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FEBRUARY 2026

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February 2026  
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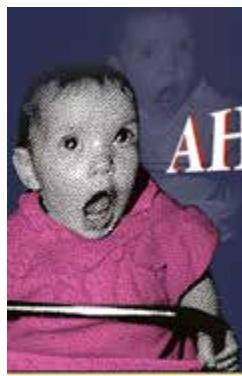


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# Building Ennis Excellence

— By Bill Smith

*A product of a small town in East Texas, Dr. Greg Bradley can relate to the sense of community he experiences in Ennis. “I went from kindergarten through high school in the Northeast Texas town of Hughes Springs. It was a great time for me — I could walk to school — and of the 65 students that I graduated with, 53 of them were original students. We started kindergarten together. Anyone who came after kindergarten was easily identified as one of the ‘new’ kids in town.”*

Dr. Bradley's father was a coach and teacher, and his mother also worked in the school district. This influenced his decision to pursue education as a career. He continued, "Back then, most schools did not have athletic trainers on staff. In Hughes Springs, the local hospital sent someone to the school once a week to check on injuries. I received a scholarship from Howard Payne University at Brownwood to study education and athletic training. After graduating in 2001, my father strongly encouraged me to pursue my master's degree."

A door opened for Dr. Bradley to attend Dallas Baptist University, and they offered a scholarship to pay his tuition as he worked for the university during the day and took classes in the evening. "There was a lot of new construction taking place on the campus, so part of my duties included construction," he recalled. "They also had a private elementary school on the campus then, so I worked there, and I also taught physical education in the afternoon."

He graduated with his master's degree in 2004 and went to work at Hebron High School in Lewisville ISD, teaching, coaching and serving as an athletic trainer. "After five years, I was hired as an assistant principal. It was a large school district with 52,000 students. I was exposed to a lot!" he exclaimed. "I did not really think about having a 'career path,' but the principal I worked with predicted I would be a superintendent someday. I enjoyed being an assistant principal and decided to pursue my doctorate because I thought it would be important if I wanted to be a principal." That led Dr. Bradley back to Dallas Baptist University, where he successfully completed the advanced degree.

His career eventually carried him to Prosper ISD, where he served as a middle school principal with 5,000 kids in the district. "That was a great opportunity that the Lord just worked out for me. In 2017, an assistant superintendent for business operations position became available. The district grew to 10,000, and I thought that was fast! I became the deputy superintendent responsible for all of the building projects. We grew to 32,000 students. I said the Lord knew I needed the DBU construction experience.

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bond. We built 20 campuses, a football stadium and a natatorium. It was very challenging to build two, three or four campuses a year. I was responsible for spending between \$1 million and \$1.25 million per day. At one point, we were welcoming about 10 new students daily into the district, so we grew by 3,600 students each year. I learned a lot during that time."

All of that background contributed to Ennis being attractive as his next stop in his career. "My wife, Melody, and I have two daughters. Kiersi had already graduated high school and was attending Texas A&M University. Kayden was a senior at Prosper and was planning to join her sister at A&M after graduation. The Ennis opportunity

was presented, and I recalled that former principal saying that I would be a superintendent someday," he shared. "With both daughters in college, it made sense to make the move."

"As much as I loved construction, my role had become less and less about education. There were days when it was hard to remember that I was an educator. I did not have a doctorate in construction. The best part of my job, and what I have come back to, is seeing people learn and grow. That includes the students, the teachers and the principals."

Dr. Bradley is complimentary about those who have come before him and those that remain in Ennis. "I saw how well managed Ennis ISD was by the board and the previous superintendents.

It seems like there is a great opportunity for growth here. The school board is excited about that and also recognizes opportunities for academic improvement. We don't want to do the same things we have always done."

He mentioned that he knows the community is different from what it was in 1975, but he quickly acknowledged the successes we have seen. "Fifty years of superior ratings for the band, 50 years of success in football and 50 years of sustained academic success. We don't exist just for those — we want to excel in all things. The vision is Ennis Excellence. There is a passion for doing things well. The passion extends beyond what the outside of the buildings look like to what is going on inside the buildings. I know kids will respond to these thoughts.

