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ON THE COVER



Glenn Heights resident Kat Lopez overcame anxiety to earn her first pageant title.

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

*Tulip time ...*

No flower reminds me more of spring than the tulip, and it can't be an accident that the bulb parallels the season so well. Like springtime in Texas, the tulip's lifespan is fleeting, lasting typically one to two weeks and, sometimes, just a few days. If you aren't paying attention, you'll miss those bursts of bright bulbs that disappear as quickly as they came. There was a time, in fact, when Southern gardens were considered inhospitable to tulips. With proper treatment, however, the tulip proved successful in full sun or, like many a Texan, even happier in partial shade.

Tulips usher in spring with brightly colored petals of red, orange, pink or yellow. The white varieties serve as a reminder that it is a season of rebirth and renewal, too. Their bell-shaped petals are few, another similarity to Texas weather, where spring-temperature days can be scant. Sometimes called "hope on a stem," tulips naturally seek light, and can be seen turning toward the sun throughout the day, whether in the garden or a vase. Like spring, they are a reminder that darkness gives way to light, as our days begin to grow longer.

Just as folks begin to shed winter's spirit of hibernation, tulip petals tuck in at night to sleep but open wide during the day. (Unlike other flowers, they even actually continue to grow for some time after being cut.) While their time is short, tulips bring much beauty and joy. Our spring, no matter how brief, is when those things awaken in us, too.

*Turn to the sun!*



*Angel*

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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

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

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# CROWNING GLORY

— By Angel Morris

*While Katherine Lopez has spent half her life on stage, earning the title Miss Red Oak Latina came as somewhat of a surprise. “I would’ve never thought I would be able to compete in a pageant. I grew up insecure, and I honestly couldn’t have imagined myself walking on stage confidently,” Kat admitted. “While my background is in acting, it’s a completely different dynamic when you’re up there representing yourself — and your city — and not playing a character.”*

Kat began performing at age 9 with the Kim Dawson Acting Studio and, after graduating from Life School, she earned an associate degree from the Kim Dawson Conservatory College of Film & Dramatic Arts. “I have worked on projects such as TV series *Cruel Summer* and *Yellowstone*, as well as roles in independent films. Aside from acting, I am a self-taught photographer and makeup artist,” Kat outlined.

Little did Kat know, these skills would prepare her for pageant participation. “I joined the Miss Texas Latina pageant during the summer of 2023. I randomly got an ad on my phone for it, and I applied instantly. I didn’t think anyone would reach out, because I didn’t have any experience in pageantry,” she noted.

Kat’s background, however, made her a perfect candidate for the pageant. “What I loved about Miss Texas Latina is that you got the chance to embrace your Latin culture, which is something I have always been afraid of doing. But this pageant really stuck out to me, because I wanted to represent my late grandmother and our roots.”

Once accepted into the pageant, Kat had two months to get ready. “During the competition, there were multiple portions to prepare for, such as the interview, evening gown, swimsuit and heritage outfit,” she outlined.

“Before I went to compete, the elementary campus I was working for at the time had a special send-off for me. The halls were filled with all of our students and their screams of excitement were so loud, my ears were ringing. I cried tears of joy because I wanted to make them proud. They looked up to me, and it meant so much to me to receive so much love from them.”







Photo by Horande Studios (@horandestudios).

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Kat's pageant platform was to help those in need of health care. "I truly believe in fighting for health care reform, because every American deserves the chance to live a healthy life and receive the resources they need, without having

to worry whether or not you have enough funds to support your medical health," she described.

Kat described her childhood dream of making a difference in the world, and the judges were sold. She received the crown in her first-ever pageant showcase last year. "I grew up wondering how I could gain confidence and learn to love myself, and it never hit me until I became Miss Red Oak Latina," Kat shared. "I learned so much about myself, and I finally felt happy with who I was."

Kat said the experience helped her overcome her struggles with anxiety. "I had a lot of self-doubt and couldn't imagine walking on a stage competing with other beautiful women. But with the amazing support from my family, friends and pageant director, I was able to overcome that fear. The moment I took my first walk on stage, it felt liberating."

Next up for Kat is the Miss Texas USA pageant, where she is excited to represent her hometown of Glenn Heights, the Red Oak community, and her supporters at Life School Waxahachie, where she works as an

administrative assistant. "I have worked with lots of children who have come from broken homes and have felt so grateful to be a part of their lives. Even to this day, when one of them sees me, they get so excited, and that makes my heart happy."

