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Creative Leap

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North Ellis Co. NOW Scavenger Hunt



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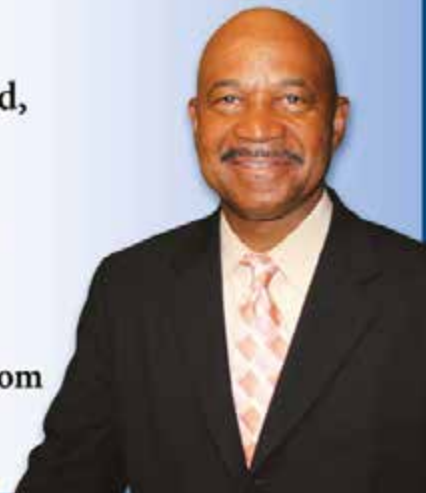
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Monday, April 8
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**Wednesday,
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Spring Dates

- Apr. 1 – Easter Holiday (Observed)*
- Apr. 3 – Coffee Talk*
- Apr. 9 – Pre-K Roundup*
- Apr. 11 – North Texas Food Pantry*
- Apr. 15 – ROISD School Board Meeting*
- Apr. 19 – District Holiday*
- Apr. 25 – Parent, Partner, and Volunteer Reception*
- Apr. 29 – Parent University: Cybersecurity*
- May 1 – Coffee Talk*
- May 9 – North Texas Food Pantry*
- May 13 – ROISD School Board Meeting*
- May 22 – Last Day of School*
- May 29 – ROHS Graduation*

Details at RedOakISD.org

ON THE COVER



Once a local pastor, Casey Lewis now focuses on his creative passions.

Photo by
Shane Kirkpatrick.

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General Manager, Rick Hensley*

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*Managing Editor, Becky Walker
North Ellis County Editor, Angel Morris
Office Assistant, Kristin Bato
Writer, Emma McKay
Editors/Proofreaders, Rachel Rich
Virginia Riddle*

GRAPHICS AND DESIGN

*Creative Director, Chris McCalla
Artists, Kristin Bato . Martha Macias
Anthony Sarmienta . Jennifer Spence*

PHOTOGRAPHY

*Photography Director, Chris McCalla
Photographer, Shane Kirkpatrick*

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Angel

Angel Morris
North Ellis Co. NOW Editor
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Dig in!

If dirt therapy is your thing, you probably don't wait until April to work in the yard. Nevertheless, this month is typically a popular one for sprucing lawns as we gear up for more time outdoors. Garden lovers know the joy of time spent pruning and preening. But did you know playing in the dirt is actually good for you ... and maybe even better for kids? An article published by Northwestern University highlights some of the ways time in the yard might work wonders for all ages. Citing a study by two anthropologists, the article explains how germ exposure early in life leads to lower levels of inflammation as we age.

The researchers built on prior studies that indicated being exposed to certain germs and parasites as a young child reduced the likelihood of allergies later in life. The NU article, among many others, suggests immune systems trained to regulate inflammation can better ward off illness — from cardiovascular diseases to dementia, certain cancers, even depression — and the exposure to non-infectious microbes found in dirt provides this training.

So, instead of warning kids away from getting dirty, unearthing bugs and making mud pies may be just what the doctor ordered. Let little hands help dig holes for planting flowers this spring. Encourage rock and leaf collections. Start a family composting project. Perhaps you can even up the "Five-second Rule" to 10 seconds and be a little slower with the Handiwipes? Just as beneficial as getting one's hands dirty is, of course, the time spent outdoors together.

Hit the dirt!

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Creative LEAP

— By Angel Morris

For pastor-turned-creative artist Casey Lewis, leaps of faith led to living his passion through photography and web design. “I became interested in photography as a college freshman when I borrowed an SLR camera. This was the first time I was able to take pictures other than with a ‘point and shoot.’ That opened up a lot of creative freedom,” Casey recalled.

“Everywhere I went, I would bring a camera,” Casey continued. “It was all film, so you couldn’t see the image immediately. You just hoped you captured what you wanted.”

