Oak. “When we first moved into this house, the very following Sunday we went to the First United Methodist Church in Red Oak, and it has been a blessing in our lives,” Tammy shared. “The people in our church and in the community, the friendliness — it’s just fantastic. We’ve met so many wonderful people, and we just love Red Oak’s home-town feel.” **NOW**

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An Eye for Detail

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

When Louis Grinage joined the Army, he knew he wanted to serve his country and be involved in something he loved. “I joined because I wanted to go to Desert Storm,” Louis shared. “Instead, I ended up in Germany for two years and missing three conflicts.” After he left the military, Louis found himself working in the banking industry. “I did well, but my heart wasn’t in it,” he shared. One cannot help but wonder if Louis’ heart already knew his true calling, though his conscious mind was unaware of it.

Louis’ path in life can be traced back to elementary school. “When I was in sixth grade I drew large cartoon characters,” he shared. The school liked his drawings so much they strung them across the school auditorium. “That was a big moment for me,” he grinned.

Later, Louis attended an arts magnet high school in Dallas. “They not only taught us the basics, they really took us out of our element,” he shared. Louis’ skills and talents were stretched like a canvas on a frame. Little did he know this schooling would help lay the foundation for the rest of his life, which now includes his wife, Jonae, and son, Tyler.

Before they married, Jonae noticed Louis was always drawing. “I had drawn a couple pictures of horses and cars,” Louis shared. After some serious thought, meditation and inspiration, “I decided to put my focus on horse art,” he added.

Jonae loved Louis’ work, encouraging him to pursue his artistic passion and dreams. “Louis has been drawing all of his life,” his father and business manager, Louis (not senior) said. “Louis’ talent is really special because he enhances it by practicing it every day.” With the support of his family, and the longing to increase his artistic expression, Louis decided to become a stay-at-home father and to pursue art.

“Staying home with Tyler is challenging,” Louis shared. “We’ve really learned to work together,” he laughed. “Especially when he goes down for a nap, that’s when I can really excel.” Louis’ work stands out and can be appreciated by just about any art enthusiast’s eye. From abstract to conventional, his love for creating equine masterpieces resonates through his work.



“Louis has a fresh approach in creating his contemporary art with a broad appeal,” his dad said. “Every horse he creates is a different experience.” While working with regular and colored pencils, Louis has been known to use ink, as well as regular- and media-quality drawing papers. His pieces range in size from 16 x 20 inches to 24 x 36 inches. Another technique Louis utilizes is the combination of colored ink and pencil to create a smudged, charcoal affect.

Each piece is special to Louis, who usually conceives his artistic ideas while admiring horse photos. “Many people ask me why I have to look at photos,” he said. “It’s because I like to be very detailed and descriptive in my work. It’s challenging to convey the complexities of their movement. ... I like that, and I hope to achieve that aspect so the viewer will want to look at the details very closely.”

“When I am drawing, it brings me to this place of overwhelming peace,” he shared. “By the time the transformation happens, it turns out to be something special. In my work, I want to deliver everything I have learned in life and let my creative passion flow through my drawings. When it flows, it flows.”

Louis’ eye for detail is obvious. From the stance of the

steeds to their muscle structure, each segmented portion of each horse is captured and in complete alignment. "My work ranges from very detailed to abstract," Louis shared. "Some people think that abstract means you're not going to know what the picture is, but it depends upon what the artist wants to convey."



"I love to do this," he exclaimed. "It doesn't seem like work, and now I know what it's like to do something I love." He does what he loves with the full support of those who love him. "It's fantastic that Louis has Jonae's 100 percent support," his father shared. "Without her, this venture probably would not have gotten launched." "To have my dad and wife's support is a great boost," Louis interjected.

Louis' venture encompasses more than just producing art. "I am in the process of getting into exhibitions and shows," he said. His work can be seen at Corners Art Gallery in Waxahachie and will soon be on display in other venues.

