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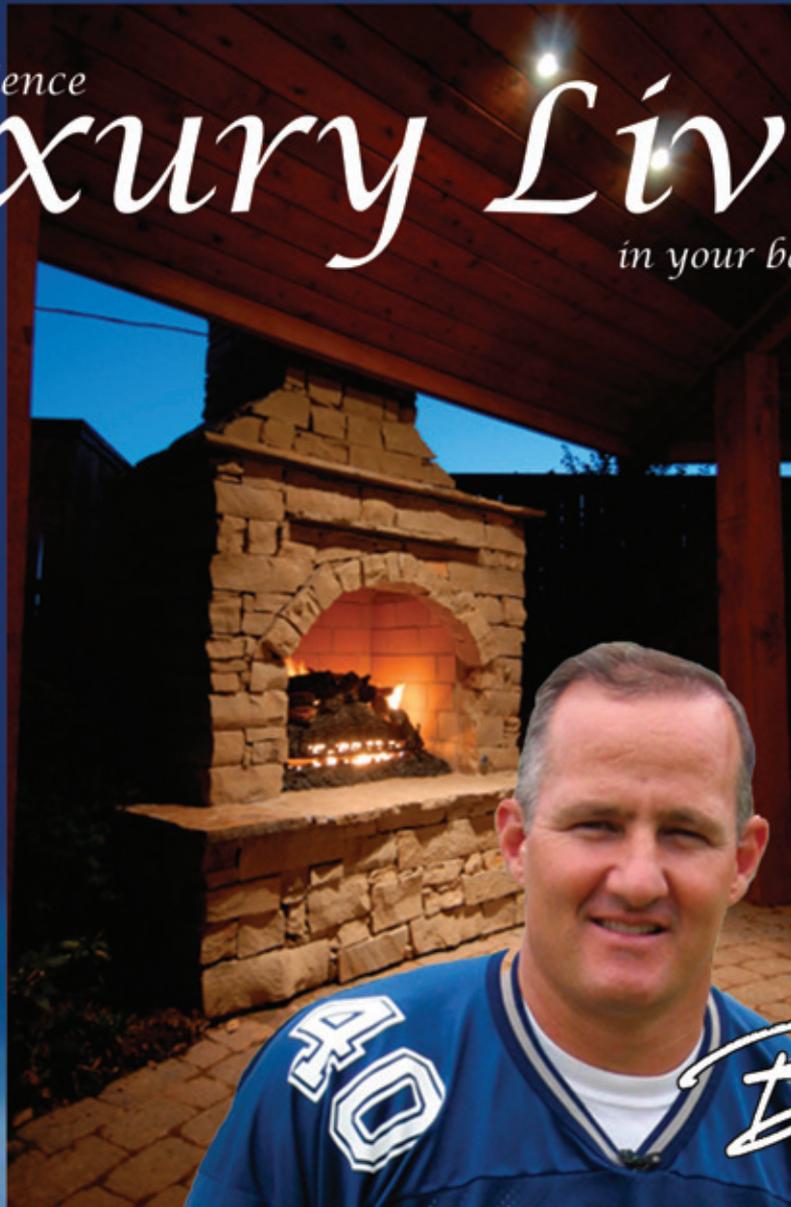
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Waxahachie
The Community Magazine
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MAGAZINE

Editor's Note

Hello, Waxahachie!

I wonder what my Valentine will give me this year — a card filled with sentiments of love and devotion, a box of chocolate candy or possibly a dozen long-stemmed red roses? Whatever the gift may be, I will receive it in the same fashion it was given, with heartfelt gratitude and love.

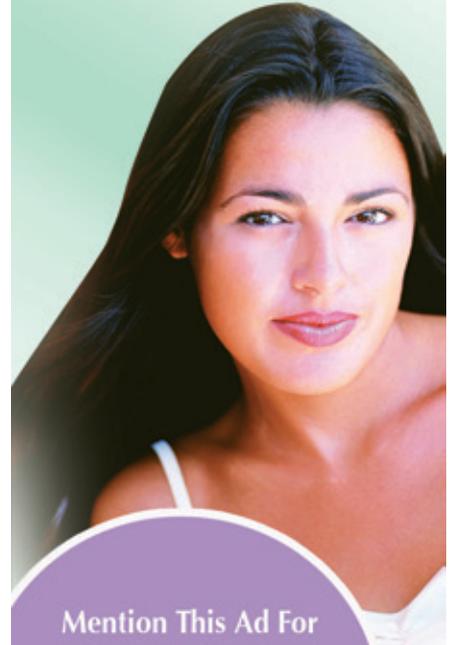
February is also the month our youngest residents will learn about dental hygiene as they are taught the proper way to brush, rinse and floss. Many others will be educated on how to have a healthy heart through special events associated with American Heart Month. February is also Black History Month, and this year on January 20, a historical milestone took place as the United States swore into office its first African-American president.

We have definitely come a long way, and I am proud to be an American!

Sandra McIntosh
WaxahachieNOW Editor



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Bred to Serve

— By Katrina D. McNair

Though her deep brown eyes, luxurious coat and playful manner lead you to believe she is a typical Labrador, Avery is anything but your typical family pet. Living with the Erickson family of Waxahachie, Avery is in training to become a guide dog for a visually impaired person. Brothers Stephen and Daniel Erickson have been working with her, ensuring she is ready to serve whenever and wherever she is needed.

Both brothers are assisting in Avery's preparations to become a service animal, but Stephen is the official "puppy raiser." A lifelong love of animals and a strong interest in

volunteering made the choice to work with Avery an easy one for Stephen. Told he was too young to begin working in a local animal shelter, he sought guidance on what he could do to help someone. "I prayed about it, and I asked God to help me find something that I could help somebody with and volunteer for," he said. "And then, my brother started talking about the girl in his dorm."

Avery was born in Florida, but the dog's journey to Waxahachie has its roots at Texas A&M University, of all places. Matthew, Daniel and Stephen's older brother, lived in a dorm, coed by floors at the university. One of his classmates was raising a puppy that was in training to become a guide dog. On a visit home, Matthew began telling his family about his friend and his amazement at what she was doing. After discussing the issue with their parents, Kirby and Christine, Stephen and Daniel began researching guide dog facilities on the Internet.