Kat said the support of family and friends has allowed her to succeed, and she hopes to pay that forward. "I want to become an entrepreneur and create my own charity that helps support children and young adults in achieving their dream jobs," Kat shared. "My mom has always believed in me, but not everyone has that support. I think I can show people that being vulnerable and taking a chance toward new things can pay off."

For anyone considering trying their hand at pageantry, Kat suggests they go for it. "If you're looking for an eye-opening experience, where you learn about yourself, get to be a role model and make an impact on your community, I definitely recommend getting involved in a pageant," she relayed. "It's something I will never forget!" **NOW**

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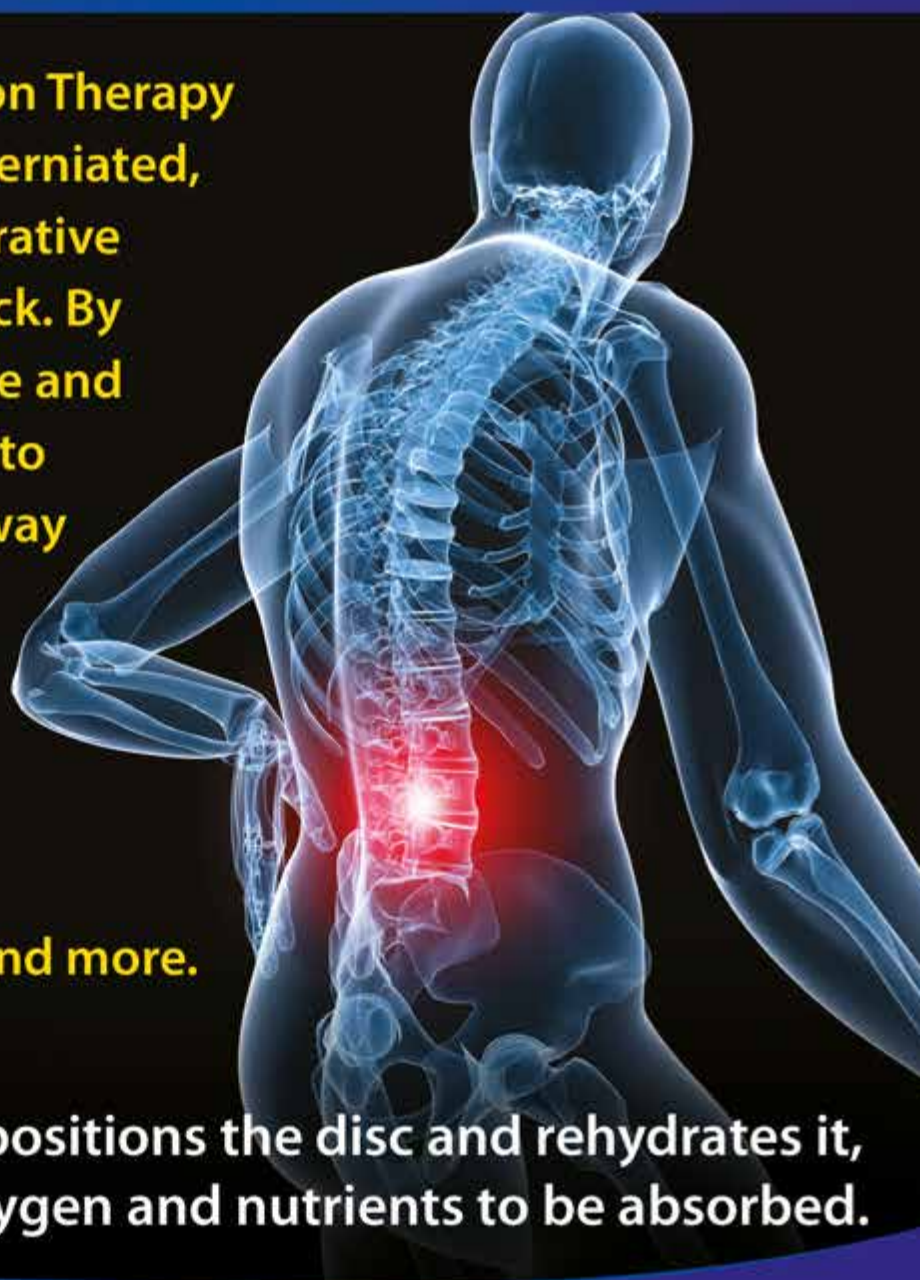
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— By Bill Smith