Louis wants to give back to the community by mentoring younger artists. "He can inspire people, and I believe many can be helped through the arts," Jonae shared. "There needs to be a forum for younger people to have access to the art world," his dad added. "As people get introduced to art, it really touches their lives and opens up a whole new world to them." "It also brings a certain sense of humanity and togetherness," Louis elaborated. **ARTS NOW**

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Free Throwin'

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Cole Harris is a humble, well-mannered and smart individual. He is also an 11-year-old free-throwing champ. By the time Cole was 6, he had developed a love of sports and found himself playing on city football, baseball and basketball teams. “I used to always watch football with my dad,” Cole shared. “So when I was in the second grade, dad signed me up on a team.” Since that day, Cole has played his heart out on many fields and courts around our town.

Cole’s father, Dan, assisted him in growing in his sportsmanship and talent. “Dan has coached Cole in both basketball and football,” Cole’s mom, Sara, said. “He likes it when Dan encourages him.” “My dad helps me to work harder,” Cole added.

Cole has certainly been working hard, especially since he joined the city’s basketball league. While on the team, he not only realized he was a good player, he also discovered a hidden talent. “During games, I would stand at the free-throw line, and I guess you could say I had very good accuracy,” Cole humbly shared.

Not long after Cole and his family noticed his skill for shooting hoops, an opportunity presented itself and encouraged the young man to utilize his talent. “Last year, Cole and a few members from his basketball team attended a ROHS basketball game,” Sara said. “During the game, people were handing out flyers that announced an upcoming free-throw competition. So we thought we would try it, especially since Cole has a natural talent for shooting,” Sara said, smiling at her son. Cole was 10 when he entered the free-throw contest.

“This was Cole’s first free-throw event,” Sara said. He won the city event for his age group. “That qualified him for districts, and from districts he went on to the regional competition in Dallas,” Sara beamed. Cole was then able to go all the way up to the state level because he placed first in his age group for each of these events.

“When Cole’s father was 10 years old, he went to a state competition for free throwing as well,” Sara said. “It’s interesting



to see Cole and Dan were the same age when they competed at state free-throw events.” “Free throw is way much funner than playing a real game,” Cole shared. “It’s great because

you don’t have to stay on the court for very long; you just shoot. There are 25-foot throws, and you throw from a painted box on the court. Then you just shoot for the square box above the rim. If you hit the box then you’ll make the shot.”

At the state competition, Cole made many great shots as he competed against 16 children in his age group. Cole placed fourth. “It was exciting,” he exclaimed. “I had confidence and just tried my hardest.” Cole draws confidence from his friends and family both in the crowd and on the court.

“When I was at state, I felt very proud because I knew some of the kids playing at the competition with me,” he shared. “It’s fun to have that support.”

Not only does Cole receive encouragement from others, he also gives it to others. “My friend at state got last place,” Cole



said. "I told him it was great playing with him and that he did a good job. We're just having fun and showing support. It's just not all about winning, I guess."

It is not just his talent on the court that has won Cole many accolades. "I think he is just so happy," Cole's youth leader, Rachel Baba, said. "He expresses joy to others and takes initiative to do things most kids his age won't. Cole really takes the lead."

Upon receiving this compliment about her son, Sara was understandably touched by the kind words and added a few of her own. "He is very sweet and humble and considerate of others," Sara commented. "I hope he understands what a blessing his talent is, and I pray he continues to follow his dreams and his beliefs."

"Free throw is way much funner than playing a real game."

For now though, Cole is having fun both on the court and in school, where his favorite subjects are math and science. "Cole has a very analytical mind," Sara said. "When he was 5 years old, he taught himself multiplication through watching football." He loved adding and multiplying different points and stats for different players and plays.

