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ON THE COVER



Meet some of the members of
Duncanville Community Theatre who
work to make you forget you are
sitting in the audience.

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As the house lights come up, the cast members take their bows, and the audience applauds. For weeks they have been memorizing the script and working on delivery and stage presence. And in this moment, they know it was worth it. But this moment doesn't depend on the abilities of the actors and directors alone. Every time you enjoy a play, there is a group of people working behind the scenes to make the production come alive. They are the magic makers, the ones who maintain the illusion of reality that makes a show a success.

Joe Skrivanek, technical coordinator for Duncanville Community Theatre, said, "The success is in the reaction from the audience."

"It's not just the applause," said Wendy Acosta, who consistently volunteers as production/stage

manager. "It's the comments like, 'Did you hear that?' Those reactions feed the cast."

James McKey, the volunteer sound effects/music "guru," said, "When we did the production of *Spreading It Around*, I knew I'd done a good job when all the people were singing along to every song. The set, lights and sound are all characters in and of themselves in a show. If you pick the right music, it sets the mood and transports the audience to that place. That's where the magic is."

Like at any community theater, Joe, James and Wendy wear multiple hats. All three of them are actors, and Joe directs one show per year. "I was cast in a show," Joe said. "Then we had volunteer days, and I started doing sets. That led to the opportunity to direct." Joe is also in charge of construction. "Some directors know exactly what they want. Others give me more free rein. I like to reuse stuff instead of buying new every time," he said.

"Joe will make a fake second floor if they want it. That is a challenge, with 9-foot ceilings!" Wendy laughed. "When I first started volunteering, I worked with the lights."

"Clark Hackney makes cool stuff out of cardboard. His wife, Rebecca, is a trained scenic artist. She can make a piece of Sheetrock look like oak!" Joe said.

"We all have specialties, but we chip in where

gic ers

— By Becky Walker



needed to make sure it all gets done," James said. "The next thing you know, you're going to work to support your theater habit!"

Wendy was first introduced to theater during a third-grade production of *Mary Poppins*. The girl cast as the Bird Lady did not show. "The teacher grabbed me and said, 'You're going to have to do it.' I didn't know the lines. I was a shy child, and after that, I didn't do theater anymore. But I was fascinated by it," she said. "I got involved with DCT when I dared my friends to come audition with me."

James remembers attending his twin aunts' high school production of *Meet Me in St. Louis* when he was 4 years old. "I was in theater in high school, and then didn't participate for years — then I got involved with these yahoos! I even met my wife, Heather, here! I do this to give people something to laugh about, where they don't have to worry for a while."



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During Joe's senior year, a teacher took the class to a theater production of *All My Sons* at Baylor University. Years later, after Ennis Public Theatre opened in his hometown, Joe got a part in *Boys Next Door*. "I learned about DCT through a co-actor in Ennis, who was in a show for both theaters at the same time."

Amy Jackson, executive director at DCT, has a rule: Scene changes should be seamless and done in 30 seconds or less, so they rehearse them to make them look easy. Every night presents its own unique set of challenges. Navigating them in such a way that the illusion of reality remains unbroken is part of the magic making and requires quick thinking and flexibility on everyone's part.

During *Steel Magnolias*, the phone fell off the wall. Another DCT rule is no one goes on stage during a play unless they are in character. So, Joe created a repairman character on the spot, went on stage and fixed the phone.

During another play, an actress got stuck in her dress from the previous scene. So, she tore the dress to change her costume. Sometimes, props or furniture get placed in the wrong spot. "The director will say, 'If something's in the wrong spot, move it.'" Wendy said.

"During an afternoon matinee performance of *Bad Seed* this past season, there was a windstorm that knocked out the power. Amy sent me to the Dollar Tree and told me to buy every flashlight they had. We set them up strategically all over the stage," James said. They had to play the sound through a laptop instead of the house speakers. They offered to refund people's money, but no one left the show.

"It was awesome to have that support from the public," Wendy said. "When the power came back on, the actors were thrilled because they were sweltering in their costumes with no air conditioning, but the audience said they wished the lights had stayed

off. They liked the mood the flashlights created."

"It's stressful when these things happen, but you laugh about it later," Joe added.

