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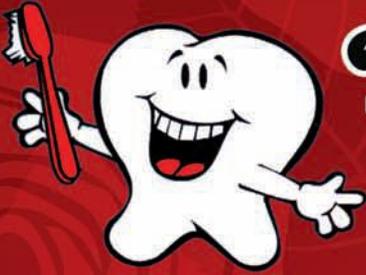
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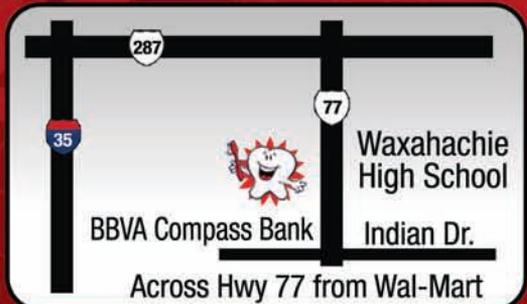
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ON THE COVER



The beauty found in the fine details is important to Ralph Cooke.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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Editor's Note

Happy Valentine's Day!

Have you purchased the perfect card to express your love? Have you hidden the oversized box of chocolates or called the local florist? Oh well, neither have I. No doubt, February is a busy month, what with cards for *all* my special valentines, a card for my hubby's birthday and another for our fifth anniversary. Looking back on things now, I guess we wanted to pile everything into this one month

dedicated to love.

I've been thinking of rainbows this month, too. We all have our own personal rainbow made up of the people in our lives. Serious friends with a matter-of-fact attitude make up the violet, indigo and blue in my life, while those who live life to the fullest with a smile on their face represent the green, yellow, orange and red. Many personalities are found in my rainbow. I greatly appreciate each one for making my life more colorful!

Sandra

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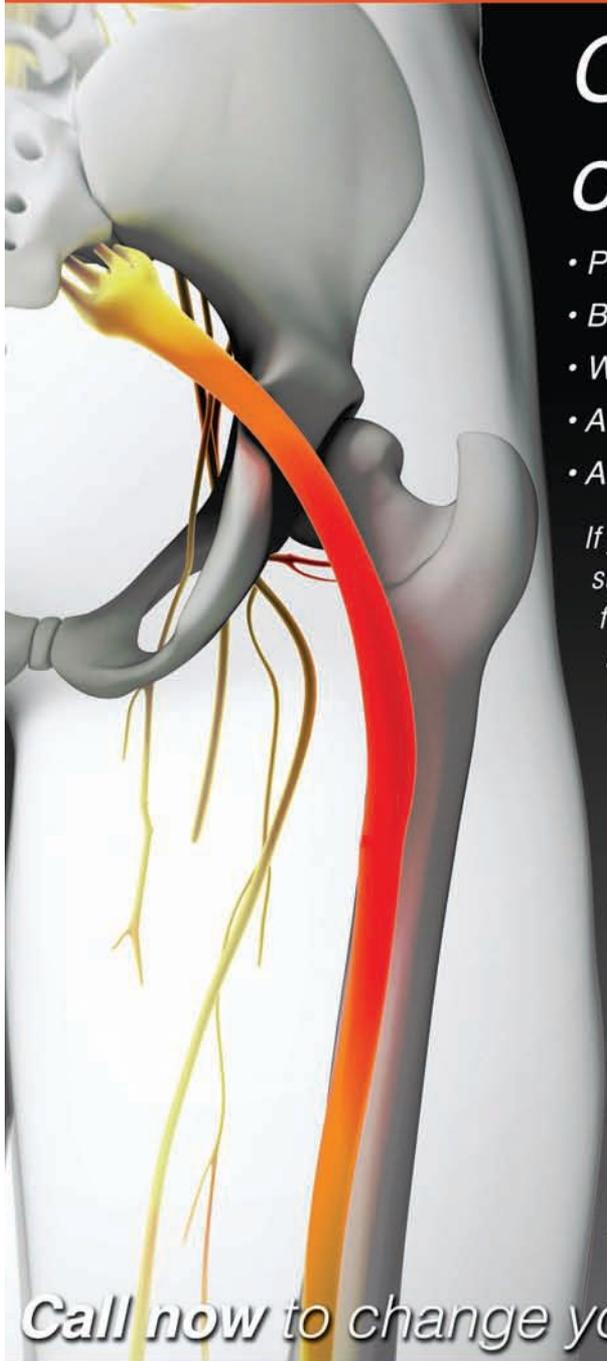
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WAXAHACHIE'S HIDDEN TREASURE

— By Carolyn Wills

Ralph Cooke has long been a hidden treasure in Waxahachie. His friend, Brown Street Church of Christ elder Glenn Perryman, believes it is time for that to change. "Ralph recently celebrated his 90th birthday," Glenn said. "He's a true craftsman and artist whose work has rarely been seen beyond his family and friends. By trade, he was a carpenter yet so much more, and it is truly an honor to know him."

The works Glenn refers to are Ralph's wood carvings. Some, like his musical instruments, are exquisite. Others are whimsical, primitive or intricate. All are simply breathtaking. His subjects range from stringed instruments, bowls and plates, birds, horses, children and historical figures to word-by-word Bible verses and historic speeches. He gets his ideas from things he sees. It may be something he's seen in a magazine or, sometimes, an idea that pops into his head. "Then, sometimes, the wood tells me," Ralph shared.

Ralph's workshop is behind his house. He goes to it every day. On the way, he passes a picturesque boulder-bordered pond with a waterfall and wooden water wheel. "It used to be a ditch filled with cans and stagnant water," he said. "I cleaned it, put a dam across one end and installed a pump to pull water from the creek." The water is now clean, the waterfall soothing and Ralph's handmade water wheel is unquestionably the perfect touch.





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IN A GREAT CIVIL WAR TEST-
ING WHETHER THAT NA-
TION OF MEN NATION SO
CONCEIVED AND SO DEDIC-
ATED CAN LONG ENDURE.
WE ARE MET ON A GREAT
BATTLEFIELD OF THAT WAR
WE HAVE COME TO DEDICATE
A PORTION OF THAT FIELD
AS A RESTING PLACE
FOR THOSE WHO WERE GAVE
THEIR LIVES THAT THAT NA-
TION MIGHT LIVE. IT IS ALTO-
GETHER A FITTING AND PROPER
THAT WE SHOULD DO THIS BUT
IN A LARGER SENSE WE CAN
NOT DEDICATE WE CAN NOT
CONSECRATE WE CAN NOT HAL-
LOW THIS GROUND THE BRAVE
MEN LIVING AND DEAD WHO STRU-
GGLED HERE HAVE CONSECRATED
IT FAR ABOVE OUR POOR POWER TO
HONOR. LET THE WORLD WILL LIVE
WE NOT FOR LONG REMEMBER WHAT
THEY SAID HERE BUT IT CAN NEVER FOR-
GET WHAT THEY DID HERE. IT IS FOR
US THE LIVING RATHER TO BE DEDICATED
HERE TO THE UNFINISHED WORK WHICH
THEY WHO FOUGHT HERE HAVE THUS FAR
SO NOBLY ADVANCED. IT IS RATHER FOR US
TO BE HERE DEDICATED TO THE GREAT
TASK REMAINING BEFORE US THAT FROM
THESE HONORABLE DEAD WE TAKE INCREASED
DEVOTION TO THAT CAUSE FOR WHICH THEY
GAVE THE LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOT-
ION THAT WE HERE HIGHLY RESOLVE THAT THESE
DEAD SHALL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN THAT THIS
NATION UNDER GOD SHALL HAVE A NEW BIRTH
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Stocked with tools, boards and beams, the large, dark and low-ceilinged workshop speaks of days, months and years of concentrated work. "Most of my wood comes from scraps or old logs," Ralph explained. Except for the ebony head of his walking cane on which he's carved the Waxahachie Indian chief, Ralph uses mostly Texas-abundant walnut, ash and boxed elder.

