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M A G A Z I N E

DECEMBER 2015

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2015  
Holiday  
Shopping  
Guide

## Blessing Others

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Promoting Patriotism  
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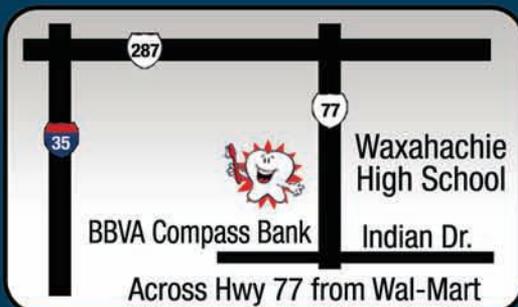
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## ON THE COVER



*One of the many Santas at the Pope home peeks out from the Christmas tree.*

*Photo by Amy Ramirez.*

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## Editor's Note

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, too!*

As I watch 500 lights twinkle on the Christmas tree, I'm reminded of how blessed I am. Each tiny light could so easily represent a blessing in my life. My career as a writer allows me to share "good stories about good people." I have so many cherished friendships. If I allowed each light to represent a blessing in my life, I'd have to get up, go out to the garage, climb up the stairs to the attic and grab another

string. I bet if you think about it, you'd have at least that many blessings, too!

I quickly realize the biggest blessings are not those found wrapped in beautifully decorated bags and boxes under the tree. The blessings I cherish most come in the form of Jesus, my husband, my children, my children's children, my immediate family and my close-to-the-heart friends. Without them, all the smaller blessings wouldn't mean a thing!

Count your many blessings!

### Sandra

Sandra Strong  
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P.S. The publisher and staff of NOW Magazines wish you and your family a very merry Christmas and a happy holiday season!

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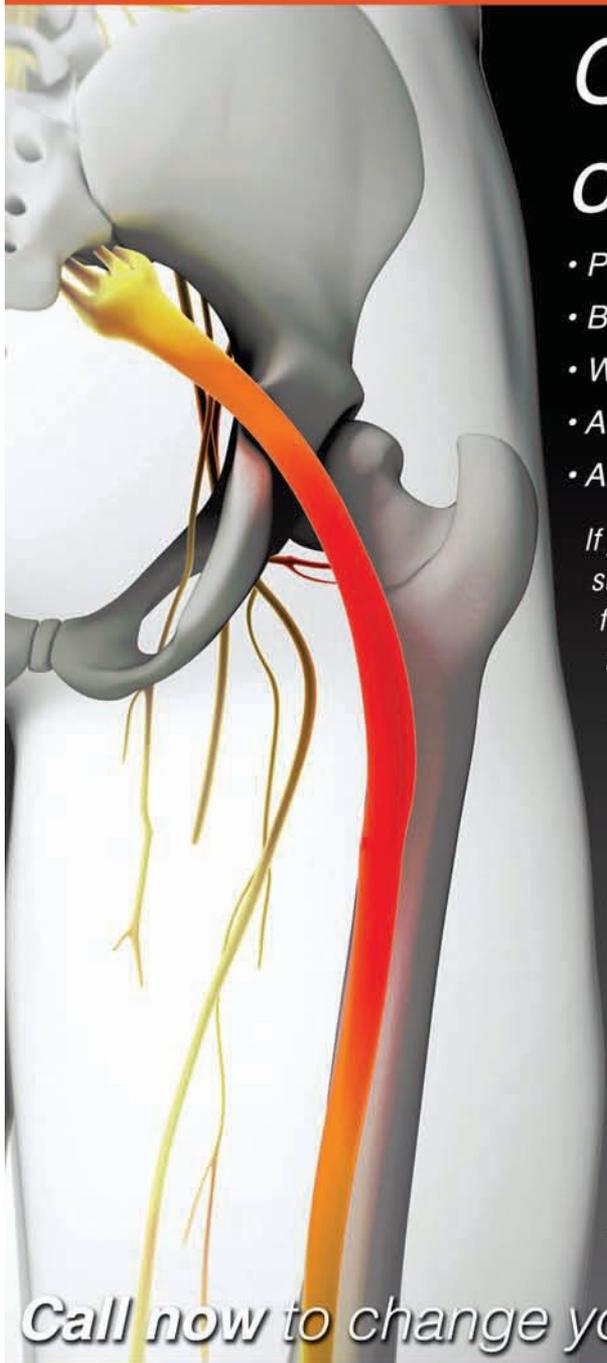
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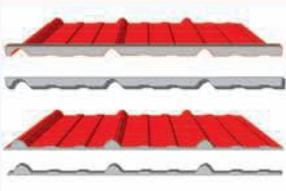
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# Blessing Others

— By Sandra Strong

*Once the dishes were cleared from the dining room table, it was time for the family to start decorating the house for Christmas. In fact, at the home of John and Diane Szymczak, decorating as a family has become quite the tradition, especially since the children are grown and gone. “Christmas is our favorite time of year,” John said, as Diane nodded in agreement. “We begin the decorating process as a family as soon as we’ve finished eating Thanksgiving breakfast.” This allows them to start the process early and spend the whole day transforming their home into a winter wonderland.*



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However, John and Diane start thinking about Christmas long before this annual family gathering. As volunteers for the Habitat for Humanity Festival of Trees, their brainstorming begins soon after the two-day event comes to a close. This year marked the third year of the event and also the third year John and Diane made donations of time, effort, elbow grease and silent auction items. “It all began when a friend of mine who knew we loved the Christmas holiday asked if I’d like to attend a meeting,” Diane remembered. “I drug John along!”

Initially, the couple thought all they would need to do was decorate a tree for that first event. They soon found they were in for a surprise, as the project morphed into something much bigger than they imagined. Their involvement has allowed them to give back to their community in more ways than one.

They did decorate a wonderfully, whimsical tree adorned with no fewer than 40 Beanie Babies that first year.

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Each Beanie from Diane's personal collection was tied to the tree. All types, sizes and colors of Beanie Babies peaked from the branches that were also decorated with many twinkling lights. "This tree went home with a single mom," Diane shared. "Her little girl kept telling her to up her bid. It was a great deal for both of them." The mom, who had little time to decorate, took a completely decorated tree home, as well as a daughter who had a smile on her face.

The second year, John and Diane once again used Beanie Babies, but concentrated on 35-40 of the many birds in Diane's collection. They also added wooden birdhouses, themed ornaments and more twinkling lights. The "Beanie Bird Tree" was placed in one of the large picture windows at the event's venue, Waxahachie Bible Church.

Just last month, they delivered their donated creations to the church. This year's themed trees were Beanie Bears with an addition — plush, adorable teddy bears. Several small Beanies and teddies were placed strategically on a small tabletop tree, perfect as a dining room centerpiece or a focal point on the living room mantel. The larger tree was a replica of the tabletop tree, but with many more bears to feast your eyes on. "We enjoy making trees that appeal to the children who come to the Festival of Trees with their parents," John said. "It's always been about the children," Diane reiterated.

Many individuals take part in the Festival of Trees, creating one-of-a-kind ornaments, wall decorations, wreathes



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and trees of all shapes and sizes, some traditional and so many others full of eclectic whimsy. "People love getting involved when it's for such a good cause," Diane said. "And we've found that everyone has a story." One lady hosts a crafting night for family and friends. All items constructed at this fun gathering are donated to the silent auction and general store.

John and Diane also play an integral role in the setup, break down and behind-the-scenes work that makes any fundraiser of this size possible, as well as successful. "We start on Wednesday," John explained. "I am at the church most of the day. Diane gets there and works during the evening hours."

On Thursday, the process starts all over again. John constructs whatever is needed, including the small stands that hold the bid sheets, display stands that in some cases are tiered to three levels and pegboard display boards that will hold up to eight beautifully decorated wreaths. "Over the years, we've all learned the way items are displayed throughout the church is very important," Diane stated. "Not all the large trees need to be in the rotunda. Some need to be centered in the windows so they can easily be seen from the street and parking lot." Bottom line, John and all those associated with Festival of Trees are looking for the "wow factor," as they put each item in its perfect place, and the church offers the perfect setting for all that the fundraiser offers, including the North Pole Experience for the children, which proved to be quite popular again this year. Children enjoyed activities throughout the day on Saturday. They shared cookies with Mrs. Claus, and had their photos taken with Santa. Wood crafts, story time and laughter made for some great holiday memories.

