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Collecting Christmas

At Home With Mark
and Dee Alamo

Also inside:

Scavenger Hunt

Crossword/Sudoku

Featured Business:
Impressions Salon Etc.

2021 Holiday
Shopping Guide

In the Kitchen With
Tonya Willis

Postal Customer

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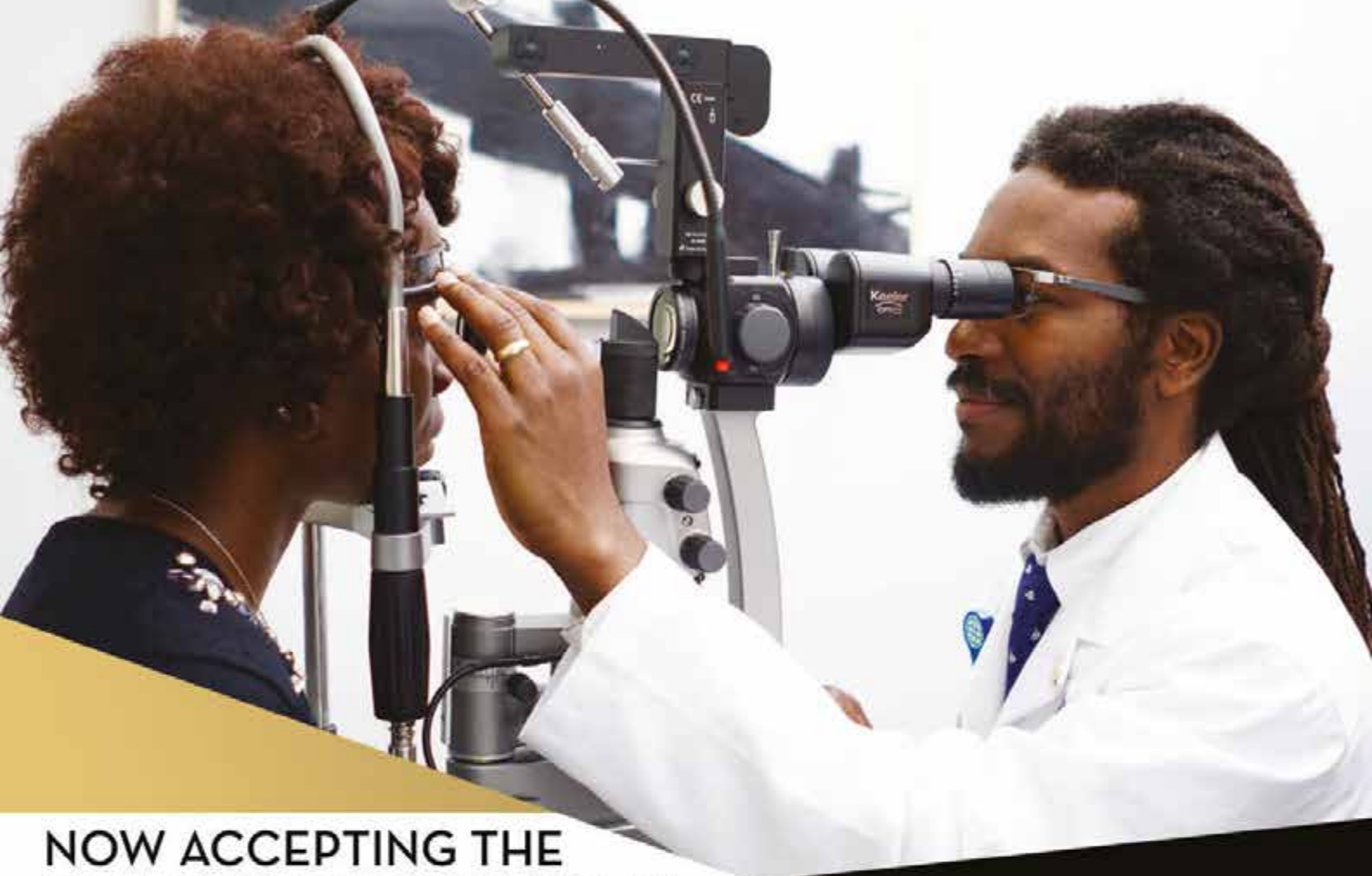


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ON THE COVER

*A 100-plus piece village is the
centerpiece of the Alamo
family's holiday decor.*

Photo by
Shane Kirkpatrick.

