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DECEMBER 2018

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At Home With Jeff and Nicole Blackmon

2018 Holiday Shopping Guide

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*Managing Editor, Becky Walker | Midlothian Editor, Angel Morris
Editorial Coordinator, Sandra Strong
Editorial Assistant, Rachel Smith | Writers, Lindsay L. Allen
Corey C. Poole . Virginia Riddle*

GRAPHICS AND DESIGN

Creative Director, Chris McCalla | Artists, Kristin Bato . Morgan Christensen . Martha Macias . Brande Morgan . Anthony Sarmienta

PHOTOGRAPHY

*Photography Directors, Chris McCalla . Sandra Strong
Photographers, Kobbi R. Blair . Hannah Chartrand*

ADVERTISING

*Advertising Representatives, Joyce Sebesta . Cherise Burnett
Dustin Dauenhauer . Trent Dean . Bryan Frye . Ashlyn LeVesque
Kelsea Locke . Lori O'Connell . Melissa Perkins . Steve Randle
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ON THE COVER

The Blackmons showcase holiday trends throughout their home.

Photo by
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Angel

Angel Morris
MidlothianNOW Editor
angel.morris@nowmagazines.com
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Hello, Midlothian!

Here we are, one year into my role as editor for *MidlothianNOW*, and how quickly time has passed. What amazing people I have met, interviewed and photographed for these pages. How supportive I have found everyone with whom I've come in contact. It's the perfect time to say thank you as I reflect on the blessing of working in this community. With the city's continued growth, sometimes you may be tempted to suggest there is no more room at the inn. Instead, I increasingly see old-timers and newcomers alike embrace one another, and not just during the holidays. Month after month, I see you respond to the community and its people, its children, its teachers. I see "ask and ye shall receive" come to fruition.

While growing pains may mean more folks in need, it also means more folks to answer their prayers. No community is perfect, but isn't it in imperfection where we most find grace? I'm reminded of Charlie Brown's sad little pine tree that sparks Linus' reminder of what Christmas is really about. May you, too, find tidings of great joy in this town. Thank you for helping me share stories of those who bring goodwill year-round!

Have a wonderful month!

P.S. The publisher and staff of NOW Magazines would like to wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and the happiest of holiday seasons!

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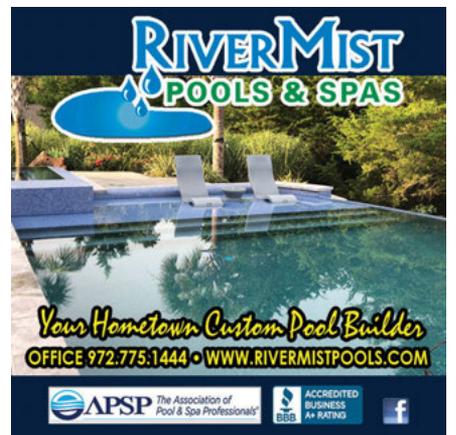
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What started as a rival relationship 25 years ago this month became a winning partnership between Randy and Nikki Clayton. After meeting on a blind date in December 1993, they became a couple that has served the Midlothian community well. "I was from Duncanville, and he was from DeSoto. Our friends were not thrilled about the rival matchup," Nikki recalled. "A mutual friend tried to set us up for a long time, but it never worked out. She finally succeeded, and we have been together ever since."

Soul

SERVANTS

— By Angel Morris



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Married in June 1997, Nikki and Randy were students at The University of Texas at Arlington. They lived near the college for one year, then moved to Midlothian and began building a reputation of servitude. “We began our community service through a ministry called Young Life. We volunteered as leaders and committee members for many years,” Nikki reflected. “Church has always been a way to serve for us, mainly with children’s ministry, but also women’s and men’s ministries.”

Over time, the couple realized some of Midlothian’s hidden needs. “Many in our wonderful town have no idea that we have kids here that are homeless, neglected, abused, addicted, hungry and just lost,” Randy noted.

Working with a group called Movement Toward a Future (today known as Mentors Care), the Claytons saw a way to partner Randy’s martial arts studio with local at-risk youth, and they created the Road Foundation. “Many young men in this program are fatherless and need a positive male role model in their lives,” Randy explained. “Anger and aggression can be a part of their struggle. Martial arts is a great physical outlet for this.”

The Road Foundation allows some to train for no cost and provides groceries, clothing and necessities for those in need. “There are so many people hurting. Not just teens, but adults as well. Through jiu-jitsu and mentoring, we meet people where they are and try to help them in any way we can. No one is turned away,” Randy said.

In August, Randy and Nikki combined their passions to create an after-school program in the community. Their foundation began Elevate After School, offering parents a child care option providing homework help, a

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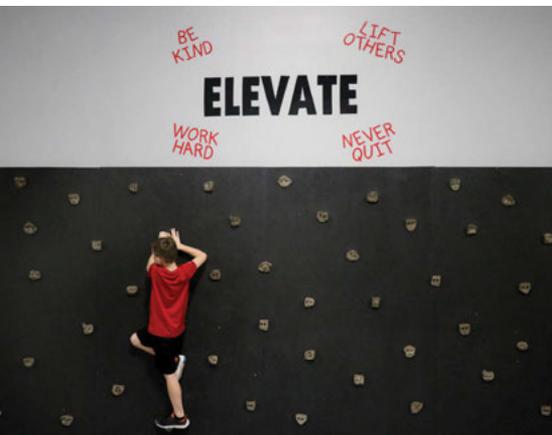
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martial arts class and physical activity. Elevate After School also offers transportation from schools to their gym, Soul Fighters Midlothian.

The program is currently full, but they hope to expand one day. "In the future, we hope our nonprofit will also allow us to provide scholarships for parents in need that cannot afford after-school care for their children," Randy explained.

Those who know the Claytons are not surprised by their civic-mindedness. In addition to their foundation work, Nikki is recognized as an MISD Teacher of the Year and beloved dance instructor. Randy and Nikki became even more recognized after their assistance following a tornado that struck the community in 2015. "One of Randy's closest friends lost their home in the tornado. Randy was on the scene checking on the family within minutes after the storm had passed," Nikki recalled. "Through helping this family, he was made aware of the heartache and destruction that the storm caused our community. That assistance just spread to others."



Nikki rallied assistance through social media and word of mouth, organizing teams to clear rubble, deliver meals and locate housing in conjunction with Red Cross initiatives. "It was an incredible time of watching people pull together for those in need," Nikki recalled.