The offerings available at the silent auction are great. Some trees honor groups or organizations, while many

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others are fit for the room of a “little prince or princess.” Some are naturally simple and many more are elaborately decorated with golds, silvers, baubles and bling. There really is something for everyone. Those who take the time to decorate trees, wreathes, birdcages, sconces, screened windows and tabletop trees and arrangements are so artistically talented, and they take their imaginations to new holiday levels.

As the main fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity, the Festival of Trees helps to eliminate poverty housing in Ellis County — one home and one family at a time. The nonprofit organization is dedicated to building houses and relationships as a way to guarantee a better future for the community as a whole. Festival of Trees involves talented people using their creative skills to decorate unique items.

John and Diane love this time of year, so the Festival of Trees fits them well. Looking back to the first year with fond memories, John remembers the snowman they brought home crafted from wire mesh and decorated with white tulle and all the details that make a snowman a snowman. He heard that someone else had really wanted it, but John came away with the highest bid. “I used it that year on our front porch,” he shared. John and Diane re-donated the snowman to the cause the second year for the silent auction. The man who bid alongside John ended up paying the “pay it now price” in order to make sure he was the one who took it home that year!

Those who serve on the Festival of Trees committee, the numerous volunteers and all those who donate their talents are a dedicated group of individuals who care deeply for their community. “We are blessed in our personal lives,” Diane admitted. “Volunteering for this event allows someone else to experience the blessing, as well. Really, what’s the point if you can’t help someone else?” **NOW**



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# Promoting PATRIOTISM

— By Virginia Riddle

*Cheree Barrett is a proud mother and wife of men who have served in the U.S. military. Her husband, Rick, who served as a Navy Seabee, is a second-generation veteran. Rick and Cheree's son, James, served as an Army sergeant and was honorably discharged in 2013. Cheree serves in her own way as president of the Bluebonnet Blue Star Mothers, a chapter of the state and national organizations of Blue Star Mothers, Inc. "The camaraderie of the mothers is a joy felt by all of us," Cheree said.*

It's not just an organization for mothers. Stepmothers, grandmothers, foster mothers, godmothers and female legal guardians of children serving in the military, National Guard, military reserve branch or of military veterans are welcomed.

Cindy McCain, wife of Senator John McCain, is the national spokeswoman of the organization, since she is a former military wife and mom of two sons serving in the U.S. Navy. The Blue Star Mothers' mission is to never forsake U.S. troops, veterans or families of Fallen Heroes. "We are a nonpartisan, nonpolitical and nonsectarian organization," Cheree said.

When parents raise a son or daughter who is inspired to serve their country through joining a military branch, that parent is full of pride and apprehension. Studies have shown that supportive parents play an important role in how their son or daughter reintegrates into everyday life at home following deployment. Some of the most supportive parents of military service men and women are the Bluebonnet Blue Star Mothers.

"Our local chapter has 25 members from locations as far away as Snyder toward the west, Southern Dallas County to the north, Corsicana to the south and Mabank to the east," Cheree explained. "When someone sends in her membership application, she can choose a local chapter or decide to be a member at the national level only." Cheree is one of the



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original members of the Bluebonnet Chapter located in Ovilla, which was chartered five years ago with the required five initial members.

Rounding out the chapter's governing board are 1st Vice President Martha Vansyckle, 2nd Vice President Donna Fosner, Treasurer Karen Hall, Financial Secretary Doris Urban, Recording Secretary Kathy Kresse, Chaplain Joy Sanders, Care Package Coordinator Sheryl Hornung, Membership Chair Sheri McMillan, Patriotic Instructor Collis Blackmon, Refreshment Chair Pat Minyard and Scrapbook Chair Donna Fosner. The chapter's annual membership fee is \$30. Members meet on the fourth Monday of each month (except on holidays) at 7:00 p.m. at St. Paul's Church in Ovilla.

Trenda Thompson of Waxahachie became a member in 2014 and has already become very active in the chapter's work. Her son, Colt Thompson,



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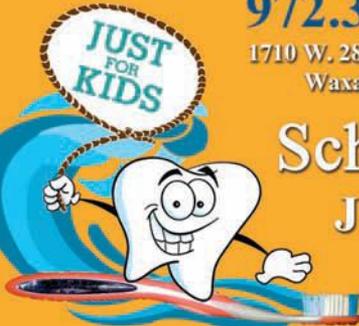
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is in the Army Reserves until he graduates from Texas A&M University, at which time he will go into active duty. This busy mom works at DeSoto Fashion Glass but still finds time to participate in many of the group's activities, as well as volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America and reenactment troops with her husband, who is an Army veteran.

A scrapbook chronicles the chapter's many activities, which include participating in area parades, donating boxes of Girl Scout cookies to VA hospitals, shipping male and female gift boxes quarterly to military units, sending out "care cards" to troops in the U.S. during holiday seasons, participating in area veterans' ceremonies, speaking to civic clubs and volunteering at the Dallas Fisher House and DFW Airport USO.

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“We are allowed to go to the gate to greet service men and women,” Cheree said. Chapter members receive help with their activities. “We work with the Patriot Guard Riders, and area churches and Crafty Scrappers in Waxahachie are collection points for donations that are packed into the gift boxes. “The Boy Scouts of America troops help pack boxes,” Cheree said thankfully. The scrapbook is especially important to members, since each mom has a page dedicated to her military child or children.

Some duties are very hard on members emotionally but are essential in order to carry out the chapter’s stated mission of support. Chapter members presented a Waxahachie mom with her Gold Star flag signifying the loss of a child while serving in the military. “Thank goodness that isn’t something we do often nor do we want to have to do it,” Cheree said. Members were interviewed by WFAA-TV, Channel 8, while standing on the route Chris Kyle’s burial procession took. “That was a sad day for everyone,” Cheree remembered. A Hutchins-area mom’s son received a traumatic brain injury from an IED while in a mess hall, and the chapter members were able to help the family through his recovery in the Dallas VA Medical Center. He is successfully continuing to serve in the Army National Guard. “We have found that families deal with death and injury in many different ways,” Cheree revealed.



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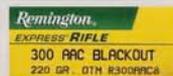
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The chapter has won several honors for its parade truck, which is decorated with flags. Rick created the special equipment used, and the members use hand clappers and display big photos of their children while chanting a shortened version of “We Raised Warriors” that Cheree learned while attending a national convention of Blue Star Mothers. The group won the Mayor’s Choice Award in the Ovilla Heritage Day Parade and took second place in the Red Oak Veterans’ Day Parade. Additionally, they have appeared in the Ennis Polka Festival Parade and the Ferris Pioneer Day Parade.

Cheree has enjoyed attending the group’s national conventions in Colorado; Washington, D.C.; Ohio; and California. She gets to learn from speakers and network with moms from every corner of the U.S. “At the D.C. convention, we were given a tour of the Pentagon, which was fascinating,” she remembered.

A native of Ferris, Cheree holds a position in the Trust Department of Bank of America in downtown Dallas. That experience has helped her during speaking engagements and in conducting meetings, which always include a prayer, business meeting and occasional speakers. Each member has a lanyard, pin, ribbon and decal for her car, all of which denote her child’s service.

