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MAY 2024



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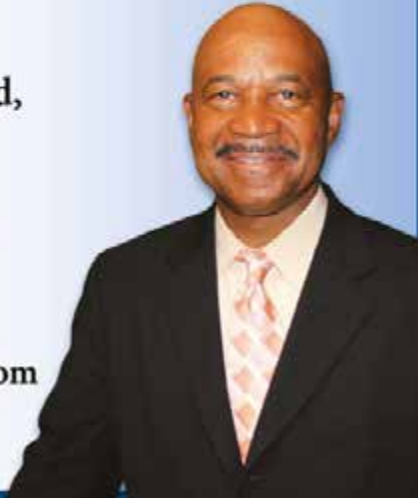
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ON THE COVER



An unexpected life challenge turned to triumph for Eastridge Elementary Librarian Cassie Brand.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Angel

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May is for mothers!

Whether you're a new mom, a veteran mom, a mom-to-be, the office mom or someone who is a mom to everyone around you, this is your month! Celebrated the second Sunday in May, Mother's Day has been a national holiday for 110 years. The first Mother's Day is said to have been celebrated several years earlier, when activist Anna Jarvis held a memorial service honoring her own mother, who had always wanted to found such a holiday. Ironically, Jarvis would later denounce the day because of its increasing commercialization. Nevertheless, the holiday continues, providing an opportunity to honor motherhood in any number of ways.

While cards and flowers are the norm, it's nice to consider what mom prefers. The foodie mom might appreciate breakfast in bed or being treated to brunch. Purchase a gift card to her favorite restaurant or a certificate for a cooking experience. A budget-friendly idea is to cook a favorite family recipe with you taking the lead. The outdoorsy mom might like you to join her for a hike through a local nature preserve, or just a walk in the neighborhood followed by a picnic at the park. Take crafty mom to something like a paint lesson or ceramics class where you can make a keepsake together.

Many moms would enjoy a day of self-care, whether that's at a spa or at home with gifts like candles and lotions. A subscription to a yoga app or just a very long nap could help mom feel rejuvenated. For those whose moms have passed, doing something they would have enjoyed is a wonderful tribute. However you decide to honor mom, the most important gesture is simply to remember.

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From Roadblocks to Reading

— By Angel Morris

Roadblocks and reading have made Cassie Brand who she is today. The third-year Library Media Specialist at Eastridge Elementary initially earned an associate degree in general studies. “I had no idea what I wanted to do, so I dabbled in fine arts, computer graphics and education classes. After graduating from Navarro College, I felt called to continue my education to become a teacher.”

With a bachelor’s from Texas A&M University-Commerce, Cassie went on to teach for 10 years, primarily in first grade. An unexpected divorce, however, became an opportunity to change direction. “It was an opportunity to re-invent myself, but I had to figure out what I really wanted to do,” Cassie recalled.

Cassie’s love of books was the answer. “I’ve watched students lose their love for reading over the years and wanted to bring back the enjoyment,” Cassie noted. “With a lot of reflection, I was moved to become a librarian.”

Raising two children under age 2, working full time and running a side business as a travel agent did not leave Cassie much free time. “What was I thinking? My life was already chaotic, but I was determined to better my life for myself and my kids.”

Ultimately, Cassie earned a master’s degree in library science and technology with a 3.9 GPA, graduating in front of her parents and children. With library certification in hand, she applied for the Eastridge librarian role. “I put all my eggs in this one basket because it was the only position close to my hometown,” she admitted. “When I got the call back, I was blown away. All my hard work paid off.”

Cassie enthusiastically began to incorporate creative ideas into the library. “The sky was the limit, and I took full advantage of that. I enjoyed hiding golden tickets in books one March, which students could turn in for prizes,” she described. “I put books in brown paper sacks with a giant question mark to get kids to read things they wouldn’t normally.

“Dr. Seuss Day was when we read *Green Eggs and Ham* and hid green plastic eggs around the school to turn in for prizes. Emojis were a hit when staff and students got to rate books with emoji face stickers,” Cassie recalled.



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“Any way I can get students to look into the library and get excited is my goal. I even created a Walk of Fame display case with a cutout of myself to promote award-winning books for our school’s theme this year. I thrive on the excitement students get when they see what shenanigans I’m up to.”

Cassie’s favorite activity was throwing a stuffed animal sleepover. “I was nervous about how it was going to go, but once we opened the school up for reading night, there was a line out the door to get in,” Cassie remembered. “I enjoyed spending time with their beloved stuffed animals. Too bad I ‘fell asleep,’ and the stuffed animals got

loose and took photos of themselves around the school!”

