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DECEMBER 2024

## Christmas Everywhere

At Home With Chris  
and Danielle Tucker

## A Hot DIY Project

Enhance the coziness  
of your backyard with  
a new fire pit

In the Kitchen With  
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2024 Holiday  
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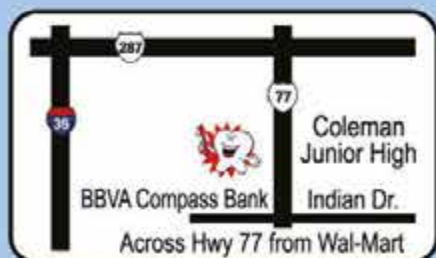
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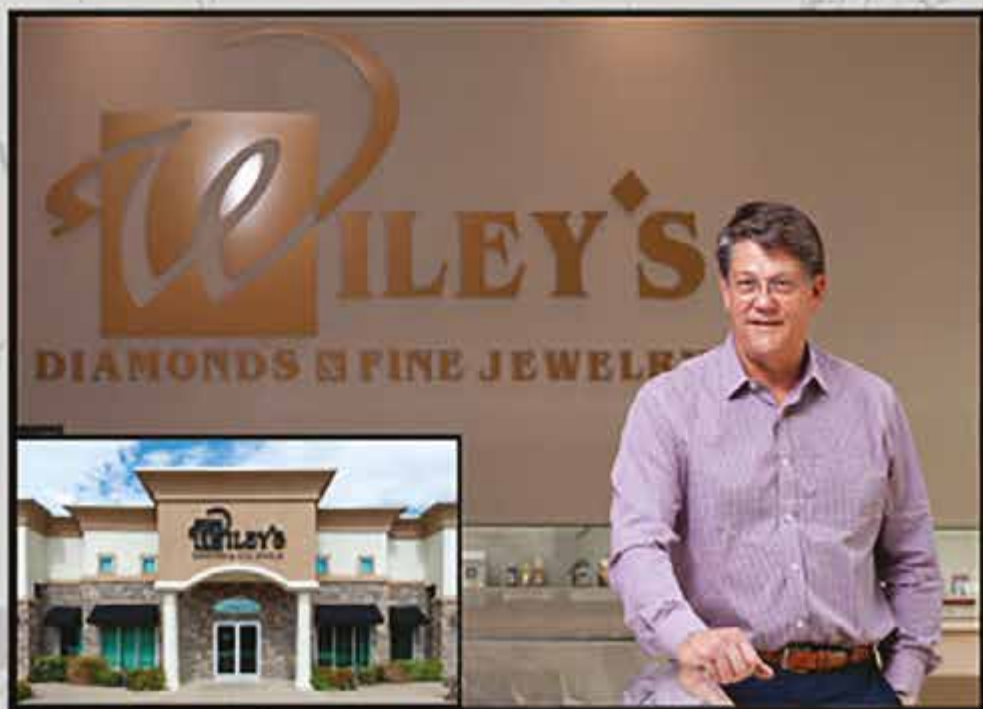
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ON THE COVER



Christmas charm hangs from every branch at the Tucker home.

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WaxahachieNOW is a NOW Magazines, L.L.C. publication. Copyright © 2024. All rights reserved. WaxahachieNOW is published monthly and individually mailed free of charge to homes and businesses in the Waxahachie 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 correspondence, call (972) 937-8447 or visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).




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# EDITOR'S NOTE

*Away in a Manger ...*

Years ago, when I had my first apartment, I got a nativity set. It's still in its original box from Walmart. I can't remember now if I bought it myself, or if it was a gift from Mom. We were both a little overboard about Christmas. Anyway, that set served me for several years. Then I moved to Taiwan. I bought another set there and brought it back with me. I had no need for two Marys, two Josephs and definitely no need for two baby Jesuses. But the extra Mary could be a shepherd girl, and the extra Joseph could increase the crowd of shepherds. And the Bible doesn't say how many wise men there were, only that they brought three gifts. So I had some extra kings.

