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MARCH 2025

## From Hawk to Panther

James Walker III  
transitions to the pros

Also inside:  
Scavenger Hunt

In the Kitchen With  
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## Tips to Prevent Deadly Poisoning Mistakes

Learn simple safety measures  
to help keep kids safe





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ON THE COVER



Red Oak High School graduate James Walker III credits local coaches with his advancement to the United Football League.

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# EDITOR'S NOTE



*Angel*

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*Gimme a break ...*

With a change of season on the horizon, thoughts turn to warmer weather and, if you're lucky, time off for spring break. Even if you're well beyond week-off-from-school age, the month of March can find us itching for a new experience. Days are getting longer, and hibernation is coming to an end. What next?

Whether you have days to fill with children enjoying a school vacation, or you're just wanting to take a little break yourself, here are some ideas to ponder. Why not kick off spring with a backyard party? Consider pitching a tent with the kids, enjoying a picnic and setting up an outdoor cinema. Or, for just the grown-ups, a first-of-the-year barbecue could precede outdoor movie night.

Pleasant temperatures may make you more inclined to take a hike or bike ride, but why not incorporate a scavenger hunt into these activities? Looking for clues toward a fun destination is something the young and the young at heart can enjoy. Have the hunt end at a local ice cream or coffee shop and pick up the scavenger winner's tab.

Getting out and about doesn't have to mean time in nature if that's not your thing. Dust off the winter cobwebs of your mind with a game night, museum visit or trip to your local library. If you haven't been to Red Oak's newest reading spot, you're missing out. Make it a priority this spring to take a break with a book. The library offers many other opportunities to enjoy during springtime and year-round.

*Break out!*

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# From HAWK to PANTHER

— By Angel Morris

*Never underestimate the power of a good coach. Red Oak High School graduate James Walker III credits two local coaches for putting him on the path toward a professional career in the United Football League. “My PE teacher, Coach Jay Johnson, and chemistry teacher, Coach Brett Haugh, both said I should give football a try in the second semester of my sophomore year, so I got my schedule switched to football,” James recalled.*

A lifelong Red Oak resident, James attended Wooden Elementary, Red Oak Intermediate, Red Oak Junior High and Red Oak High School, graduating in 2017. He played varsity football his junior and senior years. “My first start at defensive tackle my junior year is my favorite athletic memory from high school,” James shared.

James’s high school football stats include 18 starts and 2nd Team All-District. This performance led to playing at Navarro Junior College for two years, where he had 17 starts across the offensive line and helped win the 2019 SWJCAA Championship.

Then James transferred to Southeastern Oklahoma State University, where he started in all of the 15 games he played, earning 2021 First Team All Conference and Division 2 Football Honorable Mention All-Region. Playing in three games his senior year, he earned 2nd Team All-Conference and graduated in 2022 with a Bachelor of Science degree. “I’m particularly proud of getting my education paid for through football,” James noted.

Continuing his football career after college, James was selected to play offensive tackle for the UFL’s Michigan Panthers in 2023. “It’s been surreal. Getting to play football after high school was such a good experience, and getting to play after college is something I’m so grateful for,” James said.

With its spring football platform, the UFL features eight teams that begin a 10-game regular season March 28. The league is divided into two conferences, USFL and XFL, with the Panthers in the USFL. “Being able to form relationships with people in professional football and traveling all over the country to play a game ... these are incredible experiences,” James relayed.

Like many football players, James has experienced his share of obstacles. “For me, personally, injuries have been the biggest challenges I have had to overcome. Not so much physically but mentally,” James shared. “I’ve had an ACL tear in my right knee while at Navarro College and PCL tears in my left knee almost exactly a year apart my junior and senior years at Southeastern.

“Returning to play after overcoming injuries was always more mentally challenging than physically challenging,” James continued. “Getting back out there and having to second guess if you’re ready can cause even more issues on the field than not getting back on it at all.”







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James credits family with helping him persevere. "My mother and grandmother both have always supported me and been to every game since I started to play. Without them as well as the rest of my support system, I wouldn't be where I am today," he attributed.

In the off season, James works at A Oasis Pools and Outdoor Living as a pool technician. James enjoys cooking and playing video games "maybe a little too much," he joked.

While James hopes to play football as long as possible, the 25-year-old already has his sights set on life after sports, hoping to pay forward what the game has given him. "I would like to get into coaching to help kids get the opportunities I've gotten, get their education and keep playing football as long as they can," he said.

James encourages current students to enjoy the simple things about high school like he did: "Getting food with



friends after all the football games and attending the volleyball and basketball games my senior year are still great memories."

