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Dr. Allala is a graduate of the Texas A&M School of Dentistry. “When I started there, it was still Baylor. My diploma has both names on it,” she recalled. “I specialize in oral surgery, and we’re really good at it. I’m nothing without my team. We do everything in dentistry. I like being well rounded. I enjoy being an overachiever, so I’m constantly taking continuing education, keeping up with all the

newest techniques and technology. I’m also a native Spanish speaker. I grew up speaking both languages. Our YouTube videos explaining procedures are available in both English and Spanish.”

Dr. Allala is proud of the service they provide at Serenity Advanced Dentistry. “I think we give five-star service. And I know my staff is five-star. We know what works and what doesn’t. I know it sounds corny, but this is my life’s work. Most of my staff have been with me for years, at different locations around DFW, before I came to Cedar Hill. I met Mariela seven years ago, in Pleasant Grove. It was my first job out of school. Racine has been with me four years, and Jazmine three years, both in Red Oak. Our newest team member is Jessica. She found us three months ago when she emailed me looking for an opportunity to shadow a dentist.”

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When you're worried and you can't sleep ...

Rosemary Clooney and Bing Crosby sing these lyrics in *White Christmas*. They were written by Irving Berlin, and the solution promoted by the song is to, "Just count your blessings instead of sheep, and you'll fall asleep counting your blessings."

It's good advice, especially this time of year, when we are getting really busy planning, inviting, shopping, cooking, cleaning, wrapping and everything else that we do so we can "enjoy" the holidays. With all of that going on, one would think it would be so easy to fall into an exhausted sleep as the head is on the way to the pillow, but it is often not the case. We tend to worry about what we didn't get done today.

I'm a list maker, and it really calms me as the length of the list of tasks to be completed decreases. Those



Bill

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items that remain can still make sleep elusive, though. That's when I start counting. I move the list out of my mind and start going over the things I'm thankful for. The blessings always start with family, but they soon move to friends, health, food, shelter and faith. It grows. I never get to the end of it.

We have a lot to be thankful for!

November 2025
Volume 22, Issue 11

ON THE COVER



Tommy Blankenship and Ron Thomas lead the local VFW.

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Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$35 per year or \$3.50 per issue. Subscriptions should be sent to: NOW Magazines, P.O. Box 1071, Waxahachie, TX 75168. For advertising rates or editorial correspondence, call (972) 875-3299 or visit www.nowmagazines.com.

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IT IS THE CAMARADERIE

— By Bill Smith



While neither Tommy Blankenship nor Ron Thomas are natives of Ennis, they have been around long enough to assume the positions of commander and senior vice-commander, respectively, of our local VFW. Tommy moved to Ellis County in 2000 and to Ennis in 2019. He has been a member of Jack Lummus Memorial VFW Post 7106 since 2020. Ron is originally from Navarro County. “Dad bought land in Ennis in 1976. I came here in 2000,” he recalled.

Both men have a record of military service, where they served honorably on foreign soil or in hostile waters, which is a requirement for membership. Tommy was in the Marines from 1990-1994. Part of that time he was an infantryman in Somalia. “Our flight from California to Somalia took 42 hours. We had some hydraulic issues along the way, and as soon as we touched down, we were being shot at,” he recalled. “I also spent some time in Okinawa, Thailand and Panama.”

Ron joined the Navy in 1979 and retired in 1998. “I did two Mediterranean cruises and was on the ship that took down two Libyan MiGs in 1981. After the foreign service, I spent the rest of my career as a flight engineer on P-3s.” His first membership in the VFW was in Tennessee in the 1990s. “I joined the Waxahachie VFW around 2000. The Ennis Post was not very active at the time, but around 2015 when Dan Cook and then Don Fritz were commanders here, I came over, and Tommy soon followed.”

Sadly, the men agreed that part of the decline in interest in the VFW was a reflection on how Vietnam veterans were received during and after that conflict. Ron said, “The public perception kept them away. Some of them did not want to be recognized as veterans at all. It has taken a while, but a lot of that has changed today.

“Also, after Vietnam, it was a while before there were many veterans with the service eligibility to join the VFW,” he continued. “Of course, that changed with Desert Storm and Desert Shield, along with Somalia and Libya. There were some younger veterans who joined after those theaters.”