As a coach and a teacher, Randy and Nikki believe service by example is the best lesson, especially for their own children. "We have always included our children in serving with us, when appropriate. Our kids help us serve in children's ministry at church and at our gym," Nikki noted. "We also like to do things together like delivering meals to

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the elderly and feeding the homeless. More importantly, we try to teach our kids to be kind to everyone they meet.”

The Claytons are especially sensitive to the fact that middle and high school are difficult times. “For some, those challenges can be life-changing. We hope and pray that our kids make a difference in the lives of those around them through kindness and inclusion,” Nikki said, “Our oldest is involved with the PAL and Partners in PE programs, mentoring younger kids. We know they’re far from perfect, but it’s so rewarding to hear stories from others about how our kids encourage other kids.”

Nikki is no stranger to encouraging children herself. “Teaching, to me, is about so much more than content. It is about loving kids, teaching them to love others and empowering them to be the best they can be,” she said. “Whether I’m in the classroom, the dance studio, the gym or church, my mission is the same. I strive to make children feel loved. A child who feels loved and empowered can do anything!”

The Claytons continued to serve by assisting in the startup of a new local church, Rock City Fellowship. “We try to love others as He loves us and live out that hope in our community,” Nikki said.

Proud to call Midlothian home for more than 20 years, the Claytons believe the community has repaid their efforts. “We’ve been very blessed in our lives and feel compelled to pass that along to others. Helping someone in need or making a difference in someone’s life is truly the most incredible reward,” Nikki shared. “We always say we just do for others what we know others would do for us.”

To that end, they encourage others to get involved. “Each of us has God-given gifts we can use to help others. Reach out, smile at a stranger, befriend a neighbor, deliver a meal, donate clothing or food, read to a child ... there are endless options. It doesn’t have to be huge. If you see a need, help!” Nikki suggested. “Mentors Care, in MISD high schools, is a wonderful way to make a difference, and it requires one hour a week of your time. Building relationships with youth in our community ensures that Midlothian, and our world, will be a better place in the future.” **NOW**



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COUTURE CHRIS

AT HOME WITH JEFF AND NICOLE BLACKMON

While Christmas trees adorn homes across the country and around the globe, some of the best decorated trees may well be in and around Midlothian thanks to Nicole Blackmon. And some of those trees are even found in the home Nicole makes with her husband, Jeff, and their two children, Briley and Jayden.

The Christmas tree tradition most Americans know is said to date back to 16th-century Germany, when Christian families either brought trees inside to decorate or covered wood pyramids with evergreens. Prior to this practice, people used fir tree branches to decorate inside as a reminder that spring was coming, and the world would soon be green again.

In the mid-1800s, a newspaper image of popular Queen Victoria and Prince Albert standing with their family around a Christmas tree made the idea trendy in Britain and America. Today, Nicole Blackmon is the queen of local tree displays.

“We have an annual breakfast with Santa at our home where a friend of ours saw all my decorated trees one year. Well, she told everyone about them and, through word of mouth, I started getting requests to decorate other people’s trees,” Nicole explained.

Nicole decorates about three dozen trees for clients each season, starting in November, which puts her own home’s decor on the back burner. “I like to think outside the box and be creative with my clients’ trees. I love, love to do theme trees. They are my favorite,” Nicole said. “As a result, my own trees get the backseat and go up sometimes the week before Christmas.”





— By Angel Morris

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In their home, the Blackmons typically have eight trees each year, and surfaces are covered with favorite holiday pieces ranging from Mr. and Mrs. Claus figures to plush gingerbread men and women. Holiday bulbs and bobbles abound. “My love for Christmas decorating came from my mom. My mom owned a

Christmas store when I was growing up,” Nicole recalled. “I never grew up with a free-for-all tree or a tree with child’s ornaments. My mom had a tree in every room that was color-coordinated, so that is all I knew.”

Jeff appreciates Nicole’s eye for design and has learned to leave the decorating

to her ... especially at the holidays. “I knew from the beginning not to mess with her Christmas stuff, but I never know what to expect from year to year,” Jeff admitted of his wife’s ever-changing holiday decor.

After meeting through a mutual friend, then marrying in 2001, the Blackmons settled in the Midlothian home Nicole already owned. Today, they are in house number three in the city. “We chose the Crystal Forest neighborhood this time because it is a great area with a family-friendly atmosphere,” Jeff noted.



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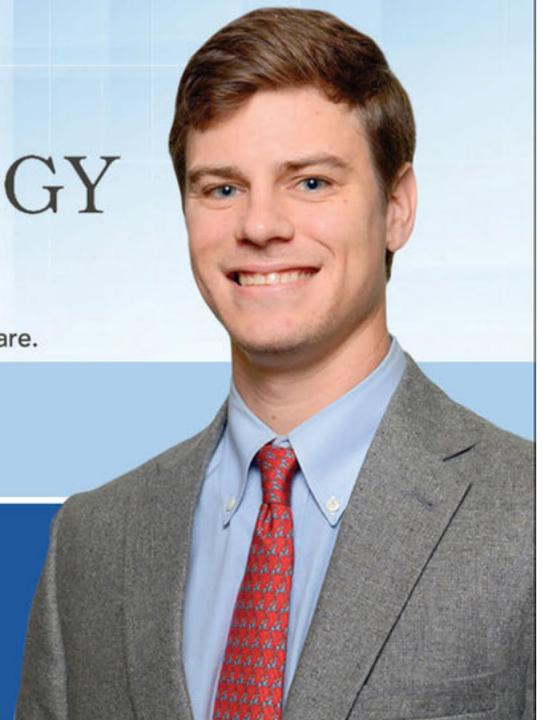
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The Blackmons' four-bedroom home was built in 2006 on a 1-acre lot. "We have remodeled the entire house with paint and the kitchen with cabinets and the area beneath the island," Jeff described. "Nicole is always wanting to update some area of the house."

While they consider their decor "traditional" the rest of the year, at Christmas, the house takes on a magnificent style all its own. Entering the holiday home, guests are greeted by an 11-foot greenery archway featuring white lights and leading into the living room where a main tree is bedecked in an entirely red theme from bows to bulbs. Here, the fireplace mantel features greenery covered in red bulbs of varied shapes and sizes; a 2-foot, red-glittered reindeer and tree; an evergreen letter B; and red polka-dotted stockings.

