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DECEMBER 2024

Welcoming Hearths

At Home With Richard
and Gail Smoot

2024 Holiday
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In the Kitchen With
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ON THE COVER



There's Christmas joy to be found in every turn of the Ferris wheel at Richard and Gail Smoot's home.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Virginia

Virginia Riddle
CorsicanaNOW Editor
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Season's Greetings!

Oh, happy days! Peppermint mochas are back! These are two of my favorite flavors combined in a warming drink on colder days! Yet, for Christians celebrating Christmas around the world, that peppermint smell, so strong as we unwrap red and white candy canes, brings back memories of childhood holiday wonder and, for older kids and adults, it becomes more meaningful. According to the *Legend of the Peppermint*, the red of the candy represents Christ's blood shed for us. The white stripes represent our sinless Savior, and the "J" shape reminds us of Jesus. Turn the candy around, and it becomes a shepherd's staff favored by Him. During my childhood, we decorated the family Christmas tree with vintage ornaments, our childhood creations we made each year, bubbling lights and candy canes. Upon taking down and packing everything after Christmas, we were allowed to consume the candy canes, one a day for weeks, making the chore a little more fun.

While Christians celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmastime, most of my Muslim and Jewish friends celebrate the holiday, too, with many of the Christian traditions such as trees, gifts and foods long cherished by their families. I attended school and made longtime Muslim and Jewish friends in Waco ISD. During the various holidays we celebrated with our families during the school-year months, we would bring food delicacies to share around our Richfield High School cafeteria table. Whether it was my grandmother's Christmas fudge and divinity or classmates' Eid al-Fitr treats or sholeh-zard from Ramadan or challah and latkes from Hanukkah, we augmented our usual cafeteria or sack lunches brought from home well. Sharing food, traditions and stories of celebrations brought us closer together throughout our time in school and at reunions throughout the years since.

May your December be merry!

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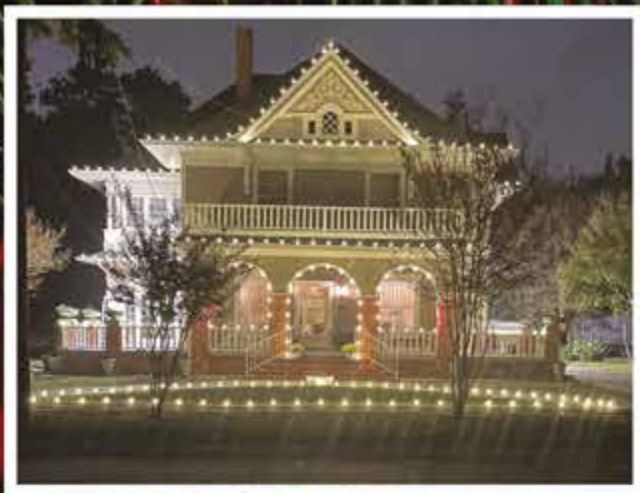
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Welcoming Hearths

AT HOME WITH RICHARD AND GAIL SMOOT

— By Virginia Riddle

The broad front porch that graces Richard and Gail Smoot's Historical Carriage District home is aglow with Christmas lights. A step into the central hallway, which has one of the six fireplaces and decorative hearths in the home, is a step into Corsicana's yesterdays. "We were looking for an old house and had never been to Corsicana before a friend told us about this home," Richard said. "We fell in love with this home and felt a continuity to the past."

Richard and Gail had taught together in Dallas ISD, but both lived in Plano. She suggested commuting together, since it was quite a drive. "At first he said no, but then he saw I was reliable," Gail quipped. Gail, a native of Illinois, received her master's from Texas Woman's University and had been a full-time mom before following her mother into teaching. Richard, born in Louisiana but raised in Garland, Texas, graduated from Southern Methodist University and the University of Dallas and had had a real estate investment career before going into education. After 17 years in education, Richard retired from Dallas ISD, while Gail retired from Plano ISD after 20 years. They have been retired for the past 14 years.