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and individually mailed free of charge to homes and businesses in
the Red Oak, Ferris, Ovilla, Bristol, Glenn Heights, Pecan Hill and
Oak Leaf ZIP codes.*

*Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$35 per year or \$3.50
per issue. Subscriptions should be sent to: NOW Magazines, P.O.
Box 1071, Waxahachie, TX 75168. For advertising rates or editorial
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Original artwork by ROHS student Roxana Diaz

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Winter Events

- Dec. 1 - Superintendent Coffee Talk (Virtual)
- Dec. 4 - Red Oak Winter Wonderland Parade
- Dec. 13 - School Board Meeting
- Dec. 15 - Superintendent Coffee Talk (Virtual)
- Dec. 17 - Staff Development (No School)
- Dec. 20-31 - Winter Break
- Jan. 3 - Staff Development (No School)
- Jan. 4-7 - Academic Aid Week
- Jan. 17 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (District Closed)
- Dec. 24 - School Board Meeting
- Feb. 18 - Staff Development (No School)
- Feb. 21 - Presidents Day (District Closed)



EDITOR'S NOTE



Angel

Angel Morris
North Ellis Co. NOW Editor
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Thinking small ...

When I was a child, my family didn't have much money. I would say we were poor, although I never remember doing without. There were those with far less than we had, and, for the times, we were probably lower-to-middle of the middle class. Fortunately, my young parents were creative. Much of the furniture in our home was refurbished from neighbors' castoffs, and many of my clothing and toys were from Goodwill. If you know me today, you might now be thinking, *Well, that explains a lot.*

By middle school, my dad had built the sign company — which he began with nothing more than a ladder and a small paint kit — to quite a successful business. Times were more fat than lean, and I'd estimate we sat squarely in the middle of middle class through the rest of my teen years and beyond. I received a new car for my 16th birthday and a free ride to college thanks to my folks. However, it's from humble beginnings my attitude toward money was formed, and my awareness of the difference between mom-and-pop shops and big business was established.

I've always been frugal and won't buy something unless it's on sale — even better if it's on clearance. Thrift stores are my home away from home, and I'm conflicted about shopping megastores because, while their prices may be cheaper, I know my dollar means far less at them than it does to a small business. So, this Christmas, I'm making a concentrated effort to shop small, in honor of families who worked hard to make something from nothing. If you'll join me, we might save a neighborhood store and make it so the owner's children never remember doing without.

That's big thinking!

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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COLLECTING

Christmas

— By Angel Morris

At Home With Mark and Dee Alamo



This time of year has had special meaning for Mark and Dee Alamo since the beginning of their relationship. “Our first date was on Halloween, and we were engaged by Christmas. Mark proposed at a Christmas concert at the Meyerson Symphony Center,” Dee recalled.

Joking that the reason he wanted to marry her was because of her set of Christmas china, Mark always shared Dee’s love of the season. “It holds special meaning to us because of our Christian beliefs and what this time of year represents,” Mark noted.

While they were older when they married, the Alamos were thrilled to celebrate a new season of life with the birth of their son, Andy, five years into their marriage. “We gave Andy our love of Christmas from the start. When he was 6 months old, we rented a large van and took many of our family members to Santaland in Tyler,” Dee reflected. “Our poor child didn’t stand a chance of not loving the holidays!”

The Alamo trio continues to enjoy looking at Christmas lights each year.