A life-size Santa keeps watch inside the home, which features additional trees from glam to playful. One tree showcases all golden decor, while another has plaid ribbon lacing through branches within which elfin ornaments and figures peek and play. A 3-foot plush elf stands near its branches.

Eleven-year-old Jayden's room depicts his baseball enthusiasm, with a blue tree highlighted by white lights, baseball bulbs and ornaments, topped with a leather baseball glove. A baseball-capped Santa figurine flanks the tree, which has *Take me out to the ballgame* streamers around it, as well.

Fifteen-year-old Briley's decor showcases her own personality, with a streamlined white tree and bulbs in shades of blue and gold surrounding leopard print ribbons to match the room's hues. A change to pink and black decor may be next, however.





Although each bedroom depicts its owner's style, Nicole says her favorite thing to do is use nontraditional materials and to change those from year to year. "Trees don't necessarily have to be decorated with ornaments," she said. "I've put pearls on a tree, used hat boxes — even snowmen that were meant for displaying elsewhere ended up in one of my trees."

Once the holiday decor is packed away for another year, the Blackmons' energies continue to be on family. Nicole is involved in Midlothian Cotillion, a series of evening social skills classes and activities for youth promoting confidence and courtesy. "We stay very busy chasing our kids with their involvement in several activities. They keep us on our toes," Jeff said.

And Nicole's love of holiday decorating keeps her busy for many months of the year, as well. "I start getting requests in August to decorate other people's homes," Nicole noted. "Every year, I say it's my last, and somehow I find myself hanging off a ladder to get an ornament in the right spot year after year."

Jeff is no stranger to the hustle and bustle of the holidays himself, as the family's pool business slows down, and exterior Christmas light placement kicks in. "He actually starts in October putting lights on houses and businesses!" Nicole said.

Taking in her own home full of Christmas spirit, Nicole admitted she doesn't know how she finds the time or energy — but she's glad she does. "I like going out and finding the latest pieces of holiday decor, and I have too many favorites to list," she said. "I love the unique ones that inspire me to do something different each year. I guess I'm a collector of Christmas!" **NOW**

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BLAZE



What began as a fun way to spend a few summer days has developed into a passion and potential career for 14-year-old Blaze Freeman. After a two-week film camp culminated in a performance for parents and agents, Blaze was approached regarding being represented in the film industry. He signed with his first agent within a week and has since become represented by the Dallas Kim Dawson Agency's Deeann Vernon.

"His first year he took classes, camps and seminars with coaches around the Dallas area. When we found Cathryn Sullivan's Acting for Film in Lewisville, we knew it was the right fit for him," Blaze's mom, Michele, said. "He has been there for three years and has advanced to her Masters Classes. She



— By Angel Morris



treats him like her own family and pushes him to reach his best.”

While acting seems to come naturally to Blaze, he admits it is not as simple as it might seem. “People think acting is easy, but sometimes I have two or three scripts to memorize in a few days, and they can be 15 pages or longer,” Blaze explained. “It’s harder than you think to switch characters and get into totally different stories when you have back-to-back auditions.”

Before he began acting, Blaze was like any boy his age, enjoying soccer, swimming, jumping on the trampoline and playing with the family’s black Lab, Remington. He also loves bike riding, skateboarding, traveling, scooters, riding his dirt bike and being part of his church’s youth group.

Michele and her husband, Mark, moved their two sons, Hunter and Blaze, to Midlothian in 2010, just before Blaze started kindergarten at Longbranch Elementary. Currently, Hunter is a senior at Heritage High School, and Blaze is a Walnut Grove middle schooler, where he

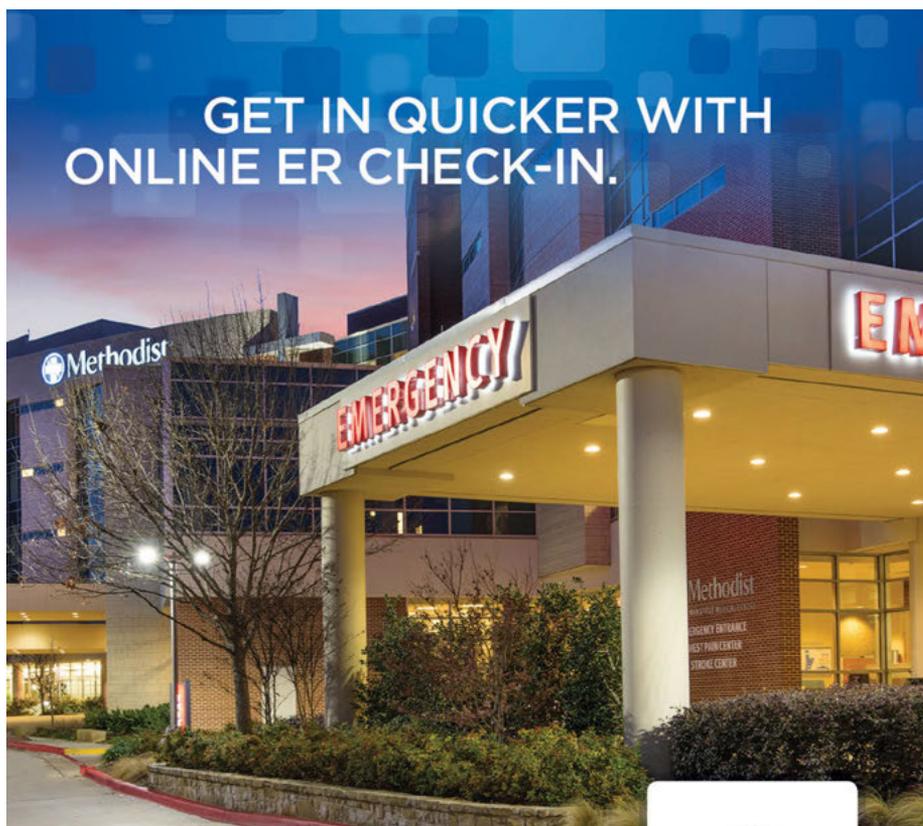
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One look at the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Blaze, with a spattering of freckles across his nose, and it is easy to see him acting on TV or in films. "I have done a few commercials [local and nationwide], videos, and I've been an extra in a few movies," Blaze recounted of his blossoming career. "The Promised Land Dairy commercial I did is my favorite because I got to work with cows, and I got to name and feed a newborn calf."