Cassie recalled libraries of her childhood not being nearly as exciting. “Nowadays, we have the opportunity to let students use their creativity and challenge them with technology and thought-provoking games all the while enticing them to read,” she explained. “In my library, I have makerspaces where students can play classic games or STEM games, a LEGO wall, Osmo and electronic exploration centers. Students can create, explore and socialize. It’s the best 30-minute escape for students, and I get to feel like the cool aunt.”

With that reputation, Cassie is able to introduce students to her favorite books. “I love several authors, but especially Jory John’s *The Food Group*, Aaron Blabey’s *Pig the Pub* and Ryan T. Higgins’ *Mother Bruce* series for picture books,” Cassie listed. “These are humorous, but also teach a life skill that makes a great conversation starter with kids. Even the oldest student loves a good read-aloud using my silly voices.”

When Cassie started at Eastridge, she and its new principal wanted to begin

presenting morning announcements. “With the assistance of the technology team and lots of troubleshooting, we got off the ground. I’ve fostered a broadcasting crew filled with fifth-graders that train, organize and run the announcements, and we feature all the students who want to participate on the morning broadcast. It’s fun watching students get out of their comfort zone to do something brave,” she admitted.

Being brave is exactly what landed Cassie in her current role, where her next goal is to bring in an author to discuss their work and share tips on becoming a writer with students. “I would also like to write a book of my own someday,” she admitted. “I would love seeing children reading something I created.”

In the meantime, the recently remarried librarian enjoys spending time with her husband, Brandon, and their “Brandy bunch” of five children. “I give them at least one book at Christmas. I guess it’s the librarian in me,” Cassie shared. “It’s also important for your children to see you reading books yourself. It shows that reading is enjoyable for all ages!” **NOW**



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The City of Red Oak employees, Iliana Vigil, Jeanluca Solís, RJ Nelson and Antonio Hernandez, prepare for the total solar eclipse.

Zoomed In: Kaytlynn Maddox

By Angel Morris

Getting chickens for her birthday is teaching Kaytlynn Maddox many lessons. “She helps with everything a 6-year-old possibly can when it comes to the chickens,” dad, Jeffrey, stated. “She comes home from school and visits with the chickens and our ducks. She collects the eggs and is beginning to sell them to earn her own money.”

At a table outside Red Oak’s Cut ‘N’ Up Barbershop, Kaytlynn has discovered the difference in the value of coins and bills. “She is just learning to make change if she needs to. And she is definitely learning how to save up for things that she wants,” mom, Kayla, shared. “When she spends those coins, she realizes how much work it took, and it makes her really appreciate things that much more.”



Delaney Simpson locates a Chick-Fil-A prize egg hidden at Red Oak Health and Rehabilitation Center.



Volunteers celebrate a successful rummage sale hosted on behalf of the Red Oak Senior Center to fund activities and outings.



A participant in the Education and Training program of Life High School Waxahachie, Daizjia Bluitt assists Eliana Cuellar, a Life School Red Oak student.



Mitch Brijil, with Qarbon Aerospace, speaks to guests at the North Ellis County Business EXPO, hosted by the Red Oak Area Chamber.



Sisters Tammy Mabra and Jennifer Mabra-Llarena, co-founders and chocolatiers of Good Golly Chocolate, showcase their treats.

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CookingNOW In the Kitchen With

SINDY GARCIA

— By Angel Morris



Sindy Garcia appreciates Red Oak's small-town feeling and quality schools for her sons because family is important to her. That's also why she enjoys cooking. "My favorite cooking memory is my family's annual tamale cooking day. Every year, we pick one day when my grandma, mom and sisters get together and make as many tamales as we can for our family and loved ones," Sindy noted. "We laugh, cry, give advice and most importantly, eat. I love every second of it!"

Mexican meals are a comfort to Sindy. "I enjoy finding new recipes and putting my own spin on them for my liking," she explained. "Cooking really is a great passion of mine, and I love the joy it brings to people trying my dishes." **NOW**

Picadillo

- 1 lb. ground beef**
- 1/4 cup onions, diced**
- 1/2 green bell pepper, diced**
- 2 potatoes, diced**
- 2 Roma tomatoes, diced**
- 1 Tbsp. chicken bouillon**
- 1 Tbsp. garlic**
- 1 tsp. salt**
- 1 8-oz. can tomato sauce**
- 2 cups water**

1. In a skillet, brown the ground meat until fully cooked. Add the onions and bell peppers; cook for about 5 minutes.

2. Add the potatoes, tomatoes, spices, tomato sauce and water. Simmer on medium heat for about 15-20 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender.

