

In the Kitchen With Zada Owens

Also inside: Scavenger Hunt

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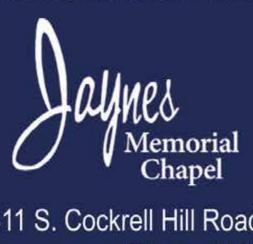






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June 2022 Volume 17, Issue 6

#### ON THE COVER



Leaders of Essential Foundation Inc. provide foster care and adoption services but also help families learn essential life skills.

#### Photo by

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Angel Morris

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#### **EDITOR'S NOTE**

Midsummer Night's Dream?

While August is technically the middle of the summer season, the term, *Midsummer*, actually refers to June. Seems confusing at first glance, but it makes more sense with a little understanding of history — from ancient calendars to roots in Christianity. If you're always up for reasons to celebrate, here's a little lesson on why June 24 is the perfect excuse for a party.

In the Stone Age, pagans believed plants had healing properties during the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. To encourage fertility and successful harvests, they would perform certain rituals in tribute to nature. By the fourth century, Christians began recognizing June 24 as St. John's Day — since the Bible puts St. John the Baptist's birthday as six months prior to the birth of Christ. In the Middle Ages, Germany marked their summer solstice in May ... but moved it to Midsummer, so they could more readily find green leaves to decorate the celebratory maypole.

Today, Midsummer is incredibly popular in some cultures, particularly Sweden. Second only to Christmas, people travel from around the world to celebrate the day there. In the British Isles and Scandinavia, the summer solstice provides almost a full day of sunlight, when inhabitants re-enact traditions not entirely unlike those of pagan times — bonfires, dances, feasts and festivals.

For us, marking the day could simply translate to a big family meal followed by a walk where we take time to appreciate nature. We might circle around a bonfire, where Midsummer lore suggests wishes come true by tossing a pebble on the fire. Ultimately, it's meant to celebrate life and love ... and who needs an excuse for that?

Wake up and enjoy!







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When many businesses were wondering how they would stay open, one area nonprofit was just getting started. When the term "essential worker" was coined, Essential Foundation Inc., began serving Ellis County, as well.

Today, EFI offers services to children and families in the community around the clock, if needed. "We were founded in 2020 to provide foster care and adoption services to children who have been removed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services," Executive Director Lisa Daniels Wall explained.

Elyssia Armstead and Candice Lewis joined forces to form EFI after seeing a need in the community. Primarily, EFI assists with foster care and adoption placement. "When children are in custody of the state, we work with CPS with a goal of reunifying the family," Lisa said. "Foster parents must be found in the interim, and children will need counseling, therapy and education."

In the last two years, several children have been placed in loving environments through its foster care program. EFI is not just about placement, however. "A child's mental health is the top priority," Lisa continued. "We focus on building self-confidence, and we care for children from all development needs." In addition, EFI events have provided more than 150 children with backpacks filled with school supplies and fed over 500 families through their food pantry.

The core mission at EFI is to help families learn essential

life skills and be future focused. "By including these skills into their daily routine, these families can develop lifelong practices, which will encourage success. The mentoring focus is education, career advancement, self-image, confidence and all areas which build a foundation for a better future," Lisa listed. "We help them realize their future is bright, but they must open the window. We consider every staff member, volunteer and college tutor as a mentor because our focus is always to lead by example, which is the core responsibility of a mentor. Everyone is a mentor."

Lisa joined EFI last summer to help organize these efforts and begin EFI's grant focus. "When building a multiprogram organization, you must have resources coming in from several avenues such as grants, fundraisers, auctions and donations from individuals and the business community," she outlined. "One of my tasks is to keep funds coming in, so we can provide services. Working at EFI has been a wonderful opportunity for me to personally change lives in our community."

Lisa's unique background proved perfectly suited for her EFI role. "I graduated from The University of Texas at Arlington with the objective of attending law school, which I did for one year. It was not what I thought it would be," she recalled. "I decided to go into academics and worked at Southern Methodist University as their film and cinema specialist for 18 years. During my career at SMU, I obtained a master's degree in conflict resolution, realizing this is what I wanted to accomplish with law school. I am fortunate that one of my roles at EFI is managing their Community Mediation Program, which gives me the opportunity to use this very specialized degree."

