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MARCH 2022

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Melanie Curtin supports Project Prom to create a safe after-prom party

In the Kitchen With Lesley Mckuin

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Crossword

Featured Business: Cowłown Cotłages

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ON THE COVER

Caring about students drives Melanie Curtain's passion for Project Prom.

Photo by Constance O'Bryan.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The madness of March ...

U.S. statistics show March as the least productive month of the year. Some want to blame NBA, but I suspect basketball has little to do with it. After all, in another lifetime, I taught preschoolers (4- and 5-year-old ones). Every March, the teachers cheered the warmer days and dreaded the cold ones. Are we so different from young children? Like them, we want to forget work, venture outside, sit back and let the glow of warm sunshine spread over us. We relished the gentle kiss of a warm breeze instead of suffering through the bite of wintry, ice-filled winds.

I suspect we all enjoy the beginning of a new season. Spring ushers in hope as many animals emerge from hibernation, finding their mates and producing new life. Even trees, plants and the ground reveal hope for the future, a promise of rebirth. No wonder we long to experience nature more than in the cold months of winter. In ancient times, Romans celebrated the new year in March — until the powers of the time added January and February as two more months in a year.

Why not renew our commitments this month? After all, we settled into 2022, and maybe we made slight progress on some of those goals we set but didn't quite finish. As spring arrives, perhaps we take a moment to get outside and enjoy nature. Our minds and bodies want to, after all. Then, renewed by the world around us, maybe we can attack daily and longer-term tasks with freshness. Worth a try, isn't it?

Enjoy the beginning of a new season this month.



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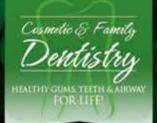
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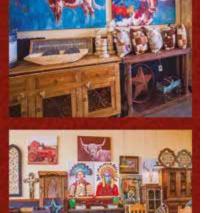
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Senior Prom is perhaps the single largest event of the high school experience. Since the beginning of proms in the late 1800s, kids looked for ways to extend the evening, often without the watchful eyes of chaperones. Students dream of, fret over and embrace the spring hoping to have the perfect date, fabulous attire and the best night of their young lives. Parents have nightmares. Unless, like Melanie Curtin, they get involved with Project Prom, providing a safe, fun, alcohol- and drug-free alternative to make the evening last longer.

In Weatherford, over the last 20 years, parents of WISD seniors have worked to plan, fund and implement the annual after party. Melanie got involved primarily because she had a senior at Weatherford High School. She wanted to participate in the events, and in her experience, the night encompassed so much more than fun.

Fully paid for by parents and community donors and businesses, they held the event at Urban Air Adventure Park in 2021, where the kids came after prom and stayed until 6:00 a.m. Although they couldn't physically lock the doors, they treated the event as a lock-in, dedicated to keeping outsiders from entering and the students from leaving until heading home. Through parental contributions, fundraisers and donations, the committee collected enough money to pay for the event, provide fabulous door prizes and give much-deserved scholarships to some students.









"I had a senior and received an email asking for parents interested in helping with Project Prom. About 25 of us expressed interest. Then about 15-18 of us joined a Zoom call," Melanie said. "Many of the positions were already filled, so I ended up in fundraising with Tosha McCune, Melody Hudson and several other parents. For four months, we asked for donations everywhere we went. Most came from small business owners and individuals."

Many local businesses and some in Fort Worth donated money and prizes. Although she couldn't name them all, Melanie especially appreciated the generosity of The Malt Shop, Splash Kingdom and Film Alley, who all proved great supporters. Long John Silvers allowed them to hold a car wash to raise money, and donated gift cards, as did numerous businesses all over the community. The city of Weatherford and First Mondays allowed them space to sell raffle tickets. The committee also allowed businesses or individuals to sponsor a senior or provide a scholarship, which they presented the evening of the event.

As another fundraiser, they placed pink flamingoes in yards, allowing a nondestructive way for friends to play a joke on each other. The seniors got involved by helping put out the birds.

Their biggest fundraiser came as an adult '80s prom. "I wore the dress I used at my senior prom," Melanie confessed. For parents and community members, the event brought back memories from their proms, and they had a blast. Shep's donated use of a back room, which allowed them to spend more of the proceeds on the kids.