Steak Quesadillas

- 1 lb. flank or skirt steak**
- 2 tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 tsp. onion powder**
- 1 tsp. black pepper**
- 1/2 tsp. ground cumin**
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder**
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil (divided use)**
- 1 medium onion, sliced**
- 2 1/2 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded**

- 2 1/2 cups Monterey Jack cheese, shredded**
- 10 medium flour tortillas**
- Pinch of salt**
- Salsa, to taste**
- Guacamole, to taste**
- Sour cream, to taste**

- Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. While heating, pat the steak dry on both sides with paper towels.
- In a small bowl, combine the salt, onion powder, pepper, cumin and garlic powder. Sprinkle the seasoning evenly over both sides of the steak.
- Add 1 1/2 Tbsp. olive oil to the skillet; add the steak. Cook each side about 6 minutes. Remove from the skillet; transfer to rest, covered, on a cutting board.
- Add the remaining oil to the skillet. Add the onions; cook, stirring occasionally, for about 8 minutes, until softened. Transfer the onions to a bowl; carefully wipe the inside of the skillet with paper towels until clean. Set aside.
- Uncover the steak; slice it against the grain at an angle into thin slices or bite-size chunks. In a medium bowl, combine the cheeses.
- Assemble the quesadillas by adding 1/2 cup cheese to the bottom of one tortilla, followed by some steak, onions

and more cheese. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt; top with one more tortilla.

7. Place the skillet over medium heat. Using a spatula, carefully transfer the quesadilla to the skillet. Cook 1-2 minutes, or until the bottom of the quesadilla is golden brown. Quickly flip; cook another 1-2 minutes until golden brown and the cheese has fully melted.

8. Assemble and cook the remaining quesadillas. Serve immediately as is or cut the quesadillas into fourths. Serve with salsa, guacamole and sour cream.

Carne Guisada

1 lb. stew meat
1/2 onion, diced
1 8-oz. can tomato sauce
1 Tbsp. cumin
1 tsp. salt
1/2 Tbsp. garlic
1 tsp. pepper
2 Tbsp. flour
3 cups water
1 Tbsp. chicken bouillon

1. In a pot, brown the stew meat and onions. Add the tomato sauce, cumin, salt, garlic and pepper. Add the flour; mix.
2. Add the water and chicken bouillon. Cover; simmer on low for 2 hours until nice and tender.

Chicken Flautas

3 chicken breasts
1 block cream cheese
8 oz. Monterrey Jack cheese
1 Tbsp. salt
1 Tbsp. garlic
Corn tortillas
Salsa, to taste

1. Boil the chicken breast; shred the meat in a bowl. Add the cream cheese, Monterrey Jack cheese and spices to the bowl; mix thoroughly.
2. Add the mixture to a corn tortilla and roll up. Roll up as many as the mixture will make. Fry the rolled tortillas in a small pan until crispy on all sides. Serve with your favorite salsa.

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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.

MAY

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Scarborough

Renaissance Festival:

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5/4

May the 4th Be With You:

Come prepared to train in the Jedi Academy and learn the way of the Jedi. 1:30-3:30 p.m., Red Oak Public Library, 101 S. Live Oak St.

5/9

ROSE Award Luncheon

and Fundraiser:

Hosted by Ellis Christian Women's Job Corps to recognize women in business committed to serving the community. Guest speaker is Kim Gilson, owner of Excellivate — Activating the Excellence in You. 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., The Graily, 716 Dunaway St., Waxahachie. Call (972) 937-6620 for more information. Tickets may be purchased at elliscwjc.life.

6/1

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First Mondays

Red Oak Lion's Club Meeting:

Network with other businesses, community leaders and civic-minded people while helping your community. 6:30-7:30 p.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. To learn more, call (469) 571-7265.

Third Mondays

Book Club:

New members always welcome. 6:30-8:00 p.m., Red Oak Library, 101 S. Live Oak

St. For more information, email awatterman@redoaktx.org.

Wednesdays and Thursdays

Senior Citizen Center of Red Oak:

Enjoy coffee, juice and donuts each morning, as well as a sponsored lunch on first-third Thursdays and a potluck on fourth Thursdays. Also, games, puzzles, bingo and informative guest speakers. 8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., 207 W. Red Oak Rd. Call (972) 576-8475 for more information.

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

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