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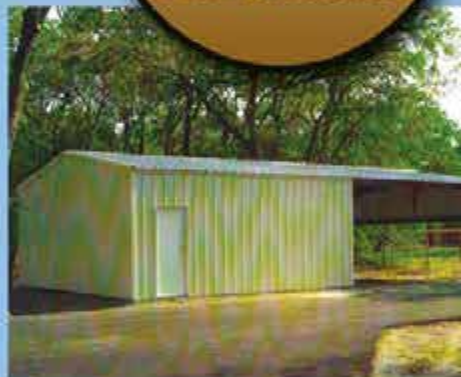
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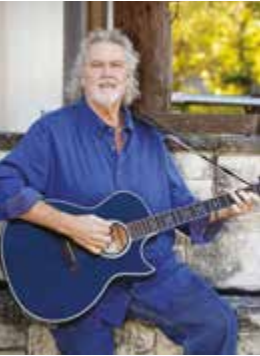


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ON THE COVER



Greg Walling made his dreams come true after five decades in music.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Angel

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Devil may care?

The idea of self-care means different things to each of us. Some people prioritize salon visits or five-star vacations, which I'm not knocking. But given the choice between paying my bills and a mani-pedi, the bills win ... Every. Darn. Time. By nature, I'm a saver, not a spender, and responsibilities outrank relaxation. Taking time to take care of myself has never been quite as important as perhaps it should be. The kind of care that's not absolutely necessary toward your physical well-being is way down my list of things to do ... even though I realize it might give my mental health a much-needed boost. Some folks skipped class to get an \$8 latte during the lesson on wants vs. needs, but not me. I took very, very extensive notes from the center of the first row.

Nevertheless, I'm not sitting around judging folks' discretionary spending. If you earned it, you spend it how you want. Even I, on occasion, splurge on beauty products or fashion (and don't forget, books!) — although I'm definitely hunting discounts on those, too. As time passes and life, stress and gravity take their toll, a little investment in things I normally consider extravagances may be required. The good news is, all those years paying off bills instead of splurging on the latest trends have positioned me to afford some personal wellness, without regret. Partner that with an appreciation for the most important investments — learning, loving and looking forward — and I've got all the self-care I need.

To self-content!

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GO ON AND ON



— By Angel Morris

Growing up singing gospel at a Free Will Baptist Church in South Oak Cliff, Greg Walling has been a musician more than 50 years. “Around 1965, my dad gave my older brother and me a set of drums and a guitar. My brother took a few lessons on guitar, and I beat on the drums,” he recalled.

Watching his brother, John, start a successful band playing parties, talent shows and being featured on TV’s *Mr. Peppermint*, Greg was inspired to pursue music. “I began plucking a guitar in the mid ’70s, teaching myself badly, mostly James Taylor, Michael Murphey, finger-picking style,” he recalled.

In the mid-1980s, Greg and John formed the group, Cruise Control, playing clubs, hotels and parties. In 1986, Greg moved from Oak Cliff to Ovilla. “In 1989 John left the band to devote more time to a Boy Scout Troop he started with his son. I took over the band, renaming it The Boogie Men and changing our musical style a bit,” Greg explained.

With its “funky blues, Texas soul” sound, the band (which currently features Greg, Steve Sinton, Aron Mattes, Caleb Blanton and Corey Reynolds) performed around North Texas, celebrating its 35th anniversary last year. Greg also started another group, Texas Kitchen Band, in 2021 “to strip down music and eventually release original music. Our CD released last fall,” Greg shared.

“Boogie Men is a five-piece group playing classic rock, blues and soul, and we keep a dance floor packed,” Greg continued. “Texas Kitchen plays as a four- or five-piece, concentrating on music by Texas artists: Stevie Ray Vaughan, ZZ Top, Delbert McClinton, Seth James, David Grissom, Jack Ingram. And now our own CD release, which is a box of everything, because it’s all about life experiences.”

Those experiences include playing everywhere from “private parties for Texas Rangers baseball, House of Blues, American Airlines and Microsoft, to VFW Halls, Dick’s Last Resort, Froggy Bottoms, The Goat, The Balcony Club and Lee Harvey’s. The list is endless, and we appreciate every venue!” Greg said.

