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MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2024



Promising Perseverance

Juan Bell aims to uplift others

Top 5 Texas Travel Destinations for 2024

Check out these stops across The Lone Star State

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Scavenger Hunt

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

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Feb. 15 – North Texas Food Pantry
Feb. 16 – District Holiday
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Feb. 26 – ROISD School Board Meeting
Mar. 10 – Daylight Savings Begins
Mar. 11-15 – Spring Break
Mar. 25 – ROISD School Board Meeting
Mar. 29 – Good Friday Holiday
Apr. 1 – Easter Holiday
Apr. 6 – Education Foundation's Handbags
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Apr. 8 – Staff Development (No School)

Details at RedOakISD.org

ON THE COVER



Experiencing poverty firsthand has led Pastor Juan Bell to help others in need.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Woodson's works ...

Black History Month developed from what was initially a one-week initiative founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1926. Woodson — who noticed the scarcity of African-Americans included in school curricula during his own studies — felt an established commemoration would help spotlight the history of people of color. It is said he chose February because it was the birth month of notable freedom advocates, Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Along with spurring the weeklong observation, Carter founded what would become the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, followed by his creation of *The Journal of African American History* — featuring stories, research and book reviews by black scholars. Carter worked alongside government officials, college presidents, noted philosophers, poets and everyday people toward ASALH's mission of sharing the history of black culture and contribution. At asalh.org, you can see how the organization advances that purpose to this day.

These accomplishments — as well as multiple authored works including the 1933 book, *The Mis-education of the Negro* — led to Carter's nickname, "the Father of Black History." A son of former slaves, Carter received a master's degree from the University of Chicago, then became the second African-American to earn a doctorate degree from Harvard University in 1912. Passing in 1950 at the age of 74, he would not live to see the expansion from a week to a monthlong observation beginning in 1976 ... but the focus on Black American history in schools across the nation this month is Carter's legacy.

HiStory continues ...



Angel

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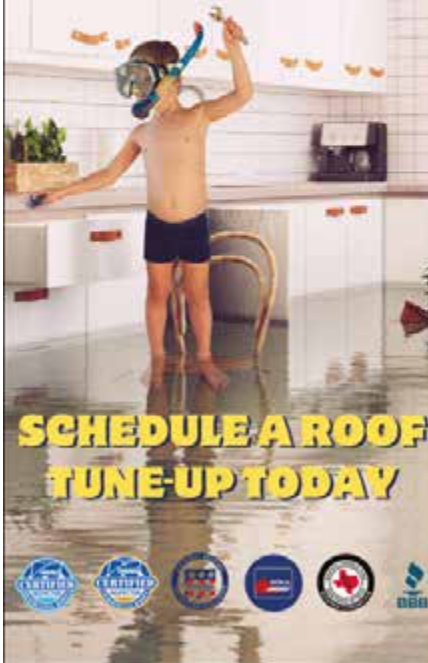


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PROMISING *Perseverance*

— By Angel Morris

Juan Bell knows firsthand the effects of poverty. The eldest of seven children of a single mother, he experienced domestic violence and homelessness. Instead of making him bitter, he was inspired to help others. “I started volunteering when I was 17 with the Helping Hands of Dallas and volunteered for over 30 years,” Juan recalled.

Born in Franklin, Louisiana, Juan moved to Dallas with his family and graduated from Skyline High School in the Class of 1985. He went on to earn a bachelor’s degree from Northwood University and, later, a master’s in professional counseling. “I was employed as a principal at New Vision Christian Academy in Oak Cliff, and my wife was employed in Waxahachie, so we moved to Red Oak in 2004, which was a halfway point for both jobs,” Juan outlined.

A year later, Juan was called back to volunteerism. “After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, we began taking water to the convention center in Dallas for those displaced. The next month, Hurricane Rita hit,” Juan remembered. “I initially used this as an educational experience for my students, but eventually, I started to feed the homeless population in Dallas, as well as supply clothing by collecting donations from individuals, churches and companies.”

Juan eventually became employed with the Department of Aging and Disability for Ellis County. In 2018, he was a substance abuse counselor serving the Ellis and Dallas county communities, obtaining licensure in 2021. “This is one of my greatest accomplishments because of the hundreds of lives I was able to impact in a community that feels downtrodden and stigmatized by society as a result of some of the decisions they made during their addictions,” Juan noted.