Blaze can also be seen in commercials for H-E-B groceries and TXU Energy, as well as inspirational videos touching on the subjects of perseverance and anti-bullying. His most recent video, *The Next Generation: We Are #Unstoppable* by Izzy Be, features a group of young teens explaining what they are capable of and how they feel about the way to treat others.

"Along with an audition, Blaze had to come up with five sayings about positive things he could be. The kids who were chosen were then sent to the company sponsoring the clothing in the video for them to choose who would best represent their brand," Michele explained.

Blaze has also been featured in print ads for Belk and AAFES and was even a credited character in the 2016 film, *Jerico*. "I knew there would be a lot of cameras and people, but this gave me a look at how you have to go back and do the same scene over and over and over again," Blaze explained. "But it confirmed that I love being in front of the camera, becoming a different person and convincing people you're that character."

After it became clear Blaze was serious about pursuing acting, Michele did not hesitate to help him follow this dream, including traveling to L.A. for audition seasons or training in February and July.

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"He gets a lot of positive feedback from these experiences," Michele said. "As a family, we decided we would make this work. Some families do whatever it takes for their children's sports, while we're doing what we can to support Blaze in acting."

Michele helped find acting coaches with local audition studios for TV shows or movies out of LA, including Lauren Lazell from Young Actors House in McKinney. "We go there and tape it, and she sends it off to the casting directors," Blaze explained, although he doesn't mind trips to California for in-person auditions. "I love the beaches and the scenery out there!"

With numerous acting classes and seminars under his belt, Blaze aspires to move to California for work on a TV show or movie in the next decade. "In 20 years, I would hope to have an Oscar and be a well-known actor," he admitted.

"He's just waiting on his big break!" Michele added.

Following the mantra, "Work until you no longer have to introduce yourself," Blaze is already building a social media presence, exceeding 30,000 followers on Instagram and promoting the hashtag, #BlazeofGlory. "My baseball coach began calling me 'B-O-G' for 'Blaze of Glory,' and it just kind of stuck," Blaze explained.

Also studying guitar and hip-hop dance to further expand his skills, Blaze described how he prepares for auditions. "I'll read the whole script if I get the whole thing, or I'll have my mom read me the description of the character for my part," he said. "Then I'll reflect on an experience that I might share with the character to get into that role, as I memorize and repeat each line. It's all mental."

Someday, Blaze would like to work alongside his brother, who is interested in directing. A Disney show is Blaze's current dream job, and he aspires to eventually emulate careers of actors such as Mark Wahlberg or Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. "They are humble and down to earth," he said.

As he works to make acting his profession, Blaze is willing to accept the rejections every actor must face. "There are a lot of 'noes' to get to one 'yes.' It's not as easy as it looks, and it's something you truly have to love," he said. "I'm ready for the hard work and dedication I'll have to give." **NOW**



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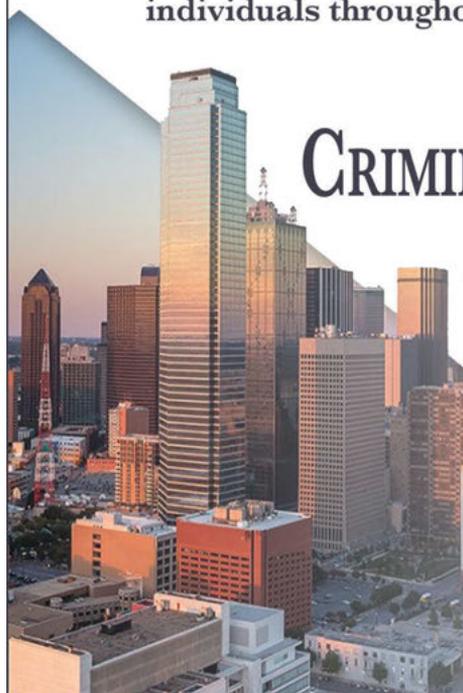
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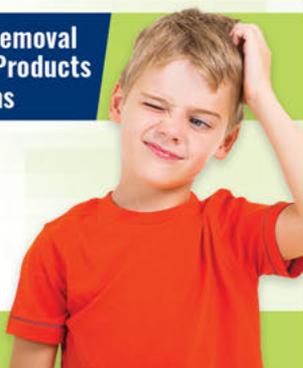
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Homemade Holiday

— By Angel Morris

Like the impromptu outdoor Christmas display that appeared at Mockingbird Lane and Walnut Grove Road in Midlothian last year, it is often small things that bring great joy. Gwen Sharb never imagined her simple act of hanging a few ornaments on a roadside tree would land her on TV, but that's exactly what happened. "It was nothing spectacular, but it still brought smiles and happiness," Gwen said of her modestly decorated shrub.

After someone posted a picture on Facebook with a thank you message to whomever initiated the idea, other people started adding to the tree on their own. Soon it was trending on local social media, and, before long, it expanded to multiple trees side by side.

Gwen's daughter, Kristen McClure, told FOX4 News last year

that the idea came from a similar activity in her former city of residency, where passersby would randomly add ornaments to a country tree. Kristen's children enjoyed adding their own ornaments then, and again can add ornaments in Midlothian now.

"We cleaned up the trees after Christmas," Kristen recalled. "It was neat to look at each ornament, wonder where they came from and how the families picked that ornament to hang."

This pop-up decor isn't the only unique local tradition. Renee and Billy McElheney enjoy an annual breakfast on the morning of Christmas Eve with Robyn and Mike Crocker. "Everyone is in their pajamas, and there is a fantastic breakfast smorgasbord including donuts, breakfast burritos and at least two pounds of perfectly cooked bacon," Renee explained.

A gift exchange and Christmas pictures round out this tradition between the friends and their children. "Robyn is my best friend from high school, and she really loves Christmas. She makes this killer hot chocolate that she won't give the

recipe for. So, this is a great opportunity to get my fill,” Renee admitted.

Other *MidlothianNOW* readers admitted to uncommon breakfast traditions, as well. “Every year since my sister and I were kids, we would see who could eat the most breakfast burritos Christmas morning. My highest was six, and my sister beat me by one every time,” Hannah Chartrand remembered. “We still do it to this day, but I can’t eat as much as I used to. My record now is three!”

Sandi Crothers-Sohn has continued a tradition in her family that other moms and dads might like to adopt. “When I was little until I moved out at 23, ‘Santa’ would leave our filled stockings at the end of our beds, so that Mom and Dad could have a few extra minutes of sleep Christmas morning,” Sandi explained. “Santa did this with my kids, too. However, as they got older, he would leave them outside their bedroom doors. The cat only got into them a couple of times!”

