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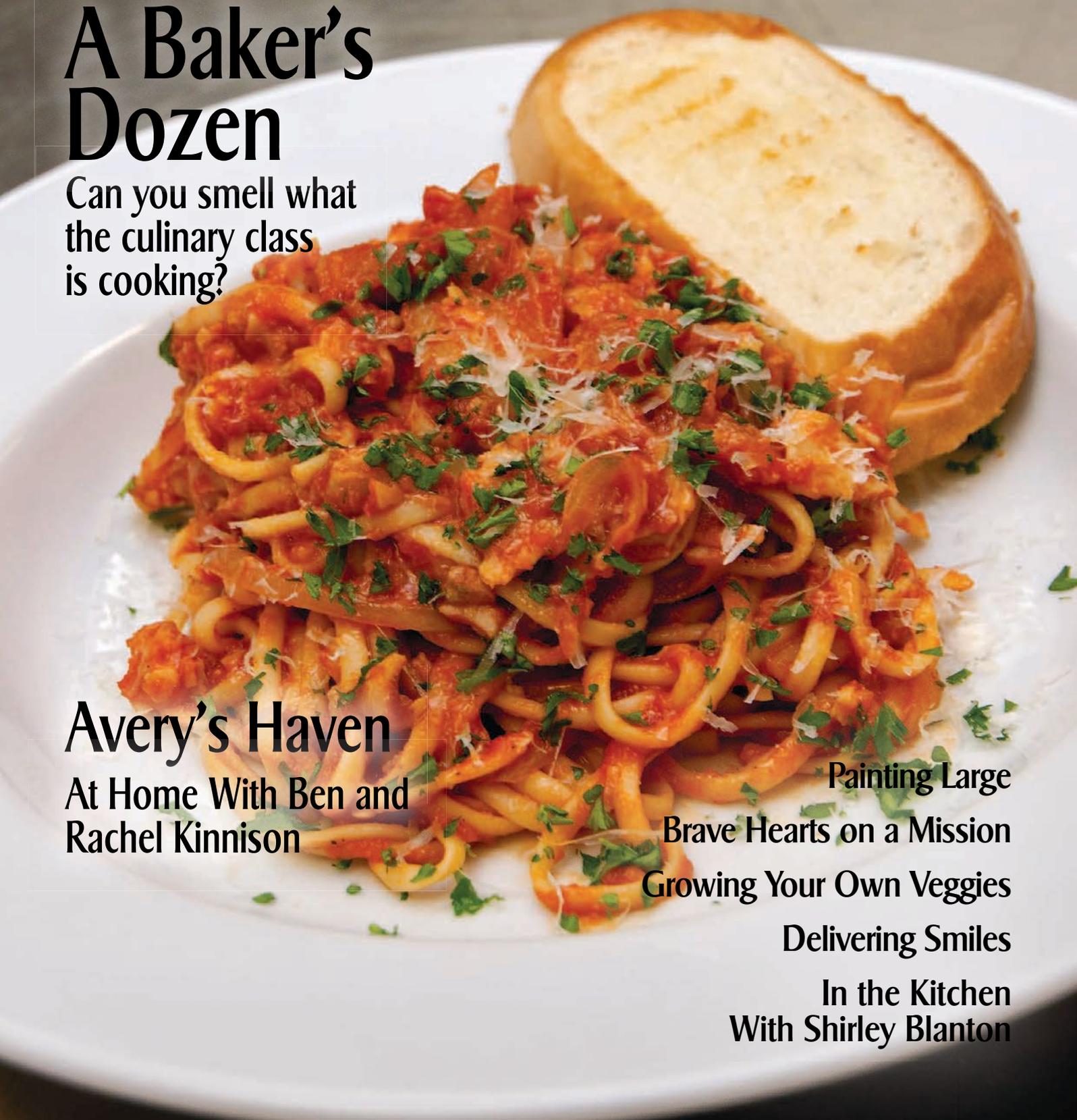
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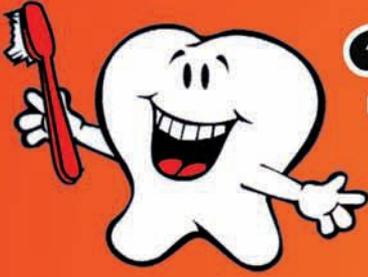
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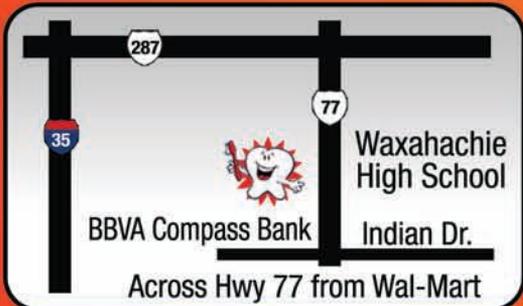
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Writers, Lisa Bell . Virginia Riddle

Adam Rope . Betty Tryon . Carolyn Wills

Editors/Proofreaders, Pat Anthony

GRAPHICS AND DESIGN

Creative Director, Chris McCalla

Artists, Kristin Bato . Julie Carpenter

Morgan Christensen . Martha Macias

Brande Morgan . Shannon Pfaff

Felipe Ruiz

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography Director, Jill Rose

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ON THE COVER



The Reservation serves up culinary delights.

Photo by Amy Ramirez.

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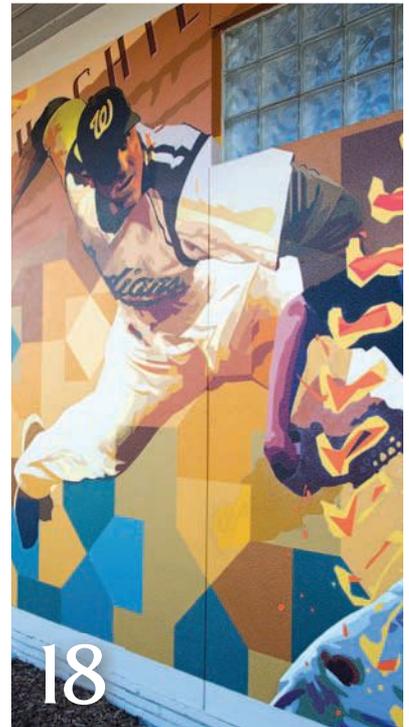
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Editor's Note

Happy Whatever Day,

We *each* have a special gift or calling unique to the way God designed us. While some are the life of any party, others are best as caregivers. I'm one of the latter. My mom told me I was very good at taking care of all those around me. And you know, I think she's right. It's in my nature to nurture. I'll do *whatever* it takes: make cookies for my co-workers, feed the hungry through my church's outreach ministry or be

there for friends and family when they need a shoulder to cry on.

Admit it, we all have our favorite word or phrase, too. People in my inner circle know me best by my "whatever." Whatever *is* the perfect answer to almost any question depending on the tone I use. Try it and see if you don't agree!

