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December 2009

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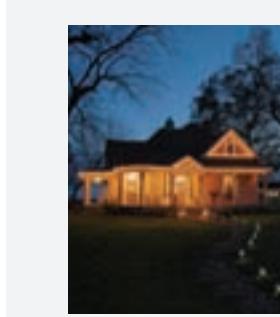
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On The Cover

The Victorian home of Lynn and Linda Cromer looks stunning in Christmas lights.

Photo by Lynn Cromer.



Editor's Note

Warm Greetings, Neighbors!

Hard to believe the holidays are right around the corner. From putting away fall decorations to stringing lights, adding candles and attending holiday celebrations, this is always the most exciting time of the year for me. Yet, I sometimes need to remind myself there are many in our area for whom there is no celebration, no tree decorating and definitely no presents, especially during these hard economic times.

So, in an effort to spread the spirit of giving, please consider donating to a local children's home or nonprofit agency whose sole purpose is to give to others year-round. For a more personal touch, visit one of the many banks and businesses participating in Angel Trees — a great way to bless a family and their children.

Blessings during this season of giving,

Diana Merrill Claussen
Red OakNOW Editor

P.S. If you or someone you know has a special knack for cooking or baking, please e-mail me at dclaussen.nowmag@sbcglobal.net.



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Believe...

— By Alex Allred

In the halls of the Red Oak Independent School District is a sign that reads: Believe in Miracles. Believe ... miracles do happen to those who believe in them.

Karen Anderson believes. But there is also something else that the executive director of the Education Foundation of Red Oak believes, and that is that a strong communal spirit and the good works of others create many of those miracles. Karen heads the nonprofit foundation that raises funds for special projects that benefit both the children and the entire community of Red Oak. With such programs as Techno Jungle — an innovative technology reading lab at Eastridge Elementary that allows children to safely explore modern technology — to the fully equipped science lab at Wooden Elementary, the Education Foundation is bringing greater educational tools to local children. With grants funded by donors such as Citizens National Bank of Texas, the Animal Hospital of Ovilla, Plan B Productions and Snap Fitness, children are also learning music, art and math through new educational tools the district could not otherwise provide. "This is exactly why I love this job so much," Karen said. "I love this school system and the people of this community who are so focused on our children."

For many people, there is an intense desire to leave home and travel the world as soon as they are of age. But all Karen needed was to leave the state of Texas just once to know exactly where home is. After graduating from Red Oak High School, "in a class with just 84 students," she chuckled, Karen went on to Stephen F. Austin State University to earn her bachelor's degree in English with a teaching certification in secondary education and a second certification in business administration. After graduation, Karen married her high school sweetheart, John Anderson,

and the two moved to Virginia Beach during his stint in the U.S. Navy.

"It was a very transient community," Karen said, adding that she knew she much preferred the small, tight-knit community of Red Oak. "Family, community, our church," she said, "is what we're about."

Red Oak is now home to her two daughters, Taylor, 14, and Abby, 7, "who our whole lives revolve around," Karen smiled without a hint of teasing. In fact, both the city of



Red Oak and her place of employment were chosen for two specific reasons: community and children.

"I got that from my mother," Karen said of Laura Autrey, who passed away on August 1, 2009. After a 19-year battle with cancer, it was her liver, compromised by the intense chemotherapy treatments that failed her. "Not the cancer. The cancer did not win; it did not get her," Karen said.

A deeply religious and community-driven person, Laura was a board member to the North Ellis County Outreach Program, Relay for Life and a number of other



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organizations that quickly became equally important to Karen. "It's just the way I grew up. It's all I've ever known," she explained.

It is no surprise then that such programs as Rachel's Challenge is of particular interest to Karen. In 1999, Rachel Scott was the first fatal shooting victim in the Columbine High School tragedy. Just one month before her death, however, she wrote an insightful essay entitled, "My Ethics, My Codes on Life," in which she wrote, "I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go."

Today, the Red Oak Intermediate School is the beneficiary of a grant for Rachel's Challenge, a school assembly and training program that challenges children to become better, kinder friends and neighbors. "It's that kind of spirit," said Karen, "that we see all over our campuses."

In the Payroll Deduction Program, employees of the Red Oak School District volunteer a small deduction in their paycheck to be funneled back into the ROISD. "We have some 800 employees," Karen said, "and over 50 percent are participating in the Payroll Deduction Program." In total, ROISD employees gave back more than \$30,000 to the education of the children.

"We give maroon T-shirts to the Partners," Karen said, the name referring to those involved in the Payroll Deduction Program. "So, on Partner Day when everyone can wear their T-shirt and jeans, it is the coolest thing to walk on campuses and see a sea of maroon everywhere!"

The Education Foundation's two largest events, an annual golf tournament and a walk/5k race, are put on to raise both funds and community awareness. The Gerry Ann North Fun Walk/5k is a fitness affair named after a secretary from D.T. Shields Elementary who had

always envisioned teachers and students walking together. While Mrs. North died in 2004, her legacy and great acts of kindness live on in Red Oak. And even as the year draws to an end, Karen jokes that she and her staff are not yet done with community projects. Though always short on time and always searching for more funds, she is tenacious. In an almost competitive spirit, Karen is determined to give back as much as she possibly can to the city she loves so much.