Service to the community and giving back seems to be second nature for all of the Erickson boys. Matthew, Tim (another brother, who is also a student at Texas A&M) and Stephen are all Eagle Scouts, and Daniel is a Life Scout. "Part of Scouting is giving back to the community," Kirby said. "We try to keep them interested in giving back to the community and try to keep their eyes open to opportunities where they can help people."

All of their research led the brothers to Southeastern Guide Dogs, a nonprofit organization located in Florida. The school has provided guide dogs to the visually impaired since 1982 and has matched more than 800 individuals with lifelong

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canine companions. The school operates its own breeding colony, to ensure the dogs are bred for proper temperament and optimum health. Roughly 20 dogs are currently being raised in the Dallas area by various people, from families to retirees.

After filling out evaluation forms, the Ericksons were also required to attend three local events with other area puppy raisers. This gave the other puppy raisers a chance to evaluate them; it was also a test of the family's dedication and commitment to raising Avery, and allowed them to ask questions. There was also an in-home visit and intensive interview.

As a puppy raiser, Stephen, with Daniel's assistance, is responsible for getting Avery accustomed to many things typical family pets may not have to encounter. Guide dogs, while being the "pet" of their human companion, must be able to navigate things like revolving doors and resist the temptation to run off and play when they are leading a visually impaired person. "Our job is to socialize the dog, and we're supposed to get them used to every different aspect of life that they can have," Stephen explained.

Socializing Avery means she travels all over the metroplex in order to grow accustomed to everyday noises, situations and potential distractions. This means trips on DART buses and trains, football games and aquariums — you name the place, Avery has probably been there. "She's been to Walmart more times probably than most people who live in Waxahachie," Kirby laughed. "With four sons, we make almost daily trips for something."

Though her training is a little more intensive than that of most pets, Avery also has to learn everyday commands as well. "We had to do basic commands — sit, stay, down," Daniel added. "They have to be quiet — they can't bark or whine."

"From day one, she never barked," Stephen noted. "Her temperament is great." However, even basic commands require a little more training for the



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Dr. Cole is a native Texan who enjoys treating a broad range of general surgical conditions. His particular clinical interests include advanced laparoscopic procedures such as colon resections, gallbladder and appendix removal, as well as hernia repairs and anti-reflux surgeries. Dr. Cole treats colorectal, endocrine and breast diseases. He also performs colonoscopy and upper endoscopy.

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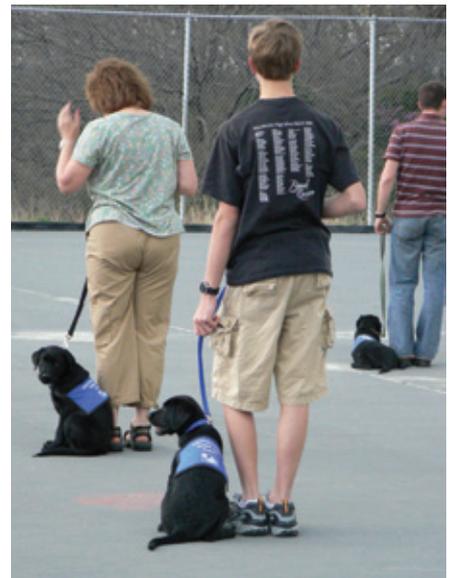
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important job Avery may have one day. Her walk, for example has to be watched. Ensuring that she does not cross in front of Stephen when she walks means she will not do so to a visually impaired person she leads. When Avery heels, she must learn to be a little ahead of the person she is guiding, versus being at their side like most dogs.

Almost a year old, Avery will return to Southeastern Guide Dogs this month, where the staff will evaluate her readiness to assist a visually impaired person. If Avery is deemed ready for further training, she will stay at the school to be further prepared. This further training can take up to eight months.

With Stephen's busy schedule, it can be a little challenging adding Avery to



"We try to keep them interested in giving back to the community."

the mix, but so far, everything has worked out. "It's been pretty tough," said Stephen, who is involved in sports, student government and carries a load of advanced courses. "But, we work her in with my schedule. I've taken her to school before, and that's a lot different from a normal school day," he laughed, "but that was a great experience. It's really good to help educate the public, because more people know she has a special job."

Because this is their first experience raising a guide dog, neither Stephen

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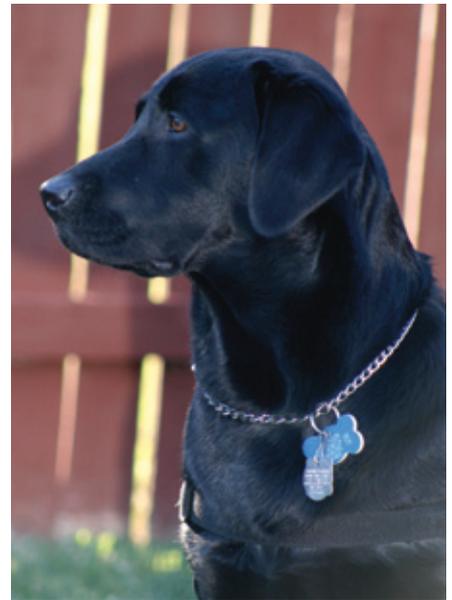
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nor Daniel are really sure how they will feel when it is time to take Avery back to Florida. The upcoming separation has not dampened their spirit and excitement for the next step — raising another guide dog puppy. Once Avery is returned to Southeastern Guide Dogs, another puppy will join the family in February — and the process will begin again, with a slightly different twist. “This time Daniel will be listed as the official raiser,” Kirby stated. “We’re going to drop her off and get another one,” he said. “So, Stephen will have Avery and Daniel will have the next one.”



“From day one, she never barked. Her temperament is great.”

