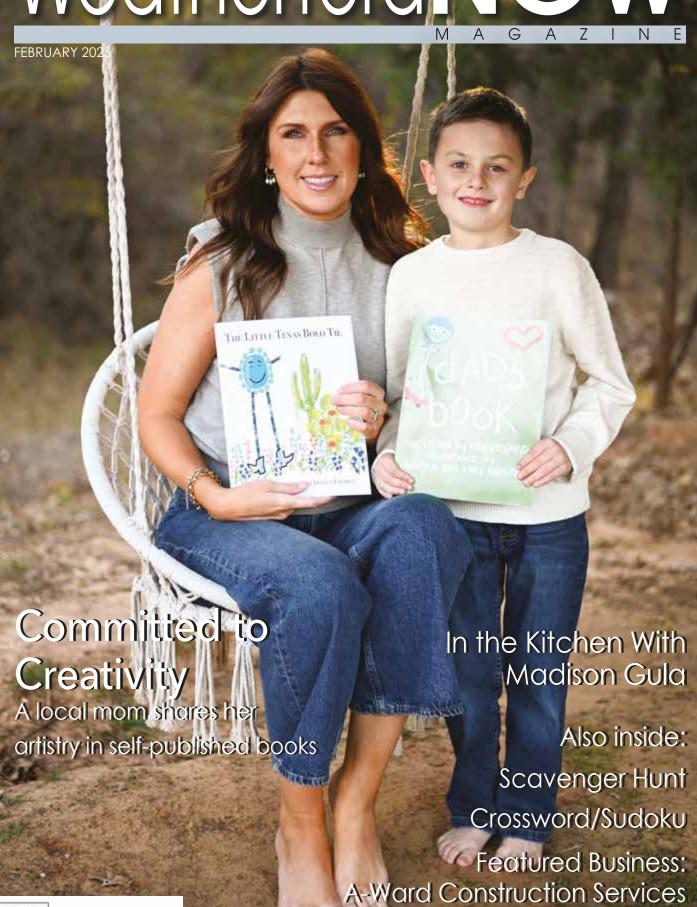
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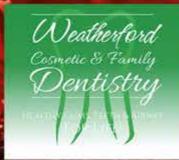
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# ON THE COVER



From the minds of Danica Esparza and her son, Trey, illustrated stories are created.

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Subscriptions are available at the rate of \$35 per year or \$3.50 per issue. Subscriptions should be sent to: NOW Magazines, P.O. Box 1071, Waxahachie, TX 75168. For advertising rates or editorial correspondence, call (817) 613-1533 or visit www.nowmagazines.com.





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# **EDITOR'S NOTE**

Love is in the air!

Valentine's Day. What is the history behind this day that we celebrate and show our love to significant others? Historical accounts claim the celebration stems from a pagan fertility festival or recognizes a martyred Christian saint, according to History.com. The first recorded reference of St. Valentine's Day as a romantic holiday stems from Geoffrey Chaucer's 1375 poem, "Parliament of Foules." Some joke the greeting card companies created this holiday, but according to History.com, written valentines first appeared in the 1400s. A poem by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife in 1415 is the oldest known valentine. Whether written words, fresh flowers or decadent chocolates are selected to express appreciation on this heart-filled holiday, showing gratitude to loved ones is essential.

In recent years, icy weather has forced many in the local area to cancel Valentine's Day plans. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate this month, and celebrations with loved ones will go off without a hitch. Cuddling up next to a warm fireplace and reminiscing about the good times is an inexpensive way to keep your loved one close. For an evening out, local restaurants often offer Valentine's Day features that may include dinner for two, complete with drinks and dessert.

If an evening for two is not in the cards, many may choose to practice a little self-love on Valentine's Day. Why not book a massage, take a weekend trip to a destination on the bucket list or take some time to relax and wind down at home? Gratitude and love for oneself and others can be a cornerstone of good health, one that needs to be emphasized often.

Have fun out there!





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With more than 20 self-published books to her credit in less than a year, Weatherford author, illustrator and artist Danica Esparza shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. Her children's books range from Western favorites, such as The Little Texas Bolo Tie and Ranger the Ramblin' Tumbleweed to a series inspired by her late grandmother, My MooMoo, and many more.