"We travel near and far to see them. It's one of our traditions," Mark explained.

Having lived in Red Oak for 20 years, the family has strong local ties. Dee taught and retired from Red Oak ISD, Mark from Lancaster ISD and Andy is an ROHS graduate, who now works in regional theaters throughout the Metroplex. "I have all the ornaments students gave me from 34 years of teaching and, of course, every ornament Andy made as a child," Dee expressed.

Sentimentality plays a big part in how the Alamos decorate for the holiday. "We love things with meaning from our past," Mark admitted, "and we enjoy having people drop by for coffee and to look at all our stuff."

Perhaps most impressive is the family's 100-plus piece collection of Department 56 Christmas Village houses. "Mark's mother loved them and left her collection to Andy. He has an entire room set up like a village, including snow and mountains. It has so much meaning to him," Dee enthused. "Last year, some friends added to the collection by giving us some of their mom's original Department 56 villages. Those are retired, so they hold such special meaning to us. We were more excited over those than if someone had given us a million dollars ... well, almost!"

Through the years, Mark and Andy gifted many Snow Baby ornaments to Dee, who decorates with them on a



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Federico Maese, MD



master bedroom tree. In the kitchen, a tree is decked with a gingerbread motif, inspired by another family tradition. "Andy and his aunt have made gingerbread cookies every year of his life — 24 years!" Dee calculated. "We always set up a hot chocolate bar with a gingerbread theme, too. Andy is a great cook, and having people over to eat is something we love, especially at the holidays."

Perhaps the family's most precious decor is a set of nativities. "We have quite a few, thanks to family and friends. I have the nativity that was mine as a young child, which I have given to Andy," Dee said. "None of them are expensive or fancy, but all have so much meaning to us."

While Dee describes their home as modest, her decorating style creatively brings it to life year-round. "My brother teases me about decorating an old pair of bed springs for each season," Dee laughed.

Their casual farmhouse style greets guests from the moment they reach the porch, with a large galvanized letter A worked into a wreath for every season. At Christmas, the Alamos' front yard makes their love of this particular holiday even more evident.

A white nativity set featuring Mary, Joseph, three wise men, camels, sheep and, of course, baby Jesus, reminds passersby of the reason for the season, while another collection gives a nod to the more whimsical side of Christmas.

The family's lawn becomes a scene similar to something from Disney's *101 Dalmatians*, complete with parent dogs and their pups, who playfully parade around Frosty, while taking charge of the

sleigh for Rudolph and Santa. "Andy and I love working on these wooden cutouts for the yard. Many hours are spent painting them, and our collection has grown to around 50," Mark estimated.

Both inside and out, Dee's love of the color red is evident, which plays perfectly into traditional Christmas shades. A garden beside the front walkway showcases a red bistro set, red birdhouse and giant red star on a vintage screen door outlined in twinkle lights. At night, the home's roofline is outlined in green, white and, of course, red lights.

A rustic red front porch bench gets decked for the season beside a 5-foot Santa figure at the home's crimson front door. Upon entering the foyer, guests are welcomed by red-and-white gingham covered chairs surrounding the family's dining room table. "This was my mother's table. It was old and brown, so I decided to paint it myself," Dee explained.



Now a distressed white, the table is flanked by two Christmas trees and a corner hutch where the Christmas china that first drew Mark to Dee is displayed. From their first holiday together to today, the Alamos' love of Christmas, and one another, has only grown.

"We love all of our collections and Christmas traditions as a family — everything that has become a habit from when it was just the two of us and then when we became a family of three," Dee reiterated. "But the real reason we have always loved Christmas is to celebrate the birth of Jesus." **NOW**




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BusinessNOW

Impressions Salon Etc.

— By Angel Morris

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Impressions Salon Etc. knows you never get a second chance to make a first impression. From the moment guests enter through ornate wood-and-wrought-iron doors, they are greeted by warmth and richness. Chocolate-colored walls, comfortable couches and chairs with cushy pillows are lit by a glamorous chandelier. The sweet smell of Aveda-scented



candles also welcomes salon clientele.