More than anything else, Stephen is in awe of all the potential Avery has to be of service to someone. Stephen had a brief episode of blindness resulting from a childhood accident, and the ensuing disorientation and fear serves as further confirmation that Avery is being prepared to do a great thing. “I experienced what it was like not to be able to see,” Stephen admitted. “I was nervous and didn’t know if my life was going to change. Avery has the potential to really help someone. We’re the beginning of that process and that feels good.” **NOW**

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Decorating *With* Purpose

— By Sandra McIntosh



At Home With John and Debbie DeNicola

John and Debbie DeNicola met on a blind date. He was on active duty in the Navy in Charleston, South Carolina, and she was from upstate New York, attending college at the University of South Carolina. After their first meeting, it was not long before their long-distance relationship began. “We met through mutual friends,” Debbie said. “We dated for a year-and-a-half before marrying.”

Talking about the early years of marriage brought back a flood of memories, many of which are beautifully displayed throughout





their new three-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath home. "So much happened to us when we lived in Charleston," Debbie said, as John nodded his head in agreement. "We met and married there. I taught there while John served on a guided missile destroyer. Our oldest daughter, Danielle, now 20 and away at college, was born and baptized there. There are so many memories."

Since leaving South Carolina, John and Debbie have lived several places, including Georgia, Tennessee and Arkansas. Upon his return from serving during the Iraq War at Special Operations Command, John learned his job with General Electric had been



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dissolved due to the plant's closing. He quickly landed a position in Fort Worth, which prompted the family's speedy relocation to Waxahachie, Texas, just over three years ago. "We had two weekends to find a city, a house and a high school that offered a good performing arts program," Debbie explained. "We had narrowed our search down to three towns."

"We were shopping in November," John interjected, "so there weren't many houses for sale to choose from."

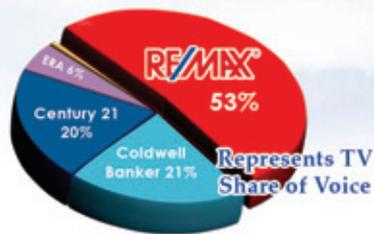
With their main priority being the level of performing arts at the city's high school, they began to seriously, and quickly, house hunt in Waxahachie.

Luckily, while driving around, the Realtor drove in front of the house they lovingly call home today.



"There was a 'For Sale' sign in the yard," Debbie remembered. "The Austin stone facade made me want to go inside and take a closer look." Years earlier, Debbie had taken a pleasure trip to Texas with a friend. During that visit, she first saw Austin stone. Her memory drew her to the Texas Hill Country prairie-style abode constructed by the home's first

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Elton had custom-designed the home to fit his needs — a process that took 200 schematic drawings before the building ever got underway. The open floor plan was inviting, and the use of straight lines and subtle colors seemed to welcome the couple during that first visit. Needless to say, the DeNicolas went home to pack, while Elton began to build the back porch he had promised when closing the deal. “We knew we were going to miss the trees in Arkansas,” she said. “The back porch has provided the shade we knew we were going to need.” The landscaping, all native to Texas, drought-resistant and complementary to the home, is an

eye-catching creation by The Greenery.

Three weeks from the couple’s first look, they were moving into their new home. One initial problem was solved by garage sales, giveaways and several trips to the local resale shop. “We downsized when moving to Waxahachie,” Debbie said. “I had so much trouble deciding what to keep and what we could live without.” Robin Chatfield, a local designer, helped Debbie pull the couple’s new home together. “She helped me figure the house out,” Debbie noted. “We had two huge yard sales after moving here and we gave a lot of things away.” During the downsizing, Debbie learned the importance of making the right decision when it comes

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to selling, discarding or giving things away. “You have to ask yourself if you’ll need or want it later,” she said, referring to the girls’ rocker as an item she wished she had added to the “keep” column.

The open floor plan has proven great for entertaining. In fact, while Danielle was still a student at Waxahachie High School, the DeNicolas held a cast party for those involved in the production of *Into the Woods* with no fewer than 75 people in attendance. “There was plenty of room for everyone,” John remembered. “The home is conducive to entertaining.” They all smiled as they recalled the home’s transformation after local florist,



Villa Flora’s, job was complete. “Our home became a wooded forest with trees, birds, moss and twigs,” Debbie said. “The decor matched the theme of the production perfectly.”

Several cosmetic changes have been made since the family took ownership. The bedrooms and bathrooms have been customized to meet the individual personalities of each member of the family. The carpet in the oversized family room was removed and the concrete beneath was stained to add ambiance to an already warm, cozy space. The carpet was also replaced in the master bedroom, while slate and porcelain tile

was added to the master bathroom.

The life-sized mural of three horses done by the Painted Lady blends well with the red oak floors original to the home. This same type of flooring is located in the half-bath located behind a somewhat hidden doorway off the living room, as well as in the living room, formal dining area, foyer, kitchen, breakfast room and the hallways. The kitchen cabinetry is also constructed from red oak.

Memories are displayed throughout the home. "Kid art" is framed and hangs in the hall leading to the girls' rooms, while a watercolor of the Summerville Presbyterian Church located outside of Charleston hangs in the entry opposite the piano, which the couple's youngest daughter Katie, age 10, plays with grace and ease. "That's the church where we were married," Debbie said, explaining the significance of the painting. "It is also the church where Danielle was baptized." A larger selection of framed art hangs in the living room. "That's an enlarged photograph I took in France when I was still in college," Debbie admitted. "When I look at it, I remember the trip in detail."

Most of the decorative items evoke special memories for the couple. "All the things in the home tie into our life together," Debbie said. "They may not mean anything to anyone else, but they have very special meaning to us." Most everything has sentimental value tied to the DeNicolas' life, including her brother's pottery, quilts handcrafted by her mother and grandmother, several pieces of furniture handed down from John's parents, which date back to the 1800s, and the large painting created by Katie and beautifully displayed in the master bedroom. The furniture placement may differ from their past home, but John and Debbie have been able to find warmth with clean lines, warm colors and decorating with one purpose in mind — that each room will hold at least one special memory for the whole family. **NOW**

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Walking in the

Light

— By Sandra McIntosh



Eric Jenkins is proud of the man he has become, but he gives all the glory to the God he now serves. He expresses his praise through his music. “It’s a gift,” he humbly stated. “When I think of art, I think of expression. I express my love and devotion to God when I’m singing and ministering to others. I believe the music that comes from within me is my art form, and it’s also my way of preaching.”