While I was in Taiwan, I bought a set of miniature reproductions of the terracotta warriors of Xi'an. Those joined the nativity, because China had wise men, and they're from the east. I started adding more angels to the great multitude. Then there were European peasants, gospel choirs, African women dancing with pots on their heads, more camels, an elephant or two, a cow, a cowboy with his horse. A Native American joined in as did some Dutch kids, a Japanese lady, a country doctor, some elderly villagers, a couple of Victorian ladies, a Roman centurion, a Chinese scholar, a Mexican dude my mom and sister brought me from Puerto Vallarta.

This year, I'm adding another elephant and an Indonesian prince. I'll keep adding to this odd nativity of mine as I find more figures that are the right size and represent more cultures and times. Because the story that started at that first Christmas is for all times and all peoples.

*... let heaven and nature sing!*

*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!*



*Adam*

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WaxahachieNOW Editor  
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# Christmas EVERYWHERE

— By Adam Walker

## At Home With Chris and Danielle Tucker

*“Last year was our first Christmas in this house,” Chris Tucker informed. “We designed and built this house from the ground up. We had just bought another house, and had only been in it eight months, when I found this lot. I called Danielle and said, ‘I know you’re gonna hate me, but we’re building again and moving.’ This location is incredible! You can see God’s hand in all of this. We designed this house from the ground up. We wanted it to be unique to the area. Any room that faces west, you can see the sunset over that view. Every night, I take a picture. Behind this lot is a flood zone, so no one can ever build back there. We’ll always have this view.”*







Christmas is huge at the Tucker home. “We have four kids: Briar, Elle, Drue and Greyson,” Danielle shared. “Christmas starts around here at the stroke of midnight on November 1! I love doing holiday crafts with the kids, like salt dough Santa hands, with their thumbs as the hat, their fingers as the beard and their palms as Santa’s face. We have those on the tree in the office room. We have trees everywhere — a 9-foot tree in the living room, four 7-and-a-half-foot trees and several smaller ones. The kids even have a tree in the play room upstairs.”

The big tree in the living room is the most grown up. “Chris has pretty serious Christmas OCD,” Danielle joked. “It’s hard for him to let go control of that one. But the kids get to choose a lot of the ornaments for the other trees. The one in their room is all theirs, and about 75 percent Disney.”

The living room tree stands between the fireplace and the huge windows looking out on the patio, swimming pool and the view that first captured Chris’ imagination. It’s flocked and bedecked in pretty glass baubles and tinsel icicles that harken back to the grandeur of yesteryear. It’s piled about with packages. The fireplace is festooned with pine garland and candles, while the stockings await the treats Santa will leave in them, come the big night. The credenza on the other wall







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displays Christmas cards among a forest of tiny Christmas trees.

The Disney connection is important. “We got engaged at Disney, at Christmastime,” Chris explained. “We still go once or twice a year for the kids. Our first apartment was decorated in Disney, but we don’t do that anymore. Our taste has matured.” One wall in the open concept living area, however, is dedicated to photographs of their Disney trips.

Still Danielle says her favorite part of the house is the oven. "I love to cook. We have homemade sausage balls every Christmas morning. We hosted our families for Christmas dinner last year. We love hosting parties and having friends and family over."

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the whole poem memorized, and she recited it to us every Christmas. I want to do the same for my kids, to continue that tradition.”

The outside of the house is just as grand. The patio-swimming pool area has light-up toy soldiers and reindeer as well as multicolored lights on all the palm trees. The iron fence is festooned with lighted garland. At the front of the house every line of the roof is lit. Lighted Christmas trees flank the entrance. A family of reindeer graze and a wreath hangs on every window. Chris makes sure the outside shines. In addition to his financial advising business, Chris owns a Christmas lighting business. “We have a jeep in the Christmas parade,” Chris added.

Christmas at the Tucker home is a two-month celebration of family, tradition, beauty and fun. As their children grow, so will the memories, and the traditions. **NOW**

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# A HOT DIY PROJECT

— By Bill Smith



*What could be more pleasant on a cool, late-fall-through-early-spring evening than being seated around your own backyard fire pit? As a do-it-yourself project, the task is not only relatively simple, but it's also inexpensive and can be completed in just a day.*

You'll need some common tools for this project. Both a straight and a pointed shovel will come in handy. A level — ideally a two-foot level and a four-foot level. Have a two-by-four about three feet long to use as a screed. A rubber mallet will help align your stones, and something with which to tamp the base down is also needed.