Their Corsicana home was built in 1900 by John Cunningham, who co-owned Tatum and Cunningham Hardware with his brother-in-law, William Tatum. Stately brick columns frame the wide front porch, and the original side porch is now a conservatory, complete with a recently installed elevator. Richard and Gail enjoy bird-watching, reading, playing games with their children and grandchildren and even pitching a child-size tent for pretend camping in the conservatory during the holidays. "We have room for everyone to gather and make memories," Gail said. The six fireplaces originally burned coal, and the two in the central hall and dining room are back-to-back. The hearths are artistic creations. "We also love all the windows, and when I first walked in, I knew this house was perfect," Gail added. "We feel very comfortable here, since this home has survived through all the storms for years."



The ceilings of the front porch and back service porch are painted in the Southern tradition of sky blue. “The color is pretty good about keeping the ghosts away but not always the wasps,” Richard said. “We also have lots of shiplap that was installed long before Chip and Joanna’s show. Our home is especially adapted to entertaining.” On the left side of the entry hall, a graceful stairwell rises to the bedrooms. Two kitchen windows overlook the shaded backyard and brick patio. An eat-in kitchen’s white cabinets and blue valances complement a displayed collection of plates. The back stairwell from the kitchen to upper floor bedrooms was originally primarily used by servants, and servants’ quarters, back in the day, were built adjoining the garage. Pocket doors, original to the home, still glide well and divide the living spaces. “I wish there was more of an emphasis on the restoration of older homes,” Richard added.

Purchasing the home in 2016, the couple waited two months to move in while the electrical wiring was replaced. Later, new paint was applied, and the garage was repaired. One other change had to happen, too. “We weren’t married yet, so buying the

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house changed a lot of things,” Gail recalled. “We were married at St. John’s Episcopal Church.”

With a blended family, including six grandchildren, names are drawn for presents, which are opened on Christmas Eve, a tradition in Gail’s family. “We have three children each, and both of our youngest children are named ‘Melissa,’” Richard noted. Richard and Gail’s dog, a Sheltie, is ever present and barks enthusiastic greetings to guests. “I didn’t want a puppy,” Richard recalled. “Gail wanted a puppy, so we compromised and



got a puppy!” Meals are served in the elegant dining room, which hosts Santa Claus just waiting to take a seat. The mantel is decorated with garlands and a collection of horse-themed ornaments. Stockings are hung with care over the Christ Child surrounded by His parents on the hearth. On a side table, Santa Claus appears at the center of a child-sized antique Ferris wheel, which is accompanied by a colorful carousel. Christmas trees in the entry hall and dining room hold ornaments from the couple’s childhood days. “We’ve used these 70-year-old ornaments every year and nearly always break a few,” Richard added.

Their favorite memories of childhood

Christmases? For Gail, it’s the trips to downtown Chicago to view the Marshall Field’s department store windows. For Richard, it’s the Christmas parades in Garland. In more recent years, the couple has traveled to Europe and on five cruises, bringing back mementos and cherished memories. They enjoy car trips back to Illinois and through the Southern states.

However, they also cherish life in Corsicana. Gail is a member of James Blair Chapter, DAR; Better Garden Club; a local book club and literary club; and is a Kinsloe House board member. Both Richard and Gail serve as Corsicana Ambassadors with Corsicana Main Street and are members of Navarro County Retired Teachers Association on which Richard is a board member.

While the blue porch ceilings keep the ghosts of the many Christmases past away, Richard and Gail will enjoy the season with family and friends in a home they loved at first sight and have made their own with their collection of antiques. And with all those welcoming hearths, which one will Santa land on this year? **NOW**

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— By Virginia Riddle

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The drive is short and scenic. The destination is restful and rewarding — a vintage country cottage with its broad, welcoming porch set with two hand-carved, painted wooden rockers that greet visitors. Stroll among the brightly colored metal art, whirligigs, pottery, wind chimes and wooden signs and birdhouses. Shop inside and then sit a spell. “Come out to the country... it’s cheaper



in the country” is Turquoise Armadillo’s slogan. “First of all, the sales tax is lower,” Cheryl Pratt, the shop’s owner, explained. “Our overhead is low out here, so we can keep our prices low as well. We are a hidden treasure.