Carvings line a shelf above his main workspace. Two are easily recognized as historic Americans. "I saw an illustration of Abraham Lincoln delivering a speech," Ralph said. He was inspired to carve a depiction of President Lincoln in the same stance as the illustration and, amazingly, to etch the entire Gettysburg Address into the background. After completing Abe, Ralph remembered Robert E. Lee as one of America's smartest military men and proceeded to do a carving of Lee on his famous horse, Traveler. On another day, in answer to a special request from a granddaughter (one of his six grandchildren) to make something for her, Ralph looked at a calendar, saw a picture of children in a garden and replicated a carving just for her.

Apart from figures, Ralph also crafts finely fashioned bowls and plates by combining little right-angled pieces of walnut, mahogany and maple into intricately glued and lathed patterns. He also creates realistic horse and bird carvings that do justice to Mother Nature. One day, the workshop cat abruptly stopped, hopped up on the table, stared at and smelled a recently carved bird to assess it as possible prey.

Ralph's father loved music and, as a teenager, Ralph and his brothers had a bluegrass band. "Two of my brothers still play," he said. "I play some on the fiddle and dulcimer." So far, he has made six dulcimers, five mandolins, three fiddles



and a ukulele. "I had a real pretty piece of wood that wasn't big enough to make anything but a ukulele," he smiled. One dulcimer is double-necked and can be played by two musicians at once. Ralph even made a custom case for it.

Seventh of 12 children, Ralph grew up on his family's farm between Ennis and Waxahachie. "I've lived in Ellis County all my life," he said. For him, wood carving started when he was about 10 years old. "Like my daddy, I'm kind of a jack-of-all-trades," he grinned. "That's the way it was back in the Depression. If you needed something, you figured out how to make it."

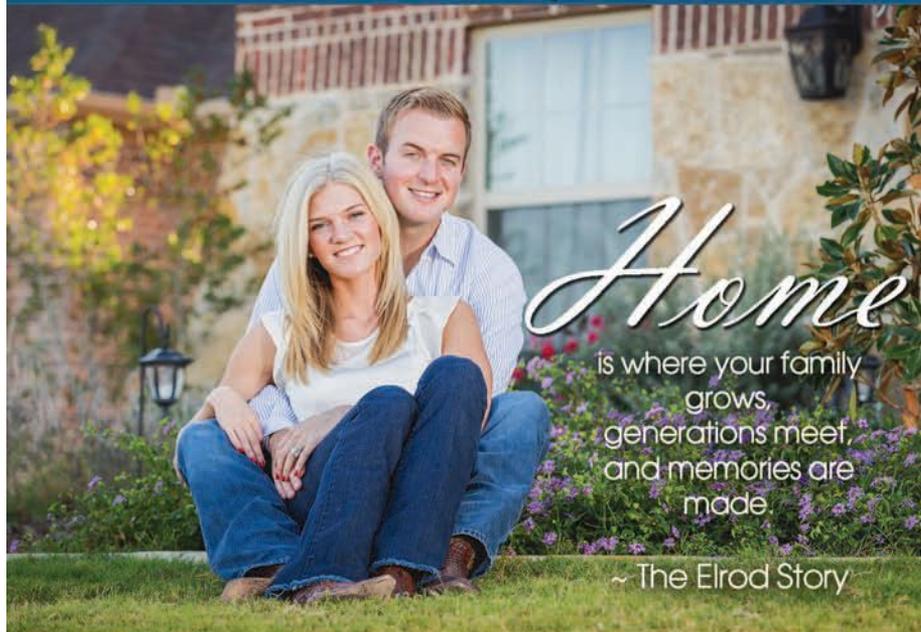
Making things from wood became his direction and passion. He started building cabinets in high school wood shop and, whenever possible, watched and listened to experienced carpenters. "I learned mostly by seeing," he admitted.

When it was time to earn a living, Ralph became a carpenter. For many years, he built houses all over the county. "Carpenters were very different then," he explained. Before standards, codes and housing developments encouraged tradesmen to diversify and made contractors necessities, a carpenter could

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largely be a one-man show. “I would cut the weeds, lay out the foundation, put up the walls, make the cabinets and basically build the house,” he shared.

In fact, Ralph built the home just outside of Waxahachie where he and his wife, Juanita, lived for 36 years and where their two sons grew up. Seventeen years ago, he and Juanita moved to a home next door to their youngest son and his family and, naturally, Ralph set to work. “I turned the garage into an extra room and added a new garage,” he said. He also refinished the kitchen cabinets and added an island.

More than 54 years ago, a mutual friend of Ralph and Juanita’s, Wanda Pindely, arranged for the two to meet. His first wife had died three years into their marriage, leaving Ralph with an infant son. “Three years later, my family and Wanda decided I needed help, so they got busy,” he grinned. “Juanita had grown up in Maypearl, but she was a



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telephone operator so I had to go to Dallas to get her.”

Today, his and Juanita’s home is a picture of comfort and beauty. Most of the furniture was made by Ralph — including a large walnut entertainment center crafted from a tree that had to be removed from his church grounds. There’s also a coffee table, cabinet, desk, headboard and a stunning cedar-lined walnut hope chest. “I’m most proud of the chest,” Ralph said. “The wood is cut into pieces and inset.” He was only 15 when he designed and made the chest for a brother and his wife.

When not in his workshop or at home with Juanita, Ralph can be found at Brown Street Church of Christ managing the Care Center two days a week. “He was a church elder for many years,” Glenn shared. “Now, Ralph operates the Care Center dedicated to distributing food and clothing to people in need.”

Beginning with a passion for the art of carving, Ralph ultimately became a carpenter to provide for his family. When the time arrived for him to forgo hard carpenter work, he returned to his art. “I can’t get it out of my blood, I guess,” he smiled. Surely, the treasures of this hidden treasure now stand ready to be shared. **NOW**

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CHANGING LIVES

— By Melissa Swedoski

Young boys dream of action, adventure, inventions and a desire to go places they have never gone before. When the daunting question of “how” begins to fill their minds, it is the energized adults who take them further than they imagined. In the case of Waxahachie’s Cub Scout Pack 681, the horizon is not the limit — it is only the beginning.



As the cafeteria at Shackleford Elementary buzzed with the hum of young men sharing stories of their day one Tuesday night, Pack 681 fostered a commitment to ideals dating further back than anyone in the room had been alive. The ideals live and breathe just as vividly as when Sir Robert Baden-Powell founded the Boy Scouts in 1908, and with leaders like Cub master John Knepler and committee chair David Turner helming Pack 681, the philosophy continues to impact the community through the annual Pinewood Derby in March.

“You will learn things from the pack opportunity that you cannot find anywhere else,” John explained. “You reach a common goal with the help of others, and recognize responsibility in front of your peers and superiors. We learn about God and country in a peer-on-peer group.”