One message that the chapter tries to instill in the public’s mind is to remind veterans to register with their local VA. “That’s a first priority,” Cheree emphasized. “Veterans have many benefits, which they need to access. When my son became a veteran, it made me more aware of veterans’ issues. I can’t say enough good things about the Dallas VA.” **NOW**

*Editor’s Note: For more information about the chapter, contact Cheree at (972) 679-9425.*

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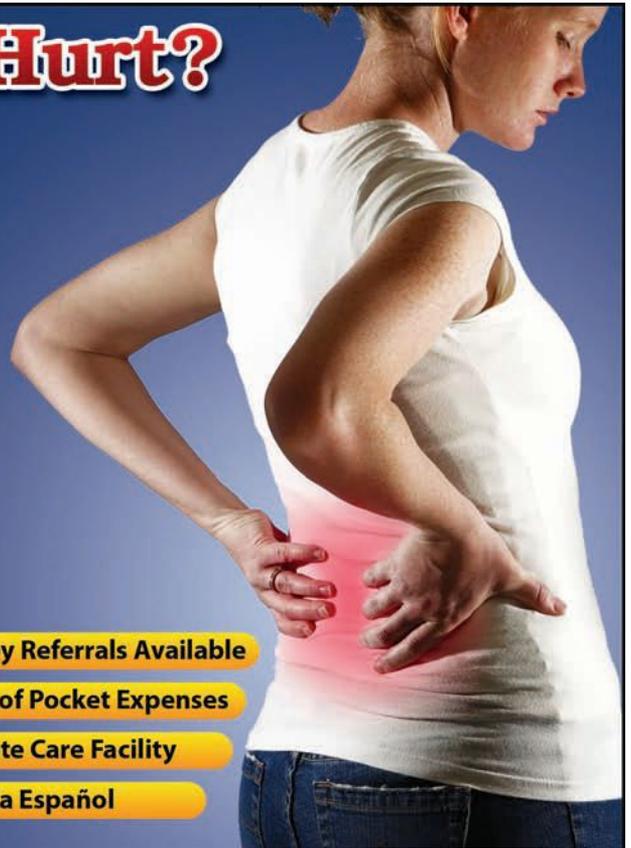
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— By Donnielle Tyner



## At Home With Don & Brenda Pope

*For many, Christmas is a time solely for friends and family, but for Don and Brenda Pope, Christmas is about spreading joy to all. “Christmas is a time when everyone gets along, and that is really what Christianity is all about — serving each other and loving each other,” Don humbly admitted. During the holidays, the couple likes to dress up as Mr. and Mrs. Claus and visit the nursing homes around town passing out candy canes. Sometimes, Don will stand outside his home dressed like Santa, so he can spread the Gospel to others by passing out a candy cane with a short message about Jesus attached.*

Don and Brenda often open up their home to the neighborhood children and the community, so they can talk to, and have their pictures taken with, Santa. During the Christmas season, the Pops’ home is decorated with thousands of unique Santas they have collected throughout their 49 years of marriage, but they don’t decorate for themselves. They decorate to spread joy to everyone who comes by their home. “God has





blessed us so richly that we try to share it with other people,” Don reiterated.

Don and Brenda met at the Princess Theater in Tennessee while Don was home visiting his grandparents, and not too long after, they were engaged. Their courtship was short, but even at 18, they knew they wanted to be together. Through college, being drafted during Vietnam, raising two sons, moving 32 times due to his job as a store manager for Wal-Mart, and eventually, turning his hobby of investing into his job as a financial planner — the couple finally settled in Waxahachie. Throughout all the years, they collected Santas.

The Popes’ holiday story started during their first Christmas as a married couple. Before they had any children, the only decoration they owned was a little Santa head. They wrapped it around the TV antenna with some pipe cleaners. Each year, they added something new. One year, they made Christmas ornaments because they couldn’t afford to buy any. They poured hot paraffin wax over ice cubes with bobby pins stuck in the trays. As the ice melted, it made funny designs in the wax. “My parent’s didn’t really celebrate and go all out for Christmas that much when I was growing

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up, so I think I'm overzealous with Christmas," Brenda explained. "I love anything that has to do with Christmas. I love the happiness and spreading cheer. I love watching people be happy. It's such a special thing."

The Popes, however, celebrate Christmas more than just in the month of December. Throughout the year, there are special items that Don and Brenda keep on display. Most of these items are ones they have collected while traveling. The couple has been to every continent except Antarctica, but Russia is one

of their favorite places to visit. Brenda especially loves the styling of Russian art, with their hand-crafted pieces and vivid painting style. Each one of their Santas from Russia is unique because they are crafted by hand.

Brenda spends hours every holiday carefully placing their treasured decorations to transform their home into a winter wonderland. Most of the rooms in the house are host to the thousands of little Santas. There are a few exceptions, however, such as the guest bedroom. Even their master bedroom and patio are

decorated. One room, in particular, which Brenda lovingly calls the angel room, is decorated to depict Jesus' life story.

A tall Christmas tree takes the focus in the living room, surrounded by Santas of various sizes and origins, from a Santa table holding Christmas books to tiny knickknacks lining their mantel and bookshelf. Each item is special to the Popes, especially the ornaments they both have from their childhood. Don's reindeer with a missing leg and no horns and Brenda's Santa that used to hold candy, both have a place of honor



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on their tree. "The most special Santa I own is the first one I got as a child," Brenda fondly recollected. "There's just something about that Santa that brings back warm childhood memories." Another special ornament was a dime store snowball Brenda saved money for in the early years of their marriage when money was tight.

In the dining room, another Christmas tree proudly stands in the corner next to a line of larger Santas in the old St. Nick style. The classic charm in this room stirs the excitement of Christmas past for all who visit during the holiday season. Don and Brenda receive quite a few visitors who want to see a mini winter wonderland. "I enjoy decorating for others. I want people to come and bring their children. We only have two boys and one grandson. They enjoy it, but I do it for others. I always make sure that someone is coming to see it," Brenda shared. "Why decorate if you're not going to share it? It brings joy to my heart when I watch people enjoying themselves."

More modern-looking Santas are prominently displayed in the kitchen, alongside a few classic St. Nicks in every form of decoration, from the classic



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The Popes find great satisfaction in keeping the love of Christmas alive. Brenda, whose parents were much older when she was born and not physically able to decorate for Christmas, is still childlike when it comes to Christmas. “She is still celebrating her childhood, even now,” Don explained. “Her family were poor, dirt farmers from Tennessee. Christmas was too much of a luxury.”

Don has his own special memories that keep the belief of Santa alive, even though he is now a grandfather. When he was 8, after their yearly trip to his grandmother’s house where he received his first BB gun, his family returned home and he found all the accessories for his new gun under the tree. “I looked around before we left, and there was nothing under the tree. Santa came to my house,” Don stated excitedly.

The belief in joy and love that is so thoroughly shared during the holiday season is what drives this couple to decorate and open their home to the community each year, even though the task of decorating is becoming more and more difficult. “We love seeing children’s faces light up when they see Santa,” Brenda stated, as Don nodded his head in agreement. “God has truly blessed us.” **NOW**

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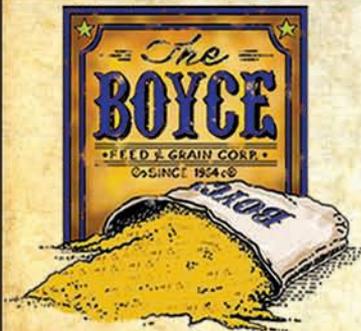