During the fall season, "We'll go to some Oklahoma Sooners football games," Sara said. Cole has a few plans of his own. He will be playing baseball and having fun with his friends, especially during Halloween. "I like Halloween," Cole said. "There are times when people go to sleep early and leave their candy on their porch, so we take all their candy," he shyly admitted. **NOW**

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People have turned to selling their used gold for several reasons. Some people genuinely need to sell because of expenses. Some just want to clean out their jewelry box of unwanted items. Many want to trade in and upgrade to white gold or just a new piece of jewelry. Others may just need some extra spending money for that Aruba vacation.

Whatever the reason, seller beware! Be as cautious with selling your valuables as you were in making the purchase. Think twice before mailing in your goodies in response to an Internet ad or TV infomercial (read the fine print). As the old saying goes, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Sell only to reputable jewelers or buyers you trust, so you know you will get the most for your gold and diamonds and won't be taken advantage of. Wiley mentions that if you are even thinking about selling your old gold, now is the time. It's just a smart thing to do. Over the last week, gold prices have begun to fall, and it might be your last opportunity to get a great price. At our store, we actually increase our offer even more if it is going toward a new purchase, repair or custom design. We had a lady in our store today who traded in all her gold toward the purchase of her daughters' class ring and another cashing in for new school clothes.

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Jumpin' For Joy

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

When it comes to children, there is a family that not only said their home is the local “fun house,” their business is as well. From ingenuity and a zest for life, Ken and Marcy Noah began an establishment centering around family fun and togetherness. Extreme Jump of Red Oak was inspired by their children. Before founding Extreme Jump, “Marcy was a stay-at-home mom for years and wanted to have her own business,” Ken shared. “So we started an outdoor party business six years ago.”

“I knew kids; I had five of them,” Marcy shared. “I also just love to see the kids when they’re happy.”

In 2001, they started their outdoor bounce house business with the mission of making every event special. “When a child has a party with us, we want to make it the best day they have ever had,” Marcy said. In 2007, they opened their indoor party establishment. “The indoor facility is great because it doesn’t matter what the weather is like outside,” Ken said. With no weather worries, parents are free to book a party and let the Noahs do the rest.

The Noahs’ goal is to ensure that everyone in the family enjoys themselves. In the early days when they threw parties at home for their own children, “We would miss everything because we would always be too busy working the party,” Marcy shared. “For years, I don’t remember much of our kids’ parties. I missed special times because I would be too busy running it.”

The Noahs handle every detail on the day of an event, from decorating to providing utensils. “All the parents have to do is show up with the cake and a kid. We do the rest,” Marcy said. They also use a system which enables them to keep their pint-sized parties safe and secure, making special events fun and worry-free for all.

“Hostesses keep a gift list to assist families when it comes time to sending out thank yous,” Ken said. “We also create a scrapbook page of the party for the parents to take home as a keepsake.” “This way mom and dad don’t miss out on any memories,” Marcy added.

The Noahs’ outdoor and indoor services include a variety of packages and a la carte extras and concessions such as gift bags, balloons, cotton candy and popcorn. They also provide their bounce house, obstacle course and Velcro wall including numerous games for all ages. “For adults we offer air hockey,



Making children happy is a year-round mission for the Noah family.

foosball and basketball,” Marcy shared. There is also a wall-sized movie screen and a Little Tykes toy area for the smaller guys and gals.

“All of our games are included with our packages,” Marcy said. “No one is left out when they come here because everyone can play. We even see a lot of parents who don’t want to go home because they are having such a blast.”

For this family-oriented business, making children happy is a year-round mission. This fall, the Noahs will feature many exciting events and opportunities for local families. “We participate in many fall festivals,” Marcy shared. “We will also be offering more karaoke, face painting, picture packages, and girl-



“We even see a lot of parents who don’t want to go home because they are having such a blast.”

themed parties which will feature makeovers and spa sessions.”