Sandra

Sandra Strong
WaxahachieNOW Editor
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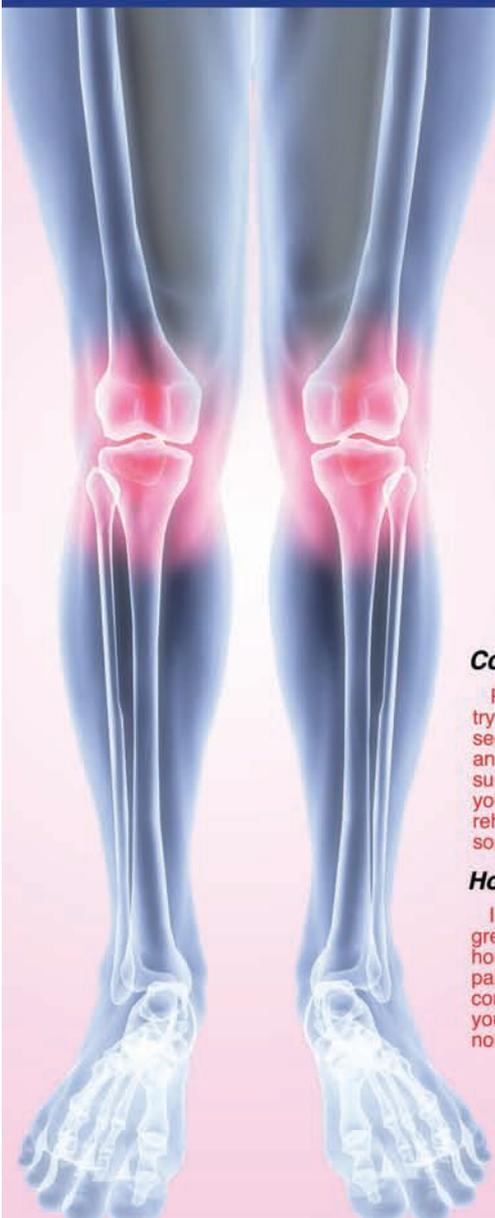
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"We are learning to work together – to trust ourselves and our peers. We are also learning what it means not to give up."

A Baker's

— By Sandra Strong

The wonderfully delicious smells permeate the hallways of Waxahachie High School even before patrons reach the door. Once the door is opened, they realize they have entered another dimension. They've entered The Reservation, the on-campus restaurant where Joel Skipper, executive chef, and his baker's dozen take center stage. "The Reservation opened much sooner than

we envisioned," Joel said. "We thought it would probably take a year or longer." The enthusiasm the selected students had for the class, along with some very good ideas, allowed The Reservation to open earlier than expected to rave reviews and menus the patrons, including WISD staff, family and community members, are hard-pressed to find at other locations this close to home.



The students who are sharing their culinary talent with the community were selected after a lengthy process. “I evaluated the kids in the culinary class for a year before selecting the 20 who would make up the class,” Joel explained. “I looked for skill and desire. I observed how they worked in class and how they worked with one another.” Joel wanted a group of diversified students who presented an eagerness to take their love of culinary arts to the next level, and thankfully, he found that and so much more. Scheduling conflicts were the only obstacles seven of the original 20 chosen faced, thus making this first class a perfect baker’s dozen.

Two seniors, Ashlyn Benitez and Aaron Stephens, have had such a great time this year learning all they can about the culinary world. Ashlyn came to the class with a real love for cooking, while Aaron’s desire prompted him to design his schedule around the class. “I was willing to give up another dual-credit class if that’s what it meant to get into this one,” Aaron admitted. But thankfully, he didn’t have to.

Along with the other members of the class, they are learning the restaurant business from top to bottom. “We are responsible for planning the menus, crunching the numbers on food costs, production and staffing schedules, overall quality and

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presentation,” Ashlyn stated. “We are learning to work together — to trust ourselves and our peers. We are also learning what it means not to give up.”

“Yes, that’s true,” Aaron added. “We are learning that even though everything is planned out perfectly on paper, it may not always go according to that plan. We’ve learned we must be prepared for anything.”

The culinary class, as well as The Reservation and the patrons who frequent it from service to service, offer the students a safe environment where mistakes are forgiven without incident. “We do everything we can to avoid mess ups,” Joel admitted, “but if we do mess up, it’s OK here.” Patrons understand the students are in serious learning mode as they prepare and serve the meals, so any mistake is considered a lesson learned in culinary class. “I get feedback from





guests all the time,” Joel added. “The positive feedback helps to fulfill the ultimate goal to always keep improving the program.”

Joel is referred to by the students as Chef Skipper, while he in return shows them the same respect. “Respect is a lot bigger for kids now than it was when I was in school,” Joel said. “I demonstrate my respect for them by adding Miss or Mister before their name.” This exchange of respect is just one more of the many life lessons being learned in the culinary class.

Although Ashlyn likes to be in the kitchen and Aaron finds his solace out front among the guests, all members of the class will be introduced to each phase of the restaurant business before the class comes to an end. For one service, they may find themselves in the back, preparing one portion of the meal.



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Another time, they may be standing at the door ready to seat guests as they arrive for lunch.

As the menus were planned, each student got to choose the service in which they would act as sous chef and the service where they would work at the front of the house. Where they worked in other services was decided when the schedules were made. “The sous chef is second in charge under Chef Skipper,” Ashlyn explained. “Working the front of the house means you could be the greeter at the door, or you could be one of the servers.”

Needless to say, working as a team is so important, and picking up the slack for a team member, although rare, is something each student must be prepared to do. “I remember one service earlier in the year when the assigned sous chef was unable to get through the service,” Aaron confessed. “The sous chef is the one in charge of the service, so he or she can’t get frustrated and give up. If they do, the whole system could fail.” That day was a learning experience for the class as a collective whole. When one team member had a problem, the other members stepped up to keep the service running smoothly.

Ashlyn finds relaxation in the kitchen, whether at school or at home. She loves trying new foods and recipes, because she enjoys seeing the reaction of others when they eat. “I would like to be a chef one day. I’d like to see where my love



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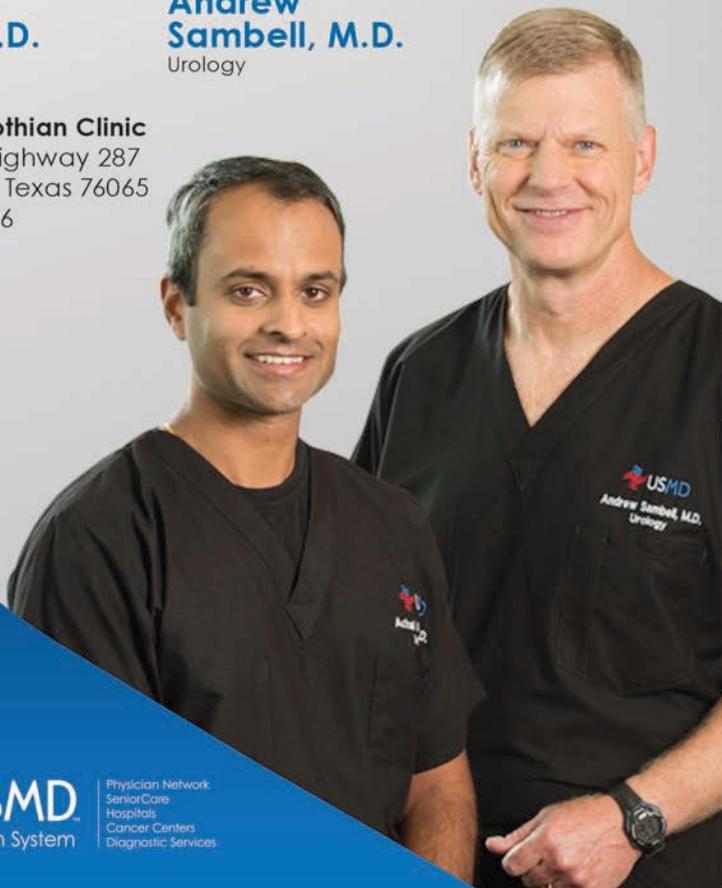
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for cooking will take me in the future,” Ashlyn shared, mentioning a trip she took to a restaurant location in Miami last year. “A friend of Chef Skipper’s is the executive chef at this restaurant. It was such an awesome experience.”