Cub Scout Pack 681 is in the Southern Star District of the Circle 10 Council of the Boy Scouts of America. In fall 2013, the pack found itself depleted in numbers, with no money or resources. Rising like a phoenix from the ashes, the pack now is the largest in Ellis County, with fiercely loyal recruiting led by John and David. “We felt if we were going to run the most successful pack, we had a huge responsibility,” John said. “There are smaller packs in Ellis County, and our commitment is to open all our events to the rest of the district. Five other units came to our Cub mobile race last April, and that’s what we want to see with the pinewood derby. We want every dad and

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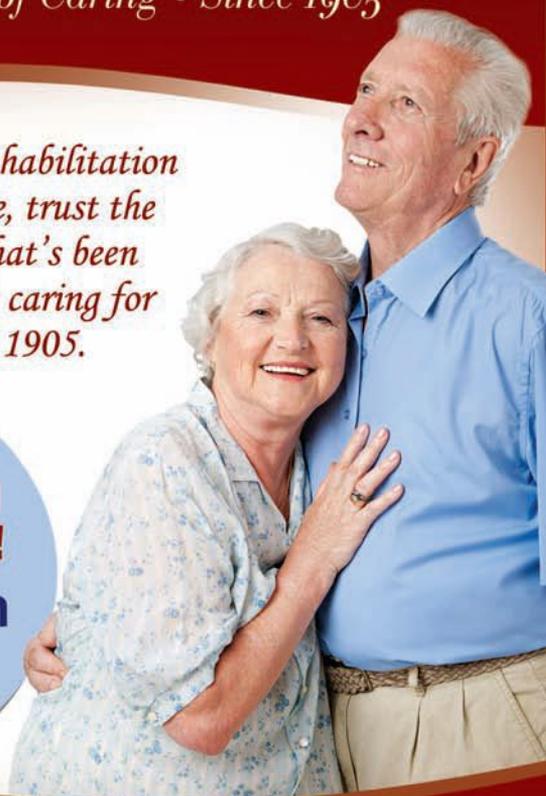
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grandpa who remembers racing to come and bring a car to the event and join us.”

“We have fun activities with a whole lot of purpose,” David noted, “which is part of the goal of the pinewood derby.” The boys are given a lump of wood and fashion their own design. As they work, they learn patience, as well



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as organizational and critical-thinking skills, on how to design a car that will run faster.

“This is really a feel-good event, and we want to do more with the community,” John pointed out. “We love people to come out and reminisce about their derby days.”

The Cub Scouts encompass ages 6 through 11 and grades one through five. As Tigers, Wolves, Bears, Webelos I and II, the members learn the skills and knowledge necessary to advance to the Boy Scouts. Along with that are the den leaders, parents and adult volunteers who spend hours in training, as well as in preparing for the activities and weekly meetings.

Wolves' member Andrew Davis, 7, knows when he comes on Tuesdays, he will have fun. “My favorite is the Cub mobile,” he said with a huge grin lighting his face. “We got to build a car and race.



But I've learned a bunch of good stuff," Andrew added, citing a litany of flag rules, including not letting it touch the ground or get dirty.

The Pack stays busy year-round with camping, activities, community service and the annual popcorn sales. The Cub Scouts present the American flag at every



Waxahachie High School football game, as well as carry it in all the city's parades and at Veterans Day events. They collect canned goods on their Scouting for Food weekends in February, and pick up trash along the shoreline of Bardwell Lake during camp outings.

"Our philosophy is we're not just here to teach the boys," David emphasized. "We're here to be part of the community. That's why we invite everyone to the pinewood derby and the Cub mobile race. Every time we are out and about, the great thing about this community is the appreciation. There's been nothing but praise. The town really cares for us."

The Pack will be teaming up with the Waxahachie Rotary Club to put out American flags around town several times throughout the year. In the past, they have assisted the Waxahachie Running Club and the WISD with various charity runs, including the one after the fertilizer

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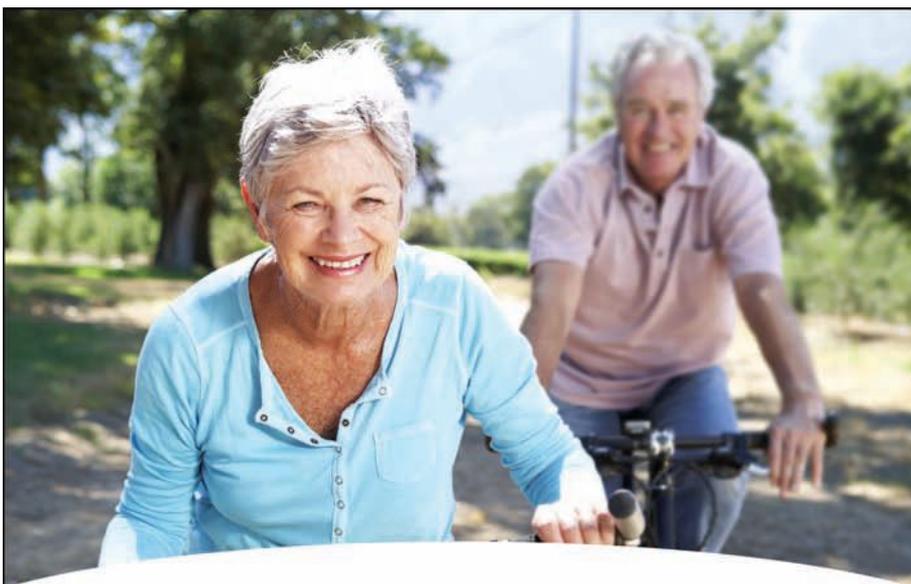


plant explosion in West and the annual Legacy Run. David's wife, Susan, who is a member of the Waxahachie Running Club and serves as the Pack's re-charter membership coordinator, shared her thoughts: "It feels good to know we're helping children grow and become better citizens within our community. All boys are accepted for who they are. We teach them to love each other, be the best of pals and look out for one another." The

"YOU WILL LEARN THINGS FROM THE PACK OPPORTUNITY THAT YOU CANNOT FIND ANYWHERE ELSE."

Cub Scouts are open to members with physical and/or mental disabilities. Susan recalled a mother of a new pack member, a boy with autism, who shared how her son's experiences with the Pack had helped him come out of his shell.

"This environment helps you become competitive and thrive," David shared. "But they're competitive within the group, not as individuals. No one is ever singled out, and no one is ever made to feel as if they let the pack down. There's a buddy system, and these boys stay together through the years."



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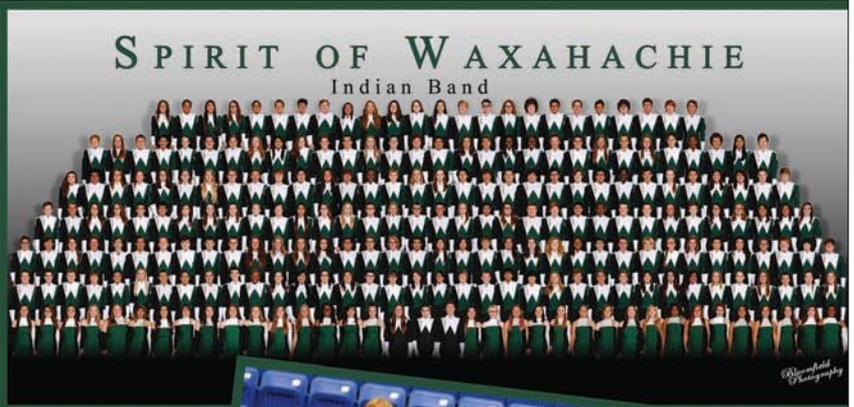
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Part of what keeps the members coming back is the activities, and one of the most popular is the campouts. Robert Mitchell, unit commissioner for the Southern Star District, works with Pack 681, serving as outdoor activities chair, and he explained how camping is an excellent way to have fun and emphasize the character connection: commit, know and practice. "In everything we do, we are instilling those connections," Robert said. "We have breakfast, and we teach them how to share and how to do dishes. We go on a hike and teach them responsibility and respect for the plants and the land, as well as the conservation code." The boys pick up trash in a competitive fashion, racing to see who can collect more pieces in the shortest time. "When we do the flag-raising, we learn about reverence and responsibility for the flag and country," Robert added.