These are just a few examples of the challenges the cast and crew face in maintaining the illusion of reality. Each has their favorite part, whether it's creating a memorable soundtrack; fitting seven doors, one window and a staircase on the stage; or watching the progression from first rehearsal to opening night. "It's like a family, and everyone pitches in and picks up other people's slack to make it work," James said.

Duncanville Community Theatre is in the middle of its 39th season, which has been dedicated to the memory of Jerry Ayers, who was a board member, director and actor with DCT for about 30 years. Their next show will be *A Christmas Story*, presented November 19-22 and December 3 and 5. The cast and crew invite you to come experience the magic! **NOW**

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Kosmic Kids Day Care and Learning Center

Kosmic Kids Day Care and Learning Center has served local families since 2004, offering a safe, nurturing and joyful place for children to learn and grow. Owner Belinda May founded the center with a desire to help children receive a strong start in education while growing in a faith-based environment. Her background includes an associate degree in child development, a BSN, an MSN and a



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director's certification.

Today, Kosmic Kids provides more than traditional day care. The center offers care during working hours, before- and after-school programs, transportation for qualifying students, summer camp opportunities and a pre-K program designed to help children gain an early academic advantage before entering kindergarten. Children from 6 weeks through 13 years can be served, giving families options as their children grow.

Education is a central part of the program. Kosmic Kids follows their own curriculum, infused with Christianity, Scriptures, prayer and the Golden Rule, and provides a Christian-based learning environment. The center also emphasizes physical and social development through activities

that encourage movement, teamwork and interaction. Its Stretch & Grow program helps children learn about exercise, body movement, social interaction and calming techniques.

Learning is balanced with activities designed to make the day engaging. Weekly entertainment can include puppet shows, storytelling and music, giving children opportunities to socialize while enjoying creative experiences. The center also offers daily devotions, snacks and homework assistance as part of its care programs. During the summer, children can participate in camps featuring a variety of activities.

Quality and accountability are additional priorities. Kosmic Kids is licensed with Texas Rising Star and meets the program's standards, a designation that reflects the center's commitment to maintaining quality child care practices.

Belinda's community involvement extends beyond the classroom. She was honored with the Woman of Wisdom Award, which recognizes women who work to improve their communities. She has been involved with the DeSoto economic development board, partnered with DeSoto ISD and served as chairman of the DeSoto Chamber of Commerce. She also donated to the DeSoto Police Department's Back the Black & Blue program.

At Kosmic Kids, early childhood is viewed as a sacred foundation. Parents can take advantage of an open-door policy that allows them to stop in and check on their children. The center's approach combines supervision with opportunities for children to build confidence, discover interests and develop skills that support them at home and school. "We are honored to serve our community and grateful for the families who trust us with their little ones," Belinda said.

Kosmic Kids works to make child care more accessible. The center offers financial assistance to eligible families, monthly child care discounts and a fifth week of tuition free for new enrollees, according to its website. Families interested in learning more can schedule a tour and visit the facility. **NOW**



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Zoomed In:
Louis and Stephanie Dixon

By Becky Walker

Louis and Stephanie Dixon celebrated their wedding anniversary with a trip to Cancun. “We met at our church, Trinity Temple Full Gospel Church in Oak Cliff and have been married for 12 years,” Stephanie shared. The active couple enjoyed ziplining, horseback riding and riding a four-wheeler during their trip. “I’ve done ziplining before, but it was my husband’s first time to do that,” Stephanie said. “It was the first time for both of us to ride a four-wheeler. We enjoyed it, but I like ziplining better!”

The couple stays busy. Louis is a truck driver. Stephanie is a hairstylist and has a crafting business. At church, she is the youth ministry director, and he sings in the choir. “For me,” Stephanie said, “spending time with my husband and being able to just sit on the beach and relax was the most memorable part of the trip.”



Duncanville City Councilman Don McBurnett has his blood drawn by a student and staff member from Absolute Allied Health Academy during the Fun After 5 Business Networking Mixer.



Mario Ascencio stops by Snow on the Rox at Grow DeSoto Market Place for a cool treat.



The Pynk Pit's Cyndi Ellis serves customers with a smile at Duncan Switch.



Cedar Hill City Secretary Belinda Berg swears in new Chief of Police Matthew Stogner.