Immediately after the prom last year, about 125 kids joined the after-prom event. "Some said it was more fun than the prom," Melanie shared. "This event may be the only outlet they have if they didn't get invited to a private party. We don't want to leave any kid behind."

Every year, students make decisions on prom night that could alter their future, sometimes removing a future. Often, they end up at parties with alcohol and drugs. "If we could prevent that and didn't, shame on us," Melanie stated. "If everyone gave even small amounts, that's a lot of money."

Melanie wishes they could get more

parents involved with the planning of the event, although many parents donated funds. That helped. The support from the community overall impressed her.

During Project Prom, they gave away so many door prizes that the kids who stayed until the end all won something. "These were deserving kids," she said, thrilled with the generosity of the community. "It's imperative to have community support. There's no way a committee can pull it off every year without everyone."

Although Melanie took a break from volunteering this year, her passion for the event remains strong. She plans to volunteer for the committee next year when she again has a high school senior and encourages all community members to take part in helping with the 2022 event at any level. While senior prom can leave lasting memories in the life of a student, Project Prom 2022 helps make those memories treasured ones.

The committee for 2022, headed up by Tammy Reed and Pam Van Horn, decided to support both the prom and after party with funds they raise. Pam said, "We're desperate to raise enough money to cover the costs this year, but we're struggling." Following the prom on April 30, they plan to host the after party, providing entertainment, food and prizes.

They held one fundraiser in February, and they have more in the works. Because they use no school funds, Project Prom 2022 depends on donations from families, friends, businesses and the community.

"We have an obligation to provide a safe and wholesome atmosphere for our students and young adults," Pam and Tammy stated. "With your help in making this a blowout event, teens will be encouraged to stay in a safe environment."

Success depends entirely on the generosity of donors. Without support, they can't have the after party. The committee has a page on Facebook. Be sure to watch for upcoming fundraisers and take part in as many as possible.

Editor's Note: For those with students in other ISDs or in private schools, contact your student's high school to see what after party plans they have in place and to learn how you can help.



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THE UPS STORE





By Lisa Bell

Zoomed In: Jennifer Bledsoe

As the director of operations at Weatherford Senior Activity Center since August 2021, Jennifer Bledsoe can hardly contain her excitement over future possibilities. Nicknaming the center the "60 plus Club," she said, "Doesn't, 'Let's go to the club,' sound better than, 'Let's go to the senior center? We are a club."

Citizens over 60 have a choice of activities and a chef-prepared meal daily. "Bingo is a hit," Jennifer added. From art classes to quilting, pool tables and entertainment, senior adults join Jennifer and staff members, Kristi Smith, Anita Capsome and Kim Boothe for fun days and friendship. "I don't want anyone to ever sit at home alone," Jennifer explained. Excited to implement ideas for more activities, she often must slow herself down.



Tison Middle School's Annie Jr. cast celebrates a wonderful performance.

Around Town



Doug Jefferson celebrates 30 years with Weatherford College.



During art classes at the 60 Plus Club, ladies create art and friendships.



Boyish antics keep these seniors active and young at heart.

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Kitchen staff, led by Chef Gilbert Rivera (far left), prepare for Meals on Wheels deliveries and senior activities.



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Stemming from a three-year journey caring for her father with dementia, Kelley Walker shared, "We had just moved him into a memory-care facility minutes from our home when the COVID lockdown hit. There was no way I was leaving him alone, visually impaired and isolated from family. We moved him back into our home."

Kelley found herself reinstated in a 24/7 caregiver role, homeschooling two preteens and managing three businesses. Before long, she and her husband, Warren, realized they needed a place to get away and connect as a family. Already owning six acres on Richland Chambers Lake, they needed a little home there, which began their builder hunt. Kelley



had been fascinated by the "tiny home movement" for years. Fate met them when they discovered an array of cottages on Highway 31 in Malakoff, Texas.

Learning this tiny home seller didn't sell to the public, Kelley requested a meeting. When they presented an opportunity as exclusive Platinum Dealership for the Fort Worth Market, she said, "We'll take it!"