As the pack leaders share leadership skills and love of God and country, the bigger message of faith and community service is not lost. Robert praised John and David's selfless efforts for the pack. "They want to reach everybody in the community for miles around," Robert said. "No one exemplifies the Boy Scout philosophy more." **NOW**

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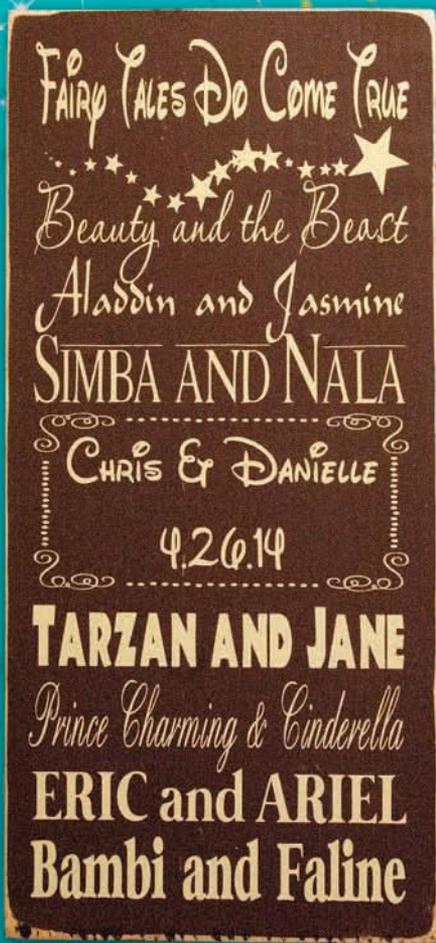
— By Sandra Strong

People often say opposites attract, and that was truly the case for sweethearts Chris and Danielle Tucker. “She was a cheerleader, and I was in band at Red Oak High School,” Chris said with a smile. After earning their high school diplomas, they took classes online and in the classroom, graduating the same day from Tarleton State University in December 2013.

As life and love would have it, the pair became engaged at their favorite place — Walt Disney World in Florida. The original plan was to host a destination wedding. “I wanted to rent the wedding pavilion at the Grand Floridian, because the window behind where we would have stood to exchange our vows has the castle showing through it,” Danielle explained. The castle is significant to the couple because that’s where she said, “Yes.”



At Home With
Chris and Danielle Tucker



Reality, as it so often does, set in. After Chris and Danielle realized how expensive a destination Disney wedding was going to be, they decided to wed closer to home. They wanted to remember who they shared their special day with rather than the location. "We were married at the Midlothian Conference Center on April 26, 2014," Chris said. "We were able to share our special day with family and friends."

"We received so many Disney gift cards at the wedding that we held on to until we took our honeymoon," Danielle said. "It took some planning to get our honeymoon purchases into the suitcases for the trip back home."

Even though they are still classified as newlyweds, they love going back down memory lane. The day Chris proposed, the forecast called for a 90-percent chance of rain. "I prayed for no rain," he admitted, "and there was no rain."

The same exact thing happened on the day of their wedding. "We were having an outdoor ceremony," Danielle shared. "Once again, the forecast called for rain, and we didn't have a plan B."

"Our prayers were answered. There was no rain," Chris said. "It was the perfect day!"



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One day in the future, they hope to purchase a home of their own in Ellis County, but for now, the one-bedroom, one-bath apartment is their home sweet home. As the months of newly married bliss have come and gone, Chris and Danielle have taken the time to decorate their home in most things Disney. The five Thomas Kinkadee paintings would more than likely be monetary investments for others, but they are heart investments for the Tuckers. “*Sleeping Beauty, Lion King, Little Mermaid, Tangled and Main Street* make up the five pieces of art we are most proud to own,” Chris explained, “because they each have special meaning to us.”

The paintings have all been enhanced, making them more valuable, detailed and

colorful. *Main Street* is their most recent purchase, and its meaning goes back to the beginning of their journey as man and wife. “Chris asked me to marry him in front of the castle on Main Street,” Danielle reiterated. “We went back several months following the wedding to honeymoon at Walt Disney World.”

“Waiting months after the wedding gave us something to look forward to,” Chris confessed. “Walt Disney World is our favorite during the holiday season. It was all decked out for Christmas. We had the best time.”

Chris and Danielle purchased items for the home long before they married and moved into it. And amazingly, the accents they bought separately merge together harmoniously into a home that reflects the love they share. And needless to say, that love includes most everything Disney.

A large, elegantly framed wedding portrait from the day it didn't rain sits to one side of the bar. The dark cabinetry blends well with the cream walls. The crown molding, 10-foot ceilings, large walk-in closet and larger-than-normal



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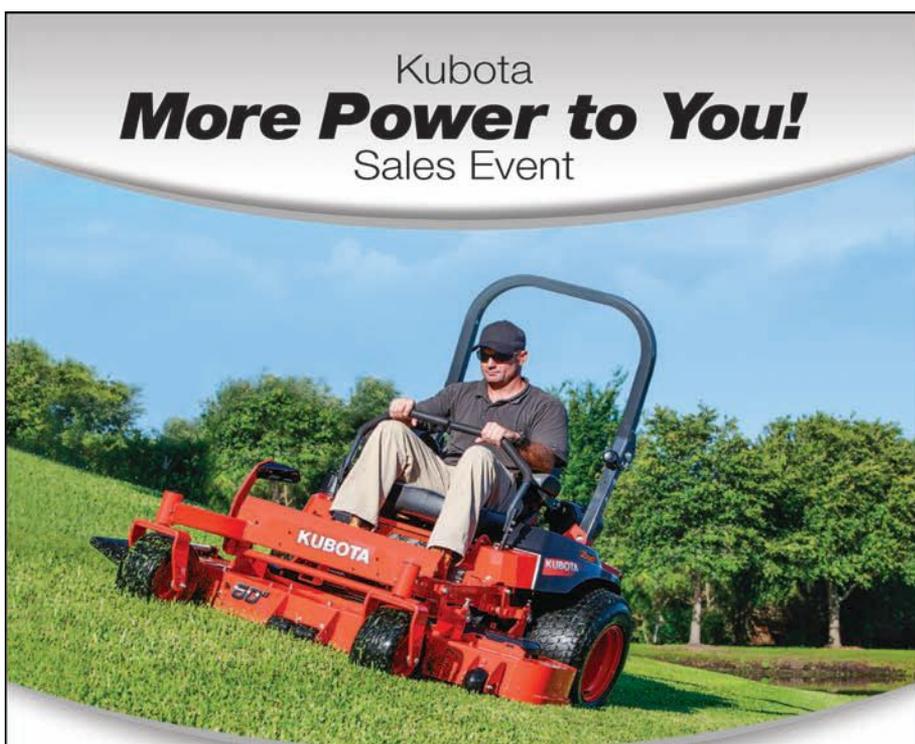
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bathroom make the home appear much bigger than its actual 735 square feet. The curio cabinet directly inside the threshold is home to the couple's Jim Shore collection and several of their new Little Golden Disney books that they will one day gift to their children.

The wall art in the master bedroom tells the story of their journey thus far. "The wood art in the far corner represents our engagement in one piece," Chris stated. "Life with Danielle really is my greatest adventure."

The living room and kitchen are open to one another, once again making the apartment seem more spacious than it actually is. The "verse of the week" can be seen from all angles, and no doubt that was the plan when deciding on the placement. "Chris gets the blackboard down for me," Danielle said, "and I handwrite the verse." The verse chosen each week is one they agree calls out to them or has special meaning for what they are feeling at the time. The grouping of owls and a large *T* add to the whimsy when mixed with authentic Mickey Mouse coffee and soup mugs, plates and canisters. "Ninety-nine percent of what we have that's Disney was bought at Walt Disney World on one of our three visits," Chris confessed, as Danielle smiled while nodding her head in agreement.