Aaron honestly likes to see the reactions on faces as they take their first bite. He also understands the importance of plate presentation. “The plate needs to present well to the guest,” Aaron explained. “I understand the front of the house better, but I can hold my own in the kitchen.”

By the end of the school year, The Reservation will have presented 24 services to 60 faculty and community members per service. Guests have enjoyed gourmet burgers with all the trimmings; grilled cod with zucchini, snow peas and basil; and Cuban sandwiches with tostones (twice-fried green bananas) and key lime pie, to name only a few. Twelve services have come from the American region, while the other 12 have been International fares.

This group of students has definitely exceeded Joel’s expectations. “They have done very well,” Joel said. “All the kids listen to instruction. They were selected because they are the best of the best. I am exceptionally proud of their performance week in and week out.”

The success of The Reservation and the baker’s dozen was seen early on in the year. Joel’s mantra from the onset was simple. “Failure is not an option,” Joel said. “They understood early on that to be successful there would be no room for complacency. They have to continually think outside the box.” **NOW**

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Painting LARGE

— By Lisa Bell

The parks and recreation building in Waxahachie has a new face — or rather several new faces. A welcome addition to the building, lead painter Aryn Dalton transformed the brick and stucco wall into a larger-than-life depiction of sports figures and symbols. Within the painting, sub-scenes create a unique design sure to capture the attention of visitors.

Aryn, a Cedar Hill resident, has always loved painting. His grandmother first influenced him, allowing a 10-year-old boy access to her studio and supplies. Learning from her expertise, he produced his first oil painting of a seascape.

Painting and sculpture came easily to Aryn, but he also loved drafting. In his senior year of high school, he took a two-hour art class, a two-hour drafting class and study hall. At that point, his weekdays consisted of pretty much drawing all day.

A Texas resident for 20 years, Aryn grew up in a small Arkansas town. Straight out of high school, he and some friends headed to the closest big city where he knew someone — Dallas. Although he had initially planned to move to Georgia and pursue a fine arts






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“Anyone can learn to draw. It’s just practice. Art needs to say something.”

degree, at the last minute, he changed his mind. Also a musician, he wanted to see what might happen in that arena. For about a decade, Aryn toured around and worked odd jobs.

“I was lucky enough to land a job at DS Arts,” he said. “That’s where I cut my teeth, learning the trade of commercial art.” The company creates custom scenery and exhibits. In addition to new painting skills, he also developed leadership abilities during his 12-year career there.

With the downturn in the economy, the company underwent a series of layoffs five years ago. Aryn was the last to go. “Being laid off opened a lot of doors. I’m really glad it happened,” he said. Maintaining a good relationship with his former employer, he launched himself as a freelancer. Working with

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EyeCon Studios, which produces murals for commercial and residential clients, gave Aryn amazing opportunities. Having never created a mural before, he had to learn how to paint them. His experience in backdrops helped. He already had the skillset and eye, but the owners mentored him in techniques they had learned working toward fine art degrees. Some of these were methods he had never thought about using. He's thankful for great mentors while painting fine art outdoors.

Although they don't keep him busy 365 days a year, he has worked on 20-30 murals with them. Sometimes his former employer gets busy and hires him for projects. In his spare time, Aryn works on personal pieces. A culmination of his love for painting and sculpting, he fills his art with symbolism in conceptual, abstract expressions capable of speaking

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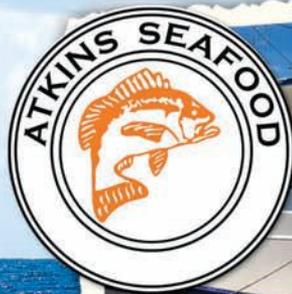
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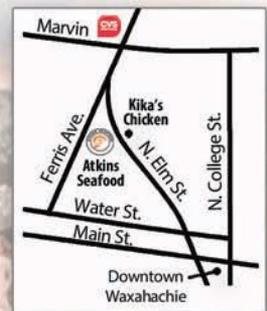
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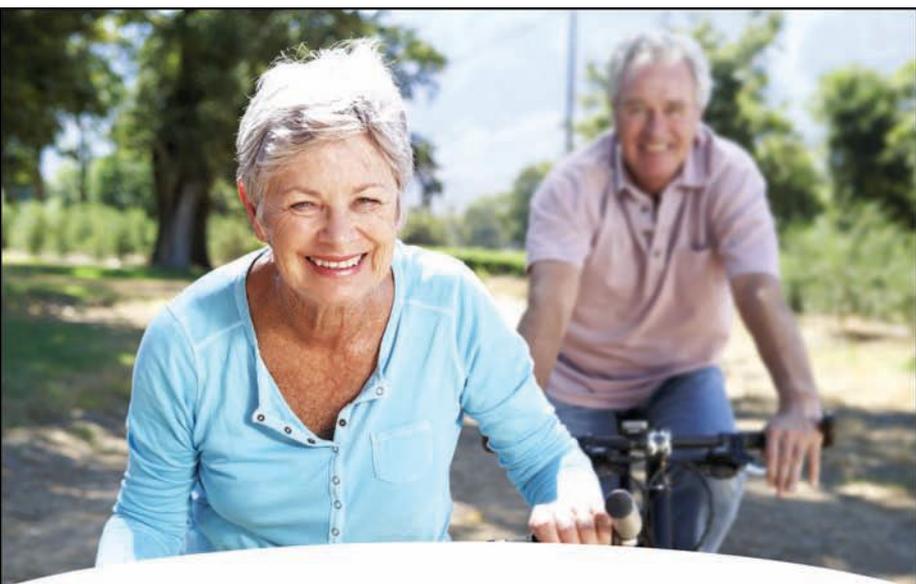
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to any person looking at it. Often, people with little or no art background see unique things in his work.

Aryn's wife, Cheri, is a fashion designer. The couple share studio space in their home. With a 5-year-old daughter, Scarlet, Cheri has less time available for creating her masterpieces. Nevertheless, they are taking steps to fulfill the dream of eventually having a boutique business featuring hand-picked artists.

Drafting skills enable Aryn to use dimensional design techniques when needed for a project. The ability to draw a design complete with specs, makes the process easier later. Producing art on a building offers challenges. Going from a smooth canvas to rough and sometimes varying surfaces is only the beginning. For the sports mural in Waxahachie, the team moved between brick and stucco. But the elements play a big part in the finished product.

In Texas, about two months of the year are great for painting outside — and unfortunately, they are usually in the studio during those months. At 105 F, paint dries almost immediately, making gradient colors difficult to achieve. During cold weather, paint colors mix where the painter does not want them to combine. Aryn takes the adversity in stride. Regardless of any obstacle, the mural painting team must achieve a quality equal to that of painting on canvas in a climate-controlled studio. Fortunately, he is meticulous in his work and gets things done, expecting the same from those he leads on projects. “You take issues as they come, jumping in with confidence in your abilities,” he said.



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All of Aryn's personal artwork has its own ideal attached to it. "Anyone can learn to draw. It's just practice. Art needs to say something," he said. Each piece starts with a concept — a visual idea in mind. Then the piece grows and evolves, sometimes completely changing to a new ideal. The end result may look nothing like he originally planned, but often more wonderful. "That's the fun in it," Aryn said. "Keeps it interesting."