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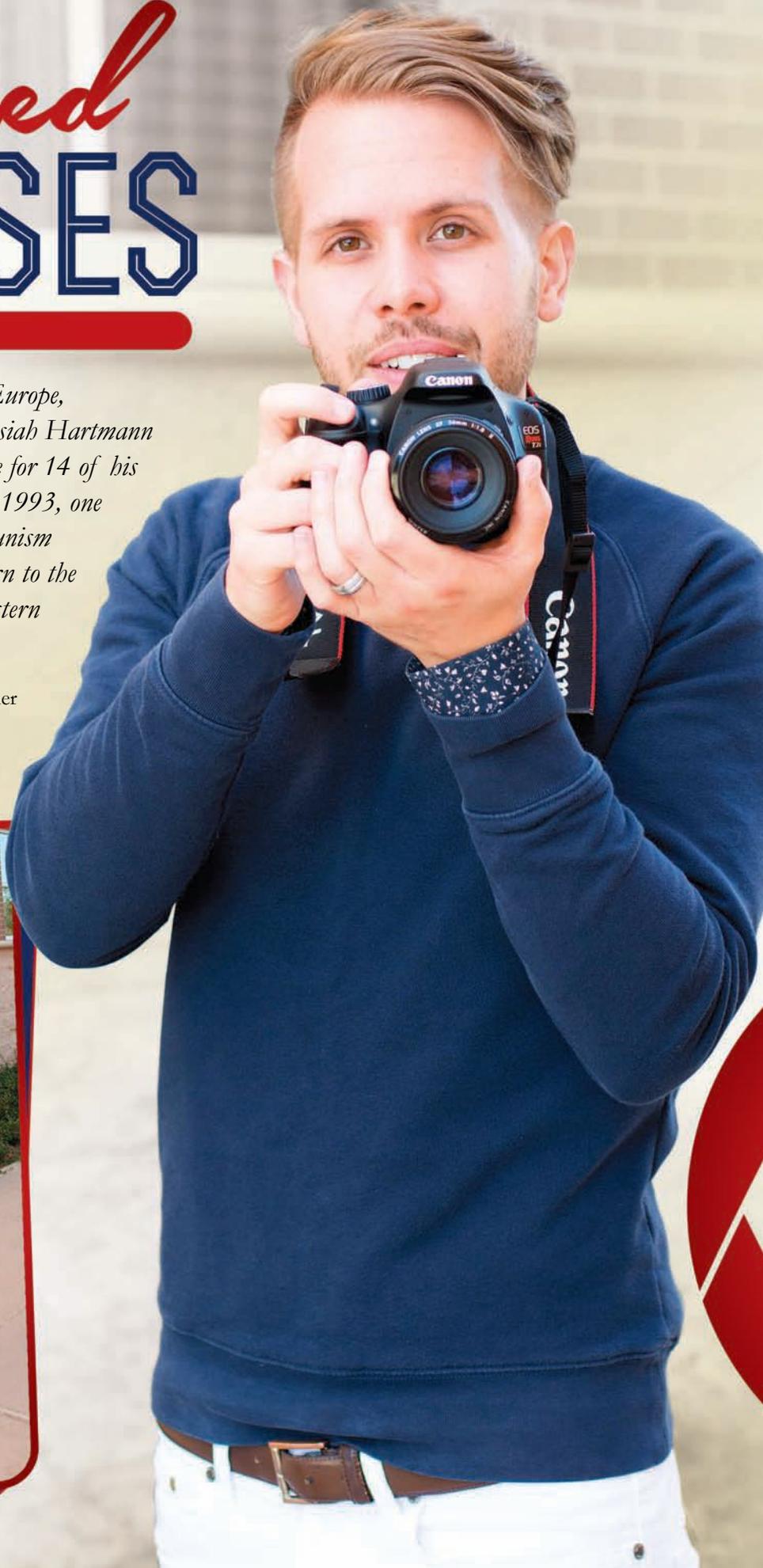


# Unposed GLIMPSES

— By Lisa Bell

*The small country of Albania rests in Europe, approximately 6,000 miles from Texas. Josiah Hartmann knew this Maryland-sized country as home for 14 of his 26 years. His family moved to Albania in 1993, one of the first missionary families after communism fell. When the time came for Josiah to return to the United States for college, he chose Southwestern Assemblies of God University.*

Josiah's mother is a SAGU alumna, while his father graduated from a rival school, Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. SAGU offered the largest scholarship to children of missionaries. "That was



a huge blessing and probably one of the greatest motivators for me to come here,” Josiah said. Since 2007, he has seen considerable growth in the university, both physically and in activities available to students.

While earning a degree in digital media and broadcasting, Josiah took a job as a student worker to help cover his expenses. After receiving a bachelor’s degree, he went on to earn a master’s in organizational leadership.

As a student, Josiah traveled with a quartet, and in the process, he became close friends with Irby McKnight, the VP of Advancement, learning daily routines and travel schedules. The move to Irby’s executive assistant was a natural progression. Josiah works in this full-time position, while he pursues his passion for photography and videography as more of a hobby.

While attending the university, Josiah met Merissa, a student in the two-year Master’s Commission program at SAGU. After she finished the program, she went back home to Albuquerque, New Mexico, but the two chatted, occasionally, through social media. It happened that the quartet spent quite a bit of time in New Mexico, and he reconnected with her. They got to know each other better over a period of months and entered a long-distance relationship. After six months, he proposed, and she accepted. The couple

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always  
watches for  
glimpses of  
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got married on November 9, 2013. Two years later, they find themselves celebrating the arrival of their first son, Edison Parker.

In preparing for their wedding, Josiah talked to a photographer friend who lived in Japan but already planned to be in the U.S. for another wedding shoot in November. The week of the wedding, she contacted Josiah, letting him know she couldn't legally leave the country due to a visa mix-up. She already had a photographer lined up as a replacement, so Josiah and Merissa had a photographer during their wedding. "It wasn't my first choice, and we didn't get the exact poses we hoped for," he said.

Josiah purchased a camera capable of video and still shots. He did an engagement shoot for a friend as a gift and as a way to play with his new camera. He never considered doing his own wedding shoot. After the wedding, to capture some of the photos they wanted, he and Merissa went out one day, dressed in wedding attire. Setting up a tripod, Josiah used a remote to capture the unique poses they wanted.

He also used this technique for their pregnancy announcement and gender reveal. Since his parents live

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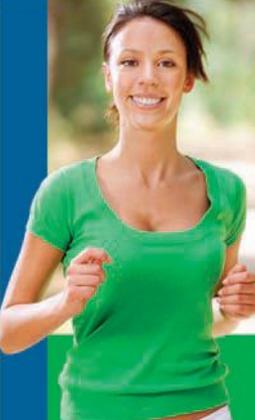
in Midlothian now, and hers are in Albuquerque, they were able to share these two moments at the same time with both sets of grandparents through the photos he took.

Merissa tells Josiah he has a big talent. He started doing more photography because he loves the artistic aspect, the ability to add effects and create something spectacular from ordinary photos. While he offers photography for a wide range of events, from engagement to pet shots, the shoots are more for fun right now. He charges what he could afford to pay, often less than most photographers. "I want to be a blessing to those who can't afford an expensive photo shoot," he said. He also uses his skills to make birthday and Christmas cards for family. He looks forward to many amazing photo shoots with his new tiny subject!



Josiah loves to take photos in downtown Dallas, but he has favorite places in Waxahachie. The train tracks make a good backdrop, but he prefers a small garden located across the street from College Street Restaurant & Pub. A small ravine covered with flowers provides many different options. He loves taking photos outdoors in the early evening. "Sunset photos are always beautiful," he said. "Overcast days are the best."

Although he loves taking photos of their dogs, he'd rather capture people, especially in unposed shots. "I love capturing moments," he said. He suggests a pose and then waits. When a fiancé whispers something in the bride's ear and they both laugh, he catches that moment of genuine laughter and joy. He always watches for glimpses of reality.



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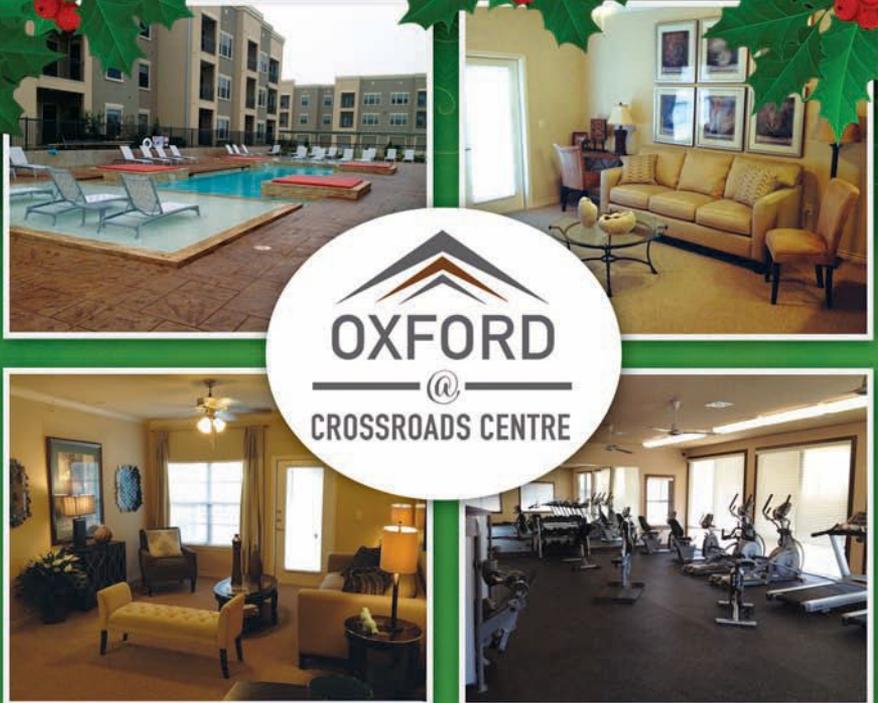
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To enhance his own work, Josiah studies other photographers and applies what he likes from their techniques. "I definitely get a lot of inspiration from other photographers. Sometimes, my wife and I go out and take random photos just for fun. We try different poses and different locations," he said. "Our family doesn't mind being test subjects."