Danica expressed her creativity for the written word and artwork as a young child when she would handwrite greeting cards for family and draw her classmates as cartoon characters to present as gifts. When her 20-year-old daughter, Kaden Reamy-Tunison, was younger, Danica pondered writing children's books, but the idea fizzled. About five years ago, the dream rekindled when she discovered aspiring authors could self-publish books on Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing. She added the intel to her storyboard, and in March 2024, Danica self-published her first book featuring a character sparked from her 6-year-old son's imagination.

"It was amazing. It became into something that I never thought it would be. It was really all of Trey's little stick bread characters that he came up with. He kept saying, 'Mamma-ma Bread,'" she explained. Danica began drawing Trey's characters on the Procreate app on his iPad. "It came out so cute." Through trial and error and lots of YouTube videos, this self-taught publisher authored and illustrated her first book — *Mamma-ma Bread and Me.* "I had a dream of all these other book ideas," Danica said. Those dreams soon became reality.

For her first few books, Danica used her finger to draw the illustrations on the app. "I didn't even have a stylus pen or really know what that was," she shared. Danica's daughter visited from California and gave her a stylus pen. "It helps so much with the details," Danica explained.

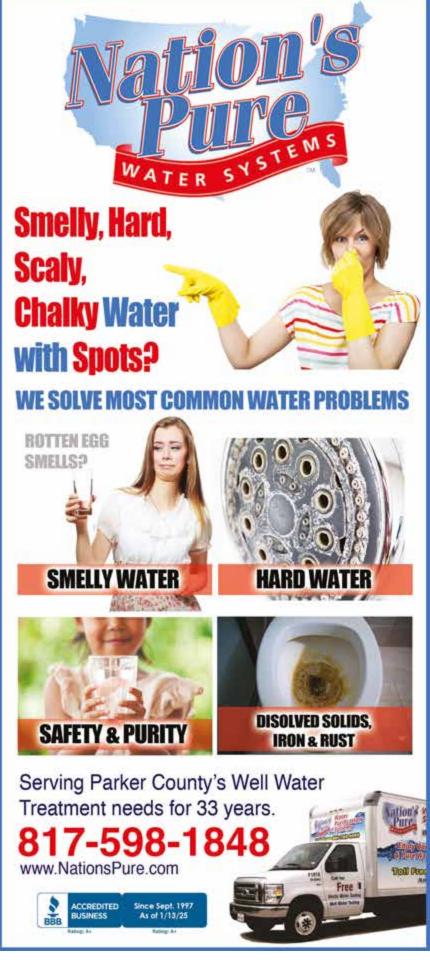
Danica often stays up into the early morning hours writing and drawing. "It's kind of like my me time, but I can't stay too focused on it because I'm a stay-at-home mom," she said. Although 6-year-old Trey and 2-year-old Kenna keep her busy, Danica's dedication and determination to her self-publishing journey are inspiring. "I'm learning to take a break here and there and relax," she shared. "I don't have to hurry, hurry and get it published. On the *Ranger the Ramblin' Tumbleweed* story, he's always in a hurry. That's me," she confessed.



With two young children and so many book ideas, Danica seems to always find time for the next storyline. She prefers to write the story first, typically with a comedic plot, and then develop the characters. "Mostly, I'm a sucker for stuff that has a touch of nostalgia to it. Maybe that's why my cartoons are kind of simple and remind me of when I was younger, how I used to draw things."

Her My MooMoo character, a cow that dresses in various Hawaiian muumuus inspired by her late grandmother, Johnnie Clark, has developed into a series. "She had every muumuu there was with matching earrings and the red lipstick. She never went anywhere without her red lipstick," Danica shared about her grandmother.

"I don't see myself as a writer. I'm more of an artist. That's always been my real passion. But I can rhyme," she shared. Her Western collection includes other titles such as Duke the Boot and Pancho the Concho, which incorporates Spanish verbiage. Danica





created a coloring book to accompany The Little Texas Bolo Tie book and published a Christmas recipe scrapbook - Santa's Family Cookbook — this past December.