Materials include retaining wall blocks (36 is a good number for an average fire pit), square concrete pavers might be used for the floor of the pit, but some people also use

gravel or lava rock. If you choose the pavers, get some pea gravel to fill in the gaps. One bag of sand or paver base should be adequate. Get a metal fire pit ring.

Site selection is the first consideration, even before driving to the local home improvement store to choose the materials. Find a spot that is relatively level, with a water source nearby and far enough from any structures that an unfriendly fire can be easily extinguished. It appears that 15 feet from other structures is a common distance, but it is always a good idea to check local building codes before you make your final decision.

Your fire pit may be round or square, with the round structure perhaps the most popular. Paving stones or retaining wall blocks are available with sides cut at an angle so that 10 stones joined tightly together will produce a pit about 25 inches in diameter, whereas 12 stones might yield 30 to 35 inches. The thickness of the stones will determine the final height of the pit, and a common design of a backyard pit is three stones high.

Some large home improvement stores may sell a kit



that includes the stones and a metal fire ring, including instructions and a diagram of the completed size of the pit. One might want to just get an idea of what size pit the kit will produce and make a few changes, or just purchase the kit and create a “stock version.” Creating your custom kit might prove to be a little less expensive, but you will probably want to include a metal fire ring with this project, so that should be the first thing to consider, since that will give you an idea of the size of your pit and how many retaining wall blocks you will need.

After you determine the location and purchase the stones and fire ring, you will need to dig a hole. Place the metal fire ring on the ground in your selected location, and surround it with the first layer of stones. Push the shovel into the ground at regular intervals around the stones to mark the circle. Then remove the blocks and dig the hole about seven inches deep inside the area you marked.

To make sure you have a firm, level base, put sand or paver base in the hole. If you are on clay soil, drainage could be an issue, so you might want to dig another, deeper hole in the middle and fill it with gravel to provide a place for excess water to go. Use a level and a screed (a two-by-four works fine) to make sure the base is level and tamp the base down firmly.

Place your first row of stones around the inside of the first hole and make sure the top is level. You can always add a little sand or paver base under part of the individual stones or take a little away to get the first row as level as possible. If the first row is level, the next rows should be also.

If you haven't already put the metal fire ring in place, do it now, then add your next two rows of stones. The project could be considered complete at this point, but some builders like to add either heat-resistant adhesive or mortar to hold the stones in place.

Well done! Now it's time to bring out the marshmallows and make some s'mores! **NOW**

Sources:  
1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWffhXndXr4>.  
2. <https://www.hgtv.com/outdoors/landscaping-and-hardscaping/how-to-build-a-fire-pit-for-less-than-100>.



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— By Adam Walker

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Jennifer Reed is your hometown Geico agent. Her office may be in DeSoto, but she’s from Waxahachie. “I’ve lived in Waxahachie for over 20 years, and my office serves southern Dallas County and all of Ellis County,” she explained. “I have 27 years of experience with Geico in sales and underwriting. My husband has



22 years of experience with Geico as an adjuster before he joined me here in the office. So between the two of us, we have 50 years of experience in this business.”

Geico offers insurance for a wide range of situations. “We provide all kinds of property and casualty insurance. We have home and renter’s insurance. We insure all kinds of vehicles: autos, RVs, boats, motorcycles, ATVs. We can insure your jewelry. We offer insurance against ID theft and umbrella policies. We are able to bundle all your policies in one location in order to maximize your discounts. We’ve been able to lower our auto rates, in Texas, twice this year! Call us even if you have tickets or accidents. We are still able to insure you and hopefully save you money.”

Jennifer enjoys working with people. “This is a family business, and we treat you like family. Our service sets us apart from other insurance agencies. We love referrals, so we take care of you along with your friends and family. I love meeting and talking to my clients. I enjoy helping people find solutions, saving you money while finding the best coverage to protect your assets. Every person’s situation is



Because Jennifer cares so much about relationships, she and her agency are deeply involved in the community. I do a lot of community events. We were at the Crossroads of Texas Country Festival, with the gecko, meeting people. We're in the Christmas Parade, and we sponsor both the Christmas Tour of Homes and the Gingerbread Trail Tour of Homes. We're also sponsoring Nelson University's Christmas celebration.