With the Festival of Trees or, as Karen calls it, "a winter wonderland," members of the community come together to donate decorated wreaths, Christmas trees, gift baskets, centerpieces and stockings all to be auctioned off in a silent auction with proceeds going to the Red Oak ISD Education Foundation, the Red Oak Lions Club and the First United Methodist Church of Red Oak. With decorative styles ranging from traditional, country, patriotic, whimsical or humorous, the tree viewing begins on Friday, December 3 and runs until 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 5. Throughout the festival, such groups as the Steel Drum Band, Red Oak High School Choir, Eastridge Elementary Fine Arts Department and the Junior High School Choir will perform while a community panel of judges awards Best of Class and Best of Festival to the most creative entries.

Then, no sooner than the Festival of Trees is over, Karen will be looking to a new year. Not far from her desk is a tribute to Karen's tireless devotion, given to her by the second-graders of Shields Elementary. Titled, "Karen's educational super times," hand-drawn pictures of Karen performing community works — her own little miracles — are taped to the wall.

"I only hope to be part of what my mom was able to do," Karen said, reminding us all of how those little acts of kindness can truly change the world. **NOW**

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Victorian Wonderland

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

When Lynn and Linda Cromer first saw their century-old dream house, they thought the home and its price were both too good to be true. "Before we bought the home it had been in foreclosure and disrepair," Lynn said. The pink two-story Victorian home may have been in bad shape, but as soon as the couple saw it in 2003 in the midst of a very snowy day, they decided to purchase it. "Lynn was so in love with the home that he jumped out of his truck and took a picture of it covered in snow right before we bought it," Linda recalled.

Built in 1894, the home was originally located on a farm in Lancaster. It was moved to its Ellis County location in 1985 and restored by a man named Mr. Coffee. "It was called the Coffee plantation," Lynn said. Mr. Coffee used to have racing pigeons at the property, but now,

the land is more of a "gentleman's farm than a working farm," Linda explained. The property and home now look exactly as one would imagine it looking at its prime, before the turn of the century. There are six outdoor buildings, a koi pond, an observatory for star and planet gazing and four acres of over-hanging pecan trees, all of which create the feeling that time for this vintage residence has stood still for over 100 years.

The residence is not only lovely but incredibly livable. The Cromers have kept many of the original aspects of the home while adding to the era-inspired decor. "The master bathroom boasts a claw-footed tub, while the rest of the home features three original fireplaces located in the kitchen, living room and bedroom," Lynn said, noting that the fireplace in the kitchen still works and the plumbing throughout

the home is also still original.

The couple shares their beautiful Victorian home with their 11-year-old daughter, Mikaela, who loves playing in the red-accented bathroom and using the unique bath tub. Mikaela and her friends also love raiding Linda's closet and playing dress up, because the space holds more than just everyday clothing. Linda has a vast collection of Victorian hats, costumes, accessories and shoes.

Mikaela and her friends are not the only ones in the Cromer family who

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love to embrace the fun and history of the Victorian era. Throughout the years, Linda has remained true to decorating the home with pieces and accessories which are authentic to the time period. "When we first moved here, I shopped for two years because we didn't have any furniture to fit the house," she said. "You will not find any piece within this house that is not at least 100 years old." The home's stately dining room, with its grand solid wood table and numerous handmade items, is one of the main reasons Linda fell in love with and purchased the home.

Lynn and Linda love to share their home with others and enjoy holding holiday events and casual or formal

parties at the residence. "The Christian Ladies [group] loves to come over for English tea, complete with sugar cubes, English china and crumpets," Linda smiled.

The Cromers keep the rich history of the home alive year-round, especially during the winter holidays, when the interior is transformed into a Victorian wonderland. The home and its Christmas decor is reminiscent of what one would see on the front of a picturesque holiday card. From garland-strewn fireplaces to crystal tree chandeliers and collector dolls in wintry Victorian dress, the lights, sparkle and ambience of this stately home is breathtaking. Every nook

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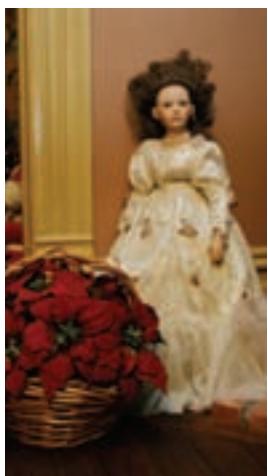
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is representative of a true Victorian Christmas, especially the first floor. "The downstairs is where we do our entertaining and have fun," Linda shared.