In the car, Warren asked, "What are you doing?"

Kelley replied, "Just trust me! COVID changed everything. We're going to help a lot of people. This will be the new affordable housing solution. We have 43 years of combined real estate experience, with my 27 years of interior design. This is literally our wheelhouse."

After securing the Fort Worth market, they spent the 2020 summer researching the industry. Kelley's expertise in new home sales influenced them to pursue a "Model Home Park" experience for clients. Visitors find climate-controlled tiny homes displaying many options with homelike interior furnishings. Kelley designed a stylish brand that is hard to beat. "Knowing I can customize these homes around our client's needs was an exciting aspect of moving forward with this venture," she said.

The couple offers real estate services to help customers find the ideal location for their new tiny home. "We have many connections from prior years and love working with Realtors," Warren shared.

As a faith-based business, Warren; Kelley; and their manager, Cara Thornton, hope their daily impact demonstrates Christian principles. All three expressed, "Any success we have is because of Him."

Cowtown Cottages offers five series of 399-square-foot plans. Optional porches and lofts expand living space while retaining status as a park model RV. The RV classification allows buyers to maintain an AG exemption and doesn't impact property taxes. Although tiny homes aren't intended for fulltime living, many people choose this route because of escalating prices in residential and rental markets.

"It is the perfect solution for aging parents to live near you affordably while maintaining independence," Kelley added. "The low overhead also contributes to funds for a private caregiver if necessary."

Passion for the 55-plus market grew because of Kelley's experiences with her dad, who passed away in their home 17 days after the business opened in December 2020. "My dad was a custom home builder and land developer. We would have had so much fun doing this together. I know he is up there smiling about all this," Kelley shared.

The Chrestos on Richland Chambers Lake opens this April, a tiny home vacation resort on 800 linear feet of lake front. Starting small, phase one consists of six luxurious Cowtown Cottages for nightly rental. "More than anything, we hope The Chrestos offers a tiny-home experience, allowing people to rediscover what matters most in life," Kelley said.

After completing all three phases of The Chrestos, they plan to develop tiny-house communities, especially one for people over 55. Because of versatility, mixed use and many design options, tiny homes are becoming a big solution for affordable housing in today's market. Designer Cottages That Feel Like Home Looking for rental income? Come tour our new designer duplex! Model Home Sales Center Open: Wednesday - Saturday 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM



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St. Patrick's Day is always a celebration for Lesley Mckuin and her family, as March 17 marks her husband, Earl's, birthday. He is Irish and Scottish, so she enjoys incorporating Irish dishes into the festivities. Lesley's family is from the Azores Island of Terceira, so her Portuguese heritage also influences recipes.

Lesley is completing a nutrition certification through Cornell University. Nourishment through healthy dishes inspires many of her menus. "I look at food as an enjoyable way to fuel my body. I love incorporating different spices, herbs and vegetables in existing recipes to see what kind of flavor I get."

Pinterest serves as a hub for Lesley's recipe ideas, but trial and error often lead to new dishes. She enjoys baking sweet and festive treats with her three children, especially for holidays. Now

Irish Soda Bread

- 4 cups flour
 1 Tbsp. baking powder
 1 tsp. salt
 2 Tbsp. sugar
 1 tsp. baking soda
 3/4 cup currants or raisins
- 1/2 cup butter, softened

I 1/4 cups buttermilk (divided use) I egg I/4 cup butter, melted

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I. Preheat the oven to 375 F. In a large bowl, mix together the flour and the next 5 ingredients.