The roots of the VFW go back as far as 1899, at the end of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection. No medical care or pensions for veterans had been established up to that time, so returning veterans and their families bore the cost of their care. Some veterans joined together and eventually became known as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Today, the VFW and its Auxiliary have 1.4 million members. The history of the national organization shows that they helped



form the Veterans Administration, the development of the national cemetery system, joined the fight for Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange, expanded the GI Bill and worked with Congress to pass several additional acts of legislation benefiting veterans.

Locally, our Jack Lummus Memorial VFW Post 7106 actively promotes involvement in the local community and invites the public to participate in their activities. Ron mentioned VFW Auxiliary membership, and the VFW website explains, "Nearly 470,000 members in more than 3,600 Auxiliaries across the nation work to improve the lives of veterans, service members and their families, and their communities in various ways."

Tommy continued, "Parents, children, siblings, grandparents and grandchildren may join the VFW Auxiliary under their VFW-eligible veteran. During those lean years, it was the auxiliary that kept us going out here. Today, we have 124 active members. We invite the community to come out and visit the

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forward to starting a darts league. We have also offered karaoke on Friday nights in the dance hall.”

The local post also offers community participation, including money for scholarships, with the Voice of Democracy audio essay contest and the Patriots Pen written essay contest. Both of these programs invite youth to vie for awards on the local, district, state and national levels. “Last year, we had a student win the district level and participate in the state contest,” Tommy said. “Even though he did not make it to the national level, it was a great experience for him.”

Additionally, the post has a food bank, and anyone with a need is welcome to withdraw food without question. The post supports youth with a Back-to-School Supply Festival featuring backpack school supplies, free haircuts, food trucks, face painting and more. “We invite the public to our facility to see what the VFW is all about,” Ron offered.

Ultimately, the VFW, like the American Legion, exists to support the veterans, and many veterans are

members of both organizations. The members support the community, and the community supports the veterans. Tommy emphasized, “This building was built for veterans. It is a place where they can come and visit with other veterans who have had similar experiences. We all have some problems. We have all been in war. Sometimes, veterans need financial assistance, and we are here for them. Other times, it may be a ride to the VA Hospital. We have built ramps at veterans’ homes to help with wheelchair access.”

Ron concluded with his thoughts about camaraderie: “Sometimes, we have feelings that only another person who has had a similar experience can understand,” he said. “We share those, and we share our patriotism. We are a nonprofit, and everything we do is to bring awareness and support for our veterans. We are grateful for everything the community does to assist us. A lot of veterans put their lives on the line so we can continue to meet and support each other. The Ennis VFW is growing, and the community is invited to be part of it.” **NOW**

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— By Bill Smith

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Gabe Larez brought Twisted Metal Rod & Collision to Ennis in 2003, but it was not an easy decision to make. “We had a lot of customers in the Carrollton/Farmers Branch area, and I was afraid we would lose them if we moved down here,” Gabe recalled. “Our old clientele essentially sustained us for the first three years here. We transported their cars down here to work on them, then transported them back.”

The move to Ennis was primarily because the business needed shop space, and they found the building on Avenue A was the size they were looking for. It was also more affordable than what was available in the Metroplex. “During those first few years, I did most of the work myself with the assistance of some students that the high school referred to us from their vocational education program. At the time, we were primarily building hot rods, and the body work expanded from there,” Gabe added.

Gabe has been doing something with cars since he was about 17 years old, when he started washing cars. “Larry

Riggs is the one who brought me into the hot rod business, and he has been like a father to me over the years. He had a lot to do with convincing me that the business could grow in a smaller community," Gabe related. "I had always lived in the city, but now that I am here, I love the small town. The people are so friendly. I even met my wife here!" Gabe has a record of community service also, having served as the local Lions Club president and delivering Meals on Wheels.

Twisted Metal does everything related to auto body repairs, from complete restorations and insurance work to painting. They work on all makes and models, and the customer's satisfaction is their No. 1 goal. "We are really pleased to have a full staff of 12 solid employees. A few years ago, it was harder to find employees like we have today.

"We still pride ourselves on getting repairs done in a timely manner. Another issue that has cleared up in recent years is the supply chain. We typically have a three- to five-day turnaround getting cars out."

Automobile body repair includes restoring a vehicle's exterior and interior, including the engine, after damage from collisions, weather or wear. Technicians repair dents, scratches and replace damaged panels using specialized tools. Precision, skill and knowledge of materials are crucial. Quality repair ensures safety, appearance and value retention, making this trade essential in the automotive industry.