Levi and Jackie McDonald started a new Christmas tradition with daughters Emma, age 7, and Allison, age 5, when their girls were old enough to hold bingo cards. “Our favorite Christmas Eve tradition is Christmas Light Bingo. We drive around trying to see who can black out their bingo card first,” Jackie explained.

Before the girls could read, the cards featured images of traditional symbols, such as angels and Santa. Now the cards have words and phrases for the family to find within lawn displays: candles in windows, inflatable snow globes, decorated mailboxes and so on.

Jackie locates the pre-made cards on Pinterest, taking the stress out of the bingo fun. “Our girls get new PJs. And we make hot chocolate, and then drive around looking for the lights,” she said.

Whether inside with friends or outside bringing together strangers, holidays are a time for remembering old customs and making them anew. “I hope the tradition continues, and as cars drive by, they get the same sense of wonder my children did,” Kristen said of the Mockingbird and Walnut Grove tree decor. “And that new families will stop and add to the tradition.” **NOW**

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CookingNOW

In the Kitchen With

CRISTA FUNDERBURK

— By Lindsay L. Allen



Crista Funderburk loves being in the kitchen. She likes the challenge of cooking, and the fact that she started learning how to prepare food by smoking a brisket is proof of her appreciation of a challenge.

With her own homestead, she is busy tending to the orchards, honey bees, garden, goats and chickens, so their products can be used in her dishes. As a former student at Texas A&M University, she will only use Messina Hof wine, an Aggie-inspired winery, when cooking. "It's better than anything from California and supports the Texas wine industry," she said. A mom to three boys, she stays busy, but she is always looking for new recipes to try for her family and friends. **NOW**

Garlic Cream Mashed Potatoes

- 1 head garlic**
- 1-2 tsp. olive oil**
- Salt, to taste**
- Pepper, to taste**
- 5 lbs. russet potatoes**
- 16 oz. half-and-half**
- 1-2 sticks butter**

1. Preheat oven to 400 F.
2. Carefully peel skin from the outside of the garlic head until the cluster of cloves is exposed. Peel gently so no cloves separate from the head. Leave cloves intact in casings.
3. Slice top part of garlic head off, leaving cloves exposed. Drizzle olive oil over exposed

cloves at top of garlic head. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

4. Wrap in parchment paper with crimped end closed just above top of garlic head. Do the same with aluminum foil, wrapping it around the parchment paper. Make sure it's crimped shut for garlic to steam a bit. Roast 40-45 minutes until cloves are tender.
5. Peel and chop potatoes in equal-size chunks. Place chunks in a large saucepan. Add 2 Tbsp. salt; cover with water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat; reduce heat to maintain rolling boil. Cook until a fork can easily be inserted into potato pieces, and they start to fall apart.
6. Heat half-and-half and roasted garlic in a medium saucepan over medium heat until

simmering. Remove from heat; set aside.

7. Remove potatoes from heat. Drain water; mix in butter until melted. Pour garlic cream mixture a little at a time into potatoes. Once combined and to desired consistency, let stand for 3-5 minutes to thicken.

Red Wine-braised Short Ribs

- 5 lbs. beef short ribs, bone-in**
- Kosher salt, to taste**
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- 3 Tbsp. vegetable oil**
- 3 sweet onions, chopped**
- 3 medium carrots, chopped**
- 2 celery stalks, chopped**
- 1-2 heads garlic, chopped**
- 3 Tbsp. all-purpose flour**
- 1 Tbsp. tomato paste**
- 1 750-milliliter bottle red wine, dry**
(Messina Hof Cabernet Franc, Messina Hof Cabernet Sauvignon or Messina Hof Merlot)
- 3-5 bay leaves**
- 5-10 sprigs flat-leaf parsley**
- 4 sprigs fresh oregano**
- 6 sprigs fresh rosemary**
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme**
- 4 cups beef stock, low-salt**

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Season ribs with salt and pepper.

2. Heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, brown ribs on all sides, about 8 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate. Leave rendered fat in Dutch oven.

3. Into remaining rendered fat, add onions, carrots and celery. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring often, until onions start turning translucent, about 3-5 minutes.

4. Add garlic; cook 1-2 more minutes. Add flour and tomato paste; cook, stirring constantly, until well combined and deep red, about 2-3 minutes.

5. Stir in wine. Add short ribs with any accumulated juices. Bring to a boil. Lower heat to medium; simmer until wine is reduced by half, about 25 minutes. Add all herbs to pot. Stir in stock. Add more stock if ribs are not mostly submerged. Bring to a boil. Cover; transfer to oven.

6. Cook until short ribs are tender, about 2 to 2 1/2 hours.

Grandma's Cherry Junk

- 1 box Honey Maid Graham Crackers, crushed
- 2 sticks butter
- 2 8-oz. blocks cream cheese, softened
- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 cup pecans, chopped (optional)
- 12 oz. whipped topping
- 2 21-oz. cans cherry pie filling or topping

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Pour cracker crumbs into a 9x13-inch glass baking dish.

2. Cut butter sticks; microwave 30 seconds at a time, until completely melted. Pour over crumbs; stir until coated with butter. Press crumbs firmly into bottom of pan to form a thick crust. Place into pre-heated oven for about 15 minutes; remove and let cool completely.

3. Beat cream cheese to help soften further. While cream cheese is still beating, add powdered sugar, slowly. Mix in vanilla until well combined.

4. After crust has cooled, spread cream cheese mixture across entire top. If using pecans, sprinkle on cream cheese mixture now.

5. Spread whipped topping across whole dessert as the next layer.

6. Pour cherries evenly atop whipped cream for the final touch.

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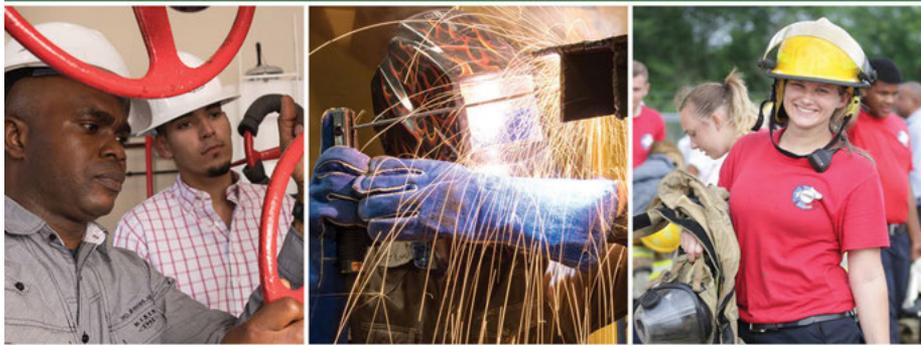


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TravelNOW

The City of Lights

— By Corey C. Poole

Natchitoches is known for many things — its culture, cuisine and hard to pronounce name (Nack-a-tish). Named after a Native American Indian tribe, Natchitoches translates to “pawpaw eaters,” a fruit tree once plentiful in the region.