2. Add the softened butter, 1 cup buttermilk and egg to the dry ingredients; mix well.

3. Flour a work surface and your hands. Knead the dough on the work surface for 2 minutes. Shape the dough into a mound; place it on a greased baking sheet.
4. In a small bowl, mix together the melted butter and the remaining 1/4 cup buttermilk. Brush the mixture on top of the dough; cut an X shape on top of dough. Bake for 45 minutes at 375 F, or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Slow Cooker Corned Beef and Cabbage

- 8 red potatoes, diced
- I large yellow onion, chopped
- I small cabbage, chopped
- 2 cups carrots, chopped
- 4 lbs. corned beef, with provided seasoning packet
- 1 11-oz. bottle Guinness
- 2 cups water
- 2 cups beef broth

2 Tbsp. sea salt2 Tbsp. fresh black pepper2 Tbsp. garlic powder3 thyme twigs2 dried bay leaves

 Add the potatoes and the next 3 ingredients to the bottom of a Cock-Pot. Place the corned beef on top of the vegetables. Add the Guinness, water and broth.
 In a small bowl, add the seasoning packet from the corned beef package, salt, pepper and garlic powder; mix well. Rub the seasonings onto the meat. Place the thyme and bay leaves on top of the corned beef; cover and cook for 6-8 hours. Serve with Irish Soda Bread.

Strawberry and Honey Goat Cheese Salad With Balsamic Vinaigrette

Salad:

 cup strawberries, sliced
 1/4 lb. Montchevre Rondin Goat Cheese With Honey, crumbled
 1/2 cup almonds, sliced
 2 cups baby spring mix salad
 2 cups arugula
 Balsamic Vinaigrette:
 1 shallot, diced
 1/4 cup Colavita balsamic vinegar (may substitute another brand)
 2 tsp. Dijon mustard

1 Tbsp. fresh garlic, minced

- 1/4 tsp. fresh black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. sea salt

1 tsp. dried oregano

3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

 For salad: Toss together all ingredients. Note: You may add seasonal fruits, such as peaches, in place of strawberries.
 For balsamic vinaigrette: Whisk together all ingredients. Refrigerate the vinaigrette in an airtight container for at least 1 hour before use. Pour the desired amount over the salad; toss before serving.

Baked Parmesan Crispy Chicken

Olive oil or avocado oil cooking spray

- 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup almond flour
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- l tsp. salt
- l egg
- $1 \ 1/2$ lbs. chicken breasts

I. Preheat the oven to 375 F. Spray a baking sheet with olive oil or avocado oil cooking spray.







2. In a small bowl, mix together the Parmesan cheese, almond flour, pepper, and salt; set aside.

3. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg. Dredge I chicken breast at a time in the egg; toss in the almond flour mixture so that both sides are coated. Place each coated chicken breast onto a baking sheet.

4. Bake for 15-17 minutes, or until the internal temperature of each chicken breast is 165 F. Broil for 2 more minutes for your desired crispiness. *Note: This pairs well with the Strawberry and Honey Goat Cheese Salad.*

Grain-Free Granola

3/4 cup sliced almonds
3/4 cup pumpkin seeds
1/2 cup unsweetened coconut chips
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
Pinch of salt
1 Tbsp. coconut oil
2 tsp. vanilla extract
4 Tbsp. pure maple syrup
Coconut oil baking spray

 Preheat the oven to 300 F. In a bowl, add the first 7 ingredients; combine well. Pour the maple syrup over the mixture; mix well.
 Spray a baking sheet with coconut oil spray; spread the mixture evenly onto a baking



sheet. Bake at 300 F for 15-20 minutes. Let cool completely. Break apart into your desired size; store in an air-tight container. The granola will stay fresh for 4-5 days.

Breakfast Scramble

l tsp. olive oil

- 1/3 cup bell pepper, diced
- 1/4 cup red onion, diced
- I link Aidells Smoked Chicken Sausage-Spicy Mango With Jalapeno, diced
- 1/2 cup sweet potato, roasted
- l egg
- I egg white

I. Warm the olive oil in a skillet on medium heat. Add the bell pepper and onions; cook until soft. Add the chicken sausage; cook until browned.

2. Mix in the roasted sweet potato; add the egg and the egg white. Heat and stir until the eggs are thoroughly cooked. Serve with fresh arugula and salsa or pico de gallo.