**"This is a family business, and we treat you like family. Our service sets us apart from other insurance agencies."**

“We sponsor events at Sims Library, like their summer reading program, the Easter egg hunt and the Creature Teacher. We also support the DeSoto library. We give JROTC scholarships, work with military associations, and we sponsored the Texas State Police Games. We host several ISD events throughout the year. We will host teacher appreciation lunches, convocations, sports games and other activities. We even bring the gecko out to career days. Geico is Government Employees Insurance Company, so we truly appreciate our educators, first responders and government employees.

"We're members of both the DeSoto and Waxahachie Chambers of Commerce, and sponsor events for both of them. I'm an adviser for Leadership Ellis County and a mentor for The Bridge membership program, with the Waxahachie Chamber. I'm also a Rose Award sponsor for the Ellis County Christian Women's Job Corps, where I've taught classes on insurance and been a mentor. I truly believe in giving back to our community in all areas."

*Merry Christmas*

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Ignacio Vera and Genesis Lopez pose outside the Historic Ellis County Courthouse after their wedding.

Zoomed In:  
Glen Parker

By Adam Walker

Master Sergeant Glen Parker served 25 years in the United States Marine Corps. “I was a drill instructor from 1973-1974 and a recruiter from 1979-1980. The rest of the time, from 1966 to 1992, I was either on the West Coast or in the Pacific.” Glen was at the Civic Center helping put on the Veterans Celebration. “I’m one of 17 committee members. We’re trying to make sure that the veterans whose shoulders we have stood on are not forgotten,” he said. “Because too many have been.” The event had about 800 veterans show up to be honored for their service by various community groups. “We’ve been doing this for 24 years now. Prominent businesses all over Ellis County donate to support what we’re doing to honor our veterans.”



The Crossroads of Texas Country Festival has something for everyone.



The Avenue church re-launches their upgraded Kids Area at the Waxahachie Campus.



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The king (Mick Moreau) doth get his groove on at the new Tom Thumb.



Shoppers browse the ECLSR Holiday Market.



Everyone shows up when Sims Library throws a party.



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A quick look at the gift items and discounts available locally.

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## CookingNOW

# *In the Kitchen With*

## MATINA ROSE

— By Adam Walker

Matina Rose, a real estate agent with City Real Estate, has fond memories of childhood summers spent visiting family in Greece. She grew up in California with a mix of American, Greek and Mexican food.

“My husband brags about my cooking to his friends, and there was a time I was experimenting a lot with new recipes. One of his friends dropped by for dinner one night. I had found a recipe for an Eastern European dish called varnishkes which is bow tie noodles and buckwheat. I’d read a food blog and was intrigued. I served varnishkes, and it was awful. It was dry, and we all agreed the buckwheat tasted like dirt. I’m sure I did something terribly wrong. We still bring it up and laugh about it.” **NOW**

### Galaktoboureko

**4 cups milk**  
**1/2 cup fine semolina**  
**1 cup sugar**  
**1 1/3 cups butter (divided use)**  
**4 eggs**  
**1/2 tsp. vanilla**  
**1 lb. phyllo dough**  
**2/3 cup melted butter**

*Syrup:*  
**3 cups water**  
**2 cups sugar**  
**1/2 lemon**

**1.** Preheat the oven to 375 F.  
**2.** In a heavy pot, bring the milk to a boil without scalding. Lower the heat; whisk in the semolina, stirring constantly. Add the sugar; simmer for 5-6 minutes, stirring occasionally.

**3.** Remove from heat; add 2/3 cup of butter and the eggs, one at a time, stirring them in quickly. Add the vanilla, and keep stirring. The mix should be thick but pourable.

**4.** Butter a deep, 10-inch baking pan. Melt the remaining 2/3 cup of butter. On a cookie sheet, layer 8 sheets of phyllo dough, brushing melted butter on each layer. Place in the baking pan. Pour the mixture onto the layered dough. On the cookie sheet, layer an additional 8 sheets, brushing the melted butter between these sheets as well. Place these on top of the mixture in the baking pan. Tuck the edges into the sides of the pan. With a sharp knife, score the top diagonally trying not to cut into the last few layers of phyllo dough.