*Travel Interstate 40 east from Amarillo, and in just about 45 minutes, a tall beacon will appear on the south side of the highway. You have been driving along what has been known as “The Mother Road” — or the iconic Route 66. There are a lot of things to see along the way — some historical, some quirky and some inspiring. Without a doubt, The Cross at Groom falls into the inspiring category.*

Route 66 met the fate of becoming a decommissioned highway as recently as 1985, and the route was largely overlayed by Interstate 40 across the Texas Panhandle and beyond. Though many of the towns along the way have turnouts from the highway where you can still travel on the road with the Route 66 designation, a desire to reach destinations with the most expedience tends to make drivers bypass the two-lane routes through the small towns in favor of the interstate. Travel guides for the Route 66 trip still exist, and most of them will mention pulling off the highway at Groom.



The reason the cross stands out so prominently to the passing motorist is the notoriously flat terrain across this part of the Panhandle, as well as the magnificent height of the cross, upwards of 19 stories. Made of steel, the cross weighs 2.5 million pounds, took eight months to build and required the work of more than 100 welders. It was erected in 1995 and is visible for 20 miles.

As significant as the huge cross is, it is only the beginning of the attraction if you take the exit from the big highway. The formal name of the exhibition is The Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ Ministries. The official website has the mission statement, which reads in part: “Our mission is to serve people from all walks of life by creating an environment that is filled with peace, compassion and spiritual direction. We believe in cherishing and strengthening the institution of the family, which we feel is a vital part for establishing a culture that flourishes.”

The exhibit welcomes more than 1,000 visitors per day, and while that sounds like a lot, the parking area is large enough for a significant number of cars and can accommodate large RVs. The outside exhibits are spaced well apart, and the interior gift shop and exhibits are more than adequate for the traffic. The numerous bronze sculptures depict the stations of the cross — that is, the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ — and continue with an exhibit of the empty tomb, celebrating His resurrection. Each





station is accompanied by Scripture that explains the sculpture.

At the top of the steps that represent the climb up Golgotha's Hill are three crosses with bronzes representing the scene of the crucifixion. Another large, yet unfinished, sculpture represents the Last Supper.

The Cross at Groom is obviously more than a place to take a break from your drive down the highway. It's a place to pause — a place of spiritual reflection. The exhibits are extremely well done, creating an unforgettable destination. There is no cost to view the exhibit, and it is available for viewing 24 hours daily. **NOW**

#### Sources:

1. <https://www.audleytravel.com/us/usa/country-guides/route-66>.
2. <https://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/12568>.
3. <https://crossministries.net>.

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Leslie and Joe Tucker, owners of Papa Joes BBQ Pro Shop, mark their ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Red Oak Area Chamber of Commerce.

Zoomed In:  
Skylar McMahon

By Angel Morris

A 2023 Positive Coaching Alliance Coach of the Year nominee, Skylar McMahon appreciates youth sports. “My journey into coaching began after watching a mother teaching baseball to 4- and 5-year-old athletes at the YMCA,” he recalled. “Post-practice, I asked if she could use some assistance.”

A Red Oak resident, Skylar now manages the Rebel Baseball Club in Waxahachie. “The primary objective is preparing young talents to excel at the next level, equipping them with not only tools for high school-level competition but also fostering strategic thinking and mental toughness,” he noted. “Effective coaching is built on trust, active listening and a collaborative partnership. Integrating my experiences, education, positive mindset and core values, I strive to create an impactful coaching experience for those I have the privilege to work with.”



Eastridge Elementary student James Sanders celebrates academic gains at the Level Up with the Principals Party.



Girl Scout Troop No. 338 uses cookie proceeds to coordinate birthday boxes for North Ellis County Outreach’s delivery to local youth in need.



Lauri Sapp of Red Oak gets a 27th birthday surprise with signs from Deck the Lawn Waxahachie.





Desmond and Kelcie Davis of the Kelcie D. Davis Foundation participate in the Glenn Heights All Abilities Park groundbreaking.



The City of Red Oak recognizes its 2023 Employee of the Year nominees.



Netra Langston loads donations for Discipleship Ministries' fundraiser shoe drive.