“Sometimes, we just need to have things that make us feel good,” Cheryl added. “If you don’t find what you want, tell me. I’ll go look for it. I enjoy shopping and having a reason to seek and find unique items. I tell people I feel if you come out to the middle of nowhere to shop, I need to give you choices. And there are lots of choices.” Many items are reflective of area fans’ support of local, college and professional sports teams as well as rodeo, western and holiday themes. Her excursions take her on travels far and wide as shown in the interior offerings of infant, children and ladies’ boutique items; crosses; stuffed animals; planters; glassware and kitchenware; candles; signs of all sizes and entertaining sayings; teas; and Mexican

vanilla. “I carry infant to plus-size clothing along with hats, socks, jewelry and purses,” Cheryl said.

A Frost native, Cheryl now enjoys getting to know the area people. She is a retired teacher, who taught in Kilgore, Kerens and Corsicana ISDs after having graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University and East Texas State University. “I missed the social aspect of teaching — watching families grow and meeting local folks, former students and colleagues,” she revealed. “I had toyed with the idea of having a gift shop for years. I loved being retired but not becoming a hermit. There was a cute little house that was going to be bulldozed down the road. My husband, Mark, and I arranged to have it moved to our property.” The couple invested in the home’s remodeling into the shop it is today. A nearby barn holds more outdoor art items Cheryl has collected from her shopping travels.

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Fulfilling her dream, Cheryl opened Turquoise Armadillo in November 2019, so it has just turned five years old. “Even with COVID, my business has thrived,” she said. So much so, Cheryl employs one part-time employee and several more during peak seasons. The business accepts major credit cards, local checks, PayPal, Venmo and even cash as payment. “The shop donates to some local causes supporting local youth, churches and fire departments,” Cheryl said.

Cheryl and Mark have three sons, three daughters-in-law and six grandchildren — two girls and four boys — who all live in the area. “We love spending time with them going to ballgames, dance recitals and school events,” Cheryl remarked. The couple also loves to travel, and Cheryl enjoys gardening, canning and working in her yard during her few spare moments.

“I love my time in the shop, talking with people, many of whom have made the excursion to the country a day trip,” she said. “I have the best gift and boutique shop in Cryer Creek. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it!” **NOW**

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Tina Emhoolah and Pamela Dean attend the 61st Annual Parker Family Reunion at Ft. Parker State Park.

Zoomed In:
Bonnie Stover

By Virginia Riddle

A Corsicana native, Bonnie Stover graduated from Corsicana High School prior to attending Texas Woman’s University, and then she returned home to a career in mortgage banking. “I love the people and Corsicana’s community feeling of care,” she said. “We come together in times of need, and having grown up here, I enjoy knowing a lot of people.”

Family, friends and volunteerism fill her days. An involved Kiwanis Club of Corsicana board member serving a term through 2027, Bonnie also volunteers at the Corsicana Animal Shelter and hand ties blankets for the local CASA. Through her association with Kiwanis International, Bonnie’s volunteerism in the organization’s projects span the globe. She added, “I also love to read and enjoy cooking.”



Rick and Anita Eldridge entertain Corsicana Opry’s dinner crowd.



The Atkins and Perez families enjoy touring vintage planes at the Corsicana Airsho.



Twilight Home Nursing and Rehabilitation Center staff and residents host Halloween Trunk or Treat in style.



Pamela Funk and Angela Reznicek represent Home Helpers at the Navarro County Health Fair.



Sharon Thomas, RN; Kim Loflin, RN; and Jessica Amone with the Navarro County Health Department, administer flu shots around town.



It's make-and-take fun at the Corsicana Public Library's Family Fun Night.



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CookingNOW

In the Kitchen With

DR. JACOB RASH

— By Virginia Riddle

While growing up in Mildred, Dr. Jacob Rash learned to cook from his mom and through 4-H. “My interest in cooking grew in college as my cousin, Cameron, and I started smoking meats almost every weekend and having friends over to eat and hang out,” he recalled.