**5.** Sprinkle with a little water; bake for 1 hour.  
**6.** For the syrup: In a saucepan, combine the water and sugar. Add the lemon half, and simmer on low for 1 hour. Remove the lemon.

**7.** Remove the galaktoboureko from the oven, it should be a golden brown, and immediately pour the hot syrup over the top. It will sizzle and pop, so be careful



not to get burned and to protect the surrounding area with paper towels. Let cool and serve!

Valia’s Ukrainian Green Borscht

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 big carrot, grated
- 1 big tomato, grated
- 4 potatoes, cubed
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced into strips
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 head of cabbage, sliced thinly like for coleslaw
- 1/2 bunch dill, chopped
- 1/2 bunch parsley, chopped
- Cooked pork chops (or other cooked meat), cubed
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice (or vinegar)
- 1 Tbsp. sour cream per soup bowl

1. Heat the olive oil in a skillet; fry the diced onion and grated carrots until golden; add the grated tomato. Continue to cook until it’s all soft; transfer to a soup pot.

2. To the pot, add the potatoes, bell peppers and chicken broth; bring to a boil. Reduce heat slightly until the potatoes are almost soft, about 15 minutes.

3. Add the cabbage, dill, parsley and meat; add additional water, if needed, so it looks like a soup. Season with salt and pepper. Once the cabbage is soft, add the lemon juice. Serve with a dollop of sour cream and a nice French bread.

Aunt Pippitsa’s Stifado

- 1/2 cup butter
- 2-3 lbs. cubed beef
- 2 1/2 lbs. pearl onions
- 1 can tomato paste
- 1/3 cup red wine
- 2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 6-8 whole allspice
- 1/2 tsp. whole cloves
- 1/4 tsp. ground cumin

1. In a deep heavy bottom pot, melt the butter; add the meat to coat but do not brown. Add the onions.

2. Mix the tomato paste, wine, vinegar, sugar and garlic; pour the mixture over the meat and onions. Add the spices; bring to a simmer.

3. Cover; simmer for 3 hours until the meat is tender. Served with rice or potatoes.

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Galaktoboureko

1 tsp. salt  
1/2 tsp. black pepper  
1 tsp. cumin  
1/2 tsp. turmeric  
1 cabbage, shredded  
5 potatoes, cubed

1. In a heavy bottom pot, cook the onions and carrots in the olive oil over medium heat for about 10 minutes. Add salt, pepper, cumin, turmeric and cabbage; stir well. Cook an additional 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

2. Lower the temperature; add the potatoes. Cover and cook until the potatoes are soft, another 15-20 minutes. The cabbage and the potatoes will release water, so don't add any; the oil will keep it from sticking. Serve with Ethiopian injera bread.

## Demetra's Chicken Kokkinisto

4-6 chicken breasts, skins removed  
2 Tbsp. olive oil  
Salt, to taste  
Pepper, to taste  
1 8-oz. can tomato sauce  
1 cup water  
1/2 cup white wine  
1/2 tsp. cinnamon  
1/2 cup lemon juice

1. In a deep heavy bottom pot, brown the chicken in the olive oil; add the salt and pepper.

2. Add the tomato sauce, water, wine and cinnamon. Bring to a boil; then reduce to a simmer. Cook about 20 minutes, adding more water if needed. You want enough sauce to cover the chicken, so it all cooks.  
3. Add the lemon juice; cook another 20 minutes. Taste and add more lemon or cinnamon as you like. Serve with orzo pasta or rice.