Recurring themes run between his work, stringing together his style and branding, yet keeping them one-of-a-kind. The themes focus on relationships, life and death, or struggles to find who you are. He tries to keep the themes broad, inviting viewers to see what is most meaningful to them. Leaving the interpretation open to some extent makes his work speak at different levels and distinctive for each person.

Aryn incorporates the love of sculpturing into personal paintings. His paintings have texture, but also may include bits and pieces of metal objects or something else he found somewhere. An assemblage sculpture in his studio includes parts of three different trees. The trunk came from one tree. Branches from a second tree were painted to resemble bones. Leaves from a third tree, were painted black with the finishing touch of a symbol of eternity on the trunk. In the piece, Aryn captures the concept of rebirth.

Although Aryn didn't make it to Georgia and a fine arts degree, he's learned well from working with other artists and honed his skills over time. His path took a detour but turned out better than he expected. Much like his art, the road of life took turns that led him to paint large and widely share his gift. **NOW**

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Avery's Haven

— By Carolyn Wills

April 14, 2012, was a very special day for Ben and Rachel Kinnison. That was the day they began their search for a family home and, most importantly, the day their beautiful daughter, Avery, was born. “Ben was on the Internet looking for homes when Avery arrived,” Rachel smiled. “We had been renting, and we wanted Avery to have her own home.”



Their search led them to a developing neighborhood on the outskirts of Waxahachie and a just completed, nearly 2,000-square-foot brick home. “We walked in, saw the high ceilings, long hallway and huge open family/dining/kitchen



area, and we knew this was the one,” Ben said. Remarkably, in addition to three bedrooms and a bonus room for Ben’s office, the home was move-in ready.

“We loved the dark espresso kitchen cabinets, black appliances, taupe backsplash, hard surface counters and big kitchen island,” Rachel added. “Our style is a little rustic with a little contemporary, and we would have picked the same colors.” That’s not to say they weren’t excited about adding their own touches.

“The walls were as whitewall as can be,” Ben smiled. “Rachel has changed most of them, and now we only have a few more walls to paint.”

A spacious light-filled living/dining area, kitchen and master bedroom are located toward the back of the home. The living room is banked on one side by windows and the dining room by a glass-paned

At Home With Ben and Rachel Kinnison

French door. Except for carpets in the bedrooms, the floors are a neutral shade of linoleum that looks every bit like tiled stone. “Linoleum has come a long way,” Ben said. While installing wood floors is a future option, the linoleum has proved



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to be the perfect surface for their 10-year-old, 95-pound chocolate Lab, Nash, and 5-year-old Dachshund/Yorkshire Terrier, Miya. "It's easy to clean," he added, an important attribute with eight paws and a toddler. "Also, Avery and I have a great time running up and down the long hallway," he grinned.

The contrast of light floors, espresso cabinetry, dark wood dining table and comfortable furnishings lends a sense of space and warmth. Wall colors in the living/dining area are a mixture of blues and greens with an accent wall in the living room in striped shades of sandy taupe. "The colors give me a calming feeling" Rachel smiled. "They remind me of our

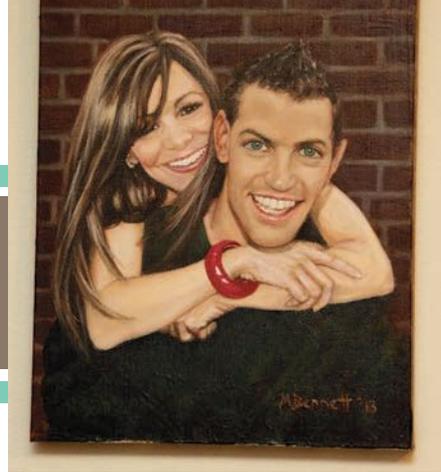


honeymoon in Jamaica." A large fireplace added to the living room shares warmth and completes the homey atmosphere.

An entryway, Ben's office and the guest bedroom are located at the front of the house, while Avery's bedroom is tucked in the middle. "We've enjoyed the unique floorplan," Rachel said. "Ben needs an office and having it located away from the family area is great."

Ben is the junior high and high school athletic director for the Blooming Grove Independent School District and head coach of the boys' basketball team. "I spend a lot of time at home grading and viewing game videos," he said.

"The office was totally his project,"



Rachel explained. "He built a long white desktop and attached it to the wall and then added shelves."

"I'm a big fan of white, gray and black, so everything is in those colors," Ben added. The space also doubles as a workout room, a place for sports memorabilia and a nook for a little red-headed visitor to watch Disney Princesses or Mickey Mouse on her iPad.

While Ben and Rachel's home is completely charming, 2-year-old Avery's bedroom is pure magic. Pale aquamarine walls are the perfect backdrop for her cream-colored princess bed, overstuffed chevron-patterned chair, low-hanging rack of pink tutus, gangs of stuffed

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"We call Avery our spring bird, because she was born in April," Rachel explained. "The robin in the drawing represents her red hair, the hand is mine and the small whistle hanging from a cord is Ben's."

When Avery isn't in her room playing with her toys or in the office watching Disney movies or running up and down the long hallway with her father, she's probably in the backyard. "Ben's mother is Oma, which is German for



grandmother," Rachel said. "Avery's playhouse was a gift from Oma." In addition to the backyard playhouse, Ben has built a giant outdoor chalkboard.

"It's an 8-foot by 4-foot wall of a 2-year-old's art," he laughed. "Avery loves being outside." The addition of a trampoline will arrive soon.

This July, Ben and Rachel will celebrate their sixth wedding anniversary. "We met in college through mutual friends," Rachel said. They both graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, where Ben majored in kinesiology (the study of motion of

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the human body), and Rachel focused on speech pathology. After being apart for two years, they reconnected after Rachel had earned her master's degree. Today, she works as a pediatric speech pathologist for a home health agency.

"Rachel grew up in Palmer," Ben said. "Her family is still there, and her sister lives in Waxahachie. We love living in Waxahachie. It's near to her family, and it's also a big small town — close enough to being in the city, without the big-city issues."

When they're not at home, the family is probably watching an athletic competition or theatrical performance. "Avery and I go to all of Ben's games," Rachel smiled. "In basketball season, we sometimes go two to three times a week, and Avery loves it. She cheers for the teams. Also, our brother-in-law is director of Waxahachie High School's theater, so we go to a lot of plays."

As for Avery's future, whether it is in sports, theater, art or something else, Ben



and Rachel hope she will be passionately involved in something. "My wish for her is that her interests will drive her to be motivated daily," Ben said.

Travel is another priority for the family. "This summer, we'll be visiting Ben's sister in California and taking Avery to Disneyland," Rachel smiled. "Ben and I are also planning a trip to the Caribbean in the spring." One clue to Rachel's love of travel is the large world map hanging in the dining room. "I've had it for years," she said.

Among original art and family photos displayed in Ben and Rachel's home is a plaque which reads *Put Love First*. Certainly, there is no better or more accurate theme for this young family. "We bought a backyard and a neighborhood for Avery," Ben smiled. "This is her home." **NOW**

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Brave Hearts on a Mission

— By Carolyn Wills

In 1997, five Ellis County residents completed their Master Gardener applications and internships to form the Ellis County Master Gardeners Association, and like a well-tended garden, the group grew to its current 100 members and impressive list of community programs and activities. “We’re not a gardening club,” said veteran member, Micki Roark. “We’re a community service organization.” Officially, the Texas Master Gardener program is an educational volunteer program sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of the Texas A&M University System.