"We consider ourselves an upscale salon with a down-home feel. The decor and atmosphere are warm and comforting to our clients," Vonda Whaley, salon coordinator, stylist and colorist, stated. "We also have stylists with varied experience, so new clients can quickly find a match with any one of them."

Upon arrival at the salon, patrons are greeted by guest specialists Misty and Rebecca. Beyond the reception area is a coffee and snack room with cakes and cookies and an adjacent room that houses the main hair stations.

Besides haircuts, some of the salon's specialties are Brazilian blowouts, keratin straighteners, balayage and ombre hair color techniques, as well as ecliping, an innovative color technique that takes facial features into account to contour hair color around the face and bring out the client's best features.

In addition, Impressions Salon Etc. offers massage therapy in separate, relaxing rooms; facials; and manicures and pedicures.

Special event hair and makeup application is also available.

One of the community's only Aveda Concepts salons, Impressions Salon Etc. strictly uses Aveda products. According to Vonda, the concentration of Aveda products is superb, and Aveda's signature citrus and botanical scent makes the brand popular with its loyal patrons. "If you care about quality and customer service, you will want to come here," Vonda explained.

Impressions Salon Etc. is also mindful of the importance of each customer's time. "We don't make our clients wait two to three weeks for an appointment, Vonda explained. "We try to only be a week or so out in our calendar. We work hard to keep everyone happy."

The salon originally began pleasing customers from a storefront in DeSoto, where it was located for more than 20 years. Owner Reba Chandler moved the salon and staff to its current space 10 years ago.

Vonda has helped Reba promote an ongoing family atmosphere, so there's less employee turnover. In fact, Vonda and fellow stylists Gina and Alanna, have been working alongside each other more than 30 years. "Meghan and Stephanie have also been with us for about nine years each, and Ms. Dean, the massage therapist, has been giving customers much-needed massages for 20-plus years," Vonda recounted. "Anna and Mallory have been with the salon many years, as well."

Rounding out the Impressions Salon family is esthetician Junelle, who Vonda reports, "gives the best facials in Ellis County," alongside the rest of Impressions' talented team. "We're always looking for new talent to add to our salon; and it's a great team to be part of because we really are like family," Vonda promised.

This month the salon invites its family of customers to an annual open house, where guests can come and go, grab a bite to eat and take advantage of certain Aveda product specials and holiday offerings. "We also have pop-up sales throughout the year," Vonda reminded. "Stop by any time to see firsthand what Impressions Salon Etc. has to offer!" **NOW**

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Zoomed In: Stephen Hernandez

By Angel Morris

Red Oak native Stephen Hernandez began working with children with autism 20 years ago and returned to school to become a board-certified behavior analyst because the southern sector was lacking in services. A GoFundMe account started by his wife as a surprise graduation gift was wildly supported by families he'd helped through the years, enabling him to open Reinforced Behavior Interventions in his hometown.

"I'm forever grateful to those who helped and encouraged us to start this business in the community where I grew up," Stephen noted. "Before our opening, families had to travel quite a distance for therapy — sometimes five days a week. I'm proud that we can service Ellis County families and give back some of the blessings we've received here."



Bo Pierson and Elton Stewart meet the Mighty Hawk Mascot.



Kyle Clemmons and Jeremy Taylor display their awards from the Bridges Bands and BBQ Bash fundraiser.



Ellis County Women in Business enjoy their first Wine Night Social at Cork & Keg.



Valarie Bennett, April Lynn Prentice and Donna Knight celebrate the Red Oak Senior Center's re-grand opening.



Omega Psi Phi's Raymond Strain helps the North Texas Food Pantry distribute food to ROISD families.



Jaydenn Johnson, Jackson Robson and Dylan Taylor welcome guests to Believers City Church.