## Elsa's Ethiopian Atakilt Wat

1 onion, diced  
4 carrots, peeled and sliced into rounds  
1/2 cup olive oil

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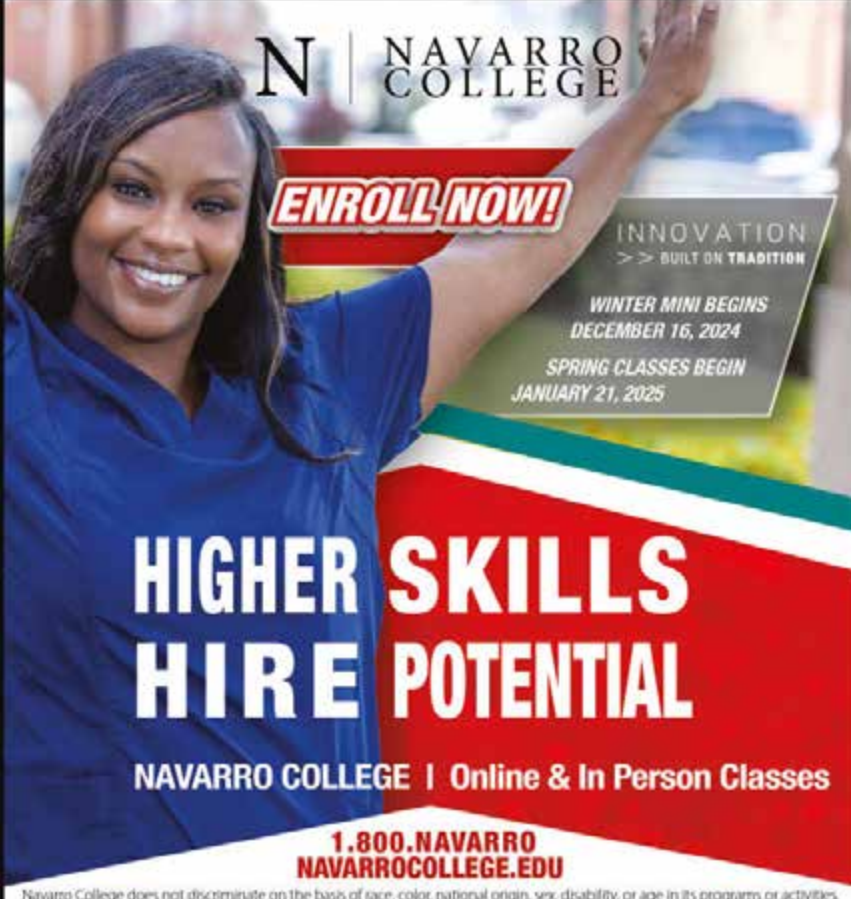
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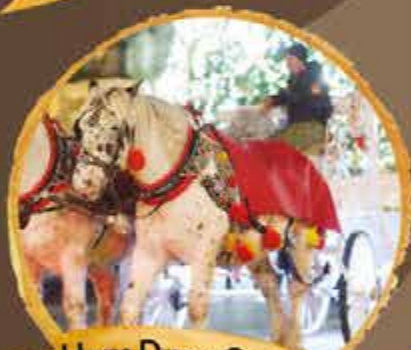
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8			7					
6			5					
		5					3	1
				3			8	
	4			5				9
			4			6		
5	8					2	4	
	3	9			2			

Medium

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

**12/3**  
**Christmas Parade and Community Tree Lighting:**  
Come out for a Waxahachie tradition. Free. 6:00-9:00 p.m., downtown.

**12/5-12/7**  
**Yeti, It's Cold Outside:**  
Nelson University theater department presents fun holiday fare. Purchase tickets at [brushfire.com/nelson/yetiitscoldoutside/591731](https://brushfire.com/nelson/yetiitscoldoutside/591731).

**12/6-12/8 and 12/13-12/15**  
**Bethlehem Revisited:**

Come relive that first night. Donations accepted. 6:00-9:00 p.m., 402 N. College St. (Behind Central Presbyterian Church).

**12/7**  
**Ellis County Christmas Fest:**  
Come for light displays, Santa, holiday market, food trucks and bounce houses. Free. 5:00-9:00 p.m., The Avenue Church, 1761 Hwy. 77.

**12/13-12/14 and 12/20-12/21**  
**Downtown Carriage Rides:**  
Supports CASA. Adults: \$20; kids: \$10. 6:00-8:00 p.m.

**12/13-12/15**  
**Happy Hollandaise!:**  
Presented by Waxahachie Community Theatre. \$25. **Friday and Saturday:** 7:30 p.m.; **Sunday:** 2:30 p.m., University Church, 221 Solon Rd.

**12/14**  
**Toys for Tots Collection Drive:**  
Masonic Lodge #90 will be collecting. 7:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., 303 John Arden Dr.