Every year since the Cromers moved into their dream home, they have hosted a Victorian-themed Christmas party. "We even wear Victorian outfits for this annual event," Lynn said. As partygoers stroll about the wraparound porch or the many rooms throughout the home, many intricate details and exciting special touches may be seen. There is over 1,200 square feet of porch space, accented with 18 wonderfully lit columns. Poinsettias in antique flower pots, as well as



vintage holiday accessories both dot the landscape. "There is no shortage of stuff," Linda laughed. It takes many months for the couple to prepare for their Christmas event, and several more months to take it all down and pack each item away securely until the next year.

Whether it is the holidays, or just any ordinary day, one of Linda's favorite activities is finding new things to restore, refurbish or accessorize. That desire to help take the shell of something special and turn it into a flourishing thing of beauty can be seen throughout their home and property. This theme even influences their choice of pets. "We have dogs, cats, pigeons and horses and all of our

animals are rescues," Linda said. Unfortunately, sometimes it is no accident that animals find their way to the Cromers. "We usually get six or seven animals dropped off on our property every year, but I find a bunch of them homes," she added. "You do it for the animal's sake."

Linda and Lynn hope to one day have their own horse rescue operation, but for now they keep busy working on their home and land. "This house is good for us. It is our retirement project," Lynn said. Linda added with a laugh, "Most normal people usually downsize their homes when they are our age." The beautiful Victorian house is not only the Cromers' home, it is a reflection of the things that matter most to them. **NOW**

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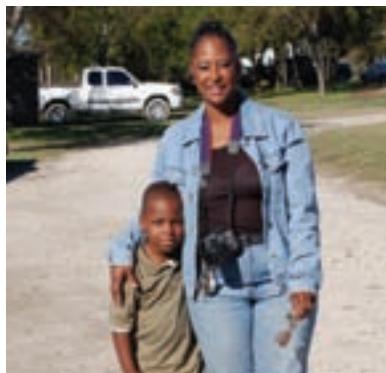
Local children have fun coloring pictures of animals at a Red Oak Library event.



Jane Vallejo masters her face painting during a local festival.



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“Our focus is mostly on wildlife and landscapes.”



Nature on Canvas

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Venturing onto the Red Oak property of Bob and Maria Pauken is like walking into a present-day Garden of Eden. From lily and koi ponds and greenhouses to multiple garden oases, the Paukens have an obvious love and appreciation for the outdoors. “We are very nature-oriented,” Bob said. Maria added with a smile, “Bob is a fanatical gardener and even has a live flock of ring-necked doves.”

This couple not only enjoys the peace and serenity of flora and fauna, they both love to capture their many nature-inspired moments and experiences first in photographs and later on canvas. “Our focus is mostly on wildlife and landscapes,” Bob said. “Maria likes to go sit in our bird blind area and photograph the variety of migratory and native birds. They’re everywhere in the yard.”

There are many places on the property for the couple to paint their inspirational scenes, including a greenhouse that has many uses. “During the winter, we use it to protect our outdoor plants,” Bob said. “It makes a nice area to paint in, too,”

he added, explaining that the area doubles as a second art studio.

The couple’s official studio is located inside their home. “The studio was originally a sunroom until we added 12 skylights, which give us a lot of natural light,” Bob said. “It’s great for painting.” The studio is home to two side-by-side, his-and-hers easels, both with pieces still in progress. Scattered about the room are many finished pieces, as well as all of the tools needed for any professional artist.

Bob and Maria developed their mutual love of oil painting at different times of their lives. “When I was younger I would watch my mother paint,” Bob recalled. “Then I dabbled in art when I was older and in high school.” However, it was not until after he had retired in 2001 that Bob decided to give painting another try. Maria started painting a few years later. “In 2003, I retired after working within the computer industry 40 years,” she said. “Once I retired, I thought, What am I going to do now? So I tried painting, and I love it!”

The creative couple has gone to

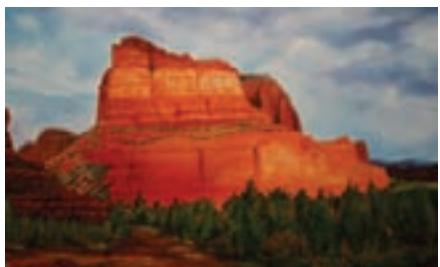


numerous workshops and has taken many art-inspired vacations. “We paint mainly in oils,” Bob said. “Most of the painting courses we take are from very well-known artists. You learn a whole lot by taking seminars and workshops.” The Paukens try to attend at least one art class per week at Hobby Lobby in Cedar Hill, but they have also ventured well beyond the local community. “Last year, we took a trip to the Galapagos Islands,” Bob shared. “We took a lot of pictures of everything.” From beautiful flowers to a family of iguanas, the Paukens painted almost everything they captured in photographs. “My iguana painting was recently accepted into the Irving, Texas, Juried Wildlife Show,” Bob said. They have also taken trips to Costa Rica and Colorado, each time being inspired to capture the natural settings and aspects of their adventures.

While their travels have produced many beautiful works, Bob and Maria also find inspiration at home on their own property. “We have night vision wildlife cameras with infrared sensors throughout our yard and at our place at Lake Whitney,” Bob noted. More than a few easels have been covered with recreations of the Axis deer, fox and bobcats their infrared cameras have captured.