During the holidays, they will host Parent’s Night Out events. “These events will include pizza, movies and all of the games,” Ken said. “Parent’s Night Out is really helpful around the holidays, especially when parents need to shop or get the house ready,” Marcy added. Regardless of the season, “Everyone has a lot of fun because there is something for everyone to do,” she smiled.

Extreme Jump is located at 2524 Ovilla Road in Red Oak. Contact (972) 576-5867 or visit www.extreme-jump.com for more information. **NOW**

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Earthy Delights

— By Katrina D. McNair

For Sylvia Gordon, working a garden is more than growing the biggest roses, the sweetest melons or the tallest trees. Her connection with soil and the joy she feels when working in her own garden is only intensified when she is able to pass along her knowledge to others — a true gardening mentor. “When I was little, my brothers and I would stay with our grandparents. My grandmother had raised 12 kids during and after the Depression. Everybody was rural at the time — you lived out of your garden. You ate out of your garden. If you didn’t have a garden, you didn’t eat,” she said of her introduction to gardening.

As she blossomed into a teenager, Sylvia still had a love of gardening, but the changing social influences of the decade affected her connection to her childhood pastime. “As I grew up, gardening and nature were out. The emphasis was on mastery and control of nature through chemical means and better living through chemical means. I lived that way for a very long time,” she shared. “Then, at some point when I was in my 40s, my body just crashed, and it said, ‘You’d better get your fingers in the soil, or you’re gonna go crazy.’ I started gardening so I could contact with the real world, with the Earth.”

Since her reintroduction to gardening, Sylvia has not looked back, although there is a pronounced difference in her viewpoint of what gardening is about. “The therapeutic effect of gardening finally sank in through all the dirt that I

was absorbing through the skin of my fingers. I realized that the beauty and joy of gardening is not being ambitious for what can be forced out of it, but being grateful for what it yields willingly, gracefully, beautifully and for the ‘living in the moment’ that it involves,” she said.

Her role as a gardening mentor is not one that Sylvia pursued, but is one that she relishes when encountering those who are new to gardening. “The most fun I’ve had, and the most effective, is helping people who were born too late to have had grandmothers like mine,” she expressed. “People feel overwhelmed; there’s almost too much information available. I like to help people who are beginners. I like to get them started.”

There is no typical student. “I run into them at garden sales. I’ve met several people online. I’ve met a lot of people during plant sales. It’s not a formal thing. I just say, ‘Come over to the garden, and I’ll show you what I’ve got.’”

Living in Red Oak, Sylvia is very knowledgeable about what plants work and do not work in a sometimes unforgiving Texas climate. “I can give them [students] suggestions on how to get things to grow in our soil, in the sun or in the shade,” she said, further explaining her need to educate those who have a passion to get their hands in the soil. “I try to teach them what to get alarmed about, what imperfections to expect and to accept, what critters are bad news and which ones are good.”

Education **NOW**

For gardening novices or those ready to toss their pruning shears, Sylvia offers several hints, one of which may surprise some. "Don't do houseplants. Houses are not good places for plants. Our houses are usually too dry and we water them too much. They don't get enough light. We torture them to death," she said.

Sylvia also encourages would-be green thumbs to decide what kind of result they want for their personal Garden of Eden. "Do you want something green that doesn't require maintenance, like shrubs? If you want shrubs, do you want full sun, part-sun or shade? What do you want and what area do you have for it?"

Soil preparation is also key to having the best garden possible. "I thought you just dug it up, shook out the grass roots and threw them away, mixed in your good stuff and you were ready to plant," she said, referring to the soil. "Experienced gardeners don't do that. They till it up, throw out the grass root and wait a month, because there's going to be seeds that are still in that soil. The key is to plant what works."

As the heat of summer wanes and fall colors begin to appear, Sylvia encourages people to continue their gardening efforts. "Fall is a real good time to plant trees. It's not a good time to start seeds of ornamentals because they don't have enough energy stored up to make it through the winter," she added. "It's a good time to plant trees, shrubs and perennials because fall is when they develop their root system. Then they go to sleep. In the spring when the sun stimulates them to start growing, then they've got their root system to support them and they take off better."