Pam Bell celebrates her 60th birthday with family and friends.

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CookingNOW

In the Kitchen With TONYA WILLIS

— By Angel Morris

Tonya Willis can't recall a day when her grandmother wasn't cooking for her grandchildren. "I would watch her cut, stir and season her food with so much love and her food always brought smiles and full bellies," Tonya admitted. "Granny died in 2015, but prior to that, she gave me handwritten recipes of her family favorites. I'm so grateful to have them."

A school counselor, Tonya enjoys volunteering and reading. Married with four children, she favors soups, beans, pies and potato salad. "These particular meals allow for creativity. You can mix almost anything for a great soup. But the potato salad was Granny's specialty, so I make it just like her," Tonya explained. "I'm also a leftover guru and can make anything into a brand-new meal!" **NOW**

Cornbread Dressing

1 cup cornmeal
1/2 cup flour
1 egg
2 Tbsp. sugar
1 tsp. salt
2 tsp. baking powder
Milk, for consistency

1 Tbsp. margarine or butter
1 medium white onion, chopped
1/2 red or green bell pepper
4 stalks celery, chopped
2 Tbsp. chicken soup base mix
1 14.5-oz. can cream of chicken soup
1 14.5-oz. can of water
Garlic powder, to taste
Onion powder, to taste

Pepper, to taste

Salt, to taste

1 small bunch green onions finely chopped

1. Mix the cornmeal, flour, egg, sugar, salt, baking powder and milk. Bake at 400 F for 35-45 minutes.
2. When the cornbread is ready; warm butter or margarine in a pan. Sauté the onions, bell peppers and celery.
3. Combine the cornbread with the sauteed vegetables and all remaining ingredients. Add the green onions last. Bake in the oven for 1 hour at 350 F.

Buttermilk Pie

2 cups white sugar
2 Tbsp. flour
2/3 cup buttermilk
5 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1/2 cup butter, melted
1 9-inch unbaked deep-dish piecrust

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Mix the sugar and flour in a bowl. Beat the buttermilk and eggs in a blender; add to the sugar/flour mixture.
2. Stir in the vanilla and the melted butter; pour into the crust. Bake for 50 minutes. Let cool before serving.

Pecan Pie

- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup white sugar
- 1 Tbsp. flour
- 1 Tbsp. milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 cup pecans, chopped

1. Beat the eggs until foamy. Stir in melted butter. Stir in brown sugar, white sugar and flour. Add the milk, vanilla and nuts.
2. Bake for 10 minutes at 400 F. Reduce heat to 350 F; bake for 30-40 minutes more.

Cabbage

- 1/2 stick butter or 1/3 cup oil (grapeseed, avocado or olive oil)
- 1 head of cabbage, chopped or shredded
- 1 sweet onion, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1-2 Tbsp. garlic powder
- 1-2 Tbsp. onion powder
- 1 Tbsp. chicken soup base mix

1. Heat a medium-size pot or deep skillet; add oil or butter, cabbage, onions and bell peppers. Stir the mixture around in the pot continuously, making sure that the butter or oil is getting on all of the cabbage. Let sit for about 4 minutes before stirring again.
2. Continue to stir the cabbage until it begins to soften and make its own water. Add in all of the seasonings; continue to stir for about 7 to 8 minutes.
3. Lower the temperature; place a lid on the pot. After about 15 minutes, check the cabbage for taste and consistency. Add more salt and pepper, to taste.
4. Variation: Use your favorite seasoning salt in lieu of salt and pepper. My personal favorite is Johnny's Seasoning Salt.