The couple also believes that anyone can learn this artistic expression. “I

always suggest people go out and try an art class," Maria said. "That way you can learn under the guidance of a teacher who will instruct you correctly on techniques and even brush strokes." For other aspiring artists, the Paukens suggest joining an art club. "We are members of the Cedar Hill, Irving and DeSoto Art Leagues. It would be nice to have more art closer to us here, though," Bob reflected. "Ellis



County has many notable artists." To encourage other local artists to gather and share their work, Bob explained, "You have to provide art reviews and events. It's good to have groups get together and paint for a few hours. I think there needs to be more interest in art because it is truly a satisfying thing to do."

Painting is one of the most fulfilling parts of Bob and Maria's lives. Two of Bob's favorite pieces were inspired by the holiday season. One of the paintings is a replica of their home surrounded by snow and decorated in lights. The other is of a sweet, little fur-tufted church mouse filling its cherubic cheeks with holiday treats. "Creating that picture was the most fun painting I have ever done," Bob said. "I had more fun in just watching that picture come alive." **NOW**



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STRONG ARM

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

Arm wrestling might not be considered a mainstream sport, but it is certainly competitive. It is a sport that has taken 18-year-old Justin Deason across the country and the world.

It all started when he was 7 years old. “Justin would play with his friends, and he would arm wrestle with them, too,” his dad, Jackie, remembered. By the time Justin was in the sixth grade, he would arm wrestle just about anybody on the playground. “I was the smallest kid in the class. I loved arm wrestling my classmates,” he said. Once during his school’s field day, Justin was doing what he loved best and decided to wrestle the biggest student in his class — and won.

By junior high, 130-pound Justin started to compete in shows. “When I was 16, I competed at the Europa show,” he recalled. He also competed in Texas and Oklahoma shows, as well as at nationals in Arkansas, where he qualified to compete in the World Armwrestling Federation’s World Armwrestling Championships held in Porto Viro, Italy. Justin was responsible

for obtaining sponsors so he could attend the World competition. “We were his biggest sponsors,” laughed his mom, Lisa, “but he was responsible for a lot of his travel expenses.” One way Justin obtained the funds was through selling custom-made “Team USA” T-shirts.

Once the funds were obtained, Justin’s once-in-a-lifetime experience began. Along with his teammate, Hank Henderson, Justin represented the American team at the world championships. Jackie went on the trip to show support for the boys, while Lisa made all of the travel arrangements and stayed stateside. “It was hard getting their passports, but all of it was exciting,” Lisa said.

When they were not attending competitions, the three men enjoyed nine days in Italy, touring the land, seeing the sights and experiencing the different culture. “We went to outdoor cafés and the beach. I have never walked so much in my life,” Justin laughed. His father added, “We had a blast.”

When the boys were competing, Jackie provided proud support and

coaching. In their 60k class competition, Justin ranked in the top 10 and Hank received silver. As the week progressed, Justin was ecstatic to learn that he placed sixth and Hank finished third in their weight division on the U.S. team. “We had competed against athletes from 41 other countries, and the American team was awarded fifth place,” he said.

Justin enjoyed meeting people and competitors from all over the world. “This trip was the first time I had ever been on a plane and out of the country,” he said. “We made really good friends with people from all over, like Great Britain and South Africa. Hopefully, I will see them next year when the world tournament is held in Las Vegas.”

Needless to say, Justin is looking forward to visiting Las Vegas, but until then, “I’m going to keep working out and practicing,” he said. “Hopefully, I’ll make it to the nationals in Montana.” Justin also hopes to be able to participate in a men’s class in the future. He has been classified in a junior class up to this point because

of his age, not his frame. When he does move into the men's division, Lisa explained with a smile that Justin will have to be put on weight-gain supplements to help him increase his muscle mass.

For anyone who might consider getting into this sport, Justin suggests first researching techniques and then looking for a trainer or arm wrestling team or club. "People just think you just get up and start wrestling, but there are a lot of different techniques you can use depending on the strengths and weaknesses of your competitor," he said. The secret to having good form, he added, is to "keep your shoulder as close as you can to your hand, use adequate back pressure, and don't let your arm get away from your body. Following these steps will give you better control and more power."

Justin credits his family and friends for their constant support. "My mom, dad and girlfriend, Ally, encourage me to do well," he said. "My dad even built me a special table to practice on. He trains and works out with me, too." Ally has begun expressing interest in learning more about arm wrestling. "There is a lot of opportunity in the sport, and you really meet a lot of nice people," she said. Justin added, "Some of the best arm wrestlers in the world are also female."