"COVID had a dramatic effect on education a few years ago, but now it is time to return to higher expectations from the kids and the teachers. After eight months on the job, what excites me is the potential that is here. We are at a place where we can focus on the stuff that matters." **NOW**

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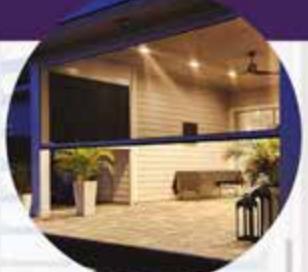


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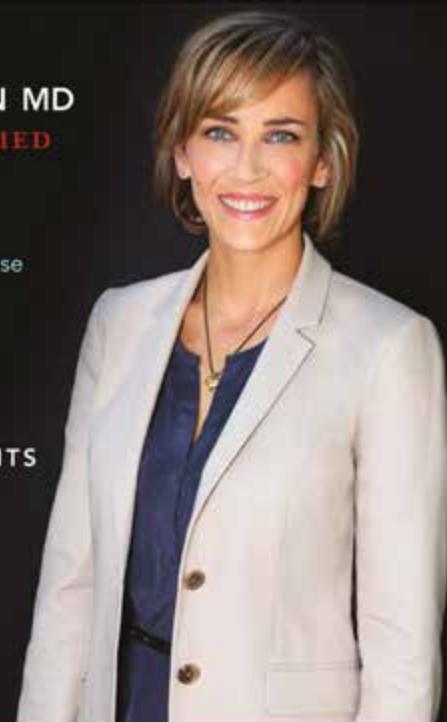


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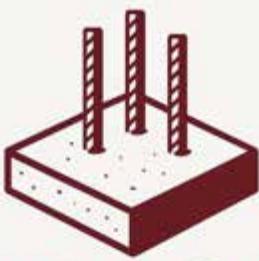


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## Zoomed In: Zoe Zhanel and Holden Smith

By Bill Smith

Zoe Zhanel and Holden Smith are both lifelong residents of Ennis, and they are both seniors at Palmer High School. Holden said, "Ennis has been a great place to grow up. We enjoy the parks, and there is always a lot to do."

Zoe added, "I like downtown Ennis. I think it is cute, and there are lots of places to shop. It is easy to spend the day there." Zoe indicated she enjoys reading in school, and after she graduates, she wants to pursue nursing at Texas Tech.

Holden's favorite subjects are math and science, and he's considering studying engineering. "I'd also like to play soccer in college. I've played football and participated in track and cross-country at Palmer, but soccer is my favorite sport."



Parker McCarty enjoys serving at Fern in the Wild.



Kristy Tomlinson introduces musicians Carter Tomlinson and Blayne Caliendo.



Jeremy and Claire Simmons enjoy a brisk neighborhood walk with their children, Jane, Ruthie and Sam.



K-Nor staff Norma Epstein, Wendy Merritt and Rachael Skinner show off their Dolly glasses.

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BusinessNOW

# Ashleigh's Downtown Kitchen + Bar

— By Bill Smith

## Ashleigh's Downtown Kitchen + Bar

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ashleigh@ashleighsdowntown.com  
www.ashleighsdowntown.com  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/search/?top?q=ashleigh%27s%20downtown%20kitchen%20bar>

**Hours:** Monday-Tuesday: 11:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.  
Wednesday-Thursday: 11:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.  
Friday-Saturday: 11:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.  
Sunday: 4:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

Ashleigh Ned's enthusiasm for the restaurant and bar that bears her name is contagious and shared by the regular groups of patrons who enjoy the atmosphere of this



downtown destination. "The prior owners have been great, and we are building on what they started. We added a pizza oven. We make all of our own in-house sauces, and the recipes are mine," she said.

"Our wine selection has changed, and we added some additional beers," she continued. "We feature all of the popular brands, plus we have rotating craft beers. We also changed the mixed drink program with some of my favorite recipes."

Originally from Durant, Oklahoma, Ashleigh likes the small-town feeling that Ennis offers. "Before coming here, I was managing a restaurant in Melissa, in Collin County near McKinney. It was a bustling place to be, but it is better here. The pace is much slower. We have already made a number of friends here, and we are looking forward to hanging out with them once we move our residence here."