More realistic artistic Western books teach young children the alphabet in The Western Brand ABCs: A is for Ace and their numbers in The Cattle Call, which also features different breeds of cattle. Much research went into creating these two children's books, which feature factual information. "This was harder than just coming up with stuff," she admitted.

A special book published by Danica was authored by her son, Trey. It is called Dad's Book. "I was trying to get him to do all of the illustrations for the book, but his hand got tired," she laughed. She used one of his illustrations and drew the others. which went well with his storyline. "It came out really cute." Initially, Danica's husband, Aaron, was unaware they were writing Dad's Book. "When I first read him the book, he was like, You should go buy that book for Trey because it's funny." After publishing the book, they presented Aaron with a copy. "He loved it."

Danica plans to keep a record of Trey's imaginative characters and ideas for potential books, just in case he wants to continue his publishing career in the future. "He comes up with little stories, or he'll sing a song. I think it's so cool that he's so creative."

Danica's books are available locally at Teskey's and Byrd Mill, along with several online boutiques and on Amazon. She also participates in book readings at Playhouse Children's Museum, attends local

festivals to share her books with the community and donates books for fundraising efforts.

Danica is also known for her artwork, some of which is displayed at Adobe Western Art Gallery in the Fort Worth Stockyards. In their Weatherford home, her paintings, murals and crafts are on display, adding color and sophistication to rooms. Danica is a self-described DIY enthusiast and enjoys refurbishing furniture and painting other pieces built by her husband.

She comes by her artistic qualities naturally. Her mother, Sandi Williams, would often paint skulls acquired from ranches in her hometown of Mission in South Texas. "I've always been around it, so it's in my blood," Danica shared. "She's very Western, and I didn't know I liked that style until I was 35ish. I really started going back to that Western style. I just love it so much."

With endless ideas yet to be realized, Danica plans to keep writing, illustrating and publishing additional books. "I would love to make a career off my books." NOW







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# **Zoomed In:**Beth Culler

# With a drive to share her love of volunteering with her daughter, Beth Culler

joined a group of other Aledo moms to found the National Charity League, Inc. Parker County TX Chapter in 2023. Beth had been a member of the Aledo chapter of Young Men's Service League, where she volunteered in the community with her son, Davey. "I loved watching him grow into a leader. I was looking for something similar to do with my daughter, Tori," Beth shared.

"This chapter means so much to me to have this time together with my daughter — learning, growing and serving others in our community," Beth said. "Sharing my love of volunteering with my daughter and watching her grow as she serves and in the leadership positions of NCL is priceless."

# **Around Town**



Laura Waldron stands ready to serve hungry guests at The District Butcher in Willow Park.



Aledo's Pawprints of Hope Rescue reunites Zeus, missing for four years, with his owner, Ian Aguirre.



The Oakridge Christian Academy Musical Theatre Class brings joy to residents at Hilltop Park Rehabilitation and Care Center.



Parker County Chamber President and CEO Lisa Flowers joins local leaders at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Texas Clear Lanes Project, a significant infrastructure project in the region.

By Amber D. Browne



Weatherford High School students Berkley Austin Roark, Reagan Rees and Ansley Crippen raise \$1,200 for the Careity Foundation through their DECA project, Score For a Cure.



The kitchen crew at Fuzzy's Taco Shop in Willow Park prepares breakfast, lunch and dinner for hungry customers.



Brock Elementary School educator Whitney Chilton wins the EECU drawing for perfect attendance.







**BusinessNOW** 

# A-Ward Construction Services

- By Amber D. Browne

A-Ward Construction Services

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For nearly three decades, John Ward, owner of A-Ward Construction Services, has been turning his customers' visions into reality. John's passion for construction came to

# A-WARD CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

him honestly. "Pop was a builder in Gainesville, Florida," John explained. In his early 20s, John took a different path for a short while and worked in computer programming. He preferred an outdoor setting to the office, so he took a leap and opened his first construction company, J&B Services, named after John and his son, Billy. John moved with his family to Texas in 1992, and after nearly a decade working for others in the industry, he opened A-Ward Construction Services in 2000.

A-Ward's main focus is kitchen and bath remodels that encompass everything from the floor to the ceiling. "We can gut them. We can take the tubs out and redo showers. Everything — cabinets, countertops, granite," he said. "I have contractors for everything." Other services include driveways, foundations, fencing and patios. "If it's got construction in it, I'm on it," John shared. "I've done everything. I'll do a house from the ground up. Whatever they're out there looking for, I've got it."