While some children realize their God-given talent at a very young age, others like Eric walk through their childhood in a cloud of darkness. The road out of the darkness was not an easy one. “I came from a family that liked to party,” Eric admitted. “I was in and out of trouble until I finally saw the light.”

A major change came in Eric’s life after he was in a serious automobile accident. “I was in a really bad wreck,” he said, “and the only thing broken was my pelvis.” Nearly six months to the day after the accident, Eric felt a strong desire to take a friend up on their invitation. “My mom’s friend invited us to go to church,” he remembered. “At this service, I truly surrendered my life over to God, and I began to walk in the light.” Almost immediately following this service, the musical talent began to pour out of him. “I quickly began to discover who God [had] created me to be,” he added. “We all have a purpose in life, and I learned mine was to minister through music and song.”

During this time of revelation and transformation, Eric

decided to go back to school and work toward his G.E.D. "I felt the calling on my life to be an evangelist, so after getting my diploma, I enrolled at SAGU [Southwestern Assemblies of God University]," he said, proud of the bachelor's degree in church ministries he received in December of 2008. "It's amazing to be able to say I'm no longer the man I used to be."

The words were always in him, but now he knew how best to release them. "One day, I picked up a guitar," he said. "Friends may have shown me a few cords, but I learned the rest on

"Sometimes it's the words and other times it's the music, but I believe it's God who makes sure they come together."

my own." When asked what comes first, the lyrics or the music, Eric just smiled, "It varies," he said. "Sometimes it's the words and other times it's the music, but I believe it's God who makes sure they come together."

Eric has become well-known in several churches in and around Ellis County for his unique style of hip-hop Christian music. Although he loves to minister to the area's youth, he feels very comfortable with all age groups. His favorite form of music to perform is praise and worship.

"It's intimate," he shared. "I can get lost in the moment. I just feel this need to bring everyone along with me — to have them be part of the masterpiece."

While working toward his degree, Eric also led worship services and helped a close friend plant a church in

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the Dallas area. Since graduating, his heart's desire is to travel the world as an evangelist. "I want to share the gift God gave me with the world," he stated. "I would love to share my music with churches in Europe." Eric also feels his newfound confidence in the Lord was strengthened during the four years he spent at SAGU. "The professors became my mentors," he said. "They trained and disciplined me. They helped me be who I'm supposed to be. They helped bring the music in me to the



**"I want to share the
gift God gave me
with the world."**

surface. They provided the environment I needed to grow in my music, as well as equip me with the tools I need to be successful in the real world."

Eric compares life to a really difficult jigsaw puzzle. He has had to work very hard to see the puzzle pieces of his new life come together. He is a perfect example that change is possible, even when you have to claw to climb out of the bottom of the barrel. "My music keeps me walking in the light," he noted.

As this talented young man moves into adulthood as a musician and evangelist, he never wants to forget where he came from, but he never wants to return either. "Each day I continue to see my dreams come true," he explained. "I believe it's all because of forgiveness." **NOW**

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Fit to Win

— By Amanda Madden Pitt



As a personal trainer, Waxahachie's Freestyle Fitness owner Daniel Ortiz sports a long list of impressive accomplishments. He pushes hard and gets results. "There's a difference between hanging out and working out. I am neither a social trainer nor your therapist, but I will be your best friend in helping you reach your goals," he said.

A well-known local boxer, Daniel has been featured twice on a Fox sports show for the 2007 Ardmore, Oklahoma and Biloxi, Mississippi Toughman competitions, and has interviewed for NBC's television show *The Contender*. He also coaches cops and firefighters for the annual Guns & Hoses Tournament hosted in Mesquite, which aired on Telemundo in November 2008. He trains members of the FBI and has coached a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader and professional body building competitors. He has implemented fitness programs at the Waxahachie YMCA, Navarro Jr. College, the Waxahachie Daily Light and taught classes at the University of Arlington. As a boxing instructor, Daniel loves his shot in the ring against guys in their

20s. "We're not trying to knock each other out, but endurance-wise, I still pride myself on being able to hang with them," he said. "I want to keep fighting until some young guy whups my butt."

A day in the life of this disciplined trainer begins at 3:30 a.m. when he heads to his office at the Waxahachie Lord's Gym. He has to make personal workout time fit in with 40

"I am neither a social trainer nor your therapist, but I will be your best friend in helping you reach your goals."

to 50 personal training sessions on top of classes each week. "I usually get up at about 3:30 in the morning because I want to be wide awake for my clients, and get here [the gym] at about 4:30 a.m.," Daniel said. "I train the Waxahachie Daily Light at noon Monday through Friday, and I have clients in the mornings and afternoons. I teach six classes a week."

Daniel fits in an hour some days to nap and eat.

Certifications he has obtained over the years include: Cooper Aerobics Institute Elite Physical Fitness Specialist, Turbo Kickboxing Certification and State of Texas Boxing Second License, to name a few. His disciplines of choice are boxing, Karate and jujitsu. "It's cool for my clients to be able to say their trainer has done things professionally, like boxing and martial arts, but my workouts are less about me and more about what they need," Daniel said. "The goal is to promote fitness safely, and everyone will be at a different level."

So, where does Daniel get the energy and passion to push as hard as he does? "I love what I do," he said, and his dedication shows as he works to create personalized programs based on the individuality of each client. "If I put them on a fitness program based on what I like, they're going to say, 'I don't want to do that. I don't like that.'" His first meeting with new clients is an interview-style evaluation. "To make sure they don't mind me telling them what to do," he joked.

Someone who needs to be weaned off the couch of complacency could expect four days a week of activity. Two days may consist of a 20-minute cardiovascular workout, and two days may include two 10-minute cardio intervals before and after a weight routine. Time wise, the novice can expect about 45 minutes maximum on the two longest days of a four-day routine. Depending on the individual's fitness level, the much-feared free weight or circuit training may be as easy as one set of 10 reps on each of the major muscle groups, which takes about 20 minutes total to complete.