Ashleigh's partner, Jeff Card, is in the restaurant often, and he and Ashleigh like to get around and greet each table. "We want our customers to know we hear them," Ashleigh said. "Jeff handles a lot of the business side of things, and he was the one who found that The Vine was for sale. One thing

led to another, and here we are! He has also helped build the wine program and is working towards an advanced wine certification.

"We have several non-alcoholic beverages available, including soft drinks and tea, and we also have added non-alcoholic beer and wine. We offer Michelob Ultra Zero beer and Mionetto Prosecco NA and Pizzolato NA sparkling wines."

Ashleigh's Downtown Kitchen + Bar has published hours, but Ashleigh said they are happy to be open as long as the customers are there. "We want to be a place where anyone can go. People go to work, and they go home. We want to be the third place they think of. We are a fairly upscale place, but very casual — certainly no special dress code. We have filled our own niche in Ennis, and Ennis is like a breath of fresh air every time we drive down here."

***"We want our customers to know we hear them."***

The restaurant and bar have a number of specials during the week, and they encourage patrons to watch their website and Facebook for new events. Sundays feature a Sunday Spritzer at a discounted price. Mule Mondays offer \$5.00 Moscow Mules all day. Tequila is \$2.00 off on Tuesday, and Wednesday features a half-price wine list. Their afternoon happy hour runs from 2:00-6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and a unique evening happy hour on Monday and Tuesday from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

"We want to focus on providing high-quality dishes to go along with the value price. Our 16-inch pizza is less than \$20.00, and we stress great service, too, whether it be for lunch, happy hour, dinner or a late-night drink," Ashleigh related.

Ashleigh's menu is published on their website. They summarize their business stating they are, "rooted in a passion for food and community, bringing people together over delicious shareable dishes, like our pizzas or handmade meatballs, incredible wines and craft cocktails, all at an affordable price. We pride ourselves on creating a welcoming atmosphere in the heart of historic Downtown Ennis, Texas. We look forward to serving you soon!" **NOW**

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# FinanceNOW

## The Importance of Setting Strong Financial Goals

There's a quote about the importance of setting goals that says, "If you don't know where you're going, any path will take you there." You probably have dreams about retirement, vacations, hobbies and more. But if you don't have a strategy with financial goals in place, you may not make the choices that can best set you on the path to achieve those dreams.

Setting goals helps define and showcase your purpose, passions and priorities. And establishing your own strong financial goals can help you earn and enjoy a wide variety of short- and long-term achievements throughout your life. When you reach your financial goals, you can feel a sense of accomplishment in seeing your efforts literally pay off. But how do you get started?

**Prioritize your needs and wants.** Think about the things that are most important to you, and then outline them as financial "must-haves" and "wish-list" targets. Start with the big-ticket items and work through to ideas that may not cost as much. A must-have for many people is having enough to live comfortably through retirement. Being able to afford the college of your child's choice, without incurring mounds of debt, is another. Your wish list, on the other hand, may include things like saving for vacations, hobbies or entertainment expenses.

**Create detailed short- and long-term goals within your financial strategy.** It's important to be specific about the goals you want to achieve and

how much you'll need to achieve them. One way to do this is by making your goals measurable. Assign estimated dates and costs to each goal so you can plan how much to save and how much time you have before you need the money. For example, for your retirement goal, be specific about how many years before you want to retire. And once you do, how you plan to spend your time — perhaps traveling the world, turning your hobby into a business or taking your grandkids on outings. These can have vastly different price tags.

**Be willing to compromise.** Reaching one, or more, of your goals may mean compromising. If your must-have is building your dream home, but it's not looking quite affordable, you may need to make a trade-off — build it a bit smaller, work a year or two longer or trade in some of your wish-list goals so you can stay focused on your must-haves.

**Hold yourself accountable to stay on track.** Once your strategy is in place, it's not a set-and-forget exercise. Actively tracking your progress and managing your decisions and actions can help you be better positioned to reach your goals. Use time-tested principles for making financial decisions, not predictions. Diversify, own quality investments and keep a realistic perspective, especially for your long-term goals. Maintain your focus, and don't let your emotions control your investment decisions. It can be helpful to meet with a financial advisor at least annually to review your full financial strategy, address any changes in your life or your goals and discuss your progress and new ideas.