The desk area with built-in bookcases is the perfect size for the young couple. The desktop allows them the necessary space to check emails or for Danielle to search Etsy for a special bargain or Pinterest for another repurposing idea that can pique Chris' interest. One of the shelves is home to the couple's black and white cake topper, which when placed side-by-side forms the shape of Mickey Mouse's head, ears and all.

The conversation starter in the living



room is the entertainment center Chris refurbished. "He is always looking for his next project," Danielle said, proud of the detailed work Chris does to bring a boring piece of furniture back to life. "He loves being referred to as the handyman."



They don't want to deal with the possibility of divorce, so they put God first in all things. "Any small issues we've had have made us closer," Chris said. "If you put your heart into whatever you do, great things really can happen."

Great things *are* definitely happening for the Tuckers. They live in a specific order — the Lord, each other, family, life and, of course, Disney. They know they won't always live in an apartment, but for now, it's become close to their happiest place on earth, with a trip to Disneyland to celebrate their first anniversary coming in at a very, very close second. Even though their dream wedding may have been diverted for all the right and practical reasons, they look forward to one day renewing their vows on Main Street, right in front of the castle that was the start of their lifetime adventure. Their first home is really a testament to the love they have for each other and Walt Disney World. **NOW**

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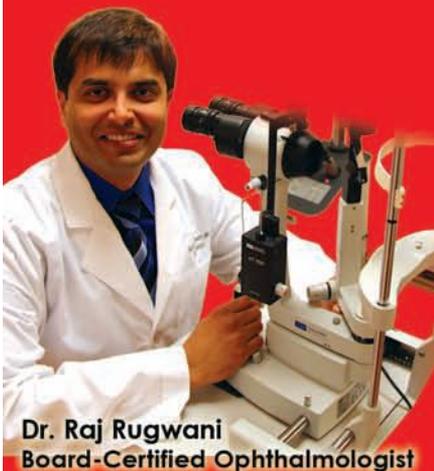
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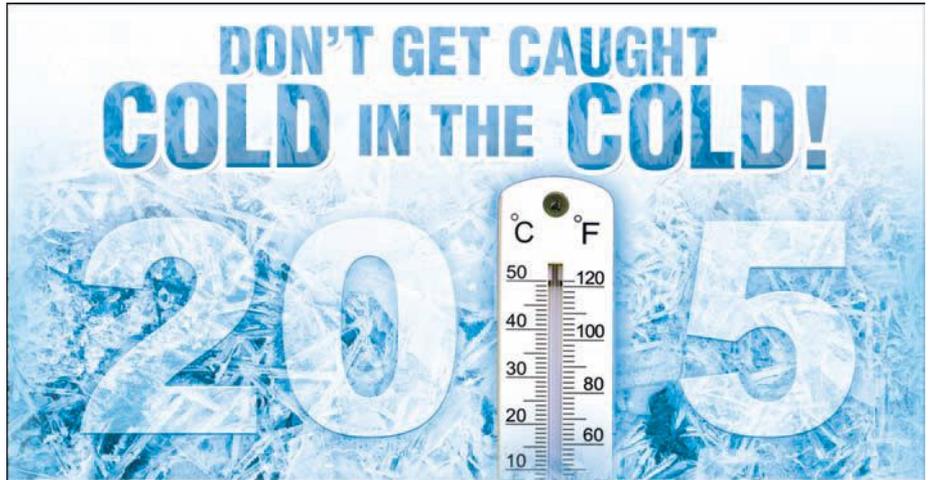
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Beyond the Court

— By Abby Rich

Waxahachie Preparatory Academy may be small in size, categorized as a 1A school, but its boys' basketball program is churning out future leaders in a big way, with the help of Head Coach Chad Moss. The goal of the school's athletics program is to use sports "to develop academically prepared Christian disciples who embrace Christ's call to transform the world," according to its website. The school is also associated with the Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools, an organization that creates rules for, and sometimes administers, almost all athletic and academic contests for nonpublic high schools in Texas.

At the school, Coach Moss is in his fifth year as head of the boys' basketball program. Originally from Red Oak, with a degree from Southwestern Assemblies of God University



(SAGU), Coach Moss started playing sports at the age of 4. He played them all until deciding to gravitate more toward basketball.

Although most people's idea of a coach is one that helps their team focus on the big wins, his coaching style is that of a player's coach, a philosophy which focuses on the relationships between the coach and players in an almost reciprocal approach. A player's coach accommodates the right coaching style for each player, at the right time, and teaches athletes lessons on and off the court. As a role model and a teacher, Coach Moss listens to the players as much as he talks strategy with them. He also lets them try out new ideas on the court if his players think it'll work, acting more as a beneficiary to the team versus a coach who strictly hands out orders.

His primary job is at First State Bank in Ennis, where he is assistant vice president of credit and loans. Aside from work, his passion lies in leading his team members both on and off the court. His ultimate goal as coach is to instill integrity, accountability and godly leadership in his players that will carry on throughout their lives. "I hate the word, 'potential,'" Coach Moss explained. "I want these young men to believe in themselves completely." Everyone has potential, but he believes it's what you do with that potential that shapes a man.

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For Coach Moss, success on the basketball court isn't as important as success off the court. However, he would love for his team to win a state championship in the next few years. He prefers coaching and inspiring younger



athletes. "I was a good player, but I'm better at anticipating what will happen next on the court and seeing the bigger picture," he explained.

During basketball season, the team spends at least two hours together every day between practices and games, including travel to away games. And, when they're not practicing or playing, they continue to hang out with one another and "do life together," according



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to Coach Moss. He makes it a point to stay connected with his team, and encourages them by sending daily devotionals that pertain to life and the leadership he wishes to instill in the boys. "From their freshman to their senior year, I have a chance to make a big impact in shaping these kids to eventually go out

“Coach pushes and runs us pretty hard, but it gets us in shape and makes us play well as a team.”

in the world and become good men and leaders,” he admitted. “I consider it a blessing to spend this time with them and be an integral part of their lives.”

His coaching style also includes playing opposing teams that will challenge his players to always do their best. His philosophy is to schedule games that include 3A schools and larger schools, so his players will be challenged. This strategy eventually pays off when his team faces similar teams at the end of the season in playoffs. With a team of only nine or 10 players each year, the kids have

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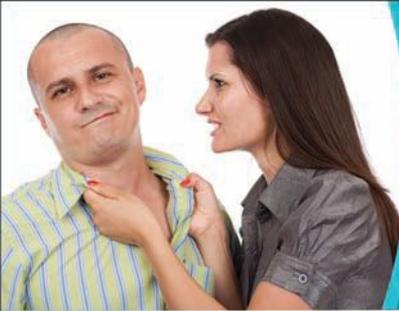
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a lot of responsibility on their shoulders. Although there are eight teams in their district, they're not counting themselves out. Even if it brings their record down, they want to grow as a team. It's not just about the win, but that the team shows tenacity, and they're not going down without a fight. Furthermore, if the team is up in points, Coach Moss will always let the bench play, and doesn't see a reason to run the score up on another team just because they can.

Coach Moss still keeps in touch with former players who have graduated and moved on. It's this kind of caring approach as a coach that has made an impact on team captains Jacob Moore and Skylar Slack. Both juniors, the young men are polite, hardworking leaders of the team. Skylar, a shooting guard, holds such titles as first team all-district and team defensive player of the year. He has started for the team since he was a sophomore. Jacob, who plays center, is offensive player of the year, first team all-district and second team all-state for TAPPS 1A. "Coach pushes and runs us pretty hard, but it gets us in shape and makes us play well as a team," Jacob shared. The captains also like the fact that practice closes every day in prayer. Coach Moss chooses a different junior or senior team member to lead the group each time, which helps the freshmen and younger players learn by example.