Chicken Soup

- 4 chicken hindquarters or whole chicken
- 1 14-oz. can stewed tomatoes
- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 stalks celery, chopped
- 1/2 cup barley (optional)
- 1 16-oz. bag frozen mixed veggies



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ODDS OF A CHILD BEING DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM: 1 IN 68

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- Few babbling by 12 months
- Few words by 18 months

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- 1 14-oz. can tomato sauce
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tsp. onion powder
- 1/2 cup chicken soup base mix
- 1 14.5-oz. can cream of chicken soup (optional)
- 1 8-oz. bag frozen sweet corn

1. Place the chicken in a pot; cover with water. Boil until the chicken begins to fall off the bone; cool.
2. After cooling, debone the chicken; place it back in the pot with the chicken broth. Add the tomatoes, onions; celery; barley, if using; mixed veggies; and tomato sauce. Add all the seasonings, chicken soup base mix and cream of chicken soup, if using.
3. Boil until the vegetables are tender. Add the frozen corn; cook for another 15-20 minutes. Add more seasoning, to taste, if desired.

Sauteed Green Beans

Eat as is or with a side of steamed white rice.

- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 lb. fresh green beans, with ends removed
- 3 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- Pinch red pepper flakes



Pecan Pie

1. Heat the oil in a skillet or wok; add the green beans. Cook for about 3-4 minutes until the skin begins to wrinkle. Remove; place on a napkin.
2. Add the garlic in the same oil; sauté for about 1 minute until fragrant. Add the green beans back to the pan; stir to combine. Cook for about another minute. Sprinkle with the salt and red pepper flakes.

To search for more great recipes from any of the 9 NOW Magazines publications, visit www.nowmagazines.com.

SCAVENGER HUNT WINNER!



Courtney Jackson won a \$50 cash prize courtesy of North Ellis Co. NOW Magazine!

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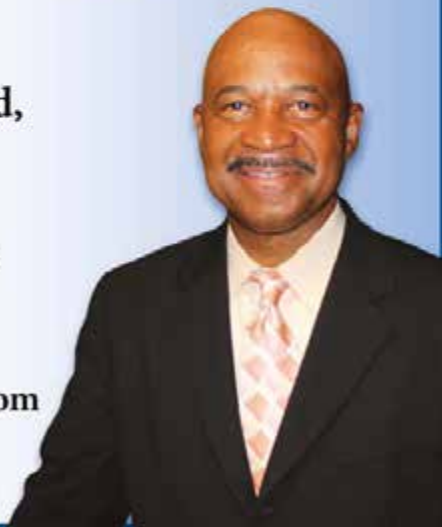
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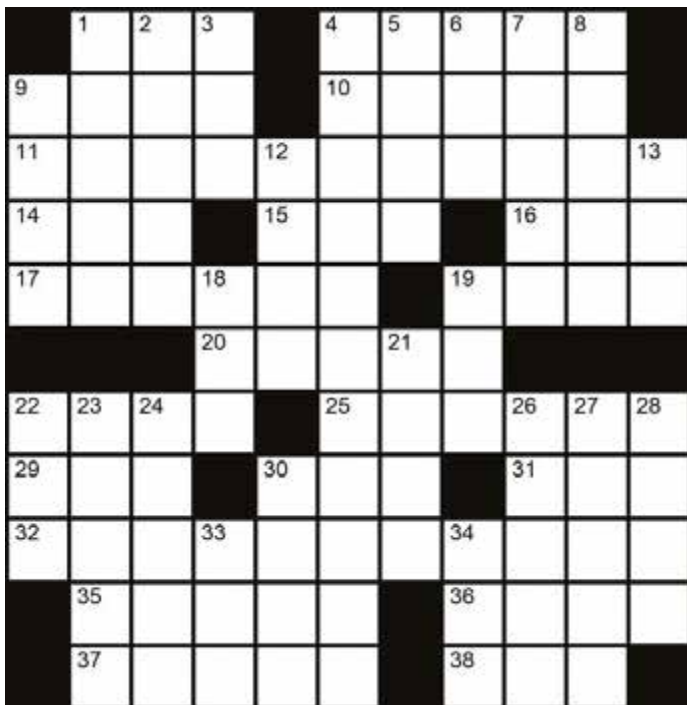
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Angie's list f Instagram