**Toys for Tots Distribution:**  
VFW Post 3894 will be distributing toys. 1405 N. I-35 E.

**12/14-12/15**  
**Historic Waxahachie Christmas Tour of Homes:**  
\$30. 2:00-8:00 p.m., various locations.

**12/31**  
**New Year's Eve Party:**  
The VFW Post 3894 will be hosting. DJ provided. 7:00 p.m., 1405 N. I-35 E.

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



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Dr. Allala is proud of the service they provide at Serenity Advanced Dentistry. "I think we give five-star service. And I know my staff is five-star. We know what works and what doesn't. I know it sounds corny, but this is my life's work. Most of my staff have been with me for years, at different locations around DFW, before I came to Cedar Hill. I met Mariela seven years ago, in Pleasant Grove. It was my first job out of school. Racine has been with me four years, and Jazmine three years, both in Red Oak. Our newest team member is Jessica. She found us three months ago when she emailed me looking for an opportunity to shadow a dentist."



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If you are an adult who is afraid of going to the dentist, or even just a little extra anxious, Serenity Advanced Dentistry may be just what you are looking for. "We do a lot of sedation dentistry, mostly for adults," Dr. Allala explained. "It's kind of my niche. Many adults may have some pretty serious anxiety about going to the dentist. They may not even seek care. They'd rather be in pain. I provide a place to take care of these people. When patients elect to get treatment, we lower the statistics of people living in pain. I like being able to contribute to improving people's lives."

"Coincidentally, a lot of people who are anxious about going to the dentist are also people who don't have good insurance. That's a bad combination. I have membership plans for patients without insurance, and really good discounts on implants and dentures. A membership might not be necessary if you only need one simple procedure, but if you need sedation and a lot of work, it really pays for itself."

Dr. Allala is a graduate of the Texas A&M School of Dentistry. "When I started there, it was still Baylor. My diploma has both names on it," she recalled. "I specialize in oral surgery, and we're really good at it. I'm nothing without my team. We do everything in dentistry. I like being well rounded. I enjoy being an overachiever, so I'm constantly taking continuing education, keeping up with all the

Serenity Advanced Dentistry has all the newest technology to make your experience convenient. "We have hospital-grade blood pressure machines, so we can do sedation. We also have intraoral scanners, so I can see inside your mouth, from every angle, before I ever go in for your procedure. We print dentures and place implants right here in the office. With our skills and strategies, most patients don't even feel our injections. We have TVs in every room to keep you entertained while we work. It's all about efficiency — working smarter, not harder. That's why I designed the floor plan of the office myself. And we're really big on sanitation and sterilization. It's important to maintain a sterile environment, which is why we're closed every Friday for deep cleaning the office and training."



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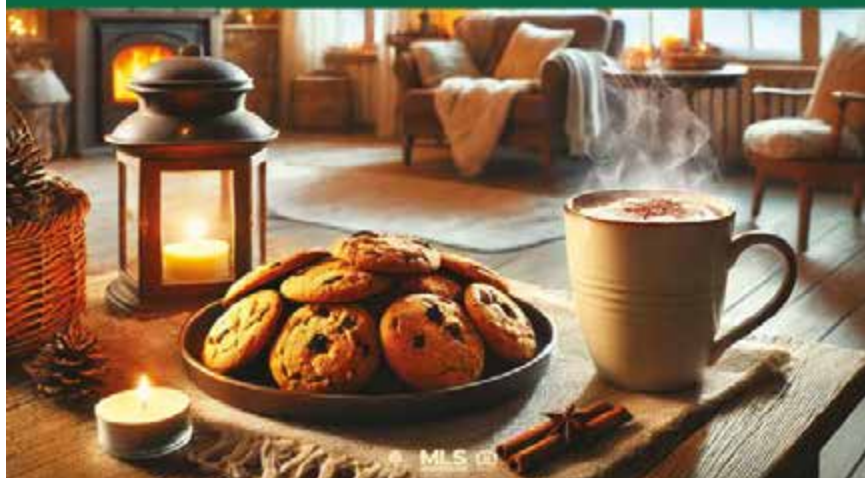
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