His trade contractors — plumbing, electric, HVAC, drywall, paint, etc. — are all licensed and insured. His paint and

drywall crews have been working with him for about 20 years. "They're all loyal. They're honest. They're cleancut. They speak English, and if they don't, the head crew guy does. And I'm always around."

When first meeting with a potential customer, John discusses the potential client's wants and needs, as well as expectations and proposed timeline. He will create a proposal, and if the budget works for the client, the subcontractors will walk the job to present an itemized proposal. The customer has the options to pick and choose what they want included in the job. John offers the client an opportunity to demolish the space, tearing out the old to the studs and disposing of the materials. This step gives the customer a chance to be involved in the process, if they choose, but most prefer A-Ward to handle the job. Customers can also supply the materials, or A-Ward can purchase their selections for them.

"Customers want to be involved. They may not want to touch it, but they want to know, and that's why I keep them abreast of everything." At the end of each day of construction, John calls or texts the client with an update of what happened on the job site and a preview of what is to come the following day. "I expect communication, so I keep the customers abreast of everything, and they like it."

A-Ward Construction Services works with residential clients in the local area up to 50 miles outside of Willow Park in any direction. A 30-percent deposit is required, and John draws the remaining balance in equal amounts each week during the job timeline. A-Ward does not offer financing, but cash and check are accepted.

"I'm a good guy. I'm going to be hands-on. I'm going to walk them and talk them through it and make them as comfortable as possible," John said about his customers. "I'm a small guy. I'm not out here to make a million dollars a year. I'm out here to make people happy and keep money coming in." As an involved owner at A-Ward Construction Services and a selfdescribed people person, John plans to help his customers along every step of the building process until their vision becomes reality. NOW





# THE LOCAL TABLE

One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.

- Virginia Woolf







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# CookingNOW

# IN THE KITCHEN WITH MADISON GULA

By Amber D. Browne



Those who know Weatherford resident Madison Gula lovingly refer to her as the "Sauce Queen." Nearly every dish she creates for her husband and close family members features one of her signature sauces. A Friday night favorite? Madison's Spicy Sausage Rigatoni. "I like to call it Fancy Mac and Cheese. The secret ingredient in this recipe is the Brie. It makes the sauce so creamy and delicious."

Most of her recipes are discovered on social media. "After I make a recipe once, I usually will remember the ingredients and just make it my way." However, Madison's Linguini and Clam Sauce recipe was inherited from her Pepere. "I was blessed because he was able to teach me right before he passed away. This recipe is a family favorite." Now

# **Linguini and Clam Sauce**

- 1 lb. linguini pasta
- 4 10-oz. cans chopped or whole belly clams
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- I onion, chopped
- 1 1/2 bulbs garlic, minced
- 1/4 tsp. white pepper
- 1 Tbsp. oregano
- 1 Tbsp. basil

1/2 cup Sauvignon Blanc or your favorite white wine

Lemon slices, to taste

Parmesan cheese, grated, to taste Red pepper flakes, to taste (optional)

- **1.** Cook the linguini pasta according to package directions. Pour the juice from the cans of clams into a large bowl; set the clams and juice aside.
- **2.** While your pasta is cooking, add the olive oil and onions to a large skillet on medium heat. Cook until the onions are translucent; add the garlic.
- **3.** Add the white pepper, oregano and basil to the onion and garlic mixture; stir. Add the white wine and the reserved clam juice. Combine well; simmer on low for several minutes. Add the clams; simmer for 3 minutes. Add the cooked pasta; combine. Serve with lemon slices and grated Parmesan cheese. Sprinkle with red pepper flakes, if desired.