Being a Master Gardener is not for the faint of heart. Membership takes a fairly substantial commitment of time, energy and aptitude. Applicants attend 56 hours of horticulture training followed by at least 75 hours of volunteer service, during which they may answer horticulture-related questions, staff plant clinics or booths, aid school and community garden

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projects, work with 4-H, Junior Master Gardeners or assist the county agent with gardening-related projects.

When ECMGA Expo publicity chairman, Ginger Cole, and her husband, George, applied for certification and, then, membership in 2009, they were seeking an organization aligned with their beliefs and lifestyle. "I had gardened for more than 40 years," Ginger said. "George and I both love to work outdoors, so we decided to apply for the Master Gardener program."

Since retirement, they've also been working on their 2-acre lot. "We want to be good land stewards and as earth-kind as possible," she shared. "So far, we've developed two small gardens, added fruit trees and grape vines, acquired 30 chickens (hens only) for fresh pastured eggs, Nigerian goats for milk and cheese and nine colonies of honey bees." They've also installed 40 energy-saving solar roof panels; added rain barrels, a rain garden, berms and buried ollas (clay pots) for irrigation; planted Buffalo grass and bluebonnets to ease lawn maintenance and initiated a composting program.



“We’re living the green movement,” she explained. “Gardening is an excellent way to relieve stress, get exercise and fresh, local pesticide-free produce. I’ve learned to make soap, harvest honey and milk goats.” The Coles have also recently added an outdoor kitchen with a wood-burning oven. “It goes with our lifestyle,” she said. “While working in the yard, I do yard yoga by collecting sticks and branches for kindling. The scraps become fuel and also reduce what we carry to the landfill. All of these things are a part of a greener, gentler lifestyle.”

As Master Gardeners, George and Ginger enjoy sharing what they’ve learned through experience and training, as well as their personal commitment to green living. “ECMGA has projects all around Ellis County,” Ginger said. “My personal favorite is the butterfly garden on the bike trail by the rodeo grounds.”

Clearly, education and service form the core of the Master Gardener program. In 2003, ECMGA initiated a scholarship program to provide opportunity for Ellis County graduating high school seniors to study horticulture and/or related life sciences. The program has now awarded 29 high school students with college scholarships totaling \$42,500.

“We’ve also partnered with the Waxahachie Independent School District for what we’ve named the Green Team,” Ginger added. In exchange for teaching students about horticulture through hands-on experience, Master Gardeners are free to make use of the Waxahachie High School greenhouse to grow plants for the annual Lawn and Garden Expo.

The 15th Annual Lawn and Garden Expo is scheduled for March 28. “The Lawn and Garden Expo is usually on the



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last Saturday of March,” said Micki, who serves as this year’s event chairman. “It is held at the Waxahachie Civic Center from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.” This full day of fun, education and experience for gardeners, families, children and shoppers is ECMGA’s yearly fundraiser in support of its scholarships and projects.

By March 28, more than 100 exhibitors with gardening and outdoor living items including plants, machinery, landscape materials and yard art will have arrived and set up shop at the Civic Center. Master Gardeners will be on hand to teach workshops and special sessions for adults, while children will especially enjoy the hands-on experience of growing plants and completing a variety of take-home projects. Snacks and lunch will be available for purchase at the Ellis County 4H Club concession stand.

This year’s keynote speakers for the Lawn and Garden Expo are two military veterans, James Jeffers and Stephen Smith, who own and operate Eat the Yard, a new and successful urban farming business in the densely populated Dallas neighborhood of Oak Cliff.

“We’re excited to welcome James and Stephen,” Micki said. “We’re also grateful to all of the sponsors who have supported and continue to support this event.” Tickets are free at any participating sponsor and \$5 for an adult when purchased at the event. Admission for children is free.

While most calendars tell us when daylight saving time begins, the date of St. Patrick’s Day and the first day of spring, the ECMGA calendar digs deep to the root of Ellis County to tell us the cycles of the moon, average first and last frost dates, gardening and fertilizing facts, soil preparation, dates and details of community events and in-depth

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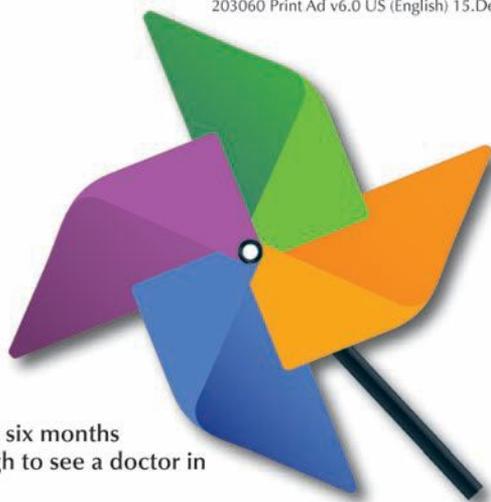
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information about local horticulture. The ECMGA gardening calendar, now in its ninth edition, was first created and continues to be guided by Master Gardeners James and Melinda Kocian.

Since 1997, ECMGA has amassed a treasury of information including the annual calendar. Additionally, their website, Facebook page and newsletter continually add, update and refine information. "The Master Gardeners' process is similar to a train-the-trainer program," Ginger explained. "It is our mission to share knowledge from our training with the public."



Information is also shared through a speakers' bureau. "Members often gravitate to a special interest," she added. "Some become so well-versed on a particular subject they are frequently asked to talk about it." Having enjoyed caring for and harvesting honey from honey bees, Ginger is recognized as the honey bee specialist. "We have experts in many fields," she smiled. Master Gardeners are prepared to speak on various subject areas from lawn and turf, pesticides and fertilizers, earth kind methodology to fruits, veggies, nuts, birds, bats and butterflies and to all that falls before, after and in-between.

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Editor's Note: To find gardening tips, advice and resources, visit: www.ecmga.com.