Josiah and Merissa love the area. The community and atmosphere at SAGU make it a top-ranked place to work in the Dallas area. "The people are always loving, caring and ready to help," he said. "Working here has been a huge blessing."

They love the quaintness of Waxahachie and the small-town feeling,

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For unto us a  
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-Isaiah 9:6

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while still being fairly close to the big city. Both of them enjoy cooking and eating. They like to try out new restaurants and have many opportunities, whether they drive to Dallas or relax locally.

Currently, Josiah's biggest focus is being a dad and providing a stable home for their son. Although he loves working at SAGU and has no plans of leaving, he and his wife believe the Lord has more for them. Uncertain exactly how the future appears, Josiah looks forward most to spoiling his son. "I grew up with a wonderful father. He's been one of the biggest inspirations in my life," he said. "I look forward to being that positive influence in my own son's life — being the one he looks up to like I look up to my dad."

Merissa holds the place as Josiah's other biggest inspiration and his best critic. She points out what he does well, but also shares where he can improve. Often, he has her review photos, after he finishes editing and adding effects. "She has a creative side that helps out a lot," he said. "She's definitely my better half in every way possible. Anyone who knows me will tell you that." Josiah hopes to work more with media in the future, so he'll keep capturing unposed glimpses, with his beautiful wife by his side. **NOW**



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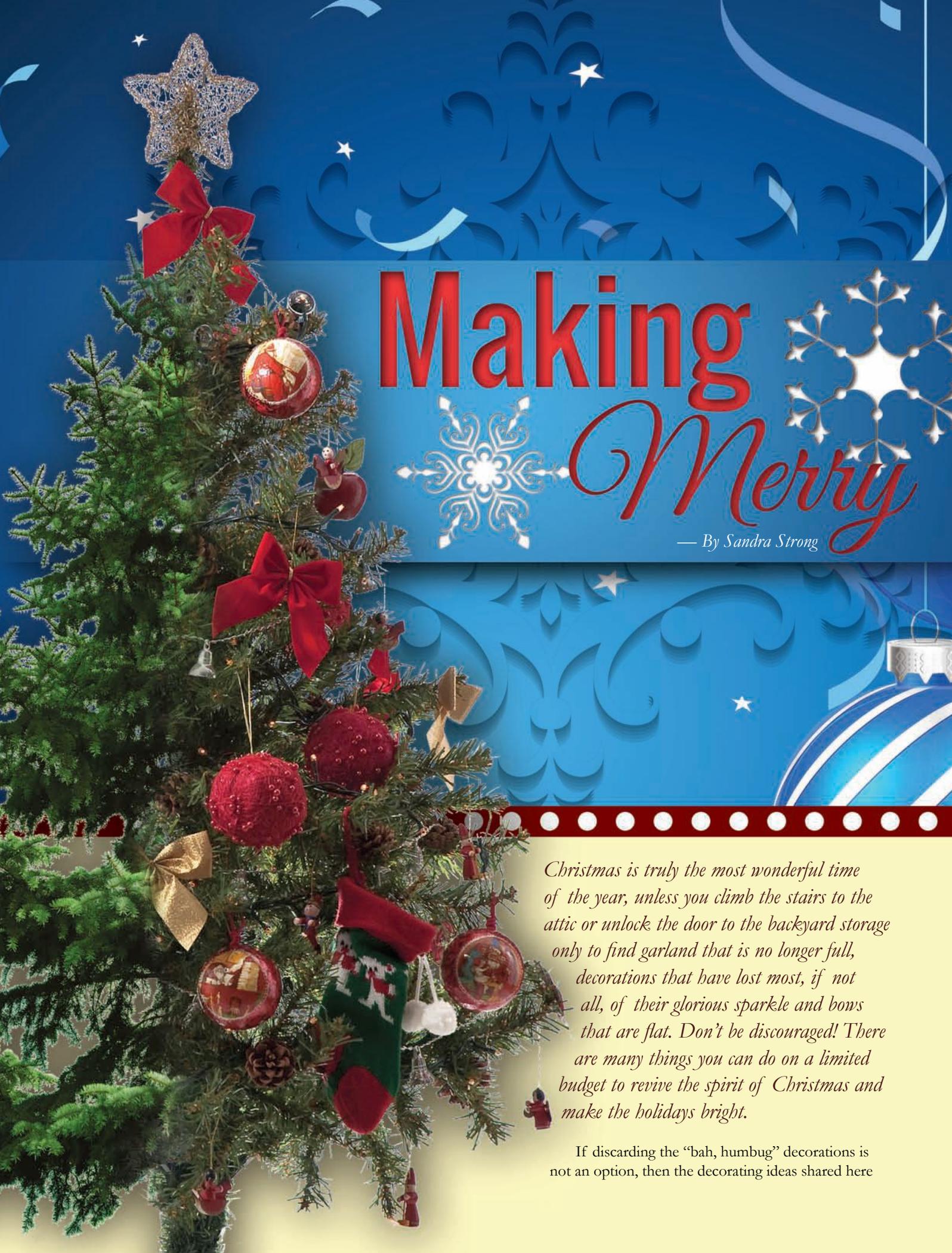
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# Making Merry

— By Sandra Strong

*Christmas is truly the most wonderful time of the year, unless you climb the stairs to the attic or unlock the door to the backyard storage only to find garland that is no longer full, decorations that have lost most, if not all, of their glorious sparkle and bows that are flat. Don't be discouraged! There are many things you can do on a limited budget to revive the spirit of Christmas and make the holidays bright.*

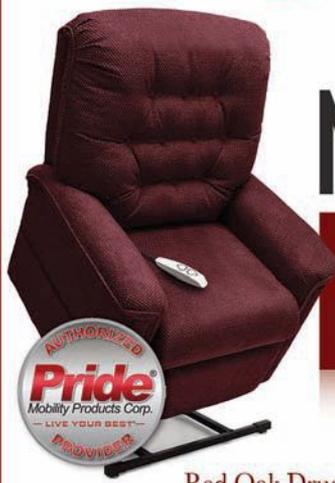
If discarding the “bah, humbug” decorations is not an option, then the decorating ideas shared here



will, hopefully, be the help you need to restore your holiday favorites to their original glory. Each suggestion can be accomplished alone, but why not get everyone together for some good, old-fashioned family time. You might even start a new Christmas tradition.

## Decking the Halls

Here are a few ways you can revive your garland. The easiest option is to take two strands of old garland and twist them together from one end to the next, securing both ends with floral wire. Once secured, the two strands will need



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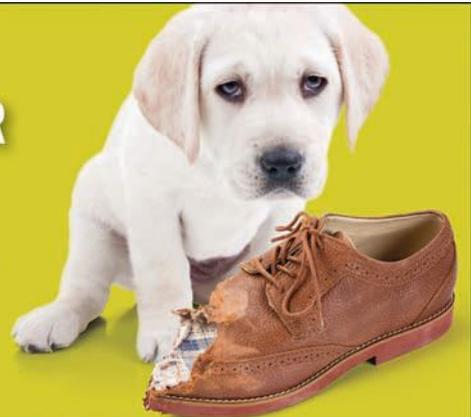
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to be entwined, one with the other. This process calls for patience and plenty of time to do it properly. As you entwine the two, you will touch each small limb on the garland strands, merging them together as you work from one end to the next.

To further fill out the garland, you can also add a string of twinkling lights and some holiday ribbon. These options can be added and removed from season-to-season in order to give the decorations a new punch each year. You might use white lights with blue ribbons one year and decide to go all out with red lights and Scotch plaid bows the next. One year, you may even decide to forgo the ribbons and bows and tie themed ornaments and festive greenery to the garland. As your taste in holiday decorating changes from year-to-year, now, so can your fluffy strands of garland.



## Trimming the Tree

Some homes boast one tall, regally standing, fresh cut tree, while other homes have trees of varying shapes and sizes in every room. Regardless of how many trees you display, there are some easy guidelines you can follow to ensure the tree-decorating process is one that lends to good memories, instead of huge holiday headaches. Patience will, once again, be important as you plug in the pre-lit tree or the string of lights to begin wrapping the tree in their warm

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glow. Last year, the pre-lit tree worked. You may find that it doesn't this year. The process to find the one bulb that has caused the lights to go out is difficult and, many times, impossible. In this case, you have three options — throw the tree out the backdoor, string working lights over nonworking lights or grab a trusty pair of scissors and start cutting the lights from the tree.