For the past six years, Juan has served as pastor of Abundant Life Full Gospel Church of God in Christ, overseeing the Tracy Eugene Hines Outreach Ministries — named for one of the church’s biggest donors toward mission work. “Although a small ministry, we’ve impacted thousands of families. Through word-of-mouth, we primarily help locals in need, but we’ve also crossed state lines,” Juan explained. “Our goal is to be there in the aftermath of tragedy. When the cameras leave, we show up.”

TEHOM assisted following the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas, in 2022 and after a hospital shooting in Jackson, Mississippi, in 2023. Their volunteers traveled to Sulphur Springs and Arkansas following recent tornadoes. “Once we carried so much water that we blew out a tire on the U-Haul trailer, but we just kept going,” Juan reflected. “We just want to provide emotional support, clothes, food and monies wherever we can.”

Operating out of the Comfort Inn and Suites in Red Oak, Juan’s goal is to find a local building where he can expand

the ministry and store donations. “We are a 24/7/365 ministry, and most of our funds come from our small church family. Our lack of resources hinders us,” Juan admitted. “The hope is to have the staff and the facility to better help meet the needs of this community and beyond.”

To that end, Juan pulls double duty by also serving as a pastor of Mount Calvary Church of God in Christ in Quitman, Texas, where he recently opened a food pantry. “Cooking is another passion of mine, so we serve hot meals after services every Sunday and Wednesday to anyone in need,” he noted. “We also continue to deliver hot meals, clothes and water to Dallas-area homeless.”

Juan wants to return to some of the mission work he helped conduct prior to the pandemic. “Before COVID, we visited nursing homes in Red Oak, Waxahachie and Ennis, especially during the holidays, taking socks, blankets, gifts and other small treats,” he said.

Employed as a special needs teacher at Global High School in Waxahachie and serving on the School Board of Ferris ISD, Juan said his various mission work would not be possible without the support of Keturah, his wife of 20 years. He said his marriage and children — Juan Jr., Shemaiah, Eboni and Amariah, plus three grandchildren and one on the way — are easily his greatest accomplishments.

Juan is also careful to credit his mother, Linda Williams White, for showing him purposefulness. “The one person who has impacted me most was, without a doubt, my mom. She fought through domestic violence and poverty, raising her children and then a grandchild — eight of us in a three-bedroom apartment. In an already crowded situation, she would take in other families, too,” he shared. “She worked multiple jobs while going to school and obtained her bachelor’s degree at the age of 50, and was the first African-American to hold her position in the city of Dallas.

“Of her seven kids, two are police officers, one is an actress, two are pastors and a couple are entrepreneurs,” Juan continued. “She persevered, and I am whom I am because of who she is. Now I just want to help others persevere.” **NOW**

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TOP 5

Texas Travel Destinations

FOR 2024

— By Amber D. Browne

With New Year's resolutions still fresh on the minds of many, travel might top the list for 2024. The great state of Texas has an abundance of travel destinations across its nearly 269,000 square miles. From the Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park to the spring-fed Comal River in New Braunfels, The Lone Star State does not disappoint. Here are five great places to visit this year:

#1 Big Bend National Park

This national park has been fascinating visitors since 1944. The best time to visit Big Bend National Park is late fall through early spring, as the summer months are extremely hot. Guests can camp, hike the mountain trails, birdwatch, stargaze and simply enjoy time in nature.

#2 Space Center Houston

Space Center Houston offers more than 400 artifacts to explore. With rockets and a collection of spacesuits, hands-on experiences, historical films and live demonstrations, visitors can spend all day soaking up the fun. You can check out Mission Control and the Astronaut Training Facility by taking a NASA Tram Tour to NASA Johnson Space Center.

Don't forget to stop by the gift shop for some freeze-dried ice cream and other space-related merchandise. Check the Space Center Houston website to view a calendar of upcoming special events and ticket pricing.

#3 San Antonio River Walk

First envisioned by Robert H.H. Hugman in the early 1920s, the San Antonio River Walk provides visitors with ample opportunities to enjoy food and drink, shopping, nightlife and more. It was not until 1939 that construction crews broke ground on the river project with Hugman, otherwise known as the Father of the River Walk, serving as architect to develop the area for flood management and to increase tourism.

The 15-mile stretch of river now includes three main sections. The

Downtown area boasts restaurants, hotels, retail space and boat tours. Museum Reach just north of Downtown includes hotels, residences and a number of museums. The section south of Downtown, Mission Reach, is a woodland habitat that connects several UNESCO World Heritage-designated missions.

#4 Comal River in New Braunfels

The Comal River is considered the shortest river in Texas, at 2.5 miles, and stays a constant 70-72 degrees. When entering the river at Prince Solms Park, the first splash of cold water is a shock, but your body acclimates as you float on a tube toward the tube chute. If you choose to forgo the chute, you can walk around and return to floating down river through several small rapids.