Regardless of skill level or what plants and flowers one chooses, gardening should be fun. At least that is what Sylvia tells her students. She advised, "You want the activity to fulfill you, and you want the garden itself to be a pleasant place." **NOW**



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David and Barbara Littlefield, top left, visited with their granddaughter, Mikayla. Harps of God, top center, provided lively entertainment recently at Bubba Q. Roy Tamez and his grandchildren, top right, played and had a fun time at the local park. The Mosely family, second row left, enjoyed fellowship and conversation during their family reunion. Ethan Pilarski, bottom left, safely came down the slide faster than even he expected. Sue Land, bottom center, visited her horse, Sunny, at Stone Canyon located in Glenn Heights. Mary Beth Perez and her daughter, second row center right, spent some quality time together. Tyler Riley, second row right, cooled off with a soda at a local eatery. Officers Carr and Ortegon of the Ovilla Police Department, bottom right, posed for a quick snapshot.



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Look Who's Cooking

— By Faith Browning

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1 pkg. frozen broccoli
 1 8-oz. jar Cheez Whiz
 1 cup Minute Rice, uncooked
 1 12-oz. can cream of mushroom soup
 1 12-oz. can cream of celery soup
 onion flakes

Cook broccoli according to package instructions; drain. Mix all ingredients together. Place in casserole dish; bake covered for 45 minutes at 350 F. Uncover and bake 15 more minutes.

COLESLAW BY BARBARA

1 head cabbage, shredded
 4 green onions, chopped fine
 3/4 cup almonds, sliced
 1/2 cup sesame seeds
 2 pkgs. Ramen soup noodles, broken into small pieces
 butter, enough for sautéing

DRESSING:

1 cup oil
 1/3 cup rice vinegar
 1/4 cup sugar
 1 1/2 tsp. salt

2 tsp. Accent
 1 tsp. pepper

Mix cabbage and onions; store in Ziploc bag. Sauté and lightly brown almonds, sesame seeds and noodles in butter; refrigerate. Combine dressing ingredients; mix well. Combine all three mixtures just before serving.

BOB'S BEEF JERKY

5 lbs. beef or venison (suggest round roast, sirloin, eye of round or rump roast)
 2 Tbsp. salt
 3 Tbsp. seasoning salt
 3 Tbsp. granulated beef bouillon
 1 Tbsp. garlic powder
 1 Tbsp. onion powder
 1 tsp. allspice
 3 Tbsp. pepper, finely ground
 2 Tbsp. pepper, coarse ground
 1/2 cup liquid smoke
 1/2 cup Worcestershire sauce

Slice beef or venison with the grain, not across, in 1/4-inch strips; trim off excess fat (Fat does not dry out and may leave rancid taste.) In a large bowl, mix remaining ingredients. Put meat in bowl, mixing

thoroughly to get a spice coating on sides of each piece. Cover bowl; let stand in refrigerator overnight. Remix meat in marinade to ensure uniform coverage. Let stand in refrigerator an additional 8 hours. Do not rinse meat. Place a cooling rack on a cookie sheet lined with foil. Place meat strips on rack. Do not let meat strips touch. Put meat in oven on the lowest setting (warm) for about 8 hours. Prop oven door open to allow moisture to escape. Do not store in a sealed container, as there may be residual moisture that may cause meat to mildew.

GLADIOLA QUICK CHEESE BREAD

2 eggs
 3/4 cup water
 2 6-oz. pkgs. Gladiola buttermilk biscuit mix
 2 tsp. dry mustard
 1 1/2 cup grated sharp cheddar cheese, divided use
 2 Tbsp. butter

Heat oven to 350 F. Grease 8 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 2 1/2-inch loaf pan. Beat eggs in a large bowl; stir in water. Add biscuit mix; beat well. Add mustard and 1 cup cheese; mix thoroughly. Pour batter into pan. Sprinkle with remaining cheese; dot butter on top. Bake 45 minutes. Remove and cool on rack before slicing.