Payton Hall and Prince Brown pick up some extra practices in preparation for the fall football season with Coach James Mitchell at Armstrong Park.

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Zoomed In:
Carolyn Campbell
and the Watsons

By Becky Walker

Carolyn Campbell ran into some old friends during a recent trip to Tom Thumb. Actor/Producer Akron Watson and his mother, Theresa Watson, were exiting the store as she was entering it. “We all went to church together at the original IBOC, when we were on Buckner Blvd.,” Carolyn said.

Akron, known for his role in the movie, *Miss Juneteenth*, has also appeared on Broadway in *The Color Purple Revival* as well as the Chicago cast of *Hamilton*. “I would make videos with Sis. Watson and send them to Akron when he was traveling just to give him some peace of mind, knowing his momma was always smiling,” Carolyn remembered.

“While we were talking, this bee kept buzzing around, but it didn’t end our chat until it went up Sis. Watson’s pant leg and gave her a sting!” Carolyn said. “I checked on her later, and she was good.”



Danyel Fuentes plays in the splash pad at Armstrong Park.



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Duncanville Arts Foundation

This independent, artist-centered nonprofit works to make Duncanville a place where artists can create, connect and be seen. Executive Director, Ron Thompson, ron@duncanvillearts.org, (972) 435-9842.

Pink Diamonds Survivors of Cancer, Inc.

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LIFEGUARD RECERTIFICATION COURSE | \$160.00

DECEMBER 19, 2026
Saturday: 9 am - 5:30 pm

JANUARY 2, 2027
Saturday: 9 am - 5:30 pm

Cozy Pumpkin Recipes



Pumpkin, warm spices and hearty ingredients take center stage as we embrace comfort food season. These recipes capture the essence of fall, bringing warmth and nostalgia to your table. [NOW](#)

Creamy Pumpkin Pasta

- 1 lb. penne pasta
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup pumpkin puree
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 tsp. dried sage
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- 1/4 cup toasted pumpkin seeds

1. Cook the pasta according to the package directions until al dente; drain and set aside.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic; sauté for 1 minute until fragrant.
3. Stir in the pumpkin puree, mixing well.
4. Pour in the cream and chicken broth, stirring until smooth.
5. Add the Parmesan; stir until melted and incorporated. Add the spices.
6. Simmer for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened.
7. Add the pasta; toss to coat evenly.
8. Serve hot, garnished with toasted pumpkin seeds.

Pumpkin Soup With Bacon

- 6 slices bacon, chopped
- 1 medium onion, diced

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 cups pumpkin puree
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- Sour cream, for serving
- Fresh chives, for garnish

1. In a large pot, cook the bacon over medium heat until crispy, about 5-7 minutes.
2. Remove half of the bacon with a slotted spoon; set aside for garnish.
3. Add the onions to the pot with the remaining bacon; cook until softened, about 5 minutes.
4. Stir in the garlic; cook for 1 minute until fragrant.
5. Add the pumpkin puree and chicken broth, stirring to combine.
6. Bring to a simmer; cook for 10 minutes.
7. Stir in the cream and spices. Use an immersion blender to puree the soup until smooth, or transfer to a blender in batches.
8. Simmer for an additional 5 minutes to heat through.
9. Serve hot, topped with a dollop of sour cream, reserved crispy bacon and fresh chives.

Pumpkin Spice Muffins

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup pumpkin puree
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

1. Preheat the oven to 375 F; line a 12-cup muffin tin with paper liners.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the first 5 ingredients.
3. In a large bowl, combine the melted butter and both sugars, stirring until smooth. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, until well incorporated.
4. Add the pumpkin puree, milk and vanilla extract, mixing until smooth.
5. Gradually fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until just combined.
6. Divide the batter evenly among the muffin cups, filling each about three-quarters full.
7. Bake for 18-22 minutes until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
8. Let the muffins cool in the pan for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack.
9. Serve warm or at room temperature.

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Things to do in Southwest!

OCTOBER

Some events may have been cancelled or rescheduled while we were at press.

SouthwestNOW

M A G A Z I N E

10/6

Texas Night Out

Community connection. Meet our first responders. 6:30-8:30 p.m., DeSoto East Middle School, 601 E. Belt Line Rd., DeSoto.