# Spicy Sausage Rigatoni

I lb. rigatoni pasta

1 Tbsp. olive oil

1/2 onion, chopped

3 garlic cloves, minced

6 spicy sausage links, casings removed

1 Tbsp. cornstarch or flour

1/3 cup white wine

I cup heavy cream

1 cup milk

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. pepper

1/4 Brie wheel

1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated

- **1.** Cook the rigatoni pasta according to package directions.
- **2.** Add the olive oil, onions and garlic to a skillet on medium heat. Cook until the onions are translucent. Add the sausage; chop up the sausage as it cooks.
- **3.** Once the sausage is cooked, sprinkle it with the cornstarch or flour to thicken the sauce. Add the wine, heavy cream and milk; mix well. Add the salt and pepper; stir. Boil the mixture, and then turn down the heat to a simmer, stirring occasionally.
- **4.** Cut off the rind from the Brie; add chunks of the Brie to the sauce. Stir until melted. Add the Parmesan cheese to the

sauce. Add the cooked pasta; combine and serve.

# **Herby Turkey Meatball Bowl**

Meatballs:

1 lb. ground turkey

1 cup ricotta

1 egg

1/2 cup Panko breadcrumbs

I shallot, finely chopped

2 green onions, finely chopped

1/2 Tbsp. honey

1/2 cup cilantro, finely chopped

1/4 cup dill, finely chopped

Zest of 1 lemon

1/2 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. pepper

2 Tbsp. olive oil (divided use)

#### Sweet Potatoes:

2 sweet potatoes, washed, dried and diced

1/2 Tbsp. olive oil

1/2 tsp. salt

1/4 tsp. cumin

1/2 tsp. cinnamon

#### Sauce:

1 cup Greek yogurt

1 cup fresh basil

1/2 cup fresh dill

Juice of 1 lemon

1 Tbsp. olive oil

1 Tbsp. honey

1 jalapeño

2 cloves garlic

Salt, to taste

Pepper, to taste

- 1. For meatballs: Add the ground turkey, ricotta and next 10 ingredients to a large bowl. Add one Tbsp. of the olive oil. Mix well; roll into balls. Add the remaining Tbsp. of olive oil to a skillet or an oven-safe dish. Brown the meatballs in the skillet or bake at 350 F until the internal temperature reaches 165 F.
- **2.** For sweet potatoes: Preheat the oven to 350 F. Coat the diced sweet potatoes with the olive oil. Sprinkle the seasonings onto the potatoes; bake for 30 minutes or until the potatoes are soft.
- 3. For sauce: Add all the ingredients to a food processor or blender; mix well.
- **4.** Serve the meatballs and sweet potatoes with white rice and kale. Drizzle the sauce onto the dish before serving.







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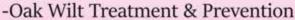


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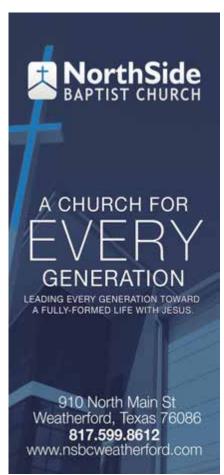
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	1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		Across		Down		
9 12 14	17		18	13	10	21	19	16		11	Upper limit     Tires     End of a radio alphabet     On the contrary     Now and then     Controversial driving video game	25 *_ and on Earth, peace * (Luke 2: 14) 28 Chafe 29 Criticize heavily 30 Young reporter 32 Recording tool Harry is adjusting 35 Autobiography	Film script words between scenes     Assumed name     Groan-causing wordplay     "Steps in Time" autobiographer     Augment with	9 Take a sharp turn 11 Your answer is requested 13 Remove 18 Organization for Nadal and Djokovic 19 Where to work on a six-pack? 21 A whole lot	27 Poppy Pomfrey at Hogwarts, for example 29 Yankees' legend Rizzuto 31 "Adios!" 33 High ball 34 Media organization
22	23	24			25			26	27		15 Go on to say 16 "Catfish: The TV Show" host	36 Otherwise 37 Heraldic black	something superfluous 6 Rugged four-	22 First word of "The Marines" Hymn"	which disseminates "ideas worth spreading"
28 32 35			33	29			34 36	30		31	Schulman  17 Japan's "City of Water"  19 Breathe convulsively  20 Imitably	38 Thread cutter	wheeler  7 African republic preceded by the Ashanti Empire  8 Monica	23 Angler's equipment 24 Bo's master 26 Gut bugs	,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,
	37						38				impatient 22 Turkey		stabbed during a tennis tournament		

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Medium

# Sudoku Puzzle

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

Crosswordsite.com Ltd

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# 2/15

## **Parker County Health Foundation Boots & Bling Charity Gala:**

Attend to raise funds benefiting Parker County organizations. 6:00-11:00 p.m., River Ranch Stockyards, 500 NE 23rd St., Fort Worth. parkercountyhealthfoundation.org.