Beyond that, James offers the following advice. "You can do anything you put your mind to. Failure is part of success. It may sound cliché, but it all begins with controlling the controllable.

"If something bad or unexpected happens, do not let it ruin your plans, do everything in your power to overcome it," James continued. "When injuries in football happen, you make the best of it by doing everything possible to recover quicker. Same goes for anything in life." **NOW**



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The flags of six nations have flown over the state of Texas — France, Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States of America and the United States of America. The city of Nacogdoches, however, one of the oldest cities in the state, claims an additional three — the Magee-Gutierrez flag, which flew during the first attempt to establish a Texas republic (1812-1813); the Dr. James Long flag, which flew during an attempt to claim Texas as part of the Louisiana Purchase (1819-1821); and the Fredonia Rebellion flag, which flew during a 37-day rebellion with the goal of establishing a separate republic from Mexico called the Fredonia Republic (1826-1827).



2

The second-largest canyon in the United States is located in Texas. Palo Duro Canyon in the Texas Panhandle is approximately 120 miles long with an average 6-mile width. Only the Grand Canyon is larger. It's the state's largest park and hosts the annual drama, *Texas*. It has been home to many cultures during the canyon's 200 million years of geological time.



3

Texas boasts an annual birthday celebration in honor of Winnie-the-Pooh's friend, Eeyore, who believed his friends had forgotten his birthday. The birthday celebration was first held in Austin in 1963. Folks wear costumes, and the celebration is a fundraiser for nonprofit organizations.



4

The city of Clute, Texas, annually hosts The Great Texas Mosquito Festival. Willie-Man-Chew, honorary mosquito, presides over volunteer ambassadors who make up his "Swat Team."







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# TIPS TO PREVENT DEADLY POISONING MISTAKES

— By Sandra Walters

*National Poison Prevention Week is observed annually during the third full week of March. The dates for this year are March 16-22. This observance serves as a vital reminder of the importance of poison safety and prevention, aiming to raise awareness about the dangers of poisoning, particularly for young children, who are most at risk. The Aspirus Health website states, “According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, 92 percent of poisonings happen at home, and 43 percent of poisonings involve children under the age of 6. Poisoning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury death among children ages 1 to 19 years.” Fortunately, many of these emergencies are preventable with a few simple safety measures.*

One of the most effective ways to prevent poison exposure is by keeping hazardous substances out of children’s reach. Common household items such as cleaning supplies, medications, pesticides and cosmetics can pose significant risks. Keep items in their original containers. Never transfer chemicals or medications into unlabeled containers that could confuse children. Use child-resistant packaging. While not entirely childproof, these containers add an extra layer of protection. Store all toxic substances in high cabinets or locked drawers, and ensure that access is physically restricted.

Medications are one of the leading causes of unintentional poisoning in children. Even small doses of adult medications can be extremely harmful to young ones. Count every pill. Keep track of all medications to ensure none are missing. Avoid calling medicine “candy.” This might encourage children to seek out pills when unsupervised. Dispose of unused medicine properly by using drug take-back programs or follow FDA guidelines for safe disposal.

Cleaning products often contain harsh chemicals that can cause severe injuries if ingested, inhaled or spilled on skin. Read the labels and always follow instructions and warnings on cleaning product labels. Clean up immediately. After cleaning, ensure you securely store products, even during short breaks. Choose safer options by looking for non-toxic, eco-friendly alternatives to harsh cleaners when possible.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless gas that can cause poisoning and death. CO poisoning is a silent killer and a significant safety risk in homes. Install CO detectors. Place them near sleeping areas and fuel-burning appliances. Service appliances regularly, and ensure gas furnaces, water heaters and fireplaces are inspected annually by professionals. Never use generators or grills indoors. These devices produce CO and must be operated in well-ventilated outdoor areas.

Some household and garden plants are toxic to children if ingested. Popular plants such as lilies, philodendrons and poinsettias can pose risks. Know your plants by identifying all plants in your home and yard, and remove any that are poisonous. Educate older children. Teach kids not to eat any part of a plant unless an adult has confirmed it’s safe.

Food poisoning can occur when perishable items are not stored or handled correctly. Follow expiration dates. Discard expired food items, even if they appear fine. Refrigerate food promptly. Store perishable food items in the refrigerator within two hours of cooking. Separate raw and cooked food. Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meat away from ready-to-eat food.



Empowering children with knowledge can go a long way in preventing poisoning accidents. Explain what's off-limits, while teaching children not to eat or drink anything without permission. Use visual aids. Show them labels or symbols on hazardous products to recognize danger. Role-play safety scenarios to help kids understand what to do if they come across something suspicious.