As you achieve certain milestones, celebrate them. You may even want to refresh your outlook with new goals. Take pride in your ability to strategize and accomplish a personal financial goal for yourself by following the path you envisioned and created. **NOW**

*This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones, Member SIPC. Jeff Irish is an Edward Jones representative based in Ennis.*

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newest techniques and technology. I'm also a native Spanish speaker. I grew up speaking both languages. Our YouTube videos explaining procedures are available in both English and Spanish."

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."

# Serenity Advanced Dentistry

If you are an adult who is afraid of going to the dentist, or even just a little extra anxious, Serenity Advanced Dentistry may be just what you are looking for. "We do a lot of sedation dentistry, mostly for adults," Dr. Allala explained. "It's kind of my niche. Many adults may have some pretty serious anxiety about going to the dentist. They may not even seek care. They'd rather be in pain. I provide a place to take care of these people. When patients elect to get treatment, we lower the statistics of people living in pain. I like being able to contribute to improving people's lives."

"Coincidentally, a lot of people who are anxious about going to the dentist are also people who don't have good insurance. That's a bad combination. I have membership plans for patients without insurance, and really good discounts on implants and dentures. A membership might not be necessary if you only need one simple procedure, but if you need sedation and a lot of work, it really pays for itself."

Dr. Allala is a graduate of the Texas A&M School of Dentistry. "When I started there, it was still Baylor. My diploma has both names on it," she recalled. "I specialize in oral surgery, and we're really good at it. I'm nothing without my team. We do everything in dentistry. I like being well rounded. I enjoy being an overachiever, so I'm constantly taking continuing education, keeping up with all the

"I LIKE BEING WELL ROUNDED. I ENJOY BEING AN OVERACHIEVER, SO I'M CONSTANTLY TAKING CONTINUING EDUCATION, KEEPING UP WITH ALL THE NEWEST TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGY."

Serenity Advanced Dentistry has all the newest technology to make your experience convenient. "We have hospital-grade blood pressure machines, so we can do sedation. We also have intraoral scanners, so I can see inside your mouth, from every angle, before I ever go in for your procedure. We print dentures and place implants right here in the office. With our skills and strategies, most patients don't even feel our injections. We have TVs in every room to keep you entertained while we work. It's all about efficiency — working smarter, not harder. That's why I designed the floor plan of the office myself. And we're really big on sanitation and sterilization. It's important to maintain a sterile environment, which is why we're closed every Friday for deep cleaning the office and training."

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Strawberry Cake

# CookingNOW IN THE KITCHEN WITH CHRISTINA DODSON

— By Bill Smith



“Some folks may know me personally through my many years as general manager of IHOP from 2001 through 2017,” Christina Dodson said. “I had years of experience in food service, food handling and customer service, so I started offering to bake and make ‘yummies’ for others. I enjoy cooking because it brings people together. Food brings them happiness.”

Christina grew up in Gilmer, Texas, and believes her savory Southern tastes flow from that area. “I grew up on Paula Deen-style cooking. Some of my fondest memories were watching *Louisiana Cookin': With Justin Wilson* with my grandparents, Fred and Frieda Hayes,” she added. “Today, I am learning to dial back my preference of heavy seasoning and butter-based cooking to a healthier lifestyle. That has been very challenging!” **NOW**

## Strawberry Cake

### Strawberry Filling/Reduction:

600 grams (or 3 cups) strawberries, halved  
150 grams (or 3/4 cup) granulated sugar  
1 Tbsp. lemon zest  
1/4 cup lemon juice  
3 Tbsp. cornstarch  
2 Tbsp. water

### Cake:

2 1/3 cups flour  
1/4 cup cornstarch  
2 1/2 tsp. baking powder  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1/4 cup milk, room temperature  
1 drop of red gel food coloring  
113 grams (or 1/2 cup) butter, room temperature  
105 grams (or 1/2 cup) vegetable oil

300 grams (or 1 1/2 cups) granulated sugar

255 grams egg whites (or 6 egg whites), in 3 batches  
3 tsp. strawberry extract  
1 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract  
1 tsp. white vinegar

### Strawberry Cream Cheese Icing:

1 cup butter, room temperature  
4 1/2 cups powdered sugar  
1 1/2 cups cold cream cheese (firm type, not spreadable type)  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
2 tsp. strawberry extract

**1.** For the filling: Simmer the strawberries, sugar, lemon zest and lemon juice in a pan for about 10 minutes. When the strawberries are soft, mash them with a

potato masher.