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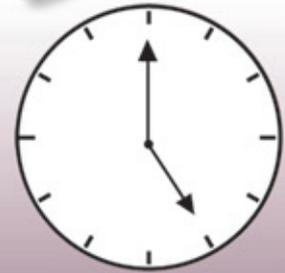
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Smart Retirement Savings Moves for Gen Xers

— By Renee Chase

If you belong to “Generation X” — generally defined as those born between 1965 and 1980 — you’ve got many years to go until you retire. However, that doesn’t mean you should delay saving for retirement — but that’s exactly what many of your peers are doing. And in the process, they may be jeopardizing the retirement lifestyle they’ve envisioned.

Consider the following:

- More than one in three workers ages 35 to 44 aren’t saving anything for retirement, according to a survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

- Nearly half of all Gen Xers are at risk of being unable to maintain their standard of living in retirement, according to the Center of Retirement Research at Boston College.

These figures are daunting, but they don’t necessarily mean that you will fall short of your retirement goals. As a Gen Xer, you have, on your side, the world’s most valuable asset — time. By using it wisely, and by following proven savings and investment strategies, you can make excellent progress toward your important retirement goals.

What savings and investment strategies should you pursue? Here are a few ideas:

- Take full advantage of your 401(k). If your employer offers a 401(k) or similar plan, such as a 403(b) or 457(b), put in as much as you can afford each year, and increase your contribution every time you get a raise. Your 401(k) earnings can potentially grow on a tax-deferred basis, and you generally contribute pre-tax dollars, so the more you put in, the lower your annual taxable income. At a minimum, contribute enough to earn your employer’s match, if one is offered. And if you leave your job, try to avoid liquidating your 401(k) account. Instead, consider rolling over your 401(k) to an IRA or to your new employer’s retirement plan, if such transfers are allowed.

- Open an IRA. Even if you have a 401(k), you can probably still contribute to an IRA, as well — and you should. You can fund an IRA with virtually any type of investment, such as stocks, bonds, government securities and Certificates of Deposit (CDs). And you’ll get valuable tax benefits, too. A traditional IRA can grow tax-deferred, while a Roth IRA offers potentially tax-free earnings, as long as you’ve had

your account at least five years and don’t start taking withdrawals until you’re 59-1/2.

- Don’t invest too conservatively. Many people are afraid of investing in the stock market, given its ups and downs. Yet, historically, stocks have outperformed all other financial assets. And while it’s true that past performance cannot guarantee future results, it’s also true that if you only invest in “conservative” investments, such as Treasury bonds or CDs, you might not even keep up with inflation, much less earn enough to reach your retirement savings goals. Consequently, you’ll want to include a reasonable percentage of quality stocks in your investment portfolio.

- Cut down on your debts. The more money you spend paying off debts, the less you’ll have to invest for the future. Try hard to live within your means and work diligently to reduce your debt load.

It will take effort, patience and discipline, but by following these suggestions, you can boost your chances of attaining a financially secure retirement. Get started soon. **NOW**

Renee Chase is an Edward Jones representative based in Red Oak.

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October 2008

Community Calendar

Every Monday

Celebrate Recovery meeting, First Baptist Church of Red Oak, 103 West Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-3591. www.redoakcelebraterecovery.com.

Second and Fourth Mondays

Texas Ladies Networking meeting, 11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Ryan's Grill, Waxahachie. (214) 587-1221.

First and Third Tuesdays

Red Oak Lions Club meeting, 7:00 p.m., 207 West Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-3577.

Tuesdays and Thursdays

Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, 7:00 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 Red Oak Rd. Non-smoking. (972) 617-9100.