For those who opt for a tree that is not pre-lit, your struggles could be just as great, especially if the light Grinch somehow got into the lights that were organized and working when you stored them neatly away the year before! If you find this is the case, get a large cup of hot cocoa, have a seat and let the untangling begin.



### Ornamental Revitalization

Ornaments on a Christmas tree are what keep the memories alive within the branches each year. The engraved spoon commemorating baby's first Christmas, the paper star those same little hands made once they got to kindergarten and vintage glass decorations that have been passed down through the generations evoke emotions each time the tree is trimmed. Sometimes, these same decorations need to be rejuvenated to bring back their original beauty.

Silver polish and a buffing cloth will shine up the spoon in no time. All it takes to add a button or some glitter back to the paper star is a few small dots of Elmer's glue. The vintage decorations will

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Regardless of what you decide to do, the main focus should be on having family fun. Garland, decorations and bows will come and go, but your Christmas memories can last a lifetime, if they are preserved and cared for properly. **NOW**

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Don't come to Ogden expecting a typical mountain town. Al Capone is rumored to have said Ogden was too wild a town for him in the 1920s. While Ogden has recently experienced a renaissance, O-town's soul will always be a bit rowdy.

As Utah's oldest settlement, Ogden was once the intersection of the West. In 1896, transcontinental railroad officials designated Ogden as their junction point. More than 120 trains passed through Ogden each day. Today, Ogden's accessibility makes it a gathering spot for visitors and locals alike.

Ogden is the perfect place to hike or bike the area's 230-mile trail system, cling to 1,000-foot walls, kayak in Ogden's two adventure parks or paddle 13,000 acres of flat water. Ogden offers adventure for novice to advanced seekers with multiple adrenaline-filled options.

The area boasts three major ski resorts — Snowbasin, Powder Mountain and Wolf Mountain — 25 minutes away from downtown. The resorts offer a combined 10,000 acres of skiing with an average of 400 inches of the white stuff. No lift lines mar the landscape, just open terrain and access to pristine groomers and powder shots, not to mention spectacular views. *Ski Magazine* consistently ranks Powder Mountain and Snowbasin resorts in the top five for value, snow, on-mountain dining and service.

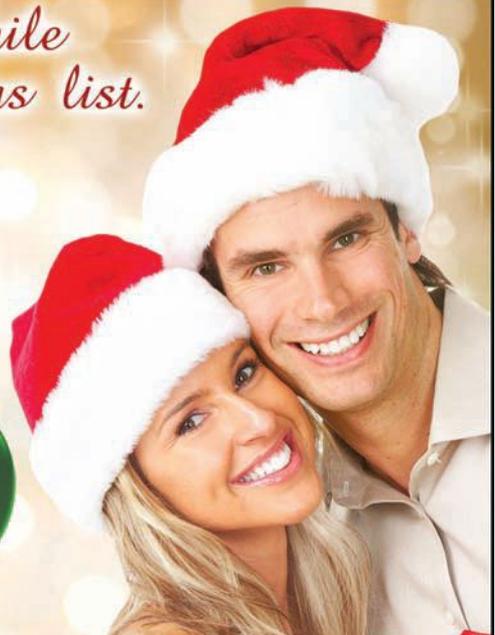




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After absorbing Ogden's 170,000 acres of national forest, three ski resorts, miles of trails or 13,000 acres of lakes connected by pristine rivers, you can head downtown for a cool place to hang with friends. Charming, historic 25th Street is injected with local love, featuring boutique shopping, galleries, independent restaurants and bars. Visit Tona, voted one of the top-10 ski-town sushi restaurants by *Ski Magazine*, or Roosters Brewing Company and Restaurant, where craft beer is an unforgettable experience. Dining options, such as Union Grill, Bistro 258, The Lucky Slice Pizza and Hearth on 25th offer gourmet options for any palate. Alleged is a stylish lounge with an eclectic mix of music that pays homage to the nefarious activities that reportedly took place on Historic 25th Street.

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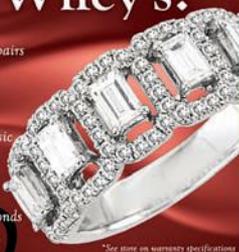
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Downtown Ogden offers live entertainment, museums, culture and events. Visit Fort Buenaventura for an epic sporting event or mountain man rendezvous. Tour the Union Station's numerous museums, including the John M. Browning Firearms Museum or the Utah State Railroad Museum among others. Experience live theater, music and dance at Peery's Egyptian Theater or browse one of the 20 fully operating galleries displaying original works of art. Additionally, a number of nationally recognized events take place throughout



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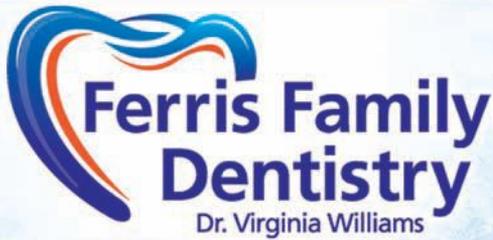
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Jason and Nicole Chambers (right) are ready to serve customers who have remained faithful since Nicole's parents, Phillip and Diana Downs (left), opened for business in 1982.

# Firm Foundation

*Nicole and Jason Chambers follow in the footsteps of the past. — By Sandra Strong*

Niños Mexican Restaurant has been a Waxahachie tradition since 1982. “My parents, Phillip and Diana Downs, operated Niños for 27 years before retiring the business,” current owner Nicole Chambers shared. The restaurant was closed to faithful customers for four-and-a-half years before Nicole and her husband, Jason, were in a position to reopen in September 2013, as the new owners of Niños Mexican Restaurant.

It was amazing how many of Jason’s thoughts for the reopening mirrored Nicole’s. They continue to stand firm in the decisions they made at the beginning of their journey. “We quickly decided, ‘Why change what’s worked for so long?’” Jason said in reference to Niños’ first 27 years.

They have been at their new location since February 2015. Although they may have downsized in overall square footage, Niños

will seat 96 customers, and parking is no longer an issue. Nicole and Jason are on the premises all day overseeing the restaurant from opening to close. They work side-by-side with their employees to lead by example and be able to say, “There is nothing we won’t ask you to do that we wouldn’t do.”

The staff they manage is made up of 15 part-time individuals. Nicole hires high school students as a way to give young adults an opportunity to work. “A first job is very important. It can shape how a student will work as an adult,” Nicole explained. “Just like my parents before us, we are helping these young adults build a firm foundation, while also teaching them positive character traits.”

Some may work only one day a week because that’s all their school schedule will allow. Nicole and Jason are conscious of extracurricular school activities and church functions when it comes

to their younger employees. “The mantra we live by is God first, family second and other activities third,” Nicole admitted, as Christian music played softly in the background. “We have always encouraged them to be busy at school and at church.”

Although many things have changed in the restaurant business since Nicole’s parents first opened Niños Restaurant, one thing has definitely stayed the same — Niños hot sauce. The recipe dates back over 30 years. “My dad made a mistake with the wrong size spoon,” Nicole confessed. “He put more spices in than the recipe called for.” By accident, Phillip created an entirely new recipe that customers have come to expect and enjoy. “The recipe has not changed over the years because of its lasting popularity,” Nicole stated. The French dressing is also a Niños mainstay. “It has a wonderful taste alone *or* mixed with the hot sauce,” Nicole added.

**“The mantra we live by is God first, family second and other activities third.”**

Niños Mexican Restaurant serves delicious Mexican combination plates, but rib eye steaks, chicken fried steaks and burgers with all the fixings are also available. The Tuesday menu offers “all-you-can-eat” dinner plates, while Fridays are reserved for fajitas and game day specials. “Municipal workers get a discount any time they dine with us,” Nicole said. “Half price lunch for city employees is Tuesday.” These are just a few of the many ways Nicole and Jason give back to the community that’s brought them success as one of many “mom and pop” businesses in the area.