Greg also found a way to appreciate the 2020 pandemic. “When most live music — and life in general — stopped, I was lucky enough to get booked at Mike McClain’s Garland studio for a great amount of sessions recreating some Kentucky and Tennessee gospel songwriters’ catalogs. We’re probably marginally famous in those states,” Greg quipped. “I also went through years of songs I’d written. At 65 years old, I finished my first and probably only CD!”



Greg credits the completion to Texas Kitchen Band mates Aron Mattes, Corey Reynolds and Chris Peake. "They've helped me so much. It's been a lot of fun and a lot of over thinking," he admitted. "Letting our guards down and being creative together is the best."

Greg had the opportunity to record with "old friend" Paul Osborn at Audio Dallas Recording Studio. "Sessions with Paul and Mike, both of these great musicians/engineers, has been a wonderful learning experience," he attributed.

Creating the CD, *Come and Get It*, brought many lessons. "I'm surprised it's so easy to go studio blind. So many decisions can bog you down. From rewriting a lyric because you've heard it played back 50 times now and you're tired of it, to getting tired of the sound of your own voice. I've never liked to listen to myself. This year of recording has been a stretch!" Greg noted.

The release of original music may open doors to larger performances. "I'm a marginal guitar player and not

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the worst harmonica player in Texas, but if the worst guy dies, I'm No, I!" Greg joked. "I'd like to continue to improve as a songwriter and performer — maybe get a song onto an independent film? And continue playing around DFW with both bands until I'm too old to move my own amp!"

Greg recognizes his circle of support, including "supremely significant other," Jennifer Hartley; family members, John, Mom Ann



Walling and L. Henry Norton; and "family by love," London Grounds, Alexis Belk and her children, Berkeley and Memphis Belk, who call him "Jampaw." Last but not least, Dandy the dog (named for Greg's grandfather). "I'm very thankful for the support folks have shown toward my musical adventures," Greg said. "My Dandy taught me, 'We're just gonna eat this apple one bite at a time,' meaning slow down and appreciate what's in front of you."

Outside of music, Greg refinishes ice boxes from the 1920s and '30s,

enjoys re-purposing old things and working on his house. He calls himself a proud Texan and American. "I pray we can move forward from the 'social media' lifestyle. It's making us less social. We can agree to disagree and improve all our lives together," he encouraged.

Greg offers wisdom toward pursuing one's dreams. "I've supported my family, raised children, worked a day job over 41 years, all while playing music everywhere from churches to stadiums. It took time, self-discipline and patience from both myself and my family, but I'm doing what I always wanted to do," he outlined. "Stay your course, but take care of your responsibilities first."

Greg said he learned priorities from his father — a World War II Marine on Guadalcanal and Okinawa, at 17 years old. "He passed in 2009 after teaching me values throughout my lifetime," Greg praised. "Ultimately, you have to find joy in the journey, and it helps to have people who care about you along for the ride. I'm a very lucky old dude." **NOW**



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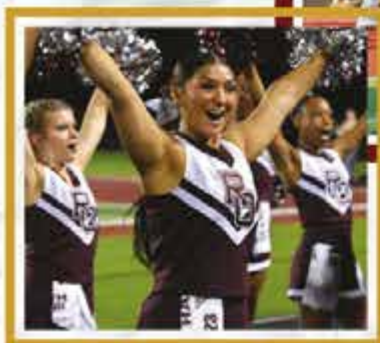
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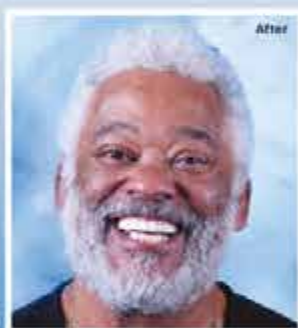
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— By Angel Morris

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Who better to build your family home than Southern Star Builders Inc., a family-owned and -operated business. Founder and Owner Melvin Barnes brings over three decades of experience in constructing custom residential homes,



multifamily units and commercial buildings. He is joined by his son, Giovanni Barnes, as project manager, his daughter-in-law, Madison Barnes, handling estimating and accounting, and his sister, Stephanie Foster, as administrative assistant and accountant.