A personal trainer since 1988, Daniel has seen fitness fads come and go. "The only ones that work are diet changes and exercise," he said. Though weight loss requires more calories burned than consumed, each person's physical fitness level is unique, so Daniel promotes safety first. "My main goal is to train

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my clients and increase their fitness level,” Daniel said. “I need to train them safely, and slowly progress them from A to Z not from Y to Z. I need to get them in better shape than when they walked in the door so that a month from now they’re going to be able to do something — push-ups, cycling, weight training — better than when they first walked in the



“My main goal is to train my clients and increase their fitness level.”

door.” One of his most inspiring clients was Big Todd, and Daniel’s greatest inspiration was Todd’s attitude. “He had hundreds of pounds to lose, but he came every day at the same time. He was there, faithfully.” In the beginning, it took Todd double the time to walk a mile as it did within a few months of their first session.

To help remain focused on health rather than the vanity that surrounds the fitness scene, reminders are written on the walls of the gym. Daniel’s favorite is I Corinthians 9:24: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” **NOW**



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Office Manager Ana Lara and her two assistant managers, Whitney Trevino and Leandra Gonzales are ready to help you secure a small loan.

Trio of Team Players

— By Sandra McIntosh

Are you looking for a loan to help with a special Valentine's Day purchase? What about fast, reliable, competent help in filing your income tax return? Look no further than Sun Loan Company and Tax Service. Office manager, Ana Lara, and her two assistant managers, Whitney Trevino and Leandra Gonzales, take great pride in the relationships they have built with their bank of customers. "They're much more than customers," Ana admitted. "We know their names." The trio agrees that customer opinion can make or break a company. "Several new customers are here because of our regular customers," Ana added, referring to the "word of mouth" philosophy aforementioned. "Good customer service is key to operating a successful business."

Ana's tenure with Sun Loan Company began in February 2004. "I hired on as an assistant," she said, happy to be celebrating her six-year anniversary with the company later this month. "I wasn't promoted to office manager until May of 2008." There is plenty of valuable experience found in Ana, Whitney and Leandra. On those rare occasions when they cannot answer a customer's question or a problem arises, they have their supervisor, Christi Dovel, to look to for guidance and help. The Waxahachie office, located at 1014 Ferris Avenue, Suite 101, is only one of the many area locations Christi oversees. "Her area also includes: Cleburne, Abilene, Corsicana, Temple, Brownwood, Fort Worth and Waco," Whitney stated. "She helps us

find solutions, instead of dwelling on the problems," Leandra added. Needless to say, Sun Loan Company is committed to customer service with over 250 offices statewide.

The "signature loans" help customers with no credit history establish a history of good credit, as long as they make their monthly payments on time. It also allows return customers to grow their credit history. "Some young couples start with a \$100 loan," Ana said, "and build up to the highest level of \$1,193. Some have even gone on to buy homes based on the credit history they've established through their relationship with Sun Loan Company."

Providing tax service is still fairly new to the company, but Ana has seen

a steady growth since its inclusion three years ago. Comparable to the area competition, the women at Sun Loan Company not only figure taxes, they can also file rapid refunds and are familiar with the e-File system, too. "We offer free tax estimates," Ana said, further explaining that the customer is not obligated to file their taxes at Sun Loan just because it was estimated there.

The trio of team players all agree: customers make the job worthwhile. "We like getting to meet new people; getting to really know them," Ana confessed. "The fact that people know us away from the office gives us all a sense of pride." They also agree when it comes to identifying the most difficult part of the job: "Collections are part of what we do," Ana explained. "Saying 'no' to a customer is hard."

Bottom line, the most important responsibility they share is customer service, which they offer with professionalism in every situation.

"The fact that people know us away from the office gives us all a sense of pride."

"The way we treat the customers," Ana said, "is the way they will pay back their loan. If we offer poor customer service, they will pay us back the same way — poorly. Good customer service is very, very important!"

If you have questions or need a small loan, stop by the office of Sun Loan Company and Tax Service, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. and Saturdays throughout the tax season from 8:30 a.m. - noon, or give them a call at (972) 938-7861. **NOW**

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Technological Mindset

— By Sandra McIntosh



As a mother, Rena Bowden wanted the best for her daughter when it came to extracurricular learning activities. “She was my inspiration,” Rena confessed, as she referred to the Imagine Tomorrow software and curriculum for children offered through her company, iLearn Computers. “Because I wanted the best for her, I was able to step out to bring this technological learning experience, not only to Meredith, but to the entire community.”

Rena was all too familiar with the computer puzzles and games available for children ages 3 through 7. When her six months of research began, she

was looking for a computer program that was robust, as well as intelligent. “I wanted the full package,” she said. “Imagine Tomorrow was designed by an early childhood teacher. It incorporates modern technology with early learning skills. The program offers a unique, positive learning experience where all children are successful.”

What began in the privacy of Rena’s home has grown to include daycare centers and private schools in and around Ellis County. The parent-funded program offers four eight-week sessions during the calendar year which consist of 32 lessons, while a single eight-week session is offered during the summer months. “No two lessons are ever the same,” Rena stated. “Each lesson takes the students on a mission into a new world each week. The problem that must be solved teaches them a technology concept that is relevant in the world today.”

Each interactive lesson begins as a group. On her own computer, Rena presents the lesson for the day. The children, who are now called computer detectives, are introduced to the day’s mission. On this particular day, they were going to solve one of the most difficult lessons available within the program. “We are going to solve The Case of the Fossil Find,” Rena explained. “We’re going to learn how to copy and paste.”