Despite taking precautions, accidents can still happen. Acting quickly in the event of poisoning is critical. Save the number for The Poison Control Hotline, 1-800-222-1222. This is a 24/7 free resource for poisoning emergencies and prevention advice. The signs of poisoning include nausea, vomiting, confusion, difficulty breathing and burns or stains around the mouth. Call, don't guess! If you suspect poisoning, call the hotline immediately instead of trying home remedies or waiting for symptoms to worsen.

During National Poison Prevention Week, take the time to inspect your home for potential poisoning hazards, and implement these safety tips. By doing so, you can create a safer environment for your children and significantly reduce the risk of accidental poisoning. Remember, prevention is always better than cure, and your vigilance could save a life.

Constant adult supervision is one of the simplest ways to prevent poisoning accidents. Young children are naturally curious and may explore potentially dangerous substances when left alone, even for a few moments. Let's use this week as a reminder to make poison prevention a priority — not just for seven days but all year round. Your actions today could make all the difference in protecting your loved ones. **NOW**

Sources:

1. <https://www.aspirus.org/poisoning-prevention-substance-misuse#:text=According%20to%20the%20American%20Association,ages%201%20to%2019%20years.>
2. <https://www.poison.org/>
3. <https://www.texaschildrens.org/content/wellness/national-poison-prevention-week-keeping-our-children-out-harms-way>



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## Zoomed In: Alisa Russell Sykes

By Angel Morris

Ovilla Garden Club Officer Alisa Russell Sykes recently shared with the group the tools she uses in floral design. “At age 12, I worked with my family’s event and pageant business, behind the scenes with the staff and TV production,” she recalled.

Alisa’s official floral design began as owner of a flower shop in Atlanta, Georgia. “I was good at business, but I wasn’t great at floral design, so I enrolled in a community college to become certified in floral design.”

In 2011, Alisa worked on a float for the Rose Bowl parade, winning the Governor’s Award in her category. After relocating to Dallas, she became an event facilitator at the Dallas Arboretum. “I’ve lived in Ellis County for five years and joined the garden club to learn about gardening in this region,” Alisa noted. “Although I’ve retired from the floral business, I will always be a floral designer at heart.”



Veola Munoz tries her hand at fishing the community pond.



Zaida Meda-Mota with Impact Communities leads art activities at the Senior Citizen Center of Red Oak.



Glenn Heights Councilman Travis Bruton recognizes ROISD trustees during School Board Appreciation Month.



Owners Phillip Hughes and Michelle Benzanilla celebrate the opening of Zucchs restaurant with their staff at a Red Oak Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting.





Wooden Elementary School fifth-grader Sydney Mitchell receives recognition from School Board Trustee Michelle Porter after leading the pledge.



Owners of the new Brisket City restaurant recently participated in a ribbon cutting with the Red Oak Chamber of Commerce.



Schupmann Elementary Garden Club member Allen Gomez helps beautify the school.

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The Russo Carrot Cake

## Chocolate Chip Cookie Supreme

*Born from a pantry cleanout!*

3/4 cup pure cane sugar  
 3/4 cup brown sugar, packed  
 2 sticks butter  
 2 eggs  
 Dash of vanilla  
 2 1/4 cups flour  
 1/2 cup oatmeal (optional)  
 1 tsp. baking soda  
 1 tsp. salt  
 1 tsp. baking powder  
 1/2 cup milk chocolate chips  
 1/2 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips  
 1 cup semi-sweet chunks  
 3/4 cup toffee bits

1. Beat the sugars and butter until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating between each addition. Add the vanilla, and fluff some more.
2. Add the dry ingredients, mixing until barely combined. Add all chocolate chips and bits until just combined and all flour is incorporated.
3. Using a cookie scoop or a tablespoon, dollop large scoops of the dough onto a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake at 350 F for about 12 minutes or until just barely gold around the edges. *Note: Add any oddball ingredients that you love!*

## Classic Buttercream Frosting for Decorating

4 sticks butter  
 1 32-oz. bag powdered sugar  
 3 Tbsp. clear vanilla extract

1. Beat the butter until fluffy. Slowly add in the sugar; beat well.
2. Add the vanilla. Stop and scrape the sides to make sure all the butter and sugar is blended.
3. Beat again until fluffy. *Tip: Beat on low speed afterward for a few minutes to help get rid of some of the air in your icing.*

## OTTC Signature Chicken Salad

4 chicken breasts  
 2 heaping Tbsp. mayonnaise  
 Salt, to taste  
 Pepper, to taste  
 Sprinkle of garlic powder  
 2-3 sticks celery, finely chopped  
 Cranberries, to taste  
 Pecans, to taste  
 A few splashes heavy whipping cream  
 1 Tbsp. raw honey

1. Cook, cool and shred the chicken. Stir in

# CookingNOW IN THE KITCHEN WITH HEATHER MCCANN

— By Angel Morris



After graduating from Red Oak High School in 2007, Heather McCann's first job was at the Lovin' Oven Bakery. "I started out working the counter and washing dishes. The owner wanted me to decorate cakes, but I was left-handed, so no one really knew how to teach me. She had me work at it over and over until I got the hang of it!" Heather recalled. "I fell in love with decorating cakes with freehand designs all done in buttercream."