Dr. Rash’s family owns Triple J BBQ, but he mostly cooks for family gatherings and colleagues at Lott Physical Therapy, where he works as a physical therapist and the clinic director. “Grilling and smoking are my favorite kinds of cooking,” Dr. Rash said. He likes down-home cooking with a “Cajun flare” he learned from a Louisiana friend. Dr. Rash concluded, “Cooking has always meant, in my close-knit family, a time of fellowship and being around those you love.” **NOW**

Mac 'n' Cheese

3 pieces of bacon, diced and cooked
1 tsp. olive oil or reserved bacon fat
2 Tbsp. minced garlic
2 Tbsp. flour
4 cups heavy cream or half-and-half
1 tsp. thyme
3 cups cheddar and Pepper Jack combined, shredded (Monterey Jack, cheddar or Colby Jack can be used.)
Salt, to taste
Pepper, to taste

1 lb. penne pasta, cooked according to pkg. directions
1/2 cup Panko breadcrumbs
2 Tbsp. butter, melted
2 Tbsp. parsley, diced

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Fry and dice the bacon. Reserve the bacon fat, if using.
3. In a large sauté pan, heat the oil or reserved bacon fat over medium heat. Add the garlic; sauté for 1 minute.
4. Add the flour; stir for 1 minute. Whisk in

the heavy cream or half-and-half and thyme; reduce the heat by a third.

5. Stir in the cheese until melted, creamy and thickened; season with salt and pepper.

6. Remove the mixture from the heat; gently stir in the pasta. Place the mixture in a 9x13-inch casserole dish.

7. In a small bowl, mix the bacon, breadcrumbs, butter and parsley. Top the mac 'n' cheese with the Panko mixture; bake, uncovered, for 20-25 minutes, or until the casserole is bubbling and lightly browned on top.

Mamaw's Pecan Pie

1 Tbsp. flour
1 1/2 cups sugar
1/4 tsp. salt
4 eggs
1 cup light Karo syrup
4 Tbsp. butter, melted
2 cups pecans, chopped
1 9-inch unbaked pie shell

- 1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. In a large bowl, combine and stir the flour, sugar and salt.
- 2. In a separate bowl, thoroughly mix the eggs, Karo syrup and butter.
- 3. Combine the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients; mix completely.
- 4. Add the pecans; mix well.
- 5. Pour the mixture into the pie shell; place it on the middle rack. Bake for 55 minutes or until the filling is firm.

Bacon Twists

- 2 cups light brown sugar, packed
- 22 bacon slices
- 22 very thin breadsticks

- 1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Spread the brown sugar over a large pan or baking sheet. Twist/wrap one slice of bacon around each breadstick, barely overlapping the bacon as it's rolled down the breadstick.
- 2. Roll the bacon-wrapped breadsticks in the brown sugar, pressing down some to help the sugar adhere to the bacon. *Note: The breadsticks can be covered and refrigerated overnight if cooking them the next day.*
- 3. Place the breadsticks on a baking sheet covered with aluminum foil; bake for 30-35 minutes, or until the bacon is cooked and almost crisp. *Note: If the breadsticks are cooking too fast on the bottom, roll them over so they can caramelize evenly.*
- 4. Immediately remove the breadsticks from the baking sheet; place them on waxed paper. Let cool to room temperature; store in an airtight container up to two days.