This month, Justin is making plans to attend winter and spring competitions. In the future, he would like to be able to compete professionally. "You get paid if you win in the top three places," he explained. In the meantime, Justin is finishing off his last few high school classes and works for the family business. "After graduating high school," he shared, "I'll probably work with my dad and go to college for a business degree." But for now, he will wrestle one thing at a time. **NOW**



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Dedicated Doc

— By Diana Merrill Claussen

When Dr. Trammell and his wife, Stephany, first opened the doors to Ovilla Medical Clinic in February 2009, the couple had put many years of medical experience and office knowledge into the planning and then constructing of their new building. "We have learned much over the years, especially when it comes to patients checking in and being seen," Dr. Trammell said. "That is why when we drew up the plans to the clinic, we made sure it would be created as a patient-friendly facility."

Another major consideration was to create convenient hallways for easy patient access to the labs, staff and even the X-ray room. "We like having the patients located in one place," Dr. Trammell said. Ovilla Medical Clinic is not only state-of-the-art but actually has a relaxing atmosphere, thanks to natural lighting from multiple windows and a lovely view of the Ovilla City Park from the doctor's office. Another touch the Trammells have added to their practice are pagers for patients who would prefer to wait in their car

or outside in the park. The pagers offer a convenience well-liked by patients.

When it came time to move to the Ovilla office, "We needed a lot of artwork to hang on the walls, so we decided to do something a little different," Dr. Trammell explained. He saw the blank walls of the newly built facility as a blank canvas and decided to take advantage of the space. The clinic offers an element of fun, with stations organized and accented with a themed "wall of fame." Dr. Trammell and Stephany are big fans of NASCAR, sports and superstars. "So, we started collecting signed autographs, posters and memorabilia from many of them," Dr. Trammell said. Each room of the clinic now has its own collector's theme, from Toby Keith to the Dallas Cowboys. "We have a lot of fun here at the clinic," Stephany smiled.

Dr. Trammell's mission for the Ovilla Medical Clinic is simple. "I like people to come to the clinic to see me as soon as they get sick," he said. "I think people should

have immediate access to treatment, especially when they first come down with something. I provide my patients with 24-hour access to speak with me, and I even take medical calls at home." The clinic not only sees people with temporary ailments; they also monitor and provide healthcare for those with long-term or chronic conditions such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) and diabetes. "I also help provide long-term goals and plans if they have these kinds of conditions," he noted.

Dr. Trammell has much experience and knowledge to offer his patients, but he is quick to give credit to his peers. "I have learned a lot, especially from my mentor, Dr. Phipps," Dr. Trammell said, explaining that Dr.

"We have a lot of fun here at the clinic."

Phipps also practices at the clinic. Of course, the doctor's best advice is to take care of problems before they arise. Thankfully, however, the doctors and staff of Ovilla Medical Clinic have everything they need in-house and at their disposal. "We can perform digital X-rays here, routine labs and even blood draws," Dr. Trammell noted.

"I believe in the personal approach," Dr. Trammell said. "My dad was a preacher, and he taught me the importance of understanding and feeling concern for others. Sometimes doctors forget that patients are scared, but I am here to answer their fears and to partner with them in their care."

Ovilla Medical Clinic is located at 675 W. Main Street in downtown Ovilla. Office hours are Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. with the office closed from noon to 1:30 daily. For more information, call (972) 617-6376 or visit Dr-Trammell.com. **NOW**

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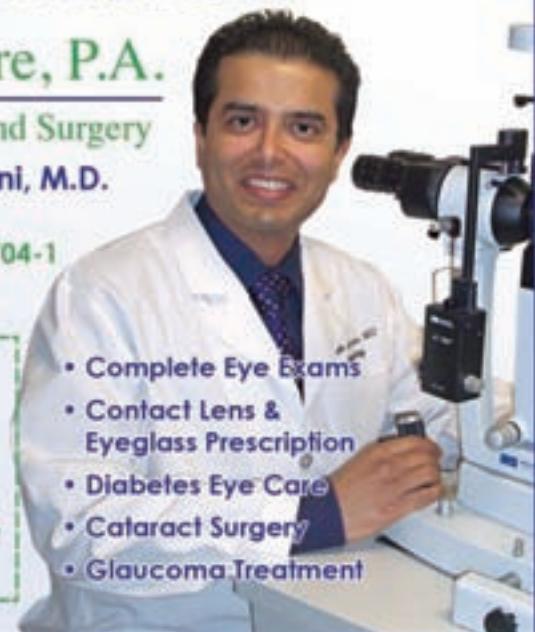
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Energizing Their Curiosity

— By L.B. Lyon



Rebecca Strickland has a passion for children. She strives to energize their curiosity. She wants them to not only learn about people, places and events; she wants them to experience it all. She has the energy of a half-dozen people bundled into one awesome lady, known as Mrs. Strickland to her students and "Becky" to her co-workers and friends.

It may have come as no surprise to her peers that Becky earned the title of 2008-09 Junior High Teacher of the Year, but Becky was, for a rare moment, rendered speechless. When names for the teacher of the year were being discussed, Becky recalled poking her friend and saying, "I think it is you." When she heard her name called, she said she felt like she had just won the Miss America crown or a million dollars.