# 2/22

## Hats, Horses & Hoopla:

Attend for an evening of fun benefiting Aledo High School Project Celebration 2026. 6:00-9:00 p.m., The Social Space, 205 S. Calhoun St., Fort Worth. Visit aledopc2026.com for tickets and more info.

# 2/24-4/14

#### Matter of Balance Fall **Prevention Class:**

Join a series of eight free workshops every Monday. 1:00-3:00 p.m., Couts United Methodist Church, 802 North Elm St. For more information or to register, call (817) 598-6168.

# 2/25

#### **67th Annual Rotary Pancake Supper:**

Funds raised go toward scholarships for Weatherford high school seniors. 6:00-8:00 p.m., Weatherford High School Cafeteria, 2121 Bethel Rd. (817) 360-8173 or weatherfordrotary.org.

# 2/27 and 2/28

## The Cheese Class:

Antonelli's Cheese Shop's class will explore all things cheese, plus a wine pairing from Bankhead Texas Wine Bar for an extra fee. Cost: \$75. 6:00-8:00 p.m., Clark Gardens, 567 Maddux Rd. (940) 682-4856.

# 3/4

## 3rd Annual Mardi Gras Festival:

Family-friendly event featuring jazz music, gumbo contest, face painting, crafts for kids and great food. Free. 6:00-9:00 p.m.. Weatherford College Alkek Fine Arts Center, 225 College Park Dr. For more information, contact Sandra Kurosky at (817) 598-8981.

# Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays

#### **Tone and Trim:**

Join Weatherford ISD's Community Education's adult fitness class. Mondays and Thursdays: 7:00-8:00 p.m.; Saturdays: 8:30-9:30 a.m. Cost: \$30. Curtis Elementary gym, 501 W. Russell, weatherfordisd.com.

# Fourth Mondays

## Weatherford Art **Association Meeting:**

Join for an artist demonstration and more. 6:00 p.m., Senior

Center, 1225 Holland Lake Dr. For more information, visit weatherfordart.com.

# **Tuesdays**

#### **Preschool Story Time:**

Join us for story time. 10:30 a.m., The Doss Heritage and Culture Center, 1400 Texas Dr. dosscenter.org.

# Tuesdays and **Thursdays**

#### Storytime at the Library:

Toddlers enjoy books and activities on Tuesdays and preschoolers on Thursdays. 10:30 a.m., Weatherford Public Library, 1014 Charles St. weatherfordtx.gov/142/library.

# Wednesdays

#### VFW Post 4746:

Join to support veterans. Burger night: Cost \$5. (Steak Night on 1st & 3rd Fridays: Cost \$20.) 6:00-8:00 p.m., 224 Zion Hill Rd. (817) 594-7356.

# Second **Thursdays**

#### Gardeners' Club of Parker **County Monthly Meeting:**

Each meeting includes a speaker with information relative to gardening in Parker County. 10:00 a.m., St. Francis Church, 117 Ranch House Rd., Willow Park. Call (817) 919-6280 for more information.

# Third Thursdays

## Quilter's Guild of **Parker County:**

Come early to socialize: 6:15 p.m.; meeting: 6:45 p.m., Lakeshore Drive Baptist Church, 200 S. Lakeshore Dr., Hudson Oaks, quiltersguildofparkercounty.org.

# Fridays

#### **American Legion Post** 163 Dinner:

Enjoy dinner for a small fee to support local veterans. Opens: 5:00 p.m.; dinner: 6:00 p.m., 200 Cartwright Park Rd. Email alpost 163@gmail.com for info.

# Second Fridays

#### Parker County Women's and Newcomers' Club:

Social hour: 9:30 a.m.: meeting: 10:30 a.m.; lunch: Noon, Weatherford College **Emerging Technologies and** Workforce Solutions Building, 225 College Park Dr. pcwnc.org/ monthly-meeting.

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



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66

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