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

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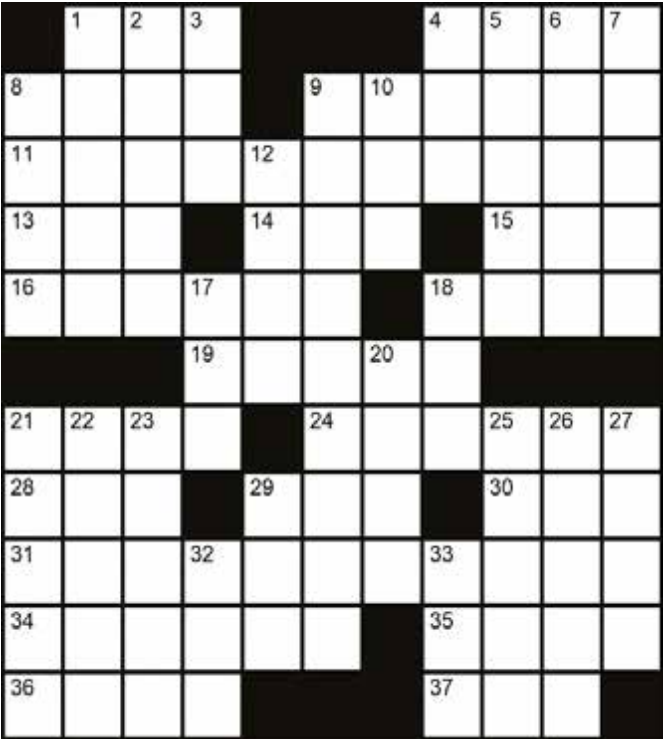
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- Across

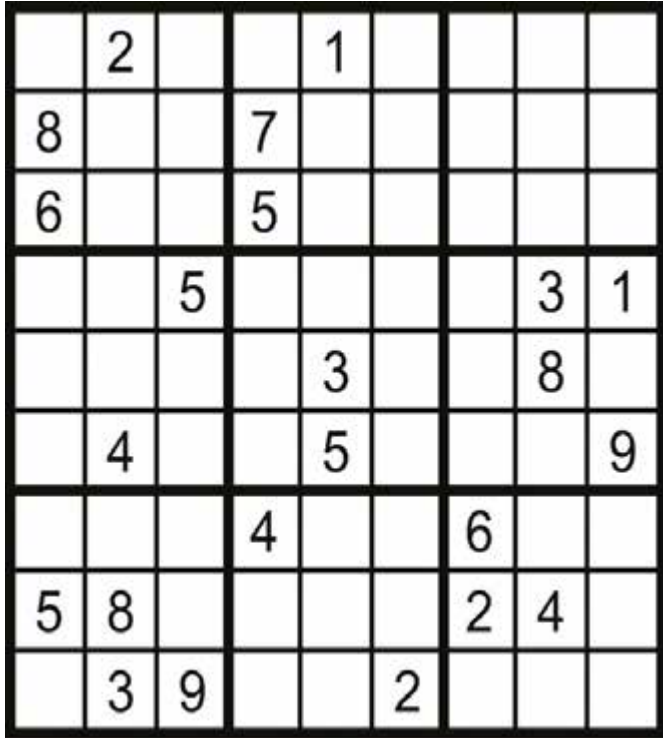
 - 1 Empty writing
 - 4 Bonkers
 - 8 Sliding window
 - 9 Harlem theater
 - 11 Small amount, low interest lender
 - 13 Alias
 - 14 It tells you where you are
 - 15 Stimulus
 - 16 Ill will
 - 18 Anorak
 - 19 Sleeps
 - 21 Perversely, The Rolling Stones gathered plenty
- Down

 - 24 Potion or peak in California
 - 28 Lyric poem
 - 29 "Agnus ---"
 - 30 Abe's fourth son
 - 31 Not a lot Hun might con characters about
 - 34 School skipper
 - 35 "Go placidly --- the noise ---" (Ehrmann, "Desiderata")
 - 36 Spot
 - 37 Plump
- Down

 - 1 Cold comfort?
 - 2 Far Eastern intergovernmental organization
 - 3 College professor's degree
 - 4 Put on
 - 5 She pondered about a grin without a cat
 - 6 Finely ground grain meal
 - 7 In good shape, musclewise
 - 8 Residual mark of a wound
 - 9 Right now
 - 10 Sign of infection
 - 12 "Firebird" composer Stravinsky
- 17 The Tiffany network
 - 18 Snowden's former employer
 - 20 Zachary Taylor was one
 - 21 Game with a 40-card deck
 - 22 Air freshener targets
 - 23 Organization
 - 25 Make political speeches
 - 26 Implied
 - 27 Target for Ritalin
 - 29 Cacophony
 - 32 It's hit at bedtime
 - 33 Chairman painted by Andy Warhol