After earning his Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Georgia, Casey began working as a staffing agency recruiter. The company transferred him to Dallas, where he managed accounts with Fortune 500 companies.

At this time, Casey purchased his first Digital SLR Canon Rebel. “Not the most pro camera, but it helped me learn how to shoot in manual mode, as well as what lens to select,” Casey noted. “Not limited by film, I could take as many pictures as

I wanted to see what worked.”

Casey grew as a photographer — primarily through YouTube videos, paid courses and practice — while his professional interests began changing. “Working in sales was exciting, but I felt called to something different and began attending seminary,” he explained.

Casey attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for a Master of Divinity and began ministering at Sycamore Baptist Church in Decatur. He served as senior pastor eight years, wrapping up his Doctor of Ministry in Expository Preaching while at SBTS, and as he moved into the senior pastor role at Red Oak’s Eastridge Baptist Church where he served for almost three years. “Creative arts remained a passion of mine, and it was one of the



ways I served the churches," Casey shared. "Ultimately, I felt called to move into the field full time."

As a result, two businesses were born: Casey Lewis Photography, offering professional photography for individuals, businesses and families and CL Creative, providing a suite of web design, development and marketing services. "I like shooting with natural light, but I do a lot of portrait photography with flash. I really like using big diffused umbrellas and directional light to produce images that are soft and flattering, yet interesting," he described.

Casey's interest in web design began when he started in ministry and discovered many small churches were lacking in online presence. "Wanting to



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help the churches I pastored grow, I began working on their website, social media and anything else that people saw either online or in person.”

Ultimately, Casey’s passion for helping others showcase their own business turned into his business. But he also simply enjoys helping others tap into their creative side. “I like making videos. Mainly tutorial type videos that help others understand web design and web development,” Casey described. “I started making videos during COVID to keep in touch with my congregation. Now I have my own YouTube channel where I teach people web design and development, one video at a time.”

Casey has a number of pointers for would-be photographers, too. “The camera you have won’t make you a better or worse photographer, so start with your phone and take photos everywhere you go. Spend your time discovering how composition and light impact your image,” he stated. “At

some point, if you want to be a professional photographer, you’ll need to get a pro-level camera. Then you need to learn to shoot in manual mode. You will have greater control and more creative freedom than if you allow the camera to choose settings for you. And you will really begin to learn how to take a good photograph in any situation.”

For those interested in web design, Casey suggests first learning the fundamental technologies and languages such as HTML, CSS and JavaScript. Understanding Responsive Design, User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) Design are next steps. Studying search engine optimization and staying on top of design trends are also key. “If you are eager to get started building your own websites, look into Webflow. With a bit of learning, you’ll be able to develop the website you designed,” he suggested. “Spend time learning Figma. It is the standard for design. It is easy and intuitive to pick up.”

Casey credits his father — who began his own home renovation and rental business — for his entrepreneurial spirit. “He used skills he learned working in maintenance by day, took a seminar on buying houses with no money down, and went out and did it without any formal training or financial backers,” Casey remarked. “That shows you can accomplish something for yourself and family if you are willing to put in the work and take the leap to begin.”

Casey’s family — wife, Jennifer, and sons, Camden and Bryson — encourage him to believe in himself. “I don’t have formal education in web design and development, nor do I have it in photography, but I have a desire to learn and a willingness to take a chance.” **NOW**

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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

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

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

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Soarin' OVER TEXAS

— By Emma McKay

As the frost begins to melt and flowers bloom once again, humans and animals alike emerge from their shelters to bask in the warmth of the sun. After a long, harsh winter, spring brings about beautiful things to remind us that life is resilient. One of the joys that the April winds carry is the return of the Monarch butterfly.

Like birds, Monarchs migrate south to survive the winter months. These fragile creatures will spend months fluttering through the trees of Central Mexico, until eventually making the journey back north — a journey that only their great-grandchildren will see the conclusion of.