Disposable items, such as sandwich baggies, cans and water bottles are no longer allowed on the river, so be sure to pack reusable containers for food and beverages. Wear a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and, if necessary, grab a waterproof bag to store important belongings. Paid parking is available at the park, or you can catch a shuttle from one of the local tubing outfitters.



#5 Fort Worth Stockyards

The historic Fort Worth Stockyards has been a staple in North Texas since it was established in 1849 as an outpost for cattle drives along the Chisholm Trail. In recent years, more hotels were added to the area, and horse and mule barns underwent restorations to create Mule Alley.

New restaurant concepts and trendy shops add to some Stockyard staples — Billy Bob's for all of your honky-tonk needs and Cowtown Coliseum for an evening of rodeo. Visitors can ride a mechanical bull, take a ghost tour, taste some wines and catch one of the twice-daily cattle drives of the Fort Worth Herd. Paid parking is available if street spaces are occupied.

No matter your interests, Texas has much to offer. So, have fun exploring The Lone Star State! **NOW**

Sources:

1. [nps.gov/bibe](https://www.nps.gov/bibe).
2. [spacecenter.org](https://www.spacecenter.org).
3. [thesanantonioriverwalk.com](https://www.thesanantonioriverwalk.com).
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Zoomed In:
Stephanie Shuster

By Angel Morris

With deep roots in Ellis County, Stephanie Shuster said her animal shelter job in high school led to a lifetime of volunteerism. “My childhood love of caring for animals grew into a passion to help ones in need. That was 23 years ago,” the volunteer for 4-Legged Helpers, Fostering Hope and Forgotten Ones, calculated.

In the last decade, Stephanie has fostered 360 dogs and cats, while helping pet owners get food and vet services, as well as transporting animals to rescue shelters from Abilene to Austin. She outlines how people can assist in her work with Saving Pyrs in Need (SPIN) on her TikTok account, @houseofpyrenees. “Rescue groups handle the financial needs of their animals,” Stephanie noted, “but when strays show up, I cover those costs myself with community help.”



Bailey Gleaves receives a plaque for being named City of Red Oak 2023 Employee of the Year.



Eastridge Elementary Librarian Cassie Brand cuddles with guests at the school’s Stuffed Animal Sleepover following Reading Night.



Red Oak High School Cheerleaders take second place in Novice Crowd Performance and fourth in Large Varsity Game Day performance at the NCA Regional competition.



Keri Bickerstaff, owner of Clean Girls Cleaning Service, beautifies a local home for the new year.



Bishop T.D. Jakes and Glenn Heights Mayor Sonja Brown enjoy their time at the 9th Annual African American Elected Officials Brunch.



Kaley Luce aims to sell 3,000 Girl Scout cookies around town this year.

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A photograph of Sheila Karpas, a woman with dark hair, smiling in her kitchen. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a purple floral apron. On the counter in front of her are several dishes, including a bowl of rice pudding, a plate of food, and a blue kettle. The kitchen has wooden cabinets and a microwave in the background.

CookingNOW

In the Kitchen With

SHEILA KARPAS

— By Angel Morris

Sheila Karpas moved from the Dominican Republic to Red Oak to marry her husband, Matthew, two years ago. “My favorite food to cook is arroz con leche (rice pudding), because it reminds me of being in my small apartment cooking for all my nephews and nieces who love that recipe,” Sheila recalled. “Spending time with them and hearing about their day was priceless.”

From a young age, Sheila was interested in cooking. “My best memories were arriving home from school and smelling the aroma of my mother’s delicious food. Helping my mother cook was always a pleasure,” she noted.

Sheila trained in business, pharmaceuticals and health care as a nurse technician. “Today, I love baking,” she admitted. “Especially healthy desserts. I also like to work with resin in my free time.” **NOW**

Arroz con Leche Mis Favoritos

My favorite rice pudding.

1 cup white rice, rinsed and strained
1-2 cinnamon sticks
2 whole cloves
1 strip lemon zest
2 1/2 cups water

2 cups whole milk
1 14-oz. can evaporated milk
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 tsp. salt
1 Tbsp. vanilla
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 cup caramelized sugar
Cinnamon powder

1. Place rice, cinnamon stick(s), cloves, lemon zest and water in a large, heavy saucepan. Soak for 30 minutes to 1 hour, if possible.

2. Bring the mixture to a boil, uncovered, over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low; cook for 10 minutes, uncovered, or until most of the water has been absorbed.