Becky's influence in the district is felt in more places than her classroom. She is the head of the English department at Red Oak Junior High and last year, she worked as co-sponsor of the new show choir and as a drill team sponsor. Becky is also the UIL (University Interscholastic League) coach for the poetry team. In her many roles, Becky always looks for the underdog who may not feel qualified to be on one of these teams and she gives them the encouragement they need to at least try.

The Famous Texans Ball is another big event that Becky started at the school; students, teachers and parents look forward to it each year. Becky collaborates with the history and science teachers to come up with a list of famous Texans. "The students choose a partner and one becomes the press



agent for the character they select and the other becomes the actor representing that character," she explained. "Research is done and in the end, a big presentation is made with the students dressed as the character they have researched." Becky believes this type of research draws students into the learning process and, at the same time, it helps them understand that some famous Texans had very ordinary beginnings. This year, the Famous Texans Ball will be held on December 14 and 15 with the involvement of about 90 students.

Along with all the activities Becky is involved with in the school she is also busy as a wife and mother of three. Her 18-year-old daughter, Valerie, is a freshman at Navarro College, her 14-year-old daughter, Victoria, is a freshman in Red Oak High and her 12-year-old son, Grant, is in the seventh grade and is one of her students. "It makes me kind of sad," she shared. "For the past six years, I've had one of my kids riding to school with me or being in my class. But now my son plays football so he comes early in the morning, and my husband drops him off on his way to work. It's a new world for me as I come to school alone."

Change, however, is nothing new to Becky. She changes the way she teaches from one year to another to see what works best in making a personal connection with the students. In her eight years in the district, she has seen new technology bring about much change, as her students increase their online communication through text, MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.

Education **NOW**

An interesting classroom moment happened to Becky when she was talking to her students about writing informal notes and asked how many had ever sent an actual thank you note. "None. Out of 28 students, not one of them had ever sent a hand-written thank you note," Becky said with sadness in her voice. "I just think this is going to be lost on this generation, and it just breaks my heart."

Her passion for children goes beyond just teaching. Becky tells of a student a few years back who wore the same pants with a broken zipper every day. After observing this, she asked the young boy if she could buy him a new pair of pants. Knowing that some families face tough times, she thought

"For the past six years, I've had one of my kids riding to school with me or being in my class."

she could help both the parents and the self-esteem of the student. She bought two pairs of pants for that young man who wore them everywhere he went. "Maybe those two pairs of pants helped him stay in school," Becky said.

A constantly busy schedule can not keep Becky from getting more involved in the lives of her students. "I don't know how to say 'no,'" she laughed. But it is more than that. Becky wants her students to learn how to be servants and in turn reach out to others in need. Some students live in abundance and others do not have a change of clothes, she has realized, "So I'm trying to figure out how to marry the two and make it a project for the kids to get involved in," she shared. Becky is also creating a "Distinguished Students Institute" for the students who excel. Thankfully, "slow down" are two words not currently in this English teacher's vocabulary. **NOW**

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In The Kitchen With Heather Hare

— By Faith Browning

When Heather Hare was a little girl, her mom and eight aunts would bake for Christmas. "Everyone would bring and make their own recipes, and then everyone would take some of everything home," she remembered. "It was a great cooking memory!" Later, when Heather first married Tony, she relied on her grandmother for cooking tips. "She made everything from scratch and was the best cook I knew," Heather recalled.

"That's when I learned to try new things and found out I loved to cook. There's nothing better than cooking a meal that your family loves."

Today, Heather loves spending quality time making crafts and cooking with her daughters Kaitlyn, Kassidy and Kourtney. "All three love to help me cook," she said. "I've tried to always include them when cooking so they can learn." **NOW**

CHRISTMAS MICE

**Maraschino cherries, with stem on
Almond bark, melted
Hershey's kisses
Almond slivers
Gel icing (red or black is best)**

1. Melt almond bark until soft. Dip drained cherries in melted bark until fully coated, including stem.
2. Lightly dip bottom of Hershey's kiss in melted bark and place almond slivers as ears at the top.
3. Place one cherry and one Hershey's kiss together and hold for a few seconds for them to adhere together. Place a drop of gel icing for eyes on front of Hershey's kiss.
4. Repeat until all cherries and Hershey's kisses have been used.

MEATBALLS

**1 lb. hamburger
1 medium onion, chopped
1 medium egg
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 1/2 cups crackers, crushed
2 Tbsp. butter
1 can mushroom soup
1 can milk**

1. Mix together hamburger, onion, egg, salt and pepper.
2. Add crackers and make into balls. If sticky, add a handful of oatmeal.
3. Fry in butter; cook slowly until done.
4. Place balls in casserole dish or medium-size pan; add mushroom soup and milk.