At the beginning of March, Monarchs begin their flight to Texas, where they find a suitable milkweed plant on which to lay the eggs of the first generation of offspring. As the overwintered Monarchs' flights end, the first generation continues the expedition to the Midwest and Northeastern states, spending their two to six weeks of life repopulating old breeding grounds. During the summer months, the second and third generations continue this cycle of growing, flying, breeding and dying. By August, the fourth and final generation of this months-long flight will embark on its southward journey.

Whereas its predecessors only lived a handful of weeks, so they might reproduce the next generations, the fourth generation goes into a reproductive diapause, meaning they will not mature and reproduce until the spring. Due to the energy this lack of breeding conserves and the cool overwintering climate slowing its metabolism, the fourth generation can live up to nine months, allowing the butterflies to see the next spring and begin the journey all over again.

Despite having never known their next of kin, Monarchs will take the same flight paths through the East Coast and the Midwest down through Texas and into central America. After years of research on the migratory patterns of the Monarch, biologists attribute this navigation instinct to the utilization of the sun and the Earth's magnetic field. By using both the sun as a compass and their own internal magnetic compasses, Monarchs can find their way in just about any weather. However, one innate habit of Monarchs stumps biologists to this day. Throughout their journey, they will roost in the same exact trees their ancestors did in previous years.

While the nectar of flowers is a great way to attract just about any sort of butterfly, if you are hoping to lure Monarchs into your garden this spring, be sure to plant lots of *asclepias*, otherwise known as milkweed. Milkweeds are poisonous plants, which contain cardiac glycosides.



Monarchs prefer to lay their eggs on the leaves of these plants. When the larvae ingest milkweed, the toxins will linger inside of them as they grow, making them poisonous and therefore protected against predators.

Antelope-horns milkweed (*asclepias asperula*) is a hardy plant that grows best in soils that allow drainage. Native to Texas, this species of milkweed can weather dry seasons gracefully, provided the occasional watering. Antelope-horns milkweed requires direct sunlight, so it might reach its full 2-foot height. This species of milkweed blooms from March to November, allowing passing Monarchs to drink its nectar when stopping to lay eggs. Despite its Texas-strong resilience, replanting already-grown antelope-horns can be tricky due to their brittle roots. For the best results, grow this type of milkweed from seeds.

Beloved by many Monarch enthusiasts, green milkweed (*asclepias viridis*), another Texas native, thrives in similar sunlight, varied soil and low-watering conditions to those preferred by its cousin, the antelope-horns milkweed. Unlike antelope-horns milkweed, green milkweed can reach up to 3 feet in height. It also sports larger leaves than other species of milkweed, gifting young caterpillars a feast as they grow.

If you neither have the space nor green thumb to maintain a butterfly garden, there is another way to attract this regal insect. Butterflies love the juice from old fruits. Place scraps of fruit — melon rinds,



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strawberry tops, apple cores, spoiled peaches, etc. — outside, and watch as butterflies flock to your backyard.

Whether you plan on spotting Monarchs at a public park or attracting them to your own backyard, take a moment to enjoy their presence. Although their flights are fleeting, your time spent with them doesn't have to be. **NOW**

Sources:

1. Ajilvsgi, G. (2013). *Butterfly Gardening for Texas*. Texas A&M University Press.
2. Maeckle, M. (2013, April 25). *Got Milkweed? Updated Plant Guide for Central and South Texas*. Texas Butterfly Ranch. <https://texasbutterflyranch.com/2013/04/25/got-milkweed-updated-plant-guide-for-central-and-south-texas/>.
3. Migration. *Monarch Joint Adventure*. <https://monarchjointventure.org/monarch-biology/monarch-migration>.
4. *Monarch Butterfly Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*. U.S. Forest Service. https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/pollinators/Monarch_Butterfly/faqs.shtml#:~:text=Monarch%20butterflies%20typically%20live%20from,to%208%20to%209%20months.

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Zoomed In: Carol Harris

By Angel Morris

As a Leap Year baby, Carol Harris recently turned 80 on her 20th birthday. "I've always loved my birthday being February 29. It helped people remember it," Carol admitted.