10/9

Old Settler's Reunion

\$5. 5:30 p.m., Pioneer Park, 600 Cedar St., Cedar Hill.

10/10

Country Day on the Hill

Parade, craft vendors, food, live entertainment. 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., Pioneer Park, 600 Cedar St., Cedar Hill.

Breast Cancer

Awareness Fashion Show

10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Methodist Southwest Medical Center Auditorium, 3500 W. Wheatland Rd., Dallas.

10/23

Golf Classics

Presented by the DeSoto Area Chamber of Commerce. Shotgun start: 8:30 a.m., Thorntree Golf Club, 825 W. Wintergreen Rd., DeSoto. For fees and to register, visit <https://desotoareachamber.org/>.

Boo Bash

Come for the annual monster mash! Free.

6:00-9:00 p.m., Duncanville Fieldhouse, 1700 S. Main St.

10/24

Crossroads of Texas Go Texan Country Festival

Enjoy Texas' largest one-day arts, music and food festival. Free. 9:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m., Downtown Waxahachie. For more information, visit <https://www.waxahachiecvb.com/events/>.

Scare on the Square

6:00-8:00 p.m., Pioneer Park, 600 Cedar St., Cedar Hill.

Dance Cancer Away:

Featuring Prince Djae & Ayyye Line Dance. Free.

6:45-11:00 p.m., Armstrong Park, 100 James Collins Blvd., Duncanville.

10/31

Pink Hike

Join HikeHer to raise breast cancer awareness. 7:30-9:30 a.m., Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Pkwy.; 10:00 a.m.-noon, Armstrong Park Pavillion, 100 James Collins Blvd. Register at hikeher.org.

Wingspan Game Day and Costume Contest

Noon-2:00 p.m., Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center, 1206 W. FM 1382, Cedar Hill. <https://tickets.audubon.org/events>.

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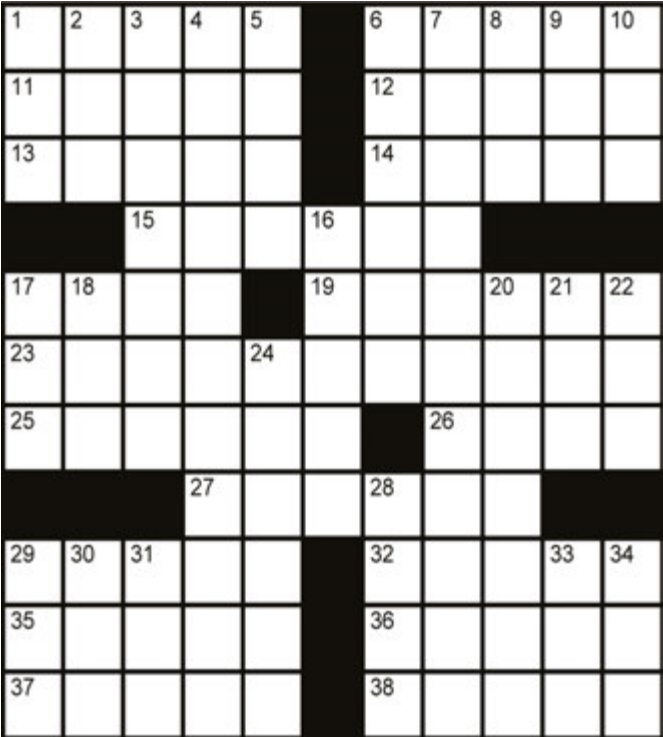
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Crossword Puzzle



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Find puzzle answers within this magazine. Online versions and solutions are also available at www.nowmagazines.com.