- 2.** Continue to cook for about 10 more minutes until the sauce thickens.
- 3.** Mix the cornstarch and water together; add it to the sauce. Cook about 2 more minutes until it is an applesauce like texture. Allow to cool completely.
- 4.** For the cake: Mix the flour, cornstarch, baking powder and salt together with a whisk; set aside.
- 5.** In a small bowl, combine 3/4 cup of the strawberry filling with the milk and red gel food coloring. Mix until well combined; set aside.
- 6.** In a large bowl, mix the butter, vegetable oil and sugar for about 3 minutes until fluffy.
- 7.** Add the egg whites in three batches.
- 8.** Add half of the 3/4 cup of strawberry filling/milk mixture, the strawberry extract, vanilla extract and the white vinegar; mix together.
- 9.** Add half of the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients; gently combine by hand. Add the remaining strawberry filling/milk mixture. Don’t overmix.
- 10.** Add the remaining dry ingredients; combine. Add a bit more red gel; combine.
- 11.** Evenly split the batter between 2 cake pans. Bake for about 35 minutes on 320 F. Cool before icing.
- 12.** For the icing: Mix the butter until fluffy.
- 13.** Add the powdered sugar in 3 batches on low speed.
- 14.** Add the cream cheese, vanilla extract and strawberry extract. Mix until the cream cheese is smooth.
- 15.** Add 1/4 cup of the strawberry filling; mix until just combined. Add 1 drop red gel food coloring.
- 16.** When building the cake, use icing to create a dam on the top of the bottom layer. Fill the dam with the strawberry filling before adding the second cake layer on top.
- 17.** Cover the top and sides with icing. Decorate as desired.

## Japanese Clear Soup

Make 10 cups and is good for three days.

2 tsp. sesame oil  
1 large sweet onion  
6 cloves garlic  
2 large carrots, cut into chunks  
1 2-inch piece of ginger, sliced  
8 cups chicken broth  
4 cups beef broth  
4 cups water  
Salt, to taste  
4 whole scallions, chopped  
10 butter mushrooms, thinly sliced

1. Add the oil, onions, garlic, carrots and ginger to a pot. Sear all the vegetables, being sure not to burn the garlic.
2. Pour in the chicken broth, beef broth and water; bring to a boil. Lower the heat to simmer; boil for 1 hour.
3. Remove the vegetables; add salt to taste.
4. Serve with scallions and mushrooms.