Wednesdays and Thursdays

Senior Citizens Club meeting, 8:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., 207 West Red Oak Rd. Games, exercise and activities. (972) 576-2777.

Thursdays

Gamblers Anonymous meeting, 8:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-9100.

Second Thursday

American Cancer Society Support group meeting, 7:00 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 West Red

Oak Rd. (972) 617-9100.

Third Thursday

American Business Women's Association Express Network meeting, 5:45 p.m., Midlothian Conference Center, 1 Community Circle, Midlothian. RSVP (972) 723-6551 or visit www.abwa-empoweringwomen.org.

Last Thursday

DeSoto Art League meeting. www.desotoartleague.com.

First Friday

Worship Jam, 6:30 p.m., Bubba Que BBQ's front porch.

First Saturday

Fire Rescue CPR classes, 9:00 a.m. Call early to register. (469) 218-7713. www.redoaktx.org.

First and Third Saturday

Family Story Time: 3:30 - 4:30 p.m., Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. All ages welcome. (469) 218-1230. www.redoakpubliclibrary.org.

Every Saturday

Downtown Waxahachie Farmers Market, 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Produce, plants, jams, jellies and other goods available. (972) 938-2101, ext. 198.

October 7

National Night Out block parties to be held in individual

neighborhoods. Local law enforcement will visit participating communities. Get outside, have fun and meet your neighbors! 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

October 18

Red Oak Area Chamber of Commerce presents the Annual Auction, "The Mystique of Red Oak: A Magical Night of Fun," held at Red Oak's Municipal Center. Practical and elaborate items to bid on. Contact Kelsey at (972) 617-0906 for tickets.

Pee Wee Football Association games, Gerald J. Ford Football Stadium, Southern Methodist University Campus, 5800 Ownby Dr. (972) 576-2211.

October 31 - November 2

The King and I performed by the Waxahachie Community Theatre at the Chautauqua Auditorium in Waxahachie. www.waxahachiecommunitytheatre.com.

"Trunk or Treat" in the Patch, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 600 Red Oak Rd. (972) 617-9100.

November 8

Ovilla United Methodist Church's annual Lord's Acre event, 9:00 a.m. Crafts, vendor booths and a live auction.

For more community events, visit our online calendar at www.nowmagazines.com.

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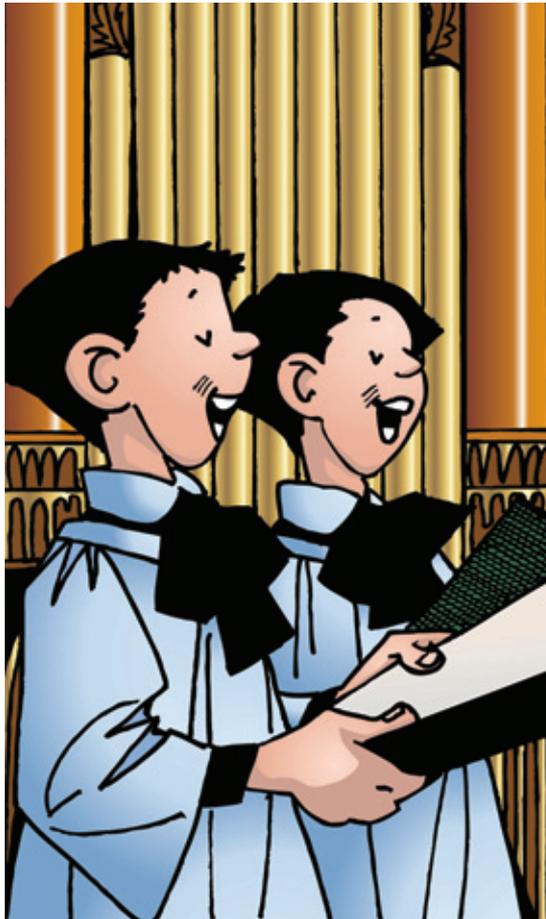
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