Gabe acknowledged that the car repair business has changed over the years, and it has been important to keep up with technology. "Everything is computerized now," he said. "Even the hot rods have computers. We have not had many total electric vehicles yet, but we know they are coming, and it requires that our tech employees go back to school. We have already worked on a lot of hybrid vehicles.

"We believe the future of Ennis and our business here is bright. We have expanded our building to some land behind the shop. It gives us a place to move customers' vehicles inside at night. We are so happy to be in Ennis, and we really want to thank our friends and customers for their support." **NOW**

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Friday - Saturday
Dec. 12-13 and Dec. 19-20
For more information: downtownwaxahachie.com

YMCA Santa Run

Saturday
Dec. 13 | 9 am
Registration information: waxahachieymca.org

Santa Craft Beer Stroll

Saturday
Dec. 13
At Participating Downtown Merchants

Historic Christmas Tour of Homes 2025

Saturday - Sunday
Dec. 13-14 | 1 pm - 7 pm
Tickets online: downtownwaxahachie.com

Pajama Story Time at Railyard Park

Friday
Dec. 19 | 2 pm



Scan here for a complete list of events!



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Kacie Tiner celebrates the second anniversary of Thistle + Sage.

Zoomed In: Natalie and Noel Williamson

By Bill Smith

Sisters Natalie and Noel Williamson enjoy their classes and extracurricular activities at school. They are already proven leaders, as Natalie serves as senior captain of the Lionettes, and Noel is the eighth-grade junior high cheer captain.

A fourth-year Lionette, Natalie said, "I love to dance and want to do it in college, also. My favorite part of being a Lionette is bonding with the other members. The friendships are important. My favorite subject is English, but I want to study business marketing at UNT or TWU next year.

Noel has been in cheer for four years, including two years before junior high. "I like the friendships, and I also like to go to games. Hanging out with my friends is fun, and I enjoy Midweek at church," she said. "My favorite subject in school is math."



Olivia Partin celebrates the completion of her new home with Habitat for Humanity.



HOTWORX hosts their ribbon cutting with the Greater Ennis Chamber of Commerce.



Members of Ennis Retired School Personnel Association donate to Helping Hands of Ennis.



Jessica Diaz is presented by James Whitfield at the NARFE meeting.



Texas fans, Adrian and Elysa Gutierrez, have their pregame meal at Fern In The Wild.



Logan Rathbun celebrates his 12th birthday.

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Is Your Retirement at Risk?

It's important to save for retirement, but only half of Americans have calculated how much money they'll need, according to the 2024 Retirement Confidence Survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute. Yet without knowing how much you'll need, it's hard to know if you're on track to reach your goals for retirement.

Here are a few considerations to help shape your retirement savings strategy.

Calculate how much you'll need. You may dream of retiring "comfortably," but how do you define "comfortable" in terms of actual money? Take the time to outline how much you spend now, and how much you think you'll spend in retirement. That will help you understand how much you need to save now to afford the retirement lifestyle you want later. A financial advisor can help with resources and knowledge for building and managing your retirement strategy.

Start saving now. It's easy to procrastinate, especially if you are younger and further away from retirement. But the earlier you start, the less you may need to save from each paycheck to build your funds over time. If you're closer to retirement, you can take advantage of catch-up contributions to most 401(k), 403(b), governmental 457 plans and the federal government's Thrift Savings Plan. If you're 50 or older, you can save pretax an extra \$7,500 to your retirement account beyond the standard total limit of \$23,500 allowed in 2025. Those 60-63 years old can contribute to these plans an extra \$11,250 above the standard total limit. That's an annual total of \$31,000 for people ages 50 and older; or \$34,750 for those 60-63 years old in pretax retirement plan contributions.

Take the right amount of risk. You may think it's risky to put money away for retirement instead of keeping it handy for discretionary spending. But the biggest risk of all is not reaching your retirement goal. For example, a portfolio that's all in cash will have little increasing value over time and won't provide any growth potential even to keep up with inflation. It's as if you're losing money every year. Then again, if your investments are only keeping up with inflation, your money is not growing. Consider growth investments to help build the funds you'll need in retirement. The key is ensuring you have the appropriate amount of risk — not too much, but not too little — to achieve your growth goals.