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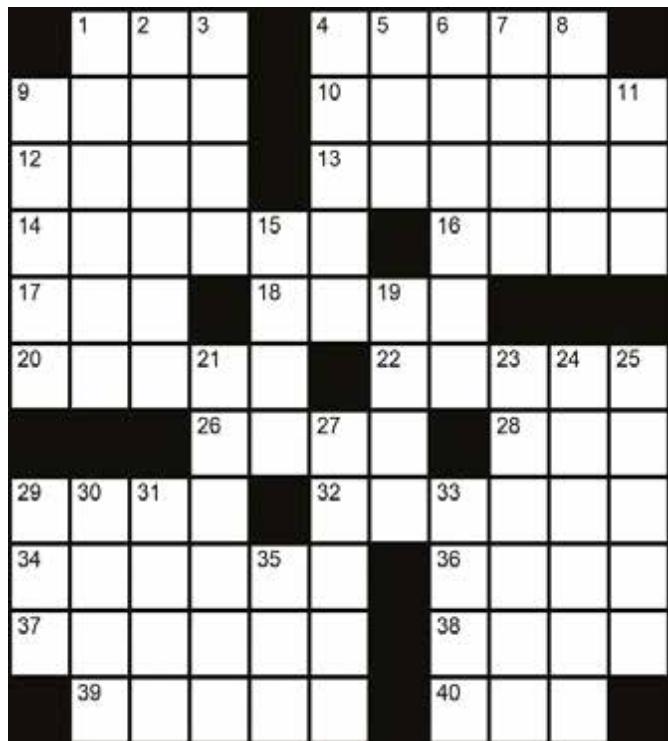
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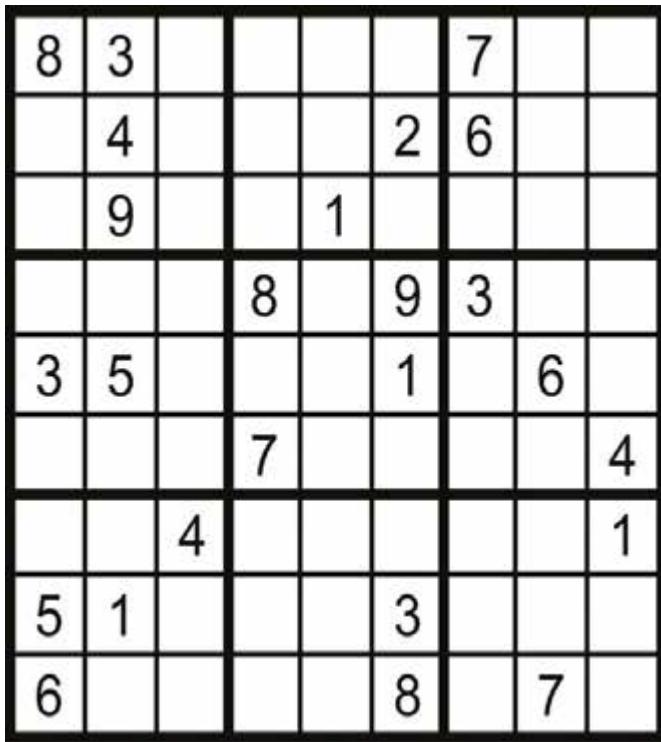


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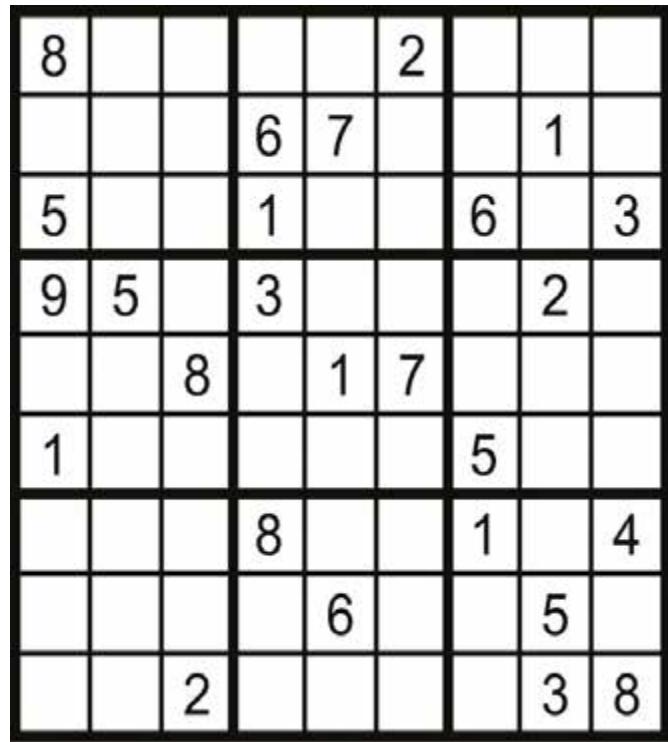
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4

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5

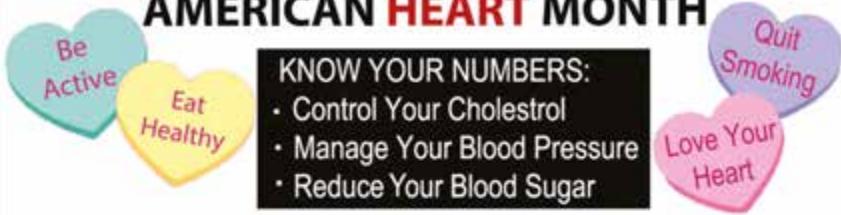
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# WINTER 2026 FASHION TRENDS FOR WOMEN

— By Amber D. Browne

*As seasons change, so do fashion styles. New trends emerge to incorporate with favorites of the past, and popular color choices combine with classics. The winter 2026 season allows all generations of women to integrate current fashion front-runners into their wardrobes.*

The new year brings bold styles featuring silhouettes of volume and elongated lines. Puffy bomber jackets, which can be worn for warmth or as a top according to Dallas fashion blogger, Heather Anderson, are all the rage this winter. “I love this trend because it feels modern, confident and very fashion-forward, but it’s also incredibly flattering,” Heather shared in an article, *8 Fashion Trends That Look Expensive But Aren’t* (2026 Style Guide). She suggests zipping up the jacket and slightly tucking it under for a more streamlined silhouette.