“Our family wants to be part of building your family’s dream home,” Melvin shared. “Everyone’s lifestyle is unique, and your home should reflect that. We understand this is about more than just putting a roof over your head.”

Melvin emphasized that Southern Star Builders’ attention to detail and commitment to quality set them apart. “We’re dedicated to providing the quality craftsmanship we would expect for our own homes. This is your family’s safe haven, after all,” he noted. “Because this is our family’s reputation on the line, we pride ourselves on being efficient and reliable. We’re motivated by seeing our clients’ visions come to life.”

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your land or in one of their established communities. Located in the Southwest sector of Ellis County, Gladiator Estates is one of their premier communities. The site offers a variety of exterior elevations or can be adapted to customers' specific requests. "Whatever your construction goals, we can figure out how to achieve them," Melvin promised. "We've worked with customers from all walks of life with all kinds of styles and have even been featured on TV shows like *Cash Pad* and *Tiny House Nation*, showcasing our versatility."

Southern Star's expertise extends beyond residential projects to include commercial builds of various sizes, from retail spaces to office buildings. "We understand the importance of budget and timing in all our projects — especially in commercial builds," Melvin underscored. "You can visit our website to learn more about our commercial expertise."

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Lifelong residents of Ellis County, the Southern Star team members are proud graduates of the area whose children attend school here, as well. Melvin is also a member of the Planning and Zoning Committee for the city of Ferris. "My goal is to create a business where my children and their children can grow and thrive. I want my grandkids to be excited to work for the family company, positioning it in a way that creates opportunities for future generations," Melvin admitted.

"Our family's foundation is our strong work ethic, a value that has been passed down from our grandfather. It's one of the core principles that grounds us," Melvin continued. "Running a business with my son, daughter-in-law and sister is incredibly fulfilling. The pride I feel in having a family-run company is overwhelming. I know that no one will care for it like family does. We do it from our family, for yours." **NOW**

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Zoomed In:
Jalen Woods

By Angel Morris

Jalen Woods is in his first season with the new American Basketball Association team, the Midlothian Marshals. A Red Oak resident since 2020, Jalen started the sport when he was just 7 years old. “My dad got me into it, and I have been in love with basketball ever since,” Jalen noted.

The Marshals’ first season includes 20 games — nine at home in nearby Midlothian. The organization’s goal is to provide high-energy spectator sports for all ages. With general admission tickets starting at \$15, the Marshals offer affordable, family-friendly fun. Jalen, who enjoys mentoring children, appreciates this about his team.

Jalen, who enjoys photography in the offseason, looks forward to the remainder of his team’s season which runs through March. “Playing for the Marshals has been a good experience,” he said, “It has given me a great sense of community, which I really appreciate.”



Craig Belcher volunteers for a Cost of Poverty Experience, hosted by Unite Ellis, a group supporting locals in need.



Glenn Heights Fire Department representatives Joshua Lascano and Sean Kelly assist with United MegaCare’s distribution of a record number of meals during the recent Season of Service Giveaway.



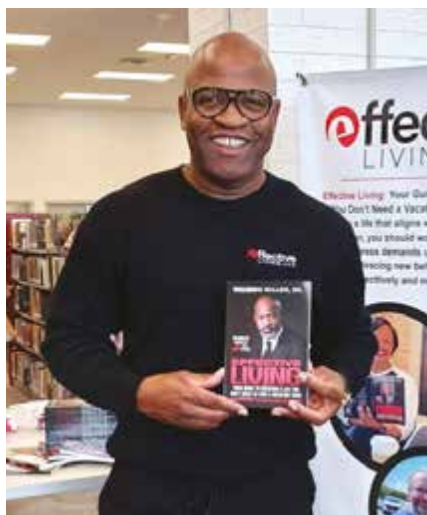
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Parmesan Risotto

CookingNOW

IN THE KITCHEN WITH

TINA STRAND

— By Angel Morris



Tina Strand grew up cooking with her mother and grandmothers. “We lived in East Texas, and the nearest town was 30 miles away. We cooked at home,” Tina noted, carrying on the tradition with her own children. “We always had dinner at the table as a family. We would talk about anything. No subject was off limits!”