Crossword Puzzle



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Across

- 1 Rotten
- 4 Wanted an answer
- 9 Art movement intended to shock
- 10 Official Texas state dish
- 11 Wiping out
- 14 Thick mane
- 15 Youngster
- 16 Found in the middle of Arizona
- 17 We're all --- together
- 19 Heat up
- 20 9/11's mastermind
- 22 Polar shipping hazard
- 25 Donned for dinner
- 29 Abu Dhabi is its capital
- 30 Artificial locks
- 31 What a captured soldier becomes
- 32 Confused pooches test vet's instrument
- 35 Jakarta-based inter-governmental organization
- 36 Finishes off a cake
- 37 Written phone messages
- 38 Withdrawn

Down

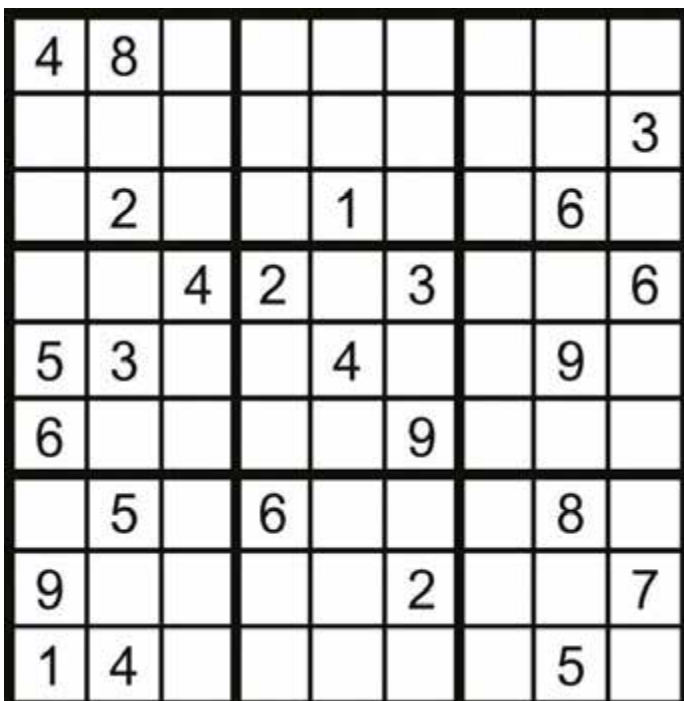
- 1 Beef cut for a nobleman?
- 2 Adjust to fit
- 3 The old man
- 4 Charges
- 5 Food fish
- 6 Baby ferret
- 7 Higgins's prodigy
- 8 Casual eatery
- 9 Bruce's ex
- 12 Sacred Egyptian bird
- 13 Sparkler
- 18 Harley
- 19 Grow
- 21 Faces
- 22 Type of conductor
- 23 --- Joe's (classic gustatory exhortation)
- 24 Della ---, jazz and Gospel singer
- 26 Bit of a period
- 27 One of a famous septet
- 28 Has yet to settle
- 30 "Huh?"
- 33 Man from Dallas or Amarillo, perhaps
- 34 Successor to the U S S R