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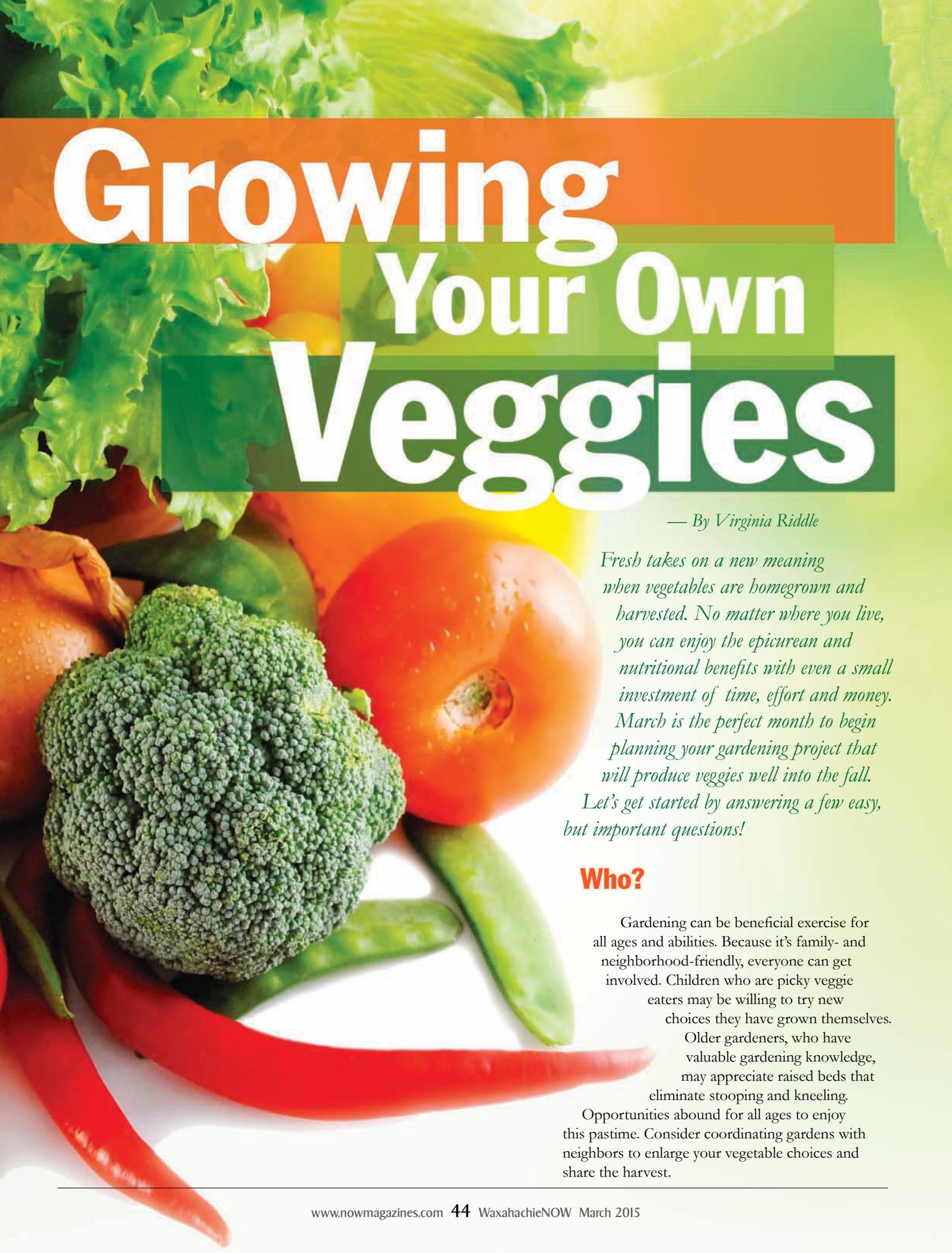
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Growing Your Own Veggies

— By Virginia Riddle

Fresh takes on a new meaning when vegetables are homegrown and harvested. No matter where you live, you can enjoy the epicurean and nutritional benefits with even a small investment of time, effort and money. March is the perfect month to begin planning your gardening project that will produce veggies well into the fall. Let's get started by answering a few easy, but important questions!

Who?

Gardening can be beneficial exercise for all ages and abilities. Because it's family- and neighborhood-friendly, everyone can get involved. Children who are picky veggie eaters may be willing to try new choices they have grown themselves.

Older gardeners, who have valuable gardening knowledge, may appreciate raised beds that eliminate stooping and kneeling.

Opportunities abound for all ages to enjoy this pastime. Consider coordinating gardens with neighbors to enlarge your vegetable choices and share the harvest.

What?

Endless vegetables are easy to grow depending on the season of the year. If you are a first-time veggie gardener, keep things simple. Plant easy-to-grow vegetables or your favorites that have been recommended by neighbors or nurseries in the area. Spring and summer plant choices include all varieties of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, summer



squash, peas, beans, okra and nearly all herbs. Swiss chard is a green that will survive the Texas summer heat.

Where?

Most veggies require a sunny, well-drained area, but if that's not possible, try a potted garden or a hydroponic system in a sunny patio or balcony area. One patio tomato plant can produce a plentiful and continuous supply when planted in a pot. Local garden centers have a large range of pots. You can also create your own pot by cutting drainage holes into the bottom of a potted soil bag, splitting open the top of the bag, removing about half the soil, rolling the bag's sides down, and finally, planting a vegetable inside. Hydroponic systems are pricier but can yield produce for years to come. And since most vegetable



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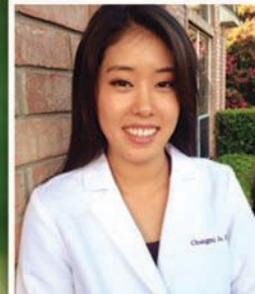




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plants blossom, they are attractive when incorporated into favorite sunny flower beds.

If you are carving a vegetable plot out of your backyard, have your soil tested. Use either a commercial kit or ask your county extension agent for advice. Almost any type of soil can be amended to give good plant growth. Your choice of mulch and fertilizer depends on soil type and available supplies.

What kind of watering system is available for your location? For small gardens or potted veggies, a watering can or diffused sprayer may work well. However, for larger plots, you may wish to lay soaker hoses on timers.

Invest in great time-saving gardening tools and keep them sharpened, cleaned and organized throughout the years to come. Simple hand tools are available, as well as powered tools.

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When?

Planning begins now. However, planting out-of-doors needs to wait until the danger of a late frost or freeze is over. One of the best indicators of that date is when you notice buds on native-to-Texas pecan or mesquite trees. Vegetables, even tomatoes, can be started from seeds planted in starter trays purchased, along with quality potting soil, at your local nursery. Just follow the



directions on the seed packet. The trays are easy to set outside during warm days



and nights but move them to a heated location when temperatures dip down below 40 F.

How?

Now is the time to choose between organic or nonorganic vegetable gardens. Start a compost pile and investigate appropriate choices for fertilizer and pesticides that work best in your area. Your local garden nurseries, county extension agents and Master Gardeners are great resources for information that will help you whether you decide to go organic or not.

If your veggie garden is going to encompass more than a few square feet, rent or purchase a tiller from an area garden center or hardware store. Break the soil and turn the subsoil at a depth of about 6 inches. Remove rocks, make

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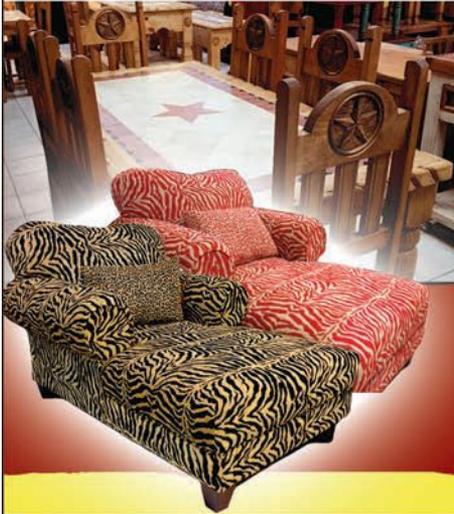
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Pick, wash, eat and enjoy your produce each day, but if your bounty exceeds your gastronomic limits, here are some easy tips:

- **Most veggies can be frozen, canned or dehydrated for future use.** Research methods online or with your county extension agents. Follow food-handling safety tips exactly.
- **Donate produce to a local food bank.** Their clients love to see fresh vegetable offerings. Your charitable donations may be tax deductible — check with your income tax specialist.



• **Share with friends and family.** They will know it is a gift from your heart!

Growing your own vegetables can be a fun, educational experience for family, friends and neighbors, and the physical exercise and healthy eating can elevate your spirits after our cold winter days. Welcome spring by enjoying watching your new veggie garden thrive! **NOW**

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Since buying a home is the largest emotional and financial investment a buyer will make in his or her lifetime, Scott Sandlin's goal is to create a dream home based on his customer's vision.