The hometown atmosphere at Niños is another carryover from the early days, which allows for the relaxed family dining that patrons have come to expect. As Nicole and Jason look to Niños’ future, they are actively discussing the possibility of a delivery service. But, regardless of what may come next, they will continue to walk proudly in the footsteps of the past. **NOW**

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*During their wedding reception, Chaz and Crystal Skoda smile for the camera.*



*Cub Scouts from Troop 681 provide one of the water stations along the Legacy Run route.*



*Approved Home Health is available for questions and answers during the business expo held at the Waxahachie Senior Center.*



*Darexa Crowe and managers Donna Hubs and James Simpkins are all smiles during the Hobby Lobby grand opening celebration.*



*The Fox Duo provides the music during the Legacy Run held throughout Waxahachie.*



*Glory Bound Vintage Market celebrates their grand opening as they receive a plaque from the Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce.*



*Julie Lam, also known as The Painted Lady, stops to pose before choosing just the right color.*



*The Waxahachie Chamber of Commerce holds a ribbon cutting for Yeldell, Wilson and Co. at their new Waxahachie location.*



*America performs 70's favorites at the Texas Country Reporter Festival.*

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## Time to Harvest Your Losses?

*The fourth quarter is a good time to determine if harvesting your losses would be an effective tax strategy.*



The fourth quarter is a good time to review your overall asset allocation to ensure it is both tax efficient and aligns with your financial goals. Since some investments generate more taxable distributions than others, it's important to evaluate your investments, after-tax returns, portfolio turnover ratio and historical distributions to get a sense of your annual tax liability. Especially at year end, you have the opportunity now to take steps to help minimize this year's tax liability.

One way to diminish your 2015 tax burden is to harvest capital losses in order to offset realized gains. The deadline to sell securities to realize a gain or loss is December 31, 2015. However, be aware of the "wash-sale" rule. This rule will not allow you to deduct capital losses on the sale of a particular security if you initiate a similar position within a 61-day period (30 days before the sale date and 30 days after the sale date). Note that these rules apply to both taxable and nontaxable accounts. So, for example, you can't liquidate a position in one account and establish a similar position in your IRA within that timeframe.

### Tax-loss harvesting dos and don'ts

**Do:** Sell depreciated investments that don't fit your strategy.

**Do:** Research your records and cost basis carefully before you sell any investment.

**Don't:** Undermine long-term investing goals for tax purposes.

**Don't:** Buy a substantially identical security within 30 days before or after the sale.

Source: Fidelity

If your capital losses are more than your capital gains, you can claim a capital loss deduction. You may use your total net loss to reduce your income dollar for dollar, up to the \$3,000 limit per year.

If you have a total net loss that is more than the annual limit, you can carry over that unused portion to next year and treat it as if you incurred it in 2016. If part of the loss is still unused, you can carry it over to later years until it is completely used up.

Here's an example of how to claim the capital loss deduction. Let's say Earl and Samantha sell securities at the end of this year. The sale yields a capital loss of \$7,000, and they have no other capital transactions. On their joint tax return for 2015, they can deduct \$3,000 of the \$7,000 loss. Next year, they can carry over the unused part of the loss, \$4,000 (\$7,000 - \$3,000), up to the limit for that year.

It's important to work with your financial and/or tax advisor to determine if harvesting your losses would be an effective strategy to help reduce your 2015 taxes. **NOW**

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*Jonathan Pope is a Raymond James Financial Advisor based in Duncanville.*

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## Straighten Up

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

“Stand up straight!” How many times have you heard that in your lifetime? It could’ve been from your mom, your teacher, dance instructor or a friend. Depending upon who gave the order, you may or may not have tried to accommodate them. But who wants to stand straight when a good slouch seems to work just as well? And, what about that cozy curl into the big chair? Why sit up straight when the opposite feels so right and comfortable? Here is an inconvenient truth: Unless you have been taught and encouraged to practice good posture, you probably need some encouraging reminders.

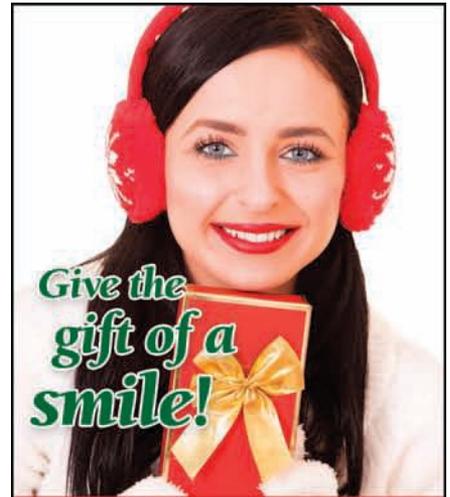
The correct posture follows the natural curvature of the spine. A good standing posture starts with holding your head up, shoulders back, stomach tucked, knees relaxed, not locked, and your feet a shoulder’s width apart. A good sitting posture begins with your buttocks touching the back of the chair. Have your back and shoulders straight and feet planted on the floor. Your weight should be equally distributed. Use an arm rest. If you need to turn while sitting, do not twist. Turn your whole body. Practice good computer posture by sitting with good posture and keeping your arms and wrists parallel to the floor. Make sure the computer screen is at eye level.

Posture plays a big part in your overall health. One of the areas impacted is your breathing. There is a reason programs

such as yoga and Pilates place so much emphasis on breathing. For the brain to function properly, it is critical for it to receive the oxygen it needs. This improves your critical thinking. Proper posture facilitates that. When you use good posture, your muscles, ligaments and joints are aligned as they should be, and this alignment allows internal organs to be positioned properly inside the body. When your organs are compromised because of bad posture, they can’t function as they should, and that sets up other issues, such as digestion or respiratory problems.

There is less wear and tear on the skeletal system when you maintain good posture, thereby lessening the prospect of injury. Going against this can set you up for arthritis, back pain and body fatigue. Good posture equals a more efficient system. Other considerations would be to invest in a good mattress for the good of your spine at night and an orthopedic pillow. Wear quality footwear. Sit in a solid chair that gives your back the support it needs. There are good reasons for all of this attention to posture. In addition, you will look better and exude confidence when you stand and sit up straight! **NOW**

*This article is for general information only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult with your physician if you have questions regarding this topic.*



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### December 3

Christmas Parade of Lights & Block Party: 7:00 p.m., downtown Ennis. Evening will include food trucks, children's activities and much more.

### December 3 — 5, 6

A Duo of One-Act Plays: *Little Women* and *The Olive Press*: Dec. 3-5, 7:00 p.m.; Dec. 6, 3:00 p.m., Hagee Communication Center's Black Box Theater, SAGU campus. Limited seating. Tickets are available at [www.sagu.edu/events/](http://www.sagu.edu/events/).

### December 4

VIP Shopping Party & Taste of Ellis County: 6:00-9:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at Interbank.

*Shrek the Musical*: 7:00-9:00 p.m., Ennis Public Theatre, 2705 N. Kaufman St. For more information, call (972) 878-7529 or visit [www.ennispublictheatre.com](http://www.ennispublictheatre.com).

### December 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19

*A Christmas Story*: 7:30-9:30 p.m., **Friday** and **Saturday**; **Sunday** matinees, Theatre' Rocks, 505 N.E. Main St. For more information, call (972) 878-5126 or visit [www.theatrerocks.com](http://www.theatrerocks.com).

### December 4 — 6, 11 — 13

Bethlehem Revisited: 6:00-9:00 p.m., 402 N. College St. directly behind Central Presbyterian Church. Free admission, but donations are always welcome. Call (972) 937-2924 or visit [www.cpcwax.org](http://www.cpcwax.org) for more information.

### December 5

Christmas Market & Gift Show: 9:00-5:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center. The event is sponsored by the Waxahachie Junior Service League. Tickets are \$5 at the door. Children under 10 are free.

Lucky's CC Car Show/Toy Drive: 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., N.W. Main Street in downtown Ennis. \$10 registration fee along with one unwrapped toy. Proceeds and toys from the event will benefit Mission Ennis – Bridge Builders Angel Tree. For more information, call Chubby at (469) 774-5692.

### December 5, 6

Candlelight Home Tour: 2:00-8:00 p.m. Visit three unique home, spanning from the Victorian era to the 21st Century, as they don their holiday finery. Tickets: \$15, children 12 and under are free. Visit [www.downtownwaxahachie.com](http://www.downtownwaxahachie.com) for more details.