A 41-year Ovilla resident, Carol met her husband, Nick, in 1965. "I've loved being a pastor's wife for 58 years," she shared. "I also love my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, my cats and dog, and I'm crazy about the Texas Rangers!"

Carol stays young through activity. "I enjoy reading, movies and good discussions on theology, politics, history and genealogy," she stated. "And we've done a lot of traveling: Israel twice, Hawaii, Jamaica. And my favorite was Great Britain's England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. I'm an extrovert and don't believe in strangers ... just friends we haven't met yet!"



Victoria Cowper, Patrick Souter and Jerry Cozby volunteer at the free pet vaccine clinic hosted by Ellis County Sheriff's Office and SPCA of Texas.



Brie Cooper gets into the spirit of Dr. Seuss's birthday bash at the Red Oak Public Library.



Chris Sybank shows his catch of the day from Pearson Park in Red Oak.



Community leaders break ground on the Glenn Heights All Abilities Park.



Friends, Rhett and Coye, earn trophies in the Red Oak Parks and Recreation Department Catch-a-Trout event.



ROHS Color Guard Captain Axel Briseno and Lieutenant Kimaria Newton accept the team's second place award at the NTCA Winter Guard Competition.



Taichi Fukumura, conductor of the FWSO, introduces Ellis County fifth-graders to a program on *The Women of Texas*.



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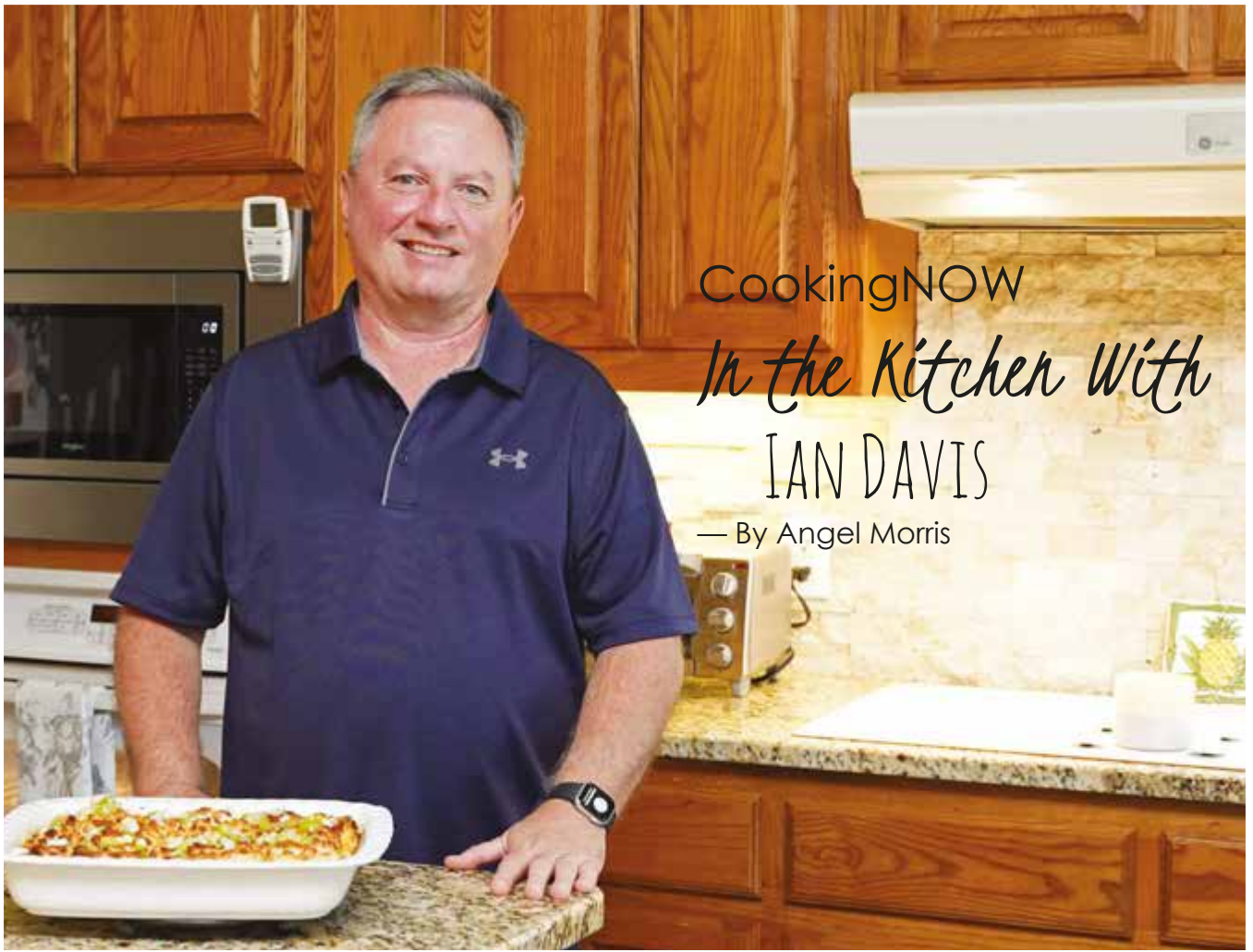
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MAGAZINES