Delivering *Smiles*

Sandlin Homes is building a way of life for the family. — By Sandra Strong

The Sandlin brothers' passion for building began at a very early age. Their father, J.B. Sandlin, was a builder, and it only seemed natural they would, and did, follow in his footsteps. "We grew up around it," Scott Sandlin shared. "It's all we knew." J.B. Sandlin started the business in 1957 in North Richland Hills, Texas. The first home built was for his family. The second house was designed and built for a co-worker. And like they say, the rest is history — a very successful history.

Sandlin Homes began as a family business where Scott and his brothers, Mike and Terry, learned what it meant to build a home from the ground up, while their mother, Mary Lou, served as the interior decorator and superintendent overseeing the homes while they were in the process of being built. As a young boy, Scott

recalls afternoons and weekends spent checking houses with his dad. As young adults, Scott and his brothers also learned from firsthand experience about customer service and home warranties. "My brothers and I did it all," Scott admitted. "We got the real-world experience formal schooling did not or could not teach us."

In those early years, the three brothers were being groomed to oversee the business when the time came for J.B. to retire. As the family legacy continues to flourish, Scott, his brothers and his brother-in-law, Matt Speight, as partners, continue to offer the same craftsmanship, durability and practicality started when J.B. was at the helm. The homebuilding business is ever-changing. To stay abreast of changes, the partners attend

Business **NOW**

several yearly continuing education classes and meetings designed to offer information about changes in warranties, certifications and energy efficiency options available to homebuyers.

J.B. also taught by example the importance of ethics and integrity. “Customers have always been our main priority,” Scott said. “This is the largest emotional and financial investment the buyer will make in his or her lifetime.” The goal of Sandlin Homes is to take the customer’s vision and style and create the home of their dreams.

Sandlin Homes can be found throughout the D/FW Metroplex, but three developments in Waxahachie — Katy Lake, The Arbor at Willow Grove and Summit Estates — are a testament to the quality and longevity the company is experiencing 58 years later in the area. The most recent one is the 2014 Builder of the Year award from the Greater Fort Worth Builders Association. “The winner is chosen from peers within the building industry,” he said. “That means something to me, and this is the fifth time one of our principals has received this. The accolades date back to the days when J.B. owned the business, and now Scott, Mike, Terry and Matt are thankful and humbled by all the acclaim the company is receiving.

“Customers have always been our main priority.”

The success of building happy homes can be found in the care that goes beyond the written warranties and attention to details. “So much of what we do for the customer isn’t listed on any warranty or written agreement,” Scott explained. “It’s found in the relationship we build with each one of them. As a builder and developer, it’s my responsibility to put the customer at ease.”

Many components go into making someone’s dream home a reality. The mission is to make sure customers see each component in every step of the Sandlin Homes building process. The main goal is to continue delivering smiles. **NOW**



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A tree is dedicated in downtown Waxabachie in honor of former Mayor and City Councilman Joe Jenkins. Celebrating with him are City Manager Paul Stephens; Cindy Burch, Waxabachie Downtown Merchants Association; and his wife, Jan Jenkins.



Sisters Louisa and Lily Miner enjoy a brisk walk on a chilly afternoon.



Luke Reeves, Charlie Allen and Kooper King enjoy their climb at Getzender Park.



Several members from Waxabachie INTERACT prepare to read to students at Dunaway Elementary during DEAR Day.



Jordan Stacks, Billie Nelson, Joseph Sayegh and Santiago Torres munch on a large box of chicken while relaxing on the patio at Hastings Bookstore.



Gabi Ruiz and Holly Ostendorf sell Girl Scout cookies on a cold, windy day.



NOW Magazines Managing Editor Becky Walker reads to a class of Wedgeworth Elementary second-graders during the annual DEAR Day event.



Kayla Boring celebrates her 19th birthday at TaMolly's with her 4-month-old niece, Airanna Miller.



The first ever Hachie Health Hike is successful thanks to all those who came out to participate in a morning of healthy fun.



Toni Darrough, age 9, has a fun time shopping the candy counter with her family.

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Your Credit Score

Have you ever wondered how you qualified for a loan? Or why you didn't? Or why you ended up with an interest rate higher than the one advertised?

Many of the financial steps you take are tracked and used to calculate your credit score, a three-digit number ranging from 300 to 850. The higher the number, the more likely you are to get the credit you want — and at a desirable rate. Creditors consult credit scores to assess whether or not loaning you money is worth the risk. Generally, 700 is considered a good credit score. A score below 600 may put you in a “high risk” category.

What Determines Your Credit Score

A variety of factors determine a credit score. One of the most important is your payment history, which accounts for approximately 35 percent of your credit score. This summary of payments on past and current debts details all of your reported credit accounts and if payments were on time or late, including by how many days, or not made at all.

Another important factor, at about 30 percent, is your amount of debt. This is more than a total of all debt you owe. It also includes the number of reported accounts with outstanding balances and how much available credit you've used. The total debt is compared to the total credit available to determine your debt-to-credit ratio. Your credit score can suffer if those two numbers are too close together.

Your credit score also takes into account the number of years you've used credit. This factor isn't weighted as heavily — it tends to be about 15 percent of your credit score — but it shows that establishing good credit early is wise, because a longer credit history can positively impact your credit score. A high score may be possible with a short credit history if you've used credit responsibly.

The final and least-weighted factors are new credit and what are loosely referred to as “other factors.” Although both account for just around 10 percent of your credit score, they should not be treated lightly.

Credit inquiries to transfer a balance to a credit card with a lower annual percentage rate or opening new credit to receive a percentage off your total purchase at your favorite retailer can lower your credit score in the short term. Other factors include having a mixture of credit types, such as credit cards, auto loans and home mortgages. This diversification of credit is good for your credit score and common for those with long credit histories.

What Doesn't Determine Your Credit Score

It's important to note that your credit score isn't based on discriminating factors, such as race, gender, marital status, religion, age, salary, employment or where you live. Your credit score, along with all of the reported account information used to determine it, is contained in your credit report. Three national reporting agencies, or credit bureaus, track credit scores and compile credit reports: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. Your credit score and report may vary by agency, depending on the information each has received from lenders.

What Is On Your Credit Report

Besides financial information and your Social Security number, a credit report contains personal details that lenders update, such as your name, address, date of birth and employer. It also details items of public record, including bankruptcies, foreclosures, lawsuits and wage attachments, as well as actions by collection agencies.

Remember, it's important to monitor your credit report periodically. Understanding your credit score is only your first step to financial success: You also must ensure the information on your credit report is accurate and up-to-date if you want it to help you get the credit you need. **NOW**

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March 3

TEEN Movie Night: 5:30-7:30 p.m., Sims Library. The movie selected is rated up to PG-13 and is for ages 13-17. Call the library at (972) 937-2671 or visit the library at 515 W. Main St. for movie title.

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.

March 13

Beginner's Crochet: 4:00 p.m., Sims Library.

This is a beginner's class for ages 10 and up where students will learn the basics of how to start a project along with basic stitches and how to read a pattern. Bring a size H crochet hook and a No. 4 worsted yarn of your choice. All experience levels are welcome.

March 14

Library Indoor Scavenger Hunt: 10:00-11:00 a.m., Sims Library, 515 W. Main St. If you are age 5-12 and want to learn where things are located at the library, this is the hunt for you.