- Across**

 - 1 Ladybug food
 - 6 Sound made by many things, these days
 - 11 Flambéed steak preparation
 - 12 Competitor
 - 13 Start a match
 - 14 Egg producer
 - 15 It's the same old story
 - 17 Sets of clothes, all of the same design
 - 19 Adventurous expedition
 - 23 Two Party men revised a Roy Orbison number
- Down**

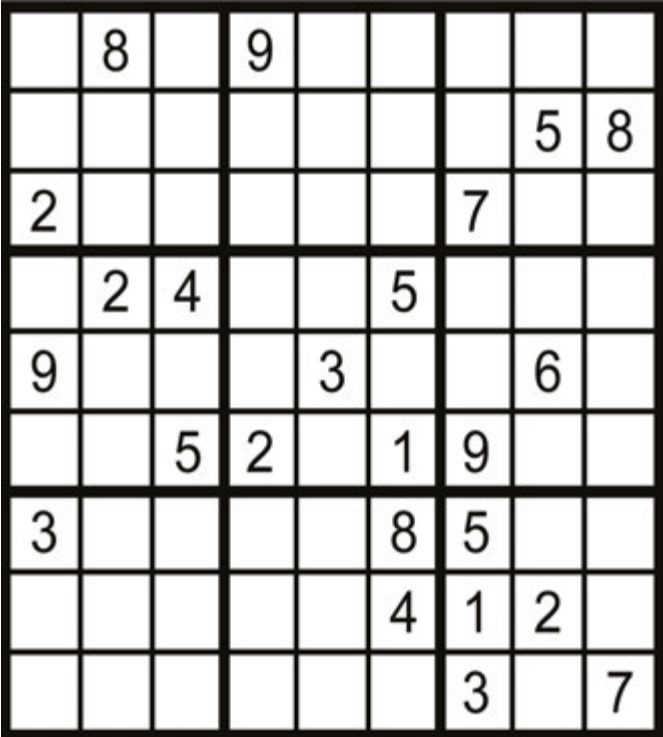
 - 25 Literary ridicule
 - 26 Clarets
 - 27 Obtained
 - 29 Dry stalks
 - 32 Throw out
 - 35 Path
 - 36 Copycat phrase
 - 37 Big name in chips
 - 38 "Stir Crazy" co-star Richard ---
- Down**

 - 1 Lifeblood of TV and the web
 - 2 Filled pastry crust
 - 3 Abolitionist --- Tubman
 - 4 Probe vintage site after disturbance
 - 5 Consider
 - 6 Long-running anchor Tom ---
 - 7 Aaron's Rod
 - 8 Model --- Marcille
 - 9 Corn spike
 - 10 Tire layer
 - 16 Thus far
 - 17 "Brown" delivery co.
- Down**

 - 18 2nd Amendment defenders
 - 20 Agreeable quality
 - 21 "Awesome!"
 - 22 Those currently in favor
 - 24 Bricklayer's tool
 - 28 Short-term worker
 - 29 Mr., in Madras
 - 30 100 cubic feet on a ship
 - 31 Furrow
 - 33 Dove sound
 - 34 High craggy hill

Sudoku Puzzle

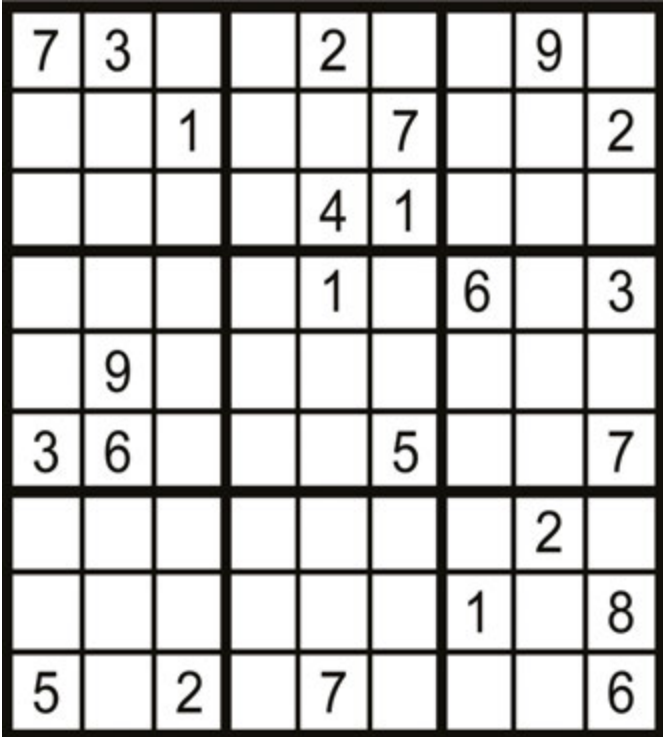
Easy



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Find puzzle answers within this magazine. Online versions and solutions are also available at www.nowmagazines.com.