### December 8

Ellis County Veterans Networking Group: 6:30 p.m., Ryan's Steakhouse, Waxahachie. Come join the group for dinner and listen to what the guest speaker for the evening has to share. For more information, call Mike Lamb at (214) 763-0378.

### December 10

Christmas Market: 5:30-8:00 p.m., Red Oak High School Cafeteria. Event includes a silent auction and several door prizes. Donations benefit the ROHS Special Needs Prom. Free admission. For more information, contact Melinda Hines at (972) 617-3535, ext. 6117.

### December 11 — 13

Happy Hollandaise – Winter/Christmas Showcase: Chautauqua Auditorium. For more details, visit [www.wct.texas@gmail.com](http://www.wct.texas@gmail.com).

### December 12

YMCA Santa Run: 8:30 a.m., registration begins; 10:00 a.m., 5K run begins with the 1-mile run/walk starting a few minutes later. Register or find out about volunteer opportunities by calling Jonathan McLaughlin at (972) 937-9622.

Cocoa Stroll: 4:00-8:00 p.m., downtown Waxahachie.

### December 12, 13

The Turkish Van Cat Connection Club Cat Show: Ellis County Expo Center. For event times and information, visit [www.TurkishVanClub.com](http://www.TurkishVanClub.com).

### December 13

Ellis County Gryphon Toy Run & Motorcycle Parade: 8:00-11:00 a.m. Riders will meet in downtown Midlothian. The parade will depart at 11:00 a.m. Proceeds benefit Ellis County children and the Midlothian Senior Center.

### December 22

Girl Scout monthly volunteer meeting: 7:00-8:30 p.m., Water Street Baptist Church, 804 Water St. For additional information, visit [joinus@gssu251.org](mailto:joinus@gssu251.org).

### January 12

National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association Chapter 1191 monthly meeting: 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Cancun's Ameri-Mex Restaurant, 1585 N. Hwy 77. The event also includes a guest speaker. For membership information, call (214) 850-4783.

### January 23

Annual 5K Run for Their Lives Round-up for Children: 8:00 a.m., registration; 9:00 a.m.,

race begins, Getzendaner Park, 400 S. Grand Ave. \$30 per person; groups of four or more are \$25 per person. Proceeds help support the Texas Baptist Home for Children adoptions. For more information and to register, visit [www.tbhc.org](http://www.tbhc.org) or email [cbarber@tbhc.org](mailto:cbarber@tbhc.org) for sponsorship opportunities.

### February 5

DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) Day: 8:45 and 10:15 a.m. Contact Melissa Cobb at [mcobb@wisd.org](mailto:mcobb@wisd.org) or (972) 923-4631 to reserve your place to read!

### Ongoing:

#### Mondays

Celebrate Recovery: 7:00-9:00 p.m., The Avenue Church, 1761 Hwy 77. For more information, call (972) 937-5301.

Celebrate Recovery: 7:00 p.m., Cowboy Church of Ellis County, 2374 Hwy. 287 Bypass W. For more information, call (972) 935-9801.

#### First Mondays

Friends of Sims Library meeting: 10:00-11:00 a.m., library meeting room, 515 W. Main St. Newcomers are always welcome.

#### Third Mondays

Ellis County Aggie Moms meeting: 7:00 p.m., Waxahachie First United Methodist Church, 505 W. Marvin. For more information, visit [www.elliscountyyaggiemoms.org](http://www.elliscountyyaggiemoms.org).

#### Fourth Mondays

Creative Quilters Guild of Ellis County meeting: 6:30-8:30 p.m., Waxahachie Bible Church, 621 Grand Ave.

#### Mondays and Thursdays

Fitness Revolution: 6:30 p.m., Salvation Army, 620 Farley St. Work out to fun aerobics choreographed to upbeat Christian and wholesome music. \$15 per month. Call (214) 477-1164 for more information.

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

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## In the Kitchen With Sue Allelo

— By Sandra Strong

Sue Allelo was once intimidated by the ease and perfection of her father's baking and cooking. "His food was always prepared without the use of recipes," she shared, "and he rarely measured the ingredients. His dishes were oozing with love." Now, Sue loves trying new recipes. She tweaks and experiments to create delicious meals for her family and friends. "I use ingredients that are fresh, healthy and colorful," she added. "I replace the bad stuff with healthier choices."

Sue finds inspiration by searching for new ways to add better nutrition to the meals she prepares at home. "I love learning from other cooks," she admitted. "I have encouraged our daughter, two sons and now our 8-year-old granddaughter to cook." Sue has made cooking a fun activity for the whole family. **NOW**

### Coffee-Brown Sugar Rubbed Beef Tenderloin or Rib Eye Steak

Serves 12.

- 1 trimmed beef tenderloin or 2-inch thick rib eye steak**
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil**
- 1/4 cup brown sugar**
- 3 Tbsp. finely ground coffee**
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper or red pepper flakes**
- 2 tsp. smoked paprika**
- 2 tsp. garlic powder**

- 1.** On a large sheet of plastic wrap, brush meat with oil on all sides. In a medium bowl, add remaining ingredients and mix. Rub this mixture onto all sides of the meat and wrap. Place in the refrigerator for 4 hours.
- 2.** Preheat oven to 450 F. Remove the meat from the plastic wrap. Place on rack in roasting pan filled with a couple inches of water. The meat should not touch the water but simply roast above it.
- 3.** Cook for 40-50 minutes, or until desired doneness. Medium rare is 145 degrees.

- 4.** Let meat stand on cutting board at least 10 minutes before thinly slicing. (Rib eyes may require more rub.)

### Elena's Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Pancakes

Makes 18-21 pancakes.

- 3 cups Krusteaz pancake mix**
- 1 cup pumpkin (can substitute with mashed banana or blueberries)**
- 2 cups water**
- 1 cup milk chocolate chips**
- 1/2 cup walnuts or pecans**
- 1/8 cup flaxseeds, ground or whole**
- 1/8 cup chia seeds**
- 1 tsp. cinnamon**
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla**
- Pat butter**

- 1.** Preheat griddle. Mix all ingredients, except butter, in a large bowl. Add more water, if necessary, a little at a time.
- 2.** Put butter on the griddle. Add pancake batter. Let pancakes bubble before flipping to the other side.

### Aunt Betty's Chicken & Dumplings

*Chicken:*

- 1 whole chicken**
- 1 32-oz. carton chicken broth**
- 12 cups water**
- 4 stalks celery, diced**
- 5 carrots, peeled and sliced**
- 1 large yellow onion, diced**
- 1 tsp. rubbed sage**
- 2 bay leaves**
- 1 Tbsp. dried parsley**
- 1 Tbsp. poultry seasoning**
- 3/4 cup cooled broth**
- 1 cup peas (optional)**
- Salt and pepper, to taste**
- 1 egg**

*Dumplings:*

- 2 cups flour**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- 1 pinch salt and pepper**

- 1.** For chicken: Rinse chicken, empty cavity and place chicken and broth in a large soup pot. Cover with water.
- 2.** Add all veggies, except the peas. Add seasonings and bring to a slow boil until chicken begins to fall apart.
- 3.** Remove chicken from the pot once the meat begins to fall off the bone. Allow it to cool somewhat, so you can remove all the meat from the bones.
- 4.** Set aside 3/4 cup of the stock, allowing it to cool. Continue to allow the broth and veggies to simmer for an additional 30 minutes, adding meat back into the pot. Add peas.
- 5.** Beat egg into 3/4 cup of cooled broth, set aside.
- 6.** For dumplings: Put flour, baking soda, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add the broth/egg liquid. Mix well. Add more flour, if needed.
- 7.** Roll out the dumpling dough. Cut into bite-size pieces. Drop them into the simmering pot, one at a time. Drop a few and wait, then drop a few more. This keeps them from sticking to one another. Stir gently. They will float to the top.
- 8.** Allow dumplings to cook another 10 minutes, and then taste. You may need to add more salt and pepper at this time. If possible, allow to cool; place in the fridge and reheat and serve the next day for flavors that really jump.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).

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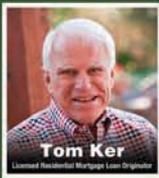
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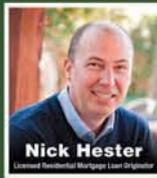
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