Solutions on page 28

For online versions, visit nowmagazines.com

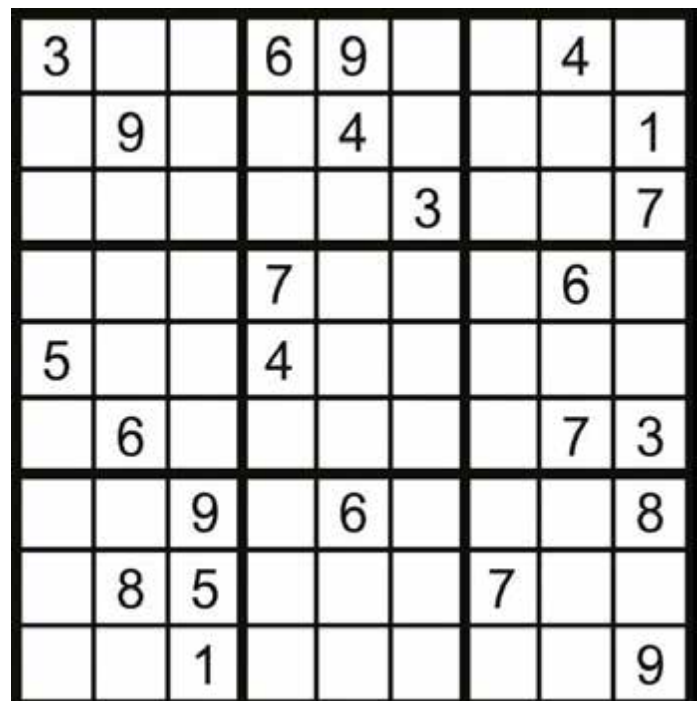
Sudoku Puzzle

Easy



CrosswordSite.com Ltd

Medium



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Solutions on page 28

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Due to COVID-19, some events may have been cancelled or rescheduled while we were at press. Check with individual organizations or your city or Chamber websites to verify dates and times.

Through 12/21

Art Exhibit:

Ellis County Art Association presents its annual member show, featuring a variety of watercolors, oils, acrylics, portraits, still life and landscapes. Free and open to the public. **Tuesday-Friday:** Noon-4:00 p.m.; **Saturday:** 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; **Sunday:** Noon-4:00 p.m., ECAA, 113 W. Franklin. For more details, call (972) 937-3414.

12/4

Breakfast With Santa:

Pancake breakfast for \$7 per person with children 4 and under admitted free. 7:00-10:00 a.m., Lions Club Senior Citizen

Center, 207 W. Red Oak Rd. For more details, contact Eva Richardson at (469) 571-7265.

Christmas in Red Oak:

Hosted by the city of Red Oak. 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Watkins Park, 101 Live Oak. More information will be available nearer the event date at www.redoaktx.org/christmas.

12/8

Christmas in Ovilla:

Quintessential small-town holiday celebration featuring vendors, bounce houses, snow slide, Santa and more. 6:00-8:30 p.m., Ovilla Road Baptist Church, 3251 Ovilla Rd.

Third Wednesdays

Lancaster Women's Connection:

Welcoming Christian women in Ellis County. Cost is \$15 which includes lunch, a special feature and a Stonecroft Speaker. Reservations due **Thursday prior** to the monthly meeting. 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Country View Golf Course, 240 W. Belt Line Rd., Lancaster. Contact Dee Ann Ellis at deecannellis@sbcglobal.net or (972) 921-6221.

Second Thursdays Cocktails and Canvas:

Ellis County Art Association's painting social. Limited enrollment; \$40 cost. BYOB, but all art supplies provided. ECAA, 113 W. Franklin. For more details, call (972) 937-3414.

Second Saturdays

Red Oak Opry:

Classic country and gospel musicians. \$12 admission. Doors and concessions open at 6:00 p.m.; shows begin at 7:00 p.m. Lone Star Cowboy Church, 1011 E. Ovilla Rd., Red Oak.

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

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1	B	A	D	4	A	S	K	E	D
9	D	A	D	A	10	C	H	I	L
11	E	R	A	D	12	I	C	A	T
14	M	O	P	15	B	U	D	16	Z
17	I	N	T	18	H	I	S	19	W
20	O	S	A	21	M	A			
22	B	E	R	G	25	T	U	X	E
29	U	A	E	30	W	I	G	31	P
32	S	T	E	33	T	H	O	S	34
35	A	S	E	A	N	36	I	C	E
37	T	E	X	T	S	38	S	H	Y

Easy

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

Medium

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

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