To help others further their education, EFI sponsors the EFI Academic Tutoring and Mentoring Center. "We have partnered

with Navarro College to provide tutoring and mentoring to at-risk high school students. Our service area, Ellis, Navarro and Southern Dallas counties have a low college application rate, and EFI has the goal of raising this number by 15 percent over the next five years," Lisa said.

"Many of the high school students in our area will be first generation college students in their family. The problem isn't that families do not want their children to attend college, it is that they aren't familiar with the college and financial aid process, which can be daunting. We want to remove those concerns by guiding the entire family through the process. But first, we must help these students master concepts that hinder their high school completion."

EFI plans to build on those processes in the next five years, with a new facility set to open by year's end. Over the next two years, EFI expects its academic center to tutor/mentor about 200 atrisk youth to high school completion and guide 75 percent of these youth into college, internships or apprenticeships.

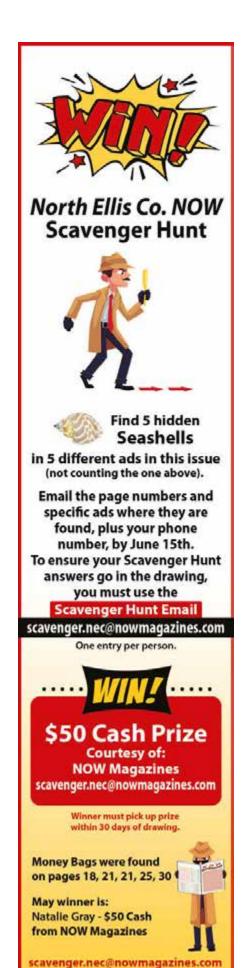
The EFI food pantry, in conjunction with Crossroads Community Services and the North Texas Food Bank, will provide more than 500 families with weekly food boxes over this same time. "Another goal is to work with the court system in Ellis County to provide mediation services with hopes it will relieve the courts of much needed docket space," Lisa continued, noting that EFI also offers employment resources and domestic violence resources.

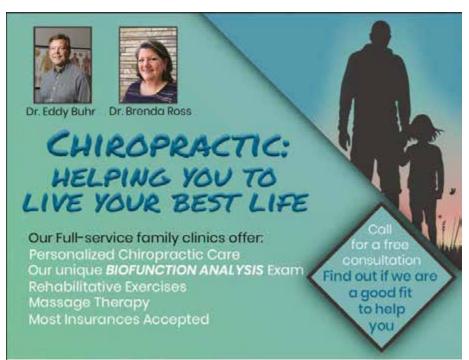
An ambassador for the Red Oak Chamber, member of the LDS Church in Waxahachie and avid reader. Lisa is grateful her family can join her in EFI's mission. "We are a family of volunteers, so working at EFI gives us the opportunity to be together at many events," she explained. "It has been such a personal and professional blessing to see what EFI has accomplished in the last year, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for EFI and the community it serves.

"The most important idea I would like to impart regarding EFI is we are here to serve. We were established with this as our mission and motto." Lisa reiterated. "If someone has a need we can't relieve, we will find an organization that can help." NOW











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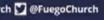
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#### 6/4

#### **Bingo & Banana Splits:**

Prizes and fun. Free event, but donations will be accepted for the Lord's Acre Committee. 6:00-8:00 p.m., First United Methodist Church Red Oak, 600 Daubitz Dr.

#### 6/6-6/10

#### Ellis County Art Association Storytime Art:

Retired elementary teacher shares her art background with stories and activities for children. \$50. 10:00-11:00 a.m., Art on the Square Gallery, 113 W. Franklin St., Waxahachie.

#### 6/7-7/13

#### **Summer Reading Club:**

Join us for stories, crafts, learning games and songs. **Tuesdays**: 10:00 a.m. (ages 18 months to 5 years old); **Wednesdays**: 2:00 p.m. (all ages); **Thursdays**: 7:00 p.m. (all ages), Red Oak Library, 200 Lakeview Pkwy.

#### 6/9

#### Casino Night:

Texas Hold 'Em Tournament with food, drinks, prizes and more benefiting Hearts and Tails of Hope Pet Rescue. 6:30-10:00 p.m., Billy Bob's Texas, 2525 Rode Plaza, Fort Worth.

#### Magic & Movies in the Park:

The city of Red Oak and Red Oak Library present a magic show followed by the movie *Encanto*. Magic begins: 7:00 p.m., watkins Park, 101 Live Oak St.