Save separately for emergencies. To protect your hard-earned retirement savings, build an emergency fund separate from your long-term investments. It can help ensure you have what you need to cover surprises like a large auto repair, unexpected medical bills, temporary loss of income from changing jobs or early retirement caused by health issues. For most people, three to six months' worth of total expenses is an appropriate amount for an emergency fund. And you'll want to keep it in an accessible, low-risk account that holds cash and equivalents. Above all, try to avoid taking money from your long-term retirement investments. Doing so could result in taxes, penalties and reductions to your overall principal investment, all of which could affect your retirement savings.

Retirement should be an exciting time to enjoy what you've worked so hard to earn. Planning for what you'll need and protecting those savings can help ensure a comfortable future.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC. Jeff Irish is an Edward Jones representative based in Ennis.

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Creamy Mushroom Soup

CookingNOW

BEST OF ... SOUP RECIPES

Soups are versatile. Whether they are fall comfort foods or light summer sides, there's a soup for everybody and every time of year. Here's a selection of soup recipes we have printed through the years for you to try! **NOW**

Spicy Sausage & Spinach Soup

Provided by Amanda Grant for the November 2016 issue of EnnisNOW Magazine.

- 4 strips nitrate-free uncured bacon, diced
- 1/2 white onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2-3 links pasteurized Italian sausage links, crumbled
- 1 32-oz. carton organic chicken broth
- 1 white potato, diced
- 1-2 carrots, diced
- 1/2 lb. whole grain, organic pasta (cavatappi pasta, macaroni or shells)
- Sea salt and pepper, to taste
- Sprinkle crushed red pepper
- 1 large handful organic baby spinach, roughly chopped
- 1/2 cup raw milk or half-and-half

1. Cook bacon in a Dutch oven; remove; set aside.
2. Cook onion, garlic and sausage in bacon renderings over medium heat.
3. Add the crispy bacon back into onion/sausage mixture; pour in the chicken broth; bring soup to a light boil.
4. Add potatoes and carrots followed by pasta and spices.
5. Bring soup to a simmer; cook for 30 minutes to an hour until pasta and veggies are cooked though; add spinach.
6. Stir carefully; pour in milk or half-and-half.

Crab Soup

Provided by Amy Lane for the April 2022 issue of WaxahachieNOW Magazine.

- 4 qts. water
- 2 cups potatoes, cubed
- 1 lb. crab meat
- 1 14-oz. pkg. frozen corn
- 1 12-oz. pkg. frozen peas
- 1 28-oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley
- 2-4 cups chicken or vegetable broth

1. In a large pot, bring the water to a boil; add the potatoes. Cook until fork-tender; drain off most of the water, leaving just enough to cover the potatoes.
2. Add the crab meat and the next 5 ingredients. Add broth to your liking; mix well.
3. Simmer over medium-high heat for 20-30 minutes; serve.

Chicken Tortilla Soup

Provided by Tricia Jones for the October 2010 issue of BursesNOW Magazine.

- 3 skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- 1/2 tsp. olive oil
- 2 tsp. minced garlic
- 1/4 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 14.5-oz. cans low-sodium chicken broth

- 12 oz. frozen corn kernels
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 tsp. chili powder
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 cup chunky salsa
- 8 oz. corn tortilla chips
- 1/2 cup shredded low-fat Mexi-blend cheese (optional)
- 1/2 cup fat-free sour cream (optional)

1. In a large pot over medium heat, sauté the chicken in the oil for 5 minutes. Cut into bite-size pieces, return chicken to pot and cook through.
2. Add the garlic and cumin and mix well.
3. Add the broth, corn, black beans, onion, chili powder, lemon juice and salsa.
4. Reduce heat to low and simmer for about 20 to 30 minutes.
5. Break up some tortilla chips into individual bowls and pour soup over chips.
6. Top with the cheese and a little sour cream. Makes 6 to 8 servings. *NOTE: For a time saver, bake 6-8 chicken breasts on the weekend and use the pre-cooked chicken cut into bite size pieces.*

Creamy Mushroom Soup

Provided by Kristi Brantley for the November 2022 issue of WeatherfordNOW Magazine.