3. Add the whole milk, stirring; let the milk reduce.

4. Add the evaporated milk, sugar, salt, vanilla and raisins, stirring well to combine. Lower the heat to the lowest setting possible; cook, stirring often, until thickened, but still soupy, about 20-25 minutes.

5. Once the rice pudding has finished cooking, taste it and gently fold in the caramelized sugar. Serve warm or cold; sprinkle a little cinnamon powder on top.

Pasta in a Pot

Serves 8 people.

2 lbs. ground beef, cooked in vegetable oil
2 medium onions, chopped

- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 32-oz. jar spaghetti sauce with mushrooms
- 1 8-oz. pkg. shell macaroni, cooked according to package instructions
- 1 1/2 pts. sour cream
- 1/2 lb. sliced provolone cheese
- 1/2 lb. mozzarella cheese

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Drain the excess fat from the cooked beef. Add the onions and garlic to the beef. Brown slightly.
2. Add the spaghetti sauce; simmer 20 minutes. Pour half of the meat and tomato sauce over the prepared shells. Spread on sour cream; cover with provolone, ending with mozzarella.
3. Cover the casserole; bake 35-40 minutes. Remove the cover; continue baking until the mozzarella browns slightly.

Mangu

Dominican Mashed Plantains.

- 4 green plantains, peeled and sliced into 1/2-inch slices
- 1 to 1 1/2 cups water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 4 Tbsp. butter
- Pickled red onions, for garnish

1. Place the plantains in a saucepan. Fill the pan with water until the plantains are covered; add the salt.
2. Cook over medium-high heat, bringing the water to a boil. Decrease the heat, keeping the water at a low boil. Cook another 20 minutes or so. Plantains are done when they are tender and easily mashed.
3. Cut the butter into 4 tablespoon-size pieces; put them in a large heat-proof mixing bowl. Using a slotted spoon, move the cooked plantains to the bowl, placing them atop the butter pats. Reserve the water from cooking the plantains.
4. Use a fork or potato masher to mash the plantains and butter. Add enough of the reserved water to get the consistency you want. Aim for a mashed potato-like texture. Let it sit for a few minutes before serving.
5. Garnish with onions. Serve with los tres golpes (the three hits): fried eggs, fried Dominican salami and fried cheese.

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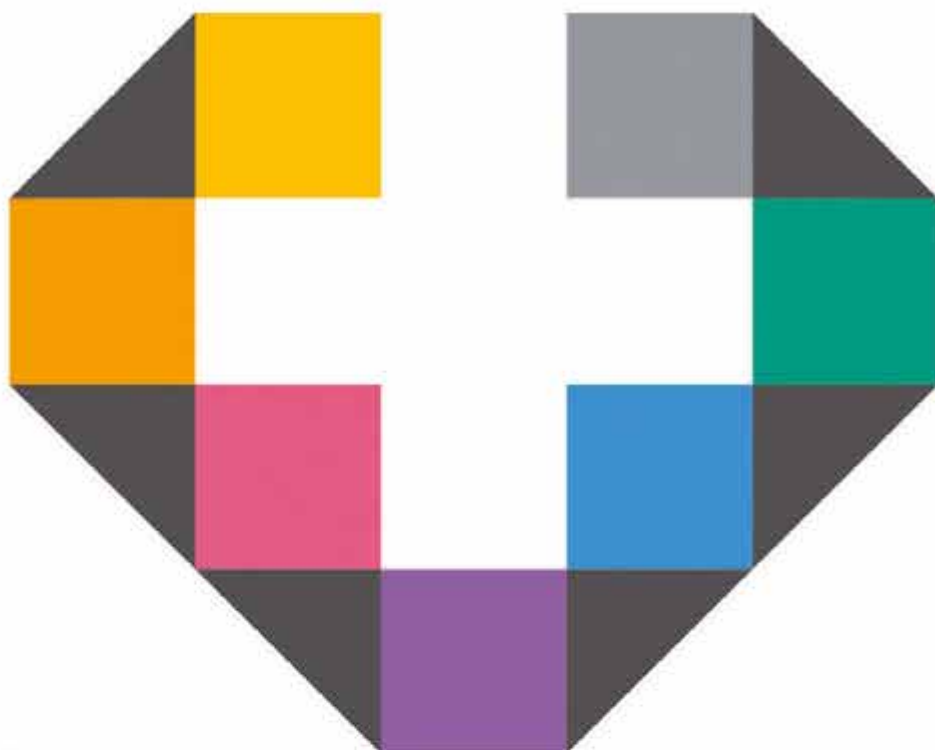

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