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As Coach Moss pushes and runs his team, he never deliberately puts all the emphasis on one player. Instead, he prefers to have a balanced team and encourages his players to use all their assets. Even when they do have one player who can make all the shots, he believes it's important to have a well-rounded team. He knows he'll always have players that do really well in one area, but to grow, his players need to have flexibility.

Although he has a lot on his plate with his full-time banking career and his coaching position, Coach Moss also is a first-time father to a newborn son who makes him realize even more that the time and influence parents, teachers and coaches have on their kids is short — only 18 years. “From the mid- to late-teenage years is the most important time for these kids to be inspired,” Coach Moss insisted.

The Waxahachie Preparatory Academy boys' basketball team had a 14 and 10 record last year and made the final eight teams at state, which is the farthest they've gone since the school's basketball program began. It's impressive, but beyond the court, the team has more than the benefit of a player's coach. They have a lifelong advocate in Coach Moss, who truly is inspiring his players to thrive and prosper on and off the court. **NOW**

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Before You Tie *the* Knot

— By Shannon Pfaff

From the dress to the favors, the cake to the invitations, a wedding has many components that need to come together. There are countless options to choose from. You may find yourself overwhelmed trying to narrow down the scope of your choices in order to help you decide on the individual pieces of your big day. A great way to do that is by choosing a theme for your wedding.

A theme ties all of your ideas together, so your ceremony and reception flow with each other. You can choose a song, season, pattern, color, etc. around which to build your wedding. What type of wedding do you want to have? Would you prefer a more modern wedding or something rustic? Maybe your dream-come-true wedding is a fairy-tale style affair. Perhaps you would like to create your special day around your favorite color. Maybe you have already found the

perfect dress, and you'd like to design the wedding around its style. The theme of your wedding can be anything you desire it to be.

Choosing a theme can also be a creative way to illustrate who you and your husband-to-be are as a couple. Are you an adventurous pair? Did you meet in an unusual way? Do you have a mutual passion, such as music or food? The things you enjoy together can create a unique theme. Your individual family heritage can also be a beautiful backdrop for your wedding.

Once you have decided on your theme, you can have the wedding professionals you employ help you incorporate that



theme into each aspect of your wedding. When you are choosing your wedding gown, a bridal consultant can help you with dress options that coordinate with your theme. They can also help you with attire options for the wedding party that will complement your dress. The consultant can also advise you on hairstyles and accessory choices for your gown. Your hairstylist can offer hair options, as well as showing you how to pair those options with any desired accessories.

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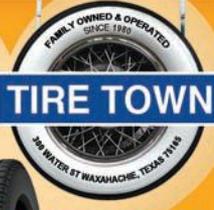

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you will want to be certain the venue is appropriate. If you don't have a wedding planner, you can contact the person who coordinates events at your chosen venue. They can inform you of the ideal seasonal conditions for their location.

After your theme has been selected, there will still be several decisions to



make about the wedding. You will, however, have a better understanding of what your selections should look like. Here are a few theme examples to get you started:

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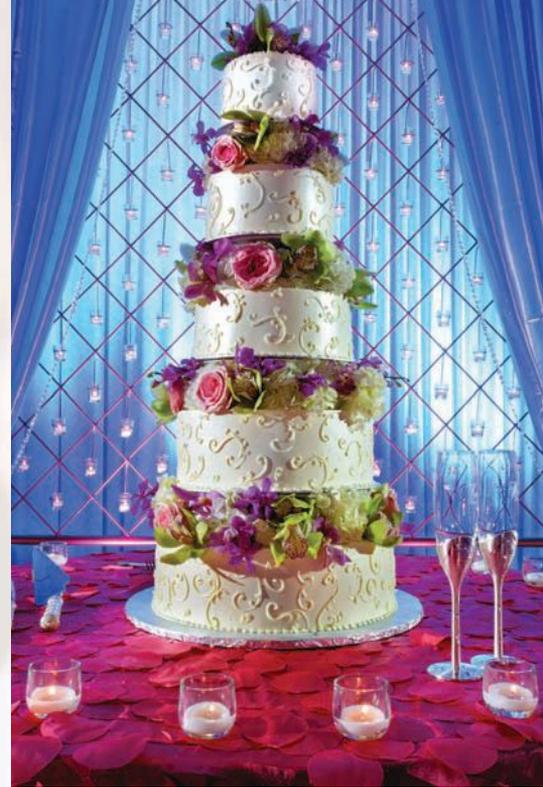
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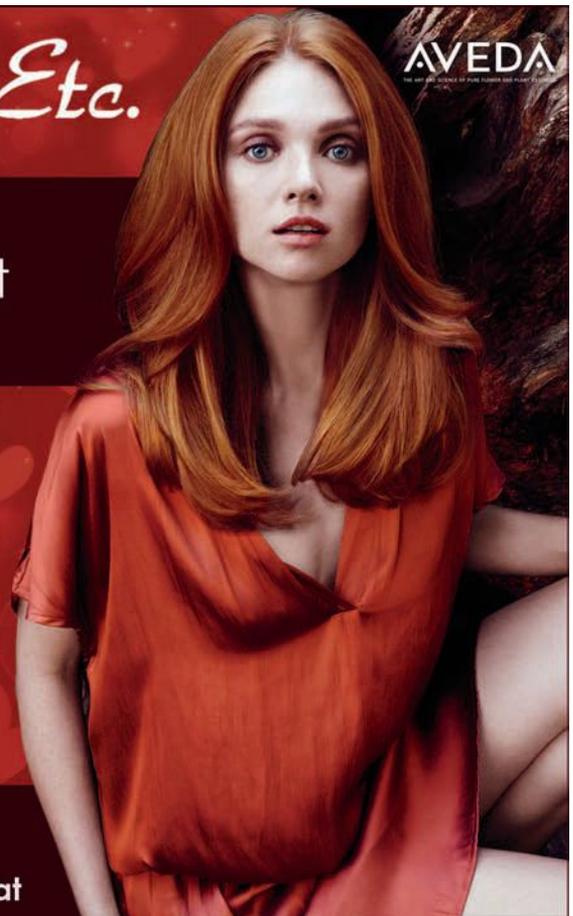
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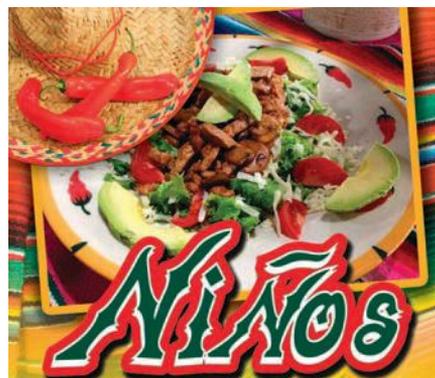


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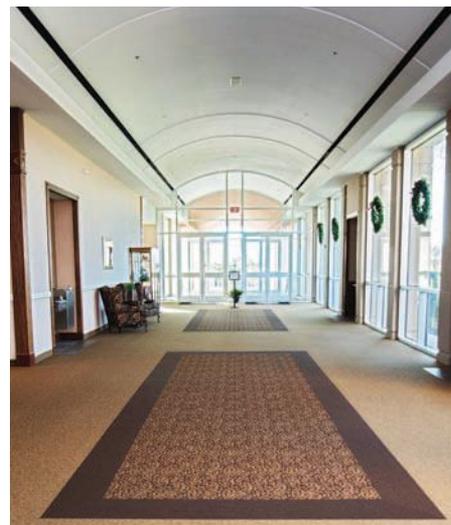
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Event Hours:

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April Ortiz and the dedicated staff at Waxahachie Civic Center work tirelessly to make each event successful.