Another trend this winter is popping the collar of the jacket. Some designs include their own stand collar for a sophisticated look. Basic black leather jackets are a must-

have. Utility jackets paired with wide-leg cargo pants popped up throughout winter 2026 collections, according to the *Marie Claire* article, *The Best Winter 2026 Fashion Trends Are Both Weatherproof and Party-Proof*.

Although wide-leg pants are trending, the skinny jean look continues to hold space in the fashion world providing a slim-fitting silhouette. In 2026, high-waisted wide-leg pants, leggings and ankle-length pants in black or dark neutral colors pair well with tucked in or waist-length tops. Maxi dresses are also must-haves and can be layered with neutral jackets. Dress up the look with knee-high boots or wear ballet flats or skinny sneakers for a more casual feel.

Scarves are making a comeback this winter, according to the *Marie Claire* article. “It’s not just a winter add-on or afterthought,” the article stated. “Just as a great coat can be the whole look, the right scarf can offer enough drama and intrigue to be the grounding factor of an outfit.” Ivory faux fur stoles, skinny scarves and tops with built-in shawls are some examples of this winter’s women fashion accessories.

Trending shoes include slimmer boot silhouettes. According to the article *Winter 2026 Fashion Trends: Simple, Stylish Updates for Your Wardrobe* on [jolynnshane.com](http://jolynnshane.com), boots are a foundation to most winter wardrobes. The article



suggests this winter, the style shifts from a chunkier, heavier boot to boots with “cleaner lines, sleeker profiles and a more refined overall shape.” Almond-shaped or softly rounded toes and low or block heels are popular in ankle boots and knee-high styles. The article continued, “Decorative buckles, cutouts, and other extra details aren’t as prominent this year; the most modern boots feel streamlined and minimal.” Ballet flats, pointed-toe heels, leather lace-up shoes and skinny sneakers are also in style this winter.

Sherpa is a popular texture this season for vests and accents in shoes and boots. “It adds warmth and texture without overwhelming your outfit, which makes it an easy trend to incorporate even if you prefer a more understated vibe,” according to the [jolynnshane.com](http://jolynnshane.com) article. Additional trending textures include organic cotton, velvet and faux fur.

Now onto color. The Pantone Color of the Year 2026 is PANTONE 11-4201 Cloud Dancer. According to [pantone.com](http://pantone.com), this shade of white “serves as a symbol of calming influence in a society rediscovering the value of quiet reflection. A billowy white imbued with serenity, PANTONE 11-4201 Cloud Dancer encourages true relaxation and focus, allowing the mind to wander and creativity to breathe, making room for innovation.” This light, neutral shade allows other

colors of pastels and deeper hues to hold the spotlight. Other color trends this winter are deep navy blue as an alternative to black, camel brown, teal, powder pink, pale pistachio and winter citrus, according to the *Marie Claire* article.

As fashion trends come and go, tried and true styles can last a lifetime. Essentials to incorporate into any woman’s wardrobe this winter include a puffy bomber jacket, black leather jacket, scarves, ballet flats and sleek, almond-shaped ankle boots. Think about incorporating neutral colors when shopping for winter clothing this year. Incorporating some newer favorites into the closet this season can create a fresh and sophisticated wardrobe. **NOW**

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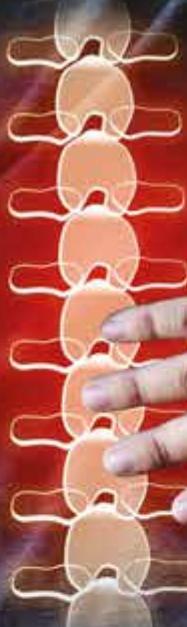


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