From its roots as the oldest settlement in the Louisiana Purchase, Natchitoches was established in 1714 by French explorer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis as a French Outpost along the Red River. After the river changed its course in the late 1800s, Cane River Lake was created, a 33-mile long section of the Red River that is now landlocked. The downtown Historic District is nestled along the banks of this picturesque body of water.

“The City” is known as the filming location for *Steel Magnolias*, as the Bed and Breakfast Capital of Louisiana and as a popular tourism destination. Nicknamed “The City of Lights,” Natchitoches is best known for its six-week Christmas Festival of Lights, featuring more than 300,000 lights that make the town twinkle with magic. Starting the weekend before Thanksgiving with a “Turn on the Holidays” celebration, the festival continues through January 6. The

official Natchitoches Christmas Festival Day is the first Saturday in December. A Christmas parade winds its way through downtown. Vendors sell fresh meat pies, and bands perform through the night. 2018 marks the 92nd annual celebration.

While this is the most popular festival, there’s a plethora of events to enjoy year-round. Enjoy a day of competition, and cheer on rowers at the Dragon Boat Races, held annually at the beginning of March. In April is the Melrose Arts and Crafts Festival, where more than 100 vendors sell their wares beneath the canopy of oak trees at Melrose Plantation, just 17 miles south of Natchitoches. And the Natchitoches Jazz R&B Festival is held annually in May with four stages playing a variety of music from jazz to rock.

For 39 years, the Natchitoches/NSU Folk Festival has been held annually in July in the air-conditioned Prather Coliseum on the Northwestern State University Campus. Browse through vendors and demonstrations, and listen to an eclectic variety of musicians.

Both the Fall and Christmas Tour of Homes offer sneak



peeks inside some of the town's historic buildings, presented by the Natchitoches Historic Foundation and the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches. Also in the fall, stroll the streets and look under the hoods of antique autos at the annual Natchitoches Classic Car Show.

Each October, prominent figures from Natchitoches' history come to life at History Among the Tombstones: Stories from the American Cemetery. And the Grand Ecore Visitors Center, Los Adaes State Historic Site and Fort St. Jean Baptiste each offer unique programming throughout the year from lectures to demonstrations and re-enactments.

Stroll through downtown shops like Kaffie Frederick — Louisiana's oldest general store. Bring a boat and cruise Cane River and Sibley Lake for some of the best fishing spots around, or grab a kayak and take it slow. Whatever adventure you have in mind, Natchitoches will welcome you with its true Southern charm and hospitality. **NOW**

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— By Virginia Riddle

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(972) 775-5550
linda.averitt@yahoo.com
Facebook: Lee's Jewelry & Repair

Hours: Tuesday-Friday: 10:00 a.m.-5:59 p.m.
Saturday: 9:00 a.m.-2:29 p.m.

Want some sparkle for your neck, wrist or hand? Stop by Lee's Jewelry & Repair to talk with shop owners, Lee and Linda Averitt. "We are Midlothian's only jeweler," Lee said. "I cut up with everybody who comes by and love getting to know people. I will get a smile on customers' faces and put them in a good mood."

A Louisiana native, Lee first started working at a jewelry store next door to his dad's movie theater in Alexandria while he was still in high school. Inspired, he attended trade school to learn jewelry design and watch repair. "I've been in the business ever since," he said proudly. Linda Averitt and Lee met at a jewelry trade show, and a "jewel" of a marriage and business partnership was formed.

Lee custom designs and repairs jewelry and watches in-store. "If I can't do the work needed, I refer the customer elsewhere," Lee said. Need that special gift for a special person? Lee and Linda carry Seiko mantel and wall clocks; decorative vases; pre-owned Rolex watches; bracelets; pendants; earrings; necklaces; chains; G-SHOCK, WeWOOD and Pulsar watches; and rings for all occasions. The store's high Facebook rating and patron comments speak volumes about Lee and Linda's excellent customer service.

“Everything’s for sale. We’ve sold our own wedding rings right off our fingers several times. I’ll even sell Lee,” Linda joked. “He comes with a brand-new Corvette!”

Lee and Linda, along with one daughter who works part time in the shop, greet customers personally. The couple accepts all major credit and debit cards and cash as payment. “We’re an old-fashioned mom-and-pop store. We also offer a layaway plan,” Lee said.

Lee custom designs and repairs jewelry and watches in-store.

Having been in business in Duncanville for 10 years and DeSoto for 13 years before moving to the store’s present Midlothian location five years ago, Lee and Linda are helping customers who first came to them as children. “We’ve seen kids grow up, sold them wedding rings, and they are now returning for their children’s jewelry,” Lee explained. “Everywhere we go, people know me as Mr. Lee.”

The store is a Third Tradition and Midlothian Classic Wheels sponsor. “We sponsor Midlothian High School activities and provide free watch batteries to law enforcement personnel and firefighters,” Lee stated. Plaques presented to the store in appreciation from these groups line the walls.

Linda, raised in both Austin and Dallas, and Lee are parents to two grown daughters and one son. They have five grandchildren. Since working and living together 24/7 can be challenging, they enjoy traveling for a change of pace. “We’ve cruised to Alaska and the Caribbean and have been to a lot of the states, including Hawaii,” Lee noted.

Linda invites shoppers to stop in and see what they have to offer. “We enjoy people. Some folks come in just to talk. In five minutes after meeting someone new, Lee knows everything about them and will remember their names,” she said. “We treat people honestly, fairly and the way we like to be treated. Come by and see us.” **NOW**

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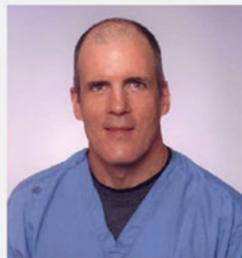
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Zoomed In: Chuck Lee

By Angel Morris

One of many helpers employed by Santa Claus to portray him, Chuck Lee spends much of the season in Midlothian. Helping Santa since 2011, Chuck has visited families of the Dallas Cowboys and the Dallas Mavericks, been in commercials for American Airlines and is guest of honor this year in Waxahachie's Christmas parade. "My most fulfilling gigs are for dog rescue groups and special needs adults. I also love the Storybook Santa Experience here in Midlothian with Ivey Photography," Chuck said.