Boomerang Program: 1:00 p.m., Sims Library. This new program is designed for individuals 50 and up. It offers an afternoon of social fun and learning. Call (972) 937-2671 for more information or to be placed on the email list.

March 21

St Joseph Spring Fiesta: 10:00 a.m.-7:00p.m., 500 E. Marvin St., Waxahachie. This is a community-wide event offering food, fun and entertainment for all ages. Grand Fiesta Tent opening at 10:00 a.m. Activities include carnival games, bingo, raffle drawings, karaoke contest, washer tournament, Mexican food, BBQ and live music. Visit springfiesta.net or call (972) 938-1953 for more information.

Cub Scout Pack 681 Pinewood Derby Day: Noon-4:00 p.m., Park Meadows Baptist Church, 3350 Hwy. 77. The event is open to the public.

March 28

Easter Egg Hunt: 10:00 a.m., back lawn of Sims Library, 515 W. Main St. The Easter Bunny will be hopping through to visit, too.

Ellis County Master Gardener Lawn & Garden Expo: 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Waxahachie Civic Center. Enjoy the day with your family. Tickets are \$5 for adults and children under 12 are free. Complimentary tickets are available by visiting an expo sponsor. A list of sponsors can be found by visiting www.ecmga.com.

April 9

Waxahachie Symphony Orchestra presents SAGU Jazz Band: 7:00-9:00 p.m., SAGU Performance Hall. Visit www.waxahachiesymphony.com for more information.

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

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Poison Beware

— By Betty Tryon, BSN

No one wants to be poisoned. However, if it happens, you will want to do everything you can as soon as you can to counteract the toxins. National Poison Prevention Week is March 15-21, the third week of that month every year. The main goal is to raise awareness in preventing accidental poisonings. It's important to remember anyone at any age can be poisoned by just about anything that can be ingested or has the potential of affecting the body in any way, if it is used inappropriately.

If you think you have been poisoned, there are things you can do before you seek the service of professionals. Poison Help, a website from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services writes:

- If the person inhaled poison, get to fresh air right away.
- If the person has poison on the skin, take off any clothing the poison touched. Rinse skin with running water for 15 to 20 minutes.
- If the person has poison in the eyes, rinse eyes with running water for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Your poison center can give you other first-aid advice and may save you from a visit to the emergency room.

Before you ever get to that point of dashing to fresh air or running water, a serious look at things in your environment can be helpful. A few of the more obvious

ones are: plants, medications and cleaning agents. Plants can be trouble, so it is always helpful for the sake of children and pets, to move them to a place that is out of reach. Keep in mind that just because a medication is in a child-resistant container does not mean that it is childproof. Avoid putting medications on tables or countertops easily accessible to children. Keeping cleaning agents unavailable to children and pets is a given. What is not often considered is following the label on the container. It could be dangerous to mix certain ingredients. Always check. Storing chemicals or even medications in containers other than the original is a bad idea. It makes it too easy for accidents to occur. Those laundry and dishwasher pods are very handy but can also be delicious looking to the eyes of children. Too many children have been poisoned already because of them. Store them out-of-reach.

The Poison Help line is 1-800-222-1222. It will connect you to your local poison control center. If a possible poisoning has ensued, there is help available at your fingertips. **NOW**

Source:

www.PoisonHelp.hrsa.gov/what-can-you-do/national-poison-prevention-week/.

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

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In the Kitchen With Shirley Blanton

— By *Sandra Strong*

Twenty years ago, Shirley Blanton had the opportunity to care for three precious elderly people. “I learned to cook during that time,” Shirley remembered. “I made chicken fried steak, fried chicken and chocolate pie.” Her inspiration for cooking still comes from making others in her life happy, and could also come from inside the pages of her old church cookbooks. “If I find an old cookbook,” she said, “I’ll buy it.”

Shirley’s style of cooking is simple Southern. Food has always been a form of comfort to her, and cooking for others over the years has brought her much joy. “I love preparing meals for my husband,” she admitted. “In 18 years, he’s never complained, other than to say I cook too much. He’s definitely my biggest fan.” **NOW**

Your Beans

- 1 lb. ground beef, browned, drained**
- 1 pkg. Beef Lit'l Smokies, cut into small pieces**
- 1/4 cup brown sugar, packed**
- 1/3 cup “WOODY’S” Cook-in Sauce**
- 2 15-oz. cans pork and beans, undrained**
- 1 15-oz. can ranch-style beans, undrained**
- 1 15-oz. can pinto beans with jalapeños, undrained**

1. Combine all ingredients in a Crock-Pot. Cook on low for 3-4 hours, stirring occasionally. Serve with chips or as a side dish.

Cream Cheese Bundt Cake

- 3 sticks butter, room temperature**
- 8 oz. cream cheese, room temperature**
- 2 cups sugar**
- 6 eggs, room temperature**

- 2 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 1/2 tsp. almond extract**
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, sifted**
- Confectioner’s sugar (optional)**

- 1.** Grease 12-cup Bundt pan. Preheat oven to 300 F
- 2.** Beat butter and cream cheese together until well-blended. Add sugar. Beat until light and fluffy.
- 3.** Add eggs, one at a time. Beat well after each addition. Blend in vanilla and almond extract.
- 4.** Blend flour into creamed mixture. Spoon batter into prepared pan.
- 5.** Bake for 1 hour, 45 minutes. Allow to cool in pan for 5 minutes. Turn out onto wire cooling rack. Cool completely. Dust with confectioner’s sugar, if desired.

Crock-Pot Chicken and Dressing

- 3 chicken breasts**

- 1/4 cup oil**
- 1 cup onion, chopped**
- 1 cup celery, chopped**
- 1 Tbsp. salt**
- 1 Tbsp. sage**
- 1 tsp. poultry seasoning**
- 1 cup day-old white bread**
- 8 cups cornbread**
- 2 10.75-oz. cans cream of chicken soup**
- 28 oz. chicken broth or at least 3 cups broth from cooking chicken**
- 3 eggs**
- 1 Tbsp. vinegar**

- 1.** Boil chicken until done. Remove from pan. Set broth aside.
- 2.** In oil, cook onion and celery until tender. Add salt, sage and poultry seasoning. Combine the breads in a separate bowl. Stir in the cooked onion mixture.
- 3.** In another bowl, combine soup, broth, eggs and vinegar. Add to bread mixture; stir well. Pour into Crock-Pot. Cook on high for 30 minutes.
- 4.** Turn heat down to low. Cook for 3-4 hours. About 1 hour before it’s done, add the broken pieces of chicken to the Crock-Pot.

Corn Casserole

- 1 stick butter**
- 1 14.75-oz. can cream-style corn**
- 1 egg**
- 1 8.5-oz. box JIFFY corn muffin mix**
- 8 oz. sour cream**

- 1.** Melt butter in a 1 1/2-qt. casserole dish. Stir in corn, egg and corn muffin mix.
- 2.** Drop sour cream in each corner of the dish making sure it doesn’t touch the side. Add a drop in the middle. Do not mix.
- 3.** Bake at 400 F for 45 minutes or until light brown.

Sticky Fingers

- 1 2.5-lb. bag Tyson breaded chicken tenders**
- 1 1/2 cups brown sugar**
- 6 Tbsp. Frank’s RedHot Buffalo Wings Sauce**
- 4 Tbsp. water**

- 1.** Fry or bake chicken strips.
- 2.** Mix remaining ingredients together to make sauce. Heat until sugar is dissolved. Dip each strip and pour the remaining sauce over the strips.

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