Once Heather started having children, she became a baker from home. "I've been doing my own thing now for close to 14 years, and I've done desserts and sandwich trays for people from their baby showers to double digit parties! Such a cool thing to see people that have stuck with me from the beginning, and I'm so thankful for my cake families!" **NOW**



the mayonnaise, salt, pepper and garlic. Add the celery, cranberries and pecans.

2. Add the whipping cream. Drizzle honey over the top and mix.

3. Serve on croissants or with crackers.

### The Russo Carrot Cake

*Tweaked from the recipe of dear lifetime friends!*

2 cups flour

2 tsp. baking soda

2 tsp. cinnamon

1/2 tsp. salt

3 eggs

2 cups sugar

3/4 cup oil

3/4 cup buttermilk, room temperature

2 tsp. vanilla

1 20-oz. can crushed pineapple, drained

2 cups carrots, finely grated

1 cup pecans, toasted

1. Sift the flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Beat in the eggs and sugar until fluffy.

2. Beat in the oil, buttermilk and vanilla.

3. Slowly add the pineapple, carrots and pecans; mix well.

4. Bake at 350 F for 45-50 minutes, checking that a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

5. Let cool before frosting with Cream Cheese Frosting.

### Cream Cheese Frosting

*Decorates 2 8-inch round layers.*

2 8-oz. blocks cream cheese

2 sticks butter

1 2-lb. bag powdered sugar

Dash of vanilla


Cinnamon, to taste (optional)

Pecans, chopped (optional)

1. Beat the cream cheese and butter. Add the sugar; beat well.

2. Add the vanilla to the cream cheese mixture; beat well. Add cinnamon and chopped pecans, if using.

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# Happy ST. PATRICK'S DAY MARCH

Some events may have been cancelled or rescheduled while we were at press.  
Check with individual organizations or your city or Chamber websites to verify dates and times.

3/1

## Book Sale:

Books, movies, music and more for all ages from many genres. Friends of the Library fundraiser. 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Red Oak Library, 101 S. Live Oak.

## Red Oak Lions Club

### Charity Bowling:

Proceeds allow Lions to continue service projects in the community. \$35 per person includes shoes. \$1 raffle tickets sold on site. 1:00 p.m., Hilltop Lanes, 2010 U.S.-287 Business, Waxahachie. To sign up, donate or for more information, contact Terrance Suber at (214) 715-9323.

3/5

## Moms Group:

Community and encouragement for moms. Breakfast provided. 9:00-11:00 a.m., The Oaks Church, 777 S. I-35.

3/10

## Spring Break Movies:

Free showing of *The Wild Robot* and drinks and snacks while they last. 10:00 a.m., Red Oak Government Center Community Room, 101 S. Live Oak.

3/12

## Spring Break Movies:

Free showing of *Despicable Me 4* and drinks and snacks while

they last. 10:00 a.m., Red Oak Government Center Community Room, 101 S. Live Oak.

3/26

## Chamber Luncheon:

Monthly guest speaker and lunch included. Members who RSVP: \$20; Non-Members/Non-RSVP: \$25. Guests have a 10-second window to introduce themselves at the end of the program and are welcome to bring business cards, publications, etc. for sharing. Noon-1:00 p.m., Red Oak Municipal Building, 200 Lakeview Pkwy. RSVP to (972) 617-0906.

4/12

## Relay for Life:

Join us for this Mardi Gras-themed time to celebrate, remember and fight back!

4:00 p.m.-midnight, Veterans Memorial Park, 2301 Ennis Pkwy., Ennis.

## Third Saturdays

### Mobile Food Pantry:

Please remain in your car. Food will be brought to you. 10:00 a.m.-noon, Red Oak Discipleship Ministries, 507 I-35 E. South. To volunteer, email [communityoutreach@dmnc.org](mailto:communityoutreach@dmnc.org).

Submissions are welcome and published as space allows. Send your current event details to [angel.morris@nowmagazines.com](mailto:angel.morris@nowmagazines.com).



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