CookingNOW In the Kitchen With IAN DAVIS

— By Angel Morris

When Ian Davis was 5 years old, he told his parents he wanted to be a pizza maker. “I have always loved to cook,” he shared. “When I was in college at the University of Houston, my student organization — Par Excellence — and a local chef, prepared a luncheon for the Queen of England.”

The 22-year Red Oak resident enjoys spending free time with family, traveling and serving as a Lifetime PTA Member. He’s also a Dallas Scottish Rite and DeSoto Masonic Lodge member.

April is the perfect month for preparing Ian’s favorite dish one last time before summer. “Breakfast Pot Pie is so easy and always tastes great for any meal — breakfast, lunch or dinner.” **NOW**

Breakfast Pot Pie

1 Tbsp. butter
1/2 large yellow onion
2 cups frozen hash brown potatoes
1 cup sliced mushrooms
1/2 lb. breakfast sausage, cooked and crumbled
12 eggs, scrambled and cooked
1/2 cup pickled jalapeños, chopped
1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
2 cups prepared Pioneer Peppered Gravy
2 cups Pioneer Baking Mix
3/4 cup milk

1/4 lb. cooked bacon, chopped
6 green onions, white and light green parts, thinly sliced

1. Heat the butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat.
2. Mix together the onions, potatoes and mushrooms; add them to the pan. Heat on medium for 10 minutes. Shake the pan occasionally to prevent burning.
3. Preheat the oven to 450 F. Grease a 9x13-inch pan. Mix together the hash brown mixture, sausage, eggs, jalapeños, cheese and gravy. Add the mixture to the pan.

4. Mix together the Pioneer Baking Mix, milk and bacon. Crumble the mixture loosely over the top of the ingredients in the pan.

5. Bake 25-30 minutes, or until the top is nicely browned and the biscuit mixture is baked all the way through.

6. Top with sliced green onions; serve immediately.

Hatch Chile Enchiladas

2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken tenders
1/2 Tbsp. salt
2 cups Pioneer Roasted Chicken Gravy Mix
1/2 cup cool water
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbsp. olive oil
1/2 cup (4 oz.) Hatch green chiles, diced
1/4 cup cilantro, chopped (optional)
8 oz. cream cheese
4 oz. sour cream
12 corn or flour tortillas
1 lb. Jack cheese, shredded (divided use)

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Place the chicken tenders in a large pot; cover with just enough water to submerge all of the chicken. Add the salt; bring to a

boil. Reduce heat to simmer.