#### 7/2

#### Red Oak, White & Blue:

Food, fun and fireworks. Live DJ, bounce houses, face painting, food trucks and a 15-minute fireworks display. Please note: Parking for the event grounds can only be accessed from the right-hand land of the Southbound I-35 service road at

the Red Oak Road exit. Remain in the right-hand lane until reaching Oaks Church.
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More details are available at https://www.redoaktx.org/378/Red-Oak-White-and-Blue.

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





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#### Zoomed In: Pablo Veliz

By Angel Morris

The recent recipient of Ellis County Art Association's \$1,000 Shelley Nance Memorial Art Scholarship, Pablo Veliz, was surprised by the win. "There were a lot of other talented artists, and I was not so sure how I measured up. Especially since one of the other artists who was competing against me for the scholarship was a classmate whose art is really good," Pablo admitted.

Interested in art most of his life, Pablo said he began taking it seriously in ninth grade and has since completed four years of art studies. This fall, Pablo hopes to attend Navarro College to study studio art, then Sam Houston State University to major in animation. "Eventually, I hope to work in the game and animation industry — specifically as a visual development artist or character designer."

#### **Around Town**



Guests like Kanga and Kaleb Henry offer educational activities during Red Oak Library's summer programs for kids.



Kimberly Case gets support from her granddaughter at the polls before winning Ovilla City Council Place I.



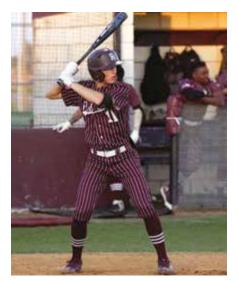
Wrapping up the school year last month, the Life School District Science Fair concludes with several top places earned by students from Red Oak.



Employee Noemi Cruz and volunteer Dylan Vazquez sort donations for Pennies from Heaven Thrift Store.



Bill and Sherri Halverson count it an honor to do their duty as citizens and exercise the freedom to vote.



Red Oak's Easten Smith shows the form that won him VYPE DFW Preseason Player of the Year before committing to Eastfield College to play baseball this fall.



Ron Reynolds, Charlotte Duncan and David Duncan enjoy pot luck day — the last Thursday of each month — at the Senior Citizen Center of Red Oak







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While Zada Owens grew up in Red Oak and now lives in Waxahachie, her family is from the Hill Country. "We love to get together for outdoor activities. So, a lot of our recipes center around campouts, river trips and ranch life," Zada noted.

Zada's mom was her biggest influence in the kitchen. "Since she passed, I find comfort in preparing her recipes — lots of spicy food with Hill Country influence. Texas food is my specialty," Zada described. "From enchiladas to pickled carrots, my recipes are from family. My King Ranch Chicken was inspired by my brother's life as a working cowboy on that ranch." Discussions of ranch and family life also play a part in the podcast Zada hosts with radio personality Big Al Mack. NOW

#### King Ranch Chicken

- I green bell pepper, diced I white onion, diced
- 3 cups chicken, cooked and shredded
- 1 14-oz. can cream of chicken soup, not diluted
- 1 14-oz. can cream of mushroom soup or cream of poblano soup
- 1 14-oz. can Ro-Tel, undrained 14 corn tortillas 2 cups cheddar cheese, grated Paprika or chili powder, to taste Salt, to taste Pepper, to taste
- 1. Sauté the bell peppers and onions until tender. In a large bowl, stir together the

- chicken, soups, Ro-Tel and sautéed vegetables. 2. Brown the tortillas in some oil for just a second; layer them on the bottom of a greased casserole dish.
- **3.** Spread half of the chicken mixture over the tortillas; sprinkle the layer with cheese. Repeat layers of tortillas and chicken mixture using the remaining cheese on top. Sprinkle spices on top.
- **4.** Bake, uncovered, for 25-30 minutes on 375 F. Let sit a few minutes before serving.

#### **Hobo Stew Foil Packs**

Great over a campfire.