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# NOW Magazines' Best of ... Italian Cuisine



Who doesn't love Italian food? It's all about family and flavor! Here is a small sampling of some of the many wonderful Italian recipes that we've printed in our magazines over the years. *Buon appetito!* **NOW**

## Magagnotti Spaghetti Sauce

*Provided by Alyssa Magagnotti Rose for the January 2018 issue of BurlesonNOW Magazine.*

**1 lb. ground chuck**  
**1 medium onion, chopped**  
**1 carrot, peeled and chopped**  
**2-3 garlic cloves, finely chopped or pressed through a garlic press**  
**2 Tbsp. tomato paste**  
**1 cup dry red wine**  
**1 28-oz. can Cento crushed tomatoes**  
**2 Tbsp. sugar**  
**1 Tbsp. Italian seasoning**  
**2 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar**  
**1 Tbsp. fresh parsley, chopped**  
**1 Tbsp. fresh basil, chopped**  
**1 fresh sprig of rosemary, whole**  
**Salt, to taste**  
**Pepper, to taste**

**1.** In a large Dutch oven or pot, brown the meat with the onions and carrots. Drain residual grease from the meat mixture.

**2.** Add the garlic and tomato paste. Cook for another 2 minutes over medium heat.  
**3.** Add the red wine; cook until the wine has reduced, about 3-4 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients; simmer on low for at least 20 minutes.  
**4.** This recipe will make enough for one 9x13-inch pan of lasagna or a pound of cooked pasta.

## Tortellini Soup

*Provided by Jolie Crews for the December 2017 issue of North Ellis Co.NOW Magazine.*

**3 garlic cloves, minced**  
**1 tsp. olive oil**  
**1 large can diced tomatoes**  
**1 can tomato sauce**  
**4 cups chicken stock**  
**1/2 tsp. dried oregano**  
**4 large fresh basil leaves**  
**1/2 tsp. dried basil**  
**1/2 block cream cheese**  
**1 bag frozen cheese tortellini**

**1 bundle fresh spinach leaves**  
**Browned ground beef, to taste (optional)**  
**Salt and pepper, to taste**

**1.** Lightly brown garlic in olive oil.  
**2.** Add tomatoes, tomato sauce, chicken stock and spices; add cream cheese.  
**3.** While cheese melts, prepare tortellini per package directions. Drain and add to sauce mixture. Add spinach and beef, if desired. Add salt and pepper to taste.

## Italian Cheese Bread

*Provided by Marsha Dameron for the April 2022 issue of CorsicanaNOW Magazine.*

**1/2 cup butter**  
**1/2 cup mayonnaise**  
**2 cups mozzarella cheese, grated**  
**6 green onions, chopped**  
**1 cup ripe olives**  
**1 tsp. garlic powder**  
**1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper**  
**French bread loaf, halved lengthwise**

**1.** In a bowl, blend the butter and mayonnaise; add the remaining ingredients except the bread. Spread the mixture onto the bread halves; piling it up high.



2. Bake at 350 F for 15-20 minutes until bubbly.

**Awesome Pepperoni Pizza**  
*Provided by Tracey Skrivanek for the May 2010 issue of EnnisNOW Magazine.*

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 pkg. dry yeast
- 1 Tbsp., plus 2 tsp. olive oil
- 1 cup lukewarm water
- 1/4 cup pizza sauce
- 12 oz. mozzarella cheese
- 1 3/4 oz. pepperoni slices
- 1/2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/8 tsp. black pepper

- 1. Preheat oven to 400 F. Lightly grease a 12x9-inch baking sheet.
- 2. Sift the flour and salt into a large bowl. Stir in the yeast. Make a well in the center and add olive oil and water. Mix until a soft dough forms. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead gently for 5 minutes.
- 3. Roll out the dough and rest into prepared baking sheet. Cover for 10 minutes at room temperature; bake for 5-7 minutes.
- 4. Remove the crust from the oven and spread pizza sauce on top, leaving a 3/4-inch border. Sprinkle with mozzarella and place pepperoni slices. Sprinkle with oregano and pepper. Drizzle with olive oil and bake until golden, 15-20 minutes.

**Picnic Pasta Salad**  
*Provided by Parker and Scarlett Burt for the September 2020 issue of MansfieldNOW Magazine.*

- 6 servings of your favorite Rotini pasta, cooked, drained and cooled
- 1/2 cup Italian breadcrumbs
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- Salt, to taste
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 Tbsp. chopped black olives
- 1/4 cup diced canned tomatoes (Do not drain juice.)

- 1. Carefully combine all ingredients; chill and enjoy.

To search for more great recipes from any of the 9 NOW Magazines publications, visit [www.nowmagazines.com](http://www.nowmagazines.com).



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## Martha B., Mansfield, TX

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