Once they have learned what the mission is for the day, each child takes their place in front of their own computer, thus allowing them to work at their own pace within the lesson. As they press the “green light go button” their journey begins. “Throughout the mission, they are given instructions on what to



do to get to the next level of learning,” Rena said. “It usually begins with a simple mouse activity which serves as a hand/eye coordination warm-up that also helps them practice their counting skills.” What Rena found to be so great about this overall program is the software gets to know the individual skill level of each student beginning with their first lesson. “The computer conforms to the child’s skill level,” Rena said, “so each child will be challenged at their own learning level.” No longer does the child feel as if something presented is too easy; no longer does a child sit in frustration waiting for the lesson to move ahead. “They each find success within their own lesson,” she said.

The faster a child works through each section, the more difficult the section becomes until it is time to move on to the next level of play. “Positive reinforcement is an integral part of the program,” Rena added. “The ‘puterbugs’ that journey through the mission with them are always eager to tell them what a great job they are doing.”

When solving The Case of the Fossil Find, each student learned how to copy and paste bones that would complete a large dinosaur by using their mouse, as well as using the Ctrl C and Ctrl V buttons on their keyboards. Once the missing pieces were copied and pasted into the picture of the dinosaur with

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several missing bones, the students then learned the technique of “dragging and dropping” the pieces into place.

Other one-of-a-kind offerings the students look forward to from week to week are the vehicles they drive throughout each mission. One week it may be a spaceship, while the next week it could be a race car or airplane. “Each vehicle is different in each lesson,” Rena said, “and they all come equipped with a GPS map to help them get where they are going.” There is also a lesson on shapes that uses “megabytes.” This particular activity challenges the

“The problem that must be solved teaches them a technology concept that is relevant in the world today.”

students every week on shapes, sizes and colors. “They learn to expect the sequence and flow of the software,” Rena noted, “while also learning the proper computer terminology such as click and drag.”

The all-inclusive program also introduces these young students to the early stages of graphic design, the difference between a laptop and a desktop, satellites, cell phones, printers and ink, the World Wide Web and how best to use a search engine. At the end of each mission, the student receives a mission checklist which shows them, as well as their parents, what they learned within that particular 25-minute session.

Through this program, Rena has seen more parental involvement and she has also seen distracted students become more focused and eager to learn. “The program is designed for each child to be challenged to focus, learn, concentrate and listen comprehensively,” Rena stated. “It’s designed so the children enjoy the overall experience of learning. They learn they can do anything they set their minds to doing.” **NOW**



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Ribbon cuttings were held at: Main Place Music, top left; Coal City Cob Company, top right; Brian Lance of Merrill Lynch, second row center; Monarch Dental, second row right; and Legacy Liquor, bottom left. Charles Solomon Jr., son of Waxahachie resident, Susan Solomon, second row left, shared a fun lunch at Tomato's Restaurant with his 17-month-old son, Harrison. The Reverend Anna Whitehead of Central Presbyterian Church in Waxahachie, bottom right, visited with Canterbury's Head of School Lyn Baker.

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Look Who's Cooking

— By Faith Browning

IN THE KITCHEN WITH BETH BOLES-TERMINELLA

HOPKINS COUNTY STEW

- 2 lbs. chicken parts, preferably breasts or thighs
- 4 cups unsalted chicken stock
- 2 1/2 tsp. salt
- 4 medium baking potatoes, diced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 cups canned, crushed tomatoes
- 1 15-oz. can tomato sauce
- 2 tsp. chili powder, preferably homemade or Gebhardt's
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. coarse-ground black pepper
- 2 cups corn kernels, fresh or frozen
- 1 16-oz. can cream-style corn
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter

Use a Dutch oven or heavy stock pot for cooking the stew. Place chicken in pot with stock and salt. Over medium heat, simmer the chicken until it is tender and cooked through, about 15 to 20 minutes. With a slotted spoon, remove the chicken; set aside until it is cool enough to handle. Bring stock back to a simmer; add the potatoes and onion. Simmer until the potatoes are cooked through, about 15

minutes. In the meantime, skin, bone and shred/dice the chicken. Return it to the pot, along with tomatoes, tomato sauce, chili powder, paprika and pepper. Bring the mixture to a simmer again. Add both types of corn and butter. Cover the pot, and continue simmering stew for at least 30 minutes, until it is quite thick. Stir the stew up from the bottom frequently to prevent scorching; add a little water if it starts to get dry. Do not let it boil; that would toughen the chicken. Serve with corn bread, or with fistfuls of crackers, slices of cheese and plenty of pickles. Serves 6 to 8.

FRESH TOMATO AND MOZZARELLA SALAD

fresh tomatoes, sliced
 fresh basil leaves, carefully chopped without bruising
 fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced
 extra-virgin olive oil
 balsamic wine vinegar
 salt and pepper

Assemble the salad with slices of tomatoes, basil leaves and mozzarella slices. Sprinkle olive oil over the salad. Add a dash of vinegar and a very light

sprinkling of salt and pepper. For a completely different flavor, you can substitute thin slices of Parmesan for the mozzarella.

TOMATO GRAVY

- 2 Tbsp. margarine or olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. flour
- 1 tsp. sugar or honey
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper (scant)
- 15-oz. can tomatoes
- 1/2 cup milk or evaporated milk

Heat the margarine or oil in a nice big skillet over medium heat. Stir in the flour with a fork or a whisk until it is lump free. Let fat simmer for a moment or two, to toast flour just a little bit. Add the sugar or honey, salt and a little less than 1/4-teaspoon pepper. Add the tomatoes; smash them with your fork to make them sort of choppy or shredded. This gravy is not smooth, so you do not have to work real hard at smashing the tomatoes. The lumpy tomatoes are actually what give it the characteristic texture which Tomato Gravy is famous for. When it begins

Growing up with five brothers and sisters made life very interesting from the start for Beth Boles-Terminella. "While growing up with six kids, our best memories were made around cooking and eating," she recalled. "Since I was about 3, I can remember going to my mother and father's restaurant on Saturday mornings, and helping my father cook Italian meatballs."

Beth loves her career selling real estate with Re/Max. She also loves running, doing volunteer work, a good red wine and spending time cooking for her husband, John, and their daughter, Katherine. "My husband has gained 20 pounds since we've been married," she said, "and my daughter has been taught to at least have a 'no-thank-you' bite of everything on the table." **NOVY**

To view more of your neighbors' recipes, visit our archives at www.nowmagazines.com.