- 1 lb. mushrooms, sliced
- 1/2 medium onion, coarsely chopped
- 3 Tbsp. butter
- 1 Tbsp. bacon grease
- 2-3 carrots, chopped
- 2 grilled chicken breasts, chopped
- 6-8 cups chicken broth
- 1 tsp. seasoned salt
- 1/2 tsp. thyme
- Pepper, to taste
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 1/2 cups instant rice (optional)

1. In a large Dutch oven, sauté the mushrooms and onions in the butter and bacon grease for 15-20 minutes until tender.
2. Add in the carrots, chicken, chicken broth and seasonings. Bring to a boil; simmer 15-20 minutes.
3. Add the cream; stir well. Let simmer 10 minutes.
4. Add the rice; cook for 4-5 minutes. Add more broth, if desired; simmer 5 minutes. Serve hot!





EnnisNOW Scavenger Hunt



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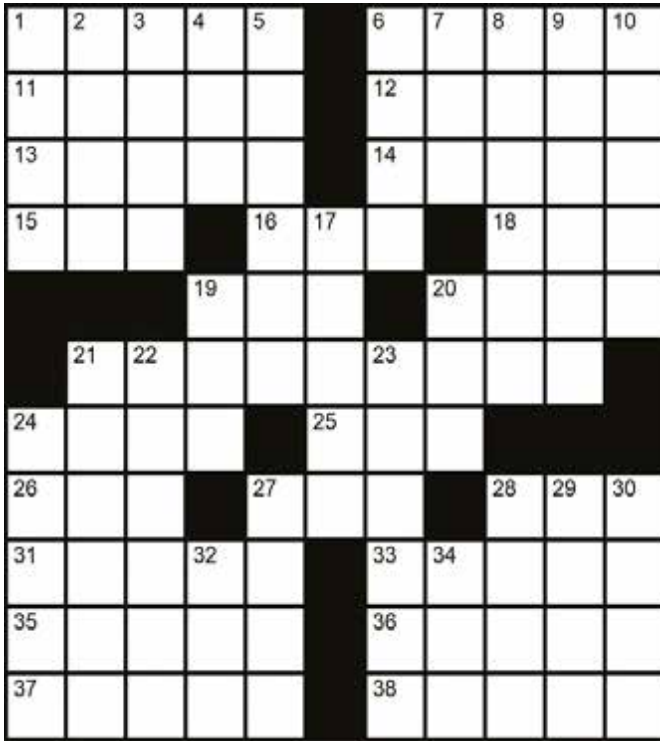
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Across

- 1 Obama's youngest
- 6 One Note ---
- 11 Florida Keys, e.g.
- 12 Check for fit
- 13 Detroit gridders
- 14 Oak-to-be
- 15 Testing place
- 16 Kind of port
- 18 Kissing in public, perhaps, briefly
- 19 Hesitator's syllable
- 20 Claim against property
- 21 San Francisco sight
- 24 Duration
- 25 Wee boy
- 26 "It's pretty, but is it ---?" (Kipling)
- 27 Government agency controlling one-eighth of the country
- 28 Army detectives
- 31 Supple
- 33 Incongruity
- 35 Muzzle
- 36 "Bronco Billy" co-star Sondra ---
- 37 They might be smashed as Tom gets drunk
- 38 Persuades
- 10 UN head before Ki-moon
- 17 Nose
- 19 "Ode on a Grecian ---" (Keats)
- 20 Type of TV screen
- 21 Burst of speed
- 22 Military display
- 23 Some Sri Lankans
- 24 Chip dip
- 27 Takes a chance
- 28 Narcotic shrub
- 29 Deep black
- 30 Treats with tinctures
- 32 Sing wordlessly
- 34 Rank