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 1 Community Dr., Midlothian, TX 76065



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Crossword - Sudoku Solutions

1	A	P	H	I	D		B	L	E	E	P
11	D	I	A	N	E		12	R	I	V	A
13	S	E	R	V	E		14	O	V	A	R
			15	R	E	M	16	A	K	E	
17	U	N	I	S		19	S	A	F	A	R
23	P	R	E	T	T	24	Y	W	O	M	A
25	S	A	T	I	R	E		26	R	E	D
			27	G	O	T	28	T	E	N	
29	S	T	R	A	W		32	E	V	I	C
35	R	O	U	T	E		36	M	E	T	O
37	I	N	T	E	L		38	P	R	Y	O

Easy

5	8	7	9	1	6	4	3	2
1	9	3	7	4	2	6	5	8
2	4	6	8	5	3	7	9	1
7	2	4	6	9	5	8	1	3
9	1	8	4	3	7	2	6	5
6	3	5	2	8	1	9	7	4
3	7	2	1	6	8	5	4	9
8	5	9	3	7	4	1	2	6
4	6	1	5	2	9	3	8	7

Medium

7	3	8	5	2	6	4	9	1
4	5	1	3	9	7	8	6	2
6	2	9	8	4	1	7	3	5
2	8	7	4	1	9	6	5	3
1	9	5	7	6	3	2	8	4
3	6	4	2	8	5	9	1	7
8	7	6	1	3	4	5	2	9
9	4	3	6	5	2	1	7	8
5	1	2	9	7	8	3	4	6

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Nov. 7



After shadowing different careers in college, Dr. Cristina Allala discovered her calling in dentistry. Ten years later, she brings specialized expertise and a spa-like atmosphere to Cedar Hill through Serenity Advanced Dentistry, a solo, minority, woman-owned private practice.

Dr. Allala graduated from Baylor College of Dentistry in 2016 and completed her Bachelor of Science from The University of Texas at San Antonio in 2012. Since opening her practice, she has built a loyal following of patients who have followed her from her previous office, drawn by her gentle approach and commitment to patient care.

What sets her practice apart is her advanced certification in Level 2 moderate sedation — a qualification most dentists do not have. This certification requires at least 60 hours of specialized instruction and successfully administering sedation to at least 20 patients under supervision. For patients who experience dental anxiety, this option can transform their experience, making procedures like extractions comfortable and stress-free.

"Another thing that sets our practice apart is our skill with dental surgeries," Dr. Allala said. "Here are some of my favorite quotes from patients:

"Regarding implants: 'My implant surgery went smoothly. They explained everything, kept me relaxed, and I had very little discomfort afterward.'

"Regarding tooth extractions: 'I had oral surgery done and was extremely nervous, but the doctor and team made me feel comfortable the entire time. The procedure was painless, and recovery was easy.'

"Regarding tooth fixed dentures: 'My experience with fixed dentures was great. Dr. Allala planned everything digitally, the surgery went smoothly, and I had no complications. I can eat comfortably now, and they feel like my own natural teeth.'

Serenity Advanced Dentistry offers most dental procedures under one roof, including sedation dentistry, dental crowns, dentures, emergency treatment, oral surgery, dental implants, root canals, teeth whitening, extractions, clear aligners, gum grafts and periodontal therapy. The practice emphasizes privacy and comfort. The office features private treatment rooms that allow honest conversations between doctor and patient without worry of being overheard. The modern facility incorporates the latest dental technology while maintaining a calming, spa-like environment.

"We are not a corporation," Dr. Allala said. Unlike larger corporate dental practices, Serenity Advanced Dentistry remains independent, allowing Dr. Allala to focus on building genuine relationships with patients. All assistants are bilingual, ensuring Spanish-speaking patients feel comfortable and fully understand their treatment options.

Dr. Allala lives in DeSoto, just 10 minutes away from her office, keeping her deeply connected to the community she serves. She gives back by supporting the Friends of Tri-City Animal Shelter through monthly contributions, a cause close to her heart as a devoted pet lover. For families seeking personalized dental care in a welcoming, professional environment, Serenity Advanced Dentistry offers an alternative to corporate dental chains.

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