3. Simmer 30 minutes; partially drain, reserving 1 1/2 cups of the cooking liquid.
4. Prepare the gravy mix, using 1 1/2 cups of reserved chicken cooking liquid; bring to a boil. Then use 1/2 cup cool water (per package instructions to make slurry).
5. Let the chicken cool slightly; shred by hand. Set aside in the refrigerator.
6. Sauté the garlic in the olive oil; add the chiles to prevent the garlic from burning. Add this to the gravy with a whisk. Simmer 5 minutes; remove from heat. Whisk in the cilantro, cream cheese and sour cream.
7. Spread one large spoonful of the sauce on the bottom of a 13x9-inch casserole dish; set aside.
8. Prepare the tortillas by warming on a griddle or in the microwave.
9. In a large bowl, mix the cooled shredded chicken and half of the shredded cheese to combine.
10. Fill the tortillas with about 1/4 cup of the chicken and cheese mixture. Roll the tortillas; place them seam side down into the dish.
11. Spread enough of the sauce on top of the tortillas to cover. Then, spread the remaining shredded cheese on top of the sauce.
12. Bake 10 minutes, or until the cheese is lightly browned on top. Serve with the remaining sauce.

Instant Pot Sweet and Sour Pork

Great for meal prep.

- 1 pkg. Pioneer Roasted Pork Gravy Mix
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1/3 cup white vinegar
- 3 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 3 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 tsp. ginger, ground
- 1 lb. boneless pork chops, cubed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced
- 1 8-oz. can pineapple chunks, drained

1. In a large bowl, whisk the gravy mix, water, light brown sugar, white vinegar, soy sauce, tomato paste, garlic and ground ginger. Pour into the Instant Pot.
2. Add the pork, onions, bell peppers and pineapple chunks into the sauce mixture; stir.
3. Pressure cook on high for 10 minutes.

To search for more great recipes from any of the 9 NOW Magazines publications, visit www.nowmagazines.com.



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"From the front staff, Alexis and Janet were both very nice and assisted me with the forms. Dr. Tomi was amazing. She took her time and listened to my concerns. I didn't feel rushed at all. I can feel the comforting spirit that permeates the whole office!! I am so excited to continue my health journey." - Sharon

"This was my first visit to see Dr. Peters, and she was amazing. She was attentive, patient, a good listener and wanted to give top notch overall care. Her staff was friendly and professional. I just found my new PCP doctor! I highly recommend her." - Leah

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Hello, Spring

APRIL

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.

4/6

Wine, Arts Craft & Brew Festival:

Midlothian Chamber of Commerce festival. 2:00-8:00 p.m., downtown Midlothian. Learn more at: <https://www.midlothianchamber.org/wine-arts--craft-brew-fest.html>.

4/6-4/8

Hachie Eclipse of the Heart:

Waxahachie Solar Eclipse 2024 Weekend. Join us for a 3-day weekend filled with science, live music, activities for the family, food trucks and fun! Railyard Park, 455 S. College St., Waxahachie.

4/13

Robotics Workshop:

Google hosts a free STEM robot-building program for sixth- through 10th-graders. Snacks provided. 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., The MILE, 711 W. Ave. I, Midlothian. To register, visit <https://qrco.de/benkVH>.

4/20

Touch-A-Truck:

Free event for kids of all ages supported by the Red Oak Parks Department, Public Works Department, Fire Department, Police Department and Red Oak Public Library. Representatives from each department will be available to

answer questions and show off their vehicles. 9:00-11:00 a.m., Red Oak Municipal Center, 200 Lakeview Pkwy.

4/26

Red Oak Chamber Classic:

Benefiting the Chamber Scholarship Program for local seniors, this is not your ordinary day of golf. Have you ever shot a golf ball cannon? Teed off with a marshmallow? Prizes, raffle and silent auction, as well. Registration, breakfast and warm-up: 7:00 a.m.; event: 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., Country View Golf Club, 240 W. Belt Line Rd., Lancaster. Learn more at <https://>

business.redoakareachamber.org/events/details/red-oak-chamber-classic-5229.

4/27

Bunco Fundraiser:

Red Oak Friends of the Library host bunco, snacks, raffles and prizes to benefit the library and its programs. \$20 tickets must be purchased in advance; space is limited. 2:00 p.m. (doors open at 1:30 p.m.), Community Room, 101 Live Oak St. Contact the library at (469) 218-1230 for more details.

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



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