Lemon Curd and Greek Yogurt Parfait

- 3/4 cup Two Good Low Fat Vanilla Greek Yogurt
- 1 Tbsp. Wilkin & Sons Ltd. Lemon Curd
- 1/3 cup SOLA granola or Grain-Free
- Granola (See recipe in this article.) 1/2 cup blueberries

I. In a bowl, mix together the yogurt and lemon curd.

2. In a separate small bowl or cup, layer the yogurt and lemon curd mixture, then the granola. Top with blueberries; serve.







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	38	+	+	+		39	+	-	+	-

Solutions on page 28

Across

- Andrew Carnegie and Alexander Graham Bell
- 6 Bonny girl
- 10 Case place
- 11 Fairy tale opener
- 12 Rite site
- 13 Like the "sisters" in "Macbeth"
- 15 Flunky
- 17 "--- Only Just Begun" (Carpenters hit)
- 18 "Render --- Caesar "
- 19 Mint
- 20 Federal public lands agency
- 22 Assist
- 24 Exclamation
- 25 Stick up
- 26 Where the pews are
- 28 Unreturned opening shots
- 30 Evinces disdain
- 33 Challenged
- 35 19th century pianist --- Schumann
- 36 Suggestive grin
- 37 Professional wrestler a k a Jeffrey Sciullo
- 38 Small whirlpool
- 39 Tapered tucks in dressmaking

Down

- 1 Con game
- 2 "Anything Goes" composer --- Porter
- 3 Facing a bigger army
- 4 Work out
- 5 Levels of society
- 6 Down in the dumps
- 7 Once again
- 8 Showcase for more analytical students
- 9 Waitron
- 14 Innocent
- 16 Lower part of the abdomen
- 20 Thin nail
- 21 Spot
- 23 Twisted?
- 27 Mexico's Pancho ---
- 29 He/she might fire off a lot of 28 Across
- 31 Brotherhood
- 32 Impertinence
- 34 Teetotal

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2/28-4/18

Matter of Balance: Eight-week course for older adults to help overcome falls. Free. 1:00-3:00 p.m., Couts United Methodist Church, 802 N. Elm St. For information and registration, contact Kathy Smith at (817) 598-6168 or kl-smith@tamu.edu.

3/5

Spring Fest Car Show 2022:

Benefits cancer research. Free to attend; \$20 for participants. **Registration:** 8:00-11:00 a.m.;

car show: 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Willow Park Baptist Church, 129 S. Ranch House Rd., Willow Park. Text or call Chris Rodriguez, (706) 622-1253 or Rita Backes, (817) 304-7556.

Patrick

3/10

Mediterranean Cooking Workshop: \$20/person. 6:00-8:00 p.m., Parker County Extension Office,

604 N. Main St. Sign up for workshop, (817) 598-6168.

3/15-3/19

Kids Week:

Free programs for students. Registration opens **March 3** at 10:00 a.m. Various times, Doss Heritage & Culture Center. www.dosscenter.org.

3/18

Movies in the Park: Encanto showing. 7:30-10:00 p.m., Heritage Park Amphitheater, 378 Jack Borden Way. www.experienceweatherford.com.

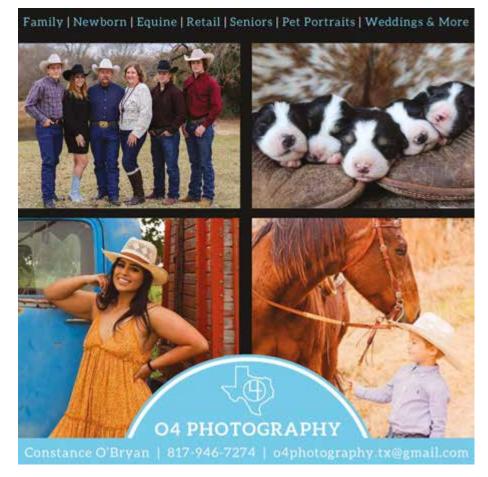
3/19

Spring Fling 2022: Come out and support local artists. \$5 admission. Noon-4:00 p.m., Chandor Gardens. www.chandergardensfoundation.org.

3/21-5/16

Walk Across Texas: Parker County 2022 challenge with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Up to eight-member teams work toward 831-mile goal. Virtual kick-off event: Noon. www.Howdyhealth.org.

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









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