- 1 lb. ground beef 1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce Bill's Seasoning or Tony Chachere's, to taste
- 2 red onions, chopped
- 4 red potatoes, chopped small
- 2 bell peppers, chopped (green and red) Vegetables of your choice that will cook evenly with the meat

- **1.** Mix the meat with the Worcestershire sauce and some seasoning. Form medium-size meatballs. Tear thick foil into 12x12-inch squares.
- **2.** Season the vegetables. Using the foil as a plate, put a little bit of everything you want into the center of the foil. Do not overpack; it's better to have two small ones for a better cooking consistency.
- **3.** Fold the packet, leaving room for steam to cook the meal. Label each packet with a marker if everyone picked their own veggies!
- **4.** Place over a campfire for 20-30 minutes, depending on how hot your fire is and how big your potatoes and meatballs are. I make an extra pack to check on every 5-10 minutes to verify doneness. This is perfect for the kids to have fun making their own at a campout or off the grill at home. Serve in the foil for no mess!

#### **Sherry Vonn BBQ Sauce**

2 cups ketchup

- 1/2 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 2 Tbsp. honey
- 1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- I lemon, squeezed (reserve 1 Tbsp. juice and rind)
- I Tbsp. Cajun seasoning of choice Salt, to taste Pepper, to taste

Hot sauce, to add spice (optional)

- **I.** Whisk together all ingredients, except rind, in a saucepan over medium heat. Add rind. Simmer until thickened, about 10 minutes.
- **2.** Apply to grilled meat of your choice. This can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

#### **Flote Street Corn on the Cob**

6 ears corn, shucked and cleaned 1 Tbsp. lime juice 1/2 cup mayonnaise Chili powder, to taste 1/3 cup Cotija cheese, grated Cilantro, freshly chopped, to taste

- **I.** Grill the corn, flipping until evenly charred. Mix the lime juice with the mayonnaise; brush heavily over the corn.
- 2. Sprinkle with chili powder, Cotija and cilantro.

#### **Bubba Beans**

- 1 14-oz. can chicken broth
- 1 16-oz. pkg. rinsed lima/butter beans, soaked overnight
- 1 10-oz. can Ro-Tel
- I green bell pepper, diced

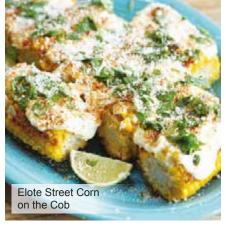




- I white onion, diced
  2 celery sticks, chopped
  I 12-oz. pkg. browned breakfast
  sausage (spicy if preferred)
  Seasoning of choice (I use Bill's
  Seasoning or Cajun.)
  Salt, to taste
  Pepper, to taste
- **I.** In a Crock-Pot or on a stovetop, fill a pot with half chicken broth and half water Add the beans, Ro-Tel, vegetables, sausage and seasonings.
- **2.** Cook in on low for 6-7 hours, or sauté the vegetables on a stovetop for 5 minutes before adding to the beans. Cover and simmer 30-45 minutes.

#### **Fried Green Tomatoes**

- 2 large firm green tomatoes, sliced 1/4-inch thick
- I cup all-purpose flour (divided use) 3/4 cup self-rising yellow cornmeal Salt, to taste
- I tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. onion powder
- 1/2 tsp. smoked paprika
- 1/2 tsp. ground pepper
- 2 large eggs
- 2 Tbsp. buttermilk



- I tsp. hot sauce
- 3 Tbsp. vegetable oil, for frying (more as needed)
- **1.** Place a single layer of tomatoes on doubled paper towels. Gently press; let rest for 10 minutes.
- **2.** Place 1/2 cup of the flour on a plate. On a second plate, whisk together the remaining flour, cornmeal and spices until blended.
- **3.** In a shallow bowl, whisk the eggs, buttermilk and hot sauce together. Dredge the tomato slices first in the plain flour, second in the egg wash and then in the seasoned commeal mix. Gently press the breading onto the tomato slices.
- **4.** In a deep cast-iron skillet, heat 1 inch of vegetable oil to 350-360 F. Don't overcrowd the skillet. Fry 4-5 minutes, flipping carefully

until golden brown. Best served alone or with homemade ranch dressing.

#### **Summer Squash Casserole**

- 2 lbs. yellow squash, halved
- 1 14-oz. can cream of chicken soup
- 1 stick butter
- 2 large carrots, grated
- 1/2 green bell pepper, diced
- 1/2 cup milk
- I box Jiffy Cornbread Mix
- I raw egg
- 1 tsp. sage
- **1.** Cook, drain and mash the squash.
- **2.** Combine the remaining ingredients; mix well. Pour into a lightly sprayed casserole dish. Bake at 350 F for 45 minutes. Let sit 5 minutes before serving.

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