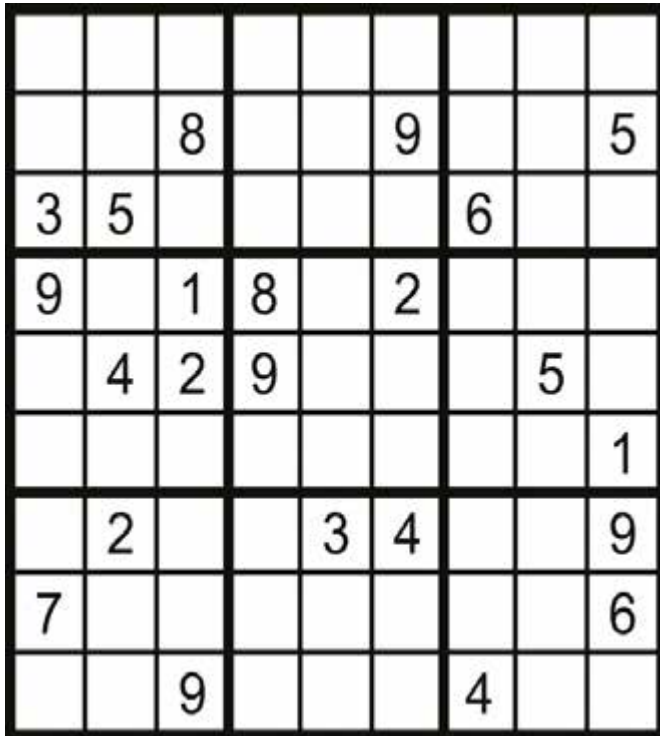
Down

- 1 Ledge
- 2 Home to billions
- 3 Grubby guy
- 4 Cackleberry maker
- 5 Suppose Sue mixes it with Sam
- 6 Brief attempt
- 7 Curve
- 8 Short-sightedness
- 9 Place for a patrol

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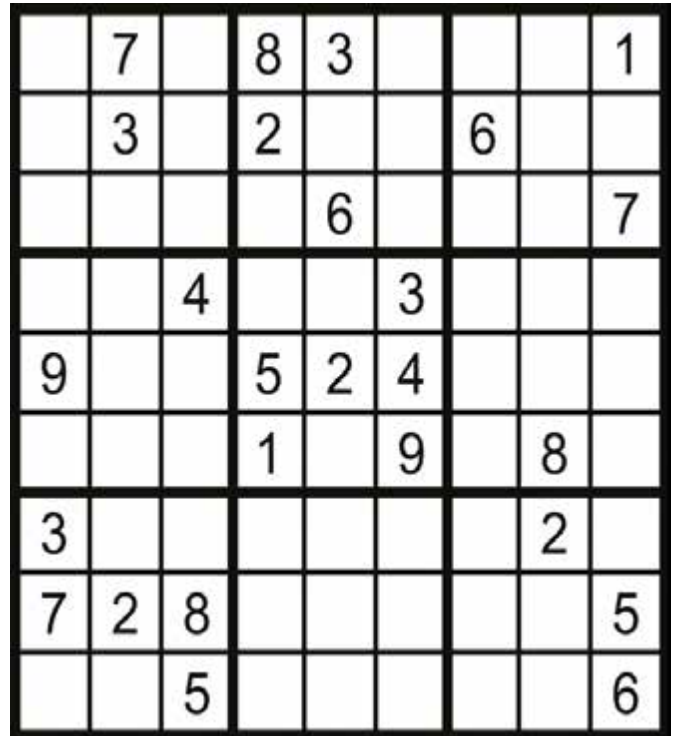
Sudoku Puzzle

Easy



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Medium



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11/2, 11/7-11/8,
11/14-11/16

Texas Motorplex Events:

11/2: Import Face Off. The largest, continually running national import show and race event in the United States. **11/7-11/8:** Texas Radial Roundup. The biggest and baddest premier radial race in Texas! **11/14-11/16:** GTR Festival-USA. The ultimate celebration of all things GT-R and Nissan. Texas Motorplex, 7500 W. Hwy. 287. (972) 878-2641, support@texasmotorplex.com.

11/7

Greater Ennis Chamber of Commerce Golf Classic:

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11/8

VFW Second Annual Chili Cook-off:

Cash prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place. After judging, the chili and beans will be available for \$5 for all you can eat. There will also be a silent auction. \$15 entry fee for beans; \$20 entry fee for chili. Ennis VFW Post 7106, 3100 N. IH-45. For more information, call (972) 875-8576.

11/13

CoreTrades Alliance Kickoff:

In partnership with TMAC, this quarterly program connects leaders in logistics, manufacturing and construction for networking, education and industry exchange. Welcome Center Bluebonnet Room, 201 NW Main St. Contact the Greater Ennis Chamber of Commerce for details. www.ennis-chamber.com.

11/15-11/16

Paint Historic

Waxahachie Exhibition:

Original paintings created during the annual Plein Air Paint Out on display at the Women's Building, 407 W. Jefferson St., Waxahachie. Hosted by

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11/30

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