Fans can learn more about Chuck at his website HeresSanta.com. "I listen to a few items from wish lists, but it's important to hear from kids on how they are making a positive impact on the world. How they help their family, if they are kind, those kinds of things!"



Eva Jacobsen and Kasey Cheshier earn the Overall Female and Male running times at the Midlothian Cupcake 5K.



Methodist Home Group members encourage residents to donate to or take from the Little Free Pantry located at 817 W. Avenue E.



Members of the Midlothian High School Theater group perform at the Fall Festival.



Members of the Midlothian Heritage High School Choir perform at one of their annual Coffee House events.



Entrepreneurs Khloe and Kassidy debut their original Pink Flamingo Slimes in Midlothian.



Dr. Stephen Mansfield, President and CEO of Methodist Health System, and Mayor Bill Houston, celebrate the Methodist Midlothian Hospital groundbreaking.



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The National Merit Scholarship program recently announced that five MISD students earned Commended or Hispanic Scholar status.

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Kids' Fun Pages

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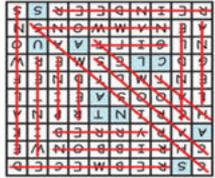
Can you spot the two identical pictures?

ANSWER: 9 7

MYSTERIOUS WORD:

C	S	R	E	B	M	E	C	E	D
C	H	R	I	B	B	O	N	W	E
A	A	R	Y	R	R	E	B	I	K
H	C	R	I	N	T	R	P	N	A
L	A	O	O	S	A	E	I	T	L
E	N	T	M	L	T	D	N	E	F
G	D	C	L	E	S	M	E	R	W
N	L	G	I	F	T	A	A	U	O
A	E	N	A	M	W	O	N	S	N
R	E	I	N	D	E	E	R	S	S

- ANGEL
- BERRY
- CANDLE
- CAROLS
- CHRISTMAS
- COMET
- DECEMBER
- GIFT
- HAT
- PINE
- RED
- REINDEER
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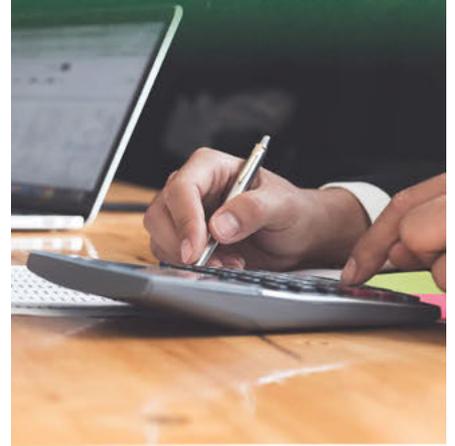
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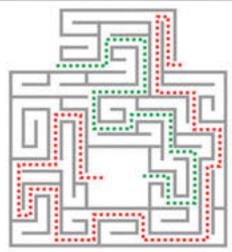
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ANSWER:



Draw a line from dot number 1 to dot number 2, then from dot number 2 to dot number 3, 3 to 4, and so on. Continue to join the dots until you have connected all the numbered dots. Then color the picture!



ANSWER:

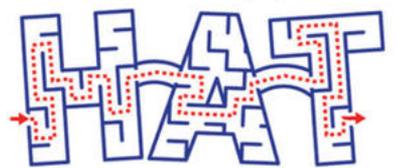


ANSWER:



Help Santa get through the HAT maze to catch up to his hat. It was blown away by the wind.

ANSWER:



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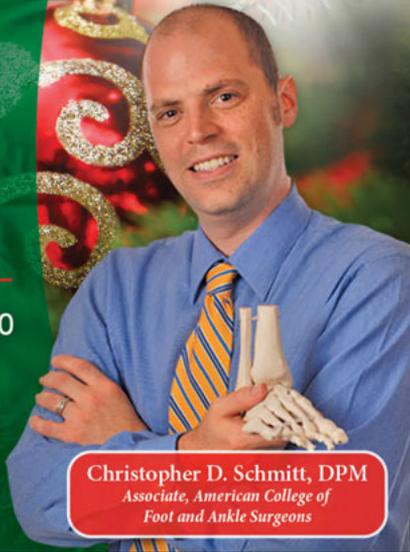
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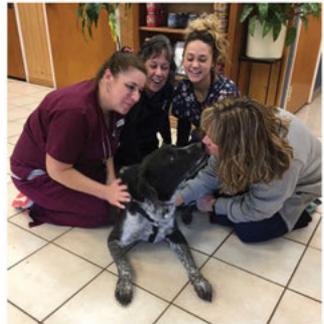


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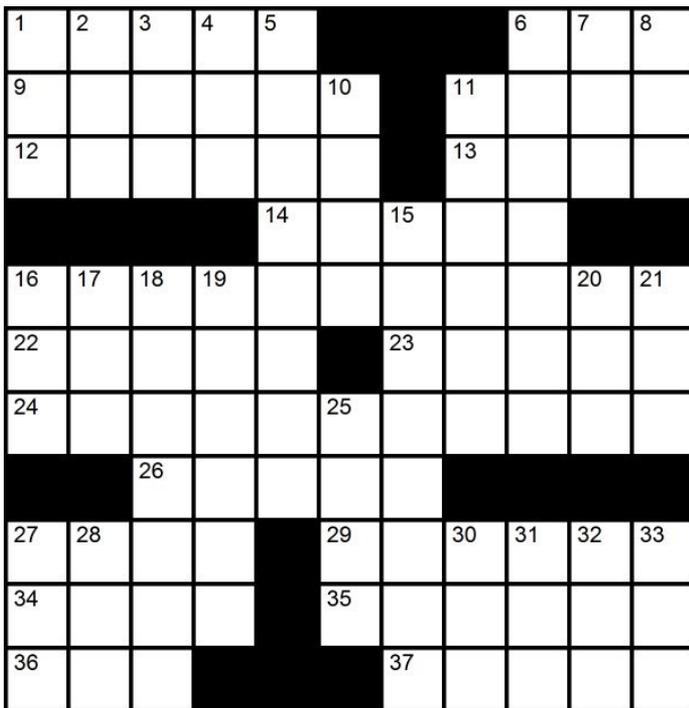