All Hands on Deck

Every event is made special at Waxahachie Civic Center.

— By Sandra Strong

April Ortiz became the director of the Waxahachie Civic Center two years ago. The lead position fits her can-do personality perfectly. “We work with people in all capacities,” April explained. “The facility is very user-friendly.”

Located in the heart of Ellis County, Waxahachie Civic Center offers a venue for weddings, memorials, funerals, seminars, holiday corporate parties, meetings and annual community events that individuals look forward to attending from year-to-year. In April’s tenure as director, she’s found juggling is something she needs to be prepared to do, sometimes at the drop of a hat. “Being flexible is one of the most important aspects of my position,” April admitted. “One example that comes to mind was during a two-day rental event. An influential member of our

community passed away. Family needed the space we provide here for the funeral.” April and the staff took down the props for the two-day rental to accommodate the funeral and reset the stage once again when the funeral came to an end.

At times, a funeral or memorial will change some plans in the event scheduling at the Waxahachie Civic Center, thus causing April and the staff to work double-time to make each event successful. But, that’s what they do best. “We sell the event, set the event up and many times work the event in some capacity,” April explained. “Whatever can arise, we try to have it thought out and covered prior to any event.” April and the staff work diligently to foresee anything that might or could happen and have an alternate plan in place to keep the events flowing

smoothly. "Our goal is to make every event special," April added.

April knows she would be unable to do her job without the wonderful staff she has working alongside her. Donna Smith is the salesperson for the facility. April's right arm is administrative assistant Sheila Domino. Lori Malone is the one full-time event coordinator, while Angelina Alejandre and Gerome Taylor serve as part-time event coordinators. The two-member, set-up crew is comprised of Cody Pscion and Shane Alford. Rounding out the group is David John, senior maintenance technician. "At times, it takes all of us to see an event come to fruition," April admitted. "Those are the times that it becomes an all-hands-on-deck kind of day."

"We work with people in all capacities."

Later this month, the center will be transformed into a winter wonderland closely resembling one of the scenes found in the movie *Frozen* as April and the staff prepare for the Fourth Annual Daddy Daughter Dance. "The first year, we started out with a goal of 100, but we surpassed that. Each year, our goal has increased, and each year, we've had to make room for more," April happily admitted. "This year's goal is 300." The event so many look forward to has evolved to include food items, a live DJ, door prizes and souvenir photos. Memories from the first year bring a smile to April's face. "We were sold out when one young girl called," April said. "We didn't want to leave anyone out, so we made room for the extra tickets we sold."

Seeing a need and fulfilling the need is what the staff does best at the Waxahachie Civic Center. "Our main goal is to make every event special," April shared. "Great customer service and proper planning mean repetitive business." And needless to say, repetitive business is a very good thing. **NOW**

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Meteorologist Colleen Coyle from Channel 8 conducts a Weather Minds Lesson for grades 3 and 4 at Northside Elementary.



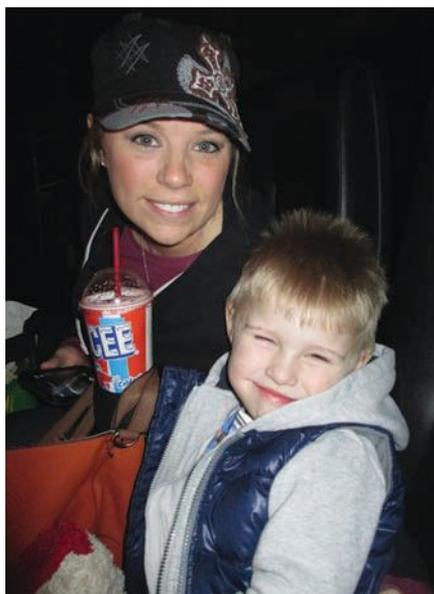
Several members of the Rockett Baptist Church spend the first Friday night of the month eating dinner together.



Jacqueline Hernandez is happy to help her return customers.



An extremely large crowd gathers for the ribbon cutting of the newly renovated HEB.



Luke Turner, Michael Simmons, Zane Turner and Maryn Simmons laugh as they share a group hug.



Members of the King Family enjoy a yummy meal at El Fenix on a cold winter evening.

Easton McIntosh is ready to watch his first big boy movie at Showbiz Cinemas with his mom.



Teresa McNeil graciously accepts a generous donation from HEB for Habitat for Humanity.



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When Uncle Sam gives back, make the most of it. Instead of spending your tax refund on some new gadget or other source of instant gratification, consider improving your life, well-being and even your financial future with these investing ideas for your tax return this year.

Invest in Your Future

- *Save for retirement* — Contribute to your existing IRA or start a new one.
- *Pay down/refinance your mortgage* — Pay off your home sooner or reduce your monthly payments.
- *Start a rainy day fund* — Open a high-yield savings account to earn interest and still have cash for emergencies.
- *Save for your kids' education* — Put your refund in a college savings plan to prepare for tuition and related expenses.
- *Create a will* — Ensure your legacy and see that your loved ones are cared for.

Invest in Yourself

- *Get a gym membership* — Get healthy now, and you will look and feel better.
- *Start a sunny day fund* — Not all funds have to be for emergencies. Plan a vacation and have it paid for before you go.
- *Adopt a pet* — Studies show that pets reduce stress and elevate moods. Bring a little love into your life.
- *Attend a college course* — Next to a healthy body, a healthy mind is vital to a happy life.

- *Take a healthy cooking class* — Combine learning with a healthy lifestyle choice and live happier, longer.

Invest in the World

- *Give to a charity* — Support that group you have always wanted to.
- *Invest in a socially responsible manner* — Ask your advisor about socially responsible or “green” investments.
- *Go energy efficient* — Save money on energy expenses through home renovations, a new hybrid car or joining an energy co-op.
- *Join a food co-op* — Support local farmers and enjoy healthy fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products produced right in your own community.
- *Grow your own garden* — Reduce your carbon footprint, and save money, by growing healthy fruits and veggies in your backyard.

Make the most of your tax refund. Talk to your financial advisor about these and other investment opportunities. **NOW**

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Todd Simmons is a Raymond James Financial Advisor based in Duncanville.

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Musicians Needed: We are looking for adults who play or have played a band instrument or current high school band students who are interested in helping form a concert band for the Ellis County community. If you are interested in joining, email your name, your email address, instrument(s) played, years of experience and the name of the Ellis County town in which you reside to dapotter@ectisp.net.

February 6

Waxahachie ISD's DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) Day: reading times are 8:45 and 10:15 a.m. Contact Melissa Cobb at mcobb@wisd.org or call her at (972) 923-4631 to reserve your place to read.

February 12

Fourth Annual Daddy Daughter Dance: 6:00-9:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center, 2000 Civic Center Ln. Tickets are \$15 per person and they go on sale **January 5**. Tickets must be purchased in advance. This year's theme is *Frozen*. For more information, call (469) 309-4041.

February 13 — 15

Gingerbread House Chili Cook-off: Ellis County Youth Expo Center, Hwy. 287 N. For more information, call (972) 937-1870 or

visit www.elliscountycac.org. The barn dance featuring music from The Marshall ARgovitz Experience will be held **Saturday** from 6:30 p.m.-midnight. Barn dance general admission is \$10 per person and \$30 per person when including prime rib dinner.

February 14

Cupid Shuffle 5K and 15K: For more details, call (972) 723-1053. Register online at www.reachcouncil.org/events. All money raised will support REACH Council Prevention Services and Crime Stoppers of Ellis County.