Sudoku Puzzle

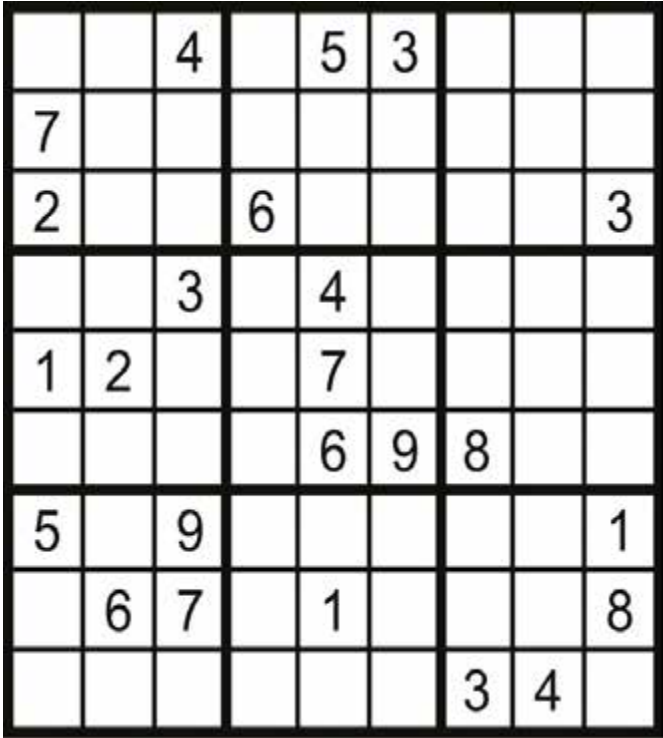
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& Happy Holidays

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Merry CHRISTMAS DECEMBER

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.

12/1-12/5

**Corsicana Art League
Show and Sale:**

Monday-Friday: Noon-5:00 p.m.,
Warehouse Living Arts Center
Gallery, 119 W. 6th Ave. Facebook:
Corsicana Art League.

12/5-12/8

**A Christmas Carol,
The Musical:**

Times vary, Warehouse Living Arts
Center, 119 W. 6th Ave.
(903) 872-5421.

12/6

**Better Garden Club Christmas
Luncheon and Auction:**

Bring an item for the auction. 11:00
a.m., Kinsloe House, 618 W. 3rd
Ave. Facebook: Better Garden Club.

The Very Merry Library:

Crafts, refreshments, balloons and
a magic show starring Santa Claus.
6:00 p.m., Corsicana Public Library,
100 N. 12th St.

12/7

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7:00 p.m., Historic Mills Place

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Festival of Lights Parade:

6:00 p.m., Downtown Corsicana.
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12/13

**Corsicana Newcomers
Club Meeting:**

Celebrate the season with a Sandra
Mahood reading. 11:00 a.m.,
Kinsloe House, 618 W. 3rd Ave.
Annie Avery, (714) 345-6707

12/19

Santa Sip & Stroll:

5:00-8:00 p.m.,
Downtown Corsicana.

**Movie Night at the
Palace Theatre:**

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12/31

Happy Noon Year Party:

Dance party and countdown
until 12:00...Noon! 11:00 a.m.,
Corsicana Public Library,
100 N. 12th St.

*Submissions are welcome and
published as space allows. Send
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virginia.riddle@nowmagazines.com.*

SCAVENGER HUNT WINNER!



Brenda Robinson, winner of \$50 cash, said, "I just love CorsicanaNOW Magazine. It helps me find something fun to do in this town. In Fact, last weekend we went to Angelita Wine Vineyard for the comedy show and had such a good time. I would not have known about it if I hadn't read the magazine"



Kimberly, Jenn, Tonja, Lori & Troy

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