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Across

- 1 Spud source
- 6 Short boxing punch
- 9 Roomy autos
- 11 Sainly symbol
- 12 Accident
- 13 "I suppose"
- 14 Match
- 16 Turnpike convenience
- 22 Solo numbers
- 23 Like certain organs
- 24 Multiply rapidly
- 26 Teacher
- 27 Gratis
- 29 Onetime Disney chief
- 34 Obstructs
- 35 How bodysuits fit
- 36 They go with outs
- 37 Pixie

Down

- 1 Doctrine
- 2 Agnus or Opus follower
- 3 Sales aids, for short
- 4 "Baloney!"
- 5 Stopping by
- 6 Capital of Indonesia
- 7 Cotton state
- 8 Early man?
- 10 Building detail, briefly
- 11 Type of balloon
- 15 Breaking off
- 16 Plant juice
- 17 Sin
- 18 Unruly mob
- 19 Appraises
- 20 Consume
- 21 Malt beverage
- 25 Hatfields and McCoys
- 27 Crime fighters
- 28 Hurried
- 30 Daystar
- 31 The Y is one
- 32 Horror street
- 33 Cereal grass

Solutions on page 56

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

Medium

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

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Solutions on page 56

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
S	E	D	A	N	S	H	A	L
M	I	S	H	A	P	O	K	A
			V	E	S	T	A	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
A	R	I	A	S	V	I	T	A
P	R	O	L	I	F	E	R	A
			T	U	T	O	R	
27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
F	R	E	E	I	S	N	E	R
B	A	R	S	S	N	U	G	L
36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44
I	N	S	G	N	O	M	E	

Easy

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

Medium

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

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12/1

Midlothian High School PeeWee Cheer Camp/Parent Shopping Day: Activities for boys and girls ages 3+. \$50 includes lunch, a visit from Santa and the chance to learn a routine. 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., MHS Arena, 923 S. 9th St. For details, email amy_wright@misd.gs.

Hometown Christmas Craft Show: Gift items, tasty treats, drawings, prizes and swag bags. \$3 per adult; kids admitted free with a paid adult. 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Midlothian Conference Center, 1 Community Circle Dr.

Southern Star Christmas Celebration: Holiday activities and entertainment followed by the Light Up Parade. Noon-6:00 p.m., downtown Midlothian and Heritage Park, 234 N. 8th St.



12/3-12/4

Santa at Heritage House: Bring a camera for your own photos. One ticket equals five minutes with Santa. Tickets are \$40. 5:00-8:00 p.m., 6881 FM 1387. Email SnowShack.HeritageHouse@gmail.com or visit Eventbrite to register.

12/7-12/9

Waxahachie Community Theatre's *Christmas Belles*: Tickets are \$10. **Friday** and **Saturday**, 7:30 p.m.; **Sunday**, 2:30 p.m., University Church, 221 Solon Rd., Waxahachie. waxahachiecommunitytheatre.com.

12/8

Homemade Cookie Walk: Proceeds benefit FOOD4KIDS program. 10 a.m.-

2:00 p.m., Midlothian First United Methodist Church, 800 S. 9th St. For details, call (972) 775-3993.

12/9

Worldwide Memorial Candlelighting: Compassionate Friends of Southwest Dallas invite anyone who has lost a child to its candlelight remembrance. 6:45 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 427 W. Ave. C, Duncanville. info@tcfswdallas.org.

12/11

Breakfast with the Blue: 8:00-9:30 a.m., Courtyard by Marriott, 3 Community Circle Dr. Businesses register at www.midlothianchamber.org.

Cancer Survivor Support Group: 6:30-8:00 p.m., Cowboy Church of Ellis County, 2374 W. Hwy. 287 Bypass, Waxahachie.

12/13, 12/15

Totally 80's Christmas Concert: Midlothian Heritage Jaguar Choir performance. Adults \$10; students and seniors over 65 \$5. **Thursday**, 7:00 p.m.; **Saturday**, 2:00 and 7:00 p.m., MHHS Cafetorium, 4000 FM 1387.

12/15

Vanity With A Chill Fashion Show: \$20 admission benefits The Mint Foundation toy drive. New, unwrapped toys also welcomed. 6:00 p.m., Midlothian Conference Center, 1 Community Circle Dr. vwacfs@gmail.com.



Mondays

Celebrate Recovery meeting: 7:00-9:00 p.m., The Lighthouse Church, 1400 N. 9th St. jason@dfwlighthouse.org.

Second and Fourth Mondays

Rag-Tag Readers Book Club: Book club for kids. 10:00 a.m., A.H. Meadows Public Library, 923 S. 9th St. For details, call (972) 775-3417.



Third Mondays

Writers' Circle: 6:00 p.m., A.H. Meadows Public Library, 923 S. 9th St. writerscirclemidlo@gmail.com.

Tuesdays

Rotary Club meeting: Noon-1:00 p.m., Midlothian Civic Center, 224 S. 11th St. midlorotary@gmail.com.

First Tuesdays

Midlothian Area Historical Society meeting: 7:00 p.m., Community Room of CNB, 310 N. 9th St. Edwin Bateman at (972) 743-2379.

Wednesdays

DivorceCare Support Group: 6:30-8:00 p.m., First United Methodist Church Family Life Center, 800 S. 9th St. For details, call (972) 775-3993.

Second Wednesdays

Sarah's Laughter: Support group for infertility and child loss. 7:00-8:30 p.m., Gateway Church Midlothian, 555 N. Walnut Grove Rd. For more details, visit www.sarahs-laughter.com.

Fridays

Preschool Storytime: Story, craft and snack provided. 11:00 a.m., A.H. Meadows Public Library, 923 S. 9th St. (972) 775-3417.

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to angel.morris@nowmagazines.com.

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We all know them. We have probably heard them hundreds of times. This year FBC Midlothian is going deeper into some of the most classic Christmas songs of all time. From "O Come Emmanuel" to "Silent Night," these songs paint a much clearer picture of the birth of Christ!

We hope you will be able to join us in this series starting December 2.

SUNDAY
DECEMBER 23*

9:30 & 11:00 am

MONDAY
DECEMBER 24*

2:30 & 4:00 pm

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