5. Cook in medium oven for 30 minutes. Serve over rice.

MOM'S WAFER CHRISTMAS COOKIES

(Cream wafer cookies with cream filling)

COOKIE:

**1 cup butter, softened
1/3 cup whipping cream
2 cups all-purpose flour
Granulated sugar**

FILLING:

**1/4 cup butter, softened
3/4 cup powdered sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
Red and/or green food coloring**

1. Mix butter, cream and flour thoroughly; cover and chill.
2. Heat oven to 375 F.
3. Roll out about 1/3 of dough at a time, 1/8-inch thick on floured cloth-covered board, keeping remaining dough refrigerated until ready to roll. Cut into 1 1/2-inch circles.
4. Transfer rounds with spatula to a piece of waxed paper heavily covered with granulated sugar; coat both sides with sugar.
5. Place on ungreased cookie sheet; pick rounds with fork about 4 times.
6. Bake 7 to 9 minutes or until just set but not brown; cool.

For Filling:

1. Cream together butter, powdered sugar and vanilla until smooth and fluffy; add food coloring to desired tint.
2. Put cookies together in pairs with cream filling.

HOMEMADE EGG NOODLES

**1 or 2 eggs (One egg makes 4 servings.
Two eggs make eight servings.)
1 Tbsp. salt
Flour**

1. Beat eggs lightly; add salt.
2. Gradually add flour until it forms a ball-like pie crust; work it well with your hands on a floured surface.
3. Roll out as thin as you can, keeping flour on surface so mixture will not stick. Let dry for an hour or so.
4. Cut into quarters, then strips, stacking each quarter and cutting to the size you want. The thinner they are, the quicker they cook.

CHICKEN POT PIE

**2 chicken breasts, cooked and shredded
2 cans Campbell's Cream of Chicken and Mushroom Soup
2 1/2 cups frozen mixed vegetables
2 pie crusts
Salt and pepper, to taste**

1. Preheat oven to 350 F.
2. In a bowl, mix chicken breast, soup and vegetables.
3. Place bottom pie crust in pie plate; fill with above mixture, adding salt and pepper to taste.
4. Cover with top pie crust, crimp sides and lightly salt top of pie.
5. Bake for approximately 1 hour or until crust is golden brown.

To view more of your neighbors' recipes, visit our archives at www.nowmagazines.com.

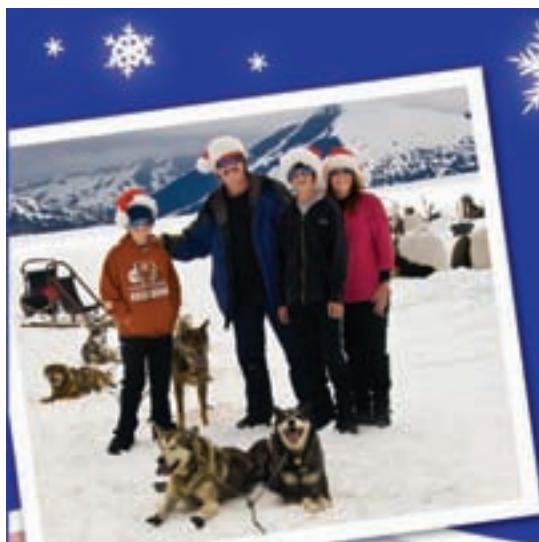
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What Basic Information Do I Need to Know About Life Insurance?

— By Nickie Weyrauch

Life insurance helps provide peace of mind that your family is financially protected when you are no longer around. However, buying life insurance can seem like a daunting task because of the variety of products that are available; plus, it is hard to approach the idea that you should plan for a time when you're not around. However, life insurance is a critical component to financial well-being, so it is a discussion you should not postpone. To get started, you should consider two common questions: *How much life insurance do I need? What type of insurance should I buy?* The answers to these questions will arm you with the basics to begin your assessment of life insurance options.

How much life insurance do you need?

A general rule of thumb is that your life insurance should be at least five to seven times your annual salary. However, the amount you need can vary because it is dependant on so many factors, including: income, expenses, assets and liabilities. You need to think about your current situation and how that situation may change in the future. Your insurance agent or financial professional will likely have a worksheet to help you calculate your needs.

What are the different types?

There are many kinds of life insurance, but they generally fall into two categories: term life insurance and permanent life insurance. Term life insurance is in some respects similar to renting a home. When you rent a home, you get to take full advantage of the entire property immediately and for as long as you continue paying rent. As soon as your lease expires, you must renegotiate your lease or move out. Even if you rented the house for 30 years, you have no equity or value that belongs to you.

This concept could be applied when thinking of term life insurance. You establish a term, or amount of time you'd like life insurance protection for, and you will pay the premiums for this certain period of protection. At the end of the term, you can request to renew at a new rate, discontinue protection or apply for a new policy.

Permanent life insurance is in some respects similar to owning a home. It provides insurance throughout your life. Because it is designed to last a lifetime, permanent life insurance accumulates cash value — like the equity in your home — and is priced for you to maintain over a long period of time. If you make regular premium payments and avoid loans, withdrawals or surrenders, the full-face amount will be paid.

So, which one is better? Just like buying or renting a home, neither option is always right or always wrong. Rather, the type of policy that's right for you depends on your specific situation. A financial professional can help you make the decision that may be appropriate for you. **NOW**

Nickie Weyrauch is an Allstate agent based in Red Oak.