The owner of S&S Signs & Specialties for 23 years, Tina uses cooking to relax. “It is my Zen,” she admitted. “I also enjoy attending concerts and watching Texas Longhorns and Kansas City Chiefs football.”

Tina shared her one food fantasy: “If I could do one thing in life, it would be to go to culinary school to learn all of the techniques and try different foods and just expand my palate.” **NOW**

Tomato Pie

Serves 6.

- 1 cup mayonnaise**
- Salt, to taste**
- Pepper, to taste**
- 1 cup Colby Jack cheese, grated**
- 1 cup Italian 4-cheese blend**
- 3-4 tomatoes, sliced about 1/2-inch thick**
- 10 fresh basil leaves, chopped**
- 1/2 cup green onion, chopped**
- 1 9-inch prebaked deep dish pie shell**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 350 F. Mix the mayonnaise, salt, pepper and cheeses.
- 2.** Layer the tomato slices, basil and onion in the pie shell. Spread the mayo/cheese mixture on top.
- 3.** Bake 20-30 minutes, or until lightly browned.

Parmesan Risotto

- 3 1/2 cups chicken broth**
- 3 Tbsp. butter, unsalted**
- 1 cup onion, finely chopped**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 cup Arborio rice**
- 1/2 cup dry red wine**
- 1/3 cup frozen peas**
- 1/2 cup Parmesan, grated**
- 1/4 cup parsley, chopped**
- Salt, to taste**
- Pepper, to taste**

- 1.** Bring the broth to a simmer over medium-high heat. Keep warm on low heat.
- 2.** Melt the butter in a large heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions; sauté until translucent, about 8 minutes. Stir in the garlic for 30 seconds. Stir in the rice; cook 2 minutes until toasted.
- 3.** Add the wine; stir until absorbed, about 1 minute. Add 3/4 cup of the hot broth; simmer on low, stirring often. Repeat, adding 3/4 cup of broth two more times until all of the broth is absorbed.
- 4.** Cook 12 minutes longer. Add half the remaining broth; stir. Add remaining broth; stir. Add the peas and Parmesan; heat through. Add the parsley, salt and pepper.

Ranch Potatoes

- 5-6 medium potatoes, washed and sliced**
- 1/4-inch thick**
- 1/4 tsp. garlic powder**
- 1 tsp. black pepper**
- 2 Tbsp. butter, melted**
- 1 16-oz. bottle ranch dressing**
- Cheese, to taste, grated (optional)**
- Bacon bits, to taste (optional)**
- Chives, to taste (optional)**

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 400 F. Place the potatoes in a 9x13-inch pan. Sprinkle with garlic powder and pepper. Drizzle with butter. Pour the dressing over the potatoes; toss to coat well.
- 2.** Cover; bake 50-60 minutes until tender.
- 3.** Sprinkle with grated cheese, bacon bits and/or chives, if desired.

Roasted Tomato Soup With
Bruschetta

Makes about 8 cups.

Soup:

- 12 large tomatoes (about 4 lbs.), stemmed and quartered
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil (divided use)
- 1/4 cup good quality balsamic vinegar
- 12 large garlic cloves, peeled
- Salt, to taste (divided use)
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste (divided use)
- 1 cup yellow onions, chopped
- 2 cups fresh basil leaves, lightly packed, plus a few leaves for garnish
- 2 cups cold water

Bruschetta:

- 1 loaf country-style bread, cut crosswise into 1-inch slices
- Extra-virgin olive oil, to taste
- Salt, to taste