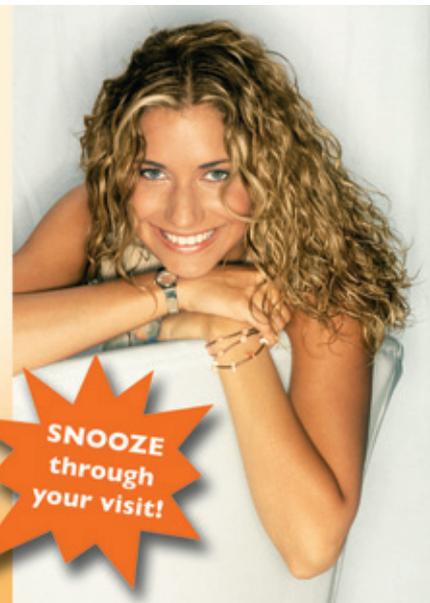
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Who's Cooking **NOW**

Gravy is famous for. When it begins to boil and thicken, add milk gradually. Stir it all up; let it boil again. The milk will sometimes curdle a little bit, but it tastes so good, folks seldom notice if the milk is smooth or not. This recipe makes about 2 1/2 cups of gravy. Good with biscuits for breakfast or lunch.

HUMMINGBIRD CAKE

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 1/4 cups vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 8-oz. can crushed pineapple, well drained
- 1 cup pecans, chopped
- 2 cups firm ripe banana, chopped

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING:

- 16 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup butter, room temperature
- 2 lbs. confectioners' sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 to 1 cup pecans, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 F. Sift flour, sugar, salt, baking soda and cinnamon together into mixing bowl several times. Add eggs and vegetable oil to dry ingredients. Stir with a wooden spoon until ingredients are moistened. Stir in vanilla, pineapple and pecans; stir in the bananas. Spoon the batter into 3 well-greased, floured 9-inch round cake pans. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until a wooden pick or cake tester inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 10 minutes; turn onto cooling rack. Cool completely before frosting. **FROSTING:** Combine cream cheese and butter; cream until smooth. Add confectioners' sugar, beating with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Stir in vanilla. Frost the tops of all 3 layers, stack and then frost sides. Sprinkle top evenly with the 1/2 to 1 cup chopped pecans.

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Saving for College

— By Adam Rope

I am talking with more families about planning for the future. While families almost always want to talk about retirement, their most immediate concern is saving for their children's college education. This is wise. College education will, in most cases, be a family's second largest expense after home ownership, so it deserves careful planning. Rising college costs make saving even more important.

According to The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2006*, tuition and fees for a public college or university average \$5,836 per year, over six percent higher than in the 2005 report. For private colleges and universities, the average tuition and fees have also increased nearly six percent to over \$22,000. That is just tuition, not room and board, books and supplies, and other expenses.

If those numbers do not make you want to start putting money aside, I do not know what will. The good news is that with sound planning and a long-term outlook you have the potential, over the course of 10 - 15 years, to build up a nice college nest egg. The government even has ways to help you reach that goal.

In 1997, Congress gave middle-income parents a new college-planning tool with the Education IRA, now called the Coverdell Education Savings Account (ESA). Contributions to an ESA are limited to \$2,000 per year. Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles can all contribute until the child reaches 18 years of age, as long as the total yearly contribution for the child does not exceed \$2,000.

529 Plans are another tool available to set aside money for education. Since 529 Plans are regulated by the states, each state determines the contribution limit. However, 529 Plans allow you to contribute much more than allowed by an ESA. This gives families a greater opportunity to better meet their education savings needs.

While contributions to these accounts are not tax deductible, earnings

accumulate tax deferred. Even better, when you draw the money out to start paying for qualified education expenses, those distributions are tax free.¹ You would be surprised how a program like that can help. If you have an 8-year-old child — and thus have 10 years to save for college — an investment of \$100 per month at an 8 percent annual rate of return would create a nest egg of \$18,295 when the child turns 18. These figures are based on the value of the investment with an 8 percent fixed rate of return and do not represent any particular investment. While such rates of return may not be representative of investments currently or historically available, this hypothetical situation is added for illustrative purposes only and reinforces that starting early can be significant.

That is good for any investor to know, especially if you want to invest in mutual funds, which contain a certain element of risk. Disciplined investors know that while the stock and bond markets do fluctuate, over time they have historically produced a greater rate of return than other types of investments that carry lower risk.

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college takes preparation, some guidance and, in many cases, sacrifice. Americans have traditionally been more than willing to make that sacrifice to secure a better future for their children. By setting up a plan with earning potential, we can help our children fulfill their learning potential. There is no assurance that any investment will achieve its investment objectives. Past performance is not indicative of future performance. Investment return and principal value will fluctuate and the investment, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than its original cost. **NOW**

Note:

1. If the money is used for purposes other than education, earnings are taxed as ordinary income and may be subject to an additional 10 percent tax penalty. Funds must be withdrawn within 30 days of the beneficiary's 30th birthday. At that time, earnings are taxed as ordinary income and may be subject to an additional 10 percent tax penalty.

Adam Rope is a State Farm agent based in Waxahachie.

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Children's Dental Health

— By Betty Tryon, R.N.

Is there anything sweeter than the sight of a child with a big smile on his or her face? Even if the smile has a few empty holes, it is still a beautiful thing to behold. If the empty spaces in the mouth are because of the normal growing process — no problem. However, if the empty spaces are because of tooth decay, there is a big problem. Dental care for children starts as soon as that first tooth proudly pushes its way to light. This does not mean parents need to rush their babies to the dentist; it means there is another element to childcare that needs to be addressed.

The American Dental Association recommends dental appointments begin when your child is 1 year old.