Share the Love Gala: 6:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center. Tickets can be purchased online at www.casaofelliscounty.org or by calling (972) 937-1455.

February 23

Lighthouse for Learning Community Education spring semester begins. There are over 50 classes to select from. Contact Waxahachie ISD at (972) 923-4631 or visit www.wisd.org for class information and registration details.

February 24

Girl Scout monthly volunteer meeting: 7:00-8:30 p.m., Brown Street Church of

Christ, 2471 Brown St. For more information, visit www.joinus@gssu251.org.

February 28

Waxahachie Symphony Orchestra presents Arts District Chorale: 7:00-9:00 p.m., Presbyterian Church, 402 N. College St. For more information, visit www.waxahachiesymphony.com.

Stephen Ministry Introductory Workshops: 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Midlothian Bible Church, Midlothian. Workshop is \$15 per person or \$50 per congregation (four or more). You can register at www.stephenministry.org/workshop or call Stephen Ministries at (314) 428-2600.

March 7

Deeper Journeys with Nichole Nordeman, Lisa Harper and Tammy Trent: 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., The Avenue Church, 210 YMCA Dr. Tickets are \$35. To purchase tickets, visit theavenuechurch.com/events. For more information, call (972) 937-5301.

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



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What You Should Know Before You Get an Oral Piercing

Many people in their teens and 20s want to get their tongue or lips pierced. This isn't like getting your ears pierced. Unlike your ear lobe, your tongue is a muscle with many blood vessels. To get your tongue pierced, a cork is placed underneath it. A long needle is punched through the sensitive tissue. Then a bar bell is inserted in the hole, and all of this is done without anesthesia. Soon after the bar bell is inserted, your tongue will swell. The swelling is significant and usually lasts for three to five days. Because your tongue is covered with bacteria, they can invade the wound and enter your blood stream. This can result in painful infections that ooze pus into your mouth and throat. If this happens, you need immediate medical attention.

The needle used in a tongue piercing is quite thick, and the sheer size of it can cause problems. If it hits one of the many veins in your tongue, expect heavy bleeding. The nerves in the tongue can be severed, resulting in permanent numbness. You can also lose the ability to taste.

The jewelry itself can present problems. The hard metal ball is constantly hitting the fragile tooth

structure, much like a wrecking ball. People with tongue studs tend to habitually bite them, which increases the chance of chipping or scratching a tooth. If the ball becomes loose, you might inhale or swallow it, resulting in serious injury or death. Lip rings can also wear away the gums. This can lead to gingivitis and expose the tooth roots, which can make your teeth sensitive to hot, cold and sweet foods.

Because our goal is to keep your teeth and gums healthy, we do not recommend this fashion statement. If you must get an oral piercing, take some precautions. Make sure the piercing shop is clean. The piercer should be properly trained, follow OSHA guidelines for blood-borne pathogens, use only sterilized needles and equipment and take the time to explain the procedure and follow up care. You should also begin using a brand new toothbrush immediately after the procedure. Oral piercings are a trend that can cause lasting, severe damage, so please think twice before doing it. **NOW**

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In the Kitchen With Sylvia Smith

— By Sandra Strong

When Sylvia Smith baked her first cake at the age of 10 with her Grandmother Worley, she was hooked. “The thing I like most about cooking is sharing tasty treats with others,” she admitted. “My first cake was a pound cake. Perhaps I enjoy baking best of all.” In those early years, Sylvia learned a lot from her parents, who were great cooks with their own special recipes.

In recent years, Sylvia’s downfall has been the food networks. “I see something on TV and go straight to the kitchen to conjure up the dish,” she said. “Sometimes I have to improvise if I’m missing ingredients. I often look in the pantry or freezer, survey the possibilities and come up with an unplanned, but very enjoyable, meal.” **NOW**

My First Pound Cake

1/2 lb. butter
2 cups sugar
5 whole eggs
1 tsp. vanilla flavoring
2 cups flour

1. Cream butter and sugar; add eggs and vanilla. Stir in flour. Beat with a wooden spoon 200 strokes.

2. Bake in a greased and floured tube pan at 325 F for 1 hour or until toothpick or wire tester comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes before removing from pan.

Sunshine Cake

Cake:
1 box yellow cake mix
4 eggs
1/2 cup vegetable oil
11-oz. can Mandarin oranges with juice

Frosting:

20-oz. can crushed pineapple with juice
4-oz. box instant vanilla pudding mix
9-oz. Cool Whip or other whipped topping

Optional toppings: pecans, Mandarin orange slices, Maraschino cherries, pineapple tidbits or coconut

1. For cake: Combine cake mix, eggs, oil and oranges. Mix according to box directions.

2. Pour into 3 greased and floured 8-inch cake pans. Bake at 350 F for 20 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before turning out on wire rack to cool completely.

3. For frosting: Blend pineapple with pudding mix; let stand for 5 minutes before folding in whipped topping.

4. Frost between layers and on top. Decorate cake top with any of the optional toppings. The cake must be refrigerated and removed about 30 minutes before serving.

Sauerkraut Salad

1/4 cup vinegar
1/2 cup water
1 cup sugar
1/2 cup onion, chopped
1/2 cup green pepper, chopped
1/2 cup red pepper, chopped
 (may substitute with pimento)
1 cup carrots, shredded
1 #2-can sauerkraut (cut strands, but don't rinse)

1. In a saucepan, bring vinegar, water and sugar to a boil. Allow to cool. Pour over remaining ingredients, mixing well. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Chicken Sour Cream Enchiladas

Enchiladas:

1 whole chicken or 4 large chicken breasts, stewed, deboned, shredded
1 cup onion, chopped
8 oz. Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
1 Tbsp. shortening or oil (add more as needed)
12 corn tortillas

Sour cream sauce:

1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup flour
1/2 tsp. salt
2 cups chicken broth
1 cup sour cream
Jalapeño pepper slices, fresh or canned

1. For enchiladas: Mix first 3 ingredients together in a large bowl. In a heavy skillet, melt shortening. Heat tortillas in skillet, one at a time, for 2-3 seconds on each side to soften.

2. Fill tortillas with chicken mixture. Roll up; place seam-side down in a 9x13-inch baking dish.

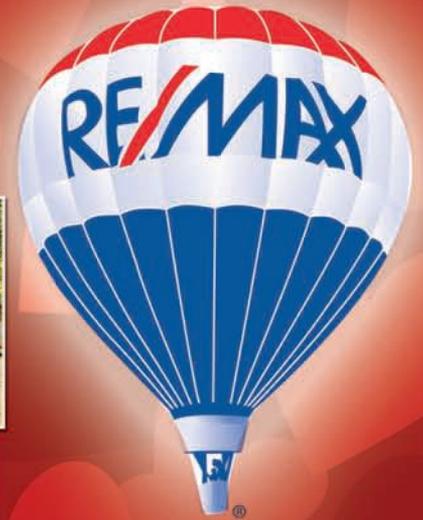
3. For sauce: Melt butter in medium sauce pan. Add flour and salt. Stir over low heat to blend.

4. Slowly add broth; stirring until thickened. Remove from heat; fold in sour cream. Pour sauce over enchiladas. Top with jalapeños.

5. Bake at 350 F for about 25-30 minutes to heat through. Can also be heated in microwave at 100-percent power for 10 minutes.

To view recipes from current and previous issues, visit www.nowmagazines.com.

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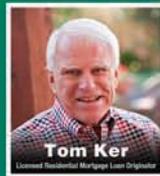
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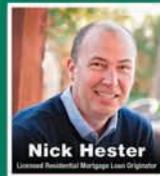
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