1. For soup: Preheat the oven to 500 F. In a large bowl, mix the tomatoes, 1/4 cup oil, vinegar, garlic, salt and pepper. Spread the tomatoes out on a nonreflective baking sheet; roast in the oven until very dark in spots, about 35-40 minutes. Remove; allow to cool a bit.
2. In a large saucepan over medium heat, combine the remaining 1/4 cup oil, onions and a pinch of salt. Cook until the onions are very soft, 8-10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the basil leaves; sauté with the onions for about 1 minute.
3. Add the roasted tomatoes and water to a saucepan, bringing to a simmer; cook for 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Puree the tomato mixture in a blender, starting at a slow speed and gradually increasing. (Alternatively, you can use an immersion blender directly in the pot.) The mixture should be very smooth. You can prepare the soup to this point and refrigerate.
5. For bruschetta: Lightly brush 8 slices of bread with oil and season with salt. Place on a baking sheet; toast in the oven until golden brown and just beginning to crisp, about 6 minutes.
6. When ready to serve, pour the soup into a medium saucepan, bringing to a slow simmer over medium heat. Serve alongside bruschetta.

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JANUARY

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.

1/11

Catch-a-Trout:

Free kids fishing event. The Pond at Pearson Park will be stocked with trout from Texas Parks and Wildlife Neighborhood Fishin' Program. Registration: 8:00 a.m.; event: 8:00-10:00 a.m., 200 Lakeview Pkwy.

1/27

Christian Women's Job Corps Classes:

Free 12-week training program including Microsoft programs, money management, résumé writing and interviewing, Bible study and more. CWJC will also offer a free ESL class in Ferris in January. Call (972) 937-6620 for more information or visit

www.elliswcjc.life.

Fourth Mondays

Creative Quilters

Guild of Ellis County:

Program by Robyn Gotch from Kits to Custom followed by group member show and tell. 6:00-8:30 p.m., Waxahachie Bible Church, 621 N. Grand Ave., Waxahachie.

Tuesdays

Children's Storytime:

Reading of stories, making crafts and playing games based around a weekly theme. Recommended for children aged 18 months-5 years old. 10:00 a.m., Red Oak Library, 101 S. Live Oak St. To discover other

events, visit www.redoaktx.org/224/Programs-Events.

First Thursdays

Red Oak Lion's Club Meeting:

Joining Lions Club is a way to network with other businesses, community leaders and civic-minded people while helping your community. 6:30-7:30 p.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. To learn more, call (469) 571-7265.

Wednesdays and Thursdays

Senior Citizen

Center of Red Oak:

Enjoy coffee, juice and donuts each morning, as well as a sponsored lunch on first-third

Thursdays and a potluck on fourth Thursdays. Also, games, puzzles, bingo and informative guest speakers. 8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. Call (972) 576-8475 for more information.

Third Saturdays

Mobile Food Pantry:

Please remain in your car. Food will be brought to you. 10:00 a.m.-noon, Red Oak Discipleship Ministries, 507 I-35 E. South. To volunteer, email communityoutreach@dminc.org.

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



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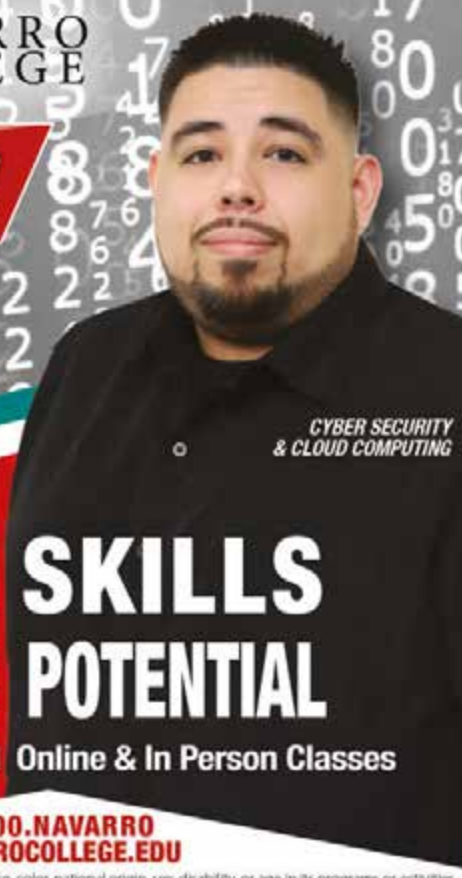


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