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Third Monday

Ellis County Aggie Moms: 7:00 p.m., Waxahachie First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin. Call Cheryl Bell at (972) 723-0341.

First Tuesday

PrimeTimers Senior Group: 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Oaks Fellowship, 777 S. I-35 E. Fun, food and fellowship. RSVP (214) 376-8208.

Buffalo Creek Grief Recovery Group: 9:00 a.m., 1329 Brown St., Waxahachie. (972) 937-5999.

AA meeting: 8:00 p.m., Lonestar Cowboy Church, 1011 E. Ovilla Rd. (972) 576-0900.

Tuesdays and Thursdays

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

Every Wednesday

Family Story Time: 10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m., Red Oak Public Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. All ages welcome. (469) 218-1230. www.redoakpubliclibrary.org.

Wednesdays and Thursdays

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

First and Third Thursday

Red Oak senior's luncheon. No cost to residents, \$5 for non-residents. Pre-register the Tuesday before each event. Call Jennifer at (972) 576-3414.

Third Thursday

American Business Womens' Association meeting. www.abwa-empoweringwomen.org.

First Friday

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Sunday, December 6th "Peace"

8:30 and 10:50 am - Choir Cantata

"In the Fullness of Time", (communion both services)

12:00 - Soup Lunch

1:00 - Advent Event-Make and take crafts for the family

Sunday, December 13th "Joy"

8:30 am Traditional Worship & 10:50 am Children's program,

"How Long Will it Take?"

Sunday, December 20th "Love"

8:30 am Traditional Worship

10:50 am Blended Service

6 pm, Carols Around the Table-

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Second Saturday

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December 3-5

Red Oak's Festival of Trees: First United Methodist Church, 600 Daubitz Dr. Holiday donations accepted prior to event. To pledge a holiday item, call (972) 617-4320 or e-mail melanie_75125@yahoo.com.

December 4-6, 11, 13

Bethlehem Revisited: behind Central Presbyterian Church at 402 N. College St., Waxahachie. Free admission. (972) 937-2390.

December 5

Capitol One Bank and Adolphus Children's parade: 10:00 a.m., Dallas. www.childrens.com/Parade.

December 5, 6

Waxahachie Candlelight Home Tour: 2:00-8:00 p.m. (972) 937-2390. www.waxahachiechamber.com/candlelight

December 12

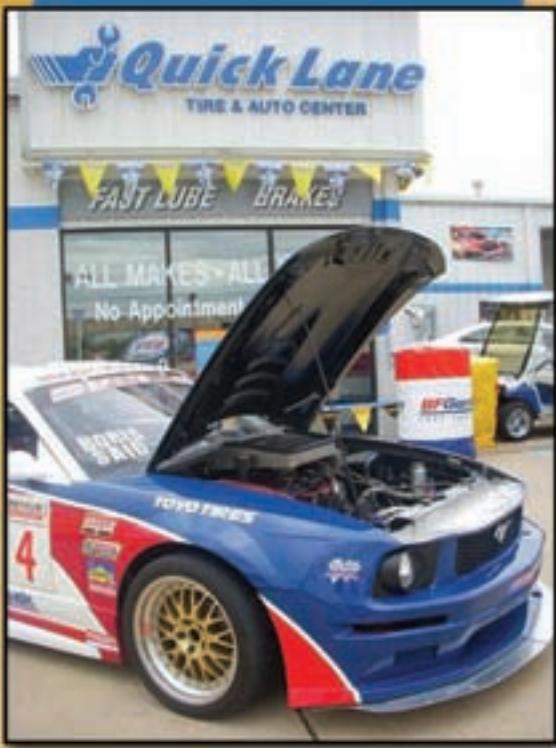
Christmas in Downtown: line-up for parade at Olde Town Park: 5:00 p.m., parade begins: 6:00 p.m., activities to follow in Main St. Plaza. Bring your camera for pics with Santa, unwrapped toys for Red Oak Police Toys for Tots, blankets for North Ellis County Outreach. Enjoy refreshments and performances provided by locals. (469) 218-1202.

December 19

Red Oak Lions Club's Breakfast with Santa: 7:00-11:00 a.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. Cost: \$4/person. Santa will be on hand to visit and get Christmas wish lists. Photographer available for photos with Santa.

December 31

Dallas Symphony Orchestra's New Year's Celebration: Myerson Symphony Center, 2301 Flora St., Dallas. (214) 871-4550. December 31



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“Recognize me?”

“The biggest change is how I look at the world,” says Fercina Fudge, who had gastric bypass surgery at Baylor. “I walk into a room now, and I don’t have to look around to see if I’m the fattest person there,” she says. After struggling with weight most of her life, Fercina says. “I knew I had to make a change....it was affecting my blood pressure, my joints. There were so many things I couldn’t do.” Now, Fercina says, “not being recognized is a fabulous thing.”

For a physician referral or for more information about weight loss services at Baylor Waxahachie, call **1.800.4BAYLOR** or visit us online at BaylorHealth.com.

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