In the beginning, a moist washcloth cleans those tiny pearls just fine. When more teeth emerge, switch to a child's toothbrush with soft bristles. Do not use toothpaste until you are confident your child will not swallow it. This usually happens around 2 years of age. Only a very small amount of toothpaste is necessary. Toothbrushes should be replaced every three months. When your child is older, teach them how to floss. Include this as part of the overall dental health regime. Starting this routine when the child is very young habituates them to a lifetime of good health practices.

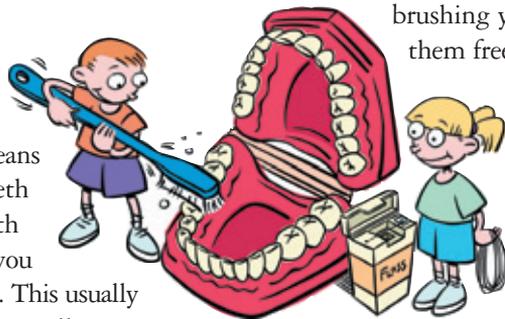
Dental health is important to avoid decay of the teeth. Tooth decay is the most common childhood disease, and the

percentage of children who fall prey to this is on the upswing. Some parents may think that decay in baby teeth is not as important as in permanent teeth because baby teeth will fall out eventually. There are a couple of flaws in this line of thinking. For one, some of the baby teeth will stay with the child for many years. Also, cavities are painful and will influence how your child thinks, behaves and eats during this time.

There is a simple preventative to tooth decay — brushing your teeth (and your children's) to keep them free of plaque. Plaque sticks to teeth and attracts bacteria, which in turn feeds on the sugar in food, turning it into acid. The acid breaks down the tooth enamel causing cavities. Diet plays an important role in dental health. A child's intake of sugar should be monitored and limited. That includes drinks with sugar in them.

Encourage snacks such as fresh vegetables and fruits, cheese and crackers, whole-wheat pretzels, trail mix and popcorn. Giving your child's teeth the attention they deserve can ensure many years of a beautiful smile. **NOW**

This article is for general information only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult with your physician for questions regarding this topic.



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Time to Cut Back

— By Nancy Fenton

It is time to begin to think about cutting back. I am not talking about the cash you are spending or the food you are eating, but the plants and trees around your landscape! There are some good and some better times to reduce the size of trees and plants. Most plants can take a bit of pruning almost anytime, but for trees, the best time is early spring (mid-to-late February or early March). Dead wood can come out anytime, but cuts into living wood will stimulate new growth which you want, but not if there is a possibility of a freeze within the following six weeks. After you eliminate the dead wood, it is time to take a good look at the branches, taking off any that are rubbing on others. (The



places where they rub are ideal sites for fungus and disease to get a foothold.) No pruning paint is needed if you cut back to the source (trunk or larger limb) and angle the cut to make sure that it will be flush and no water will stand in it.

Tree cuts can be made to train the plant in the growth pattern you desire. (For me, that means pruning them so no branches will hit me in the face when I mow!) I like to take out as many of the small, one-inch thick or smaller branches (called water spouts) which grow off the large limbs as I can reach so the sun will be able to filter through a bit more.

This is called opening up the canopy, and it makes a big difference to the grass and flowers trying to grow under the trees. My Christmas gift of an electric pole saw should really extend my reach this year!

Please do not crawl up in your trees to do your pruning! Heights and sharp objects do not mix! Do what you can from the ground, remembering there is always another year. Our big trees tend to get shocked when more than a third of their leaf coverage bites the dust, so plan carefully what you want to do and please do it safely! **WAXAHACHIE**

Nancy Fenton is a Master Gardener in Ellis County.

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ABWA - Empowering Women Express Network will meet at 5:45 p.m. at the Midlothian Conference Center, located at 1 Community Circle in Midlothian. Please visit www.abwa-empoweringwomen.org to RSVP a seat and dinner reservations.

February 6-8

The Gingerbread Annual Chili Cook-off and Barn Dance will be held at the Ellis County Expo Center. The event features three days of CASI-sanctioned chili cook-offs, celebrity mechanical bull riding, a dance and prime rib dinner Saturday evening. For sponsorship information, tickets, table reservations, donations and volunteer opportunities, call (972) 937-1870.

February 7

Nicholas P. Sims Library, located at 515 W. Main St., will host "Love Your Li-Bear-y" from 10:30-11:30 a.m. Bring teddy bears or other stuffed

furry friends and create some beary special crafts while enjoying a variety of chocolates. Children ages 2-10 are invited along with their adult care-givers. For more information, call (972) 937-2671.

February 14

A special Sweetheart Wedding event package has been created for this day only! Give this unique gift to your love. It will be a time to renew your vows or schedule your wedding. The Grape Myrtle Room at the Waxahachie Civic Center will be transformed into an elegantly decorated wedding chapel. For more information, contact Jeanee Smiles at (972) 938-3434.

February 20

The Lunch of Champions will be held from 12:00-1:00 p.m. in the Grape Myrtle room at the Waxahachie Civic Center. This will be a time to enjoy lunch and recognize all the new Chamber members for December and January. For more information, call (972) 937-2390.

February 21

"The Elvis Chronicles" will be performed by David Allen and the Burning Love Showdown Band. The Chautauqua Auditorium curtain will rise at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for VIP seating and \$15 for general admission. For more information or to reserve your tickets, call (972) 533-5847 or visit www.yourelvis.com.

The 6th Annual Mardi Gras Parade, hosted by the College Street Pub, located at 210 N. College St., will begin at 3:00 p.m. Entry fee and float participation is \$10. For more information, call (972) 938-2062.

The 3rd Annual Waxahachie IOOF Lodge No. 80 Mardi Gras Charity Ball will be held at The Loft in downtown Waxahachie beginning at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$35 per person and will include a Cajun style dinner, refreshments and live music. Proceeds will benefit the Waxahachie High School Scholarship Fund, Hope Clinic and Waxahachie CARE. For more information, call (972) 938-2062.

For more community events, visit our online calendar at www.nowmagazines.com.

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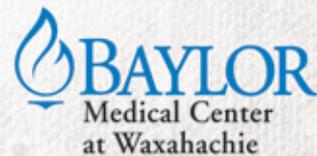
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